

Daryaei also shows that part of the obstacle to promoting ancient Iranian history lies in the nature of the history itself. Sources for ancient Iranian history are scattered and require multilingual abilities to read in their original language. Because of this philological studies, rather than historical treatments, have tended to dominate research into ancient Iran assisting in the isolation of the discipline. Daryaei also provides a quick overview of the ethno-linguistic origins of the Iranians. As a branch of the Indo-European languages the Iranian speaking peoples were comprised of several tribal groups including, among others, the Medes, Persians, Arsacids, and Sogdians. These Indo-Iranian tribes moved on the Iranian plateau in several waves of migration, stretching out over centuries. While the Medes would be the first to establish a centre of power, it was the Achaemenid Persians, based out of the modern day Fars region, who would establish the first true world empire.⁴ After its conquest by Alexander of Macedon the Achaemenid Empire would be succeeded first by the Seleucids, then by the Arsacids who would rule Iran for nearly six hundred years.⁵

In Chapter One: *Iran before the Sasanians* Daryaei briefly examines the geopolitical situation on the Iranian plateau prior the rise of the Sasanians. After discussing the importance of the Achaemenid empire in Iranian and world history Daryaei looks at how the rulers of Fars interacted with the Seleucid and Arsacid periods of rule. Daryaei highlights the fact that while acknowledging the Seleucids and the Arsacids, as the King of Kings, the rulers of Fars still retained cultural memories of the Achaemenid kings. Using numismatic materials Daryaei illustrates the slow process by which the rulers of Fars gradually reclaimed the title of King, setting the stage for the sudden rise to power of the Sasanians in the third century.

With Chapter Two: *Ardaxšir I and the Establishment of the Sasanian Empire* Daryaei charts the rapid rise to power of Ardaxšir I and his defeat of the Arsacid King of Kings. He examines the still murky issue of Ardaxšir's connection to the eponymous Sasan, followed by a discussion of what is known of his family background. In discussing Ardaxšir's conquest of the Arsacid Kingdom Daryaei emphasizes that, contrary to the standard decline and fall narrative, several factors indicated that the Arsacids were far from being a weakened state ready to fall. Notable among others was the fact that the Arsacid Shah Ardawan IV (Artabanus IV) had just successfully beaten back a new Roman invasion under the Emperor Caracalla, imposing a peace treaty favourable to Iran upon Caracalla's successor. Also important is the fact that it took Ardaxšir over twelve years to build up his forces enough to defeat Ardawan IV's forces at Hormozgan and that the Roman Empire was otherwise occupied during

⁴ An excellent discussion of the Medes and other Indo-Iranian tribes may be found in (YAMAUCHI 1990) 31-63. For a brief introduction to the Achaemenid Empire see (DANDEMAYV 1989). Best short monograph introduction may be found in (WATER 2013). For Cyrus II and the foundation of the Achaemenid Empire see now: (ZARGAHMEE 2013).

⁵ Materials on the Seleucids is somewhat scattered. The best narrative introduction may be found in (GRAINGER 2013, 2014 & 2015.). Works on the Arsacids are scarce: the standard narrative is still (DEVEBOISE 1938), while more cultural history may be found in (COLLEDGE 1967). An excellent short monograph in article form is found in (BIVAR 1983) 21-99, while shorter studies may be found in (KOSHELENKO & PILIPKO 1999) 128-145; (DAŹBROWA 2012) 164-186; and (GREGORATTI 2017) 125-153.

his civil war. Daryaei concludes this chapter with a look at the rock engravings that Ardaxšir commissioned at Naqsh-e Rostam and other sites. He notes that the imagery used by Ardaxšir in these engravings, Ahura Mazda handing Ardaxšir the symbol of sovereignty, shows he believed himself to be divinely appointed to rule over Eransahr. Daryaei stresses that the concept of Eransahr first and foremost had a religious aspect, related to the practice of Zoroastrianism, and only later assumed political dimensions. It did not, as believed by the Roman historian Herodian, indicate a desire on the part of Ardaxšir to reclaim all the territories of the Achaemenid Empire now held by the Romans.⁶

Chapter Three: *Šābuhr I: The Strongest World Empire in the Third Century* focuses primarily on the warfare between Shapur I and the Roman Empire. Ruling over a thirty year period Shapur faced three different Roman emperors' in battle, emerging victorious each time. While Armenia would be the main point of contention between the Sasanian and Roman Empire's, due to the Armenian royal family being a cadet branch of the Arsacid dynasty, conflict would spill over to include Syria and Palestine. Daryaei uses the great trilingual inscription of Shapur at Ka'be-ye Zardost and the rock-reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam and Besabahr to illustrate the success of Shapur on the battlefield, and the decidedly weak position Rome was in vis-à-vis the Sasanians during this timeframe. Daryaei also touches briefly on the continuing emergence of the Zoroastrian faith, under the influence of the *mohbeds*, emphasising that it was not an exclusive religion. Instead it was, like Christianity, still a religion that conquered subjects could convert to. Shapur I's reign also saw an expansion and complexity of the Sasanian central administration, one of the key differences between the Arsacids and the Sasanians was the degree of centralisation achieved under the Sasanian's.

Chapter Four: *Jousting for Kingship: Wahrāms and Narsē* looks at the turbulent period in Sasanian history following the death of Shapur I. Despite an established priesthood, Ardaxšir and Shapur I both exercised firm control over the political and religious spheres of power. During the reigns of their successors however, the Sasanian Shah's would see their religious authority reduced in as the Zoroastrian priesthood gained legal and judicial authority at the Shah's expense. With the rising power and authority of the Zoroastrian *mohbeds* the persecution of religious minorities begins to appear. Daryaei highlights the fact that a good deal of information on life in the Sasanian royal court comes from rock reliefs carved during this period. Daryaei emphasises the instability within the Sasanian royal family, which culminated in AD 293 with the successful *coup d'état* of Narseh against his nephew. After a brief discussion on the royal inscriptions at Paikuli used by Narseh to justify his removal of his nephew, Daryaei then moves his focus to the Sasanian foreign policy with the Byzantine Empire under Diocletian. Here, unlike the warfare during the reigns of Ardaxšir and Shapur, the Sasanians were routed and defeated in battle, leading to a diplomatic treaty establishing a new power balance between the Byzantine and Sasanian empires.

Chapter V: *Šābuhr II and the Sasanian Rulers in the*
⁶ (HERODIAN VI.2.2-3)

Fourth Century. The fourth century Sasanian Empire is dominated by the figure of Shapur II, the longest reigning ruler of the dynasty (AD 309-379). Since Shapur II came to throne as an infant, power remained in the hands of the Sasanian court and the Zoroastrian priests until he came of age. Daryaee first focuses on the impact that Armenia's conversion to Christianity had on relations, not only between Armenia and the Sasanians, but also with the Romano-Byzantine Empire. He also notes the stresses that Christianity put on Armenia, dividing it into an Armenian Christian and Armenian Zoroastrian society. By the reign of Emperor Constantius open warfare broke out between the two superpowers over Armenia. Shapur II's coming of age marked the beginning of a long life of military campaigns. In addition to the Romano-Byzantine Empire, Shapur II campaigned against the Arabs and the Chionite's in the East to secure the Sasanian Empire's borders. After discussing the campaigns of Shapur II and Julian in Mesopotamia, Daryaee shifts his focus to the changes in location and type of monumental artwork produced for the Sasanians. He notes that the Sasanians shifted the location of their monumental works from Persis to Media, hypothesising a resurgent Zoroastrian priesthood that was able to reassert its power over the Sasanian crown during the time period. Other indications are also seen in the artwork of the period that the power of the nobility had increased at the expense of the Emperors. Daryaee concludes by re-looking at the permanent split between Byzantine Armenia and Persoarmenia.

Chapter VI: *Yazdgerd the Prince of Peace and the fabled Kings in the Fifth Century.* Political narrative provides much of the focus for this chapter, dominated by rulers Daryaee characterises as being 'generally weak' in power versus the clergy and nobility. In generally the first three rulers of the fifth century were the most successful. Yazdgerd I inaugurated a new policy of toleration and favourable treatment of Christians, Jews, and other religious minorities in the Sasanian Empire. Daryaee also stresses the mutual respect that was established between the Sasanian and Byzantine Empires during this time period. The fifth century was marked by comparatively little warfare between the two states, especially when compared to the third and fourth centuries. While both Bahram IV Gur and Yazdgerd II were able to maintain their eastern borders against the Hephthalites, succeeding Shahs would not be so lucky. The military nadir of the Sasanians would come in AD 484 when Shah Peroz, seven of his sons, and nearly all of the Sasanian army were annihilated in battle against the Hephthalites. Additionally Daryaee emphasises a clear ideological shift with the Sasanians during the fifth century. During this period the Sasanians began to emphasise their supposed descent from the legendary Kayanid kings found in the *Avesta*, rather than the Achaemenids Empire of the first millennium BC.

Chapter VII: *Kawād I and Xusrō I: Revolution and renovation in the Sixth Century.* The majority of the sixth century would see a resurgence in Sasanian power and prestige. Here, Daryaee looks at the efforts of Kavad I and Khusrau I Anushirvan to reassert the power of the Sasanian crown against the clergy and nobility, and also to strengthen and centralise the Sasanian state. In particular

Daryaee stresses that many of the crucial reforms of the sixth century came from Kavad I, rather than Khusrau I who is usually credited with enactment. Part of the reason for Kavad I's efforts to reassert Sasanian royal power stemmed from his brief overthrow by an alliance of the nobility and the clergy in AD 496-498. Daryaee notes that Kavad I used the ideas of Mazdak, a Zoroastrian priest who advocated an egalitarian social order, to weaken the holds of the nobility and priesthood. While Mazdak's influence and movement would not long survive the death of Kavad I, the weakening of the greater nobility would continue under Khusrau I. Though Khusrau I broke any power the Mazdakian priests may have had in the Empire, he did not restore the political position of the great nobles. Instead, Khusrau favoured the *deghāns*, the small landholders who were the backbone of the Sasanian military, as well as the economic foundation for the empire. Both Kavad I and Khusrau I's efforts were successful as the Sasanian Empire saw a resurgence of power and influence in the Sixth Century. Daryaee closes out the chapter by looking at the troubled reign of Hormazd IV, who inherited a protracted war with the Byzantine Empire while trying to continue Khusrau I's policy of weakening the greater nobility. Hormazd IV would be overthrown in favour of his son Khusrau II after the revolt of the *spahbod*, or general, in charge of the Eastern frontiers, Bahram Chobin. Daryaee notes that by this point the administrative institutions of the Sasanian state functioned efficiently, regardless of the political chaos that engulfed the empire.

Chapter VIII: *From Xusrō II to Yazdgerd III: The Pinnacle and Fall of the Sasanian Empire.* With this final chapter Daryaee covers the last sixty years of the Sasanian Empire, a period which saw the height of Sasanian power in the Near-East, as well as the overthrow and collapse of the empire. After being installed as Shah in place of his father Hormazd IV by his uncles and the nobility, Khusrau II was unable to withstand the military forces of Bahram Chobin and fled to Hierapolis in the Byzantine Empire. Only after receiving recognition and military aid from the Emperor Maurice was Khusrau II able to return to the Sasanian Empire and defeat Bahram VI Chobin. While Chobin was defeated, he was not killed immediately, instead fleeing into the East where he continued to mint coinage as a legitimate Shah until his assassination in AD 591. Daryaee emphasises the damage that Bahram VI Chobin's usurpation had upon the prestige of the House of Sasan. For the next ten years, after consolidating his rule within the empire proper, Khusrau II reestablished his control over the Persian Gulf. However, the overthrow and execution of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice inaugurated the last and greatest war of antiquity as Khusrau II first invaded the empire to avenge Maurice. Khusrau's war of vengeance soon became a war of conquest as his great generals, Shahin and Shahrbaraz, peeled away the Byzantine defences taking Syria in AD 604, Palestine in AD 614, and finally Egypt in AD 619. At the same time Sasanian forces raided into Libya and Anatolia. While Herakleios, son of the Exarch of Africa, had overthrown the murderer of Maurice, the Emperor Phokas, all peace overtures from the Byzantine Empire to Khusrau II were rebuffed. Beginning in AD 622 Herakleios travelled to Armenia, launching a series of campaigns that would continue for the next five years,

leading to the destruction of the sacred fire temples of Adur Gushnasp at Shirz, and the defeat of the Sasanian army at the Battle of Nineveh. At this point Khusrau II had gone from being a world conqueror to a defeated ruler unable to protect the sacred Zoroastrian fire-temples of the Sasanian people. Khusrau II's removal from power by a palace coup d'état in AD 628 inaugurated a four year period of chaotic instability in which a series of ephemeral rulers, including two ruling Queens, strove to maintain some type of control over the Sasanian empire. Daryaei highlights the fact that even with the Yazdgerd III's ascension to the throne there were still other regional rulers claiming to be the Shah, causing the centralised Sasanian state was looking more and more like their Parthian predecessors. The ultimate problem this caused was that Yazdgerd III was unable to mobilise the Sasanian armed forces, or state, fully to effectively combat the advancing Arab forces. The result would be that, despite significant resistance by several regional Sasanian armies, the Arab armies would have taken Ctesiphon by AD 637 and breached the Zagros Mountains and overrun western Iran by AD 642. With the loss of the centre, Yazdgerd III was unable to hold together the loyalty of the provinces, and would wind up being murdered in Marv by a miller in AD 651. Some of his sons would wind up at the court of the T'ang Emperor Kao-t'sung, seeking Chinese aid against the Arabs before ultimately becoming part of the T'ang administration of the Western Regions.⁷ Daryaei puts emphasis on the fact that with the capture of Ctesiphon, and the Sasanian treasury, the Arabs were able to finance not only campaigns, but also the creation of a new central army.

When reading *Sasanian Iran* one must keep in mind the constraints Daryaei set out for this book. Specifically that it presents "an outline history" of the Sasanian Empire, not a comprehensive history. Daryaei is effectively laying the foundation for more comprehensive or thematic histories of the Sasanians, in future, with this work. With that in mind the following were topics that could have been expanded to receive greater coverage, or to clarify their position. While current students and general readers are unlikely to recognise the name, Daryaei's citation of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* is liable to raise the hackles of established classicists. Daryaei is using Bernal to make the important point that Iranian history, and that of other non-Greco-Roman civilisations, is often glossed over in history books. However, due to the controversial nature of Bernal's publications with in classical studies, it would be worth the space to elaborate on the historiographic importance of Bernal's work. In Chapter I, greater discussion of the position of Persia under the Arsacids would provide greater clarity to the reader as to how the former heartland of the Achaemenids fit into their state. Chapter III while including some discussion on Shapur I's great inscription, the SKZ, could have expanded that discussion to include the lingering questions, mostly from classicists, over its reliability as a source. Additionally, some coverage of the warfare between Odenatheus of Palmyra and Shapur I would help to highlight

⁷ Presumably, due to the political chaos that engulfed the Sasanians during the AD 630's the T'ang Empire had become the major military presence in Central Asia, and for a time Transoxiana. For a brief introduction see (SHUN-YING and YAO 1999) 343-350, in-depth coverage of T'ang foreign policy in (PAN 1997).

the breakdown of traditional Roman defences in the East, and the degree of Shapur's success. In Chapter IV greater discussion on the organisation of the Zoroastrian clergy, how this organisation fit into the Sasanian state, and the nature of the Sasanian Shah's authority over the *mohbeds* would help clarify the discussion of religious politics within the empire. With Chapter V greater elaboration on the two decade long conflict between the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires, sometimes known as the Nisibis War, would make it clearer that for all Shapur II's skill as a general, Constantius II's defensive strategy was generally successful in halting Sasanian advances. Only with Julian's headlong disastrous campaign into Sasanian Mesopotamia, and his ensuing death, was Shapur II able to make territorial gains from the Byzantine Empire through the peace treaty with Jovian. In Chapter VI one chief issue this reviewer noted is that Daryaei refers to the Fifth Century Shah's as being 'generally weak,' yet this statement is not borne out when reviewing his coverage of Yazdgerd I, Bahram V Gor, or Yazdgerd II. This statement needs greater elaboration of whether Daryaei means political/military power or administrative power over the nobility. On an overall level, the reader would benefit from an examination of the Sasanian military, such as the main types of units employed and the strengths of the Sasanian military as compared to the Arsacids. Likewise, a similar examination of the central administration would be helpful as well. In terms of the critical apparatus this work is somewhat lacking. The general index is small and limited. While a general map of the Sasanian Empire is included, there is nothing to indicate what period in Sasanian history the map actually depicts. Additionally, not all key towns mentioned in the text are included on the map. Also, why are portions of the map used in George Rawlinson's *The Sassanian or New Persian Empire* embedded in several chapters? These extracts are frequently too small, and too cluttered, for readers to use, and also do not show all the towns mentioned in the text. Finally, no explanation or description is given for the system of transliteration used for Sasanian names. As the system Daryaei uses is much different than previous seen in the *Cambridge History of Iran* or other works, it makes it extremely confusing for the reader to know who Daryaei is referring to. At the very least, a comparative chart and pronunciation guide would aid readers greatly.

However, none of the above thoughts in any way detracts from the great value of Daryaei's work. This is an work of critical importance not only to students of Persian history, but also to Roman, Byzantine, Central Asian, and Indian historians. Daryaei's writing is clear, understandable, and easy to read. While this is not the definite comprehensive history of the Sasanian Empire, it is a highly needed introduction, which can then be supplemented by other works. Highly recommended as a main text for undergraduate students and the general reader.

APPENDIX I – SASANIAN SHAHS

To aid readers in ascertaining which Shah Daryae is referring to, a complete comparative listing of the Sasanian Shahs is given below. The names of the Shahs with their Anglicised form as given by Daryae are equated with the better known equivalent given by Richard N. Frye in Vol. III of the *Cambridge History of Iran*.

Ardaxšir I = Ardashir I
 Šābuhr I = Shāpūr I
 Hormīzd I = Hormazd I
 Wahrām I = Bahrām I
 Wahrām II = Bahrām II
 Wahrām III = Bahrām III
 Narsēs = Narseh
 Hormīzd II = Hormazd II
 Adūr Narsēs = Ādhurnarseh
 Šābuhr II = Shāpūr II
 Ardaxšir II = Ardashir II
 Šābuhr III = Shāpūr III
 Wahrām IV = Bahrām IV
 Yazdgird I = Yazdgerd I
 Wahrām V Gūr = Bahrām V Gur
 Yazdgird II = Yazdgerd II
 Hormīzd III = Hormazd III
 Pērōz = Pērōz
 Walaxš = Balāsh
 Kawād I = Kavād I
 Zāmāsp = Zāmāsp
 Xusrō I Anuše-ruwān = Khusrau I Anūshīrvān
 Hormīzd IV = Hurmazd IV
 Wahrām VI Čōbin = Bahrām VI Chobin
 Wistahm = Bistām
 Xusrō II Aparvīz = Khusrau II Parvīz
 Kawād II Shiroē = Kavād II Shirūya
 Ardaxšir III = Ardashir III
 Šahrvarāz = Shahrbarāz
 Azarmī(g)duxt = Āzarmēdukht
 Bōrān = Bōrān
 Yazdgird III = Yazdgerd III

APPENDIX II – ADDITIONAL WORKS ON THE SASANIAN EMPIRE

The following list is of works published in English, focusing specifically on aspects of the Sasanian Empire, since *Sasanian Iran* was published. Please note that this list is not intended to be exhaustive, but as a further introduction to modern Sasanian studies.

Canepa, M. *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran*. (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2009.)

Daryae, T. *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*. (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2009.)

Daryae, T. & K. Reza khani. *From Oxus to Euphrates: The World of Late Antique Iran*. Ancient Iran Series Vol. I Jordan Centre for Persian Studies. (Los Angeles, CA: Farhang Foundation, 2016.)

Edwell, Peter M. "The Sources for Rome's Wars with Shapur I: Eurocentric and Eastern Perspectives" In *Ancient West & East* Vol. 9 (2010) 155-179.

Farrokh, Kaveh. *The Armies of Ancient Persia: The Sassanians*. (Barnsley: UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2017.)

Farrokh, Kaveh, Gholamreza Karamian & Katarzyna Maksymiuk. *A Synopsis of Sasanian Military Organisation and Combat Units*. (Siedlce, PL: Siedlce-Tehran, 2018.)

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Ka'bi, N. Trans: *A Short Chronicle on the End of the Sasanian Empire and early Islam 590-660 A.D.* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016.)

IMPORTANT PRIMARY - SOURCE FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION.

Maksymiuk, Katarzyna. *Geography of Roman-Iranian Wars: Military Operations of Rome and Sasanian Iran*. (Siedlce, PL: Uniwersytet Przyrodniczo-Humanistyczny w Siedlcach, 2015.)

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