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THE LAST SASANIANS IN EASTERN IRAN AND CHINA

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The events of the last years of Sasanian rule (224–651) and the fate of the Sasanian royal family upon the Arab conquest have received scant attention by researchers and historians alike. There are three reasons for this neglect. First, the two decisive battles – the Battle of Qadisiyyah (637) and the Battle of Nihāwand (641) – in which the Persians were defeated are generally considered as marking the end of the Sasanian dynasty. Second, the death of Yazdegerd¹ (651) in Merv is believed to be the primary cause that led to the overthrow of the Sasanians, and thus little attention has been paid to his descendants. A third and most important reason concerns the literary sources of the period, especially the information contained in the Chinese accounts, of which the most important texts are the *Old Book of Tang* (Jiu Tangshu 舊唐書), the *New Book of Tang* (Xin tang-shu 新唐書) and *Cefu yuangui* (冊府元龜). Yazdegerd's descendants who sought refuge in China along with other Persian nobles tried to regain Persia with the support of the Tang emperors. Based on an analysis of the primary sources of this period, some scholars² suggest that Pērōz and Wahrām managed to form an Iranian kingdom with China's support in Sīstān and identify Chi-ling (疾陵城, jǐ-líng chéng or Jiling city) as the city of Zarang mentioned in 661. We disagree with that view and this article proposes an alternative reconstruction of the history of this period. It is our contention, for example, that Chi-ling was located in

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¹ For our purposes, the name “Yazdegerd” refers to Yazdegerd III (632–651 A.D.), the last king of the Sasanian empire. Thanks are due to the anonymous referees of the article. Professor Jeffrey D. Lerner (USA) has kindly given expert advice on philological and historical matters.

² See for example: Harmatta 1971, 140–141; Daryaei 2003, 542; Daryaei 2009c, 25–26; Compareti 2003, 206; Compareti 2009.

Tocharistan and the Pamir mountains, not in Sīstān. As a result, a clearer picture emerges of the waning years of the Sasanian Dynasty as it existed on the eastern Iranian plateau, in Central Asia, and in China according to the Pahlavi, early Islamic, and Chinese sources. We will offer a reexamination of the textual references in the Chinese historical sources that are relevant to the last attempts of Sasanians in Eastern Iran and China. We will also offer some interpretations of those references, in the hope that they may help to clarify some misunderstandings and provide a solid ground for the future study of the last claimants of the Sasanian throne living in China

The Fall of the Sasanians in Iran – an Overview

Having lost any hope of regaining Mesopotamia after his defeat at Nihāwand, Yazdegerd spent several years traveling from one district to the next seeking alliances with various rulers. The Arabs meanwhile encountered little resistance as they occupied districts that Yazdegerd was compelled to abandon. Thus Xūzistān was occupied in 642 prior to the Battle of Nihāwand, while all of Media, including the cities of Isfahan, Jibāl, Ray, and Azerbaijan to Darband ‘Closed Gates’, were conquered by 23 AH/644 A.D. (Ṭabarī I, 3147).

For his part, Yazdegerd fled to Persis, but he was forced to flee eastward when in 650 the Arabs conquered it.³ Making his way to Xwarāsān by way of Kerman and Sīstān, Yazdegerd intended to win over the margraves and nobles as the last line of defense. He had not anticipated, however, that many regarded his presence as a threat to their authority as was the case upon his arrival in Sīstān.⁴ Given his inhospitable reception, he moved on to Xwarāsān in c. 650.⁵ Apparently, Farruxzād, the brother of Rustam who was the commander of Qadisīyya army, accompanied Yazdegerd,⁶ where the ruling Kunārang of Tūs⁷ refused to accommodate him on the pretext that the city was incapable of accommodating the king’s royal entourage, and thus sent him along his way with gifts (Ṭa‘ālibī 734).

Yazdegerd who now feared the margraves as much as he did the Arabs eventually fled to the Farṟāna district in Sogdia in 650 (Ṭabarī I, 3189) and did not return to Xwarāsān until 651 when the uprising of its people against the Arabs gave him hope of fomenting a transregional rebellion against the Arabs.

³ Daryaei 2009a, 37.

⁴ For example, he asked for his overdue tribute, thereby earning the enmity of its governor (Balādhurī 315).

⁵ Pourshariati 2008, 258.

⁶ Pourshariati 2008, 258.

⁷ An epithet used to designate Sasanian margraves.

After the death of Rustam, Farruxzād became the commander of the Persian army. When Yazdegerd was in Xwarāsān, Farruxzād asked Māhōy Suri (a member of the Sūrēn family), the Merv margrave, to support Yazdegerd in this endeavor,⁸ however, Yazdegerd and Māhōy soon fell into discord. Māhōy allied with Nēzak (also called Tarxān), the Hephthalite ruler of Bāydfīs, against Yazdegerd. Māhōy treacherously provoked Nēzak to fight against Yazdegerd in 650–651.⁹ Already abandoned by his forces due to the deceit of Māhōy, Yazdegerd lost the battle and was betrayed by Māhōy and murdered in a mill, in which he had taken refuge.¹⁰ They thereupon threw his corpse into Merv River where it was eventually found by a Christian priest who buried him. If we assume that Yazdegerd was only eight years of age when he was crowned king (632), then at the time of his death he was around 28 (Ṭabarī I, 3189–3190). Those subjects still loyal to Yazdegerd, blamed his death on Māhōy, bestowing upon him and his descendants the epithet *x^wadāy kušān*, literally ‘king killer’ (Iṣfāhānī 63).

The Sasanian Court’s seeking refuge in Central Asia and China

I. Sources

Information on Yazdegerd and his descendents in Central Asia or at the Tang court appears in the variegated works of early Muslim authors, later Middle Persian literature, and Chinese sources. Together with Middle Persian texts and Early Islamic sources such as the *Zand-e Bahman Yasn*, the *Bundahishn*, and *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān*, the Chinese texts provide the earliest written records about the last Sasanians in Central Asia and China. The *Jiu Tangshu* (舊唐書), or *The Old Book of the Tang Dynasty*, is the first official dynastic history (zhengshi 正史) of the Tang dynasty 唐 (618–907). It was compiled under the direction of Liu Xu (劉昫) and Zhang Zhaoyuan (張昭遠) during the Later Jin period (後晉, 936–946). The *Xin tangshu* (新唐書), or *The New Book of the Tang Dynasty*, is the second official dynastic history (zhengshi 正史) of the Tang dynasty (唐). It was written by a team under the supervision of the Northern Song period (北宋, 960–1126). And the book *Cefu yuangui* (冊府元龜), or *Prime Tortoise of the Record*

⁸ Pourshariati 2008, 259. This is the last time that we hear of Farruxzād in the sources.

⁹ Grenet 2002.

¹⁰ This is the context that forms the famous Islamic story of Yazdegerd’s murder by the miller. The story is that he was killed by a miller who robbed him of his clothes and jewelry. This account is paraphrased by Ṭabarī and other sources. According to Ṭa’ālibī, Māhōy’s soldiers found him in the mill and strangled him with a bowstring and imputed the killing of the Sasanian emperor to the miller (Ṭa’ālibī 747).

Bureau, is one of the so-called “four large books” (sòng sì dà shū, 宋四大書) of the Northern Song. Collectively, they cover more than five hundred years.¹¹ *Cefu yuangui* was the largest encyclopedia compiled during the Chinese Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD).

The account of the last Sasanians in the *Jiu Tangshu* is vague, and probably contains factual errors.¹² For example, the section regarding Pērōz (here called, Bilusi) is quite different from what is presented in the *Xin tangshu*. According to the *Jiu Tangshu*, Pērōz was captured by the Turkish prince of Tocharistan/Tokārestān,¹³ while the *Xin tangshu* correctly has Pērōz’s son, Narseh, captured by the Turkish prince of Tocharistan.¹⁴ Errors like this in the account of the last Sasanians in the *Jiu Tangshu*, are a reflection of the limited information that the author had available. Since the *Jiu Tangshu* was revised during the Song Dynasty and published as the *Xin Tangshu*, or the *New Book of Tang*, the account of the last Sasanians in the *Xin Tangshu* appears more reliable because it was written at a time of peace when the authors had access to additional sources of information.¹⁵ In fact, the author of *Xin Tangshu* based his accounts strictly on what he considered reliable evidence, including a reliable style, facts, and eliminated anything that he was unable to verify.¹⁶ Thus, we can regard the account of the last Sasanian in the *Xin Tangshu* as containing highly relevant information which we can use to reconstruct a fairly realistic image of last Sasanians’ life in China.

Early Islamic historians have also provided some information on Yazdegerd and his descendents as preserved in the Islamic accounts with the works of Ṭabarī, Masoudī, and Balāḍorī as the earliest and best of such narratives. There is also some information about Yazdegerd and his sons in the Middle Persian texts, such as the *Zand-e Bahman Yasn* and the *Bundahishn*. Touraj Daryaee, an Iranian Iranologist and Historian, was the first who mentioned the importance of the Middle Persian texts for the history of the last Sasanians in China. Daryaee, whose works provided the most extensive studies of the Sasanian history, also

¹¹ The majority of the relevant Chinese texts are now available in a variety of languages. Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918), a French sinologist, wrote the first detailed study of Tang historical texts on the Last Sasanians in China. Chavannes’s, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) occidentaux*, published in 1900, has remained the most important source for the translations of the *Jiu Tangshu* (舊唐書/旧唐书) and the *Xin Tangshu* (新唐書). Antonino Forte, an Italian sinologist, published several works on the history of last Sasanians in China. Forte also focused on Tang historical texts. His works on late Sasanians in Tang court and other Iranians in China are among the best interpretive essays of this period.

¹² See, e.g., Comparetti 2009.

¹³ Liu Xu 1975, 5311–5313.

¹⁴ Ou Yangxiu 1975, 6258–6260.

¹⁵ Sivin 1968, 88; see also Wilkinson 2000, 820.

¹⁶ Sivin 1968, 99.

drew on archaeological data to reconstruct the history of the last Sasanians in Central Asia and China. More recently, Matteo Compareti, in his article, ‘The last Sasanians in China’, has also incorporated archaeological data along with Chinese sources to discuss this issue.

The archaeological finds of the last Sasanians in Central Asia and China are few but they remain extremely important for reconstructing the life of last Sasanians. There are some gaps in the texts which sometimes can be filled by archaeological evidence. For instance, there is no mention of Aluohan (died in 710) in the Tang historical texts and it is from a funerary stele, discovered near Luoyang, that we know about him.

Despite the scholarship by Forte, Daryae, and Compareti, there are still questions surrounding the last Sasanians in Central Asia and China that have not been fully resolved, such as, where was the location of Pērōz’s kingdom, Chi-ling (疾陵城, i.e., Jiling city)? as well as other questions about the Sasanian claimants after Pērōz and Aluohan. What follows, then, is a thorough reexamination of the textual references in those historical sources that are relevant for understanding the Sasanian dynasty as it existed in eastern Iran and China.

II. The Last Claimants of the Sasanian Throne in Central Asia and China

A. Pērōz and Narseh

In 639 Yazdegerd sought an alliance with the Tang court,¹⁷ which was fast emerging as an important regional power. Yazdegerd sent two envoys to China and had also sought help from the kings of Sogdia and the khan of the western Turks. According to the *Xin Tangshu* and *Cefu yuangui*,¹⁸ the first envoy was sent in 639/40. The mission was headed by a certain Mo-se-pan (没似半 i.e. Marzban). Recent scholarship shows that the second envoy was sent to China in 647/48.¹⁹ It was during this second envoy that Yazdegerd’s sons and daughters migrated to China.²⁰ When the second envoy was sent – a mere five years before the king’s death – Yazdegerd was gradually losing hope that an effective resistance against the Arabs would ever materialize. Masoudi tells us that Yazdegerd had two sons, Wahrām and Pērōz, and three daughters, Adrag, Šahrbānu, and Mardāwand.²¹ He sent his sons and daughters to Tang controlled Central Asia in the hope of receiving military assistance from the Chinese

¹⁷ Daryae 2009b, 25.

¹⁸ Ou Yangxiu 1975, 6258–6260; Zhang 2006, 75–77.

¹⁹ Daryae 2009b, 25.

²⁰ Daryae 2009b, 25.

²¹ Masoudi II, 241

against the Arab invasion, but the Chinese emperor, Taizong 唐太宗 (626–649), was not inclined to help militarily due to the long distances involved.²²

According to the *Jiu Tangshu*, *Xin Tangshu*, and *Cefu yuangui*, Pērōz, whom they call 卑路斯, or Beilusi, was king of Persia in 661.²³ After the death of Yazdegerd, Pērōz sought help from Gaozong (唐高宗) (649–683), the third emperor of the Tang dynasty and son of Taizong.²⁴ According to the *Xin Tangshu* and the *Cefu yuangui*, when the Tang emperor refused Pērōz's request for help against the Arabs,²⁵ Pērōz, found refuge in Tocharistan (i.e., in the northern parts of modern Afghanistan), following the Arabs' abandonment of the area.²⁶ In 661–664, Pērōz again requested help from emperor Gaozong. He sent envoys to the Tang court and asked the emperor to help him defend his kingdom from the Arabs.²⁷ According to the *Xin Tangshu* and the *Cefu yuangui*, he finally managed to forge an Iranian kingdom²⁸ (with support from China) in a city called Chi-ling or Tsi-ling (疾陵城, i.e., Jiling city) in 661–663²⁹ that lasted until 674.³⁰ Some scholars, such as T. Daryaee and J. Harmatta, believe that the location of this kingdom was in Sīstān and identify Chi-ling as the city of Zarang (capital of Sīstān).³¹

Harmatta brings forth two arguments for the identification of Chi-ling as Sīstān. First, from the linguistic viewpoint, he recognizes Dz'jēt-ljəng/Dz'i(ɪ)-ljəŋ (official and northwestern middle Chinese forms) as a reflection of the Iranian *Zireng from a dialectical variant for Zrang (with an epenthesis vowel between *z* and *r*, and the palatalized development of the *a* and thus rendering it *zarang*).³² But linguistic evidences indicates that the Old Persian form *z-r-k Zranka/*Dranka* becomes in Middle Persian, Zrang, and from its Middle Persian form it is Zarang in New Persian. This is also attested by the Arabic form Zaranj زرنج. As far as historical documents and linguistic evidences indicate, such shifts in vowels from Middle Iranian to New Iranian (at least in the western Iranian Languages) are improbable. We also lack any attestation from the dialect in Sīstān to support Harmatta's conjecture. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that

²² Chavannes 1903, 257; Zhang 2006, 76.

²³ Zhang 2006, 73, 76–77.

²⁴ Chavannes 1903, 257.

²⁵ Ou Yangxiu 1975, 6258; Zhang 2006, 76.

²⁶ Ou Yangxiu 1975, 6258; Zhang 2006, 76–77.

²⁷ Ou Yangxiu 1975, 6258; Zhang 2006, 77.

²⁸ The texts called it *Po-szu* (i.e., Persia).

²⁹ Ou Yangxiu 1975, 6258–6260; Wang 1960, vol. 12, 11365. According to the *Cefu yuangui*, the emperor Gaozong sent Pērōz to Tocharistan as the ruler on February 14th of 663, Wang 1960, vol. 12, 11365; Zhang 2006, 77.

³⁰ See Harmatta 1971, 140–141.

³¹ See also Yule 1915, 150: where this kingdom is referred to as Zaranj.

³² Harmatta 1971, 140.

the Tang records preferred a dialectical variant over an official name, given that the name was probably transmitted by Sasanian refugees to the Tang officials. Second, Harmatta assumes a link between Tang policies and the fact that Zarang was independent between 658–663. According to Arabic sources, Pērōz took back Sīstān from the Arabs with the help of the king of Tocharistan and took up residence in Zarang (making it his capital) in 658–663.³³ This argument is mistaken, because the *Xin Tangshu* and the *Cefu yuangui* mention that Pērōz came to Chi-ling or Tsi-ling (疾陵城), in 661–663, while Zarang again fell to the Arabs in c. 663. Even though there were some minor turbulence in Sīstān at that time, there is no mention of Pērōz or any foreign power (Chinese or Turkic) involved in the Sīstān uprisings in any Islamic or local sources. Moreover, the Tang's involvement in any military operation in Sīstān is quite improbable because of logistical problems concerning the distances necessary to traverse from the western frontiers of the Tang to Sīstān, not to mention crossing mountainous roads and enemy territories.

Daryaee reasons that the numerous coins dated in the twentieth year of Yazdegerd's reign (650/51) found in eastern Iran indicate that Pērōz minted Sasanian coins in his father's name in order to establish legitimacy for his reign.³⁴ Daryaee maintains that this was a hectic period and so there was not time to mint coins with a new image and the name of Pērōz.³⁵ However, there are two reasons that nullify this hypothesis: first, he could have minted coins in his own name instead of his father's to reinforce his legitimacy, as minting a coin in one's own name had been a common practice in Iran since antiquity, and no less so than in the Sasanian era, as seen in the instances of Narseh (293–302),³⁶ Wahrām VI (590–91) and Wistahm (591–95).³⁷ In addition, we know that Tocharistan was a part of the Turkic Kaganate in c. 658³⁸ and as Chavannes had long ago established, Pērōz obtained the area of Chi-ling in the same year following the defeat of the western Turks in 658 by the Tang emperor.³⁹ So, it is logical to assume that the emperor of China gave Tocharistan or part of it to Pērōz, after the defeat of the western Turks in 658 and before the Arab conquest of Tocharistan in 674,⁴⁰

³³ Harmatta 1971, 140–141.

³⁴ Daryaee 2003, 542.

³⁵ Daryaee 2009b, 25–26.

³⁶ Lukonin 1969, 116.

³⁷ For details of coins see Alram 1986, 210.

³⁸ Tocharistan was a part of Hephtalite kingdom (Ṭabarī I, 873–874) and after its fall in the 6th century, became semi-autonomous, divided as it were between the western Turkic Khaganate and Sasanian Persia (6th–7th centuries). In the 8th century it was finally conquered by the Arabs (709/710), see Ṭabarī II, 1218.

³⁹ Chavannes 1903, 257.

⁴⁰ We know that Muslims first crossed the Oxus in 653–4 during the caliphate of Uthmān (644 A.D.–56 A.H.), but such vital crossing-points as Amul-i Shatt and Tirmidh (Termez) were

especially when one takes into account that Sīstān was far from the Turkic kingdom and even further from the Tang court. As a result, Pērōz's kingdom was located in Tocharistan.

Furthermore, we know that Pērōz's attempts to regain Persia are mentioned in Chinese and Islamic sources but there is no direct mention of it in Middle Persian Literature. However, Daryaei sees in chapter 18 of the *Bundahishn* a reference to Yazdegerd's son whom he recognizes as Pērōz: "Yazdegerd's son went to India, bringing with him a gigantic army [*Gund*, Pahlavi]. There he passed before coming to Xwarāsān, causing his large army to scatter."⁴¹ In this sentence, the location of India is controversial. Daryaei refers to Bīrūnī and believes that India here refers to Tocharistan.⁴² Bīrūnī, in his book, *Tahqīq mā le'l-Hend* (التحقيق ما للهند), says that the Zoroastrians of Sogdiana recognized the Punjab along with Hindu Kush as India.⁴³ Balāḍori's information that Pērōz settled among the Turks of Tocharistan and even married a noble Turkic woman also confirms this assumption.⁴⁴ According to the *Cefu yuangui*, embassies from kings of Persia came to Chang'an (Tang capital) several times until 772.⁴⁵ As we shall see, this country was Tocharistan.⁴⁶ We can therefore assume that these kings who, most likely, were from the Sasanian dynasty, like Pērōz and Narseh, attempted to regain Persia from Tocharistan.⁴⁷

Pērōz's reign in Tocharistan was short-lived. Unable to withstand the Arab invasion, he returned to China in 673–674,⁴⁸ which indicates that he had been defeated by the Arabs.⁴⁹ He went again to the west and returned on 17 June 675 to China for the last time. Pērōz was warmly received by Gaozong, who bestowed upon him the honorary title of "Awe-inspiring General of the Left (Flank)

not secured until sometime later, only then was it strategically wise for the Arab commanders to commit large bodies of troops for raids across the river. Hence it was not until 674, under the first Umayyad caliph Muawiyah I, that his general Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad crossed the Amu Darya and defeated the forces of the Sogdian ruler of Bukhara, Bukhār Khudāt, see Bosworth 1999, 28.

⁴¹ Daryaei 2003, 542.

⁴² Daryaei 2003, 543–544.

⁴³ Bīrūnī 1910, 260–261.

⁴⁴ Hitti 1968, 493.

⁴⁵ See *Cefu yuangui*, chapters: 971, 972, 973, 975, 999 in Wang 1960; Zhang 2006 78–80.

⁴⁶ Chavannes 1903, 257; Compareti 2009; Daffinà 1983, 135.

⁴⁷ It seems that the Arab conquest of Tocharistan coincided with the last attempt of Yazdegerd's descendants to regain Ērānšahr from the Arabs (Narseh's attempt in 708/709 = final conquest of Tocharistan 709–710). Moreover, the direction of Narseh and Khosrow's invasion indicates that it was directed south of the Oxus, since the only region that was controlled by the Sasanians was the southern districts of the Oxus and Tocharistan where Yazdegerd had spent his final years trying to forge alliances with regional rulers.

⁴⁸ Ou Yangxiu 1975, 6258–6260.

⁴⁹ Chavannes 1903, 257.

Guards” (*zuǒ wēi wèi jiāng jūn* 左威卫将军).⁵⁰ This title was among sixteen such titles he had received.⁵¹ According to the *Liǎng Jīng Xīnjì* (兩京新記 i.e., *New Records of the Two Capitals*) by Wei Shu (韋述), written in eighth century, Pērōz managed to get permission from Gaozong to build a “Persian Temple” called Bosi-si (波斯寺) in Chang’an.⁵²

Pērōz died the following year in 678–679⁵³ and was succeeded by his son Narseh.⁵⁴ He was buried in China.⁵⁵ His beheaded statue stands in front of the large mausoleum of Gaozong and his wife, Qiangling, near Xi’an. Gaozong’s mausoleum bears the following Chinese inscription on the back pedestal:

右驍衛大將軍兼波斯都督波斯王卑路斯

Zòu xiāowèi dà jiàngjūn jiānbōsī dūdū bōsī wáng bēilùsī

“Pērōz, king of Persia, grand general of the right courageous guard and commander-in-chief of Persia”.⁵⁶

This inscription holds great importance for us to understand Pērōz’s relations with the Tang court. If we take these titles as merely honorary and see in the word “Persia” an equivalent for *Ērānšahr*, then it would be redundant to call someone “King of Persia” and “Commander in chief of Persia”. On the other hand, we may assume that “King of Persia” indicates kingdom lost (i.e., *Ērānšahr*), while “Commander in chief of Persia” indicates that Chi-ling was given to Pērōz by the Tang emperor as a fiefdom. This is confirmed by the seventh word in the inscription – the Chinese title, dūdū 都督, literally military commander who was in charge of a dūdūfū, 都督府, i.e. area commandery.⁵⁷ It seems that Pērōz was the dūdū (military commander) of a dūdūfū which was most likely Chi-ling. After all, these titles were intended for client kings providing the Tang a legitimate kingship.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Ou Yangxiu 1975, 6258–6260.

⁵¹ Daryae 2003, 542.

⁵² Drake 1943, 6. Scholars believe that this temple was a Christian establishment (Forte 1999, 282; Compareti 2009; Leslie 1981–83, 290) and serves as evidence that late Sasanian rulers were interested in Christianity. Recent scholarship shows that Pērōz’s wife, most likely, was Christian (Scarcia 2004, 121; Compareti 2009). We know also of another Persian, a certain Aluoben (阿罗本), who introduced Christianity into China and built the first church at Chang’an in 635 (Forte 1996a, 349–74; Tajadod 2000, 43–45; Compareti 2009).

⁵³ Chavannes 1903, 258.

⁵⁴ Chavannes 1903, 258.

⁵⁵ There is no mention in any Chinese source about his burial place, but because of his presence in the Tang court (in Chang’an) during his last year, we may assume that he was buried there.

⁵⁶ Forte 1996c, 404; Daryae 2003, 542.

⁵⁷ This title was bestowed by the Tang court on Chinese generals stationed at the border or on vassal kings in the conquered lands. For Tang administration of the frontier regions and conquered lands, see Skaff 2012, 248–249.

⁵⁸ Canepa 2010, 140.

After Pērōz, his son Narseh tried to regain *Ērānšahr*. In c. 678 or 679, the Chinese general, Péi Xíng Jiǎn (裴行俭), responsible for subduing the western Turkic khan āshīnà dōuzhī (阿史那都支), who was allied with the Tibetans and Kashgarians, crowned Narseh (涅涅师, Nie-nie-che) in Tocharistan. Under the pretext of restoring the Sasanian prince onto the throne of *Ērānšahr*, he surprised the Turkic khan and defeated him. The Chinese general, having achieved his purpose, did not continue his march toward *Ērānšahr* and left the Iranian prince there. Being left alone in Tocharistan, Narseh fought for twenty years against the Arabs until all his men and resources were exhausted; whereupon he reluctantly left and returned to the Chinese court in 708/9.⁵⁹ There he received the title of “General of the Left Majestic Guard” (*zuǒ wēi wèi jiāng jūn* 左威衛將軍). His statue is next to that of his father’s.⁶⁰

B. Aluohan, Juluo and other Sasanian Claimants

Although recent scholarship has tended to focus on Pērōz and Narseh and their struggle to regain Persia, there were other individuals from the Sasanian clan who also tried to retake Persia. There is information about a Persian nobleman who is identified as Pērōz’s brother, Wahrām.⁶¹ A funerary stele, which was recovered near Luoyang, reveals important information regarding the career of Aluohan, probably the Chinese variant of Wahrām.⁶² He is described as a Persian who was a contemporary of Pērōz and highly esteemed by Gaozong.⁶³ He is also said to have been a member of the Sasanian royal family and held the title of “General of the Left Awesome Guard” (*zòu wuwèi jiāngjūn* 左威卫将军).⁶⁴ He was famous for two important events. He was sent to Byzantium as a Chinese envoy (probably to conclude an alliance between the Tang and Byzantine Empire), and he constructed an important building in China.⁶⁵ In 656–661, he was charged by the Tang with retaking Iran from the Arabs.⁶⁶ The following inscription stored today in the Imperial Museum of Uyeno in Japan reveals something about his life at the Tang court:

“The Inscription on the Stone-tablet set up in memory of the late Great Persian Chieftain, the General and Commander of the Right Wings of the Imperial Army of Tang [i.e. China] with the title of Grand Duke of Chin-ch’êng-chūn [in Kan-su] and the Rank of Shang-chu-kuo [上柱國⁶⁷,

⁵⁹ Chavannes 1903, 258.

⁶⁰ Daryae 2003, 543–544.

⁶¹ Forte 1996b, 193–194.

⁶² Forte 1996c, 411.

⁶³ Zhang 2006, 89.

⁶⁴ Zhang 2006, 89.

⁶⁵ Zhang 2006, 89.

⁶⁶ Zhang 2006, 89.

⁶⁷ Shang-chu-kuo (上柱國 [py: shang zhu guo]), an honorary office given to only a select few. The office was established in the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581) and abolished during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912).

i.e. lit. The first-class Corner Stone of the Empire]: This is the Stone-tablet erected in memory of A-lo-han [阿羅喊] a Persian prince by birth and the most illustrious of the whole tribe. During the period of Hsien-ching [656–661], the then reigning Emperor Kao-Tsung the Great, hearing of the meritorious service and illustrious deeds of this Persian prince sent a special messenger to invite him to his own palace [Here are two illegible characters]. As soon as the Prince arrived at the capital, the Emperor appointed him Generalissimo, and charged him with the responsibility of defending the Northern Gate [i.e. the northern region of China] [here is one illegible character] and sent him as the Imperial envoy to the tribes of Tibet, Ephraim, and other countries.⁶⁸

This inscription continues to mention Wahrām's sagacious acts, his death, followed by a requiem. The importance of this inscription is its information about Wahrām's attempts to take *Ērānšahr*. It seems that Wahrām alongside his brother Pērōz had tried to restore the Sasanian kingdom, and his role in this attempt was more diplomatic than military. He was a Tang envoy to "Tibet, Ephraim⁶⁹, and other countries". This assumption is confirmed by a Middle Persian text called *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*. In this book there is the story of someone called "Wahrām-ī-Warjāwand" who ultimately put an end to the atrocities of the Iranian people and expelled the Arabs. Some scholars believe that he might be Wahrām the son of Yazdegerd.⁷⁰ This is well illustrated by looking at the text of *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*: "And he is born as a king who is called in the religion Wahrām -ī-Warjāwand ... and when that king is 30 years old ... having gathered innumerable soldiers and banners, of China and India holding banners ... the kingdom is entrusted to him" (*Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 7/5,6).⁷¹

Nevertheless, Wahrām was not successful in bringing about Iranian aspirations. This prince died at the age of 95 on the first day of the fourth month of Chingyūn's reign (710) in his private domicile in Honan Fu.⁷² After Wahrām, his son whose name is stated as Jū Luó (俱羅) in the Chinese sources – the Chinese variant of Xusrow – continued his father's mission.⁷³ Ṭabarī also points to someone called Xusrow who fought the Arabs in 728/29 in the Turkic Khan's army in Transoxiana, whom he identifies as Yazdegerd's son.⁷⁴ Since there is a 78 year gap between Yazdegerd's death and Xusrow, we can assume that he was same Xusrow in the Chinese records and thus Yazdegerd's great-grandson. He also visited China's capital in 730/31.⁷⁵

In the *Cefu yuangui* (冊府元龜), there is information about Kings of Persia who sent embassies to the Tang court at Chang'an from 723 to 772.⁷⁶ As noted above,

⁶⁸ Saeki 1916, 257.

⁶⁹ It seems that the country of Ephraim was near the Eastern Roman Empire on the coast of Mediterranean Sea (Zhang 2006, 89).

⁷⁰ Cereti 1996, 636; Sprengling 1939, 175–176; Compareti 2009.

⁷¹ Daryaei (2003, 546) maintains that "the resurgence of king Wahrām ī Warjāwand" in Pahlavi texts also points to Wahrām.

⁷² Saeki 1916, 258; Zhang 2006, 90.

⁷³ Zhang 2006, 90.

⁷⁴ Ṭabarī II, 1518. See Harmatta 1971, 141–142; Marquart 1901, 69.

⁷⁵ Zhang 2006, 79.

⁷⁶ See *Cefu yuangui*, chapters 971, 972, 973, 975, 999 in Wang 1960; Zhang, 2006 78–80.

some scholars identify “Persia” as Tocharistan.⁷⁷ The *Cefu yuangui* even mentions two of these kings’ names: one is called Bó Qiāng Huó (勃善活), probably the Chinese variant of Pušang, who is referred to as the Persian king in 723.⁷⁸ He was apparently the son of Narseh and the grandson of Pērōz.⁷⁹ It seems that he was in Tocharistan like his father fighting the Arabs. In the same source, we also learn of another person called Mù Shānuò (穆沙诺) who is referred to as the king of Persia.⁸⁰ He came to the Tang court in 726 or 731 and was given the rank of a General (折冲 shé chōng) and became a Guardian (留宿卫 liú sù wèi) of the Emperor in 731.⁸¹ After Mù Shānuò, there is some information about envoys from Persia who came to the Tang court until 772, but there is no direct mention of any Persian king. It seems that after Mù Shānuò, the Persians (most likely Sasanians) in Tocharistan were completely defeated by the Arabs. Although this is an inference, it is known that after 731, the names of Sasanian claimants disappear from the histories.

Although there is no mention of the names of Sasanian claimants in the histories after 731, we know that several Persian nobles lived in the Far East. Some of these nobles lived in China because of support of the first Tang emperors, but this changed after the rebellion of the Sogdian-Turkic General Ruhsan-An Lushan (755–756) and, especially with the edicts issued by the minister Li Mi (722–789), who wanted to stop the financial support granted to the Iranian nobles living at Chang’an.⁸² There is also information about the first Persians visiting Japan. In the *Nihon Shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*), one of the earliest Japanese historical sources, completed in 720, we read that in 654 several people arrived in Japan from Tokhārā,⁸³ which must be an abbreviated version of Tocharistan/Tokārestān.⁸⁴ Elsewhere in the *Nihon Shoki*, it is mentioned that in 660, when a Persian, whose name was Dārā, returned to his country, he left his wife in Japan and promised the Emperor that he would come back and work for him again.⁸⁵

Conclusion

After the death of Yazdegerd, his son, Pērōz escaped along with a few Persian nobles and took refuge in the Chinese imperial court. Together with Persian sources, Chinese texts and inscriptions provide the earliest written records about

⁷⁷ Chavannes 1903, 257; Compareti 2009; Daffinà 1983, 135.

⁷⁸ Wang 1960, vol. 12, 11723.

⁷⁹ Shahmardān 1360, 49.

⁸⁰ Wang 1960, vol. 12, 11450; Zhang 2006, 78.

⁸¹ Wang 1960, vol. 12, 11450; Zhang 2006, 78.

⁸² Compareti 2003, 211; Dulby 1979, 593.

⁸³ Aston 1972, 246, 251, 259.

⁸⁴ Itō 1980, 5–10.

⁸⁵ Aston 1972, 266; Imoto 2002, 58–60; Morita 2012.

Yazdegerd and his descendants who avoided the submission to the Arabs and lived in Central Asia or at the Tang court.

In this article we have endeavored to illuminate the following. Although some scholars have suggested that Pērōz managed to form an Iranian kingdom with China's support in a region known as Chi-ling in Sīstān (疾陵城, Jiling city) in 661, in actuality it was located in Tocharistan. Second, from the death of Yazdegerd to 731 or even up to the end of eighth century, Tocharistan served as a bastion for Sasanian refugees who still clung to the hope of one day taking Ērānšahr away from the Arabs. Based on the Chinese sources and the Middle Persian and early Islamic sources we know the names of these kings. We also argued that Bó Qiāng Huó (勃善活), probably the Chinese variant of Pušang and Mù Shānuò (穆沙诺) are other Sasanian claimants who were settled in Tocharistan and were called Kings of Persia in the *Cefu yuangui* (冊府元龜).

Although their relationship to the Sasanian family is tenuous, there are other Persians who appear in the Chinese sources for various reasons due to the nature of Chinese sources which are concerned with such variegated issues as climate, local products, trade, and the customs or strange behavior of western peoples. The description of foreign peoples in the official histories is not for information's sake, but to provide assistance to the Chinese bureaucracy for purposes of taxation and military services. Nevertheless, according to these sources we reasoned that Pērōz's kingdom in Tocharistan lasted from 661 until 674. Following the death of Pērōz, his sons along with other Sasanian claimants tried to retake Persia. Chinese sources say that they were in Tocharistan but we cannot be sure whether they could manage to form a kingdom there or not. What we do know is that they were fighting with the Arabs and sending embassies to China on behalf of the King of Persia. All these factors compel us to conclude that the collapse of Sasanian Empire did not mean that the dynasty simply disappeared. On the contrary, we have ample evidence that indicates that the Sasanians undertook numerous attempts to retake Persia for about a century with Chinese assistance.

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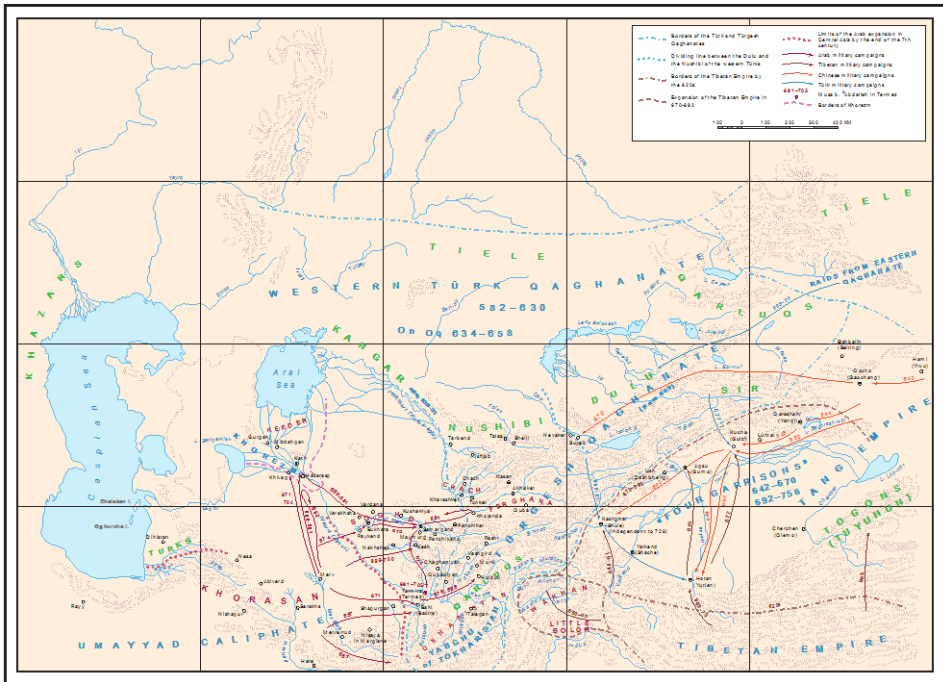
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Abstract

Following the devastating defeat at Nihawand, the last Sasanian emperor, Yazdegerd III (632–651) sought refuge in the eastern Iranian plateau, although he continued to return to his country to exert influence over the Persian nobility until his death. His sons, Pērōz and Wahrām, along with a few Persian nobles took refuge in the Tang court of imperial China. They constantly tried to regain “Ēranšahr” (Persia) from the Arabs with the assistance of the Chinese, Sogdians, and the inhabitants of Tocharistan, but all their attempts were in vain. Information about Yazdegerd and his sons and the time they spent in Central Asia and at the Tang court is recorded in the works of Muslim authors, in later Middle Persian literature, and in Chinese sources. In what follows, we will offer some fresh insights about these accounts as they relate to the final years of the Sasanian empire and afterwards.



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