

*ĀSĀR-E 'AJAM: A DIFFERENT VISION FOR IRAN'S ANCIENT HISTORY*

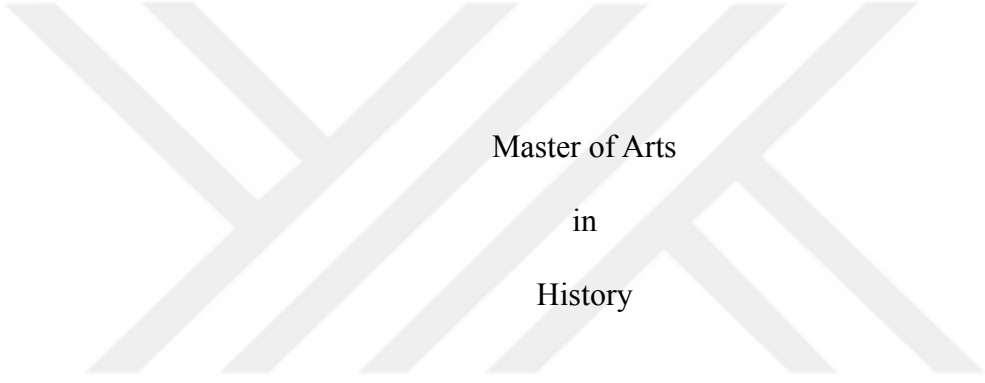
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BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY

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*ĀSĀR-E 'AJAM: A DIFFERENT VISION FOR IRAN'S ANCIENT HISTORY*

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*Āsār-e 'Ajam: A Different Vision for Iran's Ancient History*

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June 2024

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Mert Aydemir, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

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## ABSTRACT

### *Āsār-e 'Ajam: A Different Vision for Iran's Ancient History*

This thesis investigates the contending perceptions of ancient history in late nineteenth-century Iran, focusing on the intellectual history of early Iranian nationalism and the concept of Iranianness. By defining secular, anti-Islamic, and anti-Arab ideas that emerged in the nineteenth century as the main components of mainstream nationalism in Iran, it critiques the secondary literature on Iranian nationalism for adopting a teleological interpretation of nationalism. This study rejects the notion that any interest in pre-Islamic Iran is necessarily related to that particular nationalism and requires a wholesale rejection of existing religious, social, and intellectual values. The three dissident intellectuals, Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah, Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, and Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, are considered the pioneers of mainstream nationalist thought and historiography in this thesis. In contrast, Forsat al-Dowlah's *Āsār-e 'Ajam* exemplifies a different vision of Iran's ancient history, as it does not construct pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran as mutually exclusive for Iranian identity. Although *Āsār-e 'Ajam* reflects the rising interest in pre-Islamic Iran among Qajar literati, it highlights alternative approaches to making sense of ancient ruins. Despite the presence of orientalist and Neo-Zoroastrian sources influential in the emergence of mainstream nationalism in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, it is argued that Islamic mysticism, philosophy/theology, faith, and ethics were more decisive conceptual categories in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. This thesis argues that Forsat's vision of ancient Iran demonstrates a more inclusive conception of Iranianness and refutes the necessity of a binary perspective on the Iranian past.

## ÖZET

### *Āsār-ı 'Acem: İran'ın Antik Tarihine Farklı Bir Yaklaşım*

Bu tez, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın sonlarında İran'da antik döneme dair çatışan algıları incelemektedir. Bu bakımdan çalışma, İranlılık kimliği ve İran milliyetçiliğinin entelektüel tarihine odaklanır. Seküler, İslam ve Arap karşıtı fikirleri 19.yüzyılda ortaya çıkan ve ana akım İran milliyetçiliğinin temel bileşenleri olarak gören tez, ayrıca milliyetçiliği teleolojik olarak yorumlayan ikincil literatürü eleştirir. Bu araştırma, İslam öncesi İran'a dair her türlü ilginin zorunlu olarak ana akım milliyetçilik ve mevcut dinî, sosyal ve entelektüel değerlerin toptan inkârı anlamına geldiği önermelerini de reddeder. Üç muhalif entelektüel—Mirza Fethali Ahundzâde, Celâleddin Mirza ve Mirza Aga Han Kirmani—Kaçar dönemi'nde milliyetçi düşünce ve tarihyazımının öncüleri olarak incelenmiştir. Buna karşın, Fursat al-Dovle'nin *Āsār-ı 'Acem* adlı eseri İslamî ve İslam öncesi İran'ı birbirini dışlayan tarihsel dönemler olarak görmeyerek İran kimliğine ve antik İran tarihine farklı bir yaklaşım geliştirir. *Āsār-ı 'Acem*, Kaçar dönemi entelektüelleri arasında antik döneme ilişkin artan ilgiyi yansıtsa da antik harabeleri anlamlandırmada alternatif yaklaşımların varlığını da gösterir. Bu araştırma ayrıca ana akım milliyetçiliğin doğuşunda etkili rol oynamış oryantalist ve Yeni-Zerdüştuçi metinlerin *Āsār-ı 'Acem*'in başvurduğu kaynaklar arasında yer aldığını ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte; irfan, felsefe/kelam, inanç, ahlâk gibi öğeleri içine alan geniş bir kavramsal kategori olarak İslam'ın Fursat al-Dovle'nin antik tarihe ve eserde ele aldığı diğer konulara ilişkin tavrını belirlemede daha etkili bir faktör olduğunu savunmaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca Fursat'ın antik İran'a bakışının daha kapsayıcı bir İranlılık kimliğine işaret ettiğini gösterir.

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The Persian language has been at the core of my interest in Iranian history and culture. Thus, I want to thank all of my Persian language tutors. I began learning Persian with Toğrul Atabay, who not only taught the language itself but also sparked my interest in historical philology. The intensive program at the Persian Language Center at Shiraz University significantly boosted my language skills, and I am grateful to the university and its teachers.

Madinah Karami has been not only a teacher but also a friend since we first met in Shiraz in 2017. Having a friend who can understand any text in Persian and Arabic and is always ready to help is an excellent privilege. Discussing the challenging aspects of the nineteenth-century Persian texts I used as primary sources in my thesis was incredibly instructive. She also assisted me in reading unpublished

personal letters of Forsat al-Dowlah and acquiring both published and unpublished materials in Iran.

Some people were very helpful in providing me with the books and documents I needed for my research. I bought a facsimile of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* from the Ahmadi bookstore (*Ketābforushī-ye Ahmadi*) in Shiraz, along with many other rare books. I thank Mr. Asghari and his colleagues. Sheyda Rahimi kindly shared Forsat's unpublished personal letters with me, further illuminating Forsat's biography and occupations. Mohammad Javad Ahmedinia sent me the impossible-to-find book *Nagāhī bah Āsār-e Mosavvar-e Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzī*. I owe an outstanding debt to these people who facilitated my research.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an inquiry into the perception of ancient Iran in the Qajar period (1794-1925). The idea of writing such a thesis emerged from my observations among Iranians in and outside Iran and academic readings. To begin with, my interest in the perception of ancient history in Modern Iran appeared in 2017 when I was learning Persian in Shiraz. From the beginning of my fruitful experience of living among the fascinating Shirazi people, I discerned that Iranians attribute particular importance to their ancient history and ruins around Shiraz.

Many Iranians, with whom I got acquainted for years, generally expected me to study the pre-Islamic period. It was surprising to notice their disappointment after learning about my interest in the Qajar period. The Qajar era symbolized the backwardness and weakness of the country for many and was not deemed worthy of scholarly curiosity. In history books, particularly those written in the Pahlavi period, this era is seen as the period of Ignorance (*'asr-e bīkhabarī*).<sup>1</sup> The pre-Islamic period<sup>2</sup>, however, is regarded as the golden age of Iranian history.

People were generally willing to talk about history with me and frequently initiated interesting conversations after learning that I am from Turkey and studying history. I cannot remember how many times I heard from people or read on social media platforms and blogs statements like, “Do you know that Turkey was part of

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Ebrāhīm Taymūrī's book on capitulations in the Qajar period bears the title of *'Asr-e Bīkhabarī yā Tārīkh-e Emīyāzāt dar Īrān* (The period of Ignorance or the history of Capitulations in Iran). Ebrāhīm Taymūrī, *'Asr-e Bīkhabarī yā Tārīkh-e Emīyāzāt dar Īrān* (Tehran: Eqbāl, 1333/1954).

<sup>2</sup> I use pre-Islamic Iran and ancient Iran interchangeably throughout the text.

Iran once upon a time?”<sup>3</sup> After a brief puzzlement, I figured out that they were implying the Achaemenid domination of Anatolia during the sixth century BCE.

In addition to my conversations with Iranians, it did not take very long for me to realize to what extent pre-Islamic symbols are widespread in Iranian visual culture. Figures such as Zoroaster, Farahavar, Cyrus the Great, Darius, etc., are commercialized and can be seen in clothes, jewelry, and other manufactured goods. This was in stark contrast with the state-sponsored murals in big cities of Iran, which try to keep the memory of the Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and the concept of Shiite martyrdom alive.<sup>4</sup>

Even though the popular perception of ancient history inspired me, this study focuses on the intellectual background of modern Iranian obsession with the pre-Islamic period, which arguably emerged in the Qajar period. This inevitably leads me to discuss the emergence of Iranian nationalism, as the modern obsession with ancient Iran cannot be considered independent of nationalism.

The literature on the emergence of Iranian nationalism is quite rich, as I will review it in the following pages. For now, suffice it to say that the secondary literature on Iranian nationalism and the perception of pre-Islamic Iran during the Qajar period has chiefly dealt with specific texts considered the precursors of secular or mainstream nationalism, which would be the state ideology in the Pahlavi period. Defining or describing what has been mainstream in Iranian nationalism is a challenging task. From my perspective, mainstream nationalism should represent

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<sup>3</sup> Turkey is considered part of larger Iran (*Īrān-e Bozorg*) in this popular article, which carries the title “Which countries were part of the Iranian territory in the past?”. “Īrān-e Bozorg,” Eligasht, 2024, <https://www.eligasht.com/Blog/tourism/-تجزیه-ایران-از-20%ایران-بزرگ-20%جدا-شد-#:~:text=20%جدا-شد-20%بزرگ-20%ایران-بزرگ-20%عهدنامه-20%قصر,از-20%ایران-بزرگ-20%جدا-شد-#:~:text=20%جدا-شد-20%بزرگ-20%ایران-بزرگ-20%عهدنامه-20%قصر>.

<sup>4</sup> For more information and analyses on propagandist murals and their role in Iranian contemporary art see Talinn Grigor, “(Re)Claiming Space: Use/Misuse of Propaganda Murals in Republican Tehran,” *International Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter* 28 (August 2002), p. 37 and H.E. Chehabi and Fotini Christia, “The Art of State Persuasion: Iran’s Post Revolutionary Murals,” *Persica* 22, no.1 (2008): 1-13.

ideas and discourses that proved durable in the long run. In this regard, I consider the secular, anti-Arab, and anti-Islamic nationalist discourse that emerged in the Qajar period as the mainstream nationalism because it proved to be resilient in three different periods: the Qajar and the Pahlavi monarchies and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

One may notice the impact of the hindsight bias or creeping determinism in historiography on Iranian nationalism. Texts that do not fall in the category of mainstream nationalism have become less the subject of scholarly work or have been regarded as being in the same line as the former group. Therefore, this study questions the constructed uniformity of visions that existed for Iranian identity in the Qajar period. This is not to say that this thesis has the bold claim of being a pioneer in this attempt. As I will mention in the literature review section below, there are valuable scholarly works pointing to the existence of different visions for Iranian identity in the Qajar period.

It is commonplace that any study intended to be a significant one aims to fill a gap in the secondary literature. For studies dealing with texts, this can be achieved by using untapped sources or offering new conceptual and theoretical frameworks for the interpretation of well-known texts. Taking the conviction that the scholarship should turn its attention to the less-studied or ignored texts with the hope that they can provide us with different insights into the perception of ancient Iran, I decided to study Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzī's (1854-1920) *Āsār-e 'Ajam*.

*Āsār-e 'Ajam* is the compilation of Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzī's travel notes (*Mosāferatnāmah* or *Mosāferatnāmchah*), mainly across the Fars region alongside his 50 drawings of mostly pre-Islamic ruins. In addition to the travel notes, Forsat combines the information he acquired from Perso-Islamic and European sources.

Although his focus is on ancient ruins located in the Fars region throughout the book, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* contains a wide range of subjects such as geography, history, ancient scripts, literature, Islamic knowledge, biographies of historical and contemporary figures, etc.

*Āsār-e 'Ajam* is a long text that includes various topics like archeological sites, contemporary buildings in Shiraz, ancient scripts, popular stories, verses in Arabic and Persian, 50 drawings of mostly pre-Islamic ruins, biographies, as well as debate and discussions regarding the Islamic sciences. It should be emphasized that pre-Islamic Iran is located in the center of the narrative, as Forsat himself frequently says throughout the book that it is time to go back to the main topic (*metleb-e aslī*), meaning ancient sites and ruins.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note that the word *Āsār* is a direct reference to antiquities or ancient monuments.<sup>6</sup> Be that as it may, the book covers numerous digressions from the theme of pre-Islamic Iran in so much that it can be safely argued that the number of pages in which Forsat deals with the topics unrelated to pre-Islamic Iran is not less than those in which he deals with ancient Iran. Digressions in *Āsār-e 'Ajam* are usually related to Islamic sciences, ethics, biographies of historical and contemporary figures, or anecdotes aimed to advise the audience. More importantly, there are many sections and sub-sections in *Āsār-e 'Ajam* that ancient Iran meets Islamic knowledge, mysticism, piety, theology, and philosophy.

Forsat undertook most of his trips, which were later documented in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, as a result of his patronage relationships with various elites. At different times over approximately 20 years, he was commissioned by two different Qajar princes

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<sup>5</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:124, 191.

<sup>6</sup> F. Steingass, "Āsār," in *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2005), 4.

serving as the governors of the Fars region and by Manekji Limji Hataria (d. 1890), the emissary of the Parsis of India in Iran from 1854 to 1890, to visit ancient ruins across the Fars region, draw their pictures, and provide information about them.

The majority of the studies conducted on *Āsār-e 'Ajam* have focused on sorting out the topics related to pre-Islamic Iran in the book, remaining indifferent to the others. However, as I will show in this thesis, Forsat frequently discusses ancient ruins, i.e., subjects related to pre-Islamic Iran, by keeping different knowledge systems and religio-cultural sensibilities in mind. I argue that Islam, as a belief system, a concept of knowledge, a historical legacy, an ethos, a mystic tradition, and ethics, was Forsat's primary conceptual tool to explore and make sense of the ancient ruins he dealt with in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. While some orientalist studies, which were helpful for Forsat in finding the translations of the inscriptions of ancient ruins, travelogues written in English and French, and neo-Zoroastrian Desatir texts were significant sources occasionally drawn upon in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, they only served as sources of information for Forsat's aims. As a large conceptual category, Islam remains central in Forsat's contemplation of ancient ruins.

### 1.1 Historical background

A concise discussion about the evolution of the perception of pre-Islamic Iran is necessary to contextualize the rising interest in ancient Iran during the Qajar period. Islamization of Iran began following the Muslim conquest of Iran in the seventh century. Despite the persistence of Zoroastrianism, the official and most common religion in the pre-Islamic period in certain regions, at least the urban centers within the former Sasanid geography, became Muslim in a few centuries. Until recently, the Islamization of Iran has been regarded as a national failure and a total break with the

country's pre-Islamic past by Orientalists and Iranian nationalists.<sup>7</sup> Recent studies, however, emphasize that political, religious, and socio-economic change was gradual in former Sasanid territories.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the long-term cultural and ideological implications of the conquest of Iran by Muslim Arabs would be very much beyond an ordinary dynastical change. Contrary to the consolidation of Muslim identity among Iranians, it is safe to argue that the memory of the pre-Islamic period did not wholly fade away after the Islamic conquests and further Islamization of Iran as of the seventh century. Instead, it continued to find a place for itself in written and oral cultures.

Early Islamic historiography showed a general inclination to reconcile and synchronize the Islamic (Quranic or Abrahamic) historical framework with Persian mytho-history. Early Muslim historians, such as Tabarī (d. 923) and Mas'ūdī (d. 956), opted for the Islamic framework and deemed the latter unreliable when reconciliation seemed impossible.<sup>9</sup> In a similar way, Al-Dīnavarī (d. 895) posited historical or legendary Persian figures in the scheme of prophetic history.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the reconciliation and synchronization attempts, the memory of pre-Islamic Iran also had a pedagogical value, especially in the advise literature known as *Mirror for Princes*. The emphasis is generally on the deeds of Persian kings (*molūk-e 'Ajam* or *molūk-e Fārs*).<sup>11</sup> Some local Iranian dynasties, like the Buyids,

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<sup>7</sup> 'Abdolhosayn Zarrīnkūb's *Do Qarn Soqūt* (Two Centuries of Silence) has been probably the most popular example of this genre in Iran. 'Abdolhosayn Zarrīnkūb, *Do Qarn Soqūt* (Tehran: Ahmad Helmī, 1344/1965).

<sup>8</sup> See Khodadad Rezakhani's two short articles. Khodadad Rezakhani, "The Arab Conquests and Sasanian Iran (Part 1) Some General Observations on the Late Sasanian Period," *Mizan*, February 3, 2016, <https://mizanproject.org/the-arab-conquests-and-sasanian-iran-part-1/>; "The Arab Conquests and Sasanian Iran (Part 2) Islam in a Sasanian Context," *Mizan*, February 18, 2016, <https://mizanproject.org/the-arab-conquests-and-sasanian-iran-part-2/>.

<sup>9</sup> Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Contested Memories of Pre-Islamic Iran," *The Medieval History Journal* 2, no. 2 (1999): 249.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 156.

<sup>11</sup> Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Contested Memories of Pre-Islamic Iran," 259.

emerged following the loosening of the Abbasid tight in Iran, claimed ancestral connection to pre-Islamic Iran, and allegedly revived the ancient festivals, thus wanting to strengthen their political positions.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the attempt to reconcile and synchronize the two traditions, there were arguably negative evaluations of ancient Iran. In this regard, the identification of ancient Iranian rulers with oppression and persecution is remarkable, as some medieval Muslim scholars even regarded the Quranic Pharaoh as Iranian-born. The Zoroastrian heritage also counted as a factor in the negative perception of pre-Islamic Iran.<sup>13</sup>

It can be assumed that pre-Islamic Iran may have gained other connotations and uses throughout the medieval and early modern periods across the Persianate world<sup>14</sup>, alongside those mentioned above. That said, it seems hard to assert that ancient Iran served as a core element in the pre-modern identity configurations of Persianate Muslims. It is only with the emergence of nationalism in the nineteenth century that ancient history started to be seen as a part of Iran's national past. It can be argued that regional, tribal, sectarian, and religious identities were more dominant in pre-modern Iran. It is also important to note that discussions on identity in pre-

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<sup>12</sup> Tilman Nagel, "BUYIDS," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed April 18, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/buyids>

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran*, 160-164.

<sup>14</sup> The term Persianate was first coined by the famous historian Marshall Hodgson. In his seminal three-volume work, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Hodgson refers to the rise of Persian as a new cultural orientation within Islamdom and uses Persianate as an umbrella term, pointing to the cultural traditions produced in or influenced by Persian. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 293.; The term Persianate has gained considerable currency in Anglo-Saxon academic tradition in recent decades. For other studies dealing with this term, see Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (California: University of California Press, 2019) and Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). Shahab Ahmed challenges the use of the terms Persianate or Turco-Persian, arguing that they privilege particular linguistic and ethnic elements. Instead, he offers the use of the term Balkans-to-Bengal historical space to represent better the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in Islamic societies and to avoid falling into the trap of Persian or Arab nationalist readings of Islamic history. Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 84. My understanding of Persianate is inspired by Marshall Hodgson, who did not use it in an ethnic sense.

modern times generally deal with a small segment of society, the elites, who produced the written documents, thanks to which historians reconstruct the past.

The nineteenth century witnessed a change of attitude vis-à-vis the pre-Islamic past among Muslims.<sup>15</sup> Even a cursory look demonstrates that Muslim societies or emerging national cultures developed different approaches to the pre-Islamic past of their people or country. For Iranians and Egyptians, archaeology and pre-Islamic history came to represent the ancient history of their nations over the course of this century. However, archaeology or pre-Islamic history was less a quest for a bygone national history but a matter of international politics and imperial prestige for the Ottomans.<sup>16</sup> In searching for the origins of the nation and the dynasty, the Hamidian regime and intellectuals like Ahmet Mithat Efendi turned their attention to medieval Anatolia. In this regard, the 1886 Söğüt Expedition, intended to photograph the land for documenting the birthplace of the Ottoman state alongside the tribal population, who were assumed to have a kinship with the Ottoman dynasty, is a telling example of the Ottoman quest for its origins.<sup>17</sup> Ahmet Mithat Efendi (d.1912), a leading Ottoman author and journalist, argues in the introduction of his

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<sup>15</sup> I do not claim that the reevaluation of ancient history was limited to Muslims in the nineteenth century. Similar trends can be observed in Greece, Italy, and many other countries. Instead, I prefer to limit the subject for this thesis's scope.

<sup>16</sup> For insightful analyses of the development of archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, see Zainab Bahrani, Zeynep Çelik and Edhem Eldem, eds., *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753-1914* (İstanbul: Salt, 2011); Yet, it would be a bold claim to argue that nineteenth-century Ottoman-Turkish society did not develop any thoughts on Turkic people's pre-Islamic past.; The late nineteenth century was a period when cultural Turkism, through the field of Turcology and new history books, gained a wider currency among Ottoman intellectual circles. Şükrü Hanioglu, "Türkçülük," in Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, accessed May 20, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/turkculuk>.; In this regard, Mustafa Celâleddin Paşa's *Les Turcs Anciens et Modernes*, first published in 1869 in Istanbul and a year later in Paris, was a turning point in considering Turks as a distinct nation whose history goes back to pre-Islamic times. Moustapha Djelaleddin, *Les Turcs Anciens et Modernes* (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1870) [https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:44825871\\$11i](https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:44825871$11i).; Be that as it may, Turkism would be overshadowed by Ottomanism and Islamism at least until the First World War, when the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) came to power.

<sup>17</sup> See Bahattin Öztuncay and Özge Ertem, eds., *Ottoman Arcadia: The Hamidian Expedition to the Land of Tribal Roots (1886)* (İstanbul, Koç University Press, 2018).

*Üss-i İnkilâb* that a concept of Ottoman nation emerged in the early fourteenth-century Anatolia, transcending any tribal, confessional, and religious differences within that community.<sup>18</sup>

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked the rise of Egyptians' interest in the history of pre-Islamic Egypt and then the emergence of the ideology of Pharaonism in Egypt. As Michael Wood aptly puts it, "...Pharaonism identified Egypt as a distinctive territorial entity with its own history and character separate from that of the rest of the Arab and Islamic world."<sup>19</sup> It should also be added that the proponents of this ideology in Egypt emphasized Egypt's Mediterranean, in other words, European, past. Even though the ideology of Pharaonism seemed to be weakened after the 1930s, after the rise of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism in the country, pre-Islamic Egypt can still play a role in Egyptian politics and society as a ceremonial transfer of mummies to a new museum to which the Egyptian President Sisi also attended, has shown.<sup>20</sup>

For the Iranian part, we may take the story a step back and contextualize the emergence of obsession with ancient history by referring to the appearance of "intellectual" and modernism in general. Like its Ottoman and Egyptian counterparts, the Qajar modernity produced a group of reform-minded individuals who can be termed intellectuals. It is easy to take the emergence of the "intellectual" typology in the nineteenth century for granted. However, it is crucial to highlight the

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<sup>18</sup> Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Üss-i İnkılap* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2013), 21-40.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Wood, "The Use of the Pharaonic Past in Modern Egyptian Nationalism," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 35 (1998): 181.

<sup>20</sup> "Egyptian mummies paraded through Cairo," Aljazeera, April 4, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2021/4/4/in-pictures-egyptian-mummies-paraded-through-cairo>; For more insights on the relationship between ancient history and the Egyptian national identity see Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Donald Malcolm Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2015).

political, social, and institutional developments that rendered the transition from traditional literati to modern intellectuals, including dissidents. It is widely recognized that the encounter with the European political and military power, particularly the traumatic wars with Russia in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, ushered in a new period in Iran. Attempts to reform the military and adopt European technology characterized the reform efforts of the first half of the nineteenth century. The rise in the number of Iranians visiting Europe for various reasons, such as diplomacy and education, the establishment of new schools like *Dār al-Fonūn*, the presence of European experts, particularly in Tehran, and the emergence of intellectual circles in cities like Istanbul, Cairo, Tbilisi, and Beirut—where many Iranian intellectuals had greater opportunities to acquaint themselves with modern ideas—were some of the notable signs that Iran’s relative isolation and intellectual insularity was ending.

These developments may have paved the way for a new modernist discourse in Iran alongside the failed attempts to match European military technology and economic penetration. According to its proponents, the arbitrary and autocratic nature of the state, along with the traditional ulama class, was the main obstacle.<sup>21</sup> At this point, a handful of intellectuals came up with a radically revisionist reading of the history of Iran. Influenced by the anti-Islamic stance and classicism of Orientalism, they developed a naïve conviction that ancient Iran was the golden age, which ended with the conquest of Iran by Arabs. Parallel to the glorification of pre-Islamic Iran, these intellectuals often depicted Islamic Iran generally as a period of wholesale decadence or, at best, ignored the achievements of this period. The obsession with pre-Islamic Iran was later consolidated and sponsored by the state

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<sup>21</sup> Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 3.

during the Pahlavi period.<sup>22</sup> Thus, this obsession became a significant component of mainstream Iranian nationalism until today, as ancient Iran continues to be a key component of their identity, and it serves as a source of nostalgia for a bygone golden age in the nation's past, despite the Islamic regime's efforts since its inception in 1979 for a considerable number of Iranians.

## 1.2 Literature review

There is a long list of insightful studies on Iranian identity, nationalism, and perception of the ancient period. To begin with, Juan Cole's article "Marking Boundaries, Marking Time: The Iranian Past and the Construction of the Self by Qajar Thinkers" is one of the earliest publications highlighting the diverse perspectives on the formation of modern Iranian identity. Cole argues that there have been two main approaches to national identity in Iran since the Qajar period. The first approach views the Iranian identity within a binary of Self and Other, perceiving the Self as a unitary entity with an authentic spirit that can be revived. However, the other approach affirms the internal plurality of national culture and rejects the notion of scapegoating the Other.<sup>23</sup> Cole considers Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah (d. 1878) as a representative of the first group of Iranian thinkers. In contrast, he discusses Majd al-Molk (d.1881), a Qajar diplomat, and 'Abd al- Bahā' 'Abbas (d.1921), the son of Bahā' ollah (d.1892) as examples of thinkers who embrace various sources, such as Islam and Zoroastrianism, as integral to Iranian identity.<sup>24</sup> Cole also touches

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<sup>22</sup> One of the most conspicuous indicators of the relationship between the state ideology and the image of ancient Iran was the 2500-year-old celebration of the Persian Empire in 1971 in Shiraz. For a sober analysis of the celebrations, see Robert Steele, *The Shah's Imperial Celebrations of 1971: Nationalism, Culture and Politics in Late Pahlavi Iran* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> Juan R. I. Cole, "Marking Boundaries, Marking Time: The Iranian Past and the Construction of the Self by Qajar Thinkers," *Iranian Studies* 29, no. 1-2 (2022): 35-36.

<sup>24</sup> Juan R. I. Cole, "Marking Boundaries, Marking Time," 53-55.

upon E'temād al-Saltanah (d.1896), an influential Qajar court minister and author of several books, noting his pro-absolutist vision for Iranian identity.

Another scholarly work that challenges the teleological approach to the emergence of Iranian nationalism in the secondary literature is James M. Gustafson's article titled "Geographical Literature in Nineteenth-Century Iran: Regional Identities and the Construction of Space".<sup>25</sup> In his article, Gustafson examines five examples of geographical texts from the 1870s and 1880s, each focusing on different regions of Qajar Iran. He traces the development of regional identities across the borders of Qajar Iran, emphasizing the persistence of pre-modern loyalties—such as local, tribal, and sectarian—amidst emerging nationalism. Gustafson argues against the assumption that the discursive emergence of nationalism among the elites completely replaced these older forms of identity. His article indicates how changing socio-economic patterns in nineteenth-century Iran, reflected in the geographical literature, related to the consolidation of regional identity.<sup>26</sup> Gustafson's article provides a theoretical base for my research, as *Āsār-e 'Ajam* also deals with a region and reflects a provincial literati's vision.

Mostafa Vaziri's *Iran: As Imagined Nation*, published for the first time in 1993, is the first major attempt to deconstruct the assumption of the primordial historicity of the Iranian identity. Edward Said's groundbreaking *Orientalism* and Benedict Anderson's pioneer *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* are the two sources from which Vaziri takes his inspiration. In his seminal work, Vaziri argues that Iran as a political concept had no precedence before the nineteenth century. In his opinion, the concept of Iran could have been

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<sup>25</sup> James M. Gustafson, "Geographical Literature in Nineteenth-Century Iran: Regional Identities and the Construction of Space," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59, no. 5 (2016): 793-827.

<sup>26</sup> James M. Gustafson, "Geographical Literature in Nineteenth-Century Iran," 824.

used only as a geographical or religious term, depending on the period. Thus, it was Orientalists and Iranian nationalists, under the strong influence of the former group, who constructed the Iranian identity.<sup>27</sup> He is particularly successful in noting how the concept of Iran was homogenized through its reduction to the Aryan race and the Persian language. Credit should be given to Vaziri's book because of its pioneering role in challenging the central tenets of the Iranology field developed by European orientalism and Iranian nationalist historiography.

Nonetheless, this significant study belittles the agency of Iranians in adapting discourses of modern nationalism. In other words, Vaziri does not attempt to show the political, social, and intellectual strategies developed by Iranians to create a national culture. As a last point regarding Vaziri's book, it leaves the impression on the reader that he uses the concept of "imagined nation" as something "false" or "fabricated" instead of "historically constructed" as Afshin Matin-Asgari notes.<sup>28</sup>

Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi's *Refashioning Iran Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* is another seminal work that attempts to explain the roots of Iranian modernity and nationalism. Tavakoli-Targhi criticizes "the Westernization approach" in Iranian historiography, the dominant explanatory tool for understanding Iranian modernity. He invites the scholarship to look at the Persian texts, which he defines as "homeless" and were produced in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century India to indicate the flaws of Westernization accounts. Tavakoli-Targhi considers modernity not a European phenomenon but a result of a globalizing network of power and knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mustafa Vaziri, *Iran As Imagined Nation*. 2nd ed. (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Afshin Matin-Asgari, "The Academic Debate on Iranian Identity: Nation and Empire Entangled," in *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 180.

<sup>29</sup> Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 4.

Tavakoli-Targhi differs from Vaziri in his evaluation of Orientalism's impact on the emergence of modern Iranian identity and historical consciousness. Unlike Vaziri, who sees these two phenomena as direct results of Orientalism, Tavakoli-Targhi argues that *Shāhnāmah* of Ferdowsi and the *Dasātīr* texts, a bunch of Neo-Zoroastrian texts gained larger circulation in the nineteenth century, provided the necessary base for Iranians to "refashion" their identity. According to him, *Shāhnāmah* and the *Dasātīr* texts located Iran at the center of the universe and displaced the Islamic metanarrative.<sup>30</sup>

Reza Zia-Ebrahimi attempts to shed light on the intellectual roots of Iranian nationalism in his *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*. He follows the traditional modernization narrative that the humiliating defeats at the hands of the Russians and the loss of Caucasian territories to them marked the beginning of Iranian modernity. The first reaction was to import European military technology and catch up with the European states. When it proved to be unsuccessful or insufficient, we see another modernist alternative emerged in the 1850s and was represented chiefly by Mīrzā Malkom Khān (d.1908) and Mīrzā Yūsaf Khān Mosteshār od-Dowleh (d. 1895). Reforming state apparatus through legal reforms was the ultimate goal of the second wave of modernism.<sup>31</sup> Once the hopes for political reform shattered, a new nationalist ideology was introduced by a handful of dissident intellectuals, particularly by Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah (d. 1878) and Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī (d.1896).

Zia-Ebrahimi's work offers a new conceptual framework for Iranian nationalism by coining the term "dislocative nationalism" to define the dominant

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<sup>30</sup> Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 97.

<sup>31</sup> Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 26.

nationalism in Iran. He argues that “dislocative nationalism” was an “intellectual strategy to manage the trauma of the encounter with the seemingly more advanced Europeans.”<sup>32</sup> Even though Zia-Ebrahimi disagrees with the idea that Orientalists invented the concept of Iran and that Iranian nationalism was a wholesale import from Europe, he affirms Orientalism’s defining role in the formation of modern nationalism and identity in Iran. In his opinion, Iranian intellectuals selectively used particular European ideas to serve their ideological needs.<sup>33</sup> Thus, this book’s significance lies in developing a reconciliatory approach between Vaziri’s and Tavakoli-Targhi’s opinions.

Zia-Ebrahimi asserts that the belief in the primordality of the Iranian nation since ancient times, consideration of the pre-Islamic period as Iran’s golden age, anti-Arab and anti-Islamic opinions, and Aryan racism have been the main tenets of dislocative nationalism. The followers of this ideology have arguably produced the dominant historiography in Iran.<sup>34</sup> I find Zia-Ebrahimi’s book very useful in identifying mainstream nationalism in Iran and will use it as a point of departure to argue that dislocative nationalism was not the only option for the formation of the Iranian self in the Qajar period. It should be stated that Zia-Ebrahimi’s argument is also quite nuanced in that it differentiates various types of nationalism and imaginative attempts to evaluate pre-Islamic history.

Afshin Matin-Asgari’s “The Academic Debate on Iranian Identity: Nation and Empire Entangled” critically analyzes the literature on Iranian identity produced since the early 1990s. Matin-Asgari defines the dominant approach to Iranian identity until the 1990s as the “Persian-national” paradigm. He argues that although

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<sup>32</sup> Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*, 18-19.

<sup>34</sup> Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*, 2-3.

this paradigm was considerably challenged and weakened by its critics, no full-fledged and consistent approach replaced it.<sup>35</sup> After dealing with the so-called Persian-national paradigm and critical literature developed since the 1990s in a balanced way, he proposes that the pre-modern concept of Iran should be understood in the imperial sense rather than having national or ethnic connotations.<sup>36</sup> Matin-Asgari's book chapter is particularly useful for its content and rich bibliography, primarily in English and Persian.

Reza Bigdeloo's *Bāstāngarāyī Dar Tārīkh-e Mo'āser-e Īrān* (Archaism in the Contemporary History of Iran) is arguably the first comprehensive study on the archaist nationalism—a nationalism which prioritizes pre-Islamic Iran over the Islamic period—published in Iran. Bigdeloo assumes a critical position vis-à-vis the particular type of nationalism he examines throughout his book. However, it should be stated that he continues to see the concept of nation as applicable to pre-modern times, as he speaks of the Iranian nation after the Arab invasion of Iran in the seventh century.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, Bigdeloo's use of material, the published and unpublished writings from the Qajar period, newspapers, and journals, is quite impressive and provides a rich anthology of the particular nationalist thought examined in this thesis.

Contrary to the majority of revisionist secondary literature, Ali Ansari challenges the idea that the dominant narrative of Iranian nationalism has been based on Aryanist racism in his book chapter titled "Iranian Nationalism and the Question of Race".<sup>38</sup> Even though he accepts that biological racism has been influential among

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<sup>35</sup> Afshin Matin-Asgari, "The Academic Debate on Iranian Identity: Nation and Empire Entangled," in *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vajdani (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173.

<sup>36</sup> Afshin Matin-Asgari, "The Academic Debate on Iranian Identity," 185-186.

<sup>37</sup> Reza Bigdeloo, *Bāstāngarāyī Dar Tārīkh-e Mo'āser-e Īrān* (Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 1380/ 2001), 22-23.

<sup>38</sup> Ali Ansari, "Iranian Nationalism and the Question of Race," in *Constructing Nationalism in Iran: From the Qajars to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Meir Litvak, 101-117. (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Iranians, he claims that the leading nationalist intellectuals, such as Mohammad ‘Ali Forūghī (d.1942) and Sayyīd Hasan Takīzādah (d.1970), espoused a cosmopolitan nationalist outlook. Ansari’s article is useful, as it demonstrates that the aforementioned intellectuals could defy rising chauvinism and the use of race as an important component of Iranian national identity. Be that as it may, he belittles the rich literature on Aryanist references from the nineteenth century onwards by confining himself to state that the concept *nazhād*, commonly used for race in Persian, has had an ambiguous use in that language. Despite the efforts of a handful of sophisticated intellectuals, the racial configuration of the Iranian nation and a strong sense of Iranian superiority proved to be solid among Iranian masses throughout the Pahlavi period.

Abdalmajid Aidi’s recently published *Maḥmūm-e Īrān vah Īrāngarāyī dar Andīshahvarzān-e ‘Asr-e Nāserī* (The Concept of Iran and Iranism in the Works of the Thinkers of the Naseri period)<sup>39</sup> is a survey of court chronicles, geography books, treatises containing political and social criticism, and history books about pre-Islamic period.<sup>40</sup> It can hardly be claimed that Aidi’s book offers a new theoretical insight into the development of the concept of Iran in the nineteenth century. However, it analyzes various texts penned by bureaucrats, provincial literati, and dissident intellectuals. This book indicates the range of ideas articulated about the concept of Iran and ancient Iranian history. Therefore, it made me more aware of the differing positions regarding the identity issues in the Qajar period.

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<sup>39</sup> It is common in contemporary Persian book culture to provide an English title for a book, and this book is given the title “The Idea of Iran and Iranian Tendencies in the Thinkers [sic] Works in Naseri Shah Era (1848-1896 A.D)”.

<sup>40</sup> Abdalmajid Aidi, *Maḥmūm-e Īrān vah Īrāngarāyī dar Andīshahvarzān-e ‘Asr-e Nāserī* (1264-1313q) (Tehran: Nedā-ye Tārikh, 1399/2021).

### 1.3 The critical analysis of the secondary literature on *Āsār-e 'Ajam*

*Āsār-e 'Ajam* appears only briefly in some academic publications dealing with Iranian nationalism and the perception of ancient history in the Qajar period. For instance, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet wrote a descriptive paragraph on *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and noted its reception in the newspaper *Habl al-Matin* in 1900.<sup>41</sup> Without mentioning his *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi regards Forsat among literati, who used obsolete Persian words, found their way to Persian through the *Dasātīr* texts and dictionaries like *Farhang-e Jahāngīrī* and *Borhān-e Qāte*.<sup>42</sup> In a similar vein, Reza Bigdeloo discusses Forsat's role by referring to his use of obsolete words and experimentation with pure Persian without mentioning *Āsār-e 'Ajam*.<sup>43</sup> In his comprehensive essay about the Qajar historiography, Abbas Amanat spares a few paragraphs to *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. He thinks Forsat's work is an articulation of "the cultural autonomy of the Fars province and its significance as the heartland of Persian identity."<sup>44</sup> Amanat also argues that *Āsār-e 'Ajam* represents "a deep sense of national belonging and cultural pride."<sup>45</sup> Abdalmajid Aidi argues that the modern and scientific approach to ancient ruins was one of the peculiar aspects of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. He asserts that Forsat's engagement in ancient ruins was, in a sense, an articulation of the glory of ancient Iranian history. Aidi also notes that Forsat's concept of Iran was informed by his knowledge of Iranian legends and the history of ancient Iran.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 44.

<sup>42</sup> Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 106.; I will touch upon the issue of neologism and the role of neo-Zoroastrian texts in Forsat's works.

<sup>43</sup> Reza Bigdeloo, *Bāstāngarāyī Dar Tārīkh-e Mo'āser-e Īrān*, 147.

<sup>44</sup> Abbas Amanat, "Legend, Legitimacy and Making a National Narrative in the Historiography of Qajar Iran (1785-1925)." in *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville, Vol. 10 of *A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 359.

<sup>45</sup> Abbas Amanat, "Legend, Legitimacy and Making a National Narrative," 359.

<sup>46</sup> 'Abdolmecid Eydi, *Maḥmūd-e Īrān va Īrāngarāyī Dar Āsār-e Andīshavarzān-e 'Asr-e Nāserī (1264-1313q)* (Tehran: Nedā-ye Tārīkh, 1399/2021), 138-148.

Even though Aidi does not elaborate on *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s content, he provides a more detailed analysis of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* in comparison to the works discussed above.

Some scholars who briefly discussed *Āsār-e 'Ajam* in their publications treat it as an obvious manifestation of rising awareness about pre-Islamic Iran in the Qajar period and failed to point to its peculiar features. For example, Farzin Vejdani states: “Jalal al-Din Mirza, Fursat al-Dawlah, and Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani’s relative autonomy from court patronage foreshadowed new modes of history writing and translation in which the glory of the Iranian nation replaced the Qajar dynasty’s legitimacy as the central preoccupation of historians.”<sup>47</sup> I find Vejdani’s statement flawed on the grounds that even a cursory look at the introductions of these texts will demonstrate the discrepancy between *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and other texts. Forsat’s aim and methodology cannot be seen in the same line as the two dissident intellectuals.

Some other scholarly works are more nuanced in terms of awareness of the differing visions for ancient history in the Qajar period and Forsat’s role in their creation. Zia-Ebrahimi’s remark, for example, is quite accurate: “Deeper into the nineteenth century, reliance on the pre-Islamic period could come from widely different schools of thought and serve diverse objectives; it was in no way an exclusive domain of incipient nationalists.”<sup>48</sup> Zia-Ebrahimi notes Forsat’s *Āsār-e 'Ajam* as one of the narratives on the pre-Islamic period that appeared toward the end of the nineteenth century, but he does not go further.<sup>49</sup>

In one of his articles, Iraj Afshar explains the emergence and development of studies on the pre-Islamic period in seven stages based on each one’s peculiar characteristics. He names the first stage *talangor* (blow, stimulus), pointing to the

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<sup>47</sup> Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 28.

<sup>48</sup> Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*, 75-76.

emergence of early narratives on ancient Iran in the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> The second stage is *gozar-e mellī* (national transition), an allusion to the appearance of narratives with a nationalist agenda. Afshar includes Forsat's two works, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and *Dar Nahv vah Sarf-e Khatt-e Āryā (Aryan)*, into the first group of works. He contends that the importance of Forsat's writings lies behind the fact that they increased Iranians' interest in ancient history. However, it is impossible to compare them to the works of Europeans.<sup>51</sup> Afshar distinguishes Forsat from those intellectuals who wrote with a nationalist agenda, like Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, who represents the national transition in the article.

Touraj Daryae's article titled "Persianate Contribution to the Study of Antiquity: E'temād al-Saltanah's Nativisation of the Qajars" is another important publication that aims to identify different approaches to ancient history in the Qajar period. Daryae primarily focuses on E'temād al-Saltanah's contribution to what he calls the nativization and the legitimization of the Qajar dynasty by linking them with the Arsadic empire, also known as Parthians.<sup>52</sup> Following Iraj Afshar's categorization for the study of ancient history in the Qajar period, Daryae states that Ākhūndzādah and Kermānī's approaches to ancient history radically differed from E'temād al-Saltanah and Forsat. While the formers took an ultra-nationalist stance consisting of racist thought, anti-Arab discourse, and glorification of pre-Islamic Iran, the latter ones were more moderate in terms of their political and social views and had genuine scholarly interests in the pre-Islamic period, as Daryae does not fail to note.<sup>53</sup>

Daryae's article is one of the few scholarly works that truly distinguishes narratives

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<sup>50</sup> Iraj Āfshār, "Kheft Khān-e Resīden bah Īrān-e Bāstān," *Bokhārā* 70, no.1 (1388/2009): 299.

<sup>51</sup> Iraj Āfshār, "Kheft Khān-e Resīden bah Īrān-e Bāstān," *Bokhārā* 70, no.1 (1388/2009): 301.

<sup>52</sup> Touraj Daryae, "Persianate Contribution to the Study of Antiquity: E'temad Al-Saltaneh's Nativisation of the Qajars, Iran," *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 54, no.1. (2016): 39-45.

<sup>53</sup> Touraj Daryae, "Persianate Contribution to the Study of Antiquity," 40.

on ancient history from each other and does not implement a reductionist explanation.

In his article titled “Mīrzā Muḥammad Naṣīr Furṣat al-Dawla and the Archaeology of Iranian Archaeology”, Iván Szántó contextualizes *Āsār-e ‘Ajām* in terms of ancient revivalism, particularly in visual culture, and the beginning of archaeology in Iran. He asserts that *Āsār-e ‘Ajām* may point to the shift from antiquarianism to archaeology in Qajar revivalism. Although I find Szántó’s article useful in general, I take issue with some of his statements regarding the function of archaeology and the development of historical consciousness in Iran. He states: “For Iranians, Ottomans, and Egyptians, the excavation of pre-Islamic patrimony meant secularization and the restoration of a broken national continuity.”<sup>54</sup> The present thesis is an attempt to show that interest in pre-Islamic history did not necessarily connote secularization. Szántó’s argument about the restoration of national continuity is problematic because it presupposes the existence of such a continuity. In addition, it is hard to claim that the goal of Forsat was to restore the broken national continuity. When he discusses the development of Iranian interest in ancient monuments since the era of Fath ‘Alī Shāh (d.1834), Szántó puts forth that the modern historical consciousness in Iran developed by following a straight course.<sup>55</sup> Assuming historical consciousness followed a linear path in Qajar Iran would mean that we endorse a teleological approach in dealing with ancient revivalism and nationalism. Such an attitude is problematic because it ignores the alternative viewpoints in the period at stake.

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<sup>54</sup> Iván Szántó, “Mīrzā Muḥammad Naṣīr Furṣat al-Dawla and the Archaeology of Iranian Archaeology.” *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* 2, no. 1 (2015): 75.

<sup>55</sup> Iván Szántó, “Mīrzā Muḥammad Naṣīr Furṣat al-Dawla”, 78.

Simone Cristoforetti's book chapter titled "Beyond Recovery Towards Continuity in the Qajar Perception of the Past: the Case of Āthār-e 'Ajam (Antiquities of the Persians) by Forsat al-Dowla Shirazi" is a recent contribution to the secondary literature on *Āsār-e 'Ajam*.<sup>56</sup> His main aim is to contextualize *Āsār-e 'Ajam* by emphasizing the decipherment of cuneiform inscriptions by Western scholars and the general development and rise of interest in the archaeology of the Achaemenid period. Cristoforetti considers the recent findings of Western scholars to be the main instigator of archaeological interest in the Achaemenid period among Iranians. Forsat's use of a few books containing information on ancient languages and archaeology stands as proof for his argument. There is no doubt that the decipherment of ancient inscriptions and progress in archaeology provided a base for Forsat and other Iranians who developed an interest in the Achaemenid period, whose account is missing in traditional narratives on pre-Islamic Iran, such as *Shāhnāmāh*. Another notable point in the article is that Cristoforetti draws attention to Forsat's attempts to reconcile the denomination and chronology of pre-Islamic Iran that existed in traditional accounts with modern archaeological data.

*Negāhī bah Āsār-e Mosavvar-e Forsat al-Dowlah* (A Glance at the Illustrated Works of Forsat al-Dowlah)<sup>57</sup> is a recent book consisting of chapters on the visual aspect of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and Forsat's other works. It also includes reflections on a documentary about Forsat's life and *Āsār-e 'Ajam*<sup>58</sup>, as well as a few short analyses

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<sup>56</sup> Simone Cristoforetti, "Beyond Recovery Towards Continuity in the Qajar Perception of the Past: the Case of Āthār-e 'Ajam (Antiquities of the Persians) by Forsat al-Dowla Shirazi," in *Before Archaeology: The Meaning of the Past in the Islamic Pre-Modern Thought (And After)*, ed. Leonardo Capezzone, 177-186. Roma: Artemide, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> The book is the second and revised edition of an earlier work written by Mohammad Hosayn Salehī. See the second edition, Mohammad Hosayn Salehī (Ed.), *Negāhī bah Āsār-e Mosavvar-e Forsat al-Dowlah* (Tehran: Farhangestān-e Honar, 1398/2019).

<sup>58</sup> *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, directed by Hasan Naqqāshī (1397/2018, Hānah-ye Farhang vah Honar-e Māan), <https://maacentre.com/2862/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A2%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%AC%D9%85/>.

of Forsat's life and the significance of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Beyond containing useful but descriptive and sometimes repetitive information in various articles, it is hard to say that the book differs from most of the research conducted on *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, apart from the part dealing with the visual aspect of Forsat's corpus. In other words, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* is treated as a manifestation of Iranians' rising interest in ancient history, the emergence of nationalist feelings, and as a part of modernist discourse in the nineteenth century.

Mohammad Keshāvarz Beyzāyī and Rezā Mo'ayyanī Rūdbālī's article titled *Bīnash va Ravash dar Tārīkhnegārī-ye Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzī* (The Approach and Method in Forsat al-Dowlah's Historiography) locates *Āsār-e 'Ajam* among the important local histories written in the Qajar period. The authors argue that Forsat combined traditional and novel historiographical methods throughout his book. Causation, field research, visual material use, recent scientific findings in archaeology, and information on ancient languages are some novel aspects of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. On the other hand, the ubiquitousness of poetry and failure to give proper references to the works used by Forsat are the features that indicate the traditional aspect of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*.<sup>59</sup>

Setrag Manoukian is arguably the only scholar who does not just content himself with pointing to Forsat's particular reading of ancient Iranian history but also offers insightful analyses in his works. Manoukian's *City of Knowledge in Twentieth Century Iran: Shiraz, History and Poetry*, is an ethnographic and historical inquiry into the concepts of knowledge and culture in shaping the Iranian self. By locating the city of Shiraz, known as *Dār al-'Elm* (the abode of knowledge), he attempts to

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<sup>59</sup> Mohammad Kashāvarz Beyzāyī and Rezā Mo'ayyanī Rūdbālī. "Bīnash va Ravash dar Tārīkhnegārī-ye Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzī," *Pajūhashhā-ye Īrānshenāsī* 10, no.1 (1399/2020): 206-207.

show the centrality of history and poetry in defining the strong concept of *farhang* (culture) in modern Iran.<sup>60</sup> In Manoukian's analysis, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* is one of the first texts written in the late nineteenth century, which contributed to the consolidation of the perception of Shiraz as the city of knowledge. He takes his interest in Forsat's vision of ancient history one step further by providing a more detailed analysis of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* in his "The Ruins of Others: History and Modernity in Iran", a book chapter published as part of the book project titled *Modernity's Classics*.<sup>61</sup>

Manoukian's core argument, which is compatible with the scope of this thesis, is the rejection of the idea that ancient Iran was a field of knowledge for "rigid and exclusionary bipolarity between Iran and Islam, the nation and religion" in the Qajar period. Rather, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* enables us to realize the assumed contrast between pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran, which would gain more ground in the Pahlavi period, was not necessarily the case in all the texts produced about ancient Iran in the Qajar period.<sup>62</sup>

#### 1.4 Outline

In Chapter 2, I examine the thoughts of three dissident intellectuals: Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah (1812-1878), Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā (1827-1872), and Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī (1853-1896), who arguably were the pioneers of the nationalist thought and historiography in Qajar Iran. The three intellectuals represent the emergence of the so-called secular nationalism. I also show how these intellectuals instrumentalized the image of ancient Iran as a golden age to create political and social discourses

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<sup>60</sup> Setrag Manoukian, *City of Knowledge in Twentieth Century Iran: Shiraz, History and Poetry* (London: Routledge: 2012).

<sup>61</sup> Setrag Manoukian, "The Ruins of Others: History and Modernity in Iran," in *Modernity's Classics*, ed. Sarah C. Humphreys and Rudolf G. Wager, 211-230. Berlin: Springer, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Setrag Manoukian, "The Ruin of Others", 219.

against the Qajar political and religious establishment. I contend the exaltation of ancient Iran goes hand in hand with these intellectuals' ideological stances against the political and religious authorities and current administrative and social practices in the Qajar society. By and large, the three intellectuals' approaches to ancient Iran symbolize what would become the standard ideology in the Pahlavi period.

In Chapter 3, I provide a synopsis of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and contextualize it based on the patronage ties behind its production and generic and literary features. This chapter can be read as a preparation for the last chapter, as the unique structure of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* necessitates such a chapter before its detailed analysis. I put forth that the aspirations of different patrons, i.e., the Parsi and the Qajar interest in geography and ancient ruins, merged with Forsat's scholarly curiosity and artistic skills. The existence of different sources of patronage indicates the growing significance of ancient history as a theme in Qajar political and social discourses. The generic and literary features of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* will be another focus in this chapter. After briefly noting the similar examples from India to *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, I touch upon Forsat's language preferences throughout the text and its particular literary aspects. In the last section, I deal with the publication history of the book and discuss the reception of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* in the late Qajar period.

In Chapter 4, I assert that Islam as a conceptual category hugely influenced Forsat's interpretation of ancient ruins. To do this, I follow Forsat's narrative technique, which includes description of ancient ruins, interpretation of visual material in ancient sites, providing first-hand and scholarly information, mentions of notable contemporary and historical religious, political, and literary figures, narration of popular stories about particular ruins or sites, and other digressions within

different sections and anecdotes. More specifically, I focus on particular ancient sites across the Fars region, such as Persepolis, known as *Takht-e Jamshīd* in Iranian tradition, Pasargad, Naqsh-e Rostam, and the tomb of Jāmāsp Hakīm. In later sections, I will analyze the concept of Iran as reflected in *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* by considering Forsat’s views on the history and etymology of the terms Iran, Pars, and the Persian language.

Given that anti-Arab and partly anti-Turkish discourses have been popular among the representatives of mainstream nationalism since the nineteenth century, Forsat’s views on Arabs and Turks are critical for comparing him to the intellectuals examined in the second chapter. Therefore, I discuss how he considered non-Persian Iranians in his writings. I also contend that *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* should not be read as a book exclusively dealing with ancient Iran. Instead, I argue that his discussion of Islamic theology, philosophy, ethics, and other kinds of digressions irrelevant to pre-Islamic Iran is just as central as the parts of the book that deal with ancient Iran.

## CHAPTER 2

### CORRECTING A 1280-YEAR OLD MISTAKE?:

#### THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONALIST HISTORICAL THINKING AND HISTORIOGRAPHY IN QAJAR IRAN

*Now, [the only] thing that can be a consolation is to understand what is incumbent upon us and [the fact that] we have been making a mistake for 1280 years.<sup>63</sup>*

— Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah

*When I reflect on how our ancestors’ language, like all our sciences, was plundered by the Arabs (Tāzīyān), and nowadays, nothing remained except its name, I intended to use a specific language [Pure Persian], write a book in the manner of Europeans (Farangīyān), who are wises of the world today, for the benefit of the people of my homeland. I could not find anything more worthy than the history of Persian kings (dāstān-e pādashāhān-e Pārs), which, contrary to all its magnificence, was vanished because of Arabs’ encroachment.<sup>64</sup>*

— Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā

*The discovery of the roots of each nation is like searching and touching something [to make sense of it] in the darkness. The past accounts (ahvāl-e sābeqah) are covered and concealed either because of the lapse of time and the revolution of ages or the lack of books and sources (āsār) with the curtain of the darkness and the veil of ignorance. In particular, the Iranian nation whose books and accounts entirely perished after the invasion of Arab people (āqvām-e ‘Arabī), as the followers of the Arab prophet were enraged with Iranians due to their perseverance in defending their state (molk) and religion (mazheb), and due to the incompatibility of their breed (jansīyyat) and temper (mashrab) from time immemorial, [Arabs] destroyed everything after seizure. They put all sources and accounts (āsār o akhbār) into oblivion, razed the cities to the ground, extinguished the Zoroastrian temples, burnt the books, and slaughtered the Zoroastrian priests, who were responsible for [religious] affairs, temples, and statues. Fanatical Arab (‘arab-e mota’asseb) neither knew nor wanted to learn any book except the Quran at that time.<sup>65</sup>*

— Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī

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<sup>63</sup> Ākhūndzādah implies the Islamization of Iran. Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah, “Sah Maktūb: Molhaqāt-e Noskhah-ye Kamāl al-Dowlah,” in *Majmū’ah-ye Āsār-e Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah*, vol.1, ed. ‘Alī Asghar Haqdār (Istanbul: Entashārāt-e Bāshgāh-e Adabīyāt, 2021), 530.

<sup>64</sup> A Personal Letter from Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā to Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah in *Majmū’ah-ye Āsār-e Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah*, vol.2, ed. ‘Alī Asghar Haqdār (Istanbul: Entashārāt-e Bāshgāh-e Adabīyāt, 2021), 940.

<sup>65</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyeh-ye Sekandarī* (Tehran, 1909?), 24-25.

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze the writings of the three intellectuals— Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah (1812-1878), Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā (1827-1872), and Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī (1853-1896)—who produced the pioneering texts of the nationalist historiography in pre-Constitutional Iran. Despite the generic and methodological differences between these texts, the exaltation of pre-Islamic Iran, the negative view of Islam as a religion and culture, and anti-Arab discourses are common themes in their writings. The main objective of this article is to examine how mainstream nationalists regarded pre-Islamic Iran and instrumentalized ancient history to achieve their ideological and political aims.

## 2.2 Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah: Gogol of Iranian nationalism

### 2.2.1 The biography of Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah

Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah, an Iranian/Azerbaijani intellectual, was born in the town of Nūkhah (modern-day Shaki in Azerbaijan) in Qajar Iran. Ākhūndzādah’s hometown was annexed by the Russian Empire in 1828. He was the son of a certain Mīrzā Mohammad Tāqī’s second wife, who left her husband due to a quarrel with his first wife. These two incidents, one political and the other familial, significantly impacted Ākhūndzādah’s life. He was raised under the guidance of his uncle, Ākhūnd Hājī ‘Asghar, and received a traditional madrasa education and spent the early years of his life in the Qārājādagh region, Ganja and Nūkhah. Initially aiming to become a mollah, Ākhūndzādah’s path changed after meeting the Azerbaijani poet Mīrzā Shafī’ Vāzeh (d.1852)<sup>66</sup> in Ganja. According to Ākhūndzādah’s autobiography,

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<sup>66</sup> Mīrzā Shafī’ was an Azerbaijani mystic poet and calligrapher. Known for his anti-clerical thoughts based on his inclination to mysticism, he is credited with writing the first book on Azerbaijani Turkish. Yavuz Akpınar, “Mīrza Şefi’ VÂZİH,” in Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, accessed April 13, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/vazih-mirza-sefi>.

it was Mīrzā Shafī' who discouraged him from following a clerical career. Having asked young Ākhūndzādah about his motivation for excelling at sciences and learned that he wants to be a mollah, Mīrzā Shafī' rebukes him: "Do you want to be hypocritical and charlatan?"<sup>67</sup> Then, Mīrzā Shafī' informs Ākhūndzādah about mysticism (*'erfānīyyat*). This encounter sparked Ākhūndzādah's lifelong disdain for the ulama and led him to abandon his clerical aspirations. Ākhūndzādah subsequently attended a newly-opened Russian school in Nūkhah. He later moved to Tbilisi with his uncle and was appointed as a translator of Oriental languages in the office of the Russian viceroy. His migration to Tbilisi, a cosmopolitan Caucasian city, and his role as a translator were pivotal moments in his life. Apart from a diplomatic mission to Tehran in 1848 and a short visit to Istanbul in 1863, Ākhūndzādah spent most of his life in Tbilisi. In addition to his official position as a translator in the service of the Russian government, he taught Azeri Turkish at the Tbilisi gymnasium, where he established a friendship with the gymnasium's director, Khachatur Abovian (d.1848?), a noteworthy Armenian intellectual who is also considered as one of the first nationalist authors in Caucasia. Russian was the only non-Islamic language Ākhūndzādah could read through which he accessed modern ideas.<sup>68</sup>

Evaluating Ākhūndzādah's corpus will provide significant insights into his intellectual contribution to Iranian modernist and nationalist discourse. His plays and satirical comedies, originally written in Azerbaijani Turkish and later translated into Persian by Mīrzā Ja'far Qārājādāghī, aimed to criticize the superstitions and

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<sup>67</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Bīyoghrāfyā: Ya' nī Sargozasht-e Kolonel Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndof ke Khodash be Qalem Āvardah Ast," 50.

<sup>68</sup> For Ākhūndzādah's biography, I have relied on an encyclopedia entry written by Hamid Algar and Faraydūn Ādamīyyat's classical *Andīshahā-ye Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah*. Hamid Algar, "ĀKHŪNDZĀDA," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/akundzada-playwright> ; Faraydūn Ādamīyyat, *Andīshahā-ye Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah* (Tehran: Entashārāt-e Khwārazmī, 1349/1960).

ignorance prevalent in the society. One of Ākhūndzādah's major aspirations was the reform of the alphabet in Muslim societies. Convinced by the Arabic script's deficiencies, he saw it as an obstacle to progress. He authored a treatise, *Resālah-ye Alefbā'-ye Jadīd* (A Treatise on the New Alphabet), to advocate for alphabet reform in Islamic languages and traveled to Istanbul in 1863 to present the new alphabet project to the Ottoman elites, including Mūnif Paşa, who shared similar ideas on the incompatibility of the Arabic script. Despite an appreciation by the Ottoman Scientific Society (*Cemiyet-i İlmiye-yi Osmaniye*), Ākhūndzādah's proposal is not found applicable in Istanbul.<sup>69</sup> Ākhūndzādah is also credited with writing the first modern book review in Farsi. His *Resālah-ye Īrād* (Faultfinding Treatise) is a criticism of the court historian Rezā Qolī Khān Hedāyet's *Rowzat al-Safā-ye Nāserīyyah* (The Gardens of Purity). His other and arguably more famous treatise, *Qerītekā* (Criticism), is a pioneer of literary criticism in Persian.<sup>70</sup> Before delving into his *Maktūbāt* (Letters), an essential one among his corpus and the primary source of this section of the chapter, it is important to note that Ākhūndzādah maintained correspondence with various intellectuals and statesmen, although he was living outside Qajar Iran. Mīrzā Yūsaf Khān Mostashār al-Dowlah (d.1895), a leading diplomat, statesman, and the author of the famous treatise *Yak Kalīmah* (One Word), Mīrzā Malkom Khān (d.1908), an Iranian intellectual and reformist of Armenian origin, Manekji Limji Hataria (d.1890), Parsi philanthropist and

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<sup>69</sup> For Ākhūndzādah and Malkom Khān's attempts to reform the alphabet, see Hamid Algar, "Malkom Khān, Ākhūndzāda and the Proposed Reform of the Arabic Alphabet," *Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 2 (1969): 116–30; Fevziye Abdullah Tansel also analyzes the alphabet debate in the Ottoman context. Fevziye Abdullah Tansel, "Arap Harflerinin İslāhı ve Değiştirilmesi Hakkında İlk Teşebbüsler ve Neticeleri, 1862-1884," *Belleten* 17, (1953): 224-249; For a recent study on this subject see Tanya Elal Lawrence's chapter in her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Tanya Elal Lawrence, in "Akhundzādeh and Malkom Khan: A Sustained Interaction and Trans-Imperial Experiments in Alphabet Reform," in *An Age of Trans-Imperial Vernacularisms: The Iranian Dissident Community of the Late Ottoman Empire* (PhD diss., Yale University, 2018), 148-193.

<sup>70</sup> For an evaluation of Ākhūndzādah's contribution to literary criticism in Iran, see Iraj Parsinejad, *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran (1866-1951)* (Maryland: Ibex Publishers, 2003), 39-65.

intellectual, and Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā (d.1872), a Qajar prince, whose *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān* will be analyzed in the second part of the chapter, were some of Ākhūndzādah's contacts demonstrating the intellectual ties he established with Iranian elites.

### 2.2.2 *Maktūbāt* as a foundational text for Iranian nationalism

Ākhūndzādah's *Maktūbāt* (Letters) is arguably one of the foundational texts that mark Iranian modernity, as it questions the age-old beliefs, ideas, and institutions in Iranian society. *Maktūbāt* consists of three letters sent by Kamāl al-Dowlah to Jalāl al-Dowlah, two imaginary Iranian princes, from Tabriz in Ramadan of 1280 (*hajri*). The correspondence includes a brief response letter by Jalāl al-Dowlah. There are three other letters, known as *molhaqāt* (appendices), at the end of *Maktūbāt*.

Ākhūndzādah originally wrote *Maktūbāt* in Azeri Turkish and translated it to Persian with Mīrzā Yūsaf Khān, also known as Mostashār al-Dowlah.<sup>71</sup> It is emphasized in a letter exchanged between Ākhūndzādah and Mostashār al-Dowlah that if *Maktūbāt* was to be published anywhere, the names of the author, Ākhūndzādah, and the scribe (*mostansakh*), should remain confidential.<sup>72</sup> The reason why Ākhūndzādah wrote under a pseudonym was due to the provocative nature of the content, which is analyzed in detail below. Despite Ākhūndzādah's desire to publish his work in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, Egypt, or Europe, the efforts were unsuccessful during his lifetime. Nevertheless, *Maktūbāt* circulated within clandestine societies in pre-constitutional Iran.

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<sup>71</sup> "Shārt-nāmāh-ye Mostansakh-e Noskhah-ye Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah" in *Majmū'ah-ye Āsār-e Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah*, 379.

<sup>72</sup> "Shārt-nāmāh", 381.

As an introduction to the text, we find definitions of concepts like “despot”, “civilization”, “fanatic”, “literature”, “politics”, “progress”, “penseur”, “charlatan”, “Protestantism”, and “patriot”. Ākhūndzādah must have thought that his intended audience was unfamiliar with these concepts and, therefore, felt the need to explain them beforehand. Indeed, his choice of concepts and the way he explains them give hints about the ideas that will be articulated throughout *Maktūbāt*. For instance, he defines “revolution” as a state (*hālat*) in which people, fed up with the unlawfulness of a tyrant and despot king, revolt against him and depose the king. Additionally, Ākhūndzādah describes revolution as reaching the conclusion that religious creeds are baseless (*pūch*). Consequently, people would go against the ulama and establish a new religion based on the judgments of philosophers, which are in accordance with reason (*movāfeq-e ‘aql*).<sup>73</sup>

*Maktūbāt* begins with Kamāl al-Dowlah’s reflections on Iran after journeys to England, France, and America (*Yangī Donyā*). Taking the calamitous and sorrowful conditions of contemporary Iran as a point of departure, Ākhūndzādah initiates a revisionist interpretation of Iranian history. His depiction of pre-Islamic Iran is mixed with nostalgia:

O Iran! Where are your glory (*shovkat*) and prosperity (*sa’ādat*) that existed in the periods of Kayūmars, Jamshīd, Goshtāsb, Anūshīravan, Khosrowparvīz? Even if that glory and prosperity were like a candle vis-à-vis the sun in comparison to the contemporary glory and prosperity of American and European nations, they were like light (*nūr*) vis-à-vis the darkness (*zolmat*) compared to Iran’s current state.<sup>74</sup>

What is worth noting here is that despite his nostalgia for ancient Iran, Ākhūndzādah attributes far more glory to modern Europe and America. By looking at his comparison of ancient Iran and the modern West, one might expect that his further remarks on pre-Islamic Iran would be balanced. On the contrary,

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<sup>73</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 393.

<sup>74</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 397.

Ākhūndzādah idealizes pre-Islamic Iran as a paradise on earth where justice, the rule of law, humanitarian principles, health services, and a tax system were perfectly implemented. He regards the pre-Islamic period as Iran's golden age and emphasizes the stark contrast between pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran. In the initial pages of *Maktūbāt*, he elaborates on the characteristics of the pre-Islamic Iranian state and society, albeit scattered and cursory. Undoubtedly, a closer look at Ākhūndzādah's writings on pre-Islamic Iran will reveal his ideas on this period of Iran.

Ākhūndzādah asserts that ancient Iran had no poor or beggars. People enjoyed freedom within the country and were respected abroad. Although there are no written records of ancient Iran by the Iranian nation, ancient Greek sources attest to the magnificence of Iranian rulers. These rulers were regularly informed about the country's affairs by state officials in the provinces and acted according to the principles of *paymān-e farhang*.<sup>75</sup> Ākhūndzādah says that the prosperity and contentment of the *ra'āyā* from the Sasanids were such that they were willing to pay more taxes than what the state imposed on them. Local rulers (*hokkām*) were not authorized to sentence anyone to death in any part of Iran, even if that person deserved execution. It was necessary first to submit the case to the king (*pādeshāh*), and his verdict, supposedly in line with *paymān-e farhang*, would be carried out. However, in any case, the authorities were trying to avoid the death penalty as far as possible, and the king's favorites were unable to intercede on behalf of the guilty.

The reports of spies were taken seriously in ancient Iran. Soldiers did not rest in military camps and were always ready for duty. State officials were not dismissed

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<sup>75</sup> *Paymān-e farhang* is "name of a certain work replete with prudential and political maxims, ascribed to Mah-ābād, an early apostle sent to Persia." F. Steingass, "paimān-farhang," in *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2005), 270; *Paymān-e farhang* is mentioned and quoted in *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*, one of the neo-Zoroastrian Dasāfir texts. Thus, it shows the impact of these texts on Ākhūndzādah. Kayhosrow Asfandiyār, *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*, ed. Rahīm Rezāzādah-e Malīk, vol. 1 (Tehran: Tahūrī Publishing, 1362/1983), 49-64.

without solid evidence, and those who dedicated their lives to public service, were paid regular salaries, along with their relatives. Separate hospitals for men and women ensured that all individuals received appropriate care and that needy people were provided with treatment. Additionally, an advanced postal system allowed the exchange of news between the capital and the provinces.

Kings had wise advisors who guided them in good deeds. Each day, these advisors would recite *paymān-e farhang* for them. Additionally, Zoroastrian high priests, highly knowledgeable in all sciences, especially history and the principles of *paymān-e farhang*, assisted rulers with challenging affairs (*omūr-e moshkalah*). Kings granted audiences regularly, and the contact between kings and their subjects was direct to the extent that the former ones would sit at the same table with the subjects during meals. The royal harem also had its own set of rules. *Bānū-ye Bānovān*, the queen, had female servants, but she did not get involved in state affairs. Ākhūndzādah states that the laws of the Persian reign (*qavā'ed-e saltanat-e Fors*) were numerous, and Persians (*Fārsīyān*) specified a separate law for each matter. Thus, he remarks that it would be redundant to enumerate them one by one. Suffice it to say that *paymān-e farhang* was the main source of the fame of Persian rulers (*salātīn-e Fors*) and the distinguished nature of the Persian nation (*mellat-e Fārs*).

Overall, Ākhūndzādah's depiction of pre-Islamic Iran portrays a perfect state, exalting the concept of the rule of law, providing social services to its subjects, having a strong military and intelligence, and implementing a just tax system. All these attributes of pre-Islamic Iran undoubtedly symbolize Ākhūndzādah's aspirations for a modern Iranian state. Thus, he advocates for a return to Iran's magnificent past by discarding specific Islamic elements that he believes were introduced by Arabs.

Ākhūndzādah notes that pre-Islamic Iran was a vast empire, with its borders stretching to the Oxus River (*Jayhūn*), the Aral Sea, and Derbent, also known as *Bāb al-Abvāb*, in the north, to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea (*bahr-e ‘Omman*) in the south. The Satluj river, located between Sindh (*Send*) and India (*Handūstān*), marked the Eastern front. On the western side, Iran’s territory reached the Bosphorus (*Boghāz-e Estānbūl*) around the Mediterranean Sea. Regions such as Baluchistan, Afghanistan, Kashan, Ghor, Sistan, Lahore, Kashmir, Shikarpur, and the entire Sindh, Belkh, Khiva, Urgench, *Dasht-e Qepchāq* (Cumania), Shirvan, Babylonia (*Bābīlzamīn*), Hira, Diyarbakır (*Dīyār-e Bakr*), Armenia (*Armanzamīn*), Syrian provinces, Damascus (*Shām*) and Aleppo (*Haleb*), were under the dominance of Iranian rulers.<sup>76</sup> Ākhūndzādah’s description of ancient Iran’s most-extended territories and borders can be seen as a forerunner of later Iranian nationalists’ conceptualization of Greater Iran (*Īrān-e Bozorg*).

Parallel to his glorification of pre-Islamic Iran, Ākhūndzādah adopts a strong anti-Arab discourse throughout *Maktūbāt*. He portrays Arabs as inherently backward and savage, blaming them for bringing Iran to the brink of destruction through conquest and Islamization. For example, the fictional Kamāl al-Dowlah describes the decline of Iran as a process initiated by the Arabs, telling his fictive interlocutor, Jalāl al-Dowlah: “Naked and hungry (*barahnah and gorosnah*) Arabs have made you miserable for 1280 years. [As a result], your land is devastated, your people are unlearned, ignorant of world civilization, deprived of the blessing of liberty, and your king is a despot.”<sup>77</sup> Ākhūndzādah argues that Arabs should not be credited with spreading knowledge even during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. He contends

<sup>76</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 400.

<sup>77</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 400-401.

that their contribution to the cultivation of sciences is negligible compared to what they destroyed.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to the glorification of pre-Islamic Iran and anti-Arab discourse, *Maktūbāt*'s contribution to the development of national(ist) terminology in Persian is significant. Ākhūndzādah was one of the first Iranian intellectuals to use concepts such as homeland (*vatan*), nation (*mellat*), and race/lineage (*najād*) in their modern meanings. For instance, he addresses the Iranian people as *mellat* and uses and refers to them as *Fārsīnāzhādān*<sup>79</sup> (Persian race) in *Maktūbāt*. Furthermore, Ākhūndzādah introduces the notions of patriotism (*vatanparvarī* or *vatanparastī*) and nationalism (*mellatdūstī*)<sup>80</sup>, advocating for the spread of the patriotic zeal (*ta'assob-e vatan*) in place of religious zeal (*ta'assob-e dīn*) among Iranians.<sup>81</sup> He encourages rulers to work in accordance with the principle of *hobb-e vatan* (the love of homeland).<sup>82</sup> Thus, it is safe to claim that he considers Iranians as a distinct nation. It is also worth noting that Ākhūndzādah emphasizes the Persian element/race in Iranian identity.

Contrary to the modern context of these concepts, the traces of pre-modern meanings of *mellat* still appear in *Maktūbāt*. For example, Ākhūndzādah sometimes refers to Muslims as *mellat-e Eslām* and Shiites as *mellat-e Shī'ah*.<sup>83</sup> While Ākhūndzādah's writings predominantly engage with the Iranian-national context, he also addresses non-Iranian Muslims, appealing to the Islamic ummah (*ommat-e Eslām*) in some instances. His intellectual relationships with Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals like Mūnif Paşa (d.1910) and Ali Suavi Efendi (d.1878) and his visit to

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<sup>78</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Sah Maktūb," 530.

<sup>79</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah," 494.

<sup>80</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah," 389.

<sup>81</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Sah Maktūb," 531-532.

<sup>82</sup> This phrase is reminiscent of Prophet Mohammad's famous hadith: The love of homeland is part of faith (*Hobb al-Vatan men Al-Īmān*).

<sup>83</sup> See pages 477, 491, and 526-527 in *Majmū'ah-ye Āsār-e Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah*.

Istanbul to promote alphabet reform are indicative of his transnational reform efforts. In any case, I argue that Ākhūndzādah's writings exemplify the nationalization of the political language despite their occasional transnational context.

As a final remark on the role of history in *Maktūbāt*, it should be stated that despite its significance, history is not the primary focus of the text. Instead, history serves as an explanatory tool for Iran's backwardness, the despotism of the Qajar political elite, the fanaticism of the ulama, and the ignorance of the people. This historical perspective is intertwined with Ākhūndzādah's anti-Arab discourse and his use of national terminology. In essence, Ākhūndzādah's criticisms of the Qajar political, social, and religious establishment gain deeper significance through his radical juxtaposition of pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran. Below, I will briefly analyze his social criticism and his reform proposals.

Ākhūndzādah views religion, particularly Shiite/Islamic theology and popular religious beliefs, as an impediment to the progress of the Iranian nation. Therefore, he challenges these doctrines vigorously in *Maktūbāt*. His repeated criticisms and mocking of religion throughout the text underscore his stance. He attributes the prevalence of superstitions in Islamic society to a lack of knowledge of natural sciences<sup>84</sup> and criticizes traditional concepts of the afterlife, particularly noting the terrifying depictions of hell.<sup>85</sup> Ākhūndzādah is especially critical of the Shiite belief in the Hidden Imam (*Emām-e Ghāyeb*), dismissing claims of the Imam's authenticity as unfounded and lacking rational proof (*dalīl-e 'aqlī*).<sup>86</sup> He also examines and dismisses theological and Sufi arguments for the existence of God as unconvincing.

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<sup>84</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah," 450.

<sup>85</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah," 432-435.

<sup>86</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah," 448.

Furthermore, he is unabashed in his criticism of Prophet Mohammad, focusing particularly on his multiple marriages.<sup>87</sup> According to Ākhūndzādah, foundational Islamic practices—such as daily prayers, pilgrimage to Mecca, and fasting—were originally designed to discipline the pagan Arabs, whose primary livelihood was plundering.<sup>88</sup> He also laments that Islamic jurisprudence (*feqh*) has remained unchanged for 1200 years despite significant changes in the living conditions of Muslims.<sup>89</sup> Last but not least, he deals with the plight of Muslim women, pointing to the adverse effects of their seclusion from society and the practice of polygamy.<sup>90</sup> At one point, he dismisses all religions as meaningless (*bīma'nī*) and fiction (*afsānah*), clarifying that his criticisms are not targeted solely at Islam but at religious dogma more broadly.<sup>91</sup> Needless to say, alienation from the religious dogma of Islam is a must to obtain modern sciences and make progress, in Ākhūndzādah's opinion.

Ākhūndzādah's sharp criticism of the Shiite ulama can be seen as a corollary to his anti-religious discourses. He labels the ulama as fanatics and charlatans (*shārlātān*). He is uneasy about the role of the ulama in the state and society, noting that the power of the Shiite ulama can exceed that of the Sultans when it comes to religious affairs, and the ulama considers itself independent (*mostaqel*) of the Sultanic authority. The ulama humiliates rulers by calling them “the dog of the threshold of the Imam” (*kalb-e āstān-e amām*).<sup>92</sup>

After evaluating his anti-Islamic stance, a brief discussion of Ākhūndzādah's concrete suggestions concerning the necessary reforms for political and social

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<sup>87</sup> Ākhūndzādah cannot control himself and often insults the Prophet. See 467-473.

<sup>88</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 481-483.

<sup>89</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 484-485.

<sup>90</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 504.

<sup>91</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 410.

<sup>92</sup> Ākhūndzādah, “Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah,” 425.

modernization is essential. Although Ākhūndzādah is more focused on leveling criticisms against the ulama, despotic rulers, and religious beliefs throughout *Maktūbāt*, his reform proposals can be inferred between the lines. He argues that disseminating knowledge (*'elm*) is the only way to overcome ignorance, religious superstitions, and despotic rulers.<sup>93</sup> In this context, he does not fail to mention the importance of alphabet reform for achieving the dissemination of knowledge and progress (*proqrah*) in Islamic societies, although he elaborates on ideas concerning alphabet reform in a separate essay<sup>94</sup>. He asserts that the Iranian state will not regain its ancient strength and grandeur without the education of its people (*tarbīyat-e mellat*). This education will not be possible without literacy (*kasb-e savād*), which in turn cannot become widespread without the reform and change of the current alphabet. Such a change is possible only through wise and effective measures (*tadābīr-e mūasserānah-ye hakīmānah*) that will be implemented over no less than 15 years.<sup>95</sup> Regarding political reforms, Ākhūndzādah emphasizes the concept of law (*qānūn*) and the necessity of a parliament, indicating his support for constitutionalism.

In a nutshell, a comprehensive examination of *Maktūbāt* reveals that the text comprises multiple layers. After capturing Iran's current political, social, legal, and religious conditions, Ākhūndzādah outlines the necessary reforms in the political and social spheres. Alongside proposing necessary reforms in the state and society, he touches upon the obstacles to reform within Iranian society. The glorification of ancient Iran and a strong anti-Arab discourse accompany his political, social, and religious criticisms. He does not adhere to a specific order in articulating these

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<sup>93</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah," 506-507.

<sup>94</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Alefbā-ye Jadīd," 289-375.

<sup>95</sup> Ākhūndzādah, "Maktūbāt-e Kamāl al-Dowlah," 429.

layers, allowing the audience to find references to different aspects throughout the text.

### 2.3 Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā and the emergence of nationalist historiography in Iran

Though Ākhūndzādah's writings predate those of the two other intellectuals examined in this chapter, it can be argued that Ākhūndzādah did not produce any major work that falls into the category of history as a genre. As previously stated, in Ākhūndzādah's writings, history serves primarily as an explanatory tool for making sense of Iran's backwardness. In this regard, one may credit him with being one of the precursors of nationalism in Iran. However, when it comes to historiography as a genre, we should turn our attention to Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā and Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī as the first representatives of nationalist historiography.

Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā was the fifty-fifth son of Fath 'Alī Shāh (r.1797-1834). He probably received his early education in a traditional manner like the other princes. However, it seems that his later education in the newly established *Dār-al-Fonūn* and acquaintance with the European residents in Tehran and reform-minded Iranians radically transformed his ideas on matters like religion and history. The impact of *Dār-al-Fonūn* on his mindset is unmistakable, as Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā states that he attended French lessons in *Dār-al-Fonūn*. He also points out the existence of Europeans as instructors, and his remarks are very positive on *Dār-al-Fonūn*.<sup>96</sup>

Contemporary sources do not give much detail on his life and activities. One may say that the reason behind this negligence is that as the fifty-fifth son of Fath 'Alī Shāh, he had no chance of ascending to the throne. Thus, we may assume that he was not an influential figure in the Qajar society. However, it is also plausible to

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<sup>96</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, *Nāmah-ye Khosrowān* (Bombay: Mozaffarī Press, 1906-7?), 2.

think that because of his bad reputation, the sources mention him in *passim*. For example, we are informed by Dīvānbeygī that he was known among the public as an atheist because of his *vos'at-mashrab* (liberal disposition). He also mentions that his words were against the sharia at their face value.<sup>97</sup> His familiarity with European ideas can be considered the source of his discomfort with the Sharia and the established religious worldview in the Qajar period. Abbas Amanat reminds us of an ancient critical attitude towards the Sharia-based socio-political entity among the Sufi circles. This critical attitude might at least prepare the ground for the reception of modern Western ideas for Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā and like-minded intellectuals.<sup>98</sup>

Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's friendship with the reform-minded Iranians and his collaboration with them illuminate his political, ideological, and intellectual affiliations. As an example, his friendship with Mīrzā Malkom Khān should be mentioned. Mīrzā Malkom Khān was an Armenian convert educated in France and returned to Iran in the 1850s. After returning from France, he proposed reforms to Nāser al-Dīn Shāh for the modernization of Iran. Also, we know he lectured on different scientific subjects in Dār al-Fonūn. He also founded a secret society called *Farāmūshānah* (House of Oblivion) in a manner of Mason lodges with which he became familiar in Paris. It seems that Malkom Khān aimed to spread modern ideas among prominent political and intellectual figures. Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's role in this pseudo-Masonic organization was also illustrative of Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's thoughts. Apart from being an active member, Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā was hosting these meetings in his house. The *Farāmūshānah* was abolished by a royal decree in October 1861.<sup>99</sup> Its

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<sup>97</sup> Sayyīd Ahmad Dīvānbeygī Shirazī, *Hadiqat-al-Shoarā*. Vol. 1. ed. 'Abd-al-Hosayn Navāyī. (Tehran: Enteharat-e Zarrīn, 1985), 370.

<sup>98</sup> Abbas Amanat, "Pūrkhāqān va Andīshah-ye Bāzyābī-ye Mallī-ye Īrān: Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā va Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān". *Īrān Nāmāh* 17, no. 1 (1999): 9.

<sup>99</sup> Hamid Algar, "Freemasonry; ii. In the Qajar Period," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater. accessed January 26, 2022, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/freemasonry-ii-in-the-qajar-period>.

members, including the founder, Malcolm Khān, had to flee from Iran after the royal decree. Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā took refuge at Shāh ‘Abd-al-‘Azim Shrine, located in the vicinities of the capital, due to the fear of death. Although he was pardoned after a while, he could not gain the trust of Nāser al-Dīn Shāh until he died in 1872.

In addition to Malkom Khān, he was in contact with Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah. The letters between Ākhūndzādah and Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā show their joint dissatisfaction with the Qajar political and social establishment. The letters are also significant as they reveal some details concerning the writing process of *Nāmah-ye Khosrowān*.<sup>100</sup> Another influential figure with whom Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā had relations was Manekji Limji Hataria, who was the representative of the Indian Parsi community in Iran between the years 1854-1890. Manekji was striving to improve the social and economic conditions of the Iranian Zoroastrians, particularly through philanthropy. It seems that he had a considerable impact on certain dissident intellectuals.<sup>101</sup> In this regard, Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's collaboration with him is interesting as he included a text written by Manekji on the history of Zoroastrianism to his *Nāmah-ye Khosrowān*.<sup>102</sup>

### 2.3.1 Nāmah-ye Khosrowān

In the light of his dissident ideas and intellectual background explained above, Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā wrote a history of Iran from the ancient period to his time. His three-volume *Nāmah-ye Khosrowān* marks a definitive departure from traditional

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<sup>100</sup> Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah, *Alefba-ye Jadīd va Maktūbāt*, ed. Hamīd Mohammadzādah and Hamīd Ārāslī, (Baku: Nashriyāt-e Farhangestān-e ‘Olūm-e Comhūrī-ye Shūravī-ye Sosyālīstī-ye Āzarbāycān, 1963); for Ākhūndzādā's letters to Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā see pages 170-7; 182; 220-9; 247-9, 252-4; for Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's letters to Ākhūndzādā see pages 373-9; 393-5.

<sup>101</sup> For a general evaluation of Manekji's impact on Iranian intellectuals and how the nationalist Iranians perceived him, see Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, "An Emissary of the Golden Age: Manekji Limji Hataria and the Charisma of the Archaic in Pre-Nationalist Iran", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 10, no. 3 (2010): 377-390.

<sup>102</sup> I could not look at this text because it was excluded in the edition I used.

historiography, particularly in its treatment of ancient history. His remarks on the reason for writing *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān* reveal his motives. He says:

[After learning French in Dār-al-fonūn], this humble read many books, [and] one day contemplated why we, Iranians, forgot the language of our ancestors. Although our ancestors were world-renowned authors and poets, we do not have any books written in old Persian from them. For a while, I lamented the disappearance of Iranians' ancient language. Then, I decided to start writing a book in the old style. I could not find a worthier account than the Iranian kings. Hence, I called it *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān*. I tried to use plain language because I wanted to make sure my words were understood.<sup>103</sup>

The novelty of Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's approach is evident from the structure and organization of the book. Taking a glance at the structure and periodization would be useful to understand his intention and mindset. The first volume of the book deals with pre-Islamic Iran. He divides the kings of the ancient history of Iran into five groups: *Ābādīyān*, *Jīyān*, *Shāyīyān*, *Yāsāyīyān*, and *Golshāhīyān*. He spares only three pages for the history of the first four groups. Nevertheless, the existence of such groups is one of the most interesting aspects of *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān* since these names did not exist, neither in medieval Islamic sources dealing with ancient Iran nor the modern historiography can prove their existence. The only source that mentions these groups is the *Dasātīr* texts (*Motūn-e Dasātīr*). *Golshāhīyān*, the fifth group, is also divided into four dynasties: *Pishdādīyān*, *Keyān*, *Askhānīyān*, and *Sāsānīyān*. The genealogy he offers for the *Golshāhīyān* is more or less compatible with the narratives of ancient Iran that can be found in classical medieval and early modern Iranian-Islamic historiography.

The second and third volumes deal with Islamic Iran until the Zand period (1751-1794). The first volume ends with the fall of Sasanid Iran into the hands of the Muslim Arabs. Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā states at the very beginning of the second volume that after the death of Yazdegerd, the last Sasanid king, Arabs and Turks destroyed Iran. He starts the second volume with the Taherid dynasty, considered the first

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<sup>103</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān*, 2.

Iranian dynasty after the Muslim conquest. He points out that there were rebellions against Muslim rule in different parts of Iran, such as Tabaristan, Sakistan, Kerman, etc. However, they were insufficient to rescue such a vast country from the Arabs.<sup>104</sup> The second volume ends with the Mongol attack. The third volume also covers the history of Iran from the Cengizids to the Zand dynasty. In one of his letters to Ākhūndzāde, he stated that to write the fourth volume, which would deal with the Qajar history, either the affairs should change, or he has to leave Iran.<sup>105</sup>

The periodization of *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān* resembles the tripartite periodization of history as ancient, medieval, and modern even though the author intended to write the fourth volume in addition to the three volumes he could finish.<sup>106</sup> A remarkable feature of Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's periodization is the point that the first and second volumes end with foreign occupations, namely, the Arab and Mongol invasions of Iran. Amanat argues in his article on the *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān* that Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's periodization evokes romanticism in the historiography of nineteenth-century Europe. Searching for the nation's roots was one of the most significant components of romantic historiography's agenda. Romantic historians thought the national identity resulted from strife between the indigenous and foreign people. In this regard, the French historian Thierry, one of the most prominent members of this school, asserted that the Norman conquest was a turning point in the history of England. According to this school of historiography, the duty of historians was to find the national essence. The ideas of freedom and equality were considered the national essence. These historians hoped to find the national essence in a distant past that could be used as a template for the nation's present condition.<sup>107</sup> Amanat

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<sup>104</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān*. vol.2, 2.

<sup>105</sup> Ākhūndzādah, *Alefba-ye Jadīd*, 373.

<sup>106</sup> Abbas Amanat, "Pūrkhāqān va Andīshah-ye Bāzyābī-ye Mallī-ye Īrān," 30-31.

<sup>107</sup> Abbas Amanat, "Pūrkhāqān va Andīshah-ye Bāzyābī-ye Mallī-ye Īrān," 31.

qualifies his argument by saying that we should not necessarily assume that Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā has read and been directly inspired by the Romantic school. Instead, parallels between his work and the European historians may point out a common characteristic of reconstruction or reformulation of the past in the nineteenth century in any part of the world.

In a nutshell, the three-volume *Nāmah-ye Khosrowān* exemplifies certain novelties in the genre of historiography of the Qajar period. For one thing, we see an Iran-centered historical narrative. The history of Iran in Jalāl-al-din Mīrzā's work is not depicted as a part of Islamic history. Instead, the subject matter is Iran from the ancient period until the Qajar period. He departed from the narrative of the Abrahamic religions about the ancient history. As opposed to most of the universal histories written in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish until the nineteenth century, he did not use the general framework provided by the Qur'an. Instead, he espoused the neo-Zoroastrian worldview by using the *Dasātir* texts. Thirdly, he wrote his work in pure Persian (*Fārsī-ye Sarah*). Last but not least, Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's periodization of Iranian history was a clear departure from the histories of the Qajar period written until the 1860s. The Arab and Mongol invasions were depicted as interruptions in Iranian history as Jalāl-al-din Mīrzā ended the first two volumes with the Arab and Mongol invasions.<sup>108</sup>

#### 2.4 Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī and racialization of ancient Iranian history

Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī is the chronologically last significant figure included in this chapter, as his politically and intellectually active years spanned the 1880s and the 1890s. Kermānī's dissent from the Qajar political and religious establishment was

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<sup>108</sup> Abbas Amanat, "Legend, Legitimacy and Making a National Narrative," 327-329.

even more apparent than Ākhūndzādah and Jalāl-al-din Mirzā. His writings on various topics, such as religion, history, and politics, underscore his radicalism and dissent.

#### 2.4.1 A radical Iranian in Hamidian Istanbul: The intellectual and political biography of Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī

Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, a pivotal figure in early Iranian nationalism, was born in 1853 in Kerman. He came from an established local family with a Zoroastrian background and Sufi affiliations.<sup>109</sup> Although detailed information about his life and activities in Kerman is scarce, it can be assumed that his familial background and the religio-political fabric of Kerman had a significant impact on the formation of Kermānī's intellectual mindset.<sup>110</sup> He received a traditional education in rhetoric, logic, theology, and the Persian and Arabic languages. Kermānī became acquainted with Babi-Azali religious ideas<sup>111</sup> in Kerman and eventually identified as a Babi-Azali. At one point, he was compelled to assume the tax collection duty in the region. According to the accounts of his life, he had to flee Kerman because of a dispute with the governor over tax collection.<sup>112</sup> After spending some time at the court of Zell al-Soltan, a Qajar prince and the governor of Isfahan, and then in cities like

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<sup>109</sup> Kermānī's great-grandfather was a Zoroastrian convert, and his father belonged to the *Ahl-e Haqq* sect. See Faraydūn Ādamīyyat, *Andīshahā-ye Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī* (Tehran: Entashārāt-e Payām, 1357/1978), 13.

<sup>110</sup> Kerman harbored people from various religious backgrounds with orthodox and unorthodox inclinations. For the social, religious, and political fabric of Kerman and Mīrzā Āqā Khān's life in Kerman, see Mangol Bayat Philipp, "Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani: Nineteenth Century Persian Revolutionary Thinker" (PhD diss., University of Los Angeles, California, 1971), 91-108.

<sup>111</sup> Azalism is one of the two factions of the nineteenth-century messianic movement, Babism. Introduced by Sayyīd 'Alī Mohammad-e Shīrāzī, known as Bāb, were divided into two groups: Bahaim and Azalism. It is generally acknowledged that Azalism is a more conservative and dissident form of Babism than Bahaim. D. M. MacEoin, "BABISM," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/babism-index> ; D. M. MacEoin, "AZALI BABISM," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/azali-babism>.

<sup>112</sup> Shaykh Mahmūd Afdal Kermānī, "Mokhtasarī Az Sharh-e Ahvāl-e Marhūm Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī" in Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī and Shaykh Ahmad-e Rūhī, *Hasht Bahesht*, Published digitally by Bayani Digital Publications, 2001.

Tehran and Mashad, he immigrated to the Ottoman Empire in 1886. This marked a new era in Kermānī's life.<sup>113</sup> In the meantime, he went to Cyprus with his close friend Shaykh Ahmad Rūhī, met Sobh-e Azal, the leader of Azalis, and both friends married two daughters of Sobh-e Azal, signifying their commitment to the Azali cause.

Kermānī's Istanbul years, which concluded with his extradition by the Sublime Porte to Iran in 1896, were marked by significant intellectual and political activity. Initially, he likely supported the Azali-Babi cause. Later, Kermānī corresponded with Malkom Khān and helped him to spread his oppositional journal, *Qānūn*<sup>114</sup>, by distributing it among Iranians in the Ottoman Empire and Iran.<sup>115</sup> His final political involvement was joining pan-Islamist cause led by Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī in Istanbul. Following his extradition to Iran on accusations of involvement in the assassination of the Iranian Shah, Nāser al-Dīn, Kermānī was executed with his two friends in Tabriz.<sup>116</sup>

Kermānī authored numerous texts on history, literature, philosophy, religion, anthropology, and other fields.<sup>117</sup> Although most of his works have never been

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<sup>113</sup> There are many sources that provide a biography of Kermānī. As Faraydūn Ādamīyyat notes, however, Shaykh Mahmūd Afdal Kermānī's introduction in *Hasht Bahesht* and Mahmūd Dabestānī's two articles in *Yaghmah* journal seem to serve as points of departure for further accounts of Kermānī's biography, as the former was living in Istanbul and the brother of Kermānī's friend, Shaykh Ahmad Rūhī, and the latter had contact with Kermānī's family in Kerman. Faraydūn Ādamīyyat, *Andīshahā-ye Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī* (Tehran: Entashārāt-e Payām, 1357/1978), 14; Mahmūd Dabestānī-ye Kermānī, "Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī," *Yaghmah* 2, vol. 6 (Shahrīvar 1328/1949): 255-259; Mahmūd Dabestānī-ye Kermānī, "Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī II," *Yaghmah* 3, vol. 2 (Ordībahasht 1329/1950), 82-87.

<sup>114</sup> Malkom Khān published his modernist newspaper, *Qānūn*, in London between 1890 and 1898. For an analysis of the newspaper's content in the context of Malkom's opposition to the Shah, see especially pages 187-205 of Hamid Algar's highly critical biography of Malkom Khān. Hamid Algar, *Mīrzā Malkom Khān: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>115</sup> Faraydūn Ādamīyyat, *Andīshahā-ye Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī*, 30.

<sup>116</sup> For Kermānī's political activities, see Tanya Elal Lawrence, "An Age of Trans-Imperial Vernacularisms: The Iranian Dissident Community of the Late Ottoman Empire" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2018), 82-98.

<sup>117</sup> For a sketch of Kermānī's corpus see Faraydūn Ādamīyyat, *Andīshahā-ye Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī*, 49-70.

published, Kermānī's significant role in Qajar intellectual history can hardly be exaggerated.<sup>118</sup> Despite his intellectual versatility, I will focus on his writings on pre-Islamic Iran, Arabs, and the role of Islam in Iranian history. I contend, following Zia-Ebrahimi's argument, that Kermānī radicalized Ākhūndzādah's views on pre-Islamic Iran and Islam.

#### 2.4.2 *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī* (Alexander's Mirror) and *Sad Khetābah* (Hundred Lectures)

*Āyegah-ye Sekandarī* stands as the most comprehensive of Kermānī's works related to history. The title of the book is a reference to a verse by Hāfez-e Shīrāzī: "The wine cup is an Alexandrian mirror/ Look how it reveals to you the affairs of Dārā's kingdom."<sup>119</sup> This book is a product of Kermānī's Istanbul years, like the majority of his corpus. He says that he began to write *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī* after completing *Āyegah-ye Sokhanvarī*, a book on Persian literature, in the years 1889 and 1890. According to Kermānī's account, he presented *Āyegah-ye Sokhanvarī* to one of the grandees (*yakī az bozorgān*),<sup>120</sup> who, appreciating Kermānī's work, encouraged him to write a book on history, asserting that "histoire" is more important than "littérature" nowadays.<sup>121</sup> It was published during the Constitutional struggle in Iran (1906-1909) by order of 'Alā' al-Molk<sup>122</sup>, the minister of education and sciences.

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<sup>118</sup> See these publications to have a better understanding of Kermānī's intellectualism. Iraj Parsinejad, *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran (1866-1951)* (Maryland: Ibex Publishers, 2003), 67-93; Pejman Abdolmohammadi, "The Political Thought of Mirzā Aqā Khān Kermāni, The Father of Persian National Liberalism," *Oriente Moderno* 94, no. 1 (2014): 148-61; Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 133-175.

<sup>119</sup> Abbas Amanat, "Legend, Legitimacy and Making a National Narrative," 338.

<sup>120</sup> Sayyīd Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī was probably the person to whom Kermāni presented his work.

<sup>121</sup> Mirzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī*, 8.

<sup>122</sup> It is interesting to note that 'Alā' al-Molk was the Iranian ambassador in the Ottoman Empire when Kermānī was extradited to Iran in 1896. 'Alā' al-Molk's and his predecessor, Nezām al-Saltanah's requests for Kermānī and his friends' extradition to Iran are reflected in the Ottoman documents.

Motarjem al-Mamālīk, Zayn al-‘Ābedīn, and Mīrzā Jahāngīr Khān Shīrāzī (d.1908) undertook the task of editorship.<sup>123</sup>

The detailed analysis of the entire text is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, a glance at the introduction of *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī* reveals much about his novel approach to history as a concept. For Kermānī, history is not just a narrative written and read to take lessons (‘*ebnat*) from the deeds of kings and nobles. Instead, it serves as an indicator and proof of a nation’s nobility and a document of its grandeur and honor.<sup>124</sup> Kermānī argues that the reason why the Indians, the Greeks, the Chinese, and the Jews continue to exist today is that they have preserved their ancient writings, unlike the peoples of Troy, Lydia, and Carthage. He contends that Iranians would have lost their language and identity, much like the Egyptians, Syrians, and Iraqis, if Ferdowsi had not written his *Shāhnāmāh*.<sup>125</sup> *Taraqī* (progress) and *tanazzol* (decline) are two key concepts that appear recurrently in *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī*. Kermānī claims that history is the only way for a nation to overcome the challenge of decline, which, along with progress, forms part of the natural cycles.<sup>126</sup>

Although *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī* shares the same ideological stance with *Nāmāh-ye Khosrowān*, it differs based on its particular features. Unlike Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, who writes a kind of dynastical history, Kermānī places specific emphasis on the concept of the Iranian nation throughout *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī*. It is debatable, of

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<sup>123</sup> Information concerning the publication of the book comes from a foreword written by Motarjem al-Mamālīk, Zayn al-‘Ābedīn. According to this writing, Mīrzā Jahāngīr Khān Shīrāzī fixed the scribal errors concerning the nomenclature and dates. He also added the original French words to the text. The foreword was written in October 1906. It is appropriate, therefore, to assume that the book was published shortly after this date.; The second edition of *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī* was prepared by ‘Alī Asghar Haqdār and came out in 2010 in Iran. Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī: Tārīkh-e Īrān Az Zamān-e Māqabl-e Tārīkh tā Rehlat-e Hazret-e Khatmī Martabat*, edited by ‘Alī Asghar Haqdār (Tehran: Naṣr-e Chasmah, 2010).

<sup>124</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī*, 13.

<sup>125</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī*, 13-14.

<sup>126</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī*, 14.

course, to what extent he was successful in writing a history of the people of ancient Iran, as references to kings and dynasties are ubiquitous.

It is also important to note that *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī* is a history written with the hope of fostering a sense of national awakening among Iranians. To achieve such a goal, Kermānī effectively uses ancient legends as exemplars. For example, he references the story of Kaveh the Blacksmith (*Kāvah-ye Āhangar*), who, according to *Shāhnāmāh*, expelled the foreigners from Iran. Kermānī emphasizes that Iranians should take pride in the national effort Kāvah demonstrated in extinguishing oppression.<sup>127</sup> From an overview of *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī*, one can assert that the occupation of Iran by Arabs or Semitic people and national resistance demonstrated by Iranians are central themes Kermānī deals addresses in his work.

One of Kermānī's remarkable contributions to mainstream nationalism is his full-fledged articulation of Aryanist racism. References to Aryan race (*nazhād-e Āryā*) are numerous in Kermānī's works. This is not to say that he was the first Iranian to use the concept of *nazhād* (race) in Persian. Rather, the term can be seen in the writings of Ākhūndzādāh and Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, and others. It should be noted, however, that *nazhād* seemed to mean family, origin, root, and descent until it gained the racial tone in the late nineteenth century by Kermānī<sup>128</sup>, as Zia-Ebrahimi argues that Kermānī was the first Iranian, who used the term Aryan in its modern racial context in Persian.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyegah-ye Sekandarī*, 75-76.

<sup>128</sup> F. Steingass, "nazhād," in *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2005), 1398.; Ali Ansari discusses the ambiguous use of race in Farsi in later periods. Ali Ansari, "Iranian Nationalism and the Question of Race," 104.

<sup>129</sup> Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*, 155.; David Motadel argues that Ākhūndzādāh was also under Ernest Renan's distinction between Aryans and Semites, although the former did not make a direct reference to any European scholars or thinkers. It is also important to note that Ākhūndzādāh does not use the term Aryan in his writings. David Motadel, "Iran and the Aryan myth," in *Perceptions of Iran: History, Myths and Nationalism from Medieval Persia to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Ali M. Ansari (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 130-131.

Kermānī's *Sad Khetābah* provides clear evidence of his racism. In the fifth section of *Sad Khetābah*, which is titled "On the Difference of Human Races and Definition of Civilization" (*Darbārah-ye Tafāvot-e Nazhādhā-ye Ādamī bā Yakdīgar va Ta'rīf-e Tamaddon*), he delves into the categorization of human races. Kermānī asserts that humans come from different species and breeds (*anvā' va ajnās*). He claims that the Caucasian man is more distinguished, noble, and handsome (*khoshqīyāfah*) than others. More importantly, he states that the form and the structure of the Caucasian brain (*demāgh*) are more complex than others. It is important to note that when Kermānī refers to the Caucasian race, he does not mean people living in that specific region. According to Kermānī, Europeans and the majority of the Asian countries are considered to belong to the Caucasian race. He classifies others, such as the negro (*zangī*), the Chinese, etc., as different breeds.<sup>130</sup>

Kermānī regards blood as another determinant in a nation's breed. After briefly touching upon the factors that impact the balance of blood and breed, he asserts that there is a complete difference (*tafāvot-e kollī*) between the blood and the form and the structure of the brain of savage (*vahshī*) and civilized (*motamaddīna*) nations. To that effect, he notes a huge difference between the Negro and Ethiopian (*habeshī*), and the English and the Parisian (*Pārīsī*). In the end, he asserts that the noble Iranian nation, which he regards as the father of nations, lived under the principles of polite manners and civilization (*tarbīyat va tamaddon*) in the past.<sup>131</sup>

Kermānī's anti-Arab and anti-Semitic<sup>132</sup> ideas are reflections of his appropriation of Aryanism and biological racism. In addition to the fact that Arab

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<sup>130</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Sad Khetābah*, ed. Mohammad Ja'far Mahjūb (Los Angeles, Ketab Corp., 2006), 14.

<sup>131</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Sad Khetābah*, 14-15.

<sup>132</sup> Kermānī considers Arabs and Jews under the umbrella term "Semites". At one point, however, he acknowledges that Jews are famous for their intelligence. Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyeh-ye Sekandarī*, 107.

invasions disrupted Iranian national history, Kermānī blames Arabs for destroying the written records of Iranian civilization.<sup>133</sup> He states that European philosophers (*fiṣūfān-e farang*) believe there are no other two nations whose concepts of ethics and morality are as contradictory as those of the Arabs and Iranians.<sup>134</sup> Thus, the dichotomy between the “savage” Arabs and the “civilized” Iranians is well established throughout his writings. Kermānī uses offensive language against Arabs, describing them as barbarian and savage and devoid of knowledge and manners (*‘elm o adab*).<sup>135</sup> At times, he cannot restrain himself and openly curse Arabs.<sup>136</sup>

Kermānī’s approach to religions, particularly Islam, is too complex to provide a clear picture of his ideas. Although it is known that Kermānī sympathized with the Babi-Azali cause for a while and wrote a treatise, *Hasht Bahesht*, to explain Babi religious and philosophical concepts, some of his writings suggest that he questioned all religions, particularly Abrahamic ones. What adds to the puzzlement is that he often references the Qur’an and speaks like a Muslim in some of his writings, and even espoused pan-Islamic cause when Āfghānī was in Istanbul. One possible explanation for this complexity is that Kermānī’s religious ideas evolved throughout his life in Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, inconsistencies might reflect the shifts that occurred in his understanding of religious. Alternatively, Kermānī may have adopted a pragmatic approach to religion based on his aim to appeal to different groups, such as Babi-Azalis, Muslims, or dissident intellectuals. It is also important to note that Kermānī may have wanted to protect himself from accusations of heresy by pretending to be a devout Muslim.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Āyeh-ye Sekandari*, 24.

<sup>134</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Sad Khetābah*, 122.

<sup>135</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Sad Khetābah*, 122-124, 127.

<sup>136</sup> He calls Arabs *kūn-barahnah* (bare-assed). See Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, *Sad Khetābah*, 18.

<sup>137</sup> Mangol Bayat Philipp, “Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani: Nineteenth Century Persian Revolutionary Thinker,” 177; Certain documents in the Ottoman archive demonstrate that the Sublime Porte was

## 2.5 Conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate that the three intellectuals analyzed in this chapter significantly contributed to and arguably shaped the development of Iranian nationalism. I considered their familial backgrounds, educations, intellectual connections, and political affiliations as some of the main determinants in their intellectual paths. In this regard, Ākhūndzādah's connection with Tsarist Russia, Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's education at Dār al-Fonūn, and Kermānī's early Azali-Babism and intellectual maturation in Istanbul are unmistakable. In conclusion, if Ākhūndzādah was the intellectual who articulated foundational tenets of mainstream nationalism for the first time, Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā provided the first example of new Iran-centered historiography, and Kermānī expounded and racialized Ākhūndzādah's thoughts.

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informed by the Iranian embassy that Kermānī has anti-Islamic writings. Following this accusation, the Sublime Porte conducted an investigation. See BOA, BEO 338/25280., (25 Cemazeyelahir 1311/ 3 Ocak 1894); BOA, BEO 352/26397., (25 Recep 1311/ 1 Şubat 1894); BOA, BEO 359/26924., (9 Şaban 1311/ 15 Şubat 1894).

## CHAPTER 3

### CONTEXTUALIZING *ĀSĀR-E 'AJAM*

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the second chapter, I analyzed the writings of the three noteworthy early nationalist intellectuals, particularly how they instrumentalized pre-Islamic Iran to strengthen their ideological positions. In this chapter, I introduce the main source of this thesis, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. I first provide an overview of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Later, I will discuss the patronage ties behind the production of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Then, I will contextualize *Āsār-e 'Ajam* as a travel book dealing with various subjects. Furthermore, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s literary characteristics will be a matter of concern in this chapter. The sources Forsat used in writing *Āsār-e 'Ajam* will be another subheading in the chapter. After that, I will separately deal with the early reception and impact of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s visual and written content. The chapter mainly aims to shed light on the technical aspects of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and provide a critical analysis of the appearance of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* as a text and its publication.

#### 3.2 The synopsis of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*

*Āsār-e 'Ajam* consists of an introduction and nineteen chapters. Even though each chapter differs in its scope, it can be stated that Forsat has a particular method throughout the book. He usually describes ancient ruins first and provides historical information regarding them. In addition to his detailed description and drawings, Forsat includes translations of the inscriptions in ancient sites like Persepolis whenever he can find them in European sources. He often tries to decipher meaning from the visual material he sees in ancient sites. When speaking about the cities or

towns, he briefly dwells on topics such as agriculture, nature, and climate, as well as the moral and religious characteristics of the local people. He also includes the biographies of notable historical and contemporary figures of each town and city in the Fars region in so much that the number of people Forsat deals with in *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* is hundreds. He makes frequent digressions to relate moral stories and quotes poetry from his *diwan* or other poets. Forsat’s primary focus is on the Fars region, but he describes and provides information about Susa, Kermanshah, Basra, and the famous *Tāq Kesrā*, located in the ancient city of Ctesiphon in modern Iraq. He briefly mentions the ancient monuments in other regions of Iran and gives concise information about civilizations, such as ancient Egypt, Afghanistan, and Babel. He dedicates the last part of the book to contemporary Shiraz. This part of the book bears the title *Shīrāznāmah*. After giving a brief historical background of the foundation and development of Shiraz in pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, Forsat writes about the rivers, gates, neighborhoods, mosques, tombs, dervish lodges, schools, *hosayniyachs*<sup>138</sup>, bazaars, caravanserais, public bathrooms, public and private gardens, administrative offices and foreign companies. Apart from the monuments of contemporary Shiraz, he touches upon several scholars, jurists, men of letters (*odebā*), learned men (*fozelā*), preachers (*ahl-e menbar*), physicians, calligraphers, painters, book illuminators (*mozahheb*), merchants, and artisans lived before or currently living in Shiraz. *Shīrāznāmah* stands as an appendix to *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, although it carries a different title.

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<sup>138</sup> Hosayniyah is an architectural unit that emerged in early Islamic history for Moharram ceremonies to commemorate Hosayn’s martyrdom. After the Safavid period, however, its function started to overlap with the *takyas*. Later, it gained political character, especially during the Constitutional Revolution and anti-Pahlavi campaign. See Jean Calmard, “HOSAYNIYA in *Encyclopædia Iranica*,” accessed March 7, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hosayniya>.

Mīrzā Mohammad Nasīr Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, better known by his pen name, Forsat, was born in Shiraz in 1854. He came from an established family whose members had literary and artistic tastes. Forsat's father and grandfather were poets, and his great-grandfather was the chief physician at the court of Karīm Khān (d. 1779), the founder of the Shiraz-based Zand dynasty. Forsat pursued a path similar to his ancestors, as he was also a known poet and artist in the late Qajar period. He started to learn painting with his father, a book illuminator (*mozahheb*). Forsat was more interested in portrait painting than *tazheb*, as he says in his autobiography.<sup>139</sup> Painting for Forsat was a way of making life as he drew portraits of local elites. In addition to painting, he learned photography while residing in Tehran shortly before the Constitutional Revolution. Forsat's early education covers the traditional madrasa curriculum, i.e., the religious and rational sciences. He taught at a madrasa in Shiraz for a while.

Notwithstanding his traditional education, he was eager to learn modern sciences. For example, he says that Darwin's evolution theory revived him and advised the readers to learn this science as it strengthens believers' *towhed*.<sup>140</sup> His open-minded enthusiasm for all kinds of knowledge was one of the most interesting characteristics of Forsat. He was a prolific writer as well as a polymath. He wrote books about different topics like ancient Iranian scripts, the geography of India, traditional Iranian music, the account of the Constitutional revolution, and modern astronomy. He edited Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmah* and published it in India as well. Among his numerous works, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was probably the most well-known book of Forsat. As to his political thoughts and activities, although he had patronage ties with the Qajar court and ruling

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<sup>139</sup> Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzī, *Dīvān-e Forsat*, ed. 'Alī Zarrīnqalam (Tehran: Ketābforūshī-ye Sīrūs, 1958), 4.

<sup>140</sup> Forsat, *Dīvān*, 100.

elite, he took part in the Constitutional struggle in Iran for a while. His acquaintance with Sayyīd Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī, known as Afghānī, was a decisive event in his life. The impact of Afghānī was profound on Forsat, as he explains in his writings. After the Constitutional period, he assumed the directorship of the Shiraz branch of the Department of Education. He also served as the first head of the new Department of Justice in Shiraz for a short term. Forsat died in 1920 and was buried next to the famous Shirazi poet Hāfez in *Hāfezīyyah*.<sup>141</sup>

### 3.3 The travels of Forsat al-Dowla and the patronage ties behind the production of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*

*Āsār-e 'Ajam* is the blend and result of Forsat's travel notes and research, covering the notes of four trips made over approximately twenty years. It is necessary to examine the patronage ties behind its production, as the making of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was largely related to the patronage links still vivid in late nineteenth-century Iran. Given the lack of an established print culture and middle-class urban readers until the Constitutional period in Iran, it is hard to assume autonomy for the authors of the Qajar period. Commissioning a treatise or a book was also common for the Qajar elites.<sup>142</sup>

Three of Forsat's four travels were commissioned by different notables to examine the ancient monuments, draw their pictures, calculate the altitude of certain places, and survey some of the lands in the Fars region. His journey to 'Atabat

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<sup>141</sup> For the general information about Forsat's biography see Forsat al-Dowla Shīrāzī, *Dīvān-e Forsat*, ed. 'Alī Zarrīnqalam (Tehran: Ketābforūshī-ye Sīrūs, 1958); Manouchehr Kasheff, "FORŠAT-AL-DAWLA," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/forsat-al-dawla>; introduction of Mohammad Nasīr Forsat Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, ed. Mansūr Rastgār Fasāyī, 2 volumes (Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Amīr Kabīr, 1998).

<sup>142</sup> Marashi, Afshin. "Print Culture and Its Publics: A Social History of Bookstores in Tehran, 1900-1950," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 89-108.

region, located in modern Iraq, was an exception, as he visited the shrines of Shiite imams and the famous *Taq-e Kesrā* (Arch of Ctesiphon), the remains of a Sasanid building located in modern Iraq, on his own in 1886 (1303 *Sha'ban*). Among his four travels, two of them stand as more influential in terms of shaping his project. Thus, it would be better to deal with them first.

According to what Forsat writes at the beginning of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, he was commissioned by a British official (*az sāhebān-e dowlat-e bahāyya-ye engilis*) through Manekji Limji Hataria (1813-1890), the emissary of Parsis (Indian Zoroastrians) in Iran, who requested Forsat: "...this humble draws some of the ancient monuments in Fars, calculate particular altitudes and measures lands, then send to him."<sup>143</sup> It should be added that Forsat does not mention the British patron in his autobiography and states that it was Manekji who commissioned the book.<sup>144</sup> This fact led some scholars to doubt the existence of a British official as a patron.<sup>145</sup> However, it is hard to find why Forsat would fabricate a British patronage for *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. There is no clue that Forsat may have wanted to boast about receiving a British patronage. From another angle, he would not shy away from explicitly mentioning that only Manekji encouraged him for the project, as Forsat had no difficulties mingling with non-Muslims, including Zoroastrians.<sup>146</sup> Thus, it is more

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<sup>143</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:2.

<sup>144</sup> Forsat-al-Dowlah Shīrāzī, *Dīvān-e Forsat*, ed. 'Alī Zarrīnqalam, (Tehran: Ketābforūshī-ye Sīrūs, 1958), 82-83.

<sup>145</sup> Talinn Grigor, for example, writes: "In his biography, he later confessed that it was, in fact, Hataria who had commissioned the work." Talinn Grigor, *The Persian Revival: The Imperialism of Copy in Iranian and Parsi Architecture* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2021), 169; Setrag Manoukian also notes the different accounts regarding the patronage of the book. Setrag Manoukian, *The Ruins of Others*, 219.

<sup>146</sup> Mohammad Hosayn Roknzādah, whose father was a friend of Forsat, states that Forsat was not a fanatic in religious affairs. He was seeing all subjects of God with the same eye, meaning he was not discriminating against any people, and he was considering social intercourse (*mo'āsharāt*) with non-Muslims religiously acceptable (*jā'iz*). Mohammad Hosayn Roknzādah Adamīyāt, *Dāneshmandān va Sokhansorāyān-e Fārs*, Vol.4, (Tehran, Ketābforūshīhā-ye Eslāmīya va Khayyām, 1340/1961), 95.; In his under-studied *Maqālāt-e 'Elmī va Sīyāsī*, Forsat advocates religious dialogue among members of different faiths. Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Maqālāt-e 'Elmī va Sīyāsī*, Vol. 2 (Tehran: Matba'-ye Khorshīd, 1325/1907-1908), 24.

likely that he just ignored or forgot to mention the British patronage in his autobiography.

What was the motivation of the British official for commissioning such a work? The British official may have been interested in the Fars region's ancient ruins, as interest in archaeology was widespread among Europeans in the nineteenth century. Or, the British colonial mindset may have played a role in the book's commission, as the British officer requested not only the drawings of ancient monuments but also the survey of the land. In any case, the collaboration of the British official and Manekji, who also had British citizenship, was a manifestation of the alliance between the British Raj and the Parsis of India.<sup>147</sup>

Despite the obscure motivation of the unknown British official in commissioning *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, Manekji's goals in commissioning *Āsār-e 'Ajam* can be easily contextualized, as he was a very influential figure in Qajar Iran as the first representative of Parsis (Indian Zoroastrians) in Iran. He is known for his efforts to alleviate the current conditions of Iranian Zoroastrians and draw attention to the legacy of the pre-Islamic period in Iran.<sup>148</sup> Thus, his mediation is not surprising. Manekji's efforts in Iran can be examined in two categories: 1-Parsi philanthropy and 2-Religious and intellectual propaganda.

In order to understand the politics of Parsi philanthropy and religious and intellectual propaganda in Iran, we should briefly turn our attention to the backdrop of the relationship between Indian and Iranian Zoroastrians. It is known that Indian

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<sup>147</sup> Afshin Marashi, *Exile and the Nation: The Parsi Community of India and the Making of Modern Iran*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020).

<sup>148</sup> For a general evaluation of Manekji's impact on Iranian intellectuals and how the nationalist Iranians perceived him, see Firoze M. Kotwal, Jamsheed K. Choksy, Christopher J. Brunner, and Mahnaz Moazami, "HATARIA, MANEKJI LIMJI," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed May 7, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hataria-manekji-limji> and Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, "An Emissary of the Golden Age: Manekji Limji Hataria and the Charisma of the Archaic in Pre-Nationalist Iran", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 10, no. 3 (2010): 377-390.

Zoroastrians were seeking guidance from Iranian Zoroastrians in religious matters, such as establishing the religious calendar and acquiring knowledge until the late eighteenth century. Indeed, until this period, Zoroastrians could visit Iran to seek knowledge not only in Zoroastrian but also in Muslim circles. Moreover, Zoroastrian priests from Iran traveled to India to provide answers to the religious questions posed by Indian Parsis. However, European accounts of Iranian Zoroastrians living in cities like Yazd and Kerman from the first half of the nineteenth century point to the poor level of religious knowledge, even among the priests, and the dire living conditions of the Zoroastrian community. Appalled by the current conditions of their co-religionists in Iran, the Parsis of India, who were benefiting from the political, social, and economic premises of British colonial rule in India<sup>149</sup>, found the Society for the Amelioration of Conditions (*Anjoman-e Akāber-e Pārsīyān*) in 1853 on the purpose of lifting legal discriminations against Zoroastrians and providing philanthropic services to the Zoroastrian community by opening hospitals, schools, and helping needy.<sup>150</sup>

In this context, Manekji was appointed as the first representative of the newly founded society in 1854. He held his position until his death in 1890, serving as the representative of the Parsis in Iran. His activism focused on two areas: improving the socio-economic and political conditions of Zoroastrians in Iran and promoting ancient archaism among Iranian elites. As part of his philanthropic efforts for Iranian Zoroastrians, he lobbied for the abolition of the jizya tax, which was eventually lifted by Nāser al-Dīn Shāh in 1882. In addition to his service for the repeal of the jizya

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<sup>149</sup> The Parsi community flourished thanks to the East Indian Company and then British colonial rule, the existence of which increased trade and industrialization in port cities like Bombay. Afshin Marashi, *Exile and the Nation*, 10-11.

<sup>150</sup> Monica M. Ringer, *Pious Citizens: Reforming Zoroastrianism in India and Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 144-146.

tax, he also played a role in establishing schools and hospitals, and anjomans belonged to Zoroastrians.

What is more important for this study is to discuss Manekji's role in disseminating of a particular interpretation of pre-Islamic history of Iran. Thus, it is necessary to mention his writings and the texts he commissioned about ancient Iran. In his *Parsi Mission to Iran*, an English translation of his travel account in Gujarati, Manekji regards ancient Iranian history as a primarily Zoroastrian heritage. Reminiscent of Ākhūndzādah's nostalgic feelings, he depicts pre-Islamic Iran as a "garden of paradise" and a "sign of heaven".<sup>151</sup> In addition to his travel account, containing his social and economic efforts for Zoroastrians and observations concerning their religious and social customs, Manekji encouraged Iranian literati or, in some instances, directly commissioned books about ancient Iran. He sometimes wrote introductions to these works. Among the books he commissioned and contributed in some way, *Najādnamah-ye Pādashāhān-e Īrānīnājād* (Book of the lineage of the kings of Iranian descent) of Qajar court historian Rezā Qolī Khān Hedāyat (d. 1871), *Farāzestān* of Tūysarkānī are remarkable.

Forsat draws ancient ruins in the Fars region, provides information about them in a booklet (*ketabcheh*), and sends it to Manekji. After a while, however, he hears that Manekji died. The material he sent to Manekji was registered as a part of Manekji's *tarakah*, meaning he would not have access to it.<sup>152</sup> Forsat was disappointed as he wanted to publish it by copying the drawings and improving the textual content.<sup>153</sup> One may infer from Forsat's disappointment that he probably did not have a copy of the manuscript, including drawings, he had sent to Manekji. In

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<sup>151</sup> Monica M. Ringer, *Pious Citizens*, 159.

<sup>152</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:2.

<sup>153</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:2.

any case, Forsat carried out this trip in 1889-1890 (1307 hajri), making it his chronologically third trip. Be that as it may, Forsat gives precedence to the notes of his third trip in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Thus, he does not follow the chronological sequence to narrate his trips and provide information regarding ancient ruins and other points. Rather, he starts the narrative with his reflections on this trip.

Another significant patronage comes from Nezām al-Saltanah (d.1908), the then governor of the Fars region, when Forsat was desperate to start his work after Manekji's death. Nezām al-Saltanah entrusted Forsat with drawing Persepolis and other nearby locations in 1893.<sup>154</sup> This commission marked Forsat's last trip to these sites and was crucial for finishing the book. The governor's encouragement indicates that the Qajar imperial establishment had developed an interest in the geography and history of the imperial domains. This interest was also reflected in the books published by the royal printing press in Tehran, with E'temād al-Saltanah (d.1896) playing a leading role as the director of the Government Translation Bureau (*Dār al-Tarjomah-ye Khassā-ye Dovletī*). He supervised the publication of historical and geographical texts, including translations from various languages.<sup>155</sup> Nezām al-Saltanah's patronage of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* can thus be seen as part of a similar Qajar vision. Forsat's gratitude to his patron is evident throughout the book, where he praises Nezām al-Saltanah for ensuring the security of the roads, justice, and prosperity for the people of Fars and his patronage of cultured men.<sup>156</sup>

In addition to Forsat's two trips commissioned by a British official through Manekji and Nezām al-Saltanah and his visit to the 'Atabat region on his own, there

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<sup>154</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:201.

<sup>155</sup> Abbas Amanat, "E' TEMĀD-AL-SALTĀNA, MOĤAMMAD-ĤASAN KHAN MOQADDAM MARĀĠĀ 'Ī," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed May 17, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/etemad-al-saltana>.

<sup>156</sup> See Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 203-204, 367, 424-426.

is one more trip that finally becomes a part of the book, even though it was not intended in the time of its realization. Farhād Mīrzā Mo‘tamad al-Dowlah, another prince-governor of the Fars region, commissioned Forsat’s chronologically first trip in 1876-1877 (1293 hajri). Farhād Mīrzā sent Forsat to the Tabar Castle to draw a picture of the castle following its seizure from bandits, whose leader was someone called Fazl‘Alī Bahārlū, to send it to the capital as a sign of victory. Forsat decided to add his notes on the capture of Tabar Castle and its environs following Shaykh Mofīd’s encouragement.<sup>157</sup> Farhād Mīrzā’s patronage is not surprising as he was the author of a translation of an English geography book, *Jām-e Jam*, and a travel journal for his pilgrimage to Mecca, showing his interest in geography.<sup>158</sup>

What should be inferred from the patronage background that made the production of *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* possible is that British-Parsi patronage and the Qajar elites’ interest in the history and geography of Iranian territory, along with Forsat’s intellectual and scholarly interests and his artistic skills were all influential. Hence, it is tempting to see that ancient history and geography became common interests for a British official, a Parsi activist-intellectual, Qajar political elites, and a provincial literati. The presence of these different actors behind the production of the book shows that various local, imperial, and trans-imperial actors were engaged in ancient history and geographic knowledge in nineteenth-century Iran.

What kind of help he sought from his patrons? He does not reveal much detail about the scope of patronage he acquired. In any case, one may expect that the

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<sup>157</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 2: 547.

<sup>158</sup> For Farhad Mirza’s intellectual contribution to the burgeoning Qajar geography literature and a discussion on its political and ideological implications see Kambiz Eslami, “FARHĀD MĪRZĀ MO‘TAMAD-AL-DAWLA,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed April 2, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/farhad-mirza-motamad-al-dawla> ; Zeinab Azarbadegan, “Imagined Geographies, Re-invented Histories: Ottoman Iraq as Part of Iran,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (2018): 115-141; Zeinab Azarbadegan, “The World-Revealing Goblet: Reading Farhād Mīrzā’s Geographical Treatise *Jām-i Jam* as a Lithograph”, *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 3-4 (2020): 409-449.

British-Parsi and Qajar imperial patronage must have provided financial help for Forsat. However, the only time when Forsat writes about the financial incentive he got for *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* is Mozaffar al-Dīn Shāh’s largesse to him.<sup>159</sup> Even though there is no direct reference to Forsat’s financial relationships with his patrons with regard to the travels, it seems nearly impossible that the patronage did not cover financial support. In addition to financial support, other kinds of support, such as logistics and manpower, were probably significant, as the travel conditions were not always easy considering the lack of the railway and drivable roads whose later construction would accelerate the archaeological field search in Iran.<sup>160</sup> For the logistic and manpower support, we know he was accompanied by other people, at least in some of his travels across the Fars region. Forsat mentions, for example, that he retained six local people to climb *Dakhmah-ye Shāpūr* (Shapur Cave near Kazerun), a mountainous and steep area, in addition to three people accompanying himself.<sup>161</sup> His brother, Rohsat al-Dowlah, also accompanied Forsat on his travels.<sup>162</sup> Other people were perhaps employed by Forsat’s sponsor. Alternatively, Forsat may have chosen people from his acquaintances, as in the case of his brother, and the patronage he received may have covered their expenses.

#### 3.4 The generic and literary features of *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*

Despite containing many topics, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* is, first and foremost, a travelogue. It consists of notes and explanations from Forsat’s four different trips. From the early

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<sup>159</sup> Mansūr Rastgār Fasāyī, “Zendagīnāma-ye Forsat,” in *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, Vol.1, 74.

<sup>160</sup> Nile Green, “New Histories for the Age of Speed: The Archaeological–Architectural Past in Interwar Afghanistan and Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 54, no. 3–4 (2021): 349–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2020.1840967>.

<sup>161</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 2: 478-79.

<sup>162</sup> Forsat mentions his brother in the section of *Sho’arā-ye Shīrāz* (Poets of Shiraz). Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 2: 907.

nineteenth century, the Qajar period witnessed a significant increase in the number of travel books in Iran. It is understandable from the abundance of travelogues in this period that the genre became very popular in Iran. While more research has been conducted on travelogues written about Europe or other foreign countries by Iranians, there are plenty of travel books written by Iranian literati or bureaucrats to describe the Iranian territory.<sup>163</sup> Considering the generic commonalities, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* may be regarded as a part of burgeoning Qajar travel literature. Additionally, pre-modern travel books, local histories, particularly *Fārsnāmah* and *Shīrāznāmah* literature, and travelogues written by European officials or orientalist who passed by the Fars region are kinds of sources that can be brought into dialogue with *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*. Indeed, Forsat often refers to European travelogues without revealing their names. However, it is hard to say that *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* follows the methodology of any particular text written in Qajar Iran or simply imitates the European travelogues he perused.

We may turn our attention to India for more similar examples to *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*. In this regard, Talinn Grigor brings the scholarship’s attention to two books published in nineteenth-century India, stressing a possible Indian connection in serving Forsat as a model to envision such a project. One of them is K. D. Kiash’s *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, a trilingual (English, Gujarati, Persian) travel book containing descriptions and depictions of ancient monuments, buildings, bas-reliefs, and rock inscriptions in Iran. The author, an Indian Zoroastrian, explains his motivation for writing such a book as reviving the Zoroastrian memories in Iran and inducing “the present liberal-minded ruler of Persia”, i.e., Nāser al-Dīn Shāh, to

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<sup>163</sup> For one of the fundamental studies concerning the Qajar travel literature, see Nagmeh Sohrabi, *Taken For Wonder: Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts from Iran to Europe*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

preserve these “sacred mementos”. Besides, anti-Arab feelings are apparent in Kiash’s book, as he regards invading Arabs as “fanatical hordes” and the Arab invasion of Iran as a terrible one.<sup>164</sup> Putting aside Kiash’s ideological motives, it has similar features to *Āsār-e ‘Ajām*, as both books describe the ancient sites, their environs, and surrounding remnants. Kiash also largely draws from European travelers who passed by ancient sites of Iran. It is noteworthy that Kiash’s and Forsat’s drawings bear many stylistic similarities. (compare figures 1-4).

The other book that may have influenced Forsat’s project, according to Grigor, is *Āsār el-Sanādīd* (The Remnant Signs of Ancient Heroes), written by an Indian Muslim social reformer, Munshi Syed Ahmad Khan. *Āsār el-Sanādīd* is a history of Delhi and a survey of its historical monuments embellished with more than a hundred drawings. (see figures 5-8) The book was published twice, in 1847 and 1854, with notable changes in form and content.<sup>165</sup> Even a cursory look at the title and content of the book reveals certain common features with *Āsār-e ‘Ajām*. The similarity between the titles of the books is the first thing one may note, as *āsār*, meaning remnants, traces, or antiquities, is common in both. The title of Syed Ahmad Khan’s book *Āsār el-Sanādīd* is a direct reference to ‘Orfi’s<sup>166</sup> famous verse, a part of his praise of Prophet Mohammad: “The ornamentations still left on the ruined walls and gates are the remnant signs of Persia's ancient heroes.”<sup>167</sup> The author begins his narrative by quoting the verse. The same verse by ‘Orfi is also quoted by Forsat at

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<sup>164</sup> K. D. Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures: Or the Monuments, Buildings, Bas-Reliefs, Rock Inscriptions* (Bombay: Education Society’s Press, 1889).

<sup>165</sup> Two scholarly articles analyze the book and compare its different versions. Troll, Christian W. “A Note on an Early Topographical Work of Sayyid Ahmad Khān: ‘Āṣār al-Ṣanādīd.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1972): 135–46; Naim, C. M. “Syed Ahmad and His Two Books Called ‘Asar-al-Sanadid.” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 3 (2011): 669–708.

<sup>166</sup> Paul Losensky, “‘ORFI ŠIRAZI.” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed March 1, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/orfi-of-shiraz>

<sup>167</sup> Here, I use C. M. Naim’s translation. NAIM, C. M. “Syed Ahmad and His Two Books,” 671-672.

the beginning of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*.<sup>168</sup> Like Forsat, Syed Ahmad Khan also visits monuments, transcripts the inscriptions, gleans historical information from books he peruses, and adds the information provided by local people to his narrative.<sup>169</sup> In addition, Syed Ahmad Khan includes biographies of more than a hundred people from Delhi, which makes some parts of the book a tazkira or biographical dictionary.<sup>170</sup> British patronage was at work behind the production of both books, although the case of *Āsār el-Sanādīd* is a more obvious example of British colonial interest in the history and geography of a particular land and a direct link between the patron and client.

Concerning the similarities between *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and the two books published in India, the former may be an Iranian response to Kiash's Ancient Persian Sculptures or modeled after Syed Ahmad Khan's *Āsār el-Sanādīd*, as Grigor suggests. Alternatively, Forsat may have never seen these books in his life. What is important, however, is to note the intentional or unintentional commonalities between these works. In any case, these works indicate a new mode of knowledge production and sensitivity toward the ancient and Islamic past and their relation to the city. Furthermore, the fact that three of them were published as lithographs in India should not be ignored. The newly-emerged lithography technology made the production of these texts, which combine the traditional and modern modes of knowledge and authorship, possible.<sup>171</sup>

Another significant aspect of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* is its literary style. Forsat primarily utilizes a relatively plain language in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, considering the Persian

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<sup>168</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:18.

<sup>169</sup> Naim, C. M. "Syed Ahmad and His Two Books," 675.

<sup>170</sup> Naim, C. M. "Syed Ahmad and His Two Books," 674.

<sup>171</sup> I will touch upon the lithographic aspect in the section dedicated to the publication history of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* in this chapter.

prose of the Qajar period. He mentions that his preference for plain Persian should not be seen as a lack of good command of bombastic and rhymed prose (*'ebārāt pardāzī ve saji'*), as he dealt with that kind of language style in another book, *Daryā-ye Kabīr*.<sup>172</sup> Without a doubt, Forsat's choice for a simpler Persian reflects his aim to address not only cultural elites but also a wider audience. He usually states that his audience is both common people and nobles, meaning literati and people with a certain level of literacy and education (*'avamm u khass*). Another indication of Forsat's concern for addressing a larger audience is that he provided the translations of all Arabic expressions in the book, a preference not necessarily a case in Persian book culture in former centuries.

Despite Forsat's preference for plain language, he sometimes experiments with different styles throughout the book. He occasionally writes in pure Persian (*Fārsī-ye Sara*) in a few places in the book. At the very beginning of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, for example, he praises God and expresses his gratitude for the creation of the universe and human beings, granting knowledge to human beings to be servants of God and contemplate (*pazhūhash*)<sup>173</sup> about him. Forsat ends the beginning of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* by stating that the Zoroastrian fire was extinguished for the sake of prophet Muhammad's auspicious birth.<sup>174</sup> It was common in Islamic book culture to begin the book by praising God and the prophet. What is interesting, however, is that Forsat uses pure Persian style for this purpose.

Poetry plays a significant role in what makes *Āsār-e 'Ajam* a literary product. Forsat often quotes from his and other historical or contemporary figures' poems when he sees it convenient. He provides sample verses from people whose

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<sup>172</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 9.

<sup>173</sup> *Pazhūhash* normally means inquiry or research in a modern context. However, I thought contemplation was a better equivalent in this case.

<sup>174</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, I: 1-2.

biographies he writes down in the book. In general, poetry enables Forsat to strengthen the meaning as he tries to quote verses related to the subjects he deals with and embellish the narrative. In addition to a large number of verses from classical and contemporary Persian literature, Forsat includes a significant number of verses in Arabic to *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. It is not surprising as he had a madrasa education, and the Arabic language was still a component of Iranian literary culture in late nineteenth-century Iran.

Beholding the historical and natural places (*tamāshah*) and amazement (*hayran*) for them are recurrent emotions Forsat wants to convey to the reader. At the same time, they reinforce the first-person characteristic of his narrative. For instance, he writes about a castle: "...the mind is amazed by its shape."<sup>175</sup> In another instance, he writes about *Bāgh-e Shāh* (Shah Garden) in Firuzabad, where he rests for a while: "It has an astonishing air! A person who rests there will feel the utmost cheerness [be nehāyat mahzūz mīgardad]."<sup>176</sup> In a similar vein, he writes for the Maiden's Castle (*Qal'ah-ye Dokhtar*), located again in Firuzabad, "...my mind is amazed because of seeing it. What an astonishing edifices and houses [they] built."<sup>177</sup>

A discussion of Forsat's writing style, research methods, and sources is necessary to understand the scope of Forsat's scholarly endeavor. He combines different methods of writing and research throughout the book. In general, he writes down his impressions during his journeys, as he occasionally points to this in the book: "...as I was writing the explanations of my journey every night..."<sup>178</sup> In addition to taking regular notes during his journeys, Forsat adds any relevant information he can derive from Iranian or European sources after his journeys. For

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<sup>175</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:152.

<sup>176</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:189.

<sup>177</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:197.

<sup>178</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:146.

example, the second chapter of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s first volume stands as an appendix, including the translations of the ancient scripts in Persepolis and information and discussion on the origin of the languages in the first chapter.<sup>179</sup>

There is one more point to address concerning Forsat's methods of exploring ancient ruins, Islamic monuments, and urban topography. He informs the reader about his basic excavations across the Fars region and shares his observations regarding the foundations of particular ruins.<sup>180</sup> The fact that Forsat engaged in basic excavations has led some researchers to consider him one of the early precursors of Iranian archaeology.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, Forsat was one of the first Iranians to physically engage in the exploration of ancient heritage in Iran. However, it would be a mistake to assume such a leading position for Forsat in the development of archaeology in Iran.

For one thing, he was not the first Iranian to engage in archaeological excavations in the nineteenth century. According to Touraj Daryaee, the first Iranian archaeological expedition commissioned by the Qajar court dates back to the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>182</sup> There are records of earlier excavations in the early nineteenth century. It is reported that Hosayn 'Alī Mīrzā, a Qajar prince and the governor of the Fars region, ordered the excavation of royal graves at Persepolis in 1811.<sup>183</sup> Rather than being a direct consequence of modern nationalism, Naser al-Dīn Shāh's and Qajar elites' interest in antiquities and their desire to link themselves to pre-Islamic

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<sup>179</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:229.

<sup>180</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2:814.

<sup>181</sup> "Nokhostīn Naqqāsh-e Bāstānshenās-e Īrān" in *Faslnāmah-ye Honar* 16 (1367/1988): 67-83; Iván Szántó, "Mīrzā Muḥammad Naṣīr Furṣat al-Dawla", 73-92.

<sup>182</sup> Touraj Daryaee, "Persianate Contribution to the Study of Antiquity: E'temad Al-Saltaneh's Nativisation of the Qajars, Iran," *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 54, no.1 (2016): 41.

<sup>183</sup> Talinn Grigor, *The Persian Revival*, 152.

Iran were probably related to the legitimacy concerns of the Qajar dynasty.<sup>184</sup> Additionally, the prospect of finding treasuries and precious stones in royal graves or other archaeological sites could have motivated those who conducting excavations, as was the case with Hosayn ‘Alī Mīrzā. The diaries of the prominent Qajar statesman, E’temād al-Saltanah (d. 1896), further illuminate the Qajar elites’ antiquarian curiosity, reflecting his and the Shah’s motivation beyond the imperial and ideological concerns.<sup>185</sup>

While it would be misleading to regard Forsat as a precursor of Iranian archaeology when considering the emergence and development of archaeology in Iran, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* significantly differed from most nineteenth-century texts about pre-Islamic Iran, which were often written without systematic surveys of ancient ruins. The narratives of Ākhūndzādah, Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, and Kermānī resemble armchair theorizing<sup>186</sup> or ideology-making.

### 3.5 The sources of *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*

Further discussion of *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*’s sources is essential to understanding Forsat’s scholarship. He employs a variety of sources throughout the book. One significant category includes classical Perso-Islamic historical, geographical, and biographical literature. Some of the notable works in this category are Ebn Khaleqān’s *Vafīyāt al-A’yān*, Amīr Hwānd’s *Rowza ‘t al-Safā*, ‘Abd al-Rahman Jāmī’s *Nafhāt al-Ons* and Hamdollah Mostawfī’s *Tārīkh-e Gozīdah*. In addition to the medieval and early

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<sup>184</sup> Abbas Amanat analyzes the relationship between the Qajar quest for political legitimacy and the revival of ancient themes through the use of the “Kayānid” crown by Fath ‘Alī Shāh. Abbas Amanat, “The Kayānid Crown and Qajar Reclaiming of Royal Authority,” *Iranian Studies* 34, no. 1–4 (2001): 17–30.

<sup>185</sup> Sādeq Malek Shahrīzādī, “Eshārāī Mokhtasar bar Tahavvol-e Bāstānshenāsī dar Īrān,” *Asar* 66, (1365/1986): 134–135.

<sup>186</sup> The term is generally used to define the nature of the nineteenth-century Western anthropology tradition.

modern texts, he extensively uses the history and geography books commissioned under Qajar court patronage, such as Mīrzā Taqī Khān Lesān al-Molk's *Nāsekh al-Tawārekh* and Rezā Qolī Khān Hedāyat's *Rowza 't al-Safā-ye Nāserī*.<sup>187</sup> Forsat also references the Neo-Zoroastrian Desatir texts and Ferdowsi's *Shāhnamah*.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, he occasionally consults works related to mystic poetry, Shiite theology, and philosophy to interpret visual materials from ancient ruins or to provide accounts of scholars and poets.

Perhaps more intriguing in terms of knowledge transmission in late nineteenth-century Iran are Forsat's European sources. I have previously noted that Forsat utilized European travelogues in *Āsār-e 'Ajam* without specifying which books he referenced. In some instances, he mentions dialogues with European travelers who visited Shiraz.<sup>189</sup> Among the few European sources explicitly cited in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, Sir John Malcolm's (d. 1833) *The History of Persia* is particularly noteworthy. Translated into Persian by Mīrzā Esmā'īl Hayrat in 1870-1871, Sir John Malcolm's book is regarded as one of the first modern history books to treat Iran as a nation with a history extending back to pre-Islamic times. As such, it had a significant impact on Qajar historiography.<sup>190</sup>

More importantly, Forsat refers to European sources concerning the history of Iranian languages and translations of ancient and Middle Persian inscriptions found at ancient sites. For instance, he notes learning the Pahlavi script from an Englishman called "Blackman" (بلکمن).<sup>191</sup> Later, in the section of "Foreign Administration Offices

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<sup>187</sup> Although Forsat does not usually explicitly refer to his sources, he enumerates some of the sources he uses for the biography section at the beginning of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. See Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 60. Furthermore, a complete list of sources mentioned in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, including the editor's references, can be found at the end of the second volume. Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2: 1075-1082.

<sup>188</sup> See Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:55-56 for his use of the Desatir text.

<sup>189</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:362.

<sup>190</sup> Abbas Amanat, "Legend, Legitimacy and Making a National Narrative," 333. For Forsat's references to Sir John Malcolm, see Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2:477, 623.

<sup>191</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2:467.

of Shiraz” (*Edārahjāt-e Khārajah-ye Shīrāz*) within the *Shīrāznāmah* part, Forsat identifies Blackman an engineer (*sīmkash*) at the English post office in Shiraz (*Talgrafkhānah-ye Englīs*).<sup>192</sup> Additionally, Forsat mentions an Italian and a Dutch merchant, residing in Shiraz who assisted him with the cuneiform script. Indeed, Forsat’s Dutch acquaintance was Henryk Dunlop, the representative of the Hotz company, a Dutch commercial enterprise in Iran.<sup>193</sup>

In another instance, Forsat mentions that one day, he discovered a book in the library of an Italian merchant that contained translations of the cuneiform inscriptions from Persepolis. The book was in Italian, the Italian merchant likely explained the translations to Forsat. Additionally, Forsat spent 20 days at the merchant’s house studying the cuneiform script with him.<sup>194</sup> He heavily relies on the same Italian book for the details he provides about the history of languages, particularly Persian. He references the pioneering studies of leading German orientalist and scholar of Iranian studies, Von Friedrich Spiegel (d.1905), regarding the decipherment of Persian cuneiform.<sup>195</sup> However, it remains unclear whether Forsat encountered Spiegel’s studies in the Italian book or had access to Spiegel’s

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<sup>192</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajām*, 2:883.

<sup>193</sup> See the article by William Floor and Behnam Aboutorabian for information about the Hotz company. William Floor and Behnam Aboutorabian, “The Dutch Wholesalers and Retailers in Iran during Qajar Era,” *Historical Sciences Studies* 7, no. 1 (September 2015): 79-131.

<sup>194</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajām*, 1:230; Forsat would later improve his knowledge of the Persian cuneiform years by studying with the famous German orientalist and philologist Oscar Mann (d.1917). As a result, he penned a booklet on the Persian cuneiform, *Dar Nahv vah Sarf-e Khatt-e Āryā (Aryan)* in 1904. Forsat mentions Dr. Mann, whom he describes as *hakīmī dāneshmand vah sayyāhī bīmānand* (an erudite philosopher and a unique traveler) and the intellectual exchange between him and the German scholar. Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Dar Nahv vah Sarf-e Khatt-e Āryā (Aryan)* (Bombay: 1904), 18-19. Oscar Mann also speaks of Forsat as a witty man who taught classical Persian poetry and helped him with reading the handwritten texts in his letters from Shiraz to Germany. See, Mojtaba Kolivand (Ed.), *Persische Und Kurdische Reiseberichte: Die Briefe Des Berliner Orientalisten Oskar Mann Während Seiner Beiden Expeditionen in Den Vorderen Orient 1901-1907 Mit 100 Abbildungen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 54-57.

<sup>195</sup> For Spiegel’s contribution to the Iranology field, see Rüdiger Schmitt, “Spiegel, Friedrich (Von),” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed July 13, 2024, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/spiegel>.

works.<sup>196</sup> Another reference to a non-Islamic source is a Russian book owned by a Russian who stayed in Shiraz for a while. Forsat used this book to determine the identities and periods of ancient Iranian rulers whose Greek and Iranian names were listed, which the Russian translated for Forsat.<sup>197</sup>

What can be inferred from the textual sources Forsat relies on throughout *Āsār-e 'Ajam*? He duly utilizes classical Perso-Islamic literature and is aware of the emerging Qajar history and geography literature. However, Forsat recognizes that the nomenclature in European sources regarding pre-Islamic Iran usually contradicts classical or Qajar sources. The European sources Forsat directly cites—he reads English and probably a bit of French—or relies on translations provided to him, stand out for the novel information they offer. The novel information generally pertains to the authentic names of pre-Islamic rulers and the chronology derived from the translations of inscriptions at ancient sites. Despite the undeniable impact of Forsat's European sources on *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, it is difficult to assert that the so-called orientalist attitude towards pre-Islamic Iran profoundly influenced Forsat's approach. Instead, Forsat seems to use a hint of orientalist literature as a source of information rather than inspiration and conceptual reference.

Since I will address the methodological and conceptual tools that Forsat utilized in *Āsār-e 'Ajam* in the fourth chapter, it suffices to say here that he did not adopt the anti-Islamic stance typical of much orientalist literature, such as Sir John Malcolm's history. Moreover, his European acquaintances were dilettante orientalists, except for Oscar Mann, whom Forsat met after publishing *Āsār-e 'Ajam*.

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<sup>196</sup> The reason for this confusion is the fact that Forsat includes Spiegel's scholarly contributions when he summarizes the Italian book's content. However, he mentions Spiegel's book as a separate work later on. See, Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 235-236, 256.

<sup>197</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:257.

### 3.6 The publication and reception of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*

As noted by Forsat, he completed the main section of his book, the *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, in 1311/1893-4.<sup>198</sup> He then began writing *Shīrāznāmah*, which he finished in the Zīlhejja of 1313/1896.<sup>199</sup> One month later, in Moharram of 1314/1896, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was published by *Matba'-ye Naserī* in Bombay.<sup>200</sup> Forsat mentions the names of *Matba'-ye Naserī*'s owners, five sons of late Hājī Mīrzā Sayyīd Hasan, in the section he dealt with merchants of Shiraz in *Shīrāznāmah*, noting that the *Naserī* printing house has a leading role in Bombay.<sup>201</sup> He also mentions that Qodsī, his brother-in-law, copied the work and a certain Hājī Mīrzā Asadollah endeavored for the book's publication.<sup>202</sup> Forsat's unpublished personal letters confirm Hājī Mīrzā Asadollah's role as a probable financial sponsor of the printing, as Forsat identifies Mīrzā Asadollah, known as *dallāl* (broker), as *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s patron (*bānī vah bā'es*).<sup>203</sup> (figure 9).

How *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was received by its intended audience? There are different ways to understand the popularity and circulation of a book. One way is to look at the literary references given to the book after its publication. For example, looking at the *taqrīzāt*<sup>204</sup> written for *Āsār-e 'Ajam* will provide an idea of its immediate reception by people around Forsat.<sup>205</sup> There are five *taqrīz* at the end of the book, each written by scholars, Sufis, or poets whom Forsat knew well. Shaykh Mofīd,

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<sup>198</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2:697.

<sup>199</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2:984.

<sup>200</sup> Mohammad Nasīr Mīrzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzi, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāserī, 1896).

<sup>201</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2:897-898.

<sup>202</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2:1003.

<sup>203</sup> An undated letter by Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzi to one of his friends: "Janāb Hājī Mīrzā Asadollah mashūr bah dallāl kah dar Shīrāzand vah bānī vah bā'es-e chāp-e ketāb hastand rezāyat-e īshān ham shart ast."; For an overview and analysis of Forsat's unpublished 18 letters see Shaydā Rahīmī, "Maktūbāt-e Novyāftah az Forsat al-Dowlah-ye Shīrāzi," *Mīrās* 3, no. 9-10 (1395/2016): 227-240.

<sup>204</sup> *Taqrīz* is a laudatory passage written about a book by respectable scholars or poets in Islamic book culture. Mustafā İsmet Uzun and Ahmet Turan Aslan, "Takriz," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed April 28, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/takriz>.

<sup>205</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2: 991-1001.

Shaykh al-Reīs Qājār, Mīrzā Hasan Estahbānātī, Mīrzā ‘Abd el-Vahhāb Āshtīyānī, and Mīrzā Mahdī Khān Vakīl al-Dowlah are those who wrote *taqrīz* for *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*.

Another trace of *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*’s early reception is an introductory passage, which includes positive remarks about the book, found in the famous Calcutta-based Persian language newspaper, *Habl al-Matīn*, in 1900. As noted by Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, the article dealing with *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* mentions its “refreshing” effect on the “hearts of Iranians”.<sup>206</sup> There is one more laudatory article in *Tarbiyat*, the first non-governmental newspaper in Iran. In the article, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* was regarded as a sign of Iranian soil’s convenience for the cultivation of knowledge and art unless there were subsequent accidents (*‘avārez-e pay dar pay*). It is also mentioned that Forsat did research among works of travelers of civilized countries (*sayyāhān-e mamālek-e motamaddīnah*). In the end, there is a list of content covered in *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*.<sup>207</sup>

Moreover, Edward Granville Browne (d.1926), the famous British orientalist, includes *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* in the list of the scientific, literary, and historical publications which, according to him, have had a modernizing effect on Iranian minds.<sup>208</sup> It should also be mentioned that Forsat was assigned an annual salary (*mostamarī*) by Mozaffar al-dīn Shāh after finishing *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, according to his account.<sup>209</sup> Thus, it is safe to argue that *Āsār-e ‘Ajam* was well received by the Qajar court as well.

Despite the examples of *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*’s positive reception mentioned above, there is also evidence showing that it drew some criticism from contemporaries.

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<sup>206</sup> Cited in Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999), 44.

<sup>207</sup> *Tarbiyat*, Tehran, no. 221, Shavvāl 1318/ 24 January 1900, p. 2-3.

<sup>208</sup> Edward G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia: Partly Based on the Manuscript Work of Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali Khan Tarbiyat of Tabriz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 162-163.

<sup>209</sup> It seems Forsat had difficulties with getting the promised salary despite the Shāh’s fermān. Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Mokhtasar Cografi-ye Hendūstān: Tarzī Tāzah bah Tarīq-e Sūāl o Javāb* (Bombay, 1322/1904), 4.

Shoā' al-Molk, who was a friend of Forsat and composed a chronogram<sup>210</sup> for *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, states only in passing that the book is *maqbul* (pleasing) to some people, whereas *matrūd* (rejected) by others.<sup>211</sup> Who were *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s critics? What were the arguments against it? Considering the lack of further evidence, it is difficult to mount any solid argument in this respect.

Perhaps the critics were those who had grown tired of history mixed with mythology and were searching for more "scientific" books based on translations from European languages or those written in imitation of them. Indeed, the late 1890s witnessed the emergence of new history books in the form of translations and adaptations from European languages. These books enabled Iranian readers to consider the history of Iran in a global context and shifted the balance between factual and mythological elements in earlier history books in favor of the former.<sup>212</sup>

Alternatively, critics may have found the abundance of digressions from the main topic, namely ancient ruins, irrelevant and boring. One may even suppose that *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was a disappointment for those who regarded ancient history as a genre for national awakening in the manner of Kermānī.<sup>213</sup> Despite all these hypothetical scenarios, the fact remains that *Āsār-e 'Ajam* aroused certain interest in Iranian society.

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<sup>210</sup> Chronogram is a genre in classical literature. J. T. P. De Bruijn, "Chronograms," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/chronograms-pers>.

<sup>211</sup> Mohammad Hosayn Shoā'-e Shīrāzī, *Tazkerah-ye Shoā'īyyah*, ed. Mahmūd Tāvūsī (Shiraz: Bonyād-e Fārsshēnāsī, 1380/2001), 387.

<sup>212</sup> Amanat mentions a seminal example of these books as *Tārīkh-e Īrān Qabl az Mīlād Tā Zamān-e Qājārīyya* (1900). Abbas Amanat, "Legend, Legitimacy and Making a National Narrative," 350-351; The process was even accelerated with the proliferation of modern schools and private printing initiatives. Farzin Vejdani, *Making history in Iran: Education, Nationalism, Print Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

<sup>213</sup> Consider Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrẓā and Mīrẓā Āqā Khān Kermānī's books in this regard.

The second edition, without any change within the text, appeared in Bombay in 1935, this time published by *Matba'-ye Nāderī*.<sup>214</sup> The explanation, written at the very end of the book, sheds some light on its second publication process. It is noted that the book was published during the period of Reza Shāh, mentioning him as *Ā'lāhazret-e Shahenshāh-e Mo'azzam Rezā Shāh-e Pahlavī*, under the supervision of 'Abdollah Tahrānī<sup>215</sup>, the owner of the printing house.<sup>216</sup> Beyond this brief note, however, there is no other clarification for *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s second publication. In any case, the second publication, which came forty years after the first one, indicates that *Āsār-e 'Ajam* continued to arouse some interest.

The fact that the first two editions of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* were printed in Bombay needs to be elaborated to understand the intellectual links between Iran and India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thanks to the strong role the Persian language was still playing in India during this period and the presence of a large number of émigré Iranians, India was a center for Persian lithographed books. Additionally, a more favorable political atmosphere existed in India, compared to Qajar Iran, should also be considered as a contributing factor.

One of the most salient features of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* is the fact it was an illustrated lithographic edition. Although Iranians started using iron presses to print books around 1820, the printing revolution became possible with lithography. This technology had certain advantages over typography for Muslims. First, printing the Arabic script in lithography was easier than printing it with typography. Second, established traditions of calligraphy could continue with this new technology, unlike

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<sup>214</sup> Mohammad Nasīr Mīrzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935)

<sup>215</sup> I could not find any information on his identity or printing house.

<sup>216</sup> Mohammad Nasīr Mīrzā Āqā Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1354/1935), 596.

typography. Hence, aesthetic concern can be observed to some extent. Third, lithography was cheaper than typography. Last but not least, lithography provided the opportunity to print books with illustrations.<sup>217</sup> Illustrated lithographed books became popular in the mid-nineteenth century. Classical Persian literature, religious literature, romantic epics, and popular narratives were common themes for the illustrations.<sup>218</sup> *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was also a result of this cultural phenomenon like its Indian counterparts. Its illustrations enable us to consider it within the context of ancient revivalism in the visual culture of the Qajar period.

The third edition came out in Iran in 1983 by *Enteshārāt-e Bāmdād* (Bamdad Press), and *Chāphāna-ye Honar* (Honar Press) published the fourth edition in the same year. Mansūr Rastgār Fasāyī edited the book and annotated it by adding a long introduction. This edition, the first and last typescript edition so far, was published in 1998 by *Enteshārāt-e Amīr Kabīr* (Amir Kabir Press).

How should one interpret that *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was not published after the 1930s in Pahlavi Iran, when nationalism, with its strong emphasis on pre-Islamic Iran, was the state ideology? It may be argued that copies of the first and second editions were available in the market for some years from the 1930s onwards. Nevertheless, it would not be wrong to put forth that Iranian readers turned their attention to more updated books regarding following the historiographical trends in Europe. In this regard, Hasan Pīrnīyā's (d.1935) works represent this shift in the narratives on pre-Islamic Iran.<sup>219</sup> Originally a prominent Qajar statesman, Pīrnīyā penned some of the most popular publications about ancient Iran since the early Pahlavi period in Iran.

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<sup>217</sup> Nile Green, "Stones from Bavaria: Iranian Lithography in Its Global Contexts." *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 3 (2010): 312-313.

<sup>218</sup> Ulrich Marzolph, *Narrative Illustration in Persian Lithographed Books*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001)

<sup>219</sup> For a general evaluation of his intellectual contribution, see Fakhreddin Azimi, "Historiography in the Pahlavi Era." in *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville, Vol. 10 of *A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 370-377.

His first work appeared in 1928 under the title of *Îrân-e Bāstānī*<sup>220</sup>, and the second one, *Dāstānhā-ye Îrân-e Qadīm*<sup>221</sup>, came after a year. Unlike the Qajar narratives on pre-Islamic Iran, Pīrnīyā draws a more precise line between Iran's historical and mythological past, as he deals with them separately in *Îrân-e Bāstānī* and *Dāstānhā-ye Îrân-e Qadīm*.

It is surprising to see that, after a long period, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was published twice in the early years of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is known that the new regime was rejecting the idea that pre-Islamic Iran was the most essential part of Iranian identity. Ancient Iran symbolized the ideology of the *ancien régime* in the new order. Even the archaeological studies seem to have been halted for nearly ten years following the Islamic Revolution in Iran.<sup>222</sup> The answer to this problem can be sought in the cultural and intellectual atmosphere of 1980s Iran.

As I noted in the introduction, the visual material of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and its contribution to the spread of pre-Islamic imagery in Iran have attracted more scholarly attention than the textual content itself. Therefore, its impact on the development of ancient imagery in the late Qajar period will also be briefly discussed here. A careful look at some of the architectural buildings and decorations of the late Qajar era points out the fact that the drawings of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* may have become a significant source of inspiration for the popularization of the theme of ancient Iran in the Qajar visual culture.

The most conspicuous example of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s impact on visual culture can be found in the Fāzel 'Erāqī House, built in Tehran in the late Qajar period. The building is decorated with 30 tile medallions whose content was taken from *Āsār-e*

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<sup>220</sup> Hasan Pīrnīyā, *Îrân-e Bāstānī* (Tahran: Matba'-ye Majles, 1927).

<sup>221</sup> Hasan Pīrnīyā, *Dāstānhā-ye Îrân-e Qadīm: Motammem-e Îrân-e Bāstānī*, nd, np.

<sup>222</sup> Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran," *American Journal of Archaeology* 105, no. 1 (2001): 69-71.

*'Ajam*. Some of Forsat's drawings were selected and placed with informative notes stating the location of the sites. Although identical to those in Forsat's writings, the whole enterprise was not the exact copy of Forsat's organization of visual material. Instead, the patron of the building or any other person responsible for preparing a new collage on the façade brought different drawings together. It also deserves mentioning that there are ten tile portraits of Iran's various pre-Islamic and Muslim rulers. That also indicates the Qajar hybridity and emphasizes the ideal Persian kingship.<sup>223</sup>

There might be other examples in late Qajar art and architecture that can show the impact of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Judith Lerner, who examines and compares the three Qajar reliefs inspired by Achaemenid reliefs in the Brooklyn Museum and the reliefs in Narenjestan Palace of Shiraz, argues that Forsat's *Āsār-e 'Ajam* may have served as a guidebook for these reliefs.<sup>224</sup> *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s influence on Qajar art was not necessarily limited to the "secular" buildings. The tiles in the takiyya of Hasan Khān Mo'āven al-Molk in Kermanshah could also be inspired by *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. In one of these tiles, an Achaemenid ruler is depicted in combat with a lion.<sup>225</sup> It is also probable to think that if there was no conscious and extensive destruction of the Qajar architecture in the Pahlavi period, more examples of the impact of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* could be found. Beyond these assumptions, however, it is important to note

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<sup>223</sup> Talinn Grigor, "Kingship Hybridized, Kingship Homogenized: Revivalism under the Qajar and Pahlavi Dynasties," in *Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis*, ed. Sussan Babaie and Talinn Grigor. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 230-232.

<sup>224</sup> Judith Lerner, "Three Achaemenid Fakes: A Re-evaluation in the Light of 19<sup>th</sup> century Iranian Architectural Sculpture," *Expedition* (Winter 1980): 14.; The three reliefs were acquired in Cairo in the late 19th century by Armand de Potter. They were believed to be the product of the Achaemenid period. In 1963, John D. Cooney put forth that these reliefs were forgeries. Cooney's statement was true in the sense that they were not ancient products. Instead, they were examples of Qajar art.

<sup>225</sup> J.M. Scarce, "Ancestral themes in the art of Iran, 1785-1925." in *Islamic Art in the 19th Century: Tradition, Innovation, and Eclecticism*, edited by Doris Behrens-Abouseif and Stephen Vernoit (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006.), 244.

that all the evidence indicates that *Āsār-e 'Ajam* became a guidebook for producing artworks and decorations with ancient imagery in the Qajar period. Further research on the newspapers and books may reveal many examples of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s influence in illustrated printings.



## CHAPTER 4

### ROWING AGAINST THE CURRENT?: THE ANALYSIS OF HITHERTO UNEXPLORED ASPECTS OF *ĀSĀR-E 'AJAM*

In this chapter, I offer a new way of reading *Āsār-e 'Ajām* by considering the structure and content of the entire text rather than focusing only on parts related to pre-Islamic Iran. I put forth that seemingly irrelevant parts of the text merge into a coherent narrative. In terms of methodology, I usually prefer to stick to Forsat's narrative strategy, which can be summarized as starting a topic with the description of an ancient site and surrounding ruins, interpreting visual material in places he passes by, making numerous digressions with exemplary anecdotes, providing biographies of contemporary and historical figures, and poetry. In the first sections of the chapter, I will deal with Forsat's descriptions of particular ancient ruins, such as the Tomb of Jamasp, Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, and Pasargad. Then, I will touch upon the biographies and Forsat's social criticisms toward certain groups in *Āsār-e 'Ajām*. After briefly emphasizing the role of mysticism, I will analyze the concept of Iran and Forsat's treatment of non-Persian Iranians. I argue that the function of the theme of ancient Iran in *Āsār-e 'Ajām* was somewhat different from its instrumentalization for creating a nationalist ideology and criticizing the current political, social, and religious practices in the Qajar society by intellectuals examined in the first chapter. Instead, I contend that Islam, through its theology, philosophy, and ethics, had a decisive impact on Forsat's vision for ancient Iran.

#### 4.1 The tomb of Jāmāsp Hakīm

The tomb of Jāmāsp Hakīm (Jamasp the Philosopher) is one of the ancient ruins in the Fars region (*āsār-e qadīmah-ye Fārs*) that Forsat describes the building and its environs, draws its picture, and provide information. What he relates about this tomb, *maqbarah* or *boq'ah* as he calls it, and the legendary Jāmāsp, a good example of Forsat's versatile approach and syncretism throughout *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. In shaping his narrative, Forsat considers different factors and sources, such as literal sources, material culture, and oral culture. What comes out is a multi-layered narrative.

According to the Zoroastrian traditions and Avesta, Jāmāsp was an official at the court of Vishtaspa, *Goshtāsp* in Persian sources, an early follower of the Zoroastrian religion, and an efficient figure in the dissemination of the faith. Vishtaspa is generally depicted as Zoroastrian's princely patron, Jāmāsp as an early convert of Zoroastrianism, and the prophet Zoroaster's son-in-law. Jāmāsp is traditionally identified with wisdom, and there was a genre called *Jāmāspnāmah* in classical Persian and Turkish literary traditions.<sup>226</sup> It seems that the tradition about Jāmāsp continued to survive through oral culture and a middle-Persian work known as *Jāmāspī and Jāmāspnāmah* (Memorial of Jāmāsp).<sup>227</sup>

Forsat states that Jāmāsp, the brother of *Goshtāsb ben Lahrāsb*, is one the most illustrious philosophers of *'Ajam (az ajellah-ye hokamā-ye 'ajam)*. He appeared 4994 years after Adam and was educated by the Prophet Zoroaster, and he was successful in proselytizing his Indian master, *Changaranghājah*. Forsat also mentions that Jāmāsp, in his book *Jāmāsbnāmah*, predicted the future events through

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<sup>226</sup> W. W. Malandra, "JĀMĀSPA," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed April 28, 2024, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/jamaspa>.; Mustafa Erkan, "Cāmasbnāme," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed April 28, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/camasbname>

<sup>227</sup> Mary Boyce, "AYĀDGĀR Ī JĀMĀSPĪG," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed April 28, 2024, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/ayadgar-i-jamaspig-memorial-of-jamasp-a-short-but-important-zoroastrian-work-in-middle-persian-also-known-as-the->

particular omens. Some of his prophecies proved solid; for others, people are trying to decipher the meaning through *ta 'vīl* (allegorical interpretation). Jāmāsp expounded the words of Persian philosophers (*hokamā-ye 'Ajam*) and provided *ta 'vīl* in his book. For example, he said that the world (*gītī*) has two creators, Yazdān and *Ahrīman*<sup>228</sup>, and all have allegorical meanings. *Gītī* means the body or flesh (*badan-e 'onsorī*), *Yazdān* is the soul (*rūh*), and *Ahrīman* is nature (*tabī'at*). Thus, the instigation and mischief of *Ahrīman* symbolize the sway of nature over the soul.<sup>229</sup>

What is remarkable about the information Forsat gives about Jāmāsp and his ideas is that he relied on *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*, one of the Neo-Zoroastrian Dasātīr text, widely circulating in nineteenth-century Iran.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, Forsat's depiction of *Goshtāsp* (Vishtaspa) as a unifying and constructor leader, following again the Zoroastrian tradition, is opposed to the somewhat negative image of him as a corrupt and violent ruler in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmah*.<sup>231</sup>

Despite drawing information from Neo-Zoroastrian tradition, Forsat ends the section on Jāmāsp's prophecies with a verse from the surah of al-An'am of the Quran: "For, with Him are the keys to the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception: none knows them but He."<sup>232</sup> Without a doubt, the reference to the Quran symbolizes the utmost authority of the holy book concerning the knowledge of the Unseen (*Al-Ghayb*), in Forsat's opinion.

After describing the tomb of Jāmāsp in detail, Forsat notes that he heard from the local people (*az ahālī-ye ānjā shanīdam*) that there is a castle close to the tomb

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<sup>228</sup> J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Ahriman," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed April 28, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahriman>

<sup>229</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:36-37.

<sup>230</sup> Mansūr Rastgār Fasāyī mentions Forsat's borrowing from *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*. Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:56; Compare Forsat's writings to *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*. Kayhosrow Asfandīyār, *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*, 93/113.

<sup>231</sup> Iván Szántó, "Mīrzā Muḥammad Naṣīr Furṣat al-Dawla", 83.

<sup>232</sup> *The Message of the Qur'an*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad (London: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 180.

and there was an underground tunnel (*naq̄b*) between the two buildings. Jāmāsp himself constructed both, and he ordered the construction of a tunnel to transfer his body to the tomb. Forsat mentions that the tunnel does not exist anymore, but the stones (*ahjār*) and a hill (*tal*) attest to the existence of a building. As to the tomb's location, he reasons that Jāmāsp constructed it in a place preserved from the danger of flood. Lastly, he states an inscription on the north-western side of the tomb, some parts of which have fallen to the ground, with *solos* script, and informs the reader that he will decode the difficult-to-read inscription.<sup>233</sup>

While he deals with the tomb and biography of Jāmāsp, he makes a digression to other topics, showing his sensitivities other than the explicit premises of the book, such as drawing and description of ancient ruins. Forsat encounters the judge (*qādī*) of the town of Khafr in one of his stops. He states that the judge boasts about his knowledge. However, he confuses the essential parts of Arabic grammar and randomly mentions the titles of classical books, thus trying to show off his fake erudition. Forsat recounts that the judge of Khafr despises and does not accept Forsat to accompany him on his journey to Khafr, considering Forsat a vulgar person (*mardom-e 'avām*) because of his simple dress. Forsat accidentally encounters the same judge when he is drawing the tomb of Jāmāsp. The judge was surprised when he saw Forsat with the tools for measuring (*masāhat*) the height of the tomb. Then, the judge demands Forsat to read an old Arabic inscription, the same inscription Forsat mentions above, if he was a man of knowledge (*ahl-e 'elm*). In the end, the judge misreads the inscription, whose date goes back to the era of Ghīyās al-Dīn Kaykhosrow of the Seljukids, according to Forsat's reading. Providing the whole text inscribed on the stone, Forsat states that a certain Hosam al-Molk Damāvandī should

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<sup>233</sup> *Solos* literally means one-third, and it was one of the main scripts in Islamic calligraphy.

have undertaken the repairment of the tomb, as there is no doubt that Jāmāsp constructed the tomb in his life, according to what *ahl-e sīyar*, an allusion to historians, have written.<sup>234</sup>

Since Forsat interprets the phrase of *Ghīyās al-Haqq ve'l-Donyā Kaykhosrow* as an allusion to the Seljuk Sultan, Ghīyās al-Dīn Kaykhosrow, he briefly touches upon his life and the Seljuk dynasty. He states that the Seljuks were three branches. The first branch ruled over the entire territory of Iran, the second branch in Kerman, and the third in *Rūm* (Anatolia). He narrates Ghīyās al-Dīn Kaykhosrow's fights for the throne with other princes and mentions that he was martyred in a war.<sup>235</sup> Even though Forsat points to the fact that the seat of Ghīyās al-Dīn was in *Rūm*, he reasons that either the Sultan had brought the Fars region under his possession or Hosam al-Molk Damāvandī was acting as a functionary (*kārgozār*) on behalf of the Sultan.<sup>236</sup>

In addition to all kinds of information Forsat gives about Jāmāsp, the tomb, and an anecdote with the judge, he relates two legends concerning the tomb. He saw in some books that every sultan or ruler who passes by the tomb of Jāmāsp the Philosopher if mounted on a horse, should dismount and pass the tomb by foot. Otherwise, a blow will happen to him.<sup>237</sup> Forsat does not comment on this legend. However, Mīrzā Hasan Fasāyī, who wrote a famous local history of the Fars region, *Fārsnāmah-ye Nāsarī*, shortly before Forsat, relates this account in his work in a more detailed way. Since *Fārsnāmah-ye Nāsarī* is one of the sources Forsat frequently uses, and he probably refers to it in this case, it is worth looking at what

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<sup>234</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:32-34.

<sup>235</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:35; Ghīyās al-Dīn Kaykhosrow was killed by a Byzantine soldier when he was helping his Byzantine ally Alexios III against the latter's rival Theodore Lascaris. Osman Gazi Özgüdenli, "Giyaseddin Keyhüsrev I". in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, accessed April 28, 2024, doi: [https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_32073](https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_32073).

<sup>236</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:35.

<sup>237</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:36.;

Fasāyī writes about this legend. In a very similar way to Forsat, he writes: “It is well-known (*mashūr*) in the Fars [region] that if a ruler (*farmānfarmāyī*) does not dismounts while passing by the tomb, he will be dismissed in the same year.”<sup>238</sup> He states that Farhād Mīrzā Mota’mad al-Dowlah, a former governor of the Fars region, confided in Fasāyī that he did not dismount while passing by the tomb and was dismissed the same year from his post.

Forsat elaborates more on the second legend he heard from the locals. He states that local people were claiming that the sound of “pour, pour!” (*beriz, beriz!*) come out from the tomb every Friday night. Forsat notes that local people were saying Jāmāsp had understood by considering astrological signs that he would die because of a scorpion sting. Then, he charges one of his disciples to apply medicine (*rovgan*) to the part of the body that a scorpion would bite. Thus, the sound of “pour” is attributed to Jāmāsp himself. However, he dies before the medicine can be applied. Forsat spends one of his nights around the tomb and does not hear anything except the sound of mosquitoes. When he shares his experience with one of the local people, the local man answers that the sound cannot be heard unless nobody is around. Then, Forsat asks who was the one who heard the sound and narrated it first. After stating his interlocutor’s silence, he notes that people recount other odd stories (*chīzhā-ye gharīb-e dīgar*) concerning the tomb that can be considered as superstitions and vain words (*men al mohmelāt va’l abātel*).<sup>239</sup>

This section on the tomb of Jāmāsp reveals some of the main generic features of *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*. For example, it pays special attention to the legends and popular stories regarding the ancient ruins in the Fars region, as he recounts the two of them

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<sup>238</sup> Mīrzā Hasan Fasāyī, *Fārsnāmah-ye Nāsarī*, vol.2, ed. Mansūr Rastgār Fasāyī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Amīr Kabīr, 1378/1999), 1300.; Fasāyī also provides a reading of the inscription, which is ironically more complete than Forsat’s reading.

<sup>239</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1:36.

in this example. Be that as it may, Forsat generally despises the popular stories he heard from local people as superstitions throughout *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, except those related to Sufism/mysticism. Second, although ancient ruins are at the center of Forsat's narrative, he does not ignore traces of the Islamic period, as in the example of the inscription mentioned. It is also important to note that Forsat's encounter with the judge of Khafr and the dialogues between them stand as a social criticism based on the ideals of humility and knowledge against vanity and ignorance. This anecdote, like others in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, indicates Forsat's desire to combine his sponsored journeys, primarily intended for ancient ruins, with his societal, ethical, and moral concerns.

The significance of Forsat's use of Neo-Zoroastrian Desatir texts is clear, as these texts contributed to Iranian nationalism by offering a new framework for reshaping Iranian identity and history. However, it is difficult to assert that Forsat completely shaped his narrative according to these texts, as his references to them are sporadic. Instead, Forsat may have thought that Zoroastrian sources could provide more solid information about pre-Islamic Iran. His mention of the Quran might seem merely a discursive or stylistic element in the text. However, examining this example alongside others discussed later will reveal the significant role he assigns Islam as a conceptual category. Last but not least, he followed the traditional Islamic periodization of human history; for instance, he writes that Jāmāsp appeared 4994 years after Adam, rather than consulting the Desatir text's periodization, which dramatically expanded human history to a billion years.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Contested Memories of Pre-Islamic Iran," 263-264.

#### 4.2 *Takht-e Jamshīd rā Parsapolīs gūyand* (They call *Takht-e Jamshīd* Persepolis)

Forsat's writings on Persepolis are scattered between the first and sixth chapters of the first volume of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. He describes the topography of Persepolis and comes up with a bird's-eye view drawing of Persepolis (figure 10) at the very end of the first chapter. In the second chapter, he adds information, including the translations of the inscriptions in Persepolis, which he finds in different sources. In addition to the translations of inscriptions, which Forsat finds in an Italian book in the library of an Italian merchant residing in Shiraz for a while, Forsat mainly gives comprehensive information on the history of languages.<sup>241</sup> The remaining chapters are a blend of descriptions of the topography and different parts of Persepolis, translations of the inscriptions in Persepolis, and Forsat's interpretations of visual material on the site.

There is no doubt that the translations of the inscriptions in Old Persian Cuneiform and other Iranian languages, such as Pahlavi, play a significant role not only in the section Forsat dedicates to Persepolis but in the entire book.<sup>242</sup> The translations of the inscriptions familiarize Forsat with the names of Iranian rulers and dynasties he has never seen in Perso-Islamic sources. He comes to understand that traditional names attributed to ancient ruins were either wrong or have changed throughout history. Thus, he attempts to reconcile the conventional names and those mentioned in the inscriptions. For example, he gives the Arabic or Persian equivalents of particular old Persian words, such as Ahuramazda (*Allah*), Aryan (*Āryā*), as an ancient language and a group of people, Pars (*Fārs*), and Achaemenid (*Kīyān*).<sup>243</sup> He gives another list for reconciling specifically the names of the rulers

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<sup>241</sup> Since the issue of the origin of languages is related to the concept of Iran and identity in general, I will focus on this aspect in later sections of the chapter.

<sup>242</sup> Simone Cristoforetti, "Beyond Recovery Towards Continuity," 179-180.

<sup>243</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:242-243.

in traditional sources with the inscriptions. For instance, he asserts that Cyrus (*Kūrosh*) is *Kaykhosrow*, *Kāmbezaz* is *Kaykāvos*, *Vīstaspā* is *Goshtāsb*, Darius is *Dāryūsh*, *Zarksaz* is *Esfandīyār*, etc.<sup>244</sup> Then, Forsat states that it is apparent to those who are knowledgeable about *tārīkh* and *sīyar* that there are strong contradictions (*ekhtalāfāt-e kollī*) in world histories and accounts. Moreover, the difference between the Western and Eastern accounts is unmistakable. The reasons for the contradictory accounts can be scribal errors, historian's oblivion and fault, change and conversion of names with the lapse of time, and the diversity of names for one person. He notes that one should not be terrified due to the inconsistencies in different sources, as they are not the contradictions in the words of God and Imams, which may cause a disorder in one's religion. Forsat concludes by stating that one should rely more on the inscriptions in ancient ruins than the other literal sources because the former have not changed since their creation.<sup>245</sup>

In addition to the information and interpretations found in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, its literary aspect also warrants our attention, as I briefly mentioned in the third chapter. When discussing Persepolis, Forsat occasionally abandons his straightforward descriptive style and adopts a more assertive tone. For example, he writes:

It is apparent from its vestiges, ruins, edifices, and pillars that there were a few palaces with this basis and firmness. Minds are astonished by seeing it; the Eternal God is a witness to the state that pencil is unable to describe by writing. As long as anybody does not see it, will not know [what kind of] works and buildings [they] did. This humble stopped there for seven nights and days. Within the realm of possibility, I drew some pictures of buildings, and I wrote a little [piece] from the history of that place...<sup>246</sup>

The contemplation and drawing of Persepolis was an impressive experience for Forsat, as his vivid lines demonstrate. However, one should not fail to realize that his tone cannot be considered a sign of nationalist nostalgia for pre-Islamic Iran.

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<sup>244</sup> I relied on modern English usage when I was able to find which ruler Forsat mentions, such as Cyrus and Darius. In other instances, I preferred to write them according to Forsat's use.

<sup>245</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 259-260.

<sup>246</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 218.

Although his desire to contribute to the Iranian knowledge of the pre-Islamic heritage of Iran has a genuine scholarly and cultural basis, Forsat considers Persepolis, and arguably many other ruins, as occasions for contemplation and drawing lessons (*'ebrat*).<sup>247</sup>

The interpretation of reliefs and figures on various ruins in Persepolis is another subject that needs our focus. In some examples, Forsat is less assertive and non-polemical and generally relates the remarks he finds in European sources, popular views, and his personal ideas. For example, he notes that some European sources name the four bulls carved into the entrance of Persepolis, “The Gate of All Lands”, as “Sphinx”, whose Arabic equivalent is *Abū'l-Hūl*, a term used for frightening figures (see figure 4 again). He adds that these animal and human-like figures did not probably have external existence (*vocūd-e khārajī*). They were made for beholding (*tamāshah*) and representation of the glory and the pomp of the ruler.<sup>248</sup> Another similar example is his interpretation of a tool, held by someone standing behind the king, as a swatter (*asbāb-e magasparānī*), a stick for fending off flies. Forsat also notes, with his usual disdain for the ideas of the common people, that they think (*'avām az mardom*) it represents a sickle (*dās*), indicating that ancient people were engaged in agriculture.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Forsat's visit to *Tāq-e Kesrā* (the Arch of Ctesiphon) in his journey to the *'Atabāt* region, located in modern Iraq, is another example of the fact that *'ebrat* was the prism through which he beholds ancient ruins. Furthermore, he reiterates the leitmotiv in the classical Persian and Arabic literature that the fall of *Tāq-e Kesrā*'s arch was a harbinger of Prophet Muhammad's auspicious birth: "...and the roof of the so-called great arch split. [The reason] is nothing except the dawn of the Prophet's *dīn-i mobīn*. He quotes the medieval Arabic and Persian poems by Al-Būsīrī (d. 1294) and Khāqānī (d. 1199), who regarded *Tāq-e Kesrā* as an object lesson (*'ebrat*) for the temporality of mundane. In parallel with the medieval poets, Forsat considers the ruin as a means of drawing a lesson (*'ebrat*) from a bygone civilization: "In sum, anyone who beholds *Tāq-e Kesrā* with a with a look of *'ebrat*, he is forced to cry." Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 609-613

<sup>248</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:266.

<sup>249</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:287.

Forsat's discussion about a rock carving depicting the battle of a person stabbing a winged animal figure (figure 11) reflects how Forsat keeps Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism in his mind in his attempt to infer a meaning from the images in Persepolis, while not categorically denying the scattered information he can acquire from European sources. In the first place, Forsat states that there is no solid information on the nature of these carvings. However, Europeans call these kinds of figures sphinx, and mythology (*metālojīyā*) is the Greek word for these figures, which were constructed solely for beholding (*tamāshah*).<sup>250</sup> Then, Forsat mentions that he remembers some refined people who have inclinations for philosophy and mysticism (*ba 'zī az ahl-e zovq va hekmat va 'erfān*), were claiming that this figure represents either the ravine of punishment (*barzakh-e 'eqāb*) or the ravine of wretched soul (*barzakh-e nafs-e zamīmah-ye shūm*). Accordingly, the intended message was to kill the wretched soul (*nafs-e zamīmah-ye shūm*) just as the person in the figure does. In another published history book, it is argued that the figure is marked as a deity (*rabb al-nov'*)<sup>251</sup> by philosophers (*hokamā*). Forsat challenges this idea on the grounds that the author does not explain which *rabb* he means, as each species (*anvā'*) has its own *rabb*, such as humans, lions, sheep, mosquitos, and trees. Forsat notes that those who believe in *arbāb-e anvā'* (the plural of *rabb al-nov'*) call them also *mosol-e Aflātūnī* (Ideas of Platon). Molla Sadra, for example, insists on the existence of *arbāb-e anvā'*

<sup>250</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:304.

<sup>251</sup> *Rabb al-nov'* means a deity or a god in ancient Greek and Iranian contexts, particularly *Eshraqī* philosophers, who thought that each type of star, planet, and different elements (*vasā'it-e 'onsorīyyah, morakkabāt-e va ashbāh-e mojarradah*) has a particular deity (*rabb*). For example, *Mordād* is the deity of trees (*ashjār*), *Ordībahasht* is the deity of fire (*ātash*), and Apollo is the deity of Sun. Molla Sadra (d. 1641), a famous philosopher of the Safavid period, states that the term *rabb al-nov'* was used by Empedocles, Hermes, and Pythagoras. 'Alī Akbar Dahkhodā, "Rabb al-Nov'" in *Loghatnamah-ye Dahkhodā*, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://dekhoda.ut.ac.ir/fa/dictionary/detail/161370?title=رب-النوع>; Sayyīd Ja'far Sajjādī, *Farhang-e Loghat va Estelāhāt-e Falsafī*, ed. Hosam al-Dīn Qahhārī (Tehran: Entashārāt-e Sa'dī, 1338/1959), 144-145.

in his *Asfār*<sup>252</sup>, like *Eshrāqī* philosophers. However, *Mashha* 'ī philosophers do not embrace this approach. Forsat concludes the debate on the carving mentioned above by reasoning that even if we agree upon the existence of *arbāb-e anvā*', the question of what kind of *rabb* is the winged animal figure on a rock carving will remain.<sup>253</sup>

In interpreting one of the inscriptions in Persepolis, Forsat takes the opportunity to give moral lessons to his audience. His interpretation is a good example of inspiration he got from ancient ruins. By using mentions of famine (*tangsālī*) and false-speaking (*dorūghūyī*) in the mentioned inscription as a point of departure, Forsat writes:

It seems that [they] considered famine as an enormous calamity and false speaking as a great blasphemy in the era of this king. It is good for us, as the people of this age, assuming ourselves to be Muslims, to draw a little lesson and become awakened to what kind of famines there are in our time, and false speaking is in fashion. And, the famine is caused by false speaking and other sins, which cause divine enragement. My God, prevent any calamity from [befalling] us for the sake of noble Imams.<sup>254</sup>

The destruction of Persepolis by Alexander the Great is another instance Forsat uses to draw moral lessons. He states that Alexander was convinced by his mistress, *Tays*, to ravage the city of Istahr, including Persepolis, when he was drunk. Forsat reasons that one would not expect such an action from Alexander except due to thoughtlessness (*bīkheradī*). Thoughtlessness, he argues, would not exist without a state of intoxication (*mastī*).<sup>255</sup> Henceforth, Forsat starts his anti-alcohol campaign in earnest. He contends that although one may not believe in the prohibition of alcohol by prophets and saints, considering it a myth (*afsānah*), the evils of alcohol are so evident that one does not need to refer to any other source. He highlights the troubles

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<sup>252</sup> The full title of Molla Sadra's book is *Al-Hekmat 'ol-Mota 'ālīyyah fī 'l-Asfāre 'l-'Aqlīyyate 'l-Arba 'a*.

<sup>253</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:304.

<sup>254</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:295.

<sup>255</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:327-328.

that alcohol consumption causes in one's life, which usually end with the loss of dignity in society.

Forsat refers to a few European periodicals that oppose alcohol consumption. After paraphrasing the content of the periodicals at his disposal, he states that harsh regulations were implemented in most European countries against the consumption of alcohol, and some alcohol factories were even destroyed. Forsat may have believed that religious references alone would not be sufficient to convince some people about the harms of alcohol, so he drew additional arguments from European sources. Thus, he likely wanted to add a "scientific" aspect to his anti-alcohol campaign, as anti-alcohol Europeans do not rely on religious arguments concerning alcohol consumption but instead provide arguments focused on health.<sup>256</sup>

In his anti-alcohol campaign, he lastly tackles the undeniable presence of alcohol in classical poetry. To counter the argument that wine is ubiquitous in poetry, including mystic poetry, and thus acceptable, he argues that poets use wine as a metaphor in most cases. In instances where wine is not used metaphorically, the poetic imagination (*khīyālāt-e sha'rīyyah*) should not mislead a wise person. After all, it is normal for poets to talk about pleasure (*hazz*), the mole of the beloved (*khāl-e ma'shūq*), and the description of wine-cup (*jām o modām*).<sup>257</sup> Forsat completes his anti-alcohol discourse by quoting verses or anecdotes from poets and Sufis to endorse his ideas.

Forsat stays for six days in Persepolis to draw pictures of ruins. Before departing from Persepolis, he realizes that the next day corresponds with the birthday of Prophet Mohammad, which he considers fortuitous (*men hosn al-ettafāq*). Therefore, he decides to spend the seventh day in Persepolis and write a *qāsīdah* for

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<sup>256</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:329-330.

<sup>257</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:330.

the Prophet, hoping to gain the Prophet's intercession (*shafā'at*) on his behalf in the afterlife.<sup>258</sup> The first lines describe the destruction of Persepolis and the disappearance of pre-Islamic heritage by alluding to legendary characters, such as Jamshīd, Farīdūn, Kāvos, and Sīyāvosh. The emphasis on *'ebrat* is unmistakable, as Forsat urges the audience to take *'ebrat* from what was gone. He dedicates the second part to the praise of the Prophet. At the beginning of the *qāsīdah*, Forsat asserts that Mohammad's birthday was the cause of the destruction of Zoroastrian temples, the palace of Kesrā, and the Roman armies. In the remaining part, he writes about the morality and wisdom of the Prophet.

The last two examples reveal Forsat's hybrid approach to ancient ruins. In the first example, he uses the leitmotif of Alexander the Great, who devastated Persepolis while drunk, to teach moral lessons to the audience. In the second example, his Muslim piety, respect, and love for the Prophet merge with his contemplation of ancient ruins. Thus, it is safe to argue that pre-Islamic heritage meets Forsat's Islamic sensibilities.

#### 4.3 *Naqsh-e Rostam*

I have argued that Islam is Forsat's main conceptual tool for making sense of ancient ruins in the Fars region, despite his references to European sources, primarily travelogues, and the Parsi patronage behind the production of the book. I have also noted before that one of Forsat's methodological aims in dealing with ancient ruins is to make sense of the images he sees on reliefs across the Fars region. In this section of the chapter, I will show and discuss how Forsat keeps Islamic theology into consideration in his dilettante attempt to understand the ruin.

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<sup>258</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 332-336

*Naqsh-e Rostam* (Pictures of Rostam) is an archeological site, having Achaemenid and Sasanid monuments, notably royal tombs carved into the mountain. The area is known by its traditional Persian name, coming from the Sasanian reliefs on the cliff, which are believed to reference the legendary hero Rostam.<sup>259</sup> Forsat states that, as he noted before in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, there is no logic behind naming this place as *Naqsh-e Rostam* since it is the tradition of villagers (*ahālī-ye dahāt va rūstāyīhā*) to give such a name wherever they see a similar grand image.<sup>260</sup>

An interpretation of a relief in *Naqsh-e Rostam* produces a challenge for Forsat. In the relief, two characters are depicted on a horse holding a ring. (figure 12) He states that an English book on geography argues that it was the God who was shown on a horse in front of Ardashīr Bābakān, the founder of the Sasanid empire, in one of the reliefs in *Naqsh-e Rostam*. He is surprised that the English source, whose translations are compatible with those Forsat had from other sources in European languages, assumes a shape (*sūrat*) for God. He reasons that it is impossible for Ardashīr Bābakān, whose words are not devoid of wisdom, to attribute a shape to God, who is transcending (*ta'āla*). Forsat links the idea he encounters in an English book with the *moshabbahah* groups in Islam. The word *moshabbahah* comes from the root *tashbeh*, meaning emulation or likening. It refers to groups that draw parallels between God and creatures based on mutual similarities and imagine God in a human shape. For example, God has parts of a body, and he moves like humans. Attributing the divine characteristics of God (*sefāt*) to humans is another creed traditionally associated with these groups.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Hubertus Von Gall, "NAQŠ-E ROSTAM," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed March 1, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/naqs-e-rostam#prettyPhoto>.

<sup>260</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 342.

<sup>261</sup> Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Müşebbihe," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/musebbihe>.

Forsat asserts that this group was originally a faction of common people (*'āmmī*) among Jews. He refutes the idea that God can be considered as a body (*jesm*) on the grounds that, in that case, he is *mohtaj* (needy) of a place (*makān*). Since any *mohtaj* is possible (*momken*) but not necessary (*vājeb*). Because God is considered as *vājeb al-vocūd*, meaning the one whose existence is necessary, the God cannot be considered in any shape. Forsat's objection to the idea articulated by an English book derives from his commitment to the theological understanding of God's essence in Islam.

Forsat, as in many instances in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, consults his sufi patron, Shaykh Mofid, regarding the *moshabbahah* groups in Islam and quotes the document the Shaykh prepared based on scholars' works (*kotob-e 'olamā*).<sup>262</sup> Shaykh Mofid states that the majority of those who belong to *moshabbahah* are Sunni groups. He gives anecdotes from the *moshabbahah* groups regarding God in a personified manner to refute their ideas. Then, he gives reference to an authoritative remark by the eleventh Shiite Imam Hasan al-'Asqarī, defending the non-personal nature of God.<sup>263</sup>

The anonymous English source seems right to argue that it was the God (*Ahūrāmazdā*) depicted on the right side. It is stated that the relief depicts the Ardashīr's coronation by God. The trilingual inscription (Ancient Greek, Parthian, and Pahlavi languages) attests to this fact.<sup>264</sup> It is not one of the main concerns of this thesis to compare Forsat's opinions to the latest findings of scholarship. What is remarkable about this example is that theological debates of Islam played a central role in Forsat's evaluation of the ancient ruins.

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<sup>262</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 347-348.

<sup>263</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 348-349.

<sup>264</sup> See 'Alī Rezā Shāpūr Shahbāzī, *Rāhnomā-ye Mostaned-e Naqsh-e Rostam* (Tehran, Sefiran Publication, 1393/2014), 156-167.

The relief at *Naqsh-e Rostam* was not the only material Forsat assessed based on his Islamic knowledge and sensitivity. What is equally interesting is his attempt to expound the translation of one of the inscriptions at *Naqsh-e Rostam* (*Tarjomah-ye Hotūt-e Pahlavī-ye Majles-e Shāpūr dar Naqsh-e Rostam*), which he found in an English travelogue. Among the phrases used for Shapur, a Sasanid ruler, in the inscription, Forsat explains *zādah az asamān* (born of heaven) in a marginalia note. He notes that the birth does not connote a biological or external (*sūrī*) one here. Instead, it should be understood under the same logic as the concept of birth out of knowledge (‘elm) or faith (*īmān*). Then, Forsat refers to a famous hadith by Jesus to the effect that it is incumbent upon anybody who intends to enter the heavenly sphere to be born more than once. Forsat argues that since biological birth is a self-evident phenomenon, the phrase “born of heaven” must have a metaphorical meaning.<sup>265</sup>

#### 4.4 Pasargad

Having done with *Naqsh-e Rostam*, Forsat writes about the Pasargad region. The tomb of the famous Achaemenid ruler, Cyrus the Great (*maqbarah-ye Kūrosh*), is a significant place for its historical and modern ideological meaning. Forsat mentions that there is a tomb called *mashad-e māder-e Solaymān* (the tomb of Soleyman’s mother), but European historians (*movarrīkhīn-e farangestān*) assert that it belongs to a ruler, called *Kūrosh* or *Chetrīsh*, whose reign was 2450 years ago. He states that it is not known which Suleiman and his mother are mentioned. If it is the Prophet Soleyman, he says, there is no information on whether his mother is buried here. He enters the tomb but cannot find anybody inside. He reports that local people

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<sup>265</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1: 399.

informed him that there was a coffin and a body inside the tomb before some people destroyed it.<sup>266</sup>

One of the interesting aspects of Forsat's description and discussion of Pasargad, proving his inclusion of both Islamic and pre-Islamic vestiges for Iranian identity and culture, is that he did not ignore the traces of the ruins of a medieval mosque adjacent to the tomb of Cyrus, which coexisted with pre-Islamic ruins until the 1970s when they were removed on grounds that they do not have authenticity. Why a mosque was constructed in a way encircling the tomb of Cyrus by the *Atābakān-e Fārs*, descendants of the Salghurid dynasty who ruled in the Fars region in the twentieth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>267</sup> The mosque has been known by different names throughout history, such as *Masjed-e Atābakī* and *Masjed-e Mādar-e Solaymān*.

Forsat duly describes the Islamic traces as well as the pre-Islamic ones. He reads the medieval or a later inscription to the effect that Sa'ad Zangi of Atabak converted the place to the mosque (*īncā rā masjed az jehat-e moslīmīn sākhtahand*) for the Muslims.<sup>268</sup> By taking other examples, such as Masjed-e Sangī in Darabjard, he states in a marginalia note that the *Atābakān-e Fārs* converted the majority of the Zoroastrian temples (*ma'ābad-e Pārsīyān*) into Muslim mosques.<sup>269</sup>

Forsat mentions that there are verses from the Quran inside Cyrus's tomb and the mosque's mihrab. Muslim graves in the area demonstrate the identities of scholars, learned men (*fozalā*), and sufis. There was also a madrasa or an edifice

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<sup>266</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 379.

<sup>267</sup> For brief information about Atābakān-e Fārs, see Bertold Spuler, "ATĀBAKĀN-E FĀRS," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed March 7, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atabakan-e-fars-princes-of-the-salghurid-dynasty-who-ruled-fars-in-the-6th-12th-and-7th-13th-centuries-initially-with->.

<sup>268</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 382.

<sup>269</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 382.

(*sarāy*) built by Sa'ad Zangi, but it was entirely destroyed. A local mulla (*ākhūnd*), whom Forsat describes as a pious holy man (*mard-e moqaddas-e zāhedī*), shows Forsat a gravestone, half of which remained underground that has the name of Sa'ad Zangi in the inscription. Forsat orders the peasants (*ra'īyathā*) to clean the gravestone, and then he finds out that the grave belongs to one of Sa'ad Zangi's descendants.

Lastly, he tries to understand the figure that he calls *sūret-e bāldār* (The Winged Figure), whose image is a matter of wonder (*mahall-e hayrat*). (figure 13) Forsat relates that an Englishman (*shakhsī az angerīzhā*) wrote down a note in English on the carved stone that it was done in the period of a Persian king (*pādashāh-e pārsī*), called *Kūrosh*. The same Englishman wrote down also a note on Cyrus's tomb that it belongs to *Kūrosh*, i.e., Cyrus. After noting this graffiti, Forsat deals with the meaning of the image. He supposes that *sūret-e bāldār* may represent angels (*malā'īkah*), a deity of the star (*rabb al-nov'-e satārah*), or any other imaginations (*khīyālāt*) they had. In addition, he also refers to an idea he encountered in a European travelogue (*dar mosāfaratnāmah-ye sayyahī az ahl-e farangestān*) that the Winged Figure can be Cyrus's own deific image, which would help him to ascend to the haven after his death. The material on top of his hat can be an allegory that Cyrus undertook significant duties and occupations (*kārkhā vah bārkhā*).<sup>270</sup> Contrary to his objection to the idea that the figure in front of Ardashir Babakan is Ahuramazda, i.e., the God, Forsat does not make a value judgment in interpreting the Winged Figure in Pasargad.

In the eleventh chapter, Forsat introduces his recent findings (*enkhīshāfāt-e jadīdah*) concerning the images he visited previously based on European travel

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<sup>270</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:387.

accounts. He compares what he wrote during his journeys across the Fars region to what he found in certain European travelogues. As I will show below, he finds some of the explanations acceptable or assumes a neutral position. For some others, however, he has critical views based on his foundational objection to the visual representation of God.

Forsat informs the reader that he integrated what he read and learned into his narrative after turning back to Shiraz, as he frequently makes amendments to the text. Then, he compares and contrasts differing opinions regarding the meanings of different images from ancient ruins in Fars. For example, he notes that an English travelogue argues the fourth image, a beardless one in Barm-e Delak, a site of a Sasanian rock relief located in the southeast of Shiraz (figure 14), is actually a woman dressed up as a man. Forsat states that he does not have any information on the identity of this image and makes no judgment. The second point is about an image depicting a scene in which a person is under the horse of a kingly figure while the latter holds another person's arm (figure 15) in the Darabjard region. Forsat mentions that he had guessed the identities of the people depicted here as Dārābshāh and Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. However, the same English source holds the idea that the kingly figure is Shapur I and the one depicted under Shapur's horse is the captured Roman emperor Valerian, and the last one is another Roman emperor (*Shīrīdīs?*), crowned by Shapur I.<sup>271</sup> Another interesting reference to the two travelogues is the interpretation of animal-like figures with human heads (see figure 4 again) in Persepolis. The aforementioned English source claims that these figures may be related to the worshipping of cows, a practice that existed in Egypt and India. It also refers to Avesta, according to which the cow was

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<sup>271</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 395-396.

the first creature, and humans and other animals came after. Another traveler writes that these images might be the representations of Kayūmars, the progenitor of the Pīshdādīyān dynasty, whose name comes from *gāv* (cow) and *mard* (man). Forsat thinks that the etymological explanation is worthy of thinking.<sup>272</sup> In another example, he states that the image, whose upper part is human-like and the lower part is bird-like (figure 16) is called Forūhar, and some European travelers and philosophers (*chand nafar az sayyāhān ve hokamā-ye Farang*) argue that it is the image of the soul (*jān*), a reference to the idea that soul leaving the body, and its transition to the other world (*‘ālam-e bālā*). Forsat agrees with the sources he refers to without giving any bibliographical information.<sup>273</sup>

A French traveler’s interpretation of an image in *Naqsh-e Rajab* (figure 17) is the only explanation Forsat takes issue with in this section. The French traveler, whose identity is unbeknown to us, asserts that this scene, showing two people on foot while holding a ring together, is the depiction of God (*Ahūrāmazdā*) endowing the throne to Shapur I. The same source reminds that Ardashīr Bābakān and the God are depicted on a horse in *Naqsh-e Rostam*. Forsat states that the objection (*īrād*), his assumption of the impossibility of the personification of God, that he raised for an image in *Naqsh-e Rostam* is also applicable to this example and ends the discussion by quoting a verse from the Quran about the uniqueness of the God: “[but] there is nothing like unto Him, and He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing.”<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1:396.

<sup>273</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1:398; Even though it is hard to equate the concept of the soul in Abrahamic religions to *forūhar*, modern scholarship confirms that *forūhar* was related to the soul as well as having a supernatural existence. Mary Boyce, “FRAVAŠI,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed March 7, 2024, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fravasi->.

<sup>274</sup> *The Message of the Qur’ān*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad (London: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 740-741.

#### 4.5 Biography or the politics of inclusion & exclusion in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*

Biographies occupy a significant place in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. The inclusion of biographies of historical and contemporary figures enriches the book's content and broadens its scope. Therefore, biography forms one of the generic layers of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Forsat typically includes the biographies of scholars, Sufis, poets, and other local notables for each town he visits in the Fars region.

There are other occasions for him to mention historical personalities. For example, Forsat quotes the ode (*qāsīdah*) he wrote in praise of his sufi master, Shaykh Mofīd, whom he describes as the mine of divine mysteries and the source of divine lights (*ma'dan-e asrār-e rabbānī va manba'e- anvār-e sobhānī*), before ending the introduction part.<sup>275</sup> In his ode, Forsat resembles Shaykh Mofīd's intellectual, philosophical, poetic, religious, and moral qualities to the ancient Greek philosophers, like Aristoteles, Platon, Euclid, Ptolemy, Galen, mythical pre-Islamic Iranian thinkers, like Bozorgmahr, Islamic philosophers like Farabi and Avicenna (*Ibn Sina*), pre-Islamic poets, famous sufis such as Bāyazīd-e Bestāmī and Farīd al-Dīn 'Attar, and also Prophet Muhammad's companions like Salmān-e Fāresī, Sābet and Abūzar, who would support 'Alī ibn Abi Tāleb, the fourth caliph.<sup>276</sup>

Forsat begins the first chapter with short biographies of the tens of historical personalities he mentions in his ode for Shaykh Mofīd and other significant figures.<sup>277</sup> Forsat justifies such a digression in the book by explaining that he includes the biographies to clarify ambiguities concerning the ode and to avoid boring the reader.<sup>278</sup> He aligns some ancient Greek philosophers the main tenets of

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<sup>275</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:39.

<sup>276</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:46-49

<sup>277</sup> The biographies constitute a considerable section of the first chapter. See Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:60-122.

<sup>278</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:59.

the Abrahamic religions. For example, Forsat notes that Socrates was killed because he objected to idol worship and performed ablution (*ḡasl*) and prayed (*bah namāz īstād*) before his death.<sup>279</sup> He asserts that Platon believed in the createdness of the universe (*hodūs-e ‘ālam*) and a creator.<sup>280</sup> Regarding Aristotle, Forsat quotes a hadith by Prophet Mohammad stating that Aristoteles was a prophet.<sup>281</sup>

Forsat’s engagement with significant Muslim figures is equally interesting to understand his broad vision for Iran’s cultural, religious, and historical legacy. In this regard, he writes about Sufis like Bāyazīd-e Bestāmī and Shahāb al-Dīn Sohrawardī, representing his commitment to Sufism. Forsat prioritizes the Shiite Muslims by providing more examples from Prophet Mohammad and Caliph Ali’s companions. Nevertheless, he does not entirely ignore Sunni scholars such as Abū al-Hasan al-Ash‘arī, the founder of the Sunni Ash‘ari school. Forsat continues to provide biographies of philosophers (*hokamā*), mystics (*‘orafā*), eloquent men (*fosahā*), and companions of the Prophet (*sahābah*) for pages until he states that it is time to get to the point by which he means the description of his travels and ancient ruins.<sup>282</sup>

Despite the presence of a large number of biographies within *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, groups of people are missing in the book, such as women and Babis.<sup>283</sup> Forsat does not provide any biography of women in the book, but he mentions a few of those who sponsored the restoration of religious buildings, such as a certain Tāshī Khātūn, who endowed the revenues of the town of Maymand in medieval periods.<sup>284</sup> Another instance in which Forsat mentions a woman is when he writes about Hājī Moshīr al-Molk, a prominent Qajar statesman. Forsat notes that although Moshīr al-Molk has

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<sup>279</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1:62-63

<sup>280</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1:64.

<sup>281</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1:65.

<sup>282</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1:124.

<sup>283</sup> Setrag Manoukian, “The Ruins of Others,” 226-228.

<sup>284</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 1:178.

no sons, he has a daughter. Forsat praises her charitable works and describes her: “Even though she is a woman, she has manly quality and disposition. She is like a man in the guise of a woman...”<sup>285</sup> He quotes an Arabic poem that extols a woman’s chastity on the grounds that only mirrors can see her face. In parallel with Moshīr al-Molk’s daughter, Forsat praises a woman from the Qavam family, which held significant governmental offices in the Qajar period, with similar statements.<sup>286</sup> He does not fail to mention two shrines supposedly dedicated to women, Bībī Dokhtarān and Khātūn Qīyāmat in the Shīrāznāmah part.<sup>287</sup> In another instance, he recounts that there is a deep well in the vicinity of Shiraz, to which guilty prostitutes, sentenced to death, are thrown.<sup>288</sup> Interestingly, the only section dealing with women in his another significant work, *Māqālāt-e ‘Elmī va Sīyāsī*, carries the title of The Harms of Prostitute Women (*Azrār-e Zanān-e Fāheṣah*).<sup>289</sup>

The biographies of Muslim scholars and sufis are occasions to elaborate on Islamic theology and ethics for Forsat. For example, after dealing with al-Ash‘arī, he compares and contrasts Ash‘arism with Mu‘tazilism according to their different opinions regarding the concept of *jabr* (compulsion) and *ehktīyar* (free will), one of the most essential subjects in Islamic theology (*kalām*). The matter can be seen as the debate of freedom and predestination in Islamic theology. Although there has always been a debate on to what extent God determines human acts, the eighth and ninth centuries (second and third hejrī) was the period when the debate was hot among Muslim theologians.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>285</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 2:439-440.

<sup>286</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 2: 825.

<sup>287</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 2:765-766.

<sup>288</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 2:689-690.

<sup>289</sup> Mīrzā Āqā Mohammad Nasīr Forsat-e Shīrāzī, *Māqālāt-e ‘Elmī va Sīyāsī*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Matba‘-ye Pārsīyān, 1325/1907-1908), 9.

<sup>290</sup> Dmitry V. Frolov, “Freedom and Predestination”, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ān*, vol.2, 267-271.

Forsat states that followers of al-Ash'arī think that people do not have free choice in any matters and that their acts are created by God, who is responsible for both the reasons and results of human acts. According to this school of thought, no medium exists for God's will. The question of why there is reward and punishment in Islam if such a thing as free will does not exist remains. As an answer to this question, this group contends that God can send all people to heaven or hell, according to his wish, and this act cannot be considered as oppression (*zolm*) on the grounds that oppression is the possession of someone's property. As every entity is a possession of God, there will not be any oppression. Mu'tazilis, on the other hand, argue that people are the creators of their good and evil acts and God is only the creator of souls (*zavāt-e nofūs*) and does not interfere in the affairs of people. They also put forth that it is impossible to see God in the world and the afterlife. Lastly, Forsat points out other matters of dispute between the two groups, such as the attributes of God (*sefāt*) and the ability of reason (*'aql*) to distinguish good and evil in the absence of *shar'* (divine law).<sup>291</sup>

After presenting two opposing views, Forsat introduces a third religious doctrine (*mazhab*) concerning the issue of *jabr* and *ehktīyar*, which is adopted by *Emāmiyyah*—a term that can refer either to a particular Shiite sect or to Shiism in general—and the majority of philosophers (*hokamā*). According to this view, a person is the direct creator (*bīvāsetah*) of his act, which are the indirect result (*bahvāsetah*) of God's intention. Thus, this third approach serves as a reconciliatory one between the two extremes. Forsat gives reference to works of the famous medieval Muslim philosopher Nāser al-Dīn Tūsī (d.1274) and the most renowned philosopher of the Qajar period, Mollā Hādī Sabzahvārī (d.1873), and he quotes from

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<sup>291</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:83-84.

the Caliph 'Alī to support his position. He concludes this section by quoting a couplet from his *Dīwān* related to the *jabr* and *ehktīyar* issue: "If there were not free choice, compulsion would not exist of course / Except a sage one, nobody solved this riddle."<sup>292</sup>

Immediately after the *jabr* and *ehktīyar* issue, Forsat introduces another topic related to Islam, this time focusing on the relationship between knowledge and different groups of people who make the cause of Islam (*da 'va-ye Eslām mīkonand*). He categorizes these individuals into three groups based on their *mazhab* and *mashrab* (manner and temper): 1-Scholars, who successfully undergone education, acquired *ma 'āref* (knowledge), and possess exact knowledge or beliefs 2-Confused individuals, who have studied but failed to find their way, and are perplexed about religious matters (*omūr-e mazhabīyyah*) 3-The ignorant.

Forsat notes that there are different subgroups in the last category of sheer ignorants (*'ammī-ye baht-e basīt*). For example, there are people who neither acquired knowledge nor learned anything about humanity (*ensānīyat*) and ethics (*ahlāqīyyat*).<sup>293</sup> They do not question the reasons for their ignorance. Life for them is to open their stores and put effort into worldly interests (*manāfa'-ye donyavī*). According to Forsat, this group of people only care about their worldly interests and do not pay heed to any *hadith*, poem, or mystical subject (*matlab-e 'erfānī*) if they ever hear such things. He resembles those devoid of the pleasures of *'Elm o Adab* (etiquette and morals) and abhors the daily prayers (*farāyez-e panjgānah*) to animals, as they do not have any pleasure except eating and sleeping.<sup>294</sup> Forsat mentions another group in the large category of ignorants that studied little through sources in

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<sup>292</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:85-86. غیر دانا گره از این دو معما نگشود / اختیار ار نبود جبر هم البته نبود

<sup>293</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:83-85

<sup>294</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:83-86.

Persian language, heed words of the people of *shar'* and '*erfān*, and can occasionally benefit from the cultivated people. He also adds that they are aware of their ignorance and regret it. The last subgroup among the ignorants consists of people who pretend to be cultivated and educated. They pretend to be virtuous, knowledgeable, and have high morals.<sup>295</sup> When they see a wretch (*mardak*), they try to sell a few words they heard from somewhere by adding superstitions (*abātel*). However, they constantly fear being castigated by the cultivated and educated people in the gathering.

Forsat asserts that ignorant people generally defend their positions by giving reference to Ash'ari arguments, although they have no idea about the *jabr* and *ehktīyar* issue and Ash'arism and Mu'tazilism. In addition, they sometimes take shelter in poetry but are unaware that poetry cannot stand as a convincing proof (*borhān-e qāte'*) in religious matters. Then, he reminds the reader that there are poems devoid of *hekmat* (wisdom). However, this does not mean that poetry should be challenged.<sup>296</sup>

Before going back to the biographies, Forsat quotes one of the poems he wrote upon the request of a friend about the betrayal of foolish profanes and the condemnation of selfish common people (*dar ehānat-e majāz pīshagān-e nāharadmand va nakūhash-e mardomān-e 'ammī-ye khodpasand*).<sup>297</sup> Although he quotes many verses from the poem, the whole can be found in his *diwān*.<sup>298</sup> Using his literary skills, Forsat continues elaborating on the criticism he directed at the common people (*'avām*). Again, he warns the reader not to mingle with the common people (*'ammī*), who reject the principles of the divine law (*sharī'ah*) and indulge in

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<sup>295</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:87.

<sup>296</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:88-89.

<sup>297</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:89-95.

<sup>298</sup> Forsat-al-Dowlah Shīrāzī, *Dīwān-e Forsat*, 366-387.

earthly pleasures. He states that those people deny knowledge (*'elm*) and the religion (*āyīn*), ridicule the divine law (*sharī'a*) and the religion, claim that knowledge is just a gossip (*qāl*), argue for excessive pleasure and cheerfulness (*'eysh o tarab*). They use the creeds of Ash'arism as excuses for their mischievous deeds.<sup>299</sup>

In addition to Forsat's continued criticism of common people, this poem is remarkable for its attacks on pederasty (*shāhadbāzī*), as he writes: "Do not give your heart to the child..."<sup>300</sup> Forsat argues that *shāhadbāzī* is merely a profane and superficial love and has nothing to do with the true love of God. Undoubtedly, the outcome of a pederastic love will be regret. At the end of the poem, he reasons that overeating and alcohol consumption (*akl-e mofrat va aṣṣrabah*), as well as listening to mundane music and poetry, are instigators of profane love.<sup>301</sup> In Forsat's opinion, idolatry (*botparastī*) is better than drinking wine (*bādahparastī*), and death is more acceptable (*ovla*) than intoxication (*sarmastī*), as the habit of drinking alcohol is the calamity of the soul (*āfat-e rūh*).<sup>302</sup>

Overall, Forsat's categorization of people and his criticisms of ignorant alongside those indulge in mundane pleasures give significant clues about his intellectual mindset and ideal Iranian type.

#### 4.6 Superstition and mysticism

Islamic mysticism (*'erfān*) has a strong influence on Forsat's Islamic outlook. Even a cursory glance at Forsat's divan reveals the significance of Islamic mysticism (*'erfān*) in his mindset, as his poetry is filled with mystical allusions. Forsat frequently mentions Shaykh Mofīd, his spiritual master, and consistently praises him

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<sup>299</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:91.

<sup>300</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:90. دل به کودک مسپار آن بود موجب صد بدنامی.

<sup>301</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:94.

<sup>302</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:94-95.

throughout *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Moreover, he often poses questions regarding Sufism and theology. As a sign of his commitment to the Sufi tradition, he provides biographies of tens of historical and contemporary Sufi figures.

In this regard, his account of Shaykh Qotb-al-Dīn Mobārak is noteworthy, as it exemplifies the presence of Sufism in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. After addressing the historical monuments in Arsenjan, a small town in the Fars region, Forsat relates an anecdote about Shaykh Qotb-al-Dīn Mobārak (d. 607/1210-1211). He states that the Shaykh is known with his lofty assemblies (*'olovv-e maqāmāt*) and grand ranks (*somovv-e darajāt*). Once upon a time, Shaykh Qotb-al-Dīn Mobārak faints, and while fainted with his mouth open, a bee makes a nest in his mouth.<sup>303</sup> Forsat notes that the *jazbah* (divine attraction) made this occurrence possible.

Forsat then poses a question in the form of a letter to his master, Shaykh Mofid, and shares the answer he received. The Shaykh notes that the paths leading people to God are as numerous as the number of created beings.<sup>304</sup> However, it is possible to categorize them into three groups according to their common characteristics.

The first path covers the group of *ashāb-e mo'āmalāt*, which attributes great significance to prayers and external deeds (*a'māl-e zāherah*). Only a few of them can reach God, even over a long period. The second group is *ashāb-e mojāhadāt vah rīyāzāt*, relying on esoteric methods (*'amārat-e bāten*) for the alteration of morality (*akhlāq*), purification of the self (*tazkīyah-ye nefis*), and refinement of the hearth (*tasfīyah-ye qalb*). Though the number of people who can reach God is more than the first group, they are also rare. The third group is *arbāb-e mohabbat*, utilizing the *jazba* to reach God. The path followed by the third group is the closest one to God,

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<sup>303</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 405.

<sup>304</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 405; طرق به سوی حق تعالی به عدد نفسهای خلائق است.

and the number of those who achieved their goal of reaching God exceeds the first two groups.

In another place, Forsat talks about a cave called *Ashāb-e Kehf* (Seven Sleepers), also known as the cave of *Deqyānūs*, located in southwest of Kazerun. The story of Seven Sleepers is common in Christian and Islamic traditions and is also mentioned in the Quran.<sup>305</sup> Forsat does not confirm the belief that the cave in Kazerun is related to the Seven Sleepers and says:

...and for the sake of future travelers' foresight, this humble wanted to show that this issue does not have any truth and is false because the Seven Sleepers were in Rum [Anatolia], and the mountain is located in that land, as it is recorded in all histories. Anybody wishes [to check], refer to them [these sources].<sup>306</sup>

#### 4.7 The concept of Iran in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*

It goes without saying that focusing on how Forsat conceives of Iran and its historical roots is significant in specifying his differing vision from those of mainstream nationalists examined in the first chapter. To do this, I will examine how he explained the etymology of the terms Iran and Pars. I will also address the question of to what extent we find traces of emerging nationalist terminology in *Āsār-e 'Ajam* through its discourses on Iran and the people of Iran. In the texts examined in the first chapter, particularly *Ākhūndzādah* and *Kermānī*, nationalist vocabulary was unmistakable. Then, I will touch upon Forsat's use of the term Aryan alongside his extractions from European sources on the history of the Persian language and its relation to other languages. A debate on which territories Iran has covered since then is also necessary for the focus of this section.

In the introduction, Forsat explains the origins of the terms Iran and Pars. He states that geographical terms *Īrān* and *Pārs* may have come from the names of

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<sup>305</sup> See the *Al-Kahf* (The Cave) Surah. *The Message of the Qur'ān*, 437-456.

<sup>306</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2: 533.

ancient rulers of Iran, like *Hūshang*, who was the son of *Sīyāmak*. Forsat asserts that historians wrongly used the term *Pārs* to describe the whole geography of Iran. The cause of this misconception was the fact that the territory was under the control of *Îrān ben Hūshang*.<sup>307</sup> When *Îrān*'s son, *Pārs*, ascended to the throne, the territory of Iran was partly called *Pārs*. Then, Forsat states that the term *Pārs* covered cities like Shiraz, Kazerun, Firuzabad, Darabjard, Fasa, Neyriz, Sarvestan, Kevar, Jahrom, Marvdasht, Shebankara, etc.<sup>308</sup> He also gives alternative explanations for the origin of the term *Pārs*. According to what some people wrote (*ba 'zī navashtah and kah*), *Pārs* was the son of *Tahmūras*, the third Shah of *Pīshdādīyān*, the first Iranian dynasty, according to Avesta and *Shāhnāmah*. *Tahmūras* granted certain territories in the Fars region. Shiraz, Istakhr, Fasa, and other cities carry the names of Tahmuras's sons. What should be inferred from the information Forsat provides is that he still follows the genealogies attributed to pre-Islamic Iran by sources like *Khodāynāmah*, *Shāhnāmah* of Ferdowsi, medieval Islamic history and geography literature, and neo-Zoroastrian Desatir Texts, at least in the introduction. One may say that traditional/mythical narratives on the roots of pre-Islamic Iran exist *Āsār-e 'Ajam*.<sup>309</sup>

Forsat states at the very beginning of *Āsār-e 'Ajam* that Iran was a large country (*Îrān mamlakatī vasī' būdah*), implying some of its former parts do not belong to Iran anymore, and the names of certain places in Iran have changed. Iraq (*'Erāq-e 'Ajam*), Khorasan, Taberestan, Fars, Azerbaijan, Kerman, etc., are some of Iran's current territories (*molik*).<sup>310</sup> Then, he asserts that Fars is among the southern

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<sup>307</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:17.

<sup>308</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:17.

<sup>309</sup> By traditional/mythical narratives, I mean the concepts of Iran embedded in Iranian and Islamic studies roughly in the period between Islamization of Iran and the emergence of Orientalist studies. For a summary of "Iranian national history", as conceived by Iranians, see Ehsan Yarshater, "Iranian National History," in *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Vol. 3(1), ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 359-478.

<sup>310</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:17.

*mamālek* (province, kingdom, dominion) of Iran (*az mamālek-e Janūbī-ye Īrān ast*).<sup>311</sup> The idea that Fars is one of Iran's provinces fits the region's the historical and contemporary position. In a later section of the book, Forsat provides a new geographic segmentation for the Fars region. He puts forth that the Fars region used to comprise five different *kūrah* (regions), each was created by a ruler: 1-*Kūrah-ye Ardashīr* (Shiraz and Firuzabad) 2-*Kūrah-ye Estakhr* (Beyza and Ramjard) 3-*Kūrah-ye Dārābjard* (Fasa and Jahrom) 4-*Kūrah-ye Qobād* (Bushehr and Borazjan) 5- *Kūrah-ye Shāpūr* (Kazerun and Jareh). Forsat notes that each of these regions was conquered [*maftūh shod*] in the period of the second Caliph, 'Omar ben Khattab, and was brought to Islamic dominance.<sup>312</sup>

In the seventh chapter of the second volume of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, Forsat deals with the regions in and outside Iran that he has not visited and relied on geography and history books in Persian as well as a few travelogues in English and French. Afghanistan, Egypt, Babylonia, and some cities in Caucasia, such as Yerevan, Baku, and Derbent, are where Forsat provides brief historical background and describes the ancient sites. Khuzistan, Kermanshah, Hamadan, Mazandaran, Kohgiluyeh, Bakhtiari, Ardabil, Ardestan, and Tadavan are also the cities or regions inside Iran that Forsat mentions. Forsat's method does not differ from the other chapters, as he mentions the ancient places, provides translations of some ancient inscriptions, and tries to discover the identity of the depicted people in the ancient ruins.

The rationale behind the inclusion of these cities and regions to the narrative is to cover some of the monuments of Persian rulers (*Āsār-e Salātīn-e 'Ajam*) within or outside the Iranian territories (*dar belād-e Īrān yā ghayr-e ān ast*), as Forsat himself writes. We also know that he was encouraged by some of his friends who

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<sup>311</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:18.

<sup>312</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2: 446.

perused his manuscript to produce a more complete narrative.<sup>313</sup> It is another proof that Forsat's concept of Iran exceeds the borders of the Qajar state. According to this mindset, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Caucasia can be seen as part of ancient and classical Iranian territories, and the ancient ruins automatically belong to Persian rulers.

Certain points related to Forsat's vision of greater Iran are worth emphasizing. In his discussion of Baku and Yerevan, for example, Forsat states that Baku was a part of Iran before, but now, it is within the Russian domains (*hāl zamīmah-ye mamālek-e Rūs ast*). For Yerevan, he says that once it was the capital of Armenia, and now it is in the hands of Russia, thus not mentioning that Yerevan belonged to the Iranian state until its cession to Russia with the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828.<sup>314</sup> What are the implications of Forsat's preference regarding Baku as a former Iranian territory and Yerevan as the center of Armenia? One may assume that he was influenced by the sources, especially European ones, he used. Or, Forsat may have considered Armenia a region in Iran, and Yerevan was its seat. Otherwise, Forsat must have had a different territorial concept of Iran, or '*Ajam*, as he uses them interchangeably.

Another interesting point in this chapter is Forsat's naming of Khuzestan province. Located in southwest Iran, Khuzestan is a region on the border of Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Even though the region was generally named Khuzestan by medieval Islamic geographers such as Ibn Hawqal and Yaqut al-Hamawi, it began to be called Arabistan as of the Safavid period, based on the migration of the Arab tribes, thus bringing demographical changes in the region. The official administrative name of the region, Arabistan, was altered to Khuzestan following

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<sup>313</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2: 624.

<sup>314</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2: 663-664.

Reza Khan's military expedition to establish the central authority in 1924.<sup>315</sup> What was the reason behind Forsat's preference for the name Khuzestan instead of more common Arabistan? Did he assume a sensitive stance regarding the naming of the province long before it would become a sensitive issue in Iranian politics? The more plausible answer should be sought in that he kept up with the tradition of medieval Islamic geography, as nowhere in the book has Forsat shown such an attitude against non-Persian geographic names.

Forsat's naming of some geographical units, such as the Persian Gulf, the Euphrates, and the Tigris rivers, reveals the ambiguity of the geographical nomenclature at that time. For example, he uses the title of *Derya-ye Fars* for the Persian Gulf while reminding the reader: "It is also called Khalij-e 'Ajam [=Fars] (sic) and also Derya-ye Basra and Bahr-e 'Omman, connected to the Indian Ocean, and actually, is an extension of the Indian Ocean and this extension [the Persian Gulf] is located between Fars and 'Arabistan."<sup>316</sup> Considering the naming dispute between Iranians and Arabs for this body of water, it is noteworthy that Forsat does not shy away from referring to other prevalent names, despite even conservative Iranians' reluctance to accept the existence of other names nowadays.

Forsat's use of the concepts, such as *molk*, *mamlakat*, and *mamālek*, is also interesting. Until the late nineteenth century, Iran was not regarded as a unified country in the sense of a modern nation-state. Even in the Qajar period, the official name of the state was *Mamālek-e Mahrūsah-e Īrānīyyah* (The Guarded Domains of Iran).<sup>317</sup> While *mamālek* denotes an imperial rule alongside its provinces with a

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<sup>315</sup> Soucek Svat, "Arabistan or Khuzistan." *Iranian Studies* 17, no. 2/3 (1984): 207.

<sup>316</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2: 601.

<sup>317</sup> Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19; The similarity with *Memalik-i Mahruse-yi Osmaniye* in the Ottoman context is unmistakable.

certain autonomy from the center, *mamlakat* is closer to the principles of the modern nation-state. Thus, the crystallization of the national political culture and the idea of Iran as a unified country with definite borders can be observed in the conceptual shift from *mamālek-e Īrān* to *mamlakat-e Īrān*, as noted by Tavakoli-Targhi.<sup>318</sup> How should one interpret that Forsat used both terms—*mamlakat* for Iran and Fars, as *mamālek* is the plural form of the former—in successive pages?

After mentioning the positive developments in the Fars region under the governorship of Nezām al-Saltanah, the last major patron of *Āsār-e ‘Ajām*, Forsat advises the ruling elite (*omarā va hokkām*) on how to take care of their subjects (*ra’āyā*):

The reason behind what it was said [above] is the fact that *omarā* and *hokkām* should know that the subjects [*ra’āyā*] are like their children and observing their rights is among the *mellatī* and *molktī* duties. Furthermore, they should be aware that if a commander or a ruler is not informed about the methods of justice and ordering the affairs of the state, it will not be possible for him to work with the principle of justice. In addition, they ought to know that when the benefits of mankind are at the hand of a prudent ruler and he prevents oppression, rule justly, and ensure the well-being of the subjects, not only all servants [reference to the subjects] will benefit from various kinds of blessings but also he will have the advantage, as it is written in the *akhbār* [traditions] that if one-hour justice is compared to worshipping, the former is equal to 60 years of the latter. I saw in a different *khavar* [tradition] that it is even better than the latter.<sup>319</sup>

Forsat’s *nasīhat* to the rulers is a telling example, as it provides significant insights into how Forsat conceives of the society and the relationship between the people and the ruling elites. For example, the fact that he regards the concept of justice as the underlying cause for the order in society reflects the deep impact of pre-modern Islamic political thought. Furthermore, addressing rulers by warning and giving advice to them is another sign of the persistence of classical political thought.

Forsat’s use of particular concepts is another significant point in gauging the presence of the concept of “national” in his work. For instance, he refers to people as *ra’āyā*, another classical concept for alluding to the subjects. Forsat utilizes *mellat*

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<sup>318</sup> Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 114.

<sup>319</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajām*, 1:204-205.

and *molk* at the same time when he mentions the duties of rulers in the sense that they are complementary to each other. The use of *mellat* as an equivalent of the modern nation became widespread not before the Constitutional Revolution despite its preeminence in the writings of particular intellectuals like Ākhūndzādah and Kermānī. However, it is hard to say that concepts like *mellat* had a fixed meaning or use in the pre-Constitutional period. For example, Māshā‘āllah Ājūdānī aptly exposes the religious connotations of the concept of *mellat* had in the Constitutional period.<sup>320</sup> Touraj Atabaki also states that words like *ahālī*, *ommat*, and *mellat* could be used interchangeably even in the writings of notable reformists like Mostashār al-Dowlah.<sup>321</sup> In addition to the marginal and ambiguous use of *mellat* in *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, Forsat usually employs the words like *mardom* or its plural form *mardomān*, and *ahālī* to mean people.

Forsat’s judgment concerning the people of Kazerun is another example that deserves to be noted. He mentions that they once belonged to the Shafi’i branch of Sunni Islam and converted to Shiism in due course. Although he generally talks about the virtues of the people of a particular town or city that Forsat visits, he castigates Kazerunis for their evil morality:

The majority of them are malicious, corrupt, and liars...[they are] the most evil people and resemble the people of ‘Ad<sup>322</sup> in destroying the affairs of the servants of God, corrupting the countries, and promoting obstinacy. They always put [the principle of] harmony aside, create discord...<sup>323</sup>

Forsat finds only a few people from Kazerun who are devoid of shameful actions and worthy of note in the following pages. What were the reasons for Forsat’s very unfavorable opinion of the people of Kazerun? Was it representing Forsat’s

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<sup>320</sup> See his book chapter titled “Mellat va Mellī”. Māshā‘āllah Ājūdānī, *Mashrūtah-ye Īrānī* (Tehran: Nashr-e Akhtarān, 1400/2021), 177-187.

<sup>321</sup> Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 18-24.

<sup>322</sup> A group of people who were punished by God because of their rejection of the prophets.

<sup>323</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, 2: 445.

personal view, arising from his experience during his journey, or a more general stereotype against them? One may claim that their Shafi'i past turned Forsat against them. However, it cannot be, at least, the main cause, as he has no difficulty in mentioning Sunni religious figures from Islamic history. I offer an alternative explanation to understand Forsat's highly critical remark on the people of Kazerun. Whatever the reason for his discomfort with Kazerunis was, religious, ethnic, personal, etc., these lines point out the persistence of non-national forms of identity in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, if not the lack of the concept of "national".

Contrary to the ambiguous use of *mellat*, there are signs of emerging national culture related to the symbols created by the Qajar state in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. The then governor of the Fars region, Farhād Mīrzā, entrusts Forsat to draw a picture of the Tabar Castle in order to send it to the capital as a sign of its capture from the hands of bandits. He briefly writes about the military expedition and states:

[the army] with great toil, conquered the castle and hung the flag of lion and sun [*'elem-e shīr o horshīd*], alluring the flag of the Iranian state, in the castle, killed Fazl'Ali Baharlu, the leader of the tribal gang, and his followers.<sup>324</sup>

Nevertheless, it would not be wrong to assert that Forsat did not write *Āsār-e 'Ajam* in a strict national sense. Instead, his other concerns, such as providing moral lessons, are more explicit.

Forsat's approach to the issues of race and language theories is a significant point in which he differs from mainstream nationalism, especially in comparison to Kermānī's Aryanist racism. Forsat knows about the Aryan language theory, as he explains its linguistic implications based on an Italian book at his disposal. He provides translations of relevant passages from this book, including the translations

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<sup>324</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 2: 548.

of ancient inscriptions across the Fars region and information on the history of languages he finds in Shiraz. He writes:

The origin of all languages was the *Īrā* (ایرانی) language, as the etymological roots of *Īrā* (ایرا) and *Īrān* (ایران) are identical. [That language] is also called *Īrī* (ایری) and *Āryan* (آریین), and, at first, it was common among a group of people in Central Asia. This people was an agrarian society that dispersed across the world because of an increase in their population.<sup>325</sup>

While he deals with Friedric Spiegel's contributions to Iranian philology, he states that the cuneiform script in Persepolis is the *Ārya* language.<sup>326</sup> However, we do not see any trace of racist classification of human societies, unlike Kermānī. Neither Forsat has an obsession with racial or linguistic purity. For example, he says that some languages are mixed, like the languages of Ethiopia (*habashah*) and Zanzibar (*zangbār*). In his opinion, the modern Persian language, which he considers sweeter than most languages (*nīkū zabānīst shīrīntar az aksar-e zabānhā*), is also mixed with Arabic.<sup>327</sup> His ease with Persian being mixed with Arabic is again another contrast with secular nationalists, such as Ākhūndzādah and Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā. Forsat's occasional experimentations with Pure Persian in *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and his *dīvān* have been shown as evidence for his assumed archaist nationalist position by some scholars.<sup>328</sup> However, it is hard to argue that they had any ideological meaning other than literary ostentation, based on the significant presence of Arabic vocabulary and poetry in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, and his other works. Therefore, one should be aware of the contrast between Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā's intentional use of Pure Persian due to his distaste for Arabic loanwords in Persian and Forsat's literary tour de force.

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<sup>325</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 232.

<sup>326</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1: 238

<sup>327</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:235-36.

<sup>328</sup> Reza Bigdeloo, *Bāstāngarāyī Dar Tārīkh-e Mo'āser-e Īrān*, 147.

#### 4.8 The representation of non-Persian Iranians

Forsat's treatment of non-Persian Iranians is important to understand his vision for Iranian identity. In this regard, his description of Hāji Nasrallah Khān Elkhānī, one of the leaders of the Turkic Qashqāyī tribe, is revealing. He states that his genealogy goes back to Chengiz Khan, and this dynasty of the Qashqai tribe was brought to the Fars region from Tūrānzamīn by Nāder Shāh, and they provided great services to the Sublime Iranian state (*Dowlat-e 'Alīyya-ye Īrānīyyah*).<sup>329</sup>

The representation of non-Persian Iranians is not always positive, as in the case of Qashqāyī Khān mentioned above. Instead, when Forsat deals with the tribes across the Fars region and mentions their "mischievous" activities, he usually emphasizes their ethnicity. While he was wandering around Firuzabad, for example, Forsat encountered two nomads en route, mentioning they were talking in Turkish with each other (*bā ham torkī sokhan mīgoftand*) and reasons that they were about to steal their horses and stuff. Then, he recounts that he could somehow prevent them from stealing their horses and stuff and draws pictures of the Dokhtar Castle (*Qal'e-ye Dokhtar*) and the mountain on which the castle is located.<sup>330</sup>

Forsat's autobiography, albeit written toward the end of his life, provides interesting examples regarding his opinions on Turkic Iranians. For instance, Forsat recounts an event he witnessed in Shiraz. A certain Ghazanfar, a grim, fraud and full of tricks, claims to be the owner of a donkey, which, in fact, was recently bought by another person in the bazaar. As in the case of those Turks with whom he met in Firuzabad, Forsat again notes that Ghazanfar's son was petting the donkey in his Turkish dialect (*bā lahjah-ye torkī*).<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:190-91.

<sup>330</sup> Forsat, *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, 1:198.

<sup>331</sup> Forsat-al-Dowlah Shīrāzī, *Dīvān-e Forsat*, 86. (the page number is falsely written as 89 instead of 86.)

Another example is Mīrzā Jahāngīr Khān, a scholar of the Qashqāyī origin, with whom Forsat met in Isfahan. By emphasizing Mīrzā Jahāngīr Khān's Qashqāyī origin and how he improved himself both spiritually and scholarly, Forsat appeals to the Qashqāyī tribe, whom he addresses as the glorious tribe (*īl-e jalīl*):

O savage people, don't you have any shame? One of you gave the ignorance up, chose the path of knowledge, and reached such a position (*maqām*), and the rest of you attired the garment of injustice, busy of banditry (*rāhzanī*)?! The former has the book of judgment [probably a metaphor for the holy book], the latter holds the stick of grief, the former rejuvenates the people with his advice, the latter sheds the blood of the people with these disgraceful acts, the former dresses the people with the garment of humanity, and the latter takes the garment of man and woman off. Behold the distance of the Path, from where to where?<sup>332</sup>

A last example is from his official correspondence (figure 18) with the Ministry of Education (*Vezārat-e Ma'āref*) when he was serving as the director of Education in the Fars region after the Constitutional Revolution. Forsat informs his interlocutor about his activities:

Besides, I founded a mobile school (*madrasayī sayyār*) for the Arab tribe, [hoping that], perhaps with the lapse of time, the children of the tribe, i.e., the thief children, might become civilized through the study of particular books. According to some prudent people, I split the moon<sup>333</sup>. In any case, if this school makes progress, we will have achieved a goal.<sup>334</sup>

As I have explained in the first chapter, the anti-Arab stance became one of the tenets of mainstream Iranian nationalism in the Qajar period. It is also important to note that the Turkic people's political domination started to be seen as a sign of shame by the Iranian nationalists. Thus, mainstream nationalism has not been at ease with the non-Persian speakers in the country since then. In the case of Forsat, however, we do not see any trace of racial humiliation for the Arabs or the Turks. It is true that while he recounts the harmful acts of the tribes and brigands of the Fars region, he emphasizes their ethnicity. Contrary to the highly negative image of the

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<sup>332</sup> Forsat-al-Dowlah Shīrāzī, *Dīvān-e Forsat*, 94-95.; The last sentence is a famous verse by Hāfez-e Shīrāzī (*Salāh-e Kār Kojā vo Man-e Kharāb Kojā / Babīn Tafāvot-e Rah Kaz Kojāst tā ba Kojā*), and here, I rely on Henry Wilberforce Clarke's translation. *The Divan-i Hafiz*, trans. H. Wilberforce Clarke (Maryland, Ibeex Publishers, 2007), 51.

<sup>333</sup> Splitting of the Moon is an allusion to a miracle of the Prophet Muhammad. In this context, it points out the difficulty or the significance of the task.

<sup>334</sup> NLAI-297-038973, 1328 (1910).

tribal population of Iran in Forsat's writings, including *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, Forsat does not share the racist position of the nationalist intellectuals. The urban bias against tribal manners and security problems caused by the tribes across the Fars region seems more probable cause for Forsat's negative view of nomads, who were generally Turkic around Shiraz. Moreover, one may also assume that Forsat sided with the central state authority in Iran, which would try very hard to subjugate the tribes throughout the Qajar period. To demonstrate the Qajar central authority's opinion of the tribes, Mohammad Taqī Khān Hakīm's description of the Bakhtīyārī tribe is useful:

If a strong state were created, the reprisal of law would spread among the tribes and in the mountains, places that are now far from the manners and culture of the cities... it can be said that they, and other tribes, have never been fully under the rule of any sultan. In their impenetrable and lofty mountains, they still live according to their own old customs and ways. They pay little heed to the central government and its representatives, only providing some soldiers and paying scant taxes for the portions of land they hold in the foothills.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Quoted in Arash Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 192.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Interest in ancient history increased due to political, intellectual, and social reasons in Qajar Iran. The emergence of nationalist thought and nationalist historiography paved the way for the theme of ancient Iran to enter the political discourses of Iranian modernism. The perception of ancient Iran in Iranian nationalism has been studied by many scholars. Although there are many useful scholarly works, certain texts were regarded as having primary significance, and the standard history of the making of modern Iranian identity was constructed upon these sources. Other sources were either ignored by scholars or mistakenly considered to be in line with mainstream accounts. In this thesis, I aimed to highlight Forsat-al-Dowlah's *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s different vision for Iran's ancient history. I also argued that even though the ancient history of Iran gained significance in defining Iranian identity, Islam remained one of the main components of Iranian identity in Forsat's thought, unlike mainstream nationalism.

In the introduction of this thesis, I proposed that ancient history gained a new connotation in nineteenth-century Iran based on the newly emerged modern nationalism. I have contended, by considering the rich secondary literature on ancient revivalism and nationalism, that considerably more research has been conducted on the texts that are regarded as the precursors of mainstream nationalism in Iran, except in a few notable examples that inspired me for this thesis. Although I acknowledge that defining the central tenets of mainstream nationalism can be challenging, if not impossible, I found Zia-Ebrahimi's conceptualization of mainstream nationalism as "dislocative nationalism" useful. Without rejecting the long-standing impact of the

texts on the formation of modern Iranian identity and academic and popular discourses on ancient Iran, offer an examination of texts that do not fall into this category to discover alternative conceptions or visions concerning ancient history in the Qajar period. In this regard, I introduced *Āsār-e 'Ajam* as a Qajar text dealing with ancient Iran, but, at the same time, it does not fall into the category of mainstream nationalism.

In the second chapter, I have analyzed the texts written about ancient Iran in the pre-constitutional period by mainstream or dislocative nationalists. By looking at these sources, I aimed to show how the pre-Islamic period was instrumentalized to serve the ideological needs of dissident intellectuals. I focused on three notable figures, Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndzādah Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, and Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī and asserted the exaltation of pre-Islamic Iran, the negative view of Islam as a religion and culture, and anti-Arab discourses are common subjects in their writings. Ākhūndzādah's and Kermānī's writings may reflect the Russian and Ottoman influence on Iranian modernity, as the former spent most of his life in tsarist Russia as an official translator holding a military rank, and the latter lived ten years in Istanbul. Ākhūndzādah was more like an intellectual father for Iranian nationalism, as nobody wrote such bold statements against the Qajar political and religious establishment and put such an explicit emphasis on the concept of the Iranian nation, together with occasional references to the concept of Islamic or Shiite nation. Kermānī, who was hailed as the "martyr of freedom" by a modern author<sup>336</sup>, was the radical figure who racialized Ākhūndzādah's thoughts. Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā wrote the first Persian history book which considered Iranian history distinct from Islamic history and integrated pre-Islamic history into its narrative.

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<sup>336</sup> 'Abdolrafi' Haqīqat, "Shahīd dar Rāh-e Āzādī: Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī Navīsandah-ye Āgāh va Tavānā-ye Dovrah-ye Qājārīyyah (1279-1314)," *Gozārash* 169, no. 8 (Āzar 1384/2005): 52-54.

In the third chapter, I provided a summary of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Then, I analyzed the patronage ties behind the production of the book, arguing that various Parsi and Qajar political and ideological agendas were at work in its making. In addition, I explored *Āsār-e 'Ajam*'s generic and literary characteristics. In the last section of the chapter, I discussed the publication and reception of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. Overall, this chapter aims to shed light on some technical details about *Āsār-e 'Ajam* and serves as an introduction to my analysis in the fourth chapter.

In the fourth chapter, I aimed to put forth the hitherto unexplored aspects of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. This chapter first deals with some ancient sites and ruins that Forsat visits, such as Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, Pasargad, etc. Forsat developed a versatile approach vis-à-vis ancient sites throughout *Āsār-e 'Ajam*, which means describing ruins, interpreting images in the sites, providing translations of the inscriptions, relating popular stories, and deducing moral lessons from what he went through during his journeys. In the later parts of this chapter, I dealt with the concept of Iran and the representation of non-Persian people in *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. I also questioned the existence of national context in the text.

All in all, this thesis aims to be a humble attempt to demonstrate the plurality of the visions that existed for ancient Iran and modern Iranian identity in the Qajar period. Thus, it challenges the teleological evaluation of Iranian nationalism, which posits that secular nationalist intellectuals in the nineteenth century set the standard principles of Iranian nationalism and represented the sole position among Iranian literati. I acknowledge that their ideas became more popular after the Constitutional Revolution and formed the ideological basis of the Pahlavi regime. However, this should not prevent scholarship from recognizing alternative or marginalized visions for Iran's ancient past and identity in the Qajar period.

## CHAPTER 6

### EPILOGUE

My conviction regarding the significance of identity and a sense of belonging for a country's long-term prosperity and stability has solidified throughout my academic studies and observations of Iran, Turkey, and other Middle Eastern societies. It is commonplace to say that various internal conflicts can potentially divide societies into irreconcilable factions, especially in the context of identity politics. Ethnicity, religion, and sectarianism are just a few factors that may lead to, at best, multicultural societies or, at worst, highly polarized ones, and in some cases, countries torn by civil war. Therefore, if ethnic, religious, and denominational differences are not integrated within a broader pluralistic and inclusive national culture, they could become significant sources of internal strife. Conversely, countries that foster an inclusive citizenship culture will likely experience less political and social polarization.

I argue that the constructed binary between pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran has been a pivotal point of controversy in Iranian society since the advent of modernity and secular nationalism. More specifically, the debate over which period can represent the Iranian self and its past is central to political and intellectual polarization. Although this controversy emerged during the Qajar period, it became more entrenched in Iranian society during the Pahlavi era, driven by state-sponsored secular nationalism and the expansion of modern education systems. In this context, the famous 2500-year Celebrations of the Persian Empire in 1971 marked the zenith of pre-Islamic Iran's ideological importance to the Shah and the Pahlavi elites. Indeed, Shojā' al-Dīn Shafā, a prominent cultural and political figure who also

played a significant role in the organizing of the 1971 Celebrations, later admitted that one of the event's objectives was to position the monarchy, rather than Islamic factions, as a foundational element of Iranian national identity.<sup>337</sup> Thus, the imagery and legacy of ancient Iran were integral to Pahlavi identity politics.

The early days of the Iranian Revolution revealed the contending visions for Iran's ancient and Islamic pasts. There were rumors that Sādeq Khalkhālī, a zealot cleric, intended to destroy Persepolis with revolutionary mobs connected to him during the heydays of the Revolution. He also authored a pamphlet titled *Kūrūsh-e Dorūghīn vah Janāyatkār* (Cyrus the Liar and the Murderer) following the 1971 Celebrations, challenging the image of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty, as a virtuous and tolerant leader. Although Persepolis was not destroyed, the new Islamic regime regarded anything related to the monarchy and Iran's ancient past as ideological distortions of the ancien régime, aimed primarily at undermining Iran's Shiite-Islamic legacy. Therefore, secular Iranian nationalism was denied and equated with the "Westoxication" (*Ghārbzadagī*)<sup>338</sup> of intellectuals and society, leading to a halt in archaeological research in Iran for at least a decade.<sup>339</sup> The 1990s saw a kind of revival of Iranian nationalism, including a renewed emphasis on the pre-Islamic period. Iranian presidents' visits to Persepolis, from the late 1980s until the late Ebrāhem Ra'īsī, illustrate the Islamic regime's balancing efforts in the definition of Iranianness.<sup>340</sup> Nonetheless, the contrast between the

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<sup>337</sup> Robert Steele, *The Shah's Imperial Celebrations of 1971*, 110.

<sup>338</sup> The concept *Ghārbzadagī* was first introduced by the Iranian thinker Ahmad Fardīd but popularized after the famous literary figure Jalāl al-e Ahmad's book carrying the same title. For its English translation, see Jalal Al-i Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West*, trans. R. Campbell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984).

<sup>339</sup> Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran," 70-71.

<sup>340</sup> "Ebrāhem Ra'īsī vah Ro'asā-ye Comhūrī kah bah Takht-e Jamshīd Raftand," BBC Farsi, October 14, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-58915132>.

Islamic-Iranian nationalism of the new regime and secular-monarchical Iranian nationalism of the Pahlavi regime is unmistakable.<sup>341</sup>

The tension between Islamic and secular Iranian nationalisms remains unresolved. The unofficial Cyrus the Great Day, observed by Iranian nationalists on October 29, highlights the ongoing conflict between these nationalisms in Iran. The recent politicization of this unofficial commemoration can be seen as a continuation of the Imperial Celebrations of 1971. Iranian security forces often prohibit gatherings at Persepolis on this significant day for secular Iranian nationalism.<sup>342</sup> Additionally, the recent surge in monarchism, considered a potential alternative to the post-Islamic regime, along with the accompanying nostalgia for a 2500-year strong monarchy, underscores the divergent perspectives on Iran's past, present, and future.

For those Iranians uneasy with Islam and seeking an alternative source of identity, Iran's pre-Islamic legacy has been the strongest alternative since the nineteenth century. Although partly chronicled by non-Iranian sources, Iran's long, documentable history provides a solid foundation for this effort. Ironically, the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, intended to make Iranian society more Islamic, have intensified the debate over whether Islam truly represents Iranian values or national culture.

As opposed to the contending visions for Iran's ancient and Islamic past mentioned above, Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzī's approach was reconciliatory. That being said, I did not claim that his *Āsār-e 'Ajam* was a response to the emerging

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<sup>341</sup> Islamic-Iranian nationalism is a useful conceptualization by Kamran Scot Aghaie to explain the phenomenon of religious nationalism in Iran. Kamran Scot Aghaie, "Islamic-Iranian Nationalism and Its Implications for the Study of Political Islam and Religious Nationalism," in *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 181-204.

<sup>342</sup> "Iranians Barred from Marking Cyrus Day by Visiting His Tomb", Iran International, October 29, 2021, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/20211029093020>.

mainstream nationalism in Iran, as the contending visions for Iran's past had yet to crystallize. Forsat was more interested in imparting moral lessons to his audience than inculcating ideological tenets. Beyond its literary, artistic, and scholarly value, what makes *Āsār-e 'Ajam* a unique example is that it does not narrate Iran's ancient and Islamic history as a story of tension, as the mainstream nationalism and nationalist historiography have done since the nineteenth century. I do not regard most of Forsat's methodological and epistemological tools as applicable to interpreting pre-Islamic Iran today. Such an expectation would be an injustice to Forsat himself, as once seemed solid, the most advanced methodologies and approaches of nineteenth-century humanities have been subject to criticism and replaced by recent conceptual, intellectual, and ideological perspectives. Nevertheless, Forsat's inclusive vision might inspire contemporary Iranians to abandon a strictly binary view of their historical past.

To conclude, Setrag Manoukian's remark that the Iranian past is depicted in *Āsār-e 'Ajam* neither as a complete break nor as a simple continuity holds firm.<sup>343</sup> Overall, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* serves as a reminder that the development of Iranian modernity and the emergence of modern Iranian identity did not follow a predetermined path and were subject to various contingencies.

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<sup>343</sup> Setrag Manoukian, "The Ruin of Others", 212.

APPENDIX

FIGURES

Sculpture at Sapur.

شاپور شاه

نقش شاه شاپور



Pt. VII. A gigantic statue  
of Shapur I.

نقش شاه شاپور  
شاپور شاه  
باصفت: ۱۳۰۰

Figure 1. The statue of Shapur I. (From Kiash, K. D, *Ancient Persian Sculptures: Or the Monuments, Buildings, Bas-Reliefs, Rock Inscriptions* (Bombay, Education Society's Press, 1889), 61.)

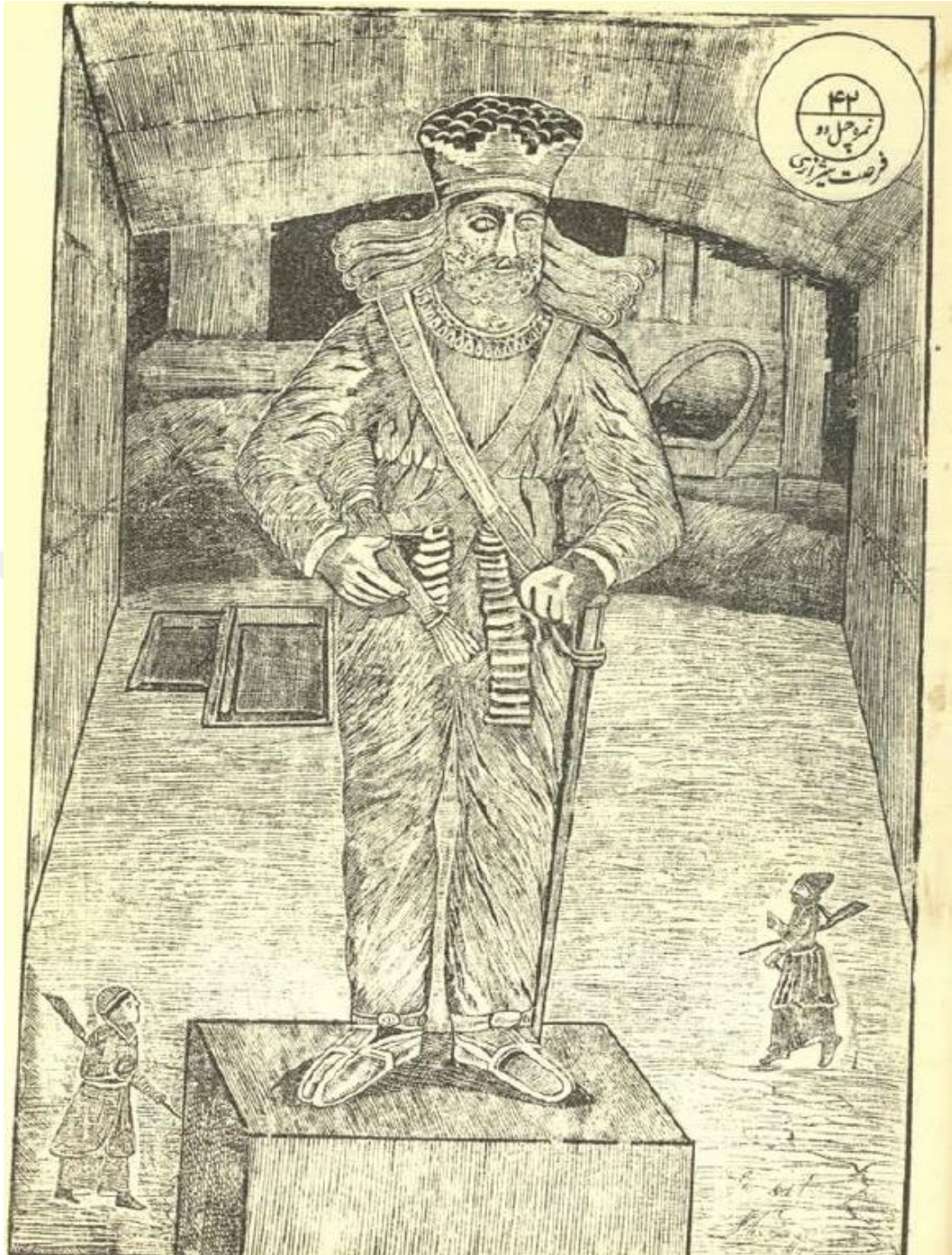
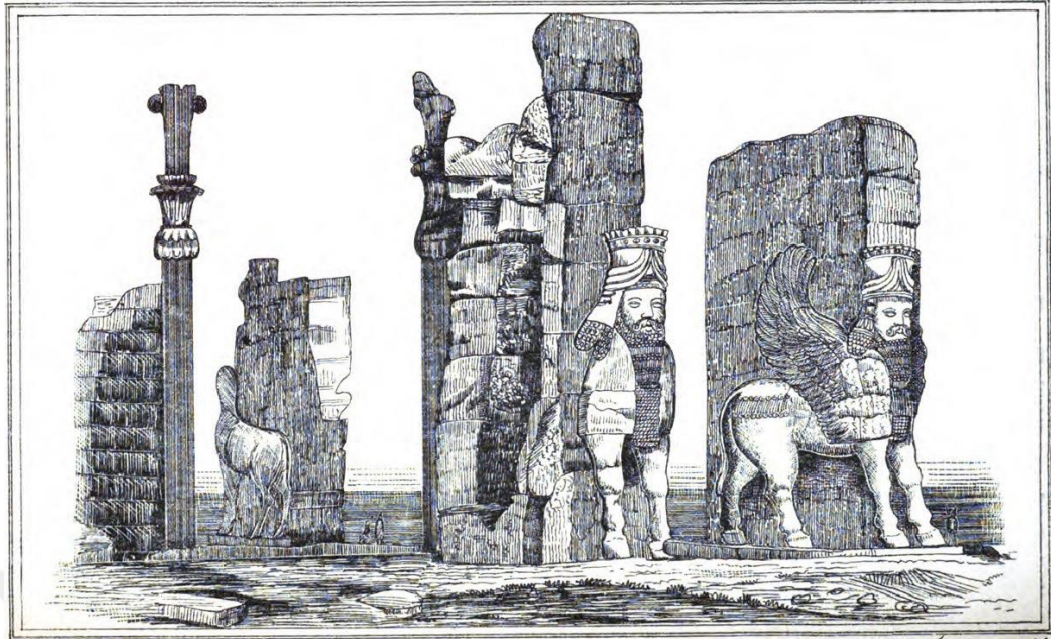


Figure 2. The statue of Shapur I. (From Mohammad Nasir Mirzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzi, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 296.)



Pt. XIX. Ruined portal of Xerxes.

پرسپولیس نامی ناسی پامبلی لاجا. ص ۱۷۷.

پرسپولیس یا تخت جمشید

Figure 3. The ruined portal of Xerxes. (From Kiash, K. D, *Ancient Persian Sculptures: Or the Monuments, Buildings, Bas-Reliefs, Rock Inscriptions* (Bombay, Education Society's Press, 1889), 78.)

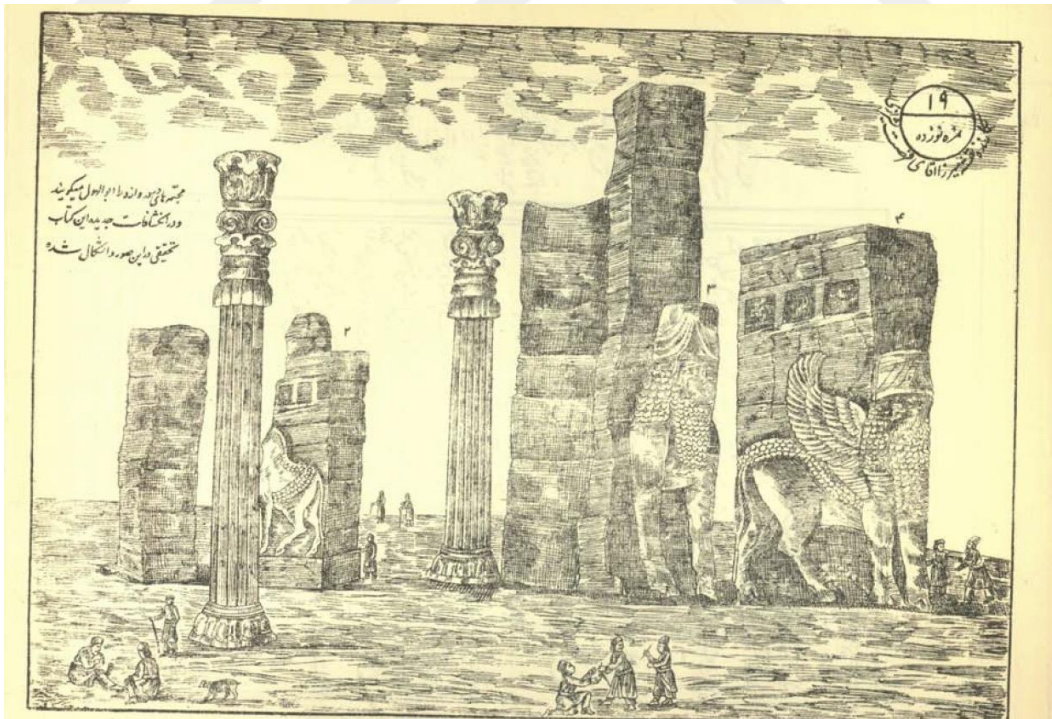


Figure 4. The ruined portal of Xerxes & The Sphinx figure at the entrance of the gate of all lands. (From Mohammad Nasir Mirza Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzi, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 160.)

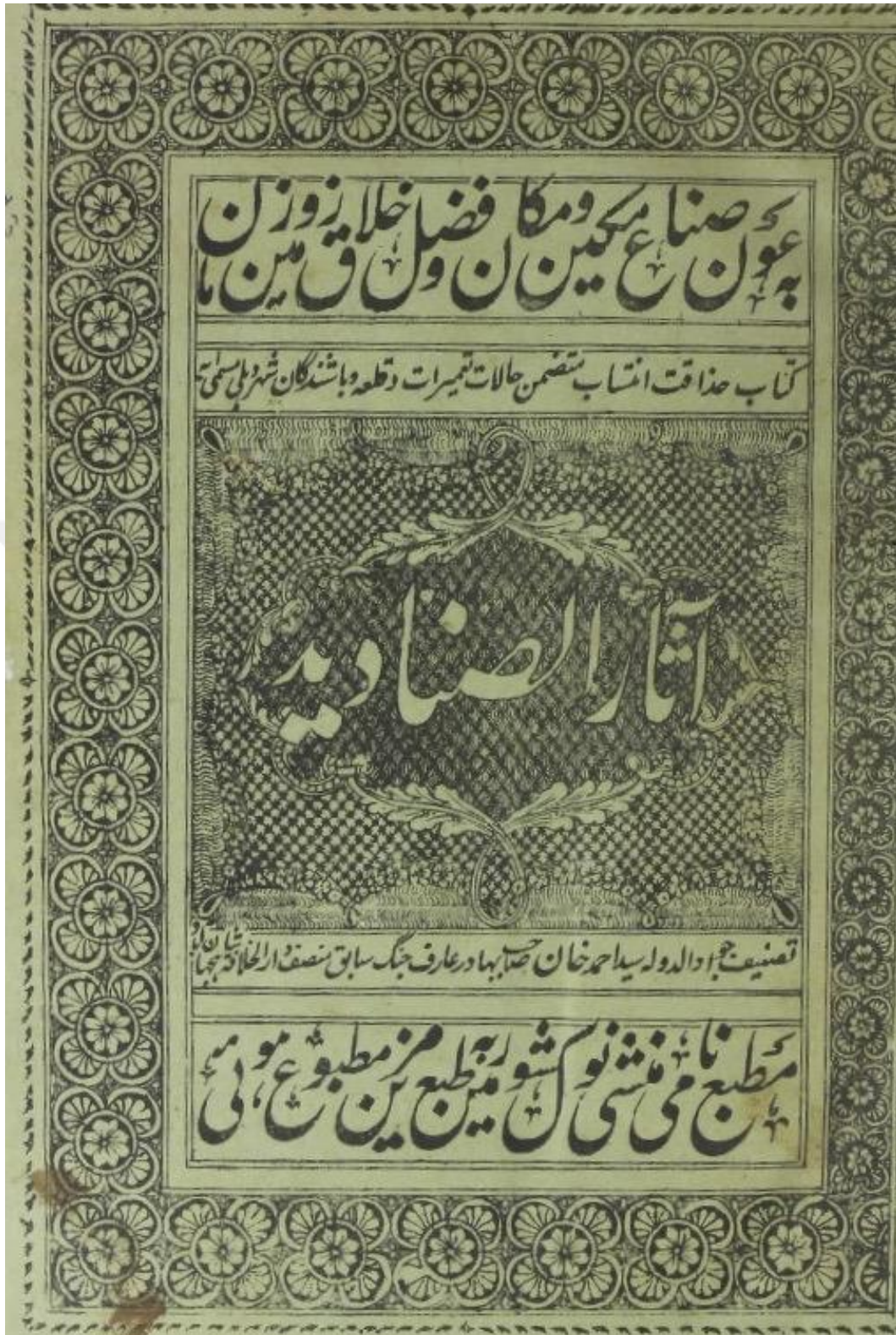


Figure 5. The front page of *Āsār el-Sanādīd*. (From Sayyīd Ahmad Khān, *Āsār el-Sanādīd* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1900?))

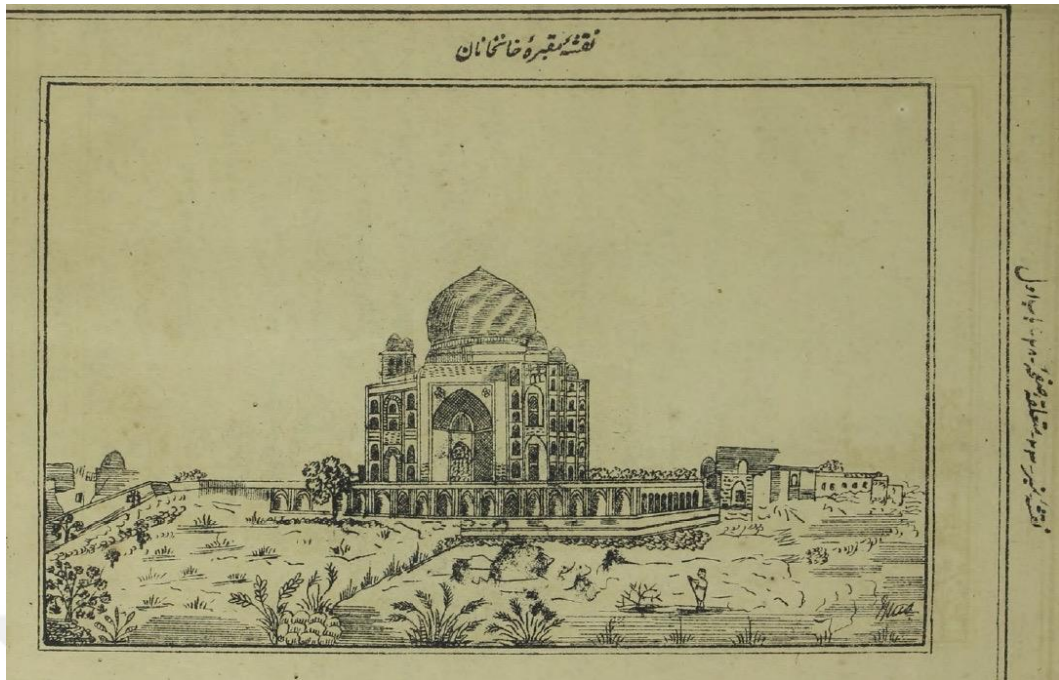


Figure 6. A drawing of a tomb in Delhi. (From Sayyīd Ahmad Khān, *Āsār el-Sanādīd* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1900?), 29.)

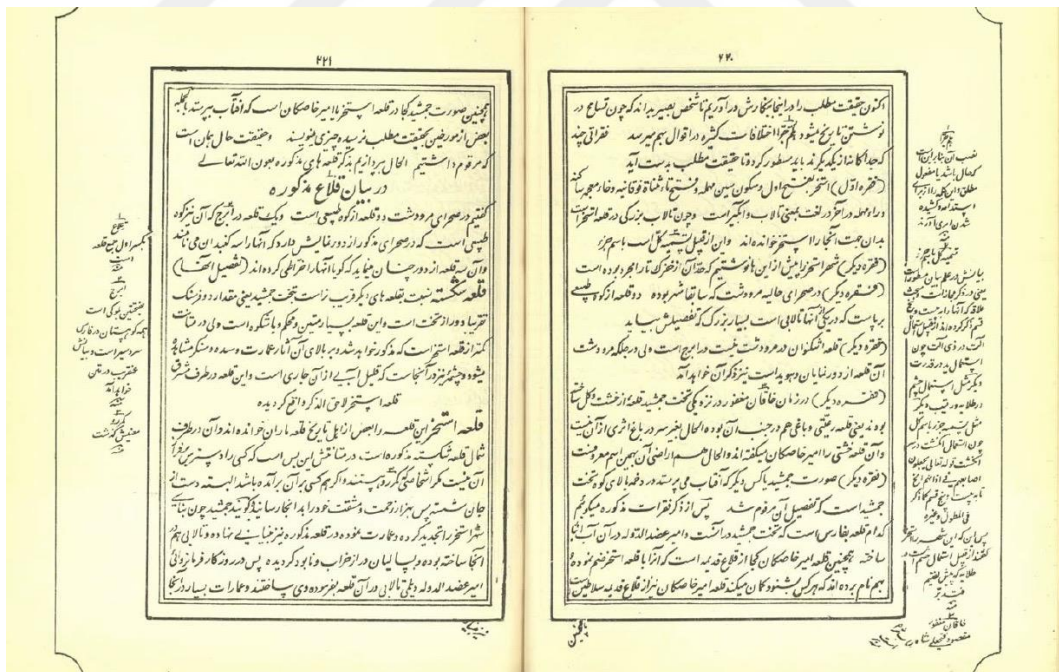


Figure 7. A typical page layout of *Āsār-e 'Ajam*. (From Mohammad Nasir Mirzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosayni-ye Shīrāzi, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 220-221.)

میں سے یہ بھی ایک نشانی ہے۔ یہ دروازہ عظمت و شان میں بہت عقول ہے۔ تمام شہر کا راستہ بنا ہوا ہے لیکن روکار سنگ سب کی ہے اس دروازہ پر دالان اور حجرہ اور شہن بہت خوبصورت خوبصورت بنے ہوئے ہیں اور اب اس میں جیلخانہ کے سپاہی رہتے ہیں۔ اگرچہ کسی تاریخ کی کتاب سے نہیں تحقیق ہو سکتا کہ یہ دروازہ کس بادشاہ کے عہد میں بنا۔ لیکن ایسا خیال کیا جاتا ہے کہ ہمایوں کے عہد میں میراٹھ کے ساتھ بنا ہوگا اور ایسا ہی لوگوں میں مشہور بھی ہے۔ اس مقام پر پھر اس دروازے کے اور کچھ نشانی برانی دلی کی باقی نہیں اور اسی دروازہ کے پاس جیلخانہ ہے

### جیلخانہ

یہ جیلخانہ حقیقت میں سرا ہے۔ جبکہ برانی دلی ویران ہوتی گئی۔ یہ سرا بھی ویران ہوئی یہاں تک کہ عالمگیر ثانی اور شاہ عالم کے وقت میں بالکل ویران ہو گئی تھی جبکہ انگریزوں کی عملداری میں صاجیان لاشان نے جیلخانہ کے لیے اس سے بہتر کوئی عمارت نہ دیکھی اور اس سرا کی مرمت و ترمیم کی کر کے جیلخانہ بنایا اس سرا کا دروازہ بہت بلند اور زیبا عمارت ہے اور اس پر ایسے عقول مکان بنے ہوئے ہیں کہ جیلخانہ کا داروغہ آئین اچھی طرح سے بفرغت رہتا ہے۔ اسی کے پاس دو تین برس سے انگریزوں نے شہر کو ایک بنا جیلخانہ بنایا ہے اور دوسری طرف اسپتال بنائی ہے۔ غرض کہ اب اس میں جو ایک مسافر خانہ تھا بند ہو گیا ہے۔ اور وہ کچھ بھرتے ہیں۔ چند روز سے اسی جیلخانہ کے میدان میں قصاص لینے کو جگہ تجویز ہوئی اور اب جس کسی کو پھانسی ملتی ہے اسی میدان میں ملتی ہے اللہ حافظ نامہ کلیات الدینا و الآخرة

### مندیان

یہ ایک عمارت تھی عجیب نیچے تو مکانات در در سے بنے ہوئے تھے اور اوپر چاروں کونوں پر چار برجیاں تھیں اور ایک بیچ میں برجی تھی حقیقت تو یہ ہے کہ کچھ نہیں معلوم ہوتا کہ یہ عمارت کیا چیز تھی اور کب بنی تھی اور کس نے بنائی تھی مگر عوام الناس میں یہ مشہور ہے۔ کہ کوئی نواب تھے کہ جناب حضرت غوث الاعظم کی جناب میں انکو نہایت عقدا تھا۔ اور ہندوستان میں بظہ بعض لوگوں نے یہ رسم نکالی ہے کہ ہر برس حضرت غوث الاعظم کی مندیان بھر کر تے ہیں یعنی کچھ بیچوں کی ایک برجی اونچی سی بنا کر اور کاندھ سے منڈھکر

Figure 8. A typical page layout of *Āsār el-Sanādīd*. (From Sayyīd Ahmad Khān, *Āsār el-Sanādīd* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1900?), 50.)

Handwritten Persian text in a personal letter, written in a cursive style. The text is arranged in several columns, with some lines written vertically. The paper shows signs of age and wear.

Figure 9. A Personal letter by Forsat al-Dowlah Shīrāzī to an unknown person. (Courtesy of Sheyda Rahimi)

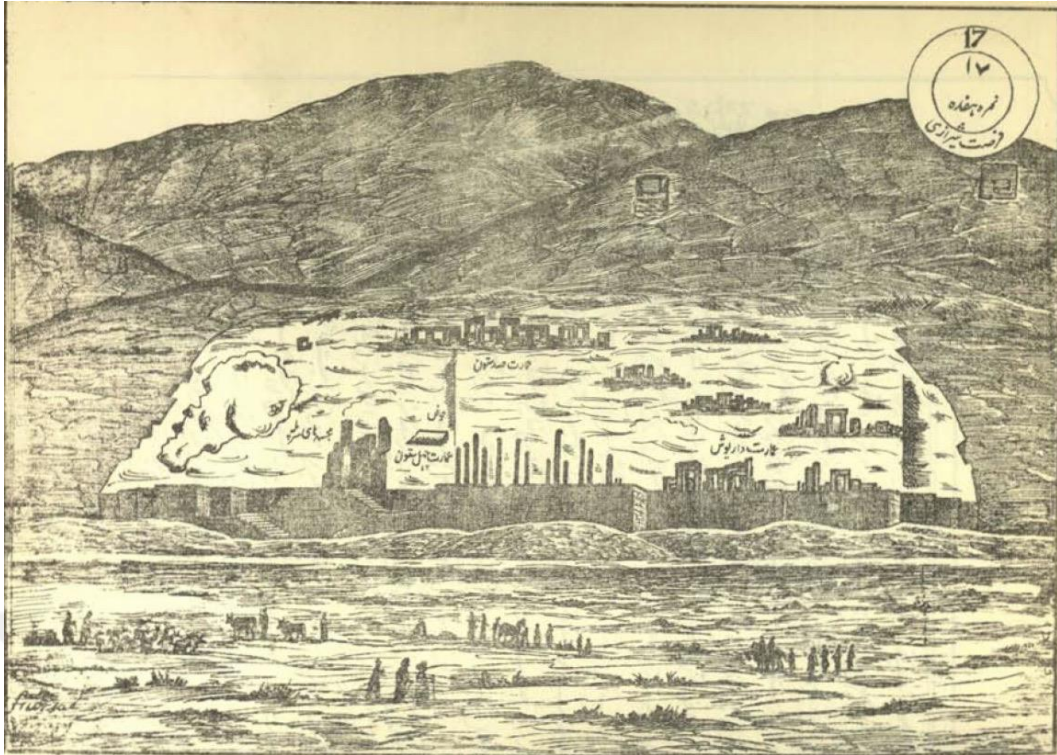


Figure 10. The bird's-eye view drawing of Persepolis. (From Mohammad Nasir Mīrzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 136.)

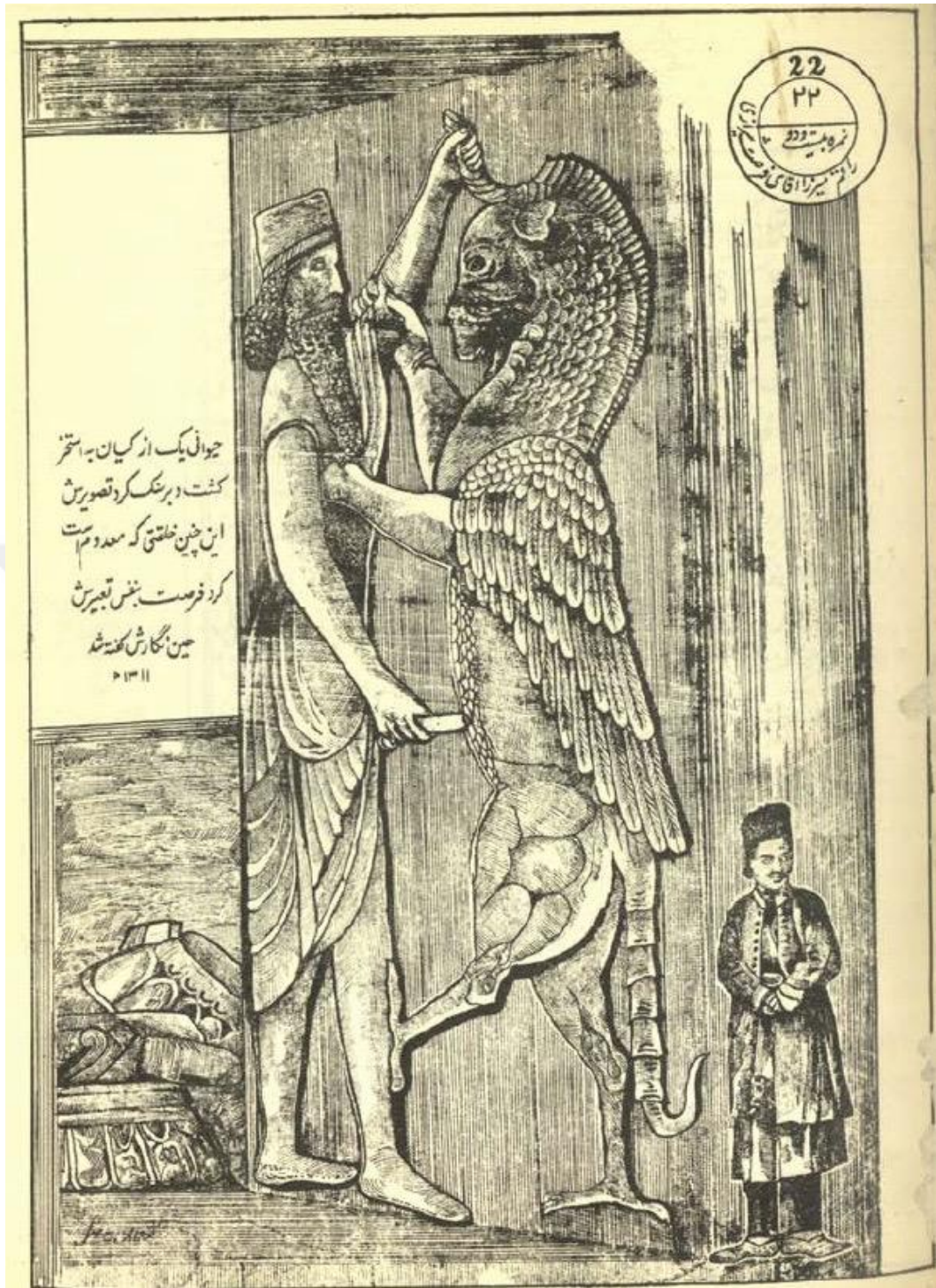


Figure 11. A drawing of the stabbed animal figure. (From Mohammad Nasir Mirza Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 176.)



Figure 12. A relief in *Naqsh-e Rostam*. (From Mohammad Nasir Mīrzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 204.)

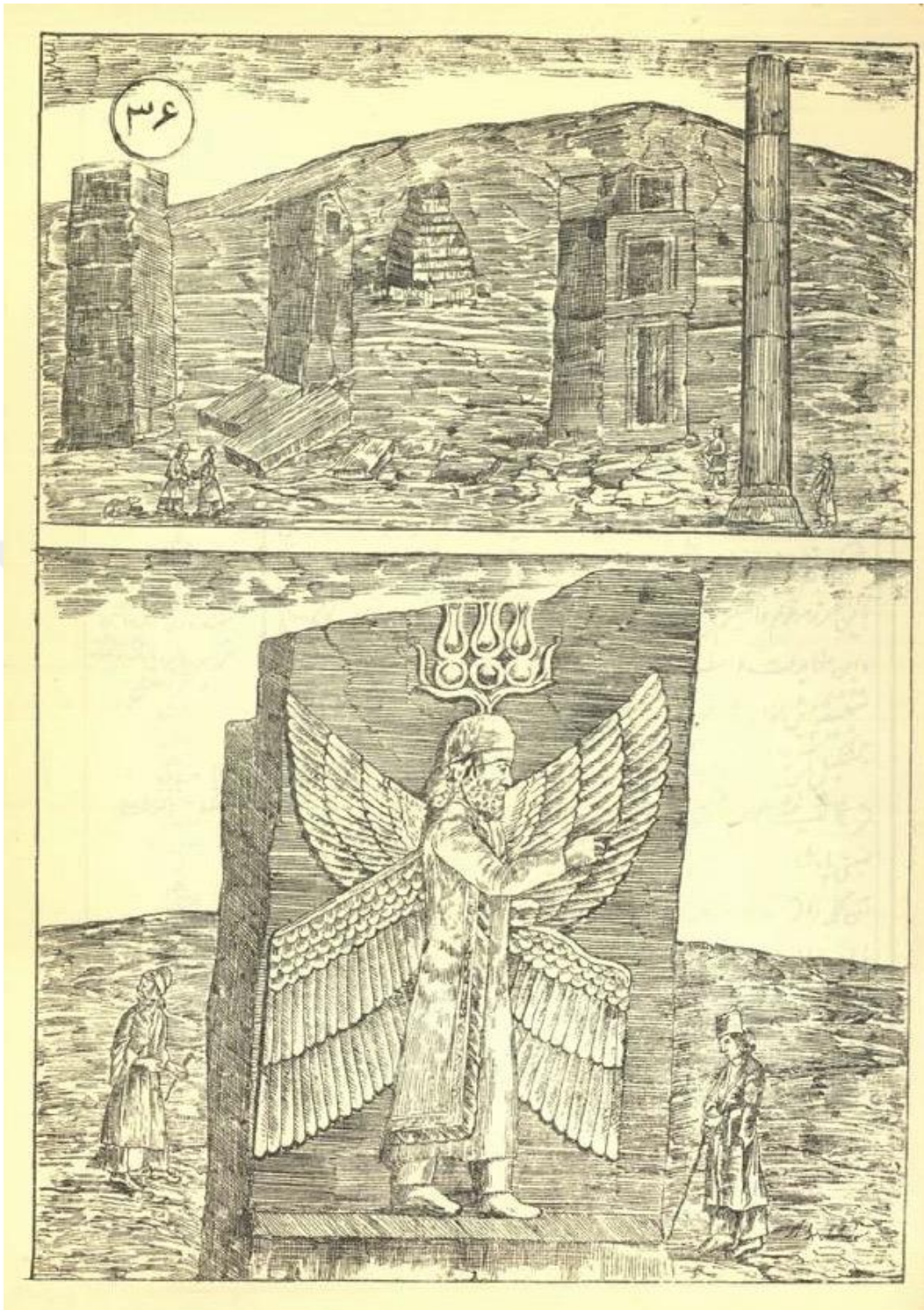


Figure 13. A drawing of the winged figure. (From Mohammad Nasir Mirza Aqa-ye Forsat Hosayni-ye Shirazi, *Asar-e Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Naderi, 1935), 232.)



Figure 14. Drawings of human figures in Barm-e Delak. (From Mohammad Nasir Mīrzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 14.)

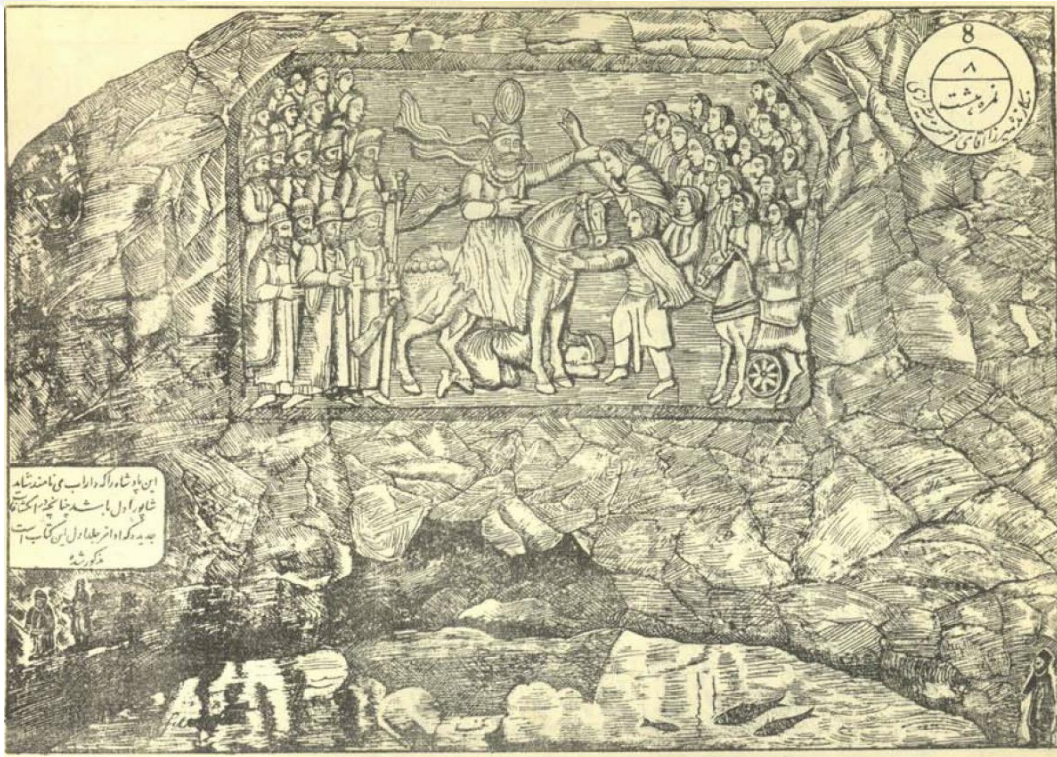


Figure 15. A drawing from the Darabjard region. (From Mohammad Nasir Mīrzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 96.)



Figure 16. A drawing of Fravashi. (From Mohammad Nasir Mīrzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 178.)

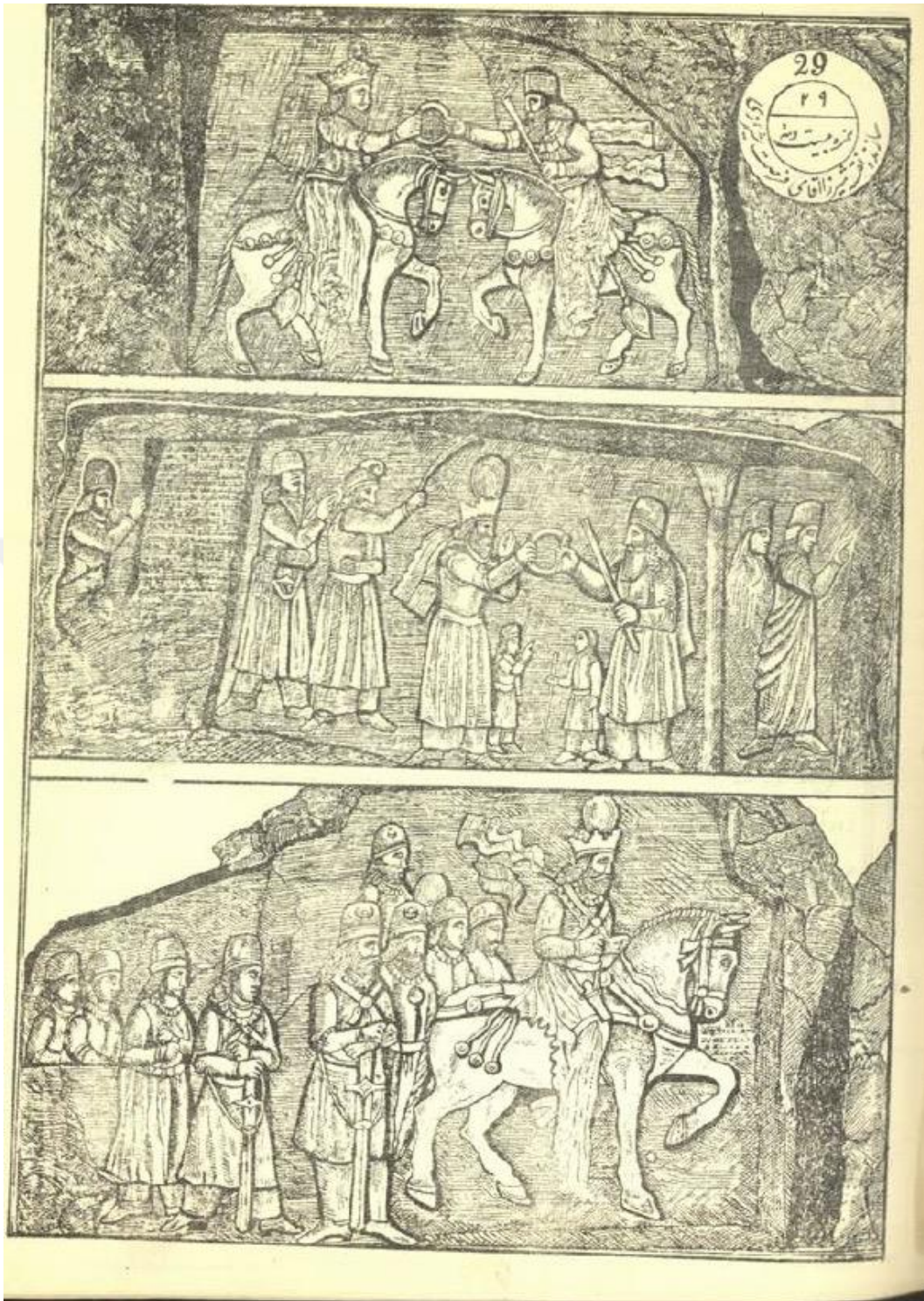


Figure 17. A drawing of an image in *Naqsh-e Rajab*. (From Mohammad Nasir Mirzā Āqā-ye Forsat Hosaynī-ye Shīrāzī, *Āsār-e 'Ajam* (Bombay: Matba'-ye Nāderī, 1935), 198.)

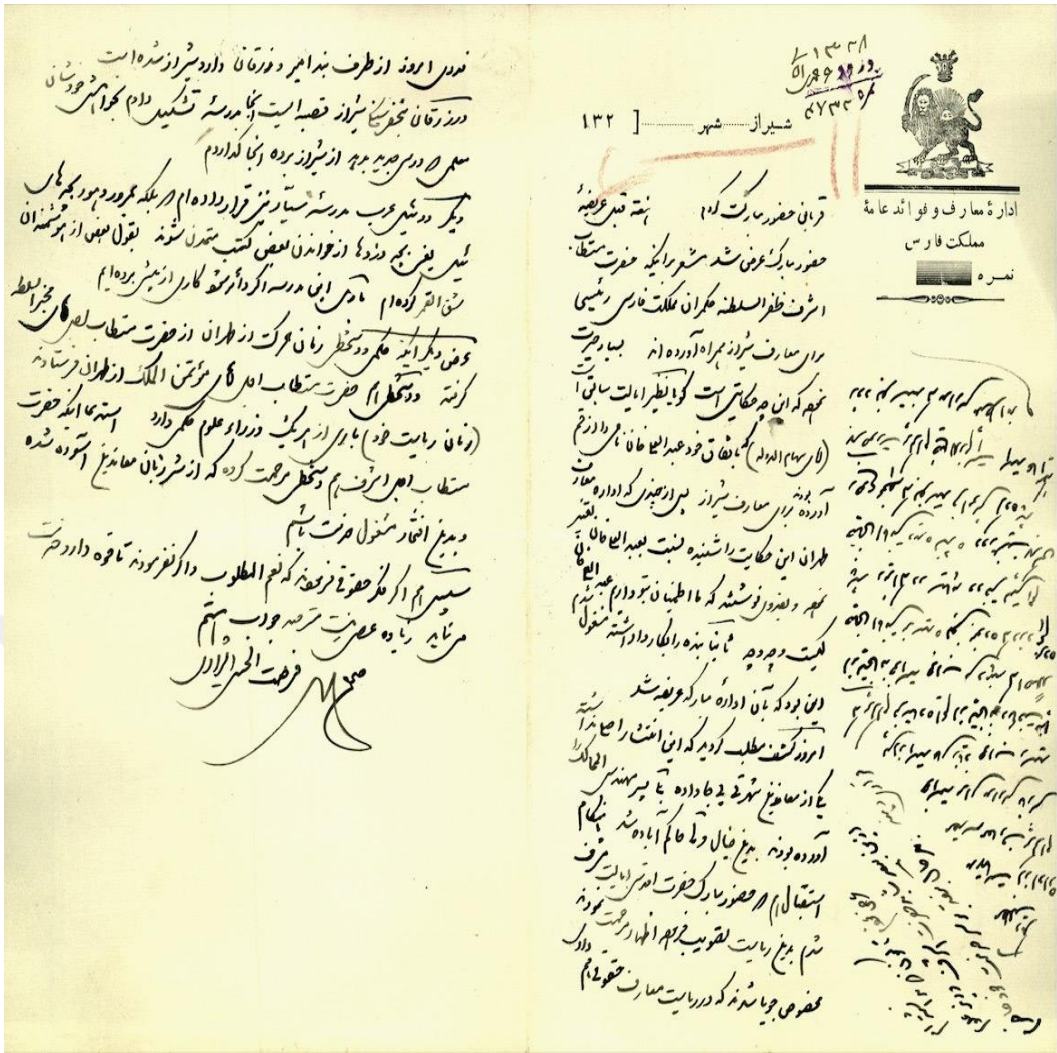


Figure 18. An example of Forsat's official correspondence with the Ministry of Education. (From The National Library and Archive of Islamic Republic of Iran (NLAI))

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