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The Ancient Iranian Perception of Cyrus the Great

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Abstract

While the only surviving legends of Cyrus the Great are found in Graeco-Roman sources, such sources ultimately speak to the varied views of Cyrus in Achaemenid Iran. Following a survey of the historical conditions leading to the rise of the Persian Empire under Cyrus and its consolidation under Darius, this article explores the characteristics of western Iranian historiography of the Median “state” and dawn of the Persian Empire in the Achaemenid period. This article argues that the Median and Iranian orientation of the Achaemenid Empire from the time of Darius provided the grounds for the infusing of Young Avestan myths and legends in western Iran. In particular, this article investigates parallels between stories of Cyrus the Great and those of Kauui Haosrauuah (Kay Khosrow); an investigation that points to the assimilation of the former with the latter that likely began in the Achaemenid period and later led to a two-way interaction of legends about these figures. In addition, this article also explores the Iranian tradition’s depiction of Alexander and his association with Kay Khosrow, which is similar to his association with Cyrus the Great in western sources and may further show Cyrus the Great’s assimilation with the Iranian tradition through his identification with Kay Khosrow.

Keywords: Cyrus the Great; Medes/Medians; Achaemenids; Alexander; Western Iran; oral Iranian tradition; oral Iranian epigraphy

Introduction

The Iranian view of Cyrus the Great is comprised of the Iranian world of the Persian Empire’s opinion of him in its own cultural milieu. However, such a discussion is hampered by the paucity of Iranian material on Cyrus, as his memory appears to have been forgotten in Iran by late antiquity, at the latest.¹ Indeed, apart from the brief mention of “Cyrus of our family” in the Behistun inscription (DB I.10), we only find detailed accounts of Cyrus—presumably coming from Iranian circles—in Greek and Latin sources. In order to extract the Iranian point of view of Cyrus from these sources, we must consider the Greek lens and its perspective of the Persian Empire.² However, teasing out the nature of the Iranian tradition and what it entailed in the Achaemenid period through this method is not easy. Apart from brief references in Avestan texts, Iranian legends only begin appearing in the much later Iranian national tradition of the early Islamic period,³ but the evolution of this tradition from Avestan times to late antiquity is not well understood. Thus, we must consider the chronological problems inherent in comparing Greek sources of Achaemenid period and the later Iranian tradition.

¹ Daryaei, “On Forgetting Cyrus.”

² Sancisi-Weerdenburg & Kuhrt, *Achaemenid History II*.

³ Yarshater, “Iranian National History.”

Several studies have focused on the idealized image of Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* as compared to the Iranian tradition. In his work, Christensen notes the similarity between Cyrus's speech in the *Cyropaedia* VIII.8 and the later Iranian tradition, concluding that the dying king's final message to his heir and court belongs to the Iranian tradition.⁴ In addition, the discursive tone of Cyrus's deathbed speech is reminiscent of the Naqš-i Rostam inscriptions of Darius on his tomb (DNA/DNb). As Sancisi-Weerdenburg shows, while all the elements of Cyrus's prayer and farewell address can be accounted for individually in the Greek, the group of topics coincides strikingly with the Naqš-i Rostam inscriptions.⁵ This grouping includes an acknowledgment of the king's divine benevolence, a justification of his personal right to rule, a retrospect of his time in power (both on morally and militarily), a care for the kingdom and dynasty's future, and a nod to the king's posthumous reputation. Furthermore, while the merits of the *Cyropaedia*'s model of exemplary conduct is also reflected in Xenophon's earlier writings (such as proficiency in hunting, domestic affairs, military ethos, philosophical education, and humane governance), Knauth also shows the striking resemblance between parts of the *Cyropaedia* and the later Iranian epic tradition.⁶ Cyrus's behavior, attitudes, and certain discourses in the *Cyropaedia* parallel those of kings in the *Šāh-nāma* and in the inscription at Darius's tomb (DNb). Knauth thus concludes that Xenophon built his tale of the exemplary monarch on a framework ultimately derived from the Iranian tradition in terms of the political philosophy of the Socrates school of thought. Therefore, the ahistorical Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia* reflects at least some aspects of the Iranian model of ruler.

In addition to the *Cyropaedia*'s reflections on the model of the ideal Iranian ruler, the divergent historiographies of Cyrus the Great by Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon also point to the Iranian tradition. In this vein, Christensen provides a general survey of Iranian motifs used in Greek writings on the Medo-Persian tradition.⁷ However, a detailed analysis of the accounts of Cyrus with respect to the Avestan tradition is lacking, which could provide further insight into the Iranian perception of Cyrus in the Achaemenid period. In what follows, we first give a contextual historical background to the rise of Cyrus the Great's Persian Empire with particular attention to the preceding Median confederacy. Following on, we then turn to the question of the Achaemenid Empire's Median and Iranian orientation. By presenting the argument this way, we are able to both view the figure of Cyrus in the Iranian context and evidence the need for this study's focus on Iranian historiography of the Achaemenid period. Finally, we consider the possible assimilation and interaction of Cyrus legends with the Avestan tradition; interactions that lingered far beyond the Achaemenids' demise and his disappearance from the Iranian historiography.

The Median Background

Cyrus's own reflection on his background reveals his Elamite affiliation, as he introduces himself as King of Anšan.⁸ While, in the Mesopotamian world, the use of this title might have had ideological reasons,⁹ Cyrus's appreciation for the Elamite tradition is also clear in the naming of his throne as Kuraš (or Cyrus)¹⁰ and his dressing in Elamite garb.¹¹ However, the Elamites play no role in any Greek rendition of Cyrus's rise to power. Instead, Medes are highlighted as the precursors to Persian power and Cyrus is depicted

⁴ Christensen, *Les gestes*, 127 f.

⁵ Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The Death of Cyrus," 468–471.

⁶ Knauth, *Das altiranische Fürstentum*.

⁷ Christensen, *Les gestes*.

⁸ Finkel, *The Cyrus Cylinder*, 110–111.

⁹ Zournatzi, "Early cross-cultural."

¹⁰ Tavernier, *Iranica*, 528–30; Henkelman, "Cyrus the Persian," 585.

¹¹ George, "Studies," 379–80.

as closely linked to the Median court. This representation elicits the “Median dilemma” that must be addressed in Greek sources, alongside analysis of the Median prominence.

It is not clear whether the people the sources call the Medes also took that name themselves,¹² as there is no trace of this ethnonym in the later Iranian tradition. Indeed, it seems the terms *Madāya* and *Māda* used in Assyrian and Old Persian sources originated from a toponym; a toponym that, by the Achaemenid period, came to refer to the whole of central Zagros and further east. In line with the highly fragmented political landscape in this region,¹³ it follows that the linguistic and (likely) ethnic landscape was also fragmentary. The usage of Median proper names points to a variety of local Iranian dialects or languages in northwestern Iran. While the so-called “Median” language might not be a homogenous and well-defined Iranian language,¹⁴ it is clear that the Iranian trait became dominant following the rise of a Median monarchy and confederacy, and until the dawn of the Achaemenid Empire.

Medes of Iranian decent seemingly dominated a confederation in northwestern Iran that led to the fall of the Assyrian Empire. The Babylonian “fall of Ninveh Chronicle”¹⁵ calls the Medes “Ummān-manda” (a destructive and untamable force with loose unifying leadership)¹⁶ led by Umakištar (Greek Cyaxares, Old Iranian Huvaxšōra). Importantly, two of the insurgents who rebelled against Darius the Great—the Median Fravartiš and the Sagartian Ciçantakhma—declared themselves descendants of Huvaxšōra (DB II.24, 33). Such claims indicate the legendary Median leader’s sphere of influence, as he founded a Median monarchy and larger confederation legitimized by his fame.¹⁷ Around six decades after the fall of Ninveh, the Babylonian chronicle of Nabonidus speaks of the Median ruler Ištumegu (Greek Astyages, Old Iranian *Ršti-vaiga) centered in Hagmatana/Ecbatana, but whose territory probably covered the central Zagros region. Thus, the Median monarchy likely founded by Huvaxšōra, and continued by his descendant(s), had a legacy in the Zagros region, especially in Iranian-speaking parts of Greater Media.

Furthermore, northern Iran also might have fallen within the Median kingdom’s sphere of influence (see below). This sphere bordered countries of Avestan provenance to the east, making the Avestan tradition’s diffusion into Media probable. Either way, the Median sphere of influence played prominently in the rise and consolidation of the Persian Empire.

The Rise of the Persian Empire in the Iranian Context

The Persian Empire’s foundation originated in Cyrus the Great’s initiative seeking to unify the heterogeneous local rulers of the Persian heartland. While his title—King of Anšan—indicates Cyrus’s desire to relate to the traditional dynastic locality,¹⁸ onomastic evidence attests to the likelihood that his dynasty was of Iranian decent (Strabo XV.3.6; Cyrus I’s son *Aryuka¹⁹). Moreover, Cyrus most probably found support among a powerful group of Persian nobles of Iranian decent, i.e., the Achaemenids, through a marriage alliance.²⁰ As he took a leading role in building alliances in the Persian heartland, Cyrus sought to expand his rule and form the world’s largest empire.

The first step of this expansion was apparently instigated by Astyages’s expedition to conquer Persia. According to the Nabonides Chronicle (II.1),²¹ Astyages mustered his army and

¹² Lanfranchi, “The Assyrian expansion,” 84.

¹³ Radner, “An Assyrian view.”

¹⁴ Rossi, “Elusive identities”; Rossi, “« ... how Median.”

¹⁵ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian*, 90–96.

¹⁶ Liverani, “The rise,” 7.

¹⁷ cf. Rollinger, “The Median Dilemma,” 341.

¹⁸ Potts, “Cyrus”; Stronach, “Cyrus.”

¹⁹ Tavernier, *Iranica*, 117.

²⁰ Waters, “Cyrus and the Achaemenids.”

²¹ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian*, 106.

marched against Cyrus for conquest. With his small army, however, Cyrus dispersed the vast Median horde and took Astyages, the Median king, captive (Sippar Cylinder I.29).²² In this context, we hear of other kings on the side of the Median king, which points to the Median confederacy's sphere of influence. Thus, at the time of Cyrus the Great, Astyages attempted to bring Persia within his sphere of influence, ushering the beginning of the Persian Empire.

Following the fall of Media, as suggested by Ctesias, Parthia and Hyrcania likely allied with Cyrus. Similarly, the Sakā people contributed to Cyrus's expedition against Croesus (*Persica* §4). Further, while Cyrus's activity in the east of Iran is not clear, he still probably campaigned against the Bactrians and Sakā (Herodotus, I.153, 177; cf. Ctesias, *Persica* §§ 2–3). Indeed, on his way to the Sakā, Cyrus received help from the Ariaspian in the Helmand River area (Arrian, III.27; cf. Curtius VII.3). On the same path, Cyrus may have also reached the country of Paropamisus in the HinduKush Mountain (Pliny, Natural History, VI.25), which was of Avestan significance. There are also hints of Cyrus establishing a cluster of garrison sites in the frontier zone of the middle Jaxartes River (Arrian IV.2.2; IV.3.1; Curtius VII.6.16, 19; Justin XII.5.12; Strabo XI.11.4). Apparently, securing East Iran's northern borders was one of Cyrus's strategic goals.

Cyrus likely faced his fate in his campaign against the Massagetae in the same landscape (Herodotus I.201–214). The Massagetae were nomadic people in the wide lowlands to the east of the Caspian Sea and southeast of the Aral Sea, between the Oxus and Jaxartes Rivers (Strabo, XI.8.6). They were probably neighbors of the Sogdians and in contact with the Chorasmians (Arrian IV.16–17; Curtius VIII.1.3–8; Strabo XI.11.8.8). The Massagetae may have even been defeated by Darius the Great (Polyaenus VII.11.6); hence they should be included in the Sakā Tigraxaudā.²³ The Massagetae may have also had subdivisions among themselves, which likely included the Derbices, who were neighbors at the very least (Strabo XI.8.8; Pliny VI.18.48). In Ctesias's account, when Cyrus waged his last campaign against the Derbices, the Sakā—led by King Amorges—came to his aid (*Persica* 29; Photius, Bibl. 72.7–8). Most probably, Ctesias invented this Amorges by confusing *Humarga with Haumavargā (Greek Amorgioi), the Persian designation of a Sakā group. A likely scenario, it was the continuous menace of nomadic raids in East Iran's northern borderlands that forced Cyrus to act, but the nomads defeated him using mobile war tactics.

In sum, it appears the Medes and their sphere of influence were central to the formation of the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great. In addition, Cyrus's concerns around the northern borders and the appointment of one of his sons as Lord of Bactria demonstrate East Iran's significance (Ctesias, *Persica* § 8). The importance of Iranian countries of the Persian Empire persisted under Darius and his successors.

The Median and Iranian Orientation of the Achaemenid Empire

The Behistun inscription appears to paint the image of Media during the Achaemenid Empire. The inscription's country list shows a Median bias, as Māda headed most of the lands in northern Iran, namely Armina, Katpatuka and Parθava (DB I.6; cf. presence of Medes in Anatolia, Herodotus I.72, 103; Parthian allegiance with Medes, Ctesias apud Diodorus II.34). Furthermore, the Behistun text also points to some form of relationship between the Medes, Varkāna and Parθava.²⁴ Hence, Media figures as a supra-regional entity reaching from eastern Anatolia to central-west Iran and farther east. Alongside the Behistun image of Media, we also have Greek legends signifying Median power. Against the historical reality, this agreement between sources indicates the Median orientation of the Achaemenid Empire. In fact, Darius even names the Medes—along with the Persians—as the Empire's

²² Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 417.

²³ Vogelsang, *The Rise*, 235.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 125; also, *Cyropaedia* I.1.4 implies the submission of the Hyrcanians to Astyages.

constituents *par excellence* (DB I.11, 12; DPg 1–2; Herodotus VIII.89), and the Achaemenid king took the “King of Persia and Media” title from the reign of Xerxes.²⁵ However, Darius’s reliance on loyal Medes (DB II.25; III.41) might have also played a role in this prominent representation; for instance, Taxmaspada’s support was crucial to Darius’s success (DB II.33). We should also note Darius’s pronouncement (DB I.13), that “neither Persian nor Mede nor anyone of our family” would act against the usurper. Aside from the Elamites, who were native to the imperial heartland, the Medes appear to be the only conquered people who attained high-ranking positions.²⁶ In this section, we attempt to see this Median bias within the broader Iranian context.

Along with other Persians, Darius’s Achaemenid family had an Iranian orientation, as personal names of either Gāθic origin or related to the Gāθic circle are widely attested.²⁷ Furthermore, the emphasis on AhuraMazdā in Darius’s inscriptions stands in contrast to the Elamo-Indo-Iranian dominant religious reality of the imperial heartland,²⁸ a manifestation of this orientation. Evidently, the Old Persian language used in Achaemenid inscriptions was written with an interdialectal koine that was likely comprehensible to at least western Iranians.²⁹ By the end of the Achaemenid period, Iranians from East Iran to parts of Persia and Media had a nearly common language (Strabo XV.2.8). Such a common language should have been a variety of Old Persian, as a sort of *lingua franca* for Iranians of the Persian Empire, and might trace its origins to the time of Darius.³⁰ The explicit adoption of the name “Ariya” (Iranian) for the language in the Behistun inscription attests to a conservative declaration of belonging to a common ethno-religious heritage. Further, this highlighting of Iranian heritage may also be an acknowledgment of Darius’s broader base among Iranian peoples, observable in the crisis following the fall of (false) Bardiya in Parthia, Bactria and Arachosia.³¹ Consequently, we can assume that the Medes of Iranian descent, along with other Iranians, received special attention from the Achaemenid administration.

Darius the Great relied on the Iranian elite—Persians and Medes of Iranian origin in particular—for the empire’s administration. As such, he likely sought a unifying banner under which all the Iranian elite could gather. We may note that the Medes were called “Arioi” (Iranians) by all people in ancient times (Herodotus VII.62). Acknowledging the ethnical heterogeneity of Greater Media in the first half of the first millennium BCE³² leads us to note that the Medians’ highlighted Iranian identity originally held true for eastern Medes (*Arizantoi*, Herodotus I.101). This ethnic character of Iranian identity, commensurate with the Avestan tradition, contrasts with the linguistic and religious nature of Iranian identity among early Persians.³³ Therefore, it is likely that the Avestan tradition reached the Medes at some point in the first half of the first millennium BCE (see further below).

During Darius’s reign, the Iranian identity in Achaemenid inscriptions also took on an ethnic character. Consequently, Darius introduces himself as Iranian, beyond being Persian, stressing the supremacy of Iranians over all the empire’s other ethnic origins.³⁴ Thus, the Iranian orientation of the Persian Empire likely started in Cyrus’s imperial construction was probably reinforced by events leading to Darius’s consolidation of imperial power. This Iranian bias points to a need to investigate the possible Avestan traits of the Median tradition practiced in the Achaemenid Empire.

²⁵ Tuplin, “Persians as Medes,” 256.

²⁶ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 81.

²⁷ See Cantera, “La liturgie longue.”

²⁸ Henkelman, “The Heartland Pantheon.”

²⁹ Rossi, “Elusive identities,” 320–1.

³⁰ Panaino, “ΟΜΟΓΛΩΤΤΟΙ.”

³¹ Waters, “Cyrus and the Achaemenids,” 98.

³² Zadok, “The Ethno-Linguistic Character.”

³³ Irannejad, “The Old Avesta.”

³⁴ Herrenschildt, “Désignation de l’empire,” 52–56.

Median Logos and Iranian Traits

As a prelude to the story of Cyrus the Great's rise to power, the Greek tradition details the Medes' early "history," beginning with the rule of Assyria in Upper Asia and the Medes' revolt against them (Herodotus I.95 ff., Ctesias, *Persica*, books I–VI Apud Diodorus 2.21.8; 28.8; 2.32.5; 34.1; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, books II–VI). Notably, it is quite possible that Herodotus's writings on the subject (Herodotus I.95) might have been derived from western Iranian sources that portrayed a continuum of Medo-Persian history. This account's verifiable names and clichés (e.g., Herodotus I.106) speak to its drawing on an oral tradition. Zournatzi shows that the Medo-Persian *logos* was meant to promote Cyrus's rightful accession to ruling Asia, as traced to the Assyrians.³⁵ The Persian bias of the narrative is best attributed to the ultimate Persian sources, reflecting the impact of the political rhetoric of Persia on accounts of its subjects' historical pasts. Yet, the Median *logos* has a special position in this context, as it also reveals the account's Avestan orientation.

The Median *logos* represents a combination of elements from the heroic oral sagas of Avestan heritage, as well as some elements of the Medes' actual history grouped in a continuous chronological dynastic framework.³⁶ The chronological framework and structuring by kings' reigns is likely a Greek product.³⁷ Indeed, the details of the emergence of the Median state could have been fashioned after the Greek political experience and/or contemporary Achaemenid practices.³⁸ Nonetheless, we can still contextualize some aspects of the rise of Median power within the Avestan tradition. While Herodotus's ahistorical account (I. 96–101) of the Median kingdom's emergence could have been partially drawn from the Greek model of state formation³⁹ within the story's Greek ideological context,⁴⁰ its core reflects a legendary tradition of the Medes. In this story, the insistence on justice and wisdom (also Aeschylus, *Persae* §§ 765–770) has direct parallels in Old Persian (DNb 3–11; 17–24). There is also correspondence between the Achaemenid kings' "eyes" and "ears" (Herodotus I.114; cf. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* VIII.2) on the one hand, and Deioces's spies and eavesdroppers (Herodotus I.100) on the other. The Achaemenid kingship might have seen the Medes as part of their own history, attributing elements of the Achaemenid phenomenology of domination to them.⁴¹ Notwithstanding, the role played by Miθra as the god of the contract, on the respect of which he supervises, bears resemblance to the concept of royalty depicted in the story of Deioces and later Achaemenid kingship institutions.⁴² In Mehr Yašt, Miθra has one thousand ears, ten thousand eyes and ten thousand spies (Yt. 10.7, 24, 60, 91, 141). In this respect, we can see that the western Iranian worldview evident in the story of Deioces assimilates the king with Miθra. The theophoric name *Miθra-ka of a Median city lord⁴³ bears witness to such a phenomenon. Thus, behind the parallels between the Median and Achaemenid kingship ideologies lay a series of possible adoptions of Avestan patterns of royalty and its legal function in defense of the order.

Some elements of the story of the mythical founder of the Median monarchy may have been borrowed from the Avestan tradition of primordial kings. Indeed, the processes that led to choosing Gayōmard⁴⁴ and Deioces (Herodotus I.96–98) are strikingly similar. Gayōmard is the hypostasis of the first human in the Avesta and king in the later Iranian tradition.⁴⁵ In addition, we hear of the construction of Ecbatana using seven concentric walls of white,

³⁵ Zournatzi, "The Median Logos."

³⁶ cf. Helm, "Herodotus," 81–88.

³⁷ Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The orality."

³⁸ Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "Was There Ever," 211.

³⁹ How & Wells, *A Commentary*, 104.

⁴⁰ See Meier et al., *Deiokes*.

⁴¹ Waters, "Cyrus and the Achaemenids," 91.

⁴² Panaino "Herodotus."

⁴³ apud Rossi, "« ... how Median," 484.

⁴⁴ al-Mas'ūdī, *Murij*, II: 106.

⁴⁵ Christensen, *Le premier*, I: 89; *Les gestes*, 113.

black, purple, blue, orange, silver, and golden battlements (Herodotus I.98). According to the lost Avestan Sūdgar Nask (*apud Dēnkard* IX.22.4), Kāy Ūs (Av. Kauui Usan), who was considered a primordial sovereign in the Avestan milieu,⁴⁶ constructed a sevenfold mansion in the Harburz Mountain: one of gold, two of silver, two of steel, and two of crystal.⁴⁷ Ṭabari names this construction “the city of Kangdež.”⁴⁸ Greater Bundahišn (32.12) also mentions that Kangdež’s seven beams were made of gold, silver, steel, bronze, iron, glass, and crystal. Thus, it appears that legends of Deioces and his traits were constructed by combining Iranian legends of primordial kings as viewed through the lens of sophistic Greek theories on how states come into being.⁴⁹

According to Herodotus (I.102), Deioces had a son, Phraortes (Old Pers. Fravertiš), who inherited the Median throne and, allegedly, perished in an unsuccessful march against the Assyrians, along with most of his army. His story might have roots in the events narrated in the Behistun inscription, where we read that Fravertiš—the great Median rebel—took Xšaθrita of the family of Huvaxšōra as his throne name (DB II.24). Clearly, this name had a legacy; a legacy likely linked to the city lord of Kār-Kašši in the Central Zagros Mountains called Kaštariti in Assyrian sources around 672 BCE. Apparently, Xšaθrita was an ally of the Medes, Manneans, Cimmerians and other groups in the region.⁵⁰ In Greater Media, he was still remembered as an influential leader who may have organized one of the first military attempts against the Assyrians in the region. On the other hand, it is possible that the memory of the rebel Fravertiš (Xšaθrita) and his claim to be part of the Huvaxšōra family were later combined in Median legends. Thus, the old hero Xšaθrita was remembered as Fravertiš and, since he was supposed to both antedate Huvaxšōra and be concurrent with his family, Fravertiš was assumed to be Huvaxšōra’s father.

Regarding Medo-Persian history, we have an earlier, although brief account of Aeschylus (*Persae* §§ 760–770): Medus, an eponym for the founder of Media, was the first to rule over Asia, followed by his son. Next was Cyrus, who established peace for all his people and won divine favor through right-mindedness. In this account, we see a Median dynasty that had only two kings prior to Cyrus the Great; an account commensurate with historical events extracted from Near Eastern sources. Thus, the Median monarchy—likely founded by Huvaxšōra and lasting only as long as his son—was later expanded to include an unrelated Greater Median hero of old and a mythical founder of the Avestan tradition.

As early as the reign of Xerxes, the Greeks were familiar with the concept of Medo-Persian kingship continuity, which accords with the Medo-Persian naming of the Achaemenid king in Babylonian documents. This concept leads us to assume that western Iranians considered Cyrus’s rule to be a continuation of the Median monarchy. The Avestan elements of the legends of the Median monarchy’s founder and the Medes’ ethnic Iranian identity, also like that of the Avestan tradition, raise the possibility that this tradition circulated among the Medes. Thusly, the next section investigates legends of Cyrus the Great in the western Iranian context to explore for possible Avestan traits.

Legends of Cyrus the Great in the Western Iranian Context

Cyrus the Great’s rise to power and eventual demise were the subjects of popular legends in western Iran (Herodotus I.95, 214; *Cyropaedia* I.2.1). Therefore, there must have been a western Iranian perception of Cyrus that echoes in Graeco-Roman sources. There are three detailed versions of the story of Cyrus the Great: Herodotus’s *Histories*, Ctesias’s *Persica* and Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*. While the purpose and explanatory cadre of each version might have contributed to how widely the accounts diverged, it is also important that the

⁴⁶ Irannejad, “Kavis,” 258–9.

⁴⁷ cf. Firdowsi, *Šāh-nāma*, II: 93 f.

⁴⁸ de Goeje (ed.), *Annales*, 601–2.

⁴⁹ see Meier et al., *Deiokes* for the Greek viewpoint.

⁵⁰ Starr, *Queries to the Sungod*, No 41–51, 60, 62.

oral Iranian tradition, which has great variety, was their primary source. In oral traditions, such as the western Iranian tradition concerned here, while the pattern of a story might be similar, various themes can be elaborated, left out or even moved from one story-pattern to another.⁵¹ Hence, each of the three authors had the chance to draw on different variants of legends. In this section, therefore, we look at the legends of Cyrus with a mind to their oral nature. Such legends must have been composed using fixed elements of subject-matter, diction and style, adopted and harmonized with fresh improvisation. Putting these stories into the western Iranian context enables us to distinguish Iranian elements leveraged for different ends.

Herodotus (1.107–123) recounts one version of Cyrus's origin that he considered most reliable: after a dream in which the magi interpreted/predicted that his grandson would take his throne, Astyages summoned his pregnant daughter Mandane from Persia in order to kill her son Cyrus upon his birth. Astyages gave this task to one of his courtiers, Harpagus, who turned the infant over to one of Astyages's shepherds, named Mithridates. Instead, however, the shepherd and his wife decided to raise Cyrus in the place of their own stillborn son. It was only after a dispute in which the young Cyrus played the role of the king with others of his age that he was recognized as the king's grandson. Assuming the prophecy had already come to pass, Astyages then sent Cyrus back to his parents in Persia.

The story of Ctesias (apud Nicolaus Damascenus, FGrH 90 F66; cf. Diodorus IX.22) makes Cyrus a non-Achaemenid from the nomadic Mardi people (of possible Elamite origin),⁵² whose mother Argoste herded goats and father Atradates (cf. Agradates, Cyrus's name before his reign, Strabo XV.3.6) was a bandit due to poverty. Later, the young Cyrus made his way into Astyages's court, performing a series of varied jobs—from palace functions to administrative posts—before serving as wine pourer at the king's table, when he first caught Astyages's attention. From there, Cyrus was taken under the chief cup-bearer's wing and, after his predecessor's death, made chief cup-bearer himself. Upon assuming his new position, Cyrus summoned his parents to the court and, for the first time, heard of the dream his mother had while pregnant with him, in which she urinated so much that a flood swept across Asia. Meanwhile, Cyrus had also managed to make his father ruler of Persia. Simultaneously, Astyages gave his daughter in marriage to a Median grandee by the name of Spitamas, with all of Media as her dowry. When the king sent Cyrus to suppress a revolt, he instead joined in rebellion with the Persians and seized the Median throne. Ctesias (apud Photius, Bibliotheca 72) also gives further details on Astyages's capture: Astyages fled from Cyrus to Ecbatana, hiding in the vaults of the royal palace with the aid of his daughter Amytis and her husband Spitamas. Upon his arrival, Cyrus ordered the torture of Spitamas, Amytis, and their children in an effort to discover Astyages's whereabouts. At this point, Astyages gave himself up to save the children. However, while Astyages was bound in heavy chains to start, Cyrus freed him shortly after and honored him as a father. Cyrus, for a while, honored Amytis as a mother, but later married her as Spitamas had been executed for lying about Astyages.

Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* I.2.1) agrees with Herodotus that Mandane, daughter of Astyages, was Cyrus's mother. However, contrary to the other tales, *Cyropaedia* presents a romantic narration of Cyrus; one in which he establishes his empire while still remaining obedient to Astyages. Although Cyaxares, Cyrus's maternal uncle, is supposed to succeed Astyages, Cyrus's achievements lead him to becoming king. Indeed, when Cyaxares's daughter places the crown on Cyrus's head, he declares that she is to be his wife and the kingdom her dowry (*Cyropaedia* VIII.5.18–19).

Legends of Cyrus's death are equally diverse. According to Herodotus (I.201 ff.), Cyrus was captured and killed in a war with nomads beyond the Araxes (most probably Jaxartes) River.

⁵¹ Lord, *The Singer of tales*, 109, 123.

⁵² Potts, "Cyrus," 109, 23.

This was a war Cyrus had initiated, believing in his own superhuman status, invincibility, and the divine care bestowed on him, which showed him all that was coming to him beforehand. According to *Cyropaedia* (VIII.7), on the other hand, Cyrus learned in a dream that his time had come, when a god said to him, “Make ready, Cyrus, for you shall soon depart to the gods.” After this dream, Cyrus climbed to an altar on a high mountain, made a sacrifice to the gods, gave a sermon to the nobles, advised his sons and then died in peace. Finally, Ctesias’s account essentially amalgamates Cyrus’s death on the battlefield and in bed: while Cyrus was wounded in war with nomads, he survived long enough to return to Persia and die in peace. Even though the narrative structures of Cyrus’s last campaign are similar in the Herodotus and Ctesias accounts, seemingly countering the depiction of *Cyropaedia*, the existence of these tales points to a diversity of viewpoints on Cyrus the Great among western Iranians.

In order to tease out the possible diverse western Iranian viewpoints on Cyrus the Great, the literary genre and intention of the three accounts must be considered. Herodotus outlines the integral drama of the conqueror of the potentate spectacularly raised and then humiliated and destroyed by providence, while Ctesias converts the tragedy into romance, expressing the aesthetic frames and including the fabulous, absurd, exotic and abject categories. In Ctesias’s accounts, Cyrus is of humble origins and his social ascension unfolds through a great number of adventures. Eventually, he dies with great honor and finds peace among his family. In *Cyropaedia*, on the other hand, we see the quest of a person instilled with proper ethical and political virtues. Indeed, *Cyropaedia* is ruled by the ideological convention, subordinating fictional elements to its specific requirement. As such, Cyrus is raised in a situation of perfect harmony between Persians and Medes and his destiny is reshaped by the ethical parable, thus illustrating the story’s intended ethical and political theses. In sum, Herodotus represents Cyrus as the conqueror of the potentate, while Ctesias conforms him into a romantic adventurer and Xenophon provides the ethical and idealized ruler.⁵³

The differences between the three images of Cyrus presented by Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon can be explained, at the first glance, in the context of the Greek literary tradition. Herodotus draws from the same tragic conception as his contemporary, Aeschylus. Indeed, similar attitudes and structures exist both in *Persae* and Herodotus’s corresponding texts. While Cyrus’s birth parallels myths of the divine hybrid, such as Dionysus or Hercules, Herodotus’s choice of the most convincing version of Cyrus’s death reveals a subjective path in line with the Aeschylean Attic drama model. Ctesias’s account, on the other hand, marks the evolution of letters at the beginning of the fourth century BCE, when drama and historiography were on the wane and the romance was still in an embryonic phase. Simultaneously, the decline of polis institutions calling for the establishment of ethical and political virtues also provides the grounds for *Cyropaedia*’s genesis and structure. Therefore, the three versions of the life of Cyrus illustrate how historiography allows data to be converted in accordance with a convention progressively distanced from the initial sources.⁵⁴

Bearing in mind the central differences in imagery and fundamental reasons for such differences in the literary tradition helps us distinguish specific elements and themes used in these accounts, presumably borrowed from the western Iranian oral tradition. In contrast to Herodotus’s tragic scheme, Ctesias could have incorporated diverse legends in his romance, while *Cyropaedia* would appeal to exemplified rulers. Still, their similar elements could, on the one hand, point to an already constructed image in western Iran. In what follows, we focus on these accounts’ similarities and differences with regards to elements derived presumably from the western Iranian tradition.

⁵³ Cizek, “From the Historical Truth.”

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Cyrus the Great's connection to the Median court is a well-established legend, appearing in different forms in each of these accounts. While the story of the marriage between the Persian King Cambyses I and Mandane, as well as Cyrus's birth from this marriage, is historically doubtful, it serves the function of constructing a direct relation between the royal houses of Media and Persia.⁵⁵ The persistence of this legend—evident in *Histories* and *Cyropaedia*—could point to a well-established theme in western Iran; a theme implementable in different literary genres.

While all three accounts have an observable Median orientation, *Cyropaedia* reveals modifications within a possible Median milieu. In this version, a fictitious Cyaxares (son of Astyages) aids a peaceful transition of power from the Median royal house to the Persians. Such modifications dynastically rationalize Cyrus's kingship over the Medes and their incorporation into the Persian Empire. It is possible that Xenophon purposefully adopted a Median perspective here, which makes sense with the intended demonstration of *Cyropaedia*.

The conflicting legends reported by contemporaries Ctesias and Xenophon of Cyrus's origin seem to come from different circles.⁵⁶ When we read *Cyropaedia* and the *Anabasis* together, it becomes clear that Cyrus the Younger equated himself with his namesake: a Cyrus reborn to lead the empire back to its glorious days. Against such a portrayal, Artaxerxes II might have attempted to undermine Cyrus the Great's reputation and glory to some extent, and Ctesias might have taken on this representation, as it suits his adventurous imagery. Thus, we must consider the possibility that the Greek renditions of the rise of Cyrus the Great are likely manipulations of fact to ideologically suit different factions of the Achaemenid period, from Darius I to Artaxerxes II.

Cyrus's death is another point of possible diverse extractions from the western Iranian oral tradition. Herodotus's account agrees well with his conception of historical causality and tragedy, as the hybris, the river and the sober-living people beyond the river are recurrent elements in his reports on expeditions of Persian kings.⁵⁷ Still, it is possible that the core of the legend originated in an Iranian milieu. Moreover, there is a detail in the legend that points to the reign of Darius the Great. Before his capture, Cyrus dreams he sees Darius, the eldest son of Achaemenid Hystaspes, with a pair of wings covering both Europe and Asia. Indeed, Cyrus's dream predicts that he will die and Darius will become king. This preemptive absolution for the future coup could only have come from Darius's court. Thus, Herodotus's version presents a distorted telling of Cyrus's death, painting Cyrus as having lost divine favor and putting the empire at risk, leaving Darius to reorganize the empire again.⁵⁸ This undermining of the memory of Cyrus the Great in favor of Darius might have been partially in place at the time of Darius. Meanwhile, Xenophon's idealized account accords with the propaganda of glorifying Cyrus the Great in favor of Cyrus the Younger, while Ctesias's account—beside its romantic elements—served to challenge Cyrus the Great's legitimacy in a similar or even more pronounced way than Herodotus. As Beckman argued, Ctesias's version might have originated from Artaxerxes II's propaganda against his brother.⁵⁹ On the other hand, however, both Xenophon and Ctesias's accounts emphasize the importance of loyalty between royal brothers, which likely drew on the contemporary rivalry between Cyrus the Younger and Artaxerxes II.

Locating legends of Cyrus the Great within the western Iranian context in which they originated sheds light on the fact that some legendary motifs were used for different reasons. Darius could appeal to his audience's fear by highlighting that Cyrus had lost divine favor, put the empire at risk, and only he (Darius) had been divinely chosen to set things

⁵⁵ Brosius, *Women*, 42–45.

⁵⁶ Beckman, "The Many Deaths."

⁵⁷ Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The Death of Cyrus," 464.

⁵⁸ Beckman, "The Many Deaths," 5, 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9–12.

right. Recognizing that Herodotus's account likely emanated from Dairus's court helps us also better understand the imagery of the last Median king, as Herodotus's general outline reveals a rendering that alienates the Median sovereign. While Darius relied on some Medes in his efforts to quell revolts around the empire, the great revolts in Media and Sagartia—whose leaders attempted to connect to the royal house of Media—can explain this version's negative representation of the last Median monarch. On the other hand, Artaxerxes II's propaganda likely represented Cyrus the Great as the descendent of a non-noble family, undermining his glories in a context where Cyrus the Younger was pushing his glorious conquests and wisdom. In addition, albeit with some innovations that could have been drawn from various western Iranian legends, we may also note that Ctesias's legends essentially came from the same sources as Herodotus, with their negative representation of the last Median monarch. In contrast to Herodotus and Ctesias, we face a specifically Median bias in Xenophon's recounting of the life of Cyrus the Great; a bias directly suitable to Xenophon's scheme. Due to its favorable attitude toward the Medes, *Cyropaedia* seems to have appropriated a Median perspective on the foundation of the Persian Empire. In sum, we should appreciate the Persian-Median dichotomy regarding legends of Cyrus the Great.

The legends of Cyrus the Great reported by Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon must have originally been developed in Persian and, perhaps, Median circles in western Iran, which were under the influence of both the Avestan and Mesopotamian traditions. In particular, the story of Cyrus's birth elaborated in Greek sources has some elements of the so-called Sargon legend.⁶⁰ Thus, in order to locate the specifically Avestan elements and themes, we must first distinguish the Mesopotamian elements.

Sargon's extensive conquests and foundation of a new political order made him the subject of many stories. The birth legend of Sargon of Agade begins with his parents: while his mother was a high priestess, implying she was of royal birth, his father's kinsmen lived in the mountains. Sargon's birth was shameful for his mother and, as such, she placed him in a basket and let it float down the Euphrates. A humble gardener found the basket and adopted Sargon. At some stage, Sargon rose to become the cup-bearer of the King of Kish in northern Babylonia. After the king was killed, Sargon gradually became a universal king, penetrating the edges of the world. While this folktale was already in circulation, a different version was advanced during the reign of Sargon II in the later Assyrian period. In this version, the theme of infant exposure was used to present Sargon as a royal figure who miraculously regains his rightful position.⁶¹ Legends of Sargon greatly influenced later legendary traditions, including those of Cyrus the Great.

There are several comparable elements between Herodotus and Ctesias's tales and the Sargon story. In Herodotus's account, the mother's highlighted status and the father's lesser significance, the rescue and adoption of the child by a lowly man, and the planned exposure of the child, even though not carried out, are points of similarity (cf. Herodotus I.122; Justin I.4). In Ctesias's account, Cyrus's first patron—a gardener—and his final position as the king's cup-bearer are closely comparable. The common elements of these two versions with the two different versions of Sargon's story, alongside their prominence in Nabonidus's reign, suggest the Persians may have deliberately fostered an elision between the two kings.⁶² Hence, as Kuhrt notes, the figure of Sargon of Agade was merged with that of Cyrus, identifying the Persian victor with this Mesopotamian hero of antiquity as the true king of the universe.

The common elements in the legends of Cyrus and Sargon exemplify Cyrus's assimilation into a conquered culture. Such an assimilation could well have happened for the Iranian audience of the Persian Empire, particularly following the Iranian tendencies pursued by and after the reign of Darius the Great.

⁶⁰ Kuhrt, "Making History."

⁶¹ For references, see *Ibid.*, 350–352.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 354–355.

Assimilation of Cyrus the Great with the Iranian Tradition

In this section, we first discuss the introduction of Avestan texts to Persis and the transmission of Avestan mythology and legends. Following on, we then turn to analysis of the Avestan tradition with a focus on the figure Kauui Haosrauuah, paving the ground for a discussion of Cyrus the Great's possible assimilation with this Avestan figure.

The complex "Avesta" of Achaemenid Persis is still far from understood. Nevertheless, we take the working hypothesis that the accumulation of evidence makes the Avestan tradition's presence in early Achaemenid Persis likely. Some religious terminologies of Achaemenid western Iran—such as the theonym **Naryasanga*- and the term **Dainamazdāyasniš*—are presumably borrowings from Avestan.⁶³ The traditional pronunciation of Avestan texts has characteristics in common with Old Persian.⁶⁴ In addition, the generalization of the Mazdean liturgical calendar can only be understood if the liturgy for which and with which the calendar was developed was itself celebrated in Persis.⁶⁵ It is possible that under Darius or Xerxes, the Avestan liturgy for AhuraMazdā was imported to Persis; this was not the Persian, but the *Iranian* form of worship. This introduction must have aimed to promote unity among Persians, Medes and probably other Iranians. In particular, the supra-country proto-national ethnic Iranian identity evident in the Avestan texts was likely attractive to Darius.⁶⁶ The Persian elite of Iranian descent's cultural affinity with northern Iranians, primarily the Medes, could be strengthened by adhering to Avestan rituals and tradition.

The presence of Avestan texts and ritual performance in Achaemenid Persis may point to the transmission of Avestan mythology and legends. Indeed, the inclusion of Miθra and Anahitā in Artaxerxes II's inscription makes the hypothesis of performance of the Bayān Yašt ceremony at the court possible. In this ceremony, Yašts 5, 19, 14 and 10 are recited among the Old Avestan texts, with Ābān and Mehr Yašts taking the opening and closing positions.⁶⁷ These Yašts are imbued with myths and epics marked as Iranian *par excellence*. Moreover, personal names—such as **Apiva*- (Av. *Aipi.vohu*-), **Kav-usadan*- (cf. Av. *Kauui Usađan*-) and **Šyāva-ršan*- (cf. Av. *Siiāuuaršan*-),⁶⁸ along with royal prominence of **Ršan*—likely bear witness to the circulation of legends of Kauuis. It is possible that, at this time, the Persians began identifying with these myths and epics.⁶⁹

The Avestan tradition depicts a dualistic mytho-epic time-evolution for Iranians. The first millennium of world history is the golden age of Yima's dominion (Yt. 9.10; 17.30). The second millennium witnesses the hegemony of evil in the face of Aži Dahāka. Ōraētaona Slaying Aži Dahāka inaugurates the third millennium, which is the period of admixture of good and evil. The Iranians' final victory, led by Kauui Haosrauuah, over the nomadic Tūriias is the ultimate victory of good over evil (Yt. 19).⁷⁰ In this scheme, a legendary dynasty of Kauuis, called Kayanids, who may be historical and go back to the late second millennium BCE,⁷¹ are laid at the climax of the temporal evolution.

In considering the possibility of Cyrus the Great's identification with Kauui Haosrauuah, we must first investigate the Avestan tradition's ancient legends of the latter. In other words, we are looking for an archaic epos whose fragments have been preserved through Avestan allusions, as the detailed epic is only found in texts of early Islamic Iran—Middle Persian literature, the New Persian *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi, and other Perso-Arabic literatures in

⁶³ Cantera, "La liturgie longue," 35–40, 47–48.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 40–43; Hoffmann, "Das Avesta in der Persis," 89–93; Hoffman & Narten, *Der sasanidische Archetypus*, 41f., 67f.

⁶⁵ Cantera, "La liturgie longue," 51–60.

⁶⁶ Irannejad, "The Old Avesta."

⁶⁷ Cantera, "La liturgie longue," 60.

⁶⁸ Tavernier, *Iranica*, 109, 232, 319.

⁶⁹ cf. Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 389–391.

⁷⁰ For contextualizing this encounter in archeological settings and an updated discussion on Tūriias, see Irannejad, "The Indo-Iranian Approach," §X.

⁷¹ See recent arguments in Irannejad, "Kavis."

particular. During the lengthy transmission of the Kayanid circle, large quantities of younger tradition material—particularly tales of Parthian heroes—were attached to it.⁷² Even though we can disregard clear Parthian interpolations, the large temporal gap between the Avestan and late Sasanian periods poses significant chronological difficulties. Notwithstanding, we still attempt to reconstruct the relevant Kayanid legends that form a coherent narrative in line with Avestan allusions, thus antedating the Achaemenid period.

Kauui Haosrauuah is mentioned a few times in Avestan texts; references that show different aspects of his significance. The divine plant-derived juice Haoma captured Fraŋrasiīān the Tūiriia and led him bound to Kauui Haosrauuah to be killed by Lake Caēcasta as filial revenge (Av. *puθrō.kaēna*) for his father, Kauui Siiāuuaršan (Yt. 9.17–23; without the intervention of Haoma, Yt. 5.49–50; 19.77, 92–93; cf. *Dēnkard* VII.1.39). The Middle Persian tradition (e.g., Greater Bundahišn 18.12) relates that Kay Husrōy had destroyed an idol-temple at Lake Čēčist—identified with Lake Urmia—and set the fire-cult, Ādur Gušnasp, instead. According to al-Mas‘ūdī, Khosrow I Anōšīravān transformed this sanctuary from an idol temple to a fire temple.⁷³ Noting the aniconic nature of Avestan ideology, as well as the fact that idols and cultic structures are completely absent from the East Iranian Avesta, we can conclude that Anōšīravān’s action was projected onto his ancient namesake. Nevertheless, there may also have been an impetus for this projection originating in the Achaemenid period (see below). Beside the encounter with Fraŋrasiīān, Kauui Haosrauuah appears in a chariot race and fight in the pan-Iranian *razura* (Yt. 5.50, cf. 15.32; note also Yt. 5.53–55 that he is followed by the firm charioteer Tusa, who is depicted in conflict with the Tūiriias). In addition to these two epic depictions, Kauui Haosrauuah also appears in veneration of the divine fire who is called the charioteer—i.e., warrior—abundant with glory (Sī-rōzag 1.9 = 2.9). Here, Kauui Haosrauuah is associated with both Kayanid and Iranian glory, as well as Lake Haosrauuahja (probably alluding to the capture of Fraŋrasiīān, cf. Yt. 19.56), Lake Caēcasta and Mount Asnuuant (cf. the mountainous milieu of his occultation, see below). This appearance is built on the association of fire with glory, alongside the warrior aspect of fire, which likely gave rise to Kay Husrōy’s Middle Persian association with the post-Avestan fire temples. Furthermore, we have a great eulogy of him that references his strength, victories, superiority and, especially, his luminous *xšaθra*-, implying his royal character (Yt. 13.133–135,⁷⁴ cf. Yt. 19.74–76⁷⁵). He epitomizes being disease-free and death-free (AZ 7), which could be an allusion to his occultation (see below). He is also exemplified as *ašəm mərəncō* (VYt. 2), the meaning of which is obscure, but potentially refers to him being blessed (cf. below).⁷⁶ Overall, Kauui Haosrauuah appears to be a glorious figure of Iranians, whose deeds and memories contribute to Avestan hymnic composition.

The Avestan formula *arša airiianam daxiunam xšaθrāi haŋkərəmō haosrauua* (Yt. 5.49, 15.32) seems to be Kauui Haosrauuah’s unique standing epithet. He is *arša*- “the hero” of Iranian countries that arranges *xšaθra*- in view of date. Linked to the past by the virtues of *arša*-, widespread in the onomastics of his ancestors, Haosrauuah had the specific task of providing the Iranian peoples with *xšaθra*-, of which this is the first manifestation since the primordial kings.⁷⁷ An alternative translation would be “*arša*- of Iranian peoples who exercised *xšaθra*- and thus maintained the arrangement within the Iranian peoples.”⁷⁸ Av. *xšaθra*- in agreement with its Indian cognate *ḡsatra*-, as well as later Iranian linguistic evidence, signifies temporal power that is also of spiritual provenance (note the contrast of *xšaθra*- and

⁷² Boyce, “Some Remarks”; “The Parthian Gōsān.”

⁷³ al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, II: 1400.

⁷⁴ Malandra, *The Frawardin Yašt*, 112–113.

⁷⁵ Humbach & Ichaporia, *Zamyād Yašt*, 52–3.

⁷⁶ Darmesteter, *The Zend Avesta*, II: 328.

⁷⁷ Kellens, *Cinq cours*, 132.

⁷⁸ Pirart, *Les Adorables*, 68, 114.

daēnā-, Vd. 2.4-5).⁷⁹ Simultaneously, Avestan evidence leans toward the royal significance of *kauui-* associated with *xšaθra-*, in agreement with later Iranian evidence.⁸⁰ The formula has a variant with *haṅkərətō* “put together” (Yt. 9.21), which aligns well with both the main formula and the later tradition that depicts Kay Husrōy as the consolidator of the Iranian kingdom with *xšaθra-*, signifying temporal power.

Comparing the legendary Yašts, the Middle Persian tradition and the *Šāh-nāma* reveals their homogeneity with regards to the Kayanid saga. According to the Middle Persian tradition, Kay Husrōy is the offspring of the exogamy of Siyāwaxš and Vispān-Fryā (Farīgīs/Farangīs in *Šāh-nāma*⁸¹), daughter of Frāsiyāg/ Frāsiyāb (Bundahišn 35.21). Siyāwaxš went to the land of Turān to fight and was killed by Frāsiyāg (Bundahišn 33.10). The *Šāh-nāma* has Kay Khosrow born in Turān in the house of Pīrān, after the execution of his father. Pīrān then entrusts him to herdsmen, and he is raised in exile. At his youth, Kay Khosrow flees to Iran with his mother to appear before his paternal grandfather.⁸² Kay Khosrow then goes into battle with Afrāsiāb and consolidates the kingdom while his grandfather remains king; following his grandfather’s death, Kay Khosrow becomes king.⁸³ According to Bundahišn (33.11), he went to the Kang-diz after killing Frāsiyāb. This summary constitutes the main lines of Kauui Haosrauuah accounts potentially known in Avestan society.

Cyrus the Great’s unification of (western) Iranians parallels Kauui Haosrauuah’s consolidation of Iranian countries. Such a parallel might have led different western Iranian circles to identify Cyrus with Kauui Haosrauuah, as the great hero of Iranian antiquity. According to Christensen, we can find salient features of the story of Cyrus’s youth here and there in the later Iranian legends.⁸⁴ These features include the dream that announces the fall of a reign and the advent of another (Dahāg, Frēdōn, Ardašīr); the nonexecuted order to kill a newborn child (Kay Khosrow); the child’s exposure (Kay Kawād, Dārāy); the child’s rearing among shepherds or other common people (Frēdōn, Kay Khosrow, Dārāy, Ardašīr); and the child’s superior spirit, as he betrays himself in games and exercises (Kay Khosrow, Ardašīr). Christensen concludes that these features are a series of common ancient Iranian patterns. However, setting the dream motif aside, further scrutiny of stories of Cyrus the Great and a consideration of the oral Iranian tradition’s evolution gives us insight into the antiquity and direction of borrowing between legends, as well as the possible interactions that led specifically to legends of Kauui Haosrauuah.

The motif of the child’s exposure is a key component of the legends of Sargon, associated with the change of dynasties and a major shift in power. Middle Persian literature’s depiction of Kay Kawād attributes the establishment of kingship in Iran to him (*Dēnkard* VII.1.33), qualifying him with such a legend. Accordingly, Kay Kawād was abandoned in a basket (*kēwūd*) on a river and was found by Uzaw when the basket got caught in the reeds (Bundahišn 31.23). Perso-Arabic literature does not mention this origin story, instead ascribing a similar story to Dārāy. When Dārāy was born, his mother did not share the news of his birth, but instead had him laid out with precious jewels in a casket exposed on a river. A fuller or miller found the child.⁸⁵ *Dārāb-nāma* is an important source in this regard, as it represents an oral tradition that transmitted the stories of later Achaemenid kings as the last Kayanid kings. *Dārāb-nāma* also includes legends of Alexander as an integral part of the Kayanid saga: Alexander’s mother gives birth to him in secret and, to avoid scandal, leaves him on the mountain where Aristotle lives. Eventually, an old woman finds the infant and

⁷⁹ contra Kellens, “Langues,” 727; also, Kellens, *Cinq cours*, 135 and Pirart, *Les Adorables*, 28, 68, 355, who suggested a ritual interpretation of *xšaθra-*.

⁸⁰ Schwartz, “Avestan *kauui-*”; Irannejad, “Kavis.”

⁸¹ Firdowsi, *Šāh-nāma*, II: 482.

⁸² *Ibid.*, II, 295-307, 343-75, 422-48

⁸³ *Ibid.*, IV, 325-27.

⁸⁴ Christensen, *Les gestes*, 114.

⁸⁵ Tafāzūli, “DĀRĀ(B), i. Dārā(b) I.”

nourishes and rears him under the guidance of Aristotle.⁸⁶ We may note that, in contrast to the stories of Cyrus, where the exposure motif is only minorly present, the legends of Kay Kawād, Dārāy and Alexander have strong parallelism with legends of Sargon in this regard. Nevertheless, the similarity of Dārāy and Alexander's birth legends to that of Sargon in the Iranian context may well have been a result of the assimilation of Cyrus the Great with Cyrus the Younger under his father Darius II, on the one hand, and the equivalence of Alexander and Cyrus the Great in the Iranian tradition on the other.

The similarity in the legend of Cyrus according to Ctesias and the legend of Ardašīr is indeed striking. The hero (Cyrus/Ardašīr) is a shepherd's son whose parents' dream prophesizes his future greatness. In his youth, he arrives at the court in Media and, by a peculiarly fateful fate, is there to perform servant services. The plot reaches its height with the hero's flight to his homeland in Persis. From the horse stables, where he does lowly work, Ardašīr steps into the escape that leads to his eventual rule. Similarly, when Cyrus decides to break with Astyages, he meets the Persian Oibara who is carrying horse manure in a basket. The manure is what makes Cyrus interpret this as a good omen, as it implies wealth and power. Gutschmid, who pointed out these parallelisms, plausibly assumed that legends of Cyrus as the founder of the first Persian Empire might have been transferred to the founder of the second Persian Empire.⁸⁷

Thus, what appears to be common ancient Iranian patterns are traceable in terms of interactions with Mesopotamian legends and the temporal evolution of the legends developed in western Iran. Having distinguished this evolution, we now turn to the parallels between legends of Cyrus the Great's origin and demise with those of Kay Khosrow. In so doing, we consider the possible Persian-Median dichotomy—or rather, the various Greek narratives—in different accounts of the legends of Cyrus, enabling us to distinguish diverging parallels with the legends of Kay Khosrow.

Cyrus the Great's birth and upbringing according to Herodotus' *Histories* parallel that of Kay Khosrow. In both cases, an alien/alienated king (Afrāsiyāb-Astyages) orders an Iranian prince (Cyrus-Kay Khosrow) and the son of his own daughter (Farangīs-Mandane) slain. Nevertheless, with the help of a courtier (Pirān-Harpagus), the child is saved, brought up among shepherds and later overcomes his maternal grandfather.⁸⁸ Astyages's dream also has a parallel with Afrāsiāb's dream on the eve of the war with the Iranian troops.⁸⁹ Further, Ctesias's detailing of Astyages's capture reveals other parallels with the legend of Afrāsiāb's capture by Kay Khosrow. In the *Šāh-nāma*, Afrāsiāb first fled to the town of Kang Fortress, where, in his pursuit, Kay Khosrow kills many of Afrāsiāb's relatives. Then, after realizing that Afrāsiāb had hidden in Lake Čičast, Kay Khosrow orders the torture of Afrāsiāb's brother, Karsivaz. Afrāsiāb gives himself up to save his brother, only to be slain by Kay Khosrow.⁹⁰ In these stories, Cyrus the Great and Kay Khosrow show similarities foiled against the alienated monarch.

The *Cyropaedia*'s fantastic outline also parallels the legends of Kay Khosrow, but from another perspective. Here, Cyrus's deeds parallel those of Kay Khosrow under the kingship of his grandfather Kāvus, Assyrians are the target of enmity, and the transfer of power is narrated via the peaceful rivalry with his uncle, paralleling Kay Khosrow's uncle Farīborz.⁹¹ The name Farīborz is a modification of Borzāfarah,⁹² comparable with Barzapharnes, a Parthian general under Pacorus (Flavius Josephus I.11). Hence, Farīborz's significance is a Parthian interpolation, even though the story pattern may be old. Aeschylus's short account seems to fall in line with Xenophon's narrative. In these versions,

⁸⁶ Tarsūsī, *Dārāb-nāma*, I: 390 f.

⁸⁷ Gutschmid, *Kline Schriften*, III: 133–4.

⁸⁸ Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 388–9.

⁸⁹ Firdowsi, *Šāh-nāma*, II: 248 f.; 300, 367.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, IV: 300 f.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, II: 456–67.

⁹² Bahār (ed.), *Mojmal al-tawārīkh*, 29.

the last Median monarch is not Cyrus's enemy; instead, he is Cyrus's grandfather, the legitimate ruler, and the transition of power to Cyrus is peaceful and commemorates the memory of the Median monarchs.

The striking similarities in Herodotus and Ctesias's accounts of Kay Khosrow and Cyrus the Great's origins and rise to power on one side, and the *Cyropaedia* (and Aeschylus) on the other, show two different instances of the assimilation of legends of the Kayanid and Cyrus. The components of Kay Khosrow's birth and rise to power in Kayanid legends coherently form a legendary narrative. The two parallels in Cyrus and Kay Khosrow's origins show how some legends of the latter were used in legends of the former. This observation indicates that, in some Iranian circles in Media and Persia, the process of assimilating Cyrus the Great with the distinguished Kayanid king in the Achaemenid period was likely conscious, with Cyrus being intentionally likened to Kay Khosrow.

In order to further investigate this assimilation process, we compare Cyrus the Great's death stories to those of the demise of Kay Khosrow. In this respect, there are several common, interdependent motifs present in various stories of Cyrus and Kay Khosrow. First, we review the available information about Kay Khosrow's disappearance and then we single out parallels with the events of Cyrus the Great's death.

According to the *Šāh-nāma*,⁹³ after a sixty-year reign, Kay Khosrow wishes to ascend to God. Thus, God's messenger, Soruš, appears to him in a dream and says his wish has been granted and he is to elect a successor. After giving a sermon, Kay Khosrow ascends from the material to the spiritual world. A few of his paladins—including Tus and others of clearly Parthian interpolation—accompany him to a spring. In the middle of the night, he performs ablution in the spring and everyone sleeps. The next day, when the paladins awake, they realize Kay Khosrow has disappeared. In addition to the *Šāh-nāma*, there is also a version of this story, in which Khosrow is called “the blessed,” in a passage in the Chester Beatty Manichean Kephalia codex.⁹⁴ At some point, Khosrow is depicted in conversation with one of his lieutenants, Vēžan son of Gēv (Wēw, Biy), and, foreseeing disaster for Vēžan, states: “you will not reach Persia.” On the other hand, Kay Khosrow also concedes his kingdom and departs to a transcendental realm. A sage named Danaan, son of Danaan (Dāna Dānayana? cf. Yt. 19.41), is speaking to the king in his military camp somewhere outside Persia. Danaan has led the king to the tree of ambrosia. From this treasure tree, Khosrow receives gifts, treasures, and glory. Then, Khosrow and Danaan are said to have gone up to the land of light.

Legends of Kay Khosrow's occultation do not have Avestan precedence. The inclusion of Vēžan son of Gēv is clearly a Parthian interpolation. However, there are clues to the occultation of Kauui Haosrauah in some Avestan allusions (AZ 7). According to contents of the lost Avestan Sūdgar Nask (*apud Dēnkard* IX.23.1-8), Kay Husrōy subdues Wāy, who has been responsible for past deaths, close to renovation (cf. Zādspram 35.6). Here, the idea of an undying hero is at work.⁹⁵ According to the *Dēnkard* (VII.1.40), Kay Husrōy was needed as an instrument for the renovation and, thus, he was moved to a secret place for his body to be kept until the renovation. This secret place is said to be at Kang Fortress, on a mountain between Iran and Turān (*Dēnkard* VIII.1.40). Therefore, some lines of the story of Kay Khosrow's occultation could go back to the (late) Avestan period.

Given its early Sasanian date, the Chester Beatty Manichean Kephalia reference gives us important insight regarding the evolution of Kay Khosrow's story, and the localization of this legend is key to our investigation. The Kephalia text mentions that Vēžan got lost amid the mountains and occurring storms. This fate agrees with the legend in the *Šāh-nāma*, where Vēžan and several of Kay Khosrow's other knights die in a snowstorm as they follow him into the mountains. Hence, we are dealing with a mountainous area. On the other hand,

⁹³ Firdowsi, *Šāh-nāma*, IV: 327.

⁹⁴ see BeDuhn, “Iranian Epic.”

⁹⁵ Vevaina, “The Ground Well,” 180.

an important clue is revealed regarding the tree associated with the elixir of immortality, which may have connections with the Tree of Antidotes, Tree Opposed to Harm or white Haoma, Av. *gaokerena* (Yt. 12.17; Vd. 20.4; Bundahišn 27.4, 30.25). The tree motif, absent in the later Iranian tradition, is also probably not a Manichaean addition; it must be original to the story.⁹⁶ It seems the ritual importance of plants in general, and ephedra in particular, was common practice in the mountainous areas of Central Asia bordering Xinjiang. For some of the Sakā people, called Haumavargā in Old Persian inscriptions, the importance of Haoma was a distinguishing character (DNa 25, XPh 26, A3Pb 14). Indo-Iranian texts say the Haoma plant grows in the mountains; as such, the mountainous region from the Altai in the north to the Pamirs in the south is the most likely focal point for this cult's origin.⁹⁷ On the other hand, the Chester Beatty Kephalia codex's first mention of Danaan son of Danaan immediately follows a long passage on the Scythian sage Anacharsis. Considerably, the Scythian name for the Jaxartes River was Danu (Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.28.3), after the water stream goddess, and therefore Danaan could be a theophoric name connected to Danu. Thus, the legend of Kay Khosrow's occultation happened somewhere in the mountainous area of Transoxiana, likely reaching the Jaxartes River.

Sakā nomads' continuous threats to the Persian Empire's northeastern borderlands had lasting effects. Indeed, a good deal of the battle and triumph scenes displayed on seals and sealings depict a Persian victory over enemies wearing costumes typical of the nomadic Sakā.⁹⁸ Cyrus the Great's encounters with various nomadic people of northern East Iran brings him near the Iranian epic tradition of facing nomadic Tūirias reflected in Avestan texts. The Chester Beatty Kephalia text contextualizes Kay Khosrow's disappearance from a military camp and proximity to nomads in a manner akin to that said of Cyrus's death. Moreover, according to Ctesias, the standing of Amorges, King of the Sakā (Haumavargā), at Cyrus's fateful battle against Derbices parallels the figure of Danaan. In addition, the significance of the Haoma ritual for these Sakā also acts as a counterpart to the sacred tree in the Chester Beatty Kephalia text. Hence, both the localization and context of the legends of Cyrus and Kay Khosrow are similar.

There are further parallels in the stories of Kay Khosrow and Cyrus's demise. The appearance of a divine entity to both Cyrus and Kay Khosrow, in the *Cyropaedia* and later Iranian tradition respectively, is quite similar. Indeed, the divine favor and foresight attributed to Cyrus are also characteristics of Kay Khosrow, and the succession stories are also comparable. Just as Kay Khosrow chooses the unknown Lohrāsp father of Goštāsp, who is not well-received by the nobles at first, Cyrus's dream predicts the ascension of Darius son of Hystaspes, whose throne was initially contested. Thus, different legends of the fates of Cyrus and Kay Khosrow have interdependent components.

In conclusion, appreciating the Avestan tradition's possible existence in the Achaemenid period enables us to see parallels between Greek sources and Kayanid legends. There are similarities between different versions of the origin, rising to power and death of Cyrus the Great and corresponding legends of Kay Khosrow. While appreciating their differences, which clearly arose from the western Iranian situation, there are instances of Cyrus's possible identification, or rather association, with Kauui Haosrauuah in the Achaemenid period. The Chester Beatty Kephalia explicitly called Kay Khosrow "King of Persia," not of Parthia or some other Iranian realm. This reveals that, by at least the third or early fourth century CE, Kay Khosrow had been integrated into the Persian tradition; an integration that might have begun in the Achaemenid period.

Legends of Cyrus the Great's Interactions with the Iranian tradition

Putting Cyrus the Great on par with Kauui Haosrauuah may have helped to assimilate the western Iranian monarchs and ancient Iranian kings, blurring their differences and

⁹⁶ BeDuhn, "Manichaean Interpretation."

⁹⁷ Narain, "The Sakā Haumavargā."

⁹⁸ Xin, "Enemies of Empire," 557–560.

ultimately influencing the later Iranian tradition of the Kayanids. This process might have started a two-way interaction between legends of Cyrus and Kauui Haosrauuah.

Aeschylus's report of the succession arrangement of Median and Persian kings is reminiscent of the Kayanid kings' arrangement in the Iranian national Iranian tradition. In Aeschylus's account, the two Median monarchs are portrayed similar to the Kayanid kings Kay Kawād and Kay Us (Kāvus), followed by Cyrus the Great as Kay Khosrow. If we consider the western Iranian tendency to liken the lines of Median monarchs together with internalized Cyrus to Kayanid kings, then we can better understand the parallels between the story of Cyrus's rise to power as depicted in the *Cyropaedia* and legends of Kay Khosrow. Hence, it is highly possible that, in the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon leveraged some of the fundamental components of the legends of Kauui Haosrauuah through Iranian sources in the making of Cyrus.

The *Cyropaedia*, however, with its possible Median perspective, is not the only account that borrowed patterns and motifs from legends of Kauui Haosrauuah. The accounts of Herodotus and Ctesias, which both presumably emanated from the Persian court, also borrowed themes from the stories of Kauui Haosrauuah beginning at the time of Darius. For the Persians, these borrowings could have spoken to Darius's interest in bringing about Persian and Mede unity while still alienating the Median royal house.

Interestingly, the poetic tradition of Cyrus the Great that possibly borrowed traits from Kayanid legends in the Achaemenid period, in time, also affected those legends. In the version of Kayanid legends Dīnavarī posited, Kāvus was dethroned after Kay Khosrow's arrival to Persia and imprisoned until his death.⁹⁹ This account contrasts with what can be inferred from Middle Persian literature and the *Šāh-nāma*. If we consider the assimilation of Kay Khosrow and Kāvus with Cyrus and Astyages, then it is not outside the realm of possibilities that this account might have western Iranian origins. There is, however, no supporting evidence for this assumption. Nevertheless, other evidence suggests a western Iranian context for some stories of the East Iranian Kayanid saga.

In the story of Kay Khosrow's qualification as crown prince, as he had God-given glory, he destroyed a fortress occupied by *dēvs*, "demons," and then established a new town centered around a magnificent fire temple, which he tended for an entire year.¹⁰⁰ Despite the East Iranian focus of Kayanid legends, this episode is centered in Pārs (Persis): Kay Khosrow's point of departure is Eṣṭakhr (environ of Persepolis) and he returns there after one year. The *Šāh-nāma*'s telling of the fortress of demons is the foundational myth for the western Iranian temple of Ādur Gušnasp at Šiz (Takht-e Solaymān, Azerbaijan). The earliest settlement here was a small and poor agglomeration of houses with stone socles and clay or mud brick walls. The pottery and few small finds—such as three-winged bronze arrowheads and an elbow-shaped fibula—allow dating this settlement to the Achaemenid period. Intramural burials were placed in the corners and next to the walls of the houses and courtyards, in pits cut into the rocky ground and partly covered by benches or walls. The process of the site's architectural transformation into the renowned fire temple presumably began after the suppression of the Mazdakite movement under Sasanian Khosrow I.¹⁰¹ It is thus safe to assume that Khosrow attributed the first foundation of the temple to his namesake, the great Kayanid Khosrow.

The story of Kay Khosrow's qualification and the fortress of *dēvs* does not have Avestan precedence and seems to originate from an Achaemenid milieu. The circumstances influencing Kay Khosrow's appointment as crown prince appear to form the background of the story, as we can find this narrative's main components in Xerxes's inscriptions.¹⁰² According to Xerxes, Darius had other sons, but Xerxes became the crown prince through the grace of AhuraMazdā (XPf 4). On a separate occasion, Xerxes speaks of destroying *daivadāna* "the

⁹⁹ Dīnavarī, *Akhhār al-ṭawāl*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Firdowsi, *Šāh-nāma*, II: 460–7.

¹⁰¹ Huff, "TAKT-e SOLAYMĀN."

¹⁰² Jamzadeh, "A Shahnama passage."

den of demons” (XPh 5). Despite the timeless sense of Xerxes’s *daiva* inscription, *daivas* could point to the archaic deities of inhabitants of Media outside Persia, as the worship of *daivas* and AhuraMazdā was current in the unidentified land of Daivadāna.¹⁰³ The Achaemenid remains at the site of Ādur Gušnasp could, due to its burials, outline a non-Mazdean religious practice. It is possible that the Daivadāna in Xerxes’s inscription could point to somewhere in Media, Šiz in particular. Overall, the story of Kay Khosrow’s competition for the crown and conquering the fortress of demons is likely indebted to Xerxes’s inscriptions.

The story of Kay Khosrow and the fortress of demons has another detail that points to events under Cyrus the Great and, in turn, makes Xerxes indebted to his maternal grandfather in his narrative. The letter Kay Khosrow dictated to a scribe to be placed on the fortress is a declaration to the world, the wording of which echoes elements of Cyrus’s cylinder inscription. This cylinder had been placed as a foundation deposit and instituted a restoration of the correct worship of Marduk.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, Xerxes recalled the correct worship as practiced by Cyrus and utilized it in his plot, but in an Iranian milieu. Iranians might have remembered such practices from the account of the original player, i.e., Cyrus the Great, who is here fully acclimated into Kayanid legends as Kay Khosrow.

While the Avestan legend of Fraŋrasiīān took place in an East Iranian context, Afrāsīāb’s flight to a cave near Barda’ in ancient Albania in the *Šāh-nāma* transfers the scene of his final capture to a western Iranian locale.¹⁰⁵ It is possible that this transfer was a faint reflection of a reworking of the original legend to conform to the history of western Iran. The Medes’ fight with invading Scythians is reflected in the *Cyropaedia* (III.2) as Cyrus the Great’s conflict with a roaming troop of plundering Chaldeans on the borders with Armenia. Cyrus founded a fortress as a protective measure in the mountains that mark the border between Armenia and Scythia. The anonymous *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam*¹⁰⁶ mentions a fortress in the mountain at Sarīr (meaning “throne”) in ancient Albania with a throne of red and gold. In his account of Alexander, Niẓāmī narrates that storytellers recited stories about Sarīr during soirees, which was how Alexander learned of the fortress where Kay Khosrow’s throne resided.¹⁰⁷ In addition, Alexander visits the nearby cave of Kay Khosrow and then faces a snowstorm akin to that which Kay Khosrow’s paladins faced upon his disappearance.¹⁰⁸ The *Šāh-nāma*’s cave of Afrāsīāb and Niẓāmī’s cave of Kay Khosrow are conflation of East Iranian legends transferred to western Iran. We can find the details of what appears as a western Iranian reworking of the *Šāh-nāma*’s Avestan legend in the *Šarafnāma*. Niẓāmī’s tales were likely based on the secular oral tradition of Azerbaijan (i.e., ancient Media Atropatene), his homeland. Furthermore, Kay Khosrow’s fortress in the *Šarafnāma* and its parallel in the *Cyropaedia* indicate that this western Iranian transfer emerged within the context of legends of Cyrus the Great.

A hidden piece in the interaction of Cyrus the Great’s legends with those of Kay Khosrow lies in the later Iranian tradition’s association of Alexander and Kay Khosrow. The next section discusses legends of Alexander in association with Cyrus the Great in occidental sources as compared to legends of Alexander connected to Kay Khosrow in the Iranian tradition.

Alexander, Cyrus, and their Associations with the Iranian Tradition

Alexander’s assimilation with Kay Khosrow is an ironic feature of the integration of Alexander legends into the Iranian tradition. The *Dārāb-nāma*¹⁰⁹ links Alexander with the Iranian past by having him find Kay Khosrow’s treasure, kill a Central Asian king as revenge

¹⁰³ Ghirshman, “Les Daivadāna,” 6–9.

¹⁰⁴ Davidson, “Traces,” 238–9.

¹⁰⁵ Firdowsi, *Šāh-nāma*, IV: 312–13.

¹⁰⁶ Sutūdiḥ (ed.), *Ḥudūd*, 192.

¹⁰⁷ Niẓāmī, *Šarafnāma*, 324.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 337 f.

¹⁰⁹ Ṭarsūsī, *Dārāb-nāma*, II.

for Siyāvaš's death, and visit Afrāsīāb's city and the Brazen Castle (Rūyin Diž). In addition, in Niẓāmī's account of Dārā's final war, one of his counselors alludes to an old prophecy: before Kay Khosrow's occultation, he used his magic cup to look into the future. Out of Greece shall come an arrogant ruffian who will conquer the entire land of Iran and then reign on the throne of the Kayanids.¹¹⁰ In retrospect, Alexander finds Kay Khosrow's magic cup at Sarīr, whose secrets enabled the Greeks to invent the astrolabe.¹¹¹ Alexander sits on Kay Khosrow's throne and drinks wine from his cup. At this point, Niẓāmī compares Alexander's mirror with Kay Khosrow's cup.¹¹² Hence, Alexander's mirror is analogous to the cup of Kay Khosrow, later popularly known as the goblet of Jam (Yima), which mirrors the unseen world where reality is reflected. Furthermore, as Alexander approaches the confines of the known world, he confronts strange creatures and encounters supernatural phenomena that Kay Khosrow similarly met. Such parallelism puts Alexander on par with Kay Khosrow.

To understand the Iranian tradition's assimilation of Alexander with Kay Khosrow, we must appreciate Cyrus the Great's possible identification with Kay Khosrow. The story of Alexander arriving at the throne fortress parallels an episode in the *Šāh-nāma's* Alexander Romance in which he reaches a palace made of topaz on a high mountain.¹¹³ This episode corresponds to an episode in the Greek version of the Alexander Romance (Pseudo-Callisthenes III.28) in which Alexander enters the royal palace of Cyrus and finds a golden throne and a large engraved golden mixing bowl. In addition, as Šafavī noted,¹¹⁴ Alexander's visit to Kay Khosrow's resting place in the *Šarāfnāma* may actually be a reflection of a historical event, i.e., Alexander's visit to Cyrus's tomb. Thus, the association of Alexander and Kay Khosrow in fact speaks to Alexander's identification with Cyrus the Great and the Iranian tradition's identification of the latter with Kay Khosrow.

The association of Alexander with Cyrus the Great, and ultimately Kay Khosrow, may reflect a shadow of Alexander's own Persianization propaganda. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* was an important inspiration for Alexander, as he sought to imitate Cyrus the Great.¹¹⁵ Alexander deliberately connected himself to Cyrus, and echoes of Cyrus ring around Alexander.¹¹⁶ Alexander's later career reflects as much familiarity with Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* as the *Anabasis*. According to Stark, some parallels between Arrian's account of Alexander and Xenophon's portrait of Cyrus suggest a more direct connection between Alexander and the Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia*.¹¹⁷ Parallels between Xenophon's Books VII-VIII and Alexander's career after his defeat of Darius also reflect Arrian's intense devotion to his literary model. In fact, Arrian borrowed many stylistic features from Xenophon's *Anabasis*. From Xenophon's Cyrus the Younger to Alexander, and from Artaxerxes II to Darius III, the discursive connections are unequivocal: after implacable discourses of delegitimization, Artaxerxes II and Darius III were stripped of their status as Great Kings due to an irrevocable choice publicly expressed by their former comrades in arms.¹¹⁸ Hence, as Jamzadeh suggested, in Iranian legends that make Alexander a half-brother of Dārā, we may see echoes of Cyrus the Younger's rebellion, who challenged his brother Artaxerxes II.¹¹⁹ In sum, Alexander's propaganda and biographies, bearing some Persian traits, affected the Iranian perception of him as a half-Persian, legitimate Iranian sovereign who is indirectly depicted on par with Cyrus the Great, identified with Kay Khosrow.

¹¹⁰ Niẓāmī, *Šarāfnāma*, 172–3.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 335–6.

¹¹² *ibid.*, 327–8.

¹¹³ Firdowsi, *Šāh-nāma*, VI:100.

¹¹⁴ Šafavī, *Iskandar*, 178.

¹¹⁵ Tatum, *Xenophon's*, 238–9.

¹¹⁶ See Mitchell, "Alexander the Great," 101 with classical references.

¹¹⁷ Stark, *Alexander's Path*, 203–210.

¹¹⁸ Briant, *Darius*, 139–146.

¹¹⁹ Jamzadeh, *Alexander Histories*, 180.

Conclusion

The narrative structure of legends of Cyrus the Great as transmitted by Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon, as well as the themes employed to give form to these patterns, point to the existence of a diversity of views on Cyrus in the western Iranian milieu. By the time of Artaxerxes I, and certainly by the middle of the Achaemenid period, we hear of the multiplicity of versions of Cyrus stories. In addition, these accounts show that older molds of the oral Iranian tradition were used to relay more recent events. Apparently, some of these versions also independently borrowed various motifs and patterns from the legends of Kay Khosrow. This adoption of Iranian legends may have been an attempt to internalize the “non-Iranian” element of Cyrus’s ancestors and reign within western Iranian circles of the Achaemenid Empire, whose elite was pushed towards an Iranian ideology following Darius the Great’s ascension to the Persian imperial throne. From the reign of Darius onward, it seems, components of Kay Khosrow legends were leveraged in stories of Cyrus in the western Iranian milieu. This assimilation later resulted in a two-way interaction between the legends of Kay Khosrow and those of Cyrus, as well as their possible fusion.

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