

SILLA THE FOUNDER OR SILLA THE KINGDOM: ACCORDING TO KUŠ-NĀMEH AND SELECTED ARABO-PERSIAN TEXTS

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Iran's relations with the Far East date back to the Parthian Period. Despite this, the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the escape of Yazdgird's survivors is currently being re-evaluated as the beginning of a new chapter in bilateral ties, especially between Iran and China and Iran and Silla. In a chapter of Kuš-nāmeḥ (KN), the text describes Silla (an individual's name) as the father of the people of Silla (toponym). In this paper, I have tried to give a reasonable interpretation for this narration by KN. Also I have frequently referred to other texts to present a comparative study that supports my claim.

Keywords: Sasanian, Yazdgird (iii), Silla, genealogy, China.

INTRODUCTION

Iran's political and cultural links with the Far East date back to the Parthian era, to the Kingdom of Mithridates II. The Parthian objects discovered in parts of China support this claim. Nevertheless, the Sasanian period (224-651 CE), is considered as a brilliant era in Iran's cultural links with the Far East, namely China, Silla and Japan, whether directly or indirectly. In this period, Sasanian art affected most parts of that geographical area, as attested by Sasanian archeological artifacts found in China, Silla (such as the Sasanian relics discovered in Gyeongju) and Japan (Nara) (Akbarzadeh: 2013, 38).

In fact, the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the escape of Yazdgird's survivors¹

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¹ Yazdgird (III) reigned 632-651 AD; he was a grandson of Khosrow II. With him ended the Sasanian dynasty, for the attempts of his son, Pērōz (Pahl.), and his descendants to regain power with the help of Chinese or Turkish troops proved futile (cf. Shahbazi:2005, online).

together with a group of artists, musicians, and army generals, is currently being re-evaluated as the beginning of a new chapter in bilateral ties, especially between Iran and China and Iran and Silla. In some of the Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts (8th-9th centuries CE), such as *Bundahishn*² (Bahar: 1991), clear reference has been made to Firuz's escape to the Far East. However, the term *Chinestan* (Čīnestān) has been used in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts applying to a highly meaningful climate. Silla has been described in Islamic texts as a part of *Chinestan* and China (cf. Hodud-al-Alam: 1962, 60, 19; Ibn Khordadbeh: 1991:53-54).

Although scholarly works have been published in the past century concerning bilateral ties between Iran and China, and even Iran and Japan, after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, along with the presence of Sasanian princes in that region, (Compareti: 2009, Online), the issue of bilateral relations between Iran and Silla has been less studied and written about; what the Post-Sasanian and Arabo-Persian texts have registered and recorded about Silla is in no way comparable with the reports associated with China and of course with Japan in Persian texts.

Post-Sasanian references and Arabo-Persian texts (from historical to geographical and epic texts) depict Silla's role in safeguarding Sasanian art and culture and also helping the wandering Sasanian princes to a much greater extent than China.³ This issue of the presence of the Sasanian princes in Silla is now considered to be one of the most recent topics regarding the Silk Road and political-cultural relations between the two countries.

The book *Kuš-nāme*⁴, written by Irānšān b. Abu'l-Ḳayr, is one of the unique books which

² *Bundahishn* (*Bundahišn*) includes different mythological and historical kinds of data in its 36 chapters. These include: Ohrmazd (Good Spirit) and Ahriman (Evil Spirit) (I), Primal Creation (2-6), On the Creatures (7), On the Mountains (9), On the Seas (10), On the Rivers (11), On the Kinds of people (14), On the Divider Bridge (26), Famous cities of Iran / toponyms (31), Kayanid kings (35), Arabs and Sasanian kings (36). Also see Akbarzadeh: 2010: 419.

³ Fortunately, thanks to *Kuš-nāme* research project, effective measures (articles, books, conferences) have been taken since 2008 concerning cultural and political relations between Iran and Silla. Prior to this project, precious works have been very trivial in this regard.

⁴ - Matini (2008, online) writes: *Kuš-nāma*, part of a mythical history of Iran written by Ḥakim Irānšān b. Abu'l-Ḳayr between the years 501-04/1108-11 (lines 167-70; 5538-47) dealing with the eventful life of *Kuš the Tusked* (or *Pil-guš*, "the Elephant-eared"), Tusk the son of *Kuš* (brother of *Žaḥḥāk*). *Kuš the Tusked* is said to have lived 1,500 years; however, the only manuscript of the *Kuš-nāma* lacks an account of the last years of his life. The work (lines 5553-64) is dedicated to the Seljuk ruler Ġiā'ī-Dīn Moḥammad b. Malek-Šāh (r. 498--511/1105-18). The writer's name does not appear in the work. The only source that refers to him, albeit indirectly, is *Mojmal* (written in 520/1126), which in mentioning another work by the author, the *Bahman-nāma*, says, "I [the author of *Mojmal*] have found no reference [to the death of *Zal*] except in the *Bahman-nāma*, written by Ḥakim Irānšāh b. Abu'l-Ḳayr." In two out of the four manuscripts of *Mojmal*, the author's name is recorded as "Irānšān", "while in the other two it is "Irānšāh" and "Inšāh" (*Kuš-nāma*, intro. pp. 28-9). The poet refers to his poem as *Kuš-nāma* twice (lines 30, 4802), while *Mojmal* (pp. 2, 189) refers to it as *Qeṣṣa-ye Kuš-e Pil-Dandān* ("the tale of *Kuš the Tusked*") and *Aḳbār-e Kuš-e Pil-Dandān* ("Accounts of *Kuš the Tusked*"). Irānšān was a Muslim, but it is hard to say whether he was Sunni or Shi'i Muslim. A unique manuscript of the work is found in a collection held in the British Library (OR 2780) (>British Library). The collection contains five *maṣnavis*: namely, *Asadi Ṭusi's Garšasp-nāma*, *Ahmad Tabrizi's Šāhanshāh-nāma*, *Tāriḳ-e Čangiz Ḳān va Jānešinānaš* ("the History of Genghis Khan and his Successors") the *Bahman-nāma*, and the *Kuš-nāma*. The manuscript is dated Šafar 800/October 1397. This manuscript of the *Kuš-nāma* is composed of 10,129

offer information in the epic style, concerning Iran and Silla relations. It is interesting that the history of ancient Iran has been narrated in the epic style in these books, intertwining history and myth.

Sasanian historiography,⁵ namely *Xodāy-nāmag* or the *Shah-nameh* (cf. the historical chapter), offers some evidence on this point. This issue is also understandable through the Sasanian reliefs (cf. *Naqsh-e Rājab: the Founder of Sasanian Empire, his rival under the horse's hoof and the Supreme God*).

Among valuable information about Silla are the verses which refer to the Silla people's genealogy in *Kuš-nāmeḥ*.

KUŠ-NĀMEH AND SILLIAN (KOREAN) GENEALOGY

In a chapter of *Kuš-nāmeḥ* entitled “Question and Answer (3491-3563) between Abtin and Taehur”, where Abtin (the Iranian prince) and Taehur (King of Silla) talk about different subjects such as religion, knowledge and the background of Silla, with the help of an interpreter, Taehur, the King of Silla, introduces his ancestors:

3500. Taehur replied: But my ancestors and former kings, all called themselves creators.

3502. It was the case until the *rule of Basila* that the people named a *mountain (land) after him*.

3503. He (= *Basila*) was higher in knowledge than his ancestors, and he was better than the influential persons of his family.

3504. *He* built these cities (of *Basilla*) near this mountain, and gained historical fame ...

In the above-mentioned verses, Silla is mentioned as the name of a king (and the (founder) of the dynasty), while in other parts of the book this name (Silla) refers to a city/country⁶. The question is whether such a description has precedence in the Persian language. Furthermore, could such a background in itself be regarded as a seal of verification on the ancientness of bilateral relations?

lines. It contains a number of gaps and a relatively large number of errors, which escaped the notice of the scribe. The work contains very few headings, but for ease of analysis it can be divided into an introduction and two parts. The introduction (lines 1-226) begins by extolling God, then refers to the *Bahman-nāma*, and the *Kuš-nāma*, the reasons behind their composition, and ends with praise of the patron. Part I (lines 227-918) can be considered a kind of introduction to Part II. Part II (lines 919-10,129) describes the exploits of *Kuš the Tusked*. This figure also appears in *Ferdowsi's Šāh-nāma*, the *Bahman-nāma*, and the *Farāmarz-nāma*. Also see, Akbarzadeh: 2014, 1-8.

⁵ - *Xodāy-nāmag* in Pahlavi means “Act of Lords/kings”. They recorded historical events during the Sasanian period which were mingled with mythical objects. Post-Sasanian texts have mentioned it under *Xhosrow I* (the sixth century). It served as one of the most importance sources for epic works such as *Firdowsi's Shah-nameh*.

⁶ *Shahr* (city) means, both, “the city” and also “the country” in Pahlavi (Sasanian) and New Persian languages (classic texts), i.e. *Iran-šahr* means “the country of Iran” (widely in Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts and Sasanian inscriptions); also it means a city i.e. *Iran-šahr* (cf. like *Iran-šahr*, a city in Sistan and Baluchistan province at present); (cf. Mackenzi: 1971, 79).

Obviously, genealogy was one of the most important sciences in Pre-Islamic period Iran. In other words, having a patent of nobility and monarchical blood was the most important factor for becoming a legitimate king. Apart from Avesta in the northeast (cf. Reichlet: 1911, 263), the Achaemenid kings in the southwest repeatedly mentioned this issue in their inscriptions.

Darius the Great introduced himself in different inscriptions (above all in Bisotun) as the son of Hystaspes, Hystaspes son of Arshameh, son of Ariaramnes ... son of Achaemenid (Kent: 1953, 119). The ancestor of this dynasty was a person called Achaemenid, therefore, the dynasty is referred to in the histories by his name. The status of the Parthians whose ancestor is Arsacid, or the Sasanian whose ancestor is Sassan, support the claim in the Pre-Islamic periods.

Recounting one's ancestry gave a kind of legitimacy to the kings as well. This issue has been applied not only to the kings but also to the Iranian dynasties, secretaries, scribes and other important social casts (cf. Shahbazi: 2005, online). In the Sasanian era, this cast system can be verified through various texts.

But in most of the *Kuš-nāme* verses, we are faced with a remote territory (Silla) rather than a king or a dynasty. This article puts forward the question how this issue (Silla the king) should be interpreted.

More importantly, such a claim has only been made by *Kuš-nāme*, which can be considered as the most important and largest text in the Persian language regarding bilateral relations between Iran and Silla.

However, such a genealogy in regard to alien lands can be found in the Post-Sasanian (and Arabo-Persian) texts, where Masudi (2008, 232), in *Mowruj-al-Zahhab*, speaks about the Iranians themselves:

“Some believe that the Iranians are the offspring of IRAN (>individual name), the son of Fereidun.”

However, in the Pre-Islamic period up to the Islamic era texts, it can be repeatedly noticed that the genealogy of Iranians went back to Kiomarth (ancient texts attribute Kiomarth to a father called Maš and a mother named Mašyāna). Therefore we might ask whether Masudi's writings were in comparison with reports such as Silla and the following examples?

Apart from ancient relations with Greece, Masudi writes (Ibd. 279): “There are different narrations about Greek's race (family tree). Some have said that “Greek” (> individual name) was the son of Noah's son Japheth.”

Maqdisi (2008, 457): “Zulqarnayn (> Alexander) was a man from Egypt and the son of Greek, son of Japheth, son of Noah.”

Masudi (2011, 107) in *Al-Tanbih wa-al-Ashraf*: “There are discrepancies over the original race of the Greeks. There is a narration saying they are descendants of Greek, son of Japheth, son of Noah.”

Tarikh Tabari (1983: 137) considers “Greek, son of Japheth as the ancestor of the Greeks.” Also, Tusi (2003: 242) in *Ajaye* -al-Makhluqat writes: China (toponym) is called after

the name of China (> individual name), son of Faghfur, son of Komari, son of Japheth, son of Noah. Other texts have referred to these narrations repeatedly. (cf. Zayn -al-Akhbar: 2006, 370; Mojmal -al-Tawarikh: 2010, 124).

Gardizi (2006: 370): “Noah divided the world among his three sons, Sām, Hām and Japheth. He gave Turk, Soqlab, Gog and Magog as far as China to his son Japheth.”

Dinvari in Akhbar al-Towal (2010: 27, 25) mentioned:

“There were seven brothers named Turk, Khazar, Soqlab, Taris, Mansak, Komari and China who departed for the North and the East (directions). After them, sons of Hām, son of Noah, who were seven brothers named Sind, Hind (> India), Zang (Zanj, cf. Zanzibar), Qebt (> Copt> Coptus), Habash (>Ethiopia), Nobeh and Kana’n proceeded towards the South and the West.”

Also Masudi (2008: 128, 153, 591) writes: “There are discrepancies among people about the origin and genealogy of the Chinese people. Many people have said that when Noah divided the Earth, the children of Amur ibn (son), Subil ibn (son), Japheth ibn (son), and Noah proceeded towards the East. There, they split into a number of realms. Among those who left for the desert were Turk, Khazlaj and Toghozghoz, who went further than the land of China, where, in the vicinity of the sea, the *famous Silli and its islands* are located with pleasant climate and good soil. They are said to be a group of Amur’s descendants who we have earlier referred to in the chapter regarding the dwelling of Chinese people in that land.”

Also he writes in Al-Tanbih wa -al-Ashraf (2011: 79): “(people of) China and Silli are one nation and the children of Amur.”

As the above evidence shows, Greece, China, India, Turk and of course Silla are the names of people, each of whom is the founder of his homeland, while the names of their countries are the eponym of their names. In Masudi’s report, Silla like China, is among Amur’s children. This genealogy has become Semitic and has been influenced by Islam.

In Islamic texts (Arabo-Persian) we are faced with three types of tradition and narration in the genealogy of ethnic groups. One is an Iranian tradition in which all the ethnic groups are somehow of Iranian origin. This ideology dates back to a very old time in the Pre-Islamic era when Iran was supposed to be the center of the world; this thought is part of an old Iranian myth (Bundahishn, 1991: 83):

“Those who are in the land of Iran (= reside there) and those who are in the non-Iranian territories, i.e. those who are in the Tur territory and those who are in Salm (i.e. Rome) and those who are in the Sin territory (i.e. Chinestan) and those who are in the territory of Sogdiana and those who are in the Sind territory and also those who are in the six other countries, are all the children of Fravāg, son of Syāmak, son of the Maš.”

The second tradition, which has become completely Semitic, also includes the Iranians who are the descendants of Noah’s sons. This tradition has been strongly influenced by Islamic thought and acquired validity among writers with the arrival of Islam in Iran. Its instance is the attribution of ethnic groups to Noah and his children, such as Amur, which Masudi has used for Silla. In this ideology, contrary to the Iranian tradition, Islam has been used as the basis for

the interpretation of genealogy.

The third tradition concerns combining of written history and foreign elements. In this tradition, ethnic groups are affiliated neither to the Iranian nor Semitic races. This tradition has provided approximately true information regarding genealogy.

For example, in most texts concerning Alexander's genealogy, he is referred to as the son of Phillip (a Hellenic tradition); but Alexander is a well-known personality and his story is different from Silla, China, etc. In the Silla people's genealogy, (Silla is attributed to a person named Silla, China to a person named Chin, Turks to a person called Turk ...). My interpretation is that in such texts the writers were well aware, on the one hand, that these ethnic groups were not related to the Semitic or the Iranian groups; while on the other hand, they had no precise information about the ethnic background and genealogy of these territories or at least it was not mentioned in their references (oral and written).

Therefore, in Silla's genealogy, reference in *Kuš-nāmeḥ* to Silla as the father of the Silla people is placed under this subject. Furthermore, *Iran-shan* makes no reference to Amur and the Semitic tradition in Silla genealogy. This would appear to represent another seal of verification on the ancientness of the story and the preservation of the originality of the Silla family tree on the basis of the same methods of genealogy registration (third method). In other words, the mixture of Silla genealogy with Amur is a recent event and the references in *Kuš-nāmeḥ* are more original and ancient.

It is clear that Iran and Korea began their cultural and historical relations during the Silla monarchy and the term Silla, as the first gateway for Iranians to recognition of that sacred homeland, represents the most compelling reason for the registration in Iranian writings of Silla as the father of the people of that island, in similar manner to the term Iran (the ancestor of the Iranians), China, Turk, Greece, and Rome.

The obvious difference here is that Silla is merely the name of a monarchical period and a historical era, while (for example) China had been the name of the territory – rather than an era or a king – in the Iranian texts since the beginning of bilateral relations. Given that no specific image or document existed for the writers of the early Islamic centuries about the beginning of relations with this or that country, they have named the Chinese the children of Chin (China) and the Turks the children of Turk...⁷

The fact is that Korea attained unity in the course of the Silla kingdom and the two monarchies of Baekje and Goguryeo were merged into this kingdom. What can be realized from this genealogy on the basis of the existing texts is that there was no relationship between Iran and Korea until the historic period of Silla.

⁷ With respect to naming the Iranians by other people, reference can be made to some evidence where the Chinese called Iran "An Shi" while "An Shi" was also used in the Chinese language when referring to the Parthians. Obviously, bilateral relations between Iran and China date back to the Parthian era.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of all the available evidence, genealogy was an important science in ancient Iran. Having a royal descent gave a measure of legitimacy for seizing power. However, we are faced with two actual (real) and mythical practices of genealogy in ancient Iran. This issue has been frequently addressed in texts using two methods: one is the Iranian tradition and Iranization of the race of others; the other is the tradition of Semiticisation of ethnic groups, which was frequently applied to Iranians and non-Iranians with the arrival of Islam. This is why Greece, China, India, and Turk are attributed as the fathers of the Greeks, Chinese, Indians and Turks, while the latter are considered of Iranian origin in the Sasanian Pahlavi texts such as *Bundahishn* and they are attributed to Noah in Islamic texts.

In the meantime, the case of Silla offers a similar situation. In some Islamic narrations such as Masudi's report, Silla is attributed to Noah; but in texts such as *Kuš-nāmeḥ*, he is the father of all the people of Silla and enjoys an independent genealogy. Apart from verifying the ancientness of the text of *Kuš-nāmeḥ*, its reference and content about Silla, such an independent genealogy also verifies some sort of legitimacy for the Silla (the king) in ruling over Silla (the territory). Detailed knowledge of the narrators regarding the arrival of the Sasanians (Iranians) to Silla, as the gateway of the historical relationships during this period, can be one of the reasons for this narration not becoming Semitic. But these Iranians must have entered Silla at a time when Islam had not arrived in Iran or the subject of those Iranians and their story may have contradicted the issue of becoming Semitic.

This lack of mixture of the race of the Silla people with the Semitic tradition, somehow can be intermingled with the presence of the Sasanian princes in that territory.

Obviously, as a result of the Arab invasion of Iran and the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, the survivors of Yazdgird fled to China and it is highly probable that a number of them asked for the help of Silla to combat against the Arabs, though due to their unsuccessful expeditions, they had to remain there. However, as the text of *Kuš-nāmeḥ* deals with the efforts of the Iranians to return to Iran and rescue the country from the hands of the Arabs - and Silla plays an outstanding role in this regard - the originality of this genealogy - neither Iranian nor Semitic - has been maintained. What Taehur says about the greatness of his ancestor the king of Silla and his respect for him is in fact the respect of the Iranians for the territory and monarchy which gave refuge to some Sasanian princes. This originality, respect and splendor about Silla can be seen throughout Persian texts, a point which cannot be witnessed in the case of any other country or any monarchy to such an extent. Such respect, with the dislocation of one of the oldest Iranian myths, that is to say marriage of the Iranian prince Abtin to Fararang, the princess of Silla, and the rescue of Fereidun the redeemer of Iran from the hands of the intruders, reached the peak of kinship and friendship. This friendship, respect and historical support would appear to merit further study and research.

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