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THE REIGN OF HUSRAW I IN THE ŠĀHNĀMA

Traduction inédite

INTRODUCTION

What follows is an annotated translation of the portions of the *Šāhnāma* dealing with Husraw I's reign. More fanciful portions of it, such as the wisdom literature attributed to Buzurg-Mihr, are passed over in brief summaries, but I have translated everything else that is of high worth to an historian. I have compared my translation to the much older 1923 Warner¹ version, and to the 2006 one by Dick Davis,² and I have tried to strike a balance between the stiff literalism of the former and the loose fluency of the latter. References to lines are taken from the Khaleghi-Motlagh edition of the *Šāhnāma*.³

Firdawsī writes in an archaising form of New Persian which avoids Arabic and other foreign words, and which preserves grammatical forms that had already begun to drop out of Persian in the eleventh century. But it is perfectly intelligible to a modern speaker of Persian. So I have tried to give the modern Anglo-Saxon reader a sense of what Firdawsī's language is really like. This means a conservative vocabulary of mostly Anglo-Saxon words, a turgid syntax, and early-modern English grammar. However, I have often had to supply words to flesh out the sense in English, and these I have put in italics.

¹ Warner / Warner 1923

² Davis 2006.

³ *Šāhnāma* 1987, p. 87–652.

THE REIGN OF NŌŠĪN-RAVĀN. THE PROLOGUE

l. 1–14

O thou tall, heart-adorning cypress,
 What befell thee that thou art so wretched?
 Despite that pleasure and that glory and ornament,
 Why is thy heart become fearful?
 Thus spake the asker to the cypress tree:
 Glad was I till I grew old;
 So weak I grew by the might of thirty *years*.
 Beware! And bruise not thy hand *striving* with it.
 It hath dragon's breath and lion's claw;
 It gnaweth him that it bringeth down!
 Thunder-voiced it is and wolf-swift:
 In one hand woe, and in the other death.
 Of the heart-adorning cypress it maketh a *bent* hoop;
 The jasmine leaf it maketh amber;
 The ruddy flower it maketh saffron;
 After saffron *come* heavy pains!
 The messenger's foot becometh bound without fetter,
 And because of it the noble body groweth wretched.
 My watery pearl hath taken on weakness:
 Likewise the noble cypress hath taken on baseness.
 Those crop-sick narcissus flowers are become full of lamentation:
 They get bent backs from the pain of it.
 Thus our days become base.
Even when man is full of *his mother's* milk
 Death hasteth and calleth him old.
 Forty and eight *years* were the era of Nōšīn-Ravān:⁴
 Thou hast passed sixty: thou art not a youth.

⁴ The poet sometimes calls his subject 'Nōšīn-Ravān' and sometimes 'Kisrā'. Nōšīn-Ravān is a corruption of Husraw I's epithet *anōšag-ruwān* which means 'of immortal soul'. Neither *anōšag-ruwān* nor its Arabicised form *ānūšīrwān* would have fit Firdawsī's metre, so he changed it to 'Nōšīn-Ravān', which means 'of sweet soul'. 'Kisrā' is the Arabic form of 'Husraw'.

THE BEGINNING OF THE TALE

l. 15-179

When Kīsrā sat upon the ivory throne,
 He put upon his head the heart-enkindling crown.
 The grandees of the world gathered,
 As knight sat with counsellor.
 The chief of the nobles opened his mouth;
 He remembered the Giver of Goodness.
 Thus he spake: ‘Be our hearts full of blessing and kindness
 From heaven’s almighty god!
 From him is glory and in him is might.
 At his behest shineth the star from heaven.
 May we pass not from his counsel and bidding!
 He that doeth righteousness upon the throne of greatness
 Shall rightly be glad in his heart.
 Whoever thinketh evil thoughts
 Shall in the end fasten evil to his own body.
 Whatever be asked of us, we shall reply.
 We shall grant a glorious day to the askers.
 No one is aware of the heart’s thought:
 I have no road into the narrow heart.
 If righteousness be the emperor’s work,
 All they that are joyful at justice shall be without doubt.
 Let no work from to-day remain till to-morrow,
For who knoweth how fate shall turn to-morrow?
 The rose-garth that is in bloom to-day
 If thou shalt pluck it up to-morrow, it shall bring forth no flower.
 When thou findest the body strong,
 Think on sickness and woe and ruin.
 Then think life to be the day of death:
 Thus are we with death as wind and leaf.
 Whensoever thou art weak in work,
 Thou makest ill all thy counsel.
 When envy overcometh the heart of man,
 It is a pain without healer.
 And if passion sway wisdom,
 He shall want no witness to *his own* madness!
 The heart of the lazy and much-talking man

Shall have honour with no one.
 The way to crookedness is nearer;
 The way to righteousness is more slender.
 The work wherein thou doest well
 Shall fail if thou be stupid and idle.
 If thy tongue be wed to the lie,
 It shall have no brightness from heavenly fortune.
 Crooked speaking proceedeth from helplessness:
 The helpless must be wept over.
 As the king is first to rise from sleep,
 He is safe from the fiend, and hale,
 Wise, and free from want of food.
 More than this is pain and woe and greed.
 If the king be *one* with ruth and righteousness,
 The world shall be full of goodness and repose.
 But if he bring crookedness into righteousness,
 The bitter cucumber shall be his food and his water blood!
 All ye that are gathered here,
 Hear this my uttered voice.
 Know it and acknowledge it from end to end.
 Be ye wayfarers with *good* fortune all *your* years,
 For we have exalted the royal dignity;
 We have fed it with wise counsel.
 But ye must heed *my* minister:
 Bad and good appear not without him.
 Whosoever cometh to this court in need,
But the way is not found:
 I shall not approve of the minister
 That hideth the matter from me.
 My ministers in the court,
 My warlike knights among the army —
 As we withhold not the living *owed* to them,
 They must respect *my* name and honour.
 May all be courtesy and uprightness!
 Let there be no lying within the deed.
 All they that are among the Aryans who
 Gird their waists in this court
 Shall find treasures and warm speech from us
 If he be a worshipper with counsel and modesty.
 If a vassal seek injustice
And be not wise and king-revering,

Retribution shall he find for that evil that he wrought.
 Let there be no lament for the niggard.
 Keep your heart to the bidding of the pure god,
 And have no fear of us,
 For he is emperor above emperor,
 World-holder, victorious, worthy of command!
 The enkindler of the crown, of the sun, and of the moon,
 Who sheweth us the way to righteousness!
 The holder of the world is judge above judges:
 He is higher than the thoughts of all *men*.
 Space and time he created, and heaven;
 He adorned our soul and heart with kindness;
 He enkindled your heart with our kindness,
Though the fiend's heart and eye be fastened upon us.
 He is guardian of the crown and the high throne.
 Thy well-being dependeth upon worship of him.
 All haleness dependeth upon his command.
 All goodness is below his providence.
 From the dust *of the earth* to the seven lofty spheres *of heaven*,
 Alike fire and water and lowly ground
 Bear witness to the god's being.
 They give surety to thy soul.
 All praise is under his command:
 All worship is under his providence.'

THE FARTHING OF THE EMPIRE AND THE TAX REFORM

l. 70-179

When Nōšīn-Ravān ended his speech,
 The world stood in wonder at him.
 All rose together from the place:
 They adorned him with new blessing.
 The king of kings summoned the wise;
 He spoke of the world from beginning to end.
 The world he divided into four parts
 And from it he ordained settled cities.
 First Ḥurāsān; he called it to mind,
And the nobles' heart was glad of it.

The next portion of it was Qum and Ispahān:
 Seat of grandees and place of noblemen.
 And Āzarābādagān was of this portion,
 Whereon nobles bestowed gifts.
 And from Armenia to the gate of Ardabīl
 The wise-seeing *king* meted out the land of Gēl.
 The third had Pārs and Ahvāz and the march of the Ḥazar
 From east to west.
 Fourth came ‘Irāq and the land of Byzantium,
 So imperious and populous.
 And from these marches whosoever was poor
And whose poverty was painful to the body,
 He meted out the full treasury upon them.
 The world called down blessings upon him.

All among the kings that were before him,
 Whether lesser of stature or greater than he,
 Sought a portion of tillage and harvest.
 None put his hand toward increasing *it*.
 One third to one fourth was the king’s portion.
 Qubād came, and lessened it to one tenth.
 Than one tenth he meant to make it less:
 He strove to make the lowly as the lordly.
 Fate made no delay for him in this.
 Trust not the crocodile in the river!
 To Kisrā came that worthy crown;
 Instead of one tenth he meted out the ḥaraj.⁵
 Ministers, counsellors, grandees and quick-witted mobads⁶
 Forgathered.
 All rulers assembled.
 They apportioned the land and cast the *measuring* rope upon it.
 A gazīt⁷ they imposed of one dirham,
 If thus the dihqān⁸ be not wroth.
 He that lacked seed or beast

⁵ *i.e.*, a fixed sum levied on land.

⁶ Strictly speaking a mobad is a Zoroastrian priest. But in some cases Firdawsī seems to use it to mean ‘counsellor’ or ‘adviser’. Below we discover that the Byzantine emperor and the Turkish Haqan had ‘mobads’.

⁷ *i.e.*, a fixed sum levied on persons.

⁸ ‘Dihqān’ here seems to mean a landholding magnate (Tafazzoli 1994).

In time of labour,
 The king of kings sustained from the treasury,
 And so the land was not abandoned.
 There was no word about unsown land:
 The old custom was ended.
 The tax upon six fruiting vines: one dirham.
 The same number was upon the date grove.
 Of the olive and of the walnut and each fruit-bearing *tree*,
 Whose stalk fruiteth in *the time of* Mihragān,⁹
 From ten stems, one dirham came to the treasury.
 Save this, there was no other burden for the year.
 And to these foods of the month of Ḥurdād,¹⁰
 When in fruit, none gave any heed.
 Whosoever had money and was not a dihqān *and who*
 Saw not pain nor woe of tillage and harvest,
 On a measure of ten to four dirhams
 Yearly from him the tax-officer gathered *the tax*.
 No one mistreated the landlord:
 This money was paid yearly in three portions.
 He brought payment to the king's chancery
 From this tribute one portion every four months.
 Scribe and servant of the king
 In the chancery – none could count them.
 The gazīt and the ḥarāj, those that bore the name,
 Were reckoned in three accounts by the mobad.
 One was that which was in the hand of the treasurer.
 The minister was protector of that book.
 The next *was* to be sent to all countries,
 To every official and to every potentate.
 The third they bestowed upon the mobad.
 They reckoned up the gazīt and the tributes.
 At his command was the work that was *done*
 Concerning tribute and ḥarāj and tillage and harvest.
 Skillful *men* were plentiful in the world,
 So that good and evil were not hid from him.
 All the face of the earth he filled with righteousness.
 He cultivated every ruined place.
 The wise and the good slept upon their backs.

⁹ *i.e.*, in autumn.

¹⁰ *i.e.*, in late spring.

Ram and wolf would come to the trough *together*.
 He commanded a letter in Pahlavi.
 It shall be pleasant to thee when thou hearest it from me.
 First, the beginning of the letter was: ‘From the chief,
 The king of kings Kīsrā, the god-worshipper,
 Who upon the day of Bahrām¹¹ in the month of Ḥurdād,
 To whom Yazdān¹² gave crown and rank from the earth,
 From the fecund stalk of the tree of Qubād,
 Who hath put on the crown of greatness –
 Unto the officers of the tribute and the ḥarāj,
 Worshippers of the shadow *my* glory and crown:
 Measureless greeting from us to you!
 If wisdom be joined with good lineage, may it increase!
 First, when we begin to speak,
 Let us glorify the World-Maker:
 Know *that* he *is* wise and clear-minded
 That hath thanks from the Judge of the World.
 He knoweth that he is without need of us.
 Unto him secrets are plain.
 When he exalteth someone,
 First he freeth him of need.
 He gave me authority, though he be judge,
 And higher than all loftiness for ever.
 Unto Yazdān empire and lord are one.
 Apart from worship, noone hath aught *to do*.
 From the marrow of the earth to the lofty sphere *of heaven*,
 From the heavens to the dark and lowly ground,
 The foot of the ant is witness to him,
 That we are *his* bondsmen and he is lord.
 He commandeth us naught but righteousness,
 For the dēv¹³ bringeth crookedness and loss.
 If my portion of this small tent
 Had been nothing but garden, palace, or treasure-house,
 My heart would seek nothing but ruth and righteousness.
 To open unto all things a smiling face.
 Now upon the lands of the earth end to end,

¹¹ This apparently signifies the twentieth day of the month.

¹² As a rule, Firdawsī uses this word to refer to the supreme deity.

¹³ A malevolent spirit comparable to a demon.

From the west unto the gate of the east,
 We ought to bring forth naught but ruth and righteousness,
 Though I bring wrinkles to my face by work.
 If the shepherd be careless and the field be great,
 No sheep remaineth safe from the wolf.
 It is not fit that upon our subjects
 (Among the dihqāns or our own pious worshippers,
 In dryness upon earth or in a ship upon water,
 In sunny day or time of sleep.
 Whether among merchants that go upon moist water or dry land)
 Have money and lustrous pearls and musk.
 May the shining sun shine not but with ruth and righteousness
 Upon them from the arch of the *heavenly* sphere.
 On this wise it went from my origin and family:
 The son would find crown from father.
 Naught but righteousness and goodness are in the world.
What is hidden is one with *that which is* the plain.
 We have put a ḥarāj upon the face of the world:
 A tax for the sake of the throne.
 When they bring this letter to you,
 May your *god* Urmazd¹⁴ be glad!
 Whoever transgresseth by one dirham,
 Whoever counteth a single breath unjustly,
 By Yazdān who gave *me* the diadem and the glory,
 I myself shall saw him in two with a saw.
 On this wise also the Creator's punishment
 Shall he find who bringeth bad lineage to fruit.
 Heed ye this letter and custom;
 Turn ye not from your glorious way.
 Every four months one part of it
 Take, with righteousness and blessing.
 In the place where the damage of the locust hath been,
 Or where the heat of the sun shineth upon the hard ground,
 Or where snow and wind of the lofty sphere *of heaven*
 Bring ruin upon these sown fields.
 Likewise if dew come not in the new year
 And the fecund plain turn ill because of drought,
 Take no tribute from that land and field,
 For the clouds of spring have not washed *them* in rain.

¹⁴ *i.e.*, the god Ahura Mazda.

From the stored-up seed and the wage of pain,
 Pay ye the workers from the treasury.
 The land whose lord
 Hath died, himself having no kin –
 That land must not be in ruin,
 For Iran is in the shadow of the king.
 The evil one bringeth disgrace upon the treasury,
 Who bringeth war on such a pretext.
 Withhold not what is needed from the treasury,
 For Yazdān hath made me without need.
 If fields within my land be desolate,
 The shadow of my glory shineth upon them.
 Him that was in charge of it,
 Though he find the work contemptible,
 Him I shall put live upon the gibbet right where he is,
 Be he high or be he lowly!
 The great, who were kings of old,
 Had customs different from this one.
 Bad and good were with their counsellors.
 The world was before the knights' horse, *and*
 Never were they satisfied with increase of treasure.
But my treasure is righteousness and the dihqān is my army;
 I shall not look upon dinars.
 Your seeking the world's renown for righteousness, *and*
 Respecting the worth of the man of high birth
Are worth more to me than warfare against my foe
 That seeketh ever my country and my rank.
 The spāhbad¹⁵ that selleth men for gold
 Must not *be* in this court with *his* belt of honour.
 The court giveth honour to him
 That is upright and noble, and *one* with the custom and way *thereof*.
 If my shrewd ministers
 Forgather at the office of the mobad
And the lie appear from the speech of one of them,
 From then on he shall get no blessing from us.
 My love is not for the unjust man.
 The leopard and the tyrant are one.

¹⁵ This rank, which we may translate as 'general', was not used before Husraw's reforms (Gyselen 2001, p. 12; Gyselen 2008). Firdawsī does not appear to be aware of this fact.

Whosoever bindeth himself to the way of Yazdān, *and*
 Batheth *his* dark soul in the water of wisdom:
 He shall be high in this court;
 His nobility shall be with the mobads,
 And with Yazdān, because of what he hath sown,
 Shall he find the glad heaven as a companion.
 For we are without need of provision
 Wherewith the soul groweth small and accursed.
 If *a man's* food be the poor man's flesh,
 There shall be, no doubt, nourishment from his hide.
 Thus is a leopard better than a king,
 For *the leopard* hath no shame, nor faith, nor religion.
 The door of righteousness is open unto us:
 Wherefore knock we vainly upon the door of lying?
 To do ill in secret, to do good openly,
 So that talk *thereof* come to us,
 Shall not be pleasing to Yazdān.
Such a one shall not be counted noble in this court.
 From Yazdān and from us shall be blessing upon him,
 For whom ruth and righteousness are as thread and weft.'

If thou art righteous, O king,
 Thou shalt remain on earth as a memory:
 For all men shall praise forever
 That king which made the earth to flourish.
 Of the kings that had had throne and crown *and*
 Who were mighty in treasury and army,
 None was more righteous than Nōšīn-Ravān.
 May his soul be forever young!
 None than he was more skilled in wisdom,
 In throne, in righteousness, or in manliness.

THE STORY OF BĀBAK AND THE MARSHALLING OF THE ARMY

l. 180-292

He had a mobad, Bābak by name,
 Wise, and shrewd-hearted, and joyful.
 To him he gave the office of mustering the army *and*
 Ordered him before the king's court

To set up a wide and high place,
 Whose top was higher than the shining peak of a mountain.
 He spread a royal carpet upon it.
 All whose task it was sat *thereon*.
 The cry went forth from Bābak's office.
 At once they gave ear to the voice:

'O war-learned men of renown!
 Mount your horses *and*
 Ride to the king's court
 With iron hat upon *your* head,
 Clad in mail with ox-headed mace,
 All ye that wish payment from the monarch!'

The army went to Bābak's portico.
 The air grew black from the riders.
 When Bābak beheld the whole army,
 He saw not the banner, nor the top of Kisrā's helm.
 He rode forth from the portico.
 He commanded them to return to *their* place.
 Thus again the whirling heaven proceeded.
 When the shining sun shewed *his* face,
 A cry went up from the court of the king:

'O mace-bearing Aryan host,
 All with armour and bow, and lasso
 Gather before the office of Bābak!'

They went with spear, and helmet, and mail.
 All dust about the army went up to the clouds.
 Bābak looked upon the treasury of the army.
 When the glory and dignity of the king appeared not,
 Thus he spake: 'To-day with grace and righteousness,
 Go ye back *home*, *in* victory and joy.'

On the third day the cry went up:

'O men of renown, with glory and pomp,
 Let not one knight
 Without helm and mail for battle
 Come *here*. Let him pass before the palace,
 Let him look upon the mustering ground and his office.
 Everyone that is noble by *reason of* a crown,
 Or by glory and greatness, and high throne,
 Let him know that the muster hath no respect,

Neither shame nor modesty *for persons*.’

When the king of kings Kīsrā opened his ear,
 He heard that cry from Bābak’s office.
 He smiled and called for shirt and mail-coif;
 The banner of greatness he held upright.
 The king strode into the office of Bābak
 With helm of iron upon his head, *and*
 Mail hanging loose from *his* Byzantine helm,
 Bound by manifold fastenings,
 An ox-shapen mace in hand.
 Bound upon his belt *were* arrows of poplar wood,
 Upon his arm a bow, and lasso upon his saddle.
 Upon his waist had he fastened a golden belt.
 He spurred *his* horse and gripped the reins.
 Upon his shoulder he put the heavy mace.
 He pulled the reins a little right and left;
 He shewed amour and riding to Bābak.
 Bābak looked, and it pleased him.
 He went to the wise king of kings, *and*
 Said to him: ‘O king, be thou undying!
 May thy soul be provided with excellence!
 Thou hast adorned the face of the earth with righteousness:
 On this wise we shall have righteousness as thy memorial.
 This *my* speech was boldness from a slave.
 It is right that thou turn not thy face from righteousness.
 Pull the reins a little to the right,
 For it befitteth thy skill.’

Again Kīsrā spurred *his* horse
 Right and left like unto Ādargušāsp.
 Bābak looked. He was astonished at him, *and*
 Called much upon the World-Maker.
 The knights’ payment was one thousand or two thousand;
 No one had more than four.
 He made the king’s pay one dirham more.
 The cry went up from the court to the office:
 ‘Bring the horse of the chief warrior,
 The world-renowned knight, the monarch!’
 Nōšīn-Ravān laughed much,

Fate is young and Husraw is young.
 When Bābak arose from the king's office,
 He came back from the renowned court.
 He said to him: 'O great monarch!
 Though I *who am* a slave am today become impudent,
 All was right and just in my heart.
 May the king take no harshness from me!'
 I shew no harshness, for I am right:
 Blessed be he that sought not harshness.
 The king spake to him: 'O wise man,
 Never go from the way of righteousness!
 If thou respect thine own self *overmuch*,
 Thou shalt break the heart of righteousness.
 Therefore thy worth to me is increased.
But my heart hath its own worry:
 When in array for the task of skirmish and battle,
 How shall we fare in war?'
 Thus he gave answer to the noble king:
 'Ring and crown see not thy like!
 Of thy hand and rein, O monarch,
 Upon the portico, painter hath not seen *any likeness*.
 The lofty sphere turneth at thy pleasure!
 O may thy heart be joyful, thy body without hurt!'
 Thus Nōšīn-Ravān spake to the mobad:
 'By our justice the old become young.
 The monarch must leave only righteousness
 As a memorial in the world.
 Wherefore *then* this treasure, and this desire, and pain
 To bind the soul within this small tent?
 Since thou shalt find no abiding,
 There must be eating and walking *on*.
 I am full of worry about the work of the world,
But I kept my speech hidden,
 For I have enemies because of the royal crown.
 Āhriman is all round me.
 I said in my heart: I shall draw the army from every side.
 I shall summon the valiant from every country.
 The army shall not assemble save with treasure, *but*
 Pain cometh with unmanliness even from treasure.

If evil come upon the poor,
 My heart must be cut from this weight.
 I considered the mystery in my heart:
 When thought alighted upon wisdom,
 To the pahlavāns and to the rad-priests¹⁶
And also to the shrewd-hearted mobads
 In every country I wrote a letter
Even unto all nobles and potentates:
 “Every one that hath wisdom,
 Raise sons for *military* service.
 Send *them* to the field with war-gear.
 Seek from us renown and reward.
 On high and low ground let them know
 Grip, and rein, and riding
 With mace and with sword, and arrow, and bow.
 May they know how to strive with the enemy.
 The unlearned youth is useless,
 Though he be the lineage of Āraš.”¹⁷

The paymaster went from the court to every country.
 He bore payment to every chief.
 Forty days was the duration of payment.
Then they left the city with the gear of war.
 When they took money from the office,
 They passed the day in such joy.
 ‘Now truly I have adorned the face of the earth with men.
 Let war come!
 I have more equipment and forces than kings before,
 And more knowledge and foresight also.’
 When the mobad had heard *these* words from the king,
 He called down many blessings upon crown and court.

When the sun shewed *his* shining cheek,
 The whirling sphere *of heaven* opened the garden door, *and*
 The mass of fenugreek appeared,

¹⁶ *Rad* was the common name for any sort of Zoroastrian priest.

¹⁷ Āraš was a mighty bowman of Avestan lore. He is mentioned in Yašt 8.IV.6 under the Avestan name ‘*Erekshô khshviwi-ishu*’, which Darmesteter construes as ‘Ereksha à la flèche rapide’ (Zend-Avesta, p. 415 with n. 24).

The two ringlets of dark night went away.
 Nōšīn-Ravān sat upon his throne,
 The blessed glad-hearted king of the world.
 A cry went up from the royal court:
 ‘All that seek the way to justice,
 Come to the court of Nōšīn-Ravān, *to beseech*
 The lip of the smiling king and the authority of youth.’
 The *whole* world turned to face the court,
 All that sought the *right* way upon the earth.
 All that time the monarch spoke with his voice:
 ‘Seek no friend save the pure god,
 For he is *our* keeper and also *our* guide.
 Even he taketh *us* by the hand to both worlds.
 Be not afraid of throne and crown.
 This court is open to all!
 All ye that come by day or night,
 Let your lip be not bound from speaking.
 If we drink wine with the nobility;
 If we be in deliberation with counsellors;
 At polo or upon the field of hunting,
 The way to us is open to you!
 In sleep and in wakefulness and in pain and play,
 Turn no one away from this court.
 But let all find *their* desire.
 Let no one sleep unfulfilled by me.
 Thus happy and bright shall be my heart
 When I break the pain of the oppressed.
 May it not be that among my friends –
 Whether from the army or my servants –
 Someone sleep with aggrieved heart,
 For harm shall come to me because of this pain!
 Even if the thing be small and secret,
 The World-Maker shall ask it of me.
 The place of tax and tribute hath remained,
 For the mobad hath paid it to my office.
 They ask of you neither gold nor silver.
 Hereafter sleep not in fear of me.’

A blessing arose from the portico
 Unto the sun from the dark face of earth:

‘May Nōšīn-Ravān have glory
 All *his* years with the royal crown!
 May throne and rank never be taken from thee,
 Nor this renowned royal crown!’

They left with happiness and rejoicing.
 The face of the earth became as the garden of Iram.
 Thou wouldst not have seen anyone in the earth distraught.
 Rain in *due* season came from the cloud.
 The world became as a joyful harem.
 Air became tulips with rain upon the earth!
 Valley and plain and seed-field became as lamps;
 Garden was as sun and mountain-slope as the moon.

Then tidings came to Byzantium and India:
 The face of Iran is become as the silk of Byzantium.
 The king hath adorned the land
 As the shining moon with righteousness and military camps.
 No one knew the number of the army
 Upon the earth but the renowned monarch.
 Everyone with happy heart and with war-gear,
 All world-enflaming with name and fame.
 Kings’ hearts in every country were astonished;
 At Nōšīn-Ravān their counsels grew dark.
 Ambassadors came from India and China.
 All called blessing upon the king.
 They beheld not his strength amongst themselves.
 Tribute and levy grew light to him in heart.
 All performed service *to him*:
 Many purses and captives they summoned.
 With golden staff and with golden crown
 Ambassadors went upon the way.
All the world came to the court of the king;
 The mighty came with levy and tribute.
 The court was adorned as heaven
 With purses, captives, and suppliants.

NŌŠĪN-RAVĀN GOETH THROUGHOUT IRAN

l. 293-440

Thus the whirling sphere *of heaven* turned:
 It turned with love for the king of Iran.
 Wise Kisrā thus determined
 That he would go from that place for a time
 To travel about the joyful world
 And make hidden secrets plain.
 He struck the drum and the army moved from *their* place.
 Moon and sun were astonished at it.
 Because of the idols, and host, and silver, and gold,
 Belts of gold, and golden shields,
 Thou wouldst have said: no gold remaineth in the mine!
 Likewise, no watery pearl and jewel is left!
 Quietly he marched toward Ḥurāsān;
 He marched the army according to Sasanian manner.
 In every settled land that he passed,
 Pavillions and tents he pitched upon the field.
 When the cry of the trumpet would arise,
 A herald on foot would say:
 ‘O subjects of the king of the world,
 Who hath *kept* from us a secret injury?
 Sleep not unhappy at the king!
 Let not the heart be wasted with worry!’
 On this wise he marched the army to Gurgān.
 He drew the crown and the noble throne *with him*.
 Know thus that loss cometh never from righteousness.
 Skill, and good counsel, and breeding, must come from the king!
 They went from Gurgān to Sārī and Āmul.
 They went in the season of the nightingale’s voice.
 Hill and field were all overgrown, *and*
 The heart of the king of Iran was full of worry.
 From desert to high mountain he came.
 Sitting upon his Arab steed,
 He beheld mountain-peak and that woodland;
 He saw rose, hyacinth, water, and beasts.
 Thus he said: ‘O bright Creator,
 World-Holder, Victor, and Fosterer!’

Thou madest the world in *such* joyfulness,
 That land be not distinguished from heaven!
 Whoso worshippeth *aught* but thee
 Sendeth *his own* soul to hell.
 For this the god-worshipping Farīdūn¹⁸
 Built up *his* settlement in this woodland.’

A speaker said to him: ‘O judge,
 Were this not a passage for Turks¹⁹
 From this rich place with such joy,
 Our heart would not be empty of pleasure!
 We may not raise *our* necks
 Because of killing, pillage, and plundering.
 Here there remain
 Few birds or men or beasts.
Because of the injury that cometh upon the Aryan army,
 There is no way but this from country to country.
 Of old was much struggle and strife,
For the Ḥwārazm road was the Turks’ passage.
 Now when one of the dihqāns or nobles
 Raiseth *his* head for counsel,
 lesseneth not the pain, for it is increased!
 There ought not to be such a place for a city in the world,
 If we find a portion of thy justice.
 Thus the god-worshipping Farīdūn
 Here raised up the place of settlement.
 If the king see with lofty sight,
 The foeman’s way shall he bind in fetters.’

The king poured forth tears from his two eyes,
 When he heard the plaintive speech.
 Then the monarch spake to the minister:
 ‘Heavy work cometh forward;
 It is unfitting to eat and drink.
 Yea, though I cherish my own crown.
 The World-Holder shall take from me no tyranny,
 Whereby we shall be joyful,
 And the dihqān *shall be* aggrieved.

¹⁸ Farīdūn is an Iranian culture hero associated *inter alia* with civilised life and agriculture.

¹⁹ An obvious anachronism.

This mountain on these wide plains
 Is all fit for garden, and square, and villa,
 Full of oxen, and beasts, and flowing water.
 Confusion turneth felicitous at the sight *of it*.
 We shall not allow them to waste this land;
 To make desolation of the empire of Iran,
Neither of kingship, nor glory, nor learning,
 (It shall not be thus!), nor of courage!
For none shall call blessing upon us
 If the land of Irān-Zamīn be desolate.’

He commanded the minister: ‘From India and Byzantium,
 Which are renowned for civilised land,
 From every country choose far-seeing men:
 Choose whom thou seest as master.
 Build thou an high wall from the sea,
 Its base broad and its height ten lassos.
 Let it be of stone and mortar from the depth of the sea
 Rising to the source of the sun.
 This shall make a barrier,
 Lest harm come to Iran from the foe.
 Let none of these come to harm.
 Give what they ask for and open the treasury.
 The master, and the dihqān, and the nobleman
 Must take no injury from righteousness.’

He put an old mobad upon that task.
 He put the desert behind the wall.
 They put therein a great gate of iron:
 The sheep were safe from fear of the wolf.
 He put guards everywhere in the country,
And when it was safe, he led the army out of the desert.

He marched from the sea upon the Ālān road:
 He beheld a ruined and idle frontier.
 To the nobles he said: ‘This is a shame,
 That the land of Irān-Zamīn is ruined!
 It is not right that we should agree
 That the foe telleth the same tale from these signs.’

From the host he chose an ambassador,
 Eloquent and wise, as was fitting.

He said unto him: ‘Go hence at dawn,
 Then say to the marzbāns of the army:
 I heard from the speech of my spies
 What is said openly and in secret.
 They said: what fear have we of Kistrā?
 What is Iran to us but a handful of dust?
 Now we are come near you;
 We have set up pavilion, court, and tent.
 The desert is wide, and its mountain tall.
 The army *have* arrow, and mace, and lasso;
 Valley and cave are places to ambush you.
 Land, field, mountain, and plain are yours.
 We warriors are all strangers;
 Army and general, we are not of this house!’

The ambassador went. He spake the speech
 That the commander of Iran had planned.
 The Ālān army was forgathered,
 Wise grandees and counsellors:
 An army whose living was plundering
 And *which* had little care for nobility.
 The empire of Iran was in fear of them.
 No garment, gold, or silver, was upon anyone.
 Women and men with children and beasts
 Went out to the desert. They would not remain at home.
 The ambassador spake unto them
 The message of the king of the world *both* openly and in secret.
 The nobles’ cheeks grew pale thereat:
Their hearts were wildered at the name of Nōšīn-Ravān.
 The grandees of that frontier and the chiefs
 Went *forth* with tribute and heavy toll –
 All purses and garments of silver and gold,
And many noble horses.
 All among them that were old,
 Who were eloquent and knowledge-seeking,
 All came before Nōšīn-Ravān:
 They remembered their past deeds
 When they came before the pavillion of the monarch
 With gifts and money,
 Wailing and writhing in the dust,
 All eyes full of water, and hearts full of blood!

When wisdom is with the brave *man* in secret,
 There is no need for shame, nor for excuse.
 The wise king forgave them:
 He forgave past sin at once.
 He commanded that all that had been wasted –
All that had become the lair of leopards and lions –
That a city be built there swiftly
 With room in it for tillage and reaping,
 An high wall round about it,
 That no harm come to it from the foe.
 They spake with the renowned monarch:
 ‘We are *thy* slaves with earrings:
 As the king commanded, we shall raise
 A wall and a noble stead.’

And the king led the army out of that place
 To Hindūstān he went, and stayed *there* a while.
 All came before him at *his* command:
 All came seeking redress *of grievances*.
 Along the river of Hindūstān for two miles
 Were coins, as well as gifts and horses and elephants.
 Grandees came to the king.
 With sighing and honesty they came.
 Kisrā asked *things* of them, and treated them kindly.
 Glad in heart he went from that spot.
 Elephant and host adorned the world.

Tidings came to the king
 That the world was turned black by reason of the Balōčī *men*.
 With great killing and pillage and plunder
 They had overwhelmed the earth!
But the trouble from Gēlān is worse than this.
 Blessing is become stuffed with curses.
 The heart of king Nōšīn-Ravān grew sorrowful.
 He mixed grief with joy.
 He spake to the Aryans:
 ‘The Ālāns and India
 Become as silk out of fear of our sword.
 Are we not worthy of our own empire?
 Shall we hunt lions twisting away from sheep?’

A speaker spake to him: ‘O monarch!
 In the garden is no rose without the wound of a thorn.
 Likewise the frontier hath been afflicted as long as it hath been.
 Because of the full treasury,
 The noble Ardašīr²⁰ strove with old officers
 Because of the doings of the Balōčī *men*.
 There was no gain in deceit, nor stratagem,
 Nor from fetter, nor pain, nor combat, nor war.
 Though the matter was without remedy,
 Ardašīr hid it unto himself.’

The king was startled at the speech of the dihqān.
 He went along the road to the Balōč.
 When he came near that lofty mountain,
 He went round it with *his* troops.
 Thus the army went round:
 They bound the way from multitudes upon the wind.
 From the skirts of the mountain to the peak,
 All the army was as ant and locust.
 An herald went round the host.
 The cry went up from cave and mountain and desert:
 ‘All that find food among the mountain-dwellers,
 Whether archers or men of war,
 Whether many or few,
 Let none find a way *out!*’

When the host was ware of the king’s wrath,
 Knight and foot-soldier barred the road.
 Hardly any of them remained.
 Women, warlike men, and children, remained not.
 All fell by the sword together:
 The tyranny of the mountain-men ended.
 The world was safe from their pain.
 No Balōčī was left openly or in secret.
 Thus it was that upon their mountains
 Flocks were let loose without guard.
 There was even no shepherd for the sheep
 In desert or upon the sharp peak of the high mountain.

²⁰ It is unclear who this is, but it is most probably the same Ardašīr, Husraw’s ‘mobad of mobads’, mentioned below.

They forsook all goods.
They took the vein of the mountain *for* an house.

He went thence to Gēlān,
Since trouble had appeared from Gēl and Daylam.
From sea to mountain peak *went* the army.
The air was full of banners, and the ground full of battalions.
The army was round about Gēlān:
Brightness left sun and moon.

Thus quoth he: ‘Here let there be no sheep nor wolf
Among *both* small and great *alike!*’

Thus there was *so great* a mountain and field of the slain,
That blood covered all the face of the country.
From such great killing, plundering, and burning,
The cry went up and the wailing of men and women.
Everywhere were heaps of the slain:
The ground was stained with brains of heads.
All that were warriors of Gēlān,
Wise, witting, and mighty,
Bound *their* hands (women behind, children in front),
Came wailing before the monarch.
Breasts rent and drenched in blood they came.
They gathered in that court,
Hands bound and bodies wounded:

‘We have turned from evil-doing!
Would that the king were pleased with us with a good heart!
If the king’s heart be wounded by Gēlān,
We shall cut *our* heads from *our* bodies by hand!’

When such a cry went up from the court
(And when the king heard that voice),
The king of the world forgave them,
And the past became hidden in *his* heart.
He asked two hundred hostages from Gēlān and Daylam,
That thenceforth none would take the evil way.
One pahlavān remained with them,
As the matter ought to have been, *and* the army marched on.

THE GRIEVANCE OF MUNZIR

l. 441–512

From Gēlān he took the road to Madā'in;²¹
 He saw not the number, nor the end of the army.
 Upon the road was an army without count.
 Spearmen appeared from afar.
 A knight came swift as dust,
 For he was a mediator in the army.
 He got off his horse and opened his mouth.
 Thus he spake: 'This is Munzir of the Arabs.'
 He came, but when he saw the king,
 He kissed the ground of the palace.
 The king of kings spake: 'If he came, it is proper:
 Know thus that this our house is his *also!*'
 The ambassador came. He kissed the ground.
 He went *and* reported all that he had heard.
 When Munzir heard what Kistrā had said,
 He went with force upon the dust of the earth.
 When he came near the king,
 All nobles opened the way.
 The king asked of him, and shewed him gladness.
 At the look of him, his brightness increased.
 Well-experienced Munzir loosed his tongue:
 He called to mind Byzantium and Caesar.²²
 He said to him: 'If thou art king of Iran,
 Protector and backer of thy heroes,
 Wherefore hold sway the men of Byzantium?
 Why ride they upon the horsemen's desert?
 If the king were upon Caesar's throne,
 It would be right that the arrogant were headless!
 Should the noble king give leave,
 He shall see us ask for redress.
 When the knight of the desert behold the Byzantine knights,
 Armour shall be of no use!'

²¹ Madā'in is the Arabic name for Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital.

²² 'Caesar' is used as though it were the Byzantine Emperor's name. The emperor in question is Justinian I.

At Munzir's speech the king was wroth,
 That Caesar would exalt his crown.
 He chose from the host an eloquent man
 Who knew their speech.
 To him he said: 'Go hence to Byzantium.
 Tarry not in settled land.
 Say to Caesar: if thou have no sense,
 Thy brain shall have revenge upon thy counsel.
 If the warlike lion chase the wild ass,
 He shall make milk his meat in the dry desert.
 If thou find justice from Munzir,
 It is enough that his seat be upon the dog-star.²³
 Discern thy left from thy right hand.
 When thou hast found *it*, find *also* the right frontier.
 Since I am bestower of land and country,
 Exalted and potent am I in the world.
 I shall do all that work, for it besitteth me.
 I shall not allow wind to blow upon it.
 Strikest thou thy hand upon the Arabs in revenge?
 Look to thyself in secret,
 But all that kingship is mine.
 The Gate of Taurus unto the Tower of Pisces is mine!
 If I send an army to Byzantium,
 Thy sword of steel shall become as wax!'
 The ambassador went from before Nōšīn-Ravān.
 He came like as a swift wind.
 He came to Caesar. He gave his message.
 Ignoble Caesar twisted away from righteousness.
 He gave him no answer but treachery:
 He saw a high fall from afar.
 Thus he spake: 'Of Munzir of little wit,
 Believe *his* word as of small account!
 If Munzir waiteth in confusion,
 Thus his pain groweth,
 And if one of the spearmen of the desert
 Bewail from end to end,
 I shall make high land low,
 And from that waterless waste I shall make a river *of blood*.'

²³ The image is obscure.

The ambassador heard, and came like dust.
 Every word that he heard he remembered.
 Kistrā was wroth, and spake to his minister:
 ‘Wisdom is unwed to Caesar’s brain!
 I shall shew him whose is the power
 To rule the world, to wage war, and to make treaty.
 Because of evil and arrogance,
 And this murder, pillage, and plunder,
 Then shall the drunken man repent
 Who in the night putteth both hands under the fire.’

He commanded that they blow the trumpet, *and*
 The army came *forth* from every side.
 The voice of the drum arose from the court.
 Earth became as pitch, air as ebony.
 He chose from that famous army
 Thirty thousand sword-bearing knights.
 He entrusted that army to Munzir.
 He commanded that, from the desert of the spearmen,
 An army of warriors carry fire to Byzantium
 From borderland and countryside.

‘Though I am thy monarch,
 In this battle I am thy hero.
 We shall send now a glib-tongued ambassador
 With a letter to him.
 But no injury shall come to thee henceforth
 We shall have pleasure in Byzantium and in thy Caesar.’

He summoned a scribe from the court.
 The king commanded a letter to Caesar:

‘From Nōšīn-Ravān, king of blessed seed,
 Holder of the world, and life-giver of Kay Qubād,
 Unto Caesar, lofty *one* of Byzantium,
 Ward of that border and settled land...’

The beginning of the letter invoked blessing first:

‘Let not greatness be sought but from Yazdān,
 Lord of the whirling sun and moon,
 Whence is victory and might,
 Who is without the way of the whirling sphere *of heaven*,
 Whether he seeketh war, or justice, or love,
 If thou be Caesar, the lord of Byzantium,

Do no evil with the just Arabs,
 And if thou seek the ram from the grip of the wolf,
 It is evil sin and great pain.
 And if a subject become great,
 Disobedience shall meet my sword.
 Step thou not one cubit from that border,
 If thou wish that *our* treaty remain in place.
 But if thou pass *beyond it*, we shall pass from this *also*.
 The head and station shall we tread under foot.
 Greeting from the lord of diadem and might:
 Know that he seeketh not trouble in injustice!’

They put the king’s seal upon the letter.
 They chose a knight from that court,
 As was needed, free-spoken,
 Experienced, a warrior, and bright of soul.
 The ambassador with the monarch’s letter
 Came to the renowned Caesar.
 He blessed him and gave the letter.
 Thus he recounted Kisrā’s counsel.
 He heard the speech openly and read the letter.
 He writhed and was astonished
 At the speech of the lofty Kisrā.
 He filled his brow with wrinkles and made sallow his face.
 He summoned a scribe and wrote *an* answer.
 He made good and evil plain therein.
 The tip of the pen, when it made the hue of pitch,
 First blessed the Creator,
 The artist that painted the sphere *of heaven*,
 From whom is war, peace, and love.
 He maketh one *man* king in the world,
 And from him to one before him with the belt *of honour*.
 ‘If the flowing welkin itself be beneath thee,
 The hand of Jupiter is beneath thy sword.
 Behold the record book; for no Byzantine progeny
 Ever gave tribute to the seed of Kay.
 If thou be monarch, I am not less!
 Alike *am I* with head, and diadem, and army.
 Why must such sorrow be taken
 Out of elephant’s foot and din of drum?

Now I wish tribute and levy from you.
 Who hath strength for war with Byzantium?
 They took a little plunder.
 That injustice passed; we shall take no more of it!
 From the desert of the spear-bearing horsemen
 We shall raise up dust from end to end.
 Nōšīn-Ravān made not the sun,
 Nor hath he plucked the key from the whirling wheel *of fate*,
 That he wish no power for any other,
And that he find only his own will in the world!
 He gave no answer to the ambassador.
 Swiftly he remembered not Kisrā.
 When he set the seal of musk, he said:
 ‘The cross and Christ are with thee.’
 The ambassador stayed not a moment with him.
 He saw the grievous answer, *and* he came in grief.
 He came to the king of Iran *swift* as dust.
 He recounted all Caesar’s words.
 When the monarch read that letter,
 He was wroth at the turn of fate.
 He summoned all mobads and rad-priests, *and*
 He read out a few words of that letter.
 He was three days with his counsellors,
 With host-shattering pahlavāns.
 Upon the fourth *day*, the mind of the king resolved
 To lead the army to war with Caesar.

THE WAR WITH BYZANTIUM

l. 513–742

The cry of trumpet arose from the court,
And the shout of flutes and brazen cymbal.
 He made no delay in his ease, *for*
 He sought war for the sake of righteousness.
 He drave on the host, and put the baggage *in place*.
 He called to mind Yazdān, the giver of good.
 A dust arose, so that thou wouldst have said *that*

The *heavenly* sphere had dyed its face in a river of pitch.
 He clothed the face of earth in horseshoes:
 The air grew red with silken *banners*.
 There was no room *even* for a gnat upon the ground,
 Nor way for wind in the air.
 From the raging of the knights and the dust of elephants,
 Earth became as the river Nile.
 The holder of the world with the banner of Kāva²⁴
 Went *forth* with crown and golden boots.
 Their sound went on for two miles:
 Before the army were trumpet and elephant;
 Before and behind were nobles.
 He went straightway to Āzarābādagān.
 When his eye came to *the temple of* Āzargušasp,
 He went on foot from afar and left *his* horse.
 He sought the barsom-twigs²⁵ from the pure minister;
 He bathed his two cheeks in the water of his two eyes, *and*
 He went to the fire temple in silence.
 They set up a chair overlaid with gold:
 The Zend-Avesta they put upon it, *and*
 The mobad read it aright *and* aloud.
 Rad-priest and hirbad²⁶ rolled in the dust before it.
 All rent their shirts.
 Nobles cast jewels upon it, *while*
 They muttered blessings.
 When he drew near, he made benediction;
 He glorified the World-Maker,
And asked of him might and victory
 To shew his heart the way to justice.
 He gave gifts to *his* subjects,
 When they saw paupers.
 He put up a tent before the fire temple,
And they formed the army on all sides in line.
 He summoned a wise scribe:

²⁴ Kāva is a mythical Iranian blacksmith who led an uprising against the tyranny of Zakhāk, a homicidal villain of Arabian or Babylonian lineage. He used his apron as a standard in battle, which was then supposedly inherited and passed down by successive kings of Iran (Khaleghi-Motlagh 1994).

²⁵ These twigs are an important part of Zoroastrian ritual (Kanga 1998).

²⁶ Another form of Zoroastrian priest.

He spoke fitting words, *and*
 Commanded a gracious letter
 To the marzbāns of the land of Iran:
 ‘Be fearful and be vigilant, *and*
 Ward off the foe from the world!
 All that be kanārangs and pahlavāns,²⁷
 Seek ye all justice with *your* underlings.
 Have what the army needeth,
 That thereby there shall be no disloyalty.
 As long as one seeth my banner,
 Let him not sleep safely.’

When he went from the fire temple toward Byzantium,
 The circuit of the land was full of news of him.
 All whom he had appointed came to him,
 Till the land and country could not be seen.
 Experienced *men* came with many gifts and tribute
 For the monarch.
 In every land and everywhere, from every side,
 Message and greeting came
 From the world to every side where he led the army.
 He saw no delight but in feast and hunting.
 Thus it was that every night a thousand *chieftains* from all around
 Would come to feast with the monarch.

When he drew near, he made ready for battle.
 He began to give payment to the army.
 The general was Šērōy-i-Bahrām
 Who was of *good* sense, and calm in battle.
 He gave the left flank of his army to Farhād.
 He recalled in his heart many good counsels.
 Since Āštād-Pērōz *was* upon the right *flank*, *and*
 Gušasp, the world-seeker, *was* before the baggage *train*,
 Awrānd-i-Mihrān *was* at the centre on foot,
 Who kept his heart steadfast in time of battle.
 The advance-guard he gave to Hurmāzd-i-Ḥarrād.
 He spoke much to him of injustice and justice.

²⁷ These words may once have had a more specific meaning, but the poet seems to imply simply ‘brave warriors’.

On all sides went spies,
 That nothing would be hid.
 He summoned the veterans of the army, *and*
 Gave them much advice and good counsel.
 Thus he spake: ‘This army without end
 Of noblemen and braves,
 If one body shall pass from my way,
 If he count one breath without my knowing,
 And if he strike a sown field with *his* foot,
 And if he go from his place before the army,
 Of if he cut a row of fruiting trees,
 Or if he do an unseemly deed,
 By Yazdān, who gave the diadem and strength,
By the lord of Saturn, Mars, and the sun,
I swear that I shall cut him *in twain* in the middle,
 Though he go into the mist.
 I am the vanguard before the army,
 Seeking war, and in the middle, I am
 Ward of elephant, army, and baggage.
 Sometimes on the left, *and* sometimes on the right.
 I go upon dry land and upon the watery river.
 In battle I seek neither rest nor sleep.’

A herald by name of Rašnavād
 Remembered these words of Kisrā.
 He came running round the army;
 To every tent and pavillion he went,
And cried: ‘O endless host,
 Such is the command of the wise king:
 If anyone look upon the black earth
 Save in justice, love, and wisdom,
 They shall pour his blood upon that dark dust,
 When he goeth from the command of Yazdān!’

At the noise of the herald, the king was not content.
 By white day or *by* dark-hued night,
 He went round the army upon the road.
 He had sight of good and evil;
 He was ware of the doings of the world.
 He ignored neither evil nor good.
 When someone of the army died upon the way,

He would make a *daḥma*²⁸ upon that spot.
 If any of his silver or gold remained,
Or crown, bow, lasso, *or* belt,
 Evil and good were with the dead in the ground.
 It was no better than mankind in the grave.²⁹
 The world was astounded at him,
 For Nōšīn-Ravān grew in greatness.

In every place whereunto war came,
 Good counsel and caution came to him.
 A right-speaking ambassador he would summon,
 Who would go to the foe suing for peace.
 If they found the way to justice,
 The wise king would not be tyrannous.
 If he sought war, he would come to war.
 The crocodile would come to the eye of the warrior, *and*
 He would give field and hard ground over to plunder.
 He sprung upon the world with justice and sword.
 The king's counsel was as the sun
 That shineth on its way upon wet and dry land.
 He withholdeth not brightness from anyone.
 When *his* beam passeth though the whirling wheel *of the sky*,
 All its earth, and dust, and hue, and scent;
 All its watery pearls, and streams of water,
 Its brightness and height are not *hid* from anyone.
 Heart-enkindling and merciful it is.
 This nobility and glory belonged to the king of kings, *and*
 He had the world under his wing.
 War and mercy was a game to him:
 Thus he was without need.
 If lion or elephant came to him,
 He delayed not battle for *a single* day.
 The army that went at the front of the host
 Against him with shirt of war –

²⁸ A high platform upon which Zoroastrians put dead bodies to moulder away and to be eaten by birds, commonly but wrongly called a 'tower of silence' in English.

²⁹ This line is obscure. But the sense must be that men were treated in death as well as they had been treated in life.

If *one of them* were slain, or taken prisoner
 In the prison of the victorious monarch, *there would be* no delay.³⁰

Thus he came to that city
 Whose name was Sūrāb.
 He beheld the top of that town rising in the air,
 Full of men, engines of war, and sound.
 Rising up from stone in deep water,
 The top of the wall was in the cloud.
 The army surround the city.
 They saw no way into the gate.
 He put catapults on four sides of it, *and*
 That Christian wall came down.
 Doom came upon every side of the city;
 They saw no way out, nor *any* escape.
 When the shining sun went from the vault *of heaven*,
 That city wall was become as desert
 From the fervour of the horsemen and the dust of the army.
 The smoke of fire went up to the moon.
 All the castle was without body, head, and food.
 Their bodies were without heads elsewhere.
 Cries of lamentation and shouting of women
 Arose as the beating of drummers.
 All that were noble among them
Who were renowned for riches and bravery –
 They bound *them*, and loaded them upon elephants.
 The cry arose, and wailing and lamentation.
 He had mercy upon no one in time of battle,
 Nor upon *his* hoards of money in time of feasting.

From that place he led the army.
 Upon the road another fortress appeared
 In whose fastness was Caesar's treasure,
And a powerful man was its overseer,
And its name was Ārāyiš-i-Rūm.
 It had a bad end because of Kisrā.
 The wise king looked upon that fortress:
 Within it was an unripe army.

³⁰ This appears to be very strained or perhaps corrupt, but the idea is that a captive would be sent to prison without delay.

He commanded that the bowmen shoot:
 They made the air as hail in spring-time.
 Not one nobleman remained in the army:
Nothing remained upon that land, *nor* upon the dust or thorns.
 All Caesar's treasure he gave over to plunder:
 Every purse and crown he gave to the army.
 He brought doom upon that city!
 Everyone fled.
 The cry arose from child, man, and woman.
 All old and youth gathered
And came before the noble king, howling and wailing:
 'Minister, treasurer, and treasure are thine!
 The battle and pain in Byzantium are thine!
 With honest souls we are thy refugees:
 We are obedient to the glory of thy crown!'

The king commanded that they kill no more.
 He bestowed many things upon them.
 From that place he led the army.
 He marched away from Ārāyiš-i-Rūm.
 A report of the speech of spies
 Came to the king of the world:
 'Caesar hath sent forth an army
 From those renowned men and warriors of his.
 Before them was a quarrelsome pahlavān
 In war like unto a wolf.
 In the Byzantine *tongue*, they call him Farfūriyūs,³¹
 A proud warrior with knight, trumpet, and drum.'
 When this was spoken before the wise king,
 The dust of the army appeared from afar.
 The king of the world smiled thereat.
 He said to him: 'This is not hid from us,
 For we had made ready for war before now:
 We were busied with all manner of worry.'
 The crowned king brought hand to lip,
And commanded that the troops form up.
 A general came before the army,
 So that the way was shut to dust and wind.

³¹ *i.e.*, Belisarius, general to the emperor Justinian.

The renowned army gathered,
 Proud, heroic swordsmen,
 Each with waist girt for war,
 Nobles, learned men, and kings.
 All made sharp swords wet with blood,
 So that sword-tip cut through mist.
 The army made no more delay therefrom
 Than hath the prey from the proud leopard.
 On all sides was a heap of Byzantine dead,
And the wounded left the battle.
 Farfūriyūs was wounded in battle.
 Banner *was* rent and trumpet thrown down.
 The knights of Iran, like the leopard
 When in the desert the mountain-sheep cometh into his claw,
 Harried the Byzantines,
And chased them from field and desert.

Thus he went on with war-gear,
 All with spear, mace, and dagger in hand.
 He marched the army into a desert, *and*
 There appeared another high fortress –
 A fortress with army, trumpet, and drum,
 Which they called Qālīniyūs.
 The top of the wall *was* higher than eagle feather.
 A water-filled trench was round it:
It was a city with a wide space about it,
 Full of porticoes, square, garden, and palace.
 There was a great Byzantine army in it,
 All renowned *men* and seeking war.
 The king was two parasangs before the city, *and*
 The world grew dark from the dust of the army.
 A cry arose from Qālīniyūs,
 But the voice of the drum bedwarfed that shout.
 The army grew larger at every moment.
 They waged war at the gates:
 They all hurled arrows and missiles.
 When the shining sun turned yellow,
And half the whirling *welkin* grew dark,
 Nothing of the fortress remained.
 All the city was one with the ground.
 A cry went up from the court of the king:

‘O renowned men of the Aryan host,
 All ye that are pure, go out of this city,
 Go into the desert in darkness.
 If there be any noise from woman or old man,
 And if *din* of plunder, tumult, and seizure
 Come to mine ear in dark night,
 So that one man ope his lip out of pain,
 At that time when the cry cometh from him,
 His skin shall be seen stuffed full of straw.’

When the sun sent forth *his* ray from the *sign* of Cancer,
 And washed away pain and drained away sleep,
 Drumming arose from the king’s court.
 The nobles set out upon the road
 From that fortress, and from that city
 Men and women gathered at the court of Kisrā, *and said*:

‘No knight remaineth here from the battle.
 No renown remaineth in this city.
 All were wounded and killed, *though* without guilt.
 The time is come for mercy from the king.
 Women and small children with old men
Ought not be prisoners by Yazdān’s justice.
 Such were fortress, wall, and city.
 Since Caesar was the sinner, what are we?
 What are we in Qālīniyūs?’

The king forgave those Byzantines:
 Sinner went free with the innocent.
But many prisoners remained with them,
 And from that place he led the army away swiftly.
 All that were fit for war
 They bound and loaded upon elephants.

News of the king came to Antioch,
 That he came upon the road with elephant and army.
 An army without end was in that city.
 Brave *men* of Byzantium and warriors.
 The king had a delay of three days,
 That the way should not be unjust.
 On the fourth day, the army went in as a mountain:
 Braves of Iran in many troops.

The knights of Byzantium went forth together
 On behalf of woman, child, treasure, and land.
 Three long battles were fought in three days.
 On the fourth *day* when the earth-shiner shone,
 That frontier of the settled land was open.
 No warlike knights were seen in Byzantium.
 The army went into the city end to end, *and*
 There was no room upon the ground for *a* foot.
 The grandees who had throne and diadem,
 (They also that were Caesar's treasurers),
 Gave treasure to the world-holding king, *and*
 Treasure came to his hand, *even* as he saw pain.
 And them that were warriors
 They put upon the back of elephants in fetters.
 Prisoners, and that treasure of Caesar's
 The king sent on the road to Madā'in.
 By so many gardens and squares and flowing water *in Antioch*
 The old man was refreshed and grew young.
 Thus the monarch spake with *his* mobads:
 'Is this Antioch or early spring?
 Whoever hath not seen the joyful heaven,
Its ground of musk and bricks of gold,
 Its trees of ruby and its streams of rosewater,
 (*For* its ground is the sphere *of* heaven; *its* sky the sun!),
 Must look upon this fresh land!
 May all the borderland of Byzantium be *thus* settled!'

Nōšīn-Ravān commanded a city *be built*,
 Within which was flowing water,
 Alike to Antioch as a lamp,
 Full of palace, square, and garden.
 Bright-hearted and joyful grandees
 Gave it the name of Zēb-i-Ḥusrū,
 That ornament of Husraw was as the joyful spring,
 A heaven full of hue, scent, and beauty.
 The prisoners of these cities that had been bound
 With heavy bonds were fastened hand and foot.
 He commanded that they take off the bonds, *and*
 He put *those* wretched *men* in that new city.

Thus he spake: ‘This new-arisen place,
All rose-garth, fragrant grove, and palace,
Such that every one for his *own* pleasure
Hath a place worthy of *his* name!’

He bestowed provision upon every man, *and*
The earth was adorned as heaven.
From so many mansions and lanes and marketplaces,
Thou wouldst have said: ‘There is no road upon the ground!’
A much-talking cobbler came *forth*.

Thus he spake: ‘O unjust king!
Within my house at Qālīniyūs
Was a mulberry-bush before my courtyard.
I have no gain from this Zēb-i-Ḥusrū,
For there is no mulberry-bush before my abode.’

He commanded that they plant
Some well-watered trees before the door of the ill-fated *man*.

The king chose a Christian man:
To him he gave command and treasure and crown.
He said to him: ‘This Zēb-i-Ḥusrū is thine;
Strangers and this new house are thine.
Be thou as a fruitful tree, *and*
Be thou father and sometimes son.
Adorn *the city* with generosity and be not covetous.
Be measured in all matters.’

The king led the army from Antioch, *and*
The experienced Christian remained as overseer.

Then came news of Farfūriyūs, *and*
He said all that which occurred at Qālīniyūs.
He spake to Caesar: ‘The army came,
The world-holding Kistrā and elephants and throne.
His army is so great that sea and mountain
Are wildered at the dust of the horses.’
Caesar twisted from his own speech.
He summoned forth his wise grandees.
His heart grew fearful at Nōšīn-Ravān, *and*
He took counsel day and night for three watches.

The mobad said to him: ‘This is not good counsel,
 For thou hast no power in battle with Kisrā.
 He made dust of this settled frontier, *and*
 The work of Caesar went down to the grave.
 The tongue of the singer and the slow intellect
 Seeketh but pain from the emperor.’

When Caesar heard *this*, his heart was wildered.
 His mind grew dark because of Nōšīn-Ravān.
 He chose from among the philosophers of Byzantium,
 Eloquent with wisdom and holy ground.
 Sixty men among the mobads³² came to the palace,
 Bright of soul and wisdom of the world.
 The ambassador came before the king, *and*
 The nobles set out upon the road.
 Since their leader was the wise Mihrās,
 Thou wouldst say *that he was* old in wisdom, *but* young in years.
 A treasury of all things was before him, *and*
 Its reckoning went beyond *asking* how much and how.
 Many a supplication, parable, and good speech *Caesar uttered*,
 Repenting of his past speaking.
 The ambassador with tribute and heavy toll,
 Hostages of his own *people* and the generals.
 When Mihrās heard Caesar’s speech,
 The key to that evil bond appeared.
 They came before Nōšīn-Ravān, *and*
 He made his tongue *sharp* as diamond with fluency.
 When Mihrās came before Kisrā,
 He broadcast a blessing in the Byzantine speech.
 Thou wouldst have said: ‘Because of his sharpness and righteousness,
 He pulleth stars from *his* sleeve.’

Thus he spake to Kisrā: ‘O monarch,
 Set not such worth upon the world!
 Thou art now at Byzantium, and Iran is empty:
 Every frontier is without value or glory.
 When Caesar is not at Byzantium,
 This border and land weigheth not one gnat.

³² *Sic!* Obviously, this cannot mean that the Byzantine court was attended by Zoroastrian priests, so it could perhaps be construed as meaning ‘counsellor’ or ‘adviser’.

For all *such* value is from the men *that dwell there*.
 When *one man* is lost, *all* mankind is lost.
 If this doom is for the sake of provision –
 And how might and wisdom are lessened by it! –
 I have spent now all the treasure of Byzantium.
 For a bright soul is better than treasure and land!’

When the monarch heard this speech from him,
 His heart grew glad as a garden in spring.
 He got from him all that he had brought,
 Whether a purse of gold, or captives.
 He praised the ambassadors, *and*
 Magnified those bounties.

He said to them: ‘O man of bright mind,
 Brave *is the* one whom wisdom fostereth.
 If all the earth of Byzantium turned to gold,
 Thou wouldst be heavier than that proud land.’

Tribute and toll were set upon Byzantium:
 Ten ox-hides crammed with coins.
 And from that place they heard the din of the drum,
 And the voice of the brass trumpet.
 The wise world-holder led the army.
 To Syria he came and stayed awhile.
 He brought much army and troops,
 Likewise captive, purse, and throne.
 When leaving that frontier came to his mind,
 He entrusted the place to Šērōy-i-Bahrām.

He said to him: ‘Ask this tribute of Caesar, *and*
 Delay not by day or by night!’

Šērōy kissed the face of the ground, *and*
 Called down blessings upon the monarch, *saying*:

‘Be thou wise-hearted and victorious of fortune!
 Let not the royal tree turn fallow!’

The drum-beat arose from the king’s court.
 The army’s banner went toward the *river* Jordan.
 World-holding Kisrā was as the sun.
 The world had fear and hope from him.
 Thus the sun in the sphere *of heaven* went *on its course*.
 Sword in one hand; in one hand love.

He brought no mercy in time of wrath.
 No wrath came to his eye in time of mercy.
 Just so was that king of the lineage of Husraw:
 He had bedecked the world with justice.

THE TALE OF NŌŠ-ZĀD

l. 743–980

If thou saw king or underling,
 Or pure-hearted man worshipping Yazdān,
 Know thus that there is no avoiding mate,
 Clothing, eating, and a place to sleep.
 If she be pure and of good counsel,
 Woman is a treasury crammed full,
 And specially if she be tall in height,
With musky tresses hanging down to the foot,
 Wise, sober, witting, and prudent, *and*
 Her speech good, and with mild voice.
 On this wise, the king had a noble wife:
 A cypress in height and in *her* look *as* the moon.
 That moon-faced *lady* was of the Christian religion, *and*
 The empire was full of talk of her.
 A child came to her, sun-cheeked,
 Brighter than Venus in the sphere *of heaven*.
 The noble woman called him Nōš-Zād.
 The whirlwind above assailed him not.
 He grew like as a straight cypress-tree,
 Wise, and a royal ornament.
 Though he knew of hell and the way to heaven,
 Ezra, Christ, and the way of Zardušt.
 The Zand-Avesta he received not, *and so*
 He washed his two cheeks in the water of Christ.
 From the religion of his father he took up the faith of his mother.
 Fate was wildered at him.
 Thus the monarch was aggrieved at him,
 For only thorns came as fruit from the rose.
 In his palace and his pleasant portico
 They bound him, and they made them his prison.

His dwelling-place was Gundišāpūr:
 He was far from Iran and Bactria.³³
 Many prisoners and cripples there were
 In that city with him in prison.

At that time when the king was back from Byzantium,
 He wailed because of that wearisome and painful road.
 He went thus because of the weakness of his body:
 Because of illness he tarried at the *river* Jordan.
 Someone brought news to Nōš-Zād
 That the royal glory was turned dark.
 The world is become full of confusion now:
 Everywhere guides proclaimed the evil tidings
 That the world-holding, vigilant Kisrā was dead,
 And had entrusted time and earth to another.
 Nōš-Zād was glad at his father's death.
 May a sweet name never be his!
 On this wise a man recounted:
 'If thou rejoice at death, never die!
 If the son pass from the father's way,
 Let us read it as tyranny or as unwisdom.
 If the root of the ground be wet or dry,
 The musk-tree ought not bear fruit.
 Why should it be mixed with that
 Which its gardener sowed in the beginning?
 And if it bend toward earth,
 It shall be cut off from sun and from pure water:
 Let no fruit come of it, nor leaf:
 Life and death *come* from its earth.
 I made a tale about Nōš-Zād
 See that thou turn not thy head from justice.
 If the wheel *of fate* had crown and horn,
 Likewise his horn was Kisrā.
 Why turneth the son his head from his way?
 He sitteth where he may pounce upon his throne.
 Hear this story from me from end to end:
 I shall tell you, O my son, chapter to chapter.
 Since I have adorned the speech of the dihqān,

³³ I cannot explain this reference to Bactria.

I wish thus to make a memorial of myself
 Which shall remain as a memorial after me.
 Let there be blessing upon him that blesseth, *and* after my death,
Let there be blessing upon me, who am the speaker.
 Thus I am seeker of an undying name.’

Thus the Persian speaker spake,
 Upon whom four times thirty years had passed.
 Whoever is foeman to the judge
 Is not of mankind’s image, for he is Āhriman.
 This story came from Nōš-Zād:
 Recollection *of it* came from the olden speech.

When the son of Kisrā heard that the throne
 Had passed from that royal tree,
 The king’s son oped the palace door,
And the army gathered to him from every side.
 Whoever had leapt from the bond of reason,
 Who had been bound in Nōšīn-Ravān’s prison
 He took off the bonds from the prisoners.
 All the empire put hand on head because of him
 All that were Christian in the empire,
 Whether primates³⁴ or bishops.
 He gathered to himself
 Many proud sword-wielding knights:
 A body of thirty thousand men came to him,
 All spearmen, ready for battle.
 His kinsman wrote a letter
 From Caesar as his own dark counsel:
 ‘Thou art lord over Gundišāpūr;
 Thou art in agreement and of the same faith as Caesar.
 All the empire was full of sinners because of him, *and*
 The head of fate, though turned down, is awake!’

News of this came to the city of Madā’in,
 What had happened from the son of Kisrā,
 The watcher of Madā’in’s frontier from the road,
 A knight, he declared before the king

³⁴ The word here means literally ‘catholicoi’.

What he had heard. He spake with him.
 Thus what had been hid was *become* plain.
 The ambassador came as flowing water
 Unto Nōšīn-Ravān.
 He said what he had heard, and gave the letter,
 The matters which had arisen from Nōš-Zād.
 The king heard him, and read the letter.
 He grew rueful by it and was astonished.
 The world-holder sat with proud mobad, *and*
 Words went forth in secret.

When that matter was settled in his heart,
 He commanded that a scribe go to him.
 He wrote a letter with wound and pain,
 Cheek full of wrinkles and lip full of cold wind.
 First he spread blessing upon him
 That made the wheel *of the sky*, fate, and the earth,
 The painter of the sun, Saturn, and the moon,
 The enkindler of glory, diadem, and throne.
 From worthless chaff to lion and elephant,
 From the dust of the gnat's foot to the river Nile,
 All are under the command of Yazdān.
 Though they go among the great and mighty,
 His behest hath no bound, *and*
 Kingship shall not be cut from him.
 I know from this woeful letter
 (Which came from the injurious prince.
 And from these sinful prison-breakers)
 That they have forgathered with Nōš-Zād
 From the foot of the gnat and ant to elephant and rhinoceros,
 There is no freedom from the claw and beak of death
 If earth spread out all his secrets, *and*
 Meted out measured shears,
 Its lap would be full of kings;
 Its breast full of the blood of knights,
 Its skirt full of learned men;
 Its torn shirt full of fair faces.
 Why put tiara upon thy head? Wherefore crown?
 Death shall put wing and arrow upon it.
 The troop that is confederate with Nōš-Zād,
 Who take no thought but of the death of Kistrā –

If thou thyself find flight from the evil day,
 It were fitting to rejoice at the death of one *of them*.
But none but the base-born would rejoice
 At the death of the righteous king.
 Nōš-Zād's head is turned from wisdom:
 The dēv is become confederate with him.
But the matter is not secure for him,
For he was enflamed when his wish came true.
 Let him have no rank near us.
 Thus baseness shall be wildered.
 If the throne become empty of Kisrā.
 He too shall be the royal ornament.
 Such a deed itself was *befitting* his base faith, *and*
 Worthy of his evil-thinking soul.
 The heart hath no worry, nor fear from this,
 If the faith of my son is not pure.
 As for those provisions which he hath ruined also,
 It weigheth not upon our heart.
 And as for them that joined with him,
Who have rid their heart of respect for us,
They are ill-thinking and idle and of bad lineage.
 Talk of this deed is hateful to us.
 Afflict not thy heart because of their deed.
 I have fear and dread of the World-Judge,
 Whose wisdom is higher than high.
 Let not our soul be unthankful
 To Yazdān who knoweth goodness.
 He gave me victory and glory,
 Excellence, and the royal diadem.
 If blessing be worthy of his gift,
 I shall have abundance of excellence.
 If one drop of water were come from my back,
 He would have found elsewhere a place to sleep.³⁵
 I fear that my pain is come to me.
 If the World-Holder be not wroth with me,
 I have no fear of such a deed.
 And as for them that gathered with him,
 All are weeping and thorns upon my wrath.
 And as for that letter that came from Caesar to *my* face,

³⁵ The image is obscure.

Dark water came into the stream –
 From that *one* who is allied and coreligionist with him,
 They are in doubt: Caesar is with his own body.
 He hath small mind
 That keepeth not to his grandsires' faith.
 If that witless *boy* twist his head from righteousness,
 May no lip open to curse him,
 For cursing him is to curse us also.
 He is of our foot, blood, and body.
 Draw thou up the army and prepare war.
But conciliate in the midst *of battle* with delay.
 And if the matter come to distress,
 Be not rash in battle:
 It is better to capture him than to kill *him*.
 Perhaps he shall repent of his sin.
 For the water wherefrom the noble cypress grew –
 It is unmeet that dirt be washed in it.
 And if the noble body taketh a prick,
 The tall cypress shall put *his* face upon the ground, *and*
 His head shall turn from the pillow of pleasure,
 Withhold not mace and sword from him.
 The revered *man* that maketh his worthiness base –
 It is unmeet that he be cut off from his manner.
 A nobleman is become base
 When he doeth battle with the king of the world.
 Have thou no fear to kill him,
 If he spill the blood of his head upon the dust.
 He inclineth unto the faith of Caesar.
His head *had* shone because of our diadem,
But he is *now* lowly and base, and his lineage *also*.
 Having chosen blackness from the lofty wheel *of fate*.
 (Thus Mihr-i-Nōš told the tale,
 A wise worshipper clad in wool
 That all they that be pleased at a father's death –
 Let him have neither peace nor life.
 Seek thou not brightness from darkness,
 For water shall mix with fire in the stream.
 One seeth no ease without pain:
 The law of pain is upon this world, and that is all.
 Be thou not friendly with the whirling wheel *of fate*,
 For at times, thou findest the marrow; at *other* times the skin.

Wherefore seekest thou hue and smell from it?
 It shall rob *thee* when it sheweth its face.
 Then there shall be fear of woe and injury,
 For the spinning whirl *of fate* shall raise *thee* up.)
 The army that are with Nōš-Zād,
 Who thus twist *their* head from righteousness,
 Reckon it wind and sport.
 Ruin not the world with them a long while.
 Every one that is Christian from his army,
Who hath twisted his head for faith's sake –
 Such is the faith of Christ: if thou breathe hard,
 One *of them* turneth from it downcast.
 There is no power to belief in Christ:
 In the end the cross was his enemy.
 And the others that are among that rabble,
 The ill-taught, the malevolent, and the troublesome,
 Not one hath fear in his heart.
 Their counsel is *as* a breath of wind.
 If Nōš-Zād be captured in battle,
 Say nothing of these things to him.
 Let not his body find injury, *and*
 Let not his shirt be torn from the battle,
 For his veiled-faced *women* in secret
 Shall do themselves in.
 Make his palace his prison:
 It shall be so for them that obeyed his command.
 Shut not the treasury door to him,
 Though nobility is thus become base.
 As for clothing and food,
 As for throws and spreading *carpets* also,
 Let there be no stinting him in anything.
 Let him lack for nothing!
 As for those marzbāns of the Aryans,
 All they that have girt their waists with him –
 When thou art victorious, twist not thy speech! –
 Make two halves of their waists with the sword,
 All that are foemen to the king.
 It is right to entrust him to the pleasure of the crocodile.
 Apart from all them that are foemen to us at heart,
 He is of the tyrannical seed of Āhriman.
 Take no heed of blessings from me,

Thou shalt have a trial *of them* from Nōš-Zād.
 All were thankless before this:
 They were fearful of our punishment.
 All witnesses that have cursed *him*,
And moved his tongue against Nōš-Zād:
 Thereby have they called curses upon us also.
 They have prepared slander.
 Make no agreement with them also,
 For the malevolent telleth such a tale.
 If he become skill-less, he is also behind us.
 Our heart is witness to this righteousness.
 The tongue of him that maketh mention of evil
 (And if some injustice come upon Nōš-Zād):
 Burn them all before the multitude.
 May he have no tongue! May he have no mouth!
 Everyone that sought the day
 When the king's body groweth weak
 Useth crookedness, slander,
 Evil-thinking and the faith of Āhriman.
 It is right that there be no devilish religion in the empire,
 Whose glory, head, diadem, and seed, are mine.'

The put the king's seal upon the letter.
 Messenger went running upon the road, *and*
 When he came from the way to Rām-Barzīn,
 He said all that he had heard from king Kisrā.
 When that was said he gave the letter
 With the order that he had commanded anent Nōš-Zād:
 To raise the army and to make ready for war,
 And to remove from mind ruth for him.
 When the old man read that letter,
 He heard a few words from the ambassador.
 It this moment, when the cock-crow arose,
 The voice of the drum went up from the court.
 The great army went out of Madā'in.
 Rām-Barzīn ran to battle.
 Thus the news came to Nōš-Zād.
 He gathered *his* army and gave *them* payment:
 All primates and patriarchs of Byzantium
 Who were in that settled frontier.

The general Šammās³⁶ *was* before them, *and*
 All the host had washed their hands in blood.
 The cry came up from the court of Nōš-Zād, *and*
 And the army moved as the wind-blown sea.
 Together they marched from city to desert,
 Heads full of war, hearts full of revenge and venom.
 When he saw the dust of Rām-Barzīn's army,
 He blew the trumpet, and drew up the battle line.
 Because of the dust of fervent knights,
 The wielding of heavy maces
 Tore hearts of stone.
 No one saw the face of the shining sun.
 At the centre of the army *was* Nōš-Zād.
 He put a Byzantine helmet upon his head.
 The army was full of primates of Byzantium,
 For the ground was hidden by *horses'* hooves.
 Thou wouldst have said: 'The earth is become seething;
 The air above the head is become *full of* wailing.'
 A brave mail-clad warrior came,
 Whose name was Pērōz-i-Šēr.
 He cried: 'O famous Nōš-Zād,
 Hast thou twisted thy head from justice.
 Thou art gone from the religion of Gayumart, *and*
 Also from the way of Hōšang and Tahmurat!
 Christ the deceiver was himself slain
 Because his head had gone from the religion of Yazdān.
 Among *all* the founders of religions, choose not the religion of him
 Who knew not the face of his own work.
 If the glory of Yazdān had shone upon him,
 Would the Jews have found the way to him?
 Thy father, the world-holding nobleman –
 Hast thou heard what he did to Byzantium and Caesar?
 Now preparest thou war with him?
 Raisest thou thy head to the sky?
 Despite this moon-like cheek, this glory, and stature,
 Despite this mane, this trunk, and this hand and mace,
 I see no wisdom with thee:
 Thus thy dark soul is become wildered!

³⁶ This is the Syriac word for 'deacon'.

Alas for that head and crown, name and lineage,
 Which now thou givest to the wind!
 Thou art not worthy of king Kīsrā;
 Neither elephant, nor snorting lion art thou.
 O monarch! I have seen in the portico of kings
 No image of hand or rein like thine,
 Like thy foot, riding, chest, and mane.
 Such bluster, hand, and club of thine
 No Chinese painter hath seen.
 Fate hath not seen a monarch like thee.
 Young man, burn not the heart of king Kīsrā:
 Make not this world-enflaming crown dark.
 Get off thy horse. Seek mercy.
 Throw down this mace and Byzantine crown!
 If a cold wind far from here
 Shall put upon thy face dark dust.
 The heart of the king shall burn because of thee:
 The sun shall weep for thy face.
 Sow not the seed of covetousness in the world.
 Quarelling is not good for a monarch.
 If thou bear thy head one way from my counsel, *and*
 Choose haughtiness and aggression,
 Oft shall remembrance of Pērōz' admonition come to thee:
 The words of evil speakers shall come to thee as *doth* the wind!'

Thus Nōš-Zād answered him:

'O ancient old man with a head full of wind,
 Seek no mercy from my army,
 Proud warriors and the king's son.
 For the religion of Kīsrā is nothing to me:
 My heart bendeth toward *my* mother,
 For her custom is the religion of Christ.
 I go not from her glory and religion.
 Religion-giving Christ, though he was slain –
 The glory of the world went not from him.
 That man of pure thought went to Yazdān the pure.
 He saw no haughtiness on this dark earth.
 If I shall be killed, I have no fear of it,
 For it is the venom of death, and there is no antidote!'

He spake the speech before old Pērōz.
 He covered the face of the air with arrows, *and*
 The warriors of the army went forth from the place, *and*
 The cry went up from drum and trumpet.
 The general spurred on *his* horse like fire,
 He went forth like unto Āzargušasp.
 He cut the left flank of the king of Iran's army, *and*
 No warrior remained within the host.
 Many of the army's lions he slew.
 Rām-Barzīn grew wrathful at that deed.
 He ordered that they make a shower of arrows, *and*
 They made the air as the spring-time hail.
 Nōš-Zād was wounded in the dust *of battle*.
 Oft he recalled the admonition of Pērōz, *and*
 Full of pain he went to the centre of the host,
 His body wounded with arrows; his cheek yellow with pain.
 Thus he spake before the braves of Byzantium:
 'War against *my* father is lowly, base, and shameful.'
 He wailed, and weeping called for the bishop, *and*
 Told him all that was in his heart.
 He said to him: 'This cruel fate
 Hath brought so great a tyranny upon me from myself.
 Now that my head shall go below the earth,
 Send a rider to my mother.
 Tell her that Nōš-Zād is gone from this world, *and that*
 The day of injustice and justice is over for him.
 Afflict thou not thy heart for me,
 For such is the custom of this wayside inn.
 My portion is the dark way:
 How was my heart glad and earth bright?
 My head is full of smoke because I am slain, *but*
 Nothing is worse than *my* father's displeasure at me.
 Make no daḥma, throne, or long mourning.
 Prepare a grave in the Christian manner.
 Let there be no camphour, neither musk, nor ambergris,
 For I have left this world wounded by an arrow.'
 He said this and shut his lips together, *and*
 That happy-hearted Nōš-Zād departed.

When the army was ware of their king's death,
 They fled that battlefield.
 When he heard that he was slain, the weeping pahlavān
 Went running to his pillow.
 Whoever had not been slain upon that battlefield,
 Was not joyful, neither did any plundering.
 They saw him slain and thrown down low,
 His head in the lap of a Byzantine bishop.
 All the battlefield was full of shouting because of him.
 The heart of Rām-Barzīn was full of pain and trouble.
 He asked the bishop about Nōš-Zād:

‘What knowest thou of the royal testament?’

Thus he gave answer: ‘Let only his mother
 Behold his naked breast.’

When he beheld his own body wounded by arrows,
 No ossuary,³⁷ no musk, nor ambergris he commanded;
 Neither diadem, nor Byzantine brocade, nor throne,
 When he saw the dark fate of *his* subjects.
 Now his mother prepared a shroud in the Christian fashion,
 And a grave, and her own veil *also*.
 Now his soul is one with Christ:
 It is the same, though he was slain not upon a cross.

All who were Christian in the empire –
 No Christian remained without rent cheek.
 The cry went from man and woman of the empire,
 For they were all gathered as one.
 The body of the brave, young monarch,
 The heart and eye of king Nōšīn-Ravān,
 They bore from the place in his coffin.
 Three parasangs they moved *it* by hand.
 When his mother was ware of that report,
 Her head and heart went down to the dust
 Naked of veil she went upon the road, *and*
 The *people of* the marketplace gathered round her.
 They put a pavillion round about her, *and*
 All the world put dust upon *their* head.

³⁷ The word here is *satūdān*, which must be a corruption of *astōdān*, lit. ‘bone-holder’. It could be literally an ossuary, or perhaps the inner part of a *daḥma*.

The entrusted him to the earth, *and*
 And Nōš-Zād went.
 He came from wind, and on sudden is gone to wind.³⁸
 All Gundišāpūr began to weep.
 At the pain of the king's heart they began to burn.
 Wherefore twistest thou wildered in the bonds of greed,
 When thou knowest that here shalt thou not long remain.
 Thou seekest escape: seek thou nothing for the world's sake.
 Its rose hath venom. Smell it not overmuch,
 Turn not thy head from *the right* religion and righteousness,
 For the wrath of the god shall bring chastisement
 Since thou hast heard this, pull thy heart from grief;
 Strike not the axe upon thy lip out of grief.
 If thou live, ask for the bowl of yellow wine, *and*
 Consider not the joyful heart as sin.
 Seek joy and pleasure, but be not proud.
 Consider not as foolish the marrow of *my* word.

Tales and sayings of famous sage and minister Buzurg-Mihr follow from l. 981–1572. These are without historical value because they do not narrate anything and consist exclusively of gnomic and proverbial sayings put into the mouth of Buzurg-Mihr in the context of seven feasts. Not even the feasts themselves are described. Moreover, what I omit here has already been translated and summarised recently by Davis.³⁹

THE TALE OF MAHBŌD AND ZARVĀN

l. 1573–1716

Never cease from learning,
 Nor throw thine heart from knowledge to error.
 If thou say: 'I have paid wisdom's debt, *and*
 I have learnt all that I needed,'

³⁸ The image does not make much sense. Would it be overbold to imagine that *bād* (wind) is a misreading for *hāk* (earth)? I do not find such a variant reading, but in context it seems to make more sense.

³⁹ Davis 2006, p. 690–693.

Fortune playeth a game *with thee*.
 For it sitteth thee *again* before the teacher.
 Hear now this tale from the dihqān,
 Which he recited from the ancient speech.
 Thus spake the mobad: when Kistrā
 Donned the crown upon the ivory throne,
 In battle, in feasting, in continence and justice,
 None hath memory of anyone like him among kings.
 He would learn wisdom from the wise;
 He would enlighten his heart with knowledge;
 He would have food and rest with *his* mobads;
 Ever did he exalt his head with wisdom.
 When a thing is agreeable to him,
 Be thou not slack in learning *it!*
 Thou must not say, ‘I am become learned, *or*
 I am become powerful over my desire.
 When thou hearest this tale, take heed
 Of the speech of the eloquent old dihqān!
 I asked about ancient days, *and*
 He remembered these words about Nōšīn-Ravān:

He had a pure minister
 Who was alert of heart and was treasurer.
 He had a heart full of wisdom and upright counsel.
 He sought nothing from the world but a good name:
 Thus Mahbōd was the name of that *man* of pure brain.
 His tongue and heart *were* full of fine speech.
 He had two sons as the joyful spring,
 Ever worshipping the monarch.
 When the king of kings laid out the feast,
 Or if a mobad called for the barsom-twigs,
 He would not eat a thing except it were from the hand of Mahbōd.
 Safe was he with these two sons.
 He had his kitchen in his house:
 He had himself as his guest.
 The two sons of that pure man
 Would prepare food for the king.
 The grandees were envious of Mahbōd,
 So that they poured tears down *their* cheeks.
 There was a renowned *man*, Zarvān by name
 Whose desire was for the court of the king.

He was old and was the king's door-keeper also.
 He was resplendent at the courts' feasts.
 At Mahbōd and the glory of his two sons,
 His face was full of weeping all year long *in envy*.
 He would contrive that the royal head
 Be wroth at the doings of that pure man.
But he saw no way to slander him
 Whereby to fill the king's soul with outrage at him.
 The wise man was himself aware of that evil,
 That he had an enemy at court.
 At the speech and deeds of that impudent man
 Mahbōd's face never went pale.
 Thus it was that one day, a Jew
 Asked money of Zarvān for the sake of trade.
 He went *and* came. He increased *his influence* upon him, *and*
 Mingled with his dark soul.
 When he became bold with the king's doorman,
 He became a worshipper at the palace of Husraw.
 He spake one day, in secret, of incantations,
 Of the court, and of the monarch of the world;
 Of sorcery, dwimmercraft, and witchery;
 Of crooked deeds and evil conduct.
 When Zarvān beheld the speech of the Jew,
 And heard words of that kind,
 He bewrayed his secret to him, and spake these words:
 'Reveal *it* not save to thine own soul.
 Thou must prepare a stratagem
And rid the world of Mahbōd.
 For greatness in rank is come to him,
 So that he lordeth himself over the age.
 He respecteth no one in the world.
 Thou sayest: "he is Nōšīn-Ravān" and it is enough.
 Except it be from the hand of Mahbōd's son,
 The holder of the world wanteth no food.
 So arrogant is he become through his favour,
 That heaven even kisseth his skirt.'

Thus the Jew gave answer to Zarvān:

'Grief need not increase from this matter.
 When the world-holding king summoneth the barsom-twigs,

Behold the food, how they serve it, *and*
 See whether any milk be in it.
 Go and smell the food.
 It shall be enough if I see the milk from afar.
Then look thou to Mahbōd and his sons not living.
 And if he eat of it, without doubt, be he bronze or stone,
 He shall fall down at that moment without delay.’

Zarvān heeded his speech.
 His heart grew refreshed at the sight of him.
 He went not to the court without that Jew.
 There was no eating, nor joy, nor desire without him.
 Thus while some time passed,
 The evil teacher went about the court of the king.
 Every morning the two sons of Mahbōd
 Would stride before the munificent king.
 Behind the curtain of the renowned lord
 Was a woman pure and of good counsel,
 Who when king Kisrā wanted food,
 Would bedeck a golden table.
 She would put three bejewelled goblets upon it,
 The top covered in a gold-embroidered cloth.
 From the hands of the two sons of that nobleman
 There came to the lofty king
 Food of honey and of milk and rosewater.
 He ate and prepared the place of sleep.
 Thus it was that one day both youths
 Brought the board to Nōšīn-Ravān.
 A servant put it upon *his* head,
 For the food was entrusted to him.
 When the board came to the king’s vestibule,
 Zarvān the doorkeeper looked upon it.
 Thus he spake laughing to the two youths:
 ‘O trusty ones of king Nōšīn-Ravān,
 Show the face of this food,
 Which shall be nourishment for the king.
 What hue is it that hath the good smell?
 Draw from it the silken veil.’
 The youth lifted the cover from that food.
 Zarvān looked upon it from afar.

Likewise the Jew beheld it.
 Then he came when he saw the hue of the food.
 Thereafter he said to the master of ceremonies:
 ‘The tree that thou hast planted is come to fruit.’

They brought the table to Nōšīn-Ravān,
 Both youths wise and wary.
 After the table went Zarvān *swift* as dust.
 Thus he spake with the noble king:
 ‘O king of good and righteous augury,
 Put not thy hand to eating without tasting,
 For the face of heaven is thy laughing fortune;
 The world is brightened by thy throne and hippodrome.
 The cook hath mingled poison with the milk:
 May this poison be the portion of evil men!
 When Nōšīn-Ravān heard *this* from him,
 He looked upon the two bright youths,
 Whose mother was his cook – she was
 Wise and solicitous of them –
 The youths out of purity and righteousness
 Rolled up their sleeves upon *their* arms.
 When they drank milk from the goblet,
 Thou wouldst have said the twain were wounded by an arrow.
 Both fell asleep on the spot, *and*
 They gave up their souls before Nōšīn-Ravān.
 When the king of the world looked upon them,
 He was wildered, and became as the flower of fenugreek.
 He commanded: ‘Let dust arise from the house of Mahbōd
 And let no one have fear of anyone.
 Let his head be cut off upon that dust.
 Let neither Mahbōd be, nor his cook!’

None remained in the portico of Mahbōd, *and*
 Few of his own remained in the world.
 All his goods *Kisrā* gave to plunder:
 Women, children, and the adorned treasure.
 Zarvān achieved his desire in that matter:
 In one place he saw his desire; in *the other* place renown.
 The Jew became noble before him.
 He exalted *his* head unto the lofty cloud.

The *celestial* sphere turned a little, *and*
 Righteousness hid *its* face from the king.
 He commanded that many a hunting horse
 Pass before the king's eye.
 Among the horses which Kisrā beheld,
 He saw two *bearing* the brand of Mahbōd upon the thigh.
 His cheek was enflamed at those Arab horses, *and*
 He burned with love for Mahbōd.
 Water poured down from his two eyes in pain.
 His wounded heart remembered Mahbōd much.
 Thus he spake: 'That man of counsel and rank,
 How the evil dēv turned him from the *right* way!
 With that friendliness and righteousness,
 Why knocked his soul upon the door of lying?
 The maker of the world alone knoweth
 Hidden righteousness from the appearance *thereof*.'
 And from that place to the hunting ground
 He came thus with wounded heart and with *his* army.
 Upon the road he spake with everyone:
 He adorned his heart with words.
 He took many minstrels as fellow wayfarers.
 He shortened the way with tales:
 Scribes and Zarvān and the king's minister
 Went conversing upon the road one day.
 Some words passed of spells and incantations,
 Of sorcery and the injurious Āhriman.
 Then the monarch spake thus to the mobad:
 'Pain not *thine* heart with dwimmercraft,
But speak no word but to Yazdān and of religion.
 Speak not of dwimmercraft and the wonder of witchery.'
 Zarvān said to him: 'may the king live forever!
 May wisdom have nourishment in thy speech!
 All that they say of sorcery is *true*:
But none knoweth but the sorcerer.
 If food have a portion of milk *in it*,
 With a gaze they can turn it to poison from afar.'
 When Nōšīn-Ravān heard this speech,
And olden time was renewed for him,
 He remembered Mahbōd and his two sons.

A cold wind came to his lip.
 He looked to Zarvān and stood silent.
 He swiftly urged on *his* high-stepping steed.
 His soul was beclouded in thought,
 For Zarvān was foeman to Mahbōd.
 He said: ‘this unworthy man,
 I know not what he did at that time,
 When Mahbōd was killed by our hand,
 Thus perished *that* tribe’s day.
 May the Creator make *it* plain,
 And give rest to our heart and brain.
 For I see the matter polluted with him.
 I am full of pain at *that* old day.
 He went on with heart full of pain and sorrow,
 With wrinkled cheek, *and* eyes full of woe.
 At that time the monarch came to a lodge, *and*
 He struck *his* pavillion by the shore of a stream.
 When Zarvān came to the tent,
 He rid the place of strangers.
 Talk passed of witchery and of honey and milk.
 He said to him: ‘this matter pleaseth the heart.’
 Thereafter the king asked about Mahbōd:
 How his son was laid low.
 When he heard the answer from him trembling,
 The crime of Zarvān was manifest.
 Kistrā said to him: ‘speak the truth!
 Make no excuse and seek no crookedness,
 For crookedness bringeth *nothing* but evil deeds.
 The good heart turneth evil with evil friends.’
 Zarvān spoke the truth from end to end.
 He made the hidden secret plain.
 Straightway he cast the sin upon the Jew:
 He filled his own body with pain and anguish.
 When he came to that lofty court,
 The exalted king asked him mildly:
 ‘Tell me how this deed was *done*?
 Show no not *thy* face to the hand of the lie.’
 The Jew asked clemency of the world-holder
 If he bewrayed aright the way of dwimmercraft.

He spake what Zarvān had said to him, *and*
 All the matter that had passed in secret.
 The world-holder heard and was astounded.
 He summoned counsellor, mobad, and marzbān
 Before his counsellors,
 The just monarch asked of the matter a second time.
 Then he commanded that two high gibbets *be built*,
 With twisting ropes hanging down from the gibbet.
 The executioner put *it* before his palace
 In view of all his country.
 On one gibbet Zarvān, and on the other the Jew.
 The killer hung *them* up and did violence *to them*.
 Under a rain of stones and a rain of arrows,
 They gave *up their heads* for milk magic.

Entrust not the world to evil,
 For without doubt evil cometh to the evil doer.
 He sought out some of Mahbōd's kin,
 That he might find one of them alive.
 He found a girl with veiled face, *and*
 Three noble men and of good disposition.
 He shewed them all the treasure of Zarvān
 And all that was the Jew's.
 His soul was aflame for Mahbōd.
 He wept from dark night unto day.
 He sought protection from Yazdān
And poured his heart's blood upon *his* bosom.
 He gave much to the poor,
 And filled *his* tongue with praise,
 That Yazdān would forgive his sin,
 And call not the just *king* tyrannical.

He that is pure and Yazdān-worshipping
 Stretcheth not *his* hand to wicked deeds.
 Though it it easy to do some evil,
 In the end *his* soul shall dread it.
 If thy hard heart of stone become evil,
 Its secret shall not remain hid. It shall be manifest.
 However soft be thy voice,
 All thy secrets shall be disclosed.
 The world hath no regard for men's secrets:

Likewise for the good that thou doest in secret.
 When thou art without pain and of pure counsel,
 Thou shalt have a portion of it in both worlds.
 Now the matter of Zarvān and the Jew
 Is over. Praise be to wisdom!

NOŠĪN-RAVĀN'S BUILDING OF CITIES

l. 1717–1755

If thou art just and upright,
 Thou shalt not long remain, *but* thy name shall endure.
 The unjust king shall bring upon his body only the grave and cursing.
 If thy heart have righteous dealings,
 Know thus that thou adornest the world.
 If thou desire praise after thy death,
 Let wisdom be thy crown and thy helm.
 Thus it was that after the death of Nōšīn-Ravān
 His justice grew young because of my speech.
 After the world was become just by him,
 He wished for nothing but praise and greatness.
 Wise and great *men* slept upon the open plain:
 Sheep and wolf came to water pool *together*.
 The great adorned lowliness.
 They wanted his name upon their diadems.
 The neck rested from the bond of chain-mail, *and*
 Warriors loosed the knots of *their* chain-mail.
 Shoulder rested from *the weight of* mace and dagger, *and*
 Only the voice of rest came to the eye.
 No one had trouble with the world-holder.
 He joined tribute and toll with everyone.
 The world-holder took difficulty easy.
 He took up the gear of the hunt and the horse race.
 He sat in the bejewelled portico, *and*
 He gave counsel with wine and wine-drinkers.

He built a city in the Byzantine fashion:
 More than two parasangs was its length.
 Within it *were* palace, hippodrome, and garden;

On one hand a river; and on one hand the mountain slope,
 As was Andiū-šahr in Byzantine *land*,
 Which Kistrā measured and copied.
 A lofty palace arose from it:
 It was pleasing to everyone in the world.
 The monarch built a palace in it,
 Within which was a bejewelled portico.
 Every part of the vaults *was of* silver and gold,
And in the gold *was* many a jewel.
 A dome of ebony and ivory
 With shapes of ivory, šīz-wood⁴⁰ and teak.
 They that were master *craftsmen* of Byzantium and India,
Who had learnt their masters' skill –
 From Iran and from the southern country,
 All world-brightening craftsmen,
 Gathered all about the city,
 Which was both city and workshop.
 In this city he made houses.
 He made the heart's ornament the country's ornament.
 When they finished the city,
 They built villages around it.
 He adorned every side with farmland,
 Fertile earth and fruitful.
 Captives that had been brought from among the mountain-dwellers,
 From Gēlān and from all them that had cause injury –
 To every one of these he gave an house.
 The whole city he made a place for strangers.
 And to every one of them he gave a job;
 If he were alone he gave an helper,
 A worker, and a tiller of the soil:
 One that would measure parasangs and borders.
 Traders and priests,
And noblemen and subjects.
 He adorned that city as heaven.
 Eye saw therein no ugly place.
 Kistrā called it Sūristān by name,
 For in banqueting, the World-Holder findeth pleasure.
 Nothing was in his heart, both open and hid,
 But justice and civilising the world.

⁴⁰ I do not know what this sort of wood is.

But when fate bore him away from kingship,
 It entrusted the crown to another man.
 Know thus that it is beguilement, and have done with it.
 Neither loftiness nor lowliness remain to anyone.

THE FALL OF THE HEPHTHALITES AND THE RISE OF THE TURKS

l. 1754–2425

‘Begin now the war of the Ḥāqān and the Hephthalites:
 Since battle cometh to thee, take up *thy* club.’

Thus spake the noble old dihqān;
 Remember all that thou hast heard of it.

Of all the glorious and just *men* of renown
 In hardihood, treasure, and breeding.
 There was none as great as the Ḥāqān of China⁴¹
 (Passing over Kistrā) in the whole world.
 All *men* from China unto the shore of the river Oxus
 Justly called down praise upon him.
 The *Turkish* general with army, treasure, and crown
 Was at Gul-Zarrayūn on the further side of Čāč.

Talk of Kistrā was spread throughout the world
 In the midst of the grandees.
 In manliness, understanding, and glory;
In greatness, *and* his royal manner.
 In those days, the wise Ḥāqān
 Sought friendship with the monarch.
 He sat awhile with *his* counsellors:
 All renowned men gathered.
 First in opening that friendship,
 He sought the counsel of counsellors and mobads, *and*
 Then he prepared gifts without number –
 Everyone made remembrance worthy of the monarch –
 Of Chinese horses and brocade of China,
 Of throne, crown, sword, and signet ring:

⁴¹ This always refers to the Turkish king.

Rarities from every Chinese court
 He loaded upon camels, *and*
 Thirty thousand Chinese coins
 He commanded as a gift from *his* treasury.
 He brought ten camel-loads of coins,
 And added them to the gifts.
 He sought among the grandees an eloquent man,
 Wise and who had travelled the world.
 He commanded that a scribe come before him
 To write upon silk a letter from the Ḥāqān,
 In the manner of Chinese drawing,
 To the king with one hundred thousand blessings.
That man's journey was toward the Hephthalites:
 The whole way was full of sword and mace.
 From within Sogdiana to the Oxus
 The Hephthalite king mustered the masters of his army.
 Thou wouldst say: Gātfar was the name of their general,
 Implacable in their battles.
 When he became aware of the doings of the Ḥāqān,
 And of the gifts from the king of the land of Iran,
 He summoned the experienced *men* of the army,
 And he spake to them *about the matter* from end to end.
 Thus Gātfar spake with his proud *warriors*:
 'Evil cometh upon us from the stars' augury.
 If the king of Iran and the Ḥāqān of China
 Make *a treaty* and bless *one another* from the heart,
 Fear shall be our portion from this friendship.
 On this side our empire shall be ruined.
 An attack must be made:
 Let the messenger be deprived of his life.'

He chose from the army a renowned *man*,
 A proud warrior, as was fitting.
 All those goods he gave to plunder:
 The camels and the adorned horses.
 When the news *of this* came to the Ḥāqān of China,
 His heart became full of pain, and his head full of vengeance.
 He marched *his* army from Quijār-Bāšī:⁴²

⁴² This is to be identified with Tarāz (Monchi-Zadeh 1975, p. 221 with n. 4).

No renowned *man* remained in China and Ḥutan.
 He allowed no man of the offspring of Arjāsp and Āfrāsyāb
To have rest and sleep.
 They went at once to *the river* Gul-Zarrayūn,
 Every head full of wrath and heart full of blood.
 The general of the Ḥāqān of China was Sinjih.
 Smoke arose from water unto the sky.
 From the tumult of the knights within Čāč,
 The water of the Gul-Zarrayūn became as blood in hue.
 When Ġātfar became aware
 Of what the Ḥāqān of China had done,
 He chose an army of Hephthalites,
 Which would block out the sun from the world.
 From Balḥ and from Šignān, Āmōy and Zam
 He summoned armour, troops, and *a* hoard of coins.
 From Ḥutan and from Tirmiz and Visagird
 He raised the army from every side.
 From mountain and desert and from sand and stalk,
 The army seethed as ant and locust.
 When the Ḥāqān passed to the river Barak,
 Thou wouldst have said: ‘the sky raineth swords’.
 He gathered the army at Māy and Marg, *and*
 The sky turned black as *a* hawk’s feather
With many a spear and purple sword, *and*
 The sheen of many-hued banners.
 Buḥārā was full of mace and axe,
 For it was the encampment of the Hephthalite king.
 Ġātfar was as a mountain with *his* army, *for*
 He had brought troops of Hephthalites.
 When the army went forth tightly on every side,
 They blocked the wind’s way.
At the flashing of the chieftains’ swords, *and*
 The brandishing of heavy maces,
 Thou wouldst have said that iron had a tongue, *and*
That air had mace as an interpreter.
 A wind arose, and black dust
 Grew bright from the shining of sun and moon.
 Kušān and Sogdian *men* gathered, *and*
 Cheek of child, man, and woman *was* full of water.
 How would the outcome of the battle be?
 Whom would the whirling of sun and moon favour?

For one week those battle-seeking armies
 Were face to face.
 On every side was an heap of the slain:
 Earth and stone turned purple from the blood.
 Because of spear, mace, axe, and sword,
 Thou wouldst have said: stones rain down from the cloud.
 The sun was hidden in the dust, *and*
 The eye of the flying eagle was full of dust.

Defeat overcame the Hephthalites –
 A defeat which bound them for years.
 They looked, and every one that remained
 Called upon the name of Yazdān in *their* hearts.
 The wounded were scattered in every direction, *and*
 All borderlands were full of the wounded and captives.
 One to another said: ‘never
 Have we seen war with such ruin.
 That army was not of men:
 It is bad to look upon them, *for*
 In face they were all *dēv* and beast;
 In heart far from good and evil thoughts.
 At javelin, spear, mace, and sword,
 Thou wouldst have said: they know not the way of retreat!
 Every *man* had the face of a dragon, *and*
Their spears pass through mountains.
 Their claws are as *those of* a leopard.
 Their hearts grow not weary of way, thou wouldst say.
 They take not off the saddle from the horse.
 They sleep not, and pass over stone.
 Their horses’ food is all thorns.
 They sleep mounted. The twain are awake
 All the night in attack and pillage.
 They cast their bodies into fire.
 None *of them* knoweth sleep or food.
 May the *dev* seek war from them!
 Let us have no strife with the Ḥāqān of China:
 Way must be made to the land of Iran.
 Now if Gātfar shall do *our* bidding,
 He shall bind his belt to Kistrā’s behest.
 He shall grant him the empire of the Hephthalites,

And he shall forget mace and axe.
 But if not, we ourselves shall choose
 A proud warrior of the seed of ʕušnavāz,
 Who himself shall be pleasing to Nōšīn-Ravān,
 For whom ancient fortune turneth young.
 He shall tell the ʕāqān's business to him.
 All at once shall the world praise *him*,
 For he is glorious, elegant, generous, and wise, *and*
 Wisdom feedeth righteousness.
 He hath laden tribute and toll upon the Caesars.
 None have strength or strife with him.⁷
 Child, man, and woman among the Hephthalites
 Were as one on this score.

There was a man of Čaḡān, of noble lineage,
 Young and *yet* experienced, generous, just, *and*
 Wise, and his name was Faḡānīš,
 Who had his own treasure and army.
 The Hephthalite grandees and the ʕāqān of China
 Praised him royally.
 Then news came to the great king
 That the ʕāqān, who had been renowned and impudent –
News of the Hephthalites and the warriors of that host,
 That defeat had come upon them from the ʕāqān, *and*
 Of the Čaḡān king who was come
 With new fortune to sit upon *his* new throne.
 The king of the world sat full of thought
 At the speech of *his* shrewd spies.
 In the portico he prepared a place for counsel:
 The Husraw-worshipping warriors went in
 With Ardašīr, the mobad of mobads;
 With Šāpūr and Yazdgard the scribe.
 All those wise men who shewed the way
 Took counsel together before the king's throne.

Thus said Kisrā: 'O wise men,
 Experienced *men* of the world,
 I have found unpleasing news,
 Matters ill and unprofitable.
 An army without number of Hephthalites, Turks, the ʕāqān of China,

And of those marzbāns of Tūrān land,
 Is gathered from Čāč, from China, and from Turkistān and Ḥutan.
 For one week, the Hephthalites, *together* with Turk and Chinaman,
 Took not *their* saddles from *their* horses.
 In the end the Hephthalites were beaten:
 Two halves were wounded or slain.
 For those renowned *warriors* that were Hephthalite
 The world was full of mace an axe:
So it is a wonder that defeat was come upon them.
 May the general be not of lowly counsel!
 If Gātfar had had *good* name and counsel,
 The *celestial* sphere would not have borne that host from *its* place.
 Since the Hephthalite borderlands were full of confusion,
 They sought out *a leader* from the seed of Bahrām Gōr, *and*
 They enthroned a new king:
 They blessed him royally.
 The Ḥāqān was encamped upon the further side of Čāč,
 Proud among his army, treasure, and crown,
 Of the seed of Arjāsp and Afrāsyāb, *and*
 He dreamt of nothing but Iran.
 At the victory of Gātfar's army,
 He raised up his head to the sun.
 It is unfit that we be confederate *with them*,
 Though the Ḥāqān calleth for treaty.
 Kavāristān is the land of my empire,
 From which the Chinese derive their backing.
 All *our* subjects *are* in pain because of them,
And they pay them *in* women, men, and treasure.
 What see ye in this?
 What shall we do with the Turks and the Ḥāqān of China?'

The wise grandees, *and*
 They all gave answer, *and*
 They began to praise him:
 'O king of good augury and pure religion,
 All the Hephthalites are Āhriman,
 Two-faced and inimical to this land.
 It is right that nothing but evil come to them, *and*
 Good speech from the king is also right.
 If there were no revenge or pain from them

But the blood of that noble king
 (For they slew Pērōz suddenly,
 Such a king, the light of the world!),
 May they not be joyful for *even* one day!
 For justice cometh never from injustice.
 Such is the judge's recompense:
 Evil cometh upon the heads of evil doers.
 If the king speak of the Ḥāqān,
 That he hath in *his* heart pain and ancient grievance,
 It is fitting that he hath an evil counsellor
 Of the lineage of Afrāsyāb, *whose* two eyes *are* full of water.
 But if he were victorious, he may have taken heart.
 So if thou fear him, it is no wonder.
 Think not of Hephthalites and of Ġātfar's army,
 And fear them not.
But as for the lineage of Arjāsp and Afrāsyāb,
 Of the Ḥāqān that sitteth upon the further side of the river,
 Put thy bright mind upon their doings.
 Thou art the proud king of the world.
 Spirit and wisdom get *their* brightness from thee.
 Undying is he whom wisdom feedeth.
 Thou art wiser than the great moot, *and*
 Thou needest no wise man or counsellor.
 Crown and throne befit thee in the world,
 For thou art glorious, resplendent, wise, and lucky.
 If the king go to Ḥurāsān,
 There shall be trouble for his empire.
 When they see that the land *of Iran is* without a king,
 Time and time again shall armies come from Byzantium.
 They shall seek revenge upon the Aryans:
 No field or land of Iran shall remain.
 None hath set foot upon the dust of Iran,
 Nor hath anyone remembered this empire.
 If the king's counsel be revenge and war,
 The crocodile in the river shall have rest from him.'

When the monarch heard from *his* Aryan counsellors
 Of feasting, battle, and war,
 None had any wish for battle,
All having inclined to feasting and pleasure.
 The king, the world-lord, knew

What the wise men's counsel was at heart.
 Thus he gave answer: 'thanks be to Yazdān,
 Whom I fear in both worlds,
 That Iran wanteth nothing but sleeping and eating:
 They have forgotten the way of battle.
 Thus your hearts are turned from fighting
 Because of ease and feasting.
 But whatever bringeth pain becometh easy:
 From the body's pain cometh pleasure and riches.
 With the strength of Yazdān, at the beginning of the month,
 We shall prepare the way *to war*.
 I shall raise an army *bound for* Ḥurāsān:
 I shall summon a host from every country,
 All the renowned *men* and warriors that there are, *and*
 We shall bind drums upon rutting elephants.
 I shall leave no Hephthalites *alive*, nor the Ḥāqān of China,
 Who shall bless the land of Iran.
 I shall purify the world of the tares of evil men.
 I shall renew the country in justice and bounty.'

All renowned *warriors* were astounded:
 By way of excuse, they blessed him *saying*:
 'O victorious king, glorious and just,
 May fate be glad at thy regard!
 We renowned *men* are thy servants;
 We bow *our* heads at thy command and counsel.
 When combat commandeth,
 The monarch shall behold no sloth from us!'
 Thereafter when he sat with counsellors,
 The moot spake for a time.
 It went on in this fashion till the new moon arose,
And sat upon his new throne.
 Thou wouldst have said:
 A cup of golden ruby has been set upon a robe of lapis lazuli.
 They beheld the moon upon the king's face, *and*
 A cry went up from the king's court.
 When the shining lamp stood upon the mountain, *and*
 The ground became as a golden saddle-cover,
 The shout went forth and the cry of the trumpet.
 They bound bronze drums to elephants.

The army went to camp step by step, *as*
 The drummers led the way.
 Yazdgard the scribe went into the court
 With the counsellor mobad, Ardašīr.
 They wrote a letter to every country,
 To every noble and to every grandee, *saying*
 That the king went forth with *his* army for battle, *and*
 ‘Make no feasting for the sake of loyalty.’
 He ordered a letter to the Ḥāqān of China,
 To Faḡānīš also he gave blessing.
 He led an army out of Madā’in, *so large*
 That no surface of the earth remained *visible*, save the sea.
 The ground *was* the army, mountain to mountain,
 The world-holder’s banner in the midst *of it*.
 He marched the army to Gurgān,
 So that the sun vanished from the earth.
 He rested a while for the sake of hunting, *and*
 He went *to hunt* in mountain and in meadow.
 The Ḥāqān was in Sogdiana,
 While the king took counsel with *his* army.
 Sogdiana was become as a watery sea
 Of the progeny of Arjāsp and Afrāsyāb.
 The Ḥāqān said: ‘the earth cannot bear my army,
 Nor my throne
 Hence shall I lead my army toward Iran,
 And from Iran to the desert of brave *Arab* men shall I lead *it*.
 I shall carry the dust of Iran to China,
 And I shall bring the Arabs to *my* religion!
 I shall not allow any to have crown, nor throne,
 Nor royal splendour, nor fortune of the throne!’

He was a moment in speech,
 Seeking the world with *his* fearsome army,
 Until news came from the king
 That he had strode forth in glory from Iran.
 And *he heard* of that victorious fortune and that power,
And of that army stretching from sea to sea.
 The Ḥāqān writhed when he was ware.
 The way to battle was shortened.
 He sat in thought with his counsellors,

And the grandees of the army gathered together.
 The Ḥāqān's general spake to *this* minister:
 'This base news cannot be hid;
 We have heard that Kisrā is come to Gurgān.
 He hath spread the army all over the country.
 But he hath no news of us,
 Or he hath a head empty of counsel.
 From China unto the Oxus my army is *arrayed*.
 The world is beneath the glory of my crown.
 I must go before him to fight:
 I shall not cover the fire of my name and honour.
 He thinketh that there is no way that thou canst pass from him,
 And *that* there is no king in the age but he.
 Now shall he be aware how warlike I am.
 I shall go before him with *his* Chinese horsemen.'

A learned man spake thus to the Ḥāqān of China:

'O monarch of the land!
 Think not of battle with the king of Iran.
 Give neither empire, nor army to the wind.
 No one among kings seeketh his place:
 Except his heart and mind be dark,
 The king's throne hath not his glory.
 Not even the moon in heaven is like him.
 He demandeth tribute from India and Byzantium,
 Where there is treasure and settled land.
 He is the lord of the crown and the ornament of the throne.
 World-holder, alert, and of victorious fate.'

When the Ḥāqān heard the speech from the mobad,
 He took fitting counsel.

Thus he spake to the intelligent *and* eager man:

'How see the wise men this thing?
 To inescapable things are come before *us*,
 Which must not be *kept* quiet *and* dark.
 If pain be the only fruit of battle with him,
 Nothing is better than giving out treasure.
 Clothing cometh not from money, nor food,
 Nor carpets on the day of honour and battle,
But let him have safety and food,

And clothing and fine carpets.
 Every one that be afraid of evil
 Shall consider money base *and* shall be safe.’
 From the army he chose out ten eloquent men
 Who knew how to speak and how to listen.
 Well-spoken men of China wrote a letter
 With blessing, like the portrait-gallery of China.
 These ten learned knights went forth,
 Speaking in secret, to the monarch’s court.
 When they brought the news to Kisrā,
 He made ready the royal portico.
 He demanded that the curtain be drawn up,
And from their court they went forth joyfully.
 All ten went before the monarch,
 With the letter and gifts and with coins.
 When the world-holder saw *them*, he treated them well.
 He asked about the Ḥāqān and sat them down.
 They put their heads upon the ground before him.
 They gave the message of the Ḥāqān of China,
 A letter *written* in Chinese upon silk.
 The ambassador put it before the scribe.
 When he began to read that *letter* before the warriors,
 The whole moot stood astounded.
 The beginning of the letter was first of all blessing
 From the *divine* judge upon the monarch of the land.
 Next *came* the king’s pride, treasure, army,
 Armour, and greatness.
 Third, words *saying* that ‘the Faḡfūr of China
 Calleth to me in *invocation of* the World-Maker.
 He gave me his daughter without *my* asking,
And his country seeketh nothing but my counsel.
 And because of the gifts which he sent unto the king,
 And *because* he barred the Hephthalites from the road,
 Know that I am come for vengeance from the city of Čāč,
 So that I may take treasure and crown from Gātfar.
 I am come in this fashion from Gul-Zarrayūn,
 That the water of the Oxus grew red from blood.
 When news came to us piece by piece,
 We called down blessings upon the speaker,
 Of this king’s victory and manliness,

Wisdom, prudence, and intelligence.
For it was all secret friendship
 That we sought with the monarch of the world.’

When he heard that letter and his speech,
 His greatness, manliness, and splendour,
 They made a place for the ambassador:
 He praised them much, and treated *them* well.
 When the wine-pourer prepared table and wine,
 The monarch summoned the ambassadors.
 They were with the king for one month
 In the portico of feasting and hunting.
 One day, he set up court upon the open field.
 The air grew dark from the dust of the knights,
 All marzbāns with golden belts,
 Balōcī and Gēlānī *men* with golden shields.
 They came end to end in that court, *and*
 The worshippers came near the king.
 When they brought three hundred horses with golden saddles,
 And swords with golden sheathes.

At the glittering of blade, spear and javelin,
 Thou wouldst have said that gold was mixed with iron.
 The elephant’s back *was* adorned in brocade,
And upon it was a throne of victory, the colour of the Nile.
 The earth *was* full of shouting, and the air *was* full of uproar.
 Keen-eared men grew deaf.
 Envoys of Barda’, India, and Byzantium,
 From every kingdom of settled land, *and*
 From the spear-wielding knights of the desert
 Went at once before the monarch.
 He shewed, in Chinese, whose is the kingship:
 Whose is *the sway* from the sun to the fish’s back.
 The air was full of uproar and the dust of knights, *and*
 The ground was full of instruments of warfare.
 They built in the desert a battlefield, *and*
 Warlike knights charged upon it.
 With axe, sword, and with arrow and bow
 They went forth proudly each time.
 All the plain *was* javelin-men and spear-holders,
 On one side afoot; on the other side ahorse.

Unto the ambassadors from every country
 From every renowned man and every noble,
 Came wonder at his army and equipment,
 And at his face, name, and voice.
 The ambassadors spake one to another in secret:
 ‘This proud king –
 Seeketh he understanding and pulleth he the reins?
 Sheweth he the spear unto the army’s heroes?
 If the monarch sheweth understanding to us,
 Take remembrance of it.’

When every one goeth before his own king,
 Speaking friend to his fellow wayfarer,
 He would say: ‘old and young have not seen
 The like of Nōšīn-Ravān.’

All that they said in secret
 They said *openly* to the monarch of the world.
 Then the monarch ordered the treasurer
 To bring instruments of war to the field.
 He brought shirt, helmet, and mail, *and*
 He commanded him to untie the knots *joining the armour together*.
 A wrestler of great strength
 Could not pick up his hauberk from its place.
 Likewise his helmet, shirt, and axe
 Could he not bear upon his chest and mane.
 There was no bowman in the army like him,
 Nor *anyone* among the renowned men as warlike *as he*.
 He went into the battlefield as a rutting elephant
 With an ox-headed mace in hand, *and*
 Beneath him a high-stepping steed.
 The moot was astonished at his height.
 The shout arose and the cry of the trumpet
 And the tinkling of bells from the backs of the elephants, *and*
 Drummers bore up the rear.
 Earth was in pain from horses’ hooves.
 The king of kings was with helmet, mail corselet, and spear,
 Turning left and right, and pulling the reins.
 The ambassadors called down blessings, *and*
 Altogether put their heads upon the ground.
 The king of the world went from the field into the portico.

One by one the nobles went with him.
 He commanded that the scribe go before him
 With Ardašīr, the mobad of mobads,
 The scribe wrote on paper
 A royal letter in Pahlavi.
 When he bathed the pen's two cheeks in ambergris,
 He made the beginning of the letter a blessing first of all
 Upon that *divine* Judge that made the *celestial* sphere,
Who made height, swiftness, and love:
 'We all are slaves and he is emperor.
 Wisdom is witness to his power.
 Breath passeth not but by his command, *and*
 No ant's foot treadeth the ground without him.
 From him I have asked that blessing
 Come from us to the Hāqān of China.
 First, what thou saidest about the Hephthalites,
 That they have girt themselves for evil, *and*
 Unjustly and froward have they shed blood, *and*
 Are themselves caught up in the trap that they set.
Even if the evildoer have lion's strength,
 He must not be bold with Yazdān.
 Though they take the way of the leopard,
 Thou art victorious over them in war.
 And second, what thou hast said about treasure and army,
 About the strength of Faġfūr, and *his* throne and crown.
 He that telleth the story of greatness
 Is not at one with the wise *man*.
 Thou hast not seen the throne of greatness, nor the crown:
 The host and the borderland of Čāč come to thee as a wonder.
 Thus a man must ask,
 Who hath seen no treasure, neither host, nor battle, nor pain.
 The grandees of the world have seen me, *but*
 If they have not seen me, they have heard
 That I consider not the sea of China as water;
 Mountains flee from my fighting.
 My treasury is all below the earth;
 Where water and land are, *there* is my labour.
 Third, if thou desire friendship *with me*,
And have prepared thine for treaty with me,
Since thou seekest feasting, I shall have no war.

No one would ever have war over feasting.
 And again, the wise *man* never seeketh battle
 With a renowned man, *and*
 Especially one skilled in war,
Who seeketh no delay in time of battle,
Who hath seen much in time of strife, *and*
Who wisheth for no teacher in time of fighting.
 Let his heart be hard in warfare,
Who thus keepeth calm as *he is* with crown and throne.
 May the World-Maker be thy friend, *and*
 May *thy* crown and signet-ring be bright!’

They put the king’s seal upon the letter, *and*
 Adorned that royal crown and throne.
 In the kingly fashion they prepared a robe, *and*
 They summoned a messenger before him.
 All that was in his heart from the message
 He multiplied upon the letter in speech.
 They went forth gracefully from the king’s portico, *and*
 Set out invoking praises.

Then they came before the Ḥāqān of China, *and*
 All tongues were full of blessing.
 The world-experienced Ḥāqān left his place, *and*
His adviser came to his throne.
 He summoned the ambassadors.
 He uttered many words about Kisra,
 First about his *good* sense, his knowledge, and his counsel;
 About his speech, his look, and his height.
 Then quoth he: ‘how great an army is with him?
 And among them who hath crown and signet-ring?’
And he asked of justice and injustice, and of his country,
 And about his army, treasure, and diadem.
 An ambassador oped his speaking tongue:
 He called to mind all sights before him.
 To the Ḥāqān of China, he spake: ‘O monarch,
 Consider not thyself his subject!
 In that time when we *were* with him,
 We were happy-hearted and fresh-faced.
 In the portico of feasting and in the hunting-plain,

Never have we seen a monarch like him.
 He is the height of a cypress-tree, and strong as an elephant;
 In generosity as the river Nile;
 Upon the throne he is the trusty sphere *of heaven*;
 In time of battle, an harmful crocodile.
 If he become wroth, he roareth like a cloud, *and*
 At his voice the lion becometh calm.
 And if he quaff wine with a soft voice,
 He conquereth hearts with *his* warm voice.
 As the happy Surōš⁴³ is he in rank and throne;
And a fruitful stalk of a beautiful tree.
 All the empire of Iran is his army:
 Worshippers of his crown they are.
 When he prepareth *his* court upon the field,
 That army fitteth not into the world:
 All his gold-belted mace-bearers, *and*
 All his ministers with ornament and glory!
 Because of *abundance of* elephant, loftiness, and the ivory throne;
And of glory, tiara, collar, and crown,
 No man knoweth the reckoning of his ways
 In the world, save the righteous monarch!
 If his enemy became an iron mountain,
 It would become as the eye of a needle before his wrath.
 Everyone that is tired of his days –
 Let him become bold and do battle with him!’

When the Hāqān heard those words,
 He withered and became as the flower of fenugreek.
 His heart was *cleft* in two halves
 And at that thought his heart grew full of fear.
 Full of sorrow he sat with his counsellors, *and*
 Thus he spake with *his* renowned moot:
 ‘O wise men, how is the face of this matter?
 Who is full of worry and sore pained?
 Let him not be victorious in battle,

⁴³ A major Zoroastrian deity whose name in Avestan is *Sraoša*. He was thought of as very swift, strong, and good-looking. The context of his appearance here seems to confirm Malandra’s observation that the authority of Surōš was a model for that of Sasanian kings (Malandra 2014).

Lest all my fame turn to shame!
 Mobads examined the matter on every side:
 Left and right they spake and cast *their minds*.
 Thus spake the Ḥāqān: ‘this is the way –
 We shall send men to the king, *and*
 With thought for the matter, we shall advance the matter:
 We shall contrive and make friendship with the king.
 Many a daughter is in our harem –
Each one a diadem upon the ladies’ heads –
 I shall give one to the king of kings, *and*
 Lessen my worry for him *thereby!*
 When we make a link with him in blood,
 He shall have no guide to *working evil against us...*

The Ḥāqān then decides to send an embassy to Husraw to propose a marriage alliance (l. 2067–2133). The latter responds by sending a certain Mihrān-Sitād to choose a girl of the Ḥāqān’s harem (l. 2134–2425). This portion of the poem is without historical value, as is all that follows it till the end — apart, perhaps, from the claim that (after the supposed marriage alliance with Husraw) the Ḥāqān relinquished Sogdiana, Samarqand, and Čāč, and made his capital at Qujquār-Bāšī (l. 2283). I am inclined to doubt this notice, but the historian should take account of it.

Davis has translated all the ensuing stories into colloquial modern English.⁴⁴ So I shall merely summarise the end of the poem here. After the fall of the Hephthalites and its aftermath, Firdawsī narrates the coming of the game of chess from India to Iran and the invention of nard (apparently a kind of backgammon) which Nōšīn-Ravān sent to the Indian king (l. 2426–2847). Buzurg-Mihr impossibly divines the rules of the game of chess merely by looking at the board and pieces, but the Indian king and all his ministers cannot understand the game of nard.

The tale of Talḥand and Gav and their battles is plainly of Indian origin and has nothing whatever to do with the reign of Husraw I (l. 2858–3382). Next, we hear of the advent of the Kalīla and Dimna from India to Iran (l.3383–3518). This story plainly contains a germ of truth, since the book ‘Kalīla and Dimna’ did indeed come to Iran from India, but the context in the Šāhnāma involves the physician Burzōy’s mission to India to retrieve a plant that revives the dead, but he brings back that book in place of it. The

⁴⁴ Davis 2006, p. 694–716.

rest of the canto (with its narrative of a feud between Buzurg-Mihr and Husraw, correspondence between him and the Roman emperor and a short description of warfare, Husraw's advice to his son, and his will) are either too vague to be of any use to an historian or belong to the genre of wisdom literature (l. 3519–4517).

Reading these tales, one sees clearly that the sources of them must have been a collection of several documents.⁴⁵ Firdawsī must have gathered them all and fitted them into his canto on Husraw I as best he could. But they probably did not originate all in one place, because they do not have any rational connexion to one another. The stories connected with India, or of Indian origin, may attest the influence of Indian culture upon Iran during Husraw's reign, but one wonders whether Firdawsī included them because of Indian influence upon the Ghaznavid court following Sultan Mahmud's campaigns in India in the early eleventh century A.D.

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⁴⁵ Jackson Bonner 2011, p. 36–37.

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