

## The Old Persian Era

The Magi not only revitalized the legendary history of the millennium of the religion and reinterpreted it with reference to the actual history of Persia, but also equated the beginning of the millennium to the historical era(s).

The Old Persian Era used by the Magi was from the year 330 B.C. in which Dārayavaṇu (Darius III) was killed. After the fall of the Sasanian kingdom, the Magi anew used to date from the year in which Yazdegird was killed (that is, 652 A.D.). This era was called *pārsīg* ‘Persian’, or الميوس ‘Magian’.<sup>1</sup> However, the Persian scribes used the *Æra* Yazdegirdi in the astronomical tables, the epoch of which is the beginning of his reign.<sup>2</sup>

The early Sasanian scholars were familiar with the Seleucid era called by the Parthians and Persians *Former Reckoning*<sup>3</sup>, known also as *Æra Alexandri*<sup>4</sup> (312-311 B.C.) and or *anno astronomorum Babyloniae*<sup>5</sup> (311-310 B.C.), and the Arsacid era called *Royal Reckoning*<sup>6</sup>, identical with the former era except for beginning of the epochal year 64 years later.

In the early Sasanian period, the initial dates of these three eras were identified with the first year of the tenth (and or twelfth) millennium of the world year.

### Anno religionis

We find three kinds of interpreting the opening year of the tenth millennium (Capricornus):

1) The era of Zaratustra is the old Persian “era” with the epoch date -329 April (Daθuš 1).

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<sup>1</sup> . *sāl ī pārsīg*, cf. Bd 240; تاريخ الميوس, cf. ۱۱۵، ۶، الآثار الباقية، بيروني، ۳۳۸، ۱۹۷۱ / ۱۳۵۳. «و بیشترين گبرکان و مغان تاريخ از هلاک شدن يزدگرد دارند، و آن از پس اول ملك وى است بيست سال.» التفهيم، ۲۳۸، ۱۹۷۱ / ۱۳۵۳.

<sup>2</sup> . See Šahmardān Rāzī

شهمردان رازی، روضة المنجمين، تهران، ۱۳۶۸، ۳۵.

<sup>3</sup> . πεότερος

<sup>4</sup> . Occasionally also called “of the Greeks”. See Bērōnī

«تاريخ اهل كتاب تاريخ يونانيان است از اول آن سال كه سولوقس به ملك انطاكيه تنها به نشست، هر چند كه اين تاريخ به اسكندر معروف شده است.» التفهيم، ۲۳۷.

<sup>5</sup> . See Bērōnī

«تاريخ منجمي بابل يعني تاريخ الاسكندر.» الآثار، ۶، ۵۸.

<sup>6</sup> . βασιλείος

This results in the shortening of the first period of the religion to 258 years<sup>7</sup> and the curtailment of the duration of the Arsacid period to 284 years.<sup>8</sup>

Example.

According to Bērōnī in the Canon Masudicus, Zaratūštra was 276 years before Æra Alexandri.<sup>9</sup> The death of Dārayavaḥu was in July (or August) of the year 330 B.C. The Seleucid era was reckoned from the Babylonian New Year, and began on 3 April 311 B.C. (i.e., six months later than the Macedonian Seleucid era with the epoch date 312 B.C., Oct. 1). Thus Æra Alexandri started 18 years after Alexander's conquest of Persia (and or the death of the last Achaemenian king).

$$258 + 18 = 276.$$

2) The Royal era was taken as the era of Zaratūštra.

The difference of 82 years between the initial dates results in the re-shortening of the Arsacid period to 202 years.

Examples.

One. From the Bundahišn, 240

*aškānān <ī> ped ahlav-x<sup>v</sup> adāyīh nām barend, 200 ud and sāl.*

‘The Arsacids who bear the name of the “Truthful Rule” (OPers. *arta- xšaça-*) ruled something over two-hundred years.’

Two. The Šāhnāma (possibly based on the official Persian book of the kings, the X<sup>v</sup>adāy-nāmag) assigned two hundred and odd years to the Arsacid kings<sup>10</sup>: « Thus elapsed some two hundred years » (M 21, 49)<sup>11</sup> between the reign of Arsaces I (Aršaka) in 247 B.C. and the accession of Ardašēr.

3) The beginning of the Former (Seleucid) era was referred to, by some Persian scribes, as “the coming of the religion” or “the appearance of Zaratūštra”<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup>. The figure 258 could be obtained by deducting 42 (i.e., when Zaratūštra was 42 years old, Vīštāspa accepted the religion) from 300. But, according to the Bundahišn, there was 258 years between the acceptance of the religion (by Zaratūštra) and Alexander's invasion. Cf. Bd 239-40.

<sup>8</sup>. Cf. the short Bundahišn, XXIX; the Jāmāspīg, XV.

<sup>9</sup>. vol. 1, 89.

«وكان زرادشت قبل تاريخ الاسكندر بمائتين وست وسبعين سنة.» كتاب القانون المسعودي، حيدرآباد، الجزء الاول، ١٣٧٣ / ١٩٥٤، ٨٩.

<sup>10</sup>. See Sh. Shahbazi, « Recent speculations on the “Traditional Date of Zoroaster” », *Studia Iranica* 31, 2002, (7-45), 25.

<sup>11</sup>. از این گونه به گذشت سالی دویست .

<sup>12</sup>. ظهر زرادشت . See Bērōnī, *Vestiges*, 8, 14.

The 538 years from the beginning of the Seleucid era to the accession of Ardašēr were divided into three periods: 258 from “the appearance of Zaratuštra” to Alexander’s conquest of Persia (and or the death of the last Achaemenian king); 14 years for Alexander’s reign; 266 years covering the rule of the Arsacids.<sup>13</sup>

Bērōnī reported that: The Persians and Magians count 258 years from the appearance of Zaratuštra till the beginning of the Æra Alexandri.<sup>14</sup> Bērōnī himself counted 1221 years from his appearance till the death of Yazdegird III.<sup>15</sup> This means that Bērōnī and some Persians placed the beginning of the millennium of the religion in 570 B.C., i.e. twelve years before the supposed conversion of Vīštāspa in 558 B.C.

Example. The story of the Cypress of Kašmar.

There is a story<sup>16</sup>, told by Daqīqī in the Šāhnāma, and narrated in a number of Arabic and Persian books, about the planting of a cypress-tree (by the order of Vīštāspa) by Zaratuštra who had brought from Airyana Vaējah, at the gate of the fire-temple at Kašmar, in the district of Taršīz in X<sup>v</sup>arāsān, as a memento of Vīštāspa’s conversion, and had inscribed upon the noble cypress that: “Vīštāspa accepted the Good Religion”.<sup>17</sup>

The Khalif Mutawakkal ordered in the year 232 of the Hejira (A.D. 846 Aug. 28- A.D. 847 Aug. 16) the cypress to be cut off. It had stood for 1405 years<sup>18</sup> from the time of its being planted, to the date of its cutting down by the Muslims.<sup>19</sup> If we take solar (calculated) years, we arrive at 558 B.C. as the date when the tree was planted.

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<sup>13</sup> . See H. Levy, “The genesis of the faulty Persian Chronology”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 64/4, 1944, (197-214), 209; “Le calendrier perse”, *Orientalia*, 10, 1941, (1-64), 61-2.

<sup>14</sup> . *Vestiges*, 3,3.

«وین ظهوره واول تاريخ الاسكندر مائتان وثمان وخمسون سنة.»

<sup>15</sup> . *Ibid.* 6, 71.

«آن مابین ظهور زرادشت الی زوال ملک الفرس بقتل یزدجرد (بن شهریار) هو الف ومائتان واحدی وعشرون سنة.»

<sup>16</sup> . See A.V. Williams Jackson, “The Cypress of Kashmar and Zoroaster”, *Zoroastrian Studies*, New York, 1928, 255-66.

<sup>17</sup> . Cf. Šāhnāma (Daqīqī), M 15, 63-4:

یکی سرو آزاده بود از بهشت به پیش در آذر اندر به گشت.  
نیشته بر آزاد سرو سهی که: پذیرفت گشتاسپ دین بهی.

VD 43 ... *abar hān ōy varg ped framān ī ohrmazd mēnōgīhā nibišt būd ped mārīg ī abēzag kū: ē kay vištāsp, dēn ī veh bē pedīr!*

<sup>18</sup> . Or: 1450 years, according to the Dabestān:

«تا سنه اثنی و ثلاثین ومائتن یک هزار و چهار صد و پنجاه سال بر او گذشته.» دبستان مذاهب، تهران، ۱۳۶۲، ۱.

<sup>19</sup> . ظهیرالدین ابوالحسن بیهقی، تاریخ بیهقی، حیدرآباد، ۱۹۶۸، ۹۴-۴۸۹.