

# **Neither Just nor Kingly: Defensive responses in Sasanian Historiography**

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I, Matthew O'Farrell, certify that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any  
other university or institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Matthew O'Farrell', written in a cursive style with a large loop at the end.



برای استادان من.  
ببین، خیاط هم در کوزه افتاده است



## Abstract

The Sasanian historical tradition, the so-called *Khwadāy-nāmag* or “*Book of Lords*” forms the basis of Islamic historiography of the Sasanian era as well as Ferdowsi’s *Šāhnāmeḥ*, Iran’s national epic. No primary work of this tradition is extant and it is retrievable only by its redactions in much later works. Examination of these has led to a characterization of the lost original texts as a sixth century formulation of a “national” history based on a royal chronicle with ancient religious and mythic beliefs codified into a fictional deep history servicing the needs of the Sasanian dynasty.

The second hand, retrospective and mythic character of the tradition however, has made historians understandably wary of engaging with it as a source for the Sasanian period. This is particularly true of the early Sasanians whose short, formulaic reigns are both unhelpful and suggestive of an enormous loss (or suppression) of historical information between the dynasty’s foundation and the compilation of the parent texts of the tradition. This amnesia does, however, highlight the modular and episodic structure of the tradition. Importantly, it also raises questions as to the reasons for their presence.

In light of the changing views of the nature of the Sasanian state, particular episodes attached to this early period deserve a more intensive reading. A comparison between contradictory internal traditions regarding particular events as well as their record in the empire’s other literatures, suggests the development of a Sasanian historiography took place in a competitive and defensive context. Its compilers, intent on preserving a constructed elite identity, answered aristocratic and religious critiques directly; incorporating their features and using the poorly remembered past as a convenient canvas on which to reshape them.



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## Abbreviations

- Acta Archelai* = Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai*. Ed. Beeson. C.H. Die Griechen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte, J.C. Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1906.
- Bal'ami = Bal'ami, *Tārikh-i-Bal'ami*. Vol II. Ed. Gonabadi. M.P. Tehran: Kitābforushi Zavār, 1974-5.
- Biruni = Biruni, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*. Trans & ed. Sachau. C.E. London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1879.
- Fārsnāmeḥ* = Ibn Balkhi, *Fārsnāmeḥ*, Ed. Le Strange. G & Nicholson. R.A., E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Publications, New Series I. London: University of Cambridge Press, 1921.
- Fihrist* = al-Nadim. *The Fihrist of al-Nadim, A Tenth Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, Vol.II, Trans & ed. Dodge. B. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.
- Hamza = Hamza al-Isfahani., *Hamzae Isfahanensis, Annalium Libri X*, (Gottwald. J.M.E., Trans & Ed.) Leipzig: 1848. (Page numbers refer to the Latin translation)
- Hymns* = Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns*, Trans & ed. McVey. K.E. The Classics of Western Spirituality, New York: Paulist Press, 1989.
- KrN = *Kārnāmeḥ Ardashir Bābakān*, Trans. & ed. Javadmaskur. M. Tehran: Donaye Kitāb, 2010/11.
- LoT* = *The Letter of Tansar*. Trans. & ed. Boyce. M. Rome: Royal Institute of Translation and Publication of Iran, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, UNESCO, 1968.
- Man Hom* = *Manichäische Homilien*, Trans & ed. Polotsky. H.J. Manichäische Handschriften der Sammlung A Chester Beatty, Band 1. Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1934.
- MMTKI* = *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts*, Trans & ed. Sundermann. W. Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des alten Orients, Berliner Turfantexte XI. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981.
- Muruj* = Mas'udi. *Les Praries D'or*. Vol.II, Trans & ed. De Maynard. C.B. & De Courteille. P. Paris: Société Asiatique, 1863.
- NPi = *The Sasanian Inscription of Paikuli, Part 3.1, Restored text and translation*. Trans & ed Skjaervø. P.O. Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1983.
- PG 111* = Ibn Batriq/Eutychius, *Contextia Gemmarum sive Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*, 2 vols. Trans. & ed. J. Selden. J. & Pococke. E. Oxford: 1658-59; tr. repr. in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*, Vol. 111. Ed. Migne. J.P. Paris: 1857-66, cols. 889-1232.

- Prose Ref* = Ephrem the Syrian, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan, Vol.I*. Trans & ed. Mitchell. C.W. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912.
- PsBk* = *A Manichean Psalm-Book, Part II*. Trans & ed. Allberry. C.R.C. Manichean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection. Vol II. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938.
- ShN* = Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeḥ*, Vol. VI or VIII. Ed. Khaleghi-Motlagh. D. & Omidshahar. M. New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 2005.
- ŠKZ* = Huyse. P. *Die dreisprachige Inschrift Šābuhrs I. an der Ka'ba-I Zardušt (ŠKZ) Band 1*. Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicum prt III. Vol.I. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1999.
- Tabari* = Tabari. *History of the Prophets and Kings*, Vol V, *The Sāssānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids and Yemen*. Trans. & ed. Bosworth. C.E. Bibliotheca Persica, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Tanbih* = Mas'udi. *Le Livre de L'Avertissement*. Trans & Ed. De Vaux. B.C. Paris: Société Asiatique, 1868.
- Tha'alibi* = Tha'alibi. *Historie des Rois des Pers*. Trans. & ed. Zotenberg. H. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1900.
- Ya'qubi* = Ya'qubi. *Historiae*. Ed. Houtsma. M. Th. Leiden: Brill, 1883.