Jamzadeh Parivash,
Alexander Histories and Iranian Reflections. Remnants of Propaganda and Resistance.

Leyde, Brill (Studies in Persian Cultural History, 3), 2012, x + 193 p.
ISBN : 978-9004217461

This book searches for Iranian reflections in the Greco-Roman sources for Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire, and a particular claim advanced at the outset is that Iranian minstrelsy functioned "as heralder of Alexander's glory and informing the populace of the righteousness of his claim" (5) – that is that a species of Iranian source had an impact on what we read in Greek and Latin writers.

We start with certain stories predicated on the presence of Achaemenid royal women with Darius' army in 333 and their consequent capture. These stories are, it seems to be suggested, historically spurious. They result from a (deliberate) confusion between festal events in which the whole royal family participated and military expeditions in which they did not, and the purpose is to provide an image of Alexander's chivalrous behaviour to Darius' mother and wife and his recognition as Darius' proper successor both by his mother and (when convinced of Alexander's proper treatment of his wife) by Darius himself. This is thus Iranian pro-Alexander propaganda.

There remain loose ends, e.g. Sisigambis being upset at the idea of cloth-working which is an alleged historical implausibility (Herodotus 9.109 on the fatal garment made for Xerxes by Amestris and an Elamite relief are adduced to disprove it) for which no explanation can be advanced (by contrast a slightly similar story in which a grand-daughter of Ochus is embarrassed at being asked to sing is claimed as an Iranian story on the grounds that it resembles Vashti's behaviour in *Esther*, a putative storehouse of Iranian stories). Presumably stories such as Sisigambis' role in dealing with the Medates and the Uxii are treated as credible because not intrinsically dependent on the imposture about her capture during the Issus campaign: there must have been some contact with the royal women in any case. In her own terms, J.'s treatment of the narrative is not always persuasive. She thinks the King's wife symbolized the land ruled by the king but that her death in miscarriage or childbirth is somehow linked to Alexander's early death. But, if it is symbolic at all, is it not symbolic of the death of Darius' hopes of continued kingship? (And remember that Alexander will in due course – after Darius' death – acquire his own Iranian wife). But, more importantly, it is debatable whether the starting point – that Darius is unlikely to have taken his womenfolk on campaign – is sufficiently obvious to justify the train of argument. That Xerxes did not take his womenfolk to Greece in 480 does not prove the point.

The various communications that allegedly passed between Alexander and Darius have long been a subject of suspicion. J.'s more distinctive observation is that Justin and Diodorus include a reference to (the impossibility of) the idea of the world being ruled by two suns and that this implicit assimilation of king and sun is Iranian, on the grounds that Shahnameh speaks of a royal throne being raised in the sky like the sun. As J. duly notices there are also Achaemenid images of kings being raised up on platforms (if not exactly thrones), though she does not note that the Naqš-i Rustam version also contains sun + crescent-moon symbol – perhaps because it is arguable how easily it sits with her thesis. In any case, this time the context in which putative Iranian material is lodged is deemed hostile to Alexander, the suggestion being that Alexander is inadequate for universal rule – a similar message to that of the fact that he was physically too small for Darius' throne (Curt. 5.2.14). But, whatever we make of this latter point, it is not intrinsically obvious that Alexander – self-confident though he is being – is the object of hostility here. If there were Iranian sources that viewed him as an appropriate successor to Darius (which is what J. infers from the stories about Achaemenid women) why should they not – with hindsight, of course, as throughout – be expressing the same conception here by making him deploy an Iranian concept to reject Darius' negotiations? On the other hand, given the Macedonian sunburst image familiar from Vergina, why should one rule out a Greco-Macedonian origin?

Next we have Alexander's passage of the Persian Gates, arrival in Persepolis and subsequent burning of that site. The last-named event (at least in a form involving drunkenness and the incitement of a prostitute) does not redound to Alexander's credit, and similar hostility is claimed to be already implicit in the Persian Gates story (Curt.5.4.14-26), wherein allegedly the Persian defenders are of (literally) heroic stature, while Alexander's troops are like people passing through a Zoroastrian Hell and therefore agents of Ahriman. But there is also material hereabouts hostile to the Iranian side – the parade of mutilated prisoners or the suggestion that Tiridates surrendered Persepolis lest it be looted by Persians. By any reckoning there is some mixture of good and bad here from Alexander's point of view. But many will feel that the Curtius passage, overheated though it is, contains no rhetoric of which Curtius was not capable without the assistance of Iranian-Zoroastrian

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minstrels. And the claim that the 30 days Alexander subsequently spent attacking the Mardi allude to a "calendrical cycle of devastation" seems rather arbitrary.

With the death of Darius we get back on the track of putative Iranian pro-Alexander representations. No one will doubt that the story makes Bessus look treacherous, Darius pitiful (even tragic) and Alexander noble – and a legitimate successor. But do we have to discern folklore, with the betrayal of Darius being like that of Te-uman (Assurbanipal's hapless opponent – but, *pace* J., not actually, in current views of Elamite history the last independent Elamite king) and his conveyance in a wagon redolent of Stesichorus' picture of what happens to the sun at night? It is rather over-stretching the earlier discussion of Darius' womenfolk to conclude that the nighttime journey of the sun in a cup to see his mother, wife and children tells us something significant about the fate of the last Achaemenid. Nor is it even clear that J. wishes us to believe that symbolic narrative – the sun-king is betrayed as last kings are (incidentally, why not throw in Astyages here, in both Herodotean and non-Greek traditions?) and goes into the night, never to return – has substituted what was originally a different story. At times there seem to be hints that e.g. the puzzle of how Darius was arrested when many Persians and Greek mercenaries still supported him might make one question the record. But the point is not pushed, and to my mind the story-line as a whole has the inconsequences and unpredictabilities of real life – especially when real life is as problematic as it was for all involved at this juncture in the balancing of ambition and survival.

The whole thing was in fact a slow-motion car-crash, with two victims: Darius and then Bessus. For J. Bessus is a sort of counterpart-Darius (at least, he – literally – burns boats when Darius did not and is betrayed as Darius was; but an alleged reverse parallel between Darius' defeat of a Cadusian chief and Erigyius' defeat of Satibarzanes does not directly touch Bessus at all and seems irrelevant), but his eventual execution at Ecbatana is held to link his story with another Darius, viz. the hero of the Behistun inscription, who had one of his enemies nastily done away with in the Median capital. Various other echoes of "the rhetoric of Darius I" appear in a subsequent chapter. The observation that the mysterious "assembly of the Persians and Medes" adduced in connection with Bessus' condemnation evokes the meaning of the name Ecbatana, viz. "gathering place", is fair; it is true that Arrian's Alexander tells mutineers that kings speak the truth and his promise to settle debts should therefore be believed; and Plutarch's effusion (330E) about one *nomos* and *dikaion* being a source of light for the world if Alexander had lived uses a concept (law) not alien to Darius' royal pronouncements. But is J. actually proposing that Bessus was *not* executed at Ecbatana? And do we need Iranian minstrelsy to explain whatever Achaemenid overtones there may be in truth and law? These were matters quite familiar to Greeks anyway. Meanwhile, strangely perhaps, despite J.'s earlier interest in the sun, Plutarch's "light" seems to be passed by in silence – which makes one wonder whether J. really has the courage of her convictions – and what she says about Alexander's mock divinity (a discussion of Diod. 17.76.2, Curtius 6.4.12 and Arr. 3.23.8-9 in alleged relation to DB 4.35-36,44-45) and Cyrus' tomb (specifically Curtius 25,30-10.1.22) is opaque. Of course, if the claim is not now about Iranian minstrelsy's effects upon the Alexander story but just about Alexander's own engagement with Iranian values and sensibilities that is another matter.

A similar uncertainty hovers over the miscellaneous matters discussed in the last third of the book, and claims advanced carry varying degrees of conviction. The treatment of Diod.17.114 on the extinction of fires at Hephaestion's death is interesting, but the claim that the boar unwisely killed by the page Hermolaus has something to do with Verethragna is entirely arbitrary, and the discovery of Anahita in the Sogdian narrative only a little bit less so. The storm at Curtius 9-8.4.2 is an ordinary (albeit rhetorically somewhat overblown) thunder-storm with torrential rain as well as flashes of lightning: linking it with Rhoxana, "light of the world" in the Shahnameh, again looks far-fetched. When Curtius' Alexander says to mutinous troops *subest nimirum altius malum quod omnes avertit a me* (10.2.20), it does vaguely recall Darius' talk of the Lie – but *malum* is much less specific than "lie", and other claims to discern Darius in Arrian's or Curtius' treatment of mutinies do not convince. The suggestion that the appearance of three day periods in the stories of Clitus' murder or the Opis mutiny have a Zoroastrian significance (albeit contradictory ones) would need fuller elaboration than it is given here to be persuasive.

There is much room for subjectivity in these and other cases both here and throughout the book; and J. might with justice plead the argument of cumulative effect. The effect, cumulative or otherwise, might in any case have been stronger if the manner were less discursive and impressionistic. One risks provoking the ire of some students of Greek historiography if one talks about what really happened as something that might be inferred from a writer such as Arrian or Curtius. But one can in any case legitimately ask any analyst of such texts how relatively

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far from or close to what occurred in the real world a particular narrated episode might be supposed to be. When what is at stake is the impact of potentially culturally alien tropes upon a historiographical tradition that is already as problematic as that pertaining to Alexander and when those tropes belong to a culture with which some of the actors in the story needed to engage consciously, that legitimate request becomes quite pressing. The task J. has set herself is a good one. But investigating the Iranian imprint on the Alexander story requires a more discriminating grasp of the nature of the Greek source-tradition and the conscious development of a (hierarchic) typology of the salient phenomena.

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