

Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests

The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran

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Comparing Sasanian Religions

In chapter 1 of this book, I laid out the rationale for why scholars of Babylonian Judaism should aim to contextualize the Talmud in its Sasanian context by adopting ancient Iranology as an additional lens of study. If this is indeed a sound proposition, then a question that naturally arises is how one goes about contextualizing the Talmud in Sasanian Iran using balanced methodologies that avoid the common pitfalls of comparative inquiry. Although a majority of Talmudists would agree in principle that there exists a relationship between Talmudic texts and the Persian world, they continue to debate the appropriate scope and methods of tracing it. As decades of scholarship demonstrate, comparative research is a necessary methodological framework through which scholars make sense of ancient materials, albeit one fraught with challenges. In this chapter, I draw from the discipline of comparative religion in order to map out the major prospects and pitfalls of juxtaposing the Talmudic and Middle Persian corpora.

The best comparative approaches toward Talmudic and Middle Persian literatures—as well as toward the rabbis, Persian priests, and other groups who authored them—are those that seek a nuanced application of sameness and difference between them. Attention paid to differences, as articulated in postmodern thought, is of central importance in the comparison of Sasanian religions.¹ In an influential book on comparative religions, Jonathan Z. Smith expresses the necessity for comparativists to point to the differences between two religions rather than the drawing up of simple similarities: “What is required is the development of a discourse of ‘difference’, a complex term which invites negotiation, classification and comparison, and, at the same time, avoids too easy a discourse of the ‘same.’”² With Smith’s arguments in mind, in what follows I would like to outline the differ-

ences between the Talmud and the Middle Persian corpus before proceeding to locate specific areas where comparative inquiry can be productive.

One problem that comparativists in this field face is the interpretive question of how one uses textual comparisons as evidence of intercultural influences between Jews and Persians. From the outset, the analytical categories “intercultural” and “influence” are not straightforward and require scrutiny.³ Scholars of the Iranian context of the Talmud should try to neutralize the goal of discovering intercultural influences via primary textual comparisons by self-consciously employing academic skepticism that considers seriously the differences between the elements of comparison. This need for scholarly circumspection is especially heightened in the case of Talmudic and Middle Persian texts, since neither corpus necessarily lends itself to analysis of intercultural relations; instead, these corpora express exclusivist ideologies that downplay the presence of other cultures by ignoring, generalizing, or denigrating them in what Albert de Jong calls “a rhetoric of insularity.” The author explains one of the main challenges in the study of Sasanian religions:⁴

This leads to some of the most crucial problems in the writing of the religious history of the Sasanian empire. Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Mandaean texts all reflect what one could call a “rhetoric of insularity.” This means that they present a vision of their own community as being self-contained and autonomous.

Internally oriented texts are challenging to use for researching interculturality. The way that I deal with this interpretive problem of the insularity of Talmudic texts is not by placing them in dialogue with Middle Persian texts, as Shai Secunda advocates in his book *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context*,⁵ but rather by explaining why and how they are insular in a noninsular cultural and social environment. To be sure, this common form of late antique writing—of obfuscating others—creates quandaries of interpretation for modern researchers of group interactions in Sasanian Iran, for if the Talmud and Middle Persian texts themselves limit their explicit engagement with other cultures, how then do we today justify tracing interculturality through the comparison of primary texts?⁶

Scholars who compare Talmudic and Middle Persian sources bear the burden of proof in demonstrating which excavated literary affinities or shared legal concerns serve as corroborated evidence of the impact of Persian civilization on rabbinic Judaism, as opposed to which are merely phenomenological similarities between two ancient religions in contact. How, in other words, do we avoid misinterpreting universal congruities as historical interculturalism? In my opinion, the comparative study of Judaism and Zoroastrianism in late antiquity needs to counterbalance the trap of textual parallelomania,⁷ encouraging a nuanced understanding of rabbinic and Sasanian history and society. It is, in other words, through historical insights that comparativists can differentiate between universal congruities and intercultural activity. And herein lies the real interpretive obstacle for the

study of the Talmud in its Iranian context: for comparative research to demonstrate that similarities between the Bavli and Middle Persian texts are the result of centuries of interaction between Jews and Persians requires a sophisticated engagement with history and society; and yet it is exactly this type of engagement that is hindered by the internal, ahistorical nature of the literary sources upon which our reconstructions of history and society depend. No doubt, writing social history on the basis of literary sources is difficult, a situation exacerbated by the complex dialectic between comparative methods and historical knowledge. Such circularity makes the study of the Talmud in its Iranian context a frustrating field.

Although the late antique East is ripe for comparative inquiry, there are flaws in methods of analysis that thrive on the juxtaposition of literary sources from diverse communities. Given these limitations, scholars invoking literary parallels need to address on a text-by-text basis what constitutes a suitable parallel and why it does so. Scholars should continue to debate the value of any given textual comparison, and it is counterproductive to try to assign a single standard. In carving out areas of consensus, scholars who research Sasanian religions can avert some of the common methodological fallacies in comparative work by drawing from the decades of pertinent research on comparative religions. Where does the study of the Talmud in its Sasanian context fall on the spectrum in the field of comparative religion?

COMPARISONS AND COMPARATIVISTS IN THE STUDY OF SASANIAN RELIGIONS

The field of comparative religion frequently debates the question of to what extent a scholar does and should play a role in the comparison of two religious traditions. On one end of the spectrum, comparativists who deploy approaches in the mold of Mircea Eliade argue that scholars can compare patterns and concepts about the sacred across time and space in order to gain insight into a reified essence of religious phenomena. Since its inception, the discipline of the history of religions has been flooded with phenomenological and morphological studies comparing the world's religions, which need not have been in historical contact with one another for the comparison of their sacred structures to be of value. By downplaying history, or at least reducing it to a simplistic notion of time and space, morphological and transhistorical hermeneutics compare "variations on structures—like cosmogonic myths—in order to amplify the meaning of the structure."⁸ For Eliade specifically, the scholarly quest for reconstructing the universal elements of religions using "creative hermeneutics" qua spiritual technique also had humanistic motivations.⁹

Critics of this form of scholarship justifiably argue that transhistorical approaches toward comparative religion are problematic on several fronts. For instance, critics have rightly faulted such methods for not championing a sophisti-

cated notion of history.¹⁰ In a book entitled *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Timothy Fitzgerald has critiqued the field of religious studies, especially its phenomenological heritage, as a form of theology in how it reifies religion as a *sui generis* concept.¹¹ In the history of comparative religion, phenomenological inquiry has often focused upon the similarities between two religions and has been an easy target of criticism for historically minded scholars who instead prefer to spotlight differences. As noted by David Gordon White, there is a general division in religious studies between two sorts of comparisons—one oriented toward universalism and sameness, exemplified by the phenomenological heritage of Eliade, and the other toward history and difference.¹²

Scholars of Sasanian religions face a unique set of circumstances regarding the role of sociohistorical contexts in comparative inquiry. In the case of Sasanian Mesopotamia, comparativists are able to research religious groups that were undoubtedly in social and historical contact with one another. This is, in fact, one of the basic premises in accordance with which the study of the Talmud in its Sasanian context is a worthwhile course of research. Comparative studies of Talmudic Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Syriac Christianity need not be criticized for Eliadean antihistoricism, since scholars agree that these groups resided in the same time and place. The justification of contextualizing the Bavli in Sasanian Persia is therefore as follows: since the study of texts in contexts is an accepted and logical mode of inquiry, and given the fact that the rabbis and Persians lived in a heterogeneous world where social contact between groups occurred, then there must be fruitful areas of comparative inquiry to be unearthed between their literatures.

Although there is something to be gained from undertaking research based on these premises, it behooves comparativists to be equally cautious of such logic and ask how the well-established fact of historical contact between groups in Sasanian Persia affects how they compare the evidence. The interactive historical context is certainly a boon to scholars interested in researching the sociocultural interactions between the groups of the time period. Nevertheless, it is essential to note the potential downside to this boon—namely, when it leads to scholarly overreach. As rewarding as the fact of interaction seems, it can mislead comparativists into methods of inquiry that read too far against the grain of the internal source material in a desire to find intercultural influences. Once given the green light by history, textual comparativists feel protected in classifying literary parallels as evidence for social interactions. But this approach can sometimes lead us astray. In this book, I push back against this method and instead argue that scholars of Sasanian religions should be all the more circumspect in their comparisons of primary texts precisely because of the ease of drawing textual similarities in light of the historical boon of interaction. The historical asset of Sasanian Mesopotamia is real, but its complexity requires us to make it the focus of our research rather than

to interpret it as blanket permission to trace similarities and influences between texts that also exhibit differences.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPHASIZING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SASANIAN RELIGIONS

Further explaining the challenges of comparison, Jonathan Z. Smith explains that historical contiguity is a flawed category of inquiry for scholars who overemphasize similarities between religions. For Smith, comparison qua differences and similarities is a scholarly enterprise that is not necessarily rooted in historical realities.¹³ Although this limitation does not preclude the value of comparisons, it requires comparativists to be sensitive to principles of interpretive neutrality.¹⁴ If anything, scholars of Sasanian religions should let differences dominate, offsetting such universalist and essentialist discourses as are common in comparative inquiries.¹⁵ In numerous publications, Smith criticizes comparative methods that emphasize similarities at the expense of differences and make no attempt to answer why patterns matter.¹⁶ In Smith's words, "*comparison has been chiefly an affair of the recollection of similarity. The chief explanation for the significance of comparison has been contiguity.*"¹⁷ The author adds elsewhere that "the perception of similarity has been construed as the chief purpose of comparison; contiguity, expressed as historical 'influence' or filiation, has provided the explanation."¹⁸ In these two statements Smith chooses his words of caution carefully: "recollection" and "perception" refer to the cognitive processes of comparativists. Perhaps utilizing encyclopedic knowledge,¹⁹ comparativists may recall that they have seen something similar to what is presently before them. A comparison that focuses on similarities is a positivistic act whereby scholars construe contiguity in terms of historical influence or genealogy. Humanistic research, especially in the field of comparative religion, tends toward positivism since scholarship devalues negative arguments emanating from research that concludes that there existed a lack of interaction between groups.

In a well-known quote, Smith calls flawed comparisons magic rather than science:²⁰

In the vast majority of instances in the history of comparison, this subjective experience is projected as an objective connection through some theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing, or the like. It is a process of working from a psychological association to an historical one; it is to assert that similarity and contiguity have causal effect. But this, to revert to the language of Victorian anthropology, is not science but magic.

Comparativists can manifest their "subjective experience" of "recollecting similarity" by making the fallacious move of working "from a psychological association to

an historical one.” The field of comparative religions is prone to the encroachment of subjective perspectives. For these and other reasons, comparativists are at risk of confusing subjective readings with objective links, usually at the expense of historical understanding.²¹ Automatic recourse to theories of influence, borrowing, genealogy, or psychic unity²² permits comparativists to make such confused interpretive transitions and connections, which are sometimes apologetic.²³ With these problems in mind, comparativists of Sasanian religions need to police themselves with respect to how much their desire for similarities and influences intrudes into the comparative analysis. The tendency toward the drawing up of similarities for the sake of one’s core discipline is common in the study of Sasanian religions, wherein each subfield has developed and worked in relative isolation. Scholars trained in one religious tradition should therefore be careful not to transpose internal categories onto other traditions’ data,²⁴ or to perceive similarities based on what they may see as “intuitive familiarities . . . in traditions different from their own.”²⁵ As Smith warns about such connections, “one may derive arresting anecdotal juxtapositions or self-serving differentiations, but the disciplined constructive work of the academy will not have been advanced, nor will the study of religion have come of age.”²⁶ In the end, comparisons between Talmudic and Middle Persian texts are problematic if their main aim is to analyze or harmonize one (internal) tradition in light of another (external) tradition via a discourse of sameness.

Another potential flaw in the comparison of Sasanian religions is its tacit participation in centuries of identity politics.²⁷ As is often acknowledged, the origins and methods of comparative religion are bound up with the history of Western imperialism and colonialism.²⁸ The reception of Iranian languages and religions in European and American universities from the seventeenth through the twentieth century plays a vital role in the development of religious studies as practiced today. Irano-Semitic studies have been susceptible to polemics and apologetics. Viewed more specifically, the field of Irano-Judaica as conceived by early European scholars helped to orientalize and biblicalize Zoroastrianism by tracing seeming Iranian influences in the Hebrew Bible, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Babylonian Talmud through an emphasis on sameness. In a brilliant study of this topic, Guy Stroumsa describes how the seventeenth-century orientalist and humanist Thomas Hyde sparked a debate regarding Zoroastrianism’s dualistic and monotheistic tendencies as a means of espousing sympathetic views of the Persian religion. Hyde’s research is paradigmatic of the problems in the historiography of comparisons of Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Describing Hyde, Stroumsa writes:²⁹

It was pure monotheism, then, that Zoroaster had preached, and the dualism reflected by the Greek sources and the Islamic heresiographers reflected a later stage of the religion, when the original cult was misunderstood. One advantage of presenting Zoroastrianism as an essentially monotheistic tradition was obvious: it permitted its

sympathetic treatment, as a religion akin to that of Israel. The original religious teaching of humankind thus remained within the biblical *Heilsgeschichte*; Israel's religion (and, ipso facto, Christianity) retained its chronological as well as its ontological supremacy.

The study of Zoroastrianism as a potential form of monotheism served Hyde's apologetics. According to Stroumsa, Hyde brought Zoroastrianism into the fold of the Abrahamic religions, thereby biblicalizing it. By arguing that Noah and Seth were "the forefathers of the religion later preached by Zardusht," Hyde maintained, "like other great scholars of the seventeenth century, the original unity of humankind."³⁰ In another study that draws attention to how the personal judgments of scholars in Irano-Judaica affected the field, Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin characterizes Hyde in similar terms:³¹

To Hyde, Zoroaster not only had been the preceptor of Pythagoras: he had prophesied about Christ and borrowed from Ezra and other Jewish prophets. . . . Thus, in his portrayal of Zoroaster and his religion, Hyde is bent on showing them in the light most favourable to Christian eyes. Zoroastrians were always monotheists.

A humanist, Hyde maintained "the existence of deep Jewish influences on the religion of Iran" as "a way to affirm his sympathy with Zoroastrianism."³² Hyde's universalist perspective on the purported similarities between Judaism and Zoroastrianism represents a major rupture in the history of religious studies in the past several centuries. Stroumsa explains:³³

By insisting on the universal patterns of religious transformation, across time and around the world, the orientalist were effecting a dramatic "de-theologizing" (one could speak, in Bultmanian fashion, of an *Enttheologisierung*) of the study of religious phenomena. It is there, mainly, that one can detect the paradigm shift that permitted the birth of the modern study of religion.

In the centuries since Hyde, there have been both Iranists and scholars of Jewish studies, including throughout the twentieth century, who researched the Iranian-Jewish nexus using problematic, even polemical, methods of comparisons qua similarities.³⁴ Contemporary scholars engaged in the comparison of Sasanian religious traditions should be cautious not to recycle these earlier flawed models of Irano-Judaica, which aimed to emphasize the similarities between Semitic and Iranian religions as a means of harmonization for humanistic purposes.³⁵

THE RECONDITE STATE OF MIDDLE PERSIAN STUDIES

Another hurdle that scholars comparing Talmudic and Middle Persian sources face is the recondite state of ancient Iranian studies. There are several reasons why the study of ancient Iran has, in my view, not kept pace with analogous disciplines.

Over the course of the past century, this field has been dominated by philology, a trend that contributes to the field's inaccessibility to nonspecialists, including Talmudists. According to one school of thought among Iranian philologists, expertise in Middle Persian language and literature requires knowledge of numerous other Iranian languages, including Avestan, Old Persian, and modern Persian. The emphasis on philology has indeed been one of necessity for the discipline, since the semantics and syntax of many Avestan and Middle Persian works remain elusive and debated. Pahlavi manuscripts are also late, corrupt, and in some cases produced by scribes whose knowledge of the Middle Persian language was deficient, making their decipherment difficult.³⁶ The exertion of scholarly resources on critically editing and translating Middle Persian texts has hampered the field's progress on source-critical or historical interpretations of these works of literature, a tension between the prerequisites of philology and the challenges of history that should be familiar to Talmudists. In addition to linguistic issues, Iranology's frequent lack of consensus on basic questions stems from Sasanian historians' disagreements regarding the use of literary sources for writing history.³⁷ This lack of consensus not only exacerbates the isolation of ancient Iranian studies from other disciplines, but it also makes it crucially important that students of Iran do not rely upon earlier secondary literature and instead critically engage anew the primary sources. Paradoxically, however, the study of ancient Iran, at least in the United States, has been marginalized and co-opted by other disciplines interested in comparative research, such as history of religions, Indo-European studies, archaeology, classics, and, more recently, Talmudic and Syriac studies, a trend that can result in an underspecialization in Iranian philology as a core research area.

Thankfully, Iranists today, in North America, Europe, and Israel, are dramatically improving the discipline by rectifying gaps in our knowledge through the publication of up-to-date critical editions of key primary texts (e.g., the *Hērbedestān*, *Pahlavi Vīdēvdād*, and *Bundahišn*), comprehensive transcriptions and dictionaries, and synthetic histories of Sasanian Iran.³⁸ There are recent monographs devoted to the topic of the Zand's dating, translation techniques, and literary strata such as, to name but two examples, Carlo Cereti's work on the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, and a rich study of the *Hōm Yašt* by Judith Josephson.³⁹ Research on Sasanian glyptics is also of high value to the reconstruction of social history. These and other important advances in the field will continue to open the door for nonspecialists to engage with Sasanian imperial and Zoroastrian sources.

DIFFERENCES IN THE TRANSMISSION OF TALMUDIC AND MIDDLE PERSIAN SOURCES

One difference between the Talmud and Middle Persian sources is the way in which the two corpora were transmitted circa the third through the tenth century

C.E.⁴⁰ The fact that both literatures developed from an originally oral context is a significant though not necessarily distinctive feature in late antique compositions.⁴¹ Although Middle Persian works contain datable authorities such as Sōšāns and Abarag,⁴² they do not necessarily betray an entrenched system of attribution, followed by later editorial anonymity, that parallels the development of oral Torah or Islamic Hadith. As I discuss below, many extant Pahlavi sources have a transmission history that is complex and poorly understood.⁴³ The fact that Jews and Zoroastrians of late antiquity did not share scriptural writings, as did Jews and Christians, significantly limits any connection between rabbinic texts and the Zand.⁴⁴ This type of incongruity makes Jewish-Zoroastrian polemics unlikely to be expressed via competing exegeses of the same scriptural lemma. Moreover, each group's ties to its own past scriptures were idiosyncratic: whereas the Aramaic-speaking rabbis of Babylonia had access to the Hebrew Bible and Mishnah as the basis of their exegetical study, the Persian priests produced the Zand, a Middle Persian translation-*cum*-exegesis of the Avestan canon composed in an archaic eastern Iranian language.

The Talmud and the Middle Persian corpus are different compositions in other ways as well. For its part, the Bavli is a unified corpus collectively produced by members of the rabbinic class over the course of late antiquity. Driven by an exegesis of the Mishnah, Talmudic sugyot are reworkings of earlier traditions in increasingly dialectical modes of thought. The Talmud's editors fuse together Tannaitic, Amoraic, and anonymous layers in an intentional way, homogenizing its composite genres and original sources, which range from Second Temple traditions to local folklore. In contrast, the Middle Persian corpus is a scattered collection of books and inscriptions that contains no clear counterpart to the Bavli, not even the *Dēnkard*. Middle Persian literature is made up of independent genres and styles, ranging from the religious treatises called *Rivāyats* to epic poetry to apocalypses to secular how-to manuals, and each Pahlavi work has a distinctive transmission history and purpose. Except for the Zand, most Middle Persian legal works do not have a hermeneutical focus on earlier traditions in the same manner that the Talmud concentrates on the Mishnah. As a point of similarity, it is worth noting that Middle Persian literature, such as *Dēnkard* Book 9, does evince intertextual ties with other Zoroastrian works,⁴⁵ a feature that it has in common with other religious scriptural writings of late antiquity.

THE MIDDLE PERSIAN CORPUS

Middle Persian literature contains numerous works that are of value to Talmudists interested in contextual research. In what follows, I would like to synopsise this rich and diverse corpus, with some attention paid to which resources Talmudists can exploit. One concern here is Iranists' ability (or inability) to date accurately

Middle Persian texts to the Sasanian era, when the rabbis were active. Sources that unambiguously date to this period include material remains and epigraphica (e.g., seals, magical bowls, inscriptions), as well as sundry Middle Persian texts that were composed in the late Sasanian period, including works of law and exegesis. The use of the Pahlavi books from the ninth and tenth centuries C.E. is more complicated. Although there is widespread agreement among experts in the field that in some fashion or another much of these books' contents are based on or are conservative renderings of traditions or materials from the pre-Islamic period, Middle Persian studies as a whole has not yet applied source-critical methods to the corpus text by text with the hope of disentangling early and late layers.⁴⁶ The most suitable approaches toward this goal are likely to be found in the linguistic features of each text, as well as in references to external and internal figures or events (e.g., to Muslims or named Zoroastrian jurists). In the end, even though there may still be more questions than answers about the dating of Middle Persian texts, we must proceed as best we can on the basis of available information.⁴⁷

The Middle Persian law book known as the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* (*Book of a Thousand Judgements*) is the single richest source for Sasanian law.⁴⁸ This work is a seventh-century compilation of records from cases that were potentially adjudicated in imperial courts. As such, it reflects the legal opinions of key Sasanian jurists and contains discussions of a range of civil matters, including guardianship, inheritances, and ownership. Absent from this work is any serious engagement with questions of religious practice. Although the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* does not mention Jews explicitly, and rarely references Christians, it is the indispensable resource for understanding the inner workings of Sasanian courts of law in the seventh century.

In addition to the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān*, the Middle Persian corpus contains numerous works that are translations of or related to the Avesta, including the *Pahlavi Yasna*, the *Zand ī Xorde Avesta* (*The Small Avesta*), and several *Yašts* (Hymns).⁴⁹ Even though produced in late antiquity and the early medieval periods, the *Zand-Avesta* (i.e., the Middle Persian translation of the canon of Zoroastrian holy scriptures, the Avesta) records ancient materials from the Avestan oral tradition dating back millennia. In general, works of *Zand* are composed of verbatim Pahlavi translations of Avestan texts alongside exegetical glosses. In comparison with the Jewish canon, the *Zand*'s model of exegesis is more similar to the Aramaic translations, or Targums, of the Bible than to the Bavli.⁵⁰ For Talmudists interested in comparative law, much of the *Zand* treats matters of purity, as for example the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād* (*Laws against the Demons*)⁵¹ and the sixth-century *Zand ī Fragard ī Juddēvdād* (*A Commentary on Chapters of the Vidēvdād*),⁵² which delineate regulations regarding corpses, menstruation,⁵³ and noxious creatures. In addition to these works, the *Hērbedestān* (*Priestly-Scholar School*) and the *Nērangestān* (*Book of Ritual Directions*) are two priestly-scholar study manuals together offering

a raw perspective on the details of scholarly and ritual practices in the late Sasanian or the early Islamic era.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, there is no consensus among Iranists regarding the transmissional backgrounds and dates of most of these works, each of which would benefit from a reexamination using up-to-date tools. Some experts suggest that the Zand began to be composed and even written circa the third century C.E., with subsequent updates in the time of Khusrow I (531–79 C.E.).⁵⁵ The late writing down and redaction of Pahlavi sources deflate this dating, however. In a key study of the Zand, Alberto Cantera dates the redaction of the *Hērbedestān*, *Nērangestān*, and *Pahlavi Vidēvdād* to roughly the sixth century C.E., the *Pahlavi Yasna* to the eighth and ninth centuries, and the *Zand ī Xorde Avesta* to various time periods.⁵⁶ If Cantera's dates are correct, then the first set of these Middle Persian works emanating from the sixth century could justifiably be dated to the same general time frame as the Talmud. Finally, there are other religious works in the Middle Persian corpus whose authors build on and cite works of Zand. For instance, *Šāyest nē Šāyest* (*Proper and Improper*), which could have been compiled in the late Sasanian period, though a later date is also possible, obsesses over pollutions, rituals, and repentance.⁵⁷ For Talmudists interested in comparative law and exegesis, the Zand is the most fertile part of the Middle Persian corpus to exploit.

In addition to imperial law books and the Zand-Avesta, Middle Persian literature also contains national narratives dating to the late Sasanian era. The most famous of these is the romance describing the exploits of the founding monarch of the Sasanian Empire, entitled *The Book of the Deeds of Ardashir, the Son of Pābag* (*Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān*), a work from Fārs, some of which was composed in the time of Khusrow I.⁵⁸ This dating is complicated by the fact that the work clearly underwent different stages of editing, perhaps even as late as the ninth century. For Talmudists, this narrative offers value in comparison with Aggadah, as demonstrated in several articles by Geoffrey Herman and Jeffrey Rubenstein.⁵⁹

Another central genre in the Middle Persian corpus is *andarz* (wisdom literature), which offers testimony to Zoroastrian sensibilities regarding how to live a proper life.⁶⁰ Topics in such works include guidance on how much to eat and drink, on the value of prayer and rituals, and on core beliefs. Although many of these works, such as the *Memorial of Wuzurgmīhr* (*Ayādgar ī Wuzurgmīhr*)⁶¹ and *Selected Precepts of the Ancient Sages* (*Čīdag Andarz ī Pōryōtkēšān*),⁶² are attributed to well-known Sasanian authorities in the fourth century and onward, it is hard to accept so early a dating. A different work in this genre, known as *The Spirit of Wisdom* (*Mēnōg ī Xrad*), is an extraordinary question-and-answer dialogue between personifications of Wisdom.⁶³ Regrettably, except for Ahmad Tafazzoli's Persian translation, there exists no reliable translation nor either any critical edition in English since Edward West's version (1871).

The Middle Persian corpus also includes several apocalyptic and eschatological works. Two of these are the *Memorial of Zarēr* (*Ayādgar ī Zarērān*)⁶⁴ and the

Memorial of Jāmāsp (*Ayādgar ī Jāmāspīg*),⁶⁵ both short works. The *Memorial of Zarēr* is one of the few extant Middle Persian remnants of the Iranian epic tradition, reporting the story of the battle between the heroes Wištāsp (who was converted to the Good Religion by Zarathustra)⁶⁶ and his brother Zarēr versus the sorcerer Widrafš. It may contain Parthian materials, and if so it would be a rare example of so early a literary specimen. The *Memorial of Jāmāsp* contains a dialogue between Wištāsp and Jāmāsp and is a part of apocalyptic tradition in Pahlavi, a genre that also includes the seventh- or eighth-century *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*,⁶⁷ and the spiritual voyage to heaven and hell described in *The Book of Wirāz the Just* (*Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*).⁶⁸ These two latter works probably date from the seventh to the ninth or even the tenth century, but they seem to contain earlier materials.

THE PROBLEM OF ANACHRONISM

The most significant impediment to the comparison of Talmudic and Middle Persian literature is the potential for anachronism as a result of the latter's early Islamic context of production. Indeed, major Zoroastrian books such as the *Dēnkard* (*Acts of the Religion*), the cosmological tract *Bundahišn* (*Primal Creation*),⁶⁹ and the apocalyptic work the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* were redacted in the ninth and tenth centuries C.E., and thus centuries after the Bavli. Dating to an even later time, two well-known political treatises ascribed to the Sasanian founding monarch, Ardashir, the *Testament of Ardashir* and the *Letter of Tansar*,⁷⁰ are extant only in later Persian and Arabic recensions.⁷¹ The fact that we do not have a copy of the original Middle Persian *Xwadāy-Nāmag* (*Book of Lords*), the Iranian national history, epitomizes the problem of lateness in the study of the Middle Persian literary tradition. Shapur Shahbazi dates the earliest compilations of *The Book of Lords* to the fifth century, with later editing and additions in the sixth and the early seventh century.⁷² But it is difficult to reconstruct the Sasanian work based on today's remnants, which are "Arabic and Persian adaptations of the ninth to eleventh centuries,"⁷³ including most famously in Ferdowsi's tenth-century *Book of Kings* (*Šāhnāme*).

Complicating the task of dating Middle Persian sources is the question regarding what impact the Arab conquests may have had on the ninth- and tenth-century Zoroastrian priests in Fārs who compiled or authored many of the Pahlavi books.⁷⁴ In my opinion, a drastic change in the structures and role of the priesthood occurred in the two centuries between the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the editing of the Pahlavi books. The roles in society of the *mowbeds*, *hērbeds*, *rads*, *dastwars*, and other priestly posts and titles were transformed by the transition of their status from administrators of the Persian Empire to subjects of an Islamic one. Pahlavi literature's explicit engagement with Islam and heightened concern for apostasy and conversion reflects this less favorable environment. For this

reason, one must be judicious in using post-Sasanian sources as accurate representations of Sasanian-era priestly society, such as researching priestly titles, rituals, hierarchy, or authority. Comparative studies on rabbis and Persian priests should avoid using only Pahlavi literature as a source. In post-Sasanian Iran, the Zoroastrian priests' authority, stripped of its imperial status, became more focused on ritual law. In several definitive articles,⁷⁵ Philip Kreyenbroek explains the challenges of researching the Zoroastrian priesthood using Pahlavi sources such as the *Dēnkard* or Arabic sources about the scholar-priests:⁷⁶

The difficulty in interpreting these data is that, although the anecdotes may well be based on an old oral tradition . . . they were written down in their present form in the 10th century, so that it is impossible to tell whether their terminology reflects Sasanian or post-Sasanian usage, i.e. whether such priests would indeed have been called *hērbed* in Sasanian times.

The titles and social positions of the Zoroastrian priests changed over time, with the Islamic conquests being a particularly transformative moment of rupture that resulted in the reduction of administrative authority. As Albert de Jong has spelled out, Pahlavi sources erase from discussion the position of the *mog*, a title that is so prominent on Sasanian seals.⁷⁷ In the same article cited above, Kreyenbroek explains how the later works of Manuščihr discontinued a deep engagement with the priestly tradition of administration and instead turned to the scholar-priests as the leaders of the community:⁷⁸

Given the radically altered position of the Zoroastrian Church in post-Sasanian Iran, it is hardly surprising to find signs of change and decay in the later use of administrative titles. Thus the title *mōbedān mōbed* had been replaced by *hudēnān pēšōbāy*, “leader of the faithful” (a title reminiscent of the Islamic *amīr al-mu'minīn*).

In the post-Sasanian Pahlavi writings, the *dastwar* succeeded earlier administrative titles used in imperial contexts.⁷⁹ The fact that the post-Sasanian Pahlavi sources, written by the priests themselves, often retroject concerns and knowledge from an early Islamic standpoint into their recordings of the past, while posing a difficulty for scholars of comparison, actually offers Iranists an opportunity to differentiate between pre- and post-Islamic contents using source-critical methods. In the end, however, comparativists interested in the rabbinic-priestly interface must take into account the fact that the later Pahlavi corpus does not accurately represent the social fabric of the Sasanian-era priesthood.⁸⁰

Another example of the difficulty of dating Pahlavi texts from the early Islamic period will suffice—namely, the case of *Dēnkard* Book 3.⁸¹ The *Dēnkard* is a compilation in nine distinctive tomes of Zoroastrian law, theology, narrative, exegesis, and polemics that was redacted in the ninth and tenth centuries. By far the lengthiest of the nine volumes, *Dēnkard* Book 3 is a trove of polemics against others,

such as heretics, Jews, and Muslims, and thus constitutes a particularly valuable resource for understanding intercultural dialogues. Despite its potential merit, the date of this notoriously cryptic work, of which there exists no modern critical edition, is still unclear and debated.⁸² On both the macro and the micro level, the redaction of the work's hundreds of loosely related chapters is imperfectly understood. Is there any organizational logic to the sequence of its chapters? Are there common literary features throughout the work, such as introductory formulas, that can be attributed to later redactors? And which chapters or traditions originate from the Sasanian era and were left unaltered? Until such questions are resolved, *Dēnkard* Book 3 remains of limited and controversial value for understanding Zoroastrianism of the pre-Islamic era and, by extension, its ties to Talmudic Judaism.

Further highlighting Middle Persian literature's early Islamic context, the *Bundahišn*, *Dēnkard*, and *Ayādgar ī Jāmāspīg*, among other works, explicitly reference Islam and the Arab conquests, including in apocalyptic terms.⁸³ For instance, a later chapter in the dense cosmological work the *Bundahišn* expresses the anguish felt by the rise of the Arabs (Middle Persian *tāzīg*), explaining:⁸⁴

Iran was left to the Arabs and they have made that law of evil religion current, many customs of the ancients they destroyed and the religion of the Mazdā worshipping religion was made feeble and they established the washing of the dead, burying the dead, and eating the dead. And from the primal creation of the material world till today, a heavier harm has not come, because of their evil behavior, misery and ruin and doing violence and evil law, evil religion, danger and misery and other harm have become accepted.

In addition to these explicit testimonies, Zoroastrian apocalypticism is a literary expression of the despondent mood felt by a priesthood in decline. With respect to Islam, the ninth-century polemical work the *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* (*The Doubt-Dispelling Exposition*),⁸⁵ written in Pāzand (Pahlavi transcribed in Avestan characters), devotes several of its chapters to safeguarding the faith against the intrusion of the new religion, as well as against Judaism,⁸⁶ Christianity, and Manichaeism. The *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* was written by Mardānfarroxx son of Ohrmazddād in response to the inquiries of a man named Mihrayār ī Mahmadān, whom Maria Macuch identifies as perhaps "a Zoroastrian from a family of Muslim converts."⁸⁷ Although much more research needs to be done on this fascinating work's history of composition, it appears that it was intended for internal consumption by Zoroastrians living under Islam.⁸⁸

Finally, other Pahlavi works from the ninth and the tenth century, especially the *Rivāyats*, attest their authors' heightened concern with Islam through more restrictive laws against interactions with non-Zoroastrians and apostates. As Yuhan Vevaina has shown, hermeneutics and history were intertwined phenomena in

late antique Iran, especially when it came to the Islamic conquests. The author explains that:⁸⁹

This powerful hermeneutic assumption of “Omnisignificance,” which I have written about elsewhere, is activated by the narrative of the four ages in the *Sūdgar Nask* of *Dēnkard* Book 9, which clearly acknowledges a period of social challenges faced by the Zoroastrian tradition. This period of difficulty appears to me to primarily reflect the social challenges of the early Islamic era, and the “memories of much hardship” appear to acknowledge the changing socio-economic conditions facing the Zoroastrian communities of Iran. . . . It seems to me that the entire narrative of the four ages was mobilized by the Zoroastrian priests to explain the contemporary challenges they faced in a new era dominated by non-Iranian—Arab—elites and an ever-increasing number of apostates.

The social setting of the Pahlavi priestly writers in early Islamic Iran plays a vital role in the production of the literature at our disposal. Notwithstanding Macuch’s argument that the *Rivāyats*, such as the *Rivāyat ī Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān*,⁹⁰ named after a high priest from the middle of the tenth century, contain useful information for the reconstruction of Sasanian law, because of their lateness these works should be sparingly juxtaposed with the Bavli.⁹¹

Middle Persian works composed in the ninth and tenth centuries do not represent the diversity of pre-Islamic Zoroastrianism. This misrepresentation is a result not only of the texts’ lateness but also of the fact that many of them were produced by a single priestly family from Fārs, a region where Zoroastrianism persisted into the tenth century. The final two editors of the *Dēnkard* come from this priestly line.⁹² The first of these figures, Ādurfarnbag ī Farroxzādān, was the chief priest, or *mowbedān mowbed*, during the reign of the caliph al-Ma’mūn (813–33 C.E.) who redacted *Dēnkard* Books 3–5 and helped to preserve earlier religious literature. The purported author of *andarz* and a *rivāyat*, Ādurfarnbag ī Farroxzādān is also the protagonist of a court drama entitled *The Accursed Abalish* (*Gizistag Abāliš*), wherein before al-Ma’mūn he debates a disaffected Zoroastrian convert to Islam. Given its early Islamic milieu, this work has little historical value for understanding the interactions between Jews and Zoroastrians in late antiquity.⁹³ Approximately a century after Ādurfarnbag another priest, named Ādurbād Ēmēdān, whose life story is obscure, continued the task of his predecessor by completing the redaction of the final four books of the *Dēnkard*. Decades later, in the late ninth century, descendants of Ādurfarnbag ī Farroxzādān,⁹⁴ brothers named Manūščihr and Zādspram,⁹⁵ authored other important Pahlavi works. Caught in a brotherly struggle, Manūščihr wrote works reflecting a new genre entitled the *Religious Judgments* (*Dādestān ī Dēnīg*)⁹⁶ and the *Epistles of Manūščihr* (*Nāmagihā ī Manūščihr*)⁹⁷ while acting as the *rad* and *pēšaḡ-framādār* of Fārs and Kirman circa the 880s, and Zādspram, located in Sirgan, was attracted to astrology and medi-

cine as seen in the *Selections of Zādspram (Wizīdagihā ī Zādspram)*.⁹⁸ These two brothers, leaders of their communities, expressed themselves in writings that were inspired not only by a desire to preserve and draw upon earlier Zoroastrian traditions to which they had access but also by the realities of their lives in the ninth century.

This brief background of the authors of our later Pahlavi sources points to several difficulties for scholars who are interested in using them as the basis of researching Sasanian Zoroastrianism and its similarities to the Talmud. In the first place, the location of these authors is not in Mesopotamia, a geographical difference with the Talmud that should not be ignored. A more urgent consideration is that scholars should be wary of interpreting ninth- and tenth-century Pahlavi texts as reflecting late antique Zoroastrianism, which in reality was legally and theologically more diverse than what the sources depict. Later Pahlavi works represent only one branch of ancient Iranian religions, and they tend to ignore or to polemicize against the numerous divisions or sects that existed alongside them.⁹⁹ The Sasanian priesthood and monarchy faced heretical and sectarian challenges, chief among them Manichaeism, Zarduštagan,¹⁰⁰ and Mazdakism. The heterodoxy of Iranian religions in late antiquity is illustrated by the worship of Mithra and Anahita and other polytheistic trends that are not recorded in the Pahlavi corpus.¹⁰¹ Pointing to the limitations of evidence regarding the eclecticism of Sasanian-era Zoroastrianism, Shaul Shaked's assessment is correct when he writes that scholars "can only manage to reconstruct a small portion of the variegated religious heritage of ancient Iran."¹⁰² In sum, the Pahlavi corpus is not at all representative of the diversity of Iranian religions and Zoroastrian beliefs in the Sasanian period.¹⁰³

The study of Middle Persian literature would benefit from reassessing the conventional wisdom that Pahlavi writings from the ninth and tenth centuries emanate ultimately from the era of Khusrow I, whose reign lasted for about half of the sixth century. Carlo Cereti synthesizes the main question of the dating of Pahlavi literature in the following passage:¹⁰⁴

The bulk of it was compiled in the ninth and the tenth centuries A.D. and some texts date from even later. Though most of these works contain much earlier material, this material was influenced by the religious tradition to such an extent that it often cannot be entirely trusted. In passing, it may be said that the greatest part of the historical evidence present in such works can, with all probability, be traced back to the reign of Xōsrōē I (531–572 A.D.) or even later.

This monarch is well known for instituting military and fiscal reforms and promoting the centralization of the empire. It is also possible that the Avesta was written down sometime during or around his reign, although this claim is still conjectural.¹⁰⁵ There is a common view among Iranists that the Pahlavi texts, despite their

lateness, are in some way either from or representative of the late Sasanian period, thanks to the “diligent priestly copyists who preserved the literary remains of their ancestors,” as Macuch writes (see below). The Zand-Avesta in particular records religious traditions that date to the first or second millennium B.C.E. These features of Zoroastrian preservation and conservatism were championed by Mary Boyce, whose normative perspectives have since been critiqued.¹⁰⁶ Frustrated by the lack of extant literature produced in late antiquity proper, Sasanian historians sometimes fall into the trap of reading Pahlavi literature as reflective of earlier centuries. Maria Macuch has described the nuance with which a scholar must approach the use of religious and minstrel Pahlavi materials as conservative records of ancient Zoroastrian traditions:¹⁰⁷

Although the loss of these different genres leaves a deplorable gap in our knowledge of Pahlavi literature, we still have reason to be thankful to the generations of diligent priestly copyists who preserved the literary remains of their ancestors over long periods of oppression and persecution. The surviving works, tedious and conservative as they may partly seem, are nonetheless of eminent importance for the social and cultural history of ancient and medieval Iran, since they not only reflect the beliefs and convictions of the late period in which they were put to writing, but also ancient traditions of the Zoroastrians from time immemorial. As has been repeatedly observed, it is mainly due to the tenacity of this tradition that a chronological survey of Pahlavi writings seems impossible. Individual works from the ninth century may contain material from a much earlier period, transmitted across numerous centuries, whereas a composition from the sixth or seventh century may reflect only the circumstances and conditions of its own time.

Macuch notes here the difficulty of chronologizing Pahlavi literature, which comprises Zoroastrian traditions dating from the Avestan period to the tenth century C.E. The more that Iranists can date specific traditions or chapters of Pahlavi works to the reign of Khusrow I in the sixth century C.E., the higher their potential value for comparison with the latest Amoraic stratum of the Bavli, since this was the general time frame in which the Talmud underwent its transition from Amoraic attributions to anonymity.

THE MATERIAL REMAINS OF SASANIAN PERSIA: SEALS, INSCRIPTIONS, AND ARAMAIC BOWLS

In addition to Middle Persian literature, scholars of Sasanian Persia can utilize epigraphic and material sources. These types of evidence include Sasanian administrative seals, the imperial inscriptions, the Aramaic magical bowls from Mesopotamia, and other remains such as coins.¹⁰⁸ Philippe Gignoux and other Iranists have justifiably promoted epigraphic remains and Talmudic, Syriac, and Manichaean

sources as the best resources to study Sasanian society, in part because they challenge the literary evidence of Middle Persian sources.¹⁰⁹ The material remains of the Zoroastrian priesthood are firmly datable to the Sasanian era. Historiographically considered, the study of ancient Iranian history from the Achaemenids through the Sasanians has been political or social history,¹¹⁰ in part because of the archaeological evidence available. With respect to Sasanian seals, Rika Gyselen has noted that the seals “are the only objects to have been handled by all levels of society, as well as by the administration,”¹¹¹ which certified the transactions recorded by the seals. Sasanian seals “functioned as a guarantee of a sealed document in commercial transactions and in administrative records.”¹¹² The personal and administrative seals offer insight into the roles and the personal names of Zoroastrian priests who engaged in commercial or administrative transactions.¹¹³ The Sasanians produced the seals beginning in the late fifth and the early sixth century.¹¹⁴ Seals are attested on local, district, provincial, and regional administrative levels, including near Babylonia. One seal, for instance, records the presence of a *mowbed* in Mesene, southern Mesopotamia (“Baffarag, *mowbed* of Meshun”).¹¹⁵ Material sources are on-the-ground testimony to the functions of the Zoroastrian priesthood in Sasanian society.

Of particular value to the study of the Talmud in its Sasanian context are the Jewish Aramaic magical bowls from late Sasanian Mesopotamia.¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, the precise provenance of a great number of these magical bowls is unknown, though some are from Nippur, a city between the two rivers approximately 125 kilometers southeast of Ctesiphon in the region of Mesene. Some bowls include the names of geographical locales that are near Pumbedita and Maḥoza,¹¹⁷ and still others mention Babylonia. The apotropaic incantations written on these bowls were produced by Jewish magicians individually for both Jewish and gentile clients and were intended to ward off evil spirits, diseases, and bad luck. Other spells serve other purposes, such as for success in business.¹¹⁸ Most sorcerers used efficacious words that kept demons and illnesses away from the bodies and residences of clients. In Sasanian Mesopotamia the belief in both white magic, which protected someone from harm and evil spirits, and black magic, which brought evil upon an enemy, was ubiquitous. Extant bowls are written in various Aramaic dialects, and there also exist around twenty cryptic bowls in Pahlavi.¹¹⁹ As I discuss later in this book, these archaeological relics, which record the names of the clients, demonstrate popular forms of religious syncretism that overlap in both harmony and tension with the Talmudic tradition. Although known for a long time as a potential resource for historians of Babylonian Jewry, scholars have yet to fully exploit the valuable corpus of spell texts.¹²⁰ The recent and forthcoming publication of hundreds of new bowls,¹²¹ alongside the surge in interest in the Talmud’s Iranian context, makes the comparative inquiry of the Bavli and bowls relatively untapped territory.

THE LIMITS OF PARALLELING
TALMUDIC AND MIDDLE PERSIAN TEXTS

Historiographically speaking, one reason that the study of the Talmud in its Iranian setting has not been fully integrated into the academic study of late antique Judaism is because of a lack of robust dialogue. As more scholars populate this small subfield, our understanding of the Bavli in its Iranian context will be enriched by the carving out of a consensus on basic questions, as well as by the fostering of debates over controversial issues. With the publication of several monographs and many articles on Irano-Talmudica in recent years, the discipline of Irano-Talmudica is becoming increasingly accepted. This monograph's emphasis on the historical context of the Babylonian rabbis, and the differences between the Talmud and the Pahlavi corpus, is in part a response to some of the current trends in this subfield. For instance, Shai Secunda's monograph *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context* lays out a path forward in this field of study, offering up a solid justification for researching the Talmud in Sasanian Iran. Although Secunda and I agree on multiple key issues, including the idea of a world of discourse shared between groups in Sasanian Mesopotamia, and the notion that the internal rhetoric of the Bavli gives the wrong impression of rabbinic cultural segregation,¹²² there are also methodological, evidentiary, and argumentative differences between our researches that are worth noting. One distinction between Secunda's *Iranian Talmud* and this book is how each monograph employs the comparative method. Secunda's book prioritizes the excavation of similarities and textual parallels between the Bavli and Middle Persian literature.¹²³ For Secunda, the way to offset the problem of the internal nature of these texts and "the apparent lack of intersection between the Bavli and Middle Persian literature" is by undertaking "a more traditional examination of influences," which illuminates "certain kinds of historical 'encounters' between Jews and Persians, namely, between their literatures."¹²⁴ Scholars reconstruct plausible conversations between Jews and Zoroastrians by paralleling their literatures or examining the portrayals of their interactions.¹²⁵ Secunda advocates bringing Talmudic and Middle Persian texts, including those with no internal markers of cultural dialogue, "into conversation with one another as a kind of reenactment of late antique historical encounters."¹²⁶ Comparison is justified when one demonstrates that the Zoroastrians and rabbis "shared common geographic space, assumptions, and experiences."¹²⁷ In this approach, Secunda intentionally reads against the grain of rabbinic internality by putting the Bavli into dialogue with Middle Persian sources as part of a broader "text-scape" of Sasanian Iran. The author describes the idea as follows:¹²⁸

To conceive of these forms of textual interactions, one might imagine a kind of late antique (and early medieval) "text-scape" across Iranian lands that included, among other groups, Aramaic-speaking rabbis and Persian-speaking Zoroastrians. Using

the notion of “text-scape” may help account for related articulations appearing in different textual and cultural formations. It also implies that these phenomena might even represent a type of textual interaction. In a sense, the current attempt to read the Bavli and Middle Persian literature together by placing them in conversation with one another is not an entirely unreasonable exercise, as it can be seen as parallel to the original textual work of late antique Jews and Zoroastrians. . . . The approach that I am outlining focuses on moments when texts from one tradition directly intersect with those of another.

For Secunda, one of the values of juxtaposing Talmudic and Middle Persian sources is that this procedure “can be seen as parallel to the original textual work of late antique Jews and Zoroastrians.” In this perspective, the comparativist’s act of putting texts into dialogue with each other mimics ancient authors’ textual processes. In Secunda’s work, the theory of a Sasanian “text-scape,” buttressed by the historical premise of interaction, transcends the internal nature of the sources, which do not offer unambiguous data regarding interactions between Jews and Persians. In another passage in *The Iranian Talmud*, Secunda describes further his text-centered approach:¹²⁹

I would like to suggest a different strategy, in which scholars initially approach the reading of the Bavli and Middle Persian literature *qua* texts, and as a result look at the intersections between them first and foremost as *textual* intersections. By honing in on the very textuality of the parallels between the Bavli and Zoroastrian literature, it is possible to highlight examples of textual and literary interactions between these two corpora that can be considered apart from—and in the hermeneutical process “prior” to—the intermingling of flesh and blood rabbis and Zoroastrian priests. My intention here is not to flee to the cocoon of philological research, nor to ignore the agency of the people and communities that created the texts. Rather, my purpose is to construct an interpretative structure built on an alternative order of operations wherein the textual nature of the sources is acknowledged first, even when considering questions of cultural intersection. Subsequently, this textuality can inform comparative research.

Advocating a notion of “textual intersections,” Secunda argues that comparativists should focus on “the very textuality of the parallels” between the Bavli and Middle Persian sources. Secunda concludes that the elite scholastic groups who produced our literature communicated with one another orally and textually, exchanging religious traditions through various channels such as religious disputations (e.g., *bei abeidan*), translation projects, and study houses.¹³⁰ Moreover, the Babylonian rabbis possessed knowledge of Persian priestly traditions, because they studied with them in oral fashion.¹³¹ On this point Secunda contends that “direct study with Zoroastrian priests could have constituted one mode by which Zoroastrian texts entered rabbinic society”¹³² and that Talmudists can find “instances in which explicit traces and even entire passages of imperial, cosmological, and polemical

Middle Persian literature appear in the Bavli in the form of parallel taxonomies, loanwords, and calques of specific terminologies.¹³³ According to this point of view, comparativists will discover passages in the Bavli that contain traces of Middle Persian literary influence.

As I have outlined in this chapter, I believe that between the Bavli and Middle Persian texts there are differences in chronology, transmission, and geography that diminish the value of researching intercultural interactions through their juxtaposition. Although there exist some traceable fragments of Middle Persian textual influence on the Bavli, the bulk of the Bavli does not contain markers of textual interpenetration from outside sources that warrants strict juxtapositions. For these reasons, I disagree with Secunda's appraisal that entire passages from Middle Persian texts appear in the Talmud. Moreover, we do not need to regard the historical boon of interaction, proved by the totality of the evidence, especially from Iranology, as license to read against the grain of the insular rhetoric of Talmudic sources by putting them into conversation with Zoroastrian texts that were produced centuries later. Instead of inverting the rabbis' internality, I argue in this book that comparativists should try to explain why the rabbis constructed an insular ideology while residing in a diverse social environment. In other words, why were the rabbis insular in a heterogeneous environment? And why were their ideologies toward others what they were in light of the rabbinic movement's place within Sasanian society? It is these questions that the remaining chapters of this monograph will address.

POINTS OF MUTUAL FRUITION BETWEEN IRANIAN AND JEWISH STUDIES

In this chapter I have outlined a path forward in the study of the Talmud in its Persian context by drawing from the discipline of comparative religion in order to avoid some of the common pitfalls of comparative research. Methodologically, I argue that it is crucial for comparativists of Sasanian religions to accentuate and take seriously the differences between Jews and Persians, and between Talmudic and Middle Persian texts, alongside any similarities. To this end, one goal of this chapter has been to demonstrate how different and disconnected Talmudic and Pahlavi primary texts are from one another in terms of transmission, purpose, provenance, and chronology. These differences raise serious doubts about comparative methods that seek to juxtapose Talmudic and Zoroastrian sources without attention being paid to broader sociohistorical contexts. In this regard, studies of Sasanian history need to be exploited. Rather than engaging in textual parallelomania or comparative taxonomies, the rest of this book aims to contextualize the Bavli's portrayals of Persians, as well as rabbinic culture's insular ideologies toward others, by emphasizing as much as possible social and historical frames of reference in addition to those types of evidence that are most historically valuable.

71. For more on the flourishing of Ctesiphon as a major urban center in the Sasanian era, see Robert McCormick Adams, *Land behind Baghdad: A History of Settlement on the Diyala Plains* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 70–74.

72. For more on Maḥoza, see Ben-Zion Eshel, *Jewish Settlements in Babylonia during Talmudic Times: Talmudic Onomasticon, Including Geographical Locations, Historical Notes, and Indices of Place-Names* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 141–44 (Hebrew); Oppenheimer, with Isaac and Lecker, *Babylonia Judaica*, 179–235, with map on page 233; J. M. Fiey, “Topographie chrétienne de Mahozé,” *L’Orient Syrien* 12 (1967): 397–420.

73. See Yaakov Elman, “The Socioeconomics of Babylonian Heresy,” *Jewish Law Association Studies* 17 (2007): 80–127, “Talmud, ii: Rabbinic Literature and Middle Persian Texts,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed., 2010: www.iranica.com/articles/talmud-ii, and “Middle Persian Culture.”

74. On the ties of the exilarch to Maḥoza, including its market, see Geoffrey Herman, *Prince*, 11, 156–58, 173–76.

75. The contextual study of the Babylonian Talmud, especially in light of Christianity, has a complicated historiography that I do not claim to have exhausted here, in part because my book focuses on the understudied topic of its Iranian setting. On the Bavli and Christianity, see, for instance, Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Geoffrey Herman, *Prince*, 14–15, 123–32; Reuven Kiperwasser and Serge Ruzer, “Zoroastrian Proselytes in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Narratives: Orality-Related Markers of Cultural Identity,” *History of Religions* 51 (2012): 197–218; Adam H. Becker, “The Comparative Study of ‘Scholasticism’ in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 34 (2010): 91–113; Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

2. COMPARING SASANIAN RELIGIONS

1. The tension between scholars’ constructs of sameness and difference is well known in the history of religions; see, for example, Wendy Doniger, “Minimyths and Maximyths and Political Points of View,” in *Myth and Method*, ed. Laurie L. Patton and Wendy Doniger (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 109–27, esp. 109, synthesizing the trend as follows: “The tension between sameness and difference has become a crucial issue for the self-definitions of postmodernism. . . . For postmodernism, sameness is the devil, difference the angel.”

2. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 42.

3. For a discussion of the concept of literary influences, see Ihab H. Hassan, “The Problem of Influence in Literary History: Notes towards a Definition,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14 (1955): 66–76, esp. 67, where he emphasizes causality in defining influence, which is “any relationship, running the gamut of incidence to causality, with a somewhat expansive range of intermediate correlations.” For a treatment of the concept of influence as it pertains to Jewish studies, see Michael L. Satlow, “Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm,” in *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*, ed.

Yaron Eliav and Anita Norich (Providence: Brown University Press, 2008), 37–53. On influences in the study of the Talmud in Iran, see Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 111–16.

4. Albert de Jong, “Zoroastrian Religious Polemics and Their Contexts: Interconfessional Relations in the Sasanian Empire,” in *Religious Polemics in Context: Papers Presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden 27–28 April 2000*, ed. T.L. Hetteema and A. van der Kooij (Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2004), 48–63, esp. 58.

5. Secunda, *Iranian Talmud*, 131.

6. At stake here is the problem of under what circumstances and to what extent scholars should suspend a religious group’s internal perspective; for one take, see Russell T. McCutcheon, “It’s a Lie. There’s no Truth in It! It’s a Sin! : On the Limits of the Humanistic Study of Religion and the Costs of Saving Others from Themselves,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (2006): 720–50, esp. 730.

7. For an early discussion of the idea of parallelomania as it applies to ancient Jewish and Christian texts, see Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1–13, esp. 1: “We might for our purposes define parallelomania as that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction.”

8. William E. Paden, “Elements of a New Comparativism,” in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 182–92, esp. 183.

9. See Carl Olson, *The Allure of Decadent Thinking: Religious Studies and the Challenge of Postmodernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 82–83: “By creative hermeneutics, Eliade means more than a method of interpretation, because it is also ‘a spiritual technique that possessed the ability of modifying the quality of existence itself.’ Thus, hermeneutics, a never-completed task, is creative in a dual sense: It is creative for the particular interpreter by enriching his or her mind and life, and it is creative because it reveals values unavailable in ordinary experience. This type of awareness is liberating for Eliade. Besides its potential ontological implications for the individual interpreter, the study of unfamiliar religions more than broadens one’s horizon of understanding because one encounters representatives of foreign cultures, which results in culturally stimulating the interpreter.” On the humanistic value of history of religions, see Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 1–11.

10. For an overview of the criticisms of Eliade’s work specifically, see Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 119–212. See also *ibid.* 89–108 on Eliade’s notion of history. For critiques of Eliade’s notion of history, see Robert D. Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (Paris: Mouton, 1971), 153; Guilford Dudley, “Mircea Eliade as the ‘Anti-Historian’ of Religions,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (1976): 345–59; Douglas Allen, “Eliade and History,” *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988): 545–65, esp. 547–49; Ivan Strenski, *Thinking about Religion: An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 311–13; Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Eternal Deferral,” in *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea*

Eliade, ed. Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 215–37, esp. 237. To be fair, Eliade discusses the relationship between phenomenology and history on numerous occasions; for a representative statement, see Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 2, on how “each category of evidence (myths, rites, gods, superstitions, and so on) is really equally important to us if we are to understand the religious phenomenon. And this understanding will always come about in relation to history. Every hierophany we look at is also an historical fact. Every manifestation of the sacred takes place in some historical situation.” See also Eliade, *Quest*, 9.

11. Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3–32.

12. See David Gordon White, “The Scholar as Mythographer: Comparative Indo-European Myth and Postmodern Concerns,” in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 47–54, esp. 50–51.

13. On comparison disguised as genealogy, see Smith, *Drudgery*, 51.

14. On this issue, see Peter Donovan, “Neutrality in Religious Studies,” in *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: Cassell, 1999), 235–47. For more on the ramifications of a scholar’s personal perspective in research, see Fitzgerald, *Ideology*, 37, describing Joachim Wach’s hermeneutics, “whereby he fully acknowledged that the interpreter of ‘other religions’ relies on an intuitive understanding of religions deriving from his own natural religious disposition. Doing the comparative study of religion thus becomes an explicitly theological enterprise, bringing to light and giving expression to the forms of religious experience and making judgements about its spiritual value for the human being.”

15. For an overview of various stances regarding the proper balance between similarities and differences, see Mark C. Taylor, “Introduction,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1–19, esp. 6–8 and 14–15 on Smith and Doniger. But compare the critical assessment of Taylor by Robert Segal, “All Generalizations Are Bad: Postmodernism on Theories,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (2006): 157–71, esp. 164–65.

16. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 35 on how patterns are simple to construct, whereas “the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ and, above all, the ‘so what’ remain most refractory.”

17. *Ibid.* 21 (author’s italics).

18. See Jonathan Z. Smith, “The ‘End’ of Comparison: Redescription and Rectification,” in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 237–41, esp. 237.

19. Smith, *Imagining*, 23, defines the encyclopedic method as the “topical arrangement of cross-cultural material culled, most usually, from reading. The data are seldom either explicitly compared or explained. They simply cohabit within some category, inviting comparison by their coexistence, but providing no clues as to how this comparison might be undertaken. The encyclopaedic mode consists of contextless lists held together by mere surface associations in which the overwhelming sense is that of the exotic.”

20. Ibid. 22.

21. Smith, *Drudgery*, 52.

22. Ibid. 47: “It is as if the only choices the comparativist has are to assert either identity or uniqueness, and that the only possibilities for utilizing comparisons are to make assertions regarding dependence. In such an enterprise, it would appear, dissimilarity is assumed to be the norm; similarities are to be explained as either the result of the ‘psychic unity’ of humankind, or the result of ‘borrowing.’”

23. Ibid. 143.

24. Compare the statement by Fitzgerald, *Ideology*, 22, regarding how confusion over what the study of religion is can lead to “cognitive imperialism,” which is “an attempt to remake the world according to one’s own dominant ideological categories, not merely to understand but to force compliance.”

25. Luther H. Martin, “Comparison,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: Cassell, 2000), 45–56, esp. 52.

26. Smith, *Drudgery* 53. The question of to what extent scholars who research comparative exegesis are engaging questions of interreligious dialogue is valid here; see David Tracy, “Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue” in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 1–43, esp. 9.

27. For more on the relationship between comparative inquiry and discourses of power, see, e.g., Wendy Doniger, “Post-modern and -colonial -structural Comparisons,” in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 63–74, esp. 67: “Comparison has long been an imperial enterprise. We need to know this, so that we can stop doing it the way they did it and start doing it the way we do it. . . . In pursuing the multivocal, multicultural agenda, we must face the implications of the fact that we use other peoples’ stories for our purposes. The political problem inheres in the asymmetry of power between the appropriating culture and the appropriated. Thus, if Europe has dominated India, it is deemed wrong for a European to make use of an Indian text. But it seems to me that there are very different ways of using other peoples’ texts, some of them fairly innocuous, and that the usual alternative . . . can be even worse: ignoring it or scorning it.”

28. See, e.g., Fitzgerald, *Ideology*, 8.

29. Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 106. And see *ibid.* 101–13.

30. Ibid. 112.

31. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Western Response to Zoroaster* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 10–11.

32. Stroumsa, *New Science*, 112.

33. Ibid.

34. By way of example, see Robert C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times: An Essay in the Comparison of Religions* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 141–44, regarding the purported parallels of the dualistic motifs of light and darkness attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Gathas. As with Hyde, these studies, which argue for Iranian-Jewish interchanges, often center on the dichotomy of Judaism’s monotheism versus Zoroastrianism’s dualism; see, e.g., George William Carter, *Zoroastrianism and Judaism* (New York: AMS Press, 1918), 51–54; and Ugo Bianchi, *The History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 148, who finds the

hypothesis of Jewish origins to the monotheism of the Gathas “attractive, if not convincing.” Anachronism abounds in some of these works. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the idea of Semitic-Iranian fusion has captured the imagination of nonspecialists, who use it for polemical purposes; see, for instance, Edmond Bordeaux Székely, *The Essene Teachings of Zarathustra* (Cartago: International Biogenetic Society, 1973), 22: “The ten commandments of Moses are represented in Zoroastrianism by this famous sentence from the *Avestas*: ‘Good thoughts, good words, good deeds.’”

35. The series entitled *Irano-Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, edited by Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer, is an example of research that avoids the common pitfalls that existed in Irano-Judaica.

36. Many Pahlavi manuscripts contain damaged pages and errors of transmission, on which see the example elucidated in Alberto Cantera, “Lost in Transmission: The Case of the Pahlavi-Vidēvdād manuscripts,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 73 (2010): 179–205. In some cases the authors, editors, or scribes of Pahlavi works did not understand the nuances of the language, which was already in decline circa the eighth and ninth centuries C.E.; on this, see the introduction in Mahmoud Jaafari-Dehaghi, *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, part 1, *Transcription, Translation, and Commentary* (Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1998), 25, on how “the art of composing original texts in Pahlavi had become somewhat artificial by the ninth century,” resulting in this text’s abstruse style.

37. See Carlo G. Cereti, “Primary Sources for the History of Inner and Outer Iran in the Sasanian Period (Third–Seventh Centuries),” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 9 (1997): 17–71, esp. 19.

38. For example, see the project aimed at providing a critical edition of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād* led by Alberto Cantera: ada.usal.es/videvdad/project.htm; the watershed analysis of the Zand by Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004); the Middle Persian dictionary in preparation by Shaul Shaked, discussed in Shaked, “Towards a Middle Persian Dictionary,” in *Iran: Questions et connaissances—Actes du IVe Congrès européen des études iraniennes, organisé par la Societas Iranologica Europaea, Paris, 6–10 septembre 1999*, vol. 1, *La période ancienne*, ed. Philip Huyse (Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2002), 121–34.

39. See Carlo G. Cereti, “On the Date of the Zand ī Wahman Yasn,” in K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, *Second International Congress Proceedings*, ed. H. J. M. Desai and H. N. Modi (Bombay: K. R. Cama Institute, 1996), 243–58; Judith Josephson, *The Pahlavi Translation Technique as Illustrated by the Hōm Yašt* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, 1997).

40. For a comparative analysis of the Zand, the Quran, and oral Torah, see Shaul Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), 115–19.

41. For more on orality in the Bavli and Middle Persian texts, see Shai Secunda, “The Sasanian ‘Stam’: Orality and the Composition of Babylonian Rabbinic and Zoroastrian Legal Literature,” in *The Talmud in Its Iranian Context*, ed. Carol Bakhos and M. Rahim Shayegan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 140–60.

42. For more on these figures, see Cantera, *Studien*, 207–20, who dates many of them to the fifth century; Yaakov Elman, “Toward an Intellectual History of Sasanian Law: An Intergenerational Dispute in *Hērbedestān* 9 and Its Rabbinic and Roman Parallels,” in *The Talmud in Its Iranian Context*, ed. Carol Bakhos and M. Rahim Shayegan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010),

21–57, esp. 24, where he dates Sōšāns and Gōgušnasp to circa 375–450 C.E. and Abarag and Mēdōmah to circa 450–550 C.E., concluding that “the careers of these sages make them contemporaries with the last generations of the Babylonian amoraim, while the redactors of the Zand would then be contemporaries of the anonymous redactors of the Babylonian Talmud.” See also Shai Secunda, “On the Age of the Zoroastrian Sages of the Zand,” *Iranica Antiqua* 47 (2012): 317–49, who draws from numerous Middle Persian works and concludes (346): “Based on this study, it seems plausible that nearly every Zoroastrian commentator of significance lived in some proximity to the sixth-century.”

43. For an analysis of the oral and textual transmission of Zoroastrian literature, see Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “The Importance of Orality for the Study of Old Iranian Literature and Myth,” *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān: The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 5 (2005–6): 1–23.

44. For an alternative point of view that sees the Zand as similar to the Bavli, see Secunda, *Iranian Talmud*, 24: “More generally speaking, much of the excitement that has energized the renewed interest in the Bavli’s Iranian context stems from the almost tangibly rabbinic ‘feel’ of the discursive Zand.”

45. On intertextuality in Middle Persian, see Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, “Relentless Allusion: Intertextuality and the Reading of Zoroastrian Interpretive Literature,” in *The Talmud in Its Iranian Context*, ed. Carol Bakhos and M. Rahim Shayegan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 206–32, and “Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis and Hermeneutics, with a Critical Edition of the *Sūdgar Nask* of *Dēnkard* Book 9” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2007), 101: “The texts like the *Sūdgar Nask* are ‘intertextual’ because their meanings are derived from their relationships with other texts (cotexts) in the Zoroastrian religious corpus.” The author adds (105) that the “*Sūdgar Nask* derives its exegetical trajectories and literary structure from its relationship with other texts,” such as the *Mēnōg ī Xrad*, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, and *Pahlavi Vidēvdād*.

46. The application of source-critical methods to Middle Persian technical terms can yield important new insights; see, for instance, Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “On the Terminology and Style of the Pahlavi Scholastic Literature,” in *The Talmud in Its Iranian Context*, ed. Carol Bakhos and M. Rahim Shayegan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 178–205.

47. Unless indicated otherwise, the dates in this section of the book are based on the conclusions of two up-to-date summaries of Middle Persian literature by leading scholars in the field: Maria Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 116–96; and Carlo G. Cereti, “Middle Persian Literature, i: Pahlavi Literature,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed., 2009; www.iranica.com/articles/middle-persian-literature-1-pahlavi.

48. See the critical editions of the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* by Anahit Perikhanian, *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān: The Book of a Thousand Judgements, a Sasanian Law-Book* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1997); Maria Macuch, *Das sasanidische Rechtsbuch “Mātakdān ī hazār dātistān,”* part 2 (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, Kommissionsverlag F. Steiner, 1981). See further Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 188, who writes that this legal work “was compiled sometime during or after the reign of Xosrau II (590–628).”

49. See William W. Malandra and Pallan Ichaporja, *The Pahlavi Yasna of the Gāthās and Yasna Haptañhāiti* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2013); Bamanji Nusserwanji Dhabhar, *Translation of Zand-i Khūrtak Avistāk* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1963).

50. See Dan D. Y. Shapira, “Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis: *Zand*” (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), xxxi–xxxii.

51. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 129, dates this text to after 528 C.E. See the new edition by Mahnaz Moazami, *Wrestling with the Demons of the Pahlavi Widēwdād: Transcription, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), esp. 7–8, where the editor dates the text to the Sasanian era with some additions in the early Islamic period. For an older critical edition, see Behramgore Tahmuras Anklesaria, *Pahlavi Vendidād (Zand-ī Jvīṭ-dēv-dâṭ): Transliteration and Translation in English* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1949). For one article that fruitfully compares this work’s concept of pollution with the Bavli, see Yaakov Elman, “The Other in the Mirror: Iranians and Jews View One Another—Questions of Identity, Conversion, and Exogamy in the Fifth-Century Iranian Empire (Part One),” in Carol Altman Bromberg, Nicholas Sims-Williams, and Ursula Sims-Williams, eds., *Iranian and Zoroastrian Studies in Honor of Prods Oktor Skjærvø*, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19 (2009): 15–25.

52. See Götz König, “Der Pahlavi-Text *Zand ī Fragard ī Juddēvdād*,” in *Ancient and Middle Iranian Studies: Proceedings of the 6th European Conference of Iranian Studies, Held in Vienna, 18–22 September 2007*, ed. Maria Macuch, Dieter Weber, and Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 115–32. For a dating to the sixth century, see also Yaakov Elman and Mahnaz Moazami, “*Zand ī Fragard ī Jud-dēw-dād*,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed., 2014: www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zand-fragard-jud-dew-dad.

53. See Shai Secunda, “*Dashtana—‘Ki Derekh Nashim Li’: A Study of the Babylonian Rabbinic Laws of Menstruation in Relation to Corresponding Zoroastrian Texts*” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yeshiva University, 2007).

54. See the editions by Firoze M. Kotwal and Philip G. Kreyenbroek, with contributions by James R. Russell, *The Hērbedestān and Nērangestān*, 4 vols. (Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1992–2009). Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 129, dates the completion of these works to “some time after the reform of the calendar by Yazdegird III in 632 C.E.” For a reading of this text in an Islamic context, see Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 90. On this later dating, see Philip G. Kreyenbroek, “Review: J. K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997),” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 42 (1999): 387–92, esp. 388–89, who notes that the work actually does not explicitly refer to Muslims but rather only to Christians.

55. For more on the date of the *Zand-Avesta*, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 124–26, who hypothesizes, based on the totality of the evidence, that its writing down came to prominence in the early third century C.E., with later updates by Khusrow I. Most of the evidence for early datings of a written *Zand*, however, stem from later literary sources or short references to connotative words such as *nask*, as explained in Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “‘Kirdir’s Vision’: Translation and Analysis,” *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 16 (1983): 269–306, esp. 290.

56. Cantera, *Studien*, 235–36; and see also the evaluation of some of Cantera’s propositions by Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “Review: Cantera, Alberto. *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta*,” “Cantera, *Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta*,” *Kratylos* 53 (2008): 1–20.

57. For a critical edition, see Jehangir C. Tavadia, *Šāyast-nē-šāyast: A Pahlavi Text on Religious Customs* (Hamburg: De Gruyter, 1930); Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 146, and

Cereti, “Middle Persian Literature,” agree that the lack of reference to Islam indicates that this work was probably brought together in the late Sasanian era.

58. See Frantz Grenet, *La geste d’Ardashir fils de Pâbag: Kār-nāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pâbagān* (Die: Éditions A Die, 2003). The exact date of the *Kār-nāmag*’s composition is not entirely clear, as a result of the book’s having undergone several stages of redaction, the last taking place perhaps as late as the ninth century. For more on the difficulties of dating this text, see Grenet’s comments on the manuscripts and changing linguistic characteristics, *ibid.* 26. See also the discussion in Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 178–79.

59. See Geoffrey Herman, “Ahasuerus, the Former Stable-Master of Belshazzar, and the Wicked Alexander of Macedon: Two Parallels between the Babylonian Talmud and Persian Sources,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 29 (2005): 283–97, esp. 288–93; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “Astrology and the Head of the Academy,” in *Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman*, ed. Shai Secunda and Steven Fine (Boston: Brill, 2012), 301–21, esp. 315–16.

60. For an overview, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 160–72.

61. This piece of *andarz* literature is attributed to this famous sage from the time of Khusrow I, but its exact date of composition is unknown; see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 165–66.

62. This work is sometimes called *The Book of the Counsels of Zoroaster (Pand-Nāmag ī Zardušt)*. For the text and translation, see J. C. Tarapore, *Pahlavi Andarz-Nāmak, Containing Čītak Andarz ī Pōryōtkāēshān; or, The Selected Admonitions of the Pōryōtkāēshān and Five Other Andarz Texts* (Bombay: The Trustees of the Parsee Punchayet Funds and Properties, 1933); Maneck Fardunji Kanga, *Čītak Handarž ī Pōryōtkēšān: A Pahlavi Text Edited, Transcribed, and Translated into English, with Introduction and a Critical Glossary, and with a Foreword by Professor H. W. Bailey* (Bombay: M. F. Kanga, 1960).

63. According to Cereti, “Middle Persian Literature,” the language of this text can perhaps be dated to the late Sasanian period. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 169, agrees that it was “most probably written in the Sasanian period, during the reign of Xosrau I, but contains much older material.” See Tehmuras Dinshaw Anklesaria, *Dānāk-u Mainyō-i Khard: Pahlavi, Pazand, and Sanskrit Texts* (Bombay: The Fort Printing Press, 1913), which does not have a translation; the Persian glossary by Ahmad Tafazzoli, *Vāza-nāma-ye minū-ye karad* (Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1969); and the English translation, E. W. West, *The Book of the Mainyō-i-Khard: The Pazand and Sanskrit Texts (in Roman Characters) as Arranged by Neriosengh Dhaval in the Fifteenth Century, with an English Translation, a Glossary of the Pazand Text, Containing the Sanskrit, Persian and Pahlavi Equivalents, a Sketch of Pazand Grammar, and an Introduction* (Stuttgart: Grüninger, 1871).

64. This epic poem shows traces of a Parthian rendering, but its precise compositional history is unclear; see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 177, and the edition by Davoud Monchi-Zadeh, *Die Geschichte Zarēr’s* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1981).

65. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 156–57, who states that it is an Islamic-era work but that it contains earlier traditions that may have been brought together in the sixth century. The only complete version of this work is in Pāzand, with some Pahlavi fragments also extant; see the edition by Giuseppe Messina, *Libro apocalittico persiano Ayātkār ī Žāmāspik* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1939). See also Harold W. Bailey, “To the Zamasp-Namak,

I,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 6 (1930): 55–85, and “To the Zamasp-Namak, II,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 6 (1931): 581–600.

66. On the conversion of Wištāsp, see *Dēnk. VII* chapter 4.63–7.38 (Marijan Molé, *La légende de Zoroastre selon les textes pehlevi* [Paris: Klincksieck, 1967], 52–79).

67. On the debates over the date of this work, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 154–55; Cereti, “On the Date,” 252, argues that it is made up of content from both the late Sasanian and the early Islamic era, and that Iranian apocalyptic traditions generally date from the seventh to the eighth century.

68. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 159–60, argues that this work contains older content that was redacted in the post-Sasanian era. For two editions of this text, see Philippe Gignoux, *Le livre d’Ardā Wirāz: Translittération, transcription et traduction du texte pehlevi* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1984) and Fereydun Vahman, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmāg: The Iranian “Divina Commedia”* (London: Curzon Press, 1986).

69. Macuch, “Pahlavi literature,” 138: “It is impossible to date the first compilation of the *Bundahišn* (which may well have been undertaken in late Sasanian times), since the text has gone through different redactions down to the last important one in the second half of the ninth century (the final redaction is even dated according to the year 1178 given in the text itself to the 12th century).”

70. On the *Letter of Tansar*, attributed to the high priest Tansar during the reign of Ardashir, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 181–82. What is attested of this work today is a thirteenth-century Persian translation of the mid-eighth century Zoroastrian convert to Islam ibn al-Muqaffā’s Arabic translation of the original Middle Persian text. For an English translation with extensive introduction, see Mary Boyce, *The Letter of Tansar* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1968), esp. 2–8.

71. On political treatises, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 181–83. On the *Testament of Ardashir*, see Mario Grignaschi, “Quelques spécimens de la littérature sassanide conservés dans les bibliothèques d’Istanbul,” *Journal Asiatique* 254 (1966): 1–142.

72. On the *Xwadāy-Nāmāg*, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 173–77; Shapur Shahbazi, “On the *Xwadāy-Nāmāg*,” in *Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 208–29, esp. 213–15 on its various datings, including its compilation in the era of Khusrow I. For more on the Iranian national tradition, see Ehsan Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3.1, *The Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 359–480.

73. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 174.

74. On the decline of the Zoroastrian priesthood and rise of Islam in Iran, see Apton Khanbaghi, “De-Zoroastrianization and Islamization: The Two Phases of Iran’s Religious Transition, 747–837 CE,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 29 (2009): 201–12, esp. 206, who argues that the de-Zoroastrianization of Iran occurred in the eighth century, whereas the ninth century saw its Islamization. Elite Persian culture and language remained influential in the early Islamic Empire as well. On this topic, see Hugh Kennedy, “Survival of Iranianness,” in *The Rise of Islam*, vol. 4 of *The Idea of Iran*, ed. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 13–29.

75. See Philip G. Kreyenbroek, “The Zoroastrian Priesthood after the Fall of the Sasanian Empire,” in *Transition Periods in Iranian History: Actes du Symposium de Fribourg-en-Brisgau, 22–24 Mai 1985* (Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1987),

151–66, esp. 153–54 and 165–66. For more on the status of priests in the post-Sasanian period, see also Kreyenbroek, “The *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* on Priests,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 30 (1987): 185–208, esp. 196–97 on the economic tension between *hērbeds* and *hāwišts* as a result of the latter’s status as practitioners in the early Islamic context, thus demonstrating yet another example of how post-Sasanian sources do not accurately represent the Sasanian priesthood.

76. Kreyenbroek, “Zoroastrian Priesthood,” 153.

77. See also Albert de Jong, “The Contribution of the Magi,” in *Birth of the Persian Empire*, vol. 1 of *The Idea of Iran*, ed. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 85–99, esp. 92, on how Pahlavi sources rarely use the title *mog*, which is ubiquitously attested in Sasanian seals.

78. Kreyenbroek, “Zoroastrian Priesthood,” 160.

79. *Ibid.* 165.

80. For one recent study that compares the rabbis and Persian priests using the post-Sasanian Pahlavi books the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* and the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* as sources for understanding recitation practices, see Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 150–66.

81. On this work, see Jean de Menasce, *Le troisième livre du Dēnkart, traduit du pehlevi* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973).

82. The translation into French forty years ago by de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, is still the best resource; see also Shaul Shaked, “Zoroastrian Polemics against Jews in the Sasanian and Early Islamic Period,” in *Irano-Judaica II: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1990), 85–104.

83. See Touraj Daryaee, “Apocalypse Now: Zoroastrian Reflections on the Early Islamic Centuries,” *Medieval Encounters* 4 (1998): 188–202, with numerous examples of primary sources translated therein. On the Arabs in Middle Persian texts, see ZWY chapters 4.59, 6.10, and 9.10 (Carlo G. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* [Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995], 157, 161, and 167); *Dēnk. III* chapters 176, 308, and 420 (de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 185, 297, and 380); *Dēnk. VII* chapters 1.34 and 8.47 (Molé, *Légende*, 10–11 and 88–89); *Zādsp.* chapter 3.13 (Philippe Gignoux and Ahmad Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram* [Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1993], 42–43); *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* chapter 16.2 (Messina, *Libro*, 66 and 112); *Bund.* chapters 0.2, 14.38, 31.37, 33.1–22, 36.0, and 36.9 (Behramgore Tahmuras Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsīh: Iranian or Greater Bundahišn* [Bombay: Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha, 1956], 2–3, 134–35, 268–69, 272–79, and 304–7). For a transcription of these passages in the *Bundahišn*, see Fazlollah Pakzad, *Bundahišn—Zoroastriche Kosmogonie und Kosmologie*, vol. 1, *Kritische Edition* (Tehran: Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, 2005), 2, 193, 357, 362–67, 410, and 414. See also Khanbaghi, “De-Zoroastrianization,” 211, citing a telling line from the *Dēnkard*: “The state of affairs now evident is indicative of how Iranian rule has come to an end in the country of Iran.”

84. This is *Bund.* chapter 33.21–22 (Behramgore Tahmuras Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsīh: Iranian or Greater Bundahišn* [Bombay: Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha, 1956], 276–79), a later addition to the work, translated by Daryaee, “Apocalypse Now,” 192.

85. This Islamicized work was composed in the ninth century, though it may contain some older materials; see Cereti, “Middle Persian Literature.” Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,”

149–50, dates the composition of the *Škand Gumānig Wizār* to the ninth century at the hands of Mardānfarrox son of Ohrmazddād. For the French translation, see Jean de Menasce, *Une apologétique mazdénne du IXe siècle: Škand-gumānik vičār, la solution décise des doutes* (Fribourg: Librairie de l'Université, 1945).

86. See Jacob Neusner, “A Zoroastrian Critique of Judaism (Škand Gumanik Vičār, Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen: A New Translation and Exposition),” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963): 283–94.

87. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 150.

88. De Jong, “Zoroastrian Religious Polemics and Their Contexts,” 60–61.

89. See Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, “Miscegenation, ‘Mixture’ and ‘Mixed Iron’: The Hermeneutics, Historiography, and Cultural Poetics of the ‘Four Ages’ in Zoroastrianism,” in *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity*, ed. Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 237–69, esp. 245.

90. On the *Rivāyat ī Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān*, including its usefulness in the study of Sasanian laws of marriage and inheritance, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 145. For a critical edition, see Nezhat Safa-Isfehiani, *Rivāyat-i Hēmūt-i Ašawahištān: Edition, Transcription and Translation—A Study in Zoroastrian Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980). See also other *Rivāyats*, including Behramgore Tahmuras Anklesaria, *The Pahlavi Rivāyat of Āturfarnbag and Farnbag-Srōš*, part 1, *Text and Transcription* (Bombay: Cama Athornan Institute, 1969); Bamanji Nusserwanji Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1932). See also the unique work that is part of this genre, Kaikhusroo M. Jamaspasa and Helmut Humbach, eds., *Pursišnīhā: A Zoroastrian Catechism*, part 1, *Text, Translation, Notes* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1971). As Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 148–49, states, this latter book is a post-Sasanian work that is focused on preserving Zoroastrianism against the threat of conversion in an early Islamic environment.

91. See the flawed attempt to compare the Bavli with the *Rivāyats* by Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Zoroastrianism at the Dusk of Late Antiquity: How Two Ancient Faiths Wrote Down Their Great Traditions* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 53–86.

92. For more on these two figures, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 131. Scholars are not in full agreement on the identification of these two men, on which see Jaleh Amouzgar and Ahmad Tafazzoli, *Le cinquième livre du Dēnkard* (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2000), 15–17.

93. See Homi F. Chacha, *Gajastak Abālish* (Bombay: The Trustees of the Parsi Punchayat Funds and Properties, 1936). For a comparison of this source with the Bavli, see Secunda, *Iranian Talmud*, 129–31.

94. According to Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (Boston: Routledge, 1979), 153, Ādurfarnbag ī Farroxzādān's successor and son Zardušt may have converted to Islam during the reign of Mutawakkil circa the middle of the ninth century. This demonstrates the personal impact that Islam had on the Pahlavi authors.

95. On these figures, see Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 141–45; the introduction to the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (*DiD* 23–24); and the introduction to the *Zādspram* (*Zādsp.* 21).

96. See the conservative view in *DiD* 24: this work “belongs to a group of Pahlavi texts which appear almost wholly Sasanian in its content and references,” and was likely “written several years before 881 A.D.” The *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* is accompanied by a separate, tenth-

century work by an anonymous author referred to as the *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, on which see the two volumes by A. V. Williams, *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, part 1, *Transliteration, Transcription and Glossary* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1990), and *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, part 2, *Translation, Commentary and Pahlavi Text* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1990).

97. See Bamanji Nusserwanji Dhabhar, *The Epistles of Mānūshchīhar* (Bombay: The Trustees of the Parsee Panchayat Funds and Properties, 1912). The writings of Manūšchīr represent a clear rupture from previous works in the Middle Persian tradition.

98. See the critical edition by Philippe Gignoux and Ahmad Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram* (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1993). Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature," 139, dates it to around 880 C.E.

99. For the argument that the diversity of Sasanian Zoroastrian beliefs and schools of thought on such topics as eschatology or the powers of man is not reflected in the Pahlavi books of the ninth and tenth centuries, see Shaked, *Dualism*, 32, 57, 93–98. See also Pourshariati, *Decline*, 338, on the difficulties of using foreign or Middle Persian sources for researching Zoroastrian religion in the Sasanian period. The question of sectarianism in late antique Zoroastrianism is complicated and debated, in part because of the errant attempts by past scholars to characterize Zurvanism as a Zoroastrian sect. On this now-defunct theory, see Robert C. Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), and the refutation of Zurvanism as a "scholarly invention which lacks historical substance," by Shaul Shaked, "The Myth of Zurvan: Cosmogony and Eschatology," in *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity, Presented to David Flusser on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. I. Gruenwald, S. Shaked, and G. G. Stroumsa (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 219–40, esp. 228. For a key essay on the issue of sectarianism, see Marijan Molé, "Le problème des sectes zoroastriennes dans les livres pehlevi," *Oriens* 13–14 (1960–61): 1–28.

100. On the heretics Zarduštagan and Mazdak, both of whom according to later sources had ties to the Zoroastrian priesthood, see Patricia Crone, "Kavād's Heresy and Mazdak's Revolt," *Iran* 29 (1991): 21–42, including the references in 37 n. 72.

101. For more on Zoroastrian polytheism, see the ninth- or tenth-century Middle Persian text containing thirty prayers for the deities who watch over the days of the month, edited by Enrico G. Raffaelli, *The Sih-rōzag in Zoroastrianism: A Textual and Historico-Religious Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2014). On the importance of the worship of Mihr and Anahita, and the limits of using Pahlavi sources for their study, see Shaked, *Dualism*, 91–98.

102. *Ibid.* 93.

103. *Ibid.* 14–15 on cosmogony and eschatology, and 97. Shaked argues for three types of religious expression in the Sasanian era—namely, elite, popular (magic), and common. On the elite versus popular dichotomy, see below, chapter 6.

104. Cereti, "Primary Sources," 18.

105. The date of the invention of the script and writing down of the Avesta has long been debated, though there is a consensus that it occurred in the Sasanian era, probably sometime between the fourth and the sixth century. Earlier scholars (Henning and Hoffman) dated it to the fourth, and still others (Bailey and Boyce) to the fifth or sixth century. On this topic, see the summary in Michael Stausberg, "The Invention of a Canon: The Case of Zoroastrianism," in *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International*

Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden 9–10 January 1997, ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 257–78, esp. 262 and n. 14 for the literature.

106. See Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1992); Boyce, “On the Orthodoxy of Sasanian Zoroastrianism,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59 (1996): 11–28. But see the convincing critiques of notions of Zoroastrian conservatism and orthodoxy by Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 53–57 and 67. To be fair, Boyce sometimes does acknowledge the impact of the author’s own time period on the compositions; see, e.g., Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 155.

107. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 120–21.

108. On these sources, see below. Resources include the magical seals of Sasanian Iran presented in Rika Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques en Iran sassanide* (Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1995); Sasanian coins that have iconographic representations of fire temples and priestly attendants, on which see Robert Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics* (Würzburg: Braunschweig, Klinkhardt, and Biermann, 1971), 17–19; remains of Sasanian Zoroastrian fire temples, as seen in Klaus Schippmann, *Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer* (New York: De Gruyter, 1971); and Sasanian stamp seals that have images of Zoroastrian priests and fire altars, as cited in Christopher J. Brunner, *Sasanian Stamp Seals in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), 10 and 65.

109. On the hierarchy of Sasanian sources, see Philippe Gignoux, “Problèmes de distinction et de priorité des sources,” in *Prolegomena to the Sources on the History of Pre-Islamic Central Asia*, ed. János Harmatta (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), 137–41, and “Pour une nouvelle histoire de l’Iran sassanide,” in *Middle Iranian Studies: Proceedings of the International Symposium Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th of May 1982*, ed. Wojciech Skalmowski and Alois Van Tongerloo (Leuven: Peeters, 1984), 253–62; Rika Gyselen, “Primary Sources and Historiography on the Sasanian Empire,” *Studia Iranica* 38 (2009): 163–90; Cereti, “Primary Sources.”

110. For examples of studies in Sasanian social or political history, see Richard N. Frye, “The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3.1, *The Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Periods*, 116–80; Ahmad Tafazzoli, *Sasanian Society* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000); and on the administrative structure of the empire as reconstructed from material sources, see Gyselen, *Géographie*.

111. See Rika Gyselen, *Sasanian Seals and Sealings in the A. Saeedi Collection* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 8. For a study of the Iranian word for “seal” or “document” (cf. MP *muhr*, “seal”) as it appears in the Talmud, see *DJBA* 646 and the study by Maria Macuch, “Iranian Legal Terminology in the Babylonian Talmud in Light of Sasanian Jurisprudence,” in *Irano-Judaica IV: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1999), 91–101, esp. the conclusions on 96–97.

112. Guitty Azarpay, with Catherine Demos, Edward Gans, Lydia Gans, Wolfgang Heimpel, Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, Sanjyot Mehendale, and Jeanette Zerneke, “Sasanian Seals from the Collection of the Late Edward Gans, at the University of California, Berkeley,” online: www.ecai.org/sasanianweb/docs/sasanianseals.html, 20.

113. For an overview of Sasanian glyptics, see Cereti, “Primary Sources,” 44–50. For more on the Sasanian seals and bullae used among Sasanian officials in the late sixth century, including those presumably stored in a central imperial archive or royal treasury either housed in Ctesiphon or itinerant, see Gyselen, *Sasanian Seals and Sealings*, 12–14. On magian seals, see also Gyselen, “Les sceaux des mages de l’Iran sassanide,” in *Au carrefour des religions: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Gignoux*, ed. Rika Gyselen (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l’Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1995), 121–50.

114. Based on the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* and the glyptics, Gyselen, *Géographie*, 3, dates the offices of the *mowbed* and *āmārgar* to Kawad I (488–96 and 498–531) and the *dādwar* to Khusrow I.

115. Azarpay, “Sasanian Seals,” 29.

116. The Aramaic incantation bowls dating circa the fourth through seventh centuries C.E. have been critically edited in several recent volumes by Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro with contributions from Matthew Morgenstern and Naama Vilozny, eds., *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls* (Boston: Brill, 2013), and see 1–8 for the provenance and dating of this collection; and Dan Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia: “May These Curses Go Out and Flee”* (Boston: Brill, 2013). Shaked notes in *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, xv, that these are part of nine volumes that will be published, including Mandaic, Syriac, and Pahlavi spells. Previous volumes include James Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1913); Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, 3rd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998); Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (New York: Kegan Paul, 2003). For an overview of the value of the bowls to the study of ancient Jewish magic, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 183–93.

117. See Dan Levene and Gideon Bohak, “A Babylonian Jewish Aramaic Incantation Bowl with a List of Deities and Toponyms,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 19 (2012): 56–72, esp. 65–67.

118. For an incantation on prosperity in business, see Dan Levene and Siam Bhayro, “‘Bring to the Gates . . . upon a Good Smell and upon Good Fragrances’: An Aramaic Incantation Bowl for Success in Business,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 51 (2005–6): 242–46.

119. Shaul Shaked, “Notes on the Pahlavi Amulet and Sasanian Courts of Law,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 7 (1993): 165–72, esp. 165.

120. For an early statement on the potential for comparison between the bowls and Bayli, see Julian Obermann, “Two Magic Bowls: New Incantation Texts from Mesopotamia,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 57 (1940): 1–31, esp. 29: “Indeed a corpus of all extant incantation texts from Mesopotamia—an urgent scientific desideratum in itself—is likely to yield aid of first magnitude to the critical study of the Talmud.” See also the discussion of the antiarchaeological slant of “Talmudic history” in an article by Jacob Neusner and Jonathan Z. Smith, “Archaeology and Babylonian Jewry,” in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck*, ed. James A. Sanders (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 331–47.

121. According to Shaked, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, xiii (preface), the Schøyen collection includes 654 Aramaic bowls and jugs from around the fifth to the seventh or the eighth century. See also Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 183, on how there have been only several

hundred bowls published out of more than 1,500 in existence. Shaked's new project will add to this number.

122. See Secunda, *Iranian Talmud*, 7, 27–28, and (discussing Elman) 114.

123. On various occasions Secunda acknowledges the differences between the texts but eschews them in favor of discussing similarities; see, for instance, Secunda, *Iranian Talmud*, 63, where he analyzes the Talmudic texts on the *bei abeidan* vis-à-vis a *Dēnkard* passage that may stem from the late Sasanian era: “But regardless of the differences, there seem to be enough similarities to offer a final, admittedly speculative claim: in a place that Jews referred to as a *bei abeidan*, Sasanian authorities gathered scrolls and people of various extractions in order to explore, discuss, and dispute their learned traditions in an effort to ‘recover’ the sacred Zoroastrian tradition.”

124. *Ibid.* 111.

125. *Ibid.* 50.

126. *Ibid.* 33.

127. *Ibid.*

128. *Ibid.* 131.

129. *Ibid.* 127.

130. *Ibid.* 42–43 and 50–63.

131. *Ibid.* 42–45.

132. *Ibid.* 50.

133. *Ibid.* 132.

3. RABBINIC PORTRAYALS OF PERSIANS AS OTHERS

1. On the word טבהקי, “meat dish,” see *DJBA* 492, and cf. NP *tabāha*, “stewed meat,” in Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (London: Routledge, 1892), 278. The loanword is repeated a second time consecutively in MS Vatican 109 and MS Oxford Opp. Add. fol. 23. On the etymology of this word, see Shaul Shaked, “Between Iranian and Aramaic: Iranian Words Concerning Food in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, with Some Notes on the Aramaic Heterograms in Iranian,” in *Irano-Judaica V: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2003), 120–37, esp. 124–25 on how it is perhaps related to “poor; ruined” (MP *tabāh*) and, by extension, “spoiling by heat.” The author also notes that it is a plural form (124 n. 19).

2. *B. Erub.* 29b (MS Vatican 109).

3. Although MS Vatican 109 (which is the principal witness according to *DJBA* 55) reads “Rava,” it is the only witness that does so. I have therefore translated this name according to the majority reading, “Rabbah.” These names are often confused, as explained in Shamma Friedman, “The Orthography of the Names Rabbah and Rava in the Babylonian Talmud,” *Sinai* 110 (1992): 140–64 (Hebrew).

4. The printed editions read והתגן, whereas MS Vatican 109 and MS Munich 95 read either והתניא or והא תניא.

5. The verse from Exodus 12:9, which describes the Israelites' preparations for the Exodus, reads: “Do not eat any of it raw [אֵי], or cooked in any way with water, but roasted—head, legs, and entrails—over the fire.”