

The Development of a Near Eastern Culture during the Persian Empire

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Most scholars - European, American or Iranian - see Ancient Iranian history, that is, the period before the advent of the Islamic Arabs, as a succession of the three empires of the Achaemenids, Arsacids and Sasanians. It is only in the last two decades that we begin to realize the existence of a predecessor of the Achaemenids, the Median Empire. But the more we learn about this early period the more astonishing are the results we get.

Up to last century our single source for Median history was Herodotus¹ who had information about four Median emperors,² ruling over a period of 150 years. These were Deiokes, who founded Hamadan/Ekbatana; Phraortes, who was killed in war against Assyria; Kyaxares, who made wars against the Scythians, the Assyrians and Lydians and finally conquered Nineve(h); and last, King Astyages, who lost his empire to Kyros (or Cyrus) the Great.

The contemporary documents of the Assyrians and Babylonians, written in cuneiform script, have in many details confirmed the report of Herodotus, but in some particularities they have added substantially.³ So, the Median period did not last for 150 years only but for not much less than 300 years. It began in 835 BCE and ended in 550 BCE. There were some more Median kings than those mentioned by Herodotus, but up to now the whole line of the dynasty could not be established with certainty. Even now it is especially the first century of Median history that still remains a white patch.

The report of Herodotus about the invasion of the Scythians into the Iranian region was fully confirmed by Assyrian clay tablets. They tell us about the two tribes of Gimirra and Ishkuzai, i.e., Cimmerians and Scythians, and about a king Partatua who certainly is identical with Herodotus' Protothytes. The invasion now can be well dated in the years 715-675 BCE, a period of 40 years.

The Median king of this Scythian period is called Kashtariti by the Assyrians, which certainly is the Kyaxares of Herodotus, and the Median name Khshathrita (Xšāhrita) mentioned in the Old Persian inscription of Darius at Bisotun. From 715 to 680 BCE Khshathrita was lord of a residential town Karkashi, which very probably is identical with Hamadan/Ekbatana. In the period about 700 BCE the Medians seem to have been fully urbanized. And into this period we now date the palace excavated by the Americans at Godin Tepe,⁴ the town with a lion sculpture at its gate traced by the Germans at Bisotun,⁵ and the small land-lord residency of Baba Jan⁶ excavated by the English. The most exciting discovery is certainly the big treasury of Ziwiye,⁷ the gold tomb of a Scythian king,

¹ Herodotus, *Historiae*, I, 95-130.

² At the head of these four kings Moses of Khorene (*Hist. Armen.*, I, 21-24) places three additional rulers: Warbakes, Modakis and Artikis.

³ I.M. Diakonoff, "Media", in I. Gershevitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran* (hereafter *CHI*), Cambridge 1985, vol. 2, pp. 66-148. Already Ferdinand Justi, *Geschichte Irans von den ältesten Zeiten bis zum Ausgang der Sāsāniden* (Grundriß der Iranischen Philologie II), Leipzig, 1904, pp. 404-15 used the Assyrian records, so also F.W. König, *Älteste Geschichte der Meder und Perser* (Der Alte Orient 33/3-4), Leipzig 1934, and A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (1948), Chicago, 1959 edn., pp. 22-32.

⁴ T.C. Young Jr., *Excavations at Godin Tepe: first progress report*, Toronto, 1969; *Second progress report*, Toronto, 1974.

⁵ W. Kleiss and P. Calmeyer, (eds.), *Bisotun: Ausgrabungen und Forschungen in den Jahren 1963-1967* (Teheraner Forschungen 7), Berlin, 1995.

⁶ C. Goff(-Meade), "Luristan in the First Half of the First Millennium BC: a preliminary report on the first season's excavations at Baba Jan, and associated surveys in the eastern Pish-i Kuh", *Iran* 6 (1968): 105-34; R.C. Henrickson, "A Reconstruction of the Painted Chamber Ceiling at Baba Jan", *Iranica Antiqua* 18 (1983): 81-96.

⁷ A. Godard, *Le trésor de Ziwiye*, Haarlem, 1950; R. Ghirshman, *Tombe princière et le début de l'art animalier Scythe*, Leiden, 1979; B. Hrouda, "Der "Schatzfund" von Ziwiyah und der Ursprung des sog[enanten] Skythischen Tierstils in Vorderasien", *Iranica Antiqua* 18 (1983): 97ff.

possibly that of the well known Partatua. From these discoveries we learn that Media under King Khshathrita was a powerful kingdom respected by Assyria and a cradle of an independent culture. It developed a new form of residential palace, the Apadana hall of columns; it knew sculptures, gold jewellery and armour, and furniture inlaid with ivory and pottery which reflects drinking vessels made of silver and gold.

After this period our knowledge becomes very scanty for half a century. But in the period from 615 to 580 BCE, that is, a whole century later than Khshathrita, there ruled the Median king Uvakishtar, as pronounced in Babylonian cuneiform tablets, which is identical with the Median name Uvakhshtra (Uvaxstra) mentioned in the Old Persian inscription of Darius, whom Herodotus confounded with the former king Kyaxares. King Uvakhshtra united forces with the Babylonians in 612 BC and conquered the Assyrian Empire. He then extended his realm to the west and conquered the Urartian-Armenian Caucasus and further to the west the area of Central Anatolia up to modern Ankara, which at that time was called Cappadocia. Here he joined battle with the Lydians at a date when occurred an eclipse of the sun predicted by the Ionian astronomer Thales. This was in 585 BCE as calculated by modern astronomers. Three Iranian kingdoms were annexed by Uvakhshtra and organized as satrapies. The satrapy of Sagartia⁸ seems to be located in modern Luristan, it is mentioned by Herodotus as a Persian tribe, and the one name of a Sagartian person preserved in the Bisotun inscription is peculiarly Persian in language. The Luri language of today is a Persian, not Kurdish dialect, and probably these tribals are the Parsumash of the Assyrian texts. To the east, in modern Khorasan up to the Afghan border the Parthians were incorporated, and to the south the Persians. Later in the time of King Darius we can observe that all these tribes - Medes, Cappadocians, Armenians, Sagartians and Parthians - wore the Median costume; they all with the exception of the Persians were assimilated to their Median rulers.

There are preserved some remains of this second period of the Median Empire. Most important is the Zoroastrian fire temple of Nushijan⁹ excavated by the British and extremely well preserved with its 8 m high walls. It documents that the Medes were Zoroastrians by religion at the latest round about 600 BC, but because already a century earlier the custom of gravegoods ceases in western and eastern Iran we see that the salvation religion of Zarathustra was effective here from about 700 BCE. The richly equipped tomb of Ziwiye mentioned above is just exceptional, being pagan, and of course the Scythians never embraced Zoroastrianism and kept the ancient pagan custom of gravegoods, eventually filling the treasury of the Hermitage in St Petersburg with golden jewellery. Another interesting discovery was made by German archaeologists in the Zoroastrian sanctuary of Adur Gushnasp or Takht-e Suleiman¹⁰ in Azarbaijan. They discovered that the Sassanian temple had had a much more ancient predecessor with a circular building round about a sacred lake (Zendan-e Suleiman). This pagan building of a non-Iranian tribe, the Mannaeans, was destroyed about 600 BCE and later it was rebuilt by the Medes. And this event is mentioned in the Avestan books where we read that Kavi Haosravah, grandson of Kavi Usa, took part in a horse race at Lake Chaechasta - the lake of Adur Gushnasp. And then he is said to have destroyed the pagan temple there and to have installed the sacred fire. Probably the Avestan texts confused the two similar names Haosravah and Uvakhshtra, for the Avesta never mentions the Median empire and locates the kingdom of Haosravah near to the Hilmand river in modern Seistan. But it seems certain that King Uvakhshtra installed the Zoroastrian temple on Zendan-e Suleiman during his campaign against the western lands.

There in Anatolia, moreover, this same king must have introduced the Zoroastrian calendar to the

⁸ Herodotus, *Hist.*, I, 125; G. Morgenstierne, *Neu-iranische Sprachen* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 1,4,1), Leiden, 1958, p. 175 on Luri; L.D. Levine, "Geographical Studies in Neo-Assyrian Zagros", *Iran* 12 (1974): 106-12 on Parsumas.

⁹ D. Stronach, "Tepe Nush-i Jan: the Median settlement", in Gershevitch (ed.), *CHI, op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 832-7.

¹⁰ W. Kleiss, *Zendan-i Suleiman: die Bauwerke* (DAI Beiträge zur Archäologie und Geologie des Zendan-i Suleiman II), Wiesbaden, 1971; R. Hauschild, *Die Tirade von der Wagenwettfahrt des Königs Haosravah und des Junkers N^er^emanah* (Yt. 5,50) (Neuer Versuch einer Deutung Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung), Berlin, 1959, pp. 6ff.

people of Cappadocia.¹¹ They kept it in use up to the sixth century AD/CE, when a Christian bishop reported the names of the twelve months. Now the Ameshaspenta Asha-vahishta is pronounced *Urđi-behesht* in the modern calendar and *Arta-(be)yeste* in the Cappadocian calendar, the Avestan word *Asha* being transformed to *Urđi/Arta*. But *Arta* is the regular Median language form of *Asha* and it was preserved in the Old-Iranian form in this calendar from isolated faraway Cappadocia, more ancient than the Parthian period, when the names got their modern form in proper Iran (in the first century BCE). Also the month-name Farvardin, Cappadocian (*frav*)*artana*, took the Median form of Avestan *fravashi*. And Fraortes/Fravartish was the name of one of the Median kings already, but the *fravashi* are not mentioned in Zarathustra's *Gathas*, being introduced only in "Later Avesta". It is very probable now that the Zoroastrian calendar was invented in the Median empire about 700-600 BCE, whilst the "Later Avesta", the *Yashts* and the *Vendidad*, was composed in contemporary Eastern Iran. In Cappadocia only this calendar is preserved in Old Iranian (Median) language, in Iran proper the months names were transformed into Middle Iranian (Parthian). From Achaemenid inscriptions we learn that during that period a different Iranian calendar was in use, so the Zoroastrian calendar could not be introduced in far off Cappadocia during the Achaemenid period, and it must date from the Median period.

Now if we ask: of what did the Median Empire comprise? the answer would be approximately the area of modern Iran, GUS Azarbaijan and Armenia, eastern Turkey and parts of Iraq and Syria. And what did the Medians hand down to neighbouring peoples and to posterity? Above all, if we follow Herodotus, they introduced the ceremonial and splendour of the royal court. This must be correct because linguists have observed that the royal titles of the Achaemenid Persians are full of Median words, the title *Shahinshah* being borrowed from the Median language. And the Median royal cap was inherited by the Eastern Iranian tribes like the Kushans and from them by the Tibetans (the Lama cap), and in the West by the Cappadocians, and as the "Phrygian cap" it was introduced to Europe up to the French Madeleine. The excavations at Godin Tepe and Nushijan have demonstrated that the Median court knew already the enormous throne hall of Apadana, and certainly the Median king wore already the royal purpur mantle adorned with golden applications. Some similar golden applications were discovered by the German excavations at Babylon in the pillaged tomb of contemporary King Nebuchadnezzar,¹² and the purple colour with its golden inlay was seen painted (at the time of excavation) on some well preserved reliefs of Darius at Persepolis. In Roman times this splendour was transferred to Europe and the German Emperor of the mediaeval age still wore this Median-Persian mantle.

But the Median contribution goes further, even if much less known is another significant achievement of this period. During the Median period the Scythian invaders had their own script. Preserved are one inscription on a silver vase from Ziwiye¹³ and another one on a silver bowl of the Achaemenid period from the tomb of Issyk¹⁴ near Alma Ata. This is not much, and the texts of both inscriptions are short and undeciphered up to now. But this script seems to be very similar to the Turkish runic script of Central Asia, which some Turkish and Russian scholars try to trace back to the Ukraine steppes, the area of the Scythians and later the abode of Germanic Goths, who first introduced runic script to Northern Europe. Germanic and Turkish runic scripts seem to be related, and most probably have their roots in Scythian scripts. This very scant evidence about Scythian script may be supported in future by another argument: about 520 BCE King Darius gave order to create an Iranian script to write down the Old Persian language. This Old Persian cuneiform script has certain peculiarities unknown to other scripts except Turkish runes, especially the differentiation of

¹¹ H.S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran* (Mitteilungen des Vorderasiatisch-Ägyptischen Gesellschaft 43), Leipzig, 1938, p. 479.

¹² R. Koldewey, *Das wiedererstehende Babylon* (1925) Leipzig, 1981 repr., p. 117 and fig. 20.

¹³ Ghirshman, *Iran*, Harmondsworth 1954, p. 109, fig. 42.

¹⁴ K.A. Akishev, *Kurgan Issyk, iskusstvo Sakov Kazaxstana*, Moscow, 1978.

two k-signs and two j-signs, etc. Scholars always had serious problems in trying to explain these signs as influences from Semitic scripts. But possibly the man who created for King Darius the Old Persian cuneiform script knew the Scythian script and adopted these peculiarities. If we are right and the Scythians of the Median period invented the first Iranian script, then an Iranian tribe took the first step to make Central Asia, Eastern and Northern Europe literate over a period from 680 BCE to 1200 AD/CE.

Research about the Median period has just begun and these first results encourage that future work will bring many interesting discoveries.

The Median kingdom was replaced in 550 BCE by the Persian empire. From Assyrian cuneiform tablets we know that the Persian tribe, at first about 835 BCE, was living together with the Medes in Azarbaijan; but recent research has ascertained that in the year 695 BCE - during the rule of the Median king Khshathrita - the Persians invaded the Elamite kingdom of Anshan near to the modern town of Shiraz.¹⁵ Herodotus and (with identical words) King Darius in the Bisotun inscription give the line of their first rulers, kings Chishpish/Teispes, Kurush/Cyrus I, and Kambujiya/Cambyses I, who ruled in Anshan from 695 to 560 BCE with that famous long life of the Achaemenid rulers, everyone of which was ruling for about half a century. Most probably in this period the Persians were living together with their flocks of cattle like modern Kashgai, their *yailak* near to Pasargadae and *kishlak* near to Bushir-Kazerun. There are preserved only two small objects of art from this period, the royal seals of kings Chishpish and Kurush I, imprinted on much later clay tablets from Persepolis.¹⁶ These seals were cut by Persian artists but the inscriptions were added in Elamite cuneiform script and language. Persians and Elamites became good companions in Anshan, and King Kurush I in 647 intervened with the Assyrians when these conquered western Elam and the metropolis of Susa. The Persians adopted Elamite script and language for writing documents, and they decided to dress in Elamite garments. The Elamites borrowed many Persian words in these centuries, their language becoming half Persian. No richly equipped tombs of the Persians from this period were excavated. This is clear evidence that the Persians also were Zoroastrians like the Medians. But during the very short period when they were incorporated into the Median empire the Persians neither put on Median dress like the other suzerains nor adopted the Median Zoroastrian calendar. They had a native Persian calendar,¹⁷ well known from the royal Achaemenid inscriptions and the Elamite cuneiform tablets.

With the advent of Cyrus II, Cambyses II and Darius I, the Iranian Empire extended enormously up to western Anatolia, the northern Caucasus, the Transoxanian plains, the area of modern Pakistan, Oman, Iraq, Syria and Arabia up to Medina, Egypt, northern Sudan and eastern Libya in Africa. If we realize that the tribe of the Persians was not especially numerous - probably not exceeding 100,000 men and the Persian army counting about 30,000 men in armour - we have to admire the wisdom and diplomacy of King Cyrus, who, after his victory over the Median empire, made a contract and joined forces with the Medians, thus multiplying his army. Still a century later all officers and notables of the Persian army and government were provided half by Persians and half by Medians.¹⁸ Cyrus and his successors politically united all the Iranian tribes with the exception of one, the Scythians of the north. Up to modern Tajikistan and Kazakhstan Iranian people were participants of the big empire. We have a letter written by a Khwarezmian general, who was born in the area of modern Uzbekistan and became the leader of a frontier guard in southern Egypt. Foreign, non-Iranian, people subject to the Persians were now Babylonians, Arabs, Egyptians and Nubians

¹⁵ J. Hansman, "Anshan in the Median and Achaemenian periods", in Gershevitch (ed.), *CHI, op. cit.*, pp. 25-35 [note that the actual chapter title Median reads as Elamite through an apparent error. Eds.]; and *idem*, "Anshan", *Iran* 10 (1972): 101-25.

¹⁶ B. Brentjes, *Alte Siegelkunst des Vorderen Orients*, Leipzig, 1983, p. 161.

¹⁷ H. Lewy, "La calendrier perse", *Orientalia* 10 (1941): 37.

¹⁸ Olmstead, *History, op. cit.*, p. 37.

and all the Anatolian tribes up to Greece and the Caucasus in the west and the Indians to the east.

The inhabitants of this empire gained by the stability and guarantee of peace established by such organizers as Cyrus and Darius. There were some rebellions and fights, but these were locally and temporary limited. We must say in admiration that in 300 years, from the time of the Median King Uvakhshtra to the Persian King Darius III, the Near East was formed into a great political and cultural unit. Whereas before there had been such different cultures like Egypt, Babylonia, Ionian Greece or India, now in a long-lasting process of melting there developed a new culture which was summing up most features of the old with a new, purely Persian-Iranian character.

It is astonishing that all the foreign people united in the Persian empire later preserved a very positive reminiscence of these conquerors. The Greeks said that the Medes and Persians everytime spoke the truth and were very reliable partners. They were fierce warriors but also wonderful friends.¹⁹ The officers were independent in their decisions and full of generosity. The wisdom, personal consciousness and generosity was especially obvious with their kings, with Cyrus and Darius. The Egyptians for centuries later admired the politeness of the Persians, especially in two extraordinary customs they recalled of their former masters: when greeting one another the Persians would take off their hats; and during their meals they would sit silent and never chat together. The Jews got a fully new experience when their new overlords gave permission for free return from Babylon to Jerusalem instead of being pressed into additional forced labour. Archaeologists have observed all over the Persian empire that the conquest almost never resulted in destructions,

The Great King was acknowledged by all these people over several centuries because of his superior wisdom and because the peaceful development gave safety and wealth to the inhabitants. Really there is a clear difference between the Persian period and the reports we get about Assyrian, Babylonian or Egyptian rules - all known for cruel excesses. This difference of rule was the result of a new style of government. In his tomb inscription King Darius explains his efforts to become an optimal ruler. He says that every day he exercised in sports like horseriding and spear-throwing and always tried to be critical in his decisions as a judge in a law court. He would always ask both parties.²⁰ These Persian and Median kings were no more kings by God's grace enjoying the property of their countries than the holders of their personal possessions for fun; instead they tried to work hard to make their rule profitable for their subjects. The new style of government was the most important fundament of the empire, a real column of support, and so King Darius not only got his tomb inscription with the proclamation of his principles cut into the rock of Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis, but he also distributed them in small copies on stone, clay tablets, pergament or papyrus, all over the empire. Together with the Bisotun inscription it became a propaganda text for Persian rule available in every satrapal residence. And as an *andarz*, a handbook of good government, it had to be read by every Persian official.

And this style of government became famous far from Persia and was copied at least in two other Asiatic countries. Eighty years after the downfall of the Achaemenid empire in India the Maurya kingdom was established. The most important ruler was Ashoka (273-23 BC) who distributed rock cut inscriptions all over his kingdom, the first ones known in India.²¹ In these inscriptions he mentions his hard work as a ruler, arising early in the morning and being busy up to late at night, always striving for legality and justice. These inscriptions in some places read like word-for-word copies of the Darius inscriptions. And also the endeavour for readability is the same. The Achaemenid inscriptions being trilingual, Persian-Elamite-Babylonian, sometimes even with added Egyptian or Aramaic versions, while the inscriptions of Ashoka were always translated into the local

¹⁹ Although see G.W. Trompf's article above for other and later stereotypical impressions by Greeks, back in Hellas.

²⁰ W. Hinz, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, Berlin, 1969, pp. 45-62.

²¹ H. Bechert, *Einführung in die Indologie*, Darmstadt, 1979, pp. 27-30.

idiom of his vast empire. Also the word for “inscription” - *lipi* - was adopted by the Indians from the Persian word *dipi*, which up to now in the form *diwân* preserves the meaning of “document”.

In the same decades when Ashoka ruled in India, China was united by the First Emperor Qin Shih Huang Di in 221 BC. And also he is known to have established the first stone cut inscriptions in his country,²² all the more ancient Chinese inscriptions being scratched into bronze vessels. Qin Shih Huang Di got stone pillars with his inscription erected on the great places of pilgrimage, and these inscriptions tell us that the Emperor was arising early in the morning and working hard all the day through to rule his country for the profit of his subjects.

But not only the royal inscriptions of King Darius were copied worldwide; the king gave order to collect the local laws of all his different satrapies and to compose a common law codex.²³ Parts of this codex are preserved still today in India, being the *Artashâstra* of Kautilya, composed in the third century BC. This book also is a handbook of government and describes all the officials and their duties. From Persian documents we are able to trace these officials back into the sixth century BC. The Persians did much for the development in faraway satrapies. So in Egypt the Persian King Darius got built the first Suez Canal,²⁴ and between Nubia and Libya he got established a desert road through the Sahara. It was the Persians who introduced the camel from Arabia into the Sahara to organize the postal service on this new desert road. Well known is the famous postal road through Anatolia to the royal residence in Susa. But twenty years ago another amazing road was discovered in Pakistan. It crossed the Karakoram ridge at 6000m above sea level and connected the valleys of the Indus and the Oxus-Amu Darya.²⁵ Through recent excavations several post stations are now known;²⁶ they are buildings with a huge central courtyard, being the predecessors of the mediaeval Karawansarai.

There were other handbooks composed in Darius' times. An Egyptian official reports in an inscription on his statue that he got order by King Darius to collect all the books about medicine.²⁷ And also this handbook is still preserved in India, for the *Siddhasara* of Ravigupta copies much from the Achaemenid text. Darius gave order to regulate the calendar and to introduce a new system of intercalary days. Cuneiform tablets from Babylon preserve part of a handbook on astronomy and on mathematics sponsored by the Great King.²⁸ All these handbooks contain the knowledge and experience of many different oriental peoples, so in a strict sense they are not Persian, but it was the Persian organization, the concern of these rulers in far-reaching ventures and attempts, which gave to this period its universal importance for science and research.

King Darius also gave orders to create a common *lingua franca* through all his empire. We know from several archives of cuneiform tablets that at first the Persians used the Elamite language for administration. Then by order of Darius a cuneiform script for Persian language was invented. As I mentioned already, this script seems to be related structurally to the Scythian one. But at last the Great King installed a real caste of scribes, distributed all over his vast empire with schools and offices in every town and residence. It is really curious that he chose the Aramaean²⁹ people to do this work. But for 200 years onwards Aramaean scribes were doing all the writing service of the Persian empire, and several royal and satrapal letters and documents are preserved from their hands, especially in Egypt. This is doubly curious, because the Egyptians had had their scribal tradition in

²² His five inscriptions are literally recorded by Chinese chronicles: E. Chavannes (trans.), *Les mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien*, Paris, 1897, vol. 2, pp. 140-186. Inscription 1 on Mount T'ai Chan is preserved in original, *ibid.*, pp. 553ff.

²³ Olmstead, *History, op. cit.*, pp. 119ff., 142.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁵ K. Jettmar, *Rock inscriptions in the Indus Valley* (Antiquities of Northern Pakistan 1), Mainz, 1989.

²⁶ U. Scerrato, "Excavations at Dahan-i Ghulaman (Seistan-Iran), First Preliminary Report", *East and West* 16, (1966): 9-30.

²⁷ Olmstead, *op. cit.* pp.143, 449.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁹ J.C. Greenfield, "Aramaic in the Achaemenian Empire", in Gershevitch, *CHI, op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 698-713.

hieroglyphic scripts for more than two millennia before Darius' time, but all the correspondence with Persia was done by the Egyptians in Aramaic. Babylonian cuneiform was also mostly replaced by Aramaic, although Babylonia had an even longer tradition of literacy than Egypt. But there were many countries in Eastern Iran, India and Central Asia which did not know script to that time. All these people became literate now. And as a result of this politics of cultural unification the satrapal residences became centres of learning like modern universities.

The far-reaching decision of Darius to install scribal centres in all his satrapies became more important still centuries later after the downfall of the Achaemenid empire, when in all these countries the local languages were written down with the Aramaic alphabetical script. One of these languages was Pahlavi in the Arsacid and Sasanian periods, another the Sogdian language. From the Sogdians the Central Asiatic Turks received their Uigur scripts which became the mother of the Mongol and the modern Manchurian script reaching China in the seventeenth century. The Indian Brahmi and Kharoshthi scripts developed out of Achaemenid Aramaic and later spread to Tibet, Southern India and Southeast Asian Vietnam and Java. In Africa the Nubian script of mediaeval Sudan also seems to have developed out of Achaemenid Aramaic. And thus East and Central Asia and parts of Africa received some of their learning via Iran. The formation of a Near Eastern culture learning and art was thus initiated by the Medians and Achaemenids.

With literacy Persian literature became important. Two topics are characteristic of Old Persian literature, and these were love story and travelling. Now romances on far journeys were already famous in Egyptian and Babylonian literature centuries before. But the romance of love was quite new in Achaemenid times. We read shortened abstracts on the romance of Cyrus and Mandane, on Semiramis and Zariadres and on Cyrus the Younger and Syennesis' wife in the Greek books of Herodotus and Xenophon.³⁰ These same tales are better preserved a millennium later in the *Shahnameh*. Traces are observable in Sanskrit literature also. But especially the Egyptians expressly said that their Hellenistic love romances date from Persian days. Neither the Greek nor the Egyptians or Babylonians or the Indians had love stories of length in pre-Achaemenid times. Maybe these romances of love are the most important heritage the Persians left to us up to modern times. And now look into a modern bookshop to realize what developed out of the romance of Cyrus and Mandane to Vis and Ramin and Khosro and Shirin up to *Gone with the Wind!*

³⁰ T. Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, Berlin 1920, pp. 2-4.



Women dancing to Tar: Persian Carpet



Traditional Food Served for Mehregan