Why Was the Story of Arash-i Kamangir Excluded from the *Shahnameh*?*

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In contemporary Iranian culture, the legendary figure of Arash-i Kamangir, or Arash the Archer, is known and celebrated as the national hero par excellence. After all, he is willing to lay down his life by infusing his arrow with his life force in order to restore territories usurped by Iran’s enemy. As the legend goes, he does so in order to have the arrow move to the farthest point possible for the stretch of land over which the arrow flies shall be included in Iranshahr proper. The story without a doubt was popular for many centuries, but during the various upheavals of the twentieth century, the story of Arash the Archer was invoked, and in the hands of artists with various political leanings his figure was imbued with layers reflecting the respective artist’s ideological presuppositions.¹ The most famous of modern renditions of Arash’s legend is Siavash Kasra’i’s narrative poem named after its protagonist. An excerpt of Kasra’i’s rendition of Arash’s story

"For further discussion of this issue please see my forthcoming work, *On the Margins of Historiography: The Sistani Cycle of Epics and Iran’s National History* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

was included in the textbooks during the Mohammad Reza Shah’s reign.² Whatever the various factors that contributed to the legend’s popularity and its reinvocation by a number of Iranian intellectuals, the result is that Arash and his story became well known to generations of Iranians. But where did the story come from? When I posed this question to a number of educated Iranians, most everyone told me that they thought the source of the story was to be found in the *Shahnameh*, because, the modern adaptation of the story notwithstanding, everyone knew that story was “an ancient one.”

The expectation that Arash’s story should be found in the *Shahnameh* is not unreasonable, because the story does belong, generically speaking, to the corpus of the Iranian national epics, and the *Shahnameh* is the canonical version of that corpus. Yet, surprisingly, the story is absent from Firdowsi’s *Shahnameh*.

In this paper, I shall follow the trajectory of the legend’s development, and fortunately for us the story indeed has a fascinating genealogy. In examining the different versions of the account the goal is to speculate about the reasons for the existence of such differences. It will be argued that the creation of new recensions of the story as well as its exclusion from in a compilation such as Firdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, are politically motivated, as any (re)writing of historical narrative would be. Hence, in addition to discussing the provenance of the story and the forces that helped shape and reshape it, I would like to emphasize the function of the Iranian epic genre as historiography³ by using this particular episode to illustrate how historical discourse was formed and was subsequently continuously.

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2. This is in spite of Kasra’i’s leftist inclinations. Kasra’i’s Arash is a commoner, a simple foot soldier whose heroic act should be read as a rebellion of the oppressed. See for instance how Arash introduces himself:

منم آرش
- چنین آغاز کرد آن مرد با دشمن -
منم آرش
سپاهی مردی از دزدان


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The oldest version, which forms the kernel of all the different stories that I shall discuss, can be traced back to Avestan literature. It is in Yasht no. 8, a hymn in praise of the star Tristrya, that we encounter Arash the Archer in the following context:

We sacrifice unto Tristrya, the bright and glorious star; who flies, toward the sea Vouru-Kasha, as swiftly as the arrow darted through the heavenly space, which Erkhsha, the swift archer, the Arya amongst the Aryas whose arrow was the swiftest, shot from Mount Khshaotha to Mount Hvanvant. For Ahura Mazda gave him assistance; so did the waters and the plants; and Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, opened a wide way unto him.4

And again in the same Yasht, in an account only slightly different from the one above:

We sacrifice unto Tristrya, the bright and glorious star, swift-flying and swift-moving, who flies to the sea Vouru-Kasha, as swiftly as the arrow darted through heavenly space, which Erekhsha, the swift archer, the Arya amongst the Aryas whose arrow was the swiftest, shot from Mount Khshaotha to Mount Hvanvant. Ahura Mazda gave him assistance, and the Amesha-Spentas and Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, pointed him the way: behind him went the tall Ashis Vaguhi and Parenidi on her light chariot: always till, in his course, he reached Mount Hvanvant on the shining waters.5

Let us identify the basic elements of the Avestan account. What we learn from the one and only reference to Arash is the following: there was an archer by the name Erekhsha (Avestan for Arash),6 and his epithet is the

6. For identification of the Avestan Erekhsha...
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...swift archer. We can also gather that he is a great warrior, after all he is the best archer among the Aryans. His most notable act, which earned him this stature as well as his epithet is his memorable shot, which, originating from one mountain, ended up at another, presumably traversing a great distance. Finally, we learn from the account that this decisive shot moved as far as it did with the supernatural assistance of Ahura Mazda and Mithra, as well as water and plant deities.\(^7\)

This summarizes the elements that are important for our discussion, because they reappear in various accounts composed in Arabic or New Persian. Incidentally, there have been attempts, most notably by Vladimir Minorsky, to identify the location of the mountains, however, his identifications are tentative, like much of the studies of Avestan toponyms.\(^8\) As we shall see, the toponyms mentioned in later accounts differ from one account to another and speculation of the whereabouts of each location is not significant for the present study.

What is important in the Avestan narrative, aside from the summarized elements, is the absence of any context for Arash’s impressive feat. For in every other subsequent narrative we learn that Arash shot this arrow as a condition of a peace treaty between Iran and Turan: wherever the arrow landed was to become the border between the two nations. When we

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\(^7\) Antonio Panaino regards the mythical figure of Erekhsha as exhibiting strictly Mithraic features, a factor which remains consistent in Middle and New Iranian literatures. (Panaino, *Tisstrya*, II: 52–53). The identification of Mithra with Erekhsha, albeit partial, does have interesting consequences on the central argument of this study. It is a topic that deserves its own independent consideration.

examine the next generation of the account, however, it is not always Arash (or Arash alone) who takes back the Iranian territories from the Turanian villain king, Afrasiyab.

The first of the two accounts appears in the Middle Persian text *Menog i Xrad*. Interestingly enough, in this text there is an allusion to the decisive shot, but there is no mention of Arash. Instead, credit is given to the Pishdadi Iranian king, Manuchihr. Hence, in a passage recounting Manuchihr’s virtues we learn that he “reclaimed the lands between Padhashhkwargar to Bon-i Guzag, which were occupied by Afrasiyab as a result of a peace treaty, and restored them to Iranian territory.”

Aside from the *Menog i Xrad*, the story appears in yet another Middle Persian text. *Māh i Frawardīn Rōz i Xurdād* informs us that on a certain auspicious day, namely the sixth day of the month Farvardin, Manuchihr and Arash of the swift arrow (*šēbāg-tīr*) took the occupied Iranian territories. I shall return to this significant alteration in Arash’s role as the one (and only) archer who could possibly accomplish the task at hand later on. The other crucial addition to the Avestan account, which must be underlined here, is the context of the miraculous shot, that is, the peace treaty between Iran and Turan. This becomes common to all subsequent versions of the story.

Like the Middle Persian versions, in all the Arabic and New Persian recensions of the story, we find the peace treaty between Turan and Iran to be the context of the story. Hence, we learn from some of the authors

9. I am aware that the transcription date of some of the Middle Persian texts may be more recent than those composed in the post-Sasanian period. Middle Persian texts are notoriously difficult to date, and the question of whether or not they appeared before or after the Arabic and New Persian accounts does not affect my argument.


For commentary on this verse, see 129–30.

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who are known to have preserved (hi)stories of the Persians, such as Tabari, Tha’alibi, Maqdisi, Bal’ami, Biruni, to name a few. While there are many variations in their accounts, this is what is common to all of them:

After a Turanian siege of Iran an agreement is reached between Afrasiyab and the Iranian king. Afrasiyab is to withdraw with his army. In most accounts, the Iranian king is Manuchihr. The border of the two kingdoms must be determined, and this is when Arash steps in to shoot his arrow. According to different versions, Arash shot his arrow from a location in or around the region of Tabaristan and it landed somewhere east (Oxus, Balkh, Turan, etc.), so regardless of the exact points of its origin and destination, the arrow essentially moved eastward.

What should be striking to a person familiar with the legend of Arash the Archer is that there is an element missing from most accounts: Arash the Archer does not die as a result of having shot the arrow. As one might notice, this element was also missing from the Avestan version of the legend. But there are versions of the story in which Arash does die at the end. One such example is Biruni’s version, which preserves the story of Arash in the section of his work devoted to the discussion of various Zoroastrian festivals.


13. The exception is Tha’alibi’s account, which unfolds during the reign of Zav Tahmasp.

14. For the variation of the various important elements of the different versions, see Table 1.
According to this version, the arrow is shot as a condition of the peace treaty between Manuchihr and Afrasiyab. Then the Amshaspand Sepandarmaz, one of the six angelic beings who accompany and aid Ahura Mazda, orders a special arrow to be made. Sepandarmaz, therefore, endows the arrow with supernatural powers, for the length it will come to traverse will determine the expanse of Iranian territories to be restored to Manuchihr. Next, Arash enters the story, and beholds the arrow and proclaims:

O king and you others, look at my body. I am free from any wound or disease. I know when I shoot with this bow and arrow I shall fall into pieces and my life will be gone, but I have determined to sacrifice it for you.¹⁵

Having foreshadowed his own death, when Arash falls dead after releasing the arrow, there is no sense of surprise but rather a feeling of sad inevitability of the hero’s fate. Stepping into his fate knowing its tragic end in turn lends his sacrifice an added sense of grandeur. The festival of Tirgan, therefore, Biruni informs us, is celebrated to commemorate Arash and his great sacrifice.

Given the significance of Arash’s selfless act, as articulated in Biruni’s account and as it is known in its modern versions, it is rather surprising that most other accounts would overlook this crucial element. Why leave out the most dramatic moment of the story, which also grants its hero its best-known attribute? In other words, why would a story, attested to be the most astonishing of the tall tales Iranians (al-Furs) like to repeat¹⁶ be devoid of its most distinguishing element? An examination of the different versions of the story makes it clear that there were two distinct recensions of the story, and there seems to have been different opinions as to which recension was the “authentic one.” Juzjani provides the following versions of the story of Arash:

¹⁵. Biruni, 220.
Sam-i Nariman, Rustam’s grandfather, arrived with his army from Zavulistan and India and joined Manuchihr. They fought many battles until both sides agreed to a peace treaty according to which it was decided that one arrow should be shot from Tabaristan, and the distance it traverses should be restored to Manuchihr. Arash, the best archer among the Iranians [‘ajam], having fashioned himself a supernatural arrow, climbed Mount Amul. From there, he shot the arrow toward Khurasan and it reached the Oxus. There is another narration according to which Arash dies right there [after having shot the arrow], but the more authentic narration has it that [Manuchihr] made him the commander of all archers and that the Oxus became the border between Iran and Turan.

So, clearly, there were two versions and one of which was viewed to be the more authentic version. Having undertaken a close textual analysis of various accounts, it is time to consider the significance of the various versions.

In order to grasp the significance of this last version of events, let us pause here for a moment and ponder the importance of the first addition to the Avestan legend, namely adding the context of the story, the peace treaty between Iran and Turan. The function of this alteration is to pin down the

17. Juzjani, I, 140.
legend to the chronology of Iran’s “National History.” In other words, for Arash to leave the mythical realm and enter historical time, he had to be made a historical actor. Hence, his action and his story were moved to a historical period. The historicization of the Avestan legend of Arash in turn granted it political significance, opening it up to revisions, modifications, and exclusion. I am well aware that the historical chronology referred to here is a “legendary one.” After all, the process of historicization referred to here is Arash’s appearance in the reign of Manuchihr, and I think most agree that Manuchihr’s reign cannot be taken to refer to a real historical period. Therefore, the reference to the process of historicization of the character, of course, the process that took shape within the Iranian genre of historiography, that is the “National History” of Iran, the corpus which we otherwise know as Iran’s epic literature.  

Arash is not the only mythical character who is appropriated and all of a sudden transported into the realm of history. Garshasp, the ancestor of the Sistani heroes, for instance, is also historicized, subsequent to which his role becomes subject to various contradictory depictions. The question that should be asked in the case of our mythical figure is why did it become necessary to incorporate the story into the chronology of Iran’s “National History?” Politically speaking, what was at stake? It is only by answering this question that we can arrive at some solutions as to the reason for the existence of an alternate narrative of events and its exclusion in certain other texts such as the *Shahnameh*.

The story was transported into the realm of “National History” as a result of the appropriation of the Avestan hero Erekhsha as the ancestor of the Arsacid royal house. That Arash is the ancestor of the Arsacids is mentioned

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18. I have discussed why the generic categorization of “epics” in the case of the *Shahnameh* and the Sistani Cycle of Epics is rather inaccurate in the introduction of my forthcoming work, *On the Margins of Historiography*.

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by Firdowsi in the beginning of his brief section on them. Speaking of the Parthian kings, Firdowsi states:

بزرگان که از تخم آرش بدند
دلیر و سبکسار و سرکش بدنند

The grandees (i.e., the Arsacids) who were of Arash’s pedigree were valorous, yet haughty and hasty.

Since none of the historians of the Parthian period really would believe Ferdoswi, because historians of Iran, for the most part, remain faithful adherents to the positivistic method of writing/studying history, Firdowsi’s work, to the majority in this camp, is tainted by myth, fantasy, and magic and simply does not pass the standards set by Greco-Roman genres of historiography and/or archaeological evidence. This perhaps is the main reason why this important connection was missed, but to say no one picked up on Firdowsi’s hint would not be entirely accurate.

A little over one hundred thirty years ago, Von Gutschmid, who wrote an extensive review on Nöldeke’s translation and commentary of Tabari, also recognized Arash as the legendary ancestor of the Arsacids. Adding to Firdowsi’s abovementioned genealogical link, he also quotes Maš’udi as citing a certain Ash al-Jabbar to be the ancestor of the Arsacids. Von Gutschmid argues that Ash the Pahlavan, or Parthian, is none other than Arash the Archer, “der vegötterte Gründer des Partherreiches” (the deified founder of the Parthian Empire). Furthermore, there is a suggestion that the very name Arshak (i.e., Arsaces) could be the Middle

23. Guttschmitt, “Bemerkungen zu Tabari’s Sasanidengeschichte,” For the passage in Maš’udi, see Moruj al-Dhabab wa Ma‘ādīn al-Jawbar (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1965), I, 259. This Arash, also known as Kay Arash, seems to be a different figure however; he is made to be the son of Siavush, and there exist variations where he is the brother Siavush and Kavus’s son. Nevertheless, the appearance of this name as the ancestor of the Arsaces I remains significant.
Persian rendition of the Avestan Erekhsha. If this etymological link had been established beyond doubt, then my case here would have been made, but there has been no serious attempt at the etymology of the Middle Persian name Arshak, while some suggestions as to the provenance of the Avestan Erekhsha have been made.

There is yet another piece of evidence linking Arash to the Arsacids from a better-trusted source. The presence of the famous bowman on the reverse of Arsacid royal coins caught the attention of some historians of the period, and Lukonin was one of the first to identify the bowman as Arash, the legendary ancestor of the Arsacids. In spite of the identification, which has remained unchallenged, still to this day the ubiquitous bowman of the Arsacid coins is commonly identified as Arsaces I, the founder of the dynasty, obviously disregarding Lukonin’s keen observation decades ago.

It is true that the appearance of the image of a bowman is hardly unique to Parthian coins; for instance, there exists a Seleucid type of coin featuring Apollo on the omphalos, and these coins circulated at the same time as the very early Arsacid coins. However, the bowman, which becomes a constant presence on Parthian coins, is significantly different from the preceding types, so much so that the genesis of the bowman on the Parthian coins cannot be traced back to the types that existed before. On the Parthian version, the arrow disappears, instead the bowman holds his extended bow. The Parthian rendition of the archer on the reverse of the Parthian coins becomes the most ubiquitous motif,

25. For a summary of references to the eponym of the Arsacid dynasty, see Ferdinand Justi, *Das iranische Namenbuch* (Marburg: Elwert, 1895), 27–29; yet there is no mention of the possibility of a connection between the Avestan Erekhsha and Arshak.
the Parthian coin motif par excellence. It appears on all drachm coins as well as some other types of coins for all subsequent Arsacid rulers.  

What we have here, therefore, is evidence pointing to the process of the appropriation of the legend by the founder of the Arsacids dynasty. It is logical to assume that the appearance of the image on the coins was an attempt to make the claim of descent from the legendary figure Arash a public proclamation sometime after Arsaces assumed the throne. Arsaces was indeed very much in need of a public legitimizing discourse that would justify the upstart king’s ambitions to become king and emperor. After all, like the founders of many dynasties throughout the course of Iranian history, he in fact was of obscure origins. He was the chief ruler of a band of Scythians who were a branch of the tribe of Dahae. Justin, the historian whose accounts of the origin of the Arsacids is generally trusted, goes as far as saying that Arsaces was probably a robber and of uncertain origin. Justin’s statement regarding the nature of Arsaces’s activities must be taken with a grain of salt because his endeavors as a nomadic warlord, it has been pointed out, could be confused with robbery. What we do know, however, is that Arsaces, from the time he assumed the throne in Parthia, spearheaded a concerted campaign of legitimization. This meant that he had to connect his dynasty to the royal tradition of ancient Iran, and he partially accomplished this by the use of Aramaic (in addition to Greek) on his coins. However, that is only part of the legitimization campaign packed onto his coins. The other part is the appropriation of the mythical hero Arash the Archer as his own ancestor, the pictorial representation of which on the coins forms another important part of his royal imagery.

Now that Arash was appropriated as the ancestor of the Arsacids, he had to

also appear in the narration of Iran’s history. In other words, his heroic feat, his valor, the swiftness of his arrow all become relevant in the context of history. Incidentally, as we know, the Arsacids are also known to have been excellent archers. In this manner Arash now appear Manuchihr’s reign, fairly early in the chronology of the “National History.”

With the fundamental question of the reason for inclusion of the legend in the corpus of “National History” answered, we can now examine the significance of the various recensions of the story. As mentioned above, the most significant variation in the later reincarnations of the story is whether or not Arash dies as a result of shooting the arrow.

As we have seen in the Avestan version of the story there is no mention of Arash losing his life. Also we have seen that Juzjani, the author of Tabaqat-i Nasiri, argued that the version that lacked Arash’s death was the more authentic of the two. If the extant accounts are any indication of the prevalence of a particular version, then it is safe to assume that the version in which Arash dies was not as widely circulated as the other version during the period when our medieval accounts were transcribed. If Arash’s sacrifice of his life is a later addition to the story, one might ask, where does this addition originate and why did it become necessary?

It is in answering this question that we get a glimpse of the formation of Iranian national historiography. Because in this theme what we have seems to be a reflection of historical events of the early Parthian period.

We know that in the early Parthian period two Arsacid monarchs, Phraates II (139/8–127 BCE) and Artabanus I (127–124–3 BCE), were slain in the course of battles with the Saka invaders. I have discussed the reflections of

32. Out of twelve accounts that I have encountered, only in three does Arash die. Two of those three also narrate the other version of the story according to which Arash does not die; See Table 1.
33. For an exhaustive list of Classical sources that narrate the story of the impingement of the Sakas on the northeastern frontier during the Saka period, see Bruno Jacobs, “Die Ausdehnung nach Norden und Osten,” in Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches: Textsammlung mit Übersetzungen.
this episode of Parthian history in the corpus of epics in my forthcoming monograph. There are a lot of details in the account of Nodhar’s reign which match the events of this particular period in Parthian history. Nodhar’s death at the hands of the Turanian king Afrasiyab is undoubtedly a reflection of the traumatic slaying of the two Parthian monarchs. The subsequent Saka invasion of Iran during the reigns of Phraates II and Artabanus I\(^\text{34}\) is yet another detail that is expressed in the account of Nodhar’s reign, for Afrasiyab does not simply defeat the Iranians, but becomes Iran’s king for some time.\(^\text{35}\) The unjustified change in the succession line from Nodhars to that of Zav Tahmasp encapsulates the memories of the change of line of succession from Phraates II to Artabanus I.\(^\text{36}\)

But the account of Nodhar’s reign in the *Shahnameh* is not the only historiographical reference to these traumatic events. I postulate that the perceived sacrifice of these Parthian kings was also projected back to their legendary ancestor Arash. After all, Arash and the slain Parthian kings were facing the same enemy, namely the Turanians, or the nomadic tribes of the northern and eastern frontier of the Parthian Empire. Now in the new version of Arash’s narrative, rather than being slain by the enemy, he chooses to lay down his life in a grand act of self-sacrifice, an act that restores the sovereignty of an Iranian king (Manuchihr) to the territories that were occupied by the Turanians. Projection of contemporary affairs to a remote past is a characteristic of this genre of historiography, a trait of this genre that the late Shapur Shahbazi referred to as the Ctesian method...
of historical writing. It is very likely, therefore, that a new version of the legend of Arash was patronized and propagated by the royal Arsacids. In this new version Arash is made to sacrifice his life by infusing his arrow with his life energy. It is curious that in the extant accounts where Arash does die at the end, he also enjoys supernatural assistance. Where is the need, one might ask, for Arash to sacrifice his life if his arrow is endowed by magical powers? Be this as it may, what is significant is that the Parthians revised the legend of their appropriate ancestor in order to aggrandize the slain Parthian kings.

The fact that there are different extant versions of the accounts and the fact that it becomes excluded from some collections point to the existence of rivals, who challenged the appropriation of the Avestan hero as the Arsacid ancestor. The obvious culprits are of course the Sasanians. After all, the so-called epic material, or at least a version of it, was subject to heavy-handed revisions by the Sasanians, who, long after their ascension to the throne, continued to regard the Arsacids as their rivals. It is well known that the Sasanians did attempt to erase the legacy of the Parthians, and they did manage to truncate the half-millennium-long period of their reign and refer to it as the period of petty kings. Their campaign is best exemplified in the length of the Arsacid section of the *Shahnameh*. Firdowsi devotes a total of twenty lines, admitting at the end of those lines that is hard to find information about them because:

38. The legend, like most materials from the same corpus of literature, must have been disseminated by the professional minstrels who played a crucial role in the formation, preservation, and the dissemination of Iranian (hi)stories; for more on the minstrels, see Mary Boyce, "The Parthian Gosan and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Britain* 89 (1957), 12–45.
39. The most elaborate of these accounts is Biruni’s, discussed above.
40. For the continued influence of the Parthian nobles during the Sasanian period, see Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008).
41. For instance, according to Firdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, they reign for 283 years. There are other significantly shortened numbers attributed to their reign.
Since they [the Arsacids] seem to be insignificant in number and obscure in lineage, a wise person doesn’t attempt to narrate their history. I have not heard anything about them other than their names and I have not seen their accounts in the Book of the Kings.

Given the nature of the Sasanian revisions to the Book of the Kings, it comes as no surprise that the legend of Arash, the legendary ancestor of the Arsacids would be subject to exclusion from the corpus. However, we know that in spite of the Sasanians’ attempts at stifling the narration of the stories of Parthians, many of them not only survived but turned up in various compilations of epic material. As it turns out, when it comes to the exclusion of the story of Arash from the *Shahnameh* and various other compilations, there may have been factors which contributed to it.

But the Sasanians were not the only rivals of the royal Arsacids; throughout the course of their long history, they had a complicated and rocky relationship to other Parthian noble houses. Rustam and his clan, who represent the Suren family, go from being servants of the kings to being their rivals. Actually, the only mention of Arash in the Sistani Cycle of Epics, which relates the lives of the Sistani heroes, is when the relationship between the two families representing the Suren and the Arsacid royal house is deteriorating. Once Faramarz, Rustam’s son and king of Sistan,

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42. Firdowsi, *Shahnameh*, 6, 139.

43. There have been numerous attempts to identify Parthian stories in the *Shahnameh*. I discuss the stories and the scholarship while identifying numerous other episodes in my forthcoming monograph.

44. Once again I refer to my own work, where I have discussed the previous scholars’ hint at such identification, while providing additional information from various sources to substantial the identification of Suren and Rustam families.
is put up on gallows by the Iranian king, Bahman, Rustam’s daughters Banugoshasp and Zarbanu are chased out of Sistan and into India. There, a number of adventures unfold as Bahman is attempting to eradicate not only Rustam’s offspring, but anything that testifies to their existence, their glorious history, and their presence in India. In one of the numerous battles, as Banugoshasp and various warriors from Bahman’s camp come face to face, we encounter a certain Piruz who is a descendant of Arash-i Kamangir. When someone enquires about Piruz’s identity, Jamasp, the wise vizir of Bahman responds:

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\begin{align*}
\text{بدو گفت پیروز آرش نزاد} \\
\text{که در مردی و مردمی داد داد} \\
\text{که آرش چو از بلخ بگشاد دست} \\
\text{به جیحون رسانید تیرش ز شست} \\
\text{همانا که آن بهترست از پدر} \\
\text{سواری گرانماه و پر هنر}
\end{align*}
\]

He [Jamasp] said, it is Piruz Arash’s descendant. He is well-loved and strong. Arash released the arrow from Balkh and it reached the Oxus. Piruz is even a better archer than his father; a noble, skillful warrior.

Next, Piruz is defeated on the battlefield: Banugoshasp drags him off his horse and takes him back to the Sistani camp, where he is presented to Zal as a prisoner.⁴⁶ So what becomes apparent in this episode is that there was no attempt on the part of the family of Suren to appropriate Arash as their own ancestor, for clearly they see their genealogy as distinct, considering Garshasp as the first member of their race. It is interesting, however, that in the battle between the family of Rustam and Bahman, one of Arash’s offspring appears on Bahman’s side and is defeated. Therefore, we can conclude that any stories patronized by the Suren or favorable to the Sistani

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heroes would have no interest in preserving Arash’s story, for as a hero, he would have been at best irrelevant to the Sistani heroes or at worst the ancestor of their enemy.

Let us examine how the other noble families regarded Arash. We have evidence that the house of Mihran, another powerful noble family, also claimed Arash as their own ancestor. The evidence comes from Firdowsi’s narration of the Mihranid Bahram-i Chubin revolt.\(^47\) In the long diatribe between Khusrow Parviz (590–628 CE) and Bahram, the latter proclaims:

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\text{بر اندازم اندر جهان داد را}
\text{کنم تازه آیین میلاد را}
\text{من از تخمة نامور آرشم}
\text{چو جنگ اورم آتش سرکشم}
\text{نبیره جهان جوی گرگین منم}
\text{همان آتش تیز برزین منم.}\]

I shall establish justice in the world; I shall revive Milad’s creed. I am the descendant of renowned Arash! When I come in war, I am like the rampant fire. I am the offspring of the warrior Gurgin. I am the very fire of Burzin!

A little later his rival Khosrwo Parziv retorts:

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\text{که بد شاه هنگام آرش بگوی}
\text{سرآید مگر من این گفت و گویی}
\text{چنین گفت بهرام کان گاهشاه}
\text{منوجهربد با کلاه و سیاه}
\text{بدو گفت خسرو که ای بدنهمان}
\text{چو دانته که او بود شاه جهان.}\]

\(^{47}\) The revolt of Bahram Chubin has been studied in the context of the power struggle between the Parthian nobles and the Sasanians by Pourshariati, in *Decline and Fall*, section 2.6.3.

\(^{48}\) Firdowsi, *Shahnameh*, 8, 29.
Who was the king during Arash’s time, tell me! Once you do, this conversation will be over. Bahram then proclaimed that at that time, it was Manuchihr who was king; he wore the crown and commanded the armies. Khusrow then responded, “You ill-natured one! How come you do recall that Manuchihr was king but forget to mention that Arash was his servant, obedient to him and ready to follow his command?

Bahram, therefore connects himself, genealogically speaking, to three figures, Gurgin, Milad, and our archer, Arash. Gurgin was son of Milad who has been recognized as the ancestor of house of Mihran. So the claim that Arash is also his ancestor could be taken in two distinct ways: first that he is a Parthian, which is certainly true, as he is a member of the Mihran family; second, it could be read that he is claiming to be the true descendant of the royal Arsacid house. In any case, we see that the claim of descent from Arash would have various ramifications for the story of Arash: it could be subjected to revision or exclusion from the various compilations, which were patronized by different noble families with different sympathies and predispositions.

There is evidence that the Karinids, yet another Parthian noble family, also laid claim to Arash as their ancestor. According Mar’ashi’s version of Arash’s anecdote preserved in Tarikh-i Tabaristan va Ruyan, Arash is

49. Firdowski, Shahnameh, VIII, 33.
51. For a discussion of the continued involvement of the noble family of Karin, for instance, in propagation of epic material in the post-Sasanid period, see Parvaneh Pourshariati, “The Parthians and the Production of the Canonical Shāhnāmas: Of Pahlavi, Pahlavāni and the Pahlav,” in Commutatio Et Contentio. Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East in Memory of Zeev Rubin, ed. H. Börm and J. Wisshöfer (Düsseldorf: Wellem Verlag, 2010).
the brother of Qarin, or Karin. Karin is in fact the legendary ancestor of the house of Karin. To make Arash his brother, a genealogical link that is absent elsewhere, is to make Arash the ancestor of the house. Hence, as in the case of the house of Mihran, we have evidence that there seems to have been rivalry between the various branches of the Parthians in claiming Arash as their ancestor in some cases and viewing him as a hostile figure in other instances.

To summarize, the story was first transported into the realm of history proper as a consequence of the Arsacid appropriation of Arash as their ancestor. Once Arash was made an ancestor to the Arsacids, he had to be placed in a historical context, and this was done by making him appear in the reign of Manuchihr and by assigning his memorable heroic feat historical significance. Later on, as Parthian kings lose their lives on the battlefield when they attempt to ward off the onslaught of Saka tribes, the legend of their ancestor is revised. Arash, accordingly loses his life once he shoots an arrow, and hence the self-sacrifice of the Parthian king becomes commemorated each time the story of their ancestor is performed.

The existence of rival claims to the legend, in addition to the Sasanians’ concerted efforts at the elimination of the Parthian historical heritage, therefore, resulted in different elaborations of this innocuously apolitical Avestan legend. Another direct result of the rivalry and the different claims on Arash was that his legend became perpetuated, as different versions of it were probably patronized and performed by groups of people with different loyalties. But the exclusion of the story in a collection such as Firdowsi’s or the attribution of Arash’s most famous heroic deed to Manuchihr by the Middle Persian text *Menog i Xrad*, must also be regarded in the context of the relevance of the story to the discourse of legitimization.

It is an irony of history that Arash, in spite of the various attempts to alter or eradicate his story, is once again resurrected in modern times to play the glorified national hero, to be commemorated for his sacrificial act of laying down his life for a goal greater than himself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Period in Iranian National History</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tabari Tarikh</strong> (838–923 CE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bal’ami Tarikhnameh-ye Tabari</strong> (d. ca. 931–41 CE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maqdisi al-Bad’wbara-‘l-Tarikh</strong> (completed 965–56 CE)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tha’alibi Ghurar</strong> (961-1038 CE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biruni Athar al-Baqiya</strong> (973-1048 CE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gurgani Vis-o-Ramin</strong> (completed 1054 CE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gardizi Zayn al-Akbhar</strong> (d. 1061 CE)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Why Was the Story of Arash-i Kamangir Excluded from the *Shahnameh*?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Manuchihr’s reign</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mojmal al-Tawarih</strong> (complete 1126 CE)</td>
<td>Manuchihr’s reign</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No from Amol citadel to Turan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ibn al-Athir</strong> <em>Al-Kamil fil-Tarih</em> (completed ca.1236 CE)</td>
<td>Manuchihr’s reign</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No from Tabaristan to Balkh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Juzjani</strong> <em>Tabaqat-e Naseri</em> (completed 1258 CE)</td>
<td>Manuchihr’s reign</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes and no (different versions) from “mountain of Amol” to Oxus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husaini Qazvini</strong> <em>Al-Mu’jam fi Athar-i Muluk al-‘Ajam</em> (~1300)</td>
<td>Manuchihr’s reign</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No from Tabarestan to Oxus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mar’ashi</strong> <em>Tarih-e Tabarestan va Rujan</em> (complete 1476–77 CE)</td>
<td>Manuchihr’s reign</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No from Tabarestan to Marv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>