

The literary re-placement of ‘Iran’ in India: The *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* of the Zoroastrian ‘Persians’ (Parsis)

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The Persian Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān (‘the Story of Sanjān’), written in 1599 CE, is our only source for the account of the supposed Zoroastrian ‘migration’ from Iran to India in the 8th cent. The last of the Sasanian kings, Yazdegard III, had been deposed after the battle of Nehāvand in 642 CE, and Zoroastrian Iran was overrun by Arab invaders who Islamicized Iran after hundreds of years of Zoroastrian domination of the country under Achaemenian, Parthian and Sasanian empires (530 BCE–651 CE). According to the Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān, ‘Iran’ was ‘shattered’ by the Arab conquest, and those who remained faithful to the old religion fled from persecution by the new Muslim presence. The Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān tells of the long journey of a group of Zoroastrians to seek asylum in India, and the subsequent resettlement there, where they later became the Parsis, ‘the Persians’. The key factor in this re-placement of Iran is their finding a new monarch, not in human form but in a sacred fire, called ‘King of Iran’. When it is read as a myth of charter and series of rites de passage, it reveals much about the literary construction of place as a form of religious and social commentary.

Iran as a location in culture

Iran is geographically situated at the crossroads of European, Middle Eastern, and Asian routes: it is in many other ways a somewhat anomalous location that straddles boundaries and is, as the 21st century opens, problematic for the West to understand. Iran was invaded and plundered by Alexander of Macedon in antiquity, and it was overrun by Arabs bringing Islam in the 7th century CE, yet it has never been a Western colony in modern times like much of the Middle East and South Asia. Since the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s, it has been an Islamic republic, yet it remains among the most economically rich and culturally sophisticated in the world. The language of Iran, Fārsi ‘Persian’, is properly a member of the Indo-European group of languages descended through Middle Persian (Pahlavi) from Old Persian and Avestan, cognate with Vedic Sanskrit, yet it is now written in a form of the

Semitic, Arabic script. Moreover, since the Islamic conquest of Iran in the 7th century CE, Persian has increasingly acquired an additional element of Arabic vocabulary, especially for philosophical, religious and technical terms, much as Latin and Greek provide this lexical range in English. Iran, however, is also the birthplace and ancient homeland of Zoroastrianism, for which it was long the state religion and which profoundly influenced the thought and practice of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Today in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Zoroastrianism is practised by only a small minority community: the Iranian prophet Zoroaster is not considered by Islam as belonging to the line of divine revelation, and Zoroastrians are not considered *ahl al-kitāb*, ‘people of the book’ who are in receipt of divine revelation. There was a migration of Iranian Zoroastrians to India in the century after the Islamic conquest, and the modern community, of less than 80,000 today, is now known as the Parsis, ‘Persians’. Parsi Zoroastrians are thus doubly anomalous, having at the same time a claim to Iranian and Indian identity, but being neither Muslim nor Hindu. In South Asia they constitute a diaspora as migrants from Iran many centuries ago, and are now doubly diasporic as many of them have migrated again from South Asia to cities in the West (see Hinnells, Williams 2007). The Parsis are the sub-continent’s smallest religious minority, yet they have been among the most influential in the past 200 years. The locations of other essays in this volume are all within areas known as South and South East Asia. This paper is about the transition and transmission of a community from the far western boundary of this definition of ‘Asia’ into the South Asian milieu. The case of the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* is relevant to the general theme of this volume in that the literary reconstruction of place it describes is a reconstruction of the Iranian identity in a new, South Asian context.

Synopsis of the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān*

The *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* is little known outside the Parsi community and beyond a small coterie of scholars of Iranology. There is no published critical edition and no authoritative, literal English translation.¹ In 1599 a Zoroastrian priest of Navsari in Gujarat, Bahman Kay Kobād, composed an epic poem, drawn from oral tradition of an old vintage, about the migration of a company of Zoroastrians from Iran to India some eight centuries before. No dates are given in Bahman’s text, except that of his composition. Phrases such as ‘They stayed in Kuhestān a hundred years ...’ and ‘When fifteen years had passed ...’ allow the approximate calculation that the

¹ I have rectified this situation with the publication of the text of the earliest extant manuscript, analysis, and blank verse translation: all verse references are to my text and translation (Williams, forthcoming 2009).

Zoroastrians 'arrived' in India in the latter part of the 8th century CE—'arrived' because it is known from historical records that the Sasanian regime of Iran (224–651 CE), traded extensively with ports along the coast of western India. The *Qeşşe-ye Sanjān* tells the story of not just a sea-journey to India, but of the relocation of a community which became exiled from the land of its origins after the defeat and downfall of the Sasanian Empire after the Muslim invasion. It is a picturesque account, told in rhyming couplets, in which a great expanse of time is reviewed, starting from the ancient days of their prophet Zoroaster (whom scholars date to the second millennium BCE), down to the author's own time. The majority of the story focuses on two major narratives:

- the journey to, and first settlement in, Sanjan, India in the 8/9th century CE, and
- the battles fought alongside a Hindu ruler against a Muslim invader who attacked Sanjan in the late 15th century CE.

These two main narratives, which are separated by a linking sub-narrative, are framed by two further principal narratives, namely

- the recounting of the history of the Zoroastrians down to the Muslim invasion, and
- the description of the survival and prospering of the community after the invasion of Sanjan. In addition, the whole of this story is enclosed with an introductory and closing doxology in the voice of the author.

The sequence is thus

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|---------|--|
| A §§1–3 | Opening doxology |
| B §1 | Narrative down to Muslim invasion (past history of Iran) |
| §2 | Narrative of journey from Iran to India (past crisis/transition) |
| §3 | Narrative of the arrival of community and establishment of the fire in Sanjan (past history of settlement) |
| C §1 | linking sub-narrative of the dispersal, settlement and prosperity for 700 years (recent history of India) |
| §2–3 | Narrative of two battles against Muslims (recent crisis/transition) |
| D §1–3 | Narrative of progress of community and fire (recent settlement) |
| E §1–3 | Closing doxology |

In Figure 1 the narrative sequence is expanded again in order to serve as a synopsis of the action of the *Qeşşe-ye Sanjān* for the present reader. Here we see that the journey of emigration does not begin until verse 98, after the recitation of the historical narrative of the millennium of Zoroaster (64–97). Zoroaster himself predicts three catastrophes of oppression that will overrun Iran and the faith in the

course of his millennium. These are the conquest of Achaemenian Iran by Alexander the Macedonian² and the burning of Persepolis (330 BCE); second, the ruin of the faith by the Evil Spirit (possibly Mani, the founder of Manichaeism is meant); and, thirdly, the invasion of the Muslims.

In the wake of the Arab invasion of Iran and the imposition of Islam, the community of Zoroastrians is said to have taken refuge in the mountains of Iran, 'Kuhestan'. The journey, from the mountain fastness of Iran to the mainland of Gujarat, is described in a mere 38 verses in total (98–135) and is said to take 134 years, with 100 years in the mountains, 15 years on the southern coast of Iran and 19 years on an island (Diu) off the coast of Gujarat.

The passage best remembered by the Parsis today is the next 87 verses which recount the landing, negotiation and settlement with the local Hindu ruler (136–223) at Sanjān. After a 19 verse linking narrative (224–42), section C is concerned with two battles which are recounted in vivid detail, in the longest passage of the text in 110 verses (243–352). The battles are said to be between a general of the Muslim ruler Mahmud Shah and a local Hindu ruler, who remains unnamed in the poem. This Sultan Mahmud may be identified as Sultan Mahmud Shah I, known as *Begadha* 'two forts', of Gujarat (ruled 1459–1511).³ It is likely that these battles never actually took place as described in the *Qeşşe-ye Sanjān* and that they serve as an opportunity for the author of the text to engage in lurid accounts of war in which the Zoroastrian warriors save the day for the Hindu prince, and exact a sweet, cold revenge, for justice's sake, on Islam, many centuries after they had been defeated in the Iranian homeland by the Arab invaders. The hero of the battle is the Zoroastrian warrior Ardashir (a famous name, since Ardashir I was the first of the Sasanian kings who ruled 224–240 CE), who not only wins the first battle in spite of being grossly outnumbered, but then also defeats an unnamed Muslim champion in a one-to-one combat of heroes, described in a passage which is strikingly reminiscent of the mortal combats enacted in the great Iranian national epic, *Shāhnāma* 'Book of Kings' of Ferdowsi. Having slain the Muslim warrior, Ardashir is then cruelly cut down in a surprise ambush attack launched by the furious Muslim general.

By this point (verse 353) the action of the text is over and the remaining section (D in the synopsis) is a period of reconstruction and growing prosperity as the community establishes itself and time moves through the recent past of the author. The text ends with a closing doxology of prayers for blessings upon the author.

² For obvious reasons, he is known as *iskandar i gizistag* 'Alexander the Accursed' in the Zoroastrian tradition, not 'Alexander the Great'.

³ I am indebted to Professor John McLeod of the University of Louisville, Kentucky, who has shed much light in correspondence on the quasi-historical references of the *Qeşşe-ye Sanjān*.

Figure 1. Synoptic Chart of Narrative Structure

Time ↓	A Opening doxology	B Journey to India	C Dispersion, Victory and Defeat in India	D The Journey of the Irān Shāh	E Closing Do- xology
1 <i>Bundahišn</i> Prototype Creation Past ↓	1-10 [<i>In praise of God</i>]	64-97 [<i>History</i>] a. Zoroaster; Gushāsp [77-89] Alexander [80-83] b. Ardā Virāf; Ardashir [84-86] Evil Spirit [87-88] c. Ādurbād, Shapur [89-92] Muslims invade [92-97] End of Zoroaster's Millennium	224-242 [<i>Dispersion & Prosperity in Gujarat</i>] a. 300 yrs dispersion in India [224-230] b. 200 yrs settlement [231-239b] c. 200 years = total 700 yrs [240-242]	353-366 [<i>Dispersion of the Persians</i>] a. to Bahārut for 12 yrs [353-356] b. depart [356] c. settle with Irān Shāh fire in Bānsdah 14 yrs [357-366]	403-405 [<i>In praise of God</i>]
2 <i>Gumēzīšn</i> Mixture of good and evil Present ↓	11-21 [<i>Humanity</i>] Nature of humanity and relati- onship with God	98-135 [<i>Removal</i>] a. to Kuhestān (100 years) and to Hoormuz (15 years) [98-109] b. to Diu (19 years) [110-116] c. to mainland India via storm [117-136]	243-311 [<i>1st Battle Against Islam</i>] a. threat of attack; recruitment of Persians to Hindu army [243- 269] b. 1 st Hindus routed in 1 st pitched battle [270-283] c. Ardashir rallies Persians to 1 st victory [284-311]	367-392 [<i>Removal of Fire</i>] a. Layman Changā Asa on pilgrimage in Bāns- dah [367-381] b. returns to Navsāri 382 c. proposes move of Irān Shāh to Navsāri [383-392]	406-414 [<i>Blessings</i>] on the author's teacher and ancestors
3 <i>Wizārīšn</i> Resolution [Future]	22-63 [<i>Blessings</i>] forgiveness for the soul of the aut- hor	137-223 [<i>Arrival of the Zoroastrians in India & Establishing of the Irān Shāh</i>] a. encounter of the <i>dastur</i> & the rajah [136-147] b. conditions & settlement [148-193] c. Establishment of the Irān Shāh at Sanjān [194-223]	312-352 [<i>2nd Battle Against Islam</i>] a. Ardashir slays the Muslim champion [312-335] b. Ulugh Khan orders slaying of Ardashir in surprise attack [336-349] c. Hindu rajah & Persian forces perish [350-352]	393-402 [<i>Arrival of Irān Shāh</i>] Removal of the Irān Shāh to Navsāri, and its esta- blishment and care	415-432 [<i>Blessings</i>] for the author and closing of the QS

‘Iran’ as a religious cultural location

The name Iran is derived from Middle Persian *Ērān* and is first attested in this form in the titles of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashir I, where he is referred to in a rock relief as *ardašir šāhān šāh ērān* ‘Ardashir King of Kings of Iran’. *Ērān* is related to the Old Iranian word *arya-* (Old Persian *ariya*, Avestan *airiia-* etc.) ‘Aryan’. This term has been described as properly denoting

the self designation of the peoples of Ancient India and Ancient Iran who spoke Aryan languages, in contrast to the ‘non-Aryan’ people of those ‘Aryan’ countries’ ... basically a linguistic concept, denoting the closely related Indo-Aryan and Iranian languages ..., which together form the Indo-Iranian or Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family ... (Schmitt 1992).

The Sasanian dynasty of Iran was the first to use the term *Ērānšahr* to mean ‘the land of Iran’ as a geographical collective name for the countries ruled by a Persian monarch. The word *Ērān* on its own, as distinct from its use in combinations, is a term primarily reserved for the phrase *šāh ī ērān*, ‘king of Iran’ (Mackenzie 1992). It came to have great significance for Zoroastrian cosmology and eschatology in the Avesta, as far as we can tell from the *Zand* (exegetical) texts that survive in Middle Persian, in the concept of *Ērānwēz* ‘the Iranian Expanse’. *Ērānwēz* has a central position in the most important surviving account of the Zoroastrian myth of creation, the ninth century CE Pahlavi *Bundahišn*. In this text, Ohrmazd (Avestan *Ahura Mazdā*, ‘Wise Lord’) exists on high in endless light for eternity. In his omniscience he is also aware of another force, which is the Evil Spirit, in an abyss of endless darkness. In order to annihilate this opponent, Ohrmazd created limited time:

ohrmazd pad harwisp āgāhih dānist ku gannāg mēnōg ast če handāzed ud gīred pad areshk kāmāgīh-iz andar gumēzēd, če fragān, če frazām, pad če ud čand abzārān u-š menōgīhā ān dām ī pad ān abzār andar abāyed frāz brēhēnīd. se hazār sāl dām pad mēnōgīh estād

Ohrmazd by His omniscience knew that the Evil Spirit existed, what he plotted in his enviousness to do, how he would commingle, what the beginning, what the end; what and how many the tools (with which He would make an end) and He created in the spirit state the creatures He would need as those tools. For 3,000 years creation remained in the spirit state.⁴

The Evil Spirit ‘mis-created’ his own evil spirit creation but was rendered unconscious for 3,000 years by Ohrmazd’s recitation of a sacred prayer. In this period Ohrmazd created the material (*gētīg*) world in the form of seven principal and unique creations: first, the Sky,⁵ made of shining metal, joined to the Endless Light of the spiritual world; then, within this Sky ‘like a castle or a fort’, he created the rest of the

⁴ *Greater Bundahišn* I.13–14 in Boyce 1984, 46 (with my adjustments).

⁵ The creations are capitalized to signify their prototype nature.

gētīg world: Water, with wind and rain; Earth, without hill or dale, 'set exactly in the middle of the Sky' beneath which 'is water everywhere'; fourth, he created the Plant, in the middle of the Earth; fifth, he created the Uniquely Created Bull in *Ērānwēz*, in the middle of the world, on the bank of the *Veh Daiti* (river) ... sixth, he created Gayōmard ('mortal life', Man), bright as the sun ... on the bank of the river Daiti where is the middle of the world—Gayōmard on the left side, the Bull upon the right side. The Evil Spirit Ahriman attacks and pollutes the Earth and Water, withers the Plant, and poisons the Animal and Man, but they are all revived in a new creation by Ohrmazd of the world in fecund multiplicity. This takes place in *Ērānwēz* in the centre of the universe; man's central role here is to maintain the purity of the *gētīg* world through his good thought, word and action, and through worship of Ohrmazd and opposition to the destructive forces of evil until the end of time. Again, at the end of time, it will be in *Ērānwēz* that Ohrmazd will call an assembly of all the good spiritual beings (*yazads*) and righteous humankind.

In many other ways, Iran is a central motif in the Zoroastrian religion. Zoroastrianism, as far as we know, has never proselytized nor sent missions to other countries to convert others. Its rigorous purity codes draw boundaries which exclude non-Zoroastrians from its practices and the precincts of its temples.⁶ Its apocalyptic texts speak of invaders as a kind of pollution; the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* has Ohrmazd saying to his prophet Zoroaster:

dayšag ī hazārag ī tō sar bawēd kū hān ī nidom āwām rasēd. ēk-sad ēwēnag, ud hazār ēwēnag ud bēwar ēwēnag dēwān ī wizārd-wars ī χēšm-tōhmag az kustag ī χwarāsān, hān ī nidom-tōhmag, ō ērānšahr dwarēnd. ul-grift-drafs hēnd, syā zēn barēnd ud wars wizārd ō pušt dārēnd ud χwurdag ud nidom-bunīg ud nērōg-kār-zanišn ud pešyār-wiš hēnd

The sign of the end of your millennium will be that the least of periods will arrive. One hundred kinds, one thousand kinds, a myriad kinds of parted hair devils of the seed of *Xēšm* (the demon 'Wrath'), those of very mean stock will creep into *Ērānshahr* from the side of *Xwarāsān*. They will have raised banners, will wear black armour and have the hair parted to the back, and will be small and of the lowest stock and of mighty blows and will piss venom ...⁷

Even more dramatically the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* predicts the destruction of Iran at the end of the millennium of Zoroaster,

*hamāg ērān dehān pad asp sumb ī awēšān be kanīhēd, awēšān drafs andar ō padišχwargar rasēd, ud gāh ud dēn pad *stahm-padiχšāyih az anōh bē barēnd ...*

... all the *Ērānian* lands will be razed by the hooves of their horses and their banners will arrive into *Padišχwārgar*. By oppressive rule they will remove throne and religion from there ...⁸

⁶ See further Williams 1989.

⁷ *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 4.2–9, in Cereti 1995, text 136 / tr. 153, with changes to the transcription.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.9, text 140 / tr. 159.

Turning back to the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* we can now better appreciate the disaster of loss of the Iranian homeland and throne and the challenge of relocation to a new, strange land. This is the central crisis of the text, which we discuss below, namely the shattering of Iran by the Muslim invaders, also called *divān-(e dorvand)* ‘(wicked) demons’, >Pahlavi *dēwān (ī druwand)*.

The *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* is not, however, a text of gloomy nostalgia or menacing apocalyptic. The author begins in the sublime place of stillness announcing that he will sing of God’s delights—his soul exhilarates in thanking him—and he addresses him as ‘Eternal King of all the world’ (*ke u bar ‘ālam āmad jāvedān shāh*). The 63 lines of the opening doxology flow with an easy mixture of Persian Zoroastrian and Arabic Muslim terms of devotion. God is addressed in the formal 3rd person terms of Qur’anic sovereignty and transcendence as well as in the 2nd person intimate language of Sufi and Zoroastrian piety:

*chonān bar lawḥ-e naqshat ‘ālam oftād
ke bar ṣan’atgari jān mitavān dād
be jān-e ‘āsheqān tu gham nehādi
be ghamshān dāde-’i ārām o shādi
tu basti bar ‘adam naqsh-e du ‘ālam
tu kardī bar malak sardār ādam
mosallam bar tu mi zibad khodā’i
kherad bar tu hami dāde govāhi
tu rā hargah ke guyam shokr-e bi hadd
zabānam zin sokhan har lahze zibad
maḥabbat dar geluyam rismān bast
ke har jā mi keshad puyam bedin shast*

The world accords so with Your graven tablet
the soul would die to have Your artistry.
You have put sadness in the souls of lovers
You’ve given to their sadness peace and joy.
You fastened both worlds’ form to non-existence:
You made mankind superior to the angels.
The fullest lordship is adorning You:
and wisdom testifies to You alone.
And when I give You words of boundless thanks,
they beautify my tongue at every moment.
For Love has tied a cord around my neck,
wherever He should drag me by this snare.⁹

These lines are evocative of Rumi’s *Maṣnavi*:

*asb-e jānhā-rā konad ‘āri ze zin
serr-e an-nawm akhw al-mawt ast in*

⁹ *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* 19–24. All translations of this text are by the present author (Williams forthcoming 2009).

*lik bahr-e ānke ruz āyand bāz
bar nehad bar pāyashān band-e darāz
tā ke ruzash vā kashad zān margh zār
vaz cherāgāh āradash dar zir-e bār*

He strips the saddle from the souls' own steeds,
this is the secret of 'Sleep is death's brother'.
But so they will come back again by day,
He ties a lengthy tether to their legs.
To bring them from that meadow in the day
and from the pasture bring them back to burden. (I.403–5)¹⁰

The echo of Rumi is striking as Bahman, the author of the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān*, drops the tone of pious panegyric to get down to the serious purpose of the present text:

*konun beshnow shegefti dāstānhā
Now listen to the tales of wondrous things (64)*

I say 'echo of Rumi' as since the opening line of his great *Masnavi*, *beshnow in nay chun shekāyat mi konad* ... 'Listen to the reed as it is grieving', no poet, however minor, writing in Persian could ever after use the word *beshnow* in an opening line without such an echo. In the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān*, Bahman attributes what he has to say not to himself, but to the priests and sages, and his own wise *dastur* ('master'),

*ze goft-e bāstān in dāstān goft
nehāni rāzhā-ye rāstān goft
be yak ruz u be mā in qeṣṣe gofte
be niku'i dor-e akhbār softe
hamān dastur in qeṣṣe be man guft
verā niki hamishā bād hamjoft
ze goftārash hekāyat bāz guyam
ze kār-e mard-e behdīn rāz guyam*

He told this tale just as the ancients told it,
he spoke the hidden mysteries of the righteous.
One day he told this story to us and
strung beautifully the pearls of past events.
For that *dastur* who told this tale to me
May goodness be his ever-present friend.
I shall recount the story in his words,
I'll tell the secret deeds of Zoroastrians. (73–6.)

This narrator in turn hands over to the Prophet Zoroaster himself, thus:

*dar ayyāmi ke shah gush tāsp bude
āshu zartosht rāh-e din nomude
be vestā dar begofte hāl hā rā
setamgar shah padid āyad shomā rā*

¹⁰ Este'lami 2000–2001; trans. Williams 2006, 42.

*se bāre din-e beh bāshad shekaste
 kazu behdin shavad tārāj o khaste
 hamān shah rā setamgar nām bāshad
 azu din-e behi bi kām bāshad
 ze kār-e din konun guyam khabardār
 chonān shod bāz behdin zār o bizār*

Back in the days when King Gushtasp was ruling
 Holy Zartusht showed us religion's way.
 He'd told of things to come in the *Avesta*
 "Oppressive kings will show themselves to you,
 Three times the Good Religion will be broken,
 each time the faithful will be crushed and wounded
 The name of those three kings will be Oppressor:
 and hence the noble faith become despairing".
 I speak now of Religion's Fate, so listen,
 how once again our noble faith was weakened. (77–81)

The narrative of the retrospective prediction, whereby it is *as if* the ancient prophet is foretelling the events to come, yet which is said with the knowledge of hindsight, is an important literary technique of the authorial voice in this genre. The passage ends with a devastating prediction which is at the same time a terrible memory, evocative of the text of the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* cited above:

*sar āmad ruz-e zartusht az zamāne
 najoste kas ze behdini neshāne
 chu az zartusht sāl āmad hazāre
 ze din-e beh hami āmad kenāre
 chu az shah yazdegar shāhi berafte
 ke joddin āmad o takhtash gerefte
 az ān moddat shekaste gashī irān
 darigh ān molk-e din oftād virān*

In time the days of Zartusht passed away:
 no one could even trace the Noble Faith.
 When the millennium year of Zartusht came,
 the limit of the Noble Faith came too.
 When kingship went from Yazdegar the king,
 the infidels arrived and took his throne.
 From that time forth Iran was smashed to pieces.
 Alas! That land of faith now gone to ruin! (94–97)

At this point in the text the flight from home begins:

*bedāngāhi shode har kas parākand
 har ānku dāsht del bar zand o pāzand
 chu behdinān o dasturān sarāsar
 ze kār-e din nehān gashtand yaksar
 maqām o jāy o bāgh o kākḥ o ayvān
 hame bogzāshand az bahr-e dinshān*

At that time all who kept their hearts in faith
 with Zand and Pāzand, spread in all directions,
 When every single layman and *dastur*
 went into hiding for Religion's sake,
 Left homes, lands, gardens, villas, palaces
 they left all for the sake of their Religion. (98–100)

For them the future is another country.

We observe that the migration away from their homeland is not achieved in one movement, but rather in four stages, from their homes to the mountains for 100 years, from the mountains to Hormuz¹¹ for 15 years, from Hormuz to Diu for 19 years, and from Diu to Sanjān. As the text complains, so long as they are in Iran, even hiding in the mountains or at the coast they live in fear of the *joddin*, which is the Zoroastrian equivalent to the disparaging Arabic term *kāfir* 'infidel'. The leaving of Iran from Hormuz is most bitter, for their home has become a trap:

hamu dar zījhā-ye kohne dide
ke bar mā ābkhur ākher raside
agar in bum bogzārim shāyad
konun zin molk bīrun raftē bāyad
va gar na mā hame oftīm dar dām
kherad bātel shavad kāri bovad khām
pas ān behtar ke az divān-e dorvand
bebāyad raft mā rā bar sar-e hend

He looked in his old tables of the heavens,
 And said, "At last our life is finished here.
 If we should leave this land it is correct.
 Now we must make our exit from this kingdom,
 Or else we all shall fall into a trap.
 To reason is in vain, a foolish thing.
 So it is better we should go away
 to Hind and leave behind the wicked devils". (108–110)

On the last stage of their journey, they set sail from Diu to Gujarat and they encounter a storm in an episode which is pivotal in the fate of the exiled Persians. Nature's *rite de passage* brings them to promise to consecrate a sacred fire of the highest purity, dedicated to the god of victory, Bahrām/Vərəθrāγna. As it is central to our theme of relocation, I translate the entire passage:

¹¹ Hormuz was a town, in the province of Mogostan of the kingdom of Kirman, on the coast of Iran at the far west of the Persian Gulf until c. 1300 CE when, after repeated attacks by marauding raiders, it was moved to an island in the Strait of Hormuz between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. The new port prospered as a centre of trade with India and China. Hence the *Qeşse-ye Sanjān* may have known Hormuz as an island, though it refers to it as *shahr-e hormuz* 'city of Hormuz'—the island of Diu, is not referred to as an island. On Hormuz see historical essays at <http://www.datax-info.com/hormuz/essays/list.htm> (19-10-2008).

be zij andar bedide pir dastur
 hamāngah goft kay yārān-e por nur
 az injā raft bāyad jā-ye digar
 ke dar ānjā bovad ārām-e yaksar
 ze goftārash hame kas shād gashtand
 suye gujrāt kashti tiz rāndand
chu kashti rah be daryā dar keshide
 az ānjā āfat-e tufān raside
 hama dastur-e din hayrān bemāndand
 dar ān varṭe chu sargardān bemāndand
 be dargah-e khodā rokh zār sudand
 be pā istāde zārihā nomudand
 ke ay dānā tu yāri ras dar in kār
 azin sakhti rahān mā rā be yak bār
 be yāri ras tu ay bahrām-e firuz
 azin moshkel marā gardān tu behruz
 be lof-e tu gham az .tufān nadārim
 harāsi dar del o jān mi nayārim
 tu khwod faryād ras bichāragān rā
 nomā'i rāh tu gom kardagān rā
 azin gharqāb gar yābam rahā'i
 na hargez pish āyad zin balā'i
 azin daryā agar dar keshvar-e hend
 rasim ānjā be del shādān khorsand
 foruzim ātash-e bahrām-e pānā
 azin sakhti rahān o kon tavānā
 paziroftim māyān in ze karkar
 ke joz vay mā nadārim ich digar
 ze yumn-e ātash-e bahrām-e firuz
 az-ān sakhti hame gashtand behruz
 hamān sā'at qabul uftād zāri
khodā dar kār-e ishān dād yāri
khonak bādi vazide bā khorre nur
 hamān bād-e mokhālef shod az ān dur
chu kashtibān be nām-e pāk dādār
 zabān bogshād o zauraq rānd yakkār
 135 hame dastur o behdin kard kusti
 hamāngah rānd andar baḥr kashti
chonin ḥokm-e qazā shod ham az ān pas
 suye sanjān rasidand ān hame kas

The old *dastur* consulted his star tables
 and said at once: "Companions, full of light,
 We must depart here for another place,
 together in that place there will be peace".
 They all rejoiced to hear what he had said,
 full speed they sailed their boat to Gujarāt.
 But once the boat made headway on the sea
 there came a most ferocious hurricane

The *dasturs* of the faith were all distraught,
 as they were cast adrift upon that whirlpool.
 They rubbed their faces, crying in God's presence,
 they stood up straight and let their cries come out.
 "Wise Lord, come to our rescue in this plight,
 save us from this calamity at once!
 Will You deliver us, victorious Bahrām!
 make things auspicious for us in this plight!
 By your grace we'll not suffer from the storm
 there'll be no dread within our hearts or souls.
 Will You defend the helpless ones Yourself?
 Reveal the way to us who've lost our way!
 If we should find salvation from this whirlpool,
 and no disaster falls on us again,
 If from this sea we reach the land of Hind—
 and are contented there with happy hearts,
 We'll light a Fire of Bahrām, our Protector,
 O save us from this plight and make us strong!
 We've undertaken this ourselves with God,
 apart from Him we have no other help".
 They were all blessed in their adversity
 by fortune of victorious Bahrām's Fire.
 The very moment when their cry was heard
 God gave them succour in their difficulties.
 A fair wind blew, there was a glorious light,
 that hostile wind then disappeared from there.
 The captain uttered "By the Holy Name
 of God", and straightaway he steered the vessel.
 The priests and laity all tied the *kusti*,
 the boat was then propelled upon the sea.
 And after that it was the will of Fate
 that every one of them arrived at Sanjān. (117–36)

The promise to Bahrām made by the Zoroastrians during the storm at sea is fulfilled in the course of time. This passage is significant as the beginning of the restoration of the sovereignty of the Zoroastrian community: once they have landed in India, the sacred fire which the Hindu ruler permits them to consecrate on his land is named *Shāh-e Irān* or *Irānshāh*, meaning King of Iran. This *Irān Shāh* fire still burns today and remains the oldest and most sacred Zoroastrian fire in the Subcontinent. What is articulately symbolised in the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān*, and even, as we shall see later, explicitly stated, is that the fire is the newly restored Iranian monarch of the Zoroastrians. It may be considered a virtual monarch only, but now, after the death of their last human king, Yazdegard III in 651, for the first time it is perpetual. More than being merely a replacement for the king, the *Irān Shāh* fire signifies the unification of the Iranian kingship and Zoroastrian priesthood. The tradition of collaboration of

king and priest had been derived from the model of Zoroaster and his patron King Gushtāsp (Avestan Wīštāspa). The *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* mentions them together at v. 77 and then pairs the founding Sasanian King Ardashir with his high priest Ardā Virāz, and the later Sasanian King Shāpur with Ādurbād. Upon arrival in India, the Zoroastrians are led not by a prince or prime minister, nor by a warrior hero, but by a priest, and it is he, the *dastur*, who negotiates asylum and a home for his people and their religion with the local ruler, a ‘goodly rajah’, one Jādi Rāna (136–223). Thus the first action on the Subcontinent is to seal an alliance of religion and royalty—albeit temporarily in the viceregency of a Hindu monarch. Popular elaboration of the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* in Parsi tradition envisions the encounter of the two figures on a beach with their respective entourages, though the text itself is restricted to an exchange of gifts and negotiation of terms by the *dastur* and the rajah. The scene is written in spare terms which acutely describe a political *rite de passage* for the immigrants. The rajah displays alarm and due caution when confronted by these strangely dressed foreigners speaking in their alien tongue:

*vali chun did ishān rā rāy zāde
yakāyak dar delash bim oftāde
be del āmad nahibash az pay-ye tāj
ke boknand in velāyat rā be tārāj
az ān kesvat lebāsash rāy tarsid
nehāni rāz az dastur pursid*

But when the noble prince looked on these folk,
immediately his heart was gripped by fear.
His heart was struck by terror for his throne
imagining that they would sack his country.
The prince was frightened by their robes and vestments,
aside he asked the *dastur* of their mysteries.

The rajah demands to know the secrets of their religion and imposes a further four conditions, concerning religion, language, female dress, bearing arms, and procreation :

*begoft ākher ke ay dastur-e dindār
begu mā rā tu avval serr-e in kār
ke rasm-e dinatān ākher che bāshad
nehāni che bovad zāher che bāshad
man avval binam az dīn-e shomāyān
azān pas jāyatān sāzim māyān
degar ānke zabān-e molk-e khwod rā
gozārandash ke tā yāband mavā
155 zabān-e shahr-e irān dur dārand
zabān-e molk-e hendi rā berānand
sedigar ānk’ ze pusheshhā zanānhā
bepushad pusheshh-e hamchun zanān mā*

*chahārom ānke in ālāt o shamshir
 goshāyand o na bandand ich jā gir
 be panjom chunke kār-e khayr-e farzand
 kunand ān shāmgah-e kābin bebandand
 garin qowl-e shomā avval bovad rāst
 be shahr-e man shomā rā jāy o mā'vāst*

He said: “*dastur*, upholder of your faith,
 first tell me of the secrets of these matters.
 Tell me what are the customs of your faith,
 what are the inner things, what are the outer?
 First I shall see the features of your faith
 and later we shall grant a place for you.
 And next, they must renounce the language
 of their own native land to gain asylum.
 They shall give up the language of Iran
 and speak the language of the land of Hind.
 Third, as to mode of dress, your womenfolk
 shall wear such garments as our women wear.
 And fourth, they shall lay down these swords and weapons,
 and never more shall take them up again.
 The fifth, when they perform the noble act
 of children, on that night they should be married.¹²
 If from the first your word is true to this,
 you'll have a place and refuge in my land”. (151–9)

This elicits a long response by the *dastur*, in which he describes the principles of the Zoroastrian religion in a way which emphasises features that would extol the religion to the rajah by its very similarity to Hinduism. He mentions reverence of the sun, moon, cow, water, fire, sacred thread, recitation of prayers ‘by heart’, and a creator god. Above all, he goes to great lengths (9 out of 14 verses on religion) to explain the rules by which women must abide in dealing with their menstrual pollution. I have written about this anomaly elsewhere, concluding that women’s purity rules are mentioned as they are an index of the community’s general self-containment, harmlessness, and law-abiding character (Williams 1999).

The story continues with the rajah granting refuge and a place to reside to the asylum seekers. Allowing a decent time to elapse, the *dastur* comes back to the rajah to ask for permission to build a fire temple. He is not shy in asking for what is needed:

*bedu dastur guft ay rāy zāde
 dar in keshvar tu mā rā jāy dāde
 kunun khwāhim kandar keshvar-e hend
 neshānim ātash-e bahrām yakchand*

¹² This line is obscure in Persian, and the present translation is a reconstruction: its significance is that it prescribes that sexual activity should not pre-marital, but contained within marriage.

*tohi kardan zamin bāyad se farsang
 ke bāshad rāst ānjā kār-e nirang
 dar ānjā mard-e bigāne nabāyad
 bejuz behdin-e farzāne nashāyad
 dar ānjā'i yaki joddin nabāyad
 vazān pas kār-e ātash rāst āyad
 kunad dar vay kasi āvāz bi shakk
 khalal oftad be kār-e din yakāyak*

The *dastur* said to him: “O noble prince,
 you’ve given us a place in this domain.
 Now we would wish that in this land of Hind
 somehow we may set up the Fire of Bahrām
 We need to clear the land three leagues around
 so it is proper for the rite of *Nirang*.
 No strangers can be tolerated there:
 it’s only for the blest ones of our faith.
 There must not be a single *joddin* there,
 and then the ritual for the fire will work.
 If someone makes a noise, no doubt that instant
 the ritual will be rendered null and void”. (195–200)

The rajah (who has previously himself been called ‘auspicious king’—*shāh-e niku bakht*) is not only willing, he is eager that they should enthrone the fire, and as if to emphasise the significance again, he acknowledges the fire as a king:

*shodam bā jān dar in kār ekhtiyāram
 chonin shāhi bovad dar ruzgāram
 azin behtar che bāshad ay kheradmand
 be kār-e u halā zudi kamar band*

“It was my choice with all my soul for this
 that in my life there should be such a king.
 What could be better than this thing, O wise one?
 Now, quickly, gird yourself to do this work”. (202–3)

Days and months of preparation and consecration then followed, and the ritual means to constitute the fire (which would have included embers from a fire of the same highest purity in Iran) are said to have been brought from Khorasan. Now, at the very centre of the *Qeşse-ye Sanjān*, the text declares triumphantly:

*be rasm-e din hame pirān o dastur
 shah-e irān neshānde nur por nur*

The priests and elders followed their tradition
 enthroned the King of Iran, light on light. (220)

The relocation of the throne has been achieved by the absorption of royalty into religion. Ohrmazd, God, had been described at the opening of the *Qeşse-ye Sanjān* (9–10).

tu'i soltān o molkat bizavāl ast
tu hasti bar khodāvandān khodāvand
 You are the King, your rule is never ceasing.
 You are the Sovereign Lord of sovereign lords

He is *shāh-e niku kār* the virtuous Majesty, who bestows kingship. There is no mention in the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* of the old Iranian notion of *χvarənah*, a neuter Avestan noun surviving as Persian *farr*, which signifies a kind of divine grace bestowed upon kings and heroes.¹³ However, it is significant that the text states that at the end of Zoroaster's millennium 'kingship went from Yazdegar the king' (*az shah yazdegar shāhi berafte*) and from 'that land of faith now gone to ruin' (*ān molk-e din oftād virān*). Henceforth, this kingship (by which *farr/χvarənah* may perhaps be understood) will not it seems, return to a human being, and at that time the faithful are said to have scattered for religion's sake (*ze kār-e din, az bahr-e din*) (96–100).

After the members of the community arrived in their new home, the text now speaks of the happy dispersal of the Zoroastrians 'in the land of Hind' (*dar keshvar-e hend*) and their peaceful dwelling there. It is said that 700 years passed, still with the presence of their *shāh-e Irān* among them, until:

yakāyak bar delash āmad jahān tang
zamāne bahr-e jānash kard āhang
 The world became distressing to their heart:
 and heaven's Fate resounded on their soul.

Fate (*zamāne*) was to bring upon them an opportunity to pay back the generosity of the Hindu rajah and also to get some justice against Islam. The sections which follow, §§C2 and 3, are nowadays less well known than the rest of the text, telling of two ferocious battles. Their significance is possibly somewhat lost on a modern audience, yet they are, I would argue, of symbolically central importance to the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* for several reasons. First, the battles that follow have a symbolic significance as the third of three rites of passage into India, the first two having been the rite of the natural elements of the storm at sea and the political negotiations of entry and settlement in the rajah's territory. The third rite requires the forging and transformation of their Iranian warrior prowess into an Indian-Persian identity. Just as this was most costly, in terms of human life lost on the battlefield, as Zoroastrian blood is mixed with the soil of India, so also was it most recent, taking place some two 2 centuries before Bahman's composition. The second main significance of the episode of the two battles against the forces of Sultan Mahmud, as I would argue, is that they symbolically replicate

¹³ And above all the prophet Zoroaster and his future forebear, the Saošyant, 'saviour' of the eschatological scheme—on *χvarənah* see further Boyce 1975, 66 ff.

the 7th century invasion of Arab Muslim armies and the two most famous battles, Qādisiyyah (636) and Nihāvand (642). Back then, according to Muslim sources, the Arabs had been victorious despite being outnumbered four to one and five to one by the Sasanian army. In the present account of the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān*, the Hindu rajah is told that an attacking force of 30,000 cavalry surrounds him. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, to the skeptical modern reader, the rajah's first action, after waking up from a faint at hearing the news, is to summon the Zoroastrian priests to call the Persians to arms to be in the vanguard of the battle—this in spite of the fourth condition of not bearing arms which Jādi Rana had imposed upon their forebears (v. 157, see above). The text tells that they mustered a band of 1,400 Zoroastrian warriors on the Hindu side against the mighty forces of Mahmud's general Ulugh Khan, whose forces are described in lavish terms, reminiscent of Al-Tabari's description of the mighty Sasanian army at al-Qādisiyya complete with the most famous feature of that battle, which is said to have terrified the Arab forces, namely elephants (al-Tabarī 1992). The *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* says:

*azānjā chun ulugh khān bā savārān
 reh pushid o āmad suye maydān
 morāṣṣ'a zin bar asbān nehādand
 alam bar posht-e filān bar nehādand
 ze bahr-e jang zin kardand asbān
 amin-e jang tang āmad ze pilān*

Then Ulugh Khan and all his cavalry
 put on their mail coats and approached the plain,
 They put bejewelled saddles on the horses:
 unfurled their banners on the elephants.
 They saddled up the horses for the battle:
 the field was shaken by the elephants. (271–3)

According to the Zoroastrian account, the Hindu forces are all wiped out early on in the first encounter: only the Zoroastrian warriors are left on the Hindu side, led by their foremost champion, Ardashir. Up to this point in the violent battle, there has been no mention of blood; the Zoroastrian warriors vow as they advance,

*konun hengām-e jangast ay 'azizān
 bebāyad raft dar ṣaff hamchu sherān
 agar mā jomle bā jomle bekhizim
 be tigh o tir ze a'dā khun berizim*

Now is the time for battle, o dear friends.
 We must advance like lions to the front.
 If we assault them in a mass together
 we'll spill the enemy's blood with sharpened swords.

The battle, lasting 3 days and nights (305), is literally a blood-bath in which Muslim and Zoroastrian blood flows freely and is mixed with the earth:

zamin o āsmān shod tire o tār
shode chun lāle khāk az khun-e sālār
ze tan gashte ravān khun chu favvāre
separ az tigh gashte pāre pāre...
zereh āfat shode bar jān-e mardom
ziyān har dam shode mehmān-e mardom
 300 *ze sar tā pā yalān gharqe dar āhan*
darakhshān bud chun khworshid-e rowshan
du jāneb kard paykānhā davā dow
be khāk-e tire khun karde ravā row
nomude nayzehā dar sine kāvosh
ze jowshānhā gerefte khun tarāvosh
na az zakhm-e yalān kas ruy gardānd
hame 'ālāt-e khunrize furu khwānd
zamin shod āhanin az na'l-e aspān
be har su gharqe khun tā sāq mardān

The land and sky turned deepest red and black,
 the earth was tulip-red with soldiers' blood,
 Blood spurting from their bodies like a fountain,
 the shields were smashed to pieces by the swords...

The armour was the bane of human souls;

the men made harm their guest at every moment.

The men were drowned in iron from head to foot;

till they were gleaming like the brilliant sun.

On every side the spears were flying by,
 and on the blackened earth the blood was flowing.

And there were spears protruding from their breasts,
 their blood was oozing out of chain mail armour.

None turned their faces from the warrior's blows
 all called for fresh supplies of deadly weapons.

**Earth turned to iron by the horseshoe nails,
 the men submerged in blood up to their shins. (297–304)**

I quote this passage at some length because it contains several important keys to understanding the significance of the episode. I suggest that in these battles there is a libation of blood to the earth of India which is both a chthonic and a cathartic rite: it is literally a blood bath, and even more poignantly it is also a scene which would resonate in the Zoroastrian imagination, considering the vivid ancient imagery of the old Iranian religious eschatology. As the historian of Zoroastrianism, Mary Boyce, has put it:

The tradition tells of a great battle in which the *yazatas*, strengthened by their own and by man's many minor victories, will meet the forces of evil in direct combat, with the

Bounteous Immortals¹⁴ pitted against the *daēvās* and demons, and will utterly defeat them ... (Zoroaster's) references to the last things are more clearly ... to the final great ordeal by which evil will be purged from the world. This the tradition describes as submersion in a river of molten metal, to be undergone by the whole physical world and by all humanity ... "Then Fire and Airyaman Yazad will melt the metal in the hills and mountains, and it will be upon this earth like a river. Then they will cause men to pass through that molten metal ... And for him who is righteous, it will seem as if he is walking through warm milk; and for him who is wicked it will seem as if he is walking in the flesh (*pad gētīg*) through molten metal" (Boyce 1975, 242, citing *Greater Bundahišn* XXXIV.18–19).

I do not go so far as to argue that the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* passage is consciously referring to the Zoroastrian eschatological narrative of the end of the world and the judgment of souls in the *Greater Bundahishn*; nor do I mean that the terms used to refer to the Muslim armies that invaded Iran in the 7th century CE were consciously borrowed from the apocalyptic narrative of the *Zand ī Wohuman Yasn* cited above. It is rather that all three texts are part of a long religious tradition which is expressed in mythological and theological narratives of warring opposites, of good against evil, which is most naturally expressed in imagery of invasion, battle, war, victory and defeat. At this point in the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān*, the triumphant end of the first battle is couched in terms far more mythologically resonant than would be the case if this were just a victory over a marauding invader,

dar ān maydān eslām uftāde
ke kushṭe shod be razm-e rāy zāde

Islam had fallen on that battlefield.
slain in the battle with the noble prince. (307)

This verse directly corresponds to verse 97:

az ān moddat shekaste gashṭ irān
dariḡh ān molk-e dīn oftād virān

From that time forth Iran was smashed to pieces.
Alas! That land of faith now gone to ruin!

The latter-day victory on Indian soil is not merely revenge against Islam, but some small token of justice obtained; it is represented in the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* as a swingeing victory against 'Islam', not merely against a marauding invader, which is won by the valour of the Zoroastrian warriors defending not just the Hindu rajah but the sovereignty of the sacred fire of Irān Shāh. Ardashir, the Persian hero of the battle against the Muslim Sultan Mahmud, goes on to win another personal victory the next day against a Muslim champion. It is not insignificant that Ardashir is 'girt with a Hindu sword and spear in hand' (*kamar bar tigh-e hendi nayze bar kaff*). His act of beheading the Muslim hero seals his own fate, as the Muslim forces are

¹⁴ Avestan *amāša spānta*.

commanded to annihilate him and the rest of their opponents in revenge. Once again blood flows:

*chu du ruye sepah āvikhte shod
ze tanha khun chu daryā rikhte shod
bar āmad mowj az daryā-ye khunin
ze mardom har taraf āmad zabunin
na jā mānad ke dar vay mur ganjad
vali bi ḥokm-e ḥaqq kas khwod che sanjad*

And as the armies struggled on both sides
blood swelled out of their bodies like a sea.
A wave came rushing from a bloody sea:
and men exuded gore from every side.
An ant could find no place upon that field,
but then, without God's law, what is a man? (340–2)

The phrase 'without God's law' (*bi ḥokm-e ḥaqq*) signals the lowest point in the text since the defeat of the Sasanians. It would appear from the usages in the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* that the terms *qazā*, *zamāne* and *bakht* refer to fate in the sense of 'blind fate', or morally neutral 'fortune', which is more or less synonymous in Zoroastrian thought with the process of bounded time of 12,000 years created by Ohrmazd as the battle ground on which good and evil struggle for supremacy. Three verses meditate on Fate:

*darighā ān sepaḥdār-e delāvar
ke bar bādash zamāne kard ākhar
chu bakht-e shum khashm ārad bedānjā
be sān-e mum gardad sakht-e khārā
agar chandi nabard o kusheshi kard
che sud ar **bakht** bar gashte az ān mard*

Alas for such a valiant commander
whom Fate had scattered to the winds at last!
When inauspicious Fate has turned to anger
the very hardest stone is turned to wax.
And even though he fought and struggled so,
to what avail if Fate had turned away? (347–9)

This episode, which began when Fate *zamāne* had earlier resounded on the souls of the Zoroastrians and the world had become distressing to their hearts (242), ends with Fate scattering their champion, Ardashir, to the winds (347) so that they must disperse again 'Those of the Noble Faith **were scattered** there' (353 *hamān behdin shode ākher parākand*). This dispersal harks back to the chaos following the Muslim invasion of Iran:

*bedāngāhi shode har kas **parākand**
har ānku dāshd del bar zand o pāzand
chu behdinān o dasturān sarāsar
ze kār-e din nehān gashtand yaksar*

And at that time all those who fixed their hearts
 upon the Zand and Pāzand scattered.
 When every single layman and dastur
 went into hiding for Religion's sake. (98–9)

In Iran they had taken to the mountains (*kuhestān*), and now they take to the *kuh*
 of Bahārūt in India. Unlike then, however, they have their king with them:

*dah o du sāl bar vay raft yaksar
 abā khwod bord irānshah barābar
 pas az moddat ke az ḥokm-e khodāvand
 be rāh āmad hame bā khwish o payvand*

A dozen years passed by upon this peak:
 the Irān Shāh was borne up there with them.
 A time went by, as was decreed by God,
 all found the way of kin and of tradition.

The holy Irān Shāh fire is their fortune, and the Zoroastrians are able to reconstitute
 themselves as a community. This happens in a passage of just a few verses, when the fire
 is brought, as if with a royal escort, to reside in the town of Bānsdah. As the text says,

*hamāngah khwish bā siṣad savārān
 pazire shod be chandin nāmdārān
 be ṣad tashrif āvardand dar shahr
 chonān chun dardmandi yāft pāzahr
 az ānpas bānsdah shod chu bahārān
 baringune gozashte ruzegārān
 pas az vay mardomān az nasl-e behdīn
 be har keshvar ke bud ān pāk āyin
 ze bahr-e khedmat-e ān shāh-e irān
 berafti az zanān o pir o mardān
 be pishin vaqt dar sanjān-e vālā
 shodi bahr-e ṭavāf-e bi masālā
 bedīnsān pārsi dar bānsdah niz
 ze har jā āmadandi bā basi chiz*

And then three hundred of them riding horses
 received them with a group of notables.
 They brought it to the town with much thanksgiving
 as when an ailing man receives a cure.
 From that time Bānsdah was like spring had come
 to bloom and in this way the years rolled by.
 From then on all the folk of good religion,
 wherever pure tradition had survived,
 The men and women and the old, went up
 to pay their homage to the Irānshāh.
 In former times in much respected Sanjān
 they went for pilgrimage which had no equal
 And in this way the Persians came to Bānsdah
 from every place, with many offerings.

This last verse has the first and only occurrence in the text of the name 'Parsi'—as if, after all their trials and *rites de passage*, they have finally become a community which is both Iranian and Indian, and yet fully neither, being distinctively Parsi. After a period of residence there in Bānsdah, the Irān Shāh is ceremonially relocated in the town of Navsari—which is the home of the author and which remains the orthodox religious centre of the Parsi community to this day. With this arrival of the King of Iran in its proper abode, the journey of repatriation is finally over and the text closes in blessings and peace on the author.

Conclusion: Movement + place = re-placement

It has been argued in this paper that the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* does not merely record historical events in a folk-narrative, but rather that it is a religious text of re-enactment and retelling of their past: it serves to reconstitute the Parsi Zoroastrian community as they find themselves at the time of the text's composition and for the future. This idea is not new, having been suggested some years ago by the anthropologist Paul Axelrod, when he referred to the *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* as a myth in his article 'Myth and Identity in the Indian Zoroastrian Community' (Axelrod 1980, 152). Axelrod suggested 'that the myth provides a charter of the capacity of the contemporary Parsi community to provide its members with a characteristic, and separate, identity'. However, I would wish to go further than Axelrod and insist that there is much more to this myth/story. The Zoroastrians of India already had a very strong, characteristic and separate identity—the religion had seen to that—separating them from other groups around them very effectively as a sort of virtual caste *outside* the *jajmani* system. Rather, the story enables the Zoroastrians to adapt that Iranian identity to their new situation in India. That did not require the surrendering of their Iranian identity, but on the contrary the transposition of their Iranian identity to India. This can be seen variously as a transplantation, reinvention or rediscovery of their tradition in a process of what I would define as 're-placement'.

The *Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān* focuses intently and constantly on the twin themes of place and movement, which together amount to the 're-placement' of the Zoroastrian community from Iran to India. These two features, the substantive 'place' and the dynamic, verbal 'movement' are necessary twins because, from a Zoroastrian point of view, in this 'mixed world' (Pahlavi *gētīg*) which has been attacked by evil, *there is no permanent fixed abode available*: even Iran itself will fall, as the text remembers, at the end of Zoroaster's millennium: Iran proper will survive only *in the religion*, so to speak. In the introductory doxology, all references to 'place' are to the permanent, abiding place of God, Ohrmazd, in his own created world. In return God is '... our refuge and protector everywhere, and He has been our constant source of refuge' (5–6). Refuge (*panāh*, *faryād-ras*) He may be, but, in the light of events described

in the poem, it is with a degree of realism that the author admits early on: 'I've no escaping from my Lord's command / who scatters us wherever He might please' (25). This line of thought culminates in the questions 'Who shall I turn to if You should reject me? / Where shall I run? You have no substitute' (38). The resolution of this contradiction of God as Refuge vs. God as Scatterer comes soon, and is not mere piety: 'In this world our salvation is from You, why should I seek for refuge from another?' (53). Refuge had also been provided by the monarch in the world, until it was three times disrupted by the attack of an evil oppressor. Religion and King re-established order twice, but the third time, when religion and throne are toppled by the Arab invasion, there is no refuge except escape: '... Left homes, lands gardens, villas, palaces, / they left all for the sake of their religion' (100). The halting, stop-start, journey is painfully long and slow, and achieved in so few lines in a poetic device of stopping and starting the narrative every few lines. The Zoroastrians are tossed by fate from here to there—the storm at sea is just the climax of this process in which promise of resolution is made proactively by them in prayer. Their search for their own place demands that they replace their fallen monarch with a sacred fire. However, their asylum, refuge and settlement are not something given to them freely: they must always strive for their place, in encounter with adversity, in negotiation for their rights, and in the building of their new abode for themselves and their Irān Shāh. The process of re-placement also requires the dis-placement of others: 'No strangers can be tolerated there: it's only for the blest ones of our faith' (198).

However, even with their new settled abode in Sanjan, and the long period of prosperity to which the text alludes, they themselves are once again dis-placed, when Sanjan is attacked by the Muslim army and again they have to fight for a place to exist on. The battlefield, which is the ultimate struggle for a place on the earth, allows the full drama of the whole text to be played out in the most vivid colours. In their hour of need, the routed Hindu forces are re-placed by the Zoroastrian warriors, who win the day. As we have seen, the extreme low point, of violent contraction when no place is left at all for anyone in the chaos of battle, occurs at verse 342 'An ant could find no place upon that field, but then without God's law what is a man?', and soon afterwards the battle is lost. What has been gained is the honour of having spilled their blood on the Indian earth, having stood by their hosts as fellow soldiers: they no longer need to look for re-placement as, otherwise inexplicably, heaven begins to smile upon their circumstances and within 50 verses the text has come to a conclusion in blessings. The symbolic re-placement of the old Iran which had fallen and been left behind with the new Iran which had had to be negotiated for, cultivated and, latterly, fought for all over again, is achieved and the text may close. This was the story of how the fire of Bahram, Irān Shāh, is the King of Iran yet who resides in India, at the centre of the Persian Zoroastrians still today known as the Parsis of India.

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