THE CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH OF CYRUS

The story about the marriage of Mandane and Cambyses I recorded by Herodotus is mirrored in the Šahnāme, yet not very clearly, in the story relating the marriage of Farangis and Seyāvuš. Likewise, the story of Cyrus' birth and his upbringing by herdsmen in the mountains is parallel to the story of Kay Xosrow.

1. The Dream of Astyages before the Marriage of Mandane

Herodotus, I, 107:

“Astyages had a daughter called Mandane, and he dreamed one night that she made water in such enormous quantities that it filled his city and swamped the whole of Asia. He told his dream to the Magi whose business it was to interpret such things, and was much alarmed by what they said it meant.”

Ferdousi, Seyāvuš, v. 1490—1493:

“(Afrāsyāb to Pirān:) And besides I have heard from the investigators of the stars, proud of their knowledge, who had several times before drawn horoscopes from the stars in the presence of my father, that this marriage shall bring the birth of a king who will seize the whole world, raze Turān to the ground, and in the first place he will defile my royal calpac.”

H., I, 107:

“(…) when Mandane was old enough to marry, he (Astyages) did not give her to some Mede of suitable rank, but was induced by his fear of the dream's significance to marry her to a Persian named Cambyses, a man he knew to be of good family and quiet habits — though he considered him much below a Mede even of middle rank.”

So Afrāsyāb gave his daughter to Seyāvuš, whom he knew as a man of good manners.

Seyāvuš, v. 1499—1500:

“Pirān said to him (Afrāsyāb):

— O, my lord! Let not this affair trouble thy heart! That one to whom Seyāvuš will give birth, must be wise, prudent and silent.”
2. The dream of Astyages before the birth of Cyrus

H., I, 108:

"Before Mandane and Cambyses had been married a year, Astyages had another dream. This time it was that a vine grew from his daughter's private parts and spread over Asia. As before, he told the interpreters about his dream, and then sent for his daughter, who was now pregnant. When she arrived, he kept her under strict watch, intending to make away with her child; for the fact was that the Magi had interpreted the dream to mean that his daughter's son would usurp his throne."

Seyāvuš, v. 2358—2362:

"Said (Afrāsyāb) to the despicable Gersivez:
— Drag her (Farangis) out of the chamber to the castle at once, give her to the tortures, the assassins, let them pluck her hair out of her head, tear the veil on her breasts. Let them beat her till she drops the seed of revenge here, on the Turan soil. I do not want from the roots of Seyāvuš neither the tree, nor the leaves, the crown and the throne!"

H., I 109:

[Harpagus does not want to kill Cyrus]

Seyāvuš, b. 2438—2442:

'The chieftain (Pirān) came to the king (new-born Kay Khusraw), he brought him gifts and praised the Creator for this lofty figure, these shoulders and breast, as if the whole year had already passed since his birth. Tears filled his eyes when he recalled Seyāvuš, and he cursed Afrāsyāb. Thus spoke he to the famous warriors:
— Even though (Afrāsyāb) took my life for it, I would not let him reach his hands for this king (Kay Khusraw)! Even though he threw me into a throat of a crocodile!"

According to Herodotus, Astyages gives young Cyrus to a herdsman and bids him to kill Cyrus; according to Ferdousi however, Pirān bids the herdsman to spare Kay Khusrow.

H., I, 110—111:

"He (Harpagus) promptly sent a messenger to one of the king's herdsmen,
who he knew had a stretch of pasture in the mountains ranged by wild beasts, and therefore most suitable for the purpose in hand (...).

The herdsman made haste to answer the summons, and Harpagus said to him: “The king’s orders are that you must expouse this infant in the wildest spot you know of amongst the hills, where it may soonest die.”

Seyāvūš. v. 2470—2472:

“(Pirān) called the herdsmen from the Qalā mountains and told them many things about the little one:

“Guard him as thou guard thy own souls! Neither the earth nor the wind dare to touch him. He should not lack anything in the world even if it were thy eye or heart!”

3. The meeting of Astyages with ten years old Cyrus

H., I, 114:

“When the boy was ten years old, his identity was revealed in the way I will now relate. He and some other boys were playing the game of “Kings” in the street of the village, where Mitrdates kept his oxen, and it so happened that Cyrus — the supposed son of the herdsman — was one whom the boys picked as their king (...) one of the players, who happened to be the son of a distinguished Mede called Artembares, refused to do what King Cyrus commanded, and Cyrus ordered his arrest. The other boys accordingly seized him, and Cyrus beat him savagely with a whip (...) Artembares was very angry. He took his boy to Astyages, and reported the monstrous treatment he had received...

(...) Astyages had guessed who he was, for that was not the answer of a slave; (...)”

Seyāvūš. v. 2479—2487:

When he was ten, he was a fierce warrior, he hunted wild boars, wolves and bears and then also lions and panthers, and his weapons was a curved stick. And so, for some time, he was obedient to his host.

2 — The Cyrus Legend
— And a herdsman came from the steppe and from the mountains and went to Pirān to complain.

— To you, pahlavān, I came with a grievance against that hero brave as a lion. First he hunted gazelles and did not look for the paths of panthers and lions, but now all is the same to him — a panther or a lion, or the hunt for gazelles. I wish not any adventure to trouble him since the noble pahlavān entrusted me with him.

Then Pirān laughed and said:
— Neither the stock nor the art can be concealed.
H., I, 121:

"Astyages (...) called Cyrus and said to him: "I did you a wrong, my boy, because of a dream which was not fulfilled; but your own fortune saved you. Be off now to Persia — I will give you an escort on your way — and good luck to you. You will find a father and a mother there)."

Seyānūš, v. 2531—2532:

پیامد بنزدیک افرسیاب
نبایا رخ از شرمو شرد پر آب
بران خسروی یال و آن چنگ او
بدان شاخ و آن فر و اورنگ او

When he came to Afrāsyāb, the tears of shame rose to the eyes of the grandfather, when he saw the king's shoulders, arms, dignity and majesty.

Seyānūš, v. 2543—2546:

سوی پهلوان سیه کرد روی
بختیار خسرو ز گفتار اوی
زسر پرمش پاشخ آرد ز بای
نیایید همانا بد و نیک ازوی
باید یکی مرد پرهیزگر
رو این را بخویبد باد سیار

The king laughed at these words and thus addressed the pahlavan:

(...) Go, you can safely give him to his mother and commit him to a cautions man...

THE WAR FOR THE PERSIAN LIBERATION

Olmstead relates scant information about the war between Cyrus and Astyages:¹

"As Nabu-naid tells it, in his accession year the gods Marduk and Sin appeared to him in a dream. Marduk bade him to restore the Harran temple; we wonder whether the priests of Esagila approved. When Nabu-naid fearfully protested that the Mede surrounded it and that he was exceedingly strong, Marduk answered: "the Mede of whom you are speaking, he himself, his land, and the kings who march at his side are not! When the third year comes, the

¹ Olmst., pp. 36—37.
gods will cause Cyrus, king of Anshan, his little slave, to advance against him with his small army. He will overthrow the wide extending Medes; he will capture Astyages, king of the Medes, and take him captive to his land.

In this hope, Nabu-naid made alliance with Cyrus, who thereupon openly rebelled against Media. To fulfil his part of the agreement, Nabu-naid promptly levied an army against the “rebels” who lived in the countries once held by Nebuchadnezzar. Before he left, Nabu-naid handed over the “kingship” of Babylonia to his eldest son, Belshar-usur (...), and started off for Harran. No aid for the city was possible, since the revolt of Cyrus kept Astyages busy at home, and Harran was quickly recovered. The city was rebuilt, and the army had laid the temple foundations by 555.

(...) Astyages did send out against his rebellious vassal an army under Harpagus, but he had forgotten how he had cruelly slain that general’s son; Harpagus did not forget and promptly deserted to Cyrus, bringing over with him most of his soldiers. A second army, commanded by Astyages in person, reached the capital of Parsa; here it mutinied, seized its king, and handed him over to Cyrus. Ecbatana was captured, and its wealth of gold, an precious objects was carried off to Anshan (550).”

1. The agreement between Cyrus and Harpagus

Acc. to Herodotus, I, 123—124, Harpagus, whose son was killed by Astyages, concludes an agreement with young Cyrus and summons him to fight against Astyages.

Acc. to Ferdousi (Zohāk, v. 183—218 and 227—245), Kāveh, whose son was to be killed by Zohāk, comes to an understanding with young Feridun and drives him into the war against Zohāk.

Geršasp, v. 104—118, 113—162 and 170—183:
Rostam comes to young Kayqobād with a mission to prompt him to seize the throne of Iran and to participate in the war with Afrāsyāb.

Seyāvūš, v. 3021—3034, 3128—3132 and 3139—3157:
Giv finds young Kay Xosrow and takes him to Iran, thus enabling him to revenge Afrāsyāb.

2. The unification of the Persian tribes

Cyrus began plotting against Astyages with bringing the Persian tribes into the union.2

H., I 125:
“The Persian nation contains a number of tribes, and the ones which Cyrus assembled and persuaded to revolt were Pasargadae, Maraphii and Maspii, upon which all the other tribes are dependent. Of these the Pasargadae are the most distinguished; they contain the clan of the Achaemenidae from which spring the Perseid kings.”

2 I.V. Piankov, Obrazovaniye deržavy Axemenidov, ligk, p. 86.
On the other hand, judging from the context of the preserved fragment, Hellanicus wrote about the fight against the Medes undertaken by Cyrus and his two brothers, Marafis and the second one, whose name in this fragment is illegible. It may read like Мαραφ, or Μεραφ. It is possible that those three brothers correspond to the three tribes mentioned by Herodotus.\(^3\)

Zohāk, v. 254—258:

“Soon Feridun began to prepare himself for the travel and he concealed his intentions from everyone. Two brothers and he, two fortunate companions and both distinguished ones were older than he was. One was called Kayanush and the second one bore a fortunate name Pormaye. To them Feridun opened his mouth:

— May life be propitious to you, oh, the brave and happy ones! May the heaven bring only good unto you, may the crown of might return to us!”

3. The defeat of Astyages

Acc. to Ctesias, at first Astyages was not taken prisoner, but he managed to flee to Ecbatana and to find a shelter there. Having invaded Ecbatana, Cyrus ordered to torture Astyages’ daughter Amitida and her husband Spitakes as well as their sons Spitakes and Megabernes; then Astyages surrendered to Cyrus so as to deliver his relatives from the tortures.\(^4\)

Čang-e bozorg-e Kay Xosrow hā Afrāsīāb, v. 2306-2313:

“He (Kay Xosrow) ordered the guards of the gate to seize their Gilān swords and shields and to fetch the despicable Gersivez who threw the world into confusion. He ordered the torturer to remove, to tear off the veil of shame from the face; to flog his back with a cowhide till his soul leaves the body; to tear off his skin till he begs for mercy, begs the Creator of the world for help. Having heard his voice, Afrāsīāb, driven to desperation, emerged crying

\(^3\) Cf. Ibid., pp. 86—87.

\(^4\) Cf. I. M. Diakonov, Istorinya Midii, p. 422.
from the water and swam on the surface of the lake till he arrived to a place where he could set his foot. There he heard his brother screaming and what he saw was worse even than the death itself.”

THE CONQUESTS OF CYRUS

It seems that the war between Cyrus and Croesus did not leave so distinct traces in the Persian epos as the war with Astyages, or the wars with Hrycanians, with the Saceas or with the Babylonia which bring to mind several fragments from the Śāhnāme.

It is possible to trace some fragments of the legend concerning the war with Croesus among the legends od Zohāk, in the story about the seven services of Rostam and in the story about Seyāvuš.

On the other hand, the legends which seem to mirror the later wars of Cyrus are more promising. Indeed, they are the substantial source of information. The stories of Kay Xosrow themselves, which, according to many scholars, reflect the life of Cyrus, constitute more than one fifth of the whole epos. Nonetheless, I will try to demonstrate that not all of these stories and not only they may refer to the events from the times of Cyrus’ conquests.

In comparison with the story concerning Cyrus’ childhood, which introduces us into the already historic events of the Persian liberation war and of the defeat of the Median empire, Herodotus pays less attention to them. Because it is impossible to compare some of the legends contained in the Śāhnāme with those which could have been recorded directly from oral tradition by an ancient historian, we shall confront some of those legends with the accounts of modern research in history.

To-day we know that about 545 Cyrus conquered Varkana i.e. Hrycania (modern Māzanderān and Gorgān), then Parthava (Xorāsān), then moving further to the East, he defeated Harava, i.e. Aria with the capital Artokoana (Herāt), here being aided by the Ariaspi from the region adjoining the Etymandrus (Helmand) river, then he conquered Sogdiana lying between Oxus and Yaxartes with the capital in Maracanda (Samarand), then the land of the Massagetae and Xorazmians; later, on his way back he seized (probably) Margus (Marv), then Bactria (previously Zariaspa, now Bālχ), finally Gandara and Sattagydia (Eastern Afghanistan). Nothing definite is known of his route back. We know however, that, “(...) Cyrus made ready to invade the alluvium as soon as he had returned from the eastern campaigns. Before the snows of the

1 T. Nöldeke, Das iranische Nationalepos, GIP, II, p. 132—133; F. Justi, Geschichte Iran..., GIP, II, p. 416; Hfd, Zor, I, p. 48, 320; T. Kowalski, Studia nad Śah-nāme, I, p. 44.
2 Cf. Olmst, pp. 45—49.
3 Ibid., p. 113.
winter of 540—539 could fill the passes, he was on the border.”
We know also
that he attacked Babylon from the north-west. It may be possible then, that he
came back to Ecbatana from his campaign to the East.
These campaigns can be detected in the Šahnāme in the stories about
Ferdun, in the three stories about Kay Kāwus (Pādešahi-ye Kay Kāwus va
rafta-ye u be Māzanderān, Razm-e Kāwus bā šäh-e Hāmāverān and Dāstān-e
Seyāvūs) and in the story of Kay Xosrow (Gang-e bozorg-e Kay Xosrow bā
Afrāṣyāb).

1. The Hyrcania campaign

This campaign was only the first stage of the great campaign of Cyrus. The
next stage was the great march to the East: Parthava, Hariva, Sogdiana, then
the lands of the Massagetae and Xorasmians.
The motives of Cyrus’ campaign against the Massagetae are symptomatic
(in the work of Herodotus, Cyrus defines them before setting out for the second
campaign to the East. (It is worth comparing them with the motives which,
according to Asadi from Tus, drove Feridun when he decided to conquer
Xāvar.

H., I, 204:
“The greater part of this region is occupied by the Massagetae whom Cyrus
wished to attack. There were many things which roused his ambition and gave
him courage to undertake this new war, the two most important being the
legend of his superhuman origin and the success of all his previous campaigns;
for it was fact that till then it had been impossible for any nation to escape,
once he had marched against it.”

Kay Kāwus va rafa-ye u be Māzanderān, v. 15, 17—18, 35—40:

“...It was some time ago when Kay Kāwus was sitting in a golden garden
and, full of bliss, was drinking wine (...) and was disputing with the warriors of
Iran about this and that, devil disguised as a harpist asked the doorkeeper to
let him to the king. (...)”

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4 Ibid., p. 49.
The king ordered to let him in and to seat him before the musicians. He tuned the strings properly, then began a Māzanderān song. (...

When Kāwus heard these words from him, a new affliction arose in his soul. And in his courageous heart he instilled a thought that he would lead his troops to Māzanderān. Thus spoke he to the proud warriors:

— We are all here enjoing this feast. When a warrior idles away his time, he has never enough of bliss and comforts. In happiness, glory and in justice, I am greater than Ġamšīd, Zohāk and Kayqobād. I should surpass them in the warfare; the greed for conquering the world becomes the kings.”

Asadi of Tus, Geršāspnāme.⁶

“From among many lands, chose (Feridun) Āmul as his seat. He dispatched his scouts to all countries. He sent the vengeful Kāveh to the land of Xāvar⁷ with the banner and the army, to carry his order to this land, and to induce submission in the hearts of everyone. Such letters sent he to Sistān, to the hero conquering the world, to Geršasp, eager for revenge, the conqueror of the lands, the pahlavān of the world, the lord of Zāvuł:

— Listen to the good news that the high heaven entrusted me at last with the crown of the kingdom, that the hearts of all kingdoms depend on my will, that they stamp all letters with my name. That man is entitled to the true kingdom who is superior to the previous kings, who is both wise and just, who instead of dasturs has wisdom and reason, and instead of the army, knowledge. And all these the Creator gave unto me, so I became the ruler of the kings.”

Āmul is situated in Māzanderān. Asadi’s account of Āmul as Feridun’s capital is not isolated.⁸ As we know, Cyrus deemed himself to be the king of the defeated countries.⁹ This might be the source of information that Feridun was

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⁶ Cf., FNA, I, p. 395.
⁷ The term used here, Xāvar zamin denotes probably Xorazm (Xuvārazm — OP Ḥuvāraʾzmin), cf., AirDb, pp. 1855—1856; cf. also, E. Herzfeld, The Persian Empire, p. 325. NB, Wolff notices that the statement Xāvar zamin appears in the Šn twice (p. 34) and the expression ze Xāvar tā Bāxtar — nine times (p. 101), and never ze Bāxtar tā Xāvar. — Cyrus’ army, having conquered Xorazm, marched to Bactria, but not the other way round. Cf. also p. 79 of this work.
⁸ Cf., Māzanderān, p. 81f.
⁹ Cf. e.g., Olmst., pp. 49—52.
building a palace in Varena (Gilān), that Kay Kāwus was the king of Balx or that he moved there his capital from Irāq.\(^{10}\)

According to Herodotus then, Cyrus undertakes his north-east campaign to satisfy his own pride. According to Ferdousi, the same motive underlies Kay Kāwus campaign against Xāvar Zamin (Xorazm).\(^{11}\)

We know, that besides Âmul, Xorazm was an equally important stage of Cyrus' campaign. As we shall see, according to Ferdousi, it was also an important stage of Kay Xosrow's campaign.

2. The Massagetae campaign

*Razm-e Kay Kāwus bā šāh-e Hāmāverān, v. 1–6:

“Afterwards Kay Kāwus resolved to march out in the royal glory. He set out from Iran to Turān and China, and then he crossed the land of Mekrān; from Mekrān he went to the Zere and nowhere any army disturbed him. He collected tributes from all the noble, as the timid game did not dare to struggle against the lion. In that manner he entered Barbar with dignity, he marched avid of the world, with the throne marched he and with the crown. The king of Barbaristān welcomed him with the war and the fate turned otherwise.”

A similar rout, but in a different order, is described by Ferdousi several lines later:

*Ibid., v. 20–25:

“The peal of the bells and the gongs began to ring and the horns to sound. When (the king) crossed the land of Mekrān, he marched for the Qāf mountains and for Bāxtar. There, when they heard about him, all came out on the road, bowing. All the powerful entertained him and paid heavy tributes. When he saw their submission, he set forth and they marched undisturbed — the king and his army. He led his troops to Zābulistān, to call upon the son of Dastān.”


\(^{11}\) Cf. note 7 to this chapter.
گانگ‌بزرگ کَی خسرو بِه افراسیاب، ب. ۳۴۰—۳۴۴:

"When the Lord reached the desert, he saw the march and drawing up the troops in the battle-array, and the army moved towards Xorasm, and the war spread on the steppe and on the sands. To the left was Dahestān, to the right the water, all around the sand, in front of them Afrasyāb.

When the sun emerged from the Tower of Aries and adorned the whole earth, the lord of the Turks saw these troops, he ordered to blow the flutes and aligned his army."

Ibid., v. 616:

"The desert where they fought the battle was within the confines of Xorazm."

In a letter sent from the campaign to Kay Kāwus, Kay Xosrow writes:

Ibid., v. 860:

"I came from Iran to the sands of Farab, I fought three hard battles in three nights."

After the lost battles, Afrasyāb withdrew behind the Ğeyhun:

Ibid., v. 874:

"He rested in Buxārā and still wished the lions to begin to fight."

The troops of Afrasyāb, in fear of the Iranian offensive:

Ibid., v. 888:

"All set off towards Golzarreyun, with their eyes full of tears, and their hearts full of blood."

Ibid., v. 890:

"From there they went towards Gang and nowhere did they linger."