I

The famous heresiarch Mazdak is generally believed to have been a communist active in the time of Kavad (488–96, 498–531), and to have been killed along with many of his followers by Khusrau Anūshirvān (531–79), Kavad’s son and successor, after Kavad’s attempt to implement his communist ideas had unleashed a popular revolt which plunged the Sasanid empire into chaos.1 H. Gaube, however, dissents from this view. According to him, Mazdak may never have existed; even if he did, he played no role in Kavad’s politics, nor did such doctrines as he may have espoused stir up social unrest: it was Kavad who mobilised the masses against the nobility in the name of communist ideas, while Mazdak was probably invented or misrepresented to take the blame for the king’s unorthodox behaviour.2 This is a claim apt to make a historian sit up in surprise. Though friction between kings and nobles has been commonplace in history, one does not often hear of kings stirring up peasant revolts against their noble rivals, for the obvious reason that the latter were the pillars of the established order: if the peasants destroyed the nobility, by what means was the king to restore order among the peasants? Whatever else may be said for it, Gaube’s argument certainly makes Kavad’s behaviour even more problematic than it already is. But is there anything to be said for it? It rests on the two facts that no contemporary source mentions Mazdak (though several refer to Kavad’s communist phase) and that the later sources are full of contradictions. Both facts do indeed suggest that something is wrong with the standard account, but there is a less radical way of explaining them than that which Gaube proposes.

Kavad was king of Persia twice. He was elevated to the throne in 488 and expelled in 496, whereupon he spent two years in exile among the Hephthalites; he regained his throne with Hephthalite help in 498 and ruled without interruption from then onwards until his death in 531.3 All the sixth-century sources place his communist phase in his first reign. The sources in question are, first, the Syriac chronicle attributed to Joshua the Stylite which was compiled about 507, well before Kavad’s second reign was over;4 secondly, Procopius’ account based on information gathered during the war of 527–31, in which he participated as Belisarius’ secretary;5 and thirdly, the history of Agathias, who died about 582 and who had access, not just to Procopius, but also to notes taken by a Christian interpreter from the Royal Annals of the Sasanids.6 (There are also a couple of lines by the apparently sixth-century John Diakrinomenos, who does not however add anything to Procopius and Agathias.)7 Given the unanimity of the contemporary sources, Kavad’s communist phase must be regarded as securely dated. In fact, the late Nestorian Chronicle of St’ird also places it in his first reign,8 and so do numerous Muslim authors: Ibn Qutayba,9 al-Dīnawāri,10 al-Tabārī,11 al-Mas’ūdī,12 Muṭḥahhar al-Maqṣīsī13 and others.14 All these sources, both Christian and Muslim, state that his unorthodox views were the very reason why he was deposed. However, neither the sixth-century sources nor the Chronicle of St’ird mentions Mazdak, whereas practically all the Muslim sources claim that he was the moving force behind Kavad.15 This is the problem to which Gaube draws attention.

Klima, who was the first to discuss the sixth-century silence, initially argued that the Christians were simply ill-informed.16 But Mazdak’s absence from the contemporary sources contrasts strangely with his towering presence in later accounts: if he was really so prominent, how could contemporaries have overlooked him? Joshua was very close indeed to the events in terms of time and place alike, while Procopius’s account is full of circumstantial and local detail which he must have picked up in conversation with Persians.17 He knew the story of how Kavad’s wife and/or sister helped the latter escape from jail, for example;18 why did no story about Mazdak come to his attention? Gaube is right that the sixth-century silence is problematic; it continued to worry Klima too.

When Klima returned to the problem twenty years later, he argued that Khusrau must have deleted Mazdak from the official records in order to save his father’s reputation.19 But this hypothesis is even less satisfactory than his first. Khusrau may well have revised the official records after his accession, but he cannot thereby have affected information transmitted before it: Mazdak’s absence from Joshua and Stylite and Procopius thus remains problematic. Khusrau’s revisions ought however to have affected the Islamic tradition, given that most of it goes back to a Book of

*I should like to thank Prof. W. Madelung, Prof. S. Shaked and Dr. H. Halm for comments on this paper.
Kings based on the very records from which Mazdak was supposedly deleted: Mazdak’s presence in the Muslim sources thus becomes problematic too. Klima argued that Ibn al-Muqaffa’, the first translator of the Sasanid Book of Kings, inserted an account of Mazdak where he found it missing; but where did Ibn al-Muqaffa’ get his information from? He cannot have got it from the Book of Mazdak/Marwak/Mardak, which he translated too; for though this work is conventionally assumed to have been a Mazdak romance, it has now been identified as a piece of wisdom literature. Besides, the Muslim sources contain information which is too precise for an origin in romantic fiction to be plausible (though they are full of romantic stories too). It is presumably for this reason that Klima only adduces the supposed Mazdak romance as evidence of Ibn al-Muqaffa’s familiarity with Mazdakite material, not as his actual source: Ibn al-Muqaffa’, he says, relied on his own knowledge, or on some account already in existence, when he inserted his account of Mazdak in the Book of Kings. But this does not solve the problem where Ibn al-Muqaffa’ got his knowledge from unless we assume the pre-existing account to have been found in the Book of Kings itself. In short, Klima’s second hypothesis merely creates new problems without solving the one it was meant to remove.

Gaube stands Klima’s hypothesis on its head: Khusrau did not delete Mazdak from the official records, but on the contrary wrote him into them; Mazdak is absent from the contemporary sources because he played no role in the events which they report, but present in the later sources because Khusrau invented or redesigned him as a scapegoat for Kavād’s misbehaviour. This does at least have the merit of offering a coherent solution, and there is no objection to it on the Greek or Syriac side, though it would have been to Gaube’s advantage if Mazdak had figured in Agathias’ account: his sudden appearance in a Greek author who used the Sasanid records some forty years after Khusrau’s accession would have reinforced the suspicion that the records had been doctored. But Agathias’ silence is not important. Gaube’s hypothesis is however hard to square with the Islamic tradition. Mazdak does not sound in the least like an apologetic invention here; there is nothing schematic about him, nor are there other suggestions of ahistoricity once the romantic embellishments have been discounted. Could Khusrau have thought up so convincing an account? And could a figure invented or reshaped by him have captured popular imagination to the extent of generating so much embellishment? It does not seem likely.

But there is an obvious chronological problem. If Mazdak was the man behind Kavād, he was active in the 490s; yet the sources are agreed that he was suppressed by Khusrau, in the 530s. Kavād was de-throned for heresy thirty-five years before Khusrau’s accession, at a time when Khusrau had not even been born; and there is no suggestion that he resumed his heretical activities after his restoration: both Joshua and Procopius provide detailed accounts of his second reign (up to 506 and his death respectively) without breathing a word about communist activities on his part, or for that matter on the part of anyone else; some Muslim sources explicitly say that his heretical phase came to an end on his fall, and as Nöldeke points out, he would hardly have been capable of conducting major wars against Byzantium if he had continued to alienate his clergy and nobility. Yet Mazdak is associated with both Kavād and Khusrau, or with Khusrau on his own, in Zoroastrian and Muslim sources, be they Pahlavi, Arabic or new Persian: Mazdak, they say, seduced the former and was killed by the latter. What, one wonders, was he doing in the thirty-five years in between? The simplest solution is that two different incidents have been conflated: the sources contemporary with Kavād’s heretical phase fail to mention Mazdak for the simple reason that Mazdak only made his appearance after this phase, in the reign of Khusrau.

This hypothesis accords well with the fact that the sources associate Kavād and Mazdak with different doctrines and incompatible events. As regards the doctrines, the sixth-century sources unanimously describe Kavād as a communist in respect of women alone. According to Joshua, he re-established (sic, to a point to which I shall come back) the abominable heresy which teaches that “women should be in common and that everyone should have intercourse with whomever he liked”. According to Procopius, he legislated “that Persians should have communal intercourse with their women” which is also what Agathias and John Diakrinomenos tell us: “it is said that he actually made a law according to which women were to be available to men in common”, as Agathias puts it, adding that “these sins were committed frequently and with full legality”. But of communism in respect of property there is not a word. The Nestorian Chronicle of Si’ird provides details of the facilities provided for the sins in question: Kavād built shrines and inns (haydkil wa-fanddiq) where people could meet and engage in incontinence and the Jewish Seder ‘olam zuta refers vaguely to sexual immorality at the courts of Persian princes, which Graetz, probably wrongly, understood as a reference to heretical practices. But there is no reference to communism in respect of property in these sources either. Communal sex is of course a particularly scandalous idea, but the abolition of private property struck Muslim authors as almost equally horrendous, and it is hardly to be supposed that contemporaries would have remained silent if Kavād had launched an attack on aristocratic and ecclesiastical possessions. Yet silent they were. By
contrast, practically all the later sources associate Mazdak, and thus Kavad too, with heretical views in respect of women and property alike.³⁶ Pigulevskaja solves this problem by blithely reading tenth-century Muslim accounts into sixth-century Greek and Syriac sources,³⁷ while Christensen harmonises by assuming Kavad’s innovations in respect of property to have been of minor importance: perhaps they took the form of extraordinary taxes on the rich to alleviate the condition of the poor.³⁸ But complete silence in the contemporary sources on Kavad plus descriptions of revolutionary measures in the later sources on Mazdak hardly add up to evidence for moderate reforms by the former. We may take it that Kavad’s heresy was only about women, whereas Mazdak’s was about women and property alike.

As regards the events, the sixth-century sources are unanimous that Kavad’s measures were unpopular. “The nobles... of his kingdom hated him because he had allowed their wives to commit adultery... The Persian grandees plotted in secret to slay Kavad, on account of his impure morals and perverse laws”, Joshua says;³⁹ Kavad’s law “by no means pleased the sources,³⁷ while Christensen harmonises by assuming Kavad’s heresy was only revolutionary measures in the later sources on Mazdak condition of the poor.³⁸ But complete silence in the of extraordinary taxes on the rich to alleviate the Kavad’s innovations in respect of property to have somehow or other to be eliminated. It is for this reason that we are told, now explicitly and now implicitly, that Kavad adopted communist ideas after his restoration,⁴⁰ or that he was deposed for his heresy by Khusrau,⁴¹ or that his heresy caused him to abdicate in favour of the latter,⁵¹ or that he made the latter his co-regent,⁵² or that the heretics survived his deposition or came back towards the end of his reign,⁵³ or even that Mazdak’s revolt lasted all the time from his first reign to Khusrau’s accession.⁵⁴ What all these variant versions are trying to say is that a heretical Kavad gave way directly to an orthodox Khusrau, without a thirty-five year gap in between. But an explanation also had to be found for the problem that Kavad was supposed to have been in league with the very heretics who rebelled against the crown. Hence we are told that Kavad was forced to join the rebels, the latter having grown very strong,⁵⁵ or that he had to pretend to be on their side lest he lose his throne,⁵⁶ or that he was deceived into supporting people who were really against him;⁵⁷ some sources even think that it was the rebels who deposed him³⁸ or at least kept him in isolation while the grandees of the realm enthroned his brother:⁵⁸ Kavad escaped from them to become king again, which is why the Mazdakites had to be suppressed prior to his restoration.⁶⁰ Mazdak himself being killed at that time.⁶¹ But how then did Mazdak and his followers come to be around at the time of Khusrau’s accession? Back to square one. Since all this wriggling and writhing is accompanied by efforts to fit in Kavad’s flight to the Huns, his fathering of Khusrau, and his relations with his regent Sōkhrā and the latter’s son Zarmihr, it is hardly surprising that the outcome is a confusing mass of similar, yet never quite identical accounts.⁶² Gaube is right that some of them have an apologetic intent, but the apologetic element is minute compared with that of genuine confusion.

II

The argument so far, then, is that Kavad tried to enforce communal access to women in the 490s, only to be deposed by his nobility in 496, while Mazdak was a later heretic who tried to enforce communal access to women and property by raising a peasant revolt, only to be executed along with his followers by Khusrau in the 530s. The reason why the two episodes have been conflated is undoubtedly that they were closely spaced
events in the history of the same sect, and I shall now examine the nature of this sect. The question of how the events are to be interpreted will be taken up in the last section.

There is nothing to be learnt about the religious views involved from the Greek authors, all of whom describe Kavād’s innovations in terms of secular legislation; but according to Joshua, Kavād’s communism was derived from “the abominable Magian heresy known as the Zarađushtaqan”, which he re-established (ḥaddet). This heresy is also referred to in the Syriac History of Karka de-Bet Selok, a sixth-century Nestorian account written in Persian Mesopotamia, which credits a certain Zarađusht, described as a contemporary of Mānī (d. 277), with a heresy that existed now openly and now secretly until the time of Khusrau. The heresiarch in question was Zarađusht Khrosakān of Fāsā according to the Dēnkard, which identifies him as the original proponent of the doctrine that women and property should be held in common, and that he was the source of Kavād’s ideas as confirmed by the Chronicle of Si’ird (in which the author has some trouble distinguishing the third-century heresiarch from the original Zoroastrianism and many people had followed him: Mazdak was one of those who made propaganda for his views. Miskawayh says much the same.65 Al-Ya’qūbi and others wrongly make him a contemporary of Mazdak rather than a third-century figure,66 while Ibn al-Nadīm quaintly refers to him as “the older Mazdak”67 but the sheer fact that they know him is important. Mole toys with the idea of taking the name of Zarađusht as a title, noting that this would make Zarađusht of Fāsā identifiable with Mazdak himself.71 Mazdak was Zarađusht in the sense of mubād. According to Klima, on the other hand, it is Mazdak’s name that could be taken as a title: Zarađusht was the older Mazdak in the sense of first leader of the sect.73 But whether one or the other name was a title or not, the Syriac and Muslim evidence leaves no doubt that Zarađusht of Fāsā was a person separate from, and indeed much earlier than, Mazdak. Besides, they had different patronyms, Zarađusht being a son of Khrosak/Khurrak while Mazdak was the son of Bāmdād; and they are also said to have come from different places, Zarađusht being a native of Fāsā, whereas Mazdak is said to have come from Nasā, Istakhr, Tabrīz, Nishāpur, or MDRYH, identified as Mādharāyā in Iraq by Christensen, as the Murghāb in eastern Iran by F. Altheim and R. Stehl. In short, we may accept that Zarađusht Khrosakān was the original propounder of tenets taken up by Kavād and Mazdak in succession.

The fundamental idea behind Zarađusht’s heresy was that women and property engender envy, anger, hatred, greed and needs which would not arise if both were held in common; women and wealth are the ultimate causes of practically all dissension among mankind. But God had created all men alike and placed the means of sustenance, including the means of procreation, on earth “so that mankind may divide them equally among themselves” (lį-yuqassimahā l’-ibād baynakum bi ‘l-ṭā‘āsīs[sawyiya]). Women and property should be held in partnership like water, fire and pasture (ja’ala l-nās shirka fi-himā kā-śhirākīhim fi ‘l-ma‘a wa ‘l-nār wa ‘l-kalā‘). Nobody was allowed to have more than others, sharing was a religious duty.

The sources are not clear exactly how the sharing is to be envisaged. The formulations just cited suggest collective ownership, and this is also what many other authors took to be the objective: Mazdak abolished marriage and private property according to Bal’ami, he told his followers that “your wives are like your other possessions, they too should be regarded as common property”, according to Nizām al-Mulk, he preached communal control of children as well, according to the Bundahishn and Ibn al-Balkhi. Noldke likewise believed Mazdak to have abolished private property and marriage, on the grounds that equality in respect of possessions cannot be maintained for long unless collective ownership is instituted and hereditary transmission of property eliminated. But though this may well have been what Zarađusht had in mind, it is not how it worked out in practice. Kavād is said to have ruled that children born of extra-marital unions were to be affiliated to the husband,92 his communist views on women notwithstanding, marriage thus persisted along with parental control of children and hereditary transmission of property. And a widely cited tradition has it that Mazdak and his followers did not institute collective ownership as much as engage in redistribution: they claimed that “they were taking from the rich and giving to the poor (annahum ya’khudhāna li’l-ARGVād min al-aghnīyā wa-yaruddāna min al-mukaththirīn ‘alā ‘l-muqillīn) and that whoever had a surplus in respect of landed property, women or goods had no better right to it than anyone else”.93 Mazdak “ordered that people should be equal in respect of property and women” (yatastānī fī l-amwāl wa-l-hurām), as al-Ya’qūbi put it.94 Mazdak “made people equal” (sawwa ḫayna l-nās), according to Ibn al-Athir: he “would take the wife of the one and hand her over to another, and likewise possessions, slaves, slave-girls and other things, such as landed property and real estate (al-ī)yā wa ‘l-iqād).95 These statements clearly imply that private property and marriage alike were left intact, only inequalities being removed. Mazdak’s view seems to have been that the rich should divest themselves of their surplus by giving freely, and that the poor were allowed to help themselves to the possessions of those who had more than the rest: ‘when
Adam died, God let his sons inherit [the world] equally; nobody has a right to more property or wives than others, so that he who is able to take people's possessions or obtain their wives by stealth, deceit, trickery or blandishment is allowed and free to do so; the property which some people possess in excess of others is forbidden to them until it is distributed equally among mankind", as al-Malāṭī quotes the Mazdakites as saying (in terms obviously borrowed from Islam and with an emphasis on non-violent methods which suggests that the statement refers to later conditions rather than Mazdak's revolt). This goes well with the claim that Mazdak sanctioned guest prostitution and other forms of wife-lending, a measure for which he may have found inspiration in Zoroastrian law. According to the Mātēgan-i ḥazar dāastān as interpreted by Bartholomae, a man could cede his wife (be she willing or unwilling) to another man in need, who would be entitled to her labour, but not to her property or to any children born of the union; in other words, he might lend her as he would a slave, and the deed counted as charitable. The existence of such an "interim marriage" has been disputed by M. Shaki, but Shaki implicitly outlines an interim marriage of another kind: a man without male issue might give his wife in stārīh (loosely translatable as levirate) to another man even in his own lifetime with a view to procuring heirs for himself (stārīh being more commonly arranged after a husband's death); he would retain his guardianship over his wife, in addition to his rights to any children she might bear, and the stārīh would (or could) come to an end on the birth of a son. Or indeed (putting Bartholomae's and Shaki's institutions together), he could lend her to another man so that the latter could acquire heirs. One way or the other, there certainly seems to have been a Zoroastrian institution of wife-lending which the followers of Zaradusth took up and generalized. But in doing so, they confirmed rather than abrogated the existence of marriage (and they obviously took male control over women for granted too). The later Khurramī also endorsed ibāḥat al-nisā' (as the Muslims were to call communal access to women) without abolishing marriage thereby. Kavād and Mazdak seem to have argued that nobody had exclusive rights to women or (in Mazdak's case) to anything at all: everything in a man's possession was available to others, ownership being common in the last resort, and anything he possessed in excess of others could be freely taken, the correct distribution being equal. But actual pooling of property, women or children was not apparently attempted.

Even so, Nöldeke is undoubtedly right that ibāḥat al-nisā' was meant in a drastically egalitarian vein. What the Zarādushṭīs demanded was not simply that women hoarded in princely harems should be redistributed or that women should be allowed to marry outside their own class, that it should be cheaper to marry, that the rules of levirate should be relaxed, or the like; but nor was it against hereditary transmission of property that their views on women were directed. What ibāḥat al-nisā' achieved was to obstruct the growth of social distance and (crucially in Kavād's case) to undermine the power of those who had a vested interest in it's preservation. Communal access to women prevented the formation of noble lineages sealed off from the rest of the community by endogamous or indeed incestuous unions; communal access to the wives of aristocrats destroyed the mystique of noble blood produced by generations of such unions, placing a question mark over the political entitlements with which such blood was associated. The horror of ibāḥa to non-Zarādushṭīs lay precisely in the fact that it obliterated hereditary ranking. It worked by "obscuring the descent of every individual", as the Dēnkard complains. "Genealogies were mixed", "base people of all sorts mixed with people of noble blood", as we are told with reference to Mazdak's revolt. "If people have women and property in common, how can they know their children and establish their genealogies?", as Zoroastrian priests asked Mazdak, who was supposedly dumfounded, never having thought that far himself.

If Kavād and Mazdak modified Zaradusht's vision on women and property in the course of their attempt to implement it, the later Mazdakites, or some of them, seem to have changed it almost beyond recognition. The Dēnkard accuses them of tracing descent through the mother and of holding the property of sons and brothers in common; thus conjuring up a society similar to that of the famous Nayar of Malabar (or for that matter Strabo's Yemenis), among whom ownership of land and livestock was vested in the matrilineal lineage, agricultural work being done by brothers while their sisters produced children by non-resident and temporary husbands. In western Persia, to which the information in the Dēnkard is most likely to refer, Mazdakism would thus appear to have come to validate a local and, by Zoroastrian standards, highly unorthodox form of kinship organisation to which there is perhaps an allusion in Herodotus' account of Achaemenid Iran as well; and Narshakhī gives us to understand that Mazdakism came to perform the same function in Transoxania. But there were also Khurramī who used the creed to sanction monogamy. The Mazdakite association with deviant systems is consonant with the fact that it was among isolated mountaineers (many of them Kurds) that Mazdakism survived, but it is unlikely to throw light on the origins and nature of the heresy itself. Zaradushtism was undoubtedly a priestly response to mainstream Zoroastrian problems which only came to be adapted to local institutions after Mazdak's death.
egalitarian, but also pacifist. Kavād disliked war and bloodshed in his heretical phase;\(^{118}\) he was a mild man who tried to deal leniently with his subjects and enemies alike, a fact which some construed as weakness;\(^{119}\) and he was a vegetarian too: “the king eats no meat and holds bloodshed to be forbidden because he is a zinadīq”, as the ruler of the Yemen was informed.\(^{120}\) The king proved warlike enough on his restoration.\(^{121}\) Mazdak similarly wanted to eliminate war, hatred and dispute,\(^{122}\) and he too was a vegetarian: according to Ibn al-Athir, he held that “plants and animal products such as eggs, milk, butter and cheese suffice as human food”.\(^{123}\) According to al-Birūnī, he told Kavād to abstain from the slaughter of cattle “before the natural term of their life has come” (hatā ya’tiya ‘alayhā ajaluhā),\(^{124}\) which is more ambivalent: it could be taken to mean that carring was legitimate food, which Nöldeke rightly deemed unlikely,\(^{125}\) or that cattle could be both slaughtered and eaten provided that it was old, which is a view attested in Zoroastrian literature,\(^{126}\) or that cattle could be both slaughtered but not eaten, as opposed to cut up for its hides, horns, etc after it had died. Possibly al-Birūnī mixed up Zoroastrian and Mazdakite doctrine here and possibly it was the third interpretation he had in mind: either way, the evidence for Zarādushṭī vegetarianism is strong. (Pace Nöldeke, however, there does not seem to be a reference to his vegetarianism in the Pahlavi commentary on the Vendidad;\(^{127}\) nor does there seem to be one in the Dēnkhārd.\(^{128}\) The Khurramīs of the early Muslim world likewise disapproved of bloodshed, except in times of revolt; no living being should be killed in their view,\(^{129}\) and they too were vegetarians: Bābak complained that the hands and breath of his Muslim prison-guard stank of meat.\(^{130}\) One twelfth-century Khurramī sect prohibited injury to humans, animals and plants alike.\(^{131}\)

Possibly, Zarādushṭī was also an antinomian, but it is only of Mazdak’s followers that we have any information on this point. According to the Dēnkhārd, they did not perform the external acts of worship.\(^{132}\) They continued to ignore them after they had become Muslims (of sorts) as well: the Khurramīs did not perform the ritual prayer, observe the fast or otherwise adhere to the law, as several sources inform us.\(^{133}\)

Three further points need to be made about the Zarādushṭī heresy. First, neither Zarādushṭī’s heresy nor its Mazdakite version was a species of Manichaism. The idea that Mazdak was a Manichaean dissident goes back to Christensen and it is still widespread even though it was refuted by Molé almost thirty years ago.\(^{134}\) and again by Shaki and Yarshater in more recent publications.\(^{135}\) Christensen based his argument on a passage in Malalas according to which a third-century Manichaean by the name of Bundos proposed a new doctrine to the effect that the good god had defeated the evil god and that the victor should be honoured; this Bundos was active in Rome under Diocletian (285-305), but he subsequently went to Persia where his religion was called the doctrine of tön daristhenān, explained by Malalas as “the adherents of the good [god]” (probably from drist-dēn, “professing the true religion”).\(^{136}\) On the strength of the fact that Malalas also calls Kavād ho darasthenos, Christensen identifies Bundos and Zarādushṭ of Fasā, constructing Bundos as a Greek rendition of Pahlavi bundag or the like, meaning “venerable”.\(^{137}\) It must be granted that there is an odd coincidence here, and all the more so in that the Dēnkhārd could be taken to say that Zarādushṭ of Fasā was called dris[t]-dēn (though the word could also be read as Khrosakan),\(^{138}\) that various garbled epithets of Kavād in Muslim sources could likewise be read as dirst-dēn (though this reading is not compelling),\(^{139}\) and that the appellation al-‘adliyya and madhhab-i ‘adl attested in Muslim sources for the Mazdakite sect could be taken as a translation of the same term (on the assumption that d’rist could mean “just” as well as “true”, which is not however obvious).\(^{140}\) It may also be added that al-İskāfī has Mazdak come from Syria.\(^{141}\) But even so, Christensen’s theory is hard to accept.\(^{142}\) Al-İskāfī’s testimony is best discounted, partly because adab works are unreliable sources of historical information and partly because it is Bundos/Zarādushṭ rather than Mazdak who ought to have come from (or via) Syria. If “Mazdak” was a title, as Klima argued, one could of course take al-İskāfī’s statement as a confused reflection of the fact that the older Mazdak came from Syria and seek support for this view in the fact that al-İskāfī has his Mazdak go to Fars, the province with which Zarādushṭ is associated. But conjectures based on confusion do not make good evidence. Malalas’ testimony should probably be discounted too. It is not very likely that a native of a provincial town of Fars should have travelled all the way to Rome and made it as a preacher there before going back to found a sect in Iran; conversely, if Bundos was a Roman (or other non-Persian resident of Rome), how did the Farsīs come to accept him as a religious authority? A Syriac-speaking citizen of the Roman empire might well have made it as a preacher in Iraq, but surely not in Fasā; that Zarādushṭ came from Fasā is however a point on which Zoroastrian and Muslim sources are agreed. No communist views are reported for Bundos, and no assertion regarding the victory of the good god is attested for Zarādushṭ, or for any of his followers,\(^{143}\) so that all they have in common is the appellation dirst-dēn. If there is any significance to this, all one can say is that Malalas’ story is too garbled for us to retrieve it.

But even if one accepts that Bundos and Zarādushṭ are somehow related, it does not in any way follow that Zarādushṭ’s creed was a species of Manichaism, for Malalas plainly uses that word in the completely nonspecific sense of “dualist heresy”.\(^{144}\) Obviously,
Zarādusht was a dualist. Zoroastrian, Christian and Muslim sources are however agreed that his dualism was Zoroastrian rather than Manichaean.

Thus the Dēnkard refers to him as heretic who came up with the wrong answer to a Zoroastrian problem,\(^{145}\) while the History of Karka de-Bet Selok credits him and Mānī with different heresies, not, as Pigulevskaja would have it, the same.\(^{146}\) Al-Ṭabarī describes his sect as a development within Zoroastrianism (mīlla ... ibtada'āhī ft 'l-majūṣiyā);\(^{147}\) and it is similarly described by al-Yaʿqūbī\(^{148}\) and Ibn al-Nadīm.\(^{149}\) As for Kavād, the abominable Zarādūshṭ heresy that he took up was Zoroastrian (de-magūṣuta),\(^{150}\) and his religion is likewise described as Zoroastrianism (magūṣiyā) in the Chronicle of Siʿīrdr;\(^{151}\) the description is correct for he tried to impose fire-worship on the Armenians in his heretical phase.\(^{152}\) Mazdak, too, is classified as a Zoroastrian by Ibn al-Nadīm;\(^{153}\) and Mazdak was also a Zoroastrian according to the Pahlavi books, which depict him as a heretic, not as a Manichaean (Mānī being seen as the founder of a new religion);\(^{154}\) Mazdak modified Zoroaster’s religion according to al-Birūnī, Abū ‘l-Maʿālī and Ibn al-Athīr, all of whom clearly mean the original prophet, not Zarādūshṭ of Fāsā;\(^{155}\) he proposed a new interpretation of “the book of Zoroaster known as the Avestā”, according to al-Maṣʿūdī, al-Birūnī and al-Khwārizmī, and it was for this reason that he was known as a zindāq.\(^{156}\) He claimed to be a prophet sent to restore the religion of Zoroaster according to Niẓām al-Mulk.\(^{157}\) He aspired to the spiritual leadership of the religion of Ohrmazd according to the Dēnkard (in a passage on which he is not however explicitly named).\(^{158}\) What is more, he is said to have been a mūbad\(^{159}\) or even chief mūbad,\(^{160}\) that is to say, a member of the Zoroastrian priesthood; and though he is more likely to have been a minor priest than a leader of the clerical hierarchy (a position ascribed to him on the basis of his supposed association with Kavād), his allegiance to that hierarchy is not in doubt, for he (or a follower of his) compares two divine powers to the chief mūbad and chief hērābād in the fragment in cosmology preserved by al-Shahrastānī.\(^{161}\) He worshipped fire, too, for he had his own views on the number and distribution of fire-temples;\(^{162}\) and he allegedly proved the truth of his religion by making a fire speak,\(^{163}\) a miracle which is moreover borrowed from the life of Zoroaster.\(^{164}\) He also appears as a Zoroastrian in the Dāhīstān-i madahābīh, the author of which relied on Mazdakite informants and an alleged book of Mazdak’s entitled the Dīnād;\(^{165}\) and his speeches in Niẓām al-Mulk, Firdawsī and other sources are wholly Zoroastrian too.\(^{166}\)

The fact that Mazdakism originated within Zoroastrianism does not of course rule out the possibility that Zarādūshṭ and/or Mazdak were influenced by Manichaicism; but where is the influence supposed to be? In terms of ethos, the two heresies were diametrically opposed. Manichaicism was a world-renouncing religion which taught liberation from matter through abstention from procreation, bloodshed and material possessions. Zarādūshṭ and his followers by contrast taught equal access to all the good things of life, including women and material possessions.\(^{167}\) Christensen understands Mazdak’s vegetarianism as an attempt to avoid entanglement in matter,\(^{168}\) and Carratelli and others follow suit by crediting the Mazdakites with abstention from sex and material goods as well in their supposed effort to kill desire!\(^{169}\) But unlike the Manichaecans, the followers of Zarādūshṭ were vegetarians because life was good, not because bloodshed would entangle them in matter. Their general idea (as reported with particular clarity for later Khurramis) was that everyone should be nice to everyone else, and that all pleasurable things should be allowed as long as they did not harm the interests of others, animals included.\(^{170}\) There is a strange statement in al-Shahrastānī, citing Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, to the effect that Mazdak enjoined qāl al-anfūs, “killing of souls/selves” as a means of liberation from evil and darkness, which Christensen took to mean that he enjoined asceticism.\(^{171}\) But in Ibn al-Malāḥīmī’s and ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s versions of Abū ʿĪsā, the reference is to actual killing;\(^{172}\) Christensen’s interpretation of the passage is thus untenable.\(^{173}\) There is in fact no reason at all to assume that the Mazdakites practised asceticism;\(^{174}\) though Mirkhwānd, a fifteenth-century author, claims that Mazdak “wore woollen clothing and engaged in constant devotion”,\(^{175}\) all early sources give us to understand that Mazdak preached elimination of desire through fulfilment; of one Mazdakite sect we are explicitly told that they rejected the asceticism of the Marcionites; with whom they otherwise had much in common.\(^{176}\) But what then does Abū ʿĪsā’s statement mean? Since he knew that Mazdak was a pacifist,\(^{177}\) he can hardly have credited the latter with a recommendation of ritual murder; but he may well have meant that Mazdak permitted killing, normally prohibited, under conditions of revolt, which is what the later Mazdakites took to be the case;\(^{178}\) and he may further have stated that Mazdak rationalised this dispensation on the grounds that opponents [so overcome by evil as to force the believers into revolt] should be killed because there was no other way of releasing their souls. But this is not a Manichaean view. No doubt Mazdak’s heresy resembled Manichaicism, as Abū ʿĪsā says with reference to Mazdak’s belief in two principles,\(^{179}\) but then what dualism did not? The fact that Abū ʿĪsā compares it with Manichaicism rather than Zoroastrianism merely illustrates the fact that Manichaicism was the most important form of dualism to early Muslims, being infinitely more intelligible, enticing and dangerous than Zoroastrianism; it does not mean that Manichaicism and Mazdakism were especially closely related. Like all the Iranian dualists,
Mazdak had views on the nature of light and darkness, but his views were Zoroastrian, not Manichaean. If Abū Tāsa (or an anonymous informant) is to be trusted, Mazdak had certainly been exposed to Gnostic influence in respect of his cosmology, but there is nothing specifically Manichaean about this influence; some even conjecture it to have been neo-Platonic. Madelung suggests that it was Kanthaean. The later Khurramīs likewise subscribed to a number of beliefs commonly associated with Gnosticism, notably reincarnation of the soul and periodic incarnation of the deity (or, less radically, of messengers) on earth, and they shared with the Manichaens the concept of the moon as a soul-carrying vessel which waxes and wanes in accordance with its freight. But they need not have borrowed any of these ideas from the Manichaens, and they were in any case quite unlike the Manichaens in their ethos, a fact well captured by the fact that they came to be known as Khurramīs or Khurram-dīnīs “adherents of the joyous religion”. Zaradushthism was not a religion of cosmic alienation in either its original or its later versions; it did not preach that man is a stranger in this world, a fallen soul or spark of light trapped in matter by mistake, nor did it teach asceticism as a means of escape. It did say that the world has arisen through a deplorable mixture of light and darkness to which man should respond by trying to vanquish darkness and its evil creations (notably by avoiding discord and bloodshed), but then so did Zoroastrianism. Clearly Zoroastrianism was the common source of Gnostic dualism and the Zarādūshthī/Mazdakīte/Khurramī religion; the latter sprang directly from it, not from a Gnostic offshoot, and it continued to be a Zoroastrian heresy rather than a Gnostic creed inasmuch as it remained life-affirming: hatred of matter is not attested.

The second point that needs to be stressed is that Zarādūshthī’s communism owed its existence to Zoroastrian thought, not to classical antecedents. The practice of looking for Greek antecedents is a venerable one inasmuch as Agathias was the first to do so: he rejected the theory, not because of its historical implausibility, but rather because the Persians could not in his view be credited with motives higher than concupiscence. More recently, Altheim and Stiel have located the origins of Mazdakite thought in neo-Platonism supposedly transmitted by Bud, a sixth-century Syrian whom the authors briskly redate to the third century and identify with Bundos, who supposedly picked up neo-Platonist ideas in Rome before moving on to the Murghāb in eastern Iran, where his ideas lay dormant for two centuries until they were picked up by Mazdak. Klīma, on the other hand, played around with the idea of finding the roots of Zarādūshthī communism in Carpocratianism, and though he more or less renounced this view in his second publication, it has since been revived by Caratelli, according to whom Zarādūshthī picked up Carpocratian ideas during his sojourn as Bundos in the Roman empire. That these suggestions are strained in the extreme should be obvious. Christensen saw a reference to Zarādūshthī of Fasa in a bilingual inscription (Phoenician and Greek) from Cyrenaica in which Zarādēs is mentioned along with Pythagoras as having commended communism in respect of property and wives; and Klīma cautiously followed suit in his first book on the subject. But later he discovered that the inscription had long been dismissed as a fake, as had another (in Greek alone) in which Zoroastre and Pythagoras appear along with Maedakēs and others as commenders of communal life. Even if Zoroaster were to turn up as a commender of communism in a genuine inscription, he was so widely invoked as a figure of wisdom in the Graeco-Roman world that his appearance along with Pythagoras as a source of exotic ideas would tell us no more about intellectual exchanges between the Roman and the Persian empires than does the legend to the effect that Pythagoras and other Greek philosophers had learnt their wisdom from Persian Magi. The Carpocratian hypothesis is quite unnecessary too. For one thing, the idea of joint property and/or women is so simple that it is unlikely only to have been dreamed up once, all other occurrences being the outcome of diffusion. For another thing, Zarādūshthī communism was intimately linked with Zoroastrian speculation on Āz, concupiscence, which is the principal force through which Ahriman (the evil god) gains power over mankind and which represents both excess and deprivation, fulfilment in the right measure being the remedy against it. Communal goods and wives were meant to diminish the power of Āz, as a heretic affirms in the Zoroastrian books; and the only objection his orthodox adversary could mobilise against it was that communism turns the socio-political order upside down: logically, the communist argument was unimpeachable. That the Zoroastrians should have had to visit the Roman empire in order to develop such ideas is implausible in the extreme.

Finally, the modern tendency to dismiss accounts of Zarādūshthī communism, or more precisely that in respect of women, as exaggerated by hostile reporters, twisted by malicious slander and so forth, is mistaken. Obviously there are embellishments in the sources, such as Kavād becoming a Mazdakite because he fancied an otherwise unavailable woman or Mazdak provoking his own fall by asking Kavād for Khusrāw’s mother; this is as might be expected. But there is nothing embellished about the simple claim that communal access to women was part of the Zarādūshthī creed. On this there is agreement in Greek, Syriac, Zoroastrian and Muslim sources; and we may take the sources on their word, for the Zarādūshthīs are the only sectarians of the Middle East to whom a
communist vision of production and reproduction is imputed.

It is true, of course, that numerous Gnostic sects both before and after the appearance of Kavād and Mazdak were accused of promiscuity and that the Ismāʿīlīs of tenth-century Iraq and eleventh-century Bahrayn are said to have been communists, the former in that they pooled both their women and their property on the eve of their ritual departure from non-Islamic society and the latter in that they organised themselves along communist (or semi-communist) lines on a permanent basis. But neither the Ismāʿīlīs nor their Gnostic predecessors, with the exception of the Carpocratians, are described as adherents of communist creeds. The Gnostics rejected the law as an instrument of salvation and frequently preached and/or engaged in the most outrageous behaviour they could think of by way of proving its irrelevance, with the result that they were routinely accused of promiscuity; and believers in messianic visions were apt to engage in the same kind of behaviour, partly because they shared the Gnostic view of the law and more particularly because ritual violation of deeply internalised rules is an effective way of burning bridges, or in other words of ensuring that the sectarians will have to stick together even though life on the margins may prove difficult and the messiah may fail to arrive. But the antinomian behaviour rarely amounted to communism in either case, and there was no communism in the creeds themselves. The Ismāʿīlī leader in Iraq who persuaded his followers to pool their women and property under his control accomplished the bridge-burning and united his followers in abject dependence on himself by one and the same measure: his communism was instrumental. We do not know what sort of permanent order emerged from his innovations, but in Ismāʿīlī Bahrayn, where the first (and apparently non-communist) attempt at transition to millenarian conditions was a failure, a new order eventually emerged which had communist features too. Here the communism was not instrumental, or not anymore, but it was still a local vision of messianic society which the propounders of the official creed had not envisaged. One can deny that the Ismāʿīlīs engaged in any communist activities whatever, be it in Iraq or Bahrayn (and many scholars are suspicious of the reports) without greatly affecting our understanding of the Ismāʿīlī belief system.

But in the case of Zarādushṭīs, communism is presented as an integral part of the belief system itself, and one cannot reject it as mere slander without thereby causing the very creed to vanish: take away the communist vision of production and reproduction and what is left? Either we must accept that the Zarādushṭīs advocated joint control of women and property, as the sources say (since one can hardly reject the claim in respect of women and accept it in respect of land), or else we must admit that all we know about their beliefs is that they included pacifism and vegetarianism, everything else being misrepresentation. But misrepresentations of what? If we take the sources to be indulging in stereotypes, the only stereotypes available are those associated with Gnostic and millenarian sects, but these have the merit of being instantly recognisable and they do not fit: whether a particular group did or did not go in for orgiastic nights, incestuous couplings, obligatory pederasty/wine-drinking/murder or the like is usually impossible to determine, but the nature of the charge is unmistakable; and it is not the charge we encounter in connection with the Zarādushṭīs. Mazdak preached quīl al-anfūs, but the reference is not to ritual murder. Both he and Zarādushṭī may have rejected Zoroastrian law, given the Gnostic tendencies of their sect, but the sources say nothing about it. The Zarādushṭīs believed in communal access to women and property, but their views are described as utopian, not antinomian. It was only among the later Khurramīs that ibhāḥat al-nīsāʾ assumed an antinomian colouring (ibhāḥat al-mdl, or communal access to land, having been largely or wholly forgotten in the meantime), just as it was only among them that millenarianism made its appearance. It is precisely because the Zarādushṭīs were utopian rather than antinomian communists that scholars such as Klima and Caratelli were fascinated by the Carpocratians, who likewise incorporated communism in their very creed: the parallel is real even though the genetic relationship between them is fictitious. It is for the same reason that the Zarādushṭīs cannot be presented as victims of a stereotype; on the contrary they engendered one: all communist tendencies in the Muslim world were automatically branded as Mazdakite borrowings. And it is not of course problematic that the Zarādushṭīs were less communist in practice than they were in principle, whereas it is the other way round with the Ismāʿīlīs. Neither Kavād nor Mazdak could hope to transform Sasanid Iran into a communist society in the sense of one in which resources were pooled under state control; the empire was too large and too complex for this to be possible, and too opposed to the attempt; however the vision was to be enacted, public ownership was not an option, and it does not in fact seem to have suggested itself to them. But petty communities opting out of mainstream society in the name of a heretical creed were well placed to obtain a consensus on communist ways, even if these ways were not part of the heresy itself, and they were sufficiently small and homogeneous for public control of land and other resources to be viable. (There was no pooling of women once the transitional phase was over.)

In sum, sources of the most diverse kind are unanimous that the Zarādushṭīs preached communal access to women and property, and many confirm that communal access to women continued to be preached
by the Khurramiš; some of the observers were contemporaries of the Zarādushṭīs, others of the Khurramiš, and they were not invariably hostile; their claim is specific, not stereotypical, and what they say makes sense. On what grounds, then, do we purport to know better, a millennium and a half later? The modern scepticism does not arise from the nature of the documentation, but rather from a deep-seated conviction that communist solutions to the problems of production and reproduction simply cannot have been proposed in earnest in Sasanid Iran. But this is a matter of evidence: a great many things that simply cannot happen do happen. To reject the evidence on the basis of an a priori conviction is to engage in a circular argument; and the circular argument leads to the absurd proposition that the sources invented an intellectually coherent communist doctrine in order to distance themselves from a sect which, whatever else may be said about it, certainly was not communist. We may take it that Kavād and Mazdak endeavoured to transform Zoroastrian speculation on the elimination of Az into practical politics, as Molé said; the question is not whether they made the attempt, but rather why they made it.

III

Kavād’s communism is generally, and undoubtedly correctly, interpreted as an anti-noble measure. Joint access to women, promoted in the name of the Zoroastrian faith to which practically all Iranian nobles were committed, offered a beguilingly simple way of curtailing the power of the nobility for a ruler who had no army with which to defeat or despoilate it, his only troops being those furnished by the nobles themselves. In practice, of course, the attempt was a failure, and Kavād would scarcely have made it if he had not been a very young man at the time: he was twelve or fifteen when he was raised to the throne, or at any rate a minor (some dissenting views notwithstanding), meaning that he was only in his early twenties when the Persians put an end to his experiment. But unconventional though it was, the experiment clearly formed part of the protracted effort of the Sasanid emperors to modernise the Sasanid state. Modernity from a Sasanid point of view was incarnate in Byzantium, which was highly centralised, wealthy and sophisticated by the standards of its Persian neighbours and which unwittingly induced the latter to reorganise themselves along similar lines by being almost constantly at war with them, the Sasanids being forced to imitate in order to keep up. Pērūz, Kavād’s father, had incurred the enmity of the Zoroastrian clergy by attempting to introduce Roman baths, which Kavād himself was also to sponsor too in due course, presumably in much the same spirit as that in which Ataturk sponsored European hats; and Kavād is said to have engaged in a whole string of Byzantinising measures in his first reign, reducing his kitchen expenses in imitation of Julian and promoting agriculture in imitation of the Romans in general (though he hardly needed the Greek example as far as agriculture is concerned). He is also said to have engaged in ideological market research, ordering each religious community in his realm to present him with a treatise on its faith, presumably with a view to ascertaining which religion offered the most appropriate aegis under which to effect the reorganisation; and though he abandoned both his heresy and his openness to foreign religions on his restoration, he stuck to his efforts at centralisation: it was he who initiated the cadastral survey which culminated in Khusrau’s celebrated tax-reform. Khusrau was a Byzantiniser, too, for whether or not his tax reform was inspired by the Byzantine system, he built an exact replica of Antioch in Iraq, populating it with Antiochene prisoners-of-war and proudly proclaiming it better than the original version; and he took pleasure in upstaging the Greeks by offering hospitality to the pagan philosophers when Justinian closed their academy. The Sasanid reaction to its Byzantine neighbour is an example of the well-known rule that military competition between states of similar standing is apt to engender political, social and cultural change; and it is doubtless in this context that Kavād’s heresy should be seen.

As regards Mazdak’s revolt, however, we can only guess at its causes. But before we start guessing we need to establish where and when it broke out, a question on which there is some contentious evidence. The sources generally assume the Mazdakites to have rebelled in response to Kavād’s adoption of the Zarādushṭī heresy, that is in the 490s, and to have been suppressed by Khusrau after the latter’s accession, that is in the 530s. If Kavād’s heresy and Mazdak’s revolt were separate phenomena, we are left without a date for the beginning of the revolt, but its end is not affected. It is, however, to the end of the revolt that the problematic evidence refers.

The problem is caused by Malalas. According to this source, an unnamed Persian emperor was angered by the appearance of “Manicheans” in his realm and summoned them to a meeting at which he had all of them massacred, including their “bishop” Indazarar, whereupon he gave orders for their property to be confiscated and for all Manicheans elsewhere in his realm to be burnt along with their books; Malalas had this information from a Persian convert to Christianity by the name of Timothy. That the “Manicheans” were Mazdakites is hardly open to doubt; their bishop Indarazar (Andarzar, adviser or teacher) may well have been Mazdak himself, and though it is unlikely that Zoroastrians should have wished to defile fire by
burning heretics and their books, the claim that the Mazdakites were massacred at a meeting at court recurs in Arabic and Persian sources. Malalas, however, places his account between the Antiochene earthquake of 528 and al-Mundhir's Syrian incursion of 529, meaning that the unnamed emperor is Kavad. By contrast, all Muslim sources credit both the meeting and the massacre to Khusrau, and almost all are agreed that Khusrau acted as king; one version in al-Tabarî even says that he only took action when he was firmly established on the throne (lamma 'stahkama lahu 'l-mulk), and Khusrau was certainly king when he tidied up the social and economic disorder left by the revolt. The History of Karka de-Bet Selok, a contemporary Syriac source, implicitly places the suppression in the reign of Khusrau too, while the Christian Arabic Chronicle of Si'ird does so explicitly, and it is also Khusrau who disposes of Mazdak in the Zoroastrian books. How can Khusrau have massacred Mazdakites after his accession if Kavad had already done so in 528–9?

Nöldeke's answer is that the Mazdakites were suppressed twice, first in 528–9 by Khusrau in his capacity of heir apparent, and next some time after 531 by Khusrau in his capacity as king. As regards the second occasion, Nöldeke notes that Malalas has a strange story that Khusrau granted tolerance to the “Manichaeans” at the time of his accession: the nobles and priests reacted by plotting to depose him in favour of a brother of his, whereupon Khusrau executed all of them. This, Nöldeke thought, could perhaps be seen as a confused reflection of the second occasion on which Mazdakites were suppressed. But Nöldeke's solution is not acceptable. In the first place, it is one and the same meeting plus massacre which is placed in 528–9 by Malalas and after 531 by the Islamic tradition. Khusrau can hardly have massacred the Mazdakites twice in precisely the same manner; and if Mazdak was killed in the reign of Kavûd under the name of Indazarar, how did he come to be killed all over again by Khusrau after the latter's accession? In the second place, it does seem a bit strange that an edict of tolerance should be used as evidence of persecution. And in the third place, Klima is right that 528–9 is a most implausible date in view of the fact that the Persians were then in the middle of a war with the Byzantines. It was not an opportune moment for the emperor to start killing thousands of Persians, and if thousands of Persians had been killed in that year, we can be sure that the Byzantines would have heard of it. “It has been customary from ancient times both among the Romans and the Persians to maintain spies at public expense; these men are accustomed to go secretly among the enemy, in order that they may investigate accurately what is going on, and may then return and report to the rulers”: thus Procopius, who was in the field with Belisarius at the very time when the massacre is supposed to have been perpetrated. But the Byzantines heard nothing until a Persian convert got talking to Malalas some forty years after Khusrau’s accession. Readers of Abu l-Baqâ’s recently published Manâiqû may object that Nöldeke's reconstruction is confirmed by a passage in this text according to which “[Khusrau] killed Mazdak and his followers in the reign of his father and then again in his own reign until he destroyed and exterminated them; but the truth is that it only happened under Kavûd, for he was weak.” Nöldeke would however have been the first to see that this passage does not make sense. The manuscript does not have qatala, “he killed”, but qfla, “it is said”, which should be left unemended while two missing words should be supplied (an zahara or the like): “it is said that [that] Mazdak and his followers [appeared] in the reign of his father and then again in his own reign until he destroyed and exterminated them, but the truth is that is only happened under Kavûd, for he was weak.” Abu l-Baqâ was puzzled by the dual appearance of the “Mazdakites” and reacted by placing it all in the reign of Kavad. That was one way of bridging the gap between the Kavûd’s heresy and Mazdak’s revolt, and it was quite possibly how Malalas’ Persian informant had bridged it too.

Klima, however, solves the problem by placing the bloodbath earlier rather than later, with reference to Theophanes. Theophanes tells much the same story as Malalas, but he adds that Kavûd’s third son, Phthasouarsan, had been brought up by the “Manichaeans” and that he made a bid for the throne with their help: the “Manichaeans” undertook to make Kavad to abdicate in his favour, and he undertook to uphold their faith in return. This is why Kavad (who is explicitly named in this account) killed “thousands upon thousands of Manichaeans is a single day”, along with their bishop Indazarar, etc. Theophanes places his account in 523–4, and this is the date that Klima accepts.

Theophanes’ Phthasouarsan renders Padashkhwarshâh, ruler of Tabaristan, the ruler in question being Kavûs, Kavûd’s eldest son, not his third. Assuming that Kavûs was born in Kavûd’s first reign, it is not impossible that he should have been tutored in the Zarâdushthi faith for a while; but given that Kavûd was only in his twenties when he was deposed, the instruction must have ceased when Kavûs was a mere child, and it certainly cannot have continued right up to his bid for the throne, as Michael the Syrian’s version of Theophanes’ story would have it. Kavûs was the natural heir according to Procopius, but Kavûd did not want him to succeed, and his second son Jâmâsp was disqualified because he had lost an eye; so Kavûd’s heart was set on Khusrau. At some point after the accession of Justin I in 518, he began negotiating with the latter in the hope of making him adopt Khusrau
and thus guarantee his succession. These negotiations came to nothing, and in 527 war broke out again, so that when Kavad fell ill in 531 the best he could do was to write a succession document in Khusrau’s favour, asProcopius and many later sources say he did, or to crown Khusrau himself, as he did according to Malalas. Kāvūs laid claim to the throne immediately after Kavād’s death according toProcopius, and staged a revolt at some point or other after Khusrau’s accession according to Ibn Islāndiyār, claiming the throne with reference to his seniority and losing his life in the process. Did he also conspire with Mazdakites some seven years before Kavād’s death, thereby causing the Mazdakites (though not himself) to be massacred? This is what Klima would have us believe, but his reconstruction carries no more conviction than does Nöldeke’s.

In the first place, the Mazdakites can hardly have entertained hopes of making Kavād resign in favour of Kāvūs in 523-4, given that Kavad had by then revealed his willingness to go to extremes in order to ensure the succession of Khusrau. In the second place, and more importantly, Theophanes places the death of Kavād in 526. The interval between the massacre and Kavād’s death is thus exactly the same in Theophanes as it is in Malalas: two to three years. Since Kavaid did not die in 526, but rather in 531, the massacre should be moved from 523-4 to 528-9, the date at which Malalas puts it; or in other words, Theophanes’ date is simply Malalas’ date in a new guise, as Klima himself saw even though he refused to accept it. In the third place, what do we do about the fact that the non-Greek sources, be they Muslim, Zoroastrian or Christian, associate the massacre with Khusrau rather than Kavād? Klima’s answer is that Khusrau suppressed the Mazdakites in the reign of Kavād, acting as co-regent; but the sources on which he bases this conjecture are both exceedingly late and ahistorical, as he himself admits; and if Khusrau was co-regent, how could the Mazdakites have believed that Kavād might resign in favour of Kavūs? If moreover the Mazdakites were suppressed in the reign of Kavād, why were they still around in the reign in Khusrau for the latter to grant them tolerance (according to Malalas) or to suppress them (according to the Islamic tradition), and why was it only in his reign that the chaos left by the rebellion was tidied up? Or are we to take it that all the sources are mistaken when they claim that something or other happened between Mazdakites and Khusrau in the latter’s reign?

Let us start again. The massacre placed by Malalas and Theophanes in the reign of Kavād is identical with that placed by the Islamic tradition in the reign of Khusrau, and Khusrau is so firmly associated with Mazdakites in general and their end in particular that their suppression must in fact be credited to him. Khusrau did not however act as co-regent with his father, nor did the latter abdicate in his favour, except in the limited sense that Khusrau may have been raised to the throne a couple of weeks before his father died. This may well have been the starting point for the stories of co-regency and abdication with which some sources try to bridge the gap between Kavād’s heresy and Khusrau’s accession, but it does not allow for any action by Khusrau against the Mazdakites before the year in which he actually acceded. In other words, Khusrau must have suppressed them in his capacity as king. It follows that Malalas must have misplaced his account of this event. Either his Persian informant shared the view of Abu ’l-Baqā’ or else he himself got things wrong, being in general apt to do so; the unnamed emperor was at all events Khusrau, not Kavād, and the date was some time after 531, not 528-9. (Theophanes merely followed suit; spelling out the emperor’s name as Kavād and getting the latter’s death date wrong in the process.)

If the Mazdakites were suppressed in Khusrau’s reign, by far the most reasonable conjecture is that the revolt broke out on his accession. For one thing, it was the kind of revolt that would rapidly paralyse the workings of the state, yet Kavād was engaged in war against the Byzantines from 527 until his death: clearly, both money and men could be raised in the normal fashion; indeed, Byzantine overtures of peace were vigorously rejected. For another thing, it is precisely when rulers are preoccupied with succession disputes, civil war or other forms of splits within the elite that peasant revolts tend to occur. Khusrau’s succession was problematic, as has been seen, and it continued to be disputed after he had been enthroned. His eldest brother Kāvūs rebelled against him, while others plotted to overthrow him in favour of a son of Jāmāsp, the brother who was disqualified because he had lost an eye. That the Mazdakite revolt should have broken out in the course of all this makes excellent sense.

Khusrau made peace with the Byzantines as soon as he succeeded, and there is every reason to believe Malalas’ assertion that he made peace with the Mazdakites too, issuing some sort of a decree of tolerance for the Zaradushti faith in order to buy time. This action increased the opposition against him on the part of the clergy and nobility, as Malalas claims, is perfectly possible too. At all events, he crushed the revolt of Kāvūs and foiled the plot in favour of his nephew, executing all his brothers along with numerous grandees of the realm (though the nephew is supposed to have escaped); and being now firmly ensconced on the throne (al-šābkkāmahu lahu ’l-mulk, as al-Tabarī says), he took on the Mazdakites: their revolt was suppressed and the chaos they had left tidied up. And once this was done, he took on the Byzantines too, resuming the war against them in 540. By 540, then, it was all over. This fits with a passage in the Chronicle of Si’ird, according to which
Zaradushthism was still rampant in the period between Mar Aba’s return from Constantinople, which took place somewhere between 525 and 533, and his election as patriarch in either 536–7 or 540, five or eight years after Khosrau’s accession.253 In that period Mar Aba did his best to warn the people of the Nisibis area against the doctrine of Zarādushth which taught that “all physical pleasures are licit.”254 This is certainly a reference to the Zarādushthī heresy, not Zoroastrianism.255 and it lends some support to the view that Mazdakism was only suppressed after Khosrau’s accession.

Were the Mazdakites really in league with Kāvūs, as Theophanes asserts? It is not impossible. A princely contender for the throne may not be an obvious ally for a rural mob on the rampage, but both were rebels, and their revolts must have been enacted about the same time. It does however seem more likely that the complicity is a later fiction. Khosrau may have used the Mazdakite revolt to destroy his brother’s credentials, accusing him of complicity with the dreaded rebels and harping on his real or invented upbringing in the Zarādushthī faith, or later generations may have inferred the complicity from the sheer fact that the revolts were contemporary. The latter seems more likely given that the story fails to appear in Malalas, who wrote about 570, whereas it was known to Theophanes, who wrote about 800 and whose version of the Mazdakite bloodbath reflects other developments in the tradition: thus he is familiar with the idea of Kavād abdicating; and his statement that myriads of Mazdakites were killed “in one day” echoes that current in the Islamic tradition.256

As for where the revolt broke out, the Dēnkard implies that the rebellion affected all or most of Iran, but the passage is both vague and polemical.257 Most of such exiguous evidence as we have points to Iraq. Mazdak may have come from Mādhrāyā in lower Iraq; it was in the Nisibis area that Mar Aba encountered Zarādushths; and it was in Iraq (between al-Jāzir and al-Nahrawān) that myriads of Mazdakites were slaughtered in one day.258 This is not to deny that the revolt may have spread to Persia itself: the later Khurramīs were concentrated in the mountains of western Persia,259 and al-Iskāfi has it that Mazdak corrupted the population of Fars.260 But Iraq would seem to have been the centre.

What then was the revolt about? Some might argue that this question is superfluous: since peasants always had grounds for rebellion against landlords, agents of the state and other exploiters, their perennial grievances are less important for explanatory purposes than the particular conditions under which they manage to take action against their oppressors.261 The facilitating factors in our case were the disarray of the central government on the one hand (as argued already) and the availability of a religious message with corresponding organisation on the other; and as regards the latter, it seems reasonable to infer that Kavād’s sponsorship of the Zarādushthī heresy had given it a boost which assisted its diffusion. But one would nonetheless like to know more about the specific grievances involved.

To Marxists such as Pigulevskaja, Klima and Nomani, the revolt was a response to the break-up of the old commune in which land was held in collective ownership, the break-up being effected by landlords representing the forces of feudalism;262 to non-Marxists, the complete lack of evidence for the existence of such communes in Iran precludes acceptance of the thesis: that the Mazdakite movement reflects “the interest and hopes of those reduced to dependent status” is obvious enough, but there is no particular reason to believe that the dependence was recent.263 There had been a famine under Perōz, with which the government is supposed to have coped admirably;264 but this was some time ago, and the later famine which Firdawši and others describe as the trigger of Mazdak’s is probably fictitious.265 The relationship between famines and revolts is in any case contentious. It is considerably more tempting to link Mazdak’s rebellion with the cadastral survey initiated by Kavād. The fiscal reforms which followed the completion of this survey are described as having involved a change from payment of a proportion of the harvest, presumably in kind, to payment of fixed taxes in cash.266 This is routinely acclaimed as the epitome of justice in the sources, and from the ruler’s point of view, fixed taxes were of course highly desirable in that they made for a stable and predictable income. But it is precisely the kind of change that would threaten the peasants’ livelihood, partly because fixed taxes removed the guarantee that something would be left for the peasants themselves to eat, and partly because taxes in cash forced the peasants to sell their crops, which in the vast majority of cases meant selling at the same time, with the result that prices would slump and that taxes could not be paid and/or that subsistence could not be ensured without ruinous loans from landlords or merchants.267 There are no complaints about taxes in cash in the sources, be it because they were generally paid in cash already, or had come to be by Muslim times, or because our information is fragmentary in the extreme; but we are explicitly told that the shift to fixed taxes was a source of hardship. A story in al-Tabar’s has it that when Khosrau solicited reactions to his proposed tax reforms, a scribe pointed out that he was putting a “perpetual tax on perishable things, such as a vine which may die, a grain which may dry up, a canal which may disappear or a spring or qandāt which may lose its water” (to which Khosrau reacted by having the scribe executed)!268 a tenth-century landowner from Nihāwand informs us that the Persians were horrified by the Sasanid shift from proportional to
The anonymous *Nihāyat al-irab* adds that the Iraqis found Khusrau’s tax régime so hard to bear and protested so much against it that proportional taxation (*muqāsama*) was eventually restored.272 Here then we have a change of the requisite kind.

Kāvād did not live to complete his cadastral survey, and the sources generally credit the fiscal reform to Khusrau, who is said to have enacted it after his suppression of the Mazdakite revolt. Modern scholars are accordingly more inclined to see the revolt as the cause or facilitating factor of the reform than the other way round, the argument being that the Mazdakite disturbances broke the power of the nobility, thereby enabling the crown to reorganise the state.273 But this argument rests on the assumption that the Mazdakites rebelled in Kāvād’s heretical phase and continued to be on the rampage for another thirty-five years thereafter (orchestrated by Kāvād himself in Gaube’s view). If Kāvād initiated his cadastral survey before Khusrau was confronted with Mazdakites, we have the choice between arguing that the survey formed part of the aetiology of the revolt or else that there was no connection between the two phenomena, and the latter does sound improbable. Mere fear of the reform could hardly have generated a major rebellion. It is however likely that the reform was instituted piecemeal as the cadastral survey went along, in which case it was started by Kāvād and completed by Khusrau, not instituted by the latter alone; and Kāvād undoubtedly started the survey with attendant reform in Iraq. Several sources, in fact, inform us that it was Kāvād who instituted the new tax system in Iraq, or more precisely in the Sawad,274 adding that he collected 150 million *mithqāls* of silver,275 though others claim that it was Khusrau who collected this sum after Kāvād had died,276 and Kāvād is also credited with the shift from *muqāsama* to fixed taxes in Fars.277 He set up his tax office (*diwan*) in Hulwān,278 which he is commonly said to have built and in which the registers were kept until Umayyad times.279 If the fiscal reform was initiated by Kāvād himself in Iraq and western Persia, it is not surprising that the peasants of these regions rebelled under the leadership of a dissident priest as soon as an opportune moment presented itself in the form of a disputed succession. But Khusrau crushed the revolt and completed the reform, be it in a modified form or otherwise.

This would seem to be the best that one can do in the way of guesswork. Going beyond guesswork would be preferable, of course, but it is only in connection with Mazdak’s revolt that the sources on Sasanid history afford us a glimpse of a real society at work, and they only show us enough to make us realise how little information was transmitted.1

---


2 “Mazdak: Historical Reality or Invention?”, in St Ir, XI, 1982 (= Mêlanges offerts à Raoul Curé).

3 Thus Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sassaniden* (Copenhagen, 1925) (summarised in idem, “Mazdak: Historical Reality or Invention?”, in St Ir, XI, 1982 (= Mêlanges offerts à Raoul Curé).)


5 Thus Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sassaniden* (Copenhagen, 1925), pp. 427 f. (In what follows I shall give the author of the work as Tabari when the reference is to the translation and as Nöldeke when the reference is to the commentary). Kāvād was deposed in 495 according to N. Pigulevskaja (*Les villes de l’État iranien* (Paris, 1957), p. 215), in 497 according to Gaube (“Mazdak”, p. 111), and restored in 499 according to both; but neither offers any arguments against Nöldeke’s reasoning.


9 Diakrinomenos, in G. C. Hansen (ed.), *Theodoros Anagnostos Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin, 1971), p. 157 (Epitome, fragment no. 557). The date of John Diakrinomenos seems impossible to fix precisely. His history ran from about 431 to 471 according to A. Cameron and J. Herrin (eds. and trs.), *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: the Parastases Syntomos Chronikoi* (Leiden, 1984), p. 39. But fragment no. 557 refers to Kāvād’s restoration and so must date from 498 at the earliest; and its wording reflects that of Procopius or Agathias (though he transcribes Kāvād as Kōadēs where his two predecessors have Kabadēs), so it must have been written in the second half of the sixth century or later. Hansen places Theodoros Anagnostos/Lector in the early sixth century and dates the epitome of his ecclesiastical history, in which John Diakrinomenos is cited, to “probably after 610” (*Kirchengeschichte*, pp. iv ff, xxii, xxxiii).


The exceptions are al-Ya‘qūbī, Ta‘rikh, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883), vol. I, p. 186, and the narratives B and C in Ṭabarānī (Christensen, Kavād, pp. 26 ff.), where Mazdak is first mentioned under Kavād.

Mazdak, p. 135.

Beitrdge, p. 54.

Cf. Noldeke’s introduction to his Geschichte, pp. xv ff.; Christensen, "Mazdak", pp. 994 f., where the fictional themes show the book of Marwak or Mardak to have contained wisdom.

He explicitly says that the translator who furnished him with the text had been both (Mazdak, p. 142); and she is in fact described as both in Bā‘al’mī, Tājurme, p. 145 = 239 (he had a son by her); cf. also Mīrhwān, Ra‘aštul, vol. I, pp. 774, 775 = part I, vol. II, pp. 369, 370, where Kavād sleeps with her with Mazdak’s permission, Mazdak being the inventor of incestuous marriages (a role also ascribed to him by modern Zoroastrians, cf. Christensen, L’Iran, p. 325).

Beitrdge, pp. 43 ff. (where Gaube’s theory is rejected in advance: we are not to infer that Mazdak did not exist).

Cf. Noldeke’s introduction to his Geschichte, pp. xv ff.; Christensen, Kavād, pp. 22 ff.; Klima, Mazdak, pp. 7 ff. in Geschichte, p. 54.

A. Ta‘azzoli, "Observations sur le soi-disant Mazdak-Nāmag", Acta Iranica xxii (1984); the work in question is variously known as kitdb mzdk/mrwk/mrdk; Hamza assigns it to the Parthian period, so its subject matter cannot have been Sasanid; no book of Mazdak is cited in any account of Mazdak’s revolt, and several references show the book of Marwak or Mardak to have contained wisdom.

Cf. Yarshater, “Mazdak”, pp. 994 f., where the fictional themes (here assumed to have come from a Mazdak-nāmag) are listed.

He explicitly says that the translator who furnished him with the extracts from the Royal Annals had abbreviated his material, so that silence in Agathias cannot be taken to mean silence in the Annals; and his account of Kavād’s law was clearly dependent on Procopius (Cameron, “Agathias on the Sassanians”, pp. 114, 136).

The Muslim sources have Kavād father Khusrav during his journey to the Hephtalites after his deposition, or on such a journey in the reign of his predecessor Balāsh; and since the latter journey is simply a duplicate of the former (Noldeke, Geschichte, pp. 133 n., 137 n.), the story would imply that Khusrav was conceived in 498. But the story is obviously legendary. (For “an incestuous marriage” Kavād was conceived in 498. But the story is obviously legendary. (For “an incestuous marriage” see the references given above, nn. 8-14. Cf. also the confused account in E. Rehatsek, part I (Oxford, 1880), p. 206, in which the Persian people consider Kavād to have been born in Kavād’s first reign.

Dinawari, Akhkhār, p. 68 (where the Persians realise that he raja’a anmm kānna ittahānnahu); Bā‘al’mī, Tājurme, p. 146 = 241 (where Kavād stops supporting the Mazdakites, though he continued to adhere to them in secret); Ibn Qutayba, Mérīf, p. 292 (where Mazdak is killed prior to Kavād’s restoration to the throne); Maqdisī, Badr, vol. III, p. 168 = 171 (ja-tabarrān a’minhum).

Noldeke, Geschicthe, p. 462.

Mazdak seduces Kavād and is killed by Khusrav in the Bundahishn (B. T. Ankesaria (ed. and tr.), Zand-i Akhsh (Bombay, 1956), p. 277; missing from the translation of E. West, Pahlavi Texts, part i (Oxford, 1880)). He is disposed of by Khusrav without reference to Kavād in the Bahman Yast (B. T. Ankesaria (ed. and tr.), Zand-i Vohdān Yasn and Two Pahlavi Fragments (Bombay, 1957), pp. 102, 106; West, Pahlavi Texts, part i, pp. 193 f., 201; Christensen, Kavād, pp. 20 f.). Mazdak is also mentioned on his own in the Dēnkard (J. de Menasce (tr.), Le troisième livre du Dēnkard (Paris, 1973), p. 316; below, nn. 42, 112), and in the Pahlavi commentary on Vendīdād (below, n. 127), while Khusrav is also mentioned in the Dēnkard as having combated unspecified heresy and tyranny (West, op. cit., part iv (Oxford, 1892), p. 415; Christensen, Kavād, pp. 21 f.).

Cf. Christensen, Kavād, pp. 26 ff.

These are mostly Muslim (cf. Christensen, Kavād, pp. 26 ff.); but there are also two seventeenth-century Zoroastrian ones: a poetic account of Mazdak and Khusrav by a Kirmānī dastūr in Dārāb Hornmazyr, Rāstūd, ed. E. M. R. Unvala (Bombay, 1922), vol. II, p. 214 ff.; summarised by A. Christensen, “Two Versions of the History of Mazdak”, in Dr. Modi Memorial Volume (Bombay, 1930); and the Parsee Dabistān-i madhāhīb (Calcutta, 1809), vol. I, pp. 164 ff. = The Dabistān, or School of Manners, tr. D. Shea and A. Troyer (Paris, 1843), vol. I, pp. 372 ff. (on which see also E.F., s.v. “Dabistān al-madhāhīb”; Christensen, “Two Versions”, pp. 86 ff.; below, n. 165).

Cf. Christensen, Kavād, pp. 26 ff.

Chronicle, §20 ff.

Ward, i, 5, 1 ff.

Cf. also the confused account in Euyruchus, Annales, ed. L. Cheikhho, part i (Beirut, Paris and Leipzig, 1906), p. 206, in which the Persian people consider killing Kavād useleypnap he gets involved with Mazdak (here Marraq).


Kavād’s Heresy and Mazdak’s Revolt 35


Procopus may of course be wrong, or he may have meant the mass of the aristocracy; but though one may discount his plîthos, one does not thereof create evidence for popular support.

The view is explicit in Mqml al-dîwân (Tehran, 1956), pp. 195 f.; cf. also Ibn al-Athîr, Kâmûl, vol. I, p. 298. (Neither Christensen nor Noldeke, Geschichte, pp. 447 f., nor anyone else, compare the claim that Kuhâr was seventeen when he deposed his father the (Zoroastrian poet in Christensen, “Two Versions”, p. 323), or eighteen at the time of his confrontation with the Mazdakites (Nizâm al-Mulk, Siyást-nâmeh, p. 198 f. 199). Klima inferred from the Zoroastrian poem and Nizâm al-Mulk that Khûrâw had ruled in tandem with his father (“Über das Datum von Mazdaks Tod”), in Chrestie Orientalis, ed. F. Tauer, V. Kubîeckova and I. Hrbek [Prague, 1956], p. 140; and it is presupposed in a list of these sources (in conjunction with the tale of Khurâw’s conception referred to above, note 25) that lies behind Baron’s claim that Khûrâw had acted as co-regent since 513 (Social and Religious History of the Jews, vol. III, p. 56). (Note, however, that Nizâm al-Mulk also describes Khurâw as eighteen when his father died, Siyást-nâmeh, p. 32 = 34.) But it is difficult to see how Mqml arrived at the idea that Khûrâw was active in government already at the time of Kavâd’s restoration, in which he allegedly played a leading role! (Murûj, vol. II, pp. 195 f.; ed. Pellat, vol. I, 8618).

Cf. Dînawarî, Akhbar, pp. 67, 69; Ibn Qutayba, Ma’ârif, p. 292; Thârîh, ser. i, p. 886 = Geschichte, p. 142; Ibn al-Balkhi, Fârs-nâmeh, pp. 84 f. Compare Graetz, cited above, n. 35; Noldeke, Geschichte, p. 462; R. Forsdyke, Ancient Iran, p. 324. (Neither Christensen nor Pigulevskaja seems to have noticed the problem.)

This view is explicit in Eutchius, Annales, part i, p. 207 (where the Mazdakites are massacred on Kavâd’s restoration, but nonetheless remain strong enough to wreak havoc in his kingdom, whereupon he dies); and it reappears in the secondary literature too, cf. R. Ghirshman, Iran from the Earliest Time to the Islamic Conquest (Harmondsworth, 1954), p. 302 f.; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, La Religion de l’Iran ancien (Paris, 1962), p. 286; J. Neusner, A History of the Jews in Babylonia, vol. V (Leiden, 1970), p. 75, where Kavâd’s second reign is dominated by the struggle against the Mazdakites. Compare Hamza al-Isfahânî, Ta’rikh, p. 107; Mas’ûdî, Muruj, vol. II, p. 195 f. (ed. Pellat, vol. I, 8617), which could be taken to imply the same, as could many other sources which fail to specify whether the Mazdakites came back or had been active all the time.


Birûnî, Âhâr, p. 209 = 192, where the bait was a married woman Kavâd fancied; cf. Ibn Qutayba, Ma’ârif, p. 292 (Kavâd was weak); Nizâm al-Mulk, Siyást-nâmeh, pp. 32, 198 = 34, 199 (he succumbed to Kavâd’s wiles); Tha’âlibî, Ghurar, p. 596; Ibn al-Balkhi, Fârs-nâmeh, p. 84 (similarly).

Tabâri, Ta’rikh, ser. i, p. 886 = Geschichte, p. 142; Mqmlî, Bad’, vol. III, p. 168 = 171; Miskawayh, Ta’rikh, pp. 168 f. (where this view is rejected); Christensen, Kawûdah, p. 29 f.


Ibn Qutayba, Akhbar, p. 292.


Chronicles, 220. (The view of Klima, Mazdak, p. 156, that it reflects the name Zaradustshak, “little Zaradush”, is not right, cf. Noldeke, Geschichte, p. 457.)


Scher, “Histoire nestorienne”, II, I, p. 125; cf. p. 147, where Khûrâw suppresses Zaradûsh’s doctrine and imposes Manichaism! Other sources distinguish effortlessly between the Zoroasters (cf. Miskawayh, Ta’rikh, p. 177, where the heretic is called “the second Zaradûsh”), and they have different patronymics too, so there is no reason to regard the one as a doubl? of the other (similarly Noldeke, Geschichte, pp. 456 f.; but Mole, “Sectes”, p. 25, toys with the idea of identifying them nonetheless, and de Menasce, Troisihme livre du Dnkar, p. 31, follows him; cf. also Klima, Mazdak, p. 172, n. 4.)


Thus the thirteenth-century Tabsirdt al-‘awdmm cited in Schefer, Bal’ami, Du Solomon, p. 238 (“du pays de Khorisan, de la ville de Nishabour”)…

...with reference to the caliph Mu’tasim, cf. Noldeke, Geschichte, pp. XXXII, 457.

Mazdak, pp. 106 f., with reference to the Fihrist (above, n. 70).

Mazdak is in fact supposed to have been a mibahd, or even chief mibahd (cf. the references given below, nn. 159–60). Another two Zaradusts mentioned in the Muslim sources are expressly said to have been mibahds too (in one 379 A.D. and the other in the time of the caliph Mu’tasim, cf. Noldeke, Geschichte, pp. XXXII, 457).

Mazdak, pp. 147 Bandadānā = (Nāmīrān); Bīrūnī, Athdr, p. 209 = 192 (Hamdādān); Miskawayh, Tajarīb, p. 177 (Qāmārād); Dinawari’s Māzāyr is presumably also a corruption of Bāmdādan (Akhrar, p. 69).

Bīrūnī, Athdr, p. 209 = 192; Abu ‘l-Ma’il, Baydn al-adydn, in Ch. Tabari, Ta’rfkh, ser. i, p. 893 = Geschichte, p. 154; cf. ibid., p. 547, Dinawari, Akhbdr, p. 67; Miskawayh, Tajarīb, p. 177 (Qāmārād); Dinawari’s Māzāyr is presumably also a corruption of Bāmdādan (Akhrar, p. 69).


Bal’ami, Du Solomon, p. 238 (“du pays de Khorasan, de la ville de Nishabour”)…

...with reference to the caliph Mu’tasim, cf. Noldeke, Geschichte, pp. XXXII, 457.

Mazdak, pp. 106 f., with reference to the Fihrist (above, n. 70).

Mazdak is in fact supposed to have been a mibahd, or even chief mibahd (cf. the references given below, nn. 159–60). Another two Zaradusts mentioned in the Muslim sources are expressly said to have been mibahds too (in one 379 A.D. and the other in the time of the caliph Mu’tasim, cf. Noldeke, Geschichte, pp. XXXII, 457).
his soul, not merely his worldly welfare, was at stake; placing one's own wife at the disposal of such a man would indeed be the height of charity. Secondly, did the first husband make a straight gift of his wife (Shaki) or did he lend her for a specified period (Bartholomae)? Here Bartholomae would seem to have the better case, for if the first husband had ceded all rights to her, the Ntangisin (cited in Shaki, "Matrimonial Relations", p. 324) would hardly have found it necessary to explain that she was not allowed to cohabit with both men at the same time. Shaki asserts that Bartholomae's institution would have been regarded as a gross sin, but the passage adduced in support of this contention (ibid., pp. 338, 343 ff.) speaks of a woman who does cohabit with two men; and his own stārīk could clearly function as an interim marriage too. In short, just as a woman could be handed over to a stār for the benefit of her own husband (alive or dead), so she could be placed at the disposal of a poor and kinless man who had no wife himself, remaining the legal wife of her first husband in both cases and returning to him (if still alive) after the task had been accomplished. Shaki seems to clinch this interpretation by quoting Isohbokh as saying that a wife was like a fertile field which could be rented in the lifetime of its owner or after his death (Shaki, "Social Doctrine", p. 303, with reference to Sachau (ed.), Syriac Redechsieber (Berlin, 1907-14), vol. III, p. 97); but unfortunately the quote is incorrect.


Shaki, "Social Doctrine", p. 291; cf. also Baron, Social and Religious History of the Jews, vol. III, p. 53, according to whom the Mazdakites insisted on the woman's free consent. But the Zarādshāta plainly equated women with property, and it is only in connection with the tenth-century Khurramis that female consent is mentioned (below, n. 114). When Shahrustānī says that Mazdak aballa 'l-nisd', he means that he made women available to all, not that he "liess... die Frauen frei", as Haarbrücker translates (Milal, p. 193 = 291), followed by Pigulevskaja and Klima (cf. the sensible comments of Shaki, "Social Doctrine", pp. 301 ff.).

Cf. below, n. 114, and the twelfth-century Khurramīs in W. Madelung, Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran, Columbia 1988, p. 10 (all women were available to everyone, but having two wives was a deadly sin).

Cf. Yarshater, "Mazdakism", p. 1000, for a list of what ibhāma may have meant if it is not to be understood literally.


Tabari, Tarīkh, ser. i, p. 888 = Geschichte, pp. 148 f.; Scher, op. cit., part II, i, p. 124; Sebes, Histoire d'Héraclius, tr. F. Macer (Paris, 1910), p. 4 (where his peaceful relations with his neighbours are explained with reference to the state of his army rather than his creed, neither Sebes nor any other Armenian source displaying awareness that he was a heretic). On his supposed weakness, see also Ibn Qutayba, above, n. 57, and Abu 'l-Baqā', below, n. 236.

Tabari, Tarīkh, ser. i, p. 889 = Geschichte, p. 150.

He started a long war against Byzantines as soon as he was back and is said to have slaughtered a huge number of people on his conquest of Amida (Procopius, Wars, I, vii, 29; Joshua, Chronicle, §53).

Shahrastānī, Mīlān, p. 193 = 291.


p. 209 = 192.

Gesichte, p. 460.


The vendūlā contains a long harangue against asceticism: having a wife is better than being celibate, having children better still, eating meat is better than abstaining therforem and eating is better than fasting (J. Darmesteter (ed.), The Zand-Avesta, part i (Oxford, 1880), pp. 46 f.; the Pahlavi commentary explains "the impure heretic who does not eat" (i.e. who fasts) with the gloss "like a wolf"). This is a far cry from the concept of a society in which they are presented (a gathering of priests around Khusrav) is almost identical with that in the Bahman Yašt (Anklesaria, Zand-I Vahaman Yas, p. 102; Christensen, Kašīvād, pp. 20 f.).

Shaki, "Social Doctrine", pp. 293 ff. (a new translation of Dinkard VII, 21, previously translated, though not very intelligibly, by West, Pahlavi Texts, part v (Oxford 1897), pp. 88 f., and briefly mentioned in Christensen, Kašīvād, p. 22). As Shaki notes, this passage must refer to normal rather than revolutionary conditions ("Social Doctrine", pp. 304 f.); and since the heretics are explicitly called Mazdakites, it must refer to normal conditions after the suppression of Mazdak's revolt. (Shaki's interpretation ignores this point.)

R. Fox, Kinship and Marriage (Harmondsworth 1967), pp. 100 ff., where other examples of matrilineal organisation are also discussed; Strabo, Geography, ed. and tr. H. L. Jones, vol. VII (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1965), XVI, 4, 25 (brothers are held in higher esteem than children, property is held in common by kinsmen, one woman is wife for all). Nižām al-Mulk has it that if a man had sexual relations with a woman, he would put a hat on the door to indicate that the woman was occupied (Siyyāvat-nāme, p. 198 = 198). This is told in connection with lusty prostitution, clearly in a sensationalist vein (all guests at a party, even twenty would visit the host's wife one by one!). But the custom has nothing to do with lusty prostitution, nor is it presented as such in Narshākhī, according to whom the descendants of al-Muqannā's followers in Transoxania would put a mark on the door when they were visiting other men's "wives" (Narshākhī, Tā'īrī-ši Bukhārā, ed. Scherfer (Paris 1892), p. 73 = idem, The History of Bukhara, tr. R. N. Frye (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 75 f., a remarkably sober account). Among the Nayar the men with visiting rights to a certain woman (of whom there were up to twelve) would indicate that they were visiting their "wife" by leaving a spear or a shield outside the house (Fox, Kinship, p. 101). In Strabo's Yemen they would place a staff by the door; cf. also the following note. Presumably there were customs of this kind in all polyandrous societies.

According to him, the Massagetes of the Caucasus used wives promiscuously; if a man visited a woman, he would hang his quiver in front of her waggon (History, ed. and tr. A. D. Godley (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1920-5), i, 216, cf. the preceding note). Presumably they too were matrilineally organised, though Herodotus does not say so. Of the tenth-century Khurramīs of Jībāl, or some of them, we are explicitly told that they accepted ibhāta-l-nisd', provided that the women consented (Maqdisi, Bad', vol. IV, p. 1, p. 29; cf. also Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist, p. 406); but we are not told how they practised it or what their kinship system was. ( Pace Yarshater, "Mazdakism", p. 1013, Maqdisi's information is based on personal information, not on heresiographical stereotypes; and it is not contradicted by the existence of marriage among the Khurramis, still less by the Khurrami concern with purity, honesty and avoidance of harm to others!)}
the gloss as a reference to Mazdak's vegetarianism. But one would have expected such a reference to have been offered in explanation of the statement that "he who fills himself with meat is filled with the good spirit much more than he who does not"; moreover, Mazdak is said to have satisfied himself (though only in Klíma's translation); and vegetarianism can hardly be equated with hunger and death (šik u morg). It seems more likely that the commentator had the dire effects of Mazdak's revolt in mind: the means of livelihood were destroyed, as Maqdisí says (Bad, vol. I, p. 168 = 171). Presumably the gloss was triggered by the description of the non-eating heretic as someone against whom one should fight.

138 Shaki, "Social Doctrine", pp. 294 f. and n. 61 thereto.

137 Altheim and Stiehl, op. cit., p. 75 and n. 8 thereto (where Shaki, "Social Doctrine", p. 301, that it reflects an original Drist-namag is not persuasive).

The existence of Mazdakite asceticism is accepted by Yarshater, ‘Abd al-Jabbar, Mughnt, vol. V, pp. 16,65 = Monnot, Penseurs, p. 165; and G. Pugliese Carratelli, "Les doctrines sociales de Bundos et de God made over the world to Adam so that he could "eat of its fruits, drink of its drinks, enjoy its pleasures and marry its women"; and the sons of Adam inherited it in equal measure. Malati, Radd, p. 72.


Mazdak, p. 193 = vol. I, p. 291; Christensen, Kauwâd, p. 103; idem, L'Iran, p. 342.


Compare Shahrastânî, Milal, p. 92 = 138, where the expression also refers to literal killing (the Najadât held 'aggâs to apply wa-in iskäna fi qatl al-nufis).

The existence of Mazdakite asceticism is accepted by Yarshater ("Mazdakism", pp. 1013 f.), with reference to Shahrastânî on qatl al-anfus, which is not about asceticism (above, nn. 172 f.) and the Pahlavi commentary on the Vendidad, the interpretation of which is doubtful (above, n. 127). I thus cannot agree with Madelung that a current of asceticism among the Khurrâmis is "well attested" (Religious Trends, p. 5, with reference to Yarshater). Shaki also accepts Mazdakite asceticism, though on what grounds is not clear ("Cosmogonical and Cosmological Teachings", p. 543, cf. p. 528).


Madelung, Religious Trends, p. 6 (on the Mâlahîyâ).

Madelung, Religious Trends, p. 122.


Shahrastânî, Milal, vol. I, p. 193 = vol. I, p. 291 f.; Dabistân, vol. I, p. 165 f. = vol. I, p. 375 f.; cf. H. Halm, "Die Sieben und die zwölf. Die isma'ilitische Kosmogenie und das Mazdak-Fragment des Şahrastânî", in XVIII. Deutscher Orientalistentag, ed. W. Voigt (Wiesbaden, 1974); Shaki, "Cosmogonical and Cosmological Teachings". In Madelung's opinion, this part of Shahrastânî's account does not go back to Abî 'Isa, but rather to an unknown informant ("Abî 'Isa al-Warrâq", p. 221 n.); however, the fact that it is also found in the Dabistân could be taken to suggest that Abî 'Isa was the source after all (cf. above, n. 165).

Altheim and Stiel, "Mazdak and Porphyrians".


Reincarnation of the soul and periodic incarnation of the deity were ideas with a wide diffusion in the pre-Islamic Near East, and the concept of the moon as a carrier of souls is likely to have been widely diffused too. The idea was Indian and linked with reincarnation from the start (cf. Kauwâd, Upanisads, I, 2, in F. M. Müller (ed.), The Upanisads, vol. I (Oxford, 1879) (reprinted New York, 1962), p. 273 f.).

Rekaya's view that the Khurrâmis originated within Islam is evidently also mistaken (M. Rekaya, "Les hurramites sous les 'Abbasides", Studia Islamica LX (1984)).

Kavâd legislated that women should be held in common "not, I'm sure, according to the argument of Plato and Socrates or for the hidden benefit in their proposal, but so that anyone could consort with whichever one he liked" (Cameron, "Agathias on the Sasanians", p. 128 = 129).

Altheim and Steihe, "Mazdak und Porphyrians", pp. 76 ff. (cf. Baumstark, Geschichte, pp. 124 f., on Bod). The whole article is a star example of what one might call philological hurufiyâ.


Mazdak, p. 211 f.

Ibid., Beiträge, pp. 122 ff.


I hope to publish, jointly with John Hall, a volume of conference papers on the attestation of such ideas throughout the pre-industrial world.


Cf. above, n. 57 (the unavailable woman); Christensen, Kauwâd, p. 59 (Khusru's mother).

This topic will be dealt with by H. Halm in the volume referred to above, n. 196. In the meantime, see B. Lewis, The Origins of Imâlim (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 96 ff.

The most famous modern example is Patricia Hearst, the American heiress who was kidnapped by a revolutionary group and substituted her conversion to the creed of her kidnappers by raiding a bank. This was obviously meant as an irrevocable act, partly in that she would be jailed and partly in that she would be deeply ashamed of her behaviour if she returned to normal society; but as the daughter of a newspaper magnate she only found it difficult, not impossible, to rebuild her bridges.


Some might wish to deny that the Zaradushthis were communists on this ground; but this is to adopt a narrow definition of...
For the exceptions, see above, n. 52.

Taʾrikh, ser. i, p. 895 = Geschichte, pp. 153 f.; the alternative tradition (ibid., pp. 896 f. = 161) has him take action as soon as the crown was on his head.

Taʾbārī, Taʾrikh, ser. i, p. 897 = Geschichte, pp. 165 f.; Eutychius, Annales, part i, p. 207; cf. also Ibn Qutayba, Maʿārīf, p. 292; Christensen, Kawād, pp. 122 f.

The heresy is here said to have existed now openly and now in secret until the time of Khusrau, presumably meaning that it was suppressed in his reign (cf. the reference given above, note 64).

Scher, “Histoire nestorienne”, part II, p. 147 (with the confusion referred to above, n. 66).

Cf. above, n. 28.

Geschichte, pp. 462 ff. Nöldeke’s reconstruction has been generally accepted in the sense that the end of the revolt is usually placed in 528-9, the second suppression being forgotten (cf. Christensen, Kawād, p. 124; idem, L’Iran, pp. 339 ff.; Pigulevskaia, Les villes, p. 218; Altheim and Stiehl, “Mazdak and Porphyrius”, p. 71; Neusner, Jews in Babylonia, vol. V, p. 75; Yarshater, “Mazdakism”, pp. 1021 f.).

Malāfās, Chronographia, p. 471 = 274 (xviii, 69).

Geschichte, p. 466.


Wars, I, xii, 11.


Christensen, Kawād, p. 117; idem, L’Iran, p. 533; Procopius, Wars, I, xi, 3. Theophanes’ claim that Kāvūs was Kavād’s son by a daughter is thus implausible.


Wars, I, xi, 3 ff.

Ibid., I, xi, 6 ff. Arcadius is said previously to have used a similar ploy to secure the succession of his son Theodosius, appointing Yazgird his guardian (Cameron, “Agathias on the Sasanians,” p. 124 = 125; cf. the discussion of both cases at p. 149).


Chronographia, p. 471 = 274 (xviii, 68); compare Dinawārī, Akhbār, pp. 84 f.

Ibid., I, xii, 20.


“Mazdaks Tod”, p. 140.


Cf. Taqizadeh, “Some Chronological Data”, pp. 128 ff., where it is calculated (on the basis of Malāfās himself and other sources) that Khusraw acceded on 18 August, 531, three weeks before Kavād’s death in mid-September.

Procopius, Wars, I, xiv, 1 ff.; xxi, 1 ff.

For Kāvūs, see above, nn. 244 f.; for the son of Jāmāṣp, see Procopius, Wars, I, xiii, 1 ff.

Ibid., I, xii, 23 ff.; ibid., I, ff.; Malāfās, Chronographia, p. 471 = 274 (xviii, 68). The so-called “endless peace” was ratified in 532.

It might be argued that Malālas’ story of Khausar granting tolerance to “Manichaean” reflects the same confusion between
Zoroastrians and Zarâdushâs as that which prevails in the Chronicle of Si'ird, where the suppression of Zarddushtism is taken to mean that Khusrau must have established Manichaeism (above, n. 66). But this interpretation is awkward in view of Malalas' statement that Khusrau's decree of tolerance alienated the magi: "Manichaens" does seem to mean Mazdakites here, not Zoroastrians.

254 Procopius, Wars, II, 1, 1 ff.
255 Scher, op. cit., part II, 1, pp. 156 f., and notes 1 and 3 thereto.
257 There is no reference to licentiousness in Mar Aba's dispute with a Magian ibid., part II, 1, pp. 164 ff.).
258 Compare the references given above, n. 47.
261 Cf. EF, s.v. “Khurramiyya”.
262 Luff al-tadbîr, pp. 130 f.
266 Cf. Anklesaria, Żand Ąkāšt, p. 276 = 277.
267 Firdawši, Shâh-nâmeh, p. 2305 = Epic, p. 317; Tha'alîbî, Gharâr, pp. 597 ff.; Mu'mûn al-tawârikh, p. 73.
270 Ta'rikh, ser. i, p. 961 = Geschichte, p. 243. Elsewhere, the scribe reproaches Khusrau for placing an eternal tax on perishable humans, suggesting that the problem was fixed provincial rates in conjunction with fluctuating populations ('Nihdîat al-irâb reproduced in M. Grignaschi, “La riforma tributaria di ˙Hor ˙ı e il feudalismo sassanide”, in La Persia nel medioevo (Atti del convegno, Accademia nazionale dei lincei) (Rome, 1971), p. 135; compare Qummi, Ta'rikh-i Qumm, p. 183).
271 Ibid., pp. 183.
272 Cited in Grignaschi, op. cit., p. 137. Grignaschi takes this passage to refer to the reintroduction of maqûsama in the time of the 'Abhâsid caliph al-Mahdî (p. 119), but the formulation suggests a much earlier change.
273 Christensen, L'Iran, p. 361; Klima, Mazdak, pp. 281 ff.; Pigulevskaya, Les villes, pp. 197, 211; Neusner, Jews in Babylonia, p. 75; Frye, Ancient Iran, pp. 324, 325.
275 Thus Ibn Khurramâddhibbî, al-`Masîrik wa `l-namâlik, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1889), p. 14; Qummi, Ta'rikh-i Qumm, and Ibn Rusta (slightly different figure; cf. the preceding note).
276 Mas'ûdî, Tanbih, p. 39; cf. pp. 101 f.
278 Qummi, Ta'rikh-i Qumm, p. 180.

This content downloaded from 128.112.203.193 on Fri, 28 Sep 2018 20:26:51 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms