1966

Iranian Kinship and Marriage

Brian Spooner
University of Pennsylvania, spooner@sas.upenn.edu

Iranian Kinship and Marriage

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to distinguish and discuss the Iranian (as distinct from the Turkish, Arabic and Islamic) elements in the present pattern of kinship and marriage practice in Persia in their historical context. This will entail also a discussion of what can be known of the pre-Islamic Iranian system.

Disciplines
Anthropology | Social and Behavioral Sciences

IRANIAN KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

By Brian Spooner

This paper is an attempt to distinguish and discuss the Iranian (as distinct from the Turkish, Arabic and Islamic) elements in the present pattern of kinship and marriage practice in Persia in their historical context. This will entail also a discussion of what can be known of the pre-Islamic Iranian system.[1]

I

Terms

In standard New Persian the linguistically Iranian terms in normal usage are confined to the following:

mādar	mother (M)
pidar	father (F)
barādar	brother (B)
khwāhar[2]	sister (Z)
shauhar	husband (H)
dāmād	bridegroom/son-in-law (DH) and brother-in-law (ZH)
naveh	grandchild
havū	co-wife

Wife, son and daughter are covered by the ordinary words for woman, boy and girl/virgin, respectively. All other terms in standard use are either taken from Arabic or Turkish (viz. *'amū, dāī*), or are compounded of two simple terms (e.g. *pesar khāleh*) or a simple term plus *zādeh* (" born of ", e.g. *barādar-zādeh*). Grandparents are simply " big parents ", e.g. *pidar buzurg*.

In certain provincial Persian dialects, and other Iranian languages further native Iranian terms are found which account in addition for the following relatives:

father-in-law e.g. (in Gunābād) *khāsur* (*khwāsur*? Cf. Baluchi *waserk*)

mother-in-law e.g. (in Gunābād) *khāsh* (*khwāsh*? Cf. Baluchi *wasūk*)

No other relatives have Iranian terms.

---

[1] I wish to express my indebtedness and gratitude to the following: C. op 't Land for frequent and valuable discussion and bibliographical advice; Père J. de Menasce, O.P. for discussion of the evidence for *khwētūdās*; Drs. M. Boyce, R. Needham and Professor R. C. Zaehner for reading the article through in typescript and making valuable suggestions. Such mistakes and inadequacies which remain are purely the writer's responsibility.

   This article constitutes a sequel to my article in *Sociologus* (Spooner, 1965a, generally referred to as "the earlier article") which was a descriptive analysis of Persian kinship and marriage practice as it is at present, with especial reference to the east of Persia. The following point, whose place is properly in the earlier article, has come to my notice since it was published: the following terms also technically exist

natījeh great grandchild
   (word of Arabic origin literally meaning " result ", for which it is the normal word in New Persian)

nabīreh great great grandchild
   (word of Iranian origin etymologically giving the same meaning as *naveh* and used also with this meaning in classical New Persian)

nadīdeh great great great grandchild
   (Persian word literally meaning " unseen ", for which it is the normal word in New Persian)

However, these terms cannot be said to form an integral part of the system since they are very rare, and appear to be a New Persian literary invention. I am grateful to Mr. Richard Tapper for the information that these terms also occur in Shahsavan Turki. I have never met them in the east of Persia. *Kākā* is found here and there in New Persian meaning elder brother, father's brother, or more often a term of endearment for an old family slave or servant, often negroid. It is found as part of Buwayhid proper names and also once as a proper name in Pahlavi (SBE, XXIV, pp. xxxi, xxxii and xxxiv). The Persian *niākān* (ancestors) should perhaps also be included for the sake of completeness, but its etymology is dubious (Buck, 1949), and it is purely literary. Finally, *pūr* is cognate with *pisar* and Latin *puer*, meaning boy rather than son.

   I have thought it convenient to distinguish between what pertains to pre-Islamic Iranian things and what belongs to the present Persian situation by the terms Iranian and Persian respectively.

[2] Transliteration of terms differs slightly in this paper from the method used in the earlier article. The reason for this is that in a purely sociological journal I felt free to represent the terms as phonetically as possible (though this admittedly has its drawbacks in a language which uses its own letters as eccentrically as English does), whereas in this article it seemed better to conform to the traditionally accepted method followed in *Iran*.

According to Buck (1949, pp. 93 ff.), this situation differs from (recoverable) Indo-European (IE) only in the following respects: Persian has son-in-law, but not daughter-in-law, whereas IE had not son-in-law but daughter-in-law and probably also HF, HB, HM, HZ, " or even " HBW, i.e. " IE family was obviously not matriarchal ". He considers that terms for wife's father, etc., arose only later, " either by extension of the inherited group or otherwise ". *Dāmād* was originally from the same root as γάμος, i.e. related by marriage. The reconstruction of IE uncles and aunts (cf. *patruus, matertera, avunculus, amita*) is doubtful, FB having the highest probability, and there are certainly no IE cousins.

It would of course be interesting to be able to go further in the etymological analysis of this nuclear family—for the terms cover little more than that. Buck can only tentatively suggest for " brother " a connexion with " brood " which would nicely fit a tribal partilinear brother–sister relationship. He suggests that " mother " and " father " probably simply derive from the " intrinsically meaningless infantile syllables pa and ma ". Malinowski (1923) thought that a child says " *ma ma ma* " repeatedly in any language when it is dissatisfied generally; then its mother appears and it is satisfied: therefore, " *mama* " comes to mean " mother " in many languages. That is, " parents give meaning and make words out of a child's babblings, which are sounds expressed naturally under pain or emotion " (but cf. also Jesperson, 1922, pp. 154–60).

The vowel-plus-r suffix which characterizes these terms is explained by Buck as the " -tero suffix of contrasted relationship ". (Baluchi—a language, like Pahlavi, peculiarly devoid of grammatical undergrowth—does not have them: Baluchi *māt* = M, *pet* = F, *warg* (a more common form is *gohār*) = Z, *brāt* = B.) Of the terms which do not have the suffix, *dāmād* denotes a relationship between the whole family and an outsider who can be of only one sex; *naveh* is similar in a way for it is not part of the primary nuclear family and does not distinguish sex; *havū* is a contrasted relationship in itself, i.e. it is a reciprocal term: two or more women call each other *havū*. It is interesting also that *shauhar*, at first sight an apparent exception, has an alternative form *shū*, which is very common in dialect Persian. May we perhaps then assume that *shauhar* has adopted the suffix by analogy? This leaves just two neat pairs of obvious contrasting relationships, both seen from the point of view of the child: father–mother and brother–sister—or rather a foursome: the basic nuclear family which for the child is just four relationships, and he or she (and the parents who when talking to the child sympathetically put themselves in its place) naturally contrasts himself with each of the other members of the family.

The Iranian terminology then, on the basis of existing evidence, cannot but be described as cognatic and simple. The New Persian system, however, has grown out of the Iranian system on the one hand, and on the other cannot fail to have been influenced strongly by three extraneous factors and movements which have been integrated into the life of the country over the last thirteen centuries: Arabic, Islamic and Turko-Mongol. Certain of the results of the advent of Islam on the Persian system have been indicated in the earlier article. The influence on the social structure of the Turkish and Mongol invasions and settlement is much harder to assess, but is probably not so important since it came later, when the great religio–political revolution of the first few centuries of Islam was already an established fact, and the Turks never became an integral part of the Persian community as the Arabs had done (except perhaps in the west, where the writer has no first-hand knowledge). However, the adoption of the Turkish term *dāī* for mother's brother (while other uncles and aunts have Arabic terms, cf. the earlier article) remains a mystery.

The two most striking factors which could have contributed to shaping the growth of the modern Persian system would seem to be (a) the Zoroastrian practice of *khwētūdās*, and (b) the Arab tradition of marriage with the father's brother's daughter.

II

Khwētūdās

Khwētūdās is normally translated as " next-of-kin marriage " (West, SBE XVIII, pp. 389 ff. and Bartholomae, 1904, p. 1860). In the Pahlavi Books it is specifically defined as marriage with one's sister, mother or daughter. External evidence for it comes also from Greek, Armenian and early-Christian writings. Until recently scholars connected with Zoroastrian studies have found difficulty in accepting

the full significance of it. It is, of course, as an institution, a very surprising and unusual phenomenon, and in their reluctance to accept it one suspects they were guided at least to some extent by a sub-conscious belief that consanguineous marriages must be unnatural for all mankind. However, there *are* several reasons for being suspicious. Such marriages were abhorrent to the Indian branch of the Indo-Iranians. The Parsis strongly deny that *khwētūdās* could have had this meaning (cf. West, SBE V, p. 389 n. and XVIII, pp. xxix, 389 ff.). Far stranger than this, however, is the fact that the early-Muslim writers who inveighed against it never cite contemporary practice—only past practice. In 1947 Slotkin raised the question for the first time in a modern anthropological journal, and gave a good list of Greek, Latin, Avestan, Pahlavi and Arabic sources for it. He received a reply in 1949 from Goodenough who preferred simply to accept the (rather inadequate) discussion of the authorities, but came back with a rejoinder (Slotkin, 1949) in which he pointed out rightly that the old contemporary sources are far more important than modern Zoroastrian scholars. The distinguished Iranist Père J. de Menasce, O.P. (1938 and 1962)[3] has consistently made a case for accepting the practice of *khwētūdās* as a fact and as having been widespread throughout the population. And the evidence is, surely impossible to explain away. But no one has yet made a serious effort to understand its origins or its effects on the society in which it was practised, or to estimate the extent to which it was, or could have been, practised.

Sociological evidence is indeed meagre, but the most striking fact about the internal Pahlavi evidence is that the practice was actually preached in such a way that the texts give the impression that although there was nothing extraordinary in it, nevertheless there was great virtue in it—something like supernumerary attendances at mass. It had, in fact, a sacramental value. For instance:

> *Pahlavi Rivayat* 8 f. 3: " The first time it comes near 1000 *dēvs* and 2000 *Yātūks* and *Parīks* [three types of evil creatures in the command of Ahriman] die; the second time it comes near 2000 *dēvs* and 4000 *Yātūks* and *Parīks* die; the third time it comes near 3000 *dēvs* and 6000 *Yātūks* and *Parīks* die; the fourth time both man and wife become manifestly *ahrav* (blessed); "

> *Pahlavi Rivayat* 8 l. 3: " If one is married in *khwētūdās* four years and performs sacrifice, then the soul goes manifestly to Garōtmān;[4] if not, it goes to Heaven "; and

> *Pahlavi Rivayat* 8 c.: " The sacrifice and praise of one who has performed *khwētūdās* are 1000 times as valid as those of other men ".

We know that *khwētūdās* was practised in the context of polygyny, and that consanguineous unions were mixed and contemporaneous with non-consanguineous. Artā Virāf made seven wives of his seven sisters (Artā Virāf Nāmak). Also, the Magian emissaries of Yazdikart II to the Armenians say: " Let them have many wives instead of one that the Armenian race may wax and multiply: let daughter lie with father, and sister with brother. Not only shall mother lie with son, but granddaughter with grandfather" (Elišě *apud* Langlois, II, p. 199). We know that *khwētūdās*, like ordinary marriage, needed witnesses. It could be initiated by parents or children, and both parties had to give their consent (*Rivāyat Ēmēt-i Ašavahištān, apud* de Menasce, 1962, p. 84). But could a son marry his mother while his father was still alive, or could two sons marry her at the same time, i.e. could a woman practise polyandry in *khwētūdās*? If not, did this give rise to disruptive jealousies? This is, in the nature of it, extremely unlikely. There were two categories of wives: principal wives (*zan-i pādheshāyēhā*) and subordinate wives (*zan-i chāghārēhā*). Their conditions were legally defined. The subordinate wives were very likely bought slaves or captured in war. Men with two " principal " wives are often mentioned (Christensen, 1944, pp. 316 ff.; Bartholomae, 1918, I, p. 29 ff.; but cf. also five categories of wives in Dhabhar, 1932, p. 195 and Modi, 1922, I, p. 190). Each principal wife was also called *kadhagh-bānūgh*, and so probably each had her own house. There was also a legal term for the " master of the house "—*kadhagh-khwadhāy*—who had *patria potestas*—*sardārēh-i dūdhagh*. However, principal wives could be lent to friends in times of need without their consent (Bartholomae, 1918, I, p. 29 ff.)! Although he accepts *khwētūdās* as fact, Christensen does not discuss its implications.

Whether or not children resulted from these unions did not affect the virtue (de Menasce, 1962,

---

[3] Cf. also his *Feux et Fondations Pieuses dans le Droit Sassanide*, Paris, 1964 (just appeared), which presents some essential texts, with translations and commentary, in a way eminently useful for the purposes of comparative sociology.

[4] Garōtmān is the part of Zoroastrian heaven in which Ohrmazd himself lives (Lommel, 1930, p. 211).

[5] The priestly class, the Magi, whose origin is obscure, were said by classical authors to practise *khwētūdās* (Benveniste, 1938, p. 23).
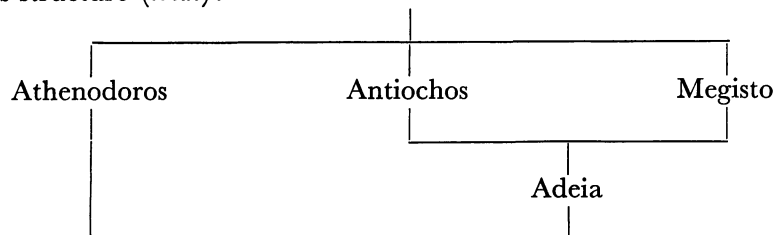
p. 84). How far all this affected the laws of inheritance is not clear. Bartholomae has discussed the evidence that exists. In the *Mātikān-i Hazār Dātestān* we are told that an only daughter's first son belonged to her father, not to her husband.

My intention has been to quote enough of the evidence to give an idea of its general nature; to show how difficult it is to explain away, and yet how inadequate as a basis for sociological reconstruction. For we are talking about a people which is generally thought to have come into the Iranian homelands from the north not so many centuries earlier as pastoral nomads. One of the principal books of Zoroastrian religious law, the *Dēnkart*, proclaims (iii, 82) that "the basis of *khwētūdās* was a desire to preserve the purity of the race, to increase the compatibility of husband and wife, and to increase the affection for children, which would be felt in redoubled measure for offspring so wholly of the same family ". We might perhaps add that it must also have helped to preserve the purity of the fixed social classes of Sassanian society, and, later, the purity of the Zoroastrian religion in the face of Islam. During the early centuries of Islam, and the dying centuries of Zoroastrianism, the Zoroastrians were much disturbed by the chaotic effects of apostasy on their social relations. Mihran Gushnasp became a Christian, and so was forced to divorce his wife who was his sister (Christensen, 1944).

Consanguineous marriages are of course known elsewhere, especially in the ancient Middle East, and incest is not anyway such a rigid conception as is generally thought. In the United States the list of forbidden degrees differs even from state to state. The Ptolemies made the practice of consanguineous marriages famous in Egypt, where they adopted the custom from the indigenous people (Middleton, 1962).

The Bible furnishes several cases of next-of-kin unions: Abraham was Sarah's half brother by the same father (Gen. xx, 12). Milcah was Nahor's brother's daughter (Gen. xi, 29), and Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel were sisters (Gen. xxix, 19–30). Moses and Aaron were born from Amram and his father's sister, Jochebed (Exod. vi, 20). In reporting these the writer sees nothing unusual in them. There are also: Lot and his two daughters (Gen. xix, 30 ff.) and Reuben and his father's concubine (Gen. xlix, 4). These are reported as naughty and evil respectively, but not as specifically incestuous. In Gen. xxvi, 34–5 Isaac and Rebecca are disturbed because Esaw takes two Hittite wives. We may perhaps safely assume then that endogamy was the rule, and that truly consanguineous marriages were uncommon (there are no examples of B = Z or S = M), but there was no formulated code of forbidden degrees. It is only later (Lev. xviii) that they are laid down (viz. D, M, FW, Z, FD, MD, SD, DD, FWD, FZ, MZ, FBW, SW, BW—i.e. all primary, secondary and tertiary relatives except cousins and grandparents—and, at one time, a mother and daughter, mother and granddaughter or two sisters).

The Greeks allowed marriage with nieces, aunts and half-sisters (by the same father). The ancient Prussians, Lithuanians and Irish are said to have allowed marriage with all but mothers (Gray, 1915). " *Si le traité* De Sacrificiis *était de Lucien de Samosate, il nous fournirait la preuve que pour un Syrien héllénisé, de tels mariages étaient ceux des barbares habitant au delà de l'Euphrate. Parlant de Zeus (c. 5) le satirique nous dit: 'il épousa beaucoup de femmes et en dernier lieu Héra sa soeur, suivant les lois des Perses et des Assyriens'. Seulement ce dialogue est généralement considéré comme apocryphe* " (Cumont, 1924, p. 58 n.). Apocryphal or not, it is nevertheless surely significant. Among inscriptions found at the Temple of Artemis at Doura-Europos is evidence for this structure (*ibid.*):

```
                              |
            _____
           |                  |                      |
      Athenodoros        Antiochos               Megisto
           |                  |_____|
           |                            |
           |                          Adeia
           |_____|
```

Therefore, while the first Iranian we know of who contracted a consanguineous marriage was the Achaemenian Cambyses who conquered Egypt (Herodotus III, 31), further west there was at least a tradition that the practice had been imported from the East. Might not the answer lie somewhere between? in Mesopotamia? (cf. e.g. Frye, 1962, p. 60).

There are precedents for royal families of foreign origin adopting customs from the people they have come to rule, to help close the obvious cultural gap between them. The Ptolemies are an obvious example of this, expressly in the case of consanguineous marriages. I suggest that the Achaemenians may be a similar example—since we do not know who the indigenous inhabitants of the Persian plateau were when the Iranians came, and the Achaemenians anyway made Mesopotamia the heart of their empire. A list of the consanguineous marriages known to have been contracted by ruling Achaemenians is given by Benveniste (1932). It is surely significant that known cases of the practice among the Sassanian royal family are relatively few.

Incest is a perennial topic of discussion in anthropology (e.g. Lévi-Strauss, 1949; White, 1948; Radcliffe-Brown, 1949; Seligman, 1950; Slater, 1959 and 1960), but this discussion has concentrated mainly on trying to find a satisfactory explanation for the origin of exogamy, and without arriving at a generally accepted conclusion. If they have referred to *khwētūdās* at all, it has generally been as an inexplicable and almost embarrassing exception. We are not here concerned with the origins of the practice in that sense, since in Zoroastrian Persia it is most probably an alien importation, and there are no sources or publications on the effects on a community of the practice of consanguineous marriages as an accepted institution, simply because no such societies have ever come the way of ethnographers! The only accepted incestuous practices described by ethnographers are those few in which it is a privilege—or a duty—conferred on certain persons in certain circumstances. It is not the place here to start a discussion with the purpose of determining how a society which knew no incest taboos might function, and such a discussion would anyway be purely academic. However, it is perhaps worthwhile to make a few observations, which, if valid, might make the irrefutable evidence for the practice of *khwētūdās* in pre-Islamic Persia seem sociologically slightly less extraordinary.

It is perhaps best to state at first that although incest is almost universally abhorred, this abhorrence cannot be claimed to depend, at least in the first instance, on consanguinity, if only because the forbidden degrees vary so widely from society to society, and many of them often have nothing to do with consanguinity. Incest is fundamentally a moral problem (Durkheim, 1897). In any given society one can only be certain that it will apply to the nuclear family (though cf. Leach, 1961, pp. 15 ff.). " Though nowhere [or almost nowhere] may a man marry his mother, his sister, or his daughter, he may contract matrimony with any other female relative in at least some societies " (Murdock, 1949, p. 285). Further on (pp. 293-4) Murdock outlines a child's development in our own society and shows how it learns, almost by trial and error, to avoid contacts and responses of an incestual nature. This is particularly interesting when compared with the development of a child in Persia. In " middle class " village families of eastern Persia infant sons—up to the age of perhaps seven or eight—are made much fuss of. From as early as possible an intense feeling of shame is inculcated into them with regard to their genitals. Whenever the child inadvertently shows its genitals the father will point and laugh at them. He may even seek to grab, in play, even when the child is properly covered, as though to rebuke it for having any! Later on, towards and after puberty, when a modified avoidance or " modesty " develops between the sexes within the nuclear family in our own society, nothing similar is perceptible in the Persian family. Persian men and women will normally do anything not to let their genitals (and for women this includes the breasts, except when they are nursing) be seen even by other members of their own sex. This situation obtains within the nuclear family as well, but apart from this relationships between the sexes within the nuclear family scarcely change at all as the children reach adulthood. Even in wealthy families that have lived in cosmopolitan Teheran for several generations nothing *unnatural* is seen in a father and daughter or brother and sister (for instance) sleeping in the same room.

The first reaction to the problem of incest is generally " *ce sentiment obscure de la foule que, si l'inceste était permis, la famille ne serait plus la famille, de même que le mariage ne serait plus le mariage* " (Durkheim, 1897, p. 59). " *L'incompatibilité moral* [of sexual and filial or intra-family love] *au nom de laquelle nous prohibons actuellement l'inceste est elle-même une conséquence de cette prohibition, qui par conséquent doit avoir existé d'abord pour une tout autre cause* " (*ibid.*, p. 65). It would substitute the known for the unknown in sex. In his commentary on Durkheim's monograph Ellis points out that Lévi-Strauss follows Malinowski and Seligman in basing " social life on the existence of separate nuclear families. These separate families can only exist if there are some kinds of incest taboos . . . so they should not merge into one

non-nuclear family group " (Ellis, 1963, p. 127). This is why *khwētūdās* is so puzzling: *in one society, based on the nuclear family, at one and the same time, we have, legally recognized and religiously encouraged, polygamous and " incestuous " marriages.*

Durkheim, for whom incest taboos and exogamy grew originally from a religious awe of own blood, including menstrual and hymeneal blood, as the vital life-force of the clan, reasoned that where incest was legitimized there must have to be particularly pressing social necessities in order to triumph over it (Durkheim, 1897, pp. 66–7). We know of no such necessities in Persia.

White (1948), who considers the problems of the origin of incest taboos solved, adopts E. B. Tylor's formula: " Marry out, or be killed out ". Exogamy is positive for society, endogamy—negative. An individual family, or clan, is bound to give and take its women with other families or clans in order to become strong with friends and allies. This fits, inversely, with the Zoroastrian situation post-Islam, and most of the extant Pahlavi works which preach *khwētūdās* were written after the Arab conquest. Consanguineous marriages could have been seen by the religious as an (admittedly extreme) means of turning the community in on itself and preserving the purity of the religion. Consanguineous marriages within the Achaemenian dynasty, as mentioned above, may be seen in the same light as the Ptolemaic incestuous unions in Egypt, as designed to help reconcile an alien dynasty by adopting customs which the people would expect from an indigenous one. Examples in the Parthian and Sassanian dynasties could be merely harking back to the customs of Achaemenian greatness. But this still leaves the common practice of *khwētūdās* by ordinary people from Achaemenian times up to the Arab conquest.

To recapitulate: *khwētūdās* was practised by ordinary people, over a period of some 1500 years at least, but not by everybody; it was a fully legal and proper marriage, but was practised in the context of polygyny; it had a sacramental value in the state religion, Zoroastrianism, and was equally valued, sacramentally, whether or not children issued from it, but children from it were highly valued, since we know that it was considered a wonderful thing, religiously, to be the children of parents who were likewise the offspring of a consanguineous union. However, when we speak of ordinary people we probably mean in fact wealthy, leisured, aristocratic families, who were not either royal or priestly.[5] We know nothing about the masses. Church and State were very close, and in Sassanian times it was impossible to imagine either without the other (cf., e.g. Zaehner, 1961, p. 284; Mas'udi, ed. Meynard, 1863, II, p. 162). I suggest then, that the most feasible explanation of *khwētūdās* is this: that the society at large had the same fundamental attitude, qualitatively, towards these consanguineous unions as most societies; but owing to close contact with Mesopotamian religions and customs (in the heart of the Empire) and the adoption (unproved) of the custom of incest-privilege by the King, who was the leader of the Church on Earth, from that direction, the practice took on a sacramental value, and the upper leisured class or aristocracy, who formed the basis of the King's power and identified themselves closely with him, were also allowed, in imitation, to perform the sacrament. Gradually this became encouraged and the practice spread as one of the marks of purity of the nation–religion, Persianism–Zoroastrianism.

If this is true, the removal of the King at the Arab conquest, as it is admitted to have spelt the decline of Zoroastrianism because of the close connexion between Church and State, so it put the seal on (at least a temporary) disintegration of Persianism, and with the disappearance of both aspects of this nation–religion and the gradual spread of Islam there was no longer any reason to continue a practice which was never an integral part of the social structure but simply a vehicle to a type of " grace " which was now no longer valid. This would explain its complete disappearance from the scene in New Persian sources, and even the ease with which the modern Parsis are able to deny that it ever existed, for it was never really an integral part of Zoroastrianism.

III

FBD marriage

The Arab conquest of Persia in the seventh century and the subsequent Turkish domination, although Persian nationalism eventually reappeared, resulted on the Persian plateau in an almost inextricable intermingling of the Arab and Persian (pre-Islamic) elements of the population—in religion, society and politics. In parts of the eastern half of Persia there are still areas (e.g. Rishm, south

of Dāmghān, along the northern " shore " of the *kavīr*) where the ordinary people claim to be Arabs, though they can point to no customs or practices which would distinguish them from Persians in similar circumstances. Certain areas (e.g. Ṭabas, Biyābānāk, Bīrjand, Gunābād) have been dominated in modern times (Bīrjand still is) by families of known Arab origin. The word *'Arab* seems to have been used at times to mean simply " nomad " (Spooner, 1965b, p. 104).

The Arab practice of preferential marriage with the father's brother's daughter (unusual elsewhere) has been much discussed (e.g. Daghestani, 1932; Patai, 1955; Murphy and Kasdan, 1959; Ayoub, 1959; Cuisinier, 1962; op't Land, 1961, pp. 42–7). It is a marriage rule of the preferential type, but Patai (1955) shows well the usually compulsory nature of it: how, often, a man wishing to by-pass his *bint 'am* or take somebody else's must be sure to reconcile first all concerned. Ayoub (1959) tried to prove that it was not what it seemed; and that it tended to be almost classificatory in practice, and statistics showed it to be relatively a not very significant marriage practice. But surely there are many obvious factors that would reduce the statistical occurrence of this type of marriage and what is really important is the emphasis which the people themselves place on the ethic. Cuisinier (1962) in his interesting study of the practice goes about as far as is possible in that direction when he writes that FBD marriage is not the norm in the Arab system: *it is the most remarkable expression of a structure characterized by the order of the alternatives in the choice of a wife.*

Most interest, however, has been attracted by the political advantages of the system. Murphy and Kasdan (1959) see in it a means of creating small, unified, subordinate and relatively isolated groups within the context of a lineage system which theoretically may be extended to include all Arabs. Perhaps the best analysis is still Barth's (1953, 1954) in his writings about the same practice among the Kurds. He claims (1953, p. 136) that incidence of the practice is in fact higher there than among the Arabs, and he defines its political rôle as " solidifying the minimal lineage as a corporate group in a factional struggle " (Barth, 1954, p. 171). It " serves to reinforce the political implications of the lineage system " (1953, p. 137). " A man's political position and power depends in the last instance on the number of riflemen he can muster. However, only co-lineage males can be expected to give such political support. A pattern of FaBrDa marriage contributes to prevent alienation of immediate collateral lines, and re-affirms the old man's leading position in relation to his agnatic nephews, thereby vesting him with control over a larger agnatic group of males " (*ibid.*). He finds it puzzling (at first) that Kurdish kinship terms are purely descriptive and show no unilineal emphasis. They are, in fact very similar to Persian, only more extensive (cf. Leach, 1940). He also finds among the Kurds that this system results in a direct correspondence between lineage segments and local groups (1953, p. 137) so that in fact the settlement pattern and ecology (of these Kurds) and this marriage preference interact with and complement each other, and unilineal emphasis in the terminology would be superfluous, since the unilineal groups are adequately defined territorially. However, all this is not completely satisfactory, since it requires assumptions about the origins and history of the Kurds which we are in no position to make. Nevertheless, it is useful in that it leads him in conclusion to quote from Parsons (1951) a passage which is supremely relevant to the Persian and Iranian system. I requote: " There seem to be certain elements of inherent instability in societies where the overwhelming bulk of the population is organized on the basis of peasant village communities. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the village community as a primary focus of solidarity can only within very narrow limits be an effective unit for the organization of the use of force. It is, in the face of any more extensive organization, not a defensible unit. Hence there must always be a ' superstructure ' over a peasant society, which, among other things, organizes and stabilizes the use of force. The question is how far such a superstructure is, as it were, ' organically ' integrated with the self-contained village communities and often the level of integration is not high " (pp. 162–3). This " superstructure " in eastern Persia has, until very recently, taken the form of " dynastic " families (cf. Spooner, 1965a, p. 23). These were often of tribal origin, and varied in effectiveness from generation to generation. An understanding of the interdependent relationship between the tribal and peasant elements of the population is essential for any reconstruction of the social history of the Persian plateau outside the main cities. However, what little can be known points to long periods of instability and insecurity, and this is bound also to have had its effect on the marriage practice.

The kinship system of the Persian village is cognatic. There is a strong preference for marriage with a cousin, but no detectable distinction is made between the four types of cousin (Spooner, 1965a, pp. 24–5). Alliance between villages, when made at all, are generally made by " dynastic " influential families, which form a hierarchy of power in an area, which is however, very unstable. To counteract this isolation, since motorized transport and increased centralization of administration have led to an enormous increase in travel for the villagers, there is an anxiety to " discover " kin (or other) relationships wherever strangers meet on favourable terms (ibid., p. 30). Except for khwētūdās, we have no information about marriage preferences in the Iranian situation. However, since we know the kinship terminology (it is just possible owing to the nature of the extant literature that a term or so has been lost, but even if this were so such terms would be unlikely to affect the analysis, since if they were relevant to the classification of the system they would surely certainly appear at least in the legal books of the literature we possess) and can be almost certain that the ecology did not differ markedly from that of the present day, it would seem at least very feasible that the Persian preference for marrying a cousin is simply the cognatic society's adaptation of the practice of the (in the first few centuries of Islam) socially and politically superior Arabs. The fact that they were used to marriage with close kin would facilitate such an adaptation. Barth (1954) also notices that the FBD marriage is considered " thoughtful and proper "; " The father knows his daughter's spouse well, and will be able to exert some control over his actions towards her after marriage ". I have heard similar sentiments expressed in the east of Persia to justify marriage with any cousin. It is of course also quite possible that, apart from khwētūdās, marriage with a cousin was the general practice in the Iranian situation.

REFERENCES

Ayoub, M. R. " Parallel Cousin Marriage and Endogamy ", South Western Journal of Anthropology XV (1959), pp. 266–76.

Barth, F. Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan, Oslo, 1953.

Barth, F. " FaBrDa Marriage in Kurdistan ", South Western Journal of Anthropology X (1954), pp. 164–71.

Bartholomae, C. " Zum Sasanidischen Recht " I and II, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (1918), February and September.

Bartholomae, C. Altiranisches Wörterbuch, 1904.

Benveniste, E. " Les Classes Sociales dans la tradition avestique ", Journal Asiatique CCXXI (1932), pp. 117 ff.

Benveniste, E. Les Mages dans l'Ancien Iran, Société des Études Iraniennes, Paris, 1938.

Buck, C. D. Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages, Chicago, 1949.

Christensen, A. L'Iran sous les Sasanides, 1944.

Cuisinier, J. " Endogamie et Exogamie dans le mariage Arabe ", L'Homme II (1962), No. 2, pp. 80–115.

Cumont, M. F. " Les Unions entre les Proches à Doura et chez les Perses ", Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres: comptes rendues des séances, 1924.

Daghestani, K. Étude Sociologique sur la famille musulmane contemporaine en Syrie, Paris, 1932.

Dhabher, B. N., ed. The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz, Bombay, 1932.

Durkheim, E. " La Prohibition de l'inceste et ses Origines ", L'Année Sociologique I (1897).

Eliše, in Langlois, V. Collection des Historiens Anciens et Modernes de L'Arménie II, 1869.

Ellis, A. The Origins and the Development of the Incest Taboo, New York, 1963.

Frye, R. N. The Heritage of Persia, 1962.

Goodenough, W. H. " Comments on the Question of Incestuous Marriages in Old Iran ", American Anthropologist LI (1949), pp. 326–8.

Gray, L. H. " Marriage (Iranian) No. 2 Next of Kin Marriage ", Hastings: Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics VIII (1915), pp. 456–9.

Jesperson, O. Language, 1922.

op't Land, C. The Shahsavan of Azarbaijan, Institute of Social Studies and Research, University of Tehran (duplicated), 1961.

Leach, E. R. Social and Economic Organisation of the Rowanduz Kurds, Monographs on Social Anthropology No. 3, LSE, 1940.

Leach, E. R. Rethinking Anthropology, Monographs on Social Anthropology No. 22, LSE, 1961.

Levi-Strauss, C. Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté, 1949.

Lommel, H. Die Religion Zarathustras, Tübingen, 1930.

Malinowski, B. Supplement in Ogden and Richards: The Meaning of Meaning, 1923.

Mas'udi. Murūj, ed. by Meynard, 1863.

de Menasce, P. J. " Autour d'un texte syriaque inédit sur la religion des Mages ", BSOAS IX (1938), pp. 587–601.

de Menasce, P. J. Revue de l'Histoire des Religions CLXII (1962), pp. 69–88.

Middleton, R. " Br–Si and Fa–Da marriage in Ancient Egypt ", American Sociological Review XXVII (1962), No. 5, pp. 602–11.

Modi, J. J., ed. Darab Hormazyar's Rivayat (Persian text), Bombay, 1922.

Murdock, G. P. Social Structure, New York, 1949.

Murphy, R. F., and Kasdan, L. " The Structure of Parallel Cousin Marriage ", American Anthropologist LXI (1959), No. 1, pp. 17–29.

Pahlavi Books. Rivayat Accompanying Dadistan-i Dinik, ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1913.

Pahlavi Books. Transl. by E. West in Sacred Books of the East (SBE), esp. vols. V, XVIII and XXIV, 1880.

Parsons, T. The Social System, London, 1951.

Patai, R. " Cousin Right in Middle Eastern Marriage ", South Western Journal of Anthropology XI (1955).

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. " White's View of a Science of Culture ", American Anthropologist LI (1949), pp. 503–12.

SBE = Sacred Books of the East, see Pahlavi Books.

Seligman, B. Z. " The Problem of Incest and Exogamy: a Restatement ", American Anthropologist LII (1950), pp. 305–16.

Slater, M. K. "Ecological Factors in the Origin of Incest", *American Anthropologist* LXI (1959), pp. 1042–59.

Slater, M. K. "Rejoinder to Dr. Moore's 'Psychological Deterrents to Incest'", *American Anthropologist* LXII (1960), pp. 1054–6.

Slotkin, J. S. "On a Possible Lack of Incest Regulations in Old Iran", *American Anthropologist* XLIX (1947), pp. 612–17.

Slotkin, J. S. "Reply to Goodenough", *American Anthropologist* LI (1949), pp. 531–2.

Spooner, B. (a). "Kinship and Marriage in Eastern Persia", *Sociologus*, New Series XV (1965), No. 1, pp. 22–31.

Spooner, B. (b). "Arghiyan, the Area of Jajarm in Western Khurasan", *Iran* III (1965).

White, L. A. "The Definition and Prohibition of Incest", *American Anthropologist* L (1948), pp. 416–35.

Zaehner, R. C. *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, 1961.