

## **Excerpts and Comments: Contributions of Assyrians to Pre-Islamic Iranian Civilization**

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### **Introductory Remarks:**

The interaction among the ancient civilizations of the Middle East is too well known among the scholars of the world. Occasionally, one comes across researchers who, in order to rank their contributions to world civilization higher in stature or even deny the impact of other civilizations on theirs, present their treatises on those interactions and borrowings in a very biased manner. No objective investigator would dare to deny the prominent status of the Persian civilization among its neighboring civilizations and its influence on them. By the same token, the same investigators have amply documented the impact of other civilizations on the Persian civilization in both the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic eras. The extensive influence of the Assyrian/Aramaic/Syriac (Soryani) civilizations on the Iranian civilizations is too well documented to be ignored or denied. In fact, Moslem scholars, Arabs and Iranians, have acknowledged this influence. However, at times, in the recent history of Iran, both before and after the Islamic revolution, a trend of silence concerning the Soryani influence has been promoted. In light of the above biased trend, the book under evaluation here is of great significance because the author is audacious enough to reveal the historical facts in a very objective manner despite his conservative and religious background.

Dr. Parviz Azkaii, an Iranian scholar, published the first volume<sup>1</sup> of a two-volume book titled: *فهرست ما قبل الفهرست (آثار ایرانی پیش از اسلام) - The Index before the Index: Pre-Islamic Iranian Works,* in 1996.<sup>2</sup> He, as a compiler [henceforth, *author* for convenience], has made extensive use of a wide variety of sources and books written by international scholars with expertise on the subjects targeted for analysis by him. His presentation of those materials is in an orderly fashion. Reaching into the far and shadowy horizons of history is not an easy task; however, Azkaii, not only succeeds in probing those horizons, but also affords the readers with an exciting picture.

The book consists, essentially, of an investigation of the state of knowledge in the ancient Persian Empire and the works written throughout its duration. An effort has been made by the author to demonstrate that knowledge first originated in the greater Persian Empire, stretching from Iran to Mesopotamia, then, from there, it spread to the western world.

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<sup>1</sup> In Farsi, published in Mashhad/Iran: The Islamic Research Foundation, Astan Quds Razavi, 1996, 279 pages with no index, 2000 copies, only.

<sup>2</sup> *Index*, in this context, means listing and cataloguing of published or written books.

The work suffers from some shortcomings, such as the occasional lack of accuracy and precision in dealing with some linguistic relationships, especially those governing the differences between *language* and *orthography* [writing system]. More specifically, at least with regards to this evaluation of the book, the absence of the English counterparts of the Farsi transcribed names of authors make it quite difficult to reconstruct the original names. Other shortcomings relate to the bibliography where the information about the year of publication and the names of publishers are missing. Also the lack of an index renders any search extremely difficult. A systematic bibliography would enhance the usefulness of the work. As for the linguistic style of the author, he makes ample use of some newly coined Farsi words and overloads his texts with Arabic words and quotations which, at first, may create the impression of a work difficult to read. But soon, a tolerant reader becomes familiar with the style and the text. However, in spite of all those secondary shortcomings, the strengths by far outweigh its weaknesses.

The author, apparently a Muslim cleric, often comes through as a real scholar, unbiased by religious prejudices. Firstly, he vividly admits that the Islamic Law was based on the Roman Law of the time as practiced in Syria and Egypt. In this connection, he writes:

*“That this was the first time Moslems came face to face with the Roman Law in Syria and Egypt is a certain fact. When Moslems conquered these lands, they were faced with a complete set of established laws and regulations concerning land ownership, trade contracts and regulations with which the simple Arab Bedouins were unfamiliar. Because they could not ignore those laws, they accepted many of them which they later on made them part of the Islamic Law.”*  
(p. YA, ٤ in the “Introduction”)

Secondly, his quotation of Sibvey Farsi, an Iranian scholar, who wrote that the Arabic grammar was based on the Syriac grammar, is another courageous admission regarding the non-Islamic influence on the Islamic institutions. (p. T, ٥) Thirdly and interestingly, Azkaii also repeatedly shows signs of blending his objectivity in assessment with his national pride. On page “J, ٤”, he cites Bertrand Russell, the late great British philosopher, as having identified the Iranians as deeply religious people and strong thinkers who, after embracing Islam, rendered the Islamic religion theologically more interesting and philosophically more stimulating than what the Prophet Mohammed and his followers had imagined. This is a very strong statement given the fact that Moslems consider the Qor`an to be God’s words conveyed through His messenger Mohammad.

The intention of this short article is to cite some significant statements from Azkaii’s work, especially those relevant to the history of the Assyrians and their contributions to the Middle Eastern civilizations with focus on the Iranian civilization, and comment on them. Such citations and commentaries, it is hoped,

might be of interest to the Assyrian readers for reasons clarified at the outset of these introductory remarks. It is interesting to note that this book had been previously reviewed by Hannibal Givargis, in the June, 1998 issue of “Matvana d’Aturaye, مَطْبُتْأ دَاقُو لِأَنْبِيَّأ” published in Tehran, Iran. To demonstrate the relevance of the book to Assyrian readers, some numbers on word counting from Givargis’ review are worthy of being reproduced here:

“...the word ‘Soryani’<sup>3</sup> has been used more than 162 times; the word ‘Aramaic’, 106 times, the word ‘Assyrian/Assuri’, 450 times, the word ‘Babylonian’, 155 times, the word ‘Chaldean’, more than 19 times. Finally, several hundred words in Sumerian, Akkadian, Nestorian, Jacobite, together with the names of tens of Assyrian/Christian authors and translators have been mentioned.”

### Excerpts From the Introduction:

In the Introduction (p. ٥, ٢), Azkaii mentions how Assyria was overthrown by the Medes in 612 B.C. and the Persians conquered Babylonia in 539 B.C. and eventually dominated all Mesopotamia for more than a Millennium. Thus, Mesopotamia, with its important cities such as Babylon and Ctesiphon, has continuously been one of the provinces of the ancient Iranian Empire. For this reason, he concludes that during the Sassanid rule that province was called “**Assurestan.**”

As for the impact of the Soryani [Syriac, Aramaic] language on Iran, he stresses the significance of pointing out to other Iranian scholars that the Aramaic language and its alphabetic orthography [writing system] had become the official administrative and literary tools of the Achaemenid Empire.

Another contribution of the Soryanis pertains to their role in the transfer of the Greek heritage to the Moslems. Referring to O’Leary’s work<sup>4</sup> (p. ٥, ٢), the author explains that the transfer took place through the Soryani translations of the Greek works by the Christian scholars mostly Nestorians and some Jacobites from the schools of Mesopotamia and Syria, during the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Azkaii then digresses somewhat to dwell on the historical background of the Soryanis. Soryanis, or *Assuris* according to Persians, he explains, were Aramaic-speaking Iranians, who, during the Parthian and Sassanid dynasties became Christian and followed the Assyrian Church. One of the

<sup>3</sup> Azkaii, as it is traditional in Persian, transcribes the name as ‘Soryani’ [with an Arabic diacritical mark of Dhamma / ّ /] instead of its more common rendition as ‘Seryani’ [with Kasrah / ِ /]; however, I have been informed that both pronunciations and transcriptions are attested in the Moslem Arabic and Christian Arabic works.

<sup>4</sup> De Lacy O’Leary, *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs* (reprinted, Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc. 1979).

Soryani-speaking regions, other than Babylon in the south of Iraq and Harran in the north, was the city of Edessa from where the Soryani language and Christianity spread eastward into the cities of Iran.

Azkaii pleads to scholars and researchers interested in Persian works to discard the notion that the Syriac language and orthography are not part of the Iranian heritage. To support his claim, he mentions the names of great Islamic Iranian scholars, such as Ibn Al-Muqaffa', Hamza Esfahani, Ibn An-Nadim and Abu Abdullah Kharazmi (Khwarezmi), who, unanimously believed that the ancient Iranian *speech* [sic.] was based on five languages: Pahlavi; Dari; Parsi; Khuzi and Soryani [Syriac] the latter being the language of the land of Assurestan or today's Iraq. He then addresses the reason why modern linguists have not listed Syriac among Iranian languages. This, he expounds, is because Soryani is a Semitic language, which unlike Pahlavi, does not fit among the Arian [Indo-European] languages. But, there is absolutely no doubt in the fact that the ancient Iranians had chosen Syriac [Aramaic] as their language, just as in the Islamic period they chose Arabic for their literary, scientific and philosophical works. It is because of this status of Syriac that Azkaii likens the role it had played in ancient Iran to the role the Arabic language played during the Islamic period. (p. T, ط)

The author divides Syriac speaking people into two groups: one group living under the Roman rule known as Jacobites and the other, living in the Iranian territory known as Nestorians. When, in 479 A.D., the Romans closed the school at Edessa, the Nestorians moved to Nisibin (Nisibis), where they founded a school, which also rose to prominence. The conflicts between these two Christian groups reflect the underlying conflicts between the Roman and Iranian Empires. In fact, the conflicts were more political than religious. (p. Y, ٥)

As a different area of emphasis, Azkaii places the Soryani achievements into categories.

- Religious disputes between the Nestorian and Jacobite leaders,
- Canon laws based on the Old and New Testaments and religious tradition.
- History of the Syriac Church, and the lists of its patriarchs.
- Scientific works on philosophy, medical science, nature, astronomy, mathematics, alchemy and geography.
- Works translated from Greek to Syriac. (p. Y, ٥)

Turning to other Western sources of influence on the Islamic jurisprudence, the author demonstrates how the Bedouin Arabs, leaders of Islam, after conquering Syria and Mesopotamia and coming face to face with their civilized communities were compelled to adopt some of their civic and religious laws and adapt them to the newly emerging conditions in the conquered societies. He specifically points out that those laws were based on stoic teachings, which the Roman legislators had, in turn, adopted from Greek sources. (p. YA, ٦) Later on (p. YJ, ٧) the author recommends to the Iranian theological centers to

acquaint themselves with the Pahlavi language and incorporate it in their comparative studies related to Islam, Shi'ism and Iranology. He further emphasizes that **even if they did so, it would be preferable to include in their studies the etymology of legal terminology and the origin of jurisprudence as they appear in Arabic and Soryani sources.** [*Bold characters from this writer*]. In the course of this introduction, Azkaii makes an inaccurate statement, which needs rectification. In enumerating the Iranian contributions to world culture, he names Iran as the cradle of the first world government and the site of the first empire. (p. V, 9) As it is well known, Iran began building its empire after defeating Assyria in 612 B.C. Iran built its own empire based on the Assyrian model of administration. Therefore, the Assyrian Empire, which was probably built by King Sargon I of Akkad (2340 – 2284 B.C.), is centuries older than Persian Empire.

### **Excerpts From the Section on Writing:**

Azkaii recognizes the common origin of the Arabic and Syriac orthographies and languages and that the former is a natural continuation of the latter. He further recognizes that both the Pahlavi and the ancient Arabic orthographies to be based on Aramaic which is the ancestor of Syriac. Regressing further into the ancient history, the author refers to the civilization of Elam, southwest of Iran, and how the Elamites adopted the Babylonian orthography which is originally an extension of the Sumerian orthography. On writing during the reign of the Medes, he quotes Malek al Shoara-e-Bahar, in a work titled Median Cuneiform, stating that the Median cuneiform had 42 symbols 36 of which were adopted from the Assyrian cuneiform (page 9).

Moving to the Achaemenid Empire, he refers to the renowned monument<sup>5</sup> erected by Darius I, [521 – 486 B.C.] to immortalize his victories. In the Elamite rendition of this inscription, Darius says that he has introduced another “Arian” writing system, previously unknown, which is written on clay tablets as well as on parchment. A number of scholars, adds Azkaii, believe that this is a reference to the introduction and use of the Aramaic alphabet in the transcription of the Iranian language. It is this alphabetic script, which is producible on clay tablets and parchments unlike the cuneiform, which is exclusively impressed on clay. (p. 10). The cuneiform writing of the Achaemenid period died with the fall of that dynasty, but the Aramaic alphabetic writing, which was used throughout the Persian Empire, spread all over the Middle East and as far as India; in fact, it became the universal origin of almost all the well-known alphabetic scripts presently used in the world. With specific reference to the Achaemenid period,

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<sup>5</sup> The monument, known as Bisotun [historically known as Behistun] and located east of Kermanshah (Bakhtaran), had been one of the most central pieces of evidence, which scholars have used to decipher the ancient writing. The inscription on the monument is trilingual in Babylonian, Elamite and Old Persian.

the importance of this language and its writing lies not only in the fact that it was the principal language among traders and immigrants, but also, because all central government communications and mail to the regional governors and satraps, were conducted in this language. (p. 12)

Under the heading: “Greek Writing” (p. 15), we read that during the Seleucid rule, the learned men from Babylon began to acquire literacy skills [reading and writing] in Greek. The Greeks, in turn, acquired the Babylonian knowledge and translated it into Greek.

Finally, “in the cultural history of Iran from the ancient times even in the Islamic period, the Aramaic or Assuri [Modern Assyrian] language and writing had special importance in the history of the Iranian culture because all Iranian languages before Islam had been seriously impacted by Aramaic; in fact, the Arabic writing styles [fonts], such as Kufi and Naskh with which Persian languages are still written, have all originated from Aramaic.” (p. 11)

### **Excerpts from the Section on Philosophy**

Greek philosophers used to travel to Susa<sup>6</sup> and to Babylon in search of knowledge. For example, Democritus,<sup>7</sup> wrote his hypothesis on the indivisible atom as a result of his trip to Iran and Babylon (p. 88). Referring to Richard Frye’s “Opera Minora,” (Shiraz, 1976, pp. 82-86), he writes that during the Seleucid period the Jews and Greeks were influenced by the Iranian thought which, in turn, had Babylonian origins (p. 90).

On books written in Pahlavi, Azkaii lists the following, among others:

- “*The Christian Faith*”, translated to Pahlavi by Metropolitan Elisha Bar Kuzbaey for Ghobad, the Sassanian King (488-531 A.D.).
- “*The Religion of Christ*” translated into Pahlavi, by Catholicus Acacius [Aqaq], for the Sassanian King Ghobad, during the years 485-495 A.D. (p. 94).

A list of Syriac books is given (p. 94), as follows:

- “Sermons,” in Syriac, written by Titus Basraya, in 462 A.D. This book is addressed against the Manichaeans.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Southwest Iran; Biblical Shushan, Neh 1.1, Esther 1.2, Dan 1.2. *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Third Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Greek philosopher, c460-c370 B.C., from Abdera. *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Third Edition. ذيمقراطيس

<sup>8</sup> Manichaeism, religion founded by Mani (c. 216- 276). *The Columbia Encyclopedia*. Third Edition.

- “Theophania,” which has been translated to Syriac, around 411 A.D.
- “The Monophysite Creed,” in Syriac, written by Severus of Antioch, 540 A.D. This author had another book translated from Greek to Syriac.
- “A Demonstration,” an Essay in Syriac, by the same Severus of Antioch (from 512 to 518 A.D.). This is written about Manichaeans and others.
- “Manichaeans and Astrologers,” a book written by Gabriel [Jebrail] of Marv, Bishop of Hormuzd Ardashir (550 A.D.).
- “The Arbitrators,” a book by Yahia Eskandarani, Monophysite (568 A.D.). The Syriac translation of this book is extant.
- The “Syriac Disputes,” is a dispute between, Azar Hormozd, and Anahid, both Christians, against the Zoroastrian Mago [Mobed], during the reign of Sassanians.

Azkaii writes, when Alexander the Great conquered Iran, he burnt some Iranian philosophical, scientific and religious books and carried away the rest to Greece and Egypt, for translation. Ironically, later on during the reign of Shapoor, the Sassanian King, Greek knowledge was translated to Pahlavi and incorporated into Avesta [Zoroastrian scripture]. This reversed translation, in the opinion of both ancient and modern scholars, is nothing but an act of returning the credit to its creditors- the Achaemenian Magi. To prove his point, the author quotes Paulus, an Iranian of Nisibis or Basrah, a Christian scholar of Logic who converted to Zoroastrianism (571-573 A.D.) during the Sassanian reign. In the introduction to his book, in Syriac, titled: “Logical Selections,” a translation from Aristotle, Paulus, after praising the Shahenshah, Khosrov Anushiravan, writes: “philosophy is real knowledge of all things, which you possess; now, I am presenting to you, your own philosophy” (p. 99). Here, Paulus is telling the Iranian King that this Greek knowledge is the Iranian knowledge returning back to its origin.

Examining contemplative philosophy and Neo-Platonism before Islam (p. 100), the author writes that, the establishment of Iranian Syriac schools (in Edessa, Nisibis, Harran), and the teachers and translators associated with those schools, should not be forgotten. He then suggests that for a deeper investigation of Syriac works, the following sources should be consulted: M. Steinscheinder, *Die Arabischen Übersetzungen aus Griechischen*, Graz/Austria, Akademische Druck – U., 1960 [Arab Translations from Greek]; W. Wright, *History of the Syriac Literature*, 1894; and A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn, 1922. Reference is also made (p. 101) to Agathias,<sup>9</sup> the Roman poet and historian, whom Azkaii cites as saying that Khosrov Anushiravan (531-579 A.D.), the Sassanian King, was very fond of philosophical works, therefore, a

<sup>9</sup> Agathias (d.c. 582 A.D.) was a Byzantine poet and author of a history covering part of Justinian I’s reign. This unfinished work in five books stands as the chief authority for the period 552 to 558 A.D. *Encyclopedia Britannica CD*, 98.

few books, such as those written by Paulus on Plato and Aristotle were translated for him into Pahlavi. Once again, the author reiterates that the Syriac language in those days played the role that the Arabic language played in the Islamic period- Syriac was used as the scientific medium. To stress the role of Syriac as a scientific medium, the author points out that the roots of the word “philosopher” in Persian, Arabic and Armenian is from the Syriac “Pilisoup” (p. 102). (This latter term was, in turn, transliterated from Greek)

Below are some of the Syriac works in philosophy, logic, and natural science (p. 105-8):

- “History of Philosophers and their Works,” by Porphyry<sup>10</sup>, in four essays, from Thales<sup>11</sup> to Plato [427? to 347? B.C.].
- *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (Concise), translated into Syriac by Nicholas of Damascus (a copy of which is in the Museum, in Paris). This book was translated into Pahlavi for Khosrov Anushiravan (531-579 A.D.).
- *The Logic of Aristotle*, a selection, in Syriac, by the scholar Paulus the Nestorian (of Nisibis or Basra), converted to Zoroastrianism (deceased in 571/573 A.D.). This work was written for Khosrov Anushiravan, the Sassanian King (531-579 A.D.), supposedly, based on an anthology by Sergius Ras-’ain (deceased 536 A.D.), with an eloquent introduction.
- *Alfa to Mega*, book one of natural science (= physics) by Aristotle. The Pahlavi version of this book, supposedly existed, because, Budh, the Christian traveller-physician, and provincial bishop (sixth century A.D.), who was sent to India by Khosrov Anushiravan, the Sassanian king, to collect medical herbs, had apparently translated it from Pahlavi to Syriac. No copies of this work are extant.

### **Excerpts from the Section on Science**

From language and philosophy, the author moves to address the transfer of knowledge and science. Addressing those who believe that knowledge originated in Greece, he writes (p. 131), it would be very childish to think that science began in Greece. Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and probably others precede the so-called “*Greek Miracle*” by thousands of years of innovative work. The Greek science is more of a renaissance than an invention.

An interesting subject is brought up by the author (p. 135), which deals with Babylonian and Chaldean influences on the Zoroastrian teachings. Basically, what the author says is that during the reign of the Seleucids, the teachings of the

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<sup>10</sup> Greek scholar and Neo-Platonic philosopher 233-304 A.D. *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Third Edition.

<sup>11</sup> Pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, 636-546 B.C.

pro-Greek magi became mixed with a series of mystery subjects, such as witchcraft, alchemy, astrology, and Babylonian divination. This knowledge, as preached by the magi and Chaldeans (Chaldean magi), spread over the ancient world, and became known as the "Teachings of Zoroaster." Azkaii, quotes a great Iranian scholar of the 3rd Hegira century [Lunar calender], Ibn-Nadim as follows:

*".... The major problems concerning astronomy are among phenomena that their appearance was related to some causes. This knowledge was expounded by Babylonians in their books, whence the Egyptians learned, and Indians used in their country.... Concerning the knowledge of the world, its beginning and end.... All this knowledge came about during the reign of Jam Ben and Younghan.... This was so until the time of Zahak or Dahak, who built a town in the land of "literacy" (Southern Mesopotamia), named it after the star Hormazd (that is Babylon), and gathered all the scholars there. He then built twelve palaces, as the signs of the Zodiac, and named them after those scholars." (p. 136)*

Later he quotes Hamze Esfahani, a scholar who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> Hegira century [Lunar] as the source for the following story:

*When Alexander conquered Babylon, he became envious of their scientific achievements that no other nation had been able to acquire. So, he ordered the books to be burned, and he also ordered the killing of all the priests, scholars, scribes, and all those involved in the maintenance of the records, plus the ordinary citizens. But, before proceeding with this destruction, he ordered that all needed science, such as astronomy, medicine, philosophy, and agriculture, be translated into the Greek and Coptic languages and transferred to the West. (P. 138)*

Dealing with mathematics (p.148-51), the author writes that, most of the mathematical problems, which have come down to us from the Babylonians, whether geometrical or arithmetic, have an algebraic character. There is a noticeable link between the algebraic theorems of Diophantus (Greek mathematician of the third century A.D.), and those of the ancient Babylonians (2000-1200 B.C.). Babylonians used geometrical figures for the solution of algebraic problems and they knew the basic first, second, and even, third degree equations. Among the second degree equations, found on mathematical tablets in the British Museum, is the following: "if the area of a square is added to its side,

and the result is  $\frac{3}{4}$ , find the length of the side.” This shows that algebra, in Babylon, had almost reached a scientific level.<sup>12</sup>

The mathematical foundation built by Babylonians facilitated the progress of scientific astronomy. During the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, King of Assyria (1260-1232 B.C.), a device was invented for the observation of stars during the day, which was used in the palace of Ashur (Assur). In the same period, a simple sundial and water clock were used. The ziggurats, built for the god Enlil, made the observation of the heaven, easier. The most important observations made by the Babylonians relate to the planet Venus. Many of the astronomical tables compiled for the planet Venus, which belong to the period of King Ammisaduka<sup>13</sup> (1921-1901 B.C.), have caught the attention of scientists. In the library of Ashurbanipal, they found tablets dealing with astronomy and its laws. Assyrian astronomers studied the new and the full moon. From the Twelfth Day of each month they would work to determine the hour of the full moon because the middle of each month was dedicated to religious ceremonies. They focussed their attention on the moon and sun eclipses because they didn't know their causes. Then, from the twenty-sixth day of each month, they tried to determine the new moon, that is, the first day of the month.

The prominent Babylonian astronomer, Nabu-Rimanni (560-480 B.C.), the son of Balatu, started his work during the reign of Xerxes, King of Persia. He was from a family of priests and his work, “*Observations of the Moon and the Stars*”, has acquired immense fame in the history of science. Nabu-Rimanni, determined the solar year to be 365 days, 6 hours, 15 minutes and 41 seconds. It should be pointed out that these accurate results were obtained without the benefit of modern tools and telescopes. Nabu-Rimanni used a water clock to measure the days, months and, hence, the length of the year and the beginning of the calendar. Such accurate calculations seem incredible to modern astronomers.

A short selection of works written by Babylonian astronomers is listed (p. 157) in the book:

- “Manifestations of Stars,” in Akkadian, written in cuneiform by Labashi, son of Belsharibni, in 577 B.C.
- “Observations of the Moon and Stars,” by Nabu Rimanni (560-480 B.C.), son of Balatu, in Akkadian.
- “The New Moon Chart” by Kidinnu of Sippar, the greatest Babylonian astronomer of the fourth century B.C. A cuneiform copy of this chart written in 145 B.C., was translated into Greek.

<sup>12</sup> طه باقر, تاريخ الحضارات القديمة (بغداد: 1951 ص 284-305)

<sup>13</sup> Ammisaduqa, 1646-1626 B.C., first dynasty of Babylon, page 337, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, by A. Leo oppenheim.

- The book “About the Triangle,” by Archimedes of Syracuse (282-212 B.C.), was translated from Syriac to Arabic by Youssef [Joseph] Al-Khouri, a Christian priest.

With relevance to the *Lion and Sun* motif (former Iranian national emblem), on page 193, the author writes the motif has, apparently, an astronomical origin; however, today, it has become a mere symbol of dynastic nobility. The winged sun,<sup>14</sup> seen in the Median tomb in Sakhaneh of Kangavar [A city in Western Iran, east of Kermanshah], is also used in Persepolis, therefore, its origin is pre-Achaemenid via ancient Assyria, where it was used as the symbol of Shamash “sun” which, in turn, became the symbol of Ahura Mazda for the Iranians. Further elaborating on the same motif (p. 252), the author writes that in ancient times, the constellation Leo [Lion] was considered to be the home of the sun. Such a happenstance seems to be at the root of the *Lion and Sun* symbol being adopted as the official Emblem of Iran.<sup>15</sup>

On the subject of Assyrian astronomy, (p. 200), Azkaii writes that from the three collections of Assyrian astronomy (second half of the second millennium B.C.), the oldest one, that is the “Nippur” collection, has some kind of insight, which indicates the beginning of mathematical astronomy. Another collection is the one called the Assyrian Divination (Berlin), which consists of 36 stars related to the 12 months of the year, and is dated 1100 B.C. In the library of Ashurbanipal (669-630 B.C.), a round chart has been found, which is divided into twelve months. It completely resembles the circular divination charts of a later date though with some additional sophistication. Among the collection of mathematical astronomy, there are square divination charts, too.

### Excerpts from the Appendix

According to historic documents, Alexander collected an innumerable number of books written in the sciences of the time, and sent them, from Iran to Greece, to his teacher, Aristotle.

Ptolemy Philadelphus<sup>16</sup> collected 54,120 volumes of books of non-Greek knowledge, and gathered them in Alexandria. This information was reported by Ibn al Ebri, who wrote that, Ptolemy Philadelphus was a lover of knowledge, and protected the scholars. When Ptolemy heard that there was a variety of

<sup>14</sup> Symbol of Ahura Mazda, the god of goodness in the Zoroastrian religion.

<sup>15</sup> This book was printed in 1996, after the Islamic Revolution. Therefore, this statement indicates that this part of the book was written, perhaps sometime before the Islamic Revolution.

<sup>16</sup> Ptolemy II (308-246 B.C.) was king of ancient Egypt (285-246 B.C.) of the Macedonian dynasty, son of Ptolemy I. *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Third Edition.

knowledge, in India, Fars [southern Iran, home of the Persians], Gorgan [northern Iran, near the Caspian sea], Babylon and Assyria, different than what existed in Greece, he ordered his vizier to collect those books, who did obtain them at any price. (p. 237)

From page 230 we read that the word “Ajour” [meaning brick in Persian and Arabic] is the name Babylonian scribes had given to baked clay tablets. This Babylonian word entered the Arabic language.

Further below, page 244, the author lists Aphrahat’s work titled “Demonstrations” among other works, and equates Aphrahat’s name to “Farhad” the Iranian.

### **Concluding remarks**

For many readers, the facts quoted from Azkaii's book, relating to the depth and extent of the contributions made by the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian societies to the world culture are well known. Equally well known are the immense contributions made by the Assyrian Christians in the transfer of the Greek knowledge to Arabs and through them to Europe.

All these facts are documented and many readers are acquainted with them. What is significant in Azkaii's work is that for the first time in the recent history of Iran a scholar openly subscribes to the importance of the role played by the ancestors of the modern Assyrians whose population is, unfortunately, dwindling in number.

It would be heartening if such views were held by a broader spectrum of the Iranian lay and clerical academicians and the populace at large. Documents such as this book should stimulate further academic and scholarly investigations pertinent to the post Assyrian Empire’s history of the Assyrians. Such investigations are inevitable since much of the history of the Assyrian contributions to world civilization from the downfall of the Empire to the advent of Christianity is hidden in the annals and archives of other nations and empires that coexisted with or outlived the Assyrian Empire. Expressed differently, much of the history of the Assyrians is concealed in the layers of the history of the Achaemenid, Sassanid, Greek, Parthian, Roman, etc. More specifically, after the advent of Christianity, much of the civilizational accomplishments of the Assyrians is embedded in the Islamic and Arabic records and archives. Thus, a careful survey of the history of all those nations is worthy of serious consideration.