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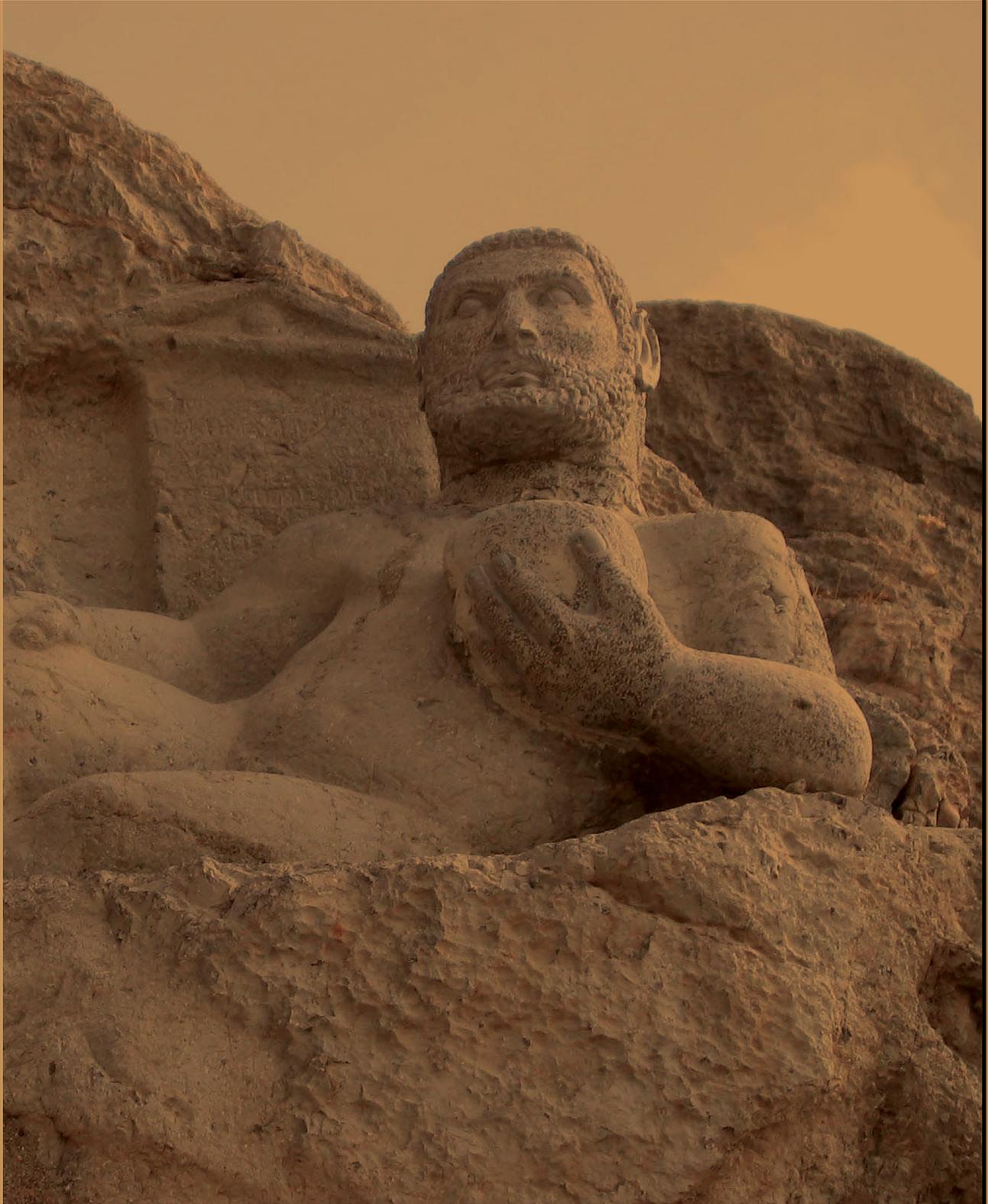
Special Issue: Hellenism and Iran



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*xšnaoθrahe ahurahe mazdā*

Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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**Special Issue: Hellenism and Iran**

Benkato, Adam. *Āzandnāmē. An Edition and Literary-Critical Study of the Manichaean-Sogdian*

*Parable-Book. Beiträge zur Iranistik 42. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2017.*

Chiara Barbati  
(Università di Pisa)

This publication is absolutely to be recommended. What is striking from the very beginning is the ability of the author to combine details into more complex and larger contexts.

In the concise and clear introduction (pp. 11-14), Benkato clarifies the significance and methodological implications of dealing with Manichaean philology in the past as well as in our days by recording a shift from a purely philological approach (p. 11) to a phase in which “Manichaean philology therefore can be said to have two goals that are simultaneous and inform each other: to translate the testimony of the sources, and to extract from the sources information about their historical context” (p. 12). In so doing, Benkato links this methodological shift to the issues of the “material philology” or “new philology” (note 3, p. 14). Those who are particularly sensitive to the relationships between the literary and material aspects of a given text will have no difficulties in recalling definitions developed in recent years in the field of Manuscript Studies. I fully agree and strongly support this approach.

Methodology aside, a very interesting point is made in the first pages of this book. While listing the main features of the Manichaean texts and their transmission, Benkato rightly stresses that “no bilingual Manichaean manuscripts (that is, one manuscript containing the same text in two different languages) from Turfan are attested (excepting Sogdian-Old Turkic wordlists), even though a number of miscellanies containing different texts in different languages are now known” (p. 13). This aspect is not secondary when we discuss the bilingualism or multilingualism of the different religious communities from Turfan between eighth to tenth/eleventh centuries.

The chapter “The manuscript and its context” (pp. 15-28) provides a very detailed presentation of the state of the art with particular regard to the text of the *Āzandnāmē* and the manuscript. Of particular merit is the discussion about the book format. The book format is that of a scroll showing a Chinese text on the recto and the Sogdian text of the *Āzandnāmē* on the verso (p. 20), an example of the phenomenon of the re-use of a manuscript which is well attested within the Manichaean manuscript tradition. At this point, Benkato focuses on the social aspects through a very broad discussion linking the book format to the problem of the find-signatures, to the place of production, to the storage, to the find-site—in this case that of Toyoq—and, last but not least, to the necessity of combining the data on Manichaean manuscript fragments gathered from the Turfanforschung in Berlin with that of the Japanese and Russian collections. In my opinion, this is a crucial point for the advancement of research.

Inclusion of photographic reproductions of the fragments making up the parable-book would have been desirable, in order to facilitate immediate consultation, even if these are available online at the Digitales Turfan Archiv (<http://turfan.de/dta/>) and carefully described by Benkato (pp. 18-22).

The subsequent chapter is aimed at outlining the peculiarities of the “manuscript formalities” (pp. 29-47), i.e. the peculiarities of “a rather large Sogdian script, not uncommon for the texts written on Chinese scrolls, and not with particular care” (p. 29), of the orthography (pp. 31-37) and of the grammar (pp. 38-47) as reflected in the *Āzandnāmē*. With more than 200 writing lines, the Manichaean Sogdian parable-book is among the longest extant Sogdian—not only Manichaean—texts, and therefore is a very important source for the understanding of the Sogdian language.

The attention given to the “errors” in a broader perspective focused on the problem of the text transmission (pp. 45-47), i.e. by dictation or by copying, is admirable. In the same way, Benkato’s reflections on the paratextual elements, especially in the case where more than one hand is involved, are noteworthy (p.47). Benkato comes back to this point at the end of the next chapter (pp. 102-111), the fourth, entitled “Edition of the *Āzandnāmē*” (pp. 49-115). By analysing lines of Sogdian language and script which are written between or over the lines of the Chinese recto of the scroll, the author focuses on the purpose of the formula *ky L pyr’t* “he who does not believe”, convincingly demonstrating that this formula indicates a later use of the manuscript rather than implying a dictation process or any activity of the original scribe, as also hypothesized in the past years.

Benkato’s undoubted philological and linguistic abilities are well demonstrated in this chapter. Even the most hypothetical linguistic reconstructions or text restorations are very well argued. At the end of the chapter, Benkato analyses the textual and material aspects of other fragments of the parable of the Religion and the Ocean (pp. 112-115).

The next two chapters—“Textual Commentary on the *Āzandnāmē*” (pp. 116-158) and “Interpreting the Manichaean Parables” (pp. 159-169)—are rightly described as “inseparable parts of the philological study of a Manichaean text” (p. 120). Benkato defines the parable as “a type of text that employs a narrative fiction to reference a symbol” (p. 117), discusses the structure of the parables and advocates the need for literary criticism to be applied to the study of the Manichaean parables, as already carried out in the study of the Christian parables. The author revises Henning’s point of view, one which was focused on the narrative importance of the Manichaean parables, and demonstrates in a very convincing way that the Manichaean parables “were an important part of both Manichaean religious discourse and ritual practice” (p. 163). With particular regard to the transmission and reception of the Manichaean parables, Benkato points out that they have to be regarded as an example of the active integration of Manichaeism in new cultural

areas rather than as an example of intermediary between East and West (pp. 165-167). Given the fact that the parables “as a text-type are not at all unusual in the scheme of religious literature”, I would strongly recommend these two chapters to all scholars and students of Religious Studies.

The final part of the book consists of a glossary (pp.171-189), a useful list of the Manichaean parables in Iranian languages that have been published or identified so far (pp. 190-193), an updated bibliography (pp. 194-206), an index verborum (pp. 207-209) and an index locorum (pp. 209-210).

This precious publication is highly representative of new perspectives in the field of Middle Iranian Studies. One should look out for further contributions from the author, which will no doubt contribute to the fruitful development of the field.