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EVALUATION OF *KŪSHNĀMA* AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE IN REGARD TO DESCRIPTIONS OF BASĪLĀ

By LEE HEE SOO

This article examines the descriptions of *Basīlā* in the *Kūshnāma* (کوش نامه) and determines the credibility of those descriptions as historical evidence. *Kūshnāma* is a Persian epic and part of a mythical history of Iran written by Hakim Irānshān b. Abī al-Khayr between 1108 and 1111 CE. Many scholars argue that *Basīlā* in *Kūshnāma* can be identified with the Silla Kingdom (57 BCE–935 CE) of ancient Korea for many reasons. First, the descriptions of *Basīlā* in *Kūshnāma* largely correspond to those of *Silā/al-Silā* in contemporary Islamic texts. Second, in some Muslim historical and geographical works such as *Masālek wa Mamālek* by Sāed bin Ali Jorjāni (1476 CE), and *Ajāyib al-Makhlūghāt* by Muhammad bin Ahmad Tusi (1161–1178 CE), we find that *Basīlā* is used, together with *Silā/al-Silā*, to describe the same area of the Korean peninsula. With the advent of Islam, references to Korea found in twenty-three Islamic sources written between the ninth and sixteenth centuries by eighteen Muslim scholars, including Ibn Khurdābih (d. 886 CE), Sulaiman al-Tajir (written around 850 CE), and al-Mas'udi (d. 957 CE), suggest that Muslims' influence had already reached the Korean peninsula by that time.² Before the discovery of *Kūshnāma*, however, no documents or epics had been found that describe ancient relations between Iran and Silla in such a detailed manner. In this sense, an in-depth study of *Kūshnāma* focusing on its descriptions of “*Basīlā*” will contribute to expanding our understanding of pre-modern relations between the Middle East and Korea. Because both historical events and mythological beliefs of ancient Persia are incorporated in *Kūshnāma*, this article will consider to what extent we can accept descriptions within *Kūshnāma* to be reliable historical evidence.

Keywords: *Kūshnāma*, *Basīlā*, Silla, Abtin, Ancient Korea-Iran Relations, Sassanid

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¹ For a detailed discussion, see Hee Soo Lee, “Early Korea-Arabic Maritime Relations Based on Muslim Sources,” *Korea Journal* 31, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 21–32.

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KŪSHNĀMA AS A SOURCE OF ANCIENT KOREA-IRAN RELATIONS

Kūshnāma manuscripts³ contain historical facts and traditional Persian legends, sometimes mingled with each other. Based on Jalal Matini's reprinted version of *Kūshnāma* in 1998, among 10,129 total couples, 3914 couples between No. 2011–5925 cover many aspects of Silla⁴ such as general societal conditions, China-Iran-Silla relations, military cooperation between Silla and Iran, Iranian settlements in Silla society, the marriage of an Iranian prince with a Silla princess, and the excellent living conditions of Silla.⁵

Islamic sources reveal that with the collapse of the Sassanian dynasty, many Persian royal families and artisans escaped to East Asian countries including China and the Korean peninsula. History preserves no account of what exactly happened to them or of their destinies except in a few Chinese chronicles. Under such circumstances, it is interesting to note that the Persian prince and his army appear under different names in different stories along with the tales of those who migrated to Silla in search of political asylum. The Persian prince was renamed Abtin and got married to Frārang, a Silla princess. Upon residing in Silla, the group of Persians contributed greatly to Silla society especially as they fought against the Chinese troops to help the Silla king. After coming back to their home country near the Caspian Sea under the amicable patronage of Silla King - Tayhur, Persians described the beautiful Silla people and their society in written records.

Kūshnāma was handed down from generation to generation in the form of separate epic tales until the eleventh century when an Iranian scholar, compiled the oral epic into written records. Afterward, Jalal Matini, an Iranian historian re-edited *Kūshnāma* and published it in the form of a modern book in 1998 based on the original manuscripts possessed by the British Library (No. OR 2780). *Kūshnāma* can be helpful in reconstructing the historical relations between Iran and Silla (i.e. a land near China found in other Islamic texts).

Sources of information on Iran and Korea relations have been limited to Islamic geographical and historical texts about Silla. Although *Kūshnāma* is based on traditional Persian myths with an extensive use of symbolism, it contains significant collective memories held by Iranians of ancient Korea. Moreover,

³ The original manuscripts of *Kūshnāma* are well preserved at the British Library as No. OR-2780, London, England.

⁴ Abī al-Khayr Irānshān b., *Kūshnāma*, edited by Jalāl Matīnī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī, 1998 (AH1377)).

⁵ Yi Hūisoo [Hee Soo Lee], "Kodae P'erūsia sōsasi Kuswiname ūi palgul kwa Silla kwallyōn yōn'gu [A preliminary study on Kushnameh, an ancient Persian epic and its descriptions of Silla]," *Han'guk Isūllam hakhoe nonch'ong* 20, no.3 (2010): 100.

geographical information and the natural environment of Korea as well as the architectural characteristics of ancient Korean palaces and castles are portrayed with extraordinary accuracy in *Kūshnāma*.

Until now, no documents or epic has shown such ancient relations between Iran and Silla. In this sense, the finding of *Kūshnāma* and its re-interpretation will contribute much to academia, especially to the Silk Road studies to open a new chapter in studying Silla's foreign relations and develop more realistic approaches to Silla society. The *Kūshnāma* is primarily a Persian epic based on oral tradition following the *Shahnāma* style very closely, and it was later compiled in the form of a manuscript. However, because it seems that some historical events are associated with the mythological beliefs of ancient Persia, determining the reliability of descriptions within the *Kūshnāma* is the key task in this study.

2. WHY BASĪLĀ, NOT SILĀ IN KŪSHNĀMA?

One thing still not clear is why *Kūshnāma* refers to Korea not as Silla, but as “*Basīlā*” (*Besīlā*). The name referring to Korea is clarified as “*Basīlā*” in *Kūshnāma*. However, many other Islamic texts identify the Korean kingdom by various names such as *Sillā*, *Silī*, *Selā*, *Silān*, *Shilā*, *Lasīlā*, and *Kasīlā*. It may be possible that “*Lasīlā*” and “*Kasīlā*” were mistakenly written as names for *Basīlā* by the scribes.⁶

Akbarzadeh, a philologist of the Pahlavi language, explained that the name *Basīlā* is unique to *Kūshnāma* and that it is not a mistake of the scribe because this toponym appears consistently throughout the book. The occurrences of the toponym Silla in the *Kūshnāma* can be categorized into two groups. In the first group, *Basīlā* can be interpreted as a compound, made from a preposition and the toponym. In the second group, *Basīlā* can be interpreted as a compound made up of an adjective and *Silā* and employed as a toponym.⁷

For examples, *Shahr before Basīlā* (City of *Basīlā*) confirms that *Basīlā* should be rendered as a simple noun toponym (*Kūshnāma*. Nos. 2241, 2455, 2500, 2523, 2562, 2566, 2570, 2694, 3346, and 3347). On the contrary *Kūshnāma* Nos. 2747 and 2448 cannot be linguistically or semantically considered a unity, *Basīlā*. We are able to say that the *Basīlā* of No. 2747 is compounded of a preposition (ba>be) and a proper name (=Sila). No. 2747 is normally translated as follows:

⁶ Daryoosh Akbarzadeh, “Silla or Basilla,” in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Korea-Iran Relations*, Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea, May 31 2012, 3–12.

⁷ Ibid., 4.

He went from that forest and mountain to reach Silā (Prep. + Noun) and to start fighting.

This kind of preposition (=be) is usually joined with words that appear next to them (verbs, names, adjectives) according to the writing system of Persian classic texts. This preposition makes a kind of locative (to, inside, in) with toponyms. There is no doubt that the author could have easily used *be* before the proper name of Sila on more than one occasion.⁸

In the second form of *Basilā*, linguistically and phonologically, it seems that *beh* (adjective) is added to the proper name, Sila. *Beh* means “good, and better” and comes from a Middle Persian (Pahlavi language) word *web*.⁹ There are many examples illustrating such a composition technique both in Middle Persian and New Persian. Such names are generally considered vestiges of the new Persian language adopted in the late Sassanian dynasty.¹⁰ *Beh-dan* (village near Birjand), *Beh-deh* (Fars), *Beh-shahr* (Mazandaran), *web-ardashir*, *web-andiyok*, *web-shapuhr*, *web-aẓamad-Kavad* (toponyms),¹¹ *web-dad*, *web gushnasp* (proper names of humans) and *web-den* and *wahman* (religious terms)¹² are examples of such names.

So, the *Basilā* in *Kūshnāma* is strongly believed to refer to Silā in Islamic texts. Furthermore, the descriptions of *Basilā* largely correspond to the records of Silā in Islamic texts. Most importantly, in some Islamic historical and geographical works such as *Masālek wa Mamālek* by Ali Jorjāni (d. 886 AH/1476 CE) and *Ajāyeb Al-Makhlughāt* (556–573 AH/1161–1178 CE), we find *Basilā*, together with *Silā/al-Silā*, both depicting the same area of the Korean peninsula.¹³ According to Vosoughi, an Iranian historian of the Islamic era, the term *Basilā* was used for the first time in *Kūshnāma*, and later found its way into the book *Majmal Al-Tawārikh wa'l-Qesas* (520AH/1126 CE) where the writer observed the convention established by the *Kūshnāma*, and then into the *Jahannāmā* (605AH/1288 CE)

⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹ D.N. Mackenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press: 1971), 89.

¹⁰ Ali A. Dehkoda, *Loghat-nameh* (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1963), 413–417.

¹¹ N. Shindel, *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum Paris-Berlin-Wien*, Band III/I (Wien: VÖAW, 2004), 169–170.

¹² Phillippe Gignoux, Rika Gyselen and A. D. H. Bivar, *Bulks et sceaux sassanides de diverses collections* (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Etudes Iraniennes, 1987), 179.

¹³ M. Vosoughi insists that the word of Silā in the Islamic sources means the Peninsula of Korea and the word *Basillā* in Islamic sources means the Island of Korea. See M. Vosoughi, “Sillā, Basillā or Bosillā,” in *Proceedings of The Eighth International Seminar on Kushnāmeh*, Hanyang University Museum, Seoul, Korea, 2014, 47–72. The description is as follow: “Silā is located at the extreme part of China. Basilā has coast, too, so some people called it Basilā which is wealthy and beautiful...The number of persons who traveled there is so limited and they won't leave this city because of its good conditions.”

where the name Basīlā was recorded. At the end of the fifteenth century, Sāed bin Ali Jorjāni (d. 886AH/1481 CE) referred to a number of different sources, including *Jahannāmā* and *Masālek wa Mamālek*. These two names were then used side-by-side across the centuries in Persian literature, both referring to the same country, Korea, as shown below.¹⁴

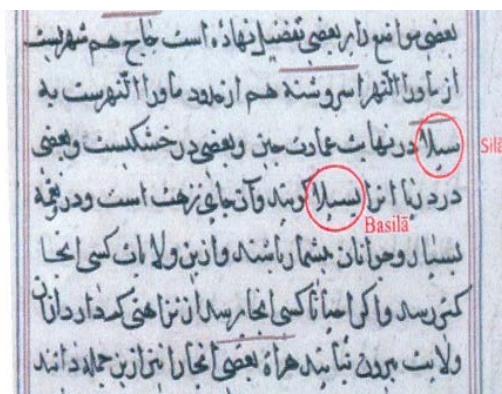


Figure 1: Masālek wa Mamālek by Sāed bin Ali Jorjāni, The Central Library of University of Tehran No. 6824

3. ANCIENT CULTURAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND KOREA

Of course, long before the advent of Islam, Korea and the Middle East traded by sea and by overland routes such as the Silk Road. Documented references are few and far between, but sufficient evidence remains to give proof of substantial commerce between Korea and the Middle East.

One example is the twenty-five kinds of glass cups excavated from ancient tombs in Kyōng-ju, the capital of the Silla Kingdom. Most of these cups are either from Roman territories in the Middle East or Sassanid Persia in the fifth and sixth centuries. Among the specimens of typical cut glass, the glass bottle unearthed from tomb No. 98 shows the same manufacturing technique as in the Sassanian dynasty. Assuming that the tomb was constructed during the fifth and

¹⁴ Lee and Vosoughi suggest the hypothesis that in early Iranian manuscripts, Korea was once described as “Kang dez”, then “Basīlā” in the pre-Islamic period, and finally “Sīlā” in the Islamic period. See “Korea in the Imagination of Persian Geographers,” *Forthcoming Issue of Iranian and Caucasus Journal* (2018).

sixth centuries, it is safe to assert that around that time Persian merchandise had already found its way into Korea and was being used by Koreans.¹⁵

We have another remarkable artifact showing the connection between Korea and the Sassanian dynasty. A small silver cup, which takes a bowl-like shape commonly found in the early fifth century and very similar to an Anahita statue, the traditional goddess of Ancient Persia, was found. During this period, the influence of Sassanid culture was very strong in Korea. In the fields of music, art, literature and related disciplines, Iranian motifs came to Korea and prompted imports of Persian products. Products with Persian designs and patterns were extremely popular in Korea, as is confirmed by the “the design of pearl-studded roundels” and symmetrical, zoomorphic patterns.¹⁶ The best example is “Bas-relief of Pearl-Roundel, Tree-of-Life, Peacocks, and Lion” from the Gyeongju National Museum which is strongly believed to demonstrate the influence of Persia of the seventh and eighth centuries and is assumed to have been designed by Persian stonemasons.¹⁷

We know that human statues of Persians with deeply socketed eyes and high noses (深目高鼻) were produced in large quantities as earthen burial figurines in Korea. It is possible that the military guardians at the Kwaerŭng tomb of Korea might have been modeled on Persian earthen figurines. Additionally, headbands, unique to Persian or Muslim culture, are minutely depicted in the stone statues at Kwaerŭng tomb. On another stone statue standing in front of Kujŏngdong tomb of the Silla period, the warrior is vividly depicted playing polo. This stone statue provides a significant clue that the upper class of Silla played polo, which supports the record in the *Samguk sagi* mentioning the fact that the Silla people

¹⁵ Lee Heesoo, *The Advent of Islam in Korea: A Historical Account* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1997), 54.

¹⁶ Min Pyŏnghun [Byung Hoon Min], “Silk’ŭ rodŭ rŭl t’onghan yŏksajŏk munhwa kyoryu, [Historical and cultural exchanges through the Silk Road]” *The Silk Road and Korean Culture* (Seoul: 1999), 66–75; Lee, *ibid.*, 54–55. On the cultural relations between ancient Iran and the Korean peninsula, Kwŏn Yŏngp’il discusses it in detail saying that Persian artistic style flowed into the Korean peninsula in great diversity. In the Griffin of Achaemenian period, the pattern of an akinakes bronze dagger with a Parthian shoot of the Parthian dynasty, in an earthenware of Persian shape, rhyton with an animal decoration has been found. Particularly during the Sassanid period, cut-glass, glass vessels with ring motifs, silverware, pearl-studded roundel motifs and winged lion patterns were widely introduced to Korean art indicating the direct contact of Koreans with Persians). See Kwŏn Yŏngp’il, “Misulsa ro pon kodae Han’guk kwa P’erŭsia kan munhwa kyoryu wa yŏnghyang [Cultural exchanges and influence between Ancient Korea and Persia from the perspective of art history],” *Cultural and Regional Studies* 3 (2014): 75–76.

¹⁷ Kim Hongnam, “Saja kongjak munsŏk yŏn’gu.”

(The fourth collaboration of folk culture studies: A study on the early Unified Silla Bas-relief of pearl-roundel, tree-of-Life, peacocks, and lion from the Gyeongju National Museum, Korea),” *Silla munmul yŏn’gu* 10 (2017): 5–40.

enjoyed the sport of polo.¹⁸ This leads us to presume that there must have been some direct contact with Persians.¹⁹

Persian items such as carpets and wool fabrics were imported and widely used by the Silla aristocrats. Floral-designed seating mattresses in the Persian style were quite popular in ancient Korea. It is also interesting to note that alfalfa or *medicago lentilata*, a plant native to the Caucasus or Persia, was transplanted to the Korean peninsula. According to the *Samguk sagi* (三國史記: *Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms*), there were four state-run farms in Silla where alfalfa or *moksuk*, as it is called in Korea, was grown. In addition, according to *Sino-Iranica: Chinese Contributions to the History of Civilization in Ancient Iran* by Berthold Laufer, Persian products such as the Persian emerald called *se-se* (瑟瑟), along with aloe, ambergris, pomegranate, sesame, grape, peppermint, and walnuts were all transplanted to Korea.²⁰ *Samguk sagi* also gives a detailed account of peculiar musical instruments and trading products representing Persian culture in Korea.

The introduction of Persian culture and its products into Korea before the advent of Islam was largely a result of indirect contact between Korea and Persia. But direct contacts between Persians and Central Asians with the Korean peninsula were also made from time to time. Moreover, during recent archaeological digs in Korea, several clay busts have been revealed whose shape resembles Persian merchants with beards and moustaches. Furthermore, comprehensive research carried out recently by several Korean scholars revealed that the hero of the Ch'öyong mask dance was an actual human being native to an Indo-Arian tribe that migrated to Silla in 880 CE.²¹

4. KŪSHNĀMA, AS A POSSIBLE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

It was during the Islamic period that the mythical geographical classification recorded in the Avesta was confirmed to be historically accurate. Zoroastrian writers were eager to collect and write the Pahlavi books in early Islamic centuries, mostly motivated by fear that the new religion might cause the extinction of their religious assets.²² Writing in new Persian under Arabic predominance, Persian

¹⁸ Min, "Silk'ü rodü rül t'onghan yöksajök munhwa kyoryu," 83–84.

¹⁹ Hee Soo Lee, "1500 Years of Contact between Korea and Middle East," *Middle East Institute* (June, 2014):1–2.

²⁰ Berthold Laufer, *Sino-Iranica: Chinese Contributions to the History of Civilization in Ancient Iran* (Taipei: Ch'eng-Wen Publishing Company, 1973), 220–275.

²¹ Lee, *The Advent of Islam in Korea*, 55.

²² Daryoosh Akbarzadeh, "Silla, Paradise of Ancient Iranians," Paper presented at International Conference the Middle East in the World, the World in the Middle East, Seoul, Korea, 2010, 141.

Muslim authors awakened the soul of the Iranians. Making no distinction between myth, lore, and fact the authors poured the folk history of Iran into the *Kūshnāma*.²³ Furthermore, as strategic methods to preserve the long and deep-rooted history of Iran under Arab dominance, they described their history metaphorically and incorporated traditional mythology into historical facts. Because they preferred the oral transmission of stories over written records, it was customary for them to add new information during the process of oral storytelling. The author of *Kūshnāma*, Hakim Irānshān b. Abī al-Khayr carefully explains such a background in the introduction:²⁴

When I fulfilled a main part of my wishes, I decided to start another tale. I had a dearest friend in my city that was knowledgeable and generous to the peoples. He told me if I wanted to write another tale, he has a ready tale related to China. I saw that as a useful text, full of knowledge and advice. I decided to show myself knowledgeable by the versification of that important text.

The above passage shows that the support granted to Iranians in the Silla kingdom led to the use of “Silla” as a unique toponym. We know that many Iranians accompanied Pērōz when he escaped to China. Silla might have been a familiar name for Iranian aristocrats and traders at this point in history.²⁵

In the introduction of *Kūshnāma*, the author tells the story of a community of Iranians who had been in China since Jamshid’s time. Iranians were faced with many problems in China and this led to conflicts between Iranians and the Chinese government under Kush’s reign. As a result, Iranians decided to escape and request the help of King of Basīlā, Tayhur, who welcomed Iranians warmly.²⁶ Also the author of *Kūshnāma* explains how the Iranian prince, Abtin sent different messages to different kings to find support. It was Bahak, king of Māchin, who advised him to contact the kingdom of Silla.

In fact, Silla was an ideal land to the Iranians after they had escaped from China. Even though *Kūshnāma* was compiled in the eleventh century, when we take the contents and the language into consideration, it seems that the source could be the oldest text dealing with Silla and its relations with Iran. In particular, the archaic expressions show that the author used an old and original text. Therefore,

²³ Sandra Mackey and W. Scott Harrop, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and The Soul of A nation* (New York: Plume, 1998), 63.

²⁴ Daryoosh Akbarzadeh, “Different Parts of Kush-nameh,” *Cultural and Regional Studies* 3, (2014): 2.

²⁵ Ibid., 141.

²⁶ Akbarzadeh, “Silla, Paradise of Ancient Iranians,” 141.

it seems that the original source of *Kūshnāma* can be dated back to the last period of the Sassanian dynasty when Pērōz, son of the last Sassanid king, Yazdgerd III, escaped to China. According to *Kūshnāma*, *Thalabi* and many Post-Sasanian texts Feridun was born in Basīlā after a marriage between Abtin and Frārang, a Basīlā princess. *Kūshnāma* confirms his expedition to Basīlā to support his remains as well as to China and Central Asia for revenge.

In this context, Iranian Prince, Abtin, in *Kūshnāma* seems closely associated with the fall of the Sassanian dynasty. Therefore, it is vital to extract historical facts from the epic passage of *Kūshnāma* as well as *Shahnamā*, which is regarded as a meaningful source for Iranian history.

1) Sassanian Royal Descendants in Chinese Chronicles

The relations between China and the Sassanian dynasty had strengthened since ancient times and had been strengthened, especially during the early years of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). During the war between the Arabs and Sassanid Persia, Yazdgerd III, the last king of the Sassanian dynasty, sent his prince Pērōz III to the Chinese court in Chang-an, to demand China's aid against the attacks of the Arab Muslims in 650.²⁷ By then, newly acceded Chinese emperor Gaozong (唐高宗: r. 650–683) was already fully aware of the Arabs' move to form formidable adversaries, so he replied that Persia was too far away for the required troops to be sent.²⁸ At the same time, because of the formal contact made

²⁷ Most of this information showing the destiny of the last royal families of the Sassanid dynasty can be deduced from Chinese sources, especially the *Jin Tangshu* (舊唐書: Old History of the Tang completed in 945) and the *Xin Tangshu* (新唐書: New History of the Tang composed in 1060). The section regarding the history of Peroz is quite different in the two chronicles. According to the *Jin Tangshu* in 661–62, Prince Peroz sent an embassy to Tang Emperor Gaozong (r. 650–83), asking for military support against the Arabs. Even though he could not achieve his goals to recover his dynasty, Peroz was appointed as the ruler of Sistān. Afterwards the Tang court accorded him the title of 'Grand General of the Right Courageous Guard and Commander-in-chief of Persia.' Peroz could stay for about twenty years in Ṭokāristān fighting the Arabs. In 708–9 Peroz went back to the Tang capital and died from a disease. See Touraj Daryaei, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 37–38. Meanwhile, *Xin Tangshu* (新唐書) states that Pērōz in Ṭokāristān did not receive any support from the Tang court. So, he established himself in Sistān with the help of the rulers of Ṭokāristān to fight against advancing Arab troops. From 661–64 Pērōz sent several embassies to the Chinese court to request the help of Tang against the Arabs. In 662 Gaozong accorded to him the title of 'King of Persia', but, with the strong advance of the Arabs, Pērōz escaped to the Chinese capital Ch'ang-an between 673 and 675.

²⁸ E. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) Occidentaux* (St. Petersburg: Commissionnaires de l'Académie impériale des sciences, 1903), 172; M. Broomhall, *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem* (London: Morgan & Scott, Ltd.: 1910), 13.

between the Tang dynasty and Arabia in 651, it was the intention of the Chinese emperor to refrain from providing military support to Pērōz or any other Persian royal family for fear of provoking the new ally of the Tang dynasty. Instead, according to Chinese sources, the Chinese emperor showed them generosity by appointing them as government officials.

But Sahmeddin Khazaee insists that after the Arab invasion of the Sassanid Dynasty in 651, the Tang court supported the Sassanid survivors in forming a government in these areas to deal with the Arabs, so that there was a buffer state between China and the Arabs. The Tang court tried to help the Sassanid Prince Pērōz III, in the western regions, including Zarang (Sistān), and then again in Tokāristān. Tang recognized the Sassanid royal families Pērōz, Narsieh, Wahram and Khusro as legitimate rulers of Iran for some time. However, the Sasanian survivors did not reach their goal and finally were defeated by the Arabs. They fled to the imperial court of China, including such neighboring areas as Machīn and Basīlā. Several studies have been done on the survivors of the Sassanid and in particular Pērōz III by Touraj Daryaei (1382, 1383), Cheragh Ali A'zami Sangsari (1377), and William Watson (1368).²⁹

Chinese sources state that Pērōz (卑路斯: Beilusi) took refuge in Tokāristān,³⁰ where he obtained the support of the local Turkish ruler and sent an embassy to China asking for assistance again. Pērōz was appointed as the governor of Po-ssu, with his capital at Ji-ling (Zarang, in Sistān) from 658–663 CE.³¹ However, he was unable to hold out against the advancement of the Arabs and took refuge at the Tang court between 670 and 673. He died around 679 CE. After the death of Pērōz, his son Narsieh and Wahram, another son of Yazdgerd were escorted west by Chinese troops and remained there under the protection of the Turkish ruler of Tokāristān for about twenty years.³²

After the failure of the revival of the Sassanid dynasty, Narsieh went back to China around 707–9, as a guest of the Tang court, and died in Ch'ang-an. The Tang emperor granted him the title of 'General of the Left Majestic Guard.' The

²⁹ Sahmeddin Khazaee, *Pirouz III: The Last King of the Sassanid Throne* (England: Natural History SOC Northumbria, 2015), 221–222.

³⁰ Chavannes, index, 353.

³¹ Daryaei claimed Pērōz established a kingdom called the "Persian Area Command", and was recognized as the legitimate king of Iran by the Chinese court. (Daryaei, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 237). According to Herzfeld ("Khusrau Parwēz und der Tāq i Vastān," *AMI* 9, (1938), 94, Pērōz was born in 636, a date which could be considered well-fitting for the general history of late Sassanians and for the events narrated in the Chinese chronicles. There then arises another question regarding the military position of Pērōz as described in the *Jin Tangshu* (舊唐書): why, in fact, should Gaozong have accorded to him two different titles?

³² Ibid., index, 353.

Xin Tangshu reports that embassies from most likely such Persian territories as Māzandarān or Tokāristān continuously arrived at the Chinese court until 755.³³ Also *Xin Tangshu* states that after the death of Pērōz in 679, Narsieh continued to fight in Tokāristān against the Arabs.³⁴

The other son of Yazdgerd III, Wahram (Aluohan in Chinese sources), attempted to recapture the lost territories from the Arabs, but he died in 710 CE without achieving his goal. According to Daryaei, Wahram's son, Khusro, who with the aid of the Turks invaded Persia, was not able to defeat the Arabs either and this is the last time we hear of someone from the family of Sasan trying to capture the throne of Persia. Even then, many rulers in Central Asia remembered the Sassanians and claimed to be the descendants of Sasan in one way or another. The family of Sasan was never forgotten.³⁵

Many Persians lived undisturbed in China due to the hospitality of the Tang emperors, but the situation changed after the An Lushan rebellion, which broke out in 755–6, especially, with the edicts issued by the Taoist minister Li Mi (722–89), who aimed to stop the financial support granted to foreign nobles living in Chang-an.³⁶

Information on Sassanians, who avoided submission to the Arabs and lived in Central Asia or at the Tang court, can be found in the works of Muslim authors and in Chinese sources. According to Mas'ūdī, Yazdgerd III had two sons, Wahrām and Pērōz, and three daughters, Adrag, Shahr-bānu, and Mardāwand.³⁷ As Balādiri recorded, Pērōz settled among the Turks of Tokāristān and even married a noble Turkish woman.³⁸ It seems clear that Abtin in *Kūshnāma* is the embodiment of national salvation, who sought refuge in Silla after passing through Central Asia and China to restore his homeland, which had vanished from history following the fall of Sassanid Persia.

³³ Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turc) Occidentaux*, 173–4; P. Daffinà, “La Persia sassanide secondo le fonti cinesi,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 57 (1983): 39; Matteo Compareti, “The Last Sasanians in China,” *Eurasian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2003): 211.

³⁴ F. S. Drake, “Mohammedanism in the Tang Dynasty,” *Monumenta Serica* 8, no.1 (1943): 6–7.

³⁵ Daryaei, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 38.

³⁶ M. T. Dalby, “Court Politics in late Tang Times,” in *The Cambridge History of China, vol. III: Sui and T'ang China, 589–906*, pt. 1, edited by D. Twitchett (Cambridge: 1979), 593.

³⁷ Maçoudī, *Les prairies d'or*, edited and translated by C. Barbier de Meynard and P. de Courteille, 9 vols. (Paris: 1861–77), 41; see also A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen: 1944), 508; M. A. -Moezzi, “Shahr-bānū, princesse sassanide et épouse de l'Imam Husayn. De l'Iran préislamique à l'Islam Shi'ite,” *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 1 (2002): 255–56.

³⁸ P. K. Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State. Being a Translation from Arabic Accompanied with Annotations Geographic and Historic Notes of the Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān of al-Imām abu-l 'Abbās Ahmad ibn-Jābir al-Balādhuri*, vol. I (New York: 1916; repr. in 1968), 493.

Under such political circumstances, some possible assumptions can be made about the Sassanian royal descendants' political refuge as stated in the *Kūshnāma*.

First, the Sassanian royal descendants could have sought refuge in the Silla kingdom during the war that broke out under Pērōz III for the purpose of retaking his native land.³⁹ The war and the seeking of refuge would have taken place sometime between 651 and 679. At this time, the Silla kingdom was desperately in need of foreign assistance to obtain advanced weapons, technology and to devise military strategies for the unification of the Three Nations. Considering the position of Silla, before and after the unification, the first scenario would be in the period from 660–668 CE when Silla was fiercely battling against Paekche and Koguryō on the way to unification. In view of the global reach of their knowledge and advanced technology, the Sassanid prince and his entourage must have been seen as critical for Silla. As described in detail in *Kūshnāma*, it is highly probable that they were involved in educating the Hwarang at Silla's military training institutions for the selected elite and teaching them technologies to develop new weapons, in addition to how to play polo. In fact, Korean historical sources clearly tell that in the era of the Silla kingdom, the Hwarang played *kyōkkeu* (擊毬), which is a variant of polo.

Second, the political exile of the Sassanian royal descendants could be associated with the advance of Narsieh, Pērōz's son, into the Silla kingdom. It is speculated to have taken place between 679 and 709, which is a period when the Silla kingdom faced conflicts with Tang China after the unification of the Three Nations. Third, the political exile of the Sassanian royal descendants could have been inevitable because they were no longer able to receive the support or protection of the Tang court after the An Lushan Rebellion, which left the Sassanian royal descendants with no choice but to flee in all directions. This is speculated to have taken place sometime around 755.

Historical sources of Islam also recorded that after the collapse of Sassanid Persia, followers of the Sassanid surprisingly took refuge in East Asia. They are described as Alawis. While it is not clear whether the remaining forces in Sassanid Persia accepted Islam as the state religion, it is interesting to note that Iranians with strong ties to Shia Islam are referred to as Alawis, a sect of Shia Islam that follows the path of the fourth Caliph Ali.⁴⁰

However, because *Kūshnāma* is based on the traditional epic poetry of Persia and largely adopted the use of metaphors in portraying Persian history based on *Shahnamā*, it is difficult to reconcile every detail of the *Kūshnāma* and all historical

³⁹ Daryoosh Akbarzadeh, "Silla the Founder or Silla the Kingdom," *Acta Via Serica Inaugural Issue* (Winter, 2016): 31.

⁴⁰ Lee, *The Advent of Islam*, 51.

facts. Rather than considering the *Kūshnāma* as historical data, we should use the book as a resource in enhancing our understanding of the detailed analysis of the Silla kingdom illustrated in the *Kūshnāma* through linguistic analysis of names and appellations, micro-analysis of Silla's customs, its view of nature, sports and food, and the comparative analysis of perceptions that Persians had of the Silla kingdom.

2) The Political Situation of the Silla Kingdom before and after Unification

From the mid-seventh century, Silla was engaged in fierce battles for survival with the neighboring kingdoms of Koguryō to the north and Paekche to the west—in the quest for the unification of the Three Kingdoms. By then, Silla had achieved innovation in weapon production after embracing advanced ironworking technology from the Gaya confederation,⁴¹ and had established diplomatic relations with Tang China for military cooperation.⁴² At this time, the thirst for new weapons, military operations, advancement in the regional power structure, and effective military training was stronger than ever.⁴³

The collapse of Sassanid Persia at the end of the seventh century was followed by the migration to Silla of the Iranian royal family and its intellectual elite. They were from a highly civilized culture and had extensive knowledge of the regional situation including that of the Silk Road, and must have found exile in Silla an attractive choice.

Silla King Chinhūng reformed the Hwarang to be a state-level organization, with the objective of educating talented youths for future contribution to the state, and re-organized Buddhist denominations for ideological unification while Koguryō was defending itself against attacks from the Sui and Tang Dynasties of China. At this juncture, Silla joined forces with the Tang Dynasty and formed a Silla-Tang alliance to launch counterattacks on Koguryō and Paekche.⁴⁴

Due to a joint military expedition of Silla-Tang forces, the kingdom of Paekche fell in 660 CE. Eventually, the kingdom of Koguryō also collapsed after being attacked by a joint Silla-Tang force in 668 CE. The Tang Dynasty had plans to defeat Paekche and Koguryō through an alliance with Silla, and then to seize the Korean Peninsula by taking advantage of its alliance with Silla. In response to

⁴¹ Chŏn Hot'ae, *Kūllobŏl Han'guksa* (Global Korean history), vol.1 (P'ulbit, 2011), 183.

⁴² Ibid., 239.

⁴³ Han Wookeun *The History of Korea*, trans. Lee Kyung-shik, et al. (Seoul: Eul Yoo Publishing, 1980), 75–98.

⁴⁴ Chŏn Hot'ae, op. cit., 262.

these ambitions, Silla, cooperating with those who were displaced from former Koguryō and Paekche, battled with the Tang Dynasty.⁴⁵

Following the conquest of the two kingdoms, Silla defeated the Tang forces advancing southward to the Silla territories, and subsequently crushed the Tang naval force at the mouth of the Kūm River. They then drove the remaining Chinese forces out of the peninsula in 676 CE.⁴⁶ However, a complete unification was not achieved because Silla was not able to capture Manchuria and the area to the north of the Taedong River, which had belonged to Koguryō. Before long, Parhae was founded by exiles from former Koguryō and a new era called the North–South States Period began.⁴⁷

Without doubt, during this period, Silla was in need of both material and skilled human resources and was in a position to establish relations with any partner including China, who could help bring them victory in war. It was almost inevitable that Silla was chosen by the Persian royal family and their subjects, who had fully familiarized themselves with the current situation of East Asia during their exile in China. The description of the arrival of Abtin and his subjects in Basīlā, and his fighting in a war to help Silla is strong historical evidence of the state of affairs and regional situation at the time of the North–South States.

In *Kūshnāma*, the protagonist Kush, is described as a tyrant of China. Moreover, the description of a polo match played by Persian exiles and Silla soldiers is consistent with the *Samguk sagi* (a historical record of the Three Kingdoms), which recorded that Hwarang members played *kyōkkeu*, an equestrian sport.⁴⁸

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN BASĪLĀ IN KŪSHNĀMA AND SILĀ IN ISLAMIC TEXTS

Since the pre-Islamic period, the location of Korea has been well-recorded in Persian geography books. According to pre-Islamic Iranian texts, the easternmost point of Earth is *Kang dez*,⁴⁹ which is recognized as the beginning point of

⁴⁵ Han Wookeun, *ibid.*, 82–84.

⁴⁶ Chōn Hot'ae, *ibid.*, 264–266.

⁴⁷ Han Wookeun, *ibid.*, 83–89.

⁴⁸ Lee, “A Preliminary Study on Kushnameh, an Ancient Persian Epic and Its Description on Silla,” 110.

⁴⁹ This place-name is mentioned in a number of different forms, including Kang dez [کنگ دز], Kang dez [کنگ دز], Kong diz [کنگ دیز], Kang dez [کنگ دز], Kang dez [کنگ دز] and Kang diz [کنگ دیز]. In this article, the form adopted is the one recorded in the Avesta – Kang dez [کنگ دز]. For further discussion of the characteristics of how this term was recorded, see: Poure Dāvoud, *Introduction to the Yashts*, translated by D. J. Irani (Bombai: 1928), 219–221.

civilized lands in the eastern world. Texts considered it to be the standard from which to measure longitude with a distance equal to 180 degrees from the westernmost area of the world. Furthermore, *Kang dez̄h* is described as a sacred and idyllic land in ancient Iranian religious texts, which gave birth to numerous stories and myths.⁵⁰ Large amounts of historical and geographical evidence indicate that the Iranian mythological *Kang dez̄h* fits geographically with present-day Korea. The use of *Kang dez̄h* dates back to the pre-Islamic period.⁵¹ The major sources of information on the geographical position of *Kang dez̄h* are two Pahlavi texts—*Bondaheshn*⁵² and *Minuy-e Kherad*.⁵³ Iranian geographers and astronomers have considered Sillā and Kang dez̄h to have the same geographical coordinates at 180 degrees east longitude, exactly in the Korean geographical location later described by Arab geographers.

Firdawshi's *Shahnamā* states:

He turned toward Kang dez̄h from the sea, so Rostam told him that Afrasiāb is...When you pass, you see a large city, all roses and gardens and iwans and palaces, all pure and delicious water, always it seems it is spring.⁵⁴

Furthermore, descriptions of Basīlā in *Kūshnāma* surprisingly correspond to the records on Silla in Islamic texts. Also, the attributes given to Silla as a dreamy and peaceful land in Islamic texts are comparable to the descriptions in *Kūshnāma*, where Basīlā appears as a peaceful land and as a paradise where Iranians sought refuge and were greeted with warm hospitality by the King of Silla. The period in which the main Islamic texts including *Kūshnāma* were composed is not much

⁵⁰ Kang-dez is a known mythological term from Old Persian (Avestā) to the early Islamic texts like *Shahnamā*. Kang-dez, according to Iranian belief, was in the sky and founded by Siyāvash—a mythological king who passed from the fire, Kang dez̄h is a very holy city but is not historical.

⁵¹ Edward Sachau (ed.) *Al-Biruni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about the A.D. 1030*, 1 vol. in Arabic, 2 vols. in English, London: Trübner & Co. 1887/1888, (Reprinted by Fuat Sezgin. Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, 1993), 157.

⁵² Bondaheshn, the name, meaning “Primal creation”, traditionally given to a major Pahlavi compilation, is mainly a detailed cosmogony and cosmography based on Zoroastrian scriptures but also contains a short history of the legendary Kayanids and Ērānšahr in their days.

⁵³ Menog-i Khrad (meaning: “Spirit of Wisdom”) is one of the most important secondary texts in Zoroastrianism written in Middle Persian. Also transcribed as Menog-i Xrad from Pahlavi, or from Pazand Minuy-e X(e/a)rad and transcribed from modern Persian [Minuj-e Xerād], (meaning: “Spirit of Wisdom”) the text is a Zoroastrian Pahlavi book in sixty-three chapters (a preamble and sixty-two questions and answers).

⁵⁴ Abu'l-Qasem Ferdowsi, *Shanama*, vol. 2 (California and New York: Costa Mesa, 1990), 309.

distant from the years when the final edition of the Pahlavi (Sassanian) Texts (eight-ninth century) was written.⁵⁵

It is an island (jazīra) surrounded by high mountains, located in the far eastern sea, facing Māchīn across the sea and with good relations, possessing fertile grounds and rich cities, with people of good figures and beautiful faces. In *Kūshnāma*, *Basīlā/Silā* is described in the following way: In all neighborhoods delicious water springs flow, beside the streams abundant cedars, gardens full of tulips and colchicum, each tulip giving a pleasant smell of its own.⁵⁶

Muslim merchants from Iran may have pioneered their own trade routes and eventually reached the Korean peninsula. While trade was the primary reason for their travel to Korea, it seems that many elements of Islamic culture were introduced to the Korean peninsula during this process as well. This is well supported by accounts of Korea called ‘Silla’ found in twenty-three Islamic books of geography, history, and travel written by eighteen Muslim scholars ranging from Ibn Khurdādbih of the mid-ninth century⁵⁷ to A’bul Fazl of the early sixteenth century. Iranian texts describing Silla, however, are rarely known to academic society except for a few manuscripts such as *Kūshnāma*.

Interestingly, Silla appears in Islamic texts not as a trading country like China, but mainly as a land of dreams. Islamic texts hardly pay attention to the economic relations between Persia and Silla.⁵⁸ In particular, the writings of Dimashqi, Al-Nuwairi and Al-Maqrizi are worthy of attention. To our surprise, they record that part of the Alawis, the followers of Ali, took refuge on the Korean peninsula to flee the persecution of the Arab Ummaiya Dynasty (661–750).⁵⁹

The fourth Caliph, Ali (r. 656–661) was killed, and the power of the Alawis quickly waned. Ali’s rival, Muawiya (r. 661–680) put an end to the Orthodox Caliphate and set up the Ummaiya Dynasty in Damascus. To survive, the Alawis dispersed and sought political asylum in many regions. The Alawis are known to have gone as far as the south-eastern coast of China. According to the writing of Nureddin Muhammad al-Awfi, at the time of the inauguration of the Ummaiya

⁵⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁵⁶ Hakim Iranshan Ibne Abul Kheir, *Kūshnāmeḥ*, couplets No. 2244–5, edited by Jalāl Matini, (Tehran: Entesharate Elmi, 1377H/1998).

⁵⁷ The first book on Sillā is regarded as “Kitāb al-masālik wa’l-mamālik,” compiled in 845 by Ibn Khurdādbih.

⁵⁸ Akbarzadeh, “Silla, Paradise of the Ancient Iranians,” 145.

⁵⁹ Lee, *The advent of Islam in Korea*, 50.

Dynasty, a great number of Muslim Shiites, in allegiance to Ali, formed their own community and lived collectively on Hainan Island, south of China.⁶⁰

Yonder to the east of China there are six islands. This comprises Silla. Its inhabitants consist of Alawis. They found shelter there escaping from persecution by the Ummaiyan people. According to what is known, they dislike leaving this place, despite living difficulties, including those of obtaining fresh air and clean water.⁶¹

We have no way of determining the accuracy or the credibility of the writing of Dimashqi. Nevertheless, the fact that Shiite tribes, followers of Ali, lived en masse on Hainan Island and in the south-eastern part of China around the seventh century raises the possibility that some of Ali's followers could have advanced as far as the Korean peninsula in search of paradise.

The structure of *Kūshnāma* closely resembles that of the Islamic texts mentioning the Alawi (mostly Persian Shiites) refugees in Silla. With the overthrow of the Sassanian dynasty by the Arabs, some Persians refused to yield and were forced to flee to neighboring countries while the majority accepted Arab dominance and converted to Islam from Zoroastrianism. But the soul of the Persian ethos remained untouched by the Arabs. Its essence continued to determine the basic nature of Persian culture in all of its manifestations.⁶² It is clear that Shia Muslims (mostly Persians) were severely persecuted under the Arab Ummaiya regime. It seems that the common sufferings of Persians were correctly described in *Kūshnāma* and Islamic texts.

6. CONCLUSION

Kūshnāma states that Persian Prince Abtin, together with his people, immigrated to Silla under the positive patronage of Silla King, Tayhur. The Sassanid prince married Frārang, a Silla princess, and contributed much to Silla society. Judging from these circumstances, it is not at all surprising that Koreans were in close contact with Iranians and the Sassanid dynasty. Two different cultures thus naturally met and blended with each other.

⁶⁰ Nureddin M. al-Awfi, *Jami al-bikayat*, (Old Turkish Edition) (Istanbul : Archives of Hagia Sophia), No. 3167 ; Hee Soo Lee, "Early Korea-Arab Maritime Relations Based on Muslim Sources," *Korea Journal* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 28

⁶¹ Al-Nuwayri, Ahmet, *Nibayat al-arab fi funun al-adab* (Cairo: 1923), 230.

⁶² Mackey and Harrop, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and The Soul of a Nation*, 49.

Among many other names used to refer to Korea in Persian classical texts, Basīlā is uniquely used to identify Korea in the *Kūshnāma*, an epic text that gives a detailed account of the Silla Kingdom. Thus, this Persian epic, which was written in the Islamic era of the eleventh century, should be considered as a reliable work to reconstruct forgotten Iranian history and collective memory of the pre-Islamic period. Of course, the story of *Kūshnāma* is comprised of both mythical legends and historical events transmitted in the pre-Islamic era. But, as a unique source to show ancient Korea (Basīlā) and Iran (Sassanid) relations, the contents of the *Kūshnāma* can be evaluated further in future studies.

According to Chinese written sources, however, the story of Abtin's seeking refuge in Basīlā with his army described in *Kūshnāma*, may be far from historical accounts because we believe that the author of *Kūshnāma* might have collected and recomposed the long-standing legends of Iranians of the pre-Islamic period, particularly concerning the fate of the last Sassanid royal families to whom Iranians strongly adhered as representing the dignity and glory of Iranian identity.

Unfortunately, in the study of Korean history, little attention has been paid to the wide range of cross-cultural aspects along the Silk Road, mainly because of the lack of experts and shortage of reliable materials. To combat this asymmetric trend prevalent in today's historical approaches, discovering and unveiling illuminating facts regarding Korea-Iran cultural exchanges during the fifth through tenth centuries along the Silk Road are urgently required. These historical relations must be supported by first-hand materials and other essential historical references in Persian and Arabic languages. In this sense, the newly discovered Persian epic *Kūshnāma* and other Persian manuscripts that contain informative contents on Silla should be the pivotal source materials for further Silk Road studies in East Asia.

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