

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The five chapters in this study represent lightly revised versions of the Biennial Ehsan Yarshater Lectures delivered at UCLA between 2 and 11 March 2020 under the auspices of the Pourdavoud Center for the Study of the Iranian World. I am indebted, first and foremost, to Professor Rahim Shayegan, the center's director, for the invitation to deliver these lectures and to the many friends and colleagues at UCLA who made the experience so memorable. Particular thanks go to Dr. Marissa Stevens of the Pourdavoud Center who organized so many things for my wife, Hildy, and me and made our stay so pleasant. For their generous assistance with images and information used in this work, I would also like to warmly acknowledge Javier Álvarez-Mon, Alireza Askari Chaverdi, John Ferreira, Wouter Henkelman, Brian Kritt, Dane Kuhrt, Fabrizio Sinisi, and Nikolaus Schindel. The comments of three anonymous readers on the original manuscript are also gratefully acknowledged.

Since their inception the Yarshater Lectures have been delivered on a wide range of topics, both ancient and modern, encompassing many different subfields of Iranian studies. I freely acknowledge that choosing a suitable topic was a considerable challenge, and it took some time before I settled on the broad theme of kinship. Although I had previously done some work on the avunculate (Potts 2018a), I had not worked extensively on kinship. Nevertheless, although it may not seem like an obvious choice of subject, kinship embodies the kind of historico-anthropological research that I enjoy, a branch of research that was absent from my education in what is termed "anthropological archaeology" at American universities. My own academic trajectory within Iranian studies has been characterized by many swings and roundabouts since I first began in the early 1970s as a student working on the

Bronze Age archaeology of southeastern Iran. From that time onward, my interests have steadily expanded and grown increasingly historical, to the point where they now encompass all periods of the pre-Islamic past, as well as the postconquest periods, right through the Qajar era (see Potts 2014, 2022a, and 2022b). I am far from expert in all of the periods in which I take an interest, but a fascination with Iran, as opposed to the discipline of archaeology per se, led me, many years ago, to begin pursuing a very different path from the one that my teachers and fellow students in anthropology probably anticipated. Instead of cleaving closely to the processual creed of American anthropological archaeology as taught to me between 1971 and 1980, I began moving into the domain of history, often assisted by epigraphic and literary sources, even before completing my dissertation. This inclination only intensified as a result of contact with Assyriologists in Copenhagen and Berlin between 1980 and 1991, when I became increasingly aware of the extraordinarily rich body of literary and epigraphic sources that offered a very different way of seeing the past than that in which I had been schooled. Since the mid-1990s, my work on the Elamites, Achaemenids, Seleucids, Arsacids, and Sasanians, as well as on nomadism and Safavid and Qajar history, has only pulled me further and further away from my American anthropological roots. Trips to Iran in 1995, 1996, and 2001 introduced me to both the architecture and the history of Safavid and Qajar Iran, and more recent work on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Iranian history has broadened my perspectives even further.

In thinking about what I might present, I had several considerations in mind. In the first place, I had no interest in offering something that might be broadly characterized as “traditionally archaeological”—that is, relating to excavations, typology, style, iconography, and so forth. Rather, I wanted to address issues that concerned the people of ancient Iran, drawing on a wide variety of sources, principally written, as opposed to their material culture. Moreover, I wanted to do something that was comparative, in the sense that it would illustrate how patterns observable in data from Iran belonged to a wider body of comparable material from outside Iran. In addition, like much of my work, I wished to offer a diachronic perspective, presenting cases drawn from many millennia of Iranian history. Specifically, I wanted to illustrate how a cross-cultural approach to Iranian data could help illuminate what have too often been viewed as peculiarly, even idiosyncratically, Iranian cultural practices. Finally, I wanted to attempt something in which the late Professor Yarshater would have taken an interest. Although I am neither a student of Persian literature nor Iranian linguistics, to name just two of his many fields, I was privileged to spend some precious hours with Professor Yarshater in his apartment on Riverside Drive and at the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* offices at Columbia over the past two decades, occasionally having lunch with him and talking about all manner of things. I remember well how honored I felt the first time I received an invitation from him to contribute to the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and how much I looked forward to finally meeting him several years later. To sit

with him in his office, aware of his immense erudition, was positively thrilling and only confirmed in my own mind that Iran and Iranology, rather than archaeology per se, were what mattered most to me. Little did I know at the time that the expansion of my interests from the archaeology of Bronze Age Iran to Safavid and Qajar history would only strengthen my resolve to devote as much of my scholarly energy to Iran as possible in the years to come.

But in addition to reflecting on Professor Yarshater, the invitation to deliver a series of lectures bearing his name prompted another kind of reflection. The intellectual history of Iranian studies has always been a subject of enormous interest to me, and I can think of dozens of intellectual companions in ancient Iranian studies who are never very far from my thoughts, scholars like Friedrich Carl Andreas, Wilhelm Eilers, Alfred von Gutschmid, Walter Bruno Henning, Ernst Herzfeld, Albert Houtum-Schindler, A. V. Williams Jackson, Ferdinand Justi, Josef Markwart, Vladimir Minorsky, Theodor Nöldeke, William Ouseley, Henry Rawlinson, Vincent Scheil, Marc Aurel Stein, Wilhelm Tomaschek, Rüdiger Schmitt, and Ran Zadok. They, too, crowded my mind when I began to seriously consider the prospect of delivering these lectures. And what could be more intimidating than to stand, metaphorically speaking, opposite such an array of extraordinary scholars and contemplate how in the world one was going to bring something worthy to this lecture series? One obvious ploy would be to concentrate on epigraphic and archaeological evidence that postdates the lifetimes of most of these scholars. Yet in my experience, even when new evidence appears, as soon as one seeks to integrate that with what is already known, one finds scholars of the past two or three centuries who have already dealt, in some fashion, with many of the same problems raised by the new data.

One field, however, which most of these scholars neglected to exploit in seeking to understand the Iranian evidence, is social anthropology. Thus, it gradually dawned on me that a diachronic perspective on issues associated with kinship, broadly speaking, was something that might be worth pursuing. Moreover, as a refugee from American anthropological archaeology, I was particularly attracted to issues of kinship. For all of the rhetoric of this field, there is often precious little anthropology, in the sense of classical subjects like kinship, in what American students are taught under the rubric of anthropological archaeology. Certainly, my own teachers had no interest in demonstrating how we might deploy the voluminous literature on kinship from social anthropology to better understand societies of the prehistoric or early historic past. Yet in my reading of the epigraphic and literary evidence pertaining to ancient Iran, I had on many occasions encountered issues that seemed ripe for elucidation using anthropological sources. Once I had decided on this course, it remained only for me to identify a suitable number of instances where this was the case and to stitch them together into five lectures. My choice of topics was highly idiosyncratic, but, first and foremost, they were ones in which I was myself interested.

The printed form of my Yarshater Lectures differs from the spoken form only in the insertion of a few more references, some rewriting, and the removal of quotations in French and German originally contained in the footnotes. These lectures certainly never pretended to be the last word on ancient Iranian kinship and social organization, but I hope that, by their example, whether as something to follow or as a subject for criticism, they will stimulate others to undertake further studies of this kind and thereby advance our understanding of Iran's past, in all its complexity, messiness, obscurity, and vibrancy, using insights gained by generations of anthropologists and historians. I am only too aware of the deficiencies in my own preparation for this sort of work, whether on an anthropological, historical, or philological level. But to paraphrase the Enlightenment scholar Jean Hardouin, I didn't get into this business just to say what others had already said before me (see Grafton 1999, 264n95).