

ANNALES

ACTA ACADEMIAE SCIENTIARUM INSTITUTI BONONIENSIS

CLASSIS SCIENTIARUM MORALIUM



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Annales. Acta Academiae Scientiarum Instituti Bononiensis Classis Scientiarum Moralium

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Fondazione Bologna University Press

Via Saragozza 10, 40123 Bologna

tel. (+39) 051 232 882

ISBN: 979-12-5477-553-0

ISBN online: 979-12-5477-554-7

ISSN: 2389-6116

DOI: 10.30682/annalesm2402

www.buonline.com

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Cover: Pellegrino Tibaldi, *Odysseus and Ino-Leocothea*, 1550-1551,
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Layout: Gianluca Bollina-DoppioClickArt (Bologna)

First edition: December 2024

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Note, Discussioni e Recensioni / Notes, Discussions, and Reviews

D.T. Potts, *Aspects of Kinship in Ancient Iran*, (Iran in the Ancient World, 1), Oakland, University of California Press, 2023, i-xv, 1-130

The present volume inaugurates a new series of Iranian studies directed by Prof. Dr. Rahim Shayegan. It collects and offers revised versions of five lectures given by Prof. Dr. Daniel T. Potts at the University of California, Los Angeles, in March 2020, in the framework of the Biennial Ehsan Yarshater Lecture Series (p. ix). The text is arranged in five chapters, with a *Preface* (pp. xi-xiv), two pages of *Contents* (pp. v-vi), and another list of the *Illustrations* (pp. vii-viii) by the same author, and the book concludes with an *Afterword* (pp. 97-98), a list of *Abbreviations* (pp. 99-100), *References* (pp. 101-123), and an *Index* (pp. 125-130).

The author – a very prominent colleague in the field of Iranian studies – is professor of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology and History at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University, but his expertise is enormous, and at the same time deep, so much that the academic interests of this remarkable leader of our studies cannot be confined to one historical period or even one main field.

The present text, of course, preserves some aspects of the oral dimension of the lectures from which the book was produced; it cannot cover in a systematic way all the complex matters it handles due to its final format. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, it offers an extraordinary conspectus of important problems with inspiring insight, while encouraging a number of relevant and innovative changes of paradigms. The volume, as clearly illustrated by the title, deals with kinship in Ancient Iran. Here “Iran” must be taken in a larger sense, including the period in which the Iranians had not yet reached their historical settlements. The book analyses various subjects, ranging from the ancient Elamite phase to the Sasanian Empire, dedicating a relatively significant space to the Achaemenid period.

In the first chapter (*Money is to the West what Kinship is to the Rest*, pp. 1-12), Potts presents some clarifications regarding methodology, addressing a few of foundational categories taken from the fields of social anthropology and sociology, which are *par excellence* connected with the scientific study of kinship. The author rightly underlines some *caveats* concerning the limits of the archaeological and historical approach to some questions concerning the categories of kinship within the ancient societies we study, in particular because many scholars have applied *a priori* inappropriate categories, and, furthermore, they have not considered much evidence emerging from the parallel developments of socio-anthropological studies, in particu-

lar those dedicated to ethnic groups still living outside of the domain of the so-called civilized and Western worlds. A more prudent observation of these theoretical distinctions, such as those between *filiation* (as a category belonging to the domestic domain) and *descent* (belonging to the politico-juridical domain) would have avoided certain bold mistakes in the reconstruction of particular family relations within Elamite society. As a negative example in the history of the studies, Potts mentions the approach assumed by Friedrich Wilhelm König, who despite his many merits, strongly rejected any comparative evaluation of other anthropological data, a limit that the author analyses in detail in this volume. For instance, «descent may be unilineal and either patrilineal or matrilineal [...] – or it may be bilineal-bilateral – that is, determined through both ancestral lines» (p. 8). This distinction is paramount to the treatment of matrilinearity in the Elamite world, and not only in that context, in particular if this approach is joined with another important distinction between classificatory (*i.e.*, social) versus descriptive (*i.e.*, biological) kinship terminology (p. 9). In this way, some tantalizing problems can be resolved, as in the case of the Elamite king Hutelutuš-Inšušinak, who refers to himself as the “son” of three different ancestors (p. 10). Potts analyses the intriguing matter of the cross-cousin (*i.e.*, children of siblings of the opposite sex, such as brothers and sisters) and parallel-cousin (*i.e.*, children of siblings of the same sex) marriages, which are greatly attested in the Near East. Potts very interestingly (pp. 10-11) adopts the concept of “moiety” (exactly like the Italian *metà*), «since cross-cousins are by definition members of opposite halves or moieties of a group». All these intellectual categorizations help in the investigation of familial relationships with a more accurate apparatus for distinguishing different dynamics. As an additional subject of reflection, we must recall, as Gian Pietro Basello kindly remarked to me,¹ that in the Akkadian texts of Susa Elamite *ruhušak*, “the sister’s son”, is normally translated as *mār aḫāti* (DUMU NIN₉), to which can also be added the suffix of the possessive pronoun *-šu* (in agreement with the following masculine anthroponym). But the presence of this *-šu* compellingly implies that we are dealing with “the son of his own sister”, and not just the son of one generic sister, an occurrence that seems to exclude the theoretical inclusion of other female members in this familial arrangement, specifically in the network of a larger family. This problem should foster further debates by the Elamitists in the future.

The second chapter (*Aspects of Kingship in Iranian Prehistory*, pp. 13-29) starts with an observation about the typical fourfold graduation of the ancient Iranian social order (p. 13) referred to in the Avestan sources (divided into *nmāna-*, “house”, *vīš-*, “clan”, *zañtu-*, “tribe”, *dahyu-*, “people”): that it is not pertinent for the whole conspectus of the peoples living on the Iranian plateau. This statement is correct, but a little Lapalissian, if we consider that no Iranologist has attempted to attribute this distribution to non-Iranian tribes. The quoted Ernst Herzfeld’s reference² to prehistorical times concerns the background of the Iranian and Indo-Iranian peoples, not that of the other ethno-linguistic groups. Potts also remarks (p. 13) that the ex-

¹ Personal communication, dated January 4th 2024. Prof. G.P. Basello is preparing a new grammar of Elamite (probably entitled *A New Grammar of Elamite*) that includes, when pertinent and necessary, a number of comparative references to the parallel sources in Old Persian and Akkadian.

² E. Herzfeld, “Old Iranian Peership”, *BSOAS* 8, 1937, 937-945, in particular p. 937.

traction of DNA can also inform us with a high degree of precision about the kinship of some persons living in the same place, but he seems to undermine this opportunity, assuming that this biological evidence ought to be expected. On the contrary, I think that deeper engagement with these investigations would shed more light on the mobility or sedentarism of some peoples, and their interethnic interactions, as well as even confirm or deny the relations with later tribes in the same areas. In this respect, any reference to the contributions of the school of the late Luigi Cavalli-Sforza (absent in the bibliography) is curiously missing.

I absolutely agree with the weight given by the author to ceramics as a means of deeply understanding the material culture of ancient societies, though, as Potts rightly stresses, it would be a mistake to follow the simplistic assumption «that pots equal ceramics» (p. 14). In this case, the risks are many, in particular if one assumes that a certain tribe and a certain language should correspond to a certain style of ceramic production, and Potts again gives various fitting examples concerning the difficult contexts. Equally interesting is the discussion of the dialectics between the family-based model of production, which inevitably developed some special characteristics, but also a trend toward uniformity with a related prevalence in a specific and wide cultural area (pp. 16-17). For these reasons, social exchanges through marriage (in particular thanks to exogamy) could have encouraged a reasonable diffusion of particular styles, and Potts analyses various approaches to the problem with close reference to the anthropological studies of the Americanists, critically discussing the assumption that (1) ceramic production was mostly a female activity; (2) the crafts of pottery-making were passed on from mother to daughter; and (3) that a unified ceramic pattern implied that the women who produced it remained in their settlements after marriage. But Potts moves away from these problems, and prefers to focus his attention on the homogeneity (or lack thereof) of the materials. For instance, from the example of Tol-e Nurabad, c. 6000 BC, where the variability is extreme, he assumes that exogamy was relevant, although different solutions can be imagined, which my colleagues, specialists of archaeology, should discuss in further detail. Exogamy is again the center of the discussion in this chapter (pp. 21-25), in which the author offers a lesson – and remarkable prudence in particular – when he observes that in certain cases, such as those of the modern Bakhtiyari as discussed by Jean-Pierre Digard, the evidence derived from pottery is nonsensical, because these nomads did not produce special potters. In the framework of this discussion, Potts enters a very sensible subject: namely, that of dowry, which, according to a reasonable definition given by Jack Goody and Stanley Tambiah, «can be seen as a type of pre-mortem inheritance to the bride». One problem in this investigation emerges from the disappointing fact that written records from the third to the first millennium BCE mention dowries made of perishable materials, yet very precious objects seem to be absent. But the situation is much more complex. In fact, funerary contexts show the presence of various dowry objects in both male and female graves, but one can also observe that it is evident that the legal code of Lipit-İštar (§24; 19th century BCE) states that the dowry belonging to the second wife of a man can be inherited only by the children of that woman, and not by the other members of the family who descend from the first-ranked wife. Potts mentions also the case of the *Codex of Hammurabi* (§ 162), in which it was established that when a woman dies, her dowry must be inherited by her direct children, and cannot be transferred to the woman's father nor to the husband. Before concluding this

important chapter, Potts shortly touches on another relevant subject: that of the definition of the concept of “tribe” in relation to nomadism. He notes that some Iranologists have not clarified this anthropic category, and that the current use of the word “tribe” is sometimes ambiguous, in particular when it refers to nomadism. In this regard, he insists on the fact that, as in the case of the Kurdish peoples, not all tribes were nomadic, and that sedentism and tribalism are not incompatible or antagonistic concepts. We can recall that in some cases, the two realities form an economic system with mutual advantages.

The third chapter (*Problems in the Study of Elamite Kinship*, pp. 30-48) presents the complexity of the ethnolinguistic dimension of the Elamite world. This world had attracted many foreign peoples since the fourth millennium BCE. Potts explains that Susa in particular hosted a great number of Akkadian-speakers, so that the influence of Mesopotamian culture was significant already before its conquest by the Akkadians in the 24th century BCE. Potts does not hesitate to define Susa as an eastern Mesopotamian city, emphasizing the fact that only in the early second millennium, other dynasties of eastern origin claimed their full authority over this area. This premise is foundational in order to properly distinguish legal and social Elamite traditions with respect to foreign practices, in particular with reference to four different areas of interest: filiation, descent, the avunculate, and marriage. Here, Potts, developing an important previous work he dedicated to this subject,³ comes back to the previous example of the 12th century Elamite king Hutelutuš-Inšušinak, and his reference to himself as the “son” of three different kings, *i.e.*, Šutruk-Nahhunte, Kutir-Nahhunte, and Šilhak-Inšušinak. Rightly, Potts wonders (p. 33), «Is this a recitation of filiation or descent?». As the author notes, the sources show that, in reality, Šutruk-Nahhunte was the biological father of two sons, *i.e.*, Kutir-Nahhunte and his brother Šilhak-Inšušinak. The latter, Šilhak-Inšušinak, was the true and only biological father of Hutelutuš-Inšušinak. The three “fathers” in reality correspond to a grand-father, a paternal uncle, and the true biological father. Thus, the quoted statement about the “triple paternity” does not allow any speculation about father-daughter incest, and the reference to this example as the first case referring the presence of this custom within the Elamite royal families is not pertinent at all. Very fittingly, Potts adds, «Whereas descriptive systems retain “specific terms for members of the immediate family, and other terms for more distant collateral kin”, classificatory systems do not “reflect natural degrees of kinship, but lumped together relationships of different kinds under one term”». The reader must appreciate the pertinence of these observations in the case of the Elamites, and further agree with Potts on the fact that we must deal with a «classic case of classificatory kinship terminology». Furthermore, Potts adds a few important lines about the use of patronymic designations, such as in the case of the relation between Šilhak-Inšušinak and his (biological) son Hutelutuš-Inšušinak, but the rationale becomes even more evident in long lists of royal names (p. 34), where the patronymic functions as a means of better identification, in which direct filiation is strongly marked, though one cannot dismiss

³ D.T. Potts, “The epithet ‘sister’s son’ in ancient Elam. Aspects of the avunculate in cross-cultural perspective”, in *Grenzüberschreitungen. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orients. Festschrift für Hans Neumann zum 65. Geburtstag am 9. Mai 2018*, herausgegeben von Kr. Kleber, G. Neumann und S. Paulus unter Mitarbeit von Chr. Möllenbeck, Münster 2018, 523-555.

the suspicion that this was also a marker of social status (p. 35). The next problem discussed in this chapter concerns the “avunculate”, and the implications of an Elamite gentilic, such as *Unskpera*, firstly interpreted by Vincent Scheil as «someone of the *gens* of Unsak»,⁴ or better, as suggested by Potts (p. 35), instead of “the Unskian”, (which seems to refer to a geographic term), “the people of Unsak”, in the sense of his descendants, and for this reason it has been fittingly termed by Rüdiger Schmitt as *Protopatronymikon*,⁵ *i.e.*, «an ancestral name derived from that of an eponymous ancestor that indicates tribal or lineage membership rather than filiation». François Vallat,⁶ in turn, has attempted to explain *Unskpera* as being connected with a personal name, which would have been adopted in order to designate nomadic groups, but Potts shows that this interpretation presents some weak points. In the following pages, Potts deals with contexts in which a patrilineal lineage is mixed with a matrilineal one, as in the case of the “Berlin Letter”, in which an Elamite king, married to a daughter of a Kassite king, complains that he himself should be the legitimate Kassite king in consideration of his own direct, and in order to support his rights he lists four generations of ancestors who had married Kassite princesses, simply identified as «daughters of the Kassite King X», although these ladies are never mentioned by their proper names. In this way, we observe the juxtaposition of two different systems and categorizations of familiar relations, which can find other examples in the anthropological literature (pp. 36-37).

In the following pages (pp. 37-45), the author starts to better define the category of “avunculate”, adopting a designation offered by Jan Bremmer⁷ as follows: the avunculate is a kind of «more cordial, affectionate relationship between the mother’s brother [...] and the sister’s son». This kind of relationship opens the way for a more detailed and relevant discussion, because the sister’s son was a person of special significance in many ancient and modern societies, although this fact was not recognized or taken into serious consideration by Fr. König in the framework of his investigations. Thus, in a work of the year 1926, König⁸ assumed that the sister’s son in Elam was the male offspring of a sibling marriage between the Elamite ruler and his biological sister, thus underpinning a general theory about the next-of-kin marriage within the royal Elamite framework. I fully agree with Potts that the simplistic interpretation of the fact that the Elamite Royal inscriptions identify more than a dozen kings with the epithet “sister’s son of X”, does not compellingly mean that we are dealing with an incestuous marriage. For instance, the term for “sister”, was of a classificatory – not descriptive – nature, so that behind a *sister* we can

⁴ V. Scheil, *Textes élamites-anzanites*, troisième série, Paris 1907, MDP 9, 9.

⁵ R. Schmitt, “Onomastische Bemerkungen zu der Namenliste des Fravardīn Yašt”, in *Religious Themes and Texts of Pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia: Studies in Honour of Professor Gherardo Gnoli on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday on 6th December 2002*, ed. by C.G. Cereti, M. Maggi, and E. Provasi, Wiesbaden 2002, 363-374, in particular p. 364.

⁶ Fr. Vallat, « Les prétendus fonctionnaires Unsak des textes néo-élamites et achéménides », *ARTA* 2002. 006. www.achemenet.com/pdf/arta/2002.006.pdf.

⁷ J. Bremmer, “Avunculate and Fosterage”, *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 4, 1976, 65-78, in particular p. 65.

⁸ Fr. König, “Mutterrecht und Thronfolge im alten Elam”, in *Festschrift der Nationalbibliothek in Wien herausgegeben zur Feier des 200jährigen Bestehens des Gebäudes*, herausgegeben von J. Bick, Wien 1926, 529-552.

find different kinds of female relatives. Furthermore, the epithet “sister’s son” can be attributed to rulers living a long time after the kings who were their “uncles”, and Potts rightly shows that this kind of attribution reveals anthropological parallels as a complementary designation in various cultural contexts. In addition to this observation, Potts remarks (pp. 38-44) that already Hugo Winckler⁹ observed that the Elamite references to the “sister’s son of PN” in the royal lists can be explained not in terms of incestuous unions, but as a kind of direct transmission of power to the “sister’s children” (*sorum filiis*) of the king. The link with this *son of the sister* would have been considered more sacred than that between father and son, as it was in the case of the prestigious role of the “uncle”, *avunculus*, among the Germans according to Tacitus’ *Germania* (20,4). All these observations represent a serious *caveat* against *a priori* statements, inviting the Elamitists, as well as the Iranologists, to be prudent in their evaluation of incest in the social context of the Elamites, in particular before the Achaemenid period (pp. 39-40), when (p. 40), as Potts emphasizes, «there is no undisputed evidence of any royal incest in Elam».

An interesting discussion about the “Levirate” concludes the third chapter (pp. 45-48), in which the author presents the most important literature, discussing in particular the studies of Isidor Scheftelowitz¹⁰ and Max Weber¹¹ about this topic. The presence of this social form of marriage among Elamites was suggested by Paul Koschaker¹² in 1933, with reference to the union of Šilhak-Inšušinak with his brother’s widow. Potts investigates the subject and some sources concluding with remarkable prudence that despite the fact that the levirate cannot be considered implausible in Elam, additional evidences are still needed, particularly in Susa (pp. 47-48).

In chapter four (*Descent and Marriage in Achaemenid Iran*, pp. 49-71), the author touches on the subject of the inner tribal organization of the Medes, starting from A.T.E. Olmstead’s definition of them as “essentially nomadic”,¹³ debating the intricacies of the pertinent Herodotean terminology in Greek, in particular words such as *éthnos* (ἔθνος), *génos* (γένος), and “phratry”, or “brotherhood”, *i.e.*, *phrāthriā* (φρᾶτρία) and *phrētrē* (φρήτρη). He also deals with the anthropological meaning of Darius I’s self-representation as «son of Vištāspa, of the Achaemenid clan, a Persian, son of a Persian, and Aryan, of Aryan lineage», as attested in Naqš-e Rostām. He points to the potential correspondences of this sequence with the Avestan social order (already mentioned at p. 13, although with some unexplained differences in the transcription of the same words)¹⁴ in four levels: *nmāna-*, “house”, *vis-*, (better *vīs-*; cf. O.P. *viθ-*)

⁹ H. Winckler, “Review of Scheil”, MDP 2, *OLZ* 4, 1901, 412-415, 448-453, in particular p. 449.

¹⁰ I. Scheftelowitz, “Die Leviratehe”, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 18, 1915, 250-256.

¹¹ This work is quoted after the edition established by S. Hellmann and M. Palyi, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte von Max Weber. Abriss der universalen Sozial- und Wirtschafts-Geschichte aus den nachgelassenen Vorlesungen*, München 1923.

¹² P. Koschaker, *Fratriarchat, Hausgemeinschaft und Mutterrecht in Keilschriftrechten*, *ZA* 4, 1933, 1-89.

¹³ A.T.E. Olmstead, *History of Assyria*, Chicago 1951, 244.

¹⁴ At p. 50, *nmana-* (sic!) is written without a long *ā* (as it should be in *nmāna-*), which correctly appears on p. 13. In turn, *dahyu-* is written with the final *u-* long on pp. 13 and 50, while it is short on p. 78; in any case, the orthography *dahyū-* is unjustified. Cf. also Old Avestan *daxiiu-*, *f.* Furthermore, the orthography of Avestan *vīs-* as *vis-* is very rare (according to Chr. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, Strassburg 1904, col. 1457, in n. I, only in the ms. F8), and in any case this is not the form currently referred to. These orthographies are

“clan”, *zantu-*, “tribe”, *dahyu-*, “people”, as suggested by Carl Friedrich Andreas.¹⁵ Emile Benveniste¹⁶ and Arthur Christensen¹⁷ additionally saw a territorial division in this quadripartition, a solution that Andreas mostly accepted in the case of *vīs-*, while it was Antoine Meillet¹⁸ who presumed the existence of more political implications. In reality, these distinctions seem to me peculiar and partly unhistorical, in the sense that the Avestan sequence underlines a climax in the increasing participation in rituals by the chiefs of these different social units belonging to the larger Mazdean community. The perspective is mainly liturgical and it presupposes both a political and territorial dimension, but in terms which have nothing to do with administration and social control, while its invocation in particular moments of the Avestan sacrifice stresses the complete unity of the Iranian (Aryan) stock.

Potts must inevitably deal with the subject of Darius’ genealogy, starting with the term (in the plural form) *Haxāmanišiyā*, and he adds to the debate an original set of remarks, observing after the pertinent anthropological literature, that a genealogy reflects a legal charter, and it is not a proper historical record. In other words, Darius’ genealogy would not record or describe any kind of lineal accuracy, but it seems to represent a political and social rearrangement of a political design (p. 52). Potts (pp. 52-54) continues his investigation dealing with the subject of the choice of Xerxes as his successor instead of the elder son Ariobazanes, which he explains – following the witness of Herodotus (7,2-3) – that «filiation and descent were the decisive factors in the promotion of Xerxes over Ariobazanes, not the fact that Darius I was king when Xerxes was born but not when Ariobazanes was born». In fact, as Herodotus stated, Xerxes was younger, but his social rank was higher, because he was the son of the daughter of Cyrus, and I would like to underline that his ascent to the throne would have definitively cleared any doubt about the full legitimacy of his crown. Any potential rumor, doubt, suspect, or accusation would have been erased thanks to the strategic marriage chosen by Darius, who in this way joined different Persian lines. The author, then, focuses on the special parental position of Sisigambis, the mother of Darius III, a princess to whom he dedicates some important historical observations (pp. 54-56), and to the subject of certain preferential marriages among the Achaemenids (pp. 56-64). In this analysis, Potts reviews an article by Clarisse Herrenschildt.¹⁹ She studied a number of preferential marriages, involving both cross-cousins and parallel-cousins. Potts shows that the first example concerning the union between Cambyses (the son of Cyrus the Great) and his matrilineal cousin, Phaidyme,

probably due to the obsolete transcriptions adopted by Herzfeld, as again in the case of *zantu-* instead of *zantu-*. Cf. R. Schmitt, *Wörterbuch der altpersischen Königsinschriften*, Wiesbaden 2015, 162-163, sub voce *dahyu-*, f.; p. 181, sub voce *viθ-*, but with reference to Av. *vīs-*. See already Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, cols 1090-1092, sub voce *nmāna-*, *dāmāna-*, *dmāna-*, f.; sub voce Av. *vīs-*, OP. *viθ-*, f., cols. 1455-1457.

¹⁵ F.-C. Andreas, “Ueber einige Fragen der ältesten persischen Geschichte”, in *Verhandlungen des XIII. Internationalen Orientalisten-Kongresses. Hamburg September 1902*, Leiden 1904, 93-99, in particular p. 95.

¹⁶ E. Benveniste, « Les classes sociales dans la tradition avestique », *Journal asiatique* 221, 1932, 117-134, in particular p. 125.

¹⁷ A. Christensen, *L’empire des Sassanides : Le peuple, l’état, la cour*, Copenhagen 1936, 13.

¹⁸ A. Meillet, *Trois conférences sur les Gâthâ de l’Avesta*, (Annales du Musée Guimet 44), Paris 1925, 23.

¹⁹ Cl. Herrenschildt, « Notes sur la parenté chez les Perses au début de l’empire achéménide », in *Achaemenid History II. The Greek Sources*, ed. by H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt, Leiden 1987, 53-67.

daughter of Otanes – who would have been Cambyses' maternal uncle (*Historiae* 3,68) – could be removed from the list of the pertinent cases normally quoted, because the reference to this Otanes in particular seems to be due to a mistaken identification made by Herodotus, probably as a result of homonymy. In reality, various sources show that this Otanes was not the brother of Cyrus' wife Cassandane. The second example is, on the contrary, appropriate, and it concerns Mardonius, the son of Gobryas, and Artozostre, the daughter of Darius I by an unknown wife. Although Herrenschmidt has correctly focused on the political importance of this kind of marriage, Potts remarks that it would have been necessary to consider another aspect that was later addressed by John Hyland,²⁰ *i.e.*, the marriages of Gobryas with the sister of Darius I, and that of Darius himself with the daughter of the same Gobryas, his brother-in-law. In this case, Potts properly insists on the fact that here we are dealing with a classic cross-cousin marriage, whose significance is complex and quite relevant from many perspectives. The investigation of Potts continues with other good examples, such as the case of a parallel-cousin marriage (pp. 60-61), that of a girl's marriage with her paternal uncle (pp. 62-63), and the case of the niece marriage (pp. 63-64). In conclusion, Potts (pp. 63-64) does not accept the economic arguments collected by Herrenschmidt in order to explain the uncle-niece marriage, and observes that this explanation, for instance, has never been taken into consideration in the pertinent Biblical and Talmudic sources (and related literature), and for this reason he suggested more prudence on the subject.

The last section of this chapter is probably for many Iranologists the most interesting, because it is dedicated to «incestuous marriage in the Achaemenid period» (pp. 64-71). The subtitle has a question mark, which underlines the prudence in these matters maintained by the author. Despite this, a detailed critical treatment of this part of the book would require a long article in itself or, probably, even another book. I would simply present some points as a positive contribution to the discussion.

Pott's presentation of the history of the debate, in particular with regard to some of the oldest studies concerning Cambyses' marriage with his sister (such as those of Adolf Rapp²¹ and Philip Keiper²²) are meritorious (pp. 68-69), because this approach shows the complexity of the history of the studies, which in recent times seem to have gone out of fashion. On the contrary, Potts reveals a very admirable position toward a reevaluation of previous investigations, even those completely forgotten, despite their pertinence. On the other hand, the conclusion of the chapter, equally prudent, in its neutrality, sounds like that of a *lectio facilior*. Potts (p. 70) actually assumes, and we easily agree with him, that we must understand «the rare but well-attested practice of royal brother-sister marriage in a broader context», although he inclines toward the implicit solution that behind the references to alleged “sisters”, there were in reality other kinds of familial relations, such as cousins, etc. Nobody would deny

²⁰ J. Hoyland, “Hystaspes, Gobryas, and Elite Marriage Politics in Teispid Persia”, *Dabir* 5, 2018, 30-35.

²¹ A. Rapp, “Die Religion und Sitte der Perser und übrigen Iranier nach den griechischen und römischen Quellen”, *ZDMG* 20, 1866, 49-140, in particular p. 112.

²² Ph. Keiper, “Atossa nach Äschylus ‘Persern’ und nach Herodot”, *Blätter für das Bayerische Gymnasial- und Real-Schulwesen* 15, 1879, 6-22, in particular p. 15.

that cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriage, etc., can offer some help, in particular if the terms for “sister” or “brother” were just classificatory, and not strictly biological. The author has rightly taken into consideration the anthropological studies, which have emphasized the relevance of the incest taboo, and the political and social meanings of marriage alliances as well. Furthermore, he did not avoid mentioning the problem of the Indo-Iranian witness concerning the case of Ĵam and Ĵamag (curiously²³ spelled Yima, as if he were the Avestan ambiguous hero himself, whose sister is never openly mentioned; see p. 69), although all these references seem to be just a sort of “tax” paid to the intricacy of the subject, but without any other original additional remarks. I must note that the discussion of Ernst Koernemann’s²⁴ work and his observations about the fact that the Iranians apparently would have preserved a pattern of Indo-European (and Indo-Iranian) derivation would have been quite important, but the potential implications of this bibliographical quotation have not been taken into consideration. Actually, the study of this subject would have shed more light on this matter. On the contrary, immediately after, Potts mentions the opposite explanation proposed by Ernst Herzfeld,²⁵ who considered “the endogamy” of the Achaemenids as an inheritance from an earlier local people, such as the Elamites. In this case, the circular argument (which Potts has rightfully and fully criticized in this book) would be closed, though, as we have seen, it would be misleading. While this paragraph is certainly useful, I would like to contribute to the discussion with some additional remarks as a supporting contribution to the originality of the research in this especially complex field.

If we discuss the alleged Achaemenid custom of close endogamy, we can treat it as a Persian, political, and juridical problem, or we must face the religious problem of the next-of-kin marriage in the Zoroastrian tradition, a choice which I consider more suitable, and in doing this we should analyze its connection with the Indo-Iranian background. In this case, the discussion of the *x^vaētuuadaθa-* (which in this book is never mentioned in Avestan, but only in the Pahlavi form; p. 72) would be compelling. The second problem is that we cannot treat the subject of so-called “incest” if we do not clarify why we use this term, or whether it is methodologically correct and legitimate to use the term itself. As is well known, *incest* comes from Latin *incestum*, which derives from **in-castum*, *i.e.*, “what is not pious, appropriate, or religiously fitting”. But among peoples who considered this kind of matrimonial behavior as the best form of union, this designation would be incorrect from an internal, emic, perspective. This is not at all a linguistic problem of a *politically correct* nature, but it concerns the psychological approach to the subject, which, despite many anthropological *caveats*, is generally avoided, because it is considered – certainly not by the author of this book – as embarrassing.

We must compellingly clear the field of some ambiguities and certain implications steeped in prudery. When we mention the institution of next-of-kin marriage in ancient Iran, we do not

²³ In addition, the unspecified reference to *Bundahišn* 23,1, is unclear; it concerns the Indian version of this text, while the story of this couple is mentioned in chapter 35,4 of the Iranian *Bundahišn*.

²⁴ E. Koernemann, “Zur Geschwisterehe im Altertum”, *Klio* 19, 1925, 355-361.

²⁵ E. Herzfeld, *Altperisische Inschriften*, Berlin 1938 (AMI Ergänzungsband 1), 255.

refer to a psychiatric disease, or to a mentally sick society, full of lustful mental patients, only capable of abusing their female relatives without any restraint. On the contrary, we are dealing with a pious institution, socially accepted and promoted, at least from what we can deduce from the Zoroastrian sources. It was publicly performed, and proposed, as we know from the Zoroastrian legal regulations, and considered as a highly meritorious religious act. This observation has been terribly annoying for generations of anthropologists and psychologists, who have tried to deny (or simply bypass) *a priori* its existence (for instance, H. Lévi-Strauss dedicates just one little note to the Persians in his book on the incest taboo).²⁶ This negative, censorial attitude, is widespread, and rare studies such as the one of N. Sidler (*Zur Universalität der Inzesttabu*, Stuttgart 1971, 86-90), represent a positive evolution in a field frequently more conservative than expected.

In any case, the innovative approach endorsed by a distinguished pupil of Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, more than one century ago in his work *Das Inzestmotiv in Dichtung und Sage. Grundzüge einer Psychologie des dichterischen Schaffens* (Leipzig-Wien 1912), has been completely ignored, despite the fact that this book dedicated a large section to the Persian case. It is not my intention to criticize the present study for the absence of a proper treatment of these problems, but in a work on kinship in Iran – where the subject of next-of-kin unions was serious – the approach to an anthropological and multicultural analysis, which should take into consideration also the contributions of other disciplines, ought to have been a little bit more careful. In any case, here is not the place for offering a solution to these difficult matters, but certainly we can limit our observations to some facts, without the need to look through the keyhole into the bedrooms of the ancient Iranians. The *x^vaētuuadaθa-*, Pahlavi *xwēdōdah* or *xwēdōdad*, was strictly linked with the Mazdean (and Indo-Iranian) conceptions of twinship (see the Vedic relationship between Yama and his sister Yamī; the explicit union of Mašya and Mašyāne; and also Ĵam and Ĵamag in the Pahlavi literature). In turn, the twinship is not only biological, but mainly spiritual and symbolic, because it concerns the image of the double of the self, and involves the role of the *daēnā-* (the soul-vision, as female double) and its mirroring interplay with the *uruuan-* (the masculine soul, who meet his own *daēnā-*) in the afterlife journey. It is for these reasons that we should distinguish between *incest* and *incestuality*, as already established by Paul-Claude Racamier,²⁷ in order to discriminate between physical intercourse (with its many different historical conditions) and a true abuse, sometimes not even completely concluded, but certainly imposed upon victims through a number of a hidden psychic forms of violence. But the Iranian and Mazdean situation was radically different, and the phantom of a dramatical accusation of impiety and lust still endures in the academic discussion; it inevitably fouls any public discussion of this topic, which cannot be handled in a neutral and scientific manner, in particular when some persons feel offended, because they assume that their own ancestors were presented as mentally ill criminals, responsible for sexual abuses.

As I previously remarked, the Mazdean *xwēdōdah* did not show or underpin any *incestual* hidden aspect at all (a behavior, which, on the contrary, would have been repressed and

²⁶ H. Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, Paris 1949 (reprint, Paris 1967), 545, n. 33.

²⁷ P.-C. Racamier, *L'inceste et l'incestuel*, Paris 2010.

punished). Furthermore, we should presume or at least suspect that the “publicity” offered to this sexual desire in itself (because normally presented as a matter of plain religious teaching) removed the normal censure of it, at the level of a phantasmatic sexual drive, so that anybody (male and female) might imagine or simply dream (as in the form of a mental process produced by the unconscious, exactly as the Oedipus complex presupposes for all normal human beings) of copulation with the whole range of his/her relatives without feeling oneself to be a sinner, and this condition probably would/could have produced a different orientation in the inner psychological scenario for the objectual relations. What were the consequences? We do not know, because nobody has systematically studied this problem, but it is also possible that the theoretical freedom of incest had not at all underpinned the inclinations toward its actual performance, because the desire – felt and then satisfied in a fantasy – could not generate the need for remotion, in particular the remotion of something that psychoanalysis imagines as present in the unconscious behavior. When this union was performed, then, we must consider that it had a legal and religious support, but also that it was a continuation of an earlier ancestral Indo-Iranian custom, and not a crazy innovation; its performance, in many cases, took place probably in an esoteric, priestly, and ritual context. Thus, the complexity of these matters should be better framed and it is a pity, in any case, that some fresh literature about Yima and the problem of his double (and the next-of-kin marriage as well) has been overlooked,²⁸ a limit which I hope could be resolved in future.

The reading of chapter five (*Some Aspects of Feudalism in Ancient Iran*, pp. 51-96), the final one, generates great enthusiasm and at the same time some perplexity. From the point of view of the history of the studies, the author very fittingly outlines the different approaches to the adoption of the historical category of “feudalism” in Pre-Islamic Iran, a term which has been attributed to the Achaemenid kingdom as well as to the Sasanian one, or to both societies. Arthur Christensen²⁹ largely contributed to the diffusion of this very extensive definition, assuming that the origin of the Iranian feudal system should be found in the role played by the seven prominent clans, which decided the succession of the royal power. König,³⁰ in turn, emphasized the value of the Old Persian word *ba^adaka-*, in its etymological meaning of “bound”, in the sense of a kind of “vassalage”, while, for instance, Herzfeld³¹ invoked the role of Ahura Mazdā as the distributor of power as a sort of pillar of Iranian feudalism. On the other hand, the prominence attributed to the role of knights and chivalry as a meaningful mark of the feudal condition has been undermined

²⁸ A. Panaino, “Mortality and Immortality: Yama’s / Yima’s Choice and the Primordial Incest”, (*Mythologica Indo-Iranica*, I), in V. Sadovski and A. Panaino, *Disputationes Iranologicae Vindobonenses, II* (Sitzungsberichte der ÖAW. Philosophisch-historische Klasse, 845. Band / Veröffentlichungen zur Iranistik, Nr. 65). Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 2013, 47-221; Idem, “Yima ed il rifiuto della *daēnā*. Ovvero dell’incestualità, della beatitudine e della morte tra ambigui ostacoli e seducenti trasparenze”, in *Démons iraniens*, éd. par Ph. Swennen, Liège 2015, 97-123; Idem, “The Liturgical Daēnā. Speculative Aspects of the Next-of-Kin Unions”, in *A Thousand Judgements. Festschrift for Maria Macuch*, ed. by A. Hintze, D. Durkin-Meisterernst und Cl. Naumann. Wiesbaden 2019, 331-344.

²⁹ Arthur Christensen, *L’empire de Sassanides : Le peuple, l’état, la cour*, Copenhagen 1907, pp. 6-7, and *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, Copenhagen 1936, 14.

³⁰ Fr. König, *Der falsche Bardija: Dareios der Grosse und die Lügenkönige*, Wien 1938, 57, n. 4.

³¹ E. Herzfeld, *Altpersische Inschriften*, Berlin 1938, 153.

by Christopher Tuplin,³² who has rightly emphasized the higher importance of infantry in the Persian army. Thus, while the extensive definition of the Achaemenid system as strictly feudal has met with increasing skepticism, Potts notes (pp. 77-78) that it was already Étienne-Marc Quatremère two centuries ago who considered the Arsacid kingdom as a feudal structure, in light of the role assumed by the petty kings of Armenia, Media, Elymais, Adiabene, etc. This assumption found a certain continuity in the scholarly literature but, despite the comparative attempts at establishing parallels between Parthian and Western Mediaeval institutions (as Geo Widengren mostly did),³³ the Sasanian Empire was considered more suitable for a reasonable comparison with later European feudalism, despite the peculiar fact that the Iranian world would have anticipated the Western phenomenon by a few centuries. This interpretation of the facts was advanced by Hans Heinrich Schaeder,³⁴ while Kurt Erdman³⁵ revisited the emphasis on knighthood. The subject, as Potts outlines (p. 78), has been taken up again by Touraj Daryaee,³⁶ who showed the limits and the weak points of this doctrinal statement, but Joseph Wiesehöfer³⁷ did not completely disregard the usefulness of this kind of approach. Very interestingly, Pierre Briant,³⁸ whose opinion is not mentioned by Potts, distances himself from any reference to feudalism in the Achaemenid context, and points out various objections in this regard. We must also remark that Muhammad A. Dandamaev and Vladimir G. Lukonin³⁹ too have expressed their doubts about the use of the category of feudalism in relation to the Old Persian world.

In any case, while I have frankly appreciated the synthetic presentation by Potts of the most critical points, what I find peculiar, not only in this book, but in many other works, is that we cannot find any clear, well-shaped definition of what we consider a feudal system in the East between antiquity and late antiquity. My approach could perhaps be taken as overly Marxist, in the sense that I would like to insist on the theoretical pre-determination of the form of the power and the capital, and its economic structure and class relations, as, for instance, but not exclusively, Karl Marx himself did with respect to Oriental societies in his remarkable work *Formen, die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen*, which was written in 1857/58, having survived only in its manuscript form until it was published for the first time in Moscow

³² Chr. Tuplin, “All the King’s men”, in *The World of Achaemenid Persia: History, Art and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East*, ed. by J. Curtis and St. Simpson, London 2010, 51-61, in particular p. 58.

³³ G. Widengren, « Recherches sur le féodalisme iranien », *Orientalia Suecana* 5, 1956, 79-182, and Idem, *Der Feudalismus im alten Iran. Männerbund–Gefolgswesen–Feudalismus in der iranischen Gesellschaft im Hinblick auf die indogermanischen Verhältnisse*, (Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 40), Köln 1969, *passim*.

³⁴ H.H. Schaeder, “Ein parthischer Titel im Sogdischen”, *BSOAS* 8, 738-749.

³⁵ K. Erdman, *Die Kunst Irans zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, Mainz 1943 (reprint 1969), 73.

³⁶ Unfortunately, the author confers to Daryaee 2010, 401-402, but this entry does not occur in the final bibliography.

³⁷ J. Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD*, London 2010, 143.

³⁸ P. Briant, « Dons de terre et de ville : l’Asie mineure dans le contexte achéménide », in *Revue des Études Anciennes* 87, 1985, 53-72, in particular pp. 66-67.

³⁹ M.A. Dandamaev and V.J. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, Cambridge 1989, 176-177.

in the year 1939 as a section of the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*.⁴⁰ Thus, apart from the importance of this text for the determination of the so-called “Asiatic mode of production”, which became a matter of violent polemics after the publication of *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) by Karl Wittfogel, I should remark that in the context of a critical discussion about the existence of an ancient Iranian feudalism (or lack thereof), the determination of the economic categories of reference is foundational, while in general this subject is too vague and evasive. We can take into consideration a later critical conspectus, which goes beyond Marx, although remaining within a Marxist perspective, namely that of Witold Kula, in *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego. Próba modelu* (Warszawa 1962).⁴¹ But this is just one example, now included in the catalogue of the old literature about the economic determination of what is feudalism. In addition to these remarks, we must observe that it is a patent paradox that, while we are still using the concept of “feudalism” in the context of Iranology, its adoption is not neutral in the field of Western Mediaeval Studies, where some scholars would like to eventually abolish it from the scientific lexicon in the study of history. For Western medievalists, two large areas must be carefully distinguished: that of feudal-vassal relations (the relationships between man and man) and that of the regime of the land or rural lordship (the ways in which a *dominus* manages property and relations with the dependent peasant labor). Today, only in the presence of these two social situations, one tends to speak of “feudalism” in a proper way in Mediaeval Studies. Therefore, one notion is mostly political, while the latter is of a socioeconomic nature.⁴² In reality, we can add a third aspect, which is strictly juridical, and which has been addressed by François-Louis Ganshof.⁴³ The strict relationship of “vassalage”, as such, does not appear to constitute an exclusive element in the definition of “feudalism”. Indeed, it is now proven that, in certain situations in Europe in the 10th-12th centuries, it was precisely the feudal-vassal ties that constituted the legal instrument for the construction of a centralized power, as appears in the German empire from the Willows to the Hohenstaufen. Furthermore, there is a notion of “feudalism” most used by modernists, in particular those of Marxist origin, in which the exploitation of the peasants by the noble classes (with the request for regular uncompensated work) is accompanied by a progressive usurpation of public prerogatives by the lords themselves. This usurpation is evident where the lords exercise judicial functions on the population living on their possessions or impose forms of taxation on them. To conclude, at least in Western medievalism, few historians today would be willing to subscribe to an automatic equation between “vassalage” and “feudalism”.

⁴⁰ Of this notebook the reader can easily find a translation by J. Cohen, with an *Introduction* by E.J Hobsbawm with the title of Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, New York 1965. An electronic version is also available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/precapitalist/index.htm>.

⁴¹ See the Italian translation by B. Bravo and Z. Zaboklicki, as *Teoria economica del sistema feudale. Proposta di un modello*, Torino 1970.

⁴² See M. Bloch, *La société féodale*, tome I : *La formation des liens de dépendance*, Paris 1939 ; tome II : *Les classes et le gouvernement des hommes*, Paris 1940.

⁴³ Ch. Wicham, “Le forme del feudalesimo”, in *Il feudalesimo nell’Alto Medioevo*, (Settimane CISAM, XLVII), 2 voll., Spoleto 2000, vol. I, 15-51.

The first is a component that also requires other situations to be able to speak of a “feudal society”. I would like also to remark that in the case of Byzantium, the concept of feudalism has been and is at the center of a strong academic discussion on which I can remind just two paramount studies, one by John Haldon,⁴⁴ and another by Antonio Carile,⁴⁵ but the debate is intriguing and really polemical.⁴⁶ For these reasons, I would be more prudent in the use of the term feudalism.

With close regard to the Iranian historical framework, we must face some questions: was the Iranian alleged feudal system based on a closed market or was it an open one, did it include slavery or paid work, what was the role of money and trades, what was the relation between private landed property and royal estates, did local settlers still possess their own lands around the villages, did pious templar foundations escape taxation involving a different market (as we can presume from some details), was the so-called vassalage unilateral with the king or could be implemented by the contemporary presence of subordinated mutual nobiliary obligations, was the property of the land completely private or was the king still in condition to confiscate and reacquire it, etc.? All these questions are compellingly important, and they can change according to the periods, the geographic area, and the kingdom, without having to further delve into other details, at least for the Sasanian era, such as those concerning the economic role of the Mazdean Church, or that of the other religious communities, a matter which has not been properly studied. In addition, the role of the crown in terms of its statute and power with respect to the form of the state is another subject which we cannot ignore; this will require a variety of answers. For instance, few years ago, in the framework of a systematic investigation of the kingdom of Xusraw I, Andrea Gariboldi⁴⁷ put together a large number of arguments showing that the Sasanian economic system shared more elements in common with the Roman *colonus*, and in this respect, apart from some aesthetic comparative aspects, which apparently evoke the glories of the Medieval chivalry, a strict reference to a feudal system can turn out to be unfitting and inappropriate, if not misleading, because it is too subordinate to the overwhelming tradition of Medieval studies and examples. I hope that in the future, we could endorse a more technical discussion of the concept of feudalism in the East after having established how the social and economic systems were coordinated, especially in the framework of a clearer presentation of the legal obligations between not only the different powers, the king, and the highest nobility, but also among the lower nobility. Equally important has been another monographic contribution by Gariboldi⁴⁸ concerning the statute of the Sasanian monarchy, in which he has in particular dealt with the definition of the category of the State, which is frequently abused

⁴⁴ J. Haldon, “The Feudalism Debate One More: The Case of Byzantium”, *Journal of Peasant Studies* 17, 1989, 5-40.

⁴⁵ A. Carile, “Il feudalesimo bizantino”, in *Il feudalesimo nell’alto medioevo* (Settimane CISAM, XLVII), 2 voll., Spoleto 2000, vol. II, 969-1026.

⁴⁶ See the concise presentation by A. Soddu, “Feudalesimo Bizantino: Una questione aperta”, *Sandalion* 31, 2008, 281-289.

⁴⁷ A. Gariboldi, *Il Regno di Xusraw dall’Anima immortale. Riforme economiche e rivolte sociali nell’Iran sasanide del VI secolo*, Milano 2009², 17-83.

⁴⁸ A. Gariboldi, *La Monarchia Sasanide tra Storia e Mito*, Milano 2011, 65-69.

or used in an inappropriate way. In that particular case, he concluded that we can speak of the “State” in terms of βασιλεία, but with a prudent clarification of its use, while “monarchy” or “empire” would be better, if we want to follow modern political categories.

Coming back to the review of this book, I must note that the rest of the chapter is simply remarkable.⁴⁹ I liked it very much indeed, because Potts presents the historical relevance of the *tamgas* in a new light, showing the shape and the diffusion of these markers of nobility or a clan’s appurtenance in their remarkable heraldic and social meanings. In this case too, the author has collated a fascinating series of earlier academic materials, which go back to a period in which the study of medals, seals, and coins was exclusively in the hands of collectors. In this presentation of the facts, Potts (pp. 83-84) follows Robert Göbl’s suggestion⁵⁰ to adopt the term *tamga*, despite its anachronism, as the best descriptor of these heraldic devices, which we can find on the helmets and headgear of early Sasanian elites; they clearly had the function of identifying their owners. The critical presentation of the material and the historical problems connected with it are very informative, and the discussions of works are a superb introduction to this intricate, less known subject, at least among the non-specialists. The conclusions are certainly important, because Potts shows (pp. 95-96) that among the only nine Sasanian kings who left rock reliefs, only two of them show a *tamga* on their headgear or other equipment. These were the instances of Ardašīr I and Šābuhr I, while the rest of the kings and nobles who bear *tamgas* are unidentified. Among the ones who can be clearly distinguished, we must list the priest Kīrder (to whom Potts dedicates a very instructive note at p. 95, n. 150), an unidentified opponent of Ohrmazd II, and the last Arsacid king Ardawān. Potts is right in his observation that the episodic, even inconsistent, adoption of these *tamgas* seems to confirm that, although these emblems might bring a sort of heraldic or nobiliary mark, they did not play the same role as the familiar *insigna* in Medieval Europe.

Only two pages in the *Afterword* (pp. 97-98) conclude this very useful text, which is the precious result of the five Yarshater lectures delivered by Professor Potts. It offers important contributions to various areas of our field of studies, and the critical remarks here proposed do not undermine the validity of this contribution, but represent an occasion for further debates and developments.

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⁴⁹ I have only to express my perplexity that Potts at p. 89, translates *kē čīhr az yazdān*, as “from the race of the gods,” not only because the critical discussion of this formula is completely ignored, but also because the translation of Pahlavi *čīhr* as “race,” is highly questionable, and this is not a secondary matter in a book concerning kinship. See with a large critical conspectus of the debate: A. Panaino, “The King and the Gods in the Sasanian Royal Ideology”, in *Sources pour l’histoire et la géographie du monde iranien*, édité par R. Gyselen, (Res Orientales XVIII), Leuven 2009, 209-256.

⁵⁰ R. Göbl, “Die sasanidischen Tonbullen vom Takht-i-Suleiman und die Probleme der sasanidischen Sphragistik”, *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 19, 1971, 95-112, in particular pp. 109-110; Idem, *Die Tonbullen vom Tacht-e Suleiman: Ein Beitrag zur spätsasanidischen Sphragistik*, Berlin 1976, 83.