

A S T Ô D A N,

OR

A PERSIAN COFFIN SAID TO BE 3,000 YEARS OLD, SENT TO
THE MUSEUM OF THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF BOMBAY, BY MR. MALCOLM, OF BUSHIRE.*

Read on 29th August 1888. President.—DR. W. DYMCK.

THE subject of my paper this evening is the Persian coffin, kindly sent to our Museum by Mr. Joseph Malcolm, of Bushire, through Mr. C. J. Michael, of Bombay. I beg to submit to the Society a few observations, showing that there was an old religious custom among the ancient Persians, the ancestors of the present Parsees, to make small structures of this kind for the preservation of the bones of the dead.

The coffin is made of a kind of stone resembling our Porebunder stone. It is made out of a single piece of stone, and is covered by a lid of the same material. The lid also is made out of a single slab. The coffin is 28 inches in length, 14 inches in breadth, and 10 inches in depth. The rim is about an inch in thickness. It has four holes, each about a quarter of an inch in diameter, on its four sides, just at the upper edge. The lid also has four corresponding holes. Mr. Malcolm thinks that these holes were intended for metallic fasteners, which have, of course, rusted away, and which fastened the lid with the coffin. The stone of the coffin bears evident marks of the mason's tools to make it smooth.

The coffin contains human bones in different states of decomposition. At my request, the skull was kindly submitted by our Secretary to medical examination, but, on account of its insufficient contour, nothing could be made out of it. The bones are only of one individual. From the size of the bones, a learned medical member of our Society thinks, that they belong to a grown-up man of about sixty.

* Journal of the Anthropological Society, Vol. I, No. 7, pp. 426-41.

Mr. Malcolm, while forwarding this coffin, writes from Bushire :—

“The box contains a small earthen coffin (with lid), which again contains human bones. The coffin was dug up from our grounds here, and is said to be about 3,000 years old, and to belong to the old Fire-worshippers, before they had a Tower of Silence. Some of the Persian phrenologists have pronounced the remains to belong to the Mongolians, but others assert that they are the bones of old Persians before the conquest of Persia.”

I wrote to Mr. Malcolm on the 27th of June 1888 soliciting information on the following points :—

- (1) The average size of these coffins.
- (2) Circumstances, showing, whether the coffins were actually buried, or whether they were merely buried by the fall of houses in which they were placed.
- (3) How many feet under ground they were generally found ?
- (4) What were the materials of which they were generally found to be made ?
- (5) Was the lid nailed with the coffin ? and
- (6) What were the holes in the sides for ?

In reply to these inquiries, Mr. Malcolm in a letter dated Shiraz, 5th August 1888, which came to hand just in time last week, writes as follows :—

“The said coffin was accidentally found in a vault about 5 or 6 feet below the surface of the ground, at a place called Reshire, among others deposited there, and covered with the *débris* of parts of the vault that had fallen in from the effects of rain. The said vault is about 7 miles from the town of Bushire, and the grounds surrounding it are covered with mounds, which are manifestly the ruins of what must once have been buildings. The particular vault itself was under a mound, and the removal of which for agricultural purposes

led to the discovery of the said coffin, and this mound like all the others must have been the wreck of an edifice built upon that depository of coffins. There is no doubt, considering the limited space in the coffin, that it was after the exposure of the dead to carrion birds that its bare bones were disjointed and entombed in the manner in which they were found, for otherwise the space in the coffin would not have been sufficient for the purpose. About three miles from the site of the vault, and in a southerly direction, in the part of the country called Bakhtiar, there is a small plain within two or three feet of the surface of which there were found, some forty-five years ago, and may still be found, barrel-shaped coffins of baked earth, containing also human relics stowed away in the same fashion as these in the stone coffins, and the two sorts of repositories may be said to be of equal size and capacity, though far different in shape. The barrel-like coffins, which are termed jars, are of two equal parts, being divided in the middle breadthwise, and evidently joined together by metallic fasteners, which have, of course, rusted away, but the holes on the rims of each half, evidently intended as holds for the fasteners, bear evidence to this explanation. The same explanation may apply to similar holes on the sides of the stone coffin and its lid. One peculiarity of the jar coffins consists in there being in each of them a handful of the seeds of a plant, called in Persian, "Hiola," but I cannot now recall its botanical name. The plant generally grows in the grave-yards in Persia, and the seeds on account of their almost imperishable quality may have some connection with that ancient custom of their being buried with the dead. About forty years ago, not far from the site where the jar coffins were found, and on an elevated ground, was to be seen a large heap of bleached human bones. These at one time in remote antiquity must have formed the contents of a repository of bones attached to a Tower of Silence. Very likely these bones still exist on the

spot, though in a more decayed condition. I say "likely," because my father, who used to visit the place forty-five years ago, has not been there since. I may observe, that the stones, of which the Tower and the repository were built, must have been carried away, as in the case of those of other buildings, by the natives for the construction of their houses in the villages which now exist in these parts. The jar coffins must have been buried deeper than they now appear to be. The shallowness may be accounted for by centuries of rain washing away the earth above them. I may mention that the plain in several parts of which these coffins are found must have been the site of a large city, as one would infer from the large quantities of stones lying strewn about, the larger pieces having been taken away for building purposes. A fort with a broad ditch on three sides of it,—the rest being protected by its contiguity to the sea, and which goes by the name of Káala-e-Bahamane, that is Bahaman's fort, must have been the citadel of that city. This is the fort which was occupied by a warlike tribe called Tangustoonees during the war of 1857, who offered the only resistance to the British troops on their march to the town of Bushire, and which was mentioned in the war despatches as Reshire Fort,—the name being derived from that of a village near it, but of comparatively a modern date."

As far as I know, this is the first time that Bombay has received a *stone* coffin of this kind from Persia. But the barrel-shaped coffins, spoken about by Mr. Malcolm in his letter, were formerly received in Bombay. Our learned Vice-President, Mr. K. R. Cama, says in his *Zarthoshti Abhyâs* (*i.e.* Zoroastrian Studies), that he had heard it said, that Sir John Malcolm, the well-known author of the *History of Persia*, had brought with him from Persia, a jar of this kind, which had some inscriptions on it, and had showed it to the late learned Dasturs Moola Feroze and Edaljee Sanjana. On inquiring from the successors of these learned Dasturs, I find that no notes have been left of the decipherment, if any, of these

inscriptions. It appears that such coffins are found in different parts of Persia. Sir Henry Layard says: "The Dervish told me that some years before, when the rains had washed away the soil near the tomb, some coffins had been uncovered containing human bones, which on being exposed to the air had crumbled to dust."¹

The stone coffins seem to be very rare, because Sir John Malcolm speaks only of the 'jar' coffins in his *History of Persia* (Vol. I., Appendix p. 498, note). He says "Many vases full of human bones have been recently discovered. Several were dug out of a mound near Abusheher when I was residing there, and I was told that vases of the same kind were found in different parts of Persia. Those, which I saw, were of a size that could not have contained the body of a full grown person, but as the skeletons were complete, the flesh had evidently either been cut or eaten off."

But, before the time of Sir John Malcolm, two jar-shaped coffins were for the first time sent to Bombay in the year 1813 by Mr. Bruce from Bushire. It is exactly 75 years ago, on the 6th of July 1813, that a paper was read on these jars, by Mr. William Erskine, before the then existing Literary Society of Bombay, the parent of the present Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. This paper is published in the first volume of the "Transactions of the Literary Society, Bombay," (1819,) under the heading "Observations on Two Sepulchral Urns found in Bushire in Persia." Mr. Bruce, while forwarding these urns to Mr. William Erskine said: "As I know you are fond of the antients and their works, I presume you will have no objection to examine some of their remains; I therefore have sent you two boxes, each containing an urn with the bones of a human body. This mode of burial must be very antient and prior to Zoroaster, as I fancy his followers have not altered their mode to this day. The Mahomedans, we know, never have. I have not touched them, but send them just in the way

¹ Sir H. Layard's *Travels in Susiana, &c.* Vol. II., p. 298.

I found them in the ground. The spot from which they were taken contained five urns, one a small one, for an infant I suppose, being one family, as this is the way in which they are generally found. They were interred in a straight line, lying east and west, the small end to the east. I have examined a great number of these urns, but never met with any that contained coins; I hope you may be more fortunate, as it would lead to a knowledge of the time when this custom prevailed." In a subsequent letter, in answer to some inquiries made by Mr. Erskine, Mr. Bruce added: "In regard to the urns, all, that I have yet heard of, have been found in a flat country, excepting a few that were met with in a mound about twelve miles from this. They are generally in numbers of six, eight, ten, twelve, and so forth, lying in a direct line east and west, and are always near ruins where habitations have been formerly; indeed, I met with a number once in a space or compound which was surrounded by buildings half standing." It is important to note here the description of the jar coffins as given by Mr. Erskine.

"The urns are both made of a well-baked coarse-grained sandy clay, having a tendency to break off in scales, the whole very much resembling freestone. They are oblong, rudely cylindrical in the middle, one end contracting and terminating in a circular opening like the mouth of a jar with a rim thicker than the rest of the vessel, while the other end also contracts, but runs out terminating in a thinnish prolonged point. The urns are about three feet in length, and the widest two feet nine inches at its greatest girth, and in thickness varying from half an inch to three-tenths of an inch. The circular opening is in both about three inches three-tenths in diameter, and was filled up with a bit of baked clay. When the boxes were opened one of the urns had divided into two parts, the other into three as represented in the drawing.¹ The surface of both the vessels,

¹ *Vide* Transactions of the Literary Society, Bombay, Vol. I., p. 191, for the drawing.

particularly towards the opening, is slightly marked with circular rings, similar to those observable on vessels turned on the potter's wheel. On opening the urns, they were found to be completely filled with a very fine reddish heavy sand, not lying loose but collected into coherent masses, which contained the bones; a slight odoriferous perfume, somewhat resembling spirit of aniseed, was emitted on breaking these masses. The bones lay in them, without any kind of order,—a skull, a leg-bone, and the joints of a finger, occupying the same lump; many of them were broken and must have been in the same state when put into the urn. There was no appearance of flesh on any of them nor in the urn; they were very white and rather friable, and have not crumbled down, though now opened and exposed to the air upwards of a twelvemonth. They have no appearance of having ever been exposed to fire. All the bones were huddled together without distinction, each bone being however separated from the other by the cohering sand. In the jaw-bones, the teeth were, to appearance in good preservation, but friable like the bones: the inside of both the urns was incrustated with a thin black bituminous substance which burns when exposed to flame."

Now, this coffin before us, is not a coffin in the sense in which we generally understand it, *i.e.*, a case in which a dead human body is inclosed for burial. One may suppose from the smallness of the size that it is the coffin of an infant, but it is not so, because medical opinion says that the bones seem to be those of an adult of sixty.

Now, the most important question is, to what nation or community this and similar other coffins belong? Agreeing with Mr. William Erskine, we may safely say, "that they could not belong to Mahomedans, who do not seem ever to have deviated from their original customs, as to use urns or any other device for preserving the body after life has forsaken it. The form of the urns (much more resembling the mummies of Egypt than the fine forms of Greek and Roman taste,) as

well as the uncalcined state of the bones, take away all probability that they could belong to traders or settlers of Greece or Rome: nor does the mode of sepulture in question appear to have been adopted by the Armenians, or any other sect of Christians."

We are told by Prof. Geiger, on the authority of Justin, that the ancient Parthians exposed their dead to birds of prey, and then buried the bones after the flesh was eaten off. But we do not know whether they made receptacles for the bones like that which we have before us, or simply buried the bones.

It is very probable that, as generally believed in Persia, these coffins belonged to the original occupants of the land, the ancient Zoroastrian Persians, the ancestors of the present Parsees. But have we any grounds to say, that the ancient Persians had among them any custom of preserving the bones of the dead? Yes, we have. This coffin is what the old Parsee books call an "astodân" or ossuary, *i.e.*, a receptacle for bones. It is the relic of a very old custom which is well-nigh obsolete among the Parsees of India as among their few co-religionists in Persia. A remnant of this custom is observed in a quite different way in the construction of their present Towers of Silence. It is a custom which has its origin in one of the commandments of the Vendidâd, a book of the Avesta Scriptures of the Parsees.

Now what was this custom? The custom, as described in the Vendidâd, was this, that the body of a dead person was exposed on the top of a hill to the full rays of the sun and to birds of prey. The birds ate away the flesh, but the bones were preserved uninjured by fastening the dead body. After a certain time, probably a year, the bones, which had by this time become perfectly dry and free from any impurity that could be a source of danger to the health of the living, were collected and placed in a receptacle, specially prepared for the purpose, of stone, mortar or clay, or, in case of extreme poverty, of coarse cloth. This receptacle was known as an Astodân,

i.e., an ossuary *اسٽوڊان* (lit., a keeper of bones, from *اسٽوڊان* *astodân* L. os. Fr. os. P. *استخوان* *i.e.*, bone and *وڊ* to keep.)

The coffin sent by Mr. Malcolm is a stone *astodân* of this kind.

This old religious custom of preserving the bones in a separate receptacle had its origin in the following passage of the *Vendidâd* (VI. 49—51).

اسٽوڊان ۾ ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا
ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا ڇوڪراڻا

Dâtare gaëthanâm astvaitinâm ashâum! kva narâm iristanâm azdebîsh barâma? Ahura Mazda kva nidathâma. Âat mraot Ahurô Mazdâo uzdânem hê adhât kerenaot upairi spânem upairi raozem upairi vehrkem anaiwi-vârentish upairi naêmât apô yat vâiryayâo, yêzi tavân aêtê mazdayaçna yêzi asânaêshva yêzi vichichichaêshva yêzi tutukhshva yêzi nôit tavân aête mazdayaçna khâ-stairish kha-barezish raochâo aiwi-varena hvare-dareçya hê zemê paiti nidaithîta.

“O holy Creator of the material world! where shall we carry the bones of the dead? O Ahura Mazda! where shall we place them?”

“Then Ahura Mazda answered: One must prepare an edifice for it above the reach of a dog, above the reach of a fox, above the reach of a wolf, inaccessible to rain water from above.

into it for the admission of light. It is further enjoined on this point that the astodân shall be prepared of a single stone and its cover (or lid) be made of a single well-prepared perforated stone, and that it be set with stone and mortar all round."

When we refer to old Greek historians we find allusions to this custom of the double process of exposing the body and preserving the bones, though the custom is not perfectly understood by the writers. First of all, we find Herodotus, the father of history, saying that the dead bodies of the ancient Persians were, after their flesh being eaten off, covered with wax, and then buried in the ground. Strabo alludes to this custom when he says that "their mode of burial is to smear the bodies over with wax and then to inter them. The Magi are not buried, but the birds are allowed to devour them." Burial in the strictest sense of the word was prohibited among the ancient Persians as among the present Parsees. So, it appears that these authors refer to the custom of placing the astodâns or bone-receptacles in vaults as found by Mr. Malcolm.

There is one thing more in the statements of Herodotus and Strabo which is not corroborated by any Parsee book. It is that the skeleton, after its flesh being eaten away, was covered with wax. The main idea seems to be that of preserving the bones, and therefore it is possible that some Persians covered the bones with wax, which could keep off the action of air or water and preserve them longer. But this custom is not alluded to in any old Parsee book, though it is specially mentioned that care should be taken that no water should fall over the bones. Instead of wax, we find from the letter of Mr. Malcolm, that some jar-shaped receptacles contained the seeds of a plant called "Hioola." It is possible that these seeds have, like wax, the property of preserving the bones from destruction. From Mr. William Erskine's description of the vases sent to him in 1813, we learn that the bones therein were covered with a kind of reddish sand. From all this, it appears that the wax, or the seeds, or the sand were intended to protect the bones

from the action of air or rain, the main idea being that of the preservation of bones.

Thus we see that there was a custom in old Persia of preserving the bones in astodâns which were placed under vaults in detached buildings. The ancient Persian ruins near Persepolis, known as the tomb of Cyrus, are the ruins of the edifice that contained the astodân of king Cyrus. It appears from the construction of this edifice, as described by Chardin, Niebuhr, Sir Robert Keer Porter and other eminent travellers, and from Mr. Bruce's letter to Mr. William Erskine, that rich families had their own family vaults in which the astodâns of the deceased members of the family were placed together. The tombs in the Kaale-i-Rustam (Rustam's castle) on the banks of the Karun, referred to by Sir Henry Layard,¹ and those at Shiraz, referred to by Sir John Macdonald Kinneir² and Lieutenant Selby,³ are the family astodâns of this kind.

For those who could not afford to have a separate family vault, there were common vaults near the city. Everybody who could afford had a separate astodân of his own of stone, mortar, clay or coarse cloth, but the poorest of the people had a common receptacle in which their bones were placed together. Mr. K. R. Cama says in his 'Zarthoshti Abhyas,' that he had heard it said by a Zoroastrian Persian that the latter had seen in Persia large pits on tops of mountains covered with large stone slabs that contained human bones. This is corroborated by what Mr. Malcolm says, in his second letter, of the existence of a large heap of human bones on an elevated place. It is also corroborated by Sir H. Layard, who says: "About 7 miles from the junction of the Karun with the river of Dizful, on the right bank of the former, are the remains of a town of no great extent, belonging to the Sassanian epoch. The mounds are

¹ Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol. 16, pp. 51, 52. Travels in Susiana, &c. Vol. II., pp. 25, 237.

² Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire, p. 90.

³ Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol. 14, p. 226.

strewn with pottery and glass, and I discovered a well filled with human bones.”¹

This is then an evidence of a common astodân for the poor. The following statement of Herodotus seems to me to be a similar evidence for the common astodâns. While speaking of the battle-field of Plataæ, he says that many years after the battle, the Plataæans “made discovery of the following: the flesh having all fallen away from the bodies of the dead and the bones having been gathered together into one place, the Plataæans found a skull without a seam, &c.”

Now why were the bones preserved in the ‘Astodâns’? Why was it thought necessary to collect and preserve the bones? They were preserved for the time of the resurrection. The doctrine of the resurrection is an old Persian belief. We find the following passage in the Zamyâd Yasht (p. 89).

දුෂ්ඨස්සාදාසු මං ආදි දේවස්සාදාසු ආදි දේවස්සාදාසු දුෂ්ඨස්සාදාසු දුෂ්ඨස්සාදාසු
දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු
දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු
දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු
දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු දේවස්සාදාසු

“Yat upanghâchat saoshyantam verethrâjanem uta anyâos-chit hakhayô, yat kerenavât frashem ahûm azarêshintem amarêshintem afrithyantem apuyantem yavaêjim yavaêsîm vasô khshathrem yat irista paitî usehishtân jasat juyô amere-khtish dathaitî frashem vasnâ anghush.”

Translation—“That splendour will attach itself to the successful Saoshyant and to his companions when he shall make the world fresh, undecaying, imperishable, free from putrefaction and corruption, ever living, ever improving, powerful, when the dead shall rise again, immortality shall be the lot of the living, and the desire for freshness shall be allotted to the world.”

¹ Sir H. Layard's paper on Khozistan, Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol. 16, p. 63.

It appears from this passage, that one Saoshyant will bring about the resurrection of the world, and shall make the dead rise again. How will he make the dead rise again? He will make them rise again from their bones (ast), which are preserved in the astodân.

For this reason he is called "Astvat-ereta" in the Avesta. We find the following passage in the Farvardîn yast (129):—

𐬀𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎 𐬀𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎 𐬀𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎𐬎
 𐬀𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎
 𐬀𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎
 𐬀𐬀𐬎𐬎

"Astvat eretahê ashaonô fravashîm yazamaidê.

"Yô anghat saoshyâus verethraja nâma astvat eretascha nâma avatha saoshyâns yatha vîspem ahûm astvantem sâvayât, avatha astvat-eretô yatha astvâo hân ushtanavâo astvat-ithyêj nghem paitishtât."

"We honour the fravashi of the holy Astvat-ereta, who is by name the victorious Saoshyant and by name Astvat-ereta. (He is by name) Saoshyant (*i.e.* the Beneficent), because he will do good to the whole material world; Astvat-ereta (*i.e.*, he who makes the possessors of bones rise up), because he will raise the dead corporeal (lit. bony) creatures in the state of the living corporeal creatures."

We find from this passage, that the Saoshyant, who will bring about the resurrection is also called Astvat-ereta, because he will raise the dead again from their bones. This explains then the origin of the custom of preserving the bones in the astodâns or bone-receptacles. They were preserved, because they will be useful in future, at the time of the resurrection when the Saoshyant will make the dead rise again from their bones.

Apart from the question, whether the astodâns were buried or merely placed on the ground in subterranean vaults, it seems quite clear, that they had some connection with the ground. A mystical passage in the Bundehesh (XXX. 6) accounts for this connection. It is there said, that at the time of the resurrection, when the dead will be made to rise again, their bones will be claimed from the earth, where they have been reduced to the state of dust, their blood from water, their hair from trees, and their life from fire. The passage is as follows :--

د ف سځ ځ ف و و و ف ف و ف س ف ځ ځ ف ځ ځ ځ ف ځ ځ ځ ځ ځ ځ

. س

“Pavan zak hangâm min minô-i-jamik ast va min maya khûn, min ûrvar mûi min âtash khaya chegûnshân pavan bundeheshnih padiraft khâhad” (Justi., p. 72) *i.e.* “At that time (of resurrection) will be demanded bones from the spirit of the earth, blood from water, hair from plants, and life from fire, as they were accepted by them in the creation.”

Now, their remains one question to be considered ; and that is about the antiquity of this coffin. Mr. Malcolm says, it is said to be about 5,000 years old and to belong to the old fire worshippers before they had a “Tower of Silence.” Mr. Bruce, while sending his urns seventy-five years ago said : “This form of burial must be very ancient and prior to Zoroaster, as I fancy his followers have not altered their mode to this day.” Mr. William Erskine says that, as the custom of constructing the modern Towers of Silence, in which the central well serves as a common receptacle for the bones, comes down from the time of Zoroaster, these coffins must belong to times anterior to or just after Zoroaster. These European writers have come to this conclusion, because they have not, before them the writings of the old books to guide them. The passage in the Vendidad referring to the preservation of bones is not properly understood, even by many

European translators. Dr. Geiger, of Germany, seems to have properly understood it. Well, then, when we take into consideration, that the Vendidad was written, if not in the time of Zoroaster, at least after him, but not at all before him, we come to the conclusion that this custom of preserving the bones also prevailed after Zoroaster. The Pahlavi book *Dadistân-i-Dini*, which, as we saw, speaks of this custom of preserving the bones in an *astodân*, is a much later book. When it makes mention of this custom, it seems that the custom was prevalent at the later time also. From the consideration of these facts, we see that the custom was not altogether obsolete until a long time after Zoroaster. Thus, we cannot positively say that these coffins must be 3,000 years old, or that they must belong to an age anterior to Zoroaster. It is possible, that they may be 3,000 years old, or 2,000 years old, but we cannot positively determine their antiquity; but, at least, this much is certain, that they belong to a period anterior to the Mahomedan Conquest.¹

¹ We learn from the *Journal of the Anthropological Society*, Vol. 7, p. 12, that two ancient ossuary vases were sent, to the Museum from Busserah in 1886.