The Sistani Cycle of Epics and Iran's National History

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The Sistani Cycle of Epics and Iran's National History

On the Margins of Historiography

By

Saghi Gazerani

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Cover illustration: Indo-Parthian Tetradrachm circa 20 CE; obverse: Gondophares on horseback, reverse: Siva standing holding trident. Copyright A. Gazerani

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For my parents

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Acknowledgments

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Notes on Transliteration

Consonants

	Persian	Arabic
ب	b	b
پ	p	—
ت	t	t
ث	th	th
ج	j	j
چ	ch	—
ح	ḥ	ḥ
خ	kh	kh
د	d	d
ذ	dh	dh
ر	r	r
ز	z	z
ژ	zh	—
س	s	s
ش	sh	sh

	Persian	Arabic
ص	ṣ	ṣ
ض	z	ḍ
ط	ṭ	ṭ
ظ	ẓ	ẓ
ع	‘	‘
غ	gh	gh
ف	f	f
ق	q	q
ك	k	k
گ	g	g
ل	l	l
م	m	m
ن	n	n
و	v	w
ه	h	h
hamza	’	’

Vowels

Long	Persian	Arabic
ا	ā	ā
ی	i, y (if diphthong)	ī, y (if diphthong)
و	u, w (if diphthong)	ū, w (if diphthong)

Long	Persian	Arabic
ـَ	a	a
	e	i
ـُ	o	u

List of Figures

Abbreviations

Irānshāh ebn Abi'l-Khayr, *Bahmannāmeh*, ed. R. ʿAfifi, Tehran: Tus, 1991.

Anonymous, *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, ed. R. Karachi, Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2003.

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———. *Firuzshāhnāmeh* vol 3, ed. M. Afshari and I. Afshar, Tehran: Nashre Cheshmeh, 1388.

Anonymous, *Haft Lashkar: Ṭumār-e Jāmeʿe Naqālān az Kayumarth ta Bahman*, ed. M. Afshari and M. Mada'eni, Tehran: Pazhuehshgāh-e ʿUlum-e Ensāni, 1377.

Anonymous, *Jahāngirnāmeh*, ed. Mādḥ Qāsem and S.Z. Sajjadi, Tehran: Mo'asese-ye Motaleʿāt-e Eslāmi, 1380.

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Ferdowsi. *Shāhnāmeh*, ed. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh and Mahmoud Omidsalar, Persian Text Series, New Series no. 1, New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987.

———. *Shāhnāmeh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis*, New York: Viking, 2006.

**Note: Througout the work this is referred to as* Translation DD. If the translator's initials do not follow the word "translation," then the translation is my own.

Farāmarz ibn Khodādād Arjāni, *Samak-e ʿAyyār*, ed. P.N. Khānlari, Tehran: Nashr-e Tondar, 1368.

Anonymous, *Shahriyārnāmeh*, Khodā-Bakhsh Library Manuscript, Patna, HL-1820, 383 folios.

Anonymous, *Tārikh-e Sistān*, ed. M.T. Bahār, Tehran: Padideh-Khāvar, 2010.

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Note: This is a list of primary sources used heavily in this study. Throughout the work, they will be referenced by their title and appear here alphabetically by title.

Introduction

Half a century has elapsed since the paradigm shift introduced by the linguistic turn seriously questioned the natural development of texts. Ever since, the examination of semiotic operations has become an indispensable part of studying texts. Among social sciences and various fields in humanities, history was slow to catch up and has hence been castigated for its "disciplinary blindness."[1] In the last two decades, however, especially in medieval European history, a number of studies have emerged that employ theoretical tools which render crossing the disciplinary boundaries of literature and history necessary. Such re-reading of medieval texts and contexts has resulted in a debate about the nature of medieval historiography, particularly its function as ideological discourse.[2] A parallel trend cannot be observed in the fields of Middle Eastern history in general, and such an approach is virtually absent in the study of premodern Iran. While a few new studies have made use of a greater number of literary texts, the main aim of the historian is still to reconstruct history by extracting factual tidbits from the great amalgam of myth, legend and the occasional fact, while the literary scholar – save the preliminary exercise of establishing the historical context of her object of study – imagines her endeavor to be entirely outside the realm of historicality.

In this divide between the factual and the fictional, the so-called epic literature of Iran finds itself in an odd position. Having been coined as epic since the time Western scholars showed an interest in it, the entire corpus was designated to be the territory of the literary scholar. This is true even in the case of Ferdowsi's *magnum opus*, the *Shāhnāmeh*, a work that has also been called Iran's national history. One would think calling a work national history – or history of any kind for that matter – would naturally pique the interest of historians of that particular field. But this has not been the case.

In addition to the 19th century positivist view of history, which dominated and defined, rather narrowly, what constituted a historical text, there was an added problem in the case of non-Western cultural production: the non-Western literatures were classified according to the proximity of the genres, both in form and content, to what was perceived to be their European counterparts. This scholarly endeavor of taxonomy, which was undertaken by the

1 Megill, AHR Forum 695.

2 For a few works in this area see Grunmann-Gaudet and Jones, *Nature of Medieval narrative*; Beer, *Narrative conventions*; Patterson, *Negotiating the past*; Vance, *From topic to tale*; Spiegel, *Romancing the past*; Tyler and Balzaretti, *Narrative and history*.

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first and second generation Orientalists, resulted in force-fitting Persian literary works into molds that failed to contain them.[3] But in spite of this obvious mismatch, no one has ever bothered to point out that if there is a misfit, the problem might be with the container and not the content. This is how the *Shāhnāmeh* and other stories belonging to the same genre were categorized as epic and neglected to be considered as narrations of history, in spite of the insistence of the texts at being accounts of the past.

There are in fact some critical differences between the Western epic genre and its supposed Iranian counterpart. One of the defining features of the Western epics, as Bakhtin argued, is the time in which the epic stories unfold. According to him, the time of the epic genre not only is distant from the real, from the present, but also "is not localized in an actual historical sequence; it is not relative to the present or the future; it contains within itself, as it were, the entire fullness of time."[4] If we take this to be a defining feature of the Greek epics, for example, and then compare it with the way the concept of time is elaborated in the *Shāhnāmeh*, it becomes apparent that the two literatures indeed have a very different conceptualization of time, and by extension, of the past. In the *Shāhnāmeh* we are not only presented with a seamless chronology of Iran's pre-Islamic past, but the thread of time reaches the Arab invasion of Iran, some 350 years prior to the composition of the work. The Arab invasion initiated forces of social change, albeit gradually, which placed (or rather displaced) Ferdowsi, the author of the *Shāhnāmeh*, in a present that was unpalatable to him. This context, namely the unfavorable social changes that threatened the values, principles and beliefs into obsoleteness, is what gave rise to the search for a "usable past."[5] Ferdowsi's search is for a romanticized past, a time when things were as they were supposed to be. In the epilogue of the *Shāhnāmeh*, Ferdowsi clearly presents us with the answer as to why he is concerned with the past and ultimately why the project of writing a monumental work of Iran's history became an exigency to him. The burning question, which set off Ferdowsi's intellectual endeavor, to which he devoted thirty years of his life, is expressed in the beginning of his work: he wants to follow the trajectory of history in order to gain an insight into historical progression,

3 Obviously I do not suggest here that there has been no discussion of the *Shāhnāmeh* as a historical text. In fact a discussion of the *Shāhnāmeh*'s value as a historical source appears in a few works that have appeared on Persian historiography thus far, but they generally just consider the Sasanian part of the *Shāhnāmeh* and the "facts" contained therein. Meisami, *Persian historiography*, 37–45; and more recently, Daniel, Turco-Mongol period, 140–3.

4 Bakhtin, *Dialogic imaginations* 19.

5 I have borrowed the term from Gabrielle Spiegel; Spiegel, *Romancing the past* 1.

a process which by the time it reaches Ferdowsi's own times has left the world in a wretched state.[6] This, at the very least, qualifies the *Shāhnāmeh* and, as we shall see, the remainder of the "epic literature" of Iran as works pertaining to the past. As a matter of fact, what Ferdowsi presents to us is a chronological account of Iran's past from the time of the first primordial human/king to the Arab invasion of Iran in the second half of the 7th century. This view of the past alone sets this genre apart from the Western epics, with their disconnected time and their lack of historical sequence.

The *Shāhnāmeh's* historical outlook is so pronounced that it could not be ignored altogether: it was recognized as a kind of meta-narrative concerned with the past.[7] The trouble was, and to a large extent remains, that in spite of the acknowledgment of the fact that the *Shāhnāmeh* and other epics have past events as their referents, they have been deemed inadequate as sources for historical investigation. Therefore, instead of engaging in studies of the nature and function of this particular genre of historiography, attempts have been made to explain "the aberrant nature" of this kind of historical work.[8] Some recent studies have attempted to trace the connection between oral tradition, which served as a basis for what came to be known as the Iranian epic genre, and epigraphical evidence.[9] The appearance of characters, motifs, and themes from the epic genre on pre-Islamic inscriptions attests to the pervasiveness of this particular historiography.

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6 *Shāhnāmeh*, 1:12:

که گیتی به آغاز چون داشتند که به ما این‌چنین‌خوار بگذاشتند

Translation:
How were the affairs of the world in the beginning (of its creation)? How is it that they were bequeathed to us in such a wretched state?

7 Yarshater, Iranian national history, 359–477.

8 For an example of this see approach see Daryaee, National history 129–41, where the author claims that the reason the Achaemenids were left out of the national history is that the historical conception of Iranian National History had been crafted according to the Avestan view of history by Orthodox Zoroastrian clergy. The Zoroastrian priests, as argued by Shahbazi, were *one of the influential groups* who had a hand in the composition and dissemination of the different versions of the stories/histories but by no means were they the only composers of the National History, and not all the supposed aberrations in the stories can be attributed to their revisionist agenda; Shahbazi, On the *Xʷadāy Nāmak*, 208–29.

9 The most recent and significant of these works is Shayegan's *Aspects of history*, where the author offers "strong evidence for the composition of the Sasanian inscriptions within the framework of an oral tradition," 139. It is in the *Shāhnāmeh* and epics such as those belonging to the Sistani Cycle that we have a recension of the oral tradition.

The field of pre-modern Iranian history, nevertheless, remains hopelessly positivistic in its approach to Iran's historiographical production. What have made matters worse in recent years are the consequences of attempts to include the Sasanian Empire into the conceptual landscape of the late-antique world. Historical sources stemming from Iran have been judged according to the closeness of their resemblance to their Greco-Roman counterparts, entirely neglecting Iran's historiographical production.[10]

The philosophical background of 19th century positivism, which excluded a great number of narrations from the historiographical repertoire, has had detrimental consequences for those cultures that were deemed to belong to the Hegelian category of "peoples without history." In a concise but enormously consequential work, Ranajit Guha has examined the ramification of the Hegelian conception of progress in history, especially as a philosophical force justifying, defending and vindicating the colonialist endeavors of Europe.[11] As the state became the actualization of the World Spirit and history an account of this actualization, "non-statist" accounts of the past were excluded from the realm of historiography. This understanding of historiography became, and to a large extent remains, the dominant mode of writing about the past. As Guha puts it, "in doing so, it has inspired the intellectuals of the 'peoples without history', who had only recently been admitted to World-History, to emulate the statism of their European mentors."[12] Guha then calls on historians, especially of non-European cultures, to break this mold by including genres of historiography which were excluded as the result of the hegemony of the statist definition of history. This he calls a radical act of expropriation, for its aim is to recover a past appropriated by conquest and colonization.[13]

I must confess, however, that my argument, namely that the "epic literature" of Iran is a kind of historiography, did not arise from this level of understanding of the roots of the problem, nor did it initiate from a desire to take a radical stance to expropriate my past. It grew out of a study that I started in 2002, which eventually grew into my doctoral dissertation, where I looked at a body of epic literature of Iran, referred to as the Sistani Cycle of Epics (henceforth SCE), a whole cycle of stories that was not studied before. My amazement at such a "discovery" was justified particularly because the stories belonging to

10 For a critique of such attitudes regarding the incorporation of Sasanian Iran in studies of the Late Antique period see Pourshariati's introduction to the special volume on Late Antique Iran, *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1–14.

11 Guha, *History at the limit*.

12 Ibid., 74.

13 Ibid., 2.

the Sistani cycle were those of Rostam's family, and Rostam is the most prominent hero of the *Shāhnāmeh*.

At the very first stage of my investigation, I realized that these stories, in spite of *Shāhnāmeh* scholarship's preoccupation with Rostam, were dismissed as subjects unworthy of a literary scholar's attention. Referred to as "secondary epics",[14] aside from an occasional article referring to a manuscript of these epics, the only work that discusses, or rather describes, them is Safa's *Ḥemāseh Sarāiy dar Irān*.[15] Safa introduces these epics by providing a summary of their plot as well as information about their authorship and manuscript tradition. Safa's assessment of each individual story mainly consists of voicing a number of mostly negative value-judgments: in his opinion, in spite of the antiquity of the stories, these epics are imitations of Ferdowsi's great work; furthermore they lack literary value due to their poor diction and the inclusion of "unpleasant" episodes.[16] Safa's opinion reflects the general consensus of scholarship regarding these epics. Still caught up in attempts to establish the origin and authenticity of the canonical version of the text, *Shāhnāmeh* scholarship dismissed these epics as later works of less-than-talented panegyric poets of minor courts. Being the handicraft of later and lesser poets, another reason for their dismissal is that the poems have been tainted by a heavy usage of Arabic words. Finally, there seems to be an unspoken verdict about these secondary epics: since Ferdowsi chose not to include these stories in the *Shāhnāmeh* they must be somehow irrelevant and unworthy of being studied. Therefore, the "value" of the epic poems was gauged merely on the artistic style of their authors in comparison to Ferdowsi's poetic talents. Safa, who assigned each of the epics a certain grade based on their "poetic value" and the "purity of the language" – purity being relative to the scarcity of Arabic words – defined the yardstick by which the epics were to be evaluated for scholars who followed him. Viewed from this perspective, there is another factor that renders these epics secondary to Ferdowsi's work: the stories' close connection to popular medieval literature. Poor poetic quality, lack of creativity, use of impure language, inclusion of motifs from popular literature, therefore, are the reasons for what could be described as scholars' disdain for the epics.

When I attempted to take the next natural step in my pursuit of these 'secondary epics', I realized that the dismissive attitude had a very tangibly negative consequence for me: in spite of the existence of prolific manuscript

14 Actually in Persian the SCE is still referred to as حماسه های ثانوی or secondary epics.

15 Safa, *Ḥemāseh Sarāiy dar Irān*.

16 Ibid., 28; 294; 310.

traditions, there were no critical editions of the stories.[17] So I spent close to a year traveling to collect manuscripts from various libraries, mainly in India. Although by now some version of most of the stories is available in print, my efforts were not in vain, because not only did I come across various illustrated manuscripts, but, most significantly, I also identified stories never mentioned by anyone before, such as the *Narimānnāmeh*.[18] Additionally, at the Khuda Bakhsh Library in Patna, I found the complete version of the *Shahriyārnāmeh*, a work whose complete version was thought to be no longer extant.[19] Now armed with thousands of pages of poorly reproduced copies of Persian poetry that almost no one else had bothered to read for generations, I started the next phase of my project.

But as I was collecting and reading the manuscripts of the SCE, I needed some direction, some framework of understanding in order to contextualize what I was reading. Therefore, early on I began looking at what traces of the stories were left behind in works of medieval authors. I came across a number of Persian sources, which referenced these stories, and hence I became interested in their provenance.[20] Aside from the intriguing question of their written and oral life and their crystallization in poetic form, what immediately caught my attention was that these stories were always discussed as sources of Iran's or, more specifically Sistan's, pre-Islamic history. The function of these stories as histories of Sistan is articulated most indisputably in the anonymous *Tārikh-e Sistān*, the first part of which was completed around 1053 CE.[21] The pre-Islamic account of history in *Tārikh-e Sistān* begins by a reference to

17 That is with the exception of the *Garshāspnāmeh* and the *Bahmannāmeh*; also a number of edited texts have appeared since then; for a brief discussion of the stories, a summary of their plots, and references to their manuscript tradition and their edited versions see Appendix A.

18 This particular *Narimānnāmeh* is a stand-alone manuscript and not an interpolation to the *Garshāspnāmeh*.

19 The *Shahriyārnāmeh* is one of the most fascinating stories for the range of material it covers. I have made extensive use of this story because I believe that it has encapsulated the reflection of significant episodes of history as well as offering an alternative narration to some of the events described in the *Shāhnāmeh*.

20 For a discussion of the sources of the Sistani Cycle of Epics see: Gazerani, Old garment 178–96.

21 *Tārikh-e Sistān* is certainly the work of at least two (or three) anonymous authors. For a complete discussion of the text's different styles and dating see Bosworth, Tārikh-e Sistān, where he offers a summary of scholarship on the text as well as a synopsis of its plot.

the Book of Garshāsp.[22] This book in a sense was the book of origins of Rostam's house (Garshāsp being the ancestor of Rostam's house) as well as Sistan's earliest history. It contained the account of Sistan's founding as well as Garshāsp's many adventures. Then we are presented with a short list of rulers of Sistan after Garshāsp. It is here that we encounter most of the heroes of the Sistani Cycle such as Sām, Zāl, Rostam, and Farāmarz. Because of the availability of the stories in separate manuscripts at the time, and for the practical reason of wanting to keep the length of his work reasonable, the author of *Tārikh-e Sistān* confines his discussion of Sistan's pre-Islamic rulers to cursory remarks about Sām, Dastān (Zāl), Rostam, and Farāmarz, and informs the reader that their stories are to be found in various books, Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh* being one of them.[23] What is remarkable is the author's insistence that Rostam's progeny continued to rule the region until the arrival of Islam. Therefore, the names of the rulers of the region are mentioned, beginning with Garshāsp and ending with Bakhtiyār, the last major figure to become the hero of a Sistani story, who was the ruler of Sistan during Khosrow II's reign (590–628 CE). When the Arab armies arrived in Sistan, it was Rostam, the grandson of this Bakhtiyār, who put up a resistance against the invading enemy.[24]

If we take a closer look at the account of this local history, we notice that the entire narration of the region's pre-Islamic past is nothing but a reference list to the stories that constitute the SCE. This really intrigued me and formulated what would become the basic question of this book: how and why would these stories be considered as accounts of the region's past? So by the time I had actually gained an overall understanding of all the relevant stories, I was aware that these stories were regarded, at least partially, as relating the history of Sistan's pre-Islamic past. In addition to the question of their function, the identity of the family, who purportedly ruled over a region and traced their genealogy to legendary heroes, became an intriguing puzzle to me. The search for an answer to this question has resulted in what became a significant part of this work, for I discovered layers of stories containing narrations of episodes from Parthian history (circa 247 BCE–224 CE). The discovery of these historical reflections is of particular importance because, as scholars and students of Ancient Iranian history are well aware, the history of the Parthian period has

22 This work, composed in prose by Abu'l-Mo'ayyad al-Balkhi, is no longer extant, but was most likely one of the sources, if not the source for the *Garshāspnāmeh*. For a discussion of the sources of the *Garshāspnāmeh*, see Gazerani, Old garment.

23 *Tārikh-e Sistān* 8.

24 Ibid., 9.

suffered the targeted campaign of revision, if not an outright eradication, by their successors, the Sasanians.

While investigating the Parthian stories in this cycle, it became apparent that for some crucial events we have two distinct narrations. I shall discuss these different narrations as they offer a rare glimpse into the religio-political conflicts in the Parthian period. These conflicts are mostly rooted in the rivalry between the Parthian royal house, i.e. the Arsacids, and a number of Parthian noble families. The power dynamics of this period are one of the many blind spots of Parthian history, since the only narrative histories about this period are those offered by the Classical sources, whose authors were uninterested in or uninformed about the internal affairs of the Parthians as well as everything that transpired in the eastern regions of the empire. I would imagine that the contribution of the present work to Parthian history would be particularly welcome at this present moment, since the field of Parthian history has broken new grounds in recent decades: whereas formerly this period of a half millennium was considered to have been one of stagnation for Iranian cultural productions, new scholarship has radically challenged this notion, especially in light of new archaeological and numismatic finds.[25] I would assume that the discussion of the Parthian stories of the Sistani Cycle could perhaps contribute to our understanding of some aspects of the period's cultural and political life, and it goes to validate, corroborate, and elaborate on the recent findings in the field of Parthian history.

Although my methodology is borrowed from the field of history, especially in the first chapter of this work, it is merely utilized to establish the Parthian context of the stories. I have refrained from examining the stories themselves as mines of information. In other words, though some evidence is provided to argue for the Parthian origin of the stories, my aim is not to identify the characters or events with specific events from Parthian history. Instead I am interested in the way the events are narrated. To understand the way or ways of a narration, one should take into account the manner in which the narrative is molded by both a formal convention of the genre as well as its moral purview, which in this case stems from a fixed rhetoric. Accounting for the elements that make up the narrative is crucial, for the nature of the narrative as a medium for historical production, as Hayden White argued, plays an important role in the shaping of the "real life referents" into an expression of ideology.[26] The narrativity of this particular body of the stories, as we shall see, plays an important

25 For an example of a work that discusses new directions in Parthian history, see the volume edited by Curtis and Stewart, *The idea of Iran II*.

26 White, Historical discourse 25–35; White, *Content of the form*.

role in what the stories tell us about the past. This requires a closer look at certain features of the narrative's structural and rhetorical components.

As a first step to the analysis of the narrative, I have looked at how the convention of this genre is utilized to produce a narration of the past. In each chapter, I shall discuss how this convention translated into certain heroic motifs, which grant the hero/king legitimacy to rule and further determine the direction of the narrative. As I discuss different parts of this convention, I will look back at the genealogy of a particular convention, when relevant, and discuss how it was appropriated from other genres of literature. The heroic motifs in particular are constructed, invoked, and altered in order to express, establish and challenge a character's legitimacy to rule. As a part of their legitimizing function, they are constructed to give rise to a sense of wonder: they contain descriptions of the hero's battles with supernatural creatures and his adventures in strange landscapes. Therefore, it will be demonstrated how these "fictional elements" of the repertoire help create a complex discourse of legitimacy.

In addition to considering the structural units of the genre (such as the heroic motifs), I shall also examine other types of "generic constraints," both in content and form, which determine the manner in which a historical episode is narrated. These generic constraints are made up of a host of themes and discourses, which set the parameters for this particular historical narration. It is according to these generic constraints that actions of characters are determined and judged as morally sanctioned or not, as honorable or dishonorable, or as good or bad. This internal, moral architecture becomes yet another mold into which the historical narration has been fitted. As a result, for example, the many wars between Iran and Turān are motivated by revenge, as it is a noble and accepted reason to wage wars. Therefore, the historical impetus for defense or conquest, which we might find as the reason for waging war, is entirely absent in this corpus of literature.

Another structural feature that is of great significance, especially for the analysis of the stories as histories, is the chronological organization of the events. The Sistani stories, regardless of whether they appear in the *Shāhnāmeh* or in separate manuscripts, unfold during the reign of a particular Iranian king. The stories, in other words, are pinned to specific periods of Iran's past. Here I must clarify what I mean whenever I refer to National History (capitalized), especially since the same terminology was used by Ehsan Yarshater to refer essentially to Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*. Here, however, by National History, I refer to the conception of historical time starting with the Pishdādi dynasty, who are followed by the Kayānids, Parthians and Sasanians. Therefore throughout this work when I mention National History, I do not mean a specific work, such as

Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, but the periodization by which the *Shāhnāmeh* and the SCE and other historical works abide.[27] As we shall see, there are structural devices used to incorporate a particular story into the National History, for those stories that fall out of this chronology cannot be considered as narrations of the past. As a part of the structural analysis of the stories, I shall discuss the question of the specific ways in which the stories were incorporated into this greater chronology of Iran's past.

Because of the different methodologies employed, and given the aim of the study to look at the genre holistically, I have chosen not to separate each of these facets of analysis into different parts or chapters. Rather, I have attempted to establish the historical context of the stories in the first chapter, so that each time we encounter a historical episode, I refer back to the first chapter. Each subsequent chapter focuses on the stories of Sistani heroes in a chronological fashion, incorporating the analysis of the structure of the story, its usage and adaptation of the convention of the genre, and the ways in which it utilizes the constraints of the genre as a conceptual boundary for the narration of historical events. The analysis of various episodes reveals, as we shall see, the existence of alternative narrations of the same episodes. Speculation about the reason for the existence of alternate narratives and the suppression and resurfacing of various versions of events invariably gets us closer to what was at stake for those who were major players in the production of these stories. I hope for the discussion to reveal some of the components of the much-contested discourse of legitimacy in late-antique Iran as expressed in this genre of Iran's historiography.

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27 When referring to the pre-Islamic period, the medieval sources unanimously make use of this periodization. Hence in local histories we read how a certain Pishdādi or Kayānid king founded a city, or that during his reign there was an attack which demolished the city, etc.

CHAPTER 1

The Historical Context

I have claimed that the SCE constitutes a genre of historiography. To substantiate this claim, it behooves me to establish the historical context of the stories. While they continued to be recited for millennia throughout a vast geographical territory, stretching from the Indian subcontinent in the east to Armenia in the northwest and the Arabian Peninsula in the southwest, the formative layer of the stories is undeniably a product of a specific historical period of the region which came to be known as Sistan. Therefore, in the first part of this chapter, I will lay out the historical circumstances that led to the rise of the Parthian noble family of Suren[1] in the eastern fringes of the Parthian Empire. After all, the impetus for the patronage and production of the SCE was to narrate the feats of the Suren rulers of the region, past and present. The second logical step would be to identify the heroes of the house of Rostam with the Suren rulers of the region, something that has been postulated previously, as we shall see. In this chapter, however, I will provide complementary evidence from literary and numismatic sources in order to provide support for this identification.

Although I have employed methods from the discipline of history to accomplish this task, I insist that my aim is not to examine the factual value of the SCE. Hence I will neither attempt to isolate protagonists from their settings in order to identify them with one particular historical persona (such as Rostam with Gondophares, for instance), nor will I insist that the reflection of the historical event contained in a story refers to *one particular event*. As we shall see, my analysis takes into account the function of literary themes and motifs in this genre, which have a basis in mythology, and certainly have a more ancient provenance than the historical layer of the stories. The aim here is not to separate fact from fiction, but to observe the way in which the genre as a whole narrates the past. Nevertheless, the discussion of the historical background of the epics is necessary, for only by pinning down the geo-historical context of their formation can one perhaps begin to discern their historiographical function: as works at least partially preoccupied with the polemics of the legitimacy of power. Therefore, the identification of the historical events to which they refer becomes an essential first step in this process. After having established the historical context of their formation in the first part of the chapter, I shall give an

1 On the proposed etymology of the name Suren see Schmitt, Suren aber Karin, 197–205.

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overview of the specific way in which the genre of SCE recalls the past. What I will provide in the second part of the chapter is merely a brief outline. I refer the reader to the following chapters, in which SCE's specific narration of each historical theme will be dealt with at length.

1.1 The Scythio-Parthian Kingdom of Sistan

The event that sets the parameters for the emergence of a new kind of historiography,[2] in this case the SCE, begins with the Saka[3] infringement on the Parthian Empire. A confederation of nomadic tribes, collectively known as the Sakas, marched southwest from their homeland roughly around the end of the second century BCE. The massive movement of the Saka was provoked by the attack of a tribe on their homeland; the Saka were known to the Chinese as the Yüeh-chi and to their neighbors as the Hsiung-nu or Huns. Though we are not certain about the specifics of the attack, we do know that it was the reason for the Saka movement westward into Bactria and from there into the Parthian realms.[4]

Before we can turn our attention to the impact of this event on the affairs of the Parthian empire, a few words must be said about the nature of the historical sources. The sole literary sources for this period of Iranian history appear in the works of Greco-Roman authors, who were preoccupied with the affairs of the western regions of the Parthian empire, especially the encounters of Parthia with Rome. "Evidence for the story of the eastern frontier of Parthia," wrote Debevoise in 1938, "is scanty, for events there were too remote to interest

2 I do not mean to insinuate that all stories included in the SCE were produced after the Saka invasion of the region. It is apparent that many of the stories as well as their themes and motifs have a much more ancient genealogy. Nevertheless, the driving force for inclusion of older stories from various different literary traditions into this cohesive and formally recognizable genre must have been the emergence of the Scythio-Parthian polity, the origin of which is to be sought in the Saka invasion of the region.

3 Saka or Scythian is a general term referring to a diverse conglomerate of nomadic and semi-nomadic populations originating from Central Asia. They migrated in the directions of east and west at various times. They are mentioned in the Bisotun inscription of Darius I, as well as in the accounts of the Greek historian Herodotus. One of the well-known Saka groups in the context of Iranian history is the Dahea confederation, to which the Aparni tribe belonged. This is of significance because Arshak (Arsaces), the founder of the Arsacid dynasty and the Parthian empire, was the head of the Aparni tribe.

4 Senior, *Indo-Scythian coins* 1:10.

western historians and archaeological work in eastern Iran has hardly begun."[5] Since Debevoise reconstructed the political history of the Parthian Empire, the field of Parthian history has witnessed a surge of new scholarship, mainly as a result of archaeological and numismatic finds, which allowed new interpretations of crucial aspects of Parthian history to be made.[6] As we shall see, however, information on affairs of eastern Iran is still nebulous and fragmentary at best. Bearing the limitation of our sources in mind, we can begin discussing a series of events that created the historical context for the formation of this new historiographical genre.

The first evidence of the appearance of the Saka tribes on the eastern frontiers of the Parthian Empire is recorded around the end of the reign of Mithradates I (171–138 BCE). To say that the following two Parthian monarchs, Phraates II (138/9–127 BCE) and Artabanus I (127–124 BCE) continued to be plagued by the Saka problem is an understatement, for both these kings lost their lives on the battlefield against the Sakas in the eastern frontiers.[7] What is of utmost significance for our discussion is that some time during the reign of Artabanus I, the Saka settled in the eastern province, hitherto known as Drangiana. It was the settlement of the Saka in that region that gave the province its new name Sakastan (i.e. land of Saka), which survives in a modified form to this day in the toponym Sistan.[8] Undoubtedly, the Saka invasion of the region and the chain of events that followed it must have changed the very fabric of life in the region. The event not only altered the ethnic makeup of the populace of the ancient province of Drangiana, but it also prepared the ground for the emergence of a new polity, in which both the Saka leaders and the Parthian-Suren family played crucial roles. Therefore, formative in nature, this event inaugurated a new era in the history of the region.

Though much of what occurred after the Saka invasion is far from clear, we do have some evidence in the form of coins; from the Saka invasion of

5 Debevoise, *Political history of Parthia* 54.

6 The introduction to the following volume summarizes the changing perspective on Parthians and their legacy: Curtis and Stewart, *Age of the Parthians*, the introduction to Wolski, *L'Empire*, and most recently in *Orbis Parthicus: Studies in Memory of Professor Józef Wolski*.

7 Wolski, *L'Empire* 86–7; Schippmann, *Grundzüge Der Parthischen Geschichte* 28–30; Debevoise, *Political history* 56–9; Colledge, *Ancient peoples* 30–2.

8 From this point on I shall refer to the eastern province, which sometimes stretched into Punjab in the east and the Kabul valley in the north, as Sistan, unless the discussion demands naming specific regions such as Arachosia, Taxila, and Punjab. I have studied the geography of the region and the different toponyms which were used to refer to it in the first chapter of my doctoral dissertation; Gazerani, Sistani cycle of epics; for the approximate outline of the ancient provinces see Figure 6.

Sistan onward, we have ample numismatic evidence attesting to the existence of independent (or semi-independent) polities in the region, whose sphere of influence stretched from the delta of the Hilmand River to Kabul Valley in the northeast and well into the region of Punjab in the southeast. The numismatic evidence, although ample (quantitatively speaking), is particularly difficult to decipher for a number of reasons – first and foremost for lack of the literary narratives that are usually used as a guide in identifying rulers and dynasties. Furthermore, the few studies of these coins, which have been labeled as "Indo-Scythians" and "Indo-Parthian", have not attempted to link the history of the eastern realms to that of the Parthian Empire. Part of the problem with this lopsided approach is a result of the numismatists' lack of interest in the affairs of the "mainlands" of the Parthian Empire, because these scholars' primary area of interest is ancient India. What I shall try to do here is to use their findings in the context of Parthian history.

As mentioned earlier, the Saka invasion of the province took place some time during the reign of Artabanus I (127–124 BCE). Artabanus I is followed by Mithradates II (124–188 BCE), whose achievements in expanding and consolidating the empire have been compared to those of the Achaemenid Darius I (c. 552–486 BCE), whose epithet of "king of kings" Mithradates II adopted. It was Mithradates II who attended to the problem of Sakastan by commissioning a Parthian notable or general, who did not belong to the Arsacid royal house, to recapture the province. It is the recapture of the province that, for the first time, puts the Parthian family name Suren on the map of Iranian history and invariably links it to Sistan. For according to Tarn, the liquidation of the Saka invasion in the territories east of the Persian desert was entrusted to a Suren whose coins are known as "king of campaign coins."[9] These coins bear his portrait while identifying the Parthian king as Mithradates II.[10] Upon victory, this Suren, Tarn argues, was awarded the province as a fiefdom.[11] The Suren capture of Sistan must have taken place sometime between the Mithradates II's accession to the throne in 124 BCE and 115 BCE.[12] During this time, Tarn continues to argue, the Surens were vassals of the Parthian king, but this soon changed after the death of Mithradates II in 88 BCE, for in the aftermath of succession struggles that left the empire divided for a period of almost thirty years, the Suren vassal kingdom become practically independent. From this

9 Tarn, *Seleucid-Parthian studies* 13–16; McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia* 211.

10 Tarn, *Greeks in Bactria & India* 400–500.

11 Ibid., 501.

12 Ibid.

point on there were two Parthian realms, one the Arsacid-governed "Parthia" and the second the Suren-governed east.[13]

Unfortunately, the Classical sources, our only narratives of this period, are silent on what happened in the region. Therefore, to establish the connection between the family of Surens to the region of Sistan, and the identification of the Surens with Rostam's family, a discussion of the numismatic evidence with its variety of hypothesis and interpretation is inevitable. What we can gather with certainty, as we shall see, is that in the first century BCE, in the region of Sistan, there existed two dynasties, which are generally referred to as the two distinct dynasties of "Indo-Scythians" and "Indo-Parthians".[14]

Let us begin with what the coins tell us about the first ruler of the first dynasty. The first king who has left behind ample coinage of the most diverse iconography is Maues, whose reign has conventionally been dated between 95/85 BCE and 60/57 BCE. He adopted the title of king of kings, and his seat was not Drangiana or Arachosia but the region of Hazara-Kashmir. This is all we know about Maues with certainty. It is further speculated that Maues was of Scythian origin, as both his name and other identifications on his coins indicate.[15]

At least part of Maues's reign overlaps with the next ruler, Vovones, who issued coins in conjunction with his commanders, Spalohres and Spalirises, and with Spalohres's son Spalgadama. As opposed to the name Maues, Vovones (lit. victor), is indisputably a Parthian name, borne by several Arsacid kings in the first half of the first century BCE. These coins are speculated to have been minted between 75 BCE and 57 BCE. The earlier coins belonging to Vovones and his commanders were predominately found in the western region of the province, namely Sistan and Arachosia, while later issues were found as far east as Taxila.[16] The Vovones coins proclaim him "king of kings," while Spalohres and Spalirises are referred to as brothers of the king. There have been different explanations of the relationship between Vovones and his commanders. Senior, for instance, maintains that there is no reason to doubt the relationship

13 Ibid., 204; 209.

14 The reason I insist on putting these terms in quotation marks is because they are names invented by numismatists; the relationship between the two groups of rulers or dynasties is far from clear. Also, as we shall see below, all evidence indicates that the so-called "Indo-Parthians" were members of the Suren family.

15 Senior, *Indo-Scythian coins* 1:33; Dobbins, *Śaka-Pahlava coinage* 45.

16 Senior, *Indo-Scythian coins* 1:39–45; Dobbins, *Śaka-Pahlava coinage* 64–8; Fröhlich, *Monnaies Indo-scythes* 32–9.

between the commanders to Vovones is other than stated on their coins,[17] while others argue that "brother of the king" was an honorary title bestowed on these Saka satraps.[18] A major misconception that resulted in doubting the relationship between Vovones and his commanders as something other than kinship is that Vonones's name is Parthian while his commanders bear Saka names. Because of the unfounded presupposition that the two groups, namely the Saka and the Parthians, were distinct and at times rivals, this connection between Vovones and his commanders has been perceived to be complicated.

Before returning to the trajectory the coins have left behind, let us be reminded of Tarn's hypothesis of the liquidation of the Saka occupation between 124 and 115 BCE. The Suren, therefore, were present in the region ever since they overpowered the Saka and eventually founded their independent kingdom after Mithradates II's death (88 BCE). What we learn from the coins about the same period (after Mithradates II's death) is the following: in the region of greater Sistan, which included Arachosia, the Kabul Valley, Ghadhara, and Taxila, there were at least two major contenders to power: Maues, who seems to have controlled the eastern region and Vovones and his commanders, whose sphere of influence was the west, although one must bear in mind that at times their territories overlapped. It has been argued that Vovones was the Suren ruler of Sistan.[19] At the same time there are others who claim that Vovones, his Parthian name notwithstanding, was an "Indo-Scythian."[20]

Although it is certain that the names of those who struck coins in the period between 88 BCE and 57 BCE are sometimes Saka and at other times Parthian, there is no reason to regard this as a discrepancy or a puzzle. There is linguistic evidence that suggests that at least one group of the "Saka" referred to as Ksatrapas have an Iranian background as indicated by their names,[21] as is the case of the titles of Vovones's commanders Spalohres and Spalirises and Spalgama, whose titles are variant compounds including the Middle Persian word *spal*, "army."[22] It is highly likely that after the Suren takeover of Sistan, the Saka group became connected to the Suren, and this may explain the relationship between Vovones (Parthian) and his commanders (Saka). It is much more plausible to assume that the relationship between the two groups was a complicated one, perhaps created and buttressed through alliances,

17 Senior, *Indo-Scythian coins* 1:39.

18 Dobbins, *Śaka-Pahlava coinage* 68.

19 Tarn, *Greeks* 344.

20 Senior, *Indo-Scythian coins* 1:43; Fröhlich, *Monnaies Indo-scythes* 103.

21 von Hinüber, Zu einigen Iranischen Namen 643–58.

22 Falk, Names and titles 76.

which one could assume must have included inter-marriage between members of the two groups. The references in Indian literature to the Sakas and Parthians in this period are indeed so enmeshed with each other that one cannot justify labeling a dynasty as purely Parthian or Indo-Scythian.[23] Here I will jump a few steps ahead of the discussion, just to mention that there is evidence in the Sistani Cycle that substantiates this dual identity, for Rostam is both Parthian, *pahlav* or *pahlavān* – terms which in the context of epic literature mean "Parthian"[24] – as well Saka, a *sagzi*.[25]

Let me take a step back to offer a summary of what we know of the region's history up to the year 57 BCE, the only fixed date of the period. The succession struggles that followed Mithradates II's death (88 BCE) left the empire in turmoil for over thirty years, and from this period, known as the "Dark Age" of Parthian history, we have coins issued by a number of kings, about whose activities and extent of their power we still know little.[26] It is precisely in this period that Sistan gains an independent or semi-independent status, for the coinage attest to the existence of two rulers, Maues (98/85 BCE–60/57 BCE) and Vovones (75 BCE–57 BCE),[27] one predominantly in the east and one in the west, minting coins and giving themselves the title of king of kings.

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23 Mitra, *Śakas in India* 31.

24 For a discussion of these terms in the context of epic literature, see Pourshariati, Parthians 347–92.

25 *Shāhnāmeh*, 3:186; 3:187; 3:214 and 215; 3:225; 3:228; 3:232; 3:235; 3:238. Throughout the corpus of SCE, descendants of Rostam – for example his son Farāmarz and his great grandson Shahriyār – are also referred to as *sagzi*, see *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 201; *Shahriyārnāmeh* 48. It is important to note that in all instances quoted above the term *sagzi* is used as a derogatory designation, intending to ridicule the lowly pedigree of Rostam's house, while members of Rostam's house are self-identified as *pahlavāns* or Parthians. This indicates that members of this house became increasingly identified with their Parthian rather than Saka pedigree. Nevertheless, the identification of the lineage as Saka or *sagzi* continued to be known in the 19th century, even though the meaning of the term had become a mystery. In *Joqrāfiyā-ye Nimruz*, a geographical survey commissioned by the Qajar king, Nāser al-Din Shāh (1848–96), the author identifies two mountains in the region by the name *sagzi*, which he goes on to explain is the source of Rostam's epithet, *sagzi*, which was used to deride Rostam; see *Joghrāfiyā-ye Nimruz* 51–2.

26 The Parthian c. 95–57 BCE is the most confused period of the Parthian history from the last years of the reign of Mithradates II (ended c. 88 BCE) to 57 BCE, when Ordotes II consolidated the empire.

27 Once again, keep in mind that dates are not exact but approximations. Also as mentioned previously, Vovones co-ruled with his commanders.

The next major ruler of the region, Azes, is thought to have assumed the throne in 57 BCE and is traditionally identified as the founder of the "Indo-Scythian" dynasty. Now Azes minted coins jointly with Spalirises, one of Vovone's commanders. This has led some to speculate that Azes was Spalirises's son.[28] Although the data at our disposal is simply not adequate for one to ascertain this conjecture, it is significant that Azes and Spalirises are somehow connected; this connection, which is proclaimed publicly on their jointly issued coins, problematizes the notion of an appearance of a new dynasty with Azes as its first ruler. Aside from the relationship between Azes and Spalirises, there is yet another conjecture concerning Azes and the next ruler appearing on the coins, Azilises. It has been suggested that Azes was Azilises's father, and there are several mints on which their names appear jointly. What is certain, however, is that Azes managed to unite the western territories held by Vovones and his commanders and the eastern territories held by Maues. Furthermore, contemporary to Azes's coins, we have a great number of other coins belonging to local dynasties, princes, and 'satraps', especially in the east of the region. It appears that some of these eastern territories had become independent upon Azes's demise. The only fixed date of these series of rulers is the beginning of Azes's reign, i.e. 57 BCE, and beyond this date, everything else, including the order of succession of the rulers, their relationship with each other and to their 'satraps,' is based on conjecture.[29]

Before continuing with the history of the region based on numismatic evidence, let us return to the literary sources for the Parthian history, for although they are silent on eastern affairs, they offer us invaluable information that demonstrate the great sphere of influence of the Suren family. From among the contenders to power who entered the succession struggles in the aftermath of Mithradates II's death, two figures are of particular interest to us. One is the better known and documented Gotarzes I (95–90 BCE) of the Karen family, to whom we shall return later, and the second is Sinatruces.[30] The latter was

28 Dobbins, *Śaka-Pahlava coinage* 6.

29 A discussion of the different theories of the chronology of the "Indo-Scythian" kings and their implications for the history of the region is outside the scope of this work, and in the absence of consensus on basic determining factors for reconstruction of political history such as chronology, the order of succession, and the identity of rulers, it is virtually impossible to include a synopsis of the numismatic finds and their respective interpretation without venturing on a complex and lengthy discussion, which at this point would not enhance our understanding of the major problematic of this chapter.

30 Other spellings of his name are Sintricus, Sinatrocles and Sinatroces.

recalled around 70 BCE from his dwelling place among the Scythians to assume the Parthian throne.[31]

There seem to be definite links between the figure of Sinatruces and the region of Sistan and their Suren rulers. First, speculations have been made about his genealogy,[32] and it has been stated that he is almost certainly not of royal Arsacid origin. Furthermore, Classical sources report that he resided for some time among the Scythians.[33] This is the closest that we get to a geographical designation, and by the time it is mentioned, we know that the Scythio-Parthians had already established their independent kingdom in Sistan. I have mentioned the complicated relationship between the Parthian and the Sakas in that province, and given that the Classical sources were not well-informed on eastern affairs, it is not unlikely that the vague mention of Sinatruces's "exile" among the "Saka" was in fact a reference to the time he spent in the Suren-governed kingdom of Sistan.[34]

There are more connections between the Sakas and Sinatruces: the iconography of his coins reveals emblems generally associated with Saka art.[35] Additionally, Sinatruces was among a few early Parthian monarchs to adopt the title *theopator*. The only other Parthian kings who adopted the title were Sinatruces's son and grandson, Phraates III and Orodes II; furthermore this title is found exclusively on coins copied in Sistan and is entirely absent on their royal issues. The significance of this title remains to be explored; the exclusive appearance of it on Sinatruces' coins and later on coins of his descendants links him to the region of Sistan.[36] Recent research indicates that Sinatruces began issuing coins during the reign of Mithradates II and continued to do so after his death, simultaneous with various other contenders to the Arsacid throne. Furthermore, it has been asserted that Sinatruces's power base was the eastern realms of the Parthian Empire, while at the same time Gotarzes I held territories in the west.[37] All these details, scanty as they may be, serve to argue for the existence of Sinatruces' ties to the east and to Sistan. But what is the significance of this connection?

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31 Assar, Revised chronology 58.

32 Rawlinson, *Sixth great Oriental monarchy* 139.

33 Rawlinson, *Sixth great Oriental monarchy* 61.

34 Schipmann, *Grundzüge Der Parthischen Geschichte* 33, where the author makes the same speculation, namely that the location of Sinatruces' exile, which has vaguely been referred to as "among the Sakas," must have been the east Iranian province of Sistan.

35 Assar, Revised chronology 56–7.

36 Senior, *Indo-Scythian coins* 1:105

37 Assar, Revised chronology 56–7.

We can answer this question by exploring Sinatruces' link to Sistan further. We do know for certain that *all* descendants of Sinatruces enjoyed Suren support in varying degrees. As we shall see, the picture changes drastically after the Arsacid throne shifts out of Sinatruces' line with the enthronement of Artabanus II (10–38 CE).[38] It is then that, in an unprecedented move, the Suren withdraw their support from the Parthian monarch. I shall discuss this episode below, but for now let us return to Sinatruces and his immediate successors. Following Sinatruces on the throne was his son Phraates III. Phraates III was killed by his two sons Orodes II and Mithradates III. The act of patricide committed by Orodes and Mithradates initiated a lengthy struggle over the kingdom. The nobles, more specifically the Suren, as we shall see, rejected Mithradates III and installed Orodes II to power in 53 BCE, who in turn became powerful enough to consolidate various parts of the empire.

Soon after his accession, Orodes II faced a major challenge from the Roman front. It was in the same year, when Orodes finally managed to ascend the throne, that a Roman army led by General Licinus Crassus marched to Syria, entering Mesopotamia and defeating its Parthian Satrap, Silaces. The latter sent a missive to Orodes II, asking him for reinforcements. And this is where we encounter one of the two places where the family name Suren appears in the works of Classical authors.[39] The commander of the army sent by Orodes is identified by his family name of Surena and is described by Plutarch as follows:

> For Surena was no ordinary person: but in fortune, family and honour was the first after the king; and in point of courage and capacity, as well as size and beauty, superior to the Parthians of his time. If he went only on an excursion into the country, he had a thousand camels to carry his baggage, and two hundred carriages for his concubines. He was attended by a thousand heavy-armed horses, and many more of the light-armed rode before him. Indeed his vassals and slaves made up a body of cavalry little less than ten thousand. He had the hereditary privilege in his family of putting the diadem upon the king's head, when he was crowned. When Orodes was driven from the throne, he restored him; and it was he who conquered for him the great city of Seleucia, being the first to scale the wall and beating off the enemy with his own hand. Though he was

38 See Figure 1 for the genealogical chart of the Arsacid family.

39 For a complete list of references of classical sources to the battle of Carrhae, see Karrass-Klapproth, *Prosopographische Studien* 165–71.

> not then thirty years old, his discernment was strong, and his counsel esteemed the best.[40]

Several points from this much cited passage must be highlighted. First, the Surena was almost certainly the head of the Suren family. In his influence and power, the Surena is said to have been only second to the Parthian king, making him one of the most powerful figures in the Parthian Empire. As a matter of fact, from this passage we can gather that he is a king in his own right, as he travels with what is unmistakably a courtly retinue. Next the passage informs us that the Surena had previously supported Orodes during the succession struggles with his brother Mithradates. Here we have evidence of the Suren involvement in the affairs of the Parthian Empire, actively supporting and in effect installing their candidate on the throne. Next comes the crucial information about the hereditary privilege of the Suren family to crown the king. As we shall see below, this piece of information supplied by Plutarch has been instrumental in the identification of the Surena with Rostam. A number of scholars beginning with Marquart[41] to Herzfeld[42] to Bivar[43] to Shahbazi[44] have recognized in the Surena of Carrhae some of the defining characteristics of Rostam.

Significant for our present discussion is that in the year 54 BCE, after almost 35 years of succession struggles, the Parthian Empire was once again consolidated by Orodes II, who came to power with the support of the Suren. Plutarch also informs us of the famous Surena's fate: having aroused Orodes's "jealousy", the unfortunate Surena is executed. The execution of the Surena takes place shortly after the battle of Carrhae; therefore, this event can be dated to 54 or at the latest to 53 BCE.[45] The execution of the Surena must have strained the relationship between the Arsacid royal house and the Suren for some time; however, the literary sources fail to provide additional information.

Let us return to the numismatic evidence procured from the region of Sistan. Around the same time the Arsacid-Suren relationship deteriorated we encounter a symbol on coins from the region of Sistan. In the middle of the first century BCE, a number of royal countermarked Parthian coins were being circulated in Sistan and among the countermarks etched on them, one finds the

40 Plutarch, *Crassus* 21.6. Quoted in Bivar, Political history 51–2.

41 Marquart, Beitrage zur Geschichte 628–72.

42 Herzfeld, *Sakastan* 115–16.

43 Bivar, Gondophares and the Shāhnāma 141–50.

44 Shahbazi, Parthian origin 155–63.

45 Plutarch, *Selected lives* 280.

Gondopharid symbol.[46] The Gondopharid symbol appears on all coins associated with the "Indo-Parthian" dynasty[47] founded by Gondophares, whose rise to power is dated to 19/20 CE. The appearance of the Gondopharid symbol as a countermark on Orodes II's regal coins in the middle of the first century BCE is therefore puzzling. After all, if this was a symbol of the "Indo-Parthian" dynasty whose founder is dated to the year 19 CE, why does it appear some 70 years earlier as a countermark on the coins of the Parthian king? Assuming that this symbol was the emblem of the "Indo-Parthian" dynasty, Senior attempts to resolve this seeming anachronism by pushing back the date of Gondophares's reign to 45–20 BCE. However, the new chronology proposed by Senior creates several new non-resolvable problems of chronology and has thus been rejected.[48] Therefore, the problem of the appearance of the Gondopharid symbol as early as the middle of the first century BCE as countermarks on royal Parthian coins remains unresolved.

But what if we consider the symbol a symbol of the house of Suren in general, rather than belonging to a particular branch of the Surens who are known to the numismatists as the Gondopharids or the ' "Indo-Parthians?" Were this the case, would it not be natural for there to be a reaction on the part of Suren to the execution of the head of their family and the ruler of the region? The countermarks with the Gondopharid symbol appearing around the middle of the first century BCE could be interpreted as a declaration of the Surens' break with the Parthian king. There is another argument for the consideration of the Gondopharid symbol as the icon representing the Suren family, because if we assume that it is so, yet another riddle is solved: the symbol continues to appear on Sasanian coins up to the reign of Shahpur II (309–379 CE), long after the disappearance of the Gondopharid "Indo-Parthian" dynasty.[49]

Let us shift back to the discussion of the local rulers of the region and pick up the thread of the discussion of the numismatic evidence. As mentioned previously, the names of the rulers appearing in the region are that of Azes and Azilises followed by Gondophares. Most numismatists studying the coinage of this region agree that there existed more than one king by the name of Azes, followed at some time by Azilises.[50] At least according to one interpreta-

46 Senior, *Indo-Scythian* 1:105; the symbol is visible on the Gondophares coin depicted on the cover.

47 See below for more on the Indo-Parthian dynasty.

48 Fröhlich, *Monnaies Indo-scythes* 1:109.

49 Senior, *Indo-Scythian* 1:127, note 5.

50 Dobbins, *Śaka-Pahlava* 40–5; Fröhlich, *Monnaies Indo-scythes* 28–33. Senior rejects this, partly due to his proposed dating of Gondophares; he claims that Gondophares followed

tion of the data at hand, there were struggles in the western part of the region (of greater Sistan) between the region's ruler and the Parthian king sometime prior to Gondophares's assumption of the throne. The western part of the region could have been invaded during these struggles, during which Azilises may have lost his life.[51] The "Indo-Parthian" dynasty, therefore, was established in the aftermath of a rebellion, which was followed by an Arsacid invasion of the region.[52]

Next, we have Gondophares, perhaps the best-known ruler among all the "Indo-Scythian" and "Indo-Parthian" kings. Gondophares's fame is partially due to the fact that he is mentioned by Thomas, the Christian "apostle to India," who mentions a king by the name of Gudnaphar who purchased him as a slave.[53] Gondophares had a long reign, which most agree falls between the years 19/20 and 46 CE. The new numismatic finds indicate that there were multiple kings who bore the name Gondophares, and thus there remains little doubt that this indeed was an epithet and not a personal name. As a matter of fact, the epithet is the Middle Persian rendition of the Old Persian *vindafarna*, which appears in Darius I's Bisotun inscription to describe one of his six companions.[54]

As it turns out, around the time Gondophares assumed the throne in Sistan the genealogical line of the Arsacids was shifted from descendants of Sinatruces to Artabanus II (r. 10–38 CE).[55] According to Tacitus, Artabanus II was an Arsacid on his mother's side, and this is cited as the reason for the nobles' objection to him.[56] That Artabanus was not an acceptable choice is apparent from the several attempts of the nobles to reinstate a prince from the Sinatruces' line: first they chose Phraates, the last and youngest son of Phraates IV who had lived at the Roman court. But Phraates died

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Azes immediately, and that Azes II was invented to fill the misconceived gap between Azes I and Gondophares; see Senior, *Indo-Scythian* 1:66.

51 Dobbins, *Śaka-Pahlava* 43. Dobbins' argument is constructed on what he refers to as the disturbance of the coinage system in the eastern realms of the region, which he speculates to have been a result of a war in the western realms of Sakastan and Arachosia.

52 Ibid. 85.

53 Bivar, Gondophares and the Shāhnāma.

54 Herzfeld, Sakastan 110; Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch* 368–9. The two occurrences of the name refer to Darius I's companion and later the Gondopharid dynasty. The name itself means one who finds his *farr*, and it is not unlikely that adopting this name was an attempt on the part of the Suren to connect themselves to a person or a genealogical line going all the way back to the Achaemenid period.

55 For the genealogical chart of the Arsacid family see Figure 1.

56 Tacitus, *Annals* book 6, 189.

suddenly after his arrival in Syria. When this first attempt failed, the nobles turned to Tiridates III, a grandson of Phraates IV, once again from the line of Sinatruces. Tiridates, supported by the Romans and the Parthian nobility, revolted against Artabanus II, and it is in the narration of his revolt that we encounter the family name Suren for the second time.[57] This time the name Suren, or Surena, is supplied with the personal name Abdagases. When the nobles gathered in an assembly to swear allegiance to Tiridates, the Surena was called upon, and "the Surena, to the approval of the many who were present, wreathed Tiridates with the royal insignia according to the ancestral custom."[58] Here we have yet another reference to the hereditary privilege of coronation, which belonged exclusively to the head of the house of Suren. Abdagases the Suren seems to be the most important figure among the Parthian nobility, for he is the one summoned to spearhead the coronation, and the significance granted to him by the Parthian nobility brings to mind the status of the Surena of Carrhae, who according to Plutarch was second only to the Parthian king. Shortly after the coronation, Tacitus reports, some of the nobles withdrew their support from Tiridates, for they feared that should he be able to assume the throne, power and influence over all affairs of the empire would fall into the hands of the Suren, headed by Abdagases. The unidentified nobles therefore sent for Artabanus with the promise to restore him to power. Artabanus naturally questioned their motives for wanting to reinstate him to power after having plotted to depose him, and in response, the nobles, "complain about Tiridates' boyhood, his Roman softness, which made him unwarlike, while *power rested in the house of* Abdagases."[59] Shortly after this, Tacitus informs us that Abdagases and his son Sinnacus withdrew their support from Tiridates, who was abandoned in Syria and was not heard from again.[60] If we juxtapose our two sets of sources, namely the numismatic evidence and the literary sources, it becomes apparent that the break with the royal Arsacid house occurred after the enthronement of Artabanus II. His struggle to consolidate his power, which preoccupied him throughout his reign, coupled with the Suren's animosity towards him, allowed for Sistan to break away from the Parthian Empire and declare independence. This coincides with the rise of the Gondopharid dynasty in Sistan. Gondophares' rise to power is dated to 19/20 CE, which is nine years into the reign of Artabanus II. Astonishingly, the first coins of Artabanus II are from the year

57 Debevoise, *Political history* 157–8.

58 Tacitus, *Annals* 185.

59 Ibid., emphasis is mine.

60 Ibid. 190.

19 CE, which coincides precisely with Gondophares's assumption of the throne in Sistan, where he minted coins on which he gave himself the epithet of *autokrato*.[61] The episode of Tiridates' revolt and the Suren support of it (36 CE) underlines the alliances of the house of Suren with Sinatruces' descendants: it was the Suren's last attempt to return someone belonging to Sinatruces' line to the Arsacid throne. When this plot failed, there was a break between the two families.

Once again, let us return to the numismatic evidence regarding the Gondopharid dynasty. As mentioned above, the reign of Gondophares, the founder of the dynasty, is dated to 19/20–46 CE. If there is any agreement on the part of the numismatists[62] regarding the date, chronology, and ruler's kinship, this is where it ends. Next we have a series of rulers with different arrangements of their reign and chronologies attached to them. Hence, we have Orthanges, Gondophares Sām,[63] Ubouzanes,[64] Abdagases, Sanabares, Pacores, and in some instances there is more than one king by the same name. According to some,[65] Abdagases I – it is generally agreed there were two kings by this name – was Gondophares' nephew and succeeded him, and if so, it is likely that the Abdagases of Tactius' *Annals* is the same person as the Indo-Parthian king Abdagases. This likelihood has been expressed by some,[66] but because of the nature of the numismatic evidence this identification is not conclusive. What is certain, however, is that the name Abdagases only occurred in these two instances, both of which are linked with the family of Suren and the region of Sistan, and is otherwise unattested.[67]

At the conclusion of this discussion on all the evidence pertaining to the kingdom of Sistan in the period from around the first century BCE to the first century CE, I would like to once again point out that the geographical domain I have been referring to throughout as "the region" or Sistan in fact comprises different centers of power: Drangiana, Arachosia, Ghadhara, and Punjab.

61 Herzfeld, *Sakastan* 101–2.

62 As mentioned earlier, Senior does not agree with this dating, but the earlier date he proposed has been rejected.

63 For a discussion on an alternate reading of this family name please refer to the section "The Rostam and Suren Families" below.

64 The name of this king was recently added to the Indo-Parthian rulers, see Alram, Pahlavas: Hybouzanes 69–74.

65 Alram, Indo-Parthian 39; Brunner, Abdagases 145.

66 Brunner, Abdagases; Bivar, Gondophares and the Shāhnāma 145; Senior, *Indo-Scythian* 1:113. Because of his drastically different chronology, Senior speculates that it must have been Abdagases II.

67 Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch* 1; Ginioux, *Personennamenbuch* 23.

At the height of its power, therefore, the Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian dynasties ruled over large parts of the Indian subcontinent. As a matter of fact, Indian historians have traditionally viewed the period between 200 BCE to 300 CE as one characterized by invasions of hoards from Bactria, Parthia and "Turkestan," various groups pouring across the north-western frontier.[68] Indian historians with nationalist inclinations have gone so far as coining the period as India's Dark Age, a notion that recent scholarship has questioned seriously.[69] The dominion of Scythio-Parthians, whose base was the region of Sistan, falls within this period of Indian history. There is much more to be said if we are to examine the Parthian/Suren presence in India from the traces they left behind in the subcontinent; however, such investigation clearly deserves a detailed study of its own. Here, I would like to mention briefly that at least one of the prominent dynasties established in the second century CE in India seems to have been founded by one of the Indo-Parthians. There is indeed evidence that the Pallava dynasty of Southern India (2–9th centuries CE) was established by none other than one of the prominent figures who belonged to the ruling elite of the Sistan province.[70] It is needless to say that this is of great significance, especially since the memory of the presence of the members of the Indo-Parthian/Surens in the southern regions of the Indian subcontinent is preserved in the SCE, as we shall see.

The entire expanse of the territories under the dominion of various Scythio-Parthian rulers was of course changed over the two hundred year period in question. The Scythio-Parthian kingdom shrank and grew as a result of conquests and alliances forged with local Indian rulers. This obviously complicates the picture, making the reconstruction of a simple outline of events even more challenging. What we do know for sure is that towards the end of the first century the territories under the dominion of the Parthian/Suren kingdom of Sistan became restricted to the western half of their kingdom.[71] Eventually, the Indo-Parthian/Suren kingdom was attacked by the nascent Kushana kingdom. Recent numismatic evidence indicates that the Indo-Parthians/Surens did not

68 Keay, *India* 201.

69 Ibid.

70 The connection between the Pallavas and the Parthians was first argued by Venkayya, Annual report 1906–7, 217–43. The notion of the "foreign origin" of an important dynasty was resisted by Indian scholarship for some time; however more evidence has accumulated, making Venkayya's thesis more credible. For example, see V. Ayyar, A new link 11–16; For a summary of the arguments regarding the provenance of the Pallava dynasty of India see the first chapter of Minakshi, *Administration*.

71 Fröhlich, Indo-Parthian dynasty 70; Alram, Indo-Parhian 42.

vanish from the scene as a result of the Kushana attack. The Indo-Parthians retained a much smaller territory centered in the province of Sistan until the fall of the Parthian empire.[72]

The Suren family continued to exercise political power long after the advent of the Sasanians. As mentioned earlier, the Gondopharid symbol, the emblem of the Suren (or a branch of the Suren) family, appeared on coins up until the reign of Shahpur II (309–379 CE). Even after the Sasanians installed their governor of the region, coins continued to be minted in the "Indo-Parthian" style.[73]

The Suren family continued to be powerful after the fall of the Parthian empire. In her groundbreaking work, Parvaneh Pourshariati examines the role of this (and other) noble families at various junctures of the history of the Sasanian dynasty.[74] The Surens had been, from the time of the rise of Ardashir I (224–241 CE), the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, allies and supporters of the Sasanians.[75] There are individuals on the monumental inscriptions of Shahpur I, as well as Shahpur II's Paikuli inscriptions, with the propatronym Suren.[76] It is not until the reign of Yazdgird I (399–420 CE), however, that we have a clear picture of their involvement and their great sphere of influence in the affairs of the Sasanian court. According to Pourshariati, between the years of 399 and 457 the Surens' extensive powers are corroborated by all of the sources.[77] The Suren, in addition to their extensive involvement in the Sasanian military, "had a central hold over the administration, military, and treasury of the realm, not to mention the leadership of the clergy in Fars."[78]

The close relationship between the Suren and the Sasanian court, Pourshariati goes on to argue, can at least be partly attributed to the proximity of Suren's traditional seat of Sistan to Fars, the home territory of the Sasanians. Perhaps the emergence of two distinct branches of the Suren family, the Suren Parsig and Suren Pahlav (attested by Armenian sources), can be viewed in

72 Alram, Indo-Parthian 42–4.

73 Shahbazi, Ardashir Skansah; Senior, *Indo-Scythian* 1:105, n. 5; Fröhlich, Indo-Parthian dynasty.

74 Pourshariati, *Decline and fall*.

75 Ibid. 60–2.

76 For a list of all appearances of persons with the name Suren during the Sasanian period see Gignoux, Nom propers sassanides, entry 160.

77 Ibid. 61. The sources are discussed in depth in the section 2.2. Yazdgird I, Bahram-i Gur, Yazdgird II/the Surens.

78 Ibid. 63.

light of the close cooperation of the two families.[79] Pourshariati provides yet another crucial piece of evidence regarding the affairs of the province, which helps link the Suren family to Sistan. In the late Sasanian period, at crucial junctures in Sasanian history, there is a mention of the army of Nimruz[80] in the *Shāhnāmeh* as well as Ṭabarī's account of the Sasanians. The Nimruz or Sistani faction had a hand in Khosrow II's deposition and was called on to reinforce the Sasanian army during the Arab invasion. The presence of a distinct and powerful faction with its own army located in Sistan has led to the conjecture that it was led by the Suren family.[81]

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What I hope to have established thus far is the existence of the Scythio-Parthian kingdom on the eastern fringes of the Parthian Empire in the aftermath of the Saka invasion of the region. While initially the Saka and Parthian elements were equally present as identifying factors on the coins of various rulers, the relationship between the two ethnic groups is complex and definitely could not have been mutually exclusive. Eventually, it seems the Parthian element became more dominant, at least as far as the self-identification of the rulers is concerned. The Parthians of Sistan, however, are not royal Arsacids, and as discussed, all evidence points to the fact that the Parthian rulers of the kingdom of Sistan in the first century CE belonged to the noble Parthian family of Suren. Coins attesting to the reign of major "Indo-Parthian" rulers of the region are extant until the beginning of the second century CE. In spite of the Sasanian invasion of the region by Ardashir Pāpakān, there is evidence of the continued power and influence of the Suren family, both in the region as well as at the center of the Sasanian court.

1.2 The Ruling Family in Sistan in Ancient Times

As we have seen, the region was governed by its own indigenous polity that must have left behind some traces. The political autonomy (or semi-autonomy) must have had other implications, such as the existence of a unique regional identity with its specific cultural production, and this is the case with the literary works composed in and about the province. In addition to the SCE,

79 Ibid. 64.

80 Nimruz means south and is another name for Sistan.

81 Pourshariati, *Decline and fall* 155–6.

we have at our disposal local histories of Sistan composed after the advent of Islam. Before proceeding to examine the content and significance of the local histories of Sistan, however, it is useful to say a few words about the local historiography of Iran.

Studies of local historiography have raised many questions as to how this genre of historical writing can be defined and classified. The difficulty of the task of arriving at an all-encompassing definition is rooted in the variety of topics and perspectives represented in the local histories of Iran.[82] The local histories include descriptions of physical features of the locality and its distinctive virtues (*faẓā'el*), foundation narratives and myths, biographies of local notables, and accounts of the first mosques and other monuments that have been constructed or endowed at different times, as well as dynastic, political history. None of the surviving local histories contain all the aforementioned elements, and hence the difficulty of defining it as a uniform genre. The solution for some has therefore been to abandon the rubric of genre in order to find other ways to describe it. For instance, Humphreys describes the local histories as being focus-determined, the focus being the geographical parameters, and hence the works are governed by a sense of space rather than time or topic.[83] Alternatively, Lambton, in her survey of local histories, observes that it is misleading to generalize both the contents of such histories and the particular circumstances in which they were written, concluding that "each region and each town must be looked at individually."[84] Therefore, it is clear that, other than a regional focus, the local histories do not contain either structural or thematic uniformity that would enable one to speak about a genre of local historiography. It cannot be denied, however, that in the broadest of terms they can be described as being preoccupied with establishing or defining aspects of regional identity. Therefore, the choice of content of local histories indeed reveals something about how the region attempted to define itself. If that indeed is the case, what are the defining features of Sistan's local histories? The answer to this question is rather evident, for the main preoccupation of the local histories of Sistan is to narrate a continuous, seamless political history of the region from its founding by the great hero Garshāsp up to each author's time.

82 For a discussion of the secondary sources on local historiography, see Melville, Persian local histories 7–14.

83 Humphreys, Ta'rikh (b) 10:277–8.

84 Lambton, Persian local histories 227–38.

The extant local histories of Sistan are *Tārikh-e Sistān* and *Eḥyā' al-moluk*.[85] One of the earliest specimens of prose in New Persian, the former is the work of at least two unknown authors. The first author completed his work some time around 1053 CE. There is a lacuna from 1062 CE covering seventeen years, and then the narration is picked up in a distinctively different style from the main body of *Tārikh-e Sistān*. Like *Tārikh-e Sistān Eḥyā' al-moluk*, the other extant local history of Sistan, is largely a dynastic history. As a matter of fact, *Eḥyā' al-moluk* picks up the historical narrative where *Tārikh-e Sistān* leaves off, i.e. in the early 14th century. The unique surviving manuscript of the work identifies its author as Malek Shāh Ḥusayn b. Malek Ghiyāth al-Din Moḥammad b. Shāh Malek Moḥammad Sistani. He belonged to one of the great families of Sistan and claimed to be a descendant of the Saffarids.[86] The work was completed in 1619 CE at the Safavid capital of Isfahan. It is important to note that there have been many more local histories of Sistan that have not survived, mainly due to the post-Safavid decline of the region. We know this because Malek Shāh Ḥusayn, the author of *Eḥyā' al-moluk*, enumerates their titles when mentioning other histories of Sistan.[87] The contents of these histories are unknown and their authors are largely not identified. Among these local histories of Sistan is one in Arabic by Abu ʿAbdallāh, which was translated into Persian by Abu Moḥammad, and two other Persian ones, one of which was composed by Malek Shāh Ḥusayn's maternal grandfather or ancestor (*jadd*).[88]

The region of Sistan, therefore, had a prolific historiographical production aimed at producing mainly political histories of the region. Bosworth observed this unique characteristic of *Tārikh-e Sistān* and coined it a secular history because, unlike works composed in other regions, the authors of *Tārikh-e Sistān* were not concerned with offering the names and stories of the region's religious scholars, the Companions of the Prophet, the building of the first mosque or other religious endowments.[89] Furthermore, I might add,

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85 For a detailed discussion of the two local histories, see Bosworth, Sistan and its local histories 31–43.

86 The Saffarids (867–1002) were the first of the independent dynasties to assume provincial power after the Arab conquest of Iran. For more on the Saffarids, see Bosworth, *The history*.

87 See the discussions of Malek Shāh Ḥusayn's sources in the editor's introduction to *Eḥyā' al-molūk* 17.

88 Ibid.

89 Bosworth, Sistan and its local histories. I do not think, however, that "secular history" is the best description of Sistan's local histories, because describing them as secular would imply that local histories from other regions are exclusively concerned with religious affairs, which is not the case; they are best described as dynastic, i.e. political histories.

most other local histories do not attempt to establish such continuous and independent historical narratives. The only region whose production of local histories parallels Sistan is the region of Ṭabarestān.[90] Given the geo-political position of Ṭabarestān, and the fact that it too had enjoyed autonomous rule for many centuries, it comes as no surprise that histories of that region, like Sistan's histories, would attempt to anchor their historical narratives as independent, albeit parallel, to that of Iran's history.[91]

But where and how does the history of our region begin? Of great significance to us is that according to the local histories of Sistan, the region was founded by Garshāsp, the ancestor of Rostam's family. Here is yet another distinguishing feature of local histories of Sistan: unlike other local histories that attribute the founding of their region to one of the kings from Iran's National History, be they from the Pishdādi, the Kayānid or Sasanian dynasties,[92] the local histories of Sistan have their own independent line of kings and heroes.

Sistan's history begins with Garshāsp, whose genealogy is traced back to Kayumarth, the first human-king in the Iranian national tradition.[93] Next in line comes Narimān, Garshāsp's nephew, followed by Sām, followed by Dastān (Zāl), followed by Rostam and Farāmarz.[94] The line of the region's rulers continues to remain within the family up until the time of Khosrow II (590–628 CE). At this time, according to *Tārikh-e Sistān*, Bakhtiyār from the house of Rostam, whose genealogy is traced all the way to Garshāsp, was

90 The region of Ṭabarestān has the most prolific and continuous body of local histories, the last of which was written in the late 19th century. For a survey of Ṭabarestān's local histories, see Melville, Persian local histories. For a fascinating discussion of local dynasties of Ṭabarestān after the Arab conquest see Pourshariati, *Decline and fall* 287–316.

91 When the narrations are concerned with the pre-conquest era, the local events narrated are linked to Iran's National History because that was the predominant mode of historiography for that period.

92 For instance Ṭabarestān was founded by Fereidun Ebn Esfandiyār, *Tārikh-e Ṭabarestān* 56–7, while Bayhaq (modern-day Sabzevār) was founded by Bahman, Ebn Fondoq, *Tārikh-e Bayhaq* 30. Qom was founded by an otherwise unknown son of Lohrāsp by the name of Qamsāreh, Qomi, *Tārikh-e Qom* 23. Nishapur was founded by Iraj, son of Fereidun, and later on rebuilt and expanded by the Sasanian king Shahpur, who named the city after himself, Nayshāburi, *Tārikh-e Nayshābur* 196–8. The city of Bokhārā, while founded by the Turānian king Afrāsiyāb, bears hallmarks that attest to the presence of Kay Khosrow and his father, Siāvush, Narkhashi, *Tārikh-e Bokhārā* 23, and the city of Yazd was founded by the Sasanian king Yazdgird II Ja'fari, *Tārikh-e Yazd* 29.

93 *Tārikh-e Sistān* 2; see Figure 2 for Garshāsp's genealogy. For the discussion of how he was given this particular genealogy, see chapter 2.

94 *Tārikh-e Sistān* 6–7.

the ruler of the region.[95] When Sistan faced the onslaught of the Arab armies, the Sistani military commander was Bakhtiyār's grandson, a person by the name of Rostam b. Āzādkhu.[96]

One might ask how the *Tārikh-e Sistān* narrates the region's pre-conquest past. The pre-conquest history of the region is nothing but the tale of the uninterrupted power of Rostam's family as rulers of the region. *Tārikh-e Sistān* regards the stories contained in the SCE as the sources for the pre-conquest history of the region. Therefore, beginning with Garshāsp, the anonymous author provides a synopsis of *Ketāb-e Garshāsp*, composed by Abu'l-Mo'ayyad al-Balkhi, one of the now extinct prose sources for the *Garshāspnāmeh* of 'Asadi Ṭusi, and continues to either offer a synopsis of stories of Rostam, Farāmarz and Bakhtiyār or refer the reader to the book where the stories are narrated at great length.[97]

As expected, the approach of the other local history of the region towards its pre-Islamic past is the same: all kings in pre-Islamic times came from Rostam's family and their stories are in fact nothing but the history of the region. Malek Shāh Ḥusayn, the author of *Eḥyā' al-moluk*, is even more conscious of the role of the stories of Rostam's family as the histories of the region's past. In order to provide a seamless narrative of the region's history from its founding to present, he organizes most of the sections that do not fit into his chronological framework, such as the wonder stories or the prophetic stories, into a preface.

Hence, *Eḥyā' al-moluk*'s historical narrative begins with the story of Garshāsp, followed by references and stories of his progeny.[98] The author attempts to fill in the gap when it comes to Rostam's family's reign by including episodes that were left out of other works. Malek Shāh Ḥusayn was faced with an additional problem of the disappearance of many of the separate volumes that narrated these stories such as the great *Shāhnāmeh* of Abu'l-Mo'ayyad or the twelve-

95 Ibid. 8.

بختیار بن شاه فیروز بن بزوی بن شیراوژن بن خدایکان بن فرخ به بن ماه خدای بن فیروز بن کردآفرین بن پهلوان بن اسپهبد بن مهرآزاد بن رستم ابن بولاد بن کان آزاد مرد بن رستم بن جهرآزاد بن نیروسنج بن فرخ به بن دادآفرین ابن سام بن به آفرید بن هوشنگ بن فرامرز بن رستم الاکبر بن دستان بن سام بن نریمان بن کورنگ بن گرشاسب

96 Ibid. 9.

97 *Tārikh-e Sistān* 4–9.

98 *Eḥyā' al-moluk* 23–4.

volume *Farāmarznāmeh* mentioned in *Tārikh-e Sistān*.[99] Hence, the author feels the urgency to include them in his historical narrative. For instance, he gives the following reason for why he chose to include the story of Kok-e Kuhzād in his work:

چون ناظم مناظم تاریخ عجم ، فردوسی طوسی علیه الرحمه، اعتقادی بقصه کوك ندارد و احوال او در شاهنامه نشده ، لکن این قصه در سیستان مشهورست ونسخه ای به زبان فرس و پهلوی درآن باب مطالعه شده، ازنقل آن ناگزیراست اما به صحت آن اعتقاد ندارد.

> Since the poet of Iranian history, Ferdowsi of Ṭus (may God have mercy upon his soul), did not believe [in the authenticity] of the story of Kuk, his adventures have not been recorded in the *Shāhnāmeh*. However, this story is famous in Sistan, and I have studied a manuscript of the story in (new Persian) and another in Pahlavi, and therefore, even though I doubt its authenticity, I am obliged to relate it here.[100]

The author then proceeds to narrate this story and many episodes of various epics such as the *Borzunāmeh* and the *Farāmarznāmeh* as well as the story of Āzarborzin, Farāmarz's son preserved in the *Bahmannāmeh*. Following the story of Āzarborzin, the author of *Eḥyā' al-moluk* gives us a list of rulers of Sistan who followed him, all of whom are his descendants or otherwise related to his family. He continues this list until he reaches the time of Khosrow II, which coincides with the reign of Bakhtiyār in Sistan.[101] This is the most complete list of the rulers of Sistan, and most of the names of the rulers that appear after Āzarborzin are not to be found in any other source.[102]

There remains no doubt that the local histories of the region remembered the family of Rostam as the ruler of Sistan. The stories or histories of the times prior to the Arab conquest, they insist, were widely circulated in written form as well as passed down orally. What has survived from this corpus of stories/

99 Both of these were prose sources of the SCE. For a discussion of these and other sources of the SCE, see Gazerani, Old garment.

100 *Eḥyā' al-moluk* 26.

101 Ibid. 46–7.

102 Ibid. 45–7.

histories reappears in the extant form of the SCE, which are precisely stories of Rostam's family, stories that were clearly viewed as histories of the region.

In what I have presented so far, however, there seems to be a gap. The discussion of the history of the region during the Parthian period revealed that political power rested with the Parthian family of the Suren. Furthermore, as mentioned above, we know that during the Sasanian period the same Suren continued to exert power over the region as well as in the Sasanian court. The local histories, whose aim is to provide a seamless history of the region, however, identify the ruling family as the family of Rostam, with Garshāsp as their great ancestor. The gap to be bridged here concerns the identity of the two families. Are the families of Suren and Rostam one and the same?

1.3 The Family of Suren, the Family of Rostam

Attempts to identify these two families have been undertaken by several scholars, and as we shall see over time, the evidence has accumulated. The first scholar to take a crucial step in this direction was Marquart, who argued that the character of Rostam bears traces of both the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares and the ancient (Avestan) myth of Garshāsp.[103] As we recall, the first person documented as bearing the family name Suren is Surena of Carrhae. In his description, Plutarch informs us that the prerogative of coronation belonged to the family of the Surena. This indeed was the most important clue to scholars who argued for the identification of Rostam as the Surena of Carrhae. In Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, it has been observed, Rostam carries the epithet of *tāj-bakhsh*, or crown-bestower. Both Nöldeke and Christensen, however, rejected Marquart's thesis, citing the dissimilarities between the legend of Garshāsp and that of Rostam and the lack of evidence connecting Rostam to the Parthians.[104] Lack of evidence may have been a valid argument at the time when they made their speculations, but since then clues have been accumulating, as we shall see, which leave no doubt about the Parthian context of the stories of Rostam and his family. Marquart's thesis was resurrected and substantially enhanced by the archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld, who linked the remains of the palace and temple complex of Kuh-e Khwājeh in Sistan to Rostam, who Herzfeld claimed was "identical to Gondophares."[105] Herzfeld, who was the second archaeologist to visit the Kuh-e Khwājeh complex, dated

103 Marquart, Beitrage zur Geschichte 628–72.

104 Nöldeke, *Iranian national epic* 10; Christensen, *Les Kayanids* 135–7.

105 Herzfeld, *Sakastan* 114.

the structure to the first century BCE. This dating is of utmost significance, for it coincides with the zenith of the Indo-Parthian/Suren power in Sistan as established in the first section of this chapter. Herzfeld informs us that when he visited it in 1929 local people referred to it as Rostam's citadel (Qal'eh-ye Rostam).[106] A more recent and refined archaeological survey of the site confirmed the existence of six levels of the structure, with the oldest dating to the Achaemenid period, hence confirming the existence of the Parthian and Sasanian layers identified by Herzfeld.[107] A further attempt at the dating of the structure was undertaken by Ghanimati as a part of her doctoral dissertation in the 1990s. She collected samples of the structures that she then subjected to carbon (C14) testing, according to which the oldest layer of the structure dated to (80–240 CE +/– 50 years).[108] This makes the dating of the bulk of the structure and its exceptional wall-paintings to the first century CE highly likely. In any case, the combination of archaeological and numismatic evidence from the region leaves little doubt that the structure must have been built by member(s) of the Parthian/Suren dynasty, either Gondophares or one of his more powerful successors such as Abdagases I.

As Herzfeld has observed, local tradition attributes the construction of the complex to Rostam. Actually, within the confines of the complex, in addition to the palace and the temple, there is a pilgrimage site, which the locals refer to it as the Suren's resting place.[109] To provide further evidence for the identification of the Surens with Rostam's family, Herzfeld attempted to identify a certain name mentioned in Mithradates II's Bisotun inscriptions. The name in question is that of a prince and a vassal king, Kaufasata or Kohsad. In the body of the SCE, there is a story of Rostam's battle with a demon by the name of Kok-e Kuhzād, whose story the author of *Eḥyā' al-moluk* mentions in his work. Herzfeld postulates that Kohsād might have been an actual historical character, whose conflict with the ruling house has survived in the story.[110] Interestingly enough, one of the citadels of the Kuh-e Khwājeh complex is the citadel of Kok-e Kuhzād.[111]

While this concludes the evidence that Herzfeld provided to link the family of Rostam to the Parthian/Surens of the region, there are additional clues

106 Herzfeld, *Sakastan* 115–16.

107 Kawami, Becker and Koestler, Kuh-e Khwaja, Iran 15.

108 Ghanimati, Kuh-e Khwāja; Ghanimati, New perspectives 137–50.

109 Bahrami, Kuh-e Khawajeh.

110 Ibid. 79–80.

111 Bahrami, Kuh-e Khawajeh. In 2005 this particular citadel was registered by Miras-e Farhangi.

from Kuh-e Khwājeh that, in my opinion, help buttress the claim of the identification of the family of Rostam with that of Suren. There are elements from the paintings that adorned the palace walls of the citadel that mirror details from stories of Rostam's family as preserved in the Sistani cycle. In one of the paintings the hero, while painted in a Greek style, lacks any emblems associated with a Greek hero (such as the lion-skin, a club, or a cup). Instead, he holds an ox-headed mace,[112] a weapon carried by Rostam and a number of other *Shāhnāmeh* characters.[113] There is yet another figure that has left archaeologists astonished and in want of a plausible explanation: a mace-bearing female figure. Depictions of armed female figures are extremely rare in ancient Iranian art, with the exception of a few pictorial representations of the Greek goddesses Athena and Artemis during the Parthian period, both of whom carry a bow. As scarce as the depiction of female warriors are, there are no instances at all where a female figure is depicted carrying a mace.[114] Because this site has been connected to the Suren/Rostam family, it would be plausible to presume this figure depicts one of the female heroes of the house of Rostam, the most renowned among whom is Bānu-Goshasp.[115]

Chronologically speaking, Bivar was next to pick up where Herzfeld left off; however, since he has a more recent and more complete contribution to the topic, I leave off the discussion of his work until later. Next, Shahbazi offers a summary of the thesis, emphasizing once again that Rostam's epithet of *tāj-bakhsh* mirrors the hereditary prerogative of coronation, which belonged exclusively to the Suren family.[116] Shahbazi adds one crucial link: the Parthian army had a dragon emblem on its banner; this is also the case for the banners of Rostam's family, which in the *Shāhnāmeh* are distinguished from those of

112 For the significance of this weapon, its ancient representations, as well as its modern usage in Zoroastrian religious ceremonies, see Harper, The ox-headed mace.

113 Kawami, Becker and Koestler, Kuh-e Khwaja 26.

114 Ibid. 33–4.

115 See Appendix A for more on Bānu-Goshasp and her story.

116 Shahbazi, Parthian origin of Rostam. So far the evidence from the epics as regards to the coronation privilege of Rostam's family has been confined to the mention of his epithet *tāj-bakhsh*. I can offer an additional piece of evidence from the SCE (*Bahmannāmeh* 433) where Rostam reports that he had performed a coronation, namely that of Bahman. Here Rostam is addressing the ruler posthumously:

نشاندمت برتخت شاهنشهی نهادمت برسرکلاه مهی

Translation:

I seated you on the royal throne; I placed the crown on your head.

other families by the image of a dragon imprinted on them.[117] In fact, it seems the dragon was a unit, denoting 1,000 cavalrymen. In the case of the Surena of Carrhae, for example, we learn that his troops were ten dragons, i.e., ten thousand cavalry men.[118]

Bivar also points to this parallel and offers an additional piece of numismatic evidence, which he had alluded to previously.[119] The coin – or the series as it turns out – belongs to the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares who is surnamed Sām. Bivar confesses that the Sām reading is his own and is not unanimously accepted.[120] If indeed Gondophares also carried the family name Sām, the whole question of the identification of the two families could be resolved once and for all.[121] Therefore, it is worth looking at this particular coin series to examine Bivar's reasoning behind reading the surname Sām. The coins belonging to the series contain three Greek letters. The first two letters are clearly a *sigma* and an *alpha* respectively, while the disputed last letter can be read either as a *mu* or an *eta*. If it is read as *mu*, then the surname in question can be read as Sām, as Bivar has done. But there seems to be an argument against reading it as an *eta*, for the way this particular *eta* is engraved is inconsistent with other occurrences of the same letter on the coin legend,[122] making the reading Sām more conceivable. Though not everyone agrees with this reading,[123] it seems Bivar's reading is at the very least plausible and, if correct, would have tremendous consequences for our current discussion. We would then be able to argue that the King of Kings Gondophares, who without a doubt was a Parthian Suren, proclaimed to be of Sām's lineage.

In addition to this, Bivar provides other pieces of recently discovered gold coins, which confirm that the later "Indo-Parthians" had achieved a status of affluence and independence. The last of the numismatic discoveries is a reading of the series of coins from the early Sasanian period. They belong to a certain Farn-Sasan, grandson of Tiridates, great-grandson of Sanabares King of

117 Ibid. 159.

118 Debevoise, *Political history* 83.

119 Bivar, Gondophares and the Indo-Parthians 26–36.

120 Ibid. 31.

121 Sām is one of Rostam's ancestors and it is generally agreed that Sām and Garshāsp are the same character. For Garshāsp and his identification with Sām in Zoroastrian religious texts see Chapter 2.

122 Fröhlich, *Monnaies Indo-scythes* 56.

123 Senior reads the particular word in question as Sae and later as Sases; see *Indo-Scythian* 1:113.

Kings.[124] This is the longest genealogy found on an ancient coin, and according to Bivar, is engraved to establish the ruler's claim to be a descendant of a great "Indo-Parthian" king. It is also significant that while this particular series of coins belong to the Sasanian period, they do not acknowledge Ardashir as a king. Bivar concludes that the new pieces of numismatic evidence hint at the independence and the enduring grandeur of this kingdom, the homeland of Rostam.[125]

1.4 The Other Parthian Family

In addition to the Parthian family of Suren, represented by Rostam and his line, there are other narrations in the *Shāhnāmeh* and the SCE that originated from the Parthian period.[126] Fortunately, the identification of the other families has been less problematic than that of the house of Suren, and hence there is consensus that some of the heroes who appear during the reigns of Kay Kāvus and Kay Khosrow can be identified as Parthian kings and princes of the Arsacid house, as well as members of the Karen and Mehrān families. Nöldeke identified some of the Parthian names: First, Gudarz is identified as the Parthian king Gotarzes; next, we have Milād (Gorgin's father) whose name has been recognized to be a form of Mihrdāt, Mithradat, which is the name of several Parthian kings. The same is true of the name Farhād, Pharates in Greek, a name borne by a whole series of Parthian kings.[127] Establishing the connection between historical persona from the Parthian royal and noble families and the corresponding characters in the epics has been a relatively easy task, since the epic heroes bear similar if not the same names as the Parthian princes. Both in the *Shāhnāmeh* and the SCE there is a character by the name Qāren, who is the ancestor of the most famous Karenids of the epics or the house of Gutarza (Greek: Gotarzes), whose seat of reign was (at least at some point) the province of Hyrcania, or modern-day Gorgān.[128]

In the *Shāhnāmeh* the characters Gudarz, Giv and Bizhan represent the house of Karen, and as we shall see, members of this family are very much present in many adventures alongside the Sistani heroes. The other two very

124 Bivar, Gondophares and the Indo-Parthians 34. Sanabares is one of the Parthian/Suren rulers, the first to have inscribed his coins in Parthian (language).

125 Ibid.

126 For background on Parthian families, see Pourshariati, *Decline and fall* 24–7.

127 Nöldeke, *Iranian national epic* 12–13.

128 Ibid. 60.

well-known noble houses are the house of Mehrān with their seat in Ray and the house of Aspadpati (Ispahbads) based mainly in Ṭus. The only character who can be identified as belonging to the house of Mehrān is Gorgin Milād, from whose name Marquart recognized the name Mehrdād or Mithridates as noted above. Gorgin Milād is not a major character and only makes an appearance in one episode when other Parthian heroes of the houses of Rostam and Gudarz are also present. The hero Ṭus, son of Nodhar, represents the royal Arsacid family, and his negative characterization in the Iranian epics and the struggles between him and the rest of the Parthian heroes is a reflection of the power struggles between the Arsacid ruling family and the Parthian nobility.[129]

Although the Parthian origin of many of the episodes of the *Shāhnāmeh*, especially those in the combined reigns of Kay Kāvus and Kay Khosrow, has been established, there were no serious attempts to study these stories in the context of Parthian history, with the exception of an article by Jahangir Coyajee that scrutinizes one of the Parthian stories of the *Shāhnāmeh*.[130] According to him, the portion of the epic that begins with the murder of Forud and ends with the Iranians' battle against Kamus the Kushanian displays chronological parallelism to the "facts of Parthian history."[131] First, Coyajee explains the parallels between the epic hero Gudarz and the Parthian king Gotarzes, as well as Kay Khosrow and the Parthian king Artabanus III. Then, he identifies Forud with the Parthian prince Vardanes, or alternatively Phraotes, as the details of both their lives seem to be astoundingly similar. But the similarity between the names of the Parthian prince and Siāvush's son is not all, for the events as they are described in the *Shāhnāmeh* and the Classical narrations of Parthian history corroborate each other to the detail. In addition to this episode, Coyajee discusses how the *Shāhnāmeh* actually provides an answer to a question that has been left unanswered by the Classical historians. The house of Karen seemed to have vanished from the political sphere at the end of the Parthian period, only to reappear later during the Sasanian times.[132] The phenomenon can be explained, according to Coyajee, as a consequence of the Kushān invasion of the empire, an event that has been amply described in the *Shāhnāmeh*. It is the ethnically mixed nomadic army of the Kushān, that rushed down to the north and west of Parthia, that defeats the house of Gudarz/Gotarzes.[133]

129 Marquart, *Die Chronologie* 67–88.

130 Coyajee, House of Gotarzes 207–24.

131 Ibid. 208.

132 Pourshariati, *Decline and fall* 75–82.

133 Coyajee, House of Gotarzes 218–20.

It is apparent that the story in question is a Parthian one, most likely patronized by the house of Gotarzes in the northern region of Hyrcania, as the story clearly has pro-Gudarz bias. All other Iranian heroes in this story, such as Ṭus and Fariborz, commit one blunder after the other, and they are saved from the consequences of their mistakes by the interventions of either Gudarz or some relation of his.[134] Coyajee's article is the first step toward an identification of the Parthian stories, which were incorporated in the corpus of Iran's epic literature. Many more episodes, based on events of Parthian history, are incorporated anachronistically in the Kayānid section of the *Shāhnāmeh*. What Coyajee has uncovered is merely the tip of the iceberg. Throughout this study, I will point out the historical reflection of events of the "Indo-Parthian," or more precisely the Suren kingdom in eastern province of Sistan, that find reflection in many of the stories of the SCE. There remains one more question that deserves consideration before we can move on to the discussion of the Sistani stories, and that is the mechanism by which these stories were transmitted and fused together and eventually incorporated into the various works of this corpus.

Mary Boyce, in a much cited article on the role of the Parthian musician storytellers, or *gosans*, has offered clues as to how the stories were patronized, performed and disseminated at various courts and public venues. According to her, the *gosan* was employed to entertain both royal/noble as well as popular audiences. Indeed, he played a considerable part in the Parthian life: he was "entertainer of king and commoner, privileged at court and popular with the people; present at the graveside and at the feast; eulogist, satirist, story-teller, musician; recorder of past achievements, commentator of his own times."[135] Throughout the pre-Islamic period, professional minstrels sang heroic poems at the courts of the kings and in public places, and they handed down the stories as well as the art of their performance, from one generation to the next.[136]

Here I would like to offer additional evidence from the text of the *Shāhnāmeh* that supports Boyce's description of the process of the stories' formation. At the end of the story of Kāmus-e Koshāni, when Rostam returns victorious from yet another encounter with the Turānians, there is a feast at the court of Kay Khosrow, as per custom. The king, elated at this great victory, asks Gudarz, who was present alongside Rostam at the battle, to tell him in detail what had happened. Gudarz, however, responds by saying that the story

134 Ibid. 208.

135 Boyce, Parthian writings 1155.

136 Boyce, Parthian Gosan 10–45.

is a long one and requires the proper context for its recitation. Kay Khosrow, who knows what Gudarz has in mind, makes the necessary preparations for the proper narration of the story by providing wine and summoning the court minstrels.[137] Then, we learn, the stories of Rostam were accompanied by music and narrated in *pahlavāni sorud*.[138] The terms *pahlav* and *pahlavāni* in the context of the *Shāhnāmeh*, as Pourshariati has argued, refer to Parthian, and *pahlavāni sorud*, therefore, is Parthian lyric.[139] This passage clearly illustrates the setting and mechanism of production of the stories: immediately after the battle, there are musicians singing and recounting the adventures of Rostam at the court of Kay Khosrow in Parthian lyric to a feasting audience at the court.

If that was the milieu of the production of the stories, and it was performed by minstrels, one might naturally ask how these stories find their way into the compilation known as the *Khodāynāmak*, the book that was at least one of the sources of Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*.[140] It was only much later, presumably during the late-Sasanian period, that the stories entered the national narrative as a result of the Sasanians' concerted legitimization efforts that necessitated the creation of an uninterrupted narrative of monarchy from mythical times to their own period. In their version of history, however, they obliterated the nearly five centuries of Parthian rule from this grand narrative of Iran's history. There was a paradox at the heart of this historiographical exercise: the "seamless narrative" of Iran's history had a huge hole in it. But the material that filled up this hole continued to be produced, circulated, told and retold; there was no way to entirely suppress it. This is how the Parthian stories resurface,

137 *Shāhnāmeh* 3:283.

138 Ibid. 3:284;

سخن های رستم به نای و به رود بگفتند بر پهلوانی سرود

Translation:
The (told) tales/accounts of Rostam, in Parthian verse, accompanied by the instruments Nay and Rud.

139 Pourshariati, Parthians 347–92; See p. 384 for reference to *pahlavāni sorud*.

140 The discussion of the *Shāhnāmeh*'s sources has preoccupied the field of *Shāhnāmeh* studies for some time. Therefore, I will not engage in the merits of the arguments presented by the different camps but refer the reader to the literature: Davidson, *Poet and hero*; Davis, and Problem of Ferdowsi's sources, who suggested that the *Shāhnāmeh* could have been the product of an oral-formulated composition. For the critique of the oral-composition theory, see Omidsalar, Unburdening Ferdowsi and Omidsalar, Could al-Tha'alibi.

albeit anachronistically in the Kayānid period, in the narrative of the National History.[141] As a matter of fact, a substantial section of the national Iranian tradition was sustained, elaborated and promoted under the patronage of the Parthian families, not only during the Parthian period but also throughout the Sasanian period.[142] What happens to the Suren family after the Arab conquest of the region remains to be investigated. The name Suren, however, does not vanish from Sistan's local lore, and in one instance, it appears in the 13th century local history of Herat.[143]

1.5 Reflections of Parthian History in the SCE

As mentioned before, throughout this book I shall make references to the events described in the first part of this chapter, for the majority of the extant stories of the SCE recall some of the historical events described from the Saka invasion of Sistan in the beginning of the first century BCE down to the events of the second century CE, when the Parthian/Suren dynasty reached the zenith of their power. Here I would like to offer a summary of the kind of historical reflections that are preserved in the SCE. What is offered here is an outline of the events, and reference is given to the chapters where each story is discussed in depth.

The first event in question is the Saka invasion of Sistan, which resulted not only in a name change from Drangiana to Sakastan but also established the region as a new center of political power. The reflection of this founding event is preserved in the *Garshāspnāmeh* and is discussed at length in chapter 2. The story of the founding of Sistan preserves the memory of the creation of a semi-

141 Nöldeke explains how these relatively newer stories were placed in the mythological and legendary narrative of the *Shāhnāmeh* and attributes the inclusion of the stories to the continued power of the Parthian nobles during the Sāsāniān Empire in Nöldeke, *Iranian national epic* 15.

142 For a discussion of the continued influence of the Parthian families, see Pourshariati, *Decline and fall*, part 1, a brief summary of which, as it pertains to the Suren family, is given above. For the patronage of the epics by Parhian families, see Pourshariati, Parthians and the production.

143 *Tārikhnāmeh-ye Herāt* 245, where one of the notables of the Afghan tribes who lived in the vicinity of Herat is said to have belonged to the "tribe/house" of the Surena:

از زعما افغان بود - سندان نام- این سندان پسرعم شعیب بود وهزار مرد دلا و ر
است ومردی بود پردل وکاردیده گرم وسرد چشیده

independent polity with whose support an entire line of Parthian kings (the line of Sinatruces) was put on the throne. The relationship of the Suren kingdom vis-à-vis the Parthian kingdom is best reflected in the stories of Rostam included in the *Shāhnāmeh*. As we shall see in the discussion of chapter 3, the semi-independent status of the kingdom of Sistan is clearly articulated at various places in a number of stories. Rostam's relationship to the Kayānid kings, especially Kay Khosrow and Kay Kāvus, mirrors the role played by the Suren rulers of Sistan. Rostam not only is a *jahān-pahlavān*, a certain hereditary office held by members of his family, but also provides his services as a commander of the Sistani army at various junctures in history. Rostam's battles with Turān and the Romans reflect the historical reality of the constant struggles over territory in the east and the west of the Parthian empire.

The kingdom of Sistan at different stages of its formation attempted to expand eastward into the Indian subcontinent. As discussed in the earlier part of this chapter, there is abundant numismatic evidence that the rulers of the region conducted campaigns into India, gained territories, and upon victory appointed local rulers or "satraps." The reflections of such connections to India are ubiquitous in the SCE: they appear in all stories in one form or the other. In fact, going to India becomes one of the heroic trials of at least one type of Sistani hero. This is supplemented with descriptions of battles of Sistani heroes in India, stories of alliances formed with the Indian rulers, as well as the search of deposed Sistani heroes for fame and glory in India. The latter phenomenon will be discussed in chapter 4, which is devoted to the discussion of the "downtrodden" Sistani heroes. Since it is found in all SCE stories, however, the India-Sistan relationship will be discussed in all chapters.

Similarly, there is a plethora of material concerning the relationship between the families of Karen and Suren, about which we otherwise have no information for the Parthian period. They not only formed alliances through marriage, but they also united their forces in some of the eastern battles in which members of both families participated. In chapters 3 and 5 much will be said about the formation of alliances and the end of those alliances between a number of noble families.

The shift from the line of Sinatruces, which resulted in a break of the Suren and the Arsacid houses, finds abundant reflection in a number of stories. In chapters 2 and 4, I shall discuss Rostam's withdrawal from the affairs of the Iranian kingdom on the account of his opposition to Lohrāsp's assumption of the Iranian throne. While the sense of Rostam's resentment for the line of Lohrāsp is unmistakably present in the *Shāhnāmeh*, there are various other indications and elaborations on this topic, particularly in the *Farāmarznāmeh* and the *Shahriyārnāmeh*.

The final break with the Arsacid house is most dramatically articulated in the SCE by the Sistani version of Bahman's invasion of Sistan and Farāmarz's execution and will be discussed at length in chapter 5. Farāmarz's execution may contain reflections of the execution of the Surena of Carrhae. At the same time, there may have been an Arsacid invasion of Sistan sometime after the second half of the first century CE. As we have seen, the Suren family survived the fall of the Parthian empire and so did the stories of Sistani heroes, although they were excluded from Ferdowsi's version.

CHAPTER 2

The Appropriation of an Avestan Hero and the Birth of the House of Rostam

The process of creating a body of epics that both narrates and celebrates a past made up entirely of the actions of its heroes and anti-heroes, a past that can be animated through recitation of these stories, is driven first and foremost by a complicated and multifaceted campaign of legitimization. While the relevance of any genre that purports to have a legitimizing function is partly articulated through its very structure and content, within the body of such literature there are more explicit attempts to lend credibility to the stories as accounts of the past. One such practice within the Iranian National History is tracing one's genealogy to one of the mythological or legendary figures within the corpus. The house of Suren, therefore, chose as their ancestor the Avestan hero Kərəsāspa, Garshāsp.[1] In the first part of this chapter, I shall discuss the various layers of Garshāsp's character. As we shall see, the Sistani version bestows on him a lofty genealogy, making him the heir to mythological kings of Iran as well as connecting him to the local rulers of the eastern province of Zābolestān. This layer to Garshāsp's character, however, is constructed on top of an older elaboration of him found in Avestan literature. As the ancestor of this noble-heroic house, his character serves as a prototype for all other Sistani heroes who became the rulers of the province.[2]

Given Garshāsp's marginal role in the *Shāhnāmeh*, the composite nature of his character has not been examined. What we have are a few scanty observations about the formation of his character. Nöldeke speculated that Garshāsp's heroic role is artificially patched together in an attempt to forge a genealogy for Rostam. As we shall see, while the appropriation of the Avestan hero by the same name was indeed an attempt to grant the house of Rostam/Suren a legitimate genealogy, the Avestan layer of Garshāsp's character is rather slender. Nöldeke's assertion that Garshāsp's character was divided into two (or one could even say three) persons for the sake of genealogy seems to be

1 For an exhaustive list of Garshāsp's appearances in the Zoroastrian literature, see Skjærvø, Karasap. I will discuss the evolution of Garshāsp's character in Zoroastrian literature below. For the various forms of the name see Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shāhnāmeh notes* 1: 168.

2 That is, all Sistani rulers with the exception of Zāl. The exceptional case of Zāl will be discussed in the next chapter.

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true.[3] The purpose for the emergence of Sām as a separate character was to fill in the genealogical gap between Garshāsp and Rostam. Hence Sām, the family name of Garshāsp in the Avesta, becomes a separate character.[4] One indication for the fabrication process of Sām's character is that the Sistani account of his deeds, unlike that of Garshāsp, Rostam, Bānu-Goshasp, and Farāmarz, is not narrated in the context of Iran's National History and is devoid of historical referents. Similarly, Narimān's character has been created, this time using one of Garshāsp's epithets, in the same fashion, and the story of the adventures of Narimān as they appear at the end of *Garshāspnāmeh*[5] or as a separate story (*Narimānnāmeh*) lacks devices by which the narrative is pegged down to the chronology of the National History. Garshāsp's story, by contrast, is full of historical referents: therein we find reflections of the establishment of the Suren polity in the province as well as references to the relationship of the semi-independent kingdom of Sistan with the Iranian throne, its Indian vassals, and their rivals. Additionally, as far as the generic requirement of this corpus of literature is concerned, the *Garshāspnāmeh* sets the precedent by defining the building blocks of the heroic character. In other words, it is in the elaboration of Garshāsp's character that the prototype of the Sistani hero is created. As we shall see, this particular character mold is discernible for all Sistani heroes who assume the Sistani throne and become the *jahān-pahlavān* of Iran.[6] In the first part of this chapter, therefore, I will discuss how Garshāsp's character is constructed in the Sistani Cycle. In constructing the character of the ancestor of the house, we are also informed on how the genre of heroic discourse is created in order to narrate a version of the past.

Being the very first Sistani hero/ruler, Garshāsp is responsible the "founding of Sistan," and this event, which reflects the Saka invasion and the establishment of a new polity in the region, is pinned down in the chronology of Iran's National History. Garshāsp's story is anchored in the line of succession of the mythological and legendary kings of Iran, and this with his appearance there commences the Sistani version of history, whose narrative runs parallel to that of the National History.

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3 Nöldeke, *Iranian national epic* 16–17.

4 Gazerani, Sām.

5 For a brief account of the text, its authorship and dating see De Blois, "Garšāsp-Nāma"; and for a more detailed discussion of its plot see Appendix A.

6 For the other type of Sistani hero, see chapter 4. The distinction between the two Sistani heroic types are that the first type assumes the throne of the Sistani kingdom, while the second type is deprived of political power due to various reasons.

The description of Garshāsp's character in the Sistani version articulated in the *Garshāspnāmeh* also defines a mold into which all other Sistani heroes who enjoyed political power were fitted. In other words, his actions, adventures, and heroic feats, as well as his relationship to the Iranian throne, become a model for the later Sistani heroes. Being a hero of a specific type sets forth a host of generic demands, i.e., requirements prescribed by the genre both in content and form. It is in the process of defining, invoking, and altering these heroic requirements that a discourse of legitimacy is defined. The discourse of legitimacy, however, does not remain confined to establishing the Sistani hero's legitimacy but becomes prevalent and widespread to such an extent that it becomes the model in the case of non-Sistani kings and heroes of the National History. Part of this chapter, therefore, is devoted to the discussion of the construction of this particular form of heroic image. Next, I shall discuss how the Sistani version of Garshāsp provides an alternate narration of Zaḥḥāk's reign.

Garshāsp's prominence as the founder of Sistan and the great ancestor of the house of Rostam also made him the subject of controversy for other narrations of Iran's past. In an article discussing the different versions and recensions of the Sasanian *Khodāynāmak*, Shahbazi mentions that there were three versions of the *Khodāynāmak*, i.e., priestly, royal and "*pahlavānic*" or heroic, each having a certain outlook and predispositions.[7] In Garshāsp's case, we encounter the reincarnation of the different versions of the *Khodāynāmaks*, which, as we shall see, clash with each other in their attempts to negotiate Garshāsp's legitimacy. For instance, in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh* Garshāsp is not a real character but a mere name, a name enumerated in a list of other commanders of the Iranian army during the reigns of Fereidun and Nodhar.[8] The story of Garshāsp, therefore, is excluded from Ferdowsi's narrative. The Middle Persian Zoroastrian literature, on the other hand, goes a step further and attempts to defame this Avestan hero. In the last part of this chapter, I will discuss how the priestly version of the narration contested Garshāsp's appropriation as the ancestor of the Sistani heroes by providing commentary that in effect slanders his character.

7 Shahbazi, On the X^{w}aday-Nāmag.

8 *Shāhnāmeh* 1:132; 1:135; 1:148; 1:290; 291.

2.1 Garshāsp's Genealogy

The choice of Garshāsp as the ancestor of the house of Rostam has a two-fold significance. First, Garshāsp is an Avestan warrior-hero, whose prominence within that tradition is discussed below. Second, the figure of this appropriated Avestan hero finds relevance as he is placed in the chronology of Iran's National History, making him an offspring of Jamshid, the last mythological king of the *Shāhnāmeh*. In fact, the connection to Jamshid, or the choice of Jamshid as the ancestor of Garshāsp, is not unrelated to the appropriation of the Avestan Garshāsp for, as we shall see below, the Avestan Garshāsp receives Jamshid's *farr*,[9] or the hero/warrior portion of it.

In order to link him to Jamshid, therefore, the *Garshāspnāmeh*'s account does not begin with the birth of Garshāsp. Rather, it starts with the story of Jamshid's flight to Zābolestān in the aftermath of Zaḥḥāk's onslaught, which brings Jamshid to the court of Kurang, the king of Zābol. There, Jamshid falls in love with Kurang's daughter, who remains unnamed throughout the account of the romance.[10] Garshāsp and his ancestors, i.e. Ṭur, Shidasp, Ṭurag, Sham, and Athar̤, are descendants of Jamshid and Kurang's daughter.[11]

Garshāsp and his descendants are, therefore, of two important noble/royal lineages: first, they are the progeny of the king of Zābol and second, they are of royal Iranian pedigree. Here it is important to point out that the area of Zābol or Zābolestān, or Arachosia as the Greeks called it, was an ancient center of civilization. The placement of Garshāsp's ancestors in Zābol, rather than Sistan, reflects historical events for, as we recall, it was the Saka invasion of Sistan that gave the province its name and established a home territory for the Scythio-Parthian (i.e. Saka-Suren) kingdom that emerged during the first century BCE.[12] Let us pause here and consider the significance of Garshāsp's genealogy. The fact that he is made to be a descendant of the Iranian king Jamshid, would, of course, buttress his claims to legitimization, for in the account of the *Shāhnāmeh* Jamshid's line is interrupted by the foreign usurper, Zaḥḥāk.

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9 Much has been said about the concept of *farr* (*Khvarnah*) as an exigent requirement for kingship. For a summary of scholarship see Gnoli, Farr(ah). For a discussion of the iconographic representations of *farr* see: Soudavar, *Aura of the kings*. For the connection between *farr* and the Iranian deity Mithra see Pourshariati, *Decline and fall* 354.

10 Generally speaking, when a female character in a romantic tale remains unnamed, her function in the story is to bear an offspring, as in the case of Siāvush's mother, for example; *Shāhnāmeh* 2:202–6.

11 *Garshāspnāmeh* 65–9. For Garshāsp's genealogy see Figure 2.

12 See the first part of chapter 1 for a discussion of the Scythio-Parthian kingdom of Sistan.

In some ways, therefore, Garshāsp and his descendants, while connected to the region through their kinship to Kurang, are the true heirs to the Iranian throne.

Concocting lofty genealogies is a rather obvious attempt at legitimization. This, one may argue, is another clear indication that this genre offered the main forum for historical discourse. After all, both the Sasanians and the Parthians claimed descent from "legendary" figures who are protagonists in this genre. The Sasanians traced their genealogy to Ardashir, son of Bahman, and through Bahman to the line of the Kayānid kings of the National History.[13] Similarly, the Arsacids adopted the legendary figure of Ārash the Archer as their ancestor.[14] There is a further parallel in the case of the Arsacids and the Surens. The Arsacids were originally Saka migrants who settled in the province of Parthia, and the Suren family, as discussed in the first chapter, had strong ties with the Saka rulers of the region of Sistan. Nevertheless, appropriating a mythological or legendary figure from the corpus of Iranian epics was absolutely indispensable for the purposes of legitimization, for in doing so the particular house not only came to have a royal/noble blood line but also found an ancient origin in the narration of Iran's history.

The house of Rostam/Suren achieves this by appropriating the Avestan hero, whose genealogy, only in the Sistani version of history, is traced to the mythological king Jamshid. It therefore comes as no surprise that the *Garshāspnāmeh*, which among other things aims at fixing a point of origin for the house of Rostam, "foretells" the rise of heroes such as Rostam, and grants them a lofty lineage by tracing it back to Garshāsp (and Jamshid). Just before the account of Garshāsp's birth the *Garshāspnāmeh* provides the reader with a list of Garshāsp's ancestors, proclaiming that all these great men mentioned traced their lineage all the way back to Jamshid and that these are in fact Rostam's ancestors.[15]

13 *Shāhnāmeh* 6:139–42.

14 For the narrations of Ārash-e Kamāngir and his link to the Arsacids, see Gazerani, Wither the story.

15 *Garshāspnāmeh* 70:

بزرگان این تخمه کزجم بدند سراسر نیاکان رستم بدند

Translation:
Each and every notable person from this lineage was in fact a descendant of Jam, and all of them were Rostam's ancestors.

2.2 Garshāsp and the Founding of Sistan

According to the *Garshāspnāmeh*, while Atharṭ, Garshāsp's father, was ruling in the region of Zābolestān, he decided to build his own city to the east, naming it Zarang and later on Sistan.[16] Zarang, or Drangiana as the Greeks referred to it, is the ancient name of the region, and Sistan or Sakastan the name of the same region after the Saka invasion.[17] Interestingly enough, the *Garshāspnāmeh* refers to both names, and what is significant is that Zarang becomes Sistan after Garshāsp establishes himself there as the most powerful ruler of the eastern realms. In the account of the founding of Zarang/Sistan, we have details that corroborate what we know of the "Indo-Scythian" and "Indo-Parthian" kings and their constant campaigns in the eastern realms as well as their appointment of vassal kings or satraps.[18]

In the *Garshāspnāmeh*, the founding of Zarang occurs after Garshāsp establishes himself as a hero by emerging victoriously from a series of heroic trials.[19] Zarang then becomes the seat of his kingdom. At first Atharṭ remains the king of Zābol, and Garshāsp becomes the ruler of this newly founded city. Soon after the city is founded, however, Garshāsp is called on to subdue the king of Kabul, who had refused to pay tribute to his father. Garshāsp's father is unable to defeat Kabul's king, and this is a clear sign that Atharṭ is losing his grip on the throne. This is when Garshāsp steps in and conquers Kabul and takes its throne as his own. It is at this crucial moment that Garshāsp's father leaves the throne of Zābol, his loss of power foreshadowed by a rather long passage of advice to his son.[20] But Garshāsp does not simply take over the old kingdom of Zābol; he builds a new one instead and, upon his father's demise, annexes Zābol to his newly established kingdom centered in Sistan. This is precisely our hint that this part of the story contains reflections of the new settlement and a new polity emerging west of Zābol in the Hilmand delta. Garshāsp builds the city of Sistan using slave labor from his exploits in Kabul. The details of this episode contain reflections of the Saka settlement in the region during

16 *Garshāspnāmeh* 219; 244.

17 For the topography of the region and the various toponyms by which it was referred, see the first chapter of the present author's doctoral dissertation.

18 The Indian connection of the Scythio-Parthian kingdom has been discussed in chapter 1.

19 *Garshāspnāmeh* 70.

20 In this genre of literature, it is customary for a king who feels his death approaching to offer advice to his successor. One finds this in the form of a long passage containing the king's advice for his son. The appearance of the passage, therefore, indicates that Garshāsp's father is leaving the throne, and Garshāsp is to be king soon; see *Garshāspnāmeh* 238–43.

the Parthian period: first, the Hilmand region is mentioned as the location of the new city; second, there are references to the construction of irrigational structures on the river in a manner consistent with what we know of the irrigation practices of the region;[21] third, the new city's name is Sistan, a name the region took after the Saka invasion.

While the foundation of Sistan is unmistakably a reflection of the Saka invasion of the region with the emergence of the new polity, known to the numismatists as the Indo-Scythian and later Indo-Parthian dynasties, there are more details in the account of the *Garshāspnāmeh* that mirror what we know of the history of the region after the Saka settlement. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is clear that the Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthians constantly struggled to extend their territories to the east. This is essentially what Garshāsp does before finishing the construction of his new city. He subdues the king of Kabul and asserts his superiority over his own father who was unable to tame Kabul's king and force him into paying tributes. To underline Garshāsp's victory, the city of Sistan – its fortress, palace, and other structures – are built as a direct result of this victory: when the prisoners taken from Kabul are brought back to Sistan, they are slaughtered en masse. Their blood is used to make the mud from which the city is constructed:

اسیران که از کابل آورده بود به یك جایگه گردشان کرده بود
بفرمود خون همه ریختن و زیشان گل باره انگیختن
یکی نیمه بدکرده دیوار شهر دگر نیمه کردند از آن گل دو بهر[22]
....

> Garshāsp gathered all the prisoners he had brought from Kabul in one place and then he ordered their blood to be spilled. The blood then was used to form the mud of the fortifications: half of it was used to construct the city wall, the other half was in turn divided in half . . .

The horrifying symbolism of the account serves to underline that the very structures that make up the city were founded as a result of victory over Kabul,

21 For a summary of the irrigation practices in the region, see the present author's dissertation, 39–44.

22 *Garshāspnāmeh* 243.

for the city walls and palaces contain within them more than the mere memory of victory; they are erected with the enemy's blood.

Once established as the king of Sistan, Garshāsp rules what seems to be an extended territory through a network of vassal kings. For example, Garshāsp's father Atharṭ remains the king of Zābol for some time after he ascends the throne of Sistan, and the son of the defeated king of Kabul is appointed as the ruler of that region. We can recognize the relationship of the Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian dynasties to their vassals, often referred to as satraps, in the way Garshāsp's kingdom is structured, as was briefly mentioned in Chapter 1.

While the description found in the *Garshāspnāmeh* is the most elaborate, other sources also link the founding of Sistan with the Saka invasion of the region, albeit implicitly. *Tārikh-e Sistān*,[23] the oldest local historiography of the region, attributes the founding of the city of Sistan to Garshāsp. According to *Tārikh-e Sistān* the founding of Sistan takes place in legendary times, which the anonymous author of this work dates to 4,000 solar years prior to the coming of Islam.[24] It goes without saying that this date cannot be taken literally, as the dating of pre-Islamic events in medieval Islamic writings usually had religious and oftentimes apocalyptic significance. What we can gather from these founding accounts is that they do contain at least a reflection of the Saka invasion of the province, which subsequently resulted in the province becoming the seat of the noble house of Suren. As we have seen, encapsulated in the *Garshāspnāmeh* account are hints of political struggles in the region, the consequence of which was that the old kingdom of Zābol, governed by Garshāsp's father, lost its prominence. In the aftermath of these developments a polity with a newly constructed capital in the Hilmand delta emerged. *Tārikh-e Sistān* corroborates this, adding the date of foundation in order to emphasize the region's antiquity.

The Sistani version of Sistan's founding, however, is not the only account of the origin of this province. The Middle Persian text, *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*,[25] names Zarang as the capital of Sistan and attributes its construction to Afrāsiyāb, the Turānian king and Iran's archenemy. The capital of the province, according to this text, is said to have been destroyed in ancient times and then rebuilt by Kay Khosrow, the legendary Kayānid king. The city was reconstructed once again by Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty.[26] Clearly,

23 For more on *Tārikh-e Sistān*, see Chapter 1.

24 *Tārikh-e Sistān* 1–3.

25 Daryaee, *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*.

26 Ibid. 27.

in this version of the narration, Garshāsp and his house have been completely eliminated. Instead, the foundation of the region is attributed to the Turānian king Afrāsiyāb. This attribution, while drastically different from the Sistani version, also contains a memory of the Saka invasion of the region, for Turān, in fact, refers to the central Asian territories, the homeland of Saka tribes.

The question of the existence of the two different attributions or narrations of origin must be examined in the context of the existence of distinct narrations of the past as alluded to above. While the Sistani version gives credit of the founding of the region to the ancestor of the house of Rostam, the other version clearly aims at eliminating the traces of their very existence. For not only is it Afrāsiyāb who is responsible for founding Sistan, but the city is rebuilt twice by Iranian kings (Kay Khosrow and Ardashir) subsequent to the battles, which presumably had left the city in ruins. What we do not get from the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* version is the account of conflicts and battles that destroyed the city, because there are indications elsewhere that the region of Sistan was conquered both by a Parthian king as well as later by Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. Hence, instead of an account of conquest, we have a mention of rebuilding the city twice, with absolutely no mention of the local Suren rulers/Sistani heroes.

Interestingly enough, the Sistani account neglects to mention an invasion. If the SCE is indeed preserving the history of the region, and the Saka invasion was such a pivotal event, why do the region's own histories leave out any and all references to it? This question, in a sense, is a recurring one. In its essence, it is not unlike the question many *Shāhnāmeh* scholars have asked about the reasons for the absence of the Median and Achaemenid dynasties from the *Shāhnāmeh*.[27] The answer to this enigma can be found in the nature of historiography that the "epic" genre of Iran presents us with.

In the case of the indirect reflection of the Saka invasion by the SCE version, it is important to keep in mind the polemical aim of this story of origin. The SCE, or in this instance, the *Garshāspnāmeh*'s function, is first and foremost to legitimize the Sistani heroes of Rostam's house. Being of non-Iranian origin clearly would defeat this purpose, and hence the forging of the double connection of the house of Rostam, first via appropriation of the Avestan hero Garshāsp to

27 The question of why the *Shāhnāmeh* fails to mention important dynasties such as the Medes and the Achaemenids is explored by various works such as Yarshater, Chera dar Shāhnāmeh. But the more general question is the lack of reference to watershed events and hence the various speculations about this astonishing lapse in collective memory.

the Zoroastrian literature and second to the narration of National History by connecting him to Jamshid. The partial Saka identity of the house of Rostam, however, could not be completely brushed off. In Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, Rostam on certain occasions is called a *sagzi*.[28] However, unlike his *pahlavānic* affiliation, being a *sagzi* is far from complimentary for, as already mentioned in Chapter 1, Rostam is called *sagzi* exclusively by his enemies and the term has derogatory connotations.[29] The Sistani account, therefore, would eliminate the notion of an invasion, in an attempt to erase the non-Iranian origin of the house of Rostam, while the account of *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, which aims to undermine the house of Suren/Rostam, attributes the very founding of the region to the Turānian villain Afrāsiyāb.

2.3 The Repertoire of Heroic Motifs

The story of Garshāsp as narrated in the *Garshāspnāmeh*, in addition to anchoring the Sistani narration of events in the chronology of the National History and to the geographical location of the province of Sistan, also establishes a precedent for all Sistani heroes who assume the throne. This is done through the elaboration of heroic trials, which serves as a model for all other Sistani heroes. The repertoire of the heroic motifs is invoked, altered, and even reversed in order to legitimize – or, in the case of its reversal, to delegitimize – kings and rulers. Its function, however, goes beyond mere legitimization, for the repertoire creates generic requirements that become exigent features, formally speaking, in which historical discourse must be narrated.

The setting for the heroic trials of the Sistani hero is the land of India. Going to India is absolutely imperative for the Sistani hero, for it is in India that he has to go through a series of adventures and trials. Once he comes back a victor from these trials, the heroic stature is conferred upon him. Obviously, the choice of India as the setting for the heroic trials is not random. As we saw in chapter 1, the Suren rulers of the eastern province of Sistan constantly struggled to expand the territories east of the Hilmand delta, territories which stretched well into the Indian subcontinent. What we are provided with by

28 See Chapter 1, note 25 for the occurrence of this word in the *Shāhnāmeh*.

29 For example: *Shāhnāmeh* 3:225; 3:228, where Rostam's opponent addresses him on the battlefield as follows: "I shall not call you anything but *sagzi*, to which Rostam responds, "Zāl-e Zarr calls me Rostam; How dare you call me *sagzi*, oh you incompetent one!"

مرا نام رستم کند زال زر توسگزی چرا خوانی ای بی هنر

the Sistani stories is a portrayal of India that oscillates between the imaginary and the real.

The very first of the heroic trials taking place in India – or in some cases as the hero is on his way there – is the act of dragon slaying. This of course is a very common motif in Indo-European heroic literature.[30] For the three most famous heroes of the Sistani tradition, Garshāsp, Rostam, and Farāmarz, slaying a dragon is a rite of passage. In Garshāsp's case, it is his first assignment given to him by Zaḥḥāk, who has stopped in Zābol on his way to a conquest in India.[31] The dragon is a hindrance for Zaḥḥāk's planned journey and Garshāsp, ignoring the advice of his father, sets out to kill him. He does so effortlessly and returns to his father's court in Zābol, where he is received by Zaḥḥāk.[32] It is at this point, after having proved himself worthy, that Zaḥḥāk bestows the title of *jahān-pahlavān* on Garshāsp and grants him the territories of Zābol and Bost as fiefdoms.[33]

Obviously, slaying the dragon grants Garshāsp the status of *jahān-pahlavān*, a title or an office, that henceforth belongs to members of his line. It is not clear what the title or office exactly refers to and what privileges are attached to it, but as indicated in this passage, the *jahān-pahlavān* becomes and remains the semi-autonomous ruler of the kingdom of Zābol and later on of Sistan.[34] What we have here is a reflection of the powerful Suren kingdom in the east, as well as hints that the hereditary title of *jahān-pahlavān* may be a reflection of the Suren's privilege to lead Parthian armies and to physically place the crown on the incoming monarch's head during the coronation ceremony.

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30 For a discussion of Indo-European stories featuring dragon slaying, see Watkins, *How to Kill*.

31 *Garshāspnāmeh* 70.

32 Ibid. 77–80.

33 Ibid. 80:

زمین همه زاول و بوم بست بدو داد و بنوشت عهدی درست
جهان پهلوانی مرو او را سپرد وزآنجای لشکر سوی هند برد

Translation:
In a written treaty, Zaḥḥāk granted the lands of Zābol and Bost to Garshāsp. Zaḥḥāk also bestowed on him the title/office of *jahān-pahlavān*; then along with his army he set out to India.

34 Sistan has not been founded yet. The construction of the seat of the new kingdom takes place upon Garshāsp's return from India, because first he has to go through a series of heroic trials.

There is another fascinating detail in this account. Given the significance of this heroic action, the dragon slaying becomes memorialized as its emblematic rendition: the banner of the Sistani armies, henceforth, bears the image of a dragon. To be more precise, depicted on the banner are images of a black dragon at the bottom and a golden lion crowned with a crescent moon on top.[35] As discussed in chapter 1, the dragon emblem adorned the flags of the Surena of Carrhae and a dragon flag, or simply a dragon, was the way the Classical authors referred to the Parthian army. In the story of Garshāsp's dragon slaying, therefore, we have the origin of this emblem, which appears on the flags of the Sistani armies for generations of Sistani heroes to come.[36]

Garshāsp and his descendants appropriated the status of the dragon slayer, which in the Avesta is not exclusively granted to Garshāsp but also to Θraētaona or Fereidun, as he comes to be known in New Persian. It is Fereidun, after all, who slays the three-headed, six-eyed dragon Aži Dahāka in the Avesta.[37] A rendition of the same story is found in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, where the Iranian king Fereidun slays Zaḥḥāk, the usurper of the Iranian throne. What we have in the Sistani version is, therefore, a conscious and successful attempt on the part of the Sistani/Suren rulers to appropriate the status of dragon slayer. As we shall see in chapter 3, Rostam also slays a dragon by the name of Babr-e Bayān. The symbol of his heroic feat becomes one of Rostam's identifying features since he wears the dragon skin as his armor. The appropriation of the Avestan dragon slayer Garshāsp as the ancestor of the house and the repeatedly narrated dragon slaying of its members invariably links the heroic feat of dragon slaying to the house of Suren/Rostam.

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35 *Garshāspnāmeh* 80:

از آن کارژدها کشت وشیری نمود درفش چنان ساخت کز هردو بود
به زیر درفش اژدهای سیاه زبرشیر زرین و برسرش ماه

Translation:
He (Garshāsp) made a banner that memorialized his (own) brave deed (lit. lion-ness) of dragon slaying; the bottom of the banner bore the image of a black dragon, the top a golden lion crowned with a moon-shaped diadem.

36 There are a number of references to the dragon banner of the house of Rostam. For example, see *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 160; 3: 173 where Rostam is mentioned as carrying the dragon banner of Sistan, and *Shāhnāmeh*, 3: 19 and *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*), 167, where the same is attributed to Farāmarz.

37 Yasht 9.14; Yasht 5.33–5; Yasht 15.22–5; Darmesteter, *Zend-Avesta*, part 2 113; 61–2; 22–5.

The next motif that is linked both with the construction of the heroic image and India is the Sistani hero's discovery of treasures left behind there by the hero's ancestor or one of the Iranian kings under whom their ancestor served. Hence, during his adventures in India, Garshāsp comes across a beautiful palace adorned with a lavish garden. This place, Garshāsp finds out, is the tomb (*dakhmeh*) of Siāmak, one of the mythological Iranian kings, who is Garshāsp's ancestor (through his genealogical connection to Jamshid). There he discovers the treasures left behind by Siāmak, but the person who is in charge of the palace tells Garshāsp that whoever takes any of these things will not make it much farther that the outskirts of the palace, for there seems to be a supernatural or magical protective measure in place, which is the equivalent of the demon appointed to safeguard the treasures and the tombs in other Sistani stories. As one would expect, there is a rather extensive *pandnāmeh* left behind by Siāmak himself. The first and most salient theme in this and other *pandnāmehs* is a reminder of the transience of the world, a consequence of man's inevitable mortal nature. When Garshāsp, who at this point is young and carefree, reads the letter, he starts weeping and pleads with Siāmak to give him more advice, and then he hears Siāmak's voice giving him a discourse on morality.[38]

Once again we see that there is a connection between India and what defines a hero: in both the "slaying of the dragon" and the "treasure" motifs, India is the landscape where these characterizing feats must take place. In the case of the first motif, one finds it to be a trial and a rite of passage, while the function of the second is to connect the hero to his ancestors, thereby reaffirming the long-lived connection between the Sistani heroes and the land of India.[39] As we shall see later, as the Sistani Cycle develops, this particular motif becomes imbued with an apocalyptic tone because it seems that the discourse of legitimization had by then expanded to encompass or at least partly include messianic notions.

Closely related to the *andarz* or advice genre, the next heroic motif of the repertoire is concerned with establishing the hero/ruler's attribute as wise, or at least having sought out wisdom. In the context of the SCE the hero acquires wisdom in his encounter with an Indian sage or a "Brahmin"[40] from whom he

38 *Garshāspnāmeh* 178–83.

39 The invocation, revision/alteration of this motif will be discussed in the case of other Sistani heroes below.

40 The term does not necessarily refer to the Brahmin caste, although in some cases in Persian medieval literature it could. In this genre it refers to the iconic figure of the Indian ascetic who is in possession of a superior kind of wisdom. This notion remains prevalent

seeks counsel. Both Garshāsp and Farāmarz, therefore, come across an Indian sage during their adventures in India and ask the sage several questions on the nature of life, death, and the universe.[41] It is important to note that one finds specimens of this form of discourse, i.e., questions posed to a wise man and their answers, which could be considered as a part of the aforementioned *andarz* genre in Middle Persian Zoroastrian literature such as *Mēnōg ī Xrad*.[42] The motif of seeking counsel from an Indian Brahmin follows the same structure as the Middle Persian works, where the seeker, in our case the Sistani hero, poses questions to a wise man and receives answers, thereby enhancing his knowledge and wisdom about spiritual and mundane affairs.

Beginning with Garshāsp, the Sistani hero, while in India, also visits a series of wondrous places where he is to overcome extraordinary situations involving strange people, landscapes and animals. This motif could be regarded as a part of an extensive medieval literature, the *ʿajāyeb* (marvels) genre.[43] Typically for the Sistani hero, India is the land of strange people, creatures, landscapes, and the setting for the unfolding of various types of adventures. The section describing the hero's adventure in strange places is an extensive one, and as a norm, the hero goes to several of these places, one after the other. For example, Garshāsp does so after having defeated Bahu, the Indian king who had rebelled against India's more powerful king, Mahraj (i.e. Māharāja or great king in Sanskrit and the title of Indian rulers). Accompanied with Mahrāj and his

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throughout the pre-modern period in Iran. For instance, Hafez invokes the term barhaman or brahman in the same fashion:

مزاج دهر تبه شد در این بلا حافظ کجاست فکر حکیمی و رای برهمنی

41 For example, Garshāspnāmeh 127–38; Farāmarznāmeh (*a*), 144–9.

42 Tafazzoli, *Mēnōg ī Xrad*. At this point, I am not suggesting that there is a thematic connection between the works. I am merely alluding to the formal/structural resemblance of the two.

43 The description of wondrous and strange places is not confined to the passage mentioned in the SCE. As stated earlier, during the medieval period this genre of literature was considered to be a pseudo-geography of countries, regions and provinces within the empire. The interest in marvelous creatures, buildings and places was bequeathed to the Muslim scholars from Classical Greek literature. However, from the 12th century onwards, this interest was cultivated and expanded to form its own unique genre first in Arabic and then in Persian. Incidentally, the first author to collect these tales of marvels in a separate book is none other than Abu'l-Mo'ayyad al-Balkhi, the composer of the *Ketāb-e Garshāsp* and the *Great Shāhnāmeh,* which included many, if not all, the stories of the Sistani heroes. The work of Abu'l-Mo'ayyad's ʿAjāyeb al-Donyā is not extant; Gazerani, Old garment.

retinue, Garshāsp takes a series of trips to various wondrous places. With the Māharāja as a guide, Garshāsp travels around India, and beginning with some marvelous islands, he witnesses many extraordinary things: an island covered with plants and fruits of extraordinary qualities (they could put people to sleep or make them cry, etc.), an island covered entirely with snakes, several islands with striking natural beauty the likes of which were not found anywhere in Iran or Sistan, islands ruled by magicians, a place full of rhinoceros, an island inhabited by demonic creatures, etc.[44] This list is incomplete and does not include all of Garshāsp's adventures; much space and attention is devoted to these episodes; there are almost fifty printed pages describing in detail the various strange places where they take place.

Also taking place in India, and closely related to the *ʿajāyeb* motif, is the multi-staged trial that the Sistani hero must undertake. The most famous example of this is, of course, Rostam's *haft-khān*, or seven trials. Garshāsp's adventures in India include several such trials. Garshāsp tackles dangerous animals and creatures several times; he defeats scores of rhinoceros,[45] a second dragon,[46] a strange demon/dragon,[47] and an entire of army of creatures of supernatural powers and strange creatures by the name of sagsar.[48]

This concludes the repertoire of the heroic motifs, which must be invoked before a Sistani hero can lay any claims to legitimacy. By slaying a dragon, the hero passes the first, and perhaps the most significant, test. Then he finds treasures left behind for him by his ancestor, which can only be claimed by him (hence the connection to his lineage), and their presence in India is emphasized. Receiving counsel from a Brahmin fulfills the requirement for a ruler to be wise or have sought out and received wisdom. Seeing wondrous places and overcoming danger in the shape of unknown animals and creatures are further indications of the hero's bravery and the richness of his life experience that sets him apart from the ordinary person.

The image projected of India in the heroic motifs discussed so far is very much part of how India was perceived throughout the medieval

44 *Garshāspnāmeh* 148–97.

45 Ibid. 159–60. Incidentally, hunting rhinoceros apparently becomes a legitimization motif. The Sasanian inscription Rag-e Bibi in Bactria, which celebrates Shahpur I's conquest of the region, depicts him hunting rhinos, see Grenet et al., Sasanian Relief at Rag-i Bibi 243–67. Grenet, Découverte d'un relief sassanide 116.

46 Ibid. 162.

47 Ibid. 163–5.

48 Ibid. 169. The *sagsars* are not the only magical creatures in the SCE. Because of the overlap between the *ʿajāyeb* genre and the SCE, many such creatures appear in the respective bodies of literature, with a certain amount of consistency in their names and description.

period – as the land of all things strange. Often in the *Shāhnāmeh*, as well as other medieval works, the very word Hindustan (i.e. India in Persian) is rhymed with the word *jāduestān/jādusetān* (lit. land of magic). The wondrous people, creatures, and landscapes ascribed to India in the epics can be viewed as part of this notion of India as the mysterious land of the supernatural, both good and evil. One cannot attribute this characterization of India to mere imagination, however. As already mentioned, parts of India were historically conquered by the rulers of Sistan, whose stories are captured in the SCE, and it is because of this perhaps that we find hints and clues that seem to have stemmed from the observations of those who visited India. For example, in the *Garshāspnāmeh* one can clearly see that the different flora and fauna of the land are seen as one of its strange features. At the same time, there was some knowledge of the various magical and occult practices in India, and some of the ways India has been perceived must be attributed to the existing realities. It is a land of a different kind of wisdom, a birthplace of some of the world's esoteric traditions. The belief in the existence of a superior kind of wisdom in India is substantiated in the introduction to *Kalilah wa Dimnah* or *Pañcatantra*, the collection of fables of Indian origin. According to the introduction of the work, the Sasanian king Anushirvān sent Burzoy, one his court physicians, to India in search of superior scientific/medical knowledge. After traveling throughout India, however, Burzoy returns with the book of *Pañcatantra*, along with a few chapters of the Indian epic *Mahābhārata*, presenting these to the court as containing the most superior knowledge and wisdom that India has to offer.[49]

In the popular medieval culture, therefore, India is this complex mysterious place defined by the presence of magic and wisdom. This characterization of India in the mind of the audience and the fact that the rulers of Sistan throughout many centuries did have a presence in India made it an ideal playground for the heroic motifs discussed above. In other words, the foreignness and mysteriousness of India, the strangeness of its people and their customs, makes the tasks expected of the heroes even more challenging. At the same time, embellishing the story with the marvels of India, without a doubt, enhances the story itself, as some of those episodes are the most entertaining and awe-inspiring of the whole tale.

The presence of these heroic motifs, which contain recognizable *topi* from various corpora of heroic literature, does not, however, diminish the argument that some of the events that unfold in India could have had real historical referents. A question that will naturally arise is how and by what mechanism

49 De Blois, *Burzoy's voyage*.

could this imaginary landscape of India have been linked to the "real" historical landscape? Although there is a mechanism to link these two, one cannot dismiss the imaginary landscape as having been constructed without any reference to the existing realities in India, especially when viewed through foreign eyes. Throughout the ages those who traveled from the Middle East to India have found India to be drastically different than any other place: most travelers experienced it as an exotic, mysterious and strange place. This is true both of India's landscape and climate and its diverse populace.[50] Therefore, some of the "imaginary" landscape of India must have been constructed based on the experiences of the travelers who had visited it. Nevertheless, in the SCE there is a mechanism or a device by which a connection is made to the real, historical landscape. This link is established by using real geographical names as well as the names of real historical dynasties or characters. In a sense, these names function as tropes to the audience: they pin down, as it were, the imaginary landscape to the real geographical locations, creating a bridge between the two landscapes.

2.4 Another Version of the Story/History

At the time of Garshāsp's initiation as a hero, and the consequent forging of a relationship between the hero of Sistan and the Iranian throne, Zaḥḥāk is king of Iran. It is Zaḥḥāk to whom Garshāsp has sworn allegiance and it is following Zaḥḥāk's orders that Garshāsp embarks on his adventures in India. This may come as a surprise to the reader who is acquainted with Zaḥḥāk's character as depicted in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh* for, without a doubt, Zaḥḥāk is one of the worst characters in the *Shāhnāmeh*. With a character partly based on the Avestan demon Aži Dahāka,[51] Zaḥḥāk is portrayed in the *Shāhnāmeh* as a foreign, and hence inherently illegitimate, usurper of the Iranian throne.[52] The demonic Zaḥḥāk of the *Shāhnāmeh* is a cruel tyrant whose malicious acts continue to evoke a deep sense of abhorrence in the audience. This characterization of Zaḥḥāk is the context in which the whole story of his emergence, his

50 For attitudes of some of the people who visited India in the medieval period, see Dale, *Garden of eight* chapter 7.

51 Khaleghi-Motlagh, Azdaha – part II.

52 Zaḥḥāk's character and narrations concerning him are surprisingly varied. His character is definitely a composite one, as already argued in chapter 5. Further investigation into this topic has revealed it to be rather complex and deserving of attention in a separate study that I intend to undertake.

reign and his removal from the throne are narrated. Zaḥḥāk is able to seize the Iranian throne because the previous Iranian king, Jamshid, has lost his *farr*. In Ferdowsi's version, however, Jamshid's hubris, which resulted in his loss of *farr*, is downplayed. Instead, the blame for the tragedy of the loss of power is placed entirely on Zaḥḥāk. His arrival in Iran is one of the most tragic and disastrous moments in the *Shāhnāmeh*. Not only does he cause much destruction to the country, but he also slays Jamshid and forces his two sisters, Shahrnavāz and Arnavāz, into marrying him and tarnishes their characters by initiating them into the dark arts of magic. But Zaḥḥāk's evil ways do not end here; perhaps the best-known of Zaḥḥāk's acts is his slaughter of two young men on a daily basis, so that their brains could be harvested and fed to the serpents that have grown out of his shoulders. Zaḥḥāk's unjust acts eventually fuel the fires of a revolt, leading to the blacksmith Kāveh's uprising and Zaḥḥāk's eventual removal from the throne.

The Sistani depiction of Zaḥḥāk's character, however, is very different. To begin with, there is no discussion in the *Garshāspnāmeh* of the way in which he deposed Jamshid and gained power in Iran. According to both the *Shāhnāmeh* and the *Garshāspnāmeh* Jamshid fled Iran, abandoning his throne and crown to Zaḥḥāk. Ferdowsi's Zaḥḥāk, as one comes to expect from him, kills Jamshid upon his seizure of the Iranian throne.[53]

Given Zaḥḥāk's characterization in the *Shāhnāmeh*, what he does to Jamshid comes as no surprise. Indeed, he is expected to commit cruel and senseless acts, and killing Jamshid by sawing him in two is very much in line with the way he is described in the *Shāhnāmeh*. At the same time, what is interesting is how Ferdowsi downplays the fact that Jamshid flees Iran and is absent for a hundred years.[54] Jamshid's escape and exile from Iran is only mentioned in passing; instead, the main emphasis is on Zaḥḥāk's slaying of Jamshid, the details of which have been cited above. There is therefore no information in

53 *Shāhnāmeh* 1:51–2.

نهان بود چند از بداژدها نیامد به فرجام هم زو رها
چو ضحاکش آورد ناگه به چنگ یکایک ندادش سخن را درنگ
به اره اش سراسردو نیم کرد جهان را از او پاک پر بیم کرد

Translation DD 13:
When Zaḥḥāk had him in his clutches, he gave him no time to plead his case but had him sawn in two and filled the world with terror at his fate.

54 *Shāhnāmeh* 1: 51.

the *Shāhnāmeh* as to what happens to Jamshid in the hundred years that he is away from Iran.

The *Garshāspnāmeh* addresses this lacuna, and we learn that after Jamshid fled the seat of the Iranian monarchy, he headed for the southeastern province of Zābolestān. Having taken refuge with the king of Zābolestān, his days are spent drinking and hunting. It is during this time that he falls in love with the unnamed daughter of Kurang. What follows is a long and detailed romance between Jamshid and Kurang's daughter. In the SCE, we often find a romantic episode usually involving the protagonist and a princess from a foreign land.[55] The sole purpose of the romantic episode, however, is to produce an offspring, and this is precisely the case here. The story of Jamshid and Kurang's daughter serves another purpose as well: it is through this union that Garshāsp and his descendants are able to trace their origin back to Jamshid, and therefore, this romantic episode occupies an important point of reference for later Sistani epics. The existence of a manuscript tradition containing just that episode is another indication that it became important enough within the body of the SCE to be recited and read as an autonomous story.[56]

The *Garshāspnāmeh*, however, does not dwell on the reasons why Jamshid had to escape. Instead, the reader's focus is almost immediately shifted to Jamshid's princely adventures and his romance with Kurang's daughter. The account of Jamshid's murder at the hands of Zaḥḥāk also appears in the *Garshāspnāmeh*, but there it is summed up in two forgettable lines.[57]

The significance of the alternative narrations of Jamshid's fate lies in what each story chose to highlight and what details were deemed unnecessary. The 'facts' of the different versions are the same. After all, in the *Shāhnāmeh* all we are told about Jamshid's end: he is removed from power, forced to abandon his throne and run off to an unknown destination in utter despair. We do not learn

55 For other examples in the SCE see the romance of Rostam and Delāvāz, which results in the birth of his son, Jahāngir, *Jahāngirnāmeh* 5–31, as well as that of Rostam and the daughter of an Indian king, and the offspring of this union is Farāmarz, *Farāmarznāmeh* (b) 24–5.

56 For example, British Library Oriental MS 393.

57 *Garshāspnāmeh* 64.

چنین آمد از گفته باستان و زآن کاگه از راز این داستان
که ضحاك ناگه گرفتش به چین به اره به دو نیم کردش به کین

Translation:
Thus is reported in ancient tales by those who are aware of their intricacies: Zaḥḥāk captured him (Jamshid) in China and sawed him in two.

anything about how his time was spent when he was away from Iran. Instead, Ferdowsi presents us with the gruesome scene of Jamshid being sawn in two.

The reasons for such different depictions are related to what has been said in the previous section, on the different characterizations of Zaḥḥāk. Making Jamshid a protagonist in a love story immediately after has been removed from the throne, as is the case in the *Garshāspnāmeh*, does not befit his characterization in the *Shāhnāmeh* as victimized and an unjustly treated king. Therefore, in the *Shāhnāmeh* the period of Jamshid's absence from Iran is glossed over, and instead the reader is left with Jamshid's horrific fate.

The Sistani narration of Zaḥḥāk's rise to power is devoid of a sense of tragedy, disaster or injustice. Zaḥḥāk is merely another Iranian king, and his legitimacy is never questioned explicitly or implicitly in the text. The 'neutral' depiction of Zaḥḥāk is indeed required, for it is from Zaḥḥāk that Garshāsp receives the kingdom of Sistan and his title *jahān-pahlavān*. In the SCE, unlike in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, there is no mention of Zaḥḥāk's Arab ethnicity. As a matter of fact, nowhere are we given any reason to believe that Zaḥḥāk is not Iranian.[58] What is most surprising, however, is the absence of the iconic serpents on Zaḥḥāk's shoulders. In the Sistani version of the story, with the exception of a cursory reference,[59] there is no mention of the snakes, and therefore, there is no need for elaborate stories of Iranian youth being murdered in order to feed their brains to Zaḥḥāk's snakes. Absent from the description of Zaḥḥāk's removal from power are his evil deeds that resulted in the popular uprising headed by Kāveh the blacksmith. Instead of being condemned for his unjust behavior that resulted in his deposition from the Iranian throne, the *Garshāspnāmeh* cites Zaḥḥāk's bad luck as the reason for his fate.[60]

Let us summarize Zaḥḥāk's character as he appears in the Sistani version of events. Zaḥḥāk enters the narrative of the *Garshāspnāmeh*, accompanied by his army and heading for India. He makes a stop in Zābolestān, at the court of Garshāsp's father, Atharṭ. Zaḥḥāk is received according to the royal custom: Atharṭ receives him with great pomp, arranges a magnificent feast in his honor, and opens up his treasury to accommodate his entire army.[61] It is at this royal party that Zaḥḥāk encounters Garshāsp for the first time and mar-

58 Zaḥḥāk's ethnicity as an Arab is emphasized in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, while other narrations of Zaḥḥāk depict him as being of Iranian origin. I will take up the discussion of Zaḥḥāk's composite character elsewhere.

59 *Garshāspnāmeh* 328–9. It is only upon Zaḥḥāk's removal from power that one finds a rather vague mention of the snakes.

60 Ibid. 293.

61 *Garshāspnāmeh* 50.

vels at his strength and beauty, guessing that he must be of Jamshid's lineage. Unlike what one would expect of the Ferdowsi's Zaḥḥāk, this Zaḥḥāk does not seem to be threatened by Garshāsp's royal lineage, which indeed is traced back to Zaḥḥāk's predecessor and rival, Jamshid. Instead, as far as Zaḥḥāk is concerned, Garshāsp's genealogical connection to Jamshid is an indication that Garshāsp is a great hero, possessing the essential dual qualifications of skill (*honar*) and noble lineage (*gohar*).[62]

As mentioned above, it is upon Zaḥḥāk's request that Garshāsp agrees to fight a dragon, and after accomplishing this mission, he receives the title of *Jahān-Pahlavān* and the fiefdom of Zābol from Zaḥḥāk. There is a sense, however, that Zaḥḥāk is left with no choice but to accept Garshāsp's reign over these territories. After he visits Sistan for the first time, shortly after the completion of its construction, Zaḥḥāk is awed by Garshāsp's court and his power and decides quickly that he in no way should make an enemy out of Garshāsp. As a result, Zaḥḥāk plots to keep Garshāsp away from Sistan by sending him off on another mission to India.[63] Rather than in Zaḥḥāk's evil nature, the roots of the conflict must be sought in the complicated relationship of the Sistani heroes and Iranian kings, which is a reflection of the historical struggles between members of the Suren family and the Parthian king.

Beyond the *Garshāspnāmeh*, there is further evidence in the SCE that Zaḥḥāk is viewed simply as another Iranian king. As mentioned earlier, during their adventures in India, the Sistani heroes often come across treasures left behind for them by either one of their ancestors or one of the Iranian kings.[64] Farāmarz finds such treasure in India, and this particular treasure has been left behind for Farāmarz by Zaḥḥāk. As one would expect of a *topos*, along with the treasure there is a note – in this case a note of advice (*pandnāmeh*) – left behind by Zaḥḥāk in which he has foretold Farāmarz's discovery of the treasure by the power of his *farr*.[65]

Most striking, and contradictory to the *Shāhnāmeh*, is Zaḥḥāk's image in this episode. First and foremost, by being the one who has buried the treasure, he is given the status of a legitimate Iranian king, because all other treasures that the Sistani heroes come across have been hidden either by their ancestors or by legitimate Iranian kings, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, finding a treasure is part of the repertoire of heroic motifs that aims at legitimizing a

62 Ibid. 51.

63 Ibid. 269–70.

64 For a detailed discussion of the evolution of this motif, see chapter 5.

65 *Farāmraznāmeh* (*b*) 96. For a discussion of Zaḥḥāk's treasure left behind for Farāmarz, see chapter 5.

hero/king. The other elements that appear in this motif and that are associated with someone of royal status are also present in this passage. First, all the kings by virtue of their royal status are able to predict the future; therefore, the treasure is always left behind for a specific person whose coming is foretold, in this case Farāmarz. Second, the treasure includes some of the royal jewels, including the throne or the crown. Third, the king, in this case Zaḥḥāk, has the ability to protect the treasure by appointing a demonic being to safeguard it. Here, in addition to all the aforementioned points there is a mention of the contemporaneous (to Farāmarz) Iranian king, Kay Kāvus, who is the rightful heir to the treasure. This means that according to this version of the story, Zaḥḥāk views himself as Kay Kāvus' predecessor (and perhaps even an ancestor), and this notion does not appear to be problematic to Farāmarz or to the audiences who heard the story. After all, nowhere in the story do we find a need to justify Zaḥḥāk's depiction as one of Iran's legitimate kings.

2.5 Footprints of a Religious Conflict

We began our discussion of Garshāsp by indicating that he, in his most ancient avatar, is an Avestan hero who was appropriated as the ancestor of the house of Rostam. This act of appropriation, however, resulted in a "revision" of Garshāsp's character in later Zoroastrian literature. Bits and pieces of what seems to be a more ancient Garshāsp legend are preserved in various Avestan *Yashts* as well as in the *Vendidād*. Among the Yashts, the *Zamyād Yasht* (Yasht 19) has the most extensive account of Garshāsp. According to the *Zamyād Yasht*, Yima (Jamshid) loses his *farr* and as a consequence his *farr* is handed down to three figures: Mehr or Mithra receives the part of *farr* related to kingship, Fereidun the part related to priesthood, and Garshāsp receives the *farr* of warriors.[66] The three figures mentioned here reflect the three major castes of society in that order, and Garshāsp receiving the part related to the warriors is significant, for it grants him the position of the ancestor of the warrior caste.

The mention of Garshāsp or Kərəsāspa Av. as a recipient of *farr* and his description as "manly-heroic" (*naire.manah* Av., Naremān MP) is a starting place for the narration of the Garshāsp legend in the same *Yasht*. Hence, following his reception of the heroic portion of Yima's *farr*, we have an impressive list of Garshāsp's heroic deeds: ever-alert and watchful, Garshāsp first

66 Purdavud, Zamyād Yasht 337–8; Humbach and Ichaporia, *Zamyād Yast* 112–55; Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt* 196–211. Here we see a connection to Yima, Jamshid, which has been 'translated' as a genealogical link in the Sistani epics.

slays the dragon Aži Sruuna, a horse-devouring, man-eating, poisonous yellow creature, on whose back Garshāsp cooks his meal prior to killing him.[67] Next Garshāsp slays Gandaress, a creature whose description, while vague in the Avesta, is described in later Pahlavi texts as Gandarw, a monster that once devoured twelve villages. This Gandarw is a sea-creature, for according to the later Pahlavi texts, it drags Garshāsp into the sea where they engage in a battle that lasts nine days and nine nights, at the end of which the beast is killed.[68] Next, Garshāsp kills nine rascal sons of a rebellious king as well as two witches. Carrying his mace, he next slays another creature that remains unknown aside from his attribute of possessing leaden jaws and hands of stone.[69]

In other Yashts, Garshāsp's image remains that of an unscathed hero: in the *Ābān Yasht*, for example, we learn that Anāhitā, acknowledging Garshāsp's pious deeds and devotion to her, granted him the boon of defeating the sea monster/dragon Gandarw mentioned in the *Zamyād Yasht*.[70] In the *Rām Yasht*, Garshāsp beseeches the deity Vahu to grant him the ability to avenge his brother's blood and receives it.[71] Finally in the *Farvardin Yasht*, which is devoted to the worship of the *fravashi* – the sacred souls of the dead – Garshāsp is mentioned as one whose *fravashi* deserves being worshiped because he was a mighty mace-bearing warrior, capable of withstanding the dreadful spear-bearing brigand, who had wreaked havoc on mankind through evil acts.[72]

In the Avestan texts, Garshāsp is depicted as pious and reverent towards gods, and he is a glorious hero admired by humans and gods alike. He is an archetypal warrior, a defender of civilization, an eradicator of all sorts of menace and danger that might afflict humans, and a devout worshiper of the rightful gods. The depiction of Garshāsp in the *Yashts*, therefore, is free from any blemish.

However, in the legal treatises *Vendidād*, considered part of Avestan literature, we start seeing two trends: first, Garshāsp is linked to the land of Kabul, and second, he marries a fairy, a magical creature by the name of Khonanth'iti.[73] It is noteworthy that the notion of the supernatural, especially magic, with

67 Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt* 212–18; Humbach and Ichapaoria, *Zamyād Yast* 116–19.

68 For the Pahlavi Rivāyat description of the monster, see Humbach and Ichapaoria, *Zamyād Yast* 119.

69 Ibid. 119–25. Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt* 219–35.

70 Darmesteter, Ābān Yasht 5. 2:37–9, 2:62–3; Purdavud, Ābān Yasht 2:249–50.

71 Darmesteter, Rām Yasht 15. 2:26–9, 2:255–6; Purdavud, Rām Yasht 2:150–1.

72 Darmesteter, Farvardin Yasht 1:136, 1:223; Purdavud, Rām Yasht 2:73.

73 Darmesteter, Vendidād 1:7; Razzi, *Vendidād* 1:195.

which fairies and sorcerers are associated, is univocally condemned as belonging to the evil forces of Angrminu or Ahreman.[74] What we can gather from this reference is that by the time of the composition of this particular Avestan text, the process of appropriation of Garshāsp as the ancestor of the Sistani heroes/Suren house was underway. It is this association, namely that of Garshāsp with the Sistani heroes, that has slowly imbued his character with negative attributes as well as linking him to a specific geographical location in the east.

Why, one might naturally ask, would there be a need for a smear campaign when it comes to one of the most venerated Avestan heroes? The answer to this question lies in what seems to have been a religious conflict between the house of Suren, the rulers of Sistan, and the new religion, Zoroastrianism. For as we shall see, the religious rhetoric against him picks up momentum as we move to the Middle Persian, or Pahlavi texts.

The circumstances of the marriage between Garshāsp and the fairy Khonanth'iti remains unexplained in the Avestan text, *Vendidād*. In a Middle Persian exegesis on *Vendidād*, however, we learn that the fairy in question was a sorceress who deceived Garshāsp into idol-worship.[75] In other Middle Persian works two added notions emerge: First, Garshāsp is portrayed as being an adherent of "bad religion," the antithesis to Zoroastrianism, which is often also called the good religion. Garshāsp has earned this condemnation because he committed the great sin of extinguishing the sacred fire.[76] Second, in Middle Persian texts, Garshāsp becomes the savior, the one who at the end of time will be awakened to fight the remainder of the Ahrimanic creatures.[77] At first glance these notions may seem contradictory. Why would a sinner who has been condemned to hell be granted the role of a messiah?

As mentioned before, Garshāsp, after his appropriation by the house of Suren as their ancestor, became the archetypal Sistani hero. Because of the religious conflict between the house of Suren and Iranian kings (in the line of Lohrāsp) who had converted to Zoroastrianism, Garshāsp is condemned of the great sin of extinguishing the sacred fire by the Zoroastrian exegesis of the Avesta. Garshāsp, however, given his pivotal role in the Avesta, cannot simply be written off. There is a historical parallel to this also: the Suren family, who

74 For a recent work that offers a classification of different evil creatures in the Avestan literature, see Forrest, *Witches, whores and sorcerers*.

75 Razzi, Vendidād 2:222.

76 Bahar, *Pazhuheshi dar Asaṭir-e Irān* 234–8; Dadegi, *Bundahish* 134; Mazdapur, *Dāstān-e Garshāsp* 148–9.

77 Ibid.; Anonymous, *Zand Bahman Yasn* 18–19. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn*.

claim to be of his lineage, are too powerful to be removed entirely from the political arena.[78] Therefore, what we see in the later Zoroastrian texts is a kind of negotiation as regards Garshāsp's position. One of the longest mentions of Garshāsp in the Pahlavi texts is in *Dāstān-e Garshāsp*, a story in the form of a dialogue between the Zoroastrian god, Ahuramazdā or Ormazd, and Garshāsp. In it, a repentant Garshāsp approaches Ormazd and begs to be forgiven so that he might enter heaven. He approaches Ormazd several times with his request and each time he is reminded of his great sin and his request is denied until finally Garshāsp reminds Ormazd that he has no choice but to give him a second chance since he is the only one who can counter the evil forces who are going to be unleashed at the end of the world. Ormazd, unable to counter this argument, accepts Garshāsp's plea.[79]

Garshāsp's assumption of the role of messiah in the later Pahlavi texts, therefore, is not contradictory to his portrayal as a sinful creature and adherent of "bad religion", which resulted in his condemnation to hell. It is rather an outcome of a negotiation or a concession, which, given Garshāsp's prominent and lofty place in the Avesta, cannot be denied him.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the SCE contains other references to a religious conflict between Zoroastrianism and the older religion to which Rostam and his ancestors adhered. It is clear that this must be a historical reflection of a religious conflict, to which I shall return in chapter 3.

78 See chapter 1, especially the Surens in the Parthian period.

79 Mazdapur, *Dāstān-e Garshāsp*.

CHAPTER 3

The Zenith of Suren Power

With Garshāsp established as the great ancestor of the Sistani house, we have the beginning of a genealogical line to which Rostam belongs. But Rostam is not a direct descendant of Garshāsp; he is followed by Sām, Narimān, and then Rostam's father, Zāl.[1] I have decided to continue the discussion of the SCE by examining the stories of Rostam, hence omitting an in-depth discussion of the stories where Sām, Narimān and Zāl are the protagonists. This omission, however, needs to be justified. The first and most important reason why I have not included these stories is the lack of a substantial historical layer pertaining to the accounts of these three Sistani heroes.[2] The lack of historical referents or, to be more precise, the thinness of the historical layer, is partly due to the fact that Sām and Narimān are characters created to fill the gap between Rostam and Garshāsp. Hence as first observed by Nöldeke,[3] Sām and Narimān are both terms that appeared in the Avesta to describe Garshāsp; the former is his family name and the latter his epithet. However, I must admit that as opposed to Zāl, the characters of Sām and Narimān are fashioned according to Garshāsp's model of a Sistani hero, and both at certain times become the rulers of Sistan. Therefore, there are episodes in their stories that could be analyzed in the context of the present study.[4] Zāl's heroic character, however, seems to have an entirely different provenance. After all, Zāl is rather odd from the time of his birth. The story of his white hair, which prompted his father to banish him, his upbringing by the mythological bird Simorgh, and his ubiquitous and continuous presence throughout the legendary part of the National History clearly set him apart from all other Sistani heroes, as does the fact that Zāl lacks warlike qualities. Nowhere do we find traces of any heroic trials as we did in the case of all prominent Sistani heroes who eventually assumed Sistan's throne. Another significant factor that sets Zāl apart from his ancestors and progeny is that he is not the king of Sistan but the ruler of Zābolestān, the province to the east

1 For the genealogical chart see Figure 3.

2 While Sām's character figures largely in certain episodes of the *Shāhnāmeh*, Narimān is merely mentioned, while Zāl of course is present for a long span of time. In the SCE there are separate stories dedicated to each of the three heroes and these have been discussed in Appendix A.

3 Nöldeke, *Iranian National Epic* 24.

4 The episodes of the stories that do seem to have historical referents are general in nature.

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of Sistan/Drangiana, which in ancient times bore the name Arachosia. Where is one to seek the origin or the prototype for Zāl's character? Could it have been based on the legends of the pre-Saka inhabitants of the ancient provinces of Drangiana and Arachosia as implied by Nöldeke,[5] or does it bear traces of Chinese myths and legends incorporated into the legends of the Saka settlers of the province?[6] Obviously, engaging in these question as well as other facets of Zāl's character would be a fascinating project that would enrich our understanding of various aspects of the formation of this body of literature. Zāl's character, however, did not lend itself to superimposition of a historical layer, and given that this is precisely the focus of the present study, he also has been left out of our discussion.

This brings us to Rostam. Included in the discussion of this chapter are episodes of the Rostam legend that are not part of the *Shāhnāmeh*, as well as many that in fact constitute some of the better-known and much celebrated episodes of Ferdowsi's *magnum opus*. As we shall see, some of the excluded episodes depict a young Rostam who establishes himself not as a mere hero but the Sistani hero par excellence. The collection of Rostam stories contains reflections of both historical events and socio-political dynamics of power structure(s). Therefore, preserved in one of the layers of these stories is a reflection of the state of affairs between the first century BCE and the first century CE, which coincides with the zenith of the political power of the Suren family. What we can glean from these episodes is the nature of the socio-political dynamics that dominated the court as well as the throne's relationship vis-à-vis the noble houses. Hence, in the Rostam stories we have a clear reflection of the relationship amongst the noble families at various stages, the special status of Rostam's house, and their collective relationship to the Iranian king. As we shall see, one can trace the different stages of the relationship between Rostam's house and the Iranian king as it deteriorates from the initial state of an alliance to a contemptuous distance to outright animosity. In tracing this shift, we are aided by the fact that the SCE offers an alternative narration of the causes and the nature of the changing dynamics of the power structure to that of Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*. Furthermore, we are able to pursue the trajectory of the different narrations in the body of Zoroastrian literature and, by doing so, we get a sense of the complexity of the sources of the National History.

5 Nöldeke, *Iranian National Epic* 17.

6 The Chinese roots of certain themes of Zāl's legend have been suggested by Coyajee, *Bonyādhāye* 42–7.

3.1 Rostam's Early Heroic Career

3.1.1 *Babr-e Bayān*

Babr-e Bayān is Rostam's famous impenetrable armor that renders him invincible.[7] Indeed, Babr-e Bayān partially defines Rostam's heroic image, as it is this special armor that grants him super-human ability. In the *Shāhnāmeh* illustrations, Babr-e Bayān is an emblem by which Rostam is identifiable among the other heroes and warriors. However, nowhere in the *Shāhnāmeh* do we learn about the origin of this wondrous armor. Its absence from the *Shāhnāmeh* notwithstanding, the story of its origin, which is significant for the construction of Rostam's heroic image, has survived.

In a series of articles, Khaleghi-Motlagh has published an incomplete version of the story of Rostam's battle with Babr-e Bayān.[8] This he has found interpolated in a *Shāhnāmeh* manuscript, which he does not identify, but my comparison of the text cited by Khaleghi-Motlagh with several other manuscripts reveals that it is a British library manuscript that contains many other interpolated stories from the SCE.[9] In addition to this version, he cites an oral version recorded by a German scholar in the 19th century.[10] There are more than the two extant versions of the story mentioned by Khaleghi-Motlagh. In the beginning of the lithograph *Farāmarznāmeh*,[11] the compiler provides another and a more complete version of this story.[12] Another prose version of this story that corroborates the other versions appears in the Qajar period collection of the scrolls (*ṭumār*) of the storytellers.[13] The latter two versions match in much of their detail. Here I will provide a summary of this episode.

The story begins at the court of the Iranian king Manuchehr, where many of the heroes have assembled in the king's garden for a feast. Among them are Zāl, and a youthful Rostam – 14 or 17 years old depending on the different versions of the story – as well as a number of Karenid/Gudarziān heroes such as Qāren, Kashvād, Gudarz and Giv. The feast is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of a messenger with an urgent request. The messenger beseeches the

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7 For studies of Babr-e Bayān see Khaleghi-Motlagh, Babr-e Bayān; Omidsalar, Beast Babr-e Bayān 129–42.

8 Khaleghi-Motlagh, Babr-e Bayān 200–27 and ibid. no. 2: 382–416.

9 The manuscript in question is OR. 2926 British Library.

10 Khaleghi-Motlagh, Babr-e Bayān 1: 221.

11 This is what I have designated as *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*). For more see Appendix A, *Farāmarznāmeh*.

12 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 5–25.

13 Afshari and Mada'eni, *Haft Lashkar* 153–6.

king to send someone to subdue a creature that has appeared in India and is wrecking havoc in the land and terrorizing the population. Manuchehr, after praising Zāl, asks him to take care of the problem by going to India and killing the animal. Rostam, however, thinks that his father is in no way a match for this mighty creature. Obviously Rostam thinks that he is the only one who is up to the task and Manuchehr should send him instead of his father. Zāl is offended and chastises Rostam for his insolence at the assembly. It is mentioned at this time that Gudarz is in charge of Rostam's education, and Kashvād and Qāren are the commanders of the army.

Gudarz tries to put Rostam in his place by slapping him, but Rostam fights back, striking Gudarz on the head, causing him to pass out. Then, Rostam goes to the armory and asks for his ancestor's weapon, whereupon he receives Sām's weapon. He then sets out to India. In the meantime, Gudarz becomes worried about him and joins him, as he is responsible for Rostam's safety. Rostam encounters both Qāren's and Kashvād's armies and defeats them, capturing Qāren, Kashvād and 120 other warriors. All this time, he has concealed his identify from the Iranian army. It is noteworthy that in this episode, Zāl's position is a king, and Qāren and Kashvād are his army commanders.[14]

Rostam, who has disguised himself and has taken on the pseudo-name Alborz, is finally able to kill this animal, which contrary to contemporary and medieval belief is actually a dragon.[15] After the menace of the dragon is eliminated, we find the heroes once again at a marvelous feast, this time at the court of India's king. As a token of his appreciation, the king of India offers his daughter to Rostam, whom he marries the same day. Farāmarz, according to this story, is conceived the very same night.

There are several heroic motifs in this story that can be considered as generic requirements for narrating the episode, i.e. motifs whose function it is to ascribe the required heroic qualities to a young hero-to-be. Actually, the entire episode can be regarded as describing Rostam's rite of passage from a "mere child" to the greatest hero of the Sistani Cycle. As mentioned earlier, the testing ground for the Sistani hero is India, and once there, the first heroic trial is to slay a dragon.[16] It is Rostam's first adventure, at the end of which he establishes himself not only as a hero, but, in the circumstances of his dragon slaying, as a better hero, superior to his father and all prominent heroes of the house of Gudarz. Therefore, the story, while employing the dragon-slaying

14 I have given only the main plot and some relevant detail.

15 Babr-e Bayān is not a tiger but a dragon. This is Khaleghi-Motlagh's argument, and I have found evidence in the two versions that I have discovered that supports his argument.

16 See chapter 2 for the first instance of dragon slaying by Garshāsp.

motif discussed in chapter 2, invokes it in a manner that highlights and to some extent foreshadows Rostam's position as the most powerful hero of the Sistani Cycle. The armor Babr-e Bayān, which from then on is associated with Rostam and his family, is an emblem, a visual sign, that refers back to this episode in which Rostam's supremacy is underlined. Therefore, this particular episode of dragon slaying must have been of importance for the Sistani narration, because while Garshāsp's victory over the dragon resulted in the etching of the dragon emblem on the Sistani flags, Rostam's success granted him the armor, which became another ubiquitous sign, keeping the memory of this great victory alive in all episodes where he makes an appearance.

But why is it that only Rostam is able to kill the dragon, when all other heroes have failed? The key to Rostam's success is his dexterity in the art of trickery.[17] It is because he is a capable trickster that he is able to defeat the dragon, because unlike all other heroes who defeated the dragon by attacking him, Rostam devises another method for defeating the beast: he constructs a "house" made out of iron and fills it up with sharp objects, and he himself hides in the iron house. The dragon is in the habit of eating everything that appears before him, so he also swallows the iron house. Once in the dragon's throat, Rostam opens up the iron house. The sharp objects pierce the dragon's insides, and Rostam cuts him open and comes out. This, of course, is because the dragon's skin is impenetrable, and that is why the armor made out of his skin renders Rostam and his descendants who use it invincible.[18] This is an example of Rostam's ability to employ non-conventional methods in fighting the enemy. Actually, this is not the only incident of such behavior on Rostam's part in this episode. Because his father has forbidden Rostam to undertake the adventure, he disguises himself and even assumes the pseudonym Alborz. Throughout the corpus of the SCE, one finds many examples where the better-known heroes of the cycle resort to trickery for accomplishing a task. Obviously in this episode Rostam's trick of attacking the dragon from within is not considered a weakness. It is rather a sign of Rostam's superior intelligence that allows him to find an unconventional solution. This is true of other incidents of trickery

17 This is not a unique instance of Rostam resorting to trickery. For his role as a trickster hero see Davis, Rustam-i Dastān 231–41.

18 Farāmarz also uses the Babr-e Bayān, see *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 262; 294; and it would make sense that this significant symbol of Rostam's family's heroic achievement would be passed down to the hero of the next generation. The reason why Babr-e Bayān is exclusively associated with Rostam is because this is the way it is represented in the *Shāhnāmeh*, where, as we shall see, the majority of stories related to Farāmarz have been excluded.

throughout the epic: trickery is not morally reprehensible or even questionable but is rather a required skill for the Sistani hero.

Often, in the SCE as well as in other heroic literatures, at the end of a difficult task the hero is rewarded in some form. As mentioned earlier, the SCE heroes get their reward, in some instances, in the form of a marriage to a foreign princess. At the end of this episode, Rostam marries the daughter of the Indian king, and Farāmarz, the next great hero of the Sistani Cycle, is conceived. The marriage to the daughter of the Indian king is more than just a reward, because in this case it also serves as yet another rite of passage motif. Rostam can no longer be described as a child, as he was in the beginning of the episode. Furthermore, Farāmarz, the greatest hero to follow Rostam, could also be seen as another reward, because he is conceived as a direct result of Rostam's ability to kill the dragon.

The image portrayed of Rostam in this story is naturally consistent with the kind of hero Rostam becomes later in his life. Therefore, the general heroic motifs are employed both for their generic function, i.e. to define him as a Sistani hero, and to distinguish him as the most powerful hero of the cycle.

This story contains unmistakable references to circumstances that reflect aspects of Parthian history. First is the opening scene of a feast at the court of the Iranian king Manuchehr. In many instances, a Parthian story starts with the mention of several Parthian heroes at a drinking feast at the court of a certain Iranian king, which serves as a literary device to place the story within the chronology of the National History.

The other interesting reference is to Qāren (Karen) and his son Kashvād as leaders of the army. Although chosen by the king as the person to battle the dragon, Zāl's position is not that of an army commander. Later, we learn that Qāren and Kashvād are serving Zāl as army commanders, very much in the same way that they would serve the Iranian king. Therefore, without doubt, the episode of Manuchehr's court is not an integral part of the story, and it makes much more sense to consider Zāl as the king/ruler and Qāren and his son Kashvād as commanders of the army. In this story we find a reflection of the relationship between the houses of Rostam (Suren) and Qāren (Karen) at the time when they were close allies. This echoes the historical alliances between the two houses, for which we have some evidence.[19]

It is noteworthy that all the heroes mentioned at the drinking party belong to the house of Gudarz.[20] This story is most definitely a Sistani story, as here Zāl and Rostam enjoy a superior position compared with the status of the

19 For an example of such close ties between the two houses, see Herzfeld, *Sakastan* 93.

20 For the genealogy of the Gudarziān, see Figure 4.

Gudarziān heroes, who are there merely to provide services to Zāl and Rostam. The other indication of the friendly relationship between the two houses is the fact that Gudarz is in charge of Rostam's upbringing. Sending off a future king to a noble family at a certain age was a traditional educational practice in ancient Iran. According to Widengren,[21] this custom was prevalent throughout the pre-Islamic period, and there is ample evidence to substantiate its existence, both during the Parthian period and well into the Sasanian period, the evidence for which appears in Greek, Middle Persian, and Arabic sources, where there are a number of cases where a prince – oftentimes a future king – is sent off to be raised by a noble family residing at some distance from the court.[22] The person who is in charge of educating the young person, namely the *dāyeh*, has a special relationship to the king. What we have here is another instance of this practice: Zāl is the king, and his son Rostam is being groomed by a member of another noble family, namely that of Gudarz.

The other historical connection is that the Rostam's battle with the dragon takes place in India, and upon slaying it, Rostam marries the daughter of one of the Indian kings. The close ties between the "Indo-Scythian" and "Indo-Parthian" dynasties to India have been explored in chapter 1, and as we have seen in the case of Garshāsp's story, the connection to India is reflected in the SCE by making India the geographical setting of heroic trials. Here, however, we have an additional connection to India: Rostam's son and the next great hero of Sistan, Farāmarz, is born to an Indian princess. The marriage between Rostam and the Indian princess is a reward for the successful completion of heroic trials, but it also reflects the nature of relationships that the Suren rulers of the region must have forged with their Indian vassals.

3.1.2 *Kok-e Kuhzād*

The story of Rostam's battle with Kok-e Kuhzād is not included in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, as lamented by the Malek Shāh Ḥusayn, the author of *Eḥyā' al-moluk*.[23] By Malek Shāh Ḥusayn's attestation, however, the story was not only well-known and much recited in Sistan, but there were also written versions of the story, one in New Persian and one in Middle Persian.[24] The fame of the story, coupled with its exclusion from Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, is the justification for the author to provide a succinct sketch of its plot, which he does.[25]

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21 Widengren, *Feudalismus in alten Iran*.

22 Ibid. 69–75.

23 For the quote in full and its translation as well as a discussion of this work, see chapter 1.

24 *Eḥyā' al-moluk* 26.

25 Ibid. 26–27.

In addition to Malek Shāh Ḥusayn's brief summary, there are other extant versions of the story, usually as interpolations in the text of the *Shāhnāmeh*. The edited text of the story, which appeared along with *Borzunāmeh*,[26] is based on interpolations in the text of two *Shāhnāmeh* manuscripts.[27]

Like the episode of Babr-e Bayān, this story also pertains to Rostam's youth, about which little has been included in the *Shāhnāmeh*. While there is a mention of Manuchehr as the Iranian king of the time,[28] the focus of this story is the affairs of Sistan. This is precisely the reason why the story has been deemed too tangential for inclusion in Ferdowsi's narration of Iran's National History. However, as far as the story is concerned, the mention of Manuchehr's reign as its chronological framework is absolutely necessary, for it lends the story historical credibility.

The story begins with the description of the impenetrable citadel Marbad, followed immediately by the introduction of its ruler, Kok, an old yet powerful man. Rostam learns that Kok was feared not only by his father, Zāl, but also by virtually every notable warrior. This is because in the many battles that had unfolded between Kok-e Kuhzād and Zāl, Sām, Narimān and Garshāsp, the Sistani heroes suffered terrible defeats at his hand each time.[29] Kok's physical strength as a warrior coupled with his possession of the impregnable citadel had humbled Zāl into paying him tribute. Located en route to India, the strategic significance of Kok's citadel was yet another factor for the Sistani rulers' acceptance of Kok's terms, because had they refused to do so, their access to India would be cut off.[30]

Now, Zāl has issued orders to keep Rostam in the dark about Kok's existence, for he fears that if Rostam learns about the whole humiliating affair, he would set out at once to fight Kok:

چنین گفت با یلان زال زر که هرگز ز کهزاد بیدادگر
مگویید با رستم شیر گیر که ترسم به جنگش شتابد دلیر
شود کشته بر دست بیدادگر به خاك اندر آید سر زال زر[31]

26 Razi, *Borzunāmeh va Kok-e Kuhzād*.
27 Ibid. 235.
28 Ibid. 261.
29 Ibid. 238.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid. 238–9.

> Zāl had advised the paladins thus: Never speak of that tyrant, Kuhzād, to brave Rostam. For I am afraid [that should Rostam know about him], he would rush fearlessly to fight him. Then Rostam would be killed by the tyrant, and Zāl-e Zarr [here Zāl referring to himself in the third-person] would perish from sorrow.

As to be expected, however, the truth does not remain concealed from Rostam for long. One day, Rostam, accompanied by Kashvād and Mihan-e Milād, encounters two young men. Impressed by Rostam's strength and the grandeur of his stature, the two young men, while praising Rostam, liken him to Kok-e Kuhzād. Rostam is furious at this comparison, and upon questioning the two unassuming men, learns of the existence of Kok and the humiliating history of his ancestors' repeated defeat at his hand.[32] As Zāl had feared, Rostam at once sets out to wage war on Kok, and no amount of persuasion proves convincing. Then, Rostam challenges Kok and defeats him single-handedly and effortlessly by lifting him off his horse and throwing him in front of Zāl, who is present as a spectator.[33] Next, Rostam destroys Kok's citadel and returns to Sistan a great victor.[34]

There are several elements in the story that deserve some consideration: first, like that of Babr-e Bayān, it is one of the heroic trials, the function of which is to establish Rostam as a superior hero, unique even within his own lineage. This is perhaps why we have the account of this rather unique challenge, for it does not take place in the mysterious and distant land of India but in Sistan itself. There are clear clues in the story that serve to link Rostam to his ancestors while granting him a superior status. As opposed to Garshāsp, Sām, Narimān and Zāl, who were all defeated by Kok, Rostam removes Kok's menacing existence from Sistan effortlessly. Rostam, however, is not only conscious of his lineage; in the story itself we have the invocation of a motif that is clearly meant to connect him to his ancestors. Rostam wears Sām's hat and carries Garshāsp's bow and Fereidun's club.[35] Sām and Garshāsp are his ancestors and Sistani heroes and Fereidun, through the genealogical connection to Jamshid,[36] is also related to Rostam.

This episode contains reflections of historical events. The presence of semi-autonomous forts in and around Sistan, as well as those extending into

32 Ibid. 240.

33 Ibid. 244–58.

34 Ibid. 261

35 Ibid. 239; 257.

36 The connection has been discussed at length in chapter 2.

neighboring territories of Ghur, is attested by local histories of Sistan and the local history of Herat, among other post-Sasanian sources.[37] Given the antiquity of some of the structures, we can assume that autonomous or semi-autonomous forts pre-date their mention in post-Sasanian sources by centuries at the very least.

What we have here is a narration, within the confines of this genre, of a struggle for the take over of an autonomous fort. This particular story must have been a famous one for, aside from the survival of the story in spite of its exclusion from the *Shāhnāmeh*, as mentioned earlier, the name Kok appears in Mithradates II's inscription and is the name of a citadel in the Kuh-e Khwājeh complex.[38]

The other detail that deserves our attention and has bearings on the discussion of this genre as historiography is the mention of two other Parthian noble families aside from the Suren. Rostam in this story is accompanied by Kashvād, the son of Qāren (Karen),[39] and Mihan from Milād (Mehrān) families. It is also noteworthy that in this episode we have the mention of Mihan-e Milād, the only other member of the Mehrān family mentioned in this genre of literature besides Gorgin Milād.[40] Here we have a unique reference to one of his ancestors as one of Rostam's companions.

3.1.3 *The Haft-Khān*

While the two aforementioned episodes where excluded from the *Shāhnāmeh*, part of Rostam's trials in fact appear in Ferdowsi's version. Rostam's *haft-khān*, or the seven-staged trials, are not only included in the *Shāhnāmeh*[41] but have become one of its better-known stories in popular culture and a model for other multi-stage heroic trials.[42] There is something about Rostam's *haft-khān*, however, that seems to break the pattern that I have been trying to establish. As mentioned in chapter 2, when discussing the crystallization of the

37 Archaeological surveys throughout Western Afghanistan have revealed a great number of fortification structures catalogued in Ball, *Archaeological Gazetteer*. The entries are too numerous to be listed here. A number of citadels have also been documented in the Afghan province of Sistan and the results have been published in Fischer, *Geläedebegehungen in Sistan*. See also local history of Herat, *Tārikhnāmeh-ye Herāt*, for numerous descriptions of the attack and conquest of several such structures.

38 Chapter 1, 35.

39 For the genealogical chart of Karen/Gudarziān, see Figure 4.

40 See chapter 1, 38 for the identification of Gorgin as a member of the Mehrān family.

41 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 21–45.

42 See the discussion of the construction of Esfandiyār's heroic character below in this chapter.

repertoire of heroic motifs, I mentioned India as the setting for the unfolding of heroic trials. Rostam's *haft-khān*, however, takes place in Māzandarān. Because Māzandarān is a province in modern-day Iran, most contemporary readers assume that Ferdowsi's Māzandarān is the same place as the modern-day province. It is worthwhile, however, to consider the question of the location of this toponym.

In the most extensive and thorough work on the topography of the *Shāhnāmeh*, the question of Māzandarān's location is discussed at length.[43] In his *Topographisch-Historische Studien zum Iranischen Nationalepos*, Monchi-Zadeh argues rather convincingly that whenever Ferdowsi refers to Māzandarān, he is actually referring to the land stretching from the Indo-Iranian border well into the Indian subcontinent.[44] According to him, when referring to the Caspian Sea region, Ferdowsi usually employs the names Amol or Sari, which are the names of two modern-day cities in the Caspian Sea region.[45] A crucial part of Monchi-Zadeh's argument for identifying Māzandarān as India is that the names of six demons that appear in Māzandarān are found in the Indian epic of *Mahābhārata*.[46] Additionally, there is a mountain in India called Ispiroz, which Monchi-Zadeh identifies as *Shāhnāmeh's* Alborz Mountain.[47] The same mountain is mentioned by other Pahlavi sources such as the *Bundahishn*, according to which it is located in the east. Likewise, the relationship of the house of Sām, i.e. the Sistani heroes of the SCE or the local rulers of Sistan, prior to the Arab conquest in the Indian borderlands is substantiated by several Pahlavi works.[48] In addition to Rostam's adventures in Māzandarān, we also have his father's marriage to Rudābeh, who is the daughter of the king of Kabul (Indo-Iranian border territories). Thus, Rostam's maternal grandfather carries the title of Mahāraj, which has been preserved, albeit in a distorted fashion, as Mahrāb. Monchi-Zadeh argues that the idea of India as the land of demons was no longer sustainable because of exceedingly good relations between India and Iran during the Sasanian period. This relationship led to cultural exchanges, as a result of which India could no longer be reduced to the strange land of demons. Therefore, instead of a direct reference to India, the term Māzandarān, with its vague geographical connotations, was used by

43 For the most extensive and detailed discussion of the identity of Māzandarān, see Monchi-Zadeh, *Topographisch-Historische Studien*.

44 Ibid. 62–8.

45 Ibid. 54–61.

46 Ibid. 66.

47 Ibid. 148.

48 Ibid. 109.

Ferdowsi.[49] Nevertheless, ancient traces, such as the names of demons from the *Mahābhārata*, survive in the story, enabling us to recognize India in the description of Māzandarān.

In the story of Rostam's *haft-khān*, there are at least two clues that, when considered in the context of the SCE, substantiate Monchi-Zadeh's argument. First, there is a reference to Rostam's previous involvement in Māzandarān during Kay Qobād's reign. When Kay Kāvus decides to go to Māzandarān, his courtiers write to Zāl to warn him of Kay Kāvus' dangerous decision. It is in this context that they mention Zāl and a young Rostam (*Rostam-e shir nākhowrdeh sir*) in Māzandarān and how, as the result of this journey, safety and security was established there.[50] Nowhere in the standard text of the *Shāhnāmeh* do we find Rostam's adventures in Māzandarān prior to his *haft-khān*. It is highly likely that this is a reference to Rostam's first heroic adventure in India that resulted in the slaying of the dragon Babr-e Bayān, or another episode pertaining to Rostam's early heroic career, now excluded from the *Shāhnāmeh*.[51] We know that Rostam went to India when he was a mere child. Zāl also went to India, although not together with Rostam. Therefore, it is highly likely that the reference to Rostam's earlier adventures in Māzandarān is to the story of his battle against Babr-e Bayān in India or some other story which must have taken place in the borderlands of Sistan en route to India.

The second clue is found in the name of one of the demon-commanders that Rostam encounters in Māzandarān. Arzang or Arjang happens to be an Indian king in the *Shahriyārnāmeh*, and when one looks closely at his description in the *Shāhnāmeh*, he resembles an army commander rather than a demon. Although it is difficult to argue that Arjang the demon is the same character as

49 Ibid. 143.

50 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 7:

اگرهیچ سرخاری ازآمدن سپهبد همی زود خواهد شدن
همه رنج تو داد خواهد به باد که بردی به آغاز باکیقباد
تو با رستم شیر ناخورده سیر میان را ببستی چو شیر دلیر
کنون آن همه باد شد پیش اوی بپیچید جان بد اندیش اوی

Translation DD144–5:

If you pause long enough to scratch your head, the king will have left and thrown to the wind all the trouble you took in Kay Qobād's service. Evil thoughts have twisted the king's soul, so that everything that you and your lion cub Rostam have done seems so much wind to him.

51 There are a number of intertextual references to stories, which are not included in Ferdowsi's text.

Arjang the Indian king of the *Shahriyārnāmeh*, one must take into consideration the naming conventions in these stories. As far as Indian names are concerned, there is a stock of names, such as Rāy, Mahrāj, Jaypāl, Arjang, Arvand, Hitāl, from which the names of the Indian characters are selected. These are the names befitting Indian kings, and therefore the attribution of one of these names to a demon from Māzandarān is another hint that Māzandarān and India are the same place. Although modified, distorted and veiled, the setting for Rostam's heroic trials is, in fact, no other place than India, the setting for all heroic trials of all heroes of his house.

3.2 Historical Reflections

3.2.1 *A Time of Alliance*

With the dawn of the Kayānid dynasty, the noble families of Rostam (Suren), Qāren (Karen), Gorgin (Mehrān) and Nodhar (a branch of the royal family) dominate the narrative. The presence of members of these families is particularly pronounced in the various stories during the combined reigns of Kay Kāvus and Kay Khosrow. These stories incidentally are some of the best-known stories of the *Shāhnāmeh*, including the story of Rostam and Sohrāb, the story of Siāvush, and the romance of Bizhan and Manizheh. As a matter of fact, this section of the *Shāhnāmeh* is predominantly made up of the Sistani (i.e. Surenid) and Gudarziān (i.e. Karenid) stories. What stands out in this section of the *Shāhnāmeh* is not the mere presence and the abundance of the Parthian heroes, but also an articulation of their position vis-a-vis the Iranian throne.

After the story of the Battle of Hāmāvarān, we learn that each of the participating *pahlavāns* receives the diadem or local rulership of one of the provinces:[52]

فرستاد هر سو یکی پهلوان جهاندار و بیدار و روشن روان
به مرو و نشابور و بلخ وهری فرستاد برهرسوی لشکری (مهتری)
جهانی پرازداد شاد شد یکسره همی روی برتافت گرگ از بره

. . .

مهان پیش کاووس کهتر شدند همه تاجدارانش لشکرشدند
جهان پهوانی به رستم سپرد همه روزگار بهی زو شمرد

52 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 93.

Kāvus dispatched to each direction (province) a *pahlavān*:
To Marv, Nishapur, Balkh, and Herat, he sent out a magnate/an army[53]
The world was beaming with justice and joy
So much so that even the wolf desisted from attacking lambs!
The nobles, enjoying lofty positions, were subordinate to Kāvus
All those diadem-bearing nobles were like soldiers in Kāvus' army
Kāvus bestowed the title/office of *jahān-pahlavān* on Rostam,
For Kāvus credited Rostam for the great state of affairs.

While in this particular passage it is not spelled out what the particular assignment of provinces was, it is clear that each of the *pahlavāns* is put in charge of one of the eastern provinces, with Rostam receiving the title of *jahān-pahlavān*.

What we have here, fairly early into the narration of Kay Kāvus' reign, is an insight to the structure of the Iranian polity. The noble families each received a province as their fiefdom, while Rostam becomes the *jahān-pahlavān* of the court and the sovereign of Sistan. As we shall see below, Rostam's superiority to other nobles is expressed time and again, as is the persistent mention of Sistan, Zābol and Nimruz as his kingdom. Later on we get indications as to where the seats of each of the prominent families were: the Karen were based in Sepahan (Isfahan),[54] the Mehrān in the province of

53 The alternative reading of *mahtar/mehtar* (noble, magnate) makes sense, as does *lashkar*, for each of the nobles is accompanied by his own army.

54 *Shāhnāmeh*, 2: 451:

و زان روی جمله مهان جهان برفتند یکسر سوی اصفهان
بیاراست گودرز کاخ بلند همه دیبه خسروانی فکند

Translation:
And then all noteworthy magnates set out to Isfahan at once. Gudarz adorned his lofty palace with royal fabric (in anticipation of their arrival).

4: 158:

به گودرز داد آنزمان اصفهان کلاه بزرگی و تخت مهان

Translation:
He (Kay Khosrow) granted (the province of) Isfahan to Gudarz, appointing him to its throne, and giving him its diadem.

4: 355:
As Kay Khosrow prepares to abdicate the throne, he once again grants the province(s) of Isfahan and Qom to Gudarz:

بفرمود تا عهد قم و اصفهان نهاد بزرگان و جای مهان
نبیسد ز مشك و ز عنبر دبیر یکی نامه از پادشا بر حریر

Rey,[55] and the Nodhariān in Khurasan.[56] Each prominent *pahlavān* was also the commander of his own army and, during the many battles that unfold in this section of the *Shāhnāmeh*, it is the armies of these *pahlavāns* that collectively make up the Iranian army. Among the different armies, Rostam's army seems to have been greater in numbers and in general more powerful. Each of the army divisions, commanded by a *pahlavān* from a different family, is identified by the emblem that appears on its flag.[57]

Aside from the names of the families, which have been linked to those of the Parthian families, the political organization of the Iranian empire in this period reflects that of the Parthians, when the king ruled in conjunction with a council of nobles who were none other than the Parthian families.[58] Additionally, the description of the composition of Parthian armies, though scant in Classical sources, corroborates the evidence discussed here.[59]

It is important to note that the bulk of the stories in this part of the *Shāhnāmeh* revolve around the deeds of various heroic figures, very much in accordance with the generic demand imposed on the narrative. Nevertheless, the stories' preoccupation is to narrate the past, and hence they are rooted in and related to historical events. One of the fascinating areas, about which they have an abundance of material, is the nature of the relationship of these four families. Before I can start the discussion of the role of Rostam's house and the nature of its alliances to the royal and other noble houses, however, I would like to provide some background by taking a look at the *Shāhnāmeh*'s narration of the succession struggle that followed the death of the Iranian king Nodhar. This episode encapsulates reflections of certain significant events of

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Translation:
He ordered the scribe to write a letter, granting the noble cities of Isfahan and Qom (to Gudarz). Using golden, fragrant ink, the royal decree was written on silk.

55 Ibid. 5: 179 where Gorgin Milād is described as having warriors from Rey in his entourage.

56 *Shāhnāmeh* 4: 357, where Kay Khosrow addresses Farrokhān of the Nodhar family and tells him that his share of the world is the province of Khurasan.

57 For the seven factions of the Iranian army, which does not include Rostam's troops, see *Shāhnāmeh* 3: 11. For each of the heroes' emblems, see ibid. 3: 19; 3: 35; For some of the *pahlavāns* tents and flags, see 2: 159–61. The emblems associated with all the heroes are not always consistent. Those that are, however, are the following: Ṭus – elephant, Gudarz – lion, Giv – wolf, Gorāz – boar. In the case of all members of Rostam's family, it is always a dragon.

58 See Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall* 25–8. For a discussion of the Classical sources that mention the role of nobility in the Parthian Empire, see Jacobs, Hackl and Weber, *Quellen Zur Geschichte* 81–4.

59 Jacobs, *Quellen* 104–5.

the Parthian history that are enmeshed together and fitted into the account of Nodhar's reign. It also illustrates the special status of Rostam and his house, the relationship between the noble families, and their role in the succession struggles.

Nodhar's assumption of the Iranian throne is not problematic, for he is the son of Manuchehr, a legitimate and powerful Iranian monarch. However, his authority is challenged from the inception of his reign. Soon after he takes the throne, the king faces considerable resistance from the nobles on the account of his "unjust ways":

برین بر نیامد بسی روزگار — که بیدادگر شد سر شهریار
زگیتی برآمد زهر جای غو — جهان را کهن شد سر از شاه نو
چن او رسم های پدر در نوشت — ابا موبدان و ردان شد درشت
همه مردمی نزد او خوار گشت — دلش بر ره گنج و دینار گشت
کدیور یکایك سپاهی شدند — دلیران سزاوار شاهی شدند
چن از روی گیتی برآمد خروش — جهانی سراسر برآمد به جوش[60]

> But not many days passed (since his enthronement) before his mind turned toward injustice. Murmurings were heard on every side, and the world grew weary of this new king whose heart lived only for wealth and money, who had abrogated his father's customs, acted cruelly toward his priests and advisors, and despised all men. Peasant revolts sprang up, and pretenders to the throne appeared.

Sensing that he is about to lose his grip on power, Nodhar solicits the support of Sām, Rostam's grandfather. Sām readily steps in and, in spite of the fact that Sām himself is offered the throne by the nobles,[61] convinces them to

60 *Shāhnāmeh* 1: 285; Translation DD 111.

61 Ibid. 1: 287:

چه باشد اگر سام یل پهلوان — نشیند برین تخت روشن روان
جهان گردد آباد با داد اوی — مرو راست ایران و بنیاد اوی
همه بنده باشیم و فرمان کنیم — روان ها به مهرش گروگان کنیم

renew their allegiance to the king.[62] Having eased tensions at court, at least for the time being, Sām returns to his own kingdom of Sistan. Soon after Sām's departure, however, the Turānians led by Afrāsiyāb attack Iran. After all, the Turānians are well aware of the weakened position of the Iranian king brought on by the nobles' withdrawal of their support. In the course of one of the battles with Afrāsiyāb, Nodhar is killed, leaving the Iranian throne vacant.[63] During Nodhar's reign Sām passes away and Zāl becomes the head of the family and the ruler of the region of Zābolestān and Sistan. It is at this juncture that Zāl is summoned to attend to the problem of succession. Now, Nodhar is survived by two sons, Gostaham and Ṭus, the elder of whom is an obvious candidate for the throne. Surprisingly, however, Zāl chooses Zav Tahmāsp who, although of royal lineage, is from a different, distant, and obscure branch of the royal family:

بباید یکی شاه خسرو نژاد که دارد گذشته سخن ها یاد

. . .

اگر داردی طوس وگستهم فر سپاهست و گردان بسیار مر
نزیبد بریشان همی تاج و تخت بباید یکی دیگر شاه بیدار بخت
که باشد بر و فره ایزدی بتابد ز دیهیم او بخردی[64]

> Zāl addressing the assembly of nobles: "We need a kind of royal lineage, someone aware of our past and its traditions. Although Ṭus and Gostaham have *farr*, and army and numerous warriors at their service, they are not worthy of the throne and diadem. Another auspicious king must be sought; one bestowed with divine *farr* and from his diadem wisdom should shine . . ."

The justification for Zāl's choice is rather unconvincing in the context of this genre, which regards the male offspring of a king as a legitimate successor, as

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Translation DD 111–12.

Nobles addressing Sām: ". . . There would be nothing wrong if the hero Sām were to take his place on the royal throne. The world would flourish beneath his justice; Persia and her people support him, we are all his slaves, our souls live for him, and we will be obedient to his will."

62 Ibid. 1: 285–9.

63 Ibid. 1: 315.

64 Ibid. 1: 322–3.

long as he is in possession of *farr*. Zāl admits that both Gostaham and Ṭus posses the required *farr* but still are unsuitable for rule because of their lack of wisdom. It is noteworthy that there is nothing in the narrative up to this point that would indicate that either Gostaham or Ṭus suffers from a lapse of judgment. It is only much later in the narrative that we learn of Ṭus's numerous indiscretions. Also, one should keep in mind that lack of wisdom is not a legitimate excuse to depose a ruler: Kay Kāvus, for example, lacks this quality and yet is served by members of the noble houses throughout his long reign.[65]

Why then, one might ask, would the legitimate candidates for the Iranian throne be dismissed by Zāl? The answer to this question lies in the story's unmistakable historical references to various crucial junctures in the Parthian history, in some of which the Suren family played a significant role. First, we know that in the early Parthian period two Arsacid monarchs, i.e. Phraates II (139/8–127 BCE) and Artabanus I (127–124/3 BCE), were slain in the course of battles with the Saka invaders.[66] Nodhar's fate at the hands of Afrāsiyāb is undoubtedly a reflection of the slaying of the two Parthian monarchs. The subsequent Saka invasion of Iran during the reigns of Phraates II and Artabanus I[67] is yet another detail expressed in the account of Nodhar's reign, for Afrāsiyāb does not merely defeat the Iranians but becomes Iran's king for some time.[68] The unjustified change in the succession line from Nodhar's to Zav Tahmāsp encapsulates the memories of the change of line of succession from Phraates II to Artabanus I, as well as the passing of the throne to Sinatruce in the aftermath of the succession struggles to Mithradates II (d. 88 BCE).[69] Let us remember that, in the *Shāhnāmeh* narration of the passing of the throne from Nodhar to Zav Tahmāsp, Zāl plays a pivotal role. Actually, the succession of Zav Tahmāsp was engineered and executed by Zāl. The story, I speculate, contains reflections of Sinatruces' rise to power, whose connection to Sistan and its ruler has been explored in chapter 1. There is another minor detail that corroborates this thesis: both Zav Tahmāsp and Sinatruces are clearly identified as having been of a ripe age when they assumed the throne.[70] However, the most interesting

65 There are many examples in the *Shāhnāmeh* that illustrate Kāvus' stupidity, and some are discussed below.

66 For an exhaustive list of Classical sources that narrate the account, see Jacobs, *Quellen* 1: 50.

67 Debevoise, *Political History* 36–8.

68 *Shāhnāmeh* 1: 316.

69 As discussed in the introduction, one characteristic of this genre is that a story could refer to multiple historical events.

70 Debevoise, *Political History* 53; Schipmann, *Grundzüge* 33.

parallel between the two narrations is the support of the house of Rostam/Suren for the monarchs who are descendants of this line.[71] In chapter 1, I discussed the Suren support of the line of Sinatruces in detail, and as we shall see, Zav Tahmāsp's successors, namely the first three Kayānid kings, enjoy Rostam's unfaltering support.

This episode, therefore, sets the stage for much of what is to follow in the reigns of Kay Kāvus and Kay Khosrow. We learn that when Afrāsiyāb attacks Iran, during Nodhar's reign, it was Qāren, the ancestor of Gudarziān/Karen family, who led the Iranian armies.[72] This is where this family makes its entrance into the narrative,[73] and from then on it is clear that the relationship between this family and that of Rostam is based on a kind of alliance, with the house of Rostam always maintaining a superior status. There is also a foreshadowing of how Ṭus is going to be characterized, for before he enters the narrative, we know that he is condemned as lacking wisdom, and later on he proves the validity of the verdict passed on him on many occasions. As a result, throughout the reigns of Kay Kāvus and Kay Khosrow, the relationship of Nodhariān, i.e. Ṭus and his descendants, to the rest of the noble houses remains strained at best.

3.2.2 *The Special Status of the House of Rostam*

As mentioned before, much of the narration devoted to the reigns of Kay Kāvus and Kay Khosrow revolves around the heroic feats and adventures of Rostam. As we shall see, Rostam's role and relationship to the Iranian court is actually unique in many ways. Like his ancestors,[74] Rostam receives the title of *jahān-pahlavān* from the Iranian king. If we rely solely on the evidence from our stories, we do not get a sense of what this title or office actually entailed. What we do know, however, is that this was a hereditary title, exclusive to Rostam's family, and on all occasions when the title is bestowed by the Iranian king to

71 How is it that Kay Qobād is not Zav Tahmāsp's son, but the succession is not objectionable as far as Zāl/Rostam are concerned? It may be that there is an interruption in the line of Sinatruces as well, corresponding to the account in the *Shāhnāmeh*, for according to one ostraca discovered in Nisa, Phraates III (70–57) was not the son of Sinatruces but a descendant of Phirapatius. Frye, *History of Ancient Iran* 209.

72 Qāren appears elsewhere during Nodhar's reign, but his role as a commander of the Iranian army is described in *Shāhnāmeh* 1: 305–9.

73 Before this episode Qāren is a mere name, which is listed along with other army commanders such as Garshāsp. It is in this episode that Qāren appears as a character.

74 Garshāsp, the great ancestor of the Sistani heroes, receives this title from Zaḥḥāk as discussed in chapter 2, and Sām receives it from Fereidun. *Shāhnāmeh* 1: 163–164.

someone in the house of Rostam, the person also receives the official mandate to reign in Sistan. This special prerogative coupled with the fact that Rostam carries the epithet *tāj-bakhsh*,[75] as observed by a number of scholars,[76] reflects the memory of the special status of the Suren family as crown bestower, i.e. being responsible for physically placing the crown on the king's head. The title *jahān-pahlavān*, rather than referring to a military position, therefore refers to the privileged status of the house of Rostam, for, contrary to general perception, Rostam is not the commander of the Iranian armies. Additionally, we learn that at least in one instance, when the Iranian throne is to remain vacant, it is Zāl and Rostam who are called on to act as deputies;[77] when they refuse by returning to Sistan, it is Milād who is entrusted with the throne.[78] This once again corroborates the evidence provided by the Classical sources, which identified heads of the Suren family as coming second in their power after the Parthian king.

The evidence from the *Shāhnāmeh* suggests that another privilege of the house of Rostam was to bring up royal princes. Rostam assumes this role for Siāvush[79] and later on for Bahman.[80] This custom, as discussed above, was prevalent among the royal and noble families, and here we have evidence that Rostam's family, perhaps as a part of their special status, were in charge of the royal princes' training and eduction.

The cornerstone of Rostam's unique status, however, is his position as the ruler of the semi-independent kingdom of Sistan. This authority is not merely alluded to but highlighted throughout the text. Rostam's sovereignty over Sistan is emphasized in the *Shāhnāmeh*, where he receives the official mandate to rule over the region, not once but twice. First he receives it from Kay

75 For a few instances when this epithet is invoked, see *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 28; 2: 120; 2: 125; 3: 298.

76 For a summary of their main arguments, see chapter 1.

77 *Shāhnāmeh*, 2: 11:

تو با رستم ایدر جهاندار باش نگهبان ایران و بیدار باش

This is uttered by Kay Kāvus to Zāl, as he prepares to go to Māzandarān, against everyone's advice. Translation:

You (i.e. Zāl) and Rostam should be monarchs, the wakeful guardians of Iran.

78 Ibid. 2: 12:

به میلاد بسپرد ایران زمین کلید درگنج وگاه ونگین

Translation:

He (Kay Kāvus) put Milād in charge of Iran, entrusting the treasury, the court and the signet ring to him.

79 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 207.

80 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 425–6.

Qobād,[81] Kay Kāvus's father, and again from Kay Khosrow toward the end of his reign. Kay Khosrow, speaking of Rostam, states:

که او باشد اندر جهان پیشرو — جهاندار بیدار وسالارگو
همو را بود کشور نیمروز — سپهدار پیروزلشکرفروز
نهادند برعهد برمهرزر — برآیین خسرو دادگر
بدو داد منشور وکرد آفرین — که آباد باد ابه رستم زمین[82]

> . . . His valor is no secret, and no one has seen his equal in all the world." He ordered that a scribe bring paper, musk, and ambergris, and a document was written, by Khosrow's command, conferring on Rostam, the mammoth-bodied warrior who was praised by all men, the lordship of Sistan. The document was affixed by the royal seal and Khosrow handed it to Rostam saying, "May this land remain forever under Rostam's sovereignty."

One must remember, however, that Rostam and his ancestors were already rulers of Sistan prior to receiving the mandate from Kay Qobād. The text's insistence on having the Iranian kings grant Rostam his kingdom serves as a reminder of the existence of an alliance between Rostam and the Iranian kings. The two officiations, one by Kay Qobād, the first Kayānid king, and the second by Kay Khosrow, the last Kayānid king who enjoys the support of the house of Rostam, also define a bracket of time in which this alliance was strong. This alliance, as we shall see, does not remain intact. As the line of succession shifts to Lohrāsp, the relationship between the Iranian throne and Rostam and his family deteriorates.

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81 *Shāhnāmeh* 1: 355:

ز زاولستان تا به دریای سند — نبشتیم عهدی ترا بر پرند
توشو تخت با افسر نیمروز — بدار وهمی باش گیتی فروز

Translation DD 140:
I have written a charter on silk granting you the sovereignty over Zāvolestān, as far as the Sea of Sind. May you wear the crown of Nimruz and sit on the throne, illuminating the world.

82 *Shāhnāmeh* 4: 355; Translation DD 360.

The fact that, under normal circumstances, Rostam dwells in his kingdom of Sistan is attested to time and again. Unlike other *pahlavāns* who are usually described as being present at the court of Iran's king, Rostam, at least in times of peace, is always in Sistan. It is in times of crisis, usually after the Iranian army, which is commanded by a member of the Gudarziān family, has suffered defeat, that Rostam and his Sistani armies are called to the rescue. The first such instance is the battle of Māzandarān, where Kay Kāvus, driven by an overpowering yet irrational whim to see the mysterious land of Māzandarān, puts together an army to accompany him on his adventure. The command of Kay Kāvus's army is shared by Gudarz and Ṭus.[83] Rostam is called on after the king and his *pahlavāns* are defeated and taken captive by the demonic king of Māzandarān.[84]

The role of Rostam in the battle of Hāmāvarān, the next major crisis of Kay Kāvus's reign, parallels his actions in the battle of Māzandarān. This time Gudarz is the commander of the Iranian army, and the king is accompanied by a member of Gudarziān *pahlavāns* such as Gudarz himself, his son Giv, Shidush, Farhād, as well as Gorgin Milād from the Mehrān family, and Ṭus from the family of Nodhar.[85] Once again, Rostam is initially absent and only enters the story after the king and his *pahlavāns* have suffered a defeat and Kāvus himself has been taken captive.[86] As expected, Rostam takes on the challenges and emerges victoriously.[87] There are other occasions when Rostam's help is enlisted as a last resort, such as in the aftermath of Sohrāb's attack on Iranian territories[88] or subsequent to the colossal defeat and slaughter of members of the Gudarziān family in Turān.[89]

In addition to the depiction of the relationship of the house of Rostam to the Iranian throne, there are ample references within the body of SCE as well as the *Shāhnāmeh* to the nature of the relationship between the house of Rostam and the other noble families. For the same period of time,[90] when there is an alliance between the Iranian throne and the house of Rostam, the houses of Rostam and Gudarz also enjoy a friendly relationship, marked by

83 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 13.
84 Ibid. 2: 17.
85 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 71.
86 Ibid. 2: 80.
87 Ibid. 2: 81–89.
88 Ibid. 2: 141.
89 Ibid. 3: 145.
90 The time period being from the reign of Kay Qobād to the end of Kay Khosrow's reign.

close ties and an enduring alliance. There are many episodes in which this alliance is highlighted, and here I will provide a few examples.

One such episode appears in the story of Rostam and Sohrāb. When Giv is sent to Sistan to bring Rostam to counter Sohrāb's threat, he is given a royal reception by Rostam:

چو نزدیکی زاولستان رسید — خبر زو به فرزند دستان رسید
تهمتن پذیره شدش با سپاه — نهادند بر سر بزرگان کلاه
پیاده شدش گیو و گردان بهم — هرانکس که بر زین بد از بیش وکم
از اسپ اندر آمد گو نامدار — از ایران بپرسید واز شهریار[91]

> When he was near Zavulestan, the news of his arrival reached Rostam. Rostam came out with a contingent of his nobles to welcome him; Giv and Rostam's group dismounted together, and Rostam questioned him closely about the king and events in Iran.

When, subsequent to Rostam's delayed arrival at the court, a feud breaks out between Rostam and Kay Kāvus, it is Gudarz who reminds Kay Kāvus of Rostam's glorious deeds in service of the king, and it is upon hearing Gudarz's discourse that Kay Kāvus becomes repentant of the way he has treated Rostam:

غمی شد دل نامداران همه — که رستم شبان بود وایشان رمه
به گودرز گفتند کین کار تست — شکسته به دست تو گردد درست
سپهبد جز از توسخن نشنود — همه بخت ما زین سخن بغنود
بنزدیك این شاه دیوانه شو — وزین درسخن یاد کن نو به نو
سخن های درخور فراز آوری — مگر بخت گم بوده باز آوری
سپهدار گودرز کشواد رفت — بنزدیك خسرو خرامید تفت
به کاوس کی گفت: رستم چه کرد — کز ایران برآوردی امروز گرد؟

. . .

91 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 143; Translation DD 194.

کسی را که جنگی چو رستم بود برانـد، خـرد در سـرش کم بود
چو بشنید گفتار گودرز شاه بـدانست کو دارد آیین و راه
پشیمـان بشـد زان کجـا گفته بود به بیهودگی مغـزش آشفته بود[92]

> The courtiers were deeply alarmed, since they regarded Rostam as a shepherd and themselves as his flock. They turned to Gudarz and said, "You must heal this breach, the king will listen to no one but you; go to this crazy monarch and speak to him mildly and at length, and with luck we'll be able to restore our fortunes again." Gudarz went to Kāvus and reminded him of Rostam's past services and of the threat that Sohrāb was to Iran, and when he had heard him out, Kāvus repented of his anger.

In the story of Kāmus-e Koshāni, when the Gudarziān suffer a defeat in their encounters with Turānian armies, Kay Khosrow sends for Rostam, who responds by avowing to avenge their slaughter:

شوم با سپاهی، کمر بـرمیـان بینـدم برین کین ایرانیـان
به گودرزیان خود جگرخسته ام کمر برمیان سوگ را بسته ام[93]

> Rostam addressing Kay Khosrow: I shall go, determined to avenge the Iranians, for the death of the Gudarziān has left me broken-hearted. I shall indeed mourn them.

In episodes excluded from the *Shāhnāmeh*, there are further details about the alliance between the two families. First, as discussed in the episode of Babr-e Bayān above, it is members of the Gudarziān family, namely Kashvād and Qāren, who are charged with Rostam's upbringing. Obviously it is significant that the task of rearing future Sistani heroes or Suren kings was given to the Gudarziān.

In addition to this particular tie between the two families, we have evidence from the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* that the families also shared an additional bond forged through marriage. Though included at the end of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, the episode of the marriage was clearly a separate story as the narrator begins it by invoking formulas usually found in the beginning of a

92 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 147–149; Translation DD 196.

93 *Shāhnāmeh* 4: 147.

story.[94] In the opening scene, once again we have a description of the assembly of heroes or the noble *pahlavāns* at the court of Kay Kāvus.[95] In an attempt to contextualize dispersed stories from the Sistani Cycle, therefore, this story, like that of Babr-e Bayān, becomes pegged down to the chronology of Iranian National History by the description of a feast at the court of a specific Kayānid king. It is also important to note that the narrator/author of the poem says that he has heard this episode from the histories of kings.[96]

The topic of conversation amongst the *pahlavāns* in this particular *bazm* is the unsurpassed beauty and strength of Rostam's daughter, Bānu-Goshasp. Soon the rivalry between those present prompts them to compete over Bānu-Goshasp, because naturally every single *pahlavān* present wants to marry her. Intoxicated by excessive amounts of wine and excited by their exaggerated boasts, a fight breaks out. Rostam is immediately informed of the matter and rushes to set up a trial in order to determine who among the noble *pahlavāns* is worthy of his daughter's hand. The trial consists of having all the suitors, whose number has reached four hundred (!), sit on a rug. Then, Rostam shakes the rug vigorously, and the only person who is able to hold on to it would be a suitable husband for his daughter Bānu-Goshasp. The person who withstands Rostam's vigorous shakes and hence passes the test is Giv, son of Gudarz.[97]

Bānu-Goshasp and Giv celebrate a magnificent wedding, but on their wedding night Bānu-Goshasp does not let Giv get close to her. When he attempts, she ties him up and locks him up in a closet. This scenario repeats itself anytime Giv attempts to consummate the marriage. It is only after Rostam intervenes that Giv is set free and her attitude towards him is softened. Bizhan, another famous hero whose romantic adventures are recounted in the *Shāhnāmeh*, is

94 *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* 114. Thus we have sections in praise of the God and the prophet, usually appearing in the beginning. See appendix A, *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, for more on the structure and content of this story.

95 Ibid. 115. Gudarz is present with his 88 sons. In addition to Gudarziān (Giv and Bahram, Rohām, the rest), present at the assembly are Zang-ye Shāravan, Gorgin Milād, Farhād, Kharrād, Borzin, Fariborz and Ṭus.

96 Ibid. 114.

97 Passing a trial in order to receive a bride is not as common of a phenomenon in the corpus of Iranian literature, although there are instances of it both in the epics (for example the test set up by Mahrāb, Rudābeh's father in *Shāhnāmeh* 1: 247–256) as well as popular literature (as in the trial for Mah-Pari's hand in the story of *Samak-e ʿAyyār* 1: 26). However, in the Indian epic *Mahābhārata*, such trials are a frequent and regular occurrence and are referred to by the term *Svayamvara*.

born to Giv and Bānu-Goshasp in due time. In fact this episode in the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* ends with the birth of Bizhan.[98]

The opening scene of the episode, as already mentioned, contains a direct reference to the Gudarziān and *pahlavāns* from the houses of Nodhar and Mehrān. However, what is of particular interest in this scene is the presence of vassal kings of the northeastern and western regions, who are considered to be among the heroes.[99] Therefore, we get a sense that this is a gathering of all the rulers of Iran, and the well-known Parthian heroes must also be considered as kings in their own right, as they are present there with some of the warriors of their own armies.[100]

As far as the relationship between the houses is concerned, we have evidence of a mechanism through which alliances were sealed by marriage in this story. Therefore, we have an allusion to an alliance that must have been formed between the houses of Karen and Suren, which produced Bizhan, a ruler whose existence during the Parthian times is attested.[101] But this is not all. The story of the trial and its outcome (Giv being the only one to win it) portrays the Gudarziān as the only one that could possibly be considered as enjoying the same status and rank as the house of Rostam. After all, no other *pahlavān*, including Ṭus, who represents a branch of the Arsacid ruling house, is worthy of a marriage with a member of Rostam's family. The collaboration of these two families in many adventures and the presence of hints at their alliance such as one finds in this story is based on the fact that they were the most powerful of the Parthian noble families. The tradition of building an alliance through marriage continues in the next generation as well. Farāmarz, we learn in *Shahriyārnāmeh*, marries one of Gudarz's offspring.[102]

In the story there are hints that the alliance represented by the union of Giv and Bānu-Goshasp happens with some resistance and hesitation on the part of Rostam's family. One must understand that the characters of Bānu-Goshasp and Giv, alongside their other function, represent each respective noble's house sentiments and attitudes. Bānu-Goshasp's refusal to sleep with Giv and the fact that she humiliates him by beating him up and tying up his arms and legs is an indication that rather than being a merging of two equal partners, the alliance is a favor granted to the Gudarziāns by Rostam's house.

98 Ibid. 114–29.

99 Ibid. 115.

100 Ibid. 114–15.

101 See Herzfeld, *Sakastan* 109, where he cites Acts of Thomas as mentioning a noble house by the name of Wēzhan in conjunction with a woman by the name Manēsar.

102 *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 152.

Bānu-Goshasp's strength and vigor are highlighted, even more so because she is a woman, to stress the superiority of the house of Rostam. Let us not forget that this, after all, is a Sistani/Surenid story, and it is predisposed to highlight the superiority of Rostam's family.

To summarize the material discussed so far, there is little doubt that at some point during the course of its long history, the relationship between Gudarziān and Rostam's family was marked by alliance. However this alliance is characterized by the superiority of the house of Rostam in status and rank, and this is expressed both subtly and directly in various episodes.

The alliance between these two families is strengthened by their univocal and unwavering antagonism toward the family of Nodhariān, represented chiefly by the figure of Ṭus. As we saw above, it was Zāl, Rostam's father, who prevented Ṭus from succeeding his father to the throne. Henceforth Ṭus and his brother Gostaham appear as *pahlavāns* in the courts of Kay-Kāvus and Kay Khosrow and in all episodes pertaining to their combined reigns. In these episodes, Ṭus is depicted as an unsympathetic character, to say the least. In the story of Rostam and Sohrāb, for instance, when Giv and Rostam appear at Kay Kāvus' court with a delay, inciting Kay Kāvus' wrath, it is Ṭus who is given the order to put them up on the gallows. However, defying Kāvus's authority, Rostam throws Ṭus to the ground, proclaiming his superiority to both Ṭus and Kay Kāvus:

بزد تند یك دست بر دست طوس توگفتی ز پیل ژیان یافت کوس
ز بالا نگون اندرآمد به سر برو کرد رستم به تندی گذر
به درشد به خشم اندرآمد به رخش منم گفت شیر اوزن تاج بخش
چه خشم آورد؟ شاه کاوس کیست؟ چرا دست یازد به من طوس کیست؟[103]

> Ṭus he sent sprawling with a single blow
> Then he strode toward the door as if to go
> But turned back in his rage and said, "I am
> The crown-bestower, the renowned Rostam,
> When I am angry who is Kay Kāvus?".

But nowhere does the opposition to Ṭus and his characterization as utterly lacking wisdom become more apparent than in the story of Kay Kāvus's succession.

103 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 146–7; Translation DD 195–6.

The nobles unanimously agree on Kay Kāvus's grandson, Kay Khosrow, and the only opposition comes from Ṭus, who sides with Fariborz, Kay Kāvus's son.[104] Gudarz tries to reason with Ṭus, but he is defiant, and claims to be superior in lineage and skill to all other *pahlavāns*, save Rostam:

چو بشنید، پاسخ چنین داد طوس که برما نه خوبست کردن فسوس
به ایران پس از رستم پیلتن سرافراز ترکس منم زانجمن
نبیره منوچهر شاه دلیر که گیتی به تیغ اندر آورد زیر
همان شیر پرخاش جویم به جنگ بدرم دل پیل و چنگ پلنگ
همی برمن آیین و رای آورید جهان را به نوکدخدای آورید
نباشم بدین کار همداستان زخسرومزن پیش من داستان[105]

> When Ṭus heard (of the decision) he said, "It is not befitting us to do something now and regret it later! After all in Iran after elephant-bodied Rostam, I am the most exalted among you. I am the grandson of the brave king, Manuchehr, who subdued the entire world with the might of his sword! I am a combative lion, when it comes to war; I rend into pieces hearts of elephants, claws of tigers! All of you should turn to me, and let the world have a new king. For I shall not hear anymore about Khosrow becoming a king, and I shall not give my consent to it."

Gudarz dismisses Ṭus's claims, humiliates him and his lineage by calling him insane:

تو نوذر نژادی، نه بیگانه ای پدر تند بود تو دیوانه ای[106]

> Your are of Nodhar's lineage; you are not a stranger to us
> Your father was hot-tempered, and you are crazy.

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104 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 456:

بیستند گردان ایران کمر جز از طوس نوذر که پیچید سر

Translation:
All Iranian nobles declared their readiness to enter (his/Kay Khosrow's) service, save Ṭus son of Nodhar, who refused.

105 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 457.

106 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 461.

Subsequent to this confrontation, Ṭus and Fariborz put up a short-lived resistance to Kay Khosrow's succession.[107] This episode passes and Ṭus continues to serve at the court of the Iranian king. However, he is far from exonerated, for in the next episode, as yet another conflict erupts between Gudarziān and Ṭus, Kay Khosrow, remembering Ṭus' disloyalty, condemns him as ill-natured, disobedient, and malevolent.

ولیکن سپهبد خردمند نیست سر و مغز او از در پند نیست
هنر دارد و خواسته هم نژاد نیارد همی بر دل از شاه یاد
بشورید با گیو و گودرز و شاه ز بهر فریبرز و تخت و کلاه
همی گوید از تخمه نوذرم جهان را به شاهی اندر خورم
سزد گر بپیچید ز گفتار من گر آید به تندی و پیکار من
که خودکامه مردیست بی تار و پود کسی دیگر آید نباشد درود
و دیگرکه با ما دلش نیست راست که شاهی همی با فریبرز خواست[108]

> But the commander (Ṭus) is not wise; his mind is not enlightened by words of wisdom. Though he is a good warrior in possession of wealth and good lineage, his heart is not loyal to the king. He has rebelled against Giv, Gudarz and the king for the sake of Fariboz. He constantly boasts that he is of Nodhar's lineage, that he is worthy of becoming king. So it is befitting his character to disobey me, and to become ill-tempered and belligerent toward me. He is an ignoble, selfish man, who has even refused to greet others. His heart is not with us for he has always wanted to see Fariborz on the throne."

In the aftermath of this conflict, Ṭus is removed as the commander of the Iranian army and Fariborz is appointed in his place.[109] As if that were not enough, Ṭus is also blamed for slaying Forud, Siāvush's son and Kay Khosrow's brother. As a matter of fact, the most fervid condemnations of Ṭus are put in the mouth of Kay Khosrow after he learns of his brother's death:

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107 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 463–8.
108 *Shāhnāmeh* 3: 40.
109 *Shāhnāmeh* 3: 78.

به دشنام بگشاد لب شهریار بر آن انجمن طوس را کرد خوار
ازآنپس بدوگفت کای بدنشان که کم باد نامت ز گردنکشان
نترسی همی از جهاندار پاك؟ زگردان نیاید ترا شرم و باك؟[110]

> The king opened his mouth to demean Ṭus, to belittle him in front of the courtiers, and said, "Oh you ill-omened one! May your very name be erased from this assembly of the heroes! Are you not scared of God? Are you not ashamed of the heroes?"

Ṭus is temporarily imprisoned,[111] but is set free after Rostam, in spite of his low opinion of Ṭus, intercedes on his behalf.[112] Another charge brought forth against Ṭus is his lack of cooperation with members of Gudarz's house. Once gain, Kay Kāvus reserves the most denigrating remarks for Ṭus:

به گیتی نباشد کم از طوس کس درست از در پای وندست و بس
نه در سرش مغز و نه در تنش رگ چه طوس فرومایه پیشم چه سگ[113]

> In the entire world, there is no one lowlier than Ṭus. He deserves to be held captive. He has neither intellect nor emotions; in my eyes there is no difference between vile Ṭus and a dog!

As apparent from the above discussion, the house of Rostam and Gudarz enjoyed a strong alliance during this period. At the same time, they were united against the house of Nodhar, with Ṭus being the most prominent member of this house. We may recall from the discussion of the different Parthian families in chapter 1 that Ṭus is representative of a branch of the Arsacid family, and here we have evidence that the house of Rostam/Suren had a hand in circumventing the succession of a certain branch of the Arsacid house to the throne.[114] Instead, Rostam lends his unwavering support to Kay Kāvus, in spite of his many bad decisions and his chronic lapse of judgment. Furthermore, the noble houses of Rostam and Gudarz are instrumental in installing Kay

110 *Shāhnāmeh* 3: 79.
111 *Shāhnāmeh* 3: 79.
112 *Shāhnāmeh* 3: 108–9.
113 *Shāhnāmeh* 3: 107.
114 See chapter 1 for the discussion of the Suren support of the rebellious prince Tiridates.

Khosrow, Kay Kāvus's grandson, to power, once again at the cost of Fariborz who was in fact the lawful heir to the throne.

In some ways then, Kay Khosrow's depiction as an ideal king may be regarded as a consequence of the support he enjoyed by the noble houses of Rostam and Gudarz, for the bulk of the stories in this section of the *Shāhnāmeh* stem from the Sistani/Surenid Cycle and as such are sympathetic to the Sistani heroes. Here, in Rostam's support of the Kayānid kings up to Kay Khosrow, we have a reflection of the support granted to the Arsacid kings who descended from the line of Sinatruces, as discussed in chapter 1. For as we shall see, as the line of succession shifts to Lohrāsp, the support of Rostam's house for the Iranian throne dwindles until the relationship of the Iranian kings and the house of Rostam is characterized by conflict and hostility.

3.2.3 *The Beginning of the End: The Advent of Lohrāsp*

Lohrāsp's ascension to power heralds a new era as far as the presence of the noble families of Rostam, Gudarz and Nodhar are concerned. As a matter of fact, members of the families of Gudarz and Nodhar are literally made to vanish from the *Shāhnāmeh*: they have accompanied Kay Khosrow on his last journey to a mountain where they disappear in a snowstorm.[115] The only heroes surviving the snowstorm/occultation are Zāl, Rostam, and Gudarz, the old patriarch of his family. While Zāl and Rostam make appearances after this episode, Gudarz and all members of his family are permanently erased from the subsequent narration of the *Shāhnāmeh*. This, however, is not so in the Sistani narration, as the next generation of Gudarziān are very much present in different stories of the Sistani Cycle.

While Zāl and Rostam are present during the reigns of Lohrāsp and his son Goshtāsp, with the disappearance of Kay Khosrow the relationship between the house of Rostam and the Iranian throne is characterized by a series of conflicts, which culminates in Farāmarz's execution and the conquest of Sistan at the hand of the Iranian king Bahman.[116] But how do these stories justify this shift in loyalties? The core of the problem lies, as clearly articulated in both the *Shāhnāmeh* and the Sistani Cycle, in the shift in the royal house from Kay Khosrow to Lohrāsp.

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115 *Shāhnāmeh* 4: 366:

نگشتند از و باز چون طوس و گیو فریبرز و بیژن، چوگستهم نیو

Translation:

Neither Ṭus, nor Giv; neither Fariborz nor Bizhan, neither the manly Gostaham returned.

116 For a detailed discussion of the different accounts of this episode, see chapter 5.

When Kay Khosrow first nominates Lohrāsp as his successor, the *pahlavāns* at his court react with intense anger. After all, Lohrāsp is of an unknown, lowly lineage. Zāl addresses Kay Khosrow, reminding him of how many other well-deserving Iranians of royal lineage could have been chosen instead of the wretched Lohrāsp, who is of an unknown pedigree and who, according to Zāl, had appeared with only one horse to his name and was given an army and a banner[117] by Kay Khosrow:

شگفت اندر و مانده ایرانیان — برآشفت هر یك چو شیر ژیان
همی هرکسی درشگفتی بماند — که لهراسپ را شاه باید خواند
ز پیش یلان زال بر پای خاست — بگفت آنچ بودش به دل راه راست
چنین گفت کای شهریار بلند — سزد گر کنی خاك را ارجمند
سر بخت آنکس پر از خاك باد — روان ورا خاك تریاك باد
که لهراسپ را شاه خواند به داد — زبیداد هر کس نیگیریم یاد
به ایران چو آمد بنزد زرسپ — فرومایه ای دیدمش با یك اسپ
به جنگ الانان فرستادیش — سپاه و درفش و کمر دادیش
ز چندین بزرگان خسرونژاد — نیامد کسی بر دل شاه یاد
نژادش نبینم، نبینم گهر — برین گونه نشنید کس تاجور[118]

> The Persians were astonished by this turn of events, and bridled like angry lions; none could accept that they would have to call Lohrāsp their king. Zāl strode forward and said aloud what he felt in his heart: "My lord, is it right for you to dignify such dirt this way? My curses on anyone who calls Lohrāsp his king, no one here will submit to such injustice! I saw Lohrāsp when he arrived in Iran; he was a wretch with one horse to his name. You sent him off to fight against the Alans, and gave him soldiers, a banner

117 As discussed earlier, the *pahlavāns* when appearing at the court of the Iranian king would usually be accompanied by their armies whose banners displayed their unique emblems. Here, the fact that Lohrāsp did not have such an army and banner is yet another way to emphasize his lack of noble lineage.

118 *Shāhnāmeh* 4: 359; Translation DD 362–3.

and a sword belt. How many wellborn Persians has the king passed over for this man, whose family I've never set eyes on, whose ancestry's all unknown? No one has ever heard of such a man becoming a king."

When Zāl is finished, there comes a roar of agreement from the magnates and nobles present at the court who proclaim that should Lohrāsp become king they would refuse to serve him and will partake neither in feasts nor battles on his behalf:

خروشی برآمد از ایرانیان که زین پس نبندیم شاهان میان
نجوییم کس بزم و نه کارزار چو لهراسپ را برکشد رو زگار[119]

As soon as Zāl finished speaking a roar of agreement came from the courtiers there, and voices cried out, "We'll serve no longer! If Lohrāsp is to be king he can count on us for neither his banquets nor his battles."

At this point, Kay Khosrow once again addresses the assembly, recounting Lohrāsp's various virtues, upon which all present swear allegiance to Lohrāsp.[120]

Nevertheless, Lohrāsp's ascension to the throne remains problematic, and later on in the *Shāhnāmeh*'s narrative the issue of Lohrāsp's unacceptable lineage is once again expressed. The first place where this resurfaces is when much later Goshtāsp, Lohrāsp's son, is trying to convince his son Esfandiyār to confront Rostam on the battlefield. Hence Goshtāsp reminds his son of Rostam's hubris: Rostam has refused to serve Goshtāsp, for Rostam regards everyone, including Goshtāsp, the king of Iran and his son as inferior to himself; as far as Rostam is concerned his own diadem, the symbol of his authority, is legitimate because he has received it from indisputably legitimate kings such as Kay Khosrow, while according to Rostam, Goshtāsp's diadem is new and lacks authority for it was bequeathed to him by his father Lohrāsp:

به گیتی ندارد کسی را همال مگر بیخرد نامور پور زال
که او راست تا هست زاولستان همان بست وغزنین وکاولستان
به مردی همی زآسمان بگذرد همی خویشتن کهتری نشمرد

119 *Shāhnāmeh* 4: 359; Translation DD 363.
120 Ibid. 359–61.

کجا پیش کاوس کی بنده بود ز یکخسرو اندر جهان زنده بود
به شاهی زگشتاسب نارد سخن که: او تاج نو دارد و ما کهن[121]

"No one in all the world is your equal, unless it be that foolish son of Zāl. His valor lifts him above the skies, and he thinks of himself as no king's subject. He was a slave before Kāvus, and he lived by the grace of Khosrow, but about me, Goshtāsp, he says, 'His crown is new, mine is ancient . . .'"

Surprisingly, Esfandiyār defends Rostam not only by recalling his services to the Iranian throne but also by reminding his father of Rostam's status as a superior hero and as a crown-bestower, concluding that Rostam had a right to forgo service to his father. Esfandiyār continues to argue that Rostam's position as the king of Sistan cannot be questioned because he has received the right to rule from previous kings whose legitimacy is well-established:

چه جویی نبرد یکی مرد پیر که کاوس خواندی و را شیرگیر
ز گاه منوچهر تا کیقباد همه شهر ایران بدو بود شاد
همی خواندندش خداوند رخش جهانگیر و شیر اوزن و تاج بخش
نه او در جهان نامداری نوست بزرگست و با عهد کیخسروست
اگر عهد شاهان نباشد درست نباید زگشتاسپ منشور جست![122]

(Esfandiyār responding to his father, Goshtāsp):

"... what are you doing fighting against an old man whom Kāvus called a conqueror of lions? From the time of Manuchehr and Kay Qobād all the kings of Iran have delighted in him, calling him Rakhsh's master, world-conqueror, lion-slayer, crown-bestower. He's not some young stripling making his way in the world; he is a great man, one who entered into a pact with Kay Khosrow. If such pacts are wrong then he shouldn't be seeking one with you, Goshtāsp."

The issue of Lohrāsp's lowly lineage appears once more during the narration of the Rostam and Esfandiyār episode. Once, for example, Rostam reveals to

121 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 302; Translation DD 373–4.

122 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 303–304; Translation DD 474.

Esfandiyār, who is boasting about his lineage and his new religion, that Zāl's acceptance of Lohrāsp as the Iranian sovereign had caused him much sorrow and shame:

پدرم آن دلیر گرانمایه مرد زننگ اندر آن انجمن خاك خورد
که لهراسپ را شاه بایست خواند و زو در جهان نام چندین نماند
چه نازی بدین تاج لهراسپی؟ بدین نو آیین گشتاسپی؟[123]

> Rostam addressing Esfandiyār: "... My father is a great warrior, and he swallowed the dust of shame when he had to call insignificant Lohrāsp his king. Why do you boast of Goshtāsp's crown and Lohrāsp's throne?"

I shall return to this crucial juncture of Lohrāsp's succession below to explore the Sistani version of the events. For now, let us remember that the succession struggle, consequent to which, I maintain, the Surens withdrew their support from the Arsacid king, is the historical referent of this particular episode. As mentioned in chapter 1, subsequent to the break of the Suren with Sinatruces' line, the former withdrew its support from the Parthian monarch. One must not forget, however, that the *Shāhnāmeh*'s narration of the events, while retaining a reflection of this hallmark event of the Parthian history, attempts to provide a seamless history of an uninterrupted progression of the ascension of legitimate kings to the Iranian throne. This is why, in the *Shāhnāmeh* narration, Kay Khosrow is not deposed by a rival branch of the royal family; rather he abdicates out of his own volition. Imbued with a mystical tinge, this particular episode therefore narrates the story of an ideal king whose search for the Truth prompts him to leave behind the monarchy, and along with it the mundane affairs of the material world, and enter a state of occultation. The narration of the historical events, of the shift from one Arsacid branch to another, therefore unfolds within the narrative's constraints such as the desire to present a seamless story of a succession of legitimate kings and a contemplation on ideal kingship. Therefore, at least in the *Shāhnāmeh* version of events, Zāl and other members of noble families, while initially infuriated at the choice of Lohrāsp as heir apparent, quickly accept him as the next monarch and declare their allegiance to him. However, as mentioned above, most of the prominent *pahlavāns*, the representatives of the noble houses, leave the narrative of the *Shāhnāmeh* consequent to the problematic succession of Lohrāsp to the

123 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 354; Translation DD 392–3.

throne. It would be logical to assume that Lohrāsp, upon securing the throne, would eliminate members of the powerful noble families who had initially opposed him so vehemently, but this is not how the story is told. The *pahlavāns* are pushed out of the narrative, as they are made to accompany Kay Khosrow on his quest: that is, all prominent *pahlavāns* except for members of Rostam's family[124] and that is despite the fact that Rostam and Zāl were part of Kay Khosrow's retinue, which disappears in the snowstorm.

What then is the role of the only remaining noble family, namely the house of Rostam, vis-à-vis Lohrāsp and his descendants? In the *Shāhnāmeh*, Rostam is absent from the entire narration of Lohrāsp's reign, and during the reign of Goshtāsp, Lohrāsp's son and successor, he makes an appearance only when he is challenged by Goshtāsp's son Esfandiyār. No justification for Rostam's conspicuous absence is given, that is, not until much later in the narrative, as Rostam and Esfandiyār engage in a series of tirades prior to their famous battle. There we learn that Rostam has been absent because he did not consider Lohrāsp or Goshtāsp worthy of his services. Then Esfandiyār addresses Rostam:

چه‌مایه‌جهان‌داشت‌لهراسپ‌شاه نکردی گذر سوی آن بارگاه
چواوشهرایران به‌گشتاسپ داد نیامدت خود از تخت یاد
سوی او یکی نامه ننبشته ی از آرایش بندگی گشته یی
نرفتی به درگاه او بنده وار نخواهی به گیتی‌کسی شهریار[125]

> "… You've lived for many years and seen many kings come and go in the world, and if you follow the way of wisdom you know that it was not right for someone who has received so much in the way of wealth and glory from my family to have refused to visit Lohrāsp's court. When he passed on the sovereignty over the land of Iran to his son, Goshtāsp, you paid no attention. You wrote no congratulatory letter to him, you ignored the duties of a subject, you didn't travel to his court to pay homage: you call no one king."

124 As mentioned above, Gudarz is also saved. While Gudarz and his family continue to remain important characters in the SCE, Gudarz is never heard of again in the *Shāhnāmeh* version of events.

125 *Shāhnāmeh*, 5: 313; Translation DD, 377–378.

The animosity between the two houses – a result of Lohrāsp's succession – is at the root of the conflicts that ensue subsequently, beginning with the aforementioned challenge and battle with Rostam, his slaying at the hand of Rostam, and later on, as we shall see in chapter 5, Esfandiyār's son Bahman's destruction of Sistan and execution of Farāmarz, the last prominent Sistani hero.

The void created by the *pahlavāns'* absence is filled by a conscious attempt to create another line of heroes, one from the line of Lohrāsp. Hence, beginning with Goshtāsp and his brother Zarir, the narrative invokes heroic motifs previously associated with the Sistani heroes. Goshtāsp, for example, while in the western territories and in pursuit of Caesar's daughter Katayoun, defeats a dangerous wolf,[126] and then most notably a dragon.[127] As a part of appropriating the position of the hero, or more specifically the Sistani hero, members of Lohrāsp's line are referred to by the titles and epithets previously reserved exclusively for Rostam. Zarir, Goshtāsp's brother and later on Esfandiyār and his son, become *jahān-pahlavān*,[128] and on many occasions Esfandiyār is called *tahamtan* (i.e. elephant-bodied), an epithet that had previously been attributed to Rostam exclusively.[129]

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that for the most prominent hero of this line, Esfandiyār, a number of heroic motifs are invoked in order to bestow upon him an image very much in congruence with that of a Sistani hero. So Esfandiyār embarks on a seven-stage trial, as did Rostam, and both are referred to as *haft-khān*. Thus on his first trial Esfandiyār defeats a wolf, then kills a number of lions, then slays the dragon, then kills a sorceress, then kills the mythological bird Simorgh, then survives a snowstorm, and finally penetrates into a citadel disguised as a merchant.[130] Aside from the obvious parallels, there are a few details that need further attention. First, the setting for the heroic trial, unlike for all Sistani heroes, is not India. This was also true of Goshtāsp's heroic adventures, which are not as fully developed as Esfandiyār's. In the case of the former the setting is Rum or the west, while the latter achieves his heroic feats in Garsgsar, located in the northeastern region of Turān.[131] Second, in one of the stages of his trial, Esfandiyār actually kills the Simorgh, the bird that is intimately linked to the house of Rostam, for it is the Simorgh who raised Rostam's father Zāl and comes to Rostam's rescue at crucial junctures. Not only does the

126 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 29–35.
127 Ibid. 5: 42–3.
128 Ibid. 5: 94, 5: 132; in case of Zarir 5: 201.
129 Ibid. 5: 137, 5: 153, 5: 241, 5: 299.
130 Ibid. 5: 225–63.
131 Ibid. 5: 221.

slaying of Simorgh clearly distinguish Esfandiyār from Sistani heroes, but it also may have been devised as an attack on their religious world-view, in which the Simorgh was revered as a benevolent creature that possessed supernatural powers.

The conflict between the house of Rostam and Iranian kings from Lohrāsp's line acquires a religious dimension with the advent of Zoroastrianism during Goshtāsp's reign. With Goshtāsp's conversion to Zoroastrianism, it becomes the official religion of the Iranian kingdom, and interestingly enough, there is a shift in the thematic composition of the genre. While previous wars were motivated by sentiments such as loyalty, bravery, and revenge, after Goshtāsp's conversion to the new religion the underlying cause for the ensuing war with the Turānians is religious in nature. Arjāsp, the Turānian king, upon receiving the news of Goshtāsp's conversion, writes to him with an ultimatum: he should at once abandon the new faith or suffer the disastrous consequences of an attack by a strong coalition of Turānian-Chinese armies:

شنیدم که راهی گرفتی تباه مرا روز روشن بکردی سیاه
بیامد یکی پیر مهتر فریب ترا دل پر از بیم کرد و نهیب
تو او را پذیرفتی و دینش را بیاراستی راه و آیینش را
بیفگندی آیین شاهان خویش بزرگان گیتی که بودند پیش
رها کردی آن پهلوی کیش را چرا ننگریدی پس و پیش را

. . .

و رایدونك نپذیری پند من ببینی گران آهنین بند من
بیایم پس نامه تا چند گاه کنم کشورت را سراسر تباه
سپاهی بیارم ز ترکان چین که بنگاهشان برنتابد زمین

. . .

بسوزم نگاریده کاخ ترا ز بن برکنم بیخ و شاخ ترا[132]

132 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 89–91.

> Arjāsp addressing Goshtāsp: "I have heard that you have chosen a misguided path, and have inflicted me with sorrow, turning my luminous day pitch black. Along came, I heard, a deceitful master and filled up your heart with fear and anguish. You accepted him and his religion, and lent your support to his path and his creed. You have abandoned the tradition of the previous kings; forsaken that Parthian/noble religion without much consideration for the past or the future . . . If you do not accept my advice I shall arrive shortly after you receive this letter; I will come with a mighty army of Turkish warriors, and devastate your kingdom, burn down your palaces and put iron shackles on you, and erase your very lineage!"

That a Turānian king should be offended to the point of wanting to wage war over the Iranian king's conversion to a new religion seems rather strange. Why should he care after all?

The answer to this question lies in the complexity of the sources and the process of the formation of stories that constitute Iran's epic tradition. The story in question undoubtedly stems from or is strongly influenced by Zoroastrian literature, which grants Goshtāsp and his family the glorious role of the defender of the faith. As a matter of fact, the Middle Persian text, *Ayādgār ī Zarirān*, preserves another account of the tale featuring Goshtāsp and his brother Zarir.[133] A comparison of the story of the war between Goshtāsp and Arjāsp as it appears in the *Shāhnāmeh* with account of *Ayādgār ī Zarirān*, reveals remarkable similarities not just in the plots but in many of their respective details.[134] Also remarkable is that the *Shāhnāmeh* version of the story is the part composed by the poet Daqiqi, whose verses Ferdowsi incorporated into his work. It is highly likely that Daqiqi intended to start his narration of Iran's past with Goshtāsp's reign, and it has been postulated that his source was not the Middle Persian *Ayādgār ī Zarirān* but a version of the *Khodāynāmak* which started with the story of Goshtāsp.[135] Regardless of which of the two served

133 The legend of Zarir was known, it seems, in the ancient world as versions of it were told in Greece and Armenia. See Boyce, Zariadres and Zarer 463–77 and Russel, A Parthian Bhagavad Gita 17–36. The Middle Persian legend becomes "Zoroastrian," as the ancient tale is appropriate to narrate the origins of the new faith. There are various editions and translations of the text, including the 1981 German translation by Monchi-Zadeh, *Die Geschichte Zarer's*; for a translation into New Persian, see Navvābi, *Yadegār-e Zarir*; For a discussion of the Middle Persian text, see Safa, *Manzumeh-ye Yadgār Zarir*.

134 There are differences and that is due, as Navvābi points out, to the fact that the *Shāhnāmeh* version was meant as a recital/performance, *ta'zieh* (Navvābi, *Yadgār-e Zarir* 14). Geiger, Das Yātkār-i Zarīrān 43–84.

135 Ibid.

as a source for Daqiqi, the fact that he chose to commence the narration of history with the reign of Goshtāsp is of utmost significance: first, beginning with Goshtāsp's reign would mean that the stories from the Surenid and Karenid cycles (combined reigns are of Kay Kāvus and Kay Khosrow) could automatically be left out; secondly, the emergence of Zoroastrianism could be made the point of origin; thirdly, it would have the additional function of legitimizing the Sasanian dynasty, because the Sasanians traced their genealogy to Bahman, the grandson of Goshtāsp.

However, Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, as we have already seen, incorporates various narrations of the *Khodāynāmak*, including a large number of Surenid and Karenid stories, and therefore the depiction of Goshtāsp becomes rather inconsistent; there is an effort to depict him as a hero (hence his heroic trials in Rum), and later on he becomes the champion of the good religion. Yet he is also abominably deceitful and treacherous, for he plots against his own son Esfandiyār. This complicated and inconsistent character development is a result of the multiplicity of the sources of this episode, each of which was invested in portraying Goshtāsp in a certain light. Shahbazi argued that the reason the *Shāhnāmeh* characterizes Goshtāsp as deceitful and unjust in the latter part of his reign is due to the influence of Sistani narrations that were antagonistic towards him and his line.[136] This is certainly the case, and this is why we have a character who, without justifications or explanations, is transformed from a pious hero to a treacherous narcissist. Therefore, the story of the emergence of the new religion and the opposition of Rostam's family to it must be considered in this context of various competing narrations of the past. What is to be considered here is the effort on the part of the Sasanians to concoct a genealogy that would, in addition to providing them with a royal lineage, grant them religious superiority over their predecessors and rivals.

It is Esfandiyār, Goshtāsp's son, who becomes the most fervent champion of the new faith, readily taking on the task of proselytizing the religion of Zoroaster:

گزارش همی کرد اسفندیار به فرمان یزدان همی بست کار
چو آگه شد نداز نکو دین اوی گرفتند از و دین و آیین اوی
بتان از سرگاه میسوختند به جای بت آذر افروختند

136 Shahbazi, Goshtāsp.

همه نامه کردند زی شهریار که ما دین گرفتیم از اسفندیار
بیستیم کستی و بگرفت باژ کنونت نشاید ز ما خواست باژ
که ما راست گشتیم و این ده بهست کنون زند ز ردشت زی ما فرست[137]

> Esfandiyār set out to do what god had commended him to do. When people learned of his good religion, they received its teachings from him and converted to it. They set fire to the idols, and instead of it, they kindled sacred fires. Then, they wrote to the king (Goshtāsp) and said, "We have received (the new) religion from Esfandiyār, and we have tied *kosti* around our waists; it is not appropriate that we should be asked to pay tribute since we are co-religionists and have been guided to the good religion. Now send the *Zand* of Zoroaster to us!"

It seems, however, that the attempts to convert the province of Sistan to Zoroastrianism fails, for Goshtāsp himself feels obliged to take on this endeavor. So he spends some time in Sistan denouncing the old religion and introducing the teachings of Zoroaster there.[138] While in the *Shāhnāmeh's* account the indications of the religious conflict are implicit, a number of other medieval sources identify the religious conflict as the chief reason for the conflict.[139]

If Rostam's and Lohrāsp's families represent the families of Suren and a branch of the Arsacid family as has been argued, it becomes very pertinent to investigate the historical foundation for this religious conflict. After all, more

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137 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 154:

138 Ibid. 5: 169:

نیامد بسی رو زگاری براوی که خسروسوی سیستان کرد روی
که آنجا کند زند واستا روا کند موبدان را بر آن برگوا

Translation:
Not much time had passed when the king decided to go to Sistan in order to take (the scriptures) Zand and Avesta to the region and to have the Zoroastrian clergy swear on it.
Ibid. 5: 170:

به زوالستان شد به پیغامبری که نفرین کند بر بت آزری

Translation:
So he (Goshtāsp) set out to Sistan as a Prophet/messenger in order to curse the troublesome idol(s).

139 Davis, Rostam and Zoroastrianism 49–61.

recent scholarship paints a complex picture of the religious trends, at least of the Sasanian period.[140] Furthermore, it has been argued that some of the Parthian families that continued to exercise their influence in the Sasanian period were Mithra or Mehr worshipers.[141] However, current scholarship has not investigated the religion of the house of Suren,[142] and therefore, for the time being, the question of the religion of the Surens remains unanswered. Nevertheless, as evident from our discussion, the existence of an underlying religious conflict between the house of Suren and the Arsacid house cannot be doubted for as we saw in chapter 2, Zoroastrian literature, in response to the appropriation of Garshāsp as the ancestor of the Sistani heroes, retaliated by tarnishing the character of this Avestan hero in later Zoroastrian literature. Add to that the fact that there indeed exists a religious conflict between the two houses, represented by the feud between Rostam and Esfandiyār. We may not know the nature of the religious beliefs of Rostam's camp, the religion that the Turānian king Arjāsp calls *pahlavi-kish*; however, the very fact that various houses remained faithful to different religions (or different creeds) is in itself significant.

Let us leave the discussion of the religious conflict and examine how the relationship between the members of Rostam's and Lohrāsp's lines is depicted in the SCE. While the relationship of Lohrāsp to the different noble houses is marked by the latter's absence from the narrative of the *Shāhnāmeh*, the Sistani version of events provides us with an entirely different perspective. The Sistani hero Shahriyār, son of Borzu, whose story is preserved in the *Shahriyārnāmeh*,[143] appears during the reign of Lohrāsp. It is in the *Shahriyārnāmeh* that we learn that Rostam is summoned to the court of Lohrāsp. This is because, faced with a serious onslaught from the west, Lohrāsp has no choice but to plead to Rostam to offer his services to the Iranian throne. When he receives this summon, Rostam seeks the counsel of his father, Zāl. Zāl reminds Rostam that Lohrāsp is an unworthy king who is not deserving of Rostam's services and/or his trust:

بدو گفت دستان که ای نامدار نباید ترا شد بر شهریار
ز شاهی لهراسب دارم گزند چو نامش نیوشم شوم مستمند

140 Shaul Shaked's contributions, for instance, have been instrumental in questioning the existence of an all powerful Zoroastrian orthodoxy; Shaked, *Dualism in transformation*.

141 Pourshariati, *Decline and fall* 350–92.

142 Ibid. 350.

143 See Appendix A for more on the *Shahriyārnāmeh*. The references to the work here are to the unique manuscript of the Khuda Bakhsh library discussed in Appendix A.

همین خاك خوردم بنزدیك شاه نکردم بشاهی بدو بر نگاه
کنون پیش او رفتنست روی نیست که ما را با او آب در جوی نیست
مرا دل همیشه پر از بیم اوست ندانم که دشمن بود یا ز دوست[144]

> Dastān (Zāl) then addressed him (Rostam), and said, "Oh Noble one! You shall not go to the king. I suffer whenever I have to think of Lohrāsp as king, and whenever I hear his name, I become despondent. Although I took upon myself to serve many a king, I have not even cast a glance his way. Now also, it is not right for you to go there, for we do not get along with him. I am always fearful of him for I can never tell if he is a friend or a foe."

Rostam remains steadfast in his refusal to serve Lohrāsp until Kay Khosrow appears to him in a dream and urges him to obey Lohrāsp, for it was he, Kay Khosrow, who installed Lohrāsp on the Iranian throne:

جهاندار لهراسپ را من کلاه سپردم بدادمش مهر و ماه
بزرگست و زتخمه کی پشین سزاوار گاهست و فرخ نگین
نگفتم که فرمان برندش همه که اوشد شبان فراوان رمه
چرا سرنیاری برشه فرود به پیچی سر از شاه با کبر و خود[145]

> Kay Khosrow addressed Rostam and said, "Oh noble diadem-bearing Rostam, son of Zāl-e Zarr! Remember that it was I, who bestowed the crown on him, entrusting him with the sun and the moon. He is noble, a descendant of Kay Pishin, and he is deserving of kingship. Didn't I order everyone to obey him, as a herd would obey its shepherd? Why is it that you refuse to bow down to him? Why do you refuse to serve him with such pride and vanity?"

144 *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 75.

145 *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 78:

بدو گفت کیخسرو تاجور که ای نامور رستم زال زر

Now upon waking up, Rostam naturally feels obliged to obey Lohrāsp's commands and sets out to the western territories (*khāvar zamin*). In Rostam's absence, Iran is attacked by Arjāsp, the Turānian king who has raised an army and has passed the city of Bukhara and is headed to Balkh, the seat of the Iranian throne.[146] Faced with the prospect of a Turānian onslaught, Lohrāsp sends missives to all *pahlavāns* and beseeches them to appear with their armies to defend the capital. These nobles who receive Lohrāsp's plea, it must be underlined, are absent from the *Shāhnāmeh* narrative. However, they are known from the previous section of the *Shāhnāmeh*: they are Ardashir son of Bizhan, Rohām of the Gudarz family, Firuz son of Ṭus of the Nodhar family, Gorgin Milād, as well as a certain Jāmāsp from Daylam.[147] In spite of the differences in the *Shāhnāmeh* and Sistani narration of events, certain things remain consistent. For example, all heroes who reappear in the Sistani version are either those who did not disappear in the snowstorm along with Kay Khosrow (Zāl, Rostam, Gudarz) or they are the next generation of the noble families.

The army of Turān attacks Sistan first. Zāl quickly summons Farāmarz and Bānu-Goshasp from India.[148] In addition to Zāl, there are two other Sistani heroes who offer to fend off the Turānians during the first battle: first is Zavāreh, Rostam's brother, and Salm (or Sām), Farāmarz's son.[149] Meanwhile the Turānians sack Balkh, reducing it to ruins and kidnapping Lohrāsp's son, Zarir, who is a child at this time.[150]

In stark contrast to the *Shāhnāmeh*'s narration of these events of Lohrāsp's reign, it is the members of the Rostam and Gudarz families who, one by one, appear with their armies and attempt to recapture Balkh. First to arrive is Bānu-Goshasp, Rostam's daughter, who arrives from India by way of Kabul and manages to kill Arjāsp's commander.[151] It is also Bānu-Goshasp who rescues Lohrāsp and takes him to Zāl's court in Zābolestān. She wonders why her grandfather Zāl had not been more forthcoming in offering the hapless Iranian king refuge. Here, once again, there is an opportunity for Zāl to reflect on the issue of Lohrāsp's legitimacy or lack thereof and voice his displeasure at having to accept him as king:

146 Ibid. f. 141.
147 Ibid. f. 142.
148 Ibid. f. 145.
149 Ibid. f. 152.
150 Ibid. f. 154.
151 Ibid. f. 161–3.

چنین پاسخ آورد زال سوار — که ای خوب رخ دختر نامدار
ز لهراسپ چون یاد آید مرا — چه غم این دل شاد آید مرا
به پیچد به تن همی‌موی من — فتد آتش تیز در خوی من
نداند چه آید بدین دودمان — ز لهراسپ ای دختر مهربان[152]

> The warrior Zāl answered her thus, "Oh noble girl of beautiful countenance! The mere remembrance of Lohrāsp turns all the happiness of my joyous heart into sorrow. I feel as if my hair encircles my body like a coil; my being becomes engulfed in the fire of rage. One does not know what will befall on this family (Rostam's) from Lohrāsp's ilk."

Once again Kay Khosrow appears in a dream, this time to Zāl, and urges Zāl to obey Lohrāsp.[153] Zāl confesses to Kay Khosrow that the mere utterance of the name Lohrāsp infuriates him beyond measure, but at the end he vows to support Lohrāsp.[154] Meanwhile the armies summoned by Lohrāsp arrive, and there follows a lengthy battle involving members of all noble families that were prominent in the previous section of the *Shāhnāmeh*.[155] One of the most notable losses that the Iranians suffer during this war is the loss of old Gudarz, the patriarch of his house, who is slain on the battlefield and later hung from the gallows.[156] It is important to note that the *Shāhnāmeh* does not provide an account of Gudarz's fate, because this portion of Lohrāsp's reign has not been included in Ferdowsi's account. According to the Sistani version, eventually after many battles that are described at length and in detail and which feature many of the members of the noble families, Rostam returns from the west and participates in the effort to push back the Turānians.[157] This is finally accomplished by Farāmarz, Rostam's son, who manages to kill Arjāsp and reinstall Lohrāsp as king in Balkh.[158]

152 Ibid. f. 166.
153 Ibid. 166.
154 Ibid. f. 166.
155 See section above.
156 Ibid. f. 177–8.
157 Ibid. f. 298.
158 Ibid. f. 372–6.

The Sistani version of events, therefore, notwithstanding the expression of constant disapproval of Lohrāsp,[159] absolves the Sistani heroes of abandoning Iran and its king. Furthermore, it affirms the continued presence of the noble families and their crucial participation in the affairs of the Iranian kingdom. Additionally, in the Sistani narration preserved in the *Shahriyārnāmeh*, we have a reflection of two frontier wars, one in the west and one in the north-eastern region, a phenomenon that the Parthian Empire was plagued with several times.[160] Absent from the Sistani narration is the attempts to create a new heroic line descendant from Lohrāsp as well as any hint to the existence of a religious conflict. Instead, at some point, when Zāl once again struggles to overcome his animosity for Lohrāsp, we learn that he has sensed the calamitous end his family will suffer at the hand of Bahman, Lohrāsp's great grandson.[161]

159 The example quoted above, of Rostam's refusal to rush to Lohrāsp's aid, which is resolved only when Kay Khosrow orders him to do so in a dream, is repeated on several occasions.

160 There is evidence of two-frontier wars in the reigns of the following Parthian monarchs: Mithradates I (171–139/8 BC), Phraates II (139/8–127 BC), and Artabanes II (127–124/3 BC).

161 Bahman's conquest of Sistan and its catastrophic consequences for the house of Rostam will be discussed at length in chapter 5, but here Zāl has a premonition of the disaster Bahman is going to bring upon his own family, *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 166.

همان دل زال روشن بدی خبردارکار از بهمن بدی
که بهمن چه آرد بدین دودمان گواهی دل زال دادی بدان

Translation:
Zāl's heart, because it was alight with insight, knew of Bahman's (future) deeds. Zāl's prediction was so clear to him that it was as though his heart bore witness to what is going to befall his offspring at the hand of Bahman.

CHAPTER 4

The Downtrodden Sistani Heroes

Before we turn our attention to the next prominent Sistani hero, namely Farāmarz, it is worthwhile to examine the stories of Rostam's less-known offspring. Within the corpus of the Sistani Cycle, we encounter the depiction of at least two heroic types:[1] first is the Sistani hero who at some point during his career assumes the throne of the kingdom of Sistan/Zābolestān, such as Garshāsp, Rostam and Farāmarz; second is the group of heroes who never win the bid for political power within the family. The best-known character of the latter group is Rostam's son Sohrāb. Given the prominence of the story of Rostam and Sohrāb, it comes as no surprise that Sohrāb's heroic character essentially functions as a prototype for this group of Sistani heroes, namely his descendants Borzu and Shahriyār as well as Jahāngir.[2] Their stories contain historical reflections of the internal struggle within the family of Rostam, namely a competition between its different branches, which must have resulted in filicide at some point in the history of this family. The latter traumatic event – traumatic for the family and the story's audiences alike – is captured most famously in the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrāb.

Admittedly there is no historical evidence for filicide within the family of Suren or the Indo-Parthian kings. But given the meagerness of our historical evidence the absence of a reference to filicide does not rule out the possibility of its occurrence. This is one of the classical cases where the absence of evidence does not translate into evidence of absence. There are cases of both patricide and filicide within the Arsacid royal family, and especially the particular branch of the family that enjoyed the support of the Surens, namely the descendants of Sinatruces: Phraates III (58/7–53 BCE) was killed by his sons, Orodes II and Mithradates III, and Phraates IV (r. 32–3 BCE) murdered his father Orodes II as well as his brother and his sons.

As is the case with other historical narrations of this genre, the reflection of a historical filicide, however, must be narrated within the generic parameters, hence subordinating the "facts of history" to the requirements of the genre. This is why in the much-celebrated story of Rostam and Sohrāb the protago-

1 Here I say "at least" because we also have to take into account Zāl's heroic character that does not fit either of the two categories mentioned here; see chapter 3.

2 Jahāngir is not a descendant of Sohrāb but, as we shall see, his story is heavily influenced by Sohrāb's; for the genealogical chart of Rostam's house and Jahāngir's position in it, see Figure 3.

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nists remain ignorant of the fact that they are related, in spite of the many hints present at crucial junctures in the narrative and Sohrāb's conscious attempts to discover Rostam's identity. Only when Sohrāb lies fatally wounded at the hands of his father is their relationship revealed. An act of filicide committed knowingly and deliberately on the part of the most-celebrated of Sistani heroes would not be justified or justifiable. The inclusion of the stories of this group of heroes in the cycle, however, deserves some attention, for unlike other episodes of Rostam's heroic adventures and feats, in the story of Rostam and Sohrāb Rostam not only does not have the audiences' sympathy but instead earns their wrath.[3] Sohrāb's unrelenting quest for his father has struck a cord with audiences throughout the long life of the story. All along the way Sohrāb is searching for signs that might point to Rostam, and each time as Rostam's identity is concealed deliberately, Sohrāb is overcome with disappointment and sorrow.[4] In one instance, and as the plot moves closer to its tragic end, Sohrāb professes to Rostam, who is still unwilling to divulge his identity, that he is

3 An example of this is Ferdowsi's commentary at the end of the story: *Shāhnāmeh* 2,199:

یکی داستان است پرآب چشم دل نازك از رستم آید به خشم

Translation DD 214:
This tale is full of tears, and Rostam leaves
The tender heart indignant as it grieves

4 For one such example see *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 161:

غمی گشت سهراب را دل بدان که جایی ز رستم نیامد نشان
نشان داده بود از پدر مادرش همی دید و دیده نبد باورش

Translation:
Sohrāb became sorrowful because nowhere did he find a sign of Rostam. His mother had described his father's features to him, but once he saw those features, he didn't recognize them.
Another example is when Sohrāb meets Rostam on the battlefield. Sohrāb asks him if he is Rostam, but he denies it; Ibid. 171:

من ایدون گمانم که تو رستمی گر از تخمه نامور نیرمی
چنین داد پاسخ که رستم نیم هم از تخمه سام نیرم نیم
که او پهوان است من کهترم نه با تخت وکام ونه با افسرم
از اومید سهراب شد ناامید برو تیره شد روی روز سپید

Translation:
I think you are Rostam, of the lineage of Narimān (niram). Rostam replied, "I am not Rostam, the offspring of Sām from the lineage of Narimān. For he is a noble *pahlavān*, and I a mere

moved by a sense of love and respect for him. Once again, Sohrāb asks Rostam to reveal his lineage and once again Rostam refrains from telling the truth:

دل من همی برتو مهر آورد همی آب شرمم به چهر آورد
همانا که داری ز نیرم نژاد کنی پیش من گوهر خویش یاد
مگر پور دستان سام یلی گزین نامور رستم زابلی
بدو گفت رستم که ای نامجوی نبودیم هرگز بدین گفت وگوی[5]

> Sohrāb addressing Rostam: "My heart is moved by affection for you; when I see you I can't help but shed tears of reverence. Do reveal your lineage to me, for I think you belong to the lineage of Narimān. Are you not the son of Dastān, the distinguished hero, Rostam?" Rostam responded, "this is not what we talked of last night . . ."

The sympathy of the audiences of all times is most notably with Sohrāb, as he lays wounded by Rostam and expresses his last wish: he hopes that his death might be avenged by his father, not knowing that he is in fact addressing him:

کنون گر تو در آب ماهی شوی وگر چون شب اندر سیاهی شوی
وگر چون ستاره، شوی بر سپهر ببری ز روی زمین پاك مهر
بخواهد هم از تو پدر کین من چو داند که خشتست بالین من
ازین نامداران گردنکشان کسی هم برد نزد رستم نشان
که سهراب کشته ست وافکند خوار ترا خواست کردن همی خواستار[6]

> And you could be a fish within the sea,
> Or pitch black, lost in obscurity,
> Or be a star in heaven's endless space,
> Or vanish from the earth and leave no trace
> But still my father, when he knows I'm dead,

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subject. Unlike Rostam I do not posses a throne and a crown." Upon hearing this reply Sohrāb sank in such despair that the day's luminous countenance became pitch black to him.

5 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 181–2.

6 Ibid. 2: 186; Translation DD 209.

Will bring down vengeance on your head.
One from this noble band will take this sign
To Rostam's hand, tell him it was mine.

Sohrāb's innocent quest, fueled by the urge to finally get to know his father, and Rostam's obstinate refusal to divulge his identity, spell out a tragic end for Sohrāb. While attempts are made to make the Iranian king Kay Kāvus[7] at least partially responsible for Sohrāb's death, Rostam in fact is the main culprit.

Why, one might ask, would the Sistani Cycle – with one of its functions being the legitimization of the Sistani king – include such a story in its corpus? By investigating the other stories of Sistani heroes who never gained political power within the family, one plausible answer for this question emerges. It seems that the Sistani Cycle included stories that were most likely meant for popular audiences. The stories of Borzu and Shahriyār contain in them certain elements of the popular literature, which are otherwise absent in the stories of other Sistani heroes. This is one of the reasons for the argument that the stories of these "downtrodden" heroes were popular and were perhaps narrated by storytellers who performed for commoners rather than court audiences. It is also safe to assume that the sympathy of such audiences were with the ousted princes, who were often reduced, albeit temporarily, to becoming farmers or merchants. Speaking of a close relationship between the popular medieval literature and the stories of this group of Sistani heroes, both contain stories of "ousted princes." Among the extant stories from the popular medieval literature of Iran, one is devoted entirely to one such wronged prince: the *Firuzshāhnāmeh*, also known as Bighami's *Dārābnāmeh*, is in fact the adventures of Firuzshāh, son of Dārāb, who loses the throne to his brother, Dārā.[8] Toward the end of the extant portion of the *Firuzshāhnāmeh*, we learn that in Firuzshāh's absence, his younger brother Dārā assumed the throne, contrary to the established tradition.[9] The story of *Firuzshāhnāmeh* is a celebration of the wronged prince, whose right to rule was usurped by a member of his

7 Kay Kāvus refuses to provide the antidote to the position with which Rostam's weapon was laced; see *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 191.

8 The first two volumes of the *Firuzshāhnāmeh* are published under the erroneous title *Dārābnāmeh*: Bighami, *Dārābnāmeh*. For the third volume, published recently, see Bighami, *Firuz Shāhnāmeh*. Henceforth I shall refer to the work by its title of *Firuzshāhnāmeh*.

9 *Firuzshāhnāmeh*, 3: 689:

شنیدم که برادر مدارای بن داراب در ایران پادشاه است اما نه بر طریق شاهان پیشین سلوك میکند.

family. Similarly, within the corpus of the Sistani Cycle, the stories of Borzu, Jahāngir and Shahriyār celebrate the ousted heroes within the family of Rostam. Another device that helps establish the status of Borzu and Shahriyār as princes who will not assume political power or the status of leaders within the family of Rostam is their genealogy. They are made to be the descendants of Sohrāb: Borzu is his son, and Shahriyār is Borzu's son and Sohrāb's grandson. In other words, they are the offspring of the young, innocent Sohrāb, who was killed senselessly by Rostam, the most powerful and prominent hero of the Sistani line. Though not Sohrāb's offspring, Jahāngir also is motivated to attack Iran once he has learned Sohrāb's story. Sohrāb's fate is by no means forgotten by his son and grandson, for as we shall see, Borzu and Shahriyār, who themselves are wronged by Sistani heroes, recall their ancestor's death at the hand of Rostam, condemning it as an unforgivable act.

4.1 Borzu

Borzu's adventures as narrated in the *Borzunāmeh*[10] take place during the reign of Kay Khosrow, and the story appears as an interpolation to the text of Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, usually after the story of Bizhan and Manizheh.[11] In order to discuss the ways in which the story of Borzu encapsulates the memory of ousted members of Rostam's family, it is necessary to discuss its plot in detail. The story does not merely hint at the fact that Borzu was treated unjustly, but insists on it: first, by making him the son of Sohrāb; second, by modeling his story after the story of Rostam and Sohrāb; and third, as discussed above, by including folk motifs.

Like his father Sohrāb, Borzu is conceived in Turān as a result of a brief sexual encounter between Sohrāb and a woman by the name of Shiruy.[12] However, unlike his father, Borzu grows up as a commoner; when he is old enough he

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Translation:
I have heard that in Iran my brother Dārāy ebn Dārāb has become king, but he is not ruling according to the ways of previous kings.

10 For an introduction to the *Borzunāmeh* and the position of their interpolation in a few *Shāhnāmeh* manuscripts, see van den Berg, *Barzunama* 97–114.

11 For a discussion of the chronological framework of the *Borzunāmeh* and its appearance in the *Shāhnāmeh* manuscripts as well as the edited versions of the text, see Appendix A *Borzunāmeh*.

12 *Borzunāmeh* 8.

becomes a farmer. The poem laments the fact that one with such great pedigree as Borzu's should be reduced to plebeian ranks:

به برزیگری داشت مادر ورا که بودش بسی ملك اندرخورا
جهان جوی ازتخمه راستان به برزیگری گشت همداستان
یکی مرد عام کشاورز بود اگرچه خدواند صد مرز بود[13]

> Even though he was deserving of many a kingdom, his mother raised him as a farmer, and so it was that a noble warrior, deserving reign over vast territories, became a common farmer.

Making Borzu a farmer in the story has the function of highlighting his status as a wronged hero who is condemned to live a life that does not befit his station. There is something else to be said about this upbringing. In popular literature this is a recurrent motif. A person of noble or royal lineage, usually the protagonist of the story, finds himself in difficult circumstances, which are usually created due to ill-luck or malevolent forces. Hence he is obliged to take on the profession and rank of a commoner. However, because of his innate skills as a warrior, the protagonist is soon discovered by a king.[14] Similarly, Borzu is eventually discovered by the Turānian king Afrāsiyāb and encouraged to attack Iran.[15] But in the case of Borzu the discovery is a result of his physical strength and not his skills, for having been raised as a farmer he lacks the skills expected of a noble warrior. Once discovered, Afrāsiyāb orders him to be taken to the court, where he is trained as a warrior by a Turānian and, as to be expected, soon surpasses his mentors in all skills.[16]

Like his father Sohrāb, Borzu's next step is attacking Iran; however, unlike Sohrāb, who knew Rostam was his father and was on a quest to find him, Borzu's chief aim in attacking Iran is to find Rostam and kill him, unaware that Rostam is his grandfather. Here Borzu is addressing Afrāsiyāb:

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13 *Borzunāmeh* 11.

14 There are many examples of this motif, but as an example I will provide one from the *Firuz Shāhnāmeh*. Firuzshāh, in his pursuit of his beloved, ends up in a city alone and without provisions. There he is adopted by an herb-seller by the name of Nikmard and works both on the land to farm herbs and later in the bazar to sell them. Eventually he is discovered by the king of the city; *Firuzshāhnāmeh* 1: 56–63.

15 *Borzunāmeh* 22.

16 Ibid. 26–7.

ببرم سر رستم زال زر به پیش تو آورم سر کینه ور
نمانم به ایران زمین بار و برگ برایشان برفشانم یکی باد مرگ
سرانشان را ببرم به شمشیر تیز برآرم از ایرانیان رستخیز[17]

> "Ever vengeful, I shall behead Rostam, son of Zāl-e Zar, and bring his head to you. I shall make the winds of death blow on Iran, reducing it to a wasteland. I shall wreak such havoc on their land that they should be reminded of the day of judgment. I will leave none of them alive, beheading them all with my sharp sword!"

When the Iranian king learns of the Turānian onslaught, headed by Borzu, he first asks the *pahlavāns* at his court to fend him off, and when that does not prove successful, he sends for Rostam. At this point, Rostam rushes to Kay Khosrow's aid without a delay.[18] When finally faced with Borzu on the battlefield, Rostam is injured badly[19] and deceives Borzu by promising to return to the battlefield later that day[20] but instead flees to the court, distraught and fearful:

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17 Ibid. 33.

18 Ibid. This is yet another difference between the stories of Borzu and Sohrāb, but it is not relevant to this discussion. The reason for Rostam's hesitation to face Sohrāb on the battlefield is due to the nature of his relationship with the Iranian monarch Kay Kāvus, which can be described as problematic. This, however, is not the case with Rostam's relationship with Kay Khosrow, as the latter enjoys Rostam's steadfast support.

19 Ibid. 67:

بزد گرز بر تارك پور زال درآمد سر گرز بر کتف و یال
ز زخمش بشد هوش از پهلوان توگفتی ندارد به تن در روان

Translation:
Borzu aimed his mace at Rostam's head but the mace landed on Rostam's shoulder. From the impact and the wound, Rostam lost consciousness and fell on the ground. It was as though his soul had departed his body.

20 Ibid. 68:

تو زایدر برو تا به پرده سرای که تا من همی بازگردم به جای
ز پیکار یك دم همی دم زنیم زمانی دو دیده به هم بر زنیم
بدان نیمه روز بار دگر ببندیم بر جنگ جستن کمر

وزین روی رستم بیامد دوان به نزدیك خسرو خلیده روان
سر و دست آزرده و روی زرد پر از درد جان و لبان پر زگرد
شکسته روان پیش خسرو دوید سرشکش زدیده به رخ بر چکید[21]

> Rostam ran eagerly to the king, his arm and head were injured, his face pale, his soul afflicted by pain and his lips parched. In a state of utter despair and shedding tears of shame of defeat, Rostam rushed to the king.

Rostam indeed feels helpless and knows that should he return to the battlefield he would be defeated. Nowhere within the Sistani Cycle do we encounter Rostam in such a state of utter despair. Nothing helps Rostam here: neither his previous glorious acts nor his lineage will in this particular situation prove to be helpful. This sentiment is actually put into his own mouth: as he flees back to the court, he remembers his various heroic feats but professes that he is helpless in this particular circumstance. Rostam complains to Kay Khosrow:

دگرگفت با خسروای تاجور که دیدم بسی مرد پرخاشگر
دریدم جگرگاه دیو سپید به مردی نگشتم زجان ناامید
مرا جنگ کاموس و خاقان چین به بازی شمردم به پیکار این
دو بهره ز توران ستورم بکند نیامدازایشان به رویم گزند
نه گرزم بروکارکرد و نه تیغ بترسم که ماهم درون شد به میغ[22]

> "In my times I encountered many a warrior. Remember how I slew the White Demon, always relying on my manliness, never succumbing to despair? The battles with Kamus and the Khāqān of China were mere

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Translation:
Rostam addressing Borzu:
"Set forth from here to the encampment. Let us meet again here, but now let us cease fighting and rest for a while. We shall return later during the day and resume fighting."

21 Ibid. 69.

22 Ibid. 69.

games compared with my battle with Borzu. Twice I traversed Turān on the horseback, and I was not harmed by them. But on him neither my mace nor my blade worked; I am afraid that fortune has left me [lit. my moon has been covered by clouds]."

Accepting his own inadequacy in comparison to Borzu, Rostam sends for Farāmarz who appears not a moment too soon. Pretending to be Rostam, Farāmarz challenges Borzu to battle.[23] When Farāmarz asks him who he is, Borzu, instead of replying, gives a long elegy for Sohrāb, blaming Rostam for his death:

بدو گفت رستم که نام تو چیست که زاینده بر تو بباید گریست
چو بشنید بر زوی بگریست زار ز دیده ببارید خون بر کنار
ز سهراب یاد آمدش از پدر بدو گفت کای گرد پرخاشگر
تو را چون سواران دل و شرم نیست کسی را به نزدیکت آزرم نیست
بکشتی چنان نامور مرد را برآوردی از جان او گرد را
دلت را بر او برنیاورد مهر همی آب شرمت نیامد به چهر[24]

Rostam said to him, "What is your name? Your mother will soon be mourning your death!" When Borzu heard this, he started weeping tears of blood. He remembered (his father)[25] Sohrāb. He then said, "Oh you ferocious warrior, unlike other warriors you are not moved by shame or reverence! You do not honor anyone. You destroyed such a noble man. Your heart was not moved by a sense of affection for him, you did not shed tears of reverence in his presence."

As we shall see, the condemnation of Rostam becomes much more intensified later. Farāmarz captures Borzu on the battlefield and sends him to Sistan at Rostam's request, because Rostam regards Borzu as a valuable asset given his strength and his skill. Rostam plans to choose a bride of noble lineage for him and eventually send him off to participate in wars of conquest in India,

23 Ibid. 81.

24 Ibid. 81.

25 While later we learn that Borzu was unaware that Sohrāb was his father, in this particular passage we have a hint that he may have known.

hoping that eventually Borzu could establish his own vassalage there.[26] It is also important to note that Rostam's intercession on Borzu's behalf is motivated by a self-serving agenda and in no way is described to have been moved by a sense of love or empathy for Borzu. Here obviously we have a reflection of the ongoing efforts on the part of the ruling family of Sistan to expand into the Indian subcontinent, the significance of which has been previously discussed at length. What is important in the context of our current discussion, however, is that here we get an idea of the prospects of some members of the ruling family of Rostam/Suren, who were either lower in rank or proved to be a threat to the ruler. They could venture out to India and eventually establish themselves there as vassals of Sistan's king. While in this particular story we only have this one reference to this phenomenon, later in this chapter, in the story of Shahriyār, we encounter this as a 'career option' for a deposed prince.

Let us return to the story of Borzu, who now finds himself imprisoned in Sistan. All the while, it turns out, Borzu's mother Shiruy had been following him, tracing his footsteps, and this quest invariably brings her to Sistan. There, to her utter dismay she learns that her son was being held captive at some fortification. At this juncture in the story we have an episode reminiscent of popular tales. Although we know very little about popular medieval literature, we know that in the earliest specimens of this genre there are ample descriptions of activities of *ʿayyārs*, or urban brotherhoods, who, having adopted a set of specific skills, engaged in covert operations.[27] In the following episode

26 Ibid. 95:

زتخم بزرگان بسازم زنش نمانم که رنجی رسد برتنش
به هندوستانش فرستم به جنگ بدان جای سازیم او را درنگ

Translation:
I shall choose for him a bride from noble pedigree; I shall not let him suffer. I will send him off to wage war in India, and we will make him settle there.

27 The institution of *ʿayyāri* has been the subject of few recent studies including my book chapter, "'Ayyārān va 'Ayyāri dar Iran ghabl az doryeh Ṣafavi," in *Tārikh-e Jāmeʿ-e Irān* 2015. It might be worth mentioning here that the most recent monograph-length study dedicated to the subject by Deborah G. Tor, *Violent order: Religious warfare, chivalry, and the ʿayyar phenomenon* (Wurzburg: 2007) is based on a faulty methodology and a misreading of Persian passages and invariably paints a completely misconstrued and misleading picture of this very significant social institution. For a brief critique of her work see the present author's work as well as an overview of the social institution of *ʿayyāri*: " 'Ayyārān va 'Ayyāri". Most recently Parvaneh Pourshariati has contributed to the topic by examining the provenance of this social institution, see Ethics and praxis 15–38.

we encounter characters who bear an uncanny resemblance to the *ʿayyārs* of popular literature.

In the episode in question, Borzu's mother solicits the protection of a benevolent merchant in Sistan who in turn introduces her to a female musician. This female musician, upon taking an oath[28] to assist Borzu, eventually sets him free.[29] For one familiar with the genre of popular literature, especially in those specimens of the genre where *ʿayyārs* loom large, this indeed is a familiar scene. For example, in the story of *Samak-e ʿAyyār* there are a number of episodes where female musicians facilitate the operations of the *ʿayyārs* by providing them access to the inner chambers of the court. One such example which bears similarities to the episode cited above appears fairly early in the story of *Samak-e ʿAyyār*, where its protagonist, Samak, seeks out the help of a female musician by the name of Ruhafzā. After taking an oath,[30] a means by which a person is usually initiated into the *ʿayyār* ranks, Ruhafzā helps Samak

28 Ibid. 107:
The musician addressing Borzu:

چو بشنید زن گفت کای پهلوان — به گردنده گردون و مهر روان
که گر برسرم تیغ بارد سپهر — همه تیر و زوبین زند ماه و مهر
نگویم کسی را من این راز تو — به هر نیك و بد باشم انباز تو

Translation:
When the woman heard, she addressed Borzu and said, "Oh *Pahlavān*! I swear on the one who turns the wheel of universe and to the moving Mehr/Sun that even if the sky shall rain blades and arrows upon my head, that if the Sun and the Moon strike me, I shall keep your secret. In good and bad times I shall remain by your side."

29 Ibid. 112.

30 *Samak-e ʿAyyār* 1: 29:

روح افزا گفت:

به یزدان دادار پروردگار آمرزگار و به جان پاکان و راستان که دل با شما یکی دارم و یا دوستان شما دوست باشم و با دشمنان شما دشمن، هرگز راز شما را آشکارا نکنم و هر چه شما را از آن رنجی خواهد رسید بهر توانم کرد. نیکی بکنم و در نیکی کردن تقصیر نکنم و دقیقهای حیل نسازم و اندیشه بد نکنم و اگر از دوستی شما کاری باشد که من بر باد شوم، روا دارم و اندیشه ندارم.

I swear to the merciful, just creator and to the pure souls that my heart shall be one with yours. I will be a friend of your friends and an enemy of your enemies. I swear never to divulge your secrets and to never put you in harm's way. I shall do good and I shall not hold back from doing good. In my dealings with you, I shall not resort to deceit, and I shall

gain access into the king's palace, where the brother of his patron is held captive.[31] While Ruhafzā's oath is much more detailed, one can find echoes of it in the oath the unnamed female musician of *Borzunāmeh* takes before rushing to Borzu's aid,[32] for the ideas of secrecy, loyalty and self-sacrifice are parts of the ethical-value system of *javānmardi* to which the *ʿayyārs* adhered.[33] The traces of the *ʿayyāri* oath found in this passage in the *Borzunāmeh*, however, are an indication that the stories of these lesser heroes stem from a milieu familiar with popular stories in which the *ʿayyārs* and not the noble *pahlavāns* are the protagonists.

Returning to the story, we learn that once Borzu is set free, he and his mother attempt to find their way back to Turān, but they are intercepted by Rostam's army, and this is when the final battle between Borzu and Rostam takes place. This climactic moment in the narrative offers the opportunity for Borzu to deliver a virulent discourse on Rostam's character:

تو را چون سواران دل وشرم نیست جهان را به نزدیکت آزرم نیست
نترسیدی از ننگ و از نام بد و یا سوی ایزد سرانجام بد

. . .

ندانی اگر چند مانی دراز به یزدان همی گشت بایدت باز
چو با من بسنده نبودی به جنگ سوی چاره گشتی و نیرنگ و رنگ
کجا رفت آن زور بازوی تو همان جنگ و پرخاش و نیروی تو[34]

> "Unlike warriors, you possess neither heart nor shame; in the entire world, you do not revere anything. You are neither afraid of leaving the world with ignominy, nor do you fear God. It is as though you are not aware that even if you enjoy a long life, at the end to God you shall return. Since you were not a match for me on the battlefield, you resorted to deceit and trickery. What happened to your strength? All your skill and might on the battlefield?"

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not harbor evil thoughts towards you. If your friendship shall cost me my very life, I shall gladly give it, and I shall not think twice about it.

31 *Samak-e ʿAyyār* 1: 29–35.

32 Compare the oaths in footnotes 27 and 28.

33 Ror the significance of *ʿayyāri* oaths, see Pourshariati, Ethics and praxis.

34 *Borzunāmeh* 142.

So Rostam lacks the prescribed decorum of a noble hero marked by reverence and devotion; his hubris is such that not only is he not fearful of the consequences of his actions before God but he has also forgotten that he is a mere mortal; he compensated for his lack of skill on the battlefield with trickery and deceit, and he has lost his physical strength, etc. Needless to say the sympathy of the narrative, and by extension the audience, is with its protagonist Borzu. Therefore, the charges brought forth against Rostam do sound justified and incite condemnation and anger against him. Then, as though granting voice to the audiences' anger, Borzu, the downtrodden hero, rises to the occasion and threatens to put an end to Rostam's indefensible acts:

ز ببر بیانت بسازم کفن به خنجر سرت را ببرم ز تن
ببندم دو دستت به خم کمند به پیل سیاهت ببندم به بند
به توران فرستم به افراسیاب به راه خراسان برآن روی آب

. . .

نمایدبه خاقان وشاهان تورا بگرداندت گرد توران تو را
چنان چون توکردی به تورانیان نمایم هم اکنون به ایرانیان[35]

> Your Babr-e Bayān, I shall turn into a shroud. Your head, I shall cut off. Your hands, I shall tie with my lasso. Then I shall send your severed head by the way of Khurasan to Turān to Afrāsiyāb. Then Afrāsiyāb will show off your head to Khāqān and other kings and will tour Turān with it. I will do to you and to the Iranians as you did to the Turānians.

Rostam's purported weakness notwithstanding, in their following encounter Rostam gains the upper hand, and as he is about to kill Borzu, his mother appears revealing to Rostam that Borzu is indeed his grandson. Once again, there is a long passage, put in Shiruy's mouth, condemning Rostam:

تو را شرم ناید ز یزدان پاك که چونین جوانی برین تیره خاك
به زاری برآری روان ازتنش زخون سرخ گردد همه جوشنش
ز نسل نریمان و فرزند تو نبیره جهاندار و پیوند تو

35 Ibid. 143.

تو را او نبیره هست و هستی نیا برودل چه داری پر از کیمیا
جهان جوی، فرزند سهراب گرد بدین زور بازو این دست برد
بخواهیش کشتن برین گونه خوار نترسی ز یزدان پرو ردگار
که گاهی نبیره کشی گاه پور بهانه تو را کین ایران و تور[36]

> Don't you fear God when you demean such a youth, throw him on the ground, have his armor be drenched in red blood as his soul departs his body? He is of Narimān's pedigree. He is your grandson, your kin. He is your grandson, you his grandfather. Why is your heart so full of hatred for him? Look at his stature, his might! He is the son of Sohrāb, the great warrior. And you want to kill him so humiliatingly. Indeed you are not afraid of the creator. Sometimes you kill your own son, sometimes your grandson. Your excuses are plenty: taking revenge on behalf of Iran and Turān!

Borzu's mother shares the audience's sentiments when she states that Rostam should be ashamed of himself for wanting to slay a young man such as Borzu for no good reason, and finally invoking Sohrāb and his fate, she charges Rostam with filicide. Rostam's morbid tendency to kill his offspring is a recurrent one, and therefore is by no means either forgotten or forgiven. This of course is the "popular" commentary on Rostam's character. Nowhere else do we encounter such a characterization of Rostam, and this is because the stories that celebrate Rostam as the greatest hero of the Sistani line are without a doubt the products of patronage by his family, while the stories of Borzu and Shahriyār must have been created by storytellers who catered to a different audience.

After Borzu's lineage is revealed there is a shift in the story. Borzu sides himself with Rostam and the Iranians and attempts to prove himself worthy of his lineage by tackling several Turānian warriors. Before the armies come face to face, however, we encounter yet another episode in *Borzunāmeh* shared with popular literature. After Afrāsiyāb learned of Borzu's defection to the other side, he commissioned a female musician by the name of Susan, who was skillful in the art of trickery, to capture the *pahlavāns* of the Iranian army. She did so by luring them into her tent and eventually slipping them wine laced with a *bihushāneh*, a drug usually used by the *ʿayyārs* of popular stories to render its

36 Ibid. 150–1.

consumer unconscious.[37] In this fashion she captured Ṭus,[38] Gudarz,[39] Giv,[40] and Gostaham.[41] When Rostam learns about the predicament of the Iranian *pahlavāns*, he decides to send Farāmarz to set them free. However, Zāl rebukes Rostam for this decision, arguing that Ṭus, Gudarz, Giv, and Gostaham – all members of Nodhariān and Gudarziān families – harbored ill-feelings toward members of his family. Furthermore, Zāl claims they were all crazed by anger and revenge and they were strangers, belonging to different lineages.[42] It is interesting that here we get a different view of the relationship of the noble families, of which the *Borzunāmeh* and other Sistani narrations, as we shall see, offer a more nuanced depiction.

Let us see what happens next in the story. With Farāmarz dissuaded from the rescue mission, the task is entrusted to Bizhan, son of Giv. Bizhan encounters Susan but immediately suspected her of having something to do with the disappearance of the Iranian *pahlavāns*, so he does not drink what she offers him. Instead he tells her that it is their custom for the host to drink the first three cups of any drink offered to guests, and when Susan refuses to do so, Bizhan realizes that his suspicion was correct. What Bizhan does not know, however, is that Susan is not working alone: in fact, her accomplice is one of their most prominent warriors by the name of Pilsam, who comes to Susan's aid and captures Bizhan as well.[43]

Now there is no one left to remedy the situation except the Sistani heroes. Casting their differences and apprehensions aside, Zāl, Rostam, Farāmarz and

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37 For more on this drug and works of literature that reference it, see Afshari, *Tāzeh be Tāzeh* 86–96.

38 *Borzunāmeh* 177–81.

39 Ibid. 183–6.

40 Ibid. 186–9.

41 Ibid. 190–2.

42 Ibid. 174.

ندانی مگرطوس وگودرز وگیو همان بیژن‌گیووگستهم نیو
زدرد تودلشان نباشد تهی وگر تاج زرشان برسردهی
به کینه همی تیز ودیوانه اند نژادتورانیز بیگانه اند

Zāl addressing Farāmarz:
"Don't you know that Ṭus, Gudarz, Giv, his son Bizhan and the manly Gostaham are not your well-wishers, even if you bestow on them golden crowns. The desire for revenge has rendered them all crazy and ill-tempered; and they are aliens as far as our lineage is concerned."

43 Ibid. 193–7.

Borzu face the Turānian army. This is where Borzu, as the new addition to the family, is given a chance to prove his skills, and he does fight several Turānian warriors. However, he falls short of gaining a notable victory. First Borzu, along with Zāl, tackles the Turānian army, only to hold them off for some time before Rostam and Farāmarz arrive with their reinforcements and push them back.[44] When the Turānian hero was finally captured by Rostam, Borzu is given the task to execute him on the battlefield.[45] It becomes apparent in this section of the story, therefore, that Borzu's role is secondary to that of Rostam and Farāmarz. Nevertheless, Borzu does not think any less of himself. When Kay Khosrow arrives on the scene after the retreat of the Turānian army, Borzu asks him to be sent to avenge Siāvush's blood.[46] Borzu also makes a bold attempt to usurp the throne of Sistan: he tries to persuade Kay Khosrow to expel Rostam and take away the office of *jahān-pahlavān*. Reminding Kay Khosrow that Kay Qobād, his great-grandfather, had granted the crown of the kingdom of Sistan to his family after Rostam had come out a victor from the first battle,[47] Borzu argues that it was now his turn to receive the crown and the title/office.[48] Kay Khosrow is obviously put in a difficult position, for should he oblige Borzu he would antagonize Rostam. Instead, Kay Khosrow promises to grant Borzu a position as a *pahlavān* at his court, hence defusing what could potentially become a dangerous situation.[49] Kay Khosrow is baffled by Borzu's request and his attempt to circumvent Rostam. He expresses his astonishment to Zāl, saying that Borzu has learned to be deceitful from Zāl himself.[50] In the end,

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44 Ibid. 215–19.

45 Ibid. 236.

برآو رد بر ز وی شمشیر تیز تن پیلسم کرد پس ریز ریز

Translation:
Borzu pulled out his sharp weapon and chopped up Pilsam's body into small pieces.

46 Ibid. 246; 248.

47 This episode is discussed in chapter 3.

48 Ibid. 246.

همان کن تو با من بر این جای داد که با رستم نامور کیقباد
که جنگ نخستین به پیش سپاه جهان پهلوانی بدو داد شاه

Translation:
Borzu addressing Kay Khosrow: "You should do for me what Kay Qobād did for Rostam. When Rostam returned from the first war he fought on Kay Qobād's behalf, the king appointed him as *jahān-pahlavān*."

49 Ibid. 247.

50 Ibid. 247.

به دستان چنین گفت کای پهلوان فریب از تو آموخته ست این جوان

Rostam and Kay Khosrow reach a compromise: they decide to have Borzu sent to Kay Khosrow's court and to send him to Turān to avenge Siāvush's blood.[51] Next, Borzu receives the official decree to rule over the areas of Ghur and Herat,[52] and he accompanies Kay Khosrow back to Iran, while Rostam remains in Sistan as both king and *jahān-pahlavān*.[53]

To sum up, Borzu is a wronged hero whose upbringing as a farmer deprives him of a chance to become one of the Sistani heroes, even after his identity is revealed. In Borzu's case, the repertoire of heroic motifs is not invoked in the text, because unlike his great ancestors, he has to forgo the chance to engage in heroic trials. From the narrative's perspective, such invocation is not necessary, as the aim of the motifs is to establish the Sistani heroes' legitimacy so that they are justified in assuming the throne. As far as the audience is concerned, he does have a legitimate claim to power, an ambition that remains unfulfilled. In the end, we learn that Borzu does not ascend to the throne of Sistan's kingdom and is pacified by being granted a place in Kay Khosrow's entourage of *pahlavāns*, which would safely remove him as a rival to Rostam, who reigns over Sistan. He is also given what seems to be nominal authority over the areas of Ghur and Herat. While the longest version of the *Borzunāmeh* in its extant form ends here, there is a clue that Borzu was indeed eliminated as a contender for power. He had asked Kay Khosrow to lead the Iranian armies to Turān to avenge Siāvush's blood, but there is no mention of Borzu as one of the participants – let alone as the commander of the army – in those extensive battles in Turān.

The popular dimension of the story is also significant because it preserves a nuanced commentary on the question of legitimacy and power. Hence, the negative characterization of Rostam as weak, deceitful, and self-serving, along with his unforgivable tendency for filicide, persisted for centuries, especially in the oral tradition which survives to this day. After all, in popular perception Rostam's most notable act is not dragon slaying, or his bravery and skill during his *haft-khān* in Māzandarān, or his extensive battles in Turān, but his unjust and senseless slaying of his own son Sohrāb.

Translation:
Kay Khosrow then addressed Dastān (Zāl) and said, "This youth has learned trickery from you!"

51 Ibid. 269.

52 Ibid. 270.

53 Ibid. 270.

4.2 Jahāngir

Before continuing the line of Sohrāb to Borzu's son Shahriyār, as an interlude I will discuss elements from Jahāngir, another marginal hero. While Jahāngir is not a descendant of Sohrāb, much of his story as preserved in the *Jahāngirnāmeh* is modeled after the story of Rostam and Sohrāb. First, Jahāngir is Rostam's son and, like both Sohrāb and Borzu, he has not met his father, for shortly after his mother is impregnated with him, Rostam leaves the territory, which we later learn is Gorgān.[54] Unlike Sohrāb and Borzu, however, Jahāngir learns who his father is when he comes of age, and he rejoices when he is informed by his maternal grandfather that his father is such a great hero.[55] Once on his quest to find his father, however, Jahāngir encounters Afrāsiyāb, who realizes he has to prevent Jahāngir from joining Rostam. Afrāsiyāb does so, stirring up Jahāngir's emotions against his father by narrating to him how Rostam killed Sohrāb.[56] Hence like Sohrāb and Borzu, Jahāngir joins Afrāsyiāb and becomes the chief warrior in the next wave of attacks against Iran. As expected of him, Jahāngir proves himself to be a skillful warrior and a worthy opponent for the prominent Iranian *pahlavāns*, whom he meets one by one on the battlefield; he defeats Giv, Bizhan, and Ṭus.[57] As usual, when all other *pahlavāns* are defeated, the Sistani heroes are called on, and there Farāmarz, his son Sām, as well as Rostam's brother Zavāreh, rise up to the challenge but suffer the same fate as the other *pahlavāns*.[58] Next, Zāl himself appears on the battlefield where, in spite of the fact that Jahāngir makes his identity known

54 *Jahāngirnāmeh* 108.

55 Ibid. 107: Masiḥā, Jahāngir's grandfather informs him of his pedigree

پدر باشدت رستم زابلی که مشهور عالم شد از پردلی

. . . .

جهانگیر چون گشت واقف زحال که اوهست از تخمه پور زال

بسی شادمان شد زاصل ونژاد در شادمانی به دل برگشاد

Translation:

"Your father is Rostam of Zābol, the one who is renowned for his bravery in the entire world." When Jahāngir learned he is the son of Zāl's son, he rejoiced at having such an origin and pedigree.

56 Ibid. 121–23.

57 Ibid. 135–44.

58 Ibid. 144–62.

to him, they engage in a battle that ends in a tie.[59] At this juncture, Jahāngir learns that Afrāsiyāb intends to kill all the *pahlavāns* that Jahāngir has taken captive, so he switches sides and helps the *pahlavāns* escape.[60]

Now all seems to be well, as Jahāngir participates in battles against some of Iran's enemies and is able to establish his valor and his skill as well as his position at the court of Kay Kāvus – that is, until he encounters Rostam on the battlefield, the two being unaware that they are both on the same side. Like the encounters of Sohrāb and his son Borzu with Rostam, the first two days of wrestling do not yield a winner.[61] On the third day, Rostam gains the upper hand and throws Jahāngir down and is about to slay him when Farāmarz, who is in Rostam's retinue, recognizes him and prevents a tragedy:

چو افتاد آن نوجوان دلیر نشست از برش پهلوان همچو شیر
کشید از میان خنجر آبدار که از جان پاکش برآرد دمار
همانگاه رخش یل پاك دید چو شیر ژیان شیهه ای برکشید
فرامرز بشناخت آواز رخش بگفتا که اینك یل تاج بخش
بدانست کآن شیر دل رستم است ز دستان سام است واز نیرم است
بدل گفت کایندم گو کینه خواه مراو را چو سهراب سازد تباه
برآورد آواز کای پهلوان بیندیش از داور داوران
زنسل تو و پشت و پیوند تست جهانگیر فرزند و دلبند تست[62]

> When that brave youngster fell on the ground, the *pahlavān* (Rostam) didn't hesitate and sat on his chest. He pulled out his dagger intending to kill him. When the pure-hearted Rakhsh saw this, he let out a loud neigh. Farāmarz heard this and recognized Rakhsh and thought to himself, that is the grand warrior, the crown-bestower, the lion-hearted Rostam, from the lineage of Sām and Narimān. He was afraid that fueled by revenge, Rostam would kill Jahāngir as he had killed Sohrāb. So Farāmarz address-

59 Ibid. 182.
60 Ibid. 182–92.
61 Ibid. 293–7.
62 Ibid. 299.

> ing Rostam said, "Be careful of the judgment of the great Judge, for who you are about to slay is Jahāngir, your descendant, your kin, your dear son."

But Jahāngir does not live long enough to become a threat, for next we learn that after accompanying his father and his brother to Sistan, he suddenly dies in a strange accident: he is pushed off a cliff by a demon.[63]

The parallels between the stories of Sohrāb/Borzu and that of Jahāngir are rather obvious. Like Borzu, Jahāngir is at the very least a marginal Sistani hero. As a hero without prospects of becoming the ruler, he is not required to go through the heroic trials. He is removed from the political sphere by the timely intervention of the demon that pushes him off a cliff. As in the story of Borzu, there are a number of themes and motifs from popular literature here,[64] which like the rest of the stories of the downtrodden heroes of Rostam's family point to the interest of the popular rather than the courtly milieu in these stories.

4.3 Shahriyār

The story of Borzu's son Shariyār is narrated in the chronological framework of Lohrāsp's reign. In addition to preserving the story of another downtrodden hero of Sohrāb's line, the story is remarkable as it contains the Sistani version of events for this period of National History, one that is problematic due to the hostilities between the family of Rostam and the royal house after Lohrāsp's ascension to the throne.[65] There are two distinct parts to the story: first, Shahriyār's exodus from Sistan and his struggle to gain political power in India and second, his return to Iran during the attacks of the Turānian king on Iran and Sistan.

The story of Shahriyār begins with his struggle to gain a status as a viable member of Rostam's family, an endeavor that ends in his failure. The rivalry is between Farāmarz's son Sām[66] and Shahriyār; its backdrop is a hunting scene, ending in what seems to be a squabble between Sām and Shahriyār. During

63 Ibid. 337–8.

64 For example, at some point Jahāngir is led through a tunnel (*naqb*), which is very much reminiscent of the actions of the *ʿayyārs* (ibid. 313–15), and later on there is a description of large-scale witchcraft against an army (ibid. 322), also a prevalent occurrence in various works of popular medieval literature, but otherwise entirely absent from the epic genre.

65 This has been discussed at length in chapter 3.

66 I think Salm here is a scribal error. The correct spelling of the name, as attested by other Sistani stories, is Sām, and I shall refer to this character as Sām.

the course of this argument, Sām insults Shahriyār by insinuating that his parentage is questionable and that he is thus of inferior lineage.[67] When the tirade escalates into a physical fight, Farāmarz intervenes but is perceived by Shahriyār to side with his son.[68] Fuming with rage, Shahriyār takes his complaint to his mother.[69] She in turn informs Zāl of the injustice perpetuated against Shahriyār and, rebuking Zāl for the cruelty of his family, demands that he grant Shahriyār the same attention that the descendants of Farāmarz enjoy.[70] Zāl, however, refuses to intervene on Shahriyār's behalf because he is afraid to take action against Farāmarz and his offspring.[71]

Although Shahriyār's mother does not name anyone while characterizing the family as cruel and merciless, the target of her accusation is obvious to the audience: it is an indirect reference to Rostam's act of filicide and Farāmarz's usurpation of power, which resulted in Sohrāb's death and his offspring's deprivation of an equal standing. Clearly, what we have in this story is yet another reflection of the power struggles within the ruling house of Rostam/

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67 *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 2:

بدو سلم گفت ای ندیده پدر ترا نیست چون من هنر یا گوهر
پدر را ندیدی چه گویی سخن ترا نیست. . . . به کردار من

Translation:
Sām told him (Shahriyār), "You don't even know your own father. You lack both lineage and skill. Since you haven't even met your father how dare you speak! You do not. . . . [words are illegible] like I can do."

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.:

بدو گفت ای مادر مهربان مرا خاری (خواری) آمد و جوشان روان
مرا بی پدر خواند سلم سوار به پیش یلان دلیران کار

Translation:
Shahriyār said, "Oh loving mother of mine! I have been humiliated and my soul is fuming with rage for Salm called me fatherless in front of all the brave warriors."

70 Ibid., f. 3:

اگر این فرامرز فرزند توست نه برزوی هم اصل و پیوند تست
مرین تخمه بی رحم افتاده اند زمادر بدین بوده تا زاده اند

Translation:
Shahriyār's mother addresses Zāl: "If Farāmarz is your offspring, Borzu was also your kin. This whole family is merciless and is born that way!"

71 Ibid.

Suren, with the result of pushing the rival to India, as we shall see. What is also interesting is that unlike Sohrāb and Borzu, Shahriyār seems to have grown up in Sistan and therefore does not encounter Rostam and/or other members of his family incognito, as a rival on the battlefield as did Borzu and Jahāngir. Therefore, the injustice incurred here seems to have become the deep-rooted disenfranchisement of Sohrāb's branch of the family.

Shahriyār then vows to avenge himself, his father, and his grandfather by attacking Sistan with an army, setting the entire city on fire and seeing it razed to the ground, and finally killing every member of Rostam's family, one by one:

سپاهی پدید آرم از دور دست بیابم بدین روی چون پیل مست
کشم کین سهراب از تخمه من کزین باز گویند در انجمن
بجویم زین خون سهراب را به بندم بدین کین ره خواب را
نه آرام یابم نه خواب ونه خور برآرم از این کشور زال گرد
روان پدر شاد از این کین کنم و یا چون پدر خشت بالین کنم

. . .

من این تخمه سام را زیر پای درآرم کنم تیره شان هوش و رای
یکی آتش آرم بزابل بلند که بر کوه خارا رساند گزند[72]

> "I shall return here with a mighty army, powerful like a roaring elephant. I shall avenge Sohrāb and people shall tell tales of my revenge. I shall cease to eat, sleep, and rest until I have avenged Sohrāb, until I have ruined Zāl's homeland. I shall either make my father's soul rejoice with my action or like him I shall choose to depart from this earth . . . I shall trample upon the descendants of Sām; I shall humiliate them to such a degree that they shall lose their intellect or discretion. I shall scorch down Zābol, reducing it all, even its very hard stones, to ashes."

What we gather from this passage is that it was not just Sohrāb who was wronged by the offspring of Sām or Rostam's family, but there are hints that Borzu, whose fate remains unknown otherwise, had not gained the status and position he deserved. This is why Shahriyār thinks that his father's soul will

72 Ibid.

rejoice at the idea of the complete annihilation of Rostam's family. Befitting the genre, there is no mention here of a power struggle, and the sole impetus for Shahriyār's actions is the accepted notion of revenge. Henceforth in the narrative it is injustice and humiliation, not a response to the deliberate marginalization of a rival branch of the family, that are depicted as the motivation for Shahriyār's actions. What the notions of injustice and revenge thinly disguise is the power struggle between two branches of the family, and in the case of *Shahriyārnāmeh* we are offered a reflection of an ousted prince's fate.

Thus pushed out of Sistan, Shahriyār sets out to India via Kabul and arrives in Kashmir, but he decides to continue his journey into the Indian subcontinent because Kashmir's ruler happens to be Farāmarz's relative and ally.[73] Since Shahriyār has been pushed out of India by Farāmarz's branch of the family, staying in Kashmir is out of the question for him.[74] Shahriyār moves on and settles in an unnamed city in India, where he takes up farming and lives a life of loneliness and misery for ten years.[75] The borrowing of this motif from popular literature and its implications for the social rank and predisposition of the audience towards an outcast prince, is discussed above. Here, however, there is an added dimension to the discourse of injustice: Shahriyār has been forced out of his homeland of Sistan into exile and loneliness.

Next, Shahriyār moves to the region of Sarand-Sarandip in India, where first he is adopted by a benevolent merchant, a motif discussed above, and finally is discovered by the Arjang the king of Sarand.[76] Now, the toponym Sarandip refers to Ceylon, another name for Sri Lanka. It is here that Shahriyār finds his power niche, and all his subsequent adventures in India unfold in this region. One can dismiss the toponym as a random selection of an Indian locality that was known during the time the story was formed; however, there are indications that a branch of Indo-Parthians did settle in South India, in Tamil-Nadu.[77] The reference to Sarandip, therefore, might not be a random choice but instead preserves the memory of the presence of a branch of the Indo-Parthian/Surens in the region, whose sphere of influence did in fact extent into Sri Lanka at times.

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73 Ibid. f. 4.

74 Kashmir is another Indian toponym, which is usually mentioned in relationship to Farāmarz. Therefore what we encounter here is consistent with the rest of the stories pertaining to Farāmarz's sphere of power.

75 *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 5.

76 Ibid. ff. 8–9.

77 See chapter 1. I briefly discussed the "Indo-Parthian" roots of the South Indian dynasty of Pallavas.

Once at Arjang's court, Shahriyār strengthens his alliance with Arjang by marrying his daughter.[78] One might expect the story to have a happy ending at this point. After all, Shahriyār has been recognized as a great warrior, given a prominent place at the court of Arjang as well as his daughter in marriage. But it is not so. As soon as Shahriyār's lineage is revealed, he renews his vow to annihilate Sistan and its ruling family. The story moves on to invoke the repertoire of heroic motifs associated with previous Sistani heroes discussed in chapter 2. It is important to note that the invocation of these trials becomes necessary only at this juncture in the story, when Shahriyār prepares to ascend the throne of the Indian kingdom of Sarandip.

Shahriyār's heroic trials unfold during the long battles with Arjang's rival in India. For instance, it is at this time that Shahriyār comes across a treasure left behind for him by Jamshid, the Iranian king and the ancestor of the Sistani heroes.[79] Along with the treasure, Shahriyār finds Jamshid's prophecy that the treasure can only be retrieved by a warrior from the line of Rostam, who will appear in Lohrāsp's reign.[80] Obviously, the treasure had been left behind by Jamshid for Shahriyār, and its retrieval by anyone other than him was made impossible through magical spells. In addition to the treasure motif, Shahriyār goes through a multi-stage trial, again another requirement for the Sistani hero. Hence during his nine-stage trial he accomplishes the following: he fights elephants, defeats wolves, slays a dragon, fights lions, passes through a harsh landscape infested with insects, encounters and defeats demons, battles monkeys, fights Zangis, and finally kills a demon by the name of Sagsar.[81] The important trial of dragon-slaying is included in this multi-stage trial. Interestingly enough, the seeking out of counsel, another heroic requirement, is also embedded in the nine-stage trial. Here, Shahriyār does not encounter a sage or a Brahmin but instead discovers a tomb where he finds the well-preserved bodies of Sām, Narimān and Garshāsp, along with advice for Shahriyār.[82] The same tomb is later visited by Bahman where, by then, Rostam's body also rests.[83] It appears that in the later Sistani stories, i.e. stories pertaining to heroes who followed

78 *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 10.

79 See chapter 2 for the discussion of "the treasure of ancestor" motif.

80 *Shahriyārnāmeh* ff. 34–42. For the addition of prophecies and this particular motif's evolution, which in this and some other stories takes on an "apocalyptic" tone, see the following chapter.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid. ff. 109–10. Once again there is consistency here within the Cycle, as the same tomb is depicted in the *Bahmannāmeh*; see chapter 5.

83 This will be discussed at length in chapter 5.

Rostam, we have an elaboration on the treasure motif, which served to link the Sistani heroes to India, as we may recall. Here, along with treasures, we have the tomb of the most prominent Sistani heroes in India. There is further insistence on the antiquity of the tradition of Sistani heroes' presence in India, for the tomb now contains along with the treasure words of wisdom for future generations. The now ancient Sistani heroes, whose bodies are preserved in the tomb, serve as sages in their own right, and therefore visiting the tomb for generations of Sistani heroes fulfills both heroic requirements of recovering a treasure left behind by ancestors as well as receiving words of wisdom. It is also important to note that Shahriyār, unlike Garshāsp, Rostam and Farāmarz, does not engage in these heroic trials in the beginning of the story and does so only after he forges an alliance with the Indian king Arjang. It is at this point that he becomes a candidate for the throne of that Indian kingdom. As mentioned before, it is Shahriyār's elevation to a position of political power that necessitates the invocation of the repertoire of heroic motifs whose function is to legitimize a ruler. One might also recall that in the case of his father Borzu these motifs are not invoked, for Borzu's claims to the Sistani throne were circumvented by Rostam and Kay Khosrow, rendering the invocation of the heroic motifs irrelevant.

What is common in the stories of Borzu and Shahriyār, however, is the presence of themes and motifs borrowed from popular literature. In Shahriyār's case, as a part of the narration of his struggles to establish himself in India, there is a romantic story featuring Farānak, the daughter of one of the rival Indian kings.[84] In some ways this romantic episode serves as a frame story in which themes and motifs usually associated with popular literature appear. For example, there is a story of a powerful witch by the name of Katmāreh, who is an ally of Shahriyār's enemy.[85] In popular literature, when the enemy of the protagonist faces imminent defeat, he often summons witches and sorcerers to come to his aid.[86] Similarly there is an episode within the romance story where there is a mention of an *ʿayyār* – called *shabro* or night-stroller[87] – when

84 *Shahriyārnāmeh* ff. 44–7.

85 Ibid. ff. 62–4.

86 For example, the witch Ṣeyḥāneh-ye Jādu raises an army in the story of *Samak-e ʿAyyār* 1: 318. Similarly in the *Firuzshāhnāmeh* we encounter Zardeh-ye Jādu who comes to the help of the army of Firuzshāh's opponents (1: 208). In Ṭarsusi, *Abu Muslim nāmeh*, we have several sorceresses who rush to the aid of Abu Muslim's enemy and appear on the battlefield. One such example is Shamʿune-ye Jādu (2: 507) This is not an exhaustive list of sorceresses who come to the aid of the enemy.

87 Another way to refer to the *ʿayyārs* as they accomplished their task under the cover of night's darkness.

Shahriyār and Farānak are made to consume *bihushāneh* and are kidnapped.[88] Here clearly we have another reference to the *ʿayyārs* that is consistent in detail with how they are depicted in popular literature.[89]

Shortly after the conclusion of the romance episode, Shahriyār engages in another war instigated by one of Arjang's rivals. After Shahriyār comes out a victor in this decisive conflict, Arjang installs him on the throne.[90] This concludes Shahriyār's adventures in India and the first part of the story. This offers us a glimpse at the fate of a rival/outcast prince of Rostam's house. If we recall the identification of Rostam's family with the Parthian noble family of Suren and the rulers of the Indo-Parthian kingdom, we can discern how this part of the story contains historical reflections of how the Indo-Parthians gained vast territories in the Indian subcontinent. As discussed in chapter 1, the presence of Scythio-Parthian vassal kings in the Indian subcontinent has been attested by a plethora of numismatic evidence.

As an outcast, a wronged hero robbed of his rightful position, Shahriyār like his father Borzu and his grandfather Sohrāb must have captured the sympathy of the commoners who, as mentioned above, celebrated their wronged princes and heroes in popular literature. Therefore, it is not surprising that in this part of the story we encounter such themes and motifs. However, with Shahriyār's rise to power, articulated indirectly though his successful completion of heroic trials and the victory of his Indian ally, the story takes a decisive turn. As the setting shifts from periphery (India) to center (Iran), so does its discourse and its depiction of Shahriyār, now a legitimate ruler albeit of a minor province in India.

The bulk of the second part of the story is devoted to the description of the battles between the Turānian king Arjāsp and the Iranian king Lohrāsp. The fact that most of the prominent Sistani heroes took part in these battles, in spite of their initial reservations about aiding Lohrāsp due to his dubious ancestry, has already been discussed in chapter 3. Shahriyār's specific involvement, however, is of much interest, for initially he actually sides with Arjāsp, the Turānian king. Even before venturing into Iran, he shares his intention of using the weakened position of Iran, and by extension the Sistani kingdom, as an opportunity to avenge himself by attacking Sistan.[91] Shahriyār first forges an alliance with Khāqān, the king of China, after defeating him in a battle, and

88 *Shahriyārnāmeh* ff. 64–6.

89 For the depiction of the *ʿayyārs* in popular literature, see Gazerani, ʿAyyārān va ʿAyyāri.

90 *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 98.

91 *Shahriyārnāmeh* f. 139.

then together they attack the Turānian king Arjāsp who is eventually defeated.[92] Next, Arjāsp and the Khāqān are reconciled and together with Shahriyār they form an alliance and attack Balkh, the Iranian capital.[93]

As the alliance against Lohrāsp grows, Shahriyār is joined by Ardashir, who is identified as the son of Bizhan, a member of the Gudarziān family. Together, Shahriyār and Ardashir conspire to remove both Lohrāsp and Zāl from power and install a king of their own choosing, namely Goshtāsp:

چنین گفت با اردهٔ شیر دلیر — که ای نامور گرد شمشیر گیر
کنون خود چه سازیم و این کار ما — چگونه بود روز پیکار ما
یکی شاه باید ز تخم کیان — که او را گزینیم ما از میان
بسر برش تاج شهی برنهیم — از آن پس سوی زال زر سر نهیم
اگر باشد از تخمهٔ کیقباد — و یا از فریدون فرخ نهاد[94]

> Shahriyār said thus to the brave Ardashir, "Oh you distinguished warrior, the master of sword. What shall we do now? How will this day of battle of ours unfold? We should select a kin from Kayānid lineage and crown him, and then we should go to Zāl (conquer Sistan), and we have to make sure (our candidate) is a descendant of either Kay Qobād or Fereidun the auspicious."

This may seem rather strange. After all, Goshtāsp is first in the line of succession anyway. What would be the point of deposing the father only to install his son?

One might remember, however, that Goshtāsp's character as depicted in the epic literature is a contradictory one, for on the one hand he has been depicted as the champion of the Zoroastrian faith – and as such in part of the *Shāhnāmeh* he receives an extremely positive characterization – but on the other as deceitful and tyrannical in his relationship to his son Esfandiyār. Here we are dealing with yet another layer of Goshtāsp's character that most likely reflects the succession struggles in the Parthian Empire, in the aftermath of

92 Ibid. ff. 182–209.

93 Ibid. f. 213. Balkh is the seat of the Iranian throne in the National History after the ascension of Lohrāsp to power.

94 Ibid. f. 229.

which a Parthian prince of a different branch of the Arsacid family is recalled from the Roman court by the noble families.[95] We hence learn from the *Shāhnāmeh* that Goshtāsp, after "asking" his father for the throne and being refused it, moves first to India and then to Rum in search of his fate.[96] This also happens to be the setting for Goshtāsp's heroic trials that are narrated as part of an attempt to create a line of heroes by invocation of the heroic motifs associated with the house of Rostam. The story of how Goshtāsp is recalled from Rum by the nobles is obviously missing from the *Shāhnāmeh*, for as mentioned before in chapter 3, after Lohrāsp's ascension to the throne, the noble families disappear from the story for the duration of his reign. In the *Shahriyārnāmeh*, however, we are provided with the reason for Goshtāsp's sudden return. He is recalled from the Roman court because he is the choice of the noble families, represented in the story by Shahriyār and Ardashir.

Obviously the details of the two narrations do not match, and that is precisely because of the nature of this kind of historiography. Goshtāsp's case, however, bears the added complication of a multiplicity of depictions created by the different forces that had a hand in creating and revising the stories. As we have seen, attempts to appropriate this Avestan king as the ancestor of the Sasanians must have instigated the composition of various other stories in which Goshtāsp is depicted as a villain, albeit implicitly. In addition, the stories of Goshtāsp contain a reflection of an Arsacid king being recalled from the Roman court to serve as the Parthian king, which preserves the memory of one or more historical incidences where Parthian princes were recalled from the Roman court to replace a king who had lost the nobles' support.

As we have seen, the stories of the downtrodden heroes are all connected one way or another to the story of Rostam and Sohrāb, or more precisely to the character of Sohrāb. As far as a reflection of historical events is concerned, from these stories we get a sense of the existence of rivalry among the different branches of the family, with one eventually pushing the other out to India. Once in India, we learn how an ousted prince forges alliances and eventually establishes his own kingdom. Also present in these stories is a more nuanced depiction of the relationship between the royal and noble families. Hence, it is in the story of Borzu that we get a sense of a rift between the families of Rostam and Gudarz, perhaps as a foretelling of a deteriorating relationship in the future. Also, in the *Shahriyārnāmeh* we see how marginal members of both aforementioned families join rank with Iran's enemies and attempt to stage

95 See chapter 1 for a discussion of one such instance when the Suren Abdagases, aiming to replace Artabanus, recalled the Arsacid prince Tiridates from the Roman court.

96 *Shāhnāmeh* 6: 12–13.

a coup. Therefore, even within the body of the Sistani Cycle of Epics, these stories offer us a unique perspective. This is why, only when one considers the SCE in its entirety, one realizes that it has actually preserved the predominant ideological discourse that aimed to legitimize political power *as well as* criticism of the legitimization discourse. Reflecting and remembering historical events, the genre contains a remarkable commentary on its own historical narration: there is a dialectical discourse, containing an elaborate articulation of the legitimacy of political power couched in heroic vocabulary, as well as a sharp criticism of those deemed legitimate.

CHAPTER 5

The Polemics of Making Heroes and Anti-Heroes

Had it not been for the incorporation of Rostam stories very early on in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, it is not unlikely that Farāmarz would have shared if not surpassed Rostam's fame. After all, we know of the existence of the 12-volume *Ketāb-e Farāmarz*[1] in addition to the inclusion of many stories pertaining to his adventures in the various prose and verse *Shāhnāmehs*, which were composed prior to Ferdowsi's work.[2] In spite of their near exclusion from Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, Farāmarz's extensive adventures have continued to sound a chord with audiences throughout the centuries. The survival of the Sistani stories in the oral tradition of *Shāhnāmeh Khāni* and *naqqāli* is attested by the large number of the Sistani episodes included in the Qajar period scroll of storytellers *Haft-Lashkar*.[3] Among the Sistani stories, Farāmarz's story and his end at the hand of Bahman has received particular attention in the popular recounting of the tales. Morshed Torābi, one of the contemporary storytellers, usually talks about his admiration for Farāmarz, who is his favorite hero.[4] But why Farāmarz, one might ask? After all, if we rely on the *Shāhnāmeh* Farāmarz has a minimal role. In Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, aside from the mention of his name as one of the heroes present at some war or at the court, there are two episodes where he is depicted as more than a mere name. The first is during Kay Khosrow's reign, when he is mentioned as one of the heroes going to Turān to avenge Siāvush's blood.[5] In this episode we do not learn much about Farāmarz, and in the second episode where his name is invoked we are told that he is dispatched to India in order to expel the Turānians from Khargāh,[6] a territory stretching between Sistan on the west, Turān on the north and India in the east. Once he accomplishes this task, Kay Khosrow grants him the entire land of India from Qannuj (Kannauj) to Zābolestān.[7] What is left

1 *Tārikh-e Sistān* 7.

2 For a discussion of sources of the SCE, see Gazerani, Old garment.

3 *Haft-Laskhar*.

4 Ibid. 28; I have also witnessed him express the same when asked about his favorite hero during a photo shoot at his home in spring of 2011 in Shahr-e Rey.

5 *Shāhnāmeh* 2: 385.

6 See below for a discussion of this episode as it appears in the *Farāmarznāmeh*.

7 Ibid. 2: 17; 23:

کنون سربسرهندوستان تراست زقنوج تا مرز دستان تراست

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out of the *Shāhnāmeh* is the actual account of Farāmarz's heroic adventures in India, which reaffirms his status as the ruler of Khargāh and India. Instead, what we have in the *Shāhnāmeh* seems to be an intertextual reference to the story, whose detailed version one finds in the *Farāmarznāmeh*; the story must have been known widely for it to be omitted yet mentioned in passing. In the *Shāhnāmeh*, after Kay Khosrow's reign there is no mention of Farāmarz. He vanishes from the stories only to make a brief and tragic final appearance during the reign of Bahman.

5.1 Farāmarz in Qannuj

Farāmarz's adventures during the reign of Kay Khosrow consist of two parts: first his conquests that culminate in the capture of the city of Qannuj (Kannauj) in India, and second his various adventures in the "west" and his return to India. Farāmarz's adventures in Qannuj, however, deserve our attention because embedded in the account of Farāmarz's conquest of the city of Qannuj are, as we shall see shortly, unmistakable reflections of the "Indo-Parthian's" struggles to capture and maintain vast territories in Northern India, including the ancient city of Kannauj. As mentioned before, allusions to Farāmarz's adventure and his eventual conquest of Kannauj appear in the *Shāhnāmeh*, with the actual story omitted. This is one of the many places in the *Shāhnāmeh* where one gets the sense that the audience must have had some familiarity with the story, which is merely referenced. What we do know of the story according to the *Shāhnāmeh* is as follows: having replaced his grandfather Kay Kāvus as king, Kay Khosrow in the beginning of his reign is faced with two different tasks: first, avenging the blood of his father Siāvush that eventually leads to expeditions in Turān and second, recapturing the eastern territories of the kingdom, stretching from Sistan to India. The accounts of the first task occupy the bulk of *Shāhnāmeh's* account of Kay Khosrow's reign;[8] the second task, namely the recapture of the Indian territories, is delegated to Farāmarz. Ferdowsi could have had several reasons for omitting the actual story of Farāmarz's adventures in India. One consideration may have been the sheer length of the work. Another is that this part of the *Shāhnāmeh* is dominated by

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Translation:
Now all of India is yours, all the way from Qanauj to the borders of Sistan (lit. Dastān's territories).

8 Many of the stories appearing in relationship to this task belong to the Karenid cycle, such as the story of Forud, whose Karenid provenance has already been discussed in chapter 1.

stories from the Karenid cycle, as mentioned earlier, and there seems to be no logical framework for inserting Farāmarz's story. Finally, and most importantly, Farāmarz is a character who, in spite of his importance in the epic literature as a whole, is deliberately given minimum exposure in the *Shāhnāmeh*. This is an important pre-emptive step taken by Ferdowsi, for his version requires us, his audience, to readily forgive the Iranian king Bahman for executing Farāmarz. It is Farāmarz's near absence from Ferdowsi's narrative that prevents us from growing fond of him as a hero, making it easier to condone Bahman's action of putting him on the gallows and to forget him a short while later. However, this episode must have been important enough for Ferdowsi not to be able to omit it altogether. That is why we have an allusion to the story, which has opened up a bracket so to speak, for the story to be incorporated "back" into the text of more recent *Shāhnāmeh* manuscripts.

Let us look at the story as it appears in the *Farāmarznāmeh*: the episode starts with the description of a royal feast featuring Zāl, Rostam, Zavāreh and Farāmarz at Kay Khosrow's court. Rostam addresses the king, bringing it to his attention that a vast territory has been taken over by Turānians, and the local rulers of this region, who previously paid tribute to the Iranian throne, now pay the Turānians instead. This territory, which he calls Khargāh,[9] is described as being bound in the south-west by the provinces of Sistan and Zābol, to the north by Turān, to the north-east by China and stretching eastward well into the Indian subcontinent, encompassing Kashmir and Qannuj.[10] As expected the challenge of the recapture of this vast territory, therefore, is presented

9 See Van Zutphen, Farāmarz's adventures; the author offers a long list of different conjectures offered by scholarship as regards the location of Khargāh.

10 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 159:

مرآن مرز را خرگاه خواند بنام — جهان دیده دهقان گسترده نام
ز یك نیمه بر سند دارد گذر — بقنوج وکشمیر وآن بوم و بر
دگر نیمه راهش‌سوی مرز چین — به پیوست با مرز توران زمین
فراوان درآن مرز پیل است وگنج — تن بیگاهان ازایشان به رنج
ز بس‌غارت وکشتن وتاختن — بر از بد توران بر افراختن
کنون شهریاری به ایران تراست — پی مور تا چنگ شیران تراست
بیکی لشکری باید اکنون بزرگ — فرستاده با پهلوانی سترگ
ابا باج نزدیك شاه آورند — وگرسر برین بارگاه آورند

to the *pahlavāns* at the court. Farāmarz steps up to the occasion and, taking a retinue of *pahlavāns* from other noble families, sets out to conquer to region.[11] Even before the army makes a move eastward to commence the campaign, Farāmarz is granted the kingdom of India by Kay Khosrow.[12] Farāmarz pushes back the Turānians from Khargāh, installing one of his kinsmen as a vassal.[13]

Translation:
Rostam addressing Kay Khosrow: "The wise *dehqān* of good repute called it *Khargāh*; at one end the territory stretches into Sind, to Qannuj and Kashmir and those areas; at the other end it reaches China, and it borders Turān as well. There are a lot of elephants and treasures in that land, but its inhabitants are afflicted by the Turānians' pillage and plunder and slaughter. Now that you have assumed Iran's throne and all creatures have become obedient to you, you should send a grand *pahlavān* along with a great army to demand tributes to be paid to this court.

11 Ibid. 159–64.

12 Ibid. 164.

بدوگفت برکش سوی هندوان همان مرز خرگاه تا جادوان
ز توران سپه هرکه آنجا بود اگر ناتوان ور توانا بود
هرآنکس که با تو بجوید نبرد سراسر برآور سرافشان بگرد
کسی کو برزمت نبندد میان چنان کن که او را نباشد زیان
تو فرزند بیدار دل رستمی ز دستان سامی واز نیرمی
کنون مرز هندوستان مرتراست ز قنوج تا مرز دستان تراست

Translation:
Kay Khosrow addressing Farāmarz: "Rush to India, from Khargāh to the land of the magicians! If you encounter Turānian armies who seek to oppose you, whether they are mighty or weak, do not hesitate in annihilating them. But spare those who do not intent to fight you. You are the son of brave Rostam, a descendant of Dastān, Sām and Narimān. And now, the land of India from Qannuj to Zābol is yours."

13 Ibid. 165:

جوانی سرافراز با رای وکام ابا پهلوان خویش ودستور نام
همه مرز خرگاه او راسپرد یکی لشکرش داد مردان وگرد
بدوگفت پیوسته بیدار باش سپه را زدشمن نگهدار باش
گرآرند ترکان یکی تاختن نباید تو را جای پرداختن
بزابل بدستان فرست آگهی کزویست پاینده تخت مهی

Here I would like to call into attention the "Indo-Scythian" king Vovones, who co-reigned with his commenders Spalohres, Spalirises, and Spalgama, whose kinship with each other is attested on their coins.[14] Once again I must reiterate that it is not my intention to identify characters from this – or any other episodes for that matter – with kings whose existence is confirmed by the coinage they bequeathed. Nevertheless, what we can observe here is a parallel between *Farāmarznāmeh*'s description of newly conquered territories and the organization of power in the vast and ever-changing region that constituted the "Indo-Scythian" and later the "Indo-Parthian" kingdom. As mentioned in chapter 1, the "Indo-Scythian" and "Indo-Parthian" kings managed their eastern territories by installing vassal kings who were the ruler's kinsmen and/or their army commanders. This parallel must be viewed in the context of the Indo-Parthian/Suren conquest of much of Northern India, which included the ancient city of Kannauj.

For the moment, however, we shall return to the story of Farāmarz who, having pushed out the Turānians, sets out to India. Here we have a clear indication that the locality referred to as Khargāh is not quite within the Indian territories. On the way to Qannuj, Farāmarz encounters a number of Indian kings, most notably Rāy (Rāj) and Mahārak (Mahārāj), both of whom are defeated. The former, upon his defeat, becomes Farāmarz's ally while the latter, who previously held the city of Kashmir, is removed from power.[15] Supported by Rāy, Farāmarz arrives in Qannuj where the throne is offered to him without a struggle by the nobles of the city.[16]

Being unaware of the ancient connection between Kannauj and the Iranian territories has led some scholars to speculate about the origin of this toponym in the *Shāhnāmeh*, leading to various peculiar conclusions.[17] The general assumption is that Ferdowsi must have learned of the place through Maḥmud of Ghazna's conquest of the city in 1018–19 CE. This in turn created a problem

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Translation:
Farāmarz installed a young man of wisdom and fortune, a *pahlavān* from his retinue, and who was his own kin, as the ruler of Khargāh. Then Farāmarz advised him and said, "Always remain aware of the enemy and ward off the army against their attacks. If the Turks should attack, you should not leave but instead send a missive to Zāl in Zābol, asking him for reinforcements."

14 See chapter 1.

15 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 206–28.

16 Ibid. 230–1.

17 See Van Zutphen, Farāmarz's adventures 55–7, for a summary of the arguments, including her own, which have attempted to explain the occurrence of the toponym Qannuj in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*.

of dating, because the *Shāhnāmeh*'s composition had actually been completed a few years prior to Maḥmud's conquest of Kannauj/Qannuj. The discussion and the conclusions drawn based on it, however, are deeply flawed, for they are based on the presupposition that the city of Qannuj could have only been known subsequent to Maḥmud's conquests in India.

The misunderstanding stems from the assumption that the city of Qannuj could not have been known prior to Maḥmud's conquests. The assumption is not questioned, in spite of the fact that there is ample evidence substantiating the antiquity of the city of Qannuj and its importance as a place from which "Indian knowledge" was transmitted to Iran. Here, I will simply enumerate references to the city, all of which clearly indicate that the city was known in late antique Iran in various literary and social milieus. The toponym appears in some versions of the Persian Alexander Romance, and it refers to the hometown of the two Indian sages by the names of Kumarpala and Dharmapala who served Alexander as councilors.[18] In a recent work, the historical veracity of the story of the origins of chess, as narrated in the *Shāhnāmeh*, is studied by Renate Seyd.[19] According to the *Shāhnāmeh* the game of chess came to the court of the Sasanian king Anushirvān (Khosrow I) from Qannuj. Examining various details and factors pertaining to the history of the period, Seyd concludes that the advent of the game in Iran from Qannuj, as narrated in the *Shāhnāmeh*, is based on historical reality.[20] Al-Biruni, in his work on India, not only mentions the city but stresses the city's importance as a political center because "in former times it was the residence of their [the Indian's] most famous heroes and kings."[21]

More importantly, for the purposes of our discussion of the Indo-Parthian/Suren influence in India, is also the fact that the city during the time period 200 BCE–100 CE, was the seat of a powerful Indian local dynasty. Let us look more closely at what we do know about the city of Kannauj and its rulers in order to answer the question of whether or not the *Farāmarznāmeh* could actually have captured historical memories of the conquest of the city by the "Indo-Scythian/Indo-Parthian" rulers of Sistan.

The name Kannauj or Kānyakubja is mentioned in both Indian epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Ramayana*, as well as in Patanjali's work, which proves without a doubt that the city must have existed in the beginning of the sec-

18 Casari, Wise men 73.

19 Syed, *Kanauj*.

20 Ibid. 75.

21 Al-Biruni, *Alberuni's India* 198.

ond century BCE.[22] In addition to the mention of the city by literary sources, a series of coins have been found that attest to the existence of a local dynasty, whose seat was the city of Kannauj.[23] Among the dynasty of mitras – i.e. North Indian rulers whose names end with mitra who reigned over a large part of Northern India – three mitras have been, through the distinct iconography of their coinage, connected to the city of Kannauj. Hence coins belonging to Brahmamitra, Gomitra, and Suryamitra have been identified as belonging to the rulers of the city of Kannauj and have been dated to a period between the end of the second century and the first century BCE.[24] The dating, of course, coincides with the date of the dominion of the "Indo-Scythians and/or Indo-Parthians" over parts of Northern India. It is precisely in this period of time when the struggle over the capture of various Indian provinces resulted in the infringement of the Scythio-Parthians and their establishment of numerous vassalages in that territory.

It is within this context, therefore, that the significance of the capture of Qannuj must be understood. All evidence points to the fact that the conquest of the city, regardless of how long the actual reign of the Scythio-Parthian/Suren conquest lasted, must have been significant in the history of the family of Rostam/Suren. This part of the *Farāmarznāmeh*, therefore, commemorates this crucial victory. The victory and its celebration, preserved in Farāmarz's conquest of Qannuj, must have become so well known within the corpus of the epic material that Ferdowsi could not completely erase its traces from *Shāhnāmeh*'s text.

5.2 Transformation of Heroic Imagery

In the absence of the extended story of Farāmarz, one can presume that the beginning of the story, most significantly his first rite of passage as hero by the single act of slaying the dragon, is no longer extant. Instead, chronologically speaking, his adventures begin during the reign of Kay Kāvus, when he sets out for India, and incidentally this part of Farāmarz's story happens to have the most prolific manuscript tradition.[25] The story opens with a description of

22 Lahiri, *Indigenous states* 146. It is important to note that the work in question is based on various numismatic surveys and takes into account different interpretations of the numismatic data.

23 Ibid. 74.

24 Ibid. 92–6.

25 See Appendix A: *Farāmarznāmeh*.

a royal feast (*bazm*) at the court of Kay Khosrow where, along with Farāmarz, many Iranian heroes of the houses of Gudarz and Nodhar are present.[26] As mentioned earlier, the description of a *bazm* served as a literary device to incorporate episodes from the Sistani cycle into the chronology of the National History. In addition to performing the function of pinning the episode to the reign of one of the Iranian kings, the invocation of the *bazm* motif is also a good indication that the episode in question possesses historical referents: the heroes present at these *bazms* are none other than the members of Parthian noble houses. It comes as no surprise then that the episode is clearly an account of assertion of power over Indian vassals, a task that certainly must have preoccupied the Scythio-Parthian rulers (i.e. Suren) of Sistan. Hence, we learn of the arrival of a messenger from an Indian ruler by the name of Nushād who demands protection from various menacing forces, arguing in his letter that if the Iranian throne fails to guarantee the safety of its vassals, the vassals are no longer required to pay tribute to the Iranians.[27] The removal of these threatening forces becomes the first step for securing the kingdom of India and the perfect opportunity for Farāmarz to display his heroism that in turn would grant him the required legitimacy to become the ruler of India. Accompanied with him are heroes of the noble houses of Gudarz and Nodhar as well as Gorgin Milād. Prior to leaving, while delivering a long oration containing advice, Rostam reminds Farāmarz of the history they shared with these noble houses and their uninterrupted service to the house of Rostam.[28] Most of the heroes, with the exception of Bizhan, however, do not play any significant role in the ensuing adventures and battles. Essentially, rather than honoring members of other noble houses, the fact here that they are merely in Farāmarz's retinue without performing any significant actions actually serves to highlight the superiority of the house of Rostam. In his above-cited advice to his son, moreover, Rostam calls them servants of Sām, his grandfather.

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26 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 78.

27 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 57.

28 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 88:

پدربرپدرچاکرسام‌شیر هنرمند گرد سوار دلیر
نگهدار دلشان که هنگام کار ازایشان یك به که هندی هزار

Translation:
Rostam addressing Farāmarz: "Generation after generation, they were servants to Sām, even though they were all skilled, brave warriors themselves; treat them well for on the day of battle, one of them is superior to a hundred Indians."

Their accompaniment aside, it is Bizhan, the son of Rostam's daughter Bānu-Goshasp and Giv, who shares some of the heroic spotlight with Farāmarz. While not explicitly stated, it seems that Farāmarz plays the role of a mentor in this case, but as we shall see, in places where the identity of the hero and his lineage matter, it is Farāmarz who accomplishes the task.

Among the heroic trials that are invoked here, there seems to be an unusual emphasis on the "treasure of ancestor" motif. The emphasis on this motif deserves our attention because by the time we get to the stories of Farāmarz, we encounter a distinct change or evolution of the motif.[29] The refashioning of this motif is a result of the assertion of religious legitimacy, on the part of Rostam's house, but in order to establish the nature of the change, it is useful to first examine the genealogy of the motif.

Let us look at the episode in the *Garshāspnāmeh*, when Garshāsp by chance comes across the tomb of the Pishdādi king Siāmak who, by virtue of the connection of his house to Jamshid, is also Garshāsp's ancestor. This episode is discussed briefly in chapter 2, but a more detailed analysis is necessary here so that the different elements of the story can be identified. Garshāsp comes across this treasure while he is visiting some wondrous islands. It is in this landscape that he notices an impressive structure and upon further inquiry learns that the building houses the tomb of Siāmak. The tomb is guarded by a man of unsurpassed physical beauty who, however, has the strange feature of having three eyes.[30] The man, who is quite benevolent, opens up the fortification to Garshāsp and his companion. Within are lavish gardens and an ancient tree of extravagant qualities as well as the *iwan* where Garshāsp observes a crystal throne upon which is seated a golden idol, his tilted head resting on a ruby tablet.[31] The tree-eyed man informs him that the *iwan* and the throne

29 Obviously, the dating in question refers to the chronology and order of appearance of the heroes and not the dating of the manuscripts.

30 *Garshāspnāmeh* 172:

هم آن‌گه شد از باره مردی پدید کز و خوبتر آدمی کس ندید
چنان بد که چشمش سه بد هر سه باز دو از زیر ابرو و یکی از فراز

Translation:
At once a man of unsurpassed beauty appeared from the fortification. He had three eyes, all three open; two of his eyes were below his eyebrows, one above them.

31 *Garshāspnāmeh* 172–3:

بلورینه تختی در و شاهوار بتی بر وی از زر گوهر نگار
ز یاقوت لوحی گرفته به دست بر آن لوح خفته سرافکند پست

and tablet are Siāmak's, and the idol is an effigy crafted in his image after his death.[32] On the tablet there is a long *pandnāmeh*, or words of advice, the contents of which dwell on the transience of the material world, the greatest threats to man, and the best way of living one's life.[33] It is important to note that the advice is not addressed to anyone in particular; Garshāsp receives it not because it was intended for him but because he happens to be there. After receiving the advice, Garshāsp and his companion leave the compound and then outside in the mountains they find what seems to be a treasure trove containing jewels and precious stones.[34] Coming across the treasure and its retrieval by Garshāsp seems to be a mere coincidence in this instance, for it is not bequeathed to him by his ancestor.

Now let us see how the same heroic trial is elaborated in the case of Farāmarz. Once in India Farāmarz (as expected) defeats and slays the demon Kannās who had kidnapped the daughters of the Indian ruler Nushād.[35] After having completed this rather unusual heroic task – unusual in that it is otherwise absent in other elaborations of heroic trials – Farāmarz finds a treasure left behind for him by Zaḥḥāk.

There are changes that, as we shall see, prove to be significant when we compare this and the treasure motifs that were invoked in case of Farāmarz's ancestors, such as the above-discussed episode of Garshāsp's discovery of Siāmak's tomb. First, Zaḥḥāk has left this treasure behind specifically for Farāmarz. That is, Farāmarz does not merely stumble upon the treasure during his adventures, but he finds what is his or is intended to become his. Hence, Zaḥḥāk's *pandnāmeh* is meant to address him, and therefore foretells his arrival in India as well as his defeat of the demon Kannās:

بدان ای فرامرز رستم که من به گیتی شدم برتر از انجمن
نهادم به گیتی بسی گنج و زر کشیدم به خاك ای(ن) سر تا جور

Translation:
There he found a crystal royal throne and an idol made out of jewel-bestudded gold resting upon in. He was carrying a tablet made out of ruby in his hand, and his head was resting on the tablet.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid. 174–6.

34 Ibid. 176.

35 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 71–7; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 88–96.

ز بهر تو ای سرور سیستان نهادم من این گنج هندوستان
به فکر (فرت) وطلسمات دیونژند همه گنج را کرده ام پای بند[36]

> "Oh Farāmarz, son of Rostam, you should know that I was superior to all in the material world, and before I rested this crown-bearing head of mine in dust, I left many a treasure behind. This treasure of India I have bequeathed to you, and I have secured the treasure by the spell and protection of this terrible demon."

Furthermore, Zaḥḥāk clearly indicates that the treasure has been designated for Farāmarz, who is advised to take it back to Kay Kāvus, the Iranian king of the time.[37] Following the instruction of Zaḥḥāk's *pandnāmeh*, Farāmarz finds and claims the treasure and moves to his next adventure, which involves the discovery of yet another treasure. It is, however, worth pausing here to identify the elements in the episode. First, Farāmarz finds the treasure after he has defeated the menacing demon Kannās and rescued Nushād's daughters from his clutches. It is only after having played the role of a savior, so to speak, that Farāmarz is rewarded with a treasure. But that is not all. The coming of Farāmarz and his victory against the demon was already known by Zaḥḥāk, the first Iranian king who served the family of Rostam as *jahān-pahlavāns*.[38] The treasure and the right to claim it has been reserved for a chosen person, an eradicator of evil powers and establisher of order and justice, whose advent had been prophesied a long time ago. None of these elements, as we may recall, are present in the above-cited "treasure motif" where Garshāsp is the protagonist. In addition to the obvious changes, which modify the implications of the motif's invocation all together, there seems to be an insistence on this particular heroic trial.

As a matter of fact, the very next adventure in the *Farāmarznāmeh* involves the discovery of yet another treasure. At first glance, however, it seems that the protagonist of this episode is Bizhan who, to start off the adventure, defeats the speaking wolf.[39] Prior to being killed, the wolf reveals to Bizhan that he is the guardian of a treasure and informs him of the treasure's whereabout.

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36 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 77; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 96.

37 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 78; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 96.

38 See chapter 2 where I have discussed the problematic notion of having Zaḥḥāk as the patron of the first Sistani hero.

39 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 80–4; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 97–102.

Bizhan himself, therefore, is in a position to collect the treasure; however, this is not what happens. Next, Bizhan informs Farāmarz of the existence of the treasure, whereupon Farāmarz, following the directions provided him, enters a beautiful, fragrant chamber in which he finds a throne and crown. On the golden throne lies a figure covered in silk.[40] On top of the throne, engraved on a golden tablet, is the *pandnāmeh* of, as it turns out, Nushzād the son/descendant of Jamshid, the Iranian king and ancestor of the house of Rostam,[41] a relationship which is mentioned in the *pandnāmeh*.[42] The *pandnāmeh* further reveals that the treasure has been left behind for Farāmarz, whose advent in India was known to Nushzād.[43] Farāmarz claims the treasure and is greeted by the city's inhabitants who have come out to welcome him as the annihilator of evil forces of the demon and the demonic wolf.[44] It is apparent that the foretelling of the coming of a hero along with the requirement that he should

40 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 87; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 103:

بـدان تخت زرین یکی خفتـه بود به دیباش در چهره بنهفته بود
جهان پهلوان زان درافکند رخت کیـانی تنی دید همچو درخت

Translation:
There, on the golden throne, a person was sleeping; the person's face was covered with silk cloth; the *jahān-pahlavān* (Farāmarz) removed the veil from the person and found a mighty royal [lit. Kayānid] body lying there.

41 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 87–8; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 104:

یکی لوح زرین به بالین اوی نبشته یکی نامـه کای جنگجوی
. . .
پدر کرد نام مـرا نوش زاد زجمشید دارم به گیتی نژاد
نیای تو یکسر پدر بر پدر ز پشت پدر من بدان ای پسر

Translation:
A golden tablet hung above the throne and on it there was an inscription saying, "Oh warrior! My father called me Nushzād, and I am a descendant of Jamshid. Your ancestors are all, generation after generation, descendants of my father, oh son!"

42 For the genealogy of the house of Rostam, see Figure 2.

43 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 89; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 105:

شنیدم زگفتار هندوستان که آیی تو از زابل وسیستان
نهادم ز بهر تو ای برده رنج رهـا کن مـرا و تو بـردار گنج

Translation:
I am aware of your Indian tales, and that you shall come from Zābol and Sistan. I have left the treasure behind for you, oh you formidable one. Now, leave me and claim the treasure!

44 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 90; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 106.

eradicate a demonic force before claiming the treasure are not incidental changes to this motif.

The role of the hero as a savior is once more emphasized in yet another articulation of the treasure motif. While in the "west" Farāmarz arrives at the city of Qayravān[45] where the ruler of the city informs him of the existence of a book written by his ancestor Garshāsp. In this book the advent of Farāmarz in Qayravān is foretold along with many other stories. The passage is important with regards to the evolution of the motif – which serves to imbue the heroic character with apocalyptic shades – and deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

یکی خوب دفتر چنین یافتم چو برخواندمش تیز بشتافتم
که از دانش آن دفتر باستان درو یاد کرده بسی داستان
مر این گرد گرشاسب آنرا نوشت که بودش ز فرهنگ ودانش سرشت
که آندم که ضحاك بیداد گر فرستاد ما را بدین بوم و بر
بشمشیر این مرز را بستدیم جهانی زخنجر بر هم زدیم
که چون پانصد و یك هزاری زمن گذر یابد از تخم خویشان من
بدان دم که این دفتر پهلوی نوشتم سزد گر ز من بشنوی
چنین دیدم ازگردش هور وماه چو در اختر خویش کردم نگاه
جوانی بیامد خردمند و گرد سرافراز و با نام دستبرد
نیندیشد از شیر نر واژدها نترسد ز سختی و روز بلا
بمردی جهان را زیر پای آورد بسی نیکوییها به جایی آورد
نژاد وی از ماست پنجم پدر چوآید بدین کشور و بوم و بر
برآید ز دستش سه کار بزرگ کزان خیره گردد دلیر وسترگ
بکشور هویدا شود پنج دد کزایشان جهانی در افتد به بد
دو شیر ودو گرگست و یك اژدها که گیتی ازیشان شود پر بلا
ازین پنج پتیاره تیز چنگ جهان بر بزرگان شود کارتنگ

45 The modern-day city of Kairouan or Qayrawan is located in Tunisia.

شود مرزخاور سراسر خراب همان قیروان گردد از وی بتاب
چو ایدر رسد ان یل نامور زگرزش شود ایمن آن بوم و بر[46]

> When I found this precious book, I became eager to know its contents. In it, I found many a story narrated according to ancient knowledge. The warrior, Garshāsp, whose very essence was woven from knowledge and refined by enlightenment, had written it. And (in it) he says: "the tyrannical Zaḥḥāk sent us to these territories to conquer them with the force of our dagger, and we did so. It was then that we wrote this *pahlavi* book. After examining the turning of the wheel of the sun and the moon and finding out about my own destiny, I determined that 1,500 years after my death, a young man, a powerful, noble, dignified warrior shall appear in this land. He is neither afraid of male lions nor of dragons; his resolve is not diminished by either hardship or calamity. With the vigor of his manliness he will have the entire world under his command; he will do a lot of good deeds. He is a descendant from our line, five generations apart from me. When he comes to this land he will accomplish three important tasks to the astonishment of all brave and great men. At the time of his arrival in this land, there shall appear five vicious animals, who will be menacing the world. They are two lions, two wolves and a dragon, and calamities will befall the world on their account. These sharp-clawed demonic creatures will put pressure on the nobles and notables. The territory of west will be reduced to ruins: Qayravān will become exasperated under their pressure. But once that distinguished hero arrives in that land, he shall restore safety and security to it by the force of his mace."

Farāmarz then learns that once he has successfully completed these trials using the book's guidance he will recover the treasure left behind for him by his ancestor Garshāsp.[47] Thus, first he slays the dragon,[48] then kills the lions,[49] and last the wolves;[50] next he finds the treasure which is protected by a spell; finally, applying the guidance of Garshāsp's book, he breaks the spell and retrieves the treasure.[51]

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46 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 286–7.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid. 295.
49 Ibid. 298–305.
50 Ibid. 308–305.
51 Ibid. 308–9.

Let us examine this episode, which incorporates the treasure motif with other heroic trials. Here a number of heroic motifs are woven together in the frame of the foretold advent of a hero whose task is to save the inhabitants of a city by eradicating dangers which threaten the very life of the city. The task can be accomplished only by the chosen hero whose arrival in the western region has been foretold.

In all three treasure episodes, Farāmarz's character is imbued with messianic tones. The hero is not merely put to the test of the heroic trials required of him by the genre,[52] but his advent in a certain place has been foretold by his ancestors or persons of prominence, and in order to retrieve the treasure, he has to overcome a number of evil/demonic creatures who pose a threat to a city/region. The hero, therefore, achieves the task of subduing menacing powers that have the potential of causing endless mayhem, disturbing the very social and political fabric of the city or locality, which in a sense is a microcosm of human civilization. By defeating evil forces and restoring the civilization to safety the hero takes on the added role of a savior, and in turn is rewarded with the prerogative of treasure, which obviously stands for success in the material world.

The evolution of the treasure motif, however, is not the only indication that Farāmarz has acquired a messianic role, for Farāmarz's actions are motivated, at least partially so, by religious fervor. After concluding his heroic feats of subduing the demon Kannās, the speaking wolf, a dragon, and hoards of rhinoceros, and consequent to defeating a number of Indian claimants to power, Farāmarz arrives in the city of Saranj[53] where he is welcomed by the local ruler.[54] There, at the court of the local ruler of Saranj instead of showing off his skills, Farāmarz addresses the Indians in what has the unmistakable traits of a religious sermon.[55] First he reproaches idol-worshipers, insisting that there is only one God, and then he calls on them to convert to the right religion, which remains unidentified. At the conclusion of this sermon, convinced by Farāmarz's discourse and following his orders, the courtiers gather up all idols and set them on fire. Then, Farāmarz discloses the teachings of "God's book," repeating the teachings as he heard them from his own teacher.[56] One must be cautious in attributing the insistence on Farāmarz's monotheism entirely to the influence of the Islamic milieu, where the parts of the story of Farāmarz

52 As discussed in chapter 2.

53 There is a modern city by this name in modern-day Pakistan.

54 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 137; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 137–8.

55 Ibid.

56 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 139; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 138:

were put into verse. We should not disregard the interpolation and added commentary of the Parsi collectors and scribes of the work.[57] While we cannot take Farāmarz's purported opposition to idol worship at face value, what we can conclude with certainty is that Farāmarz's heroic role has acquired a religious layer hitherto absent in the heroic depiction of this genre.

Moreover, this episode is a mere prelude to the elaboration of Farāmarz's role as a religious warrior. In the final battle between Kayd, the Indian king who by refusing to pay tributes to the Iranian throne has become, albeit temporarily, Farāmarz's enemy, we encounter much more straightforward articulation of this new heroic dimension. Once again Farāmarz assumes the pulpit at Kayd's court to offer the following ultimatum to the Indians: either renounce your religion (by the symbolic act of breaking idols) and convert to my religion or die.[58] Kayd, however, refuses to accept the new religion, arguing that no one in their right mind will turn their back on their ancestral religion when facing a threat. Instead Kayd wants to be convinced of the superiority of the

بفرمود تا هر چه بدشان شمن بیارند و سازند انجمن
چو شد انجمن آتش افروختند به یکرویه آن بت همی سوختند
بیاموختشان نامه کردگار بدان سان که بشنید از آموزگار
چو آن بوم و برگشت یزدان شناس برآمد ز هر جای درود وسپاس

Translation:

He (Farāmarz) ordered them to gather up their idols in a heap. Then they were put in a heap and set on fire. Then, he taught them the teachings of the creator's book, in the fashion that he himself had learned from his teacher. People of that land saluted and praised him after they converted.

57 Farāmarz's opposition to idol worship as he found it in India reflects sentiments of the Zoroastrian (Parsi) collectors of the poem as well as Zoroastrianism in general. For Zoroastrianism opposition to idol worship see Boyce, Iconoclasm 93–111.

58 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 158; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 150:

هر آنکو بدین گفته ناید فرود تنش را روان داد خواهد درود
به شمشیر گرشاسپی پیکرش ببرم به هامون فشانم سرش
هر آنکس که اوگشت یزدان شناس جهید از بد تیغ و رست از هراس
هر آن کس که او بت نخواهد شکست نخواهد ز تیغ فرامرز رست

Translation:

Whoever refuses to accept this will see his soul say farewell to his body! I shall behead him with Garshāsp's sword and throw away his head. Whoever accepts the new faith will be spared my blade and shall fear no more. Whoever refuses to break idols will not be spared.

new religion. Therefore, he calls on Farāmarz to have a religious debate with a Brahmin at the end of which Kayd along with his courtiers will decide which religion is better.[59]

What we have at this juncture is the modification of yet another heroic motif in order to accommodate the new heroic dimension, that is the hero as a religious leader/messiah. Whereas both in the *Garshāspnāmeh* as well as in two other instances in the *Farāmarznāmeh*[60] it is the hero who is seeking wisdom and poses questions to a Brahmin, here the roles are reversed. Incredibly, it is Farāmarz who is the authority on spiritual knowledge and is able to impress the Brahmin and the Indian courtier with his eloquence. As a matter of fact, Farāmarz clearly wins the showdown with the Brahmin because at the conclusion of this competition Kayd and his courtiers convert to Farāmarz's (unidentified) religion.[61]

Given the role of the hero as a champion of a new religion, it comes as no surprise then that the adventures of Farāmarz during the reign of Kay Kāvus are concluded as he seals his victory in India. He does so not by the mere conquest of the Indian territories and imposing tributes on Kayd but also by the successful conclusion of his religious mission. The modification of the heroic motifs has, therefore, altered the definition of the hero in order to create space for the hero's role as a religious warrior. Furthermore, as argued above, the hero is not a mere champion of the faith, but the heroic motifs have been altered in a fashion to grant his newly acquired role a messianic flavor. What, one might ask, in the greater social context of the production of the epics, made such alteration necessary, if not inevitable?

Let us begin by considering the exigency of granting the hero the role of a religious warrior. As we may recall, there was an attempt to create a genealogy of heroes originating from the line of the Iranian king Lohrāsp.[62] In Chapter 3, I argued that the heroic image of the characters belonging to this lineage, the most famous of whom is Esfandiyār, has been modeled according to the definition of a hero established by the repertoire of the heroic motifs invoked

59 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 158–9; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 150–1.

60 The first instance where the wise man motif is invoked in the case of Farāmarz is in the same part of the *Farāmarznāmeh*, namely Farāmarz's adventures during the reign of Kay Kāvus, where he encounters a Brahmin in India and receives answers on various questions; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 140–9; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 140–4. The second instance is found later during the reign of Kay Khosrow, and here Farāmarz is receiving knowledge; *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 265–76.

61 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*) 160–8 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 150–7.

62 See Figure 5 for the genealogical chart of Lohrāsp and his descendants.

for Sistani heroes. While it is apparent that the whole heroic imagery of this lineage has been created as a result of rivalry between the two houses, there is an added dimension in the heroic characterization of members of Lohrāsp's house. As discussed at length in Chapter 3, Esfandiyār, the most prominent hero of this line, is also the champion of the Zoroastrian faith, and there is ample evidence for a religious conflict between the two houses of Rostam and Lohrāsp.

The alteration of heroic motifs that grant the Sistani hero, in this case Farāmarz, a religious role are therefore to be seen as a reaction to Esfandiyār's assumption of the role of the champion of Zoroastrianism. This, however, does not solve the problem of the messianic nature of the religious dimension of Farāmarz's character. There is one thing, after all, for the Sistani storytellers to react to Esfandiyār's superior status as the righteous warrior of faith and grant Farāmarz the same, and it is quite another to assign their own hero messianic attributes. This particular development should be viewed as a response to the development of the Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature.[63] The most prominent character in Middle Persian apocalyptic literature is Pashutan, son of Goshtāsp and Esfandiyār's brother.

Pashutan's role in the epic tradition, both Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh* and the Sistani Cycle, is rather minimal. In contrast, in Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature, for example in *Zand i Wahman Yasn*, he takes on the role of a savior.[64] It is important to note that the advent of Pashutan and all actions in the *Zand i Wahman Yasn* are the fulfillment of Ormazd's prophesies about the future. Therefore, as threats against Iranian lands are increased, Pashutan emerges as a leader of the Iranian armies, aided by a number of deities and benevolent beings,[65] and he crushes the demonic enemy and restores peace and prosperity to Iranian territories.[66] It is noteworthy that one of Pashutan's tasks, which is reminiscent of Farāmarz's actions in India, is the destruction of idol temples.[67]

It must be noted that Goshtāsp and his descendants, as argued in chapter 3, are important figures in Zoroastrian literature, and by virtue of the

63 For an in-depth discussion of the Middle Persian apocalyptic literature and its origin see Widengren, Leitende Ideen 77–162. For a more recent study on the sources and dating of the Middle Persian Apocalyptic texts see Shapira, Banners, spears, Black Raiders 39–64.

64 For Pashutan's role in Pahlavi literature and studies concerned with him, see Cereti, *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 178.

65 They are Mehr, Rashan, Sorush, Ashtad, Bahram (the deity and not the apocalyptic leader), and the Xwarrah of the Mazdean religion, which according to Creti usually appear together in Avestan literature; see Cereti, *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 212.

66 Cereti, *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 163–4.

67 Ibid. 164.

genealogical connection between Sasanians and the house of Goshtāsp[68] they become important yet contested figures in the discourse of legitimacy. It is in this light that they become rivals of the Sistani heroes, a rivalry whose focal point is the question of legitimacy of power, a discourse, which as we have seen, unfolds in the battleground of heroic literature and extends to include notions of religious supremacy and messianic attributes of the hero.

There is no doubt, therefore, that these two bodies of literature, namely the epic stories and the religious literature, constituted the polemical battleground, where the war over the legitimacy of the heroes of the respective houses was fought. Hence it comes as no surprise that Pashutan in the Sistani Cycle is depicted as a treacherous, deceitful character who encourages the Indian ruler Tipal to break his pact with Farāmarz.[69] Pashutan makes an appearance after Farāmarz's death, where he is an accomplice to Bahman's tyrannical and vengeful actions as described in the *Bahmannāmeh*.[70] Pashutan attempts to lure Rostam's daughters, Bānu-Goshasp and Zar-Bānu into a feast at Tipāl's court, where he plans to have them drugged by mixing *bihushāneh* in their food in order to capture them. His plot, however, is revealed to Rostam's daughters by a faithful slave, subsequent to which Bānu-Goshasp turns the table on Pashutan at the feast and slays him right then and there:

بدوگفت کای بدرگ بدنشان ببینی تو زخم گردنکشان
برادر مرمرده در خاک پست تودر بزم و جام یکانی بدست
بزد تیغ واو را همی پاره کرد سران را ازآن بوم آواره کرد[71]

> She told him, "Oh you evil-natured, inauspicious one! You shall shortly experience a warrior's blow. How dare you sit in a royal feast, drinking merrily, while my brother (Farāmarz) suffered the humiliation of death!" She then drew out her blade and cut him up, making all the nobles flee from the scene.

The sentiment in this episode is that by slaying Pashutan justice is served, as apparent in the final address of Bānu-Goshasp to Pashutan. That the most

68 The Sasanian traced their genealogy to Bahman, who is Goshtāsp's grandson; see Figure 5.

69 *Bahmannāmeh* 388–9.

70 See section below for a full analysis of Bahman's depiction according to the Sistani Cycle of Epics and comparison to his other characterizations.

71 *Bahmannāmeh* 391.

prominent figure from the Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature is depicted as sinful (he commits the unacceptable sin of breaking his oath), conniving, and deceitful in the Sistani version is not surprising, when one remembers what was at stake. What we have here is without a doubt a battle for legitimacy between two historical factions, the noble house of Suren and the ruling Arsacid house at some point after the breakdown of the alliances between them.

The animosity between the two houses of Lohrāsp and Rostam becomes very evident in their drastically contrasting depictions of Bahman, as we shall see. Parallel to the break down of alliances between the Iranian throne and Rostam's house, one notices a sense of divergence in how the events are narrated in different accounts. The accounts of Bahman's invasion of Sistan and his execution of Farāmarz are varying and varied, and in it we find a spectrum of moral judgments on Bahman and his actions. This is particularly significant, not only as it reflects the major break of the Surens from the royal Arsacid family, for which we have evidence from other literary sources,[72] but also in the context of Sasanian history. After all, Bahman is the ancestor of the Sasanians, a fact that would grant the contest over how he is depicted as special in vigor and intensity.

5.3 Farāmarz and Bahman: The Final Showdown

The rivalry between the houses finds expression in the different narrations of the conflict between Bahman and Farāmarz. As the rivalry reaches its apogee so does the intensity of the polemics. Let us see how Farāmarz – who at this point of the evolution of the polemical discourse is not a servant of the throne but its rival – is to meet his end.

Ferdowsi's account of Bahman's conquest of Sistan and Farāmarz's execution is marked by its overtly neutral tone, especially when compared to a number of other accounts. There is an attempt to avoid explicit praise or condemnation for Bahman, yet there are a few junctures in the story where Ferdowsi reveals his sympathy. One example is when he puts his superior skills as a poet to work in order to elegize the family of Rostam.[73] Nevertheless, the *Shāhnāmeh* account cannot be considered a Sistani version of events. The Sistani version of events, as preserved in the *Bahmannāmeh*, stands on one end of the narrations of Bahman's reign, whereas the *Shāhnāmeh* account occupies the middle.

72 We do have numismatic evidence that seems to point to an Arsacid invasion of Sistan; see chapter 1.

73 See chapter 5, note 77.

The *Shāhnāmeh* version of events is rather brief. Bahman is obsessed with avenging his father Esfandiyār's death. There is an attempt here to justify Bahman's actions by highlighting that the impetus for his actions is revenge, a sentiment that is very much accepted, if not glorified, within the moral purview of the genre. Here, anticipating that the audience would eventually become ill at ease with Farāmarz's execution and the destruction of Sistan, what we have is a summary of all notable kings and heroes who rightfully acted out of vengeance, delivered by Bahman: Fereidun's actions to remove Zaḥḥāk was fueled by vengeance for Jamshid; Manuchehr's wars were fought in order to avenge Iraj's blood; even the noble Kay Khosrow drenched the world in blood to avenge his father, Siāvush; Esfandiyār, Bahman's father, rose to avenge his grandfather Lohrāsp, and even Farāmarz razed the whole province of Kabul in order to avenge Rostam's blood. Bahman here is given the chance to justify his actions:

هر آنکس که او باشد از آب پاك — نیارد سر گوهر اندر مغاك
بکردار شاه آفریدون بود — چو خونی نباشد همایون بود
که ضحاك را از پی خون جم — ز ناماوران جهان کرد کم
منوچهر برسلم و تور سترگ — بیاورد از آمل سپاهی بزرگ
به چین رفت و کین نیا بازخواست — مرا هم چنان داستان ست، راست
چو کیخسرو آمد، از افراسیاب — ز خون کرد گیتی چو دریای آب
پدرم آمد و کین لهراسپ خواست — ز کشته زمین کرد با کوه راست
فرامرز کز بهر خون پدر — به خورشید تابان برآورد سر
به کاول شد و کین رستم بخواست — همه بوم و برکرد با خاك راست
زمین را ز خون بازنشناختند — همی اسپ برکشتگان تاختند
به کینه سزاوارتر کس منم — که بر پیل و شیر اسپ افکنم
اگر بشمری در جهان نامدار — سواری نبینی چو اسفندیار[74]

74 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 471–2; Translation DD 434–5.

> Our ancestors, when they were brave young warriors, did not hide their valor in obscurity, but acted as the glorious king Feraydun did, who destroyed Zaḥḥāk in revenge for the blood of Jamshid. And Manuchehr brought an army from Amol and marched against Salm and the barbarous Tur, pursuing them to China in pursuit of vengeance for his grandfather's death. I too leave such a tale behind me. When Kay Khosrow escaped from Afrasiyab's clutches he made the world like a lake of blood: my father demanded vengeance for Lohrāsp and piled the earth with a mountain of dead. And Farāmarz, who exalts himself above the shining sun, went to Kabol pursuing vengeance for his father's blood and razed the whole province to the ground: blood obscured all the land, and men rode their horses over the bodies of the dead. I, who ride out against raging lions, am more worthy than anyone to take revenge, since my vengeance will be for the peerless Esfandiyār.

Morally speaking, the narrative has to provide some kind of justification for Bahman's imminent killing of Farāmarz; otherwise this long passage would not have been necessary. It is an attempt to provide an excuse for Bahman's disloyalty to Rostam's family, who were the guardians and protectors of the Iranian throne. The plot moves forward after this attempt to persuade the audience of what Bahman is about to do, and invoking revenge as the impetus for action does lend it justification, for as mentioned before revenge is one of the frameworks in which historical narration can unfold.

Next in Ferdowsi's account Bahman sends a missive to Zāl informing him of his intentions of conquering Sistan. Zāl responds by arguing for peace and reconciliation, but upon hearing Zāl's response, Bahman's anger is fueled, and he orders Zāl to be put in shackles. In addition to that Bahman claims the treasures of the house of Rostam, all safeguarded in Zāl's palace. This is one of the two places in Ferdowsi's account where there is an implicit condemnation of Bahman's actions. The detailed description of all the wealth, with a reminder that all that was gathered as a result of Rostam's heroic efforts, and closing the account by saying that Bahman indeed plundered the whole of Zābolestān certainly does not portray Bahman's actions as justified:

از ایوان دستان سام سوار شتر وارها برنهادند بار
ز دینار و از گوهر نابسود زتخت و زگستردنی هرچه بود
ز زرینه وتاج های بزر ز سیمینه وگوشوار وکمر

از اسپان تازی به زرین ستام زشمشیر هندی به زرین نیام
همان برده و بدرهای درم زمشك و زکافور واز بیش وکم
که رستم فراز آورید آن به رنج ز شاهان و گردنکشان یافت گنج
مهان را همه بدره وتاج داد همه زاولستان به تاراج داد[75]

> From the *iwan* of Sām the Warrior, they loaded up the camels with whatever they could lay their hands on, be it money, jewels, furniture and rugs. They took golden diadems, silver and belts bestudded with precious stones. They took precious Arabian horses and Indian swords hidden in their golden sheaths. They even took slaves, camphor and incense. They took all that Rostam had gathered with such hardship over the years, all that he had been given (as tribute or booty) by kings and heroes. Bahman plundered all of Zavolestān and divided the wealth between the notables of his army.

One also must remember that the plunder of treasures happens in the aftermath of Zāl's imprisonment, an act that in itself is not justified and is a significant enough transgression that it would require a response of some sort. This is actually where Farāmarz steps in.

When Farāmarz hears of this act of utter irreverence and ingratitude perpetuated against his great ancestor, he quickly gathers up an army to fight Bahman. There follows a battle, and Farāmarz quickly loses on the 4th day and is sent to the gallows. The only explicit expression of condemnation of Bahman's act is put into Pashutan's mouth.[76] After the execution of Farāmarz, Pashutan, Bahman's uncle, blames him for his vengefulness and ingratitude towards Rostam's family, a noble family that rendered him and generations of Iranian kings their irreplaceable services:

توتا باشی ای خسرو نیك زاد مرنجان کسی راکه دارد نژاد
چو فرزند سام نریمان ز بند بنالدبه پروردگار بلند

75 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 476.

76 In Ferdowsi's version of events, Pashutan, while accompanying Bahman, remains neutral for the most part, but at this juncture, he is actually the voice of reason.

بپیچی تو زان گرچه نیك اختری چو با کردگار افکند داوری
چو رستم نگهبان تخت کیان همی بر در رنج بستی میان
تو این تاج از و یافتی یادگار نه از راه گشتاسب و اسفندیار[77]

> While you live my noble lord you should not harass those of exalted birth. You should tremble that Sām's son Zāl complains of his fetters, since his stars will advocate his cause before God who keeps us all. And think of Rostam, who protected the Persian throne, and who was prompt to undergo all hardship for Persia's sake: it is because of him that his crown came down to you, not because of Goshtāsp and Esfandiyār.

Bahman becomes remorseful after hearing this and sets Zāl free. Right after Zāl's shackles are removed and he is carried off from prison to the court, we have an elegy, which seems to have been uttered by Pashutan, but the utterer of those words is left vague on purpose. Later we have the most moving part of the story, which elegizes the end of the house of Rostam with a sense of devoted loyalty voiced by Rudābeh, Zāl's wife:

که زارا،دلیرا،گوا،رستما نبیره گو نامور نیرما
تو تا زنده بودی که آگاه بود که گشتاسپ اندرجهان شاه بود
کنون گنج تاراج ودستان اسیر پسر زارکشته به باران تیر
مبیناد چشم کس این روزگار زمین باد بی تخم اسفندیار[78]

> "Alas for Rostam, for his noble race,
> Our hero lies in his last resting place,
> And when he lived, who could have guessed or known
> That Goshtāsp would ascend the royal throne?
> His wealth is gone, his father's now a slave,
> His noble son lies murdered in the grave.
> May no one ever know such grief, or see
> The fateful sorrows that have come to me!
> My curses on them: may the earth be freed
> From Bahman and his evil father's seed!"

77 *Shāhnāmeh* 5: 481; Translation DD 438.
78 Ibid. 5: 481–2; Translation DD 439.

Although it is some one else and not Ferdowsi who wishes the earth cleansed of Bahman's seed, he reveals his sympathies in this passage. As we have seen Ferdowsi's account attempts to remain neutral, or rather, if we compare it with Tha'ālebi's account (see below), we find that they are remarkably similar in details of their plot. However, Ferdowsi, in the two instances pointed out above, chooses to dramatize the consequences of Bahman's actions, hence betraying his sympathies. Nevertheless, all of this is done cautiously in order to keep the neutrality of the account. At the end of Ferdowsi's version, because of his redeeming act of letting Zāl free and leaving Sistan, Bahman could come off as exonerated. This act of forgiving could come easy on the part of the audience, because Farāmarz is a character whose adventures, services to the Iranian throne, and heroic feats have been left out of the *Shāhnāmeh*, and therefore, there is a lack of emotional connection between him and Ferdowsi's audience. So his execution could easily be forgiven. Ferdowsi, however, must have been aware of the different version of events, as well as the ambivalence of his own version in taking sides, for he ends the account of Bahman's reign by stating that some were happy with him, some despondent:

برآسود بر تخت و بنشست شاد جهان را همی داشت با رسم وداد
به درویش بخشید چندی درم ازو چند شادان و چندی دژم[79]

> When they reached Iran, Bahman rested at last and sat himself on the imperial throne. He gave himself to the business of government, distributing money to the poor; some were pleased with him, while others lived in grief and sorrow.

Ferdowsi's account, however, is one of the many versions of this story. The different narrations of the same story, which are without a doubt surviving excerpts of the various recensions of the Sasanian *Khodāynāmaks*, differ in the kind of information they provide. But more importantly, the different narrations reveal their various and sometimes diametrically contrasting attitudes towards the families of Rostam and Bahman. Here my intention is not to engage in a detailed comparative analysis of all extant accounts of this episode. Given the significance of this episode and existence of different versions of it, however, I thought it would be useful to provide a compilation of them, along with their translations, in Appendix B. This exercise is incredibly illuminating aside from its implications for this particular episode, for by isolating one episode and juxtaposing the different accounts of the same episode, the

79 Ibid. 5: 482–3; Translation DD 439.

existence of astounding variations becomes apparent. The results of this exercise clearly confirm that what we refer to as the epic material constitutes a rich genre, which encapsulates the major and relevant discourses of the various points of its composition.

Hence in this case, in some accounts – such as those of Ibn Balkhi, Ṭabari, Gardizi, and Thaʿālebi – praise for Bahman is explicit and emphatic.[80] In these accounts, therefore, Bahman is extolled for being a just king and further characterized as a good-natured king, loyal to his peasants and faithful to his promises. Other accounts, such as those of Ḥamzeh Eṣfahāni, Dinawari, Balʿami, Masʿudi and the anonymous author of *Mojmal al-Tawārikh wa'l Qeṣṣaṣ*, omit the praise and offer an account of the conquest with varying degrees of detail.[81]

What is common in all the accounts is the following: there is a conflict between Bahman and the ruler of Sistan, who in some cases is Farāmarz, in others Zāl or Rostam. The conflict ends in the execution of the former by the latter and a destruction of the region and plunder of Rostam's family's wealth. What differs, however, is the different judgments, be they implicitly or explicitly expressed, about the whole affair. It is important to note that among the accounts the one preserved in *Mojmal al-Tawārikh wa'l Qeṣṣaṣ* is very close (but not identical in plot) to that of *Bahmannāmeh*, the most extensive and coherent Sistani version of this pivotal event in the history of the house of Rostam.

Let us leave all the different versions of the story and begin our investigation of the Sistani version as preserved in the *Bahmannāmeh*.[82] This version of events deserves our attention because in some ways it is a polemical treatise against Bahman, one of the Kayānid kings of the *Shāhnāmeh* and the legendary ancestor of the Sasanians. Although Bahman's impetus for conquering Sistan is the same as in the *Shāhnāmeh* version, he is consistently characterized as vengeful, obsessive, obstinate and unwise. The audience is reminded that he is of dubious lineage, namely that Bahman is a descendant of Lohrāsp, a king whose legitimacy was never accepted by Zāl, Rostam and other prominent members of the Sistani ruling family.[83] Here, as a concerted attempt is made to depict Bahman as an utter villain, questionable genealogy is naturally used as

80 For these and other accounts of Bahman and Farāmarz's conflict, see Appendix B where the original text (and translation) of the different accounts is provided.

81 See Appendix B for the full citation of the accounts.

82 I have chosen to rely on the *Bahmannāmeh*'s version of events, even though we do have another Sistani account of the episode in question at the end of the *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) because in my opinion a full examination of *Bahmannāmeh*'s account is the most detailed of the Sistani stories preserving this episode.

83 See chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of Lohrāsp's problematic lineage.

a part of the arsenal the text employs against him. Thus, Sām, Farāmarz's son, exalting his own ancient noble lineage, ridicules Bahman for his lack of proper pedigree:

چنین داد پاسخ که از پشت سام ز پشت فرامرز و سام به نام
ز پشت فرامرز کین گسترم وزین نام بر چرخساید سرم
من آنم که دریا به جوش آورم به هنگام کین چون خروش آورم
گلستان من گرد میدان بود شرابم همه خون گردان بود
تو برگوی تا از که داری نژاد که نام و نژادت به گیتی مباد[84]

He replied to Bahman that I am a descendant of Sām, Farāmarz's son, and my name is Sām. I am the son of dauntless Farāmarz, and I am so proud of my lineage that my head touches the sky. I am so fierce that when I let out a roar on the battlefield the oceans start to churn. For me, the dusty battlefield is the most beautiful place; to me the best wine is the blood of champions. Now you tell me what is your pedigree? May the earth be cleansed of your name and your race!

Bahman's characterization as a villain is anything but subtle: he is described as tyrannical,[85] obstinate/unwise,[86] and demonic.[87] While being of demonic descent clearly refers to Bahman's lineage, discussed above, the other two flaws are equally serious for a king. Wisdom as discussed in chapter 2 is an indispensable requirement for a ruler, while tyranny is a very serious charge, if not the most grievous deficiency, a monarch can have in this particular world view.

But what is at the root of Bahman's fall from grace in this version of events? What has he done that earns him such denunciation and, more importantly, how could the audience be convinced of such a horrid characterization for one of their legendary kings? Bahman, after all, is acting according to the accepted moral purview of the text, for his actions are fueled by his desire to seek vengeance. But revenge, a noble and just cause for going to war in this genre of literature, is not justified in the case of Bahman because of his excessiveness, which does not end with Farāmarz's execution. Bahman is appeased only

84 *Bahmannāmeh* 216.
85 *Bahmannāmeh* 233: خودکامه
86 Ibid. 234: تیره هوش
87 Ibid. 193: دیو زاد

after he has wiped out any and all traces of Rostam's family from the earth. Therefore, much of the attempt in the Sistani version of events is directed at emphasizing Bahman's obsession with revenge, circumventing the real motivation for the outbreak of conflict between the two houses.

The text's rhetoric against him, often put into the mouth of different characters, intensifies as he engages in four long, exhausting, and destructive battles against the province of Sistan. Hence in the aftermath of Bahman's defeat in the first battle, we have Jāmāsp, his wise councilor, denounce him for his unbridled anger, which will result in Bahman inflicting harm on himself and seriously damaging the world. According to Jāmāsp, what Bahman intends to do transgresses the definition of mere vengeance.

به شه گفت از من همه گفتنست ز تو شهریار بر آشفتنست
ترا این چنین شهریاری چه سود نه خواب و نه خورد و نه آرام بود
بدین کین جهان برسر آری همی به جز تخم زشتی نکاری همی
به جز خون تو دیگر چه داری به دست بدان سر چنان دانك خونی ترست
چنین داد پاسخ که چون کار بود ترا سرزنش برسر من چه سود
ز کار بد چرخ نتوان گریز وگر برسر آری بسی رستخیز[88]

> Jāmāsp told the king, "I keep telling you to give up your vengeance, but all you do in response is to get more furious. What is the use of being king when you can't eat or sleep or be peaceful for a moment? You are going to inflict serious damage on the world by your anger. You will not sow anything but the seed of evil with your hatred. Tell me, other than bloodshed, what will you achieve? What you have in mind is much worse than simple bloodshed." Bahman replied saying, "What is the use of all your reproach? No matter how capable, one cannot escape the evil-willed destiny."

The choice of Jāmāsp to deliver this harsh rebuke is not random, for as alluded to earlier, Jāmāsp is not merely a wise councilor of Goshtāsp's family but he is an important character in the Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature.[89] Here we

88 Ibid. 236.

89 The Book of Jāmāsp or the *Jāmāspnāmeh* is part of the Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature introduced in the second part of this chapter.

see traces of Jāmāsp's supernatural ability to see into the future, predicting the grim outcome of Bahman's actions, by hinting that his actions will damage himself and ruin the entire world. Bahman, however, is set on engaging in a new battle and hence dismisses Jāmāsp's prophesy by saying that one cannot change the course of one's destiny anyway.

Aside from denouncing Bahman explicitly, as done in the case of Jāmāsp's rebuke, the other strategy employed in the text is to provide a drawn-out description of Bahman's battles. The description of the battles spans over 340 pages of the printed text, and they are meant to exhaust the audience and incite their condemnation against Bahman's insatiable thirst for vengeance. It is interesting that these lengthy battles, which according to the *Bahmannāmeh* took no less than 50 years, are summarized in 20 lines in the *Shāhnāmeh*, each of the 4 battles reduced to a day in a single battle.

What is also left out of the *Shāhnāmeh* is Bahman's first three humiliating defeats, in the aftermath of which he is forced to retreat to Balkh, the seat of the Iranian throne at the time. The long and hard-fought battles provide a context to establish the Sistanis' skills in warfare, hence hinting to the political and military superiority of the position of Rostam's family. The descriptions of exhausting battles also create numerous opportunities for the text to display its sympathies and to put the blame for the catastrophic consequences of the battles entirely on Bahman.

To prepare the second attack on Sistan, Bahman puts together an army of half a million soldiers from all corners of the empire. Nevertheless, he is once again defeated and is forced to retreat to Balkh.[90] It is important to note that each of these battles is described in great detail: we learn about the composition of the army, their numbers, as well as military strategy. One of the reasons, perhaps one could argue, for preserving such degree of detail, is the historical layer of the event. But the enumeration of detail also serves to highlight the superiority of Sistanis as warriors. They are, after all, able to defeat the Iranian army in spite of their limited numbers and resources.

The third time around, Bahman puts together another large army composed of the army units of his vassals. To highlight the superiority of the warriors of Sistan, which clearly insinuates lack of valor and vigor in Bahman's camp, is best illustrated in the battle of Rohām. Bānu-Goshasp appears on the battlefield, inflicting serious damage on the Iranian army in her first attack. Then she sends a note to Bahman challenging him to send her a "worthy opponent" to engage in a one-on-one battle with her. After much pondering, Bahman comes to the conclusion that the only one of the same rank is Rohām-e Gudarz, a member

90 *Bahmannāmeh* 210–37.

of Gudarziān family. Once on the battlefield, Rohām insults Bānu-Goshasp first for being a woman and then for her demonic ancestry.[91] Bānu-Goshasp reminds him that she is not just any woman and humiliates and threatens him: she says that she will first shave off Rohām's beard, then kill him, chop him up, and feed him to dogs. Although she does not go as far as she asserts, she does injure Rohām on the battlefield. And Rohām is only the first of Bahman's warriors to be defeated and humiliated by Bānu-Goshasp.[92] At last, one of the warriors is able to kick her off her horse and at this time all the Sistani heroes come to her aid, but this warrior who is described as belonging to the Barbers of the west is able to defeat them one by one. At this point, Zāl intercedes and resorts to trickery in order to win the battle. As mentioned before, being well-versed in the art of trickery is one of the defining characteristics of the Sistani heroes and, rather than this being frowned upon, is celebrated as one their special skills. Zāl's trickery stalls Bahman's army long enough for Farāmarz to appear. At this time, the famous winds of Sistan[93] start blowing and this makes things very difficult for Bahman's army who are not accustomed to them. Farāmarz seizes the opportunity and defeats Bahman once again. Humiliated and disgraced, Bahman retreats to Balkh.[94] One expects the story to end here, but this is not so. After all, we had the description of a long and hard-fought battle, followed by the prospect of losing on the part of the sympathetic (Sistani) party, followed by the defeat of the villain (Bahman). However, the reader/listener's sense of closure is rather short-lived, for shortly after retreating to Balkh, the narrator informs us that Bahman once again becomes overwhelmed by anger and once again gathers up an army. The description of the armies, their numbers, and their crowding into the city of Balkh become tedious and frustrating to follow:

دل شاه ایران بجوشید باز همی رزم را کرد شش سال ساز
و زان پس سپه را ز کشور بخواند هم از باختر هم ز خاور بخواند

91 Ibid. 249:

بدو بانگ زد ای پلید زنان نژاد تو از پشت آهرمنان

Translation:
He (Rohām) called out to her, "Oh you, the wickedest among women with a demonic pedigree . . ."

92 *Bahmannāmeh* 246–50.

93 The 120-day winds, which blow in the region to this day. I have discussed the winds and its effects on the region in the first chapter of my doctoral dissertation.

94 Ibid. 260–1.

زمین بود هفتاد فرسنگ بیش — که بد ساخته لشکرش جای خویش
شمرده برآمد سه اسبه سوار — زجنگ آوران نهصد وده هزار
چنان گشت ازانبوهشان شهر بلخ — که شد زندگانی برآن شهر تلخ[95]

> Bahman once again became overwhelmed by anger. At this time the battles had been going on for six years. Again he summoned the armies of east and west. He gathered such a huge army that their camping ground stretched over seventy leagues. Many cavaliers came along with their horses, and a total of 910,000 warriors gathered there. The city of Balkh became so crowded that life became difficult for its inhabitants.

By this time the audience and the narrator are unified in their condemnation of Bahman. Everything about him is excessive, irrational, and aggressive. The woes of the audience and narrator alike are most eloquently expressed by Farāmarz's characterization of Bahman as he addresses Zāl:

فراوان به پیش من آمد سپاه — چه در هندوان و چه در پیش شاه
ندیدم سپاهی بدین سان بزرگ — نه چون بهمن دیو زاده سترگ
که رنج ترا پیشش آزرم نیست — مراو را زچندین شکن شرم نیست
زسگ شیرخوردست هنگام شیر — نسازد مراو را بجز تیغ و تیر[96]

> "In my days I have faced many armies, be it in India or at the service of the Iranian king, but never have I seen an army of this size, and I haven't seen anyone as this son of a demon, Bahman! He is neither bothered by the suffering he is putting you (Zāl) through, nor does he feel ashamed of his numerous defeats. He has been fed upon dogs' milk, and nothing will set him straight besides (my) sword and dagger!"

As we shall see, as each battle unfolds and as we get closer to the end of the story, the audience's frustration and the narration's condemnation of Bahman's character intensify. In the account of the fourth battle, there is much more detail in describing the alliances on both sides, as well as a romantic episode

95 Ibid. 266.
96 Ibid. 268.

involving Bahman and a fairy-like woman.[97] These tales offer a temporary break and much needed relief from Bahman's repetitious violent acts. The narrative, however, quickly returns to the conflict. We find that this time it is Farāmarz who has decided to attack Balkh to ambush Bahman's army. This tactic, however, fails and Farāmarz suffers a defeat and is forced to escape to Kabul.[98] Next we learn that Bahman's army arrives at Sistan's citadel and besieges the city. After being under siege for seven months, a famine breaks out in the city of Sistan that lasts for one year. The state of the city and its inhabitants are described in great detail: once they have finished eating everything they could lay their hands on, they resort to eating their fine Arabian horses that were used for war as well as dogs and cats. Another five months pass before the people finally go to Zāl and tell him that there is absolutely nothing else to eat, and the only thing left for them to do is to tear each other apart and eat each other. In response to the people's complaints, Zāl gives them whatever grains he has stored in his palace, which lasts them another nine months. Meanwhile Bahman starts attacking the city from his encampment outside of the citadel. He throws fire on the city and the people this time go to Zāl and demand that he should hand over the city to Bahman and his army since Zāl can neither feed nor protect them.[99]

Having accepted defeat, Zāl writes to Farāmarz who has retreated to Kabul. In the letter we find a long heart-rending lament for Sistan and the family of the heroes. In it, Zāl bids a sad farewell to Farāmarz, informing him of his decision to hand over the city and the palace to Bahman. He advises Farāmarz to escape from Kabul and never to return to either Zābol or Sistan. Zāl thinks that the best recourse for Farāmarz is to seek refuge in India and to leave Bahman alone, since the army that he has brought from the east and west is no match for the Sistani forces.[100] Meanwhile, Zāl dreams of Garshāsp, who tells him that he has hidden much grain somewhere in his palace, because he has foreseen the problems that his successors would face. Following Garshāsp's instructions, Zāl finds the grain and distributes it to the inhabitants of the city. But the grain does not last long enough, and the hungry people open the gates of the city to Bahman's army. But once the city's gates are flung open, the fierceness of the hordes of starving people who rush towards Bahman's army in hopes of finding provisions scares the Iranians off into yet another retreat. But this time Bahman and his army have a new tactic: they entice the hungry populace

97 Ibid. 280–8.
98 Ibid. 286–8.
99 Ibid. 292.
100 Ibid. 296–7.

by making food around the citadel. When the starving masses catch a whiff of smells coming from cooking, they open up the city's gate. Bahman, however, has the hungry people mercilessly slaughtered.[101]

The famine is only one of the phases of the fourth battle and as we shall see more events unfold. This is a significant event because, as argued before, it is very likely that it preserves the memory of a real famine that might have taken place during the long siege of the city. In terms of storytelling, this part of the account is very intriguing because it deviates from the kinds of events that are usually included in this genre, making the plot twists even more unpredictable. At the same time, some of the familiar motifs associated with the SCE are also present in this story. For example, Zāl's dream of Garshāsp in which he learns that Garshāsp has hidden grains is a variation of the "treasure left by ancestor/king" motif discussed at length in different contexts throughout the book. Here, the treasure is obviously the grain that, given the famine in the city, is more valuable than any treasure of gold and jewels. Another feature that reminds one of the treasure motif is that Garshāsp has foretold the events, and that is why he has left behind the grains there. It is a very interesting case where the historical memory of an event becomes incorporated into this genre, and one can clearly see in what way the genre accommodates the narration of the event.

The detailed and colorful depiction of Bahman's unjust acts is meant to leave no doubt about the wickedness of his character. He inflicts suffering on the defenseless population for many months and deceives them so that they open the gates of the city in order to slaughter them. As if doing this once was not bad enough, Bahman does this one more time. This time Farāmarz and Bānu-Goshasp have arrived at the city and are trying to find a way to break the siege but another famine breaks out. Bahman resorts to the same trick of enticing the hungry people by the smell of food. Once again the people fall for the trick, and this time they are massacred.[102] Then the city falls to Bahman, and Farāmarz and Bānu-Goshasp escape to Kabul while Zāl hides in a nearby farm. Bahman's army enters desolate Sistan to find that its remaining populace consists of women and children who did not have the means to leave the city. Bahman's army raids whatever is left of the city for days, inflicting harm on helpless women and children.[103] This obviously crowns the string of Bahman's irrational, ruthless and cruel acts, and yet it is not the last abominable act he commits.

101 *Bahmannāmeh* 270–303.

102 Ibid. 310.

103 Ibid. 313.

Zāl, who is tired of hiding, writes to Bahman and turns himself in to Jāmāsp, asking Jāmāsp to intercede on his behalf. Jāmāsp approaches Bahman, who refuses to leave without finding Zāl, to ask him to return to Balkh. The response that follows is worth citing in its entirety, because it best reflects the extent of Bahman's vengeance and hatred for the Sistanis:

بدو گفت بهر فرومایه زال — بباشم درین مرز پنجاه سال
خود از بهر زالست پیکار و جنگ — نخواهم شدن تا نیاید به چنگ
بدو گفت ار ایدر درنگ آوری — چه خواهیش کردار به چنگ آوری
بکوبم سرش گفت در زیر سنگ — خورم با ستخوانش می لعل رنگ
کنم سیستان را سراسر خراب — سراسر به ارزن کنم کشته آب
وز ایدر سوی دخمه لشکر کشم — همه نامداران سرکش کشم
یکی اندر آن دخمه آتش زنم — بن و بیخ دخمه بهم برکنم
بدان تا جهانی بدانند کار — که یافه نشد خون اسفندیار
بدو گفت جاماسپ فرمان تراست — ولیکن سگالش چنین نارواست
چو پیروز گشتی بزرگی نمای — همان به که بخشایش آری بجای
سر راستی داد و بخشایشست — کزین هر دو گیتی پر آرایشست
اگر رایت اینست و گفتار این — نیابی تو مر زال را بر زمین
گرانمایه زالی که بیچاره گشت — فرامرز در گیتی آواره گشت
بکندی تو این کاخ و ایوانشان — به تاراج دادی همه خانشان
سرایی ز گاه کیومرث باز — پر از نامداران گردنفراز
چنان گشت گویی که هرگز نبود — نه نامست ما را از این و نه سود[104]

Bahman said, "For the sake of this lowly man, Zāl, I have spent fifty years in this province. All this fighting is because of Zāl, and I am not leaving until I find him." Then Jāmāsp asked him, "What will you do if he falls into

104 Ibid. 317–18.

> your clutches?" He responded, "I will smash his head against rocks, and I will drink wine out of his skull. Then I will demolish all of Sistan's cities, and I will flood their farmlands. Next I shall go to the *dakhmeh* [here: the tomb of the Sistani heroes] along with an army and I will seek out the remains of their heroes. I will then set fire on the *dakhmeh* and raze it to the ground. I will do all this for everyone to know that Esfandiyār's blood was not spilled in vain." Jāmāsp told him, "It is up to you, as you are the king and you have the power to do as you wish, but thinking like this is not right. Once you gain victory, you should display your greatness, and that you will do by showing forgiveness. The most righteous behavior is for one to be fair and to forgive, and both worlds will be a pleasant place to you if you do this. If this is the way you think, you will never find Zāl. The noble Zāl has become desperate and is hiding, and Farāmarz has been forced into exile. You demolished their palaces, and you pillaged their wealth. What have you done to this noble race, the one that has produced heroes since the time of Kayumarth? You have destroyed them, erasing all signs of their existence. Your actions will neither leave you with an honorable legacy, nor will you find any benefit as a result of them."

This passage reveals the extent of Bahman's hatred and anger, but more importantly we realize that Jāmāsp also sympathizes with the Sistanis. Jāmāsp's sympathy will be even more clearly expressed later on in the story. Jāmāsp finally convinces Bahman to grant Zāl immunity. They bring the Avesta and the Zand and Bahman swears that he will not harm Zāl by putting his hand on it.[105] When Jāmāsp tells Zāl about Bahman's promise, Zāl expresses his fear that Bahman might not honor his promise. After all, he is stupid, vengeful and disloyal, but Jāmāsp reassures him that no one can break such a promise as Bahman has made.[106]

Once Zāl is brought before Bahman, he reproaches him, reminding him that he has brought him up and served many of his ancestors, and in turn he has only brought death and destruction on Sistan:

چنین گفت کای شاه فرخنده روز — به کام تو شد کشور نیمروز
چه خواهی ازین پیر برگشته بخت — ازآن پس که دیدم ز تو رنج سخت
نه من پروریده بودم ترا — نه من مهربانی نمودم ترا

105 Ibid. 318.
106 Ibid. 319.

کنون از بزرگان وفا این بود چنان نیکویی را جزا این بود
چه باید ترا خون مردی اسیر که پیش نیاکان تو گشت پیر
بمان پنج روز دگر در جهان بدو باز مرگ آورد ناگهان
بزرگی و نیکودلی پیشه کن به کار جهان اندر اندیشه کن
کجا رفت کیخسرو پاکزاد که باب ترا نام شاهی نهاد
کجا شد کیومرث و آن سرکشان که کس را نماندش به گیتی نشان
سرانجام نزدیک ایشان شویم گه داد در پیش یزدان شویم
بگیرم ترا دامن از درد دل کنم مر ترا پیش یزدان خجل
چه گویی چه گویم چه کردم ترا چه پاسخ دهی پیش یزدان مرا
بکندی تو این خانه و بوم و بر بخستی دلم را بمرگ پسر
بکشتی همه نامداران من دلیران این مرز و یاران من
فرامرز آواره و دختران ز تنگی بسی مرده ناماوران
نبوده به جان تو ما را گزند ز ما یافته تاج و تخت بلند[107]

Zāl addressed Bahman, "Oh prosperous king! Now you have fulfilled your desire and the province of Sistan is yours. What do you want from me? I am old and fortune has turned its back on me, and I have suffered much because of you. Don't you remember that I brought you up, and I showed you kindness when you were in my care? Is this your way of showing your loyalty? Do I deserve a punishment for what I have done for you? What will you achieve by spilling the blood of an old man who served all your ancestors? You don't have to kill me, because death awaits me anyway. You should do good and be kind-hearted and think about the impermanence of this world. After all what happened to Kay Khosrow, the one who conferred kingship on your ancestors? What happened to Kayumarth and those champions who followed him? We will also finally join them, and at the hour of justice, we will have to face God. At that time, I will recount the pain and suffering that you inflicted upon me, and

107 Ibid. 319–20.

> you will be ashamed in front of God. What will be your response to God when he asks why you have done this to me? You destroyed my house and the city. You hurt me by killing my son. You killed all my warriors, my brave ones, my friends. Many a nobleman has perished in wretched conditions. You forced Farāmarz and Rostam's daughters into exile. You have never seen any harm from us. You should remember that you have this glorious crown and throne thanks to us!"

As one might have come to expect of Bahman by time in the story, he reacts with more intense fury. Breaking the promise he had given to Jāmāsp, he imprisons Zāl in an iron cage. It is no exaggeration to say that this offense alone, namely breaking one's promise, is grave enough for a complete condemnation of a character, and in the case of a ruler, to indict him as lacking legitimacy. However, Bahman does not stop here, for his next act is to plunder Zāl's palace, including all its treasures. Once the valuables are retrieved, Bahman starts his systematic campaign of destruction of Sistan: first he demolishes the palace, and then he razes the city to the ground by first burning it and then by breaking the dams and weirs of Hilmand River and flooding what remained of the city. Next, he orders the ground, where the city once stood, to be plowed, and he sows grass there. Therefore, the place becomes a plane without water, and no passerby can guess that a magnificent city such as Sistan once stood there:

بسی گنج از ایوان او برگرفت — بسی افسر وتخت وگوهر گرفت
وزآن پس به ویرانی آورد رای — در آورد کاخ بلندش ز پای
یکی آتشی سهمگین برفروخت — همه سیستان را به آتش بسوخت
روان کرد رود از لب هیرمند — سوی شهر تا پست کرد و بکند
وزآن پس بیفکند تخم و برست — همیشه چنان بود گفتی درست
چنان شد که هرکس که در ره گذشت — همه ساله گفتی که بودست دشت[108]

> Once he had wiped his palace clean of many treasures, his jewels, his crown and throne, he set out to bring down the palace, to destroy it completely. Then he ignited a great fire and burnt down the entire city of Sistan. Next he let water flow from the River Hilmand, flattening what

108 Ibid. 321.

was left of it. Next he sowed grass. Thus later when passerbys cross the place, they wouldn't guess what once stood there.

The systematic destruction of the city of Sistan in the manner described, paralleled with his broken promise of immunity for Zāl, adds to Bahman's ever increasing pile of evil deeds. As we have seen so far, as the plot unfolds, Bahman commits one unjustified act after another, and as we approach the end of the story the senselessness and brutality of his actions are also magnified.

Once Farāmarz learns of Zāl's imprisonment, he comes to Balkh with a small entourage. There are a series of battles with Bahman's army, who are much greater in number. In the final battle, Farāmarz is captured by Bahman, but he is not killed on the battlefield as one might expect. Instead Bahman puts Farāmarz up on the gallows, where he dies disgraced and humiliated for all to see. As we approach the moment of Farāmarz's execution, there are a series of events that clarify the sympathies of characters such as Jāmāsp and Rohām and other nobles present at Bahman's court. For example, after Farāmarz has been captured, Bahman asks Rohām-e Gudarz (as well as several other heroes) to tie him up. Rohām refuses, reminding Bahman of the great history that the two families (Sistanis and Gudarziān) share:

شد از خشم مرشاه را سرخ چشم — به رهام گودرز گفتش بخشم
که باری نکرد او به تو نیکویی — سزد گر به گفتار من بگروی
چنین داد پاسخ که با من چه کرد — من از وی ندیدم نه گرم ونه سرد
ولیکن به جای نیام بسی — نکویی نمودست با هر کسی
که دژ را چنان بستد از دست دیو — تهمتن به نیروی گیهان خدیو
همان بیژن گیو را او ز چاه — رهاکرد و برداشت سنگ سیاه[109]

From the intensity of his rage, the king's eyes became red, and in such a state of fury, he addressed Rohām-e Gudarz, saying, "He (Farāmarz) has not been good to you, so it is right that you should obey me!" Rohām responded, "He hasn't done anything to me, neither good nor bad. However, my ancestors were the benefactors of his family's good deeds. It was Rostam who closed down the fortress by the might of the Lord of the

109 Ibid. 338.

> Universe, capturing a demon in it. It was Rostam who set Bizhan free by lifting the black stone from the mound of the well."

The other example is when Farāmarz is being captured. Bahman observes that Jāmāsp is weeping quietly. He asks Jāmāsp why he is crying on such an auspicious day. Jāmāsp tells him that it breaks his heart to see Farāmarz in chains. Bahman becomes furious, calling Jāmāsp a stupid, brainless man, and accuses him of treachery:

دلم گفت شاها پر از درد گشت وزین بیوفا اختران سرد گشت
سرآمد فرامرز یل را زمان دریغا بزرگان آن دودمان
بتندی برو بانگ زد شاه زوش بدو گفت کای مرد بی مغز و هوش
تو دیریست تا مهربان ویی شب و روز زین غمان ویی
ترا درد او کارگر شد به دل ولیکن خور پوشی به گل
بترسید فرزانه از خشم اوی وزان خون دل خشك شد چشم اوی[110]

> Jāmāsp said, "My heart is full of sorrow from the disloyalty of the stars. Farāmarz met his end, as did the distinguished members of this lineage." Having lost his temper, Bahman raised his voice and said, "Oh you brainless, unwise man. I should have known that you sympathize with Farāmarz; you spend your days and nights in sorrow for what has befallen him. His pain afflicts your heart, but you are trying to hide it in vain, as one might try to hide the sun by covering it with mud." The sage, frightened by the king's rage, hid his sorrow in his heart and wiped his tears dry.

In both examples, we see clearly that even those who are on Bahman's side, characters like Rohām and Jāmāsp, sympathize with the Sistanis.

The existence of a variety of accounts and, more significantly, the way in which they vary, is characteristic of narrations of contested historical events. The "factual nucleus" of the account remains the same in different versions: Bahman (for some reason) attacked Sistan, conquered the city, plundered it, and killed its ruler (in most accounts it is Farāmarz, but in some it is Rostam) and other people belonging to the ruling house. The consistency of this sequence of events is significant, for had there been wildly different versions

110 Ibid. 335.

of the event – for example, suppose we had a version in which Farāmarz conquered Balkh and killed Bahman – then we no longer could claim the historiocity of events underlying the narration, or at least our task would have become much more difficult. The variations in the accounts arise from their varying sympathies toward the house of Rostam. They do not, in other words, contest the "factual nucleus," but rather offer different interpretations for actions of their agents. As mentioned earlier, in some accounts Bahman is exonerated before committing any crime by the narration's insistence in attributing to him qualities such as justice and an unwavering commitment to keep his promises. In other accounts, crucial details such as the destruction of Rostam's city, the manner in which Farāmarz was put to death, or the imprisonment of Zāl are omitted in order to render Bahman's characterization tolerable enough. There are other accounts, however, that persist in telling the tale of a tyrannical king whose actions resulted in a tragic end for the much loved and celebrated Sistani heroes.

What is the historical event (or events) that inspired the creation of these different narrations? As alluded to before, it is a narration of the historical break between the Surens and the royal Arsacid house. As discussed in chapter 1, the falling out of the two families is documented by Classical sources, and we do have a numismatic hint that there must have been at least one instance of an Arsacid occupation of Sistan. However, as mentioned earlier, the narration can have more than one historical referent, and this indeed seems to be the case for this episode. It also encapsulates, anachronistically, the memory of the execution of the famous Surena of Carrhae at the hands of Orodes II, discussed at length in chapter 1. The account also preserves, as suggested by Shahbazi, yet another event: the Sasanian conquest of Sistan, also mentioned in chapter 1.[111] This is of utmost significance: the Sasanians after all appropriated Bahman as their ancestor and as a genealogical link to the mythological Iranian kings. It is perhaps because of this act of appropriation that we get such a large spectrum of interpretation of Bahman's actions, for he is not a mere mythological figure of little relevance to the political affairs of the times when his story is being told and contested. Instead the reinterpretation of the story offered an opportunity to make a commentary on the legitimacy of the Sasanian dynasty,

111 Shahbazi, *Tamadon-e Sāsāni* 269. Incidentally this is an excellent example of what Shahbazi himself coined as Ctesian method of history, whereby more recent events are projected into remoter times (see the Introduction for the discussion of the Ctesian method). What we have here, however, contains the recent layer, namely the Sasanian invasion of Sistan, but as the term layer indicates, it is deposited on top of various other substrata that also contain historical referents.

regardless of its position vis-a-vis Bahman. It was part of the late-antique discourse on legitimacy of power.

The existence of the Sistani version of events, preserved in the *Bahmannāmeh*, when regarded in this context, is of great importance. Not only does it reverse the characterization of Bahman as a moral, just, and legitimate king, but employing a variety of strategies consistently and indefatigably condemns Bahman. The Sistani propaganda against Bahman is systematic and relevant, and it continues to be virulently spewed, long after Farāmarz's execution. For Bahman's folly is by no means cured with Farāmarz's death: he continues to pursue other members of Rostam's family and engages in many adventures with the chief aim of erasing all traces of the family of Rostam.[112]

5.4 Bahman the Anti-Hero Par Excellence

That a narration such as the *Bahmannāmeh*, which clearly sympathizes with the house of Rostam, should depict Bahman as a villain is, of course, to be expected. But the polemics against Bahman in this narration goes a bit further than one might expect, for there is a concerted effort to depict Bahman as inherently evil. In other words, not only does Bahman act like a villain but he is, as we have seen, a tyrannical king, who commits the sin of breaking his covenant, betraying the confidence of revered figures such as Jāmāsp, and dragging Zāl in an iron cage on an elephant's back from one city to another.

What we have in the Sistani version of the account is an effort to brand Bahman as the quintessential anti-hero. In addition to the aforementioned negative depiction of his character, this is done by invoking the heroic motifs established in the SCE with the effect of stripping Bahman of any claims he might have on heroism/legitimacy.

The first of these heroic motifs invoked in the case of Bahman is the treasure motif. Now, unlike the Sistani heroes who were bound to find their ancestors' treasure bequeathed to them along with words of advice, while on his adventures in India there is no treasure left behind for Bahman. Instead, he learns of the existence of the *dakhmeh* or the tomb of the prominent Sistani heroes of the past, namely Garshāsp, Narimān, Sām and Rostam. This is where some of their considerable family treasures are kept. Bahman, having imprisoned Rostam's daughters Bānu-Goshasp and Zar-Bānu, is in search of the surviving members of the Rostam's family. It is at this juncture that he learns of the existence of

112 See Appendix A, *Bahmannāmeh*, for a summary of its plot.

this tomb and vows not to rest until he has burned it down.[113] So once again, motivated by anger and hatred, he sets out in search of the tomb. On the way to the tomb, like the Sistani heroes who embarked on adventures in India, Bahman comes across dangerous terrain and overcomes the trials posed by hostile environments and peoples, which include exotic islands with strange/supernatural inhabitants.[114] It is while on the way to the tomb of the Sistani heroes that Bahman comes across Āzarborzin, Farāmarz's son. Āzarborzin is deceived and captured by Bahman,[115] who moves across India with the retinue of captive Sistani heroes: Bānu-Goshasp, Zar-Bānu, Āzarborzin, and Zāl, with Zāl in his iron cage in a rather obscene display of his victory.

Having arrived at the tomb, Bahman's intention is to destroy this last bastion of the glory of Rostam's house. But then Bahman has a peculiar dream. He dreams of Fereidun, Siāvush, and Kay Khosrow. These three figures are significant because they are men of impeccable characters, and each is known, in his own way, for his particularly exceptional traits. Exuding joy and peace, the trio is seated in a magnificent garden, carrying goblets of wine and having the most pleasant time. Bahman, wanting to know the secret to their happiness, asks them where they are and how they ended up there. They are, of course, in heaven. Bahman then states his wish to join them. Fereidun, Siāvush and Kay Khosrow, however, tell Bahman that there is no place in heaven for him. After all, he is an unjust wrongdoer whose intention is to burn down the corpses of Sistani heroes, the very same ones who had served the three Iranian kings:

به خواب اندرون دیدم امشب سه شاه — فریدون و کیخسرو نیکخواه
سه دیگر سیاوخش کاوس کی — گرفته یکایك همه جام می
خرامان و با یکدگر داده دست — همه شادمان از می لعل مست
چو دیدم به شادی ازیشان نشان — بپرسیدم و گفتم ای سرکشان
کجا رفت خواهید هر سه بهم — چنین شادمانه ابی درد و غم

113 *Bahmannāmeh* 409:

مگر بینم آن دخمه را سوخته — ازیشان یکی آتش افروخته
نیاسایم و کم خورم نان و آب — نیاید به دیده درم نیز خواب

Bahman speaking: "Unless I see that tomb burned to the ground and their corpses consumed by fire, I shall not rest or sleep a wink, and I shall eat and drink but a little."

114 Ibid. 409–21.

115 Ibid. 413–16.

مرا هر سه گفتند سوی بهشت که یزدان زخوبی وخوشی سرشت
زبان را به لابه بیاراستم ازیشان همی‌آرزو ساختم
که من با شما هر سه آیم یکی ببینم بهشت برین اندکی
مرا هر سه گفتند کای تیره رای به مینو ستمکاره را نیست جای
تو نام نکو خواهی اندوختن به آتش تنی چند را سوختن
که پیوسته بودند در پیش ما شکسته سپاه بداندیش ما
سیاوش به پاسخ مرا سرد کرد یکی چوب زد برسرم درد کرد[116]

> Tonight, I dreamed of three kings: Fereidun, Kay Khosrow the Benevolent, and Siāvush. They were all carrying goblets of wine and, drunk from the ruby wine, and holding hands, I saw them very happy. When I saw them in the state of such happiness, I addressed them thus: "Oh dignified ones! What is this place that you find yourselves in so merrily, devoid of pain and suffering?" The three of them answered, "We are in heaven, a place founded with goodness and pleasure." I started beseeching them, telling them of my wish to join the three of them so that I might also experience the joys of heaven. They, however, said, "Oh unwise one! There is no room in heaven for evildoers. Do you think you are going to earn yourself a good reputation by burning down the corpses of those who were at our service? Those who faced our enemies and broke their ranks?" Then Siāvush told me some other unfriendly words, and even hit me hard on my head and it hurt!

As discussed in chapter 3, Rostam was put in charge of Bahman's upbringing after Esfandiyār's death and in effect it was Rostam who raised Bahman. The implications couldn't be more obvious: some of the best (morally speaking, that is) characters of the corpus of Iranian National History rebuke Bahman for his past actions and what he is about to do, telling him that unlike them, he is an evildoer who will never find his way to paradise. Their sympathies obviously lie with the Sistani heroes Garshāsp, Sām, Narimān and Rostam who served them.

This has a great impact on Bahman: he decides not to burn down the tomb but to visit it instead. Little does he know that more condemnation awaits him

116 Ibid. 422–3.

there. As it turns out, Bahman's advent to the tomb has also been foretold, very much like the arrival of Farāmarz in various places discussed above. One by one, Bahman reads the words of advice left especially for him by Garshāsp, Sām, and Narimān. When he reaches Rostam, with whom he shared a special bond,[117] he finds the harshest condemnation:

من آگاه بودم ز کردار تو ز خودکامی و تیز بازار تو
فراموش گشته ترا رنج من به تاراج داده همه گنج من
پس از من مرا خانه کرده خراب به خون ریختن داده دل را شتاب
پسر کشته و باب کرده به بند رسانیده بر کودکان بر گزند
نه پاداش من بود کردار تو بپیچید روان گنهکار تو
گر از دسترنجم نکردی تو یاد ز رنجی که بردم ترا یاد باد
از آن پس که پرورده‌مت بر کنار بسی رنج دیدم من از روزگار

. . .

ز پند و زاندرز آن (اسفندیار) نامور همی داشتم من ترا چون پسر
هنرها و مردیت آموختم به دیدار تو روی افروختم
نشاندمت بر تخت شاهنشهی نهادمت بر سر کلاه مهی
کمر بستمت پیش چون بنده وار که بخشی به من خون اسفندیار
چو من زنده بودم به گیتی به جای به دل کینه جستن نیامدت رای
پس از مرگ من کینه افروختی پسر کشتی و کاخ من سوختی
بجای نکویی کسی بد نکرد تو کردی ایا شاه آزاده مرد[118]

> Rostam addressing Bahman: "I had known all along what you will do. I also was aware of your unjust tyrannical character and extreme tem-

117 As discussed in chapter 3, Rostam was put in charge of Bahman's upbringing after Esfandiyār's death and in effect it was Rostam who raised Bahman.

118 *Bahmannāmeh* 431–3.

> per. You have wasted all I have done for you! You have plundered all my treasures! After my departure from the world you ruined my house. Your heart is set on spilling blood. You killed my son, took my father captive. You didn't even spare children from harm. This was no way to repay me, and for this, your sinful soul shall suffer much. You didn't even remember all I had done for you, the fact that it was *I* who raised you . . . Following the advice of the well-reputed one (Esfandiyār), I raised you as my own son. I taught you *honar* [skills required of a hero/warrior], manliness. My heart rejoiced at your sight. It was me who put you on the throne and crowned you. I wore the belt of servitude in your presence, so that you might forgive me for killing Esfandiyār. When I was alive, you didn't dare to come and seek vengeance. You waited until I was dead, and then fanned the flames of your revenge. You came and slaughtered my son, burned down my palace. No one has repaid goodness with evil deeds as you have done!"

Rostam's long tirade in condemning Bahman is not to be taken lightly, for not only is it poignantly and efficaciously expressed but it comes from the greatest hero, Rostam, himself.

Let us consider the invocation of the treasure motif step by step. First, the "treasure" in question has not been left behind for Bahman by his ancestors, and it does not link him to the land of India as it does in the case of Sistani heroes. Rather, it establishes the connection between the house of Rostam and India as the bodies of the most prominent members of the family are preserved and memorialized in a grand structure that serves as their tomb. Second, Bahman does not have to overcome any menacing or dangerous creatures in order to gain access to the treasures, as is the case of the more recent versions of the motif. Third, amazingly enough his coming to the tomb of the Sistani heroes, where their treasures are buried, has been foretold. It is foretold that Bahman will come to the tomb at some point, but unlike in the case of Farāmarz or Shahriyār, where the prophecy granted their characters a messianic aura, the foretelling here has the opposite effect. The great Sistani heroes, after all, had foreseen Bahman's evil deeds. It would not be going too far to claim that Bahman, as a result of the invocation of this motif, acquires the role of the "anti-messiah" whose arrival is characterized by a period of destruction and death.

The invocation of the motif also provides the opportunity for Bahman to commit the grave sin of breaking his promise once again. At the end of Rostam's *pandnāmeh*, part of which was quoted above, Bahman is given permission

to claim Rostam's treasures under the condition that he repents his sins and reconciles with Rostam's family.[119] In addition to the actual valuables retrieved from the tomb, Bahman also finds twelve treasure maps, or *ganjnāmehs*, that later on lead him to more treasures. But Bahman does not keep his promise of repentance and reconciliation. Although upon return to Sistan he does rebuild the palace of Zāl/Rostam,[120] he continues to keep Āzarborzin and other members of Rostam's family imprisoned. In one instance, he even threatens to execute all the captives. Bahman is far from remorseful for what he has done, and he proudly offers a summary of his deeds:

شهنشاه ایران بدوی کرد روی بدوگفت کای بدرگ تیره خوی
چه داری توازخنجرمن نشان بگاند آن نامور سرکشان
زواره فرامرز وسام سوار چگونه سرآوردشان روزگار
زکاخ تو چون آتش افروختم مرین شهر پرمایه را سوختم

. . . .

ازآن دخمه خرم آراسته چگونه بیاوردم این خواسته
ترا چون همی کشت خواهم به کین زخونت کنم ارغوان این زمین[121]

> The Iranian king, Bahman, turned to Zāl and said: "Oh you lowly-born unwise man! You haven't seen the worst of my dagger yet. Where are those exulted heroes (of your race)? Where are Zavāreh, Farāmarz and Sām? How did they meet their end? I burned down you palace, reduced to ruins this flourishing, beautiful city of yours. I took away much wealth from that beautifully adorned tomb. Now, I shall kill you in revenge. I shall taint the earth with the rich, deep red mark your spilled blood will leave behind!"

Though Bahman stops short of killing Zāl, his animosity towards the Sistani heroes continues to grow. He keeps Farāmarz's son Āzarborzin, who on the account of his youth and valor is a threat to him, in captivity for a long time after his return to Sistan. As a matter of fact, the majority of accounts narrated

119 *Bahmannāmeh* 434–5.
120 Ibid. 440.
121 Ibid. 444–5.

in the 4th part of the *Bahmannāmeh*[122] are devoted to the description of the various skirmishes and battles between Bahman and Āzarborzin. As the narration approaches its end, however, we learn that Bahman and Āzarborzin reconcile rather reluctantly, and Bahman grants Āzarborzin the title of *jahān-pahlavān* as well as the province of Sistan as a vassalage.[123] As far as the Sistani view of the events is concerned, a reconciliation and the recapture of political power, albeit as a vassal of the Iranian throne, is necessary, for as we have seen there is a claim that the house of Rostam reigned over Sistan continuously (see Chapter 1) until the arrival of the Arab armies. The reconciliation, however, is not the end of the account's polemics against Bahman.

To seal his image as an anti-hero yet another heroic motif is invoked at the very end of Bahman's life. Bahman, imagining himself in constant competition with members of Rostam's family, attempts to slay a dragon. This time, remembering the success of Garshāsp and Farāmarz in slaying dragons in the past[124] and the most recent dragon slaying of Āzarborzin in province of Pars,[125] he announces his intention to slay a dragon against the advice of his courtiers. What follows is a rather extraordinary scene: Bahman quickly succumbs to the dragon, and as Bahman vanishes into the dragon's mouth, as though in slow motion, he pleads with Āzarborzin for help. Āzarborzin, however, stands there motionless and silent and with the passing of each moment, Bahman slowly disappears into the beast's mouth all the while begging for help. When all but his head has been swallowed, Bahman addresses Āzarborzin once more, this time to reiterate his wish that his daughter/wife Homāy should assume the throne after him.[126]

The effectively constructed image of Bahman as an anti-hero survives well into the post-Sasanian period. It appears in various places other than the SCE. For instance, Bahman was remembered up until the Qajar period by the inhabitants of Sistan for his destruction of the region.[127] We have evidence that the Sistani portrayal of Bahman as an anti-hero survived in the popular oral literature. In the Qajar period scroll of the *naqqāls* mentioned earlier, Bahman is swallowed by a dragon.[128] In Ṭarsusi's *Dārābnāmeh* also, this is how Bahman

122 Ibid. 439–604.
123 Ibid. 585–91.
124 Ibid. 600.
125 For the complete episode, see ibid. 585–91.
126 Ibid. 600–1.
127 *Joghrāfiyā-ye Nimruz* 4; 56; 88.
128 *Haft Lashkar* 569.

meets his end.[129] There, in one instance that I am aware of, Bahman's unfortunate encounter with the dragon has become the subject of an illustration.[130] In the recently published *ṭumār* of *naqqāls* from the Safavid period,[131] Bahman reveals his evil nature by slaying prophets. This was noticed as a peculiar feature of the text by its editor, Sajjad Aydinlou. Apparently, Bahman's prophet slaying is not unique to the Safavid *ṭumār* for it has survived in oral stories recorded in the 1970s.[132] Neither Aydinlou nor Mary Allen Page, who recorded the story, offer plausible explanations for why Bahman would be depicted as slaying venerated figures such as Abrahamic prophets. The reason, however, is rather clear. Bahman's "prophet slaying" is merely a further elaboration of him being the anti-hero. In the *ṭumār* recorded by Page, there is twist in the description of how Bahman himself is killed. He is about to be swallowed by the dragon when Āzarborzin stabs the dragon, killing Bahman and the beast.[133] As a matter of fact, this version of Bahman's end appears in the collection of the oral stories which Anjavi Shirazi collected some forty years ago and published under the title of *Ferdowsināmeh*.[134] So all three version of Bahman's end in the folktales are identical to the one Page recorded: Bahman is killed by Āzarborzin's spear as he is in the dragon's mouth.[135] Interestingly enough, in two of the three versions, at the very end Āzarborzin boasts about his efficiency as he has killed "two enemies with one blade." Bahman's killing is justified as an act of revenge for what he did to his father Farāmarz, and the dragon is killed because he "killed" Bahman.[136]

The image of Bahman as the anti-hero or the villain looms large in the popular culture, but obviously, as apparent from the existence of the variety of com-

129 Ṭarsusi, *Dārābnāmeh* 1: 8–9.

130 The image in question appears in the British Library manuscript, *Dārābnāmeh* MS OR 4615.

131 Siāhpush, *Ṭumār-e Naqqāli-e Shāhnāmeh*.

132 Page, Storytelling in Iran 195–215.

133 Ibid. 203.

134 Shirazi, *Ferdowsināmeh*.

135 Ibid. 2: 217220.

136 Ibid. 2: 218:

دو دشمن به یك تیغ كردم تباه یكی اژدها ودگر پادشاه
كه اژدر به خون شهنشاه نو شهنشه به خون فرامرزگو

Translation

Two enemies I destroyed with a single blow: first the dragon and then the king
The dragon, I killed to avenge the king's blood; the king because he had spilled the blood of the hero Farāmarz.

mentaries on his character (included in Appendix B), we have evidence that in some accounts he is depicted as the perfect king, the epitome of justice.[137]

The poignantly constructed and hence effective polemics against Bahman as articulated by the stories sympathetic to the house of Rostam obviously are formulated in the aftermath of a historical conflict between the house of Rostam and the royal house. Hence, one layer of Bahman's character as the anti-hero represents the branch of the Arsacid family that replaced the line with whom the Surens were in close relationship and alliance. Additionally, since the Sasanians traced their genealogy to Bahman, his characterization as an anti-hero also reflects the challenges posed to their claims of legitimacy.

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137 For praise of Bahman, see Fondoq, *Tārikh-e Bayhaq* 39:

بهمن الملك پادشاهی بود بزرگ واو پسر اسفندیار بود وصد ودوازه سال نوبت ملك او بود بر بسیط زمین واو پادشاه اعظم بود وذات اوصحیفه سیاست وفهرس سخاوت بود، بروح نسیم اوارواح معطر بود بفوح شمیم عرف اوآثار اسلاف اوازملوك معنبر

Bahman was a great king. He was Esfandiyār's son, and he reigned over a vast territory for 120 years. He was one of the greatest kings. Woven into his very essence were the notions of justice (as it pertains to running a kingdom) and generosity. His presence was like a breeze. When this breeze touched a soul on its way, the soul would exude fragrance. His legacy is like a magnificent scent, and he himself was a descendant of great kings.

Epilogue

The present study is a contribution to understanding how Iranians conceived of their past from antiquity well into the early Modern period. In this capacity, the work attempts to dicuss the historiographical worth of the unique conceptualization of the past found in the plethora of stories that constitute the corpus of the Iranian epics. In narrating the past or histories one of the major functions of the stories in question is to legitimize political power. As a matter of fact, the discourse of legitimacy has been shaped, expressed and contested within the confines of this genre for much of Iran's long history. The vigor and at time ferociousness of the discourse of legitimacy renders the genre a polemical battleground for temporal as well as sacred right to rule. It comes as no surprise then that after the fall of the Sasanian empire, even after the emergence of new genres of historiography such as universal histories, local histories, and dynastic histories, this particular conception of the past still remained relevant and was very much utilized as a model. Hence, throughout the pre-Modern period dynasty after dynasty comissioned histories in which their rise to power was narrated as a continuum of Iran's National History. This became more of an exigency since most of these dynasties were not only of non-Iranian origin but had for the most part descended from "Turān." Therefore, throughout the pre-modern period, although different models of historiography were available to historians and was employed by them, histories continued to be written within the generic mold of this corpus of literature. The longevity of the genre as the medium for the discourse of legitimacy bespeaks the strength of its formal and conceptual framework as well its pervasiveness in society.

But the genre had a double life. After all, the histories of its kings and the adventures of its many were told and retold in gatherings in the bazaars, coffee-houses and other humble abodes. The oral recitation of the stories belonging to the corpus was equally durable.

As apparent from the discussion in the present work, the various versions of Iran's National History were patronized by various centers/contenders for political power. The SCE is one of the most extensive cycles that helped shape the corpus of Iranian epics. Reflecting the historical memory of a specific period in Iran's history, it preserves within its stories traces and clues as to how the stories underwent change as a result of challenges posed to them by rival discourses. It is the rivalry over political and religious legitimacy that has left us with the baffling depiction of the Kayānid king Bahman as the quintessential anti-hero, for example.

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The SCE, as I hope to have shown, when viewed in its entirety and examined in the context of the National History, contains criticism of its own discourse from within, in addition to the challenges posed from the outside. Hence the stories of the downtrodden heroes questions the genre's seemingly justified and accepted discourse.

Much more can be said when it comes to the process of the formation of the Iranian epics. The traces of the different patrons, different voices and different narrations of the past are discernible in the reincarnation of the genre in the post-Sasanian period, and the current study has attempted to identify one of the major strands of its fabric.

Even when it comes to the Sistani Cycle, much more could be said, but the present study is burdened with being the first to introduce the Cycle to scholarship, as well as the examination of the epic genre as a kind of historiography. As this study nears its end, one realizes there is so much still unexplored and that some of my own questions remain unanswered. Nevertheless, I hope to have taken a small step in the direction of considering Iran's rich corpora of historiography as indispensable sources for the study of its past.

Appendix A

The Sistani Cycle of Epics: Stories and Their Manuscripts

Since most of the stories that constitute the SCE are unknown to those otherwise familiar with Persian medieval literature, here I will introduce stories from the Cycle that I have discussed extensively throughout chapters 2–5. I will do so by providing a summary of their plots as well as any other information that might be available about their authorship. I have not included some of the stories such as the *Sāmnāmeh* and *Narimānāmeh* here because they are not discussed in the book for reasons that I have given in the beginning of chapter 2.

It is also worth mentioning that since I have not engaged with matters such as poetic style, use of imagery or philology, and have been mainly preoccupied with the stories' main plot, thematic development, and usage of certain recurrent motifs, I have not made extensive use of the different versions of the manuscripts. The reason for my reliance on one version of the story is simple. Although I have examined many of the extant manuscripts of the Sistani stories, I have not come across wildly different versions of the story. Certainly one finds longer, more complete versions of a story, as is the case for *Farāmarznāmeh* for instance, but this means that the difference between the two manuscripts, one containing the long version and the other the short, is that the longer version simply contains more episodes of Farāmarz's adventures. The narration of those episodes that appear in both the longer and the shorter version are nearly identical. I think this sufficiently justifies my usage of one version of the text and my avoidance of a discussion of the manuscript tradition of the various stories. Added to this is the fact that this is the first study to consider the SCE as a whole and to do so through the study of this genre as historiography. Therefore, given the fact that the variations are not only insignificant but are of little consequence for the current study, and in order to avoid overwhelming the reader with a tediously long work, I have omitted the discussion of the stories' manuscript tradition. The versions of the stories which I have made use of are indicated in the beginning of the study.

Rostam Stories not Included in the Shāhnāmeh

The stories of Rostam, the most celebrated Sistani hero, are of course considered part of the SCE. Most of the extant Rostam stories are the ones preserved in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*. Since these stories are well-known and subject to much research, I do not think it is necessary to provide their synopses. The two major episodes, not included in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, are the stories of Babr-e Bayān and Kok-e Kuhzād, and both have been summarized in chapter 3 (3.1.1 and 3.1.2 respectively). In addition to the

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summary, one finds references to their text(s) and manuscripts in the aforementioned sections. There are several stories involving Rostam in the *Borzunāmeh*, the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, and most notably the *Shahriyārnāmeh*. I have relied on these episodes heavily in chapters 4 and 5.

Garshāspnāmeh

The *Garshāspnāmeh* is the best-known Sistani story. Versified shortly after Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, the *Garshāspnāmeh* narrates the adventures of the founder of Sistan and its first king-hero, who is also the ancestor of all great Sistani heroes who follow. The extant *Garshāspnāmeh* has been versified by the court poet, 'Asadi Ṭusi (d. 1072/3 CE), and dedicated to the local ruler of Nakhjavān, a certain Abu Dolāf. According to 'Asadi Ṭusi, the work is based on ancient written sources, and because Ferdowsi neglected to include the account of Garshāsp's adventures in the *Shāhnāmeh*, the author decided to prove his capabilities as a poet to his patron by versifying the ancient tale.

The *Garshāspnāmeh* was the first epic poem aside from the *Shāhnāmeh* to be regarded worthy of being edited. There are several reasons why it was regarded valuable. The first reason was that the *Garshāspnāmeh* was written only a few years after the *Shāhnāmeh*, making it older and hence more "authentic." The second reason is that its author is known, and as mentioned above this lends credibility to the text itself.

The first and only edition of the text of *Garshāspnāmeh* appeared in 1934, and it has been reprinted many times.[1] The printed edition is based on the manuscripts mentioned in Safa's *Ḥemāseh Sarāiy dar Irān*. The problem with this and all other edited versions of the SCE is that the editors did not consult any manuscripts other than those mentioned by Safa. The edition does not consult many other manuscripts including the oldest one;[2] the variations of different versions are not reflected consistently, and most importantly the editor has excluded stories that are not included in the older manuscripts because, according to him, they are not part of "the authentic *Garshāspnāmeh*."[3] In this study, I have relied solely on the edited version of the *Garshāspnāmeh*, despite the fact that I have collected two manuscripts of the work not included in the edited version. A brief examination of the mauscripts collected from the Khuda Bakhsh Library revealed what is generally true of the manuscript tradition of the SCE epics, namely that there seem to be very little variation. The more recent manuscripts need to be examined for the existence of episodes not found in the older manuscripts of the *Garshāspnāmeh* for interpolated material. Related to the

1 *Garshāspnāmeh*.

2 For more on the oldest manuscript of the *Garshāspnāmeh*, see Omidsalar, Editing the *Garshāspnāma* 403–409.

3 *Garshāspnāmeh* 21.

story of Garshāsp is the account of the adventures of Narimān. Safa mentions that no account of his adventures has survived and therefore assumes that such an account never existed. This, however, is not true, as I have found a unique and uncatalogued manuscript entitled *Narimānnāmeh* containing the stories of Narimān's adventures.

The *Garshāspnāmeh* contains the adventure of the first Sistani hero, who has also been identified as the Avestan hero Kərəsāspa. 'Asadi's story begins with Garshāsp's ancestors. In the first part of the poem one finds the romance of Jamshid, Iran's deposed king, with the unnamed daughter of Kurang, the king of Zābolestān. Tur, the ancestor of the Sistani heroes, is born out this romance. Having achieved the goal of connecting the Sistani heroes to the Iranian royalty, the story goes on naming several generations of Tur's descendants who followed him as kings of Zābolestān until we reach Garshāsp.

Garshāsp is born during the reign of Zaḥḥāk. As Iran's king, Zaḥḥāk sends Garshāsp on his first heroic mission, which involves a journey to India and the slaying of a dragon. In the meantime a certain Indian king by the name Bahu has renounced his loyalty to Zaḥḥāk and overthrown his relative the Mahrāj. Garshāsp engages in several battles with Bahu and restores the power to Mahrāj. Then, he travels across India, witnessing many marvelous landscapes and their strange inhabitants. Upon his return he finds out that the king of Kābolestān has invaded Zābolestān, defeating his father Atharṭ. Garshāsp comes to his father's rescue and kills the king of Kābolestān and restores his father to the throne. At this time he builds a city in the delta of River Hilmand and names is Sistan. Next, he goes to the west and visits Qayravān, where he witnesses wondrous islands and their people. When he returns to Zābolestān, his father dies and he becomes the king of Zābolestān, the newly founded Sistan. At this time Zaḥḥāk is removed from the throne and Fereidun becomes the king of Iran. Garshāsp declares his allegiance to Fereidun, and the latter sends him on a mission to Turān and China, where he fights and defeats China's king. Accompanying him on these adventures is his nephew Narimān, Sām's father and Rostam's great-grandfather. He goes to the west, to Tanger one more time where he kills another dragon. He returns home and dies and Narimān takes his place, both as the king of Zābolestān/Sistan and as the *jahān-pahlavān*[4] of Iran.

Bahmannāmeh

Next to the *Garshāspnāmeh*, the *Bahmannāmeh* is the other Sistani epic that has received some attention from scholarship. Like the *Garshāspnāmeh*, the author of the verse *Bahmannāmeh* is known, and it seems to have been composed in the late 11th/early 12th century CE by Irānshāh b. Abi Al-Kheyr. The first and only edited version

4 For a discussion of the office/title of *jahān-pahlavān*, see chapter 2.

of the work appeared in 1991 and is based on four manuscripts. There are many more manuscripts of the *Bahmannāmeh* that have not been consulted in this edition, but for the purposes of our study I have relied solely on the edited version.

The hero of the *Bahmannāmeh* is supposed to be the Iranian king Bahman, son of Esfandiyār. Out of the four major parts of the work, however, only in one is Bahman the hero. It is only in the first section of the work that his actions could be identified as heroic: he goes on adventures in Kashmir and marries Katāyun, the daughter of the king of Kashmir who betrays him by having an illicit sexual relationship with her servant Lo'Lo'. Together Katāyun and Lo'Lo' conspire to kill Bahman, but their attempt fails. Later Bahman undertakes other adventures that take him to Egypt, and there he marries the daughter of the king of Egypt. In this part of the work, the Sistani heroes do not play important roles and are absent from the story for the most part.

The next three sections of the *Bahmannāmeh* are devoted to the story of Bahman's conflict with Rostam's descendants. In the second part of the poem Bahman attacks Sistan, and there follows a series of seemingly endless battles. Bahman is depicted as an excessively vengeful and compulsively irrational character, whose actions are not justified. In this section of the work, the heroes of the poem are Farāmarz, Bānu-Goshasp, and Farāmarz's son Āzarborzin.[5] In the second part of the work, after the description of four long battles that take decades to fight, Bahman kills Farāmarz and imprisons Zāl, while the other Sistani heroes flee to India. In the third part of the poem, Bahman follows Farāmarz's sisters Bānu-Goshasp and Zar-Bānu to India, captures them, and brings them back to Iran. In the fourth part, Bahman returns to India and attempts to reconcile with Rostam's family by setting Zāl, Bānu-Goshasp, and Zar-Bānu free and offering the office of *jahān-pahlavān* to Āzarborzin. At this time, a dragon has appeared whom no one can defeat, and Bahman himself attempts to slay the dragon and is killed in the process.

Farāmarznāmeh

The extant portion of the *Farāmarznāmeh* is surely a mere fraction of the stories of this Sistani hero that circulated in post-Sasanian Iran. The most complete version of the *Farāmarznāmeh* is a collection of Farāmarz stories put together by Rostam-e Bahrām, who was a contemporary of Mozaffar al-Din Shāh (r. 1896–1907). This hand-written version of the *Farāmarznāmeh* was lithographed and published in Bombay some time

5 The last three sections of *Bahmannāmeh's* plot are included in the discussion of third and fourth sections of chapter 5 (sections 5.3 and 5.4).

at the turn of the century.[6] There are essentially four parts to Rostam-e Bahrām's compilation: first, we have the story of Rostam's first heroic feat of fighting and slaying the dragon Babr-e Bayān, which ended in him marrying the daughter of India's king and conceiving Farāmarz; second, there is the story of the exploits of Bānu-Goshasp and Farāmarz, where Farāmarz is cast in a secondary role. This part constitutes the bulk of *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*; third, we have Farāmarz's adventures that mainly take place in India. It is this third part that has generally been recognized as the "authentic" *Farāmarznāmeh*; fourth, we have more of Farāmarz's adventures in India and his end at the hands of Bahman. There is no doubt that these four parts, put together in the Bombay lithograph version, came from different manuscripts (or different parts of a heavily interpolated *Shāhnāmeh* manuscript). There are no apparent connections, either chronological or in terms of plot between the four aforementioned parts, and Rostam-e Bahrām himself mentions that his sources for the book were four manuscripts that he found in India and Iran.[7]

The only edited version of the *Farāmarznāmeh* contains the third section of the Bombay Lithograph.[8] Although the editor of the work is aware of the existence of the Bombay Lithograph, he dismisses the other stories included in it as inauthentic. The bias against the other versions of the *Farāmarznāmeh* has been set by Khaleghi-Motlagh, who claims that because the third section of the *Farāmarznāmeh* is older, the other stories cannot be trusted as originally having belonged to the work.[9] Therefore, in this case, the editor chooses not to include stories that are not in the original manuscript tradition of the *Farāmarznāmeh*. In one sense Khaleghi-Motlagh is right: parts 1, 2, and 4 of the Bombay lithograph do not seem to have been part of the same *Farāmarznāmeh* manuscript. However, there is no reason to assume that the other Farāmarz stories are any less authentic just because they were not included in the older *Farāmarznāmehs*. Given the abundance of Farāmarz stories in medieval times, one should not be surprised when other Farāmarz stories make their way into other manuscripts. In the absence of a continuous and well-documented manuscript tradition for any of these stories, it is difficult, if not impossible, to date the stories

6 A copy of the Bombay lithograph, which I have referred to throughout the work as *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*), has recently been published in Iran, making it available in print for the first time since its original publication. Unfortunately, the "editor" has not given any credit to the Bombay Lithograph. Incidentally, she has published recent editions of other Sistani stories without any reference to the previously published editions. See Anonymous, *Farāmarznāmeh*.

7 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*b*) 453.

8 *Farāmarznāmeh* (*a*).

9 Khaleghi-Motlagh, Farāmarznāma.

and pass judgments about their authenticity. In my search for the manuscripts of the *Farāmarznāmeh* I have comes across some manuscripts that contain the Bombay lithograph's third part and therefore have decided to rely on the lithograph for the most part. In some instances I use the edited version of the text, which essentially is the third part of the lithograph, but I do so because for most readers the edited version is more accessible and easier to read. It is important to note that there are many other stories involving Farāmarz that have been included in various manuscript traditions, such as that of the *Bahmannāmeh*, the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* or the *Shahriyārnāmeh*.

In the first part of the collected stories preserved in the Bombay lithograph we find the episode involving Rostam's first adventure with Babr-e Bayān. The story begins with the description of a feast at Kay Qobād's court at which many heroes are present. A messenger arrives, bearing the news that a dragon has appeared in India causing much menace to the populace. Since the king of India is Kay Qobād's vassal and is under his protection, he asks Zāl, the *jahān-pahlavān*, to fight the dragon. But Rostam decides that his father is not up to the task, and in spite of his father's strong disapproval, he sets out to India in disguise. Zāl and other Iranian heroes encounter the dragon but are unable to defeat him. At this time, Rostam devises a trick and kills the dragon. He makes armor from the impenetrable skin of Babr-e Bayān. As a reward for his great achievement, India's king offers his daughter to him in marriage. He spends one night with her, and Farāmarz is conceived. The next day Rostam returns to Sistan.

The second part in the collection of the Farāmarz stories in the Bombay lithograph corresponds to the first part of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, the synopsis of which is given below (see *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*). The third part of the collection of stories is the text of the *Farāmarznāmeh*. Like the Babr-e Bayān episode, this story begins with the description of a courtly feast. A messenger from Nushād, the king of India, arrives at the court, informing those present that there are a number of problems in India: a number of vicious animals, demons, and a dragon have appeared in several places terrorizing the population; additionally, Kayd, a vassal king, has rebelled against Nushād and refuses to pay tribute to him. Farāmarz then sets out to India, and he slays the dragon, the vicious wolf, and clears an area infested with rhinoceroses. Accompanying him on all these exploits is his nephew Bizhan. After he has passed all these hurdles, he fights a number of battles with the mutinous king Kayd. During the course of the story of Farāmarz's battles against Kayd, Farāmarz undergoes a series of trials. Eventually Kayd, realizing Farāmarz's superiority as a warrior, agrees to peace, and Farāmarz grants him amnesty. This story ends with Farāmarz's religious campaign against the idol-worshipers of India, during which he destroys many temples and idols.

The fourth part of the collection also begins with a court scene. This time the heroes find themselves at the court of Kay Khosrow, who informs Rostam and Farāmarz that the people of the part of Zābolestān that borders Sind and China have refused to pay their tribute to the Iranians and have sworn allegiance to the Turānians. Farāmarz

wages war against them and defeats them along with the Turānian heroes who have come to their aid. Next, Farāmarz sets out to India where a king who was formerly paying tribute to the Iranian king has refused to continue to do so. What follows is a long account of Farāmarz's battles with this king, whose name is Rāy (i.e. Rāj). During the course of these battles Rostam joins him in India on Zāl's advice. But when Rostam arrives in India, Farāmarz has already captured Ray. Farāmarz and Rostam take Rāy to Kay Khosrow's court, where Farāmarz intercedes on his behalf, asking Kay Khosrow to return his kingdom to him. Farāmarz then returns to India to deal with yet another rebellious Indian king. What follows is a break in the narrative, and here a new story begins. This time we learn about another one of Farāmarz's adventures in India, which mainly consist of his travels in marvelous islands where he witnesses many strange landscapes, people, and animals. It is during the course of these adventures that he meets with a Brahmin (a wise man), falls in love with a local king's daughter and marries her, and fights and kills yet another dragon. It is sometime during his adventures in India when he receives a letter from Zāl informing him that the Iranian king Bahman has besieged Sistan and asks Farāmarz to return to Sistan at once. Next we have a description of Farāmarz's battles against Bahman. This part seems like a synopsis of Bahman's battles with Farāmarz as they appear in the *Bahmannāmeh*. At the end of this story, Farāmarz is killed by Bahman.

Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh

The *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* recounts the exploits of Bānu-Goshasp, Rostam's daughter. Like the *Farāmarznāmeh*, however, what is included in the manuscripts of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* is only a fraction of stories, in which Bānu-Goshasp was the protagonist. The *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* was recently edited and published; however, like the *Farāmarznāmeh*, the edited version of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* does not include any stories related to Bānu-Goshasp, which are not part of the oldest manuscript of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*.[10] Not only are these stories, which appear in the *Bahmannāmeh*, the *Farāmarznāmeh*, and the *Shahriyārnāmeh*, not included in the edited version of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, but there is no mention of them in the editor's preface. As far as the text of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* is concerned, I will rely on the edited version. I will discuss other episodes, not included in the edited version of the work, and give reference to where they appear.

What is included in the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* can be seen as two distinct stories, although the editor does not mention this distinction. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are three different story lines and two different beginnings that, judging by their

10 *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*.

style, could have been composed by more than one author. The first story line begins with Bānu-Goshasp and her brother Farāmarz's adventures in Turān. They have gone there against Zāl's advice, and Rostam decides to teach them a lesson by fighting them in disguise, but they turn the tables on their father and defeat Rostam and then return to Sistan. Bānu-Goshasp and Farāmarz return to Turān, this time with their father's permission. There they meet Pirān (the wise *vazir* of the Turānian king Afrāsiyāb) and Shideh the son of Afrāsiyāb. Taking Pirān's advice into consideration, they decide that their time is better spent feasting with the Turānians rather than fighting them. During a feast, Bānu-Goshasp removes her armor at the request of the Turānians and Shideh falls in love with her. Shideh asks Pirān for his advice, and he is told that he should forget about a marriage because the Iranians and Turānians are archenemies. But Shideh is persistent in his pursuit of Bānu-Goshasp, and a Turānian hero (who is later revealed to be Chinese) by the name of Tamartāsh comes to Shideh's help. Tamartāsh promises to bring Bānu-Goshasp by force, but he himself falls in love with her. But instead of reciprocating his feelings, Bānu-Goshasp challenges Tamartāsh to a battle and kills him.

At this point there is an abrupt shift in the narrative, and the narrator tells us that he is going to tell us a story about Bānu-Goshasp. This is an indication that this part of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* came from a different sources. What follows is a short story of three Indian kings who are in love with Bānu-Goshasp. A test is set up in order to decide which one is deserving of making her his wife; the test consists of trying to remove Bānu-Goshasp from her saddle. All three Indian kings fail at this: one is killed in the process, the other is injured, and the third one escapes.

Next, we have a second beginning to the story. The author of this part tells the reader why he composed the poem, and what follows after that is a section devoted to praising God, Prophet Muhammad, and Ali.[11] Since opening a work in this fashion is formulaic and typical of many medieval texts, there is no doubt that what we have here is a separate story, most likely versified by a different author. The story that follows takes place at the court of Kay Kāvus, where all the heroes are gathered. The heroes are drunk and all boast that they want to marry Bānu-Goshasp. News is sent to Rostam, and he comes from Sistan and sets up a test to identify who among all the heroes is worthy of his daughter: he asks all the 400 suitors to sit on a rug. Then he shakes the rug, and they only person who does not fall off of the rug is Giv. Subsequently, Giv and Bānu-Goshasp get married, and Bizhan and Pashang are born into this marriage.

11 *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* 114.

Borzunāmeh

Borzu is Sohrāb's son and Rostam's grandson. Two different versions of the *Borzunāmeh* are available. The first is based on the manuscripts of the *Borzunāmeh* mentioned by Safa and is the longer version.[12] The second and more recent publication is based on an older manuscript.[13] I have come across numerous *Shāhnāmeh* manuscripts where one finds the story of Borzu.[14] This is one of the stories that had a very prolific manuscript tradition with negligible variations. It is interesting that this is the only story of the SCE that has been consistently interpolated to the text of the *Shāhnāmeh* at the end of Kay Kāvus' reign.[15] I have acquired microfilms of several of these stories and have compared them against the edited versions of the *Borzunāmeh*. The comparison revealed that there are minor variations among the texts, a high percentage of which can be attributed to scribal errors.

Although the editor of *Borzunāmeh*, following Blochet, attributes the versification of the text to a certain ʿAṭāʾi, a 12th century Ghaznavid court poet,[16] there are indications that the story of Borzu was versified by more than one authors. According to the 13th century author ʿAwfi the poem is ascribed to three different authors: Nakuk, Amid-e ʿAṭa, and ʿAṭāʾi-e Rāzi.[17] Because of the consistency of the story found in the manuscript tradition of the *Borzunāmeh*, however, one must conclude that if there were different versions of the poem in the medieval times only one version has survived. This might explain why, unlike the *Farāmarznāmeh* or the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, the story of Borzu is complete and coherent.

The story begins with Afrāsiyāb's discovery of Borzu as he is escaping from Rostam and Bizhan. Borzu, Sohrāb's son, has been brought up as a farmer, and he is ignorant of his father's identity. Afrāsiyāb realizes that he has the potential to be a great warrior and recruits him in his army. Then, he sends him to fight Rostam, and a series of battles between Borzu and Rostam take place. During one of the battles, Rostam captures Borzu and takes him to Sistan, where he is imprisoned in the citadel. Upon learning Borzu's fate, his mother sets out to Sistan with the help of some characters that very

12 *Borzunāmeh*.

13 Kasuj, *Borzunāmeh* (*bakhsh-e kohan*).

14 I am referring to all the post-16th century manuscripts that I have seen in various manuscript collections in India.

15 Many late *Shāhnāmeh* manuscripts include the stories of other Sistani heroes. An example of such manuscripts is the British Library manuscript OR 343.

16 *Borzunāmeh* 8.

17 ʿAwfi, *Matn-e Kāmele Lobab al-Adab* 70.

much resemble the *ʿayyārs* of popular medieval literature.[18] Once she arrives in Sistan, he reveals Borzu's identity to Rostam.

Once his identity is revealed, the story shifts to describe a gathering of the heroes at the court of Zāl/Rostam in Sistan. During this gathering, Ṭus, one of the Iranian heroes notorious for his bad temper and irrational decisions, causes a disturbance at the court by offending some of the heroes. Then, he takes off and falls into the trap of Susan, a female minstrel, who has been sent to Sistan to capture the Iranian heroes. One by one the heroes leave Zāl's court and are captured by Susan, that is, all the heroes except Borzu, Farāmarz, and Rostam, who rescue the others in the end. Next, the heroes face Afrāsiyāb who has come to Sistan with his army, and in the end the Turānian army is defeated. Kay Khosrow, the Iranian king, appoints Borzu to rule over the territories of Ghur and Herat.

Shahriyārnāmeh

Shahriyār is Borzu's son and is born after Borzu's death. The *Shahriyārnāmeh* recounts his adventures, but as we will see, it also includes many episodes revolving around other Sistani heroes. I have relied on the Patna manuscript for Shahriyār's story rather than the incomplete edited version.[19] Unlike the other Sistani stories discussed so far, the incomplete manuscript, which served as the basis for the edited version of the *Shahriyārnāmeh*, displays a major difference from the Patna manuscript. The major difference is that the versification of the story is the work of two different poets. While the story the two respective poets versify remains the same, the verse they produce is entirely different. Once again, as important as this difference might be, it has little bearing on the current study. Therefore, I have chosen to rely on the Patna manuscript, which contains a complete version of the story.

The story begins when Shahriyār leaves Sistan, having been insulted by Sām, Farāmarz's son, who accuses him of being of unknown paternity/ancestry. Farāmarz intervenes but makes matters worse because he takes Sām's side. Shahriyār's mother pleads to Zāl to intervene, but he is afraid to do so and offends Farāmarz in the process. Shahriyār sets out to India, goes to various places, but settles in a place whose king is named Arjang. There he joins Arjang's army in their battle against another Indian king

18 I have discussed *ʿayyārs* briefly in chapter 4.1.

19 The manuscript in question is Khoda Bakhsh Library, Patna, HL-1820, 180(383) folios. Once again, this is the text that I have used in this study, and references to the story by title only refer to this version. For the edited version, see Ghaznavi, *Shahriyārnāmeh*.

by the name of Hitāl. What follows is a series of battles between Arjang and Hitāl and Hitāl's brother Tipāl. Shahriyār is involved in all these battles. Interjected in the story of the battles are episodes of Shahriyār killing demons, wild beasts (such as wild elephants), and sorcerers. Having defeated Hitāl, Shahriyār marries his daughter Farānak. However, this is not the end of the story of the battles between Hitāl and Shahriyār, and this story is picked up once again later.

At this time Lohrāsp writes to Rostam, who this whole time is engaged in battles in "the west," and asks him to return to Iran because the Turānians are about to attack. Initially Zāl advises Rostam against going to Lohrāsp's aid, but later Kay Khosrow appears to Zāl in a dream reminding him that he had sworn allegiance to Lohrāsp. As a result of this dream, he asks Rostam to go to Balkh, the seat of the Iranian king. Rostam, however, never makes it there because there is a new danger, this time a demon in the west. Meanwhile Farāmarz and Bānu-Goshasp have gone to India to help Shahriyār who has been captured by Hitāl. After setting Shahriyār free, Farāmarz pleads with him to return to Sistan, but Shahriyār refuses to do so. Farāmarz returns to Sistan via Kashmir.

At the same time, the Turānian king Arjāsp has sent two great armies to Balkh and Sistan. In Balkh a great army gathers from different corners of the kingdom, and what follows is a description of many battles. Meanwhile Shahriyār arrives in Turān and forges an alliance with Arjāsp and Kāqān and together they attack Lohrāsp, forcing him to take refuge with Zāl in Sistan. Other Iranian heroes join Shahriyār, most notably Ardashir from the Gudarziān family. They are united with the Turānians against Lohrāsp and, recalling Lohrāsp's problematic lineage, attempt to install another Iranian king on the throne. They therefore attempt to force Lohrāsp to abdicate and secretly plot to install his son Goshtāsp, who at this time resides at the "Roman" court. Goshtāsp at first is eager to have his father deposed but fails to gather the support needed from the nobles to do so and therefore remains in Rum. During these battles, which are described in detail, other Sistani heroes such as Bānu-Goshasp, Zavāreh, and Farāmarz are on the Iranian/Lohrāsp's side. Before the story of the battle is over, there are several other narrative strands, such as one concerning the dispatch of Sām, son of Farāmarz, to Māzandarān to put down a rebellion, the story of Rostam in the west and his loss of Rakhsh, among others. The battles between Iran and Turān are finally decided when Rostam returns and faces Shahriyār on the battlefield and persuades him to join the other side. Next, Shahriyār goes on a rescue mission to Māzandarān to set Sām free (Sām has been captured by demons). Finally, Shahriyār returns a victor from Māzandarān. Arjāsp attacks Iran once again but is eventually killed by Farāmarz, and Shahriyār participates in the battles against Arjāsp during this time. Then finally Shahriyār returns to India and kills a rival king and secures his throne. This is where the story of Shahriyār ends.

Jahāngirnāmeh

Jahāngir is Rostam's son, and his story seems to have been of considerable interest because, compared to the *Shahriyārnāmeh*, we have more manuscripts devoted to the narration of this story. Once again comparison of several manuscripts of the story with the edited version reveals minimal variations. Therefore, for my brief discussion of the story (chapter 4.2), I have relied on the edited version.

When interpolated into the *Shāhnāmeh* manuscripts, the story appears right after the story of Rostam and Sohrāb. Faced with the grave consequences of his actions and maddened by grief and despair, Rostam sets out to Māzandarān, wandering aimlessly in hopes that he would find a remedy for his sorrow. There he meets a woman by the name of Delnavā, who eventually gives birth to Jahāngir. But the love story is overshadowed with the description of various heroic feats. It is upon his return from these adventures that he "marries" Delnavā, and Jahāngir is born some time later. Shortly after the birth of Jahāngir, however, Rostam receives the news that the Turānians have attacked Iran and that Kāvus is searching for him desperately. What follows then is a long description of the war between Iran and Turān and the bravery of various famous Iranian warriors. As the battles prolong, both kings send for reinforcements, and this is how Afrāsiyāb recruits Jahāngir. Jahāngir joins the Turānians and prominent Sistani heroes on the battlefield. Hence he proves to be superior in skill to Farāmarz, Zavāreh, Sām, etc. During the course of the battles his identity is revealed. This is when he joins other members of his family in providing service to the Iranian king. Next, Jahāngir displays his skills by defeating various enemies, including sorcerers and demons. But before Jahāngir can either become a contender to power within his own house or earn more victories for the Iranian throne, he dies in an accident as a demon pushes him off of a cliff. This is how the story comes to an end.

Appendix B
Narrations of Bahman's Reign

1 Ḥamza al-Iṣfahāni[1]

كى اردشير وهو بهمن اسفديار بن كشتاسب وكان يسمى الطويل الباع وذلك لبعد مغازيه و يقال انه بلغ فى غزواته الروميه و انه غزا من جانب الجنوب ذابولستان فسبى منها سبيا كثيرا

Kay Ardashir, that is Bahman, Isfandiyār son, who is the son of Goshtāsp. He is called long-armed on the account of the numerous battles he fought. It is said of him that in waging his wars he went as far as Rum, and he also fought wars in the south, in Zābulistān, and there he took a great many captives.

2 Al-Thaʿālibi[2]

لما اتصل بهمن خبر قتل رستم وقتل فرامرز ملك كابل قال قد سبقنى شغاى الى قتل رستم ولكن لا بد لى من قتل فرامرز باسفنديا ذكما قتل هو الكابلى بابيه فسار فى عسكره الى سجستان وخيم بشاطى هيمند و فرامرز اذ ذاك بزابلستان للاستنفار فصار زال الى سرادق بهمن وسجد له و بالغ و ابلغ اتضرع وانتصل والاذكار بالحرمات و ضمان الاموال وأذرى دموع الاستعطاف فامر بهمن بحبسه وتقييده مع الرفق به واقبل فرامرز من زابلستان فى جيش كثيف وناصب بهمن الحرب فركدت بينهما ثلاثه ايام حتى كثرت القتلى والجرحى والاسرى فى الجانبين ولما كان اليوم الرابع و زالت الشمس هبت ريح عاصى فكانت على السجزية والزابلية وضربت وجوههم بالحصى والتراب فحرض بهمن عسكره على القتال وقال قد جآءكم المدد من السمآء فحملوا وجدوا فى تمزيق الصفوف وارو آء علل السيوف فانهزم السجزية والزابلية و بقى فرامرز فى

1 al-Iṣfahāni, *Ta'arikh Sani Mulūk* 24.

2 Al-Thaʿālibi, *Ghurar al-Akhabār* 386–8.

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خواصه يحارب و يكافح حتى احدقت به الايرانية وصرعوه واسروه فأمر بهمن بصلبه و رشقه بالسهام حتى تناثر لحمه وعظمه ودماغه واستولى بهمن على أموال زال و رستم وكنوزهما التى جمعاها فى مدة سبع مائة سنة وحواها كلها وهم بقتل زال وفكلمه بشوتن فيه و نبهه على حقوقه وحرماته و برآءة ساحته وقال قد قتلت فرامرز وادركت به الثأر المنيم فما المعنى فى قتل هذا الشيخ الذى قد خلق عمره وانطوى عيشه ولم يبق منه الا شفافة وحشاشة فوافق كلامه حسن رأى بهمن فيه وتذكره خدمه زال فعفا عنه وامر برده الى منزله والافراج له عن مسكة من ماله وذكر المسعودى المروزى فى مزدوجتة الفارسية انه قتله ولم يبق على احد من ذويه

When the news reached Bahman that Rostam had been killed and that Farāmarz had killed the king of Kabul, he said, "Shaghai surpassed me (in accomplishing the task of killing Rostam). I must, however, kill Farāmarz to avenge Isfandyiār, the same way he killed the king of Kabul in revenge of his father. So he set out with his army to go to Sistan and somewhere on the banks of Hilmand he pitched his tents. At this time, however, Farāmarz was gone to Zābulistān to recruit soldiers for his army. Zāl, meanwhile, went to Bahman's tent, bowed down to him, and went to great lengths in pleading with him so that he may persuade him to give up his plans. So he uttered many a reverential word and promised him much wealth. Zāl, with the aim of softening Bahman's heart, shed a lot of tears too. Bahman, however, ordered him to be taken into captivity but to be treated with kindness while a prisoner. Farāmarz returned from Zābulistān with a great army and engaged in a battle with Bahman, which lasted three days. During this battle, from both sides, many were killed, injured and taken captive. On the fourth day, when the sun was setting, there started a storm. The wind blew in the direction of the Sistani/Zabuli army. Pebbles and sand were blown in their faces. Bahman used this opportunity to spur on his army, proclaiming, "the heavens have come to your aid!" So, with much vigor and determination Bahman's army broke the ranks of the Sistani army and struck many with their swords. The Sistani/Zabuli army retreated, leaving Farāmarz and his retinue behind. Farāmarz engaged in a face to face battle but was surrounded by the Iranians, who threw him on the ground and took him captive. Then Bahman ordered him to be put up on a cross and be struck with arrows until his flesh, bones and brains were scattered about in pieces. Then Bahman usurped the treasures of Zāl and Rostam, which they had gathered over the course of 700 years. Then he set out to kill

Zāl. But Bashutan intervened and called to his attention Zāl's rights (his station), that he is deserving of Bahman's respect, and that Zāl is innocent. Pashtuan told Bahman, "Now you have killed Farāmarz and haven't avenged your father's blood in a great manner, what would be the point of killing this old man who has not much time left anyway?" Pashutan's words were agreebable and seemed beneficial to Bahman, since he was also reminded of Zāl's services to the Iranian throne. Bahman, then, forgave Zāl and ordered him to be returned to his home and returned to him a small fraction of his wealth. Mas'udi al-Marvazi,[3] in his work in Persian verse indicates, however, that Bahman killed Zāl and wiped out anyone belonging to his race.

3 Al-Ṭabari[4]

ثم ملك بعد بشتاسب ابن ابنه أردشير بهمن فذكر أنه قال يوم ملك وعقد التاج على رأسه نحن محافظون على الوفاء ودائنون رعيتنا بالخير فكان يدعى أردشير الطويل الباع و إنما لقب بذلك فيما قيل لتناوله كل ما مد اليه يده من الممالك التى حوله حتى ملك الأقاليم كلها... وسار إلى سجستان طالباً بثأر أبيه فقتل رستم وأباه دستان وأخاه ازواره وابنه فرمرز واجتبى الناس لأرزاق الجند ونفقات الهرابذة و بيوت النيران وغير ذلك أموالا عظيمة...

After Boshtasp, his grandson Ardashir Bahman assumed the throne. About him it is said that on the day that he became king and put on the crown, he said, "I am a keeper of my promises and I shall treat my subjects well." He is also called Ardashir the long-armed, on the account his conquest of the neighboring lands, and became their king . . . It is said that he went to Sajistān in order to avenge his father's blood, and he killed Rostam, his father, Dastān and his brother Zavāreh, and his son Farāmarz, and in order to finance the cost of his expedition and the firehouses and *hirbads* (Zoroastrian clergy), he took a lot of (the region's) wealth.

3 I have discussed this *Shāhnāmeh* and postulated that this work, which was in verse, was in circulation some 70 years before Ferdowsi's work; Gazerani, Old garment 185.

4 Al-Ṭabari, *Ta'arikh al-Umum* 1: 439.

4 Al-Dinawari[5]

سار بهمن الی سجستان وقتل من قدر علیه من ولد رستم واهل بیته واخرب قریته

Bahman went to Sajistān and killed whoever he could from Rostam's offspring and his relatives and destroyed his city.

5 Gardizi[6]

بهمن بن اسفندیار بن گشتاسپ. او را اردشیر دراز بازو خواندندی و بهترین ملکان عجم او بوذ و به کین خواستن پدر خویش به سیستان رفت و زال پیش او بازآمذ، او را جفاگفت واز پیش خود براند و رستم مرده بوذ و با فرامرز، پسر رستم حرب کرد و بسیار بکوشید، نتوانست فرامرز را به دست آوردن، تا فرامرز بمرد واو را مرده بردار کرد و فرموذ تا تیرباران کردند و بسیار از مردم سیستان بکشت وخانه ی ایشان ویران کرد وخزینه های رستم وسام کی اندر هزار سال نهاده بوذه اند برداشت.

Bahman son of Esfandiyār, son of Goshtāsp. They call him Ardashir the long-armed. He was the best of Persian kings. To avenge his father's blood, he went to Sistan. Zāl came to him, but Bahman said many harsh words to him and banished him. At that time, Rostam was already dead, so he fought Farāmarz who had fallowed Rostam. In spite of Bahman's efforts, he could not lay his hands on Farāmarz until Farāmarz died, and at that time Bahman put his corpse on the gallows and ordered it to be shot with arrows. Then he killed many people from Sistan and he also destroyed their houses. He also claimed as his own the treasures of Rostam and Sām, which they had gathered in the course of one thousand years.

5 Al-Dinawari, *Kitāb al-akhbār-i Ṭiwal* 29.

6 Gardizi, *Zayn al-Akhbār* 80.

6 Bal'ami[7]

و حدیث بهمن خود بگفته ایم و او را به لقب اردشیر دارا خواندندی و آتش پرستیدی و مغ بود و دین مغی را بزرگ داشت. . . . . پس مادرش گفت: سپاه به سیستان بر و کین پدرت (اسفندیار) بخواه. و او بود که فرامرز را بکشت و برادرش را بکشت نام او زوار؛ و دستان پدر رستم زنده بود و او را نیز بکشت.

We have already told the story of Bahman. His epithet was Ardashir-e Dārā, and he was a fire-worshiper and a *mogh*, and he praised the *mogh* religion . . . One day Bahman's mother told him, "Go to Sistan with an army and avenge your father's (Esfandiyār's) blood." It was him (Bahman) who killed Farāmarz and his brother by the name of Zavār. Rostam's father, Dastān, was alive at the time, and Bahman also killed him.

7 Ibn Balkhi[8]

و بهمن بن اسفندیار سخت کریم و نیکوسیرت بود و او را اردشیر بهمن دراز دست گفتندی از آنچ بسیار ولایتها بگرفت و برفت و سیستان بغارتید و شهر رستم بکند و خراب کرد بکینهٔ آنچ با پدرش کرده بودند و پدرش و برادرش را بکشت.

Bahman ebn Esfandiyār was very generous and good-natured. He was also called Bahman, the long armed, on the account of his conquest of many territories. He plundered Sistan and destroyed the city of Rostam to avenge his father's blood. He also killed Rostam's father and his brother.

7 Bal'ami, *Tārikhnāmeh-ye Ṭabari* 483–4.

8 Ibn Balkhi, *Fārsnāmeh* 56.

8 Mas'udi[9]

ملك بهمن: ثم ملك بعده"بهمن"بن اسفنديار بن يستاسف بن بهراسف، وكان له حروب كثيرة مع رستم صاحب سجستان الي ان قتل رستم و والده دستان؛

Then after him came Bahman, son of Esfandiyār, son of Yostāsf (Goshtāsp), son of Bohrāsf (Lohrāsp). He fought many battles with Rostam, the ruler of Sistan until Rostam and his father Dastān were killed.

9 Mujmal al-Tawārikh wa'l Qiṣṣaṣ[10]

چون بهمن خبر یافت ،تعزیت بداشت و پس به کین اسفندیار برخاست، وسپاه برد به سیستان وکارها رفت ، تا چند بار به هزیمت بازآمد و بعد روزگاری پیروزی یافت. فرامرز به هندوستان رفت و زال را اسیر گرفت ، وخانه فرمود ساختن، چون قفص ازآهن، و زال را درآنجا بازداشت، و برپیل همی گردانید با خود تا به کشمیر فرامرز کشته شد آخرکار. وگویند درخندق افتاد ازخطا کردن اسب، ودرآب بمرد. و به همه حال مرده او را بردار فرمودکردن واندر شاهنامه زنده میگوید والله اعلم. پس قصدکردکه دخمه سام و رستم را خراب کند و تن ها وکالبد ایشان را بسوازند تا باز باطل کرد. وآنرا بازخبرهاست ،تاآذربرزین ازهندوان به یاری پدرش همی آمد ، فرامرز. ناگاه بهمن او را بگرفت. چون اوازدریا برآمد، ولشکرگاه بهمن آن پدر پنداشت. و بندکردندش و بازگشت وسیستان وخانه دستان و رستم همچنانکه اول بود بازفرمودکردن. و زال را به خانه بازفرستاد با دخترانش،زربانو وگشسپ بانو. فرزندان زواره وآذربرزین به قلعه فرستاد، تا رستم تورگلی او را بستد اندر راه،و برسپاه وی خروج کرد وسپاه بر وی جمع گشت. وکارزارها رفت میان او و بهمن بی اندازه ،و بهمن حصار گرفت

9 Al-Mas'udi, *Murūj al-Dhahab* 254.

10 Anonymous, *Mojmal al-Tawārikh wa'l Qeṣṣaṣ* 44–5.

به گرگان اندر وآخرکارصلح کردند. وآذربرزین پهلوان گشت بهمن را. پس به دیرگجین میان ری وسپاهان بهمن را اژدها بیوبارید، و وصیت پادشاهی به دخترش کرد، چهرآزاد، که همای او را لقب بود. و به روایتی گویند به مرگ بمرد. و زال را همچنین گویند که بهمن مدتی دراز به قلعه بازداشت، و زال چندکتاب بساخت اندرسیرخاندان ایشان ومثالب ونکوهش گشتاسپ وآن تخم.

When Bahman learned of the affair (Rostam's death), he mourned him, and then he rose to avenge Esfandiyār's blood. Along with his army he went to Sistan and many things unfolded. He was defeated a few times, and then, at a certain time he gained victory. Farāmarz went to India, and Bahman took Zāl captive. Bahman ordered a "house" to be constructed, like an iron cage. Zāl was kept in it, and the cage was put on the elephant's saddle and was displayed wherever Bahman went, until at the end Farāmarz died in Kashmir. It is said that he fell into a moat, his horse having erred, and drowned there. Bahman then ordered his corpse to be put up on the gallows, though in the *Shāhnāmeh* it is mentioned that he was alive (at the time of execution), but God knows best. Then Bahman set out to destroy the tomb of Sām and Rostam and burn their preserved bodies, but he did not succeed at that either. There are many accounts of what he did. Then Āzarborzin came from India to help out his father, Farāmarz. When he came out of the sea, Bahman captured him, because Āzarborzin had by mistake taken Bahman's army to be that of his father's. Bahman eventually returned to Sistan and ordered Rostam's house to be returned to power. Then he sent Zāl to his house along with his daughters Zar-Bānu and Goshaspbānu. Bahman sent the sons of Zavāreh and Āzarborzin to a citadel, until Rostam-e Tur-e Gili captured him and mutinied against Bahman's army. Many battles unfolded between Bahman and Rostam-e Tur-e Gili, and finally Bahman took hold of a fortification in Gorgān. At the end Bahman and Āzarborzin reconciled, and Āzarborzin became Bahman's *pahlavān*. Then in the land of *Kijin* (*?*) somewhere between Rey and Sepāhān he was devoured by a dragon. He left the kingship to his daughter, Chehr-Āzād, whose epithet was Homāy. But according to another version of events Bahman died of natural causes. It is also said that Zāl continued to be a prisoner in a citadel for a long time, during which he composed many books on the affairs of the members of Bahman's house and recounted their vices and rebuked Goshtāsp and his race.

Figures

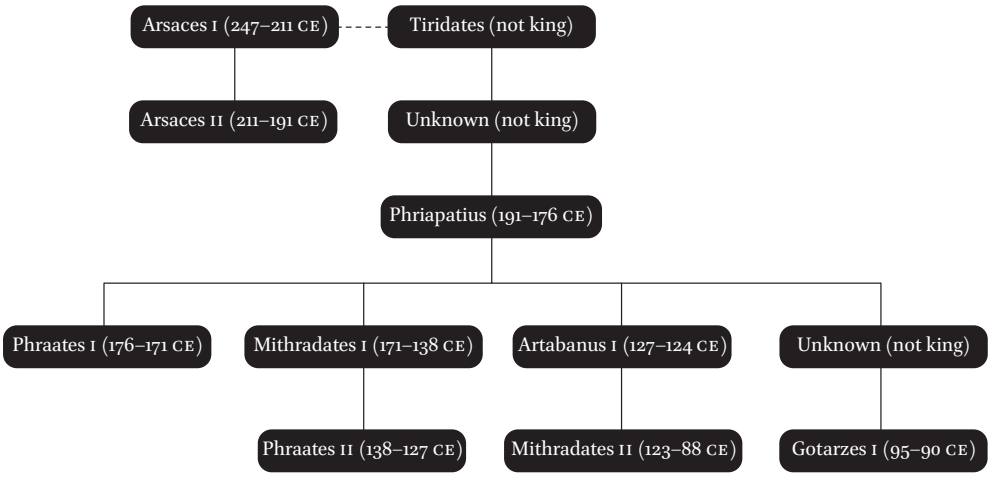
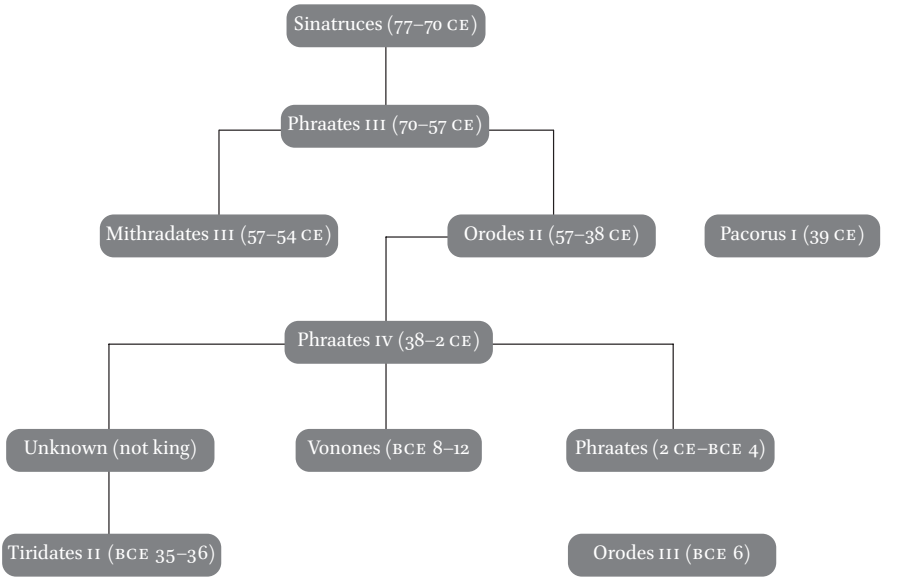
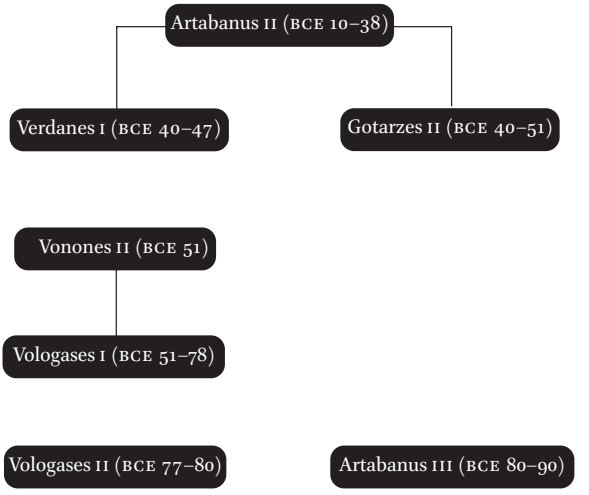


FIGURE 1 *Arsacids*


Sinatruces (77–70 CE)
Phraates III (70–57 CE)
Mithradates III (57–54 CE)
Orodes II (57–38 CE)
Pacorus I (39 CE)
Phraates IV (38–2 CE)
Unknown (not king)
Vonones (BCE 8–12
Phraates (2 CE–BCE 4)
Tiridates II (BCE 35–36)
Orodes III (BCE 6)


Artabanus II (BCE 10–38)
Verdanes I (BCE 40–47)
Gotarzes II (BCE 40–51)
Vonones II (BCE 51)
Vologases I (BCE 51–78)
Vologases II (BCE 77–80)
Artabanus III (BCE 80–90)

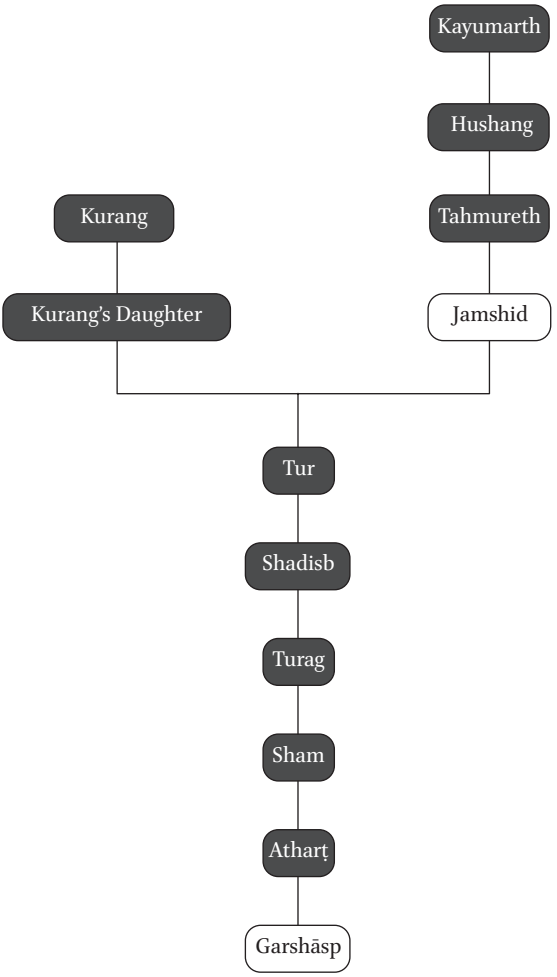


FIGURE 2 *Garshāsp's genealogy*

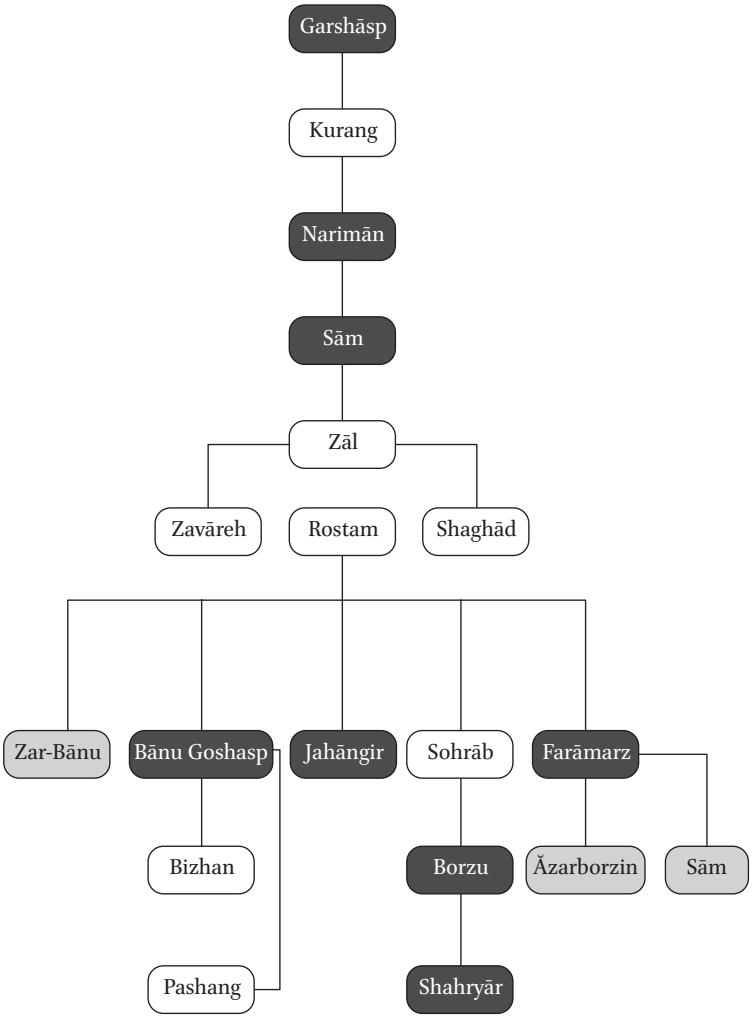


FIGURE 3 *Genealogy of Sistani heroes*

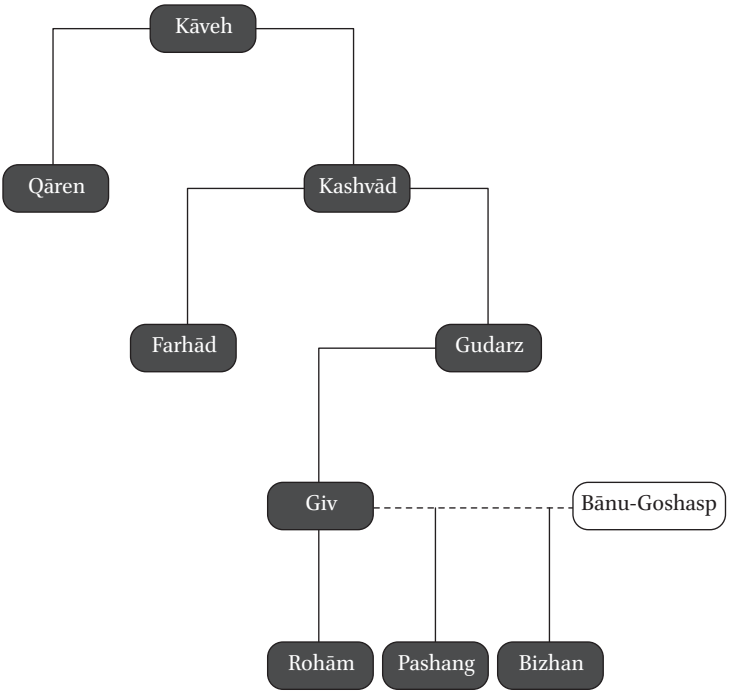


FIGURE 4 *Genealogy of Gudarziān*

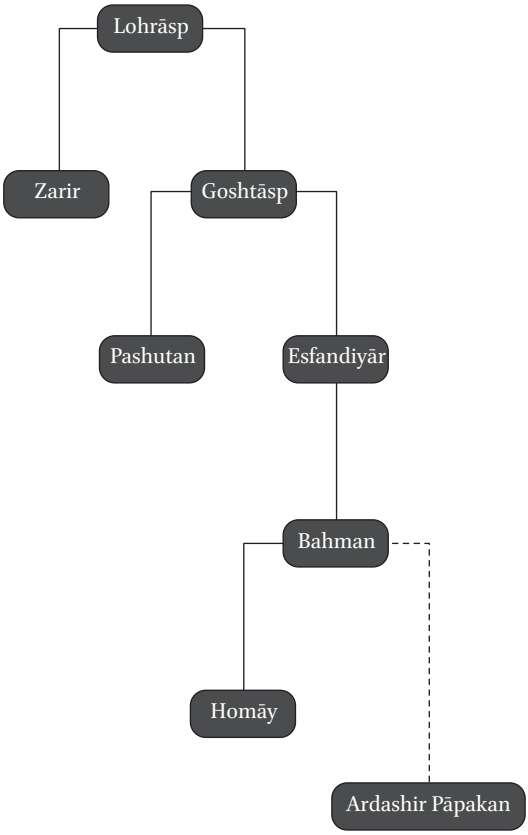


FIGURE 5 *Genealogy of Lohrāsp's house*

FIGURE 6 *Map of the ancient provinces*

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