



## ĀDUR BURZĒN-MIHR

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**ĀDUR BURZĒN-MIHR**, an Ātaš Bahrām (see [Ātaš](#)), i.e., a Zoroastrian sacred fire of the highest grade. The tradition of its foundation is lost in antiquity, but if it is correct that the temple cult of fire was first established in the late 5th or early 4th century B.C., its installation cannot be put earlier than that. Burzēn-Mihr (“Exalted is Mihr”) is known as a personal name, and is presumed to be that of the unknown founder of the fire. “Burzēn” is a Parthian form, and the fire was established in Parthia (the northeast of Iran). In *Bd.* 9.21, 37 and 18.14 it is said that its abode (*mān*) was on Mt. Rēvand (Av. Raēvant); and in one passage in the *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Borūkīm, II, p. 416.546-47) Rostam is represented as forgathering with Parthian heroes “in a place called \*Revand [mss. Navand], where now flames the lofty fire Barzīn.” In the *Ātaš nīāyeš* 6 veneration is offered to Mt. Raēvant, whose most likely identification seems to be with a spur of the Nišāpūr mountains in the district once known as Rēvand in Khorasan. A village nearby called Borzīnān may, it is suggested, preserve an element of the fire’s name. Another identification has, however, been made with Mt. Mehr, five miles from the village called Mehr on the highway between Šāhrūd and Sabzavār. Neither site has been excavated.

Many legends cluster round Ādur Burzēn-Mihr and the two other great fires of ancient Iran, [Ādur Farnbāg](#) and [Ādur Gušnasp](#). All three it is said, were brought into existence at creation by Ohrmazd himself “for the protection of the world” (*Bd.* 18.8); and at first they moved about freely, giving help where it was needed. Thus in the reign of Taxmurup, the legend goes, people were passing one stormy night from Xvaniras to another clime on the back of the



bull Srisōk, and the brazier in which they were carrying fire was blown from the bull's back into the sea. Thereupon these three fires, "like three Glories (Xvarrah)" took the place of the lost fire and burned brightly, "so that there was light" and the people could continue their crossing. The three fires also helped Jamšēd to achieve all that he did in his reign (*Bd.* 18.10).

As for the legends concerning Ādur Burzēn-Mihr alone, in the *Dēnkard*, in what is probably the oldest version (based directly on Avestan texts) of the prophet's life, it is said (*Dk.* 7.4.75-78) that when Vištāsp asked to behold his future place in heaven, three divine beings came to take his spirit there, namely Vahman, Ašavahišt, and "the holy Fire of Ohrmazd" (*ātaxš ī Ohrmazd ī abzōnīg*); but in the version of this story given in *Bd.* 18.14, the third divine being is specifically identified as Ādur Burzēn-Mihr. This fire, it is there said, "revealed many things visibly, in order to propagate the faith and to establish certainty, and to bring Vištāsp and his descendants to the faith of God;" and it was after his conversion through its help, it is said, that Vištāsp made a permanent abode for the fire on Mt. Rēvand. This version of the ancient legend must, one would think, have taken shape during the Parthian period, when Ādur Burzēn-Mihr was probably the most venerated fire in all Iran; and it was presumably embodied in a Parthian *zand* or commentary on the Avestan texts. That it came to be widely accepted is shown by the fact that it was repeated by the Persian priest Zādspram in the 9th century A.D. (*Zātspram*, 23.6). It is likewise said in the Persian *revāyat* of Shapur Bharuchi (see B. N. Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, Bombay, 1932, p. 72) that "the fire . . . which Zartošt Asfantaman brought from the court of Ohrmazd is called Ādor Borzīn Mehr. When Arjāsp killed Lohrāsp and intended (to extinguish) the fire, that Ādor Borzīn Mehr disappeared suddenly by its own power and settled in a place called Dašt-e Veštāspān." (The "Pušt ī Vištāspān" is associated in *Bd.* 9.37 with Mt. Rēvand). In the *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Borūqīm, VI, p. 1499.61), Daqīqī recorded yet another tradition, which was that the first fire-temple built by "Goštāsp" after his conversion was that of "Ādar-e Mehr-Barzīn" and that Zoroaster himself planted the Cypress of Kešmar before its portal. A rival western Iranian tradition is recorded, however, in the 15th century *Zarātošt-nāma*, where it is the two other great fires, "Ādar Ḳorād and Ādar Gošasp" which are said to have come to Goštāsp with "Bahman and Ardebehešt" (F. Rosenberg, *Le livre de Zoroastre*, St. Petersburg, 1904, line 1142). The promotion, under the Sasanians, of these two western Iranian fires over the Parthian one is even better demonstrated by the tradition (probably first shaped by Persian scholastics at that period) that the three great fires



were linked with the three ancient estates of priest, warrior, and husbandman, and that Ādur Burzēn-Mihr was the fire of the last and lowliest estate.

Yet, although always placed third in the Pahlavi books, the Parthian fire essentially retained its fame and glory even under the Sasanians, forming with the other two a splendid triad. This triad undoubtedly represents the main threefold division (political and ecclesiastical) of Iran between the Parthians, Persians, and Medes. So when in the *Kār-nāmag ī Ardašīr* (ed. Sanjana, 1.11) Pāpak sees a vision of the three fires, Farnbāg, Gušnasp and Burzēn-Mihr, all burning at the house of Sāsān, this is interpreted as a sign that the “sovereignty of the world,” i.e., of Iran, will come to a member of his family. It is held that all three fires are invoked allusively, in *Ātaš nīāyeš* 4-5 and *Sīrōza* 9 (see further under [Ādur Gušnasp](#)); and all three are called upon by name in the *Sōgand-nāma* or formula of oath-taking (see Dhabhar, *Rivayats*, pp. 40, 48). It is said, moreover, that they will give their help to Pēšōtan when he comes to conquer evil (*Zand ī Vahman Yašt*, ed. B. T. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1957, 7.24,37). With the passing of the centuries the real character of these ancient Ātaš Bahrāms was forgotten (even though Ādur Farnbāg is burning still today); and in one of the *revāyats* (Dhabhar, *Rivayats*, p. 60) it is said that they “burn without fuel and they have no fear of water,” that is, they were held to be volcanic or naphtha fires. In this same passage Burzēn-Mihr is wrongly identified with the fire of Karkōy (q.v.). There is also a passage in the *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Borūqīm, V, p. 1446. 22) which declares that “Barzīn” was the fire founded by Lohrāsp at Balk. The great Parthian fire is mentioned a number of times in the epic, appearing variously (according to the exigencies of meter) as Mehr-Barzīn, Mehr, or Barzīn, and it is used also to provide a simile for fiery fierceness.

As for the actual history of Ādur Burzēn-Mihr, Parthia’s remoteness from the western frontiers of Iran, whence most of our information comes for the pre-Islamic period, means that nothing precise is known of this. It may be safely assumed that the fire was a great center of pilgrimage, even after the fall of the Arsacids; but how long its priests were able to preserve it in the Islamic period is not recorded.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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