



ARDAŠĪR-NAMA

ARDAŠĪR-NAMA, a *matnawī* of six thousand couplets in Persian by Šāhīn Šīrāzī, a Jewish Persian poet of the 8th/14th century (comp. Šawwāl, 773/June, 1333). Composed in the meter of *hazaġ mosaddas aġrab maqbūz maḥḍūr* (- - ∪ ∪ | - ∪ - ∪ | - -) and written in the Hebrew alphabet, the work is partly based on the Book of Esther with Ardašīr (Ahasuerus of the [Book of Esther](#)) and Esther (or Hadassah), a Jewish Iranian girl from the city of Šūš, as its chief hero and heroine. Apart from the opening section which is in praise of God, Moses, and his brother Aaron, and a panegyric for the ruler of the time the Il-khanid Abū Saʿīd (r. 717-36/1317-35), *Ardašīr-nāma* may be divided into five thematic parts which are scattered without order throughout the composition:

1. This part describes the origin and genealogy of Iranian kings, i.e., ancestors of Ardašīr (or Bahman, as the latter name is sometimes used) and heroes such as Lohrāsb, Goštāsb, Ardašīr, Zāl, Rostam, Mīlād, and Pašūtan, as well as their Turanian adversaries. This part is often modeled after the *Šāh-nāma*, albeit with some minor differences (e.g., the name of the four sons of Esfandiār).
2. This part, drawn directly on the Book of Esther, involves the story of love and union between Ardašīr and Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, Vaštī, and later between him and the Jewish girl Esther, who ultimately becomes the queen of Iran and delivers the Jewish people from the threat of destruction.
3. The third part, unrelated to the Book of Esther, is a detailed story (about thirty chapters long) of the love between Šīrūya, a son of Ardašīr and Vaštī, and Mehrzād, a Chinese princess, whom Šīrūya meets during a hunting



expedition. Enamored with the princess he departs with her to China where, following their union, Māhīār is born. After a series of adventures Šīrūya ultimately drowns in the sea.

4. In this part, which mainly reflects events described in the Book of Esther, are discussed at length Ardašīr's love and life with Esther, the story of Hāmān's conspiracy to destroy the Jewish people (Esther 3), the joint endeavor of Esther and Mordechai to save their coreligionist (Esther 4-8), and the hanging of Hāmān and his ten sons (Esther 7:9). In his exposition and commentary on the themes of this part, Šāhīn has made use of Talmudic and Midrashic sources.

5. This part deals with the story of Cyrus the Great, who, according to Šāhīn and as related (with minor variations) by some Islamic historians (e.g., Ṭabarī), was born from the union of Ardašīr and Esther. Obviously the tale has no historical basis. In the concluding part of *Ardašīr-nāma*, Šāhīn praises the virtues of Cyrus but leaves the story unfinished in order to complete it in his other work known as *Ezrā-nāma* (Book of Ezra), which is found appended to all complete manuscripts of *Ardašīr-nāma*. Portions of *Ardašīr-nāma* were published in 1910 in Jerusalem by the Bukharan Šim'on Ḥakham.

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