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AŽDAHĀ II. IN PERSIAN LITERATURE
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In Persian literature the *aždahā* (also *aždar*, *aždarha@*, *aždahāk*, in modern East-Iranian dialects also *aždār*, etc.) is pictured as a giant snake or lizard with wings.

Descriptions of dragons. The principal texts containing descriptions of *aždahā*s are *Sad dar-e naṯr and sad dar-e Bondaheš* (ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1909, p. 86: the legend of Garšāsp); *Šāh-nāma* ([Moscow], I, pp. 202-04, vv. 1016-22, 1029-31, 1034, 1051; II, p. 96 vv. 274-81; VI, pp. 40 v. 530, 174-75 vv. 133-34, 155, 158; VII, pp. 72-73 vv. 1195, 1214; IX, p. 145 v. 2287-88; XI, p. 149 v. 2360), Asadī Ṭūsī, *Garšāsp-nāma* (ed. Ḥ. Yaḡmāʾī, Tehran, 1354 Š./1975, p. 53 vv. 50, 60-62, 64-65, 67; p. 54 vv. 66, 68-72; p. 57 vv. 4-15, 20-22; p. 58 vv. 28-31, 33-35, 38; p. 59 v. 43; p. 165 vv. 4, 6). In these texts the dragons are variously described: In the Persian epics it is sometimes described as a wolf, a tiger, *šīr-e kappī*, i.e., a sort of sphinx (combined lion and ape), or simply as a *patyāra* (maleficent creature), or a black cloud. In the epics it has one head and mouth, exhaling fire and smoke from its hellish mouth, and inhaling with enough force to suck in a horse and rider, or a crocodile from the water, or an eagle from the sky. In other texts, as in the Old and Middle Iranian texts, it has several heads. (In a verse by Labībī quoted in M. Dabīrsīāqī, *Ganj-e bāz yāfta*, Tehran, 2535 = 1355 Š./1976, its seven heads represent the heavenly spheres and the universe.) The

enormous size of the beast is described in the *Šāh-nāma* and the *Garšāsp-nāma*, with elements also found in the Avesta and the Pahlavi literature: It is big as a mountain. Its head resembles a thicket of hair and its bristles stretch down to the ground like nooses. It has two horns the size of the branch of a tree, ten *gaz* or eighty cubits long. Its eyes are the size of wagon wheels or like two tanks of blood. They shine from afar as brightly as stars at night, as two glittering diamonds, as two blazing torches, or as two mirrors held beneath the sun. It has two tusks, each the length of the hero's arm or of a stag's horns. Humans and animals hang from its teeth. When it sticks its long, black tongue out of its mouth it hangs down onto the road like a black tree. Its skin has scales like a fish, each as big as a shield. It has eight feet, though most often it drags itself over the ground, and when it moves it makes the valleys and plains tremble, and a river of yellow poison as deep as a spear flows from its tail and nose. Its color is variously described, e.g., as dark yellow or gray, black, blue. It can not be touched with water, fire, or any weapon. According to one legend it can even speak human language (*Šāh-nāma* 11, p. 96 vv. 274-81). Its lair, guarded day and night, is on a mountain (usually said to be near the sea, whence the *aždahā* itself originated) or rock the same color as its body and is shunned by all living things, animals and plants. The sources variously locate it on the Kašaf-rūd near Ṭūs, on Mount Šekāvand in Kabul, India, "Māzandarān," on Mount Saqīlā in the land of the Romans, Mount Zahāb in the Yaman, or in Ṭabarestān.

Àdahā in Persian legends. Several Iranian heroes battle and slay the dragons. This old literary theme, common to many civilizations and known from both Old Indian and Old Iranian, was elaborated in later times in the national legends on the basis of popular, in some instances perhaps pre-Avestan, legends of Ferēdūn and Garšāsp, and underwent changes due to new social and ideological conditions.

The legends know of a number of other dragon-slaying heroes other than Ferēdūn and Garšāsp, e.g., Sām (= Garšāsp), Rostam, Farāmarz, Borzū, Āḏar Barzīn, Šahrīār, Goštāsp, Esfandīār, Bahman, Alexander, Ardašīr, Bahrām Gōr, and Bahrām Čōbīn.

Ferēdūn. This is the great dragon-slayer in the Avesta, where he is said to have slain Aži Dahāka. In the national legends, however, Ferēdūn has lost the role of a dragon-slayer, no doubt because his opponent Żaḥḥāk was transformed more strongly into a pseudo-historical person, though he is still described as having two snakes growing from his shoulders, a reminiscence of his once

reptilian body. In another legend Ferēdūn transforms himself into a dragon to test his sons (*Šāh-nāma* I, p. 256 l. 1; see further below).

Garšāsp and Sām. Unlike Ferēdūn, Garšāsp has retained his dragon-slaying role in the national legends, and the Avestan story of Kərəsāspa has left a trace in later traditions about Garšāsp in Bayhaqī (p. 666). In addition to the older legends, the *Garšāsp-nāma* relates that Garšāsp, at the age of fourteen, was requested by Żaḥḥāk to slay a dragon which had come out of the sea after a storm and made its abode on Mount Šekāvand. Garšāsp ate some *teryāk* (antidote) and set out to fight the dragon. In the fight he shot an arrow from a specially made bow at the dragon's throat, then thrust a spear into its mouth, and finally clubbed it to death. (The club is said to be carved in the shape of a dragon's head, ibid., p. 269 v. 10.) Thereafter Garšāsp lost his skin and consciousness for a while (cf. the similar episode of Sām in *Šāh-nāma* I, pp. 202-04, and see below, Borzū). When he regained his consciousness, he gave thanks to an angel. The dragon's carcass was carried to the city on twenty hitched wagons, and celebrations were held to mark the event. Garšāsp, now honored as *jahān-pahlavān* (chief hero), commemorated his feat by making a flag adorned with a figure of the dragon in black and a pole tipped with a golden lion and a moon above it (*Garšāsp-nāma*, pp. 49-63). This flag afterwards passed to Garšāsp's descendants and was his family's coat of arms (cf. the flag of Rostam, also adorned with a dragon figure, in the *Šāh-nāma* II, p. 214 v. 566). The story is retold once (*Garšāsp-nāma*, p. 165). (A flag with a dragon emblem appears in a picture from the seventh or eighth century A.D. found in eastern Iran, see G. Widengren, *Der Feudalismus im alten Iran*, pl. 13).

In the *Šāh-nāma* (I, p. 202 vv. 1015-51) Sām slays a dragon which has come out of the Kašaf-rūd. (The same feat is attributed to Rostam in the *Jahāngīr-nāma*, ms. Bibl. Nat., Supp. Pers. 498, fols. 62f.) Ebn Esfandīār (I, p. 89) has recorded a legend from Māzandarān in which Sām had slain a dragon there at a place called Kāva Kalāda near the sea. The dragon was fifty ells (*gaz*) long and was killed with a single blow of a specially made mace. The episode was put into Ṭabarī verse, a line of which has been preserved by Ebn Esfandīār (ibid.). (A picture of a dragon trying to coil its tail around the hero has been preserved, see Widengren, op. cit., pls. 11 and 12.)

Rostam. There are several legends about dragon-slaying by Rostam, the most famous ones being Rostam and the *babr-e bayān* and the third of Rostam's *haft-k̲ᵛān*. The legend of Rostam and the *babr-e bayān* is found in two versions in a manuscript of the *Šāh-nāma* in the British Museum (Or. 2926, fols. 112b-115a

and 118b-122b) and is also current in Iranian oral folklore (A. Enjavī, *Mardom o Šāh-nāma*, Tehran, 1355 Š./1976, pp. 217f.) as well as among the Mandeans of Iraq (H. Petermann, *Reisen im Orient*, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1965, II, pp. 107-08). The scene of the slaying of the *babr-e bayān* (*patyāra* in the variant story in the B.M. ms.) is in the far east—India in the *Šāh-nāma*, China in the Mandean legend—and Rostam is but a youngster (fourteen and twelve respectively). In both variants Rostam kills the dragon by making it swallow something (a ruse suggested to him by his mentor Gōdarz according to the *Šāh-nāma*, but by a demon captured by him in the Mandean legend): In the first *Šāh-nāma* story Rostam fills ox hides with quicklime and stones and carries them to the place where the dragon comes out of the sea once a week. The dragon swallows them and its stomach bursts. Rostam then has the dragon flayed and makes a coat from its hide called the *babr-e bayān*. In the variant story Rostam does not get into the box but has fastened poisoned blades on it which kill the dragon. Rostam then remains unconscious for two days and nights, but is guarded by his steed Raḵš. On reviving he washes himself in a spring (cf. below, Borzū and Āḏar Barzīn). In the Mandean legend Rostam himself hides in a box, is swallowed by the dragon, and kills it from inside its belly. As a reward the king of China gives Rostam his daughter in marriage. (Cf. below, Farāmarz.)

The story in Rostam's *haft-ḵᵛān* (*Šāh-nāma* II, p. 94 vv. 345ff.) differs. This dragon lives underground on the road to Māzandarān (= India) and Rostam unwittingly enters the dragon's territory. The (talking) dragon attacks him while asleep but Raḵš wakes him and helps him overcome the beast.

Farāmarz. One of the most widely disseminated dragon-slaying stories in Persian tells how Rostam's son Farāmarz with the help of Bīžan slew a dragon called the *mār-e jowšā* (the hissing serpent), which dwelt on a granite mountain in India, by hiding in two boxes and letting themselves be swallowed by the dragon. Beforehand they took doses of *teryāk* against its poison and stuck ambergris and musk up their noses against the stench (*Farāmarz-nāma*, ms. B.M., Or. 2946, fols. 24f.; see also Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Farāmarz-nāma," *Iran Nameh* 1/1, Washington, D.C., 1361 Š./1982, pp. 22-45).

Borzū, son of Sohrāb. Seeking the hand of the daughter of the king of Yaman, Borzū was required to slay the dragon on Mount Zahāb. He drank *teryāk* and milk against the poison (cf. above, Garšāsp and Farāmarz), went to the dragon's lair, hurled into its mouth an iron ball which choked it, shot arrows into its eyes and blinded it, and clubbed it on the head and killed it. Borzū's armor then cracked and fell off and he lost consciousness (cf. above, Garšāsp).

Reviving he washed himself at a spring (cf. above, Rostam, and below, Āḏar Barzīn). The people celebrated this day in the same way as the new year (*Borzū-nāma*, ms. Bib. Nat., Supp. Pers. 1023, fols. 242f.).

Āḏar Barzīn, son of Farāmarz. Looking for a black cloud which came out of a mountain every year in spring and forced the daughter of the local ruler, Bēvarasp, to have intercourse, Āḏar Barzīn found that the cloud was a dragon and slew it with arrows. He then washed at a spring (*Bahman-nāma*, B.M. Or. 2780, fols. 180f.; cf. above, Rostam, Borzū).

Šahrīār, grandson of Rostam. This is another dragon-slayer (*Šahrīar-nāma*, ed. Ḡ.-Ḥ. Bīgdelī, Tehran. 1358 Š./1979, pp. 96f.).

Goštāsp. According to the *Šāh-nāma* (VI, pp. 26 v. 292, 36 vv. 461ff.), while living incognito in the land of the Romans, Goštāsp slew a wolf with the features of a dragon and later a dragon at the requests of the heroes Mīrān and Ahran who both wished to marry the Caesar's daughter.

Esfandīār. In the third of his seven exploits on his journey to rescue his sisters from Arjāsp's prison Esfandīār slew a dragon by means of the box ruse, then became unconscious and on reviving washed himself (*Šāh-nāma* VI, p. 173 vv. 126f.; cf. above, Rostam, Borzū, and Āḏar Barzīn).

Bahman son of Esfandīār. According to the *Bahman-nāma* (B.M. ms. Or. 2780, fols. 186f.), a dragon named Abr-e Sīāh (Black cloud) swallowed Bahman while he was out hunting. The defeat of the hero may symbolize the loss of the crown of an Iranian king to a foreign invader, perhaps Alexander.

Alexander. In the *Šāh-nāma* (VII, p. 71 vv. 1190f.) it is told that Alexander killed a dragon on a mountain by feeding the dragon five ox-hides stuffed with poison and naphtha, but with quicklime, bitumen, lead, and sulphur according to the Syriac Alexander romance. Th. Nöldeke, in his study of the Alexander romance noted the similarity of the Syriac version to the story of Daniel's slaying a dragon with balls of bitumen, dough, and hair, and to the killing of the snake-king Sapor (Šāpūr II, r. 309-79?) through use of camel hides stuffed with straw and charcoal (Jerusalem Talmud, Ned. 3.2; "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans," in *Denkschriften d. Königlichen Akad. d. Wiss.*, Phil.-hist. Kl., 38, Vienna, 1890, pp. 22, 25).

Of the Sasanian kings Ardašīr and Bahrām Ḡor slew dragons: Ardašīr (r. 226-41) slew a worm (*kerm*) who protected the owner Haftvād of the castle

Kojāran on the Persian Gulf coast, by pouring molten zinc and lead into its mouth (*Kār-nāmag* 7, *Šāh-nāma* VII, pp. 139ff.). Bahrām V Ḡor (r. 420-38) on his journey to India as the royal envoy slew a dragon on the seashore (*Šāh-nāma* VII, p. 464 vv. 2111f.) and was given permission to marry one of the Indian king's three daughters. In addition, Bahrām Čōbīn, the Sasanian general and claimant to the throne slew a dragon in Turkistan, which had swallowed the daughter of the ḵāqān and which would become invulnerable if it went to a certain spring and wetted its hair (*Šāh-nāma* IX, p. 145 vv. 2285ff.).

Symbolism of the dragon-slaying. The dragon in Iranian mythology is a destructive demoniacal force and a symbol of drought. Various theories about the dragon-slaying theme in both Indo-European and Indo-Iranian mythology have been advanced. One theory links the Indo-Iranian legends with solar and lunar eclipses and with lunar waxing and waning, which lay at the root of moon worship. The popular explanation for these phenomena was that a dragon comes up from hell every month on the eastern side of the sky and swallows a piece of the moon's disc every night until the night comes when no part of the moon can be seen. Then the moon-god kills the dragon from inside its belly and triumphantly reemerges. In later times, however, the sun took over the moon's role in the celestial combats, and it was the sun which slew the dragon and rescued the moon from the dragon's belly twelve times every year. Later still the celestial combats were brought down to earth. The sun-god or god of light was replaced by a hero, and the belief in the dragon's swallowing of the moon was transformed into the myth of the dragon's swallowing of a maiden (for detailed discussion see Stiecke, *Drachenkämpfe; Hüsing, Iranische Überlieferung and Krsaaspa).*

In the Persian epics there is no hint of a belief in entry of the moon or sun into a dragon's belly, but in legends and certain poems, particularly those of Neẓāmī, a few vestiges can be traced (see A. Moṣaffā, *Farhang-e eṣṭelāḥāt-e nojūmī*, Tabrīz, 1357 Š./1978, pp. 36, 693; also Faḵr-al-dīn Gorgānī, *Vīs o Ramīn*, pp. 180 v. 8, 265 v. 115). In Iran people imagined eclipses to be swallowings of the sun or the moon by a dragon, and they therefore went up onto the flat roofs of their houses at those times and thumped their washtubs in prayer for the sun's or moon's release (Moṣaffā, op. cit., p. 693).

Another interpretation of the dragon-slaying by Indo-Iranian gods is that the god in question was a god of thunder and lightning, that the dragon was a black cloud, and that by slaying the dragon, the god released water impounded in its stomach to fall as rain.

In the Iranian texts there is no direct reference to drought, but all the Persian tales describe the country for many parasangs around the dragon's lair as an arid, burning desert devoid of humans, animals, and plants. At the same time, these legends are silent on the subject of rainfall after the slaying of the dragon and release of water [which the dragon had impounded], but in all the stories the dragon's lair is close to either a spring or the sea, and in most of them, a woman plays a part. It would appear that the woman in the Iranian legends has replaced water and rain as the symbol of fertility and life. The theme of the feast held after the victory over the dragon—note especially the feast of Mehragān held after Ferēdūn's victory over Żaḥḥāk (*Šāh-nāma* I, p. 79, 1.1)—can be traced to the legend of the slaying of a dragon by the god Mehr (Mithras), though no clear and direct link between the ritual and worship and the theme of dragon-slaying has been found.

Structural changes. The main novelty of the Iranian legends is the introduction of the theme of "the maiden and the dragon," in which the dragon becomes a historical person, sometimes a foreign usurper such as Żaḥḥāk, sometimes simply a foreign enemy such as Arjāsp in the story in the seven labors of Esfandīār; (The story of Ṭāʾer and Māleka in the *Šāh-nāma* (VII, p. 220, vv. 26ff.) may be another example, see ʿA. Zaryāb Ḵūyī, "Afsāna-ye fatḥ al-ḥażar," in *Šāh-nāma-šenāsī*, Tehran, 1356 Š./1977, pp. 187-201). The kidnapped maiden always disappears and the hero, after slaying the dragon, is rewarded with marriage to another maiden, with no connection with the dragon. It appears that, as the mythology of dragon-slaying evolved, the maiden was removed from the dragon's belly in order to make the story more realistic and so it became necessary to invent a reason other than rescue of the maiden for the hero's entry into the dragon's belly, namely the invulnerability of the dragon's hide. Because of this, the hero's attacks are always aimed either at the inside of its stomach or at its mouth, eyes, or skull. He has to kill the dragon from within himself, or, in a later development, kill the dragon by feeding it skins stuffed with deadly substances. The pouring of molten lead into the dragon's mouth concurs with Iranian notions about execution of demoniacal beings in the next world by means of molten metal (this may well have been a method of torturing and killing enemies in use among the Iranians themselves, see Wikander, *Männerbund*, pp. 106f.). Against this, Christensen (*Iran Sass*., p. 96) derives the story of Ardašīr's dragon-slaying from the legend of the Babylonians' god, Marduk, who called up a terrible wind which entered the mouth of Tiʾâmat and killed her. In the Avestan account of Garšāsp's dragon-slaying, a long time has to elapse before the fire's heat begins to affect the

dragon's hide. This suggests that belief in the invulnerability of dragon hide was a very old component of the myth.

After slaying the dragon, the hero makes a coat for himself out of its invulnerable hide. As already noted, in several stories the name of some other animal is applied to the dragon in order to give variety to the hero's exploits. In the story of the *babr-e bayān*, the tiger (*babr*) is either a dragon whose name has been changed or a beast which was originally a tiger but has been endowed with dragon-like features. The fact that Rostam's coat is also called a leopard skin (*palangīna*) in the *Šāh-nāma* (IV, p. 286 v. 1188) and in a Sogdian legend (E. Benveniste, *Textes sogdiens*, Paris, 1940, pp. 134-36) supports the interpretation of *babr* in *babr-e bayān* as "tiger." It may be significant that in Greek mythology, the lion which Hercules strangled (because its skin was invulnerable), and whose skin he thereafter wore (like Rostam's *babr-e bayān*) on his shoulders, is called the Nemean lion after the place (Nemea) which the lion had infested. In another surviving legend, the *babr-e bayān* is said to have been a coat sent from heaven (see AKVĀN-E DĪV).

When the dragon is presented as a historical person, the invulnerability of the dragon's hide is transformed into the impregnability of the enemy's castle, which the hero can only seize by stealth. Similarly in the Greek legend of Troy, Epeios, the designer of the wooden horse, plays the same part as the demon in the Mandean legend and as Gōdarz in the Iranian legend of the *babr-e bayān*. In some of the Iranian legends, however, the hero himself devises the ruse (story of the *patyāra* and elsewhere). Several different stratagems for the capture of the castle are mentioned, e.g., entry in the disguise of a merchant (cf. also the story of Esfandīār's capture of the castle of Rūʾīn Dež, *Šāh-nāma* VI, p. 192 vv. 452f.), seizure of the enemy's signet-ring (the story of Qāren's capture of the castle of the Ālān people, *Šāh-nāma*, p. 126 vv. 799f.), making the castle's guards drunk (cf. also Šāpūr and Ṭāʾer, *Šāh-nāma* V, 224 vv 81f.), etc. In legends where the dragon is presented as a historical person, the maiden is imprisoned by the enemy and set free by the hero, cf. Helen of Troy, Jamšīd's sisters in Ferēdūn's struggle against Żaḥḥāk, Esfandīār's sisters in the story of Esfandīār and Arjāsp, Māleka in the story of Ṭāʾer and Māleka.

The dragon-slaying legends in the Avesta by comparison with the Rigveda, have lost their mythico-religious importance. In the national legends this development is carried much further, to the point where the theme of dragon-slaying has nothing whatever to do with service to religion and becomes an instrument of royal or heroic ideology. Thus in the Iranian legends dragon-

slaying comes first among the marvels and bold feats required as proofs of the king's or hero's legitimacy (Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Farāmarz-nāma*, p. 43 n. 23). In general it can be said that the dragon-slaying exploit of Ferēdūn is the model for kings and that of Garšāsp the model for heroes. The requirement that every king or hero should demonstrate the legitimacy of his status by slaying a dragon or doing some other fabulous deed or receiving miraculous aid prompted not only the tendency to historicize mythology but also a contrary tendency to mythologize history.

In the matter of royal ideology, special emphasis was laid on the king's legitimacy at times when his position was contested and insecure. This was the case in the reign of Ardašīr I (r. 241-66). After the overthrow of the long-established Parthian dynasty, the new regime's legitimacy had to be asserted, and this was done in various ways: notably by invention of the genealogy which makes Ardašīr a descendant of the Achaemenids (as in the *Šāh-nāma*, *Kār-nāmag*, and other sources), and by propagation of the stories about the worm (*kerm); similarly in the case of Bahrām Čōbīn, the general of Hormozd IV (r. 578-90) and rival of Ḵosrow II. According to the version in the Šāh-nāma (IX, p. 150 v. 2376), all the people with one voice acclaimed Bahrām as "Shah of Iran" after he had proved his legitimacy by slaying the šīr-e kappī in Turkistan. The same purpose is apparent in the stories about Bahrām V (r. 434-60), the renowned Bahrām Ḡor. From the accounts in the available sources, it is clear that the Iranians had greatly resented the conduct of his father, Yazdegerd I (399-420) and were unwilling, after the latter's death, to acknowledge the succession of his son, Bahrām; they therefore made a certain Ḵosrow king for a while, until Bahrām recovered his crown and throne with the help of the ruler of Ḥīra. It was because of this situation that Bahrām's legitimacy is so strongly and frequently stressed in stories of his exploits, including his slaying of dragons. In the case of Alexander, unlike the Zoroastrian priests who never acknowledged the Macedonian conqueror, the court historians attempted to justify Alexander's rule in Iran with all sorts of arguments for his legitimacy. In the Alexander romance written by Pseudo-Callisthenes, many wondrous feats and bold deeds are ascribed to Alexander, such as going disguised as his own ambassador on a mission to Darius, making the ice break after crossing a river, seeing marvels, etc.; all stemmed from stories which the Iranians themselves had invented for the purpose of legitimizing Alexander. Later, when this romance was translated into Pahlavi, the translator saw fit to add two further themes, not present in the original but of great importance for Alexander's legitimization in Iran: Alexander's Iranian lineage*

and his slaying of a dragon.

One particularly interesting example of the importance of dragon mythology in assertion of royal legitimacy is the story in the *Šāh-nāma* (I, p. 256 vv. 1ff.) that Ferēdūn turned himself into a dragon and then barred the path of his sons in order to see how each would react. In this trial, the youngest son, Ēraj, comes out best because he chooses the middle road, halfway between hesitancy and impetuosity, the inhibitive element of earth and the stimulative element of fire being equally balanced in Ēraj's constitution. Ferēdūn therefore judges him worthier than the other two, and in dividing the empire he allots its middle and best part, Iran, to Ēraj.

A recent psychoanalytic interpretation of the dragon-slaying theme, propounded by Otto Rank, a pupil of Sigmund Freud, deserves mention. Rank thinks that the entry of heroes into the belly of the dragon is a symbolic expression of the desire of sons to reenter the womb of the mother. Among other evidence for his theory he cites Iranian dragon-slaying legends.

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