



BAHRĀM V GŌR

Bahrām V Gōr, son and successor of Yazdegerd I, reigned from 420 to 438. His mother was said to have been Šōšanduxt, a daughter of the Jewish exilarch (Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, par. 74). As a youth he was brought up at the court of the Lakhmid kings of Ḥīra, No‘mān and his son Monḍer (he had probably been banished thither upon some disagreement with his father, see Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 90 n. 2). Since the death of Šāpūr II in 379, nobles and priests had increased their prestige and power at the expense of central authority, electing, deposing and killing kings (among them Yazdegerd I) at will; and they now intended to exclude Yazdegerd’s sons from the succession (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 253ff.). The eldest son, Šāpūr, governor of Persarmenia, hurried to Ctesiphon to seize the throne but was murdered by the nobles, who elected a prince of Sasanian descent, Ƙosrow by name, as king (Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 91, n. 4).

Bahrām asked and received military assistance from Monḍer, and marched on the capital. Alarmed, the nobles negotiated with him and accepted his claim after exacting from him the promise that he would right his father’s misrule. According to the Persian tradition celebrated in the *Šāh-nāma* (Moscow, VII, pp. 296-303) and other Sasanian-based sources, Bahrām opted for an ordeal, suggesting that the royal crown and garb be placed between two lions, and whoever could retrieve them by killing the beasts should be acknowledged as the divinely favored king; and while Ƙosrow withdrew, Bahrām underwent the ordeal and won the throne. He left the task of administration to his father’s officials, especially to Mihr Narseh, grand minister (*wuzurg framadār*) of the



empire. He also remitted taxes and public debts at festive occasions, promoted musicians to higher rank and brought thousands of Indian minstrels (*lūrīs*) into Iran to amuse his subjects, and he himself indulged in pleasure-loving activities, particularly hunting (his memorable shooting of a wonderful onager, *gōr*, is said to have given origin to his nickname Gōr “Onager [hunter]”). These measures made Bahrām one of the most popular kings in Iranian history. Right after his accession, he proved himself in battle against the White Huns (the Hephthalites) who had invaded eastern Iran. Leaving his brother Narseh as regent, Bahrām took the road from Nisa via Marv to Kušmēhan, where he fell upon the enemy, won a resounding victory, and obtained precious booty from which he made rich offerings to the fire temple of Ādur Gušnasp. On his return, he appointed Narseh governor of Khorasan. However, on the western front, Bahrām was less successful. Many Armenian Christians had appealed or defected to the Romans, and the refusal to surrender them resulted in open hostility in 421. Mihr Narseh led the Persian forces but engagements were indecisive, and finally a treaty was signed giving freedom of religion to the Christians in Iran and Zoroastrians in the Byzantine empire, and obliging the Romans to contribute financially to the defense of the Caucasus passes against the Huns. Bahrām then deposed the Armenian king, Artāšeš (Ardašīr), son of Bahrāmšāpūr (Vrāmšāpuh), and replaced him with a margrave (*marzbān*).

Bahrām V is exceedingly popular in Iranian literature and art (see below). His coins show him as wearing a crown with three-step crenellations and a large crescent of the moon; they also introduce certain novelties such as the appearance of the crowned king’s bust within the flames of the fire altar on the reverse (R. Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics*, Brunswick, 1971, p. 49, pl. 9 nos. 153-58). No monument has survived of Bahrām V. His death is said in one tradition to have occurred during a hunt; according to another version, he died a natural death (summer of 438).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

The main Sasanian-based account is given by Ṭabarī, tr. Nöldeke, pp. 85-112.

See also Dīnavarī, pp. 53ff.; *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, VII, pp. 266ff.; *Nehāyat al-erabapud* E.G. Browne, *JRAS*, 1900, pp. 222ff.; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj* II, pp. 157ff., 191; Ṭa'ālebī, *Ġorar*, pp. 553ff.

For chronology see Nöldeke, op. cit., pp. 419ff. Concerning Bahrām's love for music and the role of the minstrels see M. Boyce, "The Parthian *gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *JRAS*, 1957, pp. 11, 30f.

Armenian, Syriac, and Byzantine references to Bahrām are listed in Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 362 no. 14, and used by Nöldeke in his notes on Ṭabarī. Bahrām's relations with the Christians are discussed by J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse*, Paris, 1904, pp. 117ff.