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BANNERS

BANNERS (*ʿalam*, *derafš*). In the earliest surviving Persian lexicon, the *Loḡat-e fors* (ed. Dabīrsīāqī, p. 70), Asadī Ṭusī glosses the word *derafš*, or banner, as a signaling or guiding device (*ʿalāmat*). Jamālī Yazdī, the author of a popular encyclopedia entitled *Farroḵ-nāma* (ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1344 Š./1965, p. 318) more explicitly states in 580/1184-85 that the *derafš* is "an ensign at which the whole army keeps looking in the battlefield. That is called the center." The meaning remained unchanged in the 8th/14th century. Ebn Hendūšāh (*Seḥāḥ al-fors*, ed. ʿA. Ṭāʿatī, Tehran, 2535 = 1355 Š./1976, p. 151) understands *derafš* as "an ensign and a shining standard," while in 744/1343-44, Šams-e Faḵrī simply enters it with the gloss *ʿalam* in his *Meʿyār-e jamālī* (*Vāža-nāma-ye fārsī*, *Baḵš-e čahārom-e Meʿyār-e jamālī*, ed. Ṣ. Kīā, Tehran, 1337 Š./1958, p. 213).

The sheen or gleam of the *derafš*, a notion conveyed by its etymology (see Horn, *Etymologie*, p. 123), is no mere ornamental characteristic but one linked with its very purpose: to serve as a guiding device or, to put it in military language, as a rallying point. This is borne out by the glosses provided for *ʿalam* by the 6th/12th-century Arab lexicographer Ebn Manẓūr (*Lesān al-ʿArab*, Cairo, 1955, 15 vols.; repr. Beirut, n.d., XII (letter *mīm*). He enters *ʿalam* with the gloss *manār* "lighthouse." As a second meaning, Ebn Manẓūr notes that *ʿalama* and *ʿalam* are devices "stuck in deserts that those who go astray may be guided by them." A third meaning is "mountain." Indeed the fundamental meaning of a guiding device, which is therefore shiny and as high as possible, is implicit in Persian literary usage from the earliest times.

Countless references in epic literature as well as in chronicles show that, in the

clouds of dust that enveloped troops as they fought in sandy land, the glitter of the banner was the only way that warriors had of following the moves of their commanders or of identifying the enemy. As Afrāsīāb leads his army to confront the Iranians under Rostam, Gorāza sees “an army that was like a black cloud. . . . A banner emerged from the azure blue [mass]” (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Mohl, II, p. 54 l. 597).

Colors seem to have been used specifically by certain groups at certain times. In the *Šāh-nāma*, for example, the banner of the Turanians is black (*Šāh-nāma*, Mohl, I, p. 414 l. 381). The colors selected for banners would seem to have been those used for any type of emblem by a given group. “His banner is black and black is his surcoat,” Zāl warns his son Rostam as the latter is about to confront Afrāsīāb, the king of Tūrān (*Šāh-nāma* I, p. 466 l. 36 A). In the next line, he adds that “A black banner is attached on top of his helmet.” This important verse demonstrates that the small banners stuck into small spiky openings on top of helmets that we know from 9th/15th and 10th/16th-century miniature painting hark back to a distant past. They are certainly not later than the Samanid period, as proven by Ferdowsī’s mention, and might conceivably go back to Sasanian times. The line moreover leaves no doubt that the banner was an emblem which warriors were keen to display. On the other hand, there is evidence that a variety of colors could be used for the banners displayed by an army following guidelines that are as yet unclear. In the *Šāh-nāma*, for example, there is frequent reference to banners that are red, purple, and yellow. Sometimes, even additional colors are mentioned. When Ṭōs leads his troops into Torkestān, the shimmering Derafš-e Kāvīān makes “the atmosphere red, yellow, blue, purple” (*Šāh-nāma* II, p.592, l. 402).

The material of banners was often silk, the shimmering fabric par excellence. Thus space may become like purple silk (*parand*) and the banners glitter (*Šāh-nāma* III, p. 588 l. 2104). *Parnīānī derafš* “silken banner” is a recurring phrase. Different royal emblems could be used concurrently. Describing the advance of the Iranian army, a couple of distichs below the verses that have just been quoted, Ferdowsī goes on: “Behind each banner, there followed another banner—some with dragons, others with the image of the eagle” (l. 2107). Miniature painting bears out the evidence of poetry. Early illuminated manuscripts have not come down to us even though literary sources clearly show that *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts were already being illustrated by the early 6th/12th century, contrary to a widely held belief (A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, “Le *Shāh-Nāme*, Miroir du Destin,” *Stud. Ir.* 17, 1988, pp. 43-44). From the 8th/14th

century on, such representations are not uncommon. In the earliest illuminated Persian manuscripts preserved in nearly original condition banners are represented without figural emblems. For example, in a miniature from an early 8th/14th-century copy of Rašīd-al-Dīn's *Jāmeʿ al-tawārīḵ*, the banner of the king of India is a vertical rectangle filled with green cross-hatching. Three small elongated triangular red streamers, a longer one flanked by two shorter ones, are attached to its side. His enemy Sultan Maḥmūd holds a long spear tilted at a 45-degree angle and with a small triangular green streamer fastened to the shaft about one third of the way down (D. T. Rice and B. Gray, *The Illustrations of the "World History" of Rashīd al-Dīn*, Edinburgh, 1976, pl. 56, pp. 150-51). All the streamers are cross-hatched. Identical banners occur in scenes featuring Iranians (e.g., p. 148, pl. 55, showing the Ziyarid Qābūs confronted with the Buyid army). These were therefore standard formats at the time of the manuscript. Both types were still being used around Ṣafar, 731/November, 1330, when the copyist of a *Šāh-nāma* generally considered to be of the Shiraz school completed his task (J. M. Rogers, F. Çağman, Z. Tanındı, *The Topkapı Saray, The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts*, London, 1986, p. 51). Done in a crude manner, they provide the earliest securely dated examples of banners with figural emblems. In one miniature (pl. 36), a banner consists of a vertical rectangle or possibly a square of scarlet with a narrow gold border; it is prolonged by two triangular streamers of ocher. On the scarlet patch is the image of a flying bird among cloud bands stylized in the Chinese manner. The bird and clouds are gilt, suggesting brocaded silk. In a miniature from the fourth feat (*ḵᵛān*) of Esfandīār (pl. 33), large triangular banners carried by horsemen stand about three times the height of the horses. A red banner carries the golden or ocher image of a dragon, a green banner the golden image of a bird. A third banner is of plain rusty ocher. One miniature from a dispersed *Šāh-nāma* manuscript probably executed in the late 8th/14th century shows an interesting variant (B. Gray, *Persian Painting*, Geneva, 1961, p. 43). The subject is Manučehr's victory over Tūr. In the Iranian camp a horseman stands at one end of a line that also includes a rider beating on heavy war drums and two other horsemen sounding long, straight trumpets. The first horseman, who may be characterized as the royal standard-bearer, steadies with both hands a long red shaft, again about three times the height of his horse. It is crowned by an ensign, probably of brass and consisting of a series of axial elements flanked by confronted dragon heads. Immediately below a hairy tassel or tail flutters in the wind. Below that is a tall rectangular banner with a single streamer attached to its upper rim. Along the upper section of the rectangle is a short

band of *nasḵī* calligraphy in gold on a deep blue ground between two gold fillets. It consists of two titles that normally introduce the royal protocol on objets d'art of that period, *ʿezza le-Mawlānā al-So[l]ṭān* "Might/glory to our lord the sultan" (cf. A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World 8-18th Centuries*, London, 1982, pp. 214a [top inscription], 221b, 222b all on brass bowls from Fārs, the first two probably contemporary with the manuscript). The remaining portion of the banner, which is about four times as high as it is wide, is divided into two panels. In the upper panel the golden figure of an angel, apparently in flight, his left hand raised, is depicted on a vermilion ground. The figure wears a crown and may represent the archangel Gabriel. The lower panel is filled with a herringbone pattern in gold on a scarlet ground. The same abstract pattern recurs on the streamer. The rigidity of the fabric, contrasting with the undulating movement of the "tassel" above, suggests heavy brocade with thick gold threads. In the fight scene, one of the riders pierces his foe on a long spear of proportions identical to the flagpole. Near the spearhead a small rectangular strip of fabric, which in real life would have been about ten inches long, is prolonged at its lower edge by a very narrow strip of red fabric while, slightly above the miniature banner, two similar strips flutter in the air. Such a spear, with its attached miniature banner, may have been the early inspiration for the very principle of a large banner.

A double-page miniature from the same manuscript shows two facing armies, each massed against the outer frame of one page (M. Ş. Ipşiroğlu, *Masterpieces from the Topkapı Museum: Paintings and Miniatures*, pl. 19). In the open space, two horsemen are engaged in single combat under the watchful eye of a third horseman. Taken in conjunction with the previous page, this miniature is of the utmost importance. It shows how the royal standard-bearers stood in proper battle order. On each side five horsemen stand near the center of the troops close behind the front lines; they hold banners that by convention are clustered in the top corner. The four farthest banners, of which only portions are visible, are of the type already described, identifiable from the gold script on blue at the tops and portions of the angel below. The inscriptions taken together can be read: *ʿEzza le-mawlānā al-malek al-aʿdal al-aʿl[am] al-moʾayyed al-moẓaffar* . . . "glory to our lord the most just and wise king, the supported [by heaven], the victorious." This protocol identifies these four banners as royal standards, presumably of the type prevalent in Fārs and perhaps elsewhere as well. The association of the angel suggests that it must also have been a royal emblem. The nearest banner on each side consists of a large

elongated triangle; in a trapezoidal panel near the shaft a lion passant is represented in gold on a vermilion ground. The remainder of the triangle is filled with herringbone pattern.

The concurrent use of the triangular banner with a lion effigy suggests that the two types, each with its specific iconography, had different purposes. These have yet to be elucidated. Banners with lion effigies are repeatedly mentioned in Persian literature in royal or quasi-royal contexts. Azraqī Heravī writes in the 5th/11th century: "And because the black lion is the image on his standard, the black lion becomes more valiant in combat" (*Dīvān*, ed. S. Nafīsī, Tehran, 1336 Š./1957, p. 89). ʿAbd-al-Wāseʿ Ḡarjestānī Jabalī, who died in 555/1160, writes in a panegyric to a prince: "And if by you the lion of the forest is threatened when you are angry, your threat renders him more helpless than the lion on the banner" (*Dīvān*, ed. Ḍ. Ṣafā, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960, p. 269: helpless because lifeless). Elsewhere (p. 273) Jabalī conjures the image of "the lion in the sky (= Leo)," agitated like "the lion on the banner when the wind blows."

Two other emblems of royal character recur in 9th/15th- and 10th/16th-century miniatures, echoing Ferdowsī's line quoted above. One is a bird with flame-like tail and wings like those of an eagle, which is the mythical Sīmorḡ. It occurs in a *Šāh-nāma* of Bāysonḡor (q.v.), commissioned in 833/1429-30. The miniature depicts the army led by Rostam confronting the troops of the Ḵāqān of Čīn (L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson, and B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, London, 1933, pl. XLVIIIA, pp. 69-70). On a standard held upright by a standard-bearer in Rostam's army, the Sīmorḡ is very clearly depicted on the vertical rectangular section prolonged by a long triangular streamer. Dragons also occur, invariably in a royal or princely context. Such a dragon may be seen in a manuscript of Neẓāmī's *Ḵamsa* which was completed in Šawwāl, 850/20 December 1446-17 January 1447 and was illuminated by Solṭān-ʿAlī Bāvardī (I. Stchoukine, "Sultân ʿAlî al-Bâvardî," *Syria* 44/3-4, 1967, pl. XXIV/2). The standard appears behind the imperial parasol, held above Alexander as he watches the wall being built against Gog and Magog. On the vertical rectangular panel of the standard, basically similar to those of the much earlier *Jāmeʿ al-tawārīk*Â², a dragon rises threateningly, its spiked tongue lashing out. Above it an epigraphic band carries the Arabic words "the supreme sultan" [*al-Solṭān al-aʿẓam*], extracted from the usual imperial protocol, which explicitly identifies the banner as a royal emblem. A dragon is also to be seen on a standard in the *Šāh-nāma* manuscript executed around

that time, possibly about 843/1440, for Moḥammad Jūkī, the brother of prince Bāysonḡor (color plate in R. H. Pinder Wilson, *Persian Painting of the Fifteenth Century*, London, 1958, p. 11, pl. 4). It appears in a miniature illustrating the slaying of Zarasp, son of Ṭōs, son of the king Nōḏar, at the hands of Ferōd. The standard of Zarasp is of a type related to the previous example. In the upper panel of a vertical rectangle (proportionally shorter than the corresponding panel in the *Ḵamsa*) a yellow dragon is depicted on a green ground. Above it is a royal-blue band without an inscription. The lower panel is lavender, as is the triangular streamer attached to the side at the top.

From the 9th/15th century on, religious inscriptions seem to have played an increasing role, although caution must be exercised in view of the limited number of surviving illuminated manuscripts of the 14th century. An important miniature with regard to the history of banners occurs in a manuscript of the *Ḵamsa* dated (according to Rogers, Çağman, and Tanındı, op. cit., p. 113, pl. 71), 880/1475-76 and Moḥarram, 886/March, 1481. It was copied by a calligrapher attached to Sultan Yaʿqūb. In the miniature representing the armies of Ḵosrow Parvēz and Bahrām Čōbīn, Ḵosrow's five royal standard-bearers appear in a row in the top left corner. Each banner consists of a horizontal rectangle of rigid material, to which is attached an undulating triangular banner of a lighter color. The rigid panels, alternately green and azure, carry polylobed escutcheons in gold with the triple invocation to God, Moḥammad, and ʿAlī. The same invocation occurs on the standards of the enemy.

Smaller banners, more elongated and devoid of epigraphy, are carried by various officers. Very small triangular streamers of the same shape as the latter are attached just below the spearheads of the warriors, a reminder of the fundamental nature of the banner: a streamer attached to a weapon. Longer inscriptions become more common in the 10th/16th century. In the manuscript of the *Šāh-nāma* commissioned by Shah Ṭahmāsb, which survived intact into the 20th century, when it was torn apart and dispersed by Arthur Houghton Sr. in the early 1970s, Koranic inscriptions occur on royal standards.

The miniature depicting Qāren defeating Bārmān (S. C. Welch, *A King's Book of Kings*, New York, 1976, pl. on p. 137) shows sections of two royal standards, one red, the other green, on the far left. The inscription on the red standard reproduces Qurʾān 61:13 ("Victory comes from God and triumph is near; tell the tidings of joy to the Believers, oh Moḥammad"). The scribe has daringly added "oh ʿAlī." Traditional invocations also occur in the manuscript. In the

miniature illustrating the killing of Kalbād at the hands of Farīborz (ibid., pl. on p. 165) the banner of Farīborz, son of Kay Kāʾūs, is stuck in the ground at right. The large triangular pink banner carries an elongated cartouche with the triple invocation in gold lettering on black: “Oh God! Oh Moḥammad! Oh ʿAlī!” It is noteworthy that on the banner of Kalbād, symmetrically planted in the ground at the left, no inscription is visible amid the ornamental motifs. Similarly, the miniature banner set in the spike atop Farīborz’s helmet carries the triple invocation, in gold letters on a vermilion ground, but no inscription is visible on the miniature red banner that has fallen from Kalbād’s helmet. A systematic survey of banners illustrated in dated manuscripts should yield further information on their evolution. At this stage it appears that figural images were in use from as early as 5th/11th century. As there is only one known illustrated manuscript surviving from before the Mongol invasion, it is not yet possible to state with certainty when such explicitly Islamic elements as Koranic inscriptions and possibly representations of angels were first adopted; both can be found in miniatures of the 8th/14th century.

See also ʿalam wa ʿalāmat.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.