



BĀNŪ PĀRS

BĀNŪ PĀRS, “Lady of Pārs,” the name of a Zoroastrian shrine in the mountains at the northern end of the Yazd plain. The sacred rock is on a natural platform above a riverbed, usually dry but filled in rainy seasons with flood waters off the mountains. Two other river courses join it just below the shrine, a fourth a little lower down. Then a mountain ridge blocks their path and forces the waters, when in spate, to swing round and churn their way past it to reach the plain. Both sight and sound are tremendous; and even when the channels are dry, their deep boulder-strewn courses bear witness to the force and abundance of the waters in their season. By the shrine itself a never-failing spring fills a small pool.

The shrine appears to have been dedicated originally to [Ardwīsūr Anāhīd](#), who had the cult title Bānū (see *ibid.*), and whose veneration in the Yazd area is attested by the popularity there of the girl’s name [Āb-Nāhīd](#). The characteristic sacrifice to Bānū Pārs was that of cows, made annually at the shrine by local Zoroastrians until the late 13th/19th century. The cow is known to have been the sacrifice proper of old to Anāhīd (Plutarch, *Life of Lucullus* 24; cf. *Nīrangistān*, chaps. 70-71, ed. A. Waag, Leipzig, 1941, p. 81).

In Islamic times a new belief evolved as to the identity of the “Lady” of the shrine, embodied in the following legend: When Yazdegerd III was fleeing from the invading Arabs, his family took refuge in Yazd. Their pursuers catching up with them there, they scattered. A princess made her way northward on foot. She begged a peasant for a drink, and he milked his cow for her, but the animal kicked over the bowl, and she had to press on, parched.



The annual cow sacrifice was said to be a punishment for this one beast's wayward act. Followed by Arab soldiers, the princess struggled as far as the sacred rock, where, exhausted, she cried out to Ohrmazd for help; the rock opened, and she passed alive into it. (A similar legend attaches to the Muslim shrine to Šahrbānū, reputedly another daughter of Yazdegerd III, at Ray.)

In pre-Muslim times the sacred rock was probably not enclosed. Thereafter a tiny mud-brick cell was built over it, which in 1962 was replaced by a small, elegant brick building, with domed sanctuary. The annual pilgrimage, lasting five days, now takes place in July. The earliest literary reference to the shrine is from A.D. 1626, when a Parsi emissary is recorded to have "rendered homage to Kātūn Bānū Pārs, which is a place of pilgrimage" (M. R. Unvala, ed., *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat*, Bombay, 1922, II, p. 159 1. 3; B. N. Dhabhar, tr., *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others*, Bombay, 1932, p. 593). Kātūn, a Turkish rendering of Bānū, is used in the shrine legend as the princess's proper name, but has no popular currency.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text. See also P. M. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia*, London, 1902, p. 156.

M. Boyce, "Bībī Shahrībānū and the Lady of Pārs," *BSOAS* 30, 1967, pp. 30-44.

Idem, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 248-55.

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