



BĀRBAD

BĀRBAD, minstrel-poet of the court of the Sasanian king Kōsrow II Parvēz (r. 591-628 a.d.). His name is recorded as Fahl(a)bad/ḡ, Bahl(a)bad/ḡ, Fahl(a)wad/ḡ, Fahr(a)bad/ḡ, Bahr(a)bad/ḡ, or Bārbad/ḡ in the Arabic sources and as Barbād/ḡ in the Persian sources. As to the original form, Nöldeke (p. 42 n. 2) thought that the arabicized forms such as Fahl(a)bad/ḡ represented Pahlavi Pahr-/Pahlbad, and the form Bārbad (or rather *Pārbad) was due to the ambiguity of the Pahlavi character *h*, which could equally represent the sound *ā/ă*. Christensen (*Iran. Sass.*, p. 484 n. 2), on the other hand, considered Bārbad the correct form. On the evidence of the oldest attestation of the name in Arabic, namely Bahr-/Bahlbad in a poem of Kāled b. Fayyāz (d. ca. 718, see Yāqūt, III, p. 252; Qazvīnī, p. 230) and the other arabicized forms, it is more likely that the original form was Pahr-/Pahlbad (with *-hr-/hl-* < OIr. *-rθ-* or *-θr-*?), from which *Pārbad and later Bārbad developed (for the development of *-ahr* to *-ār*, cf. Pahl. *šahr*, Pers. *šār*, beside *šahr* “city”) with assimilation of *p* – *b* > *b* – *b* (cf. Pahl. Pābak/g, NPers. Bābak). This explanation is strengthened by the attestation of Pahr-/Pahlbad, probably a proper name, on a Sasanian seal (see Gignoux and Gyselen, p. 112; cf. *phlp't* on another seal, *ibid.*, p. 101).

Only scant information, mostly of a legendary nature, is preserved about Bārbad in the Arabic and Persian sources. According to these, he was the most distinguished and talented minstrel-poet of his epoch. According to the older sources, he was a native of Marv (Ebn Kordāqbeh, *Ketāb al-lahw*, p. 16; Eṣṭaqrī, p. 262; Ps. Jāheẓ, p. 363; Ta‘ālebī, *Gorar*, p. 694; *Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 157), whereas later sources (Šams-al-Dīn Rāzī, p. 193, *Farhang-e jahāngīrī*, *Borhān-e*



qāte, etc.; see Dehḳodā, *Loḡat-nāma*, s.v. Bārbad) mention Jahrom in Fārs as his hometown. The latter assumption was probably inspired by a verse of Ferdowsī (*Šāh-nāma* [Moscow] IX, p. 277 v. 376), according to which Bārbad, after having been informed of the murder of Ḳosrow, traveled from Jahrom to Tīsfūn (Ctesiphon).

His first meeting with the king is related in a legend recorded by Ferdowsī (*ibid.*, pp. 266ff.) and Ṭa‘ālebī (pp. 694ff.), according to which Bārbad, being a young talented musician, aspired to become one of Ḳosrow’s court minstrels, but Sargīs (or Sarkaš), the chief court minstrel, jealously kept him away from the court. Bārbad therefore concealed himself among the leaves of a tree in the king’s garden, where a banquet was being held, and sang three songs to his *barbat*, the first called *Dād-āfrīd* (an abbreviated form of *dādār-āfrīd* “created by god” according to *Šāh-nāma*, p. 228 v. 3644; Ṭa‘ālebī has *Yazdān-āfrīd*); the second *Peykār-e gord* “battle of the hero” according to *Šāh-nāma*, v. 3652, but *Partow-e Farḳār* “splendor of Farḳār” according to Ṭa‘ālebī; and the third *Sabz dar sabz* “green in the green” (*Šāh-nāma*, v. 3659; Ṭa‘ālebī has *Sabz andar sabz*). The king was highly delighted by his minstrel’s talent, gave him audience, and made him his chief minstrel (*Šāh-nāma*, v. 3676).

The legends related by Islamic authors clearly show Bārbad’s influence with the king. According to one legend, the oldest version of which is in Arabic verse by Ḳāled b. Fayyāz (see above), when the king’s favorite horse, Šabdēz, died, neither the master of the horse nor any other courtier dared for fear of death to notify the king. Bārbad, however, was able to save the life of the master of the horse by composing a poem and singing it for the king to the accompaniment of his instrument. The same story is retold in other sources (Ṭa‘ālebī, pp. 703f.; Ps. Jāḥeẓ, p. 364; Qazvīnī, p. 230). Ḳosrow’s favor toward Bārbad motivated the courtiers to appeal to him to mediate with the king whenever one of them was the object of disfavor. They also presented their requests through him to the king (Ps. Jāḥeẓ, pp. 363-64; Qazvīnī, p. 156). Even Šīrīn, the king’s favorite wife, is said to have once asked Bārbad, through his singing and playing, to remind the king of his promise to build her a castle. For this service the queen gave the minstrel an estate near Isfahan, in which he settled his family (Ebn al-Faḳīh, pp. 158f.; Qazvīnī, p. 296; Yāqūt, IV, p. 113; Ṭūsī, p. 210). According to another story (Neẓām-al-Molk, pp. 174f.), a courtier, having incurred the king’s disfavor, was put in prison and nobody dared to visit him except Bārbad. When the king reproached him for this, he responded with a witty remark and thus avoided the king’s anger.



Islamic sources abound in stories about Bārbad's minstrel skill and talent. According to one of them (*Aḡānī* V, p. 58), a musician who together with Bārbad was present at a royal banquet, instigated by jealousy, took advantage of the latter's temporary absence from the banquet and disordered the strings of his lute. On his return to the banquet, Bārbad, unaware that his instrument was out of tune, started to play. As kings did not approve of musicians' tuning their instruments in their presence, he continued his performance so dexterously that nobody noticed the defect of his instrument. It was only after the banquet that the king was informed of it.

Bārbad was a poet-musician of panegyric as well as elegy. He used to compose verses and sing them to his own accompaniment on various occasions, e.g., in the great Iranian festivals, especially Nowrūz and Mehragān, at state banquets, etc. He also versified victories and current events (Ps. Jāḡez, pp. 363ff.). He is related to have composed, at the request of the workmen, a melody called *Bāḡ-e nakjīrān* "garden of the game" on the occasion of the completion of the great gardens at Qaṣr-e Šīrīn (Ebn al-Faqīh, pp. 158ff.; Yāqūt, IV, pp. 112-13). Neẓāmī (*Ḳosrow o Šīrīn*, pp. 190-94) mentions the name of the thirty airs composed by Bārbad for each day of the month. These names, with some variations, are also recorded in some Persian dictionaries such as *Borhān-e qāṭe'* (see Christensen, 1918, pp. 368-77, and *Iran. Sass.*, pp. 485f.). He is also said to have composed for the banquet of the king 360 melodies, one of which he used to sing each day (*Tārīḡ-e gozīda*, p. 123). Ṭa'ālebī (p. 698) attributes to him the authorship of the royal modes (*koĀ²sravānī*), apparently the same as the seven royal modes (*ṭoroq al-molūkīya*) mentioned by Mas'ūdī (*Morūj*, ed. Pellat, V, pp. 127-28; cf. also Ebn Ḳordāḡbeh, *Lahw*, p. 15). The only surviving piece of his poetry in Middle Persian, though in Arabic script, is a panegyric in three hemistichs quoted by Ebn Ḳordāḡbeh (p. 16; see Tafazzoli, p. 338).

The end of Bārbad's life is also related in a legendary way. According to the *Šāh-nāma* ([Moscow] IX, p. 277 vv. 374-413), after Ḳosrow's death Bārbad hurried from Jahrom to Tīsfūn, where he recited some elegies about his master's death, cut his four fingers, and burned his instruments. According to another tradition (Ṭa'ālebī, *Ġorar*, pp. 704f.), Bārbad was poisoned by his rival Sarjas (Sargīs, Sarkaš). But Ebn Qotayba (*'Oyūnal-aḡbār* I, p. 98) and Ebn 'Abd Rabbeh (*'Eqd al-farīd* II, p. 182) attribute this murder to a musician called *Yošt (or *Zīwešt[?] or Rošk[?] in Jāḡez, *Ḥayawān* VII, p. 113, and *Rabūst[?] by Ṭūsī, *'Ajāyeb*, p. 546). According to Ebn Ḳordāḡbeh (p. 17), on the other hand, it was



Bārbad who killed his pupil Šarkās (probably *Sarkēs or Sargīs, etc.), but the murderer’s witty remark earned him the pardon of the king, who did not want to lose both his minstrels.

For a music sample, see [Nakisā va Bārbad](#).

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