



BEHRŪZ, ḌABĪḤ

BEHRŪZ, ḌABĪḤ (1889-1971), Persian satirist, son of the physician and calligrapher Abu'l-Faẓl Sāvajī. Having acquired a knowledge of English at Tehran's American College, he went to Cairo in 1911 to complete his studies in traditional Islamic learning. He spent the next decade in Egypt, becoming fluent in Arabic and well-versed in Arabic literature. In 1921 Behrūz moved to England and at Cambridge, while studying mathematics, became Edward G. Browne's Persian language teaching assistant. Although Browne prized his young colleague's literary taste so much that he deferred to it in *A Literary History of Persia* (1969, III, pp. 540-42), Behrūz seems to have become disenchanted with Cambridge orientalism. He returned to Tehran in 1926 and began working in the Ministry of Finance as a translator. Later he taught Arabic and English at various institutions and finally became head librarian at the Army Officers' Club (*Bāšgāh-e Afsarān*). He also served for years as a member of a commission that coined Persian neologisms at the Ministry of War.

Behrūz's satires are found chiefly in his highly popular parodies and burlesques. Circulated for years clandestinely, the bulk of his satirical work, except for the play *Jījak-'Alīšāh*, which had been published earlier, was finally brought together and published in Germany (Mard-e Emrūz Publications, 1364 Š., n.p.). It consists of (1) *Gand-e bādāvard* (The wind-blown stench), a parody of the doxologies of traditional Persian *matnawīs* in the meter and manner of Neẓāmī's *Laylī o Majnūn*. The best known section of this parody is *Layla-ye me'rāj* or the Night of Ascension, commonly known as *Me'rāj-nāma* (pp. 15-20);



the popularity of this piece as well as a similar one (pp. 44-45) must have led the publisher to call the collection *Me'rāj-nāma—Die Himmelfahrt des Propheten Muhammed*. (2) *Mer'āt al-sarāyer*, a work in prose and verse, intended to ridicule the alleged ignorance and rivalry of two Orientalists, Professors Schulkonhein and Sefkonberg (read in Persian, they sound like Professors Let-loose and Hold-tight); its prose mimics the florid style of Persian *taḍkera* writers and old-fashioned Persian literary scholars. *Mer'āt* also contains parodies of Rūmī's *Maṭnawī*, Sa'dī's introductory chapter of the *Golestān* (Behrūz's *Gandestān* or Stenchgarden) and twelve pieces in imitation of Sa'dī's *Būstān* (Behrūz's *Gand-nāma* or Stenchbook).

Behrūz's ultranationalism and romantic view of pre-Islamic Iran led him to assert the nefarious effects of the Arab conquest and Turkish invasions of Iran, the superiority of the Aryan God over the Biblical one (see, e.g., *Gand-e bādāvārd*, p. 2, ll. 27-34, and *Mer'āt*, p. 43, ll. 38ff.), the supremacy of Iranian civilization, and a Western plot to conceal the merits of this civilization and falsify its history (*Kaṭṭ o farhang*, *Īrān-kūda* 8, 1310 Š./1931, pp. 147, 163, 175ff., 200ff.; *Dabīra*, *Īrān-kūda* 2, p. 20; Baḳtīārī, p. 11). His works ridicule Islamic eschatology, the corrupt and backward practices of the Qajar court, and orientalism; but many of his farcical pieces are inspired simply by a delight in parody and facetiae. Behrūz's ridicule in the *Mer'āt* was aimed at the kind of scholarly style produced, for example, by E. G. Browne and his erudite Persian collaborator Moḥammad Qazvīnī. Behrūz's mimicry of Koranic verse in *Mer'āt* takes advantage of the chance homonymies that occur when Arabic is read as though it were Persian; the effect is similar to James Joyce's "Hail Mary, full of grease, the Lard is with thee" in *Finnegan's Wake*.

Behrūz is also the author of a number of plays, one of which, *Jījak-'Alīšāh* (Berlin, 1302 Š./1923), is among his earliest literary works and is a satire on life at the Qajar court; it has been reprinted several times (most recently in *Ketāb-e jom'a* 1/34, 1359 Š./1980, pp. 16-63). Among his other plays are *Šāh-e Īrān o bānū-ye Arman* (Persian King and Armenian Queen, Tehran, 1927), *Šab-e Ferdowsī* (A Ferdowsi Night) and *Dar rāh-e Mehr* (In the Way of the Sun, [Īrān-kūda 1], Tehran, 1944).

Behrūz's *Me'rāj-nāma*, circulated under the pen name Ebn Deylāq (on this attribution see *Rāhnamā-ye ketāb* 14/7-8, 1350 Š./1971, pp. 543-44), begins traditionally by praising God, but mischievously juxtaposes divine attributes as found in the Qur'ān, making them appear contradictory: "Be'sm Allāh, Prescient and All-knowing/Unique, Eternal, and Bestowing; Avenging, Willful,



and O so Sly/Who's founded the world on Tyranny; Having no equal, helper, or peer/No comrade, advisor, or vizier" (p. 1, ll. 1-3). After decrying what he perceived as the gap between divine will and divine actions in Islam, Behrūz turns to the scripture: "The book of heaven is called *forqān*/Authored by the God of jinn and man; With trillions of things on His mind/Imagine, penning a Book of this kind!" (p. 3, ll. 45-46). In the spirit of Voltaire in *Epître à Uranié*, railing "against a cruel God and sacred lies," he goes on to ridicule such details of Islamic eschatology as the prophet Moḥammad's horse Borāq, the "ass-angel" (*kar-ferešta*), who despite his supernatural abilities still needs to be foddered as any other horse (p. 15, l. 414), and the eternal virgins (*hūr*) and beardless youths (*ḡelmān*) who are said to inhabit and await those destined for heaven, "Nubile houris all quite sacred/Running about completely naked" (p. 10, l. 268). What distinguishes *Ganj-e bādāvard* is Behrūz's mastery of parodic technique, his extensive knowledge of both orthodox and folk Islam, and his splenetic Iranophilia, all of which coalesced to produce a major Persian parody.

While Behrūz's xenophobia and antiorientalism worked to his advantage in his satire, they seemed to have failed him in his scholarship, which was subject to gross distortions. He believed, for example, that Alexander the Great never set foot in Iran and that the Alexander cited in the sources was really a scion of the Persian kings (*Taqwīm wa tāriḵ dar Īrān*, Īrān-kūda 15, 1331 Š./1952, p. 89); that the notion that Hellenism spread in Iran was part of a conspiracy fomented by the forces of imperialism to detract from Iran's contribution to civilization (see his introduction to *Ġaffārī*); and that dating the invention of the Avestan script toward the end of the Sasanian period was again a figment of European imagination, promulgated in order to conceal the fact that the alphabet was fashioned first in Iran by Zoroaster himself thirty-seven centuries ago to both iconically represent and conform naturally to the shape of the speech organs (*Ḳaṭṭ o farhang*, pp. 135ff.). He also believed that Zoroaster was an accomplished astronomer, the first to create an astronomical table (*zīj*), and he calculated the birth and the death of Zoroaster to the precise day (Tuesday, 1st of January 1691 b.c. at the age of 77, *Taqwīm*, pp. 85, 133, 135, 139; for a barbed review of the *Taqwīm*, see "Alīnaqī Astarābādī" [Mojtabā Mīnovī], *Yaḡmā* 5/12, 1331 Š./1953, pp. 563-66). From the middle of his career, Behrūz preferred to write in "pure" Persian, eschewing words of Arabic origin; he considered Arabic to be too inefficient orthographically and grammatically for proper expression (*Zabān-e Īrān: fārsī ya 'arabī?*)



Such highly idiosyncratic notions on language and history are not uncommon among ultranationalists of various countries, and would not have been of consequence but for the fact that Behrūz influenced a number of people, among them army officers, students, and even some university instructors, thereby lending a kind of irrational cast to their thinking. To propagate his ideas, Behrūz founded, with the help of two of his disciples, M. Moğdam (Moqaddam; later professor of Old Persian at the University of Tehran) and Ş. Kīā (later professor of Middle Persian and a deputy minister of culture and the arts), the Īrān Vīj Society, whose series of publications, *Īrān-kūda* (purported to mean Iranian Compendium), became the main vehicle for Behrūz's thoughts. Behrūz's notion that Mithra was to be identified with Jesus born under the Parthian Šāpūr in 272 b.c. in Sīstān, and that a presumed Iranian Mithraic religion not only fostered Roman Mithraism, but was the basis of Christianity (*Īrān-kūda* 15) is found in the writings of M. Moqaddam; e.g., his "Mehrāba," *Našrīya-ye Anjoman-e Farhang-e Īrān-e Bāstān* 1/3, Tehran, 1964). More recently the identification has resurfaced in an article by "Nākodā," *Sahand* 3, 1364 Š./1985, pp. 302ff.). Behrūz also inspired a kind of nationalist credo called *Dīn-e ʿīṣawī* as a forum for his ideas about the independence of Iranian culture. See also conspiracy theory and nationalism.

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See also *Āyanda* 8-11, 1350 Š./1971.

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