



## BESTĀM O BENDŌY

**BESTĀM O BENDŌY**, maternal uncles of Ƙosrow II Parvĕz and leading statesmen and soldiers under Hormozd IV and Ƙosrow Parvĕz. They were sons of Šāpūr, grandsons of Ƙorbondād (Dīnavarī, p. 107; *Nehāyat al-arab fī aḵbār al-fors wa'l-arab*, apud E. G. Browne, *JRAS*, 1900, p. 238, omits Šāpūr and gives Ƙorbondādōya only, and *Šāh-nāma* (Moscow) VIII, p. 42, gives Ƙarrād [*Ƙorradād*] instead of Šāpūr). Their family, the Spāhbad (Theophylactos Simocatta, 4.3.5), was one of the seven great houses of the Parthian and Sasanian periods (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 306; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 104 n. 1), and allegedly descended from Dārā and Esfandīār through the Arsacids (Dīnavarī, loc. cit., with Theophylactos, loc. cit.). So elevated was the position of this family in the Persian empire that its members were acknowledged as “kin and partners of the Sasanians” (Dīnavarī, loc. cit.). Yet they did not escape harm when Hormozd proceeded, in his last years, to murder or detain powerful magnates whom he mistrusted exceedingly. Šāpūr was among those killed ([Pseudo-]Sebeos in M. K. Patkanian, *Essai d’une histoire de la dynastie des Sassanides*, Paris, 1866, p. 89) and his sons were among those imprisoned (*Die von Guidi herausgegebene syrische Chronik*, tr. Th. Nöldeke, Vienna, 1893, p. 8; Dīnavarī, p. 86; Ṭabarī, tr. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 273). This king further antagonized the army by reducing its pay by 10 percent (Theophylactos, 3.13.16) and dismissing some cavalry units (Ṭabarī, tr. Nöldeke, p. 267). Hormozd finally drew the most celebrated of all the nobles, **Bahrām Čōbīn** to rebellion, and as the latter marched on Ctesiphon, the magnates “who equally hated Hormozd” (*Syrische Chronik*, p. 5) instigated their own revolt, seized the palace and released the detainees. In the panic-



stricken capital the reins of power fell into the hands of Bestām and Bendōy (Arm. Vndoy, Greek Bindoēs; diminutive of Vinda[-farnah?]; see Justi, op. cit., p. 370). In league with Ƙosrow, the two brothers first arrested and blinded Hormozd, and then—as Bahrām drew closer—put him to death, and fled toward Azarbaijan (summer 590) to escape being seized by Bahrām (ibid., pp. 5ff.; Dīnavarī, pp. 87f.; for further references see *bahrām čōbīn*). In the first two troubled years of Ƙosrow, Bendōy and Bestām encouraged him to face Bahrām (Ṭa‘alebī, *Gorar*, pp. 664f.; *Nehāya*, p. 238), stood by him wholeheartedly, and earnestly strove to restore his authority. While Bestām gathered royalists in Azarbaijan, Bendōy led Ƙosrow toward the Byzantine border, and, when overtaken by Bahrām’s troops, he displayed heroic devotion, masquerading as the prince and allowing himself to be captured so that his royal nephew could escape to safety. Bahrām detained him but treated him with chivalry (Dīnavarī, pp. 89ff.; Baḷ’amī, ed. Bahār, pp. 1080ff.; *Nehāya*, pp. 239f.; Ṭa‘alebī, pp. 665ff.; *Šāh-nāma* IX, pp. 10ff.).

By January, 591, Ƙosrow was returning with a large Byzantine army that he had obtained by making territorial concessions. Bestām supported him with 8,000 royalists while Bendōy managed to escape and join them in Azarbaijan. A great battle was fought with Bahrām’s outnumbered army (see *bahrām čōbīn*), and Bendōy shrewdly induced mass desertions among the enemy ranks by promising the troops, in the name of Ƙosrow, pardon and protection (Dīnavarī, p. 98). Even after the reestablishment of his authority, Ƙosrow did not feel secure, and kept a guard of 1,000 Byzantine soldiers (Theophylactos, 5.11-13). He rewarded his supporters with estates and offices, appointing Bendōy treasurer and grand minister of the state and Bestām governor of Ṭabarestān, Gorgān, Kōmeš and Khorasan (Dīnavarī, p. 102; *Nehāya*, p. 241; cf. *Šāh-nāma* IX, pp. 136-37; Mas‘ūdī, *Morūj* II, p. 223; see also J. Marquart, “Beiträge zur Geschichte und Sage von Ērān,” in *ZDMG* 69, 1895, p. 638). To discourage future regicide, and to prove his own innocence in the murder of Hormozd (Baḷ’amī, pp. 1154, 1169) Ƙosrow decided to execute his uncles. His motives were strengthened by distrust for the magnates, especially for those who knew how to topple kings (Nöldeke, p. 484), and Bendōy’s repeated protestations at the prince’s inexperience and incompetence (*Syrische Chronik*, p. 8; Dīnavarī, p. 105). Soon after his restoration (Nöldeke, op. cit., pp. 486-87; Dīnavarī, loc. cit., is wrong in referring to Ƙosrow’s 10th year), a case of reasonable disobedience furnished Ƙosrow with the opportunity to act against Bendōy; he had him arrested, mutilated, and put to death. Dying, Bendōy “shouted insults at Ƙosrow and his father, and recalled the faithlessness and



breaking of pacts by the Sasanians” (Dīnavarī, pp. 106f.; see further *Šāh-nāma* IX, p. 178; Baḷ’amī, p. 1154; Mas’ūdī, loc. cit.). According to the *Syrische Chronik* (p. 8), Bendōy was arrested while fleeing toward Azarbaijan to join Beštām; his right hand and foot were cut off, and then he was sent to Gondišāpūr and crucified. Ƙosrow invited Beštām to come to the court, ostensibly for consultation, but the latter was informed of the truth in time, and promptly rose in rebellion, claiming kingship (like Bahrām Čōbīn) on grounds of his Arsacid heritage: “You are not worthier to rule than I am. Indeed, I am more deserving on account of my descent from Dārā, son of Dārā, who fought Alexander. You Sasanians deceitfully gained superiority over us [the Arsacids] and usurped our right, and treated us with injustice. Your ancestor Sāsān was no more than a shepherd . . .” (Dīnavarī, p. 108). He carved a kingdom for himself that stretched from the Oxus to the Zagros (Nöldeke, p. 484), and had the support of many magnates as well as the remnants of the troops of Bahrām Čōbīn who had settled in Deylam (Dīnavarī, pp. 106f.; *Šāh-nāma* IX, pp. 180ff.) and were led, it seems, by his son, Šāpūr (see below). He married Gordīya, Bahrām’s sister (Dīnavarī, p. 107; Ya’qūbī, *Ta’rīk* I, p. 194; *Šāh-nāma* IX, p. 181), thereby increasing his prestige. His coins (minted at Ray) bore the legend Pērōz Vistān “the victor Beštām,” and showed him wearing a crenellated crown adorned with three crescent moons. They are dated to years 1 through 7 and thus support some Christian sources that place his downfall in 596 (R. Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics*, Brunswick, 1971, pl. XV and p. 53; Nöldeke, pp. 484-85). Having been joined by numerous kinsmen from Iraq and mercenaries from Ray and Qazvīn (Dīnavarī, p. 107; *Šāh-nāma* IX, p. 179), Beštām succeeded in obtaining the allegiance of local magnates in Gīlān, Babr (the Ardabīl region), and Ʀaylasān (i.e., Ʀālešān; Dīnavarī, loc. cit.), and was able to repulse several forces sent against him (ibid.; *Šāh-nāma*, loc. cit.; cf. Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 485). He even expanded his authority to the land of the Hephthalites and subjugated two princes, Šaug and Pariowk ([Ps.-] Sebeos, in Patkanian, op. cit., p. 95). As Markwart (*Ērānšahr*, pp. 83f.) recognized, the *Bahrām Čōbīn-nāmak* has transferred these two princes to the history of the more famous hero: Šaug has replaced Šāba the Great Ƙāqān of the Turks, whom Bahrām slew with an arrow shot, the father of Parmōda, whom Bahrām is supposed to have besieged and forced to surrender.

These successes emboldened Beštām. Having made Daštāba/Dastabī (near Ray) his headquarters, he proceeded in earnest to make inroads into Media (Dīnavarī, pp. 107-08). Deeply alarmed (Nöldeke, op. cit., pp. 485-86), Ƙosrow sent several armies against him, and later, with a larger host joined them in



person. Bestām garrisoned strategic mountain passes, and fought the royal forces in a great battle in the neighborhood of Hamadān. When the heavy engagements continued for three days, Ƙosrow resorted to treachery, and at his instigation, Pariowk, who accompanied Bestām, murdered the latter and sent his head to Ƙosrow. The leaderless army panicked and scattered (for the campaign see Dīnavarī, pp. 108ff., which is followed by *Nehāya*, p. 243. The murder is described in [Ps.-]Sebeos, in Patkanian, loc. cit., and *Syrische Chronik*, p. 9. In another version Gordīya kills Bestām upon receiving Ƙosrow’s instructions accompanied with the promise of marriage: Dīnavarī, pp. 109-10; Ya’qūbī, *Ta’rīk* I, p. 194; *Šāh-nāma* IX, pp. 184ff.). “They hung the head of Bestām from the neck of Šāpūr, son of Bahrām [Čōbīn], who had risen in arms, and having mounted him on a camel, led him through the streets of the capital” (*Syrische Chronik*, p. 9). Some sixty kinsmen of Bendōy and Bestām were also executed (Nöldeke, op. cit., 483; Baḷ’amī, ed. Bahār, p. 1169). Ƙosrow then sent the Armenian Smbat Bagratōnī to regain the rebellious provinces ([Ps.-]Sebeos, in Patkanian, loc. cit.). Thirty-six years later, Ƙosrow was tried and executed for his great sins, among them his part in the murder of his father and his treacherous behavior toward his uncles (Nöldeke, op. cit., pp. 363ff.; Dīnavarī, pp. 112-13; Ta’ālebī, *Gōrar*, p. 721). A son of Bendōy was instrumental in these proceedings (Baḷ’amī, op. cit., p. 1155). That the fate of Bestām did not end the House of Spahbad is evidenced by the fact that of the commanders who fought the Arabs in 634, two, Tīrōya and Bendōya, were sons of Bestām (Ṭabarī, I, p. 2169) and a third was his sister’s son, Narsē (ibid., p. 2125).

Bestām’s name may survive in the name of Bestām, a town north of Šāhrūd (cf. Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 71), and in that of Ƙosrow’s famous monument near Kermānšāh, Ṭāq-e Bostān “arch of Bestām,” according to the *Mojmal* (p. 79), which says that near Kermānšāh there was a “village called Bestām, and Bestām is Gostahm, the uncle of Kosrow.” See also [bestām](#), the name.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Given in the text.