



## BĪBĪ ŠAHRBĀNŪ

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**BĪBĪ ŠAHRBĀNŪ**, the dedication of a Moslem shrine on a hillside by Ray to the south of Tehran. The legend attached to it is that Šahrbānū, a daughter of the last Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III (632-51), was captured by Arabs and taken to Medina, where she became the wife of Ḥosayn, son of ‘Alī. To him she bore a son, ‘Alī Zayn-al-‘Ābedīn, who was the fourth Shi‘ite imam. After the battle of Karbalā’ (61/680) she fled back to Persia, pursued by her dead husband’s enemies. They were close to her when she reached Ray, and in desperation she tried to call on God; but instead of *Yāllāhu* her weary tongue uttered *Yā kūh* “O mountain!”, and the mountain opened miraculously, and she passed living into its rocks. In due course a shrine was built at the place, which may be visited only by women and male descendants of Moḥammad.

The legend of Šahrbānū as “Mother of the Nine Imams,” which goes back to at least the ninth century a.d., has some importance in Shi‘ite tradition, but no historical basis, and no version of it associates this putative daughter of Yazdegerd III with Ray. Its association with that town, it has been suggested, was due to the existence there of a place that had formerly been holy to a Zoroastrian divinity, namely *Anāhīd*, whose local veneration was thus continued in Moslem guise. *Anāhīd* had the cult-title of *Bānū* “Lady,” and her shrine at Ray may well have been devoted to her as Šahrbānū “Lady of the land” (i.e., Iran). In the shrine’s *zīārat-nāma* she is also called *Šāh-Jahān* “King of the world,” *Šāh-e zanān* “King of women,” and *Jahān-Bānū* “Lady of the world.” The oldest part of the existing shrine buildings is assigned to the tenth century, with extensions in Safavid and Qajar times. In the inner sanctuary is



a fifteenth-century “tomb,” purporting to contain the princess’s body, in the manner of an ordinary *emām-zāda*.

That the shrine was originally a Zoroastrian holy place is supported by the fact that a similar legend attaches to the Zoroastrian sanctuary of *Bānū-Pārs*. The link with *Anāhīd* is strengthened by there being a sacred pool at the foot of the hill, where pilgrims make petitions before ascending to the shrine itself.

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