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# BORZU-NĀMA (ARTICLE 2)

***BORZU-NĀMA*** (*Barzu-nāma*), an epic poem named after its main hero, Borzu, son of Sohrāb and grandson of Rostam. The *Borzu-nāma* belongs to the Sistān cycle of epics dealing with the dynasty of the princes of Sistān, amongst whom Rostam has a pivotal role. It is believed that Ferdowsi used material from this existing cycle of stories on the heroes of Sistān for his *Šāh-nāma*, though he chose to limit himself to its main hero, Rostam. Other stories which Ferdowsi did not draw on were subsequently used by other poets and writers who took up the task of elaborating on other heroes from the Sistān cycle, often the ancestors or offspring of Rostam (Hanaway, 1978, pp. 89-90). This group of epics is often referred to as 'secondary epics' or 'later epics,' but a more neutral term is the 'Persian epic cycle' (as used by de Blois, 1998, p. 475). The heroes of a number of these epics, such as Farāmarz, also figure in the *Šāh-nāma*, but this is not the case with Borzu. Stories about Borzu have, however, found their way into both the oral and the written traditions of the Iranian cultural area.

It is generally assumed that the *Borzu-nāma* dates from the 11th century, but the question of its authorship remains a matter of debate. For a long time, it had been thought that the *Borzu-nāma* was composed by Abu'l-ʿAlā ʿAtāʾ b. Yaʿqub al-Kāteb, known as Nākuk, a secretary of the Ghaznavid Ebrāhim, son of Masʿud (1059-99) (de Blois, 1994, p. 267), but this attribution was based on a misreading of one of the lines in the *Borzu-nāma* (de Blois, 1994, p. 569).

The *Borzu-nāma* appears frequently as an interpolation in *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts (de Blois, 1994, p. 570), especially in those copied after the first

half of the 16th century (Rührdanz, p. 118), although interpolations can also be found in earlier manuscripts, as for example in the St. Petersburg manuscript S1654, dated 1445, used by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh for his critical edition of the *Šāh-nāma*. More instances of such interpolations may be discovered in the future, for often interpolations remain undetected in manuscripts that are not well documented.

There are also a number of separate *Borzu-nāma* manuscripts in which the *Borzu-nāma* appears on its own (Blois, 1994, pp. 569-70). In both cases, as an interpolation and as a separate entity, the story of Borzu is seen as a continuation of the episode of Sohrāb and Rostam. The *Borzu-nāma* manuscripts are said to have as many as 65,000 lines (Mohl, p. LXVII) but the longest copies of extant *Borzu-nāma*s contain about 38,000 lines (Richard, p. 241). These can be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Supplément persan 499 and 499a), which had been copied in 1760 on the request of Anquetil-Duperron, as stated in the colophon. The 17th century *Borzu-nāma* manuscript in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul (Lāleli, 1668) is much shorter, with 24,200 lines (Richard, p. 243). The *Borzu-nāma* preserved in the Vatican Library dates from 1605 and is preceded by the story of Rostam and Sohrāb (Ms. Sbath 652, described by Piemontese, pp. 447-64). Angelo Michele Piemontese mentions another *Borzu-nāma* from the Biblioteca Academiei in Cluj, Romania (Piemontese, p. 456). This however seems to be rather an interpolation included in a *Šāh-nāma* manuscript (Sowti, p. 5, ms.0.209).

The oldest extant *Borzu-nāma* manuscript dates from the 15th century and is kept in the Cambridge University Library (Kings Ms. No 56). The manuscript contains 4,253 lines in 47 folios, numbered as 94 pages (Sims, 2006, p. 190; Van den Berg, p. 101). In the colophon the name Mowlānā Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Kusanj or Kusaj appears as the author, read by E. G. Browne as Kawij (Browne, p. 30).

The immense difference in length among the existing *Borzu-nāma*s, as an interpolation or as a separate work, partly accounts for the great number of different versions of the story. The longer versions, such as the *Borzu-nāma* manuscripts in Paris and Istanbul, discussed above, contain extensive sections on the son of Borzu, named Tamur, and on his cousin Jahānbaḵš. A section on the witch Susan, sometimes named *Susan-nāma*, is included in many versions of the *Borzu-nāma*. The story of Susan may also be found as a separate work (Paris, Supplément persan 497).

The prose account of Borzu in the *Ehyāʾ-al-moluk* by Malek-Šāh Ḥoseyn Sistāni seems to be another version of the *Borzu-nāma*, though it bears close resemblance to the story as it can be found in verse in *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts (Sistāni, pp. 30-34; Van den Berg, pp. 99-101).

The *Borzu-nāma* versions interpolated in *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts usually have between 3000 and 4000 lines and they are either inserted in the *Šāh-nāma* after the episode of Rostam and Sohrāb, and before the episode of Siāvoš or, more frequently, after the episode of Bižan and Maniža, and before the episode of the Yāzdah Roḵ.

In the interpolations, at least two clearly divergent storylines may be distinguished. One storyline deals with the story of Borzu from birth to death, without a section on Susan. Afrāsiāb plays a minor role in this storyline, which is placed in the era of Kay Kāvus. This storyline forms the 'earlier' interpolation, found after the episode on Rostam and Sohrāb. The other storyline stretches from the meeting of Borzu with Afrāsiāb until the defeat of Afrāsiāb, and is accompanied by the episode of Susan. Kay Ḵosrow figures as the ruler of Iran in this 'later' interpolation, found after the episode of Bižan and Maniža.

In examples of the 'earlier' interpolation, Sohrāb and Šahru meet and fall in love, and in due course Borzu, son of Sohrāb is born. While still a young lad, he is spotted by Afrāsiāb, who sends Ruʾin to fetch him. However, Ruʾin and his horse are beaten off by Borzu and in the end it is Garsivaz who takes him to Afrāsiāb. Borzu is brought up at the court of Afrāsiāb, and is challenged by Rostam. Borzu is marching towards Iran when the Iranian heroes Ṭus and Fariborz engage him in battle. They are defeated and taken prisoner by Borzu, but freed again by Rostam; Borzu now challenges Rostam. They meet in combat, and Rostam suffers a broken shoulder at the hands of Borzu. Farāmarz comes to avenge his father and when Borzu's horse fails him, he succeeds in taking him prisoner. Šahru, the mother of Borzu, sets off to Sistān to set his son free. She is helped by a jeweler named Bahrām and a female musician who has access to Borzu, and acts as an intermediary between him and his mother. Borzu escapes, but is soon found out by Rostam and a number of fights ensue between Borzu and Rostam. In the third fight, Šahru prevents Borzu's imminent defeat and death by revealing his true ancestry. King Kāvus and the Iranian notables forgive Borzu who now comes over to the Iranian side. Afrāsiāb is furious. Borzu receives the kingdom of Ghur (Ḡur), but is killed by a div called Manharas. Having dreamt about this unfortunate event,

Rostam sets out only to find the dead body of his grandson (Van den Berg, pp. 109-112).

In examples of the 'later' interpolation, Afrāsiāb stumbles upon the young farmer Borzu when he wanders around Šengān, after having been defeated by Rostam. He is impressed by Borzu's miraculous strength and he sends his brother Garsivaz to fetch him. Borzu is then taken to Turan to further develop his talents as a warrior. From Turan, he accompanies the Turanian warriors on a mission to Iran, where Borzu enters a combat with Rostam and Farāmarz—his grandfather and uncle—although they remain unaware of each other's identity. Borzu is taken prisoner by the Iranians, but soon his mother comes and pleads his case with success, and he is set free. However, in another fight with Rostam, Borzu is almost killed, but is saved in time by the intervention of his mother, who reveals his true descent. Borzu is then united with Rostam and joins the Iranian army as a warrior. Afrāsiāb, bereft of his great champion and facing an even stronger Iranian camp, is in despair. He sends the witch Susan to deal with the warriors of Iran. During a feast Susan lures away a number of Iranian warriors. In retaliation, Borzu and Rostam wage a war against Afrāsiāb and his warrior Pilsam. In the end, Kay Ḵosrow and the Iranians come to their aid and Afrāsiāb and the Turanians are defeated. As a reward, Kay Ḵosrow gives the kingdom of Ghur and Herat to Borzu. In a variant close to this version of the story, a section is included on how Borzu takes prisoner the Iranian warriors Tus and Fariborz, who are freed by Rostam (Van den Berg, pp. 104-9).

The *Borzu-nāma*s inserted in the *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts sometimes bear an introductory title. When this opening title is lacking, the beginning of the interpolation may be difficult to spot, although the different sections of Borzu's story are usually marked by a title. Besides, the story is in many cases linked to the preceding and the following by transition lines, announcing the beginning and the end of the story. In the Cambridge manuscript of the *Borzu-nāma* (Kings Ms. No 56), which is an independent manuscript, a transition line at the end is also present, introducing the next episode of Godarz and Pirān, even though the manuscript itself ends immediately after this line. This may indicate that this *Borzu-nāma* was copied from a *Šāh-nāma* interpolation (Van den Berg, p. 114).

The story of Borzu as an interpolation in *Šāhnāma* manuscripts is often illustrated, and interpolations are perhaps most readily recognized through the presence of illustrations in a manuscript. A favorite scene forms the fight

between Rostam and Borzu (for an overview of illustrations entered thus far in the database of the Cambridge-Edinburgh Shahnama Pictorial Corpus, see their website [address provided in the bibliography]; see also Sims, 2002, pp. 102-3).

The *Borzu-nāma* has not yet been published in a critical edition, but versions of the text have been included in the *Šāh-nāma* editions of both Turner Macan (pp. 2160-296) and Dabirsiāqi (vol. VI, pp. 77-246).

In the oral tradition of Central Asia, Borzu is said to be the son of Rostam, rather than his grandson. Around Boysun in present-day Uzbekistan, Tajik stories circulate about Borzu, who is said to have lived in the area of Termez and Boysun (*Mardumgiyoh*, pp. 24-26; pp. 91-95). Furthermore, an extensive collection of stories on Borzu have been recorded in Turkmenistan by Grjunberg and Steblin-Kamenski. In the Iranian *naqqāli*-tradition Borzu also makes his appearance as the son of Sohrāb and Šohreh, the princess of Šengān (Yamamoto, p. 152).

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