



BOZORGMEHR-E BOḶTAGĀN

BOZORGMEHR-E BOḶTAGĀN, identified in literature and legend as a vizier of Ḷosrow I Anōšīravān (r. 531-78; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, I, pp. 318ff., erroneously identifies Bozorgmehr as a minister of Ḷosrow II Parvēz, r. 590-628, also mentioned in the *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, IX, p. 136 v. 2145, and attributes his death to his adherence to Manicheism). According to Persian and Arabic sources, he was characterized by exceptional wisdom and sage counsels. In Pahlavi his name was Wuzurgmihr ī Bōxtagān; it was adopted in Arabic as Abūzarjmehr, Bozorjmehr, or Būzorjmehr. Ferdowsī used the last of these arabized forms in the *Šāh-nāma*, probably because it best fits the meter. Bozorgmehr is referred to in the *Aydāgār ī Wuzurgmihr* as *argbed* and chief eunuch of the Antioch quarter at Ctesiphon (*Camb. Hist. Iran* III, p. 710). Semifabulous accounts of his career are given in the *Šāh-nāma* (VIII, pp. 110ff.) and to a lesser extent in Ṭā'ālebī's *Ġorar* (pp. 619ff.), and Mas'ūdī's *Morūj* (ed. Pellat, I, pp. 318ff.). According to Ferdowsī and Ṭā'ālebī, Bozorgmehr, while still a young student, was taken from Marv to Ḷosrow I's court to interpret a royal dream. His interpretation proved correct, and thereafter his fortunes rose. He became the king's counselor and vizier and sat in the place of honor beside him at weekly royal councils (*Šāh-nāma* VIII, pp. 116-46). When sages from India brought the game of chess to test the intelligence of the sages of Iran, it was Bozorgmehr who solved the puzzle, and he also invented the game of backgammon (*nard*), which baffled the Indian sages (*Wizārišn ī čatrang*, in *Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana; *Šāh-nāma* VIII, pp. 206-16; Ṭā'ālebī, *Ġorar*, pp. 622-25). One day, however, Ḷosrow suspected Bozorgmehr of having intended to make him swallow a jewel in his sleep; according to a commonly accepted



medical superstition of the time, swallowing a jewel would purge the system. He imprisoned the vizier, who went blind during his captivity. Nevertheless, when the Byzantine emperor set the Iranian sages the problem of a locked casket (*dorj*), it was Bozorgmehr who solved it, thus winning the king's pardon and renewed favor (*Šāh-nāma* VIII, pp. 255-66; Ṭa'ālebī, *Ġorar*, pp. 633-36). Neither Ferdowsī nor Ṭa'ālebī mentions Bozorgmehr's death.

Ferdinand Justi (*Namenbuch*, s.v.) identified Bozorgmehr with Ḳosrow I's secretary Borzmehr, who was later put to death by order of Hormoz IV (r. 578-90). He also considered the possibility that the name of the physician Borzūya (Burzōē) might be a shortened form of Bozorgmehr but did not claim that Borzūya was identical with the other two figures.

On the other hand, Arthur Christensen (1930; *Iran Sass.*, pp. 57-58) argued that, as Bozorgmehr is mentioned neither in contemporary Byzantine and Armenian sources nor in the works of Ṭabarī, Ebn Qotayba, and Ḥamza Ešfahānī, all of whom drew upon the Pahlavi *Xwadāy-nāmag*, this figure must in fact have been identical with Borzūya the physician. He argued that the name Borzūya was probably a shortened form of Borzmehr and that a misreading of the Pahlavi script might have caused Borzmehr to be written in Arabic as Bozorjmehr. Central to Christensen's argument are two 3rd/9th-century Pahlavi treatises, *Ayādgār ī Wuzurgmihr ī Bōxtagān* and *Wizārišn ī čātrang*, sometimes attributed to Bozorgmehr (see Sanjana). The name Wuzurgmihr appears on them, and Christensen believed it to be a Pahlavi transliteration of Arabic Bozorjmehr. He surmised that the treatises were subsequently translated into Persian and used by Ferdowsī as sources for his *Šāh-nāma*, Wuzurgmihr being rendered as Bozorgmehr.

There are, however, grounds for believing that the treatises, though written in the Islamic period, were based on Sasanian, rather than Arabic, works. Furthermore, it is linguistically quite unlikely that Wuzurgmihr is a reconstruction of an arabized form. Nor can the failure of Ṭabarī, Ḥamza, and other writers to mention Bozorgmehr be taken as proof that he was also not mentioned in Pahlavi sources like the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, for these authors made comparatively little use of such sources. Both Ferdowsī and Ṭa'ālebī mention the name Bozorgmehr in portions of their texts that could not have been drawn from the two treatises, and it also appears in the works of Ebn al-Nadīm, Mas'ūdī, and others.

The occurrence of stories about Bozorgmehr in the *Šāh-nāma* and *Ġorar*



suggests that Ferdowsī and Ṭa'ālebī took them from the prose *Šāh-nāma* of Abū Manšūr, which was primarily a Persian translation of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*. Although many similarities between Ferdowsī's *Šāh-nāma* and the two Pahlavi treatises, especially in the stories about chess and some of the wise counsels of Bozorgmehr, suggest a possible common origin, substantial differences can be taken as evidence that the material in the epic was not taken from the Persian translations of the treatises. These differences probably reflect the adaptation of many current stories and anecdotes to the literary purposes of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, whence they passed into Ferdowsī's *Šāh-nāma*, whereas the raw materials were reproduced more exactly in the treatises. This hypothesis is supported by comparison of other surviving Pahlavi texts like *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* and *Kār-nāmag ī Artaxšēr ī Pāpakān* with the *Šāh-nāma*, as well as in the case of the Arabic translation of the Pahlavi *Xusraw ud rēdag* in Ṭa'ālebī's *Gorar* (pp. 705-11).

The available evidence thus seems to indicate that the vizier Bozorgmehr was not Borzūya the physician but probably was identical with Borzmehr, the secretary who was put to death by order of Ḳosrow I's son and successor, Hormoz IV (*Šāh-nāma* VIII, p. 319 v. 67). His execution is likely to have given rise to the story of the royal anger told in different forms by Mas'ūdī, Ferdowsī, and Ṭa'ālebī. In the version associated with the reign of Ḳosrow I, on which Ferdowsī and Ṭa'ālebī drew, Bozorgmehr is said to have been forgiven by the shah, who was renowned for his justice; in the version repeated by Mas'ūdī, in which Bozorgmehr was associated with Ḳosrow II, it was no longer thought necessary to avoid mention of the execution.

As for the origin of the name Bozorgmehr, a misreading of the Pahlavi script for Borzmehr is certainly a tenable explanation. Another possibility is that the first component of *wuzurg framadār* (the title of the grand vizier under the late Sasanians; see Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 111; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 114-15) was combined with the second component of Borzmehr.

Aside from the two Pahlavi treatises already mentioned, Bozorgmehr is also credited with the authorship of *Ẓafar-nāma*, a work in Persian said to have been translated from Pahlavi by Ebn Sīnā (ed. Ġ.-Ḥ. Ṣadīqī, Tehran, n.d.). The counsels cited in this work are virtual equivalents or slight variants of those in the *Ayādgār ī Wuzurgmīhr ī Bōxtagān*, as are those ascribed to Bozorgmehr in the *Jāvīdān kerad* of Ebn Meskūya (Meskawayh). Of *Ketāb al-zabarj* (or *al-bezīdaj*, see Dodge, II, p. 641), a commentary on Valens's *Astrologica*, and *Ketāb Mehrzād Jošnas* (or *Mehrādar Jošnas*; see Tajaddod, p. 377, and Dodge, II, p.



739 and n. 44), both attributed to Bozorgmehr by Ebn al-Nadīm (ed. G. Flügel, pp. 269, 315), no trace survives. In addition, many stories and counsels purporting to be by Bozorgmehr are reported in Persian and Arabic texts, some of which are mentioned by Christensen (1930). Other writers have attributed to Bozorgmehr (rather than Borzūya) the preface to *Kalīla wa Demna* and even the translation of the whole work, but there is no evidence for this claim.

It is possible that Bozorgmehr actually did write some of the works listed. Yet the attributions of most Pahlavi texts, particularly of belles lettres, are too evanescent to be trusted. Authors' names were commonly changed in new recensions and identical aphorisms credited to different sages, just as the so-called "wandering" quatrains have been attributed to different Persian authors.

See also [andarz](#).

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