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BŪF
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BŪF

BŪF or **BŪM,** owl, commonly called *joḡd*.

Of the thirteen species of Strigiformes reported by Hüe and Étchécopar (pp. 401-19) for the Near and Middle East eleven species, from two families, occur in Iran (see also Scott et al., pp. 197-206): 1. the barn owl, *Tyto alba* Scop. (fam. Tytonidae); 2. the eagle owl, *Bubo bubo* L.; 3. the brown fish-owl, *Ketupa zeylonensis* Gm.; 4. the long-eared owl, *Asio otus* L.; 5. the short-eared owl, *Asio flammeus* Pontop.; 6. the scops owl, *Otus scops* L.; 7. the striated (or Bruce's) scops owl, *Otus brucei* Hume; 8. the little owl, *Athene noctua* Scop.; 9. the spotted little owl, *Athene brama* Temm.; 10. the tawny owl, *Strix aluco* L.; 11. Hume's tawny owl, *Strix butleri* Hume (fam. Strigidae).

Several other general names are found for the owl in classical Persian dictionaries and other sources, e.g.: *joḡd* (var. *čoḡd*, e.g., in Asadī Ṭūsī, *Loḡat-e fors*, ed. Eqbāl, p. 86, quoting Ferdowsī); *būm* (Ar.), now only in literary use; *būf* (Pahl. *būf*, sometimes written *būg*), a term that became popular after the revival of Ṣ. Hedāyat's novel *Būf-e kūr* (The blind owl) in the 1320s Š./1940s (cf. *bū* in the dialect of Jāf, *bo* in Laki and in the dialect of Kermānšāh, and *būk* in the dialects of Sanandaj and Garrūs; Mokrī, p. 31); *kūf*, now obsolete (e.g., in Farroḵī Sīstānī, quoted by Asadī, p. 246, who explains: "*Kūf* is [a synonym of] *kūč*, a species of small birds; found in Azarbaijan, they call it [*kongor*?]"; also *ḵar-kūf*, for which see below); *kūč* (also "cross-eyed," cf. the Māzandarāni name for the owl, *pet/pīt*(*-e/-ə*) *kole*, lit. "the cross-eyed birdie," probably because of the apparent squint in the owl's eyes), now obsolete (Asadī, p. 63, quoting Kesāʾī Marvazī); *kongor*, obsolete ("*Čoḡd* is *kūč*, and some common

people call it *kongor*," Asadī, p. 86). More specific terms are: *ḵar-kūf* (big owl) and *šāh-būm* (king owl) for the largest native species, *Bubo bubo* (called *šā-bū/-bo* in Kurdistan, Mokrī, loc. cit., and *šā-bīf* in Lorī), and (*morḡ-e*) *šab-āvīz* (night-hanging [bird]), also called *čūk* (Asadī, p. 297: "a bird that suspends itself from trees," quoting Bahrāmī and Manūčehrī), *čark* (Nasavī, *Bāz-nāma*, p. 163; see also *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*, s.v.), and *morḡ-e ḥaq*(*gūy*) (the *ḥaqq*-[uttering] bird) for one of the smaller species (see below). The name *bāy(a)-qūš* (Asadī, p. 63, s.v. *kūč*) is from southern Turkish *bay-/bāy-qūš* (the rich bird, see Doerfer, II, pp. 260-61; see also below).

To this writer's knowledge, the earliest differentiation of the owls in Persian sources is by Tonokābonī (fl. 1077-1105/1667-94), *Toḥfat al-moʾmenīn*, p. 245: The *būm* "is of several kinds: the largest, called *sār-qūš* in Turkish, *būf* or *šāh-būm* in Persian; the smallest and humblest, called *morḡ-e ḥaq*, the size of a turtledove; the kind called *yaplāq* [misprinted *bīlāq* in the text] in Turkish, larger than the latter, but smaller than the other kinds; an intermediate kind—black—called *joḡd* [in Persian] and *kūr-e bū* [blind owl] in Tonokābon" (the "blindness" of owls, which are mostly nocturnal birds, is a popular interpretation of their reduced vision and, hence, awkward, foolish-looking behavior in broad daylight; cf. also other (nick)names with *kūr* "blind": *būa-kūra* "the blind owl" in Kurmānjī and Kermānšāh dialects (Mokrī, p. 36), and *kūr(-ə) qūqū* "the blind *qūqū*" in Gīlakī).

The next inventory of owls is to be found in Teymūr Mīrzā's treatise on falconry (written in 1285/1869; pp. 19-23). He speaks of "eight or nine kinds of *būf* " but discusses only those that, supposedly, could be of some use to falconers: the *šāh-būf*, *yāp(a)lāḡ*, *ʿarūs-e čāh*, *bāy(a)-qūš*, and *morḡ-e šab-ahang*.

The author describes at length the long and tedious procedure of training the *šāh-būf*, "the best of all," to serve as a decoy for attracting and netting other birds, especially some falcons and hawks highly prized by falconers, which, instinctively recognizing in the *šāh-būf* a ruthless nocturnal predator, rush to molest or kill it while it is visible and vulnerable in daylight.

The *yāp(a)lāḡ* (cf. Azeri Turk, *yāpālāq* "owl") is said by the author to be of two kinds, both smaller than the *šāh-būf*: the *yāpalāq-e ṣaḥrāʾī* (plain/field *yāpalāq*, probably *Asio flammeus*), and the *yāpalāq-e bāḡī* (garden *yāpalāq*; probably *A. otus*), which is usually found in gardens and is a little darker than the former (see also Schapka, s.v.).

A *bī-šāḵ* (hornless, i.e., lacking the earlike tufts of feathers) species, called *ʿarūs-e čāh* (bride of the well), *Tyto alba*, which is said to be "abundant in Baghdad and in the holy places [i.e., Karbalāʾ, Kāẓemayn, and Sāmarrā], feeding mostly on the *kabūtar-e ḥaram*" ("the sanctuary's pigeons," which it is forbidden to catch, maltreat, or kill), thereby incurring the wrath of "the sanctuaries' servants, who in the spring seek out their chicks from the holes in the domes and kill them" (see also Schapka, s.v.).

The *bāy(a)-qūš* (see above), called *jogd* in Persian (probably *Athene noctua*; see Schapka, s.v.), is said to be mostly found in ruined places; when the male shaheen is trained to hunt *čāḵroq*s (stone curlews), it must previously have been flown at a couple of *bāya-qūše*s.

The *morḡ-e šab-āhang* (*sic*; "bird of nightly song," a poetical name usually applied to the nightingale; see also below), which is "called *morḡ-e ḥaq* by the common people" (identified by Scott et al. as *Otus scops* and *O. brucei*).

Modern Persian terms for native owls, as proposed or used by modern ornithologists (e.g., Read, pp. 13-14; Scott et al., loc. cit.), except for *šāh-būf* and *morḡ-e ḥaq*, are mostly adaptations of their names in different European languages, e.g., *jogd-e safīd* (white owl) for Lat. *Tyto alba*, *jogd-e māhīḵᵛor* (fish-eating owl) for Eng. "(brown) fish owl," *jogd-e tālāb* (marsh owl) for Fr. "*hibou des marais*," and *jogd-e jangalī* (forest owl) for Ger. "Waldkauz."

In Indo-Iranian traditions owls were stigmatized as sinister or macabre creatures. In Hindu mythology they represent the soul and Yama, lord of the realm of the dead (see also Balfour, III, p. 63; and the *Pañcatantra*, cited below). In the Iranian tradition, according to the *Bundahišn* (TD_2, p. 147.15; tr. Anklesaria, chap. 23.2, pp. 188-89), the owl (here written *būg*) is one of the fifteen wolfish species (*gurg-sardagān*) of animals created by Ahriman, characterized as rapacious, fierce, destructive, and, at the same time, intrepid and thievish; the category also included such animals as the wolf, the tiger, the hyena, the cat, and the crab. The following legend quoted by Damīrī (I, p. 227) from the historian Ebn al-Najjār Baḡdādī (578-643/1183-1245) and repeated in *Ḥabīb al-sīar* (compl. 927/1520; IV, pp. 696-97) may reflect the pre-Islamic bad opinion about owls: "Kesrā [Ḵosrow I?] told one of his agents, "Hunt the worst of birds for me, roast it with the worst of fuels, and give it to eat to the worst of people." The agent caught an owl (*būma*), roasted it over oleander wood [fire], and had it eaten by a calumniator [in *Ḥabīb al-sīar*: a tyrannical learned man]." The absence of representations of the owl in Iranian or Persian

handicrafts and works of art is probably due to the belief in its inauspiciousness. As explained by G. F. Hill (in *Survey of Persian Art*, 3rd ed., I, p. 401), the owl represented on the reverse of some silver coins (see op. cit., VII, pl. 126A) that were probably engraved and issued in northeastern Iran during the late 4th-early 3rd century b.c. is held by Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and the arts, thus showing influence of ancient Greece, where the owl was respected as one of the emblems of that goddess.

The Arabs, despite the Prophet's assertion that *ʿadwā* (disease contagion), *ṭīara* (ornithomancy, evil omen), and *hāma* (owl believed to represent or embody the soul of a dead person) do not exist (see Nowayrī, X, p. 286, *Lesān al-ʿarab* XV, p. 39), continued to believe in them. This fact has probably favored the persistence of the owl's bad reputation among superstitious people in Persia down to our time (cf., however, Jāḥeẓ, ca. 160-255/775-868, who reports in his *Ketāb al-ḥayawān* III, p. 457, that the sight or sound of an owl (*būm*) is considered a good omen by the people of Ray and Marv but an evil omen by the people of Baṣra; this difference may be reflected in Pers. *morvā*/Pahl. *murwāg* "good omen" but Pers. *morḡvā* "bad omen").

Whereas it seems that the owl's stealthy predation was the main cause of the grudge against them in pre-Islamic Iran, ominousness appears as their principal stigma in the Islamic period. Many references to their inauspiciousness (usually in contrast to the auspiciousness of the legendary bird Homāy, q.v.) are found in Persian literature and folklore (see Dehḵodā, s.vv.), e.g., "whoever has the owl as leader will see nothing but the ruin of lands" (Nāṣer-e Ḵosrow); "o Ḵāqānī, dost thou expect the Homāy's shadow from the owl and the vulture?" (Ḵāqānī); "nobody would seek the owl's shadow even if Homāy disappeared from the world" (Saʿdī). The scops owl (*šabāvīz*), however, has been spared the popular or poetical deprecation, probably for the following reasons: Being the smallest native owl (19 cm long), very nocturnal, chiefly insectivorous, very unobtrusive except when emitting its characteristic noise in warm and quiet nights (Hüe and Étchécopar, p. 405), it was probably not identified as an owl at all (cf. the name *šabāvīz* and the related legends, which indicate gross misconceptions about its natural behavior and which are eventually due to a confusion with the bat [see bats], another inconspicuous nocturnal creature, some native species of which hang upside-down when roosting; see Harrington et al., p. 80). Further, its low, plaintive, "monosyllabic" noise—which is very different from the frightening or disturbing screech or hoot of some other species—was identified with the

vocable *ḥaq* (Ar. *ḥaqq* “right, truth,” also “the True God”), or *hū* (alteration of Ar. *howa* “He,” i.e., Allāh, in Persian Sufi usage), and the unseen bird that uttered it as a *ḏekr* was therefore called the *ḥaq*-saying bird (in Afghanistan *ḥaq-dūstak* “the little *ḥaq*-lover” [Afḡānīnevīs, s.v.], in Kurmānjī of Turkey *ḥaq-ḥaqūk*, in Māzandarān *hū-hū-karak* “the little *hū-hū*-maker”; the last two in Mokrī, p. 33). Later still another element was added, namely, that this bird keeps repeating “*ḥaq*” until a drop of blood comes out of its throat (see, e.g., *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*, s.v. *čūk*, and Steingass, s.v. *šabāvīz*). Some authors have even mentioned miraculous virtues in a dead *šabāvīz*. Ḥobayš Teflīsī (6th/12th century) has quoted (allegedly from Aristotle’s book on animals) the following benefits of a bird called *katūm* [?] in Persian that “suspends itself from a tree at night and keeps crying”: “If one kills it with a brass knife and feeds its blood to a vociferous, uncivil person, he will quiet down and will brawl never again. If one lets its head dry in sunshine and then attaches this head to one’s arm, one will win the favor of kings and grandees” (*Bayān al-ṣenāʿāt*, p. 358). Hedāyat (*Neyrangestān*, p. 135) has recorded two accounts about the origin of the *morḡ-e ḥaq*: According to the first, this bird had once been a man who used to quarrel with his sister about a legacy, for he wanted to keep two-thirds of it for himself and give her only one-third. Finally, his sister got mad and ran away. Probably cursed by the sister, he was then transfigured into a *morḡ-e ḥaq*, which, having repented and hoping to lure her back, keeps repeating, “Bībī jūn, do tā to, yek-ī man!” i.e., “Darling lady, two for you, one for me” (in Massé, p. 186, Eng. tr., p. 183, the two contenders are sisters; the greedy one—an old woman—was changed into an owl, hence the nickname “Fāṭ(e)me Ḵānom generally given to the owl”; in another connection Massé, loc. cit., n. 1, has recorded the nickname Ḵāle Qūqūme “Aunt Qūqūme” referring to the owl). According to Hedāyat’s second account, the bird has unrightfully eaten one grain of wheat from the property of a minor child, and the grain has caught in its throat; that is why it goes on saying *ḥaq ḥaq*, thereby admitting its guilt, till three drops of blood fall from its throat.

Hedāyat (op. cit.) has also recorded four Persian superstitions about the owl in general: If the owl weeps, that is a good omen; if it laughs, that is a bad omen (p. 130); if someone sees an owl, he/she must say to it “Meymanat Ḵānom, ḵᵛoš āmadī! ʿarūsī-st!” i.e., “Lady Good Fortune, you’re very welcome! There’s a wedding party here” (loc. cit.; cf. Massé, p. 195); if an owl crosses the road in front of somebody, that is a bad omen (p. 133); bulimia (*maraż-e jūʿ*, lit. “hunger disease”) is believed to be caused by an owl dwelling inside the belly of the bulimic and consuming everything he eats (Hedāyat also reports how to

get rid of this owl). This last belief, however, according to him, is due to the confusion of the Arabic word *jūʿ* (hunger) with *jogḡ/jūḡ*, a popular alteration of *jogḡd* (p. 54). Massé has further reported that a wailing owl perching on a roof or tree harbingers a death and that to ward death off one takes a mirror and a vase of salt before the owl and says "Ḵᵛoš-ḵabar bāš!" i.e., "Bring us good news" (p. 110, Eng. tr., p. 97). The cry of an owl is interpreted variously: If it screams on a housetop, the residents will receive bad news; if it screams only once and then goes away, it announces the arrival of a traveler. If the owl remains stubbornly singing in a tree, one must hold out some bread and salt and a mirror to it and say, "Fāṭme Ḵānom, we swear you by this bread and salt to augur well for us" (ibid., p. 196, Eng. tr., p. 194). Mokrī (pp. 29, 30, etc.) has reported similar superstitions among people in western provinces of Iran about a kind of owl locally known as *bāyaqoš*, *bādawoš*, etc. (variants of Turk. *bāy-qūš*), or nicknamed Ḵāla Kūkūma "Aunt Kūkūma" (in Kermānšāh, Āštīān, etc.); e.g.: sighting it is regarded as a good omen by some but as a bad omen by others; it is considered heir to vanished families and the owner of the ruins of their houses; children are often forbidden to throw stones at it or to molest it, lest they incur its malediction.

The nicknames Fāṭ(e)me Ḵānom, Maymanat Ḵānom, and Ḵāle Qūqūme (Qūqūme/Kūkūme is apparently an onomatopoeic imitation of the *hū-hū*-like cry) are obviously euphemistic appellations designed to propitiate an inauspicious (*bad-yomn/-šogūn*) or supposedly malevolent bird. Another unmistakable example of a euphemistic, propitiatory appellation for the owl is its southern Turkish name *bāy-qūš* ("the rich bird"; see above).

According to some Zoroastrian texts of the Islamic period, the Avestan expression *mərəγa ašō.zušta* "bird loved by Aša (the Amәšāspand of truth)" (*Vd.* 17.7-10; Avesta, tr. Darmesteter, II, pp. 238-39; *AirWb.*, col. 259) designated the owl. The Avestan text enjoins that one must hide fingernails underground and, when burying them, consecrate them to the "bird loved by Aša," wishing that it would use them as weapons against the Māzana demons. Similarly, in the *Bundahišn* (TD_2, pp. 154.10-155.4; tr. Anklesaria, par. 24H, pp. 198-99) it is said that if the incantation is not recited when the nails are buried the dews will take the nails and use them as weapons against the bird *ašōzušt*. The *Ṣad dar-e naṯr* (chap. 14.8-9, p. 14) adds that the bird *ašōzošt*, created by Hormazd, is also called *bahman-morḡ* (the bird of Bahman) and *kūf*, and a Persian Rivayat states that the *jogḡd* is called *ašōzošt* in the religion (*Persian Rivayats*, ed. Unvala, I, p. 255.4; tr. Dhabhar, p. 257; see also Darmesteter, loc. cit., n. 13;

Pūr-e Dāwūd, p. 321, n. 10; *AirWb.*, col. 259; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, p. 90; and Modi, p. 161; burying the pared nails is still practiced in many parts of Iran, see, e.g., Šakūrzāda, p. 326). However, this identification of the bird *ašōzušt* with the owl is probably late, not only because the *Bundahišn* states that the owl was one of the creatures of Ahriman (see above), but also because the owl would be an unlikely opponent for formidable demons; it is probably based on the name *morḡ-e ḥaq* "bird of truth" for the owl, since Avestan *aša*, rendered by Pahlavi *ahlāyīh* or *rāstīh*, was known to signify "truth" (the Afghan term *ḥaqdūstak*, see above, is, curiously enough, an even closer correspondence).

It is no wonder that the owls, with such mysterious antecedents in popular imagination, were associated with witchery and hermetic medicine. Following are some of the wonders (*ʿajāʾeb*) or fantastic curative uses of the owl mentioned by Šahmardān (ca. 490-95/1097-1102, pp. 137-38; summarized by Danīsarī in 669/1270-71, p. 234, without indicating his source): The female owl lays two eggs, one of them makes the hair grow, the other "burns and razes" it (then it is explained how to tell the eggs from each other). One of the eyes of a killed owl remains open, and the other remains closed; placed under the bezel (*negīn*) of a finger ring the open one will prevent the owner from falling asleep, and the closed one will keep him asleep. (These and other explanations are provided by Qazvīnī, p. 271, and Tonokābonī, pp. 245-46; the latter, however, says that he has reported these properties from Mehrbāres, sic, probably Mehrārīs, a *ḥakīm* of a.d. the 5th or 6th cent.) To tell the eyes apart one should drop them into water: the one that surfaces is for sleeplessness, and the one that sinks is for sleep. Applying the blood of an owl with some oil on the head of a person with lice will kill all the lice, and on the face and neck it will cure facial palsy; placing the still warm heart of an owl on the face is also highly effective against facial palsy. Eating the brain of an owl or using it as a collyrium will cause night-blindness. Eating the brain with tamarisk wood ash before going to bed cures bedwetting. If the boiled heart and liver of an owl are fed to somebody without his knowledge he will be gripped by a hardly curable colic. Fumigation with the dung of owls will rid a place of wasps. Qazvīnī (7th/13th century) adds the following wonders (loc. cit.): The scent of a mixture of the eyes of an owl and musk will generate a strong affection towards the person who wears that mixture. Owl gall used in an eye salve cures dimness of the eyesight (*ẓolmat al-ʿayn*). Taking internally a mixture of gall and oak wood ash will triturate vesical calculi. The grilled heart of an owl will cure gripes and facial palsy. The dried flesh of an owl mixed in the food will generate hostility in a group of people normally on friendly terms with

each other. Causing the bones of an owl to fume at a wine-drinking party will provoke a brawl (see also Damīrī, I, p. 228).

The owl is also assumed to be feared and disliked by other birds, especially the crow, for its nocturnal predation and unearthly cries. Men's imagination has interpreted this natural relationship as an "old hostility and feud between owls and crows" (*Dāstānhā-ye Bīdpāy*, p. 176; see below). The oldest romanticized account of the origin of this antagonism is probably the one narrated in the well-known Sanskrit collection of animal stories, the *Pañcatantra* (probably compiled between 100 b.c. and a.d. 500; tr. A. W. Ryder, chap. 3: "Crows and Owls," pp. 251-326), retold with variations and additions in Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ's *Kalīla wa Demna* ("Bāb al-būm wa'l-ḡerbān," ed. Manfalūṭī, pp. 255-91; see also *Dāstānhā-ye Bīdpāy*, "Dāstān-e kalāḡān o būmān" pp. 175-203): Once upon a time the birds [in Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ: the cranes] assembled to choose a new king. They decided upon the owl for its venerable appearance and prepared to anoint it king. But then a crow appeared out of nowhere, and as it was considered the shrewdest of birds its opinion was solicited, as well. The crow argued that the owl was ugly, day-blind, fierce, cruel, spiteful, etc., and the ceremony was therefore interrupted and no new king elected. Ever since, the owl has borne a grudge against crows. Similar legends must have been widely known. Thus, in the *Šāh-nāma* (Moscow, IX, p. 82 v. 1236) Ḵosrow Parvīz writing to the Byzantine emperor (Caesar of Rome) tells him to ask his knowledgeable men whether the old state of war between Iran and Rome was initiated by the crow or by the owl.

The awe inspired by the owl's nightly surprise attacks on some birds is also reflected in oneirocritics, where, according to Damīrī (loc. cit.), the owl is interpreted as a sly thief or a dreadful monarch whose awe may cause "the gallbladder of his subjects to burst." It also indicates bravery and fearlessness (see, further, Nābolosī, I, pp. 58-59).

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