



BŪTĪMĀR

BŪTĪMĀR, a semilegendary aquatic bird, also called *ḡamkʿorak* (lit. “the little griever”) according to some lexicographers, usually equated with Ar. *mālek al-ḥazīn* (reported by Damīrī, II, pp. 313-14, as meaning literally “the sad owner [of waters]”). The *būtīmār* is noted in Persian literature for a lore that can be traced back at least as far as the time of Jāḥeẓ (d. 255/868), quoted by Damīrī (d. 808/1405; loc. cit.): “one of the oddities of the world is the behavior of the *mālek al-ḥazīn*, for he keeps sitting [*sic*] near waters or water sources, and, when the water [begins to] dry up, he grieves at its disappearance and remains [there] sad and depressed; [further,] fearing lest his drinking water should increase its diminution, he sometimes refrains from drinking till he dies of thirst” (an abridged version of this observation is found in Qazvīnī, d. 682/1283, p. 285). References to this ornithological legend are common in Persian literature. One of the earliest examples is by the poet Lāmeʿī Gorgānī (5th/11th century; p. 58): “The *būtīmār* is left with frustration, grief, and regret; his grief is that the pool might one day become destitute of water.” Qāʾānī Šīrāzī (d. 1270/1853) was more specific: “There is a little bird enamored of water, named *būtīmār*, for he is constantly *bā tīmār* [lit. “with sorrow,” i.e., “sorrowful”; see further below]; he sits by the brook, without drinking any water from it, [fearing] that, if he does, the water of the brooks will diminish.” The legend has been turned to advantage, however, by ʿAṭṭār Nīšābūrī (d. 618/1230) in his allegorical *Manteq al-ṭayr*, in which the *būtīmār* puts forward in eleven distichs an excuse for its unwillingness to leave its beloved seaside to venture on a proposed long and hazardous journey in search of a king (Sīmorḡ), pleading its devotion to the sea and its constant anxiety and painful



worries about the decrease of even a single drop of sea water (p. 55). Through this legend the *būtīmār* has come to symbolize in Persian literature a gloomy person dispirited by unrealistic apprehensions or conjectures and, by extension, a grief-stricken person (for other literary examples, see Dehḵodā, s.v. *būtīmār*).

The word *būtīmār* is generally considered by lexicographers to be a hybrid compound of *bū*, short for Ar. *abū* “father of . . .” (but also used to form nicknames), and Pers. *tīmār* “care, worry,” meaning literally “father of sorrow”; thus it is probably a calque of the Arabic *mālek al-ḥazīn*.

The zoological identification of the *būtīmār* is a matter of some debate. Whereas in modern Arabic sources the *mālek al-ḥazīn* is unanimously identified as *Ardea* L., heron, also called *balašūn*, Scott and his colleagues (p. 36) have identified the *būtīmār* as *Botaurus stellaris* L., bittern, discussing all species of heron under the name *ḥawāšīl* (pp. 41-42), which looks rather like an Arabic plural noun but is not found in Arabic sources. These equate “bittern” with *wāq* (see, e.g., Ghaleb, s.vv. *wāq*, *balašūn*, and *mālek al-ḥazīn*). However, this equation is not accepted by all modern authors (e.g., Dehḵodā, who identifies *būtīmār* as the heron). In fact, of all the members of the Ardeidae family, *Ardea cinerea* L., the common (or gray) heron, described as “standing motionless for long periods of time in or near the water, holding its neck erect or retracted between its shoulders” (Scott et al., loc. cit.), seems best to fit the Persian legend of the *būtīmār*. Other incorrect synonyms for *būtīmār* are found in some early Persian sources and have been transmitted uncritically by later lexicographers. For example, Tonokābonī gives *būtīmār* as the Persian equivalent of *mālek al-ḥazīn* (p. 790), (Arabic) *šefnīnbarrī* as equivalent of *būtīmār* (p. 197), and (Greek) *ṭarīqūn* (p. 581) and (Arabic) *yamām* (p. 880) as equivalents of *šefnīn-e barrī*. This set of correspondences, reproduced in *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*, Dehḵodā’s *Loḡat-nāma*, and M. Moʿīn’s *Farhang-e fārsī*, is not totally accurate. Ebn al-Bayṭār specifies that *šefnīn (barrī) = yamām = Gk. ṭarīqūn*, i.e., the turtledove (cf. Aristotle, tr. Ebn al-Beyṭāq, p. 544, where Gk. *trūgōn*, identified as the turtledove, is always translated *al-ṭorḡolla*). A more recent example is found in the “standard” Persian translation of the Bible (Leipzig, 1895), where in Leviticus 11:17 and in Deuteronomy 14:16 *būtīmār* is used to render “the great owl,” or “the long-eared owl,” whereas in Leviticus 11:19 “heron” is translated as *kolang*, properly the crane; this error in turn has led the translators/compiler of *Qāmūs-e Ketāb-e Moqaddas* (pp. 193, 194-95) to list *būtīmār* as the equivalent of *būm* “owl.”



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