



## DAVĀL-PĀ(Y)

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**DAVĀL-PĀ(Y)**, or *dovāl-pā* (colloq. *dūāl-pā*; Kurdish *dolpā*; Kermānī *dohol-pā*), an imaginary evil anthropoid creature characterized by flexible legs (*pā*) resembling leather straps (*da/ovāl* < Pahl. *dawāl* “hide, leather”), which he uses as tentacles to grip and enslave human beings, who then have to carry him on their shoulders or backs and labor for him until they die of fatigue.

The earliest references to such creatures in Persian sources seem to be in the *Šāh-nāma*. In the story of the expedition of the Kayanid king Kaykāvūs to Māzandarān they are called *sost-pāyān* (limp-legged) and are identified as a race of strong horsemen (*savārān-e pūlād-kāy* “steel-chewing riders”) with legs of *davāl*, among whom the king of Māzandarān lived (Moscow, II, p. 111). Elsewhere the *narm-pāyān* (soft-legged) are said to have fought the army of [Alexander the Great](#) after he left Ethiopia (*zamīn-e Ḥabaš*); they are described as tall, naked creatures without horses or armaments, who fought by hurling stones (Moscow, VII, p. 71).

The tradition of a fabulous limp-legged being, found only in mysterious or out-of-the-way places, seems to have been elaborated by imaginative or credulous seafarers and other travelers in the Islamic period. Moḥammad Ṭūsī (d. ca. 589/1193; pp. 499-500) quoted a certain sefarer, Walīd b. Moslem, who recounted the adventures of a man with scars on his face and neck, who, after escaping from the island of the dog-faced people, found a group of good-looking anthropoid creatures with short, limp legs and long tails in a district called Fāṭūr. When he approached, one of them sprang up, twined its tail around him, clutched his neck with its claws, and made him carry it about all



day long while it picked fruit from trees and ate it. This nightmare went on until the traveler managed to get the creature drunk, so that it relaxed and fell off. The man then killed some of its fellows and fled.

Later versions of the myth are mainly elaborations of Ṭūsī's account, with one significant change: the substitution of strap-like legs for the prehensile tail. About a century later Zakariyā' Qazvīnī (tr., pp. 173-74) reported it on the authority of a seafarer named Ya'qūb b. Eṣhāq Sarrāj, who had supposedly met the scarred narrator. According to this version, both the limp-legged and the dog-faced peoples dwelt on the same island, Jazīra Sagsār (lit., "island of the dog-headed"), in the Baḥr al-Zanj (i.e., the western Indian Ocean). One of the limp-legged creatures twined its legs around the narrator, but eventually a tree branch blinded it; then the narrator fed the creature grape juice, causing its legs to relax, and cast it off.

Qazvīnī's version was included, with further elaborations, among the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor in the later versions of *Alf layla wa layla* (nights 557-58; tr., III, pp. 360-63). The evil creature, known to previous visitors to the island as Šayk al-Baḥr (Old man of the sea), is a handsome old fellow with legs like straps of buffalo hide. Sinbad uses a large dried pumpkin shell to produce the wine that frees him; eventually he is rescued by seafarers who land on the island. Šayk-al-Baḥr reappears in the story of the king Sayf-al-Molūk (night 765; tr., IV, pp. 495-96), who is cast away with some of his retinue (*mamālīk*) on an unknown island abounding in fruit trees, from which they hasten to eat. One of his companions comes across an odd-looking, long-faced fellow sitting among the trees; the old man calls him by name and offers to give him ripe fruit. When he approaches, Šayk-al-Baḥr climbs on his shoulders, twines one leg round his neck with the other dangling, and commands, "Get going! You cannot free yourself from me!" The victim cries out to his companions "Get off this island, because one of its inhabitants is riding on my shoulders and the others are looking for you!" Alarmed, the king and his men hurry back to their boat and sail away.

The tale of Sinbad and Šayk-al-Baḥr was adapted in the popular Persian story *Sargodašt-e Salīm-e jawāherī* (The story of Salīm the jeweler), where, for the first time, the creature is expressly referred to as *davāl-pā*. In the story Salīm flees from a land inhabited by a tribe of apes to an island where grapevines and pomegranate and apple trees grow in abundance and the houses are built of mud and wood. He meets the chief *davāl-pā*, a white-bearded man, who tricks him into carrying him home by promising him bread and meat. The



*davāl-pā* jumps onto Salīm's back and twines his legs around his waist; he nibbles at Salīm's ears or pokes a *javāldūz* (large packing needle) into his neck in order to steer him.

The modern version of the *davāl-pā* (see, e.g., Şādeq Hedāyat (p. 176; Massé, *Croyances* II, p. 353; tr., p. 345) includes a few new features. The old man now usually sits by the roadside, imploring passersby to carry him across a nearby stream. Once he is on a victim's back, a long leg comes out of his belly and twists around the carrier's waist; then, firmly grasping the latter with his hands, he orders *Kār bokon, bede (be) man* (Work, [and] give [your earnings] to me). In order to be rid of him, the carrier has to make him drunk. Similar descriptions of the *davāl-pā*, with varying details, are found in local superstitions in many parts of Persia. For instance, in Lorestān and Īlām the *davāl-pā* clings to his victim even when the latter is in mortal agony; the only way to be rid of him is to stick a *javāldūz* into his body (Asadiān et al., p. 166; cf. the myth of the imaginary *merdez mā* [i.e., *mardāzmā*, lit., "man tester"] in Baḳtiārī folklore; Ḳosravī, p. 434). In contemporary Persian the expression *meṭl-e dūālpā* (like the *davāl-pā*) refers to someone who clings tenaciously to other people and importunes them with wearisome requests or commands.

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