



FERĒDŪN

FERĒDŪN (arabicized from Afrīdūn; Pahl. and Man. Mid. Pers. Frēdōn; NPers. Fereydūn or Farīdūn; Av. Θraētaona), Iranian mythic hero. He is mentioned several times in the Avesta with the epithet *Āθβiiāni* “of the house of *Āθβiia*” (*AirWb.*, p. 323), said to have been his father (*Y.* 9.7). *Āθβiia* is to be compared with Vedic *Āptya*, both from Indo-Iranian **Atp̄ias*. Both the Indian hero *Trita Āptya* and the Avestan *Θraētaona*, son of *Āθβiia*, defeated dragons: *Viśvarūpa* and *Dahāka* respectively. Furthermore, in the Iranian tradition both *Θraētaona* and *Θrita* (cf. *Trita*) were physicians (*Yt.* 13.131; *Vd.* 20.2). It can therefore be suggested that in the remote past they were two brothers of the house of **Ātp̄ias*, one a warrior, the other a physician. *Θraētaona* alone became prominent in Iranian myth and was identified as both warrior and physician (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, pp. 98-100). As both names were derived from *θri-* “three,” *Θraētaona* may originally have been a patronym from *Θrita/Trita*, meaning “son of *Θrita*,” and both *Θrita* and *Θraētaona* can be understood as reflexes of an earlier **Trito* (Lincoln, pp. 104-05).

Θraētaona’s most brilliant feat in the Avesta is his victory over the three-headed, six-eyed dragon *Dahāka* (*Yt.* 5.33-35, 15.23-24; *Y.* 9.7-8; *Vd.* 1.18). Although there and in a tradition related by *Ṭabarī* (I, p. 208) *Θraētaona* seems to have killed *Dahāka*, in the Pahlavi literature (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, pp. 548, 811) it is explicitly reported that, following *Ohrmazd*’s command, he refrained from killing the dragon, lest various noxious creatures emerge from the corpse; rather, he fettered and imprisoned the beast on Mount *Damāvand* (q.v.). It will remain there in chains until the end of the world, when it will be



slain by Garšāsb (q.v.; *Pahlavi Rivayat*, ed. Dhabhar, pp. 146-47). This version is also repeated in sources of the Islamic period (Ṭabarī, I, p. 208; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 82-83). It seems to be a late Zoroastrian scholastic elaboration of the original Avestan myth (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, p. 283). It is obviously because of this victory that Ferēdūn is often given the epithets *pur-pērōzgar* “very victorious” (*Pahlavī Rivayat*, ed. Dhabhar, p. 134), *tagīg* “valiant,” and *zōrīg* “powerful” (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, pp. 812, 814).

In the *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 61 ff.) Ferēdūn is identified as the son of Ābtīn (q.v.), a descendant of Jamšēd, and of Farānak (*Mojmal*, ed. Bahār, p. 27: *Farīrang). According to the Avesta (*Vd.* 1.18), Ferēdūn was born in Varəna, identified in later sources with Var, a village in the area of Larijān (Ebn Esfandiār, p.57; Mar’ašī, p. 11; cf. Ṭabarī, I, p. 205, who mentioned Damāvand as Ferēdūn’s birthplace). Immediately after his father’s murder by Žaḥḥāk (Dahāk) Farānak takes her son to a forest, where he is nourished by the cow Barmāya (q.v.; *Šāhnāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, v. 114; Ṭa’ālebī, *Gorar*, p. 31: Barmāyūn). When Ferēdūn is three years old his mother flees with him to Mount Alborz (q.v.), fearing Žaḥḥāk. Eventually Kāva (Ṭabarī, I, p. 207, and other Islamic sources: Kābī) rebels against Žaḥḥāk and takes his army to the castle where Ferēdūn is hiding. With their assistance Ferēdūn, still only sixteen years old (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, p 64 v. 153; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, p. 596: nine years old), sets out to exact vengeance for his father’s death. He crosses the river Arvand and goes to Jerusalem, where Žaḥḥāk has his palace. After a furious battle he defeats Žaḥḥāk and rescues two of Jamšēd’s women, Arnavāz and Šahrnāz (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi I, p. 92 v. 49; Ṭabarī, I, p. 205: Arvnāz and Sanvāz; Av. Arənouuāči and Saṇhauuāči), who had been abducted by Žaḥḥāk. They seem to have replaced “the cattle” freed from the dragon in the original Indo-Iranian myth (Lincoln, p. 109). On a Sasanian amulet in the British Museum, London, a hero with a bull-headed mace in his right hand is depicted subduing a demon; the image seems to represent the battle of Ferēdūn with Žaḥḥāk (Bivar, pp. 522-24).

Ferēdūn also does battle with the Māzandars, semi-monstrous foreign people identified with the blacks (*zangīg*; *Bundahišn*, TD2, pp. 108-9; cf. Matīnī). The event is briefly related in the *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, pp. 812-14, cf. pp. 596, 689; *Mēnōg ī xrad*, ed. Anklesaria, chap. 27.40; Tafazzoli, pp. 127-28). According to this legend, after Ferēdūn’s victory over Žaḥḥāk the Māzandars attack the region of Xwanērah (Av. Xʷaniraθa); the people there complain to Ferēdūn, who fights the aggressors in the plain of Pēšānseh, binds them to the hooves



(lit., “feet”) of the cow Barmāyūn, transforms some of them into stones, and finally expels them from the region.

According to the Avesta (*Yt.* 13.131) and the Pahlavi literature, Ferēdūn was also a physician. In one tradition (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, p. 596) the agricultural aspect of Jam’s (Yama’s) glory (*xwarrah*), attached to the third Iranian social class, is said to have been transferred to Ferēdūn, though it would be expected that the warriors’ portion would have devolved upon him. He was thus able to repel the plague and other diseases and bore the epithet *purr-bēšaz*, literally, “very healing” (*Dādistān ī dēnīg*, pt. 1, p. 84, question 36.35; cf. p. 97 question 36.80). It may be suggested that in the original myth, or at least one version of it, the portion of the farmers had been allotted to Ōrita, mentioned in the Avesta as a physician (*Vd.* 20.2); later it must have become attached to Ferēdūn, along with Ōrita’s identification as a physician. In the preserved fragment of one Avestan text, probably an incantation, Ōraētaona is invoked against evil powers (*Avesta*, tr. Darmesteter, 3.2; Modi, 1900). On a Parthian gem in the Falkiner collection, London, probably an amulet made to serve a medical purpose, an Iranian hero is depicted subduing a demon; it may represent Ferēdūn fighting a demon of severe illness (Bivar, pp. 518-23). The popularity of Ferēdūn as a physician is also reflected in a Manichean Middle Persian incantation associated with other “names of power” (Henning, pp. 39-40). There are a number of amulets and charms inscribed in Pahlavi, Pazand, and Persian in which Ferēdūn is invoked to heal diseases; some of them are still used by the Zoroastrians of Persia and India (Modi, 1894; Kanga, pp. 141-45; Boyce, *Stronghold*, pp. 63 ff.). There is also an incantation against noxious creatures and other evil powers in Pahlavi and in Persian (*Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, p. 84; cf. Modi, 1900, repr. pp. 125-26; *Zand ī Xūrdag Abestāg*, pp. 121-22; Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, p. 229; *Toḥfat al-ġarā’eb*, p. 217). In another Pahlavi incantation Ferēdūn’s name is mentioned; its purpose was to make a dried-up spring flow again (*Pahlavi Rivayat*, ed. Dhabhar, pp. 201-2; ed. Williams, I, p. 229, II, p. 265). In sources of the Islamic period the invention of medicine and the introduction of antidotes are attributed to Ferēdūn, who was also regarded as the inventor of amulets (Ḥamza, 1961, p. 34; Ṭabarī, I, p. 226; Ba’alāmī, ed. Bahār, p. 148; Ebn al-Balkī, p. 36; *Tārīk-e gozīda*, ed. Navā’ī, p. 84).

Magical powers were attributed to Ferēdūn as early as in the Avesta (*Yt.* 5.61-65), where he is said to have kept the skilled steersman Paurva, who was wandering in search of his home, tossed in the air continuously for three days and nights until the goddess Ardvī Sūrā Anāhītā rescued him. This report may



be an allusion to a steersman whose boat is buffeted by winds. Ferēdūn used his magical powers in the battle with the Māzandars. When he exhaled he projected hailstones from his right nostril and fiery stones, each as big as a room, from his left. He was also able to turn the enemy to stone (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, p. 814). Once he assumed the guise of a furious dragon in order to test the bravery of his three sons (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khalegi, I, p. 103 vv. 221 ff.). This connection of Ferēdūn with magic may have given rise to the scholastic speculation that his capital was at Babylon (Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, p. 34; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p. 265), considered the center for magicians in Pahlavi and Islamic sources.

Like other ancient mythological heroes and kings, Ferēdūn had attached to him in the Pahlavi and Islamic sources a number of deeds pertaining to early Iranian civilization, for example, the foundation of the city of Samlān/Samrān, of a marvelous town in Padēšk^vārgar, and of fire temples in three different places. He was the first to tame the elephant and use it in battle and to cross horses and donkeys to produce mules, as well as many other marvelous deeds beneficial to the world. The duration of his reign was recorded as 500 years. He was also considered the inventor of astronomy and philosophy (Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, pp. 20, 99-101; *Bundahišn*, TD2, 209.6, 127.8, 239; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, 596.13; Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, pp. 5-6; Bal'amī, ed. Bahār, p. 148; Ebn al-Balkī, p. 36; Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, p. 17; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p. 265, II, p. 398; Ṭabarī I, pp. 229-30; Ṭa'ālebī, *Ġorar*, p. 65; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīk*, p. 178; *Tārīk-e gozīda*, ed. Navā'ī, p. 84).

Ferēdūn's close connection with cattle is notewrothy. His totemic ancestors are mentioned with the suffix *gāw* "cow" (see [ĀBTĪN](#)). This connection may have influenced later reports, for example, his famous mace with a bull's head (*gorz-e gāvsār*; e.g., *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghī, I, pp. 71 v. 257, 82, v. 444; Ebn al-Balkī, pp. 12, 36; Ṭabarī, I, p. 228; Ṭa'ālebī, *Ġorar*, p. 34; Ebn Esfandīār, p.58), his nourishment by a cow named Barmāyūn, his being the first to ride a bull on the feast of *dar-e mazīnān* (16 Day; Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, p. 226; Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 246), his riding a bull while hunting (Ebn Esfandīār, p. 58), and his fastening the Māzandars to the hooves of the ox Barmāyūn (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, 814.11 ff.).

Ferēdūn is said to have had two elder brothers, who assisted him in his battle against Žaḥḥāk: Barmāyōn (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khalegi, I, pp. 58 vv. 44 ff., 70 vv. 253-54, 72 v. 272: Barmāya) and Katayōn (*Bundahišn*, TD2, 229.11; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, 320; *Šāh-nāma*, loc. cit.). According to one story, these brothers



attempted to kill Ferēdūn by rolling a boulder down on him while he was asleep, but he used his magic powers to order the boulder to stop (Gardizī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 4).

Ferēdūn is supposed to have divided his realm among his three sons, giving Rūm to Salm, Turkestan to Tōz (*Šāh-nāma*: Tūr), and Iran and India to Ēriz (*Šāh-nāma*: Īraj). A dispute arose among the three and resulted in the assassination of the youngest, Ēriz/Īraj, by the other two (*Bundahišn*, TD2, pp. 211, 229; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, 596, 689; *Ayādgar ī Jāmaspīg*, chap. 4.39; *Mēnōg ī xrad*, ed. Anklesaria, chap. 21.24; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 106 ff.; Ṭabarī, I, p. 229; Ṭa'ālebī, *Gorar*, p. 41; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p. 265; Ḥamza, 1961, p. 34; Tafazzoli, pp. 114-15).

According to one tradition, Ferēdūn was at first immortal, but Ahriman (q.v.) changed him into a mortal (*Mēnōg ī xrad*, ed. Anklesaria, chap. 8.27), either because of his contempt for Ohrmazd (*Pahlavi Rivayat*, ed. Dhabhar, p. 139; ed. Williams, II, p. 78) or because he preferred Ēriz/Īraj to the two older sons (Ṭa'ālebī, *Gorar*, p. 42; Tafazzoli, p. 111).

Like other ancient Iranian heroes, Ferēdūn was identified in Islamic sources with such biblical and koranic figures as Noah (Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, p. 46), Abraham (Maqdesī, *Bad'*, III, pp. 142, 144), and Nimrod (Dīnavarī, ed. Guirgass, p. 8). The introduction of Semitic elements into the legend of Ferēdūn also belongs to the Islamic period; for example, the story that he was twins in his mother's womb and of his miraculous birth (Maqdesī, *Bad'*, III, p. 142) is an adaptation of the story of Jacob and Esau.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(for cited works not given in detail see "Short References"):

Ayādgar ī jāmaspīg, ed. G. Messina as *Libro apocalittico persiano: Ayātkār ī žāmāspīk*, Rome, 1939.

Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, ed. J. W. Fück, Berlin, 1952.



D. H. Bivar, "A Parthian Amulet," *BSOAS* 30, 1967, pp. 512-25.

Abu'l-Ḥasan Ḥamza Eṣfahānī,, *Ketāb ta'riḳ senī molūk al-arż wa'l-anbīā'*, Beirut, 1961.

W. B. Henning, "Two Manichaeic Magical Texts," *BSOAS* 12, 1947, pp. 39-66.

K. E. Kanga, "King Farīdūn and a Few of His Amulets and Charms," in *The K. R. Cama Memorial Volume*, Bombay, 1900, pp. 141-45.

B. Lincoln, *Priests, Warriors and Cattle*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981.

Ẓahīr-al-Dīn Mar'aṣī, *Tāriḳ-e Ṭabarestān o Rūyān o Māzandarān*, ed. B. Dorn as *Sehir-eddin's Geschichte von Tabaristan, Rujan und Masanderan*, St. Petersburg, 1850.

J. Matīnī, "Māzandarān," *Iran-nāma* 2, 1363 Š./1984, pp. 611-38.

J. J. Modi, *Charms or Amulets for Some Diseases of the Eye*□, Bombay, 1894; repr. in *Anthropological Papers* I, Bombay, 1911, pp. 43-50.

Idem, "Nirang-i Jashan-ī Burzigarān □," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* 5, 1900, pp. 398-405; repr. in *Anthropological Papers* I, Bombay, 1911, pp. 122-30.

Idem "An Avesta Amulet for Contracting Friendship," in *Anthropological Papers* I, Bombay, 1911, pp. 131-39.

The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg, ed. A. V. Williams, 2 vols., Copenhagen, 1990.

A. Tafazzolī, tr., *Mēnū-ye kerad (Mēnōg ī xrad)*, Tehran, 1354 Š./1975; repr. Tehran, 1364 Š./1985.

Toḥfat al-ḡarā'eb, ed. J. Matīnī, Tehran, 1371 Š./1992.

Zand ī Xūrdag Abestāg (Zand-i Khūrtak Avistāk), ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1927.