



GARŠĀSP-NĀMA

GARŠĀSP-NĀMA (or *Karšāsp-nāma*), a long heroic epic by Asadī Ṭūsī (d. ca. 465/1072-73; q.v.). The poem was completed, as the author says in the epilogue (ed. Yaḡmā'ī, ch. 144, v. 2), in 458/1066, and it is dedicated to a ruler of Nakjavān by the name of Abū Dolaf, who does not seem to be known from any other source. The only complete edition of the work was published by Ḥabīb Yaḡmā'ī (Tehran, 1317 Š./1938, and reprints), based on several manuscripts, among them the oldest dated copy, British Library Or. 2780 (copied in 800/1397). Previously, the first part of the poem had been published, with a French translation, by Clément Huart as *Le livre de Gerchâsp, poème persan d'Asadī junior de Ṭoûs, tome premier* (Paris, 1926), and the remainder of the text was translated by Henri Massé (on the basis of Yaḡmā'ī's edition, without republication of the Persian text) as *Le livre de Gerchâsp, poème persan d'Asadī de Ṭoûs, tome second et dernier* (Paris, 1951) with an extensive introduction. A German translation by H. Kanus-Credé has been published in *Iranistische Mitteilungen* 26 (1996) to 28 (1998).

The hero of the poem, Garšāsp (or Karšāsp), the son of Eṭreṭ, and grandson of Šam, is clearly identical with the ancient Iranian hero, Kərəsāspa-, the son of Өrita-, of the clan Sāma-, but apart from the names and the fact that Asadī's hero is depicted as a dragon slayer, there does not seem to be any real point of contact between Asadī's story and what we know of Kərəsāspa- from the Avesta and the Pahlavi sources. The poet indicates that he took the story from a book of the adventures of Garšāsp (ch. 11, v. 1) and that it complements the stories told by Ferdowsī (ch. 11, v. 33). It is thus clear that the poem is based on



a written source, despite the repeated stereotyped invocation of the *dehqān* or *mōbad* who supposedly sang the story. The anonymous *Tārīk-e Sīstān* (ed. Bahār, pp. 35-37) quotes a *Ketāb-e Garšāsp* of “Bu’l-Mo’ayyad,” evidently the well-known poet and antiquarian Abu’l-Mo’ayyad Balkī (q.v.) as the source for its account of the fire-temple of Karkōy and of how this had been the oratory (*ma’bad-jāy*) of Garšāsp and was later restored by Kay Kōsrow and Rostam and inscribed with verses praising Garšāsp. There is no trace of any of this in Asadī’s poem. But earlier in the same history (pp. 2-6) we do find an account of the life of Garšāsp, and his genealogy, which agree closely with Asadī’s *Garšāsp-nāma*. It is thus possible that Abu’l-Mo’ayyad’s book is indeed the common source used by Asadī and by the author of the *Tārīk-e Sīstān*, but this cannot be considered entirely certain. It is particularly noteworthy that while Ṭabarī (I, pp. 532-33) and the *Bundahišn* (ed. Anklesaria, 35.32-33; a very late addition, evidently derived from Islamic sources) make Garšāsp a descendant of Ferēdūn’s evil son Tūr (NPers. Tūr), the source used by Asadī and the *Tārīk-e Sīstān* attach him to a different Tūr, the son of Jamšēd, though they retain most of the same names for the generations between Tūr and Garšāsp.

Asadī’s story begins with Garšāsp’s ancestors. Jamšēd is overthrown by Žaḥḥāk and flees to Kūrang, the king of Zābolestān, and falls in love with the king’s (unnamed) daughter. This liaison gives birth to Tūr. Jamšēd flees again, and Kūrang accepts Tūr as his own heir. Tūr is succeeded by his son Šēdāsp, who begets Ṭovorg. His son is Šam, who begets Etreṭ, who begets Garšāsp.

Garšāsp is born 700 years after Tūr, and Žaḥḥāk is still king of Iran. Žaḥḥāk pays a visit to Zābolestān, where his eye is caught by the boy Garšāsp, whom he challenges to slay a terrible dragon. The child does so willingly. In the meanwhile, the king of India is overthrown by his relative, a certain Bahū, who renounces his loyalty to Žaḥḥāk. Žaḥḥāk orders Garšāsp to subdue the rebel. Bahū is defeated and the king restored. Garšāsp proceeds to Sarandīb (Ceylon), where he sees the footprint of the Buddha, or rather, as in other Muslim sources, that of Adam. The poet regales us with various legends about the father of mankind. Garšāsp meets a Brahman whom he interrogates at great length on philosophical and religious questions. The words that Asadī puts in the Brahman’s mouth have nothing to do with Indian beliefs, but instead give him an opportunity to indulge in a poetic synthesis of the usual sort of Muslim Neo-Platonism. Garšāsp then visits the islands of India and admires their supernatural marvels, again described at great length. The hero returns home and pays homage to Žaḥḥāk. He then goes off to woo the



daughter of the king of Rūm. The king of Kābol defeats Etreṭ in battle, but Garšāsp kills him and restores his father. He builds the town of Sīstān and receives Žaḥḥāk there as his guest. Garšāsp travels west again, defeats the king of Qayravān, and visits Cordova in Spain. He meets a “Greek Brahman” and engages once again in philosophical discourse. He returns home, his father dies, and Garšāsp becomes king of Zābolestān. He adopts Narēmān, the son of his brother Kūrang, as his own son (in *Tārīk-e Sīstān*, this Kūrang is Garšāsp’s son and Narēmān his grandson). Ferēdūn defeats Žaḥḥāk and becomes king of Iran, and Garšāsp declares his allegiance to Ferēdūn. Garšāsp and his nephew visit Tūrān and then make war on the Faḡfūr of China. Eventually they defeat him and lead him captive to Ferēdūn. Narēmān has a son, Sām, who is to be the father of Zāl and grandfather of Rostam. Garšāsp fights the king of Tanger, and kills another dragon. He then returns home and dies.

Asadī’s *Garšāsp-nāma* is the best known of the many poetic imitations of Ferdowsī’s *Šāh-nāma* (see [EPICS](#)). No one, it seems, has ever considered it a serious rival.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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