



HAFTVĀD

HAFTVĀD (Haftwād), the hero of a legend associated with the rise of the Sasanian Ardašir I (r. 224-39). The *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Moscow, VII, pp. 139-54) gives his “strange story” (*dāstān-e šegeft*) as follows. In the city of Kojārān on the coast of the Persian Gulf, there lived a man of meager means who “was called Haftvād because he had seven (*haft*) sons” (p. 140 v. 510). He also had a daughter who went daily to the field with other women to gather cotton and spin it at home into yarn. One day she found a worm in an apple and, taking it as a sign of good fortune, placed it inside her distaff case. On that day she was able to spin a double quantity. She nurtured that “auspicious worm” (*kerm-e farrok*) at home and it turned into a mighty creature, black with golden spots. By the worm’s fortune the family grew wealthy and influential until Haftvād was able to kill the ruler of Kojārān and assume royal power. He built a fort on a nearby hill, transferred the worm there, and nurtured it with milk and rice until it grew into a giant “with horns and mane” (*bā šāk o yāl*; p. 143, v. 566). Haftvād’s power grew daily. He founded (the city of) Kermān, which he named after that worm (*kerm*, p. 143 v. 567), and with an army of 10,000 men, led by his sons he gained mastery over the whole region. Ardašir became alarmed and sent a force against him, but Haftvād took it by surprise and destroyed it. Ardašir came in person but was trapped when Šāhōy, the eldest son of Haftvād, “sailed from the other side of the sea” to his father’s aid, and they closed the roads and passes, thereby preventing Ardašir from getting provisions. Eventually he was forced to retreat to the coast. Meanwhile Mehrak, son of Nōšzād the local king of Jahrom, rose up against Ardašir, took his capital Ardašir-*korra* (q.v.) and plundered it. One night, while Ardašir was



partaking of dinner in his camp, an arrow shot from the castle hit his meal, bearing the warning message: “This is what we can do by the fortune of the worm. We would have shot Ardašir if we had wanted to.” As Ardašir hurried homewards, Haftvād’s army pursued and put his men to the sword. Ardašir escaped and reached Ardašir-ķorra with two devoted supporters. There he gathered a new army, vanquished Mehrak and his family (only a daughter escaped, destined to become the wife of Šāpur I and mother of Hormozd-Ardašir), and returned with an army of 12,000 men “to wage war on the worm” (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, VII, p. 150, vv. 694-95). Learning that the fort was impregnable, he decided to capture it with a stratagem, as his ancestor Esfandiār (q.v.) had captured the Rō’in-dež. He left one of his generals, Šahrgir, in charge of the camp and instructed him to attack when smoke or fire was seen rising from the fort. Then taking a huge brazen pot and two boxes full of lead and solder, Ardašir and his two companions, all disguised as Khorasanian merchants, were admitted into the castle bearing large loads of gifts with which they gained the trust of Haftvād and the men guarding the worm. Once inside, Ardašir prepared a banquet for the guards and intoxicated them. Then he lit a fire, melted the lead, and poured it into the mouth of the worm, killing it. He and his companions then put the guards to the sword while Šahrgir stormed the fort when smoke rose from it. Ardašir slew Haftvād and his son Šāhōy and seized their treasures. He built a fire temple there and then sent a force to reduce Kermān. Afterwards, he went to Ctesiphon and crowned himself king of kings.

An older version of the story is found in the *Kār-nāmag ī Ardašir ī Pābagān* (tr. Nöldeke, pp. 49-57; ed. and tr. Antiâ, pp. 25 ff.), where the principal character is named Haftānbōxt (q.v., for a discussion of the origin of this name and its relation to the name Haftvād). It starts abruptly, owing, no doubt, to the fact that the extant *Kār-nāmag* is a shorter recension of an original (Nöldeke, tr., p. 51 n. 1; Christensen, 1936, p. 78). According to this version, Ardašir was fighting the Kurds of Media when “the army of Haftānbōxt, the lord of the worm, attacked him, captured his horses, all his treasures and property and took them to Gulār, the borough of the district of Kōčārān, where the worm lived.” At the time Ardašir intended to campaign in Armenia and Azarbaijan, whence Yazdānkard Šahrzūrīg (of Šahrazur, most probably the Šahrgir of the *Šāh-nāma* version) had brought a force to his aid. “But when he heard what outrage the son of Haftānbōxt had committed against his army,” he decided first to bring peace to Pārs and “fight that idol-worshipper (*uzdēsparist*) in Kōčārān, who is so powerful that an army of 5,000 men previously scattered



around have come to him from Sind, Mokrān, and the sea.” Ardašīr sent an army against “the lord of the worm,” but they were vanquished in a surprise night attack. “Haftānbōxt, the lord of the worm, had seven sons, each appointed over a place and furnished with a thousand armed men. The eldest was in Ērāhastān (a coastal area of Pārs: Yāqut, cited in Nöldeke, p. 52 n). He arrived by sea with a large force of Arabs and Makranians (not *Mičrikān* “Egyptians” as Nöldeke, nor *Myčny’n* “Omanians” as Henning, p. 141 n. 12, but *myč(w)nyg’n*, i.e., **Mēčōnī-kān*, from Old Pers. *Makā*, see Bailey, pp. 10, 13 n. 3). Ardašīr was attacked from both sides. The scarcity of provisions, the arrow-shot, Ardašīr’s flight, the help he received from two devoted supporters, his regrouping in Ardašīr-*korra* and destruction of the house of Mehrak, and his return to attack Gūlār are described as in the *Šāh-nāma*, but it is added that the Royal Fortune (*kayān xwarra*), which had forsaken Ardašīr, returned to him and brought him ease and success. After instructing his 400-man force to storm the stronghold on the *Asmān-rōz* (27th day of the month), when they saw smoke, Ardašīr and two attendants, disguised as Khorasanian merchants, gained admission into the fort, and having intoxicated the guards, he fed the worm “molten lead instead of the blood of bulls and sheep it usually consumed daily.” The creature cried out hideously and breaking into two pieces, perished. The capture of the fort, the fate of Haftānbōxt and his family, the looting of his immense treasures, and Ardašīr’s establishment of a Bahrām fire in Kōčārān are narrated almost as in the *Šāh-nāma*. Ardašīr installed his two supporters as local governors, returned to Ardašīr-*korra*, and sent an army to Kermān to subdue the mountain tribe of Bāričān (Pāričān, later Bārez: Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 31, not Balās as Nöldeke).

The only other source mentioning the story is Ṭabari, whose version is highly rationalized and fragmentary (Ṭabari, I, p 817; see also Bal’ami, ed. Bahār, pp. 820, 879). The summary in *Mojmalal-tawāriḵ* (ed. Bahār, p. 60) is based on the *Šāh-nāma* (for other derivative references see Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 124). Before the overthrow of the Parthians, Ardašīr conquered Kermān and installed there as king one of his sons, also called Ardašīr. Then he moved against the coastland on the Persian Gulf (Bal’ami adds: “which belonged to Kermān”), where a local king called *’btbwd* (*’btānbw’d*, with the reading at p. 817 n. b; not *Astawād* as Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 11 n.1) “was venerated as a god” by his subjects, and had amassed great treasures in cellars. Ardašīr cut him in half with his sword, extirpated his family, and carried off his treasures. Ṭabari ends the account of Ardašīr’s conquests and reign with the following report [missing in Bal’ami’s text but added (p. 884) by the editor from Tabari]: “It is



said that in a village called Alār in the district of Kujārān on the coastland of Ardašīr-korra, there lived a queen who was worshipped as a divine being, and who had much wealth, many treasures, and armed men. Ardašīr attacked her (armed) priests (*sadana*), slew the queen, and carried off the immense riches and treasures that she had amassed.”

The legendary elements in this story are quite ancient. The belief that a worm can transform into a dragon is found elsewhere (e.g., in Irish and Scandinavian mythology; see Thompson, B11. 13.1; B11. 1.3.1.1). Indeed in Sogdian the word for dragon is *kyrm* (Henning, 1940, pp. 21-22), while Ossetic has *kalm* for “snake” (Morgenstierne, p. 24). A dynasty founder and great conqueror, Ardašīr, is accorded the status of a dragon-slayer (cf. Indra and Vṛtra, Ōraētaōna/Frēdōn and Aži Dahāka, Apollo and Python, Heracles and Hydra), which was a trait of notable Indo-European and Iranian heroes (Nöl-deke, p. 29; Darmesteter, p. 83; Yarshater, pp. 348, 428; Márkus-Takeshita; see also AŽDAHA, [FERĒDŪN](#)). It has been pointed out that “in folktales, hidden treasures are often guarded by serpents or dragons” (Yarshater, p. 428), which partially explains the widespread veneration of the house snake among Indo-Europeans (Welsford) and other communities (MacCulloch; Crooke). The similarity of the legend of Haftvād’s daughter with the Scandinavian story of princess Thora as told by the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus (d. 1220) has long been recognized (Liebrecht, p. 65-67; Darmesteter, p. 83; Christensen, 1941, p. 59). Herodd, king of Sweden, commanded his daughter Thora “to rear a race of adders with her maiden hands,” and they grew so large that they menaced the community. Prince Ragnar Lodbrog killed them and married Thora. In another version, the Saga of King Ragnar Lodbrog, Thora “kept a snake in a box, with gold under him. The snake grew until it encircled the whole room, and the gold grew with his growth” (Welsford, pp. 419-20). The place names have contributed to the development of the story. Since it is supposed to have taken place in a coastal area belonging to *Kermān*, a word play on *kerm* has been achieved. Kōčārān (and variants) was a fort of a local king of Pārs, Gōčīhr/Juzehr, who was slain at Ardašīr’s instigation (Ṭabari, I, pp. 814-16). At the same time, in cosmology, Gōčīhr is a snake-like star with a tail, a harmful being hostile to the sun (*Bundahišn*, tr. Anklesaria, pp. 242-43; MacKenzie, pp. 13-16) and destined to burn in molten metal at the end of the world (*Bunahišn*, tr. Anklesaria, pp. 188-91). By a word play on Gōčīhr, the story has given Ardašīr the role of a savior, the restorer of the perfect world of Ohrmazd.



Despite these legendary elements, the story is clearly woven around a historical base, namely, Ardašir's effort to conquer the Persian coastland and the neighboring regions of Makrān and Kermān, and the heavy local resistance that he had to overcome (Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 44; contra Henning, 1966, p. 140). The maritime trade must have made these regions wealthy, and it is quite possible, as Julius Mohl recognized (pp. iv-v), that a local industry for making silk had developed on the Persian Gulf, and its patrons had jealously guarded its secret and amassed great wealth in their strongholds. It has been pointed out (Warner, p. 204) that already Aristotle had learned (*History of Animals* 5.17.6) "of a certain great worm with horns, as it were, which produces bombycine or cocoons which the women use in weaving." The entire episode rests on the rationalization of an historical event (Henning, 1966, pp. 139-45): on the shore of the Persian Gulf, a mighty pirate, probably influenced by an Indian Nāga cult, had earned the enmity of Zoroastrian priests, particularly of Ādur Farnbag in the Kāriān temple, and Ardašir vanquished him with great difficulty. This eventually gave rise to a legend concerning a divine worm (*kerm*) and the story of Haftvād and his seven sons.

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