



IRAJ

IRAJ, the youngest son of Ferēdun and the eponymous hero of the Iranians in their traditional history. A cluster of legends in the Avesta, Pahlavi books, Sasanian-based Arabic and Persian sources, and particularly in the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi have elevated Iraj to the rank of a favorite hero who is at once the name-giver of the Iranian nation, the ancestor of their royal houses, and a paragon of those slain in defense of just causes.

The most developed form of the story of Iraj is given by Ferdowsi (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 92-157) in an episode remarkable for its eloquence and picturesque language (rendered in an abridged prose version by Yarshater, 1959, pp. 47-60, 62-79).

Fifty years into his reign as the king of the world, Ferēdun (q.v.) begot three sons. As they came of age, he searched out three royal sisters for them as wives, finding them in the daughters of Sarv, king of Yemen. Sarv invited the princes to Yemen to appraise their worth; satisfied, he gave them his daughters in marriage. On their way back, Ferēdun decided to test his sons' characters by assuming the form of a fire-belching dragon and rushing towards them furiously. The oldest fled to safety, saying that only a fool would fight a dragon. The second accepted the challenge with reckless courage. The youngest went forward gallantly and cried out that they were sons of Ferēdun and feared no monster. Reappearing in person, Ferēdun welcomed them to his palace and, "seating them upon the thrones of majesty," revealed the truth; he added: "I have chosen fit [throne] names for you" (*ibid.*, p. 105). The eldest, who wisely sought "safety" (*salāmat*), he called Salm (here wrongly



interpreted as derived from Arabic *slm*); the second, who showed unrestrained daring, he named Tur (i.e., *tur*, “reckless, brave”); and to the youngest, who exhibited the right character of prudent bravery and was thus “alone worthy of praise,” he gave the name “Iraj” (i.e., from *ēr* “noble”). Then Ferēdun “divided the world” into three realms. He created one kingdom for Salm by joining Rum and the West (*kāvar*); China and Turān he assigned to Tur, who became known as Turānšāh; and on Iraj he bestowed Iran and Arabia as well as the golden throne, crown of chiefs, and the royal seal (*ibid.*, p. 107).

The three ruled over their respective kingdoms “for a long time”; but in Ferēdun’s old age Salm revealed the extreme envy he felt towards Iraj for having received the choicest share, and he incited Tur to rebellion. The two met and sent an envoy to Ferēdun ordering him to assign a remote region to Iraj or else prepare to fight his two sons. Hoping to reconcile his brothers with their father, even if it meant himself renouncing the throne, Iraj went to them. They received him wrathfully, their envy increased by hearing their own troops murmuring “none but Iraj deserves the imperial rule and the hat of nobility” (*ibid.*, p. 118). Incited by Salm, Tur slew Iraj and sent his head to Ferēdun. The grief-stricken king prayed for a descendant of Iraj to avenge his murder. His prayers were answered. One of Iraj’s ladies called Māhāfarid bore a daughter, whom Ferēdun later gave in marriage to his own nephew Pešang (*ibid.*, p. 125 with n. 18). The couple engendered a son, whom Ferēdun named Manučehr and raised as his own heir. After coming of age, Manučehr slew Salm and Tur, whereupon Ferēdun abdicated in his favor and died soon after.

Tā’ālebi (*Ġorar*, pp. 41-60) gives the same account, which suggests that both he and Ferdowsi drew from a common source, most likely the *Šāh-nāma* of Abu Maṣur Moḥammad b. ‘Abd-al-Razzāq. The *Kuš-nāma* (pp. 609-54) reproduces this account with some elaborations, such as the alliance of Salm and Kuš, a nephew of Žaḥḥāk. In the account by Ṭabari (I, pp. 226-30, 430-34), Ferēdun assigns the lands of the Turks and Khazars together with China to Ṭuj, Rum and the lands of the Slavs and al-Burjān (Georgia) to Sarm, and “the center of the world” called *Ḳonāraṭ* (Av. *xʷaniraθa*) and known as Irānšahr to Iraj. This partition is based on the idea that the world was divided into “Seven climes” (see HAFT KEŠVAR). Others who give the story in its essentials include Bal’ami (ed. Bahār, pp. 148-50), Maqdesi (*Bad’* III, pp. 144-46), Mas’udi (*Moruj*, pp. 115-17, 140-41, 240), Ebn Ḳordāḍbeh (p. 15: “Ērān, who is Iraj”), and Ḥamza (p. 33). Dinavari (p. 9) also refers to Airaj, Salm, and Ṭus (for *Ṭuš < T@u±) sons of



Nimrod (= Ferēdun), and Manu-æhr son of Airaj. All but Dinavari consider Manu±ehr a remote descendant of Iraj (see Yarshater, 1983, p. 433). Most were aware that the name Iran derived from *ērej*/Iraj (see also Qoddāma, *Ketāb al-kerāj*, p. 234: “Iran is an attribute relating to *ēr*”). A tradition affected by Hebrew-Persian syncretism claimed that “Iran son of Aswad son of Sām” had ten sons who gave their names to various regions of Irānšahr: Khorasan, Sakastān, Kerman, Mokrān, Isfahan, Gilān, Sabadān, Jorjān, Azarbaijan, and Armenān (Yāqut, *Boldān* I, p. 418). “Irajid by descent” (*Iraji-zādeh*) is attested as a synonym for Iranian” (Daqiqi in the *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleqi, V).

The legend of Iraj can be traced back to Pahlavi and Avestan literatures. According to the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* (4.39-45 in Messina, 1939, pp. 44-46), Ferētōn divided “the entire world” between his three sons based on their ideals: Salm, who desired great riches, received the [wealthy] land of Rum; Tōz (Tur), who asked for valor, received Turkistan [the land of warriors], and Ērič (Iraj), who desired law and religion, (*dāt u dēn*), received Ērānšahr together with Ferētōn’s crown and royal glory (*xvarānah*), whereby his descendants were destined to have the royalty and sovereignty over those of his brothers. Envious of their younger brother’s lot, Salm and Tōz later found an opportunity and killed Ērič. The Sasanian Avesta had the story in the *Čihrdād Nask* (q.v.), of which a summary is preserved in *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, pp. 596, 689; ed. and tr. Mole, 1963, pp. 279-81): “Ferē-tōn, the lord (*xvatāy*) of Xvaniras” vanquished Dahāk and divided Xvaniras among his three sons Salm, Tōč, and Ērič. He had them wed the three daughters of Patsraß, the king of the Arabs (*tāžikān*), and later Manuščihr “king of Iran and descendant of Ērič” succeeded Ferētōn. The *Bundahišn* (ed. Anklesaria, p. 211; tr. p. 212) refers to the story of the three brothers and to Manuščihr’s avenging of the murder of Ērič by Sarm and Turč.

The oldest trace of the story of Iraj and his brothers is found in the *Fravardin Yašt*, where the *fravaši* of Manu-ščiθra (> Manučehr) son of Airiya (> Iraj) is venerated (*Yt.* 13.131), as are those of the pious men and women of the groups of lands of Airyana, Tūriyana, Sairima, Dāhi, and Sāinu (143-44). Three of these nations derive their names from the three sons of Ferēdun: Airya “Iranian” + *ē* of the oblique case + *č* gives the Middle Persian Ērič and Persian Iraj (on the possible Old Pers. *Airya-ča seen in Harriyazza/Harrizza of the Persepolis Elamite tablets, see, with literature, Cereti, 2002, p. 36). Similarly, Tuiyana produces Tūr(a)ča and Tur, and Sairima Sarm/Salm (on these names see Marquart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 155; Christensen, 1928, pp. 15-17, 22-25; Nyberg,



1938, pp. 250-52; Gnoli, 1980, pp. 60-61, n.; but cf. Cereti, p. 36, n. 51). That two other nations are also mentioned in the same context should not be seen as an obstacle to the tripartite division, since the descendants of Ērič/Iraj, were destined to rule over other countries, and in later accounts Ferēdun apportions five (or seven) lands between his three sons (see above).

It has long been recognized that the story of Iraj and his brothers goes back to very old traditions evolved around legends of origins (Christensen, 1916a; idem, 1916b, pp. 68-69; idem, 1928, pp. 15-17, 22-25; Nyberg, 1938, pp. 250-52, 463; Dumézil, 1968, pp. 446-52, 586-88; idem, 1973, pp. 13-14, 133-34; Yarshater, 1983, pp. 428-29, 433-34; Molé, 1952; Gnoli, 1980, pp. 60-61, 115-16). In brief, some Indo-Europeans shared a tradition about a “first king,” who divided the world he knew among his three sons. In Iran we have the case of Ferēdun and his sons. Herodotus (4.5-6) attests the legend which the ancient Scythians “gave of their origin.” Their first king Targitaus begot three sons; the oldest was Lipoxais, the middle Arpoxais, and the youngest Colaxais. They ruled for some time; but, when divine fortune favored Colaxais, the elder brothers made over the whole kingdom of Scythia to him. From these three sprang all of the Scythians. Lipoxais became the ancestor of the Auchatae, Arpoxais that of the Catiari and Trasprians, and from Colaxais sprang the Royal Scythians or Paralatae. Later, Colaxais divided his kingdom among his three sons. The analogy to the Iranian saga goes so far that even the surname of the Royal Scythians, Paralatae, is the same as the surname of Ferēdon and his family, the Paraδāta > Pišdād. The ancient Germans also had a similar legend, which they recounted “in old poems which serve these people as annals” (Tacitus, *Germania* 2.2). They relate that the ancestor of the Germans, called Mannus, divided the Germanic world between his three sons, who became the eponyms of the three main German nations: Ingaevones (north), Herminones (middle), and Istaevones (south). The same notion of a world divided into three parts underlies the Iranian legend that, during Jamšēd’s reign, thrice the earth became too crowded, and each time he was allowed to enlarge it by one-third (*Vd.* 2.9-19). In other words, originally the world had been imagined as consisting of three parts. Jamšēd was first given sovereignty over one-third, then over two-thirds, and finally over the entire world. Accordingly, his successors ruled over the whole world until Ferēdun divided it again into three realms.



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