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KĀR-NĀMAG Ī ARDAŠĪR Ī PĀBAGĀN

KĀR-NĀMAG Ī ARDAŠĪR Ī PĀBAGĀN, a short prose work written in Middle Persian. It narrates the Sasanian king Ardašīr I's own life story—his rise to the throne, battle against the Parthian king Ardawān (see ARTABANUS), and conquest of the empire by the scion of the House of Sāsān, as well as episodes concerning his heir Šābuhr and the latter's son, Ohrmazd. The sole independent manuscript of this text to have been identified so far is codex MK, which was copied in 1322 in Gujarat by Mihrābān ī Kay-Husraw, a gifted copyist belonging to a well known family of scribes. The manuscript contains a number of important non-religious texts, including the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*, *Šahrestanīhā ī Ērānšahr*, and many *andarz* texts, as well as a few short works that are very useful for understanding court customs and imperial administration in late Sasanian Iran, such as the *Wizārišn ī čātrang* and *Abar ēwēnag ī nāmag-nibēsišnīh*.

The redaction of the *Kār-nāmag* that has come down to us is undoubtedly late and probably relies on an older and longer version, which is reflected in the *Šāh-nāma*. The language of the text shows some late traits, though other passages preserve older forms and constructions. Typical of texts that enjoyed wide success, this linguistic multiplicity suggests a long tradition, possibly partly oral, which has led to textual modifications and innovations. If one accepts F. Grenet's reconstruction of the title *tegin* designating the king of Kabul in *Kār-nāmag* 14.19, the existing text should be dated later than

706—the earliest possible date for such a title to be attested (Grenet, 2003, pp. 26, 116-17, 125). However, there can be no doubt that the contents of the text draw from more ancient Iranian lore, since some traits of Ardašīr's life as narrated in this work reflect themes known from the legend of Cyrus the Great. Moreover, in all probability a telling of the life of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty close to what is found in the *Kār-nāmag* existed at least as early as late Sasanian times. This can be inferred from a number of facts. First of all, different traditions deriving from the Sasanian *Xwadāy-nāmag* (see HISTORIOGRAPHY ii) but belonging to branches of tradition which differ markedly from one another, such as Ṭabari and Ferdowsi, share a few individual episodes that must, therefore, derive from the common archetype. An example is the wedding of Ardašīr and Ardawān's daughter (Pagliaro, 1927, p. xxxiii). The account of this event that is closest to the version found in our text is in Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Khaleghi-Motlagh, 1990-2008, VI, pp. 138 ff.). As mentioned above, the great Iranian poet and the author of the *Karnāmag* relied either on the very same source or on closely related works.

Moreover, the important Byzantine historian Agathias, who wrote in the second half of the 6th century and whose work shows a bias against Sasanian Iran, knew a derogatory version of the story of Ardašīr's birth (*Hist*. II.27.1-5). This presupposes that he himself or at least his informant, Sergius, who had access to the royal Sasanian archives, was acquainted with the characters of Sāsān and Pābag and the role that each of them played in the events leading to Ardašīr's birth. According to the *Kār-nāmag*, Ardašīr was the natural son of Sāsān, a scion of the family of Dārā son of Dārā (see DĀRĀ[B])—that is, the Achaemenids—and of Pābag's daughter. Later Pābag adopted Ardašīr, who proved himself a valiant prince. Once the future king had reached the age of fifteen, Ardawān had him sent to his own court, where he was held in high esteem by the Parthian king until he got into a dispute with the sovereign's own son and fell into disgrace. The dispute between the two princes took place during a hunt and provides further testimony of Ardašīr's ambition and predestination. The young Sasanian and Ardawān's crown prince both race in pursuit of an onager, and it is Ardašīr's arrow that shoots it dead. At the arrival of Ardawān, both princes claim the quarry. In the following dispute Ardašīr speaks harsh words against the Parthian prince and, as a consequence, is confined to the stables by Ardawān. This incident provides the literary counterpart of the hunting scenes so often depicted on Sasanian silver bowls, where the Sasanian king is shown as an infallible hunter, each prey being depicted twice, once alive, pursued by the king, and once laying dead at

the feet of the sovereign.

The *Kār-nāmag* goes on to tell of the favorite maid of the Parthian king, who fell in love with Ardašīr and informed him of a prophecy that had been announced to the sovereign by the chief astrologer: the slave who was to escape his master within the next three days, and was able to escape pursuit, would himself be king (on the astrological reports found in the *Kār-nāmag*, see Panaino, 1994). The girl steals some objects from the treasury and goes to Ardašīr, and together they run away mounted on two horses stolen from the stables. The following morning Ardawān rides after them, while Ardašīr is reassured on the success of his quest by two women whom he meets on his road south. Here follows what is, symbolically, the most important scene. While pursuing the fugitives, Ardawān questions passersby, who tell him that they had seen the couple on the run, followed by a large ram. The king interrogates his Dastur about the meaning of this scene, and the sage answers that the ram represents the royal *xwarrah* (see FARR[AH]), which had not yet joined with Ardašīr. When, during the second day of pursuit, Ardawān is told that the ram sat on the back of Ardašīr's horse, the Dastur advises him not to continue his chase any longer, since once the *xwarrah* had joined Ardašīr, one could no longer defeat him. Then follows the description of Ardašīr's triumph over Ardawān in the battle of Hormuzagān (see HORMOZDGĀN) and his victorious campaign against the Kurds (a term that in pre-Islamic times designated the various nomadic lineages, rather than a specific ethnicity). Then comes his fight against *Haftobād (see HAFTĀNBŌXT), who could only be defeated through a stratagem suggested by the pious brothers Burzag and Burz-Ādur.

The last part of the *Kār-nāmag* relates episodes belonging to the life of Ardašīr's son and heir, Šābuhr I, and the life of the son of the latter, Ohrmazd. Ardašīr's wife, the daughter of Ardawān, instigated by her brothers, makes an attempt on the king's life. The plot fails and Ardašīr sentences her to death, notwithstanding her being pregnant, but the wise and compassionate Mowbedān Mowbed spares her life so that she may give birth to Šābuhr, who is raised in the house of the Mowbed. According to the *Šāh-nāma*, the holy man castrates himself in order to be beyond all suspicion. Years later the Mowbed reveals to Ardašīr Šābuhr's existence and is rewarded by the sovereign. An Indian astrologer foretells that Ērānšahr will only be united and pacified by a king in whose veins flows the blood of Ardašīr together with that of his mortal enemy, Mihrag. Upon hearing this, Ardašīr bursts into rage and orders that the

entire race of Mihrag be exterminated. In the event, only a girl of this family survives, to eventually marry Šābuhr and bear him a son, Ohrmazd, of whom it is said that he will reunite the entire Ērānšahr under his command and receive tribute and homage from the other kings of the time.

Different sources report differing genealogies for the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. According to the tradition best represented by Ṭabari (tr. Bosworth, pp. 2-3), Ardašīr is the son of Pābag and the grandson of Sāsān. This version is proved true by Šābuhr's inscription at the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt (§ 36), where a list of early Sasanians reads: "Sāsān, the lord (*xwadāy*); Pābag, the King; Ardašīr, the King of Kings" (Huyse, 1999, I, p. 49; II, pp. 114-15). However, other sources—such as Ferdowsi, Agathias, the Byzantine chronicler Synkellos (d. after 810), the Armenian historian Moses Khorenats'i, and the *Kār-nāmag*—all report variants of a different story. The *Kār-nāmag* and the *Šāh-nāma* belong to one and the same tradition, which makes of Sāsān a descendent of Darius who served as Pābag's shepherd. During three nights Pābag had premonitory dreams, each of which foretold Sāsān's greatness. The first night he dreamt that the sun was shining from Sāsān's head and illuminating the entire world. This episode is omitted in the *Šāh-nāma*. The second night the king dreamt that Sāsān was riding an elephant and that everybody bowed to him. A third night he saw the holy fires Farrbay, Gušnasp, and Burzēnmihr (see s.v. ĀDUR) burning in front of the shepherd or, according to the *Kār-nāmag*, in Sasan's house. After an astrologer had explained the meaning of these dreams, he summoned Sāsān and asked him about his identity and lineage. Sāsān revealed his secret, and Pābag married him to his own daughter, who was later to give birth to Ardašīr, whose name descends from that of the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes (Ṛtaxšaça), providing yet another link to the traditions of Pārs. Moses Khorenats'i seems to have known a similar story, while Agathias (see above) reports a derogatory version of this narration.

Thus we encounter two quite different versions of Ardašīr's genealogy, both of which might, at first sight, possess some grains of truth. However, on closer inspection, things look different. Had Pābag not had any child, one could rightly infer that, in accord with Zoroastrian customs, he adopted the son of a relative to ensure continuity to his house. However, this was not the case, since we know for sure of the existence of at least one elder brother of Ardašīr, Šābuhr, who briefly reigned in Pārs. This clearly deprives of any historicity the legend reported by the *Kār-nāmag* and the *Šāh-nāma*. Most probably it was created with the purpose of providing the rising Sasanian dynasty with a past

equal to its ambitions by creating a direct link to the Achaemenians and the, perhaps identical, *bayān* (divinized rulers) of the Frataraka dynasty, whose monuments still mark the landscape of the region.

Other aspects of the narration speak in favor of its belonging to the literary genre of fiction. It is true that the *Kār-nāmag* contains a short description of the historical battle of Hormuzgān, where Ardašīr and his son Šābuhr won the day and conquered throne and crown, as is shown in a monumental bas-relief carved on a cliff in the gorge which leads to Firuzābād and is guarded by the Qāl'a-ye Doḵtar. The text also hints at the conquest of Media by the newly crowned king. Nevertheless, in this narration the most crucial event of Ardašīr's life as a king is his fight against *Haftobād, whose power derives from the possession of a giant worm. The name of the defeated king may derive, should one accept Henning's etymology, from an old title describing the feudal lord of the seventh part of a province (**haptah^{u}a-pātā* > *haftaxōpāt* > **haftaxōbād* > **haftobād* > *haftwād*). This part of the narration is clearly set in the southern part of Pārs near the borders of Kermān, and the geographical names mentioned have been discussed in detail and identified by Henning (1968, pp. 140-43; cf. Grenet, 2003, pp. 31-33), who partly relies on J. Marquart's earlier work (Ērānšahr, pp. 43-44). Kāriyān, the seat of Ādur Farrbay, the priestly fire, was located in this area, and, according to the German scholar, the legend of the worm derives from the presence on the coast of a Nāga cult of the Indian type, which was felt as a 'thorn in the eye' by the Zoroastrian clergy.

In fact, a religious overtone permeates this episode. Ardašīr is only able to overcome *Haftobād after having killed the worm by means of a stratagem suggested by two pious Mazdean brothers, Burzag and Burz-Ādur. He conquered the worm by pouring molten copper down his throat; this procedure brings to the mind the victorious ordeal attributed to the 4th-century Zoroastrian priest Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān (see ĀDURBĀD Ī MAHRSPANDĀN), by which he proved the Good Religion true. However another explanation is also possible. The same narration, with more details, is known from the *Šāh-nāma*, which here also seems to derive from a fuller version of the *Kār-nāmag*. Ferdowsi's masterwork contains a long passage linking the worm to (cotton) weaving, which is completely absent in the Middle Persian work. Grenet (2003, p. 34) has suggested that this may somehow reflect legends linked with silk production, a technology that the Chinese long kept hidden.

The last part of the *Kār-nāmag* (as described above) narrates the birth and feats of Šābuhr. The relative brevity of Šābuhr's book in the *Šāh-nāma*, surprising for one of the greatest Sasanian sovereigns, may be due to the fact that a significant part of his life is told in the book of Ardašīr. To a certain extent this reflects factual history, since Ferdowsi's book preserves the memory of Šābuhr's co-regency with his father. In contrast, it is worthwhile to underline that the *Kār-nāmag* preserves traces of narrative themes which are current in Iranian legendary history. There Šābuhr is the son of Ardašīr and Ardawān's daughter—a woman who tried to poison her husband, the king of Iran. On the one hand this strengthens Šābuhr's claim to the throne, making him the heir of both the Sasanian and the Aškanian line, and thus the legitimate possessor of the Iranian *xwarrah* and the living symbol of the alliance between Persians and Parthians, which made the fortunes of the Sasanian empire. On the other hand, he is the offspring of Good and Evil, of Light and Darkness, a scheme that one finds in Iranian epics, particularly the Sistan cycle. Its main hero, Rostam, is undoubtedly the most powerful and renowned paladin of Iranian kings, but he also shares with his European counterpart, Lancelot, a somewhat obscure nature, which in the case of the Iranian hero leads him to kill the prince Esfandiār (q.v.) as well as his own son, Sohrāb. Šābuhr's son, Ohrmazd, shares a similar 'chiaroscuro' heritage, fulfilling the prophecy of the Indian magician that deeply upset Ardašīr. He is the son of the Sasanian prince and a daughter of Mihrag, Ardašīr's bitter enemy. This union of opposites engenders a king who will bring peace and unity to the empire.

Finally, the *Kār-nāmag* is permeated with Zoroastrian doctrine and customs, and this may explain some of the differences with the *Šāh-nāma*. The three great fires of Zoroastrianism are mentioned (see above); religious commandments such as *wāj* (see BĀJ) are described, along with many details of court life and about the education of young nobles. The important role played by *xwarrah* also fits well in the Zoroastrian context. The *Kar-nāmag* represents the *xwarrah*, which in Yima's legend (see JAMŠID i) is depicted as a falcon, in the form of a ram (*warrag*). No doubt this explains a common Sasanian iconography, well known also in glyptic: that of the beribboned ram (Grenet, 2003, pp. 42-44).

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