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KĀVA

KĀVA, the name of a heroic blacksmith in the *Šāhnāma* who rebels against the tyrant Żaḥḥāk and helps Ferēdun wrest the kingdom from him. Kāva appears in the narrative when Żaḥḥāk is set on forcing his subjects to testify to his good rule by signing an official document to that effect. At this moment the blacksmith walks into the royal court and complains that Żaḥḥāk's agents have arrested his son, in order to kill him and feed his brain to the serpents on the king's shoulders. Żaḥḥāk releases Kāva's son but demands the blacksmith sign the official declaration about his justice in return. When the affidavit is given to Kāva, however, he refuses to sign, and angrily tears it up. He then reprimands the courtiers who had signed the document and storms out of the court with his son. Żaḥḥāk remains silent through the episode of Kāva's outburst. Once the smith leaves the court, the nobles ask their king why he did not react more forcefully to the man's tirade, and he responds that, as soon as he laid eyes on Kāva, he felt completely overwhelmed by the man's presence. He adds that he could not act, because it was as though an impenetrable barrier like a mountain separated him from Kāva (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 67-69, vv. 93-226). That Kāva's mere presence immobilizes the demonic Żaḥḥāk is reminiscent of the apotropaic powers of iron and, by implication, blacksmiths (for similar instances reflection the apotropaic power of iron, see *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, V, p. 238, vv. 217-20; Enjavi, II, pp. 316-17; Suzani Samarqandi, p. 311; Neẓāmi Ganjavi, p. 459, v. 16).

When Kāva exits the court, he fashions a makeshift banner from a spear and his leather apron, gathers the disgruntled Iranians around him, and leads

them to Żaḥḥāk's rival, Ferēdun, whose whereabouts, mysteriously, are known to him (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, p. 69, vv. 226-34). Ferēdun adopts Kāva's banner as his own, decorates it with silk and jewels, and names it the Kāvian Banner (*Kāviāni derafš* "The Royal Banner"; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 69-70, vv. 235-43; Ṯaʿālebi, pp. 32-39; Christensen). This banner remained Iran's national flag until the Arab conquest of the country in the 7th century CE (see DERAFŠ-E KĀVIĀN). The story of Kāva the blacksmith in the *Šāh-nāma* ends with his arrival at Ferēdun's camp. No direct mention of the man is made in the rest of the poem. However, his sons, Qāran and Qobād, rise to positions of prominence among the Iranian warriors.

Although Kāva disappears rather abruptly in the *Šāh-nāma*, his service to Ferēdun is described in greater detail in the *Garšāsp-nāma* of Asadi Ṭusi. According to the *Garšāsp-nāma*, following Żaḥḥāk's defeat and Ferēdun's ascension to the throne, Kāva served as one of the new king's main generals. Ferēdun sent him to the land of Ḵāvar or Rum at the head of a great army to collect tribute and to pacify the area (Asadi, p. 329, vv. 8-9; p. 331, v. 46; p. 366, v. 23). Or, according to the *Mojmal al-tawāriḵ* (pp. 41-42), he was sent to Rum, and his son, Qāran, to China after Kuš-e Pil-dandān. Qāran is the more famous son, who serves as the commander of the forces of several kings in the *Šāh-nāma*, but he is not mentioned in Asadi's *Garšāsp-nāma*. The other son, Qobād, is referred to in the *Garšāsp-nāma*, according to which Qobād grows envious of the hero Garšāsp and openly criticizes Ferēdun for lavishing so many gifts upon that warrior. He points out that it was Kāva's family who helped bring Ferēdun to power, and he does not understand why the king treats Garšāsp more kindly. When the news of Qobād's protest reaches the king, he derides the warrior, saying: "Your father was no more than a blacksmith from Isfahan, who achieved prominence only because he chose to serve us, while Garšāsp descends from King Jamšid and is my kin." Ferēdun says that, if it were not for his respect for Kāva, he would have put Qobād to death for his impertinence (Asadi, pp. 433-36). Soon Kāva finds out about Qobād's disrespectful behavior toward the crown. He grows so wrathful that he attempts to kill his son, but his relatives intercede on Qobād's behalf and rescue the boy (Asadi, p. 437, vv. 65-67).

The traditions associated with Kāva and his adventures during the rules of Żaḥḥāk and Ferēdun must have been more extensive than what found its way into the prose *Šāhnāma* and, through it, into Ferdowsi's poem. For instance, according to Abu ʿAli Balʿami's free translation of Ṭabari's *History*, Kāva was a

farmer from a village near Isfahan, whose two sons were killed and fed to Żaḥḥāk's serpents, and that was why he rebelled against Żaḥḥāk's governor in Isfahan, took over the city, divided the governor's wealth among the people, and stopped tax payments. As a result, a great host gathered around him. Żaḥḥāk who was in the northern provinces at the time, sent an army against Kāva, but Kāva defeated it and began to advance north, taking over all towns on his path, until he arrived to the city of Ray, near Tehran. He then told his men: "We are now on the verge of meeting Żaḥḥāk. If we defeat him in battle, we need to choose a man we all like as the king to rule over the land." His men said that they would like him to become king, but Kāva refused, saying that he was a blacksmith, and this task should be given to a man from the line of kings. He added: "I did not rebel in order to take over the land. I did so in order to free the people from Żaḥḥāk's tyranny. If I take over the crown, people will say that he is not fit to be king and . . . there will be chaos. Find someone of royal blood so that we crown him as king." The people ask for two months to look for a suitable candidate and finally come up with Ferēdun, who was a descendant of Jamšid, and who was destined to kill Żaḥḥāk. Kāva and Ferēdun met in Ray, and Kāva offered him his services as commander of the young prince's army; together they managed to defeat and kill Żaḥḥāk. Once Ferēdun ascended the throne, he put Kāva in charge of his armies and also of his whole realm (Balʿami, ed. Bahār, pp. 143-47; ed. Rowšan, I, pp. 103-5; cf. Ebn al-Balḵi, pp. 34-35).

There is general agreement about the broad outlines of the story of Kāva and his rebellion against Żaḥḥāk in most Persian and Arabic sources, but they differ in details. For instance, Kāva's profession is given as farming (Balʿami, ed. Bahār, p. 144; *Tarjama-ye tafsir-e Ṭabari* V, p. 1153), although in one version the farmer uses a blacksmith's apron to make his banner (Balʿami, ed. Bahār, p. 145; ed. Rowšan, I, p. 103). According to the version of his story that was available to Abu'l-Ḥasan Masʿudi (d. 957), Kāva (called Kābi) was a shoemaker (*eskāf*), while in other versions his profession is not determined, and he is only said to be a commoner or a pious member of the lower classes (Masʿudi, pp. 85-88; tr., p. 86; Sediqiān, I, p. 177). His makeshift banner is said to have been made of his turban, apron, bear skin, lion skin, and even goat skin (e.g., *Tarjama-ye tafsir-e Ṭabari* V, pp. 1153-54; Biruni, p. 273; Maqdesi, III, p. 142; tr., I, p. 502). When Kāva rebels against Żaḥḥāk, God sends a message to Ferēdun informing informing him of the blacksmith's rebellion and orders him to join Kāva (Gardizi, p. 4).

The story of Kāva in the storytelling tradition (*naqqāli*) is a concoction of folk and the literary versions, with a bit of the *naqqāl*s' own contributions thrown in. For instance, Kāva had eighty sons, of whom seventy-eight were killed by Żaḥḥāk's agents (Afšār and Madāyeni, p.19). The number of his children is reminiscent of the large number of the sons of Gōdarz, an Iranian epic hero, who dies in the wars between Iran and Turan in the *Šāh-nāma*. The existence of Ferēdun is revealed to him in a dream, not by King Ṭahmuraṯ (Afšāri and Madāyeni, p. 21), a detail that exists neither in the *Šāh-nāma* nor in the folk tradition. However, as in the folk tradition (see below), it is Jamšid who tells him the exact whereabouts of the prince in a dream (Afšāri and Madāyeni, p. 30). The recognition scene between the smith and Ferēdun is quite similar to the recognition scene between the hero Giv (see GĒV) and Kay Ḵosrow in the *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Khaleghi, II, pp. 423-24, vv. 55-84). Contrary to the *Šāh-nāma*, but like the folk version of the story, it is Kāva who makes Ferēdun's famous ox-headed mace (see gorz) for him (Afšāri and Madāyeni, p. 31).

Persian folklore provides much greater detail than what is found in the *Šāh-nāma* about Kāva and his career. According to most folk versions of his rebellion against Żaḥḥāk, Kāva had twelve sons, of whom eleven had already been killed and fed to the tyrant's serpents (Enjavi, II, p. 305). Some tales put the number of his children at seven, of whom six were killed (Enjavi, III, p. 23), or at eighteen, of whom seventeen were slain (Enjavi, II, p. 315). A Kurdish verse summary of the *Šāh-nāma* includes Kašvād, the ancestor of the Gōdarziān clan of epic heroes, among Kāva's sons (Enjavi, I, p. 319; III, p. 159). Some tales introduce important Islamic elements into the story of Iran's mythical smith. For instance, according to a story that was collected in Kāzerun, a city near Shiraz, in July 1975, when Kāva rises in rebellion against Żaḥḥāk and makes his famous banner from his leather (*pustin*) apron, he writes on it the Qurʾanic verse: *naṣron men Allāh wa fatḥon qarib* "Assistance from God and imminent victory" (Qurʾan 61:13; Enjavi, III, pp. 26-27). The *Šāh-nāma* is not clear on how Kāva knew the whereabouts of Ferēdun when he took his followers to join him. By contrast, we have an explanation of how Kāva learned about the prince's location in Persian folklore: It was Ferēdun's "grandfather" Jamšid, who revealed the young prince's location to the blacksmith (Enjavi, II, p. 313; cf. III, p. 34).

There is also a great difference between the folk and the literary versions of the story of Żaḥḥāk in the details of the tyrant's defeat. In the *Šāh-nāma*, it is Ferēdun who vanquishes the dragon-king, but in most oral versions of the

story the capture, imprisonment, or killing of the tyrant is attributed to Kāva. For instance, according to one story, when Kāva, who is identified as Żaḥḥāk's brother-in-law, was pounding iron at his anvil, sparks flew into his leather apron and burned the message that he should slay his sister's husband with a knife, which he does with one that he himself had made. There is no mention of killing Żaḥḥāk with a mace in this story (Enjavi, III, p. 27). Although in the *Šāh-nāma* it is Ferēdun who designs his ox-headed mace and orders his blacksmiths to fashion it accordingly (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, p. 71, vv. 257-65), in the folktales Kāva makes the weapon for Ferēdun, spending two years in the process, and works certain talismans into the object's design (Enjavi, III, pp. 35-36). Kāva's magical prowess is sometimes explained as due to the prayers of a woman whom he had provided with free grain in a year of severe famine. She prays that Kāva may be guarded against the fires of this world and the next, and that is why the smith could reach into his forge and handle red-hot iron with his bare hands (Enjavi, II, pp. 318-19). In many of these stories Kāva tortures the enchained Żaḥḥāk by hanging him in a well and subjecting him to a burning thirst. Żaḥḥāk helplessly cries out with distress, and his cries are audible near a certain well in Mount Damāvand (Enjavi, II, pp. 306, 313). Some have even claimed to have seen Żaḥḥāk burning in the middle of flames in a cave in Mount Damāvand, but when they went to rescue him, an old man who introduced himself as Żaḥḥāk's guardian, Kāva, drove them away (Enjavi, III, pp. 23-24). According to a variant collected from a Zoroastrian in Kerman in 1955, Żaḥḥāk is bound with a chain made by Kāva and put under a spell that keeps him in a cave. Every day, the serpents on his shoulders lick his chains to the point of reducing their thickness to a hair's breadth; but just as the monster is about to break his fetters and run amok, they are restored to their original strength, because a white rooster crows somewhere in the world. That is why, the story goes, a group of people who descend from Żaḥḥāk try to kill every white rooster they find, while the Zoroastrians try to protect these birds (Enjavi, III, p. 24).

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