



KUŠ-NĀMA

KUŠ-NĀMA, part of a mythical history of Iran written by Ḥakim Irānšān b. Abu'l-Ḳayr between the years 501-04/1108-11 (lines 167-70; 5538-47) dealing with the eventful life of Kuš the Tusked (or Pil-guš, “The Elephant-eared”), the son of Kuš (brother of Žaḥḥāk). Kuš the Tusked is said to have lived 1,500 years; however, the only manuscript of the *Kuš-nāma* lacks an account of the last years of his life.

The work (lines 5553-64) is dedicated to the Seljuk ruler Ġiāt'l-Din Moḥammad b. Malek-Šāh (r. 498–511/1105-18). The writer's name does not appear in the work. The only source that refers to him, albeit indirectly, is *Mojmal* (written in 520/1126), which in mentioning another work by the author, the *Bahman-nāma*, says, “I [the author of *Mojmal*] have found no reference [to the death of Zal] except in the *Bahman-nāma*, written by Ḥakim Iranšāh b. Abu'l-Ḳayr...” (p. 92). In two out of the four manuscripts of *Mojmal*, the author's name is recorded as “Irānš@ān,” while in the other two it is “Iranšāh” and “Inšāh” (*Kuš-nāma*, intro. pp. 28-9). The poet refers to his poem as *Kuš-nāma* twice (lines 30, 4802), while *Mojmal* (pp. 2, 189) refers to it as *Qeṣṣa-ye Kuš-e Pil-Dandān* (“the tale of Kuš the Tusked”) and *Aḵbār-e Kuš-e Pil-Dandān* (“accounts of Kuš the Tusked”). Irānšān was a Muslim, but it is hard to say whether Sunni or Shi'i.

A unique manuscript of the work is found in a collection held in the British Museum (OR 2780). The collection contains five *maṣnavis*: namely, Asadi Ṭusi's *Garšasp-nāma*, Ahmad Tabrizi's *Šāhanšāh-nāma*, *Tāriḳ-e Čangiz Ḳān va Jānešinānaš* (“The History of Genghis Khan and his Successors”) the *Bahman-*



nāma, and the *Kuš-nāma*. The manuscript is dated Šafar 800/October 1397. This manuscript of the *Kuš-nāma* is composed of 10,129 lines. It contains a number of gaps and a relatively large number of errors, which escaped the notice of the scribe. The work contains very few headings, but for ease of analysis it can be divided into an introduction and two parts. The introduction (lines 1-226) begins by extolling God, then refers to the *Bahman-nāma*, and the *Kuš-nāma*, the reasons behind their composition, and ends with praise of the patron. Part I (lines 227-918) can be considered a kind of introduction to Part II. Part II (lines 919-10,129) describes the exploits of Kuš the Tusked. This figure also appears in Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*, the *Bahman-nāma*, and the *Farāmarz-nāma*.

In Part I the reader encounters the same Kuš with his hideous face and deceptions as in Part II; the only difference between the two is that in the former part he calls himself the “head of the Arabs and the king of Iran” and his base is Baghdad. By contrast in Part II, after the death of his father, Kuš is appointed by Žaḥḥāk ruler of an area known in Persian literature as Čin va Māčin. In the first part Kuš tricks the ruler of Rome into giving him tribute and hostages. Since the Kuš of Part I is learned —unlike the Kuš of Part II—the Roman ruler sends him nine books, four on medicine and five on the history of the kings of Rome. In one of these books, Alexander while in Kāvar encounters black cannibals and through a statue with an inscription learns of Kuš. This causes the Macedonian king to search out more about him. He is directed to a mountain on which a man named Mahāneš(m-h-a-n-š) lives by himself. Mahāneš introduces himself as one of Jamšid's descendants and explains that Jamšid married the daughter of the king of Čin, who bore him two sons: Nunak (n-w-n-k) and Fārak (f-a-r-k). After Žaḥḥāk had conquered Iran, Jamšid sent his family into hiding in the Arġun (a-r-ġ-w-n) forest in Čin. They took refuge there waiting for the day when some member of the family would take revenge on Žaḥḥāk. Jamšid said that the avenger would be one of the sons of Nunak. When Fārak saw that he would have no part in the vengeance, he devoted himself to worshipping God. Mahāneš tells Alexander that he is from Fārak's line. The king asks him whether he is familiar with Kuš, and Mahāneš puts the manuscript at his disposal. Whereupon the story of Kuš the Tusked begins.

Comparison of Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* and the *Kuš-nāma* is instructive. Though they both cover the same ground, their versions of the following figures and topics in the legendary history of Iran are wholly different: Jamšid; Žaḥḥāk, the growths that emerge from his shoulders, and his imprisonment; Garšāsp;

Ābtin; Farārang (Farānak in the *Šāh-nāma*); Faridun; Iraj; Salm; Tur; Manučehr; Kāvus; Rostam in the Māzandarān war; Širu; Qobād son of Kāva; Qāran and Narimān. For example, Ferdowsi’s account of Žaḥḥāk and his reign is cursory, while the *Kuš-nāma* devotes some 5,000 lines to it and to Iran’s relations with Čin and Māčīn. Another salient difference is that in the *Kuš-nāma* Žaḥḥāk and Faridun (before he divided his kingdom among his sons) rule over and are responsible for the security of the known world: from the furthest reaches of the east in China and India to the westernmost parts in Egypt and south in Abyssinia and Nubia (also called Māzandarān). For this reason some of the most important battles in the poem take place in Čin va Māčīn and Maghreb.

Before turning to a summary of the *Kuš-nāma*, it is worth noting that a prose version of the work existed during Irānšān b. Abu’l-Ḳayr’s time. The poet writes in the *Kuš-nāma* (lines 127-38) that after he had completed the *Bahmannāma*, at the suggestion of a person he calls his “patron” (*mehtar*) he produced a verse version of the poem.

Summary of the *Kuš-nāma*. The work encompasses events that take place during the reigns of Žaḥḥāk and Faridun. But for a brief section at the beginning, it deals with the heroic feats, triumphs, deceit and philandering of Kuš the Tusked. It also recounts the times that he claimed to be divine. The tale begins when Žaḥḥāk is on the verge of slaying Jamšid, who predicts that a person from his royal line shall avenge his death. To prevent this Žaḥḥāk sends his brother Kuš as governor of Čin to rid the world of Jamšid’s line. These people have in their possession *Andarz-e Jamšid* (“Jamšid’s Testament”), a book that foretells events in the family’s future and counsels them on what to do when they do. Following the advice of this book, Jamšid’s descendants remain hidden, roaming the forests, where Kuš cannot reach them. Instead, he battles the Pilguš Tribe (literally, the “elephant-eared”) and takes a woman from the tribe as his bride. She bears him an elephant-eared and tusked son. But when Kuš sees his son, he first kills his wife for giving birth to such a demonic creature and then abandons the child in the forest, which, as it happens, is the hiding place of the house of Jamšid. By this time Ābtin, the third generation of Jamšid’s line (Jamšid > Nunak > Mahāru > Ābtin), has appeared on the scene. As narrated in the *Kuš-nāma*, Ābtin’s wife shelters the abandoned child and raises him. The child shows early signs of being a physical prodigy. For a time he fights against Kuš in Ābtin’s army, but later father and son recognize one another and join forces against Ābtin.



When the going becomes difficult for Ābtin, he consults Jamsīd's Testament, which tells him that whenever he finds himself in trouble, he should take refuge with the king of Māčīn. As it happens there are two Māčīns: one is contiguous with Čīn and ruled by Bahak (b-h-k), the other is an island a month's journey by sea away and ruled by Teyhur (T-y-h-w-R).

Teyhur receives Ābtin warmly and he stays for a time on the island known variously as "Basilā," "Kuh," and "Jazira." Ābtin also marries Teyhur's daughter Farārang. Finally a dream tells Ābtin to return to Iran. This episode is an example of the important role dreams play in the narrative. After Teyhur's approval, Ābtin and Farārang aided by an ancient mariner sail for fourteen months and reach the Sea of Gilān and Āmol (the Caspian). In Iran Farārang gives birth to Faridun. When the child is four years old, his father, once again informed by a dream, entrusts him to Salkat (s-l-k-t) the commander of a fortress in Damāvand that Žaḥḥāk has not been able to take. Agents of Žaḥḥāk then kill Ābtin. Meanwhile, after Kuš the Tusked learns of Ābtin's flight to Jazira, his marriage to Farārang, and his return to Iran, he craftily takes the island, which had been unconquered for 3,000 years, and destroys it. At this point news of Faridun's capture of Žaḥḥāk reaches Kuš and he returns to Čīn. Teyhur dies and when his son Kāram (k-a-r-m) replaces him on the throne, there is an exchange of gifts between the new king and Faridun. Faridun shackles Žaḥḥāk hand and foot, puts a yoke around his neck, and imprisons him in Damāvand.

After Faridun overcomes Žaḥḥāk he decides to put an end to Kuš the Tusked's tyranny in Čīn. He sends an army there but nothing comes of the campaign. Kuš builds a city in the lands across the Oxus calling it Kušān; there he erects a statue of himself and forces the inhabitants to worship it. Eventually Faridun sends Qāran with a vast army to Čīn. Qāran captures Kuš in hand-to-hand combat. Kuš is sent back to Iran and imprisoned beside Žaḥḥāk in Damāvand, where he remains for forty years, until armies from Abyssinia and Nubia (Māzandarān) once again attack northern Africa, advancing as far as Egypt. When the inhabitants appeal to Faridun for aid, he repeatedly sends troops, but as soon as the Iranians leave, armies from the south attack despoiling the land and killing its inhabitants. At a meeting of advisors called by Faridun the consensus is that they must send a bloodthirsty tyrant to Maghreb. The unanimous choice is Kuš, who is taken from Damāvand and brought before Faridun. Kuš begs forgiveness for his past acts and swears to serve the king. They write a proclamation to which the gentry bear witness and Kuš at the

head of the army is dispatched to territory. He defeats the enemy and sends the spoils back to Faridun. He also founds several cities.

But in time Kuš, forgetting his pledge, openly rebels against the king and reverts to his old ways. He kills the Iranians in his army and orders that each home have an effigy of him and that the people worship it daily. After many years, Faridun sends one of his sons Salm to subdue Kuš, which he does. Kuš flees to the west, but that is not the end of his meddling. At this time two sons of Faridun, Tur and Salm, were aligned against the third son Iraj who demanded tribute from them. They kill Iraj and take on Kuš as an ally. The three divide the world and manage to pry some of territory from Faridun. Several years pass until Manučehr comes of age and with a large army goes into battle against the two sons and Kuš. Tur and Salm are killed in battle, and Manučehr wounds Kuš with his bull-headed mace. Kuš escapes to Kāvarān and becomes so powerful there that no one has the capacity to confront him. In the meantime armies from Abyssinia and Nubia attack once again.

Kuš goes into battle against them, but this time makes no progress. So he goes to Kay Kāvus (king of Iran) and describes Māzandarān (Nubia and Abyssinia). He convinces the Iranian ruler to go to war, but their combined forces become so tired that they are unable to proceed. The great hero Rostam saves the day. This part of the *Kuš-nāma* despite all of its differences is comparable to parts of the *Šāh-nāma* that deal with Kāvus' campaigns in Māzandarān, his battles with the demons, etc.

Despite these setbacks, another incident shows Kuš remains undeterred in his divine aspirations. One day while hunting, he becomes separated from his companions and loses his way. He reaches a palace and asks the lord for help. The lord asks, "Who are you?" "I am God, the Giver of Daily Bread and Guide," he replies. The owner finds the idea of a lost Guide laughable. Kuš is finally forced to abandon his claims to godhood. In return the lord performs plastic surgery on him that restores his face to human form. The lord of the palace also wins him over to the cause of justice. Kuš stays with this wise lord 46 years learning a variety of disciplines from him. He convinces Kuš to return to his homeland where the transformed monster encourages everyone to worship God. It turns out that the wise lord was one of Jamšid's descendants, like Mahāneš, who gave the story of Kuš-e Pil-Dandān to Alexander. At this point the *Kuš-nāma* ends.

Ḥakim Irānšān's approach to epic verse places him third, as far as literary



merit is concerned, to Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* and Asadi Tusi's *Garšāsp-nāma*. Though he does not mention the *Šāh-nāma* by name, it certainly influenced the way he wrote. He mentions Mas'udi's *Šāh-nāma* once. The *Kuš-nāma* beautifully renders a number of subjects. Especially remarkable are the poet's descriptions of battlefields, nature, and the states of lovers and their beloveds. But these exemplary verses notwithstanding, the work is not free of a considerable number of insipid lines. In several cases one finds lapses in technique as well. The *Kuš-nāma* also affords readers glimpses of beliefs and customs some of which are unique to this book.

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