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# ROSTAM B. FARROḴ-HORMOZD

**ROSTAM** b. Farroḵ-Hormozd, Sasanian military commander and provincial ruler, a scion of the aristocratic Espahbodān family, who met his death leading the Sasanian army at the Battle of Qādesiya during the Arab-Islamic conquest of Iran.

In the last decades of Sasanian rule, the Espahbodān family as a whole, and Rostam in particular, came to dominate the political scene. These notables descended from the military marshals (Pers. sing. *sepahbod*) and held vital administrative positions in the empire. In addition to evidence from symbols of rank such as Rostam's headgear, the *qalansowa* (Ṭabari, I, pp. 2025, 2340; see Morony, pp. 186-67; CLOTHING viii), multiple cases of intermarriage, stretching across generations, between the Espahbodān and Sasanian families demonstrate the clan's seniority. Indeed, not only was Rostam's great-grandfather Šāpur (d. 586) the first cousin of Ḵosrow I (r. 531-79), but his father Farroḵ-Hormozd was also the first cousin of Ḵosrow II (r. 590-628) (see the genealogy tree of the Espahbodān and Sasanian families in Lewental, forthcoming; idem, 2010, p. 180). Although the ancestral home of the Parthian dynasty appears to have been Khorasan, the Espahbodān eventually came to control the northern province of Azarbaijan. Thus, Rostam is said to have hailed from Armenia, Azarbaijan, Hamadān, or Ray (Ṭabari, I, p. 2235; Masʿudi, *Tanbih*, p. 86; Abu Yusof, p. 30; Ḥamza, I, p. 152; Balāḏori, p. 25). The loss of Khorasan likely took place after the unsuccessful revolt of Rostam's

great uncle Gostāhm (also Vestāhm or Bisṭām; d. ca. 600), who extolled his family's illustrious pedigree, while deriding the reigning emperor Ḵosrow II, his own nephew, as merely the descendant of a shepherd (Dinavari, p. 108; see Pourshariati, p. 135). Rostam's father, Farroḵ-Hormozd, the *sepahbod* of Azarbaijan—referred to in Armenian texts as *ishkan* "prince" (Sebēos, I, pp. 89, 92; Draskhanakertts'i, p. 100)—is identified with Hormozd V (r. 630-32), a claimant for a brief period to the Sasanian throne in the chaotic years following Ḵosrow's assassination, who was killed by forces associated with the Sasanian empress Āzarmīgduxt (r. 630-31; Pourshariati, pp. 205-6; Mas'udi, *Tanbih*, p. 103; Ṭabari, I, pp. 1064-46). In the aftermath of his father's death, Rostam assumed his titles and position and led an army to avenge his father's death, capturing the capital of Madā'en and setting another of Ḵosrow's daughters upon the throne. Rostam became the commander-in-chief of the imperial army and the most powerful individual in the empire.

It was precisely because Rostam commanded such authority that the Iranian ruling elite decided to dispatch him at the head of the imperial host to crush the invading Arab-Muslim force. Rostam seems to have doubted the wisdom of this plan, suggesting instead that multiple, smaller armies be sent to exhaust the raiding fighters, instead of risking the damaging effects of a defeat of their most senior military commander (Ṭabari, I, pp. 2248-50). Rostam's unwillingness to participate in this campaign and his ominous premonitions regarding its result constitute part of the narrative in nearly all the chronicles. Anna Krasnowolska (pp. 173-84) has argued that the prophecy of Rostam in the *Šāh-nāma* (Ferdowsi, VIII, pp. 417-23) likely derived from Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature seeking to explain the Arab-Islamic conquests; it is probable that the same source(s) inspired the references to omens and astrology in the accounts composed in Arabic (Hoyland, p. 328 n. 215). These plot elements—like much of the Qādesiya narrative—are largely fictional embellishments and hardly credible (e.g., the content of Rostam's private thoughts and dreams, despite his stated refusal to share it with anyone), reflecting the creative work of storytellers and traditionists (for an exploration of the significance of this material, see Lewental, 2010, pp. 92-93, 100-4).

At the frontier, Rostam camped for several months before engaging in battle. During this time, the Muslims sent several emissaries to meet with him and the bulk of the literature consists of descriptions of these meetings, juxtaposing the lavish wealth of the arrogant Iranians with the shabby and unkempt appearance of the pious Muslim soldiers. In some traditions, Rostam

reacted positively to the latter's call to Islam and even criticized his own men (Ṭabari, I, pp. 2268-69, 2271-72, 2255, 2278; Lewental, 2010, p. 194 n. 728; El-Hibri, pp. 98-100); nevertheless, hostilities commenced. Reflecting the significance of his position and of the battle itself, Rostam was seated upon a throne at the center of the battlefield, from where he commanded his army (on the symbolism of the throne, see Lewental, 2010, pp. 213-20). The accounts also relate that Rostam—unlike the opposing Muslim general Saʿd b. Abi Waqqāṣ—personally participated in the fighting (Dinavari, p. 129; Balʿami, I, p. 450; Ṭabari, I, p. 2309). After three days of warfare, a terrific dust storm engulfed the battlefield, blinding the Persians and enabling the Muslims to overpower them. The wind blew away the sunshade above Rostam's throne, leading the general to seek shelter beneath some nearby pack-mules. At this moment, an Arab warrior broke into this inner circle and flung his sword about, unknowingly causing the litter under which Rostam was hiding to fall and hit his back. Despite the injury, Rostam ran and flung himself into the nearby creek to swim away; the Muslim, observing the fleeing Persian, gave chase and killed him with a blow to the head. Only then appreciating the identity of his victim, he stood upon Rostam's throne and held up the general's decapitated head, proudly announcing for all to hear: "By the Lord of the Kaʿba, I have killed Rostam!" (Ṭabari, I, pp. 2336-37; Masʿudi, *Moruj* IV, pp. 221-23; Balʿami, I, p. 451). A total rout of the Iranian army ensued, as the Persian soldiers lost their will to fight and attempted a chaotic retreat. Narrative inconsistencies, alternative scenarios, the comic elements, and the symbolism and humiliating nature of the assassination all suggest that this version of events is also the product of the imagination of later storytellers (for a thorough analysis of the narrative, see Lewental, forthcoming). Later historians disputed the identity of the warrior who felled Rostam. Balāḏori listed as many as seven claimants, while Masʿudi acknowledged that it is impossible to determine by whose hand Rostam died; some suggested that Rostam may have perished of thirst or by drowning or even by accident (Balāḏori, p. 259; Masʿudi, *Moruj* IV, pp. 221-23; Ebn Ḵayyāṭ, I, p. 120; Maqdesi, V, p. 174; Ebn al-Zobayr, p. 167; Dinavari, p. 129; Ṭabari, I, pp. 2336-38, 2340, 2343-44, 2349, 2356-57, 2359, 2393; Balʿami, I, p. 451). By contrast, the *Šāh-nāma* provides an entirely different account, whereby Rostam fights Saʿd in single combat, dying gallantly only after being blinded by the dust storm (Ferdowsi, VIII, pp. 429-32). Lewental has proposed that this scenario emerged as a counter-narrative to the humiliating version, which was unsuitable for the Persian national epic (Lewental, 2017). Lewental has further argued that the death of Rostam is one of the few historical facts that can be discerned from

the Qādesiya narrative; such was the significance of his death that the battle was sometimes referred to as the Battle-Day of Rostam (Ar. *yawm Rostam*; see Lewental, 2010, pp. 303, 197; Ṭabari, I, p. 2359, 2472; Ḥamza, I, p. 152).

Following Rostam's death, his family continued to play in important role in twilight of the Sasanian era. His brother Farroḵzād assumed his position and led the Persians in the defense of the capital Madāʾen, at Jalulāʾ (where he fought against a Muslim army under the command of Saʿd's nephew), and finally at Ray, where he not only surrendered, but facilitated the Arab conquest of the city (Balāḏori, pp. 264, 317-18; Dinavari, pp. 133-34; Ṭabari, I, pp. 2458-62, 653-55, 2653-55; Sebēos, I, p. 99; Movsēs Xorenacʿi, pp. 112-13).

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