



## RUDĀBA

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**RUDĀBA**, princess of Kabul, wife of Zāl, and mother of Rostam. Her story (*Šāhnāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 186-270) is “one of the most beautiful narratives in Persian poetry” (Khaleghi, p. 39; cf. Nöldeke, p.71). Ṭa‘ālebi (*Ġorar*, pp. 73-106) gives so close a parallel account that a common source (undoubtedly the *Šāhnāma* of Abu Manṣuri) may be assumed. An eloquent abridged prose version by Ehsan Yarshater (pp. 93-133) appeared in 1959.

The story is briefly as follows. Mehrāb, king of Kabul, was a descendant of Žaḥḥāk, and an idolater (i.e., probably a Buddhist, Spiegel, p. 567). His authority reached over Sind (i.e., he ruled over Gandhara, Shahbazi, p. 157), yet he paid yearly tribute to Sām, prince of Sistān and chief paladin of Iran. On a trip to Kabul, Zāl, son of Sām, heard a memorable description of Rudāba, daughter of Mehrāb and queen Sindokt: her face was fairer than the sun and her ivory white figure a teak in height, her cheeks resembled pomegranate blossoms, her eyes twin narcissi in a garden, adorned with long black lashes, and her black hair was so long that it fell in two musky ringlets over her silveren neck down to her ankle. In short, “from head to feet as Paradise—all ornament, learning and beauty.” Zāl fell in love with Rudāba, and she in turn lost her heart when her father admiringly described Zāl as a young but wise paladin of unequalled handsomeness, grace and generosity. Rudāba’s maids arranged a meeting between the two. When Zāl approached the castle wall, Rudāba let her hair down the parapet so that Zāl could hold it and climb up (as in the story of Rapunzel recorded by Brothers Grimm), but the prince used his lasso for the purpose. The two pledged themselves to each other despite the



knowledge that the lineage of Mehrāb and his idolatry meant certain opposition to their marriage from King Manučehr and religious authorities in Iran. Long negotiations followed, during which the couple's strong will power and unflinching love were tested to the limit. At last Manučehr gave his consent after Zāl proved his worth in a council of the Magian priests, and astrologers predicted that from the union of the two would issue the greatest hero—"the hope and pillar"—of the Iranian nation and the truest and mightiest guardian of the royal throne. Zāl married Rudāba amidst great pomp and circumstance, and "not long afterwards," Rudāba became great with a child. As her time approached, she could not deliver her enormously large baby in the normal way, and in agony lost consciousness. Zāl appealed for help to his surrogate parent, the fabulous bird Simorg, who instructed him to make Rudāba intoxicated and then deliver the child by the caesarian method. Thus Rostam was borne in a miraculous way. Later we hear of another son (not a step-son as in Khaleghi, p. 38, n. 3), Zavāra ('heroic'; Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 337), who served as a lieutenant of Rostam in the wars with the hosts of Turān and Esfandiār. The two fell victim to the treachery of a half-brother (*Šāh-nāma* V, pp. 451-56; Ta'ālebi, *Gorar*, pp. 379-83). Rudāba was so grief-stricken that she temporarily lost her sanity (*Šāh-nāma* V, pp. 451-56, 464-65; Ta'ālebi, pp. 384-85). She was still alive when Bahman destroyed Sistān (*Šāh-nāma* V, p. 482).

Rudāba represents an ideal woman (Khaleghi, pp. 31-40; Nāderpur): virtuous, beautiful, devoted, steadfast and cultured. She took an active part in the education of Siāvakš (Ta'ālebi, p. 168). Her name (Rōdāvaḍ in Ta'ālebi; cf. Rōdduxt, a Sasanian lady mentioned in Shapur I's inscription on the wall of the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt), "means literally 'she of the River Water' " (Skjærvø, p. 163; cf. Davidson, p. 118: "Brightness of stream"), although a derivation from Av. *Raoda-* 'growth, stature', giving 'possessed of bright growth' (Justi, pp. 261, 266), or from *\*rauta-* 'child' (cf. New Pers. *rōd* 'darling child') cannot be ruled out. It has been argued that the house of Mehrāb came from the Daha- a powerful Iranian tribe who formed the core of the Arsacid invaders of Parthia in the third century B.C.E. (see [DAHAE](#)), and that their enemies later disparagingly identified the eponymous ancestor of this tribe with the demonic king Dahāk/Žaḥḥāk (Shahbazi, p. 159). Down to the fifth-century of the Islamic era, the Sām dynasty of Ġur traced their descent from "Žaḥḥāk" (for reference see *ibid.*, p. 159 with n. 117 at p. 162).



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