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ŠAHRBĀNU

ŠAHRBĀNU (lit. "Lady of the Land," i.e., of Persia), said to be the daughter of Yazdgerd III (r. 632-51), the last Sasanian king. According to the beliefs of the Shiʿites, in particular the Twelvers or Imamis, but also of a substantial number of Sunnis, she became the principal wife of the third Imam, Ḥosayn b. ʿAli, and the mother of the fourth Imam, ʿAli b. Ḥosayn b. ʿAli Zayn al-ʿĀbedin (q.v.). Consequently, the lineage of Imams, from the fourth to twelfth and final, would be her progeny. The personality of this saintly figure, especially revered in Persia, seems noteworthy and important in relationships that link Imami Shiʿism to pre-Islamic Persia. Although undeniably legendary, the Sasanian princess, "mother of the Imams," would have played a significant role in the transmission of religious ideas in Persia (regarding the subject in general, see Amir-Moezzi 2002a and 2002b).

Genesis and development of the legend of Šahrbānu. According to the oldest sources that have come down to us, the historic mother of the fourth Imam was not much of a princess. Ebn Saʿd (d. 844-45) and Ebn Qotayba (d. 889) describe her as a slave, originally from Sindh, called Ḡazāla and/or Solāfa (Ebn Saʿd V, p. 211; Ebn Qotayba, pp. 214-15). Neither do any of the scholars of ancient history that have chronicled, at times with great attention to detail, the invasion of Persia by Muslim troops and the fate of the last Sasanian sovereign and her family, establish any relationship between the wife of Imam Ḥosayn and one of the daughters of Yazdgerd III (Balāḏori 1866, pp. 262 ff.; idem 1974, pp. 102-103 and 146; Ṭabari I, 1879-1901, p. 2887 = Ṭabari IV 1960, p. 302; Ebn ʿAbd Rabbeh III, pp. 103 ff.). The same is true for a wide range of sources and

authors quite different from each other, such as *Ketāb al-ḵaraj* by the Hanafite judge Abu Yusof (d. 798) and the *Šāh-nāma* of the pro-Shiʿite Ferdowsi (d. 1019) both of whom, though surely for very different reasons, took an interest in the destiny of the last king of Sasanian Persia and his descendants (Abu Yusof, p. 30; Ferdowsi IX, pp. 358 ff.).

In his *al-Kāmel*, the philologist Mobarrad (d. 900) seems to have been one of the very first to state that Solāfa, the mother of ʿAli Zayn al-ʿĀbedin, was the daughter of Yazdgerd. He strongly emphasises the nobility of the woman and, in general, the grandeur of the Persians (Mobarrad II, pp. 645-66). However, his contemporary, Abu Ḥanifa Dinavari (d. ca. 895) only casts the daughter of "Kesrā" as a captive in the presence of ʿAli, during his caliphate (656-61), refusing the latter's offer to marry his elder son Ḥasan. The account does not even mention Imam Ḥosayn. ʿAli thus liberates the princess, granting her total freedom (Dinavari, p. 163). The nobility and pride of the Persian princess as well as her complicity with ʿAli are henceforth to become quite regular themes of the account in its different versions as it develops. During the same period, the chronicler Yaʿqubi (d. 904) and the heresiographers Ḥasan b. Musā Nowbaḵti and Saʿd b. ʿAbd-Allāh (both d. ca. 912-13) are among the first Shiʿites to allude in passing to the fact that the mother of Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbedin was the daughter of the last Sasanian king (Yaʿqubi II, pp. 246-47 and 303; Nowbaḵti, p. 53; Ašʿari, p. 70). In the second half of the 9th century, Ṣaffār Qomi (d. 902-903) delivers a long and detailed version of the account, containing especially striking details, in the form of a Hadith or saying attributed to the fifth Imam Moḥammad Bāqer: under the second caliph 'Omar (r. 634-44), the daughter of the last Sasanian king is brought captive to Medina. Light radiating from the visage of the princess illuminates the Prophet's mosque where the caliph presides. An invocation in Persian by the Princess provokes the ruler's temper. ʿAli intervenes in favour of the young princess and makes it clear to 'Omar that events unfolding are beyond his understanding and that he should step aside. ʿAli then authorises the princess, with whom he speaks in Persian, to freely choose her husband. The chosen one is Ḥosayn to whom ʿAli announces the good news that the young woman will be the mother of his child, i.e. the next Imam (Ṣaffār, p. 335, no. 8). Ṣaffār's account contains some noteworthy details: it is the first time that the account is presented in the form of an Imam's Hadith, thus rendering it a sacred quality. It will subsequently become the first account in which the Persian princess is called Šahrbānu (and also *Jahānšāh*, literally, "king of the world").

The Persian dimension as a result of Persian used for the first time in the midst of a text in Arabic, as well as the royalty are greatly magnified, still much more noticeably than in Mobarrad. The "Persianism" is magnified even more so than in Mobarrad both in terms of royalty and language (Persian is used for the first time in the midst of a text in Arabic). The most important point is the role ascribed to ʿAli: protection of the princess and perfect complicity with her; the fact that he speaks her language and insists upon her freedom and nobility of rank, his violent reaction towards ʻOmar, making him understand that he is not up to the situation, prediction of the birth of the future imam; all fully justify for a Shiʿite believer the mention of light of glory (*x̱ᵛarenah*/*x̱ᵛarr(ah)*/*farr(ah)*) (Gnoli 1962; Duchesne-Guillemin 1979) that the princess bears as well as the fact that this light could even illuminate the Prophet's mosque where the caliph of the Muslims resides. This fact acquires its fullest significance when one takes into consideration the key importance of the light of Divine Alliance (*nur al-walāya*) in Imamism (Amir-Moezzi 1992, pp.75-112). Thus, from Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbedin onwards, the Shiʿite Imams will be the bearers of a two-fold light: that of *walāya* from ʿAli and Fāṭema (thus of Moḥammad) and the glorious light from the ancient kings of Persia, as transmitted by Šahrbānu.

From the 10th to the 12th century, several Persian authors will reprise and at times considerably develop elements from the Hadith reported by Ṣaffār Qomi. Understandably, most of them are Persians and Imami Shiʿite traditionists such as Moḥammad b. Yaʿqub Kolayni (d. 940), Abu Jaʿfar Ebn Rostam Ṭabari (fl. 11th cent.), Qoṭb-al-Din Rāvandi (d. 1177-78) or Ebn Šahrāšub Māzandarāni (d. 1192), but one also finds Sunni "homme de lettre" such as Kaykāus b. Eskandar b. Qābus (fl. 11th cent.), author of *Qābus-nāma* (see Bibliography). Among some authors, the dialogue in Persian between ʿAli and Šahrbānu becomes much longer; at the same time, the nobility, wisdom and liberty of the princess, more frequently compared to Fāṭema is emphatically noted. Again, by means of the Persian language and the grandeur of royal Persian ancestry the "Persianism" is magnified. However, the gradual emergence of this version does not prevent the development of other slightly different versions. In some accounts, the role of the princess is split into two parts. For example, in the *Eṯbāt al-waṣiya*, attributed to Masʿudi (d. 956-57), the story takes place under the caliphate of ʻOmar and in this case two daughters of Yazdgerd are given in marriage, with ʿAli's consent no doubt, to his sons: Ḥasan marries Šahrbānu and Ḥosayn weds Jahānšāh (Pseudo?-Masʿudi, p. 170). In Shaykh Mofid's (d. 1022) account, under ʿAli's caliphate, the elder

daughter of the Persian king, here named *šāh-e zanān* (lit.: "king of ladies" cf. the title of Fāṭema, *sayyedat al-nesāʾ*) marries Ḥosayn, while a second unnamed daughter is given in marriage to the son of Abu Bakr, Moḥammad (Mofid, pp. 137-38). Finally, let us cite the account narrated by Mofid's master, the famous Ebn Bābuya (Ebn Bābawayh), known as Shaykh Ṣaduq, (d. 991) who in his *ʿOyun aḵbār al-Reżā*, relates a Hadith going back to the eighth Imam ʿAli Reżā in which the latter, finding himself in Khorasan as inheritor to the ʿAbbasid caliph Maʾmun (r. 813-33), confirms the link that exists between the Imams and the Persians. As proof, he tells the story of the capture, under the reign of ʿOṯmān, of the two daughters of Yazdgerd and their marriage to the Imams Ḥasan and Ḥosayn. According to this account, both women are said to die while in labour, notably the wife of Ḥosayn who passes away after giving birth to Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbedin (Ebn Bābuya, chap. 35, no. 6, II, p. 128). Further on, we will return to the importance of this relationship from a historical point of view.

Thus, at least in its literary written versions, the legend of Šahrbānu will have attained its fullest scope from the 9th to the 12th century. Writers of later periods, whether Imami or not, to this day will do no more than reproduce many of the accounts that have just been presented (for these sources, Amir-Moezzi, 2002a, p. 511 and n. 49). As we will see further on, the oral version of the legend, circulated by popular beliefs, evolved quite differently.

The origin and date of the legend. The mother of ʿAli b. Ḥosayn Zayn al-ʿĀbedin, who is also known as ʿAli Aṣḡar, is said to have been an oriental woman slave, most likely of Persian origin. Ḥosayn b. ʿAli, her master and subsequently her husband would have named her Solāfa and/or Ḡazāla. Once an adult, ʿAli Aṣḡar would have manumitted his mother, now a widow, and given her in marriage to a "client" of his father. We now surely have almost all of the elements most likely historic, regarding her drawn from historiographical reports that appear non-biased. We have seen how, from the 9th century onwards, a number of accounts were circulated, especially in the Persian Imamite milieu, according to which the mother of Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbedin was the daughter of Yazdgerd III. Let us attempt to determine why such a legend developed.

All the specialists of Sasanian history, from Darmesteter to Christensen, not to mention Nöldeke or Spuler, unanimously state that no immediate member of the Sasanian king was captured by Muslim troops for the simple reason that, according to a number of Islamic sources in agreement, the royal family had

been evacuated from the capital Ctesiphon well before the Arab invasion (Maškur, II, pp. 1288 ff. and 1344 ff.; Ḥaṣuri, passim). Moreover, important sources from the China of the T'ang dynasty (r. 618-907) regarding the Arab conquest of Persia ,also remain silent about an eventual captivity of one of the members of the family of Yazdgerd III (Marquart, pp. 68-69; Chavannes, pp. 171-73; Hoyland, pp. 243 ff.). However, some oft-repeated elements of recurring versions of the history of Šahrbānu seem to have been inspired by certain historical facts. For example, it is not entirely impossible that the association of a noble Iranian woman, captured after the seizure of the Sasanian capital, reduced to slavery and named Ḡazāla by her masters, given in marriage to an Arab noble, would have been aroused by the fact that ʿOṯmān, one of the sons of the wealthy Companion of the Prophet ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf had as a mother a certain Ḡāzāl bt. Kesrā, reduced to slavery at the time of the conquest of Ctesiphon/Madāʾen by Saʿd b. Abi Waqqāṣ (Ebn Saʿd, III, p. 128). In addition, some historiographic accounts report the capture and reduction to slavery of a descendant (not the daughter) of Yazdgerd III under the caliphate of the Omayyad Walid b. ʿAbd-al-Malek (r. 705-15). The young woman, captured in northern Khorasan, is said to have been sent to the governor Ḥajjāj b. Yusof (d. 714), who in turn would have offered her to the caliph. She gave birth to Yazid b. Walid "al-Nāqeṣ" or Yazid III (r. 744), and perhaps also to Ebrāhim b. Walid (Ṭabari, I, p. 2873 and II, pp. 1247 and 1874).

Having provided these technical details, let us examine what constitutes the essence of the legend in its most recurrent versions. A Sasanian princess, bearer of the light of glory of the kings of Persia, arrives in Medina. Challenging the caliph ʿOmar, supported by ʿAli and speaking in Persian with the latter, she freely chooses Ḥosayn b. ʿAli as her husband to give birth to ʿAli Zayn al-ʿĀbedin and thus became "the Mother of the Imams" that are going to succeed him. The story is obviously highly charged in doctrinal, ethnical and political terms. These two pro-Shiʿite and pro-Persian tendencies are introduced in such a manner that they seem indisociable. One might even say more precisely that the legend, in its Shiʿism pertains to the Ḥosaynid movement and that in its "Persianism," the most popular version seems to have emerged from radical milieu. All of this sounds very much like a challenge to a kind of Sunnite arabo-centrist "orthodoxy." Let us examine things more closely.

The Šahrbānu tradition is clearly of Ḥosaynid persuasion. It is true that, concerned with a kind of balance and still stronger link between Shiʿites and

Persians, some versions cast two Iranian princesses marrying the two Imams Ḥasan and Ḥosayn, but at the same time, with regular insistence, it is the wife of Ḥosayn who is presented as mother of Imams to follow. Let us recall that the legend began to circulate in its different versions only a few decades after the rebellion of the Zaydite Ḥasanid Moḥammad b. ʿAbd-Allāh al-Nafs al-Zakiya and of Ebrāhim, a rebellion which in a very short span seems to have evoked great sympathy, even among the non-Alids, both in the Hejaz as well as in Iraq (Ṭabari, III, p. 189-265; Eṣfahani, pp. 260-99 and 354-69; Nagel, passim). Some years later, just after the execution of Amin in 813, another rebellious Zaydite Ḥasanid Ebn Ṭabāṭabāʾ had proclamed *al-Reżā men āl-e M oḥammad* "the one from the Family of Moḥammad upon which [the Community] agrees," in January 815 in Baghdad itself, supported by the famous Abu ʾl-Sarāyā, before being killed one month later (Gibb 1960; Scarcia Amoretti). Among other things, did the story of Šahrbānu seek to counteract the popularity of the Zaydites and Ḥasanids, particularly in the Persian and Shiʿite and assimilated milieu?

There is another important aspect. Ever since Ṣaffār Qomi's version and until that of Rāvandi three centuries later (see above), the legend highlights two key elements: the magnificence of Persian royalty (light emanating from the princess, the nobility of her rank, freedom to choose her husband) and the importance of the Persian language (in the dialogue spoken by ʿAli, who is at the same time the Imam par excellence for the Shiʿites and unfamiliar to ʿOmar who is at the same time the enemy par excellence for the Shiʿites). Now, it is known that in the eyes of some, in the first centuries of Islam, it is precisely these two very factors that are considered as formative elements of the Persian identity. One can discern traces of this among such great thinkers as Ṭabari, Biruni, Meskawayh or Ferdowsi (Ṭabari, I (1), p. 353; Biruni, p. 213; Rosenthal, p. 122). Perhaps it would be anachronistic to speak of "nationalism" among these authors, but it is just as naive to deny the existence among them of a heightened sensibility, if not a real historic conscience of their cultural identity crystallised precisely around a certain perception of royalty and the Persian language (Widengren, passim; Yarshater 1983, passim; idem 1998, pp. 59-74).

The influence exercised by these men of letters and thinkers is far from negligible: here one might bear in mind that non-Persian dynasties such as the Ghaznavids, Saljuqs and Ilkhanids were rapidly to adopt the Persian language and have their origins traced back to the ancient kings of Persia rather than to

Turkish heroes or Muslim saints (Levy, pp. 66 ff.; Spuler, pp. 176-77). For almost a century, a number of scholars have attempted to show how some Persian thinkers, ever since the formation of Muslim culture, perceived themselves as the inheritors of a glorious cultural past and due to this as the principal players serving as the final link to the "History of Salvation," i.e. Islam (von Grunebaum, pp. 175 ff.; Morony 1976, pp. 50-55; idem 1982, pp. 81-84). From Grignaschi to de Fouchécour, not to mention Shaked or Tafaẓẓoli (see Bibliography), many scholars have demonstrated how what Gustave von Grunebaum calls "the Persian Humanities" crystallised around the figure of the King and royal ethics, transmitted to Islamic culture by the "Mirrors for Princes" literature. All that constitutes the finest subtlety of Persian culture, evoked by the terms *adab* and/or *honar*, is transmitted by this genre of literature and essentially by the Persian language (Rosenthal, pp. 141-42; Moḥammadi Malāyeri, I and II, passim). The most ardent champions of this Persian cultural identity during the ʿAbbasid period, one knows, were the state secretaries and scribes of Persian origin, the famous *kottāb*, many of whom were members of the *šoʿubiya* politico-intellectual movement and for whom Ebn Moqaffaʾ (executed around 757) was the emblematic figure (Gibb 1953, passim; Mottahedeh, pp. 180-82; Enderwitz, index s.v. "Shuʿūbiyya"). May one conclude that the Šahrbānu tradition emerged in the milieu of pro-*šoʿubi* Persians? It is quite possible given that in the 9th century, the very moment this tradition begins to circulate in its various versions, the *šoʿubiya* had attained its peak.

Ḥosaynid Shiʿism, in opposition to Zaydite Shiʿism, intellectual "Persianism" and a challenge to pro-Arab Sunni "orthodoxy," for the historian of early Islam all inevitably evoke the atmosphere of the court of Maʾmun, known as "Son of the Persian woman" at Marv, in Khorasan, precisely when he designated the Shiʿite Imam of Ḥosaynid lineage, ʿAli al-Reżā, as his inheritor, in the year 815, by giving him the emblematic title *al-Reżā men āl-e M oḥammad*, seeking thus to re-establish the alliance between ʿAbbasids, Alids and Persians (Rekaya). In this concern, the tradition related by Ebn Bābuya in his *ʿOyun* (see above) seems implicitly to contain some valuable historical information. First, it seems that the great traditionist of Ray, like many other datas of the same work, had recorded this Hadith in Khorasan. Next, in the body of the Hadith, it is noted that the comments were made by the Imam ʿAli b. Musā al-Reżā when in Khorasan, thus once already designated by Maʾmun as heir. In the Hadith, the interlocutor of the Imam is a member of the Persian family of Nušajāni whose pro-*šoʿubi* sympathies and influence with Maʾmun seem well

established (Amir-Moezzi 2002a, pp. 520-23; idem 2002b, pp. 274-75). In addition, during this period, the two main opponents to Maʾmun in Baghdad, namely the two sons of the ʿAbbasid caliph Mahdi (r. 775-85), had Persian mothers of very noble anscestry: Manṣur (r. 754-75) was born to the daughter of the last dābuyid *esfahbaḏ* (high military officer) of Ṭabarestān and Ebrāhim to the daughter of the last *maṣmoḡān* (great Zoroastrian priest) of Damāvand district (Rekaya). One might therefore quite reasonably conclude that in Maʾmun's entourage one sought to do even better in terms of his successor ʿAli b. Musā al-Reżā descendant of Hāšem on his paternal side, had as grandmother, a lady belonging not only to nobility, but to no less than the Persian royal family. Thus the Šahrbānu legend would have been developed in the pro-*šoʿubi* entourage of Maʾmun, in Marv, between 815 (year of the proclamation of Imam Reżā as heir of Maʾmun) and 818 (the year in which pro-Shiʿite policy was abandoned by Maʾmun, after the mysterious deaths of Maʾmun's vizier Fażl b. Sahl and the Imam Reżā).

Oral and popular traditions. In the literary tradition, Šahrbānu passes away either upon the birth of her son Zayn al-ʿĀbedin (e.g. in Ebn Bābuya), or by drowning in the Euphrates having witnessed the massacre of her family at Karbalāʾ (e.g. in Ebn Šahrāšub). Popular belief decidedly preferred otherwise as if seeking a more glorious death for its princess. In a pioneering study dedicated to popular beliefs regarding Šahrbānu, Sayyed Jaʿfar Šahidi presents the most recurrent version of the oral legend of the daughter of Yazdgerd III, here called *Bibi* (respectable Lady or grandmother) Šahrbānu: after the day of ʿĀšurāʾ Bibi Šahrbānu is able to escape, as had predicted her husband, with Ḏu ʾl-Janāḥ, the horse of the latter. Pursued by her terrifying enemies, she reaches up to the mountain Ṭabarak, at Ray, in central Iran. Hounded, at the limits of her strength, alone, she invokes God to be delivered from her assailants. At which point, the mountain miraculously opens and offers refuge to the princess. However, a tail of her dress remains wedged in the rock when it closes behind her. A little while later, her pursuers as well as other folk find the fabric in the rock, realise a miracle has occurred and acknowledge Šahrbānu as saint. The location will become a sanctuary of the princess, a pilgrimage site to remain so until today (Šahidi, pp. 186 ff.). An almost identical story is found to be at the source of the Zoroastrian sanctuary of Bānu Pārs (Lady of Persia), northwest of the plain of Yazd (Sorušiān, p. 204). More generally, themes such as the escape of Persian nobles (often members of the royal family) from the Arabs and their miraculous rescue by God thanks to elements of nature are frequently appear in foundational legends of

Zoroastrian sanctuaries in central or southern Persia (Sorušiān, pp. 205-11; Strack, I, pp. 119 and 227-28).

According to Šahidi, as well as the classic study by Karimān, on the ancient city of Ray, both of which cite the archaelogical work undertaken by Sayyed M.-T. Moṣṭafawi, the oldest section of Šahrbānu's sanctuary dates to the 15th century, shortly before the Safavid period, era from which point onward, references to sanctuaries indeed become more frequent (Šahidi, pp. 187-90; Karimān, I, pp. 403-16). From another point of view, information from *Dārāb Hormazyār's Revāyat* (ed. M. R. Unvala, Bombay 1922, II, pp.158-59) shows that the sanctuary of Bānu Pārs was already active during the 15th and 16th centuries. All this shows that, first, almost independently of the literary tradition, the oral tradition develops and attains its maturity during the centuries noted. Next, it is more than likely that the foundational legends of Zoroastrian sanctuaries had been at the source of the oral legend about Šahrbānu and her sanctuary in Ray. Moreover, the existence of an antique Zoroastrian "tower of silence" (*dak̲ma*) on the same Ṭabarak mountain, slightly to the north, also corroborates the presence of links between Zoroastrianism and the site. The figure of Bibi Šahrbānu and her sanctuary indeed seem to constitute in some measure the continuation of ancient Mazdean beliefs. Moḥammad Ebrāhim Bāstāni Pārizi also takes interest in Bibi Šahrbānu in the context of his numerous studies on Persian toponyms including terms meaning "Woman," "Lady," "Princess," "Daughter" etc. (*bānu, k̲ātun, bibi, dok̲tar*) (Bāstāni Pārizi, p. 246). By research sifted from archaelogical evidence, literary sources and folkloric accounts, he was able to establish that in almost all cases, locations bearing this kind of name housed a temple and/ or a cult of Anāhitā, the very popular goddesss of waters and fertility: Ardwīsūr Anāhīd (see ANĀHĪD) of the Zoroastrian pantheon and, it seems also, "Patron" of the Sasanians (Girshman 1962, p.149; idem 1971, p. 65; but see also the nuances introduced by Chaumont). A few years later, based on a well-documented comparison between foundational legends of Bibi Šahrbānu and Bānu Pārs, Mary Boyce reached the same conclusions as the Iranian scholar (Boyce, 1967 passim). The title *Bānu* (Lady) is the ancient title of Anāhīd. Ever since the Avesta, the goddess is named *Aredvi surā bānu* (Lady of Waters). In Pahlavi texts, but also in inscriptions at Eṣṭak̲r and Paikuli, the titles *bānu* or *ābān bānu* are associated with Anāhīd, Ardwīsūr or Ardwīsūr Amšāsfand (Boyce 1967, pp. 36-37). Although no trace of a pre-Islamic monument had been found at Bibi Šahrbānu, citing Herodotus as supporting evidence, M. Boyce believes that a simple rock, near a source of water (which

is indeed the case at Bibi Šahrbānu) could well have served as a temple for the cult of Anāhīd. In a more recent publication, M. Boyce dates the cult of the goddess to Ray during the Parthian period (Boyce, 1982a, p. 1004b). What still again corroborates the hypothesis of continuity between Anāhīd (goddess of waters and fertility) and Šahrbānu (Mother of the Imams) is first that in a number of popular versions of the legend, the latter is called *Ḥayāt Bānu* (Lady of Life) and secondly, visits to the sanctuary at Ray are exclusively reserved for women, more specifically, sterile women seeking to be healed there (Bāstāni Pārizi, p. 246; Boyce 1967, p. 38). Apart from these reasons, the choice of Ray as final resting place for Šahrbānu may also be explained by the fact that it was from this city that in 641, Yazdgerd III launched a last appeal to his people to put up strong resistance against the Muslim troops and that Ray, although almost entirely Persian in population, had always been one of the most important bastions of all forms of Shiʿism (Zaydism, Ismaʿilism, Qarmatism and Imamism) until the 12th century (Minorsky and Bosworth, p. 488).

The popularity of Šahrbānu also becomes evident by its strong presence in the *Taʿziya*—the Shiʿite Persian theatre. In their catalogue of *Taʿziya* plays in the Cerulli collection kept at the Vatican Library, E. Rossi and A. Bombaci have classified more than thirty pieces in which the Sasanian princess (sometimes called *šāh-e zanān*) has a role. Usually, the scene takes place on the day of Karbalāʾ and the play describes the mourning and courage of the martyred Imam's wife. Many plays also portray the princess being captured and especially her dialogue and complicity with ʿAli (Rossi-Bombaci, index, see "Šahrbānu").In almost all these works, sympathy for Persia and its pre-Islamic past are readily apparent. Convergence between ancient Persia and Imami Shiʿism by virtue of Šahrbānu is just as emphatic in some popular rituals dedicated to the wife of the third Imam. Sacrifices offered to Bibi Šahrbānu—horses and lambs—are the same as those offered to Bānu Pārs/Anāhīd of Yazd (Boyce 1967, pp. 42-43). The main ritual offering in the sanctuary at Ray is a bowl of water (Šahidi, p. 189)—an element of nature of which Anāhīd is the goddess. In some regions of Khorasan, among the mourning rituals that mark the first ten days of the month of Moḥarram in commemoration of the death of the martyrs at Karbalāʾ, elegies dedicated to Šahrbānu occupy an important place. Processions reciting these elegies almost invariably pass by a Zoroastrian cemetery, if not, people believe that the villages will be victim to drought or the opposite, floods, that is to say in either case natural events related to water (Šahidi, pp. 180-81; Efteḵārzāda, pp.

130-32).

The figure of Šahrbānu may be situated within the complex network of relations between Persians and Shiʿites. These relations naturally belong to the wider framework of the attitude of Persians towards Islam and the authorities and institutions that represent it during the early centuries of the hejra. This latter phenomenon has been studied widely in its many forms (Yarshater 1998, bibliography; Amir-Moezzi 2002a, pp. 532-36). On the other hand, links of a religious and doctrinal nature between ancient Iranian religions and Imami Shiʿism constitute a field of research that still remains almost completely unexplored. The complex material of the Šahrbānu tradition forms part of those elements that link Imamism to ancient Persia and serve to revalidate pre-Islamic Persian culture. Some noteworthy examples: the tradition according to which the celestial Book of Zoroaster consisted of 12000 volumes containing all Knowledge and ʿAli depicted as the Knower par excellence of this Book (Kolayni 1956, I, p. 161; Ebn Bābawayh 1984, p. 206); the tradition praising the justice of Iranian kings, particularly that of Anušervān, during whose reign the Prophet was born (Majlesi, XV, pp. 250, 254, 279 ff.); the emblematic figure of Salmān the Persian as the Persian sage, the ideal Muslim and archetype of the Shiʿite initiate adept (Massignon, passim); the glorification of two of the most important Persian festivals, Nowruz and Mehregān in Hadiths going back to Shiʿite Imams (Walbridge, passim); mourning rituals for Imam Ḥosayn as a continuation of funerary rituals and ancient practices for the Persian hero Siyāvaš (Meskub, pp. 82 f f.;Yarshater 1979, pp. 80-95), etc. In this context, and when we acknowledge the fundamental importance of the affiliation and sacred nature of the link among the *awliāʾ* in Shiʿism (Amir-Moezzi 2000, passim), the figure of Šahrbānu acquires special significance. Adding the light of Persian royal glory to that of *walāya*,stemming from Moḥammad and ʿAli, Šahrbānu lends double legitimacy—Shiʿite and Persian to its descendants, the Imams of Ḥosaynid lineage, as well as a double noblility, Qorayshite and Sasanian. At the same time, she endows the kings of ancient Persia, with the status of maternal ancestors of the Imams, thus revalidating the sovereigns and the culture of a nation of which she is the Lady. Thus, she becomes one of the main links in the relationship between pre-Islamic Persia and Imamism.

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