



ZĀL

ZĀL (also called Dastān, Zar, and Zāl-e Zar), legendary prince of Sistān, father of Rostam, and a leading figure in Iranian traditional history. His story is given in the *Šāh-nāma* (partially retold in prose by Yarshater, 1959, pp. 83-9, 93-133), so closely paralleled in Ta'ālebi's *Gōrar* (pp. 68-10, 114, 119-22, 127-9, 138-41, 143 ff., 355-57, 379 ff., 383-88) as to suggest a common source, the *Šāh-nāma-ye Abu Maṣṣuri*. Sām, lord of Sistān and the foremost noble of Iran, had no child. A woman of his harem gave birth to a beautiful boy whose "hair was all white." Sām was ashamed, likening the infant to a child of "dēv" or "Ahriman" (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 164, v. 45, p. 166, vv. 63, 65; all references are to this edition and volume unless given otherwise), and he abandoned it on the Alborz Mountain, but the fabulous bird, Simorg, which nested there, nursed the boy, and he grew to become a dashing handsome young man endowed with great physical power and a brilliant mind, whom travelers saw and admired (I, pp. 167-68). One night Sām dreamt that a mounted warrior rode in from India and informed him that he had a grown-up son. Sām consulted wise men, but they all blamed him for having destroyed his God-given child. Again he dreamt that from the mountain of India there appeared an army led by a youth flanked by a Zoroastrian priest (*mōbad*) and an advisor, and that these companions condemned his act: "If you needed a bird as the nurse for your son, what use is this royal and heroic state? If white hair is a cause of shame, what say you of your own white hair and beard?" Profoundly ashamed, Sām went to the Alborz, besought God for forgiveness, and discovered his son: "a figure worthy of royal crown and throne, with side and arms of a lion, sun-like countenance, heroic heart, sword-seeking hands, deep black eyes and lashes,



coral lips and rubicund face” (I, pp. 169-73, vv. 104-49). The youth was unwilling at first to leave Simorǧ, but the bird assured him of a glorious future, and gave him samples of his feathers, which contained God-given fortune (*farr*), to use when in peril: “put one of my feathers onto fire, at once shall you behold my *farr*” (I, pp. 171-72). The boy, now called Dastān (cf. Yarshater, 1983, pp. 432, 453), Zāl, Zar, or Zāl-e zar, came with Sām to Sistān and was clothed in noble garments (*pahlavāni qabāy*). (On *zar* “old,” see Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 346. For an attempt to explain Dastān as an adaptation of Middle Persian *dastan* “capable,” or as a family name “of the descendants of *Dast,” see Skjærvø, pp. 165-66.)

Having heard the wonderful story, King Manučehr summoned Zāl to his court and recognized that he possessed the Royal Glory (*farr-e kayān*), the heart of the wise, and the courage of a lion” (I, p. 175). The story of Simorǧ and Zāl “spread throughout the world” (ibid., p. 176, v. 185), and court astronomers cast his horoscope and predicted that he would be a mighty and wise paladin. The king made Sām lord over “the whole of Kabul, Donbor, Māy and Hend, from Zābolestān to the other side of Bost,” entitled him the chief paladin (*jahān pahlavān*), and invested him with “a throne of turquoise and crown of gold, a ruby signet-ring and golden girdle” (I, pp. 177-78). All these Sām delegated to Zāl when they returned to Zābolestān as he himself had to lead an expedition against the Gorgsārs and Māzandarān. Zāl ruled with justice and became an avid learner, surpassing others in astronomy, religion, and art of war (I, pp. 178-81). Zāl met and fell in love with Rudāba, daughter of Mehrāb, king of Kabul, and married her after overcoming many difficulties and proving his facility in horsemanship, archery, and other military skills as well as in explaining some (Zurvanite) riddles (Zaehner, pp. 242-44, 444-46) at the court of Manučehr. Zāl and Rudāba had two sons, Rostam and Zavāra. Later a slave girl from Kabul bore Zāl another son, Šagād (V, pp. 241-42).

The career of Zāl spans the entire Kayanid period (Yarshater, 1983, pp. 373-74, 377, 389, 432). He served as a military commander under all kings, but usually in an advisory role, and was regarded as the last bastion of hope. He defeated two Turanian lords who had attacked Mehrāb at Kabul, clashed with [Afrāsiāb](#) after the murder of Nowḍar, rejected ʾTus and Gostahm in favor of electing Zaw as the successor of Nowḍar, and sent Rostam to fetch Kay Qobād from the Alborz mountain and offered him the crown, thereby establishing the Kayanid dynasty (I, pp. 309-14, 317-27, 338-44). He initially opposed Kay ʾKosrow’s nomination of Lohrāsp as heir to the throne and played host to Goštāsp for



two years (Daqiqi, in *Šāh-nāma* V, pp. 171-72), tried to dissuade Rostam from fighting Esfandiār (V, pp. 371-72), and when he saw his son severely wounded and his family threatened, he once more appealed to Simorǧ for help. Guided by the bird, Rostam killed Esfandiār, but he and Zavāra fell victim to Šaǧād's treachery and were killed (V, pp. 396-422, 442-56). Bahman, son of *Esfandiār*, then invaded Sistān, overthrew the house of Rostam, imprisoned Zāl, and took his treasures, but released him after his own uncle, Pašōtan, intervened on his behalf (V, pp. 471-83). But Mas'udi of Marv, who had composed a verse *Šāh-nāma* early in the 10th century, stated (apud Ta'ālebi, *Ġorar*, p. 388; cf. Ṭīabari, I, p. 687 and Ma'udi, *Moruj* II, p. 127) that Bahman killed Zāl and slaughtered his family. Epic narratives other than the *Šāh-nāma* (e.g., *Bahman-nāma*, *Farāmarz-nāma*, *Borzu-nāma* and *Šahriār-nāma*) ascribe to Zāl many heroic deeds, especially in wars with Afrāsiāb and Bahman. The *Mojmal al-tawāriḡ* (ed. Bahār, p. 54) asserts that Zāl wrote several books on the history of the House of Bahman and maligned Goštāsp. The *Tāriḡ-e Sistān* (ed. Bahār, pp. 22-23) states that Zarang owed its name and prosperity to Zāl-e Zar, and according to the *Bundahišn* (36.40; tr. Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, p. 52), Sām divided his realm between his six sons, giving Sistān and the region of the south (Nimrōz) to the leading one, Dastān, Abaršahr to Abarnak, Rey to Ƙosrow, Patišxwārgar to Mārgandag, Isfahan to Sparnag, and Asōrestān to Damnag.

Zāl's personality has been the subject of much speculation. Šehāb-al-Din Sohrevardi explained him as a mystic figure (Parhām, pp. 334-47, with literature). His white hair at birth would have been viewed as a sign of future greatness, similar to the case of Pābak, father of Ardašīr, who was born with long hair (Ṭabari, I, 814), which his mother took as presaging future glory (Bal'ami, ed. Bahār, pp. 875-76). The nursing by a mighty bird was another sign of unusual fame and achievement, analogous to the legend of the rearing of *Achaemenes* by an eagle (Aelianus, *Nature of Animals* 12.21, with Spiegel, II, p. 262; cf. Nöldeke, p. 4). These stories are common-place with the type of "the feared child," whose lordly sire is warned by signs of the infant's future greatness and tries to dispose of him but fails because the child is saved and reared by a miraculous beast and finally replaces the guilty potentate (Yarshater, 1991, pp. 67-68). That some revered Zāl as an extraordinary, wise and mystical personality is borne out by the fact that to this day the mystic order of *Ahl-e Ḥaqq* in Kurdistan regard Simorǧ, Zāl, and Rostam as the *duns*, the incarnation of the light of God. And the Malek Ṭāwusi tribes of northwestern Iran, Iraq and Syria also count Kāva, Zāl, Rostam, and Simorǧ as



the incarnations of Malek Tāwus, himself the highest manifestation of God on earth (see, with literature, Amir Mo‘ezzi, p. 80).

While the origins of the stories about the House of Rostam go back to the Saka people (Yarshater, 1983, pp. 454-55), A. S. Shahbazi has argued that the names of the sons of Sām should be connected with the names of the provinces of the Parthian Empire and that the fully developed accounts of the House of Rostam ultimately reflect the history of an Arsacid family which ruled over Zarang (Old Pers. Zranka, Gk. Drangiana, the old Sistān; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 211) and was annihilated by Ardašir I, the historical model of Ardašir Bahman (Shahbazi, pp. 158-59). According to this theory, Zāl/Zar would have been named after the land Zarang (cf. also Zar-bānu “Lady of Zar,” a daughter of Rostam: Irānšāh, pp. 210, 270-73). An alternative theory, originally espoused by Stig Wikander (pp. 324-26) and subsequently developed by Gianroberto Scarcia and others, connects Zāl/Zar with Zurvān, god of Time. This view is primarily based on the Zurvanite character of Zāl’s riddles and on his exceptional longevity, which can be understood as an emblem of eternity. In many of his studies (see

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), Scarcia insists on the possible euhemeristic derivation of Zāl from Zurvān. Both Wikander and Scarcia have drawn attention to the analogy between the Simorǧ-Zāl relation in Ferdowsi and the Phoenix-Aiōn relation in the classical tradition, particularly in numismatics (Scarcia, 2003, p. 16) and to the fact that the ‘albino’ Zāl has a counterpart in the ‘albino’ Noah (Nuḥ). The latter was the patriarch of Mount Ararat, anciently connected with Zurvān (Zruan) according to the first chapter of the work attributed to Sebēos. A significant relation between the Phoenix and a Cosmic Mountain is to be found in the case of Mount Kasios too, another mountain with a clear Zurvanite character (Scarcia, 2003, pp. 22-24).

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