



ZARIRI, 'ABBĀS

ZARIRI, Moršed 'Abbās (b. Isfahan 1909; d. Isfahan 1971), noted storyteller (*naqqāl*). He was orphaned at early childhood and grew up in poverty in the troubled years of World War I. Lonely and helpless, he joined the rank of itinerant dervishes in his early youth and traveled with them to many towns and villages, as well as, some neighboring countries, such as Iraq and Oman, singing the praises of the Shi'ite Imams. To make a living in these years, he was involved in different professions like bookbinding, traditional medicine, as well as, making instruments, such as the compass and *Qeblanamā* (a device that points the direction to Mecca) Zariri was deeply interested in story telling since his childhood, and mastered the techniques by attending performances of distinguished eulogists of his time in Isfahan, Tehran and other cities. (Zariri, Introduction p. xxvi). He was trained by masters like Hājj Moršed 'Abbās Eṣfahāni, the outstanding dervish of the late Qajar period (Homā'i, p. 39). After years of traveling, Zariri settled in Isfahan, and performed for over three decades in the most popular coffee houses of the city, such as Golestān in *Čahār-bāg*. The audience were mesmerized by his charismatic and strong voice. He often managed to further augment the impact of his performance upon his audience by resorting to dramatic feats.

Zariri like most other eulogists of his era, was functionally illiterate. He memorized and recited whatever he heard from other storytellers and scroll-writers. However, he became literate towards the end of his life, embarked upon collecting scrolls and recording the recitations of his predecessors, and added what he himself had reconstructed during his performances (Zariri,



Introduction, p. xxviii). He managed to compile a manuscript of approximately 1,000 pages (27 × 18 cm) starting with the tale of Kayumarṭ (See [GAYOMART](#)) and concluding with the story of *Eskandar* (See [ALEXANDER THE GREAT](#) and *ESKANDARNAMA*).

Zariri's account of Iranian heroic (*pahlavāni*) tales, although different in many ways, occasionally approximated [Ferdowsi](#)'s narration in *Shah-nāma* (Book of Kings). Zariri's omnibus is more a blend of different epic narrations, such as *Garšāsbnāma* (The Book of Garshasb), *Sāmnāma*, (The Book of Sam) *Farāmarz-nāma* (The Book of [Faramarz](#)), *Bānou-Gošasbnāma* (The Book of Lady Goshasb), and *Borzu-nāma* (The Book of Borzou), with additions and embellishments introduced by himself or his predecessors. Ferdowsi's lines of poetry, and passages from other Persian epic poetry are quoted intermittently, interspersed with accounts or sayings from the Prophet or his companions already incorporated into Shi'ite theology and jurisprudence. Finally, lyrical poetry from great masters of Persian poetry is also included. The language, exposition and synthesis in Zariri's narration is quite distinguished from other conventional literary works of prose (Zariri, p. 49). Zariri's compilation is only comparable to *Haft-laškar* (Seven Legions), the popular anonymous *naqqāli* manuscript written during Nāšer-al-Din Shah era. Zariri calls his manuscript *Ketāb-e mostaṭāb-e naṭr-e šāhnāma* (The outstanding account of Book of Kings in prose) on the cover and *Zariri-nāma* (Book of Zariri) on the back page (Zariri, p. 31).

The story of *Rostam o Sohrāb*, published in one volume, is among a few short extracts from Zariri's manuscript that has already been published in literary magazines, while a complete edited version will be available soon. Furthermore, an audiocassette recorded from one of the performances of *Rostam o Sohrāb* by Moršed 'Abbās is available and is to be reproduced as a compact disk (CD) to accompany the book. Finally, the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Art (*vezārat-e farhang va honar*) commissioned Šāhroḡ Golestān to produce a film from the same performance.



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