THE SISTĀNI CYCLE OF EPICS

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with the study of the Sistāni Cycle of Epics (SCE), a body of literature produced in its extant form from 11-13th centuries in Iran. It was during the same period that Iran’s grand epic, the Shāhnāmeh, was composed. Although Ferdowsi, the composer of the Shāhnāmeh, has included some of the most famous stories of the SCE into his work, most of the Sistāni stories were excluded from Ferdowsi’s work. Modern scholarship dismissed the SCE as secondary to the Shāhnāmeh, therefore, neglecting to examine it.

In this study, first I examine the connection between the epics and the province of Sistān, their birthplace. I postulate that during the pre-Islamic period, especially from the Parthian period onward, the epics played a role in constructing a specifically Sistāni identity. Therefore, in the first three chapters I examine the way in which the epics helped shape a distinctly Sistāni identity by examining the region’s topography, political history, and historiographical production.

Arguing that up until the medieval period the epics were regarded as reflecting historical reality, in the following chapter I examine the genre for the ways in which it accommodated the historical narration, whose referents were past events. Instead of separating fact from fiction, I examine the ways in which the heroic discourse, by certain modification of the generic requirements, allows for the recounting of such
historical episodes. The two areas, where the reference to past events is apparent, are most prevalent in depictions of Sistān’s relationship to the land of India and the reflections of episodes of Parthian history.

Next, I shift the focus of the study to medieval literary milieu, which produced the extant form of the epics. I postulate that during the medieval period the epics were used in order to create another identity, i.e. a distinct Iranian identity. As a result of this endeavor to create or to revive the Iranian identity, the two bodies of epics contain divergent stories, and I scrutinize some of these stories and speculate about the reasons for the existence of such drastically different narrations.
To Sadhguru:

همه عمر برندام سر از این خمار مستی که هنوز من نیشدم که تو در دل بنستی (سعدی)
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Table 1. Transliteration Table Consonants
Note: As a general rule I will use the transliterate words using the Persian characters with the exception of when using Arabic primary sources.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sistāni Cycle of Epics (SCE) contains the stories of Sistān’s pre-Islamic rulers, narrated in the form of an epic by granting its protagonists the status of invincible heroes. The stories are those of Rostam and his family, both his ancestors and descendents.¹ For the most part, Rostam’s stories, because of their prominence, have been preserved in Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh. This, however, is not true of the stories of the other heroes of the same lineage. Despite the availability of the stories in prose form in Ferdowsi’s time², the poet excluded them from the text of the Shāhnāmeh. Many stories of the Sistāni heroes, especially those concerning Rostam’s offspring, were versified by court poets in the two centuries after the composition of the Shāhnāmeh. I would like to postulate that the SCE constitutes, and is best studied as, a continuous corpus of literature, incorporating both the Sistāni episodes preserved in the Shāhnāmeh, as well as the individual epics versified by later poets.

While modern scholarship on Iranian epic literature has been preoccupied, if not obsessed, with studying various aspects of the Shāhnāmeh, these “later epics” have been neglected entirely by scholars of medieval literature. Aside from an occasional article referring to a manuscript of these epics, the only work that

¹ For genealogical chart of Rostam’s family see Figures 1 and 2. Throughout this work, I shall refer to the heroes of the SCE as members of Rostam’s house or Garshāp’s house interchangeably.
² See Chapter 5 for the detailed discussion of the written sources of the SCE.
discusses, or rather describes them is Şafa’s Hemâseh Sarâiy dar Irân. Şafa introduces these epics by providing a summary of their plot and information about their authorship and manuscript tradition. What is significant in Şafa’s work, aside from introducing these epics, is his assessment of them. In his opinion, in spite of the antiquity of the stories, these epics are imitations of Ferdowsi’s great work, and aside from Garshâspnâmeh and Bahmannâmeh these works lack literary value due to their poor diction. Şafa’s opinion reflects the general consensus of the scholarship regarding these epics. Caught up in philology and attempting to establish the authenticity of texts (a notion that is equated with their antiquity) the Shâhnâmeh scholarship dismissed these epics as later works of less-than-talented panegyric poets of minor courts. For the scholars of epics, the main critique of poets has been that they merely imitate Shâhnâmeh, since they have been composed in the same meter and employ much of the same imagery as Ferdowsi’s work. At the same time, being the product of later and lesser poets, there are many more Arabic words that naturally found their way into these epics. Finally, there seems to be an unspoken verdict about these lesser or secondary epics: that since Ferdowsi chose not to include the stories in the Shâhnâmeh they are somehow irrelevant and unworthy of being studied. The latter objection to the study of these epics is only understood when one considers the status of Shâhnâmeh for the nationalist discourse of modern Iran; a discourse that has dominated the ideological approaches of modern Iranian scholars of this field. Generally speaking the medieval Iranian scholarship has not developed a critical approach to medieval literature, one that would take into consideration the specific historical

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3 Şafa, Hemâseh Sarâiy dar Irân, Amir Kabir, Tehran, 1321.
4 The various surveys of the medieval literature usually refer to them as secondary epics. See Rypka, History of Persian Literature, Dordrecht, 1968.
and social circumstances, which constituted the milieu for the production of texts. As a result the relationship between text and author was assumed to be the same as one finds in modern times. Therefore, the “value” of the epic poems was gauged based on the artistic style of their authors, using Ferdowsi’s text as the standard to which all others had to equal. Șafa, who assigned each of the epics a certain grade based on their poetic value and the purity of the language, purity being relative to lack use of Arabic words, set the paradigm in which the epics were to be viewed for generations of Iranian and western scholars. The standards for authenticity applied to these epics were established based on the antiquity of the work, and the “quality” of the author’s style in comparison to Ferdowsi’s work. Another factor that, in the eyes of scholars, makes these epics secondary to the Shāhnāmeh is what they rightly observed as the close relationship of the epics to popular medieval literature. Poor poetic quality, lack of creativity, use of impure language, inclusion of popular motif, therefore are the reasons for what could be described as some scholars’ disdain for the epics. An example of such attitudes towards the epics is expressed by the editor of the Borzunāmeh:

I do not know why Turner Macan, the editor of the Calcutta Shāhnāmeh, has decided to include Borzunāmeh and two other stories as addendums to the text of the Shāhnāmeh. But my hope is that his intention was to demonstrate the superiority of Ferdowsi’s status, and the heavenliness of his mature and polished work in comparison to the works of incompetent and inarticulate imitators such as ʿAtāʾī (author of the Borzunāmeh).5

This is the thought that the reader is left with at the end of the preface to the text of the Borzunāmeh. The editor’s contempt for the poem makes one wonder about his motivation for undertaking the project of editing the manuscript.

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of the *Borzunāmeh*. Maybe his aim is to offer the world an example of inferior epic poetry so that it could appreciate the “heavenliness” of Ferdowski’s work. Needless to say, such an attitude will, and as we shall see has, determined the very way these epics have been edited, and the first and most obvious result of the scholarship’s dismissive attitude of these epics is that, in spite of the existence of a manuscript tradition, we do not have acceptable editions of any of the epics.⁶

One major shortcoming on the part of the modern editors has been their failure to take into consideration the medieval authorial practices, which resulted in the production of the versified versions of the epics. As we shall see in chapter 5, the stories of various Sistāni heroes were put into verse between the 11th and 13th centuries by various court poets. However, prior to these verse versions of the stories, there were prose versions of the stories, which among other places, appeared in as a collection of stories under the title of *Shāhnāmeh-ye Bozorg* (Greater *Shāhnāmeh*). There is also evidence that these stories were the subject of oral performances throughout the centuries (for more on this see chapter 5). What emerges from this picture is that prior to the versification of the epics, the SCE were considered as one unified body of literature. There are several reasons that can be offered for this argument. First, there are many inter-textual references to the stories, characters, and events that are part of the cycle of the epics, but not found in a particular story and its manuscript. Second, the very structure of some of the manuscripts such as the *Farāmarznāmeh* or *Bānu-Goshaspānāmeh* indicates that the author(s) of the works have collected various stories from different sources and juxtaposed them together without any obvious connection. In some

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⁶ I will discuss the edited versions of each of the epics below, and discuss the biases that have resulted in mostly poor and often incomplete edited versions of the texts of SCE.
instances, we have two or three different beginnings to the same story in the same manuscript (see below: *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*). Third, the inclusion of some episodes in a certain manuscript is arbitrary because oftentimes there is more than one hero present in the story, and there is no obvious reason why in the story the episode should appear in story/manuscript tradition devoted to one hero vs. the other. An example of such case is the first story included in the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* (see below), which has also been included in the *Farāmarznāmeh*.

Given the ample evidence for the existence of one continuous body of literature, one has to approach the manuscript tradition of each story as, at best, the most well-known stories about a certain hero. However, the most logical way to perceive these stories is in the context of one continuous body of literature, where the stories of many Sistāni heroes not only followed each other, but in many instances, there are many interactions between the Sistāni heroes, as they undertake many adventures together, fight battles against enemies in each other’s company, and sometimes even turn against one another. In this study, rather than being confined to the limitation set by the manuscript traditions of each individual story, the stories have been considered as a part of a greater narrative, which incorporates all of them.

However, the manuscript traditions of the stories are a result of the medieval practice of separating them from their greater context. When discussing the manuscript tradition for the epics a few observations must be made. First, like the *Shāhnāmeh* manuscript tradition, the manuscript traditions of the SCE are significantly more recent than the time of their composition. The oldest manuscripts of the stories of SCE are Timurid manuscripts, and those are rare. The bulk of manuscripts in question were produced between the 17th and 19th...
centuries C.E. Given scholarship’s neglect of these epics, it is difficult to date the manuscripts, and in most instances, when discussing them, I have not been able to accurately date the manuscripts, and given their number in questions, I have not been able to study each of them in order to determine the date of their composition. Therefore, when discussing each individual manuscript tradition, oftentimes I am unable to offer any date for the manuscript. Second, observation regarding the manuscript traditions is that they are to a large extent conservative, and one does not find very significantly different variations of the same story. I speculate that once put into verse, a certain episode or story was crystallized, and this is the reason why we do not have significant variations of the same story. In other words, those stories related to a particular hero, which were included in a certain manuscript tradition in medieval times, continued to be passed down in a conservative manner, with little variation. However, what needs to be taken into consideration is that many other stories regarding the same hero appeared elsewhere, mainly as interpolations to the Shāhnāmeh manuscripts.

What we are left with in terms of the materials are individual manuscripts containing the adventures and exploits of one Sistāni hero. In each of these manuscript traditions, there are episodes that involve more than one Sistāni hero. We also have separate episodes which detail the exploits of one or more Sistāni hero not included in any of the manuscript traditions. The complex picture we are left with is a direct result of the medieval practice of versification of certain stories of the poem, which later became crystallized as distinct manuscript traditions. The question that should have been addressed by the modern editors of the texts is how to approach editing the material, and whether or not the extraneous stories found in the Shanāmeh manuscripts should be included in the
edited versions of each manuscript tradition. This, however, was not the approach. Instead, most editors of the texts have relied solely on the manuscripts mentioned by Šafa, neglecting the numerous manuscripts, which are held in collections in India. In some instances in their effort to produce the authentic version of the text, they rely on the oldest and incomplete version of the text (see Farāmarznāmeh below), or they simply edit whatever incomplete manuscript they have happened to come across (see Shahryārnāmeh below). Therefore, although valuable for making these stories accessible to the readers, the edited versions of the stories have serious flaws, and they should be used with caution.

Below, I will introduce each epic or story revolving around a hero by providing a summary of its plot and any other information that might be available about its authorship. It is important to mention, however, that I have not engaged in a philological discussion or a detailed study of the manuscript tradition of each epic, as such work, given the volume and number of the epics, lies outside the scope of this study. The focus of this study is on the content of the epics, as they constitute a continuous, chronological corpus of literature. Generally, for the purposes of this study I have chosen one version of the text, but have taken into consideration all the stories regarding a hero regardless of where they appear.

**Rostam Stories:**

The stories of Rostam, the most celebrated Sistâni hero are, of course, considered as part of the SCE. Most of the extant Rostam stories are the ones preserved in Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh. When speaking about these stories, I have relied on Khâleqi Moṭlaq’s edition of the Shāhnāmeh. As these stories are well-
known and subject to much research, I do not think it is necessary to provide a
synopsis of them here.

One must keep in mind however, that Ferdowsi has not included all the
stories available to him. He has rather chosen those stories, which could be easily
incorporated into the framework of his work. In addition to that, as we shall see
below in chapter 6, in case of Ferdwosi, one can detect the manipulation and the
massaging of his sources, in order to make them suitable for his purposes (for
more on this see chapter 6).

Because of the towering status of Ferdowsi’s work, the authors who
followed him did not attempt to versify the stories already included in Ferdowsi’s
Shāhnāmeh. As we shall see in chapter 5, the medieval sources, which talk about
the sources for SCE, come to the stories of Rostam, they refer the reader to
Ferdowsi, stating that since he has included them in the Shāhnāmeh, there is no
need for repeating them. There are, however, stories revolving around Rostam,
that are not included in the Shāhnāmeh, but found in various manuscripts of the
SCE. One such story is the that of Rostam and Kok-e Kuhzād, which has been
mentioned in the Šafavid local history of Sistān (chapter 3). I have come across
several manuscripts containing this story, and recently the edited text of the story
has been published as an addendum to the text of Borzunāmeh.⁷ There are several
stories involving Rostam in the Borzunāmeh, the Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh, and most
notably the Shahryārnāmeh. I have relied on these episodes heavily in chapters 4
and 5.

⁷ Attributed to ‘Atā’i Rāzi, Dabīrīyāqī, M. (edit.), Borzunāmeh and Kok-e Kuhzādī, Society for
the Appreciation of Cultural Works and Dignitaries, Tehran, 2003. Henceforth I will refer to the
text by its title.
Garshāspnāmeh

The Garshāspnāmeh is the best-known Sistāni epic. Versified shortly after Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh, the Garshāspnāmeh narrates the adventures of the founder of Sistān, and the first king-hero of Sistān, the ancestor of all other great Sistāni heroes who follow. The extant Garshāspnāmeh has been versified by the court poet, ³³Asadi Ṭusi (d. 1072/3 C.E.), and dedicated to the local ruler of Nakhjavān, a certain Abu Dolaf, only known from this source. According to ³³Asadi Ṭusi, the work is based on ancient written sources, and because Ferdowsi neglected to narrate the account of Garshāsp’s adventures in the Shāhnāmeh, the author decided to prove his capabilities as a poet to his patron by versifying the ancient source. I will discuss the sources of the SCE in chapter 5, where the claims to the existence of both written and oral sources for this epic will be closely examined.

The Garshāspnāmeh was the first epic poem aside from the Shāhnāmeh to be regarded worthy of being edited. There are several reasons why Iranian scholars regarded it as valuable. The first reason was that the Garshāspnāmeh was written only a few years after the Shāhnāmeh, making it older and hence more “authentic” in their eyes. The second reason is that its author is known, and as mentioned above, this lends credibility to the text itself.

The first and only edition of the text of Garshāspnāmeh appeared in 1934, and it has been reprinted many times.⁸ The printed edition is based on the manuscripts mentioned in Safā’s Hemseh Sarāiy dar Irān. The problem with this and all other edited versions of the SCE is that the editors did not look for any

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manuscripts other than those mentioned by Safā. Therefore, the edition is problematic in many respects: it does not consult many other manuscripts including the oldest one\(^9\); its differences in different versions are not reflected, as the editor has decided to choose one text as the main text and only gives the different versions in rare cases, and most important of all the editor does not include stories that are not included in the older manuscripts, because according to him, they are not part of “the authentic Garshāspnāmeh.”\(^{10}\) In this study, I have relied solely on the edited version of the Garshāspnāmeh, despite the fact that I have collected two manuscripts of the work not included in the edited version. Although I have not consulted the other two manuscripts in detail, a brief examination of their contents revealed what is generally true of the manuscript tradition of the SCE epics, namely there seem to be very little and insignificant variation, mainly due to scribal errors. The more recent manuscripts need to be examined for the existence of episodes not found in the older manuscripts of the Garshāspnāmeh for interpolated material. Related to the story of Garshāsp is the account of the adventures of Nārimān. Safā mentions that no account of his adventures has survived, and therefore assumes that such an account never existed. This, however, is not true, as I have found a unique and uncataloged manuscript entitled Narmiānnāmeh, containing the stories of Nārimān’s adventures. However, I have not studied the work for several reasons, but intend to do so in the future. Such a study would have to consult the various extant


\(^{10}\) *Garshāspnāmeh*, preface, p. 21.
manuscripts of Garshāspnāmeh, as I suspect a link between the manuscript traditions of the two stories.

The Garshāspnāmeh contains the adventure of the first Sistāni hero, who has also been identified as the Avestan hero Keresāspa. This identification is based on two factors: first, Garshāsp’s genealogy, which corresponds to the one found in the Avestan/Pahlavi sources, and second, the fact that he is a dragon slayer. However, apart from these two similarities, there does not seem to be any connection between the two characters. One can speculate that the existence of such dissimilar accounts about the same hero is because they are products of different literary traditions, each with a varying political and religious motivation. There will be a discussion of the different versions of the epic tradition below (chapter 5).

Asadi’s story begins with Garshāsp’s ancestors. In the first part of the poem one finds the romance of Jamshid, Iran’s deposed king, with the unnamed daughter of Kurang, the king of Zabolestān. Tur, the ancestor of the Sistāni heroes is born out this romance. Having achieved the goal of connecting the Sistāni heroes to the Iranian royalty, the story goes on naming several generations of Tur’s descendents who followed him as kings of Zabolestān until we reach Garshāsp’s turn.11

Garshāsp is born during the reign of Žaḥḥak, and at this time his father is Zabolestān’s king. As Iran’s king, Žaḥḥāk sends Garshāsp on his heroic mission, which involves a journey to India and slaying of a dragon. In the meantime a certain Indian king by the name Behu has renounced his loyalty to Žaḥḥak, and overthrown his relative the Mehrāj. Garshāsp engages in several battles with

11 For the genealogy of the Sistāni heroes see Figures 1 and 2.
Bahu, and restores the power to Mehrāj. Then, he travels in India, witnessing many marvelous landscapes and their strange inhabitants. Upon his return he finds out that the king of Kābolestān has invaded Zabolestān, inflicting a defeat upon his father Athraṭ. Garšāsp comes to his father’s rescue, and kills the king of Kābolestān and restores his father. At this time he builds a city in the delta of river Hilmand, and names it Sistān. Next, he goes to the west and visits Qariwān and Qordoba in Spain, and he witnesses wondrous islands and their people. When he returns to Zabolestān, his father dies, and he becomes the king of Zabolestān and the newly founded Sistān. At this time Žahḥāk is removed from the throne and Fereydun becomes the king of Iran. Garšāsp declares his allegiance to Fereydun, and the latter sends him on a mission to Turān and China, where he fights and defeats China’s king. Accompanying him on these adventures is his nephew, Narimān, Sām’s father and Rostam’s grandfather. He goes to the west, to Tanger one more time where he kills another dragon. He returns home and dies. Narimān takes his place, both as the king of Zabolestān/Sistān and as the jahān palevān (world hero)\(^{12}\) of Iran.

**Bahmannāmeh**

Next to the *Garshāspnāmeh*, the *Bahmannāmeh* is the other Sistāni epic that has received some attention from scholarship. As in the *Garshāspnāmeh*, the author of the verse *Bahmannāmeh* is known, and was composed in late 11\(^{th}\)/ early 12\(^{th}\) century C.E. by Irānshāh b. Abi Al-Kheyr. The first and only edited version

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\(^{12}\) This was a position or an office occupied by Garšāsp and later his descendents, which granted them a superior status to other heroes. For more on this see chapter 6.
of the work appeared in 1991, based on four manuscripts. There are many more manuscripts of the Bahmannāmeh that have not been consulted for this edition, but for the purposes of our study, I have relied solely on the edited version. However, the edited version is missing about 16 printed pages in the second section of the poem, and there are mismatched pages in the same section.

The main protagonist of the Bahmannāmeh is supposed to be the Iranian king Bahman, son of Esfandyār. However, out of the four major parts of the work, only in one is Bahman the hero. It is only in the first section of the work that his actions could be identified as heroic: he goes on adventures in Kashmir, marries Katāyun, the daughter of king of Kashmir who betrays him by having an illicit sexual relationship with her servant, Lo’Lo’. Together Katāyun and Lo’Lo’ conspire to kill him, but their attempt fails. Later Bahman undertakes other adventures, which take him to Egypt where he marries the daughter of the king of Egypt. In this part of the work, the Sistāni heroes do not play an important role, and are absent from the story for the most part.

The reason why I have included this work as part of SCE is that the next three sections are devoted to the story of Bahman’s conflict with Rostam’s descendents. In the second part of the poem Bahman attacks Sistān, and there follows a series of seemingly endless battles. It is in this part of the poem that rather than being a hero, Bahman’s role is that of a villain. He is depicted as an excessively vengeful and compulsively irrational character, whose actions are not justified. In this section of the work, the heroes of the poem are Farāmarz, Bānu

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Goshasp, and Farmarz’s son Borzin Āzar. In the second part of the work, after the description of four long battles that take decades to fight, Bahman kills Farāmarz, and imprisons Zāl, while the other Sistnai heroes flee to India. In the third part of the poem, Bahman follows Farāmarz’s sister, Bānu Goshasp and Zar Bānu in India and captures them, and brings them back to Iran. In the fourth part, Bahman returns to India, and attempts to reconcile with Rostam’s family by setting Zāl, Bānu Goshasp, and Zar Bānu free and offering the office of jahān pahlevān to Barzin Āzar. However, Barzin Āzar refuses to take the position, and leaves Bahman’s court. At this time, a dragon has appeared whom no one can defeat, and since there is no one left at his court who could face the dragon, Bahman himself fights the dragon and is killed in the process.

**Farāmarznāmeh:**

Without a doubt Farāmarz is the best known and most celebrated hero of the SCE after his father Rostam. The stories of his countless heroic adventures were very popular in the medieval times. What is extant, however, seems to be a small fraction of an extensive body of stories with Farāmarz as their protagonist. The most complete version of the *Farāmarznāmeh* that I have been able to locate is a collection of Farāmarz stories taken from various unidentified manuscripts and put together by Rostam-e Bahrām, who was a contemporary of Mozaffar al-Din Shāh (r. 1896 – 1907). This hand-written version of the *Farāmarznāmeh* was

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14 There will be a detailed discussion of this part of the work with Bahman’s story as it appears in the Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāmeh* (Chapter 6).
15 There is a detailed discussion of Farāmarz and his popularity in chapter 5, and there I will offer my reasons for believing that extant *Farmarzanmehs* contains only a fraction of the Farāmarz stories.
lithographed and published in Bombay some time around the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{16} There are essentially four parts to Rostam-e Bahrām’s compilation: first we have the story of Rostam’s first heroic feat of fighting and slaying the dragon Babr-e Bayān, which resulted in him marrying the daughter of India’s king, and conceiving Farāmarz; second, there is the story of the exploits of Bānu Goshasp and Farāmarz, where Farāmarz is cast in a secondary role. This part constitutes the bulk of \textit{Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh}; third, we have Farāmarz’s adventures, which mainly take place in India. It is this third part, which has generally been recognized as the “authentic” \textit{Farāmarznāmeh}; in the fourth section we have more of Farāmarz’s adventures in India, and his demise at the hands of Bahman. There is no doubt that these four parts are compiled in the Bombay lithograph version from different manuscripts (or different parts of a heavily interpolated \textit{Shāhnāmeh} manuscript). There are no apparent connections, either chronological or in terms of plot between these four parts parts, and Rostam-e Bahrām himself mentions that his sources for the book were four manuscripts that he found in India and Iran.\textsuperscript{17}

The only edited version of the \textit{Farāmarznāmeh} contains the third section of the Bombay Lithograph.\textsuperscript{18} Although the editor of the work is aware of the existence of the Bombay Lithograph, he dismisses the other stories included in it as inauthentic. The bias against the other versions of the \textit{Farāmarznāmeh} has been set by Khāleqi-Motlaq, who claims that because the third section of the \textit{Farāmarznāmeh} is older, the other stories cannot be trusted as originally having

\textsuperscript{16} Anonymous, Rostam-e Bahrām, \textit{Farāmarznāmeh}, Bombay Lithograph. I will refer to this work throughout the dissertation as \textit{Faramarznāmeh}, BL.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Farāmarznāmeh}, ET, p. 453.

belonged to the work. Therefore, in this case, the editor chooses not to include stories that are not in the original manuscript tradition of the *Farâmarznâmeh*. In one sense Khâléqi-Motlaq’s is right: parts 1, 2, and 4 of the Bombary lithograph do not seem to have been part of one of the extant *Farmarznâmeh* manuscript. However, there is no reason to assume that the other Farâmarz stories, because they were not included in the older *Farâmarznâmeh* are any less authentic. Given the abundance of Farâmarz stories in medieval times, one should not be surprised when other Farâmarz stories make their way into other manuscripts. In the absence of a continuous and well-documented manuscript tradition for any of the stories it is difficult, if not impossible to date the stories and pass judgments about their authenticity. This, however, seems to be the normative and acceptable approach in Iranian studies, and as a result the edited version of the *Farâmarznâmeh* only includes the third part of the Bombay lithograph. In my search for the manuscripts of the *Farâmarznâmeh* I have come across some manuscripts that contain Bombay lithograph’s third part, and therefore, have decided to rely on the lithograph for the most part. In some instances I use the edited version of the text, which essentially is the third part of the lithography, but I do so because for most readers the edited version is more accessible and easier to read. It is important to note that there are many other stories involving Farâmarz that have been included in various manuscript traditions, such as that of, *Bahmannâmeh, Bânû-Goshaspnâmeh* or *Shahryârnâmeh*.

In the first part of the collected stories preserved in the Bombay lithograph we find the episode involving Rostam’s first adventure with Babr-e Bayân. The story begins with the description of a feast at Kay Qobâd’s court where many

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heroes are present. A messenger arrives, bearing the news that a dragon has appeared in India causing much menace to the population. Since the king of India was a kind a vassal to Kay Qobād, and under his protection he asks Zāl, who is the jahān pahlevān to fight the dragon. But Rostam decides that his father is not up to the task, and in spite of his father’s strong disapproval of any involvement on his part he sets out for India, in disguise. Zāl and other Iranian heroes encounter the dragon, but are unable to defeat him. At this time, Rostam, devises a trick, and kills the dragon. He makes an armor from the impenetrable skin of Babr-e Bayān. As a reward for his great achievement, India’s king offers his daughter to him in “marriage.” He spends one night with her, and Farāmarz is conceived then. The next day Rostam returns to Sistān.

The second part in the collection of the Farāmarz stories in Bombay lithograph corresponds to the first part of the Bānu-Goshaspāneh, the synopsis of which is given below (see Bānu-Goshaspāneh). The third part of the collection of stories is the text of the Farāmarznāmah. Like the Babr-e Bayān episode, this story begins with the description of a courtly feast. A messenger from Nushād, the king of India arrives at the court, informing those present that there many of problems in India which the king needs help with: a number of vicious animals, demons, and a dragon have appeared in several places in India terrorizing the population, and to top that off, Kayd a vassal king, has rebelled against Nushād and refuses to pay tribute to him. Farāmarz then sets out for India, and one by one he fights the dragon, the vicious wolf, an area infested with rhinoceroses. Accompanying him on all these exploits is his nephew Bizhan. After he has passed all these hurdles, he fights a number of battles with the mutinous king, Kayd. During the course of the story of Farāmarz’s battles against Kayd,
Farāmarz undergoes a series of trials (*haft khān*). Eventually Kayd, realizing Farāmarz’ superiority as a warrior asks for peace, and Farāmarz grants him amnesty. This story ends with Farāmarz’s religious campaign against the idol-worshippers of India, during which he destroys many temples and idols.

The fourth part of the collection also begins with a court scene. This time the heroes find themselves at the court of Kay Khosrow, who informs Rostam and Farāmarz that the people of that part of Zabolestān which borders Sind (India) and China have refused to pay their tribute to the Iranians, and have sworn allegiance to the Turānians. Farāmarz takes his army and goes that area and fights with these people and the Turānian heroes who come to their aid. Next, Farāmarz goes to India where a king, who was formerly paying tribute to the Iranian king has refused to do so. What follows is a long account of Farāmarz’s battles with this king, whose name is Rāy (i.e Raj). During the course of these battles Rostam joins him in India on Zāl’s advice who has deemed it necessary to ask Rostam to go there. But when Rostam arrives in India, Farāmarz has already captured Rāy. Farāmarz and Rostam take Rāy to Kay Khosrow’s court, where Farāmarz intercedes on his behalf, asking Kay Khosrow to return his kingdom to him. Next, Farāmarz returns to India to deal with yet another rebellious Indian king. What follows is a break in the narrative, and it seems as though a new story begins. This time we learn about another one of Farāmarz’s adventures in India, which mainly consists of his travels in marvelous islands, where he witnesses many strange landscapes, people, and animals. It is during the course of these adventures that he meets with a Brahmin (a wise man), falls in love with a local king’s daughter and marries her, and fights and kills yet another dragon. It is sometime during his adventures in India when he receives a letter from Zāl informing him that the
Iranian king Bahman has besieged Sistān, and asking Farāmarz to return to Sistān at once. Next we have a description of Farāmarz’s battles against Bahman. This part seems like a synopsis of Bahaman’s battles with Farāmarz as they appear in the Bahmannāme (see above Bahmannāmeh). At the end of this story Farāmarz is killed by Bahman.

**Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh:**

The Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh recounts the exploits of Bānu-Goshasp, Rostam’s daughter. Like the Farmarznāmeh, however, what is included in the manuscripts of the Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh is only a fraction of stories, in which Bānu-Goshasp is the protagonist. The Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh was recently edited and published, however, like the Farāmarznāmeh, the edited version of the Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh does not include any stories related to Bānu-Goshasp, which are not part of the oldest manuscript of the Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh. Not only are these stories, which appear at length in the Bahmannāmeh, Farmarznāmeh, and Shahryārnāmeh not included in the edited version of the Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh, there is no mention of them in the editor’s preface or elsewhere in the text. This is in spite the fact that Bānu-Goshasp’s collective adventures in all the SCE are much greater in number than those narrated in the Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh. As far as the text of the Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh is concerned, I will rely on the edited version, because it consults all the manuscripts that are in my possession. However, I will discuss other episodes, not included in the edited version of the work, and give reference to where they appear.

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What is included in the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh* can be seen as three distinct stories, although this distinction is neither made in the manuscript, nor by the editor. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are three different stories lines and two different beginnings, which judging by their style could have been composed by more than one author. The first story line begins with Bānu-Goshasp and her brother Farāmarz’s adventures in Turān. They have gone there against Zāl’s advice, and Rostam decides to teach them a lesson by fighting them in disguise. However, they are able to defeat Rostam, and they return to Sistān. Bānu-Goshasp and Farmaraz return to Turān, this time with their father’s permission. There they meet Pirān, the wise wazir of the Turānian king, Afrāsyāb, and Shideh, the son of Afrasayb. Taking Pirān’s, they decide that their time is better spent partying with the Turānians, rather than fighting them. During a feast, Bānu-Goshasp removes her armor at the request of the Turānians and Shideh falls in love with her. Shideh who is hopelessly in love asks Pirān for his advice, and he thinks he should drop the whole matter, because the marriage will not happen since the Iranians and Turānians are archenemies. But Shideh is persistent in his pursuit of Bānu-Goshasp, and a Turānian hero, who is later revealed to be Chinese, by the name of Tamartāsh comes to Shideh’s help. Tamartāsh promises to bring Bānu-Goshasp by force, but he himself falls in love with Bānu-Goshasp. But instead of reciprocating his feelings, Bānu-Goshasp challenges Tamartash to a battle and kills him.

At this point there is an abrupt shift in the narrative, and the narrator tells us that he is going to narrate a story about Bānu-Goshasp. This might be an indication that this part of the *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, might have come from a different source than the first part. What follows is a short story of three Indian
kings who are in love with Bānu-Goshasp. A test is set up in order to decide which one is deserving of making her his wife; the test consists of trying to remove Bānu-Goshasp from her saddle. All three Indian kings fail at this: one is killed in the process, the other is injured, and the third one gives up and returns home.

Next, we have a second beginning to the story. The author of this part tells the reader why he composed the poem, and what follows is a section devoted to praising God, prophet Moḥammad, and ʿAlī. Since opening a work in this fashion is formulaic and typical of many medieval texts from different genre, there is no doubt that what we have here is a separate story, most likely versified by a different author. The story that follows takes place at the court of Kay Kāvus, where all the heroes are gathered. The heroes are drunk and they all boast that they want to marry Bānu-Goshasp. News is sent to Rostam, and he comes from Sistān, and sets up a test to identify who among all the heroes is worthy of his daughter: he asks all the 400 suitors to sit on a rug. Then he shakes the rug, and they only person who does not fall off of the rug is Giv. Subsequently, Giv and Bānu-Goshasp get married, and Bizhan, and Pashang are born from this marriage.

Borzunāmeh:

Borzu is Sohrāb’s son, and Rostam’s grandson. There has been a recent edition of the text of the Borzunāmeh, based on the manuscripts of the Borzunāmeh mentioned by Ṣafā. I have come across numerous Shāhnāmeh

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21 Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh, p. 114.
manuscripts where one finds the story of Borzu.\(^{23}\) It is interesting that this is the only story of SCE, which has been consistently interpolated to the text of the *Shāhnāmeh* at the end of Kay Kāvus’ reign.\(^{24}\) I have acquired microfilms of several of these stories, and have compared them against the edited version of the *Borzumāneh*. The comparison revealed that there are minor variations among the texts, over 90% of which can be attributed to scribal errors. Therefore, I have chosen to rely on the edited version of the text, because of its accessibility to the reader. It is important to note that I have not come across any stories related to Borzu other than the ones recounted in the *Borzunāmeh*.

Although the editor of *Borzunāmeh*, following Blochet, attributes the versification of the text to a certain ʿAtāʾi, a 12\(^{th}\) century Ghaznavid court poet\(^{25}\), there are indications that the story of Borzu was either versified by more than one author or attributed to them. According to the 13\(^{th}\) century author ʿAwfi the poem is ascribed to three different authors: NāKok, Amid-e ʿAtā, and ʿAtāʾi-e Rāzi.\(^{26}\) However, because of the consistency of the story found in the manuscript tradition of the *Borzunāmeh*, one must conclude that if there were different versions of the poem in the medieval times, only one version has survived. This might explain why, unlike the *Farmarznāmeh* or *Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh*, the story of Borzu is a complete and coherent story, and is not composed of different story lines.

\(^{23}\) I am referring to all the post-16\(^{th}\) century manuscripts that I have seen in various manuscript collections in India.

\(^{24}\) There are rare cases, where a *Shāhnāmeh* manuscript includes the stories of other Sistānī heroes. An example of such manuscript is the British Library manuscript OR 343. But generally speaking even if *Shāhnāmeh* manuscripts did include stories of the Sistānī heroes, it would be added as a separate story in the Samemanuscript.

\(^{25}\) *Borzunāmeh*, preface, p. 8.

The story begins with Afrāsyāb’s discovery of Borzu as he is escaping from Rostam and Bizhan. Borzu, Sohrāb’s son, has been brought up as a farmer, and he is ignorant of his father’s identity. Afrāsyāb realizes that he has a potential to be a great warrior, and recruits him in his army. Then, he sends him to fight Rostam, and a series of battles between Borzu and Rostam take place. During one of the battles, Rostam captures Borzu and takes him to Sistān, where he is imprisoned in the citadel. Upon learning Borzu’s fate, his mother sets out to Sistān, with the help of some characters, which very much resemble the ‘ayyārs of the popular medieval literature.27 Once she arrives in Sistān, he reveals Borzu’s identity to Rostam.

Once his identity is revealed, the story shifts to describe a gathering of the heroes at the court of Zāl/Rostam in Sistān. During this gathering, Ṭūs, one of the Iranian heroes who is notorious for his bad temper and irrational decisions, causes a disturbance at the court by offending some of the heroes. Then, he takes off and falls into the trap of Susan, a woman minstrel, who has been sent to Sistān to capture the Iranian heroes. One by one the heroes leave Zāl’s court and are captured by Susan. That is all the heroes with the exception of Borzu, Farāmarz and Rostam, who at the end rescue the heroes. Next the heroes face Afrāsyāb who has come to Sistān with his army, and at the end the Turānian army is defeated. Kay Khosrow, the Iranian king appoints Borzu to rule over the territories of Ghur and Herat.

27 For more on the ‘ayyārs see below chapter 2.
Shahryārnāmeh:

Shahryār is Borzu’s son, and is born after Borzu has died. The *Shahryārnāmeh* recounts his adventures, but as we will see, it also includes many episodes involving other Sistāni heroes. Like the other manuscript traditions of the SCE there has been a recent edited version of the *Shahryārnāmeh*.\(^{28}\) However, this edition is based on several manuscripts, none of which are complete. Therefore, I have not relied on the edited version of the work, and only have used it for comparative purposes. Up to now, it was believed that no complete version of the *Shahryārnāmeh* is extent. However, this is not the case, as I have acquired a manuscript in India, which includes the complete story. Unless otherwise noted, this manuscript will be used, whenever the *Shahryārnāmeh* is discussed.\(^{29}\)

The story begins when Shahryār leaves Sistān, having been insulted by Sām, Farāmarz’s son by questioning his ancestry. Farāmarz intervenes, but makes matters worse because he takes Sām’s side. Shahryār’s mother pleads with Zāl to intervene, but he is afraid to do so and offend Farāmarz in the process. Shahryār sets out to India, goes to various places to India, but settles in a place whose king is named Arjang. There he joins Arjang’s army in their battle against another Indian king by the name of Hitāl. What follows is a series of battles between Arjan and Hitāl, and Hitāl’s brother Tipāl. Shahryār is involved in all these battles, and interjected in the story of the battles are Shahryār’s fights against demons, wild beasts such as wild elephants, and sorcerers. Having defeated Hitāl, Shahryār marries his daughter Farānak. However, this is not the end of the story

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\(^{29}\) Anonymous, *Shahryārnāmeh* Khodā-Bakhsh Library Manuscript, Patna, HL-1820, 383 folios. From now on I will refer to this work simply by its title.
of the battles between Hitāl and Shahryār, and as this story is picked up once again, another story line develops.

At this time Lohrāsp writes to Rostam, who this whole time is engaged in battles in the west, and asks him to return to Iran, because the Turānians are about to attack. Initially Zāl advises Rostam against going to Lohrāsp aid’s, but later he has a dream about Kay Khosrow who reminds him that they had sworn allegiance to Lohrāsp. As a result of this dream, he asks Rostam to Balkh, the seat of the Iranian king, however, Rostam never makes it there because there is a new danger, this time from a demon in the west. Meanwhile Farāmarz and Bānu-Goshasp have gone to India to help Shahryār who has been captured by Hitāl. After setting Shahryār free, he pleads with him to return to Sistān, but Shahryār refuses to do so. Farāmarz returns to Sistān via Kashmir.

At the same time, the Turānian king, Arjāsp has sent two great armies to Balkh and Sistān. In Balkh a great army gathers from different corners of kingdom, and what follows is a description of many battles. At this time Shahryār returns to Iran and joins the Iranian army in their fight against the Turānians, but at the end the Turānians besiege the city, set fire to it, leaving it in ruins. There is much detailed description of this part of Lohrāsp reign, which has not been included in the Shāhnāmeh.

Shahryār arrives at Balkh after the fire, and rebuilds the city. Then, he engages in several other battles along side Lohrāsp (and in one incident he fights against Lohrāsp), until he learns about problems in India in a letter from his ally Arjang, who asks him to return. There are several long stories involving Rostam’s battles with several demons. Then, we learn about other adventures of Shahryār in
Māzandarān. Shahryār returns to India one more time and defeats another one of Arjangs enemies, and then he returns to Sistān.

There are two other works, mentioned by Šafa, which I have not included in this study: the Sāmnāmeh, and the Jahāngirnāmeh. 30 I have obtained several manuscripts of both epics, however, upon the examination of the content of the two manuscripts, I think that the stories preserved in them belong to the genre of the medieval popular epic-romances. The already broad scope of this project does not permit me to engage in a detailed discussion of the motifs, plots and the discourse of the works, which set them apart from the rest of the epics discussed above. However, I hope to examine these works later in a different context.

30 Šafa, Hemaseh Sarāiy dar Irān, pp. 335-340, and pp. 324-335. It is important to note that there are no edited versions of these two stories.
Without a doubt the SCE is multi-layered body of literature, composed, performed, and recreated many times over the span of many centuries. Although the form in which we receive it is a product of the medieval era, and the last major manipulation of the material, the stories scattered over many manuscript tradition are undoubtedly of a much older origin. Given the long track record of its survival, and the centrality of the material contained in for the construction of Sistâni identity, and later Iranian identities, it would be most useful for a study of SCE to approach it from different angles. Therefore, in this dissertation, the SCE is examined for the ways it functioned as a literary artifact that defined and redefined the heroic image, an accessible cultural product kept alive over the span of many centuries of oral performance, and a history that would challenge, albeit indirectly, the grand narrative of Iran’s pre-Islamic past canonized by Ferdowsi.

Central to the discussion of any epic literature is the question of identity construction. The SCE is both a product of the process of identity construction, as well as driving force for it. This two-sided relationship between epic and identity construction is what often makes it difficult to detect the origins of a certain epic, for it seems as if an ethnic group, a nation, to risk using an anachronistically modern term for this context, or a people are born at the same time as the epic about their great heroes are, and attempting to answer which one came first is as futile as trying to solve the chicken and egg puzzle.

Given the antiquity of Iranian culture one can expect that the material, which makes up the SCE, although reshuffled, modified, massaged to a great extent, to be of an unknown ancient origin. One can speculate that throughout the centuries, these stories were used for different purposes, namely to create different identities. An example of how they fulfilled different roles in Parthian and Sâsânid
periods as opposed to medieval times will be discussed below. What is central, however, when it comes to the question of identity construction, and it is present throughout this corpus of literature is its connection to the region of Sistān.

Because of this strong connection, in the first three chapters of this study the attention is turned to the region, beginning with chapter 1, in which I examine its geography and distinct topographical features. The necessity to discuss Sistān’s physical environment before moving on to its political history is due to the fact that there was a drastic topographical shift in the region sometimes between the 15-17th centuries, which left the hitherto prosperous and flourishing province a desolate wasteland. Although natural climate changes such as falling water tables and a general trend in desertification had a role to play in the state of its decline, the main reasons for its downfall must be sought in the topographical features such as the general scarcity of water, which made it very dependent on the river Hilmand and the persistent sandstorms which made the region susceptible to decline. In chapter 1, I examine the hydraulic devices, which were constructed in order to bring water from Hilmand and its tributaries as well as other indigenous methods devised to shift sand dunes left behind by the storms.

It is also important to discuss the various regions that were, both in medieval and ancient times, associated with, or perceived to be part of Sistān. Therefore, I discuss the three major centers of the region. Although it is difficult to pinpoint what belonged to the province of Sistān at any given point in the long history of the region, it is necessary nevertheless to be familiar with the length and breadth of the region, and its neighboring regions and provinces. The discussion of these different parts of Sistān is based on two different types of sources. First, we have much archaeological evidence about various locations in this general region,
evidence that I have used to speculate about the significance of each city/region for a specific period of time. Second, I have relied on the works of the Arabic and Persian medieval geographers who provide us with detailed description of the province and its various urban centers.

The puzzle of the rapid decline of the region is examined from a different angle in chapter 2. There, I attempt to provide a short synopsis of the region’s political history from the Achaeminid (559 B.C. – 330 B.C.) to the rise of the Šafavids in the 16th century C.E. What emerges from the meager evidence that is available to us for the pre-Islamic period is a strong trend that seems to have been carried through the centuries, all the way to the early Šafavid period: the region of Sistān, although part of the larger Iranian Empires, be it Achaeminid, Parthian or Sasānid, almost always enjoyed a semi-autonomous political status. The most interesting period, whose history is particularly significant in the discussion of the epics, is the Parthian period. There is indisputable evidence that during this period, a certain very powerful branch of the Parthian noble family took over the control of the region, and established several semi-autonomous dynasties, some of which absorbed most parts of modern Afghanistan as well as much of Northern India. Incidentally, it is during this period that epic poetry flourished in the courts of many Parthian kings and nobles, a point to which we will return in chapter 4.

The discussion of the political history of the region for the subsequent periods reveals that the region, for the most part retained its semi-autonomous, and at times, fully autonomous, status for many centuries to come. The ultimate blow to the region came in the 17th century, when as a result the Šafavid policy of centralization, a non-native Šafavid governor was appointed to the region. It seems that one of the immediate consequence of the collapse of the semi-
autonomous power was the gradual neglect of the hydraulic structures and protective structures for sand storms, which were of utmost importance for the region’s survival. The loss of indigenous power came at the unfortunate time when the region was trying to overcome several devastating attacks on their dams, weirs and other structures, and the combination of these factors constituted a blow from which the region never recovered.

In chapter 3, I return to the question of the region’s semi-autonomous status, examining its consequences for the production of different genres of historiography. I argue that the political status of the region was a major factor why for this region, we have a historiographical tradition, which is quite different from histories produced in any other regions of Iran. The region of Sistān, in medieval times, has contributed to the “genre” of local historiography, however; I argue in this chapter that the format, content and the presentation of the local histories of Sistān are very distinct from other specimens of this “genre”. Next, I discuss how the epics, both for Sistān and Iran, constituted a certain type of historiography. The curious lack of native historical writing for the pre-Islamic period is discussed, and the various opinions offered for the existence of this phenomenon are discussed. The fact that the region of Sistān has produced such a historiography, independent of the Iranian historiographical tradition is directly linked to the regions political status, which in turn required material for the construction of a uniquely Sistāni identity.

In the next chapter, I discuss the SCE as the ancient historiography of Sistān. In doing so, I take a “holistic approach” to the heroic genre of this epics and its requirements, and analyze how in spite of the fixed structure of genre, whose building blocks are heroic motifs and *topoi*, it allows for the reflection of
certain past events. This chapter is divided into two parts: in the first part I examine the descriptions of India, and heroes activities there. The background for many heroic motifs, which belong to the category of the biography of a hero is the land of India. It is there that they fight dragons, find treasures, go on a series of adventures, etc. At the same time, there are references to the historical relations between the kings of Sistān, represented as heroes in the epics, and their exploits in India. In this section is an analysis of the generic requirements of the heroic genre, as well as the way the genre accommodates for narration of stories, whose referents are historical events. As a result, we find the historical memory of the Sistāni presence in India preserved in the epics: Sistān’s political power over certain regions in India, and the appointed vassal kings who from time to time rebel against the Iranian/Sistāni courts, the depiction of complex relationship between the Indian and Sistāni nobility, and the continuous presence of the Sistāni heroes in India; in the second part of the dissertation, I take some time to discuss the Parthian noble families and their connection to the Iranian epics as observed by a number of scholars. The purpose for presenting the state of the field on this subject matter is to establish a link between the Parthian period and the SCE. What emerges from this discussion is that the Parthian nobles, including the Parthian royal family, had a great interest in patronizing the epics, and as a result the Parthian period, with its many rival courts and families proved to be a fertile time for the cultivation of the Iranian epics, the SCE included. Furthermore, it becomes clear that the characters of the Sistāni heroes are based on the members of historical house of Suren, one of the prominent noble families. When we return to the discussion of the SCE and the way in which they reflect certain episodes of the Parthian history, again my attempt is to discuss those episodes in the context
of the heroic genre. Therefore, for each of the stories, where I assume the referent is an event in the Parthian period, I provide the generic requirements, which build the very structure of the story. It is in the context of this specific structure dictated by the motifs and *topoi* of this genre that I discuss the reflections of the Parthian past in the stories of the SCE.

In chapter 5, I discuss the sources of the Iranian epics, both the *Shāhnāmeh* and the SCE. When discussing *Shāhnāmeh*’s sources, for the most part, my attempt is to provide the reader with the discussions that have taken place about Ferdowsi’s sources in the last century. Particular attention is given to the discussion of oral tradition, and oral-formulaic composition as possible sources for Ferdowsi’s poem. There is evidence for the existence of the latter, and it is plausible to speculate that Ferdowsi may have used the oral tradition, as one of the sources for his poem. However, there is no evidence that Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāmeh* is an oral-formulaic composition. In addition to this discussion, the written sources, both medieval and ancient for the *Shāhnāmeh* tradition are discussed.

In the second part of chapter 5, the same discussion takes place for SCE: first I discuss the written prose sources for the versifications at hand. Although none of the prose versions of the poems are extant, I argue based on scattered evidence throughout various medieval texts, that it is very likely that these prose versions were the sources for the verse versions of the epics. Next, I discuss the oral tradition of the epics, arguing that the stories of the SCE have always been the subject of oral performance, and it is plausible to argue that some of the prose or verse versions could have used the oral tradition of the stories as a source. However, as mentioned earlier in the introduction, once the epics were fixed in a certain manuscript tradition, that particular narration of the story seems to have
been crystallized, and the variations of the story are minimal. The oral tradition, however, must have contributed to the expansion of the written Sistâni stories, as the source for the various separate stories, which were added to several manuscript traditions. The relationship between written and oral versions of the epics is complex, and subject to a serious study, which should ideally take into account not only the epic genre, but also other medieval genres, for which there was an oral tradition.

In the last chapter I compare some of the same episodes and stories that appear in the Shāhnāmeh and SCE where there are drastically different versions of the same narrative. The differences range from different characterization of a character to the shifting moral values of heroes to different and irreconcilable narrations of the same event. In this chapter I speculate about the reasons why the two bodies of literature, in spite of their close and complex relationship with each other provide us with such drastically different depictions of the same character or event, with totally different outcome. In some of the cases discussed, the differences can be traced back to the framework, which Ferdowsi chose for the composition of his work, and the ideology which was he impetus for undertaking the project. In other words, Ferdowsi’s agenda to create a work that reflects the Iranian past in a continuous fashion, at the center of which is the Iranian monarchy. His ideology finds expression throughout the work, both explicitly, as when he provides a commentary in his own voice, and implicitly, in the structure of the poem. In this chapter, I will discuss the implicit crafting of the poem through selective use, manipulation and omission of the sources at his disposal. It is as if there are parameters that define a certain framework for the Shāhnāmeh, and only that material that could fit into this framework finds its way into it.
What this tells us about the SCE is equally interesting. The existence of the different versions of the same event betray the fact that the events in question, at some point in time, had either historical or political significance, and the fact that they are at a conflict with each other, points to the fact that they stem from different literary and historical traditions. Therefore, what we have preserved in the divergent stories of the SCE is the Sistāni perspective of the events, which challenges the grand narrative of Iran’s pre-Islamic history.
CHAPTER 1

THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE PROVINCE OF SISTĀN

“We have said that Garshāsp founded Sistān. Before the foundation of Sistān itself, Bost, Rakhad, Zamin Dāvr, Kābol and their surrounding areas were built by Gudarz, his maternal grandfather... Sâm, son of Narimān, founded Asfozar, Buzestān, Lavalestan, and Guhr. Rostam, son of Dastān, founded Kashmir and deposited his personal treasures there. Hamzeh ibn ʿAbdallah al-Shari founded Gardiz, while the King of the World, Yaʿqub ibn Layth, founded Gaznayn. All these cities were under the rule of the pahlavāns and the marzbāns of Sistān in the pre-Islamic times, but with the coming of the Islam, the rule over the area changed hands”, Tārikh-e Sistān, p. 24.

“(Sistān) contains more ruined cities and habitations than are perhaps to be found within a similar space of ground anywhere in the world”, G.N.Curzon, 1892.

Sistān is one of the border provinces of Iran and Afghanistan, the border bisecting it from north to south. Today, it is an impoverished and for the most part desolate region, whose population, in the eyes the late 19th century and early 20th century European travelers, were forlorn.31 Nevertheless, the ruins that are scattered over the length and breadth of the region imply a more glorious past. As a matter of fact, Sistān was a fertile and affluent province from ancient times up to the 15th century32, with a fascinating political and cultural history.

32 It is generally accepted that Timur’s expedition in Sistān resulted in the destruction of its major cities, however, there is also evidence that the process of decline had already begun after the Mongol invasion (1222 C.E.), and it became finalized during the Safavid period when the province was integrated into the empire. The decline is mainly attributed to these devastating attacks, although falling water tables and climate change did play a small role in it as well.
The province was known as Drangiana in Achaemenid times, and it is mentioned for the first time in an inscription of Darius, in Bistun, and is cited again in the works Greco-Roman geographers such as Strabo, Ptolemy, and Isidore of Charax. Although the administrative and fiscal divisions within the province altered in ancient times, there seems to have been continuity as far as the major urban centers and their populations were concerned. It was during Parthian times, in the first century B.C., that the region came to be known as Sakastan, or the land of Sakas. The Sakas were an Iranian Central Asian tribe that constantly threatened the eastern provinces of the Seleucid and Parthian empires. At some time in the beginning of the first century B.C., they invaded the province of Sistān, and as a result gave it its new name. Sakastan remained an important border province for the Sasānids, and it is mentioned in the Sāsānid geographical and administrative works. The province continued to flourish in the Islamic period. There are accounts of the Arab invasion of the region, which hint at the existence of thriving urban centers in the delta of the Hilmand river. Beginning with the 9th century C.E., the genre of geographical writings flourished in the Islamic world, and the bulk of our knowledge about the region comes from these geographical works, which were composed from the 9th and 10th centuries C.E. and onward.

The province of Sistān, as we have seen, has been referred to by different names throughout its long history. Similarly, its boundaries also changed. At

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34 The genre of geography in Arabic flourished from 9-12th centuries. Numerous authors composed geographical works depicting different regions on the caliphate. Some of their works, as it pertains to Sistan will be discussed below.
certain periods in history its rulers crossed the Indus river and extended their power over much of North India, at other points the northern territories of Herat and Balkh were annexed. Nevertheless, the core-lands of the region seem to have included, for the most part, the areas included in the Le Strange’s map of Saijistan, which is drawn based on the medieval geographers’ description of the region. It is practical, however, to break down the region into parts, in discussing the cities and towns, as such divisions seem to have persisted there throughout ancient and medieval times. I have divided the region into three areas: 1) Western Sistān: Lake Zareh vicinity. This is the heartland of Sistān and it is where Zarang was located in the medieval periods, as well as the ancient capital of Sistān (discussed below), 2) Central Sistān: the northern delta of Hilmand that includes Zabolostān. In ancient times this region had formed the province of Arachoasia. This area includes the town of Bost and the areas of Rokhj and Zamin Dāvr, 3) Eastern Sistān: the areas of Gaznayn and Kābol, which were regarded as peripheral lands of Sistān.

Before engaging in the discussion of the history of the province, it is important to understand the topography of this region. This is particularly significant given that the most characteristic features of its climate result in an ever-changing topography, which resulted in shifting populations and urban centers. As a matter of fact, none of the thriving major urban centers of medieval times has survived to this day. The topography of Sistān changed continuously, as the course of rivers shifted and as the result of the strong winds that moved sands.

35 For a discussion of medieval Arab geographers and their works see the introduction of Le Strange, *The Lands of Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia from the Moslem conquest to the time of Timur*, London: Cass, 1966. The map is question is included as Figure 4.
altering the landscape of the region. The shifting course of rivers resulted in a change in the pattern of urban centers, as well as swamps, lakes and waterways. Another important factor to be considered when discussing the region is its complex and unique irrigation system that enabled human habitation in an otherwise unbearably dry and harsh climate. The topography of Sis’tân as presented below is mainly based on these medieval geographical treatises, as well as extensive archaeological data provided by a German team of archaeologists headed by Klaus Fischer.

I. Hilmand River and Irrigation System

Various European travelers who visited Sis’tân in the 19th and early 20th centuries described the province as Hilmand’s gift, and likened the dependence of the region on the Hilmand to Egypt’s relationship to the Nile. The region’s constant change can be attributed, as suggested by a number of scholars, to the change of the water supplies of this arid land. As a matter of fact, the whole region’s economy, be it agriculture or trade, and as a result human life in general, depended on the Hilmand river’s complex irrigation system which included dams, weirs, and subterranean water channels. It was the natural alteration of the course of this river, along with modifications in the irrigation systems as a result of foreign invasions that brought about the decline in this region. Therefore, given the Hilmand River’s pivotal and defining role in this region’s history, it seems natural to begin with the description of the Hilmand River.

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The medieval geographers describe the Hilmand as rising in the mountains on the far side of Ghur, which is the mountain range lying between Ghazneh and Bāmiyān, which now forms part of Afghanistan. The river then flows by the fringes of Rokhkhaj (Arachosia) and the land of Dāvr (i.e., Zamin Dāvr) to Bost. It is at this point where it receives on its left bank its greatest tributary, the Argandāb. Below Bost, the geographers describe no more tributaries as it flows through desert regions to Sistān, with the Dasht-e Margo or "Desert of Death" to its north and the Rigestān to its south, but with rich cultivation, orchards, and date-palm groves along the river shores until it drains into Lake Zareh.37

The Hilmand is fed by the melting snows of eastern Afghanistan as well as the modest rainfall in the hilly regions to the north of Bost. According to the medieval geographers, the Hilmand never dried up, but this is not true, as there is evidence that stretches of the river dried up in the summer of 220/835. This had catastrophic results for the populations of the Zarang region and Bost, as it caused famine followed by many deaths.38 The problem of excess water in the Hilmand also occurred, as the same source, i.e. Ĥaṛīḵ-e Sistān, records a flooding of the river in the spring of 641/1244, as a result of which the entire Hamun basin was inundated a spear’s height above normal.39

The amount of water in the Hilmand determined how much water the province had, despite the existence of three other major rivers, the Fareh, Hārut and Khwash. These rivers have very erratic flows of water when the snows melt in Ghur. Late 19th century and early 20th century European travelers reported that

37 Bosworth, "Hilmand River: iii Medieval Period", EIr, www.irancian.com. For the medieval course of Hilmand, as well as other rivers and locations mentioned in the province of Sistān see Figures 3 and 4.
38 Ĥaṛīḵ-e Sistān, p. 186 quoted in Bosworth, 1994, p. 46
39 Ĥaṛīḵ-e Sistān, p. 397 quoted in Bosworth, 1994, p. 46
most of the year these rivers contained no flowing water.\textsuperscript{40} Therefore, the 
agriculture in this region was dependent, to a great extent, on the amount of water 
in the Hilmand.

One of the characteristic features of the topography of the land in this 
province is the irrigation system, which was built on the Hilmand. The hydraulic 
constructions in Sistān were mainly dams and weirs built along the Hilmand in 
order to maintain the necessary head of water in channels and canals which led off 
of it. There is ample evidence of the existence of such dams and weirs in the 
medieval period, and Bosworth argues convincingly that these structures must 
have had a more ancient origin since their construction has been attributed to 
ancient and legendary figures. For example the Band-e Koshk was attributed to 
the mythological king Jamshid, while we have a weir attributed to the famous 
Sāsānidking, Khosrow Anushīrvān. Of particular interest to us is the dam of 
Rostam, which is situated to provide water to the northern part of the Hilmand 
delta.\textsuperscript{41} In 1383 C.E., it was Timur’s destruction of this dam, which watered the 
town of Bost and the region of Hilmand’s northern delta that resulted in the 
devastation and eventually the decline of the city of Bost and the western region 
of Sistān.\textsuperscript{42} The best description of how the irrigation system worked is found in 
the geographers’ description of the medieval city of Zarang\textsuperscript{43}. It is said that about 
one march, or some thirty miles distant, from Zarang the Hilmand was checked by 
a series of great dams, and at this point the greater volume of the main stream was

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{40} Tate, \textit{The Frontiers of Sistān}, p. 397-8.
\textsuperscript{41} Bosworth, 1994, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{43} See below for a detailed discussion of the city.
\end{footnotes}
drawn off into five great canals flowing out towards Zarang. Ibn Hawqal describes the course of the flow of these canals through the gates of the city, and based on his description Miquel has drawn a map of the city, which includes the aforementioned five canals. It is interesting to note that the underground conduits for water, typical in Khorāsān and other parts of the Iranian plateau, were not used as extensively in all areas of Sīstān. The practical reason for this anomaly is the flatness of the terrain, where there is the lack of a minimum of 3% fall in the ground required for the construction of qanāts or kārīz. However, in the piedmont areas to the north and east qanāts were used, and an extensive qanāt system existed up until the second half of 20th century in the area of Fareh.

The dams and weirs built on rivers required administrative and financial arrangements for their construction and management, but as Bosworth points out, the geographers and historians recorded few of these arrangements. One exception to the general silence on this topic is the mention of the powerful office of ʿamīr-e āb or head of irrigation in the Ṣaffarid period. Be that as it may, given the antiquity of these irrigation practices, as well as their significance for the region, one can safely assume that the management of these hydraulic structures was in the hands of local rulers. Furthermore, one can assume that these rulers must have had the economic means to build and maintain these structures. The province, as

46 Qanāts are underground hydraulic structures built throughout the Iranian plateau in order to distribute water from a main source. These structures were used in many areas of Iran, and were in use until the first half of the 20th century. For more on the qanānt system see Beaumont, P., "Āb: iii. The Hydrology and Water Resources of the Iranian Plateau," Elr, www.iranica.com.
47 Bosworth, Tārikh-e Sīstān, 1994, p. 48. It is not clear, however, if these structures have survived the number of wars that have been fought in Afghanistan in the past few decades.
48 Ibid, p. 50.
will be shown in the section below, was ruled by autonomous or semi-autonomous dynasties from ancient times until the Šafavid period. During this time, these irrigation structures must have been maintained well, as the province’s prosperity rested on them.

Aside from being the source of water for almost the entire province, the Hilmand was also used for navigation from Bost to Zarang in medieval times. However, this journey was only possible when the waters were high enough. Tārīkh-e Sistān includes the navigability of the river as one of the special virtues of the province. Abu’l Fazl Bayhaqi, the famous historian of the Ghaznevids, informs us of Sultan Mas’ud’s pleasure-sailing with his entourage from Bost to Zarang in November-December of 1306.

The fertilization of the land in the delta of Hilmand and the other major rivers occurred due to the deposit of silt in these lands. During the medieval period, the province of Sistān was known for the fertility of its lands as well as the abundance of its products. Ibn Hawqal describes the region’s fertility. It was especially famous for its dates and grapes as well as the cultivation of the spice asafoetida, which was heavily used in the cuisine of the region and in India. There are several other mentions of agricultural products of each specific area within Sistān in his account. According to Mustawfi, there were great orchards with

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49 Ibn Hawqal, Kramers, *Opus Geographicum: Libre Imaginis Terre*, 1967, p. 417. For the full account of Ibn Hawqal’s account on Sistān see my translation of it in Appendix A.


52 For Ibn Hawqal’s account often the province see Appendix A.
abundant fruits near Zarang along one of the canals of Hilmand, which he calls Siāh-Rud.\textsuperscript{53}

II. The Sandstorms

As mentioned earlier, another factor in Sistān’s continuously changing topography is its notorious sandstorms that blow without interruption each year for a duration of four months. The “winds of 120 days”, /browse-e šād o bist ruz-eh, which blows from north-north-west from May to September, are so vigorous that their effects can be felt a hundred miles away in Mashhad in Khorāsān. Its cessation at the end of August is signaled by what looks like a blanket of smoke, known as “the smoke of Sistān” or dud-e Sistān.

In March 1905 Tate recorded a wind there of 120 m.p.h.\textsuperscript{54} These winds, as some modern observers have noted, have the effects of sand-blasting machines on exposed walls and buildings; an effect that leaves behind sand hills and deep drifts and results in the disintegration of buildings and settlements of Sistān. Medieval geographers give detailed accounts of these winds, and ways in which the populations had learned to control the damage they caused. As a matter of fact, Ibn Hawqal refers to this technical expertise as a science (\textit{īlm}) that some men had inherited from generation to generation.\textsuperscript{55} This “science”, as it turns out, is still practiced in Sistān, as various kinds of barriers and sand-moving devices are still being constructed.


\textsuperscript{54} Tate, \textit{The frontiers of Sistan and Baluchistan}, p. 196.

The author of *Tārikh-e Sistān*, the earlier of the two local histories of Sistān, also mentions these winds, and in his view the winds and their effects of moving sand hills are one of the unique and positive phenomena that appear only in Sistān. The following passage is in the section entitled, “What Sistān possesses which is not to be found in other countries”:

The north and east winds are constantly present, in fact, so much so that the understanding and intelligence of the people of Sistān are better than that of other peoples due to the moderate and pleasant weather. They perform other deeds, which others cannot: like moving sand from one place to another, gathering it, and depositing it where they wish. That sand is a great treasure for them because they can put anything they want in the sand; and however many years go by, the sand preserves the thing, and consequently, it in no way becomes impaired. No one else possesses this knowledge...[in Sistān] mills can be constructed which are rotated by the wind and make flour, whereas in other cities they must use animals or water or hand-powered mills. Likewise, they have constructed pulleys to draw water from wells [to cultivate] the orchards and the land, however scarce well water might otherwise be. In a like manner they derive many advantages from the use of the wind.56

The existence and the use of windmills in Sistān is substantiated by the medieval geographers as well. 57 Some European travelers who visited Sistān in the early 20th century observed that the windmills were still being used, and they were substantial structures in Sistān. Like the anonymous author of *Tārikh-e Sistān*, these European travelers’ verdict on the winds and their effects was not

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entirely negative. Tate concluded that the winds, in addition to driving the mills, mitigated the extreme summer heat, and cleared the atmosphere and drove away flies and other insects. Sykes compared Sistān’s climate favorably to that of Bengal, but a very different type of climate.

III. Urban Centers

1. The Heartland of Sistān: The ancient and medieval capitals of the province

According to the medieval geographers, the city of Zarang or Zaranj as it was known to the Arab geographers, which was situated on the eastern banks of one of the chief canals of the Hilmand river, was the capital of the province (see Map 3). According to the earlier Arab geographers, Zarang had not been the capital of the province in ancient times. The ancient capital of Sistān was called Rām Sharestān or Abar Shahriyār, a city that by the 10th century had been swallowed by the desert sands. However, its ruins were visible at this date. Ibn Hawqal relates:

It is said that the old city in times of Persian kings was between Kermān and Sijistān close to Dārak and opposite of Rashak. It is three marches (stages) to the left of one going to Kermān. Some of its structures and houses are still standing there. The name of this city is Rām Sharestān, and it is said that the River of Sijistān (Hilmand) was flowing through it. The dam which was built on Hilmand broke, and [as result] the water level became lowered, and was diverted. As a result, [the whole region] lapsed to the state of desert, and the inhabitants migrated and founded the city of Zaranj.

59 Le Strange, p. 340.
60 Ibn Hawqal, pp. 417.
The description of the location of the ancient city is vague, and the fact that the two places named above, i.e. Dark and Rashak, remain unknown, has not helped the scholars in identifying the location of this ancient city. Another fact that has not been established is the date or the time frame in which the migration from the ancient city to Zarang took place. What remains certain however, is the fact that during Sasanian times Zarang was already a flourishing city and the capital of the province Sistan. The Pahlavi text, Shāhrestānha-ye Iran, names Zarang as the capital of Sistan, and attributes its construction to Afrasyab the Turanian king-villain, who is a major character in the Shāhanāmeh. It is said to have been destroyed in legendary times, and again rebuilt by Kay Khosrow, the legendary Keyanid king. The city was yet again constructed by Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanid dynasty.\textsuperscript{61} Tārikh-e Sistan, on the other hand, attributes the founding of the city of Sistan to Garshasp. While this act also takes place in legendary times, there has been an attempt by the anonymous author of this work to date this event to 4,000 solar years prior to the coming of Islam.\textsuperscript{62} It goes without saying that this date cannot be taken literally, as the dating of pre-Islamic events in medieval Islamic writings usually had religious and sometimes apocalyptic significance. What is important for our discussion, however, is that the reference to the city is rather vague, as it does not mention the city of Zarang, but the city of Sistan, which is later referred to interchangeably with Sistan province. Given that Tārikh-e Sistan, is the regional product of Sistan, one may assume that the identification of Shahr-e Sistan with Zarang was left out on purpose. That is to say, the author was aware of the fact that the capital city had

\textsuperscript{61} Daryaei, T., Shāhrestanha-ye Iran, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{62} Tārikh-e Sistan, pp. 1-3.
changed from where it was to its contemporary location of Zarang. It is interesting to note that the Garshāspnāmeh, one of the epics of Sistān describes the founding of Sistān, and attributes it to Garshāsp, the ancestor of the house of Rostam. Upon returning from various expeditions and adventures, Garshāsp decides to build a city on the delta of the river Hilmand. The name of the city, Zaranj, is specifically mentioned in the poem; however, the name Zarang is the ancient Greek name (Drangiana, Zarngiana) that referred to the whole region of western Sistān, including the medieval city of Zarang. The poem also informs us that this city was fortified with a tall citadel rising up in its center. More importantly, the irrigation of the city and its suburbs is described in a manner that is consistent with what we know of the irrigation practices of the region.  

In the 10th century, al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal provide the fullest description of the city: it was strongly fortified by walls, and it had an inner city with five gates and a suburb that lay around the inner city. The suburb like the inner city was protected by a wall, which had thirteen gates. This outer wall was surrounded by a moat filled with water from canals, some of which were channeled into the city. Ibn Hawqal goes on to describe the locations of the great mosque, the prison, markets and the palaces of the founders of the Šaffarid dynasty. The description is in fact so detailed that Miquel has been able to produce a sketch of the layout of the city based on it (Map 4).  

The description of Zarang as a thriving urban center is repeated in the 10th century by the geographer Muqadasi who refers to the riches and the learning of the inhabitants, and notes the strongly fortified castle, and the two famous

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63 Asadi Ţusi, Garshāspnāmeh, , p. 237.
64 Ibn Hawqal, pp. 415-6, Miquel, p. 212. For the complete description of Zarang see Appendix A.

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minarets of the great mosque, one of which was built by Yaʿqub ibn Layth, the founder of the Ṣaffarid dynasty (861-79). The city continued to flourish for many centuries, and even during the Mongol invasion (1222 C.E.) the capital seems to have escaped devastation. In the early part of the 14th century Mustawfi speaks of Zarang as a very flourishing city, protected by moving sands with a great dyke (band). This major city’s decline began at the end of the same century, when Timur appeared with his armies before the city in 1383 C.E.:

The capital of Sistān closed its gates, and declined to surrender. After a short siege it was taken by storm all its inhabitants who could be found massacred, its walls then razed and its houses destroyed. Since that time Zaranj has become a nameless ruin.

The city fell into ruin and irrevocable destruction during the Ṣafavid period, as for the first time in its known history, the province became integrated into the larger empire. With the complete extermination of the indigenous local rule, Zarang and the rest of the region fell into a state of decay from which it did not recover. This much is clear as far as the decline of Sistān is concerned; however, a more detailed analysis of the reasons behind the decline, as a result of centralization, is not possible in this study. The ruins of this city and the canal system surrounding it have been identified since the 19th century; the remaining vestiges of Zarang are in the vast site known as Nād-e ʿAli, and they have been described by European travelers. The hill of Nād-e ʿAli is situated just inside

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66 Le Strange, p. 337-8, Mustawfi, p. 142.
67 Le Strange, p. 338.
68 Bosworth, 1994, pp. 40-1.
the Afghan border, and on its outskirts the town of Nosratābād, the 19th and 20th century administrative and religious center Sistān, was established.⁶⁹

Shifts in the location of the capital city of Sistān must be viewed as somewhat of a pattern. After all, Zarang had been a city founded only after the devastation of the ancient city as discussed above. The fact that the region never recovered after Timur’s attack, however, must be regarded in the context of the shift in the political structure of the province. As we shall see below, the province, from ancient times up to time of Timur, had been ruled by local dynasties. After Timur’s conquest of the region, however, there were many attempts by the local rulers to overthrow the Timurid rule. In the 16th century the reign of the local dynasty finally came to an end, as the Šafavids appointed their vassals to rule the province.⁷⁰ Therefore, the final devastation of the province could be blamed on the subsequent loss of political independence, which was an indirect consequence of Timur’s conquest of the region.

2. Central Sistān: The Cities of Bost and Qandhār

As indicated in the opening quotation in this chapter, the central region of Sistān, comprising of the northern delta of the Hilmand River, is known to be more ancient than the area of eastern Sistān. Known variably as Zabol, Zabol, or Zabolestān, this area included the regions of al-Rukkhaj and Zamin Dāvr, as well as the cities of Bost and Qandhār, and according to some geographers, Zabolestān actually stretched as far east as Ghazneh and Gardiz. The foundation of

Zabolestān is attributed to Garshāsp’s grandfather, Kurang. While this is explicitly stated in Tārikh-e Sistān, it is also implied in the Garshāspnāmeh. As discussed earlier, both sources relate that Garshāsp founded Sistān, by which they mean an ancient city in the vicinity of medieval Zarang. Kurang’s realm, however, was an established province at this time, known as Zabolestān. This region was known as Arachosia, which in the medieval period was known as al-Rukhkhaj; hence Barthold argued that the name Arachosia was how the Greeks rendered the name Rukhkhaj. The region was commercially and strategically an important one, as it connected Iran to India via important trade routes.

The Greek geographers and historians refer to the city of Bost: Pliny, for example, refers to a certain Parabestan in Arachosia, which P. Daffina takes to be a misunderstood version of Bost. Similarly the geographer Isidor of Charax mentions the city of Biyt, which is also understood to refer to the city of Bost. Ptolemy calls the city Bigis, and describes it as being situated on the border of the satrapy of Drangiana.

In the medieval period, Bost was the second largest city of the province of Sistān, and it was the chief town of all the mountainous country of central Sistān, which included the two great districts of Zamin Dāvr and Rukhkhaj. Unlike Zarang, which is described in a fair amount of detail, as far as Bost is concerned, the information related by the early medieval geographers is rather scarce. Ibn Hawqal and al-Istakhri both mention that it is the largest city in Sistān after Zarang, and it is a stage (one day’s march) away from it. Most of their attention,
in describing Bost, is devoted to the fact that the local dynasty of Ṣaffarids were from this city, and therefore they give a short account of the four brothers who founded that dynasty. Both Ibn Hawqal and al-Istakhri mention, however, that the inhabitants of the city were affluent and were mainly engaged in trade with India. Although a fertile and wealthy city, its air is said to have been prone to epidemics. Nevertheless, the geographers stress the fertility of Bost’s hinterland that produced an abundance of products such as dates, loctus fruit, herbs, aromatics, grapes, figs, and plums. As elsewhere in Sistān, this agricultural prosperity depended in large measure on the water level of the river Hilmand and its canals. The town of Bost had a strong wall and a citadel in the inner city as well as markets that dealt with Indian goods. The existence of the citadel and the fortification wall, however, has been disputed because it does not appear in the major works of the geographers, but the archaeological findings substantiate the existence of a pre-Islamic citadel and fortification wall from the Parthian period.

Although there have been archaeological finds that date from the pre-Achaemenid period, most of such evidence goes back to Parthian times. Terry Allen gives a detailed description of the archaeological site at Bost and its findings. According to him, below the Ghurid and Ghaznehvid layers of structure, there is the Parthian layer, and in addition to that he identifies some of the Parthian walls and structures. It is also curious that the Sāsānīd and Seleucid layers are not as prominent as the Parthian one. Fischer has dated the ruins of structures from the Ghaznehvid and Ghurid periods in the vicinity of the city,

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74 Ibn Hawqal, p. 419; Al-Istakhri, p. 254.
75 Cited in Bosworth, 1994, p. 63.
which is evidence of its continuing prosperity, as the structures in questions happen to be palaces and a very elaborately decorated arch.\(^{78}\)

Unlike Bost, the city of Qandhār has not been mentioned by most of the medieval geographers. The ancient Greek and Roman sources often refer to the city by the name of the region, i.e. Arachosia.\(^{79}\) As Barthold argues, the reason for this neglect is that the name Qandhār in medieval times did not refer to the city, but the whole region, and the city in question could have been Tiginābād.\(^{80}\) In the 9\(^{th}\) century, the Arab historian al-Balādhuri mentions the city of al-Qandhār, however, this name seems to have fallen out of use during the 10\(^{th}\) -12\(^{th}\) centuries, and appears again after the 13\(^{th}\) century.\(^{81}\) Al-Balādhuri’s mention of the city is in the context of the Arab invasion of the province. He relates that Qandhār was reached from Sistān (i.e. the Zarang region) after crossing deserts, and the Muslims, he adds, attacked the place in boats from the river, destroying the great idol Al-Budd, doubtless a status of Buddha.\(^{82}\) However, we have no early accounts of the city, as the systematic accounts of the province by Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal omit this city altogether. Nevertheless, we know that the city stands on a fertile plane, watered by the Arghandāb River. To the south of the river lies the Dasht-e Margo, a waterless sand sea, and to to the north, the plain quickly gives way to arid hills. Therefore, Qandhār was an oasis town, and known for its fruit.


\(^{79}\) Barthold, p. 74.

\(^{80}\) Barthold, p. 74. The identification of the medieval city has been argued by W. Anderson, "Ibn Houkul’s Account of Seestan", Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, v. 21 (1852).


\(^{82}\) Le Strange, p. 347.
Given the fact that the name of the city changed, and there seems to be no
certainty about which of the cities referred to in this region is indeed the city of
Qandhār, the use of the medieval geographers account becomes problematic. On
the other hand, there has been a considerable amount of archaeological work on
the site of the old city of Qandhār, which is situated about 4 KM to the west of the
modern city. There is evidence, both literary and archeological, that the old city of
Qandhār has existed from pre-Achamenid times, as there are Vedic references to
Arghandab’s city and river.83 There are references to this city and the region in
Achaemenid sources, and the first coin finds are dated to the second century B.C.,
which coincides with the reign of Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian dynasties.84
For all the historical and pre-historic epochs, there have been massive
archaeological finds.85 Various archaeological finds and structures have been
studied and dated to different ages, starting with the Iron Age, and ending with
late Islamic period. It is interesting that as far as the city goes, one conclusion the
archaeologists have reached is that the city of Qandhār, unlike Zarang for
example, remained at the same location, and enjoyed continuous prosperity until
its destruction by Nāder Shāh in the 18th century.86

The relative antiquity of this part of the province, as compared to “Western
Sistān” finds reflections in the SCE. We know that prior to the establishment of
the province of Sistān, which in this case is synonymous with Zarang and its
vicinity, and the indigenous rulers of Sistān resided in Zabololestān. The founding

83 Ibid, pp. 206-211.
84 Ibid, p. 218. For a discussion of these dynasties see below (Chapter 2).
85 A. McNicoll, and W. Ball, Excavations at Qandhār 1974 and 1975, Bar International Series ,
(1996); S.W. Helms, Excavations at Old Kandhahar in Afghanistan 1976-1978, Bar International
86 An example of such continuity is discussed in the section on “the East wall”, where part of the
city wall is determined to have been of Achamenid origin. A. McNicoll, and W. Ball, Excavations
of Sistān, and the shift of power from Zabol to Zarang will be discussed in chapter 4.

3. Eastern Sistān: the cities of Ghazneh and Kābol

Situated in modern-day Afghanistan, and on the Indian frontier, the cities Ghazneh and Kābol have enjoyed a long history. The political situation of these cities and the eastern region of Sistān is not clear in pre-Islamic times. Although they were seen as regions dependent on Sistān in some instances, at other times they were seen as belonging to the ruler of Bāmiyān. Nevertheless, throughout pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, there were individual local rulers both in Ghazneh and Kābol, and the ruler of Kābol bore the title of Kābol Shāh. The existence of the title Kābol Shāh is also corroborated by the accounts of Arab conquests in this region: the first time the Arab army managed to cross the Hindu Kush, they concluded a peace treaty with the Kābol Shāh, whereby he was obligated to pay tribute. As a matter of fact, this region was incorporated into the Islamic domains only in the 9th century by the Šaffarids of Sistān. After the fall of the Šaffarids, there were local rulers in both cities again.87

The region of Kābolestān, which included the city of Kābol, appears frequently in the Shāhnāme as well as the Sistāni epics. Oftentimes, in these texts, the region was ruled by autonomous rulers, however, in many episodes of the Sistāni cycle, the relationship between the rulers of the region and that of the Kābol region is very complex. Ghazneh or Ghaznayn is mentioned briefly by Istakhri as a place with fine streams but few gardens. He adds that no city of this region is richer in

87 Barthold, p. 77.
merchants and merchandise, for the city was the “port” of India. Maqdasi mentions the region and names many of its districts and towns, however, the names have not been identified. He also mentions that all the country between the city of Ghazneh and and the city of Kābol was known as Kābolestān. Ghazneh was famously rebuilt by Maḥmud in the year 1024 C.E. after his return from India. At this time, the city reached its greatest splendor, which lasted for over a century. In the year 1149 C.E., the Ghurid Solṭan ʿAla ad-Din took Ghazneh by storm, and in order to avenge the murder of his brother by the Ghaznehvid ruler, Bahrām Shāh, he sacked and burnt the city. Ghazneh never recovered from this calamity. Later geographers, such as Mostowfi, mention Ghazneh as a small town, with a very cold climate, but give no further details about it.

Like Ghazneh, Kābol was also a place of commerce, as it was conveniently located for trade with India. The medieval geographers mention that it was frequented by merchants. The name of the chief city of the district was referred to as Jurwas as well as Kābol. There is little doubt that all the names refer to the same city, namely that of Kābol, however. The city was fortified by a famous Kohanhdiz or castle, and it was a great center for Indian trade. Indigo (nil) was brought to Kābol for export at the value of a million gold dinārs annually, and most precious products that were supposed to be exported to India and China were warehoused there. Maqdasi mentions it as being the center for the trade of myrobalan, which is the Greek name of the Indian fruits used in the manufacture of a condiment from a variety of spices. However, Kābol’s prosperity, which

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88 Istakhri, p. 251.
89 Le Strange, p. 348.
90 Mostowfi, p. 211.
91 Le Strange, p. 349.
depended on trade, did not last long. A century after Maqdasi’s visit, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (b. 1304 C.E.), who visited Kābol, says that it had then deteriorated to be a mere village, inhabited by a tribe of Persians known as Afghans.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
CHAPTER 2
THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF SISTĀN

As stated in the previous chapter, the history of settlement in the province of Sistān has been traced back to the pre-Achaemenid times. However, most of its pre-Islamic history remains obscure due to lack of historical evidence. This is not to say that we are completely left in the dark: the province and its rulers, at least since the Parthian period (320 B.C. – 224 C.E.), have played important roles vis-à-vis the Parthian and Sāsānīd central powers. Although the province’s political status must have changed during the span of over 800 years of Parthian and Sāsānīd rule, the political autonomy or semi-autonomy of the province remains discernable throughout its history. The same trend of autonomous local rule is apparent in Islamic times, and greatly distinguishes Sistān from other provinces. It was about 250 years after the Arab conquest in the year 861 that the first native Iranian dynasty was established in Sistān. The Șaffarids, who claimed to be the descendents of the pre-Islamic local rulers of the region, continued to reign in the region until the 15th century. The political autonomy of this region, therefore, provides one of the contexts for the examination of the Sistāni cycle of epics. It is above all in the context of its semi-autonomous political status, its geographical setting as borderland to India, and its complex relationship to the Iranian central power that one can appreciate the epics produced in the province, and which as will be argued below, offer an alternative narrative to that of the Iranian national history.
I. Achaemenid Period (553-330 B.C.E.)

Before discussing the few references to Sistān in the Achaemenid period, Sistān’s position in pre-Achaemenid times is worth mentioning. This discussion takes place in the context of the greater problem of identification of Zoroaster’s homeland. Based on the Avesta and other Zoroastrian texts, the Italian scholar, G. Gnoli, has put forward the hypothesis that Sistān, in a pre-Achaemenid times, constituted the sacred land to which the Zoroastrian tradition refers. Although this hypothesis has not been unanimously accepted by scholars of Zoroastrianism, it has not been convincingly rejected either. What is important for our discussion, however, is not whether the identification of Sistān with the homeland of Zoroaster is valid, but rather that it has been mentioned in the most ancient Zoroastrian works, as a region of EranShāhr. We know with certainty that the information in question pertains to the pre-Achaemenid period, and therefore, we can safely conclude that the province was an important part of Iranian territories in pre-Islamic times.

The province of Sistān, known then as Drangiana to Greek writers, appears on inscriptions of Darius I in Behsitun and of Xerxes in Persepolis. The inscriptions refer to a province of Zara(n)ka or Zra(n)ka. It has been argued that the name Drangiana or Zaranka had displaced the Avestan designation Haetumant.

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“land of the Hilmand River.” 94 The other mention of the province appears in Herodotus’ account, who describes the land of Sarangai as being the 14th fiscal-administrative entity of the Persian empire. This designation is different from that of Satrapy, and the system existed under Artaxerxes I (465-415 B.C) and not under Darius, therefore, Herodotus’ identification belongs to the time of Artaxerxes’ reign. During the Achaemenid period, Drangiana must have been a flourishing province, since according to Herodotus, it along with the other southern provinces brought in much higher tribute than other eastern provinces combined.95 This most likely included tributes from the northern Indian territories that were controlled by the Iranian kings. Aside from these meager references, not much else has been said regarding this province. However, this lacuna is to be understood in the context of the nature of the sources for the ancient Iranian history, which are dependent either on Greek accounts or on inscriptions, as no native Iranian historical tradition of antiquity exists. Therefore our knowledge of the province at this time remains limited to the above-mentioned evidence.

II. The Seleucids and Parthian Periods (330 B.C. – 224 A.D.)

Alexander conquered the region in his eastern Persian campaigns of 330 B.C.E. However he did not build an Alexandria in Sistān proper; his work of constructing a city was undertaken later, as he marched eastwards towards India.

95 Bosworth, 1994, p. 31.
It was in Arachosia, that he built an Alexandria, which according to Bosworth is the origin of the city of Qandhār.96

Not much is known about the southeastern provinces of Sistān and Arachosia during the Seleucid period (330-247 B.C.). This is to be expected, as the focus of the Greek historiography, which provides the only narrative source for this period, were the western provinces, where the seat of the Seleucid rule was located. We know, however, that after the retreat of Alexander, the eastern provinces were taken over by the Indian kingdom of the Mauryas.97 The information about the province of Sistān is limited to the occasional mention of a Greek army leader who passed through the region, which does not shed any light on the way in which the province was governed, or the nature of its relationship to the central power.

The Parthian period (247 B.C. – 224 A.D.) however, is a significant one for the province of Sistān, and we are given a relatively better picture of the political affairs of this province in these centuries. Sistān acquires its name during this period, as the Sakas, who had migrated to various locations in the Iranian plateau, finally settle in this region. Therefore, the province takes on the name Saka-stan, which later, during the Sāsānīd period is changed to Sāgistan, and later Sījistān, which is how the early Arab writers refer to it. In the last century, the history of the Parthian period has been subject to much study and revision. Like most of Iran’s pre-Islamic history, the Parthian period is only documented through

96 Ibid, p. 32. The city of Qandhār, as we have seen above, has pre-Achaemenid origins, and therefore, could not have been founded by Alexander. However, it is possible, given its notoriety and attractions as a great center for commerce, that Alexander would have founded a Greek settlement in or around the city.
Greek and Roman historical narratives, and archaeological finds, the most significant of which are coins. Another factor that adds to the difficulty of reconstructing Parthian history is the narratives’ limited and biased interest in Parthians. After all, they were the enemy, and one should expect much of the Greco-Roman sources to be tainted with bias and hostility. Modern European scholarship’s uncritical approach, driven by the field’s Eurocentric biases, resulted in perpetuating the biased images of the ancient historians.\footnote{For a discussion of this phenomenon in Parthian historiography see the chapter entitled “sources” in Wolski, J. L’Empire des Arscadies, 1993, Persian Translation ShāhanShāhi-e Ashāni, 1384.} However, as mentioned earlier, in the last twenty years, scholars have been revising the historical narrative of this period. Such studies have been made possible, not only as a result of recognition of the Eurocentric bias that has dominated the field, but also because of an increasing pool of archaeological finds. The studies have successfully challenged the notion of the Parthian period as a blank page in the history of Iran; as a matter of fact, several scholars have argued that the Parthians were the true inheritors/successors of the Achaemenids, and were actively involved in keeping the Iranian cultural heritage alive.\footnote{Ibid, see the introduction for a summary of the revisionist works.}

Recent archaeological finds have been an invaluable source for revisionist scholars, especially as far as the study of language and literature of the Parthian period is concerned. Based on these archaeological finds and inscriptions, it is clear now that the Parthian writing system was directly inherited from the Achaemenid chancellery script, with little or no influence from Greek. The most significant of these finds were dug up at Nisa. They constitute about 3,000 ostraca, most of which are concerned with topics such as the delivery of wine
from the local vineyards or the issue of food.\textsuperscript{100} Although they might not be revealing as far as Parthian literature is concerned, they yield a number of Parthian common nouns and proper names, some of the latter are decidedly Zoroastrian in nature. Part of the revisionist scholarship argument has indeed been the Parthians’ crucial role as the guardians of the Iranian cultural heritage.

Such archaeological finds have enabled scholars to gain glimpses of religious life under the Parthians, which substantiate the claim that the Parthian period was a great time for the cultivation and flourishing of Iranian culture, of which an important manifestation was the religion of Zoroaster. Among these finds at Nisa is also the oldest Zoroastrian calendar, which is one indication that Zoroastrianism was widely practiced in the Parthian realms. Recent scholarship has argued that the Avesta was widespread all over Iran from the Achaemenid period onwards, at the latest, and that some Parthian rulers played a role in the collection of scriptural texts and traditions, as the surviving scripture displays traces of various dialects and regional variations in the pronunciation of the sacred texts.\textsuperscript{101}

Parallel to the development of the religious literature, one finds that in the Parthian period secular literature, mainly in the form of oral epic poetry that flourished at the courts of the rulers, and assumed a central role in the life of the Parthian court. An important development of the epic took place in this period, as

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
the age-old stories of handed down through generations were interwoven with the stories of Parthian kings and princes.\textsuperscript{102}

Obviously, this literary development is particularly significant for the discussion of the SCE, since evidence indicates that much of the cycle of stories is either of Parthian origin, or has a distinguishable Parthian layer. The new line of research argues that the Parthians were very much Persian in language, religion and culture. One of their cultural endeavors, it has been argued, is their cultivation of epic poetry by adding to and expanding on the body of literature which was bequeathed to them. This is a point that we will turn our attention to later, however, for now, we shall review the history of the southeastern provinces in Parthian times.

As is also the case with the Seleucids, much of the history of the early Parthian empire remains unclear to this day. There exists no firm chronology of the Parthian rulers for about the first eighty years of their rule. It is only in the period between the reigns of Mehrdād I (Greek:Mithradates, 171-138 B.C.E.) and Mehrdād II (124/3-88/7 B.C.E.) that a clearer picture of the empire emerges. Mehrdād I is thought to have been the first Parthian king who showed a great interest in reviving Iranian cultural traditions.\textsuperscript{103} What is significant for the history of the southeastern provinces is that both Drangiana and Arachosia fell to the Parthian empire only during this time.\textsuperscript{104} Mehrdād I’s reign coincides with the beginning of the wave of Saka attacks from the northeast. Mehrdād I was forced almost throughout his reign, to keep up a two-frontier war: on the west there were

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, see chapter “New Iranism” pp. 111-137.
\textsuperscript{104} Herzfeld E.,”Sakastan”, Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran, Band IV, Dietrich Reimer/Ernst Vohsen: Berlin 1932, p. 39.
the Romans, and on the east or to be more precise, the northeastern side of the empire, where there were nomads, the most important group of whom were the Sakas.\textsuperscript{105}

The Sakas were an ethnically and culturally Iranian nomadic people, who, according to Bosworth, might have been the ancestors of the Afghans, the present-day speakers of Pashto.\textsuperscript{106} They began to impinge on Parthian borders during the reign of Mehrdād I, although, he was able to prevent them from flooding into the Parthian territories. It is important to note that the Sakas, like other nomadic people, were known to act as mercenaries as early as the Achaemenid times. It is in this capacity that they appear in the next episode of the Parthian history. Farhād II (Greek: Phraates, 139/8 – 128), the successor of Mehrdād I, faced a great Seleucid alliance in the west, and he attempted to employ Saka mercenaries in his army. However, the Sakas arrived only when the Parthian army had already defeated the enemy. When Farhād II refused to pay the Sakas their wages or employ them in another battle, they in turn fell to ravaging Parthian territory, and some are said to have penetrated as far west as Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{107}

It was perhaps towards the end of the reign of Farhād’s successor, Ardabān I (Greek: Artabanos, 127-124/3 B.C.E.) that the Sakas finally managed to migrate to the southeastern province of Drangiana. The change of the name of Drangiana

\textsuperscript{105} Schippman, K. \textit{Grudzüge der partischen Geschichte}, Darmstadt: 1980, p. 23. The motif of the two-frontier battles appears frequently in the SCE. I shall discuss this, and other reflections of the Parthian history in the epics from Sistān in the chapters below. (This was not really a uniquely Parthian phenomenon as we have examples of such wars in Sāsānid times, as well as previously in Seleucid times)


to Sakastan is attributed to this migration and settlement of the Sakas in this province. Unfortunately, the historical accounts do not offer any detail regarding this process. It is after this migration that the Sakas became an important factor in the eastern lands of the Parthian empire, not infrequently intervening militarily in Parthian affairs. The Parthian rule over Sakastan was reestablished only under Mehrdād II (124/3-88/7 B.C.E.). In addition to the southeastern provinces of Drangiana and Arachosia, the Sakas had also conquered the province of Taxila and much of Punjab. It is in these territories that we witness the rise of the autonomous Indo-Parthian dynasty, which ruled during the first century C.E. as the allies and equals of the Parthians. However, prior to the rise of this dynasty, the Sakas had already established themselves in the Punjab region. A fixed date is provided for the final restoration of Azes I (first Saka king) in the Punjab by the fact that he was apparently responsible for the inauguration of the so-called Vikrama era, which commenced in 57 B.C, and which is still in use in India today. The other major political power in this region belonged to the Parthian feudal family of Suren. The Sakas of India and the Surens seem to have had a complex relationship at this time, and oftentimes, they shared the same political interests. Herzfeld speculates that the Surens were the vassals of the Indian Sakas.\footnote{Herzfeld, 1932, p.98} Be that as it may, there is no doubt that at least before the establishment of the Indo-Parthian dynasty, these two groups had the same political goals. For instance, during the reign of Ordoes II (58/7 -39), the Surens and Sakas supported him against the contender to power, Mehrdād III, who had support in Media.\footnote{Ibid, p. 74.} In yet another succession dispute, the Surens supported Farhād III (71/0 – 58/7), who
had not been favored by the Atropat family (another powerful Parthian family). The Surens were successful in reinstalling Farhād III, after a short reign of Tirdād (Greek: Tirdates).

In the first century C.E., a Parthian feudal family, soon to be known as the dynasty of the Indo-Parthians, pursued the migrating Sakas up the valley of the Hilmand, and down into the Punjab. Stage by stage the Indo-Scythian empire of the Sakas was conquered by the advancing Indo-Parthians, upon the coins of whom appear names such as Gondophares, Orhagnes, Abdagases, Pacores and Sasān. Gundfarr (Gondophares) is the first Suren who minted his own coins. Most of the history of the Indo-Parthians remains obscure, and a simple chronology of these kings is far from clear in many cases. The most famous king of this dynasty, Gondophares, who appears in early Christian writings, ruled from 20-45 C.E.110

A discussion relevant to both the history of Parthians, and to that of the SCE is the question of these important Parthian families. Throughout pre-Islamic Iranian history, the noble families played a major role in the political life of the country. We have evidence of their existence from the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sāsānīd times. What is significant and unique to the Parthian period, however, is that the Parthian feudal families continued to exercise power not only during Parthian times, but also all the way throughout the Sāsānīd period, up until the Arab invasion. The Parthian feudal families had the unique position of having their own armies, which was not the case with their predecessors.111 The question of the political status of these feudal noble families has been raised by revisionist scholarship. This approach calls attention to the fact that the Greco-Roman

111 Ibid, p. 54.
authors were not familiar with the social institutions of the Parthians and did not particularly concern themselves with these topics, as their interest was mainly focused on the relationship of the Roman Empire to the Parthians. Therefore, attempting to find the equivalent or parallel western social institutions and patterns will not enhance our understanding of the Parthian social and political life. Furthermore, Wolski for example, suggests that instead of attempting to decide whether or not the Parthian Empire was a real empire or a feudal state, one should attempt to understand the phenomenon of feudalism in Iran in its unique context.\footnote{Wolski, J. “Die gesellschaftliche und politische Stellung der großen Parthischen Familien, \textit{Tyche}, v.4, 1989, pp. 221-228.} Be that as it may, we have clear indications that these families exercised extensive political power. The struggles between the feudal rulers and the king became more frequent in the first century B.C.E., and continued to weaken the empire until its fall in the middle of the third century C.E.\footnote{Shippmann, K. \textit{Grundzüge der Parthischen Geschichte}, Darmstadt : Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980, p. 86.}

The Surens were one of these important feudal families whose sphere of influence was Sakastan. Herzfeld argues that the Suren family was one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful of the Parthian families. He remarks that the Suren were the closest to the king of the Arsacid line and sided with him in succession battles, which usually involved members of other noble families. Additionally, the Suren family, according to Greek accounts, was in charge of a royal institution that was responsible for crowning the king.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, p. 73.} It is worth mentioning that Rostam, the most celebrated Sistâni hero of the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} tradition bears the epithet of crown bestower (\textit{Tāj-Bakhsh}). This has been grounds for various studies, including Herzfeld’s, which have attempted to identify the
historical character of Rostam.\textsuperscript{115} Regardless of the validity of such claims, there is no dispute about the existence of a powerful, autonomous feudal power in Sakastan for the most part (if not all) of the Parthian period. In a decisive battle against the Roman army, Plutarch describes the Parthian army as being led by a person from the house of Suren, his description is striking and has been the subject of much commentary:

> For Surenas was no ordinary person: but in fortune, family and honour the first after the king; and in point of courage and capacity, as well as size and beauty, superior to the Parthians of his time. If he went only on an excursion into the country, he had a thousand camels to carry his baggage, and two hundred carriages for his concubines. He was attended by a thousand heavy-armed horses, and many more of the light-armed rode before him. Indeed his vassals and slaves made up a body of cavalry little less than ten thousand. He had the hereditary privilege in his family of putting the diadem upon the king’s head, when he was crowned. When Orodes was driven from the throne, he restored him; and it was he who conquered for him the great city of Seleucia, being the first to scale the wall and beating off the enemy with his own hand. Though he was not then thirty years old, his discernment was strong, and his counsel esteemed the best.\textsuperscript{116}

Attempts have been made to identify this powerful Suren with one of the epic characters,\textsuperscript{117} but regardless of the validity of such identifications, the passage confirms the powerful status of the Suren family. A member of the family not only led the Iranian army, but they also restored the Parthian power to

\textsuperscript{115} These studies will be discussed at length below where I examine the Parthian reflections of the Sistâni cycle of epics.


\textsuperscript{117} Herzfeld E.,”Sakastan”, \textit{Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran}, Band IV, Dietrich Reimer/Ernst Vohsen: Berlin 1932.
Orodes, and they held the hereditary privilege to place the diadem on the king’s head. Given that the province of Sakastan was ruled by this very powerful family throughout the Parthian period, and given that epic poetry was flourishing at the courts of the various Parthian families, it seems likely that there is a link between the family of Suren and the Sistāni cycle of epics. Furthermore, as we shall see, the Sistāni cycle of epics were produced and preserved for the most part during the Parthian period. If this inference is correct, it would not be hard to imagine that the feudal family of Suren indeed patronized these epics, and the storytellers in turn added stories about the feats of their patrons into their repertoire of stories.\footnote{M. Boyce discusses the evolution of the epic poetry at the Parthian courts, see: Boyce,1980, p. 1156-7. Also see: Herzfeld, *The Archaeological History of Iran*, London: Pub. for the British Academy by H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1934, pp 62-63.}

The powerful family of the Surens continued to rule independently until the Kushān invasion of the region. At this same time the nomadic central Asian people, the Tochari and their associates the Asiani, were pressing south from Tukharistan though the passes of the Hindu Kush into the Kābol valley, and by the beginning of the first century A.D. were breaking out onto the Punjab plain. Shortly after that they established the Kushān Empire, which soon expanded on both sides of the Hindu Kush. For more than a century, this empire became the most powerful military and political force in Asia. To the south, the Kushāns thrust forward into the north Indian plain. They established their centers in Peshawar and Mathura (Muttra). To the north, the sphere of influence of the Kushān Empire reached the Chinese borderland in which their wanderings had
begun. There is no doubt, that the Kushān empire absorbed the provinces of Sakastan and Arachosia into its realms.

III. The Sāsānīd Period (241 - 651 C.E.)

By the first century C.E. the provinces of Sakastan and Arachosia became part of the Kushān Empire. What remains uncertain, however, is how this region was ruled after the advent of the Kushān Empire. It is clear that the Indo-Parthian Empire, led by the Surens of Sakastan, fell to the Kushāns. However, given the expanse of the Kushān Empire, it is not hard to imagine that the Surens continued to rule the province of Sakastan as the vassals of the Kushāns.

During the reign of Ardeshir I, Sistān was ruled by a local Parthian prince, Ardeshir, “King of the Saka”, whose recognition of the Sāsānīd suzerainty was a mere formality. Sasānids appointed governors over the province of Khorāsan with the title of Khushānshāh. Actually, many of the early Sāsānīd kings held the title of Khushānshāh prior to enthronement. Similarly, the ruler of the province of Sakastan was given the title of Sakānshāh, and the first person to bear this title is Narseh (r. 293-302). The first time the province is mentioned is in the Roman historians’ reports of the battle of Carus (282/3). During this time the Persians were engaged in the succession struggle of Hormozd’s revolt in Sistān against his brother Bahrām II (276- 293). Bahrām II eventually defeated the people of Sistān and appointed his son Bahrām III to the province, giving him the title of Sakānshāh. Next time Sistān appears in history is during the reign of

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120 Christensen, Peter. The Decline of Iranshahr, p. 229.
121 Christensen, 1944, p.74.
Shāpur II (309-79), as a military force against the Albanians, Chionites and presumably the Kushāns.122

As we have seen, there is no clear picture of the political status of the province for the most part of the second century CE. Most likely, the province continued to be ruled by members of the Parthian house of Suren, and the Sāsānid appointments of heir apparent, as Sakānshāh must be considered an attempt to incorporate this province into the empire and to curtail the power of the local nobility. The only references to the province are mainly in the context of the early Sāsānid history, and the struggles for control of the province. However, despite records of their attempts, we do not have any evidence that the Sasānids actually succeeded in their centralization efforts. As a matter of fact, the lacunae of the sources as regards this province, especially for the last 150 years of the Sāsānid period, along with other evidence, suggests that political power fell into the hands of the local nobility, who must have been for the most part members of the Suren family.

The last Sāsānid heir apparent with the title Sakānshāh is Hormozd III (r. 457-5 C.E.), and we do not have any information as to who was ruling the province of Sistān for the one and half centuries that elapsed between the rule of Bahrām III and Hormozd III.123 But what we do know of the general affairs of the Sāsānid state is that after Shāpur II, the empire was ruled for the most part, by “figures of little significance, and so the death of Shāpur marks the beginning of a period of close to 125 years in which the king and the grandees of the empire vied

122 Marquart, J., Iranshahr Nach der Georgraphie des Moses Xorenaci, p. 36.
123 Christensen, 1944, 74.
for power. The great nobility, who allied themselves with the clergy, became, once again, a danger for the power of the royalty.” 124

Therefore, it is safe to assume that after the first period, during which the Sasānids tried to exert their power over Sīstān and other eastern provinces, the power fell back into the hands of the local Parthian nobility. We also know that the family of Suren continued to play a significant role throughout the Sāsānid period. One indication of the powerful status of the Surens was the appointment of a Suren by the name or title of Pahlav to the grand vizirate (vĀzarg farmadar) during the reign of Bahrām V (420-38 C.E.). 125

Another factor that becomes evident from the meager references to this province is that it was a great supplier of mercenaries throughout the Sāsānid period. At the same time, the members of the Suren family were important army commanders and leaders for most of Sāsānid history. Christensen argues, based on this, that the families of Karen and Suren, were second in importance only to the Sāsānid kings. 126

Another point worth considering in the latter part of the Sāsānid period is the influence of the Hephthalite kingdom in northern India. The Hephthalite grip over northern India was eventually relaxed, and their power decayed; however, in bordering areas of Iran and India, i.e. the southern and eastern regions of present day Afghanistan, Hephthalite kings survived as local princes. 127 With the defeat of the Sasānids during Piruz’ reign (459-84 C.E.), much of the eastern region of

124 ibid, p. 260.
125 ibid, p. 81, The title pahlav was a title of the great Parthian families and simply meant Parthian, but in this case, the person in question is known to us by this title only.
126 Christensen, 1944, p. 104.
127 Bosworth Sīstān Under the Arabs, From the Islamic Conquest to the Rise of the Saffarids (30250/651-864), IsMEO, Rome, 1968, p. 34.
Sistān, namely Archoasia, Bost and Arokhj, along with Zabolestān, were lost to the Hephthalites, and they were integrated back into IranShāhr during the time of Khosrow I after he defeated the Hephthalite empire. There is evidence that during this period Sistān was used as a base for warding off the Hephthalite armies. A reflection of this struggle of the inhabitants of Sistān with the Hephthalites is reflected in one of the later Sistāni epics, the *Shahryārnāmeh*, a point to which we shall return below.

There is evidence that in the latter part of the Sāsānid period, the position of governor became de facto hereditary. This indicates that the central government had limited control over the province. From Khosrow II (591-628) onward, no Sāsānid coins were found in Sistān, an indication that the forces of centralization had not been effective in incorporating this province into the Sāsānid Empire, and that the political power was in the hands of local nobility, who were indisputably from the family of Suren. In the time of Khosrow II, Sistān’s governor was Bakhtiyar b. Shāh Firuz, who traced his genealogy back to Rostam himself. Like his renowned ancestor, the adventures and exploits of Bakhtiyar are the subject of an epic poem, which one might consider to be the last specimen of the Sistāni epic poetry. It was Bakhtyār’s grandson, Rostam b. Azādkhu, who according to *Tārikh-e Sistān*, was the governor of Sistān, while his son, Iran b. Rostam, ruled as the “Shāh of Sistān” when the Arabs appeared in the mid-7th century. As

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129 For more on the *Bakhtyārnāmeh* see Ouseley, W, *Bakhtaynama a Persian Romance*, Lanarkshire: W. Burns printer, 1883.
130 *Tārikh-e Sistān*, p. 8.
Peter Christensen observes, as late as the 10th century, there were people among the nobility of Sistān who claimed descent from Bakhtyār.\(^{131}\)

To sum up, the traditional geographical seat of the Parthian noble house of Suren, who in Parthian times ruled the province of Sistān, Arachosia and parts of India, remained for the most part in the hands of the same family, despite the centralization attempts of the early Sāsānid kings. The role of this powerful family in the Sāsānid times needs to be studied further; however, despite the scarcity of literary and numismatic sources, one can conclude that this region, for most of the Sāsānid period, was ruled by the local nobility who held autonomous political power. The Sasānids must have had, therefore, limited control over the affairs of the province. This is certainly the case for the late Sāsānid period, especially from Khosrow II’s time onward, as no central Sāsānid coins are found in Sistān for this period. The lack of Sāsānid coins, and the presence of local coins, must be taken into consideration, along with Ṭārikh-e Sistān’s report that during this time Bakhtiyar, a descendent of Rostam was the king of the province. What is clear is that the political power was in the hands of the local nobility, who saw themselves as the legitimate rulers of the province.

IV. From the Arab Conquest to the rise of Șaffarids (650- 861 C.E.)

When the Arabs reached Sistān in 650/651 C.E. they met fierce resistance from the local governor (marzbān), who must have been Iran b. Rostam, the descendent of Bakhtyār. According to the 9th century Arab historian, al-Balādhuri,

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\(^{131}\) Christensen, P. *The Decline of IranShahr: irrigation and environments in the history of the Middle East, 500 B.C. to A.D. 1500* / Peter Christensen, Copenhagen : Museum Tusculanum Press : University of Copenhagen, 1993, p. 231.
the Arab armies entered into a peace treaty with the annual tribute of 1,000,000
*dirhams*, but otherwise they left the rule altogether to *dehqans*.132

From the beginning of their expedition, the Arabs hesitated to settle in Sistān and establish garrison towns, because of the inaccessibility of the region, and the fact that the southern part of the great desert of Lut had to be traversed for the armies headed to Sistān. Despite all its disadvantages, the Arabs were forced to take this route, and the second expedition into Sistān took place only after the Arabs had subdued Kermān and settled there. The Marzbān or Ispahbad or king of Sistān was Iran b. Azādkhuh b. Bakhtyār.133 *Tārikh-e Sistān* gives the account of this expedition, led by ar-Rabī‘, in detail.134 His tenure of power in Sistān lasted less than two years, which led to renewed expeditions and heavier terms for the peace treaty.135 Arab governors came out from Basrah periodically to collect tribute, usually supported by an army. But the country was, according to Ya‘qubi, in a state of constant rebellion until the time of Ziyād b. ʿAbīhi (670). Bosworth argues that after the initial twenty years of conducting plunder raids, the Arabs changed their policy to permanent settlement in the east. However, he is quick to point out that this idea was slow to take root there.136

Arab armies were also sent out into the eastern territories of Zamin Dāvr, Rokhj, and Zabolestān. There, a king with the title of Zunbil who ruled from Ghazneh. Around 670 C.E., Ziyād b. ʿAbīhi sent an official, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, with the task of regulating the collection of taxes, in order to lay out the financial basis

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132 Christensen, Peter, p. 229.
133 See the discussion of the titles of this person in the section above.
134 *Tārikh-e Sistān*, pp. 80-83.
136 Ibid, pp. 21-22.

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for a garrison town, like Marv. According to *Tārikh-e Sistān*, Sistān, or to be more precise, the area of Zarang was to be used as the basis for further conquests to the east, as the original expedition into Zabolestān had failed. This plan, however, did not materialize, as the warriors refused to stay in Sistān and fight in the wild mountains of Zabolestān. Therefore Ziyād and al-Hajjāj’s plans for Sistān failed. The ʿUmayyad governors posted there had little effective control. 137 With no permanent Arab settlements, the process of conversion in Sistān is estimated to have been slower and limited to the upper classes of the urban center of Zarang. 138 More recent studies have called into question the traditional view that conversion to Islam in general happened rapidly and on a massive scale. 139 Sistān makes a great case for this argument as there is ample evidence that Zoroastrianism persisted in the region for a long time after the advent of Islam. In *Tārikh-e Sistān*, for example, in the account of Sistān’s revenue system, there is an item called *mal-i adharuyi*, which is thought to be the payment for the land of the fire-temples. 140 Another piece of evidence from the same source for the persistence of Zoroastrianism is when the anonymous author mentions that the Karkuy(eh) fire temple remained intact up until his own time (11th century). It was venerated by local Zoroastrians, and it was thought to have been blessed by Garshāsp himself. 141 At times, there were attempts by Muslim rulers to enforce stringent and oppressive policies towards the adherents of older faiths. For example, the governor of Basra, ar-Rabiʾ b. Ziyād, who had jurisdiction over Sistān,

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137 Christensen, Peter, p. 231.
141 *Tārikh-e Sistān*, p. 213
extinguished the sacred fires of the Zoroastrians in Fārs. However, as Bosworth points out, conditions were different in the peripheral land of Sistān: the lack of Arab settlement and relatively few converts did not permit the Arabs to engage in similar activities, as Sistān must have been a stronghold of more ancient faiths, particularly Zoroastrianism. Indeed, there is a long passage in Tārikh-e Sistān that seems to indicate local resistance to such policies. The passage is unique, and does not occur in any of the Arabic sources of the conquest of the region:

“The coming of ʿUbaydallah b. Abi Bakra to Sistān in the year 51”

He (Ziyād b. ʿAbihi) ordered that when he (ʿUbaydallah b. Abi Bakra arrived in Sistān, he was to kill Shāpur, the chief Herbadh, and extinguish the sacred fires of Zoroastrians. The dihqāns and Zoroastrians of Sistān sought him out and told him that his course of action could only drive them into revolt. Then the Muslims of Sistān protested to him, “Did our Prophet, God’s prayers be upon him, or the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, ever do anything like this against a community with whom they had made a peace treaty, that we should in fact put this command into practice? ... They wrote a letter to the Caliphal court setting forth this view. The reply came back, ‘The order should not be carried out. These people are in a treaty relationship (muʿahad), and that place of worship (the fire-temple of Zarang) is their own property. They say that they worship God, and that they hold this fire temple and this khurshid (site for solar worship) not as places which they adore as such, but just as we have the Mehrābs of mosques and the Kaʿba.

It is apparent that Zoroastrianism had strong enough support in the region that the policy of destruction of fire-temples could not be carried out. There is

143 A discussion of the local historiography of this region will follow in the next chapter.
evidence, furthermore, that Zoroastrianism and other ancient faiths survived long after the coming of Islam to this land. The lack of rapid and massive conversion is of significance in the context of the preservation of the pre-Islamic heritage of the region. The subject of this study, namely the Sistâni cycle of epics, is indeed part of this pre-Islamic heritage, which continued to live in the memory of the people of this region. One could speculate that the epics might have even gained a greater significance as, faced with foreign occupation and active assault on their ideological values, the people may have become consciously tempted to linger in the past in order to revive its glory, albeit in the form of stories. As we shall see below, this is particularly likely in the case of the epics, as they were understood to be the history of the people Sistân. Therefore, given the circumstances in Sistân, it comes as no surprise that the epics have been preserved and that the characters of the epic gain wide popularity throughout the medieval period. It is also important to remember that the local pre-Islamic nobility of Sistân continued to play a politically significant role for at least the first two centuries after the advent of the Arabs. The epics, after all, celebrated the times and adventures of Sistâni heroes, who were considered to be the ancestors of the local nobility of Sistân.

Instead of “intruding upon the traditional autonomy” of Sistân, and pressured by both the local nobility of Sistân on the one hand and Zunbil, the king of Zabolestân on the other hand, the Arabs never gained control of the province during the ʿUmayyad period.\footnote{Christensen, Peter, p. 231.} It was the local princes of Hephthalite origin, who survived in the mountainous region of Zabolestân, who carried the title of Zunbil. This title recurs in many Arabic sources to refer to the local rulers of the eastern
region of Sistān for widely-spaced periods from the early ʿUmayyad period to the caliphate of Ḥarun ar-Rashid (r. 786-809 C.E.), and indicates that the kings of Zabolestān enjoyed a great deal of political power throughout the first two centuries after the coming of the Arabs. The Zunbils, along with Kābol Shāh, the local rulers of Kābolestan, displayed a firm resistance to the Arab raiders:

Down to the early Ẓaffarid period, and perhaps beyond (for the century preceding the rise of Ghaznevids is a particularly dark one in the history of eastern Afghanistan), they were resolute foes of the Arabs...In this inflexible opposition to the Arabs lies the historical significance of these local rulers: they blocked the Arab advance through southern and eastern Afghanistan to the Indus valley, whereas northern Afghanistan and the upper Oxus valley were, after a struggle, secured for ʿĪsām during the first half of the 8th century. The Arabs were not infrequently able to mount expeditions as far as Ghazneh, Kābol, and Bāmiyān, but these were essentially plunder and slave raids. On more than one occasion, the Zublis turned the tables and advanced on Bost and Sistān, threatening the whole Arab position there. The shift of power in the middle of the 8th century, from ʿUmayyad to ʿAbbāsid, did not bring about a fundamental change in the way Sistān was governed. Like their predecessors, the ʿAbbāsids failed to control Sistān, even when al-Ḥaʾīm ruled the eastern half of the Empire from Marv (809-817). According to both Tārikh-e Sistān, and al-Balāḏūrī, the ʿAbbāsid’s attempts to collect taxes were met with sharp local resistance, and the semi-autonomous Tāherid who ruled the east from 821 to 873 were equally unsuccessful at subduing

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147 Bosworth, (1968), p. 36.
the region. 148 Tārikh-e Sistān explains that part of this difficulty is to be attributed to the Kharajites who had acquired a stronghold in Sistān’s rural areas, and regardless of who was to rule in the capital city of Zarang, they staunchly and consistently refused to pay taxes. The Kharajites were the original “third party” who did not recognize either CAli or MuCawiyya. They refused to recognize the legitimacy of the CUmayyads and CAbbāsids. According to their doctrine, only the most pious and orthodox Muslim deserved to be elected as caliph, and an unjust caliph’s removal by force was justified. Therefore, the Kharajites were ideologically opposed to paying any taxes to the illegitimate caliphate. According to Tārikh-e Sistān, a major Kharajite revolt led by Ḥamzeh b. ʿAbdallah, also known as Ḥamzeh b. Adharak, disturbed the whole region and found much popular support. Reconstructing the account of the revolt mainly from Tārikh-e Sistān, Christensen’s clear and concise description of it deserves to be quoted in full:

The Tarkih-e Sistān says that his (Ḥamzeh b. ʿAbdallah’s) career as a rebel in fact began when he killed a tax collector in his native village. In his continuous campaigns, Ḥamzeh subsequently executed any tax collector who fell into his hands. The patricians of Zaranj, nurturing no sympathy for the Kharajites, certainly continued to recognize the suzerainty of the Empire, but Ḥamzeh resolutely prevented the transfer of any tribute from Sistān. The Kharidjites themselves took nothing, says the Tārikh-e Sistān, but got what they needed by raiding the heathen lands of Ghur and Sind. Nor after Ḥamzeh’s death, in 829, did the representatives of the Empire and their allies in Zaranj succeed in breaking Kharajite control of the rural districts.149

148 Christensen, Peter, p. 231.
Therefore, in less than fifty years after the ʿAbbāsid’s unsuccessful attempt to rule Sistān, the Kharajite revolt delivered a blow to the ʿAbbāsid appointees from which they fully recovered. The caliphal armies were unable to dislodge Ḥamzeh, and he remained in power until decades later, when he was removed by another powerful local group, the ʿayyārs under the leadership of Salih b. An-Nadr.\textsuperscript{150} The popularity of Kharajism, which seems to be unique for the eastern caliphate during the ʿAbbāsid period, is explained by Bosworth as the result of the Kharajites’ successful attempt to gain indigenous support for their cause. In Sistān, he argues, Kharajism was able to transform itself from a politico-religious movement with a strong ethnic Arab element, into one with concerns for the local population. Above all, the Kharajites’ rejection of the unjust and excessive taxation found strong local support, as it was the local population that was afflicted by these tax policies of the central caliphate.\textsuperscript{151} As mentioned earlier, Ḥamzeh’s revolt weakened the already unstable ʿAbbāsid authority, and the same trend continued under the subsequent Ṭāherid rule of the region.

It was not long after Ḥamzeh’s revolt, when the ʿAbbāsid authority in Sistān was permanently and completely removed. At this juncture in the region’s history the ʿayyārs played an important role for the subsequent history of the region. ʿayyārs were groups or bands of urban militia, who existed throughout the eastern part of the Islamic world. The origin of the social institution of ʿayyārī is generally accepted to be Iranian and pre-Islamic; however, there is no definitive study to back up this claim. The phenomenon of ʿayyārī is unique and despite apparent similarities to some western social institutions, there exists no parallel to

\textsuperscript{150} Bosworth, (1968), p. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, p. 87.
it in the western territories. The ʿayyārs were not conventional warriors: they employed tactics such as trickery and disguise, digging tunnels to access impenetrable spaces, breaking into palaces and prisons, theft, etc. to achieve their goal of establishing justice. Despite their modes of operation, the ʿayyārs adhered to a set of ethics. Furthermore, the institution of ʿayyāri seems to have been highly organized and structured.152

It was the rise of ʿayyār power in Bost under the leadership of Šaleḥ b. an-Naḍr, and eventually Yaʿqub b. Layth, the founder of the Ṣaffarid dynasty, that swept away the unstable Arab power in the region. The Ṣaffarids were the first Iranian dynasty to rise up after the fall of the Sāsānid Empire. The Ṣaffarids (861-949 C.E.) and the Malik of Nimurz (949-1542 C.E.) who claimed to be their descendents, continued to exert their autonomous power over Sistān for seven centuries to come. Undoubtedly, during the span of this time, there were attempts to bring Sistān under the control of the various central polities that sprang up in the region; however, until the middle of the 16th century this goal could not be achieved. Only the absorption of the region into the Ṣafavid Empire in the 16th century ultimately resulted in the irrecoverable decline of the region.

To sum it up, one could say that the major identifiable factor in the political history of this turbulent period is the struggle to retain an autonomous political status. As we have seen, this struggle was indeed fruitful, as various local groups, such as the pre-Islamic nobility, the local rulers of Zabolestān, the Khawārīj, and all the ʿayyārs were strong political players in this period of Sistān’s history. Two major factors contributed to the strength of the local powers:

152 For a complete review of the literature on ʿayyār, as well as a new definition of this social institution see: Gazerani, Saghi, “Thugs, Thieves and Tricksters: The concept of ʿayyāri in the medieval Iranian literature”, M.A. Thesis, The Ohio State University, 2003.
lack of significant Arab settlement and the absence of rapid and mass conversions to Islam in this period. Thus, this frontier region continued to enjoy a degree of independence from the central power that is rare and is perhaps only matched by the region of Ṭabarestān. The lack of settlement and conversion also translates into the safeguarding and preservation of indigenous cultural traditions, a significant part of which is represented in the stories narrated to us in the Sistāni cycle of epics.

V. The Șaffarids of Sistān and the indigenous rulers of Sistān (861-1542 C.E.)

Given the significance of the Șaffarids as the first indigenous Iranian dynasty, scholars from the middle of the 19th century onward have shown a great interest in their rise to power. However, it is the works of C.E. Bosworth that shaped and defined the history of this period. This is partly due to his advantage of having had access to the two local histories of Sistān, Tārīkh-e Sistān and Ilhya al-Muluk. Since the history of the Șaffarids and the other lines of indigenous power in Sistān have been reconstructed by Bosworth in detail, I will provide a mere sketch of the events in the next seven centuries.

Bosworth considers the first two of the four independent lines of kings, who claimed descent from Yaʿqub to be the real Șaffarids, while he refers to the

last two, due to a lack of evidence connecting them to the Šaffārids, the Maliks of Nimurz (the kings of Nimurz). Although what these lines of rulers of Sistān are called does not have significant implications for our discussion, one should remember that the reason why the third and fourth line of independent rulers were considered to be Šaffārid is that they traced their genealogy back to Yaʿqub. While this is in no way proof of the existence of this link, the political message encoded in this act of legitimization is a significant one, as it proclaims the Šaffārids as the just and legitimate rulers of the region. It is an attempt not unlike the attempt of the founder of the Šaffārid dynasties, to connect oneself to the legendary kings of Iran by claiming the Sāsānid king Khosrow Parviz as one’s ancestor. This piece of political propaganda, therefore, underlines the significance of the Šaffārids in the historical memory of the region.

As mentioned earlier, Yaʿqub al-Layth’s (861-79 C.E.) rise to power must be viewed in the context of the internal political affairs of the province. The Abbasid grip on Sistān was unstable and for the last fifty years before the advent of the Šaffārids, virtually non-existent. In addition to its unyielding and defiant attitude toward the Arab invaders, which left them only partially and sporadically in control of Sistān, the central polity’s control over the province was completely lost as a result of the Kharajite activities in the region. Although he mentions all of these factors, Bosworth chooses to discuss the Šaffārids’ rise to power in the context of the weakening and the decline of the āʾAbbāsids after the reign of al-Maʾmūn (786-833 C.E.). ¹⁵⁵ This consideration, however, is only worthwhile if the premise of decline is true. In other words the question arises as to whether or not the āʾAbbāsids ever had a firm grip over the eastern provinces of the caliphate.

While such discussion is beyond the scope of this study, one should just be mindful of the various revolts in the eastern Iranian provinces in the first two centuries of ābāsid rule, in addition to the lack of the appointed governors, and the constant political upheaval in the Iranian provinces. Therefore, a new and revised look at the history of the early Abbasid caliphate, especially in the eastern provinces, would shed light on the conditions of the provinces and their relationship to the caliphate, and questions the notions of centralization and decline which have been taken for granted by many generations of scholars.

Thus, it is more useful to consider Yaʿqub’s rise to power in the context of the local politics of the province of Sistān. As mentioned earlier, in the two hundred years after the arrival of the first Arab armies in Sistān, none of the caliphs or their appointees could subdue the region, or gain a firm control of power. Instead, the local Iranian nobility held on to their power for many decades at the very least. Later, the rural Kharajite revolts disturbed the region so thoroughly that at no point could the ābāsids claim to have a firm control of the region. The next, and one of the most important indigenous factors for the successful rejection of any ābāsid control of the region were the urban āyyār groups, who supported Yaʿqub in his struggle for power, and they continued to support the various other Šaffarid rulers in the face of foreign invaders. Supported by the āyyārs of Zarang, Yaʿqub was able to defeat both the ruler of Zabolestān, the Zunbil as well as the prominent Kharajite leader of his time. Within a short time, not only did he consolidate his power over the province, but he also started sending his expeditions into the western provinces of Kermān and Fārs within the next few years. His expeditions into eastern Afghanistan were successful, and he was able to impose his rule over areas that the Arabs, despite their many attempts
over two centuries, could not conquer.\textsuperscript{156} It was not long before Ṣaffarid power was established in Khorāsan as well, ousting the Tāherids who had ruled this important province as the vassals of the ʿAbbāsids. Terrified at the growing might of the Ṣaffarids, the ʿAbbāsid caliph of the time, al-Muʿtamid (r. 870-892 C.E.) denounced Yaʿqub’s annexation of Khorāsan. However, threatened by the Ṣaffarid armies who had invaded Khuzستان and were aiming for Baghdad, the caliph retracted his condemnation.\textsuperscript{157} The Ṣaffarids, therefore, kept on expanding and annexing territories during Yaʿqub’s life, so much so that by his death, he had built an empire which stretched from Kābol and Bāmiyān in the east to the borders of Khuzestān and Jebāl in the west. His brother and successor ʿAmr (896-902) conquered all of Khorāsan, and Ṣaffarid influence was also felt in Baghdad and the holy cities of Arabia.

A significant factor in considering the Ṣaffarids is their pro-Persian sentiment. In the case of Yaʿqub, given his attempt to build an empire, his policy of continuous expansion goes hand in hand with political propaganda which attempted to portray him as the legitimate heir of the Sāsānid kings and the reviver of their glories. As mentioned before, Yaʿqub traced his genealogy back to the Khosrow II. This is especially curious, given that for a ruler from Sistān, it would have been perhaps more persuasive to be a descendent of the house of Rostam. After all, even the last king of Sistān during the Sāsānid period claimed to be a descendent of the local noble house of Rostam. However, had Yaʿqub claimed to be a descendant of Rostam, he would not have had the same claim over the other provinces and eventually the empire that was a replica of the Sāsānid Empire.

\textsuperscript{156} Bosworth, 1975, 112.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid, 116.
\textsuperscript{158} Bosworth, 1994, 10.
Therefore, it is clear, that his ambitions were directed towards establishment of a great Persian empire. In addition to the Säsänid genealogy, there exists a *shu‘ubi* poem¹⁵⁹, attributed to Ya‘qub that substantiates his ambitions of reviving the Persian Empire.¹⁶⁰

The period of empire building and expansion for the Şafarids, however, came to an end with the capture and execution of ‘Amr. His successors, by the time of the first Sāmanid invasion (911 C.E.), had slowly lost all of the provinces of the empire with the exception of Sistān, the adjoining regions of Zamindāvr, Zabolestān and Kābol. The Sāmanid invasion of Sistān was successful only for a brief time. A major revolt supported by the ‘ayyārs of Sistān ended in the reinstalling of Amir Ahmad who was a Şaffarid. This marks the rule of the second line of Şaffarids, who consolidated their power over Sistān and its eastern territories until the Ghaznehvid invasion of Sistān in 1003 C.E.¹⁶¹

Ghaznehvid and Seljuq rule in Sistān lasted about 70 years, at the conclusion of which the third line of Şaffarid rulers assumed power. Termed the Nasirds, the first of these local rulers claimed to be a descendent of ‘Amr b. Layth.¹⁶² Bosworth reconstructs the political history of the region in detail, and there is no need to repeat the details of their internal and external political

¹⁶⁰ The *shu‘ubi* movement was a literary movement which started in the 9th century. It was Persian intellectuals' response to the dominating Arab culture, which dismissed Iran's pre-Islamic heritage as a legacy of paganism. The shūbi writings have almost exclusively been written in Arabic verse, because this is was the appropriate medium of the challenge, and knowing Arabic better than the Arab was a sign of the Iranians' intellectual superiority. For more on the shu‘ubiyyah movement see R. Mottahedh, "The *shu‘ubiyyah* Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, v. 7, n. 2, 1976, pp. 161-182. For more on Ya‘qub’s pro-Persian sentiments see Stren, S.M., Bosworth, C.E. (editor). "Ya‘qub the Coppersmith and Persian national sentiment.", *Iran and Islam, in memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky*, Edinburgh, 1970, pp. 535 – 55.
¹⁶¹ Bosworth, 1975, 130-5.
¹⁶² Bosworth, 1994, 368. For a detailed account of Sistān’s political history under Ghaznehvid and Seljuq’s see: Bosworth, 1994. 365-387.
struggles here. What is important for our purposes is that this line of local rulers continued to reign as independent local rulers, and that they resisted various Saljuq attempts to absorb them into their empire.

The fourth line of the Šaffarids of Sistān, also known as the Mehrābānids, rose to power a decade after the Mongol invasion, which had devastated the region. The history of this period is mainly preserved in İlya al-Muluk, one of the two local histories of Sistān. Bosworth reconstructs the political events of this period, which end with the transfer of power to the Şafavid Qezelbāş in mid 15th century. Consistent with the pattern of autonomous rule, the history of this period is defined by the central powers’ lack of ability to seize complete control of the region. It was only in Shāh Tahmāsp’s reign that the region became truly integrated into a larger polity; a change that spelled decline and eventual disaster from which it never recovered.

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CHAPTER 3
THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE PROVINCE OF SISĀN

As we have seen in the previous two chapters, the province of Sisān expanded, at various periods of time, over an extensive geographic area, stretched from the borders of Kermān province, encompassing the southern half of modern Afghanistan, and sometimes extended into Northern India. In this study, so far, the attempt has been to highlight the unique and sometimes extraordinary characteristics of the province, which in turn would justify its possession of an indigenous historiography. As we have seen the province is among the most ancient provinces of Iran. More importantly, as illustrated in chapter 2, throughout its history it was ruled by indigenous, and often autonomous rulers. The ancient irrigation system of the region, which was the main factor for its continuous flourishing, had to have been built and maintained by the local rulers. The ancient technologies of building and maintaining hydraulic structures, as well as managing the sand storms, must have been handed down through generations, and implemented at the hands of the local rulers.

All of these factors, but especially autonomous political rule, helped shaped a distinct Sistāni identity. There is a two-sided relationship between political autonomy and the Sistāni identity. Politically autonomous regimes played a major role in strengthening aspects of this local identity through propaganda, patronage of the arts and legitimization attempts which consisted of creating
genealogies traced back to the mythical founder of the region. In turn the identity provided the impetus for an establishment and the upkeep of a politically autonomous status. This dynamic probably existed in Sistān. After all, it is the only region whose myths and legends and histories have become significant enough, that despite their unmistakably Sistāni origin, they have become an integral part of the grand narrative of Iran’s history. This narrative became a chronological and continuous work as the result of several centuries of both conscious and unconscious attempts to create an uninterrupted account of the past. During this process, stories from the SCE entered the national narrative, and eventually became the best known and most celebrated episodes of the Shāhnāmeh. However, in this study, the epics will be considered first and foremost as the indigenous literary product of the province of Sistān, which like the Shāhnāmeh, are the depository of all the knowledge about the past that seemed worth remembering. Given Sistān’s politically autonomous status vis-à-vis the central powers, it is important to examine closely episodes in which the SCE’s narratives diverge or diametrically oppose that of the Shāhnāmeh. Such alternative narrations of events are invaluable, since they provide the local rendition of the events, and hint at the existence of a multitude of narrations, each perhaps supported and sponsored by a certain local polity. Such narrations, however, are lost with the exception of SCE, as during medieval times the narrative, at least in its written form, was more or less crystallized by Ferdowsi. Furthermore, with the ancient Iranian nobility gradually fading away from the political scene, there was no need for the cultivation of the alternative narrations. The SCE is unique in this sense as well, as it provides an opportunity to examine some of these alternative narratives.
It is in this context that SCE will be considered as one of two histories of the region. The consideration of epics as history, however, needs some justification, as in this case, it is clear that we are for the most part dealing with legendary stories of a fantastical past. The theoretical implications of such an approach will be discussed, and instances of how the epics chose to depict historical events will be illustrated, as an abundance of such depictions are scattered throughout the corpus of SCE.

Aside from the SCE, Sistān during the medieval period produced two local histories. The genre of local historiography was flourishing in the eastern Islamic lands during this time, and many regions produced works that are broadly categorized as local histories. An examination of these works, however, reveals that they are different from works of the same genre in different localities with respect to both their form and their content. The uniqueness of Sistān’s local historiographies will be discussed, and as well as the dynamics between their narration of the ancient period of the Sistāni history and the epics.

I. Tārīkh-e Sistān and Ihya al-Muluk: Sistān’s two local histories

Studies of local historiography have raised many questions as to how it can be defined and classified. The difficulty of this task is a result of the existence of a variety of topics and perspectives represented in the local histories of Iran. They include descriptions of physical features of the locality and its distinctive virtues (fazā’īl), foundation narratives and myths, the biographies of local notables, and accounts of the first mosques and other monuments that have been

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constructed or endowed at different times, and elements of dynastic history. None of the surviving local histories contains all the aforementioned elements, and hence the difficulty of classification arises, or definition of a genre of local historical writings. Most scholars would now agree that local historiography is not a genre, but as Humphreys puts it, a focus determined by geographical parameters, governed by a sense of space rather than time or topic. Similarly, Lambton in her survey of local histories observes, rightly, that it is misleading to generalize, both about the contents of such histories and about the particular circumstances in which they were written. “Each region and each town must be looked at individually.” Therefore, it is clear that other than a regional focus, the local histories do not contain either structural or thematic uniformity that would enable one to speak about a genre of local historiography. Indeed, the local histories of Sistān main preoccupation is to narrate a continuous political history of the region from its founding by Garshāsp up to each author’s respective time. As we shall see below, both local histories of Sistān lack information sometimes found in other local histories, such as that concerning the settlement of the first Muslims in the region and biographical information.

The surviving local histories of Sistān are Ta’rikh-e Sistān (henceforth TS) and Ihya al-Muluk (IM). The first of the two local histories is the work of at least two unknown authors. The first author completed his work some time around 1053. There is a lacuna from 1062 covering seventeen years, and then the work is

\[\text{165} \] Humphreys, “Ta’rikh (b) The Central and Eastern Lands 950-1500,” Efi, 10: 277-78.  
\[\text{167} \] The only scholar, who attempts to define such genre is Pourshariati in “Ta’rikh-e Bayhaq”, Iran Studies, 33, 2000, pp 133-164. However, her argument of existence of a link between local histories and the shu’abya movement is untenable.
continues in a distinctively different style from the main body of TS.\textsuperscript{168} The other local history of Sistān, like TS is largely a dynastic and political history. As a matter of fact, IM picks up the historical narrative where TS had left off in the early 14\textsuperscript{th} century. The unique surviving manuscript of the work identifies the author of Malek Shāh Ḥosayn’s b. Malek Ghiyās al-Din Moḥammad b. Shāh Maḥmud. He belonged to one of the great families of Sistān, and claimed to be a descendent of the Ṣaffarids. The work was completed in 1619, at the Ṣafavid capital of Isfahan. It is important to note that there have been many more local histories of Sistān that have not survived, mainly due to the post-Ṣafavid decline of the region. This we know because Malek Shāh Ḥosayn’s, the author of IL, mentions them among other histories of Sistān. The contents of these histories are unknown and their authors are largely not identified. Among these local histories of Sistān is one in Arabic by Abu ‘l-Abdallah, which was translated into Persian by Abu Moḥammad, and two other Persian ones, one of which was by Malek Shāh Ḥosayn’s ’s maternal grandfather or ancestor (jadd).\textsuperscript{169}

As Bosworth observes, Tāriḵ-e Sistān is a secular history, and the authors were not concerned with offering the names and stories of the region’s religious scholars, the Companions of the Prophet, the building of the first mosque or other religious endowments. Many other local historiographies do have a focus on the presence of Islam in their region, and their aim, essentially is to assign their region its proper place in the Islamic empire. This kind of local historiography, in addition to the sections mentioned before devotes most of its space to the biographies of Muslim scholars who reside or resided in the region. This, is not

\textsuperscript{168} For a detailed discussion of the two local histories see: Bosworth, “Sistān and Its Local Histories”, Iranian Studies, 33, 2000, pp. 31-43.

\textsuperscript{169} See the discussions of Malek Shāh Ḥosayn’s sources in Sotudeh’s introduction to IL , p. 17.
the case with the local histories of Sistān. Instead, the authors of *TS* attempt to set their narrative in the framework of political history of their region. The historical narrative of the region begins with the birth of the prophet Moḥammad, and even some of the wonders of the region are cited from the *Isrā’īliyāt* or stories from Judeo-Christian popular tradition for pre-Islamic times. There is, therefore, a clear attempt to reconcile the indigenous pre-Islamic past with that provided by the Islamic civilization. The indigenous pre-Islamic view, however, mainly due to its narrative style, is the one that resonates with the reader, and is the one that will be the focus of our discussion. The peculiarity of Sistān’s local histories, however, is that they are political histories of the region from the mythical times of their founding until the lifetime of the author. Most other local histories do not attempt to establish such continuous and independent historical narratives. The only region whose production of local histories parallels Sistān is the region of Ṭabarestān. Given the geo-political position of Ṭabarestān, and the fact that it had enjoyed autonomous rule for many centuries, it comes as no surprise that histories of the region, like Sistān’s histories, would attempt to anchor its historical narrative as independent, albeit parallel, to that of mainstream Islamic history. The other aspect of the local histories of Sistān is that Sistān has its own indigenous mythological line of ancestors and founding characters independent of the legendary kings of Iran. In other local histories, the founding of the region is usually attributed to one of the mythological or legendary kings from the Pishdādyān or Keyanid dynasties such as Fereydun or Kay Khosrow. This is not the case with Sistān as these ancestors are none other than heroes of the SCE, and

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170 The region of Ţabaristan has the most prolific and continuous body of local histories, the last of which was written in late 19th century. For more see: Melville, C. “The Caspian Provinces: A World Apart Three local histories of Māzandarān”, *Iranian Studies*, 33, 2000, 45-91.
as we shall see, their deeds and adventures are what constitute the pre-Islamic history of the region.

For the purposes of our discussion, we can divide *TS* into two sections; one that is concerned with the pre-Islamic or antiquarian history and motifs, and second that the historical narrative of the region from the advent of Islam to the authors’ respective lifetimes. The same kind of structure is apparent in *IM*, whose first section was largely based on *TS*. Our discussion of these works will be concerned with their first part, containing the pre-Islamic history of the region, and the way in which it is connected to the SCE.
II. The SCE and the pre-Islamic history of Sistān

The pre-Islamic account in *TS* begins by reference to the book of Garshāsp, which relates the founding of Sistān by Garshāsp along with his many adventures.\(^{171}\) As we shall see in the following chapters, the stories of the Sistāni heroes that were versified in a manner similar to that of Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāmeh*, existed in prose form, and are thought to have been part of Abu Muʿayad al-Balkhi’s great *Shāhnāmeh*.\(^{172}\)

The very first story, therefore, is the founding of the region by its mythological ancestor, Garshāsp. It is important to note that Garshāsp, or Keresaspa is one of the most celebrated of Avestan heroes. He fights the dragon, Azi Dahaka, in one of the most important battles in the final war between the good and the evil spirits. In the Avesta, he is the hero of innumerable adventures and fabulous exploits, and he is the son of Thrita of the family of the Sāmas, a man with curly hair, armed with a mace, the strongest amongst men, and the brother of the famous legislator Urvakhshaya.\(^{173}\) Some time during the course of history, this Avestan hero becomes the ancestor of the Sistāni kings and heroes.\(^{174}\)

The pre-Islamic history of Sistān, therefore, begins with the story of Garshāsp. After the story of how Sistān was founded, a brief account of Garshāsp’s adventures and exploits follows:

Garshab’s story is a long one and is related in its entirety in the book dealing with him. So for the sake of brevity, the few observations which follow must suffice. One instance

\(^{171}\) *TS*, p. 1.

\(^{172}\) I will address this phenomenon in detail in chapter 5, when discussing the sources for the medieval epic in general.


\(^{174}\) For the genealogy of the Sistāni heroes see the genealogical chart see Figures 1 and 2.
of Garshāsp’s greatness and valor occurred while in the service of Žahhāk, who, at the time, was only fourteen years old. By the order of Žahhāk, Garshāsp slew single-handedly a dragon as big as a mountain. Afterwards, also by order of Žahhāk, in the company of a few Zavolis (inhabitants of Zabolestān) and Iranians, he went to the aid of the Bahrām of India, and he captured and killed Behu together with two million soldiers and a thousand elephants, and succeeded in pacifying the Indians and their lands. Garshāsp then went on to Ceylon, and there seized Nasrin and killed him. He returned along the edge of the Indian Ocean and saw the islands and various other marvels. Afterwards, he went to the West and was engaged in other important activities until Afridun – his cousin– rose up in rebellion and imprisoned Žahhāk. Afridun then sent a messenger, recalling Garshāsp, who reported with his grandson, Narimān ibn Kurang ibn Garshāsp, to see Afridum. Afridum came to receive him and placed Garshāsp upon the throne, and had Narimān sit on a golden throne before him. Afridun then sent Garshāsp to China in order to take prisoner the emperor of China, who had not accepted his rule. Garshāsp carried out his orders, and sent back to court with Narimān, the emperor, together with a thousand elephant-loads of gold and jewels. Garshāsp, himself, staying in China, and dispatched a letter to Afridun, saying: “I have captured and sent on the emperor and will remain in China until his return. I would advise you to give him a robe of honor, and pardon him and permit him to return because he is a man of stature, and aside from him, there is no one else who could rule the country.” Afridun accepted his advice, whereupon Garshāsp returned to the court of Afridun, and proceeded to go to Sistān, where he was king for nine hundred years. During the period of his rule, at no time was Sistān subject to Žahhāk. What is more, Zabol, Kabok and Khorasan, which had been in the possession of Žahhāk, were turned over to Garshāsp, and Afridun increased the number of his provinces.\footnote{TS, pp 5-6, TS, English Translation, pp 3-4.}

The passage begins by referring the reader to the book of Garshāsp. This indicates that in the author’s contemporary milieu, the story of Garshāsp was known and available to his audiences in the written form. Nevertheless, he gives a synopsis of what one would find in the book of Garshāsp. The adventures of Garshāsp related here correspond completely in their overall plot to the story of
Garshāsp as narrated by ʿAsadi Ṣūsī in the *Garshāspnāmeh*. As expected, ʿAsadi Ṣūsī’s work contains much more detail not mentioned in this short rundown of Garshāsp’s adventures, but what remains significant is that all the events related in *TS* are to be found in the *Garshāspnāmeh*. This implies that the source for both versions, i.e. that of *TS* as well as *Garshāspnāmeh*, was this book of Garshāsp, which was a repertoire of all the stories about Garshāsp. Another significant implication for the purposes of our discussion is that *TS* considers this story as the ancient history of the region of Sistān, and that is why the works begins with Garshāsp’s story. As we have seen, however, the author of *TS* assumes that the audience knows, or has access to the longer version of the story, contained in the book of Garshāsp. This is where the full-length version of this chapter of Sistān’s history would be found. We have established that this book of Garshāsp served as a source for our surviving *Garshāspnāmeh*. Therefore, the story of Garshāsp as we find it in ʿAsadi Ṣūsī’s *Garshāspnāmeh* must be very close to the story found in the book of Garshāsp. Thus, one can postulate with a degree of confidence that at the time of the composition of *TS* and for many more centuries that followed, the stories of Garshāsp, and as we shall see the other heroes of Sistān, were considered the pre-Islamic history of the region, and no distinction is made between them and historical events by the medieval writers.

The author of *TS* then gives a short list of rulers of Sistān after Garshāsp. It is here that we encounter most of the heroes of the SCE such as Sām, Zāl, Rostam, and Farāmarz. The author, again for the sake of brevity only makes cursory remarks about Sām, and Dastan (Zāl), and informs the reader that their stories are contained in the *Shāhnāmeh*, although he does not mention which one, and specifically refers to Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāmeh* as containing all the Rostam stories.
In addition to these, he mentions a twelve volume *Akhbar-e Farāmarz*. He feels he is not compelled to repeat the ancient history of this region in his book, since the stories are well-known, and by his time were at least preserved in a prose form. The author points out that Rostam’s progeny continued to rule the region until the arrival of Islam. The last major figure around whose deeds and adventures the last of the SCE revolves is Bakhtiyar, the ruler of Sistān during Khosrow II’s reign. When the Arab armies arrived in Sistān, it was Rostam, the grandson of this Bakhtyār that faced them.

If we look back at this section of TS, which is the most important part as far as the ancient history of the region is concerned, what we will find is essentially a reference list of the stories found in the SCE, whether included in the *Shāhnāmeh* of Ferdowsi or not. The reason why this section is so short is that it is a mere list of references, and the reader is either aware of the stories, or can easily read them. Nevertheless it is the epics, the stories of the adventures of the Sistānī heroes and kings that are considered to be the pre-Islamic history of the region.

The rest of the pre-Islamic section of TS includes fantastical stories that have been told about Sistān from the corpus of *Isrā‘iliyāt*, or Judeo-Christian popular prophetic stories, in an attempt to link the region’s pre-Islamic history to the Islamic narrative of the pre-Islamic past. Then follows a section entitled, “things that are in Sistān and not other regions”. This latter section contains stories of the wonders (‘ajāyeb) of Sistān. It is noteworthy that the author of the book of Garshāsp and the great prose *Shāhnāmeh*, Abu al-Mu‘ayadal-Balkhi is

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176 TS. p. 7.
177 For the history of transmission of the SCE and their sources see chapter 5.
178 Ouesely, W., *Bakhtyārnāmeh: a Persian Romance*.
also the author of the work ‘ajāyeb al-barr wa-l bahr (Wonders of the land and the sea). There seems to be a connection between the genre of ‘ajāyeb and the SCE. For our purposes, the main narrative of the pre-Islamic past, the local history informs us, must be sought in the epics of the region.

This, indeed, is also the case for the other local history of Sistān. Malek Shāh Husayn, the author of IM, is even more conscious of the role of the stories of Sistān’s heroes as the histories of the region’s past. In order to give a clear narrative of the region is history from its founding to present, he organizes most of the sections that do not fit into his chronological framework, such as the wonder stories or the prophetic stories, in a preface. The preface includes a discussion of the religion of the inhabitants of Sistān, followed by a long section on the fadā’il, or the superior qualities of Sistān. Most of the material in this section comes from TS; however, the author has added information such as names of important religious scholars of Sistān, as well as some lines of panegyrical and lyric poetry.

He, then begins the historical narrative with the story of Garshāsp, which is very similar to the one quoted above from TS. Only here, he mentions Asadi Ṭusi’s Garshāspnāmeh explicitly, and adds a detail or two to the story. In his attempt to present his audience with a continuous history of Sistān, he narrates or gives reference to stories of the Sistāni heroes in some detail. Given that by the time Ferdowsi wrote the Shāhnāmeh and what was included in it were fixed, and the prose versions of the stories were not as readily available certainly not in the form of the great Shāhnāmeh of Abu Mo‘ayyad the author feels the urgency to

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180 I will discuss this connection below in chapter 4.
181 IM, pp. 23-4.
include them in his historical narrative. His justification for including the stories of Rostam and his progeny is that they are known and narrated by the inhabitants of Sistān, and in some instances they appear in alternate sources. For example, he relates the story of Rostam and Kok-e Kuhzād, and justifies the inclusion of the story in his history as follows:

Since the poet of Persian history, Firdowsi-i Tusi (may God have mercy upon his soul), did not believe [in the authenticity] of the story of Kok, his adventures have not been recorded in the Shāhnāmeh. However, this story is famous in Sistān, and I have studied a manuscript in Persian and Pahlavi language relating it, and therefore, even though I doubt its authenticity, I am obliged to relate it here.

Then the author proceeds to narrate this story, and many episodes of various epics such as the Borzunāmeh and Farāmarznāmeh, as well as the story of Āzarbarzin, Farāmarz’s son. A careful study of these episodes will reveal that the basic plot of the story is essentially the same, in both the epics and the local history. Following the story of Āzarbarzin, the author of IM gives us a list of rulers of Sistān after him, all of whom are his descendents or otherwise related to his family. He continues this list until he reaches the time of Khosrow II, which coincides with the reign of Bakhtyār in Sistān. This is the most complete existing list of the rulers of Sistān, and most of the names of the rulers that appear after Āzarbarzin are not to be found in any other source. Furthermore, the author attempts to place the some of the rulers of Sistān in the Islamic (Judeo-Christian) narration of the pre-Islamic past.

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182 For Abu'l Mu‘ayyad and his Shāhnāmeh-ye Bozorg see chapter 5, section II, part a.
There remains no doubt, therefore, that in that milieu, both the author and the audience of these local histories regarded the stories of ancient kings and heroes of Sistān, which were available both in prose and verse throughout the medieval period, as the ancient history of the region and they did not distinguish between these stories and other forms of historical writing. As mentioned before, the most extensive and detailed narrations of these stories are contained in the SCE, and therefore, a closer examination of these epics as the ancient history of the region will follow.

III. Narratives of Iran’s Pre-Islamic history

Pre-Islamic Iran did not produce what modern scholarship would regard as historical narratives. Instead, it turned out a vast amount of mythological and legendary stories throughout the ages. It is a curious question for a number of scholars: why and how is it that Iranian culture has failed to document and record the rise and fall of the mighty and powerful empires such as the Achaemenid and Parthian empires. How did the culture fail to take notice of great figures such as Cyrus the great and Darius I? It is after all, only thanks to the ancient Greek accounts that we know of the existence of these empires and the men who led them. Scrutinizing the Persian sources of the Greek writers, especially those of Ctesias, Shahbāzi argues that during the Achaemenid period, the Persians’ method of preserving the memory of their ancestors assumed three forms: oral traditions, saga illustrations, and written records. Written records were limited, and to our knowledge they were not in narrative form, and saga illustrations are pictorial representations of some of the historical records. The bulk of memories, however, were preserved in the oral tradition:
The old custom of preserving the memories of renowned men and nations and embellishing them with fabulous and often dramatized tales was kept up by the Achaemenid Iranians, especially by the Persians. As in the old days, the backbone of oral traditions was poetry, wherein the exploits of ancestors were told to encourage similar deeds among the contemporaries.\textsuperscript{185}

It was by the means of this oral tradition, that by the end of the Achaemenid period a rich oral literature had been created. This body of literature included a large measure of historical tales woven around Iranians and their neighbors. The supernatural elements of Iranian folklore were also prevalent in this literature, and the magical elements were often blended with non-Iranian materials. Like their successors, the creators of this oral literature were not concerned with geographical and historical accuracy in the way that modern historians are, and the custom of attributing the old story to a new hero was very common. The description of the Achaemenid oral tradition, in content, form, and mode of transmission is consistent with the way memory was preserved in later ages.\textsuperscript{186}

Iran’s memory of the past was preserved in a multitude of stories that were passed on from one generation to another throughout the pre-Islamic period. During this time, the stories inevitably underwent changes in both their content and their form and language, but it is safe to assume, given the conservatism of the culture, that their core remained the same. This is true of individual stories or narratives. However, by the time that we have written forms of the stories in the medieval period, the stories have been organized in a continuous narrative from the creation of the world to the Arab invasion. This is the structure of Ferdowsi’s


\textsuperscript{186}Ibid, p. 5.
Shāhnāmeh, which is the most important, and the best-known repository of these stories. It has been suggested, however, that these stories, were organized in this structure of a continuous narrative in fairly late in the pre-Islamic period. The scattered legendary tales of various kings and heroes were compiled in a coherent and chronological framework. The organization of this narrative is attributed to the Sāsānīd king, Khosrow I (531-79 C.E.).\textsuperscript{187} The impetus for compiling a continuous narrative must be regarded in the context of a growing “nationalistic” outlook of the Sāsānīds, a political manifestation of which is Khosrow’s centralizing efforts.\textsuperscript{188} Faced with various internal and external threats, Khosrow created and propagated a national ideology in which the kingship and Sāsānīd dynasty are portrayed as legitimate heirs of the mythical and legendary kings, and central to the very idea of Iran as a geographical and political entity.\textsuperscript{189}

The account of the Sāsānīd kings, as preserved in the Khodāynāmak, therefore is the outcome of this politically and ideologically driven attempt. Although no book by this title survives the Sāsānīd period, significant, if the whole of it, have been included, in different redactions, in the works of early Arab and Persian historians.\textsuperscript{190} A closer look at the content of the Khodāynāmak reveals that rather than being a new genre, it is the Sāsānīd addition to the mythological and legendary tale of various kings in Iran. Therefore, even though it has been accepted by scholars as history (while the epics have not been considered to have

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Gnoli, G. \textit{The Idea of Iran: An Essay on its Origins}, Rome, Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente ; Leiden, Netherlands : E.J. Brill , 1989. See the last chapter of this work for a detailed account of the way in which the Sāsānīan dynasty used “Iranism” or the idea of Iran to legitimize itself. Also see Christensen, A, \textit{Les Keyanids}, chapter 3 for the formation of what he calls the national tradition during the Sāsānīan period.
\item For a discussion of the Khodāynāmaks see Nöldke, \textit{The Iranian National Epic}, pp. 21-31.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
any historical value), in its preoccupation with themes and its coverage of events the *Khodāynāmak* tradition follows the Iranian storytelling concepts found in the epics. A cursory look at the Sāsānid section of the *Shāhnāmeh*, which is believed by most scholars to have been based on the Sāsānid *Khodāynāmak*, reveals that the preoccupation of the tradition is far from providing factual information. This section is replete with romantic, fantastical and *andarz* (advice literature or mirror for princes) episodes. In the Sāsānid section, we find themes and motifs from the epic tradition. There are too many of these motifs and themes, but here follows a random list: Shāpur II sewn in a donkey’s skin who is freed by empress’s servant, Bahrām Gur finds Jamshid’s treasure, romantic episodes of Bahrām Gur and Khosrow II, Bahrām Gur taking the crown from between the lions, his fight against a rhinoceros and a dragon, Bozorgmehr’s *andarz* to Anushirvān and many other episodes where he is the protagonist. The reign of the most interesting Sāsānid kings Bahrām Gur, Anushirvān, Khosrow Parviz, contains elements most obviously identifiable with epic motifs. Had the storytelling tradition not been interrupted and completely transformed by the advent of Islam, it is logical to assume that the only stories that would have been remembered in the long run would have been the stories of the reign of these three kings, while the rest, for the most part, would have been forgotten, as they are uneventful and uninteresting. The Sāsānid stories, however, have more detail, and more direct references to historical events. That is due to two reasons, first the Sāsānid dynasty had consciously created a continuous and chronological narrative of itself as a means

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191 I will discuss the question of *Shāhnāmeh* sources in chapter 5.
192 As we shall see in chapter 4, when the literary themes and motifs of SCE are discussed, this particular motif seems to be of Sistānian origin.
193 Bozorgmehr’s advice to Anushirvān seems to have been incorporated into the the *Khodāynāmak* from a Sāsānian *andarznāmeh* whose Pahlavi text survives.
for political legitimacy. The second reason is that the Sāsānid stories as preserved in the *Khodāynāmak* reach us in their unchanged form as the established process of storytelling in Iran was interrupted. Had the storytelling process continued mainly in its oral form, the uninteresting episodes of the Sāsānid history would have been erased from the repertoire of the storytellers. But instead, with the composition of the *Shāhnāmeh*, and because of the exceptional status it acquired, the stories were crystallized and remained unchanged.

Therefore, it is safe to say that the entire corpus of historical literature produced in pre-Islamic Iran, and here I am using the term historical in broad sense, is in the form of stories. These stories are preserved first and foremost in the national epic of Iran, the *Shāhnāmeh*, while the SCE constitute the second largest corpus of literature pertaining to Iran’s pre-Islamic past. In looking at the SCE as a historical narrative, the aim here is not to identify its characters, geographical locations and events with events known to us from other sources. The positivist historiography which still dominates the field of Iranian history (and Middle Eastern history) has attempted this to some extent. The goal is, first and foremost, to get a glimpse of what and how the culture preserved its past, and to speculate about how the medieval audience related to their past and participated in creating it. Where there are clear indications of historical events, these events as portrayed by the epics will be discussed in order to gain an understanding of the sense of historicity prevalent in them.

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194 In the next chapter, I will discuss the relationship between the two bodies of epic, and how parts of the SCE were included in the narrative of the *Shāhnāmeh*, while major parts were excluded.
195 For a discussion of the relationship between Mazandarn and India see Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

REFLECTIONS OF THE PAST IN THE SCE

So far I have been referring to this genre of literature as epic while at the same time claiming that these epic stories function as the ancient history of the province of Sistān. The identification of this genre as epic must be understood as a broad and loose categorization, for although decidedly heroic in structure and content, as we shall see, this genre constitutes a hybrid discourse containing reflections of past events. The way in which one should approach this body of literature as historiography is rather problematic, however. On one hand, there would be no point to treat the epics as a mere mine of information, because removed from its generic context the extracted historical information constitutes nothing but tidbits of random facts. On the other hand, one cannot ignore that some of the episodes are based on real historical events, if one is claiming the genre to be historiography. After all, for it to be historical discourse there is a presumption of the existence of the reflection of past events in the body of literature. Therefore, the discussion of episodes and stories for which historical events are primary referents is necessary to conclude that this genre is historiography. That is why there will be an attempt to identify such stories and episode and their historical referents. At the same time, juxtaposed with the discussion of the reflections of past in the story will be an analysis of generic
conventions that define the story and construct the context for way the past is remembered and is reflected upon.

The most compelling evidence for the argument that the epics were considered histories is that throughout the ancient and medieval period, the audience of the epic, and the cultural milieu which produced them, considered them to be the repository of the past. The acknowledgement of epic as history was shared among both those who contributed to the production of the epics (i.e. poets, narrators, storytellers), and the audience they targeted. There is ample evidence that both in the Shāhnāmeh and the SCE this indeed was the perspective on the epics and history. One of the places where this attitude towards history and epic is articulated explicitly is in the following passage from the Shahryārnāmeh:

The skillful, wise and attentive narrator of the story said that I have been in this world for a long time, and all along I had wished to gather the histories of the kings, so that I might have a discourse on them. I gathered many things from all corners, and my wish was granted. I acquired histories of the ancient kings, as well the anecdotes of the noble men. Among them, I found stories of Rostam’s strength, and Zāl’s character, and of the noble Gudarz and Giv, and of the farr and strength of Esfandyār, and the Zoroastrian king Goshtāsp, during whose reign the prophet Zoroaster appeared.196

The word used to refer to history in this passage is Tārikh197, and therefore, there can be no doubt that for the narrator, all the materials in the epics, including those which we have classified as myths and legends, are part of this history.

It is evident that reflections of the past were preserved in this genre by weaving them together with much heroic and legendary material as well as motifs

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196 Forāmarznāmeh, pp. 234-5. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, passage 9.
197 Both in Arabic and Persian Tārikh means history. For a discussion of the word and its usage from the medieval period onward see “Tārikh”, IE.
from popular literature. It is evident that to the medieval audience regarded the entire genre as history, and did not differentiate between the real and imaginary, or realistic and generic material that is contained in the stories. We can see that the interest of epics is to narrate a story that expounds on certain experiences of past events, which were crucial for the process of identity construction. It is perhaps more useful for us to view these reflections of the past in the context of the genre which provided the blueprint, and defined to a large extent the kind of information about the past that could be reflected in the stories. As we shall see, these stories are not concerned with providing us with dynastic information: they neither identify the polity, which they describe, nor do they attempt to establish a chronology. Nevertheless, the genre does accommodate reflections of the past to be preserved in it, but it does so within the confines of its heroic discourse.

I. India in SCE: a landscape oscillating between the real and the imagined

In the SCE India is the fantastical and mysterious land of demons, magicians, and all kinds of strange, supernatural beings, and a place where one encounters beings of unparalleled knowledge and wisdom. At the same time, India is the “real” land which many of Sistān’s rulers had been familiar with due to their political and military exploits. The attempt here is not to separate the imaginary landscape from the real, but to illustrate how this genre allowed the audience to experience both landscapes simultaneously in the stories told about the Sistāni heroes. In order to illustrate this, first I will discuss India as the land of heroic trials. As we shall see, the stock motifs that constitute a rite-of-passage for the hero do take place exclusively in India. At the same time through a certain literary device of including real names of places and people this battleground of heroes
becomes a historical landscape, where the narration of episodes, which reflect the past becomes possible.

In order to be considered a hero, the Sistāni hero must fulfill certain expectations of the audience, which are established by the genre itself. This is of course not confined to the Sistāni or Iranian tradition. This is a widespread phenomenon in Indo-European heroic literature, and there have been many studies which outline the difference stages of the hero’s life, and different themes and motifs associated with that.\textsuperscript{198} Although there are strong parallels between the various epics traditions when it comes to the construction of the heroic image, there are, at least in the case of the SCE, the way these motifs are specific to the genre. Here, instead of dwelling upon the general parallels with the Indo-European epics, we will discuss in what way some of these defining motifs have been made specific to this genre. One of the ways in which this genre is different is the connection that has been established between the land of India and these motifs.

Going to India is absolutely imperative for a Sistāni hero, for it is in India through a series of adventures and trials that the heroic stature is conferred upon him. The first of these adventures is dragon slaying. This, of course is a very common motif in the Indo-European heroic literature. What is interesting here, however, is that in order for a hero to slay a dragon he must first go to India, because this is where the dragon is. For the three most famous heroes of the Sistāni tradition, Garshāsp, Rostam, and Farāmarz this is their first feat as a hero, and it is the beginning of a series of adventures in India. In Garshāsp’s case, it is

his first assignment given to him by Žahḫāk, at the completion of which he is named jahān pahlevān (world hero).\textsuperscript{199} The dragon who is a menace to the population, and who remains undefeated prior to Garshāsp’s arrival, is in India, and therefore, Garshāsp heads to India to slay the dragon after which he has to face a series of difficult tasks.\textsuperscript{200} Rostam also has to go to India to slay the dragon, Babr-e Bayān. As is in Garshāsp’s case, slaying the dragon is Rostam’s first heroic task. Actually, at the time Rostam is a young boy of 14, and is forbidden by his father to go to India. Rostam, however, thinks that his father is no match for the dragon; therefore, he disguises himself and forces his foster father, Gudarz to go along with him. When he finally defeats the dragon, the Indian king asks him to marry his daughter. He marries the daughter on the same day, and the next day he returns to Sistān. His wife, the daughter of India’s king is pregnant with Farāmarz, the next great hero of the Sistāni cycle.\textsuperscript{201} Given this pattern, it comes as no surprise that Farāmarz’s introduction as a hero is through the difficult task of fighting a dragon. As expected, this dragon is in India, and in order to kill it Farāmarz embarks on what turns out to be a long journey to there.\textsuperscript{202}

Although the details and the circumstances in each of these episodes are different, there are common features in all three stories. All three heroes, as we have seen, had to go to India to become heroes by slaying a dragon. At the starting point of each episode, they find themselves in Iran or Sistān, and they go to India because a friendly Indian king, a vassal, has sent for their help. In all three cases, the slaying of the dragon is their first, defining feat as a hero. In Garshāsp and

\textsuperscript{199} An office always held by members of Garshāsp’s family. For more on jahān pahlevān see chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{200} Garshāspnāmeh, pp 56-61.
\textsuperscript{201} For the complete Persian text of the Babr-e Bayān episode see Appendix B.
\textsuperscript{202} Farāmarznāmeh, ET, pp 57-8.
Farāmarz’s stories, slaying the dragon is the first step in a number of adventures that they embark on. It is also the case with Rostam, in spite the fact that Rostam’s first heroic feat has not been included in Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāme. This has something to do with the way his stories were included in the Shāhnāme. Only those Rostam episodes are included in the Shāhanāme that Ferdowsi saw suitable for the structure and the discourse of his work. The episode in question is the story of Babr-e Bayān which was not included in any early Shāhnāme manuscript. One only finds it included in the Farāmarznāme (BL edition) and in an 18th century Shāhnāme manuscript, which contains many other interpolations, most of which are stories of Sistāni heroes. We do know, however, that Rostam went on a series of tasks in the land of Māzandarān, which as we shall see below, was synonymous with India.

The next motif that is linked both with the construction of the heroic image and India is the discovery of treasures left behind there by the hero’s ancestors or Iranian kings under whom their ancestor served. This is especially true for later Sistāni heroes, because one of the functions of this motif is to establish a connection between the heroes ancestry and the land of India. The classic example of this motif is found in the Farāmarznāme, when Farāmarz comes across a treasure left behind by Žahḥāk along with a letter of advice (pandnāmeh). Farāmarz is able to get to the treasure only because he has defeated a demon by the name of Konās, who we learn from Žahḥāk ’s pandnāmeh was appointed by him to safeguard the treasure. Embedded in this motif are elements of the andarz

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203 Žahḥāk ’s characterization in SCE is drastically different than the way he is portrayed in the Shāhnāme. For more on this see chapter 6.
genre, which was prevalent during the medieval period. In it, Žahḥāk reminds Farāmarz of the times when he was mighty and prosperous king, yet now, that is by the time Farāmarz reads the pandnāmeh, he has lost all because like everyone else he has succumbed to death. The main pand or maxim in Žahḥāk ’s pandnāmeh is the familiar theme of the intransience of the material world. Then Žahḥāk goes on to describe how Farāmarz will come to India and subdue Konās, the demon, and come to the treasure. This, namely foretelling the future, is part of this motif. The hero usually takes the treasure back to Sistān, or in this case, as requested by Žahḥāk, to its rightful owner, the Iranian king Kay Kāvus.

Later on during his adventures Farāmarz comes across another treasure, this time bequeathed to him by his ancestor Garshāsp. The treasure is in the bottom of a well, where as a result of a magical spell, there is a man made of turquoise on a horse of gold, with his dagger drawn, as if he were in the battlefield. Farāmarz initially sends one of his men down, but he does not survive this task and gets killed mysteriously by the turquoise man. Then Farāmarz orders his people to dig around the well, and when they get to the bottom of it, they see a magnificent palace full of jewels. He sees a tablet made out of ruby, and on it there is a message. The message is a short andarznāmeh left behind by Garshāsp for him. In it, Garshāsp who has foreseen Farāmarz’s arrival at this palace reveals the way to break the spell and take the treasure home. The message also contains, as one comes to expect at this point, a reference to the inevitability of death, and a

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204 Andarz (advice, council) literature was prevalent in Iran since the pre-Islamic times. Some Sāsānīd andarz works both secular and religious survive in translations to Arabic (such as Ibn al-Miskawayh's Javidan Kherad) or in their original Pahlavi, such as Dinkart. In new Persian there are examples of both prose and verse andarz works. The earlier prose works are thought to be translations of Sāsānīd works. What is clear that this genre of literature continued to be popular throughout the centuries. For more on andarz literature see Şafa, dh, and Shaked S, "andarz", Elr. www.iranica.com. Advice pieces, usually left by fathers for sons appear frequently in the body of SCE.
reminder that doing good in the world and leaving a good name behind as a result is much more lasting than accumulating wealth.\(^{205}\)

Garshāsp, the first hero of the Sistāni cycle also finds himself in a similar situation. During his adventures in India, he comes across a beautiful palace adorned with a lavish garden. This place, Garshāsp finds out, is the tomb (dakhmeh) of Siāmak, one of the mythological Iranian kings. There he finds a lot of jewels and other valuables. The person who is in charge of the place tells Garshāsp that whoever takes any of these things will not make it much farther than the outskirts of the palace. There seems to be a supernatural or magical protective measure in place, which is the equivalent of the demon appointed to safeguard the treasure and the tomb. As one would expect of this motif, there is a rather extensive pandnāmeh left behind by Siāmak himself. The first and most salient theme in this, and other pandnāmehs is a reminder of the transience of the world, a consequence of man’s inevitable mortal nature. When Garshāsp, who at this point is young and carefree, reads the letter, he starts weeping and pleads with Siāmak to give him more advice, and then he hears Siāmak’s voice expounding on other moral issues.\(^{206}\)

The next Sistāni hero who finds a treasure in India is Shahryār. This treasure was left behind by the legendary king Jamshid who is also the ancestor of all Sistāni heroes. As in Farāmarz’s case, Shahryār’s coming is foretold and recorded in a tablet that covers the treasure. Shahryār receives some advice from Jamshid in a dream. In order to get to the treasure, Shahryār has to defeat a

\(^{205}\) Farāmarznāmeh, BL, pp. 310-1.

\(^{206}\) Garshāspnāmeh, pp. 178-183.
In another episode, while engaged in a series of adventures, Shahryār comes across several carved tablets left behind by Garshāsp. He is able to discover them only after he has defeated many demons that reside in the island where the tablets are found. Garshāsp warns Shahryār of Bahman and the damage he is going to inflict on Sistān and its heroes; therefore, he prophesizes about events that are yet to happen. Although different in detail, all the features of this motif are there in this case as well. Once again we see that there is a connection between India and what defines a hero. In both the “slaying of dragon” and the “treasure” motifs, India is the landscape where these characterizing feats can take place. The first motif is a trial or a rite-of-passage motif, while the second one’s function is to connect the hero to his ancestors, thereby reaffirming the long-lived connection between the Sistāni heroes and the land of India.

Part of the advice genre is the next heroic motif, i.e. the hero’s encounter with an Indian sage or a Brahmin. Both Garshāsp and Farāmarz come across an Indian sage during their adventures in India and ask the sage several questions on the nature of life, death, and the universe. Farāmarz has the occasion to meet more than one Indian sage, given the length and breadth of his adventures in India. The second time he encounters a Brahmin is when he is visiting wondrous islands. Again Farāmarz asks the Brahmin several questions, all of which are answered to his satisfaction. What is interesting in those passages is that the questions are usually presented in the form of a riddle, and the Brahmin or the

\[207\] Shahryārnāmeh, folios 34-7.
\[208\] Shahryārnāmeh, folio 109.
\[209\] In medieval Persian Brahmin does not refer to a caste. It rather denotes a wise person or a sage from India. The following line is an example of such usage by the 14th century poet, Hafez: *mazaj-e dahr tabah shod dar in bala* Hafez. *Kojast fekr hakimi or ra'ay-e barhamani?*
sage not only knows the answer, but can also initially solve the riddle in order to understand the question. It is important to note that one finds specimens of this form of discourse, i.e. questions posed to a wise man and their answers, which could be considered as a part of the aforementioned andarz genre in some Middle Persian Zoroastrian literature such as Minavi Kherad. The importance of this motif is that during the medieval period India must have been considered to be a land of many sages, saints and seers who possessed supreme wisdom. The presence and recurrence of this motif is an indication of such a perception. After all, the hero while on his adventures in India, has to meet and learn from a wise man there.

The Sistäni hero, while in India also goes to a series of wondrous places and experiences extraordinary situations with strange people, landscapes and animals. This motif could be regarded as a part of an extensive medieval literature, the ‘ajāyeb genre. Typically for the Sistäni hero, India is the land of the wondrous people, creatures and landscapes. Usually, the section dealing with the hero’s adventure in strange places is an extensive one, and normally, the hero goes to several of these places, one after the other. For example, Garshāsp, after having defeated Bahu, the Indian king who had rebelled against India’s more powerful king, Mehrāj, who happened to be under the protection of the Sistān, takes a series of trips to various wondrous places. Having Mehrāj himself as a guide, he travels around India, beginning with many marvelous islands he witnesses many extraordinary things: an island

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\[211\] Tafazzoli, A. (transl.) M., Minu ye xrad. Tus Publishers, Tehran: 1380. At this point, I am not suggesting that there is a direct connection between the works, but reading the passage where the Brahmān is answering the Sistāni hero’s question brought this work in mind, both because of the similarity of content and the language employed. A more thorough investigation of these works is needed in order to establish a link between them.
covered with plants and fruits that had strange qualities (i.e. they could put people to sleep or make them cry, etc), an island covered entirely with snakes, several islands with striking natural beauty the like of which were not found anywhere in Iran, islands ruled by magicians, a place full of rhinoceros, an island whose inhabitants where demons, etc. This list is only partial, and does not include all of Garshāsp’s adventures in wondrous places, as there is much space and attention devoted to these episodes. There are almost fifty printed pages describing in much detail the various strange places. The same is true of the Farāmarznāmeh where a large portion of the Indian adventures of Farāmarz unfolds in these strange places. In order to provide the reader with a sense of the strange places and the hero’s adventure in them here, I will give a description of Farāmarz’s adventures in India’s wondrous places. The first place Farāmarz arrives at is an island of cannibals, who are described as demon-like creatures. Farāmarz fights and defeats them. Next he goes to Kohila island, an extraordinarily beautiful place, where the king of the island, who is described as a just and wise ruler, receives him as a hero and treats him with much respect. Farāmarz learns that the beautiful young daughter of the king, who throughout this episode remains unnamed, has been kidnapped by a certain demon known as siah div (lit. black demon). Farāmarz fights the demon and sets the princess free, and she falls in love in Farāmarz. As it is expected of the Sistāni heroes, after a brief romance Farāmarz marries the girl,
but moves on to the next place. One finds many short romantic episodes such as these in the SCE. Generally speaking, the girl in question is the daughter of a foreign king. The romantic episode follows a major heroic task, e.g. fighting a demon, a dragon, or defeating an army. The romance results in a marriage, but the hero moves on to the next adventure shortly after having consummated the marriage. 214 Next Farāmarz goes to the island or pādavāl or Davālpā. 215 There is no description of them here because it is assumed that due to their notoriety they would be known to the audience, and they are just called demon-faced (div-chehregān). Defeating the davālpās, Farāmarz continues his journey to the Island of Pilgushān, or Elephant Ears. These Pilgushān according to the way they have been described seem to be very dangerous creatures, and Farāmarz’s guide advises him against staying on this island. It is clear for Farāmarz that he must fight them, and he tells his guide that any kind of suffering or hardship is worth acquiring a great nām (lit. name, refer to reputation). He fights the Pilgushān, defeating them and taking much booty from the island. Next, Farāmarz goes to the Brahmin’s island where he engages in a discussion with him. This episode is discussed below. Next, he arrives at a place where there is an enormous mountain, but as soon as he glances at the mountain, the mountain raises its head. The mountain is a huge bird. Farāmarz kills the bird, and makes a magnificent throne out of the bones

214 Farāmarznāmeh, BL, pp. 244 -5. There are several other examples of such romantic episodes see: Rostam and the Indian king’s daughter after the defeat of Babr-e Bayān (Appendix B); Garshāsp and the daughter of Rum’s king (Garshāspnāmeh, pp. 223-6); Shahryār and Farānak, the daughter of Hitūl, one of India’s kings (Shahryārnāmeh, folios 44-8).
215 Davālpā is a legendary creature that has a human-like upper body but legs of leather or strings. Accordign to Dehhodā’s Loghatnāmeh (v. 7, p. 11163), if they see someone in the desert they jump on the person’s back and fasten their strings (which they have in place of legs) around their waist and ride them. Then they demand food and water from the person they are riding. The first time they appar in the story of Vameq va ‘Azra, and in the some of the works in the ‘ajāyeb genre.
of the bird. Then, he illustrates this throne with various images of Iran’s court where Kay Khosrow, Rostam, Sām and all the Pahlavāns are present. He adorns the throne with jewels and gold and silver, and sends it to Kay Khosrow. Next, Farāmarz fights a dragon, and uncovers a treasure. Then Farāmarz and his entourage go further east, and there he fights with the inhabitants of a region, who are described as being dark-skinned. Farāmarz defeats these people and collects tribute from them. Then, he moves on to fight yet another dragon, an island full of lions, and a horde of wolves. Another fifty pages or so is devoted to describing Farāmarz’s Indian adventures, much of this section contains the description of the various islands, their strange population, and Farāmarz’s encounters with them.  

The description of wondrous and strange places is not confined to the passage mentioned in the SCE. As stated earlier, during the medieval period, this genre of literature was considered to be a pseudo-geography of countries and even regions and provinces within the Islamic Empire. The interest in marvelous creatures, buildings and places was bequeathed to the Muslim scholars from the Classical Greek literature. However, from the 12th century onwards, this interest was cultivated and expanded and formed its own unique genre first in Arabic and then in Persian. Incidentally, the first author to write down these tales of marvel in a separate book is none of other than Abu Mu‘ayad al-Balkhi, the composer of the Greater Shāhnāmeh, which included many, if not all stories of the Sistāni heroes (see more on Abu al-Mu’ayad and his works in chapter 5). The text of Abu al-Mu‘ayad’s ‘ajā’eb ad-Donyā is not extant, but given that he had access to all the

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216 Farāmarznāmeh, BL, pp. 234 – 325.
wondrous tales of the Sistāni heroes, and that as we have seen, in the cases of the major heroes they constitute a large part of the story, it comes as no surprise that he decided to have a separate book devoted to this topic.

Also unfolding in India, and closely related to the ‘ajāyeb motif, is a series of adventures that the Sistāni hero must undertake. It is one of the heroic requirements that once again must happen in India. The most famous example of which is Rostam’s haft khān, or seven trials. Following his father’s footsteps, Farāmarz also engages in his own seven trials. While pursing the rebellious Indian Kayd, he is informed that he must pass through seven stages before he can reach his friend and ally Jaypāl who will assist him in defeating Kayd. What follows is a shortened list of Farāmarz’s seven trials:
1. It takes place at city called Niknur, which is described as a big city with gardens, iwans, squares and palaces, and has beautiful green gardens. Here, Farāmarz fights a king called Nushdar and defeats him. After Nushdar is subdued, he is made wear an earring as a sign of his submission. Then, he joins the Farāmarz’s army.

2. After leaving Niknur, for sixty Fārsangs the world becomes dark, and Farāmarz is not able to sit or rest. Farāmarz passes through the darkness successfully.

3. The next stop is a beautiful, green meadow with a lot of trees. There is always a pleasant smell there because incense is being burnt there all the time. It is called Saranj. Here in Saranj Farāmarz does not seem to undertake any adventure or difficulty. Instead, the inhabitants of the city welcome him.

4. Four days away from Saranj, there is a place where there is an accursed creature called Sanur. Later on we find out that this creature is a wolf. Farāmarz kills the wolf.

5. The land of Arvand Shāh, another Indian king is two days away from Saranj. There sits a Brahmin under a tall dome. Faramaz engages in a discussion with the Brahmin.

6. After another two-day journey there is a land that is like paradise, full of different trees and flowers, parrots and nightingales. It is called Kaliv

7. The final and seventh place is where Jaypāl resides.218

   It is important to note that this whole episode of Farāmarz’s adventures is incomplete and rather confusing in all the surviving manuscripts. This is why for some of the places that he visits, we have no sense of a trial or an adventure. This

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218 Farāmarznāmeh, ET, pp. 129-149.
is because the passages from that would describe his adventures in those places are missing from the manuscripts. We have a complete list of the places or stages, only because Farāmarz’s friend and guide enumerates, and to some extent describes the stages to him before he sets forth on the journey. However, even in the absence of a detailed description of some of the stages we do get the idea that going through the seven trials successfully is what is required of a hero. Here, like all the motifs discussed earlier, we are dealing with a hero-making motif. This motif, like many of the ones discussed before, is not a uniquely Sistani or even Iranian motif. The hero having to go through a series of trials and adventures is an essential part of the Indo-European hero’s biography. What is unique in the case of the Sistānis is that the trial always happens in the land of India.

Another example of such multi-staged trial is found in the *Shahryārnāme*. As one would come to expect of a Sistani hero, his adventures take place in India. Here is a short list of his nine trials:

1. Shahryār fights and kills many elephants.
2. He fights and kills many wolves.
3. He kills a dragon.
4. He kills many lions.
5. He arrives at a place called the desert of the ants (*mur*). The whole desert is covered with ants, who are described as mighty and frightening predators. Shahryār survives the desert of ants.
6. Then he arrives at a place where there are many strange demons, and he sees the wonders of the demons. Here he finds tablets left behind by Garshāsp along with a letter addressed to him (I have already discussed this episode above).
7. Next, he arrives a place full of monkeys who are described as more
dangerous than lions. Shahryār wipes them out.

8. This place is full of dark-skinned people called Zangis, who are fierce
fighters.

9. The final trial is to kill a very powerful demon called Sagsar.219

The best-known example of this motif, however, is Rostam’s haft-khān.
The content of the Rostam’s haft-khan is known and available to the reader, as it
is included in all versions of the Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh. Therefore, there is no
need to list his adventures here. There is something about Rostam’s haft-khān,
however, that seems to set it apart and break the pattern that I have been trying to
establish: Rostam’s haft-khān does not take place in India but in Māzandarān. But
where is this land referred to as Māzandarān in the Shāhnāmeh, and how are
Rostam’s adventures linked to India?

Indeed, Rostam, the most famous of the Sistāni heroes has also been
connected to India, though the connection is indirect and inferred. As discussed
earlier, Rostam’s narrative, as we know it, is mainly the one that has been
incorporated into the Shāhnāmeh, and we shall explore in the following chapters,
Ferdowsi’s ideological agenda compelled him to exclude many stories and
episodes of the SCE. Therefore, what we are left with, ironically, in the case of the
most famous hero of the SCE is the least characteristic when it comes to his
connection with India. Nevertheless such a connection does exist. Rostam’s seven
trials, according to the Shāhnāmeh, take place in a land called Māzandarān. It has
been argued that Māzandarān is not the modern-day province by the Caspian sea,

219 Shahryārnāmeh, folios 100-112.
but rather it refers to India.\textsuperscript{220} In his work, Monchi-Zadeh argues convincingly that whenever Ferdowsi refers to Māzandarān, he actually means India or some land on the Indo-Iranian border. According to him, when referring to the Caspian Sea region, Ferdowsi usually employs the names Āmol or Sāri, which are the names of two modern-day cities in the Caspian Sea region. Furthermore, the names of six demons, who appear in Māzandarān are found in the Indian epic, the \textit{Mahabharata}.\textsuperscript{221} There is a mountain in India called Ispiroz, which Monchi-Zadeh identifies as Shāhnāme’s Alborz mountain.\textsuperscript{222} This mountain is mentioned by other Pahlavi sources, such as the \textit{Bundahishn}, according to which it is located in the east. Likewise the relationship of house of Sām, i.e. the Sistāni heroes of the SCE or the local rulers of Sistān during pre-Islamic times, is substantiated by several Pahlavi works.\textsuperscript{223} In addition to Rostam’s adventures in Māzandarān, we also have his father’s marriage to Rudābeh, who is the daughter of the king of Kābol or the Indo-Iranian border territories. Thus, Rostam’s maternal grandfather carries the title of \textit{maha raj} or great king, which has been preserved, albeit in a distorted fashion, as Mahrāb. Monchi-Zadeh argues that the idea of India as the land of demons was no longer sustainable, because of the exceedingly good relationship between India and Iran during the Sāsānid period. This relationship led to cultural exchanges, as a result of which India could no longer be reduced to the strange land of demons. Therefore, instead of direct reference to India, the term Māzandarān with its vague geographical connotations was used by

\textsuperscript{220} For the most extensive and detailed discussion of the identity of Māzandarān see Monchi-Zadeh, D., \textit{Topographisch-Historische Studien zum Iranischen Nationalepos}, in Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, Nendeln, Liechtenstein : Kraus Reprint, XLI, 2, 1975.

\textsuperscript{221} \textit{Ibid}, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{222} \textit{Ibid}, p. 148.

\textsuperscript{223} \textit{Ibid}, p. 109.
Ferdowsi. However, ancient traces, such as the names of demons from the *Mahabharata* still remained in the story enabling the scholars to identify Māzandarān as India.

In the story of Rostam’s haft-khan, there are at least two clues, which when considered in the context of the SCE, substantiate Monchi-Zadeh’s argument. First, there is a reference to Rostam’s previous involvement in Māzandarān during Kay Qobād’s reign. When Kay Kāvus decides to go to Māzandarān, his courtiers write to Zāl, warning him of Kay Kāvus’ dangerous decision. It is in this context that they mention Zāl and a young Rostam (*Rostam-e shir nakhowrdeh sir*) in Māzandarān, and how as the result of this journey safety and security was established there. Nowhere in the standard text of the *Shāhnāmeh* do we find Rostam’s adventures in Māzandarān prior to his haft-khan. It is highly likely that this is a reference to Rostam’s first heroic adventure in India which resulted in the slaying of the dragon Babr-e Bayān, an episode that will be discussed in detail below. We know that Rostam went to India when he was a mere child, according to the story. Zāl also went to India, although not together with Rostam. Therefore, it is highly likely that the reference to Rostam’s earlier adventures in Māzandarān is to the story of his battle against Babr-e Bayān in India, therefore, establishing the connection between Māzandarān and India. The second clue is found in the name of one of the demon-commanders that Rostam encounters in Māzandarān. Arzang or Arjang happens to be an Indian king in the *Shahryārnāmeh*, and when one looks closely at his description in the *Shāhnāmeh*, he resembles an army commander rather than a demon. Although it is difficult to

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225 *Shāhnāmeh*, v. 2, pp. 7. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 41.
argue that Arjang the demon is the same character as Arjang the Indian king of the
*Shahryārnāmeh*, one must take into consideration the naming conventions in these
epics. As far as Indian names are concerned, there seems to a stock of names such
as Rāy, Mahrāj, Jaypāl, Arjang, Arvand, Hitāl from which the names of the Indian
characters are selected. These are the names befitting Indian kings, and therefore
the attribution of one of these names to a demon from Māzandarān is another hint
that Māzandarān and India are the same place.

Although modified, distorted and veiled, a reflection of Rostam’s
involvement in India is characteristic in one sense. His adventures in India are
seen as trials, and that is true for all the Sistāni heroes, both before and after
him. What is important in terms of history is the continuous presence of
Sistān’s heroes in the land of India.

The image projected of India in the heroic motifs discussed so far is very
much part of how India was perceived in Iran throughout the medieval period.
Throughout the medieval period, India was seen, at least in the popular culture, as
that land of all things strange. Often in the *Shāhnāmeh*, as well as other medieval
works, the very word India in Persian, *Hendustān* is rhymed with the word
*jāduestān/jāduestān* (land of magic). The wondrous people, creatures, and
landscapes ascribed to India in the epics can be viewed as part of this notion of
India as the mysterious land of the supernatural, both good and evil. One cannot
terribly attribute this characterization of India to mere imagination. For example
in the *Garshāspnāmeh* one can clearly see that the different flora and fauna of the
land is seen as one of the strange features. At the same time, there was some
knowledge of the various magical and occult practices in India, and some of the

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226 I will discuss the significance of these trials in India for the emergence of the hero in chapter 6.
way India has been perceived must be attributed to the existing realities. At the same time it is a land of a different kind of wisdom, a birthplace of one of the worlds’ scientific traditions. The belief in the existence of a superior kind of wisdom in India is substantiated in the introduction to *Kililah wa Dimnah* or *Panchatantra*, a collection of fables of Indian origin. According to the introduction of the work, the Sāsānidking Anushirvān send Burzoy, one his court physicians to India in search of superior scientific/medical knowledge. After traveling in India, however, he returns with the book of *Panchatantra* along with a few chapters of the Indian epic, *Mahabharata* presenting these to the court as the containing the most superior knowledge and wisdom that India has to offer.\(^{227}\)

In the popular medieval culture, therefore, India is a complex mysterious place defined by the presence of magic and wisdom. Given this characterization of India, and the fact that the rulers of Sistān, throughout many centuries did have a presence in India, made it an ideal playground for the heroic motifs discussed above. In other words, the foreignness and mysteriousness of India, the strangeness of its people and their customs, makes the tasks expected of the heroes even more challenging. At the same time, narrating about the marvelous nature of things in India without a doubt enhances the story itself as some of the those episodes would have been the most entertaining and awe-inspiring of the whole story.

The presence of these heroic motifs, which constitute recognizable *topoi* in heroic world literature does not diminish the argument that there some of the events that unfold in India could have had real historical referents. A question that will naturally arise is how and by what mechanism this imaginary landscape of

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India, which is the background for the heroic motifs, could have been linked to the “real”, historical landscape? Although there is a mechanism to link these two, one cannot dismiss the imaginary landscape as having been constructed without any reference to the existing realities in India, especially when viewed through foreign eyes. Throughout the ages those who traveled from the Middle East to India have found India to be drastically different than any other place: most travelers experienced it as an exotic, mysterious and strange place. This is true both of India’s landscape and climate and its people and their lifestyles. Therefore, some of the “imaginary” landscape of India must have been constructed based on the experiences of the travelers who had visited there. Nevertheless, in the SCE there is a mechanism or a device by which a connection is made to the real, historical landscape. This link is established by using real geographical names as well as the name of real historical dynasties or characters. In a sense, these names function as tropes for the audience: they pin down, as it were, the imaginary landscape to the real geographical locations or historical characters creating a bridge between the two landscapes.

One such example of the mention of a real city or a province is found in the *Farāmarznāmeh*. During one of Farāmarz’s Indian adventures, we learn that he goes to the territory of Kashmir, and somewhere in Kashmir there is a river called Zarfrud. As a matter of fact we do know that there are several major rivers that delineate the territory of Kashmir. Since the aim here is not to identify which modern river corresponds to the Zarfrud, I have not attempted to speculate about such identification. What is important, however, is that the city of Qanuj, the

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capital of Kashmir, is also mentioned by the Pahlavi Bundahishn as well as the medieval Arab geographers. According to them Kashmir was founded by Kay Kāvus, and was divided into two parts: inner and outer Kashmir. The outer part had more than 70,000 villages and the inner part had more than 1000,000 villages. The city of Qanuj, the residence of the king, was situated in Inner Kashmir. Therefore, we do have evidence that some of the localities mentioned in our stories might be actual places in India, and that is significant since it adds a tangible dimension to the way in which the ancient past is remembered, and it creates a bridge through which the reflections of the past could be connected to the otherwise fantastical depiction of the Indian landscape.

The next example is the name of a certain king is found in the Shahryārnāme; that is Hitāl, the mighty king of India against whom Shahryār fought many battles. I would like to postulate that the name Hitāl is a distorted version of the Hephtalites dynasty that became very powerful in the Sāsānid period. One clear piece of evidence for this claim lies in the name Hitāl, which actually is Hiphtal with one dropped consonant (represented by the letters “ph”). Such distortions and alteration of names of people and places are very common, as most often the ancient histories come from the Greco-Roman writers who do not always provide accurate names or transliterate the eastern names in a way that makes their vocalization difficult. The alteration of names could have also happened on the other side, namely in the storytelling milieu in Iran. As we have seen, for example, the title of maha raj has been distorted in the SCE to Mahrāj, Mahārak, etc. Another piece of evidence is that the Arabic sources refer to this

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229 Christensen, A., Les Keyanids, p. 51.
dynasty with the same name (Haital, Hitāl, Hitāl depending on transliteration).\textsuperscript{230} According to Marquart, the name of the Hephtalites is changed into Haiyaftalan in the Bundahishn. The name appears twice, each time written a little differently, but both times with a ‘f’ (or a ‘p’); it then represents a more original form than “Haital”.\textsuperscript{231} Given the occurrence of the name Hitāl in Arabic sources, and that the discrepancy between the two names comes down to one consonant, therefore, it is highly likely that the Hitāl of Shahryārnāmeh is a representative of the Hephtalite dynasty.

What we know of the Hephtalite dynasty strengthens our claim of identification of Hitāl with the Hephtalites. As we discussed earlier, the Hephtalite dynasty became powerful in northern India, but its grip over its territories was eventually relaxed, and its power, as a result declined. However, in border areas of Iran and India, Hephthalite kings survived as local princes. With the defeat of the Sasānids during Piruz’ reign (459-84), much of the eastern region of Sistān, namely Arachosia, Bost and Arokhj along with Zabolestān was lost to the Hephtalites, and these areas were integrated back into Iranshahr during the time of Khosrow I (531-579) after he defeated the Hephtalite empire. There is evidence that Sistān during this period was used as a base for warding off the Hephthalite armies.\textsuperscript{232} Although the empire was defeated, the local Hephtalite princes survived in the mountainous regions of Kābol and Zabolestān for at least one hundred years after the Arab invasion of these regions.

In the Shahryārnāmeh, the Hitāl king is indeed very mighty, and Shahryār is unable to defeat him, despite his otherwise undeniable strength and vigor.

\textsuperscript{230} Give reference to Tabarī when he is referring to Hītal
\textsuperscript{231} Marquart, J. EranShāhr nach der Geographie des ps. Moses Xorenacci.
\textsuperscript{232} Christensen, A., L’Iran sur les Sassanides, Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1944, p. 43.
Indeed, Hitāl is able to imprison and almost execute Shahryār, something that never happens to any other Sistāni hero. In all the other episodes involving a conflict between a Sistāni hero and a disobedient Indian vassal king, the space devoted to the battle is rather small, and the Indian king is usually defeated in the first encounter. However, this is not the case with Hitāl, for Shahryār is unable to defeat him, and his kingdom survives him, since his daughter is able to subdue all other kings and once again restore the power of the Hipttalite dynasty.

The memory of the long and powerful reign of the Hephthalite dynasty, I believe, is preserved in the story of Hitāl the king of Sarandip in India. Instead of preserving factual information, once again, there is another aspect of history that is more interesting and worthy of being remembered: a sense of collective experience of the event or period in question. In this case, what is remembered is the powerful status of the Hitāl dynasty, its ability to defeat Sistān’s hero and its survival even after Hitāl himself is killed.

Now that we have seen at least two examples of how names function to connect the imaginary and the historical, we can turn to the episodes within the body of SCE, where I believe a reflection of the past is preserved. However, before we discuss the actual episodes it is useful to remember that as stated in chapter 2, the region of Sistān has been politically tied to the land of India throughout the ancient period. This connection, although more ancient than the Parthian times, has been documented by the Greco-Roman Historians, at the time of the Saka invasion of the region during the reign of Mehrdād II (124/3-88/7 B.C.E.). The Sakas took over much of Northern India, and established the Indo-Scythian dynasty. They continued to rule over all the territories of Sistān, Zabolestān and much of north India until the first century C. E., when a Parthian
family removed them from power. This branch of Parthians took over both the aforementioned Iranian and Indian territories, and hence they are referred to as the Indo-Parthians. Although the chronology of this dynasty is not firmly established, it is known that some time in the middle of first century B.C., the Kushān empire absorbed the regions formerly ruled by the Indo-Parthians. As postulated before, it is likely that after the Kushān invasion, the Parthian family that was ruling Sistān continued to hold power over the region in the capacity of vassals to the Kushān emperor. What emerges from these few historical facts is that there was indeed a strong connection between Sistān and India, as they were ruled by the same dynasties. There is no historical evidence as to how these dynasties exerted their power over the Indian provinces, and what their relationships might have been to the native nobility of India. The SCE, however, provides us many stories where the heroes of Sistān are engaged in various political and military acts either happening in India or otherwise connected to it. We have already discussed how undertaking adventures in India is usually an integral, and oftentimes the most interesting part of the feats of the Sistāni hero. The adventures in unfolding in India are so central to the hero’s formation that going to India can be viewed a test or a rite of passage for the hero. One must remember that the episodes which will be discussed below unfold in the same India, which constitutes a backdrop for the heroic adventures and somewhere along side the heroic motifs discussed earlier.

The first Sistāni hero to venture out to India is the founder of Sistān, Garshāsp. Žahḥāk receives a letter from a great king in India by the name of Mahāj (maha raj), who complains of revolt in one of his provinces which is being ruled by one of his relatives by the name of Behu. Mahāj has been paying tribute to the Iranian king, but Behu refuses to accept the superiority of the Iranian
monarchy, and refuses to pay the tribute. Žaḥḥāk summons Garshāsp, and sends him to India, along with a mighty army.233 This is where Garshāsp’s India adventures begin: first he engages in a series battles with Behu at the conclusion of which he defeats him, and returns the province of Sarandip234 back to Mahrāj; then he travels in India and encounters a wise man with whom he engages in discourses on various spiritual and mundane affairs, then he sets out to visit various strange islands and other wondrous places as a part of his heroic adventures mentioned earlier. Garshāsp’s presence in India merely provides the setting for these wonder stories. The entire section of Garshāsp’s adventures in India constitutes a little less than a third of the work, and therefore is a significant part of it.

What is of utmost importance for the current discussion, however, is the reflection of some the political struggles and the involvement of the Sistāni heroes/rulers in them. Garshāsp goes to India because he has received a command from Žaḥḥāk to do so. It is important to note that Garshāsp’s adventure in India happens prior to his establishment of Sistān, and therefore, he cannot act as an autonomous figure in his decision to go to India. His adventures and success in India, however, must be seen as qualification for his position as the ruler of Sistān, and they set the precedent for his descendent’s involvement in India. As we shall see, the struggle and revolts in vassal kingdoms of India that are supposed to pay tribute to the Sistāni rulers (or in this case to the Iranian king) appear repeatedly throughout the body of the SCE. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine that such

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233 Garshāspnāme, pp. 63 – 79.
234 Sarandip is the Persian name of the Indian province of Ceylon. It, therefore, functions in the same manner as other geographical references do – it allows for the incorporation of stories with historical reference and it creates a bridge between those and the heroic motifs.
revolts and the subsequent battles that had to be fought in India were actually a major problem for the rulers of Sistān. The way these conflicts are narrated, however, is far from a mere reconstruction of some political events. Instead, the stories of Garshāsp’s battles with Behu are interspersed with and colored by various episodes. In the Sistāni epics India is not the mere battleground for these wars. It is a wondrous land, the abode of magic, sorcery, knowledge and wisdom as well as the abode of all kinds of demons and demented beings.
The link between Sistān and India cannot be more obvious than in the case of Rostam’s son, Farāmarz. His mother is the daughter of India’s king whom Rostam has married after subduing the dragon, Babr-e Bayān.\(^{235}\) He is initially summoned to India because Nushād, a vassal Indian king, has sent his messenger to the Iranian court, complaining about several problems that are occurring in his kingdom. The messenger clearly states that unless the Iranians help Nushād solve these problems, they should not expect any tribute from him. There are several problems: a demon by the name of Konās has been kidnapping people and killing them; another Indian king by the name of Kayd refuses to pay tributes to Nushād; several beasts such as a speaking wolf, a dragon, and rhinoceroses are terrorizing his subjects.\(^{236}\) Hence, Farāmarz embarks on his first voyage to India. The focus here will be his battle with Kayd, as it reflects the same historical struggle of subduing vassal kings and collecting taxes and tributes from them. There is a break in the narrative as we come to the story of Kayd. There is the sense that a new story is beginning as the author refers to his source for the story, who is none other than the source for the Sistāni stories of the Shāhnāmeh, i.e. Sarv-e Māhān\(^{237}\).

The story of Farāmarz’s battle against Kayd starts with Farāmarz sending a letter to Kayd, demanding that he should obey the Iranian king, because Kayd is no equal to either Jam or Šahrāb.\(^{238}\) In order to scare him off, Farāmarz boasts of the power of the weapons bequeathed to him by his ancestors. As we shall see in

\(^{235}\) The story of Babr-e Bayān below in this chapter. For the Persian text of Babr-e Bayān story see Appendix B.

\(^{236}\) *Fārmaraznāmeh*, edited version, pp. 56-8.


\(^{238}\) *Ibid.*, p. 104. However, in the edited version cited here there is a very clear mistake, as instead of Jam the editor has chosen the word “Jesm”, which does not make sense in this context. In both BL and BM the word in question is Jam.
the following chapters, these weapons contain the power and vigor associated with his ancestors. Kayd’s advisors also warn him against going to battle with Farāmarz. After all Farāmarz is a descendent of the Narimān race, Kayd is told, and they have never suffered defeat at the hands of any enemy. However, Kayd is not persuaded, and decides to engage in a battle with Farāmarz, for peace with the Sistāni army is contingent upon him accepting to pay tribute to the Iranians. According to Kayd, however, India has never paid tribute to Iran, and it is in this context that Garshāsp and Zahhāk’s voyage to India are mentioned. What follows is a series of battles between the Iranian and Indian heroes at the conclusion of which Kayd, of course, is defeated, but escapes to another part of India, which is under the protection of a king called Jaypāl. There is a reference to Delhi as the place where this king resides, which may be a later addition. The king of India is also referred to as Rāy or Rāy-e Japāl, Rāy being the same as raj, which simply means king. In Sanskrit the two sounds represented by the letters “y” and “j” are interchangeable. Therefore, here we have a reference to the king of India, or one of the powerful kings of India, who could have granted protection to Kayd who has already been defeated by Farāmarz. This is not the only incident where the actual Indian title of an Indian king has been preserved, as the Indian king of Garshāspnāmeh is called Mahāj, which is a distortion of Maha Raj (great king). The fact that the title Rāy is an actual Sanskrit word, and Jaypāl an Indian name, indicates that the origin of the story must be sought in the endless battles of the Sistāni army aimed at conquering and controlling the neighboring Indian

239 ibid, pp. 105-111.
240 ibid, p. 127.
241 I am indebted to my friend and colleague Sai Bhatawadekar for this clarification.
territories. It is not difficult to imagine that at some point during these encounters, there were Indian rulers who held the titles of Rāy, Raj or Maha Raj.

Farāmarz pursues Kayd, traversing a large expanse of the Indian territory and engaging in many different adventures along the way. This is where he engages in his seven trials, and as mentioned earlier there seem to be some missing pages at this point in the narrative. What we do know, however, is that after the successful completion of the seven trials, Kayd decides to accept Farāmarz’s conditions and enter a peace treaty with him.

There is an interesting anecdote that follows the peace treaty in which Farāmarz attempts to convert the Indians to his religion, Zoroastrianism. That Farāmarz is a Zoroastrian is most likely a later addition. After all, Farāmarz’s first set of adventures to which the battles with Kay belong happen during the reign of Kay Kāvus, and Zoroaster does not make his appearance until the reign of Garshāsp, three generations later. Farāmarz’s Zoroastrianism is a later addition by members of the Zoroastrian community in India, who, as mentioned earlier, kept both the stories of the Sistāni heroes as well as their manuscript tradition alive. Therefore, the reference can be regarded as a much later interpolation to the text. What is interesting for the purposes of our discussion here is the exchange of religious ideas. One of the consequences of the hero’s battles and adventures in India is his exposure to the different religion(s) practiced there, which opens up the story for a “religious discourse”. Farāmarz, therefore, argues about the superiority of his faith, and asks all the Indians to convert to his religion, but Kayd refuses to convert saying that their religion is better because instead of one god
they have a hundred gods.\textsuperscript{242} They decide to resolve the dispute by bringing a Brahmin who represents the Indian views, and ask the Iranians to select someone from their camp. Farāmarz is chosen because he is knowledgeable about religious matters. However, when the debate unfolds, we learn that the questions posed to Farāmarz are actually riddles that he is asked to solve. This, Farāmarz accomplishes with much ease, and as a result the Indians accept the superiority of the religion of the Iranians and convert. Next, Farāmarz attacks many temples, breaking idols and crosses.\textsuperscript{243} The religious encounter described here is most likely a reflection of actual religious exchanges that might have happened during the long years of Sistāni power in India. In this story, we have two approaches to handling the different religions: one is the tolerant approach represented by the debate between the Indian Brahmin and Farāmarz, and the second is the violent way in which Farāmarz goes about destroying temples and idols. Since both approaches are present in this story, it is not unlikely that the point of the story is to recount the memory of such religious encounters in India.

In the next phase of Farāmarz’s adventures preserved only in the Bombay Lithograph, we learn that he goes to India again for a reason similar to why he went there the first time. Once again, an Indian king refuses to pay tribute to the Iranian king, who by this time is Kay Khosrow. It is interesting that the plot of this episode of the \textit{Farāmarznāmeh} is much more complex and intricate than the rest of the story. In addition to Farāmarz, in this episode Rostam also makes an appearance in India.

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid, p. 158-168.
Upon learning that the Indian king Rāy has refused to pay tribute, Kay Khosrow sends Farāmarz to India, along with several other Iranian heroes. Rāy is a well-known and powerful king in India, who has appointed thirty-six vassal kings. Given his well-established and powerful position in India, he does not see a reason to accept Iranian authority in any form. Therefore, a war is inevitable. There are several things that emerge from the description of the battles with the Indians. First, the Indians, or more specifically, an Indian army commander is characterized as a demon (div). There is a lot of insistence on his demonic nature, and we learn that he uses sorcery to achieve his aims. However, there is no magic powerful enough to defeat Farāmarz, and the Indian army is defeated. The characterization of India as the land of magic and sorcery and its association with demons is a recurrent theme, not only in the Iranian epics but also in the medieval culture in general.²⁴⁴ The second noteworthy mention is that of the use of elephants in the army. Apparently, this is the first time that Farāmarz has seen an elephant, and he is described as having been terrified, at first, at the sight of the elephant.²⁴⁵

During this encounter with Rāy’s army, Farāmarz decides to appear at Rāy’s court disguised as a messenger. This is where the plot of the story becomes interesting as anticipation and excitement build up with his presence before Rāy. The Indian king suspects that this messenger might be Farāmarz son of Rostam.²⁴⁶ However, in spite of Rāy’s insistence, Fararamz does not reveal his identity, even after Rāy offers his daughter’s hand in marriage to him. Then, when everything else fails, he asks Farāmarz to fight ten Indian warriors, under the condition that if

²⁴⁴ Hendustān-jādu-setān.
²⁴⁵ Farāmarznāmeh, BL, pp. 176.
²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 187. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, Passage 3.
Farāmarz is successful, he would recognize the Iranian king’s power by paying him tribute. Farāmarz easily defeats the ten Indian warriors, and Rāy agrees to pay the tribute. However, Rāy does not accept defeat so easily and secretly plots to prepare his army for a nocturnal attack. Farāmarz senses that Rāy’s promise is not genuine and returns to his army and orders them to be prepared for an attack.\textsuperscript{247}

Meanwhile back in Zabolestān, Zāl has a terrifying dream: Farāmarz is put into a catapult and thrown into a fire that is as wide as an ocean, but all of the sudden Rostam appears and stretches out his hand and catches Farāmarz before he is about to fall into the inferno. When he wakes up, he immediately summons Rostam, and sends him to India to Farāmarz’s aid. As soon as Rostam is informed of his son’s predicament, he rushes out to India, as he is very much worried at the prospect of any harm befalling Farāmarz. It is interesting to see Rostam depicted as a caring and loving father, given that usually his relationship with his sons is defined by the story of his battle with his son Sohrāb, which ended in the tragic death of the latter. As if to redeem his image as the killer of his offspring, in this story the paternal love of Rostam for Faramaz is not only emphasized, it is also substantiated by Rostam’s actions.\textsuperscript{248}

As it turns out, however, Farāmarz is not in need of his father’s assistance, as he captures Rāy in the next battle. It is only after the imprisonment of India’s king and the successful conclusion of the war that Rostam arrives. Rostam accompanies Farāmarz back to the Iranian court, as they take Rāy to Kay Khosrow. There at the court, in response to Kay Khosrow’s inquiries, Rostam proudly gives a summary of Farāmarz’s deeds in

\textsuperscript{247} ibid, p. 188-191.
\textsuperscript{248} ibid, p. 195. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, Passage 4.
Rostam reproaches Rāy, and tells him that he deserves to be captured for his disobedience, and reminds him that Rāy’s father was on friendly terms with Rostam. Rāy is spared punishment as a result of Farāmarz’s intercession. Kay Khosrow not only forgives him, but he also returns his whole kingdom to him. Here, Farāmarz’s power in the Iranian court is expressed by words put in Kay Khosrow’s mouth: “You can do whatever you want, since all of India up to the Chinese sea is yours any way”.

Rāy returns to India happily, but he no sooner arrives there, than there is trouble with the vassal king of Kashmir, Mahārak or Mahārag. Rāy does not hesitate to call upon his powerful Iranian ally for help, and Farāmarz acts immediately by first sending the disobedient king an insulting letter, in which he threatens to kill him if he refuses to step down. Mahārak reads the letter, and his anger is aroused like that of a demon, and he challenges Farāmarz to a battle.

However, in order to get to Kashmir, Farāmarz must cross a major river called Zarfrud, and much attention is paid in the story to the crossing of this river, as it was certainly a very difficult feat. Mahārak attacks Farāmarz’s army while they are crossing this river, however, the Sistānis/Iranians manage to pass the river safely. A battle follows on the banks of this river, during the course of which the Indians are defeated and Mahārak is forced to retreat back to Kashmir. Farāmarz follows Mahārak to a city called Qanuj, where

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249 Ibid, p. 207.
250 Ibid, p. 205.
252 Again what we have here is a distorted version of the Indian title Maha raja.
253 Ibid, p. 211.
Mahārak is captured and killed and a new vassal king is appointed to take his place. Proudly, Farāmarz writes a letter to Kay Khosrow, informing him of his success, and as reward for his deeds, Kay Khosrow grants him a vast territory.255

Chronologically speaking, the next famous Sistāni hero is Borzu. He is, however, an unusual Sistāni hero. Borzu is Sohrāb’s son, who is raised as a farmer, and is unaware of his glorious lineage until he is discovered by Afrāsyāb, the king of Turān. Borzu engages in several battles with Rostam, whom he is able to injure. Farmaraz comes to Rostam’s rescue and captures Borzu and imprisons him in the citadel of Sistān. At this point both Borzu and Rostam are aware of Borzu’s identity, but Borzu is unwilling to set aside his contempt for Rostam. It is at this time that Rostam, hoping he would come around, discusses the plans he has for Borzu’s future: He would like for Borzu to join the Indian expeditions alongside the other Sistāni heroes.256 Although his plan does not materialize, it is noteworthy since it indicates that involvement in Indian wars was required of a Sistāni hero. In other words, had Borzu been a “normal” Sistāni hero, he would have had his share of adventures in India, and the only reason he does not have it is because for the most part of his life he lived far away from Sistān and was unaware of his ancestry. Historically speaking, this constant need for battles in India hints at the ongoing struggle the rulers of Sistān faced in keeping and expanding the Northern Indian territories that were under their influence.

The next Sistāni hero to spend much of his time in India is Borzu’s son, Shahryār. His reasons for going to India are initially different than those of the

256 Borzunāneh, ET, p. 38.
other Sistāni heroes. Shahryār actually leaves Sistān because in Rostam’s absence, Farāmarz’s son, Sām has insulted him, calling him “fatherless”. Unable to bear this insult, he takes off to India. He goes from Kābol to Kashmir, but decides not to stay there, knowing well that the ruler of Kashmir has a strong alliance with Farāmarz, as one of his daughters is married to Farāmarz. He goes to the sea and takes a ship and goes to a an unnamed city in India where he stays for the next ten years. All the while he is there, he is lonely and miserable and grieving for his father. After ten years, he decides to go to another location in India, and he goes to place where he has the choice of either going to Sarandip whose ruler is Hitāl Shāh, or continuing his journey to Sarand, which is a city belonging to India. He chooses the latter place.

In Sarand he is discovered as a great warrior by its king, Arjang. Once Arjang learns that Shahryār is Rostam’s grandson, he marries his daughter to him. Meanwhile, the city of Sarand, and its king Arjang are threatened by Hitāl Shāh, the king of Sarandip. There follows a series of battles between the armies of the two Indian kings, with Shahryār serving as the leader of the Sarand army. What is significant in this story of Indian adventures is that Shahryār is not there as the representative of the Sistāni power in India. On the contrary, one evening, he confides to Arjang that he would like to attack Sistān and capture and kill his relatives who are in power there. The adventures of Sistān’s heroes in India, so far, have shed light on the ongoing struggle involved in keeping power over the Indian territories. However, in the case of this story, we are given a reflection of how an internal conflict within the family of Sistān’s rulers might have played

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257 *Shahryārnāme*, folio 3.
258 Ibid, pp. 3-4.
259 Ibid, pp. 14., For the Persian passage see Appendix A, passage 5.
out. As a weaker member of Sistān’s ruling family, Shahryār does not have the protection of Zāl, when he is insulted by Farāmarz’s son. It his clear that at this time, namely during Lohrāsp’s reign, Farāmarz’s branch of the family holds greater power, so much so that even Zāl is afraid to intervene in the dispute between Farāmarz’s son and Shahryār. In this conflict, the storyteller’s sympathies, as well as the reader’s, are with Shahryār. Not only has he been wronged by the line of Farāmarz, his father, Borzu and his grandfather Sohrāb were all victimized by their relatives: Borzu was abandoned to grow up as a farmer, while Sohrāb was killed by Rostam. At the same time, regardless of their position within their family, the Sistāni heroes are connected to the affairs of India in some shape and form. Another point of reference that makes the prominence of Farāmarz’s line clear is the alliance he achieved by marrying the daughter of Kashmir’s king. This form of building an alliance must have been practiced between the various noble families and their vassals. Here, in Shahryār’s story, we have an instance of it preserved in the story of Farāmarz and his marriage to the daughter of the local ruler.

The story of Shahryār’s seemingly endless battles with Hitāl is interspersed with fascinating anecdotes of magical encounters and romance, as mentioned earlier. However, what remains clear that there is a specific, “non-generic” role that Shahryār has to play as far as the representation of Sistāni power in India is concerned. Unlike other Sistāni heroes who were successful in India, Shahryār struggles in his battles with Hitāl. He is captured several times, and once he is almost executed. It is true that Hitāl uses reprehensible means to accomplish these feats against Shahryār. He uses sorcery, and ‘āyyārs and other methods considered ignoble in an official battle. Ironically, it is the status and
power of his relatives that saves Shahryār’s life. When he is about to be hanged, Hitāl’s vizir advises him against carrying out the execution, arguing India cannot withstand a war with Sistāni heroes such as Zāl and Rostam. Instead, he writes to Zāl, informing of the situation, and promising to set Shahryār free if Zāl and the Sistāni rulers send reinforcements to subdue his enemy, Arjang. He goes on to argue that it is he who pays tributes to Zāl, and that his opponent has never recognized Sistān’s authority.260 This is an example of how the various vassals in India might have competed for the protection of the Sistāni rulers, and adds an interesting layer to the complex political relations between the local rulers in India and Sistān’s kings.

Having been made aware of Shahryār’s predicament, both Farāmarz and his sister Bānu-Goshasp set out to India. They are both masked and fight Shahryār in a battle at the conclusion of which they reveal their identity to him and plead with him to go back to Sistān with them. However, Shahryār turns his back on them and their pleas, and instead heads for Iran via China.261 His plan, as we learn from a conversation he has with old friend Arjang, is to attack Sistān and kill Zāl and the rest of the Sistāni royal family. Arjang, playing the role of the wise adviser, dissuades him from undertaking an attack on Sistān. Instead, he encourages Shahryār to joining Lohrāsp army who were engaged in a battle against Arjāsp, the Turānian king. Shahryār accepts the words of his old friend and joins Lohrāsp’s army in their fight against the Turānians, and this is the end of his adventures in India.262

261 Ibid, p 129.
When we look back at the SCE’s description of the adventures of the Sistāni heroes in India, a few common themes emerge. First and foremost, there is, in all of the epics discussed here, evidence of an ongoing power struggle involving Sistān’s rulers and their vassals in India. As we have seen, the descriptions of these power struggles and the resulting conflicts portray a complex political landscape. The Indian kings stand differently vis-à-vis both the Sistāni and Iranian courts; therefore, the Sistāni heroes are confronted with ever changing loyalty of the Indian rulers. Another emerging image from the description of these episodes is the decentralized nature of India. This, of course, is substantiated by other historical data: we know that throughout most of its pre-colonial history, India was ruled by a number of kings and princes. These stories offer insight into the relationship of the various kings to India, and some of the ways in which they built alliances either among themselves or with the Sistāni nobility. An example of such a connection is the alliance built between Sistān and the king of Kashmir through marriage.

Although the narratives reflect these political ties and struggles, they are distinctly different from political histories in many respects. As mentioned earlier, the stories of the Sistāni heroes’ battles in India are interspersed with episodes that hint of cultural and religious exchanges between the two parties. The colorful, magical and mystifying image of India portrayed in these narratives is very much linked to the episodes containing reflections of historical. What we find in the depiction of India in these stories is an amalgam of what I argue to be reflections of the historical past and the popular image of India. In other words, while the image of India created by these stories is woven together from elements of imagination and existing stereotypes about the land, other elements have been
incorporated as a result of the continuous encounter of the regions and the inhabitants of the two lands. It was not my aim to dissect these elements in order to assign them values as to which is a better or more factual representation of India. Rather my goal is to recognize all these elements in the final fabric of the story, and to theorize that the stories contain everything genre-appropriate that was considered worthy to be remembered of the past.
II. Reflections of Parthian history

Many of the episodes in the SCE, which reflect historical events, refer to the Parthian period. However, before I can discuss the “historical” episodes related to the Parthian history, some background needs to be provided regarding the major Parthian house, and the scholarship that so far has connected some of the epic material to those families. In sections 1-3 this background and scholarship will be provided. Only then, the claim that the episodes in question reflect Parthian history will be justified.

The way I will approach the historical episodes in section 4 is similar to the way the Indian episodes are discussed. Rather than extracting the episodes from the rest of the material, I will discuss the reflections of history in the context of the genre. This will be done by discussing motifs that are characteristic of the genre, and the way these motifs are utilized in order to allow for the narration of the historical episodes. Like the Indian episodes, the names, which as we shall see are usually names of members of the Parthian noble family, serve as tropes, which create the space where the narration of the historical episodes becomes possible.

1. The major Parthian noble house

During the course of Parthian rule, there were a few feudal families that continued to play a significant political role in the affairs of the empire. As discussed in chapter 3, there are no conclusive verdicts on whether or not the Parthian empire was a feudal polity, parallel to the feudal polities of Europe. There are several reasons for our lack of knowledge when it comes to the Parthians’ organization of power, such as the general lack of sources for the period, and the uniquely Parthian noble institutions, which were foreign to the
Greek historian who documented them. Nevertheless, there remains no doubt that the noble Parthian houses continued to hold pivotal positions in the empire, and as has been mentioned earlier, that some of them went as far as removing and appointing kings. The same Parthian noble families survived the fall of the Parthian empire, and continued to be powerful political players in the Sasanid empire.

What we do know of the Parthian families is that since the Achaemenid times there were seven Median and East Iranian families, who later in the Parthian period carried the epithet of Pahlav. Greek writers inform us about the Iranian nobility to some extent (for more information on the epithet of Pahlav, see below). According to them, this group of very powerful people were not related to the Arsacid ruling family, but held certain privileges such as crowning the king in the case of the members of the Suren family, and kissing the king on the mouth. Each of these families had a traditional seat of power: the Suren family seat was Sistan, the Gewpuran’s (a branch of the Karenids) seat was Hyrcania, the family of Mehran in Ray, and the Aspadpadi (Ispahbadh) in Tus.

The connection between the Parthian families and the heroes of the Iranian epics can also be observed in the etymology of the word pahlav. According to Dehkhod’s lexicon, the primary meaning of this word is Parthian, and it serves as an epithet in combination with the family name of a person (For example, Bahrām Suren-Pahlav). The word pahlav is also a synonym to the word pahlevān, which is most commonly translated as hero. A quick look at all the characters both in the

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Shāhnāmeh and the SCE reveals that most Iranian characters who are called pahlevāns are indeed members of the Parthian noble families.265 This, therefore, is another piece of evidence that links the heroes of the Iranian epic to the members of the Parthian houses.

2. Parthian Stories in the Iranian epics

From its inception, western scholarship on the Shāhnāmeh has recognized and acknowledged the presence of the Parthian stories. The Parthian names of the heroes in the Shāhnāmeh were the most obvious and clear indication of a connection of their stories with the Parthian period. Nöldeke identified some of these names: In the first instance Gudarz and his son Gev (originally Vev) are mentioned, and this corresponds with the king Gotrazes and his father. Then we have Milādh (the father of Gorgin) whose name has been recognized to be a form of Mihrdat, Mithradat, which is the name of several Parthian kings. The same is true of the name Farhādh, i.e. Pharates (Frahat), a name borne by a whole series of Parthian kings.266 Nöldeke explains how these relatively newer stories were placed in the mythological and legendary narrative of the Shāhnāmeh:

I think, therefore, that it might be admitted that because of the great influence wielded by the great houses of Arsacide origin, which had conversed through the whole time of the reign of the Sasānians their princely dignity, their ancestors were incorporated into the national legend. The latter occupy there more or less a similar position in relation to the king as the leading members of the higher nobility occupied in the Arsacide and later also in the Sāsānidempire. Should we have known the genealogy of those families, we might have been in a position to explain some

265 The two major characters who are heroes but not connected to these Parthian families are Seyavush and Esfandyār. The heroic image of the former is completely different from the other heroes of the Shāhnāmeh and is perhaps of a different origin, while Esfandyār’s, in my opinion, is an image that has been patched together based on the model of a Sistāni hero. I will discuss Esfandyār’s heroic image in chapter 6.
circumstances referred to in heroic legend. Thus, for instance, that Gashvādh, the father of Godharz, was a brother of Karen (in Arabic Qāren), the founder of the most powerful house of Arsacides of that name.267

Therefore, we have, in the Shāhnāmeh, the representatives of a branch of the Kāren family, the Gewpurakān. To prove the connection between this family and the corresponding characters in the epics has been an easy task since the heroes in the epics bear similar if not the same names as the Parthian princes. Both in the Shāhnāmeh and the SCE there is a character by the name Qāren, who is the ancestor of the most famous Karnids of epics, namely the Gewpurān, or the house of Gutarza (Greek: Gotarzes), whose seat of reign was the province of Hyrcania, or modern-day Gorgān.268 In the Shāhnāmeh, the characters Gudarz, Giv and Bizhan represent this house, and as we will see members of this family are very much present in many adventures alongside the Sistāni heroes.

The other two very well known noble houses are the house of Mehran with their seat in Rāy and the house of Aspadpati (Ispahbads) based mainly in Tus. Herzfeld argues that the latter two houses cannot be traced back to the Parthian period, and it was only later in the Sāsānid period when they became powerful enough that it became necessary to concoct a Parthian genealogy.269 Be that as it may, what is important for our purposes is that there are no major characters, either in the Shāhnāmeh or the SCE that can be identified as representatives of these two families. The only character, who can be identified as belonging to the house of Mehran is Gorgin Milād, from whose name Marquart

267 Ibid, p. 15.
268 Ibid, p. 60.
269 Ibid, p. 68. Christensen argues that the Ispahbadhs were indeed of Parthian origin, while the houses of Mihran and Spandidad constituted the new nobility, Christensen, L’Iran sure les Sasānids, p. 73.
recognized the name Mehrdād or Mithridates. Gorgin Milād is not a major character, and only makes an appearance in one episode when other Parthian heroes of the houses of Rostam and Gudarz are present. The hero Ţus, son of Nodhar, represents the Parthian family (the ruling family), and his negative characterization in the Iranian epics and the struggles between him and the rest of the Parthian heroes seem to be a reflection of the power struggles between the Arsacid ruling family and the Parthian nobility.

Although the Parthian origin of many of the episodes of the Šāhnāmeh, especially those in the reign of Kay Kāvus and Kay Khosrow has been established, there has been no serious attempt to study these stories and to examine them in the context of Parthian history, with the exception of an article by Coyajee which scrutinizes one of the Parthian stories of the Šāhnāmeh. According to him, the portion of the epic that begins with the murder of Prince Forud and ends with the Iranians’ battle against Kamus the Kushānian displays chronological parallelism to the “facts of Parthian history”.

First, Coyajee explains this parallelism between the epic hero Gudarz and the Parthian king Gotarzes, as well as the connection between Kay Khosrow and the Parthian king Artabanus III. Then, he identifies Forud with the Parthian prince Vardanes, as the details of both of their lives seem to be astoundingly similar (another redaction of his name in the Greek sources is Phraotes). If we accept these identifications, the events as they are described in the Šāhnāmeh and the Greek narrations of Parthian histories corroborate each other. In addition to this episode, Coyajee

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discusses how the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} actually provides an answer to a question that has been left unanswered by the classical historians: what happened to the house of Gotarzes? It is a fact that the house of Gotarzes suddenly and silently disappears from view in the Parthian history. This happens at the time of the Kushān invasion of the empire, an event that has been amply described in the \textit{Shāhnāmeh}. It is the ethnically mixed nomadic army of the Kushān who rushed to North and West of Parthia that brings a disastrous end to the house of Gudarz/Gotarzes.\footnote{ibid, pp. 218-220.} It is apparent that the story in question is a Parthian one, most likely patronized by the house of Gotarzes in the Northern region of Hyrcania, as the story has clearly pro-Gudarz bias. All other Iranian heroes in this story, like Ťus and Fariborz commit one blunder after the other, and they are saved from the consequences of their mistakes by the interventions of either Gudarz or some relation of his.\footnote{ibid, p. 208.}

Nöldeke’s thesis that the Parthian stories were a later addition to the corpus of the \textit{Shāhnāmeh}, has generally been accepted by scholarship. However, how these stories were transmitted and fused together, and eventually were incorporated into the national narrative, remains unknown or subject to conjectures. Mary Boyce, with her article on the role of the Parthian Gosans (musician-storytellers), sheds light on the trajectory of this process. According to her, the Gosans based on their individual talents, could have been entertaining either the royal or popular audiences. Indeed, they played a considerable part in the Parthian life. They had various and varying roles as “entertainer of king and commoner, privileged at court and popular with the people; present at the graveside and at the feast; eulogist, satirist, storyteller, musician; recorder of past
achievements, commentator of his own times.” 275 Throughout the pre-Islamic period, the professional minstrels sang heroic poems at the courts of kings and in public places, and they handed down the stories as well as the art of performing them from one generation to the next. 276 It was only much later, presumably during the late-Sásänid period, that the stories entered the national narrative as a result of the Sasänids’ concerted legitimization effort that necessitated an uninterrupted narrative of monarchy from mythical times to their times, while attempting to obliterate the five centuries of Parthian rule from this narrative. However, despite these efforts, some of the Parthian stories found their way into the national narrative. 277 No doubt remains therefore, that a substantial section of the national Iranian tradition was in fact sustained, elaborated and promoted under the patronage of the Parthian families, not only during the Parthian period, but also most likely during the Sásänid period, as the same Parthian families enjoyed considerable power throughout this time.

Elsewhere, Boyce underlines the significance of the Parthian noble houses and their stories, claiming that the core of the pre-Sásänid section of the Sháhnámeh seems to have been created by the minstrels of the Gudarzian family. The stories grew, and episodes were added. While Boyce is confident about the origin of the Godarizan stories, she merely ventures a guess when it comes to the stories of Rostam’s family. As the stories of the house of Gudarz grew in number and popularity, she writes, the minstrels of other families such as the Káren and Surens of Zrang introduced Rostam to the epic as well. In the case of the Rostam

275 Boyce, M. “Parthian Writings,” in The Cambridge History of Iran, v.3(2), 1155.
277 More will be said about the formation of the national historical/epic tradition in the late-Sásänid period in chapter 6.
stories specifically, she speculates that because Kuh-e Khwājeh\footnote{One of the holiest Zoroastrian temples located in Sistān. For more see Ghanimati, S., “New perspectives on the chronology of Kuh-i Khwaja in Sistān,” \textit{Iran}, 38, 2000, pp. 137-156.}, was a major pilgrimage site, many people from different parts of Iran heard the stories of Rostam when they visited the temple.\footnote{Boyce, M., Godrej, P. and Mistree F. (editors), “The Parthians: Defeners of the Land and Faith,” \textit{A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion, and Culture}, Middletown, NJ : Grantha, 2002, p. 110.} Here Boyce attempts to explain the way in which the Rostam stories were incorporated into the epic, but at the same time avoids identifying them as Parthian stories that were narrated and disseminated by the Suren as the Gudarzian stories. It is very likely that Sistān, having been a major pilgrimage destination, might have something to do with the fame of the Rostam stories. However, as we shall see, when we examine the content of some of the stories from SCE, it becomes clear that these stories, like the stories of the house of Gudarz, are tales sung by minstrels of the Suren family, and there is no justification for assuming a different mode of transmission for Rostam stories. The underlying problem, however, is the identification of the house of Rostam with that of the Suren, and therefore, we will turn our attention to examining the question of whether or not the stories of the house of Rostam are of Parthian origin.

3. The Parthian Origin of the house of Rostam

As we have seen, \textit{Shāhnāmeh} scholars readily identified Parthian characters and stories, and offered historical evidence as to how these stories entered the national narrative during the Sāsānid period. However, this did not apply to Rostam and his stories, as they were thought to be the stories of the
indigenous population of Sistān, or of a different origin all together. Nöldeke argued that the entire corpus of the stories of the Sistāni heroes in the *Shāhnāmeh* is of southwestern Iranian origin, and that they belong to the cycle of legends. One of the main reasons for this conclusion is that Rostam, the best-known hero of the Iranian epics is not mentioned in the Avesta. Rostam, however, is linked to the Avestan heroes Garshāsp and Sām, but according to Nöldeke,

> That genealogy has been artificially patched together. Keresaspa is mentioned in the Avesta amongst the number of kings, and it is in that capacity, that he appears in the *Shāhnāmeh* and elsewhere; Rostam’s grandfather Sām is a vassal, as well as the latter’s father or ancestor Karshasp, who is, in fact identical with Sām. Keresaspa is thus, for the sake of genealogy, being divided into two persons. In the so-called “gershasp-nāmeh” Ithrit (or Itrit) is also made ancestry of Rostam, as the father of Karshasp; that is with a certainly Thrita one of the “Sāms” of the Avesta, but we have here to do with a purely scientific transcription. So that no genuine tradition can be here the case. On the other hand, Rostam and Zāl are localized most decidedly in Sistān (Drangiana) and Zabol (Arachosia), a country, which it is true, is not unkown in the Avesta but still lies very far from its mother-country. Even that being their place of origin, shows that they belong to a quite different legendary history.²⁸⁰

There are several problems with this thesis, however. First, Garshāsp like Rostam and Zāl, has been clearly identified as a Sistāni hero. After all, he is the one who is responsible for the major city of Zarang and for building the necessary irrigation system to make it habitable. As we have already seen, this story is related by both the SCE, and the local historiography of Sistān. Therefore, there is no reason to assume that such a connection does not exist. Second, some recent research on the advent of Zoroastrianism in Iran, has claimed that there is a

prominent theory that Sistān was indeed the birthplace of Zoroastrianism.²⁸¹ Whether or not Sistān is the actual birthplace of Zoroastrianism is of no consequence. What is important for my thesis is that Sistān was indeed a significant place for later Zoroastrian tradition, and was considered to be a province of IranShāhr. While the influence of the myths of the local population (i.e. the population prior to the arrival of Sakas) cannot be established, there is no doubt that the SCE is indeed a product of the Parthian period.

As argued before, the Suren family is one of these noble lines that is, as we shall see below, directly connected to that of the house of Rostam. Even though we cannot identify individual members in the heroic cycle with well-known Suren figures, there is no doubt that characters of the Sistāni heroes are based on the historical figures of this noble family. There is compelling evidence for such identification: Surens are Sistān’s kings who are none other than the Sistāni heroes; both groups have been depicted as having a complicated relationship to the Iranian monarchy, and finally, it was the Surens who had the privilege of placing the crown on the king, and there is a direct reference to this privilege in Rostam’s epithet of Tāj-Bakhsh (crown bestower). The first scholar to postulate a link between the house of Rostam and the Surens was Marquart, who argued that the character of Rostam has been shaped by the traces of the Indo-Parthian king Gondaphares, and the ancient myth of Garshāsp.²⁸² Both Nöldeke and Christensen, however, rejected Marquart’s thesis, citing the dissimilarities


between the legend of Garshāsp and that of Rostam, and the lack of evidence connecting Rostam to Parthians. This however, was not the end of Marquart’s thesis, as Herzfeld returned to it, and by providing other pieces of evidence, he presented it as a sound historical reconstruction, and even connected the remains of Kuh-e Khwajeh in Sistān with Rostam, who he said, was “identical to Gondophares”. More recently, Bivar has taken up the Marquart-Herzfeld thesis and added a piece of numismatic evidence that establishes the connection between the Surens and the house of Rostam. Building upon this theory, Shahbāzi has offered other discoveries which link the Sistāni heroes of the epics to the Parthian house of Suren.

Herzfeld discusses the house of Suren in Parthian times, and concludes that they were the closest to the line of the ruling Arsacids, and the most powerful of the Parthian houses. They also held a complex relationship with the invading Sakas, as it appears that soon after the Saka invasion of Sistān, the Surens and Sakas joined forces, and it is impossible to distinguish between them. To provide further evidence for the identification of the Surens with Rostam’s family, Herzfeld attempts to identify a certain name mentioned in Mithradates II’s Bisitun inscriptions. The name in question is that of a prince and a vassal king, Kaufasata or Kohsad. Now, in the body of the SCE, there is a story regarding Rostam’s battle with a demon by the name of Kok-e Kuhzād. This is the same story recounted by the author of the *Ihya al-Muluk*, because he thought since Ferdowsi

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284 Herzfeld, *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus dem Iran* 4, 1931-2, pp. 114.
had left it out of the Shāhnāmeh, he should recount it in his work. Herzfeld postulates that Kohsad might have been an actual historical character, whose conflict with the ruling house is captured in the story.²⁸⁸ It therefore appears that the family of Suren is the historical blueprint for the creation of the epic characters of the Sistānī heroes.

This theory, which in light of the new numismatic and literary evidence presented by Bivar and Shahbāzi seems to be substantiated very well, has great ramifications for hitherto generally accepted theory on the origin of the Rostam stories. Proposed by Nöldeke and unchallenged since then, this theory claims the origin of the stories to belonging indigenous (pre-Saka and hence pre-Parthian) inhabitants of the regions of Sistān and Arachosia.²⁸⁹ However, if there is indeed a connection between the two houses of Rostam and Suren, then the stories of his house, if not Parthian in origin, must have a definitive Parthian substratum.²⁹⁰

As mentioned earlier, up until now, the Rostam stories have so far been considered by modern scholars to be distinct from the Parthian stories, and the process of dissemination and transmission of the stories, as postulated by Boyce, is pertinent only to the Parthian stories. If indeed they are distinct from known Parthian stories, to my knowledge, there have been no attempts made to scrutinize and explain the process by which the stories of the Sistānī heroes became such an integral part of the Shāhnāmeh. Now that the Parthian origin of these stories has

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 79-80.
²⁸⁹ Nöldeke, The Iranian National Epic, p. 17.
²⁹⁰ The more ancient layers of the epics have been discussed. For example, Davis argues that Rostam is a pre-Zoroastrian hero, see Davis, "Rustam-i Dastān", Iranian Studies, v. 32, n. 2,1999, and "Rostam and Zoroastrianism,” forthcoming. Mehrdād Bahār points to the Saka layer of the Rostam stories in his "T‘ahir-e Hokumat-e Kushān dar Tashkil-e Hēmāseh-ye Melī-ye Irān,” Az ‘Osfureh tā Tārikh, Tehran: Cheshmeh, 1376.
been established, the way of their distribution and transmission is also explained by Boyce’s inference regarding Parthian storytelling.

Christensen sides with Nöldeke regarding the origin of the Rostam stories, i.e. that they are not of Saka or Parthian origin, but are the myths and legends of the indigenous population of Sistān. He observes that Gev and Gudarz are the legendary ancestors of the powerful family of Karen. In the period between Fereydun and Nodhar, Karen, the son of the blacksmith Kaveh, belongs to the same family, and he and his brother Kashvād, are the first in rank amongst the great lords and military chiefs. Sām and, after his death his son Zāl are raised in rank by Nodhar, but it is Karen who directs the war-expeditions. Zāl is satisfied with defending his Sistān kingdom. The war with Turān is also conducted by Gev’s family; for instance, it is Godharz who is at the head of the armies to avenge Seyavush. Out of all the heroes in his family, it is only Rostam who on rare occasions accompanies the Iranian army on expeditions, and even then his role is more that of a illustrious and mighty warrior, and not the commander of the army. This observation, through some reasoning which is missing, leads Christensen to decide that the Rostam stories were a later addition to the national narrative as compared to the stories of the family of Gudarz. Since the logical basis for Christensen’s argument is unstated, we can turn our attention to his observation, and consider it in light of the new research that confirms that the stories of Rostam are indeed Parthian stories. There is, as Christensen observes, a sense of rivalry between the two houses of Rostam and Gudarz. This theme of rivalry appears time and again in the SCE as we shall see below. As we have

already seen, the characters and the history of the two most powerful Parthian houses of Suren and Kāren have shaped the stories of the two houses of Rostam and Gudarz. Evidence of rivalry between the two heroic houses is a historical reflection of historical rivalries that must have existed throughout the centuries between the two noble families of Suren and Kāren. Next, Christensen observes that Zāl is only given the kingdom of Sistān, and he is not appointed as an army leader to fight the Turānians. This, however, must not be seen as the Iranian’s king neglect, nor does it assign him a lesser rank. As we have seen, Sistān refers to a vast geographical territory including most of modern-day Afghanistan and northern India. In the earlier part of this chapter, we discussed the complex political relationship of the rulers of Sistān to their magnates in India. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the evidence provided by the SCE indicates that the kings of Sistāns had to engage in what seemed to be perpetual military campaigns in India, in order to uphold their power in that land. Therefore, Zāl being given the kingdom of Sistān is neither an indication of his lower rank compared to Gudraz, nor does it point to a lack of military involvement on his part. Last, Christensen indicates that it was Gudarz and not Rostam who led the army against Turān. This might be a reflection of a historical reality. We know that the geographical seat of the house of Gudarz (Kāren) is Hyrcania or the region of modern-day Gorgān. It is likely, if not certain, that members of this house during the Parthian period were involved in various campaigns against different Central Asian armies, and geographically speaking, it would make sense that they would be called upon first to procure an army on the border. To sum up, it is most logical to consider the relationship of these two houses, as depicted in the Shāhnāme and observed by Christensen, as being based on historical events
surrounding the two houses. However, Christensen’s reasoning for the different status of the two houses (i.e. that they entered the national narrative at different times) is not substantiated by any evidence, and does not seem to be tenable in the face of the new evidence discussed here.

We shall see that the stories of these two families are connected. In most of the Sistâni epics, especially those related to the later generations, we have heroes of both the house of Rostam and Gudarz. Actually, there are many instances of the heroes of both families appearing in the same story, that we have limited our discussion to a number of episodes. Herzfeld argues that the houses of Suren and the Kârenid Gewpurân entered an alliance around the middle of first century C.E., during which time the latter had established an independent kingdom in the province of Hyrcania. We learn from many episodes found in the SCE that the members of the house of Gewpurân had a close relationships with the house of Rostam. This includes alliances, sometimes in the form of marriage, rivalries, and military partnerships.\(^{293}\)

4. Parthian Stories of SCE

Given the lacuna of historiography in general for this period, and in particular when it comes to affairs of the Parthian houses, the picture depicted in the SCE of the Parthian nobility and their relationships becomes even more valuable. However, to reiterate, our aim here is not to identify the characters of the hero with historical characters and establish a parallel between the events described in the epics and Parthian history. Instead, the approach here is to examine the way in which the epics preserved the memory of historical events of

\(^{293}\) Herzfeld, *Sakastan*, p. 93.
this period. In order to examine the specific way in which the epics remembered the past events, first for each episode I will discuss motifs that are characteristic of the genre. The approach is similar to what has been done in “Indian episodes”.

As mentioned earlier, the SCE is replete with episodes when the heroes of various Parthian houses are engaged in adventures. Thus an exhaustive discussion of such stories is not plausible, at least not in the framework of the present study. Instead, I have chosen a few of these stories that are fascinating in their depiction of the Parthian noble house, their relationships to each other and their adventures.

a. The Story of Babr-e Bayān

_Babr-e Bayān_ is Rostam’s famous impenetrable armor that renders him invincible. Indeed, Babr-e Bayān partially defines Rostam’s heroic image as it is this special armor that grants him super-human ability. In the _Shāhnāmeh_ illustrations, _Babr-e Bayān_ is an emblem by which Rostam is identifiable among the other heroes and warriors. However, nowhere in the _Shāhnāmeh_ do we learn about the origin of this wondrous armor.

In a series of articles, Khāleqi Moṭlaq has published an incomplete version of the story of Rostam’s battle with _Babr-e Bayān_. This he has found interpolated in a _Shāhnāmeh_ manuscript, which he does not identify, but comparison of his text with the manuscript reveals that it is a British library manuscript that contains many other interpolated stories from the SCE. In addition to this version, he cites an oral version recorded by a German scholar in the 19th century. There are not only two extant versions of the story, however.

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295  The manuscript in question is OR, 2926 British Library.
In the beginning of the Farāmarznāmah, lithographed in Bombay, the compiler provides another and more complete version of this story. Since this story is not available elsewhere, I have included the Persian text in its entirety in Appendix C. Another version of this story that corroborates the other versions is found in a Qajar period collection of the tumar of the storytellers. The latter two versions match in much of their detail.

The story begins at the court of the Iranian king Manuchihr, where many of the heroes have assembled in the king’s garden for a drinking party. Among them is Zāl, and Rostam, who is only 14 or 17 years old depending on the version, as well as Qāren, Gudarz, Giv, Kashvād. Unexpectedly a messenger arrives complaining about a certain creature in India, who is causing much trouble. Manuchihr, praising Zāl, asks him to take care of the problem by going to India and killing the animal. Rostam, however, thinks that his father is in no way a match for this dreadful creature, and thinks he should be sent to fight him instead of his father. Zāl is offended and chastises Rostam for his insolence at this assembly. It is mentioned that at this time Gudarz is in charge of Rostam’s education, and Kashvād and Qāren/Kāren are commanders of army.

Gudarz tries to put Rostam in his place by slapping him, but Rostam fights him and hits him on the head, causing Gudarz to pass out. Then, Rostam goes to the place in his house where weapons are kept, and asks for his ancestor’s weapon. He receives Sām’s weapon, and he sets out for India with this weapon. Gudarz becomes worried about him, and inevitably he joins him, as he is responsible for Rostam’s safety. Rostam encounters both Qāren’s and Kashvād’s

298 Appendix C., p. 4.
armies and defeats them, capturing Qāren, Kashvād and 120 other warriors. All this time, he has concealed his identity from the Iranian army. It is noteworthy that in this episode, Zāl is like a king, and Qāren and Kashvād are his army commanders.\(^{299}\)

Rostam, who has disguised himself and has taken on the pseudo-name Alborz is finally able to kill this animal, which contrary to contemporary and medieval belief is actually a dragon.\(^{300}\) After the menace of the dragon is eliminated, once again we find the heroes at a marvelous drinking party, this time at the court of India’s king. As a token of his appreciation, the king of India offers his daughter to Rostam, whom he marries the same day. Farāmarz, according to this story, is conceived the very same night.

There are several motifs in this story that can be considered as generic requirements for narrating the episode. In the case of this story, they are primarily “heroic” motifs, i.e. motifs whose function it is to ascribe the required heroic qualities to a young hero-to-be. Actually, the entire episode can be regarded as describing Rostam’s rite of passage from a “mere child” to the greatest hero of the Sistāni cycle. As mentioned earlier, the test ground for the Sistāni hero is India, and once there, the first heroic trial is to slay a dragon. This is exactly what this story is about: it is Rostam’s first adventure at the end of which he establishes himself not only as a hero, but one who is superior to other heroes, including his father. Initially, when the challenge of defeating Babr-e Bayān is brought to the Iranian heroes’ attention, Zāl is chosen to do this task. However, Rostam

\(^{299}\) I have omitted much of detail, and have given only the main plot and some relevant detail, however; the entire story of Babr-e Bayān has been transcribed and included in Appendix B.

\(^{300}\) This is Khāleqi-Motlaq’s argument, and I have found evidence in the two versions that I have discovered that supports his argument.
questions his capabilities as a warrior in the assembly of heroes, and claims that he is the only one who is able of accomplishing the task, because neither his father nor any other hero is a match for the mighty beast. Zāl is very much offended by Rostam’s indiscretion, and asks Gudarz, his educator, to punish him for it. Gudarz not only does not dare to do so, he also has no choice but to accompany him to India, since Rostam would have gone there with or without him. Once in India, he defeats the armies headed by Qāren and Kashvād, and he wins all the battles against the Iranian heroes, including his father. Then, he proceeds to defeat the dragon, who has remained unharmed in spite of Iranian heroes ceaseless attacks on him.

From the beginning of the episode, Rostam’s behavior establishes his superiority over other heroes. In other words, in this story the aim is not merely granting Rostam a heroic status, by having him kill a dragon. Not only is he a hero, but he is a better hero than all other heroes present there. Therefore, the story, while employing the dragon-slaying motif discussed in section I of this chapter, uses it in a manner that highlights and to some extent foreshadows Rostam’s position as the most powerful hero of the Sistāni cycle. The armor Babr-e Bayān, which from then on is associated with Rostam and his family, is an emblem, or a visual sign, which refers back to this episode in which Rostam’s supremacy is established.

But why is it that only Rostam is able to kill the dragon, when all other heroes have failed? The key to Rostam’s success is his dexterity in trickery. It is because he is a capable trickster that he is able to defeat the dragon, because unlike all other heroes who defeated the dragon by attacking him Rostam devises another method for defeating the beast: he constructs a “house” made out of iron,
and fills it up with sharp objects, and he himself hides in the iron house. The dragon is in the habit of eating everything that appears before him, so he also swallows the iron house. Once in the dragon’s throat, Rostam opens up the iron house. The sharp objects pierce the dragon’s insides, and Rostam cuts him open and comes out. This tactic has to employed because the dragon’s skin is impenetrable, and that is why the armor made out of his skin renders Rostam and his descendents who use it invincible.\footnote{Farâmarz also uses the Babr-e Bayân (Farâmarznâmeh, BL, p. 262, 294), and it would make sense that this significant symbol of this family’s heroic achievement would be passed down to the hero of the next generation. The reason is why Babr-e Bayân is exclusively associated with Rostam is because this is the way it is represented in the Shâhnaemeh. But as we shall see in chapter 6, Ferdowsi neglected to include most of Farâmarz’s stories because the stories did not fit into the ideological framework of his work.} This of course, is an example of Rostam’s ability to employ non-conventional methods in fighting an enemy. Actually, this is not the only incident of such behavior on Rostam’s part in this episode. Because his father has forbid Rostam to undertake the adventure, he disguises himself and even assumes the pseudonym, Alborz. Throughout the corpus of the SCE, one finds many examples where the better-known heroes of the cycle resort to trickery for accomplishing a task. Obviously in this episode, Rostam’s trick of attacking the dragon from inside out is not considered as a weakness. Rather, it is a sign of Rostam’s superior intelligence that allows him to find an unconventional solution for the problem at hand. This is true of other incidents of trickery throughout the epic: not only is trickery not morally reprehensible or even questionable, it is a required skill for the Sistâni hero (for more episodes involving trickery see chapter 6).

Oftentimes, in the SCE, as well as other heroic literatures, at the end of the difficult task the hero is rewarded in some form. As mentioned earlier, the SCE heroes get their reward, in some instances, in the form of a marriage to a foreign
princess (for more on these marriages see above, footnote 19). At the end of this episode, Rostam marries the daughter of the Indian king, and Farāmarz, the next great hero of the Sistāni cycle is conceived. The marriage to the daughter of the Indian king is more than just a reward, because in this case, it also serves as another rite-of-passage motif. Rostam can no longer be described as a child, as he was in the beginning of the poem. Furthermore, Farāmarz, the greatest hero to follow Rostam could also be seen as another reward, because he is conceived as a direct result of Rostam’s ability to kill the dragon.

As we have seen, the episode is very much structured by these motifs whose function is to create Rostam’s heroic image. The image portrayed of Rostam in this story is naturally consistent with the kind of hero Rostam becomes in the later in his life. Therefore, the general “heroic motifs” are employed both for their generic function, i.e. to define him as a Sistāni hero, and to distinguish him as the most powerful hero of the cycle.

This story with its unmistakably heroic discourse reflects some memories of the Parthian history. Considering this story in the context of Parthian history, there are several factors that are worth mentioning. The first is the opening scene of a drinking party at the court of the Iranian king Manuchihr. In many instances, a Parthian story starts with the mention of several Parthian heroes at the court of a certain king. This is a recurrent motif, and serves the purpose of situating the Parthian story within the chronology of the national narrative, and hence making it a part of the other narrative. This, I suspect, must be a later addition to the story, and perhaps it is a result or the influence of the late-Ṣāsānid movement to
incorporate all the epic material in a continuous chronological history.³⁰² Oftentimes the motif of a drinking party at the court of an Iranian king in the presence of many Parthian heroes is a starting point for a different story, and it serves as a literary device to place this story within the chronology of history.

The other interesting reference is to Qāren (Karen) and his son Kashvād as leaders of the army, while chosen by the king as the person to battle the dragon, Zāl’s position is not that of an army commander. Later, we learn that Qāren and Kashvād are merely serving Zāl as army commanders, very much in the same way that they would serve the king. Therefore, without doubt, the episode of Manuchehr’s court is not an integral part of the story, and it makes much more sense to consider Zāl as the king/ruler and Qāren and his son Kashvād as commanders of the army. In this story we find a reflection of the relationship between Zāl and his house and Qāren and Kashvād and his house, at the times when they were allies. It is noteworthy that all the heroes mentioned at the drinking party belong to the house of Gudarz.³⁰³ This story is positively a Sistāni story, as here, Zāl and Rostam enjoy a superior position compared to that of the Gudarzid heroes, who are there merely to provide services to Zāl and Rostam.

The other indication of the friendly relationship between the houses of Zāl and Gudarz is the fact that Gudarz is in charge of Rostam’s upbringing. Sending off the future king to a noble family at a certain age is an old educational institution. According to Widengren, this custom was prevalent throughout the pre-Islamic period, and there is ample evidence to substantiate its existence and

³⁰² The process of formation of the national narrative will be discussed in chapter 6, but already we made a reference to the process when referring to the way in which the Parthian stories found their way into the Šāhnāmeh.
³⁰³ For the genealogy of the Gudarziān see Figure 2.
prevalence. Widengren offers a number of instances in which such a practice is mentioned. He starts off with a discussion of the Armenian sources, since during the Parthian period, strong connections between Armenia and Iran seem to have existed. We encounter the same practice in the Sasanid historical literature in Greek, Arabic and Pahlavi sources. In all these sources there are instances where a future king is sent off to be raised with a noble family far away. The person who is in charge of educating the young person, namely the dayeh, therefore has a special relationship to the king.\textsuperscript{304} Here we do have an indication that Zāl is a king, and Rostam is being trained by a member of another noble family, namely that of Gudraz, to take his father’s place in the future.

To sum up, in this episode there is evidence of the Parthian origin of the characters of Zāl and Rostam. They are the kings of Sistān, who have a particular relationship with the noble house of Gewpurakān, or the Gudarziān. The Gudarziān in this story are Zāl and Rostam’s allies in their adventure in India, and they are clearly of lesser rank. Moreover, the crown prince Rostam’s education has been entrusted to Gudarz, which substantiates a king-noble relationship. As mentioned earlier, throughout the Parthian period, there were instances when there was an alliance between the two houses of Gewpurakān and Suran. Herzfeld refers to one instance of such alliance.\textsuperscript{305} However, what is important for our discussion is that this story and the ones that will follow in this chapter shed light

\textsuperscript{304} Widengren, G., \textit{Feudalismus in alten Iran: Männerbund, Gefolgswesen, Feudalismus in der iranischen Gesellschaft im Hinblick auf die indogermanischen Verhältnisse}, Köln und Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1969, pp. 69-75. The reason why Widengren argues that there was a strong connection to Armenia in regards to this practice might simply be that there Armenian sources for the Parthian period, as in the Iranian case, the only Parthian narrative sources of Iranian origin are these epic stories.

\textsuperscript{305} Herzfeld, \textit{Sakastan}, p. 93.
on a long and complicated relationship between the two houses. It was this historical relationship that provides some of the background for these stories.

b. The marriage of Bānu-Goshasp and Giv

This story is included at the end of Bānu-Goshaspnāmeh, the epic that depicts the deeds and the adventures of Rostam’s daughter. However, this episode clearly was a separate story as the narrator begins it with the formulas invoked at the beginning of the poem such as those used to praise God and his prophet.306 Thematically speaking, this story is distinct from the rest of the epic, the focus of which is Bānu-Goshasp’s various adventures alongside her brother Farāmarz in India. Like the previous story discussed, the opening scene is that of an assembly of heroes, many of whom are without a doubt Parthian, at the court of the Iranian king. The significance of placing the Parthian heroes at the court of a legendary or mythological king has already been discussed. It is important to note that the narrator/author of the poem says that he has heard this episode from the histories of kings.307 Therefore, these stories, at the time our narrators heard them were already incorporated into the larger national narrative, indicating that there might have been an attempt to situate dispersed Parthian stories, even those not included in the Shāhnāmeh, in the chronology of Iranian history.

Like the story of Babr-e Bayān, this story begins with the depiction of a gathering of the pahlavāns at the court of the Iranian King, Kay Kāvus. Although there is a long list of names, there are some pahlavāns named here that are prominent figures: first Ṭus, the well-known hero and the rival of the Gudrazian; then we have Giv, and Ashkesh the Turk, and Zang-e Shavaran, who is the vassal

king of the western territories. During this feast there is talk among the pahlevāns about the beauty and strength of Rostam’s daughter, Bānu Goshosp. All the prominent pahlevāns claim that they want to marry her. Fighting breaks out among them, because they are drunk. Other pahlevāns join the fight, as well as the competition for Bānu-Goshasp. News is sent to Rostam who is away from Iran, and he rushes back upon receiving it. He sets up a trial, which consists of having all the suitors, whose number has reached 400, sit on a rug. Then, Rostam shakes the rug, and the only person who is able to hold on to it and remain on it is Giv. Bānu-Goshasp and Giv celebrate a great wedding, but on their wedding night Bānu-Goshasp does not let Giv get close to her. Instead, she ties him up and puts him a closet. This scenario repeats itself anytime Giv attempts to consummate the marriage. It is only after Rostam intervenes that Giv is set free and her attitude towards him is softened. She bears a child whose name is Bizhan, and the narrator ends the story here with the birth of Bizhan whose adventures are related in the Shāhnāme.

The most interesting heroic motifs in this story pertain to the way both in the SCE as well as the medieval popular literature, women warriors/heroes are depicted. They are always depicted as having masculine qualities of physical strength, dexterity in the battlefield, and endurance. Most of the time, especially on the battlefield, their gender identity is disguised, and only if they are defeated it becomes clear to the enemy that the warrior has been fighting is a woman. In
depicting the character of a woman warrior, there is an insistence to deprive her of all traits that would have been considered as feminine, in order to craft the image of a worthy and believable hero. Bānu-Goshasp is such a hero: she goes on several adventures in India, where she fights demons and other strange creatures; she is a mighty warrior on the battlefield, etc. The only problem arises when she is about to marry.

As we have seen in the previous section, marriage to a princess is often a reward for accomplishing a heroic task. But it really is not the marriage that is the reward. The reward is the woman (oftentimes the princess). Utilizing this motif, of course would be a problem in the case of a hero who is a woman. What he have here in the case of Bānu-Goshasp’s marriage to Giv is an alternative marriage motif.

For Giv, this story contains the traditional heroic marriage motif. He must win a test set by Rostam in order to gain his bride as a reward. By passing the test, he establishes himself as the most superior hero among the group of heroes who attempted but failed the test. This makes him the most suitable person for Rostam’s daughter Bānu-Goshasp. So far this there is nothing unconventional about this motif.

As we have mentioned earlier, Bānu-Goshasp does not allow Giv to touch her, and each time he tries he ends up beaten and bruised. Bānu-Goshasp’s refusal to consummate the marriage is her way of rejecting the notion of Giv’s superior status. While he has proven himself to other heroes, Bānu-Goshasp refuses to accept the result of the test, and engages in her own battle with him. Time after

digression from the current topic. However one thing that I would like to point out is that that the women warriors are clearly distinct from woman "yayars."
time he loses the battle, and there remain no doubt in the minds of the audience who the superior hero is. It is only after Rostam intercedes on Giv’s behalf that she is willing to accept Giv as her husband.

While this heroic discourse is the context for much of the story, there are several references to Parthian history in this episode. The opening scene of the story contains a direct reference to the Gudarziān, and among the names of the pahlevāns enumerated here are many Parthian heroes such as Rohām, Farhād, Gorgin Milād. However, what is of particular interest in this scene is the presence of vassal kings of the Turkish and Western regions, who are considered to be among the heroes. Therefore, we get a sense that this is a gathering of all the rulers of Iran, and the well-known Parthian heroes must also be considered as kings in their own right, as they are present there with some of the warriors of their own armies.310 Thus, no doubt remains that the kings of different regions are no different than the pahlevāns. This understanding of what a pahlevān means can be extended to all of the characters referred to as a pahlevān, and undoubtedly the origin of this definition is to be sought in the Parthian polity, and the similar way in which the noble families participated in it.

The other factor this story has in common, with the previously discussed one is the alliance between the two houses of Rostam and Gudarz. Here we have a reflection of the actual practice of building an alliance through marriage that must have occurred between the two noble houses of Gewpurakan and Suren. However, this is not all. The story of the trial, and Giv being the only one to win it, portrays the house of Gudarz as the only one that could possibly be considered as enjoying the same status and rank as the house of Rostam. After all, no other pahlevān,

including Tus, who represented the Parthian ruling house, is worthy of marriage with a member of Rostam’s family. It is only Giv, son of Gudarz, who is given that honor. The collaboration of these two families in many adventures, and the presence of hints at their alliance such as one finds in this story, is based on the fact that these two families were the most powerful of the Parthian families. The tradition of building an alliance through marriage continues in the next generation as well. Farāmarz, we learn in *Shahryārnāmeh*, marries one of Gudarz’s offspring.\textsuperscript{311}

Nevertheless, the story shows that the alliance represented by the union of Giv and Bānu-Goshasp happens with some resistance and hesitation on the part of Rostam’s family. One must understand that the characters of Bānu-Goshasp and Giv, alongside their other function, represent each respective noble’s house sentiments and attitudes. Bānu-Goshasp’s refusal to sleep with Giv, instead beating him up and tying up his arms and legs, is an indication that rather than being a merging of two equal partners, the alliance is a favor granted to the Gudarziāns by Rostam’s house. Bānu-Goshasp’s strength and vigor are highlighted, especially due to the fact that she is a woman, to stress the superiority of the house of Rostam.

c. Rivalry between the Parthian nobles

There are instances in the SCE when we learn of differences between the noble houses. One such episode appears in the *Borzunāmeh* as the Parthian heroes gather at the court. However, this time, the location of the gathering is not the court of the Iranian king, but Sām’s palace. Present in this scene are members of the Sistāni nobility: Rostam and Borzu as well as the Gudrazians, Gudarz, Giv,

\textsuperscript{311} *Shahryārnāmeh*, p. 152
Bizhan, and ṫus, who as we have mentioned earlier, represents the Parthian ruling family. As one might expect, the heroes are enjoying themselves at a marvelous drinking party hosted by the king of Sistān. Once drunk, Rostam begins to boast about his superior strength, and claims that none of the heroes present are his match. ṫus is offended and interrupts Rostam’s rant, claiming that he himself is the greatest hero of all, as his genealogy is superior to both Rostam and Gudarz’s house. Gudarz responds to ṫus, rebuking him for his shameful behavior, reminding him that he has insulted all of his family, who are nobles descending from Kashvād. If you are humble with us, Gudarz tells ṫus, at least you should not disrespect the house of Rostam. Furious at being humiliated by Gudarz, ṫus pulls out his dagger, but Rohām, another hero of the house of Gudarz, removes the dagger from his hand, and calls his behavior disgraceful and shameful, especially as it is occurring in Rostam’s presence. Fuming with anger, ṫus takes off from the Sistāni court and heads back to the Iranian court.312 Troubled by ṫus’ sudden departure, and the consequences of his angry return to the Iranian court, Rostam coaxes Gudarz, by reminding him of his great genealogy and his wisdom, to follow ṫus and return him to Sistān’s court. After all, ṫus is of Keyanid descent and is related to the king of Iran, Rostam argues. Gudarz agrees, but once he is gone, Giv starts worrying about him, as ṫus has a reputation for vengeance and hatred, and Gudarz is no longer as young and powerful as he used to be. So Giv takes off in search of ṫus, and in this manner, one by one, all the heroes present at the party leave, including Farāmarz, Rostam’s son. Rostam goes to Zāl and relates the events of the day to him, and Zāl, as throughout much of the SCE, assumes the role of the wise elder of the house and reproves Rostam for letting Farāmarz go.

312 Borzünāneh, pp. 83-4, For the Persian text of this passage see Appendix A, Note 7.
Zâl reminds Rostam, in unequivocal terms, that he should not forget that neither Ţus nor Gudarz and his clan are related to him, and that they all are ready to seek vengeance. He implies, therefore, that neither Ţus nor Gudarz can be trusted not to attack Farâmarz, the only representative of Rostam’s family were a fight to break out among the heroes.\footnote{Borzunâneh, pp. 87-8, For the Persian text of this passage see Appendix A, Note 8.}

From here onward, however, the story takes another turn, as the heroes are one by one captured by Susan, a female musician, who acts like an ‘ayyâr (for more on the ‘ayyârs see chapter 2). Before I discuss the motifs of this episode and how they constitute the context for the reflection of the Parthian history contained in it, it needs to be clarified that Borzu is an unusual Sistâni hero. What I mean by unusual is that his life does not fit the biography of the hero, some of its stages we have been discussing when referring to heroic motifs of the SCE. For example, he grows up as a farmer, unaware of his ancestry; he does not go to India, and therefore, he does not engage in any of the heroic tasks that are associated with India, such as killing the dragon, going on a series of adventures, going to wondrous places, conversing with a wise-man, marrying a princess. Given that he does not fit the general heroic characterization, naturally his story and the motifs employed in it are very different that the stories of other Sistâni heroes, such as Garshâsp, Rostam or Farâmarz.

First, as we have seen, in his story we have elements of popular literature in form of stories of ‘ayyârs. It would be very difficult to speculate about the origin of the ‘ayyâri motifs, and why they are only present in this Sistâni story. However, what is clear is that the disappearance and captivity of the Parthian heroes at the hands of Susan creates an opportunity for Borzu to show his heroic
capabilities. After all Parthian heroes have been captured, Zāl and Farāmarz find out that Susan has been working for the Turānian king Afrāsyāb, who has also sent one of his powerful warriors, Pilštam in the hopes of killing the Sistānī heroes. The Rostam and Borzu are able to put kill Pilštam after several battles, and then they take on the Turānian army, who have come to Sistān, after finding out that Pilštam has been defeated. It is interesting to note that throughout the episode, there are references to the fact that Borzu has not had a heroic upbringing. Borzu is reminded of this both by the enemy who use this to ridicule him, as well as by Rostam and his family. For example before the main battle with the Turānian army, Rostam tells Farāmarz that he is afraid that Borzu is farmer-like (khōwi-ye barzegar), and he does not consider Sistān to be his homeland. Therefore, Rostam thinks that during the first attack the Turānians will capture as easily as they would a woman, and humiliate him and take him back to Turān. 314 However, Borzu proves everybody wrong by being a skillful warrior who comes to Rostam’s aid several times. Therefore, one could say that he whole āyyār episode and the consequent battle with the Turānians could be seen as a trial for Borzu.

Another interesting theme that is present in this story, or this branch of stories of SCE315, is the motif of father-son relationship. Although not directly related to the characterization of a hero, this motif seems to be significant enough that it recurs frequently in this story. Like his father Sohrāb, Borzu is affiliated

314 Borzunāmeh, ET, p. 113.
315 There seems to be two distinct branches of the SCE: first, the stories of Garshāsp, Rostam, Farāmarz, Āzarbarzin, who are the most powerful heroes of the cycle, and second the stories of Sohrāb, Borzu and Shahryār, whose stories are different than the rest. The former branch depict the heroes that most readily fit the heroic image described so far. The latter all have biographies that are inconsistent with what one comes to expect of a hero's life, mainly because of the fact that they were not raised as Sistānī heroes.
with the Turānian army, because Afrāsyāb has taken him into his army after having observed his near-supernatural strength. His first encounter with Rostam, like Sohrāb, is on the battlefield. Many battles unfold between the grandfather (Rostam) and his grandson (Borzu), and in one of the battles Borzu is captured and imprisoned in the citadel of Sistān. Their battles continue there, and during one of them as Rostam is about to kill Borzu, Borzu’s mother reveals his identity. The encounters with Rostam, which end differently than Sohrāb’s battles with him, are very significant in defining Borzu’s status as a hero and as a descendent of Rostam. After all, the only way Borzu is able to prove that he is a descendent of Rostam is by fighting him and showing that he is as strong, if not stronger than him. In this context the father-son motifs, which are present in this story, could be considered heroic motifs.

Like all the episodes discussed above, it is within the context of these heroic motifs, which are sometimes very generic, other times very specific, that one finds the narration of events whose referents are Parthian history. There are several points worth mentioning, when it comes to reflections of Parthian history echoed in this story. Here, we find the heroes gathering at the court of Sistān’s king. This is by no means unusual, and given the Sistāni bias of the story, one should expect the Sistāni kings and heroes, i.e. members of house of Rostam, to be depicted as being superior. Situating the Gudarziāns and Ṭus at Sām’s court already establishes the superiority of Rostam’s house. Then, of course we have the negative characterization of Ṭus, who represents the Parthian ruling family. There are episodes in the Shāhnāmeh where Ṭus has been depicted similarly: he is an angry, irrational and vengeful person, many of whose actions are nothing but blunders that have disastrous consequences for him and other parties involved.
\( \text{Tu} \text{s} \) is no different here, and his angry departure from 
\( \text{Sistân} \) results in the 
captivity of all of the heroes who have followed him. Given that \( \text{Tu} \text{s} \) represents 
the Parthian ruling house, his depiction as an insecure, irrational, and vengeful 
character becomes more interesting. In this episode, it is clear that it is the houses 
of Rostam and Gudarz, who are more powerful, and whose members act in a wise 
manner. It is also the members of those two noble houses who suffer the 
consequences of \( \text{Tu} \text{s} \)’ foolish decisions, and have to save him and themselves by 
engaging in some heroic action. Given the Sistāni origin of these stories, this 
characterization of \( \text{Tu} \text{s} \) and his relationship to the two houses can be viewed as the 
Sistāni or Suren perspective of one or more members of the Parthian ruling house. 
Again we see here, that in their endeavors, members of the house of Rostam find 
allies in the Gudarziān.

Another episode in which the conflict between the houses of Gudarz and 
Rostam is alluded to is found in one of Farāmarz’s battles with Bahman. I will not 
discuss the particular motifs, as I have done for the other episodes in this case, and 
just refer to the reflections of the Parthian history. This is because the reader can 
find a detailed discussion of Bahman’s story in chapter 6, where the structure of 
the story is scrutinized. In this story, we find that the Gudarziān have sided with 
Bahman, and they send Rohām, one of the warriors of their family, to fight 
Farāmarz. Appearing on the battlefield, Rohām boasts about his noble lineage and 
belittles Farāmarz and his family. Farāmarz, in turn, reminds Rohām of the 
amicable ties between the two families and that Rostam’s family indeed came to 
the rescue of many heroes of Gudarziān family.\(^\text{316}\) However, this does not 
persuade Rohām, who is determined to prove his loyalty to Bahman by fighting

\(^{316}\) \textit{Bahmannāmeh}, pp. 225-6. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, Note 11.
with Farāmarz. Given that Bahman’s attack on Sistān is one of the most significant episodes of the SCE, this added information, namely the alliance of the house of Gudarz in this endeavor, becomes even more significant. There is an indication that Bahman’s alliance included vassal kings such as a certain Suqlab from Rum, the Kaqan of China, the rulers of Gilan and Daylam and Fārs. While there is simply not enough historical data on this period for one to identify this event, one can speculate that the house of Suren suffered a great defeat at the hands of the Parthian ruling house, and the most powerful branch of the house Kāren, i.e. the Gudarziān was instrumental in the Suren’s defeat.

As we have just seen in the story quoted above, this is not always the case. Although supportive of each other in the assembly, Zāl’s suspicion of Gudarziān reveals that their relationship has not always been that of allies and friends. When Farāmarz is left alone with the Gudarziān and Ṭus, Zāl fears that they might harm him, since despite their friendly appearances, they have not forgotten the old causes for hatred and vengeance.

d. The noble Parthian families’ armies

As a part of the confederacy, the Parthian noble families provided armies and fought on behalf of the Parthian empire. A reflection of this practice is preserved in Shahryārnāmeh, when Arjāsp, the Turānian king, attacks Iran. Upon being informed of the arrival of the armies from Turān, Lohrāsp sends messengers to members of all the noble houses to come to Balkh, the seat of the Iranian court. Among the people who have been summoned are Ardeshir, son of Bizhan, Ṭus, Gorgin Milād, Rohām-e Gashvād, and Jāmāsp from Daylam. Lohrāsp also sends a

messenger to Zāl, warning him about an army that is headed to Sistān.\textsuperscript{318} This is not the only case that we have the mention of the armies of the noble houses, however. When Farāmarz is sent off on one of his Indian adventures, he is accompanied by other nobles such as Gudarz, Ṭus, Ashkesh, each of whom is leading an army.\textsuperscript{319}

It is important to note that the reign of Lohrāsp and his various battles with Arjāsp have not been treated extensively, and we shall speculate about the reasons for this omission of events in detail in chapter 6, page 180. However, a glance at the events described during Lohrāsp reign, as narrated by the \textit{Shahryārnāmeh}, reveals that many of the incidents described in the epic have parallels in late Parthian history (chapter two, Parthian Period). The devastating attacks of the Kushān from Central Asia that simultaneously targeted the northeastern regions of Iran and Sistān, and the ongoing battle on the western frontiers that divided the resources of the empire are depicted in the second half of the \textit{Shahryārnāmeh}. Here we have Arjāsp attacking and besieging Balkh, while Lohrāsp is waiting for the armies of the noble families to arrive. Meanwhile Sistān is being attacked by a separate army. All this time, Rostam is absent since he is fighting a battle in the west, and Farāmarz and Bānu-Goshasp are engaged in India. Although my aim here is not to speculate about which events provided the blueprint for \textit{Shahryārnāmeh}’s narration of Lohrāsp’s reign, the similarity to watershed events of the Parthian empire, especially those occurring in the latter part of the period, cannot be overlooked. In a similar way to the story of Forud in the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} \textsuperscript{320},

\textsuperscript{318} \textit{Shahryārnāmeh}, p. 142.  
\textsuperscript{319} \textit{Farāmarznāmeh}, BL, p. 170.  
\textsuperscript{320} The story of Forud, and Cojayee’s discussion of the Parthian nature of the story is discussed above.
this story of Lohrāsp’s reign, as it appears in the *Shahryārnāmeh*, is plausibly based on significant events of the Parthian period.

As we have seen, the epics are a repository of stories about the past. The most exciting discovery, as far as the history preserved in the epics is concerned, is not the content of story. After all, as we have seen in the discussion of episodes in this chapter, there is hardly any factual information that can be used for the reconstruction of the historical events. What is significant, however, is the way the past events were incorporated and kept alive in the epics. It is even more interesting that a genre as structurally fixed as epic has indeed included stories whose referents are historical events. However, as we have seen, the epics take on the historical events as the raw material, and they fit them into the mold, which is defined by the genre-appropriate motifs, which form the heroic discourse of the epics. Unlike history’s claim to the truth of its stories, the epics in question do not have such a noble pretense. Their aim is to tell stories about the past; stories that claim the authenticity of origin and the superiority of a group of people over others; stories that define what it means to be hero, and are a source of pride for the audience because of the greatness and valor of their heroes -- in short stories whose aim it is to construct, continuously maintain, and glorify the national/ethnic identity. As such, a more detailed study of the events preserved by these epics and the manner in which they tie into the fabric of the genre sheds light into how in the medieval period heroic discourse was used as a means to construct and/or preserve a certain identity that was threatened by the Arab invasion of Iran.

The different aim of the epics as they relate to the past is the reason why in this chapter I have attempted to discuss the historical events reflected in them in the context of the genre. Many of the Parthian episodes discussed above have
survived because of the manner in which they are narrated. The historical events are presented, i.e. sometimes divorced from their larger political context, and this perhaps was the key to their survival, because had they been identified as Parthian histories, they most definitively would have been suppressed or eliminated by the Sasānids. Therefore, the other significance of the historical events depicted in the SCE is that at the very least we have how the Parthians themselves chose to represent themselves in the stories. Given the lacuna in Parthian social and literary history this knowledge of Parthian history seems especially valuable.
CHAPTER 5

SOURCES OF NATIONAL EPICS

I. The Shāhnāmeh

From its inception modern western scholarship has been preoccupied, if not obsessed, with identifying the sources of the Shāhnāmeh. The work of one scholar in particular has set the paradigm for our understanding of the nature of Ferdowsi’s sources and their mode of transmission. In his Iranian National Epic, which is still considered a classic study of the work, Nöldeke scrutinizes both internal and external references to the sources of the Shāhnāmeh. He observes that Ferdowsi in his preface to the Shāhnāmeh refers to his source, namely a Pahlavi book that was given to him by his friend. After examining all the evidence and discussing it at length, Nöldeke concludes that the work at hand is based on a prose Shāhnāmeh of Abu Manṣūr “Abd ar-Razzāq, which in turn was based on the Pahlavi (Middle-Persian) book of the kings or the Khodāy-nāmak, which was translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘. This, however, is not an original idea, as it is basically the explanation of Ferdowsi’s sources as found in the 15th century preface to the Shāhnāmeh (known as the new preface). Nöldeke, in the absence of other conclusive evidence, merely accepted the hypothesis of the new preface, and for the next fifty years after the publication of his work this thesis remained unchallenged.

However, the basic problem in such identification lies in the fact that of Abu Manṣūr’s Shāhnāmeh, only the preface is extant, and both the Pahlavi
Khodây-nāmak and its 8th century Arabic translations are lost. We do have some knowledge of the contents of the Khodây-nāmak, both from its fragments preserved in the works of Arabic chroniclers such as Ibn al-Qutaybeh and at-Tabari, as well as from references made to it by medieval authors.\(^3\) The work essentially is thought to have been a chronicle of Persian kings, from mythological times up to the period of its composition, and it served as the primary source for the national history of Iran prior to the Arab conquest.\(^3 \) While the Khodây-nāmak provided the material for the many reconstructions of the Sāsānīd history, since the work itself is lost, it is difficult to make a judgment about its content, and the degree to which it had incorporated myths, popular tales and legends. However, the extant fragments, while establishing a chronology of the Sāsānīd period, have an unmistakably epic tone. Additionally, the different version and narrations of the Khodây-nāmak add to the intricacy of the problem.

In two independent works, Davidson and Davis challenged Nöldeke’s widely accepted thesis.\(^3\) Invoking the “Oral-Formulaic Theory” propounded by Lord and Parry, they both suggested that the Shāhnāmeh could be an oral composition.\(^3 \) Since the 1960’s the aforementioned Oral-Formulaic theory had dominated the field of epic studies, and given the evidence provided for it in the case of the Homeric epics, its implication could not be ignored by the students of epic poetry. To offer a simplified explanation, according to this theory the

\(^3\) For a discussion of the surviving fragments in the works of Arab historians see, Yarshater, E., “Iranian National History”, in Cambridge History of Iran, pp. 360-4.
poet/singer re-creates the poem each time he performs it by drawing upon a repertoire of stock formulas and themes. The existence of this kind of oral tradition, namely one that renews itself in each performance by a re-telling of a story through the use of metric and thematic formulas, is proven in the case of Homeric epic. This was achieved by the study of the live oral tradition associated with the Homeric epics, and comparing the results of such study to the classical works attributed to Homer.325

The difficulty with this thesis begins with the fact that in the case of the Persian epics, however, no such oral tradition exists. While there is no doubt, and plenty of medieval and contemporary evidence for the existence of an oral tradition, nowhere do we find an indication that the oral performance conformed to what is required of the Oral-Formulaic model. Nevertheless, both Davis and Davidson argued that Shāhnāmeh was an oral composition, or in other words, an instance of an oral performance. Davidson rejects the existence of any literary work as the source of the Shāhnāmeh, and goes as far as claiming that Shāhnāmeh’s multiple references to its written sources were a symbolic expression of the authority and authenticity of the oral poetic traditions in performance.326 Even the section of the Shāhnāmeh that narrates the Sāsānid history, according to her, is not based on the Khodāy-Nāmak or any other written source. Although based on a different methodology than Davidson’s, Davis arrives at the same conclusion. According to him, Shāhnāmeh’s internal references to sources are not to be taken at face value as they are literary topoi whose function is to lend credibility to the poet. However, unlike Davidson, Davis

325 Lord, 1960.
326 Davidson, 1994, p. 53.
did make an exception regarding the Sāsānīd section of the epic, claiming that Ferdowsi might have used written sources for this part of the poem.\footnote{Davis, Dick. "The Problem of Ferdowsi's Sources," \textit{Journal of the American Oriental Society}, vol. 116, no. 1, 1996, pp. 48-57.}

Scholarship in general, and some Iranian scholars in particular, vehemently rejected this theory, arguing that there is simply not enough evidence to support this thesis.\footnote{De Blois, F, 1992, “Poetry to ca. A.D. 1100”, Persian Literature” A Bio-Bibliographical Survey (begun by C. A. Storey), Vol. V., Part 1, London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1970-1972; For review of Davidson's work see Omidsālār, M. "Unburdening Ferdowsi", \textit{Journal of the American Oriental Society}, vol. 112, no. ii, 1996, 235-242. For his review of Davis' work see Omidsālār, M., "Could al-Tha'alibi have used the \textit{Shāhnāma} as a Source?", \textit{Der Islam}, vol. 75, no. 2, 1998, pp. 338-346.} First and foremost, it has been pointed out that such an oral tradition, i.e. one that used to compose works accompanied by music, has never existed in Iran, or at least not since medieval times.\footnote{Davidson attempts to argue that the Parthian \textit{gosan} were indeed poet/singers who composed their stories orally. However, as it is apparent from Boyce’s work, there are no specific references to such practices. Boyce, 1957.} The other major objection to this theory stemmed from the fact that Ferdowsi regarded his work as a ‘book’, wherein he expressed his desire to leave a good name behind.

In spite of the apparent validity of its claims, the critique of this theory, however, has turned into a bitter diatribe, as in some scholars’ view Davidson and Davis’ claim to the oral formulaic background of \textit{Shāhnāmeh} undermines its worth as a highly literary and sophisticated masterpiece. The acerbity of the critiques of theory can partially be explained by considering the status and role of the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} for modern Iranians with nationalistic tendencies. Since the early 20th century the nationalist movement appropriated the epic as a tool for the construction of the modern national identity. Therefore, an exclusively oral source of this national emblem would, in the perception of some people, not only diminish its literary value, but also rob the nation of a written history. For
example, according to Khâleqi-Motîlaq, Ferdowski’s only source was Abu Manşur’s *Shāhnāmeh*, which was based on three written Pahlavi sources: 1) the *Khodâynāmeh*: it included the history of Iran from the first man-king to the end of the Sâsânîd period. There were several versions of the *Khodâynāmeh*, but there was a dominant version in which Esfandyār was the prominent hero, since he is a Zoroastrian hero, and Rostam is not. Other works, such as *pandnamas*, the story of Bahrām Chubin, and other similar works found their way into the *Khodâynāmeh*, but we know for the most part they were separate stories, and we have the evidence of the existence of these books, 2) the book containing the stories of Sîstân, whose main heroes were Rostam and his ancestors and children. Azad Sarv had translated most of these materials from Middle Persian (Pahlavi) to new Persian, and they found their way into the *Shāhname* (Abu Manşur and Ferdowsi) and were used as sources for various other Sîstânî epics, 3) the book of Sakisran, which is mentioned by Mas‘udî as a source, and Christensen had speculated that it related to the word Saka, or Saka-Saran (Saka leaders), but this was not the main source for the Sîstânî stories because the stories mentioned in fragments by al-Mas‘udî are general Parthian stories, in which Rostam is not the main character. There are also stories from the Giv family in this work. As we shall see, however, there are several problems with Khâleqi-Motîlaq’s assertion. First, as we shall see below, there were versions of *Khodâynāmeh*, in which Rostam played a major role. Second, whether or not the book of Sarv existed as a separate manuscript cannot be determined because we do not have a single reference to existence of such a book. We do know that his knowledge of the Sîstânî material was instrumental for both the stories of Rostam in the *Shâhnāmeh*.

and other Sistānī epics that were versified later, but we have no evidence that Sarv actually wrote a book. Third, as we shall see the book of Sakisaran was indeed a repository of the Sistānī and other Parthian stories. The presence of other Parthian stories, along with the stories of the house of Rostam, was the reason Khāleqī-Moṭlaq dismissed it as the source for the Sistānī stories. This stems from the fact that Khaleq-Moṭlaq perhaps does not accept the Parthian origin of Rostam’s house, and adheres to Nöldeke’s view of the pre-Parthian origin of house of Rostam. As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, the Parthian origin of the house of Rostam has been established fairly well, and therefore, the Pahlavi work of Sakisaran could have included many of the Sistānī episode along with the stories of Gudarziān. There is however a more basic problem with Khāleqi-Moṭlaq’s argument: in the absence of Abu Manṣur’s Shāhnāmeh, we have absolutely no evidence that Ferdowsi used that source exclusively.

Another vocal representative of the “nationalist” camp is Omidsālār, who in his reviews accused both authors of faulty methodology and selective use of evidence in order to ride the wave of the academic fad of oral composition. Bordering on personal attack and name calling, Omidsālār’s diction betrays his irritation with both scholars, whom he accuses of not having enough knowledge of Persian philology, the variants of the texts of the epic, as well as the Iranian scholarship produced in Persian on the Shāhnāmeh. 331 Davidson responded to Omidsālār and her other critics in an equally acrimonious and personal fashion, insisting on the veracity of her original oral-formulaic scheme and refusing to

acknowledge its problematics. Davidson’s insistence on the exclusively oral formulaic nature of the Shāhnāmeh is as untenable as Omidsālār’s claim that Ferdowsi’s only source was the prose Shāhnāmeh of Abu Manṣūr ar-Razzāq.

Omidsālār and Davidson and their ongoing tirade aside, there seems to be consensus in the scholarship in pointing out the implausibility of the oral-formulaic composition. There are many reasons for the rejection of this theory when it comes to the Shāhnāmeh, but such discussion lies outside the scope of the present study. In the following section, however, the sources for those stories of SCE not present in the Shāhnāmeh will be discussed in much detail, and the question of orality will be examined in that context.

Although rejected as a possible explanation for the way the poem was composed, the discussion of the oral-formulaic theory was not fruitless for Shāhnāmeh scholarship, as it opened up, for the first time, the question of the oral tradition and its role in shaping of the epic tradition. Hence, De Blois writes:

Our conclusion can thus only be that the Shaname, as it was written by Firdausi, was not oral poetry, but book-literature. However, almost as soon as it was written down, it most certainly did turn into oral poetry on the tongues of the rhapsodists, who developed and elaborated the epic orally and have continued to do so to the present. The tremendous degree of disagreement already between the oldest manuscripts of the poem cannot be explained purely in terms of the carelessness and unscrupulousness of generations of scribes. It is quite clear that from a very early date the scribal and oral textual traditions have constantly influenced one another. But this is an oral tradition which does not (as is assumed to have been the case with the Homeric poems) culminate and end with a book. In Iran the book is the point of departure.

The acknowledgement of the existence of an oral tradition that existed side-by-side with the written tradition will inevitably raise questions regarding the nature of this oral tradition and the interaction between the two. The scholarship has always been aware of the contemporary practice of *naqali*; however, a comprehensive study of this oral art form has not been undertaken. That was the case until recently when Yamamoto offered an interesting picture of the oral-written dimensions of the epic tradition, and the way in which they influenced each other. Instead of forcibly applying the oral-formulaic formula to the Iranian epics, by studying both the oral tradition and the various written epics, she proposes a model, according to which “oral composition”, which often found textual sources, was achieved. Yamamoto does not offer a definitive answer to the question or sources. Rather, she provides some explanation regarding the nature of the oral tradition of Iranian epics and the dynamics between written and oral versions of the stories.

For the purposes of our discussion, however, the most useful are those observations with regards to the formation of the national tradition. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the originally Parthian stories found their way into the national narrative, and form a substantial part of it. The means of transmission of these stories has been explained by the presence of the Parthian musician-minstrels, who continued to be active during the Sāsānidperiod as well.

While there is no doubt that the oral tradition at times played a significant role in the transmission of the stories, the existence of some written sources for the Iranian epic tradition cannot be denied. As described in sources, the *Khodāy-

The Sasanid period in order to establish a chronological history of Iran from the
Sasanid times. This was a politically motivated process aimed at portraying
the Sasanids as the legitimate heirs of the Iranian throne. By the time of
Khosrow I, the history of ancient Iran was definitely compiled in a coherent
form and kept in the treasury as a national document.  

It is presumed that the last major revision of the tradition was undertaken
under Khosrow Parviz 620 C.E., and the accounts of the short and often
chaotic reigns that succeeded him were added later. In his study of the
Khoday-namak, Shahbazi argues convincingly that there were three distinct
versions of the Khoday-namak: the royal, religious and heroic versions. Each of
these versions portray the events in different ways. An examination of Rostam’s
role in the three versions sheds light on the different tendencies preserved in the
different versions. In the priestly version, Rostam or the Sistani heroes are not
prominent. In the royal version, he is named among the heroes of Iran, but his role
is downplayed. In the heroic or the “pahlevanic” tradition, he is the supreme hero
of the Keyanid period, the bravest of the brave, and the invincible savior of Iran. It
is reasonable to assume that some material had entered from oral sources into this
“pahlevanic” tradition at different point, but its existence in a written format, in
light of the versions preserved cannot be denied. It is this version of Khoday-
namag that was greatly influenced by the Parthian stories:

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Several families of the Sāsānid period, namely, the Karen, the Suren and the Mihran, are depicted anachronistically in some recensions of the Iranian tradition as rivals of the royal house of Kayan. Just as the Sasānians claimed sovereignty by right of descent from Kai Vistasp – the royal patron of Zoroaster- so did these families allege that they had been “established” in their fiefs and in their elevated position by the same Kai Vistasp. Beside, they boasted descent from the Arsacid kingly house, and were thus the Parthava (Parthians) Pahlavans “heroes” of EranShāhr.\textsuperscript{339}

The national tradition, as compiled during the Sāsānid period, therefore, is ironically based on this “pahlevānic” tradition. I say ironically, because it was the version most sympathetic to the Parthian noble families, and it is remarkable that in spite of Sasānids’ concerted efforts to obliterate their predecessors from historical memory, the version of Khodāy-Nāmak that they bequeathed as the national tradition, surviving in Ferdowsi and Th’ālībi’s recensions, was an heroic version originating in and celebrating the Parthian noble houses:

The ‘royal’ and ‘priestly’ version of the Xwāday-Nāmag represent Kay Vistasp as a Constantine of Zoroastrianism, and Bahman-Ardaser as the great patron of the Good faith and the author of much prosperity for EranShāhr. These very kings, however, appear in the Persian national epic as treacherous, short-sighted, malignant and heartless sovereigns who disregarded their pledges, ill-rewarded their subjects and caused great harm to the people. This cannot be merely the influence of sagas upon historical records; rather, the Bahman-Ardasher of Xwāday-Nāmag has many features in common with the SāsānidArdaser, whose ruthless effort to root out pro-Arsacid opposition among the provincial lords seems to be transferred to his Kayanid namesake. Similarly, the endeavor of Ardaser-i Papakan to make Zoroastrianism the state religion must have resulted in the destruction of many cult temples, and the memory of such acts would have been kept but reshaped into malicious efforts by the royal patron of Zoroastrianism Kai Vistasp, to destroy Rostam and his house, who had refused the new faith.\textsuperscript{340}

\textsuperscript{339} \textit{Ibid}, 217.
\textsuperscript{340} \textit{Ibid}, 218.
As we shall see, however, this heroic version of the *Khodāy-Nāmak*, which most likely served, as at least one of the sources of the *Shāhnāmeh*, was very much subject to revisions and editing. We have already alluded to the fact that while some of the stories of SCE have entered this version of the national narrative, many have not. In the next chapter, while comparing specific divergent stories as narrated by the *Shāhnāmeh* and found elsewhere among the corpus of the SCE, I will speculate about the reason for and sources of the different rendition of events. For now, however, I will discuss the sources of that part of SCE that has not been included in the *Shāhnāmeh*. 
II. The SCE

a. Written Sources

The question of the sources of the SCE and their origin is as complicated as the question of Shāhnāmeh’s sources. First, what I have defined as SCE (see Introduction) includes many Shāhnāmeh stories, so here in this section, the discussion will be focused on those stories of SCE not included in the Shāhanāmeh. Second, I will start the discussion by examining the medieval references to those works, both before and after the appearance of the versified versions of the epics. My aim in this discussion is not to prove that a specific work was the source of the versified version of the epics. Instead, I would like to demonstrate that prose versions of these works existed in the literary milieu both before and after their versification. The extent to which the stories that have reached us remain faithful to their originals is another question that will be raised.

The most important medieval work that mentions the Sistāni epic is the aforementioned local history, Tārikh-e Sistān. As we have seen earlier, there are references to several of the Sistāni heroes in this work. The story of Garshāsp and his founding of Sistān, as well as his other adventures, has been discussed in chapter 4. Tārikh-e Sistān’s account of Garshāsp’s adventures is, according to its anonymous author, based on a certain Ketāb-e Garshāsp. Bahar, the editor of Tārikh-e Sistān mentions that this book must be Abu-l Mu‘ayad Balkhi’s Ketab Garshāsp, as the existence of this book has been substantiated in other medieval sources. Furthermore, Bahar argues this book of Garshāsp must have been a part of Abu-l Muyad’s Greater Shāhnāmeh, which was not included in Abu Mansur

341 Bahār, Tārikh-e Sistān, p.1.
Ar-Razzāq’s *Shāhnāmeh.* Unfortunately, the next three lines that presumably would have contained information about the work are illegible in the unique manuscript of the work. However, elsewhere, the author identifies this *Ketab-e Garshāsp* as having been composed by Abu-l Mu’ayad al-Balkhi’s. The other source for Garshāsp’s account is *Fāzā’el-e Sistān* (merits of Sistān) composed by a certain Helāl-e Yusof. We have virtually no information about the latter work, but as we shall see the former, namely the *Ketāb-e Garshāsp* has been mentioned in another medieval work.

It would be useful, therefore to compare Garshāsp’s account as it appears in a short form in *Tārikh-e Sistān* to the verse *Garshāspnāmeh.* However, before we do that, it is worth mentioning that according to its author, the verse *Garshāspnāmeh* of ʿAsadi Ṭusi had an ancient book as its source not included in the *Shāhnāmeh.* This is also the case for the other epics: there are ample references to ancient sources throughout the body of the other epics. It is possible that in the case of the epics the reference to an ancient book as the source of a poem could be a literary *topos* as suggested by Davis. However, as will be shown, the existence of such books and their popularity makes the existence of such books a real possibility.

A comparison of Garshāsp’s adventure as narrated by *Ketab-e Garshāsp* with *Garshāspnāmeh*’s account reveals a remarkable parallelism between the two. The author of *Tārikh-e Sistān*, begins his account by informing us that his account will be a brief one, since there is an entire book devoted to narrating Garshāsp’s

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342 *Ibid*, p. 1
345 Davis, 1996, p. 3.
For example, we learn about Garshasp’s service to Žahhāk, and his slaying of the dragon. Garshasp’s Indian adventures, which take up about one-third of the Garshāspnāmeh have been mentioned above in a concise form, and all the details, including the names of his opponents and allies, and plot details, are to be found in ʿAsadi’s Garshāspnāmeh. There is also a reference to his wondrous encounters, as he visited many strange islands. Then he goes to the West until the time of Fereydun, when he is summoned to the court and sent on a mission to China along with his son Narimān. At the end, Ferydun appoints him king of Sistān, Zabol, Kābol and Khorāsān. All of these activities are mentioned in elaborate detail in ʿAsadi’s verse version of the Garshāspnāmeh. What we find in Tārikh-e Sistān, therefore, is without a doubt a recounting of the main plot of Ketāb Garshasp, which was the source for ʿAsadi. Since thanks to Tārikh-e Sistān, we do have the sketch of the plot of a prose version of Ketab Garshasp, and there are astounding similarities between that and the main plot of the Garshāspnāmeh, we can no longer dismiss the idea of a written source.

Aside from Ketāb-e Garshasp, in Tārikh-e Sistān we also find references to other Sistāni epics. The adventures of Farāmarz, according to the anonymous author of the work, have been preserved in a twelve volume work by the title of Akhbar-e Farāmarz (Farāmarz’ Accounts). The author doesn’t even attempt to summarize this work, and simply refers the reader to the aforementioned work. In the case of Rostam and his heroic deeds, we are referred to Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh, since according to the author, the Shāhnāmeh is nothing but the story

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346 Tārikh-e Sistān, p.5
of Rostam. 348 The accounts of the heroes/rulers of Sistān have been preserved in
this fashion until the reign of the Sāsānīd king Khosrow II, when Sistān’s ruler
was Bakhtiar, a descendent of Rostam. His story is also preserved in Bakhtyār-
nāmeh.349

The references to the various epics appear in a passage where the author is
attempting to establish the genealogy of the kings of Sistān. The first king/hero
who has an epic devoted to him is, of course, Gashasp. Then, one by one his
descendants who were kings of Sistān are mentioned up to Bakhtyār, Sistān’s king
during the reign of Khosrow II. There is a sense in this passage, that the stories of
Sistān’s kings constitute a continuous body of literature, in which we would find
these stories in a chronological fashion very much like Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh.
These stories narrate a history parallel, albeit sometimes contradictory, to the
national tradition. We have an indication from looking at other medieval sources,
that these stories were compiled in one single work, pieces of which were
versified by later poets. This work is Abu-l Mu‘ayyad’s prose Shāhnāmeh, which
we will discuss below.

There are additional references to Sistāni epics in the medieval sources in
contexts different than those discussed above. In the 12th century anonymous
universal history, Mujmal at-Tawārikh wa-l Qīṣṣās we have a reference to our
stories, when the author is discussing his sources of history:

[We have relied on] Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh, which is the core, as
well as other books, which are like its branches. Other wise men
have versified these books such as Garsafnāmeh, Farāmarznāmeh,
Akhbār-e Bahman, and the story of Kush-i Pildandān. I have also
used Abu al-Mu‘ayyad’s prose such as the accounts of Narimān,

Sām, Kayqubad, Afrāsyāb and Lohrasb and Aghish and Hadan and Kayshikan and whatever I have found in Jarir’s history (i.e. Tārīkh-e Ţabari).350

Aside from the reference to several of the stories that are of interest to us, there are several other remarkable points in this passage. First, by the time of this work’s composition, several epics had already been versified. As a matter of fact, in the case of Garshāspnāmeh, the anonymous author mentions 3Asadi-e Ṭusi as its author.351 Second, we have a clear distinction between the works of prose and poetry. There is also a clear indication that the versified works have been put into poetry from older prose versions of the stories. What is significant is the mention of Abu al-Mu’ayad as the major prose authority. Elsewhere in the same work, Abu al-Mu’ayad is mentioned as the greatest prose-composer, the quality of whose work can only be compared to Ferdowsi’s verses. Furthermore, this is mentioned in other sources of his Shāhnāme-ye Bozorg or Greater Shāhnāmeh, but here, in this 12th century work, Abu al-Mu’ayad’s works seem to have already been divided into individual stories/epics. Nevertheless, Abu al-Mu’ayad not only mentioned as one of the principal sources for the pre-Islamic history of Iran, but he is also given a prominent position. After listing all of his sources of the composition of his universal history, the anonymous author confesses:

These books that we have mentioned do not agree with each other (in the narration of the historical accounts), and we shall speculate about the reasons for the differences to the degree that it is possible for us, so that the readers can contemplate on these reasons without withholding any information from them. However, when it comes to the poetic devices and aesthetics of expression, is impossible to narrate the events in the same style as Ferdowsi or 3Asadi’s verse or Abu al-Mu’ayad’s prose.352

350 Anonymous, Bahār, M. T. (editor), Mujmal at-Twārikh, p. 2
351 Ibid, p. 2
352 Ibid, p. 3
What emerges from this comparison and the other reference to Abu’l Mu’ayadand his work is his prominence as the author of the prose *Shāhnāmeh*, which included many episodes not found in Ferdowsi’s work. Bal’ami, the 10th century translator of *Tārikh-e Tabari* is also among the medieval authors who mentions Abu’l Mu’ayad and his *Greater Shāhnāmeh*. Bal’ami’s refers to Abu’l Mu’ayad’s *Greater Shāhnāmeh* when narrating the story of Zahhak or Bivrāsb’s usurping of the Iranian throne and Jamsheed’s fate. First, Bal’ami gives the version of known to us by Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāmeh*: Jamshid is slain by Zahhak, who takes over the Iranian monarchy and marries both of Jamshid’s daughters. However, this is only one, and perhaps the best known version, as Bal’ami proceeds to tell us another version of the story:

In another book Persians narrate the story in a lot of words that Jam fled and went to Zabolestān. The daughter of Zabolestān’s king found him, and married him without her father’s knowledge. The father had commanded for his daughter to be arrested, but meanwhile she became pregnant and gave birth to a son named Tur, who fled to India and died there. That son (i.e. Tur) had a son by the name Shidasb, and he in turn had a son named Turak, and Turak’s son was Shāhm, and his son was Athart and his son of Garshāsp, and his son was Narimān, and his son was Rostam, and his son was Dastān, and his son was Rostam, and his son was Farāmarz. There are many stories and accounts and anecdotes concerning them, and many people narrate these stories and Abu’l Mu’ayadal-Balkhi mentions them in his *Greater Shāhnāmeh*.\(^{353}\)

It is interesting to note that this version of Jamshid’s fate after the arrival of Zahhak is preserved in the *Garshāspnāmeh*. As a matter of fact, the first section of the *Garshāspnāmeh* narrates the story of Jamshid and his romance with the daughter of Zabolestān’s king. One could say this is the Sistāni version of

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353 Bal’ami, *Tārikh-e Bal’ami*, Tehran: Zavvār, 1383, p 90. For the genealogy of Rostam’s house see Figure 2. Bal’ami’s version of the genealogy matches that of the *Garshāspnāmeh*. 202
Jamshid’s story, by the means of which the house of Rostam traced their
genealogy back to one of Iran’s mythological kings. The Sistāni heroes’
connection to Jamshid and these two different versions of his story will be
discussed further in the next chapter. What is of interest here, however, is that in
his Greater Shāhnāmeh Abu’l Mu‘ayad al-Balkhi preserved the Sistāni version of
the story of Jamshid, which later on appears in ʿAsadi Ṭusi’s Garshāspnāmeh.

There remains no doubt therefore, that Abu’l Mu‘ayadal-Balkhi Greater
Shāhnāmeh contained the source for many of the stories of Rostam’s house. As
we have seen, this is clear from Balʿami’s reference to him, as well as Mujmal al-
Tawarikh’s mention of him as the author of the prose version of many of the
stories of the SCE. Another connection between Abu’l Mu‘ayad and the Sistāni
stories is his interest in the ʿajāyeb genre of literature as he is also said to have
written the first book of this genre in Persian by the title of ʿajāyeb al-donyā. In
this genre medieval scholars are interested in describing the monuments of
antiquity; the physical and topographical phenomena, such as unusual springs and
wells, mineral deposits, volcanoes, as well as the marvels of the heavens and the
celestial bodies.354 It is noteworthy that there is a connection between this genre of
literature and the SCE as well as many of the Sistāni epics, include episodes in
which the hero encounters many wondrous and strange places, monuments and
people. The accounts of wonders and marvels of places and beings became a
distinct genre only after the 12th century.355 Therefore, one can speculate that
“wonder stories” preserved in the SCE were used, not for their content, but rather
as a template or a point of departure for the later authors of this genre. Given that

354 For more on this genre of medieval literature see Bosworth, “A’jayeb al-Makluqat”, EIr,
website (www.iranica.com).
355 ibid.
Abu al-Mu’ayad, the prose narrator of the SCE, has also composed such a work, the very first work lends some credibility to this conjecture. Moreover, given this connection between the SCE and the ‘ajāyeb genre, and Abu al-Mu’ayad’s pivotal role in preserving and dissipating the stories of Sistāni heroes, which included many wonder stories, substantiates the claim that there were indeed written prose versions of the SCE, which were used as a source for later versified versions of the epics.

Aside from the aforementioned works, Abu al-Mu’ayad’s Shāhnāmeh is mentioned in two other medieval sources, Qabusnāmeh and Tārikh-e Ṭabarestān. In the 12th century Qabusnāmeh, the author, ‘Unsur al-Ma’ali, a local ruler of the Gilān/Tabarestān region, discusses his genealogy. He is a descendent of one of Kay Khosrow’s children whose account has been preserved in Abu al-Mu’ayad’s Shāhnāmeh. The account of Kay Khosrow’s children is not found in Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh, and it is interesting that Abu al-Mu’ayad’s prose work did contain the accounts of Kay Khosrow’s descendents, whom the local nobility of various regions of Iran regarded as their ancestors. This might be a further indication of the existence of a plethora of Parthian stories in the Greater Shāhnāmeh; stories that did not find their way into Ferdowsi’s national narrative and as a result were lost. The other mention of Abu-l Mu’ayad’s work in the 13th century Tārikh-e Ṭabarestān does not contain any such nuances. It merely states that in both the verse Shāhnāmeh of Ferdowsi and the prose Shāhnāmeh of Abu al-Mu’ayad the

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tale of the birth of Manuchehr and the fact that he avenged Iraj have been narrated.  

If we assume that at least one of the sources of our verse epics is Abu’l Mu’ayad’s work, the next question that will arise is that of Abu’l Mu‘ayad’s sources. As mentioned earlier, there are references to ancient books that contained these stories. For the most part, however, we do not have any specific mention of any such books. There is a piece of evidence, however, that seems to link all of these stories to a more ancient source. Şafa rightly observes that the source for the Rostam stories of the Shāhnāme is often attributed to a certain Azād Sarv or Sarv-e Māhān from Marv. The reason for his claim is that often, when about to narrate one of Rostam’s adventures, Ferdowsi refers to Sarv as the principal source of the story to follow. He speculates that these stories may not have been included in Abu Manṣūr’s Shāhnāme as indicated by Nöldeke. Although there is no way to prove it, in the absence of Abu Manṣūr and Abu’l Mu‘ayad’s, one can speculate that Sarv, the nobleman from Marv, could have been the source for Abu al-Mu‘ayad. Given the meager evidence available about him, any further speculation regarding Sarv would be pure conjecture. For example, we cannot even establish whether his work was written or if he was an oral narrator. We do not know if his work was in the form of prose or poetry, etc. However, what seems likely is that he, like Abu-l Mu‘ayad, and perhaps unlike Abu Manṣūr, was particularly interested in preserving and narrating stories of the SCE. Şafa speculated about Sarv’s role as the transmitter of the Sistāni cycle of epics based on Ferdowsi’s mention of him as his source for the stories of Rostam. There is

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358 Şafa, Hemāse-Sarāyi dar Irān, p. 32
another piece of evidence that links him to the SCE and by extension to Abu-l Mu‘ayad. In the *Farāmarznāmeh* when a new story line is about to begin, the author informs us that the following story is based on Sarv-e Māhān’s version. Sarv is identified as a nobleman from the city of Marv. As a matter of fact, the poet informs us that the preceding story was not based on Sarv’s narrative, and he is about to return to his version of events in the story that he is about to narrate. 359

Khāleqi-Moṭlaq also acknowledges Sarv as one of the sources of the Sistāni stories of the *Shāhnāmeh*. He argues that unlike Ferdowsi, the author of the *Farāmarznāmeh* had access to the original work of Sarv, which was a compilation of Sistāni stories translated from Pahlavi. 360 In the case of the *Shāhnāmeh*, he argues that Sarv’s material was included in the *Shāhnāmeh* of Abu Maşṣur, and was not directly used by Ferdowsi. However, he thinks that the author of *Farāmarznāmeh* had used Sarv’s book. Needless to say this argument is entirely unfounded and untenable. If the author of *Farāmarznāmeh* could have used Sarv’s book (assuming such a book existed), why couldn’t Ferdowsi have used it? After all, Ferdowsi lived at the very least a century prior to the author of *Farāmarznāmeh*, and hence closer to Sarv’s time. This argument comes from the author’s dogmatic insistence on the nature of Ferdowsi’s sources. As we have seen earlier, Khāleqi-Moṭlaq believes that Ferdowsi used only the *Shāhnāmeh* of Abu Maşṣur and nothing else. Therefore, this argument regarding the nature of Sarv and his work is mainly built upon Khāleqi-Moṭlaq’s opinion about Ferdowsi’s sources, and cannot be substantiated by any external evidence.

359 *Farāmarznāmeh*, edited version, p. 103.
This additional reference to Sarv as one of the main sources/transmitters of the stories of the SCE in the Farāmarznāmeh is significant as it substantiates Şafa’s argument. One must also remember that the verse versions of the epics, with the exception of Garshāspnāmeh, were not composed until the 12\textsuperscript{th} century at the very earliest. During this time, there were prose versions of the stories that were probably based on Sarv’s narration. However, with the passing of time the stories were broken up, and divided into individual accounts of one of the Sistānī heroes. The major evidence for this claim is that the earlier sources like Ballami and Ibn Esfandyār mention Abu al-Mu‘ayad’s Greater Shāhnāmeh, which must have contained most of the Sistānī stories in a chronological fashion. Later sources, like the Mujmal al-Tawārikh, however, mention certain individual stories and attribute them to Abu al-Mu‘ayad. This process of removing stories from the greater narrative must have resulted in major modifications of the overall structure of the story. It is therefore, more than likely that in this process we have lost references to Abu al-Mu‘ayad’s sources. The reference to Sarv in the Farāmarznāmeh, therefore, could be seen as a unique instance where the mention of the source was actually preserved.

There are other indications, however, that the some of the Sistānī stories may have had written sources in pre-Islamic times. Although very different than the Garshāspnāmeh as far as its content goes, there is actually a Pahlavi story of Garshāsp. Unlike the epic, where Garshāsp is the undisputed hero of Iran, in this story, he has been condemned to eternal hell because of his irreverence for the sacred fire.\footnote{Mazdapur, K., Dāštān-e Garshāsp, Tāhmureth va Jamshid Golshāh va Matnhā-ye digar, Tehran: Āgāh, 1999.} In this story, Garshāsp’s soul pleads with Ahuramazda to set him...
free. Garshāsp reminds Ahurāmazdā of his heroic deeds: his many battles with the Ahrimanic demons and sorcerers, his slaying of the dragon, his wondrous adventures in strange places, but all his pleading remains without avail. Garshāsp even boasts of his lineage, indicating that the very word hero (nīv) refers to someone of his lineage (i.e. someone from Garshāsp-e Narīmān’s descent). 362 Ahurāmazdā, however, is unable to forgive him, as he has committed the great sin of polluting the sacred fire. It is only at the end of the story that Zoroaster intercedes on his behalf when he is forgiven and his soul is allowed to enter heaven.

This is clearly a Zoroastrian version of the story of Garshāsp. If we recall Shahbāzi’s discussion of the different versions of the Khodāynāmeh, we can clearly identify this story as belonging to the priestly narration. 363 It is interesting that here Garshāsp’s heroic deeds, though remembered in detail, do not result in his redemption. Much of the detail regarding his heroic deeds is also found in the Garshāspnāmeh, but in this priestly version, his most significant act is his defilement of the sacred fire, an unforgivable sin that overshadows and nullifies his heroic deeds. There is another interesting fact hidden in this story: Garshāsp and his family are depicted as blasphemous and irreverent towards the Zoroastrian religion. This is a constant characteristic of the Garshāsp/Rostam family. Davis, in a recent article, argues convincingly that Rostam is indeed a pre-Zoroastrian hero 364, and that upon the arrival of Zoroaster during Goshtāsp’s reign he refused

362 Ibid, p. 146.
364 As mentioned in chapter 4 the stories of the SCE are multi-layered, and there is compelling evidence for the existence of the pre-Zoroastrian layer of the Rostam legend, however; the religious conflict between the house of Rostam and the Iranian kings might also reflect the later
to accept the new faith. Therefore, the conflict between Esfandyār and Rostam, according to Davis, has a religious basis. This argument is based on various “marginal” accounts that have not been influenced by the mainstream Sasānid/Zoroastrian propaganda that resulted in altering the image of Rostam to what we find in the Shāhnāmeh. This can also be viewed in another context: as we have seen there is a Parthian origin to the Rostam stories. There is evidence that the Parthian families adhered to heterodox versions of Zoroastrianism with strong mithraic undercurrents. What we have, therefore, in this story is a literary manifestation of the mainstream Zoroastrian’s disapproval of Garshāsp and his family. Therefore, when reading the various versions of the same story, be it a story concerning Garshāsp, Rostam or any other member of their family, what is important is the version of the account that we are dealing with. In the case of this story, we can assume that it is a priestly response to the more popular heroic or pahlevānic version of Garshāsp’s story.

There is evidence, however, that a book containing the accounts of Rostam and his family existed. The 9th century Arab historian al-Mas‘udi, when narrating the accounts of ancient Persia discusses one his sources:

There is a book called al-Sakikin (alternate reading: Sakisaran) in which the story of Seyavakh’s murder as well as many stories concerning Rostam ibn Dastan are preserved. Ibn al-Muqaffa has translated this book from ancient Persian (Farisya al-‘Aula) to Arabic. In it he relates the account of Esfandyār’s killing by Rostam, and Bahman ibn Esfandyār’s killing of Rostam, and other stories and wondrous tales (ājā’yeb) of ancient Persia. The

religious tensions of the various different sects of Zoroastrianism. Recent scholarship has pointed to the diverse religious landscape of ancient Iran. This is of course a mere speculation at this point, because of the lack of detailed information about the religious practices of the different Parthian houses.

Davis, D., Rostam and Zoroastrianism,” forthcoming.

Persians regard this book highly as it preserves the history of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{367}

Christensen’s argument that this book had something to do with the Sakas and Sistān and its stories has been widely accepted by the scholarship.\textsuperscript{368} If we look at the content of the passage with more care, we can speculate that this book indeed was a repository of the Sistāni stories, as well as other stories that were not necessarily part of most Khodāynāmeh versions. Al-Mas‘udī mentions two pivotal and deciding episodes, namely the killing of Esfandyār and Rostam. These two moments in the SCE are as crucial as the coming of a new religion, whose representative, Esfandyār, threatens the position of Rostam’s house. The version of Rostam’s death alluded to here is significant because it foreshadows the culminating conflict between the house of Rostam and the Iranian ruling house. Therefore, the mention of these two episodes is not coincidental given their significance in the SCE as well as the Khodāynāmeh. Another indication that this book contained stories similar to the Sistāni stories at our disposal is their characterization as wonder tales. As mentioned earlier, one characteristic of the SCE is that it does contain many episodes where the protagonist sets out to visit many strange places and beings. Finally, the Persians’ high regard for this book can be attributed to the fact that it was seen as preserving a history which was most likely drastically different, both in its narration of the events and its predisposition, from the accounts preserved in royal and priestly Khodāynāmehs.

\textsuperscript{367} Al-Mas‘udī, \textit{Muruj al-Dhahab}, v. I, p. 234. For the Arabic passage see Appendix A, Note 10.

\textsuperscript{368} Christensen, \textit{Les Keyanid}, p.136.
In the previous chapters we have seen that the SCE is regarded as the history of the Sistān region. It is highly likely given all these observations, therefore, that the book of Sagistan/Sakisaran indeed was a Pahlavi work that preserved the accounts of Garshāsp/Rostam’s house.
b. Evidence of an Oral Tradition

So far we have just discussed the written versions of the stories of SCE, but there are strong indications that there was a live oral tradition in the medieval period, that recounted these stories. Although we cannot establish the role and the influence of this oral tradition on the specific stories and epics, we can explore the evidence that hints to the existence of such an oral tradition. For the discussion of the means of transmission of the oral tradition, and its interaction with and relationship to the written tradition, I refer the reader to Yamamoto’s work.369 What is known about the oral tradition of the Shāhnāmeh performances is that it existed side-by-side and in constant interaction with the written text of the poem. Yamamoto’s work is a great step in our understanding of how the written and oral traditions were linked, but her work is confined, for the most part, to the study of the Shāhnāmeh and the naqali tradition. In order to have an understanding of how the oral and written traditions interacted, there needs to be a more comprehensive study, including genres of storytelling such as the medieval popular romances as well as the epics.370 In the previous section, we have examined all the evidence pointing to the written sources for the epics, and we have concluded that written sources existed for the epics, as early as the 10th century. Therefore, when discussing the evidence of an oral tradition, or more specifically an oral motif, the assumption is that the story or the motif in question is not an exclusively oral

370 For a study of the relationship between the written and oral performances of the Indian epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana see Flueckiger, J. B., and Sears L. J., Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and Southeast Asia, Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1991.
motif. Instead, the aim is to discuss all the evidence that point out to the existence of some oral performative tradition of the epics.

The first piece of evidence for the existence of an oral tradition recounting the stories of SCE comes to us from the Armenian sources. The Armenian sources of 5th and 6th centuries mention the Sistäni heroes and their sagas. According to Khâleqi-Moṭlaq, in Armenian sources we find references to Rostam and his son, Farāmarz and his grandson, Borzu. As a matter of fact, the latter two Sistäni heroes better known than Rostam in the Armenian sources.\(^{371}\) As we have seen in Mary Boyce’s work, there is ample evidence of the existence of Parthian poet/minstrels (gosan) in Armenia.\(^{372}\) It is well known that the influential Parthian families of Armenia retained their power after the advent of the Sasānids, and therefore, the continual existence of the institution of poet/minstrelsy of gosan is a very likely possibility.\(^{373}\) Therefore, the stories mentioned by the Armenian sources are most likely orally narrated tales of Sistäni heroes.

The second argument for the existence of an oral version of the stories is an internal one. There is a plethora of recurring motifs in the SCE that one also finds in the genre of popular medieval literature. The oral basis of this medieval genre is accepted, and there are strong indications that the medieval manuscripts were transcribed from oral performance.\(^{374}\) I will not discuss all such motifs, but will mention a few that indisputably refer to the oral literature. First, we have the

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\(^{372}\) Boyce, 1957, pp. 12-16.

\(^{373}\) There are many references to the Parthian families and their traditions in the work of the 5th century author Moses Khorenats’i. R, Thompson (trans.), History of Armenians, Harvard University Press, 1978.

\(^{374}\) An example of this occurs in the 13th century story of Sâmak-e ‘ayyar, where the narrator’s address to the audience is recorded. For a discussion of the oral basis of the popular medieval literature see the author’s M.A. thesis, pp. 37-9.
motif of a demon or demonic creature, who after being subdued by the hero, offers his services to him. This is exactly what happens to Rostam and the demon Gilimineh- Gush in the Babr-e Bayân episode. He is described as a horribly ugly creature with all the stereotypical features attributed to demons in Persian literature.\footnote{See Appendix B, p. 7 for the description of Gilimineh-Gush.} At the same time he is awe-inspiring on the account of his strength and bravery as he is able to defeat both Kashvād and Qāren’s armies single-handedly. Rostam, of course, defeats him easily, and as a sign of submission to him he makes the demon wear an earring, however, since the demon has unusually large ears\footnote{Gilimineh-Gush actually means “Kilim/Rug-like ears”.} Rostam is obliged to remove a horseshoe from his horse’s foot and use it as an earring. Giliminieh-Gush, for the remainder of this episode remains a loyal servant to Rostam. This motif appears repeatedly in the medieval popular literature. For instance, Sāmak, the main protagonist of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century epic-romance of \textit{Sāmak-e ʿayyār}, also encounters a horrible cannibal demon, by the name of Div-e Mardum-Khwar (people eating demon). At first the demon attacks Sāmak and his companions and inflicts much harm on their camp. But once defeated by Sāmak, he is regarded as Sāmak’s loyal servants, and performs tasks that one would expect of a devoted friend.\footnote{\textit{Samak-e ʿayyār}, v. 2, pp. 43-4.}

The other popular motif that appears in many of the Sistāni epics is the discovery of a treasure guarded by a beast of some sort. Usually, when the hero discovers the site of the treasure, there is a note in the form of a written document from one of his ancestors prophesizing the events, such as the heroes discovery of the treasure. One of the many examples of this motif appears in the \textit{Farāmarznāmeh}. In one of his campaigns to India, Farāmarz learns of an ancient
treasure that is guarded by a demonic creature. Once he enters the place where the
treasure is supposed to be buried, he finds a letter from Žahāhāk. Žahāhāk’s letter
reveals that he himself has buried a treasure there and has appointed Konās to
safeguard it until the time when Farāmarz shall arrive in India and claim it.
Žahāhāk wants Farāmarz to take the treasure back to the Iranian court, and to hand
it over the Iranian king of the time, Kay Kāvus. Among the things recovered in
this treasure are Žahāhāk’s throne and crown.378 Again, in Sāmak-e ‘ayyār, we
have an episode when Sāmak discovers a treasure that has been hidden away on a
distant and inaccessible island. Once Sāmak reaches this island, he finds a tumar
or a scroll, predicting all the events. The island where the actual treasure is hidden
is full of snakes, but the scroll contains a spell that makes the snakes disappear.379

Another motif from the popular literature that is to be found throughout
the corpus of the SCE is the existence of female sorcerers, who always are to be
found in the enemy’s camp. For example, in the Shahryārnāmeh, Shahryār goes
on a hunt, but gets separated from his hunting party and is lost. He spends the
night somewhere, and in the morning an old man appears to him, and informs
Shahryār that he has spent the night at a citadel belonging to the old man.
Whoever comes to this citadel, the old man informs Shahryār, must stay there for
three nights as his guest. But the citadel is in actuality a magic spell, and once
anyone arrives there he cannot leave it and is imprisoned there indefinitely. While
in this prison, Shahryār finds a written note on a tablet, reproaching the person
who has come there in search of a treasure, and prophesizing that only a warrior

378 Farāmarznāmeh, edited version, p. 78. In the SCE Žahāhāk is regarded as one of the legitimate
kings of Iran, and therefore his wish of returning his treasure to the Iranian king is not strange. I
will discuss the different image of Žahāhāk in the SCE as opposed to the Shāhnāmeh in much more
detail in the next chapter.
from the line of Rostam, who appears in Lohrāsp’s reign is able to break the spell. As soon as he reads the note, a loud voice tells him to stop crying, and lamenting. He raises his head and sees a female sorcerer. Shahryār asks the witch who she is, and what she is doing in this citadel, and she answers that she is the guard for Jamshid’s treasure. Meanwhile, Hitāl asks the witch to kill Shahryār, because he has heard from astrologers that during the reign of Lohrāsp a man will come from Iran and take the treasure and defeat him. The witch, whose name we learn is Kitmareh-ye Jadu, or Kitmareh the sorcerer, creates a dragon by her magical powers. The dragon scares away Arjang’s (Shahryār’s friend and father-in-law) army who have come to Shahryār’s rescue. The appearance of sorcerers in the enemy’s camp is a recurring motif in the medieval popular literature. For example, in the Abu-Muslimnāmeh, there are sorceresses in the camp of Marwan (the last ʿUmayyad Caliph and Abu Muslims enemy). These sorcerers function in the same way as the witch in the above-mentioned episode. They serve as enemies of the heroes, and they appear on the battlefield attempting to change the outcome of the battle by using sorcerer. In both cases, the witches are very powerful opponents, who remain on the scene for a long time and are defeated with great difficulty.

In addition to these individual motifs, the Borzunāmeh includes many characteristics of the popular medieval literature in general. For example, once Borzu has been imprisoned in the citadel of Sistān by Rostam, Borzu’s mother comes to Sistān disguising her identity. She gains entry to the citadel by joining the caravan of a merchant. Then with the help of a minstrel (rameshgar) they set
Borzu free and escape from the citadel.\footnote{\textit{Borzunāmeh}, pp. 41-51.} This episode is in general reminiscent of the actions of the ‘\textit{ayyārs}, the popular trickster heroes, whose adventures and exploits dominate much of the medieval popular literature.\footnote{Out of the four major extant works of popular literature, namely \textit{Sāmak-e ‘ayyār}, \textit{Abu Muslim-Nāmeh}, \textit{Darabnāmeh} (Bighami), \textit{Darabnāmeh} (Tarsusi), the former three are replete with accounts of ‘\textit{ayyārs} and their adventures.} Elsewhere in story of Borzu, we are introduced to another trickster hero, who also happens to be a minstrel. Susan the minstrel captures the Iranian heroes one by one with a combination of trickery and the use of \textit{daru-ye bihushane} (a medicine that renders one unconscious). Again, the activity of minstrels as ‘\textit{ayyārs}, or ‘\textit{ayyārs} disguised as minstrels, is a recurrent popular motif, and Susan’s mode of operation, namely trickery and the use of \textit{daru-ye bihushane} is very characteristic of the way ‘\textit{ayyārs} achieve their goals.\footnote{\textit{Borzunāmeh}, pp. 88-103.}

The existence of these motifs and episodes that are recurrent in both the popular literature and in the SCE hints at their oral background. There is no doubt, as discussed earlier, that the popular literature is a product of an oral tradition. The fact that the popular literature and the SCE share some of the very same motifs can only be explained in the context of a common oral storytelling tradition, in which despite the diversity of genres the storytellers employed some of the same motifs and themes.\footnote{My studies of the popular medieval literature and the epics hint at the existence of such a common repository of motifs, some of which could be used in various genres of performance. There is room for a study of these motifs in this context, and I hope to take this project up at some point in the future.} For example, in one of the works of the medieval popular literature, we encounter our Sistāni heroes. In Bighami’s \textit{Darabnāmeh} we have a multitude of episodes, in which the hero is either Rostam or Farāmarz. Although the work as a whole cannot be regarded as a Sistāni epic, some of the Sistāni
stories have been preserved in it. This is another example of how the oral tradition of storytelling cross pollinated different medieval genres by inserting stories and motifs from different bodies of literature.

There is evidence that the oral epic tradition unlike its written counterpart incorporated the entire cycle of the Sistâni epics, at least its major stories. In a Qajar period tumar (storyteller’s scroll)\textsuperscript{384}, we find in this work the stories of Sām, Farāmarz, Borzu, along with some of the Rostam stories excluded from the Shāhnâmeh, but present in the SCE. It is also important to note that to a large degree the adventures of the Sistâni heroes as they appear in this scroll match the written and verse versions of the epics. Looking at the entire work, one can say that more than 80\% of the volume of the work has been devoted to the stories of the Sistâni heroes, and a large percentage of them are stories that are not found in Ferdowsi’s Shâhnâmeh. Instead, many of them are the stories of the SCE that have reached us in verse form, the subject of the current study. Therefore, one can easily speculate about the presence and continuity of an oral tradition whose main repertoire of stories was the heroic stories of Rostam and his house.

As we have seen earlier, oral tradition was not a medieval invention. During the Parthian times, it was the gosan, the musician/minstrels who sang the stories and transmitted them from one generation to the next. The oral tradition survived alongside the written tradition, the beginning of which can be attributed to the Sāsānîd times. It was during the Sāsānîd period that the national tradition coalesced into a continuous, chronological narrative. It is highly unlikely that the state-sponsored national tradition included many Parthian episodes such as the

ones one finds in Sistāni stories. Most likely, they were either royal or priestly versions of the tradition, to borrow Shahbāzī’s terminology. However, the popularity of the stories of Parthian heroes, which constituted the bulk of Iran’s heroic literature, mainly kept alive through the oral tradition, was such that these episodes slowly found their way into the national narrative, creating the heroic or pahlevānic version of the tradition. At the same time, there are indications that there was a concerted effort to preserve these heroic stories, especially those of Sistāni origin, in a written form. One must not forget that throughout Sāsānid times, the Parthian families enjoyed a powerful political status and were capable of patronizing and preserving another version of the national narrative which underlined their role as heroes and Iran’s saviors. What Ferdowsi put into verse was a heroic version of the national tradition. This explains why Rostam, Giv, Gudarz, Bizhan and other Parthian heroes play such an important role in it. Nevertheless, as we have seen, many of the Parthian stories, especially those of the SCE, have been left out of the Shāhnāmeh. Additionally, as we shall see in the next chapter, Ferdowsi and/or his sources, molded the Parthian episodes and hero to fit his ideological framework.
CHAPTER 6

THE SHĀHNĀMEH AND THE SCE’S DIVERGENT STORIES

The Shāhnāmeh and the SCE share many characters and stories. The legendary material contained in both bodies of literature is related through common characters and stories. However, as we shall see below, there is considerable difference in the way these stories are narrated. Before we engage in the discussion of these specific stories and speculate about the reasons why they vary, it might be useful to say a few words about the impact of the medieval versifications of the epics on the material.

First, it must be made clear that the process by which the two bodies of literature were composed and handed down differ greatly. In Ferdowsi’s case, we are dealing with one single author, who as we shall see, had a clear vision for his work. Additionally, his motivation for composing a work of this magnitude was clearly ideological. The same proto-nationalist ideology finds expression throughout the work, both explicitly, as when the he provides a commentary in his own voice, and implicitly, in the structure of the poem. In the following discussion we are concerned with the implicit crafting of the poem through

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385 This is true for most of the Shāhnāmeh. There is a part that was by his predecessor Daqiqi, but it is neither long enough nor significantly different than the rest of the Shāhnāmeh for it to have a bearing on this argument.

386 I am aware that the term “nationalist” generally refers to the modern ideology, which was the driving force for the founding of modern national-states. Nevertheless, I think there is justification in using in terms in regards to Ferdowsi’s ideological agenda because he consciously attempted to create a work that tied a group of people to a specific interpretation of past through the careful crafting of mythological and historical material. Furthermore, his use of language, namely the fact that he minimizes the use of Arabic words parallels the efforts of many modern nationalist.
selective use, manipulation and omission of the sources at his disposal. It is as if there are parameters that define a certain framework for the *Shāhnāmeh*, and only that material that could fit into this framework finds its way in it. This framework constitutes Ferdowsi’s *Weltanschauung* central to which was the Iranian monarchy.

It is interesting that the very process of creation and monarchy are intertwined in the *Shāhnāmeh* as the first man is also the first king. To portray creation of mankind and kingship as inherently connected might have been deliberate on Ferdowsi’s part, because there is an alternate Zoroastrianism creation myth, i.e. that of Mashi and Mashiyaneh\(^{387}\) that Ferdowsi ignores. The monarchy continues to be the central idea throughout the poem. The very structure of the work indicates that: the work is divided into the reigns of 50 Iranian kings, and material taken from a variety of sources is incorporated into the work only in the context of the reign of a king. Furthermore, when incorporating heroic stories into the reign of kings from different sources, Ferdowsi does it by making the hero subservient to the king. In other words, only in their role as champions or warriors of the Iranian king, do the heroes find a place in the *Shāhnāmeh*. This is very much true of the Sistāni heroes. Although there are indications in the poem that they have their own independent or semi-independent kingdom, the Sistāni heroes are made to serve the Iranian kings. It is interesting to note that those Sistāni heroes with least connection to the Iranian throne are not of importance to Ferdowsi. A good example of such a hero is Farāmarz, whose heroic status is second, if not equal to that of Rostam, in the Sistāni epics. In the *Shāhnāmeh*,

\(^{387}\) According to the Pahlavi treatise, *Bundihash*. Mashi and Mashiyane are the first female-male couple. It is interesting to note that many medieval historians, whose aim was to reconcile the pre-Islamic Iranian and the Biblical/Qu’ranic accounts of creation, cited the story of Mashi and Mashiyane and identified them as Adam and Eve.
Farāmarz and his adventures are hardly known, and his only memorable act is his seeming rebellion against Bahaman, which constitutes the permanent exit of the Sistāni heroes from the Shāhnāmeh. It is important to note that in contrast to the Shāhnāmeh, Farāmarz was a major hero of the Iranian epics, both in the oral tradition and as is apparent from the Armenian sources.\textsuperscript{388} As we shall see below other ideological factors resulted in Ferdowsi’s omission of other Sistāni stories such as those of Garshāsp or Shahryār, for example. Therefore, in Ferdowsi’s case we have an author who is consciously crafting a literary artifact that is meant to place in its center the concept of Iranian monarchy as a continuous succession of dynasties and kings. This succession is interrupted by foreign invasions, which are dramatized as great calamities that along with other things resulted in the corrosion of everything worthy and valuable. As pointed out by Davis,\textsuperscript{389} there is a strong sense in the poem that as we progress in time, things become worse for the Iranian monarchy and culture, until this process of deterioration culminates in the disastrous conquest of Iran by the Arabs, and this is precisely when the poem ends. The poem is tailored, therefore, to highlight these sentiments.

The process by which the Sistāni epics where versified in medieval times is very different. As argued in the introduction, these stories were part of one corpus of literature, and they are best understood as such. This is apparent from internal evidence found in the epics; however, such a continuous body of literature has not survived. Instead, what we are left with are piecemeal versifications of

\textsuperscript{388} In the preface of Haft-Lashkar, Morshed Valiollah Torabi, a contemporary naqqal (storyteller) says that Farāmarz is his favorite hero. Also, one finds quite a few stories of Farāmarz adventure in the Ferdowsināmeh, a collection of the oral epic stories. For the reference to Farāmarz’ adventures as they appear in the Armenian sources see Farāmarznāmeh, ET, Introduction.

\textsuperscript{389} Davis, Epic and Sedition, pp. 172-4.
various stories and episodes by a number of poets. Most of them, like ʿAsadi Ťusi, the author of *Garshāspānāmeh*, were panegyric poets, whose aim was to narrate ancient heroic stories in the same fashion as the *Shāhnāmeh*. The versification of Sistāni stories, for the most part, took place during the two centuries after the composition of the *Shāhnāmeh*. However, for most of the epics we have meager, if any information about their authors. Among all the authors of the extant Sistāni epics, the most information is known about ʿAsadi Ťusi. Composing his work shortly after the completion of the *Shāhnāmeh*, ʿAsadi clearly expresses his reasons for versifying the ancient story of Garshāsp. According to him Ferdowsi has neglected to narrate this story in the *Shāhnāmeh*, he sees this as an opportunity to put the story in verse. Ultimately, his ambition is to be judged, both by his patron and his peers, as a poet either parallel or superior to Ferdowsi. He expresses this wish to be considered a great poet explicitly in the preface of the *Garshāspānāmeh*. In addition, his excessively bombastic style and his extensive use of archaic words are an indication that he tries a bit too hard to prove himself as an accomplished poet. Although we do not have such evidence regarding the motivation of other poets who versified the Sistāni stories, since most of them were panegyric poets, we can deduce with some degree of certainty that they were motivated by personal gratifications, be it financial or otherwise. Therefore, there is the sense, when looking at the way they have collected and compiled the material that the poets looked to the oral and written sources for interesting stories in which one particular hero was the

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390 Most known poets of the SCE are panegyric poets of late Ghaznavid and Saljuq courts.
392 The passage in question has been translated and cited below in this chapter. ʿAsadi Ťusi, *Garshāspānāmeh*, p. 20. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 19.
protagonist. Then, using the *Shāhnāmeh* as their model for epic verse, they narrated the stories they found in poetry. In other words, one may argue that these “lesser poets” did not consciously manipulate their sources for a larger goal, at least not to the extent that Ferdowsi did.

Their different motives for creating epics works is one reason why some of the same stories that one finds in both bodies of epic literature are so drastically different. While Ferdowsi composed his poem as a forum to articulate his interpretation of Iranian history through careful selection of his material, for the most part the motives of the composers of the Sistāni epics were to satisfy their patron and to leave a good name behind as poets. Ironically, the later poets whose aim was to make a living and to have a good reputation, may have manipulated and massaged the material to a lesser extent than Ferdowsi, the guardian of Iranian heritage.

I. Žaḥḥāk’s characterization

Without a doubt, Žaḥḥāk is one of the most, if not the most evil character in Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāmeh*. With a character partially based on the Avestan demon Azhdak, in the *Shāhnāmeh* he is portrayed as a foreign, and hence inherently illegitimate, usurper of the Iranian throne. The demonic Žaḥḥāk of the *Shāhnāmeh* is a cruel tyrant whose malicious acts continue to evoke a deep sense of abhorrence in the reader. This characterization of Žaḥḥāk is the context in which the whole story of his emergence, his reign and his removal from the throne are narrated.

Žaḥḥāk is able to seize the Iranian throne because the previous Iranian king, Jamshid, has lost his *farr*, or his divine sanction to power. However, in
Ferdowsi’s version, Jamshid’s hubris that resulted in his loss of *farr* is downplayed. Instead, the blame for the tragedy of the loss of power is placed entirely on Zāḥḥāk. His arrival in Iran is one of the most tragic and disastrous moments in the *Shāhnāmeh*. Not only does he cause much destruction to the country, but he also slays Jamshid and forces his two sisters, Shāhrnavaz and Arnavaz, to marry him after teaching them magic and other evil things. These events are dramatized by Ferdowsi in a very powerful heart rending fashion, making the following one of the most frequently quoted passages of the *Shāhnāmeh*:

Zāḥḥāk reigned for a thousand years, and from end to end the world was his to command. The wise concealed themselves and their deeds, and devils achieved their heart’s desire. Virtue was despised and magic applauded, justice hid itself away while evil flourished; demons rejoiced in their wickedness, while goodness was spoken only in secret. Two innocent young women were dragged from Jamshid’s house, trembling like the leaves of a willow tree; they were Jamshid’s sisters, the crown among his womenfolk. One of these veiled women was Shāhrnavaz, and her chaste sister was Arnavaz. Zāḥḥāk trained them in magic and taught them evil ways, since he himself knew nothing but evil – murder, rapine, and the burning of cities.393

But Zāḥḥāk’s evil ways do not end with the means by which he gains power. The best-known deed of about Zāḥḥāk is his slaughter of the Iranian youth in order to harvest their brains. The brains are to keep the two snakes that have grown out of his shoulders fed and happy, hence keeping him safe from them. Zāḥḥāk is to be blamed for the dilemma because, after all, he is the one who has been deceived by the devil, allowing him to kiss his shoulders. It is because of this that the two brain-devouring creatures grew on his shoulders. The murder of

young Iranian men, along with other unjust and outright evil acts of Žaḥḥāk, result in the blacksmith Kaveh’s uprising and Žaḥḥāk’s eventual removal from the throne. What is significant for our discussion, however, is the uncompromisingly evil characterization of Žaḥḥāk in Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāme. Not only is he an unjust and illegitimate king, but he is actually demonic in nature. The scope and nature of his evil deeds surpass those of any evil human being.

It is also important to note that in the Shāhnāme there are references that identify Žaḥḥāk as being of Arab origin. This reference to Žaḥḥāk’s ethnicity was emphasized, repeated and elaborated by the medieval authors that followed Ferdowsi, as well as by the general public, who both heard and read Žaḥḥāk’s story. The significance of his characterization as the embodiment of evil and an Arab at the same time is a point to which we will return, for among the Iranian epics, this characterization is unique to Ferdowsi’s version.

Contrary to what one might expect, Žaḥḥāk’s very character is different in the SCE. To begin with in the SCE, there is no discussion of the way he deposed Jamshid and gained power in Iran. There is, therefore, no sense of tragedy, disaster or injustice in this version of the story. Žaḥḥāk is merely another Iranian king, and his legitimacy is never questioned explicitly or implicitly in the text. Furthermore, Garshāsp, the ancestor of the Sistāni heroes and the founder of Sistān serves, Žaḥḥāk at his court, and fights many battles on his behalf.

To illustrate this point further, one could look at some of the episodes in which Žaḥḥāk appears in the SCE. In one of the episodes narrated in the Garshāspnāme, Žaḥḥāk makes a stop in Zabolestān, at the court of Žaḥḥāk’s

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394 Both Žaḥḥāk, and his father, Mardas, have been referred to as the king of Arabs (sar-e tāzian or mehtar-e tāzian, Shāh-e tāzian). Shāhnāme, v. 1, pp. 48, 49, 51.
father, Athart. As would be the case with any other Iranian king, Žahhāk gets royal treatment in Zabolestān:

In the same year, the mighty Žahhāk came to Zabolestān from Babul\textsuperscript{395}. He was taking an army to India, as he went to that country once in a while. Athart opened up his treasury generously, providing accommodation to Žahhāk’s army. Accompanied by his army, he welcomed Žahhāk, by receiving him with great ceremonies three stages (manzil) before he reached Zabolestān. Then he brought Žahhāk to his court, and summoned all the nobles to come to the court as his guests. Then he ordered a royal feast to be celebrated in such a way that compared to this celebration, the heavens would seem like a desolate wasteland.\textsuperscript{396}

It is at this royal party that Žahhāk sees Garshāsp for the first time, and marvels at his strength and beauty, guessing that he must be of Jamshid’s lineage. Unlike what one would expect of that Shāhnāmeh’s Žahhāk, he does not seem to be threatened by Garshāsp’s royal lineage, which indeed is traced back to Jamshid. Instead, as far as Žahhāk is concerned, Garshāsp’s genealogical connection to Jamshid is an indication that Garshāsp is a great hero, possessing the essential dual qualifications, skill (honar) and noble lineage (gohar).\textsuperscript{397}

Later we find out that it is Žahhāk who puts Garshāsp to one of the most basic tests that all Sistāni heroes must pass, namely the slaying of a dragon. As a reward for his accomplishment, relieving the kingdom of the imminent dangers of the dragon, he is appointed to the position of jahān pahlevān (world hero). After a rather ostentatious display of his might and skills at Žahhāk’s court,

\textsuperscript{395} Unlike the Shāhnāmeh, where there are no clear references to the seat of the Iranian throne, throughout the SCE there are references to Babul or Āmol as the location of the Iranian court. Later on this location shifts to Balkh.
\textsuperscript{396} Garshāspnāmeh, p. 50. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 12.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid, p. 51.
He (Garshāsp) kissed the ground in front of the king’s feet. The sound of drums reached the moon’s sphere. Everyone present at the court praised Garshāsp, and the king (Žahhāk) kissed Garshāsp’s face and eyes. He told him, “This task (slaying of the dragon) is only to be accomplished by you, as you know how to fight the dragon. Once you accomplished it successfully, then you will have the [office of] jahān pahlevān of Iran.”

It is important to note that Garshāsp is the first hero to be appointed as a jahān pahlevān, an office subsequently reserved exclusively for the members of his family. This position or office of jahān pahlevān, without a doubt is the portrayal of a privileged position of the Sistāni nobility vis-à-vis the Parthian throne. To be a jahān pahlevān in the Iranian epics, is to be commander of the Iranian army, and the most superior and distinguished pahlevān. What is significant for the purposes of our discussion is that it is Žahhāk on whose behalf Garshāsp engages in this and many other challenges. In addition to that, it is also Žahhāk who appoints Garshap as the jahān pahlevān of Iran, setting the precedent for this office and the many other members of Garshap’s family who hold this position.

In another episode, as Iran’s jahān pahlevān, Garshāsp is summoned to Žahhāk’s court in order to subdue a rebellious Indian vassal king, whose story has been mentioned in chapter 4. Nowhere in the description of Žahhāk ’s interactions with Garshāsp, do we find a trace of resistance or ill-will on the part of the latter. To the contrary, Garshāsp is ready to serve the Iranian king as is expected of a loyal hero.

In addition it is Žahhāk who grants Garshāsp the kingdom of Zabol estān and Sistān. Therefore, the very legitimacy of Garshāsp’s kingship, and by

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398 Garshāspnāmeh, p. 56. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 13.
399 Ibid, p. 65.
extension those of his ancestors, comes from the fact that the Iranian king, Žahḥāk, has given this land to him. There is a sense, however, that Žahḥāk is left with no choice but to accept Garshāsp’s reign over these territories. After he visits Sistān for the first time, shortly after the completion of its construction, Žahḥāk is awed at the Garshāsp’s court and his power, and decides quickly that in no way should he have him as an enemy. As a result, Žahḥāk plots to keep Garshāsp away from Sistān, by sending him off on another mission to India.\textsuperscript{400} This power struggle between the king and the Sistāni hero is not unusual. As a matter of fact, many of the stories of the later Sistāni heroes that appear in the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} revolve around conflicts between the king and the hero.\textsuperscript{401}

What is most surprising, however, is the absence of snakes on Žahḥāk’s shoulders. Due to \textit{Shāhnāmeh’s} influential status in the Iranian culture, this image of Žahḥāk with two snakes growing out of his shoulders is the first thing that comes to mind when his name is evoked. However, in this version of the story, with the exception of a cursory reference, there is no mention of the snakes, and therefore, no elaborate stories of Iranian men being murdered in order to feed their brains to Žahḥāk’s snakes. There is only a passing reference to the snakes, and that only happens when Žahḥāk’s removal from power is described:

\textit{In the same year when Žahḥāk turned 1000 years old, his luck started to fade. Fereydun came to power, and relieved the world from that \textit{mar-fash} (one who has a snake hanging from his back like a turban-sash). Fereydun smashed his head with a mace, and tied him up in Mount Damāvand.}\textsuperscript{402}

\textsuperscript{400} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 269-70.
\textsuperscript{401} For a detailed discussion of some of the king/hero conflict that appear in the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} see, Davis, D. \textit{Epic and Sedition}, chapter 3.
It is only upon Žahḥāk’s removal from power that one finds a rather vague mention of the snakes. Absent from the description of his removal from power are his evil deeds that resulted in the popular uprising headed by Kaveh the blacksmith. Instead of being condemned for his unjust behavior that resulted in his deposition from the Iranian throne, the Garshāspnāmeh cites his bad luck as a reason for his fate.

There is further evidence, beyond the Garshāspnāmeh, that in the SCE Žahḥāk is viewed as simply another Iranian king. During their adventures in India, the Sistānī heroes often come across treasures left behind for them by one of the Iranian kings. Farāmarz finds such treasure in India, and this particular treasure has been left behind for Farāmarz by Žahḥāk. As one would expect of a topos, along with the treasure there is a note, in this case, a note of advice (pandnāmeh), left behind by Žahḥāk, in which he has foretold the Farāmarz’s discovery of the treasure. Also in line with this particular motif, we find that a demon has been appointed to safeguard the treasure until the person designated to discover it arrives:

You, Farmaraz son of Rostam, should know that in the world I had acquired a high status. I left behind this treasure for you, while I myself have succumbed to death. For you, oh lord of Sistān, I have left behind this treasure in India. You have come from Zabol, and by the power of your farr you were able to remove the spell and slaughtered the demon whom I had appointed to safeguard this treasure. Now that you have come to this place, you are able to see my tomb and my dome, and you will learn what a great and wise monarch I was. You should know that I had spent much time, happily in this place. With much trickery and skill I subdued the demon, Kunas and appointed him to safeguard this treasure day and night. But you defeated him. Take whatever you want to Kay Kāvus. May you remain successful in this country.  

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403 For a more detailed discussion of this recurrent motif see Chapter 4, section on India.
404 Faramaznāmeh, BL, p. 96. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 15.
Most striking, and contradictory to the *Shāhnāmeh*, is Žaḥḥāk’s image in this passage. First and foremost, by being the one who has buried the treasure, he is given the status of a legitimate Iranian king, because all other treasures that the Sistāni heroes come across have been hidden either by their ancestors or by legitimate Iranian kings. The other elements that appear in this motif, and are associated with someone with the royal status are also present in this passage. First, all the kings by virtue of their royal status are able to predict the future, therefore, the treasure is always left behind for a specific person, Farāmarz, in this case, who is going to come to that location in the future. Second, the treasure includes some of the royal jewels, including the throne or the crown. Third, the king, in this case Žaḥḥāk, has the ability to protect the treasure by appointing a demonic being to safeguard it. In this case, in addition to all the aforementioned points, there is a mention of the current Iranian king, Kay Kāvus, who is the rightful heir to the treasure. This means that according to this version of the story, Žaḥḥāk views himself as Kay Kāvus’ predecessor and perhaps even an ancestor, and this notion does not appear to be problematic either to Farāmarz or the audience, as there are no justifications or explanations for depicting Žaḥḥāk as one of Iran’s legitimate kings.

Last but not least is the lack of reference to Žaḥḥāk’s Arab origin in these epics. Nowhere are we given any reason to believe that Žaḥḥāk is not Iranian. As mentioned earlier, as far as the epics are concerned the assertion of Žaḥḥāk’s Arab origin is to be found only in Ferdowsi’s version. The question becomes therefore, why are there such diametrically opposed characterizations of Žaḥḥāk?

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405 For a discussion of this motif and see Chapter 4, section on India.
First and foremost, the reason has to be sought in Ferdowi’s ideological agenda, and his pattern of manipulations of the ancient material in order to be able to provide his commentary on Iranian history. A salient and omnipresent sentiment that permeates Ferdowsi’s text is lamentation for a glorious bygone past. It is understood that this glory of ancient Iran and its culture were irrecoverably lost due to the Arab invasion of Iran and its aftermath. Therefore, there is a tendency for Ferdowsi to dramatize and underline the tragic and disastrous consequences of foreign invasion of Iran. In other words, not only does Ferdowsi inevitably add a layer to the ancient material by dramatizing, lamenting and bemoaning the tragedy of foreign invasion, but more importantly, he also provides commentary on the most recent foreign invasion of Iran. Žahhāk’s story is a great opportunity for Ferdowsi to portray the experience of the Arab invasion. Ferdowsi establishes a parallel between Žahhāk’s invasion of Iran and the 7th century Arab invasion by emphasizing Žahhāk’s Arab ethnicity.

The question of Žahhāk’s identity provides a key example through which one might be able to gain an understanding of how Ferdowsi, given his overall agenda, crafted the 

Shāhnāmeh

the way he died. In the medieval sources that preceded Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh, one finds several accounts regarding Žahhāk. A closer look at the 10th century historian Tha’alibi’s treatment of Žahhāk’s reign reveals that there were two different accounts regarding Žahhāk’s origin and genealogy. According to the Iranian tradition Žahhāk was not an Arab, but a descendent of Siāmak, the second Iranian king in the Shāhnāmeh, while the Arab sources describe him as a Yemenite king:

The Persians call him (Jamshid's successor) Bivrāsf, and the Arabs call him Ad-Ḍaḥḥak, and he is also called Izdeḥāq, meaning snake.
The Yemenites claim him as one of their own. They are proud that he is one of them, and Abu Nawās has a qaṣidah on him, which includes the line: “Ad-Ḍaḥḥak was one us, and both the Jinn and Al-Kḥābil served him in their own ways.” What is intended by al-Khabil here is the devil. The Arabs claim that Daḥḥak is the son of ‘Alwan, and the Persians think he is Bivrāsb b. Andarmasf from the descendents of Siāmak b. Keyumarth. He is called Bivrāsf because bivr, in the Pahlavi language means over a hundred thousand in number, and he had over one hundred thousand fully equipped horses.  

What we can gather from this passage is that there were two different and contradictory accounts as to Žahḥāk’s genealogy. First, the Arabs proudly identified him as one of them. The Persians, however, thought that he was a descendent of the Persian king Siāmak. Like Tha‘ālibī aṭ-Ṭabarí also offers two different genealogies, both tracing him back to Siāmak while clearly pointing to the existence of the two different (Arab and Iranian) narrations:

The people of Yemen claim him as one of their own, saying that he is Ad-Ḍaḥḥak b. ʿAlwān b. ʿAbid b. ʿAwij. They say that his brother, Sinān b. ʿAlwān b. ʿAbid b. ʿAwij, was one of the first Pharaohs of Egypt ruling there when Abraham (peace be upon him) first set foot there.

As for the Persians, they call him Izdehāq, and this is a different genealogy (nasab) than the one mentioned by Hishām, according to which he is claimed to be from Yemen. His genealogy is mentioned in the sources as follows: Bivrāsb b. Ardunasb b. Zinkaw b. Virushk b. Taz b. Farāvak b. Siāmak b. Masha b. Jyumarth. However, there seems to be a disagreement among the Persians regarding his ancestors, as they also provide the following genealogy: Žahḥāk b. Ardunasb b. Zanjdar b. Wandarsij b. Tāj b. Farya b. Sihimak b. Tadhi b. Jyumarth.

In this account the existence of the Arabic and Iranian stories regarding the two different characters, Žahḥāk and Bivrāsb becomes more clear. Aṭ-Ṭabarí even mentions the difference of opinion when it comes to his genealogy: he claims that

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407 Aṭ-Ṭabarī, Tārikh-i Rasul wa l-Muluk, v. I., pp, 144-5. For the Arabic passage see Appendix A, Note 24.
the Persian narration is different than Hisham’s account that claims that he is a
Yemenite king. Yet in another passage by the 10th century historian al-Mas‘udī
we find an even sharper distinction between the two characters Bivrāsb and
Zhāḥḥāk:

Ta’ b. Sahir b. Fārs b. Kauymarth reigned. They arabicized his
name, and a group of Arabs called him Ad-Ḍāḥḥāk, while another
group called him Bihrasb. But these accounts are not correct, and
his name, as we have already mentioned is Bivrāsb. He killed
Jamshid the king. There is contention (in the sources) as to whether
he was a Persian or an Arab. The Persians claimed him as one of
their own, saying that he was a magician, and that he ruled over the
seven regions of the world, and that he was a king for over one
thousand years. They also say that he was a harsh and tyrannical
ruler. The Persians tell long stories on him claiming that he
remains chained in Mount Dabavand, which is a located between
Rāy and Ṭabarastān. Both contemporary and ancient Arab poets
also mention him. Abu Nawas claims he is from Yemen, but that is
because he takes pride in him being from Yemen, as Abu Nawas
himself is a client (mawla) of the Yemenite clan of Al-Sa’d.408

Here in this account, we have yet another Persian genealogy of Bivrāsb.
However, what sets this passage apart from the others is the author’s insistence
that the correct name of the king who followed Jamshid was Bivrāsb and not
Zhāḥḥāk. He claims that Zhāḥḥāk and other variations of this name are corruptions
of the name Bivrāsb. He also gives us the information that is included from the
Iranian sources on Zhāḥḥāk. According to the Iranian sources, he is a harsh and
tyrranical king who comes to the throne after killing Jamshid. He reigns for a
thousand years, and he ends chained up inside Mount Damāvand. Curiously
absent from this account is the famous story of Zhāḥḥāk being deceived by the
devil, and no mention on any snakes growing out of his shoulders. As we shall see
these stories regarding Zhāḥḥāk and the devil are of Arab origin, and pertain to the

408 Al-Mas‘ūdī, Murūj al-Dhahab, v. 1, p. 231, For the Arabic passage see Appendix A, Note 25.
legendary Arab king Žahḥāk, and not the Iranian king Bivrāsb. That is why they are absent from Al-Masʿūdi’s account as he clearly relies on Persian sources.

The existence of these varying accounts is very significant given that Ferdowsi without a doubt had access to the Persian sources. Why then, one might ask, would he rely on the Arab traditions, when it comes to Žahḥāk’s identity? But before we answer this question, one needs to turn to other sources to solve the puzzle of Žahḥāk and his identity. Having done so, I would like to postulate that Bivrāsp and Žahḥāk were two different mythological characters, the former a king of Persian origin who took Jamshid’s place, and the latter a legendary Arab demon-king.

According to the Persian tradition, Bivrāsp must have been an insignificant king, who came to power after Jamshid was removed from the throne by the Iranian nobility. Jamshid’s dethronement was a direct result of his own actions, which ultimately resulted in his loss of farr. According to Ferdowsi, it was members of the Iranian nobility who went to Žahḥāk and brought him to Iran in order to depose Jamshid. What does not make sense, however, is why when choosing the next monarch, they would turn to a foreigner with no genealogical connections to the royal family. Without a doubt this is a story belonging to the Iranian sources. After Jamshid’s loss of farr, the Iranian nobility who had decided on replacing him, choose Bivrāsp, a descendent of Siāmak, to take the Iranian throne. This scenario would make much more sense, within the context of Iran’s succession politics. But Žahḥāk was made to be an Arab by Ferdowsi, and it is only because of that that the nobles have to go to the land of the Arabs and bring Žahḥāk in Ferdowsi’s version.
One finds the other compelling piece of evidence for the existence of these two separate characters that were coalesced into one, in the anonymous Arabic history, Nihayat al-Arab fi Akhbar al-Furs wa al-‘Arab. In this 8th century Arabic work, Žāḥḫāk is an Arab king, who has no connections to the Persians whatsoever. Here, Žāḥḫāk is portrayed as a ruthless king, and there are allusions to his demonic nature. It is here where the story of how he came to have the snakes on his shoulders appears. It is the same story that Ferdowsi narrates, namely it is the result of the devil, disguised as a cook, kissing him on his shoulders. Therefore, the story of the king who was deceived by the devil is the story of the Arab king Ad-Dahhak, and he has no connection to the Persian throne. Therefore, the story of the snakes growing on Žāḥḫāk’s shoulder comes from the Arab traditions, and it pertains to the Arab king Žāḥḫāk.

The process by which the two characters were confused, and eventually thought to be one might not have been a deliberate one, as far as Ferdowsi’s predecessors are concerned. The genre of universal history dominated Islamic historiography from the 9th century onward, the best-known example of which is Tabari’s Tārikh-e Ar-Rusul wa Al-Muluk. The pre-Islamic section of the universal histories generally consisted of two bodies of literature -- the Biblical stories of the prophets, the Esrā’îlyāt, and the accounts of the Persian kings, the Khodāy-Nāmag. Since the goal was to produce a universal history and because these two bodies of work did not cover the same events and stories, there was an attempt on the part of most of the historians to establish links between the two, mainly by identifying characters that appeared in both. The first association of Bivrasf with

Žahḥāk may have been a result of such conciliatory efforts on the part of historians. However, it needs to be said that such an association, prior to Ferdowsi, is not firmly established. It is merely suggested by the authors that the same character, known to Persians as Bivrasf, is the one Arabs know as Ad-Dahhak, or Žahḥāk. An example of such ambivalent identification of Bivrasf with Žahḥāk is found in Al-Dinwari’s *Tārīkh-e Tiwal* (composed in the 9th century):

\[\text{Ad-Đahhāk is the one whom the Persians call Bivrāsf. He defeated Jam, the king, and killed him and took control of the kingdom. Once his mind was at peace, he gathered sorcerers from all corners of his realms, and he learned sorcery until he became a master in it. He built the city of Babylon (Babil), and he made it four Fārsakh by four Fārsakh. He loaded it with mighty soldiers, and he named the city Khawb...From his shoulders two creatures in the shape of snakes appeared. These snakes kept bothering him until they were fed human brains, and only then they would quiet down. It is said that every day four big men were slaughtered, and their brains were taken to feed those snakes. He had a wazir from his tribe, (but he removed him) and appointed a wazir who was a descendent from Arfakhshadh by the name of Armiabil. When they brought the men to be slaughtered, he saved two of them, and replaced (the brains) with those of two goats. He ordered the two (saved) men to go without a trace. They went to the mountains and stayed there, and didn’t come near villages and towns. It is said that they are the ancestors of the Kurds.}\]

\[410\]

As we can clearly see, we have two different accounts. First of Bivrasf, the Persian king, who came to usurp Jamshid’s throne. Then, we have the familiar account of Žahḥāk and how he was deceived by the devil. Details of the Žahḥāk account match the other Arabic sources. There are other details that indicate that Žahḥāk was a legendary Arab king: his founding of the city of Babylon; his appointment of Armiabil, the kind-hearted wazir from the Arfakhshadh tribe. These details also appear in the *Nihāyat* account of Žahḥāk, and as mentioned

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before, in that account he is not connected to the Persians in any way.\textsuperscript{411} A closer look at the passage above reveals that indeed we do have accounts regarding two different characters, i.e. Bivrasf and Žahňâk. Bivrâsf is the Persian king who removed Jamshid from the throne and killed him, and then engaged in sorcery. Žahňâk is the Arab king who built the city of Babylon, and was deceived by the devil.

Although identified as the same king, one still can discern the existence of the two different accounts in Dînwarî’s account. However, at a later point in time, the amalgamation of the two characters was crystallized by creating a seemingly unified account of this character. This was achieved by incorporating details and elements from the respective stories of Bivrâsb and Žahňâk. It is important to note that this task, namely this final merging of the two characters, was achieved by Ferdowsi. It was he who made Bivrasf and Žahňâk into one character permanently. Then, the question arises once again: why would he create this composite character, especially given his otherwise complete neglect of the non-Iranian sources.

It is hard to believe that Ferdowsi was unaware of the existence of the two different characters. Rather than faithfully repeating what his sources had to say, he carefully crafted a character from all the material at his disposal in order to make a powerful commentary on the Arab invasion and reign of Iran. He, therefore, made Žahňâk, one the legendary kings of the Arabs, who was a source of pride for them, into the most evil character of the Shâhnâmeh.

\textsuperscript{411} The account of Žahhâk ’s reign in Nihâyat al-Arab (pp. 40-1), is much more detailed than the passage quoted from Dînwarî’s work. It contains more detail as to Žahhâk ’s Arab predecessors and successors to the throne, and there are explicit references that he ruled over the Arab people. The story of the devil appearing as a cook appears in it, and matches in all details to Ferdowsi’s recension of the same story.
It is in this context that the different characterization of Žahḥāk in the SCE is not surprising after all. He is just another Iranian king, as one might have expected Bivrasf to have been described by the Persian traditions. Žahḥāk has removed Jamshid from power, but this is not because he is a foreign invader. As a matter of fact, Ferdowsi himself provides a reason for Jamshid’s loss of power: he lost his farr as a result of his own bad behavior. This reason is downplayed in the Shāhnāmeh, and instead the focus is shifted to the evil nature of Žahḥāk, but it is safe to assume that according to some of the Persian traditions, the reason for Jamshid’s dethronement was his loss of farr, and Žahḥāk or rather Bivrāsb is another Iranian king who replaced him. Although not articulated explicitly, the image of Žahḥāk in the SCE hints at the fact that it comes from the Iranian sources, and it is a description of Bivrasf, who perhaps was one of Siāmak’s descendents. That is why, as discussed earlier, there is no indication in the SCE that he is of foreign origin. Given the fact that the story of Žahḥāk’s snakes comes from the Arab sources, it is also not surprising that it does not occur in the SCE. Instead of Ferdowsi’s Žahḥāk, whose character is a composite of the elements of the both Arab and Persian stories of Žahḥāk and Birvaraf, SCE’s Žahḥāk offers a glimpse of how the Persian king Bivrasf was characterized by the Iranian sources. It is interesting to note that Ferdowsi generally ignored the non-Iranian sources, and unlike universal historians does not attempt to reconcile Iranian and Biblical narrations by identifying the same characters in both. Instead, his concern is to give history according to the Iranian sources, which gives him the opportunity to express his version of the Iranian worldview in general and Iranian history in particular. As inferred above, in Žahḥāk’s case, however, he decided to use the narration on Žahḥāk that come from sources. This is because making Žahḥāk into
a demonic Arab king, whose ascendance to power spelled tragedy of immense measure for Iran, serves Ferdowsi’s ideological agenda.

Therefore, it is likely that due to the lack of the ideological bias which is present in *Shāhnāmeh*, the SCE has preserved an older version of Žahḥāk /Bivrasf reign. The consistency of Žahḥāk’s image as one of Iran’s legitimate kings in different epics is another piece of evidence that hints at the existence of this characterization of Žahḥāk in older sources. After all, it was not just ʿAsadi Šusi’s agenda to portray Žahḥāk in a positive light, as he is depicted similarly in the *Farāmarznāmeh*.

The different characterizations of Žahḥāk in the *Shāhnāmeh* and SCE answer another question that has puzzled both medieval and modern scholars. The question is first raised by ʿAsadi Šusi, the author of the *Garshāspnāmeh*:

In the *Shāhnāmeh* the skillful poet, Ferdowsi, who is superior to all poets, narrates the adventures of many heroes, but he neglects this story (i.e. Garshāsp’s story). This (story) is a branch from the same tree, but it has become dry and barren. Using my talents, I will bring the spring back to this branch, bringing it into bloom and fruition.\(^{412}\)

The question is, why has Ferdowsi decided to ignore Garshāsp and his adventures, given that he is a central figure both as the one who founded the province of Sistān and was Rostam’s ancestor? ʿAsadi Šusi does not speculate about the reasons for this neglect on Ferdowsi’s part, as he is just interested in the opportunity to fill the gap, a task that would grant him a poetic rank equal to that of Ferdowsi.\(^{413}\) The reason for Ferdowsi’s neglect of this story must be sought in

\(^{412}\) ʿAsadi Šusi, *Garshāspnāmeh*, p. 20. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 19.

\(^{413}\) ʿAsadi Šusi refers to himself and Ferdowsi as “the two poets of Šus”. He does so when referring to the fact that Ferdowsi has left this story out, assuring his patron that he will correct this mistake by versifying the story of Garshāsp. *Garshāspnāmeh*, p. 21.
the different characterization of Žaḥḥāk, and Garshāsp’s relationship to him. As mentioned earlier, according to the Garshāspnāmeh, Garshāsp becomes Žaḥḥāk’s jahān pahlēvān, and serves him by partaking in many battles against Iran’s enemies in a way that is very much expected of a jahān pahlēvān. However, given Ferdowsi’s characterization of Žaḥḥāk, such a relationship between Žaḥḥāk and Garshāsp, which in many ways provides the context for Garshāsp’s adventure, could not be easily rationalized. After all, how could Ferdowsi have justified making Garshāsp serve Žaḥḥāk, whom he has made into the very embodiment of evil? Instead, the way out of this dilemma for Ferdowsi is to leave Garshāsp and his adventures out of the Shāhnāmeh all together.

II. Jamshid’s fate

According to both the Shāhnāmeh and the SCE Jamshid fled Iran, abandoning his throne and crown to Žaḥḥāk. Ferdowsi’s Žaḥḥāk, as one comes to expect from him, kills Jamshid upon his seizure of the Iranian throne. Žaḥḥāk’s brutal act is dramatized by Ferdowsi as follows:

He (Jamshid) had hidden himself from the serpent king, but could not escape him at the end. When Žaḥḥāk had him in his clutches, he gave him no time to plead his case but had him sawn in two, and filled the world with terror at his fate.414

Given Žaḥḥāk’s characterization in the Shāhnāmeh, what he does to Jamshid comes as no surprise. Indeed, he is expected to commit cruel and senseless acts, and killing Jamshid by sawing him in two is very much in line with the way he is described in the Shāhnāmeh. At the same time, what is interesting is how Ferdowsi downplays the fact that Jamshid flees Iran and is absent for a

hundred years. He mentions it in passing, but the main emphasis is on Žahhāk’s slaying of Jamshid, the details of which have been cited above. There is no information, therefore, in the Shāhnāmeh, as what happens to Jamshid in the hundred years that he is away from Iran.

What happens to Jamshid after the coming of Žahhāk is a very different story when it comes to the SCE narration of the events. In the Garshāspnāmeh, we learn that Jamshid has fled the seat of the Iranian monarchy for the southeastern province of Zabolestān. At this time, the king of Zabolestān is Kurang, the great ancestor of Garshāsp and all other Sistāni heroes. It is important to note that at this time, the province of Sistān does not exist, and there is only mention of the more ancient region of Zabolestān. Jamshid is granted safety and enjoys his days in Zabolestān. His days are spent drinking and hunting. It is during this time that he falls in love with the unnamed daughter of Kurang. What follows then is a long and detailed romance between Jamshid and Kurang’s daughter. In the SCE, we often find a romantic episode of considerable length, usually involving the protagonist and a princess from a foreign land. Here, however, the story of Jamshid and Kurang’s daughter serves another purpose as well: it is through this union that Garshāsp and his descendents are able to trace their origin back to Jamshid. However, the romance between Jamshid and Kurang’s daughter seems to have been well known, as there are references to it throughout the various Sistāni epics. The existence of a manuscript containing just that episode is another indication that the romantic episode was of interest to
various audiences throughout the ages, irrespective of its implication for the Sistâni heroes.\textsuperscript{415}

Be that as it may, what is significant in terms of \textit{Shāhnāme} and SCE’s different depictions of the same episode is their emphasis as well as their tone. In the \textit{Shāhnāme}, all we are presented with, as far as Jamshid is concerned, is that he is removed from power, forced to abandon his throne and run off to an unknown destination in utter despair. We do not learn anything about how his time was spent when he was away from Iran. Instead, Ferdowsi presents us with the gruesome scene of Jamshid being sawn in two.

The \textit{Garshāspnāmeh}, however, does not dwell on the reasons why Jamshid had to escape. Instead, the reader’s focus is almost immediately shifted to Jamshid’s princely adventures and his romance with Kurang’s daughter. The account of Jamshid’s murder at the hands of Žahhâk also appears in the \textit{Garshāspnāmeh}, but there it is summed up in two forgettable lines. As mentioned earlier, in the body of the SCE, Žahhâk is viewed as one of Iran’s legitimate kings, and there would be a reason for the Iranian tradition to downplay the significance of one of his acts that would be considered morally reprehensible. After all, the act of regicide is considered to be a grave and unforgivable sin, no matter how unjust and evil the king may be.

The reasons for such different depictions are related to what has been said in the previous section, on the different characterizations of Žahhâk. Ferdowsi’s aim is to underline, emphasize and dramatize the catastrophic nature of the Arab invasion of Iran. Ferdowsi is aware of Jamshid’s absence from Iran, as he briefly alludes to it, and one can infer with certainty that he has had access to the story of

\textsuperscript{415} The manuscript which contains this romance is British Library manuscript 393.
Jamshid’s adventures in Zabolestān, but he decides not to mention it at all. Having Jamshid party and fall in love with Kurang’s beautiful daughter does not befit the image that Ferdowsi wants to portray, namely that of a victimized and unjustly treated king. Therefore, he downplays the period of Jamshid’s absence from Iran, and instead he takes the reader to the last scene of Jamshid’s life, which will leave them and “the world in terror at his fate.”

The SCE, however, seems to narrate the story of Jamshid who was removed from power at the hand of the Iranian nobility because of his loss of farr. Žaḥḥā’s profile seems to fit that of Bivrāsp, the Iranian king who followed him. For the SCE one reason for narrating Jamshid’s story, aside from the story’s popularity, is to establish the genealogical connection between Garshāsp’s house and Jamshid. However, this act of narrating the story is not as conscious of a decision, as the neglecting it is in Ferdowsi’s case. After all, Jamshid’s story is an integral part of the Sistāni legends and the choice to include it was a logical step.

III. Heroes and Morality: the cases of Garshāsp and Rostam

Neither the contemporary nor the medieval audiences would describe Rostam as a moral character, as for example Siavush is. When he fights, he uses any means to achieve his goal. Sometimes he resorts to trickery, and at other times he is mixed up with magic and sorcery. In employing these questionable means, we do not get a sense that he suffers from any internal moral crisis. Moreover, he commits the unforgivable crime of disobeying the king. When not on a mission, he spends much of his time in seemingly endless drinking parties, where he oftentimes ends up completely drunk or unconscious. He is also remembered and blamed for slaying his own son, whom he kills on the battlefield while both of
their identities are hidden. Davis discusses Rostam’s code of conduct concluding
that, “he pushes the limits of the codes with which he is surrounded, and often
transgresses them – geographically, as the champion of the kings he serves, and
morally.” This pattern is clear when one compares Rostam to other heroes of
the Shāhnāmeh. However, if we look at how the image of a Sistāni hero is
constructed, there is no anomaly in Rostam’s behavior or his morals. For example,
in the Sistāni context Rostam’s worst vice, namely trickery, is viewed as
legitimate skill that a hero can and in some instances must employ. There are
numerous examples of other Sistāni heroes both before and after him who resort
to various kinds of trickery in order to defeat an enemy. In all of these instances,
there is no sense that any moral code is being broken. To the contrary, the more
familiar one gets with the deeds of the Sistāni heroes, the more one comes to
expect them to be dexterous tricksters.

In spite of his bad behavior and questionable morals in the Shāhnāmeh,
Rostam is a sympathetic character to both the contemporary and medieval
audiences. This is because he does not overstep certain moral boundaries that
would result in his condemnation. This is not true of SCE’s Rostam, however. It
is important to remember that there are a few Rostam stories in the SCE, which
have not been included in the Shāhnāmeh. However, in the later epics Rostam
oftentimes appears along with a number of Sistāni heroes. One such episode is
Rostam’s battles with his grandson, Borzu. The battles take place at the time when
Rostam is unaware that Borzu is his grandson, which is reminiscent of Rostam’s
battles with Borzu’s father, Sohāb. Once Rostam realizes that he is unable to

defeat Borzu, he attempts to poison him. At this point Borzu’s mother reveals the fact that Borzu is his grandson and reproaches Rostam:

By God you should be ashamed of yourself for wanting to kill such a great young man. What’s the point in killing him, soaking his shirt in blood? He is a descendent of Narimān; he is your child, your blood! He is the son of Sohrāb, the great warrior. Can’t you see that in his strength and his skill on the battlefield? You want to humiliate him, kill him. Do you ever fear God’s wrath, since you are busy killing either your son or your grandson? 417

This is the only objection to Rostam’s behavior that one finds in the text, and if we examine the above-cited passage closer, we find that there is really no problem with the way in which Rostam is about to kill Buruz. Nowhere does Borzu’s mother condemn or even mention the fact that Rostam has resorted to dishonorable means of poisoning her son. Instead, her complaints about Rostam’s character has to be regarded in the context of the particular scene: Rostam is about to make the same mistake he has made with his Son, Sohrāb, and Boruz’s mother is there to prevent it. Therefore, the dramatic tone in which Rostam is condemned is to be expected. However, one must remember that Rostam is not reproached for immoral behavior, but for that fact that he is about to kill Borzu, his own grandson, and therefore repeat his past mistake. Therefore, the only immoral act, if one could call it that, is killing one’s own offspring. The fact that the whole poisoning episode is not commented upon or justified in the text hints at the fact that this kind of behavior was to be expected of a hero like Rostam.

There are other examples in the SCE of what would seem unacceptable behavior for the heroes. Garshāsp, for example, engages in acts that cannot be

417 Borzunāneh, ET, p. 73. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 42.
described as anything less than ruthless and brutal. For example, after taking over the city of Kābol this is how the state of the city is described:

Dust arose to the sky from Kavul as Garshāsp’s army started ransacking the city. The people of the city headed for the roofs of their houses in order to seek refuge from the army, but they were not spared, and streams of blood flowed down the gutters into the street. The city’s sky was clouded by dust and fire; its population lamenting in utter devastation. For a week’s time the army continued to pillage the city and gather the booty. Both men and women came to Garshāsp distraught, crying and seeking justice.⁴¹⁸

In the Shāhnāme, this kind of cruelty is unknown to anyone who is either Iranian or in the Iranian camp. Certainly, neither Rostam nor any other hero engages in amassacre of a defenseless population. But as far as the Garshāspnāme is concerned, this act does not seem to be an anomaly when it comes to the hero and his characterization. There are no attempts in the narrative to justify his actions, and this clearly indicates that this would have been considered an appropriate and acceptable course of action for a commander of an army or a hero. As if making streams of blood flow through the streets of Kābol was not enough, Garshāsp continues to shock the moral sensibility of the contemporary audience by how he handles the prisoners of war:

He gathered all the soldiers that he had captured in Kābol and he slaughtered them. He took their blood and made clay out of it. He took half of this clay and made the city wall, and the other half was used to make the citadel. It was because of this blood that was mixed in with the earth that Sistān was infested with poisonous, deadly snakes.⁴¹⁹

Like the previous incident that is left without explicit commentary, the narrative neither attempts to justify nor condemn Garshāsp’s ruthless massacre of

⁴¹⁸ Assadi Ṭusi, Garshāspnāme, p. 258. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 21.
⁴¹⁹ Ibid, p. 267, For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 22.
the war prisoners. Actually, Garshāsp does not seem to be motivated by revenge when killing the Kābol prisoners. His reasons are more pragmatic and hence more disturbing: he wants to use their blood to make a good mixture for his architectural projects. Expressed in a neutral tone free from any implication of guilt or condemnation, the only reflection of disapproval may be the mention of the appearance of deadly snakes as a consequence of the spilling of the prisoners’ blood.

Garshāsp’s ruthless behavior is not an isolated incident in the whole epic. When coming to the aid of his son Narimān in China, the Iranian army under his command engages in another equally brutal ransacking of the city and massacre of its population:

Garshāsp himself entered the city with his army, and erected the black flag over the city’s citadel. Everywhere in the city there were fights as the army went on pillaging; everywhere the cries of people begging for mercy could be heard. All the women were up on the roof, while men were on the street; dust and smoke had covered the skies of the city. There was so much blood that it got stuck to the feet the same way mud does. The people were in a state of utter devastation and despair. Heavenly, magnificent houses and buildings were turned into such ruins that they resembled hell’s landscape. The idols in the temples were broken and thrown on the ground; besides them laid also the temple priest in a pool of blood. In every street there was a stream of blood flowing, and the stream continued to follow for a mile outside of the city. For two weeks nothing happened but bloodshed, rampage, and plunder in the city.421

As in the above-cited siege of Kābol episode, here we find behavior on the part of Garshāsp that could be only seen as extremely cruel and brutal. Also as in the siege of Kābol episode, we do not find any commentary on Garhashb’s behavior: the narrative neither condemns nor justifies his acts. The silence on the

420 Reference to Sistān’s flag which is described just as a black flag.
part of the narrative, as well as the fact that this kind of behavior constitutes a pattern, indicate that this behavior was not considered to be an anomaly, but rather something that one might come to expect of a hero. Rather than a senseless murderous act, Garshāsp’s actions in Kābol and China must have been viewed as a sign of his strength, and by extension a display of Sistāni-Iranian power over foreign cities and kingdoms.

However, such interpretation of might and power would have been contrary to notions of morality so central in the Shāhnāmeh. In the context of moral boundaries established by the Shāhnāmeh, it would be unthinkable to have an Iranian hero behave the way Garshāsp does. After all, no matter how ill mannered, unwise, or downright stupid, no Iranian character, be it a king or a hero displays such traits of brutality and callousness. It is likely that in some of Ferdowsi’s sources Rostam also behaved in the same fashion as his ancestor, and if this is true, Ferdowsi did not choose to include those episodes for the reasons discussed above. Ferdowsi’s sense of morality is a radically different than that of the heroes depicted in the epics. In Ferdowsi’s social and cultural milieu ideals of morality were dictated by two main discourses of Islam and Greek philosophy, both drastically different than the one that helped shape the moral standards of the sources of the Shāhnāmeh. Given the multi-layer nature of the epics in question, when it comes to the question of morality, one can discern the nomadic notions of morality, which reminds one of the Central Asian epics.

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422 For a discussion of these Greco-Islamic notions of morality see Kazemi, R. “Morality and Idealism: Abu’l-Fazl Bayhaqi’s Historical Thought in Tarikh-i Bayhaqi”, M.A. Thesis, The Ohio State University, 2005, chapter 3 (“Man, Knowledge, and Idealism”).

mentioned earlier, in all likelihood there is a Central Asian (Saka) layer to the SCE, as the land of Sistan is very much connected to the Sakas, the Central Asian nomadic people. This notion of morality would have been drastically different than the one shared by Ferdowsi. In the absence of the sources, this suggestion regarding Rostam’s character and morality remains a conjecture, but there is evidence like the poisoning episode cited above, that Rostam was a much more unpolished character, morally speaking.

What one could speculate that one reason why Garshāsp’s story was not included in the *Shāhnāmeh* was his immoral behavior, which disqualified him as an Iranian hero. There is no doubt that this kind of behavior on the part of the heroes was reflected in sources of the epics, and for the author of *Garshāspnāmeh* repeating such image of the hero was not a problem. As mentioned earlier, ʿAsadi Ṭusi’s and Ferdowsi’s motivation and agenda for composing their works were very different: the latter’s main agenda was to make a name for himself as a poet, while for Ferdowsi the whole endeavor was motivated by his proto-nationalist ideology.

**IV. Lohrāsp’s reign**

According to both the *Shāhnāmeh* and the SCE, Lohrāsp’s ascent to the Iranian throne is problematic. In the *Shāhnāmeh* we learn that when Kay Khosrow announces Lohraps as his successor to the throne, the Iranian nobility become angry with his choice. The scene at Kay Khosrow’s court after this announcement is described as follows:

The Persians were astonished by this turn of events, and bridled like angry lions; none could accept that they would have to call Lohrāsp their king. Zāl strode forward and said aloud what he felt in his heart: “My lord, is it right for you to dignify such dirt in this
way? My curses on anyone who calls Lohrāsp his king, no one here will submit to such injustice! I saw Lohrāsp when he arrived in Iran; he was a wretch with one horse to his name. You sent him off to fight against the Alans, and gave him soldiers, a banner, and a sword belt. How many well-born Persians has the king passed over for this man, whose family I’ve never set eyes on, whose ancestry’s all unknown? No one has ever heard of such a man becoming a king.” As soon as Zāl finished speaking a roar of agreement came from the courtiers there, and voices cried out, “We’ll serve no longer! If Lohrāsp is to be king he can count on us for neither his banquets nor his battles.”

Kay Khosrow, however, does not want to hear any of this, and accuses them of neglecting Lohrāsp’s good characteristics, while at the same time reminding them that this appointment is his choice and they must accept it. Then, Zāl touches the earth and smears black dirt on his lips, as a sign that he is regretful for his comments about Lohrāsp, and he greets him as king. The Iranian nobles follow his example.

Although one does not find the same scene depicted in any of the Sistāni epics, there is evidence of Zāl’s mistrust and disapproval of Lohrāsp. The difference here is that Zāl apparently never accepts Lohrāsp as the Iranian king. There is an interesting episode in the Šahryārnāmeh, where there is an allusion to the Sistāni’s continuous rejection of Lohrāsp. Once on a campaign to fight the western enemies, he receives a letter from Lohrāsp reproaching him for not having come to his court even once since his enthronement. After going on by praising Rostam for a few lines he continues as follows:

You know that Kay Khosrow is gone, and he has conferred this crown on me. But you choose to ignore me completely, and I would like to ask you why? What wrong have I done to you, oh nobleman? You might feel disgraced that I am king, but you must remember the promise given to Kay Khosrow. If you do not feel

\[424 \text{ Šahhārnāmeh, v. 4, p. 359; Translation: Davis, 2006, pp. 362-3. For the Persian passage see} \]
\[\text{Appendix A, note 26.}\]
ashamed by the treatment you have given me, at least recall the oath you gave to the king. Why won’t you come to me just once, and gladden my sad heart by your presence? Remember, kings struggle much, using armies and force to acquire their kingdoms, but mine was handed down to me by that pious king without any effort on my part. Maybe I was deserving of this crown, and that is why God granted it to me. Now, it is my heart’s desire to see you. The mere mention of your name brings such happiness to me. I plead with the God of the sun and moon to see your face. If you refuse to come to see me this time, I would feel wounded and devastated.  

It is clear from Lohrāsp’s begging and pleading tone that it is Rostam who is in a privileged position. After all, it is Rostam whose services are needed, and without whose support the Iranian monarchy cannot be sustained. Lohrāsp has accepted the fact that the Sistānis do not take him seriously as a king, and he just tries to lure them into his service by reminding Rostam that he has made a promise to Kay Khosrow to accept him as king. Lohrāsp’s pleading and begging in the letter in spite of his continuous rejection by the Sistāni portray him as unkingly and a rather pathetic character. This is precisely how the Sistānis think of him. Once Rostam receives the letter, he consults his father Zāl on how he should respond to Lohrāsp’s pleas. Zāl’s response betrays his utter disdain for Lohrāsp:

“Do not go to Lohrāsp,” Zāl advised Rostam. “I find it a calamity that Lohrāsp is king, and whenever I hear his name I become miserable. I served many a king, but did not even look in his direction. Going to him now is not wise because we will never get along with him. I am always fearful of him as I am never sure whether he is an enemy or a friend.”

This episode and the passages confirm the sentiment expressed in the Shāhnāmeh: the Iranian nobility was not happy with Lohrāsp’s appointment, and although they accepted Kay Khosrow’s decision while he was alive, there is no

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425 Shahrīyārnāmeh, folios 75-6. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 27.
426 Shahrīyārnāmeh, folios 75-6. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 28.
indication that they honored their promise to him after his occultation. One also finds other passing references in the body of SCE that hint at the Sistānis’ continuous disapproval of Lohrāsp as a king. For example, when faced with imminent defeat at the hands of Bahman, Zāl exclaims in anger, “Fortune turned against me since the moment Kay Khosrow gave Lohrāsp the throne.”

This disapproval by Iranian nobility for Lohrāsp finds another expression in the Shāhnāmeh. Absent from Ferdowsi’s account of Lohrāsp’s reign are all Parthian heroes, including the Sistāni ones. In fact, from the Shāhnāmeh’s account, we do not learn anything at all about Iran’s affairs during Lohrāsp’s reign. Instead, Ferdowsi gives us the story of Gashtāsp’s adventures in Rum, including his romance with Katayun, the daughter of Rum’s king. We might ask ourselves, once again, why Ferdowsi has chosen to remain completely silent when it comes to the accounts of Lohrāsp’s reign. First, it is important to note that there were a number of stories, at least in the Iranian, and more specifically Sistāni tradition, regarding the events of Lohrāsp’s reign. As we shall see below, some of these stories are preserved in the SCE. If indeed he had access to the sources, which is fair to assume on our part, he chose not to include them in his narration. The main reason for his decision must be sought in the deteriorating relationship between the Iranian nobility and the Iranian king. As we have illustrated above, the Sistāni heroes despised Lohrāsp, and did not offer their

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427 Kay Khosrow follows Kavus, and during his reign a long war of vengeance for Seyāvash begins. After the Turānian king, Afrāsyāb is defeated, Khosrow announces that he wants to abdicate. Fearing the inevitable corruption and hubris that absolute power brings, he retires to a mountaintop. The Iranian heroes, including Zāl, accompany him to the mountaintop where he vanishes in a snowstorm.

428 Bahmanīnāmeh, p. 293. For the Persian Passage see Appendix A, note 31.

429 The account of Goshtāsp’s adventures in the west has the specific function of portraying him as a hero. The heroic image attributed to Goshtāsp, however, stems from the Sistāni tradition. This is also true for his son, Esfandyār. Both are heroes according to the Sistāni definition of what it is to be a hero. This will be argued in detail in the following chapter.
services to him. The question that becomes relevant then, is what would the stories of the heroes look like, if they did not serve Lohrāsp? Obviously, they would be stories of the heroic adventures and feats of the Sistāni heroes without a point of reference to the Iranian monarchy. The trouble for Ferdowsi, given the structure of his work, would be finding a way to link the story of the Sistāni heroes to the court of the much disdained Lohrāsp. After all, Ferdowsi’s aim was to narrate the story of an uninterrupted Iranian monarchy. He uses the Sistāni heroes to build up the accounts of each king’s reign, as long as the content of the stories is appropriate for such a goal. We have already discussed how he neglected the story of Garshāsp, because it did not fulfill this agenda. The same is true of the stories of the Sistāni heroes that are said to have taken place during Lohrāsp’s reign.

Most of the extant stories of Lohrāsp’s reign are contained in the Shahryārnāme, and there is reason to believe that some of Farāmarz’s later adventures in India also take place during this period. Although it has not been explicitly mentioned, one can assume that the adventures of Farāmarz in India, after the disappearance of Kay Khosrow from the narrative, can be attributed to either the period of Lohrāsp or his son Gashtāsp’s respective reigns. Additionally, given that the Farāmarznāme at our disposal contains a fraction of the Farāmarz stories that existed in the medieval period, it is very likely that there were stories of his adventures during the period of interest, which did not survive.430 However, in the absence of direct reference in the extant material, we cannot use the material in the Farāmarznāme. This case of Shahryārnāme is different when it

430 As mentioned before, we have references to a 12 volume Farāmarznāme, and we know that Farāmarz continues to be a hero of utmost importance to the oral tradition, as stories related to him occupy much space in the Šumār-e Naqālān.
comes to its coverage of this period. There, we find detailed accounts of the
events of Lohrāsp’s reign, in which a number of Sistāni heroes and Parthians are
involved.

As argued in chapter 4, the story of Lohrāsp’s reign found in the
Shahryārnāmeh reflects events of the Parthian period. Some of the events
described in the story have already been discussed. It is important to note,
however, that from this story we gather that some of the events described in this
story were of utmost importance. For example, we know that the attack of the
Turānian king Arjāsp on Iran had devastating consequences both for the capital
city of Balkh and for Sistān. Arjāsp, who is a descendent of the infamous
Afrāsyāb wants to avenge his ancestor’s blood by attacking Iran. He comes to
Balkh via Bukhara with a mighty army, and then he besieges the city. At this time
Rostam is occupied with his battles in the western territories. This is when he
receives the above-mentioned letter from Lohrāsp, summoning him to court.
Farāmarz, the Sistāni hero second in rank, is in India, trying to bring back
Shahryār. Lohrāsp sends letters to the heads of all the Parhian noble families,
his vassals, asking them to come to the rescue of the city. But in spite of all of
their efforts, Balkh falls to the Turānians, and is ransacked by the army.
Meanwhile, another Turānian army is attacking the city of Sistān, and many
Sistāni heroes such as Zavreh, Rostam’s brother, Sām, Farāmarz’s son, Āzarburzin
Farāmarz’s son, and even Zāl himself partake in endless battles against the
Turānians. Shahryār continues to fight numerous battles against Arjāsp, and goes
as far as China in his attempts to defeat him. Once he learns that Lohrāsp has been

431 Shahryār is Borzu’s son. He has taken refuge in India, after he was insulted in Sistān by
Farāmarz’s son. After a long delay, Farāmarz and his sister Bunu Goshasp go to India in order to
persuade him to return.
killed by Arjäsp, he returns to Balkh and keeps the city calm until Goshtasp, Lohrāsp’s son, returns from his battles.\footnote{Shahryārnāme, folios 232-3.}

It is interesting to note that the account of Lohrāsp’s killing in the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} is neither significant nor is it dramatic. This is puzzling given that the external circumstances surrounding the event are very much like the killing of Jamshid. In both cases, a foreign king attacks Iran and kills the legitimate king. While in Jamshid’s case, this act becomes a dramatic scene, in the case of Lohrāsp it is all but glossed over. This stems from the fact that Ferdowsi seems to have had difficulty emphasizing this event, because much of the context for it was missing. This is because Ferdowsi neglected the many stories of the Sistāni heroes during the reign of Lohrāsp; stories which would have constituted the bulk of the material on Lohrāsp reign.

The stories of Lohrāsp’s reign as presented in the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} and the SCE, therefore, serve different purposes. Ferdowsi simply attempts to fill up the pages dedicated to Lohrāsp’s reign with adventures of his son, Goshtāsp. Therefore, he neglects to mention crucial events that according to the larger Iranian tradition happened in this period. Although fragmented and incomplete, the extant stories of Lohrāsp’s reign that one finds in the SCE confirm the suspicion that they were excluded from the national narrative because they did not fulfill its maker’s ideological agenda. Instead of a mighty sovereign who is being served by the Parthian heroes we find the image of a weak, rejected and abandoned king who has to beg for Parthian heroes to serve him. Additionally, he suffers a major defeat during the course of which the seat of the Iranian throne is
reduced to ashes. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Ferdowsi excluded the events of his reign from his narrative.

V. Farāmarz’s end and Bahman’s image

Nowhere are the stories of the same events narrated by the Shāhnāmeh and SCE as divergent as in the story of Bahman’s reign and his killing of Farāmarz. Ferdowsi’s account of Bahman’s reign is short, and as we will see apologetic for Bahman. This is the plot of Bahman’s battle against Farāmarz in the Shāhnāmeh: Bahman wants to avenge his father, Esfandyār’s, blood, and he goes to Sistān. There, Zāl reminding him of all the services that his family provided to the Iranian king, asks him to return to Iran. But Bahman is not persuaded, and after a short battle, he captures and kills Farāmarz.

We shall discuss the SCE’s version of the events, which are indeed very different in every respect. However, there are a few interesting things that need to be mentioned about Ferdowsi’s account. Before moving his army to Sistān, Bahman gives various examples of kings and nobles who acted in vengeance:

“Our ancestors, when they were brave young warriors, did not hide their valor in obscurity, but acted as the glorious king Fereydun did, who destroyed Zahhāk in revenge for the blood of Jamshid. And Manuchehr brought an army from Amol and marched against Salm and the barbarous Tur, pursuing them to China in pursuit of vengeance for his grandfather’s death. I too leave such a tale behind me. When Kay Khosrow escaped from Afrsayab’s clutches he made the world drenched in blood: my father demanded vengeance for Lohrāsp, and piled the earth with a mountain of dead. And Farāmarz, who exalts himself above the shining sun, went to Kābol pursuing vengeance for his father’s blood and razed the whole province to the ground: blood obscured all the land, and men rode their horses over the bodies of the dead. I, who ride out
against raging lions, am more worthy than anyone to take revenge, since my vengeance will be for the peerless Esfandyar.”

By giving the example of the kings and heroes who sought vengeance, Bahman attempts to justify his actions, which undoubtedly were not condoned. But not only does he give various examples of characters who acted in vengeance, he glorifies their actions as a sign of their bravery. It is also interesting that Farāmarz is also said to have taken harsh measures against the people of Kābol, because according to the Shāhnāmeh, the ruler of Kābol, Shaghad who happens to be Rostam’s brother, is responsible for killing Rostam. Therefore, given that even Farāmarz himself engaged in such brutal acts in the name of revenge gives Bahman the permission to kill Farāmarz. Morally speaking, the narrative has to provide some kind of justification for Bahman’s killing of Farāmarz, otherwise this long passage would not have been necessary. It is an attempt to provide an excuse for Bahman’s disloyalty to Rostam’s family, who were the guardians and protectors of the Iranian throne. It also serves to cover up his irrational thirst for revenge as an acceptable act.

Another interesting hint in the account of Bahman’s reign is made after his return from Sistān. Ferdowsi tells us that after killing Farāmarz, Bahman rested at last, and “gave himself to the business of the government, distributing money to the poor; and some were pleased with his reign, while others lived in grief and sorrow.”  Here in spite of the insistence that he was a just king, as it is evident in his alms giving and the use of the word justice (dād), there is a hint that some people continued to see him as an unjust ruler. Once we discuss the Sistānī

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version of the events, it becomes evident that it was his actions against the house of Rostam that earned him discontent from his subjects.

Absent from Ferdowsi’s account is the image of Zāl imprisoned in an iron cage. This image invariably invokes a sense of sympathy for the aged Zāl. It is interesting that this picture is very well known to Iranians as it still remains one of favorite themes depicted by the popular miniature painters. Zāl’s imprisonment at the hands of Bahman is strangely absent in the Shāhnāmeh, however.

All the points raised about Ferdowsi’s narration of Bahman’s story indicate that he was interested in polishing Bahman’s image so that he could fulfill the moral requirements of what was expected of an Iranian king. An act of brutal vengeance against a member of a family that for the most part defended and guarded the Iranian throne would not have qualified Bahman as a moral king. Therefore, on the one hand the narrative provided justification for his actions. On the other hand, it excluded episodes and motifs such as Zāl’s imprisonment, that could be most damaging to Bahman’s depiction as a just king.

In the material at my disposal, there are two narrations of Bahman’s conflict with the Sistāni heroes. The first and shorter version of the account is included as the closing episode of the Farāmarznāmeh, while one finds the longer version in the Bahmannāmeh. In spite of their different lengths, the plot of the two accounts is very much in agreement, and they also both condemn Bahman as the unwise and unjustified aggressor. Moreover, in the Bahmannāmeh after the account of Farāmarz’s killing, we have a whole section dedicated to the battles of Farāmarz’s descendents with Bahman. Here, I will give the account of Bahman’s battles against Farāmarz as narrated in the Bahmannāmeh. The most effective way to demonstrate the difference between the two narrations is to provide, in some
detail, the story of the conflict between Bahman and the Sistāni heroes. As we shall see this story is significant in more than one way, and a closer look at it is further illuminates various discussions that have taken place both in this and previous chapters.

The fascinating story of the battles between Bahman and Farāmarz begins when Farāmarz, who at the time is in India, receives a letter from Zāl informing him of Bahman’s intention to raid Sistān in order to avenge his father’s blood. Immediately after receiving the letter he returns to Sistān, but meanwhile Bahman’s army has already reached the province and has started their attacks on the army. This is the first of four major battles, described in much vivid and intriguing detail. In the first battles Bahman suffers a humiliating defeat at the hands of Sistāni heroes. It is important to note that from the beginning of this story, Bahman is depicted as an obstinate, unwise and irrational king, whose rage and thirst for vengeance have gotten the better of him. The narrative’s, and by extension the audience’s, sympathy is with the Sistāni heroes. In this initial phase, it is the Sistāni heroes who are superior, both morally and in terms capability to the Iranian warriors. This sense of superiority is best expressed in terms of the Sistāni heroes’ possession of both noble lineage (gohar) and skills (honar), which are superior to that of Bahman. In a passage Sām, Farāmarz’s son, sums up what makes him and the Sistānis superior to Bahman and his lot:

He replied to Bahman, “I am a descendent of Sām, and I am Farāmarz’s son, and my name is Sām. I am the son of dauntless Farāmarz, and I am so proud of my lineage that my head touches the sky. I am so fierce that when I let out a roar on the battlefield the oceans start to boil. For me the dusty battlefield is the most beautiful place; to me the best wine is the blood of champions.
Now you tell me, what is your pedigree? May the earth be cleansed of your name and your race!  

It is true that this kind of heroic boast, especially regarding one’s lineage, is a recurrent literary topos in this genre of literature. However, in most cases the boast is about the greatness of one’s lineage, and at least in the Iranian epics, under no circumstances are members of noble or royal families ridiculed or insulted unless it is common knowledge that they, like Lohrāsp and his descendants, do not belong to the genealogically distinguished. The heroic boasts, when faced with members of other noble or royal lineages are usually about a heroes’ skill and power, and in the rare case where pedigree is the subject to a boast, the hero tells his opponent, “My ancestors were better than yours”, but he would never say, “Your ancestors are of common background”. This is how the passage cited diverges from the way the boasting topos: Lohrāsp is ridiculed for his anonymous lineage. The audience, having been familiar with Lohrāsp’s questionable lineage, probably shared Sām’s sentiments about the Sistāni’s superior status; therefore, the question at the end of this passage is a rhetorical one, meant to instigate a process of comparison of Sistānis and the descendents of Lohrāsp in the mind of reader, whereby Bahman comes off as a clear loser.

This, however, is not the only way and the only place where the sympathies of the text are revealed. In the course of the description of the first battle, Sistāni heroes describe Bahman as obstinate, unwise, and demonic (khud-kameh, tireh-hush, div-zad). All of these characterizations of Bahman are justified in the eyes of the audience, because Bahman’s actions are irrational and

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435 Bahmannāmeh, p. 216. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 32.
motivated solely by his hatred and anger. The story’s rhetoric against Bahman intensifies as we get to his second battle with Farāmarz. After Bahman’s defeat in the first battle, the army retreats to Balkh, Iran’s capital at the time. As soon as he sets foot in Balkh, Bahman begins to plan his next attack on Sistān. He is consumed by his rage and his vengeance and cannot think about anything else. There at the court, the royal astrologer, who we later learn is none other then the legendary Jāmāsp, tries to persuade him to give up his anger and make peace with the Sistānis:

He told the king, “I keep telling you (to give up your vengeance), but all you do in response is to get more angry. What is the use of being king to you when you can’t eat or sleep or be in peace? You are going to inflict serious damage on the world by your anger. You will not sow anything but the seed of ugliness with your hatred. Other than bloodshed what will you achieve? Yet what you is on your mind (i.e. what you plan to do) is much worse than simple bloodshed.” Bahman replied saying, “What is the use of all your reproach? No matter how capable, one cannot escape the evil-willed destiny.”

This advice as well as the verdict given on Bahman’s behavior is very significant because it comes from Jāmāsp. From ancient times onward, Jāmāsp was known to be a legendary seer, who possessed superhuman wisdom. He is the ancient counterpart of Bozorgmehr, who is the most celebrated seer and wise man and advisor to the kings in the Sāsānid period. The judgment and advice contained in the words are given a different level of credibility because it is Jāmāsp who utters them. Therefore, when Bahman decides to go against Jāmāsp’s advice, it is clear that he is an obstinate and unwise character, as the Sistāni heroes have described him.

437 *Ibid* 236. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 33.
Although Bahman is able to put together an army of half a million soldiers from all corners of the empire, he is once again defeated and is forced to retreat to Balkh. It is important to note that each of these battles is described in great detail: we learn about the composition of the army, their numbers and military strategy. Given the significance of the region of Sistān and its consequences for the relationship of the Sistānis and the Iranian throne it comes as no surprise that so much attention is given to depicting the details of this events. It is also worth mentioning that although providing this kind of detail might be characteristic of epic literature in general, the specific descriptions entailed in this episode are not ones that one usually finds, as for instance, the “catalogue of heroes” generally invoked at the beginning of a battle. The names mentioned here, include many names that one usually does not find elsewhere either in the Shāhnāme or SCE. There is indication that each of the armies participating belongs to one of the vassal kings appointed by Bahman. This becomes apparent at the end of the story when he assigns new vassal kings: Rohām gets Palestine, and Qirwan. Suqlī, the king of Rum gets half of India. Behānruz is appointed to the region of Daylam up to Gorgān. Siahmard gets Gilan, and Kaqan, China. Buvrasp gets the entire western province of Iraq, and Burzin Āzar, Farāmarz’s son, is to reign over a region expanding from ʿUman to Nimruz, and in addition to that he is appointed as jahān pahlevān, a post, which he refuses. In addition to the unusual cast of characters, there is various other detailed information which is uncharacteristic of the Iranian epics, such as internal conflicts of Bahman’s army, their numbers, their way in which Bahman had to convince them to partake in battles. These details also serve to highlight that the superiority of Sistānis as warriors since they were

439 Bahmannāme, pp. 587-590.
able to defeat the Iranian army in spite the fact that their armies were much smaller and their resources much more limited than the Iranians.

The third time around, Bahman puts together another large army composed of the army units of his vassals. Again, there is much description of who sided with Farāmarz, and who joined Bahman. This time, Bānu Goshasp appears on the battlefield and in her first attack on the Iranians inflicts serious damage on the army. Then she sends a note to Bahman challenging him to send her a “worthy opponent” to the fight with her. After much pondering, Bahman comes to the conclusion that the only one of the same rank is Rohām-e Gudarz. Once on the battlefield, Rohām insults Bānu Goshasp first for being a woman, and then for her demonic ancestry. Bānu Goshasp reminds him that she is not just any woman and humiliates and threatens him: she says that she will first shave off Rohām’s beard then she will kill him, chop him up and feed him to the dogs. Although she does not go as far as she asserts, she does injure Rohām on the battlefield. And Rohām is only the first of the Bahman’s warriors to be defeated and humiliated by Bānu Goshasp. At last, one of the warriors is able to kick her off her horse and at this time all the Sistāni heroes come to her aid, but this warrior who is described as belonging to the Barbers of the west is able to defeat them one by one. At this point, Zāl intercedes and resorts to trickery to win the battle. As mentioned elsewhere, in these epics the use of trickery on the part of the heroes does not create any moral dilemmas. On the contrary, it is one of the defining characteristics of the Sistāni heroes, and rather than being frowned upon it is celebrated as one their special skills. Zāl’s trickery stalls Bahman’s army long enough for Farāmarz to appear. At this time, the winds of Sistān start blowing and

440 Bahmannāneh, pp. 246-250.
that makes things very difficult for Bahman’s army who are not accustomed to them. Farāmarz seizes the opportunity and defeats Bahman once again. Humiliated and disgraced, Bahman retreats to Balkh.  

Bahman, however, is not about to give up. On the contrary, his insatiable desire for vengeance is fueled by each defeat. Again, he concentrates on putting together a great force:

Bahman once again became overwhelmed by anger. At this time the battles had been going on for six years. Again he summoned the armies of east and west. He gathered such a huge army that their camping ground stretched over seventy leagues. Many cavaliers came along with their horses, and a total of 910,000 warriors gathered there. The city of Balkh became so crowded that life became difficult for its inhabitants.

What becomes apparent from this passage is that Bahman is forced to increase the size of his army. Unlike the Shāhnāmeh’s depiction of the conflict, here we find a long drawn out war that is almost impossible for Bahman to win in spite of the seemingly great strength and number of his army. That Bahman could stay motivated for such a long time given his numerous defeats, underlines his obstinate and excessively vengeful character. The size of the army and Bahman’s persistence, and what it means in terms of his characterization are best expressed in a passage where Farāmarz shares his concern with Zāl:

Farāmarz said, “In my days I have faced many armies, be it in India or at the service of the Iranian king, but never have I seen an army of this size, and I haven’t seen anyone as aggressive as Bahman, that offspring of demons. He is neither cares that he is putting you through so much suffering, nor does he feel ashamed of his numerous defeats. He has been fed upon dogs’ milk, and the only thing that he will see from me is my sword and dagger!”

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442 Bahmannāmeh, p. 266. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 34.
443 Ibid, p. 268. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 35.
As we shall see, as each battle unfolds, and as we get closer to the end of the story, Bahman’s negative characterization becomes underlined. In the description of the fourth battle, there is much more detail describing the alliances on both sides, as well as a romantic episode involving Bahman, and a fairy-like woman. However, the narrative quickly returns to the conflict, and we find that this time it is Farāmarz who has decided to attack Balkh to ambush Bahman’s army. This tactic, however, fails and Farāmarz suffers a defeat and is forced to escape to Kābol.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 286-8.} Next we learn that Bahman’s army arrives at Sistān’s Citadel, and besieges the city. After a siege for seven months a famine breaks out in the city of Sistān, and lasts for one year. The state of the city and its inhabitants is described in great detail: once they have finished eating everything they could lay their hands on they resort to eating their fine Arabian horses that were used for war, as well as dogs and cats. Another five months passes before the people finally go to Zāl and tell him that there is absolutely nothing else to eat, and the only thing left for them to do is to tear each other apart and to eat each other. In response to the people’s complaints, Zāl gives the people whatever grains he has stored in his palace, which lasts them another nine months. Meanwhile Bahman starts attacking the city from his position outside the citadel. He throws fire on the city and the people this time go to Zāl and demand that he should hand over the city to Bahman and his army since he can neither feed them nor protect them.

Having accepted defeat, Zāl in his desperation writes to Farāmarz who has retreated to Kābol. In the letter we find a long heart-rending lament for Sistān and the family of the heroes. In the letter he says goodbye to Farāmarz, informing him...
of his decision to hand over the city and palace to Bahman. He advises Farāmarz to escape from Kābol, and never return to either Zabol or Sistān. Instead, he should seek refuge in India (Kashmir and Sarandip) and leave Bahman alone, since the army that he has brought from the east and west is no match for his army. Meanwhile, Zāl dreams of Garshāsp, who tells him that he has hidden much grain somewhere in his palace, because he has foreseen the problems that his successors would have. They follow Garshāsp’s instruction and find the grain and distribute it to the inhabitants of the city. However, the grain does not last long enough, and the hungry people open up the gates of the city to Bahman.

Faced with hordes of hungry and armed people, Bahman’s army retreats because they are very scared. Once again, the people are able to close the gates of the city and ward off the enemy. But this time, Bahman and his army have a new tactic: they entice the hungry people by making food around the citadel. When the people smell the food, they lose all sense and rush towards Bahman’s army. The hungry people are mercilessly slaughtered.\(^{445}\)

The famine is only one of the phases of the fourth battle and as we shall see more events unfold. However, it is a significant event that, as argued before, most likely functions as memory of a real famine that might have taken place during a long siege of the city. In terms of plot, this part of the account is very intriguing because it deviates from what one has come to expect of this genre, hence making the events unpredictable. One such deviation from the formulaic expectation is the presence of the commoners in this episode. Generally speaking, the common people do not appear, especially as a whole. That is, there may be at various points certain characters introduced into the story for certain purposes, but

\(^{445}\) Bahmannāmeh, pp. 270-303.
the commoners collectively are absent from the epic genre. In this episode, however, they decide the outcome of the battle. At the same time, some of the familiar motifs associated with the SCE are also present in this story. For example, Zal’s dream of Garshasp, in which he learns that Garashasp has hidden grain is a variation of the “treasure left by ancestor/king” motif discussed earlier in this chapter. Here, the treasure is obviously the grain, which given the famine in the city, is more valuable than any treasure of gold and jewels. Another feature that reminds one of the treasure motif is that Garshasp has foretold the events, and that is why he has left the grain there. It is a very interesting case where the historical memory of an event gets incorporated into this genre, and one can clearly see in what way the genre accommodates the narration of such the events.

The other thing emphasized by this detailed and colorful story is Bahman’s unjust acts. He inflicts suffering on the defenseless population for many months, tricks them into opening the gates of the city, and slaughters them mercilessly. As if doing this once was not bad enough, Bahman does this one more time. This time Faramarz and Bānu Goshasp have arrived at the city and are trying to find a way to break the siege, but another famine breaks out, and Bahman resorts to the same trick of enticing the hungry people by the smell of food. Once again the people fall for the trick and they are massacred.446

The excessiveness of Bahman’s character is paralleled in the very way the story unfolds. In the Indo-European epics, generally if there are multiple battles, the number of battles is usually three. In Bahman’s case we have four battles, the last of which seems to be a repetition of the previous ones. The best example of such repetition is the story of famine. The long and repetitious story of the

446 Ibid, p. 310.
seeming endless attacks on Sistān creates a sense of exhaustion in the audience, which might have been a deliberate storytelling technique. By making the account of the battles long, and by the time we reach the fourth battle, boring, the excessiveness of Bahman’s character is made apparent to the audience. The audience would have become frustrated with the story, and with a conflict that would not resolve, and would have blamed Bahman, and his excessive, compulsive character for it.

During the last battle the city of Sistān falls to Bahman, and Farāmarz and Bānu Goshasp escape to Kābol, while Zāl hides in a nearby farm. Then Bahman’s army enters Sistān, where the only inhabitants left are women and children – people who could not escape the army in time. Bahman’s army raids whatever is left of the city for three days, harming the helpless women and children. This behavior on Bahman’s part is definitely not justified, and adds one more ruthless and cruel act to the long list of his baseless deeds. However, this is certainly not Bahman’s last irrational act.

Zāl, who is tired of hiding, writes to Bahman and turns himself in to Jāмāsp, and asks Jāмāsp to intercede on his behalf. Jāмāsp approaches Bahman who refuses to leave without finding Zāl, and asks him to return to Balkh. The response that follows is worth citing at length, because it best reflects the extent of Bahman’s vengeance and hatred for the Sistānis:

Bahman said, “For the sake of this lowly man, Zāl, I have spent fifty years in this province. All this fighting is because of Zāl, and I am not leaving until I find him.” Then Jāмāsp asked him, “What will you do if he falls into your clutches?” He responded, “I will smash his head against rocks, and I will drink wine out of his skull. Then I will demolish all of Sistān’s cities, and I will flood their

farmlands. Next I shall go to the *dakhmeh* along with the army and I will seek out the remains of their heroes. Then, I will set fire to the *dakhmeh*, and annihilate it completely. I will do all of this so that it could be known by all people around the world that Esfandyār’s blood was not spilled in vain.” Jamsap told him, “It is up to you, as you are the king and you have the power, but thinking like this is not right. Once you gain victory, you should display your greatness, and that you will do by forgiveness. The most righteous behavior is for one to be fair and to forgive, and both worlds will be a pleasant place to you if you do this. If this is the way you think, you will never find Zāl. The noble Zāl has become desperate and is hiding, and Farāmarz has been forced into exile. You demolished their palaces, and you pillaged their wealth. What have you done to this noble race that has constantly produced heroes since the time of Kayumarth? You have destroyed them to such an extent that it is hard to imagine that they once existed. Your actions will neither leave you with an honorable legacy, nor will you find any benefit as result of them.”

Not only can we see in this passage the extent to which Bahman is consumed by his hatred and anger, but more importantly we realize that Jāmāsp also sympathizes with the Sistānis. Jāmāsp’s sympathy will be even more clearly expressed later in the story. Jāmāsp finally convinces Bahman to grant Zāl immunity. They bring the Avesta and the Zand and Bahman swears that he will not harm Zāl placing his hand on it. When Jāmāsp tells Zāl about Bahman’s promise, Zāl expresses his fear that Bahman might not honor his promise. After all, he is stupid, vengeful and disloyal, but Jāmāsp reassures him that no one can break such a promise as Bahman has made.

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Once Zāl is brought before Bahman, he reproaches him, reminding him that he has brought him up, and served many of his ancestors, and in turn he has only brought death and destruction on Sistān:

Zāl addressed Bahman, “Oh prosperous king! Now you have fulfilled your desire and the province of Sistān is yours. What do you want from me? I am old and fortune has turned its back on me, and I have suffered much because of you. Don’t you remember that I brought you up, and I showed you kindness when you were in my care? Is this your way of showing your loyalty? Do I deserve a punishment for what I have done for you? What will you achieve by spilling the blood of an old man who served all your ancestors? You don’t have to kill me, because death is awaiting me anyway. You should do good and be kind-hearted and think about the impermanence of this world. After all what happened to Kay Khosrow, the one who conferred kingship on your ancestors? What happened to Kayumarth and those champions who followed him? We also will finally join them, and at the hour of justice we will have to face God. At that time, I will recount the pain and suffering that you inflicted upon me, and you will be ashamed in front of God. What will be your response to God when he asks why you have done this to me? You destroyed my house and the city. You injured me by killing my son.\textsuperscript{451} You killed all my warriors, my brave ones, my friends. Many nobles perished in wretched conditions, and you forced Farāmarz and Rostam’s daughters into exile. You have never seen any harm from us. You should remember that you have this glorious crown and throne thanks to us!\textsuperscript{452}

As one might by this time in the story come to expect of Bahman, he reacts with more intense fury. Breaking the promise he had given to Jāmāsp, he imprisons Zāl in an iron cage. Then he plunders Zāl’s palace and takes many treasures and other valuables. After he is finished pillaging the palaces, he starts his systematic campaign of destruction. First he demolishes the palace. Then he burns to the ground the entire city of Sistān. He breaks the dams and weirs of the Hilmand River and floods the city. Next, he orders the ground, where the city

\textsuperscript{451} This is a reference to killing of Rostam. I will discuss the different accounts on Rostam’s death below.

\textsuperscript{452} Bahmannāmeh, pp. 319-320. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 37.
once stood, to be plowed, and he sows grass there. Thus, the place becomes a plain without water, and no passerby can guess that a magnificent city such as Sīstān once stood there. The systematic destruction of the city of Sīstān in the manner described, paralleled with his broken promise of immunity for Zāl, gives the audience no option but to sympathize with the Sīstānis. As we have seen so far, as the plot unfolds, Bahman commits one unjustified act after another, and as we approach the end of the story the senselessness and brutality of his actions are also magnified.

Once Farāmarz learns of Zāl’s imprisonment, he comes to Balkh with a small entourage. There is a series of battles with Bahman’s army, who are much greater in number. In the final battle, Farāmarz is captured by Bahman, but he is not killed on the battlefield as one might expect. Instead Bahman puts Farāmarz up on the gallows, and he meets his end in this way. As we approach the moment of Farāmarz’s execution, there are a series of events that clarify without a doubt the sympathies of characters such as Jāmāsp and Rohām and other nobles present at Bahman’s court. For example after Farāmarz has been captured, Bahman asks Rohām-e Gudarz as well as several other heroes to tie him up. Rohām refuses, reminding Bahman of the great history that the two families (Sīstānis and Gudarziān) share. The other example: when Farāmarz is being captured, Bahman observes that Jāmāsp is weeping quietly. He asks Jāmāsp why he is crying on such an auspicious day. Jāmāsp tells him that it breaks his heart to see Farāmarz in chains, because he has seen so many heroes from this family. Bahman becomes furious, calling Jāmāsp a stupid, brainless man, and accuses him

454 Ibid, pp. 338. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 39.
of treachery.\textsuperscript{455} In both examples, we see clearly that even those who are on Bahman’s side, characters like Rohām and Jāmāsp, sympathize with the Sistānis.

However, contrary to what one might expect, this is not the end of the conflict between Bahman and the Sistānis. In the next two sections of the \textit{Bahmannāmeh}, we learn of many battles that Bahman fought against the descendents of the Sistānis who are, for the most part, in India. Bahman was not satisfied by killing Farāmarz, capturing Zāl and reducing Sistān to ruins. He followed Farāmarz’s sisters, Bānu Goshasp and Zar Bānu in India, and captured them and brought them back to Iran. At the end of the poem, however, Bahman attempts to reconcile with Rostams’ family by freeing Zāl, Bānu Goshasp and Zar Bānu, and by appointing Borzin Āzar, Farāmarz’s son as \textit{jahān pahlevān}. Borzin Āzar, however, refuses to offer his services to Bahman and leaves his court. At this time, there is a dragon menacing the populace, and since Borzin Āzar has left the court, Bahman himself is forced to fight him. The dragon kills Bahman, and this is how the story ends. As mentioned earlier, slaying the dragon is the first heroic trial, and the fact that Bahman does not get passed this first trial underlines his incompetence, and even grants him an anti-heroic status.

Another story, which is closely related to this one and drastically different in the \textit{Shāhnāmeh} and the SCE, is the account of Rostam’s death. According to the \textit{Shāhnāmeh}, Rostam dies at the hands of his brother Shaghad. However, in the SCE, there is no mention of this story. Instead we have ample references to the fact that Rostam was indeed killed by Bahman.\textsuperscript{456} This account is corroborated by Arabic universal histories, such as those of at-Tabari and al-Masʿudī. According

\begin{footnotes}
\item[455] \textit{Ibid}, pp. 335. For the Persian passage see Appendix A, note 40.
\item[456] \textit{Ibid}, pp. 319, 320, 431.
\end{footnotes}
to at-Tabari, Bahman went to Sistān seeking to avenge his father. He killed Rostam, his father Dastan, his brother Zavareh, and his son Farāmarz.\footnote{At-Ṭabari, Ṭārīkh, v. I, p. 401.} Al-Mas‘ūdī informs us that there were many battles between Bahman and Rostam, until the latter was killed along with his father, Zāl.\footnote{Al-Mas‘ūdī, Muruj, v. I, p. 238.} Therefore, without a doubt, this narration of Rostam’s death was known prior to Ferdowsi’s time.

A closer look at these divergent stories reveals that Ferdowsi carefully selected the Sistān stories that he wanted to include in the Shāhnāmeh. He, like most authors, had a vision for what the work attempted to convey. His aim was first and foremost to narrate the history of the Iranian monarchy. This is clear from the very organization and structure of the Shāhnāmeh. Time has been divided according to the reigns of each Iranian king. Or to look at it from another angle, one could say that in each section, it is the king who is the main protagonist of the story. At the same time, Ferdowsi aims to grant legitimacy to the succession of kings by weaving together stories from traditions that supported his aim. One example of such an attempt is the way he avoids delving into the question of Lohrāsp’s legitimacy, by skipping the stories of his reign. In the case of Bahman’s reign, he chooses to give an extremely abridged version of the events. By leaving out the stories of the long drawn out and bloody wars between the Iranians and Sistānis, Ferdowsi once again avoids problematic questions whether or not Bahman was justified in his actions. Furthermore, this plot sequence calls into question his description of the relationship that existed between the Iranian and Sistāni thrones. In the Shāhnāmeh, the Sistānis are at best vassals of the Iranians, and there is an unmistakable sense that in spite of their special status, they do not
have the same rank as the Iranian royal house. But according to the SCE, the dynamics of the relationship between the two houses are not always that of the superior and the subordinate. This kind of relationship, however, could not find a place in the *Shāhnāmeh*, therefore, when there are instances of it, they are either ignored, or abridged beyond the point of recognition.

Another interesting observation that emerges from the comparison of the two bodies of epic is that after Lohrāsp, we see a heroic tradition that parallels the Sistāni tradition. It is interesting that Goshtasp, Esfandyār and Bahman are heroes as well as kings. The heroic feats of Goshtasp have been narrated in the *Shāhnāmeh*: he has many adventures in Rum, where he kills a dragon and a wolf, and engages in many other battles. There is also a long romantic episode between him and the daughter of Rum’s king, Katayun. As we have seen, fighting and either subduing or killing a wild animal, especially a dragon, is one of the deeds that defines a Sistāni hero. It is a test as well as a rite of passage. Similarly, the Sistāni heroes always have fleeting romances with the daughters of foreign kings.

Next, we have Esfandyār. The the heroic image in his case is easier to describe, mainly due to his *haft-khan*, or seven tasks that are closely modeled after Rostam’s seven tasks. Again, Rostam is not the only hero who performs a number of heroic tasks one after the other. This indeed is one of the features of the Sistāni epics: all Sistāni heroes go on multiple adventures, where they have to face a series (usually 7-9) difficult task. Esfandyār’s heroic image is modeled after a Sistāni hero, and there are more instances from his tale to substantiate this claim. Similarly, Bahman has heroic stories associated with him. As mentioned in the introduction, the *Bahmannāmeh* is strange compilation of Bahman’s heroic deeds (the first section of the work), and Bahman’s action as the ultimate villain (the
second, third and fourth sections of the work). What is important for this discussion, however, is that there were heroic stories around Bahman, and once again Bahman’s heroic image closely resembles that of a Sistāni hero. Therefore, there were different and sometimes conflicting story lines, containing drastically different characterization of these figures, as to one tradition they were kings and heroes, and in the other vengeful and stupid villains.

Given the level of manipulation of the sources that one can detect in Ferdowsi’s work, one cannot but wonder what the Rostam stories were like before Ferdowsi incorporated them into the Shāhnāme. As we have argued, in order for him to include a story, either the story had to fit into his general framework, or he modified it in order to make it fit. Therefore, one can assume that the Rostam stories, some the best known and celebrated stories of the Shāhnāme may have been altered and revised by Ferdowsi. By incorporating them into the Shāhnāme, Ferdowsi fixed the story, at least in the written form. It was precisely because they were included in the Shāhnāme that no medieval panegyric poet dared to put them into verse. After all, the peerless master epic poet of all times, as Ferdowsi was perceived soon after his death, had already narrated Rostam’s stories. By including him in the Shāhnāme, Ferdowsi made Rostam the most distinguished hero and the most celebrated champion in the Iranian culture, but in doing so he must have polished his character considerably to make him fit into his worldview.

459 I will not discuss or attempt to provide detailed textual evidence for this hypothesis, since it is a separate discussion that I hope to take up in the future.
CONCLUSION

The function of the SCE, to put it simply, was to help construct a certain identity. Given the antiquity of its material, however, it is not surprising that this corpus of literature has gone through a series of changes, each significant change leaving its discernable mark on the epic stories. The two recognizable marks, or layers on the SCE have something to do with the efforts to construct two different kinds of identity. In the first case, namely the Parthian layer of the SCE, the aim was to create a distinctively Sistāni identity, which celebrated the Parthian nobles who ruled over the region. The region of Sistān continues to play a significant role in the SCE, and that is why the first three chapters of this dissertation are devoted to the study of this region. The heroes of the SCE are intimately linked, as one would expect, to their homeland of Sistān. So much so, that the very foundation of the region Sistān, which followed after construction of dams and weirs on the Hilmand River, is attributed to the first hero of the Sistāni cycle, Garshāsp. Therefore, in a sense, the SCE and the region begin at the same time, and this is a correlation that is often true of epics and the people who give birth to them: the epics are such an integral part of building the ethnic/regional identity that one cannot date their origin, as they seem to be as ancient as the people whom they celebrate. When it comes to the creation and cultivation of the Sistāni identity, the epics played an important role. However, the reason why I continue to suggest
that this layer of the epics could be Parthian in origin is that, as discussed in detail in chapters 2 and 4, it was during this period that Sistān was ruled by the mighty, for the most part autonomous Parthian noble family, whose members have been identified as having provided the inspiration for the characters in the SCE. In addition to that, there is evidence that there are other, more ancient layers to the stories and characters of SCE. One such example is Garshāsp’s character in the more ancient Avestan sources. The Garshāsp of Avesta, while sharing a few characteristics with the SCE’s newer edition of the character, is in no way linked to the land of Sistān or Zabolestān. This leads one to assume that perhaps at a later period, this Avestan hero was appropriated and recreated in the SCE, and there, he is depicted to be the founder of the region.

One might ask why there was a need to borrow an Avestan hero as the founder of Sistān? The answer lies in the complicated regional identities both in the ancient and the medieval times, as well as the Parthians’ perception of themselves as Iranians, both in ethnicity and religion. As discussed in chapter 2, new research reveals that the Parthians were very much part of the Iranian religious and cultural sphere, and identify themselves as such. Viewed in this context, making an Avestan hero their ancestor seems to be logical because, above all, it provides the Sistāni heroes with a glorified genealogy. Another attempt in the same direction is making Jamshid, the legendary Iranian king their ancestor. In this way, the Sistāni heroes not only incorporate into their genealogy religious legitimization, but also assign themselves royal lineage, which links them to the Iranian throne.
Nevertheless, the Parthian layer of the SCE is concerned with creation of a Sistāni identity. The heroes of the Sistāni cycle of epics, although linked to the Iranian court, are consistently portrayed as stronger, wiser, and more complex characters than the Iranian kings. The relationship between the Sistāni heroes and the Iranian kings in the SCE is not so much a subject-king relationship. Instead, the Sistāni heroes are the upholders of the Iranian monarchy, the crown-bestowers, both literally and figuratively, and the Iranian kings are continuously in need of the assistance and protection that the Sistāni heroes offer to them. As discussed in chapter 4, the relationship depicted in the SCE must be a reflection of the relationship between the Parthian noble house of Suren to the Parthian royal house.

However, these reflections of the Parthian history are embedded, as it were, in the structure of genre, whose main discourse is heroic. Therefore, rather than attempting to narrate the events “as they happened”, the genre cultivates first and foremost the heroic image of its protagonist, and while doing so preserves memories of some historical events. This is perhaps why in this genre the concern is not to provide the detailed or accurate information, which one expects of political history; instead, its aim is to construct a heroic image, which is not only linked to a particular ethnic or regional identity, but also creates and cultivates that particular identity.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the choice of heroic discourse for the preservation of the past is not unique to the SCE: the Iranians did not produce any genres of writing, prior to the 6th century (or one could even argue in the entire span of the pre-Islamic period) which would qualify as historiography according
to our modern definition and expectations. Memories of past were preserved mostly in the heroic discourse of epics. In other words, this makes the SCE an alternate version of the past events – a regional perspective on the pre-Islamic Iranian history. As I have argued in a number of places in this study, the SCE, in its pre-Islamic form, was a continuous body of literature, starting with Garshāsp and ending with Bakhtyār, the ruler of Sistān during Khosrow Parviz’s [590- 628 C.E.] time. Therefore, a byproduct of the effort to construct a Sistāni identity was the composition of an alternative version of Iran’s pre-Islamic history.

However, what we have at our disposal is not the Parthian version of the SCE. What we have is a version of the SCE that bears the marks of another wave of identity construction during the medieval period. The most significant change to the body of the SCE was that it was broken up into many different stories, each of which either generated a separate manuscript tradition, or were interpolated as stand-alone episodes to some Shāhnāmeh manuscript. As discussed in chapter 5, the stories of SCE were handed down from the pre-Islamic period in most likelihood, by the oral tradition. However, prior to the versification of the epics, there were prose versions of the stories, and the oldest prose version containing the stories of the SCE, i.e. Shāhnāmeh-ye Bozorg, seems to have included most of the stories in volume, and as one unified body of literature. Creating an identity was still the impetus for the preservation, narration and performance of the stories, but the identity in question, for the most part, was no longer the regional Sistāni identity.

Given the Arab invasion of Iran, and what was perceived as the gradual loss of the pre-Islamic cultural heritage, preserving the SCE stories was seen as
preserving a part of the Iran’s pre-Islamic past. One major factor for the way the SCE was regarded and treated was the way some of the stories were incorporated in Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh. As discussed in chapter 6, Ferdowsi aimed at composing a work that immortalized the ancient Iranian past, by reviving its myths and legends and stories. Central to his discourse is the Iranian monarchy; this being articulated both explicitly as well as in his choice of the structure for his poem. Therefore, he chose those stories of the SCE, which would best fit his ideological and formal framework, and even those stories have been massaged in order to either sever or dilute their link to Sistān and its autonomous rule. In chapter 6, I have discussed Ferdowsi’s approach, when faced with problematic material, i.e. conflicting traditions on the same events the best example of which is Bahman’s characterization and Farāmarz’s end. Ferdowsi did what he did, because at this point in time, the force, which was creating and upholding the different traditions was no longer in place. Instead there was another sense of purpose and urgency for the narration of stories of the pre-Islamic past: faced with centuries of foreign rule, with adverse, if not devastating effects on the Iranian culture and language, intellectuals such as Ferdowsi were motivated by the idea of preserving the Iranian cultural heritage. But preservation of the cultural heritage is never an innocent process of gathering what is left behind. Instead, often times it is an attempt to create a version of the past which is worthy of being glorified. This process inevitably results in the creation of a new identity, as the version of past created from the building block of the ancient material left behind becomes an integral part of the new identity.

The poets of the SCE followed Ferdowsi, and by that I am not just referring to the fact that they imitated his meter, vocabulary and imageries.
Although they were neither as ambitious, nor as ideologically conscious as Ferdowsi, they put into verse various ancient Iranian stories. The did so because in the courts where they most often found themselves, these kinds of ancient stories of the Iranian past were valued in the courtly milieu. One thing that sets apart their efforts from Ferdowsi’s is that none of them attempted to create a continuous narrative of the Iranian past, and therefore, there was no need to face the difficulties of different, and sometimes contradictory versions of the same story. Their task was rather simple. They have to put into verse a story of an ancient Iranian hero, which they either had heard in an oral performance, or had a prose version of. Nevertheless, the cultural milieu which welcomed these stories and valued them for their antiquity was participating in the exercise of creating a new Iranian identity based on the ancient material.


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APPENDIX A

PERSIAN AND ARABIC PASSAGES
1. 

2. 

3. 

293
از پیش از هنگامی که شد به چندین سخنه‌ای تنگ و مرد ورودی، نیاز به جز چهل‌ها راده‌ای کیا. که این‌جا سریال آرمان‌های از این سر به گذشته ومرا در دل اتیسته: ام‌سر فراز زندان‌ها، و او باریکه که اوی شیر زیان رسته‌ای

4.

پیکته تنها چند افسانه که گفته دشت از آن سوخته، پیدا آمد، مهتری حلالی. که بر که بر لذتی منجمدی تنهای فرامرز را اندروی، سوی آتش اندخنی همچون گوری. بهم‌گرد آتش جو در دنیا، شدی، بهم‌گرد آتش. به مشتری هژی روا، بهم‌گرد زمان دست کردی دراز بیر در گرفتی از آنجایی بار...

نیایه، (سرست) روز و شب از آتختن همه رزم بودن بد ساختن. جهان‌خدا گویید زهر پسر، فورون تر نیایی تو درد دگر بپام‌خواهی بردن چه‌شیر و شراب که مهرست اورا با جان باید.

5.

اگر دست ایستاد نبندم یکین مخوان مردم ای شهره‌تان گذینکیه، خلقه در گوش ایستاد کم، بر آرم زباله‌ها می رسته‌خی گردید، از که آرم راه بی‌پایشه به تنرنده به تن اورم، دو کارمان به تن اورم.
بازگردی به ذهن خوش
از تاریخ شاهان شیمی چین
نشست برحبار یکی شاد بود
سیر افتاد سر اوراد شمشاد و سرو
گل و لال و ارغوان در چمن
زدی در بی‌شماری کاوش شاه
یک سوی گورخر، خردنده فیر
اگر گریز نه به نارود طاق
نشسته گورخر یکی شر آمد
چه رحم و گورخر یکی شر آمد
چه لشکری که بود چرکان تازه
ز دست نگه روزانه شارون
چه گرگین میلاد کار آزمای
چهر فرید و خرداد و برزین گر

در این داوری طوس به پای خاست
هم برزیون و نورش تازه
نیشین چون گاو بر پنULT
جور گریز شیان گشا خوش
به یوزه برگان گشا اگر
کسی را به چرک تازه نیست
که در خاک اوراد از زین‌گون
بنده به میان کوش و پیش وی
ز بزورخ چون پرده‌ای ناید کرون
کافون می‌آوری کسی پیس او
رگزد و خدر کشیده‌ای نیست
به نیرو جدید خنجر اروه
اگر نسبت برهم رست ز پیش

295
1. چو گوشتندا ازین کار ماهمه قره
بیامد به اندیک آب زره
بروم بهنه انکه بتنمداز
ز اخترش، و واهس شمار
کره در کارناسود روزی زرین
پیاده برند. شهر زرین
میانه دیز سری به بزهکی
زهر جوی و شهر عیاب در روی باخت
زن جوی و کاریگرها برکنن

2. سهیند گرفت از یکد پیدا
قصد که از کلی اورده بود
پرمرده خون همه ریخت.
بیک نعم بهتر چه دیوان شهر
از آن خون برگی ادروار خاست مر
کران گرددی یکرید دکر
بر رجب در اهلین پرشاخت
همه شهر و برز زن مانند.
چنان که براهم ورا داد پید
پل کرده ازاسو که پا اب مغر
زیک پاش به رگه هنگام
میانه دریا ردزا برکناد
بزگدادن از پایداری سوت
بخوایی بخت نمی دانند.
همراه مردان ایشان دیو بهره
چو کشتندا از کار رپادنی

3. سهید خود است و برتشه خود است
بیا بینده را و هم بیمده
 بنان آستن او که تنوگرد
همان سی هزار از دل عمان مرست
خواهم کسب را که پیش ایم
فرمان را خواهم لاند نیم

......

به رحم کم کن ای سر قرازمرد
ز کردر رست یکی یاد کن
که گوهر دار یکدست نیم
بر اورشل تدرَش تهره نگ
همان بیست گیو که چه تک
برادر مرا گیو بر خواشگ
میادا ایچ بر ناگا آفرین

کوئن هست پادشاه زنجبیلین

12.
زیبای بیامز پایرستان
به درسپشت خواست بودن سیاه
در یگ کریکس بار کردم
رد کریس و با بخش اش و ساز
در یاد یکی جشن خوش
که که ام زیبی بن اجند حور

13.
یورسید از ان پس زمین پیش شاه
گرفته افکن هر کس از دل بروی
یاد که زمینان هر کرکت
در ارمن جهان پهلوان ترست

14.
همان سال ضحیاک را روزگار
بزم گست و شدست صرع هزار
یامد هر اسپریش گیتی شاهنشاهی
سرش را برگزبی که کوت خرد

15.
نوزهته بسی گفته ودارلرمند
زمحلک زیهپیاون بالک
نهام من این گنج هندوستان
بریز دو یو آفرین
همین را که گردش آم یایید
بنی همین کنون و جایی من
خوانن دنکه من در همین مغز
دهم و بدهم و اژ واژ و ژی
بنین گنج کرمت ورا پاسیان
بزر و سنی دوبیحان کنی
همان مرمر گچ (؟) پیچان کنی
که اخمده باشی برین ژوی بی

چو ضاحک برختند شهیر
سراس زمانه دو یو گشت باز
نهان گشت کردار قرانتان
هر خوار شد جداوی ازمحمد
شد بر دین دستان دیوان دراز
در یکپزه از خانه چمی
که جمشید را در خوایه یلدند
بین پیشنه دوبلوقوی شهنزه
به ایران منصوبه دوی ژانین
بروشن آر اره جادوی
بیاموخته کلما و بیدوی
نداست خود جز برد امکان

افریکا زری‌پوراسیه وعرب نسبه ضاحک بریال عراده و اهماله اول و اولین دنیه و قد اگه برکه مهیر ابی شریف
ای تصدیت آنها

و کسان ضاحک یعده

و غیر از اصفهان این شیطان و انا ترکن به ایشان جهان گلایم چنان به ورینظیر وادارمانت ورد گردان
کومار و در ایام سمنی ووروناز آن ژوز افهلوهی ما جوزر ژاند ماف آند و کانی به اهر من ماف افرین بسیار اک تو و

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300
که زی یکتی مانند خیل‌خور نگرانی
ز شاهی تِم گرانا عباره است
زا گر زن یک خیل نسبت
که رهی بزیر بزین نسبت
به همراه یکن در نسبت
پس این تا بی کوشش و (۲) نسبت
سراوی بودن نسبت و کلک
گامان در زیبایی گرمی
که دیار بنا داری و نسبت
همین خواهی از دار اور و نسبت
وگر یکی بیانا نسبت
چنان داشته که تِم نازار من

چو این دم آور خوانی دلیر
بیان به کف که بر زال پیر
بیا بیا چند بر مشیر.
چو نامش نیستم شوم مستمّت
نکردم شاهی بیو بر نگاه
که ما و با آب در جوی نیست
ننام که داشتم بیو یا نوست.

هر آنکه او باشد بر پر یک
تیار سر گاه آن مغافک.
برندگان شاه افریدن بود
که مصاق را از پی‌زن جم
ژن‌های زبانی در این نویس
یافته‌اند از الی لیلیاند در گرگ
به جهنم رفته و کین نیا بپرچه‌کویست
ژن‌هایی کردد که در دوی ای
که در این کرده که در دوی رست
به خریداری می‌کند بر اورور سر
فرامرز که نه قهر خون دهد
به کادو شد و کین رست بپرچه‌کویست
همی‌های روم بر کردد با خاک رست
زیست را از خون بازی‌شان‌پرداز
که بر پیل و شیر اسب آفر
سواری‌بینی چو استفاده‌کرده‌اند
اگر شمعی در جهان نامدار
پرستاد و پرخست بنشست شاد
جهان را همی‌دشت بارسمو داد
به دریانش بخشید چندی نرم
ازو چندشان و چندی دژم

که لهراسب را خسر و این کُج داد
مرا بخت از اینگاه تاریخ داد

چین داد پاسخ که نِلیت سلم
ژنتیک فراورتر که نیپر گسترش
وزین‌نام بر جرح سید سرم
به هنگام کین چون خون‌گرفتار
شرام همه نزدیک گردان بود
که نام و نزدیک به اپیت میلاد
تو بر گری که در نزدیک
به شه‌گفت زن همه گفتنست
ترا این چنين شه‌پاریه چه سود
نخواب و نه خورود و نه آم بود
دنیا چگونه بود چهارمین هنرمند شیراز.
وزن پس سیها را از کل غداه گرفت و خارج کرد از باختخه، این عجیب که به ساحته اشکشدار چنینی شد. این نماینده و گهر که از زیر زمین ایستاد شد و در این زمین ایستاد که از زیر زمین ایستاد شد و در این زمین ایستاد که

فرمانی دارد به شاپ من ادیسی به که در هنرند و چه در پیش شاه

نگهداری می‌شود سه‌پنجه سنگ برگ

که چون پیکست انرژی است.

سپتی، که از را باید بگذاریم. شبكة لگه، نسبتاً شهر که از ناری باید بگذاریم و نسل که از ناری باید بگذاریم.

بودگفت کا نامور شهرهای تراکمی دریاچه‌های زمین کانگاژ

که تا کی از افراد مایلی می‌خواهند به چهارمین هنرمند شیراز یک نامور شهرهای تراکمی دریاچه‌های زمین کانگاژ

بودگفت به سوی ماهی‌ای این که به این سبک این که به این سبک

خود از زمین زنده‌پرده و چشمه نخوادهمی که که چهارمین هنرمند شیراز

بودگفت به این سویه این که به این سبک

کم سیستانی را در این سرزمین سویه این که به این سبک

وزن آقای دهبهشکن و چهارمین هنرمند شیراز

پیکار این که به این سبک

بتدان تاجفیب پادنی کار که آنگه نشان این استفاده

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چینی گفت کاً شا فرخنده روز به کام تو شد کشتر نیمروز
چه خواهی این پی برگشت بهت از ان پس که دید ز ترونق سخت
نه من پورانوده بودم تو را چنان نیکویی را چاحا این بود
چه باید ترا خون مرده اسر
پیام پناه روژ دگر در جهان
بیزگی و نیکوئی بهشه چن
به کار جهان ادر ندیده کن
کجا رفت کی در یکنداه یک کن
کچاحد خیموت و این سرکشان
که کس را نامندش به گمی نشان
سرازیم نزیک ایشان شویم گه داد بر پیش پرداز شویم
پگویم نزیک از دیدن کم مردا بهش پزان حب
چه گونه چه گیم چه کرم دا چه پاسح دهی بهش پزان مرا
بکنی تو اوی خانه و بوم و بر
پیکنیت همه نامداران من
درپن این مرز و باران من
فرامرز ایاره و دختران
زمگی بسی مرده نامداران
نه به جان تو می آزند ز ماواهت ناج و نتمت بدن

پیما گنج از ایوان او برگرفت
پس اضر و تخت و گوه گرفت
در اورد کاج پادش ز برای
همه سیستان را بهتش سخخت
رمان کرد رود از لب هرمند سوی شهر ثناست کرد و یکد رزآن پی پی کرد کم و بیست همیشه چندن بود کنن درست چنان شد که هر کس که در رهگشته همه ساله گفت که بوسن دشت.

شده‌ای حشم مردار متاخر چشم به رهام گونبرز گفت بلخم که یک نکود اوه تو بیکیمنی من از یو تدید هم گرم و ها سرد نکوی نیمودست که هر کسی به عری و گیم با خدیار یها کرد و بردنشت سنگ سیاه همان منزن گیوه رازو چهار.

دلم گفت شاهی پر از درگشت رزین بیوافا اختران سرد گشت زرفا بزرگان آن درمان بدگفت کار میدی زن و زه ورز زن حمایت وی ورگکن خون بیشه به که وزن خون نه همک شد کم شم اوت.

اگر هرچ سر خاری از آمدن سهیبد همی زود خواهش شد که برگ سیه گفت با کیفیت توبا رستم شیر ناخورده سیر بپرهید چیز باذخیش اوی کونن آم همی باذ شیش اوی.

تراشلم بن ره نورانی یکه که جوحنی جوانی برن شته خاک به زاری بر اری روان از تش بیزه خوشن کی لعل پر ایشان زخم تریمان و فوزندت تو نیره جهاندار و پرونته.
جهاندار فرزند سهراب گرد
پدر سیزد هزار پوردار
که گاهی دیروز کشی گذه یور
ترا خود به دیده درون شرم نیست
جهان را به تزدیک آزم نیست
APPENDIX B

THE STORY OF BABR-E BAYĀN
داستان رستم پور زال در هفتاد سالگی و جنگ کردن او با بر بیان

که او هست بر نیک و بر رهمنای
چش باید بقبول باشند
ما در جهان بدرخت بد شهیر
نک خداحافظی مجلس اوست
بخشتم کمیست اند میان
نشسته بر همان زال سام سوار
ز سوی دنیا پرگوشاد نیو
در این برهم که بیست
زا بیوه خوش فرح چپی کن
بر و زبالا سیاه چوک داده بود
دجلس در بورعی هادت حکم
گه از درد اجیش دشی نسیم
که ای هادی نیکوی و بالأهر
بنیکنی به ها شاه ایرانیان
ایا زدهای جلیل اندیم
ندیده زمان و نه دوران شنید
بود بیشتر آه ای ارچم
شود من نتیجه ابر هر دوی مه خوی
تفاوت را رس کنیم یا (؟) ناخوش است
بیرون ز وی و دمید خسک و تر
همین نتیجه ابری میگوند انگ
ز سر علی کیپر افراش کرد
بدوگفت کایی پیلو ناماد
پر آتان دل خاطر و دانسان
دن خونگری جو آپ روان
زدنمن کس از ما نیاورد یاد

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چپ گیری یاکف نیزه آتشی
دل من زمیر تو نازد همی
همه از نوریان شمارش زن
از یادور مرذ را با سایه
چو بحثی دازال آذه انگفت راست
بکنا که ای شهربان جوان
تو برهم داغیت و در دل شاد در
پر که بانست از ایپمخ
پرمرد به درم رفیق مرا
دیده چه رانده گیمی دار و گر
(۴) بیانه به نژیک بزدان تکوی
کنون من دینه زرم بندم گمر
می آ در است کان جانور
پدر گرچه از شیر اسر برتر است
ز گفتار رست برانقت زال
چو گفت کی کودک خوره سال
بخش گفت کی کودک کم خرد
که مثلی تو دوخته سانه تمام
چو گفت کی کودک یوروده یمن
چو من پاییز که در هر چاپ
می‌دانست را به ائه خودم
زبانم بیدین زمین در خوراست
که تا چرک نگربی چنین
پس لیک یک گمانه چنود گفت
بکنم تر مر چنین چگا
ادب بروش و عقل و هوش و خرد
بسانن دهش گرشمال و ادب
برائشت زمین گیا کردن یگر
گریز کرد اتکه زل سوار
چو گشتار و چهار وزن سیاه
دهنکه داده داد و هوشاد

که چون پر گذرد گودرز گرد
ز دست نل خود پر آرا کرد
تهمت پر اشع شا ای بی چگ
چو پر یک گذگر روزشان بارگشت
بند میش ب فرق گودرز سخت
به پر پرند بید کرد
تهمت برن ای آن از نرد وی
همان دم سوی خانه امد چو دیر
سلح دار را یک گذ بر ید برد
سلح نیاکان پیون بر می
به بیست سلح که ظریر است
سلح دار گفتا که تکبینی
بدو گفت تمپپر دستان سام
چو بشاردم امید بر یدش نماد
که بی رای دستان فرخ زارد
بر هشت رسم زگنار ایو
بند یا پاشت نه بکند
سلح دار چون دید بر یدش گام
یارس یا من و ابتدا پای
من سلح خانه چون بنگرد
چاگنده یه یک ب انشتی
ازنا نامداران فرخندنام
بیوده بوزن سلح دار گفت
گوفر فش سازی توان راز من
رایجا سری فرده گرباد سوار
پس شکا بستروتا کنیه خواه
بدو گفت پیگنار ابرت رای
نواه گنر راز از بیه سنن
تهمت زگنار او کمک شد
تن یکت هره ای بزه گفت
تهمت ز گذرتر چون گفت در
مر او را مجلس گویی خمه برید
برو چی دو بکی امب کار کرد
گرگتش دوک کم گوش تغلب
بر اورده رسم کم گر گن
که ای بی ام کوش افت خود
گریبیتش از دست وی چاک کرد
رخش گشته گلانز پر خون ز خی (؟)
دلی پر خون از یی ز در و گری
که بگذا در کلیه و اسباب چند
بندتا بیشان کی بگرم
کدامن ز ریشا یر در هنر ایست
چون تن به ذه یی بی چشیت
تهمت می یاب را کرده نام
بدو گفت ای بهو سرفاراز
نیویم سلح خانه را در گشاد
سیوی سلح خانه بیش روی
میان سلح خانه خود را فند
بدو بهادر ز رست راز سام
دو رست چو ن راز ازدهای
سلح نیاکان بسردار دید
سلح هم (؟) هست گذشته
گزیدن سلح سهیار سام
پیز درین که ای هست بی و خفت
تمبی بیکن راز و آغاز من
از انجاد قرم بر آرم دمار
کن روزگارچه نهال نیاه
بدیم گر با کن نیست رنمند
تو دلی کتون چه چه خیوه بین
بیویش بر دم سلح هم هم بی
یپ شکر زر و گرگرت
ز دریوش گودرز شد نامور
بله گفت‌های کودک نور رشد که هنگام طالع است مادر یوز گری را به دست از این راهکار یکند ان و بر بارگی بر نشت جهان تن‌گر کش کرد گرد زن گرد و هم‌ساختم نظر بی‌دان وقت گنبد آید به پیش ره‌گاس باستک و بر جای خروش همانند باستک و بر جای خروش بهمنی نابین ایام آمیز پس از آن‌ها رکش‌های بر نشت و گفت بدل ترس و ونیشی به‌کسی کن به‌بینی که این کودک حرف‌سال نیاز و جماله برهم زناد کشان‌های فوق در کوش‌اتی پدید تا به بیرون مردی من بزرگ‌ترین مراد گفت سرد برگ‌های ویوهای گرم بار و آی چو بیشتر گوره چری دیدگفت همه روز از سی می‌نخواند ره‌گاس تیره و زال زن پیش‌تر کارن زرن‌زن چو دو روزه را به نگ‌ناتخت شب‌های می‌ماه من نود سی‌های‌گو فارن زن تن‌گر بگو امن گرفت به‌پیزار و دنی‌می‌ماد نگ یک نبات ای‌دنی‌دریک و ماه که راز‌تان کن دنی‌می‌ماد چو ره‌گاس کن‌ی ان‌ها را گفت‌شان شان.
بل که از کودک نه رسید
گاهی طلقی است مانند یوز
گل ایم راد از این رهگیر
یگاه ان و یی بارگی بر تنست
جزئیت های گزیده گرد
ژن ایم برتص که گسته نظر
بیابند گور در آیه به پیش
همانند باستاین و بر جای خروش
تهمین بابن این ایم چو با
پس انگه رکشید بهسود و گفت
بل ترس و آشیشی بهکسوی کن
به بینی که این کودک خرد سال
سباطه و جمله برهم زدم
کشم حلقه نفره در کوش اوی
بیابن ای به بیبید مبین می
بند تازه‌ای مرآت گفت سرد
نکر مهره گم برادر و آی
چو شیفتگی گوز جزیر گفت
همه روز از سب همی نخست
ریسیدن بر اکمر زال زر
پی اشک کرون رم زن
چو دو روزه شاه دنگ نخست
نب یبود و ما بیا تبون
سیمانه گو قارز رم زن
تهمین گویدر خوش کف
به پیمان و دادر خوشید و ماد
نگر با سه آتشنی ده
نام دنگ با تو در سیستان
که زهش ام تو کو ارور
که راز تو با کس وحشم همی
چو رسم شید دنکن گشت شا
بوشید اندر زمان ساز چنگ
بگردن بارود رومی عمود
بر گفمخت بارگو گنج خواجه
بگیرن چون شیر ندر در شکار
آن تعریه وقت قرن بچه
بیاد به انده که یاد
بوده کن که خیرگی مرد شوم
سر و ره گرفته و راه تر چیست
به گرا نمایه زال زز است
بگنک از لب دا یا گستاخ را
بگو نام تان دامی کشیت

همتی آر این ریت چون شنت
بیاند از خوانه هر چه نست
یکی بچه مرد همه پیش اورده
چو به شریق قربان گفمخت است
عمود گران بد باید سر

همتی برانشت چون پیل مست
پیچیده گر گر از کشش دور کرد
چو کشش قارن بیگونه دید
بگیرن آن امر گر که نک
تهمتی به ضیعی وبیلا چنگ
بکنسه زاین و بزد بر زمین
نیران ایران چو شیر زمین
بیگانه که یوز بر شریفت

ز عیده گرفت اندار زمگه
از شیرت دم تر گرفت و بست
بربندی بسکر بر زال زر
که اب ماما اما ره بست
بسته است کندارت و فارون بهم
چو زال این سخن های شهید دید
زاین گانه خونار برام بجوش
بیاند شتابان بیان رزمارگ
شدند میانش گیری نت
زهره ای زده بر گریبان گره
خوشنامی جوشان جوی دیرای چین
نشته می‌شای که تندیاران
بل دگت کن پر تبیمان هنر
پس اگه بگیرم بترسانش
بیاند نهادن بیان هزار

برد چند ور تندگ مرکب چر سلگ
سر و پای اسب گرداشته زال
بیاند که زد پاشته زال سام
ند اندو کین زل سام بور
به بر یاد سوی هنگ اندم

جهان پهن‌پا یاری زمین
تنانید یک مریض گردن بنتگ
پلاسته همانه که بر مزید

گریخ بی‌خست باج نگی بود
چه مالی نام چکر اورم
دگر کلث نگیش یاد چرخین
چه ابرز بر گشته زاگ بیار

تو از سام و گز کن از او گری
هر روز هر هفتمان تویی
چو بی‌خست از نخ دیده و گفت

بچگم هر ساله سامت دارد
بدر بز و کان تیف‌شتن
گذشتند از تاب داده کهدن
بگفتند هر یک بدان شر و حال
که از دست وی بای گرم درخت
از این گفت گردن برا کن‌وار

مزن دم از این گفت تنگ مگی

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چه دارم بفک نیزه و گروه را
بگاه کامان در این زمان
که بسته بگو پایه از مرافیان
هر ان باره و گهو ز و تاج را

چو فردا زند بر سپه اتفاق
کمدن گیاً و من وتی و گروه
جان را بر چشم گریزان کتم
چو خورشید بدری از شب فقس
بر کل سر زال و از جای خواب
سیر ی فریز کیه دلی پر شاتاب
بت کرگ بر سر زوالد چین
و از زده بر سمرتی
کمر گرکن اند میان کرد تناک
فناک بر یست پهن کمند
پگو گرکن نهند مین زیر زین
پس از پشت پیچن کمند
بر آماد دیگر چو زیر زیان
وران روی انبر چو گشت روز
بر کمر ز گرکن گنگی فرور
به پس کرگ بر حقشن و خود گرم
ز سمس فیلیپ روچندی نرم
گرو خیره شدیدن هومشند
کمر کرد اند میان پهلوان
کمر گرکن اند میان تپگ و بست
کمر یم زیجی رد بر علما
کم مان می خوش و چین به چین
بفناک برست اند پهن یک
پگو هم(؟) بر ارود گرگ گوزن
سینرد در پشت خود گرد تاتگ
فرو برید بر هلک رینک
همی رادید باره بدست نبرد
پرون ام ار گرد دیوی پشته
سرش گیردی به و با مثار
لش خورشندی (؟) و حق شاخت
دهان چون لب کوره از هم فراخ
در چشمه بیدی مشعل کامپی
سیزه چهره نامش گلومینه گوش
فرسهته فلاغه همچون سنگ
چو ام همی امش وارزنگ
گرفته همی خسته ز سنگین یکی
زب یا اند افتاد توی یکی
بایندانه در ای جایگاه
سیزه و مران پمپار دنج
پرپیدی کسان لشکر و چنگ کست
بر اورینگ دارو و برقانش پال
گرفش همی سنگ دیگر چنگ
بیدندن گچواد و فارن ز دور
ز یکسر باره بر اورینگ
بر لشان بیدرکید وکار سنگ
یبد گردن اسب گچواد گرد
اب اسپ قارن رن گرگفت
ز قطیا سنگ دگر بر گرفت
که باره نخاف اند افتاد و پست
کریم گدر ز کرگدن زال
بیامده ره یک چهار سرریمه حلال
بر ونکشته بر ارب امی بجوجه
چو یازده ند این بر شکفت
ز قطیا سنگ دیگر بر گرفت
بر ارب یک سنگ کوه تال
بدننگ مرکب هنک درن
چو دید آقچان زال علما گنگ نکست
بفریت بیاره از پهندشت
زمین سنگ ار یاره هم ارمن
برد بر سر زال زانه بال
بر ارب پاره زار بکار
سیزه را یکند بی حال دید
گو اهدیت دل گوله نهاد
فرود ام از باره جهل مسما
بر انشش بیاره او گرد
چو بیشکتی این لشکر و بیل و کرس
نمایی همی رشته و قوس
چو چوحتاره دریا بر امی بجوجه
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ز کن سوی البوز کردن روان
گران ساکرا در هوا برگرفت
زد ان زشت پرخور را برکم
همه در میان بشت طوفان (7)
چیزی نیا می‌کند برگیری
بی‌چهره، ان ضرب الیزه دید
سری پر، سیز و دیپ بر شبان
بر افتارش پاییز سر آرام
بر آتش پایشه مچون نه‌دگ
همادم برادر البوز جوش
بی‌چهره، از این پس، که خاموشش نشده
چو اگر بی‌پکر بر آدم زجای
بیست پشم چمن چلمی
گو شیرش پهلو زلی بی
سی خیمه بردن، گر شهر نو
از ان زور، بری ی از کنن، خواه
تأسست کن این دلیل از کجاست
در ایندشت، پارناس جنگش بر است
گو عشق، در پهلو دیو بین
پس اگه، بیاید بجای نشست
مار او، بر روی دره، دست
زا خواند بر پهلوه جهان
گوگش کانه پهلوان زمین
روان مردی، یا برکت دما
فرورزیده نام ایران تربی
شا خواند بر پهلوان چون سزید
بی‌چهره، از چاه خود ندید
زا نگردان، اگه دیو، پید
خان زهور و پاپه، که آن دیو دید
یک و گفت، کانه پهلوان جهان
پیکن پیکن، از این دیو، گوش
چندان گفت البوز پخشتم
وگرشن، برورن یاهردار، از تو، دیو،
ز ند تود، اگه، برون مکر و روه
همی‌بالدید از ای پهلوان
کرایشان و دیپ در بَل
همان منزل جوی، و جای و آرام خوش
۳۱۸

که من پاز داهم که تر کیستی
بید نشکن کی از یک چهارمی
بهدن لشکر که کمیل بند
تهرمان مرا باید کردند نام
چرا دوستی دریای چرخی
چنین دیو دیو این سنگ شکن
بهای شمسی چرا زردم رو
ماهیه و اسکر چرا گنگ
نه با ماست گو خودنا مرا هست جد
سوی هن پیادی و دیج من پیاده
هرانگی چرخ زیبای سرک اوری
تو رو منزل و چرا از من محاوی
ترا باج از زم زادناده بیشت
چاو برز بهشتی علیه و گنگ
مرا زمان در این ایمان دیو
چنین گفت فارن بدن سان
سوارها کهشن و کردن بار
پیادنی با هباد همانهستان
بی‌خبره شدن گرَد لشکر بی‌ساز
سپه سپه زنی با یا هم‌نشست
چه‌نهد با اشک‌های هم‌بی‌ساز
کمیشوندو از مرز برآ
برقئت خواب که آن برود
بیدنی دشتی پر اتش‌که
فرسید دستان فرشته را
هی دیگه نشکن یا گو شیر کرد
مُرد بریزیکمه که رست
ازو خیره که راز لم بریزی دیگت
بیم رفته چون حضور شانگک
شادیدن لشکر کشیش من مسافر
با چه‌مین حضور به حفظ هلال
که تا سامان این بی‌گران تباه
چو می‌ماند یک گمانه
پیامی فرستاد باید زنی
بی‌نیاد این بار کردن مسافر
چاو باشید برز گفتا روانست
بیدنی لشکر که من شماست

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چنین گفت با دیده بان زال زر
بود به دیده بان گفت کای کمیاب
همانند که آی دی نداشته بر ن
جهان‌بیان همه‌مری را
و لیکن بیکه‌های البرز مارد
دردی را به دیدا و راه کرد
همه جنگ آبادان بیز
کارش همه خور جان ستان
میکش بیکه‌های آب به خود
بردی‌خورد است دی‌آنها دست
وزان سو ذکر زال سوار
زنانه پیدا بردای شکست
بی‌گفتگو بی‌پای بودان
پرامد بی‌بین زال بیل مست
چو بر ام از دور دریا بر
زبس اتش فروخت اند دهان
سیل به گفت انداده بکسر همه
زی‌های سبک رفت و درا دو گیر
پیک جوشن افکند نیکگر عمود
بی‌گفتگو بی‌پای برق هازه زال
چو بی‌بای ناو پای صستر
ایارای برکوه گردن‌جا
زو خوانه بی‌بای بی‌پای برق
تشتری دیپ بر بی‌پای بدل
پیر را آفکن بی‌پای هم‌بیدر
بی‌b
کمان را پرفیین (۳) گفته بخت
مبودن خندگان ز کمان بی زی
وزن تیر نامه مردان برنست
فرد آم از بارگذاری نیپت
سوزی خانه شک بیرا شاق
دم آورد آن خانه ای خون کشید
چپ و راست بلحاق و بیش تیر
ده همو خارش تو از ام فراغ
همان شک تیر راجمات سوخت
بیفایت جعفر و زور و ناد
بیفایت مرز بیشتره تز
برای دوàn بر اتاق فیش
چپ ابرز دیدن ز عم بر گفت
ز اتراک پرگشاد. پیمان کمک
نمگهارا بر زمین کرد سخت
ز دیپ اپو روز بیگاشت
چه دمسه جست بر آمد تن
وز افریو گندز بر اضطراب
چه همز اورم گندز بر اضطراب
بیزیر تابای گامنه گوش
بی آرا ما ار دل اوردی روم
بینیم کورا چه آم ای پیش
بفاین بلندی روی نام نهگشت
میدا کمی از سر کو سر
هم آخر یافتن دل پر نهایت
بیفاید آن ادامه درشت
شکایت از گرمه یزیزی اندن
از آن روی دسی خوش بر دند
چنین گفت بلداوان هد
پاگئی چو پریز مدرن خوست
چو اوماری پریز بر اکبات
یور روز روش شک. تر کردن
دربایی دامور خوار دش
دران بد که امد دوند گیه بیا
مخور هم که قدرتش هو چه دنیست
که نور از بیان آن گلست سرد
قد اک نشان که گریست سرد
چه شبیه‌ای من خبره ماند
بدین آن درخش و موهایی بیا
جاوSEN و جوکان و کفی بر دهن
Z فیروزی از بیان سرد
در گفتگو آن چنان گرخت
بنگ گفت که باید بر بیان
مگر بازگشتی کردن به من
که برآ در ز ما باج خواهد سنت
سرب من بکن نهگند گردست
بن آی بیان سر بر خروش
چه بیت درد تو بازیتی مرد
که این است بیشتر رستنم به نام
از آنی که گفت به شکست پدید زال
روان بش در آندم بر بیان بن یک
آن دینبد دو دستش حمال بگردین فکن
ربی یکی کردن بر بیان
فوازده ملل کر ایران تویی
جان فردین نهفته و این
پدرای بیا این مارد
بله برای یک مرد
پس از آینسن بسته پدی
که نیست یک چه تافت
جهان ایران پدی بن روش است
اگذاره دل و دیوانه ایمین
پس از خود رضای را شکت
بر شکت
سمن داغ و گل یک دیور بن
دو ابریزی زماه مه بیام است
بر خور اشکانت کی
بدمان اطهار بر اویخت و گفت
سلام
که از وی حیات ابرقی رسان
بفرمود نا قاضی آمد چو یاد
بهکفایتیام بکریم هم اخترا
بیستند با نیک هم اختران
بیشمار شاهان علفت زبرش
کررو جهان پرده همی از صف فای گوهر بست
همین میان از طلب جای جست
چو افکند شاهین کررو جهان
بگردن و را ساعدید دیو بیوی(؟)
وزان حوض انادخت ماهی پدی
کل برد و شاخدل لام کرد
کادید زر از اقروخ خام کرد
ز گوهر که چون در صرف گشت پری هن داد پردن یکی دانه در
هران دانه در فرامر زو سریوار و میروز هرزم بود
همین که ای بود لشکر بیان
بایران رستید باان سیاه
دگر روز دستان ایان سیاه
سوی شهر ایران گرفته راه
بیانان شد این داستان کهن
APPENDIX C

THE TRANSLATION OF IBN ḤAWQAL’S ACCOUNT OF SISTĀN
This is a translation of Ibn Hawqal’s description of Sistān.\textsuperscript{460}

1) As for Sijstan and what is connected to it, I have collected in the map the following: what is adjacent to the east of Mafazah between Kirman and the land of As-Sind, and between Sijistan and a stretch from al-Multan and Sijistan is to the west of Khurasan, and it is north of India and to the south of Mafazeh which is between Sijistan and Kirman, and in it (i.e. the map) are Khurasan, al-Ghur, and India.

2) This is the map (lit. picture) of Sijistan.\textsuperscript{461}

3) Sijistan, in its territories lay many noteworthy cities and they are: Zaranj, Kish, Nih, At-Taq, Al-Qarnayn, Khawash, Farah, Jizah, Bost, Rudhan, Sarwan, Az-Zalqan, Biqnayn, Daraghsh, Dartal, Bishlank, Fanjaway, Kuhk, Ghazna, Al-Qasr, Siva, Isfinijai and Mahakan.

4) Zaranj is its greatest city (capital) and it is a fortified city, and it has an extensive suburb/outer city full of inhabitants. In it there are many official buildings (\textit{dur al-‘marra}) that belonged to the Saffarids, in addition to stores and guesthouse (\textit{fandadiqi}). The outer city also had a protection wall and it was fortified, and it had a well-protected moat. In it (the outer city) there is water, and its water springs from within, the best/most of running waters drain this spring. It has five gates: one of them is the new gate and one is the old gate, and both lead in the direction of Fars, and they are close to each other. The Karkuyah gate leads to Khurasan. The fourth, called the gate of Nishak lead to Bost. The fifth gate known is the gate of

\textsuperscript{460} Ibn Hawqal, ed. Kramers, \textit{Opus Geographicum: Libre Imaginis Terre"}, 1967, 411-425. This is a chapter entitled "Sajistan". See Miquel's sketch of Zarang on the description of the city found in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{461} See Map 5.
At-Ta’am leads to the hinterlands. The busiest of the five gates is the gate of At-Ta’am, and all the gates are made out of iron. The outer city has thirteen gates. The gate of Mina leads to Fars, then the gate of Dokhan, then [there is] the gate of Shairak, then the gate of Sharaw, then the gate of Su’ayb, then gate of Nujawaik, then gate of Akan, then gate of Naishak, then the gate of Karkoyah, then the gate of Asbiris, then the gate of Ghanjarah, then the gate of Baristan, and last the gate of Rothkaran. They (the structures of the gates) are made out of clay because the wood in it has termites and falls apart and does not last. The Jami’ mosque is in the inner city short of [dun] outer city. If you enter the gate of Fars, and the dar al-imara (official building of the rulers) is in the outer city between gates of At-Ta’am and Fars out of the inner city. The prison is inside the inner city next to the mosque. There is also a dar al-imara on top of the mosque next to the old prison. The dar al-imara was moved from there (i.e. the inner city) to the outer city. Between the gates of At-Ta’am and Fars, there are two palaces belonging to Ya’qub and ‘Amr ibn al-Layth, and the dar al-imara is inside the house of Ya’qub ibn al-Layth. Inside the inner city, between the gate of Karkuyah and gate of Nishak, there are great buildings, known as Arg, which was a treasury of ‘Amr ibn Layth who had built it. The markets of the inner city are in the vicinity of the Jami’ mosque. These markets [of the inner city] are superiorly built, while the markets of the outer city are very busy. One of the latter markets is ‘Amr’s market, which was built by him, and made its revenues an endowment to the Jam‘ mosque, and to the hospital (al-Bimaristan), and to the great mosque of Mecca (Masjid al-Haram). The revenue of this market is
approximately 1,000 dirhams. In the inner city, there are rivers, one is entering from the old gate, another is flowing through the new gate, and a third enters from At-Ta’am gate. The amount of their waters [combined] would turn a millstone. Next to the Jam’ mosque there are two great pools where the running waters drain. The water leaves and is distributed to the houses of the inhabitants and their water tanks, as the waters of Ar-Rajan flow in the same fashion to the water tank of the town (al-balad) and the houses through canals. Most of the houses of both the inner and the outer cities have flowing water, and have gardens. In the outer city, there are also rivers, which have been driven from the inner city rivers. The market is stretched from gate of Fars in the inner city to gate of Mina, continuously without disjunction for about about half a farsakh.  

5) The earth [of Sijistan] is salty and sandy, and its climate is hot. There is no snow fall there, and there are palm trees, and its land is flat. There are no mountains in it, and the closest mountains to it are in the vicinity of Farah. It has severe and lasting winds. As a result, they build windmills in order to grind their wheat. The winds move the sand from place to place. If they had not devised engineering strategies that they have inherited from their ancestor and carried out by a group of men among them, the cities and towns would have been covered with sand. And this because the entire region (balad) is sandy. I heard that if they wish to move the sand from a place to another, without it falling on the land, which would be harmful for them, they would make huts and fences into a protective wall. [These

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462 The term used here is saradib, the broken plural of the Persian word sardab. It is a part of the house, usually the basement, where water is kept for daily use.
463 Each farsakh is known to have been a little less than three miles.
fences were made] out of wood and branches or other material, which they could find around the sand, and they would like to move. They open up a door [in the hut or the fence] to receive the wind, so the winds enters from there, and flies up in it like a tornado, it lifts it up the sand and moves the sand to where ever they prefer it to be. I have been told by one of them who was heading to Egypt in the year 60 whom I met on the road. We remembered their situation. He said, last year the wind blew uninterruptedly, in the way that had not happened to us before. The wind threw down the sand on the mosque, and the wind harmed and devastated the region They called upon the experts in this industry [of building sand protection], and those who were appointed for this task to push the sand away, however, most of them failed. They admitted that they had no idea on how to guard against it, because of the degree of its severity. They didn’t know from where it was getting its strength (lit. substance), and it was an unruly wind. A young man appointed himself [to the task], and said I have the knowledge, and I am given what I wish, I will push [the sand] away, and what I wish for is 20,000 dirhams. They didn’t pay attention to him because of the greatness of the sum, and the situation got worse. They were convinced that if the winds lasted for another day and night the whole region would be fall into destruction. So they went to the man, with the money he had demanded, and he accepted it. He said, the difficulty of the task has increased for me, but you are safe from the winds. Then, he rushed 18 farsakhs away from the city against the direction of the wind, along with some helpers whose help he had solicited. He offered resistance against the wind with his trick, and he diverted the wind away, and
directed to a place that was not harmful for them. He spared them the work by diverting the wind from the place where it started away from the city. Then, because he was the head of the group who were experts in this knowledge, and he succeeded in having a good reputation, and he worked on the sand that had fallen on the region and blasted it away.

6) It is said that the old city in times of Persian kings was between Kirman and Sijistan close to Darak and opposite of Rashak. It is three marches (stages) left hand of one going to Kirman. Some of its structures and houses are still standing there. The name of this city is Ram Shahristan, and it is said that the River of Sijistan [Hilmand was flowing through it. The dam, which was built on Hilmand broke, and [as result] the water level became lowered, and was diverted. As a result, [the whole region] lapsed to the state of desert, and the inhabitants, migrated and founded the city of Zaranj.

7) As for its rivers, the Helmand is the greatest one, and it flows from behind al-Ghur, until it reaches the borders of Al-Rokhj, and Balad-Dawar, then it flows to Bost, until it ends up in Sijistan, and it drains in the lake Zarah. Zarah is a lake whose size increases and decreases as the amount of water in it increases and decreases. Its length is 30 farsakhs, from the vicinity of Kuwayn on the path of Quhistan to the bridge of Kirman on the path to Fars, and the width of it is one march [one day’s journey, its water is sweet, and an abundance of fish and reeds in and around it. Many villages surround the lake, except in the direction of the Mafazah. The river of Helmand is single river from Bost until it flows for a march from Sijistan, and from it branched out to water canals.. The first river (canal) is the river
of the At-Ta’am gate, and it is taken to the hinterlands (rasatiq), until it ends up on Nishak’s border. From it [Hilmand], the river of Naysharudh is branched out, and it waters its hinterlands. Another river which branches out [from the Hilmand] is called Sanarudh: it flows in a distance of one march away from Sijistan, and it is the river on which the ships sail from Bost to Sijistan, if the water is flowing and there is an excess of water. The rivers of Sijistan are all branched out from Sanarudh. It slopes down, and there is another that branches out from it which waters about 30 villages. Then the river Mili is branched out from it (Sanarudh) and it waters those vicinities, and its excess is drained in the lake Zarah. The river of Balshanak branches out from near Al-Ghur, and waters those regions, and rarely its excess is drained in lake Zarah.

8) Sijistan is a fertile country with a plenty of foods such as dates, grapes. Its inhabitants are wealthy. Much crop of asafoetida is yielded from Mafazah of Sijistan to what is between it and Makran, which dominates their food, and they put it in most of their dishes.

9) Balish is the name of the region and its city is called Sivi. Their wali lives in Al-qasr, and Isfanjay is larger than Al-Qasr, and Rakhkhj is the name of region and its main city is Banjuway, and it has the cities of Kahak, and Rokhj-Iqlim. Rokhj region is between Balad-i Dawar and Balish, and its populace textile workers/wood merchants. Great revenue goes to bayt al-mal from it. There are abundant crops in this region, and it is affluent, fertile and plentiful. Balad-i Dawar is a fertile region, and is situated at the opening to Al-Ghur, Baghnin, Khilj and Bashlanak, each of which has a city by the same name. Khash is a city that has no walls, but has a citadel.
Balad-i Dawar is the name of a region (iqlim), and its city is Dar tal, and it also has a city called Darqash, and they are both in the banks of Helmand. However, Baghnin, Khalj, Kabul and Ghur are regions [that are not on Helmand’s path]. In these regions, there are some people who converted to Islam and they are peaceful. This region has cold climate. Khalj are groups of Turks who settled down in this region in ancient times, which is between India and vicinities of Sijistan behind Al-Ghur. They are wealthy people. They follow the traditions of the Turks in customs and dress. Bost is the second largest city of Sijistan after Zaranj, and it has infested air, and its inhabitants dress in the fashion of the people of Iraq. They are fair and affluent who are merchants trading in India. In the city there are date palms and grapes and it is very fertile.

10) Al-Qarnayn it is a city that has many villages and hinterlands. It is a march away from Sijistan, to the left one going to Bost, two farasakhs away from Sharuzan, and the Saffarids are from there, who ruled over Fars, Khurasan, Kirman, Sijistan. They were four brothers: Y’aqub, ‘Amr, Tahir, and ‘Ali sons of Layth. As for Tahir, he was killed at the gate of Bost, and Y’aqub died in Jundishapur after his return from Baghdad, and his grave is there. As for ‘Ali, he was granted security in Rafi’s in Jurjan, and he died in Dihistan, and his grave is there. Ya’qub was the eldest, and he was a servant of some coppersmiths. ‘Amr was artful, and at some time in his life he was a builder. ‘Ali was the youngest among them. The reason why they rebelled and they acquired a great reputation is that an uncle of
their's, named Kathir ibn Ruqad, was a heretic\textsuperscript{464} in some of the forts of the region. Many leaders of Khawarij were gathered around his place, and they besieged his fort. He was killed. They [the sons of Layth] ran away, and they reached the land of Bost. There was a man in that region, who had gathered a large following [lit. around whom a large number of people had gathered] who were getting prepared to fight the Khawarij. He was known as Dirham b. Nasr. These brothers joined his [i.e. Dirham’s] followers, and they aimed to go to Sijistan. The Tahird governor (al-wali) [of Sijistan] was Ibrahim b. Husayn, and he was in a weak position. They arrived at the gate of the city, and Dirham b. Nasr showed that he was one of the volunteers and that he aimed to fight the Khawarij for a religious purpose (muhtasib). The public was inclined towards him and followed him. He entered the city and the governor left it for some areas. He [Dirham b. Nasr] did not cease until he gained control over the entire region (balad). [Dirham b. Nasr] fought the Khawarij while their leader was a certain ‘Amar b. Yasir. He [Dirham b. Nasr] appointed Ya’qub b. al-Layth to fight him [‘Amar b. Yasir]. So Ya’qub fought them, and ‘Amar b. Yasir was killed. In every difficult situation, they appointed Ya’qub (lit. no grave matter befell them [for the resolution of which] Ya’qub was not appointed). The problems were solved as he wished. The followers of Dirham b. Nasr became inclined towards him, until leadership was bestowed upon him, and he was put in charge. After that, Dirham ibn Nasr was a follower of Ya’qub. Ya’qub continued to be good to Dirham until

\textsuperscript{464} The word used is "shari", which according to Lane’s dictionary was a way to refer to heretics in general, and to the Khawarij specifically. W. Lane, Arab-English Lexicon, Part 4, p. 1546.
the time he excused himself to go to hajj. Ya’qub granted him permission to go to hajj, and he stayed in Baghdad for a while. The messenger of the commander of the faithful [the ‘Abbasid caliph came to ‘Amr, and Ya’qub killed him. His and his brothers’ power greatly increased, and after that gained control over Fars, Kirman, Khurasan, some regions of Iraq, and Khuzistan.

11) At-Taq is one station (marhala) from Zarang. It is located on the backside of one who is arriving from Khurasan to Sijistan. It is a small city and it has hinterlands (rastāiq). It has a lot of grape orchards and grapes from which the people of Sijistan make a living. The city of Khawash/Khash of Qarnayn is one station to the left of the one coming from Bost. Between it and the road there is a distance of about half a farsakh. Khawash is the larger than Qarnayn, and there are palm trees and other trees in it and around it. Qarnayn has flowing waters and a large number of underground channels. Farrah is a city larger than those cities. It has villages which consist of about sixty villages, and there palm trees and fruits trees and other plantations in it. The Farrah River flows through it. Its buildings are from clay and its land is flat. Jazah is connected to provinces of Farrah on the right of the one going from Sijistan to Khurasan for about one station. It is a small area with plenty of water around Qarnayn, and it has villages and it is fertile and their water runs in underground irrigation channels, and their buildings are also made of out of clay. Sirwan is a small city close to Qarnayn, but it is most developed and populated. In it there are lots of fruits carried [to other cities] and grape and dates are taken from it and moved [to other places]. It is two stations away from Bost, and it has two
areas, which are two stages away, one of them is called Firuzqand, and the other is Sirwan on the way to Balad-i Dawar. Az-Zaliqan is about one station from Bost, and it has fruit, palm and other trees, most of its inhabitants are weavers. Their water comes from flowing rivers, and their buildings are made from clay, and is almost as big as Qarnayn. Radhuan is smaller than al-Qarnayn and it is close to Firuzqand on the right of the one going to Ar-Rokhj and most of its crops consists of al-minj, and in addition to that they have other produce and fruits as well as flowing waters.

12) As for distances, in the way from Sijistan to Herat, the first station is called Karkawayh. From Karkawayh to Bashtar is four farsakhs. You pass a bridge over the remaining of Hilmand River. From Bashtar to Juwayn is one station. From Jowaying to Bost is one station. From Bost to Kankarah is one station. From Kankarah to Sarshak is one station. From Sarshak to the bridge of Wadi Farrah is one station. From bridge of Wadi to Farrah is one station. From Farrah to Dazah is one station. From Dazah to Kuwisan is one station, From Kuwisan to Khashan, which is from Il-Isfizar is one station. From Khashan to Qanat Siri is one station, and from Qanat Siri to Jabal al-Aswad (black mountain) is one station. From Jabal al-Aswad to Jidman is one station and from Jidman to Herat is one station. The road from Sijistan to Bost has Zanbuq as its first station. From Zanbuq to Shirawzan, which is a flourishing and royal village, there is one station, and from Shirawzan to Haruri, which is also a flourishing royal village there is one station. Between them, Nishk river flows, and there is a bridge on it made out of baked brick. From Haruri to Dahk, and the place of
guesthouse/station for horses there is a station, and from this guesthouse is al-Mafazah, and one Manzil from it is the guesthouse called Ab-i Shur, and from Ab-i Shur to the guesthouse of Kiruwwayn is one station, and from the guest house of Kiruwwayn to the guesthouse of Hafshiyan is one station, and from it to the guesthouse of ‘Abdallah, and from the guesthouse of ‘Abdallah to the city of Bost, and from the guesthouse of Dihk to the Masirah one farsakh from Bost all of it is Mufarah.  

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466 The rest of the account is devoted to citing the distances from various cities and towns in Sistān to neighboring provinces.
APPENDIX D

FIGURES
Figure 1. Genealogy of the Sistāni heroes

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Figure 2. Genealogy of the Sistsani heroes (continued)

Note: For each of the highlighted names, there is a corresponding epic.
Figure 3. Genealogy of the Gudarziān
Figure 4. Map of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate including Medieval Iran (Le Strange, p. 1)
Figure 5. Map of the medieval province of Sistān
Figure 6. Map of Modern Iran