

Khosrow and the Old Woman: Two Historical Stories with Two Side Stories on Animal Rights

Farzin Ghafouri

(The Academy of Persian Language and Literature, Tehran)

Mitra Reyhani

(The Academy of Persian Language and Literature, Tehran)

Abstract: Khosrow Anōšīravān is a renowned Iranian king, widely admired among Iranians, particularly for his good governance and tax reforms. His remembrances have been perpetuated in historical sources as well as in Persian literature. Persian stories about Khosrow Anōšīravān can be divided into two categories: 1) stories with historical origins; 2) fictional narratives. The former group may be useful for understanding historical events once the fictional components are removed. The latter group mainly serves as part of the folklore. Among the Persian literary stories featuring Khosrow and an elderly woman, there are two main stories each with a side story. Animal rights are hinted at in the side stories. This paper argues that the first main story, its side story, and the second main story are historical stories and there is evidence for approving their historical basis, while the second side story has no historical basis and seems to have emerged from folklore.

Keywords: Persian literature, Khosrow Anōšīravān, Royal Palaces, Chain of Justice, Animal Rights, Folk Literature

Introduction

Three of the Sasanian kings have a more prominent presence in Persian literature: Bahrām Gōr, Khosrow Anōšīravān and Khosrow Parviz. However, the name of each of these three

kings is immortalized in the literature for a different reason. While Bahrām Gōr is best remembered for his legendary hunting skills, his merrymaking, and his love affairs, and Khosrow Parviz for his treasures, his magnificent luxuries and his beloved Šīrīn, Khosrow Anōšīravān is known for his great wisdom and sagacity as well as his good governance and statecraft. Indeed, Bahrām Gōr and Khosrow Parviz are the heroes of romantic and lyrical literature while Anōšīravān and Bozorgmehr are exemplars of the ideal king and vizier in didactic and instructional literature. The stories about Khosrow Anōšīravān in Persian literature are of two kinds: historical and non-historical. The formers are associated with historical events; for example, despite some exaggerated elements, the famous story about shoemaker and Khosrow Anōšīravān in the *Shahnameh* has historical basis and is related to the war between Iran and Rome in 572 AD (see Ghafouri 2018, 345-347). Apart from the official literature, the popularity of Khosrow Anōšīravān among the Iranian people has resulted in a significant number of stories about this king in folk literature. Even some of these non-historical stories have entered the important literary texts. A story about the importance of hiding a secret and the thief who dreamt of stealing from Anōšīravān's palace is among such stories: the thief befriends a flea in his clothes and tells it about his plan of this big burglary. When the thief breaks into the palace and crawls under the king's bed, the flea jumps out of the thief's clothes, onto the bed, and then into the king's clothes and bites him. The servants of the palace search the bed to find the biting insect, but they find the unfortunate thief under it (Varavini 1988, 202-203). Another story that originated in folk literature and then entered the literary texts is a two-part story of a clever girl. In the first part, the rural girl meets a thirsty stranger on horseback (Anōšīravān, who had been separated from his companions during the hunt), and gives him sugarcane water instead of ordinary water, but deliberately throws a small piece of straw on the water, so the exhausted and thirsty stranger, drenched in sweat, had to drink it slowly to avoid the straw, and this nicety aroused the admiration of the king. In the second part, the girl restores the tax increase on her village to its former amount. At the end of the story, because of her great intelligence, she becomes Anōšīravān's wife (Ghazali 1988, 140-142). In the realm of Persian literature, there are two stories about Anōšīravān and an old woman, each of which has a side story. The examination of these stories show that the first main story and its side story, as well as the second main story, have historical basis, but a direct historical link cannot be found for the second side story, so it may have originated in folklore. We argue about the details of these four stories below.

The First Main Story

The first story of the king and the old woman is very famous in Persian literature. The ode *Ayvān-e Madā'en* and its poet, Khaqani, are extremely popular among the Iranians. Like Bohtori, the renowned Arab poet, Khaqani broke into tears when he visited Ayvān-e

Madā'en and faced the ruins of the magnificent Sasanian palaces. A religious person saw him in this state and scoffed at him, so he received a crushing reply:

You scoff at my eyes, asking why is he crying here / One must pity the eyes that do not shed tears here

The old woman of Madā'en is not inferior to the old woman of Kōfa / Nor her chamber is inferior to her tandoor (Khaqani 1978, 358-360).

Here, the poet is subtly alluding to the famous story of the king and the old woman's house, and he considers it no less important than the story of the gushing of water from the old woman's tandoor in the story of the prophet Noah's flood, a fitting response to the prejudiced scoffer who believed the history of Iran to be inferior to the history of religions and mocked Khaqani's sorrow. Also, in the second part of another ode starting with "The sleepless have witnessed the Ka'ba of spirit at twilight", two famous stories, "the king and the old woman" and "the chain of justice", are mentioned (Khaqani 1978, 90). In addition, in the ode *Ayvān-e Madā'en*, especially in the 8th and 22nd verses, the word *selseleh* is a pun and has a subtle allusion to the story of the chain of justice; however, in one of his refrains (Tarjī'āt), Khaqani makes an explicit allusion to this story:

"Stop your cruelty, especially as the just king / has hung the chain of safety"
(Khaqani 1978, 476; for the chain of justice see below).

Ayvān-e Madā'en or Tāq-e Kasrā was erected after the great victory of Anōšīravān over the Roman Emperor Justinian the Great in 540 AD. Subsequently, the royal palace complex in the capital was expanded. The first story of the king and the old woman refers to the important historical fact that the residential areas of common people were included in "the development plan" of the palaces. Qazvini wrote that for the plan to be implemented, residential houses were bought from their owners at generous prices, but an old woman insisted on keeping her tiny house, even if it meant that the palace wall had to become crooked. Her house was preserved and even reconstructed by the order of Anōšīravān (Qazvini 1960, 454). When the Roman ambassador was admiringly visiting Ayvan-e Mada'en, he was surprised at the occurrence of this crookedness in the construction of the palace wall, and when he heard the story behind it, he said: "This crookedness is better than any rightness" (Mas'udi 2005, 1:201).

It is important to note that the old woman's house was so solidly rebuilt that it was still standing in the early Islamic period, and the locals called it *Qobbat al-Ajōz* (Qazvini 1960, 454-455). This means that the small, one-room house was rebuilt with a *čahārtāqī* architecture, hence it was called *Qobbat* in Arabic, because a *čahārtāqī* was a square building with four thick walls (usually each of the walls had an arch) and a domed roof (Qobbat) on top of the walls. This architectural style reached its peak in the Sasanian period, and it was considered one of the main elements especially in the architecture of fire temples, with the sacred fire altar placed under this dome (Godard 1962, 230, 340; see also

Porada 1965, 198, 271). The Nīyāsar Fire Temple is an example of the use of čahārtāqī in the construction of a place of worship (Godard 1962, 206, 242, pl. 108). This model was adopted by Muslims in building mosques in the early Islamic period. Godard used the term “la mosquée-kiosque” to refer to these small early mosques (Godard 1962, 340). Apart from fire temples, čahārtāqī was also used in the construction of palaces. For instance, the dome of the Sarvestān Palace, which belongs to the 5th century AD, is an example of the progress Sasanian architecture had made since the construction of Fīrūzābād Palace, which dates back to the 3rd century AD (Godard 1962, 242, pl. 107). In the above description by Qazvini, the Dome of al-Ajōz is evidence of the reconstruction of the old woman’s house in the čahārtāqī style and an example of the use of this architecture in the dwellings of common people. The standing of the old woman’s house in the early Islamic period and the specific name by which it was known, bear witness that this story has a historical basis. Also in connection with the main story, Qazvini has narrated a very short story which seems to have historical origin based on some available evidence.

The First Side Story

This is a very short story that consists of two parts. In the first part, it is said that the servants of the royal palace complained to Anōšīravān about the risk of the stove smoke of the old woman’s house damaging the murals in the royal palaces. The king ordered them not to bother the old woman despite this problem and told the painters to repair the murals if parts of them were damaged (Qazvini 1960, 455). This story is one of the few reports of the existence of royal murals in the Sasanian capital’s palace complex. Some other sources also confirm the existence of these murals. When the famous Arab poet, Bohtori, visited the royal palace complex of Madā’en in the 3rd century AH, there were still murals depicting the Battle of Antioch on the wall of “the Jermāz Palace” near “the White Palace” or “Qasr Abyaz al-Madā’en” (Bohtori 1980, 2:1154-1157). Yaqut (1995, 2:129) described the remains of Jermāz Palace as “majestic”. Both Qazvini and Yaqut have quoted the well-known ode *Sīnīyyah* in which Bohtori has described the features of Anōšīravān and the Iranian soldiers in the mural as vivid and magnificent under the *derafs* (Bohtori 1980, 2:1156-1157; see also Qazvini 1960, 454-455; Yaqut 1995, 1:295-296).¹ This is significant and is a sign of the fineness of the art of painting in the Sasanian period.² Also, Bohtori has clearly stated that the huge painting of the battle of 540 AD depicted the siege of Antioch, (Yaqut 1995, 1:295; Qazvini 1960, 454). This is an important proof that the development plan of the royal palaces during Anōšīravān’s reign was implemented after the victory in the 540 AD war with Roman Empire, and it is possible that the compensations of this war

¹ *Derafs* is an Arabicized form of *derafš* or *derafš-e Kāvīān*. The point that the king himself was actually among the Iranian soldiers in the attack as depicted in the mural, is confirmed by Procopius’s account of the battle (Procopius, *the Persian War*, II: VIII, 15-30).

² For the remains of some wall paintings from the Parthian and Sasanian periods, see Azhand 2010, 1:30-38, 64-65.

(according to Procopius (*the Persian War*, I: X, 24): 50 centenary gold immediately and five yearly) were used to fund this plan, particularly as we are informed by Tha'alibi that simultaneously some Roman spoils were used in the construction of Wēh-Andiōk-Khosrow³, one of the cities of urban complex called Madā'en (Tha'alibi 1979, 612).

In the second part of this very short story, it is said that the old woman has a cow that returns to her house only in the evenings to be milked, but with the implementation of the royal complex development plan, the cow has to pass through the royal palaces. By Anōšīravān's orders nobody was to stop the cow, to the point that the servants roll the carpets of the royal palace when the cow walks through and spread them out again after it has passed (Qazvini 1960, 455). This last part about the carpets may be an exaggerated part of the narrative, but the cow's behavior as described in this story may hold an important fact. In the evenings, this cow visits the old woman's house to be milked, but then it returns to a place not mentioned in the story, once more through the palace. In other words, the cow does not stay in the old woman's house all day or night and only goes to the house near sunset as a brief pause. What can this strange behavior mean? Indeed, this animal could not have been an ordinary cow. Even though in this very short story, there is no mention of the appearance of this animal's body, from its described behavior, it seems to have been a *gāwmīš* (water buffalo) and it is the missing key element of this historical puzzle. The water buffalo has lived in Iran and Mesopotamia since ancient times, and sometimes it is difficult for researchers to distinguish, for example, which of the Bovidae family was meant in Sumerian texts, because there were three species in Mesopotamia. Two species, the wild bull and the bison, have gone extinct, but the water buffalo still exists in the region (Vanstiphout 2003, 163n79). In addition, Sumerian texts mention an unknown tree called Shenu, whose leaves were eaten by buffaloes (Vanstiphout 2003, 176). Archaeological findings also confirm the information. For example, the image of a water buffalo can be seen on a cylinder seal bearing an Akkadian inscription, dating from around 2250 to 2150 BC.⁴ Today, there are still a large number of domestic water buffaloes in Iran and Iraq. Considering the similarities, it seems that the buffaloes of Iran and Iraq have a common ancestor of Indian origin (Naserian and Saremi 2007, 1404-1405).

Studies of the water buffaloes' behavior have shown that female buffaloes form groups of up to thirty. These groups come together, especially at nights, and form a larger herd (Hutchins 2003, 21). This may explain the cow's short stay at the old woman's house and its return after milking. In fact, this buffalo would return to the banks of the Tigris to spend the night with other buffaloes. In addition, this water-loving animal preferred to stay in its natural habitat rather than a small and dark pen in the city and in order to continue this commute between the river and the house, the old woman had to feed the buffalo with

³ Or *Rōmīyyah* in Arabic texts.

⁴ For an image of this seal, visit <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327600> (accessed on 23 October 2023).

a little rare fodder during milking. Apart from determining the type of this Bovidae and explaining its behavior, another problem is this buffalo's trip between the old woman's house and the bank of the Tigris River. Why does the buffalo have to pass through the royal complex to reach the old woman's house? In spite of the neighborhood, the old woman's house must have had a door to the outside of the palaces area, but the development of the royal complex along the river bank, had blocked this buffalo's access to the river bank, and it had to go through the complex to move between the house and the river bank. Therefore, another door of the house or its pen must open to the inside of the complex.

In the narrative above, the exaggerated element about royal carpets has replaced the necessary explanations of the strange behavior of the cow and its difficulty in reaching the river bank. If we cut this exaggerated and fictional element off the original event, we are left with a historical event, which shows the blockage of the buffalo's route between the river bank and the old woman's house by the implementation of the royal palace development plan. Anōšīravān had ordered the royal servants and guards to respect the buffalo's right to use its usual and permanent route. Nobody interrupted buffalo's habit in using this shortest and straight route between the river and the old woman's house, although the route passed through the royal complex.

The Second Main Story

Although the second story of the king and the old woman is very important because it explains the origin of the installation of the king's chain of justice, it is not as well-known as the first story of the king and the old woman. Khawaja Nezam al-Molk begins the story in the early days of Khosrow Anōšīravān's reign,⁵ when he was very dissatisfied with his father's appointees. Thus, he called for a meeting⁶ and summoned all the prominent figures (*bozorgān*). In a speech, he identified injustice and oppression as the cause of the decline of the country and urged everyone to avoid evil, respect the wise, keep the company of the virtuous, abstain from the wicked, and not bother the weak and the conscientious (*xīškārān*). He then warned them that he would not have the slightest mercy towards those who fail to follow these mandates. All those attending the meeting vowed to do so (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 35-36).

Some time passed, and the governor of Azarbayjan, a general who did not have any competitor among the generals of the country in wealth and power, decided to build a

⁵ Nezam al-Molk has written that Anōšīravān were eighteen years old when he ascended the throne. However, it is not confirmed by historical documents. Indeed, he was about thirty years old.

⁶ Nezam al-Molk has mentioned that the council held about Anōšīravān's forth regnal year. This may be correct. The similar chronology has been used in the political autobiography of Anōšīravān, quoted by Meskawayh (for the political autobiography see below).

garden and a residence for himself on the outskirts of his city.⁷ In the area he had set his sights on, there was a small piece of land that was the only property of an old woman. The general wanted to take the old woman's land from her to add it to his garden and mansion and offered to buy it or exchange it for another land, but the old woman refused. Finally, the general took possession of the land by force. The old woman went to him and demanded the price of the land or its exchange, but she was faced with the general's indifference (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 36-37). She tried for two years but in vain, suffering great hardship in her pursuit of justice. At last, she decided to go to the capital and take her complaint to Anōšīravān. Therefore, without informing anyone, she left Azarbayjan and toiled her way to Ctesiphon. After learning about Anōšīravān's hunting date, she placed herself in his path with a clever plan to approach him and relate the injustice she had been subjected to. By Anōšīravān's order, five dīnārs per month were paid to the old woman and she was taken care of. Then the king ordered one of his trustworthy servants to go secretly to Azarbayjan for investigating the injustice that had befallen the old woman (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 38-38). Anōšīravān investigated the general's wealth and assets, and upon the confirmation by his secret agent, he summoned the prominent figures (*bozorgān*) and the *mobeds* to attend the session and asked them what should be done with a wealthy general who took the only property of an old woman from her by force. All those present agreed that he deserved the most severe of punishments. As a result, Anōšīravān ordered his execution⁸, so that it would be a lesson to all oppressors and evildoers. Then he summoned the old woman to the session and announced that she was the one wronged by the general. Anōšīravān said to the old woman: "The oppressor has received his punishment and I will give you the house and the garden in which your land is. I will also give you a pack animal and a pension so that you can safely return to your city with my brief order (Toqī'), and pray for me" (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 41-42). After that, to facilitate the complaint of the oppressed, Anōšīravān ordered a chain to be installed with one end attached to bells within the palace and the other end hanging outside the palace gate at a height even a seven-year-old could reach (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 43). There are many important details in this story, making it one of the crucial narratives in the book of the famous Iranian vizier, Khawaja Nezam al-Molk. It also includes some Sasanian elements that confirm the historical basis of the story as mentioned below.

Some Sasanian Elements in the Second Main Story

1) The first point that draws attention as a key element in this story is the position of the usurper of the old woman's land: the governor of Azarbayjan, a general more powerful

⁷ Nezam al-Molk does not mention the headquarters of the general but the name of the city was likely Doubios or Dvin (see Procopius, *the Persian War*, II: XXV, 9)

⁸ The execution has been described horrifically in *Sīyāsatnāmeḥ* and it is not clear that it actually happened so or was fictionally exaggerated.

than any other commander or general in the country. This description immediately brings to mind the administrative and military reforms of Khosrow Anōšīravān, who divided the country into four large military regions and appointed a general as the ruler of each (see Gnoli 1985, 265-270). In a Pahlavi text, *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, the names of these four regions (*kust*) are as follows: *kust ī xwarāsān* (in the east), *kust [ī] xwarwarān* (in the west), *kust [ī] nēmrōz* (in the south), and *kust [ī] ādūrbādagān* (in the north; Daryae 2002, 18, 19, 21, 23). While this text mentions the regions geographically, in paragraph 56, it also mentions the position of *ādūrbādagān spāhbed* and one of its holders by the name of ‘*ērān-gušasp*’ (Daryae 2002, 23), which shows the strategic importance of this part of Iran. Ibn Khordādbēh has also stated that during the Sasanian period, the general of the north was called Āzarbādakān Espahbad (Ibn Khordadbeh 1889, 118-119). To protect their long borders with Roman Empire, the Sasanians had two military regions, the west and the north, and they assigned their most qualified generals to these two regions. Moreover the military governor of Āzarbāyjān in the north was responsible for the longest conflict between Iran and Roman Empire over Armenia. Thus, it becomes clear why in the text of *Sīyāsatnāmeḥ*, the title of “general” (in Islamic period: *sepahsālār*) is used alongside the title of “Governor of Āzarbāyjān” and why the political and military influence of this person has been described as extraordinary.

2) In this story, the council of the prominent figures (including *šahryārān* “landholders”, *wispuhrān* “princes”, *wuzurgān*⁹ “grandees”, *āzādān* “nobles”, *kadag-xwadāyān* “householders”; see Tafazzoli 1990, 427) has been mentioned several times, which is reminiscent of reports in historical sources about holding the council during the reign of Khosrow Anōšīravān. One of the most important instances of this council was in response to the request for help from the Yemeni prince, Sayf Ibn Zī-Yazan, whose country was occupied by Abyssinia. Anōšīravān told him that due to the high risk of such a long-distance campaign, he could not personally decide in favour of it. The king left the hard and final decision to the council and it suggested that as there might be no return from this campaign, prisoners sentenced to death should be sent to Yemen to fight against Abyssinia. The king welcomed this proposal and the Iranians won the war under the command of Vahrez (Tabari 1960, 2:140, 144).

3) Another term that is a reflection of the Sasanian period is the word *xīškārān* (the people who are *xīškār*). Mackenzie translated *xwēš-kār* as “dutiful” and *xwēš-kārīh* as “proper function” (Mackenzie 1986, 96), but this is not very convincing. A friend proposed the term “conscientiousness” for *xwēš-kārīh*, although it is not perfect to reflect the conceptual scope of the word, but it seems better than other translations. *Xwēš-kārīh* was one of the most important moral virtues in ancient Iran and in fact one of the fundamental concepts in Iranian social philosophy. Nyberg has examined the conceptual scope of this

⁹ Or *Bozorgān*, as it occurs in New Persian. Nezam al-Molk used the word to refer to the whole prominent figures six times (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 35, 41 (twice alongside the *mobeds*), 42 (twice), 43).

word in Pahlavi texts and explained it well. In the first sense, *xwēš-kārīh* simply means doing one's duty and doing what one is supposed to do. However, in a deeper sense, *xwēš-kārīh* is realized by doing the right, correct, good, and moral thing, which includes numerous and various activities that are referred to as *kerpak* "virtue, good deed" in Zoroastrianism (Nyberg 1974, 2:223). What can be added to Nyberg's standpoint is that as a virtue, *xīškārī* is a voluntary self-discipline and self-monitoring endeavor to fulfill personal, social, and moral duties, even beyond what is expected by custom and religion.

The voluntary nature of *xīškārī* is reflected in one of the old translations of the Quran (9:79) into Persian, where the word *motawwe'īn* is understood as *xīškārān*, which implies the concept of doing good deeds voluntarily and willingly (Yahaghi 1998, 3:1382). In any case this word has less frequency in the texts of the early Islamic period; it is used three times in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, the most important of which is in one of the question sessions of Anōšīravān and Bozorgmehr, in which *xīškārān* are described as being of "good-character" (Ferdowsi 2010, 7:294).¹⁰ The source of this part of the *Shahnameh* is the Pahlavi text of *Yādgar-e Bozorgmehr*, where the word *xīškār* is used in the part of the text that this line of Ferdowsi refers to (Mahyar Nawwabi 1952, 327). Of course, *Shahnameh* only touches upon the concept, while the concept of *xwēš-kārīh* is discussed in more detail in *Yādgar-e Bozorgmehr* (Mahyar Nawwabi 1952, 309-310). Apart from the *Shahnameh*, one of the most important instances of the use of *xīškār* in the early Islamic period is the second story of the king and the old woman in *Siyāsatnāmeḥ*, when the king strongly advised that "Don't bother the weak and the conscientious (*xīškārān*)". The term has been used in *Siyāsatnāmeḥ* in its original sense and is a reflection of the pre-Islamic concept of *xīškār* as a "good citizen" for the society.

4) Another important term used in the second main story is *Toqī'*, which has roots in the Sasanian period. *Toqī'* is a recorded brief statement by a king, usually in response to a report or a question, which may be in writing or oral (Tafazzoli 2004, 239). Tafazzoli argued that it may have originated from the Pahlavi word **dastīnag*, itself the origin of the Persian word *dastīneh*, meaning signature or royal order (Tafazzoli 2004, 239n5). Most of the Sasanian *Toqī'āt* (pl. of *Toqī'*) quoted in later sources belong to Khosrow Anōšīravān (Tafazzoli 2004, 240-241). In the early Islamic period, *Toqī'āt-e Kasrā* was very famous, as Naser Khosrow takes pride in studying them (Naser Khosrow 1991, 536: "I read completely and precisely the *Toqī'āt-e Kasrā*"). Mehdi Mohaghegh, in his comment on this poem, attributes it to a poet who was born almost forty years before Naser Khosrow (Naser Khosrow 1991, 536). In spite of this consideration, the ode is still masterfully written by a contemporary poet and still shows the importance and inspiration of the king's *Toqī'āt* for the poets of that time (for more details of its reflections in Persian literature see Tafazzoli 2004, 244-245).

¹⁰ As the poem says, "The good-character people who are *xīškār* / shall not be inferior in the eyes of the wise".

One of the most important versions of Toqī'āt in the Pahlavi language had been received by Ferdowsi (probably through the *Shahnameh Abu Mansouri*), which contained about 35 items (Ferdowsi 2010, 7:389-403), but the most detailed prose version of Toqī'āt was an Arabic translation of Pahlavi that was kept in India and was translated from Arabic into Persian around the late Safavid period. It contained 173 items, some of which Nakhjavani has compared with the Toqī'āt in *Shahnameh* (see, for instance, Nakhjavani 1955, 20-22)

5) In *Shahnameh*, parts of these Toqī'āt are the short answers of the King in response to the confidential letters or the secret reports of the *kārāgāhān*, “secret agents” (Ferdowsi 2010, 7:390; the king had *kārāgāhān* everywhere). Khosrow Anōšīravān had sent these secret agents throughout the country to be informed of the truthful reports of the affairs in Iran. In surviving Pahlavi texts, *kārāgāhīh* literarily means the quality of having the knowledge of works or skill (Nyberg 1974, 2:112), while *kārāgāh* means experienced and skilled (see Mackenzie 1986, 49). It seems that the Arabic word *monhī* in the early Islamic period has almost been a calque or loan translation from *kārāgāh*; both words had been used together as synonyms in some texts (see Dekhoda 1998, 12:17953, s.v. *kārāgāh*). But *kārāgāh* as a secret agent was gradually replaced with *monhī* in the Islamic period, until it was revived in the contemporary period, during the reign of Reza Shah by the Academy of Iran as a secret police officer or a detective who could wear civilian clothing instead of a uniform (see *Farhangestān-e Iran* 1940, 66)

In the second main story, we clearly observe one of these secret agents, who secretly goes to Azarbayjan to investigate the cruelty that has befallen the old woman; first under the guise of an agricultural assessor, and then under the guise of an agent in chasing a fugitive, both was the official titles of his mission, the former was pretended in the capital just before his departure and the latter in the city that was his destination (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 39-40). He discovered the truth of the matter, and gave a complete report to the king. As shown above, it is clear that most of these Sasanian elements, have a political nature. This point along with the original concept of the word *xīškār* also indicates that the second main story most likely originated from a lost historical account about the execution of the general of the north.

The Second Side Story

The second side story is a famous one in Persian literature and folk literature. Even it is more famous than its main story (the second main story mentioned above). It seems that the most authentic version of this story is narrated in the *Sīyāsatnāme* by Nezam al-Molk. Not only he narrates the main story with more important details, but also provides a logical link between the second main story and the second side story. In fact, after the execution of the general of the north, the news of the event made such a wave throughout the country that all the evildoers stopped oppressing the people, so seven years passed and no one took any complaint to the king by the chain of justice (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 43). Then, Nizam

al-Mulk narrates the following side-story: one day, the bells connected to the chain rang. Anōšīravān asked the palace servants to see who had rung the bell. The servants reported that an old, bony, and mangy donkey had rubbed itself on the chain to relieve itching, as quadrupeds, especially pack animals have a habit of doing so (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 43-44). Anōšīravān ordered to investigate about the animal. So two servants took the donkey to the city and questioned the people about it. They reported to the king that the donkey used to belong to a launderer, who had used the donkey to carry items of clothing to the laundry for twenty years, and had abandoned the animal when it became old (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 44). Anōšīravān ordered the launderer and the four *kadkhodā* from his neighborhood to be brought to the palace. He then reprimanded the launderer in the presence of the four *kadkhodā* for kicking the animal out and ordered that the owner should take care of the donkey and feed it sufficiently as long as it lived (Nezam al-Molk 2019, 45). Considering that the story took place in a city (Sasanian capital), and not in a village, it is more likely that here the word *kadkhodā* (ordinarily refers to a chief of a village) reflects a rare Pahlavi sense (*kadag-xwadāyān*, “householders”) as a member of the prominent figures (see Tafazzoli 1990, 427). Therefore it seems that the word is a Sasanian element in the story but alone it is not sufficient to infer a historical basis for the second side story.

This story also occurs in both available versions of *Marzbānnāmeḥ*. In this masterwork, in the style of *Kalīla and Demna*, the characters or narrators of some stories are animals, and in both versions of *Marzbānnāmeḥ*, the narrator is a deer (Varavini 1988, 320; Malatyawi 2004, 328). Of course, there are differences between the two versions of this story. For example, Varavini’s text does not mention the punishment of the owner of the donkey, but in Malatyawi’s text the owner is punished for this cruelty to the animal (Malatyawi 2004, 329). Malatyawi may have adopted the punishment from the *Sīyāsatnāmeḥ* (see Nezam al-Molk 2019, 45) and added it to the main version of *Marzbānnāmeḥ*.

On the other hand the most important difference between the versions of *Marzbānnāmeḥ* and *Sīyāsatnāmeḥ* is the job of the owner of the donkey; Varavini and Malatyawi wrote that he was a miller (Varavini 1988, 322; Malatyawi 2004, 329), but as mentioned above, Nezam al-Molk wrote that he was a *gāzar* “launderer”.¹¹ The man seems to have been originally a launderer, not a miller, because some manuscripts of *Sīyāsatnāmeḥ* (the Paris manuscript), also include the word *gāzorestān*, meaning “laundry” (see Nezam al-Molk 2019, 44n8), which is an old word (see Karmini 2006, 689) derived from *gāzar* “launderer” in Pahlavi (see Mackenzie 1986, 36; Hassandoust 2014, 4:2331).

Apart from the originality of the words *gāzar* and *gāzorestān*, in terms of historical logic, it was a launderer who need a pack animal to collect customers’ clothes, take them to the laundry, and deliver them back to their owners, while usually it was not the miller, but

¹¹ The word has two pronunciations in New Persian: *gāzar* and *gāzor* (see Dekhoda 1998, 12:18876).

the customers, who carried their wheat to the mill and picked up the flour. Another reason supporting this argument is found in Mowlawi's *Mathnawi-ye Ma'nawi*, where a launderer and his donkey appear in a story. Of course, the content of the story is different, but it also revolves around the pitiful condition of the launderer's donkey. In this story, the launderer has an emaciated donkey, and a fox tries to lure this donkey into the wounded lion's ambush and finally succeeds (Mowlawi Balkhi 2019, 2:1146-1181).

Back to *Marzbānnāmeḥ*, it is important that at the end of both versions of the story, the king issues a decree ordering all owners having an animal that serves them in its youth, shall not kick the animal out when it becomes old (Varavini 1988, 322. Malatyawi 2004, 329). If this law or a similar law existed, more likely due to the cost of food and shelter for the animal owners, it would gradually become obsolete. The law has no historical evidence directly but the remains of Pahlavi texts contain indications that laws existed for protecting animal rights. For example, in the book *Šāyest Nāšāyest*, there is a list of twelve animals that are forbidden to be kill, such as lamb, warhorse, falcon, rooster and owl (*Šāyest Nāšāyest* 1990, 124). Moreover there is a strong warning against the irregular and cruel killing of sheep (*Šāyest Nāšāyest* 1990, 123-124). Also, the eighth book of *Dēnkard* includes an interesting passage in which reducing the food amount of herding dogs in winter and starving them are strongly denounced. The book also strictly forbids herd owners and shepherds from engaging in such practices (*The eighth book of Dēnkard* 1397, chap. 22, para. 3-4). This passage may suggest that during winter, the herding dog was not needed since the herd was kept in a pen. As a result, some herd owners reduced the dog's food ration and starved it under the pretext that the dog was not active. While there is no direct evidence that supports the existence of a law protecting animals, as mentioned at the end of the second side story, it is worth noting that the story has a realistic scheme and factual details in comparison with similar stories in the folk literature.

Folk Stories based on the Second Side Story

Although the second side story does not have a direct historical basis, it contains some realistic elements. Yet it is important to note that in Iranian folklore, there are some stories that have been derived from this original story, and they rely heavily on imagination and legend. In all of these stories, animals play a major role. In a similar story in *Hamza's Secrets*, the launderer's donkey is replaced with a skinny and injured cow (Zekavati 2008, 104-105). Also, there are at least four versions of the story in which Anōšīravān orders the owner of the donkey to not only feed it but also to teach it to read within forty days. This order can be seen as connected to the prevalent notion in many cultures of the donkey as a symbol of ignorance and stupidity. At least in two of the four versions of the story, the owner of the donkey has a clever daughter who finds a solution to the seemingly impossible task. According to these versions, the daughter trains the donkey to turn the pages of the book by placing oats on them. The daughter presents this display before the

king as proof that the donkey has become literate and learned to read (Anjavi Shirazi 1975, 354-360). This story has become the source of a proverb in Iran: “When there is force, even a donkey will become a mullah” (Anjavi Shirazi 1975, 360).

Furthermore, there are at least four versions of another story preserved in oral stories in four different regions of Iran. According to them, a huge snake swallows a deer, but the deer’s horns get stuck in the snake’s mouth. While this is clearly fictional, the story is notable for its depiction of the snake’s mate seeking justice from the king by pulling the chain of justice. Anōšīravān calls for a carpenter to save the snake by cutting the deer’s horns (Anjavi Shirazi 1975, 360-366; Zekavati 2008, 105-106; see also Ja’fari Ghanavati 2014, 660-661). This diversity of the folk stories and their geographical distribution indicates the popularity of Anōšīravān among the Iranians.

It is worth mentioning that Christensen has suggested that the story of the king’s chain of justice may have originated from a custom that was prevalent in India and China, and this story as an itinerant one has in fact been adopted by the Iranians (Christensen 1936, 372). Christensen’s opinion may be correct, but one more point should be taken into account: in *Tajāreb al-Umam*, Meskawayh has quoted Anōšīravān’s political autobiography¹², in which the king says that he has studied the governance methods of the Indians and the Romans, adopting what is right and discarding what is wrong (Meskawayh 2000, 1:203; see also Tafazzoli 2004, 226). Thus it is more likely that the king actually himself adopted the chain of justice from Indian customs. On the other hand, the installation of the chain of justice in the Sasanian court does not originate in the second side story, but in the second main story, and we have argued that the latter story has a historical basis. Therefore, there is no reason for us to consider the whole narrative of the chain of justice as a fictional or itinerant story.

Conclusion

In the first main story, the historic and well-preserved house of the old woman in the early Islamic period serves as a crucial piece of evidence affirming the historical roots of the story. In addition, the name given to the house by local Muslims, “Qobbat al-Ajōz”, hints at its čahārtāqī architectural style.

¹² Grignaschi and Tafazzoli respectively refer to it as an autobiography and a political biography (Grignaschi 1966, 7; Tafazzoli 2004, 223). Many scholars believe that this political autobiography is an extant part of *al-Kārnāmaj fī Sīrat-e Anōshervān*, and even some of them have opined that *al-Tāj fī Sīrat-e Anōshervān* and *al-Kārnāmaj fī Sīrat-e Anōshervān* (both mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm in *al-Fehrest*) refer to one book that was the same old source of Meskawayh in quoting the political autobiography (for a brief review of the scholars’ standpoints see Ghafouri 2018, 453-457). But in fact the two titles belong to different books and the political autobiography has been quoted from a third book (for more details see Ghafouri 2018, especially chap. 13. An abstract is available at <https://persianacademy.academia.edu/FarzinGhafouri>)

In the first side story, the author provides one of the few literary and historical sources that attest to the existence of the large and magnificent wall paintings in the Sasanian royal complex. As mentioned above, one of these murals depicted the fall of Antioch in 540 AD. Although, the first side story fails to mention the appearance of the cow, the animal's strange behavior outlined in the story suggests that it was not a cow but a water buffalo. In fact, the royal palaces' development plan had blocked the water buffalo's route between the riverbank and the old woman's house. At the end of the first side story, which is about the buffalo's right to access its usual route without being interrupted by royal servants and guards, Qazvini praises the practice of the Sasanians' justice and adherence to the law and rights as key factors behind their long-lasting reign.

In the second main story, the political nature of other Sasanian elements, in addition to the usage of the word *xīškārān* suggests that the story originated from a Sasanian historical account about the execution of the general of the north. Among these four stories, the second side story is the only one for which no reliable historical facts have been found. Nonetheless, the second side story has a more plausible narrative in comparison with the fictional and imaginary stories commonly found in folklore.

Moreover, Christensen's standpoint about India and China as the origins of the chain of justice is likely true. However, his view that the narratives about the existence of the chain of justice in the Sasanian court are an Indian or Chinese itinerant story is not convincing. Firstly, in a widely accepted valid text quoted by Meskawayh, Anōšīravān himself states that he has studied the governance methods of the Indians and the Romans and has adopted what is right and discarding what is wrong. Therefore, it is more than likely that Khosrow Anōšīravān adopted the chain of justice from India, which had immense cultural exchanges with Iran. Secondly, the second main story serves as a background for the second side story providing historical basis for the explanation of the installation of the chain of justice in the Sasanian court. The second main story, which ends with the appearance of the chain of justice for the first time, has considerable historical grounds. Finally, the formation of imaginary and legendary animal stories around the chain of justice and their strong and diverse echoes in folk literature indicate the great popularity of Khosrow Anōšīravān and the fame of the chain of justice as a historical motif among the Iranians.

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