

WŁADYSŁAW/DULĘBA

THE CYRUS LEGEND
IN THE ŠĀHNĀME

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Acknowledgements

As Executive Secretary of the Oriental Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Branch in Cracow, as Secretary of the annual "Folia Orientalia" and first of all as the librarian of the Institute of Oriental Philology at the Jagiellonian University I had the privilege of meeting the late Dr. Władysław Dulęba (1920—1987) quite often. I keep in memory many scholarly discussions with him. I admired his research concerning ancient Iran, and more particularly his literary studies of Šāhnāme. I listened to papers he presented to the Oriental Committee. On Jan. 24, 1974 he spoke on the "Myth of the Sāma House in Šāhnāme" and on Oct. 30, 1975 he lectured on "Kayanids and Achaemenids". I remember well the opinion of Prof. Józef Wolski, an eminent specialist on ancient Iran, expressed at one of the meetings that Dr. Dulęba should present the results of his literary research to historians of antiquity, not only to Oriental scholars.

I was really pleased when some years its completion Dr. Dulęba decided to rewrite his Ph. D. dissertation on "The Cyrus Legend in the Šāhnāme" in English. Very unfortunately, he died (far from home, in Vancouver, Canada) in 1987, just after the manuscript had been finished. For some years the Jagiellonian University Publishers kept trying to print the book. However, bad luck dogged the title. Both technological change (from metal to computer setting) and the difficulty of managing the numerous quotations in Persian delayed the publication, until finally the people interested dropped the plan. I offered, early in 1995, to print the book in the Oriental Committee series and received kind permission for that from the Jagiellonian University Publishers. I should like to give my sincere thanks to Director Z. Bukowski and his staff for their very friendly cooperation in the transfer of the book to the Enigma Press. It must also be mentioned that the book appears thanks to partial subsidies from the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Oriental Philology and the Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow Branch.

I should like to express my deepest gratitude to Mrs. Janina Dulęba, who gave the Enigma Press her kind permission to publish the book of her late husband. I am also very much obliged to Dr. Anna Krasnowolska for scholarly editorship and proof-reading of the volume (both the Persian and the English text). Mr. Andrzej Bartczak was so kind as to prepare the Persian passages on computer.

No Polish summary of the dissertation was originally written by the author. However, it seems that his Polish article *Opowieść o Cyrusie w Šāhnāme* [A Tale about Cyrus in Šāhnāme], which appeared in *Studia Indo-Iranica*, Ossolineum: Wrocław—Kraków 1983, pp. 39—43, fits our purposes perfectly. The article is reprinted here thanks to kind permission granted by Dr. Edward Malak, Director of the Ossolineum [Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich. Wydawnictwo, pl. Solny 14a, 50-062 Wrocław]. In my capacity as executive editor I feel obliged to express my gratitude for this possibility of enriching the publication in this way.

It is worth mentioning that the book by W. Dulęba is an important addition to the vast field of Polish research on ancient and mediaeval Iran. It continues first of all the work of his Cracow professors T. Kowalski, J. Wolski, and W. Machalski.

The work appears exactly as prepared by the author. The only change is that we do not number the lines next the Persian texts. Instead, the proper line numbers are always given before the passages quoted.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AirWb</i>	C. Bartholomae, <i>Altiranisches Wörterbuch</i>
Akk.	Akkadian
Arab.	Arabic
Assyr.	Assyrian
<i>Av,D,O</i>	<i>Avesta</i> (Darmestetter, Oxford)
<i>AvG</i>	<i>Avesta</i> (Geldner)
Av	Avestan
Bal	Bal'ami, <i>Chronique de Tabari</i> (Zotenberg)
<i>Bd</i>	<i>Bundahiš</i>
Bir	Biruni, <i>Izbrannye proizviedeniya</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>CAH</i>	<i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i>
<i>CCV</i>	<i>Cyrus Commemoration Volume</i>
Chri, <i>Kay</i>	A. Christensen, <i>Les Kayanides</i>
<i>Dd</i>	<i>Dādistān-i dīnik</i>
Dl	Dānešnāme-ye Iran o Eslām
<i>Dk</i>	<i>Dinkārd</i>
El.	Elamite
farg.	fargard
<i>FNA</i>	<i>Farhang-e Nāmhā-ye Avestā</i>
<i>Gr. Bd.</i>	<i>Great Bundahiš</i>
<i>GIP</i>	<i>Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie</i>
Harlez	<i>Avesta, le livre sacré du zoroastrisme</i> , traduit du text zend par C. de Harlez
<i>HbO</i>	<i>Handbuch der Orientalistik</i>
Hebr	Hebrew
Her	Herodot, <i>The Histories</i>
Hfd, <i>Zor</i>	E. Herzfeld, <i>Zoroaster and his World</i>
<i>Iigk</i>	<i>Istoriya Iranskogo gosudarstva i kultury</i>
Ind.	Indian
<i>JASB</i>	<i>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal</i>
<i>JKRCOI</i>	<i>Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland</i>
Med.	Median
<i>MKh</i>	<i>Mainog-i Khirad</i>
MP	Middle Persian
<i>M-Z, THS</i>	D. Monchi-Zadeh, <i>Topographisch-historische Studien zum iranischen National-epos</i>
NP	New Persian
Olmst.	A. T. Olmstead, <i>History of the Persian Empire</i>
OP	Old Persian
Pahl.	Pahlavi
<i>PT</i>	<i>Pahlavi Texts</i>
repr.	reprint

RV	Rig-Veda
Saggs	H. W. F. Saggs, <i>Wielkość i upadek Babilonii</i>
Star.	A. A. Starikow, <i>Firdousi i jego poema Šaxname</i>
ŠMohl	<i>Le livre des rois</i> , publié, traduit et commenté par J. Mohl
Šn	<i>Šāhnāme</i>
ŠVost	<i>Šāhnāme</i> , publ. by Institut Vostokovedieniya Akademii Nauk SSSR
Tab, Tar	Tabari, <i>Tā'rix ar-rusul wa 'l-muluk</i>
Tha, Hist	Tha'alibi, <i>Histoire des rois des Perses</i> (H. Zotenberg)
Ved.	Vedic
Wolff	<i>Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname</i> von Fritz Wolff
Y	<i>Yasna</i>
Yt	<i>Yašt</i>
Zs	<i>Zatsparam</i>

GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS

Is it possible at all to search for any historical data in an epos? Can one look for the truth in the accounts of such an epos as the *Šāhnāme* which, before it finally crystallized in the work of Ferdousi, was emerging and transforming for hundreds of years in the oral tradition, was subjected to the change of language by the Middle Persian and New Persian editors of the prose records?¹

Still one could attempt a comparison of some of the plots of the *Šāhnāme* with the relations of modern studies and with the work of Herodotus, the very first — and probably preserved to a large extent — crystallization of the Iranian epos.

"I could, if I wished, give three versions of Cyrus' history, all different from what follows; but I propose to base my account on those Persian authorities who seem to tell the simple truth about him without trying to exaggerate his exploits."²

I. V. Piankov³ has reconstructed some of the plots of those stories on the basis of the accounts given not only by Herodotus, but also by Ctesias, Xenophon, Hellenicus, Diodor, Nicolaus of Damascus, Charon and Strabon. Piankov's studies corroborate the account of Herodotus who says that at least four versions of those stories existed in the oral tradition from the times of Cyrus. Piankov presents their partial reconstruction.

If we compare it with some of the plots which compose the first part of the *Šāhnāme* (i.e. the chapters from *Ġamšid* to *Ġang-e bozorg-e Kay Xosrow bā Afrāsyāb*), we shall see that some of them agree in their main outline just with this version which Herodotus thought to be the truest one and that these threads recur in the epos with various changes, more than once.

Besides these diversified epic accounts of Cyrus, which already existed in the times of the later Achaemenidae (in the times of Herodotus and Ctesias) it is possible that some information was comprised in other, today nonexistent sources which were used by such authors of historical works as Tabari, Mas'udi and Tha'ālibi.

While examining the relationships of the plots of the *Šāhnāme* and history, we meet a number of basic difficulties.

1. Persian legends often contain contradictory accounts.⁴ This difficulty is easier to overcome if we remember a fairly obvious fact that the *Šāhnāme* is

¹ Cf., Th. Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, GIP, II, pp. 136—146.

² Her., I, 95.

³ *Obrazovaniye deržavy Axemenidov po dannym antičnyx istočnikov*, Iigk, pp. 84—85.

⁴ It was already pointed out by Biruni in *Al-athār al-bāqiya*, Cf., Bir., p. 111.

composed of a number of different stories, which originally were not connected at all. They were more like “ballads”, created in various circumstances and undergoing various changes during the course of tradition.

2. As Theodor Nöldeke suggests, some figures of the *Šāhnāme* were already known in *Rigveda*⁵, from which one may conclude that they had been known in the Indo-Iranian tradition already before the Aryans arrived on the territory of the present-day Iran. However, at a closer examination, we may notice that in the *Šāhnāme* they are either totally Iranian characters, like Feridun or Kay Kāwus, only dressed up in the names from the world of Indo-Iranian myths, the names which have nothing to do with the royal power or with their history contained in the work of Ferdousi; or they are such figures like Zohāk, in whose name some authors trace the name of Deiokes⁶ (Med. Daiauku + Av. aži = Aži Dahāka), and who does not appear in *Rigveda* at all (there is only ahi⁷ there, simply a dragon).

3. Legendary, or prehistoric⁸ — according to some claims — rulers and dynasties known to us from, among others, the *Avesta* and the *Šāhnāme* appear in the works of some historians next to truly historical characters. According to Biruni, for instance, the Chaldeans were “the Kayānians’ deputees in Babylon”⁹; according to Bal’ami Nebuchadnezzar was given “Syria, Yemen and the whole West” by Luhrāsf, the king of Balx¹⁰; Goštāsp sent a general called Kureš to Irāq and Babylon, which were the seat of Nebuchadnezzar, and ordered him to send Nebuchadnezzar back to Balx¹¹; in the time of Bahman, a kinglet of Balx, Nebuchadnezzar collected an army of fifty thousand men and took three wise men with him (whom he made his visiers): Dāriuš the son of Mehri, Kuruš the son of Aikun and Ahaswerus the son of Kuruš¹².

4. Historical improbabilities (for instance, it is not difficult to count that the two beautiful daughters of Ğamšid were over a thousand years old when Feridun married them; Rostam lived over six hundred years) suggest poetic hyperbole, or a symbolic meaning of these characters, or — maybe — that some events were presented several times in the epos, as successive ones.¹³

5. The identification of some geographical names, such as Barbar (or Berber, Barber), Māzanderān, Dež-e Safid, Gang, presents similar difficulties. Some of them seem mythical and it is not known whether they ever referred to any definite places (e.g. Dež-e Safid), some (like Barbar), bringing association to

⁵ Nöldeke claims that some of the names pertaining to the characters from the Iranian epos appeared already in an early Indo-Iranian tradition. (GIP, II, p. 131).

⁶ Cf., *Zohāk*, pp. 51—52.

⁷ Cf., *Av.D,O*, II, p. 60.

⁸ Cf., e.g. Chri, *Kay*, p. 34.

⁹ Bir, p. 103.

¹⁰ Bal, I, p. 499.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 495.

¹² Ibid., p. 500.

¹³ Cf., also Olmst., p. 2.

a particular nation, may lead to far fetched hypotheses¹⁴. Others still, like Māzanderān, create particular difficulties because of the discrepancies between their reality and the relations about them in the *Šāhnāme*.

Thus, since the occurrence in the *Šāhnāme* of both mythological elements and historical evidence is a fact, the historical evidence being often an account of several distant epochs at a time¹⁵, we must realize, possibly clearly, the mechanism of the origin of particular stories.

It is not difficult to imagine that at the news of some important event (a war expedition to distant countries, the death of a hero) a primitive creator took up a tale. And as some elements of the episode he extolled were incomprehensible to him, he chose to interpret them by means of myths, which had shaped his philosophy of life, like a weaver who entwines colourful wefts around the warp, he entwined the stories he had heard with myths. As the song spread around the world, new performers, never lacking creative inventiveness¹⁶, embellished it with new interpretation of new events — the heroes often achieved superhuman qualities and their names, forgotten or simply meaning very little to the singers, were substituted by new ones, closer to the people's imagination. It was only later that the songs were joined into cycles. And then, already learned editors and poets composed them into work in which they wanted to present the nation's history. In this way the progenitor of a cruel dynasty could get a dragon's name and a dragon's face, a hero could take the shape of a god of victory and a subjugated river — of a defeated enemy...

As to analyse the plots of the epos which bring to mind some of the events from the epoch of Cyrus the Great, I have decided to divide this work into two parts.

The first one, *The Legend and History of Cyrus and the Threads of the Šāhnāme*, presents a comparison of the episodes from Cyrus' life as recorded by Herodotus on the basis of what he gathered from Persian legends, supplemented by the facts known from history, with some of the plots of the *Šāhnāme*.

The second part, *The Heroes and Countries of the Šāhnāme and the Legend of Cyrus*, is an attempt to elucidate the origin of some of the names referring to people and places in comparison with historical sources, as well as to criticize some of those hypotheses.

¹⁴ Cf., e.g. M-Z, *THS*, pp. 80—91.

¹⁵ For instance such persons as Gudarz, Milād or Bižan who, according to many scholars, belonged to the Parthian epoch (cf., T. Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, GIP, II, pp. 136—137; J. C. Coyagee, *The House of Gotarzes: a chapter of Parthian History in the Shahnameh*, JASB, No. 28 (1932), p. 207; J. C. Coyagee, *Studies in the Shahnameh*, JKRCOI, No. 33 (1939), p. 131, appear at the court of Kay Xosrow who, in the opinion of the same and some other scholars, reflects Cyrus (cf., ŠMohl, II, pp. 132—133, 136—137); F. Justi, *Geschichte Irans...*, GIP, II, p. 410; Hfd, Zor, I, p. 104; T. Kowalski, *Studia nad Šāh-nāme*, I, p. 44.

¹⁶ Cf., G. S. Kirk, *The Homeric Poems as History*, p. 8.

PART I

**THE LEGEND AND HISTORY OF CYRUS
AND THE THREADS OF THE *ŠAHNĀME***

