The *Šāh-nāme* in Armenian Oral Epic.

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(Second International Conference on Ferdōsī, Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, August 2000.)

The great Iranian poet Ferdōsī, in his *Šāh-nāme*, both perfected the epic genre for the New Persian literary language and enshrined for all time to come in the pure crystal of his verses the vast mythical and legendary tradition of the Iranian people. His divinely-bestowed genius, like that of Homer for Greece or Pushkin for Russia, both exemplifies and defines an essential part of the culture of this sacred land, Iran, the never-failing spring so abundant in every gift of thought and art in every era. And, as with every work of true inspiration, the *Book of Kings* transcends the boundaries of the realm of its origin and is now a treasure in the common inheritance of all human civilization. The Greek playwright Aeschylus modestly averred that his works were but scraps from Homer's great feast; and innumerable individual poems and *dāstāns* derive their subject and inspiration from the *razm ō bazm*, the fighting and feasting, of Ferdōsī's immortal heroes. This paper, which will draw on many scraps from the feast, some of them most obscure, is far humbler still in its aim, than Aeschylus professed to be.

The figure of the Saka hero Rostam, "River-strong" (cf. Achilles' battle with the Scamander!) the Crown-bestower of elephantine bulk and might, *tājbaxš* and *pīltan*, is so prominent, so large, that the epic was early, and justly, said to be more his than any single monarch's (and one may reflect here upon the inherent tensions between two men, both of whom had to be the "best of the Achaeans", the hero Achilles and the king Agamenon);[1] for Rostam and his line exemplify the moral code of the Iranian heroes. I propose to focus upon a few facets of the Rostam cycle- and those, mainly, from traditions on the periphery of Iran: principally Armenia in the northwest, but also the Mandaean culture to the southwest, Parsi Zoroastrian traditions from Gujarat, in India, and ancient Bactria and Sogd (the regions of Balx and Samangan, and of Samarqand and Boxārā) in the northeast. The original locus of the cycle was far from some of these places, in Seistān- ancient Sagastān, hence the epithet *sagzī* "Saka", Parthian

[1]In Armenia, except for the brief appearance of king Gagik of Vaspurakan at the beginning, there is no monarch in the Epic of Sasun at all for the heroes to serve- the memory of such sovereignty has been lost. The only king is Msra Melik', that is, the enemy caliph of the south in Mesopotamia. Parviz Tanavoli published a figural carpet from Armenian Karabagh (Arc'ax) which shows Msra Melik', apparently imprisoned in his condign pit, flanked by the two uncles of the Armenian hero David, both of whom wear tiger-skins (cf. the discussion of the *palang*-pelt, *infra*!).

and Armenian *sagčik*, that is applied to Rostam. And its beginnings, as Prof. Shapur Shahbazi has convincingly argued, lie in the remote epoch of the Parthian Arsacids- the Aākanian dynasty, of which Ferdōsī himself professes to have found but little in the chronicles of kings. Yet, even as Rostam's name, **Rautastaxma-* in its original form, means "strong as a river", the legends of Rostam's line flowed far and mighty, as far as the rays of Ferdōsī himself shone, fertilizing the poetic soil of distant parts. The discussion rests upon and advances two principles of method. First: sometimes, the stories of Rostam and his kin appear appreciably to differ from the texts of Ferdōsī's narrative, and in the case of the Armenian oral epic of Sasun, the heroes may be veiled under different names; but it seems certain to me that both the epic material attested in the millennia before Ferdōsī, and the oral and literary testimonies of the millennium intervening between him and the present day, belong to a literary culture in which there was a constant, reciprocal interplay between the venerated living tradition of poetic performance represented by the unmediated voice of orality- from the minstrelsy of the singer of tales, the Parthian *gōsān* and Armenian *gusan* to the art of the modern *Šāh-nāme-naqqāl*-[2] and the different authority of the written text, itself attested in diverse recensions. So, songs heard, and stories read, influence each other mutually, and over time.[3] Second: the regions I have termed "peripheral"- Central Asia and the Caucasus- were for the greater part of their history part of the Iranian homeland, and remained forever after steeped to the core in Iranian religion, language, and culture. Their testimony will be seen to complement that of the Persian tradition of metropolitan Iran, even to elucidate certain of its features. So in a way the scraps gathered from the distant corners of the banquetting hall are not foreign, after all, but part of an Iranian world civilization.

Prof. Nicholas Sims-Williams recently deciphered a number of documents in the ancient Iranian language of Bactria (that is, Balx), which was written in a modified Greek alphabet. A number of these come from the region near Samangan, home of Tahmīne and of Sohrāb (see the maps in the text figures);

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[2]At the end of the conference in Tehran, the participants were invited to an Azerbaijani *qahwe-xāne* in south Tehran to listen to recitation of the *Šāh-nāme* by masters of the art. Of relevance to the ancient connection I wish to propose here between the heroic code and mystical religious activity is the decoration of such an Iranian coffee house, which will include both paintings of Rostam's martial exploits and portrayals of 'Alī with the sword Zulfiqar. The axe, bowl, and other appurtenances of the dervish also decorate the walls. In such establishments, guests eat the indescribably delicious stew *āb-gušt* and drink tea (which is served with dates and cookies before the meal). They smoke the *qalyun* ("hubble-bubble"). So one comes to associate the performance with the joys of every other sense- the paintings and artifacts that greet the eye, the scent of apple-tobacco, the many tastes, the relaxation of reclining on the carpet-covered, raised platform, and of course the conviviality of friends. It is a powerful pleasure, if I may employ Tehrani slang, *zadan tu rag-* "to inject into the vein", that is, to enjoy to the hilt!

[3]The systematic and authoritative work on this issue, with reference to the *Šāh-nāme*, belongs to Prof. Olga Davidson. Objections to her study of its orality seem to rest in part on the mistaken presumption that such art either cannot or did not co-exist with literary sophistication and experience cross-fertilization with it; and these objections are accompanied on occasion by the entirely unfair suggestion that to propose such oral models is a kind of cultural denigration. It is a pleasure to express here my gratitude to her and the ILEX Foundation for enabling me to visit Iran, a joy that words cannot begin to express, and to assent to her theoretical approach.

and one, datable to the Sasanian period, mentions the proper name *Purlang-zin*, "the man with the panther's skin", which, Sims-Williams asserts, is "a clear reference to the *zīn-e palang* of Rustam."[4] This suggests knowledge of the stories about Rostam in the region north of Seistān where some of them are set, a good argument for their special popularity, some four centuries or more before the composition of the *Šāh-nāme*. Buddhism flourished in these regions; and, farther to the east, Sir Mark Aurel Stein a century ago found a wooden painted panel at Dandān-oiliq (a town known for its trade in ivory: an early Judeo-Persian document that has survived from there attests to its cosmopolitanism and economic importance) in ancient Iranian Xotan, the region south of the Taklamakan desert in what is now Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang province)(see text figure): on one side of it is painted a four-armed man with a halo, in the Persian dress of the Sasanian period; on the opposite side is a blue-skinned ascetic in a tiger's skin. On the basis of the dress and appearance of the first figure and what seems to be a mace (*gurz*) in one hand, Stein identified the four-armed, haloed man as a representation of Rostam as a *boddhisattva*- in Buddhism, a person who sacrifices his own immediate salvation in order to secure the liberation of the souls of others. And perhaps picture of the tiger-skin-clad ascetic is meant to be the same *palangzīn* hero in meditative retreat. If Stein's interpretation is correct, then there was an Iranian Buddhist understanding of the virtues Rostam exemplifies; and in fact this interpretation of the service, self-sacrifice, nobility, and discipline inherent in the heroic code as a religious quality can be demonstrated as common throughout the various cultures of Iran, in diverse ages.

We find support of this suggestion in the Middle Persian marriage contract and blessing of the Zoroastrians, the *Paymān ī kadag-xwadāyīh*, a text contemporary to the text from Bactria and the panel from Xotan, and which is still employed in the wedding ceremony of the Parsis, cites a dowry in dinars of Nishapur, suggesting a Xorasanian provenance appropriate to what follows; for the text further enjoins the groom to be a bringer of offerings or sacrifices (Phl. *zōhr-āword*), like Rostam. A popular and traditional Parsi Gujarati wedding song of India inspired by the Middle Persian text adds that the groom should be "heroic in valor" (*himmat mā pehelvān*), like Rostam; while the bride should be like Gošasp, the daughter of Rostam's son Farāmarz, who was herself a champion. (The *Farāmarz-nāme* was popular in India, in both Persian and in Gujarati translation.) On the southwestern side of Iran, a Gnostic sect of Mesopotamia and the Xuzestān region which displays very many ancient Iranian aspects, that of the Mandaeans- their name means, in Aramaic, simply "Wisdom", and they are often identified with the Sabaeans of the Holy Qur'ān, as a people of the book- preserved in their Aramaic writings a story, based in part on the character of Rostam in the *Šāh-nāme*, entitled "The Simorγ: the true history of Rustam and his son". It relates that Rustam worshipped a divinity named in Persian: Yazdān Pāk, that is, the Pure God, who was also called Xūr, the Sun; and he and his son were possessors of secret knowledge: Yazdān

[4]See Nicholas Sims-Williams, *New Light on Ancient Afghanistan: The Decipherment of Bactrian*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, 1997, p. 10.

Pāk gave the heroes- called *pahlawāns*- both wisdom and martial strength.[5] These testimonia from the Iranian periphery, as it were, provide an enriching background, of course, to the famous verse of Maulānā in the *Dīvān-e Šams-e Tabrīz*: *Z-in hamrahān-e sost-'anāser delam gereft/ Šīr-e Xodā ō Rostam-e Dastānam ārzū-st*! (My heart is tired of these weak-spirited fellow-travellers:/ My desire is for the Lion of God and Rostam, son of Zāl.) Here is the ultimate assertion of the hero's spiritual essence: the divinely-bestowed martial virtue of Rostam is linked to that of the ultimate champion, the Lion of God, *hazrat* 'Alī himself.

Ferdōsī relates, in the course of the narration of the reign of Kay Kaus, that Rostam came to Samangān because Turanian horse-thieves had kidnapped Raxš and headed that way. The princess Tahmīne fell in love with him and came to him by night. The king married them, and the hero returned to Zābolestān, giving the bride he left behind a jewel that he wore on his arm, instructing her to secure it to the arm of his son (should she bear a boy). Sohrāb was duly born to Tahmīne nine months later, but learnt who his father was only when he grew up- for fear of Afrasiyāb, the king of Tūrān, this news had been kept from him earlier. Sohrāb determined to overthrow all the kings and install his father on the throne: this filial intention, which was destined tragically to be thwarted by the crafty kings of both Iran and Turan, is the kernel of the tragic dénouement of the tale. But before this, Sohrāb goes to the *dež-e sepīd* (White Castle) and fights its defender, Hojīr, unseating the latter from his horse, then pinning him to the ground. Hojīr then *be-pīčīd ō bar gašt dar dast-e rāst*, "twisted around onto his right side", and begged for his life: Sohrāb ties him- *be-bast-aš be-band āngāhī razmjūī*- and grants him pardon. Now Gordāfrīd, the daughter of Gaždaham, lord of the White Castle, hears of Hojīr's defeat and goes out fully armed to fight Sohrāb. When he defeats her and sets her to flight, she pulls off her helmet. It is only then that the hero understands she is a girl; so he catches her with his lasso (*kamand*)[6]- for it would be unchivalrous to kill a woman. She then persuades him to release her, promising to surrender the fortress; but after returning to safety of the White Castle, she derides him (Warner tr., *ŠN*, II, pp. 131-3). A youth is born to be a hero, eventually finds out his identity, encounters a powerful and beautiful foreign maiden, and fights another man of her nation, perhaps a suitor: this, as we shall see presently, is the classical type of the Persian romance, probably one of the prototypes- along with the ancient Iranian story of Zariadris

[5]On the panel, see Sir Aurel Stein, *On Ancient Central-Asian Tracks*, 1932, repr. Jodhpur, 1984, pp. 64-66 and pl. 32; on the wedding song, J.R. Russell, "Some Parsi Zoroastrian *gārbās* and *monājāts*," *JRAS* 1989, pp. 51-63, esp. p. 60; J.R. Russell, "On Mysticism and Esotericism among the Zoroastrians," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 26, nos. 1-2, Winter/Spring 1993, pp. 85-86; and E.S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, Oxford, 1937, p. 372 f.

[6]In the Armenian epic fragments related by Movsēs Xorenac'i on king Artašēs I, 2nd cent. B.C., the monarch catches the Alan princess Sat'inik (cf. Satana, progenetrix of the epic heroes of the Alan Ossetes, the Narts) with a lasso- it is beautiful, and lovingly described- and drags her to him across the river Kura. On this see J.R. Russell, "Some Iranian Images of Kingship in the Armenian Artaxiad Epic," *REArm* 20, 1986-7, pp. 253-270. So the lasso in this context bears obvious and traditional symbolism.

and the Scythian princess Odatis recorded by Athenaeus, of which Ferdōsī records a version, as the romance of king Goštāsp (Zarēr's brother) and the Greek maiden Katāyūn.[7]

Abutting Bactria on the north was ancient Sogdiana (Suγd), also an Iranian land, no less richly cosmopolitan in its culture. The frescoes discovered by Russian archaeologists on the walls of the palaces of the city of Panjikant, now preserved at the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, bear scenes from a variety of literatures- the Greek fables of Aesop and the Indian epic *Mahabhārata*, and, notably, the Rostam cycle, which enjoyed special prominence. Some of the scenes have captions in Sogdian script; and Prof. Boris Marshak has reasonably suggested that a reciter of epic tales wounld entertain the assembled company, referring to the paintings on the wall, as is done with the *Šāh-nāme* in Iranian coffeehouses down to the present. The fresco of sector XXII:1, in a niche from the principal hall (see text figure) portrays a scene, hitherto unidentified, that I think is a variant of Sohrāb's battle at the White Castle: on the left, a warrior on horseback is fighting another on foot- perhaps Sohrāb and the unhorsed Hojīr.[8] In the next scene, to the right, the victorious warrior has dismounted and is binding his opponent, who has fallen. They are in front of a building- evidently, from its crenellated top, a fortress, from the roof of which someone, dressed like a man, is throwing stones at the victorious attacker. Another figure stands to the right. Perhaps the stone-thrower is Gordāfrīd, who has been associated with other scenes at Panjikant. There is an inscription in Sogdian on the castle-door, in which Prof. V.A. Livshits tentatively read the names (?) *dhvēnak* and *bagī*.[9] The incident of the White Castle, we recall, took place quite close by; while Afrasiyāb was a local figure; so the Rostam cycle was especially close to the Sogdians: there is a famous fragmentary text in Sogdian about Rostam, most likely a translation from Middle Persian, in which the hero is sleeping as the hordes of *dīvs*, mounted on all manner of beasts, attack- the ever faithful and wakeful Raxš rouses his master.

Rostam is known in Armenian written sources of roughly the same period as that of the Panjikant frescoes. The historian Movsēs Xorenac'i, whose *History of the Armenians* (*Patmut'iwn Hayoc'*) is variously dated between the fifth and ninth centuries- a date closer to the latter being the more

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[7]On this romance, see J.R. Russell, "An Epic for the Borderlands," forthcoming in Richard Hovannisian, ed., *Proceedings* of the 1998 UCLA Conference on Sophene/Tsop'k'.

[8]My Iranian colleagues at the conference pointed out that they have studied this painting, and think it unlikely Sohrāb would remain on horseback to fight a man on foot- it would be unfair and unseemly. Though I do not think such a contest impossible, I acknowledge the problem, and my identification is tentative.

[9]See Guitty Azarpay, *Sogdian Painting*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, p. 198 and A.M. Belenitzki, *Kunst der Sogden*, Leipzig, 1980, pp. 116-117. I am most grateful to my friend Dr. Mahmoud Omidsalar, with whom I discussed this scene and its relationship to the *Šāh-nāme*. See also A.M. Belenitskii, *Monumental'noe iskusstvo Pendzhikenta: zhivopis', skul'ptura*, Moscow, 1973, esp. pp. 33-4, 48; and Boris Marshak, "Sogd V-VIII vv., ideologiya po pamyatnikam iskusstva," in G.A. Brykina, ed., *Srednyaya Aziya i Dal'nii Vostok v epokhu srednevekov'ya: Srednyaya Aziya v rannem srednevekov'e*, ser. *Arkheologiya*, Moscow: Nauka, 1999.

likely, unless anachronisms are dismissed as interpolations- describes in II.8 the strength and heroism of the ancient Armenian hero Tork' Angełeay, that is, Tarhundas-Nergal, a composite Cyclopean storm god of old Anatolian and Mesopotamian mythology. The patron of the Movsēs was a prince, Sahak Bagratuni, whose family, though they bore an Iranian name (Pth. Bagarat derives from OIr. *baga-dāta-*, "God-given"), claimed descent from Tork'. Later, as good Christians, they "discovered" more appropriate Davidic ancestry; but Sahak pestered the learned and pious Movsēs incessantly with requests for the Iranian epic stories he loved; and Xorenac'i responds tantalizingly shortly and deplorably irritably here, as elsewhere: *Bayc' et'ē kamis, stem ew es yałags nora anyaj ew p'c'un, orpēs ew Parsikk' vasn Ṙostomay Sagčki hariwr ew k'san p'łoc' oyž asen unel. K'anzi kari imn anyarmar t'uēin ew nma erg baṅic' vasn užełut'eann ew srteay lineloyn: ork' oč' Samsoni ew oč' Herakleay ew oč' Sagčkin yarmarin ays zroyc'k'*. "But if you insist, then I'll tell senseless, foolish lies about him [Tork'], as the Persians do about Rostam the Saka's having had the strength of 120 elephants. For they recounted most incomparable songs that tell of his hearty strength; these tales surpass those of Samson, Heraklēs, and the Saka." For "Saka", Pers. *sagzī*, Xorenac'i uses the Parthian *sagčik*, which would suggest a local source rather than a southwestern, Persian one; but the reference alludes to the well-known epithet of Rostam, *piltan* "elephant-bodied", attested in the *Šāh-nāme*.[10]

Xorenac'i himself claims to have seen various Middle Persian books, though his knowledge of these is much disputed. He would have had access, in any case, to oral narratives, some of which he claims to have heard. Some of the stories incorporated by Ferdōsī into the *Šāh-nāme* were known to Armenians in Arsacid times- that is, even before the Sasanian period. For there are Armenian forms of other Iranian names associated with the Rostam cycle, that go back to Parthian rather than to Middle or New Persian, and thus provide additional evidence that the epic was recited by *gusans* in the Arsacid period. Avestan Frangrasyan, the source of Afrasiyāb, has a Middle Iranian form Frasyāg; and Armenian, with the characteristic Parthian change of *fr-* to *hr-*, has *Hraseak, attested in the toponym Hrasekaberd, "Fortress of Afrasiyāb". Avestan Syāvaršan is attested in Arm. as Šawarš, rather than the newer, Persian Siyāvōš. And, as will be seen presently, Arm. has the older form Spandarat for Ferdōsī's Esfandiyār. One should note here that Armenians early know also of another dramatic episode that we find in the *Šāh-nāme*. Avestan Thraētaona- yields Middle Persian Frēdōn; and Movsēs Xorenac'i knows the myth about Zohhāk, whom he calls Aždahak (cf. Avestan Aži Dahaka), and Hṙudēn- the Parthian form of thename of the hero Ferdōsī calls Farīdūn. A Syrian named Iamblikhos who lived in Armenia in the second century A.D. wrote a romance in Greek in which the hero and heroine are named Rhodanes and Sinonis- that is, Farīdūn, in Greco-Armenian garb, and Šahrnāz. So this aspect of the story, too, was known in Arsacid Armenia. Armenian Zoroastrians adapted the myth of the imprisonment of Zohhāk in Damāvand to their

[10]On Tork', see J.R. Russell, "Polyphemos Armenios," *REArm* 26, 1996-1997, pp. 25-38.

own use; and long into the Middle Ages blacksmiths (one recalls here Kāve the blacksmith, and his apron-standard) struck their anvils to strengthen the chains of Artavazd, who languishes in mount Ararat.

To return to Rostam, two episodes involving him are recounted, also, in the *Letters* (*T'ułt'k'*) of Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni, a Byzantine official of the 11th cent. who belonged to an Armenian noble family of Parthian origins. Grigor lived after Ferdōsī's time, and could have had access to a Persian text, but he calls Rostam's horse, Raxš, by the name Ṙaš, a Kurdish form (cf. Kd. *ṙeš*, "black") which suggests that he heard the story orally and locally. It is not clear whether the written text will yet have affected the narrative he summarizes, for the encounter with Esfandiyār as he tells it is quite different from what we read in Ferdōsī. It is noteworthy that the first episode, in which the sleeping Rostam is attacked and roused by the vigilant Raxš, parallels closely the contents of the Sogdian Rustam fragment, which is either an extraordinary coincidence or an indication of its special appeal. (The Sogdian fragment does seem to be a translation from a Middle Persian source.) Most likely the popularity of the passage would have derived from the notable propensity of villains or *dīvs* treacherously to attack heroes when they are asleep: compare the assaults by Grendel and his Mother, in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. Esfandiyār's name derives from Avestan Spəntō.dāta-, of which the well-attested old Armenian form, from Parthian, is Spandarat; so the form Spandiar encountered here would indicate a source contemporary to Grigor, probably Persian *via* a Kurdish intermediary. The stories illustrate a disquisition on sleep: that is all they have in common, though it was suggested by the late Prof. Babkēn Č'ugaszyan they follow each other directly in the narrative Grigor heard. *Isk omn merj aṙ Dabawandn koč'ec'eal leaṙn, Ṙostomn koč'ec'eal Sačik, erivar nma unel asi Ṙaš aysink'n ašxēn: ew zi k'noy ēr Ṙostomn ayn, spasēr nma mahu Diwzeł: ew zi oč' erbēk' nnjēr Diwzeł ayn, zgušut'iwn eṫeal Ṙostomeay, zor nayn xokayr: isk Ṙostomn bołk'eal erivarin Ṙašin zgušanal: ew na mišt oč' nnjēr: ew i mium gišeri hasanē i veray nora Diwzeł: gtanē zna arbeal: ew imac'eal zays Ṙašin, dabr hateal vrnjēr, minč' zart'uc'anēr zṘostom, ew ayspēs aprec'uc'anēr. Ew erbemn nnjeal k'nun Ṙostom, i veray haseal patahmamb Spandiarn anuaneal, spaṙnayr zDabawand i veray nora holovel. Zor zart'uc'eal ṙəstagēsn ayn sot'ahern aysink'n šaržeal zvarsn ibru erbemn Kṙonos yaknarkeln zOłompios ew i cayrs kawškin artakiteal i verj nahanjēr.* "And there was a certain one near the mountain named Damāvand, Rostam called the Saka, who had a steed named Raxš, which means dark-blue. Since that Rostam slept, Diwzeł of death lay in wait for him; and since that Diwzeł never slept, Rostam was careful, and kept him in mind; and Rostam scolded Raxš, telling him to be careful, too, and he always did not sleep. And on one night Diwzeł comes upon them and finds him inebriated. When Raxš realized this he stomped his hoof and whinnied, till he woke Rostam, and saved his life thereby. And once Rostam was fast asleep when the one named Spandiar came upon him by chance and threatened to roll Damāvand on top of him. That woke up the ṙəstagēs, or thick-haired one. That is, he shook his locks as Cronus once did when he looked at Olympus, kicking him back on the heel of his boot (?)." Diwzeł, it

has been suggested, is a transliteration of Pers. *duzax*, "Hell"- as though all the demons of the underworld were after Rostam- in the Sogdian Rostam fragment, they seem to be![11]

The *Šāh-nāme* in Persian was very popular in mediaeval Armenia- if not by the time of Grigor Magistros, then within a century or so after him. Kostandin of Erznka (modern Erzincan), who flourished towards the end of the 13th century, records *Ayr mi kayr ew Šahnamay asēr jaynov; nay ełbark' xndrec'in t'ē i Šahnamayi jaynn mez otanawor asay. Es šinec'i zbank's ays, i Šahnamayi jaynn kardac'ēk'*. "A man stood and recited aloud the *Šāh-nāme*; so the Brethren asked, 'Recite for us a verse in the meter of the *Šāh-nāme*.' I composed these words; read them in the meter of the *Šāh-nāme*."[12] Armenian does not have the long and short vowels of Persian; but Erznkac'i employs the stress of the final syllable to approximate the Persian heroic meter, in a poem that expounds upon the Christian cosmology, and forms part of a larger, didactic *dīvān*. The "Brethren" to whom Erznkac'i refers were probably members of a guild similar to those of the *'ayyārān* or *futuwwa*; so the context of the performance was very likely an oral recitation from memory, in a *zūrxāne*- a setting for such recitations even now. The recitation was in Persian, and was ultimately based upon a text in writing; so Armenians received the Iranian epic by this time through several channels: oral traditions in their own language going back to the time of the Parthian Arsacids, oral narratives in Kurdish and other more recent northwestern Iranian languages, secular written literature in Armenian, and oral and written texts of Ferdōsī in Persian. As for the institutions of the Christian "Brethren" and Muslim *'ayyārān*, these were embodiments of the social institutions and values that the Persian epics and romances themselves chiefly celebrated and inculcated; so the very milieu in which Kostandin of Erznka's friends enjoyed Ferdōsī was itself Iranian.

Mediaeval Armenian recorded lore is silent about Sohrāb, though his story was known well enough to have been adopted by Christians as a proper name. The first use of it, in the form Zawrhap (cf. Georgian Zurab) is attested from A.D. 1505.[13] But there is a text which may employ scenes derived from Sohrāb's career. In the 14th century Yovhannēs Orotnec'i refers to stories about one Šeranšah, "Lion-King"; and a character with a different form of the same name, Šahišeran, appears in a romance in verse of which the earliest MS. is dated to the 15th cent. This work, *Patmut'iwn Farman Mankann*, "The History of the Youth Farman", is replete with loan-words from Persian, and has Arabic loans received through Persian; and the names of characters are all Persian, too, mainly variants- as Prof. Omidsalar has pointed out to me- of names extant in Ferdōsī. The author attempted to compose the romance in Classical

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[11]K. Kostaneanc', ed., *Grigor Magistrosi T'łt'erə*, Alexandropol, 1910, no. 54, pp. 126-127; see also B.L. Č'ugaszyan, *Hay-iranakan grakan aṙnč'ut'yunner (V-XVIII dd.)*, Erevan, 1963, p. 95.

[12]See J.R. Russell, *Yovhannēs T'lkuranc'i and the Mediaeval Armenian Lyric Tradition*, Univ. of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 7, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987, pp. 6-7.

[13]H. Ačaṙean, *HAnjB*, vol. 2, pp. 212-213 s.v. He does not explain why initial s- has changed to z-, since this is not the pattern in Iranian names borrowed into Armenian. But the alternation of voiced to unvoiced stops and vice-versa is the most prominent difference between the Western and Eastern Armenian dialects.

Armenian, but the language he achieved is labored, and still bears many features of oral recitation. It has been suggested that it is a translation from an unknown Persian original, but I find this unlikely: except for individual expressions, turns of phrase of the sort that are naturally traded by neighboring tongues, the overall tone is that of secular Middle Armenian balladry, with little of the delicacy and subtlety of Persian style. Perhaps the tale is a paraphrase of a Persian original, rather than a translation, for the milieu is definitely not that of the Christian monastery: with the exception of a brief and altogether formulaic invocation of the Trinity tacked on to the very end, which may well be an interpolation, the romance has no Christian aspects at all: the prevailing mood is fatalistic, with occasional invocations of an "Immortal Father". Manuscript illuminations of a few scenes crudely attempt to reproduce the styles of Persian book painting, too. The plot of the romance of Farman resembles in several particulars the episode of Sohrāb's combat at the White Castle, and it is possible that the latter was one of its several sources, though the elements are general enough that this suggestion must remain a hypothesis. The Armenian story conforms precisely to the definition of the Persian romance enunciated by Hanaway: "The hero of each romance is a prince... [his] beloved is a princess, usually from a foreign land. Closely associated with him is his father, the old king... and several *'ayyārs*... opposing him will be an enemy prince with essentially the same sort of entourage, and often they will be pursuing the same girl. In all cases the hero is born to be a hero... he does not change or develop until after he reaches his mid-teens... When faced with a sudden or difficult decision, [the heroes] usually go to pieces and rely heavily on their advisors." The hero's *'ayyār* is typically "a speedy messenger who is also clever with words." The princess is inevitably "bold, aggressive, and beautiful."[14]

Here is the plot: Zarmanazan, king of Asorestan (Assyria, which to the mediaeval Armenians would be northern Syria) has no progeny, but the sage Musē (i.e., Musa), from Egypt, tells him the stars favor a son. This beginning plainly derives from the popular *Alexander Romance*, where the Egyptian Nectanebos predicts the birth of Alexander to Philip. When the boy is born, his father names him, appropriately, Farmān-e Āsmān. When he grows to maturity, he has a dream in which he fights a woman from Xorāsān named Tāj-e Daur, Crown of the Celestial Sphere. He consults Musē's books and informs his father he must go to Xorāsān for seven years. He takes his companions, chief amongst whom is the skillful, swift, eloquent, delicate Pāy-e Parr, Winged Foot- an embodiment of Mercury! When he arrives in the east he contests with the local *pahlavāns* and the princess, Šāh-e Šab Nūr, a sort of *Königin der Nacht* I suppose, falls in love with him. They exchange letters and meet secretly, but are seen by her jealous suitor, chief of the local *pahlavāns*, Pōlād-e Hendī, "Steely Sindi", who lies in wait for Farman on a donkey. But Farman and his friends climb over the roof, overpower Polad-e Hendi, bind, and kill him-

[14]W.L. Hanaway, Jr., *Love and War: Adventures from the Firuz Shah Nama of Sheikh Bighami*, Persian Heritage Series 19, Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1974, cited by J.R. Russell, "The History of the Youth Farman (*Patmut'iwn Farman Mankann*): A Mediaeval Armenian Romance," *Acta Orientalia* 50.1-3, Budapest, 1997, pp. 203-244.

all while Shah-e Shab Nur is in the house. The king, who likes Farman, imprisons him for his own protection. Pay-e Parr arranges his escape, and he and the princess elope and spend some time in a palace of delights. Farman remembers home, sings eloquently of the fate of the exile, and they depart for Asorestan. But the princess' father sends an army against them, which they of course defeat. Farman's father presides over their marriage, lives another three years, and dies; at thirty, Farman is blessed with a son, Šāh-e Šērān, Lion-King, who resembles him in all respects: Farman dies, abruptly, and a bit early, one would think, at the age of sixty.

Elements common to the story of Sohrāb and the White Castle are differently distributed here, and altered, with the suitor killed rather than spared, and the princess in the house as wife rather than antagonist; and the themes of the dream- in which the combat with the armed maiden is situated- and of the elopement, recall the romance of Zariadris and Odatis, or its treatment by Ferdōsī. In this version, Farman knows from the beginning who he is, a feature attributable to the contamination of the plot by the Alexander Romance; but there is also an **oral** tale of Farman, appended to the Armenian epic of Sasun, in which Farman is raised in a hostile environment, is called by the epithet *orbik*, "little orphan", and is told by his mother who his grandfather is (it being immodest for her to pronounce her husband's name) when he reaches maturity. Since the oral form of the tale contains elements of significance to the romance that the known written versions do not have, but which are in other written versions of closely similar romances, one may perhaps observe here, too, the reciprocal interplay of oral and written literature so characteristic of the Iranian tradition generally.

Having mentioned the Armenian oral epic of Sasun, one notes the recitations of the story of *Rostam Zal* that the chanters of the epic often know separately or weave into the epic itself, believing Rostam to be the offspring of one of the twin founders of the house of Sasun, Bałdasar, whose offspring went to Persia.[15] This cycle of stories, recorded first in the late 19th century by Armenian ethnographers, is preserved in various dialects, principally in the region of Van and the mountainous districts south and west of the city and its lake- Moks, and Ŗštunik', where Armeno-Kurdish interaction was particularly close. Ervand Lalayean collected in 1915 a recitation of *Rostam Zal* from an illiterate gardener (*bostančī*), Patur Połosean, of the village of Narek. He had learnt it from Usta Haro, a "singer of tales" (*hek'[i]at' əsoł*) who knew many other epic songs and stories in both Armenian and Kurdish. K. Melik'-Ōhanǰanyan published the text with an introduction some years later,[16] in free verse, though it had

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[15]Avetis Šahsuvaryan, *Šahnamen ev haykakan ałbyurnerə*, Erevan, 1967, citing the text of *Sasna cŕer*, I, Erevan, 1936, p. 491: *Dälü Bäłdäsar kə tĺnə, kə ha, k'ilnə parsik:/ Ŗostam Bäłdäsarə čłic' kə hävelana.*
[16]See *Firdusi*, Erevan: Pethrat, 1934, a collection of texts and studies by Armenian scholars in celebration of the millennium of Ferdōsī. I am deeply indebted to my good friend Prof. Dr. Garnik Asatryan (Univ. of Erevan), Director of the Caucasian Center for Iranian Studies in Armenia, for a photocopy of this rare volume, which was unobtainable in America. For the combat of Rostam and Sohrāb, see pp. 202-3.

been recorded in prose form. The primary source is evidently the *Šāh-nāme*, but the distribution of episodes is often different, and borrowings from the *dāstān* literature subsequent to Ferdōsī- mainly the *Barzū-nāme* and *Farāmarz-nāme*- are abundant. Proper names are generally transmitted in their Kurdish forms, though Rostam's horse is called Ṙäxš, not Ṙaš (as in Grigor Magistros' letter). The style is unadorned, shorn of the aesthetic delicacy of the Persian sources, and the narration is laconic, even the episode of Rostam's encounter with, and slaying of, his son Zohrab. Melikʻ-Ōhanjanyan considers certain passages: Rostam's selection of a horse by pressing the bellies of prospective steeds, for instance- to be borrowings from similar episodes in the epic of Sasun, where the wording is indeed similar; but he fails perhaps adequately to appreciate that, where such motifs are shared with the Iranian epic, their presence in the latter, and, moreover, their introduction into the Armenian oral epic corpus, are demonstrably anterior to the text of the Epic of Sasun and most likely were adopted into it. So the case is of an Iranian borrowing into an Armenian epic, re-borrowed from there into a later narration of an Iranian tale.

There is an additional cycle of stories in the dialects of the plain of Ararat and contiguous regions, collected and published at the turn of the 20th century by Bagrat Xalatʻeancʻ,[17] in which Rostam and his kin are the heroes of complex folktales, with nothing save their names to identify them as other than Armenian. The tragedy of Sohrāb, so much a focus of the aesthetic and thematic appreciation of the Rostam cycle, is present in the *Rostam Zal* cycle as an incident strangely lacking in centrality; but this most climactic, poignant climax- the battle between father and son- seems to me to have been appropriated by Armenian oral literature, as were other images and motifs from Iranian epic, in another place, where it is of appropriate importance. This is the combat of David and his son Mher in the Armenian oral epic called *Sasna cṙer*, "The Wild Men of Sasun", or, very often, *Sasuncʻi Dawitʻ*, "David of Sasun", after its principal character. Sasun, ancient Sanasun, is a mountain fastness west of Van, south of the plain of Muš, home of an isolated and proud Armenian population who rebelled against the Caliphate in 851 A.D. and were never again entirely subdued. The epic, which contains much ancient material, but which focusses upon the war much as the *Šāh-nāme* does on Iran's rivalry with Turan, has four principal chapters, called "branches" (Arm. *čiwi*), each representative of a generation. The hero of each age, incidentally, wears upon his arm a magic, flying emblem called the *xačʻ patrazin*, or Battle Cross, whose position recalls Rostam's jeweled armlet, and whose powers and locomotion make it equivalent, with the requisite alteration of religious symbolism, to the *farr* ("glory"; cf. the Arm. loan from Iranian of the same term, from OIr. *farnah-*, *pʻarkʻ*) that alights on Ardešīr ī Pāpakān. The heroes of Sasun all ride a talking horse named Kʻuṙkik Jelali, the Ferocious Little Colt, who is very much like Raxš.

[17] *Irani herosnerə Hay žołovrdi mēj*, Paris, 1901: I am at present translating this volume. The tale of Rostam Zal in the dialect of Moks was published by the great ethnographer and cleric Garegin Yovsēpʻean in *Azgagrakan Handēs*, year 6, vols. 7-8, Tiflis, 1901, pp. 205-254.

The third, and greatest, of the branches of Sasun is that of Sasunc'i Dawit', after whom, as was noted, the entire epic is often named. David, though not as physically imposing as Samson- to whom Xorenac'i had compared Rostam and Herakles- is the greatest of Biblical heroes, and, for Christians, a figure of great spiritual and temporal power, being the author of the Psalms and the lineal ancestor of Christ, as well as a powerful king. The Bagratid dynasty in Armenia, which came to power in the ninth century around the time of the revolt in Sasun around whose historical core the mythical and legendary narratives crystallize, claimed Davidic ancestry. We have seen the widespread religious importance accorded to Rostam; so it is not surprising that the hero most like him in Armenia's oral epic should bear a name of analogous weight and significance. David of Sasun, alone amongst the heroes of his line, but significantly in the Iranian pattern, is early orphaned, learning only in adolescence of his nature and mission. He becomes the strongest of the heroes, and the noblest; but the house of Sasun ends after Dawit', all unknowingly, fights his own son, P'ok'r ("little") Mher and later condemns the youth- whose name is a form of that of the Iranian *yazata* Mithra- to a kind of suspended animation till the end of time. The stratagem that pits Rostam against Sohrāb ensures that Iran's heroes will not supplant the royal line; in the case of the Armenian oral epic, where the traditions of monarchy recede after the first branch into a dim and unremembered past, the father-son combat becomes the dramatic vehicle whereby the heroic age itself is brought to a close. A great equestrian statue by Ervand K'oč'ar rises in the Armenian capital, Erevan, of Sasunc'i Dawit' (see handout). It is the country's best-known monument, the embodiment of the heroic ethos of the oral epic, of the Armenian *'ayyārān*, of the vary spirit of the people- and eloquent, decisive testimony, no less, to the antiquity, profundity, and power of Iranian culture in the land, of the bond that forever unites the peoples of Armenia and Iran- for Dawit' is, truly, the Armenian incarnation of Rostam.