

3 Būrān, the Daughter of Khusrāw Parvīz

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1 Shīrīn and Būrān

A late transformation of Shīrīn's character, the figure of Nigār in Jamālī's poem *Mihr va Nigār* (composed in 805/1403), is particularly meaningful in order to trace a possible line of development from Shīrīn to Būrān-dukht. *Mihr va Nigār* is a poem composed in response (*javāb*) to Niẓāmī's *Khusraw va Shīrīn*; the character of Nigār corresponds to Shīrīn in Niẓāmī's poem.⁵³ Jamālī gives fictitious names to his protagonists, and makes of Nigār, and not his male hero, Mihr, a descendant of the ancient dynasty ruling over Iran, having its court in Madāyīn – this being the Arabic name of Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sasanid kingdom. A particular helps place Nigār's fictional character in a precise historical context: according to Jamālī, Nigār is the daughter of Kisrā Thānī (The Second Khusraw), behind whom none other than historical Khusraw II Parvīz can be glimpsed, the hero of Niẓāmī's poem and the last great king of the Sasanid dynasty before the Arab conquest of Iran. The character of Nigār, then, reflects the figure of the historical Būrān (Bōrān), or Būrān-dukht, daughter of Khusraw Parvīz and queen of Iran (630-631 CE).⁵⁴

⁵³ London, Persian MS Ethé 1284, ff. 29v-86v. On this manuscript, the author and his work see Orsatti, "The *Ḥamsah* 'Quintet' by Gamālī".

⁵⁴ See on this queen Ṭabarī, *History*, V: *The Sāsānids*, 403-5; Bal'amī, *Tārīkh*, 2: 1198-201; and Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, 8: 391-6. On the chronology of her kingdom cf. Nöldeke, "Exkurs 1. Chronologie der Sāsāniden", 433; Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, 70; Chaumont, s.v. "Bōrān"; Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, 207-9. It is less likely that the character of Nigār

Nigār is a princess learned in all sciences, who lives in an ancient castle in the desert, near the royal court of Madāyin: it is the Qaṣr-i Shīrīn of tradition, of course. She cannot belong to any man because she is bound by a promise to her cousin Bihzād, who has asked for her hand. Soon afterwards, however, Bihzād is kidnapped by brigands, and nothing more is heard of him; a plausible narrative reason for the heroine's initial misogamy.

Apart from her initial misogamy, and her being a Lady of the Castle, no other feature pertaining to Turandot can be recognized in the character of Nigār. What is interesting, however, is that, through the character of Nigār, Jamālī gives his own authorial version as to the identity of the Lady of the Castle; the Lady of the Castle was not Shīrīn, Khusraw's wife, but Būrān, his daughter.

2 Būrān, the Wise and Combative Queen

Among the features attributed by the sources to this historical figure, one may be of interest in connection with the origins of the character of Būrān-dukht, the misogynist woman: queen Būrān is presented as a wise and combative queen, equal to a man. According to Bal'amī's account of her reign, after having appointed as minister the man who had killed the usurper to the throne of Iran, Farrahān Shahrbarāz,⁵⁵ Būrān summons the army to her presence, asking for obedience. She writes a letter to be dispatched to all cities and provinces of Iran, in which she enounces the principles of good rule, the first and foremost being justice. In this letter she openly asserts that, whoever follows these principles can rule over a kingdom, be it either a man or a woman (*čūn pādshāh dādgar buvad mulk bitavānad dāshtan, agar mard buvad va agar zan*).⁵⁶ In the *Shāhnāma*, the short report of Būrān's reign does not offer any relevant detail for the legendary development of the character, apart – perhaps – from a description of the cruel punishment reserved by Būrān for Pīrūz, one of Khusraw Parvīz's sons, responsible for the death of Ardashīr, son of Shīrūy.⁵⁷

In other sources, Būrān is mentioned in connection with the emerging Islamic power, and for having sent an army to fight the Muslim conquerors. For example in the *Mujmal al-tavārikh* (composed in 520/1127), in the section concerning Būrān's reign we read: "(Her reign) lasted a year and four months. It was the period of the (com-

could originate from the figure of another daughter of Khusraw Parvīz, Āzarm(i)dukht, whose reign is also mentioned in the *Shāhnāma*, 8: 397-400.

⁵⁵ On this personage see part I, ch. 2, §§ 4-5.

⁵⁶ Bal'amī, *Tārikh*, 2: 1198-201.

⁵⁷ *Shāhnāma*, 8: 390-396, especially 395, ll. 9-19.

ing to power of Islam (*rūzgār-i quvvat-i Islām*). She sent an army to fight against the Arabs. In the same period she died in Madāyin”.⁵⁸

In popular imagination queen Būrān must have been transformed into a warrior queen, endowed with masculine attributes, and even into a representative of the misogynist woman type. In a legend gathered by Abū Dulaf during his travels in Iran around the years 331/943 – 341/952,⁵⁹ queen Bōrān is transformed into the wife of Shahr-barāz, the usurper of the throne of Persia; she is narrated as having had Shahr-barāz killed on the very night of their wedding.⁶⁰

In a Medieval prose text, Ṭarsūsī’s *Dārāb-nāma* (twelfth century), the daughter of Dārāb son of Dārāb, i.e. Darius III – the princess Rawshanak/Roxane who married Alexander in other sources – is surprisingly called Būrān-dukht. This text shows that the transformation of the character of Būrān into a warrior and masculine woman had already been completed. Indeed, at the beginning of the section of the *Dārāb-nāma* devoted to Būrān-dukht’s story, Ṭarsūsī presents her as a beautiful and skilled girl. At the age of seventeen – he says – she was endowed with Siyāvakhsh’s appearance and Hūshang’s glory, and for her strength and courage she was like Isfandiār: she was capable of fighting with a mace of the weight of two hundred and fifty *man*. The author adds a physical detail: she had down (*khaṭṭ-i sabz*) on her lip, so that she looked like a man. Ṭarsūsī says that according to another tradition her name was Rawshanak, but she was called Būrān-dukht because of the down on her lip (*az ān sabab ū-rā Būrān-dukht guftand-ī ki ū pusht-i lab sabz dāsht*). She was said to despise men.⁶¹ Ṭarsūsī’s Būrān-dukht is a warlike heroine who – unlike Rawshanak – refuses to marry Alexander; she raises an army and fights against him and the Greek conquerors, only agreeing to marry Alexander when he happens to see her naked, while bathing in a river.⁶²

Concerning the character of Būrān-dukht, therefore, Ṭarsūsī allows a feature to emerge which probably originated from a development of the figure of Būrān, the daughter of Khursraw Parvīz: she was a queen, equal to a man. From Ṭarsūsī’s words moreover, when he says that Dārāb’s daughter was called Būrān-dukht because of her slight moustache, it appears that this name came to be used as a nickname for mustachioed, that is masculine women.

⁵⁸ *Mujmal al-tavārīkh*, 82.

⁵⁹ See Minorsky, s.v. “Abū Dulaf, Mis’ar b. Muḥalhil al-Khazraǧī al-Yanbu’ī”.

⁶⁰ Minorsky, “Two Iranian legends in Abū-Dulaf’s second risālah”, 177. See part 1, ch. 2, § 6 above.

⁶¹ Ṭarsūsī, *Dārāb-nāma*, 1: 467.

⁶² Ṭarsūsī, *Dārāb-nāma*, 2: 92. On the personage of Būrān-dukht in the *Dārāb-nāma*, see Šafā, “Introduction” to Ṭarsūsī, *Dārāb-nāma*, 1: p. yāzdah [11]; and Gaillard, “Introduction”, 40-6. See also Hanaway, s.v. “Dārāb-nāma”.

A historical analogy probably helped in the merging of the two characters, Būrān-dukht and Rawshanak, and their names: as Būrān was the daughter of the last great Sasanid king before the Arab conquest of Iran, Rawshanak/Būrān-dukht is transformed into a warrior heroine fighting against the Greek conqueror of Persia, Alexander.⁶³

63 My analysis of Būrān-dukht's character in the *Dārāb-nāma* is different but not incompatible with that offered by Hanaway ("Anāhitā and Alexander", 285-95), who sees in the character of Būrān-dukht a popular representation of the Iranian goddess Anāhitā. Venetis ("Warlike Heroines in the Persian Alexander Tradition"), calls into question Hanaway's thesis in favour of an unclear historical dimension of the Būrān-dukht character, and underlines analogies between Būrān-dukht and other fabulous characters such as Arāqit. Only in passing does he note that Būrān-dukht "bears the historical name of a short-lived Sasanian Queen" (229B).