

Shahrbānū, Lady of the Land of Iran and Mother of the Imams: Between Pre-Islamic Iran and Imami Shi'ism*

For Twelver Shi'is, as well as a large number of Sunnis, it is a fact that the third imam, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (killed at Karbalā' in 61/680), married the daughter of Yazdgird III, the last Sasanian emperor. Known more popularly as Shahrbānū, she gave birth, still according to tradition, to 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-Ābidīn (d. 92/711 or 95/714), the fourth Shi'i imam. Consequently, the line of imams, from the fourth to the twelfth and last, is said to be her progeny. The figure of Shahrbānū, Sasanian princess and mother of the imams, seems particularly important in the connections that link Imami Shi'ism to pre-Islamic Iran. The present chapter seeks to examine the origin, development and implications of traditions centred on this figure.

*Sasanian
Empire
defeated
at the
battle of
Qadisiya*

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Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/844–845), is undoubtedly one of the earliest authors to mention the mother of imam Zayn al-Ābidīn. However, he makes no mention of the fact that she belonged to the royal family of Iran:

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Her mother was a slave (of her father; *umm walad*) named Ghazāla who, after (the death) of al-Ḥusayn married Zuyayd *mawlā* of the latter and bore 'Abd Allāh b. Zuyayd, who is thus the uterine brother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.¹

Some years later, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) in his *Ma'ārif*, takes up the same information and adds to it somewhat:

As for 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn [known as] al-Aṣghar, al-Ḥusayn has no descendants except through him. It is reported that his mother was originally from Sind [*Sindiyya*; thus probably a slave from this region] named Sulāfa or Ghazāla who after [the death] of al-Ḥusayn became the wife of Zubayd [and not Zuyayd, as noted in Ibn Sa'd], *mawlā* of the latter, and bore 'Abd Allāh b. Zubayd, who is thus the uterine brother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.²

There is still no mention of the Sasanian royal family. Similarly, almost all the authors of the histories and earlier or later historiographical studies that chronicled the invasion of Iran and the fate of the last Sasanian sovereign and his family, usually with remarkable attention to detail, on this point are silent. They do however, with many variants, provide a list of the children, including the daughters, of Yazdgird III, but do not give the least indication about the eventual capture of one these daughters by Muslim soldiers or any relationship between her and the Shi'i imams.³ However, a report supplied by

1. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Beirut, 1377–1380/1957–1960), vol. 5, p. 211.

2. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Th. 'Ukāsha (4th edn, Cairo, 1995), pp. 214–215.

3. See e.g. al-Balādhuri (d. 279/892), *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. de Goeje (Leiden, 1866; rpr. 1968), pp. 262–313; elsewhere, in his *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 3 vols, ed. M. B. al-Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1974), vol. 3, pp. 102–103 and 146, al-Balādhuri writes that the mother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was a slave named Sulāfa originally from Sijistān; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940), *al-'Iqd al-farīd* (Cairo, 1316/1898), vol. 3, pp. 103ff.; al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345–346/956–957), *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. and Fr. trans. by Barbier de Meynard (Paris, 1861–1877), vol. 4, pp. 190ff.; in addition, al-Mas'ūdī devotes long passages to 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (see index, vol. 9, p. 112), but says nothing about his mother; Miskawayh (d. 421/1038), *Tajārib al-umam*,

'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Madā'inī, al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) well-informed Iranian source, says that around the year 31/650–651, during the conquest of Nisābūr, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir b. Kurayz, captured two daughters of the Kisrā family (*āl*), named Bābūnaj (= Bābūna/Bānūya?) and ṬHMĪJ or ṬMHĪJ (= Ṭahmīnaj > Tahmīna?).

According to another version, the event occurred during the siege of Sarakhs and the famous Arab conqueror offered one of two daughters to a certain al-Nūshajān (I shall return to this name), but the other died.⁴ Nowhere does the great historiographer say that these are the daughters of the Iranian king, or that there was any connection to the 'Alid imams. The same is true of sources as varied and historically far apart as the *Kitāb al-kharāj* by the Ḥanafī judge Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798) and the *Shāh-nāma* of the pro-Shi'i poet Firdawsī (d. 410/1019) both of whom, though surely for different reasons, took an interest in the fate of the last Sasanian sovereign of Iran and his descendants.⁵

One of the very first texts to suggest a connection between a daughter of the last Sasanian emperor and the imams seems to be *Kitāb al-akhbār al-ṭiwāl* by Abū Ḥanifa al-Dīnawarī (d. ca. 282/894–895). According to this text, under the caliphate of 'Alī during the

ed. H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth (*The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*) (London, 1920–1921), vol. 1, pp. 145–220; Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), *Akhbār-e Īrān az al-Kāmil-e Ibn Athīr* (excerpt from *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh* [rpr. Beirut, 1385–1386/1965–1966] and Persian trans. by M. I. Bāstānī Pārizī [Tehran, 1349 Sh./1971], pp. 209–335. The daughters of Yazdgird III, in varying number and diverse appellations according to the sources, are for example said to be named 'DRK (var. 'WZD, ARDK, ĀDhRK), ShHĪN (var. Shāhin, SHZ), MRDĀWAND (var. MRDĀWZNDĀ, MRDĀWĀR), Tahmīna, Bānūya (var. Bābūna).

4. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M. de Goeje, series 1, p. 2887; ed. M. A. F. Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, p. 302; on al-Ṭabarī and the conquest of Iran see the introduction by T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zu Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Leiden, 1879; rpr. 1973) and G. Rex Smith to *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 15: *The Conquest of Iran* (Albany, NY, 1994).

5. Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Beirut and London, 1985), p. 30; Abū'l-Qāsim Firdawsī, *Shāh-nāma* (Moscow edn, rpr. Tehran, 1350 Sh./1972), 9, pp. 358ff.

conquest of Nīsābūr, Khulayd b. Ka's, the newly appointed governor of Khurāsān,⁶ realises that one of the daughters of Kisrā who had just arrived from Kābul was leading a revolt against the Muslims. He fights the insurgents, captures the princess and sends her to 'Alī, who asks her if she wishes to marry his son al-Ḥasan. The young lady proudly replies that she will not marry one who takes orders from another (i.e. the son who obeys the father) but that she is ready to marry the caliph himself. 'Alī replies that he is too old, and lists the virtues of his eldest son; but the princess is not convinced. At this point, an Iranian noble, a *dihqān* from 'Irāq named Narsī, presents himself as a candidate for marriage; but 'Alī frees her, gives her liberty to go where she wants and allows her to make her own choice of husband.⁷ As we shall soon see, the complicity between 'Alī and the princess, as well her pride (a mark of nobility) and her freedom, are elements that play a key role in Shi'i versions of the account.

It was really after the third century AH, or perhaps from the second half of it onwards, that reports about the Sasanian wife of imam al-Ḥusayn increased in number. A contemporary of al-Dīnawarī, the philologist Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900) is perhaps the earliest, and undoubtedly the only non-Shi'i author of this period to report a tradition implying as much, in his *al-Kāmil fi'l-lughā*, by strongly emphasising the woman's nobility:

The mother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was Sulāfa, daughter of Yazdgird [the King], of noble stock (*ma'rūfat al-nasab*), one of the chosen women [due to the nobility of her race, *wa kānat min khiyarāt al-nisā'*]. [Regarding this] it is said that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was asked: 'You are one of the finest men [as regards treatment of parents,

6. Al-Ṭabarī, we have seen, believes this conqueror was 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir b. Kurayz. As for Khulayd, 'Alī's general, al-Ṭabarī identifies him as Khulayd b. Ṭarīf.

7. Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-tiwāl*, ed. V. Guirgass (Leiden, 1888), chapter on the battle of the Camel *in fine*, p. 163; Persian trans. by Ṣ. Nash'at (Tehran, 1346 Sh./1968), p. 169, tr. M. Mahdavi Dāmghānī (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1988), p. 191.

abarr al-nās] and yet you never eat from the same plate as your mother?' He replied, 'I do not wish my hand to reach for something that her eyes have already chosen, for fear of thwarting her desires.'

It is said about 'Ali b. al-Ḥusayn that he is the son of the two chosen ones (*ibn al-khiyaratayn*), for according to the Prophet's saying '[a]mong his servants God has two chosen ones; His chosen ones among the Arabs are Quraysh and among the non-Arabs (*al-'ajam*) are the Persians.'⁸

Several Shi'i authors who are exact contemporaries of al-Mubarrad repeat the same story. The chronicler Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb al-Ya'qūbī (d. 292/904) as well as the heresiographers Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ash'arī and al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (both d. ca. 300/912–913) limit themselves to a brief allusion to the fact that the woman in question was the daughter of the last Sasanian ruler.⁹

From this period onwards, it is above all the Imami authors who take up the theme. First, in his *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) reports, perhaps for the first time, an amplified version of the account that should be cited in its

8. Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, ed. M. A. al-Dālī (3rd edn in 4 vols, Beirut, 1418/1997), vol 2, pp. 645–646; on the *ḥadīth* mentioned and its sources see p. 646, note 2 by the editor.

9. Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883, rpr. Qumm, 1414/1994), vol. 2, pp. 246–247 and 303 ('Among the sons of al-Ḥusayn, 'Ali al-Akbar who had no descendants as he was killed [at a young age] at al-Ṭaff [Karbala'], and his mother was Laylā bint Abī Murra b. 'Urwa b. Mas'ūd al-Thaqafī; then 'Ali al-Aṣghar [i.e. Zayn al-'Ābidīn] whose mother was ḤIRĀR daughter of Yazdgird whom [her husband] al-Ḥusayn called Ghazāla'); al-Ash'arī, Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh, *al-Maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), p. 70; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shi'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), p. 53 (her name before captivity: Jahān Shāh 'sovereign of the world' bint Yazdgird b. Shahriyār; after captivity: Sulāfa). On the relationship between these two earliest heresiographical Shi'i texts, see W. Madelung, 'Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur', *Der Islam*, 43 (1967), pp. 37–52 (rpr. in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* [London, 1985], article XV).

entirety. This is a *ḥadīth* going back to the fifth imam, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. ca. 119/737):

When they sought to take the daughter of Yazdgird to [the caliph] 'Umar [b. al-Khaṭṭāb], she came to Medina; young girls climbed higher [to see her] and the mosque [where 'Umar presided] was illuminated by her radiant face. Once she caught sight of 'Umar inside the mosque, she covered her face and sighed: '*Ah bīrūz bādā hurmuz*' [in Persian: *Ah pīrūz bādā hormoz*; May Hormoz, i.e. Ahura Mazda, be victorious = may God be victorious?]. 'Umar became angry and said: 'She is insulting me.' At this point, the Commander of the Faithful ['Alī] intervened and said to 'Umar: 'Do not meddle, leave her alone! Let her choose a man among the Muslims and he will pay her price [to her as she is a slave] from the spoils he earned.' 'Umar then said to the girl: 'Choose!' She stepped forward and placed her hand on al-Ḥusayn's head. The Commander of the Faithful asked: 'What is your name?' 'Jahān Shāh [in Persian: sovereign of the world]', she answered. And 'Alī added: 'Shahr Bānūya also [in Persian: Lady of the Land + the typically Iranian suffix ūya].' He then turned to al-Ḥusayn and said to him: 'Abū 'Abd Allāh [al-Ḥusayn's *kunya*]! She will be the mother of your son who shall be the best of those living in the world [i.e. an imam in the person of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn].'¹⁰

At this point, the evolution of the tradition seems well under way, and as we shall see later, there will be other developments. Many elements in al-Ṣaffār's account are noteworthy; just as in al-Mubarrad, and perhaps even more so, 'Iranian-ness' and royalty are pronounced. For the first time, it would appear, Persian is used in the text. Although the sentence in Persian is much too short, the prose style seems older, modelled after expressions employed by Iranian

10. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Küchebāghī (2nd edn, Tabriz, ca. 1960), ch. 7, section 11 ('the imams speak all languages'), no. 8, p. 335. Regarding the author and his work, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi (d. 290/902–903) and his *Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt*', JA, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250. A. J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism* (Richmond, 2000), chs 5 and 7.

prisoners-of-war.¹¹ If my understanding of the sentence is correct, its purpose is to insist upon the piety (read monotheism) of the princess and certainly not her Mazdean faith (later versions of the tradition present a princess converted to Islam). 'Ali's intervention is obviously what is of most importance. Thanks to his knowledge of what is hidden and in the future, he recognises the princess and knows the fate that awaits her. Protection of the princess and perfect complicity with her, the fact that he speaks her language (hence the presence of this *ḥadīth* in this particular chapter) and that he insists upon her noble status (it is up to her to choose a husband), his vehement reaction to 'Umar, clearly explaining that he cannot rise to the occasion and that this event is beyond him, the prediction of the birth of a future imam, all fully justify the mention of the Light of royal Glory transmitted by the princess and the fact that this Light can even illuminate the Prophet's mosque in Medina, where the caliph of the Muslims presides.¹²

This information takes on great significance when we consider the importance of the notion of Light in Imamism, in which, briefly stated, the *nūr al-walāya* transmitted by seminal fluid and bearing initiatic knowledge and charisma is transmitted from

11. M. T. Bahār, *Sabk shenāsī. Tārīkh-e taṭawwur-e nathr-e fārsī*, 3 vols (2nd edn, Tehran, 1337 Sh./1959), vol. 1, ch. 5, pp. 208ff., on usage of the volitive *bādhā/bādh/bād* in Persian of the first three centuries of Islam, ch. 10, pp. 356–358; also S. Nafisī, *Tārīkh-e naẓm va nathr dar Īrān va dar zabān-e fārsī tā pāyān-e qarn-e dahom-e hejrī* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1966), vol. 1, p. 83.

12. On the Light of Glory *xvarenah/xwarr(ah)/farnah/farra* and its central role in the spiritual dimension of royalty in ancient Iran, see e.g. H. W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books* (Oxford, 1943), chs 1 and 2, pp. 1–77; also, Gh. Gnoli, 'Un particolare aspetto del simbolismo della luce nel Mazdeismo e nel Manicheismo', *AION*, N.S., 12 (1962), pp. 95–128, 'Axvaretem Xvareno', *AION*, 13 (1963), pp. 295–298 and 'Un cas possible de différenciation lexicale entre *dari* et *fārsī*', in C. H. de Fouchécour and Ph. Gignoux (eds), *Etudes irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard* (Paris, 1989), pp. 151–164; Duchesne-Guillemin, 'Le *xvarenah*', *AION*, s. linguistica, 5 (1963), pp. 19–31, 'La royauté iranienne et le *xvarenah*', in Gh. Gnoli and A. V. Rossi (eds), *Iranica* (Naples, 1979), pp. 375–386 and 'Encore le *xvarenah*', *Studia Iranica*, 20 (1991), pp. 193–195; P. O. Skjaervø, 'Farnah: mot mède en vieux-perse?', *Bulletin de Société de Linguistique*, 78 (1983), pp. 241–259.

imam to imam.¹³ Thus, from 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn onwards, the imams are the bearers of a twofold Light: the Light of *walāya* inherited from 'Alī and Fāṭima (and thus Muḥammad) and the Light of Glory from the ancient kings of Iran, transmitted by Shahr-bānū. Finally, to my knowledge, the text by al-Ṣaffār is the first in which the Sasanian princess is called by this specific name (in the form of Shahr-bānūya). The enigmatic turn of phrases exchanged between the princess and 'Alī is such that one is hard pressed to tell whether this name is indeed one of the names of the princess that 'Alī reveals, or whether it is he that confers the name on his future daughter-in-law.¹⁴ In either case, the acknowledgment and complicity between the parties is undeniable.

In his *Kāfī*, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940) calls the princess Salāma (surely a *taṣḥīf* of Sulāfa) and reports the same tradition as al-Ṣaffār with some minor variants.¹⁵ He

13. For more details refer to U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and light. Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *IOS*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–119, and 'Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī'a Tradition', *JSAT*, 1 (1979), pp. 41–65; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, sections II–1 and II–2, pp. 75–112 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–59), 'Twelver Shi'ism: Cosmogony and Cosmology', *EIr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–322, and 'Considérations sur l'expression *dīn* 'Alī. Aux origines de la foi shī'ite', *ZDMG*, 150, 1 (2000), pp. 29–68 (Chapter 1, this volume).

14. Shahr-bānū ('Lady of the Land', i.e. of Iran) seems to be a title for a queen or princess from the Parthian period, and not a first name. According to Firdawsī, *Shāh-nāma*, vol. 2, p. 909, Rostam's wife, Gīv's sister, carries this title; and according to Th. Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos* (2nd edn, Berlin and Leipzig, 1920), p. 7, Gīv was a Parthian ruler. Elsewhere, in the Parthian romance *Vīs o Rāmīn*, the queen mother Shahrū, mother of Vīs, is also called Shahr-bānū; Fakhr al-Dīn Gorgānī, *Vīs o Rāmīn*, ed. M. Mīnovī (and M. J. Maḥjūb) (Tehran, 1337 Sh./1959), see index under 'Shahrū'. On calling into question the Parthian origin of *Vīs o Rāmīn*, a theory maintained by among others V. Minorsky and M. Boyce, see A. H. Zarrīnkūb, review of the Maḥjūb edition in *Sokhan*, IX/10 (1337 Sh./1960), p. 1,015–1,018.

15. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī with Persian trans. in 4 vols (vols 1–3, Tehran, n.d.; vol. 4, Tehran, 1386/1966), Kitāb al-ḥujja, 'Bāb mawlid 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn', vol. 2, no 1. pp. 368–369. Main differences with the version by al-Ṣaffār: 1. The princess's sentence: *uf būrūj bādā hurmuz* (S. J. Muṣṭafawī renders it, without any explanation, in a curious Persian translation that is as unjustified as it is incomprehensible: 'Heavens! The

then adds: 'It was said of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn that he is the son of the two chosen ones, for the chosen of God among the Arabs are the (Banū) Hāshim and among the non-Arabs, the Persians.'¹⁶ Finally, al-Kulaynī ends his report with a verse that he attributes to the famous 'Alid poet from Baṣra, Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ālī (d. 69/688), and which he says is about 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn:

The son who links [i.e. who descends the same time as] Kisrā and Hāshim is the most noble among those who wear the amulet [against the evil eye]

(wa inna gḥulāman bayna Kisrā wa Hāshimin la-akramu man nīṭat 'alayhi al-tamā'imu).¹⁷

*is the most noble
son, in the sense of progeny*

existence of Hormoz is shrouded in darkness' (i.e. Hormoz is now unfortunate; *vāy rūzgār-e hormoz siyāh shod*). Perhaps he considered *rūj* to be synonymous with *rūz* (day, light) and so *bī-rūj* = *bī-rūz* = without light, obscure/dark; still, what does this sentence mean? Who might Hormoz be? The father of the princess is called Yazdgird b. Shahriyār b. Shirūya b. Kisrā Abarwiz. 2. Here, upon 'Alī's injunction it is nevertheless 'Umar who authorises the young woman to choose a husband. Did the version reported by al-Ṣaffār seem too audacious and thus improbable?

16. Cf. here above, the version by Mubarrad. Hāshim replaces Quraysh and the sentence is no longer presented as a Prophetic *ḥadīth*.

17. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 369. The poem does not appear in the *Diwān* by Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ālī, ed. M. Ḥ. Āl-Yāsīn (Beirut, 1974) and with good reason, the verse is modelled after that by Ibn Mayyāda, a poet from the Umayyad period, an Iranian (on his maternal side):

I am the son of Abi Salmā and my grandfather is Zālim / And my mother is Ḥasān, noble descendant of Persians

A boy linking Kisrā and Zālim / Is he not nobler among those who wear the amulet (against the evil eye)?

anā ibnu Abī Salmā wa jaddī Zālimū / wa ummī Ḥasān akhlaṣat-hā l'a'ājimu / a laysa gḥulāmun bayna Kisrā wa Zālimi / bi-akrami man nīṭat 'alayhi al-tamā'imu

Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡḥānī* (Būlāq, 1285/1868), vol. 2, pp. 262, 294, 330 and vol. 14, p. 104. As one might have realised, 'Kisrā' does not necessarily refer to an Iranian king but is perhaps a title of the nobility; see M. Morony, 'Kisrā' *EI2*; Ibn Abī'l-Thalj al-Baḡhdādī (d. 325/936–937) a contemporary of al-Kulaynī provides the following names for the mother of the fourth imam: Khilwa, Shahzanān, Shahrbanūya daughter of Yazdgird and daughter of al-Nūshahān (sic) (instead of Nūshajān; see *infra*); *Ta'rikh al-a'imma* (Qumm, 1396/1976), p. 24.

Another contemporary source, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, attributed to al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345–346/956–957), reports an account which includes some new elements. According to this, two daughters of Yazdgird are captured and reduced to slavery under 'Umar. The latter is ready to sell them. 'Alī then intervenes, declares that the daughters of a king are not sold in the marketplace and asks a woman from the *Anṣār* to present both girls for marriage to noble men from the *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār*. The first men to lay eyes upon them are 'Alī's two sons, al-Ḥasan, who marries Shahr-bānū and al-Ḥusayn, who marries Jahānshāh. 'Alī then tells al-Ḥusayn to take special care of his wife, for she will give birth to an imam.¹⁸ Although this report attempts to establish parity between the sons of 'Alī, thus reinforcing links between descendants of the Kings of Iran and the Shi'i imams, nevertheless, the last sentence underscores the fact that the imamate well and truly continues in the Ḥusaynid lineage. The report then adds that the mother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn died in Medina while giving birth.¹⁹ The child was entrusted to a nurse who nursed and educated him. He called the latter 'Mother', and once an adult, he gave her hand in marriage to his *mawlā*. The Umayyads (i.e. his adversaries) said that he was thus disgraced and dishonoured. Ibn Qutayba had already written that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn had given his mother (and not his nurse called 'mother') in marriage to the *mawlā* of his father al-Ḥusayn and that he himself had married a slave whom he liberated on that occasion. He was subsequently mocked by the Umayyad 'Abd al-Malik.²⁰

18. Al-Mas'ūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* (Qumm, 1417/1996), p. 170. C. Pellat opts instead for the authenticity of attribution of the book to the author of *Murūj al-dhahab*; see his article 'Mas'ūdī et l'imāmisme', in *Le shi'isme imāmīte*, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg (6–9 May 1968) (Paris, 1970), pp. 69–90; however, also refer to the very sceptical and often pertinent remarks by T. Khalidī, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī* (Albany, 1975), pp. 138, note 2 and pp. 163–164.

19. *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, pp. 170–171.

20. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, p. 215. Reproached by 'Abd al-Malik, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn would thus have opposed the example of the Prophet who had

With the next author, the renowned Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), this episode takes an enigmatic turn that perhaps has special significance. In his *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*,²¹ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq reports a tradition going back to the eighth imam, ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), in which the latter, finding himself in Khurāsān as heir to al-Ma'mūn, says to the Iranian Sahl b. al-Qāsim al-Nūshajānī: 'Between you [the Iranians, the Nūshajānī family?] and us [the imams] there is a relationship (*inna baynanā wa baynakum nasaban*).' Faced with the surprised reaction and curiosity of his interlocutor, al-Riḍā replies that the conqueror of Khurāsān, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿĀmir b. Kurayz, captured two of Yazdgird's daughters and sent them to the caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (the story, in keeping with historical accuracy, does not take place during the siege of al-Madā'in and ʿUmar's caliphate but during ʿUthmān's rule and the conquest of Khurāsān where the last Sasanian emperor and his family had sought refuge). The two daughters were given to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Both died during labour, al-Ḥusayn's wife while giving birth to ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. The account continues with the episode of the nurse. She was al-Ḥusayn's slave and the young ʿAlī knew no other mother but her; she was known by people as the 'mother' of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. As we shall shortly see, 'the people' here are synonymous with the adversaries of the imam, that is, the Umayyads from accounts by Ibn Qutayba and the (Pseudo-?) al-Masʿūdī. This point in the account is interrupted by an enigmatic sentence that may be interpreted in two ways according to whether we read the verb zawwaja in the active or passive form:

Umar uses this term for Quraysh

- And people claimed that he (i.e. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn) gave his 'mother's' hand in marriage (*zawwaja ummahu*).

married the freed slave Ṣafiyya bint Ḥuyayy and who gave the hand of his cousin – the daughter of his paternal aunt – Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, in marriage to his liberated *mawlā*, Zayd b. Ḥāritha.

21. Ed. M. al-Ḥusaynī al-Lājevardī (Tehran, 1378/1958), vol. 2, ch. 35, no. 6, p. 128; Persian trans. by Riḍāʾī and Ṣāʾidī, based on the edition by M. B. Biḥbūdī (Tehran, 1396/1976), vol. 2, p. 487.

- And people claimed that he married his 'mother' (*zuwwija ummahu*).

Admittedly the first reading in the active form is more plausible and more in keeping with versions already cited by Ibn Qutayba and the (Pseudo-?) al-Mas'ūdī. However, one may wonder why the complement of the verb is not given: to whom did 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn give his 'mother' in marriage? The verb *zawwaja* in the active form, in the sense of to 'marry a woman', is almost always employed with the direct accusative of the female and with *min* or *bi-* of the male.²² Here we have only *zawwaja ummahu*, which enables a reading in the passive (*zuwwija* in the passive is synonymous with the fifth form *tazawwaja*), so much so that the text immediately adds *ma'ādh Allāh*, 'it displeases God', as if to highlight the ignominy of the assertion, namely marrying one's own mother (as if the first interpretation were not as scandalous!).²³ The question may justifiably be asked: while the traditions reported by Ibn Qutayba and (Pseudo-?) al-Mas'ūdī are clear, even syntactically, why does the tradition reported by Ibn Bābūya maintain (deliberately no doubt) an ambiguity that creates confusion?

I will be advancing a hypothesis that may seem audacious but is plausible in the context of this tradition. Since the account seeks to link the descendants of pre-Islamic Iranian kings to the Shi'i imams, one can reasonably believe that the listeners and/or

22. Ibn Qutayba: *zawwaja 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn ummahu min mawlāh*; al-Mas'ūdī (attrib.): *zawwajahā bi-mawlāh*.

23. In the next part of the account, we encounter the same issue twice: *fa-zawwaja-hā/fa-zuwwija-hā* and *zawwaja/zuwwija 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn ummahu*. The Persian translators of *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* opt for the first interpretation; however, S. J. Shahīdī, in his excellent article on the popular beliefs regarding Shahrbanū (an article that I will revisit further below), prefers the second interpretation, pointing out the fact that from ancient times, according to popular belief, the despicable Umayyads had arranged to circulate a rumour that the fourth imam had married his own mother; Sayyid Ja'far Shahīdī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye Shahrbanū', in *Cherāgh-e rowshan dar donyā-ye tārik* (Tehran, 1333 Sh./1954–1955), pp. 175–176.

readers sensitive to this fact saw in the episode of the marriage of the 'mother' a similarity to the notion of *xwētōdas/xwēdōdah*, the incestuous marriage of the kings, priests and nobility of ancient Iran.²⁴ The Muslims had heard – admittedly only rather superficially – of this practice and the educated folk, especially the supporters of 'Arab-ness' did not miss an opportunity to recall this episode in order to point out the decadence and corruption of pre-Islamic Iranian culture.²⁵ In this context, our tradition seems to have two objectives in mind: first, in the eyes of Muslims in general, and more specifically the Shi'is, to clear the Iranians of early times of this accusation which ultimately stems from misinformation and slander from malicious adversaries (not unlike the rumours spread by the Umayyads regarding the fourth imam). The 'incestuous marriage' is only a metaphor and symbol, just as the appellation 'mother' for the nurse is a metaphor. Then, in the eyes of the Iranian converts – or those about to adopt Imami Shi'ism – the fourth imam is described as one who perpetuates a highly respected symbolic practice (since according to ancient Iranian belief, a son issued from *xwētōdas/xwēdōdah* is the most

24. Ever since the publication of the fundamental text by E. W. West, 'The Meaning of the *Khvêtūk-das* or *Khvêtûtâd*', in *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. M. Müller, vol. XVIII, *Pahlavi Texts*, Part II: *The Dâdistân-i Dinik and the Epistles of Manuchikar* (Oxford, 1882), Appendix 3; see J. S. Slotkin, 'On a Possible Lack of Incest Regulations in Old Iran', *American Anthropologist*, 49 (1947), pp. 612–617; on the same point, W. H. Goodenough, 'Comments on the Question of Incestuous Marriages in Old Iran', *American Anthropologist*, 51 (1949), pp. 326–328; B. Spooner, 'Iranian Kinship and Marriage', *Iran*, 4 (1966), pp. 51–59 and esp. C. Herrenschildt, 'Note sur la parenté chez les Perses au début de l'empire achéménide', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (eds), *Achaemenid History*, vol. II: *The Greek Sources* (Leiden, 1987), pp. 53–67, and 'Le *xwētōdas* ou mariage "incestueux" en Iran ancien', in P. Bonte (ed.), *Epouser au plus proche. Inceste, prohibitions et stratégies matrimoniales autour de la Méditerranée* (Paris, 1994), pp. 113–125.

25. See e.g., al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn, 4 vols (rpr. Cairo, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 260, and *al-Hayawān*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn, 7 vols (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 5, p. 324; Abū'l-'Alā al-Ma'arri, *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, ed. Khānjī (Cairo, 1924), vol. 1, p. 172. For other sources see esp. G. Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes. 'Abdal-Jabbār et ses devanciers* (Paris, 1974), index under 'inceste'.

worthy to become either a priest or a king, in other words, the most capable of holding spiritual and temporal powers), is in Shi'i terms, an imam par excellence. I will have much more to say regarding the tradition reported by al-Ṣadūq, and it seems to me that what remains to be said about it in due course will corroborate even more so what has just been observed.

* The disciple of Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), introduces yet more variants to the texture of the story. In his *Irshād*, he very briefly mentions that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Akbar's (and no longer al-Aṣghar) mother was Shāh-i Zanān,²⁶ daughter of Kisrā Yazdgird (and further Yazdgird b. Shahriyār b. Kisrā). The story here apparently takes place during 'Alī's caliphate, when 'Alī, through his agent Ḥurayth b. Jābir al-Hanafī,²⁷ who was sent to the East (*al-mashriq*, often synonymous with Khurāsān), received the two daughters of the Iranian emperor. 'Alī offers the first, Shāh-i Zanān, to his son al-Ḥusayn and by her he fathers Zayn al-Ābidīn; he offers the second (she is not named) to his supporter Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (son of the first caliph), who fathers a son by her, al-Qāsim.²⁸ To my knowledge, the brief version by al-Mufīd, that introduces Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr into the story is without precedent. When one considers the nature of his work as a whole (apart perhaps from his *Kitāb al-ikhtiṣāṣ*) and his position in Buyid Baghdad,²⁹ one can

26. Most probably instead of the Shāh-i Jahān/Jahān-Shāh that we have already encountered; in any case, it is a more appropriate variant as it means 'Sovereign (lit. King) of women'. According to al-Ṭabarī the title of Shāh-i Zanān was held by the Sasanian queen Būrān/Pūrān (Dokht) who ruled briefly in her own name, in 9-10/630-631; see Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 399 and note.

27. On him see e.g. al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl* (Najaf, 1380/1961), p. 39, no. 26.

28. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, text and Persian translation with commentary by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1346 Sh./1968), vol. 2, ch. 5, p. 137 and ch. 6, p. 138.

* || 29. See M. J. MacDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (d. 413/1022) (Beirut, 1978); A. A. Faqīhī, *Āl-e Būye va owḍā'-e zamān-e īshān* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), index, under 'Mufīd'; see *Guide divin*, index, under 'Mufīd'.

perhaps suggest that he sought through this to bring the Shi'is and Sunnis closer. But this version seems not to have had any future either.

On the other hand, his Iranian contemporary, Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, known as Ibn Rustam (fifth/eleventh century), reports one of the longest and most interesting versions of the Shahrbānū tradition in his *Dalā'il al-imāma*.³⁰ To summarise: when the Persian captives arrived in Medina, 'Umar wanted to sell them as slaves. 'Alī vigorously defended the Iranians and, referring to the sayings of the Prophet, insisted on their nobility and pure intentions, all the while declaring that it was foretold that he would have descendants by them (*lā budda min an yakūna lī minhum dhurriyya*). Upon this, he liberated the slaves belonging to him. The Banū Hāshim, *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār*, in other words, those considered the noblest among Muslim Arabs, followed suit by offering their shares to 'Alī. Thwarted, 'Umar was obliged to do the same.

'Alī then declared that the Persian women now freed were to choose their husbands for themselves, if they so wished. It is thus that Shahrbānūya bint Kisrā was able to choose al-Ḥusayn as her husband and 'Alī as 'godfather' (*wālī*). One of the 'pillars' (*arkān*) of Imamism, Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān al-'Absī,³¹ 'Alī's famous Companion, read the marriage sermon (*khuṭba*). It is also reported that Shahrbānūya had a sister, Morvārīd ('Pearl'), who chose al-Ḥasan for her husband. An important section of the account concerns the dialogue in Persian interspersed with Arabic between 'Alī and the princess:

'Alī: *'Mā ismukī?* [Arabic] What is your name?

Princess: *'Shāh-i Zanān*'. [Persian] Sovereign [lit. King] of Women.

30. Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma* (Qumm, 1413/1992), pp. 194–196; an abridged version of this tradition is also reported in the early anonymous text, *Alqāb al-rasūl wa 'itratihi in Majmū'a nafisa fī ta'rīkh al-a'imma* (Qumm, 1406/1985), p. 253.

31. For more information and further sources concerning him, now consult M. Lecker, 'Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān and 'Ammār b. Yāsir. Jewish converts to Islam', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 11 (1993), pp. 149–162.

'Alī: 'Na Shāh-i Zanān nīst *magar* dukhtar-i Muḥammad wa hiya sayyidat nisā' [sic, *nisā*' without the article] anti Shahr-bānūya wa ukhtuki Murwārid bint Kīsrā.' [Persian] No! No one is the 'Sovereign of Women' except for Muḥammad's daughter [i.e. Fāṭima] [Arabic] who is Sayyidat [al-]Nisā' [which may also be translated as 'Sovereign of Women']. You are Shahr-bānūya and your sister is Morvārid, daughter[s] of Kīsrā.

Princess: 'Āriya.' [Persian] Yes.³²

The Persian of the text is from the fourth and fifth/tenth and eleventh centuries:³³ the Pārsī *magar* as a particle of exception has replaced the Sasanian Darī *judh* (or *judhāk*) or *bēyēk*.³⁴ The same is true for the Pārsī negative *na* that replaces *nai*. The verbal form *nīst* (*na/nē* + *ast*) seems to date from the third and fourth/ninth and tenth centuries.³⁵ And it is noteworthy that, for the first time, a parallel is established between Shahr-bānū and Fāṭima. This point is all the more striking because even the name of Shāh-i Zanān (see note 26 above) seems to correspond to some famous titles given to Fāṭima: 'Sayyidat al-Nisā', 'Sayyidat Nisā' al-'Ālamīn', 'Sayyidat al-Niswān', 'Sayyidat Nisā' al-Dunyā

32. Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, p. 196. On the theory of the ancient Iranian origin of the term *morvārid* (pearl) and the refutation of its supposed late Greek etymology, see B. Sarkārāti, 'Morvārid pīsh-e khūk afshāndan', reprinted in his *Sāye hā-ye shekār shodeh* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), pp. 51–70, esp. pp. 64–70. On the Mithraic symbolism of the pearl, see M. Moqaddam, *Jostār dar bāre-ye Mehr va Nāhid* (Tehran, 1978), pp. 32ff. Cf. also I. Gershevitch, 'Margarites the pearl', in Fouchécour and Gignoux (eds), *Etudes irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard* (Paris, 1989), pp. 113–136.

33. M. T. Bahār, *Sabk-shenāsī*, vol. 1, ch. 9, p. 283ff.

34. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 336; S. Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-e naẓm va nathr*, vol. 1, p. 94. On these various Iranian languages refer also to G. Lazard, 'Pahlavi, pārsī, dari: les langues de l'Iran d'après Ibn al-Muqaffa', in C. E. Bosworth (ed.), *Iran and Islam: In Memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 361–391, and 'Pārsī et dari: nouvelles remarques', in C. Altman et al. (eds), *Aspects of Iranian Culture: In Honour of Richard Nelson Frye. Bulletin of the Asian Institute*, N.S. 4 (1990), pp. 141–148; both articles have now been published in G. Lazard, *La formation de la langue persane* (Paris, 1995), sections 3 and 9.

35. M. T. Bahār, *Sabk-shenāsī*, vol. 1, ch. 10, pp. 343–344 and 349ff.

wa al-Ākhira', etc.³⁶ Although the parallel obviously flatters Shahrībānū, it simultaneously underscores Fāṭima's superiority.

During this same fifth/eleventh century, the Ziyārid prince 'Unṣur al-Ma'ālī Kay Kāwūs b. Iskandar, probably a Sunni, also reports a beautiful version of the story in his *Qābūs-nāma*, one of the masterpieces of medieval Persian prose. The captive princess, here called Shahrībānū, is on the verge of being sold by the caliph 'Umar. Then 'Alī enters the story and dissuades him by citing a Prophetic *ḥadīth*, according to which 'the progeny of kings are not to be bought and sold (*laysa'l-bay' 'alā abnā' al-mulūk*)'. Shahrībānū is then respectfully taken to Salmān al-Fārisī, another stalwart hero of Shi'ism. Seated beside him, she declares that it is up to her to choose her husband. She acknowledges 'Umar's nobility but finds him too old.³⁷ Regarding 'Alī she announces: 'He is truly noble and suits me but I would be ashamed before Fāṭima al-Zahrā in the hereafter; so I do not want him.' Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī is also deemed worthy but the princess says that he already has many wives. Finally, al-Ḥusayn is chosen, for his nobility surely, but also because he is a virgin as is Shahrībānū, since (as it is said) 'for a virgin bride, she says, only a virgin groom will do (*dokhtar-e dūshīze rā shū-ye dūshīze bāyad*)'.³⁸

In the next century, in his *Manāqib*, Ibn Shahrāshūb al-Māzandarānī (d. 588/1192) records the tradition reported by al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and especially that by Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr that he

36. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, 3 vols (Najaf, 1956), 'Bāb manāqib Fāṭima; faṣl fī ḥilyatihā wa tawārikhihā', vol. 3, p. 133; Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *'Uyūn al-mu'jizāt* (Najaf, 1369/1950), pp. 46–47.

37. The account clearly seeks to rehabilitate the second caliph and to restore his image tarnished by Shi'i versions.

38. 'Unṣur al-Ma'ālī Kay Kāwūs b. Iskandar b. Qābūs b. Voshmgīr, *Qābūs-nāma*, ed. Gh. Ḥ. Yūsufi (8th edn, Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), ch. 27 and pp. 137–138. Cf. al-Rāzī al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 460/1068), *Ta'rikh Ṣan'ā'*, ed. Ḥ. b. 'A. al-'Amrī (Beirut–Damascus, 1989), p. 109 (*khiyarat Allāh min Quraysh wa khiyaratuhu min Fāris*). Here, the Arabic name of Shahrībānū is Ḥabbadhā.

reproduces in a version with significant variants.³⁹ In general, Ibn Shahrāshūb's version summarises the text from *Dalā'il al-imāma* or its source, which tends to show – if still necessary – that numerous versions of the Shahrbānū story were simultaneously in circulation in Imami milieus. The dialogue in Persian interspersed with Arabic has been deleted. Greater emphasis is placed on the wisdom and nobility of the entire Iranian people ('the Persians are wise and noble', *al-furs hukamā' kuramā'*)⁴⁰ as well as on the Light that is al-Ḥusayn ('auro-ral light and glistening star', *al-nūr al-sāfi' wa al-shihāb al-lāmi'*).⁴¹ Elsewhere, Ibn Shahrāshūb provides other information in fragments regarding Shahrbānū: she is the mother of imam 'Alī al-Aṣghar Zayn al-Ābidīn.⁴² She was present at Karbalā', and after the massacre of al-Ḥusayn and his family she drowned herself in the Euphrates to escape the humiliation of captivity by Yazīd.⁴³ The poem about imam Zayn al-Ābidīn with a reference to the Prophet's *ḥadīth* on the Quraysh and Persians as the 'Two chosen of God' (based on the *Rabī' al-abrār* by al-Zamakhsharī) was attributed to Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ālī (see al-Kulaynī's version above).⁴⁴ Finally, there is a passage on the different names for the mother of the fourth imam:

His mother was Shahrbānūya, daughter of Yazdgird b. Shahriyār al-Kisrā; one still called her Shāh-i Zanān, Jahān Bānūya, Sulāfa, Khawla and Shāh-i Zanān bint Shīrūya b. Kisrā Abarwīz and Barra bint al-Nūshajān [I shall comment on this name], but [only?] the first name is correct (*al-ṣaḥīḥ huwa'l-awwal*). The Commander

39. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, 'Bab fī imāmat Abī 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn, faṣl fī'l-muqaddimāt', vol. 3, pp. 207–208.

40. Ibid. p. 207.

41. Ibid., p. 208, l. 8.

42. Ibid., 'Bāb fī imāmat al-Ḥusayn, faṣl fī tawārīkhihi wa alqābihi', vol. 3, p. 231.

43. Ibid., 'Faṣl fī maqtalihi', vol. 3, p. 259.

44. Ibid., 'Bāb imāmat Abī Muḥammad 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, faṣl fī siyādātihi', vol. 3, pp. 304–305.

shihāb
"star"
lāmi
"glistening"

of the Faithful ('Alī) had called her Maryam and, it is said, also Fāṭima. She bore the title of Sayyidat al-Nisā'.⁴⁵

Two brief comments may be made about this list: first, the parallel with Fāṭima becomes more pronounced since Shahrbanū bore the name of Fāṭima (what is more, a name that was given in person by 'Alī) as well as her title: 'Sovereign of Women'. Then, with 'Barra bint al-Nūshajān', this is the third time the name Nūshajān (see the texts by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Bābūya above) is encountered. I shall address this more extensively below.

During the same period, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1177–1178) reports in his *al-Kharā'ij* what appears to be the last noteworthy version so far known of the Shahrbanū tradition.⁴⁶ The Iranian scholar seems to have endeavoured to report a version that would be a synthesis of many others (al-Ṣaffār, al-Kulaynī, Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr), even including some additional information. According to this tradition, which goes back to the fifth imam, the story took place during 'Umar's caliphate. The princess arrived in Medina, bathed in light (al-Ṣaffār's version is slightly less dramatic at this point for it is no longer the mosque [*masjid*] where the caliph presides that is illuminated by the face of the young girl, but the place where the caliph sits [*majlis*]). In this account there is the princess's exclamation (here *a firūzān*), the caliph's anger, 'Alī's intervention, the freeing of the princess and her choice of al-Ḥusayn as husband. At this point, al-Rāwandī reports a new dialogue in Persian interspersed with Arabic between 'Alī and the young woman:

'Alī [Persian]: '*Che nāmī dāri ay kanīzak*. Young lady, what is your name?' (Arabic): '*Ay aysh ismuki yā ṣabiyya*. What is your name, young lady?'

Princess [Persian]: '*Jahān Shāh bār khudhāh*; Jahān Shāh, O Lord!'

45. Ibid., 'Faṣl fi aḥwālīhi wa ta'rīkihi', vol. 3, p. 311.

46. Al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa'l-jara'ih* (Qumm, 1409/1988–1989), vol. 2, ch. 15, no. 67, pp. 750–751.

'Alī [as if a question]: 'Shahrbānūya?'

Princess [Persian]: 'Kh(w)āharam Shahrbānūya. My sister [is called] Shahrbānūya.' [Arabic]: 'Ay tilka ukhti.' That's my sister.

'Alī [Persian]: 'Rāst gofti.' You have spoken the truth. [Arabic]: 'Ay šadaqti.' You are right.

Then 'Alī speaks to al-Ḥusayn and tells him that his new wife is 'the Mother of the Legatees [i.e. the imams], those of pure descent' (*umm al-awṣiyā' al-dhurriyya al-ṭayyiba*, sic).

Once again the Persian is of a later period, that is, at the earliest dating from the fourth/tenth century. The interrogative particle *che* (those), vocatives (*ay* and *bār*) as well as the diminutive *ak* (in *kanīz-ak*) are evidence of this.⁴⁷ Al-Rāwandī then reports that the princess died giving birth to 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn and finally gives the 'extraordinary account' (*qiṣṣa 'ajība*) of her conversion to Islam. According to this account, before the arrival of the Muslim army, the princess experienced two dreams. In the first, she sees the Prophet Muḥammad accompanied by al-Ḥusayn arriving at her father's palace. He gives her in marriage to al-Ḥusayn, after a sermon delivered by the Prophet. In the second dream, she sees Fāṭima, who converts her to Islam and predicts the arrival of Muslim troops, adding that no harm will come to her as she is promised to her son al-Ḥusayn.

Slightly before the accounts of Ibn Shahrāshūb and al-Rāwandī, the anonymous Iranian author of *Mujmal al-tawārīkh*, a Persian text written in 520/1126, calls the wife of imam al-Ḥusayn 'Shahrnāz' (Bounty of the Land; a *taṣḥīf* for Shahrbānū?), daughter of Yazdgird the King or Subḥān (a *taṣḥīf* for Nūshajān?), King of Persia (*malek-e Pārs*).⁴⁸ Other authors – whether Imami or

47. M. T. Bahār, *Sabk-shenāsī*, respectively 1:406, 408 and 413–416; P. Nātel Khānlari, *Zabān shenāsī-ye fārsī* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1344 Sh./1966), pp. 70–71.

48. Anonymous, *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa'l-qiṣaṣ*, ed. M. T. Bahār (Tehran, 1318 Sh./1940), p. 456.

not – such as al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153), 'Alī b. 'Īsā al-Irbilī (d. 693/1293) and Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) to the relatively modern al-Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1320/1902), including Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699–1700) and his disciple 'Abd Allāh al-Baḥrānī al-Iṣfahānī, do no more than reproduce one or more of the reports just described.⁴⁹ Between the third/ninth and the sixth/twelfth century, the Shahr-bānū story would have reached full evolution, at least in its literary written form. As we shall see, the oral version spread via by popular beliefs underwent a different process.

2

According to the earliest sources, the mother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-Ābidīn, known as 'Alī al-Aṣghar, was an oriental slave, originally from Sind or Sijistān, thus perhaps actually Iranian, since both regions were provinces of the former Sasanian empire. Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, her master and then spouse, called her Sulāfa

49. See e.g. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī/Ṭabarsī, *I'lām al-warā* (Najaf, 1390/1970), p. 256; al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, 1381/1961), vol. 2, p. 107; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirat khawāṣṣ al-umma* (rpr. Tehran, n.d.), p. 183; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* (lithography, n.p., 1284/1867), p. 374 (based on *Rabī' al-abrār* by al-Zamakhsharī). In this case, three daughters of Yazdgird are given in marriage by 'Alī to Muḥammad son of 'Abū Bakr, 'Abd Allāh, son of 'Umar and al-Ḥusayn, his own son respectively. 'Uthmān, although one of the four 'rightly-guided' caliphs, is excluded from the list. The tradition is most likely anti-Umayyad; Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Qummī, *Tārīkh-e Qumm*, ed. S. J. Tihrānī (Tehran, rpr. 1361 Sh./1982), p. 195; Ibn 'Inaba, *Umdat al-tālib fī ansāb āl Abī Tālib* (Qumm, 1417/1996), pp. 172–173; Qāḍī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ghaffārī, *Tārīkh-e Jahān ārā* (Tehran, 1343/1924), p. 25; al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt* (3rd edn, Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985), vol. 4, p. 441; Ḥāshim al-Baḥrānī, *Hilyat al-abrār* (Qumm, 1397/1976), vol. 2, pp. 7f., and *Madīnat al-ma'ājjiz* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 129; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* (Tehran-Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 46, pp. 7ff.; al-Baḥrānī al-Iṣfahānī, *Awālim al-'ulūm* (Qumm, 1409/1988), vol. 18, pp. 6ff.; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Māzandarānī, *Jannat al-na'im* (lithograph, n.p., 1296/1878), pp. 205–206; Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī/Ṭabarsī, *Mustadrak al-wasā'il* (Qumm, 1407/1986), vol. 13, pp. 375ff. The list is obviously not exhaustive.

and/or Ghazāla. Once an adult, 'Alī al-Aṣghar freed her and gave her in marriage to a 'client' of his father. Here we have almost all the likely historic elements that can be gleaned from Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Qutayba and other third/ninth century chroniclers. For reasons we shall try to clarify, numerous accounts were circulated, especially in Iranian Imami milieus, insisting that the mother of imam Zayn al-Ābidīn was the daughter of Yazdgird III, the last Sasanian king of Iran.

Just before the Arab invasion, many Iranian nobles escaped from the capital, al-Madā'in-Ctesiphon, taking their women (free or enslaved), their wealth and valuables.⁵⁰ However, many other Iranians belonging to the noble class were not so fortunate; they were captured and reduced to slavery by the Muslim conquerors.⁵¹

It is nevertheless certain that none among them belonged to the king's immediate family. In his monograph devoted to the Sasanians, M. J. Mashkūr reviews the opinions of a number of specialists in Iranian studies and historians of Sasanian Iran regarding the family of Yazdgird III. J. Darmesteter, T. Nöldeke, B. Spuler and A. Christensen all allude to the Shi'i story of Shahrbānū, all the while stressing its legendary and biased nature.⁵² According to these scholars, who base their work specifically on non-Shi'i

50. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 30; al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-tiwāl*, p. 129; Miskawayh, *Tajārīb al-umam*, vol. 1, p. 219; Ibn al-Athīr, *Akhbār-e Īrān az al-Kāmil*, pp. 209–210.

51. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 262ff.; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 1, pp. 309ff.

52. M. J. Mashkūr, *Sāsāniyān* (revised edn, Tehran, ca. 1339 Sh./1960), vol. 2, pp. 1284ff. As a whole, these scholars of Iranian studies only accord cursory importance to the story; which is perfectly understandable in the context of the issues that preoccupy them; see also Mashkūr, *Īrān dar 'ahd-e bāstān. Dar tārikh-e aqvām va pādshāhān-e pish az Islām* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1347 Sh./1968), pp. 488ff. The numerous names given to the Iranian princess and her father are perfectly in keeping with the legendary nature of the character (the daughter: Barra, Fātima, Ghazāla, HRĀR, Jahān Bānūya, Jahān Shāh, Khawla, Khilwa, Maryam, Salāma, Sayyidat al-Nisā', Shāh-e Zanān, Shahrbān, Shahrbānū, Shahrbānūya, Shahrnāz, Sulāfa, Umm Salama; the father: Malik Harā, Malik Qāshān, Nūshajān, Shirūya b. Kisrā, Subhān Malik Pārs, Yazdgird); see also H. Karīmān, *Ray-e bāstan* (Tehran, 1345–1349 Sh./1966–1970), vol. 1, p. 409.

historiographical sources, the woman or women and children of the emperor were simply evacuated from the capital well before the invasion and were not captured.⁵³ In addition, sources from T'ang China concerning the Arab conquest of Iran, the last Sasanian emperor and his descendants also remain silent about the eventual captivity of one of Yazdgird III's relatives.⁵⁴

Some elements that appear sporadically in recurring versions of the Shahr-bānū legend seem to have come to light in reaction to certain historical facts. It is not entirely impossible, for example, that the association of a noblewoman named Ghazāla, captured in al-Madā'in and given in marriage to a noble Arab, was inspired by the fact that 'Uthmān, one of the sons of the wealthy Companion 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, had as mother a certain Ghazāl bint Kisrā, who was captured during the siege of the Sasanian capital by Sa'd b. Abi Waqqās.⁵⁵

53. Mashkūr, *Sāsāniyān*, vol. 2, pp. 1288–1290 and 1344–1347; see also S. Nafīsī, *Tārikh-e ejtemā'i-ye Īrān az enqerād-e Sāsāniyān tā enqerād-e Omaviyān* (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1964), pp. 13ff. On Yazdgird's death at the age of 35 in 32/652, he had seven sons and five daughters. According to M. J. Mashkūr and S. Nafīsī they included Ādharak, Shahīn, Mardāwand, Bābūna (Bānūya) and Tahmīna (see note 3 above). According to A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (rpr. Osnabrück, 1971), ch. 10, pp. 508–509, the name Shahr-bānū seems to have been made popular by al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* although the manuscripts are corrupted at this very point. Now also consult the monograph devoted to Yazdgird III by A. Hassuri ('A. Ḥaṣūrī), *Ākherīn Shāh* (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), where there is no mention of Shahr-bānū.

54. J. Marquart, *Irānshahr nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorenac'i* (Berlin, 1901), pp. 68–69; E. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) occidentaux* (St Petersburg, 1903), pp. 171–173; J. Harmatta, 'The Middle Persian-Chinese Bilingual Inscription from Hsian and the Chinese-Sāsānian Relations', in *La Persia nel medioevo* (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, 1971), pp. 363–376, esp. 373–375; M. G. Morony, *Irak after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984), index, under 'Yazdgird III'; R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 243ff. The study by C. 'A. A'zamī Sangesarī, 'Bāzmāndegan-e Yazdgerd-e sevvom', *Īrān Shenākht*, 10 (1377 Sh./1998), pp. 183–191, is rather perfunctory, based on very few sources, hardly drawing upon any previous studies, and not of use to scholars.

55. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, p. 128. Ghazāl would have been the name given to the female slave by her master. Her father's name seems to indicate that she was of noble stock.

Moreover, some reports recorded by historiographers describe the capture and enslavement of a descendant of Yazdgird III under the caliphate of al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik (86–97/705–715). Captured in northern Khurāsān, the young lady would have been sent to the governor of Iraq al-Hajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī who offered her to the caliph. She gave birth to Yazid b. al-Walid known as 'al-Nāqīš', that is Yazid III, and perhaps Ibrāhīm b. al-Walid.⁵⁶ The somewhat forced insistence on the liberation of the princess to the extent of freely choosing her spouse, in this case al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, is surely, as we shall see, done in order to attract the sympathy of Iranians, but also perhaps arises from the claim of the 'Abbasids, at least up to al-Manṣūr (caliph from 137/754 to 159/775), of being descendants of an uninterrupted line of free mothers and fathers. In this regard, the long letter from al-Manṣūr to the Ḥasanid Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya takes on great significance. The latter's uprising (aggravated by that led by his brother Ibrāhīm) lasted from 132/749 to 145/762. In this letter, al-Manṣūr takes pride in the fact that the 'Abbasids are of pure and free descent, paternal and maternal. At the same time he mocks the Ḥasanid and Ḥusaynid 'Alids who count among their mothers a large number of female slaves. It is interesting to note in

56. Al-Ṭabarī, ed. M. de Goeje, series 1, p. 2873 series 2, pp. 1247 and 1874. According to al-Ṭabarī, Yazid III's mother was Yazdgird's granddaughter. In series 2, p. 1874, this mother is known as Shāh-i Āfarid (pehlevi: Shāhāfrid) and a rather interesting distich is attributed to Yazid III:

I am the son of Kisrā and Marwān / One of my grandfathers is a *qayṣar*, another a *khāqān*.

It is therefore possible that Yazid III al-Nāqīš was a model for subsequent genealogical speculations regarding 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn. See also, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-Iqd al-farīd*, vol. 3, p. 103; Ibn al-'Ibrī, *Mukhtaṣar al-duwal* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 118–119; Ibn al-Athīr, *Akhbār-e Īrān az al-Kāmil*, vol. 2, pp. 334–335; refer also to A. Amin, *Duḥā'l-Islām* (Cairo, 1933), vol. 1, p. 11. Al-Mubarrad, one of the first to report the tradition linking Sulāfa, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn's mother, to the last of the Sasanians, attempts to reconcile both reports and writes that Sulāfa was Yazid al-Nāqīš's paternal or maternal aunt; *al-Kāmil fī'l-lughā*, ed. al-Dālī, vol. 2, p. 646.

passing that the letter makes no mention of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn's mother.⁵⁷

Having considered the formal details, let us now focus on what constitutes the core of the legend as it appears in the most recurrent versions. A Sasanian princess, bearer of the Light of Glory of the Iranian kings, arrives in Medina. Defying the caliph 'Umar, supported by 'Alī and speaking in Persian to him, she chooses al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī as her husband, eventually giving birth to 'Alī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, who in turn will succeed al-Ḥusayn as imam, thus becoming 'the Mother of Legatees'. The story is obviously highly charged in doctrinal, ethnic and political terms. It is at once pro-Shi'i and pro-Iranian and both elements are presented in such a manner as to be inseparable. This is a fundamental aspect of the account that one must always bear in mind. More precisely, one can add that in its Shi'ism, the story undeniably stems from the Ḥusaynid current and in its 'Iranianism' seems to emerge from radical circles. Considered together, these elements conspire to challenge a certain Sunni Arabo-centrist 'orthodoxy'.

Let us examine matters more closely. The Shahr-bānū tradition is clearly of Ḥusaynid confession. It is true that, concerned about a kind of balance and stronger rapprochement between Shi'is and Iranians, a good many versions depict two Iranian princesses who each marry al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn respectively, but at the same time, with a stubborn insistence, al-Ḥusayn's wife is presented as the mother of future imams.⁵⁸ Ibn Shahrāshūb precedes the Shahr-bānū story with a rather long development arguing for the legitimacy of the Ḥusaynid lineage of imams and consequently

57. Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, ed. M. Z. Mubārak (Cairo, 1356/1937), vol. 2, pp. 1275–1278 (refer to the sources cited in notes from the editor); al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. de Goeje, series 3(1), pp. 211–215.

58. Al-Mas'ūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, p. 170; Ibn Bābūya, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 128; Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, p. 196. The version reported by al-Mufid, *Irshād*, vol. 2, p. 138, in which Imam al-Ḥasan is replaced by Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is an isolated case.

the illegitimacy of al-Ḥasan's descendants.⁵⁹ Let us recall that in its different variants the tradition would have started circulating from the third/ninth century onwards, only a few decades after the revolt of the Zaydi Ḥasanid brothers, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and Ibrāhīm, a revolt that very quickly seems to have aroused great sympathy, even among the non-'Alid scholars, both in the Hijāz as well as in Iraq.⁶⁰ Some decades later, just after the execution of al-Amīn in 198/813, another Ḥasanid Zaydi rebel, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, who was supported by the famous Abu'l-Sarāyā, was declared *al-Riḍā min āl Muḥammad* on Jumādā II 199/January 815 in Baghdad itself, only to be killed a month later.⁶¹ Among other things, was the Shahrbanū story intended to counteract the popularity of the Zaydis and/or the Ḥasanids, especially in Shi'i milieu, both Iranian and assimilated?

Then, ever since the version reported by al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī in the third/ninth century until Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr in the fifth/eleventh and al-Rāwandī in the sixth/twelfth centuries, the tradition clearly highlights two elements: the magnificence of Persian royalty (Light emanating from the princess, her noble status, the freedom to choose her husband) and the importance of the Persian language (the dialogue with 'Alī, imam par excellence, in a language that he speaks well, in contrast with 'Umar, adversary par excellence of Shi'ism, who does not speak the language at all).

59. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, pp. 206–207.

60. See al-Ṭabarī, ed. M. de Goeje, series 3, pp. 189–265; Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭalibiyyin*, ed. A. Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949), pp. 260–299 and 354ff.; C. von Arendonk, *Les débuts de l'imamat zaydite du Yémen*, tr. J. Ryckmans (Leiden, 1960), pp. 44ff.; T. Nagel, 'Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand des Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh im Jahre 145h', *Der Islam*, 46 (1970), pp. 227–262; M. Q. Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbasids. The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 44–45 and 73–76.

61. See H. A. R. Gibb, 'Abu'l-Sarāyā al-Shaybānī', *EI2*, vol. 1, pp. 153–154 and B. Scarcia Amoretti, 'Ibn Ṭabāṭabā', *EI2*, vol. 3, pp. 975–976. On 'Alid rebellions at the beginning of the 'Abbasid caliphate see F. Omar, *The 'Abbāsīd Caliphate 750/132–786/179* (Baghdad, 1969), ch. 4; J. Lassner, *The Shaping of 'Abbāsīd Rule* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 69–87; H. Kennedy, *The Early 'Abbāsīd Caliphate* (London, 1986), pp. 198–213.

Now in the eyes of some Iranian men of letters in early Islamic centuries, these two notions are the most important elements of Iranian identity. It would perhaps be anachronistic to speak of the 'nationalism' of these educated individuals but it would be just as naive to deny that there was among them a heightened sensitivity, even a kind of historical consciousness of their cultural identity crystalised around a certain perception of royalty and the Persian language. To explain his admiration for the history of the Iranian nation and its continuity, al-Ṭabarī invokes the uninterrupted succession of royal dynasties, from the origins of time up to the advent of Islam.⁶²

In his *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) discusses the case of those Iranians who hoped that the Buyids would be agents of change or effect the restoration of the sovereignty of the Iranian monarchs and the religion of the Magi. At the same time, he is surprised that sensible folk should place their hopes in the Daylamīs – those who do not even speak adequate Persian – instead of having faith (as is apparently the case with al-Bīrūnī himself) in the 'Abbasid dynasty, a dynasty that emerged from Khurāsān and that was brought to power by true Persians ('*ajam*').⁶³ In its presentation and justification, Miskawayh's

62. Al-Ṭabarī, ed. M. de Goeje, series 1(1), p. 353; See also J. Chabbi, 'La représentation du passé aux premiers âges de l'historiographie califale', in *Itinéraires d'Orient. Hommages à Claude Cahen*, Res Orientales VI (Paris, 1995), pp. 21–46. For the importance of 'the History of Kings' in the ancient perception of Iranian culture see also Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber*, pp. xix–xxiii and *Das iranische Nationalepos*, pp. 14–16; W. Barthold, *Mussulman Culture*, tr. Sh. Suhrawardy (Calcutta, 1934, rpr. Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 49–50; G. Widengren, 'The Sacral Kingship of Iran', in *La regalità sacra* (Leiden, 1959), pp. 242–257; M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1961–1974), vol. I, *The Classical Age of Islam*, pp. 454ff.; E. Yarshater, 'Iranian National History', in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3(1) (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 359–477. For al-Mas'ūdī's pro-Iranian stance, see T. Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī*, pp. 90–91.

63. Al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya 'an al-qurūn al-khāliya*, ed. C. E. Sachau (Leipzig, 1878), p. 213; tr. Sachau, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* (London, 1897, rpr. Frankfurt, 1969), p. 197. Cf. al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*, vol 3,

oeuvre, particularly his *Tajārib al-umam*, is from beginning to end filled with admiration for these two characteristics of Iranian culture; one readily understands why F. Rosenthal termed him 'the Persian nationalist philosopher'.⁶⁴ The same is also true for Firdawsī of Ṭūs in his monumental *Shāh-nāmā*. The role played by these kinds of thinkers is certainly not negligible in the sense that even the non-Iranian dynasties such as the Ghaznavids, Saljūqs and Ilkhāns rapidly adopted Persian and traced their origins to the ancient kings of Iran instead of to Muslim saints or Turko-Mongolian heroes.⁶⁵

For almost a century now, many scholars have sought to show how these Iranian thinkers had, since the formation of Muslim culture, perceived of themselves as inheritors of a glorious cultural past and so constituting the vital last link in the chain of 'the History of Salvation', that is, of Islam.⁶⁶ M. Grignaschi, and more recently

p. 366, where it states that the Umayyad state is regarded as Arab and the 'Abbasid state as Persian Khurāsānian. For differing opinions on the nature of the 'Abbasid revolution (esp. those of M. A. Shaban, M. Sharon and J. Lassner) and for criticism of these opinions see E. Daniel, 'Arabs, Persians and the Advent of the Abbasids Reconsidered', *JAOS*, 117/3 (1997), pp. 542–548 as well as the extensively researched and much documented work by E. Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', in R. G. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (eds), *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 4–125, particularly pp. 59–74. For the importance of Persian in the ancient perception of Iranian culture, see F. Gabrieli, 'Literary Tendencies', in G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* (Chicago, 1955), pp. 87–106.

64. F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1952), p. 122.

65. See R. Levy, 'Persia and the Arabs', in A. J. Arberry (ed.), *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 56–73, esp. pp. 66ff.; B. Spuler, 'Iran: the Persistent Heritage', in G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, pp. 167–182, particularly 176–177; see also W. Madelung, 'The Assumption of the Title Shahanshah by the Buyids and the Reign of the Daylam (*Dawlat al-Daylam*)', *JNES*, 28 (1969), pp. 84–108 and 168–183, rpr. in *Religious and Ethnic Movements in Medieval Islam* (London, 1992), article 8.

66. Among many other examples, see I. Goldziher, 'Islamisme et parsisme', *RHR*, 43 (1901), pp. 1–29, and *Muslim Studies*, tr. S. M. Stern and C. R. Barber (London, 1967–1971), vol. 1, pp. 135f.; G. E. von Grunebaum, 'Firdausī's Concept of History', in his *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition* (London, 1955), pp. 175f.; M. G. Morony, 'The Effects

C. H. de Fouchécour, Sh. Shaked and A. Tafazzoli have brilliantly demonstrated how what Gustav von Grunebaum calls 'the Persian Humanities' crystallise around the figure of the 'king' and royal ethics as transmitted to Islamic culture by the literary genre of the *Mirrors for Princes* (possibly an equivalent to *naṣīḥat al-mulūk*).⁶⁷ All that, according to learned Iranian 'nationalists', constitutes the sophistication of Persian culture and is designated by terms such as *honar* or *adab*, namely ethics, good manners, courtesy, refinement of the mind and humanism; it is transmitted essentially by

of the Muslim Conquest on the Persian Population of Irak', *Iran*, 14 (1976), pp. 41–55, and 'Conquerors and Conquered: Iran', in G. H. A. Juynboll, *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL, 1982), pp. 73–87; E. Yarshater, *Iranian National History*, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1983), esp. pp. 360ff., and 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', in R. G. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (ed.), *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 4–125; C. E. Bosworth, 'The Persian Contribution to Islamic Historiography in the Pre-Mongol Period', in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, pp. 218–236; M. Moḥammadi Malāyeri, *Farhang-e Īrānī-ye pīsh az eslām wa āthār-e ān dar tamaddon-e eslāmī va adabiyyāt-e 'arab* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995).

67. Among the many publications by M. Grignaschi on the subject, see e.g. 'Quelques spécimens de la littérature sassanide conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Istanbul', *JA*, 240 (1967), pp. 33–59; 'La *Nihâyatu-l-arab fī akhbâri-l-Furs wa-l-'Arab* (first section)', *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales*, 22 (1969), pp. 15–67; 'La *Nihâyatu-l-arab fī akhbâri-l-Furs wa-l-'Arab* et les *Siyaru Mulûki-l-'Ajam* du Ps. Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Ibid.*, 26 (1973), pp. 83–184, and 'La *Siyâsatu-l-'âmmiyya* et l'influence iranienne sur la pensée politique islamique', in *Hommage et Opera Minora*, vol. 3, *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg, Acta Iranica* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 124–141; C. H. de Fouchécour, *Moralia. Les notions morales dans la littérature persane du 3e/9e au 7e/13e siècle* (Paris, 1986); Sh. Shaked, 'Andarz in Pre-Islamic Persia', *EIr*, vol. 2, pp. 11–16. In general, Sh. Shaked is one of the foremost specialists on the subject of the transmission of Iranian themes to Islamic culture. His numerous publications on the subject have now been gathered in one volume: *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam* (Aldershot, 1995); A. Tafazzoli (Tafaḍḍoli), *Tārikh-e adabiyyāt-e Īrān pīsh az eslām*, ed. Ž. Āmūzegār (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), pp. 180–250; see also T. Qāderī, 'Matn hā-ye akhlāqī-andarzī dar zabān hā-ye Īrānī-ye miyāne-ye gharbī va sharqī', in A. Kāwūs Bālā Zādeh (ed.), *Mehr o dād o bahār. Memorial Volume of Dr Mehrdād Bahār* (Tehran, 1377 Sh./1998), pp. 221–232.

the Persian language and this literature.⁶⁸ Well before translating the Qur'ān into Persian received authorisation from the inner circle of scholars in Sāmānid Transoxiana,⁶⁹ the respectability, even the sacred nature, of the Persian language was stressed, at the very least since the *fatwā* by Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), as reported in *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, according to which the Names, Attributes and Organs of God may be uttered in Persian as well as in the original Arabic.⁷⁰

68. F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, pp. 141–142; M. Moḥammadi Malāyerī, *Tārīkh va farhang-e Īrān dar dōwṛān-e enteḡāl az 'aṣr-e Sāsānī be 'aṣr-e īslāmī* (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), vol. 1, *Del-e Īrān-shahr* (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996) vol. 2; N. Pourjavady (Pūrjavādī), 'Mā be majles-e mehtarān sokhan naḡyūīm. Fārsī gūyī-ye 'Abd Allāh-i Mubārak va adab-e Īrānī', *Nashr-e Dānesh*, N.S., 16/4 (1378 Sh./1999) vol. 2, pp. 21–25. In this latter article, it is significant that the only two citations of the Khurāsānian ascetic from Marw, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), reproduced in Persian in Arabic sources (namely, *al-Ansāb* by al-Sam'ānī from Marw and *Siyar al-salaf* by Abu'l-Qāsim al-Taymī from Iṣfahān), relate to good manners: 1) *khord pish-e Ḥafṣ pāy derāz nemikonad*, 'In the presence of Ḥafṣ, the younger (i.e. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak himself), do not stretch out one's legs', and 2) *mā be majles-e mehtarān sokhan naḡyūīm*, 'Where great men are gathered, it is out of turn for me to speak'. In the account of the famous meeting between the mystics, Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād of Nisābūr and Junayd al-Baghdādī, originally from Nihāwand, taken aback by the politeness of the former's disciples, the latter tells him that they have been initiated into the good manners of kings. See e.g. al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, ed. 'A. H. Maḥmūd and M. b. al-Sharīf (Cairo, 1974), vol. 2, p. 563; 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira al-awliyā'*, ed. M. Este'lāmī (2nd edn, Tehran, 1355 Sh./1977), p. 395; both authors are from Nisābūr; cf. the expression *adab al-mulūk*. One will have noticed that the protagonists as well as the authors are all Iranians, mainly Khurāsānī.

69. M. Moḥammadi Malāyerī, *Tārīkh va farhang-e Īrān*, pp. 127ff.

70. Al-Imām Abū Ḥanīfa, *al-Fiqh al-akbar* (2nd edn, Hyderabad, 1399/1979), p. 7 (curiously, the only exception is the Persian term *dast* ['hand'], which Abū Ḥanīfa does not authorise the use of for *yad* in the expression *yad Allāh*); the namesake of the Ḥanafī legal school is said to have allowed those who spoke Persian to say *khodāy bozorg ast* ('God is Great') instead of *Allāhu akbar*; see 'A. A. Ṣādeqī, *Takvīn-e zabān-e fārsī* (Tehran, 1357 Sh./1978), p. 64; M. Moḥammadi Malāyerī, *Tārīkh va farhang-e Īrān*, p. 130. On the sacred nature of Persian and its ability to transmit wisdom and religious concepts, see W. Barthold, *Mussulman Culture*, pp. 50ff. and much more recently N. Pourjavady (Pūrjavādī), 'Ḥekmat-e dīnī va taqaddos-e zabān-e fārsī', in his

The staunchest defenders of this Iranian cultural identity, as is well known, were the scribes or secretaries of state of Iranian origin of the 'Abbasid era, the famous *kuttāb* of whom Ibn al-Muqaffa' (executed ca. 140/757), is the emblematic figure. In the context of our subject, the *Kitāb dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb* by al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869), who saw himself as defender and champion of religious orthodoxy and Arab culture, is especially telling.⁷¹ In a strongly sardonic passage, al-Jāhiz denounced the pro-Iranian stance taken by official secretaries of state and their disdain for Arab and Islamic traditions: they know the maxims of Buzurjmihr, the Testament of Ardashīr, the epistles of 'Abd al-Ḥamid and the *Adab* by Ibn al-Muqaffa' by heart. Their bedside reading includes the Book of Mazdak and *Kalīla va Dimna*. They praise only the policies of Ardashīr Bābakān, the administration of Anūshiruwān and admire Sasanian methods of government. Thus they consider themselves more expert than 'Umar in administrative affairs, than Ibn 'Abbās in Qur'ānic exegesis, than Mu'ādh b. Jabal in knowledge of the licit and the illicit, than 'Alī in his judgements and arbitration. They do not read the Qur'ān regularly and do not consider exegesis, law or the study of traditions to be basic sciences.⁷²

By evoking the milieu of the Iranian *kuttāb* one is inevitably reminded of the pro-Iranian Shu'ūbiyya, the people that al-Jāhiz

Būy-e jān (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), pp. 1–37 where many studies have been cited and examined usefully.

71. 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, *K. Dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb* in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 185–199, ed. 'A. Muḥannā (Beirut, 1988), vol. 2, pp. 199–134. Also edited in J. Finkel, *Three Essays of Abū 'Othmān ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiz* (Cairo, 1926), under the title *Dhamm al-kuttāb*, pp. 40–52.

72. Ed. Hārūn, pp. 191ff.; ed. Muḥannā, pp. 126ff.; ed. Finkel, pp. 46ff.; passage cited by E. Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', pp. 70–71, based on the edition by Hārūn. French translation in Ch. Pellat, 'Une charge contre les secrétaires d'Etat attribuée à Jāhiz', *Hespéris*, 43 (1956), pp. 29–50. On al-Jāhiz's stance, refer also to *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, vol. 7, pp. 68ff., and *al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn*, vol. 3, pp. 6–7.

wanted to fight.⁷³ Might one conclude that the Shahrbanū tradition was born in the milieu of pro-Shu'ūbī Iranian scribes? This is quite likely considering that it was in the third/ninth century, just when the tradition began to circulate widely, that the Shu'ūbiyya movement reached its peak.

For the historian of early Islam, Ḥusaynid Shi'ism, opposition to Zaydi Shi'ism, sustained Iranianism, Iranian intellectualism and the challenging of pro-Arab Sunni orthodoxy, all unmistakably evoke the ambiance of the court presided over by al-Ma'mūn 'son of the Persian' in Marw, one of the great cities of Khurāsān, just at the time when in the year 200/815 he designated the Shi'i imam of the Ḥusaynid line, 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, as his successor. Indeed, al-Ma'mūn seems to have sought this moment to re-establish the alliance between the 'Abbasids, 'Alids and Persians,

73. On the connection between scribes and the Shu'ūbiyya see e.g. H. A. R. Gibb, 'The Social Significance of the Shu'ūbiyya', in *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen Dicata* (Copenhagen, 1953), pp. 105–114, rpr. in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, ed. by S. J. Shaw and W. R. Polk (Boston, MA, 1962), pp. 62–73; M. B. Sharif, *al-Širā' bayn al-mawālī wa'l-'arab* (Cairo, 1954), passim; 'A. 'A. Dūrī, *al-Judhūr al-ta'rikhiyya li'l-shu'ūbiyya* (Beirut, 1962), passim; W. M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 1968), see index under 'Ibn al-Muqaffa' (French translation, *La pensée politique de l'Islam* [Paris, 1995], pp. 94–99 and 129f.); M. Carter, 'The Kātib in Fact and Fiction', *Abr Nahrain*, 11 (1971), pp. 42–55; R. Mottahedeh, 'The Shu'ūbiyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran', *IJMES*, 7 (1976), pp. 161–182; P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 108–112; C. E. Bosworth, 'The Persian Impact on Arabic Literature', in E. Beeston et al., *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 155–167; M. Chokr, *Zandaqa et zindīqs en Islam au second siècle de l'hégire* (Damascus, 1993), ch. 5. For other sources on the Shu'ūbiyya, see S. Enderwitz, *EI2*, vol. 9, pp. 533–536. On al-Jāhiz's anti-Shu'ūbism and anti-Shi'ism, now consult Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation. Der arabische Schriftsteller Abū 'Uthmān al-Ġāhiz über die Afrikaner, Perser und Araber in der islamischen Gesellschaft* (Freiburg, 1979), see index under 'Shu'ūbiya'; also Ch. Pellat, 'Ġāhiz à Bagdad et à Sāmarrā', *RSO*, 27 (1952), pp. 63ff., rpr. in *Etudes sur l'histoire socio-culturelle de l'Islam (VIIe-XVe s.)* (London, 1976), article 1, and 'Jāhiz', *EI2*, vol. 2, pp. 395–398, esp. pp. 396b–397a; see also his *The Life and Works of Jāhiz: Translations of Selected Texts* (London, 1969), pp. 272–275.

an alliance that in the past had led to the victory of the *da'wa ḥāshimiyya*, and fell apart after the assassination of Abū Muslim when the 'Abbasids seized power.⁷⁴

In my view, the tradition reported by Ibn Bābūya in his 'Uyūn implicitly contains some valuable information in this regard.⁷⁵ First, it is possible that the great traditionalist from Rayy had collected this report, like many others in this same work, on his journey to Khurāsān; this is all the more credible since he reports it from a Khurāsānī, apparently unknown except for his name, Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī.⁷⁶ Then, in the body of the *ḥadīth* it is said that imam al-Riḍā held court when he was in Khurāsān, being already designated crown prince by al-Ma'mūn. The eighth imam's interlocutor, as we have seen, is a certain Sahl b. al-Qāsim al-Nūshajānī, who to my knowledge is not mentioned in Imami

74. See M. Rekaya, 'al-Ma'mūn', *EI2*, vol. 6, pp. 315–323. On the relations between the 'Abbasid caliph and Shi'i movements in general and imam al-Riḍā in particular, see e.g. the now classic study by F. Gabrieli, *al-Ma'mūn e gli 'Alidi* (Leipzig, 1929); D. Sourdel, 'La politique religieuse du calife 'abbāside al-Ma'mūn', *REI*, 30/1 (1962), pp. 26–48; E. L. Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under Abbassid Rule (747–820)* (Minneapolis and Chicago, IL, 1979), see index under 'al-Ma'mūn'; W. Madelung, 'New Documents Concerning al-Ma'mūn, al-Faḍl b. Sahl and 'Alī al-Riḍā', in W. al-Qāḍi (ed.), *Studia Arabica et Islamica. Festschrift for Iḥsān 'Abbās* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 333–346; D. G. Tor, 'An Historiographical Re-examination of the Appointment and Death of 'Alī al-Riḍā', *Der Islam*, 78/1 (2001), pp. 103–128. On al-Ma'mūn and the challenge to Sunni orthodoxy, obviously reaching its peak in the *miḥna*, see the classic study by W. M. Patton, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna* (Leiden, 1897); M. Hinds, 'Miḥna', *EI2*; J. van Ess, 'Ibn Kullāb et la Miḥna', *Arabica*, 37 (1990), pp. 173–233, and *Theologie und Gesellschaft* (1994), vol. 3, pp. 446–80; J. A. Nawas, 'A Reexamination of Three Current Explanations for al-Ma'mūn's Introduction of the *Miḥna*', *IJMES*, 26 (1994), pp. 615–629; M. Q. Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbāsids*, index under 'Miḥna' and 'Ma'mūn'. Also, M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn* (Cambridge, 2000).

75. Refer to note 21 above; *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, ch. 35, *ḥadīth* no. 6, p. 128.

76. In the present state of knowledge, the chain(s) of transmitters for different versions of the Shahrbānū story – when such exist of course – do not contribute much of any great import to the issue here.

prosopographic works. However, some fragmentary information is provided by other sources regarding the Nūshajānī family. The name is clearly a patronymic — 'agān', very likely based on Anōsh 'immortal', itself abridged from a composite name typical of Pahlavi onomastics; Nūshajānī would thus be the Arabicised form of Anōshagān. According to the geographer Ibn al-Faqīh (third/ninth century), Nūshajān or Nūshanjān was the last Transoxanian Iranian province before China, in the extreme north-east of Greater Khurāsān, in the border region between al-Shāsh and the Chinese territories. The province, divided into greater and lesser Nūsha(n)jān, consisted of several large and small towns and was populated 'by Turks, Zoroastrians (*majūs*) worshippers of fire and *zindīqs*', Manicheans (*mānawiyya*). The family name is thus derived from this region; however Ibn al-Faqīh's assumption is perhaps mistaken.⁷⁷ The Nūshajānī family seems to have regularly received Sasanian kings and courtiers. Their ancestor would have been Nūshajān, son of Wahraz, the first Iranian governor of

77. Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. Y. al-Hādī (Beirut, 1416/1996), p. 635; information taken up by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1228), *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1866; rpr. Tehran, 1965), vol. 4, p. 833, Beirut edn (1376/1957), vol. 5, p. 311. Yāqūt refers to Ibn al-Faqīh via al-Sam'ānī (d. 562/1166), but the latter, in his *Ansāb*, speaks only of a Nūshajānī Sufi living in the convent of the famous mystic from Kāzarūn, namely Abū Ishāq al-Kāzarūnī; see al-Sam'ānī, *al-Ansāb*, facsimile reproduction of the manuscript by D. S. Margoliouth (London and Leiden, 1912), p. 571b, held at the British Museum; unless it is another Sam'ānī or from a work other than the *Ansāb*. See also G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1930; rpr. London, 1966), index under *Ansāb*. The author wonders if one ought to identify Greater Nūsha(n)jān with the Khotan region. The region described by Ibn al-Faqīh corresponds to Barskhān (or Barsghān) as noted by other geographers such as Qudāma, Ibn Khurdādhbih and al-Kāshgharī: these are lands around Lake Issyk-kul in current-day Kirghizistan; see *Hudūd al-'Ālam*, *The Regions of the World*, tr. V. Minorsky (Oxford-London, 1937), pp. 292ff. and p. 292, n. 3. It appears that the Sasanians never exercised any authority over these distant lands. 'Nūshajān' would thus be a dummy name due to an erroneous reading of the term Barskhān/Barsghān. The notoriety of the Nūshajānī family, having nothing to do with the region mentioned by Ibn al-Faqīh and most likely of Sasanian nobility, would thus have been a factor in establishing this corrupt manuscript tradition.

Yemen, special envoy of the king, Anūshiruwān.⁷⁸ Ibn Hishām and al-Jāhīz allude to the strong ties that bound the family to the Sasanian court, links that afforded the Nūshajānī great political influence.⁷⁹

We have seen that, according to the *Ta'rikh* by al-Ṭabarī,⁸⁰ 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir b. Kurayz offered one of the girls from the Kisrā family captured at Sarakhs to a certain al-Nūshajān (see above). If we are to trust several reports recorded by Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī in his *Aghānī*, the family seems to have maintained its power even after the advent of Islam. During both the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphates, the Nūshajānī would have retained a large part of their vast lands, fortune and influence. However, some of their palaces must have been ruined, as we can infer from the compositions by Muḥammad b. Bashīr ('Abbasid period), who declaimed nostalgic poetry about the ruined palaces of the family's glorious ancestors to their descendants in their superb mansion in Ja'fariyya, the capital's aristocratic suburb.⁸¹

Aḥmad b. Sahl al-Nūshajānī, who could be the son of imam al-Riḍā's mysterious interlocutor in our *ḥadīth*, aroused the jealousy of the caliph al-Mu'taḍid (r. 279–290/892–902) because of his lavish lifestyle and considerable social and political influence. Al-Iṣfahānī writes that the Baghdadi house of the Nūshajānī family was not only constantly frequented by poets, musicians and

78. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, vol. 3, pp. 166ff., in particular pp. 176–177.

79. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. M. Saqqā, I. Abyārī and 'A. Shalabī (2nd edn, Cairo, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 43–44; al-Jāhīz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhīz*, vol. 1, p. 201 and vol. 2, p. 290. In his entry on 'Nahr al-mar'a', Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī writes that the name of the location ('Lady's River'), in Baṣra, is named after a woman, Kāmwar/Kāmūr-Zād bint Narsī whose palace was offered to the conqueror Khālīd b. al-Walīd by her first cousin (and husband most probably) al-Nūshajān b. JSNSMĀH (?); see Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, vol. 4, p. 844, Beirut edn, vol. 5, p. 323.

80. Ed. de Goeje, series 1, p. 2,887; ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, p. 302.

81. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, vol. 3, p. 130 and vol. 12, p. 136.

singers but also by men of letters, thinkers and scribes (*kuttāb*).⁸² The mention of *kuttāb* and the sustained good relations between the Nūshajānī family and the Sasanian royal house leads one to believe that their home could very well have been a meeting place for the pro-Iranian Shu'ūbiyya.

In this context, the note by Ibn Shahrāshūb informing us that Shahrbānū was sometimes called Barra bint al-Nūshajān (*wa yuqāl hiya Barra*; cf. the report by al-Ṭabarī) is seen in an unexpected light.⁸³ Similarly, it is noteworthy that in his *Aghānī*, Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī often gives Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ālī the name Zālim b. 'Amr al-Nūshajānī.⁸⁴ It should be recalled that in al-Kulaynī and Ibn Shahrāshūb, to cite only two sources, it is to Abu'l-Aswad that the verse praising the fourth imam (descendant of Hāshim and Kisrā) is attributed.⁸⁵ Thus numerous connections link different members of the Nūshajānī family (originally or de facto Mazdaean?): on the one hand, to the Sasanian court and nobility, and on the other, to the Ḥusaynid Shi'is. One may thus reasonably believe that it was not impossible for the Shahrbānū story to have originated in their entourage.

82. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 131 and vol. 8, p. 88. According to information provided by L. Massignon, referring to *Maktūbāt* by 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī, the eminent chamberlain Naṣr al-Qushūrī at some time after 288/899–900 had bought a property in Baghdad from a certain Nūshajānī, director of the *barīd*, see L. Massignon, *La Passion de Hallāj* (rpr. Paris, 1975), vol. 1, p. 474, which once again brings us to the highly placed Iranian bureaucrats or civil servants of the 'Abbasid state.

83. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 311. See above.

84. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, vol. 1, p. 49; vol. 11, p. 105; vol. 15, p. 97; vol. 18, p. 132. Elsewhere, the 'Alid poet is called Zālim b. 'Amr b. Sufyān (or 'Uthmān); clearly the grandfather's name and its orthographic representation poses a problem. See e.g. al-Marzubānī, *Akhbār shu'arā' al-shī'a*, ed. M. Ḥ. al-Amīnī (Najaf, 1388/1968), p. 27; al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, ed. M. Ḥ. Āl-Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf, 1380/1961), p. 95, note from the editor; *Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Ṣan'ānī, Nasmāt al-saḥar bi-dhikr man tashayya'a wa sha'ar*, ed. K. S. al-Jabbūrī (Beirut, 1420/1999), vol. 2, p. 276 and the editor's note on sources.

85. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 369; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 305. See above.

In the *ḥadīth* reported by Ibn Bābūya, one finds a member of the Nūshajānī family in the entourage of al-Ma'mūn and 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā in Marw. What we have just noted above makes this historically plausible. And given the family's past as well as its position during the Sasanian era, it would not be illogical to read into these ambiguous lines of the *ḥadīth* (which, as we have seen, reminds us of the Iranian notion of *xwētōdas/xwēdōdah*) a pro-Iranian Shu'ūbism more radical than in other toned-down versions.⁸⁶

Thus the Shahrbanū story would have emerged in the pro-Iranian Shu'ūbī entourage of the Nūshajānī family at al-Ma'mūn's court in Khurāsān. The last sentence of the *ḥadīth* reported by Ibn Bābūya is a telling sign: 'Sahl b. al-Qāsim (al-Nūshajānī) says, 'There was not a single Ṭālibid [Ḥusaynid Alid?] amongst us who did not copy my version of this *ḥadīth* from al-Riḍā (*mā baqiya Ṭālibī 'indānā illā kataba 'annī hādhā'l-ḥadīth 'an al-Riḍā*).'⁸⁷

It may be possible to be more precise regarding the dating of this tradition. Immediately after the failure of the revolt by the Ḥasanid, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, in 199/815, two Ḥusaynids, both sons of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and half-brothers of 'Alī al-Riḍā, initiated insurrections against the 'Abbasid regime in Baghdad: Zayd known as

86. See above. Through these historical elements and the figure of Shahrbanū one senses a conflict between a radical Iranism that seeks, for example, to establish equal status between the Iranian princess and Fāṭima (see e.g. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 311: Shahrbanū has the same title as Fāṭima, i.e. Sayyidat al-Nisā'. 'Alī gave this name to two of the most sacred women, according to the Shi'is, namely Fāṭima and Maryam/Mary) and a more moderate Iranianism that attempts to maintain the superiority of Fāṭima (e.g. in the version reported by Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, p. 196 in which it is explicitly stated that Sayyidat al-Nisā' refers only to Fāṭima and as such the princess could not be named Shāh-e Zanān which is almost the Persian equivalent of the title granted to the Prophet's daughter).

87. Ibn Bābūya, *Uyūn*, vol. 2, p. 128. On the intellectual influence of the Iranians in al-Ma'mūn's state and their convergence with the 'Alids see also the intriguing report by al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā' wa'l-kuttāb*, ed. 'A. I. al-Sāwī (Cairo, 1357/1938), pp. 256ff.

'al-Nār' (literally 'the Fire', that is, the incendiary one) in Baṣra and Ibrāhīm known as 'al-Jazzār' (the Butcher) in Yemen. It was at this point, in 200/815–816, in Khurāsān that al-Ma'mūn initiated his great effort at reconciliation between the 'Alids and 'Abbasids, a movement widely supported by a large number of Iranians. As the Ḥasanid Zaydīs consistently proved to be too aggressive, he opted for reconciliation with the Ḥusaynids in an especially spectacular style: not only did he save the two sons of Mūsā al-Kāẓim who had just been proclaimed anti-caliphs at Baṣra and in Yemen, but on 2 Ramaḍān 201/24 March 817 he designated their brother 'Alī – wise enough to remain above the fray – as his successor, conferring him the title *al-Riḍā min āl Muḥammad*.⁸⁸

It did not take long for the 'Abbasids in Baghdad, supported by a large section of the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'a*, to react. The sons of al-Mahdī led the opposition against al-Ma'mūn: when al-Manṣūr b. al-Mahdī refused to be proclaimed caliph, his step-brother Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī accepted the title on 28 Dhu'l-Ḥijja 201/17 July 817.⁸⁹ Now, al-Manṣūr was born of al-Buḥturiyya, daughter of Khorshīd the last Dābūyid *isfahbadh* (high-ranking military official) from Ṭabaristān, and his step-brother Ibrāhīm was born of Shakla, daughter of the last *mašmughān* (great Zoroastrian priest) from the district of Damāwand. Both opponents of al-Ma'mūn were therefore descendants of high-ranking Iranian nobility on the maternal side. The Arab nobility of their father's side was not in question either. One may thus reasonably believe that in al-Ma'mūn's entourage it was envisaged that they should do even better with regard to his successor: 'Alī al-Riḍā, a descendant of Hāshim (on the paternal side), would have as his grandmother a woman not simply belonging to the nobility, but to no less than the Iranian royal family.

Some months later, al-Ma'mūn initiated his policy of rapprochement with the 'Abbasid aristocracy in Iraq. His first concession was

88. M. Rekaya, 'al-Ma'mūn', *EI2*, pp. 318–319.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

the announcement of his return to Baghdad and his departure from Marw on 10 Rajab 202/22 January 818. It was during this journey that both major obstacles to this rapprochement were eliminated: the Iranian al-Faḍl b. Sahl on 2 Sha'bān 202/13 February 818 in Sarakhs and the Ḥusaynid imam 'Alī al-Riḍā on 29 Šafar 203/5 September 818.⁹⁰ Thus, the Shahrbānū story – at least in its core form – emerged among the Iranian-Shu'ūbī Nūshajānī family in al-Ma'mūn's entourage in Marw, the Khurāsānian capital, between March 817 (the proclamation of 'Alī al-Riḍā as heir) or the month of July of the same year (proclamation of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's caliphate in Baghdad) and January 818 (when al-Ma'mūn abandoned his pro-'Alid policy).

3

'One never knows what the past will hold tomorrow.'⁹¹ This proverb perfectly illustrates the posthumous fate of the figure of Shahrbānū both in popular Shi'ism and throughout Iran, the lands of which she is said to be the Lady. In literary traditions, as we have seen, the Sasanian princess dies either upon the birth of her son Zayn al-'Ābidīn, or drowns in the Euphrates after witnessing the massacre of her family at Karbalā. Popular belief decided otherwise. It is as if such a death did not satisfy Iranian

90. Ibid., pp. 319–320. Let us also point out that the Jewish Exilarch, the *Rosh Golah* (Aramaic: *rēsh galūtha*, 'leader of the diaspora'; Arabic: *ra's jālūt/ra's al-jālūt*) Bustanai, contemporary of imam al-Ḥusayn, is also said to have married an Iranian princess; see M. Gil, *A History of Palestine 634–1099* (Cambridge, 1992), see index under 'Bustanai, exilarch'. On the convergence between Jews and Shi'is, now consult S. M. Wasserstrom, 'The Shi'is are the Jews of our Community: An Interreligious Comparison within Sunni Thought', *IOS*, 14 (1994), pp. 297–324, on Bustanai and al-Ḥusayn, p. 316; now in Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: the Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, 1995), ch. 3.

91. Proverb cited by the anthropologist F. Aubin, 'La Mongolie des premières années de l'après-communisme: la popularisation du passé national dans les mass média mongols (1990–1995)', *Etudes Mongoles et Sibériennes*, 27 (1996), p. 323.

tradition, which sought to find a more useful and glorious end for its princess.

In a pioneering study devoted to popular beliefs about Shahrbanū, Sayyid Ja'far Shahīdī relates the most frequently told version of the oral legend of the daughter of Yazdgird III, here called Bībī (Lady; also grandmother) Shahrbanū: after the day of 'Āshūrā, Bībī Shahrbanū was able to escape, as her husband had predicted, on his horse Dhu'l-janāh. Pursued by her terrible enemies, she reaches mount Ṭabarak in Rayy, central Iran. Exhausted and alone, she invokes God to deliver her from her assailants; but, as a Persian, instead of saying *yā hū* ('O God!' lit. 'O He') she mistakenly cries out *yā kūh* ('O Mountain!'). The rock miraculously opens and offers her refuge. However, a corner of her dress gets caught in the opening when the mountain closes behind her. A short while later her pursuers notice the trapped fabric and realise that a miracle has taken place – Shahrbanū's saintliness becomes apparent. The site becomes the sanctuary of the princess, a place of pilgrimage, and remains so to this day.⁹²

An almost identical story explains the Zoroastrian sanctuary of Bānū Pārs (the Lady of Persia), in the north-western plain of Yazd, south of the town of 'Aghdā. Here one encounters the daughter of Yazdgird III (in this instance called Khātūn Bānū), the escape and chase given by the Arabs, the distress of the princess and the appeal for help, the miracle of the mountain – opening and closing behind the young woman, ending with the piece of fabric (here it is the princess's scarf that is caught between the rocks).⁹³

92. S. J. Shahīdī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye Shahrbanū', in *Cherāgh-e rowshan dar donyā-ye tārik*, pp. 186ff. This study, focused mainly on the popular beliefs regarding Shahrbanū as well as the sanctuary found in Rayy, hardly deals with the literary tradition of the princess's story.

93. Jamshīd Sorūsh Sorūshiyān, *Farhang-e beh-dīnān*, ed. M. Sotūdeh (Tehran, 1334 Sh./1956), p. 204. No connection is established between the Sasanian princess and the Shi'i imams. In a fiercely anti-Muslim Zoroastrian account dating from the ninth/fifteenth century, Shahrbanū and Bānū Pārs are presented as sisters, the daughters of Yazdgird III. The first, married to

More generally, themes such as the escape of the Iranian nobility (male and female), or often members of the royal family, in the face of Arab invaders and their miraculous rescue by God acting through the natural world, are frequently seen in the foundation legends of Zoroastrian sanctuaries in central and southern Iran.⁹⁴ According to the study by S. J. Shahīdī, mention of the sanctuary in Rayy becomes more frequent in sources from the Safawid period on. Apparently, it was shortly before this period that what was once a pilgrimage site (*mazār*) became the tomb (*maqbara*, *marqad*) of Shahrbanū.⁹⁵ Indeed, not only Shahīdī but also Ḥosayn Karīmān in his classic monograph devoted to the old city of Rayy, citing the archeological works of Sayyid Moḥammad Taqī Moṣṭafavī, dates the oldest section of the sanctuary to the

Muḥammad by force, died without bearing any children. The second, also coveted by the 'Prophet of the Arabs', fled and was saved by the mountain; for the purposes of discretion, this manuscript is written in a mixture of Persian and Avestan (see the untitled manuscript R VIII/1B at the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay, fols. 430a-433a).

94. *Farhang-e beh-dīnān*, p. 204 (sanctuary of Pīrī Sabz also known as Pīrī Chakchakū, pilgrimage site of Princess Nāzbānū, hidden here); pp. 205-206 (sanctuary of Pīrī Hrisht, north-east of Ardakān: a travelling companion of Yazdgird's daughter or the daughter herself chased by Arabs and saved by the mountain); p. 206 (Shozdī Fozel = Shāhzāde Fāḍil, 'Prince Fāḍil'), sanctuary of a Sasanian princess in Yazd, p. 207 (Norakī, in southern Yazd: sanctuary of Zarbānū, princess of Yazd married to the king of Fārs, fled pursued by the Arabs and hidden in the mountains near Norakī), p. 211 (Shāh-e Harāt, north-east of Kirmān, governor of Yazdgird, pursued by the Arabs, hidden near a source henceforth called Pāy-e Shāh). Cf. also E. Strack, *Six Months in Persia* (London, 1882), vol. 1, p. 119 (cave of the Lady - *ghār-e Bibī* - and sanctuary for the Damsel in distress - *Bibī darmānda* - in Fārs province) and vol. 1, p. 227-228 (sanctuary of the Lady of Life - *Ḥayāt Bibī* - between Bāfq and Kirmān). On these pilgrimage sites refer also to R. Shahmardān, *Parastesh gāh-hā ye zartoshtiyān* (Bombay, 1345 Sh./1967).

95. S. J. Shahīdī, 'Baḥṭhī dar bāre-ye shahrbanū', pp. 186-187. According to some popular beliefs, the princess did not die here but was hidden or rendered invisible by the mountain; cf. also E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* in 4 vols (Cambridge, 1928), vol. 1, p. 131 where belief in Shahrbanū's occultation - *ghā'ib shodan* - is alluded to.

ninth/fifteenth century, shortly before the Safawid period.⁹⁶ Neither Abū Dulaf, in his description dated 330/940 of the Ṭabarak Mountain in Rayy nor al-Qazwīnī (sixth/twelfth century), in his *Kitāb al-naqd*, which includes a detailed listing of sacred sites located in Rayy, say anything about Shahr-bānū's sanctuary,⁹⁷ which shows that, almost independently of the development of the literary tradition, the oral tradition develops and reaches maturity around the ninth and tenth/fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although it is apparently impossible to date precisely the Zoroastrian legends just cited, it nonetheless seems they go back to an earlier period.⁹⁸ It is therefore likely that they were at the source of the foundational legend regarding the Bībī Shahr-bānū sanctuary in Rayy. Moreover, the presence of an ancient Zoroastrian 'tower of silence' (*dakhma*) on the same Ṭabarak mountain, further north, would also corroborate the existence of links between the sanctuary of Shahr-bānū and Iranian Zoroastrianism.

In a certain fashion, the figure of Shahr-bānū and her sanctuary seem to reflect the continuation of ancient Mazdean beliefs. A few years after the works of S. J. Shahidī, Moḥammad Ebrāhīm Bāstānī Pārīzī, another Iranian scholar, once again took an interest in Bībī Shahr-bānū in the context of his studies on Iranian toponyms, including the terms meaning woman, lady, princess and so on

96. S. J. Shahidī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye shahr-bānū', pp. 187ff.; Ḥ. Karīmān, *Ray-e bāstān* (Tehran, 1345–1349 Sh./1966–1970), vol. 1, pp. 403–416 citing at length S. M. T. Moṣṭafavī, 'Boq'e-ye Bībī Shahr-bānū dar Rayy', *Eṭṭelā'āt*, 5/2 (1331 Sh./1952), pp. 15–24 as well as the article of the same title in *Gozāresh hā-ye bāstān-shenāsī*, 3 (1334 Sh./1956), pp. 3–40, in which results of the archeological excavations previously published in earlier works are now revisited and supplemented. The most ancient item of the sanctuary seems to be the cenotaph dated 888/1483–1484.

97. Abū Dulaf, *Safar-Nāmeḥ-e Abū Dulaf dar Īrān*, ed. V. Minorsky, tr. A. F. Ṭabāṭabā'ī (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1964), 'al-Risāla al-thāniya', p. 31. 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Qazwīnī, *Kitāb al-naqd*, ed. al-Muḥaddith al-Urmawī (Tehran, 1979), p. 643.

98. Information from *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat*, ed. M. R. Unvala (Bombay, 1922), vol. 2, pp. 158–159, indicates that the Bānū Pārs sanctuary was already a place of frequent visitation in the tenth/sixteenth century.

(*Bānū*, *Khātūn*, *Bībī*, *Dokhtar* etc.).⁹⁹ Through extensive research into both the archeological evidence and written sources as well as folkloric legends and popular beliefs, Bāstānī Pārīzī convincingly establishes that in most cases, the sites bearing these kinds of names, at one time in the near or distant past, were locations for a temple and/or a cult of Ānāhītā/Ānāhīd/Āb Nāhīd/Nāhīd, the very popular goddess of water and fertility: Ardvīsūr Ānāhīd of the Zoroastrian pantheon. It is interesting to note that Ānāhīd seems to have been the patron goddess of the Sasanians.¹⁰⁰

Some years after Bāstānī Pārīzī's study, and drawing extensively on studies by S. J. Shahīdī and M. E. Bāstānī Pārīzī, Mary Boyce came to the same conclusions, by means of a well-documented comparison between the foundational legends for sanctuaries of Shahr-bānū and Bānū Pārs.¹⁰¹ The title 'Bānū' (the Lady) is the ancient title for Ānāhīd. From the Avesta onwards, the goddess is called *Aredvī sūrā bānū*.¹⁰²

In Pahlavi documents as well, the titles of *Bānū* or *ābān Bānū* (the Lady of the Waters) are associated with Ānāhīd, Ardvīsūr or Ardvīsūr Amshāsfand.¹⁰³ Citing and using all these references,

99. M. E. Bāstānī Pārīzī, 'Benā hā-ye dokhtar dar Īrān', *Majalla-ye bāstān shenāsi*, 1-2 (1338 Sh./1959), pp. 105-137, and esp. the voluminous collection on the subject: *Khātūn-e haft qal'e* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1966; 3rd. edn, Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), pp. 150-368; the Bibī Shahr-bānū sanctuary is referred to in passing on p. 246.

100. R. Ghirshman, *Iran, Parthes et Sassanides* (Paris, 1962), p. 149 and *Bichâpour* (Paris, 1971), vol. 1, p. 65; however, refer also to the nuances introduced by M. L. Chaumont, 'Ānāhīd, iii. The Cult and its Diffusion', *EIr*, vol. 1, p. 1,008a.

101. M. Boyce, 'Bibī Shahr-bānū and the Lady of Pārs', *BSOAS*, 30/1 (1967), pp. 30-44. The renowned English Iranologist had already presented a paper on this topic at the Royal Asiatic Society in May 1965 (*ibid.*, p. 36, n. 19).

102. Y 68.13, see J. Darmesteter, *Le Zend-Avesta* (Paris, 1892-1893), vol. 1, p. 419, n. 25.

103. *Saddar Nasr and Saddar Bundelesh*, ed. B. N. Dhabhar (Bombay, 1909), pp. 116-118 and 149, English trans. by Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyar Framarz* (Bombay, 1932), pp. 537-538 and 559; *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat*, ed. M. R. Unvala (Bombay, 1922), vol. 1, pp. 93 and 219-220 (tr. Dhabhar, pp. 96 and 221).

Boyce also alludes to the inscriptions of Iṣṭakhr and Paikuli in which Anāhīd is called 'Lady'.¹⁰⁴ Although no trace of a pre-Islamic monument was found at Bībī Shahr-bānū's mount, citing the *History* of Herodotus to support her claims, Boyce believes that a simple rock near a natural source of water (which is the case at Bībī Shahr-bānū) could have served as a temple for the worship of Anāhīd.¹⁰⁵ She even believes that the titles held by the Sasanian princess in Shi'i texts such as Lady of the Land (i.e. Iran) (Shahr-bānū), Sovereign of Women (Shāh-e zanān) and Lady of the Universe (Jahān bānū) could very well have been held by Anāhīd well before Islamicisation of the site.¹⁰⁶

What further corroborates a hypothesis of continuity between Anāhīd, goddess of water/fertility and Shahr-bānū, mother of the imams, is that in a large number of popular versions of the

104. M. Boyce, 'Bībī Shahr-bānū', pp. 36–37; also M. L. Chaumont, 'Anāhīd', *EIr*, vol. 3, p. 1008. On the widespread cult of Anāhīd in pre-Islamic Iran, see M. L. Chaumont, 'Le culte de Anāhitā à Stakhr et les premiers Sassanides', *RHR*, 153 (1958), pp. 154–175, and 'Le culte de la déesse Anāhitā (Anahit) dans la religion des monarques d'Iran et d'Arménie au 1er siècle de notre ère', *JA*, 253 (1965), pp. 167–181.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 43. In her article, 'Anāhīd, i, Ardwiśūr Anāhīd and ii, Anaitis', *EIr*, vol. 1, pp. 1003–1006, M. Boyce traces the cult of the goddess back to Rayy during the Parthian period, p. 1004.

106. 'Shahr-bānū and the Lady of Pārs', p. 38; the author gleans these titles from the prayer book — *ziyārat-nāma* — distributed at the entrance to the sanctuary in Rayy. We have seen that these titles are already noted in the various written versions of the Shahr-bānū story. See also Boyce, 'Anāhīd', p. 1005b. On the analogy between titles given to Bībī Shahr-bānū and Anāhitā (alias Nana), see also the Sogdian title *panchī Nana dhvambana*, 'Nana, Lady of Panch', i.e. the Pendjikent region, on coins issued by this town; see W. B. Henning, 'A Sogdian God', in *Selected Papers II = Acta Iranica* 15 (2nd series-VI) (Leiden–Tehran, Liège, 1977), pp. 617–630; esp. p. 627, n. 68. No doubt in symmetry with *Khshathra pati*, 'Lord of the Lands', a title sometimes given to Mithra; see M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 2, pp. 266–268. On the links – as close as they are complex – between Anāhitā and Nana, now consult F. Grenet and B. Marshak, 'Le mythe de Nana dans l'art de la Sogdiane', *Arts Asiatiques*, 53 (1998), pp. 5–18.

princess story she is also called Ḥayāt Bānū, the Lady of Life;¹⁰⁷ the relationship between life, water and fertility is obvious. In Mithraism, as well as in popular Mazdeism, (A)Nāhīd, mother of Mithra/Mehr, is a virgin; now, according to some popular Imami beliefs, Shahrībānū, although a mother, remains a virgin.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, visits to the sanctuary in Rayy are exclusively reserved for women (and on rare occasions for *sayyids*, men, thus to the actual or presumed descendants of imams considered the 'sons' of Shahrībānū); but most of all, infertile women visit the site to seek

107. M. E. Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Khātūn-e haft qal'e*, p. 246 who also cites the name Nik Bānū, 'the Good Lady'; cf. above Ḥayāt Bibī and her sanctuary mentioned by E. Strack, *Six Months in Persia*, vol. 1, pp. 227–228. In a Zoroastrian poem of an unknown period, the princess at the Pīrī Chakchakū sanctuary (note 94 above) is called Ḥayāt Bānū; see Ardāshīr b. Shāhī (or Bonshāhī), *Ganjīne-ye adab* (Bombay, 1373/1952), p. 84.

108. On the virginity of (A)Nāhīd, Mithra/Mehr's mother, see M. Moqaddam, *Jostār dar bāre-ye Mehr va Nāhīd* (Tehran, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 29ff. Regarding Shahrībānū's virginity, Š. Hedāyat, *Neyrangestān* (Tehran, rpr. 1344 Sh./1966), p. 118. One may advance two other hypotheses on the parallel features between Anāhīd as Mithra's mother and the figure of Shahrībānū: 1) Mithra, 'the Petrogenous', born of a rock; on this legend originating probably in Asia Minor or the Caucasus, see F. Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra*, (rpr. Paris, 1985, from the 3rd edn, Brussels, 1913), pp. 132ff.; On the many monuments representing Mithra born from a rock, see F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (Bruxelles, 1896–1899), vol. 1, pp. 161ff.; M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (La Haye, 1956–1960), vol. 1, pp. 158ff.; there is thus an analogy between the rock, a symbol of incorruptibility that gives birth to an Iranian god and Anāhīd, the deity's mother, eternally young and virgin. Shahrībānū, received by the rock at the mountain in Rayy, literally identifies with her. One finds the same analogy, even identity with the Lady of the Rock. 2) Identification of the trinity Ahura Mazdā/(marrying his daughter:) Spenta Aramati/(to give birth to his son:) Vohu Manah with the trinity Ahura Mazdā/Anāhīd/Mithra resuscitates the 'incestuous marriage' archetypal par excellence by placing the Iranian goddess at the centre of the trinity, see e.g. G. Widengren, *Les religions de l'Iran* (Paris, 1968), pp. 256ff., which obviously evokes *xwētōdas/xwēdōdah* regarding the mother of the fourth imam as we have already seen.

healing and fertility from the Lady of the Land; and this has been the case ever since ancient times.¹⁰⁹

Apart from these reasons indicated by Bāstānī Pārīzī and Boyce, namely the prior existence of a sanctuary for Anāhid,¹¹⁰ the choice of Rayy may also be explained by the fact that it was from this city in 20/641 that Yazdgird III launched a last appeal to his people to put up strong resistance against Muslim troops before escaping to Khurāsān. Moreover, the city of Rayy, although almost entirely Iranian in population (with a minimal Arab presence), had always been one of the most important bastions of all forms of Shi'ism (Zaydism, Ismailism, Qarmatism and of course Imamism) and remained so until the sixth/twelfth century.¹¹¹ Finally, during al-Ma'mūn's reign, pre-Islamic Iranian religious traditions would

109. Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Khātūn-e haft qal'e*, p. 246. Apart from Shahrbānū, in Persian literature, the goddess Anāhid also seems to have been transformed into another Sasanian princess, namely Shīrīn; see P. P. Soucek, 'Farhād and Tāq-i Bustān: the Growth of a Legend', in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honour of Richard Ettinghausen* (Washington, 1974), pp. 27–52. Moreover, the chapter devoted to Shahrbānū in M. R. Eftekhār-Zādeh, *Īslām dar Īrān. Shu'ūbiyye nehdat-e moqāvat-e mellī-ye Īrān 'alayh-e Omaviyān va 'Abbāsiyān* (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), pp. 98ff., though well documented, is nonetheless much too tainted by its ideological and polemical stance to be appropriately used in a scholarly study. Similarly, the treatment reserved for Shahrbānū in D. Pinault, 'Zaynab bint 'Alī and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms in Shī'ite Devotional Literature', in G. R. G. Hambly (ed.), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World* (New York, 1998), pp. 80–81 (the entire article pp. 69–98) is rather a shallow summary to be useful here.

110. Though advanced prudently, Ḥ. Karīmān's hypothesis according to which the Shahrbānū sanctuary would actually have been a Zoroastrian *dakhma* where lie the bodies of Hormoz (son of Yazdgird II) and his family, all assassinated by Pērōz, the other son of the Sasanian king, seems hard to support (*Ray-e bāstān*, vol. 1, p. 379 and pp. 414–415). Indeed according to the Iranian scholar, the transfer of the site to Shi'ism enabled it to be protected from the destructive rage of recent converts; now, another ancient Zoroastrian cemetery, visited in the early fourth/tenth century by Abū Dulaf (*Safar-Nāmeḥ*, 'al-risāla al-thāniyya', p. 31), is located on the same mountain. It was neither destroyed nor Islamicised. Why reserve such different treatment to locations of the same kind found on the same site? On the contrary, a 'pagan' temple is usually more in need of protection from the zeal of believers of a new religion than a cemetery.

111. V. Minorsky-C. E. Bosworth, 'al-Rayy', *EI2*, vol. 8, pp. 487–489.

have survived in Rayy since the city seems to have sheltered a still active Manichean community.¹¹²

Unlike epic religious accounts, in which Shahrbanū seems to have only a minor role,¹¹³ *ta'ziya*, Shi'i Persian theatre, shows strong evidence of her popularity. In the catalogue of *ta'ziya* plays in the Cerulli collection held at the Vatican Library, Ettore Rossi and Alessio Bombaci have classified more than thirty plays in which Shahrbanū, sometimes called Shāh-e zanān, features. Usually, the scene takes place on the day of Karbalā' and the play describes the mourning and courage of the martyred imam's wife. Some plays (nos 30–424–429–461–579–948 and 1,000) also portray the princess of Iran being captured, her dialogue with 'Alī and her marriage to al-Ḥusayn. Finally, Shahrbanū's escape to Rayy and the mountain miracle are the scenarios in two plays (no. 466 – on the hidden princess – and no. 945).¹¹⁴ In almost all

112. Gh. Ḥ. Ṣadīqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye īrānī dar qarn hā-ye dovvom va sevvom-e hejrī* (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993) a supplemented and updated version of the author's doctorate thesis, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens au IIe et IIIe siècles de l'hégire* (Paris, 1938), see index under 'Yazdānbakht' drawing on Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Bīrūnī.

113. For example, she only appears once and in a cursory manner at the beginning of the voluminous *Abū Muslim-nāma*, though curiously as the daughter of Zayd the Jew (*Abū Muslim-nāma*, the version reported by Abū Ṭāhir al-Ṭarṭūsī, ed. H. Esmāīlī, 4 vols [Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001], vol. 1, p. 92.) However, the Sasanian princess seems to have been emulated in this literature; see e.g. Princess Dhī Funūn Pākdāman, daughter of the King of Irām, who marries the son of 'Alī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya in *Ḥikāyat-e Muḥammad-e Ḥanafīyye*, cited by J. Calmard, 'Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya dans la religion populaire, le folklore, les légendes dans le monde turco-persan et indo-persan', *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*, 5–6 (1998), pp. 201–220, particularly pp. 214–215. Moreover, in the beliefs of some villages in Simnān, Shahrbanū is the sister of a (Mazdean?) prophet named Sinelūm whose sanctuary on 'the Mountain of Prophets' (*Kūh-e peyghambarān*), has remained a very popular pilgrimage site; see C. A. Azami, 'Payghambarān Mountain Temple', *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 73 (1987), pp. 45–55, and 'Parmgar Fire Temple', *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 74 (1988), pp. 200–206.

114. E. Rossi and A. Bombaci, *Elenco di drammi religiosi persiani (fondo mss. Vaticani Cerulli)* (Vatican City, 1961), index, p. 386, under 'Shahrbanū'; also C. Virolleaud, *Le théâtre persan* (Paris, 1950), pp. 7–8.

these works, sympathy for Iran and its pre-Islamic past are readily apparent.

The convergence between pre-Islamic Iran and Imami Shi'ism by virtue of Shahrbanū is just as emphatic in some popular rituals dedicated to the wife of the third imam. Sacrifices offered to Bībī Shahrbanū – horses, lambs and cattle – are the same as those offered to Bānū Pārs/Anāhīd of 'Aghdā in Yazd.¹¹⁵ The main ritual offering in the sanctuary at Rayy is a bowl of water¹¹⁶ – an element of nature of which Anāhīd is the goddess. In some regions of Iranian Khurāsān, among the mourning rituals that mark the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram in commemoration of the death of the martyrs at Karbalā', elegies (Persian: *mātam* = Arabic: *marthiya*, *nawḥa*) dedicated to Shahrbanū and often called 'the Farewell of (or: to) Shahrbanū' (*wadā'-i Shahrbanū*) occupy an important place. Processions reciting these elegies almost invariably pass by a Zoroastrian cemetery; if the ritual is not carried out, people believe that the villages will be victim to drought or floods, that is to say, in either case natural disasters related to water.¹¹⁷

115. M. Boyce, 'Bībī Shahrbanū and the Lady of Pārs', pp. 42–43. However, the author is right to stress the difference between the respective moods of the sanctuaries: while the Shi'is make their pilgrimage in sadness, mourning and with lamentations, the Zoroastrians, for whom joy is a form of energy that derives from Ahura Mazda, render worship in a lighthearted manner, with laughter, music and song, p. 44.

116. S. J. Shahīdī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye shahrbanū', p. 189.

117. Ibid., p. 180–181; also M. R. Eftekhār-Zādeh, *Islām dar Irān* (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), pp. 130–132: the elegy given as: 'Ey shahrbanū al-wadā', *ey shahrbanū al-wadā'*, copied from the notebook of an official in the village, comes from the region of Bīrjand, in southern Khurāsān. The Sogdian Manichean text on the Nana cult, published by Henning in 'The Murder of the Magi', in *Selected Papers II = Acta Iranica*, 15, pp. 139–150, though quite fragmentary, offers striking parallels with this cult of Bībī Shahrbanū: one finds the same intermingling of the funerary cult, lamentations and 'the drought curse'; see also F. Grenet and B. Marshak, 'Le mythe de Nana dans l'art de la Sogdiane', pp. 7–9 and F. Grenet in *L'Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sciences Religieuses*, 105 (1996–1997), pp. 213–217, particularly p. 216.

I am personally acquainted with some Zoroastrian women from the Kirmān region who regularly make a pilgrimage to the Shahrbānū sanctuary in Rayy. This is not an isolated case. It is true that they would only need to veil themselves in order to disguise themselves among the masses of visiting Muslim women. Although they have not explicitly said so, it seems perfectly plausible that they visit the site to worship the popular Lady Anāhīd.¹¹⁸ As J. Chabbi has so aptly observed, 'In order to survive in a present that denies it, the past must advance masked.'¹¹⁹

4

The figure of Shahrbānū may be situated within the complex network of relations between Iranians and Shi'is. These relations naturally belong to the wider framework of the attitude of Iranians towards Islam and the authorities that represented it during the first centuries of the Hijra. This framework was extensively studied in its myriad forms.¹²⁰ One could say that this attitude exhibited itself in three ways, each influenced by a number of currents: first, a violent, radical attitude, at times leading to rejection, plain and simple – whether one thinks of the political convergence that linked the Kaysānī 'Alids and Iranian nobility from the Mukhtār revolt in 66/685,¹²¹ or the Khurramī revolts, particularly

118. Jamshīd Sorūsh Sorūshiyān lists a certain number of sacred sites visited by Zoroastrians and Shi'is alike: Setī Pir in Maryam-Ābād of Yazd (*Farhang-e behdīnān*, p. 206), Āb-e Morād, west of Kirmān (pp. 207–208), Shāh Mehrīzād, north of Kirmān (p. 209), Shāh Varahrām-īzād in Kirmān itself which the Shi'is call 'Master Murtaḍā 'Alī of the Zoroastrians', *Pir Morteḍā 'Alī-ye gabrān* (p. 210) and Kūh Borīda in Zerīsf, east of Kirmān (p. 211).

119. J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus. L'Islam de Mahomet* (Paris, 1997), p. 402.

120. Now consult an analysis by E. Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World'; refer also to his excellent bibliography, pp. 100–125.

121. According to historiographical sources, only Persian was spoken in Mukhtār's army; see al-Dinawarī, *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, p. 302; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. de Goeje series 2, p. 647. Although the assertion seems exaggerated, the reactions of the Umayyad authorities led by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, as reported

of the Zoroastrian Sunbādh in Rayy (around 138/756) whose army seems to have consisted of Neo-Mazdakites, Zoroastrians and Shi'is, or of Bābak in Ādharbāyjān (from 201 to 223/816–838) undoubtedly seeking to overcome Islam with a view to restoring the Magian religion of the Persian royal house,¹²² or the Qarmaṭī Shi'is led by Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī/Ganāvehī when in 319/931 he transferred power to a young Persian from Isfahan, who according to prophecies attributed to Zoroaster and Jāmāsp, was meant to be the *Mahdī* or agent for the restoration of Magian rule,¹²³ and to free-thinkers, among them some of Iranian origin, who, according to the heresiographers, often hid their Manicheism and sometimes radical 'Iranism' in the guise of Shi'i *rafḍ*.¹²⁴

Subrawaki/Manichaeism?

by other categories of sources appear to corroborate this kind of information; see e.g., Abū'l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. Muḥammad, *Kitāb alif bā'* (Cairo, 1287/1870), vol. 1, p. 24; al-Damirī, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā* (Cairo, 1306/1888), vol. 2, pp. 78. See also Ḥ. Taqī-Zādeh, *Az Parvīz tā Changīz* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1330 Sh./1952), p. 70; Gh. Ḥ. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye īrānī*, p. 42.

122. S. Nafisī, *Bābak-e Khurramdīn, delāvar-e Ādharbāyjān* (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963), see index under 'Zoroastrian' etc.; W. Madelung, 'Khurramiyya ou Khurramdiniyya', *EI2*, vol. 5, pp. 65–67, in particular p. 65b; E. Yarshater, 'Mazdakism' in E. Yarshater (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3(2) (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1,001ff. 'A. Mīr Feṭrūs, 'Jonbesh-e sorkh jāmegān. Bar rasī-ye manābe', *Iran Nameh*, 9/1 (1991), pp. 57–89.

123. W. Madelung, 'Qarmaṭī', *EI2*, vol. 4, pp. 687–692, particularly pp. 688b–689a; now consult S. J. Hamidī, *Nehdat-e Abū Sa'īd Ganāvehī* (3rd edn, Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), ch. 5. Let us not forget the Pārsiyyān neo-Mazdakis who in 536/1141–1142 joined the Nizārī Ismailis, loyal supporters of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāh, see W. Madelung, 'Mazdakism and the Khurramiyya', in his *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, NY, 1988), pp. 1–12.

124. For example, Bashshār b. Burd, Ibn Abī'l-'Awjā', Abū Shākir, Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq, Ibn Ṭālūt, Ibn al-Rāwandī; see Gh. Ḥ. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh hāye dīnī-ye īrānī*, pp. 130–135; also G. Vajda, 'Les zindīqs en pays d'Islam au début de la période abbasside', *RSO*, 17 (1937), pp. 173–229; M. Chokr, *Zandaqa et Zindīqs en Islam au second siècle de l'hégire* (Damascus, 1993), see index under the names above. S. Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden, 1999), index. See also Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, vol. 2, pp. 115–116; Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, p. 173; Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyāsāt-nāma*, ed. J. Sha'ar (Tehran, 1364 Sh./1986), pp. 25, 249, 279, 285f.

A second category of Iranians, consisting mostly of intellectuals, the educated and thinkers, seem to have made an unconditional commitment to the new religion and even its language, to the extent of becoming its most important advocates. Indeed, until proven otherwise, no discernible Iranian trait is perceptible in the works of such figures as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Mājjā, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, or even Sibawayh, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī or Ibn Qutayba.¹²⁵

Finally, in a third category, mainly of intellectuals and politicians, men of letters and activists, and in which many tendencies co-exist or at times confront each other, from the most moderate to the most radical, with a range between the two, the protagonists seem to be ardent Muslims, though still holding on to their sense of Iranian identity, that is, the sentiment, even historical consciousness, of belonging to a great culture and an ancient civilisation. In a general way, the twofold conviction found in this third category would have led the Iranians to filter elements belonging to ancient Iranian culture into the new religion; in other words, to 'Islamicise' some traits of pre-Islamic Iranian civilisation and religious sentiment.¹²⁶ Thus, they seem to have been convinced of the need for preventing the loss of some traits considered essential, not

125. See e.g. E. Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', pp. 93ff. With regard to Ibn Qutayba, although in his *Uyūn al-akhbār* and *Ma'ārif*, he reproduces the essential works of Ibn al-Muqaffā', this seems to be more of a literary exercise than a deeply felt pro-Iranian sentiment. In any case, his anti-Shu'ūbi sentiments, admittedly moderate, are evident in his *Kitāb al-'arab*, ed. M. Kurd 'Alī, *Rasā'il al-bulaghā* (2nd edn, Cairo, 1365/1946), pp. 344–377.

126. For the denunciation of this 'infiltration' of Islam by the Iranians, see e.g. al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq* (Cairo, 1328/1910), pp. 269–271; al-Maqdisī, *al-Bad' wa'l-ta'rīkh*, ed. and tr. Cl. Huart (Paris, 1901–1903), vol. 5, pp. 133ff.; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ed. M. R. Tajaddod (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971), p. 188; al-Birūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqīya*, p. 213; al-Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbih wa'l-ishrāf*, ed. M. de Goeje (Leiden, 1893–1894), p. 395; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, vol. 1, p. 36 and vol. 2, p. 91; al-Balkhī, Abu'l-Ma'ālī Muḥammad b. Ni'mat, *Bayān al-adyān*, ed. M. T. Dānesh Pazhūh (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), ch. 5, pp. 106ff.; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* (Būlāq, 1853), vol. 2, p. 462; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Naqd al-'ilm wa'l-'ulamā' aw talbis Iblīs* (Cairo, 1340/1921), p. 212.

only for Iranian culture but also for Islam since they could provide it with fundamental elements that would render it a universal religion and a veritable civilisation. This would have been the position of a large majority of the pro-Iranian Shu'ūbiyya. In this case, it is no longer a case of threatening the permanence of the Islamic empire, but rather fighting for its future orientation. It is not the destruction of the state that is envisaged but the refashioning of its institutions, its political and social values, its structures of thought, in a word, all that would contribute to the development of its culture.¹²⁷ It was due to numerous obvious points of convergence in the opinion of various eminent specialists, that Shi'ism in its different forms constituted one of the most favourable terrains for this category of Iranian.¹²⁸ Apparently, the Shu'ūbī Irano-Shi'i milieu in which the Shahr-bānū tradition was nurtured belonged to this third category.¹²⁹

127. H. A. R. Gibb, 'The Social Significance of the Shu'ūbiyya', pp. 62ff.; S. Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation*, pp. 50ff. and 141ff.; the author supplements theories advanced by Hamilton Gibb by essentially demonstrating that in addition to one culture triumphing over another, it is also a matter of the status, social and political privileges of the new civil servants.

128. See among others, I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, 'Arab und 'Ajam' (Halle, 1888), vol. 1, pp. 101–146; *Die Shu'ūbijja*, pp. 147–176, esp. 168ff.; *ibid.*, pp. 177–218, esp. 201ff.; E. Blochet, 'Études sur l'histoire religieuse de l'Iran, I. De l'influence de la religion mazdéenne sur les croyances des peuples turcs', *RHR*, 38 (1898), pp. 26–63, particularly pp. 37ff. and 54ff.; B. Spuler, 'Iran: the Persistent Heritage', pp. 171–172; J. K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Muslim Society* (New York, 1997), see index under 'Shi'ism', as well as the great many pages in three important Persian works: 'A. Eqbāl, *Khāndān-e Nawbakhti* (Tehran, 1311 Sh./1932); M. Moḥammadi Malāyeri, *Tārīkh va farhang-e Irān*, and Gh. Ḥ. Šadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye irānī*. At times, the attitude of certain authors (Muḥammad Ghazālī, Suhrawardī Shaykh al-Ishrāq) seems rather 'tactical': in order to save some Iranian cultural elements, it seems necessary to severely criticise others. This issue merits a separate study.

129. Generally speaking, this seems to be the case in the milieu of the first great Imami traditionalists from the Schools of Rayy and Qumm (see *Guide divin*, pp. 48–54 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 19–21]) and this in spite of some fiercely anti-Arab traditions, perhaps stemming from the first category, also found in the compilations of these traditionalists (e.g. certain eschatological *ḥadīths*

The relationship between pre-Islamic Iranian culture and Islam in general, as well as the convergences, even political connivance, between Shi'is and Iranians, as we have seen, have been widely studied; on the other hand, links of a doctrinal and religious nature between ancient Iranian religions and Imami Shi'ism constitute a field of research that is still almost completely unexplored. In this dense assemblage of material, the Shahr-bānū tradition forms a part of those elements that link Imamism to ancient Iran and by the same means serve to rehabilitate pre-Islamic Iranian culture.

Let us limit ourselves to some noteworthy examples: the tradition according to which the celestial Book of Zoroaster consisted of 12,000 volumes containing all Knowledge and in which 'Alī is depicted as the ultimate connaisseur of this Book;¹³⁰ a tradition praising the justice of Iranian royalty, particularly of King Anūshiruwān, during whose reign the Prophet was born;¹³¹ the emblematic figure of Salmān the Persian as the Iranian sage, the

regarding the return of the *qā'im*; see *Guide divin*, pp. 294–295 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 115–123], and 'Eschatology, iii. In Imami Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 8, p. 578).

130. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Furū' min al-Kāfi*, 4 vols (Tehran, 1334 Sh./1956), vol. 1, p. 161; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī/al-Majālis*, Arabic text and Persian trans. by M. B. Kamāre'ī (Tehran, 1404/1984), p. 206, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, ed. al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭīhrānī (Tehran, 1398/1978), p. 7, and *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān (5th edn, n. p., 1390/1970), vol. 1, p. 17; al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān (Najaf, 1958–1962), vol. 1, p. 381. 'Alī as an expert on Zoroastrianism is also found in Sunni sources, e.g. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 129; al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥ. al-R. al-A'zamī (Beirut, 1972), vol. 6, pp. 70–71; for other Sunni sources see also Y. Friedmann, 'Classification of Unbelievers in Sunni Muslim Law and Tradition', *JSAI*, 22 (1998), p. 180 n. 78. On recourse to the figure of 'Alī for the preservation of certain Iranian traditions from the Sasanian period, see Sh. Shaked, 'From Iran to Islam: On Some Symbols of Royalty', *JSAI*, 7 (1986), pp. 85–87 (rpr. in *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam*, article VII), and 'A Facetious Recipe and the Two Wisdoms: Iranian Themes in Muslim Garb', *JSAI*, 9 (1987), pp. 31–33 (now in *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam*, article IX); For other Shi'i *ḥadīths* see also M. Mo'in, *Mazdayasnā va ta'thīr-e ān dar adabiyāt-e fārsī* (Tehran, 1326 Sh./1948), with an introduction by H. Corbin.

131. Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 15, pp. 250, 254, 279ff.

ideal Muslim and archetype of the Shi'i initiate;¹³² the glorification of two of the greatest Iranian festivals, Nawrūz and Mihrigān in *ḥadīths* going back to the Shi'i imams and texts by Imami thinkers;¹³³ mourning rituals for al-Ḥusayn as a continuation of funerary rituals not unlike ancient practices for the Iranian hero Siyāvash.¹³⁴

In this context, and when we consider the fundamental importance of filiation and the cult of kinship in Shi'ism since earliest times,¹³⁵ the figure of Shahrbānū takes on special meaning. In the ninth/fifteenth century, Jamal al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Alī, known as Ibn 'Inaba (d. 828/1424) wrote that a number of Ḥusaynid

132. L. Massignon, 'Salmān Pāk et les prémices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien', in his *Opera Minora* (Beirut, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 443–483; H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien* (Paris, 1971–1972), see index under 'Salmān'; 'A. Mohājērānī, *Barrasī-ye seyr-e zendegī va ḥekmat va ḥokūmat-e Salmān-e fārsī* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999).

133. For the *ḥadīths* see J. Walbridge, 'A Persian Gulf in the Sea of Lights: the Chapter on Naw-Rūz in the *Biḥār al-Anwār*', *Iran*, 35 (1997), pp. 83–92; among thinkers, see e.g. praises of 'Alī regarding Iranian festivals in poems by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), *Dīwān* (rpr. Qumm, n.d.), pp. 134ff. and his brother al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), *Dīwān* (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), pp. 56ff. as well as in the poems of the former's disciple, newly converted from Zoroastrianism: Maḥyār al-Daylamī (d. 428/1036), cited by M. Moḥammadi Malāyerī, *Tārīkh va farhang-e Irān*, pp. 188–190. On Nawrūz being considered 'Alī's birthday by the Bektashis, see F. De Jong, 'The Iconography of Bektashism. A Survey of Themes and Symbolism in Clerical Costume, Liturgical Objects and Pictorial Art', *The Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 4 (1989), note 56.

134. See Sh. Meskūb, *Sūg-e Siyāvash* (Tehran, 1971), pp. 82ff.; E. Yarshater, 'Ta'zieh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rituals in Iran', in P. J. Chelkowski (ed.), *Ta'zieh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York, 1979), pp. 80–95; 'A. Bolūkbāshī, 'Tābūt gardānī, namāyeshī tamthīlī az qodrat-e qodsī-ye khodāvandī', *Nashr-e Dānesh*, 16/4 (1378 Sh./2000), pp. 32–38, particularly pp. 33–34. On the identification, made in popular Persian literature, between the Iranian hero Rustam and 'Alī, see S. Soroudi, 'Islamization of the Iranian National Hero Rustam in Persian Folktales', *JSAL*, 2 (1980), pp. 365–383. The article by A. B. Ageeff, 'Les croyances mazdéennes dans la religion chiite', *Transactions of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists* (London, 1893), pp. 505–514 is now quite outdated.

135. See M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Considérations sur l'expression *dīn* 'Alī', *ZDMG*, 150/1 (2000), pp. 29–68 (Chapter 1, this volume).

Shi'is and even some Sunnis (? *al-ʿawāmm*) take pride in the fact that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, in his very being, combined prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*, by virtue of his descent from Muḥammad) and royalty (*al-mulk*, due to his Sasanian descent).¹³⁶ Here, the genealogist seems to have in mind mainly Iranians, mostly Ḥusaynid Shi'is, but apparently also non-Shi'is. It seems quite telling that for many centuries, almost without exception, the writers who have reported the main versions of the Shahr-bānū story have been Iranians or Iranianised Imamis: Šaffār, Nawbakhtī, Ash'arī Qummī, Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya, Kay Kāwūs b. Iskandar b. Qābūs, Ibn Rustam Ṭabarī, the unknown author of *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa'l-qīṣaṣ*, Rāwandī, Ibn Shahrāshūb.¹³⁷

Adding the Light of Royal Glory to that of *walāya* stemming from Muḥammad and 'Alī, Shahr-bānū gives a double legitimacy, Shi'i and Iranian, to her sons, the imams of Ḥusaynid lineage, as well as a dual nobility, Qurashī, and Sasanian. Thus she becomes the main link between the relationship which unites pre-Islamic Iran and Imamism. Much later, an analogous effort was made with regard to the mother of the twelfth imam, the Imami Mahdī, described in some versions as the granddaughter of the Byzantine

136. Ibn 'Inaba, *Umdat al-tālib fi ansāb āl Abi Ṭālib*, p. 173. The author, himself an Arab of Ḥijāzī origin and Ḥasanid descent, criticises this attitude, arguing that the nobility of the fourth imam is solely due to the fact that he is a descendant of the Prophet. This kind of polemic lives on today; see e.g. comments made by 'A. Ḥ. al-Amīnī in response to an Egyptian scholar in *al-Ghadir fi'l-kitāb wa'l-sunna wa'l-adab* (Beirut, 1397/1977), vol. 33, pp. 317–318. On polemics of a political nature regarding this subject see e.g. M. Fischer, *Iran: from Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 260–261; Y. Richard, *L'Islam Chi'ite. Croyances et idéologies* (Paris, 1991), p. 115.

137. Note that the presence of al-Mubarrad, one of the first authors to describe 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn's mother as belonging to the Sasanian royal house, is quite mysterious (cf. above); is this sympathy for the 'Alid cause? (see R. Sellheim, 'al-Mubarrad', *EI2*, vol. 7, pp. 281–284, particularly p. 281b). Or rather, is this a form of teasing aimed at his friend al-Jāhīz whose anti-Shi'i, anti-Iranian and anti-Shu'ūbī sentiments were hardly secret. Such is probably the case given that this kind of jocular behaviour was common among the intellectual circles of the large cities.

emperor, himself a descendant of the apostle Simon.¹³⁸ Thus the Imami Messiah would in his person bring together on the one hand Lights of Islam, Mazdaism and Christianity and on the other Arab, Persian and Byzantine nobility. This attempt was unsuccessful and the tradition did not increase in popularity, undoubtedly because, in the eyes of Imami Shi'is, Byzantium was less important than Iran.

138. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1405/1985), vol. 2, ch. 41, pp. 417–423; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Tabriz, 1322/1905), pp. 134–139; Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, pp. 489ff.; see *Guide divin*, p. 265 (*Divine Guide*, p. 108).