

Traces of Ancient Egyptian Culture & Civilization in the story of Samak-e ‘Ayyar

**In the memory of our contemporary artist and woman of letters, Sima Kouban
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Abstract

How do legends make use of historic events? What role does the collective memory of nations play in this use? How does the river of legends flow forth from historic sources? How do the streams of collective memory arisen from historic events in different periods merge into the river of legends? How does the river of legends alter its course, adapting itself to the beliefs of different eras? How does legend change in time and space, and how does it blend with other historic events? And many other questions, to which even a brief investigation of the story of Samak-e ‘Ayyar and its inspiration from the relations between Iran and Egypt in ancient times, may provide some answers.

To the present, little attention has been given to the influence of ancient Egyptian culture on Iranian culture and literature, while we know that, in the Achaemenian period, Egypt was twice a Persian satrapy, for a total of 132 years during the 27th and 31st dynasties, and that the Iranians also ruled over Egypt for a while in the Sasanian period. Monarchical rule was more than twenty-four centuries old in Egypt when Cambyses founded the 27th dynasty, known as the dynasty of Persian Pharaohs. Of course, culture and art were even older in Egypt than monarchical rule, having long reached their summit of perfection when the Iranian conquerors set foot on Egyptian soil. The Iranians were as fascinated by this rich culture and art as the Greeks, among whom Herodotus wrote “ Egypt being, among all the regions of the earth, the richest in marvels.”¹ We are not concerned here with assessing the contributions of ancient Egyptian art to Achaemenian or Sasanian arts. Rather, we are seeking to determine how the culture and civilization of a vanquished nation has influenced the collective memory of the victor, as can be traced here and there in a version of Samak-e ‘Ayyar written in the sixth or seventh century (12th-13th c. A.D.) The only manuscript found so far of Samak-e ‘Ayyar is “in three volumes preserved at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.”

Parts of this manuscript are missing. Thus, “many pages are absent between volumes two and three,” and the story remains unfinished at the end of volume three. Fortunately, Khanlari has unearthed the second volume of a late tenth or early eleventh century (16th-17th c. A.D.) Turkish translation in two volumes of this book. This manuscript is preserved.

On the basis of this translation... a large part of the lost pages of the original can be recovered.”⁴ In his revised edition, Khanlari has included the Persian translation of the Turkish second volume from the beginning to the point where the story rejoins the beginning of the Persian third volume at the Bodleian Library.

However, parts of the text remain obscure. Thus, at the end of the second volume at the Bodleian Library, Prince Farrokhrooz is a two and a half year old tot (when he comes in possession of Siamak’s treasure), while at the beginning of the Turkish translation’s second volume he is a youth in love wondering “how he can endure the absence of Golbooy.”

The hero of the story is an elfin paladin known as Samak-e ‘Ayyar⁶, who together with his companion brigands, gives assistance to Khorshid Shah, the son of Marzban Shah, and his son, Prince Farrokhrooz, and is eventually entitled ‘Alamafrooz after rendering outstanding services.

In Khanlari’s opinion: “The phrasing of the book is such that it appears to have been written to be narrated...” He continues: “Samak-e ‘Ayyar is a Persian popular story that has brought entertainment and joy to the people of this land for many centuries and which storytellers have learned from their masters or fathers, spending their entire lives retelling it in towns and villages, and eventually conferring this social service on their own students or sons before departing.”

Some attribute the original story of Samak-e ‘Ayyar to the Parthian period. The oath of the story’s heroes to “... Noor, Nar, Mehr and the Seven Stars...” can be seen as a relic of Mithraic beliefs. Khanlari, without putting forth a date, highlights points that indicate a relation between this story and pre-Islamic Iranian narratives, including the “appellation of Khorshid Shah, the main hero of the story of Samak-e ‘Ayyar,” which he believes corresponds “to what is recorded in the Pahlavi book *Bondehesh* ... concerning the descendants of the Kiani monarch, Manuchehr.”⁸ In the preface to his *Shahr-e Samak*, he adds: “These types of popular stories have very ancient origins in the history of a people’s life. Narrators learn them from one another in the course of time, transmitting them from bosom to bosom, while tinting each in accordance with their times and social developments so that they remain familiar to their listeners.

However, their overall structure remained in place as massive tree trunks, with only their branches altered now and then.” Khanlari concludes: “Perhaps the roots of this story must be sought in very ancient times. The original story appears to have come into being in the heroic period and been repeatedly revived and renovated in the course of time.”

The author, taking into consideration the concepts involved in some illustrations and textual passages, believes that some of the story’s events must be traced in the Iranians’ collective memory in relation to Egypt, from antiquity to the time when the story was written, i.e., the seventh century A.H. (13th c. A.D.) The origins of this relationship may be remnants from the time when Cambyses invaded Egypt. Here we concern ourselves only with those parts and illustrations of this book that may be related to the Iranians’ perception of Egyptian civilization and culture.

The three existing volumes of the Samak-e ‘Ayyar manuscript contain 80 illustrations. The calligraphy and illustration of this copy were undoubtedly commissioned by its author, whose social status was enhanced to the best ability of the artists involved. These types of paintings have come to be known as the Provincial School, owing to their distinctly lower artistic quality in comparison with the illustrations of manuscripts produced in royal and princely courts. On the other hand, these crude paintings made by one or a few painters constitute a rare source of knowledge on popular beliefs, customs and ways of life in the sixth and seventh centuries A.H. (12th-13th c. A.D.).

The discussion of the visual significance of these paintings, which are believed to be relics of the pre-Islamic tradition of mural painting in southwestern Iran, falls beyond the scope of the present article and will be dealt with in a research embodying the entire illustrations of the Samak-e ‘Ayyar manuscript.

The painting that led us to this research was one of these damaged images, in which the visages of Samak-e ‘Ayyar (‘Alamafrooz) and Roozafzoon have been obliterated. Samak is depicted unveiling an ancient corpse and saluting it, “thinking that he had died that very hour.” On the one hand, the corpse appears mummified and, on the other, an ancient corpse that appears to have died within the hour can only be a mummy.

This is mainly due to the fact that, in Iran, the dead were never mummified, even before the advent of Islam. Yet the term *mumia*'i is recorded as a word with Persian origins, and Herodotus has mentioned that the Iranians embalmed their dead with wax [moom] before burying them.

Nasser-Khosrow, who was in Egypt in 441 A.H. writes: "The Sultan had a servant ... this servant was the prince of the Mutayeban, and very great, powerful and rich."

"The Mutayeban are those who seek out buried treasures in mausoleums across Egypt. People come from the entire Maghrib and from Egypt and Syria, all taking great pains and spending great sums amid those Egyptian mausoleums and sculptures. Many are those who have found buried treasures ... for they say that pharaohs' riches were buried on these sites. And whenever someone finds something there, he hands over one fifth of it to the Sultan and the rest is his."

The name of Qebt-e Pari, one of the story's evil characters, also draws the reader's attention towards Egypt, because the Egyptian Christians are called Qebti [Coptic]. Of course, Qebt-e Pari is not Christian, because the venerable Yazdanparast helps Samak defeat the paris (fairies).

Assuming that the Treasure House is related to ancient Egypt and that Qebt-e Pari is a symbol of its people, the location of the City of the Eagle, the role of Maran in the story, the black crow's skin of Qebt-e Pari, the personality of Yazdanparast, the role of fairies and witches, the treasure inside the cow's belly in the realm of darkness, and many other points, take on clear significations. Perhaps even an explanation concerning the "Mighty as an Elephant Jackal" title of Samak's tutor can be suggested.

Before examining these points one by one, we remind the reader that the Iranians' first wide-ranging contact with the Egyptians and their civilization dates back to Egypt's invasion by Cambyses in 526 B.C. Cambyses is said to have behaved dishonorably in Egypt, wounding the sacred bull Apis and having the mummified corpse of the ancient Egyptian king, Amasis, burned.

The independent 28th through 30th dynasties ruled over Egypt from 404 B.C. to 344 B.C. when Artaxerxes III (Okhos) once again invaded Egypt.

Okhos behaved even worse than Cambyses, as attested to by far more substantial evidence than rumors. “Egyptian farmers likened Okhos to a donkey and referred to him as such, because this animal represented the essence of evil in their mind. Immediately upon entering Memphis, Ochos orders a donkey installed in the temple following the ritual specific to deities; he then has the bull Apis slain and in a feast ... eats it. ... His minister, Bagoas, loots all the temples and has their treasures, together with sacred books, sent to Iran.”

“His satrap, who dwelled in the White Wall, in the pharaohs’ ancient palace, was supported by an army of one hundred and twenty thousand men established in three camps.

Although it has been said that the Achaemenian army consisted mostly of non-Iranian mercenaries, if we assume that only 10,000 of them were Iranians, and that only 2,000 of these returned to Iran, this number is enough for them to have transferred what they had seen and heard in this wondrous land. Moreover, certainly a number of Iranians were also at the satrap’s service at the time, and Iranian merchants also traveled to this rich country, where sophisticated arts and crafts existed.

Iranians living in Egypt in ancient times belonged to different social groups and most of them probably only saw, and were fascinated by, the appearances of Egyptian culture and civilization. This may explain Egypt’s transformation into a land of fairies and witches in the Iranians’ collective memory.

The Storyline until the Arrival to the Treasure House

Khorshid Shah has gone to welcome his father, Marzban Shah, on his way back home. Samak and Roozafzoon (a female fellow brigand) have gone to the Island of Fire to lure back the witch Sayhaneh. Spies alert the enemy, whose troops launch a surprise raid on the camp and abduct Abandokht (Khorshid Shah’s consort) and her baby (Farrokhröz). The enemy’s minister devises a plot to have Abandokht sent to Goor-Khan (the king of the City of the Eagle, which borders India and Machin [trans-China]), requesting his assistance in defeating Khorshid Shah. After several events, Samak and Roozafzoon rescue Abandokht and Farrokhröz and attempt to escape through a hidden subterranean passage. In the dark, Roozafzoon, who is holding Farrokhröz in her arms, falls in a well. This well leads to the Treasure House, “said to have been left behind from the time of Kiumars” and “now transformed into a graveyard.” An old shepherd by the name of Bastookh is in charge of this treasure and he has inherited this charge from his forefathers. “No one comes here except every year on the day of Nowrooz, when King Goor-Khan sits in New Year audience, and whatever New Year presents are brought in, they bring here by night.”

As noted in our preliminary, and also in the case of Samak-e 'Ayyar, the streams of memories of historic events from different eras have merged to give birth to a river of legends. In other words, this story embraces different layers, some of which are rooted in the collective memory, left over from close and remote pasts, while others belong to the narrator's present time.

In this part of the story, although the Treasure House occurs accidentally on the way, during the escape through the subterranean passage of Goor-Khan's palace, it is reminiscent of the Motayeban's treasure-hunting mentioned in Nasser-Khosrow's travel account. This may have happened either during the author's lifetime or a little earlier.

The treasurer Bastookh who has never seen the inside of the Treasure House yet, like his father and forefathers, considers himself the "custodian" of a treasure said to have remained from "the time of Kiumars." He symbolizes the poor, kind-hearted, hospitable Iranian people, who uphold their ancient traditions even though their country has fallen under the rule of foreigners. He says that this treasure "has now been handed over to Goor-Khan," meaning that it is not his and that he is indeed unworthy of it.

The Goor-Khanids ruled from 1148 A.D. to 1215 A.D. over part of Turkmenistan, present-day Afghanistan and part of India. We saw that Goor-Khan was the king of the City of the Eagle, which borders India and Machin. In Samak's story, Goor-Khan symbolizes the Turks ruling over Iran, although the author's description of the City of the Eagle is inspired from the Iranians' collective memory of Egypt.

On the one hand, the adoption of the combination of the words Goor-Khan (a jumbled form of Khan-e Goor [Lord of the Tomb]) may be a witticism on the author's part. He has also satirically pointed out, in his description of the New Year festivities, that they hold a Nowrooz audience because it benefits them, since "whatever New Year presents are brought in, they bring here [the Treasure House] by night [secretly]." In other terms, the people are to bring "Nowroozi" presents to Goor-Khan every New Year, which he nightly, unseen by them, transfers to the Treasure House!

Fighting the Fairies

“Bastookh said get up and let us go to my wife... So the two of them got under way, eventually reaching a mountain and a valley near it... Plentiful water flowed out of that valley to the mountain’s foothills. Bastookh said O girl, beware of touching or drinking this water for it will kill you. Roozafzoon said why is that so? Bastookh said I have heard that a great king had his abode here and that a war occurred between him and the paris. They were no match for the paris. They poisoned this water, sealed it with a spell, and were gone. When the paris came back, they drank of this water, and a number of them died. No one now drinks of this water.”

The Achaemenian king was known as the Great King among the Greeks. After Darius made up for Cambyses’ misdeeds in Egypt and regained the Egyptians’ heart, the Iranians looked upon this land as their own. Perhaps “a war occurred between them and the paris” referred to the independent 28th through 30th Egyptian dynasties in the Iranians’ collective memory. Perhaps the poisoning of the water and the ensuing death of a number of the paris symbolized the Egyptians’ severe repression under Okhos (Artaxerxes III) and the advent of the 31st Persian dynasty. Although the Great King ordered the water to be poisoned for the paris, “no one now drinks of this water” because not only Alexander the Macedonian snatched away Egypt from the Iranians, but he also put an end to the Achaemenian Empire.

The Treasure House and the Way Out

Samak (‘Alamafrooz) returns to the City of the Eagle. He once again makes it to the hidden passage of Goor-Khan’s residence, finds the well in which Roozafzoon and Farrokhrooz have fallen, and moves back outside. Roozafzoon tells Samak about the Treasure House. Samak goes to see it. Only Goor-Khan has the key to the Treasure House. Samak breaks the lock open with the knife he carries as a brigand. The description of the interior of the Treasure House is similar to that of houses in Oriental stories, except that “he saw a bed with someone lying on it covered by a veil... He drew the veil off that person. He saluted him, thinking that he had died that very hour. He looked in front of him. He saw a deerskin scroll. He took it up. Something was written on it.”²⁰ Although Samak is familiar with different languages and scripts, he reads the scroll with some difficulty, and learns that the corpse died “three thousand and seven hundred” years earlier. He hands over his treasure to Farrokhrooz, who “is descended from King Fereydoon” and who “has reached the age of two upon acceding to this position.” Farrokhrooz was then brought in the presence of that man. And the veil was taken off him. Farrokhrooz was told to kiss the man’s face.”

Samak and his companions realize that only Farrokhrooz can take the treasure out of the Treasure House, and the three thousand year-old corpse has indicated the way out to Samak.

Salmoon the Sage is an erstwhile student of Plato living in the court of Shah Jipal, in the Indian city of Qaf. He has seen in his calculations of the planets' orbits that the treasure left behind by Siamak in the City of the Eagle will be opened up by one of Fereydoon's descendants, who is the grandson of the same Marzbanshah who has now been captured.

Samak tries to find the seaward access to the Treasure House by a star he has marked above its location near the sea. He is unsuccessful. He then tries to reach the underground quay of the Treasure House. Again he fails. The ship is drawn into a whirlpool and Samak jumps overboard.

Samak's adventures on this sea voyage, including his airborne trip while hanging to a huge bird or his capture by the Davalpa'is, resemble those of Sindbad the Sailor.

Eventually the bird carries Samak to a verdant island, where he finds a monastery made of tree branches. A four hundred year-old man by the name of Yazdanparast is a worshipper in this monastery.

Upon learning of Samak's efforts to find the way of taking the ancient treasure out, Yazdanparast asks him to bring him a green page of writing lying in a corner of the monastery. Samak is unable to read the writing. Yazdanparast reads it: the page is addressed from Siamak to Farrokhrooz and it reemphasizes that the treasure has been left for him. It also indicates the way out, through "a fountain which the paris have poisoned." On the right hand side of the fountain there is a large stone that must be removed to reveal a hole out of which the fountain's water flows for an hour until it is emptied. An iron door appears that leads to the City of the Eagle."

Having found the page in that same island, Yazdanparast reads it, but fails to realize its meaning before hearing Samak mention the City of the Eagle. Someone interested in the treasure must have written down this page to leave a record.

After a few more adventures, and the help of the Homamorgh, which the old man says is a Simorgh, Samak returns and they take the treasure out via the City of the Eagle, over which Goor-Khan no longer reigns.

A most striking point is that, as we saw above, the fountain was poisoned by order of the Great King, whereas the writing on Siamak's page mentions "a fountain which the Paris have poisoned." The Paris are innocent in the first version and guilty in the second! Undoubtedly, these two versions pertain to different layers of collective memory.

The ancient corpse and the Treasure House can also be pale remnants of the cremation of Amasis' mummy and the looting of his mausoleum, which is attributed to Cambyses. This memory has become inverted in the course of time. An insult to a corpse has turned into reverence and fondness: Samak salutes the corpse, and has the two-year-old Farrokhrooz kiss it! And no pharaoh whose riches may be looted is involved. In his stele, Siamak says, "I was king and I gathered this treasure and left it for eternity." Only the Siamak of Iranian mythology, descended from Kiumars, the son of Mashi and Mashianeh and the father of Hooshang, is killed during his father's reign by the div's son.

Another layer of this adventure reveals itself in the words of Salmoon the Sage, "an erstwhile student of Plato." The Egyptians considered Alexander and the Greeks as their liberators from Persian hegemony. Therefore, when a disciple of Plato says to have "seen in his calculations of the planets' orbits that the treasure left behind by Siamak in the City of the Eagle will be opened up by one of Fereydoon's descendants," no doubt remains that the Greeks also admit that the treasure belonged to the Iranians and that they had only taken away what belonged to them.

Farrokhrooz comes into possession of another treasure in the reconstituted Turkish translation of the story of Samak-e 'Ayyar, which can also be a remnant of the collective memory of Achaemenian times. This treasure is found on an island probably located on the eastern African coast, near present-day Sudan or Ethiopia, as the geographic and demographic features described in the story seem to indicate. This layer has become intermingled with another layer of collective memory connected to the period when Muslims captured and traded in slaves in Zanzibar.

The place is called “Simabiyeh,” because its king’s name is “Simab.” Borhan-e Qate‘records that “gutless, heartless, fearing, valuable and fearsome individuals are called simab-del.” Farrokhrooz and Samak “saw the town’s people [to be] tall and dark-featured.” In brief, the story goes:

‘Alamafrooz (Samak) rescues Farrokhrooz from Tooti Shah’s prison and escapes by way of sea. A storm breaks out and throws their boat on an island on which there is a pavilion in which, behind several curtains, someone is lying on a bed with a scroll addressed to Farrokhrooz before him. The corpse is that of “Tahmuras-e Div-band,” who has also left his treasure for Farrokhrooz and recommended him to wear only a gem-studded belt the first time he comes alone, but to take up his entire “treasure, crown and blade” the second time he comes with [his] army. Farrokhrooz picks up the belt, “kisses the man’s face,” and they leave the island. For three days they are lost at sea, then a storm breaks out and smashes their ship, leaving them hanging to a rock. Five more days and nights the wind carries them away, until on the sixth day a large city, which is none but Simabiyeh, comes into sight. Simab Shah receives them warmly and gives them a red wine that is not like usual yellow wines and even a small amount of it is inebriating. Simab Shah tells them that a garden existed there that, when dug, revealed a cellar with four hundred jars of wine all “bearing the seal of Tahmuras.” Some time later, while assisting Simab Shah in his war against Jam Shah’s paladins, Farrokhrooz, in reply to the cheap presents Jam Shah sends to lure him to his side, sends him Tahmuras-e Div-band’s belt and distributes Jam Shah’s presents among his servants.

The discovery of four hundred jars of wine bearing Tahmuras’ seal in Simabiyeh indicates that this place and its “tall and dark-featured” people once were part of Tahmuras’ dominion, i.e., belonged to the Iranians.

The story of Samak is silent on Farrokhrooz and his troops returning to the island and seizing Tahmuras-e Div-band’s treasure. This may be one of the story’s lost pieces or a remnant of the memory of Cambyses’ unsuccessful invasion of Napata and Ethiopia and his disdainful reception of the five hundred minae gift sent by Archesilas, the king of Cyrenaica, which he distributed among his troops.

Not only does the narrator make no mention of a dead person or of Tahmuras-e Div-band's corpse, but Farrokhrooz "kisses the man's face" before leaving, which attests to its being mummified.

Farrokhrooz tells the pari Titoon that, on her way back, in Khorshid Shah's company, from Shah Shamshakh's court in Shais ebn-e Adam's city, she found a treasure belonging to Kiumars [that amounted to] "forty Khosrovani Khanbs, all in jewels," adding, "we brought it all back. We spent a lot [of it] and a great amount still remains." No trace of this discovered treasure appears in what remains of Samak-e 'Ayyar's story and it must belong to the lost parts of the book.

Another treasure discovery exists in this story in relation with the paris that does not appear to be related to the collective memory remaining from the Achaemenian period, and to which we shall return in relation to Qebt-e Pari.

Borhan-e Qate' reads: "Qebt ... refers to the Egyptians in the Hebrew language and the term's singular form is Qebti." Quoting the Encyclopedia of Islam in his footnote on this word, Mohammad Mo'in comments: "Copte (Fr.) ... This word is now believed to be a distortion of Aiguptios (Egypt)." In fact, the Muslims' rule over Egypt, which began in 641 A.D. was followed by the settlement of a number of Arabs in this land. Initially, the Muslim Arabs referred to its inhabitants as Qebti. However, once the majority of the indigenous population embraced Islam, the term Qebti began designating the heretics who still believed in ancient Egyptian deities. And when no heretic remained in Egypt, the Christian Egyptians, who had embraced this faith near the end of the first century A.D. and were in majority when Islam reached this land, came to be called Qebti."

In Samak-e 'Ayyar's story, Qebt-e Pari is the queen of the paris, who is inimical to humans, who abducts and enthralls them.

The story of Samak-e 'Ayyar is said to have originally involved several figures named Yazdanparast, but only two of them come to our attention in the pages that have reached us: the Yazdanparast who helps Samak find the way out of Siamak's Treasure House through the City of the Eagle, and the Yazdanparast who teaches Samak how to overcome Qebt-e Pari. Samak calls upon the latter and says that other Yazdanparasts have given him keepsakes which he has taken to Khorshid Shah. "Alamafrooz spoke about those Yazdanparasts."

In Samak-e 'Ayyar's story, Yazdanparasts are three- or four-hundred year-old men who worship in isolation in a secluded monastery. They know the magic properties of plants and feed on unknown nutritious fruit. They know a language and a script which others do not. When necessary, they assist men by showing them how to escape the paris' spells. In fact, the Yazdanparasts and the paris are opposite poles.

In the Iranians' collective memory, including that of the author of Samak-e 'Ayyar, these Yazdanparasts can be recollections of the isolated monks of the early Christian era in Egypt.

The Christian monks' isolation in Egypt came about "in the wake of the events of 250 A.D. when Paul, an inhabitant of Thebes, facing the danger of being exposed as a Christian, goes to the desert to find shelter and devote himself entirely to God." 37 The exactions committed later on against the Christians, which began growing in 284 A.D. and lasted until 311 A.D. caused a number of them to seek refuge in the desert, turn to worship and temperance, and willingly live in seclusion. When the situation returned to normal, some of them preferred to remain in the wilderness and devote themselves to religious meditation, emulating such models as Khezr Peace Be Upon Him, Elias [PBUH] and the Christ. It is perhaps in recollection of this memory that, in the story of Samak-e 'Ayyar, upon Yazdanparast's death, faced with Farrokhrooz's "supplications and lamentations," God "ordered Khezr [PBUH] and Elias [PBUH] to cross that fence" and release Farrokhrooz and 'Alamafrooz from Qebt-e Pari's captivity.

The Coptic language, as it has been preserved in the liturgy of Christian Egyptians, "is the inheritor of the pharaonic Egyptian language. "It remains essentially and mostly made up of words and expressions of pharaonic origins, which continue to form the language's backdrop." Perhaps this is why Yazdanparast is able to read the tablet showing the way out of the Treasure House. Interestingly, until the time when the story of Samak-e 'Ayyar is written, that is the sixth or seventh century A.H. the term Coptic referred to the followers of the pharaonic cult rather than to Christian Egyptians. In the Iranians' collective memory, the conflict between Yazdanparast and the paris is a remnant of the memory of the downfall of the ancient cult and the rise and expansion of the new in the land of the pharaohs.

The beginning of the divs' and paris', particularly Qebt-e Pari's, animosity against Khorshid Shah and his son, Farrokhrooz, falls in the lost pages of Samak-e 'Ayyar. Yet, here and there, the words exchanged between the story's protagonists seem to indicate that this enmity is

deeply rooted. Apparently, Khorshid Shah, assisted by Samak, had undone ten of the div Esfid's talismans "and rescued Farrokhrooz along with a few women from captivity on MountJahanbin." And Qebt-e Pari reminds Samak that he has imprisoned his relatives, the plebeian div Kusal and his offspring, who have died in captivity, and adds, "What business can men have with paris?"

If we admit that the author of Samak's adventures was in the least inclined toward Egypt while writing the adventures connected with Qebt-e Pari, we find signs in them whose memories may be remnants of this country's ten-year-long occupation by the Sasanians in the Iranians' collective memory.

After reviving the boundaries of the Achaemenian Empire, in 619 A.D. fulfilling one of their long-lasting desires, the Sasanians occupied Egypt under Khosrow II. The Iranians ruled over Egypt until 629 A.D. Their rule was initially harsh and bloody, but later tended towards moderation and tolerance.

Back to the Story of Samak-e 'Ayyar

The events of this section occur in a country within the paris' territory. Qebt-e Pari has abducted Farrokhrooz's warrior wife, Mardandokht. Samak is searching for her. Qebt-e Pari has spellbound the pagans and paris opposed to her and transformed them into talking jackals and zebras. Two birds "resembling peacocks, with a spread plumage of a hundred thousand colors and with claws and beaks, but with faces like men's" tell Samak, "During the week we were here and we saw Qebt-e Pari carrying away someone in fetters ... to her abode, Parishahr, near Mount Qaf." The talking birds with human faces are neither pagans nor paris. They are called "Man-loving Birds." These birds must be related to Persian/Indian fables.

Samak asks the Malek-ot-Toyoor [King of Birds] to help him. "That bird said I can do nothing about Qebt-e Pari." Farrokhrooz goes to see the zebras. He too comes under the spell of Qebt-e Pari, who is wearing her black crow's skin. One night in a clearing in the paris' territory, Samak sees a light "joined to the sky ... he tells himself that it appears to be Yazdanparast's sign." He calls on Yazdanparast to help him liberate Mardandokht and Farrokhrooz.

“The old one tells him that there is nothing he can do about Qebt-e Pari.” Eventually, faced with Samak’s insistence, he says that Samak should go to the fountain and hide there waiting for Qebt-e Pari to arrive for her bath, at which time he should snatch her clothes away and burn them to ashes. “Then tie a string around Qebt-e Pari’s neck and bring her to me,” so that I may free them from their bonds. However, Qebt-e Pari finds Samak and imprisons him in the same dungeon as Farrokhrooz. Roozafzoon comes to Yazdanparast’s “monastery” and, relating the events, asks him for a solution. Yazdanparast tells her that he knows no means of rescuing Farrokhrooz and Samak, but that “last night Soroosh appeared to me” and showed me the way of setting Mardandokht free. Yazdanparast recites a spell and blows on Roozafzoon, rendering her invisible to the paris. He also teaches her the way of breaking the spells on her way to Parishahr. One is an old man “wearing an Egyptian daq and bearing a scarf on his head,” whom Roozafzoon is to hit on the head with the stick Yazdanparast gives her. Roozafzoon reaches Parishahr and, with the help of human beings whom Qebt-e Pari and her daughter have transformed into horses and birds, she kills Qebt-e Pari’s daughter. Qebt-e Pari pursues them as far as Yazdanparast’s monastery. A voice comes from the monastery that warns, “Return otherwise I shall burn you.” Frightened, Qebt-e Pari turns back. Roozafzoon abducts Shams Pari, Qebt-e Pari’s minister, and takes her to Yazdanparast’s monastery. Following Yazdanparast’s instructions, Shams Pari returns to Qebt-e Pari’s court. She then breaks the spell holding Mardandokht prisoner in Parishahr and takes back two cases containing the clothes and jewels of Qebt-e Pari’s daughter to Khorshid Shah, as a present for Farrokhrooz’s wife. Having dreamt that his death has come, Yazdanparast asks the men liberated from Qebt-e Paris’ bonds to bury him in the same monastery. Mardandokht goes to war against Khorshid Shah’s enemies.

As we saw above, Farrokhrooz and Samak escape Qebt-e Pari’s dungeon with the help of the prophets Khezr [PBUH] and Elias [PBUH]. On the instigation of Baktash, a member of her entourage, Qebt-e Pari throws Shams Pari in prison for having spied for human beings and promises a ministry to Baktash in exchange for his capture of Farrokhrooz. Baktash seizes Farrokhrooz and Roozafzoon, together with their belongings, and imprisons them in another dungeon.

After many adventures, both Baktash and Shams Pari vow allegiance to Khorshid Shah.

It becomes known that Qebt-e Pari has taken the spell binding Farrokhrooz to Zolamat [The Kingdom of Darkness]. Baktash says, “Kings have built a subterranean cache and the treasure of the paris’ queen is there and it is called Zolamat.” A bull stands in Zolamat that must be slain and its entrails emptied for Farrokhrooz’s fetters to come undone.

Is Baktash the pari’s description of Zolamat not a fabulous one of Egyptian pharaohs’ mausoleums?

Samak sets out, accompanied by Shams Pari, Baktash and her sons, to find a way to release Farrokhrooz. One of Baktash’s sons attempts to enter the dungeon by air; he catches fire and burns. Samak tries to secure the help of Qebt-e Pari’s enemies so that “they can match her evil.” These enemies, whom Qebt-e Pari has imprisoned, form two groups: the pari zebras, who are the subjects of Titoon, and the pagan jackals, who are the subjects of Tahnoon. Qebt-e Pari’s nanny, who resembles a huge tiger, and the nanny’s daughter, who looks like a wolf, are the holders of their destiny: if the tiger and the wolf are killed, the prisoners will recover their freedom. They are joined by Mardandokht and another paladin by the name of ‘Alqoom. One slays the tiger and the other the wolf. Titoon and Tahnoon agree to raise their troops against Qebt- Pari.

Equipped with a lamp given by Shams Pari, Samak and his companions enter Zolamat. Mardandokht and ‘Alqoom each throw an arrow at the bull, while Samak tears its side open with his dagger. Shams, Baktash and her son enter Zolamat. “Shams thrust her arm into the bull’s belly and brought that case out, whereupon the bull vanished.” Mardandokht wants a token of their passage in Zolamat. Shams, Baktash and her son “all three went into Zolamat ... brought back three cases ... Shams said there are so many goods in this Zolamat that [the like] cannot be found in the entire world.” Qebt-e Pari has sealed the cases. They all go to the paris’ fountain. Qebt arrives. Shams and Baktash carry the cases away. Samak and his companions capture Qebt, who has now abandoned her black crow’s skin. Shams burns down Qebt’s plumage. The paris accept Titoon as their monarch. Qebt admonishes Titoon: “If you want the kingdom to remain yours ... eliminate Tahnoon ... break up with Shams and Baktash ... pledge to men and make them pledge to you that enmity never arises between you and that you do not harm each other ... Do not give them these cases they have brought from the treasure, for they do not appreciate it.” Qebt dies. The paris fight between themselves for three days. Tahnoon, Shams and Baktash have been killed during the fights. Farrokhrooz is set free and he and Titoon vow that men and paris will never again harm each other. From the three cases, Titoon gives Farrokhrooz only a token of two gowhar-e shab-cheraghs.

It is unlikely that the name of Qebt-e Pari was adopted accidentally, without any relationship to Egypt, by its author.

Although archaeologists have unearthed many treasures in mausoleums across the world, the description of Zolamat corresponds most closely to that of pharaonic mausoleums. As attested to by investigations carried out by historians of Coptic Christianity, the existence of a Yazdanparast worshipping in a “monastery” may be a remnant in the collective memory of the life led by Christian Egyptian monks. If we admit these two premises, it may perhaps be said that the latter part of Samak’s story embodies the memories that have remained in the collective memory from the Sasanians’ ten-year occupation of Egypt.

As we saw above, the Sasanians’ rule over Egypt “was initially harsh and bloody, but later tended towards moderation and tolerance.” The fabulous manifestation of this historic reality appears in Qebt-e Pari’s vindictive actions against Farrokhrooz and her entourage. And Qebt-e Pari’s advice to Titoon on vowing with Farrokhrooz that “men and paris do not harm each other” belongs to the period of “moderation and tolerance.”

Another point is that the benefits accruing from the Sasanians’ occupation of Egypt are not comparable to those gained in the Achaemenian period, when Egypt was a Persian satrapy. Thus, in the fable, the memory of the Achaemenians’ exploitation of Egypt manifests itself as the discovery of treasures left behind by Siamak and Tahmuras. Farrokhrooz is fully entitled to take and spend this treasure, whereas, in the memory remaining from the Sasanians’ time, the treasure of Zolamat belongs to the paris and Farrokhrooz is given only two gowhar-e shab-cheraghs, one of which he gives to Samak, following his wife Golbooy’s advice, for him to spend on his brigandage or use to deceive a foe.

The “Mighty as an Elephant Jackal”

In Samak-e ‘Ayyar’s story, the “Mighty as an Elephant Jackal” is Samak’s teacher, who was the city’s Esfahsalar [Military Commander in Chief] under Khorshid Shah’s father, Marzban Shah, and he is respected by all until the end of the story. The combination of “jackal” and “mighty as an elephant” sounds bizarre in present-day Persian, and no other example of this kind is found in ancient Persian literature. We have not yet come across any written explanation of this appellation. Bahram Bayza’i says that this brigand teacher may have been known as such because the brigands wore a foxtail on their caps. Perhaps this title-like appellation comes from ancient times, when the Persian soldiers of the Achaemenian army serving in Egypt saw representations of Anubis, the fox-headed Egyptian god, and interpreted them according to their own tastes. In all known representations of Anubis, he has the head of a fox and the body of a physically powerful man, and he is solemnly ushering people towards eternal life.

In the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo, there is an icon on which, doubtlessly under the inspiration of Egyptian deities, two Christian saints are represented with heads of jackals.

The City of the Eagle, the Crow’s Skin and the Bull of Zolamat

The falcon is the symbol of the Egyptian god Horus. In connection with the assumptions put forth above, perhaps the appellation of the City of the Eagle, within the boundaries of which the treasure of Siamak is located, was inspired by Horus’ symbol. Qebl-e Pari, the uncompromising ruler of Parishahr and the resolute enemy of men, wears a black crow’s skin. The crow is also the appellation of the first stage of initiation to the cult of Mehr, but it is improbable that the adoption of a black crow’s skin for one of the story of Samak-e ‘Ayyar’s most unpleasant characters was related to the cult of Mehr. It appears more rational that, in the story, the symbol of pharaonic Egypt was deprecatingly changed from a falcon to a black crow. The most prominent memory remaining from the cult of Mehr, in this part of Samak-e ‘Ayyar’s story, is the moment when Samak tears the bull’s side open in Zolamat. This scene recalls images of Mehr slaying a bull, which was the central subject in most subterranean temples. The remote memory of the rumor of Cambyses’ wounding the sacred bull Apis and the memory of another Apis bull being eaten by Okhos and his company in Egypt may also have become confused in the collective memory with Mehr’s bull-slaying, and these layers are difficult to distinguish with any degree of certainty.

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Herodotus, *Histories*, Book II, ch. 35.

Samak-e 'Ayyar, preface and emendation by Parviz Natel Khanlari, vol. 1, p. 5.

Ahmad Hami asserts, in *Bagh-e Mehr*, that this name was originally Samak-e Aiiar, a Persian word related to the cult of Mehr.

Parviz Natel Khanlari, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 6.

Parviz Natel Khanlari, *Shahr-e Samak*, p. 5.

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