Some notes and assumptions on the genesis and the disputed authorship of the **Sām-nāme,** *attributed to Khwāju Kermāni*

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Abstract: The Persian poem *Sām-nāme* (*SN*), attributed to Khwāju Kermāni (14th century), depicts Sām's heroic deeds and his relentless battles against enemies, demons and monsters in order to reunite with his beloved, Princess Paridokht. As some scholars have pointed out, it is actually a late work - a collage of various texts, dating from the Timurid or Safavid era, including Khwāju's verse romance *Homāy o Homāyun* - which is why *Sām-nāme* has been traditionally attributed to him. However, according to our hypothesis, this *SN*-collage retains an older part of a purely epic-heroic character, forming the core of the central section of *SN*. This original core, which we will refer to as the *Ur-SN*, has been supplemented with additional material from oral and folkloric literature over the centuries, and has been subject to further arrangements and re-use for the purposes of plagiarism or recycling. The work has also been the subject of rewritings (*bāz-nevisi*), including a Safavid-era *Sām o Pari* by Ḥasan Beyg ʿEtābi Tekellu Qazvini, or even reductions, as evidenced by a *Sām-nāme-ye kuchak* from the same period.

This article attempts to support, on the basis of various linguistic and philological observations, the hypothesis that a substantial part of the 'epic-heroic' section of the *SN* has its origin in the Persian epic literature of the 11th and 12th centuries, in the Seljuk era. Another hypothesis put forward here is that the author of the *Ur-SN* was probably of Mazdean faith or at least close to the Zoroastrian milieu, a fact that can be deduced from the analysis of the religious-ideological structure of the work, which takes up theological themes of Mazdeism. This last aspect probably conditioned the life of the work and led to partial censorship and interpolations in the centuries following its composition. In the *SN*-collage that has come down to us, the story of Sām, a true "holy hero", nevertheless achieved a significant circulation, as evidenced by at least 21 manuscripts, probably thanks to the collage with the *Homāy o Homāyun*, a poem that has been guaranteed over the centuries by the name of Khwāju Kermāni.

Keywords: *Sām-nāme*, *Homāy o Homāyun*, Khwāju Kermāni, epic-heroic poem, Mazdaism, Ḥasan Beg ʿEtābi, "holy hero", *mathnavi*

Foreword

The Persian epic-romantic poem (*Sām-nāme* (referred to as *SN*)[1], a *mathnavi* attributed to Khwāju Kermāni (Kerman 689 H/1290 AD - Shiraz 750/1349)[2] composed in the same metre as Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāme* and Khwāju's *Homāy o Homāyun*[3] (i.e. *motaqāreb*), recounts the heroic deeds of Sām and, in particular, his journey and many vicissitudes to achieve union with his beloved, Paridokht, the daughter of the Emperor of China (*faghfur-e chin*). In short, according to some scholars, the *SN* is most likely a collage work, compiled   by an editor/plagiarist of the Timurud or Safavid era who would have combined *at least* two poems. The first and smaller part of the *SN*, of about 4,000 couplets, is largely identical to Khwāju Kermāni's *Homāy o Homāyun*, with a few minor changes, notably in the names of the protagonists. It provides a framework for the whole of the *SN*-collage, which is mainly distributed between the beginning and the end, but also appears here and there in the rest of the work. It is within this framework of essentially romantic content that the name of Khwāju appears, and it is for this reason that the *SN* has been traditionally attributed to him. The second and larger part of the *SN*, of about 10,000 couplets (the number of verses varies according to the critical edition), lies roughly in the middle of this frame and represents the epic-heroic content of the *SN*. This section mainly depicts the Iranian prince Sām's long battles against his archenemies, including demons and monsters, as well as wars against other rulers who obstruct his reunion with his beloved Paridokht. In this section, the rich and varied presence of marvellous beings, including fairies genies arch-demons monsters mythical birds (such as the Simorgh with its strange and unusual appearance) and other imaginary creatures, gives the poem a distinctly folkloric, at times one might say Indianising, aspect.[4] According to our hypothesis, a substantial part of this central section of the *SN* probably has its original core in the Persian epic literature of the 11th and 12th centuries. This initial core, which we will call the *Ur-SN*, was supplemented by additional material from oral and folkloric literature over the following centuries, while undergoing further arrangements and rewrites for the purposes of plagiarism or recycling.

We will attempt here to demonstrate the antiquity of the heroic material contained in the "original core" (*Ur-SN*) in relation to the later "composite edition" of the *SN-collage* to which we refer, possibly dating from the Safavid period and certainly after the 14th century. Our hypothesis suggests that the author of the "original core" may have been a Zoroastrian or someone very close to Zoroastrian circles. However, before presenting the state of the art of the studies on the authorship of the work, another premise must be made on the complex identity of the mythical-legendary figure of Sām.

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[1] The critical edition of the poem referred to in this study is *Sām-nāme* 2013 (1392 Sh.), ed. V. Ruyāni, abbreviated as *SN*.
[2] On the author, see Norozi 2019 and the associated bibliography. In addition, a monograph of mine on Khwāju Kermāni and his verse romance entitled: *Women, Knights, War and Love in the Persian verse romance of Khwāju Kermāni (14th century)* is forthcoming.
[3] For a first complete translation of this work in Italian, cf. Khwāju di Kermān 2016.
[4] This is a subject that would require an in-depth study in its own right. But to mention some of the more striking analogies between *SN* and Indian epics, let us recall, for example, in the poem *Rāmāyaṇa*, the topos of the hero's beloved being kidnapped by a demon, a motif also found in another work by Khwāju Kermāni (different from *Homāy o Homāyun*), the *Gol o Nowruz*, on which cf. Norozi: 2020: 51-54. Another similarity between the two poems is the numerous battles with demons, sorcerers, monstrous beings, etc., which the protagonists of the two poems, Sām and Rāmā, bravely win.

FIRST PART

1. Sām between myth, evemerisation and splitting of identity

The development of the heroic figure of Sām in Zoroastrian and Islamic texts has been a subject of confusion and variations, with a rather complex history. The name stems from the Avestic *sāma*, with different interpretations among scholars. Bartholomae (1904: 1571) suggests that it means 'black', while Khāleghi-Motlagh (1983a: 407) suggests 'abstinence' (*parhiz*). In addition, Sarkārāti (2000: 689) notes similarities with the Sanskrit term *śam*, which means 'diligent, active' from the verb *śāmyati* ('to toil, to fatigue').

At the beginning of the work, i.e. in a part derived from the *HH* of Khwāju Kermāni, the protagonist of the story, Sām, turns out to be the son of the daughter of the king of Balkh:

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چنین گفت موبد مر این داستان / که از دختر شاه بلخ آن زمان

که سام یل آمد همی در وجود / برآورد هریک به شادی سرود (*SN*: 4)

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> So the priest (*mobad*) told this story: / "From the daughter of the king of Balkh at that time
> Sām the brave came into the world / and everyone sang joyful hymns".

Curiously, the father is not mentioned in the quoted passage. We then read that from the age of eight, Sām grows up in the court of the old king Manuchehr; and later, as the rest of the poem makes clear, Sām is portrayed as a general (*sepahbod*) or a champion (*jahān pahlavān*) of king Manuchehr, according to what is also noted in Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāme* (*SHN*, vol. I: 164-282).

Notoriously, Sām is known in the Neo-Persian literature as the son of Narimān who in turn was the son of Garshāsp, and would thus be the ancestor of the famous hero Rostam son of Zāl. All of these figures are revered as heroes and paladins of Iranian rulers, and their legends are recounted in the Ferdowsi epic.

In addition to the predictable and recurring confusions and inaccuracies about Sām's ancestry, Sām is also subject to the phenomenon of evemerisation, which is typical of Islamic culture and frequently observed in the epics of the Neo-Persian letters from the earliest times.[5] A similar fate befell Sām's forefather, Garshāsb/Karshāsp, the Avestan dragon-slayer, who, as we shall soon see, is often mistakenly identified with Sām. Garshāsp's name, derived from the Avestan *Kərəsāspa* ('He who possesses lean/flanked horses', a semi-totemic name), is also found in Sanskrit in the form of *kṛśvāśva*. It is therefore possible to assume that Garshāsp is a product of an Indo-Iranian myth from a historical period when the two peoples were united (Moʿin 1947: 415; Skjærvø 2012; Khāleghi-Motlagh 1983a: 406-7). In the *Avesta* we also find the name of Garshāsp's father, King Thrita (*Farvardin Yasht*, 61, 136), who is sometimes referred to as *Sāma kərəsāspa naire-manah*, a fascinating onomastic "trinity". It is noteworthy that two components of the character's name, *sāma* (caste name) and *naire-manah* ('manly/brave'), are adjectives referring to exactly the same person. In Neopersian literature and historical works, these three elements are separated to form the names of two or three separate characters: Sām, Garshāsp/Garshāsb and Narimān (Sarkārāti 2000: 689). The original identity of Garshāsp and Sām is attested in Pahlavic texts such as the *Bundahishn* and in the *Mēnōg ī khrad*, in which Sām has a special role in eschatological events. He is said not to have died,

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[5] On this subject, cf. Scarcia 1965: 163, footnote 212 and Bausani 1960: 590.

but to be resting in a hidden place, guarded by 99,999 spirits (*fravashi*), until the day he is called upon to fight the demon Azhi Dahāka (in Neo-Persian Żaḥḥāk), who escapes from his imprisonment in the Damāvand mountain towards the end of time (De Bruijn 2010). However, in the Manichaean Book of the Giants (*Kawān/Sifr al-jabābira*), which is one of the seven books of the Prophet Mānī, Sām and Narimān appear as two different identities (Henning 1943: 52-74, especially pp. 60-62). On the other hand, in the Pahlavi books, Garshāsp's father Thrita is referred to as Sām because of their common household/clan (*khāndān*) name, and we also note that in *Yasna* 9, paragraph 10, Thrita is recognised as a member of Sām's household (Moʿin 1947: 147). But the ancient Iranian character of Thrita also survives in Islamic times, with its Arabised version Athraṭ or Ithriṭ/Ethreṭ, e.g. in Asadi Ṭusi's *Garshāsb-nāme* (hereafter abbreviated as *GN*), as well as in our *SN*, albeit with some variants. For example, in the following couplet by Asadi, where we find Sham[6] as Athraṭ's father, we read

ز شم زآن سپس اثرط آمد پدید / وزین هر دو [از طورگ و شم] شاهی به اثرط رسید (Asadi 1975: 49, v. 82)
From Sham later appeared Athraṭ / and from these two [Ṭurak and Sham] kingship came to Athraṭ

In our *SN* which has some consonance with the *GN* – probably due to an ancient confusion of identity between Garshāsp and Sām[7] - we find at least four points (*SN*: 89, 98, 207, 505) where the name Athraṭ (the only one that has a clear and constant identity in pre-Islamic Persian and Islamic texts) appears as Sām's ancestor. In the *SN*, the mention of Sām's ancestry occurs mainly during the various verbal debates that precede the physical duel, when Sām, adopting an intimidating posture towards his opponent, boasts of the fame of his ancestors. In the next quotation, Sām uses this opening statement to make a threatening declaration to the demon Makukāl:

منم سام گرد نریمان نژاد / به گرشسب و اطرد رسانم نهاد (*SN*: 89)
I am Sām, hero from the race of Narimān / my essence goes back to Garshasb and Aṭrad

In summary, in contrast to the earlier phase of confusion, Sām, Narimān and Garshāsp emerged as distinct figures, with abundant evidence in texts from the first centuries of the Islamic era[8]. Sām's transformation from the mythical figure (mainly referring to a household name) to the "historical" one makes him the ancestor of Rostam and the father of the albino Zāl. In short, on the basis of historical-literary sources, Sām's family can be divided into two categories: first, as brave warriors (*jahān pahlavān*) who helped the Iranian kings[9], and second, as either rulers or ruled individuals, the latter case being more visible in the narratives of the Sistān cycle.[10] In addition to the aforementioned division of the components within the ancient onomastic "trinity" relating to Sām's lineage, the *SN*

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[6] It is reasonable to assume that it is a variant of Sām, as this could be a common confusion due to the inaccurate transcription of the complex spelling of the Pahlavi language into Arabic characters.

[7] This Garshāsp/Sām confusion is also found in Islamic texts, such as in al-Bīrūnī's *Āthār al-bāqiya*. Cf. Christensen 1931: 131.

[8] See among the many testimonies the *Tārikh-e Balʿami* (c. 352/963), known to be the Persian translation of the famous *Taʾrīkh al-Ṭabarī* by the Persian arabographer Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (Āmol 839 - Baghdād c. 923), cf. Balʿami 1974: 133.

[9] In Zoroastrian texts, they often appear as real heroes, slayers of demons and dragons and the like. In Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāme*, for example, the house is famously made up of superheroes who often come to the aid of the Persian kings.

[10] See in some historical texts of the first centuries of the Hegira, in particular a well-known local history, the *Tārikh-e Sistān* ('History of the Sistān') of the 11th century, in which the anonymous author mentions the names of the rulers of the Sistān region, beginning with Garshāsp, whose ancestry extends to Bakhtiyār, the last governor of Sistān during the reign of Khosrow II (590-628 AD).

and *GN* also present clear evidence of the character's evemerisation. For example, Garshāsp founds a city in Sistān as described in both the *GN* (Asadi 1975: 236-8) and other texts including the *Tārikh-e Sistān* (1935: 1-5). This city, in the *GN* is referred to as Zaranj (Drangiana or Zarangiana), the ancient name of the Sistān region or Sakastan which intuitively reflects the name of the region itself after the invasion of the Saci/anc.-pers.: *Sakā* (cf. Yarshater 1983: 454-55).

2. On the authorship of the work

2.1 Previous studies on *SN*

The complexity of the question of authorship of the *SN* is essentially due to the lack of certain information on the date of composition and, even more importantly, the problematic mention of the name Khwāju (Kermāni). Khwāju is in fact mentioned in that part of the *SN* which, as noted above, consists of some 4,000 verses of the *Homāy o Homāyun* (henceforth *HH*), and which provides a kind of romantic frame to the heroic story of Sām. The issue has been complicated by the existence of at least 21 manuscripts, some of which differ significantly from each other. Despite evidence to the contrary, many scholars initially argued for the simplest solution: that Khwāju also wrote the *SN* (see next chapter).

Apart from the traditional anthologies (*tadhkere*)[11], one of the earliest studies on the *SN* and the authenticity of authorship is the article by the German Friedrich von Spiegel (Kitzingen 1820 - Munich 1881): *Die Sage von Sâm und das Sâm-nâme* (1849: 252). He presents the *SN* on the basis of a London manuscript, gives an overview of its contents and quotes selected passages in Persian. Spiegel, a pioneering Iranologist, was astonished to find that the contents of the London manuscript of the *SN* closely mirrored those of a Kazan manuscript of the *Homāy o Homāyun* by Khwāju Kermāni, except for differences in the names of characters. This Kazan manuscript had already been studied by the Orientalist Franz von Erdmann, who recorded detailed accounts of it in his journal (ibid). Spiegel, having found Khwāju's name in the work, assumed that Khwāju was the author, without questioning his own discovery that the *SN* he had at hand was largely, but not entirely, identical to the *HH*.

Jules Mohl (1880-1876), in the introduction to his translation of Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāme*, gave a rather sketchy account of a *SN* based on a "complete manuscript" of eleven thousand couplets, but he did not mention Khwāju by name, believing the author to be unknown (1876: LX). Although Mohl briefly describes some aspects of the work, his description differs from Spiegel's because the two Orientalists used different manuscripts: Mohl's manuscript was more complete, while Spiegel's seems to have been about half complete. Indeed, Mohl (1876: LXIX) notes that he had seen the London manuscript (the one studied by Spiegel) which was incomplete, but fortunately he had obtained and seen a complete manuscript of the work.

In the nineteenth century, Italo Pizzi, in his *Storia della letteratura persiana*, relied on Ethé's opinion

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[11] For instance, in an anthology composed in 1022-1024, ʿArafāt al-ʿāsheqin, by Owḥadi Baliyāni 2010: 1324, and in a manuscript of *Ḥamle-ye Ḥeydari*, composed between 1123 and 1124 by a certain M.M. Bādhel, cited by Ghafuri 2021a: 288 and 295, the poem is attributed to Khwāju.

to argue that the poem was

> […] una imitazione fiacca d'un altro di Khâgiû Kirmâni, fatta da ignoto e inetto autore, il quale lavorava e inventava di fantasia più che non attingesse alle fonti, sebbene volesse riempire una evidente lacuna del Libro dei Re e derivasse da un'antichissima tradizione il racconto degli amori del suo eroe. (Pizzi 1894, vol. II: 81)

Indeed, the fact that many manuscripts of the *SN* contain parts plagiarised from the *HH* (about 90% of which are included in the *SN* in the ed. Ruyāni that we consulted) has also led many Iranian scholars to believe that the author was Khwāju Kermāni. Scholars such as Saʿid Nafisi (although expressing some doubts), Ṣafā, Nayyer-Sinā, Rastegār Fasāʾi[12], and Mitrā Mehrābādi (who edited an edition of the *SN*), among others, share this belief (Khwāju Kermāni 2007). However, some scholars suggest that the author was a less experienced Khwāju in his youth who later refined his works and improved his *SN* by removing weaker artistic sections. He also changed the names of the protagonists from Sām and Paridokht to Homāy and Homāyun, respectively, resulting in an allegorical work with a mystical and spiritual tone.

Bahman Sarkārāti (1997: 22-23) and Maḥmud Omidsālār (1998: 102) postulated that the name Khwāju, which appears in some *SN* manuscripts, alludes to a Khwāju who was not from Kerman. Later, Maḥmud ʿĀbedi (2009: 571) suggested that the author of the *SN* may have acted as a storyteller. Jan Rypka (1968: 163) argues that the work belongs to the early Timurid period, «though in some versions [it is] a brazen plagiarism of Khvājū's *Humāy va Humāyūn*».

Vaḥid Ruyāni, editor of the most recent issue of *SN* to which we refer in this study, provides a comprehensive overview of different perspectives on authorship and related arguments in his extensive introduction (cf. Ruyāni 2013: XX-XXXV).[13] In short, Ruyāni disputes the idea that Khwāju is the author of the text and clarifies that previous scholars of the *SN* have made a fundamental error by focusing on the parts that were plagiarised from Khwāju's *HH*. Indeed, it would be obvious to him that the characteristics found in this "fake" part of the *SN*, in terms of stylistic content and mystical ideology, cannot be extended to the work as a whole. Developing this premise, Ruyāni concludes that the work is not by Khwāju, but is the result of a collage that would comprise 90% of the c. 4400 of Khwāju's *HH* out of the c. 14500 total of the poem (cf. Rastegār Fasāʾi 1991: 40-41), so that the part of the *SN* other than the *HH* would amount to over 10000 couplets. The latter part, according to Ruyāni later than the 14th century and mostly from the popular literature of the Safavid era, would be due to one or more authors, perhaps even storytellers (*naqqālān*), in any case other than Khwāju Kermāni (Ruyāni 2013: XXXIV).

2.2 Modern editions of *SN* and a new manuscript of *SN*
In fact, one should bear in mind that the manuscripts of the *SN* (at least 21) are very different from each other and vary in length from about 3700 couplets to 14760 (Ruyāni 2013: XXXII, LXIV), which complicates the investigation of the author and the period of composition. In any case, on the

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[12] For a more extensive survey cf. Ruyāni 2013: XX-XXV; Ghafuri 2021a: 288-289.
[13] It should be noted that Ruyāni had published an article on the question of *SN* authorship prior to the publication of his critical edition (cf. Ruyāni 2007).

basis of the known editions, we could say that the work basically consists of two main types of editing:

a. a collage of *HH* and the "heroic part", with folkloric grafting (see Ruyāni's edition, i.e. *Sām-nāme* 2013);
b. an enlarged collage of *SHN*, *HH* and heroic part, again with folkloric grafting, which also includes a section on the female figure of the sorceress ʿĀlamafruz, who loves the hero Sām unrequitedly, and related magical actions (see Mehrābādi's edition, i.e. Khwāju Kermāni 2007).

Ruyāni also argues that the part of the *SN* not borrowed from Khwāju Kermāni's *HH* was written at a late date, and in any case after the 14th century in which Khwāju lived. However, Ruyāni speculates that the story may have circulated orally even earlier, and that Khwāju himself may have been largely inspired by it for his *HH* (2013: XXXIV-XXXV).

Abo l-Fażl Khaṭibi, drawing on Ruyāni's hypothesis, had suggested a possible name for the compiler of the 'composite' *SN*: a certain Khwāju Shāhnāme-khwān-e Karāti (16th century), a plagiarist who also appeared in some manuscripts of the *Farāmarz-nāme* and the *Shabrang-nāme*, to which he himself attributed authorship (Khaṭibi 2016: 65).
The same name Khwāju Shāhnāme-khwān-e Karāti returns in the research of Reżā Ghafuri, who describes a new document (*sanad-i now-yāfte*) discovered by him, another little-known manuscript of the *SN*, dated 1129H/1717 AD, preserved in the Ketābkhāne-ye Melli-ye Tabriz (2021a: 293).

The hand of plagiarists (or mere amanuensis posing as authors) is sometimes clearly involved in the long and complex history of the transmission of *SN*. To show another step in this complicated story, we would like to draw attention to Hasan Beyg ʿEtābi Tekellu, who seems to have written a *mathnavi* called *Sām o Pari*, also known as *Sām-nāme*, during the 16th-17th centuries i.e. in the Safavid era. This author was previously unknown to us, so we will dwell on him and then mention another short *Sām-nāme* from the same period.

3. The *Sām o Pari* of Ḥasan Beg ʿEtābi Tekellu and the *Sām-nāme-ye kuchak* (16th-17th c.)

For the sake of completeness, in relation to the reception of the story of Sām and its narrators, we should also mention two other works from the Safavid era, which represent respectively one case of reworking/rewriting (*bāz-nevisi*) and one of significant reduction in content.

3.1 A case of reworking/rewriting (*bāz-nevisi*): the *Sām o Pari*
Ḥasan Beyg ʿEtābi Tekellu (973-1025/1566-1616), the author of a *Sām o Pari*, was born in Herat and brought up in Qazvin (according to others in Rey, cf. Golchin-e Maʿāni 1990, vol. 2: 865). He first visited the court of Shāh ʿAbbās Ṣafavi, then, it seems, emigrated to India, where he also died.[14] Golchin-e Maʿāni (1990: 865-871), Fakhr al-Zamāni Qazvini (1961: 437-452) and Ṣafā (2004: 989-992) have devoted a few pages to him in their works, mentioning among his various works also a

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[14] Gupāmuy 1957: 474 informs us that ʿEtābi was killed in Ajmir in India in 1025 H. But in some anthologies we read that ʿEtābi Tekellu died in Qandahār, see for example Fakhr al-Zamāni Qazvini 1961:443.

Sām o Pari, specifying its metre, *baḥr-e motaqāreb*, i.e. the same as *SN* and *HH*.[15]
ʿEtābi Tekellu seems to have been a rather prolific poet, with more than one hundred and fifty thousand couplets attributed to him. In Fakhr al-Zamāni's *Tadhkere-ye Meykhāne* (1961: 437-438), we find more information with valuable quotations of some verses from numerous works by ʿEtābi Tekellu, who is said to have composed not only *ghazal*, *sāqi-nāme*, *robāʿi*, and *qaṣide*, but also a quintet of *mathnavi* along the lines of Neẓāmi Ganjavi's *Panj ganj/Khamse*, although not all of them are completed. Fakhr al-Zamāni, author of the 17th-century *tadhkere* mentioned above, claims to have seen two boxes containing ʿEtābi's papers (1961: 437). He informs us that ʿEtābi Tekellu composed two other *mathnavi* in addition to the quintet mentioned above, namely *Sām o Pari* and *Iraj o Giti*, and adds that unfortunately the poet had not collected his works and not even one of his "unworthy" sons (*nākhalaf*) had looked after them. Apparently, this ʿEtābi Tekellu, of difficult character and somewhat "shameless" behaviour, had a sharp tongue and lived in a libertine and unscrupulous manner (Ṣafā 2004, vol. 5/2: 990). This biographical information may suggest us the reasons why his court patronage did not long and, consequently, why his work was not very successful. Indeed, its circulation may have been limited not only by its mediocre quality, as some scholars have suggested (ibid.), but also by lack of funds and lack of patrons, so it is not surprising that his work has not reached us in its entirety.

 Fortunately, some *tadhkere* contain a few verses from *Sām o Pari*. For example, in *Tadhkere-ye Meykhāne* by Fakhr al-Zamāni we find 13 couplets from the poem that the author of the anthology calls *Sām-nāme*:

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من سام نامه فی بحر تقارب

بتی همچو آیینه رخ آفتاب / لبی همچو یاقوت و حرفش چو آب

رخی همچو نار خلیل آبدار / دهان غنچه و غنچه چون نوک خار

دو پستان دو چشمه چو کوثر بهم / چو نور [و] نظر هر دو را سر بهم

ز شمع رخش یک شرر آفتاب / زده آتش از خوی بیاقوت ناب

خرامان ز شوقش ببستان نهال / خروشان ز شوقش در ایوان مثال

نگاهش چو مستان در آغوش خواب / دو مستند افتاده اندر شراب

نه در ساغرش بود لعل مذاب / که از تاب یاقوت شد آتش آب ...

نظر کز رخ سام برداشتی / همان سام را در نظر داشتی

شبی روز کردند با عیش ناز / که چرخ از پیش دیده ها کرد باز

عنان تکاور به تقدیر داد / دم همتش را به شمشیر داد

چو زد بر کمرگاه ببر دلیر / تن ببر را کرد چون چشم شیر

چو بازوی سام آسمان خم گرفت / همه دهر چون چرخ رستم گرفت

نه پر بود بر گوهرین افسرش / که بر آتش افشاند مرغی پرش (Fakhr al-Zamāni 1961: 445)

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From the *Sām-nāme* in the *taqārob* metre

[She was] an idol like mirror, her face [like] sunshine / her lips like ruby and her words [flowing] like water
A face shining like the fire[16] of the Friend [of God, Abraham] / the mouth [like] a bud, [tiny] like a thorn head

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[15] Other texts in which we find biographical mentions with some of the poet's verses are Badāʾuni 2000: 189-190; Sobḥāni 1998: 459 Gupāmuy 1957: 474. In the *Manẓumehā-ye fārsi* the author quotes some couplets from the *SN* of ʿEtābi, taken from Kheyri 1991: 173-174.

[16] Here "fire" is that into which the tyrant Nimrud cast Abraham (see *Qurʾān*, 2:258).

The breasts: two springs of Kawthar close together / [each other] like light and gaze close together[17]

From the candle of her face a spark of sunshine / had set fire to the pure ruby [of her lips] with sweat

The saplings in the garden were agitated with desire for her / [just as] other similar [saplings] were clamouring in the lodges with desire for her

Her gaze was like that of a drunkard in the arms of sleep / [as if] her two [eyes] were sunk in wine

There was no liquid ruby (= wine) in her goblet / but [one would say] the fire had liquefied by the heat of the ruby

Even when she looked away from Sām's face / she [always] kept Sām's face in her eyes

One night [the two lovers] rode until dawn, enjoying themselves / when the wheel (of the heavens) opened its eyes

[Then Sām] entrusted the reins of his horse to Fate / the breath of his ambition to his sword

When then [Sām], the brave panther, went to the mountain [to hunt], / he reduced the bodies of the panthers [to small pieces] like the eyes of a lion

When Sām's arm grasped the vault of the sky / he caught the whole world as with Rostam's lace[18]

There was no feather on his crown of pearls / but [you would say] a bird had spread its feathers over the fire[19]

From the few verses presented, which are primarily descriptive (ʿEtābi Tekellu first describes Pari then Sām), it is unclear how this text relates to the *SN* and other manuscripts of the Sām narrative, nor can we determine whether the author created an original work, or recycled or rewrote pre-existing material as a *naẓire-nevisi* [20]. In fact, the presence of the names of the Sām-Pari couple in the title could also suggest a work in which the romance aspect is in the foreground, in keeping with the whole series of romance *mathnavis* (from Gorgāni to Neẓami, Khwāju and beyond) that typically have the names of the lead couple in the title.

3.2 A case of reduction in content: the *Sām-nāme-ye kuchak*

In a recent article, the above mentioned Iranian scholar, Ghafuri (2021b), presented a new *SN* called *Sām-nāme-ye kuchak* ('Little Sām-nāme') of 1677 couplets, found in a manuscript of Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāme*, dated 1213H/1798-9AD and located under number 5174 in the Central Library of Tehran University (Ketābkhāne-ye markazi-ye Dāneshgāh-e Tehrān). Only two wars of Sām are narrated in this poem, one against the impious Shaddād in the West (Maghreb) and the other against the demons of Māzandarān (*divān-e māzandarān*) in the East. The poem in this manuscript, placed after a *Razm-nāme-ye bozorg-e Sepand*, begins as follows:

بگویم کنون حال سام دلیر / که چون بود احوال آن نرّه شیر
ز موبد شنیدم من این داستان / که بر خواند از گفتۀ راستان (quoted in Ghafuri 2021b: 213)

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[17] A difficult verse to interpret. It seems that the author compares the close (metaphorical) relationship between the beautiful Paridokht's breasts and Kawthar's springs with the equally close relationship between the eyes (i.e. the light of the eyes) and the gaze.

[18] Another verse that is not easy to read, of which we provide a plausible translation. Bear in mind that the original for 'lace of Rostam' (*charkh-e Rostam*, literally 'wheel of Rostam') recalls the better known *kamān-e Rostam* literally 'bow of Rostam', usually read as a synonym for 'rainbow'.

[19] This seems to be a transparent reference to the myth of the Simorgh, a bird closely associated with Rostam's family. As is well known, the hero was supposed to burn a feather of the Simorgh when he needed its help.

[20] It is possible that ʿEtābi Tekellu, like Amir Khosrow Dehlavi, wanted to replicate or rewrite an existing Sām story, just as we learn from the *Tadhkere* that he replicated the quintet (*khamse*) of Neẓāmi Ganjavi.

I will now tell of the brave Sām / what were the adventures of that male lion.
I heard this story from a *mobad* / who read it from the accounts of truthful [storytellers]

Given that Ghafuri considers the poem to have been composed from the 10th century of the Hegira (16th century) onwards, a comparison with the extensive manuscript tradition previously identified by Iranian scholars (see above) may prove useful. A similar consideration could obviously be made for the *Sām o Parì* of ʿEtabi Tekellu, were it not for the fact that only a few fragments of this *mathnavi* have survived to the present day.

In conclusion, despite the complexity of the research and the various hypotheses, the *SN* is most probably a composite or collage work of several texts by different authors, assembled in a period between the 15th and 16th-17th centuries, with many detectable adaptations and interpolations, as evidenced by the numerous manuscripts of different lengths. Starting from this operational postulate, our hypothesis focuses on the possible existence of an older core, which we will refer to more precisely as the *Ur-SN*, and which may have originated from a lost manuscript or from an oral tradition circulating in Seljuk Persia (although it is also possible that both forms of transmission existed simultaneously). Our analysis aims to objectively assess the plausibility of such a core and its possible implications. We will try to support this hypothesis by analysing various clues, some explicit, others more subtle and sometimes almost hidden, that can help us to understand the contours of this supposedly primordial and most ancient core of *SN*. This is, of course, only a first step, pending further desirable discoveries of documents and manuscripts that may in the future shed more light on the matter and provide more compelling evidence.

SECOND PART

4. An ancient *Sām-nāme* put into verse in the 11th-12th centuries, i.e. an *Ur-Sām-nāme*?

Our approach essentially follows that of Ruyāni, with the difference that among the various components of this "composite" work that is the *SN*, compiled by plagiarists or reworkers (*naẓire-nevisān*), we believe that a more original or archaic part, an *Ur-Sām-nāme* (*Ur-SN*), is conceivable. This archaic part would, in our opinion, constitute the core of the central and most heroic part of the work, describing Sām's numerous battles against enemies, both human and demonic, and would probably have been subject to alterations, additions, subtractions and interpolations over the centuries, as evidenced by the different lengths of the manuscripts. This *Ur-SN* must have been composed in verse - perhaps on the basis of a widely known prose version and possible source for other works - in the Seljuk era, probably at the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries. However, it is only in the Safavid era, or shortly before (see above), that this heroic core was assembled with Khwāju Kermāni's *HH*, according to the needs of later editors or rewriters and their patrons. The outcome is that Khwāju's *HH* was roughly used as a romantic frame for the *SN*, which emerged during the Safavid period (or perhaps earlier in the Timurid era), probably already expanded by numerous interpolations and additions. The sheer volume of the latter, present to varying degrees in the extensive textual tradition (which amounts to no less than twenty manuscripts) makes it intuitively challenging to identify the precise contours of oldest part, the *Ur-SN*. What we can do here is to outline the reasons that support

our hypothesis of the existence of an *Ur-SN* in relatively ancient times. But at this point we need to make some further preliminary remarks.

It's widely acknowledged that the Iranian world of the Islamic era saw the early emergence of a vast literature of royal chronicles and stories of Persian kings (*Khodāy-nāme/Shāh-nāme*), influenced primarily by the *shuʿūbiyya* cultural movement and culminating in the epic of Ferdowsi. In the same vein, a number of heroic poems also emerged such as *Garshāsb-nāme* by Asadi (11th cent., cf. Ṣafā 1984: 283-289), *Borzu-nāme* by ʿAṭāʾi Rāzi (11th cent., cf. Ṣafā 1984: 303-310), *Bānu Goshasp-nāme* (11th-12th cent., cf. Ṣafā 1984: 300-302), which have, like Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāme*, pre-Islamic sources. Among the poems of the Sistān cycle relating to Rostam, we also find shorter poems telling the story of his descendants, such as: *Babr-e Bayān*, *Patiyāre-nāme*, *Razm-nāme-ye Shakāvand kuh* and the like (cf. Ghafuri 2015). These so-called "secondary epic" works also include several other poems. For example, a *Bahman-nāme* by Irānshāh from the 11th-12th centuries, which is indirectly related to Rostam in that its content focuses on King Bahman's revenge on the descendants of the hero who killed his father Esfandiyār (Irānshāh 1991). We could also cite the poem *Kok-e Kuhzād-nāme*, whose anti-heroic protagonist, the cruel Kok the mountaineer (*kuhzād*), is killed by Rostam (Ghafuri 2015: 193-204). These poems were written, probably, to supplement the work of Ferdowsi who, in his *Shāh-nāme*, had to omit the stories of some of Rostam's ancestors and descendants in order to focus mainly on Iranian rulers.

With this in mind, we pondered the question of whether there should be a book about the heroic figure of Sām, who is Rostam's famous ancestor, among the texts of the Sistān cycle, which were mainly composed in the 11th and 12th centuries.

The anonymous author of the 12th-century *Mujmal al-tawārīkh* reports that Abu al-Moʾayyad [Balkhi], who preceded Ferdowsi, supposedly composed a story about Sām and his progenitor Narimān (*Mujmal* 1939: 2, although Balʿami 1974: 133 presents an alternative view). Although this text has not reached us, it will be our starting point for trying to find further clues.[21]

The *Garshāsb-nāme* (*GN*) could provide insights for our research due to the numerous similarities it shares with the *SN*, not only because of the family ties of their protagonists and their mythical-legendary exploits, but also because of the strong presence of *mirabilia* that characterises both works, a peculiar feature of 10th-12th century epic poetry.[22] In the "History of Sistān", Garshāsb is portrayed as a ruler whose reign is associated with Jamshid and Kayumarth, the latter being regarded as the prototype of humanity and compared to Adam, the biblical-Islamic ancestor of humanity (*Tārikh-e*

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[21] Moreover, in the *Loghat-nāme-ye Dehkhodā*, s.v. Abu al-Moʾayyad, we find a number of ancient texts bearing the testimony of this author as one of the most reliable sources for the history of pre-Islamic Persian kings and heroes.

[22] The *mirabilia* of little-known lands and their description constitute a special genre (usually called *ʿAjāʾeb-nāme* in Persian), which is mostly to be found in the science of geography, well known in Arabic and Persian, of which we can quote a few works: *ʿAjāʾeb-e ʿālam* (also called *ʿAjāʾib al-Buldān*, *ʿAjāʾib al-dunyā*, *ʿAjāʾib al-ʿashiyāʾ*) attributed to Abu al-Moʾayyad Balkhi (10th century), *ʿAjāʾib al-Hind* by Nākhudā Buzurg Shahriyār Rāmhurmuzī (10th-11th century), *Tuḥfat al-gharāʾib* by the mathematician Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb al-Ṭabarī (12th century), etc. On this topic, cf. Bosworth; Afshar (2011) and especially Ashkevārī; Musavi; Sādeqi 2017, in which the authors speak of the period of greatest popularity of this genre, which began around the 9th century, reached a peak from the 12th to the 14th ones, and then declined in the following centuries.

Sistān 1935: 2-3). The anonymous author of the *Tārikh-e Sistān* seems to aim at the religious and cultural justification of the Iranian Garshāsb family. It is common for Neo-Persian literature to absorb pre-Islamic elements into its dominant culture through a process of osmosis, and the authors often achieve this without too much concern for conspicuous anachronisms. Another well-known example among many is the *Vis o Rāmin*, a poem with a pre-Islamic setting in which many elements of Islamic culture contemporary with the author, Gorgāni, can be discerned. (cf. Hedāyat 2002: 386-9 and Moḥaqqeq 1957: 420-1; Idem 1958: 461-8).

Writers of epic poetry are known to have often claimed to have sought advice from Zoroastrian circles during the creation of their works; this is probably a customary practice with nationalist overtones, not merely a literary trope. Typically, in the prologue or beginning of epic poems of the 11th and 12th centuries, the authors state that they learned the story from a particular *mobad-nezhād*, as evidenced by the following couplet from the *SN* (Mehrābādi edition, attributing the work to Khwāju Kermāni):

سراینده دهقان موبدنژاد / ز سام و دلیران چنین کرد یاد (Khwāju Kermāni [*SN*] 2007: 220)
 A *dehqān* poet, of the lineage of the mobad / reported thus of Sām and the valiant

In fact, even in the part of the poem borrowed from Khwāju's *HH*, which we know provides the framework for the *SN* story, we see a similar verse:

سراینده خواجوی موبدنژاد / چنین کرد ماه از پی مهر یاد (*SN*: 152)
 The poet Khwāju of the lineage of priests (*mobad-nezhad*) / thus recalled the moon seeking the sun/love

where it is noted that the anonymous editor of the *SN* has quietly altered Khwāju's biographical record... And another verse of the same tenor appears here in the *Garshāsb-nāme* (*GN*):

سراینده دهقان موبد نژاد / ز گفت دگر موبدان کرد یاد (Asadi 1975, ch. 12, v. 1)
 A *dehqān* poet, of the mobad lineage (*mobad-nezhād*) / reported the tale of other mobads

The term *mobad-nezhād* seems to be a generic adjective indicating the religion of the narrator and, more importantly, the pre-Islamic origin of the narrated story. A similar use of such terminology can be observed in the work of Irānshāh, e.g. in *Bahman-nāme*:

چنین گفت دهقان موبد نژاد / چو بر ما در داستان برگشاد (Irānshāh 1991: 17, v. 1)
 "Thus said the *dehqān mobad-nezhād* / when he opened the door of this story to us"

We see another example from the *Kush-nāme* by the same Irānshāh/Irānshān composer of the *Bahman-nāme*, which contains a similar quotation, though in a different context:

چنین گفت دهقان موبد پرست / که روزی بیاید به کوشش بدست (Irānshān 1998: 390, v. 4529)
 Thus said the noble *dehqān,* a devotee of Zoroastrian priests (*mobad-parast*): / "Daily bread is obtained [only] by effort".

Ferdowsi also spoke of *dehqān* and *mobad* in the prologue of his *SHN* (Ferdowsi 2012, vol. I, p. 12, vv. 115-119). However, we do not see this as a mere homage by the aforementioned authors, who

were certainly admirers of their canonical master Ferdowsi, or simply as a literary cliché. These lines, although they must be treated with literary caution, provide valuable material for historians. They testify to the existence of Zoroastrian collectors and nostalgic custodians of ancient Iranian traditions in a society that had already firmly embraced the new religious civilization brought about by Muhammad. In any case, we are dealing here with a feature that is certainly common to the epic poems, including the Sistān cycle, of the eleventh to twelfth centuries[23]. This is a valuable, if still insufficient, clue in our quest to prove that the ancient core of the *SN*, i.e. the *Ur-SN*, dates back to the Seljuk period. Undoubtedly, the declaration of a source, whether oral or written, is a recurring motif in all literature and throughout history, including medieval Persian narratives. However, the explicit insistence on the 'mobad lineage/race' (*mobad-nezhād*) of the sources, as surely done with a touch of nationalistic pride by Ferdowsi, Asadi and Irānshāh (11th-12th century authors) and the anonymous author of our *Ur-SN*, should give us pause for thought.

In order to determine the age of a text, it is imperative to examine its style and language first and foremost. In particular, it is essential to meticulously analyze its lexicon, which we will briefly discuss in the next section.

5. Linguistic-stylistic aspects

The presumed belonging of the *Ur-SN* to the heroic poems of the 11th-12th century Sistān cycle could be evidenced by the Khorāsāni style (*sabk-e khorāsāni*), widely known for its sparing of the elaborate rhetorical imagery of later authors and its scarcity of Arabisms while being rich in archaisms. Here are some notable elements we will examine, mostly taken from the heroic section of our *SN*, that is, excluding the parts reused from the *HH* of Khwāju Kermāni. First of all, there are some interesting instances in the *SN* of remnants of the Pahlavi language that are relevant to our discussion:

- Prepositions: *abā* (pahl. *apâk*) instead of *bā*: 'with'; and *abar* (pahl. *apar*) instead of *bar*: 'over';

چو موسی بیاید به پیغمبری / **ابا** عوج سازد همی داوری (*SN*: 531)
When Moses takes on the prophetic mission / he will be the one to fulfil justice with ʿOwj

بخندید ازو سام فرخنده گو / **ابر** پنجره سایه ای دید نو (*SN*: 112)
Laughed at him Sām the lucky hero / at the window [in that instant] he saw a new shadow

- Words like: *oshtāb* (pahl. *Oshtâp/oshtâw* or *āshtāb*) instead of *shetāb*: 'haste/speed':

یکی جنگ برخاست بر روی آب / که ماهی فروماند از **آشتاب** (*SN*: 206)
Such a battle rose up on the surface of the water / that the fish stopped moving

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[23] A visit to the Ganjur website (https://ganjoor.net/), with a quick search in the works of over 150 of the most relevant classical Persian poets, reveals that the term *mobad-nezhād* or *mobad* in the proemial context, referring to the sources, appears almost exclusively in authors of the 11th and 12th centuries, with the exception of Khwāju, whose case in relation to the drafting of the *SN* we have discussed at length.

- Moreover, in this very last couplet we find the archaic use of *yek*: see *yeki jang* instead of *yek jang* or *jang-i* ('a war'), which is very common in the text, as well as in the following example, where we also find an archaic vocalisatation of the word *sakhon* (instead of *sokhan*), which thus often rhymes with *kon* and *bon*, although this may also be a device to bring the rhyme back:

یکی اندر این کار اندیشه کن / که جانم به لب آمده زین سخن (*SN*: 183)

Think a little about this fact / for my soul is bored with this discourse (*SN*, p. 183)

چو بشنید شاپور ازو این سخن / دلش رای دیگر بر افکند بن (*SN*: 263)

When Shāpur heard these words from him / in his heart another thought took root

- Some adverbs: *idar* (pahl. *êtar*) instead of *injā*: 'here', 'around here':

ندانم تو را چیست ایدر گذر / که اندیشه نارد درین که گذر (*SN*: 300)

I do not understand where you have passed through here / for not even thought can pass through this mountain

- *idun* (pahl. *êton*) instead of *chonin*: 'this way/that way'.

گر ایدون که گویی دروغ است این ...   (*SN*: 631)

If it is as you say, a lie is this ...

- *Kojā* as a causal conjunction meaning 'because', 'for the reason that', and not as an interrogative adverb of place:

تو دانم که با من نیایی بسی / کجا چون پری دخت نبود کسی (*SN*: 141)

I know that with me you will not stay long / for like Paridokht you will not find another

- The extensive use of the prefix *hami-* instead of *mi-* can also be observed in the *SN*:

همی خواهم ای داور رهنمون / کزین ورطهٔ دردم آری برون (*SN*: 32)

O Judge who shows the way! How I wish / that from this painful abyss you would pull me out

- The use of archaic words: *Hoshivār* instead of *hoshiyār* ('wise, intelligent') and *vir* ('sensible'), two words that we find in one couplet:

نباشد به گیتی چون او یک دلیر / هشیوار و بیدار و بسیار ویر (*SN*: 22)

There is no one in the world as brave as him / as wise and shrewd and very sensible

- The word *āhu* with the sense of 'defect':

ازین بیش گفتن نه نیکو بود / که گفتار پیش تو آهو بود (*SN*: 430)

To say more than this is not good / for to speak for you is a defect

- The word *riv* 'deception':

کنون از همه این نهنگال دیو / فزون است در مردی و رنگ و ریو (*SN*: 195)

Now Nahangāl, the demon, to all these / is far superior in virility, cunning and deceit!

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And here are some other terms, which for the sake of brevity we list here as further examples of archaic language in the *SN*:

- *Tonbol* with the sense of *jādu* 'magic'; *pardakht* 'brought to completion, liberated'; *zush* 'strongman'; *shulak* 'agile horse'; *gav/gov* 'hero'; *gavāzhe* 'sarcasm'; etc.

Examples of similar archaisms in the *SN* are numerous, and although some of them can also be found in later works and are even found in regional varieties of Neo-Persian, the coexistence of so many and varied archaisms in the *SN* seems to us a non-negligible aspect worthy of reflection. Given these linguistic and stylistic peculiarities, if one accepts the hypothesis of the existence of an *Ur-SN* in verse and its relative antiquity dating back to at least the 11th or 12th century, the following fundamental questions arise:

- Why has the *Ur-SN* not come down to us in its original form, presumably much shorter than this composite *SN*, enriched and transformed by centuries of innumerable additions and interpolations?
- Or why did it not enjoy the literary fame of the other, albeit smaller and less important, poems of the Sistān cycle?
- And why has the author's name not come down to us?
- Could it be that Sām had something less interesting/attractive than other heroes?
- Or should we rather think that there were problematic, perhaps embarrassing, elements in the work and its author that undermined its success and dissemination?

One hypothesis that comes naturally to us after a careful reading of the *SN* (we refer to the Ruyāni edition) is that the author of the *Ur-SN* was a Zoroastrian. For him, Sām's heroic deeds would be aimed at serving God, usually in the poem called Izad or Yazdān, while he carefully avoids naming Ahura Mazdā (besides Allāh, of course). In the *SN*, we repeatedly find Sām inviting his opponent, often a demon, to convert to the religion of the one true God before engaging in a duel. In fact, in the preliminary phase of the duel, the purely verbal phase of boasting and mutual intimidation, each of the duelists often invites the other to convert. Sām is seen as a holy hero, committed to defending the word of the true God, and his battles bear the watermark of religious warfare. It is no coincidence that the work is imbued with the presence of demons, often generically referred to as 'Ahreman'.

But let us now take a closer look at what exactly the text tells us in order to verify whether our hypothesis about the Mazdean religion of the anonymous author of the *Ur-SN* is tenable.

6. The struggles of Sām, "holy hero", against demons

We mentioned above the eschatological role of Sām in the Zoroastrian texts in Pahlavi, i.e. in the *Bundahishn* and in the *Mēnōg ī khrad*, in which Sām is said to have never died but to be resting in a hidden place until the day he is called to fight the final battle against the demon Azhi Dahāka (cf. de Bruijn: 2010). The fact that the anonymous author of the *HH* never mentions Ahura Mazdā should

not be too surprising, since the terms that recur in it, i.e. *Yazdān* and *Izad*, *Dādār* ('Just'), *Keyhān Khadiv* ('King of the Cosmos'), *Jān-āfarin* ('Creator of the Soul/Life'), have meanings that refer to well-known features of Ahura Mazdā. Presumably, at the time of composition, Safavid or earlier editors or rewriters (think of Khwāju himself, who may also have been inspired by the story of Sām in composing his *HH*) would undoubtedly have censored the name of the deity of reference in Mazdaism in their rewrites or *bāz-nevisihā*. Less embarrassing would have been the presence of the term Ahriman/Ahreman (the principle of evil), which, as we know, is opposed to Ahura Mazdā. The term Ahriman also appears, though much less frequently, in the *Garshāsb-nāme*, a work similar in some respects to the *SN*. *Ahreman* (a variant of *Ahriman*, used more frequently in the *SN*) has various meanings, sometimes being a simple synonym for 'evil' or 'wicked' or even 'demon' (*yeki ahreman did u tan cho kuh*, 'A demon he saw with a body as big as a mountain'), sometimes being used metaphorically. But it is also used more rarely and more explicitly, as we shall see below, to refer to the prince of Evil. In any case, its frequent use (over 60 times) in the verses of the *SN* is striking, a frequency hardly found in other Persian epic poems. There are also many other clues that lead us to speculate that the supposedly original version of Sām's story, the *Ur-SN*, was as deeply as subtly imbued with traces of Mazdean religious ideology, and that Sām had a more pronounced role in it as a "holy hero" fighting for the cause of the God of Good. We will now take a brief look at some of these textual clues.

6.1 The figure of Jibraʾil/Jebril

Among Mohl's (1876: LXIX-LXX) few remarks on the *SN*, which he mentions briefly in the introduction to his translation of the *Shāh-nāme*, one is particularly interesting: although the anonymous author of the *SN* used the formula *Bismillāh* ('in the name of Allāh'), nevertheless the archangel Gabriel (Jibraʾil, also read as Jebril in the text), who famously dictates the Qurʾān to Muḥammad, is treated in the text as a despicable demon (*div*). Here is an example from the *SN*:

بخندید از گفت او پهلوان / که جبریل دیو است تیره روان (*SN*: 360)

Laughed at his words the valiant [Sām, saying] / "Jebril, the demon, is of a darkened spirit (*tire-ravān*)"

This means, according to Mohl, that the author was very faithful to an old text from the *SN*. Note in the quotation that it is Sām, the "holy hero", who mocks Jebril; the contrast could not be sharper. This could be a remarkable clue to support the hypothesis that the *Ur-SN* originated in a Mazdean religious environment. The formula *Bismillāh*, as well as other traces from the Islamic world, can be read simply as predictable interpolations for the purpose of "adapting" to the prevailing religious culture and ensuring the survival of the work. It should be noted that in the text, Jebril/Jebraʾil is the demon assigned to serve the self-proclaimed god Shaddād, a Qurʾanic figure,[24] an impious pre-Islamic king with pretensions to divinity; moreover, this demon has the same role as Gabriel, that of a messenger. This parallelism (very unfortunate, not to say indigestible or even blasphemous to the ear of a Muslim audience) is, we believe, significant for the purposes of our hypothesis. Even more significant is the

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[24] Shaddād ibn ʿĀd is a character presented by Muslim tradition and commentators as a powerful king who had claims to divinity. The biblical David had invited him to monotheism by promising him paradise. In response, Shaddād built a palace and a marvellous garden, famous in Islamic culture as the Garden of Eram or Eram's Paradise, gathering there all that could be found in paradise; but, as the vulgate has it, once the construction was finished, he was punished by God for his arrogance, who made him die a moment before entering it.

adjective *tire-ravān* ('with a darkened spirit', also read as 'with a perverse mind') that Sām applies to Jebril, an expression that is not accidental, since the darkness of Ahriman, as opposed to the light of Ahura Mazdā, is a characteristic feature of the dualistic Mazdean ideology.[25] But in the *SN* the attribute *tire-ravān* is mostly used for demons/devils (*divān*), as in the expression *div-e tire-ravān*, probably because Ahreman and *div* are often placed on the same level in the text and, indeed, are sometimes almost synonymous and generic enemies of Sām, siding with Evil. Indeed, one of the enemies that Sām eliminates is precisely called Ahreman-div, a demon that is named after the prince of Evil in Zoroastrianism, but who turns out to be only an adjunct of the arch-demon Makukāl-div (cf. *SN*: 82-84). It is worth looking further into the figure of this demon Jebril by reading the following description:

نگه کرد سالار ایران زمین / یکی نرّه دیوی در آمد به کین
دو پا بر زمین و سرش ز آسمان / غریوان به مانند ابر دمان
زمانه گرفته همه پیکرش / برافراشته هر دو بال زرش
به صورت به ماننده‌ٔ مهر و ماه / بر ماه افشانده مشک سیاه
کلاهی به سر پر ز لعل و گوهر / به گردن درافکنده طوقی ز زر (*SN*: 360-361)

He looked at the Duke of the Iranian land (Sām): / a hideous demon arose with rancour
Two feet on the earth and head in the sky / roaring like the angry cloud
His body embraced the whole world / and raised his two golden wings
In his face he was [beautiful] like the moon and the sun / on his moon (=face) he had scattered black moss (=hair)
On his head was a crown, full of rubies and pearls / and around his neck hung a golden chain

The demon Jebril/Jebraʾil, described as a bejewelled and "respectable" giant, thus presents himself as the messenger of the god-king Shaddād, to whom he brings news of the world, and says that he is there to convert Sām to the religion of his lord and god. He adds that if Sām were converted, Shaddād would make him his prophet and give him the kingdom of the world. Upon hearing the message, Sām becomes enraged and demands that Jebril convert on the spot or else he will kill him, which he does shortly afterwards at the end of a fierce duel. Again, as we can see, the contrast between the two is stark, Sām the apostle and prophet of the true God, Jebril the messenger of a false God, and each declares that he wants to convert the other to the "true religion".

6.2 Religious warfare and Mazdean dualism
We know that Shaddād is recycled from the Qurʾān (89: 6-8) and the Islamic tradition, where he is a king punished by God for his impiety. In the *SN*, he is instead presented as an ahrimanic evil deity, commanding armies of demons and *paris* in his service, whose battles against Sām form an important part of the poem. We must add an interesting element here: the frequent presence, in the "heroic" part of the *SN*, of the *paris* with the dominant sense of 'witch, seductress/enchantress'.[26] In fact, this negative and demonic meaning of *pari* in the *SN* appears to be an inheritance from pre-Islamic beliefs

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[25] See in particular the first part of *Bundahish* 2001: 36-37, as well as the essays by Zaehner 1975, especially chapters I and II, and Panaino 2009.
[26] See for example, in the *SN* (ed. Mehrābādi), the figure of the *pari* ʿĀlamafruz, a witch who tries to seduce Sām, but fails, so she becomes enraged and captures his beloved Paridokht, then locks her in a wooden box and throws her into the sea. ʿĀlamafruz is later killed by Sām. (Khwāju Kermāni 2007: 212, 359-377).

and Zoroastrian texts (cf. the Avestic term *pairikā* in Abhami 2000). On the other hand, we note more often in the Persian literature of the Islamic period, particularly in lyric poetry, that the *paris* are mostly positive or harmless figures. Thus we find here a further element in support of our hypothesis on the antiquity of the heroic core of the *SN*, the *Ur-SN*, and its Zoroastrian resonances. On the other hand, we observe that in the framing part of the *SN*, deriving from Khwāju's *HH*, the *pari* has a decidedly positive connotation: one thinks of the onager (*gur*), i.e. the protagonist's animal guide, who turns out to be precisely a *pari* (Norozi 2017: 17-21).

In short, the relevant aspect is that the author constantly makes implicit reference to the dualistic Mazdean creed, portraying the enemies of Sām, the champion of Good, in the ranks of the wicked in the service of a god of Evil. Several times in the poem, Sām himself repeats this pattern very explicitly:

هر آنکس که باشد ز اهریمنی / که با رای یزدان کند دشمنی
به گرز گران سنگ کوبم سرش / پراکنده سازم همه لشکرش
مرا ایزد از بهر این آفرید / مرا داد نیرو چنین آفرید (*SN*: 273)

He who is a follower of Ahriman / and an enemy of the thought of God (*yazdān*)
I will strike his head with my heavy mace / and destroy his whole army.
God (*izad*) created me for this very purpose / and gave me strength and made me so [brave].

Elsewhere in the poem, in Sām's battle against the demon Makukāl, the Iranian hero reiterates in verses of self-praise that this is a religious war, that is, he says so directly that he is fighting at the behest of his God (the God of the Cosmos: *keyhān khadiv*) to eradicate evil from the world:

نیاکان من دیوبندان بدند / به هر جای آزار خندان بدند
کنون دور گردان به کام من است / می پهلوانی به جام من است
چو خم در دوال کمند آورم / چو تو دیو چندان به بند آورم
ندانی مرا رای آوردگاه / کنم جای را تنگ بر مهر و ماه
از آن رو نهادم به ماچین و چین / که با نرّه دیوان برآیم به کین
مکوکال را با نهنگال دیو / براندازم از قهر کیهان خدیو
چنین است رای جهان کردگار / بهانه پریدخت و سام سوار (*SN*: 89)

My ancestors were demon hunters / in the midst of all suffering they remained smiling
Now the sky turns at my will / the wine of bravery is in my cup
If I just twirl my lace / I catch numerous demons like you
You cannot even think of fighting with me / for I make the space narrow even for the sun and the moon
I have gone all the way to China and beyond / So that I can fight with terrible demons
The demon Makukāl and the demon Nahangāl / I will strike down for the wrath of the Lord of the Cosmos
This is the will of the Creator of the world / Paridokht and the knight Sām are only pretexts

There is an obvious echo here of the ancient Mazdean cosmogony, for which the reason for the creation of the world lies in the need to definitively eliminate the Evil principle represented by Ahriman, who, as is well known, has an army of demons fighting against Ahura Mazdā, the God of Good. It is precisely at this point in the story (the last and penultimate verses quoted) that it is

emphasised how the hero Sām is well aware that even his love for Paridokht is only a 'pretext' (*bahāne*) put in his way by a supernatural being, the Lord of the Cosmos (*Keyhān Khadiv*), to make him fight the demons; and it becomes clear that Sām himself is only a valiant knight in the army of Good, a "holy hero".

And certainly this explicit theological dimension of the adventure of the hero Sām characterises and distinguishes the *SN* from the *HH*. Scholars of the *SN* have repeatedly argued that Sām does not fight with demons to save the Iranian homeland, so that Sām is not to be considered a national hero, as is usually the case with the protagonists of other epic poems, but rather a "love hero"[27]. The latter interpretation is, however, clearly refuted in the last verse of the passage just quoted. Moreover, it must always be remembered that the original heroic core, i.e. the *Ur-SN*, was devoid of the love-romantic part which can be traced back to the poem *Homāy o Homāyun*, which framed the later "composite *SN*". In conclusion, the *Ur-SN* could not have been a work of a distinctly amorous-romantic character, but rather a heroic, and more precisely a sacred-heroic one.

There is another interesting point in the poem where Sām's struggle is clearly presented as a religious war. It is found in the words that Sām addresses to another demon (among the many present in the poem) in which the Iranian hero explicitly invites his adversary to convert:

بدو سام گفتا کزین بازگرد / وگرنه سر خود درآری به گرد
که یزدان گیتی یکی دان و بس / جزو نیست جاوید در دهر کس
همه کفر بود اینکه گفتی به من / نشاید که یزدان بود اهرمن (*SN*: 303)

> Sām said to him: "Convert! / Otherwise you will end up with your head in the dust
> You must consider the God of the world to be one / there is no one eternal in the world except Him
> All that you told me was pure impiety / surely the [true] God cannot be Ahriman!"

There is a very clear echo of Mazdean dualism in the last couplet. At these words, Rahdār-Div, a three-headed, four-armed demon, hurls himself at Sām.

In conclusion, as is evident at every turn in the *SN*, we are dealing with a real religious war, and it is no coincidence that before the outbreak of hostilities, even Shaddād's son, Shadid, invites Shāpur, a friend who supports Sām's action, to convert, but in vain:

بیا پوزش آور، ز یزدان بگرد / رگ خون گرمت مگردان تو سرد
ستایش نما باز شداد را / بپیما دگر راه میعاد را ...
مبر نام یزدان دگر در جهان / مکن خویشتن را تو از گمرهان
وگرنه تنت را همی بند بند / رسانم به شمشیر بر تو گزند
به پاسخ بدو گفت شاپور شیر / نترسم ز شمشیر و از دار و گیر
سرم در ره پاک یزدان بود / به مهرش کجاباکم از جان بود...
خدای جهانم همی یاور است / که او پاک و دادار هم داور است (*SN*: 381)

> "Come, ask for forgiveness and turn away from [the religion of] Yazdān / don't let your hot-blooded veins grow cold! (= if you don't want to die)

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[27] For example, Ghafuri (2021b: 217-218) says that Sām's ultimate goal in the *SN* is to defeat the demon Abrhā in order to free his beloved Paridokht.

Return to the worship of Shaddād / return to the path of your covenant [with him...].
Never mention Yazdān's name in the world again / do not count yourself among the lost.
Or I will tear your body to pieces / I will bring you ruin with my scimitar".
Then Shāpur the lion said to him: / "I do not fear the sword or the battle.
My head is on the path of pure Yazdān / for his sake when will I ever fear for my life? [...].
The Lord of the world is always the one who helps me / He is pure, just and the Supreme Judge".

Note how the author also here never mentions Allāh - an anachronism that sometimes recurs in Muslim authors of similar works set in a pre-Islamic environment - but only mentions Yazdān, a term that rather evokes the God of the Mazdeans, of whom certain traits are recognisable, such as that of purity and justice (see last verse quoted).

6.3 Primordial demons

The demons and monsters of the *SN* are more than a thousand years old, and in more than one case we read thatdemons existed even before the creation of the first man, an idea that can be linked to Mazdean cosmogony and the primordial struggle between Good and Evil.

6.3.1 Information about these demons appears in various passages of the *SN*, and in particular in the verbal prelude to the numerous duels in the poem, which in several cases, as we have seen, contain an invitation to the opponent to convert to the true religion.

To cite one example among many, in the next passage we read the verses of boast in which Nahangāl, the 'King of Demons' (*shāh-e divān*), presents himself as follows:

منم شاه دیوان روی زمین / نباشد چو من کس به روی زمین
نیامد کجا آدم اندر زمین / که بودی کیوشان به تخت و نگین
پس از ده هزاران برآمد به سال / کیامرث آمد مرا در همال
چو هشتاد میدان در آمد به جنگ / جهان بر کیوشان شد آنگاه تنگ
به جنگ سیم من نظاره شدم / ز اندوه او سینه پاره شدم
مرا سال بر پنج آمد هزار / که دارم به هر جایگه گیر و دار (*SN*: 214)

I am the king of demons on earth / there is none like me on earth
Adam had not yet descended to earth when / there was Kayushān[28] on the throne with the royal ring
After ten thousand years / Kayāmarth appeared and became my companion
In the eightieth war campaign / the world became narrow for Kayushān
In the third war I was present and saw [everything] / for his pain my breast/heart was broken
For five thousand years / I have fought everywhere

In his presentation, Nahangāl, the 'devourer of carrion' (*mordār khwār*), informs Sām of his lineage, which predates both the first man of the biblical tradition (Adam) and that of the Iranian tradition (Kayumarth). He seems to be a descendant of Ahriman himself, although this is not explicitly stated. Undoubtedly, we are dealing here primarily with hyperbolic imagery, a literary device used to

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[28] The vocalisation of the term is hypothetical, as no references to this name have been found in other poems or reference works. This name, like other names of *SN* characters, sounds like a *hapax legomenon*, possibly from oral literature or simply invented by the author. Here, however, it may be a variant resulting from anachronistic confusion with the name of the Central Asian dynasty of Kushān, for which see the same entry in the *Encylopaedia Iranica* (AA.VV. 2014)

emphasise the exceptional nature of Sām's feat. However, and at the same time, the presence of King Kayushān, even before the creation of mankind, probably reflects the vision of Mazdean cosmogony.[29]

There are several similar examples in which a demon or archdevil, often given an extravagant name (sometimes a *hapax legomenon*), turns out to be a figure from the early period, as in the case of the demon Abrhā (see above) or the false god Shaddād (cf. *SN*: 273-274).

6.3.2 In the central part of the *SN*, i.e. the heroic section of about 9,000 verses which is set within the framework derived from Khwāju's *HH*, Semitic-Islamic elements are not so numerous, but certainly not absent either. For example, in terms of demonological content, the Qurʾanic Iblīs is mentioned three times in the work, while Ahriman is mentioned more than 60 times.

If we want to take a closer look at an interesting example of the Semitic-Islamic elements present in the poem, let us cite the figure of the demon-giant ʿOvoj/ʿOwj ebn-e ʿOnoq (Arabic: ʿUwuj ibn ʿUnuq), of whom we read:

چنین گفت موبد که عوج پلید / ز تخم نهنگال آمد پدید
که موسی پیغمبر او را بکشت / همه روزگارش ازو شد درست (*SN*: 202)

> Thus said the Zoroastrian priest: ʿOwj, the impure, / was begotten by the seed of Nahangāl [the demon]
> And that Moses the prophet killed him / with this act the world was corrected.

ʿOwj is also a mythical figure placed in the time of Adam who, according to Islamic tradition, was later killed by the prophet Moses (Shamisā 2007: 470). The attribution to Nahangāl of the genesis of a figure that has existed since the dawn of humanity once again points to the centrality of the Mazdean cosmogony in the *SN*, the traces of which, as we can see, are still evident in the rich and long *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Sām's story.

6.4 The figure of Sorush

Another important clue in support of our hypothesis of the essentially Mazdean ideological framework of the *Ur-SN* - in which Sām's primary vocation would be to serve the God of Good and defeat demons in the service of Ahriman - can be seen in the presence of the famous Zoroastrian angel or deity Sorush < avest. *sraoša*, who appears several times in the *SN* at Sām's side. Sorush - "who acts as an intermediary in the transmission of Ahura Mazdā's commands" (Panaino 2016: 69) - appears in the *SN* as Sām's advisor and helper, but also as a messenger of good news. Indeed, Sorush comes to Sām's rescue in the most difficult moments with his guidance and advice, as well as with his auspicious oracles. For example, when his closest friend Shāpur is killed and Sām is at the height of his despair, Sorush arrives in time to comfort and encourage him.

ز بس گریه، بربود او را چو هوش / به گوشش فرو گفت فرخ سروش
که ای سام فرخ رخ نیک پی / تو چون آتشی، دشمنانت چو نی
چنین است فرمان یزدان پاک / که از دیو جادو نداری تو باک

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[29] There are many studies on Zoroastrian cosmogony and the ancestral struggle between Ahura Mazdā and Ahriman, among which we only mention Bausani 1999²: 66-81; Kreyenbroek 2011 and Panaino 2016: 90-96.

هر آنکس که با تو کند دشمنی / ز نیرنگ و جادو و اهریمنی

برو پیش با نام کیهان خدیو / مترس هیچ از رزم این نرّه دیو

جهاندار دادار یار تو باد / سر نرّه دیوان شکار تو باد

که یزدان به تو داده دست قوی / به تو مهر و منشور هر پهلوی

چو سام سپهدار بشنود ازوی / برافروخت مانند گلبرگ روی (*SN*: 567-568)

From so much weeping that he lost his wits, / the happy Sorush [came and] whispered in his ears:
"O Sām, with a cheerful countenance and a firm step, / you are like fire and your enemies like reeds.
This is the command of God (*Yazdān*), the Pure One: / Thou shalt never be afraid of demons and magic.
Whoever it is that manifests enmity with you / with magical deceit and Ahrimanic wickedness,
Go forth in the name of the King of the Cosmos / do not be afraid to fight this terrible demon!
May the Lord of the World, the Righteous, be your friend / May the heads of the terrible demons be your prey,
For God (*Yazdān*) has given you mighty arms / and the seal and decree of all heroes".
When the general Sām heard this from him (Sorush), / his face lit up like a rose petal.

Despite Sām's boundless strength, in the face of certain terrible demons, monsters and giants, in the face of the magical power of witches and sorcerers, the hero often trembles and falters, but Sorush immediately suggests that he remember God, so that the despondent Sām, comforted by the angel, easily overcomes every obstacle:

که ناگه در آمد به گوشش سروش / که ای سام بیدار چندین مجوش

چنین گفت دادار کیهان خدیو / که اندیشه در دل نداری ز دیو

که از تخمه ات هر که آید پدید / دلیری بود پهلو پاک دید

همه گرد و فرخنده و دیو کش / سپهدار و سالار و با رای و هش

از ایشان بسی کشته گردد به دهر / به دشمن ز شمشیر پاشند زهر

چراغ تو روشن بود در جهان / سرافکنده پیشت کهان و مهان ...

خدای جهان را همی یاد دار / دگر کار دشمن همی باد دار (*SN*: 518)

Suddenly Sorush came to his ears and said: / "O shrewd Sām, don't boil [with fear] so much
This is what the King of the Cosmos said: / Do not worry about the demons,
For from your seed whoever comes into the world / will be a brave hero with pure eyes
All will be brave, happy and demon slayers / eminent generals, with sense and thought
Many will be slain in the world by them / they will spread poison on the enemy with the sword
Their lamp will shine in the world / with their heads bowed the great and the small will come to them
[...]
[Always] remember the God of the world / and consider the deeds of the enemy as the wind!"

The pronunciation of God's name and prayer in general to defeat enemies and neutralise magic is a common topos in Persian literature of the Islamic period (think of the apotropaic use of certain verses of the Qurʾān), but we also find traces of it in Zoroastrianism: «At the beginning of creation, the recitation of the Ahuna Vairya prayer by Ahura Mazdā put Angra Mainyu to flight» (quoted in Duchesne-Guillemin 2011, cf. *Yasna* 19. 15).

Certainly, Sorush often appears in Neo-Persian literature as an inspiring muse for poets, and not

infrequently appears in dreams or has something to do with dreams[30]. He sometimes appears at moments of weakness, fainting or at the beginning of the hero's great deeds.[31] But we cannot fail to notice in the *SN* the implicit comparison, at a distance as it were, between Jibraʾil ('Gabriel', in the *SN* Jebril), and Sorush. The former, the angel who dictates the Qurʾān and accompanies Muhammad on his ascent (*miʿrāj*), is reduced in the *SN* to the demon-messenger of an impious self-divinised king who is defeated by the holy hero Sām, who enjoys the enlightened advice of the latter, i.e. Sorush, the messenger of Yazdān, the true God. But the clues to the pro-Mazdean orientation of the anonymous author of the *SN* do not end there.

6.5 Other minor indications of Zoroastrian beliefs in *SN*

In an episode in which Sām's friends consult a Brahmin, he gives them the following suggestions and recommendations:

نخستین زبان خوش مهربان / بدان تا که هرگز نیابی زیان
دویم راستگوی و سیم راد باش / چو ارّه گهی سوی مردم بپاش
چهارم توکل به دادار کن / ازین پیر فرخنده بشنو سخن
دگر چار چیز است کار بدی / که تابد ترا از ره ایزدی
دو رنگی و حق ناشناسی بود / بر ایزد همه نا سپاسی بود
سیم بخل کو از همه بدتر است / اگر دور باشی ازو در خور است
چهارم دل کس میازار هیچ / که بدتر نباشد ز آزار هیچ
چو اینها به جا آوری شاد باش / ز بند دو گیتی دل آزاد باش (*SN*: 249-250)

The first: have a sweet and gentle tongue / so that you do no harm
The second: be truthful and the third: be generous / distribute to the people like a saw![32]
The fourth: trust in God, the Just One / Hear these words from this happy old man!
Among the bad deeds there are also four things / that turn you away from the divine way
[The first and second are:] hypocrisy and ingratitude / which mean ungratefulness to God (*izad*).
The third is avarice, which is the worst of all / and deserves that you stay away from it
The fourth: never offend anyone's heart / for there is nothing worse than such an offence
If you respect these things, be cheerful / free your heart from the bonds of two worlds!

The first part (lines 1 to 3) of the teachings of the Brahman vaguely reminds us of the three basic principles of the Zoroastrian ethics, to which believers must adhere, namely: good thoughts: avest. *Hūmata* > pahl. *hū-manishn* > neopers. *manesh-e nik* or *andishe-ye-e nik*; good words: avest. *hūxta* > *hū-gubishn* > neopers. *govesh-e nik* or *goftār-e nik*; good deeds: avest. *Hvarshta* > pahl. *hū-kunishn* > neopers. *konesh-e nik* or *kerdār-e nik* (Moʿin 1947: 400). The Brahmin also mentions the principles contrary to these fundamentals from which the faithful should abstain, including ingratitude (*nā-*

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[30] According to Panaino, "Sraoša is a psychopompic divinity (2016: 69)"; but in the Neo-Persian literature, as a mediator between the supernatural and earthly worlds, the dream dimension for Sorush rises to become a privileged channel of communication. With regard to this latter dimension of Sorush, we recall a famous passage from the 11th-century poem *Vis o Rāmin* by Gorgāni. In one episode, the beautiful Vis, having just bid farewell to her lover Rāmin after a meeting in the garden, justifies herself to her suspicious husband, King Mobad, who arrives shortly afterwards, by explaining that the angel Sorush himself had transported her to the garden in a dream (Gorgāni 2002: 219, vv. 159-161).

[31] Consider also the *Eqbāl-nāme*, when Sorush, the messenger of the Divine, appears to Eskandar/Alexander to announce the prophetic mission he will fulfil throughout the world (Neżāmi Ganjavi 1938, 11-2).

32 This curious image perhaps alludes to the division of goods, as generosity is evoked by the saw's cutting, which divides and thus metaphorically distributes.

sepāsi) and offending someone's heart (*del-āzāri*), which are not exclusively Zoroastrian moral recommendations. In the verses quoted above we also find another emphasis, that of 'trusting in God, the Just' (*tavakkol be Dādār*), an exquisitely, if not exclusively, Islamic virtue. Indeed, as we have just seen, whenever Sām is faced with danger, he turns to God for help, relying entirely on Him, and then calmly faces the most difficult obstacles, or by simply pronouncing God's name, he makes every demon tremble.

In the second part (lines 5-7) of the above mentioned verses, we also find some prohibitions reminiscent of those of Zoroastrianism, starting with the rejection of *do-rangi* (literally: being of two colours, i.e. hypocrisy), which refers to falsehood/lying (*dorugh* from *druj-*); the condemnation of *bokhl* ('avarice') derived from 'greed' (*āz*). We should remember here that Dorugh and Āz are considered the most powerful demons of Ahriman's court in Zoroastrianism (cf. Kellens 2011 and Panaino 2016: 102-103).

Here is one last example in *SN* among many that imply the typical Zoroastrian conception of the sharp contrast between good and evil, between Izad/Yazdān and Ahriman:

بد اندیش با خود کند دشمنی / بکوشد به گفتار اهریمنی
همیشه توانی کجا راست باش / همه تخم خوبی بر این خاک پاش
چنین تا نبینی به گیتی بدی / بد اهریمن است و نکو ایزدی (*SN*: 596)

> He who thinks evil is hostile to himself / and acts with devilish (*ahrimani*) speech
> As long as you can, act righteously! / Sow only the seeds of goodness on earth
> So that you may not see evil in the world / [know that] Ahriman is Evil and Izad is Good!

Notice in the first two verses, even more explicitly, the Zoroastrian call for "good thoughts, good speech, good deeds". Undoubtedly, the Mazdean-Zoroastrian echoes or resonances in the *SN* do not end here; we have limited ourselves to mentioning only a few macroscopic elements and aspects. Certainly specialists in ancient and middle Persian culture and literature would know how to find many more.

Conclusions

With the textual examples that we have briefly illustrated by examining the "heroic" part of the *SN*, while also taking into account the additions interpolations and censorship that have transformed the alleged *Ur-SN* into something much broader over the centuries, we have attempted to gather and propose, rather than actual evidence, an articulate set of clues - both linguistic and "ideological" - in support of our hypotheses regarding the complex authorship of the *SN* and the antiquity of its original core.

Today, the *SN* undoubtedly appears to be a composite work, a collage of different texts that nevertheless preserves in its earliest core consistent remnants of the religion and environment in which it was born, making the hypothesis of the Mazdean faith of the anonymous author of the *Ur-SN*, or at least his closeness to the Zoroastrian environment, more than likely. He inserts clear apologetic and proselytising passages into his work, ignores Allāh and devalues Jebril/Gabriel, the

one who dictates the Qurʾān to Muhammad, presenting him as a demon in the service of a new and false god. Above all, he presents the actions of the heroic protagonist Sām – who, as is well known, plays a role in Mazdean eschatology - as aimed primarily at eliminating demons and fighting for the spread of "true religion". We even read that his beloved Paridokht, whom Sām joins in the *SN* (but probably not in the *Ur-SN*)[33], is only a pretext: «Thus is the will of the Creator of the world / Paridokht and the knight Sām are only pretexts» (*SN*, p. 89)

In our opinion, this subtle ideological setting has allegedly conditioned the life of the work, causing partial censorships, adaptions and interpolations over the centuries. It is therefore easy to see why the name of such an author has not come down to us, and why he probably could not have become an important court poet of a Muslim ruler, an indispensable condition for an autonomous life and the dissemination of the *Ur-SN*, as well as for the success of its author. On the other hand, as we can see from the *SN* that has come down to us within the "framework" derived from Khwāju Kermāni's *HH*, the work was able to acquire a not inconsiderable fortune and a good circulation (as evidenced by the more than twenty known manuscripts) thanks to the "burial" of its "embarrassing" original core, or *Ur-SN*, in a collage poem guaranteed by the name of Khwāju Kermāni, a well-known Muslim poet and pious disciple of the Sufi doctrine. Khwāju Kermāni, who knew the story of Sām and probably drew some inspiration from it, is certainly not the author of the *SN*-collage that has come down to us, but with his name he unwittingly ensured the circulation of a respectable epic in the centuries after his death, one of many that would enthrall the audiences of Iran's wealthy Muslim courts until the Safavid era.

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Abbreviations

SN = Anonymous (1392/2013), *Sām-nāme*, ed. by V. Ruyāni, Mirāth-e maktub, Tehran.

GN = Asadi Ṭusi (1354/1975), *Garshāsb-nāme*, ed. by Ḥ. Yaghmāʾi, Ketābkhāne-ye Ṭahuri, Tehran.

SHN = Ferdowsi, A.Q. (1391⁴/2012), *Shāh-nāme*, 8 vols., ed. by Dj. Khāleghi-Motlagh, Markaz-e dāʾerat al-maʿāref bozorg-e eslāmi, Tehran.

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[33] It is true that Sām's ultimate goal is union with the beautiful Paridokht, but in all likelihood the *Ur-SN* did not have this section on their love story, derived from Khwāju's *Homāy o Homāyun* and adapted by the later author of the *SN*-collage that has come down to us.

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