

**A Review of the Four Controversial Verses of Shahnameh¹
about Zakhāk²**

(بکشتی، به گشنی یا به کشتی؟)

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Abstract

Ferdowsi, in the early kingdom of Zahak has written four bits in expression of his concupiscible unconventional:

چنان بُد که چون می بُدیش آرزوی بکشتی	پس آیین ضحاک و ارونه خوی
که با دیو برخاستی (؟)	ز مردان جنگی یکی خواستی
به پرده اندرون پاک، بی گف و گوی	کجا نامور دختری خوب روی
نه رسم کیید نه آیین کیش	پرستنده کردیش در پیش خویش

The main difficulty of this piece is in the recording, reading and meaning of second hemistich of second line and then the connection or semantic independence of the two initial bits and the last two bits. In Shahnameh manuscripts, there are ten different recordings for second- hemistich of second bit and commentators and researchers have suggested ten meaning for it. The writer with criticism of the various recordings, readings and meanings based on reasons and witnesses like: writing "bekoshti" in most of the manuscripts, the existence of similar hemistich in terms of syntactically and semantically elsewhere in Shahnameh, paying attention to the traditional reception of some scribes and readers of the Shahnameh through the manuscript copies of these verses, explaining the report in "Bondaheshn" and ... recording and reading "be koshti ke ba div barkhasti" knows more likely and for every four bits continuously (enjambment), this interpretation is suggested: Zakhak when his lust was excited the beautiful girl and virgin was given to a man of warrior up against his eyes sexual intercourse with that girl and Ferdowsi's intention of "ayine Zakhak e varooneh khooy" this is the unbecoming work.

Key words: Shahnameh, correction, reading, meaning, Zahak.

At the beginning of Zāhhāk's kingdom in Shahnameh, after referring to the prevalence of the oppression of his time and killing two young people every day to feed the snakes on Zāhhāk's shoulders, and solving the problem by Armaeel et Garmaeel in that case, there are four verses concerning one of the Zāhhāk's perverse behaviors, which appear in the second edition of Dr. Khalequi-Motlagas as follows:

چنان بُد که چون می‌بُدیش آرزوی	پس آیین ضحاک وارونه‌خوی
بکشتی که با دیو برخاستی(؟)	ز مردان جنگی یکی خواستی
به پرده اندرون پاک، بی‌گفت‌و‌گوی	کجا نامور دختری خوب‌روی
نه رسم کیبُد نه آیین کیش	پرستنده کردیش در پیش خویش

At the end of the second hemistich of the second verse, the sign (?) indicates that it is written and its meaning, -the first verse and the other two verses - is a place of doubt and need to be investigated.

From the seventh to eleventh centuries, the above mentioned hemistich in the manuscripts of Shahnameh has been recorded in a number of different ways, which indicates its ambiguity. These different forms are as follows:

۱. بکشتی چو با دیو برخاستی
۲. بکشتی که باد تو برخاستی
۳. بگفتی و با او بیاراستی
۴. که کشتی چو با دیو برخاستی
۵. بکشتی چو بازو برافراختی
۶. به گیتی چو با دیو برخاستی
۷. بکشتی و با دیو برخاستی

But the prevailing recording of the versions is:

«بکشتی که با دیو برخاستی»

And all the editors and the authors kept this written version with the same spelling of the manuscript in the vast majority of low-credible, semi-authoritative or credible editions of Shahnameh as mentioned above. The main point of the four verses in question about Zāhhāk is in the recording, reading and meaning of the second hemistich of the second verse, and the other is the relation or the lack of semantic communication between the first and second verses with the two others (third and fourth).

At the second hemistich of the first verse, the word "wish" means "sexual desire". In this verse, the verb (می‌بُدیش) should also be read as a

past continuous tense. There are ten different views which have been taken into account on the fundamental difficulty of these verses, namely, recording, reading and meaning of the second hemistich of the second verse of *Shahnameh*, many of which are well illustrated by the degree of complexity and ambiguity of the subject.

Some of the most important reports are:

1. In 1989, in his critique of Dr. Khaleqi-Motlag's first correctional volume and in order to record «بکشتی» in the majority of the editions, Dr. Ravaghi proposed «گشنی» which is Dr. Quiasi's correction, and he reported the second verse in this way: "Whenever a wish and inner desire was dominated over Zakhāk and whenever a wish-demon smiled on him, he would call in one of the warriors to mate with".

Dr. Quiasi's correction and Dr. Ravaghi's suggested meaning, which has been accepted and repeated by a number of other researchers, attracted the attention of the scholars of *Shahnameh* to these verses of the Zakhāk monarchy and has led to the opening of various discussions about them.

2. The late Dr. Joweiny, in his description of the first volume of the booklet of the Florence edition, kept the word «بکشتی» in this manuscript, but he meant it «به کشتی گرفتن». According to a narrative of *Bundahishn*³, Zakhāk forces the demon to have a relationship with a young woman and a young man with a fairy in front of her look, and considering the fact that the four verses related to Zakhāk are not exactly consistent with *Bundahishn* report, these four verses have been mutually interconnected. "Zakhāk whose behavior was abnormal, whenever his inner desire and passion hits him, he calls in one of the brave men on the ship who was in debate with his opponent demon, and the beautiful girl sitting somewhere calmly and quietly, made her obey the warrior to have a sexual relation in front of him, that this act was neither a custom of kings, nor a religion".

3. Dr. Khatibi accepts Dr. Quiasi's correction of «گشنی», and according to two witnesses from Middle Persian, it means "the intercourse of the man with the demon", and "Demon" is considered here as a female species of these creatures. He has reported the first two verses independently of the third and fourth ones with these preliminaries and attention to the narrative of *Bundahishn* (we noticed

that Dr. Joweiny, for the first time, had been careful to discuss these verses of Shahnameh). "Therefore, Zakhāk's evil spirit was such that whenever he wished, he would summon one of the warriors for having a sexual relation with the female demon in front of him".

4. Dr. Khaleqi-Motlaq in «آویزه‌ای بر یادداشت‌های شاهنامه» which is based on their previous descriptions, suggests that we might be able to read the word «بکشتی» in the form of «به کشتی», and the verb «برخاستن» means «مقابله کردن». With this kind of reading and according to his presumption, Zakhāk wrestles with a warrior. "So Zakhāk, as a demon had a quirky behavior and whenever he wished, he would be able to summon a war man to wrestle with himself, whether he would force a demon to wrestle with".

According to the author, there is not a firm bond with the independent view of two final verses and the reports of those who passed with the inversion of Zakhāk, and the excitement of his desire (lust) as stated in the first verse, and the hemistich «نه رسم کیبید نه آیین کیش»

Despite the fact that bringing beautiful and good-natured girls to the Zakhāk palace from anywhere and provoking them as a housemaid is a cruel affair with regard to the social structure and ritualism of the ancient times - and not with the contemporary look and analysis - it is not contrary to the custom of that time to regard it as the inalienable inwards of Zakhāk.

There is evidence that both righteous and authoritarian kings, both in national/ narrative and in the real history of Iran, brought beautiful girls and women from different areas of their realms to their courts and took them as servants or spouses. Probably the reading and recording of the second hemistich of the second verse of those four verses is correct as follows:

«به کشتی که با دیو برخاستی»

And we should consider it in the sense of the "ability to wrest" of the warrior with demon and his description as mentioned in the first hemistich, and we should interpret each of the four verses continuously.

The quotes confirming this recording and meaning are: A) Register more copies of the bits. B) Similar to the semantic and syntactic aspects of the works being studied, elsewhere in the Shahnameh.

The quotes confirming this recording and meaning are:

A) In most versions «بکشتی که با دیو برخاستی» is recorded. B) There is similar semantics and syntactic structure of the studied hemistich at the other part of the *Shahnameh*.

Several scribes and readers also deduced from the second hemistich the subject of the "Battle" of the first hemistich with a demon, based on the recordings of some versions of *Shahnameh* in the tradition of its reading. With the explanations and reasons presented, recording, reading, marking and meaning of the four verses will be discussed as follows:

چنان بُد که چون می‌بُدیش آرزوی	پس آیین ضحاک وارونه‌خوی
- به کشتی که با دیو برخاستی -	ز مردان جنگی یکی خواستی
به پرده اندرون پاک؛ بی‌گفت‌و‌گوی	کجا نامور دختری خوب‌روی
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That is, the manner of ill-natured Zakhāk was so bad that when his lust provoked, he summoned one of the warrior men who could wrestle with demon, and then, whenever there was a beautiful and pure girl, he immediately forced her into the intercourse with the man in his presence, and in this regard, his behavior was neither in accordance with the dignity and conduct of the king, nor with religious principles.

Notes

- ¹. It is the name traditionally given to an encyclopedic collection of Zoroastrian cosmogony and cosmology written in Book Pahlavi.
- ². The *Shahnameh* ("The Book of Kings", also transliterated *Shahnama*) is a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between c. 977 and 1010 CE.
- ³. Zakhāk is an evil figure in Persian mythology, evident in ancient Persian folklore as AžiDahāka (Persian: اژی‌دهاک), the name by which he also appears in the texts of the *Avesta*.

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