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TRACES OF A GREEK MYTH (?) IN SUBCULTURES OF LUR-INHABITED REGIONS OF WESTERN IRAN

Kolsoum Ghazanfari[1]
Assistant Professor
Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanities
University of Tehran, Iran
k.ghazanfari@ut.ac.ir

Mohammad Seadat Asl
Department of History, Faculty of Humanities
Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran
m.seadat1370@gmail.com

Abstract: This article aims to introduce, explore, and analyse an oral folk tale called "Ahmad Sādāti and His Companions", common in some Lur villages in Fārs and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad provinces in Iran. The plot and storyline of this tale correspond to those of the myth of Ulysses and the giant Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*, attributed to Homer. The significance of this study lies in exhibiting the cultural exchange between Greek and local-indigenous subcultures of Iran. Greek and Persian cultures were in constant mutual contact from the mid-sixth century BC until late antiquity, and this contact became closer after Alexander's campaign and the rise of the Seleucids in Iran. The study area is located on the western margins of the Iranian plateau – the birthplace of two great dynasties of Iranian rulers in ancient times – which redoubles the importance of the issue under investigation.

Keywords: Lur-inhabited regions in Iran, Boyer-Ahmad, Mamasani, Rostam, Ahmad Sādāti, Odyssey, myth of Ulysses

INTRODUCTION

Civilisational contacts between the Greco-Roman and Persian worlds created a new chapter in ancient history. The rise of the Achaemenids in the ancient Near East, or rather Western Asia, inevitably led to political, military, and, especially, cultural contacts between them and the Greeks of Ionia and later

the Greek city-states. These contacts found new dimensions after the conquest of Lydia by Cyrus II in 547 BC. For instance, archaeological evidence shows that Iranian culture had significant influence across the shores of the Aegean Sea and western Anatolia (see Miller 2012 [2002]; Sekunda 1988, 1991; Briant 1996: 721–725). During the Achaemenid period, Persia's contact with the Greek world was not confined to military conflict. Rather, there were cultural relations between these two ancient civilisations (see Starr 1977).

After the military campaign of the Macedonian-Greek forces, headed by Alexander the Great, the Eastern world, which they found particularly charming and precious, came under their political influence. This influence continued after the succession of power to the Seleucids. During this time (i.e., the Hellenistic period), the Greek culture encompassing architecture, religion, art, and language was spread in the ancient East, including Persia. The bilateral political and cultural relations between the Persian and Roman worlds, which were sometimes peaceful and sometimes belligerent, continued during the Parthian and Sasanid periods.

Several views have been outlined in literature regarding the influence of Hellenistic culture in Iran. One view contends that the influence of Hellenism on Persians was mainly seen among the senior figures, elites, and the aristocracy of the Persian society and in large cities, who aspired for political participation and relations with the ruling class (Strootman 2020: 201–218; Sherwin-White & Kuhrt 1993: 74–79; Boyce & Grenet 1991: 52–53; Ghirshman 1954: 231). Still, there is also the view that considering the integration of Persian soldiers into the Seleucid army and intermarriage between the Greek soldiers and Persian locals (in regions where Greeks were stationed), the influence of Hellenistic culture must have reached the local and rural cultures (see Martinez-Sève 2012 [2003]). Some scholars disagree with these views and believe that the Persians showed strong resistance against Hellenism (Eddy 1961). Determining the scope and extent of the influence of Hellenistic culture across Iran and the public attitude towards it is highly sensitive and difficult due to the dispersion and unavailability of documents and falls beyond the scope of the present research. The issue was brought up only to illustrate the dimensions of the subject under study rather than go into detail about them, and thus the following sections will focus on the main research topic.

As mentioned earlier, one of the areas of the influence of Hellenistic culture in Persia was religion and mythology. Previous studies have addressed the integration of Persian and Greek cultures during the Hellenistic era. For example, this cultural-religious mixing between the Greek and Persian deities can be seen in the western territories of the Seleucid Empire, particularly in Kommagene (Nemrud Dağı) (see Sherwin-White & Kuhrt 1993: 75–76; Boyce & Grenet 1991: 332).

This study examines a Luri folk tale popular in Pehun and Khikandeh Jalil villages of Rostam County, Fārs Province, and Baghcheh Jalil village of Boyer-Ahmad County, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province in southwestern Iran. According to the analyses, while exhibiting various Persian elements, the tale is similar to an ancient Greek myth, which may signify the cultural exchange between the Hellenistic and the Persian world. The northwestern and western parts of Fārs Province, including Mamasani and Rostam, alongside Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Provinces, are among major Lur-inhabited regions in western and southwestern Iran. As parts of the ancient province of Pars, these areas were the birthplace of Persian governments and have hosted numerous ancient Iranian beliefs, myths, and rituals that even after centuries and millennia are still part of the people's daily lives on the western edge of the Iranian plateau.

Analysis of the cultural and civilisational exchanges between the Greek and Persian worlds in ancient times is a remarkably significant and at the same time fascinating topic in ancient history. The present study embarks upon a comparative analysis of a Greek myth that has been transferred orally from generation to generation in Iran. Therefore, aside from its gripping narrative, it is very important in that, on the one hand, the death of the older generations can render such tales – which show traces of the mythical and epical exchange between the Greek world and the Persian folk cultures – from being forgotten and, on the other hand, there have been no serious attempts so far to collect and investigate the cultural exchange between Greece and western Iran.

The research method included fieldwork of the authors attempting to collect as much information as possible on the myth under investigation by interviewing local people about the folklore in southwestern Iran.[2] Then, the findings were compared with the Greek narrative to identify their similarities and differences. Moreover, the indigenous elements, changes, and modifications of the story were discussed.

THE TALE OF "AHMAD SĀDĀTI AND HIS COMPANIONS"

The tale of "Ahmad Sādāti and His Companions" is narrated by the old men and women of the aforementioned villages in Fārs and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad provinces to their children, thus ensuring the survival and preservation of this story in these regions. It is worth noting that there are some variations in certain parts of the story, which are attributable to the oral nature and transfer of this story. The tale is about a person by the name of Ahmad Sādāti, who embarks on a Hajj pilgrimage along with his companions and his eldest son:

Once upon a time a man named Ahmad from the Shiite descendants of prophet Muhammad (in the Boyer-Ahmad area) was going on Hajj with his eldest son and some companions. After a few days and nights on the way, they come upon an enormous and dark cave (Eshkaft-e Shāh, i.e., the cave of the King) in the Alvarz Mountains.[3] *A small fire is lit in the cave. They decide to spend the night in the cave and resume their journey in the morning. A short while later, a huge flock of sheep and goats rushes into the cave, filling it completely. Following the herd, a giant as big as an old tree and with a body as hairy as his sheep, steps into the cave, driving his flocks, and places a large stone in front of the entrance. All of a sudden the giant notices Ahmad Sādāti and his companions and greets them and enquires why they have come to this cave and where they are going. They answer that they are going on a Hajj pilgrimage. The night falls and the giant decides to have dinner. He gets up and touches Ahmad Sādāti and his companions all over with his hairy hands. He then grabs one of his companions who seems to have some meat on him and puts him on a stick, and eats him after roasting him on the fire for some time. Once done eating, the giant uses one ear as a mat and the other as a blanket and slips into a deep sleep. Ahmad Sādāti and his companions are trembling with fear. The giant gets up in the middle of the night and eats yet another one of Ahmad Sādāti's companions and tells him that it is his turn to be eaten in the morning. He begins to ponder ways to save his own, his son's and companions' life, as they are the only ones left.*

At dawn, before the giant wakes up, they wake up and put a great stake[4] *they find in the back of the cave in the fire to properly harden it. Then, they take it and use it to stab the giant's eyes.*[5] *The giant jolts awake shrieking and runs around in the cave, writhing in pain. Ahmad Sādāti and his companions flock to the corner of the cave fearfully and hide among the fat sheep. At the break of day, the giant removes the stone blocking the cave's entrance and sits down in the doorway waiting for Ahmad Sādāti and his companions. Sādāti decides that the best way to escape the cave unharmed is to slaughter a few of the giant's fat sheep and hide in their skin. They do so and wear the skins of the sheep over their head.*[6]

Thus they lead the flock towards the exit where the giant is camping. The giant touches their backs, especially Ahmad Sādāti who is hiding under a ram's skin but does not realise it is them, and with this trick, he and his companions escape from the cave. They keep walking for some distance under the sheep's skin before dumping them and fleeing. The giant follows them for a while to capture and kill Ahmad Sādāti and his companions, but soon gets tired and leaves them alone. But another giant

keeps following them for a long time until Sādāti and his companions are forced to resort to tying a nērang.[7] *They tie the giant's mouth by casting spells and reciting verses and stop it from following them.*

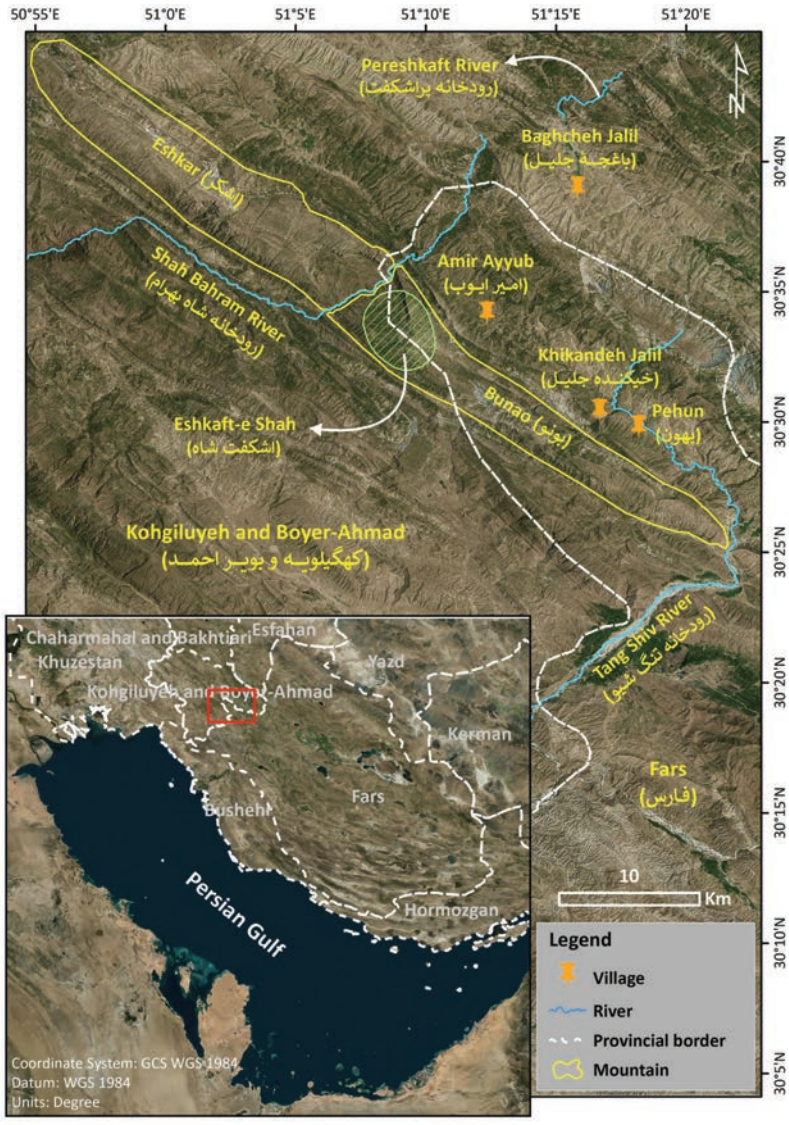

Figure 1. *Map of the study area.*[8]

With a thorough review of Iranian traditions and myths, the authors found some similarities between the elements of this tale and a section in the *Avesta,* a Zoroastrian scripture.[9] In Yašt[10] 17, 55,[11] it is stated that the Ard deity (Aši/Ahrišung[12]) hides first under the foot of a cow and then under the neck of a ram when the Turanians and the Naotarids are in her pursuit.[13] However, young boys and maidens give away her hiding place, and Ard (Aši) becomes resentful (*Avesta*; see Geldner 1889: 238–239; Lommel 1927: 164–165; see also Boyce 1975: 65, note 290; Skjærvø 1986; Malandra 1983: 134).

There are no more details included in this passage, and the only similarity is hiding from enemies under the neck of a ram. This tale was most likely a well-known story similar to other Avestan stories, the details of which would later appear in some Pahlavi texts[14] or other narrations. But the *Avesta* has only made this small reference to the tale. The authors did not find evidence of this story in other Iranian writings, and this brief reference does not allow for making more discussion and any conclusions.

Meanwhile, the authors found striking similarities between the tale of Ahmad Sādāti and the myth of Ulysses and the giant Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*. The following section presents a brief explanation of this myth, and then a comparison is made between these two narratives.

ULYSSES AND THE GIANT POLYPHEMUS

Odysseus or Ulysses, who showed great valour in the Trojan War (see Homer, *Iliad*, 1, 2, 9, 10, 11) sets out on a journey home to Greece and the island of Ithaca – where he ruled as a king before the war – with his companions after the end of the war. *Odyssey* is a description of this journey. On this journey, he encounters Calypso, a nymph. This beautiful nymph prevents Ulysses and his companions from returning to Ithaca for a long time. Once free, they sail out to sea and reach the island of Phaeacia. Ulysses' son, Telemachus – who was abandoned as a child by his father as he left for Troy – is guided by Athena to search for his father during his wanderings. In the first four books of the *Odyssey*, Telemachus asks around for any news of his father until finally, the father reveals himself to his son as encouraged by Athena (see Homer, *Odyssey*, 15, 16). In the ninth book, Ulysses relates his sufferings to the people of Phaeacia, explaining how on his path he first reached the land of Lotophages (Lotus Eaters). In this land, any one of those who ate lotus no longer wished to report back and lost the desire to return home. Odysseus and his 12 companions rush away from this land and reach an island neither far from nor near the land of the Cyclopes. On the island, they come upon the entrance of a high

cave, home to a giant called Polyphemus (see Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.1–11).[15] According to the *Odyssey*:

> *Polyphemus is a one-eyed giant that lives alone on this island and has a large herd of goats and sheep. Ulysses and his companions reach the cave but find no trace of him. After a while, the giant Polyphemus returns and drives his fat flocks into the wide cave. Once the animals are inside, the giant picks up a great heavy stone and places it in the doorway. The giant then takes notice of Ulysses and his companions and enquires: 'Strangers, who are you? From where did you sail on a watery journey?' Trembling, Ulysses and his friends reply: 'We are Achaeans, if you please, wandering home from Troy, driven by all of the winds over the great gulf of the sea. We are going homeward, but we came another way, another path.' The giant asks about their ship's whereabouts, and Ulysses cleverly replies: 'Poseidon the earth-shaker broke my ship'. Polyphemus does not respond. He gets up and puts his hand on his companions and then seizes two like puppies and strikes them down on the ground, and prepares his dinner after tearing them to pieces. Ulysses and his companions tremble with fear until dawn. In the daybreak, the giant wakes up and grabs and kills two more and eats them. After lunch, he guides his rich flock to the mountain called the Cyclops, whistling.*
>
> *Ulysses begins to ponder ways of saving himself and his companions. In one corner of the cave, there is a great club as long as a ship's mast, apparently belonging to the giant Polyphemus. With the help of Athena and others, Ulysses places the stick in the fire and hides it once it is hardened. The giant returns to the cave in the evening. Ulysses intoxicates the giant with the wine which tastes like nectar and ambrosia, and Polyphemus slips into a deep sleep. Before falling asleep, the giant tells Ulysses that he has a gift of hospitality for him to make him happy. 'I will eat all the others before you, No One, and you last after all your friends. That will be my gift to you.' Then, he falls asleep with his entire neck drooping. Ulysses pulls out the wooden stake and, after heating it up, thrusts it into his eye. The giant roars and runs around in the cave, screaming. He calls upon the other Cyclops who live on both sides in the nearby caves on the neighbouring heights. They all come up from all sides and gather around Polyphemus' cave. They say, 'Wherefore is not some mortal driving off your flocks although you are unwilling? Or is someone killing you with deceit or violence?' Polyphemus says, 'O friends! No One does me harm with deceit, not with violence,' and they assume that it must be illness inflicted by Zeus on Polyphemus and tell him to pray to his father, Lord*

> *Poseidon. Eventually, the wounded giant opens the cave's door and sits in the doorway, spreading out his hands to catch anyone who tries to get out. At this point, Ulysses thinks of finding the best way out.*
>
> *'The following seemed the best plan to me in my heart: The fat, thickly fleeced sheep in the flock were both fine and large with dark, violet wool. In silence I bound them together with the well-plaited willow twigs, on which the monster Cyclops slept, as he knew no laws, binding them together three sheep at a time. And the one in the middle carried a man (from underneath) with another sheep on each side and they went out the doorway, saving my comrades. So three sheep bore each man. Quickly then I, taking by the back a full-grown ram, who was the best of the whole flock, hid under his shaggy belly so I might go free. Then with my hands firmly gripping his excellent wool, I held on with my heart steeled.*
>
> *And there we stayed, trembling until the light of Dawn. And when early-born Rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, the flock's males went out to the pasture, but the females bleated by the pens since they were unmilked and their udders were bursting. And the lord, although worn down by his harmful pain, touched the backs of all standing nearby but the idiot did not think that they were held under the breasts of the sheep. Finally the last of the flock made its way toward pasture with me under his belly, burdened by his own wool, while I thought myself especially clever. And when huge Polyphemus recognised him, he said, 'Beloved ram, why, pray tell, are you the last of the flock to leave the cave? Never before have you left the last of the flock, but first by far you graze on tender buds of grass and stride along, and you are the first to come to the waters of the rivers, and you are the first to come back to the cave... in going they went from the cave and from the gates. And I released myself first from the ram and then released my companions. And quickly leading along the long-legged flock, we drove the sheep rich with wool, often looking back until we reached the ship.'* (Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.187–464)

Then, Ulysses and his companions select some of the large flock and lead them into the ship and sail away from the island of the Cyclops. Polyphemus breaks off and throws the top of a mountain which lands near their ship and almost sinks them. After a few attempts, the giant leaves Ulysses and his companions alone (Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.480–486).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A comparison of these two Persian and Greek tales shows that despite some differences, likely resulting from temporal, spatial, and cultural differences, there are many similarities between them. In other words, this Greek myth, with a slight change in the setting and characters, is narrated today in the regions under study in a relatively Zoroastrian-Islamic[16] format.

As far as the methodology for the comparative analysis of folklore is concerned, this tale can be classified as Types 1135 and 1137 based on the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) Index (Man Kills (Injures) Ogre). Some of the motifs of this tale are K603, K1011, and F531.1.1.1. It should be noted that this tale can also be categorised as other types, such as religious tales (827–849), considering that it has been localised in Iran. Nevertheless, according to Stith Thompson (1946: 200–201) and Oskar Hackman (1904), the tale of Polyphemus influenced numerous other folk traditions, including the Indian tradition. This further underpins the idea of direct dependence between the Iranian tale and the Homeric tradition. As explained by Ulrich Marzolph in his *Typologie des persichen Volksmärchens* (1997), the classification of Iranian tales is rather complicated as they have not been thoroughly studied before. This is particularly true about the tale investigated in this article, which has been passed down through generations not as a text but as an oral story.

This section explores the differences and similarities of this story in the Iranian and Greek narratives. Aside from the difference in the names of the protagonist in these two narratives, with the name Ahmad Sādāti replacing Ulysses, in the Greek version the number of companions is 12, but the number of Ahmad's companions is either four or not specified in the Persian version (see below).

Second, in the Greek narrative, Cyclops who are giants with no religious affiliation live in caves in high mountains of the island of Cyclops (see Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.112), whereas in the Persian narrative, the story takes place in the Alvarz Mountains (in the local dialect) and there is a huge cave in this mountain, called Eshkaft-e Shāh, which is regarded as the home of Kay Kawad (a Persian mythological figure) in the public belief. Therefore, the names of places and people in the Persian version are adapted to Iran's geographical space and history. Alborz is a mountain range in northern Iran and also a mythical mountain range in ancient Persian traditions (see Yašt 12.25; 10.50, 118; 12.23; etc.). Kay Kawad is the founder of the Kiani dynasty, which is the second dynasty in Persian mythological history. Interestingly, according to Persian mythology, before his rise to power, Kay Kawad resided in Alborz, where he was nurtured (see Ferdowsi 2007: 338–341, verses 149–155). In addition, there is another

cave called Bahmani close by, which is regarded by the locals in Pehun and Khikandeh villages (subdivisions of Rostam County) as the place where Bahman and Rostam fought. Therefore, the connection of this cave with Kay Kawad may be associated with this ancient myth.

The third difference is that, in the Greek version, the giant Polyphemus follows Ulysses and his companions until they sail away. However, in the Persian version, in addition to the giant, another giant chases Sādāti and his companions until they are forced to stop him through prayers and tying a *nērang* (incantations or religious formula). *Nērang* is a common motif in ancient Persian rituals. Ancient Persian texts regard *nērang* as highly influential, and it refers to prayers recited to resolve and repel adversities, accidents, and harms. Many ancient *nērangs* can be found in different parts of *Avesta* such as *Yasna*, *Vendidad*, and *Visperad*. One ancient strategy used by Persians to repel evil, particularly harmful creatures such as *xrafstras* (pests and evil animals such as dragons, snakes, and scorpions), was *nērang* or tying the mouth (see Hampel 1974: 20).[17] This tradition has an ancient history among the Persians (see Yašt 8.55; Pourdavoud 1931: 59–60; Navabi 1976: 265; Ferdowsi 2007: 89–153) which continues to this day among the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and Mamasani in Fārs Province.[18] A few points must be taken into account concerning the common rituals in these areas. First, instead of Zoroastrian prayer and phrases, Koranic verses such as the Throne Verse (the 255th verse of the 2nd chapter) or chapters such as the "Fātehe" (the 1st) and "Shams" (91st) are recited. Second, this ritual-mythical tradition usually begins with the word *bastam* (I closed or tied), for instance, "I closed the snout of that animal" or "I tied the fang of that animal". The use of metal objects such as locks, knives, and scissors as objects that can prevent death is also noteworthy. Metal was used to ward off *divs* (demons),[19] and jinns. The idea that iron can keep away the evil forces and malicious spirits from the realm of human and livestock life is a Zoroastrian (see Boyce 1977: 150) and also Indo-European belief (cf. Christensen 1976: 123). Therefore, tying a *nērang* also included tying the mouths of ghouls and jinns and anything in the world (*gitig*) and heavens (*minog*) that could harm human beings and their dependants. This custom is more common in the areas under study among the nomadic people or villagers associated with pastoral life.

Fourth, in the Greek narrative, after seeing Ulysses and his companions, Polyphemus took two of them and knocked them to the ground, and tore them to pieces. In the Persian narrative, however, the giant skewered one of Sādāti's companions and swallowed him after roasting him for some time.

Fifth, in the Greek version, Ulysses and four of his friends pick up a large piece of wood from the back of the cave and place it on fire to harden it, and

then lift it with the help of one of the gods and thrust it into the giant's eye. In the Persian version, Sādāti and one of his companions pick up either a stake or a two-pronged skewer and make it charred in the fire before plunging it into the giant's eyes (in the Persian narrative, the giant has two eyes).

The sixth difference is in the use of wine to intoxicate the giant in the Greek version by Ulysses and his companions before blinding the giant Polyphemus. But this has been removed in the Persian version. Though the reason is not clear, the story is about Muslims on Hajj pilgrimage, according to whose beliefs, carrying and drinking wine is prohibited. Therefore, the Persian version is consistent with the Islamic beliefs of the people of the region.

The following are the similarities between the two narratives. The first similarity is concerned with the main characters of the story. Odysseus is the king of Ithaca, and although Ahmad Sādāti is not a king, he is a holy man venerated by the locals and the nomads as the person responsible for religious and spiritual matters. The second similarity is that both tales are concerned with a group of travellers before reaching their destination. The third similarity is that in both the stories, the son of the protagonist plays a part in the storyline. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' son, Telemachus, struggles to find him and eventually succeeds. In the Iranian tale, Ahmad's son accompanies him in the journey and adventures.

Fourth, the number four is used in both stories. In the *Odyssey*, Ulysses thrusts a wooden stake into the giant's eye with the help of four of his friends. In the Persian tale, Ahmad Sādāti is said to have four companions in some narratives. Still, this repetition occurs in two different parts of the Greek and Iranian tales, and it should not be forgotten that the Iranian version is an oral story and naturally has developed variations after transmission from one generation to the next.

Fifth, in the Greek narrative, the story takes place in a cave in the mountainous part of the Island of Cyclops. Many flocks, sheep and goats rested there, and all around this cave, there were tall pine and oak trees and a stone wall (Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.182–185). In the Persian version, this story takes place in a large cave called Eshkaft-e Shāh, in the heart of a mountain located among a huge number of tall leafy oak trees. Another interesting point is the oak trees around the cave described in the Greek version. The Persian narative does not make a direct reference to oak trees; however, these are native to the region under study. Oak trees are abundant around the present-day Eshkaft-e Shāh in the Alvarz Mountains. Therefore, it seems that the reason why this is not reflected in the Persian narrative is that the narrators assume this is self-explanatory for the local audience.

Sixth, in the Greek version, the giant has a large herd, as is also reflected in the Persian version. Seventh, when the giant enters the cave, he speaks with

the protagonist and his companions in both narratives. Eighth, in the Greek version, when the giant Polyphemus kills and eats two of the companions, Ulysses prays to Zeus, the great Greek god. Similarly, in the Persian version, Ahmad Sādāti prays to God out of fear and asks for assistance. Ninth, after eating his dinner, the giant falls into a deep sleep, as reflected in both versions. Tenth, in the Greek version, when the giant sleeps, Ulysses decides to kill him with his sword but is dissuaded both out of fear and because of the huge rock blocking the cave's entrance, hindering their escape, as they would not be able to remove it. Similarly, Ahmad Sādāti decides to kill the sleeping giant with his dagger, but he changes his mind out of fear.

Eleventh, the moral of both stories is similar and concerned with the issue of inhospitality and maltreatment of guests by the host, leading to his blinding. Both Polyphemus in the *Odyssey* and the giant in Ahmad Sādāti's tale are injured by the guests in response to their transgressions.

Twelfth, in both the Greek and Persian narratives, the giant calls for the other mountain giants after being blinded by his enemies. Except that in the Greek version, the giants who rush to help the wounded Polyphemus decide that his injury is an illness inflicted by Zeus and tell him to seek Poseidon's help, whereas in the Persian version, one of the giants chases Ahmad Sādāti and his companions, but is later stopped by their *nērang* and incantations. Thirteenth, in both narratives, Ulysses and Ahmad Sādāti take advantage of the giant's foolishness and escape. Ulysses and his companions escape from the cave at dawn by hiding under the bellies of a few fat sheep, while Ulysses hides under the woolly belly of the giant's largest and fattest ram, and escapes along with his companions even though he is touched by the giant. In the Persian narratives, Ahmad Sādāti and his companions either kill a few fat sheep and hide inside their skin or under the belly of the ewes and escape the cave despite being touched by the giant. Finally, both Ulysses and Ahmad Sādāti escape from the cave under a ram.

POSSIBLE TIME OF ARRIVAL OF ULYSSES AND THE GIANT POLYPHEMUS IN IRAN

It is difficult to determine the exact time when this story was introduced to Iran and how it spread among the people of this region by relying merely on the analysis of the oral story. However, considering the existence of Zoroastrian elements and the mentioning of Kay Kawad, the name of a mythical king in the religious literature of ancient Iran, it can be argued that it should have been in ancient times, which has also undergone changes after the advent of Islam in this region.

In general, there is no comprehensive source of knowledge about the prevalence of Greek literature in ancient Iran, except limited evidence available in historical reports. Ancient, classical Greek sources refer to the teaching of both the Greek language (for more details see Shaki 2012; Bivar 1983: 56) and Homer in Persia. Confirming this argument, Plutarch reported that Homer was commonly read, and the children of the Persians, of the Susians, and of the Gedrosians learned to chant the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides (Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, I.5).

The areas under study are located in ancient Pars Province and on the western edge of the Iranian plateau which is also mentioned in Plutarch's report. As the birthplace of Persian dynasties, Pars was an important region during Alexander's campaign and the rule of the Seleucids after him, although some scholars believe that it was more immune to the influence of the Greek language and literature than other areas (Shaki 2012).

Greek literature was to some extent known by the Parthians, but it does not appear to have influenced their own traditional types of composition (Boyce 1983: 1154). Classical texts provide evidence that the Parthian elites were familiar with Greek literature. For example, reportedly Orodes II (r. 58/7–37 BC) received the severed head of the Roman general Crassus while watching *The Bacchae* by Euripides at the court of Armenia (see Plutarch, *Crassus*, 33.1–5).

Later the Sasanid kings were also familiar with foreign, especially Greek, thoughts. There is considerable evidence showing that despite their religious and nationalist tendencies, they were also familiar with, and sometimes influenced by, Greek culture and civilisation. The Greek version of the inscriptions from the early Sasanid period indicates the prevalence of the Greek language during this period, at least among the ruling class. One example demonstrating the influence of the Greek culture and thought on the Sasanid Persia is the collection of scattered Greek science and thought by the order of Shapur I and their attachment to the *Avesta* (see Madan 1911: 412, 428, 429; Shaki 1981: 119). This was directly linked to the spread of Christianity in Greater Iran. With the closure of the theological school of Edessa in the fifth century AD, many Persian Christian philosophers returned to Persia (see Lieu 1997), which resulted in the spread of Greco-Roman philosophical and religious ideas in the Sasanid Empire. They translated and promoted Greek philosophical books into Syriac or Sasanid Pahlavi (Shaki 2012). This became more pronounced with the presence of Greek philosophers at the court of Khosrow I (see Hartmann 2002: 123–160). Sasanid Pahlavi texts and treatises, such as *Dēnkard*, clearly demonstrate the extent of the influence of Greek philosophical, religious, literary, moral, etc., thought on Sasanid Persia (see Shaki 2012: 321–326).

CONCLUSION

The comparative review of the Persian and Greek narratives reveals many similarities between the tale of Ahmad Sādāti and the same story in the *Odyssey*. Despite slight differences, the structure and plot of the stories are highly similar. The findings of this comparative analysis indicate that the tale of Ulysses and the giant Polyphemus has undergone certain changes and adjustments after entering Iran, which is a natural phenomenon in the case of oral transfer. These changes are informed by the local traditions and religion of the people living in these regions. As explained earlier, there are some Zoroastrian elements in this story. Although the people are Muslim, many Zoroastrian traditions and rituals have survived through oral transfer from one generation to the next with certain adjustments in some cases based on the time and place. In addition, the names of places are replaced with Iranian geographical names, which has helped to both make the tale more tangible for the people and ensure its survival.

NOTES

[1] Corresponding author.

[2] The information on the story was collected from the people of the target areas, including: Aghajan Seadat-e Asl, male, 80, from Pehun Jalil village; Aghali Saberi, male, 80, from Pehun village; Ali-Fath Janipur, male, 80, from Baghcheh Jalil village; Beigom Seadat-e Asl, female, 75, from Pehun Jalil; Zolfaqar Saberi, male, 65, from Pehun Jalil; Mohammad Seadat-e Asl, male, 30, from Pehun Jalil. The material of the interviews is in the possession of the authors.

[3] The Alvarz Mountains, where the story takes place, is the local name of these mountains and is derived from 'Alborz', the mythical mountains in ancient Iranian texts, and nowadays this name is used for a mountain range in northern Iran. In this story the Alvarz Mountains are located on the Zagros mountain range in Poshtkuh-e Rostam Rural District, Rostam County, near the borders of Fārs and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad provinces. However, the modern name of this mountain is Bunao (rather than Alvarz), and it is located near another mountain called Eshkar. Eshkaft-e Shāh is located on Bunao Mountain, discriminated in Figure 1.

The inhabitants of these areas have adapted many Persian myths and epics to their geographical location. They state that they truly believe that many Persian epic stories (Ferdowsi 2007), such as the story of Kay Kawad Kiani, Kaykhosrow, Rostam's entire life from birth to death by his brother Shaghad, the battle of Bahman and Rostam, Kak-e Kohzad, and the story of Alexander took place in these regions.

[4] In another narrative, they place on fire a long two-pronged skewer that they find in the cave.

[5] In the local belief system, ghouls/giants usually have two eyes.

[6] Another narrative is that Sādāti and his companions hid under the sheep to escape from the cave.

[7] Incantations or religious formula (see the following pages).

[8] This map was first drawn by hand by the authors and then created in the GIS environment by Masoud Soleimani, a PhD student in GIS at the University of Tehran.

[9] For more information on *Avesta* see https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avesta-holy-book, last accessed on 13 February 2024.

[10] The Yašts are a collection of 21 Avestan hymns in praise of the various deities of the Zoroastrian pantheon (for more on Yašts see https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/yashts, last accessed on 13 Fenruary 2024).

[11] Ard (Aši) Yašt; Christensen (1928: 9) believes that based on its content, "Ard Yašt" was compiled during the Achaemenid Empire.

[12] Goddess of wealth and abundance in ancient Iran and a symbol of forgiveness and wealth (Boyce 1975: 65, 225). She is said to be the daughter of Ahura Mazdā and Ārmaiti, who grants wisdom, wealth, plenty, and riches to the good among the tribe.

[13] The similarity of this part of "Ard Yašt" to the story of Ulysses and the Cyclops has also been noted by Skjærvø (1986).

[14] A collection of texts written in or translated into Pahlavi, a Middle Iranian language, between the third and tenth centuries AD.

[15] The main plot of the story is summarised here. This study mainly used the French translation of Médéric Dufour & Jeanne Raison (Homère 1993). Robert Fagles's English translation of the *Odyssey* (Homer 1997) was also used by the authors. The paragraph numbers are based on the English translation.

[16] Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion before Islam in Iran.

[17] Among ancient societies, especially in the East, magic, sorcery, spells, and the like, which predate religion and religious thought, were used to ward off disasters, diseases, and even wild creatures (cf. Frazer 1994: 11–45; Panaino 2008).

[18] The ritual was done in the following way: When a sheep (or any other useful animal) is lost in the wild, to protect itself from thieves, bandits and especially wild animals, the owner would acquire a metal object such as a lock or knife along with threads and go to the village's spiritual leader. He would first recite a surah from the Koran (usually the Throne Verse (verse 255 of the second chapter or "Shams" (91)). Then, he would say, 'I tied the claws and teeth and anger of the specific animal, I tied the fang and poison and harm of a specific animal', and so on, and blow onto the thread. Then they would tie it to the lock and finally close the lock. Once the session is ended, they would keep the lock in a safe place. If the lock touches the ground or is opened, the *nērang* will be void or, in other words, the spell will be broken.

[19] For more on demons in Iranian culture see https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/div, last accessed on 13 February 2024.

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Kolsoum Ghazanfari has been an Assistant Professor at the Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Tehran, Iran, since 2011. She received her PhD in the History of Ancient Iran from the University of Göttingen, Germany, in 2010. Her research focuses on Zoroastrian religion as the main religion in ancient Iran, history of ancient Iran, social and cultural relations between Iran and other countries in ancient times. She has published several peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers.

k.ghazanfari@ut.ac.ir

Mohammad Seadat Asal graduated from Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran, in 2017 with a master's degree in ancient Iranian history. His main field of research is the history of ancient Iran and Zoroastrianism.

m.seadat1370@gmail.com