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From Iranian Myth to Folk Narrative

The Legend of the Dragon-Slayer and the Spinning Maiden in the Persian Book of the Kings

Abstract

This study of an episode in the latter part of Ferdawsi's version of the Iranian national epic demonstrates how a composite folktale is incorporated into the quasi-historical narrative. Ardašir, founder of the Sasanid dynasty and the second Persian empire (224–651 CE), is challenged in his conquests by Haftvād, the ruler of Kerman, whose fortune has been assured by a worm that his daughter found in an apple while spinning yarn, and nurtured until it grew into a talismanic dragon. Ardašir wins by a ruse, entering the enemy castle disguised as a merchant who desires to feed the worm, which he kills by feeding it molten metal instead of rice. Alternative versions of the tale (the Pahlavi gesta of Ardašir, the Arabic annals of Tabari) supplement the *Shāhnāma* narrative. The episode comprises the folktale types of the Dragon-Slayer (Type 300) and the Magic Spinner (Type 500), incorporating several folktale motifs. Parallels from world folklore in prior studies are noted and new ones proposed. Ferdawsi's narrative, while it successfully combines a foundation legend with tales respectively of male and of female initiation, is interpreted within its own mytho-historical context as a cautionary tale that supports divinely-sanctioned imperial authority (*farr*) and opposes the autonomy of commoners supposedly favored by a local deity (*baxti*), thus promoting religious orthodoxy over heterodoxy.

Keywords: *Shāhnāma*—Persian history and legend—Dragon-Slayer—Magic Spinner—Kerman

THE STORY OF THE WORM is the closing episode of the chapter on the Aškāni (Arsacid) rulers in Ferdawsi's *Shāhnāma*. It is 277 verses long in the Moscow edition out of the 777 rhyming couplets devoted to the Aškāni dynasty as a whole (i.e., it extends to more than one-third of the chapter).¹ It is one of the highlights of the gest of the hero Ardašir, which describes the rise of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty from humble beginnings, as the son of a shepherd, to hegemony over Iran, restoring the rule of his purported Kayāni ancestors after the interludes of Sekandar's (Alexander's) usurpation and the rule of the Aškāni kings.

The episode of the Worm chronologically follows the narratives of Ardašir's final victory over Ardavān, the last Aškāni king, and his defeat of the Kurds, and immediately precedes his official enthronement in Baghdad. It is also the last of Ardašir's heroic exploits, since the following chapter of his reign—which serves as an opening to the new cycle of the reign of Sasanian rulers in the *Shāhnāma*—consists mostly of descriptions of his domestic affairs and lengthy examples of wisdom literature attributed to him, comprising a further 689 couplets.

The historical background to this story is the series of wars that Ardašir I had fought in the first decades of the third century CE that put an end to the Parthian empire of the Arsacids, while annihilating their various semi-autonomous vassal states, aiming at a more centralized Iran. The war against the worm in addition has religious overtones, as it is fought between the forces of a local popular cult versus the state Zoroastrianism of the emerging Sasanian dynasty.

We are told by Ferdawsi that the Worm story, which he calls marvelous (*šegeft*), was transmitted by a *dehqān* (i.e., a traditional Iranian nobleman, like himself) who, by reciting it, uncovered a hidden secret (*bogšād rāz az nohoft* [verse 499]).

The narrative at first focuses—most unusually in the *Shāhnāma*—on a commoner, a young girl at that, who had to earn her own living as a spinner, because her father was poor (*bi-čiz*) and of low origin (*bad-nežād*), who had

seven sons (hence his name Haftvād) and “did not take girls into account.” Owing to a playful vow that she uttered in the course of her spinning, she was caught in a series of strange events that would irrevocably change her life and those of her family and city.

The portrayal of her is a sympathetic one, and in it Ferdawsi gives a realistic glimpse into the everyday life of a small town by the sea of Pārs, called Kojārān, full of people who were all striving to make a living (verses 501–504). The poet afterwards also gives a unique and ethnographically detailed account of the otherwise little-known world of the unmarried daughters of townsfolk of ancient times who set out daily in groups (*ham-goruh*) to spin outdoors, on the nearby mountainside, carrying spindle (*duk*) and cotton thread (*panba*), sharing meals, returning only to spend the night in the town. One of them was our unnamed heroine, the daughter of the poor man Haftvād, who happened to find an apple that was blown down by the wind. As she took a bite out of it, she found a little worm (*ķerm*) inside. She put it in her spindle case (*dukdān*) and made a vow in front of the other maidens that they took for a joke: “In the name of God who hath no partner and no peer, I’ll show you wondrous spinning done to-day/ All through the good luck [*axtar*; lit. “star”] of an apple-worm!” (verse 519; WARNER and WARNER 1910–15, vol. VI, 233).

She indeed doubled her production and her mother heaped compliments upon her. Every morning she fed an apple to the worm, and she managed to spin such an amount of yarn that her parents were awestruck and questioned her: “Hast thou obtained a fairy for thy sister/ That thou dost spin so much...?” (verse 533; WARNER and WARNER 1910–15, vol. VI, 234).

The girl disclosed her secret and showed the “blessed worm” (*ķerm-e farrox*) to the rejoicing parents. Haftvād took it for a good omen (*ba-fāli gereft*), abandoned his work, and henceforth his family tended the worm with special care. It soon outgrew the spindle case, acquired a fine black-and-yellow color and was put into a box (*sanduaq*, verse 543).

As the worm kept increasing in size, so did the fortune of the household. Haftvād and his sons prospered and became men of importance in the town. Soon they led a successful uprising against the local prince (*mir*) who tried to burden Haftvād with extra taxes, killed him, seized his wealth, and took over the town (verses 556–557). With support from the townspeople, Haftvād built a castle (*dež*) on the top of the mountain and fortified it mightily (verses 558–561). The worm, which in the meantime grew out of its box, was enshrined there inside a pool (*hawz*). It grew in the course of five years into a creature of elephantine proportions (verse 566) and Haftvād’s family established an official cult around it. The daughter was its guardian (*negāhdār*) and Haftvād its army commander (*sepahdār*, verse 568).

A well-equipped force of ten thousand was headed by Haftvād's seven sons. Their rule extended over an area between Kerman and the sea of China (verse 574) and every hostile army suffered defeat at their hands. Ardašir, who had already vanquished the Aškāni great king Ardavān and subjugated much of Iran, could not tolerate such a challenge to his newly-established sovereignty, but he proved powerless against the worm's supporters, and suffered repeated defeats. While Ardašir was besieging the fortress of the worm, Mehrak, the king of Jahrom, rose against him and looted his capital in his absence. Ardašir was dealt another blow when, during a banquet at the siege of Haftvād's fortress, the enemy shot an arrow into his meal with the warning message that the place was invincible because of the fortune (*baxt*) of the worm and Ardašir's life was at their mercy (verses 635–642; cf. *Kārnamāḡ* VI, 21–22 [SANJANA 1896]).

Disheartened, Ardašir raised the siege and ignominiously retreated with his army (verses 644–651; *Kārnamāḡ* VI, 23–25), until a meeting with two pious and wise young men restored his spirits (in the terms of the *Kārnamāḡ*, the Glory of the Kayānians returned to him). They convinced him that the worm was a creature of Ahriman, just as Dahāk, Afrāsyāb, and Sekandar were before, and like them it would soon come to a sorry end. Ardašir was comforted by their sympathy and decided on a stratagem. He brought back his army in secret near Haftvād's city and in the company of two youths and seven trusted warriors he entered the city disguised as a merchant.² They claimed that they were pilgrims who had come to see the worm. Through large donations they gained the trust of the locals and access to the sacred worm, on the pretext that they would feed it personally. They bribed and intoxicated the guards and poured—instead of its usual meal of rice and milk—molten brass into its throat, so that the beast burst and perished (verses 740–744; cf. *Kārnamāḡ* VIII, 10–11).³

The city was quickly taken in the resulting panic, and Haftvād and his sons were captured and executed (verses 746–765; *Kārnamāḡ* VIII, 15). Ardašir razed the fortress and built a fire temple on the site (verse 769; *Kārnamāḡ* VIII, 16–17). He gave governance over the area to the two youths, his trusted helpers (verse 770; *Kārnamāḡ* VIII, 19).

I

The story is also known from other sources, such as an earlier Pahlavi book, the *Kārnamāḡ-e Ardašir Pāpaḡān*, which was written in Sasanian times by Zoroastrian scribes and is available in several editions in different transcription systems (e.g., SANJANA 1896). TABARI in his chronicle records two different accounts, chronologically placing one before the victory over Ardavān, the other at the end of his reign (1999, 10, 16).

Ferdawsi's version often closely resembles that of the *Kārnāmaḳ*, but also shows many different independent features that must have come from the surviving oral tradition, where the worm and his folk were cast in a more sympathetic light. It is to this tradition that we can attribute the origin of the tale of the worm together with the figure of the spinning maiden, the daughter of Haftvād. Through focusing on this hitherto overlooked figure, I shall explore the folk narrative elements of the episode from a new angle, with the help of parallels from comparative folktale studies, as part of my ongoing survey of stock motifs in the Iranian epic tradition.

II

A similar legend concerning a worm that, in the keeping of a girl, turned into a wealth-increasing dragon appears in the Scandinavian saga of Ragnar Lodbrok, as told by Saxo Grammaticus.⁴ According to this legend, Thora, the daughter of Count Herothus (or Herraudr) raised a worm from an egg, which she put into a box placed on top of some gold. It soon outgrew its box, while the amount of gold also increased. The worm eventually turned into a dragon, which consumed daily a whole ox and occupied the entire women's quarters. Herothus promised his daughter and the gold to the hero who could get rid of the monster. It was the young hero Ragnar who finally succeeded in slaying it, winning Thora as well.

In this story, however, there is no flax or spinning; the gold increases by itself in the presence of the marvelous worm. The Dragon-Slayer pattern is common to both stories, but in the Iranian version of Ardašir and Haftvād it has an additional ideological overtone, as it is recast as the struggle of the Royal Glory (*farr*) against the luck (*baxt*) of the worm-worshipping commoners. In this exploit Ardašir joins the ranks of the great dragon-slaying heroes of the past, most notably Feridun, Sām, Rostam, and Esfandyār, as well as King Goštāsp and Sekandar.

Haftvād—who is called Haftānboxt in the *Kārnāmaḳ* (verse 510)⁵ and has the epithet “Wormlord” (*ḳermxodā*)—was considered by some leading Iranologists, such as Noeldeke and Darmesteter, as the personified dragon himself

Dragon-slaying as an attribute of kings and heroes is well known in world folklore. The archetypal dragon king Azi Dahaka, from whose name the Persian common noun *aždahā*, “dragon,” was derived, in the *Shāhnāma* was the king of Babel and appeared in anthropomorphic shape, with two snakes growing from his shoulders. According to Ferdawsi these snakes grew as a result of the kiss of Iblis and had to be fed on human brains before Feridun vanquished the king. The dragon-slayer Ardašir—who attacked the monster not in open combat, but by a cunning stratagem reminiscent of a

similar adventure by Sekandar in the epic *Reign of Sekandar* (verses 1193–1219)—is cast as the champion of religious truth against the Devil. This is similar to St. George and his fellow saints in both Oriental and Western Christianity and, in the Islamic world (especially in Iran), to the Imam 'Ali. Since in these legends—just as in the pagan Greek legends of Perseus and Andromeda, Heracles, and Hesione, or the Japanese myth of Susa no wo no Mikoto (ASTON 1993, 52–53)—there is usually a maiden to rescue. I surmise that the stories of the *Shāhnāma* and Ragnar Lodbrok belong to a special development within the tale type of Dragon-Slayer. This version provides an explanatory background to the figure of the otherwise static and passive maiden (the potential human sacrifice); and it is her original closeness to the wealth-creating, luck-bringing monster, her involvement with him, that exposes her to danger.

III

Haftvād's daughter, the maiden figure of our story, is a rather complex character, unlike the usual one-dimensional heroines of the epic. She is primarily a dutiful daughter who brings great wealth to her parents through her ingenious association with a magic animal. She is also the only sister of seven brothers (cf. Tale Type 451), who in Western and Oriental tales has either a redemptive or a sinister character. In the Oriental examples of Seven Brothers, One Sister tales (like the Lur tale *Naradiv* among others), the role of the girl is generally ominous and causes the destruction of her family. This is also true in the case of Haftvād's daughter.

The girl's adventure with the worm, her original boastful vow and her unexpected success in spinning have corresponding motifs from the folk literature of the world, such as D 2183, Magic spinning (usually performed by a magical helper); F 346, Fairy helps mortal with labor; H 915, Task assigned because of girl's own foolish boast; H 1092, Task: spinning impossible amount in one night.

In fact, these motifs are the components of two closely related folktale types concerning supernatural spinners, namely Type 500 (Engl. Tom Tit Tot, Germ. Rumpelstilzchen) and Type 501 (The Three Old Women Helpers), which are widespread in Europe, with particular concentration in northwestern Europe. The renowned folklorist Von Sydow actually sought the origin of the tale type there, in Scandinavia or England (THOMPSON 1977, 48), but it was also popular in France and was recorded sporadically in southern and eastern Europe, including Hungary and Turkey (AARNE and THOMPSON 1961, 168–69). Ferdawsi's story must be its oldest written variant. These are apparently women's cautionary tales, focusing on the typically feminine work of spinning, or perhaps even on the origins of a new

form of the craft and the resulting conflict of loyalties between work, surplus wealth, and family responsibility that may put the heroine's life at stake. In these stories about supernatural spinners, the king (the heroine's husband) also appears in an ambivalent and threatening role. While at the end he turns out to be a true rescuer, it is also he who originally overhears the foolish boast of the mother about the spinning skills of her daughter and forces her to marry him and spin extraordinary amounts of yarn, which make her depend on a demonic helpmate—a dwarf-like creature—whose name she has to discover or else he will take her away. At first it seems that the heroine is caught between the two sinister males, both out to destroy her; but finally, by another strike of luck, she comes to learn the demon's secret name with some accidental help from her husband. The king tells her about encountering a little creature during a hunting trip, who was singing out his own secret name (Tom Tit Tot) in his assumed privacy. It is intriguing that the king is so good at overhearing the discreet utterances of other people. Between his two acts of overhearing secrets, the initiatory tale of the maturing of a lazy girl into a smart royal wife effects a well-balanced structure, and the tale ends on a familiar note with the girl being rescued from the monster by the royal hero (BRIGGS and TONGUE 1965, 10–16). In the German version the girl has more integrity, since she finds out the secret name of the dwarf (Rumpelstilzchen) through her own servant (GRIMM 1980, No. 55, 285–88).

An ancient Chinese legend concerning the origin of the silkworm and the invention of sericulture focuses on a girl whose father was kidnaped by pirates. She and her mother make vows of abstinence and the girl is promised to the one who will rescue the father. Hearing this, her faithful horse brings back the father, but the daughter is denied to it as its due reward. The father kills the horse, but its skin falls upon the girl and swallows her up. Silkworms are born from them, the father becomes a rich silk merchant and the girl becomes a goddess, a wife of the Heavenly Emperor. This story, which is said to have happened in ancient times in Szechuan, was recorded in the fourth century, not long after the actual events of Ardašir's reign.⁶

Foolish wishes, vows, or boasts to obtain luck which result in evoking demons who demand one's life for temporary advancement are stock motifs in such stories, which serve also as cautionary tales about the perils of sorcery, i.e., accepting aid from magical beings (MASPERO 1932, 327; BLACKER 1986, 149–50).

The story of Haftvād is, within the framework of the narration of a historical episode, a combination of two tale types, numbers 300 and 500. The Dragon-Slayer (Tale Type 300) is the supreme "male initiatory story," which makes Ardašir ready for his enthronement. The enemy of the hero is the

supernatural helper of the heroine, the spinning maiden. Incorporating the story of the magic spinner (types 500 and 501) into the historical narrative is a well-balanced narrative device of ancient storytellers (including Ferdawsi and his predecessors), which provides the other side of the story, the perspective of the commoners and their wish-fulfilling dreams of supernatural helpers who will bring them prosperity and protection against their overlords.

The girl on the side of the monster is not a passive victim, but a young woman facing something like a female initiatory ordeal of segregation and danger. Spinning is a primeval craft strongly associated with women.⁷ A medieval song of the Lollards tells us that after Adam and Eve's fall from grace, Adam had to delve the land, while Eve took up spinning. To alleviate such toil, spinning was often performed—in traditional European society, as in the story told by Ferdawsi—in a segregated space for working girls (Hung. *fonoház* [spinning house]), in an atmosphere full of magical superstition. In a Hungarian tale a single country girl who longs for a sweetheart in the easy-going world of the spinning-house finally meets a handsome young man there, but when during a courting scene she drops her spindle and stoops to retrieve it, she realizes with horror that her suitor has horse's hoofs (i.e., he is the devil)—a motif which might help to explain the horse symbolism of the Chinese tale. Magic Spinner tales appear to be female initiatory tales. The Far Eastern folkloric parallel, the Chinese folktale about the tragic affection between the girl and the wondrous horse, which explains the origin of the silkworm (蚕 Chin. *tián*; Jap. *kaiō*), also suggests this. The latter tale became part of a shamanistic ritual in Japan and used to be chanted in the form of a sacred ballad, *Oshira-saimon*, during the initiation of the blind female medium called *itako* (BLACKER 1986, 149).

The customary royal wedding motif—which is an important feature of most variants of tale types 300 and 500—is visibly lacking in the story of Haftvād's daughter. She quickly fades out of the narrative and we hear no more of her after her appointment as guardian of the worm (*negahbān*, *negahdār-e ķerm*, verse 568), a rank which could connote a sort of dragon-priestess. She does not have any role in later narrative developments, such as Ardašir's attack on the fortress, his ruse to gain personal access to the sacred worm, and his final victory. We later hear of the execution of her father and eldest brother, but her fate remains untold. The Pahlavi *Kārnāmaḳ*, which represents the orthodox Zoroastrian version of Ardašir's gest, does not even know of her existence, or rather has good reason to ignore it.

The memory of the girl seems to linger, on the other hand, in the topographical lore of the city of Kerman, where the ancient ruins of the Maiden's Castle (*Qal'e-ye doxtar*) stand near the ruins of the neighboring fortress, called the Castle of Ardašir (*Qal'e-ye Ardašir*) on the outskirts of the

city (BĀSTĀNI-PĀRIZI 1977, 156–64). These toponyms seem to be the remnants of a lost story in which she might have played a larger role in confronting the invader Ardašīr. The legend became a foundation legend of Kerman, possibly for folk-etymological reasons. The city of Bam in the area, according to DEHXODĀ (1993, s.v. *Bam*, fourth entry), is the subject of a second folk etymology: it was the place where the worm actually burst (making a noise *bam*) after Ardašīr poured molten brass into its throat.

Dragons are often featured in foundation legends, such as the Greek legend of Kadmos (Cadmus), who founded Thebes after slaying a dragon. In Constantinople the Serpentine Column on the Hippodrome with the snakes of Apollo of Delphi was known to have talismanic powers in the Ottoman era. The presence of the worm granted invincibility to Haftvād's fortress, as King Ardašīr learned from the message on the arrow that was shot into his camp from the worm's army.

Here it should be pointed out that in folktales and legends the figure of a girl helper (Motif N 831) occasionally appears on the hero's side. In some monster-slaying stories the hero must first gain the help of the woman—the captive of the monster—to succeed, notably in order to learn the secret of its vulnerability. Also, in many legends a human tyrant is substituted for the monster. A similar pattern appears earlier in the gest of Ardašīr in his romance with Golnār, the favorite of Ardavān, and, in a later chapter, in two episodes from the exploits of Šāpur zu'l-Aktāf: one concerning Māleka, the Arab princess (*Šāpur zu'l-Aktāf*, verses 27–117), the other the slave girl of the emperor of Rum (verses 183–242) in the *Shāhnāma*.

There is some indication in our story that the girl may have appeared also in such a role, trying to switch sides to escape the servitude of the worm and be saved by the royal hero. The mysterious arrow motif, which in the narrative of the *Kārnāmaḡ* and in Ferdawsi's account scares the king into retreat, is perhaps indicative of the girl's efforts to open communication with the enemy king. Betrayal of a lord by his daughter to a besieging hero is a stock motif (K 781) in many conquest legends, such as in the stories about Scylla in ancient Greco-Roman sources or in the stories of the fall of Hatra to the Persians, Bāmiyān to the Mongols, or Aydos Castle to the Turks in the Middle Ages (see MÁRKUS-TAKESHITA 1995, 567–74). In such stories the girl often sends her offer of surrender on an arrow to the camp of the enemy's leader. But apparently, Ardašīr (who actually rose to power with the help of Ardavān's favorite lady and later also married his daughter), was not interested in an alliance with the worm's lady. The enigmatic message on the arrow caused Ardašīr to withdraw his forces in panic; he seems to have taken it more as a threat than a valuable secret, since he fled with his army. (In other conquest narratives, the hero feigns a withdrawal as part of a cooperative

stratagem with the traitress.)

The figures of the two pious young men—who encourage him to continue fighting against the worm and aid him in his stratagem—serve as substitutes for the controversial figure of the damsel of the enemy’s town. The lack of romantic involvement on the part of Ardašir this time—in accordance with his portrayal in the *Kārnāmak*—shows the maturing of the hero from adventurous young man into sacred king, the founder of the new (or rather renewed) dynasty, who wages a quasi-religious war against the worm-worshipping heretics, his last challengers to unifying the country under one king and one faith.

His *farr* (which manifested itself in dreams to his grandfather, and also accompanied him in his perilous flight from his archenemy Ardavān) is superior both to the *baxt* of Ardavān, his former sovereign, and to the *baxt* of the plebeian rebels led by the Worm-lord Haftvād. Moreover, just as Ardašir mercilessly tried to extirpate the royal house of Ardavān and of a lesser enemy, Mehrak (females included), he shows no interest in associating with the daughter of a base-born (*bad-nežād*) rebel who is so intimately involved in the cult of a demon (and indeed brought it into existence by her own efforts). To rely instead on the help of his own pious subjects is in line with the moral of other Sasanian royal narratives, where the loyal host as helper to the king is a popular motif (as in the stories about Šāpur zu’l-Aktāf, or Bahrām Gur).

I find in the narrative of the Worm a complex mixture of a foundation legend with the tales of the Dragon-Slayer and of the Magic Spinner, both of which are powerful wish-fulfilling, initiatory tales of men and women. While the actual fate of the girl—the nurse and quasi-priestess of the worm—is left untold in Ferdawsi’s narrative, a fragmentary passage in the prose chronicle of Tabari, near the end of Ardašir’s reign, reveals that a mighty and rich queen of Alār in the district of Kojārān (precisely the same location as in the *Shāhnāma*) “who was accorded the respect and worship of a divinity” was killed by Ardašir (TABARI 1999, 16).

NOTES

1. References to verses of the *Shāhnāma* are numbered for each titled section of the Moscow edition (FERDAWSI 1966–71); that of Haftvād and the Worm is from volume 7, supplemented by page numbers of corresponding verses in volume 6 of the English translation of Arthur G. WARNER and Edmond WARNER (1910–15), which includes valuable critical remarks and summaries based on contemporary scholarly works. References to the *Kārnāmak* (*Gesta of Ardashir*) are from SANJANA 1896. Tale types refer to AARNE and THOMPSON 1961, and motif numbers to THOMPSON 1955–58.

2. Here he was consciously imitating his ancestor Esfandyār’s infiltration of the Brazen

Fortress of Turān (FERDAWSI 1966–71, vol. 6, Reign of Goštāsp, verses 990–2195).

3. For similar cases of torture from Iranian mythic history designed to punish the (already dead) enemy, such as Cyrus and Crassus, see WIKANDER 1938, 106–107.

4. It was studied by Felix LIEBRECHT, a scholar from the circle of Benfey, who first made the comparison with the Haftvād legend of the *Shāhnāma* (1862, 561–67).

5. In the *Kārnāmaḡ* he was called Haftānboxt, which according to NOELDEKE (1973) means “Who is redeemed by the Seven,” i.e., the Seven Planets. It is a name with astral mythical connotations since in Zoroastrianism the planets are malevolent Ahrimanic beings. The number seven in the two variants of his proper name also evokes (for Noeldeke and Darmesteter) the association with the dragon (cf. WARNER and WARNER 1910–15, vol. 4, 205–206). The seven sons are interpreted as a reference to the seven heads of the dragon. According to Ferdawsi, the worm was a tame creature who was nourished in the beginning with apple and later with with a regular diet of milk and rice. In the *Kārnāmaḡ*, on the contrary, it was fed with the blood of small and large animals. This bloodthirsty image of the worm is echoed in the diatribe of the two youths, who called it “a combative blood-thirsty Div” (verse 659; WARNER and WARNER 1910–15, vol. VI, 241).

6. Blacker names a fourth-century Chinese work, *Sou Shen chi*, as the literary source of the story. The story of Haftvād and the Worm also led a distinguished Parsee scholar to look toward East Asian parallels to the beliefs underlying the tale of the Worm (COYAJEE 1936, 36–40). He found them in a curious Chinese superstition concerning the wealth-generating sorcery of the Golden Caterpillar, which feeds on old silk and accomplishes various chores for its master, including spinning huge amounts of silk during the night, providing him with riches and defeating his enemy.

7. The development of the English word spinster is summed up by Wilfred FUNK in his *Word Origins* (1978, 160) as follows: “One who spins, from the old-time word *spinnan*, because it used to be the accepted thing for unmarried girls to fill their time with spinning.”

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