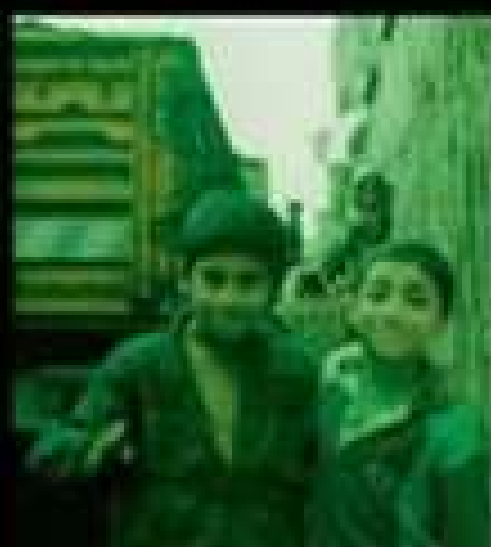


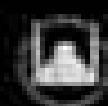
GYPSIES AND THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITIES

Contextual, Constructed and Contested



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“...the strumming of their silken bows”: The Firdawsī Legend of Bāhram Gūr & Narratives of Origin in Romani Histories

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The reference to the Firdawsī legend is one that is frequently cited in Romani Studies texts, histories of all *Gypsies*, articles and newspaper reports (see Hancock, 2000: 9; Lori, 2003, for examples in connection with the Dom), yet almost no context or explanation is given as to who Abū l-Kasīm Hasan b. ‘Alī of Tūs, or Firdawsī (c. 329 AH/940 CE-411 AH/1020 CE) was, why he wrote the *Shāhnāma* or *Shāhnāmè*, “Book of Kings” (c.1010 CE; see Huart, 2003: 918a; Warner & Warner, 1905-1925), and in what historical circumstances it was produced. Hamza al -Isfāhānī b. al-Hasan, ibn Mu’addib (c. 280 AH/893 CE-360 AH/971 CE), in his *Chronology* (*Ta’rīkh sinī mulūk al-ard wa l-anbiyā’*) of c.961 CE, is an earlier source for the Bahrām Gūr legend, for those attempting to construct a “narrative of journey” for the Romani peoples during their earliest history (see for example, Marushiakova & Popov, 2001: 11-12). Other “characters” (such as King Shangūl of Hindūstān) have been merely treated as parts in a shadow-play, without investigation of whether these have any basis in historical fact; like Karagöz, the Turkish Gypsy puppet, introducing himself to us as a diversion from our worldly travails, they form a “backdrop” for the story. Within this seminal text, however, significant clues to the history of the Gypsies lie, little explored in the discourse of Romani Studies.

Effectively with this tale, the perceived connection with an Indian origin for *Romanichals* (English Gypsies), and by extension all Romani people, was confirmed, and an early date of departure apparently established by the appearance of the *Lūrī* or *Lūlī* in Persia at the time of Sāsānid Shāh Bahram

Ghūr, (420–438 CE). Hamza al-Isfahani also seemed to report an earlier version of the same episode in his *Chronology*, c.960 CE. With the production of an English translation of the *Shāhnāmā* in India (see Macan, 1829) and a paper by Harriott (1830: 518–558), in the Royal Asiatic Society's Transactions series, this story was seized upon as an explanation and 'welded' to the linguistic arguments surrounding Romani origins. These suggested that one original migration had left the north-western Indian region at a relatively early date, before separating into the three distinctive linguistic branches of Romani, Domari and Lomavren somewhere in the Persian lands (Marushiakova & Popov, 2001: 5). The most influential of proponents was John Sampson, "...the leading English language Romani scholar of the early twentieth century" (Hancock, 2002: 3), who published his work on the dialect of Welsh Gypsies in 1926. Through discussions of this Romani monogenesis theory in the pages of the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society [JGLS]*, Sampson's work was widely disseminated, and almost immediately challenged by Sir Ralph Lilley Turner in his JGLS article on Romani and Indo-Aryan (1926: 251–290). Turner argued that he remained unconvinced of a singular origin for both Domari and Romani (Fraser, 1992: 21), as the linguistic ancestors of each were related to differing groups of Indian dialects, not the same. Despite this criticism, and continuing challenges from more recent scholarship regarding Persia and claims for such early origins, both the Firdawsī 'legend' and the monogenesis theory are still frequently cited in discussions of language and Romani history (see Mayall, 2004: 119–25; Fraser, 1992: 20–22, for summaries).

Some of the implications of this debate between Sampson, Turner and others, were that it effectively focussed on key differences; firstly that the origins of the Rom, Dom and Lom peoples as one *proto* or ancestral population, or "...the conviction that all Gypsies, dispersed at all points throughout the world, were originally from a single stock." (Mayall, 2004: 119) Secondly, that these groups stem from entirely separate and distinct ancestry, sharing similar historical circumstances surrounding their emergence as Gypsies (Hancock, 2000: 11). To some extent, the polarisation of the two positions with their supporters and adherents has characterised the field of Romani Studies ever since, in that these positions have become coalesced around notions that we might broadly define as *ethnicised*, or socio-historical discourses of origins (see Mayall, 2004: 3). Here we might discern a crucial contest in the study of the Gypsies, between those who are committed to a view of Gypsies as a distinct and identifiable ethnic group, with a history coterminous with other ethnic histories (see Kenrick, 2004; Hancock, 1987, for examples), and those who would see the claims to ethnic identity as an aspect of political mobilisation, but not adequately convincing in the context of scholarship and research (Willems, 1996). In this context, the legend of Bahrām Gūr becomes more than merely an interesting anecdote from an

early mediaeval Persian source that may refer to an episode in Romani history; it attains the status of "evidence" of claims to this coterminous history, and the *ethnicised* discourse of origins.

The context of the debate is important to establish, as it is essential to our understanding of the competing discourses and, more importantly the longevity of this 'myth' and its role. It is my intention to critically examine the principle elements of this oft-repeated legend; Hamza al-Isfahani's extraordinary *Chronology* of pre-Islamic and Islamic dynasties of Persia; Firdawsī's epic of the struggle between good and evil, precipitated by murder, and perpetuated through a bloody cycle of revenge between the sons of *Tur* (nomadic *Turanians* from Central Asia) and those of *Īraj* (the sedentary Iranians). In addition, it is important to examine the processes whereby these elements came to play a seminal role in the development of *Gypsyism* and later, Romani Studies, and examine the translations and references that were, and continue to be authorities in the discussion of Gypsy origins. Finally, it is critical to decipher the character of the Sāsānid Shāh, Bahrām Gūr (Vahrām V, 420-438 CE) in these works, before referring to *amīr*, later *sultān* Mahmud of Ghazna (389 AH/999-421 AH/1030 CE), the archetypal *ghāzī* ruler of his age, and emulator of much that is described in the cycle of legends about Bāhram, if we are to attempt to understand the intentions of the authors of these episodes, on their own terms.

I will suggest in this chapter, that we have a series of narratives recording the 5th century arrival in Sāsānid Persia of a contingent of allied Sindi mercenaries of *Rādjput* origin, the remnants of which became conflated with an eleventh century group of Domari itinerant singers, dancers and musicians, in attempts to provide a plausible genealogy for the latter. This group was part of the wider community of Gypsies that came to include elements from the later forced migrations of Sultān Mahmūd, those known by the epithet of *Kāoli* (now *Kawlī* or "from Kābulī", i.e. the central Ghaznāvid territories), and the descendants of an earlier *Zutt* population, especially from the ancient Indian colony at al-Lūr (Minorsky, 2003: 817b). The varied and differentiated character of the Gypsy communities of modern Iran are, I argue, an outcome of this picture of complex origins, and the continuing policy of forced population movements by the late Ottoman state in the lands contested by the Safavīds and their *Sunni* opponents, the House of Osmān (Windfur, 2003: 415b-421b). It is also the case that the processes of the emergence of Gypsy identities in Persia, can be described in a way that mirrors the equally differentiated and complex picture found in Europe. In the context of the semi-mythical chronicles and poetic epics of early mediaeval Iran however, I suggest the tale of the Shāh and the Gypsies must be seen as unreliable evidence of the early arrival of any ancestral migrations of proto-Gypsy populations.

HAMZA AL-ISFAHĀNĪ'S CHRONOLOGY,
FIRDAWSĪ AND THE SHĀHNĀMĀ

The chronicler and philologist known as Hamza al -Isfahānī b. al-Hasan, ibn Mu'addib (c. 280 AH/893 CE-360 AH/971 CE), was an accomplished scholar. He was especially known for the meticulous lexicographical study of misspellings caused by the ambiguities of the Arabic script in Persian literature, a study of Persian festivals, an extensively annotated *diwān* of the most famous poet of the 'Abbāsīd period, Abū Nuwās al-Hasan b. Hānī' al-Hakamī (130 AH/747 CE-198 AH/813 CE), a collection of the proverbs and expressions of Persia, a work concerning superstitious beliefs and amulets amongst common people in Iran, and a political and biographical history of Isfahān (Ar. *Isbahān*). His greatest work was the remarkable *Chronology*, detailing the history of the Islamic and pre-Islamic dynasties of Persia, and his survey of world history has been studied in western Europe since the eighteenth century and often translated since (Gottwald, 1844-48). It would appear that although Hamza al-Isfahānī was acutely aware of his position as a Persian man of letters, and as such, maintained some prejudices towards the Arab conquerors of Persia, he nevertheless combined a thorough and original scholarship and a critical use of the best available sources, whatever their provenance. His work "...demonstrates the breadth of enquiry amongst Islamic scholars and the curiosity at work in Muslim scholarship in tenth century Persia" (Rosenthal, 1984: 156a).

His reference to the legend of the *al-Zutt* comes in his description of the life of the monarch, Varakhān V (420-438), known to us as Bāhram Gūr, or the "wild ass" (onager) , because of his strength and prowess. A number of stories regarding this monarch are given, including one relating to the "Treasury of Jamshīd", a much-celebrated ruler of ancient Iran whose wealth Bāhram discovers whilst out hunting and distributes to the poor, thereby enhancing his character through this act of kindness. This particular legend has its origins in the Shāh's policy of tax remissions that he carried out at points during his reign (Huart, 2003: 939a). Hamza's *Chronology* partly belongs to that tradition of *nasīhat al-mulūk* or "mirrors for princes" (like the *Qābūs-nāma* of Qay Qāwūs b. Iskander, 485 AH/1082-3 CE), a prominent feature of Persian elite culture, and element of statecraft in later Islamic imperial systems, such as the Ottomans (Bosworth, 2003: 984b-988b). The legend which most concerned Gypsylorists, and scholars of Romani Studies, occurs a little later in the text, where he describes the story of the origins of the *al-Zutt* from the 12,000 Indian musicians, sent by the King of India for the entertainment of Bāhram's bibulous, but penurious subjects. The story serves as the model for Firdawsī's later tale, and follows the familiar

Persian pattern of beneficence on the part of the monarch in contrast with the thriftless Zutt (Fraser, 1994: 34), as a 'foil' for Bahrām's virtues. The wide use made of the works of Hamza by later Islamic scholars doesn't detract from the fact that there are some problems with his work. His lexicography suggests highly unlikely etymologies for Persian words rendered ambiguous in Arabic script, revealing a proclivity for invention and a bias towards looking for 'evidence' to support his contentions about the superiority of Persian, over Arabic (Bosworth, 2003: 985b). Additionally, his claims that the 12,000 al-Zutt dispersed into the Persian lands and multiplied, would seem to be contradicted by his assertion that their contemporary numbers were small, yet he offers no explanation for this disparity. Nonetheless, the use of Jewish, Greek and Armenian informants for sections of his histories reveals a striking comparison with other examples of panegyric courtly composition, and a concern with veracity that others noticeably lacked (Robinson, 2003: 76).

Abu 'l-Kasim Hasan b. 'Alī Firdawsī was born 941 CE at Bazh in the Tabaran area of Tus, to a family of *dikhans*, or landowners in the village. He died in 1025-26 CE/416 AH (Browne, 1902-24: 90). Like Hamza, Firdawsī was a passionate Iranian with a profound knowledge of the early legends, myths and histories of Persia, gleaned from both Arabic and Persian sources. Some of these became incorporated into the 60,000 verse epic *Shāhnāmā*, and again like Hamza, Firdawsī made use of a wide variety of sources in producing his "Book of Kings". He also extracted portions from the work of his compatriot, Dakika, who had been assassinated by a Turkish slave sometime in 370 AH/980 CE, after which Firdawsī had begun to compose the *Shāhnāmā*. Dakika's rendering of "an ancient book" that he refers to in his introduction, no doubt provided an initial inspiration; until this point Firdawsī had been the composer of some lyric verse and short, epic passages (Ménage, 2003: 918a). Despite his historical association with Mahmūd of Ghaznā, Firdawsī only approached the ruler of his day when he had exhausted his own resources and cannot be counted amongst the other panegyrists, poets and historians brought to embellish and celebrate the court of the Sultan, frequently against their wishes, as can be judged by Mahmūd's famously miserly response to the poet (Browne, 1902-24: 91). Firdawsī's achievement only serves to illustrate the transcendence of the epic over much of the other literary output of the period (Huart, 2003: 918a).

An important distinction between the *amīr* and poet was in the matter of faith; Firdawsī was of the *Shi'i* branch of Islam whilst Mahmūd was apparently *Sunni*. Having secured the protection and sponsorship of Mahmūd's first vizier, himself of *Shi'i* persuasion, Abu 'l-Abbas Fadl b. Ahmad al-Isfarayini (994-1010 CE), Firdawsī set about revising and extending his work, especially those passages where he expressed his

praise of Mahmūd, after the description of the death of Rūstam, for example (Warner & Warner, 1905-1925: 112, 118)

Abú'l Kásim! our great Sháh's hand is still
 Thus generous alike to good and ill.
 He never slackeneth in bounteousness,
 And never resteth on the day of stress,
 Delivereth battle when the times demand,
 And taketh heads of monarchs in his hand,
 But largesseth the humble with his spoils,
 And maketh no account of his own toils.
 Oh! may Mahmūd still rule the world, still be
 The source of bounty and of equity!

As we might deduce, the *amīr* was busy securing his reputation as *Yamīn al-Dawla* 'defender of the faith', and *Amīn al-Milla* 'protector of the *umma*', and a prince on a par with Rūstam or Bahrām himself, but with the fall of the vizier Abu 'l-Abbas, Mahmūd's intolerance for heterodoxy apparently became more pronounced (Ménage, 2003: 919b). The infamous and paltry reward that Firdawsī received upon submitting his *magnum opus*, was clearly a reflection of this somewhat opportunist change in opinion on Mahmūd's part. That it was opportunist is without doubt; the support of heterodox, sometimes shamanist Central Asian elements in the Khorāsān region where Iranians were predominant, was crucial to Mahmūd's early military successes in his expansionist programme (Bosworth, 1991: 65b-66a). His role as the pre-eminent *ghazī* warrior was always tempered by pragmatism, and his maintenance of his Hindū troops, especially when deployed against rebellious Muslim subjects, indicates that this ideology was part and parcel of the Ghaznāvid ruler's self-fashioning. Firdawsī may have expected a more tolerant and generous reception, if he understood the role of the poets and authors at Mahmūd's court as part of this process of promulgation of myth and majesty, and so his disappointment is understandable, as he almost certainly saw his work as vastly superior to theirs.

THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE AND MEMORY

The primary problem concerned with both poets' work has been defined by most scholars as a question of origins (Fraser, 1992: 11-32). Central to this problem and its exegesis, has been the endeavour to establish a coeval time-line, matching the conclusions of those researchers for whom the analysis of the Romani languages has provided the necessary 'framework' for developing the history of the Gypsies (see Sampson, 1926; Turner, 1926: 145-189; 1927: 129-138; Gjerdman & Ljungberg, 1963; Kochanowski, 1979: 16-52, for examples). Frequently this

has been at the expense of clearly establishing the relationship between language and memory, as recorded history. The pursuit of evidence relies upon commonly assumed connexions, as when Marushiakova and Popov refer to the Firdawsī episode as

...the events described, although told in a semi-legendary fashion, and in much later times, are rooted in historical fact and can be taken to refer to one of the initial stages of Gypsy migration (2001: 11)

The main criticism of such presentations of "historical fact" might be summarised as follows;

Statements of this kind, even when they are partially true, ignore the principle that in order to establish an historical connexion between A and B it is not enough to bring forward evidence of their likeness to one another, without showing at the same time that the actual relation of B to A was such to render the assumed filiations possible, and that the possible hypothesis fits in with all the ascertained facts... (Nicholson, 1914: 8-9)

Fraser (1992: 42) clearly cautions against reliance upon the single factor of language to determine history, when he writes "... it is prudent to take stock of possible oversimplifications which the linguistic approach to prehistory... [i.e. early Romani history]... may encourage." As such, the lexicostatistical endeavour has resulted in a number of debates and disputes, assertions and arguments, based upon abstracted notions of Romani history and migration in general, which have been adduced from linguistics. In this context, reference to historical sources has often been selective, and subjectively driven by the predisposition to support particular narratives. Uncritical use of sources in some instances has led to misidentification of Romani peoples as other groups; a case in point being the equivalence drawn between early Byzantine references to *Atsinganoi* or *Athínganoi* and the *Gypsies*, despite Byzantine chronicler's detailed knowledge of individual heretical groups and their beliefs (see Hamilton & Hamilton, 1998). Once again, Fraser's scepticism proves salutary,

Too often the assumption has been made, in looking for traces of the Gypsies, that any reference to a migrant group pursuing a Gypsy-like occupation can for that reason be equated with them...(Fraser, 1992: 35)

In this current discussion, the case of the *Lūrī*, *Lors* or *Lori* who are described in the Persian sources have been firmly located in this discourse of origins, despite the problems of identifying who is exactly meant by this description. As evidence of an early departure from India

for the Roma, they have been mobilised to support arguments between scholars, which have become extremely well worn in the discipline through repetition. Indeed, it is almost axiomatic that the legend of Bahram Ghūr and the Lūrī must appear in the early stages of any “history” or description of the Gypsies (Simmons, 2000). Many of these accept the basic story as representing a factual, albeit couched in legendary terms, account of the earliest migration (Simmons, 2000 almost uniquely notes, “... modern scholars dismiss this story as romantic fiction”; see also Hancock, 2004). Such wide circulation has this particular episode had, that English folk-singers like Fred Brookes can write a song about the subject and unquestioningly present it as part of the Romani “tradition”. The historical veracity of the story, the analysis of the descriptions Hamza al-Isfahani and Firdawsī (the two best known redactions) in either symbolic or semiotic terms, the textual analysis offering wider perspectives and a more nuanced understanding of the descriptions, have not been undertaken by Romani Studies scholars to date. Despite the previous interpretations of this episode, and if taken at face value, the story of a group of musicians from north-western India transplanted to Persia in the mid-fifth century CE remains just that. I would suggest that without further analysis it is neither incontrovertible proof of a Romani presence in Sāsānid Persia, nor is it yet a clear case of mistaken identity, and thus the continuing uncritical use of this legend of Bahram Gūr and the Lūrī in any narrative of Gypsy history is indefensible.

THE ORIGINS OF THE “ROMANI” CONNECTION

The origins of this legendary identification are to be found in a piece written by a Colonel John S. Harriott (frequently misidentified as Captain James Harriott), of the East India Company Army c.1830. Colonel Harriott later became a Major-General of Her Majesty’s Army in India (1838) and was a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society, to whom he had submitted his treatise, *Observations on the Oriental Origins of the Romanichal*, as part of their Transactions for that year (1830: 518-558). Harriott was the kind of soldier-scholar familiar in both this milieu and period (such as Captain George Grenville Malet, who wrote a history of Sind in 1855), similar in many ways to the more famous Sir Richard Francis Burton KCMG, also an East India Company officer during these years. Harriott’s treatise closely followed upon a translation of the Persian epic *Shāhnāmā* in four volumes by Turner Macan, published in Kalkhata (Calcutta), with the majestic title *The Shāh Nameh... carefully collated with a number of the oldest and best manuscripts and illustrated by a copious glossary of obsolete words and obscure idioms... that included a life of the author in Persian and English* (1829). Other European translations of Firdawsī’s poem followed this, indicating an especial level of interest in Persian literature by western European scholars at this time. A French translation by M. Jules Mohl in seven

volumes, *Le Livre des Rois* (1838-78), an Italian verse translation published in Turin, by Pizzi (1886-88), in German by F. Rückert (1890-05), English by A. G. Warner & E. Warner (1905-25), and a Gujarati version by J. J. Modi, (1897-04), were all subsequently produced, to say nothing of selections in Danish (Christensen, 1931), Dutch, Turkish and Özbek (see Ménage, 2003: 918a). The reasons for this rapid development in translations of Firdawsī might be seen in a number of factors to do with European, especially British influence in the region, as this was becoming dominant and the Empire strengthened control over the Indian sub-continent, its resources and especially its trade. According to geopolitical logic, parts of the "Middle East" were indispensable to the defence of this acquisition, in that the imperial mission was seen to be justified by the earlier Muslim invasions of Firdawsī's patron, Sultān Mahmūd of Ghaznā. As Sir Henry Miers Elliott wrote in his preface to the collection entitled *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians, The Muhammadan Period* (1867-77: 3)

...and drawing auguries from the past, he [the reader]... will derive hope for the future, that, inspired by the success which has hitherto attended our endeavours, we shall follow them up [the Muslims]... by continuous efforts to fulfil our high destiny as the rulers of India.

Thus, the work of Harriott, and others like Burton, must be seen in the complex light of European Orientalism, and part of the process Said has described as dignifying

...all the knowledge collected during colonial occupation with the title "contribution to modern learning" when the natives had neither been consulted nor treated as anything except pretexts for a text whose usefulness was not to the natives... (1987: 80)

Crucially for nineteenth century European and Ottoman Orientalists, the article by Harriott suggested the possibility of being able to "institute new areas of specialisation; to establish new disciplines; to divide, deploy, schematize, tabulate, index, and record... every observable detail..." (Said, 1987: 86; see also Makdisi, 2002: 768-797), about an Oriental population at Europe's heart, the *Gypsies*. The appearance of a group of itinerant musicians and thieves in Firdawsī's great epic, confirmed (for Harriott and his readers) that the connection of the English *Gypsies* and the Indian origin of their language, could be made securely. This confirmation underpinned the founding of what was later dubbed *Gypsylorism*, as a new discipline and area of specialisation, a means of categorising "natives" in the colonies and at home, and of conceptualising the other in both settings. It is no coincidence that the investigations of Harriott, Burton, and the later Gypsylorists are primarily intended to extend this categorisation, this "mapping" of the

Gypsies in their various "habitats". As Hancock (2004) has written, in his introduction to the life and work of Jan Yoors,

...the same colonialism and the European domination of non-western peoples were feeding into notions of a hierarchy of human groups. From the new sciences of botany and zoology the move to classifying human populations was a natural step, and the idea of "races" and their ranking occupied much of the scientific and nationalistic thought of the day. Populations resulting from unions of different "races" were believed to inherit the worst characteristics from each, and thus only the genetically pristine or "True Romany" counted for anything.

Whilst the work of Yoors was, Hancock argues, markedly different (Hancock, 2004), Harriott's study was intended to demonstrate the inheritance of *genuine* Gypsies, and those that followed him continued to promote this true/false dichotomy.

THE INTERPOLATIONS OF COLONEL HARRIOTT

This trope of authentic/inauthentic followed upon both the much earlier deduction of Romani as an Indic language, by István Váli, Jacob Bryant, Jacob Rüdiger, and Heinrich Grellman, in the late eighteenth century (Hancock, 2004), and the notion of the "counterfeit Egyptians" (Fraser, 1990: 43-69) that had been present since the mid-sixteenth century (Fraser, 1992: 85-6). The migration to Persia in the fifth century appeared plausible, as it was alluded to in the *Shāhnāmā*. The story suggests that Bahram Ghūr was visited by his Indian "father-in-law", Maharaja Rao Shankal of Sind, who offered to send him 10,000 Lūrī musicians to entertain the ordinary Persians who were imbibing their wine without musical entertainment (Hancock, 2004; Marushiakova & Popov, 2001: 5; Fraser, 1992: 35); although Hamza al-Isfahani states the figure of 12,000, whilst others suggest 4,000 in number (Minorsky, 2003: 816b). The king was however, displeased with these Lūrī and dispensed with their services before the year was out. A number of inaccuracies have crept into the story, so that the most recent recapitulations of it have conflated and reversed some important details. The 1905-25 translation by Warner and Warner (vol. vii, chap.39: 148-150), refers to the episode in the following way:

§ 39 How Bahrām summoned Gipsies from Hindústān

Thereafter he sent letters to each archmage,
Gave clothing to the mendicants, and asked:-
"In all the realm what folk are free from toil,
And who are mendicants and destitute?
Tell me how things are in the world, and lead

My heart upon the pathway toward the light."

An answer came from all the archimages,

From all the nobles, and the men of lore:-

"The face of earth appeareth prosperous,

Continuous blessings are in every part,

Save that the poor complain against the ills

Of fortune and the Sháh. 'The rich,' they say,

'Wear wreaths of roses in their drinking-bouts,

And quaff to minstrelsy, but as for us

They do not reckon us as men at all.

The empty-handed drinketh with no rose

Or harp.' The king of kings should look to it."

The Sháh laughed heartily at this report,

And sent a camel-post to king Shangul

To say thus: "O thou monarch good at need!

Select ten thousand of the Gipsy-tribe,

Both male and female, skilful on the harp,

And send them to me. I may gain mine end

Through that notorious folk."

Now when the letter

Came to Shangul he raised his head in pride

O'er Saturn's orbit and made choice of Gipsies,

As bidden by the Sháh who, when they came,

Accorded them an audience and gave each

An ox and ass, for he proposed to make

The Gipsies husbandmen, while his officials

Gave them a thousand asses' loads of wheat,

That they might have the ox and ass for work,

Employ the wheat as seed for raising crops,

And should besides make music for the poor,

And render them the service free of cost.

The Gipsies went and ate the wheat and oxen,

Then at a year's end came with pallid cheeks.

The Sháh said: "Was it not your task to plough,

To sow, and reap? Your asses yet remain,

So load them up, prepare your harps, and stretch

The silken chords."

And so the Gipsies now,

According to Bahrám's just ordinance,

Live by their wits; they have for company

The dog and wolf, and tramp unceasingly.

This text is the fullest English edition available (it may be found at <http://erga.packhum.org/persian>), and generally considered to be the best critical edition, hence referring to it here. Harriott appears to have

translated the text himself in his essay of 1830, although he may have been using the four volume 1829 Turner Macan edition. This redaction differs markedly from the Warner in some respects, most notably in Macan's translation of the apocryphal story of Firdawsī's fabulous reward and extended sojourn at Mahmūd's court (Ménage, 2003: 919b). The most obvious difference between Harriott and the later version, is the use by Warner and Warner of the terms *Gipsy* and *Gipsies*, in place of his rendering of *Lūrī*. The tale in both is more clearly defined in terms of numbers, and the change in conditions for these *Lūrī*, in their "contract" with the *Shāh*. The translation continues as above, until the final part where Harriott renders the text "...and support themselves by means of their songs, and the strumming of their silken bows..." (Harriott, quoted in Fraser, 1992: 35). Their dismissal also contains an interesting difference, in that "...the Luri, agreeably to this mandate, now wander the world, seeking employment..." and thieving on the road by day and by night", details not contained in the Warner translation. In this instance, Harriott's insertion of ideas already associated with the concept of "Gipsie" are clearly recognisable; the happy acceptance of their fate, as decreed by *Bahrām*, to wander, play and sing, and the association of criminal activities with this perambulation. We can detect the ideas of the author of the 1775-76 *Wiener Anzeigen* articles, and Heinrich Grellman's 1783 *Die Zigeuner* at work here (see Fraser, 1992: 191-93), and Harriott's prejudices about Gypsies have been interpolated in the text anachronistically, as the Warner translation suggests. The extent to which Harriott is reflecting wider prejudices is also an interesting point; despite the use of the term *Gipsies* by Warner and Warner, they do not seem to find the concomitant pejorative associations of petty larceny in the Firdawsī text. Clearly the Warner edition has been influenced by the widespread acceptance, by the time of the publication of their translation, of the tale as presenting us with something about the origins of the *Gypsies*, so that the term in the Persian text has been equated with the English term. In his introduction to volume vii where this tale appears, Edmond Warner makes mention of the inclination of "Professor Nöldeke... to consider *Bahrām*'s importation of the Gypsies [sic.] from Hind to *Īrān* historical" referring to Theodore Nöldeke's note in his *Encyclopædia Britannica* article on the monarch and his reign (Warner, 1905: n). Again, this reflects the notion that *Lūrī* can be equated with the English term, *Gypsy*, but this does not prompt Warner and Warner to "gloss" the Firdawsī text in the anachronistic way that Harriott's earlier version does.

The other differences in terms of the Harriott translation and the Warner edition of Firdawsī are more significant, if less immediately apparent in the former. The Indian ruler (*Shangūl*), is referred to elsewhere in the text as the "noble chieftain of the Sindian host..." (Warner & Warner, 1905-25, § 31: 125), and in a following section *Rai* or

Rādja (§37: 140), but the majority of the interaction between the Shāh and the King (§36-§38), takes place in Kannūj, as it is rendered (Warner and Warner, 1905-25, vii, §29: 118), suggesting that the Gangetic basin is the heart of the King's territory, which extends over the Sind. There is a long narrative of various fabulous deeds and exploits on the part of Bahrām in Hind; he wrestles with the court champion after a feast (§28: 117), and other feats, that precedes the reference to the Gypsies in the poem, in the tradition of the heroic literature of the *Khwaday-namag* (The Book of Lords; c.590-628). These deeds culminate in the King of Hind offering one of his three daughters to Bahrām as a wife:

"O thou Joy of hearts! thou hast prevailed.
Attempt no greater feat. I will bestow
My daughter on thee as thy wife, for thus
Shall I be profited in word and deed.

(Warner & Warner, 1905-25, §32: 1127)

Herein lies the origin of the identification of the Shāh as the son-in-law of Shangūl; he is married at Kannūj to the "moon-faced maid" named Sapīnūd, with whom he flees the intrigues of Shangūl to keep him in Hind, and returns to Īrān (§34:131-134). Reconciled to Shangūl, he calls upon him for the Lūrī (§39: 148-150). It is in the consideration of this point that I will turn to a closer examination of the *Lūrī*, *Lūlī* and the *Zutt*.

AL-ZUTT AND THE LŪLĪ

If we examine the literature associated with this tale (see Minorsky, 2003: 816b), it suggests that the term *lūrī* or *lūlī* is itself used inconsistently from an early point. Hamza al-Isfahānī refers to the musicians in the story as al-Zutt in his *Chronology* (c.350 AH/961 CE), but thereafter the terms used by subsequent poets are related to *lūlī*, *lūrī*, *lūrī*. In the translation by M. Jules Mohl of Firdawsī (1838-78: 76-77), the translator renders the term *Lūriyān*, and in his 1841 translation of the *Madjmil al-tawarīkh* (c. 520 AH/1126 CE), Mohl extends this term to *al-Lūriyūn al-sūdān*, or "the black Lūrī" (515-534). al-Tha'ālibī writes in his *Ghurar al-siyar* or *Ghurar akhbār mulūk al-furs wa-siyarihim* (c.429 AH/1037 CE), that the Lūrī are descended from these "black" *al-Lūriyūn al-sūdān* (Zotenberg, 1900: 567), and following this, other Persian poets refer to the "blackness... like night", of these people (there is no suggestion that these people actually originate in the Sudan; see Minorsky, 2003: 817a). They are also described by writers as *shūkh* "petulant", *bunagāh* (that is their way of life is "irregular"), and most interesting of all in the context of the *Shāhnāmā*, *shangūl* meaning "extremely joyful", "carefree in their happiness" (Minorsky oddly suggests this term means "elegant" in his discussion; 2003: 817a). Modern connotations associated with the

term *lūlī* are similarly glossed (see Digard, 2003: 413b), whilst there are a significant number of terms associated with Persian Gypsies, both in terms of occupational identity and regional designations (Minorsky, 2003: 817b; Digard, 2003: 412b-13a), to which I shall return in the following section. This shift from *al-Zutt* to *Lūlī*, *al-Lūrīyan*, *al-Lūrīyan al-sūdān*, is not merely an differing terminology, as demonstrated by the consistency with which the latter term is used. It represents an *alternative* narrative, a interpretation differing from Hamza, to the dominant discourse created after Firdawsī's text. I would suggest that Hamza is attempting to include in his *Chronology* an historical account relating to an Indian population in Persia, defined as *al-Zutt*, one that provides a plausible genealogy for groups defined as *Lūlī* or *Lūrī* five centuries later. Hamza is also attempting something else in his writing, for his text is one that is not concerned with praising present rulers, but with detailing the Iranian past, in contradistinction to the less glorious present.

Firdawsī's praise for Mahmūd, and his descriptions of Bahrām are intended as a reflection of the characters of each, and an exemplar of the princely qualities embodied by both monarchs. There is also the clear description of the frivolous, feckless characters of the *Lūrī* sent by the King of Hind, Shangūl, almost certainly intended to pander to Mahmūd's own prejudices about Hindūs, and their rulers. The cycle of events that leads to this episode demonstrates the duplicity of the Indian princes through the characterisation of Shangūl. The Hindū monarch is portrayed as deceitful (§29), and cunning, intending upon bringing Bahrām to destruction by persuading him to challenge a huge wolf (§30), and then a terrible dragon (§31). He even plots to have him beheaded at his court, a deed so scurrilous that even his chief advisor will not countenance it (§32). Although the two are reconciled eventually in the tale, after Bahrām marries Sapīnūd and the couple flee to Iran, Firdawsī does not fail to point out the Indian remains "an idolater", whilst Bahrām, he suggests, is "a worshipper of God", although he presumably means *Ahura Mazda* in this instance (§36), but may equally betray something of the poet's heterodoxy. This clearly is intended to draw attention to the *Shāh*'s similarity to the *Sultān*. In this (as in Bahrām's reply to Faghfūr of Chin §35), the contrast is drawn with the inferiority of the non-Persians, in their claims to majesty, their dealings with monarchs, and their bravery and prowess. The argument could be made that Firdawsī was clearly appealing to Mahmūd as a *Persian monarch* in the line of the king of kings (*shāhanshāh*), and equally that Mahmūd perceived himself to be so. Like earlier episodes in Iranian history, the Ghaznāvids had secured their position over their previous *Samānīd* masters through these qualities, and thus had every claim to be considered *shāhanshāh*. This aspect of Mahmūd's kingship ideology bore strong resemblance to that of the previous *Sasānīds*.

In this change in terminology as regards *al-Zutt*, or *Zott*, and the *Lūlī*, an ambivalence arises that if uncovered, may offer both the connection between the various *ethnonyms*, and provide an illuminating perspective upon the origin of the Gypsy populations of Persia and elsewhere in the region. Minorsky has identified, in his article on the term *Lūlī*, that the origin of this name is in the early Arab scholars' description of the inhabitants of a town in Sind, called by them *Arūr* or *al-Rūr* (2003: 679a; 817a). The Arab conquest of the region had taken this town sometime before 95 AH/714 CE, according to the historian *al-Balādhurī* c.850 CE (Hitti and Murgotten, 1916–1924: 439–440). Muhammad Ma'sum "Nami" Mir records that Alore was

...a very large city on the bank of the Mihran (the Indus); that there were many very fine buildings in it; that outside and around the town there were gardens full of trees, having good fruit, and that everything was to be found there that the inhabitants and travellers might desire

and it was the royal residence of *Rai Suheeris* (Malet, 1855: 7). It fell to Muhammad b. l'Kasīm on "...Thursday, the 10th day of Rumzan, in the year Hijree 93 (A. D. 711)" (Malet, 1855: 17). The linguistic shift from *Arōrī/Rūrī* to *Lōrī/Lūlī*, Minorsky argues, occurs after the translation of Indian Alore into Arabic *al-Rūr*, dissimulation of the two "r" letters, being a common occurrence (2003: 817a). The groups identified in the *Shāhnāmā* and other works, are seen as descendants of the presumed captives from this, the most important city in Sind, after the Arab conquest in the beginning of the eighth century CE. This strongly suggests that the origins of the Dom are to be found in such populations, a point I have argued elsewhere (Marsh, forthcoming, §3). What has happened in this particular case is, I suggest, that the general term *al-Zutt*, or *al-Zott*, the Arabic term for *Djāt*, has given way to the specific term *Lūlī*, but that both have their origins in the same region (Ansari, 2003: 488a). The semantic shift reflects a change in the presentation of the relationship between the *Sasānīd shāhs*, and the *Gūpta* kings of India, and the reconfiguration of relations in the wake of Arab conquest.

The interpolation of the fabulous episodes relating to *Bahrām Gūr* and *Shangūl King of Hind*, in a narrative depicting the prowess and bravery of the *Shāh*, is a device to explain the alliance of the *Sāsānīds* and the *Gūpta* monarchs, in the face of a common enemy, the Hephthalite Huns, *Hunas* or *Hayātīla* (White Huns). The origins of communities of Indians as allied troops assisting the Persians in their defence, lies at the heart of the story of *Bahrām Gūr*, I suggest. The struggle against the Hephthalites was one waged by the *shāhs* over two centuries, from the initial attacks of the *Chionite* Huns in c.350 against Shapur II. After a treaty between these combatants, the Huns refrained from full-scale assaults

upon Iran until Bahrām Gūr's reign, and it is likely that sometime in the early 420's, the *Shāh* defeated the Hephthalite king, dedicating his crown, the Hephthalite queen and her servants, to the *Gushnasp* fire-temple at Shiz (Morony, 1987: 74). Later onslaughts were more successful however, and the Hephthalites came to dominate Persia and India. However, the role of victorious allies that the Hindūs had played in relation to the fifth century Sasānīd *shāh* became problematic for the later, Muslim Persian chroniclers, as the Indians maintained their Hindūism, even after the Arab conquest of Sind, thus remaining "idolaters", whilst the Sasānīds could at least be represented as believers in one "God" (*Ahura Mazda*), and in some senses closer to the monotheism of Islam. The legend of the *Lūlī* functions as a semiotic dislocation describing this shifting relationship, giving an ignoble origin for people who may once have been valued and respected. The final echo of their former occupation is found in the phrase relating to the "silken bows" (Harriott) and stretching "the silken chords" (Warner & Warner). It was the practice of archers, just prior to battle, of stretching the silken bow-strings by plucking them to produce a low, threatening "thrum", as infantry would beat their shields with their swords. The origins of the harp in the hunter's bow is well-known, but this would seem to be a case of the conflation of original community of allied troops with the later-arrived *Lūrī*.

HARRIOTT, HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the context of the above arguments, the seminal role of John S. Harriott, in the identification of the story of the *Lūlī* and Bahrām Gūr, and the origins of the *Gypsies*, must be re-evaluated. Harriott's translation of this section of the *Shāhnāmā* (1830: 518-58; Warner & Warner, 1905-25: 148-150), interpolated anachronistic notions relating to the character of *Gypsies*, as these had been defined in European scholarship since the 1770's, and had been part of popular prejudices and stereotypes for a great deal longer. Harriott's glossing of these notions upon the text of Firdawsī's story, added an additional layer to an already complex text; one that contained elements of the less subtle panegyrics being produced at the court of the *sultān* Mahmūd of Ghaznā, as a supplication in times of the author's needs, yet retained a transcendent narrative and structure that lifted it beyond these material concerns. Firdawsī's religious heterodoxy may have added an additional motive to those of Mahmūd in awarding the aged poet a meagre pension for his monumental work, but the text itself displayed a clear intention as regards the comparisons of Bahrām and Mahmūd in this tale, and the tropes of the deceitful and dishonourable behaviour reflected the prejudices of both poet and *sultān* towards the Hindūs, I suggest. Harriott's colourful redaction of the text concerning the *Lūlī* or *Lūrī* has fundamentally been at the base of a positive identification, for many

scholars, with the *Gypsies*, yet this reference has not been systematically or rigorously interrogated by either *Gypsyologists*, or modern Romani Studies scholarship. Upon examination, the translation by Harriott displays a number of aspects that throws doubt upon any connection with Gypsy origins, and I would argue that the continuing use of this referent is an aspect of the *mythologising* of Romani history, that must be separated from the actuality of that history, even whilst it may continue to be described as an aspect of Romani historiography. The legend of Bāhram Gūr and the Lūlī must be recognised as an *orientalised* narrative, as it has been portrayed by Harriott, reflecting nineteenth century racism (built upon eighteenth century prejudices) towards Gypsies, and part of the discourse of colonial imperialism, justifying European rule in India and interference in Persia and elsewhere in the region. To continue to perpetuate this discourse in Romani Studies and Gypsy scholarship, is to accept the racist paradigm that framed the questions of origins and identities Europeans drew up regarding the *Other*, be they "Indians" in India or in Europe. To deconstruct this *myth* of origins, is to refute the reductive simplicity of European models of *narratives* of origins for distinct, and homogeneous ethnic groups, during this crucial period of imperial expansion, couched in terms of "the white man's burden" (Rudyard Kipling's imperialist paean of 1899), or "manifest destiny" (coined by John S. O'Sullivan in 1839). Romani history writing must challenge and confront these narratives, whilst avoiding the *essentialism* that accompanies a great deal of the self-fashioning of *ethno-history*, especially at the expense of much-cherished myths like that of Bāhram Gūr and the Lūlī.