

# Rostam

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*For the historical general who fought at the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah for the Sassanid Empire, also mentioned in the Shahnameh, see Rustam Farrokhzād.*

**Rustam** (Persian: رستم, pronounced [roˈstæm, ɾɒstæm]) is the national hero of Greater Iran from Zabulistan in Persian mythology and son of Zal and Rudaba. In some ways, the position of Rustam in the historical tradition is curiously parallel to that of Surena, the hero of the Carrhae. His figure was endowed with many features of the historical personality of Rustam. The latter was always represented as the mightiest of Iranian paladins, and the atmosphere of the episodes in which he features is strongly reminiscent of the Arsacid period. He was immortalized by the 10th century poet Ferdowsi of Tus in the *Shahnameh* or *Epic of Kings*, which contain pre-Islamic folklore and history.



Rustam Slaying the Dragon.  
Artwork by Adel Adili

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## Background

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Rustam is the champion of champions and is involved in numerous stories, constituting some of the most popular (and arguably some of most masterfully created) parts of the *Shahnameh*. As a young child, he slays the maddened white elephant of the king Manuchehr with just one blow of the mace owned by his grand father Sam, son of Nariman. He then tames his legendary stallion, Rakhsh. The etymology of the name Rustam is from Raodh+Takhma, where Raodh means growth, reaped, developed and Takhma means brave. In the Avesta, the form is \*Raosta-takhma and in Pahlavi \*Rodastahm<sup>[1]</sup>.

Mehrdad Bahar regards the etymology of the name to be "Ruta-staxma", i.e. the river that descends, and argues that Rustam could have been an ancient god of the river Helmand. The fact that Rustam's mother is called Rudabeh (i.e. The river of water) and his father is Zal who has a white hair, Bahar continues the argument to say that Zal is a metaphor for mountains from which the river forms, whose head is always white with snow.

Persian rumour has it that the name 'Rustam' is actually based on a historical character named "Retzehem", who was believed to be an Achaemenid general. Retzehem supposedly helped the Persians conquering the city of Sardis by climbing up the walls, throwing a rope and pulling up his fellow soldiers.

## Birth

In Persian mythology, Rudaba's labor of Rustam was prolonged due to the extraordinary size of her baby. Zal, her lover and husband, was certain that his wife would die in labor. Rudaba was near death when Zal decided to summon the Simurgh. The Simurgh appeared and instructed him upon how to perform a "Rustamzad" (Persian equivalent for caesarean section), thus saving Rudaba and the child.

## Haft Khan

*Main article: Rustam's Seven Labours*

He passes through a hero's journey to save his sovereign, Kay Kavus who is captured by the demons (Divs) of Mazandaran. This journey is called "Rustam's Seven Quests" (Persian: Haft Khan-e Rustam)

It is thought that the tale of Rustam and Sohrab is somehow related to the Lay of Hildebrand.

There are some interesting similarities between the legends of Rustam and those pertaining to the great Irish hero, Cúchulainn. They both defeat a ferocious beast as a very young man, slay their sons in combat, are virtually invincible in combat, and are murdered by treachery while killing their murderer on their last breath.<sup>[2]</sup>

Two Persian heroes, Rustam and Esfandiyar, share Labours stories with Hercules.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Alternate views

It is written by the Royal Central Asian Society in the *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* that the



Statue of Rustam , Ramsar.

struggle between Rustam and the white demon represents a struggle between Persians and invaders from the north, from the Caspian provinces.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Rustam and Shabrang

In ancient myth, Kolak Chall in Alborz was the house of Div-e-Sepid, who was slain by the great Persian hero Rustam.

Some years later, Shabrang (literally "dark as night"), the son of Div-e-Sepid, came to fight with Rustam. Their first battle was also in Kollak Chall.

## See also

- Surena
- List of Shahnameh characters
- Rustam and Sohrab
- Banu Goshasp

## References

- ↑ M. Mayrhofer, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch I/1*, Vienna, 1977
- ↑ Connell Monette, *The Medieval Hero: Christian and Muslim Traditions*. (Saarsbruck: 2008).
- ↑ Connell Monette, *The Medieval Hero: Christian and Muslim Traditions*. (Saarsbruck: 2008), pp.227-28.
- ↑ *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* By Royal Central Asian Society

## External links

### ■ Web Resources

- *Shahnameh*, by Hakim Abol-Qasem Ferdowsi Tusi, the complete work (64 Epics), in Persian (ParsTech (<http://www.parstech.org/detail.php?id=1261>) ). This work can be freely downloaded (File size, compiled in the form of an HTML Help File: 1.4 MB).
- Iraj Bashiri, *Characters of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh*, Iran Chamber Society ([http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/shahnameh/characters\\_ferdowsi\\_shahname.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/shahnameh/characters_ferdowsi_shahname.php)) , 2003.
- *Rustam* (<http://www.theshahnameh.com>) , English comic book adaptation of tales from the Shahnameh.
- *Shahnameh* (<http://classics.mit.edu/Ferdowsi/kings.html>) , English translation by Helen Zimmern.
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- *Shahnameh* (<http://www.greatworkspreserved.com/shahnama/>) , Arthur and Edmond Warner translation.
- New Translation of 'Persian Book of Kings' - March, 2006 (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5309016>) from NPR, and "The Epic of Iran" - April, 2006 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/30/books/review/30aslan.html>) , from the New York Times. Also, on 14 May 2006, Washington Post Pulitzer Prize winning book critic Michael Dirda reviewed Dick Davis's translation "Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings" "This marvelous translation of an ancient Persian classic brings these stories alive for a new audience." (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/11/AR2006051101341.html>) . The illustrated three-volume slipcase edition of this translation is ISBN 0-934211-97-3

### ■ Persian Sources

- Complete Persian text (<http://shahnameh.recent.ir/default.aspx?browse>)
- Shahnameh website (<http://www.shahnameh.com/>)
- Rostam Comic Book Website (<http://www.thesahnameh.com/>)

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Categories: Medieval legends | Warriors of Central Asia | Persian mythology | Shahnameh characters

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