

# Mythical Aspects of the Cane of Moses in Persian Exegeses

## Aspectos míticos del bastón de Moisés en exégesis persas

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## Summary

The stories and parables that we see in Quran have a logical course but our Persian exegetical texts are full of appendices which have become combined with myth. In Quran, the word “myths” is of a negative content but the reality is that human mind tends to add to the significance of the event by exaggeration and empowerment of the persons and objects. The story of Moses in Quran is one of the most extensive stories and his cane is capable of turning to a mythical symbol. Thus, this essay studies the mythocentric approach of it in four Persian exegeses.

**Keywords:** Cane of Moses, Religious Myths, Persian Exegeses.

## Resumen

Las historias y parábolas que vemos en el Corán tienen un curso lógico, pero nuestros textos exegéticos persas están llenos de apéndices que se han combinado con el mito. En el Corán, la palabra "mitos" tiene un contenido negativo, pero la realidad es que la mente humana tiende a aumentar la importancia del evento mediante la exageración y el empoderamiento de las personas y los objetos. La historia de Moisés en el Corán es una de las más extensas y su bastón es capaz de convertirse en un símbolo mítico. Por lo tanto, este ensayo estudia su enfoque mitocéntrico en cuatro exégesis persas.

**Palabras clave:** Bastón de Moisés, mitos religiosos, exégesis persas.

## Introduction

Cane is a simple tool used by hand that does not belong to any specific social class and the poor and the rich have equally taken advantage of it. This tool has given a special name depending on its usage in every class. It was considered a point of reliance for the old and the sign of domination for the young.

It represents a ritualistic object that has been the symbol of monarchy and power of kings and the sign of sainthood of the divine saints.

Cane also has its place in the myths.

The Gods of different nations have crown and cane. In the Egyptian myths, “Osiris” has the royal cane and the cane of “Vas” (Hosseini Tehrani, 2018).

In the myths of Ashur and Babylon, “Ano” also has the cane of monarchy and the walking-stick of order giving (Zhiran & Lakueh, 1996).

In Greek myths, in the time of deliverance of a speech, a special cane was kept in one’s hand (Rosenberg, 1995).

In the epigraphs of Takht-e Jamshid, a cane with a globe like head is seen at the hand of the King of Persia.

In ancient Persian texts, there are words of a golden cane that Ahura Mazda has given it to Jamshid but since Mehrdad Bahar has casted doubts of the meaning of “Sura” and “Oshtor”, one can consider it to be equal with the cane (Bahar, 2014).

In Bible, when Esther the Jewish queen attends the presence of King, the King has a cane that is touched by the queen (Bible, 2016).

Cane represents a tool that is used when one becomes aged. There is a tradition that suggests “if someone turns forty and does not carry a cane he has sinned” (Hosseini Tehrani, 2018).

## Materials and Methods

The present study's research method is library research and description and analysis. In this study, many of the Persian bibliographies, books of the literature's history by Iranian thinkers and Iran's researchers as well as the research articles have been studied and evaluated. It is evident that the research on this issue is vast and in need of extensive research; it is hoped that the present study can set the ground for the other researchers to deal with this issue and offer scientific and executive solutions for the growth and development of Persian literature amongst the people, particularly the young generations, and present a research first of its type.

## Prologue

The age of forty is the age of rational maturity and if someone has not reached this maturity that enables him to lead his nation and tribe, he has acted against the principles of action. The divine prophets have been assigned as the leader of their people. Then, taking cane to be tantamount to leadership of a group is not a meaning away from the mind.

In many mystical texts, cane is a decoration of the hand of the mystics and the men of divine bounties. The other meaning that is conveyed by the word "cane" to one's mind is magic that has a long history. The most renowned cane of the world is that of Moses the historical background and function of which have been discussed in four significant Persian exegeses, i.e. translation of Tafsir Tabari, Tafsir Surabadi, Tafsir Rawz Al Jinan and Tafsir Kashf Al Asrar.

## Cane of Moses

The staff of Moses is the heritage of Adam the Father of Mankind which is of a heavenly origin and "it was a staff that Moses received it from Shuaib when he was chosen as the shepherd. It is said that the staff is inherited from Adam and it was a cane that Adam brought with him from the paradise" and it is stated that the other night Moses escaped from Egypt and Gabriel brought the staff of Moses from the paradise (Meibodi, 2014).

In most of exegetical texts, this staff is said to have been made of "Myrtle" of paradise which was considered to be part of the sacred plants in other religions like Judaism and Zoroastrianism. This plant is the symbol of Hormoz. "Each flower of it is an Emshaspan; it is said: Myrtle and Jasmine are relatives of Hormoz" (Bahar, 2014).

When between Shuaib and Moses a pact is sealed that all piebald sheep born in that year will be for Moses, it is revealed to Moses to put his cane to the water from which the sheep drink; all sheep turn piebald. In addition to "Myrtle" the piebald color is a sacred color. The horses in paradise are piebald (Bahar, 2014). This story is repeated in the Bible for Jacob and his uncle (Bible, 2016).

The size of the staff is ten Guz equal to the height of Moses.

It is as if a measure for selection of the ruler. The basis of the selection of the King of Bani Israel in the time of Samuel is similarity with the heavenly cane. "God sent Gabriel for Samuel with a staff ... and said: your Lord says hello and states that the King of Bani Israel was the one who has a height equal to the cane" (Razi, 1990).

The individual choice on this basis is a repeated story just like David's Shield.

One of the features of Adam's Cane is that it returns to the heavens for several times and in appropriate time, it is given to a right individual. Therefore, if we consider the staff of Moses to be the same cane that Gabriel brought from the heavens for Joseph, the color of the staff will be green (Razi, 1990).

The name of this staff is "Aleeq" (Surabadi, 2002)..

The name of the tree that is on the Mount Sinai is "Aleeq" (Surabadi, 2002).

In religious myths, the objects nature and chosen animals have human spirit as well as name and nickname and one should treat them with respect. For example, the Red Sea would have not been cleaved unless Moses addressed it with its nickname (Razi, 1990).

The boys when reach the age of maturity, they would receive the special staff as a sign.

“In the house of Jacob, there was a tree from which a son came for Jacob as well as a branch and started to grow with that son. When the son grew up, the branch had already grown; the father took it and gave to him and said: this timber is for you and will serve as your staff and it was born with you and grew up with you” (Meibodi, 2014).

This is also the case with the sons of Shuaib. “This man had eleven sons. When one of these sons grew up, he would say: go and take one staff” (Meibodi, 2014).

Becoming green and having leaves is a sign of the leadership of the owner of the cane.

### **Flourishing of Staff is an Endorsement of Divine Judgement**

Strangers are not allowed to take possession of these special objects and when the strangers touch it, they would be punished.

When Moses and Bani Israel reach the Red Sea, Gabriel brings revelation that let the cane touches the sea; Harun intends the honor of this to be for him but the Sea reacts to him and Harun gives the staff back to Moses Razi F. (1990).

Even the sons of Shuaib who unintentionally make this mistake, are punished. “Whenever one of his sons got matured he would say: go and take one staff; then he would go and take one and fire would come and they would have been killed. Finally, when it was the turn of Moses, he took the staff and there was no harm” (Razi, 1990).

In this story, eleven boys are sacrificed in a mythical way in order to make Moses understand the significance of the staff.

The Prophet Soleiman also had set a staff made of ebony in the mosque of Holy House which if was touched by the son of a prophet he would have remained healthy but the pretenders would have burnt their hands in the event of touching it (Razi, 1990).

The staff of Jesus that could bring the dead back to life did not work when it was stolen by someone to cure the king and it worked the other way (Surabadi, 2002).

When the time comes, the dowry of Safura, the wife of Moses comes to its end; Moses is homesick and decides to return to his land and he heads to Egypt. Shuaib asks for the staff that he had given to Moses; but he refuses to give it back. Here like many other parables, the first anonymous man undertakes the judgement between them. The judge who is an angel coming from God, forgets the blindness and oldness of Shuaib and arranges an unfair competition at the end of which Moses is known as the owner of the staff and of course, Shuaib has no complaint (Meibodi, 2014) and (Razi, 1990).

Moses in Mount Sinai suffers many troubles and in his search for fire he finds his God who becomes manifested in a tree and speaks to him. A significant event has taken place but God asks him of his staff. Naturally, Moses knows that this question is not in vain. The commentators have said that this question has been asked so that Moses retains his peace or the importance of this cane is reminded. But when we hear these words from the language of Moses concerning Pharaoh, we find out that his God teaches him how to reveal his miracle.

“O’ Moses! What is the thing you have in your right hand? He said: This is my staff and I rely on it” (Razi, 1990).

The answer is wrong. The reliance point of Moses turns to his fear. “This is because you have to know that you are not allowed to rely on anyone but me. Anyone who relies someone but me, his confidence will be so (Meibodi, 2014) and (Razi, 1990).

Surabadi has developed this point as follows; when Moses wanted to go after the fire, Safura told him to be careful of the snakes and the scorpions of this desert. Moses answers that I will hit them with my staff and shoes. His shoes turned to a scorpion and the staff became a great serpent (Surabadi, 2002).

In the exegesis of the phrase “other uses” all four exegeses have almost the same explanations; without raising any criticism of it they just deal with the miracles of the staff.

“Moses used that staff as a beast of burden and he put his stuff including the clothes on the cane and when he hit the ground with it Moses would have the required food and drink. At night it would guard Moses and stopped the snakes and scorpions. If wolves attacked the herd,

the staff would turn to a dog and guarded the cattle. If there was an enemy, the cane would become a warrior and when Moses went to a well and there was no bucket and rope it served Moses to get to the water. If Moses wanted a fruit, he would push the cane into the ground and the fruit will emerge. Most surprisingly, this staff acted like a friend to whom Moses would tell his grief and happiness (Surabadi, 2002) and (Meibodi, 2014).

Many of these affairs like stopping the snake, scorpion and wolf or bringing the water out of well and growing fruit turned the staff into a magic object.

Meibodi believes that these magic things date back to the time when Moses was a prophet (Surabadi, 2002).

But the silence of Abulfutih is strange and there is no sign of the phrases that are usually used for casting doubt or refusal of the magic things. While the other night before the prophecy of Moses we are faced with the staff carrying the bodies.

When Moses becomes a shepherd of Shuaib, his her enters a pasture; Moses is asleep and a dragon attacks the sheep and the staff fights it back and defeats the dragon (Meibodi, 2014).

Then, how would Moses get startled by the staff's turning to a snake at the night of his prophecy? It is clear that by setting these issues together, some artificial stories emerge.

These exegeses raise questions, e.g. why in Quran the staff is referred to respectively as "snake", "serpent" and "dragon"? Is this a contradiction? There are three answers for this:

- It was first a small and fast snake and gradually it turned to a dragon.
- Once it was a snake then it turned to a serpent and finally became a dragon.
- It was a serpent in speed while its massive bulk was like a (Meibodi, 2014).

Since no discussion is made in the translation of Tabari's exegesis, it seems that this dispute is raised as to these verses one century later.

One can interpret the evolution of snake into a serpent and then into a dragon as the stages of the spiritual growth of Moses. The further moves Moses forward in the path of his prophecy, and takes stronger steps, a larger beast becomes the staff of Moses. Once Moses feared a small snake and now he is putting his hand into the mouth of a dragon.

Moses and Harun go to Pharaoh's court with such a miracle and on their way back to home they stay at the house of an old woman who was one of their relatives. The agents of Pharaoh chase them and while Moses and Harun are asleep the cane turns to a dragon and the agents escape. The importance of Moses' being asleep in this story and in the story of the protection of the herd by the staff becomes clear when Pharaoh is searching for the capable sorcerers in his kingdom. Two masters of this art claim that if Moses is a sorcerer, they will overcome him, but if his work is heavenly, they would fail to resist him. The capability of understanding the miracle before its emergence is not an earthly quality. Therefore, he asks help from the spirit of the dead ones. He goes to the graves of his ancestors and asks for a solution (Ravandi, 1989).

"A voice came from that grave telling that go and try to steal the staff when he is asleep. If he is sorcerer, you will own his staff and you can use it as the magic does not work when the sorcerer is not awakened. But if the staff fight you back while he is asleep, he is not a sorcerer and you have to keep away from him because he would defeat you." (Meibodi, 2014).

Those two masters acted based on the advice of their fathers and tested the cane and then avoided encountering him.

After the liberation of Moses and his people and amid their long journey into their original land, the Israelites decided to destroy the staff in order to overcome the power of Moses. When he is asleep they steal the cane and break it and bury it. By divine power, the cane speaks to Moses. The land bursts and the staff turns aright (Razi, 1990).

The breaking of the staff can be understood as breaking one's word (Bible, 2016).

In dream interpretation, breaking a cane is said to imply the destruction of power and the leadership of a person (Razi, 1990).

The agents of this is not the infidels. Therefore, no action and reaction is seen from the staff, because the fraud of Bani Israel should be uncovered so that Moses can adopt an appropriate stance.

Despite verses and evidence, the infidels do not stop to believe in their perspectives and are not ready to deliver the Bani Israel from the bondages of servitude. Bible speaks of ten types of punishment that descends on them. Such punishments as the blood, toad, mosquito, fly, blotch, hailstone, grasshopper, darkness and death of the first born (Ravandi, 1989).

The change of water into blood, toads dashing out of the rivers, the dust turning into mosquitos, invasion of the grasshoppers are among the effects of the cane (Bible, 2016).

But in the Persian exegeses, only in two cases the staff is involved. Moses hits the Ein Al Shams hill by his staff and the gravels turn to the lice attacking the people (Meibodi, 2014).

And he moves the staff in the air and the wind brings the grasshoppers. After the end of the bale, he moves the staff in the air and pours the grasshoppers into the sea (Meibodi, 2014).

When the infidels are paralyzed by the death of their first born, Moses has already reach the sea. There is neither a way out nor any power for confrontation. Moses is ordered to hit the sea with his staff and there appears twelve paths and the people cross the sea. It is said that God put the water of the sea into the staff of Moses and when the people search for water in the desert, he hits the stone with his cane and there appears water (Ivnes, 1996).

Surabadi himself raises the question and answers it.

“Question: no big thing can enter the small thing by necessity. Then, how would so much water come out of that small stone or staff? The answer is that it is no so that all water is created at once and it is also said that God turned the air into water in that moment” (Surabadi, 2002).

### **Later Moses Takes Advantage of Cane to Fight the Oppressors**

Avaj Ibn Unuq who is described to have been a giant man and is one of the survivors of the Noah’s storm, takes a giant stone to destroy Bani Israel. Moses is ten Guz long and his staff is also of ten Guz long; he jumps ten Guz into air and hits Avaj in his ankle with his staff and destroys him (Razi, 1990).

The mass of Bani Israel before the oppressors reminds us of the story of Gulliver and Lilliput People. This exaggeration of the enemy is usually done in the myths and in religious myths it endorses the divine aid.

In one classification, the miracles of the staff of Moses can be related with three elements of water, wind and dust.

#### **1- The Staff Hits the Water;**

When the cane touches the sheep’s water, the color and the sex of the sheep change.

Moses lets the cane touches the Nile and the water turns into blood and after the end of the bale the blood turns to pure water again by new touch.

By the indication of the cane, the toads swarm towards Egypt and with another indication they return.

By touching the sea with the cane, the sea is cleaved and twelve paths get opened for the passage of Bani Israel.

#### **2- The Staff and Air:**

By moving the cane towards the east, the eastern wind brings the grasshoppers to Egypt and by moving the cane with the western wind the grasshoppers are poured into the sea.

In Bible, by the indication of the staff towards the sky, there is hailstone and storm erupts.

In the war of Bani Israel with the Amalbaq, whenever Moses carries the staff tight and strong, they would overcome while when his hand gets weakened they are defeated (Bible, 2016).

#### **3- The Staff and Ground:**

Moses lets his cane to fall down and there appears a great dragon.

He touches the gravels of the Ein Al Shams hill, a mass of lice rises and surround the city.

He hits the stone of the desert and twelve springs flow.

When the Angel of Death comes to Moses, Moses is worried of the destiny of his children, he hits the hill and a stone is cleaved and there is a worm inside it with a green leave in his mouth.

He is said that how God would forget your children while he is providing food for the worm inside the stone.

What happens to the staff of Moses? Abdollah Abbas has said that the cane of Moses is in the Tabarestan Lake and in the age of the Owner of Time and before the Doomsday it is brought out of it (Meibodi, 2014).

Some have considered "Dabeh" to refer to the cane of Moses that rises in the Doomsday.

"It is said that the Dabeh was the staff of Moses that comes out of the ground and three days and night flies in the air and then it speaks with the people" (Surabadi, 2002).

Some have considered Dabeh to own the cane of Moses and the ring of Soleiman with which the believer is distinguished from the pagan (Razi, 1990) and (Meibodi, 2014).

## Conclusion

In religious myths, a staff is a permanent associate of a person and is a sign for identification of that person. Meanwhile the cane of Moses has certain features that puts it among the chosen ritual objects. Like many tools, manifestations of nature or the chosen religious animals, the cane of Moses has a name. Its size and material is unique because Adam brought it to the earth when he left the paradise. Only some of the saints of Allah received it as a divine trust and the strangers have no access to it. The flourishing of the cane is a divine endorsement of the person. The staff of Moses is the power of God at the hands of his trustee. The asleep or awakened states of Moses do not change the magic nature of the cane, because contrary to magic, the owner of the magic is most hearing and enlightened and there is a force that encircles the world of contingency. The magic things occurred from this staff were combined with magic in a legendary way and it seems that God's prophet relied on this staff for solving the problems of his daily life. While in Quran and Torah, we do not see such exaggerations. Likewise, in the war of Moses and the destruction of Amaliq and Avaj Ibn Unuq with the cane, this exaggeration is visible. It seems that the mythical mind of history required to promote the enemy to a superman, on the one hand, and for showing the great power of God and divine aid set all elements of the universe in motion towards the Divine. This staff punishes the infidels while it does not cause the slightest harm to the believers. The same cane that dries out the sea brings about a river in the desert.

The staff of Moses is the symbol of the divine power and distinguishes the believer from the infidel. Then, the owner of the time (ruler of the time) is considered to be the owner of the cane of Moses.

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