

# ASIATIC PAPERS

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ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

BY

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## The Irish Story of Cucullin and Conloch and the Persian Story of Rustam and Sohrâb.

[Read 18th November 1892. *The Hon'ble Mr. Justice Telang,  
in the Chair.*]

There are several episodes in Firdousi's great epic of the Persians, which present striking points of resemblance to similar episodes in the epics of other nations. In 1887 Prof. Darmesteter, of Paris, drew the attention of our Society to the Mahâbhârata episode of the renunciation of the throne by Yudhishthira and his ascension to Heaven, and said that it had its origin in the similar episode of king Kaikhosru in the Shâh-nâmeh. We know that our learned president had then entered a mild caveat against the conclusions arrived at by the French savant. This caveat has drawn forth in defence a learned paper from the pen of the French savant, entitled "Points de Contact entre le Mahâbhârata et le Shâh-nâmeh," read before the Asiatic Society of Paris (Journal Asiatique, 1887, II., p. 38-75). In this paper, the author has entered at great length into the points touched upon by him before our Society, in order to support his theory about the Persian origin of the Indian episode. Whatever be the view as to the country where the story of the episode had its origin, M. Darmesteter has clearly pointed out several points of striking resemblance between the Persian episode of Kaikhosru on the one hand, and the Indian episode of Yudhishthira and the Jewish episode of Enoch on the other. In 1889, my friend, Mr. Pallonjee Burjorjee Desai, of Bombay, in a public lecture delivered before the Gujarâti Dnyân Prasârak Mandli, pointed out several points of striking resemblance between the Persian episode of Homâe, Behe-âfrid and Arjâsp in the Shâh-nâmeh on the one hand and the Indian episode of Sitâ and Râvan in the Râmâyan and the Greek episode of Helen and Paris in the Iliad on the other.<sup>1</sup> My last paper before our Society on "The so-called Pahlavi origin of the story

<sup>1</sup> शाहानामा मध्येनूँ अेक दास्तान, अने रामायण तथा ईह्यडनी वार्ता-  
अो साथ सरभामणी. ज्ञानप्रसारक मंडणी सन १८८८-८९ ना भोसभना  
भाषणो. भाषण छुं.

of the *Sindibâd-nâme*," led to show that there was a striking resemblance between the Persian story of Kâus, Soudâbeh and Siâvaksh in the *Shâh-nâme* and the Indian story of the King, the Damsel, and the Prince in the *Sindibâd-nâme*. All these stories show, that several Persian stories of the *Shâh-nâme* have their parallels in the epics of the East and the West. My paper this evening treats of a similar subject. It is intended to compare an episode in the Persian epic with that in an Irish epic.

Mr. Mohl (small edition Vol. I, Preface p. lxxi.) in the preface to his French translation of the *Shâh-nâme*, was the first to allude to this resemblance. He said, "Miss Brooke a découvert, en Irlande deux très-anciennes ballades dont le fond offre une ressemblance étonnante avec l'histoire de Sohrâb." In this paper I have tried to point out the "ressemblance étonnante" in all its details. The two ballads referred to by M. Mohl are "Conloch, a Poem," and "The Lamentation of Cucullin over the body of his son Conloch." They are given by Miss Brooke in her "Reliques of Irish Poetry" published in 1789.

I will first narrate here the Irish story in the words of Mr. O'Halloran, the writer of the introduction<sup>1</sup> to the Poem of Conloch. "In the reign of Conor Mac-Nessa, King of Ulster (about the year of the world 3950), Ireland abounded in heroes of the most shining intrepidity; insomuch that they were all over Europe, by way of eminence, called the Heroes of the Western Isle. Amongst these were Cuchullin, the son of Sualthach; Conal-cearach, and the three sons of Uisneach, Naoise, Ainle, and Ardan, all cousins-german. Cuchullin, in one of his continental expeditions, returning home by way of Albany, or modern Scotland, fell in love, at Dun-Sgathach, with the beautiful Aife, daughter to Airdgenny. The affairs of his country calling him home, he left the lady pregnant; but on taking leave, he directed, in case his child should be a son, to have him carefully brought up to arms, at the academy of Dun-Sgathach. He gave her a chain of gold to be put round his neck, and desired that he should be sent to Ulster, as soon as his military studies were completed, and that he should there recognize him by means of the golden chain. He also left the following injunctions for his conduct: That he should never reveal his name to a foe; that he should not give the way to any man, who seemed to demand it as right; and that he should never decline the single combat with any Knight under the sun.

<sup>1</sup> Reliques of Irish Poetry by Miss Brooke, p. 6.

The youth (his education completed), came to Ireland to seek his father ; but it appears that he arrived in armour ; a manifest proof, according to the etiquette of those days, that he came with an hostile intention, and to look for occasions to signalize his valour. On his approaching Emania, the royal residence of the Ulster Kings, and of the Croabh-ruadh, or Ulster Knights, Conor sent a herald to know who he was ? A direct answer, and he armed, would have been improper ; it would have been an acknowledgment of timidity. In short, the question was only a challenge ; and his being asked to pay an eric or tribute, implied no more than that he should confess the superiority of the Ulster Knights. On his refusal to answer the question, Cuchullin appeared : they engaged, and the latter, hard-pressed, threw a spear with such direction at the young hero, as to wound him mortally. The dying youth then acknowledged himself his son, and that he fell in obedience to the injunctions of his mother. It appears, however, from the poem, that when Cuchullin left her those injunctions, he was far from expecting that his son should have put them in force upon his arrival in Ireland."

Now I will narrate briefly the story of Rustam and Sohrâb as given by Firdousi in his Shâh-nâmeh. In the reign of Kâus, Rustam, the great general of the king, went a-hunting one day in the forests near the country of Samangân. Teheminâ, the daughter of the Prince of Samangân, fell in love with him and Rustam married her. On preparing to leave her country for his native land of Irân, he found her *enciente*. He then gave her a (مهره) Mohrêh (a kind of precious jewel), with instructions, that in case his child should be a daughter, she should fasten it on her ringlets, but in case it should be a son, he should fasten it on one of his arms. A son being born, Teheminâ named him Sohrâb and fastened the jewel on one of his arms. Sohrâb grew up to be a brave and manly young man, eager to seek glory and fame in war, against the rulers of Turân and Irân. Afrasiâb of Turân, the enemy of the Irânian King Kâus, won him over to his side, and placed him at the head of a large army to invade Irân. He sent his two generals, Hô mân and Bârmân, with the army under Sohrâb, with strict instructions, that they must always take care, that Sohrâb should not know his father Rustam. The invading army marched to the Daz-i-Sapheed, *i. e.*, the white fortress, which stood over the borderland between Turân and Irân. Hajir, the commander of the fort,

fell a prisoner in the hands of Sohrâb. Gordâfrid, a brave and gallant sister of Hajir, then put on the armour of a man, and took the field against Sohrâb. In the heat of the fight in a single combat, her helmet fell off and revealed her to Sohrâb as a woman. Sohrâb being struck with her beauty, wanted to make her a captive, but she succeeded in making her escape by means of sweet tempting words. The next day, Sohrâb found the fort deserted, because Gordâfrid and the other occupants of the fort had left it by a subterranean passage. Sohrâb, then marched further on to Irân. Kâus hearing of the fall of the fortress of Daz-i-Sapheed and the march of Sohrâb, sent for his great general Rustam, who lived in Zaboulistân. On coming to the Court of the king, Rustam was strongly reprimanded by Kâus for being dilatory in obeying his orders. Rustam indignantly left the Court, to return to his country. The successful march of Sohrâb had struck terror into the hearts of all Persians, and the counsellors of the king advised him to be conciliatory and to send again for Rustam, who alone was able to stand against the successful march of Sohrâb and his army. Rustam returned to the Court and took the field against Sohrâb. In the meantime, Sohrâb, who had never previously seen his father Rustam, tried his best to gather from Hajir, the Irânian prisoner under his charge, the particulars about the tent and the whereabouts of Rustam. But Hajir did not give him any correct information, lest Sohrâb should take some foul means to do away with the Irânian general and thus succeed in overthrowing the Irânian rule. Again, it was for the interest of Homân and Barmân, the Turânian officers with Sohrâb, not to let him know who and where his father was. So, the father and the son, not knowing each other, met in a single combat on the battle-field. Sohrâb, out of filial affection, suspected his antagonist to be his father Rustam, and so asked his name. But Rustam evaded the question and did not disclose his name. In the subsequent fight, Rustam fell to the ground and Sohrâb raised his dagger to kill him, but Rustam persuaded young Sohrâb, who was ignorant of the wiles and tricks of war, to postpone his killing him till he was thrown down on the ground for the third time. The next day Rustam succeeded in throwing Sohrâb to the ground, and he, instead of waiting for the third fight, at once stabbed Sohrâb with his dagger. Sohrâb, in his dying words, found fault with the treachery of his antagonist, and said, that his father Rustam, when he would come to know of his treacherous conduct, was sure to revenge his death. The mention

of the name of Rustam, as that of his father, soon made Rustam discover his mistake, but it was too late. Sohrâb showed him the jewel on his arm to assure him of his being Rustam's son. Rustam then began to lament and curse himself, and sent Goudrez to Kâus to ask from him (نوشدارو) *nôsh dârû*, a solution to heal dagger wounds, but he could not get it. Sohrâb soon died of the mortal wound on the battle-field, and the grief of Rustam was indescribable. Teheminâ, the mother of Sohrâb, soon learnt of the sad fate of her beloved son, and died of grief and sorrow within a year after Sohrâb's death.

Thus we find that the Irish and Persian stories resemble a good deal in the principal facts, (a) of a son and a father fighting with each other in ignorance, (b) and of the son being killed by the hand of his father. We will now note here a few points of striking resemblance in some of the details of the stories :—

1. Both the generals fall in love with princesses far away from their native countries. Cucullin, the Irish general, falls in love with Aife, daughter to Airdgenny, in the country of Albany. Rustam, the Irânian general, falls in love with Teheminâ, the daughter of the King of Samangân, in the country of Turân.

2. Both leave with their wives, precious ornaments to be put on by their expected children for the sake of recognition. Cucullin leaves a golden chain for the purpose ; Rustam a *Mohréh* or a kind of jewel.

3. In both the stories, the sons, when they come to age, march with large armies against the countries, under whose kings their fathers serve as generals.

4. In both the stories, the sons before fighting with their fathers, fight with and take captive other heroes. Sohrâb fights with and takes prisoner Hajir, the commander of the fortress of Daz-i-Sapheed, situated on the borderland between Turân and Irân. Conloch, in the Irish story, fights with and takes prisoner Conall Cearnach, the master of the Ulster kings.

5. On seeing the defeat of their eminent generals, both the kings send for their heroes who stand first in rank. Kâus, the King of Irân, sends for his hero, Rustam, who lives in his country of

Zaboulistân. Conor, the king of Ulster, sends for his hero, Cucullin, who lives in his fortress of Dundalغان. Conôr orders (p. 12) :

“ Quick let a rapid courier fly !  
 (Indignant Auliffe cried,) .  
 Quick with the shameful tidings let him hie,  
 And to our aid the first of heroes call,  
 From fair Dundalغان’s lofty wall,  
 Or Dethin’s ancient pride !”

Compare with this the Irânian king’s words to his messenger Giv.  
 “ Go fast. Handle well the reins of your horse. When you go to Rustam, you need not rest in Zâboul even if you feel drowsy. If you arrive there at night, turn back the next morning. Tell him (Rustam) that we are reduced to straitened circumstances in war. If this brave man will not come forward, we cannot treat with contempt this evil-minded enemy.”<sup>1</sup>

6. Both the heroes, Cucullin and Rustam, make a little delay in responding to the call of their sovereign. Conôr, the Irish King, welcomes his general, Cucullin, though late (p. 12) :—

“ Welcome, Cucullin ! mighty chief !  
 Though late, O welcome to thy friend’s relief !  
 Behold the havoc of yon deadly blade !  
 Behold our hundred warriors bite the ground !  
 Behold thy friend, thy Conall bound !  
 Behold—nor be thy vengeful arm delay’d !”

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۱ بگيو آنگهي گفٽ بشتاب زود  
 عيان ٽڪاور ببايد بسود  
 نبايد ڪه چون نزد رستم شوي  
 بزابل بهاني وگو بغنوي  
 اگو شب رسمي روز را باز گرد  
 بگویش ڪه تنگ اندر آمد نبرد  
 وگرنه فرازست اين مرد گرد  
 بدانديش را خوار نقوان شمرد

Kâus, the Irânian King, at first gets angry at the delay and gives vent to his anger, which makes Rustam leave his court indignantly. But, when looking to the situation of imminent danger from the invading enemy, he sends for Rustam again, and when the latter being prevailed upon by the call of duty to his country, returns to the court of the king, he is welcomed as follows :

“Through the terror caused by this thoughtless new enemy, my heart was as much reduced as the new moon. I sent for you to find out a remedy for this. And when you came late I got angry. But O elephant-bodied hero ! if you were offended, I repented of it, and filled my mouth with dust of repentance . . . . O hero ! may your soul be always bright. It seems advisable that to-day we meet in an assembly of pleasure and to-morrow arrange for the battle.”<sup>1</sup>

7. As seen above, we learn from the Shâh-nâmeh that the Irânian general, Rustam, had cause to be offended against King

۱ وزین نا مهگالیده بدخواه نو  
 دلم گشت باریک چون ماه نو  
 بدین چاره جستن تو خواستم  
 چو دیر آمدی تندی آراستم  
 چو آزرده گشتی توای پیدان  
 پشیمان شدم خاکم اندر دهن

.....

چنین گفت گاوس کای پهلوان  
 ترا باد پیوسته روشن روان  
 چنین بهتر آید که امروز بزم  
 بسازیم و فردا گزینیم رزم



Kâus, and that it was after reconciliation that he went to war against Sohrâb. From the Irish story also we learn, that the Irish general, Cucullin, also had a cause to be offended against king Conor, and that it was after "a kind of sullen reconciliation" that he took arms against the new invader, Conloch. But the causes of the offence were different. In the Irânian story, it was the delay of Rustam in responding to the immediate call of his sovereign. In the case of the Irish story, it was the breach of faith on the part of the king, who (in order to prevent the fulfilment of a prediction) had ordered a few of Cucullin's kinsmen to be murdered, because one of them had married a beautiful girl, whom the king had guarded in a fortress, to frustrate the prophecy, that she would bring ruin to the house of Ulster.

8. In both the stories, the generals leave the courts with anger on account of the unbecoming conduct of their sovereigns, and at first refuse to go to war against the enemies, but at last better counsels and a call to duty prevail. Conor, the Ulster king, thus persuades Cucullin to change his mind, and withdraw his refusal (p. 15):—

"And wilt thou then decline the fight,  
O arm of Erin's fame!  
Her glorious, her unconquered knight,  
Her first and fav'rite name!  
No, brave Cucullin! mighty chief  
Of bright victorious steel!  
Fly to thy Conall, to thy friend's relief,  
And teach the foe superior force to feel!"

Godrez, the minister of the Persian king, thus persuades Rustam to change his mind, and to take arms for the sake of his king and his country :

"Do not turn your back thus on the Shâh of Irân. By such a retreat, do not disgrace your name which has been so much exalted in the whole of the world. And now, when the army (of the enemy) presses upon us, do not darken unwisely (the future of) this crown

and this throne, because disgrace comes to us from the land of Turân. Our holy religion will not approve of this.”<sup>1</sup>

9. As Cucullin in the Irish story is an “unconquered” knight so is Rustam of the Persian story, an unconquered hero. No hero had ever thrown him down upon the ground in a single combat.

10. According to both the stories, the aged general (the father), before beginning the combat, makes an offer of peace to his young antagonist (the son). In the Irish story Cucullin says to Conloch (p. 16):

“ Let me, O valiant knight, (he cried)  
 Thy courtesy request !  
 To me thy purpose, and thy name confide,  
 And what thy lineage and thy land declare ?  
 Do not my friendly hand refuse,  
 And proffer'd peace decline ;—  
 Yet, if thou wilt the doubtful combat choose,  
 The combat then, O fair-hair'd youth ! be thine !”

In the Persian story Rustam pities Sohrâb, and asks him to desert the side of Turân and go over to that of Irân. He says :

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۱ ز سہراب یل رفت یکسر سخن  
 چنین پشت برشاہ ایران مکن  
 چنین بروشدہ نامت اندر جہان  
 بدین باز گشتن مگردان نہان  
 و دیگر کہ ننگ اندر آمد سپاہ  
 مکن تیرہ برخیرہ این تاج و گاہ  
 کہ ننگ است بر ما ز توران زمین  
 پسندہ نباشد بر پاک دین

“My heart pities you, and I do not like to deprive you of your life. Do not remain in the company of the Turks. I know of none in Irân who is your equal in having such shoulders and arms.”<sup>1</sup>

11. According to both the stories, when the two generals (father and son) meet for a single combat, the first thing they do, is that one of them puts to the other a question about his name and parentage, and the other evades the question. In the Irish story it is Cucullin, the father, that puts the question, and it is Conloch, the son, that evades it. But in the Persian story it is Sohrâb, the son, that puts the question, and Rustam, the father, that evades it. Cucullin says to Conloch (p. 16) :

“To me thy purpose, and thy name confide,  
And what thy lineage and thy land declare ?”

Conloch then refuses to give any information and to accept the offer of peace (p. 16).

“Never shall aught so base as fear  
The hero's bosom sway !  
Never, to please a curious ear,  
Will I my fame betray !  
No, gallant chief ! I will to none  
My name, my purpose, or my birth reveal ;  
Nor even from *thee* the combat will I shun,  
Strong though thine arm appear, and tried thy martial steel.”

Sohrâb, who suspects his antagonist to be his father, Rustam, thus questions him :

“I ask you a question, you must tell me the truth. Tell me plainly, what is your parentage ? Please my heart with your good words. I suspect that you are Rustam, that you are descended

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۱ همی رحمت آرد بتو بودم  
نخواهم که جالت زتن بگسام  
نمانی بتوگان بدین یال وسفت  
به ایران ندانم تو را نیز جفت

from the family of glorious Narimân." Rustam, in order to frighten the young warrior with the idea, that Rustam was a more powerful and stronger man than the strong-built man before him, says an untruth, and denies his being Rustam. "I am neither Rustam, nor am I of the family of Sâm Narimân. He is a great warrior and I am much inferior to him. I neither possess the throne nor the crown."<sup>1</sup>

12. In both the stories we find that the hearts of the sons, while fighting with their fathers, are touched with feelings of tenderness and filial affection. In the Irish story Conloch, while refusing to answer the questions of Cucullin, and while declining his offers of peace, says (p. 16):—

"Yet hear me own, that, did the vow  
Of chivalry allow,  
I would not thy request withstand,  
But gladly take, in peace, thy proffer'd hand.  
So does that face each hostile thought controul!  
So does that noble mien possess my soul!"

In the Persian story Sohrâb says to Homân: "My feelings are affected by looking to (his stature), his feet and his stirrups. My face is covered with shame (to fight against him). I find (in him) all the marks pointed out by my mother, and I tremble in my heart for him."<sup>2</sup>

۱ بدو گفت کز تو بپرسم سخن  
همه راستی باید افگند بن  
یکایک نژادت مرا یاد دار  
ز گفتار خوبت مرا شان دار  
من ایدون گمانم که تو رستمی  
که از تخته نامور نیومی  
چنین داد پاسخ که رستم نیم  
هم از تخته سام نیوم نیم  
که او پهلوانست و من کهترم  
نه با نخت و گاهم نه با افسرم

Vuller, I., p. 488.

۲ ز پای ورکیدش همی مهر من  
بچند بشوم آورد چهر من  
نشانهایی مادر بیابم همی  
بدل نیز لختی بقابم همی

Vuller, I., p. 497.

13. According to both the stories, the single combat between the generals was unprecedented, and lasted very long. The Irish story says (p. 17):

“Dire was the strife each valiant arm maintain’d,  
And undecided long their fates remain’d;  
For, till that hour, no eye had ever view’d  
A field *so* fought, a conquest *so* pursu’d !”

According to Firdousi, “they fought with each other from sunrise to sunset.”

14. According to both the stories, the older generals, before killing their younger antagonists, were very hard-pressed. Cucullin was hard-pressed at first by his young antagonist, Conloch, when (p. 17)—

“At length Cucullin’s kindling soul arose;  
Indignant shame recruited fury lends;  
With fatal aim his glittering lance he throws,  
And low on earth the dying youth extends.”

In the Persian story also, we find Rustam very hard-pressed at first. In the first combat he was thrown down upon the ground by Sohrâb. Then he prayed to God for additional strength, and threw down and killed Sohrâb in the second combat.

15. It appears from both the stories, that the sons did not take full advantage of their strength as young men against their aged antagonists. Conloch, out of affectionate feelings for Cucullin, did not use all his strength to overpower him. When later on he was stabbed by his father, he says to him (p. 20):

“But, ah Cucullin!—dauntless knight!—  
Ah!—had’st thou better mark’d the fight!  
Thy skill in arms might soon have made thee know  
That I was only *half* a foe!  
Thou would’st have seen, for glory though I fought,  
Defence,—not blood I sought.  
Thou would’st have seen, from that dear breast,  
Nature and love thy Conloch’s arm arrest!  
Thou would’st have seen his spear instinctive stray;  
And, when occasion dar’d its force,  
Still from that form it fondly turn’d away,  
And gave to air its course.”

Sohrâb, when he first threw Rustam to the ground, raised his dagger to stab him, but being soon moved by the words of Rustam, for whom, in the midst of fight, he entertained tender feelings, he let him go. Like Conloch, Sohrâb, when wounded with the fatal blow, thus reminds Rustam of it: "I was kind to you in every way, but you did not show me a particle of favour."<sup>1</sup>

The most touching parts in both the stories are the lamentations of the fathers when they know that they have killed their own sons.

There is one great difference between these two stories. In the Persian story, both the father and the son do not know each other and so both fight in utter ignorance of each other. But in the Irish story, Conloch, the son, knows his father, Cucullin, but fights with him in accordance with the rules of chivalry, which Cucullin had asked his wife to communicate to their child, in case the child should be a son. Cucullin's injunctions for his son's conduct were: "That he should never reveal his name to a foe; that he should not give way to any man who seemed to demand it as a right; and that he should never decline the single combat with any knight under the sun."

Now, the question is, which is the home of these two stories? It seems that ancient Irân was the country where the touching story had its home. The very name of Ireland suggests that the country was originally inhabited by a tribe of the ancient Aryans, the common ancestors of the Irânians of Firdousi and of other adjoining nations. Again, has not the word Erin, used in the above Irish poem of Cucullin as an ancient name of Ireland, a close resemblance with the name of Irân? Firdousi's poem of Rustam and Sohrâb, which forms a small part of his whole epic, is, as compared to the Irish poem, a very long one. Again, according to Persian writers, and according to the Bundelesh, the time when Rustam, the national hero of Irân lived, was very old. It appears, therefore, that the story had, with several other stories, passed orally from the East to the West. It is possible that the Celts took it with them to Ireland.

According to M. Mohl, this tradition [of a son, fighting in ignorance with his father, is also found among other nations besides the Irish. "J. Grimm has published some fragments of a German poem of

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۱ ز هرگونه بودم تو را رهنمای  
نچنبید یک ذره مهرت زجای

Vuller, I., p. 504.

the 8th century which rests upon a similar foundation, . . . . . and Dietrich has published a Russian tale which gives a similar story."<sup>1</sup> It appears from an article in the *Academy* of 19th April 1890, written by Mr. H. Krebs, and headed "Firdousi and the Old High German lay of Hildebrand" that "Green in his Critical Edition of Hildebrandsleid (Gottinger, 1858) has first pointed out a striking parallel between the German song and the Persian episode." Mr. Krebs also mentions in connection with this episode, the classical legend of Œdipus in which it is the son who slays his father in ignorance. A comparison of the abovenamed similar German and Russian songs by some members of our Society, interested in Arian folk-song, is likely to throw a strong light on the question of the origin of the story. Leaving aside the question of its home, we have seen in this paper, that the Irish story is similar to the Persian, not only in its main features, but also in some of its details.

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<sup>1</sup> Mohl, 1876, small edition, Vol. I., Preface p. lxxi.