



## **Shahnameh: Epic of the Persian Kings – *Factoids***

The first tragedy of Shahnameh is like a King Oedipus story in reverse: Here it is the father who unknowingly kills his son.

The themes of fathers wrestling with their sons reverberate throughout the tragedies of Shahnameh. Sohrab is killed by his father. Siavosh seeks refuge in the land of Iran's archenemy fleeing the carelessness of an impetuous and cruel father. Esfandiar is sent by his father to his doom by a father who loves the throne of kingship more than his son.

Tus is the quintessence of an insubordinate, incompetent and cruel general. King Kay Khosrow publicly reprimanded him. And yet he receives the command of the army in the next war. The nobility of knights, especially those with royal lineage, was a great asset in the epic period of Shahnameh.

Many scholars believe that the epic legends came from the Parthian period (247 BC – 224 CE) of the Pre-Islamic Iran. The name of one of the knights of Shahnameh (Goudarz) who was given the command of the Isfahan region is found on the Parthian period coins that indicates the command of two kings by that name.

The epic battles of Iran and Turan are reminiscent of the Trojan war. But there is no divine intervention in these stories.

There are many overlapping legends between Shahnameh and the religious texts of Zoroastrianism. But there are significant differences in the tone of the story and the character of the kings of heroes depicted in these sources. For instance a king like Goshtasp appears as a saintly character in the religious texts of Avesta. But he is portrayed as a flawed and selfish king in Shahnameh.

Shahnameh anticipates Romeo and Juliet because its love stories occur across the boundaries of war and mistrust. In all the three love stories of the epic Shahnameh, it is the female who initiates the affair, pursues her male counterpart and finally conquers.

An important role is assigned to knights (Pahlavan) in the stories of Shahnameh. A knight was a local king with vast holdings and considerable wealth who would serve the king of Iran. The lands were given by the king to knightly families and these deeds were to be renewed by new kings. The land of Zabol was confirmed as belonging to the house Saum by several kings.

The portrayal of the enemy knights such as Piran is done with great sympathy and care. There are no white hats and black hats in Shahnameh.

The kings of Shahnameh were not “Oriental despots. The succession of kings in Shahnameh is not automatic. A council of noblemen, knights and clerics chose the king by acclamation. An inept and corrupt king loses the right to kingship and in extreme cases (king Nowzar) his dynasty is terminated in favor of a new line of kings.

There is divine sanction for kings. But the light “Farr” would be withdrawn if the king became corrupt with vanity and cruelty.

Ineluctable fate and the human condition dovetail in Shahnameh. Although fate is often foretold in dreams or by prognostication of soothsayers, humans are ultimately held accountable for their decisions. Fate is quoted as an excuse for bad behavior by many guilty parties. But the excuse never seems acceptable.

The adventures of king Kay Kavous occupy a large part of the epic Shahnameh. He is a reckless and injudicious king. The kingship passes not to his full-blooded son but to his grandson whose mother and grandmother are from the royal family of Turan, the archenemy of Iran.

Kay Khosrow is the archetype of a strong, wise, incorruptible and magnanimous king. He always advises the army to avoid unnecessary cruelty and bloodshed. The morality of Kay Kosrow seems to accord with the period of religious advancement of humanity called “the Axial Age.”

The disparaged and the outcast turn out to be heroes of the story. The infant Zaul that was exposed for suspicion that his white hair was demonic was cared for by a fabulous bird. He became an exalted knight and sired the greatest hero of Iran: Rostam.

---

### **Shahnameh: Epic of the Persian Kings**

An illustrated, narrative book based on the Persian epic, “Shahnameh” by Ferdowsi

Illustrations by Hamid Rahmanian

Translation and Adaptation by Dr. Ahmad Sadri

Contact: Fictionville Studio

Melissa Hibbard, Producer

melissa@fictionvillestudio.com / Tel: 718-852-7815

www.theepicofthepersiankings.com