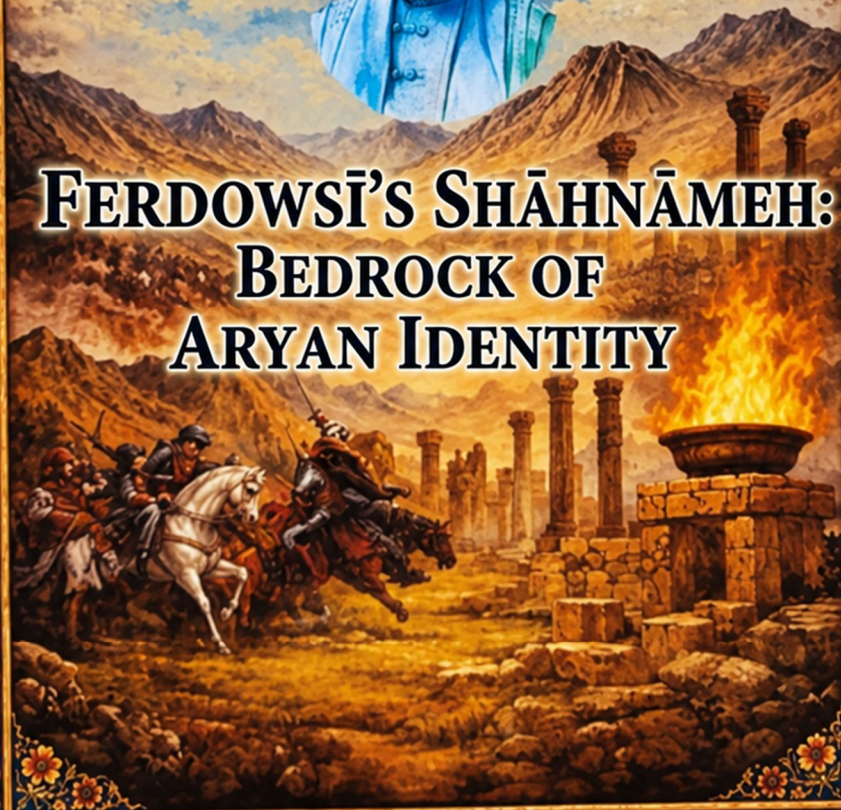


Iraj Bashiri

**FERDOWSĪ'S SHĀHNĀMEH:
BEDROCK OF
ARYAN IDENTITY**

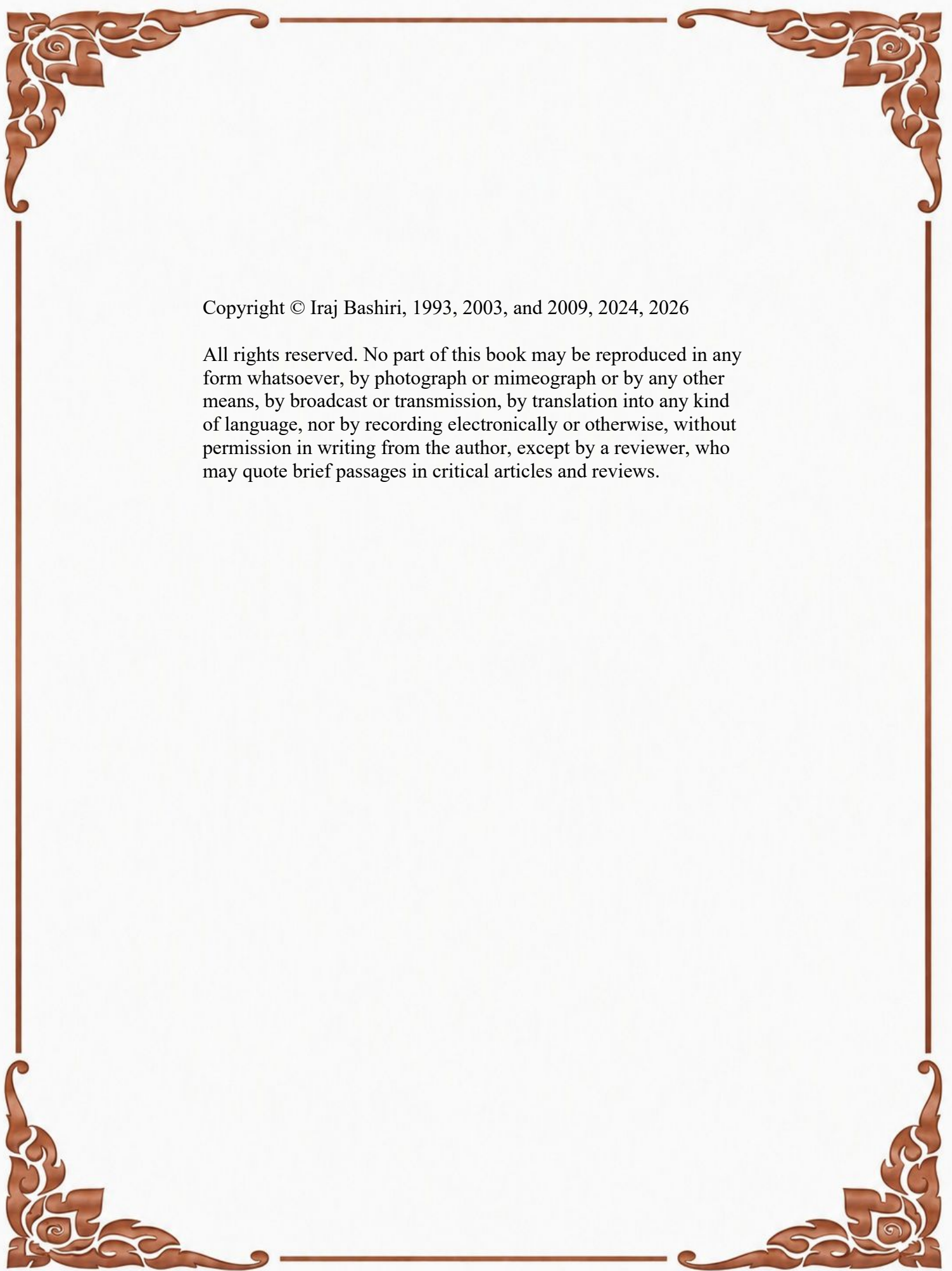


National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan
The Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography
in the name of Admad Donish

Dr. Iraj Bashiri
The University of Minnesota, U.S.A.

Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme*
Bedrock of Aryan Identity

Dushanbe, Tajikistan
2009, 2024, 2026



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Acknowledgements

First Edition

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Thomas S. Noonan of the Department of History of the University of Minnesota suggested the creation of the *Shāhnāme* project in 1988. I would like to thank him, Gary Jahn, and Susan Geiger, as well as Audrey Altstadt of the Department of History of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, for their support. I also would like to thank the three editors who have worked on this project: Russell Christensen, Paul Walsh, and John O'Brien. As with all my other projects, Carol Bashiri has assisted me in gathering information and word processing. I would like to thank her for that, as well as for her support.

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Iraj Bashiri
University of Minnesota
Spring 1994

Second Edition

The original edition of this study entitled Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme*: *1000 Years After* was published in 1994 by the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan in celebration of the 1,000th anniversary of the *Shāhnāme* of Ferdowsī. It consisted of the summary of the *Chehrdād* (Iranian cosmology and mythology from the beginnings to the appearance of the Prophet Zoroaster) and the translations of sixteen of the articles presented at the *Shāhnāme* Congress on "The *Shāhnāme* and Our Time." The present volume is a study of the role of the *farr* as a distinguishing factor between the Turks and Turs of the *Shāhnāme*, as well as a model for successive Iranian governments until our own time. Due to the importance of the *farr* as the mainstay of the cultural values of the Iranian and Central Asian peoples, indeed, of the world at large, the study was presented in three languages: English, Tajiki, and Persian. A separate Persian edition entitled *Tork va Tūr dar Shāhnāme-ye Ferdowsī* was published by Mitra Publishers, Tehran (2009).

Among the many colleagues and friends who have contributed to this volume, I would like to thank the President of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Dr. Mamadsho Ilolov, for his support of my research over the years. The Director of the Institute of Eastern Studies and Written Heritage, Dr. Karomatullo Olimov, who edited the Tajiki text with great care and added an introduction. I also would like to thank Dr. Sharafiddin Imomov, and Dr. Askarali Rajabzoda, the Director of the Borbad Institute, for their contributions.

The translation into Persian was accomplished in two phases. Dr. Abutorab Basiri completed the first part in 1995. This author undertook the second part in 2008. As a result, there might be a slight shift in style. Lola Hajibaeva rendered the Persian text into Cyrillic, while Zulfiyah Rahimova edited an earlier version of the Tajiki text and saw the manuscript through to publication. Carol Bashiri formatted the texts and prepared the camera-ready version. Barbara London served as copy-editor for the English text. Finally, Dr. Ali Musavi Garmarudi edited the Persian text, both for publication in Iran by Mitra Publishers and for the present volume, with great care. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of them, as well as and to many others; I remain, however, the sole person responsible for any shortcomings.

*Iraj Bashiri
University of Minnesota
Spring 2009*

Third Edition

The genesis of the third and final analytical edition of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* goes back to the early 1990s. It started with an analytical interpretation of the *Chehrdād* portion of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* on the basis of the concept of the *farr* (kingly glory). The analysis served as a lead essay in *Ferdowsi's Shāhnāmeḥ: 1000 Years After* (1994) published by the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan. The second edition, *Turk and Tūr in Ferdowsi's Shāhnāmeḥ*, also published by the Academy, was focused on the refutation of the claim that the Turks of Cenral Asia and the mythical son of Fereydūn, Tur, share the same ancestry (2009). This final version called, *Ferdowsi's Shāhnāmeḥ: Bedrock of Aryan Identity*, contains a biography of Abul Qasim Ferdowsi, followed by an analytical retelling of the main story of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* (or *Chehrdād*), as well as events that precede and follow the *Chehrdād*. The volume is presented in three languages, English, Tajiki, and Persian. I would like to thank Dr. Karamatullah Olimov, Dr. Askarali Rajabov, Lola Hojibaeva, Zulfiya Rahimova, and Carol Bashiri for their assistance throughout the development of the work.

*Iraj Bashiri,
University of Minnesota
2024*

The Boundless Sea of Spirituality

The date of the first completion of Ferdowsī's immortal *Shāhnāme* is incorporated in the following *beyt* in some manuscripts:

ز هجرت شده سیصد از روزگار چو هشتاد و چهار از برش بر شمار

From the Hijrah three hundred years count
And add eighty more and four to the amount.¹

However, it is incorporated in the following *beyt* in some other manuscripts:

گذشت از آن سال سیصد شمار برو بر فروزان بد هشتاد و چهار

Three hundred years since Muhammad's Flight
With eighty-four more years of day and night.²

If we convert the year AH 384 to the Gregorian calendar, it would be equivalent to AD 994. And if we accept this date as the date of the first completion of the *Shāhnāme*, then AD 1994 would become the 1000th anniversary of the completion of the epic. We must also keep in mind that Ferdowsī has provided the date of the final completion of his *Shāhnāme* in the following *beyt*:

ز هجرت شده پنج هشتاد بار که گفتم من این نامه شاهوار

And year four hundred of Muhammad's Flight,
The last words of this royal book I write.³

Before my trip to Paris, while leafing through the *Shāhnāme*, I read and reread these *beyts* several times. Then, in Paris, when I met with Mr. Faiz, the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to discuss our *Shāhnāme* project, I suggested that perhaps Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan should co-sponsor the anniversary. "After all," I said, "Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme* is a source of pride for all Persian-speaking peoples. He stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Rūdakī, Daqīqī, Nāṣir-e Khosrau, Umar-e Khayyām, Sa'dī, Hāfez, Kāmal-e Khujandī, and Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Balkhī and, like them, he strengthens the bond that unites Persian-speaking peoples. Is it not the love for the creations of these geniuses that has prevented time, place, boundaries, and countless political regimes from alienating us from each other? Have we not spoken the same language and enjoyed the same spiritual banquet for over a thousand years?" Mr. Faiz welcomed my suggestion with gratitude and promised to convey the contents of our conversation to the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In turn, I promised to convey the same information to the representative of the Republic of Afghanistan in the UNESCO. Before long, the UNESCO announced the year 1990 as the 1000th anniversary of the *Shāhnāme*. Following that announcement, we Tajiks decided to consider 1990 as the beginning and 1994 as the end of the anniversary celebrations devoted to the composition of this great epic.

The efforts of the UNESCO have increased the amount of research on the *Shāhnāme* tremendously. And that, in turn, has added to the recognition of the epic as a major source of knowledge about medieval Central Asia and Iran. Nearly a hundred articles and books have been published, all of them dedicated to a better understanding of the *Shāhnāme*. In addition, many conferences and celebrations have been held in Tehran and Kabul, as in the cities of Europe and the United States.

¹ Safa, 1988, p. 473.

² Ibid.

³ Ferdowsī, vol. IX, p. 382; Warner, vol. IX, p. 122

In Tajikistan, preparations for the celebration continue. The text of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* has been reprinted in nine volumes (in the Cyrillic script). A number of new plays based on the *Shāhnāmeḥ* have been produced, and the recitation of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* has become a permanent radio program. Like the Iranians, it should be noted, the Tajiks pay special attention to the writing of the *Shāhnāmeḥ*. In fact, in order to pay respect to his colleague, Ferdowsī incorporated a thousand *beyts* from Daqīqī in his own *Shāhnāmeḥ*. Furthermore, Ferdowsī's heroes, the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, and the stories and events of the epic are very close to the hearts of the Tajiks. Furthermore, recent archaeological finds reveal a portrait of Rostam, on a wall of the ancient city of Panjkent, fighting a dragon. This discovery proves that Ferdowsī's central character has been a part of Tajik lore from very ancient times. In addition, the events of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* take place in such Tajik locations as Balkh, Bukhārā, Samarqand, Chāch, Tirmidh, Shughnān, and the like. Consider the following *beyt*:

به شهر بخارا نهادهند روی چنان ساخته لشکر نامجوی

They marched upon Bukhārā
Intent on war for Chāch and Samarkand.⁴

Or the following:

همی گفت مارا سمرقند و چاچ ببايد گرفتن بدین مهر تاج

And they [Samarqand and Chāch] must
Be made the captives of this crown and seal.⁵

Another noteworthy aspect of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* is a language that, according to Sadridin Aini, is very close to the language of the Tajik peoples. In fact, certain words in the *Shāhnāmeḥ* are now used exclusively in Tajikistan. The word *naqz*, for example, is used in the following *beyt*:

سخن گفتن نغز و کردار نیک بمائد آن چنان تا جهان است ریک

Choice sayings and good doings: these will last
Until the world shall end.⁶

Or consider the following:

پدر وارث از مادر اندر پذیر از آن گاو نغزش بپرور بشیر

Protect this suckling for me, be a father
To him, and give him milk of yon fair cow.⁷

In addition, Ferdowsī uses the word *dihqān* as a reference for the Tajiks as a distinct people alongside the Turks and the Arabs:

از ایران و از ترک و از تازیان نژادی پدید آید اندر میان
نه دهقان نه ترک و نه تازی بود سخن ها به کردار بازی بود

A mongrel race-Iranian, Turkman, Arab
Will emerge from the mix.
Neither Iranian, Turkish, nor Arab,
The language it speaks will be gibberish.⁸

⁴ Ferdowsī, vol. IX, p. 373; Warner, vol. IX, p. 115.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ferdowsī, vol. VIII, 194; Warner, vol. VII, p. 367.

⁷ Ferdowsī, vol. I, p. 58; Warner, vol. I, p. 151.

⁸ Ferdowsī, vol. IX, p. 319; Warner, vol. IX, p. 76 [amended].

In other instances in the *Shāhnāme*, *dihqān* is used to signify the great leaders of the Tajik people.

The statue of the Ḥakīm of Tūs was unveiled on the eve of the first anniversary of Tajikistan's independence (September 9, 1992), which coincided with the first meeting of the Tajiks from all over the world. Located in the main square of Dushanbe, the statue was unveiled in the presence of hundreds of esteemed local and foreign guests. Today, along with the statues of Rūdakī, Shaykh al-Ra'is Abū Alī ibn-e Sīnā, Umar-e Khayyām, Aini, and Lahuti, this great work of art adds to the splendor of our city.

The Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan decreed that the closing of the *Shāhnāme* celebrations should coincide with the third anniversary of the independence of the Republic and the third meeting of the Tajiks from around the world. Following that decree, the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, the Ministry of Education, and various cultural organizations in the Republic established an international congress on "The *Shāhnāme* and Our Time" to be held from September 5 to September 7, 1994, in the city of Dushanbe. Following that, the Preparations Committee of the Congress requested that the *Shāhnāme* specialists throughout the world participate in and contribute to the Congress. Over one hundred articles were received by the Preparations Committee. The abstracts and the Perso-Tajik texts of these articles are published and made available to participants in the Congress in two separate volumes. In addition, the Supreme Soviet commissioned Dr. Iraj Bashiri, Professor of Iranian and Central Asian Studies at the University of Minnesota and the IREX Resident Scholar for Tajikistan in 1993-94, to translate some of the articles that reflect Tajik scholarship in the field. The present volume, in two parts, consists of a synopsis of the *Chehrdād* (Iranian history from the beginnings to Zoroaster) and sixteen articles dealing with various aspects of the epic.

In general, the reports to the Congress cover almost all aspects of Ferdowsī's great epic, including mythical, historical, ethical, and philosophical approaches. They also examine Ferdowsī's poetic skill and the depth of his knowledge of the world of his time. Certainly, this is not the first time that these aspects of the work are being discussed; however, surprisingly enough, each report has yet another bit of new information to add. That is perhaps why we recognize the *Shāhnāme* as the boundless sea of human spirituality. For a thousand years, the Ḥakīm of Tūs has been our inspiration in all aspects of life, and he will continue to be so as long as the world exists. He was right to say:

نمیرم ازین پس که من زنده ام که تخم سخن را پراکنده ام

Yet live I shall; the seed of words have I
Flung broad-cast and henceforth I shall not die.⁹

During the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the composition of the immortal *Shāhnāme*, peace-seeking humanity shall bow before the spirit of the creator of this epic for all times.

Muhammad Osemi, Academic
Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan
December 31, 1993

⁹ Ferdowsī, vol. IX, p. 382; Warner, vol. IX, p. 122.

Foreword

The topic that Professor Bashiri outlines in this study has historical merit; it also sheds light on contemporary socio-cultural issues in present-day Central Asia. The question is: Can we be certain that neighboring peoples, the Uzbeks and the Tajiks, for instance, have continuously shared close familial, literary, cultural, and commercial relations? This uncertainty becomes an issue when some scholars, either for political reasons, or due to a lack of knowledge about the region, put their opinion above historical evidence.

Not long ago, some scholars in Kazakhstan published a work that clearly and insightfully argued that mere ascription of tribal people to ancient settlements or, conversely, distancing them from their tribal roots, would not be sufficient grounds for gaining them either historicity or respectability. In fact, such a manipulation of facts, rather than gaining them respect, would deny them the benefit of a scientific evaluation of their lives. Tribal civilizations, they argued, have their own unique charm, beauty, and grandeur. The conclusion that our Kazakh colleagues have reached is noteworthy. Scholars must treat historical events responsibly and fairly. When evaluating historical issues, they must be mindful of the rights of the people whose lives form the subject of their research.

As a scholar with an eye to historical accuracy, Iraj Bashiri, analyzes mythological and historical documents and shows that, in ancient times, according to the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, Iran and Tūrān had not been two distinct countries with separate languages and races; but rather, they had been a part of a united Aryan domain, a domain that in Islamic times is referred to as Mā Warā' al-Nahr. One of the meritorious aspects of his analysis lies in the fact that he is not given to any particular national or religious inclination; rather, he outlines the facts as Ferdowsī states them and allows the reader the opportunity to draw his own conclusions. He does what is expected of a fair and judicious author.

Recently, several controversial essays appeared on the Internet. Their subject matter recalled the fruitless arguments of the early decades of the 20th century on Pan-Turkism. There was also an article by the Uzbek writer Hidayatov that dealt with Tajikistan and was very offensive to the Tajik people. It was clear from the writing that Mr. Hidayatov did not have the slightest familiarity with either the historical sources on the region, or with the dynamics of the cultures and traditions about which he wrote. His intention was to create ethnic conflict between two friendly neighbors. If Hidayatov were to study the historical documents (in Persian or Darī/Tajiki) written between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries about the Tajiks, he

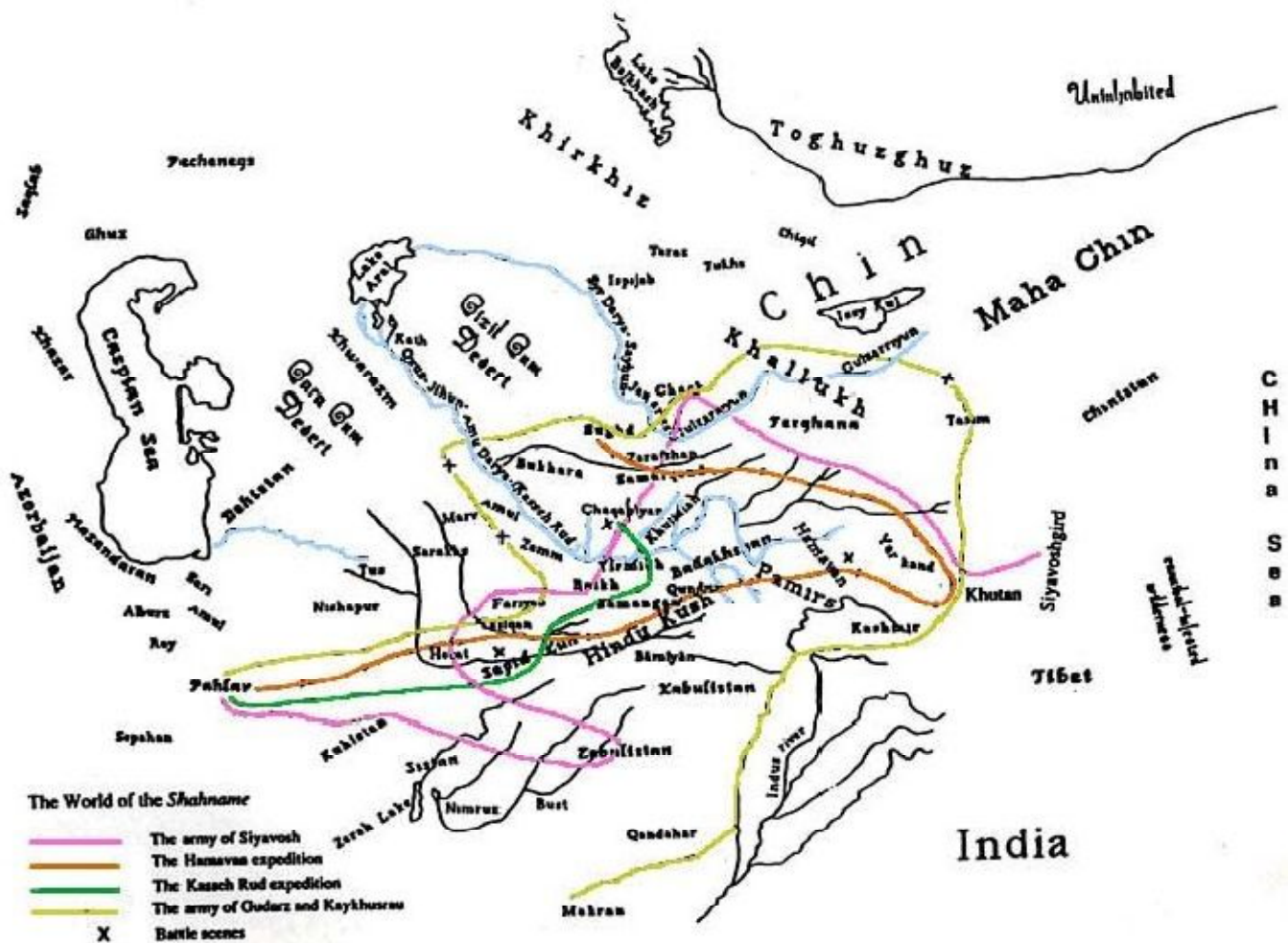
would learn more about Tajik identity and would have a different worldview about the Tajik people. The superiority of Iraj Bashiri's research lies in that he bases his scientific research on the discovery of facts, and in presenting those facts in a simple and clear language.

The wars between the kings and commanders of Iran and Tūrān in the *Shāhnāme*, so wonderfully described by the bard, have profound meanings. Ferdowsī emphasizes the fact that greed, jealousy, suspicion, ambition, and court intrigue have invariably resulted in vengeance, enmity and war, sending untold numbers to the battlefield, and from there, to their death. Conversely, he portrays the lives of those who have sought justice and fairness, and who have desired prosperity for all, to be enhanced with the eternal *farr*. The *Shāhnāme* is redolent with beneficial advice not only for our contemporary generation, but also for humanity that has constantly sought joy and happiness for all.

What the author has accomplished is remarkable. He has retold Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme* focusing on the roles of the Turks and the Tūrs. Reading his analysis, one cannot but conclude that, according to ancient sources, the people that occupied what is present-day Central Asia in ancient times had been the ancestors of the present-day Tajiks. In other words, Bashiri's research on Turks and Tūrs decidedly refutes the current contention that seeks to deny the Tajiks their rightful claim to their ancestral heritage.

The identity of the Tajiks (Iranians) as an ancient people is established in the *Avestā*, as well as documented in Persian sources. The question is: Why should we have to repeatedly prove something that is so obvious? As long as there are publications that openly ignore or misrepresent historical facts, it is incumbent upon the scholar to keep those facts before the public eye. Historical documents impact public opinion and influence governmental decisions and policies. In that context, the research of the American scholar, Iraj Bashiri, is a noteworthy contribution to Oriental Studies.

Karomattullo Olimov
Associate Member
Academy of Sciences
The Republic of Tajikistan



Map of Military Expeditions in the *Shāhnāmeh*



Ḥakīm Abū al-Qāsim Ferdowsī

Ḥakīm Abū al-Qāsim Ferdowsī¹⁰ was born circa 935 AD into a prosperous and learned *dehqān*¹¹ family in the shadow of Tūs, in the broad and storied province of Khurāsān. The land into which he was born—of wind-swept plains, ancient ruins, and caravan roads stretching toward forgotten horizons—still whispered the memory of kings and heroes long fallen into dust.

As a child, he received a sound education; as a youth, he became well versed in Darī Persian and Arabic, the two tongues that then contended for dominion over thought and expression. According to some sources, he knew the Pahlavī language as well. Through this command of languages, he entered the layered past of Iran and gained a deep understanding of its history. From this understanding arose not only a desire to preserve the legends and stories circulating within Sāmānīd¹² society—especially in Bukhārā—but also a resolve to give them enduring form.

By the age of thirty, he had mastered much of the legendary material that formed the backbone of Iranian memory. Yet he remained unsatisfied. His knowledge, though vast, seemed to him without structure—like scattered stars awaiting their constellation. He was equally troubled by the consequences of the Arab conquest of his homeland, and by the dire condition into which the Persian language had fallen. He recognized the need to safeguard it from further encroachment by Arabic; more ominously still, he foresaw the rising tide of the Turks of Central Asia and the advancing shadow of their language.

Weighing these matters, he came to believe that the surest means of preserving Iran's ancient legacy was to cast its stories into verse. Chronicles, he reflected, may serve the scholar; but stories in verse belong to all people and endure in memory like song. To prepare himself for this task, he studied the chronicles of Māzandarān,

¹⁰ The Persian word for paradise is *ferdows*. The English word paradise is derived from the same Persian word. Ferdowsī (also recorded as Firdawsi, Firdusi and Firdousi) is the pseudonym of the poet. His actual name is not known.

¹¹ In modern Persian, the term *dehqān* means a farmer or a serf. In Ferdowsī's time, however, the *dehqān* were a class of landed gentry with considerable influence in their regions. For the significance of the *dehqān* class in early Islamic times, see Bulliet, 1972, p. 22.

¹² The Sāmānīds (819–999) were the descendants of Sāmān Khodā in Central Asia. They took advantage of the weakness of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty in the region and installed an Iranian kingdom centered in Bukhārā.

Sīstān, Balkh, Bukhārā, and Khotan,¹³ along with the rich body of oral traditions that had gathered over centuries around Iran's ancient culture. These accounts—half history, half dream—spoke of immortality, the divine right of kings, wisdom and knowledge, justice and heroism, as well as vengeance, deceit, and the dark arts. He gathered them patiently, awaiting the moment when they might be shaped into a single, enduring work.

When Ferdowsī reached the age of forty, a turning of fate came upon him. A close friend¹⁴—a merchant named Abū Manšūr ibn Muḥammad¹⁵—placed in his hands a copy of the *Shāhnāme-ye Abū Manšūrī* (the Abū Manšūrī Book of Kings) and pledged to support him materially in the task of versifying its contents. In that moment, what had long been formless took shape. The stories contained in that work—drawn from eastern chronicles and recounting the deeds of Iran's hero-saints—were precisely what Ferdowsī had sought. Ordered, coherent, and rooted in ancient authority, they offered him the long-desired framework upon which his vision could be built.

Today, with the exception of a few scattered relics, the chronicles upon which Ferdowsī drew—including many of the ecclesiastical records that underlay his sources—have been lost. In the wake of the Mongol destruction that later swept across the lands of Central Asia, much of that rich civilization was reduced to silence. Only fragments remain. Yet while the original records have all but vanished, their reflection—transformed into verse within Ferdowsī's immortal *Shāhnāme* (Book of Kings)¹⁶—endures.

Through that epic, we may still discern the structure of the ancient narratives, examine their central concerns, and glimpse the poet's purpose in presenting the socio-political life of his forebears through the medium of ceaseless struggle. By studying the *Shāhnāme* with care—guided by wisdom and ingenuity, as Ferdowsī himself counsels—we may reconstruct, however imperfectly, the contours of the Aryan culture he preserved, and lend direction and vitality to our limited knowledge of pre-Zoroastrian Central Asia.

¹³ Khotan, the seat of Pīrān, is located on the southern branch of the Silk Road joining China and the West with India and Central Asia. It was, and continues to be, a place for exchange of goods, technologies, philosophies, and religions.

¹⁴ *Shāhnāme*, Moscow Edition, vol. I, p. 23.

¹⁵ Abū Manšūr ibn Muḥammad was an aristocrat at the service of the Sāmānīds of Bukhārā. For a brief period, he also served the Būyids as the governor of Āzerbāijān.

¹⁶ The title of the epic *Shāhnāme* (Book of Kings) is also recorded as Shāh Nāma and Shāhnāma. Except in quotations and titles of books, throughout this study, we have referred to the epic as *Shāhnāme*.

Ferdowsī did not invent the heroes he celebrates, nor the events he recounts. The tradition he versified reaches far into antiquity. On the one hand, it reflects the work of the *mu'bad*s,¹⁷ who preceded Zoroaster and extolled the Mazdian saints; on the other, it draws upon the efforts of Parthian and Sassanian monarchs,¹⁸ who, in securing their own rule, also preserved Iranian heritage against the encroaching forces of Hellenism¹⁹ and rival faiths such as Christianity and Buddhism.

In this sense, the origins of Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme* transcend the later courtly tradition in which kings magnified their deeds to legitimize their authority. Its roots lie in an earlier age—an age when memory itself was entrusted to the voice of the bard, and when the minstrel's song carried the fate of a people across the fragile bridge of time.

Although there is no firm evidence, it appears that, at some distant moment before the coming of Zoroaster, a profound controversy arose concerning the place of religion vis-à-vis the monarchy. At the heart of the dispute lay a single assertion: that *Ahūrā Mazdā*²⁰ had not appointed two deputies to order His affairs upon the earth. From this contention, a division of purpose emerged. The court and the *mu'bad*s each sought to justify their role, drawing upon the same divine source yet shaping its meaning to their own ends.

Thus, the court affirmed its authority by proclaiming the favor bestowed upon kings by *Ahūrā Mazdā*,²¹ presenting sovereignty as the visible reflection of divine will. The *mu'bad*s, by contrast, took refuge in the sanctity granted to their hero-saints, whose lives embodied the Creator's blessing. In time, two distinct traditions came into being, each claiming to be the true guardian of Iran.

One of these began as a stark succession of genealogies—a record of kings and their descent, austere and unadorned. This was the official and historical account. In later ages, it was enriched by narratives of the swift ascent of Cyrus the Great (c. 590–529 BCE), who rose to rule vast portions of the known world, and by the tales

¹⁷ *Mu'bad* is a Zoroastrian priest above the rank of a *herbad*.

¹⁸ The Sassanians (224–651 AD) succeeded the Parthians and ruled Iran for another four hundred years. The fall of the Sassanians to Muslim Arabs ended the Iranian rule of the Iranian plateau.

¹⁹ Hellenism denotes the classical Greek culture that appeared in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquests. A pervasive culture, it established colonies in Southwest Asia, North Africa, and South Asia.

²⁰ *Ahūrā Mazdā* (Lord of Wisdom) is the creator spirit worshiped by the Zoroastrians. He is the same deity that Ferdowsī refers to as *Yazdān*.

²¹ See, for instance, Dārius' accounts, where he claims that by the grace of *Ahūrā Mazdā* he had been able to fight nineteen battles in the course of the same year, capturing nine kings. For details, see Kent, 1953, pp. 131 ff.

carried home by veterans of the campaigns of Darius I and Xerxes I—men whose memories preserved both triumph and loss in equal measure.

The other tradition unfolded along a different path. It was shaped not by lineage alone, but by the guiding principles of wisdom (*kherad*), martyrdom, and vengeance (*kīn*). This account spoke of the sacred origins of the land of Iran, of its division under Fereydūn, and of the efforts of Kaykhosrau to restore unity to the sundered motherland. It culminated in a comprehensive vision of renewal—a doctrine of just rule under a single sovereign, ordained to bring order to a fractured world. Known as the *Chehrdād*,²² this compendium—among the most ancient inheritances of Iranian culture—forms the living core of Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme*.²³

After the invasion of Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE), these historical traditions—preserved in archives, and memorialized upon friezes and golden tablets—were revived to rekindle the memory of Iran's former glory. In time, the Parthian Empire²⁴ wielded this memory as a weapon, forging from it a spirit of resistance that drove the Greeks from Iranian lands. Their successors, the Sassanian Empire, likewise drew strength from these traditions, ascending the throne with a conscious awareness of the past they had inherited.²⁵ Once established, they committed these accounts to writing and disseminated them widely—both to legitimize their rule and to fortify Zoroastrian society against the encroachments of Buddhism in the east and Christianity in the west.

Among the rulers of Iran, the Sassanians occupied a singular position. They were, at once, a priestly lineage and a royal house—custodians of faith and makers of history. Under their authority, the chronicles of the church were granted the sanction of the state and entered into the body of recorded history. To commemorate this union of crown and creed, the *mu'bad* and the royal chroniclers

²² *Chehrdād* is the "Cihrdād nask" of the *Avestā* of which a summary—history of mankind from the beginning to the appearance of Zoroaster—is preserved.

²³ See also Pyankov's "On the Problem of the Origin of the Epic Cycles in the *Shāhnāme*," *Ferdowsī's Shāhnāme: 1000 Years After* (Iraj Bashiri, ed.), Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 1994, pp. 163-168.

²⁴ The Parthians (247 BC to 224 AD) defeated the Selucids that had ruled after Alexander the Great's division of his empire. Their political and cultural hegemony lasted for four hundred years

²⁵ For a discussion of the role of the Parthian and Sassanian rulers and of the *mu'bad*s in reviving the religion of Zoroaster after Alexander the Great's destruction and after the demise of the prophet Mānī, see Darmesteter, vol. I, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv. For the codification of the religious literature under the Sassanians, especially under Shapur II, see Darmesteter, 1972, vol. I, pp. xxx-lvi. See also Yarshater, 1983, pp. 368-369, for the meaning of history for the scribes working for the Sassanian monarchs.

joined their labors, compiling a single volume that wove together the annals of court and temple alike. Written in Pahlavī, this work—known as the *Khudāynāme*²⁶—embraced the full sweep of Iranian tradition: from the formation of the land, to the severance of Tūrān, to its reunification under Kaykhosrau, and onward to the appearance of Zoroaster and the reign of the Sassanian kings.

With the fall of Iran to the armies of Islam in the seventh century, the *Khudāynāme* passed from Pahlavī into Arabic, entering a new linguistic and cultural world. Drawing upon such translations, in the early tenth century, Abū al-Mu'ayyid Balkhī composed an extensive and authoritative prose *Shāhnāme*. Another similar work was prepared by Abū 'Alī Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Balkhī. These texts, among others, were available to Ferdowsī. Most significant of all, however, was a *Shāhnāme* commissioned by the Samanid ruler Abū Maṣṣūr al-Mu'ammārī. Completed in 957–58 AD and known as the *Shāhnāme-ye Abū Maṣṣūrī*, this compilation served both as a symbol of Sāmānīd legitimacy in Bukhārā and as Ferdowsī's principal source.

That this work had been compiled by four Zoroastrian priests is of particular importance, for it suggests a careful transmission of ancient material at a time when Zoroastrianism no longer held its former authority. Of the nature of his undertaking, Ferdowsī himself declares:²⁶

All have gone sweeping in the garth of lore
And what I tell hath all been told before [.]²⁷

²⁶ For quotations from the *Shāhnāme*, I have used the translation by Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner, *The Shāhnāma of Firdausī*, 9 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1905–1925), rather than retranslating the passages. The Warner translation is particularly useful for this purpose because it covers the entire epic and is generally faithful to the Persian text. It is also accompanied by extensive notes and supplementary material on the regions, peoples, historical and legendary background, and principal characters and events of the *Shāhnāme*. The Warners' transcription of Persian personal names and place-names, however, follows conventions that differ in some respects from those used in the present-day prose text. Consequently, names appearing in quotations from Warner may look somewhat different from their counterparts in the surrounding prose—for example, *Siyawush* versus *Siyāvosh*—but they are ordinarily recognizable without difficulty. These differences are matters of transcription rather than identity and should not be taken to indicate different persons or places.

The prose presentation itself follows the Russian/Persian edition used for the present work. Archaic words and expressions in the quotations that may be unfamiliar to modern readers are defined or otherwise clarified. Warner is therefore cited here as the source of the English quotations, not as the textual basis for the present-day prose presentation.

²⁷ ME, vol. I, p. 20; Warner, vol. I, p. 108.

Why, then, should Ferdowsī retell what has already been spoken? Perhaps to carve for himself a place within the long memory of kings whom he has rendered immortal; or perhaps to leave behind a record of his own discerning gaze—a record he could trust amid the shifting currents of time. For this reason, he cautions the reader not to dismiss his narratives as mere “lies and myths.” Within them, he insists, lie wisdom and mystery alike—truths that yield only to those who approach them with discernment:

Deem not these legends lying fantasy,
As if the world were always in one stay,
For most accord with sense, [others convey
Thoughts and mystery].²⁸

The epic, Ferdowsī explains, rests upon ancient accounts scattered among the *mu'bad*s across the regions of Iran. A noble *dehqān*, he relates, gathered these traditions—seeking out aged priests from distant lands—and shaped them into a single work:

In the days gone by
There was an Epic Cycle spread broadcast
Among the learned archmages,²⁹ and at last
A certain paladin, of rustic birth,
A man of courage, wisdom, rank, and worth,
An antiquary, one who ransacked earth
For any legends of the ages past,
Intent on learning what might yet be known,
Called hoar archmages out of every clime,
To ask about the annals of the throne,
The famed successful heroes of old time[.]³⁰

When this book came into circulation, it stirred the imagination of the learned. Among those enchanted was Abū Manšūr Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Daqīqī of Tūs³¹—a young poet of striking eloquence and talent, though shadowed by unruly habits. He resolved to cast the work into verse, undertaking the first substantial effort to give poetic form to the deeds of Iran's hero-saints and ancient kings.

²⁸ ME, vol. I, p. 21; Warner [amended], vol. I, p. 108.

²⁹ A great magician, wizard, or enchanter.

³⁰ ME, vol. I, p. 21; Warner, vol. I, p. 108. The archaic spelling of the quotations from the Warner translation are retained. [Sic] is added only if the difference is glaring.

³¹ Daqīqī was a Zoroastrian with intense patriotic feelings. He started his career as a poet at the court of the Chaghāniyān, singing the praises of Abū Muẓaffar Chaghānī. At the time of Nūḥ and later Nūḥ ibn-i Manšūr, he gained prominence at the court of the Sāmānids.

Yet his endeavor was not to reach fulfillment. After composing only 1008 distiches—between approximately 976 and 981 AD—Daqīqī met a sudden and violent end, slain by his own Turkish slave.

Thus, before the great labor had truly begun, its first voice was silenced—leaving the task unfinished, suspended in time, awaiting the hand that would carry it to completion.

In his introductory remarks, Ferdowsī relates that, upon the death of Daqīqī, the burden of the unfinished saga settled upon him. Yet the decision was not without hesitation. At forty-five, he felt already the shadow of mortality lengthening behind him; the times were unsettled, sovereigns locked in war, and the future uncertain. He feared that, should he falter, no hand equal to the task would remain to complete what had been begun.

In this unease, he turned to a trusted friend. The counsel he received was both simple and resolute. “This task,” the friend said, “requires eloquence and youth. Since you are blessed with both, why not undertake and complete it?” And with these words, he placed in Ferdowsī’s hands a volume of the ancient saga, written in Pahlavī, to serve as his guide:

He brought the volume to me and anon
The darkness of my gloomy soul was gone.³²

Thus steadied in purpose, Ferdowsī began his life’s work. The composition of the *Shāhnāme* unfolded in three discernible stages, each bearing the imprint of changing circumstance and widening vision. In the first, he gathered the scattered heroic tales of Iran’s ancient past and shaped them into verse, weaving into the growing tapestry such romances as “Bīzhan and Manīzheh,” “Rostam and Sohrāb,” and “Rostam and Akvān the Demon.” These narratives, drawn in part from a book entrusted to him by one known as Sarv Nāz, do not always conform to the extant chronicles;³³ rather, they breathe with the freedom of oral tradition, where memory and imagination are interwoven.

The second phase begins after the death of Daqīqī. With access now to both ecclesiastical and state chronicles—particularly those of Central Asia—Ferdowsī turned from legend toward a more ordered historical vision. He rendered these accounts into verse and crowned them with Daqīqī’s *Gushtāspnāme*, whose distiches recount the reign of Gushtāsp, the appearance of Zoroaster, and the king’s conversion to the Zoroastrian faith. Though the styles of the two poets remain distinct, Ferdowsī carefully marks the beginning

³² ME, vol. I, p. 23; Warner, vol. I, p. 110. Also cf., Safa, vol. I, 1985, p. 465.

³³ Cf., Safa, vol. I, 1985, p. 465.

and end of Daqīqī's contribution, preserving both voice and continuity.

The placement of Daqīqī's work within the greater whole is itself revealing.³⁴ Daqīqī, it would seem, had begun his history in the west, tracing events from the rise of Zoroaster outward into the domains of the Median³⁵ and Achaemenian³⁶ realms. Ferdowsī, by contrast, casts his gaze eastward at the outset, beginning with the creation of the sacred land of Iran and the primordial unfolding of its mythic destiny. From this origin emerge the great divisions—most notably that between Iran and Tūrān—and the epic wars that define them. The narrative culminates in the unification of Iran under Kaykhosrau, whose reign restores a fragile harmony, later strengthened by the spread of Zoroastrian belief.

After Daqīqī's untimely death, Ferdowsī wove his predecessor's work into his own as a bridge between traditions. He then carried the saga forward, versifying the chronicles of western Iran and drawing upon more recent archival accounts. The final preparation of the completed *Shāhnāme*, undertaken after reaching an accord with Maḥmūd of Ghazna,³⁷ required an additional five years, during which the requisite praises of the Sultan and his court were composed and refined.³⁸

As Ferdowsī conceived and completed it, the *Shāhnāme* stands as a medieval rearticulation of cosmic and mythological history—told through the lens of the ancient Iranians themselves, and largely free from external imposition. Yet the collapse of the Sāmānīd order and the necessity of presenting the work to Maḥmūd placed the poet in an unforeseen and uneasy position. Iran, newly emerged from Arab dominion, now found itself under the authority of Turkish rulers.

Ferdowsī could not wholly ignore the realities of his age. Within the fabric of his ancient myths, he made cautious room for the presence of Turkish warriors, extending to them the measured praise required by circumstance. In doing so, he subtly altered the

³⁴ Ferdowsī's "Bīzhan and Manīzheh," perhaps his first epic composition, follows Daqīqī's style very closely.

³⁵ Media is the home of the Medians who, as early as the 11th century BC occupied the mountainous region of northwestern Iran and northeastern Mesopotamia. They ruled Iran during the 7th and 8th centuries.

³⁶ The Achaemenian empire (550–330 BC) spanned from Egypt in the west to South Asia in the east. Its heyday was under Darius I the Great and its demise at the hand of Alexander the Great under the last Iranian monarch of the dynasty, Darius III (r. 336–330 BC).

³⁷ Maḥmūd of Ghazna (998–1030) was a Turkish sultan whose military empire stretched from northwestern Iran to the Punjab.

³⁸ For Ferdowsī's attempt to write epic pieces before Daqīqī's death, see Safa, p. 465; also Cf., Safa, vol. I, 1985, pp. 472–485.

contours of the Tūranian world he had earlier defined, allowing it to reflect, however faintly, the political order of his own time. This accommodation was not without precedent; the blending of past and present is a known feature of epic traditions, as seen among the *mānāschīs*³⁹ of Kyrgyzstan, who introduce contemporary elements into the telling of the *Mānās*.⁴⁰ Yet for Ferdowsī—writing for an audience deeply committed to the integrity of inherited forms—this adjustment remained both singular and restrained.

The labor consumed thirty years of his life. In the early years, his own landholdings provided sustenance; later, he depended upon the generosity of friends and patrons. But in his final years—especially after the bitter disappointment he suffered at Maḥmūd's court around 1010—his circumstances grew austere.⁴¹

The Sultan's rejection of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* was unlikely the caprice that later accounts suggest. Some prior agreement must have existed, compelling to return to Tūs and labor an additional five years on the work. It is equally likely that the judgment of his peers played a decisive role. Ferdowsī himself believed that their assessments were marred by religious prejudice, by racial and national rivalries, and by conflicts of interest. Maḥmūd's own inclinations—his devotion to religion, his affinity for Turkic identity, and his well-known appetite for wealth—no doubt shaped the outcome, culminating in the poet's humiliation.⁴² Of this final chapter, little endures beyond a satire, attributed by some to Ferdowsī himself.

He died in Tūs, around the age of eighty (c. 1020–1026), and was laid to rest upon his own land at the outskirts of the town.⁴³

He was survived by his only daughter, for whose future security, it is said, he had first undertaken the immense labor of completing the epic.

Thus ends the life of the poet; and thus begins the long echo of his voice.

About the *Shāhnāmeḥ*

Around the year one thousand of the Common Era, two great processes of epic formation took shape across the literary landscape

³⁹ *Mānāschī* is an individual who knows the epic *Manas* by heart and who can recite it in the traditional way.

⁴⁰ The epic *Mānās* consists of a series of battles between the Kyrgyz and other Turkish tribes or the Kyrgyz and the Chinese in the 9th century.

⁴¹ For details, see Safa, vol. I, 1985, pp. 469 ff.

⁴² See Safa, vol. I, 1985, pp. 479–484.

⁴³ It is reported that Ferdowsī's body was not allowed to be buried in the public cemetery on account of allegations that he was a *rāfezī*. See also, Safa, p. 485.

of Central Asia. Under the patronage of the Sāmānīds of Bukhārā (819–999 AD), the Iranians cultivated an epic tradition rooted in ancient oral narratives, pre-Islamic historical records, and the enduring memory of their Aryan heritage. The result was the *Shāhnāme*, composed by Abū al-Qāsim Ferdowsī Tūsī (935–1026 AD), a monumental work that gathers within itself the vast expanse of Iranian cosmology, mythology, and cultural memory. Though it offers a concise account of the dynasties that preceded the Sāmānīds, its primary purpose is not the preservation of factual history, but the articulation of a civilizational identity—an enduring vision of what it means to be Iranian.

At roughly the same historical moment, the Turks gave shape to an epic of a different but equally powerful character. Drawing upon the heroic traditions of the Kyrgyz tribal lords, they fashioned the epic of *Mānās*, a vast compilation of songs celebrating the deeds of a hero whose life echoes across generations. These narratives recount how, in 840 AD, the Kyrgyz overcame the Uyghurs⁴⁴ and brought about the fall of their capital at Bei-tin. In these songs, *Mānās* emerges not merely as a warrior, but as a unifier of tribes and a figure whose strength and foresight seem to anticipate the later appearance of Genghis Khan.⁴⁵ He wages war against formidable enemies—the Chinese and the Kalmyks⁴⁶—and triumphs through valor, cunning, and an unyielding will.

The contrast between these two epics reflects the distinct worlds from which they arose. The *Shāhnāme* emerged from a civilization striving to preserve its pre-Islamic identity through both written and oral tradition, as well as through artistic and intellectual achievement. *Mānās*, by contrast, was sustained through the living voice of the nomad, carried across the steppes by generations of singers who safeguarded the memory of Turkic heroism. Yet, despite these differences in origin and transmission, both epics achieved what they set out to do.

The *Shāhnāme*, now the bedrock of Iranian cultural and national resilience, has preserved Iranian identity across centuries marked by conquest, upheaval, and transformation. Likewise, *Mānās* has borne witness to the emergence of the Kyrgyz from subjugation under Uyghur and Chinese domination, and continues to sustain Turkic identity—Kyrgyz identity in particular—into the

⁴⁴ The Uyghurs, a Turkic ethnic group, originally lived west of Lake Baikal. In the 9th century they were defeated by the Kyrgyz and moved to the Tarim basin where we find them today.

⁴⁵ Ratchnevsky, 1993, p. 169.

⁴⁶ Kalmyks are a Mongolic ethnic group whose ancestors migrated to the northwestern areas of present-day China from the southwestern regions of Lake Baikal.

present day. Each epic has traversed a long and often precarious history from medieval times into the modern era, surviving periods of neglect, suppression, and fragmentation. That they endure is a testament not only to their cultural significance, but to their adaptability and the conviction of the peoples who preserve them.⁴⁷ More importantly, they remain living traditions, poised to continue shaping the intellectual and cultural futures of their respective societies.

For the Iranian peoples, the *Shāhnāme* serves as a well-spring of identity, embodied in the heroic lives of its protagonists. These narratives do not remain confined to the written page; they live among the people through performance and retelling. Through the art of *naqqālī* (storytelling), performers animate myth, transforming it into lived experience and shared memory. In this study, we shall turn to three such narratives: “Rostam and Sohrāb,” “The Story of Siyāvosh,” and “The Story of Kaykhosrau.”

Similarly, for the Kyrgyz people, the *Mānās* epic stands as a profound source of cultural identity, embodied in the legendary deeds of its heroic figures. These stories do not remain fixed in text; they endure through the voice of the *mānāschī*, skilled reciters who transform it into a living tradition that binds generations and sustains a shared sense of history and belonging.

The Contents of the *Shāhnāme*

The *Shāhnāme*, one of the great monuments of world literature and a cornerstone of Iranian language and culture, comprises some 60,000 *beyts* and sixty-two interwoven stories. These narratives vary in length, tone, and dramatic intensity, yet together they form a unified epic vision. The action unfolds across successive ages, structured around the central concept of the *farr*—the divine glory that serves as the fulcrum of Aryan identity and kingship.

The epic opens in a mythic dawn with the story of Kayūmars, the first man, who receives the *farr* from Qayomart, the cosmic progenitor, who in turn derives it from the Creator. From Kayūmars, this divine radiance passes through the lineage of kings, binding

⁴⁷ For a study of *Mānās*, see Bashiri, “Manas: The Kyrgyz Epic,” in bibliography.

legitimacy to possession of the *farr*.⁴⁸ The struggle to obtain, preserve, or usurp this force animates the central conflicts of the epic, drawing the forces of good and evil into perpetual opposition.⁴⁹

As will become evident, the *farr* plays a decisive role in the lives of Siyāvosh and Kaykhosrau. Both possess a moral and spiritual integrity that their adversary, Afrāsiyāb, lacks—yet desperately seeks to command through violence and deceit. One of the most revealing illustrations of the *farr*'s centrality appears in the story of Jamshīd, whose failure to rightly govern his divine endowment leads to his downfall. In its wake, the loss of the *farr* plunges the world into an age of darkness under Zahhāk, a reign of tyranny said to endure for a thousand years.⁵⁰

Among the many narratives of the *Shāhnāme*, one stands apart as a unifying structure—a meta-story that gathers the epic into a coherent whole: “The Story of Fereydūn.” Beginning with the overthrow of Zahhāk and extending to the disappearance of Kaykhosrau, the last descendant of Fereydūn, this overarching narrative contains within it a multitude of subsidiary tales, each capable of standing independently. Indeed, the popularity of these embedded stories has often led readers and scholars to overlook the larger structure, reducing the Fereydūn narrative to a simple account of a king dividing his realm among his three sons. In doing so, they risk losing sight of the deeper unity of the epic—the thread of the *farr*, the enduring contest between truth and falsehood, and the moral architecture that binds the work together.

From Ferdowsī's perspective, however, the significance of this meta-story is unmistakable. He marks it distinctly under the name “*Chehrdād*” and presents it as the central purpose of his composition: a model for just governance under the guidance of the *farr*. Within its unfolding, the spiritual and worldly dimensions of this divine force are rendered with particular clarity in two of the most celebrated narratives of the epic: “The Story of Siyāvosh” and “The Story of Kaykhosrau.”

Alongside these stand a number of related but more loosely connected tales—“Rostam and Sohrāb,” “Bīzhan and Manīzheh,” “The Seven Ordeals of Rostam,” among others. Of these, “Rostam and Sohrāb” merits close attention, for it demonstrates with tragic

⁴⁸ There is no direct translation for the *farr* because the *farr* varies depending on context. *Farr* is generally understood as a quality of spirit enjoyed by individuals, depending on their foresight and truthfulness. The *farr* of the king is the strongest, especially in matters related to legitimacy and governance. It is passed on hereditarily. Historical monarchs of Iran are linked to Iran's cosmic and mythic rulers via their divine *farr*. Those like Darius the Great, who lacked divine *farr*, had to prove themselves worthy of carrying the *farr*.

⁴⁹ Bashiri, *Ancient Iran*, p. 88.

⁵⁰ Bashiri, *Ancient Iran*, p. 88.

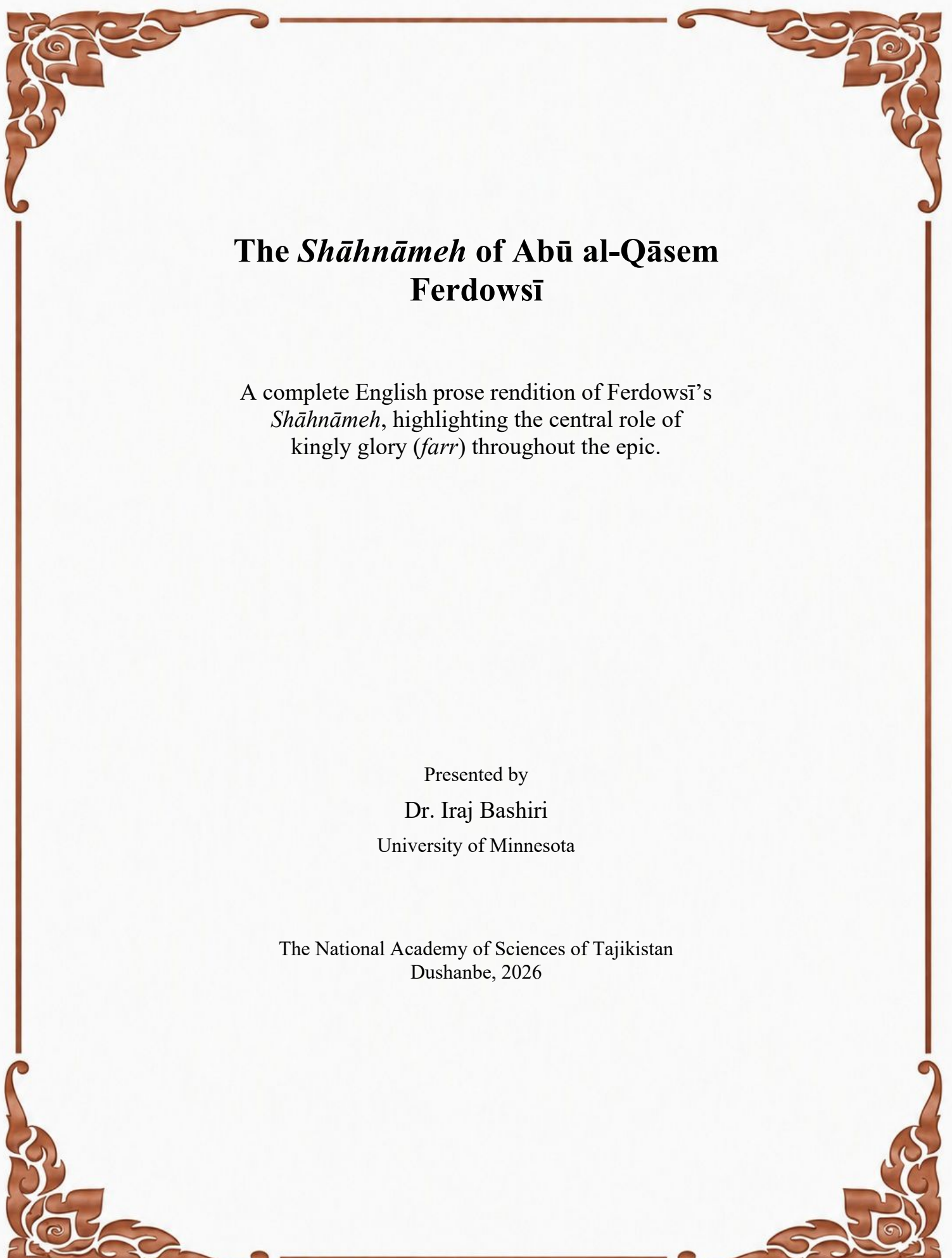
force how even the mightiest of heroes may be undone when the *farr* is absent or obscured.

The *Shāhnāmeḥ* concludes with narratives that turn toward the emergence of the Prophet Zoroaster and the spread of Zoroastrianism under King Gushtāsp and his successors. Among these final accounts, “The Story of Rostam and Esfandiyār” stands out as the last in a succession of unforgettable tales, bringing the epic to a close in a tone both solemn and resonant, as the ancient world it has preserved begins to yield to a new spiritual order.

• The •
Shāhnāmeḥ
• of •

**Hakīm Abū al-Qāsem
Ferdowsī**





The *Shāhnāmeḥ* of Abū al-Qāsem Ferdowsī

A complete English prose rendition of Ferdowsī's
Shāhnāmeḥ, highlighting the central role of
kingly glory (*farr*) throughout the epic.

Presented by
Dr. Iraj Bashiri
University of Minnesota

The National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan
Dushanbe, 2026

The Cosmic Age

Cosmology is a system of scientific, philosophical, and speculative thought concerned with the origin, structure, and space-time relations of the universe. In the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, the cosmological vision prepares the ground for the great and enduring struggle between two adversaries: Good and Evil. On the mythic plane, this struggle unfolds between the agents of Evil and the upholders of Good—those who bear the *farr*. These twin conflicts, and especially the latter, form the very backbone of the epic.

Like Daqīqī, who had intended to versify the historical portion of the *Khodāynāmeḥ*, beginning with the advent of Zoroaster, Ferdowsī undertook the far greater task of rendering the entire corpus into verse. The contents of the *Khodāynāmeḥ*, as noted, had long been preserved through oral tradition. Ferdowsī completed and deepened this inheritance by weaving recorded history into that living stream of memory. The account used by both Daqīqī and Ferdowsī begins in cosmic time and continues unbroken to the seventh century, when the Persian Empire falls to the Arab invaders.

The ancient Iranians asked questions of a profound and elemental kind—questions that seem to echo from the earliest dawn of consciousness itself. Indeed, at the beginning of Iranian history, Zoroaster, in his *Gāthās*,⁵¹ addresses *Ahūrā Mazdā* with many of these same inquiries: Who am I? Who created me? Who are my ancestors? Am I in this world for a purpose? Where, in the vast current of time, do I stand? Am I inherently good or evil? And who bears responsibility for my well-being?

At the opening of his *Shāhnāmeḥ*, Ferdowsī offers answers to some of these questions. His responses, when measured against modern research into Iranian cosmology and mythology, are broad in scope; yet in substance, they are strikingly precise.

⁵¹ The *Gāthās* are hymns traditionally believed to have been composed by the prophet Zoroaster. They are arranged in five different modes and form the core of the Zoroastrian liturgy.

Ferdowsī identifies *Yazdān*,⁵² the Lord of the life force, as the central figure in the myths he has gathered and shaped into verse:

In the name of the Lord of both wisdom and mind,
To nothing sublimer can thought be applied [.]⁵³

He declares that *Yazdān*, the embodiment of goodness, brought the world forth from the void:

The first thing needful for thee is to know
The sum of primal element which He,
Who maketh all things, made from naught to show
The greatness of His own supremacy.⁵⁴

At the heart of this creation, He set truth—figured as a blazing sphere of fire—from which all else proceeds. The earth, Ferdowsī tells us, came into being as that fire cooled; water emerged from the further tempering of the earth; and plant life arose from the mingling of the elements. With the creation of animals and, finally, human beings, the design of *Yazdān* was brought to completion.

Among all created things, Ferdowsī sets humankind apart as the crown of *Yazdān*'s work. In their pursuit of truth, he declares, *Yazdān* bestowed upon them a share of His own discernment and power. Furthermore, he relates that *Yazdān* created the sun to illuminate the world and to stand as a visible emblem of the unwavering necessity of truth. Thereafter, He created the moon, whose waxing and waning reveal the uncertainty that attends the struggle between Good and Evil. Human beings, Ferdowsī counsels, must align themselves with the fullness of the moon.

To transmit His wisdom to humankind, Ferdowsī explains, *Yazdān* established a chain of command—a vast and ordered hierarchy. It begins at His own exalted level, descends through ranks of lesser deities responsible for the spiritual and physical well-being of creation, and culminates in the souls of the believers who inhabit His world. Through this living chain, *Yazdān* oversees the inner lives of individuals. Such guidance is essential to the endurance of creation, for in the final reckoning, the triumph of Good over Evil rests upon the measure of good and evil enacted by human souls upon the earth.

The foremost task before *Yazdān* was to choose, from among His creation, a being capable of answering the needs of others with justice and balance. To this end, He weighed the capacities of all souls and selected one. This individual He distinguished as both the

⁵² Technically *Yazdān* is a lower god in the Zoroastrian pantheon. Ferdowsī uses *Yazdān* as the creator of all that is good as opposed to *Ahrīman* who is the embodiment of evil and a destroyer.

⁵³ ME, vol. I, p. 12; Warner, vol. I, p. 100.

⁵⁴ ME, vol. I, p. 14; Warner, vol. I, p. 102.

first man and the first king, bestowing upon him the divine glory—the *farr*. By this gift, that being was set apart from all others.

Thus was *Gayomart*,⁵⁵ the first cosmic man, discovered and invested with the *farr*. When the movement of existence passed from the cosmic realm into the mythic, Ferdowsī recounts that the *farr* came to Kayūmars, who, soon after receiving it, gathered all beings upon a mountain summit and proclaimed his kingship before them.

The Mythical Age

Mythology is a body of narratives concerned with gods, legendary heroes, and supernatural events. In the *Shāhnāme*, the mythical age begins with Kayūmars—the same being who, in the cosmic realm, was known as *Gayomart*. What follows is the account of how Kayūmars came to inherit *Gayomart's farr*.

In the cosmic world, *Gayomart* was slain by Evil. Yet his essence did not perish. His seed was carried to the moon, purified by the sun, and entered the mythic realm in the form of a rhubarb plant with two stalks joined at the base. These twin stalks resembled a man and a woman—the first mythic couple. At the same time, Evil, too, transferred its designs into the mythic realm, intent on continuing its struggle against Kayūmars and his descendants, who bore the kingly glory, the *farr*.

The Fereydūn meta-story, which forms the central portion of the *Chehrdād*, rests upon the miracle of the kingly *farr* and the wisdom of the epic's heroes. It is therefore essential to understand both the function of the *farr* and the enduring role it has played—and continues to play—in Iranian culture.

The *farr* is among the most foundational elements in the cultural imagination of the Iranian peoples. Beyond serving as a symbol of legitimacy, it grants its bearer foresight. Prudent monarchs, for instance, make their most consequential decisions only after consulting their *farr*. Yet the *farr* is not reserved solely for kings. Every just and courageous individual—one who believes in a single deity and stands aligned with truth—possesses a measure of it. The distinction lies in degree: the king's *farr* is the most potent. Moreover, it cannot be wrested from him by force. Symbolically, the *farr* appears in many forms: as a ram emblazoned upon a banner, as a ribbon fastened to the neck of a bird, or as an ornament attached to the headgear of Iranian monarchs.

Life in the mythic realm is, by its nature, more intricate than in the cosmic world. Consequently, Evil was compelled to fashion

⁵⁵ *Gayomart* is the first cosmic man and the first cosmic king (cf., Kayumars).

new and more complex beings to oppose Kayūmars and his lineage. With this in mind, we may enter the unfolding of the mythical age.

As noted, the first mythic man—and the first mythic king—is Kayūmars. His sovereignty extended not only over humankind, but also over *devs* (demons), birds, animals, and genies.⁵⁶ As the bearer of the *farr*, and as a visible sign of his legitimacy, he clothed himself in a leopard-skin garment. Under his rule, the Iranian peoples began their first movement toward a rudimentary civilization. Kayūmars reigned over the entire sentient world for thirty years:

This order, Grace, and lustre came to earth
 When Sol was dominant in Aries
 And shone so brightly that the world grew young
 Its lord was Gaiumart, who dwelt at first
 Upon a mountain, thence his throne and fortune
 Rose. He and all his troop wore leopard-skins.
 And under him the arts of life began,
 For food and dress were in their infancy.
 He reigned o'er all the earth for thirty years.
 In goodness like a sun upon the throne,
 And as a full moon o'er a lofty cypress
 So shone he from the seat of king of kings.
 The cattle and the divers [sic] beasts of prey
 Grew tame before him: men stood not erect
 Awed by splendour of his high estate.
 And thence received their Faith.⁵⁷

The elevation of Kayūmars, now enthroned in the mythic realm and endowed with the *farr*, stirred the anxiety of Evil. True to its nature, it sought to break his resolve. As a first blow, it slew Siyāmak, the son of Kayūmars, who had been destined to succeed his father. The kingship then passed to Hūshang, Kayūmars' grandson—a prince whom Kayūmars had kept hidden from the reach of Evil. Thus, even in the mythic realm, Evil failed in its design. The death of Siyāmak did not thwart *Yazdān*'s design for the propagation of truth. Hūshang had already been instructed in the principles of just rule.

As in the cosmic world, once defeated, Evil withdrew, and *Yazdān* continued to refine His mythic kingdom through His chosen representative. Hūshang ruled for forty years and contributed greatly to the flourishing of the material world. He discovered fire—a revelation commemorated to this day in the festival of *Sadeh*,

⁵⁶ *Gayomart* is the first cosmic man and the first cosmic king (cf., Kayūmars).

⁵⁷ ME, vol. I, pp. 28-29; Warner, vol. I, pp. 118-119.

observed one hundred days before the New Year, or *Nowrūz*.⁵⁸ He also discovered metals, taught his people to forge tools and weapons, to harness rivers, to cultivate the land, and to domesticate animals. Most significantly, he subdued the *devs*—and ushered in an era of prosperity.

The next ruler, Tahmūras, built upon Hūshang's achievements and further strengthened the Creator's kingdom by domesticating animals and teaching his people the uses of wool and milk:

[With wisdom, I shall create Order
following that with a palace and a court.]
I will restrain the div, will reign supreme.
And use the useful for the common gold.⁵⁹

Yet he erred in a crucial respect: he entrusted the administration of his realm to the defeated *devs*. Through their knowledge—of languages, of arts, of hidden sciences—the *devs* increased the kingdom's prosperity, though under their own subtle dominion:

Tahmuras,
Purged of faults and glorious with the Grace,
Bound Ahriman with spells and rode him horsewise
At whiles around the world.⁶⁰

After Tahmūras, the throne passed to Jamshīd—brilliant, inventive, and ultimately consumed by arrogance. He lived for a thousand years and ruled for six hundred. Like the kings before him, he advanced the arts of civilization: spinning wool, weaving silk and cotton, and extracting precious metals from the earth. Under Jamshīd, the *farr* came to encompass both temporal authority and spiritual dominion:

"Mine is the Grace," he said, "I am both king
And archimage,⁶¹ I will restrain ill-doers
And make for souls a path toward the light."⁶²

Jamshīd divided society into four estates: priests, warriors, landowners, and merchants. He drew the full force of the *farr* into his own person and used it to elevate both his kingship and the material conditions of his people. With knowledge derived from the *devs*, he raised magnificent palaces adorned with jewels. To com-

⁵⁸ For *Nowrūz* and *Sadeh*, see Iraj Bashiri, at "Nowruz: Origins and Rituals" https://www.academia.edu/7910067/Nowruz_Origins_and_Rituals.

⁵⁹ ME, vol. I. p. 36; Warner, vol. I, p. 126.

⁶⁰ ME, vol. I. p. 37; Warner, vol. I, p. 127.

⁶¹ Archimage means great magician, wizard, or enchanter.

⁶² ME, vol. I. p. 39; Warner, vol. I, p. 131.

memorate his achievements—chief among them the apparent eradication of death—and to mark the dawn of a new age, he inaugurated a grand celebration: *Nowrūz*, the New Year, which endures to this day:

The people scattered jewels, and bestowed
 Upon the day the name of New Year's Day,
 The first of Farwardin and of the year,
 When limbs repose from labour, hearts from strife.
 The noble chieftains held a festival,
 Called for the goblet, wine, and minstrelsy,
 And ever since that time that glorious day
 Remaineth the memorial of that Shah.
 Thus things continued for three centuries,
 And all the while men never looked on death.⁶³

Yet in time, Jamshīd forgot the source of his glory. Ignoring both the divine origin of his *farr* and the contributions of the *devs*, he claimed all achievements as his own and grew consumed by the desire to ascend to the heavens. Obsessed with reaching the stars, he commanded the *devs* to fashion a throne that would bear him aloft. They obeyed, and he astonished his people by rising above them:

These works achieved, Jamshid ambited
 Rank loftier, and by his royal Grace
 Made him a throne, with what a wealth of gems
 Inlaid! which when he willed the divs took up
 And bare from earth to heaven.⁶⁴

Upon his return, Jamshīd proclaimed himself a god. He declared that he had banished death and brought forth prosperity, and that all owed their lives to him:

[A]nd God's Grace departed from him.
 The world was filled with din, the court deserted

 [T]he crime that equalled him with God,
 brought on disaster and o'erturned the state.⁶⁵

His subjects recoiled from this blasphemy. In great numbers, they abandoned him and turned instead to Zaḥḥāk, the king of Arabia, inviting him to rule over Iran. When Zaḥḥāk arrived, Jamshīd relinquished his crown and withdrew. Two enduring traditions are attributed to Jamshīd's age: the construction of a protective enclosure—a *var*—to shelter living beings from a devastating winter, and the institution of the *Nowrūz* festival.

⁶³ ME, vol. I. p. 42; Warner, vol. I, pp. 133-134.

⁶⁴ ME, vol. I. p. 41; Warner, vol. I, p. 133.

⁶⁵ ME, vol. I. p. 43; Warner, vol. I, p. 135.

As might be expected, the next ruler was a creature of Evil. The Iranians, in their desperation, did not know that Zahhāk was bound to dark forces—that he had slain his own father to seize power. Nor did they know of the two serpents that rose from his shoulders, demanding sustenance. To keep them appeased, Zahhāk fed them human brains. Thus, through Zahhāk, Evil devised a plan to depopulate the world:

The purpose of the foul Div shrewdly scan:
Had he conceived perchance a secret plan
To rid the world of all the race of man?⁶⁶

By the end of Zahhāk's six-hundred-year reign, oppression had grown unbearable. At last, Kāveh,⁶⁷ a blacksmith who had lost seventeen of his eighteen sons to the tyrant's serpents, rose in revolt. With the aid of Fereydūn—a youth endowed with the *farr*, whose father had been slain by Zahhāk—he overthrew the despot. Zahhāk was captured and imprisoned within a cave on Mount Damāvand.

Under the radiance of Fereydūn's *farr*, Iran was restored to balance and prosperity. Once more, the designs of Evil were undone—this time not only by kings, but by ordinary people, strengthened and guided by the presence of the *farr*.

The Story of Fereydūn

Fereydūn was the son of Ābtīn and Farānak. Forty years before the end of his kingship, Zahhāk beheld in a dream a child yet unborn who would strike him down and ascend the throne. To avert this foreseen calamity, he dispatched his henchmen across the world to seek out and destroy the child. They did not find him; yet, unwittingly, they slew his father, Ābtīn.

In time, the child was born and named Fereydūn. When he came of age, his mother revealed to him the fate of his father at Zahhāk's hands. Burning with the desire for vengeance, Fereydūn joined forces with the blacksmith Kāveh, who himself had lost all but one of his sons to Zahhāk's cruelty. Together, they rose against the tyrant, seized him, and confined him within a cave on Mount Damāvand. With Zahhāk removed from the world of men, prosperity returned to Iran, and the land breathed again.

⁶⁶ ME, vol. I. p. 48; Warner, vol. I, p. 139.

⁶⁷ Kaveh was a blacksmith who launched a national uprising against Zahhāk, a foreign tyrant with no interest in the well-being of Iranians. The brains of two (This number is reported differently in different sources) of his children had been fed Zahhāk's serpents.

During Fereydūn's reign, the affairs of the kingdom grew manifold and intricate. In his old age, he made an epoch-making decision: he divided his dominion among his three sons—Salm, Tūr, and Īraj. To Salm, the eldest, he gave the western lands, known then as Rūm; to Tūr, the middle son, he granted the eastern realms, including the expanse of Central Asia; and to Īraj, the youngest, he entrusted the heartland of Iran itself.

What led Fereydūn to so uncustomary a choice? He weighed the loyalty of his sons, both to himself and to the realm, and judged that his elder sons lacked the innate wisdom required to govern a kingdom that had, under his hand, become subtle and complex. In other words, they were without the *farr*. Īraj alone possessed that divine radiance and was worthy to succeed him at any moment.

Yet Salm and Tūr, dissatisfied with their allotted domains, conspired against their younger brother. They slew Īraj, believing that by his death they might seize his *farr*. But the *farr* is no spoil of conquest; it cannot be taken by force.

Fereydūn sought to reach his errant sons, to make plain the reasoning behind his division of the realm. They would not listen. Instead, they marched upon Iran, hoping to dispossess him of the very glory they did not understand. In answer, Fereydūn armed Manūchehr—his grandson through the line of Īraj's daughter—and sent him forth to confront the rebels and exact justice. Manūchehr fulfilled his grandfather's command. Yet the deaths of Salm and Tūr did not end the feud born of that fateful division.

At the age of five hundred, his heart broken by the loss of his sons, Fereydūn laid aside the crown in favor of Manūchehr. Thereafter, the shadow of Tūr endured. Ferdowsī no longer speaks of Salm, but the death of Tūr opened a rift between Iran and Tūran—a rift that widened into great wars of vengeance: first for the innocent blood of Īraj, and later for that of Siyāvosh. Both conflicts would be waged against the Tūranian ruler, Afrāsiyāb.

Who was Afrāsiyāb? He was the grandson of Tūr, who had once stood among the righteous before staining his hands with his brother's blood. After Pashang, Afrāsiyāb ascended the throne of Tūran, ruling from a subterranean palace. Under him, the forces of Evil found not only strength but habitation—a lair within the world of Iran itself, called Tūran. He was likened to the serpents that sprang from Zahhāk's shoulders, though fiercer still; Ferdowsī names him the dragon-fiend king. In the end, his true nature is laid bare: a wanderer, a fugitive, seeking refuge in water, the element he most cherished.

Opposed to Afrāsiyāb stood Kaykā'ūs, who ruled Iran for one hundred and fifty years. In the early years of his reign, he warred against the *devs* and extended his dominion to Egypt and

Hāmāvarān.⁶⁸ Under his rule, Iran's power spread far and wide. Before his campaign against Hāmāvarān, he had heard much of the beauty of Sūdābeh, the only daughter of its king. When he overcame that king, he took Sūdābeh as his wife, against her father's wishes.

Later, the king of Hāmāvarān invited the couple to a gathering, and, taking advantage of Kaykā'ūs's trust, seized and imprisoned him. Sūdābeh pleaded for her husband's release, but her father refused. At last, she asked to share his captivity, and so she did. Within the prison walls, she tended to Kaykā'ūs until, in time, both were rescued by Rostam. She returned with Kaykā'ūs to Iran and became his favored queen.

Seeing Kaykā'ūs rise to such power, Evil devised a stratagem to strip him of his *farr*. A confidant was sent to plant a thought within the king's mind: that, as the greatest monarch in the world, he ought to add China to his dominion. The notion took root. Kaykā'ūs conceived a fantastical scheme—to fly to China borne aloft by eagles.

He ordered that young eagles be taken from their nests and trained. A throne was constructed, with tall poles rising from its four corners. When the eagles had grown strong, four were starved and then fastened to the throne, one to each pole. At the summit of each pole, pieces of meat were set. Straining upward to reach the food, the eagles lifted the throne and bore the king into the sky.

Thus did Kaykā'ūs rise toward China. But in time the birds' strength failed; their wings faltered, and the throne plunged to the earth. By miracle, the king survived the fall. After enduring great hardship, he was once more rescued by Rostam. Thereafter, Kaykā'ūs withdrew into seclusion for forty days, imploring the Creator's forgiveness. In time, forgiveness was granted.

But who is this Rostam, who again and again delivers the king from peril?

Rostam is a man of immense stature and strength; so heavy is he that the ground seems to yield beneath his tread. His steed, Rakhsh, alone can bear his weight. He is known for three things: Rakhsh, his two-pronged beard, and the skull of the White Demon which he wears as a helmet. Yet beyond these, he is marked by cunning, resourcefulness, and a fearless ease of spirit. Loyal above all, and eloquent, he confronts his foes not only with strength but with words that unnerve and unmake them before battle is joined.

Because of Rostam's central place in the story of Kaykā'ūs—and because the king's own politics will, at times, prevent him from aiding his champion when aid is most needed—we shall turn to one of Ferdowsī's most memorable scenes: the single combat between Rostam and Sohrāb, told in fuller detail.

⁶⁸ Hāmāvarān is present-day Yemen.

The Story of Rostam and Sohrāb

One of the most widely read, admired, translated, and contemplated episodes of the *Shāhnāme*, the story of Rostam and Sohrābis often recounted in a single, unbroken sitting. It is a tragedy of father and son, unfolding beneath the shadow of destiny and shaped by the perilous absence—or presence—of wisdom at the moment of irrevocable choice. It reminds us that those deprived of the *farr* are more easily ensnared by the subtle designs of Evil and are thus more prone to fatal misjudgment than those who are illumined by that divine radiance.

Sohrāb is the son of Rostam, the champion of Iran, and Tahmīneh, daughter of the governor of Samangān—a land within Tūrān, then under the dominion of Afrāsiyāb. While hunting near Samangān, Rostam loses his way and wanders into its territory. Hungry, he slays a deer, satisfies his hunger, and, beside a spring of clear and quiet water, lies down to rest. He leaves his faithful horse, Rakhsh, to graze freely in the lush meadow.

Two men of Samangān seize Rakhsh, lead him away to the city, and deliver him into the governor's stables. When Rostam awakens and finds his steed gone, he makes his way into the city in search of him. There, the guards apprehend the unknown warrior and bring him before the governor.

The governor, recognizing the famed champion, receives him with honor and bids him remain as his guest for the night. That same night, Princess Tahmīneh—who has long cherished a secret admiration for Rostam—enters his chamber with a bold proposal: she asks for a child in exchange for the return of his horse. From this union, a child is conceived.

At dawn, as Rostam prepares to depart, he entrusts Tahmīneh with two tokens: a string of beads and a bracelet. "If the child is a girl," he says, "weave these beads into her hair. If it is a boy, let him wear this bracelet upon his arm." He takes leave of the governor and returns to Iran.

In time, Tahmīneh bears a son—Sohrāb. Raised in the palace, the boy grows swiftly in strength and renown; by the age of twelve, he has become the champion of Samangān. When he presses his mother about his father, she tells him all she knows of Rostam, the unmatched hero of Iran.

Resolved to find him, Sohrāb dreams not merely of reunion but of conquest: he imagines that together they might overthrow Kaykā'ūs and raise Rostam to the throne of Iran. Before he departs, Tahmīneh gives him the bracelet left by his father and instructs him

to wear it always, as a sign by which he may be known. As his fame spreads, Sohrāb rises to become the champion of Tūrān itself.

Afrāsiyāb, ever cunning, prepares to invade Iran. He appoints Sohrāb commander of an army of twelve thousand and sends with him two trusted retainers, Hūmān and Bārmān. In secret, he instructs Hūmān that under no circumstances is Sohrāb to learn that Rostam is his father. And further: once the son has slain the father, the youth is to be brought before Afrāsiyāb.

Thus the Tūranian host advances upon Iran. Across the field, the armies draw up in grim expectation. Among the Iranian ranks, Rostam hears repeated mention of a young and formidable Tūranian champion named Sohrāb. The name stirs in him a faint unease—a memory of Samangān, of Tahmīneh, of a possibility once left behind. Yet he dismisses the thought. Surely, he reasons, such a son would be far too young to match the warrior now described.

Rustem,⁶⁹ meanwhile, the thickening tumult hears
And in his heart, untouched by human fears,
Says: 'What is this, the feeling seems to stun!
This battle must be led by Ahriman,
The awful day of doom must have begun.'
In haste he arms, and mounts his bounding steed,
The growing rage demands redoubled speed;
The leopard's skin he over his shoulders throws,
The regal girdle round his middle glows,
High wave his glorious banners; broad revealed,
The pictured dragons glare along the field.⁷⁰

At length, father and son—unaware of their bond—stand face to face in mortal combat. Rostam proposes that they withdraw from the sight of both armies and fight apart. Sohrāb consents. Before the contest begins, the young warrior, moved by an instinct he cannot name, asks his opponent:

The generous speech Sohrab⁷¹ attentive heard,
His heart expanding glowed at every word:
'One question answer, and in answering show
That truth should ever from a warrior flow:
Art thou not Rustem, whose exploits sublime
Endear his name thro' every distant clime?'⁷²

⁶⁹ Rustem is the same as Rostam.

⁷⁰ Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," p. 202.

⁷¹ Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," p. 202.

⁷² Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," p. 203.

Rostam refuses to reveal himself. Indeed, he denies even being a warrior of note. The denial extinguishes the flicker of hope in Sohrāb's heart:

'I boast no station of exalted birth,
No proud pretensions to distinguished worth;
To him inferior, no such powers are mine,
No offspring I of Nirum's glorious line!'
The prompt denial damp't his filial joy,
All hope at once forsook the Warrior-boy.⁷³

They engage. Arrows darken the air; spears, maces, and swords clash without yielding victory. They wrestle until sunset, neither prevailing. According to the custom of single combat, they part for the night.

At dawn, Sohrāb returns, his heart softened by an inexplicable affection. He proposes peace, even friendship, and once more seeks the truth of his opponent's identity:

Sohrab now buckles on his war-attire,
His heart all softness, and his brain all fire;
Around his lips such smiles benignant played,
He seemed to greet a friend, as thus he said:
'Here let us sit together on the plain,
Here social sit, and from the fight refrain;
Ask we from heaven forgiveness of the past,
And bind our souls in friendship that may last;
Ours be the feast—let us be warm and free,
For powerful instinct draws me still to thee;
Fain would my heart in bland affection join,
Then let thy generous ardour equal mine;
And kindly say, with whom I now contend—
What name distinguished boasts my warrior-friend!
Thy name unfit for champion brave to hide
Thy name so long, long-sought, and still denied;
Say, art thou Rustem, whom I burn to know?
Ingenuous say, and cease to be my foe!'⁷⁴

Rostam rejects the plea and rebukes him for delay. The combat resumes. In the struggle, Sohrāb, younger and stronger, seizes his advantage: he lifts Rostam, hurls him to the ground, and, sitting upon his chest, draws his dagger to strike.

In that instant, Rostam resorts to a ruse. "In our custom," he declares, "a contest is not decided until one has been thrown twice."

⁷³ Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," p. 203.

⁷⁴ Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," pp. 208-209.

The inexperienced youth, confident in his strength, believes him and releases his hold:

Sohrab now clasps his hands, and forward springs
 Impatiently, and round the Champion clings;
 Seizes his girdle-belt, with power to tear
 The very earth asunder; in despair
 Rustem, defeated, feels his nerves give way,
 And thundering falls. Sohrab bestrides his prey:
 Grim as the lion, prowling through the wood,
 Upon a wild ass springs, and pants for blood.
 His lifted sword had lopt the gory head,
 But Rustem, quick, with crafty ardour said:
 'One moment, hold! What, are our laws unknown?
 A Chief may fight till he is twice o'erthrown;
 The second fall, his recreant blood is spilt.'
 Proud of his strength, and easily deceived
 The wondering youth the artful tale believed;
 Released his prey, and, wild as wind over wave,
 Neglecting all the prudence of the brave.⁷⁵

On the following day, they return again. Dismounting, they grapple once more. This time, Rostam prevails. Seizing the moment, he strikes—driving his poisoned dagger into Sohrāb's side.

As he lies dying, Sohrāb speaks—not with hatred, but with sorrow—and foretells the vengeance of the father he never knew:

Again, dismounting, each the other viewed
 With sullen glance, and swift the fight renewed;
 Clenched front to front, again they tug and bend,
 Twist their broad limbs as every nerve would rend;
 With rage convulsive Rustem grasps him round;
 Bends his strong back, and hurls him down,
 Like lightening quick he gives the deadly thrust,
 And spurns the Stripling weltering in the dust—
 Thus as his blood that shining steel imbrues,
 Thine too shall flow, when Destiny pursues;
 For when she marks the victim of her power,
 A thousand daggers speed the dying hour.
 Writhing in pain Sohrab in murmurs sighed—
 And thus to Rustem: 'Vaunt not, in thy pride;
 Upon myself this sorrow have I brought,
 Thou but the instrument of fate—which wrought
 My downfall; thou art guiltless—guiltless quite;
 Oh! Had I seen my father in the fight.

⁷⁵ Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," p. 203.

My glorious father! Life will soon be o'er,
 And his great deeds enchant my soul no more!
 Of him my mother gave the mark and sign,
 For him I sought, and what an end is mine!
 My only wish on earth, my constant sigh,
 In vain for thee the deepest glooms of night;
 Couldst thou through Ocean's depths for refuge fly,
 Or midst the star-beams track the upper sky!
 Rustem, with vengeance armed, will reach thee there,
 His soul the prey of anguish and despair.'⁷⁶

These words strike Rostam with dread. A terrible suspicion seizes him. He demands proof:

An icy horror chills the Champion's heart,
 His brain whirls round with agonizing smart;
 O'er his van cheek no gushing sorrows flow,
 Senseless he sinks beneath the weight of woe;
 Relieved at length, with frenzied look he cries;
 'Prove thou art mine, confirm my doubting eyes!
 For I am Rustem!'⁷⁷

In equal horror, Sohrāb urges him to look upon the sign he bears:

'If thou art Rustem, cruel is thy part,
 No warmth paternal seems to fill thy heart;
 Else hast thou known me when, with strong desire,
 I fondly claimed thee for my valiant sire;
 Now from my body strip the shining mail,
 Untie these bands, ere life and feeling fail;
 And on my arm the direful proof behold!
 Thy sacred bracelet of refulgent gold!'⁷⁸

At the sight of the bracelet, truth descends with crushing force. Maddened with grief, Rostam sends Gūdarz to Kaykā'ūs to obtain the king's life-restoring antidote. But Kaykā'ūs—mindful of his own throne and fearful of what a union between father and son might bring—delays. He allows time itself to become the agent of death.

When Gūdarz does not return, Rostam himself hastens to fetch the remedy. Yet when he returns, it is too late. Sohrāb has already passed beyond recall.

In the lament that follows, Rostam speaks of Siyāvosh, the son of Kaykā'ūs, as though the prince were his own—seeking,

⁷⁶ Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," pp. 210-211.

⁷⁷ Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," p. 211.

⁷⁸ Atkinson, "Rustem Slays Sohrab," p. 211.

perhaps, in another's memory, a fragile refuge from the irreparable truth.

The Story of Siyāvosh

The age of renewal begins with the birth and early years of Siyāvosh, and unfolds through the sorrowful course of his exile and martyrdom. His story reveals how princes were reared—how they were instructed in duty, refined in conduct, and bound by covenant; how deeply a son felt the weight of his obligations to both father and Creator; and what it meant, for the first time in Iran's memory, for a prince to live in exile among his nation's enemies.

Siyāvosh, son of Kaykā'ūs and grandson of Kayqubād,⁷⁹ was born to the king of Iran by the daughter of a noble Tūranian lineage—one that traced its roots to both Fereydūn and Garsīvaz, son of Pashang.⁸⁰ She had been discovered by Tūs⁸¹ and Gīv⁸² while they were hunting,⁸³ and their dispute over her possession brought her before the court of Kaykā'ūs. There, the king inquired into her lineage:

He questioned her: "What is thy lineage,
For thou art fairy-like in countenance?"
"I am of high birth on my mother's side,"
She said, "my father sprang from Faridun."⁸⁴
My father's father is prince Garsiwaz,⁸⁵
Whose tents now occupy yon border land."⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Kayqubād is the first Iranian ruler to confront the Tūranian Afrāsiyāb and set him to flight. During his rule, his son, the famed archer Ārash throws the arrow that establishes the Oxus River as the border between Iran and Tūrān.

⁸⁰ Pashang, one of the early kings of Tūrān, was the father of Afrāsiyāb.

⁸¹ Tūs and Gustaham are the sons of King Nawzar. Tūs, a wayward champion, is not endowed with the kingly *farr*. We find him frequently at odds with the royal house and with the house of Gūdarz. The latter is a staunch supporter of Kaykhosrau who wins the kingly glory in a contest against Tūs.

⁸² Gīv, the son of Gūdarz, is one of the most loved heroes of the epic. He is credited with finding and bringing Kaykhosrau from Tūrān to grace the Iranian throne. For a detailed study of the house of Gūdarz and its relation to the Parthian dynasty, see Yarshater, 1983, pp. 457-461.

⁸³ See, A. Ahrarov's "Epic on the Screen," in *Ferdowsī's Shāhnāme: 1000 Years After*, Dushanbe, 1994, pp. 208-217.

⁸⁴ Same as Fereydūn.

⁸⁵ Same as Garsīvaz.

⁸⁶ ME, vol. III, p. 9; Warner, vol. II, p. 195.

The quarrel of the champions was resolved by the king, who granted the maiden to neither. Instead, he placed her within his own harem, where in time she bore him Siyāvosh.

At about seven years of age, the boy was entrusted to Rostam, that he might be trained in chivalry and instructed in the ethics of kingship. Rostam took him to Zābulistān⁸⁷ and raised him as though he were his own son.⁸⁸ There, Siyāvosh learned the arts befitting a prince: riding, archery, and wrestling; but also the subtler refinements—conversation, courtly conduct, and the measured joys of companionship.

When he reached the age of twenty, Siyāvosh returned to the royal court and was assigned his own quarters. For seven years thereafter, Kaykā'ūs honored and tested the young prince, and in time entrusted him with the governorship of Quhistān.⁸⁹ Siyāvosh remained there until the death of his mother, upon which he returned to court to mourn her passing.

Hearing of his return, the women of the harem—his sisters and the wives of the king—petitioned Kaykā'ūs to summon the prince to their chambers. The king consented:⁹⁰

Thy sisters and Sudabah, in affection
A mother to thee, are within the bower.⁹¹

Siyāvosh, sensing unease, asked to be excused, but Kaykā'ūs insisted. When the prince entered the harem, he was greeted by Sūdābeh, his stepmother, who embraced him with a fervor that lingered beyond propriety. Her closeness troubled him:

When Siyawush appeared within the veil
Sudabah hastened to descend the throne,
Advanced with graceful gait, saluted him,

⁸⁷ Zābulistān is located in the southern regions of present-day Afghanistan. It encompassed present-day provinces of Ghazna and Zābul.

⁸⁸ The name Rostam is listed neither among the *Kāvīs* of the *Avestā*, nor among lesser personages like Tūsā and the sons of Vaeska. He might be a figment of Ferdowsī's imagination, a replacement for a *Kāvī* otherwise not mentioned, or a hero of the Sakian tribes immortalized in the Sīstān chronicles. For Sām and his son, Zāl, and the Sakian genesis of the eastern house, see Yarshater, 1983, pp. 453-457. See also Eslami-Nodushan, 1985, pp. 291-389.

⁸⁹ In medieval times, Quhistān, or Kūhistān, referred to a region in the southern part of present-day Khurāsān.

⁹⁰ The story of Siyāvosh also appears in Nizām al-Mulk's *Siyāsatnāme* (Book of Government), where the Wazīr discusses the shortcomings of allowing women of the court to participate in the affairs of State. See Darke, 1962, pp. 242-245. For the role of women in the epic, see Eslami-Nodushan, 1985, pp. 119-128.

⁹¹ ME, vol. III, p. 15; Warner, vol. II, p. 201.

Embraced him long, long kissed his eyes and face,
And wearied not to look at him.⁹²

Like Joseph in form and bearing, Siyāvosh possessed both outward beauty and inner virtue. Sūdābeh, perceiving in him the promise of kingship—and having married Kaykā'ūs for power rather than affection—sought to draw him into her design by offering him her daughter in marriage. The prince refused:

Far better hold my pure heart's funeral rites
Than take a consort from among my foes.
I have been told by famous warriors
Of all the doings of Hamavaran [.]⁹³

Spurned in this, Sūdābeh cast aside all restraint and offered herself to him, believing that by entangling him in a forbidden act she might yet ensnare him:

I stand before thee and I give to thee
Myself and my sweet life. I will fulfil
Whate'er thou asketh me—thy whole desire—
And let my head be taken in thy toils."⁹⁴

But Siyāvosh, bound by his covenant to his father and to the divine order, resisted her advances. Enraged and humiliated, Sūdābeh turned to accusation. She claimed that the prince had sought to violate her:

Then he tried to force me,
And handled me with hands as hard as stones.
I would not grant his wishes. All my hair
He tore and caused these scratches on my face [.]⁹⁵

The prince denied the charges, and Kaykā'ūs found himself caught in doubt and turmoil. Sūdābeh persisted, even presenting a stillborn child as evidence of her claim. Unable to discern truth from deceit, the king brought the matter before the assembly of the *mu'bad*s. They advised that both parties submit to trial by fire.

Sūdābeh refused. Siyāvosh accepted.

On the appointed day, before a towering mass of burning wood, Siyāvosh mounted his horse and rode into the flames. The fire closed around him—and yet, he emerged untouched:

⁹² ME, vol. III, pp. 17-18; Warner, vol. II, p. 203.

⁹³ ME, vol. III, p. 22; Warner, vol. II, p. 207.

⁹⁴ ME, vol. III, p. 22; Warner, vol. II, p. 208.

⁹⁵ ME, vol. III, p. 27; Warner, vol. II, p. 212.

The noble hero nathless⁹⁶ reappeared,
 With rosy cheeks and smiles upon his lips.
 A roar went up as men caught sight of him:
 They cried: "The young Shah cometh from the fire!"⁹⁷

Though vindicated, the prince found no peace. Sūdābeh, wounded in pride, withdrew only to weave further intrigue, making life at court intolerable. Kaykā'ūs, in his lack of discernment, had unwittingly deepened the rift—first by submitting the matter to judgment, and then by subjecting Siyāvosh to the ordeal. Thus emboldened, Sūdābeh continued to torment the innocent prince.

Deliverance came in the form of war. Afrāsiyāb, ruler of Tūrān, threatened to cross the Oxus with a vast army. As Kaykā'ūs prepared his response, Siyāvosh saw in this danger an opportunity to remove himself from the poisoned atmosphere of the court. He volunteered to lead the Iranian forces:

Perchance All-righteous God will set me free
 Both from Sudaba and my sire's distrust [.]⁹⁸

Kaykā'ūs accepted. An army was assembled—twelve thousand strong—drawn from Pahlav, Pārs, Kūch, Balūch, Gīlān, and the plains of Sārūch. Rostam was summoned to stand beside the prince, and accompanied by his champions and five *mu'bad*s, Siyāvosh set forth toward Zābulistān.

After a month's stay there, Siyāvosh and Rostam resumed their march, reinforced by the warriors of Zābulistān, Kābulistān, and India. As they advanced toward the plains of Herāt, other nobles joined their ranks. Siyāvosh appointed Zangeh-ye Shāvarān to command the growing host, while he himself rode onward toward Marvrūd⁹⁹ and Tāliqān¹⁰⁰—into the unfolding destiny that awaited him.

⁹⁶ Nathless is the same as nevertheless.

⁹⁷ ME, vol. III, p. 36; Warner, vol. II, p. 220.

⁹⁸ ME, vol. III, p. 40; Warner, vol. II, p. 225.

⁹⁹ According to the *Hodūd al-Ālam*, Marvrūd was a "pleasant and prosperous town situated at the foot of a mountain. It abounded in fruit, and the river of Merv skirted it (*bar karān*)," p. 105. Marvrūd was also on the highway (*shāhrāh*) that passed Fāriyāb and Shapūrgān (now Shabīrqūn) to Balkh, *Hodūd*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ A survey of the literature on Tāliqān reveals three locations: Tāliqān of Rayy, Tāliqān of Tukhāristān, near Qundūz, and Tāliqān of Khurāsān or, more precisely, of Jūzjānān. This latter seems to be the one meant by Ferdowsī. It was three days journey from Marvrūd in the direction of Balkh. The town fell to Chingiz Khan after a seven-month siege in 617 A.H. and was razed. It was never rebuilt. See Mīr Abul Ghāsemī, 1970, pp. 5-25. See also Le Strange, 1977, pp. 423-32.

At Balkh, Siyāvosh stormed the gates with mighty armies. Despite Garsīvaz's efforts to defend the city, Balkh fell after three days of relentless fighting. Sipahram crossed the Oxus and returned in haste to his king, Afrāsiyāb.

Siyāvosh composed a silken letter to Kaykā'ūs and apprised him of his victories. "In the course of a three-day battle," he wrote, "I conquered Balkh. Sipahram fled to the city of Tirmidh, and Bārmān, like an arrow loosed, vanished from sight."¹⁰¹ He went on to report that the lands south of the Oxus were now his, and requested the king's permission to conclude the war by crossing the river into Sughdia,¹⁰² where Afrāsiyāb held his court and army.

Kaykā'ūs cautioned him against haste. He reminded the prince of Afrāsiyāb's vile cunning: "You have won a battle," the king replied, "but haste may yet lose you the war. Hold your army together. Wait where you are. Let temptation work upon Afrāsiyāb and draw him across the Oxus." Thus Siyāvosh remained upon the southern shore of the river.

Across the Oxus, Afrāsiyāb received word from Garsīvaz that Siyāvosh, Rostam, and a mighty Iranian host had stormed Balkh and taken the city. Their champions, Garsīvaz declared, wielded maces with heads as large as a buffalo's skull, and they seemed fifty for every man he could muster.

This praise of the enemy provoked Afrāsiyāb's anger. He dismissed Garsīvaz from his presence, then ordered a thousand of his lords to transform Sughd into a vision fit for a Chinese dream and prepare a great banquet.

Yet when the feast was done and silence returned, Afrāsiyāb retired to his chamber—and there the weight of the day descended upon him in the form of a dreadful dream. He saw his pavilion stranded in a desert teeming with vipers, while vultures circled above. A violent wind tore away his banner; torrents of blood swept his encampment aside. Thousands of his warriors lay decapitated upon the field. Each Iranian carried a spear tipped with a severed head, another bound to his saddle strap.

Then came a thousand black-robed warriors who seized him, bound his hands, and dragged him before Kaykā'ūs. There, beside the king, stood a very young prince. The boy leapt forward and, with a single stroke, cleft Afrāsiyāb in two.

¹⁰¹ Quotations in the body of the text are the present author's renditions of long passages in the original text. They will not be marked for reference.

¹⁰² The ancient Sughd, more properly Sughdianā, is roughly the same as the northwestern part of present-day Tajikistan. The Sughdians had a great deal of influence on the art and trade of Central Asia.

The terror of the vision wrenched him awake. His cries summoned his courtiers, including Garsīvaz, who gathered at his side.

At Garsīvaz's urging, Afrāsiyāb assembled his *mu'bad*s in secret, swore them to silence, and rewarded them richly before recounting his dream. Trembling, they agreed to interpret it on the condition that he not take offense at what they would reveal. Afrāsiyāb consented.

They declared that the prince in the dream was Siyāvosh, and that if Afrāsiyāb continued the war, Tūrān would be laid waste. Worse still, if he were to kill Siyāvosh, the prince's death would bring about the annihilation of Tūrān itself.

This interpretation struck Afrāsiyāb deeply. Seeking to avert vengeance, he summoned his nobles and champions the following morning. After recounting his former triumphs, he proposed that Tūrān pursue peace. "Two-thirds of the world remain mine," he said. "Why should it not be a tranquil one?"

For our part let us give the world some respite;
Death should not come upon men unawares.
The more part of the world is at my feet:
My court is in Iran and in Turan,
For see how many of the mighty men
Bring heavy tribute to me year by year!
Now if it be your minds I will dispatch
An embassy to Rostam, and forthwith
Knock at the door of peace with Siyawush,
And send him every kind of precious gift.¹⁰³

Thus resolved, Afrāsiyāb remained in Sughd and dispatched a delegation, headed by Garsīvaz, bearing rich gifts and an offer of peace:

I do not set my face against Iran.
All from the bank of the Jihun to Chin
Is mine, my home is Sughd—a realm distinct.
In truth it is through Tur and Valiant Salm
That all the world is thus turned upside down,
And since the innocent Iraj was slain
Our warriors' brains have lost their wits. Iran
Is not divided from Turan, but wars
And feuds prevented friendship. Now I trust
That God will give good days and joyful news.
He raised thee from the country of Iran,
And giveth thee the friendship of the brave.
Let thy fair fortune dower the world with peace,

¹⁰³ ME, vol. III, p. 53; Warner, vol. II, p. 236.

Let war and every evil disappear.
 Now Garsiwaz hath come to add his wits
 To thine, and as the valiant Faridun
 Erst shared the world among his gallant sons,
 So be it now [.]¹⁰⁴

After a day's journey along the Oxus, Garsīvaz reached Balkh, where Siyāvosh received him with royal courtesy. The gifts were presented to the prince and to Rostam, and the terms of peace were laid bare.

Siyāvosh convened his war council. After careful deliberation, they agreed to accept the treaty—provided Afrāsiyāb would offer a token of goodwill.

The prince's conditions were severe: the Tūranian army must withdraw from all previously held Iranian lands along the Oxus, and one hundred of Afrāsiyāb's kinsmen, named by Rostam, must be sent as hostages to Iran.

Afrāsiyāb balked at surrendering his own blood, yet in the end he yielded:

The monarch out of those whom Rostam named
 Selected some five score of his own kin,
 And sent them unto Siyawush, bestowing
 Upon them many gifts and benefits.
 He then bade sound drums and clarions,
 He struck the royal tent, evacuated
 Bukhara, Sughd, and Samarqand, and Chach,
 The land and ivory throne of Sipanjab,
 And led his troops upon the way to Gang
 Without excuses, pretexts, or delays.¹⁰⁵

Elated by so swift a victory, Siyāvosh reciprocated with gifts of equal splendor and sent Rostam to Kaykā'ūs with tidings:

I came to Balkh this jocund spring, rejoicing;
 But when Afrasiyab had news of me
 The sparkling liquor darkened in his cup:
 He saw that he was in a strait; the world
 Was black and fortune fallen. His brother came
 With gifts and many fair slaves richly dight
 To me to seek protection from the Shah.
 Afrasiyab will yield the crown and throne
 Of kings, content with his own realm; observe
 His station; never tread Iran's dark soil;

¹⁰⁴ ME, vol. III, pp. 53-54; Warner, vol. II, p. 237.

¹⁰⁵ ME, vol. III, p. 58; Warner, vol. II, p. 241.

But wash all strife and vengeance from his heart,
And send as hostages a hundred kinsmen.¹⁰⁶

But Kaykā'ūs rejected the treaty outright. He commanded that Afrāsiyāb be slain, rebuking Rostam for being deceived by guile. To Siyāvosh he wrote with cold severity: burn the gifts, behead the hostages, disregard the treaty, and cross the Oxus at once.

Rostam pleaded with the king to reconsider. To break a sworn covenant, he argued, was a stain upon honor and against all the laws of chivalry he had taught the prince. Yet Kaykā'ūs remained unmoved.

He trusted neither Afrāsiyāb nor the peace. "Would Afrāsiyāb value those hostages?" he demanded. "They are to him as water in a stream."

When God had meant that vengeance should be taken
And ills had asked a recompense of ill,
Ye sought to gain a heritage thereby,
And that it was which occupied your hearts.
Afrasiyab hath led your wits astray
By riches plundered from the innocent.
A hundred hapless, misbegotten Turkmans,
Who do not even know their fathers' names!
He will think little of such hostages:
They are to him as water in a stream.¹⁰⁷

At last, Kaykā'ūs ordered Siyāvosh to relinquish command to Tūs and return from Balkh. Siyāvosh refused:

A hundred
Brave cavaliers, the kinsmen of the king,
Such famous men, our friends and innocent!
If I shall now dispatch them to the Shah,
He will not ask or think about their case,
But hang them all alive upon the gibbet.
How shall I justify myself to God?
Ill will befall me through my father's acts;
If I so madly fight Afrasiyab
Without a cause I shall incur God's wrath,
And people will cry shame [.]¹⁰⁸

By defying both father and king, Siyāvosh placed himself in grave peril. His plight was sharpened by his *farr*—the divine wisdom and foresight of kingship. Was it not this very radiance that

¹⁰⁶ ME, vol. III, p. 60; Warner, vol. II, pp. 242-243.

¹⁰⁷ ME, vol. III, pp. 61-62; Warner, vol. II, p. 244.

¹⁰⁸ ME, vol. III, p. 66; Warner, vol. II, p. 248.

had driven Afrāsiyāb to seek peace? What path remained open to him?

If I return

To court, surrendering the host to Tus,
That also will bring evil on my head.
I see ill right and left, and ill in front;
Sudaba too will do me naught but ill,
And I have not an inkling of God's will!¹⁰⁹

The night of decision lay before him, dark as the face of Ahrīman,¹¹⁰ withholding the shape of what was to come. Yet could such darkness conceal the future from one endowed with? In the stillness, Siyāvosh beheld the end of his path—an end that, for all its sorrow, justified the choice now forming within him.

At dawn, he summoned Bahrām and Zange-ye Shāvarān. “I am not at ease at court,” he told them. “Nor can I abide my father’s ambition, which would raise him at the cost of my honor.”

Now if the Shah

Is merely fighting for aggrandizement
He may have war and territory too,
But why such wanton bloodshed, such revenge
Stirred up in others' hearts?

.....

The Shah

would rob me of both worlds, and yield me up
To Ahriman!¹¹¹

“I am bound by a covenant with the Creator,” he continued, “one greater than the will of any king.¹¹² My life has been steeped in trial—what future can promise otherwise?”

Would I had died, or never had been born,
Since I am fated to endure such bale
And taste of every poison in the world;
And yet the tree hath not attained full growth
Whose fruit is venom and the leafage loss!¹¹³

“I see no course but this,” he said at last. “I must defect to the enemy.” He entrusted command to Bahrām until Tūs should

¹⁰⁹ ME, vol. III, p. 66; Warner, vol. II, pp. 248-249.

¹¹⁰ *Ahrīman* is the antagonist of *Yazdān*. He is evil in nature and is determined to destroy all that is good.

¹¹¹ ME, vol. III, p. 67; Warner, vol. II, pp. 249-250.

¹¹² For the significance of covenant as explained in the *Mihr Yasht*, see Gershevitch, 1967, p. 42.

¹¹³ ME, vol. III, p. 68; Warner, vol. II, p. 250.

arrive, instructing him to account for all forces and treasures. The warriors were overcome:

Bahram was sorely troubled when he heard,
While Zanga son of Shawaran wept blood,
And cursed the country of Hamavaran.¹¹⁴

"And you, Zange," the prince added, "shall escort the gifts and hostages back to Afrāsiyāb. Speak for me. Ask that I be granted safe passage through Tūrān—to some place hidden from Kaykā'ūs."

Go tell Afrāsiyāb of what hath chanced.
Say: "Through this peace my lot is one of war:
Thine are the sweets, the pang and poison mine,
Yet will I keep my covenant with thee
Albeit I shall lose the throne of might.
God is my refuge, heaven my covering,
The ground my throne. I rashly disobeyed
And cannot face the Shah. Give me a cistern
Where God appointeth and I may not hear
Aught of the evil nature of my sire,
But find for once a respite from his ire."¹¹⁵

Afrāsiyāb listened closely to this message. He then summoned his commander-in-chief, Pīrān,¹¹⁶ and in private laid before him Siyāvosh's plea. After weighing Kaykā'ūs's designs and the prince's claim to Iran's future, Pīrān advised that Siyāvosh be received into Tūrān.

Dost thou not see that Kai Kaus is old
And must depart? Then Siyawush will take
The wide world, wealth untoiled for, hall and palace;
Thus wilt thou gain both realms, their crown and state:
The man that getteth them is fortunate.¹¹⁷

Convinced of the promise of a great future, Afrāsiyāb invited Siyāvosh to Tūrān and assured him of his own support, as well as that of his people:

For all Turan will do thee reverence,
And I for my part long to have thy love.

¹¹⁴ ME, vol. III, p. 69; Warner, vol. II, p. 250.

¹¹⁵ ME, vol. III, p. 71; Warner, vol. II, p. 252.

¹¹⁶ Pīrān is the wise and intelligent prime minister of Afrasiyab torn between his loyalty to Afrāsiyāb and love for Iran. He helps prince Siyāvosh to settle in Tūrān and Siyāvosh's son, Kaykhosrau to ascend the throne of Iran.

¹¹⁷ ME, vol. III, pp. 73-74; Warner, vol. II, p. 255.

Then thou and I will be as son and sire—
A sire who is a slave before his son.¹¹⁸

Encouraged by Afrāsiyāb's gracious words, Siyāvosh addressed his army, bidding the commanders heed Bahram. He then set forth to meet the envoys who had crossed the Oxus to conduct him and his private host into exile:

At sunset,
When air grew dark and earth ungenial,
The prince, his face obscured by tears, marched forth
Toward Jihun with all his company.
When he had reached Tirmidh, doors, roofs, and streets
Were full of scent and colour like the spring
Up to the gates of Chach: thou wouldst have said:—
"It is a bride with crown and necklaces."
At every stage were carpets laid and viands
Prepared, the whole way to Kachar Bashi,
Where he dismounted and remained a while.¹¹⁹

The Tūranians—especially Pīrān, with his retinue of a thousand noblemen—welcomed the prince:

On hearing: "Siyawush hath crossed the river
With troops to us, his envoy hath arrived,"
Afrasiyab bade all the chief estates
Go forth with kettledrums to welcome him.
Piran chose out one thousand of his kin
To meet the prince with gifts [.]¹²⁰

On the way to Afrāsiyāb's court, Pīrān spoke to the prince of his own devotion to the king and of Siyāvosh's future among them. "Afrāsiyāb," said Pīrān, "is as a father to thee. He loves thee dearly; though the world may judge him otherwise, he is wise, discerning, and God-fearing. I myself am of his kin, and I command here a host of a hundred thousand warriors."

Yet Siyāvosh's heart was elsewhere. The farther they rode into Tūrān, the heavier it grew:

For he recalled the hocktide in Zabol
When it was decked up to Kabulistan,
And he had gone as guest of Rostam there
With all the famous men for company,

¹¹⁸ ME, vol. III, p. 74; Warner, vol. II, p. 255.

¹¹⁹ ME, vol. III, p. 78; Warner, vol. II, p. 258.

¹²⁰ ME, vol. III, p. 78; Warner, vol. II, p. 258.

And how the folk had showered down gold and gems,
And sifted musk and ambergris o'erhead.¹²¹

If Siyāvosh harbored any misgivings, the welcome that Afrāsiyāb gave him dispelled them for a time. The two embraced and kissed, and a deep bond seemed to grow between them:

Afrasiyab gave heart and soul to him,
And could not sleep for thinking.¹²²

Yet inwardly Afrāsiyāb still regarded Siyāvosh as his surest path to dominion over the Kayāniyān lands:

[My son! be ever glad and conquering.]
Thou art a prince, the glory of the throne,
A royal crown and backbone of the host.¹²³

Siyāvosh accepted his fate as an exile in a hostile land. He accompanied the king on hunts and councils, and within a year had won the esteem of the Tūranian host:

Thus while a year went by
They shared all griefs and pleasures equally.¹²⁴

During this time Siyāvosh married Jarīrah, the daughter of Pīrān, and settled into a semblance of peace. A son, Farūd, was born to them. Later, urged by circumstance and by Pīrān's counsel, he also sought the hand of Farangīs, Afrāsiyāb's daughter. This request tested the king's trust:

I know not whether love will take the prince
Back to Iran, or fix all his regards
On us; but why drink poison wittingly?
One must not lightly take a serpent's breath.

.....

Piran replied: "O king! Let not thy heart
Be grieved hereat. Those born to Siyawush
Will be possessed of wits, reserved, and shrewd.
Trust not what readers of the stars may say,
Deal with his case according to thy wisdom,
For from this noble pair a prince will spring,
Whose head will be exalted to the sun
As king both in Iran and in Turan.
Then those two kingdoms will repose from strife [.]”¹²⁵

¹²¹ ME, vol. III, p. 80; Warner, vol. II, p. 260.

¹²² ME, vol. III, p. 84; Warner, vol. II, p. 263.

¹²³ ME, vol. III, p. 85; Warner, vol. II, p. 264.

¹²⁴ ME, vol. III, p. 91; Warner, vol. II, p. 268.

¹²⁵ ME, vol. III, p. 98; Warner, vol. II, pp. 273-274.

With patient counsel, Pīrān persuaded Afrāsiyāb that such a union—joining his house with the seed of Fereydūn and Kaykā'ūs—might one day heal the wounds of war. At length, the king consented, and Pīrān enlisted the aid of his consort, Gulshahr:

Piran dispatched a message to Gulshahr
Like smoke that she should go without delay
To Farangis to take her to the prince.
Thereon Gulshahr told happy Farangis
That she should go that night to Siyawush,
And ornament his palace with a Moon.¹²⁶

When the marriage rites were completed and the festivities had faded into memory, Afrāsiyāb bestowed upon Siyāvosh the governance of Tūrān's eastern provinces, granting him leave to dwell where he pleased. Siyāvosh chose Khotan, the land of Pīrān, and journeyed thither with the old warrior to the city of Gang Dezh:

"The king saith: 'O illustrious chieftain!
I have bestowed upon thee all the realm
From here to Chin: go round and view the lands.
In any city where thou findest ease,
Contentment, and no more to be desired,
Abide in gladness and prosperity;
Stint not thy soul one moment of delight.' "

.....
They went with merriment toward Khutan
With all the famous men escorting them,
Because Pirin, that general favourite,
Was of that state, and Siyawush had promised
To spend a month with him.¹²⁷

In the seclusion of Khotan, however, Siyāvosh turned inward. He weighed the past and the chain of events that had cast him into Tūrān. Guided by the *farr*, he came to a dread conclusion: war between Iran and Tūrān was inevitable, and Afrāsiyāb himself would be his slayer. He confided this vision to Pīrān, foretelling further that, after his death, Afrāsiyāb would be consumed by remorse.

Pīrān would not believe him. Yet within a week a letter arrived. Afrāsiyāb commanded Pīrān, as general of the Tūranian armies, to muster his forces and march to the empire's farthest bounds:

Choose from the warriors
A host and go toward the sea of Chin.

¹²⁶ ME, vol. III, p. 100; Warner, vol. II, p. 276.

¹²⁷ ME, vol. III, p. 74; Warner, vol. II, pp. 277-278.

Thence cross [Makran to India
And continue your march] to the river Sind,
Demand the tribute from the provinces,
And over-run the borders of Khazar.¹²⁸

Siyāvosh's forebodings began to take shape. Gradually Afrāsiyāb grew uneasy at the prince's rising fortune. Seeking clearer knowledge of events in Gang Dezh, he sent his brother Garsīvaz to observe and report.

Garsīvaz, consumed by jealousy—of Siyāvosh, of Farangīs, and of the newborn Farūd—returned with poisoned words, hoping one day to claim Gang Dezh for himself:

Garsiwaz
Said to his brother: "Siyawush, O king!
Hath wholly changed, the envoys of Ka'us
Come often secretly, he correspondeth
With Rum and Chin, and drinketh to his father [.]”¹²⁹

Thus intrigue thickened at court. Made liaison between the two realms, Garsīvaz sowed falsehood on either side, breeding fear and suspicion—most of all in Afrāsiyāb, who already stood in awe of Siyāvosh. Of his visits, he reported:

Now Siyawush showed no regard for me,
Nor even came to meet me on the way,
Would hear no words, would not peruse thy letter,
But set me on my knees below his throne.
He had much correspondence with Iran,
And kept his city's portals shut on us.
What with a host from Rum and one from Chin
There is a constant bruit within the land.
Unless thou actest promptly thou wilt have
Naught left but wind. While thou art hesitating
He will attack thee, and obtain both realms,
For should he lead his army towards Iran
What man would dare come forth to challenge him?¹³⁰

Inflamed by these lies, Afrāsiyāb gathered his host and marched upon Khotan. Hearing of this, Siyāvosh prepared his pregnant wife, Farangīs, for a future without him:

This is the fifth month of thy pregnancy
With our illustrious and growing babe:
This precious Tree of thine will bring forth Fruit,

¹²⁸ ME, vol. III, p. 102; Warner [amended], vol. II, p. 285.

¹²⁹ ME, vol. III, p. 124; Warner, vol. II, pp. 296-297.

¹³⁰ ME, vol. III, p. 137; Warner, vol. II, p. 307.

A glorious monarch; name him Kai Khosrau,
And in thy sorrowing find peace in him [.]¹³¹

He revealed to her his imminent fate and foretold that an Iranian champion would one day come in secret, to bear her and her child across the Oxus to safety. He foresaw, too, the destiny of his unborn son:

And there will come a saviour from Iran,
One with his loins girt up by God's command,
Who will convey thee and thy son in haste
Toward the Jihun. Thy son will have the throne,
And rule o'er fowl and fish. A host will come
For vengeance from Iran and shake the world.

.....
To vindicate mine honour! Battle-shouts
Will rise, and Kai Khusrau will vex the age;
Then Rostam's Rakhsh will trample earth, despising
Turanian folk, and thou wilt see no vengeance
Ta'en for me till the Resurrection-day
Save by the mace and trenchant scimitar.¹³²

At the last, he spoke to his steed, Bihzād, entrusting him to the avenger yet to come:

Long while he whispered in his charger's ear,
And said: "Be prudent, have to do with none.
When to avenge me Kai Khusrau shall come
It is on thee that he must put the bridle,
So now renounce the stable once for all,
For thou shalt carry him to his revenge.
Be thou his charger, trample on the world,
And with thy hoofs sweep foemen from the earth."¹³³

Having thus made his testament, Siyāvosh slew his remaining horses, burned his palaces with all their untold riches, and rode forth upon Bihzād to meet Afrāsiyāb. Upon the field, as his thousand Iranian warriors stood facing the gathered might of Tūrān, he commanded them to refrain from battle. He was seized and brought before Afrāsiyāb, who delivered him into the hands of Gorvy to be slain by the roadside:

Take him
Beside the road, and let him be beheaded
On some bare spot where grasses never grow,

¹³¹ ME, vol. III, p. 141; Warner, vol. II, p. 310.

¹³² ME, vol. III, p. 142; Warner, vol. II, p. 311.

¹³³ ME, vol. III, p. 143; Warner, vol. II, p. 312.

And pour his blood upon the burning earth.
Let there be no delay, and have no fears.¹³⁴

Afrāsiyāb refused to speak of the sin for which Siyāvosh was being condemned. In his mind there lingered only the words of Garsīvaz, dark and insistent as carrion wings over a field of the slain:

The plain is full
Of vultures feeding on Iranian dead,
And if thou fearest vengeance there is cause.
Should Siyawush cry out, earth would appear
All mace and scimitar from Rum to Chin.
Hath he not done thee wrong enough that thou
Shouldst listen weakly to what others say?
The snake's tail thou hast crushed and bruised its head;
Now wilt thou deck its body with brocade?
If thou shalt spare his life I will depart
To some retreat and perish.¹³⁵

Gorvy and Damūr added their voices to that of Garsīvaz, pressing their counsel upon the king, urging him to strike and be done with it—to kill Siyāvosh and secure the realm against all future peril. Yet Afrāsiyāb remained hesitant, his spirit divided against itself. No fault had he witnessed with his own eyes, no treachery proven, and still the shadow of prophecy clung to him like a chill wind:

I have myself beheld no fault in him;
Albeit astrologers declare that ill
Will come to me through him, and if I shed
His blood, revenge will raise dust in Turan
And dim the sun [.]¹³⁶

Then Farangīs came, her voice breaking yet resolute, pleading not as a princess but as a daughter and a wife, standing between doom and the man she loved:

Why hast thou wrapped thy heart up in deceit?
Dost thou not from thy height perceive the abyss?
Take not a monarch's and a guiltless head;
The Judge of sun and moon will disapprove.
When Siyawush departed from Iran
He did thee homage—thee of all the world—
Gave umbrage to the Shah, left treasures, crown,
And throne to make thee his support and shelter.
What hast thou seen in him to make thee quit

¹³⁴ ME, vol. III, p. 146; Warner, vol. II, p. 315.

¹³⁵ ME, vol. III, p. 148; Warner, vol. II, pp. 316-317.

¹³⁶ ME, vol. III, p. 149; Warner, vol. II, p. 317.

The path of right? No man beheadeth kings
 And long retaineth his own sovereignty.
 Wrong not my blameless self too, for the world
 Is fleeting and is full of sobs and sighs.¹³⁷

But her words fell as rain upon stone. Afrāsiyāb's heart, once stirred, closed again under the weight of fear and counsel. He gave the order.

Gorvy was to take Siyāvosh far from the city—beyond the reach of Farangīs' cries, beyond the gaze of the court—to a desolate height among the mountains, where neither pity nor memory might intervene.¹³⁸ And Gorvy obeyed.

When he was past the city and the host
 They bore and dragged him bound upon the plain,
 And then Gurwi received from Garsiwaz
 A blue-steel dagger for the bloody deed.
 He dragged the prince on by the hair afoot
 And when he came to where the mark had stood.

.....

The wind moved low across the barren ground, stirring dust but no living thing. There, where no grass took root and the earth lay cracked beneath a pitiless sky, the deed was done.

Flung to the ground the mighty Elephant,
 And showed no shame or reverence for rank,
 But set a golden basin on the ground,
 Turned up the prince's face as 'twere a sheep's,
 Cut off the silver Cypress' head and filled
 The bowl with blood. Gurwi took up the bowl
 And emptied it where he had been commanded.

And from that blood, poured upon the scorched and silent earth, there sprang in time a single plant—delicate, yet enduring—bearing witness where no voice remained.

From that blood presently there sprang a plant,
 Which I will teach thee how to recognise,
 For it is called "The Blood of Siyawush."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ ME, vol. III, pp. 149-150; Warner, vol. II, p. 318.

¹³⁸ For further study of the life of Siyāvosh, see Eslami-Nodushan, 1985, pp. 173-224.

¹³⁹ ME, vol. III, pp. 152-153; Warner, vol. II, p. 321.

The Story of Kaykhosrau

Upon his ascension to the throne of Iran, Kaykhosrau set his hand to a great work of renewal. With the counsel and aid of nobles and potentates, he restored the cities laid waste by the long assaults of the Tūranian hosts, drove back the haunts of demons by extending cultivation into the barren lands, and rekindled among the people a spirit of trust and goodwill. Before long, Iran began to recover the radiance it had known under Jamshīd and Fereydūn:

[He revived the times of Faridun and Jam
And tired not of dispensing justice,
The world was full of happiness and peace,
The hands of Ahriman were barred from ill [.]¹⁴⁰

Zāl¹⁴¹—son of Sām and grandson of Narīmān¹⁴²—together with his son, Rostam, and the nobles of Kābulistān, came to Iran and were received with honor by Gīv, Gūdarz, and Tūs. At the sight of Rostam—his father's guardian and mentor—Kaykhosrau was overcome, and tears gathered in his eyes. Rostam, in turn, paid homage, bowing low and kissing the ground before the king. Kaykhosrau praised him warmly, calling him the wise and steadfast guide of Siyāvosh:

Paladin!
Live ever glad and happy, for thou art
The foster-sire of Siyawush and likewise
Art of all men most wise and reticent. ¹⁴³

After some days of rest, during which the king received those who had come to declare their allegiance, he set forth upon a hunting expedition and asked Rostam to accompany him:

The monarch of the world went forth to hunt
With Rostam, that illustrious paladin [.]¹⁴⁴

Yet the hunt concealed a deeper purpose. Beneath its outward sport lay the king's intent to survey the marches of Iran and to behold with his own eyes the scars left by war. Passing through desolate tracts and broken towns, he measured the ruin that had befallen the land. Thereafter he commanded that cities fallen into decay be restored, that the dispossessed be compensated, and that life return where desolation had taken root.

¹⁴⁰ ME, vol. IV, p. 9; Warner [amended], vol. III, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ Zāl is Rostam's father. He is brought up by the legendary Sīmurgh and, in austere situations, is aided by the wise bird.

¹⁴² Same as Nairam.

¹⁴³ ME, vol. IV, p. 11; Warner, vol. III, p. 18.

¹⁴⁴ ME, vol. IV, p. 12; Warner, vol. III, p. 19.

In time, his journey brought him to Azerbaijan,¹⁴⁵ where he visited the sacred fire temple of Āzargashasp. There, before the ever-living flame, he bowed in reverence and offered praise to the Creator:

Approached the temple of Azargashasp,
Prayed in that Fane of Fire and praised the Maker.¹⁴⁶

Departing thence, Kaykhosrau went to visit Kaykā'ūs. The two kings, each surrounded by their champions, conferred together on the grievous state of the realm:

[H]ow many paladins
Had died, and how their wives and children suffered,
Thus saying: "Thou beholdest many cities
Waste in Iran, wrecked by Afrasiyab [.]"¹⁴⁷

There Kaykhosrau swore by the sacred Fire that he would not turn from his purpose. No bond of kinship—not even that which tied him to Afrāsiyāb—would stay his hand from avenging the blood of his father.¹⁴⁸ As witness to his resolve, he caused a solemn oath to be inscribed in the Pahlavī tongue and attested by Rostam, Zāl, and the assembled warriors:¹⁴⁹

This they recorded in the olden tongue
With scented ink upon a royal roll,
And Zal and Rostam signed as witnesses,
And likewise all the other mighty men.
The written oath attested in due form
Was put for safety into Rostam's hands.¹⁵⁰

On the eve of his departure, the king returned once more to the fire temple, seeking strength from the Creator:

¹⁴⁵ By the time of Ferdowsī, Central Asia had all but lost its importance as the center of Mazdian and Zoroastrian Iran. By that time, it seems, the western Iranian lands, identified with the Achaemenian and later Sassanian powers, had become increasingly prominent.

¹⁴⁶ ME, vol. IV, p. 13; Warner, vol. III, p. 20

¹⁴⁷ ME, vol. IV, p. 13; Warner, vol. III, p. 21.

¹⁴⁸ It should be noted that *kīn* (vengeance) bred *kīn* and that without vengeance to set a chaotic world right, justice could not rule. To Kaykhosrau, the murder of Siyāvosh represented an impudent infringement of Ahrīman on the most hallowed sanctuaries of his Creator. It represented a violation of his *farr*. It was not unusual, therefore, for him to seek assistance from his co-sufferer, his Maker, in this cosmic duel for restoring the reign of justice.

¹⁴⁹ Note that Ferdowsī does not consider language as a growing and changing part of the culture. He assumes that Pahlavī (i.e., Middle Persian) had been the language of Iran even in pre-Zoroastrian times.

¹⁵⁰ ME, vol. IV, p. 14; Warner, vol. III, p. 22.

O righteous Judge, the only God,
 The World-lord, the Sustainer, and the Guide!
 Thus didst deliver me, a hostless boy,
 Out of the Dragon's breath. Afrasiyab
 Thou knowest reckless, not afraid to injure;
 His curse is on the waste and peopled lands;
 Revenge against him filleth guiltless hearts.
 He hath poured fire upon these goodly coasts,
 Hath sifted o'er the brave the dust of woe,
 Unjustly shed the blood of Siyawush
 Upon the earth, and rent our souls thereby.
 The hearts of kings are filled with dread of him;
 His throne and diadem are this world's bane.
 Thou knowest that he is of evil nature,
 And both a miscreant and sorcerer.¹⁵¹

At last, he addressed the champions of Nīmrūz, Kābulistān, and Iran—those who had pledged themselves to his cause. He spoke not as a distant sovereign but as one who had walked the broken land: "I have traveled from Āzargashasp to this place," he said, "and nowhere have I found a man at ease, nor a field well-tended. The land lies in sorrow. This shall not endure. If your pledge to me be true, it shall be changed."

[T]hen the Shah
 Called all the archimages of the realm,
 And spake to them at large in fitting terms.
 He closed the door of audience for two sennights,¹⁵²
 And had the muster-roll compiled afresh.
 He bade the commissaries to call over
 The names of great and small, and had them written
 In solemn form befitting paladins.
 The kin of Kai Kaus five score and ten—
 Chiefs of the host—came first upon the list [.]¹⁵³

The muster-roll was vast and intricate, revealing the ordered strength of the realm and the varied contributions of its many houses. It displayed the meaning of titles—king of kings, kings, and satraps—woven into a hierarchy both martial and sacred.

The house of Kaykā'ūs furnished a hundred and ten commanders, led by Farīburz. The house of Nawzar, under Zarasp son of Tūs, gave eighty champions; that of Kīshwād, led by Gūdarz, sent seventy-eight warriors of mountain and plain; and the house of Gazhdaham, under Gustaham, contributed sixty-three fighters.

¹⁵¹ ME, vol. IV, p. 15; Warner, vol. III, p. 22.

¹⁵² Seven nights and days, or a week.

¹⁵³ ME, vol. IV, p. 17; Warner, vol. III, p. 24.

Many other houses followed, each bearing its own banner—Gūdarz's, for instance, bearing the Kāviyān standard of the royal line. So great was their number that even the *mu'bad* could not reckon them all:

Apart from these, the lords and paladins,
The princes and the mighty men of worship,
Were more than any archimage could reckon,
So many were the chiefs with Grace and glory!
They wrote upon the monarch's muster-roll
The names of all efficient [.]¹⁵⁴

Yet Kaykhosrau did not hasten at once to war. Instead, he gave a great feast, bestowing wealth and honors upon those who would undertake the coming trials. The greatest prize was the defeat of Palāshān, Afrāsiyāb's commander-in-chief.¹⁵⁵ Bīzhan, son of Gīv, accepted the challenge and vowed to bring back Afrāsiyāb's crown.

As the pledges mounted, Gīv himself undertook to fire a vast stockpile of timber set in the gorge of the Kāsseh Rūd,¹⁵⁶ a barrier meant to hinder any advance into Tūrān. The most perilous charge, however, fell to Gurgīn, who was to bear Kaykhosrau's challenge to Afrāsiyāb and return with his reply:

¹⁵⁴ ME, vol. IV, p. 18; Warner, vol. III, p. 25.

¹⁵⁵ Pīrān, the ever-present commander-in-chief of Tūrān, was in disgrace at the time of Kaykhosrau's preparations to invade Tūrān. Kaykhosrau, it should be mentioned, was the cause of this disgrace because Pīrān had facilitated his flight from Tūrān.

¹⁵⁶ Dehkhodā (and other Persian sources) does not give this river a definite location. He merely identifies it with Tūrān and with the incident in the *Shāhnāme* under discussion here. See Dehkhodā, Letter Kaf, Tehran, 1339.

Le Strange, while he does not mention either Kāsseh Rūd *per se* or relate his discussion to the *Shāhnāme*, discusses a gorge in which the pile of wood to be set ablaze by Gīv might have been: "One march north-west of Tirmidh, on the road to Kīsh and Nakhshab in Sughd, was the town of Hashimjird, a place of some importance in the 4th [10th] century, and two marches north of this the road passed through the famous Iron Gate.

"This defile in the mountains was described by the Chinese traveler, Hwen Thsang, who as a Buddhist pilgrim visited India in AD 629. The Arab geographers speak of a town here, and Ya'qūbī names it the City of the Iron Gate (*Madīnah Bāb-al-Ḥadīd*), of which he also gives the Persian form, Dar-e Āhanīn." See Le Strange, 1977, p. 441.

Tirmidh is on the Āmū Daryā. The gorge, therefore, is three marches, north-northwest of Tirmidh. What other river than the Jeyhūn or the Āmū can Kāsseh Rūd be? Le Strange further observes that "with the Arabs, rivers were very commonly named from the great cities on their banks; hence the Āmū Daryā, the River of Āmū, also was often called the Balkh River, although that city stands some miles distant from its southern bank."

For Kāsseh Rūd's relation to Kath, see Dehkhodā, Letter Kaf.

“This is a present meet for one
 Whose wisdom is the king of his pure mind—
 A daring, prudent man and eloquent,
 Who turneth not from lions in the fight—
 If he will carry to Afrasiyab
 A message, weeping not for dread of him,
 And will convey his answer back to me.
 Who of this noble company will dare?”
 Gurgin son of Milad held forth his hand,
 And gat him ready for that enterprise.¹⁵⁷

When all tasks had been assigned and rewards bestowed, the king spoke further with Rostam concerning the lands under Tūranian sway, especially those bordering Zābulistān:

Illustrious, glorious Shah!
 There is a district in Zabulistan,
 That formed a portion of the realm of Tur
 Till Minuchihr drove all the Turkmans out.
 It is a goodly and a glorious land;
 But when Kaus grew hoar and spiritless,
 When fame, the Grace, and prowess quitted him,
 Turanians seized it and Iranians ceased
 Therein. The folk now carry to Turan
 Both toll and tribute, heeding not the Shah.
 The march is full of elephants and treasure.
 The innocent are troubled by this folk
 With constant pillage, massacre, and raid,
 And all the insolency of Turan.
 Now that the kingship of Iran is thine,
 Thine from the ant's foot to the lion's claw,
 'Twere well to send a valiant paladin,
 And mighty host, to make this people bring
 Their tribute to the Shah and look to him.
 This region ours we can defeat Turan.¹⁵⁸

The land, rich in elephants and precious stones, lay ready to be reclaimed, and its people chafed under foreign rule. Rostam urged its liberation as a blow against Tūrān's dominion. Kaykhosrau, perceiving the wisdom of this counsel, proposed that since the region bordered Zābulistān, an army might be sent under the command of Farāmarz, Rostam's son, to subdue it.

Rostam agreed, and thus the design was set in motion.

¹⁵⁷ ME, vol. IV, pp. 22-23; Warner, vol. III, p. 29.

¹⁵⁸ ME, vol. IV, p. 23; Warner, vol. III, pp. 30-31.

Tūs Invades Tūrān

Equipped and ready for battle, the great army presented itself before the king. The king appointed Tūs, kinsman of Nawzar, as commander-in-chief. He enjoined the lower ranks to obey Tūs without question, and he cautioned the aged warrior not to forsake his loyalty to his sovereign, to observe the law of the Creator, and to extend his protection to the farmer, the craftsman, and the merchant alike. Finally, he made it clear that the army must not pass by way of Kalāt, the seat of Siyāvosh's other son, Farūd:¹⁵⁹

Thou shalt on no account pass by Kalat,
For, if thou dost, things will go hard with thee.
To Siyawush (his soul be as the sun,
His place all hopeful in the other world!)
The daughter of Piran once bare a child
But little shown in public by his sire.
He is my brother and resembleth me.
He is a youth of mine own age, high-fortuned,
And liveth with his mother at Kalat;
A world-lord he who hath the Grace and troops.
He knoweth no Iranian e'en by name,
And from that quarter thou must turn thy bridle,
For he hath troops and famous men of war
Upon a mountain steep and hard to reach [.]¹⁶⁰

Tus accepted the king's command, saying:

In thy counsels is success,
By that way which thou biddest will I go,
For good alone must come of thy behest.¹⁶¹

Tūs' army came at length to a fork in the road: one path led into a waterless desert, the other—by way of Charam—offered pasture and provisions at Mayam. Against Kaykhosrau's explicit command, Tūs chose the latter road. Gudarz reminded him of the shah's injunction—that the army should take the desert road and avoid Kalāt—but Tūs paid him no heed. The chiefs, following their general, turned the host toward Charam.

When news of the approaching army reached Farūd, he gathered his horses and livestock within his fortress and barred the

¹⁵⁹ For the life story of Farūd and his relation to Pīrān, see Eslami-Nodushan, 1985, pp. 224-249.

¹⁶⁰ ME, vol. IV, p. 34; Warner, vol. III, pp. 39-40.

¹⁶¹ ME, vol. IV, p. 35; Warner, vol. III, p. 40.

gates.¹⁶² Then, at the counsel of his mother, Jarīrah, he rode with Takhār to the crest of the mountain, that he might survey the army, discern its champions, and make himself known to them.

While Takhār pointed out the Iranian commanders to Farūd, Tūs, from the foot of the mountain, espied the two figures upon the height. He called for a volunteer to ascend and discover who they were:

We need an enterprising cavalier
To hasten to the mountain-top to learn
Who these two warriors are and wherefore there.
If they be ours let him bestow on them
Two hundred lashes on their heads, if foes
Bind them and drag them hither faces downward [.]¹⁶³

Bahrām, of the house of Gūdarz, offered himself for the task. Reaching the summit, he demanded that the two declare themselves. Farūd revealed his lineage—son of Siyāvosh and brother to the king—and, showing the mark of his royal birth, expressed his desire to meet Bahrām and the other Iranian chiefs, that he might bestow gifts upon them.

“It is my wish,” Farūd said further, “to ride with the army of Iran and partake in avenging my father’s death.”

Bahrām, in turn, declared his own name and paid homage to the prince. Yet he hesitated, mindful of the troubled state of Iran and the temperament of Tūs:

¹⁶² The site of this fortress is variously identified with Kalāt-e Nāderī, about thirty miles north of Meshed and with Kalāt-e Ghilzāi in southeastern Afghanistan. Neither of these locations fits Ferdowsī’s description. The former is the impregnable fortress that gave Alexander his share of difficulty (see, Engles, 1978, p. 88) and which Curzon considers “one of the most extraordinary natural phenomena in the world, and famous even in this land of mountain fastness and impregnable defiles for its inaccessibility and amazing natural strength” (Curzon, 1966, p. 113). This fortress, however, is not located on Sepīd Kūh, the mountainous region southwest of Afghan Turkistan. Kalāt-e Ghilzāi is too far from Kāsseh Rūd and leads to the Punjāb rather than to the Oxus and Sughd. This author believes that since Farūd’s fortification is not regarded a major fort—the Iranian army did not have a hard time capturing it—it is a *qal’a* somewhere on the Sepīd Kūh between the fork beyond Herāt where the traveler has to decide whether to cross the mountainous region of Afghan Turkistān to reach the Āmū or enter the Qara Qūm desert. Tūs chooses the former. That he chooses this route in spite of his knowledge that it crosses many hills and dales further strengthens the argument that he took his army through northern Afghanistan in the direction of the Āmū.

See also M. Aurel Stein, 1907; 1975, p. 37, where he attributes Tāshqurqān to Afrāsiyāb. This stone tower is likely to have been the site of Farūd’s castle, especially if Tūs crossed the Oxus east of Tirmidh. Furthermore, the area described above has often been in Tūranian hands while the other two locations have usually been in Iranian and other hands.

¹⁶³ ME, vol. IV, pp.43-44; Warner, vol. III, p. 46.

O prince young and accomplished,
 And valiant cavalier! I will report
 Thy words to Tus, and kiss his hand while urging
 Compliance. Still our chieftain is not wise,
 His head and brains brook not good counselling.
 He is accomplished, rich, and nobly born,
 But nameth not the Shah. When Giv brought home
 That glorious one, Tus was provoked with him,
 Gudarz and Giv, supported Fariburz,
 And said: "I am descended from Naudar:
 The kingship of the world is rightly mine."
 He very well may disregard my words,
 And in his anger quarrel with myself [.]¹⁶⁴

When their meeting drew to a close, Bahrām offered the prince a final warning: if Tūs should send any man other than himself, it would be a sign of hostile intent. In that event, Farūd must withdraw to his stronghold and prepare for siege.

Returning to the Iranian camp, Bahrām reported all: the identity of the youth, his royal descent, and his wish to join the campaign. Tūs, however, was seized with anger and rebuked Bahrām sharply:

My words to thee were: "Bring the man to me,
 Ask him no questions." If he be a king
 Who then am I, and wherefore am I here
 With this array? A man of Turkman race,
 Like some black raven on the mountain there,
 Is hindering the progress of the troops!
 Among the froward¹⁶⁵ offsprings of Gudarz
 I can see naught but mischief to the host [.]¹⁶⁶

Thus, discrediting Bahrām—attributing his loyalty to vanity and pride—Tūs called for another to ascend the height and strike down the bold "Turk." Rīv, his son-in-law, accepted the charge.

On the mountain, Farūd sought first to turn him back, shooting at his horse; but Rīv pressed on foot. Then Farūd loosed a single arrow and slew him. Tūs next sent Zarasp, his own son and Rīv's brother-in-law. He too fell by Farūd's hand.

Seeing his warriors struck down, Tūs himself mounted and rode toward the peak. Takhār urged Farūd to withdraw: "My prince, thou canst not match the might of Tūs. Let us return to the fortress and make ready our defense." But Farūd would not retreat. At last,

¹⁶⁴ ME, vol. IV, p. 47; Warner, vol. III, p. 50.

¹⁶⁵ Froward means moving or facing away from something or someone.

¹⁶⁶ ME, vol. IV, p. 48; Warner, vol. III, p. 51.

Takhār pleaded, "If thou wilt not withdraw, then strike his horse. Princes seldom fight on foot."

Farūd heeded the counsel and brought down Tūs' steed. The loss halted the general's advance; disordered and humiliated, Tūs turned back to his army.

Then Gīv took up the challenge. Takhār, beholding him, spoke in awe:

"It is the raging Dragon,
Whose sneezing make birds topple from the air,
Who put Piran thy grandsire's hands in bonds,
And brake two Turkman hosts! He hath unfathered
Full many a little child. His foot hath been
On many a river, mount, and wilderness.
Full many a father too hath he unsonned,
And treadeth underfoot the lion's neck.
'Twas he that bare thy brother to Iran,
And crossed Jihun although he saw no boat.
They call him Giv—a very Elephant
Or river Nile upon the day of battle [.]"¹⁶⁷

Yet Farūd treated Gīv as he had the others, forcing him to withdraw in frustration and return to the camp—an outcome bitter to bear, for there he faced not only his fellow warriors but also his son, Bīzhan. Inflamed by shame and oath, Bīzhan resolved to face the youth himself:

For I have sworn a great oath by the moon,
The world's Judge, and the Shah's own diadem,
That if I am not slain I will not ride
Back from the mountain but avenge Zarasp."¹⁶⁸

Recognizing Bīzhan's ferocity, Farūd at last withdrew toward the fortress. Bīzhan pursued him closely. Before Farūd could reach the gate, Bīzhan struck down his horse, wounded his back, and crippled his arm.

Farūd ordered his men to hold fast within the walls and bar the gates securely.

Bīzhan's exploit opened the pass to the Iranian army. Tūs, burning with grief and fury at the loss of Zarasp, swore vengeance:

I will send up this hold's dust to the sun.
To avenge beloved Zarasp the cavalier
I will attack without delay, will make

¹⁶⁷ ME, vol. IV, p. 56; Warner, vol. III, p. 58.

¹⁶⁸ ME, vol. IV, p. 58; Warner, vol. III, p. 60.

This Turkman wretch a corpse, and with his gore
Engrain the stones like coral to the core.¹⁶⁹

That night, Jarīrah, mother of Farūd, beheld a dreadful dream. A blaze rose up and consumed the whole of Sepīd Kūh—the White Mountain—engulfing fortress and people alike. Awakening in terror, she went to the window of her chamber and looked out upon the mountain and the surrounding plain. Everywhere she beheld the encircling host of Iran.

Her heart sank within her. She knew the end had come—that her wounded son and his defenders could not withstand so vast an army. And so, taking matters into her own hands, she resolved that none of the wealth of the fortress should fall into the grasp of the invaders.

To carry out this grim resolve, she slew and mutilated all the Arabian horses in the stables, so that none might fall into enemy hands, and set the fortress ablaze. When this was done, she went to the chamber of her mortally wounded son and, while he slept, struck him down. Then, having extinguished the last bond that held her to the world, she took her own life.

Three days after the fall of Farūd's fortress upon Sepīd Kūh, the Iranian army resumed its march toward Tūrān. Along the road they slew every Tūranian they encountered, leaving their bodies unburied as a warning to those who might oppose them. At length they reached the Oxus—Kāsseh Rūd—its waters running cold and swollen beneath a leaden sky.

On the Tūranian side, Afrāsiyāb reinstated Pīrān as commander-in-chief and commanded him to gather forces from every quarter of Tūrān with all haste. For the Iranians, at that very time, were hindered by a merciless snowstorm that descended upon them without warning.

The cold confounded the army; the weight of the snow broke their spirit. Bahrām, beholding the suffering of the host, declared that this storm was none other than the wrath of the Creator, visited upon them for the death of Farūd:

A tempest rose and none took thought of fight;
A dense cloud came like flying dust, their lips
Congealed with cold, the tents and camp-enclosures
Were turned to ice, snow carpeted the mountains,
And for a sennight's space earth disappeared.
There was but little food or rest or sleep:
Thou wouldst have said: "Earth's face is turned to stone."
They slew and ate their horses. Multitudes
Of men and cattle perished. None at last

¹⁶⁹ ME, vol. IV, p. 61; Warner, vol. III, p. 62.

Possessed a charger. When the eighth day came
 The sun prevailed, the earth was like a sea,
 The troops were mustered, and Tus spake of fight[.]¹⁷⁰

On the eighth day, Tūs assembled what remained of his warriors. He called upon Giv to fulfill the charge for which he had been richly rewarded by the king: to cross beyond Kāsseh Rūd and set fire to the great barrier of timber the Tūranians had raised in a narrow gorge, thus blocking the Iranian advance. Though Bīzhan offered to undertake the task, the aged Giv rode forth himself and kindled the blaze.

For three weeks the barrier burned, a wall of flame and smoke. In the fourth week, when the embers had died and the path lay open, the Iranian host pressed onward toward Garūgard, sending out detachments to scour the land.

Garūgard was held by Tazhāv, an Iranian who had turned traitor and taken service with Tūrān. He ruled the lands north of the Oxus—the grazing grounds of Afrāsiyāb's herds.

Tazhāv dispatched Afrāsiyāb's shepherd, Kabūdah, to observe the strength of the Iranian army and return with tidings. But Kabūdah did not return. Uneasy, Tazhāv resolved to reconnoiter the enemy camp himself. When he approached with his small retinue, the Iranians mocked him:

If thou art marchlord and king's son-in-law
 How is it that thou hast not mightier powers?¹⁷¹

Gīv urged him to abandon Afrāsiyāb and seek pardon from Tūs, but Tazhāv would not renounce his allegiance. Instead, he fled, taking with him his slave girl, Spanvī. Yet when the weight of her slowed his flight, he abandoned her upon the road and rode on alone toward Afrāsiyāb:

Then Ispanwi alighted from the steed:
 Tazhav's face was all tears at losing her,
 Yet sped he on to reach Afrasiyab,
 And all the while Bizhan was in pursuit,
 Who when he spied the moon-faced Spanwi,
 Her musky hair descending to her feet,
 Came to her, took her with all gentleness,
 Made room for her behind him, and returned
 Toward the army of the paladin.¹⁷²

When Tazhāv came before Afrāsiyāb and recounted what he had seen, the king rebuked Pīrān for his delay in raising an army. He

¹⁷⁰ ME, vol. IV, p. 72; Warner, vol. III, pp. 71-72.

¹⁷¹ ME, vol. IV, p. 76; Warner, vol. III, p. 75.

¹⁷² ME, vol. IV, p. 79-80; Warner, vol. III, p. 78

commanded him to cease all hesitation, gather the border forces, and meet Tūs in battle without delay.

Pīrān obeyed, mustering a great host. To gain advantage, he resolved to take an unfrequented path, striking the enemy unawares:

Piran commanded: "Quit the accustomed route,
Take the short road; the foeman must not hear
Of these my noble and illustrious troops,
So may I bring this great host like a mountain
Down unawares upon yon army's head."¹⁷³

This stratagem was founded upon Tazhāv's report—that the Iranians, lulled by ease and given to feasting, did not expect an attack. The judgment proved true. When battle was joined, the Iranian ranks were broken and many warriors slain:

The more part of the Iranian troops were slain,
The rest had come back wounded [.]¹⁷⁴

This fresh disaster cast grave doubt upon Tūs' fitness to command. The Iranian chiefs demanded his removal and sent a messenger to Kaykhosrau, recounting both the death of Farūd and the defeat at the hands of Afrāsiyāb.

The king was filled with wrath. Summoning his scribe, he dictated a letter to Farīborz, stripping Tūs of command and appointing the prince in his stead.

When Tūs returned to court, his humiliation was made complete. Before the assembled nobles, Kaykhosrau declared him unworthy of royal service and banished him to his estate, there to pass the remainder of his days in obscurity.

Upon assuming command, Prince Farīborz sent Ruhhām to Pīrān with both message and reproach:

Now night-attacks are not the wont of heroes
And mighty men that brandish massive maces.
If thou wilt cease from arms we too will cease;
If thou preferrest war then we will fight [.]¹⁷⁵

Ruhhām was received with honor. Pīrān, having heard the message, replied that it was Iran—not Tūrān—that had first kindled the flame of war. Yet he acknowledged the difficult position in which Tūs' rashness had placed the Iranian host. Therefore, he offered a respite of one month, that Farīborz might choose between peace and continued war:

¹⁷³ ME, vol. IV, p. 82; Warner, vol. III, p. 80.

¹⁷⁴ ME, vol. IV, p. 86; Warner, vol. III, p. 83.

¹⁷⁵ ME, vol. IV, p. 91; Warner, vol. III, pp. 87-88.

If ye will use the month that we accord
 In marching from the frontiers of Turan,
 And in a swift retreat to your own borders,
 Ye will behold your reputation saved;
 But if not we will close with you in fight;
 Ask not for any armistice henceforth.¹⁷⁶

Farīborz chose war. The armies clashed in a series of fierce engagements. In the decisive battle, the Tūranians surrounded Farīborz himself—the pillar of the Iranian host—and slew Rīv, son of Kaykā'ūs. Only the daring of Bahrām spared Iran a deeper disgrace:

Yet Bahram the warrior
 Charged lion-like the foe and carried off
 The crown upon his spear-point, while both hosts
 stood wondering[.]¹⁷⁷

By day's end, the Iranian army had been grievously diminished and was forced into retreat. The Tūranians, freed from peril, returned to their camp in triumph:

The Turkman cavaliers, with joyful hearts
 Released from travail and anxiety,
 Returned to their own camp with haughty mien [.]¹⁷⁸

To celebrate the victory, Afrāsiyāb summoned Pīrān to his capital and feasted him and his warriors for two weeks. He then bestowed upon him treasures from his own hoard and counseled vigilance.

"The Iranians," he warned, "may withdraw, but they are not defeated. Kaykhosrau is rich in treasure and swift to sway the hearts of men. Set spies upon their borders, that we may know their designs."

Pīrān listened with care. When the king had finished, he and his champions departed for China, seeking aid from the East against the ever-returning threat from the West.

Kāmūs the Kūshān

The defeat of the Iranians in Tūrān drew Rostam, Iran's national champion, into the war. At the opening of the Story of Kāmūs the Kūshān, Ferdowsī raises his voice in praise of Rostam:

¹⁷⁶ ME, vol. IV, pp. 92-93; Warner, vol. III, pp. 88-89.

¹⁷⁷ ME, vol. IV, pp. 99-100; Warner, vol. III, p. 94.

¹⁶⁴ ME, vol. IV, p. 101; Warner, vol. III, p. 95.

Of Rostam's wondrous deeds there is no scant,
 His legend in the hearts of all is rife;
 A crocodile in water, elephant
 On land, wise, shrewd of heart, a man of strife,
 Consummate both in war and valiancy,
 A man of knowledge, wit, and weight was he.¹⁷⁹

Ferdowsī then turns to the mood of the defeated host as it made its way back toward Iran. As they approached Kalāt, their hearts grew heavy with remembrance. Each man pondered what had transpired there not long before—how they might now stand before a king whose brother they had slain, and whose vengeance for his father's death they had so grievously compromised.

When they reached the court, the king refused them audience. Yet in the solitude of his chamber he laid the burden of the calamity upon the will of *Yazdān*. "Had it not been Thy decree," he cried, "I would have raised a thousand gibbets and set the chiefs upon them":

I should command to set
 A thousand stakes forthwith upon the open,
 And Tus and all that carried arms with him
 Should be impaled. I mourned my father's death,
 My heart was filled with sorrow, pain, and trouble,
 And now there is new vengeance for Farud,
 For I must needs smite off the head of Tus.
 I said: 'Avoid Kalat, avoid Charam,
 Though people should shower drachms upon thy head,
 Because Farud is with his mother there.
 He is a hero of the Kaian race—
 A warrior.' Should he know vile Tus or why
 The army marched? Of course he would attack,
 And from the mountain slaughter many chiefs.
 Why did inhuman and insensate Tus
 March in such haste against that hold?¹⁸⁰

Yet the king's anger did not rest wholly upon Tūs. Turning inward, Kaykhosrau reproached himself. Why had he entrusted such power to Tūs? Why had he armed him so richly, only to set him upon a path that led to the death of his own brother? Like Siyāvosh before him, Farūd had fallen victim to the cruel weaving of fate. In his grief, the king declared that Tūs had merely served the designs of Ahriman:

¹⁷⁹ ME, vol. IV, p. 116; Warner, vol. III, pp. 110-111.

¹⁸⁰ ME, vol. IV, p. 117; Warner, vol. III, pp. 111-112.

None know I worse than Tus, and he is ripe
 For chain and pit. Brainless and veinless too
 The wretch is as a dog to me.¹⁸¹

The champions, hearing of the king's wrath, were cast into deep dismay. They shared his sorrow, yet they could not bear his refusal to admit them. Troubled and ashamed, they turned to Rostam, seeking his intercession. They pleaded that all had come to pass by divine decree, and that none among them had wished to raise a hand against Farūd:

God willed it so!
 Who wished to fight Farud? ¹⁸²

They spoke also in defense of Tūs, saying that the loss of both son and son-in-law in a single day had driven him beyond reason.

Rostam agreed to mediate. That evening he came to the court, kissed the threshold, and stood before the king. With measured words, he laid out the champions' case, adding from his own experience that no grief cuts deeper than the loss of a son.¹⁸³

The king received Rostam with honor and listened well to his counsel. Then he permitted Tūs to enter. Tūs approached humbly, kissed the threshold, and first paid homage to Rostam before turning to the king. He praised him with fervor and confessed his fault.

Kaykhosrau accepted the apology, yet he would not allow the full weight of the disaster to be forgotten:

O'er the Turanians' waste the Iranians' hands
 And feet and trunks lie scattered!¹⁸⁴

"The fire of vengeance that drove us into Tūrān," the king said, addressing his champions, "has not been quenched. How shall we endure the shame of such a defeat?"

One by one, the champions came forward, renewed their allegiance, and swore to fight to the bitter end. The king, in turn, honored his paladins, praising especially Gīv:

Khusrau then summoned Giv and seated him
 Upon the throne of greatness, praised him much,
 Bestowing many a gift and mark of favour,

¹⁸¹ ME, vol. IV, p. 117; Warner, vol. III, p. 112.

¹⁸² ME, vol. IV, p. 118; Warner, vol. III, p. 112.

¹⁸³ Rostam's son, Sohrāb, was killed at Rostam's own hand due to political intrigue and mistaken identity. Rostam never forgave himself for not recognizing Sohrāb until it was too late to save the mortally wounded youth.

¹⁸⁴ ME, vol. IV, p. 121; Warner, vol. III, p. 115.

And said: "Thou seekest toil on mine account,
But sharest not my treasures [.]¹⁸⁵

The king observed that Tūs had erred in acting alone. In matters so grave as the march upon Kalāt, the clash with Farūd, and the confrontation with Tūrān, he should have sought the counsel of seasoned warriors like Giv.

Yet, in the end, Kaykhosrau restored to Tūs the command of the army and charged him once more with leading the host into Tūrān. In this way, the king decreed, Tūs might redeem his honor and fulfill the task for which he had first been appointed: the avenging of Siyāvosh.

Soon thereafter, Tūs assembled a vast army and marched once more toward Tūrān, meeting the enemy at the Shahd River, in the shadowed reaches of the Pamirs.¹⁸⁶

Upon reaching Shahd, Pīrān sent a swift messenger to Tūs, seeking to win him over with words of conciliation. Tūs, however, mistook this courtesy for a sign of weakness—or even a hint of defection—and urged Pīrān to abandon Afrāsiyāb:

If thou speak'st sooth we have no quarrel.
Drop fealty, abandon thy surroundings,
And bar this door of fear and road of loss.
Go to the Shah alone, he will requite thee,
Give thee a royal crown and paladinship.
When he recalleth thy good deeds thy pangs
Will pain him to the heart.¹⁸⁷

But Pīrān, far from wavering, sent another messenger—this time to Afrāsiyāb—reporting how he had deceived the Iranian commander with feigned goodwill and urging the king to prepare a great host:

Choose a warrior-host
Or else the war will be inglorious.
We may uproot the foe and fire their land,
Else in their vengeance for prince Siyawush
The Iranian army ne'er will rest from strife.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ ME, vol. IV, p. 121; Warner, vol. III, p. 116.

¹⁸⁶ According to Dehkhodā, Shahd is the name of a mountain in eastern Iran, located between Kashmir, China, and the Indus River. It is also the name of a river that takes source at that range. See Dehkhodā, Letter Shin. The location of the Shahd River is of particular importance here because a major battle, the Hamāvan, occurs in the vicinity of this river. We shall return to a discussion of this region later.

¹⁸⁷ ME, vol. IV, p. 123; Warner, vol. III, p. 117.

¹⁸⁸ ME, vol. IV, p. 124; Warner, vol. III, p. 118.

The contest between Iran and Tūrān was then joined in earnest. It began with single combat between Tūs and Arzhang; when Arzhang fell, Hūmān, brother of Pīrān, rode forth to challenge Tūs:

Tus too advanced; earth rang with clarion-blare.
 "And so from luckless Wisa," he exclaimed,
 "A miserable Tree like this up-springeth!
 Hast thou indeed come forth to fight since thou
 Hast come forth mounted and with spear in hand?
 By the Shah's life and head I would oppose thee
 Without my breastplate, mace, and Ruman casque,
 Just like a pard that clutcheth at its pray
 Among the mountains [."]¹⁸⁹

Hūmān rebuked Tūs, reminding him of his duty as commander. Why should the leader of the host risk himself in single combat? Let younger warriors—those who sought renown—come forth: Bīzhan, or Gīv of the noble house of Āzādegān. What would become of the army if its chief were to fall?

Yet neither reproach nor flattery could turn Tūs from his purpose. Not even when Hūmān likened him to the greatest of heroes—Zāl and Rostam—did he yield. Instead, Tūs sought to sway Pīrān's brothers, hoping to draw them away from the struggle and perhaps bring the war itself to an end:

The Shah directed:—
 "Harm not Piran. He is my foster-sire,
 Experienced, and my friend. Strive not with him
 Unjustly, wantonly, and see that he
 Hear thine advice."¹⁹⁰

Since the outcome of such encounters almost always meant death for one of the combatants, they would often linger—at times excessively—seeking to dissuade one another from combat. As in this instance, other paladins entered the field, urging them to abandon words and take up arms. Yet even these mediators, drawn into the gravity of the moment, would themselves prolong the exchange, adding further argument to the delay:

If Tus slay me
 Men still will use the mace and kettledrum.
 Piran is living and Afrasiyab,
 Who will avenge me promptly, but if Tus
 Shall perish by my hand none of his troops

¹⁸⁹ ME, vol. IV, p. 127; Warner, vol. III, pp. 120-121.

¹⁹⁰ ME, vol. IV, p. 193; Warner, vol. III, p. 122.

Will reach Iran. Bewail thy brothers' pangs,
Why railest thou at Tus son of Naudar?¹⁹¹

Tūs, however, would not yield, and the combat endured throughout the day. When night fell and neither had prevailed, the two withdrew, agreeing to return at dawn and bring the matter to its end.

That night, Pīrān sought out Bāzūr, a man skilled in hidden arts and the lore of enchantment. "At daybreak," he said, "I shall fall upon the Iranian host and settle this account. Ascend the mountain, and when our troops engage, summon a storm of snow upon them."

With the coming of morning, before Tūs and Hūmān could renew their duel, the Iranian army was seized by a bitter and unnatural cold. The frost bit so deeply that men could scarcely grasp their weapons.¹⁹² As they struggled against the invisible assault, Tūranian forces descended upon them, cutting down as many as they could.

Tūs, seeing his army harried and encircled, commanded his captains to rally what remained and withdraw toward the mountain heights, where the ground might favor their defense against the enemy's greater numbers:

"I purposed when I sent the cavalier
To carry news of us before the battle,
That Kai Khusrau should send the son of Zal
To lead the reinforcements to the field."
He loaded up and, thinking of the slain
With anguish, called his men to horse again.¹⁹³

When the host reached the fastness of Mount Hāmāvarān, Tūs ordered Gīv to place the men who had found brief respite under Bīzhan's command, while he himself led the remainder into the higher ground.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ ME, vol. IV, p. 130; Warner, vol. III, p. 123.

¹⁹² Black magic, *devs*, and dragons were a favorite of Iranian audiences in the past. Ferdowsī, however, unlike those who succeeded him in epic composition, used such devices sparingly. Here, apparently, the chronicles dictated that the Iranian army must lose again. Ferdowsī assures his reader that the loss has not been due to a lack of human effort on the side of his compatriots. For discussion of magic and the role of the *devs* in the epic, see Yarshater, 1983, p. 349.

¹⁹³ ME, vol. IV, p. 143; Warner, vol. III, p. 123.

¹⁹⁴ In spite of its importance for understanding Ferdowsī's epic, the name Hāmāvan has received little attention. Dehkhodā, following *Burhān-i Qāti*, provides the following: a mountain in Iran and, following *Anjuman Ārā*, gives the following: a famous mountain from the Khurāsān range where a major battle between Tūs and the sons of the commander-in-chief of the Tūranian army resulted in Tūs' defeat. See Dehkhodā, Letter Heh.

Tūs first expedition failed because he had to cross the Āmū and because he was marching directly on Sughd, Afrāsiyāb's domain. On this expedition,

Meanwhile, Pīrān dispatched scouts to learn the state of the Iranian forces. They returned with news that the army had fled, leaving behind its baggage upon the plain. Pīrān then took counsel with his chiefs. Many urged immediate pursuit and destruction of the foe, seizing the moment of weakness.

But Pīrān counseled restraint. It would be wiser, he argued, to await the arrival of Afrāsiyāb's greater host, and then strike with overwhelming force:

Piran replied: "In war the foot of haste
Is feebler than delay's. A sea-like host
Is gathering before Afrasiyab;
Let us delay till that great power with all
Its warriors and fighting-men shall come;
Then will we leave none living in Iran:
Such is the counsel of the wise. Enough [."]¹⁹⁵

Hūmān opposed this counsel. If Tūs' battered army were allowed to escape, he warned, it would soon rejoin Kaykhosrau—and under the command of Rostam, that union would become a fearsome power. Why permit such a force to recover? Now was the moment to strike and annihilate it:

Be sure of this,
That they were forced to flee and once for all
Show us their backs. We will not let them reach

rather than turning left in the direction of Balkh and Tirmidh, Tūs marched past Qundūz and Badakhshān to Shahd Rūd and Hamāvan.

We do not have a satisfactory location for either the river or the mountain. But what if like Kāsseh Rūd, Ferdowsī is again using a universal attribute for the region? An appellation like *ham-āb-ān* (where all waters take source) makes good sense here; three major rivers—the Āmū, the Indus and the Tārim—take source here. Furthermore, the Pamirs, identified with the Shahd Mountain is the logical place for an international confrontation. Three major cultures—Indian, Tūrāno-Iranian, and Chinese—come together in this region. Aurel Stein, who surveyed the area in 1900, described it in this way: "[At 15,800 feet] I was close to the point where the drainage areas of the three great river systems of the Indus, the Oxus, and the Tārim meet, the representatives as it were of the still greater ethnic areas of India, Iran, and Turkistān. That the view from the height of the Kushbel Peak...simultaneously comprised the confines of British India, Afghanistan, Russia, and China, was the best illustration of the abiding influence which geographical facts must exercise over political developments even in this desolate region."

Describing the advantages of the Pamirs as a means of communication, Stein continues, "But it was only in the light of subsequent observations...that I fully realized the historical interest of the route which leads through this valley." See Stein, 1907, 1977, p. 22. For Wakhān/Wakhāb and the four rivers that form the source of the Āmū as it flows to the Aral Lake, see Le Strange, 1977, pp. 435ff. In addition, as we shall see, the battleground is not far from Khotan, where the Iranian army enters after it defeats the Khāqān of China.

¹⁹⁵ ME, vol. IV, pp. 145-146; Warner, vol. III, p. 134.

Khusrau and muster at his court afresh;
 Then from Zabulistan will Rostam march
 Upon us, this delay cause [sic] fearful loss.
 Now is the time for me to fall on them,
 And put in practice ruse and artifice [.]¹⁹⁶

At length, Pīrān yielded, granting Hūmān leave to act as he deemed fit. In due course, Hūmān found the Iranian host and brought Pīrān's forces against it.

When the combined armies of Hūmān and Pīrān confronted the diminished ranks of Tūs, Pīrān again sought to reason with him. Resistance, he said, was futile—especially now that the house of Gūdarz had been nearly extinguished.

Tūs answered with unbending resolve. "This enmity," he said, "was born of the murder of Siyāvosh in Tūrān. Its end is not yet written." He declared that word had already been sent to the Shāh, and that Rostam himself was on the march. "When he arrives," Tūs added, "Tūrān shall remain in name alone."

Yet Tūs' plight was dire. His forces were hemmed in upon the mountain, while the surrounding plains teemed with the enemy. Pīrān judged that hunger alone would soon decide the matter.

Tūs, however, devised a desperate stratagem. By night he struck at the Tūranian lines, seizing provisions to sustain his men; and by swift courier he sent word to Kaykhusrau, calling for aid:

Assuredly my speedy camel-post
 Hath reached ere now the monarch of the world.
 My letter will inflame his heart anew,
 The elephantine chief will come to aid us,
 And with a noble company of Lions.¹⁹⁷

When news of Tūs' second defeat reached Kaykhusrau—and of the army's retreat to Mount Hamāvan—the king dispatched nobles to Kābulistān to summon Rostam.

When Rostam came before the throne, the king praised him as guardian of Iran, slayer of the White Demon, and rider of Rakhsh. He spoke of Tūs' defeat and the grievous loss of the warriors of Gūdarz, and implored his aid.

Rostam answered with reverence and resolve, affirming his lifelong devotion to Iran and its kings:

Thou art the world's king, and a slave am I
 Girt to perform thy hests. Let not the Shah
 Grieve for the slain, but let thy foes look wan.
 With belted waist will I draw near to Tus,

¹⁹⁶ ME, vol. IV, pp. 146; Warner, vol. III, p. 134.

¹⁹⁷ ME, vol. IV, p. 155; Warner, vol. III, p. 142.

And gird me to avenge the Iranians,
For liver-wounded have I been and girt
With mourning for the scions of Gudarz.¹⁹⁸

These words greatly heartened the king. He ordered the treasury opened to Rostam, granting him whatever he required, and commanded him to march with the warriors of Zabulistān and Kabulistān, joined by thirty thousand Iranian troops, to relieve Tūs at Hamāvan. He further instructed that command be entrusted to Farīborz, son of Kaykā'ūs, that he might avenge the wrongs done to his house.

Meanwhile, on the Tūranian side, Pīrān brought his army to the foot of the mountain. Yet, despite Hūmān's urgings, he persisted in his policy of delay. Time, he believed, was his ally; the Iranians, cut off from supplies, could not endure long:

Since without your fighting
The foe will come to hand, why change delay
For haste? Why should we fight? Ten horse will serve
As scouts upon the plain. Wait we until
Our foes lack food and drink, and ask for quarter.
Unless they can subsist on thorns and flints
When provand faileth they will take to them
And die.¹⁹⁹

The struggle at Hamāvan marked Iran's first encounter with a truly "international" host. The Tūranian army was swelled by warriors from Chin and India, from the Kūshān lands beyond the Oxus, from Rūm, and from the distant realms of the Saqlab. From every border of Tūrān they came to answer Afrāsiyāb's call:

Troops throng from every side—a host whose dust
Would make a desert of the sea of Chin
Upon the battle-day. A chief is there
From Ma wara 'u'n-Nahr; his head is raised
O'er circling heaven; a hundred lions' strength
Is his; he quelleth mighty elephants!
In height a cypress and in looks a moon,
A potentate whose toys are crowns and thrones,
Kamus, this chief of chiefs, will have his will
Upon Gudarz and Tus. The troops comprise
All those that dwell 'twixt Sipanjab and Rum.
I reckon first the Khan of Chin, whose crown
Is heaven, his throne the earth [.]²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ ME, vol. IV, p. 158; Warner, vol. III, p. 144-145.

¹⁹⁹ ME, vol. IV, p. 161; Warner, vol. III, p. 150.

²⁰⁰ ME, vol. IV, p. 162; Warner, vol. III, p. 150.

Pīrān stands among the most compelling figures of the *Shāhnāme*: a Tūranian in allegiance, yet not untouched by sympathy for Iran. Though steadfast in his service to Afrāsiyāb, he had bound himself by marriage to Siyāvosh and had once aided Kaykhosrau in his escape.

Now, as the ranks of Afrāsiyāb's allies swelled and mighty rulers took their place upon the field, Pīrān's prominence waned, though his counsel still guided the host. In the councils of war he listened, weighed, and spoke—but in his heart he remained fixed upon delay.

He believed that time itself would win the victory: that hunger would break the Iranians, that they would either surrender or perish, and that the vast host assembled need not hazard battle at all. The thought of triumph without bloodshed pleased him.

I will go forth
 To meet them. They have had a long and weary march,
 Equipped for battle and heavy with foreboding. They hold
 Their heads as high as doth Afrasiyab,
 For they have treasure, lustre, throne, and state.
 I will go forth and behold what manner of men they are,
 How many they be, and what chiefs and warriors
 Shall do obeisance to the Khan of Chin,
 And kiss the dust before his throne withal:
 I will behold Kamus, the exalted one,
 And find Tus an adversary in Shangol.
 Returning hither, I will gird myself
 To rob the Iranians of the breath of life,
 And, if they cannot hold their ground, will make
 Day dark and strait for them [...]²⁰¹

Moreover, Pīrān knew well that the war against Iran was not to be confounded with the contest against Tūs alone. Once the question of Tūs' surrender or destruction was settled, he intended to turn toward the greater design of war. To this end, he resolved to divide the gathered hosts into three divisions, each charged with its own appointed task. The first division was to march upon Balkh and seize that province. The second was to proceed against Kabulistān and Zabulistān—the realm of Rostam—and bring that domain under Afrāsiyāb's dominion. The third division, led by Pīrān himself, was to advance into the very heart of Iran, composed of the finest of Tūrān's warriors.

The division of armies and the deployment of several great hosts, each assigned to a distinct purpose, was a practice known to both Iran and Tūrān. Through their spies, each monarch was kept

²⁰¹ ME, vol. IV, p. 164; Warner, vol. III, pp. 152-153.

informed of the gains and losses of the other, and at times even the commanders in the field were apprised of such matters. Such tidings, they believed, stirred emulation and sharpened ambition, each seeking to enlarge the king's dominion through feats of arms.

Having thus set in order the lesser and greater designs against Iran, Pīrān went from king to king among those who had brought their forces to Hamāvan. He set forth his stratagems for the conduct of war and answered their inquiries concerning the strength of the Iranian host, the number and identity of its paladins, and all that pertained to their disposition.

In former times, armies did not possess the diversions and entertainments of later ages. They passed their hours in celebration of victory or, in defeat, in sorrow and reflection upon the future. Their fate, especially when they stood between peril and ruin—as now stood Tūs' army—rested heavily upon the character of the commander-in-chief and the valor of his champions. When the commander was weak, the warriors would reproach him in private counsel.

Religion, too, bore a decisive weight in these wars. The Creator, in whose name the struggle was undertaken, was continually invoked for aid. It was the duty of the *mu'bad*s to remind the troops of divine favor and to dispel the gloom sown in their hearts by Ahrīman.

Yet the Iranian army was increasingly consumed by despair. Tūs, the commander-in-chief, sank into melancholy, believing the host already doomed. Only Rostam, he confessed, could deliver Iran. Gīv, however, spoke with greater hope. Iran, he said, was under the protection of *Yazdān* and the favor of the Shāh. "Rostam will arrive," he declared, "and with the aid of God, evil shall be driven away":

Giv said to Tus: "O general of the Shah
 What aileth thee to think upon mishap?
 We need not look for ill; God is thy Helper;
 We are His worshippers, and have broadcast
 Much seed of good. Such fortune hath the Shah,
 The lord of scimitar and throne and crown,
 That God will not withdraw His help from us,
 And leave our enemies to work their will.
 With Rostam's coming all our soldiers' cares
 Will end. Let no man cease to trust in God
 Though day should turn to night. Let not thy heart
 Be straitened needlessly because our foes
 Forbear to fight one day: they have not shut
 Heaven's door on us. Fear not the foe's designs.

If God most high ordaineth loss for us
Quit vain imaginings for come it will [.]²⁰²

As the forces of the surrounding realms gathered about the mountain, the Iranian commanders grew ever more despondent. Their position was manifestly dire: hemmed in upon the heights, with the plains below swarming with enemies, there appeared little hope of escape. One night Tūs assembled his warriors and addressed them for the last time. "We shall fall upon the Tūranian host," he said, "and we shall fight unto death."

Yet their despair was soon turned to relief. News arrived from the scouts that an Iranian force under Farīborz, son of Kaykā'ūs, had come into sight and would reach Hamāvan by the following day. With this reinforcement, the Iranian ranks were strengthened anew.

Pīrān remained for a time in the Chinese camp until the army of the Khāqān was ready to move toward Hamāvan. Then, accompanied by Kāmūs and the other kings, he came forth to the field, and the two hosts stood face to face in full array.

The Khāqān did not conceal his displeasure at the sight of the Iranians. He reproached Pīrān for having misjudged their strength, for the army before them was no mere scattered remnant, but a force of consequence:

[B]ut when the Khan afar
Looked forth and heard the Iranian horsemen's war-cry
It pleased him and he said: "Behold a host
Of men-o'erthrowing, warlike cavaliers!
Piran the chieftain told us otherwise,
But brave men's qualities should not be hidden.
The chieftain masketh the pit's mouth with brambles,
And thither will his horse speed at the chase.
What better is it vainly to besmirch
The foemen's prowess on the day of fight?
I have not looked on cavaliers and chiefs
So stamped with chivalry and manliness."²⁰³

The structure of the Tūranian host was more intricate than that of Tūs, for Afrāsiyāb had summoned many kings from surrounding lands to support Pīrān in the field.

Afrāsiyāb himself, the supreme sovereign, remained unseen. The chief commander in the field was the Khāqān of Chīn, who led the largest contingent. Next in rank was Kāmūs the Kūshān, commander of the Transoxanian forces and himself a renowned

²⁰² ME, vol. IV, pp. 167-168; Warner, vol. III, pp. 155-156.

²⁰³ ME, vol. IV, p. 174; Warner, vol. III, pp. 155-156.

paladin, eager to test his strength against Iran's greatest champion. Beneath him stood Shangol, king of India, commanding his own army and seeking to reclaim lands once lost.

Below these stood the national champions, among whom Pīrān held the foremost place. He not only commanded his own forces of Khotan but also assigned positions to Afrāsiyāb's other champions, acting as the organizing hand of the coalition.

For Iran to prevail, it would first have to overcome Pīrān and the assembled forces of Afrāsiyāb. Yet, in Pīrān's calculation, the greater task required first the removal of Shangol, Kāmūs, and the Khāqān himself; only then would Afrāsiyāb be compelled to reveal himself as the true adversary of Iran.

Though styled commander-in-chief of the combined host, Pīrān was in truth of lesser rank than many he now directed. His authority was sustained largely through his proximity to Afrāsiyāb, without which his standing would have been diminished.

When the two great armies faced one another upon the plain, the Khāqān demanded of Pīrān his plan of battle. Pīrān replied that he intended first to grant the troops three days' rest after their long march, and then to divide the army into three divisions, engaging the enemy in rotation so that each might rest in turn. By this method, he claimed, the Iranians would be compelled to submit within a day and a half.

The Khāqān rejected this design. Kāmūs then advanced another counsel: all the armies should be united into a single force and launched at once against the Iranians, striking before their reinforcements could be properly arranged. By such a blow, he declared, the enemy would be overwhelmed within a single day. Kāmūs' counsel prevailed, and the Tūranian commanders prepared for the final assault upon Mount Hamāvan.

Ferdowsī is attentive to etiquette and protocol, and often lingers over dialogue so that every word stands in its proper place within the order of custom. A clear instance appears here, when Gūdarz receives Farīborz, the son of the king, who arrives ahead of Rostam's slower-moving reinforcements. The question—whether Rostam is near or whether this force alone constitutes the relief army—cannot be asked directly without offense. Gūdarz therefore speaks indirectly, enumerating the divisions and commanders of the opposing host. Farīborz, in turn, comforts the aged warrior by naming the champions of Iran who will yet arrive, among them Rostam himself.

Only gradually does it become clear that Rostam has been appointed supreme commander, equal in rank to the Khāqān of Chīn, and that he has issued strict orders forbidding battle until his arrival at Hamāvan:

Gudarz made answer: "What did Rostam say?
 His words should be reported. "Fariburz
 Replied: "Illustrious one! the peerless
 Bade us not fight. 'Stay on the field,' he said.
 'Ye must not show yourselves before the host,
 But take your ease until my flag appeareth.' "
 Then Fariburz, Gudarz in company,
 Marched toward Mount Hamawan right speedily.²⁰⁴

With this new influx of forces, uncertainty grew within the Tūranian ranks. Pīrān's standing at the court of the Khāqān declined, and his policy of delay was openly challenged by Kāmūs the Kūshān. Kāmūs rebuked him sharply, accusing him of wasting the strength of Afrāsiyāb's gathered armies against a weakened foe. "For months," he said, "you have held this vast host against a scattered remnant of Iranians. As for me, I fear neither Kābul nor Zābul nor India nor even Rostam himself. Indeed, Rostam is the first among those I desire to meet in battle":

Kamus said: "Keep thyself to thine own force.
 Thou hast the warriors of Afrasiyab—
 An army like unto the waters of the sea—
 Yet what hast thou accomplished in five months
 Against a foe so small? Now that the earth
 Is filled with troops led by the Khan, Manshur,
 And me, let us display our prowess; thou
 Hast locked the door, but we will bring the key.
 Although the world's face be as silk of Chin,
 With soldiers from Kabul, Zabul, and Hind,
 Yet should I fight alone, the Iranians
 Were nothing. Thou wilt say of them: 'They are not.'
 Thou wouldst affright me with illustrious Rostam;
 Him will I slaughter first; if once I catch him
 His name shall not be talked of any more [.]”²⁰⁵

Pīrān thanked Kāmūs for his courtesy and wished him well. Only then did the Khāqān of Chīn, who had hitherto remained silent toward Pīrān, address the aged commander. "It was not fitting," he said, "that thou shouldst so praise the enemy." Yet he too affirmed Kāmūs' boastful pledge, declaring that he would defeat Iran and send the captured nobles to Afrāsiyāb for punishment. Pīrān returned thanks also to the Khāqān and withdrew to his own camp.

Pīrān remained fixed upon the belief that the strength of the Tūranian host—however vast, and however reinforced by kings and

²⁰⁴ ME, vol. IV, p. 178; Warner, vol. III, p. 164.

²⁰⁵ ME, vol. IV, p. 178-79; Warner, vol. III, pp. 164-165.

champions—was equal to Iran only so long as Rostam did not appear among them. Yet whenever he gave voice to this thought, he was mocked. The presence of Farīborz in place of Rostam briefly eased his mind, though he could not conceal his deeper unease. Others in the camp spoke differently:

Why this grief? What need is there
To weep because of Rostam or of Tus?
With all our soldiers, maces, elephants,
And scimitars we block the wind itself.
Why fear then Rostam, Tus, and Kai Khusrau?
What are the Iranians but as dust to us?²⁰⁶

Pīrān, however, did not learn restraint. When he heard that Rostam's black pavilion had been raised among the Iranian tents, and that Tūs and Gūdarz had been received by the national champion, his heart sank. Though surrounded by the many princes of the allied host, his thoughts returned ever to Rostam alone. The assembly took note, and Kāmūs in particular grew impatient. "Even were Kai Khusrau himself to appear," he said, "I would not despair. I know neither fear nor retreat. Rostam and his warriors of Zābul hold no terror for me. As for thee, Pīrān," he added sharply, "compose thyself. Return to thy camp and prepare thy men for war":

"O wise one!" said Kamus,
"Thy heart produceth naught but ill surmise.
Know thou that Kai Khusrau hath come to war,
But do not therefore vex thy heart in vain.
Why harp so much on Rostam? Name no more
Zabulistan. If he beholdeth me
With flag in hand his heart will mourn at fight.
Go thou, array the host, lead forth the troops,
And bring the standards to the battlefield.
When I go forth to combat with the host
Ye must not loiter. Now shalt thou behold
The combating of men. The wilderness
Shall be a sea of blood."²⁰⁷

In the Iranian epic, the horse holds a central and almost fateful role. At times the very life of a paladin depends upon the intelligence and devotion of his steed. Farūd once saved himself from certain death by compelling Tūs to fight on foot, a condition forbidden by the custom of kingship. Likewise Siyāvosh, foreseeing his end, entrusted Shabdīz with his final will and commanded the horse to bear him only toward Kaykhusrau and the future kingship of Iran.

²⁰⁶ ME, vol. IV, p. 180; Warner, vol. III, p. 166.

²⁰⁷ ME, vol. IV, p. 190; Warner, vol. III, p. 175.

Rakhsh, the famed steed of Rostam, likewise plays a decisive part in many episodes of the *Shāhnāme*. At this juncture Rostam employed him as part of a deeper stratagem, concealing Rakhsh—and with him his own identity—in order to draw forth the enemy champions and destroy them one by one. Thus was his ruse prepared.

Rostam declared to Tūs and the other commanders that he would rest Rakhsh for a day—the first day of battle—so that the horse might recover from the strain of having twice traversed such great distances. Since command without a steed was impossible, Tūs was placed in charge of the center. Farīborz and Gūdarz were stationed on the right and left wings. The Tūranian army was arrayed in similar order: the Khāqān at the center, Kāmūs on the right, and Pīrān on the left.

Rostam's design succeeded. The battle opened with customary challenges, each side calling forth its champions. At last the Tūranian hero Ashkabūs advanced and issued his challenge. Rostam, with Tūs' permission, stepped forth to answer it. His appearance caused confusion among the enemy, for without Rakhsh none could recognize him. Seeing him on foot, Ashkabūs laughed and demanded his name.

Rostam gave none. He replied only that Tūs had sent him to the field to take Ashkabūs' horse and to teach him the art of fighting on foot. The Kūshān, unconvinced, spurred his mount to trample him, but Rostam loosed a single arrow and struck the horse dead. Only then did Ashkabūs perceive the strength of his opponent. He rose and discharged a hail of arrows, but Rostam's shaft pierced his coat of mail and killed him instantly.

Kāmūs and the Khāqān watched closely. When Rostam withdrew from the field, they examined the arrow that had slain Ashkabūs. It was so large it resembled a spear. Once again, the Khāqān reproached Pīrān for having misrepresented the strength of the Iranian warriors:

The Khan's heart aged
When he beheld the feathers and the point.
He spake thus to Piran: "Who is this man?
What is his name among the Iranian chiefs?
'They are a paltry remnant,' were thy words,
'Not on a par with men of high degree,'
Whereas their arrows are like spears! A mountain
Hath little heart to fight them; thou didst make
The matter small indeed, but thine account
Was false throughout!"²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ ME, vol. IV, p. 197; Warner, vol. III, p. 181.

Pīrān expressed his astonishment. He knew of no man in the Iranian host capable of sending an arrow through the trunk of a tree. Gīv and Tūs, he admitted, were great warriors, yet none matched the strength of the man who had just left the field. Still, Kāmūs was not deceived. He declared that the stranger could be none other than Rostam himself. Turning to Pīrān with irony, he asked whether this was the very Sagzī²⁰⁹ of whom he had so often spoken in fear:

[H]e surely is the warrior,
The man of Sigz, of whom thou spakest oft,
And he hath come upon the field afoot,
Come to give succour to the Iranian host.²¹⁰

“Who is this Sagzī?” Kāmūs demanded further. “What is his appearance? What words does he speak at the outset of battle? And what manner of tactics should I know if I am to meet him?”

“For your sake,” Pīrān replied, “may you never face the Sagzī. Even Afrāsiyāb has at times found him difficult to withstand. He is the champion of Iran, devoted wholly to Kaykhosrau. Swift is he to draw the sword, and his purpose is vengeance for Siyāvosh, whom he reared as a son and whom Afrāsiyāb slew.”²¹¹

He then described Rakhsh and the full armament of Rostam. Having heard this, Kāmūs swore before the Khāqān and the assembled kings that he would not remove the saddle from Būr until Rostam had fallen.

Late that day, the chiefs gathered in the Khāqān’s pavilion. Kāmūs, Manshūr, Fartūs, Shamīrān of Shoghn, Shangol of India, and the rulers of Sīnd and the Slavic lands spoke long into the night of Iran and of the coming struggle. At last they resolved upon war without mercy, even unto the last man.

At dawn, before the armies joined, the Khāqān urged the commanders to disregard Pīrān’s counsel and strike the Iranians with full force. The princes paid homage and proclaimed him sovereign of both China and Tūrān.

On the Iranian side, Rostam assembled his warriors and reminded them that despite the losses suffered under Tūs, the army of Iran remained formidable. They fought for Kaykhosrau, and with victory would come glory and reward.

The armies then drew up in order. The Khāqān commanded the center of the Tūranian host, Kāmūs the right wing, and Hind the left. On the Iranian side, Farīborz held the left, Pūr-e Kishwād the

²⁰⁹ A native of the Sistan province.

²¹⁰ ME, vol. IV, p. 199; Warner, vol. III, p. 183.

²¹¹ It should be noted that Pīrān is not describing Afrāsiyāb’s physical might, rather that even his sorcery had been ineffective against Rostam.

right, while Tūs remained in the center as commander of the whole army.

Rostam's design to isolate the principal champions and strike them down in succession now took effect. As he had foreseen, Kāmūs was the first to advance. He rode forth and issued his challenge. Rostam stepped into the open carrying only a heavy mace and a noose.

The two exchanged formal challenge and counter-challenge, then closed in combat. Kāmūs drew his sword to strike, but failed to land a blow. Rostam cast his noose, ensnaring the Tūranian champion. Though Kāmūs struggled fiercely, he soon lost strength and fell senseless from his horse. Rostam bound him and carried him back to the Iranian ranks.

He cast Kāmūs before the army and said they might deal with him as they wished. "Forget not," Rostam said, "that this man intended not only the ruin of Iran, but also of Kabulistān and Zabulistān—and he sought my own death as well."

Then the Iranians fell upon Kāmūs, and his body was torn apart.

The Khāqān of Chīn

With the death of Kāmūs, the Tūranian host fell into disarray. None could believe that the Kūshānī champion had been struck down so swiftly. On every tongue lingered the same uneasy question: who was this mysterious paladin? Word reached the Khāqān that the warriors of Tūrān would not willingly return to battle so long as the Iranian champion remained unnamed.

As Rostam's stratagem continued to favor Iran, confusion deepened among the Tūranian ranks. Determined to uncover the truth, the Khāqān dispatched his foremost champion, Changosh, to the field. Yet Changosh met the same grim fate as Kāmūs, and still the identity of the Iranian hero lay veiled.

When force availed them nothing, the Tūranians turned to guile. Hūmān, cloaked in disguise, sought out Rostam and attempted to draw forth his secret through a labyrinth of questions—some subtle, some perilously direct. Yet even this artifice failed. Still, the exchange was not without fruit. Hūmān gleaned the cause that burned within the Iranian champion.

"The murder of Siyāvosh," said Rostam, "is the root of this war between Iran and Tūrān. I seek those who contrived his death, and those who have drawn others—most of all the house of Gūdarz—into this sea of blood. Deliver up the murderers of Siyāvosh, and restore the men and treasure he brought to Tūrān, and

I shall cease my hostilities. I will even strive to persuade King Kaykhosrau to lay aside his vengeance and forgive.”

When Rostam named those he demanded, Hūmān’s countenance blanched. Among them stood Garsīvaz, chief author of the calamity; Gorvy of Zereh and his son; and the house of Vīseh itself—Hūmān, Lahhāk, Farshīdvard, Kulbād, and Nastīhan. “Yield these men,” Rostam declared, “and I will lift the sword from your people. You shall cast off your armor and know peace. Refuse—and you shall taste yet more of what has already befallen you.”

These words shook Hūmān to his core, for he saw his own kin arraigned among the guilty. “With such strength and greatness,” he asked, striving for composure, “why remain a mere champion? You might well be king of Iran.” Yet neither flattery nor the pretense of royal weariness could move Rostam to reveal himself.

“Set aside my name,” Rostam answered sternly. “Carry my terms to your lords. Of all men, Pīrān bears the heaviest burden for the death of Siyāvosh. Send him to me. Together, we may yet find an end to this strife.”

When Hūmān returned to the Tūranian camp, he spoke before Pīrān and the gathered champions: “I do not doubt that the Iranian is Rostam of Zābul. He spoke with clarity of his wrongs and named those he holds accountable—myself foremost among them, along with the house of Vīseh and all who have, in any measure, harmed Iran. Yet of Pīrān alone he spoke without bitterness. Indeed, he bids Pīrān come to him, that this war might yet be stayed. It is fitting that Pīrān ride forth and meet him—but with care. Provoke him not; speak gently, and tread with caution.”

Pīrān, hearing this, regarded Rostam’s presence as an ill omen and warned Hūmān of the devastation such a warrior might bring upon Tūranian lands. Yet before seeking Rostam, he went first to the Khāqān of Chīn, to lay the matter before him.

The Khāqān, knowing little of Rostam, listened as Pīrān recounted how the lord of Zābul had nurtured Siyāvosh and loved him as a son, and how for his sake he now stood ready to hazard all. “I will go to him,” Pīrān said, “and see what fate decrees.”

The Khāqān urged him on. “If he is willing to abandon the war,” he said, “demand rich recompense. But if he seeks vengeance, then we shall meet him in battle and make his life bitter. He is but a mortal, and all mortals die. For every Iranian, we have three hundred. I myself will face him, and show him the might of a warrior astride an elephant.”

When at last they met, Rostam named himself openly as the lord of Zābul. He saluted Pīrān in the name of Kaykhosrau (*xorshīd-e rowshan ravān*) and in honor of the king’s mother, the daughter of Afrāsiyāb (*dokht-e Afrāsiyāb*).

Pīrān returned the greeting, invoking Zavāreh, Farāmarz, and Zāl. "I know you loved Siyāvosh as a son," he said. "So did I. He was my son-in-law. I sheltered Kaykhosrau and his mother against my king's command, and made their escape to Iran possible. Yet I am a man divided between two mighty lords. I cannot abandon Afrāsiyāb, who has given me wealth, land, and flocks. I have children to consider. When he commands, I must obey. Yet for myself, I would see this war ended—not to preserve my riches, but to spare the armies of Iran from the ruin that awaits them upon these heights. From Kūshān, from the Slavic lands, from Shoghn and India, warriors have gathered. Our host stretches from here to the Great Sea. Consider well what is best for you, your king, and your men."

But Pīrān's words found little favor with Rostam. "I had deemed you an upright man of Tūrān," he said. "I thought you would welcome a just end to bloodshed. We speak of a murdered king. If you would settle this with bow and blade, so be it. Yet hear me once more: deliver those who plotted Siyāvosh's death, and those who have sown this strife. And you, Pīrān—sever your bond with Tūrān and come with me to Kaykhosrau. He will grant you tenfold the wealth you leave behind."

Pīrān paused long in thought. At last he answered that he must consult Manshūr, Shangol, and the Khāqān before replying. "And I must send word to Afrāsiyāb," he added, "and lay your demands before him."

Returning to camp, Pīrān gathered the house of Vīseh and spoke plainly: "Rostam demands those responsible for Siyāvosh's death. Yet I see no man here untouched by this war. The Iranians might as well demand us all."

In the Khāqān's camp, the armies of Kūshān clamored for vengeance for Kāmūs. They called upon Afrāsiyāb to leave his palace and face the war he had kindled. "We shall raise a host," they cried, "of Kūshānīs, Chinese, Buzgush, Sagsar, and Māzandarān. We shall burn Sīstān, hang Rostam of Zābul, and scatter his ashes to the wind. But first—bring us Afrāsiyāb!"

Once more Pīrān lamented that his host must stand against such a paladin. Yet Shangol, king of India, spoke otherwise: "We have come far to aid Afrāsiyāb and have prospered thereby. Shall we now fear a single Sagzī? Kāmūs fell not by this man's strength alone, but because his allotted days were spent. Let us strike swiftly and surprise the Iranians. We outnumber them by a hundred thousand. How shall one man withstand such a force? I myself will face Rostam."

Meanwhile, in the Iranian camp, Rostam assembled the great lords—Tūs, Ruhhām, Gūdarz, Gīv, Farīborz, Gustaham, Kharrād, Gurgīn, and Bīzhan—together with sages and *mu'bad*s. He recounted his meeting with Pīrān and praised the aged warrior's

integrity. He spoke, too, of the aid Pīrān had once given Kaykhosrau and his mother, and expressed the hope that he might not be forced to raise his hand against him.

“So long as they deliver those responsible,” Rostam concluded, “and restore the treasures borne to Tūrān, we shall be content.”

Gūdarz disagreed. He recalled how, on an earlier occasion, Pīrān had donned a similar guise and pledged to return to his host and bring the war to an end. “Yet instead,” said Gudarz, “he sent word to Afrāsiyāb and summoned reinforcements. Pīrān is no more a friend to Iran now than he was then, when he spoke of abandoning Afrāsiyāb and seeking refuge at the court of Kaykhosrau. Was it not he who entombed the house of Gūdarz?”

Rostam conceded the justice of Gūdarz’s suspicion, though he could not wholly dismiss Pīrān’s past services to the king. “Yet,” he said at last, “should he betray us again, he shall meet his due. I will not hesitate to strike him down myself”:

Said Rostam: "Be thy words
And wisdom wedded. He is as thou sayest.
We and that old man differ, 'tis no secret;
But, in as much as he hath done us good,
I would not fight him to the bitter end.
Remember how he acted toward the Shah,
And how he mourned the fate of Siyawush.
If he should break his word and set on us
I have my lasso at my saddle-straps
To take fierce Elephants. But I will fancy
No ill at first; we may escape a conflict;
But, if he should be faithless, he shall find
The outcome pain and grief."²¹²

At dawn the kettledrums sounded before the tent of Tūs, and the host was set in motion. Rostam appeared in full armor, towering among the ranks. The son of Kishwād took the right wing, Farīborz the left, while Tūs held the center. Rostam himself rode foremost, like a storm before the wind.

The Tūranians arrayed themselves in equal order. The Khāqān, mounted upon his elephants, formed an unyielding center; Kundor, with thirty thousand warriors bearing javelins, held the right; and Gahhār, with another thirty thousand armed with bows, arrows, and Chinese shields, took the left. Pīrān, commanding the host, reminded Shangol of his oath to avenge Kāmūs and face Rostam. Thus the battle was joined.

²¹² ME, vol. IV, p. 235; Warner, vol. III, p. 214.

Yet Pīrān's chief concern was for Hūmān, his brother, whom he wished kept from the sight of the Iranian champion. With two thousand men, he stationed him in the rear, behind the Khāqān and the elephants. Then he rode forth to Rostam, greeted him with courtesy, and spoke:

"I laid your proposal before our chiefs, yet found no path to accord. Treasure and goods they would surrender, but not men. Those you name are kin to the king; such cannot be delivered to an enemy. Moreover, this war is no longer ours alone. From China, the Slavic lands, and Khuttalān, warriors have gathered to aid Afrāsiyāb. War is now inevitable. Shangol, king of India, offers the first challenge."

Rostam listened in silence, though his brow darkened. At length he spoke, his voice edged with reproach. "Kaykhosrau, lord of the world, warned me of such deceit. I would not heed him, nor the words of Gūdarz, for I gave you the benefit of doubt. Now I see they spoke truly. You are false. I offered you honor and a place at the court of a just king, yet you chose instead to remain among the lowly upon these plains. You shall reap what you have sown."

Pīrān bowed with dignity and withdrew. Rostam then turned to his assembled captains and spoke:

"My loins are girt for battle, be it yours
To think but of revenge, and let each warrior
frown, for no small strife fronteth us to-day,
But one that will appraise both wolf and sheep.
The reader of the stars hath said to me:—
'My heart is troubled by this coming fight;
'Twill be betwixt two mountains, troops in mass
Will bathe the world in blood, the veteran chiefs
Will gather, and the strife unman the world;
Then feud will cease to stalk, the steel mace grow
Like wax.' Have no misgivings, whosoe'er
May come to fight with me, for I will bind
His hands within the twisted lasso's coils
Although the starry heavens be his ally [."]²¹³

Then Shangol advanced before the Tūranian lines and issued his challenge. Rostam, seeing a stranger before him, felt a grim relief. "I shall break the hosts of India and the Slavic lands," he said, "and shatter the might of Tūrān."

He rode Rakhsh forward and named himself to the Indian king. Rebuking Shangol for calling him merely "the Sagzī," he lowered his javelin and struck. The blow lifted Shangol from his saddle

²¹³ ME, vol. IV, p. 241; Warner, vol. III, pp. 219-220.

and dashed him to the earth. Though stunned, the king scrambled to his horse and fled.

That brief encounter cooled Shangol's pride. He turned to the Khāqān and said, "This man is too mighty to face alone. We must surround him with a full host and bring him down together."

The Khāqān answered with scorn. "Was it not you who spoke otherwise before?" Then, without delay, he commanded the entire host to fall upon Rostam.

Like a storm of locusts, the enemy closed in. Rostam stood encircled, and around him the Iranians formed a living wall. Calling upon his comrades to stand firm, he plunged into the fray. He struck down Sāvah, kinsman of Kāmūs and bearer of the Tūranian banner. The standard of the Kūshāns fell into Iranian hands.

From there he drove toward Gahhār on the left wing. Gahhār fled toward the center, seeking refuge with the Khāqān, but Rostam pursued him relentlessly and slew him. The black banner of Tūrān, too, was taken.

With both wings broken, Rostam gathered a hundred seasoned warriors and cut his way toward the heart of the enemy host. He fought through rank upon rank until he stood before the Khāqān's white elephant. Seeing his army shattered and defeat at hand, the Khāqān sued for peace. Rostam refused.

The Khāqān offered to withdraw to China and abandon all lands beyond its borders to Iran. Still Rostam refused. Then, with a cast of his noose, he brought the Khāqān crashing from his elephant. The fall of the Khāqān broke the spirit of his host. Weapons were cast aside; the field was lost. Stripped of crown and majesty, the Khāqān was led away on foot to the Shahd River and delivered into the custody of Tūs:

[Rostam] flung the lasso coiled and took the heads
Of cavaliers, neared that white elephant,
And then the Khan of Chin grown desperate,
Smote with the goad the creature's head and, roaring
Like thunder in the month of Farwardin,
Took and hurled forth at Rostam deft of hand
A double-headed battle-dart in hope
To worst him and to take his noble head;
But Rostam, scathless,²¹⁴ flung his lasso high,
Dragged from his elephant the Khan of Chin
Noosed by the neck, and dashed him to the ground,
Where others bound his hands and drove him on
Toward the Shahd afoot without his crown,

²¹⁴ Being without scathe, injury, or damage: unharmed.

His litter, throne, or elephant, and there
They made him over to the guards of Tus [.]²¹⁵

After the fall of Kāmūs, Manshūr, Shangol, and the Khāqān of Chīn, Pīrān withdrew with his champions into wild and secret regions known only to him. Rostam, angered that the chief instigators of Siyāvosh's murder had escaped, rebuked Tūs for allowing their flight. Search parties were sent, but returned empty-handed.

"So long as the house of Vīseh endures," Rostam said, "Afrāsiyāb remains strong. He still commands the armies of Khotan. We must inform the king of what has passed and seek his counsel."

Rostam chose Farīborz, son of Kaykā'ūs, to bear a letter and the recovered spoils back to Iran. In his message, he recounted the dire condition of Tūs's command at Hamāvan and the forty days of relentless battle.

The king received the news with joy, offering thanks to the Creator. Yet he warned Rostam against the cunning of the enemy. "Soon they will gather again and return to the field. Be watchful. So long as Afrāsiyāb lives, Iran shall know no lasting peace."

Meanwhile, Afrāsiyāb learned of the ruin of his champions and summoned his council. He spoke, as Pīrān had, of Rostam and the dark fate that threatened Tūrān. But the council dismissed his fears. "It was the Slavs and the Chinese who fought and fell," they said. "Tūrān itself remains unbroken. Open your treasuries, and raise a new host for a final reckoning." Afrāsiyāb consented.

Farīborz returned to Rostam bearing a diadem and a decree granting him lordship over the newly won lands. Rostam, now master of Khotan and Chīn, broke camp and journeyed to Sughd, where he remained for a fortnight. From there he dispatched Gīv with ten thousand men to watch the borders of Khotan, lest the Tūranians gather anew.

The battle of Hamāvan stands among the decisive struggles of the *Shāhnāme*. In it, Afrāsiyāb lost the greater part of his host, especially the foreign armies upon which he had relied. He lost the highlands of the Pamirs—his natural bulwark—and was left exposed along the southwestern approaches, where the Iron Gate had fallen.

Seizing the moment, Rostam pressed onward into Tūrān to confront Afrāsiyāb and his new allies. Yet even with all his cunning and the aid of strange powers, Afrāsiyāb could not withstand him. Fleeing before the Iranian champion, he sent his treasures to Almās Rud, crossed the China Sea, and abandoned Tūrān to Rostam.

²¹⁵ ME, vol. IV, p. 254; Warner, vol. III, p. 230.

When at last the Iranian host returned, the king came forth to meet them at Pahlav. At the sight of the royal crown, Rostam dismounted and bowed low. The king embraced him warmly, praised his valor, and led him into the pavilion. The other champions followed in due order, and throughout the night they spoke of war and victory.

For a month Rostam remained at court. Then he sought leave to return to Zābul and visit the aged Zāl. The king granted his wish, and as the hero departed for Zābulistān, he bestowed upon him rich and splendid gifts.

Pīrān of Vīseh

After his flight before Rostam, Afrāsiyāb withdrew into the land of Khallūkh. There he gathered his counselors, commanders, and champions—Pīrān, Garsīvaz, Qarakhān, Garsiyūn, Hūmān, Kulbād, and Ru'īn—and gave voice to his grievance:

"Since I assumed the crown of sovereignty,
And sun and moon bestowed on me their light,
I have held sway among the potentates,
And nobody hath turned aside my rein;
Thus ever since the war with Minuchihr
Iran hath not laid hand upon Turan.
Now from Iran they make a night-attack
Upon my life at mine own palace-door!
The craven hath become courageous,
The Stag hath ventured to the Lion's lair!
We must be up and doing in this strife,
Or they will make our marches reek [."]²¹⁶

"What must be done is clear," Afrāsiyāb continued. "We must station the combined forces of Tūrān and China along the marches between Iran and Tūrān. Such a host will secure the East." The assembly assented, and it was further resolved that the Tūranian army should cross the Oxus and carry the war into Iran against Rostam and Gīv.

Pleased with their accord, Afrāsiyāb sent letters to the Faghfūr, to the king of Khotan, and to other rulers inclined toward his cause. Within a fortnight, a vast army had assembled in Khallūkh. He opened the ancient treasuries of Tūrān—wealth

²¹⁶ ME, vol. V, pp. 87-88; Warner, vol. IV, p. 10. The "night attack" refers to the story of "Bīzhan and Manīzheh." In that story, Rostam disguised as a merchant enters Khotan, saves Bīzhan from Afrāsiyāb's prison and attacks the Tūranian king's palace by night. Afrāsiyāb escapes unharmed.

amassed since the days of Tūr—and distributed untold riches for arms and equipment. Even the wild horses of the steppe were brought to heel, trained, and readied for war. When all was prepared, he divided his forces thus:

1. Five thousand warriors were assigned to Shīdeh, his son, to guard the marches of Khwārazm.
2. Five thousand Chinese troops were placed under Pīrān, with orders to cross the Oxus and establish a Tūranian dominion in Iran—one that would eclipse the realm of the young shah. Pīrān was sternly warned against any thought of conciliation.
3. The remainder he retained with himself in Khallūkh.

When word reached Kaykhosrau that the Tūranians had occupied both the upper and lower reaches of the Oxus, he too assembled his champions—Zāl, Rostam, Gūdarz, Gīv, Shīdūsh, Farhād, Ruhhām, Bīzhan, Ashkāsh, Gustaham, Gurgīn, Zange, Gazhdaham, Tūs, and Farīborz. He commanded them to muster three hundred thousand warriors from India, Rūm, and Arabia, and to be ready to march upon Tūrān within forty days:

Those that reach not the presence of the Shah
In forty days shall not obtain a crown.²¹⁷

In scarcely a fortnight, the land answered the call. Nobles and captains poured into the capital in great numbers. Like Afrāsiyāb, Kaykhosrau opened his treasury and lavishly equipped his host. When all was in readiness, he apportioned his forces:

1. Rostam, with thirty thousand chosen warriors, was charged with the conquest of India, Kashmir, and Kābulistān:

"Famed hero!
Lead these toward Sistan and Hindustan.
When at Ghaznin make for the upper road,
So thou mayst win a signet, crown, and throne;
But when thou hast achieved the sovereignty,
And pard and sheep are drinking at one trough,
Give Faramarz the signet and the crown
Together with such troops as he may choose;
Then sound the kettledrums, the horns, and pipes,
And stay not in Kashmir or in Kabul,
Because this war against Afrasiyab
Depriveth me of provand, rest, and sleep."²¹⁸

²¹⁷ ME, vol. V, p. 92; Warner, vol. IV, p. 14.

²¹⁸ ME, vol. V, p. 92; Warner, vol. IV, p. 14.

2. Luhrāsp, of the Kayāniān line, was sent to the marches of Alān[ān] and Ghūzz Dizh along the Caspian, to check the movements of the Slav and the Rūs who might aid Shīdeh in Khwārazm.

3. Ashkāsh, with thirty thousand men, was commissioned to engage Shīdeh and seize Khwārazm.

4. Gūdarz, son of Kishwād, was entrusted with the main host and ordered to advance upon Tūrān by way of the ford at Tirmidh. His army comprised the forces of Zange, Gustaham, Shīdūsh, Farhād, Kharrād, Gīv, Gurāza, and Ruhhām.

When the host stood ready to depart from Pahlav, the king bade farewell to the aged Gūdarz. "Engage only when necessity demands," he counseled. "Think not, as Tūs did, of thine own renown, but of the end of thy deeds. Respect the rights of those whose lands thou traverses. Send a wise envoy to Pīrān; reason with him, and see whether he may yet be drawn into our fold. Above all, commend thy cause to the Creator."

Upon reaching Zibad, Gūdarz summoned Gīv and sent him forth with ten thousand warriors to parley with Pīrān. He instructed him thus: Pīrān's former compassion toward Siyāvosh might yet incline him to defect, bringing his house into Iran under the Shāh's protection. Should he be willing, he must deliver into Gūdarz's hands all those complicit in Siyāvosh's murder, bound and humbled, to be sent to the Shāh for judgment. Moreover, Pīrān must relinquish his possessions, to be apportioned at the commander's discretion. As a token of good faith, he was to send his brothers and his son as hostages. As for Pīrān himself, he might either go to the Shāh's court and receive great honor, or retire to Chāch and govern that region in the Shāh's name. Failing these, he must prepare to meet Gūdarz in battle.

Thus charged, Gīv journeyed from Zibad to Balkh. Leaving the greater part of his force behind, he pressed onward with a chosen few to Visegird, where Pīrān held his camp.

Pīrān delayed the negotiations for two weeks, seeking time to send word to Afrāsiyāb of Gūdarz's advance and his own need for reinforcements. Afrāsiyāb responded by dispatching thirty thousand men, commanding Pīrān to engage and utterly destroy the Iranian host, so that never again would they dream of ruling Tūrān.

As fresh troops arrived daily, Pīrān's resolve hardened. At last, he gave his answer. "I will not exchange lordship for servitude," he said. "Nor will I give my kin as hostages. Moreover, the command of Afrāsiyāb has reached me: I am to fight. I have no choice but obedience."

Gīv returned and laid the matter before his father, recounting both Pīrān's refusal and the steady influx of reinforcements into the Tūranian camp. Soon thereafter, Pīrān crossed the Oxus and commenced hostilities.

"It was ill done," Gūdarz said to his captains, "to plead with that old warrior—but the wish was the king's, not mine. I spoke against it before him as best I could, yet I was bound to obey":

I spake to that effect before the Shah
 then he gave orders for the troops to march:
 said to him: "put from thy heart the love
 of one whose heart and tongue do not accord.
 Iran's whole love is for the Turkmans; let
 the Shah wash hands of him."²¹⁹

Before long, Gūdarz left his stronghold at Zibad in the highlands and descended toward the plain. Pīrān came out to meet him at Kanābad. The battlefield was chosen with care: the Iranian host stood with a mountain guarding its right and a river securing its left, so that no enemy might easily break their ranks.

The army was arrayed with precision:

1. On the right wing stood Farīborz, supported by Gurāza and Zavāreh. Hazhīr guarded the baggage to the rear, while ten thousand warriors secured the flank.
2. Gīv, aided by Gurgīn and Zange, held the rear with another ten thousand men.
3. On the left wing stood Ruhhām, with Gustaham, Gazhdaham, and Furūhil the archer beside him; ten thousand more guarded that flank.

Gūdarz placed watchmen upon the mountain heights to survey the land and report every movement of the foe. He himself stood at the fore of the center; before him was Farīborz, and behind him Shīdūsh. Close at hand waved the *Darafsh-e Kāviyān*, the standard of Iran.

As Pīrān surveyed the field, unease took hold of him. Every avenue of attack seemed barred; the Iranian lines stood firm, guarded by nature and discipline alike. True to his nature, he turned to stratagem. He sent his son Rū'in with a detachment into a thicket, hoping to draw the Iranians out and fall upon them. Yet the plan failed. The Iranians held their ground, unmoving. Thus, three days and nights passed in stalemate, both armies armored and vigilant, while frustration mounted like a gathering storm.

On the fourth day, Bīzhan sought to persuade his father, Gīv, to break the deadlock and attack. But Gīv, seasoned by wars against the Pechenegs and at Lāvān, would not be swayed. He denied the youth even a thousand men and counseled patience:

This ancient veteran would have the Turkmans
 Advance to battle. When they leave the hills

²¹⁹ ME, vol. V, p. 101; Warner, vol. IV, p. 22.

He will attack in force, and thou shalt see
How he will ply the whole march with his mace.²²⁰

On the Tūranian side, matters stood no differently. After a week of inaction, Hūmān, brother of Pīrān, urged an assault. Pīrān refused, giving four reasons—chief among them the strength of the Iranian position. “They must first be dislodged,” he said, “before they can be destroyed.”

Unconvinced, Hūmān set out for the Iranian camp, accompanied by an interpreter.²²¹ When questioned, the interpreter declared him to be Pīrān’s brother, come to challenge the mightiest champion of Iran.

Through the interpreter, the Iranians replied that Gūdarz had forbidden single combat. Denied by the rank and file, Hūmān pressed deeper into the camp and issued his challenge to the chiefs themselves—even to Gūdarz. The old commander stood firm. “We fight when the hour demands,” he said. “Yet this should not prevent thee from boasting to Pīrān that none among us dared meet thee!”

Enraged, Hūmān turned back. On his way, he slew four heralds, seeking to provoke the Iranians. Still they did not stir.

But Bīzhan could endure no more. To see one warrior defy an entire host and depart unscathed stung his pride. Defying his father’s counsel, he went before his grandfather Gūdarz and asked leave to meet Hūmān in combat. He begged also for the armor and helmet of Siyāvosh, that he might wear them in vengeance for the slain king.

Gūdarz hesitated, preferring a more seasoned warrior. Yet this only inflamed the youth. “You did not see me against the Pechenegs,” Bīzhan said, “nor when I fought Farūd. I would prove my worth. Deny me this honor, and I shall appeal to the King himself—I shall renounce my chivalry.”

Moved by his grandson’s resolve, Gūdarz relented. “You shall fight,” he said, “and your father shall arm you in Siyāvosh’s gear.”

Gūdarz then persuaded Gīv. “Kinship must not hinder duty,” he said. “The King’s command is to avenge Siyāvosh, and this is the youth’s desire. We must not deny him and condemn him to a life of doubt.”

Thus armed, Bīzhan issued his challenge. Through the interpreter he called upon Hūmān to return and fight. Hūmān accepted,

²²⁰ ME, vol. V, p. 108; Warner, vol. IV, p. 29.

²²¹ The appearance of an interpreter is unusual for this stage of the development of the events. Both sides knew each other’s language and had had no need for such help. Since this device is used only in this episode, it is possible that Ferdowsī has used some of the tactics of his time, when Turks and Persians had to communicate through interpreters.

on the condition that the combat be delayed until the following day; Bīzhan agreed.

At dawn they chose a field apart from the armies, near Zībad, that neither host might interfere. Interpreters were appointed to report the outcome.

The duel endured through the day, until both champions paused to rest. When they resumed, Bīzhan at last struck his foe down—unhorsing and beheading Hūmān. Lifting his eyes, he gave thanks that he had avenged Siyāvosh. Then he bound the severed head to his saddle and turned toward camp:

I have no portion in this doughty deed,
Not having pluck to fight an elephant,
Yet have cut off Human's head in revenge
For Siyawush, and my sire's seventy brothers.
Now may his spirit be in thrall to mine,
His body rent to pieces by the lions."
He bound Human's head to the saddle-straps
Upon Shabrang and flung the trunk to the dust [.]²²²

Hūmān's interpreter bowed before Bīzhan, who bade him carry word of the outcome to the Tūranians. Then the victor returned to the Iranian camp, where Gūdarz ordered celebration and bestowed rich rewards upon him.

When news of his brother's death reached Pīrān, he sent another brother, Nastīhan, with ten thousand men to fall upon the rejoicing Iranians. Yet this assault also failed. Bīzhan, chosen to lead the defense, slew Nastīhan and secured another victory for Iran.

These losses did not break Pīrān's will. Rather, he prepared for a greater assault. Meanwhile, Gūdarz withdrew from Kanābad to Zībad. Fearing that Pīrān might yet be reinforced, he wrote to Kaykhosrau, recounting the failed negotiations, the deaths of Hūmān and Nastīhan, and the growing peril. "Afrāsiyāb stands near the Oxus," he warned. "If he enters the war, our strength may not suffice. Unless the king himself comes to aid us, the army may falter." He also sought word of Rostam, Luhrāsp, and Ashkāsh:

[T]hat done,
Gudarz spake thus about Afrasiyab—
"He hath approached the river; should he cross
Thou knowst that we cannot stand against him,
O monarch of Iran, lord of the world!
Unless Khusrau shall come to our support,
And set a crown upon his warriors' heads;
But if Piran shall come alone the troops

²²² ME, vol. V, p. 131; Warner, vol. IV, p. 50.

Will need no help; Khosrau shall learn how I—
 His slave—have by his fortune used Piran;
 And furthermore the conquering Shah perchance
 Will condescend to let his servant know
 What Rostam—binder of the Div—hath done,
 And what Luhrasp hath done, and wise Ashkash.²²³

Gūdarz entrusted the letter to Hazhīr, who journeyed a week to Pahlav and delivered it to the king. Kaykhosrau received him graciously, honored him with gifts, and sent him back with a reply.

In his answer, the king explained his earlier desire to parley with Pīrān: "I was bound to consider his past and offer him a chance of redemption. Yet it is clear his heart remains with Tūrān. You are now free to engage him as you see fit. As for Afrāsiyāb's presence near the Oxus, he lingers there less to aid Pīrān than to escape pursuit. Our reports tell us he is hard pressed on every side":

And thirdly, thou hast said: "Afrasiyab
 Will cross the river, having marched thereto
 Because Piran hath sent to ask for aid."
 The matter is so, and we thus reply:—
 'Know, O my thoughtful sage, mine officer
 Approved in all things! that Afrasiyab
 Abideth not by the Jihun to fight
 With us; the Khan is marching forth from Chin
 Upon him; he is ambushed on both flanks,
 Or rather, through the innumerable host,
 Whose chiefs are now disposed around Turan,

Afrasiyab is threatened on all sides,
 And therefore marcheth to the river-bank.²²⁴

"As for your inquiry concerning Rostam and the other champions," the King continued, "know that Rostam has subdued Kābul and Kashmīr; Ashkāsh has reduced Khwārazm; and Luhrāsp has taken Alānān and Ghūzz. Should Afrāsiyāb cross the Oxus, he would forfeit all these lands to the warriors I have named, who would close upon him from the rear. Yet I do not rest my hope upon this alone. I have charged Tūs to seize Dehistān, Gurgān, and their environs, and I myself shall follow with the main host and join you for a great war against Afrāsiyāb. Until that hour, fear not Pīrān. The loss of his staunchest warriors has weakened him. If he seeks battle, meet him boldly. By the time I stand beside you, Pīrān and his kin shall be but names. Kaykā'ūs and Tūs send their greetings."

²²³ ME, vol. V, p. 139; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 56-57.

²²⁴ ME, vol. V, p. 143; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 59-60.

No sooner had Hazhīr departed Pahlav than Kaykhosrau flung open his treasuries, raising a host greater than any yet assembled, to meet not only Tūrān but the forces of China as well.

Seeing the growing strength and restless stirrings within the Iranian camp, Pīrān resolved once more to avert the ruin of his people. He wrote to Gūdarz:

“If it is vengeance you seek, you have already taken much of it. If the blood of Siyāvosh alone fuels this war, consider—he was but one man; how many must perish for one? If it is dominion you desire, I will speak with my king and set terms. Let the bounds of Iran be thus: from the foothills of the great mountain and the land of the Gharcheh at Bust, to Tāliqān and Fāriyāb, thence to Balkh and the Oxus. Beyond Bust, let Panjshīr and Bāmiyān be yours; northward, Guzgānān, Mūliyān, and Badakhshān. On this side of the mountain, the Āmū plain, Zam, Khuttalān, Tirmidh, Visegird, Bukhārā, and Sughd shall be Iran’s. All lands held or won by Rostam{ XE "Rostam"}, by Luhrāsp, and by Ashkāsh shall remain yours. I will recall my men and yield these regions. I will send treasure—and, if need be, hostages. Not from fear do I make these terms, but because God abhors the slaughter of the innocent. A war of this scale will consume both hosts. Let the champions decide the matter. Yet I ask this pledge: if I fall, let my army return unharmed to Tūrān—and I shall grant the same if you fall.”

When the letter was sealed, Pīrān entrusted it to his son Rū’īn. Gūdarz received the youth with warmth and kept him a week, while he took counsel with his captains. At last, he sent his reply:

“Your deeds speak otherwise than your words. I extended friendship through my son; you chose war. Ever have you stood with Salm, Tūr, and Afrāsiyāb. Is not this very war your doing? You speak of innocent blood—yet you stood by when a blameless king was slain. Your lands you offer are no longer yours to yield: Luhrāsp has taken Bākhtar to the Caspian, Rostam holds from Nīmrūz to Sīnd, and the standards of Hīnd have bowed before our king. Dehistān and Khwārazm are already ours. Only this contest remains. The hour has come for this old warrior to humble Tūrān. I must answer before God for Siyāvosh—and for the seventy of my house. You have sown evil; now reap its fruit. Once I was forbidden to harm you; those orders have changed. I am commanded to avenge. Yet I grant you time—summon aid, tend your wounded, make ready. Let none say I struck in ambush. Though it take a hundred years, I shall fulfill my charge. As for your ‘battle royal,’ I accept—yet first let the armies clash and spend their pent fury. Perhaps that alone will decide the day.”

Gūdarz read the letter before his captains, and all approved. Rū’īn bore it back.

Seeing all paths to peace closed, Pīrān resolved to fight—not for victory alone, but to avenge Hūmān, Nastīhan, and the many fallen. He opened his treasuries, strengthened his host, and sent word to Afrāsiyāb, recounting the recent battles and warning that Kaykhosrau himself was advancing. “Without you,” he wrote, “I cannot withstand them.”

Afrāsiyāb, himself beset on all sides, answered with praise. He lamented that fate had allowed Kaykhosrau to rise against him and declared that the hand of destiny had wrought this strife. Yet he urged Pīrān to avenge his kin and promised to come in person. “When I arrive,” he said, “neither Gūdarz, nor Tūs, nor Kaykhosrau shall remain. I have sent ten thousand men—hold fast until I come.”

Pīrān gathered his lieutenants and read the message aloud. He gave them courage, though in his heart he knew the tide had turned. He marveled at Time, which had set grandfather against grandson, king against king. Yet war admitted no retreat.

When the battle was joined, Gīv secured the wings and rear, but entrusted Bīzhan with a bold charge: “Strike at the heart and challenge Pīrān. For the sake of his slain brothers, he will not refuse. If he falls, Afrāsiyāb’s strength will crumble.”

But the measure of Pīrān was misjudged. He did not answer Bīzhan, but sought out Gīv himself. The two met in fierce combat, yet neither prevailed, and the day ended without decision.

That night both hosts prepared for the morrow. Gūdarz appointed Gustaham to command should he fall, bidding him not to press the war but await the King’s command. Pīrān likewise charged his kin to withdraw to Tūrān if he were slain.

At dawn, Pīrān proposed that ten champions from each side should fight to the death, followed by the commanders themselves, and that the victor should rule both hosts. Gūdarz, long desirous of such a contest, agreed.

Thus the champions met:

Tūrān	Iran	Result
Gorvy	Gīv	Gorvy captured
Kulbād	Farīborz	Kulbād slain
Barman	Ruhhām	Barman slain
Siyāmak	Gorāzeh	Siyāmak slain
Andarīman	Gurgīn	Andarīman slain
Rū’īn	Bīzhan	Rū’īn slain
Zangaleh	Furūhal	Zangaleh slain
Ukhast	Zange	Ukhast slain
Kahram	Bartah	Kahram slain
Sepahram	Hazhīr	Sepahram slain

Then Pīrān and Gūdarz met in single combat. Bereft of his champions, Pīrān stood alone, while Gūdarz had the strength of his host behind him. After a grievous blow, Gūdarz urged him: "Yield, and I shall take you alive to Kaykhosrau." But Pīrān refused. He cast his javelin and wounded Gūdarz, yet failed to fell him. Gūdarz answered with his spear and struck Pīrān down.

True to his word, Gūdarz allowed the Tūranian host to withdraw. Yet Farshīdvard and Lahaska, fleeing as instructed, were overtaken in the desert by Gustaham and slain.

When Kaykhosrau arrived and his pavilion was raised, he saw Pīrān's body among the fallen. Remembering what he owed the aged warrior, he commanded that Pīrān be given a royal burial. But Gorvy, the slayer of Siyāvosh, he ordered to be dismembered limb by limb. "And when no limb remains," said the king, "strike off his head like that of a sheep." As for the rest of the Tūranian host, he granted them pardon, if they would swear fealty and serve Iran.

At last Gustaham, grievously wounded by Pīrān's kin and borne back by Bīzhan, was brought before the king. Seeing him near death, Kaykhosrau removed a sacred bracelet from his own arm—a relic bearing the *farr*, handed down from Jamshīd, Hūshang, and Tahmūras—and bound it upon Gustaham's arm. He summoned physicians from Rūm, India, China, Greece, and Iran to tend him. Through their skill, the warrior was restored.

Thus ended this chapter of strife—yet the great war between Iran and Tūrān flared anew.

The Great War of Kaykhosrau

With Pīrān slain and his house brought low, Kaykhosrau moved his army into the field. He held a solemn court, summoned his victorious commanders from the marches, and dispatched letters in every direction, calling upon the rulers of the world for aid:

[He] sent this letter in the ancient tongue
To all the chiefs and nobles: "Kai Khusrau,
The victor, seated on his elephant,
Hath dropped the ball; the land is like the Nile.
Let there be neither rest nor sleep for you,
But only vengeance on Afrasiyab."²²⁵

When the commanders had assembled and countless nobles answered his call, Kaykhosrau praised Rostam, Tūs, and Gūdarz.

²²⁵ ME, vol. V, pp. 241-242; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 145-146.

Then, opening the treasuries, he enriched the host and set his army in array.

On the left wing stood Gūdarz of the house of Kishwād, aided by Hazhīr, Shīdūsh, and Farhād; to him were assigned the nobles of Barda' and Ardābīl.

At the king's left hand was Dilafrūz, supported by the descendants of Kayqubād—Sammākh, king of Sūr, and Gīveh, king of Dāwar. Bīzhan, Ruhhām, Gūrgin, and the warriors of Rayy were posted in reserve.

At the center stood Kaykhosrau himself with thirty thousand chosen warriors, while the men of Zarasp and Āzargashasp guarded the rear.

On the king's right hand was Tūs, aided by Manūshān and Khūzān, kings of Fārs. Ārash, king of Kirmān; Sabbak, king of Yemen; and Īraj, king of Kābul, lent him strength.

Rostam, with the warriors of Zābulistān, held the far-right wing.

Before the advancing host, Kaykhosrau formed a moving wall of elephants bearing lofty towers. Within them stood bowmen from Balkh, and before each beast marched three hundred guards of Baghdad, loosing arrows at any who approached. A like company protected the rear of this living rampart, armed with shields and long Gīlānī spears. Behind them came rank upon rank of infantry and cavalry, their bows strung and arrows ready.

To marshal so vast a host required more than wings and center. Kaykhosrau appointed lesser commanders over auxiliary bands to maintain order, enforce justice, gather provisions, and spy upon the enemy. These men reported directly to the king, keeping him ever apprised of Afrāsiyāb's movements.

Meanwhile, the Tūranian monarch dwelt beyond Chāch at Baikant,²²⁶ seated upon his ivory throne, while his countless warriors ravaged the lands from Khallūkh to the borders of Krāshān,²²⁷ where his kinsmen ruled. He had intended to break camp and join Pīrān in the field.

But at midnight a swift messenger came, bearing grievous tidings. A wounded soldier told of Pīrān's fall, and of the deaths of Lahhāk and Farshīdvard. He spoke, too, of Kaykhosrau's vast host, whose sight had shaken the courage of the Tūranians.

Hearing this, Afrāsiyāb dismissed all but his closest counselors. In fury he descended from his throne, cast his crown upon the ground, and wept aloud:

²²⁶ Built by Jamshīd and the capital of Afrāsiyāb, Baikant is reported to have been in the vicinity of Bukhārā. See Dehkhodā, Letter Be. Ferdowsī, however, places Baikant beyond Chāch, somewhere between the Syr Daryā and the Issy Kūl in Kharlūkh country.

²²⁷ Refers to the region beyond the border of Chāch. See, Dehkhodā, Letter Kaf.

He sorrowed for the soldiers, then he swore
 A mighty oath and cried in grief and anguish:—
 "By God, I will have none of ivory throne,
 My head shall have no commerce with the crown,
 My tunic shall be mail, my throne a steed,
 My crown a helmet and my tree a spear.
 Henceforth I wish not feast and banqueting,
 Or e'en provision for the crown itself;
 I want but vengeance for my famous men,
 My swordsmen and my men of high emprise,
 On base-born Kai Khusrau, and may the seed
 Of Siyawush be lacking to the world."²²⁸

When word reached him that Kaykhusrau had come to the Oxus, Afrāsiyāb gathered his army. He praised the fallen—Pīrān, Farshīdvard, Rū'īn, and Lahhāk—and said: "The hour has come to avenge them and to meet Gīv and Gūdarz in battle. This war with my grandson will not be easy, yet I shall fight beside you with all my might."

The Tūranians wept as he spoke. "We know no king but thee," they answered. "We share thy grief and will fight Kaykhusrau to the utmost."

Their pledge gladdened Afrāsiyāb. He opened his treasuries, bestowed rich gifts, and granted them his herds of swift steeds. He sent thirty thousand warriors toward Balkh and Bamiyān, and another thirty thousand across the Oxus to guard against incursions from Iran. Encouraged by his counselors, he resolved to cross the river himself and meet the foe upon their own soil.

He summoned his eldest son, Qarakhān, entrusted him with half the army, and ordered him to remain at Bukhārā as a source of reinforcement. Then Afrāsiyāb himself set forth from Baikant toward the Oxus.

For a week the army crossed the river on a thousand boats. On the farther shore, upon the wide plain of the Āmū, the host gathered again. When all had landed, Afrāsiyāb—who had come last—commanded a full report of their position. The army, they said, lay between the Caspian and the Oxus: pasture to sustain the beasts, and water to supply the men.

Having surveyed the ground, Afrāsiyāb arrayed his forces. On the rear left he placed Jahn with a hundred thousand Chigils; on the left wing, Shīdeh with thirty thousand; in the rear center, Garsīvaz with forty thousand; on the right wing, Qarakhān with thirty thousand Chigil Turks; and on the rear right, Gav with thirty thousand from Tarāz, Ghuzz, and Khallūkh. A further ten thousand

²²⁸ ME, vol. V, pp. 249-250; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 152.

horsemen were sent out to harry the Iranian ranks and sow confusion. He ordered the army to face the southwest, whence attack was expected, and raised before them a barrier of elephants.

In like manner, Kaykhosrau assembled his captains and devised his plan. He entrusted the defense of Balkh to Gustaham and of Zam to Ashkāsh, lest the enemy strike from the rear. Then, all being prepared, he advanced into the desert to meet Afrāsiyāb. Marching toward Khwārazm, he kept Dehistān on his left and the Oxus on his right, until at last the Tūranian host lay before his sight:

The Shah, when he had reached the waste, inspected
The bearing and equipment of his men.
The army's route was toward Kharazm, where sands
And plains were fit for strife, with Dahistan
To left, the stream to right, the sands between,
Afrasiyab in front.²²⁹

At the sight of the Iranian army, Afrāsiyāb ordered the drums to sound and his forces to form for battle; yet the thought of contending with his grandsire weighed heavily upon Kaykhosrau's heart.

Accompanied by Rostam, Tūs, Gūdarz, Gīv, and the other chiefs, he surveyed his lines, strengthened his defenses, and commanded that a moat be dug around the camp. Scouts were sent forth to watch the enemy, and at night the trench between the armies was filled with water. Thus, the hosts stood facing one another for two days and nights. As the stalemate endured, astrologers hastened to read the heavens with their astrolabes, seeking to divine which king would prevail.

On the fourth day, when still neither side advanced, Shīdeh spoke to his father: "No king," he said, "save that fatherless brigand—Kaykhosrau—would dare oppose thee, and this after Siyāvosh was slain for a just cause":

Thou didst hold Siyawush as son, didst bear
A father's pains and love for him, beteeming
No noxious blast from heaven to visit him.
Thou didst distaste him when assured that he
Aimed at thy crown, thy throne, and diadem,
And if the king of earth had spared his life
The crown and signet both would have been his.
The man that now hath come to fight with thee
Shall not have long of this world. Father-like
Thou didst encourage this black reprobate,
Forbearing to consign him to the dust;
Thou didst support him till he spread his wings,

²²⁹ ME, vol. V, p. 256; Warner, vol. IV, p. 157.

Fit through thy favour for the throne of gold,
 And bird-like flew Iranward from Turan;
 Thou wouldst have said: "He never saw his grandsire."
 Look at Piran's own deeds of kindness
 Toward that faithless and unworthy man;
 Yet he forgot Piran's love and fulfilled
 His heart with vengeance and his head with strife,
 And when he caught Piran as he desired
 He put that kindly paladin to death.²³⁰

"Why comes he with so great an army against his own grand-sire?" Shīdeh continued. "Why does he refuse wealth, crown, and treasure? Why does he not seek steeds and swords? Because he thirsts for a kinsman's blood. Thou art my father—and my king. Disappoint not the army. Astrology will not avail us. The Iranians heed the sword, and by the sword must we answer. Grant me leave to advance and scatter them."

Afrāsiyāb, however, would not be swayed. "Pīrān and many more fell upon this very ground," he said. "The hearts of the Tūranians still burn for them. Let the army remain here, gazing upon the Iranians until their longing for vengeance ripens into fury. When that fire has reached its height, then shall we fall upon them—with-out pattern or restraint—and strike them down wherever they stand."

Shīdeh, eager for renown, stepped forward and asked leave to begin the combat:

I passion for a combat with Khusrau
 Because he is the new king of the world,
 And if he shall encounter me, as I
 Doubt not, withal he shall not scape [sic] my clutch,
 The Iranians shall be broken—heart and back—
 And all their projects marred, while if another
 Come forth I soon will lay his head in dust.²³¹

Afrāsiyāb shook his head. "Kaykhosrau will not stoop to fight thee," he replied. "If he seeks combat, it is with me—his grand-sire—and that would spare both hosts a grievous struggle":

"O inexperienced one!
 How should the king of kings encounter thee?
 If he would fight I am his opposite,
 'Tis mine to trample on his name and person,
 And if we meet thus on the field both hosts
 Will rest from strife."²³²

²³⁰ ME, vol. V, pp. 257-258; Warner, vol. IV, p. 159.

²³¹ ME, vol. V, pp. 259-260; Warner, vol. IV, p. 161.

²³² ME, vol. V, p. 260; Warner, vol. IV, p. 161.

Yet, wishing to grant his son an opening under less perilous terms, Afrāsiyāb resolved to send Shīdeh as envoy. He charged him carefully with his words:

“Go to Kaykhosrau and make known my mind. Tell him that it is unseemly for a grandson to rise against his grandsire. The Creator Himself has filled the world with wrath and vengeance—thus came about the death of Siyāvosh, who was not without fault, for he set aside the ancient ways. And if I am to be blamed, ask him: why then Pīrān? What had Rū’īn, Lahhāk, and Farshīdvard done that they should be bound upon the backs of rogue elephants?

“Say to him: the fault lies not in my house, but with Gūdarz and Kaykā’ūs, who first brought war into my land. I command an army numberless as the sands; at my bidding it becomes a sea and moves mountains. Yet I am restrained by fear of the Creator, and would guide thee from dishonor.

“If thou wilt accept my terms—seal a treaty and keep thy word—I shall be thy ally. Name the lands, and I will yield them to Iran. I shall send thee gold, crown, throne, steeds, and armor. Accept my son as thy champion and myself as thy kinsman, and let this war be turned to feast.

“But if thou follow Ahrīman and reject my counsel, then let us two meet apart from the hosts. If thou slay me, my army shall obey thee, and my son shall remain thy kinsman. If I slay thee, thy champions shall hold high place in my ranks. Or, if thou wilt not face an old warrior, then meet my son Shīdeh instead. Let the Firmament decide. And if even that thou refusest, then at dawn let chosen warriors fight in our stead.”

At the Iranian camp, the coming of Shīdeh was proclaimed by the heralds. A shadow fell upon Kaykhosrau’s countenance. He bade Qarān, who stood near, receive the envoy and hear his message. When Qarān returned and delivered Afrāsiyāb’s words, the king laughed softly.

“My grandsire,” he said, “repents a war for which he has already crossed the Oxus. He would sway me with talk of kinship, and daunt me with the number of his host. We accept his challenge. We shall meet Shīdeh in combat.”

This resolve troubled the chiefs and counselors of Iran. They spoke with one voice, urging caution and restraint:

The wise men and the captains of the host
All spake out, saying: "This must never be:
Afrasiyab is wise and veteran,
And never dreameth but of stratagems;
He knoweth naught but sorcery, black arts,
Deceit, malignity, and wickedness.
Now he hath chosen Shida from the host
Because he saw therein the key to loose

The bonds of bale. He challengeth the Shah
 To fight that he may fill our day with dust.
 Adventure not thyself against his rage,
 Or weary of Iran and of the crown.
 Engage not rashly in a fight with him,
 And let us not be left in grief and anguish.
 If Shida now shall perish by thy hand
 Their host will merely lose one man of name,
 But if thou perishest in some lone spot
 The darksome dust will go up from Iran,
 And none among us will be left alive:
 Iran will perish—city, field, and fell.
 We have none other of the Kaian race
 To gird himself to execute revenge [."]²³³

They added further: "Afrāsiyāb is seasoned and cunning, favored in Tūrān and Chīn. He now offers restitution—horses, the treasures of Zādsham, and the lands thou claimest. Would it not be wiser to return to Iran with these gains, crowned in victory?"

Rostam, upon whom the memory of Siyāvosh's death lay like a wound unhealed, spoke otherwise. "The King must not yield," he said.

Kaykhosrau, troubled, gnawed at his lip; then at last he spoke: "It is not fitting that we return thus. We have a tradition to uphold, a purpose to fulfill, and blood already spent in this cause. How shall we teach our people the worth of striving for the Right if we falter now? Should Afrāsiyāb regain his throne unchallenged, ruin will fall upon Iran.

"What answer shall we give to Kaykā'ūs? What of Tūr's deed against Īraj? What of Siyāvosh? Shall a smooth-tongued Tūranian wash away all wrongs with words? He has challenged me—and yet your faces pale. I had not thought that Iranians would forget so great a vendetta. Yet none among you stepped forth to answer Afrāsiyāb's call."

Ashamed, the chiefs renewed their allegiance and praised the king. But Kaykhosrau continued:

"We must see clearly. Shīdeh will not fight fairly. Afrāsiyāb, master of sorcery, has surely clad him in invulnerable armor. He who meets him must be guarded by the *farr*":

Khusrau replied: "Know counselling archmages!
 That Shida on the day of battle holdeth
 His father as no man. Afrasiyab
 Made armour for his son by magic arts
 Perversely, darkly, and malignantly.

²³³ ME, vol. V, p. 265; Warner, vol. IV, p. 166.

The arms which ye possess are not sufficient
 To pierce that breastplate and that helm of steel.
 The charger is of demon pedigree
 With lion's action and the speed of wind.
 A man that is not dowered with Grace from God
 Would lose both head and feet in fighting Shida;
 Besides he cometh not to fight with you,
 For that would shame his Grace and birth. The scions
 Of Faridun and of Kubad are twain
 As warriors, but one in heart and habit,
 And I will burn his father's gloomy soul
 As he burnt Kai Kaus for Siyawush."²³⁴

Then Kaykhosrau appointed Qarān to accompany Shīdeh and bear his reply.

"Say to my grandsire," he declared, "that though matters have grown entangled, it is the duty of a warrior to decide swiftly. Let the Sun and Moon judge between us. I reject his offers—horses, gold, treasure, and land. Who has ever lived forever to enjoy such things? By the grace of God and the *farr* of Kaykā'ūs, I shall not leave these in his possession beyond the autumn.

"Wealth gained through injustice holds no worth for me. *Yazdān* is my support. All that he names—aye, even Shīdeh, who has signed his own doom—shall fall to me. Tomorrow I shall meet him, and show him the face of Fate. Thereafter, we shall proceed as he proposes and let the champions decide the war."

When his message for Afrāsiyāb was complete, he turned to Qarān once more: "Warn Shīdeh of his error, and of what destiny awaits him":

O full of wisdom and aspiring chief!
 Thou hast come here alone within the net,
 Not come in quest of fame, or to deliver
 Thy father's message, but by adverse fate:
 The Worldlord hath impelled thee from the host,
 And here will be thy shroud and sepulchre;
 Harm will befall thee for that harmless head,
 Which they struck off as though it were a sheep's;
 Thy sire will weep o'er thee as bitterly
 As Kay Kaus is weeping for his son."²³⁵

Kaykhosrau's answer deepened Afrāsiyāb's foreboding, already stirred by a troubling dream; yet he could not turn his son aside. At dawn, Shīdeh armed himself and rode forth to meet Kaykhosrau.

²³⁴ ME, vol. V, pp. 267-268; Warner, vol. IV, p. 168.

²³⁵ ME, vol. V, p. 269; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 169-170.

The terms were set: neither host should stir; no warrior should intervene; the rights of all auxiliaries were to be observed. Thus the two champions rode out upon the wide plains of Khwārazm.

When Shīda saw the valor and the might of Kaykhosrau the tears fell on his cheeks:

He felt: "This Grace hath been bestowed by God,
And I have reason to bewail myself."
His steed moreover was distressed by thirst;
The man's own strength was failing. In his straits
He thought: "If I say thus to Kai Khusrau:—
'Come let us try a wrestling-bout afoot,
And make ourselves run down with blood and sweat,'
He will not for his honour's sake dismount;
His person as a Shah would be disgraced;
Yet if I 'scape not by this artifice
Good sooth I am within the Dragon's breath!"²³⁶

The King, though it ran counter to the custom that forbade sovereigns to fight on foot, accepted the challenge. Shīdeh, after all, was of the line of Fereydūn, and the honor of kings weighed heavily in such a moment. When the two champions met and closed in struggle, striving to cast one another to the ground, it soon became clear that Shīdeh was at a disadvantage. Perceiving that Kaykhosrau possessed the stronger *farr*, and that his own doom drew near with the passing of the day, he turned in thought to flight.

But Kaykhosrau gave him no leave. Seizing him with terrible strength, he lifted him high above his head and dashed him to the earth, breaking his back. Then, swift as fate, he drew his saber and drove it into Shīdeh's heart.

In the Tūranian camp, all had awaited Shīdeh's return, hoping he would come crowned with victory and renew their pride. Instead, his page arrived—hair disheveled, garments torn—bearing tidings of ruin. At the news, Afrāsiyāb tore at his white hair and wept bitterly. His grief turned quickly to fury, and he swore to continue the war until Kaykhosrau himself was brought low. His warriors, sharing his sorrow, stood with him in resolve.

On the following day, Jahn advanced with thirty thousand men against Qarān and Gustaham, but he was defeated and driven back. Afrāsiyāb, perceiving the ill turn of fortune, withdrew his forces. Under cover of night he crossed the Oxus once more to the Tūranian bank, abandoning his tents, his treasures, and the weight of his engines of war.

²³⁶ ME, vol. V, p. 273; Warner, vol. IV, p. 173.

At dawn, when word reached Kaykhosrau that the enemy had fled, he dismounted and bowed before God, giving thanks for divine favor. The army followed his example. For five days thereafter the host remained at rest, while the fallen were sought out, cleansed, and given burial befitting their rank.

At length, a letter was dispatched to Kaykā'ūs, recounting Kaykhosrau's arrival at Fāriyāb, his victory over Afrāsiyāb upon the plain of Khwārazm, and his resolve to press the war further. "Three hundred heads," the letter declared, "have been sent unto thee, among them those of Afrāsiyāb's brother, his son, and his kin. Two hundred of his chosen warriors likewise go in chains."

Across the river, Afrāsiyāb joined Qarakhān at Bukhārā and took stock of his shattered host. Of every hundred men who had crossed the Oxus with him, scarcely twenty remained. It was resolved that he should abandon Chāch and Gulzarriyūn²³⁷ and make his stand at the stronghold of Bihisht Gang.

He withdrew first to Gulzarriyūn, where for three days he lingered, sending out summons for reinforcements. Then the armies gathered, and counsel was taken:

"If now the monarch will be well advised
He will withdraw the army hence to Chach,
And, if suggestions may be made to him,
Cross the Gulzaryun and wait a while
At Gang-Bihisht, because it is a place
As fit for recreation as for fight."
No other plan was mooted, all agreed.
They marched to Gulzaryun, with eyes
Wet and full hearts; there spent the Turkman king
Three days, recruiting with his hawks and cheetahs,
Thence on to Gang-Bihisht where, though he had
But short repose, he thought it Paradise;
To him its soil was musk, its bricks were gold;
There he was happy, laughing in his sleep,
Thou hadst said: "Safety is his bedfellow."²³⁸

²³⁷ Apparently, the name of a town that no longer exists, Gulzarriyūn has given its name to the Syr river that, according to Le Strange, at some point passed through it: "In the 8th [14th] century, according to Mustawfi, the Mongol population of these parts knew it [i.e., the Syr Daryā] under the name of Gil-Zariyān." See, Le Strange, 1977, p. 476.

²³⁸ ME, vol. V, p. 288; Warner, vol. IV, p. 187. Dehkhodā places Bihisht Gang, also referred to as Gang Dezh, in the region of Khwārazm. See Dehkhodā, Letter Be. The *Bundahishn*, however, speaks of a fort located in the east. Ferdowsī places the fort beyond Gulzarriyūn, itself beyond Chāch. The present author believes that this fort must be viewed in the context of the developments of the Indo-Iranian, Iranian, and Tūranian cultures. Originally, somewhere on

Pursuing without respite, Kaykhosrau crossed the Oxus and brought the surrounding lands under his sway. He bestowed gifts generously upon the people, winning their loyalty. The city of Sughd welcomed him with honor, and in return he enriched it with royal bounty. Hearing of his liberality, other towns and tribes hastened to submit and pay homage.

The first resistance arose near Chāch, where Golgola, a descendant of Tūr, took it upon himself to oppose the advance. Kaykhosrau did not deign to go in person. Remaining in Sughd, he sent Gustaham with the contingents of Ardabīl and Barda', while Rostam led the warriors of Nīmrūz in support, and the rebellion was subdued.

In Sughd, the king opened his treasury once more and summoned masters skilled in breaching fortresses and penetrating defenses, adding craft to strength in his campaign against Afrāsiyāb. When all was prepared, he advanced toward Gang Dezh, commanding that none be harmed who submitted to his authority.

As the Iranian army marched toward Gulzarriyūn, the Tūranian strongholds fell one after another. Their people, seeing the might and clemency of Kaykhosrau, joined his ranks. By the end of the hundred *farsangs*²³⁹ that lay between Sughd and Gulzarriyūn, his host had grown vast beyond reckoning. There, amid a land fair as paradise, he paused and awaited Afrāsiyāb's next move.

Within Gang Dezh, Afrāsiyāb held constant counsel with his captains, seeking some path to victory. Yet all agreed that war could not be avoided, and preparations were made accordingly. At last, a great Tūranian force marched out from Gang Dezh toward Gulzarriyūn.

At first the battle went ill for the Iranians. The press of war grew heavy, and Kaykhosrau felt the shadow of defeat drawing near. Then he withdrew apart and turned his face to God, seeking aid:

When Kai Khusrau observed the battle's stress,
The world grown straitened to his heart, he went
Apart and prayed to God to do him right:—
"O Thou beyond the ken of saints," he said,
"The Lord of this world and the King of kings!
If I had never been a man oppressed,
And tried like iron in the crucible,

the headwaters of the Ganges, the fort was the location from which Evil invaded the Indo-Iranian lands. During the conflicts of Iran and Tūrān, the location was moved to areas closer to Khotan. By the time of Ferdowsī, it seems, it no longer had a particular location; it had an orientation—northeast. Ferdowsī placed it in Khallūkh country. The importance of Gang Dezh, whether in Jerusalem, Babylon, on the Ganges or in Khallūkh country rests in the fact that it is the place from which Evil issues and chaos begins.

²³⁹ *Farsang* (also *pārsang*) is a unit of length equal to six kilometers.

I would not ask to be victorious,
 Or urge my cause upon the righteous Judge."
 He spake and laid his face upon the ground;
 His bitter lamentations filled the world.
 At once there came a furious blast, which snapped
 The green boughs, from the battlefield raised dust
 And blew it in the Turkmans' eyes and faces.²⁴⁰

His prayer was answered. On the following day, Gustaham fell upon a band of Tūranians as they slept and scattered them, while Rostam descended upon the fugitives and slew them, Qarakhān among them.

When Afrāsiyāb learned that Rostam had played so great a part in the rout, he resolved first to destroy the champion before facing Kaykhosrau again. Abandoning Gang Dezh, he rode without rest to intercept him. But Kaykhosrau, who had withdrawn somewhat from the field to reorder his forces, sent swift word to Rostam, warning him of the ambush.

In time, Kaykhosrau himself advanced nearer to Gang Dezh. Afrāsiyāb, recognizing the futility of his design—since Rostam was forewarned—turned back. Before returning, he dispatched a messenger to the Khāqān of Chīn, seeking aid. Then he re-entered Gang Dezh, strengthened its defenses, and sent Jahn as envoy to parley once more with Kaykhosrau.

"Afrāsiyāb repents," said Jahn. "He confesses that he has been but an instrument of Evil. He would have the King know that the slaying of Siyāvosh was not by his own hand. He would not have his grandson become likewise a tool of the Adversary, nor destroy those whose lives have already been spared. Moreover, winter draws near, and this plain will soon be an iron waste of frost. Since the strength of the two hosts is equal"—here Jahn spoke with care, hinting that Afrāsiyāb too bore the *farr*—"would it not be wiser to cease from strife and conclude a peace?"

"I will take the Turkmans
 Of Chin, will dash the heaven upon the earth
 And pierce this people with the scimitar,"
 Shall I become a captive in thy hands?
 Presume it not, for this shall never be;
 None will erase a man indelible.
 The grandson am I of Zadsham the king,
 Descended from Jamshid and Faridun,
 My knowledge and my Grace are both from God,
 And I possess a pinion like Surush.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ ME, vol. V, p. 293; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 191-192.

²⁴¹ ME, vol. V, p. 305; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 202-203.

“He offers even to yield his kingdom,” Jahn continued, “and to withdraw beyond the Kaymak River, if he may but retain Gang Dezh as a place of rest. He will acknowledge thy suzerainty and restore unto thee the treasures that Tū denied to Īraj.”

Kaykhosrau listened in silence, weighing each word. Then he answered, his voice measured but unyielding:

“Thy speech is fair in sound, yet it is but speech. There is no truth in it—neither in thy words nor in those of thy father. How shall I rule the world while my father lies slain? Has Afrāsiyāb forgotten his crime? Has he forgotten how, after my father’s death, he had my mother scourged, that she might lose the child within her? What king, what lord, what champion has ever dealt thus with his own blood?

“He dragged my mother—his own daughter, a noble lady—from her chamber and delivered her to base men. Had not wise Pīrān intervened, we should both have perished. Tell Afrāsiyāb this: I stand here, and the grace of God is with me.”

He paused, then continued, his voice deepening with memory:

“He could not change Destiny then, nor shall he change it now. He cast me among shepherds; I knew neither rest nor sleep in my youth. When I came of age, he had Pīrān bring me before him, to test whether I might threaten his crown. But the Almighty sealed my lips, and I seemed to him as one dumb and witless—thus he spared me. Had I spoken truth, it might have cost me my life.

“And what of Siyāvosh? What sin had he committed? Did he not honor Afrāsiyāb’s sovereignty? Did he not found a kingdom in his name? Was he not loyal in all things? Yet Afrāsiyāb’s evil nature could not endure him.

“He is heir to Tūr, who dealt with his kin as he himself now does. Did he not slay Nawzar? Did he not murder his own brother, Aghrīras? Are not such deeds the work of Ahrīman? Does he not cloak his wickedness with the same falsehoods as Zahhāk and Jamshīd?

“In the war of the Pechenegs, when Pīrān laid waste the house of Gūdarz, who was the root of that evil? Did he not march upon the Oxus with a mighty host? Did he not send Shīdeh to take my head? Yet the Almighty has upheld me, granting me throne and crown, and keeping fresh in me the memory of his crimes.

“Henceforth the sword shall judge between us. We shall not meet again until the Day of Reckoning. Tell my grandsire this: I have come to uproot evil wherever it may dwell.”

This answer inflamed Afrāsiyāb, and he commanded his host to prepare for war. Kaykhosrau likewise arrayed his army, placing

Rostam's forces along the river-facing side of the fort, with Gustaham and Gūdarz guarding the adjacent flanks, while he himself held the remaining side.

A deep moat—two spear-lengths across—was dug around the stronghold to prevent sudden assault. Before each gate were stationed two hundred engines of war—catapults and naphtha-throwers—while others were mounted upon the walls. A tunnel was driven beneath the massive ramparts, and within it Kaykhosrau ordered timbers soaked in naphtha to be set in place, ready for fire:

Around were ranged two hundred arbalists,
And, when a foe's head showed above the ramparts,
Those engines showered like hail thereon; behind
Were Ruman troops engaged in working them.
The Shah then bade that elephants should draw
Shores to the hold. He undermined the walls
And shored them up; upon the wooden props
He smeared black naphtha, such was his device,
Whereby the walls were stayed and overthrown.²⁴²

Having thus checked Afrāsiyāb on every side, Kaykhosrau once more turned to prayer:

When all had been prepared the king of earth
Drew near the Maker of the world in prayer,
Writhed in his quest of vengeance like a serpent
Upon the dust, and praised the Almighty, saying:—
"Thine is it to abase and to exalt;
In every strait we look to Thee for succour.
If Thou perceivest that my cause is just
Make not my foot to slip, hurl from the throne
This sorcerer-king, and give me joy and fortune."²⁴³

At his command, the fire was kindled. The naphtha-soaked supports blazed, and the walls of the fort trembled. At once, assaults were launched upon all four sides. The Tūranians, beset from without by stones and arrows, and from within by devouring flames, found themselves trapped between ruin and despair.

The smoke thickened. Some leapt from the walls; others cast down their arms. Soon the ramparts were breached, and the Iranians poured into the fort. Still the Tūranians, urged on by Afrāsiyāb, fought upon the shattered walls—but in vain.

Rostam hewed his way through the press like a storm. Driving straight to the heart of the fortress, he seized Garsīvaz and Jahn,

²⁴² ME, vol. V, p. 312; Warner, vol. IV, p. 208.

²⁴³ ME, vol. V, pp. 312-313; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 208-209.

cast down the black banner of Tūrān, and raised in its place the purple standard of Iran.

Afrāsiyāb, seeing all lost, gazed upon Gang Dezh in bitter despair. On one side stood his captured kin; on the other, the men who had trusted him, now cut down or crushed beneath the feet of war-elephants.

Yet when he had built that fortress, he had foreseen such a day. From its heart he had caused a hidden passage to be made, leading out into the desert. Now, abandoning all, he took that secret way, and with a chosen band fled unseen into the waste.

In due time, Kaykhosrau entered Gang Dezh. Ascending his grandsire's golden throne, he ordered that Afrāsiyāb be brought before him. But he was nowhere to be found; he had vanished like smoke. Even Garsīvaz and Jahn knew nothing of his flight.

The king then took possession of the fortress. He opened its treasuries to his men, yet gave strict command that no common soldier should enter the harem, nor should any of Afrāsiyāb's women be brought forth in the city. To the Tūranians he granted amnesty, permitting them to live as before.

This clemency displeased many among the Iranians, who had hoped for plunder. "He has forgotten his own sufferings," they murmured, "and those of his mother. Rather than master, he behaves as a guest within the conquered Dezh."

Kaykhosrau summoned the *mu'bad*s and spoke plainly: "Though vengeance is sweet upon a fallen foe, I have chosen the path of justice. It is for you to teach the people that justice tempers revenge, and that justice has been fulfilled in the overthrow of Afrāsiyāb. Let them live in peace, bringing joy rather than grief. For in the end, it is benevolence alone that endures."

Then he commanded that the women of the court be brought before him. Many thought he would condemn them to death. Instead, he listened.

Led by Afrāsiyāb's chief consort, they came in sorrow and humility, pleading their innocence:

The chieftest of the ladies with her daughters,
Came wailing to the Shah; each daughter had
A hundred slaves with ruby crowns before her,
Their jewelry was like the shining sun;
The raiment that they wore was cloth of gold.
All carried golden goblets in their hands,
Their hearts were awe-struck at the king of kings;
The dames were all musk, rubies, gold, and gems,
And hung their heads down in their shamefastness [.]²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ ME, vol. V, pp. 318-319; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 213-214.

Concerning Siyāvosh, the queen spoke with grief: "I sought to dissuade my lord from harming that innocent prince, yet I could not prevail. I wept tears of blood. It is not fitting, O king, that thou shouldst repay us in the manner that Afrāsiyāb dealt with thy father. We are guiltless."

Unworthy 'tis for monarchs to behead
The innocent. Thou hast another home,
For none may tarry in this Wayside Inn,
So act as God requireth at thy hands,
And hold in awe the Day of Reckoning.²⁴⁵

Having heard both the women and their accusers, the King inclined toward mercy. He pardoned the women and ordered that they be returned unharmed to their quarters. "It is true," he said, "that Afrāsiyāb did not treat my mother as befitted a queen; yet it is not just to answer one wrong with another."

"Be at your ease; hear what I say in person:—
No miscreant that breaketh faith am I;
Henceforward ye have naught to fear from me,
And none shall entertain the wish to harm you,
Or otherwise his own life shall be brief.
Now in your palaces at ease abide,
Your souls and bodies unto God confide."²⁴⁶

To quiet the discontent of his own men, Kaykhosrau distributed among them the treasures of Tūrān, reserving only the private wealth of Afrāsiyāb. "Take this," he said, "and govern the lands I entrust to you in accordance with God's will."

Seeing such justice and generosity, many among the Tūranians came to his court, each eager to share in the shaping of a realm no longer divided between Iran and Tūrān.

As was the custom after victory, Kaykhosrau sent a letter, written on silk, to Kaykā'ūs. "Gang Dezh is in my hands," he wrote, "but Afrāsiyāb has escaped me. He has vanished. When my scouts bring word of him, I shall inform you at once."

The king remained through the winter and much of the spring in that fair land, hunting and waiting for news. At last tidings came from Khotan and Chīn: Afrāsiyāb had formed an alliance with the Faghfūr, and a great host under the Khāqān had reached Gulzarriyūn:

Then tidings came from Chin and from Khutan
Now that Afrasiyab was with that folk:—
"His cause is taken up by the Faghfur,

²⁴⁵ ME, vol. V, p. 320; Warner, vol. IV, p. 215.

²⁴⁶ ME, vol. V, p. 321; Warner, vol. IV, p. 216.

And clamour filleth all the land of Chin
 Whence troops extend to the Gulzaryun;
 The Khan of Chin himself is in command.
 None knoweth how much wealth, how many slaves,
 And steeds with harness, the Faghfur hath sent
 Afrasiyab. A host acclaimeth him,
 And he hath all the treasures of Piran—
 Enough dinars to load six thousand camels—
 And as he bare them from Khutan an army
 Flocked round him."²⁴⁷

The rumor of Afrāsiyāb's return stirred unrest among the newly subdued Tūranians, and many rose again in revolt. His ranks swelled daily. When the armies met, Afrāsiyāb—against the counsel of his allies and wise men—challenged Kaykhosrau to single combat.

Advised by Rostam, the king refused. "If wars were settled by the meeting of kings alone," he replied through the envoy, "why gather such armies? I have champions—Rostam and Gīv among them. If thy master desires combat, let him challenge them. As for the enmity between us, that chapter is closed."

That day the battle raged fiercely, and many fell. At dusk, Kaykhosrau, weary, withdrew to his pavilion and conferred with his captains.

"Afrāsiyāb held back today," he said. "He has conserved his strength for a night assault. To prevent surprise, let a trench be dug between the armies, and before rest all fires must be quenched."

He stationed Rostam with a strong force upon the adjoining plain, and Tūs with another along the mountainside. "Now the host may sleep," he said. "If Afrāsiyāb comes, he shall find a ditch before him and enemies at his rear."

So it proved. When Afrāsiyāb's scouts reported that the Iranian camp lay silent and unguarded, he ordered an immediate attack. But he fell headlong into the snare. His troops, thrown into confusion at the trench, were cut down in great numbers; and as they turned to flee, Tūs and Rostam fell upon them and completed their ruin.

Worn and broken, Afrāsiyāb returned with difficulty to his quarters.

Once more Kaykhosrau sought his grandsire, yet as soon as Afrāsiyāb saw the purple banner of Iran flying where once his own black standard had stood, he vanished again from sight.

²⁴⁷ ME, vol. V, p. 324; Warner, vol. IV, p. 219.

Kaykhosrau then held audience, honored his champions, and withdrew into prayer. Thereafter he granted his men the spoils of war and set forth for Bihišt Gang.

When news spread that Afrāsiyāb's cause had failed, the Faghfūr and the Khāqān repented of their alliance. Seeking reconciliation, they turned toward Kaykhosrau, sending rich gifts and treasures. The king accepted them, but made clear that they must declare themselves openly against Afrāsiyāb.

Bereft of allies, Afrāsiyāb wandered in fear and uncertainty. For days he led his diminished force across barren wastes, climbed the heights of Asparūz, built ships, and crossed the waters of Zereh to regain the refuge of Gang Dezh.

Kaykhosrau, learning this, resolved upon a final campaign. "This shall be my last war with my grandsire," he declared. "To bring it to an end, I shall subdue Chīn and Mahā-Chīn, cross the Kaymāk Sea, compel Makrān to submit, and then pass the waters of Zereh to destroy Afrāsiyāb utterly."

The crossing of Zereh troubled the army, yet Rostam, convinced of the king's purpose, gave his support, and the host followed his lead.

Kaykhosrau then sent Gīv to Kaykā'ūs with gifts and a letter, dispatching Garsīvaz and Jahn in chains for judgment. Kaykā'ūs received Gīv with honor, cast Garsīvaz into prison for his part in Siyāvosh's death, and placed Jahn under guard.

Kaykhosrau marched toward Chīn, halting first at Khotan. There, at a distance from the city, he was met with great ceremony by the Faghfūr and the Khāqān. His camp was richly adorned, and the land itself seemed renewed for his pleasure. The Faghfūr opened his treasuries, bestowing gifts upon all who accompanied the king—even the humblest guards at the borders.

After three months, Kaykhosrau advanced toward Makrān, leaving Rostam behind. The ruler of Makrān alone refused to provision the Iranian host. In the battle that followed, he was slain—but honored in death:

The monarch of Makran at the army's centre
 Died smitten by a double-headed dart.
 One asked: "Shall we cut off his head, O Shah!"
 Who answered: "We will treat him with respect.
 Who cutteth off kings' heads unless he be
 A villain of the seed of Ahriman?
 Prepare a charnel-house, musk, and rose-water—
 A sleeping-chamber worthy of a king—
 And, seeing that the wound is through his mail,
 By that same token strip ye not the body,

But veil his visage with brocade of Chin,
For he hath died the death that heroes die."²⁴⁸

The treasures of Makrān were divided among the army, and its people were left in peace.

Kaykhosrau remained there through the year, until spring renewed the land. Then he marched toward the desert and the waters of Zereh, leaving Ashkāsh as governor. For seven months his ships traversed those strange waters, where the soldiers beheld marvels in the deep.

At last they reached the desert shore, and there came word that Afrāsiyāb had again taken refuge in Gang Dezh. The distance to the fortress was great, yet Kaykhosrau pressed on, leaving Gīv in command of the landing.

Once more he entered the Dezh and sought Afrāsiyāb—but again the Tūranian king had vanished.

Kaykhosrau lingered there for the remainder of the year, so taken with the place that he grew reluctant to depart. Yet his nobles urged him to return to Iran, warning that Kaykā'ūs, left unguarded, might fall prey to Afrāsiyāb's designs.

Moved by their counsel, the king summoned the governors of the provinces, set the most capable among them over the marches, and departed from the Dezh.

As he journeyed homeward, multitudes came forth to greet him, bringing provisions from every land; and to each he gave gifts in return, so that generosity walked beside him like a second crown.

On the way, Kaykhosrau was met by Gīv, who, together with his sailors, so ably facilitated the king's passage across the sea that a journey of a full year was accomplished in but seven months. When they came ashore, Kaykhosrau bestowed rich gifts upon the mariners, then turned his face toward the desert. News of the King's arrival spread swiftly through those regions, and Ashkāsh hastened forth to welcome him to Makrān. The nobles of that land, too, brought offerings and received the King's benediction. Kaykhosrau thereupon appointed a worthy Makrānī lord over the province and, without delay, set out for Chīn.

The ruler of Chīn, Rostam, received him with honor. Kaykhosrau spoke at length of the strange sights and tidings encountered upon his voyage, and he informed Rostam of the disappearance of their common foe, Afrāsiyāb. After a week of repose, the King resumed his journey and pressed on to Mahā Chīn, that he might visit Siyāvoshgird—the city raised in memory of Siyāvosh. There, both Kaykhosrau and Rostam gave themselves over to mourning. They recalled the prince's untimely death and renewed

²⁴⁸ ME, vol. V, p. 348; Warner, vol. IV, p. 243.

their vows. Before departing, Kaykhosrau, in obedience to his mother's counsel, discovered his father's hidden treasure and opened it to the people, distributing great quantities of gold and precious things to Rostam and to Gīv.

In Siyāvoshgird, Gustaham came forth to greet the King. When the royal progress through those newly won lands was complete, he accompanied Kaykhosrau to Gang Dezh. There the King remained for yet another year before turning again toward Pahlav, to behold Kaykā'ūs.

Upon his departure from Gang Dezh, Kaykhosrau entrusted Gustaham with a mighty host and set him as ruler over the lands stretching from Qachqār to the China Sea. He charged him, moreover, to keep vigilant watch over Chīn and Makrān, and to dispatch scouts unceasingly in search of Afrāsiyāb.

Thereafter Kaykhosrau gathered together the spoils of his victories—treasures, herds, and captives—and set his course for Iran. So vast was his host that it required ten days and nights to traverse each pass between the Dezh and Balkh:

Thus Khusrau reached Chach,
And hung the crown above the ivory throne;
Then as he tarried one more week in Sughd
Khuzan and Talaman [or Baliman] appeared before him;
[All of Sughd welcomed him and rose in joy] ²⁴⁹
He marched thence to Bukhara while the earth
Was hidden by his troops. In rest and feasting
One week was spent, the next, lamenting sore
Past times, he donned new raiment and approached
the Fane of Fire built with its towers by Tur,
The son of Faridun. He showered gold
And silver on the archmages and flung jewels
In numbers on the Fire. Then, fain to go,
The happy Shah went with contented heart,
And crossing the Jihun arrived at Balkh,
Experienced in this world's salt and sours [.] ²⁵⁰

After this respite, it was Kaykhosrau's intent to traverse Iran from town to town, until he should reach Rayy, Pārs, and Baghdād. Yet Kaykā'ūs could not abide delay. When word came that Kaykhosrau had reached Balkh, the aged king rode forth to Tāliqān and Marvrūd to meet him, and they encountered one another upon the road to Nīshāpūr.

²⁴⁹ The Russian edition prefers the verse in brackets to the one citing Khūzān and Talīmān.

²⁵⁰ ME, vol. V, pp. 360-361; Warner, vol. IV, p. 255.

When the ceremonies were concluded, kingdoms assigned, and new governors dispatched, the two kings sat together to deliberate upon the affairs of the realm. Kaykhosrau spoke his concern that Afrāsiyāb might return to Gang Dezh and undo the fruit of his long labors—his crossing of deserts and his year upon strange seas. Kaykā'ūs then proposed a remedy.

"Were we to don fitting raiment," he said, "and supplicate the Almighty within the temple of fire, beseeching Him to reveal Afrāsiyāb's hiding place, it may be that we shall prevail before he can restore his dominion."

Kaykhosrau assented. The kings hastened to Āzerbāijān, where for a week they remained, addressing the sacred fire and pleading their cause before it.

Meanwhile, Afrāsiyāb, bereft of refuge, came to Barda'. There he took shelter in the Hang²⁵¹—a cavern perched upon the summit of a mountain so lofty that even eagles could scarcely attain it. There he brooded for many days upon his past deeds, and his meditations were so deep and troubled that the echoes of his dreams were heard in a neighboring cave, wherein dwelt Hūm, a benevolent ally of the Kayāniān line.²⁵²

Hūm, recognizing Afrāsiyāb, descended upon the Hang and seized the aged king. With his *kūstī* as a cord, he bound Afrāsiyāb's hands and dragged him forth.²⁵³ Afrāsiyāb's eloquence availed him little; he could not persuade Hūm that evil was his nature, nor that he had but obeyed the will of Ahrīman. Failing in this, he changed his plea, complaining that the cord cut cruelly into his wrists. Moved to pity, Hūm loosened the knot. In that instant Afrāsiyāb broke free, cast himself into the waters below, and vanished from sight.

It chanced that, even as Hūm searched the depths for his quarry, Gūdarz and Gīv passed that way. Seeing the old man distraught, they asked the cause of his distress. Hūm recounted all—his discovery of the Hang, the capture of Afrāsiyāb, and the king's escape into the waters. The warriors hastened to inform their sovereigns. The kings rode to the place, heard Hūm's tale, and approved his counsel for drawing Afrāsiyāb once more to the surface. At their command, Garsīvaz, Afrāsiyāb's brother, was brought from the dungeon and tormented beside the waters.

Hūm's stratagem prevailed. The cries of Garsīvaz reached Afrāsiyāb below, and he rose again to the surface. Then Hūm

²⁵¹ In the *Avestā*, the Hankana (cf., Hang) is an impregnable subterranean pleasure palace built by Afrāsiyāb. Possibly related to the abode of Ahrīman from where he launches his assaults on the kingdom of Good, the Hang is located in the east of Iran rather than in Barda', in the west where Ferdowsī locates it.

²⁵² Warner, vol. IV, p. 255.

²⁵³ *Kūstī* is a ceremonial belt worn by the Zoroastrians.

approached stealthily from the side, cast his noose about Afrāsiyāb's neck, dragged him ashore, and delivered him into Kaykhosrau's hands before departing.

For the last time, Afrāsiyāb confessed his error and begged that it might be forgiven. The kings were unmoved. Kaykhosrau drew his sword and struck off Afrāsiyāb's head, thus ending the feud that had consumed the strength of Iran and Tūrān alike. Garsīvaz met no gentler fate, for he too was hewn in twain. Their bodies were left beside the waters, while the kings returned to the temple of fire to offer thanks unto the Almighty for His guidance, bestowing rich treasure upon it for the continuance of its sacred charge.

Messengers were sent throughout the empire proclaiming that the dragon-fiend Afrāsiyāb was no more, that Siyāvosh's spirit was avenged, and that justice had been restored. For forty days the people took to the meadows in celebration of the new age ushered in by the King. When the festivities were ended, the kings departed from Āzerbāijān and made their way to Pārs.

There, Kaykā'ūs—grateful that he had lived to see in his grandson a sovereign so wise, who had avenged Siyāvosh and restored justice among kings and nobles—departed this life at the age of one hundred and fifty. As for Kaykhosrau, he withdrew into seclusion and was seen no more for forty days.

When the mourning for Kaykā'ūs was completed, Kaykhosrau ascended the throne and addressed his people:

The Shah's great soul became solicitous
About God's dealings and his own high state:
He said: "From Hind and Chin to Rum each place
Is prosperous; withal, from west to east,
Mount, desert, land, and sea have I made void
Of foes; the rule and throne of might are mine;
The world no longer dreadeth enemies.
Full many a day hath passed above my head,
And I have gained from God my full desire,
Besides the vengeance that I had at heart,
Yet let me not grow arrogant of soul,
Corrupt in thought, an Ahriman in faith,
And be an evil-doer like Zahhak,
Jamshid, or such an one as Tur or Salm .
Sprung from Kaus on one side, on the other
Sprung from Turan—all rancour and vainglory—
I, like Kaus and like Afrasiyab,
That warlock froward even in his dreams,
May grow an ingrate unawares to God,
And fray mine own pure soul. His Grace will quit me,
I shall incline to falsehood and unwisdom,
And when I pass within the gloom, and when

My head and diadem shall come to dust,
 I shall but leave a bad name in the world,
 And make an evil ending in God's sight.
 This face of mine, this colour of my cheeks
 Will fade, my bones be clad in dust, and all
 Accomplishment be lost. Ingratitude
 Will come instead, and in the other world
 My soul be dark. Another will assume
 My crown and throne, and tread my fortune down.
 A bad name will be my memorial;
 The roses of mine ancient toils will turn
 To thorns. Since now I have avenged my sire,
 And have adorned the world with goodliness,
 Have slain who should be slain, because they were
 Perverse and hostile to all holy God,
 No place remaineth—settlement or desert—
 That hath not read the legend on my sword;
 While all the mighty of the world obey me
 Albeit they be monarches throned and crowned.
 Thanks be to God who gave to me the Grace,
 With feet and wings amid the change of fortune.
 And now I deem it better to depart
 To God in all my glory, and perchance
 The Almighty's messenger may, though unseen,
 And while I still am flourishing, convey
 My spirit to the dwelling of the just,
 Because this Kaian crown and throne will pass.
 None will excel me in success and fame,
 In greatness, welfare, peace, and revelry,
 For I have heard and witnessed this world's secrets,
 Its good and ill both privy and apert;
 But still for husbandman and king alike
 There is a common end—the way to death."²⁵⁴

Having spoken thus, he commanded the chamberlain to bar the doors and turn away all who sought audience. For the space of a week thereafter, Kaykhosrau remained in seclusion, offering prayers to Yazdan and beseeching Him to keep him from the path of those who had fallen before—Zahhāk, Jamshīd, and Kaykā'ūs.

A week later, to the consternation of his champions and nobles, Kaykhosrau returned to the throne room, only to declare that he would persist in his prayers and seclusion. He enjoined all present to do likewise, and issued strict commands that he was not to be disturbed—neither by the court nor by the people at large.

²⁵⁴ ME, vol. V, pp. 379-381; Warner, vol. IV, pp. 272-274.

Another week passed. The Iranian champions, now deeply troubled, assembled at court to determine the future course of the realm. It was resolved that Gīv should ride to Rostam in Zābulistān, and that another envoy be dispatched to Kābulistān to seek counsel and aid. The nobles of those lands, the champions agreed, must be told that Kaykhosrau had withdrawn into a state perilously near to the dominion of Ahrīman.

“We fear,” their message declared, “that Ahrīman may lead our great King astray, even as he once led Kaykā’ūs from the path of righteousness. We entreat you, therefore, to come with all haste, bringing with you the astrologers of Kābulistān, the sages of Zābulistān, and the learned men of Qinnauj, Danbār, Mūrḡ, and Māy.”

Rostam and Zāl received the envoys with courtesy and heeded the summons. When the astrologers, sages, and savants had gathered in Zābul, the whole company set forth together for Iran.

At the end of yet another week in seclusion, Kaykhosrau emerged once more before the assembly, that he might speak of his condition. The champions, refusing to take their appointed seats according to custom, addressed him standing, their unease plain upon their faces. They questioned whether some fault of theirs had brought about the course he had chosen.

“It is not that I stand in no need of your aid,” the King replied, “but that, for the present, I may not concern myself with the affairs of state. The land is secure; the armies need not be stirred. My struggle is of a different order—it is personal, and demands my undivided soul. When I have attained my purpose, I shall speak with you of all matters. For now, I bid you return to your homes in peace.”

When the champions had departed, Kaykhosrau commanded the chamberlain to restore the conditions of seclusion and withdrew once more into his chambers. There he bowed himself in prayer:

“You have fashioned the universe,” he said, “and kindled within it the light of benevolence, justice, and love. What profit is kingship to me, if I stand not in Your favor? Weigh my good and evil deeds, and if I be worthy, receive me into paradise.”

For five weeks thereafter, Kaykhosrau remained in ceaseless devotion. His body faltered beneath the burden of sleeplessness, yet his spirit endured its vigil until at last he beheld Sorūsh. The message of the divine envoy was plain: if he would ascend to heaven, he must sever all bonds with the earthly realm. He must appoint a just guardian over Iran—and depart.

With Sorūsh’s departure, the King awoke as though from a dream. He gave thanks unto God and, soon thereafter, summoned his champions to hear his resolve:

I have attained my wish,
And must dispatch because glad news hath come.
Whenas mine eyes were sleeping yester-morn

Surush, the blessed, came to me from God,
 And said: "Prepare, for 'tis thy time to go,
 Thy watching and distress are overpassed."
 So now mine audiences, care for the host,
 For crown and throne and belt, are at an end.²⁵⁵

Zāl praised the King and pledged his allegiance. "This pledge," he said, "is not mine alone, but that of all the peoples of the kingdoms, from Qinnauj to Danbār, from Mūrq to Māy. Never has Iran been ruled by a sovereign of such wisdom, benevolence, and exalted rank."

Kaykhosrau gave thanks for their devotion. "As I told you before," he said, "my trial was of the spirit. Five weeks I kept vigil and supplication, until last night Sorūsh granted me answer. All things have their end—even kingship. There comes a time when the concerns of the realm must yield to a higher good. Therefore, I have resolved to step aside, that another may bear the burden of Iran."

This declaration fell upon the assembly like a thunderbolt. Zāl, shaken, rose in protest.

"The King is not himself," he said. "Is it truly the King who speaks, or is it Ahrīman? Fereydūn and Hūshang were mighty rulers—yet they did not abandon their kingdoms for solitude!"

Then, turning to Kaykhosrau, he spoke more earnestly still:

"Great King, I must recount matters of history, though they may offend. You were born in Tūrān and raised among its people. The sorceries of your maternal grandsire, Afrāsiyāb, are known to all. Nor was Kaykā'ūs, your other grandsire, free of excess. The dominion of the whole earth could not content him; he sought even to mount the heavens and number the stars. Yet lineage alone does not define a man. You have ruled with justice and strength. In your wars—against the Pechenegs and before Khwārazm—you showed chivalry and might. Had Afrāsiyāb prevailed, Iran would have been reduced to dust, its people enslaved. By God's grace, you overcame that fiend and purged the world of his evil."

"But think not," Zāl continued, "that all dangers are past. To relinquish the throne now would strip Iran of its surest pillar, and you yourself of the *farr*. Turn, I beseech you, from the whispers of Ahrīman, and let wisdom guide you back to the Creator":

If thou art bent on such a course, O Shah!
 No one will go about to do thy bidding,
 And then thou wilt repent thee of thine acts.
 Consider! Do not what the divs command.
 Moreover if thou seekest thus their way
 The Worldlord will withdraw from thee the Grace,

²⁵⁵ ME, vol. V, p. 392; Warner, vol. IV, p. 285.

Thou wilt be left in misery and sin,
 And men will never hail thee Shah again;
 God is our Refuge; therefore turn to God,
 Because He is our Guide to what is good.
 If thou rejectest this my counselling,
 And trustest unto wicked Ahriman,
 Thou wilt retain no homage and no fortune,
 No royal majesty, no crown, no throne.
 May wisdom be the leader of thy soul,
 Because the way in front of us is long.
 Mayst thou be prudent, may thy counsels prosper,
 And may thy brain be steadfast and devout.²⁵⁶

Kaykhosrau listened in silence, then answered with measured calm: "I have heard the words of the venerable Zāl, and I would not grieve him—nor Rostam, who has so often preserved my life in battle. Yet I must speak what truth compels. I praise Zāl's frankness, but his charge—that I have forsaken the Creator—is unjust. My very being flows from Him. My resolve is born not of error, but of knowledge.

"As for my lineage—let us speak plainly. I am the son of Siyāvosh, of the seed of the Kayān. My grandsire is Kaykā'ūs, whose wisdom and renown are known throughout the world. True, my mother is daughter to Afrāsiyāb—but Afrāsiyāb was son of Pashang, whose grandsire was Fereydūn. I take no shame in my descent. The world itself trembled before Afrāsiyāb.

"And as for Kaykā'ūs' ascent toward the stars—judge it not lightly. Kings are called to attempt the extraordinary. Did I not challenge Shīdeh for the same cause? He was no common foe."

He said to Zal: "Forbear thine anger, thou
 Shouldst speak in measured words. First, for
 thy saying:—
 'None wise and shrewd hath issued from Turan,'
 Worldlord and son of Siyawush am I,
 A prudent monarch of the Kaian stock,
 The grandson of the worldlord Kai Kaus—
 The love-inflaming, wise, and fortunate—
 And through my mother from Afrasiyab,
 Whose wrath deprived us both of food and sleep.
 Sprung thus from Faridun and from Pashang,
 I shame not at my birth because the sea
 Could not have purged the Lions of Iran
 Of fears inspired by Afrasiyab.
 Next for the carriage which Kaus once made

²⁵⁶ ME, vol. V, pp. 394-395; Warner, vol. IV, p. 288.

To raise his head above sovereignty,
 Know that no blame attacheth to a king
 For lofty aims [."]²⁵⁷

"Lastly," Kaykhosrau continued, "when I took the throne, one stain alone lay upon my lineage—and that I have effaced. With that, my purpose is fulfilled. To remain upon the throne would tempt me toward excess, and lead me along the path of Zahhāk and of Tūr—the path that ends in ruin.

"For five weeks I have prayed. The Creator has accepted me. Where I go, I shall have no need of army, crown, or throne. I must travel unburdened."

Then, turning once more to Zāl, he said: "Interpret my purpose as you will; it alters not my course. I go toward the Creator."

Kaykhosrau's words struck deeply upon Zāl. The aged hero reproached himself for want of discernment and begged the King's pardon.

"Perhaps," he said, "it is I who have been misled by Ahrīman. I looked to the past for guidance, yet no king, to my knowledge, has chosen the path you now tread. I spoke only because I could not endure the thought of parting from my sovereign."

Zāl's humility pleased Kaykhosrau. Taking the old warrior by the hand, he seated him beside himself upon the throne.

"I know your intentions were pure," said the King. "Now let all the champions remove their armies from the city and encamp in pavilions upon the plain. Let a pavilion be prepared for me as well."

When the encampment had been set in order, the champions assembled once more and stood before the King according to ancient custom. Kaykhosrau addressed them in a grave and measured voice:

"Great champions of Iran! You know well that only good and evil endure; all else is fleeting. We strive, we gather wealth and renown, only to leave them behind—even to our enemies. Yet for our striving there is both reward and reckoning. Of the kings of old, naught remains but their names. We recall Hūshang, Jamshīd, and Kaykā'ūs; they wrought good in their time, yet are remembered also for their tyranny and their excess."

"I am as they were," he continued. "I have devoted my life to my people, yet I have reached a point where this world no longer holds me. A realm greater than the Kayāniān crown has been revealed to me, and I am ready to depart. But before I go, I shall distribute my lands, my arms, and my treasures among the people of Iran. While I take account of my wealth—my slaves, my herds, and my stores—and divide them justly, remain here for a week: eat, drink, and take your ease."

²⁵⁷ ME, vol. V, p. 396; Warner, vol. IV, p. 289.

Some among the warriors and nobles murmured in doubt of the King's reason; others obeyed his command and passed the week in feasting as he had ordained.

On the eighth day, Kaykhosrau ascended his throne in full regalia. Before him stood the great treasury of the Khosraus—the *Ābād* chest—opened and awaiting his decree.

He summoned Gūdarz of the House of Kishwād.

"Gūdarz," he said, "there is a time to hoard and a time to give. Go forth through all Iran. Restore the houses that have fallen to ruin, and the watercourses laid waste by Afrāsiyāb. Seek out the orphans, the widows, the homeless, and the poor, and bid them share in this treasure. Where you find a city desolate, or a fire-temple in decay, or elders unable to sustain themselves, draw from the *Bād-Āvard* treasury to renew and restore them. As for the *'Arūs* treasure, enriched by Kaykā'ūs and now in Tūs—take charge of it and divide it among Zāl, Gīv, and Rostam."

Having thus divested himself of worldly wealth, Kaykhosrau addressed the people once more.

"My time has come," he said. "Ask what you will of me, and it shall be granted."

The champions were troubled, for they knew not whom they would follow in the hour of war. Zāl, ever steadfast, rose to speak.

"Your Majesty," he said, "it is fitting that I speak of Rostam and his service to the royal house. He delivered Kaykā'ūs from bondage in Māzandarān, alongside Gūdarz and Tūs. He slew the White Demon and struck down Sanjah. He gave even his own son, Sohrāb, in the cause of vengeance and loyalty. He has overthrown Kāmūs the Kūshān. Now that Your Majesty departs, what reward remains for such a champion?"

"The Creator," replied the King, "will reward Rostam beyond all others. For my part, I grant him dominion over Nīmrūz."

A decree was written, sealed, and placed in Rostam's hands. In addition, the King bestowed upon him and his companions garments of silk, gold, silver, and cups brimming with jewels.

Then Gūdarz rose to speak on behalf of his son.

"Your Majesty," he said, "from the days of Manūchehr to Kayqubād, and from Kayqubād to this auspicious reign, I have served the throne. Of my seventy-eight sons and grandsons, but eight remain; the rest have fallen in the service of crown and king. My son Gīv wandered seven years in Tūrān, clad in deerskin and feeding upon the flesh of wild beasts, until he fulfilled his charge and brought you back to Iran. What reward shall he receive?"

Kaykhosrau praised Gīv warmly, calling him his very double.

"You undervalue your son's deeds," he said. "I grant him the rule of Isfahan and Qūm."

Then, turning to the assembly, he extolled the sacrifices of Gūdarz and his house, bidding all men honor and heed him.

After Gūdarz, Tūs arose.

“Your Majesty,” he said, “among the champions here gathered, I alone descend from Fereydūn. I have served the throne since the time of Kayqubād. I led the host in vengeance for Siyāvosh in the mountains of Hamāvan. I did not abandon my post at Lāvān. I shared the fetters of Kaykā’ūs in Māzandarān. Now that Your Majesty departs, what shall become of me?”

The King appointed Tūs commander-in-chief of the armies and ruler of Khurāsān. A decree was drawn, sealed, and delivered to him, together with bracelets and belts of gold.

Yet one remained unhonored—Luhrāsp. Kaykhosrau bade Bīzhan summon him. When he came, the King descended from the throne, took the crown from his own head, and placed it upon that of Luhrāsp.

“Luhrāsp,” he declared, to the astonishment of all, “thou art now Shāh!”

Zāl could not accept this.

“Your Majesty,” he protested, “we would accept even dust as king, were it your will—but how shall a man of humble origin, who came to Iran upon a single horse, be raised to the throne? Had you not entrusted him with command at Alanān, had you not granted him banner and army, where would he stand? Who is he? What lineage claims he? Is there none among us more worthy?”

The army murmured in agreement, refusing to acknowledge a sovereign not plainly sanctioned by divine favor.

But Kaykhosrau stood firm.

“Luhrāsp is not as you deem him,” he said. “He is the grandson of Hūshang, a man of wisdom, and he bears the *farr*. As I have done, so shall he: he will contend against evil and establish justice. And his son, Gushtāsp, shall usher in a new age for the world. Heed my counsel, and obey him”:

Since God approveth not of ill from us,
And bad men writhe 'neath time's vicissitudes,
While he whom God createth for high fortune,
Fit to be monarch and adorn the throne,
Endowed with modesty, Faith, birth, and Grace
Will flourish, conquer, and rejoice in justice.
The Maker is my witness when I say
That all these qualities are in Luhrasp.
He is descended from Hushang the worldlord,
A noble of discernment and clean hands,
A scion of Pashin and Kai Kubad,
Well stocked with knowledge, righteous in his thoughts.

He will cut off the sorcerers from the earth,
 And manifest the way of holy God,
 His counsels will renew the age's youth,
 And as he is his stainless son will be.
 God said to me: "Look thou upon Luhrasp,"
 And I have acted only as He bade.
 Now do ye homage to him as your Shah,
 And as ye love me slight not mine advice,
 For if a man transgress mine parting counsel
 I shall esteem his past exertions as wind [.] ²⁵⁸

Once more convinced of his error, Zāl bent low, dipped his finger in dust, touched it to his lips, and proclaimed Luhrāsp Shāh of Iran.

"We are ignorant, O King," he said in apology. "Only a king may discern the true lineage of another king."

Luhrāsp accepted his words with grace.

When the hour of departure drew near, Kaykhosrau summoned his wives and spoke to them with gentle firmness. He bade them regard him as one already numbered among the dead. The women, unwilling to be parted from him, wept bitterly, tearing their hair and imploring the King to take them with him. Kaykhosrau soothed their grief as best he could, then turned to Luhrāsp.

"These are the women of the Kayāniān court," he said. "They are the mothers, daughters, and consorts of kings. I entrust them to your care, and I would receive from you a fair account on that day when you shall stand before Siyāvosh and me."

Luhrāsp accepted the charge with reverence. Kaykhosrau's final counsel to him was marked by humility and resignation:

"Rule with justice, and ever keep the welfare of your subjects before you. And when the day comes that kingship no longer holds your heart, do not strive to rekindle it—relinquish it, and preserve your soul."

Luhrāsp bowed low and kissed the earth before him.

Zāl, Rostam, Gūdarz, Gīv, Bīzhan, Gustaham, Farīborz, and Tūs accompanied Kaykhosrau upon the first stage of his journey, with the army following at a distance. At every halt they sought to dissuade him, urging him to return and resume the throne; yet Kaykhosrau remained steadfast in his resolve. Summoning the *mu'bad*s, he charged them to prepare for the final union.

"A long road lies before me," he said, "a road barren of water and grass. Only those endowed with the *farr* may traverse it and reach its end. Therefore, it is best that you return. Let me pass alone into that other realm."

²⁵⁸ ME, vol. V, p. 407; Warner, vol. IV, p. 302.

Zāl, Rostam, and the aged Gūdarz heeded his words and turned back. But Tūs, Gīv, Bīzhan, and Farīborz pressed onward with the King. For a day and a night they journeyed deep into the desert, until they came upon a solitary fountain. There Kaykhosrau halted.

"We shall rest here tonight," he said, "and speak of times gone by, for we shall not long be together. At dawn, when the sun rises, Sorūsh will come to me, and my journey will be fulfilled."

As evening fell, the King bathed in the clear waters of the fountain and bade farewell to the champions.

"You must return before sunrise," he warned them, "for when the sun appears, a wind shall rise that will uproot the trees, and a black cloud will overspread the heavens, casting down a deep and blinding snow. You will not find your way back to Iran."

Yet the champions would not be persuaded, and they remained.

At dawn, as the first light touched the mountain peaks, Kaykhosrau vanished from sight as though dissolved into the air. The champions searched long and far across the desert, but found no trace of him. At last, weary and disheartened, they returned to the fountain.

"This is a fair place," said Farīborz. "Let us rest here tonight and bear the tidings to the army on the morrow. It will not be easy to make men believe what we have witnessed—that a living king has passed to meet the Creator. Yet who would doubt that Kaykhosrau was unlike all other men?"

Scarcely had they finished their meal when the wind began to rise, and snow fell upon the ground. Soon the storm grew fierce, and the snow deepened until it overwhelmed them. One by one, the champions perished.

For three days, Rostam, Zāl, and Gūdarz waited upon the mountain, expecting the others to return. None came.

"If the King has departed," Gūdarz said at last, "what fate has befallen the rest?"

No answer could be given. They lingered yet another week, until Gūdarz, in sorrow, was forced to conclude that once again the house of Kayān had been sustained by the sacrifice of his own blood, and that he would never behold Gīv and Bīzhan again.

Yielding at last to the decree of the Creator, the grieving Gūdarz allowed himself to be led down from the heights. He wept for his son, for his King, and for his companions, and with the surviving champions pledged to spend the remainder of his days in service at the threshold of King Luhrāsp.

With Kaykhosrau's passing into the Pure Light, Luhrāsp—grandson of Kaypīshīn and descendant of Kayqubād—ascended the throne. Yet, as the earlier exchange between Zāl and Kaykhosrau

had foreshadowed, many among the court viewed this choice with misgiving. To the champions of Iran, Luhrāsp seemed but a minor figure, newly raised from the governorship of Alanān and the oversight of the Ghuzz fortress. That such a man should now rule the united realms of Iran and Tūrān appeared to them a grave disparity.

Nor should it be forgotten that Zāl's submission in court had been ceremonial. In his heart, he regarded the King's choice as an affront to the House of Nairam—a house that traced its lineage to Zahhāk on one side and Jamshīd on the other. Thus, at the outset of Luhrāsp's reign, Zāl, Rostam, and the champions of that house withdrew from the capital and returned to their dominion in Zābulistān.

From its very beginning, Luhrāsp's rule was beset with difficulty. The departure of the House of Nairam was but one misfortune. Another lay in the loss of four of Iran's foremost champions—Farīborz, Tūs, Gīv, and Bīzhan—who had followed Kaykhosrau on his final journey and perished in the storm. These blows, together with the later discord between Luhrāsp and his son Gushtāsp over the succession, weakened the standing of Iran among the nations of the world. Enemies, both within and without, began to whisper that the end of the Kayāniān line was at hand.

Luhrāsp had two sons, Zarīr and Gushtāsp. According to ancient custom, a king was to pass the scepter to one of his sons; yet Luhrāsp at first sought to bestow the throne upon a grandson of Kaykā'ūs. This design, however, clashed with the ambition of the bold and headstrong Gushtāsp, who claimed the kingship as his divine right. In time, Luhrāsp yielded. He relinquished the throne and withdrew to the fire temple of Nowbahār, there to live in seclusion.

The Iranians hoped that under the new king the divisions between the houses might be healed, and that the House of Nairam would once more return to serve the Kayāniān throne.

The significance of Luhrāsp's reign lay in a gradual transformation in the nature of rule. Until the time of Kaykhosrau, kingship had been the domain of saintly heroes, figures touched by the divine. Under Luhrāsp, however, the human element began to assert itself alongside the divine. The demand of Gushtāsp—that his father relinquish power so that he and his companions might reform the kingdom—marked a turning point. This movement toward a more human-centered rule, guided by wisdom rather than sustained solely by sacred charisma, prepared the ground for a greater change yet to come: the appearance of the Prophet Zoroaster.

From his youth, Gushtāsp had been restless and willful. He urged his father to abdicate in his favor; when refused, he departed Iran and journeyed to India. Persuaded at length by Luhrāsp and Zarīr, he returned, only to renew his demands. When these too were

denied, he set out for Rum, where he wed Katāyūn, daughter of the Caesar.

By the time Luhrāsp at last consented to his accession, Gushtāsp had become seasoned by travel and experience. His marriage into the house of Rūm widened his horizon beyond that of his forebears. Under his rule, Iran came into contact with distant lands that had once been but names in story and report.

Among the most momentous events of his reign was the appearance of the Prophet Zoroaster. Gushtāsp accepted the new faith and became its foremost patron and champion, promoting it throughout the realm. The spread of this religion rekindled the ancient rivalry between Iran and Tūrān. Undeterred, and supported by his iron-willed son Esfandiyār, Gushtāsp stood against Arjāsp, around whom the pagan hosts of Tūrān had gathered.

The Historical Age

As we have seen, in the *Shāhnāme*, Ferdowsī treats the Cosmic Age with brevity. His passage from the Cosmic to the Mythical Age is rendered as a succinct account of the coming-into-being of the earth itself, which he employs as a stage upon which his heroes may act. By grounding his narrative in the creation of the world, he lends to those heroes a measure of earthly reality, making them appear not as distant abstractions, but as beings who move within the same created order as his readers.

For the transition from the Mythical to the Historical Age, however, Ferdowsī turns to the perennial struggle between good and evil. This time, the conflict unfolds among the descendants of Kayūmars, now no longer mythical figures, but kings and *mu'bad*s engaged in a tangible struggle against the forces of darkness. In this age, the battle is waged upon the earth itself, as the adherents of Zoroaster rise to defend the prophet and his creed against those who oppose the faith.

Within this framework, two events assume singular importance: the appearance of Zoroaster and the reign of Gushtāsp. Equally significant is the Mazdian community into which the prophet was born. It is therefore necessary to consider, albeit briefly, the nature of Mazdaism²⁵⁹ before turning to the account of Zoroaster's appearance.

Mazdaism rests upon the fundamental opposition between good and evil. According to this creed, the individual does not

²⁵⁹ *Mazdaism* is the precursor to Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster reorganized the *Mazdian* deities and presented a pantheon consisting of the chief deity *Ahūrā Mazda*, *spentās*, *Yazatās*, and *Fravashīs* or souls of the faithful.

commune directly with the supreme deity, but through an ordered hierarchy of divine beings. Zoroaster reorganized these intermediary powers into a structured system: six *spentās*,²⁶⁰ or holy immortals, placed under the sovereignty of *Ahūrā Mazdā*. Beneath them stood a host of lesser divinities—the *īzads*—who fulfilled a dual role. They mediated between the *spentās* and *Ahūrā Mazdā*, and at the same time guided the spirits of the faithful, the *faravashīs*.

In this way, Zoroaster transformed what had once been a more immediate relationship with the divine into a measured and hierarchical system of communication. This reordering inevitably bore upon the bestowal of the *farr*, though that matter lies beyond the present inquiry.

Ferdowsī does not set forth these theological structures explicitly within his epic. Rather, he weaves them subtly into the lives and deeds of the kings and heroes of the Historical Age, much as he had earlier illustrated the workings of the *farr* among the mythical champions who enjoyed a more direct communion with the divine.

It will be recalled that when Kaykhosrau entrusted his kingdom to Luhrāsp, he uttered two prophecies: that a prophet would arise to bring a new order to the world, and that a king from Luhrāsp's line would accept and promote that faith. These pronouncements, though simply phrased, bore profound significance.

In general, they were fulfilled. The prophet was Zoroaster; the king, Gushtāsp. More deeply, Kaykhosrau signaled to his people that the age of saintly hero-kings—who alone governed both the spiritual and temporal realms—had come to its end. In the age to come, kings endowed with the *farr* would rule in concert with spiritual guides. Thus, the reign of Luhrāsp, and his tension with Gushtāsp, prepared the ground for a transformation in the nature of kingship itself.

The Appearance of Zoroaster

Zoroaster's original name in the *Avestā* is Zarathūstrā; the Greeks and later the English rendered it as Zoroaster, while the Persians call him Zardusht or Zartusht. Neither the time nor the place of his birth is known with certainty, and the circumstances of his early life are veiled in legend. It is said, for instance, that whereas other children enter the world in tears, Zoroaster was born laughing.

²⁶⁰ *Spentā* refers to the six *Ameshā spentās* (holy immortals) that in Zoroaster's reorganization of *Mazdaism* stand below *Ahūrā Mazdā*.

He came into a tribal society governed by priestly and warrior elites known as the *Karapāns*, who held sway over the working classes—farmers, herdsman, craftsmen, and smiths. Even in his youth, Zoroaster opposed the deceptive and exploitative teachings of these leaders. His dissent deepened after he began to commune with *Ahūrā Mazdā*.

These divine encounters began when he was about thirty years of age and continued for a decade. Through them, Zoroaster came to understand that he must proclaim the worship of one God, *Ahūrā Mazdā*; that the world is an arena of struggle between good and evil; and that each individual bears responsibility for aiding the good and resisting the evil. He was enjoined to teach the triad of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, and to reject all that brings suffering—falsehood, tyranny, and oppression. Above all, he was to rely upon *kherad*, innate wisdom, as the guide in all decisions.

Zoroaster proclaimed these teachings both to the common people and to the *Karapāns*, hoping to win them over. Yet they neither accepted his message nor followed him; instead, they sought to do him harm. In the end, he was compelled to abandon his homeland in the east and journey westward in search of a more receptive audience.

At the age of forty-two, he came to the court of King Gushtāsp, who was then engaged in conflict with Arjāsp, successor to Afrāsiyāb in Tūrān. Arjāsp rejected the unity established by Kaykhosrau and refused tribute, even demanding submission in return. Gushtāsp listened attentively to Zoroaster's teachings and accepted them. Alongside him, Luhrāsp and Esfandiyār likewise embraced the new faith.

In doing so, Gushtāsp acknowledged a turning of the age: the time of solitary, saintly rulers had passed, and kings must henceforth govern with the counsel of the *mu'bad*s.

From this moment, the very nature of conflict in the *Shāhnāme* undergoes a change. No longer do kings strive primarily for immortality through the *farr*; instead, they wage war to extend and defend the domain of the new faith—a pattern that endures until the rise of Islam.

Zoroaster conveyed his teachings in the form of hymns known as the *Gāthās*—simple in language, yet profound in meaning, and readily grasped by those who heard them.

His life came to an end in Balkh, where he was slain by a *Karapān* priest while at prayer in a fire temple. He was seventy-seven years of age.

The Story of Rostam and Esfandiyār

Esfandiyār is the last great warrior of the early heroic age of Iran. He is the son of Gushtāsp, an invincible, iron-clad prince who longs both for the throne of his father and for the swift expansion of the Zoroastrian faith. The tension between father and son over the kingship of Iran recalls, in its pattern and bitterness, the earlier conflict between Luhrāsp and Gushtāsp himself.

Gushtāsp exploits Esfandiyār's courage and zeal for his own ends. To avenge the death of his brother Zarīr, he promises that he will give his daughter Homāi in marriage to whoever defeats Arjāsp, and further declares that he will relinquish the throne to the victor. Esfandiyār accomplishes the deed, defeats Arjāsp, and is granted only the hand of Homāi. Yet Gushtāsp delays the fulfillment of his promise. He declares that, before Esfandiyār may ascend the throne, he must first spread the Zoroastrian faith throughout the world.

Esfandiyār sets forth and conquers India, Rūm, and Yemen. But when he returns, instead of receiving the crown, he is imprisoned by his father. While Esfandiyār lies in confinement and Gushtāsp is absent in Zābulistān visiting Rostam and Zāl, Arjāsp invades Iran, kills Luhrāsp, and carries off Gushtāsp's daughters into captivity.

In order to repel Arjāsp and prevent the further fragmentation of Iran and the weakening of the Zoroastrian order, Gushtāsp releases Esfandiyār from prison. He tells him that if he destroys Arjāsp and restores his sisters, he shall be worthy of the throne. Esfandiyār fulfills this charge, yet once again Gushtāsp withholds his promise, assigning instead a task whose impossibility he already foresees: Esfandiyār must bring the proud and defiant Rostam to court in chains.

It is said that before imposing this final trial, Gushtāsp had himself journeyed to Zābulistān and remained for two years among the House of Nairam, seeking to acquaint them with the laws of the new faith. He believed that by setting Rostam and Esfandiyār against one another, he might correct his son's excess of pride through contact with a true hero. In this vision, Esfandiyār would be tested—and tempered—by Rostam himself. Yet Rostam interpreted the challenge as open enmity, and thus entered the struggle as one who faces a mortal foe.

On the day of battle, Rostam's blows proved powerless against the iron armor of Esfandiyār, while Esfandiyār's diamond-tipped arrows pierced Rostam's defenses and wounded both him and his steed, Rakhsh. Rostam, grievously injured, asked for respite so that the Sīmurgh might tend his wounds through Zāl.

In the meantime, Zāl learned from the legendary *Šimurgh*²⁶¹ that only a double-headed arrow fashioned from the branch of a tamarisk tree—known as the *gaz*—could bring down Esfandiyār, and that both shafts must strike his eyes. He was further warned that the slayer of Esfandiyār would not long survive him.

Following this counsel, Rostam ultimately slew Esfandiyār. Yet, as foretold, his own end soon followed, at the hands of his own half-brother Shaghād. Thus Rostam and Esfandiyār stand as the final warriors of the mythical age.

As for Gushtāsp, after a reign of one hundred and twenty years, he passed away, and the sovereignty of Iran descended to Esfandiyār's son, Bahman. After Bahman, his daughter and wife Homāi Chehrzād ruled for twenty-three years. Thereafter, especially in the reigns of Dārāb and Dārā, the boundary between myth and history becomes increasingly indistinct, and the epic moves steadily toward the realm of chronicle.

After Zoroaster

The historical portion of the *Shāhnāme* reflects the events that unfold after the reign of Gushtāsp. Ferdowsi does not linger upon antiquity in detail. From among the Achaemenid kings, only Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) and Darius III (r. 336–330 BCE) are explicitly retained in the narrative. The former is rendered as Dārāb, the latter as Dārā.

Despite the many rulers who historically stood between them, the epic compresses them into a father-and-son relation. Dārāb is portrayed as a just and noble sovereign, associated with such innovations as the *chāpār* (postal relay system). Dārā, by contrast, is depicted as the unfortunate king whose reign ends in defeat at the hands of Alexander the Great.

Alexander himself occupies an ambivalent position in Iranian tradition. Because he burned the *Avestā* and slew many *mu'bad*s, he is at times remembered as *gujastag* (accursed). Yet other traditions regard him as a legitimate Iranian sovereign, and many narrative strands of the *Shāhnāme* are attached to his name.

A substantial portion of the historical section is devoted to the Sassanid kings, the revival of Zoroastrian institutions, and their wars with Rome, as well as their cultural exchanges with India. Particular attention is given to Ardashīr I, founder of the Sassanid

²⁶¹ Zāl is Rostam's father. He is brought up by the legendary *Šimurgh* and, in austere situations, is aided by the wise bird.

dynasty, whose deeds are drawn in part from the *Kārnāmak-e Ardashīr-e Pāpakān*.

Equally prominent is Khosrow I, known as Anūshīravān,²⁶² whose justice is extolled throughout the narrative. His involvement in the rise and suppression of Mazdak,²⁶³ as well as his wars with Rome, are treated at length. The epic concludes with the battle of al-Qādisiyyah in present-day Iraq, where the Iranian army is defeated by the Arab forces. The irony most often noted in this final catastrophe lies in the name of the defeated commander: Rostam Farrukhzād.²⁶⁴

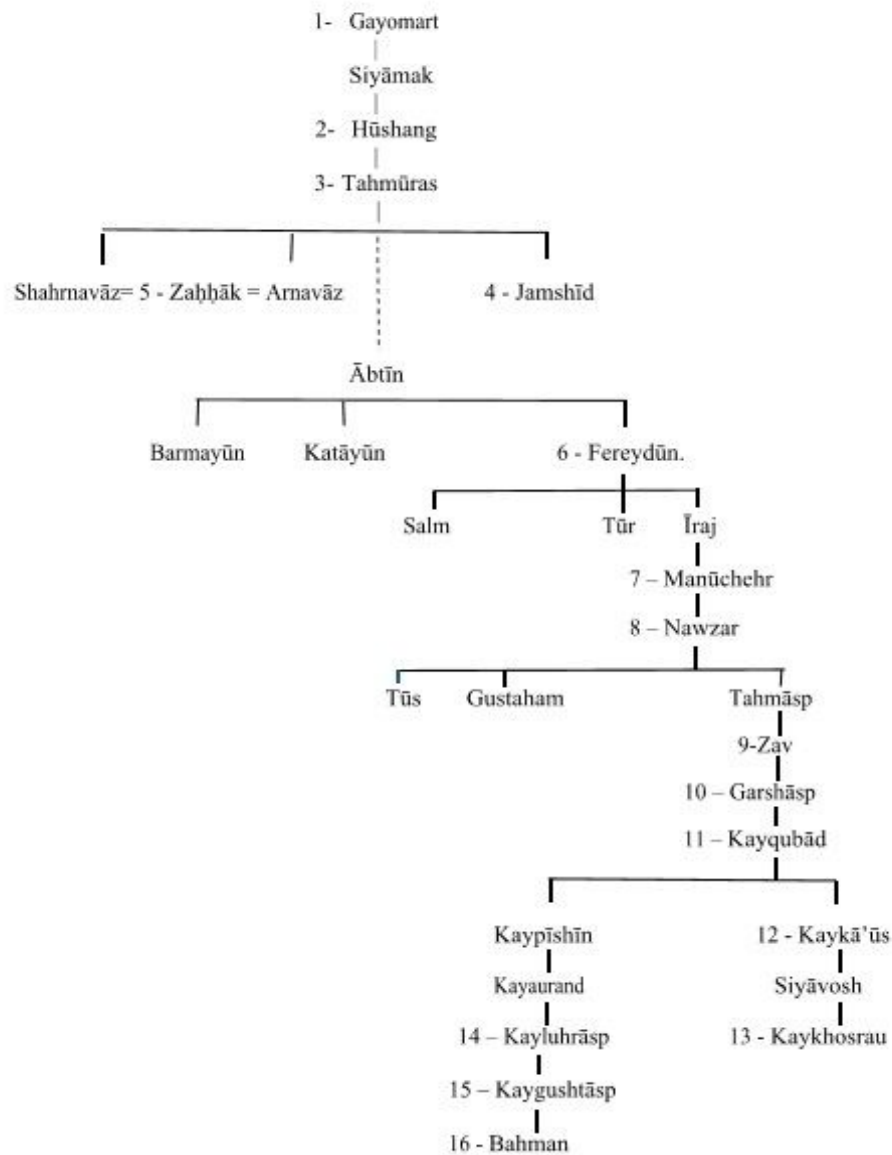
²⁶² Anūshīravān is the epithet of Khosrow I (531-579), a major Sassanian monarch known for his wars with Rome and discrediting the reformer Mazdak.

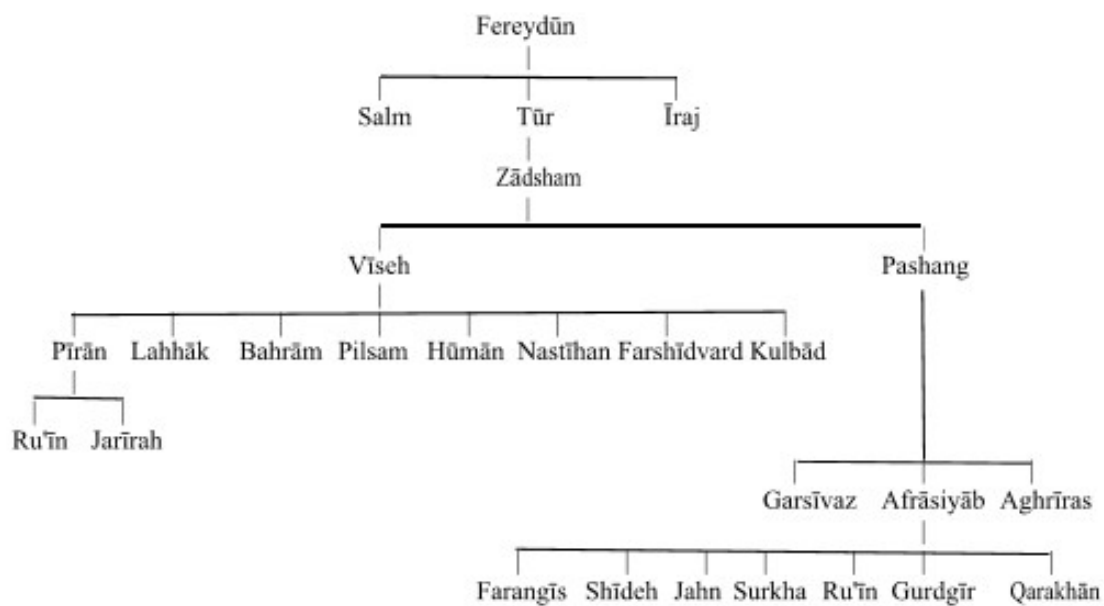
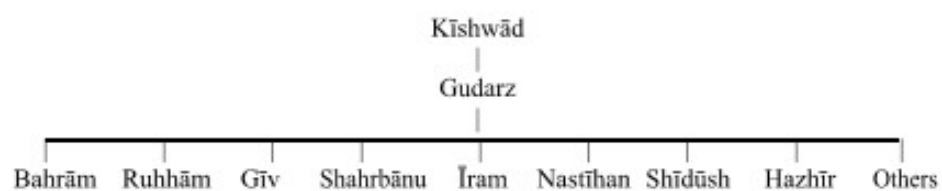
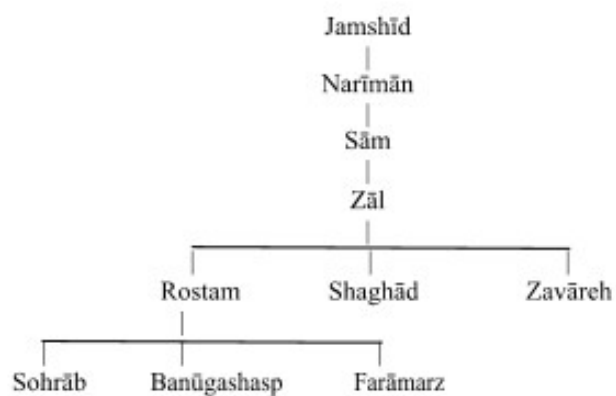
²⁶³ *Mazdak* is the architect of a communist-style reform of Sassanian society during the reign of Kāvādh I (488-496 and 498/9-531).

²⁶⁴ Rostam Farrukhzād was a Sassanian military marshal in charge of the northwestern region of present-day Āzerbāijān. Under Yazdgerd III (r. 632-651), as the commander in chief of the Iranian forces, he was defeated by the invading Muslim armies in present-day Iraq.

Appendix

Table of Legendary Kings





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