

## Notes on Some Women of the Shāhnāma

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Traditionally, the *Shāhnāma* is divided into three parts. The first, usually called the mythological section, tells of the creation of civilization by early kings and culture heroes. The second, or the legendary part, is chiefly concerned with wars of Iran with her enemy land Tūrān, and the lofty deeds of great heroes. The final portion is a legendary telling of the rule of a number of historical kings. Although many scholars tend to refer to this section of the epic as the "historical part," it is important to remember that the "historical" monarchs, whose rules and adventures are detailed in this part, are merely literary or legendary renditions of historical personages. Their characters in the *Shāhnāma* are products of ethnopoetry rather than history. Indifferent to this crucial distinction, many scholars continues to focus on the historical namesakes of these legendary figures, and bring the weight of their impressive learning to finding some dim reflection of actual past personages in the story (e.g., Alishan 1989, Shahbazi 1990). For reasons that cannot be discussed here, I find the "historical" interpretation of the *Shāhnāma* logically and scholastically flawed. Indeed, I doubt that the *Shāhnāma* contains any real historical information. I believe George Santayana's statement that: "*The Bible* is literature, not dogma," may equally apply to the *Shāhnāma* with a minor adjustment as: "*The Shāhnāma* is literature, not history." My approach to the epic, therefore, is essentially literary *not* historical. Having said this, let us consider the text of the poem.



As Mujtabā Mīnuvī pointed out, in reality we have two *Shāhnāmas*. One is a literary creation by Ferdowsī (d. circa 411/1020),<sup>1</sup> and exists in manuscripts of varying size and dependability. The other, more important for our purposes, is a cultural artifact which has evolved from Ferdowsī's original composition. This latter has many episodes, which can be objectively shown not to have been composed by Ferdowsī. However, the spuriousness of these episodes is no measure of their worth. Many of the episodes that we know were added to the text by different copyists, happen to be legitimate tales from ancient Iranian lore. For instance, the stories of Rostam's fight with the white elephant, Garshāsp's kingship, bringing of Kayqubād from Mount Alburz, and the building of Gangdiz, are, on philological, textual, and stylistic grounds not composed by Ferdowsī.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this, they are legitimate old epic traditions. Ferdowsī did not versify them only because they did not exist in the prose archetype from which he worked. Therefore, one may not exclude these narratives if one is engaged in the study of Iranian epic tradition. They should however, be excluded *only* if one is concerned with the establishing Ferdowsī's text. To put it another way, the same verses that should be included in literary studies of the Iranian epic tradition *per se*, should be excluded from studies of Ferdowsī's poetry or art. For this reason, in preparing this paper, I have used Mohl's edition of the *Shāhnāma* that, although not a critical edition, is readily accessible.<sup>3</sup> This is because here we are concerned with what the Persian epic tradition has to say on the subject of women and power, rather than being interested in Ferdowsī's personal views on the subject.

The existing literature on women in the *Shāhnāma* is meager. The best work on the subject is still Professor Khaleghi-Motlagh's dissertation *Die Frauen im Schahname*, which was published in Germany in 1971. Iraj Afshār lists a number of relevant books and articles in his magisterial *Ketāb-Shenāsī-ye Ferdowsī*. However, these, like a number of other books and articles that have appeared in Iran since the appearance of Afshār's bibliography, are either chiefly descriptive rather than analytic (*Hayāt* 1369/1991; cf. Bassārī 1971), or are reprints of older studies (Harīrī 1365/1987).

In his important book on the Iranian national epic, Theodor Nöldeke writes: "Women do not play in the *Shāhnāme* any overactive role. They practically appear only as a subject of desire or love" (Nöldeke 1979, pp. 88-89). A close reading of the poem disallows Nöldeke's views, and instead yields an entirely different impression of its women. In this paper, I hope to present a modest



analytical contribution to the study of some women of the *Shāhnāma*. I will introduce evidence which elucidates the vital role that feminine entities play in directing the flow of the poem's narrative. Rather than clutching to my concluding arguments until the end of the essay however, allow me to present them at the outset. By doing so, I hope the reader will be better able to pay attention to details of the evidence along the way, and judge its merit or lack thereof.

The point, which I hope to demonstrate, is the following: Significant political transition in the *Shāhnāma*, often involves the mediation of either women or feminine symbols. For reasons that I hope will become clear presently, women or feminine symbols arbitrate all *significant* instances of transfer of power, be they royal, heroic, or magical. This rule is so well entrenched in evidence that deviations from it are likely to be cases of under analysis. For reasons of space, only a few examples of the operation of this rule will be presented here. A detailed study of the subject, and an exhaustive catalog of its every occurrence in the poem, goes far beyond the modest ambitions of a short paper.

Zoroastrian myth tells of the creation of a primordial man and a primordial cow. The pair lives in a state of peace for a time until the Evil Spirit and his hosts attack and kill them. The world is then made from the bodies of the primordial man and his bovine companion. Among the miscreations of the Evil Spirit, there is a female demoness by the name of *Jēh*. She is instrumental in bringing about the downfall of the First Man, and by implication the creation of the world as we know it. It may be that *Jēh* is merely the female aspect of the Evil Spirit himself. This should not be surprising because a measure of gender ambiguity is implied for both the good and evil creators in the religious tradition of Zoroastrians. For instance, the Zoroastrian text *Bundahishn* speaks of how Ahura Mazda carried the ideal form of the world in his body, *like a mother carrying her child in his womb* (Duchesne-Guillemin 1973, p. 213; Bahār 1991, pp. 51-54). It also speaks of the deity being both the *mother* and the *father* of the creation (Bahār 1991, p. 38). The same duality of gender is evident among demons. According to at least one myth, the Evil Spirit created his host of demons by impregnating himself through having anal intercourse with himself (*Rivāyāt*, p. 274). This clearly suggests that the Evil Spirit possesses a "feminine" aspect that manifests itself in different ways. If this argument is correct, then the demoness *Jēh* may represent the female aspect of the Evil Spirit. Be that as it may, it is *Jēh* who sets in motion the process of corruption of



the primordial man, which results in his death. Since the world is created from the remains of the primordial man, one may argue that life, as we know it, began because of *Jēh*'s activities. Namely, her destruction of the state of *innocent stagnation* in which the first man and his bovine companion lived, brought about life.

*Jēh* does not stand alone at the beginning of all existence. The earth goddess Spandārmadh accompanies her primordial presence. Spandārmadh first receives the ejected semen of the dying primordial man into the protection of her motherly folds, and allows the divine forces to collect it for purification. Once purified, this seed is again planted in her, and from it the original human pair grow in the form of two rhubarb stalks. All human life emanates from this pair. Thus, transition from stagnation to vitality, and from proto-man to man, are both mediated by the feminine forces in Zoroastrian tradition.

Female entities roam not only at the morning of creation but also beyond the grave. In both pre-Islamic Iranian eschatology and epic tradition, every soul meets a female entity the form of which depends on whether the soul is that of a sinner or not (for *Chinwat* see *Garshāsp-nāmah*, pp. 137, 402). She is beautiful, if the soul belongs to the pious, but she is an old hag of evil countenance and foul smell, if the soul is that of a malefactor. These two ladies lead the soul to its place of rest or damnation (Bahār 1991, pp. 129-131). Once again, at the point of transition, this time from life to death stands a woman.

The examples of the feminine presence at transitional points are numerous. But why is this the case? Why do women or feminine symbols are so intimately connected to transitional states? The presence of the feminine at moments of transition may be motivated by at least two reasons. The first of these is man's zealous knowledge of the indispensability of women in bringing forth new life (Bettelheim 1962; Dundes 1975, 1987, 1997). The inescapable implication of this knowledge is that the birth of all new orders presupposes the existence of some feminine entity to act as the mother out of whom the new order is born. To the extent that these episodic changes are also births of new states, the mediating presence of the feminine is essential. The second reason may be that all points of crossing and frontiers of action are also *loci* of fear and anxiety because they involve the unknown. Man's dire psychological need to master this fear drives him to achieve this mastery either by stylized repetition of the trauma (hence the recurrence of the pattern), or by providing himself with a reassuring and comforting presence to alleviate the anxiety. Both of these strategies are



symbolically expressed in myth and folklore. Lofty rites of passage celebrated amid great pomp as well as the more mundane beliefs of our daily life (such as superstitions about thresholds) are to various extents ingenious ways of mastering the anxiety of this state. The appearance of the feminine at such points of crossing reflects the need to seek the comforting presence of the prototype of all protection, namely that of the mother.

In his brilliant essay, *The Origin and Function of Culture*, Geza Róheim observed:

Civilization originates in delayed infancy and its function is security. It is a huge network of more or less successful attempts to protect mankind against the danger of object-loss, the colossal efforts made by a baby who is afraid of being left alone in the dark (p. 100).

If Róheim is right in his interpretation, then the presence of feminine symbols at anxiety points may express men's need to retreat to the security of the maternal embrace, when they are faced with danger. This need is so powerful in Persian epic tradition that, in the rare instances when a male entity helps with the process of transition, he is effeminized (Omidshar 1984a, pp. 448-449).<sup>4</sup>

Whenever political power changes hands or when a special form of power is created in the *Shāhnāma*, a female being is always involved. If she is not a queen, a mother, or a lover, then she is a blatantly feminine symbol. Except during the reign of all but the last of the creator-kings or culture heroes, almost every important transition of power in the *Shāhnāma* involves either a woman, or a feminine symbol.

The involvement of women with transition of political power begins with the reign of the last culture-hero Jamshīd, when towards the end of his reign, he grows arrogant and claims to be God. As punishment for his arrogance, the *royal glory* is made to depart from him. In time, Jamshīd is succeeded by a dragon-king Zakhāk. All creative activity has been concluded at the time of this transition. The king has sinned and fallen from the position of a creator-king to that of a human one. A period of chaos, which ends in the ascension of the Zakhāk to the Iranian throne, ensues.

According to the *Shāhnāma*, sometime prior to ascending the Persian throne, Zakhāk was enticed by the devil to kill his father and usurp his place. Meanwhile, the Iranian nobles who had already rebelled against Jamshīd's excesses, send an emissary to Zakhāk and invite him to take over the Persian throne. The dragon-king quickly moves to Iran and assumes the reigns of power. Once in Iran, Zakhāk



legitimizes his authority by marrying the two daughters of the deposed king Jamshīd (Mohl, 1/35/6-10). The passage of royal authority from Jamshīd to Zakhāk is thus signaled by the tyrant's marriage to the princesses. There is an interesting version of Zakhāk's adventures in the folk versions of this tale, which is different from the *Shāhnāma* account. According to it Zakhāk's career begins with his incestuous love for his stepmother.<sup>5</sup>

The oral version of the story tells us that Zakhāk kills his father because he is in love with his beautiful stepmother. Following the murder of his father, Zakhāk proclaims his love to his stepmother, and asks her to marry him. The lady who is desperately trying to avoid her stepson's amorous advances, responds that she will be his wife only if he goes to King Jamshīd and asks to be appointed to his father's office. Zakhāk does so, and returns to renew his demands. But rather than succumbing to her lecherous stepson's advances, the lady commits suicide in despair (Anjavī 1975, pp. 301-302, 307-308).

In this folk tale, it is the lady's ample charms which launches Zakhāk on a path of parricide, and it is her demanding that he obtains his father's office which sets him on the ambitious path which leads to kingship over Iran. By asking the boy to gain his father's office, the lady in effect demands the son to become the father. She demands the boy to grow up, thus creating Zakhāk the King out of a lovesick whimpering little parricide.

Women play a prominent role throughout Zakhāk's career. His adventures begin and end under women's influence. Indeed, one of the tyrant's distinguishing characteristics in Persian and Arabic texts is his sexual avarice (s. v. Aždahā in *EI*.) This is clear in the story of his fall. Zakhāk's impending doom is revealed to him in a terrifying nightmare. The king stirs with a great cry of terror and much like a scared little boy seeks refuge in the arms of his wives, one of whom advises the tyrant to have his dream interpreted. The royal dream interpreters tell him that his dream portends of the coming of prince Fereydūn, who will one day overcome and unseat him. Alarmed, Zakhāk orders that all new-born male infants in his realm be slain. But neither his Pharaonic cruelty nor the ruthlessness of his agents can alter his fate. What's more, Fereydūn's father is killed by his agents, thus giving Fereydūn an additional cause to rise against him (Mohl, 1/39/106, 40/125-28, 42/170-172). Let us now consider the case of Fereydūn's mother, a woman who is instrumental in Zakhāk's downfall. Having lost his father to the murderous agents of Zakhāk, Fereydūn begins life in the exclusive company of his mother Arānak. This resourceful lady escapes the wrath of the despot with her infant son.



In the meantime, a magical cow by the name of Barmāya, which was born at the same time as our hero, serves as the infant's wet-nurse. But the agents of Zāhhāk kill the animal during a raid.

Barmāya is more than a mere animal-nurse in the folk and literary versions of the story. According to one folk tale, it not only nurses the hero but also teaches him to walk, and plays with him on the grass (Anjavī 1985, pp.31-32). Her special importance is reiterated in the text of the *Shāhnāma*, where Fereydūn mentions vengeance for the murder of his bovine wet-nurse among the reasons why he wishes to kill Zāhhāk. There is no other instance in the entire epic, where a king or a hero seeks to avenge the murder of an animal. This fact alone proves that there is more to this cow than only milk.

Even the form of the weapon by which the hero kills Zāhhāk denotes a connection to the murder of his animal-nurse. Just before he moves against the tyrant, Fereydūn orders his blacksmiths to make him a "cow-headed" mace (Mohl, 1/47/286-290). The form of the weapon is practically a reproduction of Barmāya's head. The matter is plainly stated in the poem:

همان گاو برمایه کم دایه بود  
 ز بیکر تنش همچو پیرایه بود  
 ز خون چنان بی زبان چارپای  
 چه آمد مر آن مرد ناپاک رای  
 کمر بسته ام لاجرم جنگجوی  
 از ایران بکین اندر آورده روی  
 سرش را بدان گرزۀ گاو چهر  
 بگویم، نه بخشایش آرم نه مهر

[Zāhhāk killed] that cow Barmāya, which was my wet-nurse, and of which the body was beautifully adorned. You will see what will come to that evil minded man on account of shedding the blood of that poor animal have girded myself seeking war. Having come from Iran for vengeance, I shall smash his head by this cow-headed mace. I shall show neither forgiveness nor mercy (Mohl, 1/51/379-382; cf. Anjavī 1975, p. 314).

True to his promise, Fereydūn defeats Zāhhāk's by a single blow of his mace in the royal harem (Mohl, 1/55/483). There are two reasons why Fereydūn should use a cow-headed weapon in this confrontation. The first, and the more obvious, is that he wants to kill the destroyer of his wet-nurse by a weapon which makes the



vengeful nature of the action clear. The second is that by being fashioned after the head of a female animal, the shape of the hero's weapon reiterates the mediating role of the feminine in transition of power from Zakhāk to Fereydūn.

Let us backtrack a bit, and consider the presence and the role of women in Fereydūn's life more closely. As I have already mentioned, Fereydūn begins life in an almost exclusively female company. Throughout his perilous infancy, it is his mother who saves his life by constantly moving him, often only steps ahead of Zakhāk's agents of death. His education, although conducted by three ascetics in remote places, is designed and managed only by his mother Farānak, who chooses the ascetics as her son's mentors and guardians. Later, when he triumphantly enters Zakhāk's palace, he begins with romancing the dragon-king's two wives, who must be at least as old as his mother. And the three are not even subtle in their *ménage à trois* (Mohl, 1/53/440-444).

The symbolism of Fereydūn's maternal attachment is unmistakable. That Fereydūn's first amorous encounter with the wives of the dragon-king occurs when Zakhāk is away in India simply recreates the conditions of the hero's birth. He was after all, born to a widowed mother whose husband was killed (i. e., absent). Fereydūn's assumption of kingship (his birth *qua* king if you will), symbolized by his victorious entry into the royal palace and his takeover of the royal ladies, is remarkably symmetrical with the circumstances of his actual birth. Furthermore his takeover of the royal ladies is exactly similar to the behavior of Zakhāk when he assumed the throne. The importance of feminine forces in Fereydūn's career is not limited to his contact with, and nurturing by women. It also has a significant symbolic dimension to which I shall turn next.

According to a folk version of the tale, unlike in the *Shāhnāma*, Fereydūn is the son of Jamshīd.<sup>6</sup> Before his death, Jamshīd tells his pregnant wife to go to the gate of the city, where he says, she will meet a cow which is half white and half yellow. He adds:

Ride the cow! It will take you across a river which no one else can cross. On the other side of the river [you will find] people who will help you and you will give birth to a boy. This boy will one day avenge my death.

The lady follows her husband's advice and Fereydūn is born. Zakhāk's agents who according to this tale know where Fereydūn is, however, can't cross the river and capture him. They try in vain to entice the lad to cross the river and come to his doom, but he is not fooled. The river stands as a protective barrier between



Fereydūn and his enemies (Anjavī 1985, pp. 31-33). River, as a powerful symbol, appears once again in the tale of Fereydūn's adventures.

According to the *Shāhnāma*, Fereydūn must cross a frontier river before he can enter Iran. This aquatic passage from one stage to the next, is a *rite de passage* for many kings and warriors besides Fereydūn. Although the symbolic value of water as a feminine entity hardly requires proof, it should be pointed out that in Iranian heroic and mythic traditions, water is intimately connected to female entities as well as to heroes. For instance, the deity who presides over the waters in Iranian mythology is not a god, as he is in Greco-Roman tradition, but a goddess. What's more, the Iranian goddess of waters, Anāhita, happens to be on excellent terms with kings and warriors. Indeed heroes appeal to her more often than they do to the God of war whom one would normally expect to be the natural object of these heroic supplications (Darmesteter 1960, vol. II, p. 363; Omidsalar 1984b, pp. 131-135).

The *Shāhnāma* tells us that Fereydūn meets a boatman at the riverside, who has been ordered not to carry anyone across the river without seeing a special permit. Therefore, he refuses to allow Fereydūn the use of his vessels. Strangely enough, Fereydūn, although at the head of a great force and armed to the teeth, does not fly into a fit of heroic rage by this refusal. Instead, he simply decides to cross the vast river on horseback. Such passivity is uncharacteristic of the hero who during his royal career demonstrates a terrifying cruelty, by causing the slaying of his two older sons for their murder of their youngest brother. That strict adherence to the code of heroic vengeance leaves him a mournful old man who practically cries himself to death at the side of his three slain offspring's heads (Mohl, 1/82-106). Therefore, given Fereydūn's propensity to act in a strictly "royal" manner, one expects him to deal severely with the boatman. Instead, he simply chooses to brave the raging torrent on horseback.<sup>7</sup>

The hero's unusual mildness toward the boatman underscores the symbolic significance of the scene, and sets up the dynamics of the narrative's progress. Fereydūn's passage through the torrent is test of the legitimacy of his royal authority as well as the symbolic telling of his political success. The river that once separated the boy Fereydūn and the murderous agents of Zakhāk now flows at the border of two states in his life. The state of helplessness which he leaves behind, and that of dominion, to which he goes. Once it prevented assassins from harming the boy, now it yields to the man who would be king. This pattern occurs in the epic again during another prince's entrance to Iran. This time, the *dramatis personae* are Prince Kaykhusrow, his mother Farangīs, and the warrior Gīv. When



Gūdarz sends Gīv to bring back Kaykhosrow to Iran, the Turanians give chase, but their force is beaten back by Gīv.

On their way to Iran, Gīv, Kaykhosrow, and Farangīs come to a great frontier river. Here, we have a repetition of the pattern that we formerly encountered in the story of Fereydūn. The future king must cross the water before he can enter Iran. As in the story of Fereydūn, the boatman refuses to allow the prince the use of his vessels. He demands an offensive payment before the three are permitted to board any of his ships. The price which the boatman demands is: Either the prince himself as a slave, the prince's mother for his pleasure, the black stallion of the prince, or the armor of the prince's father, which at the time is donned by the hero Gīv. Instead of killing the man in a pitch of heroic anger however, Gīv advises the prince to put his trust in God and cross the great river on horseback. He argues that if Kaykhosrow is destined to be king, God will facilitate his passage as he facilitated the passage of Fereydūn (Mohl, 2/262/1061-1065).

به شه گفت گیوار تو کیخسروی  
 نیننی ازین آب جز نیکوئی  
 فریدون که بگذشت از ارون درود  
 همی داد تخت مہی را درود  
 جهانی سراسر شد او راهی  
 که با روشنی بود و با فرہی  
 چه اندیشی ار شاه ایران توئی  
 پناه دلیران و شیران توئی  
 به بد آب را کی بود با تو راه؟  
 کہ با فر و برزی و زیبای گاہ

Gīv's sudden nonviolence in this scene is atypical in view of his usual ruthlessness. It is not because he is unable to force the boatman to carry them across. After all, shortly before this scene he has single handedly vanquished a great force of Turanians. Therefore, there is no doubt that he can, if he wants, overcome a cheeky sailor. He couldn't have suddenly grown benign. This is the same man who for seven years killed innocent Turanian wayfarers who chanced upon him so that his mission may remain secret (Mohl, 2/243/605-620). Yet in this scene the warrior who ordinarily would not allow a lowly ferryman to disobey his will and demand either payment or permit, inexplicably reverts to an atypical meekness at the riverside.<sup>8</sup>



But why this sudden docility? In my opinion, Gīv's surprising meekness is a narrative means to focus attention on Kaykhosrow's aquatic crossing. If this suggestion is correct, then Gīv's tolerance implies that crossing the river is something that Kaykhosrow should do unaided in order to prove himself. A complementary dimension of meaning may be suggested for this scene. It may be that by his sudden non-violence, Gīv further tests the legitimacy of the prince whom he has been sent to serve.

It is true that Gūdarz's dream, a royal birthmark, and the testimony of the horse, Shabdīz, have already affirmed Kaykhosrow's true identity. Nevertheless, the question of, whether this *true* prince is also a *suitable* prince continues to loom in the background. Does he have what it takes to rule? After all, the court is full of blue blooded "Royals" who are also royally unfit for kingship. As a representative of the Iranian warrior class who will soon serve Kaykhosrow in some of the bloodiest wars of the epic, Gīv is looking for proof of the lad's suitability as well as his legitimacy for kingship. After all, if one is going to put life and limb in harms way for someone else's sake, one might as well be certain that one has the genuine article. But what can establish Kaykhosrow's royal authority to Gīv's satisfaction? Charming folk versions of the episode of river-crossing present additional information that is not found in the *Shāhnāma*.

According to one story Gīv tells his companions that if they are free of sin, they all can cross the river without fear of drowning. In another version, a bit less timidly worded, the prince tells his mother "if you have been a chaste woman we can cross the water without boats." The lady assures her son that she has always lived an honorable life. When the three begin to cross the torrent, "by God's power, the waters part and a dry passage through the river appeared in front of them." They move across in magnificent Mosaic manner (Anjavī 1985, pp.148-149).

Aside from the important symbolic sense of the river crossing as a test of legitimacy in this scene, the fugitives' successful passage is clearly contingent upon the prince's mother. If she has not been chaste, that is, if the prince is a bastard, they cannot cross. The symbolic importance of the mother is reiterated in another version of the tale according to which when the three emerge on the Iranian side of the water neither the king nor any of the court heroes are there to meet them. Instead they are met by Rustam's Amazon daughter, Bānūgushasp (Anjavī 1985, p. 151). The presence of Bānūgushasp underscores the type of patterning in the narrative that requires females or feminine symbols to appear at transitional moments. After all, as we have suggested in the story of Fereydūn



before, passage of princes through frontier waters symbolizes the birth of their royal authority.

Let us summarize the important points of the tale. Like Fereydūn, Kaykhusrow is a fatherless prince who is raised by his mother in a foreign land. He sets out for Iran in order to assume his place on the royal throne. Like Fereydūn, he comes to a body of water that he crosses although he is hindered by the boatman. Like Fereydūn, neither he nor his attending hero, attempt to punish the impertinent boatman. The motif of importance here is the miraculous passage of a prince through a body of water, which symbolizes the birth of a new ruler. These waters flow at the frontier of two orders of existence. As the prince goes through them, he is baptized ruler. He enters a boy, a mere claimant to the throne, and exits a king. Like a fetus that emerges out of the flood of the amniotic fluid, a newborn life (cf. Dundes 1975).

Passage of the hero/king through water (female/mother) as a symbol of transformation, rebirth, and transition of power in the *Shāhnāma*, is not limited to the vita of these two kings. Nor is it always explicit. It occurs with slight modifications in the episode of Ardashīr-e Bābakān's kingship. Although an actual scene of aquatic passage does not occur in this variant of the motif, both of its important elements, namely women and water as mediators of the passage of royal authority, are plainly present.

According to the *Shāhnāma*, the young Ardashīr is sent to the court of king Ardavān in order to continue his princely education. Before long however, he angers his royal host who assigns him to service in the royal stables. Meanwhile Golnār, a lovely consort of the King, falls in love with him and the two begin an illicit liaison. Like Fereydūn and Kaykhusrow, Ardashīr also finds himself away from his homeland. However, rather than being in a foreign country, the hero is merely away from his place of birth. Like the two hero/kings before him, Ardashīr is also befriended by a woman. The difference here is that the woman is not his mother, but is rather the favorite concubine of the king. By virtue of being the king's favorite woman however, she is also a mother figure. That is, if we allow that kings stand as symbolic fathers in traditional narratives, then "the King's woman" may be reasonably interpreted as the symbolic mother.

Ardashīr's love affair with Golnār proves crucial for the young man's future success. She finds out that the royal astrologers have told Ardavān that any prince who rebels against him at a certain time will succeed because the position of heavenly bodies ensure the rebel's victory. Golnār imparts this vital



information to her young lover, who consequently decides to defy the king, and test his fortune by escaping. Golnār decides to flee with her paramour and at nightfall comes to him, carrying riches from the king's treasury. In the Middle Persian variant of the tale, the young lady brings him a fine sword, a golden saddle, a royal sash, golden reins, a suit of armor, and fine weapons (*Kārnāmag*, II. 12-13). It is evident that these items are among the insignia of kingship. Evidence from cognate tales within the wider tradition of Iranian epic lore supports this statement. Consider Herodotus' account of the legend of the origin of another Iranian group, namely the Scythians:

The Scythians say that their nation is the youngest in all the world, and that it came into being on this wise. There appeared in this country ... a man whose name was Targitaus ... He had three sons, Lipoxais, Arpoxais, and Colaxais, youngest of the three. In the time of their rule ... there fell down from the sky into Scythia certain implements, all of gold, namely, a plough, a yoke, a sword, and a flask. The eldest of them, seeing this, came near with intent to take them; but the gold began to burn as he came, and he ceased from his essay; then the second approached, and the gold did again as before; when these two had been driven away by the burning of the gold, last came the youngest brother, and the burning was quenched at his approach; so he took the gold to his own house. At this his elder brother saw how matters stood, and made over the whole royal power to the youngest (*Herodotus*, IV.5).

The golden objects, which signify royal authority among the Scythians, are practically identical to the ones brought by Golnār (a sword, a yoke/reins, flask/cup). By giving him these insignia of royal rank, Golnār symbolically invests her lover with kingship. She gives the boy not only the knowledge that he needs before he can move against Ardavān, but also the trappings of kingship. The difference between the Persian and the Scythian narratives is slight. In the Scythian tale, the fall of these objects from the sky is a metaphor of the idea of "kingship from heaven". In the Persian tale, the royal astrologers' warning that heavenly forces will favor rebellious princes has the same function of implying the divine origin of kingship. However, although the astrologers warn their master of the perilous position of the heavenly bodies, they tell him nothing about the identity of his challenger. The question, as it were, is left up in the air. It is Golnār who by her actions determines the identity of the king's challenger. It is to her that Ardashīr owes his rule and Ardavān his demise.

The crucial role of Golnār in bringing about the transition of political power in this story is further conveyed by the following detail. Golnār was not only much



loved by Ardavān for her charms, but also because the unfortunate monarch had developed a superstitious attachment to her. That is, he considered her beautiful countenance to be so auspicious that he had ordered her to wake him up every morning, so that her face may be the first sight that he beheld. Ardavān considered this to be an assurance against ill fortune. By investing the young lady with this bit of extra attraction, the epic tradition underscores the symbolic equality of the young woman and royal fortune. On the day of the lovers' escape, Ardavān lies in his bed as is his custom, and waits for his beautiful concubine to come and ask him to rise. However, she does not appear because she has already eloped with Ardashīr (Mohl, 5/144/261-264). Once she leaves Ardavān, the king loses his royal fortune and his throne is taken over by his young rival. Kingship goes where Golnār goes.

Shortly after the news of the lovers' escape reaches Ardavān, he sets out in hot pursuit. According to the Middle Persian variant of the tale, in the course of their flight the fugitives come upon two women who call out and address the hero saying: "Fear not O Ardashīr of the line of Sāsān, descendant of king Dārā. You are safe from harm. No one can catch you. You will lord over the land of Iran for many years ... Do not relent until you reach the sea because when your eyes behold the sea, you will have naught to fear from your enemies" (*Kārnāmag*, III. 17-18).

But who are these women who suddenly appear on the fugitives' path? How do they know Ardashīr's name, and his lineage? After all, Ardashīr's true descent was kept secret all along. His father Sāsān was so afraid of revealing it even to his father-in-law Bābak, that he confessed it only after solemn assurances that it will be safe with the man whose daughter he married (*Kārnāmag*, I. 14-16, and cf. Mohl, 5/138/96-113). Considering how well the secret was kept, the old women's knowledge of it seems quite odd. Even odder than their ability to address our hero by his name and correct lineage, is their power to forecast his future so clearly. Might one suggest that they are another manifestation of the feminine givers of royal authority? Note that until these ladies loudly proclaim Ardashīr's royal descent and hence the legitimacy of his claim to the throne, he is only a boy fleeing from the royal court. By enunciating the rebel's true lineage these women transform him. They make his kingship public. They speak the unspoken, namely that he is not Ardashīr son of Bābak, but "Ardashīr of the line of Sāsān, descendant of king Dārā." Whereas Ardashīr's royal descent and lineage is emphasized, his paternity is left unstated. He is Ardashīr the king, and as such he is no man's son.



Like all great "founders of royal houses" before him, he is the progeny of his own valor.<sup>9</sup>

In the *Shāhnāma* version of the story the two women have been transformed to two young men for reasons the analysis of which will take us far afield. The Middle Persian variant of the tale however proves the existence of an older version of the story with the motif of the two prophesying women who like the witches in the story of Macbeth forecast the hero's future. Be that as it may, Ardashīr does not feel out of danger until he reaches a body of water (Mohl, 5/147/320-321). Ardashīr defeats and kills Ardavān later in the story, and goes on to start a new dynasty. Throughout this story, no explanation is offered as to why reaching water would nullify Ardavān's efforts in nipping Ardashīr's rebellion in the bud. However, if my arguments have any merit, when contenders for the throne reach or cross a body of water, that passage also symbolizes the passage of royal authority from one person to another.

Unlike his predecessors, Ardashīr does not have to cross any rivers only because he is not coming from abroad, but is already in Iran. Like the two kings before him however, his safety is assured only when he reaches water. That in Ardashīr's case, it is reaching rather than crossing a body of water that symbolizes the transition of royal authority, is demonstrated by a small detail in the story. When the prince arrives at the riverside he has a brief conversation with a boatman who unlike the ferrymen of the tales of Kaykhosrow and Fereydūn, turns out to be a cooperative chap and sends his boats to fetch Ardashīr's sympathizers. A huge army is thus amassed at the water's edge for the young challenger. Like his royal counterparts before him, at the edge of the water Ardashīr is transformed from a fugitive to a king with a great army at his command (Mohl, 5/147-148/320-330).<sup>10</sup>

Let us backtrack a bit and look again at Golnār. We have already seen what an important role she played in bringing about her lover's success. It is therefore interesting that once Ardashīr achieves kingship Golnār is no longer mentioned. This conspicuous disappearance emphasizes her symbolic significance as the entity that confers kingship on Ardashīr. In other words, Golnār is more important symbolically and functionally than she is *personally*. Her individual identity and the question of her future destiny are no more relevant than are the identities of the two prophesying women of the Middle Persian variant of the tale. Great literature speaks in symbolic language not in the idiom of daily concerns; and as a great literary epic, *Shāhnāma* utilizes that symbolic and ultimately artistic language. As I pointed out at the beginning, it does not attempt to reflect historical reality, nor



does it utilize the realistic mode of expression that is characteristic of historical discourse.

Female granters of nobility and kingship in the *Shāhnāma* appear in many different forms. Let me illustrate the point by another example, which at the same time has a different nuance, and presents a different type of helpful maiden. This episode is found in the tale of the adventure of king Shāpūr. When the Romans capture Shāpūr, who is visiting their camp in disguise, the Roman king condemns him to be sown into the skin of an animal. The tale of his rescue has two general versions. The less dramatic version is reported in a number of historical texts which report that he was sown into the skin of a cow, and was later rescued by a number of Persian captives. This version is reported by such historians as al-Tha'ālibī (d. 429/1037, pp.524-525), al-Mas'ūdī (d. 346/957, vol.1, p.299), and Bal'amī (d. 363/973, vol.2, pp.916-917), and in it, the prisoners are directed by the captive to pour oil on the skin pouch that holds him. They do so, the skin is softened, and Shāpūr slides out.

The second version of the tale is a literary narrative and therefore, of a higher order of symbolization (cf. Jason 1977, pp.30-31). This version is preserved in the *Shāhnāma*, according to which Shāpūr is sown into the skin of an ass (Mohl, 5/221/189-190), from which he is rescued by the help of a certain woman. This lady frees Shāpūr by drenching the skin pouch that holds our hero in warm milk (Mohl, 5/222-223/229-235). The symbolism of the milk-giving woman and that of the young man engulfed inside a skin pouch is not even subtle. Moreover, the text explicitly states that when the prince came out of the skin all of his body was covered with blood. Would it be a wild flight of fancy to suggest that the scene is the symbolic telling of the hero's rebirth? By this I mean that during his captivity, Shāpūr is not a king. He is a deposed king, who has been captured and treated quite insultingly. Such a king's deliverance from captivity would in fact amount to his rebirth as a king. Given all of these, one would not be far off the mark if one interprets the scene, Shāpūr's bloody body, sliding out of the skin pouch, in the presence of some milk-bearing damsel, as the symbolic statement of his rebirth.

Let me assume that skeptics among my readers need further evidence before they can believe such an interpretation. Therefore, let me backtrack a bit in order to provide this evidence. After his arrest by the Romans, rather than being placed under heavy guard or put in prison, Shāpūr is taken *to the women's quarter*, where he is sown into the skin of an ass. What is even more interesting is that his guards



are women rather than armed men who one would ordinarily expect to watch over an important captive. Helpless and wrapped in skin, Shāpūr is symbolically infantilized (Mohl, 5/221/191-200). What's more, considering the fact that he is taken into the women's quarters (Mohl, 5/221/187) and sown into the skin pouch *there*, he is more than infantilized; he is in fact fetalized. The womb in which he is placed however, is displaced out of the "mother's" body, and is symbolically expressed as the skin sack. It is virtually impossible not to interpret this episode symbolically because so far as the specifics of this scene are concerned - if I may borrow an idea from John Steinbeck - if a symbol is not slapping us in the face, another one is kicking us in the rear. At any rate, the woman who comes to Shāpūr's assistance and delivers him from the asinine womb may be viewed as a maternal symbol. The act of giving milk and the release of the monarch out of the engulfing skin respectively symbolize maternal attention and rebirth of the captive king that are simply distorted by inversion (Mohl, 5/222-223/227-235).

Once the king is rescued, the same woman who frees him also brings him horses and weapons. She is never heard of again in the story after this episode. Like Golnār who helped Ardāshīr, she brings her beloved the insignia of rule and makes him king again (Mohl, 5/223/239-255). She has an important symbolic function to perform. Once that function is carried out, her *raison d'être* is exhausted and she quietly disappears, as did Golnār before her. Such helpful women fade away in order that the economy of the epic narrative is not disturbed. They reappear only as literary "types" whose main purpose is to be helpful. However, given the existence of such feminine "types" in the *Shāhnāma*, Nöldeke is not justified in claiming that women of the *Shāhnāma* have no personalities. Women such as Sūdāba, Manīzha, Rūdāba, and others are not types. They have specific "personalities" and psychological depth. We are however, not concerned with them in this paper.

A number of helpful maidens meet a tragic end. The most pitiable example of these in the *Shāhnāma* is another lady in the story of Shāpūr. This is an Arab princess named Malika, whose father Tā'ir has been holding out in a well-fortified castle against Shāpūr. Malika chances to see the handsome king and falls in love with him. She sends a message to the king, in which she promises to deliver her father's castle into his hands if he agrees to marry her (Mohl, 5/216-217).<sup>11</sup> Shāpūr agrees and following the directions provided by the young lady, conquers Tā'ir's castle, and marries the girl.

This proves to be a brief union even by modern standards. Shortly after their



marriage the king puts the poor woman to death in a horrifying manner because he fears that since she could betray her father, who was after all, her own flesh and blood, she is bound to betray her husband (Tabarī, vol. 2, p. 50; Tha'ālibī, pp. 491-492; Ibn al-Balkhī, p.62). The outrageousness of the act notwithstanding, the death of this helpful maiden is structurally the same as the sudden disappearance of the other like-minded ladies in the *Shāhnāma*. But let me suggest an additional explanation that may at the same time shed some light on the literary function of a number of other women in the epic.

Powerful females are dealt with in one of three ways by the androcentric universe of the Persian heroic tales. Some, such as Golnār and the young lady who helped Shāpūr escape his Roman captivity, unceremoniously disappear. Some, especially those who betray or challenge men, are not tolerated at all. They are usually killed after they are accused of some crime or potential treachery. A third group, such as Gordiya, Sīndokht, Homāy, etc. is treated with every bit as much care and narrative detail as the men in the *Shāhnāma*. These women, as I pointed out before, have their own stories and narrative significance. Shāpūr's Arab wife is a good example of this second group.<sup>12</sup>

We pointed out before, that Shāpūr kills his helpful lover because he believes that since the young lady was unfaithful to her father, she would also be unfaithful to him. Shāpūr's murder of the poor girl is thus motivated by his fear of her potential ability to harm him. The implication of this argument is that Shāpūr must have believed his wife capable of giving his kingdom away to another man, just as she was able to bestow her father's kingdom upon him. This amounts to an implicit admission of Malika's ability to both grant princely power as well as to take it away. Furthermore, the fact that the young lady's name is *malika*, "queen," implies that whoever has the "queen" must be the king.

The third category of epic women, namely those who are neither killed nor made to disappear are women who are masculinized. These women are robbed of every shred of their femininity. Their dispossession from all their womanly characteristics amounts to turning them into female men. This defeminization is the mirror image of the process of symbolic castration for men (cf. Mohl, 7/133-135; *Bahman-nāmah*, pp. 508/8703-8707, 514/8809-8810, 509/8719-8720).<sup>13</sup> One of the powerful daughters of the hero Rostam is so robbed of her femininity that she cannot even engage in normal marital relations. Rather than responding to the amorous advances of her husband during her wedding night, she attacks the poor chap, ties him up, and throws him at the corner of the nuptial chamber



where he remains bound until morning. Not until her father Rustam intercedes on behalf of the groom does she allow him to consummate their marriage (*Farāmarz-nāmah*, p. 74; Anjavī 1975, pp. 76-78). These manly women are treated as honorary men in all androcentric epochs and cultures. Blumenfeld-Kosinski has collected several comments of men who found a woman too “good” to be a “mere woman.” She quotes Saint Jerome (340-420AD) to have said: “If [a woman] wishes to serve Christ more than the world, *she will cease to be a woman and will be called a man.*” The sentiment was repeated several centuries later, when the Chancellor of the University of Paris, honored Christine de Pizans (1365-1430AD) in these words: “*insignis femina, virilis femina*, ‘distinguished woman, manly woman’ ” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, p. 188). A similar idea is expressed in the Persian Sūfī texts. ‘Attār (d. circa 672/1221) writes:

When women conduct themselves in a manly fashion on the path of [service to] God, they cannot be called women — [it is said] that on the day of judgement when the call is sounded, [saying]: ‘[Arise] O men’, the first who steps forth in the line of men is the [virgin] Mary (‘Attār, vol. 1, p. 64).

In the *Shāhnāma*, the forms of the female givers of power range from the highly disguised and symbolic to the blatantly obvious. The most masculine woman of the epic is Gordiya, the sister of the rebel general Bahrām-i Chūbīna. Gordiya is a skilled warrior of great prowess, who easily unhorses most heroes. What is very interesting in the narrative of the *Shāhnāma* however is that her brother Bahrām, a warrior of unequalled skill, is effeminized in the same story that tells of her martial skills. Significantly, Bahrām’s feminization is a prelude to his alienation and rebellion against the crown.

Bahrām’s alienation from the court begins when the king sends him a suit of women’s clothes as a mock gift, thereby insulting his valor. Bahrām dons the feminine accoutrements and appears to his troops in that attire. His devoted troops are outraged by the royal disrespect, and persuade the general to rebel against the king (Mohl, 6/330-332). This is a rather thinly disguised scene in which the mediating role of the feminine in creating a rebel is symbolized by a superimposition of the male and female persona; a fusing of the two if you will. That is, whereas Bahrām is certainly a man, Bahrām in women’s clothing is a manifestation of his own feminine aspect. He is, in other words, put through the mediating state of feminization.



Shortly afterwards, the general is led to a palace in the desert where he meets his fortune that appears to him in the form of a *beautiful woman*. The two talk in private for some time; and finally Bahrām decides to openly rebel (Mohl, 6/333/1451, 6/334/1463-1464, and 1474-1495). Bahrām's donning of the women's attire is the symbolic manifestation of his disassociation from, and later rebellion against the court. By placing himself in women's clothes, he severs his outward connection with the warrior cast attached to the royal court. He becomes something other than what he is by going through a transformation. He emerges from the dress that functionally acts as a chrysalis from which a rebel is born. Bahrām's encounter with his fortune in the desert is the symbol of the completion of his transformation and alienation from the court.

### Conclusion

There is great wisdom in Wordsworth's famous observation that "The Child is father to the Man." It is man's psycho-physiological destiny to experience his first encounter with power in a woman. Infantile experiences that present the feminine as a powerful and at the same time, a protecting and comforting entity, are not lost with age. The passage of time only mythologizes these perceptions, thus making them even more powerful. To the extent that every human being carries his infantile experiences with him, he never breaks away from the memory of the "matriarchal" world of his infancy. A world in which mothers reigned supreme. As a result, every man unconsciously and psychologically, lives in a perpetual state of matriarchy. His practical environment however, is one in which men hold the lion's share of power. Therefore, two worlds clash in men's mind. An inner matriarchal world, in which women wield absolute power, and an outer practical one, in which power is concentrated chiefly in the hands of men. Men resolve this dilemma by means of what the psychoanalysts call a compromise formation. Their response to this contradiction is to create a fantasy universe in which the experience of their infancy, namely a time when power was essentially a feminine prerogative, is replicated. The greater the subjugation of women in reality, the more powerful the female deities and forces that roam the fields of men's fancy (see Slater 1968, pp. 4-23, 131-136, 220).

If this argument is correct, then the prodigious literature about "matriarchal societies" which imagines a time during which political and economic power was chiefly concentrated in the hands of women, must be an expression of the



compromise formation to which I alluded before. No serious student of human history, least of all responsible feminist theorists, adheres to the crude mythology of the "matriarchal society" any longer (cf. Lerner 1986; Webster 1975; Wettan Kleinbaum 1983). But the myth continues to flourish.

■ Ancient Matriarchy, in so far as it is defined as a social arrangement under which women wielded political and economic power, in all likelihood never existed. However, because every man is "of woman born," and because his first real experience of power, protection, and nurturing emanates from female providers, his early infantile experiences force him to endow his mental image of women with great might. Subsequently, this infantile perception leads him to invest female symbols with vast powers, which sometimes take menacing forms. In their most threatening aspect, they are manifested as tales of Amazons and warrior women, in their symbolic forms, they are expressed in stories of female entities that bestow power or dominion.

■ One need not search for psychological matriarchy in the ghostly realms of some ancient epoch. The essentially feminine nature of power symbolically expresses itself even in modern societies. For instance, in the United States, which is certainly a different culture from Iran of the 10th century AD, a similar situation obtains with regard to the men's symbolic attribution of great power to women. A mass of circumstantial evidence may be marshaled to demonstrate at least the plausibility of this argument. For instance, the American expression "Apple pie, motherhood, and the flag," which is something of a cultural slogan in the US, has a clearly feminine order of presentation and importance. First it refers to the idea of the mother *qua* feeder, here symbolized by the apple pie. Second, it mentions motherhood itself; and assigns the reference to the male symbol of the flag to the end. In other words, reference to the only male member of the triad is delayed to the last, thus betraying its rank in order of importance. But interestingly enough, even that most phallic/male "member" of the group, is associated with Betsy Ross (1752-1836), who according to legend, made the first American flag.

A similar symbolic expression manifests itself in the way hurricanes were named in America. Until recently, every hurricane had a female name. Under political pressure from those who objected to the "sexist" character of associating the destructive power of the hurricane with women, the situation was "corrected". For some time now, hurricanes are given male and female names alternately. The feminist objections to the female names of hurricanes however,



missed the point altogether. To be powerful necessarily means to have the ability to be destructive. Hurricanes had female names, *not solely* because they are destructive, but because they are enormously powerful. Their destructiveness is the expression of their power (see Lederer 1964). In other words, they were called by women's names because Americans unconsciously pair power with women. This association of power with women is, I believe, an entirely unconscious process motivated by men's unconscious fear of women rather than by mere sexist malice.

The brutality of the power of the feminine however, is tempered by her life-giving and nurturing aspects. She is the hurricane only when she flexes her muscles, to borrow Lederer's apt description. Above all, she remains life-giving and nurturing. Let us remember that at least within the semiotics of the American culture, it is still "Mother Nature" who both devastates *and* vivifies; and "Father Time" who only corrupts, weakens, and ages. If these arguments are correct, then perhaps the ideas that have been presented in this paper may have a broader application than one suited only to the analysis of the Iranian epic literature.

## Notes

1. Dates are given according to both Muslim and Gregorian calendars. The Muslim date is given first, separated from the Gregorian date by a slash. The usual date of Ferdowsī's death is given as 411-415/1020-1025. However, since only one late source records the later date of 415/1025, I believe that we can safely dispose of it, placing the poet's death circa 411/1020. Given the fact that Ferdowsī was most probably born in 329/940, he would have been 80 years old by the year 411/1020, which is to my mind more credible for the life span of an increasingly destitute small landowner in the 5/11th century. Moreover, the poet refers to no event later than the year 411/1020 in his massive poem. For these reasons, I prefer to dismiss the second date of his death, 415/1025, and place his demise in or about the year 411/1020.
2. Khaleghi-Motlagh 1985.
3. No two manuscripts of the *Shāhnāma* completely agree in number of lines, sequence of verses, or often even individual episodes. Some are much bulkier than others. One which is preserved in the British Library, and is catalogued as manuscript Or.2926, has gained the nick name the "corpulent *Shāhnāma*" because of its great bulk (Khaleghi-Motlagh 1985, p. 259). Such manuscripts are generally considered corrupt. However, "corrupt" manuscripts - scholastic bias against them notwithstanding - are not necessarily also insignificant. We know that Ferdowsī versified *only some* of the heroic tales which were current in his time. Therefore, his *Shāhnāma* contains neither all nor even the majority



- of these tales. Precisely by reason of their "corruption" and because of their spurious episodes and verses, these "corrupt" manuscripts have a large number of epic tales with which Ferdowsī never concerned himself. In other words, although "corrupt" in terms of authenticity of their verses, these codices contain a greater mass of Iranian legendary lore than do the more "dependable" manuscripts. The important point is that while these "corrupt" texts hinder one's efforts to "reconstruct" the original form of Ferdowsī's great poem, they are indispensable if one is interested in studying the whole of the Iranian epic tradition. Ferdowsī did not have a monopoly on the Iranian epic tradition. Therefore, interpolated episodes and verses often reflect such societal attitudes and values, which although not necessarily shared by Ferdowsī, were prevalent in Iran of his time, and are therefore relevant to the study of the classical Persian epic and society.
4. In one folk tale, the hero Rustam makes a poisonous dragon swallow him only to kill the beast by cutting his way out of its bowels. When he emerges from the beast's belly however his body is covered with blood and he falls unconscious because of the animal's poisonous fumes. His father Zāl detoxifies Rustam by stripping the hero and throwing him into seven tubs of milk. The milk curdles in six of the tubs as it reacts to the poison that oozes out of Rustam's body. When the milk of the seventh tub remains unchanged, Zāl realizes that Rustam is detoxified. However, although cured of the poison, the hero has turned to skin and bones (lit. "all of the flesh on his body was melted"). The skinny Rustam is then wrapped in cotton to protect his vulnerable body, and is treated by Zāl for three months before he regains his strength (Anjavī 1976, pp. 217-220). I have already suggested that the skinny Rustam whose blood-covered body emerges from the body of the beast symbolizes the hero's regression to the foetal stage while Zāl's manner of nurturing his son back to health allows the old hero to play as his son's mother. I pointed out that in view of the fact that Zāl was an albino, the white color of the cotton into which the foetal Rustam is wrapped and nursed for three months symbolizes Zāl's "masculine womb," and provided comparative data from a number of other cultures in which similar motifs may be interpreted in a similar manner (Omidisalar 1984a, pp. 448-449).
  5. The folk version may represent an older tradition according to which Zahhāk was guilty of incest. In the Middle Persian accounts of the dragon-king's vita, Zahhāk commits incest with his own mother Vadhak, and is even known by the matronymic *Vadhakān-shāh* "king of the line of Vadhak" (West 1965, p. 103).
  6. This is quite different from the *Shāhnāma* version in which Fereydūn is the son of Ābtīn.
  7. It is only in the Avestan version of the tale that the hero punishes the hoatman by turning him into a bird condemned to perpetual flight. But even there, the man is saved through the kindness of the goddess Anāhita (*Yasht*, 5/61-66).
  8. Heroes in the *Shāhnāma* kill or maim disrespectful commoners for much lesser offences than when they demand the Queen mother for their pleasure, or the king for their slave. For instance, Rustam yanks the ears off a poor peasant merely because the poor fellow has objected to the ravaging of his fields by the hero's horse (Mohl, 1/263/460-464).



9. This is reminiscent of another ruler, Ya'qūb ibn Layth al-Saffār (867-879), who when criticized for ruling without a decree from the Caliph to justify his rule, presented his sword, saying that it was his royal decree (*Tārīkh-e Sīstān*, pp. 222-223).
10. A similar case is found in the story of Kaykhosrow's pursuit, capture, and slaying of Afrāsiyāb, who is several times chased across the water in the course of the wars (Mohl, 4/39, 76-78). The king is finally forced to hide under water in a lake, and is eventually captured and slain by the lake-side (Mohl, 4/98-106).
11. A detail, mentioned in other sources but left out in the *Shāhnāma*, is of significance in this episode. According to Al-Tabarī's version, which attributes the episode to another Persian king also by the name of Shāpūr, the young lady informs the king that her father's castle is charmed against all attacks. She tells him that the only way an army can penetrate the castle's fortifications is to practice the following counter charm. A pigeon of a special color should be captured and after its feet are smeared with the menstrual blood of a blue-eyed maiden, it should be released to alight on the walls of the fortress. A section of the walls will then collapse, and the army can invade the castle through that opening (Tabarī 2/49).
12. cf. *Bahman-nāmah*, pp. 178-179 for another example.
13. It may very well be at least partly the source of the idea of the breastless Amazons and other female warriors in the Iranian epic tradition.

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