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WHAT WE KNOW AND DON'T KNOW ABOUT FERDOWSI'S LEGACY.

(Improvising Literary Heritage with Mythology)

ABSTRACT

Objective: In the summer of 2025, a female intellectual, arrested and sentenced to death for "obscene" remarks about Ferdowsi, once again brought his personality and work to the forefront. Given that research on Ferdowsi conducted outside of Iran is considered more scientifically credible. Considering that there are serious discrepancies between the academic version of Firdausi's Shahnameh, published during the Soviet era, and the Iranian editions, as well as the fact that the poem's 60,000 "couplets" have not been confirmed in any printed version, it becomes necessary to express one's attitude towards the created historical mythology.

Theoretical Framework: Since the lives and works of representatives of classical Iranian literature contain significant elements of improvisation and mythology, it is important to approach the problem within the framework of the socio-cultural landscape of the era, using the method of comparative historical approach.

Method: One striking feature is that academic study of Ferdowsi's work has primarily been conducted by Soviet scholars. Unlike Iranian scholars, Soviet studies do not follow the tradition of presenting mythological materials as historical facts. Furthermore, they compare historical sources related to Ferdowsi's work and employ linguistic analysis.

Results and Discussion: The presented research work is aimed at revealing and systematizing the historical personality of Firdausi and the controversial aspects of his work.

Research Application: The study also examines the historical assessment of Ferdowsi and his work, the Shahnameh, across different periods. The socio-political landscape of each period is analyzed.

Key words: *The works of Ferdowsi, the era of Ferdowsi, Ferdowsi and Iranism, Ferdowsi and the Persian language, Ferdowsi and Islam.*

INTRODUCTION

Currently (June 2025), a woman named Zeinab Mousavi, arrested in the Islamic Republic of Iran for insulting Ferdowsi, is being widely discussed. Some are calling for her "to be executed." Others are suggesting she "admit her guilt, apologize, and be released." Zeinab Mousavi is currently in prison amid all this discussion. What does this woman have to say about a poet who is being threatened with execution?

Ferdowsi's "indecent" attitude toward women is reflected in many passages of the Shahnameh, and we find much information about this in the analysis of researcher and scholar Seyyed Zia Alaeddin Sadr al-Ashraf. However, there is no sign of feminism in this woman's words. In fact, she said nothing serious. After analyzing a few of Ferdowsi's poems, she expressed her irritation with meaningless allegories.¹ In fact, Iranian mullahs are also well aware of Ferdowsi's character. The goal is to "intimidate" those who hold a different opinion.

A TV presenter from Tabriz named Elmira Sharifi Moghaddam is demanding the punishment of Zeynab Mousavi, citing Firdous as the "architect of the modern Persian language."² This Tabriz resident doesn't know who the architect of the "Erk Castle" is, but appeals to the prejudices of the architect of the Persian language. In other words, isn't there a master of the Persian language that Tabriz women should master and defend? It doesn't really matter...

The name of the Tabriz resident who appeals to Firdous is "Elmira," one of the names banned in Iran, and it's not Turkish, but Azerbaijani. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, officially naming a child by this name requires a lengthy process through government agencies. This is precisely what Elmira Sharifi Moghaddam's father did. With great difficulty, he gave his daughter an Azerbaijani name. As a result, his daughter became a "Persian idolater" rather than a worthy Azerbaijani. This is what's troubling.

¹ Bayramzadeh, S. Z. O., & Kazımı, P. F. O. (2020). *Ethnogenesis of Minor Peoples or the Search for Eternal History*. *American Scientific Journal*, 42 (2), 4-10.

² Oqlukazimi, P. F., Oqlu, İ. İ. A., & Qizi, Y. G. Y. Problems of Social and Cultural Communication in the Early Stage of History. *International Journal of Arts and Social Science*, 319-327.

The tragicomedy of this event is that Zeynab, Fatima, Ruqya, Elmira, Solmaz, and Sevil have swapped places. Iranian mullahs now bring news from heaven and hell in the name of Islam, converse with the imamzaman and seek his advice on matters of public concern, prepare projects on how to enter heaven, write hadiths about how to become an Arab to enter heaven, and about Turkish speakers going to hell. Firdous, who was not allowed into the cemetery because of his unbelief, is now considered dear, and the family of Zeynab Musavi, a martyr for Iran, is considered infidels.

Furthermore, the figure of Firdous is not very familiar to Azerbaijani readers. International readers also remember this poet more from mythology than from real history. We read Firdous against the backdrop of Soviet-era ideological propaganda and know him so intimately. Therefore, our assumptions are completely incorrect, and it would be advisable to conduct a separate study on this topic.

FİRDOVSI İRSİNİN ÖYRƏNİLMƏSİNƏ MÜXTƏLİF YANAŞMALAR:

During the Soviet era, Shakespeare, Ferdowsi, and Dante were taught as works of world literature in literature textbooks for senior grades of secondary schools. Azerbaijani textbooks, in particular, provided extensive information about Ferdowsi. The textbooks also spoke of Ferdowsi's virtues, how he was not afraid of Mahmud of Ghazni, how he wrote satires about him, and the legends surrounding the writing of the Shahnameh.³ The middle and older generations' perceptions of Ferdowsi were also shaped by the books they read during that time.

It is impossible to imagine that Mahmud of Ghazni, who shook India by "striking the earth with his foot," ordered Ferdowsi to write the Shahnameh and "gave him silver coins instead of the gold he had promised." In fact, the Shahnameh was not written "by order" of Mahmud Ghaznavi, and, in fact, Ferdowsi did not write the Shahnameh himself, but translated it from ancient texts. Let's consider the various opinions on this matter.⁴ Hakim Abu'l-Qasim Ferdowsi Tusi was born during the Samanid Empire (940–1020) and was around twenty years old at the time of its fall. He lived, wrote, and died primarily during the Ghaznavid period.

"Khwaday Namak" (Khwadāy-Namag), mentioned in sources, is translated from Tajik as "salt water." Those who attribute this word to the Sassanid era translate it into modern Persian as

³ Османов, М. Н. (1959). Фирдоуси. Жизнь и творчество. М.: вост. лит.

⁴ Kazimi P. Formation of Religion-Social And Cultural Communication in Early History //Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi. – 2021. – Т. 8. – №. 4. – С. 2077-2093.

"KHUDAYNAME." In English, it is mistakenly presented as "The Book of Lords."⁵ Although the word "khuda" cannot be translated as "lord," the book dates back to the Sassanid era. Many different opinions have been expressed about this book, some of which have been refuted.

It is believed that the book was first translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa (d. 757), who had access to documents from the Sasanian court. It is believed that the book was translated into Arabic at least seven times in the 8th and 9th centuries. In Arabic translations, the book is called *Siyar al-Muluk al-Furs* (The Lives of the Persian Kings). The book itself and its translations have not survived, but they served as a source for Arab and Persian historians recounting the pre-Islamic history of Iran.⁶ Furthermore, many episodes from it were translated into New Persian during the Samanid period and presented as the *Shahnameh*.

The book is believed to have been written during the reign of Khosrow Anushirvan I (531–579) and edited during the reign of the last Sasanian shah, Yazdegerd III (632–651). The book was also translated into New Persian by Samanid scholars under the direction of Abu Mansur Ma'amari (957–958) in 957 and supplemented with other sources. However, only part of the "preface" to the original version of this version survives.

Although all representatives of medieval Eastern literature were closely familiar with the literary legacy of Ferdowsi, the fact that the original source of his works has not been "preserved" raises questions. Undoubtedly, the fact that this book, being the literary and historical legacy of a large ethnic group, has not been "preserved" either in its original language, in any of the numerous Arabic translations, or in translations into other languages, is no coincidence and has specific purposes. The scholarly study of A. Ferdowsi's literary legacy dates back to the mid-20th century. While the Iranian Pahlavi regime was busy creating ancient historical narratives based on the mythology expressed in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Soviet scholars began preparing a scholarly text and translating it. The first scholarly publication of the *Shahnameh*, based on modern textual methods and using ancient manuscripts (13th–14th centuries), was carried out by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences (9 volumes, 1960–1971). Given the high value of this publication, the book was reprinted in Tehran in 1971. The Tashkent edition of the *Shahnameh* was also fully translated into Russian, "prepared by Lahuti," and published in six

⁵ Dexoda, logetname, Iran, Tehran, 1372. (Explanatory dictionary of Persian language / compiler Dexoda).

⁶ BLAVATSKAYA E.P., "Zoroastr in" history "and zaratushtra in the secret annalah" article, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNNVhqPN9Yw> (15.03.2021).

volumes beginning in 1957, containing over 52,000 "bayts" (two lines). There are significant differences between these editions and the Iranian editions.

Iranian researchers believe that 100 years ago, Ferdowsi's work was not the focus of scholarly attention in Iran, and various mythological stories about him became more widespread. Ferdowsi was presented as a disseminator of Iranian ideas only during the reign of Reza Khan, and "sculpted" him. His tomb was restored, monuments were erected to him, and his books began to be published in large print runs. After some time, official Iranian institutions began to describe the stories of the Shahnameh as historical events. The search for the oldest manuscripts of the Shahnameh began in the 1940s and 1960s. The oldest known manuscripts of the work are 13th-century copies. One of the earliest is a Florentine manuscript from 1217, which was used to prepare a critical edition of the poem. A copy held in the British Museum was used to prepare the Moscow edition of the poem. Ferdowsi is believed to have completed the poem in 1011. However, the manuscripts written during his time have not survived. The Mongol invasion and the subsequent destruction of major libraries led to the loss of many ancient manuscripts, so the originals and autographs have not survived. However, these reasons cannot explain the disappearance of Arabic translations.

Russian researcher G.V. Nosovsky believes that although poets of the 10th–12th centuries spoke highly of Ferdowsi in their works, no originals, autographs, or exact copies of his works have survived. It can be assumed that manuscripts of the Shahnameh from the 11th, 12th, and even 13th centuries are quite rare, so it should be considered one of the most ancient sources, as well as the oldest source on his biography. On the one hand, poets speak of the wide popularity of Ferdowsi's poem, on the other, they refer not to the complete manuscript of the poem, but to a collection of the Shahnameh by the Indian poet Mas'ud Sa'd Selmān. (1276–1277) The Leningrad manuscript, written in 1333, and the Shahnameh, written in 1425–1426 and known in scholarly circles as the "Preface to Baysonqor," were also studied. However, it is unknown by whom, from what sources, and how the manuscripts stored in the collections of the A. Firdovsi National Library in Tehran were processed.

In the 16th century, copies of the "Baysonqor" were primarily circulated, while in the 19th century, anthologies of varying sizes were published in Iran, India, and Central Asia. The "Shahnameh" attracted the attention of European orientalists at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. The British primarily published fragments of the poem related to India. In the 19th century, the British attempted to publish the full text of the "Shahnameh."

Thus, it is claimed that the first manuscripts of the epic date back to the 13th and 14th centuries, while the full text is believed to have been compiled in the 15th century. Beginning in the 16th century, motifs from the "Shahnameh" became widely popular. The complete and academically studied version of the text dates back to the second half of the 20th century.

So, we are told that the original historical sources referenced by the Shahnameh were destroyed "for some reason." Perhaps this is because later editors, who created the Shahnameh from ancient Iranian chronicles in the 17th and 18th centuries, reworked them in the required reformist vein. This method is known to have been used at various stages of history. Furthermore, the surviving sources from the Sasanian period are primarily religious texts. There must have been compelling reasons for the deliberate destruction of literary monuments.

Experts present the Shahnameh as a literary monument of Iranian, and sometimes Persian, origin. We will use both terms without contradicting each other. However, during the Soviet era, the poem was taught as the literary heritage of the Tajik people, and it is important to clarify this issue.

It is believed that Ferdowsi's Shahnameh consisted of 60,000 verses. This work, the result of 30 years of Ferdowsi's labor, is considered one of the greatest and most outstanding epics in the world. It is claimed that Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, as the author himself noted, consists primarily of 60,000 couplets—couplets borrowed from Arabic and Iranian poetry.⁷ It is believed that part of the text is lost, and that interpolations are found throughout the poems.

Although the Shahnameh has been translated into Russian in fragments numerous times, the complete Russian translation, prepared by J. B. Banu-Lahuti based on the Vullers-Nafisi edition and published in six volumes between 1957 and 1989, consists of 52,000 "bytes" (104,018 lines). Ferdowsi's Shahnameh was translated into Azerbaijani by the renowned scholar Mammad Mubariz Alizade (1911–1994).⁸ Alizade is reported to have devoted approximately 30 years of his life to this work and translated the 60,000-byte Shahnameh into Azerbaijani in the original. A bibliographic analysis of the Azerbaijani editions of the Shahnameh reveals that the 60,000-byte translation was never published, and individual episodes of the poem were published in single-volume editions. In 2004, Sharq-Karb Publishing House released a 432-page book of Shahnameh in Azerbaijani, consisting of 14,400 verses and 7,200 couplets. Similarly, the two-volume Shahnameh published by Alkhuda Publishing House does not exceed 10,000 couplets. As can be seen, there is a difference between the 52,000 and 60,000 couplets of Shahnameh in the different editions.

CONTRADICTIONS IN FERDOWSI'S SHAHNAMA:

⁷ Moin. Logetname. -Iran, Tehran. 1357. [Explanatory dictionary of Persian language/ compiler Moin] (in Persian language)

⁸ Middle East, Asia, Research. What We Know and Don't Know About Firdowsi — RESEARCH <https://crossmedia.az/az/article/46876>

Seyyid Ziya Alaeddin Sadr al-Ashrafi, a sociologist of Azerbaijani descent from the Sorbonne University in Paris, is one of the most thorough scholars of Ferdows's work.⁹ His extensive research, based on the Moscow edition of the Shahnameh, revealed numerous contradictory ideas, distortions of historical facts, and misrepresentations of geographical names and territories within the poem. In this article, we present only 42 passages from this poem.

1. Being a poet, Ferdowsi was the translator of the Khwadaynamag, or, as he called it, the "Book of Kings." He was initially supported by Husayn Katib, Ali Daylami, and Budalaf, some of the first representatives of the Shu'ubiyya movement, whom he himself mentioned.¹⁰ Later, when they were in hiding from Sultan Mahmud, Ferdowsi brought the Shahnameh to the Ghaznavid court and dedicated it to Sultan Mahmud with some modifications.
2. Being a poet, he knew very little about geography and history—for example, he believed that Al-Bursa was located in India.
3. Ferdowsi describes the geographical location of Iraq and Baghdad during the reign of the last Sassanid king, Yazdegerd III. However, the Battle of Qadisiyyah (November 16–19, 632) led to the fall of the Sassanid capital, Ctesiphon, and the last major battle took place at Nahavand in 642. In the Shahnameh, Yazdegerd marches on Baghdad?! / In fact, Baghdad was founded by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (reigned 754–775) in the 13th year of his reign (149 AH = 767). Therefore, the events mentioned by Ferdowsi are fictitious.
4. Ferdowsi makes geographical errors in describing the route of Fereydun, who traveled from the Tigris to Iran.
5. When dividing the world among Fereydun's sons, the geographical directions are incorrect, and East is considered West.
6. The story of the clash between the armies of Tur and Salmi contains inconsistent geographical indications.
7. The campaign of the armies of Salman and Tur into Iran is depicted incorrectly and illogically.
8. The locations of the battles do not correspond to the actual geography of Iran. For example, "Hamun."
9. The story of Mehrab's reign in Kabul and the Arab presence in Afghanistan at that time is inaccurate.

⁹ Zia Sədr əl Əşraf Varlığın səsi. <https://varliginsesi.com/az/dr-zia-s%c9%99dr-%c9%99l-esrafinin-cixisi/>

¹⁰ Беков, К. (2016). АБУЛЬКАСЫМ ФИРДОУСИ И ШУУБИЗМ. ПАЁМИ, (1925), 185.

10. Samin's campaign in Mazandaran and the division of the lands do not correspond to the actual geographic map of Iran. According to the late Naser Purpirar, Ferdowsi's Shahnameh mentions two Mazandarans: the first is located near Kashmir, India, Pakistan, and part of China; the second is located around Palestine and a significant part of the Arabian Peninsula.¹¹
11. Rustam's gigantic physique is inconsistent with the demographics of the Sistan and Kabul regions.
12. The idea that Rustam had thousands of elephants in his army is impossible, especially given the water shortage in Sistan.
13. Distances and length measurements in the Shahnameh are exaggerated and inaccurate.
14. Kavus's journey from Iran to Turan and China without knowledge of the Turanians and Chinese is unrealistic.
15. Although Siyavush is depicted as a virtuous young man, he disdains women and condemns all women.
16. Afrasiab's transfer of cities in India to Siyavush in the name of peace is distorted both historically and geographically.
17. Siyavush marries early in Turan. Most of the men in the Shahnameh have Turkish or Turanian wives.
18. Rustam, Faramarz, and Giv go to battle against "Pilsam" with only three men. It is unclear whether this demonstrates the bravery or cowardice of the heroes.
19. Rustam destroys Rome and Talak (Russian lands) with his army, but the distance and likelihood of the scenes depicted are greatly exaggerated.
20. After killing Siyavush, Rustam kills a thousand Farsakhs in the area. This event is impossible given the size of the territory and the population.
21. In his work, Ferdowsi considers women impure and regrets their birth.
22. "Giv alone kills a thousand warriors, and no one stops him" – there are many such scenes of irrational exaggeration in the Shahnameh.
23. Rudaki, although blind from birth, correctly identified the Jeyhun (Amu Darya) River, but Ferdowsi calls it a "deep sea." This is an obvious geographical error.
24. Ardabil and Bahmandej are presented as the birthplace of Ahriman, but Kay Khosrow worships fire there. This description is contradictory from both a religious and geographical perspective.

¹¹ Hossein Kariman, "A Study of Shahnameh", National Archives of Iran, 1357 H./1978 CE.

25. The characters suffer from forgetfulness or Alzheimer's disease. Rustam and Khuman do not know each other. A discrepancy in time and space arises.
26. Bizhan and Khuman speak through an interpreter, but eventually understand each other's language without assistance—this creates a contradiction in the logic of war and communication.
27. A sandstorm completely destroys the Turanian army but does not harm the Iranian one. Miraculous and natural phenomena are exaggerated.
28. Afrasiab commands from distant China and Tarum. This is an impossible scene from a communication and geographic perspective.
29. The Iranian armies cross the sea between Turan and China in seven months, aided by a strange wind. In reality, such a sea does not exist. This scene is a figment of the poet's imagination.
30. The Shahnameh describes consanguineous marriages. For example, the scene of Humay's marriage to Bahman, Chehrzad's father. Such marriages exemplify the persistence of the caste system supported by the Zoroastrian religion and reflect pre-Islamic Iranian culture.
31. Darius (Dara) is wounded, and Alexander brings a doctor to him. At that time, there was no systematic medical system.
32. Roxana's marriage to Alexander and the subsequent name the mother gave her child are manifestations of feminist ideas. Alexander is also her cousin (one father, one mother).
33. In Ferdowsi's imagination, educated but unemployed philosophers are forced to act as ambassadors of love or hunters.
34. Ferdowsi makes historical errors regarding the religious beliefs of the Romans, portraying them as Jews.
35. Ancient Iran was easily conquered due to the weakness of its administrative apparatus.
36. Alexander, although he lived centuries before Christ, swears allegiance to the religion of Christ.
37. The six-thousand-year-old book that Ferdowsi read supposedly recounts events that occurred thousands of years later—is this a claim of miracles or a limitation of Ferdowsi's knowledge? Note that Sumerian pictograms and ideograms date back approximately 5,300 years. Where was the six-thousand-year-old book that Ferdowsi read written, and since the Shahnameh contains no information about the Sumerians, to what culture does this book belong?
38. "Yazdegerd I was killed by a seahorse" is an expression of superstition and strange tales.

39. "A vote is being held in Iran for Bahram Gur, with the participation of Romans and Persians." This is a humorous scene of a royal election. "Ancient elections."

40. The scene of Bahram fleeing to Iran with the daughter of the Indian king across the sea shows the illogical routes taken by ancient kings. This may be another retelling of the Troy story. This is a lengthy topic in itself.

41. A Sassanid named Qubad built cities and hospitals from Ahvaz to Pars—the shifting locations of cities over time and the critical assessment of historical sources in the Shahnameh are important.

42. The prayer times in the Shiruyeh story contradict previous data—this indicates historical and geographical errors on the part of Ferdowsi and requires separate analysis.

Toward the end of his life, Ferdowsi regretted writing the Shahnameh and began writing a poem on the Qur'anic chapter "Yusuf and Zuleikha." In the introduction to this work, as Mr. Pourpirar notes, he criticizes the Shahnameh.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen, Ferdowsi's personality and literary legacy became a tool for various states and their domestic national policies. This work was begun by the Iranian Pahlavi regime and continued by the Islamic Republic of Iran, adapting it to the policies of the new, national-Islamic state.

There is no clear definition of a complete or incomplete manuscript of the work. The additions made to the work at different times and by different authors have not yet been fully revealed.¹² Ferdowsi included the thousand-verse work of Daqiqi, who died young and did not have time to complete it, in the Shahnameh as his "predecessor." What other works were included in the poem?

In this work, Ferdowsi covers four dynasties from the earliest known periods of history: the Pishdadi, Kinian, Parthian, and Sassanian dynasties, and also discusses the myths and history of Iran.

The Pishdadi and Kinian dynasties are considered a "mythological state." Thus, the precise historical period during which these dynasties came to power remains unknown. The Parthians in the Shahnameh must have been predominantly Turanian, since the Parthian state is known to

¹² Джураева, Д. (2013). Сопоставительный историко-литературный анализ образа гаршаспав «Авесте», в «Шах-наме» Фирдоуси и в «Гаршоспнаме» Асади Туси. *Ученые записки Худжандского государственного университета им. академика Б. Гафурова. Гуманитарные науки*, (1 (34)), 197-209.

have been founded by the ancient Saka tribes. It also appears that Ferdowsi was unfamiliar with Herodotus's historical work. Indeed, if Ferdowsi had read Herodotus, he would certainly have included the Achaemenid rulers.

As the author of the Shahnameh, Ferdowsi is known to have played a crucial role in the development of Persian-language literature. However, this does not make him a Persian. Robin Garnet Tagore also wrote valuable works in English and, therefore, did not become an Englishman. The lack of a clear position regarding Ferdowsi's nationality and religious views makes this poet susceptible to political agendas and ethnocultural conflicts. It is known that the Shahnameh is not only a translation of an ancient text but also the product of Ferdowsi's personal creativity. Where did the "social Darwinist" approach to ethnic groups, peoples, and individuals in the Shahnameh come from? Were these stereotypes present in ancient texts, or were they Ferdowsi's personal views? Likewise, did his treatment of women¹³, his degrading views of humanity, and, in some cases, his racist views stem from the sources he consulted, or were they reflected in his works as his personal worldview? There is no definitive, substantive answer to these questions.

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