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A Bibliographic Approach to the Study of the Legacy of Ferdowsi

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Abstract

In recent years, the literary legacy of A. Ferdowsi has once again become a topical issue in the Islamic Republic of Iran within the framework of a "political concept." The fact that traditional sources present him not as a historical figure and literary identity, but as a "cultural passport" of an ethnic group, is both a manipulation of historical sources and a distortion of the role of mythology in cultural and historical development. Considering that much of the research on Ferdowsi's work has been conducted outside of Iran and is considered more scholarly, a bibliographic analysis of copies written and printed in different historical periods is important. Since improvisation and significant elements of mythology are widely reflected in the life scenes and works of figures in classical Iranian literature, it is important to examine this topic within the sociocultural context of the period, using a comparative historical approach. It is known that academic studies of Ferdowsi's work were conducted primarily by Soviet scholars. Unlike Iranian scholars, Soviet studies do not present mythological materials as historical facts. Furthermore, the researchers compared historical sources related to Ferdowsi's work and, using ethnolinguistic analysis, attempted to accurately assess the geographic region and characteristics of the period in which he lived. The goal of this study is to identify and systematize Ferdowsi's historical figure and controversial aspects of his work based on bibliographic materials. The study also examines the literary and historical assessment of Ferdowsi's work and the Shahnameh in different periods, and analyzes the sociopolitical context of this period.

Keywords: *The works of Ferdowsi, the era of Ferdowsi, Ferdowsi and Iranism, sources of the Shahnameh, Ferdowsi and the Persian language, Ferdowsi and Islam.*

Introduction

The life and works of Firdovsi have attracted the attention of specialists since the second half of the 19th century. European orientalists began to take an interest in the life and works of A. Firdovsi much earlier than Tajik and Iranian scholars. As early as the 18th century, the English orientalist W. Jones first published excerpts from the Shahnameh. Between 1830 and 1878, the French orientalist J. Moule published eight volumes of this poem in Paris.⁴ The Shahnameh was also studied by the Dutch Iranologist J. A. Vullers and the German scholar F. Rückert. T. Nöldeke's work "The Iranian National Epic," dedicated to the study of the Shahnameh, gained widespread popularity.

In Russian oriental studies, V. A. Zhukovsky first studied the Shahnameh in 1849. In 1895-1896, the renowned orientalist A. E. Krymsky published translations of the Shahnameh into Ukrainian. V.R. Rosen, V.V. Bartold, F.A. Rosenberg, and others also conducted serious research into the

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⁴ Zander E. A. (1987) Firdousi i ego vospriyatiye v Rossii pervoy treti XIX veka [Firdousi and His Perception in Russia of the First Third of the 19th Century]. *Vostok i vzaimodeystviye literatur* [The East and the Interaction of Literatures]. Dushanbe, Tadjzhikskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet Publ., 1987, pp. 61–68. (In Russian).



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life and poetry of A. Firdovsi.⁵

In 1919, some episodes of the Shahnameh were included in the "World Literature" series, translated by S.I. Sokolov, prepared for publication in Russia. S.I. Sokolov headed the rare books department of the Rumyantsev Museum-Library.⁶ Being an orientalist, he had published some episodes of the Shahnameh in his own translations even before the Revolution.⁷ It is believed that at least three editions of this series were published between 1905 and 1915.

Tajik literary critics began and continue to actively study the life and work of A. Firdous in the 1930s and 1940s. This is believed to have been facilitated by the large-scale socio-political and cultural changes that occurred in Tajikistan, which had a fundamental impact on the development of literary thought. The study and research of the lives and works of great literary, scientific, and cultural figures who played an important role in the cultural history of their people has become a new direction in Tajik literary criticism. Therefore, the topic of this research is "Firdous Studies in Tajikistan (Developed in the 1930s and 1940s)".

"Firdous Studies" in the Iranian state began simultaneously with their beginnings in the USSR, or rather, somewhat later. In 1934, Iranian literary figures actively joined the process, participating in events held in the USSR to commemorate the millennium of A. Firdous's birth, and new areas of research emerged. In 1934,⁸ commemorative events were held not only in Moscow but also in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan. This process proved so attractive that in 1936, the Iranian Pahlavi regime renamed the state "Iran" and began developing a new concept of Iranism.

VARIOUS APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF FIRDAWĪ:

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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.

⁵ Firdausi, A. (1964) *Shahnameh* // in two books, v.1. [translated from Farsi by Vladimir Derzhavin and Semyon Lipkin]. - M.: Fiction, 1964. - 752 c. (*In Russian*)

⁶ Chechnyov Ya.D. TO THE HISTORY OF PUBLICATION OF PERSIAN AUTHORS IN "WORLD LITERATURE": "SHAHNAMEH" OF FIRDAWSI (based on archival materials). Part 1. Moscow. New Philological Herald. 2022. №2(61). (*In Russian*)

⁷ Staff of the Russian State Library. Moscow Public and Rumyantsev Museums. 1862–1917: Bibliographic Dictionary / compiled by L. M. Koval, A. V. Teplitskaya. Moscow: Pashkov House, 2003. 219 c. (*In Russian*)

⁸ Ainy, S. (1934) Dar borai Firdavsi va "Shohnoma"-i / S. Ainy // Baroi adabiyoti socialisti. -1934. -№8. -C 12-16. (Tacuk)

⁹ Osmanov, M. N. (1959). Firdausi. Life and Works. Moscow: Eastern Literature. (*In Russian*)

¹⁰ Kazimi P. Formation of Religion-Social And Cultural Communication in Early History //Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi. – 2021. – T. 8. – №. 4. – C. 2077-2093.

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 "KHUDAYNAME." In English, it is mistakenly presented as "The Book of Lords."¹¹ 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).¹² 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.¹³ 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 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

¹¹ Dexoda, logetname, Iran, Tehran, 1372. (Explanatory dictionary of Persian language / compiler Dexoda). (in Pers)

¹² Firdausi, A. (1964) *Shahnameh* // in two books, v.2. [translated from Farsi by Vladimir Derzhavin and Semyon Lipkin]. - M.: 1964. - 744 c. (*In Russian*)

¹³ BLAVATSKAYA E.P., "Zoroastr in" history "and zaratushtra in the secret annalah" article, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNNVhqPN9Yw> (15.03.2021).

"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 Selman. (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 orientalist 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.¹⁴ However, during the Soviet era, the

¹⁴ Yusifova, G. Y., & Kazimi, P. F. (2025). Logical social similarities and imitation (Phenomenon influencing human

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.¹⁵ 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).¹⁶ 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.

“Contraditions” In “Shahnameh” Ferdovsi

Canadian scholar and sociologist of Azerbaijani descent, Seyyid Zia Sadr al-Ashrafi, is one of the most insightful scholars of Ferdowsi's work. His extensive research, based on the Moscow edition of the Shahnameh, reveals numerous contradictory ideas in the Shahnameh, distortions of historical facts, and distortions of geographical names and territories in the poem. The work identifies and comments on 42 contradictory ideas found in the Shahnameh.

Sayyid Zia Sadr al-Ashrafi notes that toward the end of his life, Ferdowsi regretted writing the Shahnameh and began work on a work based on the Qur'anic Surah "Yusuf and Zuleikha."¹⁷ In the introduction to this work, he expresses his regret about writing the Shahnameh.

Ferdowsi's personality and literary legacy became an instrument of the domestic national policies of the various states established in Iran during their reigns and in the course of their domestic politics. This process was initiated by the Pahlavi regime in Iran and continued by the Islamic Republic of Iran, adapting it to the policies of the new national-Islamic state.

There is no definitive information as to whether the manuscript is complete or incomplete. The additions made to the work at different times and by different authors remain unexplained. Ferdowsi included in the Shahnameh a thousand-verse work by Daqiqi, who died young and did

thinking). *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9(4), 2189-2195.

¹⁵ Moin. Logetname. -Iran, Tehran. 1357. [Explanatory dictionary of Persian language/ compiler Moin] (in Persian language)

¹⁶ Middle East, Asia, Research. What We Know and Don't Know About Ferdowsi — RESEARCH

<https://crossmedia.az/az/article/46876>

¹⁷ What we know about Ferdowsi and what we don't know. <https://azerbaijanpost.org/home/NewsDetails/15719/fas/000>

not have time to complete it, as his "predecessor." However, it is known that five other poets wrote Shahnameh during Ferdowsi's lifetime. The fact that these works have not survived also gives reason to believe that they were included in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh.

In this literary work, Ferdowsi examines four dynasties from the earliest known periods of history: the Pishdad, Kyanite, Parthian, and Sassanid dynasties, and also discusses the myths and history of Iran. The mythology of the Pishdad and Kyanite dynasties is considered one of the most well-known. Therefore, it is unknown at what specific historical stage these dynasties reigned.¹⁸ The Parthians in the Shahnameh likely primarily represented the Turanians, as it is known that the Parthian state was founded by the ancient Saka tribes. It is also clear that Ferdowsi was not familiar with Herodotus's historical work. Had he read Herodotus, he would certainly have included the Achaemenid rulers Cyrus and Darius in his work.

Conclusion

As the author of the Shahnameh, Ferdowsi is known to have played a unique role in the development of Persian-language literature. However, this does not make him Persian. Robin Garnet Tagore also wrote valuable works in English and, thus, did not become English. Ferdowsi's lack of a clear position regarding his nationality and religious views makes him a target for political agendas and ethnocultural "conflicts." It is known that the Shahnameh, in addition to being a translation from an ancient text, is also a product of Ferdowsi's personal creativity. Where does the "social Darwinism" regarding ethnic groups, peoples, and individuals in the Shahnameh come from? Did these stereotypes exist in ancient texts, or were they Ferdowsi's personal views? Also, do his attitudes toward women, his "class" views, and, in some cases, his "racist" approaches to people, emanate from the sources he used, or are they reflected in his works as his personal worldview? These questions should also be answered clearly.

Ferdowsi's "indecent" attitude toward women is reflected in many parts of the Shahnameh, and we find much information about this in the analysis of researcher and scholar Seyyed Zia Alaeddin Sadr al-Ashraf.¹⁹ However, these words bear no trace of feminism. One individual in Iran has advanced several ideas about the poet. After analyzing several of Ferdowsi's poems, he expressed irritation with the meaningless allegories. Although the poem he mentioned does not belong to Ferdowsi's work, it is claimed that he was sentenced to death.

As it turns out, the work of preparing scholarly texts on Ferdowsi's literary legacy has been studied in considerable depth in Tajikistan and Russia, the successor to the USSR. Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, published in Iran, or in published episodes, contains various poetic fragments whose original source is unknown. It is also impossible to determine the source of poetic fragments circulating in a number of scholarly articles and social media and presented in the name of Ferdowsi. For example:

ابا سرخ ترکی، بدی، گربه چشم
تو گفتی دل از رده دارد به خشم

¹⁸ Amirkulov, S.(2010) Firdavsy va Ah, madi Donish. Nigokhe ba inkishofi tarihi adabiyoti tojik dar Movarounnahr (asri XIX) [muntahabi makolaho] / S Amirkulov. -Dushanbe: Irfon, 2010. -264a(*In Russian*)

¹⁹ What we know about Ferdowsi and what we don't know. <https://azerbaijanpost.org/home/NewsDetails/15719/fas/000>

(Father, a red-haired Turk, angry, with cat-like eyes, You said his heart was filled with anger
This Turk is of poor origin and race, He is both of poor race and poor build)²⁰

Therefore, it is crucial to compile an academic bibliography of Ferdowsi's work based on reliable sources and to identify the sources of the poems transmitted to the scholarly community in his name. Poems presented in Ferdowsi's name at various international conferences are attributed to various Iranian publications as sources, and the original source of these publications is unknown. Therefore, the first priority should be to evaluate the surviving and scientifically edited copies of Ferdowsi's work. The results of 20th-century research on Ferdowsi should be systematically bibliographed. It is necessary to note which manuscripts were used for the translations of Ferdowsi that have become part of world literature, and from which reliable copies they were prepared.

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Firdovsi haqqında bildiklərimiz və bilmədiklərimiz – ARAŞDIRMA

²⁰ Firdovsi haqqında bildiklərimiz və bilmədiklərimiz – ARAŞDIRMA
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