

Investigation of the Conduct and Characteristics of the Forty-Six Kings of the Shahnameh in Davari Shirazi's Mathnawi "The End of Shahnameh Transcription"

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ABSTRACT

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Mirzamohammad Davari is one of the most prominent and artistic offspring of Shiraz. His most significant work that remains in the realm of Shahnameh is a handwritten Shahnameh in Nastaliq script, forever associating his name with the Shahnameh. After completing the manuscript mentioned, Davari composed a 126-verse mathnavi in the style and context of the Shahnameh. In this mathnavi, after invoking God's name, praising Ferdowsi, and addressing the stages of writing the Shahnameh, he briefly but informatively discussed the characters and characteristics of the forty-six kings of the Shahnameh, excluding Houshang and Shapour, the son of Shapour Zolaktaf. What is notable in these verses is not only the reference to the forty-six personalities among the forty-eight kings of the Shahnameh but also a very brief and helpful mention of their actions and critical issues related to them. The significance of this small poem lies in providing a concise, brief, and informative summary of the entire Shahnameh and the historical narrative of Iran. This article aims to examine, analyze, and classify this mathnavi using a descriptive and analytical approach to demonstrate the exploitation of the Shahnameh and the history of Iranian kings. The analyses show that in this mathnavi, Davari not only mentions the names of the kings but also provides a concise account of their actions and characteristics, each of which is thought-provoking in its own right. Due to the high level of familiarity of the poet with the Shahnameh and the valuable and rare references he makes to the Shahnameh's kings and significant events, this mathnavi is a unique, unparalleled, and study-worthy composition in Persian literature.

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Introduction

Mirzamohammad Davari Shirazi stands as one of the most distinguished figures in the artistic lineage of the Vesal Shirazi family. Renowned not only for his poetry but also for his mastery in calligraphy, painting, and illumination, Davari's most enduring legacy is his painstaking transcription of the *Shahnameh*, a project that spanned five years. Upon the completion of this manuscript, Davari composed a 126-verse *Mathnawi* titled "The End of *Shahnameh* Transcription" (*Payan-e Ketabat-e Shahnameh*). Beyond a mere record of his labor, this poem serves as a distinct literary artifact. It provides a concise, structured poetic account of the *Shahnameh*'s narrative arc, specifically focusing on forty-six of the forty-eight legendary and historical kings of the epic. This study seeks to analyze this *Mathnawi* not merely as a colophon, but as a sophisticated historical and literary synthesis that offers a didactic and character-driven summary of the Iranian epic tradition.

Method

This research utilizes a descriptive-analytical methodology to examine the contents of Davari Shirazi's *Mathnawi*. The authors classify the references to the forty-six kings—ranging from Keyumars to Yazdgerd III—based on their chronological appearance in the poem. The study analyzes the specific epithets, character traits, and key events Davari attributes to each monarch, exploring how he uses these brief, allusive references to distill the vast narrative complexity of the *Shahnameh* into a digestible, mnemonic, and morally resonant form.

Results

The analysis indicates that Davari Shirazi's *Mathnawi* acts as an epistolary bridge, connecting the Qajar-era "Return" (*Bazgasht*) literary movement with the ancient foundations of the *Shahnameh*. The poem functions as a pedagogical tool, transforming the voluminous epic into a precise history of governance and character. Key findings include:

١. **Thematic Categorization:** Davari utilizes the kings not merely as historical placeholders but as archetypes for moral instruction and historical reflection. For instance, Keyumars and the subsequent kings are framed through the lens of the “transience of power” (the concept of *Gah* or throne).
٢. **Characterization and Epistemic Allusions:** Davari adeptly summarizes the core essence of the monarchs. He highlights Zahhak’s foreign lineage and tyranny, the hubris of Kay Kavus, the justice of Anushirvan, and the tragic conclusion of Yazdgerd III.
٣. **Literary Innovation:** The *Mathnawi* demonstrates Davari’s deep internalization of Ferdowsi’s discourse. His ability to synthesize the “episodes of power” into single or couplet-based summaries reflects an “eloquent brevity” (*Ejaz-e E’jaz-guneh*). For example, his characterization of the three Bahrams as *Giv* (heroic/strong) or his depiction of the transition from the Pishdadi and Kiani dynasties to the Sasanian era shows a deliberate focus on the cyclical nature of Iranian kingship.
٤. **Moral Didacticism:** By linking the deeds of the kings to their ultimate fates, Davari imbues the poem with a sense of *‘Ebrat* (lesson/admonition), effectively turning the *Shahnameh*’s history into a mirror for his contemporary audience.

Conclusion

The *Mathnawi* “The End of Shahnameh Transcription” by Davari Shirazi is an unparalleled work in Persian literature, blending artistic technicality with deep epic erudition. It succeeds in condensing the vast tapestry of the *Shahnameh* into a compact, meaningful, and emotionally resonant narrative. By categorizing the conducts and characteristics of forty-six kings, Davari creates a comprehensive synthesis of Iranian historical narrative. This poem is not merely a record of an artist’s personal achievement but serves as a vital pedagogical text, enabling readers to grasp the historical and ethical essence of the *Shahnameh* through a unique, poetic, and concise framework. It stands as a testament to the enduring influence of Ferdowsi’s epic on the creative output of the Qajar period.