

The Aesthetic Appearance of Ghaznavid Kings in the Eulogies of Farrukhi, Unsuri, and Manuchehri

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ABSTRACT

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The Ghaznavid sultans attracted many poets to their court, so these poets, in addition to increasing the awe and glory of the court, made their name immortal and performed their media role, which is to present an ideal image of the rulers. In addition to praising the kings for possessing qualities such as courage, generosity, generosity, etc., which make the identity of an ideal king, these poets also praised his handsome face and his royal dignity. This research, using the analytical descriptive method, determines how the face and appearance of the powerful praisers are described in the praising poems of Farrokhi, Onsori and Manochehri. For this purpose, all the verses related to the descriptions of the appearance and good looks of the rulers in the praises of these three poets were examined and it was found that Ghaznavid sultans and emirs were praised with this quality in the poets' praises, and the purpose of expressing their good looks in addition to representing a lovely face of the king, is an expression of his fertility and having the heavenly confirmations that have been manifested in his face. That's because people naturally love beauty.

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Introduction

Since the inception of Persian poetry, courtly panegyrics have served not only as a means for poets to earn livelihood through praise but also as a powerful sociopolitical tool. Court poets functioned as the “media” of their era, charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the king’s legacy and disseminating a specific image of the ruler to the masses. While modern scholarship has extensively analyzed how poets praised the traditional virtues of the Ghaznavid kings—such as courage, generosity, justice, and religiosity—there has been a notable gap in examining the praise of the king’s physical appearance (*Niku-manzari* or aesthetic countenance). This study explores how three prominent poets of the early Ghaznavid period—Farrukhi, Unsuri, and Manuchehri—systematically utilized descriptions of the kings’ physical beauty to construct an idealized, semi-divine image of the ruler, thereby validating their authority and “Divine Glory” (*Farreh-ye Izadi*) in the eyes of their subjects.

Method

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology. The study systematically examines the poetic corpora (divans) of Farrukhi, Unsuri, and Manuchehri, focusing on all verses describing the physical features, countenance, and general appearance of the Ghaznavid sultans and their commanders. By situating these descriptions within the broader socio-political discourse of the Ghaznavid era and the historical Iranian concept of kingship—which inherently links physical beauty and stature to moral and divine legitimacy—the research analyzes the strategic intent behind this aesthetic praise.

Results

The analysis indicates that the depiction of the Ghaznavid kings as possessing a “kingly countenance” (*Shah-manzar*) was a recurring and deliberate theme in the works of all three poets. Key findings include:

1. **The Media Function of Poetry:** The poets recognized that most of their audience would never see the king in person. By describing

the rulers as aesthetically perfect—using motifs such as the moon, the sun, and spring—the poets created a mental image of a “divinely favored” ruler. This imagery served to command respect and affection from the populace.

۲. **Divine Legitimacy:** In Persian political thought, physical beauty was often viewed as a reflection of the “Divine Glory” (*Farreh-ye Izadi*). The poets conflated physical beauty with the ruler’s fitness to govern, framing their handsome appearance as proof of divine endorsement.
۳. **Terminology and Imagery:** The poets frequently employed epithets such as *Shah-manzar* (King-countenance), *Niku-manzar* (Beautiful-countenance), and *Tala’at-e Khujasteh* (Blessed-appearance). They often compared the kings to celestial bodies or the beauty of Manichaean art (e.g., references to *Artang-e Mani*), suggesting that the king’s beauty was a manifestation of divine radiance on earth.
۴. **Poetic Differentiation:** While all three poets utilized these motifs, Farrukhi emphasized the king’s beauty as a reflection of his inner moral virtue; Unsuri often interpreted the king’s physical perfection as a direct influence and “mark” of God (*Tashir-e Haqq*); and Manuchehri utilized celestial metaphors, casting the king as a luminous figure holding the shadow of God on earth.

Conclusion

The praise of “aesthetic appearance” in Ghaznavid panegyrics was far more than poetic hyperbole; it was a sophisticated propaganda strategy. By attributing physical perfection to the Sultans, Farrukhi, Unsuri, and Manuchehri successfully bridged the gap between the distant, inaccessible ruler and the public consciousness. This aestheticization of power transformed the king from a mere political entity into a charismatic, semi-divine figure. Ultimately, the poets reinforced the legitimacy of the Ghaznavid dynasty by linking the king’s physical beauty to the cosmic order, convincing the populace that their ruler’s outward grace was a tangible sign of divine favor and inevitable victory.