

Ferdowsi and the Critique of “Internal Conflict” in the Iranian Political Sphere: Based on Quentin Skinner’s Intentionalist Hermeneutics

* Mohammad Abdolkhani¹ Shoja Ahmadvand²

¹ .Doctoral student of Political Science Department, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran. (Corresponding author) Email: mohamadabdolkhani@gmail.com

² .Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Article Info (153-176)

ABSTRACT

Article type:
Research
Article

**Article
history:**

Received:
28 Octobre
2022

Accepted:
4 February
2023

Keywords:
Ferdowsi
Shahnameh
Political
thought
internal
conflict
Intentional
hermeneutics

Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, in the eyes of most commentators, is the narrator of Iran's various chronic wars with external enemies. But if we define the two consequences of writing the Shahnameh as "unification" and "awareness" according to Ferdowsi's words, in a new interpretation we can see Ferdowsi as a critical narrator who deals with the issue of "internal conflict leading to the collapse of Iran" behind the narratives of the Shahnameh. The purpose of this article, which was done in an analytical-descriptive manner and using library sources, is to examine the "internal conflict" in Iran and criticize it in the Shahnameh. Therefore, the main issue is: How is "internal conflict" as an issue of Iran in Ferdowsi's thought in the Shahnameh? Based on the findings of the research and using the method of content analysis and Quentin Skinner's theory of intentional hermeneutics, the Shahnameh as a whole provides a critical plan of the Iranian action model aimed at conflict. And behind the epic and mythical battles of the warriors, it raises the issue of the identity disintegration due to continuous conflicts and violent competitions of Iranian tribes and families. Therefore, in the Ferdowsi's critical view framework of internal conflict in Iran history, this study result, while revealing the error of historical understanding, is to give a new interpretation of Ferdowsi's thought to the current understanding of the problem.

Citation: Abdolkhani Mohammad , Ahmadvand Shoja (2023) Ferdowsi and the Critique of “Internal Conflict” in the Iranian Political Sphere: Based on Quentin Skinner’s Intentionalist Hermeneutics. Modern Literary Researches, 2(1) 153-176 Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature



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DOI: [20.1001.1.28211413.1402.2.1.8.2](https://doi.org/10.28211/413.1402.2.1.8.2)

Introduction

In conventional interpretations, the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi is often read as a narrative of historical wars and a defense of Iranian identity against external enemies, such as Arabs or Turks. However, these traditional readings often fall into the trap of “false dichotomy” or nationalist myths, ignoring a significant, overlooked dimension of Ferdowsi’s political thought. This study posits that Ferdowsi, rather than being a mere glorifier of war and battle, acts as a critical narrator who addresses the fundamental problem of “internal conflict”—defined as chronic factionalism and violent rivalry that leads to the disintegration of Iran. By employing Quentin Skinner’s intentionalist hermeneutics, this research aims to reconstruct the historical context of Ferdowsi’s era and uncover his intent, arguing that the *Shahnameh* serves as a critical treatise on statecraft (*Jahandari*) and a warning against the self-destructive nature of internal political struggles.

Method

This research utilizes a descriptive-analytical method based on library resources and the theoretical framework of Quentin Skinner’s hermeneutics. Skinner’s approach, which emphasizes the “illocutionary force” of a text, is employed to move beyond “text-centered” or “context-centered” myths (such as the myths of doctrine or consistency). The study reconstructs the 4th-century AH political landscape—a period marked by constant uprisings, weak central authority, and civil strife—to understand how Ferdowsi’s “active mind” processed these crises. By examining the linguistic and historical nuances of the *Shahnameh*, the researchers aim to identify the specific political questions Ferdowsi was answering and the intended meaning behind his descriptions of conflict.

Results

The analysis yields several key findings:

1. **Recontextualization:** The 4th century AH in Iran was an era of intense volatility, with constant internal rebellions and conflicts

among local dynasties (e.g., the Samanids, Saffarids, and Ghaznavids). Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* reflects this reality; it is not merely an epic of the past but a reflection of the chaos of his present.

۲. **Internal Conflict as the Core Problem:** Ferdowsi systematically portrays “internal conflict” not as a heroic ideal but as a structural flaw in the Iranian political paradigm. The “myth of the three sons of Fereydun,” for instance, is interpreted not just as an origin myth, but as a critique of fragmentation and the beginning of the “war of all against all.”
۳. **The Illocutionary Force of Peace:** Contrary to popular belief, the text conveys a strong anti-war message. Characters like Rostam are depicted as weary of conflict, repeatedly advocating for peace, reconciliation, and the avoidance of unnecessary bloodshed. Ferdowsi uses the art of storytelling to expose the futility of power struggles.
۴. **Critique of Historical Misunderstanding:** The study reveals that common nationalist or simplistic readings of the *Shahnameh* have obscured its deeper philosophical message: the necessity of unity, justice, and the “agreement of common interest” (*Peyman*) to ensure the survival of the Iranian polity.

Conclusion

The research concludes that Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is a sophisticated political critique disguised as an epic. By shifting the focus from external enemies to internal causes of collapse, Ferdowsi offers a timeless analysis of the Iranian political psyche. The “internal conflict” discussed in the *Shahnameh* acts as a warning against the political and social disintegration caused by factionalism and unchecked ambition. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Ferdowsi's true intent was to promote a paradigm of coexistence and social unity. This new reading, informed by Skinner's method, not only corrects historical misinterpretations but also provides a relevant framework for understanding contemporary challenges in the Iranian political sphere, emphasizing that true “revival” (*Zنده kardan*) of Iran lies in knowledge and political awareness, not in endless confrontation.