

Ferdowsi and the *Shāhnāme* in Mystical Prose Texts

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Article Info (۱۹۱-۲۲۴)

ABSTRACT

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received:
۶ February ۲۰۲۲

Accepted:
11 July 202۲

Keywords:
Ferdowsi
Shahnameh
mystical prose texts
mysticism
epic

Mythological and national stories, in literary, non-literary, mystical texts and other than that, have been of interest from several aspects. In this research, which has been done by descriptive-analytical method and using library resources, some basic issues will be examined: evaluating the authenticity of the praise and honoring of Ferdowsi and Shahnameh by mystics in the traditions found in mystical and non-mystical texts, The effect of the thought movements of the present era in creating a positive or negative view of the mystical heritage in relation to the Shahnameh and its stories, investigating the reasons why some verses of the Shahnameh or attributed to the Shahnameh were included in mystical texts. The research shows that due to the popularity and prevalence of some of the Shahnameh verses in various texts, these verses probably and based on the evidence left in the texts, have entered mystical sources from the middle of the fifth century onwards. Except for a few narrations, through some mystical works that testify to the explicit praise of a few mystics of Ferdowsi and his great work, the position of the national epic among Sufis and mystics can be understood.

Citation: Jabarpour Somayeh (2022) Ferdowsi and the *Shāhnāme* in Mystical Prose Texts. *Modern Literary Researches*, 1(2) ۱۹۱-۲۲۴



Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature
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DOI: [20.1001.1.28211413.1401.1.2.7.6](https://doi.org/10.28211/413.1401.1.2.7.6)

Introduction & Objectives

The reception and appropriation of Abul-Qāsim Ferdowsi and his monumental epic, the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, within the Persian Sufi and mystical tradition represent a multifaceted literary and ideological phenomenon. While modern scholarship has extensively examined the esoteric/mystical interpretations (*ta'wīl*) of heroic narratives—pioneered by figures such as Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī—the specific quantitative and qualitative presence of Ferdowsi's persona and verses in **classical and contemporary mystical prose texts** has remained largely uninvestigated.

This study aims to systematically analyze the reception history of Ferdowsi and the *Shāhnāmeḥ* across Persian mystical prose from the 5th century AH to the contemporary period. Specifically, the research addresses three central questions:

١. Were the praise and reverence accorded to Ferdowsi and his epic authentic expressions of Sufi masters, or were they retrospective interpolations created by later scribes to reconcile Persian national lore with Islamic orthodoxy?
٢. To what extent did the prevailing ideological, theological, and sociopolitical discourses of each historical era shape the positive or negative attitudes of mystics toward the *Shāhnāmeḥ*?
٣. Did the inclusion of *Shāhnāmeḥ* verses in mystical treatises stem from a direct engagement with Ferdowsi's text or from the oral and cultural renown of specific aphoristic lines circulating in society?

Methodology

The study employs a **descriptive-analytical** methodology grounded in close textual criticism and historical-hermeneutic analysis. The research corpus comprises primary Persian mystical prose texts from the 5th to the 14th centuries AH, including foundational works such as:

- *Kunūz al-Hikmah* (Ahmad-e Jām)
- *Kashf al-Asrār* (Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī)
- *Tazkirat al-Awliyā* (Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār)

- *Rawh al-Arwāh* (Ahmad Sam‘ānī)
- *Tamhīdāt* and *Namehā* (‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī)
- *Mirsād al-‘Ibād* and *Marmūzāt-e Asadī* (Najm al-Dīn Rāzī / Dāyeh)
- *Safwat al-Safā* (Ibn Bazzāz Ardabīlī)
- *Yambū‘ al-Asrār* (Sayyid Haydar Āmulī)
- *Tarā‘iq al-Haqā‘iq* (Ma‘sum ‘Alī Shāh)
- Major contemporary mystical and philosophical treatises (e.g., works by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, Allameh Hasanzadeh Amoli, and Allameh Tehrani).

All citations and attributed verses were cross-referenced and collated with authoritative critical editions of the *Shāhnāme* (primarily the Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh edition and the Moscow edition) to determine their authenticity, textual variants, and misattributions.

Results & Findings

The research divides its critical findings into two core dimensions: ideological-discursive reception and textual-poetic transmission.

1. Ideological Perceptions and Conflicting Discourses:

- **Early Harmonization (Ahmad-e Jām):** Sheikh Ahmad-e Jām (5th–6th c. AH) stands out as an early Sufi who explicitly revered Ferdowsi, designating him the “*Sage of the Community of Muhammad*” (*Hakīm-e Ummat-e Muhammad*). This positive integration was historically facilitated by the theological tolerance of the Karrāmiyyah movement in Khorasan, which supported national wisdom literature.
- **Orthodox Opposition and Cultural Shifts:** In contrast to the favorable view, conservative orthodox currents linked the *Shāhnāme* to pre-Islamic *jahiliyyah* legends (evoking the Quranic archetype of Nadr ibn al-Hārith), as reflected in Maybudī’s *Kashf al-Asrār*. Accusations of *Shāhnāme*-reading were occasionally used in sectarian polemics to discredit mystics (e.g., against Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili in *Safwat al-Safā*, and Mirza Abolqasem Shirazi “Sokout” during the Qajar era).

- **Narrative Interpolations:** Conflicting narratives surrounding the Ghazali brothers (Ahmad and Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali) concerning Ferdowsi's status—such as dreams depicting Ferdowsi in paradise due to monotheistic verses—represent later hagiographical constructs designed to elevate Ferdowsi's orthodox legitimacy.

۲. Transmission, Citation, and Textual Authenticity of Verses:

- **Direct Textual Engagement vs. Oral Fame:** With notable exceptions—such as 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (who cited unique verses indicative of direct reading or esoteric transmission via Ahmad Ghazali) and Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (who recorded the highest frequency of *Shāhnāme* citations across mystical prose)—the vast majority of Sufi authors cited *Shāhnāme* verses relying solely on cultural memory and general renown rather than direct manuscript consultation.
- **Critical Collation of Verses:** Textual collation reveals that among the analyzed verses across prose treatises, **12 couplets are definitively authentic to Ferdowsi, 7 couplets are spurious/attributed, and 2 couplets are entirely alien to the *Shāhnāme*** (e.g., misattributions of verses composed by Fuzūlī).
- **Evolution of Citation Practices:** Prior to the 9th century AH, Sufi writers rarely mentioned Ferdowsi by name when quoting his lines (subsuming them under general categories such as “*as said by a sage*”). Explicit naming of Ferdowsi became standard only from the 9th century onwards.

۳. Contemporary Mystical Reception:

- **Allameh Hasanzadeh Amoli** demonstrated the deepest direct acquaintance with the *Shāhnāme*, honoring Ferdowsi's ethical genius and monotheism without forcing artificial mystical allegories (*ta'wīl*) onto the epic, maintaining a clear distinction between epic (*hamāseh*) and mysticism (*'irfān*).
- **Allameh Sayyid Mohammad Hossein Hosseini Tehrani** (*Imam-Shenasi*) maintained the traditional clerical critique, viewing the exaltation of pre-Islamic Iranian heroes as fundamentally incompatible with Islamic universalism.

Conclusion & Discussion

The study concludes that the reception of Ferdowsi and the *Shāhnāme* in Persian mystical prose was dynamic, non-linear, and deeply mediated by the shifting theological and sociopolitical climate of each era. From the mid-5th century AH onward, *Shāhnāme* couplets entered Sufi discourse primarily through their widespread cultural renown and proverbial resonance, leading most mystics to quote them from memory without direct textual verification.

While exceptional masters (such as Ahmad-e Jām, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, and Hasanzadeh Amoli) exhibited deliberate, direct, and positive engagement with Ferdowsi’s wisdom, the recurring duality of praise and ideological rejection reflects a persistent historical tension within Islamic mysticism between embracing Iranian cultural identity and adhering to strict scriptural orthodoxy.