

# Shahnama Studies

## III

The Reception of the *Shahnama*

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## The *Shahnama* in Timurid Historiography

Michele Bernardini

### History and Convention

Persistent reference to the *Shahnama* pervades Persian historiography over the centuries. This situation was frequently taken for granted and in Mongol and Timurid times the use of various images from the *Shahnama* was considered—together with the works of Sa'di and even Hafiz-i Shirazi—as an inevitable aspect of the curricula of the historians.<sup>1</sup> If the *Shahnama* as an historical text remains a debated question,<sup>2</sup> the opposite side of the issue, namely the presence of the kings of the *Shahnama* in the historical chronicles—appears a secondary aspect. In fact, the risk of limiting oneself to simplistic observations—where the literary characters merely appear as reflections of stereotyped literary tropes, deprived of any significant role in the frame of each specific text—is substantial. A careful analysis demonstrates that the figures of the *Shahnama*, albeit permeating all Timurid historiography according to a sort of generic cultural agenda, are quite foreign to the propagandistic activity of the Central Asian sovereign.

As might appear obvious, the *Shahnama* represented one of the main “classical” references to the idea of kingship—and the exempla taken from this archetypal book were for each king of the medieval Islamic period a sort of paradigm for the construction of his own model of government.<sup>3</sup> The use of names taken from this tradition was a distinctive feature of several dynasties (for instance, the Saljuqs of Rum) and certainly deserves further investigation.

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- 1 For a good example of the interest of this historiography and the use of the *Shahnama* in post-Mongol times, see the precious work of Manuchihr Murtaazavi, *Masa'il-i 'asr-i Ilkhanan*, 2nd ed., esp. 500–580.
  - 2 Michele Bernardini, “Re storici dell'epica persiana”, 37–48; Julie Scott Meisami, *Persian historiography to the end of the twelfth century*, 41–45; eadem, “The past in service of the present: Two views of history in medieval Persia”, 247–75.
  - 3 We can adopt here the idea defined by Ali Anooshahr, *The Ghazi sultans and the frontiers of Islam*, 27; when considering the use of the *Shahnama* in the *Baburnama* the author makes a useful reference to Heidegger's concept of *Entfernung* “a method of overcoming the barrier of time and space.”

In the case of the Timurids, and in particular during Timur's lifetime, such onomastic references appear to be infrequent. One could remark that only few members of the Barlas clan adopted names from the *Shahnama*—one example being Rustam b. Tughay-Buqa Barlas.<sup>4</sup> The perception of this Iranian tradition is marked by the adoption of a broad terminology in a didactic way: albeit references to *farr* (kingly charisma), for instance, are recurrent in all the texts, such quotations are limited to a general consideration of an overall idea of kingship, modelled after the Persian manner and transposed onto a further Turko-Mongol context.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the kings of the *Shahnama* (as well as their characteristics) are good theoretical examples of the reproduction of classical literary models and are frequently taken as references to the creation of a mythology of the activities of the kings.

If one turns his attention to Timur, it can not but be observed that this sovereign was especially attentive to the matter of his origins and that, in his lifetime, he was involved in discussions about his genealogy.<sup>6</sup> An interesting episode, studied by Walter J. Fischel, which occurred in 1401 in Damascus, serves as an introduction to the issue.<sup>7</sup> On this occasion, Timur met Ibn Khaldun and invited the historian to formulate a genealogical account of his lineage. A dialogue between them, reported in the *Kitab al-'ibar*, reveals a certain embarrassment on the part of the historian, who attempts to define a sort of convenient genealogy in order to avoid possible reactions from the wrath-inclined Central Asian khan. Following the Persian epic tradition, Ibn Khaldun emphasises that the Turks had taken possession of Khurasan in the time of Afrasiyab and were in the position of claiming a royal descent over the subjugated peoples:

Sovereignty only exists because of internal group loyalty (*'asabiyya*); the greater the group, the greater the extent of sovereignty. All scholars agree that most people of the human race belong to two groups: the Arabs and the Turks. It is known how power was established when they became united in religion following their Prophet [Muhammad]. As for the Turks, their contest with the kings of Persia and the seizure of Khorāsān from Persian hands by Afrasiyab is evidence of their origin from royalty;

4 On him, Shiro Ando, *Timuridische Emire nach dem Mu'izz al-ansāb*, 71–72.

5 Some important considerations about the transformation of the idea of *farr* in the Turko-Mongol world were given by John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, confederation, empire*, 6–8; see also Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and ideology in the Islamic and Mongol worlds*, 9–10, for the link between the Persian *farr* and the Turkish *qut*.

6 See for example, John E. Woods, "Timur's genealogy", 85–125.

7 Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane*.

and in their group loyalty (*ʿasabiyya*) no king on earth can be compared with them, not Chosroes nor Caesar nor Alexander nor Nebuchadnezzar. Chosroes was the head of the Persians and their king, but what a difference between the Persians and the Turks! Caesar and Alexander were kings of the Greeks, and again what a difference between the Greeks and the Turks! As for Nebuchadnezzar, he was the head of the Babylonians and Nabateans, but what a difference between these and the Turks!<sup>8</sup>

Ibn Khaldun introduces an idea of ethnicity that clearly reflects the old perception of the *shuʿubiyya* (debate on cultural superiority) with regard to the different peoples inhabiting the Islamic world of his time. Here we can discern, in various places, Jahiz's ideas on Turkish military valour, now re-appropriated in the encyclopaedic spirit of Ibn Khaldun.<sup>9</sup> In Turkish literature, the figure of Afrasiyab as the progenitor of a Turkish lineage is not new: the Qarakhanid dynasty claimed such lineage and, as Louis Bazin underlined, it was also adopted for Alp Ār Tonga, the "Leopard Hero" in the *Qutadgu Bilig*.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, Ibn Khaldun regards the kings of the past as a model for a comparative evaluation of their specific power. The Turks are subsequently celebrated for their ability to wield the greatest power in the Islamic world of this time.<sup>11</sup> The dialogue between Timur and Ibn Khaldun continues by considering the figure of Manuchihr in a complex etymologic digression,<sup>12</sup> in which Timur claims to be a descendant of this hero on his mother's side. Finally, having taken leave of Timur, Ibn Khaldun is able to express warily his opinion about Timur's origins: he states that Timur was the guardian of the Chinggisid Mahmud, a descendant of Chaghatay, son of a lady called Surghatmish (*sic*), whom Timur himself married. Ibn Khaldun subsequently goes on calling the Timurids "Tatars" and reveals that they are numerous. They are plunderers and destroyers; they kill the sedentary population; they are cruel and similar to Arab Bedouins.<sup>13</sup>

8 Ibid., 36. About the concept of *ʿasabiyya* adopted by Ibn Khaldun, see Linda T. Darling, "Social cohesion (*ʿasabiyya*) and justice in late medieval Middle East", 329–57.

9 Cf. C.T. Harley Walker, "Jahiz of Basra to al-Fath Ibn Khaqan on the exploits of the Turks", 631–97.

10 Louis Bazin, "Qui était Alp Er Tonga identifié par les Turcs à Afrâsyâb ?", 37–42.

11 The "Turkish question" was largely debated in juridical terms, see for the Mamluks in the 14th century, Najm al-Dīn al-Tarsusi, *Kitab Tuhfat al-Turk, Oeuvre de combat hanafite à Damas au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 61–64.

12 Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane*, 37.

13 Ibid., 46. See also M. Bernardini, *Mémoire et propagande à l'époque timouride*, 71–72.

This double (positive and negative) conception provides an opportunity for further consideration: the Persian epic is clearly perceived by Ibn Khaldun as an instrument for the creation of a useful “additional” genealogy of Timur that might compensate for the real one. This may indicate that in this period *Shahnama* genealogy was already regarded as a myth rather than as historical evidence. In his *Storia della letteratura persiana*, Alessandro Bausani has demonstrated the “Euhemeristic” aspect of the *Shahnama*. He argues:

the de-mythologizing operated by Islam, and the ‘Euhemerization’ of ancient mythological legends that had already begun during the Sasanid Age, imply that the great texts of Persian epic literature were not regarded as “real” history. Quite the other way, as repeatedly stated by Firdausi, the epic had more often an artistic, moral, or practical aim rather than one befitting an authentically historical work.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of Euhemerism—originating from Euhemerus of Messina (3rd century BC), who wrote a treaty on the “Sacred History” and theorized the historicizing of myth—appears especially useful for the definition of the issue here.<sup>15</sup> To what extent was the attribution of a Persian origin (with reference to the *Shahnama*) symbolic? Certainly, such a genealogy was very useful but not conceived as “real”. It consisted of a sort of literary device, more than a conviction of real belonging. As such, it was certainly applied by the Persian historians, who used the *Shahnama* with great confidence and, at the same time, as an abstract instrument within their chronicles.

### Ghiyath al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi and the *Shahnama*

The examples I shall consider are taken from various works. The first is the *Ghazavat-i Hindustan*, or *Sa‘adatnama* by Ghiyath al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi.<sup>16</sup> Written during the first half of the 15th century, this work is a report on the Indian cam-

14 Antonino Pagliaro & Alessandro Bausani, *Storia della letteratura persiana*, 363–64, my translation.

15 On him see Marek Winiarczyk, *Euhemerus von Messene. Leben, Werk und Nachwirkung*.

16 Ghiyath al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi, *Kitab-i Ruznama-yi ghazavat-i Hindustan*, ed. L. Zimin; transl. by A.A. Semenov, Ghiyāsaddīn ‘Alī, *Dnevnik pohoda Timūra v Indiju*. A new revised edition appeared recently, ed. Iraj Afshar, *Sa‘adatnama* [hereafter cited as *GH*]. See also the trans. by M. Bernardini, Ghiyāsoddīn ‘Alī Yazdī, *Le gesta di Tamerlano*. On Ghiyath al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi see John E. Woods, “The rise of Timūrid historiography”, 94–95.

paigns of Timur, accompanied by an historical introduction that summarizes his earlier campaigns.

The *Ghazavat-i Hindustan* displays a selected use of references to the *Shahnama*: with regard to some characters, these references appear as paradigms of justice, rectitude and military valour. This is certainly the case of Faridun, who is frequently mentioned as an *exemplum* in many quotations. The first occurrence concerns the conquest of Mazandaran; here Timur is described as a Khusrau endowed with the justice of Faridun (*in Khusrau Faridun-i 'adl va dad*), who receives the help of God as exemplified by Qur'an 37:172–173.<sup>17</sup> Timur is again a Khusrau with the virtues of Faridun at the time of the conquest of Azarbaijan in 1386 and in the same passage he appears in comparison with Mahmud, whose kingdom he rebuilt in its full extent (*zahi bastat-i mulk-i padshahi ki mamalik-i mithl-i sultan Mahmud Ghazi tarfi az atraf-i mamlakati u-st*).<sup>18</sup> This last comparison is one of the main features of the *Ghazavat-i Hindustan*, even if Ghiyath al-Din 'Ali excludes all references to the *Shahnama*, choosing to mention the Arabic chronicle of Abu Nasr 'Utbi as a model.<sup>19</sup> However the parallelism between Faridun and Mahmud echoes the *Shahnama* again, where such a comparison is natural for Firdausi.<sup>20</sup> If Mahmud is an explicit model for the *Ghazavat-i Hindustan*,<sup>21</sup> his name comprises a dichotomous perception between historiography ('Utbi) and epic (Firdausi).

Together with Alexander the Great, Faridun reappears in the *Ghazavat* at the beginning of the Indian campaign: Timur here “exalts” the earlier exploits of the ancient heroes—obviously outdoing them. Here the author introduces a typical literary device, presenting Timur as the Faridun “of his time” (*Faridun-i ruzgar*) again, with a further allusion to the *ghazw* activity and the diffusion of Islam in India.<sup>22</sup> Together with Iskandar and Khusrau, Faridun is mentioned during the Indian campaign as a wealthy king, whose grandeur Timur emulates.

17 GH, 32.

18 GH, 34.

19 GH, 60; the use of the reference to 'Utbi is not unusual in this period. We can mention here the same reference by Ibn 'Arabshah mentioning 'Aziz Astarabadi (who is named 'Abd al-'Aziz), author of a *Bazm u razm* (1398) devoted to the qadi Burhan al-Din of Sivas, who according with Ibn 'Arabshah used 'Utbi as the “main” model for his chronicle (*'Aja'ib al-maqdur fi nawa'ib Taimur*, 189). Other references to 'Utbi can be found in Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, *Zafarnama*, ed. Urunbaev, 1068; there is another edition of the *Zafarnama*, by Muhammad 'Abbasi. [Hereafter both the editions of the *Zafarnama* will be quoted as ZYA].

20 Abu'l-Qasim Firdausi, *Shahnama*, ed. Khaleghi-Motlagh [hereafter KM], VI, 135–37.

21 Bernardini, *Mémoire et propagande*, 94–97.

22 GH, 58–59.



Faridun is mentioned in some verses, which precede the fight with Mahmud Shah Tughluq outside Delhi.<sup>23</sup> Later, Faridun is compared with Timur during the conquest of the Siwalik mountains in Northern India; the *ghazw* and the *jihad* are the main object of the enterprise again.<sup>24</sup> As in the aforementioned case of Faridun, this figure is presented in a very simple way, with no mention of his deeds, which are taken for granted by the historian. The association of Faridun with the religious aim of the campaign is more interesting. In this respect we can perceive a vague allusion to the character of Faridun as a liberator of Iran in a parallelism with Mahmud/Timur as liberators of the world from heresy and from the “infidels”. Nevertheless, this allusion remains an abstract and hyperbolic association of ideas more than a concrete reference.

A more detailed description is devoted to Khusrau Anushirvan, whose grandeur is reflected in his material wealth and, paradoxically, in the transient quality of the latter: in comparison with Muhammad, Khusrau—like the Qaisar—appears unable to preserve both his treasures and all the countries he conquered (Yemen, Syria and Mesopotamia), which were taken later by the victorious Islamic army. Enunciating a short theory of historiography, Ghiyath al-Din stresses that the chronicles are all that remains of ancient history, and wonders what has become of the palaces of Khusrau and the same Mahmud of Ghazna: the answer is in the fact that the only written evidence of their deeds remains, without any further explanation concerning what kind of text.<sup>25</sup>

Through a comparison with Timur, Khusrau emerges as the ruler of Arabia and Iran. Timur’s wrath is like the wrath of Khusrau. He is the founder of the law and a warrior. Ghiyath al-Din also uses Khusrau as a touchstone for a comparison with his former patron, the Muzaffarid Shah Mansur, as well as with several Timurid princes like Shahrukh and Pir Muhammad. Timur is as generous as Khusrau; he uses his noble-mindedness for his subjects; he is like Khusrau, when he is liberal to those who have been excluded from the booty, or when he offers gifts to the Indians accepting conversion to Islam. In a hyperbolic image, Timur is also seen as the Khusrau of the *ghazis* during the conquest of a village near the Ganges, where he destroys a Hindu temple.<sup>26</sup>

The several examples offered here are all typical of the extrapolation of *Shahnama* characters as a literary strategy: they are used to legitimate the hero of the chronicle—as happens in several other works. Some more sophisticated references to other heroes of the *Shahnama* are made in order to

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23 GH, 120.

24 GH, 155.

25 GH, 9–10.

26 GH, 139.

express more complicated concepts: while the dichotomy between Iran and Turan permeates the whole chronicle, Afrasiyab appears as an important reference to tyranny, being the owner of the well where Bizhan is imprisoned. In these verses, Ghiyath al-Din introduces a dichotomy between night and day: Bizhan, the hero of a “solar” Iran, is taken to a dark well by the “dark” Turanian king.<sup>27</sup> The same image is repeated, when Ghiyath al-Din briefly relates the arrival of Tughluq Timur from Mughulistan to Transoxiana. The legacy of the Qarakhanid’s claim to the inheritance of Afrasiyab is deliberately neglected, perhaps because Timur is now the hero of Iran and Turan—introducing a scope beyond the old dualistic idea and in accordance with a new universal conception of the world. Moreover the deeds of Timur, in particular the *ghazw* and the *jihad*, became one of the main reasons to mention the heroes of the Firdausian tradition (Rustam, Bizhan and Afrasiyab).<sup>28</sup>

This last point appears to be quite substantial. References to the *Shahnama* by this Timurid author reflect a didactic attitude, with a powerful display of rhetoric and poetic ability; nevertheless, at the same time, Ghiyath al-Din refrains from risking more specific statements that may involve, through a rhetorical use of Firdausi’s work, the exhibition of a personal perspective. In this sense, any reference to the past is purely decorative and never implies any real selection of themes: they are simply excluded by the author. Ghiyath al-Din never mentions Firdausi, who remains a sort of hidden reference in his quotations. At the same time he adopts the reference to Mahmud of Ghazna in a way that could be considered a direct reference to the *Shahnama*: the same *Book of Kings* celebrated the Ghaznavid sultan as the universal lord from India to Rum,<sup>29</sup> and the parallelism with Khusrau as a *ghazi*, made by Ghiyath al-Din, could be interpreted as a clear echo of the chapter devoted to Khusrau in the *Shahnama*. In a digression Mahmud is described on his *minbar* as a promoter of the war against Indian idolaters.<sup>30</sup> In fact, a substantial impression of the *Ghazavat* concerns the fact that the real hero of the Indian campaign emulates the Firdausian Mahmud more than the other heroes. This was probably the intention of Timur himself, even if throughout the work of Ghiyath al-Din, the emulation also implies Timur’s superiority over other

27 GH, 10. Cf. Dick Davis, *Epic and sedition*, 167–84.

28 GH, 159.

29 *Shahnama*, KM, I, 21.

30 *Shahnama*, KM, VII, 404.

concrete heroes of the Indian Islamization such as Jalal al-Din Mangubirni,<sup>31</sup> Tarmashirin Khan<sup>32</sup> and Firuzshah Tughluq.<sup>33</sup>

### Nizam al-Din Shami

The *Zafarnama* by Nizam al-Din Shami was completed immediately before Timur's death (806/1404).<sup>34</sup> This author employs only a few references to the heroes of the *Shahnama*: Faridun and the line of the Kayanids are conventionally mentioned together as a model for Timurid protocol in a feast (*ba-rasm-i Faridun va ayin-i Kay*) in the Qishlaq in Qara Bagh.<sup>35</sup> Shami takes the story of the duel between Rostam and Isfandiyar as a model for the duel between Amir Khizr and Timur, with the habitual formula, according to which the old battle was forgotten and eclipsed by the new one (*va jang-i vaq'a shud ki qissa-yi Isfandi'yar va Rostam-ra faramush gardanid*).<sup>36</sup>

A particular reference to Jamshid may be of greater interest here—occurring in some verses about the second campaign in the Dasht-i Qipchaq against Toqtamish Khan. On 23 Jumada I (28 April 1391), Timur ordered camp to be established in Ulugh Dagh. He reached the top of the mountain and after scanning the landscape he ordered the writing of an inscription on a rock, in order to leave a mark of his power to posterity. The engravers carved a memorial plaque. Shami subsequently adds two verses in a reference to Jamshid, who also had an inscription in stone written as a memento:

شنیدم که جمشید نیکو سرشت / بسر چشمه بر بسنگی نوشت  
برین چشمه چون ما بسی دم زدند / گذشتند چون چشم برهم زدند

31 Crossing the Indus river from the s.c. *Chūl-i Jalālī*, also named Chul-i Khusrau by Ghiyath al-Din, *GH*, 75–76. A (voluntary?) mistake of the author (i.e. *GH*), for Bartol'd has demonstrated that Timur crossed the river in the Dankot area, cf. V.V. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol invasion*, 445.

32 Conquest of the castle of Meerut (Mirat), *GH*, 128–30.

33 Ghiyath al-Din several times mentions this king as one of the main models of Timur. Timur's enthusiastic visit to Jahannuma is a further evidence of this emulation, *GH*, 118–21.

34 Nizam al-Din Shami, *Zafarnāma par Nizāmuddīn Šāmī* [hereafter *ZSH*]. On Shami see Woods, "The rise of Timūrid historiography", 85–87.

35 *ZSH*, I, 244.

36 *ZSH*, I, 17.

*I heard that Jamshid of excellent disposition /  
wrote on a stone at the top of the spring of the Bar<sup>37</sup>  
'like us, a lot of people rested by this spring /  
they passed on when they had closed their eyes'.<sup>38</sup>*

It is interesting to note that these verses apparently have no relation to the *Shahnama*, but seem to be referred to in other sources, in particular the pre-Islamic ones, probably with an inference to the figure of Alexander/Iskandar.

The existence of the rock in the Dasht-i Qipchaq is corroborated by archaeological evidence: in the 1950s, the Soviet geologist K. Satpayev discovered a block of rock with an inscription of Timur in Arabic and Uyghur Turkish close to the Ulugh Dagh range.<sup>39</sup> Leaving aside questions concerning the authenticity of this stone inscription, one can assume that a certain conceptual difference exists between Shami's description and the text carved in stone. Later, Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi returned to Shami's account without making any reference to Jamshid.

We could note here that Shami's attempt to use the *Shahnama* as an "erudite" source for the enrichment of his chronicle was later excluded by Yazdi, because he probably considered it wrong. A more detailed and erudite use of Firdausi later was made by Hafiz Abru; and Mirkhwand explicitly states the use of the *Shahnama* as an authority for the history of the ancient kings of Persia, together with other sources such as the *Garshaspnama*.<sup>40</sup> The numerous references to the main heroes of the *Shahnama* appear to be a reflection of the new intellectual trend of his time; in comparison with Shami's and Ghiyath al-Din 'Ali's rudimentary allusions, Hafiz Abru's work attests to a radical change of attitude. In order to have more substantial evidence of this change we can mention here *en passant* the work of another author, Mu'in al-Din Natanzi, completed apparently between 1413 and 1414, while his general history ends with the 807/1405, the year of the death of Timur. The use of the *Shahnama* is limited in Natanzi's work to a specific question of the local perception of the history of the foundation of Yazd, with a substantial wariness about such misconceptions.<sup>41</sup>

37 Here the author alludes to the *Vār* Fortress, O. Skjærvø, "Jamšid i. Myth of Jamšid", 501–22.

38 *ZSH*, I, 118.

39 See M. Kramarovskij, "Kamen' Timura' kak fenomen chingizidskoj istorii i kul'tury", 167–69.

40 Mirkhwand, *Tarikh-i raudat al-safa*, I, 526.

41 Mu'in al-Din Natanzi, *Muntakhab al-tavarikh-i Mu'ini*, 31.

### Hafiz Abru and Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi

Hafiz Abru was a direct witness of the campaigns of Timur, in which he took part from 1380.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, all his historical and geographical works appeared during the reign of Shahrukh, after the death of the Central Asian warlord, and this could be the first significant reason for a change of attitude towards the use of the *Shahnama* too. In comparison with the almost contemporary work of Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, the historiography of Hafiz Abru presents some differences, and a comparison of the use of the *Shahnama* by both authors could be interesting for a better understanding of the two different kinds of mentalities. Mentioning a general consideration by John E. Woods, we can consider that “given the largeness of his vision and the scope of his output, Hafiz Abru was certainly the most outstanding historian of his generation and deserves to be considered among the most outstanding intellectuals of the Islamic later middle ages.”<sup>43</sup>

A good example of this divergent intellectual attitude can be observed in the *Zubdat al-tavarikh*, completed by Hafiz Abru after 830/1427. Here, for example, the author explicitly uses Firdausi's work in an erudite way when he mentions a verse in which he declares his complete submission to Shahrukh:<sup>44</sup>

همه بندگانیم شهرخ پرست / من و رستم اسکندر و هرکه هست

*We are all slaves, adorers of the rook (shahrukh) / I, Rustam, Iskandar and everyone else*

If this could just be taken for a strategic quotation in the introductory part of the text, other similar cases are found in the additions to the *Zafarnama* of Shami, in which the comparison between the *Sahibqiran* and the complete range of the main kings of the *Shahnama* is expressed in one page: a hair of Timur is like hundred *Jamshids* in one place and hundred *Fariduns* in one encampment; a hundred *Kay Khusraus* in one saddle and hundred *Afrasiyabs* on one battlefield.<sup>45</sup> This part of the text is in an appendix, devoted to the exaltation of Timur after his birth in 736/1336. The broad use of the main figures of the *Shahnama* by Hafiz Abru is repeated in all his works and is a distinctive mark of literary quality.

42 Woods, “The rise of Timūrid historiography”, 96.

43 Ibid., 99.

44 Hafiz Abru, *Zubdat al-tavarikh*, I, 45.

45 ZSH, II, 188.

If we compare Hafiz Abru with Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, we note a completely different attitude. In Sharaf al-Din's work we find a new prudence towards the ancient literary monument. Like Hafiz Abru, Sharaf al-Din represented a new generation of historians, who wrote after the death of Timur in 1405. In his *Zafarnama*,<sup>46</sup> Sharaf al-Din introduces the real character of Firdausi in a chapter devoted to the seizure of Qarshi, with the intention of comparing Timur with the other lords of Transoxiana—especially with the Qara'unas, whom this passage is a rare mention in Timurid literature. After the capture and killing of several enemies, Sharaf al-Din points out that the narrative that follows in his chronicle will be presented through the testimony of eye witnesses of the events—not through the boastful (*laf-i guzaf*) use of Firdausi's verses, with their eloquence and rhetoric. He adds some verses by the poet of Tus, devoted to the meaning of *khirad*—but taken from the *Yusuf va Zulaikha* attributed to him,<sup>47</sup> in order to justify his choice—adding an encomium of Firdausi himself.

The events that are reported integrally and that in the assembly of the literati, some ocular witnesses have directly seen without any disguising (*mudāhinat*), are (here) confirmed, not as the type of boastful words that Firdausi applied in the *Shahnama* out of eloquence and literary refinement for the sake of some people and of which he himself was aware, in his verses on the story of Yusuf—on whom be prayers and peace—and justly said:

*I made my composition from all kind of stories / I said in it all that I wanted*

*All these stories are pure lies (durugh-ast pak) / Two hundred of them are not worth a handful of earth*

*It is fitting if wisdom laugh / how can wisdom approve of me?*

*For I lost half of my life / I filled the world with the name of Rustam*

46 See here note 19. On Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi see Woods, "The rise of Timūrid historiography", 99–105. A useful recent contribution of Charles Melville ("Ali Yazdi and the *Shāhnāme*"), offers a good idea of the role of Yazdi in the court of Ibrahim Sultan son of Shahrukh. See also the recent work of İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual networks in Timurid Iran. Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī and the Islamic Republic of Letters*.

47 Compare here Hermann Ethé, *Yūsuf and Zalīkha by Firdausī of Tūs*, 24. The authenticity of the attribution to Firdausi of this literary work was frequently questioned by scholars, see for example J. Rypka, *History of Iranian literature*, 156. We exclude two verses added by M. 'Abbasi as an insertion of Firdausi's text (cf. their absence from ZYA, ed. Urumbaev, 259–60/ fols. 120r–v); in fact this quotation could be an interesting example of the text editing criteria of 'Abbasi's time.

*What are these accomplished words / engaging the mind night and day?*<sup>48</sup>

Truly this excuse and judiciousness from such a rare incomparable discourse is another of the abundant proofs of his [Firdausi's] excellence and perfection.

*May Firdausi be eternally at rest / in the place [paradise: firdaus] of which his name brought good tidings!*

These remarks on the use of Firdausi's texts seems to offer a critique of a certain carelessness on the part of his predecessors, for which Sharaf al-Din does not hesitate to use the words of Firdausi himself. Nevertheless, he introduces a distinction between fiction and historiography, in other words between myth and history. He himself declared again his appreciation for the poet of Tus in the *kitabaha* that he included in his *Manzummat*,<sup>49</sup> and the existence of a versified version of the *Zafarnama* in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Suppl. pers. 1766) seems to confirm his conflicting appreciation of the ancient masterpiece.<sup>50</sup>

### Some Final Provisional Considerations

Sharaf al-Din's choices are emblematic in their reflection of a certain wariness in the use of the *Shahnama* as a model. It is difficult to trace specific cases of influence on the part of political powers over the choices made by Timurid authors. To return to the vagueness in the use of quotations from the *Shahnama*, one can again stress that this work was a secondary source for Timurid historians. As variously attested by several scholars, Timur spent a large portion of his life attempting to prove his Mongol ancestry—and, as S.M. Grupper, Charles Melville and Maria Subtelny recently demonstrated, the role of the *kesbig* institution, as well as the status of the Barlas tribe, were substantial priorities in the Timurid agenda.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, one can observe a diffused adoption of various propagandistic stances to counter a wide and systematic campaign

48 ZYA, ed. 'Abbasi, I, 103–4.

49 Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, *Manzummat*, 41–42.

50 Murtazavi, *Masa'il*, 574–86; cf. E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, III, 266.

51 S.M. Grupper, "A Barulas family narrative in the Yuan Shih", 59. On the *kesbig* institution see also Charles Melville, "The *kesbig* in Iran: The survival of the royal Mongol household", and Maria E. Subtelny, *Timurids in transition*, 18–24.



of denigration of the new protagonist of Asian history. For instance, in the Anatolian context, the model of the *Shahnama* was used as a moral reference to a mythic past. While ‘Aziz of Astarabad completely dispenses with this model, ‘Ashiqpashazada in a subsequent period introduced into his chronicle the figure of Rostam as a paradigm for the Ottoman *ghazis*, and various references appeared later in other chronicles.<sup>52</sup> The pragmatic use of the *Shahnama* on the part of the Timurids represented a sort of model for later sources. In fact, in his chronicle devoted to Mehmed II, Tursun Beg employs the same quotations as the Timurid sources—the use of which he explicitly declares in his text, giving also a reference for his own name to the Firdausian hero Tur.<sup>53</sup>

A more complex issue is the use of the *Shahnama* in later Timurid sources. An interesting example is the work of ‘Abd-Allah Hatifi at the end of the 15th century—which could be useful as a way to summarise our discussion of the use of the *Shahnama* in the Timurid period. Hatifi was a nephew of Jami. As reported by Sam Mirza, in his early age he was introduced to the Timurid literary world through a test of his poetic ability—a *javab* to some verses of Firdausi.<sup>54</sup> In 1492 he was appointed (presumably by Badi’ al-Zaman Mirza) to write a *Shahnama* devoted to Timur, in which he introduced a long *sabab* (reason) for his composition, declaring his desire to “continue” the work of Firdausi, using the same literary magic nature of creativeness (*tab’-i jadufarib*).<sup>55</sup> He also declared that he wanted to be honoured with the same treatment received by Firdausi on the part of the lord of his time. Nevertheless, after this digression, Hatifi revealed his real models—especially Nizami and Amir Khusrau, whom he was accused of imitating by his contemporaries.<sup>56</sup>

‘Abd-Allah Hatifi’s main model for his *Timurnama* is the *Iskandarnama*—and he introduces his poem in the frame of a *Khamsa* that clearly draws inspiration from both works by his predecessors. After a first mention, Firdausi disappears from ‘Abd-Allah Hatifi’s epic. As I remarked elsewhere, when I attempted to find a documented connection between Hatifi and Firdausi, in

52 Âşık Paşazade, *Osmanoğulları Tarihi*, 84.

53 Tursun Bey, *Târîh-i Ebül-Feth*, 125.

54 Frequently mentioned in the *tadhkiras*, the episode is equally mentioned by the literary histories of Persian: E.E. Bertel’s, *Navoi*, 33–34; E.G. Browne, *A Literary history of Persia*, IV, 227–29; Muhammad Ja’far Mahjub, *Sabk-i Khurasani dar shi’r-i Farsi*, 124–25, and others.

55 ‘Abd-Allah Hatifi, *Timurnama*, ed. Abu Hashim Sayyid Yusha’. See Michele Bernardini, “Il Timurnâme di Hâtefi e lo Şâhnâme-ye Esmâ’îl di Qâsemî (Il Ms. Frazer 87 della Bodleian Library di Oxford)”, 97–118. On Hatifi see also idem, “Hâtifi’s Timurnâme and Qâsimî’s Şâhnâme-yi Ismâ’îl: Considerations towards a double critical edition”, 3–18.

56 See the vehement observations against anonymous authors, probably Hilali, in his *Haft manzar*, cf. M. Bernardini, *I sette scenari*, 20, 118–19, and K. Ayni, *Badriddin Khiloli*, 76.



such a provincial context it could be useful to compare his biography with that of Ibn Husam—an author who, in his *Khavaran-nama*, was largely influenced by his illustrious predecessor. Even though Hatifi never mentions Ibn Husam, they share several features—with regard to which the imitation of Firdausi played an important role. As shown by Giovanna Calasso, Ibn Husam explicitly used Firdausi as a model: one could assert that Hatifi did the same during his lifetime.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, it is interesting here to remark that both attempted to abridge and “translate” the classical tradition into a more suitable popular language. If one retraces Ibn Husam’s sources in Arabic *maghazi* literature, in Hatifi one discerns substantial, albeit inexplicit references to the popular and oral traditions of his milieu—the same that will later resurface in the Safavid and Uzbek traditions about Timur.<sup>58</sup> Hatifi introduces the *noyan* Qarachar Barlas in a synthetic way and summarizes all the legends about Timur’s youth from Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali’s text. He mentions several heroes of the *Shahnama* as perfunctorily as in the case of the Timurid sources. In other words, he continues the fundamentally awkward attitude of his Timurid predecessors to confront this *monstre sacré* of Persian literature.

Taking into consideration the pages devoted to Firdausi by Daulatshah—who expends a large number of words attempting to demonstrate the impossibility of imitating the *Shahnama*<sup>59</sup>—we can continue to experience a sort of discomfort in tackling this subject. In fact, the impression is that the *Shahnama* was regarded as substantially obsolete at a time when political propaganda played a major role in the choices of authors and their patrons. It might be interesting to remark that, next to Yazdi’s *Zafarnama*, Hatifi’s *Timurnama* attained great success in Iran, India, the Ottoman Empire and Central Asia. This probably occurred also because of the substantial simplification undergone by the main themes of the *Shahnama*—generally reduced to heraldic insertions in the chronicles of the time.

57 Bernardini, “Il Timurnāme di Hātefi”, quoting Giovanna Calasso, “Un’epopea musulmana’ di epoca timuride: il Xavār-nāme di Ebn Ḥosām”, and eadem, “Una testimonianza letteraria della “provincia” timuride: il Khāvar-nāme di Ebn Ḥosām”, 133–47. [See also the chapter by Raya Shani in this volume, ed.]

58 Maria Szuppe, “L’evolution de l’image de Timour et des Timourides dans l’historiographie safavide, XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles”, 313–31. For the Uzbek legends on Timur see Ron Sela, *The legendary biographies of Tamerlane*.

59 *Dar in pansad sal-i guzashta az sha’iran va fasihan-i ruzgar hich afarida’i ra yara-yi javab-i Shahnama nabuda* [...] “During the last five hundred years not one poet or eloquent one, nor any creature with knowledge, made an answer to the *Shahnama*”, Daulatshah Samarqandi, *Tadhkirat al-shu’ara*, 57.

Moreover, we should mention here Baysunghur Mirza's 833/1430 edition of the *Shahnama*, which represented a "fresh" innovation, but as Khaleghi-Motlagh stated in his article on this subject, the purpose of this new edition "was to modernize the language of the text and to add verses to it". He added that "The introduction is likewise full of accretions about the epic and its author in which even known historical figures are misidentified."<sup>60</sup> The use of the Baysunghuri text also for modern editions could be representative of a trend that began in the Timurid period: simplification and reduction (or accretion) could have political and propagandistic implications. The price for that is the loss of the historical value of the text, together with its meaning; the advantage is the continuing use of the epic in the celebration of new generations of rulers, who were at least interested in its elegant style, if not in the high moral potential of the archetype.

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60 Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bāysongori Šāh-nāma", 9.

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