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The end of the 9th/15th century is a milestone in the history of the *Shahnama’s* reception. By that time Firdausi’s work had attained wide recognition, preeminently expressed in an array of imitations, as well as in the large-scale manuscript reproduction all over the Persian-speaking world. Baysunghur Mirza’s undertaking to produce a new and comprehensive recension of the *Shahnama* (completed in 833/1430), including the invented *vita* of the poet, bears a strong witness to the process of canonization both of the epic and of Firdausi himself.\(^1\) The stages in the dissemination of the *Shahnama* in courtly cultural circles prior to Baysunghur’s efforts are traceable enough. They are indicated, for example, by the ample use of verse quotations in courtly historical writing, such as the *Rahat al-sudur va ayat al-surur* of Muhammad b. ‘Ali Ravandi (completed around 601/1204-5) and the *Tarikh-i jahangusha* of ‘Ata Malik Juvaini (completed in 658/1260).\(^2\) However, in contrast to the court culture, the fortunes of the *Shahnama* in medieval Persian folk literature remain elusive and neglected. Generalized assertions as to the epic’s broad popularity in oral tradition are based mainly on scant and mostly oblique references to *shahnama-khvāns* and *shahnama-khvāni* in medieval sources and do not take into account the diachronic development of the reception of the *Shahnama*.

This chapter aims to examine the medieval reception of the *Shahnama*, on the basis of evidence that originates in a very specific genre of medieval Persian literature, namely epic romances in prose, or *dastans*. *Dastans* emerged from the beginning in a written medium as a result of compilation, and thus by no means represent oral composition-in-perfor-

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1. See Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Bāysongorī Šāh-nāma”. For the text of the fictional biography of Firdausi in the preface to the Baysunghuri *Shahnama* with comments, see Muhammad Amin Riyahi, *Sār-chashma-ha-yi Firdausi-shinasi*, 349-418.

2. For the deployment of the *Shahnama* by these two historians see respectively Julie S. Meisami, “The Šāh-Nāme as mirror for princes: a study in reception”; Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, “Conscience du passé et résistance culturelle dans l’Iran Mongol”.

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mance, as occasionally suggested. At the same time, the genre is firmly
rooted in the tradition of storytelling (qissa-kh’ani) and as such shows a
substantial affinity to oral traditional patterns. These comprise linguis-
tylistic features typical of spoken discourse (repetitions, referential
vagueness, reduced syntactic complexity), and narrative characteristics
(linearity, the patterning of narration through storytelling formulas, the-
matic redundancy, plot ellipses reconstituted by an addressee with
recourse to the common reservoir of oral tradition, etc.). Notwithstanding
the obvious methodological difficulty in studying oral tradition through a
textual, written channel, Persian epic romances, due to their peculiar
location at the oral-textual ‘interface’, offer a rare glimpse into certain
developments in medieval folklore and folk literature, including the
reception of the Shahnama in these domains.

To accumulate as much evidence as possible, I have examined five
voluminous texts that have been edited so far. These are:

1) Darabnama, attributed to Abu Tahir Tarsusi or Tartusi;
2) Abu Muslinnama, attributed to the same author;
3) Samak-i ‘Ayyar by Faramarz b. Khudadad Arrajani;
4) the anonymous Iskandarnama;
5) Firuzshahnama by Muhammad Bighami.

The last work was originally published under the mistaken title Darab-
nama, later emended by the editor himself to Firuzshahnama. I use the
emended title throughout this article.

From a chronological point of view, dastans nos. 1 to 3 in the list above
were written down presumably in the 6th/12th to early 7th/13th centuries;

3 Yuri Salimov, Nasri rivoyati, 115; Muhammad Sarvar-Maula’i, “Bahs-i dar-bara-yi
4 William Hanaway, “Persian popular romances”, esp. 6-7, 228-30; idem, “Formal ele-
ments”, 143-44; Yuri Salimov, Nasri rivoyati, 114-18.
5 For a detailed discussion of oral features as preserved in the dastan genre, see Julia
6 al-Tarsusi, Darabnama. For different versions of the author’s nisba see Muhammad
Ja’far Mahjub, “Sar-guzasht-i hamasi”, 201-2 and recently Husain Isma’ili’s detailed study: Abu Muslinnama, the editor’s preface, I, 181-91.
7 al-Tartusi, Abu Muslinnama.
8 al-Arrajani, Samak-i ’Ayyar.
9 Anonymous, Iskandarnama.
10 Bighami, Firuzshahnama.
11 Ibid., II, 765-66.
12 The most recent discussion of the Darabnama’s dating is by Mahmud Omidsalar,
“Darabnama-yi Tarsusi”, who places it in the 6th /12th century.
the earliest extant manuscripts, date, however, from a much later period, the 10th/16th century. The anonymous *Iskandarnama* (number 4), originally compiled at the end of the 6th/12th century, underwent a thorough re-working at the hands of a medieval editor/redactor, in all probability in the 8th/14th century.\(^{13}\) No. 5, the *Firuzshahnama* of Muhammad Bighami, belongs to the end of the 9th/15th century; the only known manuscript of this work is dated 887/1482 and seems to have been copied from the autograph already in Bighami’s lifetime.

The examination of these texts yielded three clusters of testimony pertinent to the *Shahnama*’s reception in medieval times. The first cluster comprises verse interpolations from the *Shahnama* in the prose *dastans*. The second includes the stories inserted in the main narrative of the anonymous *Iskandarnama*, which claim Firdausi’s epic as their source. The third cluster deals with evidence from the *Darabnama* of Abu Tahir Tarsusi that suggests the possible existence in the 6th/12th to early 7th/13th centuries of a parallel epic tradition, extraneous to the *Shahnama*.

**Verse Quotations in the *Dastans***

From the end of the 6th/12th century onwards the technique of poetic insertion (*darj-i shi’r*) was the most common device of enhancing the ‘poeticalness’ of prose, notably in the literary, i.e., artistic writing (*nasr-i fanni*).\(^{14}\) At the same time, *dastans*, couched in a simple, unadorned language, were influenced to considerably lesser extent by this tendency. Indeed, the anonymous *Iskandarnama* does not feature a single verse insertion; the *Darabnama* numbers only five passages of ten lines altogether. The lengthy *Samak-i ’Ayyar* (2360 printed pages) contains some 68 instances of verse quotation (247 verses and four hemistiches in all); a sizeable number of these were undoubtedly interpolated by a later copyist or copyists in the 10th/16th century.\(^{15}\) The *Abu Muslimnama* (1800 printed pages) incorporates 262 citations making up 600 verses and 13 half-lines altogether. The most noteworthy in this regard is the *Firuzshahnama* of Bighami, which in the two-volume edition of 1675 pages comprises about 400 verse quotations, nearly 1,000 verses in all. Sig-

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\(^{13}\) For the interference of a medieval redactor into the original text of the *dastan* see Julia Rubanovich, “Storytelling and meta-narration”, 74-78; *idem*, “The reconstruction of a storytelling event”, 235-37.


\(^{15}\) Marina Gaillard, *Le livre de Samak-e ’Ayyår*, 11-12, 106.
nificantly, of the *dastans* mentioned above, the 9th/15th-century *Firuzshahnama* is the only work that interpolates generously from Firdausi’s epic, which agrees well with the increasing popularity of the *Shahnama* throughout the 9th/15th century.

To place the use of the *Shahnama* quotations in the *Firuzshahnama* in proper perspective: the verse interpolations in this *dastan* come from an array of poets, the majority of whom are cited with no acknowledgement and are only partially identified by Safa in the footnotes to the edition. The interpolations represent diverse poetic genres—*ghazal*, *qasida*, *rubā‘i*, *qīţ‘a*, and, notably, the *masnavi* form: the latter encompasses nearly one third of the sum total of quoted lines of poetry. Together with verses of his own making—all in the *mutaqarib* meter and of fairly inferior quality—Bighami borrowed greatly and typically without acknowledgement, from the *Shahnama* of Firdausi, the poems of Nizami (mostly from *Khusrav va Shirin*, *Haft Paikar* and *Sharafnama*), and to a lesser extent, from the *Garshaspnama* of Asadi-yi Tusi. The borrowings from Nizami’s works slightly outweigh the number of interpolations from the *Shahnama*: 116 verses versus 100 verses; these numbers take into account the repetition—twice or three times—of verses. However, judging by the occurrence of citing, the share of the borrowings from the *Shahnama* is more substantial and amounts to 51 instances as against 36 from the poems by Nizami. These figures, despite their seemingly technical and tedious character, expose some essential proclivities in the cultural response to the poetic production of Firdausi and Nizami in the 9th/15th century. Although both poets enjoyed an equal measure of popularity—provided one takes quantitative data of overall verses as an indicator—yet the number of citations (51 for Firdausi and 36 for Nizami) suggests different patterns of quotation for the works of the two poets. The majority of Nizami’s verses are cited in compact, more or less continuous passages and display insignificant textual variants, at most. The interpolations from the *Shahnama* are distinguished by a high degree of fragmentation and instability, on the verge of the total disintegration of the original. I shall return to this point below.

In order to accentuate and refine our understanding of the *Shahnama*’s reception as it is reflected in the *dastan* of Bighami, I have sorted out the verse interpolations in accordance with their provenance within the epic and presented the findings in the form of a table.

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16 Thus, Zabih-Allah Safa identifies verses by Daqiqi, Kisa’i, Firdausi, Sana’i, Abu’l-Faraj Rumi, ‘Am’aq-i Bukhara’i, Adib-i Sabir, Anvari, ‘Abd al-Vasi’ Jabali, Nizami, Sa’di, Labibi, Hafiz, and Auhadi-yi Maragha’i. However, the majority of the verse insertions are left unidentified.
Table 1. Interpolations from the *Shahnama* in the *Firuzshahnama* of Bighami

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major divisions</th>
<th>Specific dastans</th>
<th>Overall number of verses (with references)</th>
<th>Repeated verses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی جمشید</td>
<td>2 (KM, I, 48, vs. 117-118)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی فتحک</td>
<td>1 (KM, I, 85, vs. 495)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی فردون</td>
<td>2 (KM, I, 119, vs. 473; KM, I, 157, v. 1068)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی نوحه</td>
<td>1 (Br, I, 139; cf. KM, I, 171, n. 13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی کبباد</td>
<td>1 (KM, I, 348, n. 34)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی ککاس</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>گفتاران هدیه</td>
<td>1 (Br, II, 338, v. 346)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Repeated thrice (FN I, 80; I, 168; II, 712)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>هفتخوان رستم زال</td>
<td>2 (KM, II, 86, v. 245; KM, II, 72, v. 75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی کیمر و</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>گفتاران کردنگیخته ودستاوان</td>
<td>2 (KM, III, 17, v. 236; KM, III, 18, v. 261)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>داستان ود سیاوشخ</td>
<td>1 (KM, III, 27, v. 10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major divisions Specific dastans</td>
<td>Overall number of verses (with references)</td>
<td>Repeated verses</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>داستانchargingreira خانه چیز</td>
<td>11 (Br, IV, 965, n. 10; KM, III, 234, v. 2111; KM, III, 229, v. 2038; Br, IV, 1024, vs. 1089-1090; KM, III, 221, vs. 1905-1906; Br, IV, 1003, v. 734; KM, III, 234, v. 2112; KM, III, 242, vs. 2238-2239)</td>
<td>Br, V, 1167, v. 505 repeated thrice (FN I, 258; I, 313; I, 431); KM, IV, 8, v. 72 and KM, IV, 10, v. 115 repeated twice each (FN II, 549; II, 591)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>داستان پیر نومنیزه</td>
<td>4 (Br, V, 1167, v. 505; KM, IV, 7, v. 65; KM, IV, 8, v. 72; KM, IV, 10, v. 115)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی گشتاسب</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>داستان گشتاسب با اراجاسب</td>
<td>3 (KM, V, 210, v. 1444; KM, V, 214, vs. 1485-1486)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی اسکندر</td>
<td>1 (KM, VI, 5, v. 37)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی هرشد اتوشیروان</td>
<td>1 (KM, VII, 544, v. 951)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پادشاهی خسر و پردرز</td>
<td>3 (KM, VIII, 134, v. 1768; B, IX, 11, vs. 20-21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 74 verses. Including with the repeated verses: 84

Note: The table indicates the origin of each poetic line in the major thematic divisions of the epic, that is, the reigns, and where applicable in specific narratives within the reigns. The cases where the verses are repeated two or three
times are also marked. In identifying the verses I relied on the concordance of Muhammad Dabir-Siyaqi, *Kashf al-abyat-i Shahnama-yi Firdausi*. I then verified the verses according to the edition of Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh. In the event that the verses were not found in this edition, I consulted the Moscow edition by Bertel’s and the Berukhim printing. I did not address the question of the authenticity of the verses, since it is irrelevant to the present discussion. The following abbreviations are used in the table: KM=Khaleghi-Motlagh’s edition; B=Moscow edition; Br=the Berukhim printing; FN=*Firuzshahnama*. The numbers following the abbreviations indicate volume, page, verse (or note).

What can be inferred from the material in the table as regards the reception of the *Shahnama*? First, as far as the provenance of the interpolations is concerned, in the *Firuzshahnama* the quotations extracted from the narratives that form the so-called heroic cycle preponderate, with the stories from the reign of Kay Khusrau represented most richly. Within this reign a particular place is assigned to the tale of Kamus-i Kashani and the story of Rustam’s campaign against the Khaqan of Chin (11 verses in each case). The sections of the *Shahnama* that precede the period of Kay Kavus and follow that of Gushtasp get a meager representation at best: the so-called mythological period provides only six verses, and the extensive historical portions, starting with the rule of Iskandar, barely come up to ten verses altogether. Although the tales of Kamus-i Kashani, of Rustam’s campaign against the Khaqan or the story of Haft khvān-i Isfandiyar do indeed agree perfectly with the heroic subject matter of the *Firuzshahnama*, similar thematic materials can be found in abundance also in the reigns of Manuchihr, Iskandar, Bahram Gur, Anushirvan or any of the Shapurs, for instance. To my mind, Bighami’s selectivity, rather than expressing his personal predilections, appears to reflect a general current in the reception of the *Shahnama*, which can be traced to at least the second half of the 7th/13th century, as is attested by the available evidence.

Indeed, turning again to the historical works mentioned in the opening section of the article, we can observe that among the over 60 interpolations from the *Shahnama* in Juvaini’s *Tarikh-i jahangusha* there are quite a number of verses borrowed from the parts relating to the reign of Kay Khusrau (notably, the tale of Rustam and Suhrab) and to the reign of Gushtasp (the tale of Rustam and Isfandiyar, in particular); as for the verses from the ‘post-Gushtaspian’ period, I could not track any. Parenthetically, I may note that my findings regarding the *Tarikh-i jahangusha* are consistent with the results of the partial collation of Firdausi’s verses...
in Juvaini’s work undertaken by D. Sajjadi.¹⁷ It would be quite safe to argue for some degree of continuity and stability in the patterns of reception with respect to certain parts of the *Shahnama*, from a diachronic standpoint (that is, from the 7th/13th-century Juvaini to the 9th/15th-century Bighami), as well as from a literary-cultural perspective in general, namely, disregarding the different genre affiliation of the texts (courty history versus popular dastan).

Apart from the varied degree of popularity enjoyed by the sections of the *Shahnama*, the perusal of the table reveals a curious tendency towards the recurrence of Firdausi’s verses; I have marked ten instances of double and even triple repetition (amounting to 22 verses in all). This finding is important when appraised against the data from the poems of Nizami, in which only one instance of double verse repetition was recorded (FN I, 351; FN II, 591). The recurrent use of Firdausi’s verses occurs in similar thematic contexts, which might indicate that the *Shahnama* proves to have been susceptible to a formulaic treatment—typical of oral tradition, one may add—to a much greater degree than the poems of Nizami, for example.¹⁸

Perceiving the epic as a kind of inventory for formulaic usage determines the essential characteristics of verse borrowing from the *Shahnama* in the *dastan*. In this regard two principal approaches of the medieval narrator to the text can be discerned. The most prominent is the fragmentation (or fragmentariness) that I have referred to above. This approach is expressed in the technique of collage, when single verses from various sections of the poem are joined into one thematic string. The collage-like aggregation of verses is encountered in the *Firuzshahnama* in a number of set narrative contexts, such as exhortations on the vicissitudes of fate (FN I, 109, 427; II, 448, 482), depictions of battle scenes (FN I, 101, 107, 110, 279, 281, 688; II, 549, 591), and descriptions of the alternation of day and night (FN I, 103, 106, 130, 281; II, 67, 176, 484, 564). Two examples will suffice to illustrate the idea of fragmentation. The first passage describes nightfall (FN I, 276; the lines are numbered to facilitate reference):


17 Ziya’ al-Din Sajjadi, “*Shahnama dar Tarikh-i jahangusha-yi Juvaini*”, esp. 241-42.
18 Noteworthy in this regard is a late dastan *Hamzanama*, which I am not considering here. Three out of five verses borrowed from the *Shahnama*—KM, III, 184, n. 18; KM, VIII, 423, n. 10; Br, I, 257, v. 243 are repeated respectively eleven, four and two times in the same narrative setting.
بيت:

(1) جهو خروشيد شد از جهان نابديد

(2) جهو خريلرند از شه تاجكرد

(3) جهان سير هنیان نيل شد

(4) شبد تيرو جيو زلف را تاب داد

Verse:

(1) When the Sun waned from the world, and the dark night drew its army to the plain
(2) When the lofty firmament put on a crown of agate, and Huma cast its wing upon the azure,
(3) The world became dark as indigo, the stars became a chandelier
(4) When the dark night twisted the curl; that very curl lulled (the night’s) eyes to sleep

Verse (1) is borrowed from the tale of Rustam and Suhrab (KM, II, 154, v. 441, where فيکت appears instead of شد); verse (2) derives from the story of Kamus-i Kashani (KM, III, 123, v. 286; the original has هماير برافگند instead of هماير برافگند); verse (4) is from the reign of Hurmuзд (KM, VII, 544, v. 951). The third verse is spurious and was stylized after Firdaوس; it must have been composed either by Bighامي himself or drawn from some epic poem which I have so far failed to identify.

The second passage depicts a battle between the Iranians and the Rumis (FN II, 549). Oddly enough, Bighامي is explicit in attributing the whole section to Firdaوس, saying:

As Hakim Firdaوسi says,
The interpolation:

(1) شده نامو ندرك کرگن کردن
(2) بخون آب داده همه تیگ را
(3) سپاهي چو درای جوشنان یبکنگ
(4) سپاهي كه هنگام نگن وبرد

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The renowned army assembled, proud, sword-striking heroes
They have tempered the swords in blood, they have cut the clouds with the swords
An army, which in war is like a boiling sea, they have sharpened their claws in fighting
An army which in the time of battle, shall raise dust from the Jaihun up to the heavens
An army, resembling the intoxicated elephants, battling with whom razes the mountains to the ground
Riders, admirable in battles, all are war-seeking and renowned

Verses (1) and (2) are taken from the episode of Anushirvan’s battle with Farfuriyus the Rumi (KM, VII, 135, v. 425, 427); verse (3) is of unknown provenance (despite Bighami’s ascription to Firdausi); verses (4), (5) and (6) are extracted from the Dastan-i davazdah rukh, namely from the episode where Kay Khusrau is made aware of the approach of Afrasiyab’s army (KM, IV, 7, v. 65; IV, 8, v. 72 and IV, 10, v. 115 respectively). The second half-line of the last verse differs entirely from Firdausi’s original, which reads:

Bring riders, fit for battle, in order to be able to destroy Turan

The modification of the second half-line is occasioned by a narrative need: while in the Shahnama the line appears in the context of a dialogue between Kay Khusrau and Luhrasp—hence the imperative (پیر) in the Firuzshahnama the whole passage is put in a descriptive vein. Besides, the mention of Turan in the original was obviously irrelevant to Bighami’s story, which takes place in Rum, and thus had to be dispensed with.

It is worth noting that the fragmentary arrangement of Shahnama lines differs markedly from the way of interpolating the poetry of Nizami in the Firuzshahnama. Nizami’s verses are habitually interlaced in continuous, unbroken passages. Hence, in the case of Nizami’s quotations, the technique that I termed above ‘collage’, is limited to four segments, describing the alternation of day and night (see: FN I, 284, 448; II, 330, 591).19 I shall consider the meaning of such a different attitude in a while.

Let me now look at the other mode in which the medieval narrator of the *Firuzshahnama* approached the verse-insertion from the *Shahnama*. In the *dastan* the habitual treatment of Firdausi’s verses involves a high degree of instability and variability, especially in comparison with the minor variant readings encountered in the citations from Nizami and Asadi-yi Tusi. Admittedly, although textual flexibility is typical of the *Shahnama* manuscript history on the whole, in the *Firuzshahnama* it reaches somewhat reckless dimensions, resulting in the virtual reshuffling of Firdausi’s own creation. The poet’s original verses are ‘diluted’ with stylized lines, either entirely spurious, as we have observed, or based—very partially—on the original. Here are some examples:

(FN I, 190)

بکام تو بادا سپهر بلند دلت شاد بادا تنت ارجنند

May the lofty skies be at your will, may your heart be joyful, your body exquisite

In the *Shahnama* the first half-line appears twice in the tale of Bizhan and Manizha, but with a different ending in both cases:

(KM, III, 344, v. 550)

بکام تو بادا سپهر بلند بجان تو هرگز مبادآگنند

May the lofty skies be at your will, may your soul never be hurt!

(KM, III, 372, v. 913)

بکام تو بادا سپهر بلند زچشم بادان مبادآگنند

May the lofty skies be at your will, may the eyes of the enemies not hurt you!

The lack of textual fixity contributes to fairly numerous idiosyncratic variants, not listed in any edition of the *Shahnama*. Thus, in the *Firuzshahnama* we read:

(FN I, 101)

زبس نیزه وگرز وپولاد وتبنگ توگنگی همی سنگ بارد زمین

From the horde of clubs, steel and swords, you would say that stones are raining from the clouds

where سنگ is a somewhat unsophisticated substitution for راهم (KM, III, 229, v. 2038).

Or:
The whole plain [filled with] brain marrow, feet and hands, on earth there was no room to sit [on a horse]

The above reading is not registered in any of the editions. The verse in KM, IV, 232, v. 977 runs as follows:

The whole plain [filled with] brains, heads, hands and feet, there was no (vacant) space on earth

Yet another example:

There was a night like an agate, its face washed in pitch, neither Mars was visible, nor Saturn or Mercury

In the original this famous opening verse from the tale of Bizhan and Manizha reads as follows (KM, III, 303, v. 1):

There was a night, dark as pitch, neither Mars was visible, nor Saturn or Mercury

Let me now draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the function and the meaning of verse interpolations from the Shahnama in the dastans. It appears that the practice of interpolating citations from the epic into folk prose narratives gained impetus not earlier than the 9th/15th century. It was probably a catching-up with a similar technique in 'high' literature, which by the 7th/13th century at the latest had acquired a canonical, normative status. The lack of interpolations from Firdausi's Shahnama in early dastans, such as the Darabnama, the anonymous Iskandarnama and the Samak-i 'Ayyar, seems to bear testimony to a certain indifference, disregard or perhaps ignorance of sorts on the part of popular storytellers, active in the 5th/11th, 6th/12th and early 7th/13th centuries, about Firdausi's magnum opus. I shall cautiously propose a hypothesis to the effect that up to the 9th/15th century the literary reception of the Shahnama might have been restricted to courtly (or rather, learned) circles, including first and foremost lyric and epic poetry and historical writing, while its infiltration into folk literature in prose spanned a more lengthy period.
To test this and other suggestions raised till now, I shall examine the second cluster of evidence that emerges from another dastan, the anonymous Iskandarnama.

The Anonymous Iskandarnama and the Evidence of the Inserted Stories

The Iskandarnama provides a rare example of medieval Persian prose, in that it most tangibly reflects the different chronological stages of its production. Above I have referred briefly to the fact that the dastan, compiled around the end of the 6th/12th century, actually contains the 8th/14th-century version of the work as we have it now in Iraj Afshar’s edition. Since I have dealt with the issue of the Iskandarnama’s making elsewhere, I shall recapitulate here only those points which may help to further the discussion.

Owing to the extreme paucity of historical hints in the Iskandarnama and the incompleteness of the only extant manuscript, which lacks several pages of the beginning and a substantial portion of the final part, the only way to reconstruct the phases in the production of the work is through examining its meta-narrative texture. Careful scrutiny of meta-narrative markers led me to conclude that at least three agents had contributed, consecutively, to the multilayered making of the dastan. They are the narrator/compiler, the redactor, and the scribe. Inasmuch as there is no historical background to the dastan, the identities of these agents cannot be verified; thus, it cannot be ruled out that the redactor and the scribe were not actually the same person. At all events, while speaking of the functions of the three, the following can be deduced. The narrator’s/compiler’s presence in the dastan is not explicit, but rather emanates from the structural features of the work. A single overt mention of him comes from the redactor who rather brusquely remarks: “The compiler (jam’ avaranda) of this book recorded here also some stories of the miracles of Jesus, may He rest in peace, which he had found in other books, and most of the people listen to them and read them; [hence] we (i.e., the redactor) also deleted [them] in order not to digress from the Iskandar story and in order that the readers of the story will not lose its thread” (Iskandarnama, 352, lines 15-18).

Two important observations can be inferred from this comment. First, it becomes clear that the original, earlier, text of presumably the 6th/12th

century comprised storytelling material which, following Mia Gerhardt, I prefer to define as inserted stories. Unlike the frame-stories, the inserted stories are usually shorter and less significant than the principal narrative, in whose framework they are embedded; they are therefore subordinate to it both structurally and contextually. Second, the redactor forthrightly interfered with the original text, deleting and abridging the inserted stories. As I shall demonstrate immediately, in his editorial pursuits the redactor followed specific guidelines that he had drawn up for himself and which have a direct bearing on the question of the Shahnama’s reception in the 8th/14th century, the period of the redactor’s activity.

The number of the inserted stories in the Iskandarnama—either related in full or catalogued—comes up to 37 altogether. Nearly all of them are narrated to Iskandar/Alexander by literary characters of professional and amateur storytellers. Among the latter Iskandar’s vizier Arastatalis/Aristotle figures most prominently. For our purpose, I shall concentrate on those inserted stories whose provenance in Firdausi’s epic is explicitly stated by the redactor himself.

**List 1: Epic Stories in the Anonymous Iskandarnama**

In addition to the subject of the story—or in most cases of a cluster of stories—and the location of the tales in the dastan, the list contains comments by the redactor that shed light on his editorial policy. The asterisk marks the tales that were subject to the redactor’s interference in some way.

1. *On Zahhak; exploits of Kava the Smith, Afridun, Sam (sic, correct: Salm), Tur and the daughter of Sarv-i Yaman; slaughter of Iraj; the reign of Manuchihr (129, lines 12-20):

پس آن مرد [...] جمله با شاه اسکندر یافت بینی‌ها چنان که در شهنامه فردوسی نظم داده است وغلب خوانندگان را علمی باشد و مدت و زمان در مدت و زمان در انتخاب که از نوادر و غرا [لب باشند پازن گوییم که قصة از اندام بیرون می‌افتد و خوانندگان می‌دونند و قصة اسکندر فراموش می‌گند.

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Then the man [...] told King Iskandar everything exactly (the way) in which it was versified in Firdausi’s Shahnama, and (the stories are) known to most of the readers; and we (i.e., the redactor) relate in this book only the tale of Iskandar, as well as rare and extraordinary stories; otherwise the tale would lose its shape and the readers would be bored and forget the tale of Iskandar.

2. The story of the king of Yemen, his wise vizier and the daughter of an Arab king (157, line 10 to 162, line 14 and 162, lines 15-18):

Although we (i.e., the redactor) said that we delete stories from this book, we meant those stories that are lengthy and well-known and whose reading might cause tedium and nuisance to the mind; however, we shall relate rarer and shorter stories, so that the book won’t lose its shape, and all the stories that we relate in this book will not exceed five sheets of paper.22

... And the reason for relating this story before the kings was that it was appropriate in the service of the great king. Firdausi versified this story in the Shahnama and assigns it to the daughter of Ta’ir, the king of the Arabs, and Ardashir; God knows better as for the verity of this (ascription). And we wrote it here because of its utility and shortness.

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22 The remark on the physical limits of the manuscript seems to support the suggestion that the redactor indeed could have been the same person as the scribe.
3. * The story of Queen Humay and her son Darab (191, lines 10-13):

Hakim Arastatalis bowed and related the story of Huma-yi Chihrzad, Bahman’s wife, and how she cast her son into water so that he should not reign, and he fell into the hands of a laundryman, and was named Darab, till he returned to his mother and sat on Bahman’s throne to reign, as it is told in the Shahnama.

4. * The tale of Siyavush, Kay Khusrau and their fight with Afrasiyab (201, lines 10-17):

That night Arastatalis was near the King and the King asked him for the story of Siyavush and Kay Khusrau and what happened between them and Afrasiyab... Then Hakim told the King all these stories, as they are mentioned in the Shahnama; it would be tedious to relate them here (i.e., in the Iskandarnama), and the people who read the Shahnama remember these very stories. So, Hakim Arastatalis retold this tale.

5. * Hum captures King Afrasiyab (207, lines 13-16):

“It was me who captured him (i.e., Afrasiyab) and handed him over to Kay Khusrau,” and he (i.e., Hum) told King Iskandar that story, to wit: how I captured him, as it is passed on in the Shahnama.
6. * Kay Khusrau takes revenge upon Afrasiyab; Kay Khusrau’s disappearance (207, line 19 to 208, line 3):

Then Hakim related that story to the King from the beginning to the end, as it was told in verse in the *Shahnama* by Firdausi-yi Tusi. (He related) up to the place when Kay Khusrau left his army, passed his reign over to King Luhrasb and disappeared; several heroes who went with him remained under the snow.

7. The tale of the King of Farghana and the rule of justice (239, line 1 to 241, line 1):

This story is attached to Bahram-i Gur in the *Shahnama* and to the Righteous Nushirvan in the *Siyar-i muluk*, and God knows better as for the veracity of this (attachment); we (i.e., the redactor) have written it down here because of its brevity.

8. * The story of Gushtasp’s exploits in Rum; war with Arjasp; seven trials (*haft khvān*) of Isfandiyar (249, lines 7-13):

Then Hakim related the story of Gushtasp and how this noble went to Rum, married Katayun, returned (to Iran) and ascended the throne; (Hakim) related to King (Iskandar) in full all the exploits which Gushtasp had fulfilled in Rum, namely the killing of the dragon and the wolf; after this story he retold the tale of the war with Arjasp, seven trials of Isfandiyar, how he went to Ru’in Dizh and freed his sisters from captivity. (He
told) everything in detail, as it is written in the Shahnama, and to write it here (i.e., the Iskandarnama) would cause tediousness.

9. • Tales of Rustam killing Isfandiyar; Suhrab and Rustam; Bahman and Faramarz (249, lines 14-16):

وشاه (اسکندر) هر شب بدين حكايتها مشغول بود ودعاستان [کشته شدن] اسفندیار بر
دست رستم بازخواست از حکیم وقصة سهرباب با رستم وقصة بهمن با فرآفرزجمله حکیم باز
گفت ...

King Iskandar every night was occupied by (listening) to the stories; he required again from Hakim (to relate) the story of Isfandiyar’s [killing] by Rustam; (Hakim) also retold in full the story of Rustam and Suhrab and the story of Bahman and Faramarz...

The number of stories ostensibly inserted into the dastan by its original compiler is relatively large, around one fourth of the overall quantity. These are the only tales of epic nature in the Iskandarnama, the others pertaining by and large to the qisas al-anbiya’ genre. Of the nine clusters of stories, the redactor chooses to omit or considerably abridge seven tales. He is guided by a certain “editorial strategy” that implies brevity, narrative homogeneity, and concern for his potential addressees, which involves keeping them fascinated and amused by the rarity of the stories. True to his “editorial strategy” of retaining in full only those stories that are “rarer and briefer”, while dispensing with the “lengthy and well-known”, the redactor leaves out the tales of Zahhak, Afridun, Salm, Tur and Iraj, Kay Khusrau, Afrasiyab, Siyavush, Gushtasp’s adventures in Rum, his war with Arjasp, the Seven Trials of Isfandiyar, Rustam, etc. The only two stories that escape the common lot, because of their contemporary rarity, are those borrowed by the compiler from the Sasanian section of the Shahnama: one is the story of King Ardashir and the daughter of Ardavan (no. 2 in the List); the other is the story of Bahram Gur and the gardener’s wife (no. 7 in the List). However the redactor, while identifying the source of the former story in Firdausi’s Shahnama, mistakenly refers to its protagonists as Ardashir and the daughter of the Arab king Ta’ir, thus conflating this episode with the tale of Malika and Shapur Zu’l-Aktaf.23 Such a conflation could hardly have been possible had the story

23 Iskandarnama, 162. For the story of Malika’s love of Shapur Zu’l-Aktaf in the Shahnama see KM, VI, 293-99, vs. 25-163.
enjoyed sufficient popularity. As for the tale of Bahram Gur and the gardener’s wife, the redactor seems to be at a loss concerning the origin of the story, which in the version of the *Iskandarnama* is connected to the King of Farghana. The redactor assumes a learned stance, attempting to trace a possible source for this story either in the *Shahnama* or in a work belonging to the genre of *siyar al-muluk*, saying: “This story is attached to Bahram-i Gur in the *Shahnama* and to the Righteous Nushiravan in the *Siyar-i muluk*, and God knows better as for the veracity of this (attachment”).

He thus ignores the essential principle of variation and variability in folklore, which must have guided the original compiler who operated in accordance with the conventions of oral storytelling tradition.

The redactor’s treatment of the stories from the *Shahnama* confirms the main conclusions regarding “the rating of popularity” of the epic, which I have suggested on the basis of my analysis of the poetic interpolations in the *Firuzshahnama*. Just as the author of the 9th/15th-century *dastan* draws the majority of his poetic illustrations from the commonly-known—so called “heroic”—parts of the *Shahnama*, either relying on his memory or on some collection of citations in which the verses would have been organized under thematic headings,

in the same way the redactor of the *Iskandarnama* chooses to delete the tales of the same cycles under the pretext that they are too well-known: “... the people who read the *Shahnama* remember these very stories”. Thus, the comparison of the approaches of two medieval authors towards the materials from the *Shahnama* yields quite similar results. We can rather safely conclude that in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries there existed some continuity in the patterns of reception, when the main interest and attention were given to the “heroic” part of the *Shahnama*. In contrast, the Sasanian story cycle appears to have been neglected in the folk prose literature, and even the learned redactor of the *Iskandarnama* was not absolutely sure of the details he supplied.

Up to now I have been discussing the attitude of the 8th/14th-century redactor towards the epic of Firdausi. However, what can be said about the original 6th/12th-century compiler of the *Iskandarnama*, who became overshadowed by his energetic successor? What knowledge did the compiler have of the *Shahnama* and was it indeed Firdausi’s epic that pro-

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24 *Iskandarnama*, 240-41.
25 For such a possibility see Rubanovich, “Aspects of medieval intertextuality”, 256-58.
26 *Iskandarnama*, 201.
vided him with the epic stories that he inserted into his version of Iskandar’s tale?

Here we find ourselves on shaky ground. Contrary to the redactor, the original compiler did not specify his sources. We are surely dealing with a prose rendition of the epic material, thematically similar to the *Shahnama*, but whether it was derived from Firdausi’s text or from some parallel epic traditions still extant in the 6th/12th century, as is amply testified by the anonymous *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa’l-qisas* or by the *Nuzhatnama-yi ‘Ala‘i* of Shahmardan b. Abi’l-Khair, remains unclear. The latter option is not far-fetched. First, the main story of Iskandar in the *dastan* has only a weak connection with the *Shahnama* version and is full of additional subject matter unknown from Firdausi’s epic. Second, the two inserted stories left intact by the redactor, show considerable discrepancies from the versions found in the *Shahnama*, which comprise modifications in cultural realia, ideological accents and genre transformations. In this regard, the redactor’s remark—‘Firdausi versified this story in the *Shahnama* and assigns it to the daughter of Ta‘ir, the king of the Arabs, and Ardashir; God knows better as for the verity of this (ascription)—seems to hint at a different source for the original story, betraying the redactor’s attempt to bring it into conformity with Firdausi’s account, which by his time, that is the 8th/14th century, must have been considered the authoritative version, if not the only existent one.

My assumption concerning the existence in the folk prose of the 8th/14th century of an enduring and vital epic tradition, independent of the *Shahnama*, finds its verification in another *dastan*, the *Darabnama* attributed to Abu Tahir Tarsusi.

**The *Darabnama* of Abu Tahir Tarsusi as a Witness to the Epic Tradition, Extraneous to the *Shahnama***

The *Darabnama* relates highly idiosyncratic, atypical stories of Humay, her son Darab and Iskandar, which have virtually nothing in common

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28 For the thematic comparison of the versions of the Iskandar story in the *Iskandarnama* and the *Shahnama* see Rubanovich, *Beyond the literary canon*, appendix 1; a partial comparison can be also found in Hanaway, “Persian popular romances”, 71–81, 100–102.

29 For a detailed analysis see Rubanovich, *Beyond the literary canon*, 130–35.

30 *Iskandarnama*, 162.
with the canonical version of Firdausi. Moreover, the dastan contains a wealth of allusions to motives and episodes pertaining to the exploits of various Iranian kings and heroes, which have no parallels in the Shahnama and which are often tinted with Islamic colouring. Thus, in the Darabnama we find allusions to the episodes of Afridun's crossing the Jabalqa desert on chariots under sails; of the war between Kush-i Fildandan (sic) and Sam-i Nariman, King Afridun's champion; of the sinking of Sam-i Nariman’s army in the sea of sands during his expedition to India. We learn about a faraway island with a fortress on it, erected by Kay Khusrau. We are told about an idol in a Greek temple, who foretold Kay Khusrau his victory over Afrasiyab, as well as about the progeny of a certain Arzu'ad, Pashang’s descendant, who built fortresses in the Indian Ocean and dwelt there subsisting on fish, etc.

It is certainly possible to assume that the rich imagination of the Darabnama’s narrator lead him to invent the motifs in order to connect the kings of Iran and her heroes with the geographical milieu in which he had chosen to set parts of his narrative, namely Greece and India. However, a succinct and economic way of alluding to certain episodes points to the addressees’ prior knowledge of the tales to which the narrator referred. The Darabnama seems to preserve alternative epic accounts rooted in the multifaceted activity of medieval folk storytellers who were nourished on the ancient layers of Iranian oral tradition, combining it with the elements borrowed from Islamic folklore.

Telling in this respect is the somewhat unusual role given in the Darabnama to the figure of an Iranian king Nauzar, who is referred to on two occasions. He is credited with having an illustrious horse, by the name of Shabdiz, who was the equal of the legendary Rakhsh of Rustam. According to the Shahnama, however, Shabdiz was the name of Khusrau Parviz’s faithful stallion, while Nauzar is not known to have had one. In addition, in the dastan Nauzar is mentioned among Darab’s heroic predecessors, who possessed Jamshid’s helmet (khud-i Jamshid) in the following manner: “... (Jamshid’s helmet) passed from Zahhak to Afridun, from Afridun to Iraj, from Iraj to Nauzar, from Nauzar to Zadsham, from Zadsham to Afrasiyab, from Afrasiyab to Siyavakhsh when the latter went to Turan,

31 For the thematic comparison see Rubanovich, Beyond the literary canon, appendix 1; a partial comparison can be also found in Hanaway, “Persian popular romances”, 71-81, 102-8.
32 See Darabnama, II, 306-7; II, 360-61; II, 252 respectively.
33 Ibid., I, 159.
34 Ibid., I, 236; II, 307 respectively.
35 Ibid., II, 196.
and again it passed from Siyavakhs to Afrasiyab; when Kay Khusrau defeated Afrasiyab and took his riches, the helmet and (Isfandiyar’s coat of mail) fell into Kay Khusrau’s hands, and from Kay Khusrau it passed to Luhrasp, from Luhrasp to Gushtasp, from Gushtasp to Isfandiyar, from Isfandiyar to Bahman, from Bahman to Humay, and from Humay it passed over to Darab”.36 This otherwise detailed and accurate chain of inheritance oddly omits the name of Manuchihr, Nauzar’s father, who in Firdausi’s account succeeds to Iraj and supersedes his unfortunate son in every respect. Indeed, the Iranian epic tradition, as we have it today, is unfavorable towards Nauzar, depicting him as a failing ruler whose feebleness brought upon Iran the first alien invasion, that of Afrasiyab.37 A strongly negative attitude to Nauzar is characteristic of modern folk workings of the Shahnama in prose (naqqali) as well.38 Moreover, Pahlavi sources do not list Nauzar among the Iranian kings altogether, for according to them, he was killed by Afrasiyab already during the reign of Manuchihr.39

The relative prominence of Nauzar in the Darabnama, unusual in comparison with the extant epic material represented first and foremost by Firdausi’s Shahnama, hints at the existence in the 6th/12th century of an alternative tradition, which portrayed Nauzar and his family line in a positive light. Such a portrayal might have been shaped under the impact of territorial and/or ethnic considerations; thus, one can suggest that for the circles in which the Darabnama was composed, the figure of Nauzar and his successors possessed a special significance, being forefathers, for instance.40

36 Ibid., I, 70-71.
38 Jamshid Sadaqat-nizhad, Tumar-i kuhan, 12-30; Haft lashkar, 156-59.
40 In the Avesta, the name of Nauzar functions as a patronymic for his descendants, termed “Naotara”. The Naotara are associated with rearing the herds of the swiftest horses in the Iranian lands (Aban Yasht (Yt. V) 98; Art Yasht (Yt. XVII) 55; Naotara are also mentioned in Ram Yasht (Yt. XV) 35, although without being connected with horses; the horse connection is especially interesting, for it may explain the appearance of Nauzar’s horse Shabdiz in Tarsusi’s Darabnama). The tradition reflected in the Avesta binds the Naotara with the Turanians who came to conventionally represent the ultimate foe of Iran (Art Yasht (Yt. XVII, 54, 55); this tie definitely could have caused the shift of emphasis in the image of Nauzar resulting in his later negative characterization.
Conclusion

The evidence of the early *dastans* reveals a rather late massive incorporation of the materials from Firdausi’s *Shahnama* into folk prose literature, some time in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries. The absorption of the *Shahnama* into the medieval folk milieu appears to have been connected with the canonization of the epic in ‘high’, courtly literature, in which it came to provide a useful tool for granting legitimacy to non-Iranian, Turco-Mongol rulers.41 By the 9th/15th century the *Shahnama* of Firdausi had taken its particular place in every stratum of the Persian literary system, and was to keep its singular position throughout the forthcoming centuries. As a result, alternative epic accounts, extraneous to Firdausi’s version, have become marginalized, surfacing in the so-called secondary epics and from time to time in the remnants of the once very much alive tradition of *naqqali*.

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41 Melikian-Chirvani, “Le livre des rois”; *idem*, “Conscience du passé”.

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