


Translations and Imitations of the *Shahnameh* in Turkish Lands

Hasan Javadi*  | Retired Professor, University of California, Berkeley

Abstract

Reading and reciting the *Shahnameh* in Persian was popular not only in Persianate lands, like some parts of the Caucasus and Central Asia, but in Ottoman empire as well. Furthermore, some of the stories of the *Shahnameh* were known through oral tradition. Copying and making illuminated manuscripts of the *Shahnameh* was another method of spreading the fame of Ferdowsi. Ferdowsi, like many other poets of Iran, had considerable influence on the Ottoman literature. The present article examines translations and imitations of the *Shahnameh* in Turkish Lands.

Keywords: The *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi, Translation, Turkish lands.

* Corresponding Author: javadi.hasan@gmail.com

How to Cite: Javadi, H. (2024). Translations and Imitations of the *Shahnameh* in Turkish Lands. *Literary Text Research*, 28 (100), 9-40. doi: 10.22054/LTR.2023.76079.3756.



Literary Text Research is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International License.

Introduction

Like any great literary work, the *Shahnameh* has had wide influence outside its own native readership, and Ferdowsi's influence at the courts of the Saljuqs in Anatolia and the Ottomans in Istanbul as well as in Central Asia and Azerbaijan is particularly interesting and varied. As early as 1070 Yusuf Khas Hajib in his *Kutadgu Bilig* refers to the *Shahnameh* and noticeably imitates its rhyming pattern in his work. In the thirteenth century the Anatolian Saljuq kings adorned the walls of their palaces with the battle scenes from it. The first anonymous Ottoman translation of the *Shahnameh* is in 1450, to be followed by a number of other translations and many imitations of its style, both in Persian and Turkish, on the exploits of the Ottoman Sultans.

It seems that reading and reciting the *Shahnameh* in Persian was popular not only in Persianate lands, like some parts of the Caucasus and Central Asia, but in Ottoman empire as well. Furthermore, some of the stories of the *Shahnameh* were known through oral tradition. Copying and making illuminated manuscripts of the *Shahnameh* was another method of spreading the fame of Ferdowsi. To facilitate the reading of the *Shahnameh* special lexicons were created in Turkish for it. Lastly, as the knowledge of Persian grows less and less in Turkish lands the translations and imitations of the *Shahnameh* gain special importance.

“Shahnameh-khani” and Oral Tradition

Before discussing the translations and imitations of the *Shahnameh*, it should be mentioned that the prototype of some of the stories of the *Shahnameh* were to a certain extent responsible for the popularity of the *Shahnameh*. Archetypal stories such as Rostam and Sohrab or Sudabeh and Siyavush can be found in Germanic, Icelandic,

and Finish literatures or folklores. Apart from archetypal, very likely some of these stories through oral transmission have found their place among the Kurds, Soghdians, Georgians, Russians and the Ukrainians.¹ We know that many of Ferdowsi's stories were collected from *dehqans* (landed gentry) and he names a few of them. A number of such stories were collected before him at the order of the governor of Tus, Abu Mansur 'Abdul-Razzaq in the *Shahnameh* of Abu Mansur. Apparently even before the composition of the *Shahnameh* some of the exploits of Rostam were known in Armenia. Moses of Khoren, the Armenian historian, long before Ferdowsi talks about the adventures of "Sagtchik Rostom" (= Sagzi Rostam).² Oral transmission of these stories was very prevalent in the Caucasus, especially through the Turkic people such as the Kumans. Vladimir Minorsky maintains that by these means the *Shahnameh* stories went to Russia and they appear as the folk epic of the *Rostamiades* and the Kiev cycles of Ilya.

These oral traditions and their recitals by the bards seem to have been very wide-spread before Ferdowsi. We find the paintings of "*Suke-Siyavushan*" at the Turfan archaeological site as well as in Sogdian paintings found in Panjkent.³ Similarly we find many depictions of the "Rostam cycle" in Panjkent.⁴ Ferdowsi himself says that Bahram Gur brought 12 thousand gypsies as "*khunyagar*" (minstrels) from India in order to go around the country and entertain his people. The *gūsāns*, who played a considerable part in the life of the Parthians and their neighbors, down to the late Sassanian times, entertaining kings and common folk, can be considered the precursors

1 For an interesting account of *Shahnameh* in Russia see "L'epopée Persane et la Litterature Populaire Russe" in *Iranica:Twenty Articles* by Vladimir Minorsiky, London, 1964, pp. 110-117.

2 Ibid. p.110.

3 Gitty Azarpay, *Sogdian Parthian Paintings: The Pictorial Epic in Oriental Art*, UC Berkeley, 1981, pp.129-132.

4 Ibid, pp.96-98 and the color plates at the end of the book.

of *Shahnameh*-khans. In Georgia they were called *mgosanni* and in Armenia *gūsāns*. Both the tragedies of *Siyavush* and *Zarer* were among the repertoire of the *gūsāns*.¹ It seems that apart from the *gūsāns* there was another class of minstrels, who were called “owraman” (sometimes used as “ozanan”).² This is a Pahlavi or Middle Persian word used for the minstrels and bards who recited stories and poems in that language (*fahlaviyyat*) and they were another reason why the archetype of *Shahnameh* stories were known and popular in the Caucasus and Anatolia.³ The Turkish “ozan”, traveling minstrel or troubadours, who appeared from the beginning of 11th century in Anatolia and played on their *saz* while reciting their stories and poems, may be the heirs of the *owramans* and *gūsāns*.

In Azerbaijan “*Shahnameh-khani*” was very popular since the time of Nizami, and it seems that it was mostly in Persian. Although Turkish was so prevalent that Nizami in 1188 offers to write his *Laili and Majnun* in Turkish but his patron does not permit it,⁴ since Turkish was not the preferred language of literature at the time. For many centuries, cities like Ganjeh, Shirvan, and Baku were centers of Persian literature, and reciting the *Shahnameh* was one of the manifestations of this influence. Adam Olearius while describing the Nowruz celebrations of 1637 in Shamakhi, which was part of Safavid kingdom, talks of a “*qissah-khan*” who recites “the stories of ancient

1 See Mary Boyce, “The Parthian Gōsān and Iranian Minstrel Tradition,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 12 (April 1957), p. 28. Also E. Benveniste, “Le Mémorial de Zarēr,” *JA*, 1932, I, pp.280-2.

۲ محمد رضا و عبدالجمل نصیری، فرهنگ نصیری: ترکی جغتایی، رومی، قزلباشی، روسی و قلماقی به فارسی، به کوشش حسن جوادی و ویلیم فلور، تهران، ۱۳۹۳، ص ۲۳۸.

3 See Taqī Tafazolli’s entry on “Fahlaviyyat” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

4 *Laili ve Majnun*, distich 347:

ترکانه سخن سزای ما نیست

ترکی صفت وفای ما نیست

Persian kings.” He does not say whether it was in Turkish or in Persian. While describing a “*maqal*” on the occasion of martyrdom of [Imam] ‘Ali in Ramadan the language is in Persian, a preacher says: “*Lennat Chudai ber Kushandi Alij bad.*” The people shout: “*Bisch bad kem ma bad.*”¹

In spite of the two treaties of Golestan (1813) and Turkmanchay (1828) that established a new border between Russia and Iran, and gave seventeen cities to Russia, and separated the Azerbaijani Turks of Caucasia from the majority of their linguistic and religious compatriots in Iran, Persian language and literature remained prominent among the Azerbaijanis. Occasionally, many poets from Mirza Shafi‘ Vazih to Saber wrote Persian poetry. An eminent writer like Bakikhanov wrote his main work, *Golestan-e Eram* in Persian. So, it is not surprising to see that Ferdowsi’s popularity and the influence of the *Shahnameh* persisted in Azerbaijan in very noticeable way.

Until the early decades of the twentieth century *Shahnameh-khani* was popular in Baku, Ganjah, Shamakhi and other cities of Azerbaijan both in the local courts of the khans, drawing rooms of the bourgeoisie and clerics. Natiq was a nineteenth century poet who was more known for reciting the *Shahnameh* than his own poetry.²

Emin Abid, quoting Azerbaijani poet Aqadadash Munir, says: “At one point the popularity of *Shahnameh-khani* was so much that the Tsarist government feared it might have a revolutionary effect on the people and the governor of Baku was told to encourage people to

1 *Safarnameh-ye Adam Olearius*, tr. Ahmad Behpur, Tehran, Ebtikar Publications, 1984, p. 74.

2 Naser Hamrang, “*Sada-ye pay-e Tahamtan dar kuche-hay-e shahr-e nafti-ye Baku*”:

<http://www.iranboom.ir/hakime-tos/shahnameh/14793-sedaye-tahamtan-dar-shahr-nafti.html>

replace it with Ashura ceremonies and enacting the tragedy of Kerbala.”¹

According to Emin Abid, who published an anthology of the *Shahnameh* stories in Azerbaijani in 1934, in the last years of the nineteenth century *Shahnameh-khans* were so in demand in Baku that Mulla Taqi a famous reciter of the *Shahnameh* was especially invited there from Lankaran. He would recite the stories of the *Shahnameh* at the “*Otaqs*” or salons of the wealthy merchants in Baku such as Haji Zerbali, Haji Aga Dai, and Haji Rejabali. Another *Shahnameh-khan* from Lankaran, Shohrat-yar, who was also invited to Baku in 1901, was amazed of the popularity of the *Shahnameh* in that city.² Recital of the stories of Ferdowsi was not limited to the circles of wealthy merchants, they were recited by the club-wielding sportsmen in the *zurkhanehs*, and the pictures of battle fields of Rostam, Zal, Sohrab and Afrasiab adorned the walls of bath-houses and coffee-shops. Baku’s *zurkhaneh*, which dates back at least to the fifteenth century and is situated near the Bukhari and Multani caravanserais, has had a tradition of recital from the *Shahnameh*, accompanied by drums, and invariably in Persian. Hamideh Khanim Javanshir, the wife of Jalil Memedqulizadeh, writes in her *Memoirs* that in 1908 she and her family were the guests of Qasem Bey Mehmandarov in the Tezeh quarter of Shusha, and she says: “His house was very nicely painted and there was a very big hall. On its ceiling and walls there were paintings of the heroes and characters of Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*.”³

As we know *Shahnameh-khani* was part of a tradition that existed in different parts of Iran in many different forms such as reciting of *Rostam-nameh*, *Zal-nameh*, *Abu Muslim-nameh*, *Iskender-nameh*,

1 Emin Abid, “*Ferdosi ve Azerbaijan Edabiyati*”, in *Sechilmish Eserler*, Baku, 1934, p.xcv.

بنا به روایت شفاهی شاعر آقداش منیر

2 *Ibid*, Naser Hamrang, “*Sada-ye paye Tahamtan dar kучeh-haye shahr-e nafti-ye Baku*.”

3 Hamideh Khanim Javanshir, *Mirze Jalil Haqinda Khatirelerim*, ed. Abbas Zamanov & Karim Mushrutechi, Tehran, 2010, p. 42.

Hamzah-nameh, *Mukhtar-nameh* and *Tuti-nameh*. Similar traditions existed in Baku and some other cities of Azerbaijan. Sometimes they were in Azerbaijani Turkish, which was earlier called Tatar or simply Turki, and in more educated circles in Persian. Rustam and Zal had virtually become the heroes of Turkic and Turkified people. These were folk stories and often the story tellers embellished them. Reciting of the *Shahnameh* was of a literary performance, and it seems to have been mostly in Persian.

In the Ottoman Empire we know at least of two poets who recited the *Shahnameh* to the Ottoman Sultans: a poet called Ahmad for Murad I, and Mawlana ‘Ali Chelebi Fenāri for Mehmed Fatih.¹ It seems that not only at the court, but also on a popular level *Shahnameh-khani* continued to exist until mid-seventeenth century in some Anatolian cities where Persian influence was strong. Evliya Chelebi in Muharram 1050/ May 1640 while describing story-telling in the coffee-houses of Bursa writes: “When story-teller (*Maddah*) Sharif would recite from Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* the angels in heaven would be bewildered.”²

Production of the *Shahnameh* among the Ottomans

Before going to the Ottoman translations, we should mention the popularity of Ferdowsi’s work at the court of the Saljuq kings of Anatolia and how he was greatly admired. The names of seven out of eleven Saljuq kings came from the characters of the *Shahnameh*. Beginning with Giath al-Din Key Khosrow who came to throne in 1192, some of them are: Key Khosrow II and III, Key Kavus I and II, and Key Qubad I, II and III. An excavation in 1965 by Turkish archaeologist Mehmet Ander revealed the scenes of the *Shahnameh* that adorned the walls of palace of Qobad-abad of ‘Ala al-Din Key

1 Osman G. Özgüdenli in *Iranica*, under “the translations of the *Shahnameh*.”

2 *Evliyā Çelebi Seyāhatnāmesi*, ed. Zuhuri Danişman, Istanbul, 1970, vol. III, p.27.

Qobad.¹ Bahram Shah when rewarding Nizami for dedicating his *Makhzan al-Asrar* to him, makes one of the early references to the *Shahnameh*, saying that what a great pity it was that Mahmud of Ghazna did not have the wisdom to see the value of the work of Ferdowsi “that peerless king of the world of the word.”² One of the oldest copies of the *Shahnameh*, the Florence copy of 614 H/1234 may have been written in Turkey and its colophons are in the Saljuq style and on its margin there are occasional Turkish explanations.³

Perhaps the first, albeit partial, Turkic translation of the verses from the *Shahnameh* was by Fakhr al-Din Ya’qub, a poet from Ayasuluk, who rendered them in *hezaj* meter in old Anatolian Turkish and inserted them into his translation of the *Khosrow ve Shirin* of Nizami in 768/1367.⁴

Turning to the Ottoman Sultans one can start with Mehmed the Conqueror (1451-1481), who like some of his successors, wrote Persian poetry. While triumphantly entering the palace of the Byzantine emperors in Constantinople and seeing its desolate state, he composed extempore this Persian poem, which has some influence of Ferdowsi in it:

پرده‌داری می‌کند در قصر قیصر عنکبوت بوم نوبت می‌زند در گنبد افراسیاب

The spider holds the veil in the palace of Caesar;

The owl stands sentinel on the watchtower of Afrasiab.⁵

۱ محمد امین ریاحی، ۱۳۶۹، *زبان و ادب فارسی در قلمروی عثمانی*، تهران، پازنگ، ص ۳۸.

2 Ibn Bibī, Nāṣir al-Dīn Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad, (1284 or 1285) *Kitāb-i al-avāmīr al-‘alā’īyah fī al-umūr al-‘alā’īyah*. [Ta’līf-i] al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Mansī al-Ja’farī., Ankara, Türk Tarih Kürümü Basımevi, 1956, pp.70-71.

3 For a digitalized version of the Florence MS see:

<http://teca.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=BNCF0004147894#page/14/mode/1up>.

4 Barbara Flemming, “Old Anatolian Turkish poetry in its relationship to the Persian tradition,” pp.64-65 in *Fahris Hüsrev u Şirin*, Eine türkische Dichtung von 1367, Wiesbaden, 1974.

5 The translation is by Lord Byron, *The Poetical Works*, ed. by E.H. Coleridge, London, 1901, vol.111, p. 100.

One of the imitations of the *Shahnameh* was made at the order of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror by Shehdi, in Persian, entitled “Osmanli Shahnameh.” But Shehdi died before finishing this work and his work has only 4,000 *beyts*.

Some of the Ottoman Sultans displayed a special interest in the *Shahnameh*. There are 53 manuscripts of the *Shahnameh* at the Top Kapi Saray Museum Library alone. There was a special position of *Shahnameh-chi* (or *Shahnameh-gu*) at the Ottoman court for writing of the exploits of the Sultans in the style of the *Shahnameh*. Two *Shahnamehs* were composed in Persian for Selim I and Sulayman in the sixteenth century.¹ There were a number of imitations of Ferdowsi’s work, most prominent among them by Ferdowsi-e Tavail, who wrote a *Shahnameh* like work for Sultan Bayazid, and Shuhudi who wrote 4000 distiches in imitation of the *Shahnameh*.² The case of Uzun Ferdowsi is especially interesting. In the year 876/1472 he translated a portion of the *Shahnameh* into Turkish verse and presented it to Mehmed the Conqueror. Later on, he wanted to make a rendering of the *Shahnameh* for Bayazid II, the Sultan remarking that the *Shahnameh* was widely known and it was unnecessary to repeat it, encouraged the poet to write a book on Solomon.³ He finished his huge work in forty years or so and presented it in 82 volumes to Bayazid. The Sultan ordered some parts of it to be burned, and Ferdowsi-e Tavail [not earlier mentioned] became so incensed that wrote a satire on the Sultan and fled to Khorasan. Among the court poets of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) Eyyubi has been reported to have made a prose translation of the *Shahnameh*.⁴

1 Alessio Bombaci, *Histoire de la littérature turque*. [Traduction française revue et augmentée par l’auteur.] Traduite par I. Mélikoff, Paris, C. Klincksieck, 1968, p.300.

2 For a detailed discussion of the subject see “The reception of Firdausi’s *Shahnameh* among the Ottomans” by Jan Schmidt in *Shahnameh Studies II: The Reception of Firdausi’s Shahnameh* edited by Charles Melville, Gabrielle van den Berg, Brill, 2012.

3 “Ferdowsi” by Fahir Iz in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition 1964, p.921.

4 Köpürlü, M. Fuad, “Turkler,” *Islam Anksilopediasi*, Istanbul 1988, p. 549. Vol. XII.

The Ottomans had a long history of involvement with the *Shahnameh* and the illustrations and ideas associated with it. Luxury copies of it with elaborate paintings were among the gifts most often presented to the Sultans by Safavid envoys. The most famous and magnificent of them, being the *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp, presented to Sultan Selim II in 1568, and now is known as Houghton *Shahnameh*. If the late sixteenth century was a period of intense political and ideological conflict between the Ottoman and Safavid empires, it was also especially a period of the production of the *Shahnameh* manuscripts, which formed a significant component of the rising cultural and artistic exchange between them.

In spite of the fact, that the *Shahnameh* represents the most nationalistic aspects of Iranian nationalism, some Ottoman Sultans gave their own view of Persian history in what is called “truncated *Shahnamehs*,” and tried to show that they are the “legitimate” rulers of both Iran and Rum. Of this type of shortened version of the *Shahnameh* in Persian, which were produced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century, and often in the Ottoman empire, so far eight different copies have been found and the most famous among them is the Eckstein *Shahnameh*, which was produced in 1584 with 32 magnificent miniatures by at least six artists.¹ Although the works of Ottoman painters can be seen in these illustrations, the distinctive style of the Qazvin school of painting is apparent in them.

The truncated *Shahnamehs* (as it is the case with the Eckstein MS) either end with the reign of Alexander or the reign of Queen Humay, the daughter and wife of Bahman, omitting the historical part of the *Shahnameh* that covers the Sassanian period. In addition, this group of *Shahnamehs* include passages from other epics such as *Sam-nameh*, *Burzu-nameh*, *Garshasep-nameh*, *Bahaman-nameh* and *Eskander-nameh*. Although, at first sight the choice of the Iranian national epic

¹ Will Kwiatkowski, *The Eckstein Shahnama: An Ottoman Book of Kings*, London, 2005, p.11.

to express pro-Ottoman sentiments at the midst of the Persian-Ottoman wars (1578-1590) looks strange, it seems that the Ottoman Sultans tried to legitimize their campaigns to extend their territories into Iran on the ground that they were heirs to Iskandar-e Rumi, who made both Iran and Rum his own by defeating Darab and marrying his daughter.¹

Lexicons of the *Shahnameh*

Lexicons and commentaries in Turkish on the *Shahnameh*, as well as numerous manuscripts and editions of it, are another indication that the work of Ferdowsi was read by many Turks in its original Persian. *Lughat-e Shahnameh* by ‘Abdul-Qader Baghdadi (1620-1682) in Turkish is one of the early dictionaries on the *Shahnameh*. In fact, before it there were three dictionaries on the great work of Ferdowsi in Persian of which only one, *Mu`jam-e Shahnameh* by Sharif Dastarkhan has survived, and apparently was used as one of his sources by al-Baghdadi.

‘Abdul-Qader was born in Baghdad and after mastering Arabic, Persian and Turkish, in 1640 he went to Cairo and wrote his famous dictionary there in 1656. al-Bundari’s first translation into Arabic (1223-24) and al-Baghdadi’s dictionary show the popularity of the *Shahnameh* in the Arab and Turkish worlds. Although al-Baghdadi wrote his dictionary in Cairo, it was meant for an Ottoman audience. In 1667 he moved to Istanbul and became a friend and companion to the governor of that city, Ibrahim Katkhuda. *Lughat-e Shahnameh* contains 1598 entries of difficult words or expression with their Turkish equivalents along with verses from the *Shahnameh* for most of the citations. The author quotes from many other sources and covers many extra words while discussing the entries.

¹ See also Kwiatkowski’s analysis, pp.51-53.

Another example is *Mushkelat-e Shahnameh* by Ebrāhim b. al-Ḥafez al-Za'ifi, (d. 11th/17th century) of which there is a copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale (MX\38). Another copy of it dated 954/1547 is at the Millet Kütüphanesi of Istanbul.¹ *Mushkelat-e Shahnameh* is basically a treatise on learning Persian with a glossary of the names and difficult words in the *Shahnameh*.

Translations and Adaptations of the *Shahnameh*

Obviously, the translations of the *Shahnameh* were responsible for the influence of Ferdowsi. The oldest translation of the *Shahnameh* is into Arabic by al-Bundari of Isfahan (621/1224), and then comes a fifteenth century Georgian translation which is lost.² Interestingly enough, the Georgian translations are amongst the earliest of the *Shahnameh*, and then/after which come the Ottoman translations, of which the oldest verse translation was made in 1511 in Cairo for the Mamluk king Qānsawh Gawri. This was six years before the conquest of Egypt by Selim I in 1517, to whom a copy of this translation was given as a gift. In the introduction we are told that Sultan Qānsawh had a *Shahnameh* among his treasures and since he wanted to leave a memento of himself to the world, asked Shahrifi, who was “powerful with words,” to undertake the task of translating it. The poet humbly excused himself and said: “This is a hard task and no one has

1 Istanbul, Millet Kütüphanesi Ali Emiri Kitaplığı Lgt. No. 252. There are five other MSS of this book at this library. See Yusuf Öz, “Şeh-nâme tercümelere ve sözlükleri,” *Name-i aşina*, Ankara, 2002, 4/3, p. 30.

2 According to the Georgian scholar, Jamshid Giunshvili: “The *Shahnāme* was translated, not only to satisfy the literary and aesthetic needs of readers and listeners, but also to inspire the young with the spirit of heroism and Georgian patriotism.” The occurrences of names of many *Shahnameh* heroes, such as Rustam, Sam, Zaal and Tahmineh in the 11th and 12th century Georgian literature suggest that the Georgians were familiar with Persian legends. According to Giunshvili the versions in verse “comprise Rostomiani (The book of Rostam), Zaakiani (The book of Zaḥāk), and Utrutian-Saamiani (The book of Otrōt and Sam). Prose versions are Pridoniani (The book of Feridun), Utrutian-Saamiani, and Saam-palavani (The book of Sam the Pahlavan),” Jamshid Sh. Giunshvili in *Iranica*, “The *Shahnameh* in Georgia.”

undertaken it until now. Who is Sharifi and of what standing to walk in Ferdowsi's steps?" Upon insistence of the Sultan he complied.¹ Sharifi's work has been properly edited and published by Zühal Kültüral and Latif Beyreli as *Şeh-nāme Çevrişi, çev. Şerifi*, Ankara, 1999, vols. i-iv. In their scholarly introduction they give 23 sources for the MSS of this work.

Sharifi's translation is a fairly comprehensive translation in 55,000 *beyts*, and the poet says since the original meter was hard, he has chosen a simpler one. About one thousand *beyts* in the introduction are added by the translator in praise of the Sultan and other matters. Interestingly enough, Sharifi has added the praise of the four caliphs whereas Ferdowsi only has the praise of Imam 'Ali.² A presentation copy of the same MS with 62 miniatures, dated as 1516 is preserved at the Topkapi Sarai Museum Library (no.2155), but there is no mention of Sharifi and it seems that the MS was taken as a booty when Selim I defeated and killed the ruler of Egypt in the same year.³

The first prose Turkish translation of the *Shahnameh* was earlier by the order of Murad II (1421-1451) and its translator is not known. An incomplete manuscript of this translation exists at the Topkapi Sarai Museum Library (No. 1518.) Parts of this translation have survived and a second volume is at the Topkapi Sarai Museum Library (No. 2154) which has 328 folios with nine miniatures. Another manuscript of this text containing 52 folios is kept at the National Library of Vienna.⁴ There is another prose translation at the same museum (No. 1116) by an anonymous translator, which comes to the

۱ توفیق سبحانی، "ترجمه‌ای منظوم از شاهنامه"، فصل نامه انجمن، بهار ۱۳۸۳، ص ۱۳.

2 An interesting copy of Sharifi's translation is preserved at the British Museum (Or.1126) dated 913 A.H./1507.

3 Altogether there are twelve MSS of Sharifi's translation and one prose translation that was made after his translation. For a detailed account of these MSS see Towfiq Sobhani, the above-mentioned article, and Osman G. Özgüdenli, The Turkish translations of the *Shahnameh* in *Iranica*.

4 Jan Schmidt, The Reception of Ferdowsi's *Shahnamah*, p. 128.

battle of Key-Khosrow and Afrasiyab.¹ There is also a manuscript of *Sohrab-nameh* in prose and verse at the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, which is dedicated to Prince Suleyman, the son of Selim I.²

Jules Mohl, the French translator of the *Shahnameh*, mentions a manuscript copy in the possession of M. Jaubert, which was completed in 1516. Mohl says that this is the Turkish verse translation which was done by “Tatar Ali Effendi.”³ Of the same translation, there are two other copies at Topkapi Sarai Museum Library and one at the New York Public Library.⁴

Another translation that has reached us in its complete form is made by Dervish Hasan (also called Mahdi) an official at the court of Othman II, of which copies exist in Paris, Gotha, Uppsala and St. Petersburg. A magnificent copy of this translation is preserved at the Oriental Institute of St. Petersburg and has numerous miniatures. The translation is dedicated to Othman II in Rabi‘I 1030/ January-December 1620-21.⁵ The work mainly in prose is interspersed with poetry in the writing of the famous Ottoman calligrapher Ibrahim Cevri.

Individual stories from the *Shahnameh* were also translated not only into Ottoman Turkish but other Turkic languages. A version of the story of Kay Khosrow and Gushtasb in old Anatolian Turkish is preserved at the Istanbul University Library, which bears the date of 1627. An incomplete translation into Chagatay is mentioned by Blochet in the *Catalogue of Bibliothèque Nationale* (Supplement

1 Fehmi Edhem Karatay, *Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi Kitaplığı Türkçe Yazmalar Kataloğu*, vol. 2, Istanbul, 1961, pp. 57-58.

2 Edgard Blochet, *Bibliothèque Nationale, Catalogue des manuscrits turcs*, Vol.II, pp.93-94 nos.906-10.

3 Jules Mohl, *Le livre des Rois par Aboul Kasim Ferdousi*, Vo. I.p. 78.

4 For these MSS see Jan Schmidt, *op.cit.*, p.130.

5 For this MS see F.I.Abdullayeva, A Turkish version of Firdawsi’s *Shah-Nama* in the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg State University Library. *Manuscripta Orientalia, International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research*, Vol.3, No.2, June 1997, pp.49- 55.

1010: Blochet, II, p. 129.) A 19th century Chagatay translation by Shah Hejran Qalandar is at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.¹

Popular translations of such stories seem to be fairly abundant.² In the Majlis Library in Tehran there is a Turkish MS of the *Rustam-nameh* (No. 5974) from the nineteenth century and even an older *Iskander-nameh* by Ahmadi Karmiani of Sivas (No. 7807) is dated Muharram 993/1585, at the same library. At the University of Chicago Library there is a sixteenth century verse translation of the *Shahnameh* (No. 12082A), which is a popularized version with the life story of Ferdowsi at the end.³ Fifty or sixty years ago in Tabriz, when Azerbaijani books were banned, I remember that Ferdowsi Book-shop at Shishehgar-khana Bazaar used to sell the underground and prose version of the *Shahnameh* in Azerbaijani Turkish.⁴

Hamedi of Isfahan who was a panegyrist of Sultan Mehmed for twenty years made an anthology of the *Shahnameh* in thirteen chapters for his patron, and one of his sons, ‘Abdul Jalil, translated the *Shahnameh* into Turkish for Sultan Selim.⁵ ‘Ali ibn Muzzafar Tusi,

1 Osman G. Özgüdenli in *Iranica*.

2 See "تنوع رستم‌نامه‌ها در نسخ موجود"

http://www.mazdaknameh.ir/?tabid=64&udt_385_param_detail=6

See also:

معرفی نسخ موجود به زبان ترکی کتابخانه مجلس شورای اسلامی، مهدی کریمیان سیجانی و زهرا عبداللهی طامسری.

<http://www.aghabozorg.ir/showbookdetail.aspx?bookid=5408>

For this and some other details I am indebted to Mr. Fatullah Nikbakht from Tehran.

³ <http://www.aghabozorg.ir/showbookdetail.aspx?bookid=5408>

4 This seems to be the same "Kulliyat-e Sahahnameh" in 383 pages printed in Tabriz in 1954 that Nushin Musavi has mentioned in her descriptive catalogue of Turkish books in Iran.

نوشین موسوی، کتابشناسی توصیفی آثار موجود یا منتشره به زبان ترکی آذربایجانی در ایران (از چاپ سنگی تا ۱۳۷۰)، کتابخانه ملی جمهوری اسلامی ایران، تهران، ۱۳۷۳، ص ۱۳۳.

In the same bibliography (p. 77) two Rostam-namas in Azerbaijani are mentioned that one is printed by the same Ferdowsi Bookshop and the other by "Sa‘adat Publisher." 5 Riyahi, *op.cit.* p. 151. I could not find a copy of this translation. See:

"حامدی اصفهانی و کلیات او"، عزیز دولت آبادی، دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی تبریز، زمستان ۱۳۶۹، شماره ۱۳۷۷،

known as Ma'ali, another poet from Iran, who had emigrated to Istanbul, celebrated the campaigns of Mehmed Fatih in a *Shahnameh* style work entitled *Khunkar-nameh*.¹

Coming to twentieth century there have been a number of translations: Müallem Cevdet, *Ilayadasi Şeh-name* (Istanbul, 1928) was prepared for the high school students. The author compares and contrasts the *Iliad* with the *Shahnameh* and translates most of stories of the *Shahnameh*. He especially lays emphasis on the poetic art of Ferdowsi and defines his place in Persian literature. At the same time Müallem Cevdet refers to the sources of some Turkish stories, which might have some commonality with the stories of the *Shahnameh*.

In Azerbaijan on the occasion of the millennium celebrations of Ferdowsi in 1934, one whole issue of *Revue de Turcologie* (Şubat, 1934, vol.1, No.4) was devoted to the *Shahnameh*, and Reza Nur translated a selection of it in both verse and prose in 276 pages. The title of this election was the “Wars of Iran and Turan.”

The most recent translation of the *Shahnameh* into Turkish was by Necati Lugal which was published in the series of Classics of the East in Istanbul in 4 vols. from 1945 to 1949, and its fourth edition came out in 1993. This was a prose version based on Vullers' edition (Leiden 1877-1984.) *Şeh-name'den Hikayeler* by Vasifi Bingol was another abbreviated translation which was published in Istanbul in 1975.

Translations and Adaptations of the *Shahnameh* in Azerbaijan

Although the first translation of the stories of the *Shahnameh* into Azerbaijani Turkish was in 1905, the *Shahnameh* enjoyed a remarkable popularity in Northern Azerbaijan and people considered it almost like the works of Nizami, as their own native literature. This was true, at least, until the advent of Soviet rule. It is from this time on that because of Soviet policies, and more than that on account of

¹ A copy of this book dated 974/1566 is at Topkapi Sarai Library Museum no. 155.

the rise of Pan-Turkism, Ferdowsi is looked upon in a very different way by some scholars.

There were a number of imitations of the *Shahnameh* in Azerbaijan. In the late eighteenth century Masih of Shirvan wrote “*Shahnameh*” on the exploits of Fath Ali Khan, governor of Quba, claiming in its introduction that neither his “Shah” nor his “*Shahnameh*” are less than those of Ferdowsi.

از آن شاه، شاه مرا کم مخوان
و شهنامه‌ام را از آن کم مدان

Andalib Qarachehdaghi in 1827 celebrated the successes of the Russian army, especially in capturing Yerevan in another epic poem. It is interesting to note that these two imitations were in Persian not in Turkish.

Perhaps the first Azerbaijani scholar who wrote about the *Shahnameh* was Mirza Kazem Bey (1802-1870), one of the founders of oriental studies at St. Petersburg University. Kazim Bey, the son of Qadi of Derbend, was born in Rasht, and like his more famous contemporary Akhundzadeh spent his early years under Iranian rule in Derbend and grew up and got educated under the Russians. In mid-nineteenth century while teaching at the University of Kazan, he wrote an article in Russian entitled “The Iranian mythology according to Ferdowsi.”

Fathali Akhundzadeh says that he taught his son Rashid Persian by making him read the *Shahnameh*.¹ In his *Maktubat of Kamal al-Doweh* he likens Ferdowsi to Homer and Shakespeare and says: “In the Islamic world the only poet is Ferdowsi and like him has not appeared among any of its nations until now.”² Akhundzadeh not only

1 Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh, *Alifba-ye Jadid ve Mektubat*, Baku, 1963, p.221.

2 Akhundzadeh, *Maktubat-e Kamal al-Dovleh*, ff.34-36, quoted from Feridun Aadmiiyyat, *Andisheh-ha-ye Akhundzadeh*, Tehran, Kharazmi, 1970, p. 249.

considers Ferdowsi as a great poet but also as a great free-thinker and philosopher. He believes the praise of Imam ‘Ali and devout expression of Shi‘ism by Ferdowsi towards the end of his life was because of his disappointment in Sultan Mahmud and going to the court of ‘Azud al-Dowleh, who was a Shi`ite king. According to Akhundzadeh the social and political decline of Iran was because of the invasion of hordes of “naked and hungry Arabs” who brought nothing but “devastation”.¹

In fact, Akhundzadeh mistook the “Shu‘ubi” sentiments of Ferdowsi for anti-Islamic feelings in him and praised him for being anti-religion. He praises Ferdowsi as the first great poet who went against Islam and against Islamic culture,” whereas, as it is well known, Ferdowsi was a devout Shi‘ite Moslem. Akhundzadeh quotes the well-known letter of Rostam Farrukhzad, prophesying a nation after the advent of Islam that is “neither true Persian, nor Turk nor Arab, but mixed and full of deceit.” Interestingly enough, Akhundzadeh very much admired the strong sense of Iranian nationalism in Ferdowsi and was not bothered by the rather deprecatory treatment of the Turanians in the *Shahnameh* as he did not consider them related to the Turks. Of course, this was before the rise of Turkish nationalism in Azerbaijan.

Akhundzadeh’s most heartfelt kinship with Ferdowsi comes when his plan for the change—or rather improvement—of the alphabet does not come into fruition. As Ferdowsi claimed he had revived the Persian language by composing the *Shahnameh*, Akhundzadeh saw himself in a similar role when he wanted to improve the Persian alphabet. In a Persian poem, exactly in the same meter, he echoes the famous sentiments of Ferdowsi in the following lines:

1 *Ibid.* pp. 123-124.

باندوه و حسرت مرا روزگار
سـرآمد درین دیر نا پایدار
به بسیار تدبیرها چنگ زن
همی بودم از فرط حب وطن
نبخشید سعیم ولی حاصلی
ندیدم درین عصر صاحب دلی...

Time is very important in Azeri criticism of Ferdowsi. Husainzadeh Alibeili in his article entitled “Qaf and Simurgh” (*Heyat*, Baku 1906) under the influence of the Iranian Constitutional revolution (1905-1907) and anti-Russian struggle of the *Mujahidin*, finds Ferdowsi’s feelings as the best manifestation of national freedom. It is interesting to note that Husainzadeh was one of the forerunners of Turkish nationalism, but in all of his writings praises the *Shahnameh* and the nationalistic sentiments of Ferdowsi. He compares Tolstoy’s “War and Peace” to the *Shahnameh* and calls it a “great Persian national epic.” ‘Abbas Nazir, who translated “Rustam ve Sohrab” in 1908, considers Ferdowsi not only one of the great poets of Iran, but a great poet of international standing. Similarly, in another article written by him in the journal “Edebiyyat” Ferdowsi is compared to Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton, but, as we shall see, by the emergence of Pan-Turanism, a different approach to the study of the *Shahnameh* emerges.

On Nowruz 1916 a play based on the story of Siyavush was performed in Tabriz in Turkish with a Persian nationalistic bend. This play which was organized by Hasan Naji, one of the founders of the *Anjuman-e Sa’adat* in Istanbul, was another manifestation of Persian

nationalistic feelings by Turkish speaking Azerbaijanis when Iran was occupied by various foreign forces.¹

Muhammad Emin Rasulzadeh, the president of short-lived democratic Republic of Azerbaijan from 1918 to 1920, when he is ousted by the Bolsheviks, hides in a friend's house in Lahij. There was a copy of the *Shahnameh* and while reading it he is struck by the tragedy of Siyavush and finds it very much like the fate of his country. Rasulzadeh then conceives the idea of writing his famous book "Siyavush of our Age", which is one of his ideological tracts. Later on, he is caught and is brought to Baku. Since he had saved the life of Joseph Stalin in 1905, Rasulzadeh is released and accompanies Stalin to Moscow. In 1922 he manages to escape to Finland and from there goes to Istanbul. Here he publishes "Siyavush of our Age"² in 1925 and quotes all the poems about Siyavush in Persian.

The first translation from the *Shahnameh* into Azerbaijani was the story of Sohrab and Rostam by Rashid Effendizadeh in 1906 in Tbilisi. He tried to imitate the *hezaj* meter of the original. The story is summarized in prose and parts of it are versified. Sohrab, stabbed by his father is lying in the battlefield, reveals his identity and shows the amulet that his mother had given him to show to Rostam:

سريلميش يــــره گل کيمي آق بدن
گيريب ســــينه يه خنجري قبضه جن
چکيب خنجرين سينه سيندن ائين
آخيردي هر يانا جاري قانين

1 For an account of the successful performance of this play see the site of Masoud Kouhestani-nejad:

<http://history-kouhestani.blogfa.com/post/17>

In 1915 the Ottoman army occupied Tabriz and in 1916 the Russians occupied it.

2 Asrimizin Siyavushi ; Chaghdash Azarbaijan adabiaty; Mammad Amin Rasulzada, Baku, Ganjlik, 1991.

The story of “Zahhak and Kaveh” was translated in the same year by Shamseddin Sami Bey and several times was staged as “Kaveh” and “Kaveh-e Ahangar.” The stories related to Rustam and Zal took a special place among these works.

It was in the same year that famous Azeri poet Sabir translated the story of “Sudabeh and Siyavush,” which was published in the journal “Rahbar.” This is not a complete translation, but the most important parts are given. Sabir’s translation is very close to the original and is characterized by rather excessive use of Persian words. Here is a short sample. Sudabeh after meeting Syiavush with Key Kavus falls in love with him and sends her servants to invite him to her chamber:

بو احوال‌دان کچدی بیر روزگار
که شاد ایدی هر حالدا شهریار
اوتورمشدی بیرگون سیاوخش و شاه
که سودابه وارد اولدی نابگاه،
سیاوخشی گورجک اولوب مایلی
یانیب نار عشقه ، آلیشدی دیلی
وجودی دونوب بیر طراز- نخه
اثر ایتدی گویا که آتش یخه،
نهانی اونا گوندریب خادمین،
سیاوخشه گت سویله: "کای مه جین!
تعجب که، بیر لحظه آیا نیه
خرام ایله مزسن حرمخانه یه؟"

گلیب ایلچی پیغامی ایتدی بیان
بو سوزدن بر آشفته اولدی جوان
دیدى مرد اولور مرد ایله همکلام
حرمخانه نسوان ایچون دور مقام¹

Of course, Saber was a great satirist poet, and he imitated the *Shahnameh* in his satirical works. In one poem, imitating the style of the *Shahnameh* in a mock-heroic form, Sabir makes a general of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah, who has been sent to fight Sattar Khan and the Constitutionalists in Tabriz, boast of his valor. The poem turns hilarious when he is defeated by Sattar Khan, and ‘Ayn al-Dowleh, in a letter to the king tries to justify his defeat and his flight from the battlefield. The poem is called “Shahnameh.”

شهم، تاجداریم، قوی شوکتیم!
اگر لطف ایله سورسه ننگ احوالمی،
اوگونکه حضور گدن عطف عنان
بو عزم ایله کیم، شیرتک جنگ ایدم،
فدائیلری اولدوروم (خان) ایله،
رکابمده بیر توسن بادپا،
یمین و یسارمده سرهنگ لر،
ملک احتشام، فلک رفعتیم
بو نامه م س گنا بیلدیره رحالمی
ایدوب، سوی تبریزه اولدیم روان
مجاهدله عرصه نی تنگ ایدم،
بیابانلاری دولدورم قان ایله
آچلمش باشیم اوسته زرین لوا
نه سرهنگ لر- رستم جنگ لر

1 Firdovsi, *Şahnamə: Seçilmiş Dastanlar*, Emin Abid, Baku, Azerneshr, 1934, pp.140-141. A complete translation is also given in Saber, *Hop Hop-nameh*, ed. Abbas Zamanov, Baku, 1962, pp.413-429. I have followed the latter text which is slightly different from the former.

قوشون سیل تک روبروده روان، حشم خیل تک هر طرفدن دوان،
 بویونلرده یکسر قطار فشنگ، ریوولویرلر الده، حمایل تفنگ...^۱

One interesting point about these early translations is that all of them are translated into “Turkce” not into “Azeri” or “Azerbaijani Turkish,” which comes into use after 1918. Emin Abid, a great *Shahnameh* scholar who died in Siberia in 1937, in his afore-mentioned “Selections of the *Shahnameh*” also used the word “Turkish.”

“Sohrab and Rustam” was one of the most frequently translated parts of the *Shahnameh* into Azerbaijani. It was Jalil Memedqulizadeh, the famous editor of *Mulla Nasreddin*, who encouraged the poet Ghaibzadeh ‘Abbas Nazir to translate *Sohrab and Rustam* and it was published with color pictures by the equally famous German illustrator of this journal Joseph Rotter in 1908 in Tbilisi. ‘Abbas Nazir’s translation very well represents the story and has some 67 extra lines, which are added to the original 1743 lines of Ferdowsi. Nazir says that these additions make the story more understandable to the modern reader.

Uzair Hajibekov, the famous Azerbaijani composer, at the recommendation of his teacher and mentor Feridun Kocharli, began to study Ferdowsi in 1900-1901 and it was in 1910 that he composed his libretto “Rustam and Sohrab” in four acts. It was performed under his own directorship in Baku, Tiflis, Yerevan and Batumi in 1911. “Zahhak and Serpents” and “The Tragedy of Siyavush” were two other Azerbaijani dramatic works of during these years. In 1908 again “Rustam ve Sohrab” was made into a four-act play by the poet Meshdi Azeri Bozuvanlu. The poet added some *ghazals* of his own as well as some by Fuzuli into the scenes of the play. This is not an exact translation, but rather an imitation in verse in about 800 lines, which is half the size of the original. More than two decades later Meshedi Azer translated a very close and full version of the story into

¹ Ali Akbar Saber, *Hop Hop-nameh*, ed. Abbas Zamanov, Baku, 1962, p.167.

Azerbaijani, which was published on the occasion of the millennium of Ferdowsi in 1934 in the above-mentioned work by Emin Abid and Ruhullah Akhundov.

After “Rustam and Sohrab” the second most popular story of the *Shahnameh* was “Siyavush and Sudabeh.” In 1914 a teacher from the Ittihad School of Baku, Mirza Reza Vai‘zzadeh made it into a four act play, which was performed by the teachers and students of the school on 22 April, 1914. Ali Nazmi (1878-1941) translated the early part of the story under the title of “Siyavush and Isfandiar” in 765 verses into Azerbaijani. As the complete story in the original is 3775 lines, Nazmi’s translation constitutes only one-quarter of it.¹

After the Soviet takeover Ibrahim Tahir translated the story once again and though it is slightly abbreviated, with 2,350 couplets, it is a fairly complete translation. It was the dramatization of the “Siyavush” story by Husain Javid (1882-1941) in a well-known play with this name, which gave the masterpiece of Ferdowsi further recognition. Javid, who became a victim of Stalin’s 1937 repression and died in Siberia, was educated in Turkey and was the first to write poetic drama in Azerbaijan. The play was acted 106 times from 1934 to 1936 in Baku and published as a separate work in 1934.²

“Siyavush” by Javid has been analyzed and commented upon by many Azeri critics and most of them have tried to emphasize the element of animosity between Iranians and Turanians that exists in the *Shahnameh* and particularly in this story. The story is made up of two elements: one the Phaedra-like love story of Sudabeh for Siyavush, his rejection of her, his trial by fire and his acquittal. In the second part, Siyavush, avoiding the intrigues of Sudabeh, volunteered to fight Isfandiar and a peace treaty has been signed with one hundred Turanian noblemen sent to him as guarantors of peace. Key Kavus wants to kill them, but Siyavush’s honor does not allow such a

¹ I owe these details to Amin Abid’s introduction to *Şahanmā: Seçilmiş Dastanlar*.

² اولی صمد، فردوسی و شاهنامه در قفقاز، ترجمه رحیم مسلمانیان قبادیانی، تهران ۱۳۷۸، ص ۳۲.

treachery. This is the turning point that leads Siyavush to leave his country and live in Turan. Isfandiyar, who is an equal to Key Kavus in treachery, eventually succumbs to the intrigues of his brother Garsivez and kills the innocent Siyavush. From this point on begins Rustam's saga of revenging Siyavush and finding his son Key Khosrow. Though dualistic struggle between good and evil parallels the fight between the Turanians and Iranians, the artistic treatment of the story is the foremost point in the eyes of Ferdowsi. In a similar fashion, Husain Javid is very true to the spirit of the story and pays especial attention to the treatment of the characters rather than chauvinistic consideration.

In the 1920s years a number of Azerbaijani poets translated various parts of the *Shahnameh* into verse. Ali Muznib translated early parts of the *Shahnameh* in 1921. Mashdi Ali Azeri translated "Rustam and Borzu" in 1925, and "Rustam and Isfandiyar" in 1932. One year later Muniri made a verse translation of the "Ashkebus" episode and Raf'at Hasan versified the "Kaveh" story. Again, the story of the revolt of Kaveh was translated by Ibrahim Tahir, and the "Mazdak and Qobad" episode by Abdullah Shaiq. Two other well-known pieces by Ferdowsi deserve notice: the satire on Mahmud by Mushfiq and Seyyedzadeh, and equally the well-known letter of Rustam Farrokhzad to Sa'd Vaqqas by Mirza Muhsin Ibrahim. All of these translations were in the style of the originals.

Most of these translations were collected in *Shahnameh: Sechilmesh dastanlar* in 1934. This was on the occasion of the millennium of Ferdowsi which was celebrated with great pomp and ceremony in Baku with participation of many great scholars such as Bertels, Sa'id Nafisy and Chaykin.

The millennium of Ferdowsi and 800th year anniversary of Nizami were only a few years apart and both were celebrated in Azerbaijan and numerous studies were published on them. From the anniversary of Nizami some notes of discord and sometimes harsh criticism appeared in the *Shahnameh* scholarship in Azerbaijan. Yevgeni

Bertels comparing Ferdowsi with Nizami criticized his so called “bourgeois” values in praising the ancient kings of Iran. While Ferdowsi defends a “corrupt aristocracy” Nizami celebrates “human values” and he is a poet in line with the ideals of the people.¹ It is amazing that a scholar like Bertels, who initiated and produced one of the most scholarly and good editions of the *Shahnameh* (Moscow edition) would have such a lop-sided view of Ferdowsi and sacrificed scholarship to the state ideology. A few years later, Muhammad Sa‘id Ordubadi, the famous novelist, compares Nizami’s *Khamseh* and the *Shahnameh* almost in the same vein and echoes some of the points of Bertels. On the Iranian side Vahid Dastgerdi, who produced the first critical edition of the *Khamseh*, answered Bertels saying that both poets belong to the same tradition and Nizami continued the work of his predecessor in a different genre.

The attribution of Yusef and Zuleikha to Ferdowsi was another means of criticizing Ferdowsi by such critics. This *mathnavi*, which for many years was attributed to Ferdowsi, was proven by Mujtaba Minovi and some other scholars to be a composition of the Saljuq period and very likely by a poet at the court of Shams al-Din Toghan-Shah². Apart from stylistic differences, the eulogy of the four caliphs at the beginning of the book makes it clear that the Shi‘ite Ferdowsi is not its author. Yet the detractors of the poet have claimed that Ferdowsi who was “disgraced” by Sultan Mahmud for “vilifying the Turanians and glorifying the Gabrs (Zoroastrians),” repented in his old age and decided to choose an Islamic theme. These critics not only have concocted this ridiculous theory, but also, they equate the Turanians with the Turks, which is not a very clear-cut matter. Apparently “Turan” originally meant “non-Iranian land” and the

1 For a full discussion of the views of Berthels on Ferdowsi, Nizami and Fuzuli see previously mentioned “*Ferdowsi ve Shah-nameh dar Qafqaz*,” by Vali Samad, Tehran, 1999, pp.99-100.

2 For a discussion of “Yusef ve Zuleikha,” see the article by Fatemeh Mohammadzadeh in *Danishnameh-ye Zaban ve Adab-e Farsi*, ed. Ismail Sa‘adat, Tehran, 2016, vol.6, pp.852-854.

people who lived there. Very likely Ferdowsi took the term in its mythological and original meaning and did not have in mind his contemporary Turks living in the eleventh century.¹

In 1970 Ghulam-Husain Begdeli in an article on the *Shahnameh* and the two *Iskander-namehs* of Nizami, tried to disassociate him from any influence of Ferdowsi. Ten years later Nushabeh Arasli, criticized Ali Nahat Tarlan, the eminent Turkish Nizami scholar for being influenced by Iranian scholars and giving credit to Ferdowsi. Unfortunately, “Turkification” of Nizami and “Persianization” of Ferdowsi on and off has continued to our days². One should bear in mind that 800 years ago Persian was the dominant literary medium both in Khorasan and Azerbaijan, and Turkish was on its way to become a literary language. So when Nizami offers to his patron to write Khosrow and Shirin in either Turkish or Farsi, he is acting within this tradition. Similarly, when 400 years later Bidel of Patna writes his beautiful *ghazals* in Farsi Persian and not in Hindi, he is again within the same literary tradition. So rather than pinpointing the nationalistic characteristics of the poet, one has to appreciate the poem as a work of art that can surpass the petty limitations of nationalism.

Now we come to the most complete and an exceptional translation of the *Shahnameh* by Mubarez Alizadeh, who died at the age of 83 in 1994. Alizadeh was one of the most talented and learned translators of Azerbaijan, who devoted most of his life to the translation of Persian classical and modern poetry. It took him 27 years—almost like the composition of the *Shahnameh* itself—to render nearly 60,000 couplets in the most superb fashion in the original *mutaqarib*_meter *يازار سان يازارسان يازارسان يا زار*, which in Turkish is

1 For “Turan” see the article of Bosworth in *Iranica*, and also Abbas Javadi’s article on “Iran ve Turan” in his *Iran va Azerbaijan dar Bastar-e Tarikh Iran*, H&S, Charleston, 2016, pp.12-17.

2 For a typical Pan-Turkist view article see Muhammadzadeh Sadiq: <http://isamajidi.blogfa.com/post/48/>

Mubariz Alizadeh was born in Khamaneh in 1911 where he had his elementary education in a *Maktab-khaneh* and later in one of the so called “new” schools. This was the time of Shaikh Mohammad Khiyabani and he received several special awards from him while at school. In 1928 Alizadeh first went to Nakhjevan and later to Tbilisi University. He began his academic work on Nizami’s *Khamseh* and worked on most of the classical poets of Iran. His first important translation was “Yusef and Zuleikha” attributed to Ferdowsi. Later in life he translated a variety of Persian poets ranging from Rudaki and Khaqani to Eshqi, Parvin Etisami, Simin Behbahani and Shahriyar. Mubariz Alizadeh after an absence of seventy years from Iran, on the occasion of an international conference on Ferdowsi in 1980, Mubariz Alizadeh went to Tehran and met his 80-year-old sister. It was on this occasion that he gave his translation of the *Shahnameh* to Abdul-Karim Manzuri Khamneh for publication in Persian script.

This beautiful translation has not been published in its entirety in Iran. Only one eighth of it up to the end of story of Sohrab has been published in Persian script. But the entire translation has been published in Latin script in two volumes in Baku by “Medaniyat Merkazi” and “Anvar Publications”: the first volume in 2005 in 992 pages; and the second volume in 2009 in 1007 pages. The last part of the latter volume comes to the reign of Khosrow Parviz, which is the end of the *Shahnameh*.

The translation is very faithful and extremely beautiful. I have not compared the entire translation with the text of the *Shahnameh*, but the part, which is published in Iran, follows very closely the original while keeping its forceful and sonorous rhythm and style. Here is a sample from the famous beginning of the *Shahnameh*:

او خالق کی، وئرمیش بیزه عقل و جان اونون قدرتی وصفه سیغماز اینان
اودور خلقه شهرت، شرف، شان وئرن او روزی وئرندیر، او یول گوسته رن

اونون وارلیغیندان گونش آلدی نور
 زمانی، مکانی اودور جمع ائده ن
 اونو گؤرمه یه جهد قیلما هدر
 خیالا سیغارمی مگر بو جلال
 نه آغلین چاتار، نه دیلین سؤز تاپار
 اونو گؤردیو بیر شیئه بنزه در
 مطیع بیر قول اول، خدمتینده دایان
 اونو درک اوچون یوخدورالده اساس

یئری گویلری خلق ائدن ده او دور
 زماندا، مکاندا اونو گزمه سن!
 گوره ن اولماییب خالق بییر نفر
 اونو درک قیلماز تفکر، خیال،
 سوز ایله اونو وصفه وئرسن قرار،
 آغیل، درکینه جهد قیلسا اگر،
 نجه اولدوغون کیمنه ائتمز بیان
 او روحلا، آغیلا اولونماز قیاس،

کزین برتر اندیشه برنگذرد
 خداوند روزی ده رهنمای
 فروزنده ماه و ناهید و مهر
 نگارنده بر شده پیکرست
 نبینی مرنجان دو بیننده را
 که او برتر از نام و از جایگاه
 همان را گزیند که بیند همی
 میان بندگی را بیایدت بست
 در اندیشه سخته کی گنجد اوی

به نام خداوند جان و خرد
 خداوند نام و خداوند جای
 خداوند کیوان و گردان سپهر
 ز نام و نشان و گمان برترست
 به بینندگان آفریننده را
 نیابد بدو نیز اندیشه راه
 خرد گر سخن برگزیند همی
 ستودن نداند کس او را چو هست
 خرد را و جان را همی سنجد اوی

Conclusion

The *Shahnameh* has been translated into twenty-seven languages, and Arabic, Georgian and Turkish are respectively the earliest among

them. In the case of different types of Turkish, the Ottoman and Azerbaijani translations or imitations have had their own peculiarities. In Northern Azerbaijan almost to the beginning of the twentieth century the *Shahnameh* was considered as part of the national literature, and *Shahnameh-khani* was very popular. It was after 1905 that individual stories of this great epic were translated into Azerbaijani, and they also became sources of inspirations for many poems, dramatic works and musical compositions. Similarly, the Saljuqs of Anatolia treated the *Shahnameh* as their national literature, and not only decorated the walls of their places with the scenes of the battles from the *Shahnameh* but copied and produced its manuscripts.

Ferdowsi, like many other poets of Iran, had considerable influence on Ottoman literature. Ferdowsi's work was so popular that Evliya Chelebi in 1660 describes a scene of *Shahnameh-khani* in a coffee shop of Bursa. The *Shahnameh-chi* was a special position at the Ottoman court, whose holder celebrated the exploits of the Sultan in the vein of the *Shahnameh*. The Ottoman Sultans represented their own ideology in some truncated versions of the *Shahnameh* and showed their rivalry with the Safavid kings. The first fairly complete verse in Turkish translation of the *Shahnameh* was made by Sharifi Amedi (d.1514) for the Mamluk Sultan Qānṣawh in Cairo, and consists of 56,506 couplets. Although this translation is remarkable for its richness of vocabulary and proverbs as well as a valuable document of the 15th century Anatolian Turkish, it is not a modern translation. Of modern Turkish translations three (Müallem Cevdet, 1929; Reza Nur, 1934; Vasfi Bingöl, 1965) are shortened translations. Only Necati Lugal (d.1964) attempted a full prose translation of the *Shahnameh*. But out of originally planned six volumes only four volumes have been published so far. Although the two most recent Azeri and Turkish translation cannot be compared as one is in prose and the other in verse, both are very accurate and scholarly. Of course, artistically the translation of Mubariz Alizadeh outshines the other Turkish translations. The British poet, Basil Bunting, who himself has

made excellent translations from of Persian classical poets, quoting Dryden, says that translations should “stand by themselves, works of their own language equivalent to the original but not compelled to lean on its own authority, claiming independence and accepting the responsibility inseparable from a life of their own.”¹ Mubariz Alizadah’s version comes close to this definition.

Orcid

Hasan Javadi



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9329-9966>

References

- Aadmiyyat, Fereydun. 1970. *Andisheh-ha-ye Akhundzadeh*. Tehran: Kharazmi Publishers.
- Abid, Emin. 1934. *Ferdosi ve Azerbaijan Edabiyati*. In *Seçilmis Eser-ler*. Baku.
- Azarpay, Gitty. 1981. *Sogdian Parthian Paintings: The Pictorial Epic in Oriental Art*. UC Berkeley.
- Bombaci, Alessio. 1968. *Histoire de la littérature turque*. Traduite par I. Melikoff. Paris: C. Klincksieck.
- Boyce, Mary. 1975. The Parthian Gōsān and Iranian Minstrel Tradition. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 12, 28.
- Danişman, Z. (Ed.). 1970. *Evlüyā Çelebi Seyāhatnāmesi*.
- Firdovsi, A. 1934. *Şahnamə: Seçilmiş*. Translated by Emin Abid. Baku: Azerneshr.
- Flemming, Barbara. 1974. Old Anatolian Turkish Poetry in its relationship to the Persian Tradition. *Fahrıs Hüsrev U Şirin*, 64–65.
- Hamrang, Naser. (n.d.). *Sada-ye pay-e Tahamtan dar kucgeh-hay-e shahr-e nafti-ye Baku*. <http://www.iranboom.ir/hakime-tos/shahnameh/14793-sedaye-tahamtan-dar-shahr-nafti.html>
- Iz, F. 1964. Ferdewsi. In *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

¹ Victoria Forde, “Translations and Adaptations of Basil Bunting”, *Basil Bunting, Man and Poet*, ed. Caroll F. Tercell, University of Maine, 1968, p. 302.

- Köpürlü, M. F. 1988. *Turkler*. In *Islam Anksilopediasi*.
- Kwiatkowski, Will. 2005. *The Eckstein Shahnama: An Ottoman Book of Kings*. London: Sam Fogg.
- Minorsky, Vladimir. 1964. *Iranica: Twenty Articles*.
- Mohl, Jules. (n.d.). *Le livre des Rois par Aboul Kasim Ferdousi*.
- Musavi, Nushin. 1994. *Descriptive Bibliography of Existing or Published Works in Azerbaijani Turkish Language in Iran (From Lithography to 1370)*. National Library of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Olearius, Adam. 1984. *Safarnameh-ye Adam Olearius*. Translated by A. Behpur. Tehran: Ebtikar Publishers.
- Özgüdenli, Osman G. 2006. *ŞĀH-NĀMA TRANSLATIONS i. INTO TURKISH*. Encyclopædia Iranica.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sah-nama-translations-i-into-turkish>
- Riāḥi, Moḥammad-Amin. 1990. *Zabān va Adab-e fārsi dar qalamrow-e ‘Osmāni* [Persian Language and Literature in the Ottoman Territories]. Tehran: Pāzhang Publishers.
- Samad, Vali. 1999. *Ferdowsi and Shahnameh in the Caucasus*. Translated by R. Mosalmanian Qobadiani. Tehran: Kārang Publishers.
- Schmidt, Jan. 2012. *Shahnameh Studies II: The Reception of Firdausi’s Shahnameh*. Edited by Charles Melville, Gabrielle van den Berg, Brill.
- Sobhani, Towfiq. 2004. "Tarjome'i Manzooz az *Shahnameh*" [A Versified Translation of the *Shahnameh*]. *Anjoman Quarterly*, 13.
- Tafazolli, Taqi. 1999. *FAHLAVĪYĀT*. Encyclopædia Iranica.
<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/fahlaviyat>