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Rostam's Seven Trials and the Logic of Epic Narrative in the Shāhnāma

Abstract

This paper revisits the episode of Rostam's seven trials in Persian literary and folk traditions, and his slaying of the White Demon. It takes issue with Nöldeke's interpretation of the demon as a survival of an ancient "white deity" and instead suggests that the demon represents Rostam's "albino" father, Zāl. Rostam's fight with the demon is analyzed as an Oedipal conflict in which the hero overcomes and kills the "bad father" in a cave. It proposes that the tale is a coming-of-age narrative in which the hero achieves individuation and independence. Several oral versions of the tale, and one version from a professional storyteller's nineteenth-century manuscript, are presented in translation for the purpose of comparison with the literary version.

Keywords: Persian epic—Persian folk literature—Shāhnāma—father-son combat—psychoanalytic interpretation of folklore

TWO SETS OF HEROIC ADVENTURES in the *Shāhnāma* are called “seven trials.” These are the seven trials of Rostam, and those of Esfandiyār. Of these, Rostam’s trials occur first in the narrative of the epic. In the course of these, Rostam frees King Kāvus and his entourage from the White Demon’s prison. The epic’s second “trial” episode, namely that of prince Esfandiyār, tells of the prince’s rescue of his sisters from their Turanian enslavement.

Much ink has been spilled over the question of which tale is older and which is the model for the other.¹ These questions do not concern us here because as far as semiotic analysis is concerned, the question of “primacy” is not as important as it might be in other forms of analysis. Moreover, to the extent that the motif of heroic trials is present in the biography of the majority of the Iranian epic heroes,² it alone is not a good indicator of genetic relationship or of interdependence of different narratives. These common episodes may have co-existed as discrete entities in Iran’s heroic tradition from the beginning. Generally, just because one story comes before another in the narrative of the *Shāhnāma*, one may not conclude that the latter is modeled on the former, or that the two are genetically related. Positing such a model requires corroboration from sources that no longer exist; and attempts to assign primacy might end up being a “chicken-or-egg” undertaking.

I have no doubt that the *Shāhnāma* narrative follows a literary logic that firmly connects its episodes and gives it an undeniable unity. The semiotic significance of Esfandiyār’s trials has been discussed previously (OMIDSALAR 1983). We will here propose an interpretation of Rostam’s seven trials, which we shall consider in terms of the epic’s narrative logic.

Several points should be kept in mind in analyzing *Shāhnāma* episodes. The most important of these is that the *Shāhnāma* is literature, not history. Formally, it belongs to the genre of classical Persian courtly verse, and is necessarily expressed in a highly refined courtly language, devoid of any trace of folk diction in its nearly 50,000 distichs (see OMIDSALAR 1998). Its narrative

is carefully organized into a highly symbolic discourse typical of other literary epics (see JASON 1977, 31), and its organization is designed to make smooth transitions between its episodes possible, while weaving them into a logical whole. There are no independent narratives in the *Shāhnāma*.³ All is intricately interconnected.

The *Shāhnāma*'s narrative organization is the product, not so much of Ferdawsi's efforts, but of the authors of Ferdawsi's prose archetype, who explicitly state their preoccupation with structure and symbolism:

There is much in this [book] that appears outlandish. But that is all right [because] when one learns its hidden sense (*čon mağz-e u bedāni*), and when that sense is made clear, they appear sensible and acceptable [*to-rā dorost āyad o del-pazir gardad*] (QAZVINI 1984, vol. 1, p. 37).

Ferdawsi inherited this concern with symbolic expression, which he explicitly states at his poem's beginning:

Do not consider these [stories] as lies or [mere] fables;
Things do not always happen in the same way.
What's in this book is either acceptable to reason,
Or it makes sense symbolically. (Introduction, 113-14).

Equally important in this respect is the contextual significance of every *Shāhnāma* episode. That is, much in the meaning of *Shāhnāma* episodes will be missed if one neglects the narrative context in which it occurs. The story of Rostam's seven trials is no exception.

In his introduction to the story, the poet lets it be known that the narrative is about fathers and sons, and the replacing of the old by the young:

When the fruit-tree grows tall
—Should it be harmed—
Its leaves wither, and its roots weaken
And it bends over [in ill health].
When it [finally] leaves its station [in the garden]
It surrenders its place to the sapling...
[But] if an evil sapling grows from good roots,
One should not blame the roots.
When fathers leave the world to their sons
They school them in its secrets.
If [the son] abandons his father's glory and good name
should the father call him a stranger rather than a son.
He who strays from the path of the master

Will deservedly be harmed by the world.

(Jang-e Māzandarān; henceforth J of M, 1–3, 5–8)

Thus, by a rhetorical device in the wording of his introduction the poet tells us that the story of Rostam's seven trials is about fathers and sons, and concerns the passing of generations.⁴ He then reiterates his point in the first line of the story: "When Kāvus⁵ took over the throne of his father" (J of M, 11).

I shall argue that the story of Rostam's seven trials is a tale of transformation that signifies a fundamental change in the hero's role and function in the Shāhnāma. Going through these trials signals Rostam's coming of age. These trials transform the boy Rostam into a man who replaces his aged father as the chief hero of the court. They are Rostam's rite of passage. But let us first present a summary of the story as it appears in the Shāhnāma, for those readers who might not be familiar with it.

THE SHĀHNĀMA VERSION

After Kaykāvus ascends the throne, a Māzandarānian demon musician comes to the court and sings about the beauty of his native land. Moved by the demon's song, the king decides to add Māzandarān to his possessions and attacks it with a great army. However, the champion of Māzandarān, who is called the White Demon, captures the king and his entourage, blinds them and keeps them in bondage. Kaykāvus sends a message to Zāl and his son Rostam, and asks for their help, and Zāl sends Rostam to the rescue via a perilous shortcut to Māzandarān. Rostam encounters several hardships on his way that are customarily called "Rostam's seven trials."

Several striking features of the episode of the seven trials are crucial to its proper analysis. First, contrary to the cultural tendency of the pre-Islamic Iranian ethos that consistently associates the color white with goodness and divinity, the demon in this story is white. Second, Rostam does not actually go through seven trials. In fact he performs no acts of martial importance in three of his seven trials. Third, all but the last trial hardly qualify as a trial compared to other such adventures in Persian epic tradition. Fourth, Rostam's seventh trial, namely his perilous encounter with the White Demon, is not called *xān* or "trial" in any of the sixteen authoritative manuscripts of the poem. It is simply referred to as the hero's fight with the White Demon. Fifth, the entire episode of the seven trials has a dreamlike character, quite untypical of other trial episodes in classical Persian epic literature. Indeed, Rostam is often either sleeping or about to sleep in a number of them. Sixth, a close reading of the text forces the conclusion that what is important in this episode is not the *deed*, but the *process*. Keeping these points in mind, let us proceed to consider the hero's trials in greater detail.

In the course of his first trial, Rostam arrives at a thicket, where he makes camp for the night. During the night, a lion approaches the hero, and having noticed the hero's mount, Raxš, nearby, thinks that it should first kill the horse and then the sleeping knight (J of M, line 290). However, Raxš proves too powerful an adversary and slays the cat (288–98, especially 294, 298). Rostam sleeps through the whole fight, and wakes up only to scold his horse for having endangered itself by fighting the feline prowler. Sleeping through Raxš's valiant efforts hardly constitutes going through a trial.

Passage through a dry hot desert, where he almost expires of heat and dehydration, constitutes Rostam's second trial. The hero survives because a ram leads him to water (314, 320). Once again, as soon as he has his fill of water and food, Rostam lies down to sleep (334–35, 337).

During his third trial, Rostam slays a magical dragon, which like the lion of the first trial, approaches the sleeping hero. Terrified by the serpent, Raxš twice tries to wake his master, but each time the dragon disappears as soon as Rostam is roused, and the enraged hero threatens to kill his loyal mount if it persists in waking him up. When Raxš wakes him up a third time, God prevents the dragon from cloaking itself and, aided by Raxš (375–76), Rostam quickly kills the beast.

The fourth trial brings the hero to an abundant spread of food and wine. The feast belongs to a number of witches, who disappear as soon as Rostam approaches. He sits down to feast and begins to sing about his hard life. Disguised as a beautiful damsel, a witch joins him at the spread. However, she changes back to her hideous form as soon as Rostam utters the name of God (Motif G 271.2.3), and he kills her before she can harm him.

For his fifth trial, the hero uneventfully passes through pitch darkness, and reaches Māzandarān, drenched in sweat. Leaving Raxš to graze in the cultivated fields nearby, Rostam lies down to sleep again (424–28). A local farmer attempts to punish him for being inconsiderate, and strikes him with a switch. Rostam wakes up, wrenches the poor fellow's ears off, hands them to him, and goes back to sleep. The farmer complains to the local aristocrat, Ōlād, who comes to punish Rostam with a small force of demons. Rostam routs them, captures Ōlād, and forces him to act as his guide.

The sixth trial consists of a minor skirmish with a demon force, which ends as soon as Rostam tears off the head of their commander with his bare hands. He then arrives at Kaykāvus's prison, where he finds the sightless king and his heroes. Kaykāvus tells him that only the blood of the White Demon can restore everyone's sight, and sends him to fight the monster.

Rostam's final ordeal is his fierce battle with the White Demon, and his slaying of the beast. He cuts out the monster's liver, brings it back to Kaykāvus's prison, and restores the captives' sight by applying some of the

gore to their eyes (motif D 1505.14, “animal liver cures blindness”; and cf. D 1505.19, “giant’s gall restores sight”). Although this ordeal has been called Rostam’s “seventh trial” in most editions of the poem, as well as in the prose oral versions of the tale, I have never seen a Shāhnāma manuscript that calls it by this title.⁶ This is especially striking because all manuscripts use either the word *manzel* (station, stage) or *xān* (trial) in the titles of the hero’s first six trials.⁷

The story of the seven trials is a pivotal point in Rostam’s life. It takes place when he is a teenager, who although possessed of enormous physical power, is still a mere pawn in the hands of his father. Indeed, the pair is often mentioned as an undifferentiated unit, with Zāl being clearly the more prominent aspect of the dyad. In spite of his primacy, however, by the time of Rostam’s birth Zāl, though technically Iran’s chief hero, has grown old, inactive, and bereft of much of his physical prowess. The Iranian heroes complain of his inactivity, saying:

Since you became the *jahān pahlavān*⁸ after Sām
We have not had a day’s peace (Zav Tahmāsp, 53).

In response, Zāl briefly reminds them of his exploits, and then adds significantly:

I was tireless in battle night and day
[But] I was always fearful of growing old.
Now has the heroic back been bent by age,
No longer can I wield the Kāboli blade. (60-1)

Having thus confessed to his age and feebleness, Zāl goes on to reassure the nobles by saying that Rostam is ready to take his place.

At the time when Zāl decides to send Rostam through the seven trials, however, he is worried that the boy is too young for the mission, and tells him:

There is a difficult mission ahead of us,
One that will cause much anxiety.
My son, it is still too soon for you to engage in war,
But what am I to do, since it is also no time for rest?
Your mouth still smells of [your mother’s] milk
And your heart still wants to be joyously spoiled;
How am I to send you into the battlefield,
[Where] you will face vengeful lions and hardship?
What say you? What should I do?

May goodness and honor be always with you. (71-5)

Naturally, Rostam agrees to undertake the mission, and assures his father that he prefers war to rest.

Zāl, although no longer a physically powerful man, has nonetheless become the personification of wisdom by this time. His function in the *Shāhnāma* depends more on his sagacity than on his heroism. Zāl was born with a full head of “white hair,” and is thus symbolically linked with age and wisdom from the outset. His real name, Dastān, means “artifice, ruse” and his nickname, Zāl—by which he is better known—means “hoary” or “old.”⁹ These are formidable powers in the gerontocratic universe of the Persian epic, but heroism in the *Shāhnāma* depends more on prowess than on brains. Indeed, because of his great wisdom, Zāl cannot remain a formidable hero. Wisdom inherently shrinks from the kind of violence that heroes routinely commit. Yet in the period between the death of his father, Sām, and his son’s coming of age, Zāl must fulfill the office almost by default. It is only after the episode of the seven trials that he fully disappears into the background, and Rostam takes over his heroic functions.

Zāl’s disappearance however, is not sudden. It happens gradually and is mediated by Rostam’s seven trials. There is a short period before this episode when Zāl and his son act almost as one. It is as though the character of the *jahān pahlavān* has been split in two, with Zāl acting as its “wise” aspect and Rostam fulfilling its heroic dimension. Powerful as Rostam undoubtedly is at this time, he is considered too inexperienced to be a *jahān pahlavān*, and is routinely referred to by terms such as *kuḍak-e nā rasid* “a tender child” (Kayqobād, line 32), or “boy!” (Kayqobād, line 24). In the scene of his first fight, an enemy hero refers to him as “a youth who is yet to make a name for himself” (Kayqobād, line 35). During this period neither heroic achievement (namely, his capture of Afrāsiyāb in battle), nor political service (namely, his bringing of Kayqobād to the throne), is enough to grant him the recognition that older heroes enjoy. It is revealing that in the scene of Kayqobād’s ascension ceremonies, Rostam is not even mentioned among the premier court heroes, although it was he who single-handedly brought the king from his bucolic anonymity to ascend the throne in the first place:

All the nobles gathered,
Nobles such as Dastān and the warlike Qāran,
Like Xorrdād and Kašvād and the brave Barzin... (Kayqobād, 3-4)

By contrast, at the end of the episode of the seven trials, when king Kāvus holds court Rostam is mentioned first among the heroes of the court:

He [i.e., the king] sat upon the throne of Māzandarān,
 Together with Rostam and other famed heroes,
 Such as Tus, Fariborz, Gudarz, and Giv,
 Rohhām, Gorgin, and the brave Bahrām. (J of M, 601-40)

By the end of his seven trials, Rostam, although not explicitly called a *jahān pahlavān*, is accorded the trappings of the office and is completely differentiated from his father.

It is my contention in this paper that the episode of the seven trials is the process by means of which Rostam achieves individuation and is fully differentiated from his father. It is the hero's "coming of age" story, his rite of passage after which the boy becomes a man. Whereas prior to this episode Rostam is the subservient member of the pair, "Zāl and Rostam," after it, he becomes the most prominent hero of the poem. His father almost completely recedes into the background, and it is Rostam alone to whom kings appeal for help (e.g., Jang-e Hāmāvarān, 193; Rostam and Sohrāb, 293; Siyāvaxš, 595-596, and many other places). Indeed, it is in the seven trials episode that Rostam is for the first time called *tāj-baxš* or "crown-bestowing" (375), a title that becomes typical of him during the rest of his life.

FATHERS AND SONS

Two sons, one good and one bad, are prominent in the story. The bad son is the impetuous Kaykāvus, who has just ascended his father's throne. The good son is the teenage Rostam who, though enormously powerful, is quite obedient to his sire. The attitudes of these sons towards their fathers are contrasted at the beginning of the story. Kāvus is pompous, self-important, overconfident (14), and considers himself superior to his forefathers:

I am greater than Jam, Zahhāk, and Kayqobād¹⁰
 In fortune and in generosity.
 I must [therefore] surpass them in achievement
 It is meet that Kings be seekers of the world. (J of M, 39-40)

He attempts to conquer Māzandarān even though his forbears—some of whom were sorcerer kings—shrank from it (J of M, lns 50-52). Later in the story, when Zāl advises him against the plan and reminds him that no king before him entertained such wild wishes, Kaykāvus responds that he is greater than his ancestors in manliness, wealth, bravery, and Royal Fortune, and can do what they did not or could not do (123-126). From the outset, the narrative depicts Kaykāvus as a vain, inexperienced, and arrogant youth (75; 93).¹¹

Like Kaykāvus, Rostam is quite young at this time. In their letter to Zāl,

the heroes of the court refer to him as *rostam-e šir nā xorda sir*, “Rostam as yet unweaned” (72). His youthful wisdom and humility, however, are set up as counterpoints to Kaykāvus’s youthful superciliousness and pride. In contrast to Kaykāvus’s competitive stance against his forefathers, Rostam is the obedient son, who respects the wishes of his elders even when these wishes do not appear reasonable to him. For instance, when Zāl decides to send him to the king’s rescue by way of the perilous short cut that will be his “seven trials,” he says:

I have girded myself in obedience [to you].
 However, the nobles of yore
 Did not deem it appropriate for one to endanger his own life.¹²
 None so young [as I]
 Should saunter forth to face fierce lions.
 But consider me prepared and gone.
 I need none but God as my support.
 I will sacrifice my body and soul for your lordship,
 And will crush the sorcerers’ enchantments and their hearts. (260-63)

In warning his father of the dangers of the mission with which he charges his son, Rostam resorts to the authority of the “nobles of yore” rather than to his own opinions, and couches his implicit opposition to Zāl’s orders in obedience to the ancestral ordinance that “one should not endanger his own life.”

ZĀL’S SYMBOLIC EQUIVALENCE WITH THE WHITE DEMON

Although it is customary to describe Zāl as an “albino” in the literature, that description is not accurate. To the extent that albinos lack the pigment melanin, they are characterized not only by white hair, but also by paleness of skin and pinkness of the eyes. Zāl is not an ordinary albino because he is described as white only in the hair on his head. His eyebrows, lashes, and eyes are clearly black: *siyāh-aš moža dida-hā qirgun*, “his lashes black, and his eyes black as tar” (Manučehr, 149). His father, Sām, describes him as *siyah paykar o mu-ye sar čon saman*, “black is his body and his hair is white” (Manučehr, 63), and objects that his son is “two-colored” (65). This makes it clear that the infant did not have an albino’s pale skin. Indeed, even Prince Esfandiyār notes the contrast between his dark skin and white hair much later in the poem: *tanaš tira bod, ruy o muyaš sapid*, “his body was dark, and his face and hair white” (Rostam and Esfandiyār, 631).

The White Demon is quite similar to Zāl in this respect. Like Zāl, he is not an albino in the strict sense of the word, and has white hair but dark

skin: *ba rang-e šabah ruy, čon barf, muy*, “his skin was black as onyx, and his hair was like snow” (J of M, 569). The black color of his body is alluded to when he is depicted as approaching Rostam like “a black mountain” (570). His blackness merges with the darkness of the cave in which he makes his lair (565).

What makes the White Demon especially interesting is that demons of the Iranian epic lore are never white. The most common color of demons in the Iranian heroic tradition is black. For instance, the son of the Evil Spirit, a demon by the name of Xazurān (Kayumart, 35) is a black demon (Kayumart, 33, 61). Similarly, the demons encountered during the kingship of Tahmurat are led by a black demon (Tahmurat, 34). Indeed, the very ideas of fierceness and savagery are poetically expressed as dark or black, and when heroes commit horrific acts of violence, their acts are depicted as black. Thus, Rostam himself is described as *mardi čo divi siyāh*, “A man like a black demon” (J of M, 438).

The unconventional whiteness of the White Demon fascinated Theodor Nöldeke, who tried to justify it in a short paper. Nöldeke first pointed out the singularity of the demon’s color, and went on to suggest that the demon’s whiteness may be due to his being a survival of an ancient subterranean White God (NÖLDEKE 1915). Nöldeke’s interpretation is in my opinion forced and baseless. There is no need to conjure up some prehistoric “White God” in order to account for the whiteness of this demon. The *Shāhnāma* is a literary work of art, and all of its “oddities” may be explained quite nicely by literary analysis.

Zāl and the White Demon are similar not only in appearance, but also in function, and in their relative independence from the royal court. Like his white-haired human counterpart, the White Demon is the chief hero of his country. Moreover, like Zāl, who lives away from the Persian court in Sistān, the demon lives in his fiefdom far away from the Māzandarānian capital. Furthermore, whereas the Iranian kings ask for Zāl’s help when in difficulty, it is the White Demon to whom the king of Māzandarān appeals for help when his realm is threatened (J of M, 191, cf. also 538-39, 546).

These similarities, taken together with the anomalous color of the demon, imply that Zāl and the White Demon are different aspects of the same being. The narrative has split Zāl’s imago into a good Zāl and a bad one and has created the bizarre character of the White Demon from this splitting. Rostam’s fight with the White Demon, therefore, may be understood as an Oedipal fight between the hero and his father, during which Rostam symbolically overcomes his father, forces him into the background, and takes his place.¹³

ROSTAM'S DREAMLIKE JOURNEY

If, as I have suggested, Rostam's slaying of the White Demon is a symbolic form of parricide related to the son's attempt to achieve independence and individuation from the father, then no matter how desirable the final outcome, the process itself must be heavily disguised. It must be disguised because the fiercely patriarchal universe of the classical Persian epic tradition would not allow overt parricide without exacting a horrific punishment for it. Therefore, Rostam's fight with and victory over the evil aspect of his father are not only disguised but are even removed from the normal epic landscape and transferred to a world, of which the atmosphere and scenery are reminiscent of anxiety dreams.

Aside from the strange color of the demon, two characteristics of Rostam's seven trials are immediately striking. First, in spite of the customary name by which this episode of Rostam's life is known in *Shāhnāma* scholarship and oral tradition, Rostam does not actually go through seven hardships. Second, during or close to his "trials," the hero is often asleep.

The dreamlike atmosphere of Rostam's adventures in this episode is communicated by the bizarre suspension of the customary atmosphere of epic narrative. That is, compared to other trial sequences of the Persian epic tradition, these are on the surface disorderly and confused; somewhat like parts of a dream that do not necessarily fit together in a coherent narrative at first glance. For instance, the lion that attacks the sleeping Rostam in the first trial is a strange beast. Like a human, it thinks about his options, talks to himself, and considers the pros and cons of his strategy before making his move (290). The dragon of the third trial is also given to thinking and reasoning (340-44). These beasts resemble the speaking menagerie of fairy tales and dreams more closely than the less fantastic realm of epic. The case of the dragon in Rostam's third trial is especially interesting.

Unlike other dragons of the *Shāhnāma*, this one is endowed with magical powers and is able to disappear or even sink into the ground at will (363). It also has the power of speech, and in fact engages Rostam in conversation. The interlocution between Rostam and the dragon follows the pattern of verbal exchange between warriors on the battlefield. The dragon is in this respect anthropomorphized.¹¹ The nature of the exchange between Rostam and this unusual dragon is important for our analysis:

[Rostam] roared like a spring cloud
 And filled the earth with the fires of war.
 He said to that dragon: Proclaim your name
 (Never again will you experience the world to your liking),
 Lest you die at my hands nameless! (365-67)

The dragon does not reveal his name, and instead boasts of his own prowess and asks Rostam to reveal *his* name. Rostam obliges the beast:

Thus responded Rostam: I am Rostam,
I am from the line of Dastān, of Sām, and of Nayram. (372)

The interlocution has an important narrative function. By stating his name, *man rostamam*, aloud, Rostam announces his individuality, proclaims his independence from Zāl, but at the same time confirms the genealogical relationships that connect him to his heroic ancestors. He is no longer “Rostam son of Zāl,” but “Rostam of the line of Zāl and the heroes Sām and Nayram.”¹⁵ The next verse underscores this independence:

ba tanhā yaqi kīnavar laškaram,
ba raxš-e delāvar jahān besparam.
Alone I am a fierce army,
Who travels the world on the brave Raxš. (373)

By uttering these words, Rostam portrays an image of himself as a lone mounted knight, wandering the world in magnificent heroic solitude. The gains of the hero’s third trial are individuation and independence. The logic of the Shāhnāma narrative reinforces the gains of the third by the circumstances of the fourth trial.

In his fourth trial the hero comes upon a witches’ feast in the forest. The witches disappear, leaving their ample spread behind. Rostam takes up a lute that lies next to a cup of wine on the spread, and sings aloud about his life: “An unfortunate wanderer is Rostam” (J of M, 398). If in the previous trial he announced his name to his foe in the darkness of the night, here he sings it to the whole world in the light of day. The key word in this hemistich is *āvāra*, “wanderer.” The word *āvāra* in Persian implies not only the idea of wandering, but also those of loneliness and detachment.

The final proof of Rostam’s independence, growing maturity, and political importance is signaled in the fifth trial, during which he captures a minor Māzandarānian knight to whom he promises the throne of that country (J of M, 460-61; 463-68). This is clearly the kind of promise that presupposes political authority. No mere child can make such a promise. Only one who is confident of the king’s support can pledge the throne of a country to another. Rostam’s promise to put Ōlād on the throne of Māzandarān confirms that his first four trials have transformed him into a statesman endowed with all of his aged father’s political and moral authority. It is precisely this transformation that allows the hero to promise the throne of Māzandarān to his guide.

Most would agree that Rostam's first and second trials hardly qualify as heroic deeds. In the first, the hero's horse kills a lion, and during the second, God's mercy delivers him from death by dehydration. However, his third, fourth, and fifth trials (namely his encounters with the dragon and the witches, and his capture of his Māzandarānian guide) are logically related. Semiotically, these trials not only signify Rostam's transformation from boy to man, but also free him from his father, Zāl. They additionally allow the epic narrative to make a smooth transition from one chief hero to another.

Rostam's sixth trial has two components: a less significant martial aspect that concerns the hero's routing of a minor demon force, and a more important symbolic one that formally sanctions and affirms the hero's achievements in his previous trials. It is a narrative means of signaling the crown's approval of Rostam's function as the new *jahān pahlavān*. The sequence of events that lead to this affirmation is telling.

Having defeated the demon detachment that guards the area, Rostam approaches the king's prison:

When the crown-bestowing hero entered the city
 Raxš thundered forth a neigh.
 The king said to the Iranian [prisoners],
 Our hardship is ended!
 I heard the voice of Raxš;
 My heart and soul were revived by his voice. (J of M, 523-25)

Rostam is called the "wise, warlike hero" (*yal-e dāneš-afruz-e parxāšjuj*) (526) in the next line, and is thus confirmed by the king in his new position. A boy would not be called *dāneš-afruz*. Later Kāvus orders Rostam to bring the White Demon's blood in order to cure the blindness that afflicts the Iranian prisoners. In Rostam's farewell to the Iranian captives, the epic's narrative logic cleverly confirms both the fraternity of the heroes and Rostam's newly gained supremacy over them:

The hulky hero prepared for war
 And set out to leave that place.
 He said to the Iranians: Be on your guard!
 I am leaving to face the White Demon.
 He is a demon, cunning and brave,
 Surrounded by a great force [is he].
 If he defeats me
 Long will you remain in bondage and hardship,
 But if God grants me help
 And good fortune makes me able

You will be restored to your land and to the Throne
And that royal tree will bring forth fruit. (J of M, 544-49)

In his farewell speech, Rostam explicitly ties the very survival of the heroes and the throne to his victory. He thus establishes himself as the foundation upon which all heroic and courtly life depends. His allusion to the “royal tree” that will bear fruit only if he is victorious over the White Demon, not only brings to mind the image of the tree in the introductory verses of the tale, but also implies that without him the very survival of the royal line would be in doubt. In fact this is no idle boast because the king is still childless. Therefore if he perishes in the White Demon’s prison (an outcome that may be avoided only if Rostam defeats the demon) the royal line will come to an end.¹⁶ In addressing the heroes and the crown in the manner that he does before his departure, Rostam practically takes over his absent father’s position. He lays claim to Zāl’s office, and the king upholds his claim. However, Zāl, or at least the demonic aspect of Zāl as personified by the White Demon, is not going to give up his place meekly to his son. He will put up a fight, and that brings us to Rostam’s last adventure, namely his fight with the White Demon.

Rostam cuts off the demon’s leg before killing it (J of M, 573). Leg/ foot as phallic symbols in Persian and many other literatures are too well known to require documentation. Thus, Rostam’s amputation of the demon’s leg before killing it, confirms my suggestion that the fight does have Oedipal implications. However, what is more important for our purposes than the strict psychoanalytical interpretation of the scene is the hero’s symbolic absorption of his father’s essence. In order to present the evidence in favor of this interpretation, we must backtrack a little.

When Rostam finds the king and his entourage in the White Demon’s prison, the king tells him that physicians have determined “the blood of the heart and brain of the White Demon” as the only cure of the captives’ blindness (J of M, 541). However, when Rostam finally finds and kills the beast, it is his liver that he extracts (J of M, 580, 584, 597). Heart, brain, and liver are intimately associated with the essence of human beings in Iranian and other Indo-European worldviews (cf ONIANS 1973, 84–89, 162–63, 505). If my suggestion is correct that the White Demon symbolizes Zāl, then by taking the demon’s liver, heart, and brains, Rostam captures his father’s essence and absorbs his most essential qualities in order to replace his father as the new *jahān pahlavān*.

THE WAR OF MĀZANDARĀN AS PROOF OF ROSTAM’S MATURITY

The qualitative change in the person and the function of Rostam after his

seven trials and the successful rescue of the King and other heroes is confirmed by his role in the conquest of Māzandarān. Kaykāvus, whose original mindless belligerence caused his captivity in the first place, has now learned his lesson. In contrast to his previous strategy of aggression and massacre of the Māzandarānian populace (169-70, 174-75), he approaches the matter according to the epic tradition of military conquest, which demands sending a message to the king of Māzandarān in order to give him a chance to avoid war by becoming a vassal of the Iranian court (610-13). Rostam's maturity and his incorporation into the adult assembly of the court aristocracy is at this point explicitly acknowledged for the first time:

*bad-in rāy xošnud šod pur-e Zāl,
bozorgān ke budand bā u hamāl*

The son of Zāl was pleased by this decision,
And so were the nobles who were his peers. (614)

The ruler of Māzandarān refuses to submit, however, and Rostam counsils that a new fiercely worded letter should be composed, so that he can personally take it to the enemy court. The wording of Rostam's discourse at this point is that of a court councilor, not a young man:

*čonin goft Kāvus-rā piltan:
K-azin nang bogzāram in anjoman!
Marā bord bāyad su-ye u payām
Soxan bar-gošāyam čo tiḡ az niyām
Yaḡi nāma bāyad čo borrandā tiḡ
Payāmi ba ḡerdār-e ḡorrandā miḡ
šavam čon ferestāda'i nazd-e uy
Ba goftār, xun andar-āram ba juy
Ba pāsox čonin goft Kāvus šāh
Ke az to foruzad negin o ḡolāh
Payāmi ḡojā to gozāri delir
Bedarrad del-e pil o čangāl-e šir*

Thus said the hulking [hero] to Kāvus:
I should leave this court because of this insult!
It is I who must take a message to him
I will utter words as sharp as unsheathed blades.
A letter must be prepared, keen as a sword,
With a message like roaring thunder [lit., clouds].
I will go to him in the guise of an envoy
And bring blood to flow by my words.

King Kāvus answered thus:

You are the luster of the royal seal and the crown.¹⁷
 The message that you bravely carry
 Will tear out the hearts of elephants and the claws of lions. (662-67)

Rostam, who was called *rostam-e šir nāxorda sir*, “the suckling Rostam,” at the beginning of this episode (72), is now so transformed as to directly participate in making political decisions, and even act as the crown’s ambassador to another court. By the end of the seven trials, Rostam is undoubtedly a warrior statesman. His political and moral authority is emphasized when, after final victory over Māzandarān, Kaykāvus honors the promise that the hero made to his Turanian guide, and appoints the man to rule over Māzandarān (844-848).

There is a crucial additional detail in the scene of the king’s assent to Rostam’s request to make Ōlād king of Māzandarān, which deserves mention. Not only does Kāvus grant Rostam’s request, but the text reads *ba bar zad jahāndār-e bidār dast*, “the wise king struck his chest/side in obedience” (849). Striking the chest/side is a ritualistic gesture of obeisance that, as far as I know, is expressed exclusively by subjects towards kings. It is common for heroes of the Shāhnāma to show their obedience to the king’s orders with this gesture (e.g., Khaleghi-Motlagh Vol.1, pp. 20, 511; Vol. 2, pp. 323, 1780; Vol. 3, pp. 14, 199ff.).¹⁸ But kings never strike their chest/side in response to their subordinates’ requests. That would be beneath the dignity of their office. Therefore, when Kaykāvus grants Rostam’s wishes by means of this gesture, he honors the hero far beyond normal courtly traditions.

THE NON-LITERARY VERSIONS

In contrast to the Shāhnāma version of the seven trials story which, as a part of the epic’s long narrative is intricately connected to it as a whole, the oral versions of this episode (none of which is in verse)¹⁹ are independent entities. Thus, these tales can freely rearrange and omit details and chronologies that the Shāhnāma narrative cannot afford to disregard by virtue of its being a unified literary work of art. This is best demonstrated in the rearrangement of the chronological order of events of Rostam’s life in the oral versions of the story of his seven trials. For instance, the first of the four versions that I have translated here places the episode of the seven trials after the tale of Rostam’s tragic fight with his son, Sohrāb. By contrast, the story of Rostam and Sohrāb in the Shāhnāma happens long after the episode of the hero’s seven trials. Indeed, by the time Rostam fights his son in the Shāhnāma, he is an old man, while during his seven trials he is a mere teenager. Furthermore, the oral version completely neglects the hero’s individual trials, and concen-

trates instead on his actual fight with the White Demon. It also introduces details that are typical of verbal art (e.g., replacing the Ōlād of the literary version with a character called “the son of Marjāna the witch”), the White Demon’s use of his own liver in bringing about the Iranians’ blindness, the use of the formulaic number forty, etc. The second oral version translated here likewise omits any mention of Rostam’s various trials, but it adds several details that are typical of oral traditional narratives (e.g., specifying the weight of Rostam’s weapons, replacing the blood of the demon’s liver with its ashes as a cure for the Iranians’ blindness, and increasing the number of the monster’s heads to seven). The third version specifies the cause of the fight as the Māzandarānian population’s request that Rostam rescue them from the tyranny of the demon. This version entirely eliminates the story of the War against Māzandarān, of which Rostam’s fight with the White Demon is only an episode in the literary version. It also reinterprets the *haft xān*, “seven trials,” as the name of seven caves on the way to the demon’s lair. The seventh *xān* according to this version, is the seventh cave in which the White Demon resides. This variant leaves out all reference to the Iranians’ blindness and to the efficacy of the demon’s blood in curing their condition. The fourth version conflates mutilated versions of the tales of the Demon Akvān with that of the White Demon, both narrated in the Shāhnāma, and produces a hybrid version, according to which Rostam fought the White Demon because it had kidnapped his wife.

The version found in the professional storytelling (*naqqāli*) sources tends closely to follow the Shāhnāma version because professional storytellers do not deviate from the Shāhnāma narrative in significant details. However, they freely elaborate and reorganize. For instance, the version I have translated here has somewhat altered the order of Rostam’s trials. In doing so, it has disrupted the literary logic of the textual version, but has achieved a semi-literary logic of its own which, although far less sophisticated than the Shāhnāma version and at a lower level of symbolization, is quite charming.

CONCLUSION

The early life and career of Rostam follows two complementary paths in the Shāhnāma. The overt textual path is a simple chronological progression: his birth in the reign of Manučehr, his childhood and first battle experience under Kayqobād, his seven trials and the majority of his important exploits under Kaykāvus and Kayxosraw, and finally his old age and death under Goštāsp. A covert subtext runs through this simple chronology and intricately unites seemingly disparate episodes of his life. This subtext also links episodes of the Shāhnāma that, in spite of their deceptive apparent inde-

pendence, are in fact intricately connected. What connects these episodes is an undeniable narrative logic that imposes a persistent unity on the poem's progress. This artistic unity is entirely lacking in the oral versions of the epic tale, which, by virtue of being discrete free-flowing entities in the oral tradition, need not maintain a logical connection to a greater whole. The semi-literary *naqqāli* versions of the *Shāhnāma*, although less free than their oral versions, show greater adherence to the logic of the epic narrative and the intricate interconnectedness of the *Shāhnāma*'s narrative. It is the careful examination of this rich tapestry of interconnectedness that promises to be the most fruitful avenue of *Shāhnāma* scholarship at the outset of the twenty-first century. Simple-minded re-hashings of outdated notions that allege Ferdawsi depended on oral tradition or that his diction was in any way influenced by "orality" will no longer do, even after they are cross-fertilized with Harvard's tribal religion of Oral Formulaic Theory.

APPENDIX

Four oral versions of the story of Rostam's fight with the White Demon have been translated here into English. I have also provided an English translation of a *naqqāli* version of the story. These versions, I believe, show how profoundly different are the esthetic forces that drive the *Shāhnāma* version from those that are behind the oral and *naqqāli* variants of the story.

ROSTAM AND THE WHITE DEMON (VERSION 1)

They say after Rostam killed his son Sohrāb and left in sorrow for Sistān, the White Demon was informed that Rostam had killed his son Sohrāb, and had left for Sistān.²⁰ He said, "Now is the time for me to order the demons to capture Kāvus together with all of his forces, and to imprison them in a well, and place forty demons as their guards." So, by orders of the White Demon, one night demons launched a surprise attack against Kāvus's forces from the earth and from the sky, and captured Kāvus and his army, and imprisoned them in a well. The White Demon used his own liver to magically blind Kāvus and his army, so that none of them could see anything.

A few days after this event, spies brought the news to Rostam. Rostam said to himself, "I will go and, God willing,²¹ will rescue Kāvus and his army, and will kill the White Demon." He got on his horse, Raxš, and set out for Māzandarān from Sistān, until he arrived at his destination. However, he did not know where Kāvus and his army were being held. Searching in the area, he captured the son of Marjāna the witch, and said to him, "if you tell me where Kāvus and his army are being held, I will make you the commander of the demons of Māzandarān." The son of Marjāna the witch said, "They are imprisoned in such and such a well, and forty fierce demons²² guard that well, and the mouth of the well is covered by a boulder so big that even forty fierce demons could hardly move it."

Rostam and the son of Marjāna the witch went on, until they arrived somewhere, and the son of Marjāna the witch said, "Now we are near that well." Rostam tied Raxš's reins, and firmly tied the son of Marjāna the witch to a tree, and went on until he arrived at that well. And he found forty demons sitting together around the well. As soon as the demons saw Rostam, they moved and picked up their cudgels, and fought Rostam. But Rostam killed most of them, and some escaped, injured. So Rostam went to the well with no worries and noticed that a great boulder covered the mouth of the well. He picked up the boulder with one hand and threw it away. He then went into the well and arrived at the spot where Kāvus and his army were imprisoned. He murmured something to himself, and Kāvus heard his murmuring; and said to his army, "This is Rostam's murmuring." But his army told him, "Rostam is in Sistān. How could he possibly come here so soon?" Rostam answered loudly, "It's me, who has come to rescue you." All gathered around Rostam and said, "We can't see anything, because the White Demon has used his liver to blind us by magic. If you can bring the White Demon's liver so that we can drop its blood into our eyes, we will regain our sight."

Rostam said goodbye to Kāvus and climbed out of the well, and set out with the son of Marjāna the witch, until the two of them arrived at Mount Firuz. Rostam tied his horse over there, and said to the son of Marjāna the witch, "Tell me how to get to the White Demon." The son of Marjāna the witch told him how to get there, and Rostam tied the son of Marjāna the witch tightly to a tree. Then he said to him, "When you hear me holler for the first time, know that I've come face-to-face with the White Demon. When you hear me holler a second time, know that I am fighting the White Demon. When you hear my third holler, know that I've killed him. But if you do not hear my third holler, then know that he has killed me." Rostam said this and went until he came upon the entrance to the White Demon's cave. They say the White Demon used to sleep for one week and stay awake for one week, and when Rostam got to him, he was asleep. Rostam said to himself, "It would be cowardly to kill him in his sleep." Therefore, he let out a whoop, and pushed the tip of his sword into the sole of the demon's foot. The White Demon scratched his foot, and said to himself, "What a nasty mosquito." Rostam poked the White Demon's foot harder, and the demon opened his eyes, and found Rostam in front of him. Rostam let out a whoop for the second time, and the son of Marjāna the witch heard him. The White Demon reached for his cudgel and tried to strike Rostam on the neck, but Rostam ducked, and let out another yell that the son of Marjāna the witch could hear. Then Rostam said, "O God, don't make me ashamed, and give me strength, because if I die at the hands of this afreet, Iran will surely be lost." Then he recited God's name, and tore the demon's belly open with his sword. He then took out its liver, and took its horned head, and went back to the son of Marjāna the witch. Rostam got on Raxš, and set out for the well in which Kāvus and his forces were imprisoned, with the son of Marjāna the witch in tow. When they arrived there, Rostam tied the son of Marjāna the witch to a tree and went into the well. He then applied the blood from the liver of the White Demon to everyone's eyes, and

they all regained their sight, and climbed out of the well. Then Rostam made the son of Marjāna the witch the ruler of the whole of Māzandarān, and left along with Kāvus and the others. Then Kāvus sat upon the throne, and Rostam returned to Sistān happy and honored.²³

ROSTAM AND THE WHITE DEMON (VERSION 2)

Once Rostam went to fight Afrāsiyāb in Turān. He defeated the forces of Afrāsiyāb after a few days, and captured Afrāsiyāb himself. But Afrāsiyāb, who was a sorcerer hero, managed to escape from Rostam. Afterwards, Rostam returned to Sistān, and found that King Kāvus, the king's children, and his vizier, as well as Rostam's own sister and brother-in-law were missing. He asked his father Zāl about them, and Zāl said, "When you had gone to fight Afrāsiyāb, I left to fight the demons in India. When I came back after defeating the demons, I was told that the White Demon came and captured the King, his children and vizier, and also our son-in-law, Pās, and his wife Gošasp Bānu, and has taken all of them to Māzandarān, where he has imprisoned them in a deep well, and has blinded them all by magic. He has covered the mouth of the well with a huge millstone that weighs three thousand maunds and is enchanted so that only you can lift it. He has also built a wall around that well, with a gate in the wall guarded by several ghouls."²⁴

When Rostam heard his father's words he was very upset, and asked his father's leave, mounted Raxš, took his mace of 900 maunds and his sword of 300 maunds, and set out. He traveled several days until one day he came upon a ghou, whom he captured in his lasso, and ripped its ears off without so much as speaking to it. The ghou said, "Hey Rostam, why do you hurt me? Tell me what you want, and I'll get it for you." Rostam told the ghou the full story of Kāvus's capture and imprisonment along with the others. The ghou said, "I know where they are. The White Demon has bewitched them in a deep well in Māzandarān. Now, if you don't kill me, I'll lead you there." Rostam agreed. The two traveled for a few days with the ghou leading the way and Rostam following, until they were near that well. The ghou showed the well to Rostam and said, "I don't dare go closer." So Rostam tied the ghou to a tree. The ghou said, "Don't go walking around the fortification of the well because they might bewitch you too. Go straight to the gate in the wall. The gatekeeper is a weird ghou, who knows the exact location of the well." Rostam went on until he reached the gate in the wall. The weird ghou said, "Hey Rostam! Where do you think you're going? I'll fix you so that you won't ever be seen again." Rostam cast his lasso while riding Raxš, and captured that weird ghou. When the weird ghou found himself to be no match for Rostam, he said, "Hey Rostam! Why did you capture me, and what do you want from me?" Rostam said, "Where is the well within this wall in which the White Demon has bewitched the humans?" The weird ghou responded, "I'll show you, but it's no use because the White Demon has blinded them all by magic." Rostam asked, "Can't their eyes be treated?" The ghou said, "Sure. If you burn the liver of the White Demon, and rub their eyes with its ashes, they will regain their sight."

Rostam got off Raxš and walked to the well, guided by the ghou. He lifted the millstone, and noticed that stairs led to the bottom of the well. He went down the stairs, and found a big building at the bottom of the well, where the White Demon kept his bewitched humans.

When Rostam found the humans in that pitiful state, he was very upset, and called out, "O King, why have you been afflicted like this?" When they heard Rostam's voice, they all said, "O Hero! Has the White Demon bewitched you here too?" Rostam answered, "Of course not. I've come to rescue you." The King said, "What use is your coming, now that the White Demon has made us all blind?" Rostam said, "That is easy to take care of. I will go right away, and find the White Demon. I will then kill him because the remedy for your blindness is the ashes from his liver." The King said, "O Rostam! Don't put yourself in mortal danger, because no one can kill him." Rostam said, "I'm going. You wait for me here." Anyway, Rostam came out of the well and replaced the millstone. He then got on Raxš, and said to the weird ghou, "Unless you show me the lair of the White Demon, I will kill you." The weird ghou said, "If you promise not to force me to go along with you into the lair, I'll lead you there." Rostam agreed, and asked the ghou, "What manner of beast is the White Demon, and how should one kill it?" The ghou said, "The White Demon has seven heads. Don't try to cut off his heads, because whenever you cut off one head and move on to cut off the next one, the first head will heal itself, and this goes on like this, and you won't be able to kill him. The only way you can kill him is to throw him on the ground and rip his belly open. As soon as you rip his liver out, he will die."

Anyway, he showed Rostam where the White Demon lived, and told him, "O Rostam, the white smoke that you see rising above that mountain is the breath of the White Demon." Rostam tied the ghou to a tree and set out for the mountain. He went until he arrived at the mountain and found the demon, who was as big as a mountain, sleeping. He did not want to kill it in an unmanly way. He inserted his lance about a yard deep into the sole of the demon's foot. The demon did not awake, but mumbled, "These flies don't let me sleep." Rostam said, "It's no fly. It is I, Rostam, your slayer. Get up!" When the White Demon heard the voice, he got up. As soon as he raised his head, he recognized Rostam, and said, "Rostam! What are you doing here? Not even a gnat can fly around here for fear of me." Anyway, the demon got up and wrestled with Rostam for forty days and nights. When Rostam was exhausted, he said to the demon, "O evil demon! We Muslims pray. Will you give me respite to pray?" The demon said, "That would be OK, because I'm hungry and need to eat [while you pray]."

Rostam went and did his ablutions and prayed to God, saying, "O God, I ask you not to bring about my death by the hand of this demon." Then he cried so much that a river of tears flowed from his eyes. After praying to God, he asked for power from the Simorgh,²⁵ and the Simorgh gave him his power. The Demon and Rostam wrestled again, and Rostam lifted the White Demon and smashed him on the ground so hard that the earth shook. Immediately, Rostam ripped the demon's belly

open and extracted his liver, and the White Demon died. Then Rostam thanked God, mounted Raxš, freed the ghoul that he had tied to the tree, and took him along to the wall that surrounded the well. He ordered the ghoul to gather a lot of tinder, which he used to burn the demon's liver into ashes. He collected the ashes, freed the ghoul, and went down into the well, where he restored the sight of the king and his entourage by means of that ash. They all thanked God, praised Rostam, and went out from the well joyfully and left for Sistān. Then Kāvus sat upon the royal throne and ruled happily for many years.²⁶

ROSTAM AND THE WHITE DEMON (VERSION 3)

They say because the White Demon constantly hassled the people of Māzandarān, and his presence in the forest was an obstacle to people who needed to go there, the locals asked Rostam to come to Māzandarān and kill the demon. So, Rostam came to Māzandarān, and went to Kajur, in the forests around which the White Demon resided in a cave. When Rostam reached the area, he asked the residents to show him the residence of the White Demon, and the way to go to his cave. They showed him the way to the cave and told him, "You must go to the demon at high noon. At that time, you will find him sleeping in his cave." Rostam sat upon the road and traveled for a long time. It is said that the White Demon lived in the *haft xān*, which were seven caves, with the demon living in the seventh one. He used to sleep for forty days and be awake for forty. So Rostam traveled for a long while until he arrived at the White Demon's cave at high noon, and noticed that the demon was sleeping. However, this was a time at the end of the forty days of the demon's sleep, and he was about to get up. Seeing the demon asleep, Rostam thought to himself, saying, "Killing the demon while it is sleeping would be unmanly, and it will bring me no honor. It's better that I let out a yell and wake him up in order to fight and kill him." So, he let out a whoop and the demon woke up from the sound. As soon as he saw Rostam in front of him, he picked up a huge bolder and attacked him by it. After a lot of effort, Rostam caught the demon in his lasso, threw him down, cut off his head, and wore his skull that had two huge horns on it, as a helmet for his own honor.²⁷

ROSTAM AND THE WHITE DEMON (VERSION 4)

It is said that the White Demon kidnapped Rostam's wife Tahmina, and took her to the cave in Māzandarān, where he imprisoned her. On hearing the news, Rostam becomes very upset. He prepares himself and, armed, sets out for the abode of the White Demon. When he arrives, the White Demon fights him and overcomes the hero, and takes him to the top of a mountain overlooking the sea. He puts Rostam on his horns, and says to him:

Alā Rostam-e jang-koṅ, jangjuy
be daryā biyandāzamat yā be kuḥ?
 O warring, warlike Rostam!
 Should I cast you into the sea, or onto the mountain?

Rostam, who had heard that demons are contrary, answered:

*Mabādā be daryā beyandāzi-am
 ḳabāb-e del-e māhiyān sāzi-am
 be ḳuham beyandāz ḳe babr ast o šir
 ḳe širān bebinand mard-e delir*

Do not throw me into the sea,
 Lest I become food for the fish;
 Throw me onto the mountain, where tigers and lions roam,
 So that the lions can see a brave man.

But the demon, being contrary, casts Rostam into the sea,²⁸ and Rostam saves himself from peril, overcomes the White Demon in another fight, and kills him.²⁹

COMMENTARY

All of the oral versions that have been translated here are independent from the Shāhnāma version of the story. They are also different from the versions narrated by professional storytellers (called *naqqāl* in Persian).³⁰ I will translate one *naqqāl*'s version, which is taken from a manuscript in the Majles Library, Tehran.³¹

ROSTAM AND THE WHITE DEMON: THE NAQQĀLI VERSION

Kaykāvus's ascension to the throne in place of his father: His rule was one hundred and twenty years. His going to Māzandarān, and his capture there, and the capture of the Iranian heroes at the hands of the White Demon, and the going of Rostam son of Zāl to Māzandarān, and the rescue of the Iranian heroes.

The tellers of tales and transmitters of traditions, the sweet-speaking parrots, the storytellers of old and the harvesters of the realm of fortune have narrated as follows.³²

One day when Kaykāvus was seated upon the throne of kingship, a musician³³ entered. The king asked, "Where do you come from?" He replied, "From Māzandarān." The king asked, "What manner of place is Māzandarān?" The man said, "It is a wonderful and pleasant place that is beyond the wildest imagination of the most learned."³⁴ He praised it so highly that Kaykāvus desired to conquer Māzandarān, and ordered his warlords to gather forces for the conquest of Māzandarān. The warlords said, "O king, none of the rulers of yore ever conquered Māzandarān, because there live 100,000 demons such as the White Demon, and the Aržang-e Sālār, and 'Andi-ye Bid, and the Three-Eyed Qahqaha, and Ōlād. Furthermore, not even the heroes Sām-e Narimān or Garšāsp ever attempted this feat." But Kāvus did not listen and took an army of 100,000 along with such warlords as Tūs, Gostahm, Gudarz, Giv, and Zanga-ye šāhvārān,³⁵ and having entrusted the country into the hands of Milād, set out for Māzandarān. The army advanced until it arrived at Mount Firuz, where they pitched camp.

When the White Demon heard about them, he took 200,000 sorcerers and set out to face Kāvus's army. The demons rained stones on Kāvus's forces, and after that

[the White Demon] blinded them all by magic (motif D2062.2.), and chained the king and 1,200 heroes, while the demons killed 100,000 other soldiers and devoured them with wine. They then pillaged the whole treasury and placed Aržang-e Sālār as a guard at the well.³⁶ The news of the capture of Kaykāvus and his heroes quickly reached Zāl and Rostam in Sistān. Zāl was enraged.³⁷ Rostam said, “Don’t be upset father, because I will, by the help of God, go to Māzandarān alone, and will bring Kāvus and all of the heroes back in spite of 100,000 demons.” Zāl answered, “God be with you!” Thereafter [Rostam] ordered Raxš to be saddled.³⁸ He put on the *babr-e bayān*, fastened the *Narimani* blade on his belt, slung the *Garšāspi* shield on his back, stuck the *Tāhmurasi* dagger firmly in his belt, mounted Raxš and set out for Māzandarān.

He traveled until he came upon two mountains that leaned against one another, forming a pitch-dark tunnel, from which bizarre and frightening sounds emanated. Rostam pronounced the name of God and spurred Raxš on into the tunnel, riding until dawn, lost and thirsty. He began to pray, when suddenly there appeared the door to a garden.

Concerning Rostam’s Coming to His First Trial and His Slaying of the Witch

Rostam spurred Raxš on into the garden, where he saw near a pool four trees, in the shade of which a rich spread of food and wine was arranged with roasted fowls and wine. He also noticed a lute hanging from a tree. Rostam thanked God, and dismounted from Raxš. He sat at the spread near the pool, and had his fill of the food, followed by several cups of wine. Then he took down the lute from the tree and played. He said, “O God, you have prepared everything for me. I wish you to arrange for a beautiful damsel to appear too.” He was in the middle of this when all of a sudden a beautiful damsel appeared in the garden, approaching him coquetishly. The sight of her delighted Rostam. The damsel greeted the hero, and said, “Welcome, young man. We are delighted to have you in our humble abode.” She then placed a cup full of wine in Rostam’s hand. Rostam drank the wine and began to sing the praise of God.³⁹ As soon as the woman heard the name of God, her color changed; and Rostam saw that the name of God had changed the woman, and she was transformed into an ugly hag. He drew the *Narimānian* blade, and struck the witch in the waist so hard that she was cut in two. The hero then thanked God, and mounted his horse and set out for the second trial.

Concerning Rostam’s Arrival at the Second Trial, and Raxš’s Killing of the Lion; [which] should be Narrated as Follows⁴⁰

He traveled for twenty-four hours until he arrived at a thicket, where he left Raxš to graze and, pillowed on his shield, went to sleep. Suddenly a lion came out from the thicket and approached Rostam. Raxš saw that the lion intended to harm Rostam. He jumped up and kicked the lion on the skull so fiercely that the beast’s brains were scattered. Rostam woke up at the sound of the lion’s roar, and found himself facing the wondrous scene of Raxš’s battle with the beast.⁴¹ He scolded Raxš, saying,

“Why didn’t you wake me? How was I supposed to haul two thousand maunds’ weight of armor and weaponry to Māzandarān by myself?” Then he mounted Raxš and set out for the third trial.

Concerning Rostam’s Arriving at the Third Trial and His Passage through Fire⁴² by the Help of God Almighty

He went on until he reached a hot desert covered with sand dunes. Thirst overcame him,⁴³ and the hero dismounted and took off his armor and weapons because he was overwhelmed by [heat] and thirst. Suddenly a beautiful gazelle appeared in front of him. He thought, “I should shoot this gazelle and drink its blood.” So he put an arrow in his bow, but as much as he tried he had no energy to draw the bowstring. Meanwhile, the gazelle kept on coming, and beckoning with its head, as if to say, “Follow me!” The hero began to follow the animal until they climbed upon a hill, where the gazelle disappeared, and a pleasant spring caught the hero’s eye. Rostam thanked God, and drank his fill of water. He then put his weapons and armor back on, mounted Raxš, and brought him to the spring to water, and fell asleep. After resting, he got up, mounted his horse again, and set out for the fourth trial.

Concerning Rostam’s Arrival at the Fourth Trial, and the Slaying of the Dragon, It Says

He continued until he came upon a pasture. He dismounted and drank some water. Afterwards he fell asleep. At this station, a sorcerer transformed himself into a dragon and attempted to harm Rostam. But Raxš ran up to the hero and pounded the earth with his hooves. Rostam was awakened, but the sorcerer chanted an incantation⁴⁴ and disappeared. The hero looked around but found no one, and fell asleep again. Once again that devil approached Rostam. Raxš ran up to the hero and pounded the ground with his hooves; and the hero was awakened once more, and the sorcerer disappeared again. The hero scolded Raxš, saying, “If you wake me up again, I promise I will kill you.” Having said this, he fell asleep again. That sorcerer approached Rostam again. Raxš could take this no longer and, neighing, he ran to the hero. Rostam awoke and saw a bizarre dragon. He reached for his sharp blade and struck the beast in the middle so hard that it was cut in two. That sorcerer was dispatched to hell, and Rostam kissed Raxš’s eyes, and set out for the fifth trial.

Concerning Rostam’s Arrival at the Fifth Trial and His Capture of Ōlād Son of Marzbān, It is Said

Rostam kept riding on Raxš until he spied from afar a castle that was surrounded by fields. He came upon a plane tree, where he dismounted, let Raxš graze in the fields, and fell asleep in the shade of the tree. It so happened that the guardian of the fields looked and noticed a horse grazing in his field, while a youth was sleeping under the tree nearby. He said to himself, “I should go and cut off the tail and ears of this horse.” Then he thought, “No, why should I? The horse is not at fault. I should teach its owner a lesson.” So he crept up to the tree and first struck Rostam’s foot with a stick and was about to hit him on the head, when Rostam rose, got hold of

both of his ears and yanked them off. He then handed the ears to the man, and asked him, "Who is the owner of this castle?" The poor fellow said, "This castle belongs to Ōlād son of Marzbān." Rostam said, "Go as you are to Ōlād. If he asks you [about your ears] tell him the king of ear-clippers is here." The man said, "I certainly will." And he went straight to Ōlād and related that which had happened to him. Ōlād rode against Rostam with a thousand horsemen. When Rostam spied that force, he pulled on his cinch-strap to steady the saddle on his horse, mounted, took hold of his battle mace, and attacked Ōlād's forces. Whomever he struck, he would crush to dust. Thereafter he took hold of his Narimanian blade; and whomever he struck, he would cut down to the waist, and whenever he struck someone on the shoulder, he would cut his head and shoulder clean off his body. Suddenly he came upon Ōlād, who blocked Rostam's way. Rostam said to himself, "It's better if you don't kill this one, but capture him alive in order to lead you to the White Demon's lair." Then he cast his lasso, which the hero Sām had made from the hide of the demon Nahangāl, around Ōlād's neck. Hard as Ōlād tried, he could not free himself. Rostam pulled him off the saddle, and cast him on the ground. Then he tied the end of the lasso to his own leg, and attacked Ōlād's forces, which he put to flight in a second. Then he returned, dismounted from Raxš and freed Ōlād, and Ōlād said, "O hero! They call me Ōlād son of Marzbān. I am the lord of that army." Rostam swore, "I will not kill you;⁴⁵ and on condition that you answer all of my questions truthfully I will make you the king of Māzandarān." Ōlād said, "O king!⁴⁶ I will tell you truthfully all that I know." Rostam said, "Show me where Kāvus and the Iranian heroes are imprisoned." Ōlād said, "O hero! Who can go to the place where Kāvus and the Iranian heroes have been imprisoned? Except perhaps whoever no longer wishes to live. Aržang, the warlord, and 12,000 demons guard them; and Aržang the demon is a cunning character who wields a mace of twelve hundred maunds. When you pass him,⁴⁷ you will come to the White Demon who wields a mace of thirty-two hundred maunds. There are 100,000 demons in the city of Māzandarān." Rostam said, "Don't worry about that. Be my guide!" Ōlād said, "I obey," then got up, and they set out for the sixth trial, where king Kāvus was kept in bondage.

Concerning Rostam's Coming to the Sixth Trial and the Killing of Aržang the Warlord, and the [Slaying] of Xarčang and Andi and Bandi and the Three-Eyed Qahqaha, It is Said

Tahamtan kept Ōlād son of Marzbān in front of him and traveled until the two reached the foot of a mountain (verse):

*yeki kuhpāye sar andar sahb
maḳān-e palang, āšiyān-e 'oqāb
harāsande div az dam-e ḡār-e u
dam-e aždahā bar dom-e mār-e u
čonān qolle-aš gardan-afraz bud
ke bā ḳorsi-ye 'arš ham-rāz bud*

A mountain, its summit [hidden] in the clouds,
 A place where leopards [roam] and eagles nest.
 Afraid were the demons of the mouths of its caves,
 Dragons' mouths were on the tails of the snakes that lived there.⁴⁸
 Its summit was so lofty
 That it could whisper to the divine throne.

There was a vast garden at the foot of that mountain. When they got close enough, Rostam could hear the sounds of the demons' drinking party. He asked Ōlād, "What kind of place is this?" Ōlād responded, "This is the place of Aržang the demon, who lives here together with 12,000 other demons; and the prison where the Iranian heroes are kept is on top of this mountain. The garden is Aržang, the demon's home, where he drinks wine every day, and eats kabob made of human flesh." So Rostam got off Raxš, tied Ōlād to a tree, and said to Raxš, "If he moves tear his head off." Then he stuffed the hem of his chain mail shirt under his belt and, gripping [his grandfather Sām's] sword that weighed one hundred and sixty maunds, entered the garden. He saw row after row of demons that were drinking there. Each one of them had a skewer of human limbs that was being barbecued to eat with wine. As soon as Rostam saw the demons, he cried out "*allāho akbar*,"⁴⁹ the noise of which stunned the demons, who thought the mountains were crumbling. The sound of Rostam's yell traveled a distance of one parasang. Kaykāvus heard Rostam's yell, and told his viziers, "I hear Rostam's voice." The Iranians began to laugh in spite of their condition and said, "What a smart man you are! You caused the death of 100,000 Iranians at the hands of the demons, and as much as Rostam advised you against coming to Māzandarān, you did not listen to him. How could he possibly come to this land?" Kāvus was embarrassed, and said nothing.

As soon as the demons spied Rostam, they all got up and attacked him. Rostam never needed to strike any of them with his blade more than once. After he killed sixty demons, the rest escaped and went to Aržang the warlord. Aržang asked, "What happened to you?" They said, "O king! The noise that you just heard was the voice of a man who entered the garden and put to death every demon that he struck once. We escaped and came to you." Aržang had a brother by the name of Xarčang.⁵⁰ Aržang said to him, "Brother, go capture this human and bring him to me so that I may eat his flesh with my wine." Those demons that had witnessed Rostam's strength said, "We'll see about that." Then they said, "O king, this human is superior to all demons. How can your brother get the better of him? No one can so much as look him in the eyes." Aržang got really angry and said, "You 12,000 fierce demons were scared by a mere man?" The demons responded, "You'll find out yourself, as soon as you go [against him]." Aržang got up, and took hold of his cudgel on which nine millstones were fixed. But the demon's getting there [sic] coincided with Rostam's arrival. When Aržang the demon saw Rostam and beheld his bravery, he was sorry for having come. First he wanted to turn around and leave, but he thought to himself, "What are you going to say to the White Demon, who has appointed you his warlord [if you run away]? [After all] he has charged you with

guarding this place to take care of any enemies that might approach.” Then he yelled out, “You arrogant man! Has the grim reaper grabbed you by the collar to drag you here? What could Kaykāvus with his army of 100,000 do that you think you can do better?” Then he raised his cudgel and said, “Tell me your name, human!” Rostam said, “I am the son of Zāl and Sām, and my name is Rostam.” At that moment the demon brought his cudgel down upon Rostam’s shield; and Rostam felt as if he was hit by the weight of the nine firmaments, and the milk that he had sucked from his mother’s breasts seeped out under his teeth, he sank knee deep in the earth, and his bones shook and pain spread through his body. But no matter what, he withstood the hardship. The demon began to laugh and said, “Where is Zāl-e Zarr now, to sieve out the crushed bones of Rostam?” When Rostam saw how the demon was mocking him, he jumped up and said, “What do you think you’ve done, you accursed [demon], that has made you so boastful?” Aržang the demon said, “O human! Are you cast of steel?” He once again raised his cudgel to strike Rostam, but the hero pushed his shield onto his back and grabbed the demon’s wrist and squeezed it so hard that blood poured out of the roots of the monster’s nails onto the ground. Then he took the cudgel out of his hand and threw it away. The demon tried to escape, but Rostam did not let him, and grabbed hold of the chain around his waist, and the two began to wrestle. After an hour of wrestling, Rostam pronounced the name of God and lifted Aržang up in the air and with great force threw him down. Then he sat upon the demon’s chest, took hold of his chin with one hand, and the back of his head with the other, and yanked his head off like the head of a sparrow. When the demons saw this, they began to run away, but Rostam chased them and killed nearly one hundred of them. Then he came back, picked up Aržang’s head and threw it in front of Ōlād. Ōlād praised him and said, “Truly, God has given you great power.” He was not really impressed with Rostam until that point, but when he saw what happened to Aržang he knew that Rostam could do anything.

Rostam asked him, “Where is the well in which Kāvus is kept?” Ōlād said, “It is on top of this mountain here. There are forty fierce demons who guard it, and its mouth is covered by a boulder that requires forty demons to move it.” Rostam dismounted and climbed the mountain. Three demons escaped and told those forty demons that the human who yanked off the head of Aržang was coming. Rostam appeared while the demons were still discussing the matter.⁵¹ He attacked the demons and killed twenty-four of them, and the rest ran away. Then Rostam came to the well and threw that huge boulder some ten paces away. Putting his head in the well, he saluted king Kāvus. As soon as Kāvus heard Rostam’s voice, he was rejuvenated. Rostam fastened his lasso on the mouth of the well and went down. The [king and Rostam] embraced one another. The king said, “O hero! These sorcerers have blinded our eyes by their magic.” Rostam asked, “What is the cure for your blindness?” Kāvus said, “O brother! If the blood of the White Demon’s heart is dropped into our eyes, we will regain our sight.” Rostam came out of the well and mounted Raxš. He set out for the seventh trial, following Ōlād.

Concerning Rostam's Arrival at the Seventh Trial, His Killing of the White Demon and Bringing of the Blood of His Heart, and Dropping It in the Eyes of Kaykāvus and the Heroes, and His Bringing the Heroes out of the Well and His Coming to Iran along with the Heroes, It Says

Then he asked Ōlād, "Where is the cave of the White Demon?" Ōlād said, "It is a hundred parasangs distant from here to the residence of the White Demon. Seven mountains lie between here and there. Many demons reside on each mountain, and there is much by way of wondrous beings, such as the dog-headed people, the strap-legged ones, and the carpet-eared creatures on these mountains. Two days' battle will be fought on each mountain.⁵² Come nighttime, we should pass through these mountains." Rostam accepted his proposal [of passing through at night?] and after three days they came to a mountain at the foot of which they found a large park.⁵³ Ōlād said, "This park belongs to the White Demon, and the smoke that you see rising from the mountain [top] is the demon's breath. Perhaps he is sleeping, because the White Demon sleeps seven days and is awake seven days." Rostam tied Ōlād to a tree and said, "I will let out three yells. The first when I see the demon, the second when I engage him in combat, and the third when I kill him. If you don't hear my third yell, assume that the demon has killed me. You mount Raxš and go to Kāvus and tell him what happened. Then whatever he does, he does."⁵⁴ Then Rostam surrendered himself to God, fastened his belt, and, having grabbed hold of the *Narimani* blade, stepped into the park, where he killed a great many demons. Having seen his strength, the demons escaped and informed Qahqahe of his coming. As soon as [Qahqahe] reached Rostam, he swung his cudgel at Rostam's head, but Rostam grabbed his wrist, yanked the cudgel out of his hand, and struck him hard on the head. Qahqahe passed out and fell to the ground, and the other demons flew into the sky and escaped.

Anyway, Rostam came to the entrance of the White Demon's cave. It sounded to him as if a hundred trumpets were being blown in that cave. It was the noise of the demon's breathing, of course. Rostam said, "*besmellāh-e rahmān-e rahīm*,"⁵⁵ and entered the cave. Several demons were standing at the mouth of the cave. Rostam killed all of them, and went in. He found a huge afreet 250 cubits long sleeping there. It had branched horns and was white as milk from head to toe, with colorful spots on its white body. Rostam was amazed by it, and wondered how best to deal with it. At first he was going to kill it while it slept, but thought to himself, "Having come alone to Māzandarān, and having accomplished so many difficult tasks, do you want to ruin it all? What would you say if the king asks you how you killed the demon? If I say⁵⁶ that I killed him in his sleep, I will be dishonored among the heroes; and if I say that I woke him up before killing him, then I will have lied. It is best to wake him up." So he humbly prayed to God and, putting his trust in God, walked to the demon's feet and let out a yell, the sound of which reached Ōlād. The demon kept on sleeping. [Rostam pulled out his dagger, and] stuck it to the hilt in the sole of the demon's foot. That bastard bent his knee and murmured, "These flies don't let me sleep." Rostam prayed to God: "O most merciful, I am surely lost if you

don't protect me." He then let out a yell that woke up the demon and freaked him out of his mind. As soon as the demon saw Rostam, he reached for his cudgel with the ten millstones on it, and threw it at the hero. But Rostam cut the thing in the air with his sword. Anyway, he threw it at Rostam, but Rostam blocked it with his shield.⁵⁷ He then lifted a boulder that weighed 1000 maunds and threw it at Rostam, who blocked it with his shield again, but pain spread through his body. He then cut off the demon's leg with his *Narimani* blade, and the demon fell like an aged plane tree. The demon picked up both of his legs and threw them at Rostam,⁵⁸ but Rostam hid behind his shield, though the force of the demon's throw drove him back several paces. He rushed back [at the demon], grabbed him by the throat, and the two began to fight again. The fight was fierce and the demon was tearing chunks of flesh from Rostam's body, and Rostam was at his wits' end. The demon was also hurt. He said to himself, "If I survive the fight with this human, I will no doubt live a long life."⁵⁹ Then Rostam invoked the name of God, lifted the demon, and threw him down. He drew his *Tahmurasi* dagger and ripped the demon's side open. Then he gave that liver to Ōlād, mounted Raxš, and set out for Kāvus's prison.

They got to Kāvus's prison after three days. Rostam climbed down the well and gave the good tiding to the heroes, saying, "I've brought the heart and liver of the White Demon." The heroes were overjoyed, and each put a little of the White Demon's blood in his eye, and regained his sight immediately (motif D1505.14, cf. D1505.19). As soon as Kaykāvus saw Rostam, he got up and embraced him, and said, "Thank God I have the opportunity to see you again." The heroes all kissed Rostam's hands, and Rostam freed them from bondage. They got out of the well and went into Aržang's garden. Then Rostam seated Kāvus on Aržang's throne and the other heroes also sat down according to their ranks. Then Rostam said, "O king, you must write a letter to the king of Māzandarān." They called a scribe and wrote [the following] to the king of Māzandarān: "Be advised, O king of Māzandarān, that in spite of all of your dishonorable deeds you may still have one last chance to show obedience to King Kāvus. If you don't, I will send the same Rostam, son of Zāl, who came to Māzandarān alone and ripped Aržang's head off his body and cut out the liver of the White Demon, to devastate your country and kill you. That's all."

The text continues with an account of the war of Māzandarān.

NOTES

1. For a brief discussion of the views that assign primacy to one or the other of these two sets of adventures, see NÖLDEKE 1979, 72–73. All references to the text of the *Shāhnāma* are taken from KHALEGI-MOTLAGH's ongoing edition of the *Shahnameh* (1988), the best available critical edition of the poem. Verses are cited according to Wolff's system, i.e., as numbered serially from the beginning of a titled reign or episode. Thus "Kaykāvus, 375" means verse (i.e., line, or couplet) 375 of the kingship of Kaykāvus. This system makes it easier to locate verses in different editions of the epic by eliminating reference to volume and page numbers that differ in various editions.

2. Aside from Rostam's life, trials occur in the adventures of Garšāsp, Sām, Farāmarz,

Borzu, and even Goštāsp. In Goštāsp's case, however, the sequential hardships that he experiences are not specifically called *xān*, "trial."

3. Aside from Rostam and Esfandiyār's trials, a number of other Shāhnāma episodes (e.g., Rostam's fight with the demon Akvān, the story of Bižan and Maniža, and the story of Rostam and Sohrāb) have been called "independent" tales, grafted onto the epic's narrative with varying degrees of success. NÖLDEKE, for instance, suggests that these tales did not exist in the poet's prose archetype, and allows that Ferdawsi adopted them from "some other minor books of wisdom" (1979, 66). It is a testament to his careful scholarship that he does not jump the gun in order to claim that Ferdawsi took these stories from oral tradition, but points out that the Shāhnāma is taken entirely from a written literary tradition (67). Where he is mistaken as far as our present discussion is concerned is his claim that "the different parts of the huge poem are partly only loosely connected with each other" (7). I consider none of the Shāhnāma stories independent, and have already published evidence of their intricate relationship with the narrative flow of the epic as a whole (OMIDSALAR 1983; 1987; 1990).

4. The rhetorical strategy that informs the reader of the nature of what is to follow from the wording of the introduction to a text is called *barā'at-e estehlāl* in traditional Arabic and Persian scholarship. Many classical poets as well as authors of non-poetic treatises employed this device routinely. Often when the introduction to a classical Persian or Arabic book is the only part of it that has survived, one can guess what the extinct tome was about by analyzing the wording of its extant introduction. For instance, an introduction that contains sentences that praise God as the creator of the world, and the architect of the mountains, rivers, forests, and ravines, and which goes on to exalt his name as the one who organized countries and peoples of the world in a certain way, was most likely a geographical text. Naturally medical expositions would have introductions with wording that praises God as the one who planned and arranged the marvelous structure that is the human body and its humors.

5. Kāvus is the shorter form of the name Kaykāvus, and is often employed as such in the Shāhnāma narrative.

6. Although I cannot state this with certainty, as far as I know, the episode has not been called a "trial" in the manuscript tradition of the Shāhnāma at all. Naturally, I can only speak for those manuscripts that I have consulted over the years, not the epic's entire tradition that easily surpasses 1000 codices (see KHIALEGHII-MOTLAGH 1988- Vol.1, p. 41, note 11).

7. See KHIALEGHII-MOTLAGH 1988- Vol. 1, p. 21, note 8; p. 22, note 16; p. 23, note 12; p. 26, note 6; p. 29, note 16; p. 31, note 19; p. 37, note 20.

8. *Jahān pahlavān* literally means "world hero," but practically conveys the idea of the chief hero of the Iranian court. He is a man who combines great physical prowess with moral and political authority. Before Zāl, his father Sām held the office that Rostam assumed during the life of his father.

9. NÖLDEKE (1979, 17 and note 4 on that page) correctly translates *Zāl-e zarr* as "hoary old man" on irrefutable etymological grounds.

10. Kayqobād is Kaykāvus's father. Jam and Zahhāk are two great rulers, both of whom were endowed with magical powers.

11. Zāl is explicit on this point, as he refers to Kaykāvus by saying: *ke ān kas ke urā nafar-sud sāl*, "he whom the passage of time has not withered."

12. Literally, "to saunter into hell."

13. Often the sexual aspects of the father-son combat in Oedipal narratives are extremely well disguised. In the case of Rostam's fight with the White Demon, the sexual content is disguised in the following manner: Although a maternal character is not overtly present in the story, the fact that the demon is sleeping in a cave when Rostam encounters him may symbolize the sleeping father. The sleeping father in turn implies the father who sleeps with the

mother, and the cave may represent the displaced maternal genitals. Naturally, in such a model, Rostam's amputation of the Demon's leg during their fight might be interpreted as the son's castration of his father. But regardless of whether one chooses to introduce sexual elements into the analysis or not, the symbolic father-son rivalry, and the victory of the son over the father in this narrative, may not easily be dismissed.

14. There is only one other instance of a meeting between a human and a dragon where speaking is even mentioned. However, in that scene, namely the encounter between the sorcerer king Fereydun and his sons, the dragon does not utter a word. It is the youngest of the sons who addresses the beast. Moreover, the dragon is not really an animal, but the king who has transformed himself into a dragon in order to test his sons.

15. Nayram is a short form of Narimān, who was Rostam's ancestor.

16. In fact the very next story in the Shāhnāma, namely the episode of the War of Hāmāvarān, is the narrative of Kaykāvus's marriage. At the end of that story the king officially appoints Rostam to the office of the *jahān pahlavān* (ln.340). In contrast to his Māzandarān campaign, Kaykāvus's war against Hāmāvarān is well justified.

17. Though I have translated the hemistich literally, the king means to say that the crown depends on Rostam for its glory. That is, the expression "royal seal and the crown" denotes the institution of kingship here.

18. Professor Robert Goldman told me years ago that as a sign of their volunteering for a mission, the heroes of the Mahābhārata make the following gesture: they raise one arm and strike their armpit or side fiercely with their hand, thus making a great noise.

19. Although three volumes of Iranian oral epic tales have been published, not a single story in this published corpus is in verse. This fact, taken together with the total absence of reference to verse oral epics in classical Persian sources should be enough to discredit pseudo-comparative claims that seek to connect the Iranian national epic with a "poetic oral tradition" in song.

20. I translate the narrative as literally as possible so long as my literalism does not impede understanding. All repetitions and "awkward" expressions are in the original.

21. The term used by Rostam here is the Persian rendition of the Arabic formula *enšallā*, regardless of the fact that Rostam was not a Muslim. S. SOROUDI (1980) has already discussed the conversion of the Iranian National hero to Islam in Persian folklore.

22. I have rendered *narra div*, which literally means "male demon," into "fierce demon" because the word *narra* often expresses the idea of fierceness in Persian literary and folk traditions.

23. This version of the story was narrated by a 27-year-old tradesman from the township of Mārān Kalāta, near the city of Gorgān in Māzandarān. The version was collected in the winter of 1353/1975.

24. What I have translated as "ghoul" is in fact *gūl-e biyābāni* "desert ghouls" in Persian. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica* under *gūl*.

25. *Simorgh* is a mythical bird that is closely associated with Rostam's family. She raised Rostam's father Zāl (Motif B535: Animal nurse) and helped the hero's family out of two serious difficulties. Her sudden appearance in this scene is characteristic of the oral versions of epic tales that in their presentation tend to be quite fluid. These tales tend to suddenly introduce new or even contradictory characters in their narratives. In contrast, the narrative of the literary Shāhnāma takes meticulous care to avoid contradictions.

26. Narrated by a 20-year-old student from the city of Rezvānšahr, in Tavāleš, this version was collected in the spring of 1354/1976.

27. Related by a 39-year-old tradesman from Velmarz, near Šahsavār. The story was collected in the spring of 1354/1976.

28. This folktale, which normally occurs with animals for its protagonists, has found a home in the Rostam saga. It is really Tale Type 1310, "Drowning the crayfish as punishment; eel, crab, turtle, etc. express fear of water and are thrown in." It is related to Type 1634E* "Throwing the thief over the fence," in which the thief who is surprised while stealing says: do your worst, only don't throw me over the fence. Naturally, when he is thrown over the fence, he escapes. See also the bibliography pertaining to motifs K584, K581-K581.4. The story of Rostam's deceiving the demon Akvān is clearly based on this tale type.

29. Related by a 49-year-old government employee from Dimamil, near Yāsuj, in the spring of 1354/1976.

30. For a discussion of *naqqāli*, see OMIDSALAR and OMIDSALAR 1999.

31. The codex, which is dated 1292/1875, is 446 pages and is written in different hands (for a brief description of the manuscript see AFSHARI and MADAYENI 1998, xx–xxiv).

32. This is one of the traditional formulae with which the professional *naqqāl* may open a storytelling session.

33. The text reads *sāzanda* instead of *navāzanda*, which is the correct word for musician. *Naqqāl* scrolls are notorious for grammatical and other errors, some of which have been pointed out by the editors of this scroll in the footnotes and in their introduction (AFSHARI and MADAYENI 1998, xxxiv–xxxv, 96, 107, 206, 305, etc). There is virtually no page that is devoid of errors from a formal point of view. The language of the professional storyteller, however, has its own rules and charm, and should not be judged by formal literary standards.

34. The Persian text reads: *jā-ye latif o bā safū'ist, ke dar ru-ye maskan jā'i bā ān xubi ostādān tasavvor naqarda and*, which is peculiar in terms of syntax and vocabulary. Henceforth I will provide transliterations of the actual reading of the text whenever this appears to be formally peculiar.

35. This is a folk rendition of the name of this hero. The literary form of this name in the *Shāhnāma* is *Zanga-ye šāvarān*.

36. That the king and his entourage are imprisoned in the well has not been mentioned in the story before this point. This is the type of inconsistency which, although typical of oral epic narratives in Iran, is entirely lacking in the *Shāhnāma*.

37. Literally: *zāl bar ham xord*, perhaps a contraction of the sentence: *hāl-e Zāl bar ham xord*, which could conceivably mean "Zāl got agitated."

38. Text: *pas befarmud tā raxš rā dar zir-e zin-e xadang o gāšīya-ye pust-e palang dar āvarand*. Note the internal rhyme (called *saj'* in Arabic prosody) *xadang/palang*. Such instances of ornate rhymed prose in *naqqāl's* discourse do not, of course, testify to a "poetic oral tradition" at work in this genre.

39. Text: *šoru' be sorud-e haqqāni xāndan kard*.

40. Text: *rasidan-e rostam be xun-e doyyom va koštan-e Raxš šir-rā bedin dastur guyad*.

41. Text: *tajfā ru'i be nazar dar āvord ke raxš košta bud*.

42. Rostam does not pass through fire in this narrative, though this is what the text reads (*gozaštan-e az ātaš*).

43. Text: *tešnegi bar ān gālabā kard*, where formal Persian requires the use of the pronoun *u*, "him," instead of *ān*, "it."

44. Text: *jādu esmi xānd va nāpadid šod*, literally, "the sorcerer recited a name, and disappeared." The reference to the "name" might be influenced by the belief in the magical powers of the hidden name of God, which appears in many traditional and religious narratives in the Middle East.

45. Note that Ōlād has not asked for his life to be spared. However, Rostam's statement presupposes that the captive has made such a request. This is another example of narrative inconsistency in the *naqqāli* versions of the *Shāhnāma*.

46. Text: *ey šahriyār*.

47. This too is typical of oral narration. Nothing in Ōlād's discourse prior to this point justifies the sudden reference to what lies ahead of Rostam.

48. An awkward way of saying that the snakes in that mountain were worse than dragons.

49. Literally: "God is the greatest," the traditional battle cry of Muslims. Rostam, who is not a Muslim in the literary heroic tradition, is completely Islamicized in the folk tradition, and often acts or speaks as a devout Muslim would. See SOROUDI 1980.

50. The word *xarčang* literally means "crab," and is probably used as the name of Aržang's brother because the two words rhyme.

51. Text: *išān dar in soxan budand ke utāqa-ye* [written, 'ut'qh] *par-e simorǧ ke be qamar-e xod band qarde bud nemudār šod*. The word *qamar*, "belt," is not legible in the manuscript, and I doubt the reading "*utāqeh*" proposed by the editors. My translation is thus approximate.

52. Rostam fights no battles here, which makes the narrative inconsistent once again.

53. The word translated as "park" is *čāhār bāḡ*. This translation is consistent with the sense of the word at the time when the scroll was compiled.

54. It is not clear how poor Ōlād, who was tied to a tree, was supposed to mount Raxš.

55. This is a Persianized folk version of the traditional (Arabic) Muslim formula meaning "in the name of God the merciful, the beneficent."

56. The sudden change from the third to first person is in the original. Such changes of pronoun are also typical of oral narration in Persian.

57. There must be a lacuna here. It is not clear *what* the demon next throws at the hero, which the latter intercepts with his shield. The editors, who are ordinarily careful to footnote the anomalies of their text, do not explain the situation. I thus consider it likely that the error crept into the text at the time of printing.

58. This sentence leads me to believe that the lacuna above may have concerned a description of how Rostam amputated the first one of the demon's two legs.

59. That is to say: If I survive this fight, I'll survive anything.

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