The Impact of Safavid Shia Rulers' Thought And Insight on Shahnama Manusciption

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ABSTRACT

The Safavid government used Shia belief as a tool for obtaining their political goals. Having appreciation for epic poems, heroic myths and panegyrics, policymakers during Safavid had tremendous impact on illustrated manuscripts. Safavid Empire are testimonies of ruler's thoughts and beliefs. The dominant hypothesis of the current study is that Safavid era Shahnamas were inspired by both Shia and Sunni schools of thoughts. The impact of these two perspectives is vividly seen in their poems. The study intends to make a comparative analysis of poems in Shahnamas produced and illustrated in Shia and Sunni territories. Findings show that although Safavid rulers were Shia, there are varied perspectives when it comes to different versions of Shahnama. Accordingly, the Shahnamas written or illustrated in Shia’s territory praise the first Shia Imam and fourteen innocent members of the prophetic household. The present study makes a comparative analysis of poems of three Shahnamas being preserved in the Golestan Palace Museum.

INTRODUCTION

A survey of manuscripts that have combined components provides complementary information around them. The strategy is adopted from one or several comparable traditions. A comparative analysis of contemporary samples, their creativity qualities, undeniable points, forms and original essence or techniques leads to the proposed hypothesis.

During Safavids, Shia and Sunni fought many political and religious wars because of the government’s interest in the Shia religion. Those conflicts have been widely cited in books such as "Shia in India" by Mashayekh Fereydouni, "Rashidi History" by Mirza Heydar, "Sharaf Nameh" by Sharaf khan Badlisi and "Habib al Seir" by Mourkhani. Vasefi has also mentioned wars between Safavid and Sheybani dynasty in Herat in Khorasan region. After the occupation of Herat by the Safavid, a large number of artists escaped to other cities like Masghan (Vasefi, 1350: 53).

Safavid rulers had direct supervision on the production of artistic phenomena in order to promote their political, social, cultural and religious goals hence; emphasis on Shia beliefs was more than before. The impact of this trend can be seen in different artistic works produced during the Safavid era. For instance, Shah Ismai I prohibited the illustration of Jami's poems and Naghshbandi sect’s beliefs. Marya Simpson in her book "Poetry, Painting & Patronage Illustrations” has explained in details about the hatred of the Safavid ruler towards other sects [1].

Common and different points in the poems written in various Shahnama during Safavid represent those different attitudes. It is worth to mention that the great Iranian epic was written by a poet with Shia belief at the time the number of Shia followers was at its lowest in Iran. Ferdowsi has praised his religion recklessly in his poems and worshiped the household of Prophet Mohammad.

The current paper deals with the main question as if there is any Shahnama parallel to Sunni thought in the Safavid dynasty. To find an answer, and to distinguish differences in Shai and Sunni attitude, the author has tried to study different Shahnama belonged to Safavid dynasty and are kept in the Golestan palace and other museums around the world.
Supplemental Poems In Ferdowsi’s Shahnama:

The great Iranian epic poet Ferdowsi versified Shahnama to keep the Persian language alive. Ferdowsi was a Shia poet who has obviously declared his ideas in this eternal work.

The first garble that happened quickly to this work was in its preface “the praise of Prophet Mohammad”. Ferdowsi has indicated his sincerity to Prophet Mohammad’s progeny. Sunni readers, however, inserted verses praising Prophet’s companions Abu Bakr, Omar and Osman in the text and then the entire verses became the battlefield of Shia and Sunni (Khaleghi Motlagh, 1372:129).

What Ferdowsi himself versified to praise the religion and belief has been initiated from the verse 8:

What said the God of inspiration and revelation?
God of imperativeness and God of prohibition
I’m the house and Ali is the door
Of course the prophet quoted this
Hereby I certify it’s his quotation
So to speak, I’m hearing his voice now
God created this world like a sea
That wind makes waves in this sea
A lot of ships have been fully decorated
In the most beautiful way
Mohammad has been in with Ali
The very progeny
If you want to have a good room in other world
Try to be close to Mohammad and Ali
If you don’t like these words it’s my fault
But this is my belief and way
I was created with this idea and live with it
You consider me a true follower of Ali
You should be careful not to waste the life
If you have righteous companions
You should be a righteous too
Due to their company and engagement

(Ferdowsi’s Shahnama, edited by Khaleghi Motlagh, 1366)

Khaleghi Motlagh believes that many couplets were added to this verse over the passage of time and that the most controversial one is a quatrain which was added before the verse 8:

That sun after prophet
Hasn’t shine on anybody better than Abubakr
Omar clarified Islam
And decorated it like this universe
After both of them Osman was
The symbol of modesty and man of religion
Ali was the forth follower of prophet
That prophet has praised him well

(Khaleghi Motlagh, 1369:195-206)

Khaleghi Motlagh has described the reason behind additional verses as follows: 8th and 9th verses are translations of the quotation of Prophet “I’m the home of science and Ali is the door”. He believes that the interval between the two verses has been artificial and the above quatrain was inserted later on.

Ferdowsi has brought another instance to emphasize on his interest to Prophet Mohammad and his progeny. After the city of science, he talks about seas and seven hundred ships which denote different religions and types of Islam. Then poet says: among seven hundred ships, one ship is bigger and more beautiful and that is the one which Mohammad and Ali are in. Everybody who desires for Heaven should be close to this ship and be faithful to them. So is it possible that the only way of survival is entering to Ali’s ship and then the poet praises Abu Bakr, Omar and Osman in a quatrain but once again emphasizes the righteous have been in the Shiite ship.

Motlagh believes that existing quatrain has disordered the whole verses and ideas declared there violate the ideas in the rest of verses (Khaleghi Motlagh, 1368:675-690).

The Arabic word meaning “then” has never been used in this work and all concepts related to this are Persian words which are repeated thousand times. Again, the Arabic words for “prophet” are used twice whereas Ferdowsi has used just the Persian words (Khaleghi Motlagh, 1366:1828).

Among 15 manuscripts of Ferdowsi, this quatrain is lacking in the Egypt manuscript numbered 741, London numbered 891 and Istanbul numbered 903.
Absence of the quatrain in the aforementioned works has a great importance because these are few copies that don’t have many supplemental verses (Matini, 1350:249).


The most debatable aspect regarding the aforementioned quatrain in some Shahnama of the Safavid era is that how it was ignored during the rule which strictly and fanatically adhered to Shiite social, religious, cultural and artistic affairs.

Safavid-Era Shahnama:

An investigation of the Safavid era Shahnama indicates that some of them don’t have quatrains praising Sunni leaders and some have quatrains with minor changes. Interestingly, the two works kept in Golestan Palace (No. 2250 and 1946) which was produced in Isfahan in 11th century lack quatrain praising Omar, Osman and Abu Bakr (Pics. 1 & 2).

Fig. 1: Ferdousi shahnama, Golestan Palace (No 2250) Esfahan school

Fig. 2: Ferdousi Shanama, Golestan Palace (property No 1946), Esfahan school
Verses in Shahnama 2250 at Golestan Palace are as follows:
What said the God of inspiration and revelation
God of imperativeness and God of prohibition
I’m the house and Ali is the door
Of course the prophet quoted this
Hereby I certify it’s his quotation
So to speak I’m hearing his voice now
Ali revealed Islam
World became as spring
I don’t care his foes
I’m advised not to associate them
I’m follower of Mohammed’s households
Adorer of Prophet Mohammad
(Shahnama, No. 2250, Golestan Palace)

Verses of Shahnama (No. 1946) adore Prophet Mohammad as follows:
What said the God of inspiration and revelation?
God of imperativeness and God of prohibition
Sun hasn’t shined on anybody after Prophet
But Ali
Ali revealed Islam
World became as spring
So love and follow both of them
The symbol of modesty and man of religion
Ali was forth and Fatema’s husband
That Prophet has fully praised him
(Shahnama, No. 1946, Golestan Palace)

Both versions indicate that their supporter and writer believed Prophet’s progeny was Shia hence; they changed this part of verse based on their own tastes. Hiring Arabic words was not adapted with ordering and structuring the Persian or the writing style of Ferdowsi. But Shahnama No. 2239 of Golestan Palace which is famous as Rashida Shahnama has a quatrain praising Omar, Osman, Abu Bakr and Ali (Pic. 3).

Fig. 3: Shanama,Golestan Palace No 2239 (Rashida Shanama) Golestan Palace,Tehran, Iran.
Sun hasn’t shined on anybody after Prophet
Better than Abu Bakr
Omar revealed Islam
World became as spring
Select Osman after both of them
The symbol of modesty and man of religion
Ali was forth and Fatima’s husband
That Prophet has fully praised him
(Shahnama, No. 2239, Golestan Palace)

Concerning this significant issue, it can be concluded that although this manuscript belongs to 11th century which was the reign of Shiite kings, it could remain hidden from their strict monitoring and the very verses are in adoring of Sunni leaders.

Rashida Shahnama in Golestan Palace and Shahnama of Winsor Palace famously known as Gharcheghay Khan Shahnama were produced in Mashhad and according to Robinson et al were sent to Shah Abbas II as a gift [3].

Existing quatrain praising Sunnite leaders in Shahnama of the Golestan Palace and an investigation carried out by researchers such as Robinson et al. show that central Safavid government that emphasized on Shiite principles had no supervision and role in preparing and producing the very books.

Based on the idea of Najib Mayel as well as by virtue of sources such as in “Habib-al-Seir” by Khandamir and “Sharaf Nameh” by Sharaf-aldin Badlisi, Safavi era Shahnamas having quatrain probably prepared and produced under the influence of Shibanian Sunnite principles (Mayel Heravi, 1380:181).

Most precious and beautiful manuscripts were prepared and illustrated in the Royal Workshop of Isfahan. Supervision of Shiite followers and representatives of Safavid government were by far stricter there than other local places and cities.

Charles Melville has mentioned differences between Shahnamas which were prepared and produced under the impression of Shiite thoughts in “Epic of Iranian Kings”. In this book, he illustrates primary drafts of “Progeny Ship” from Tahmasb’s Shahnama belonging to the Safavid School in Tabriz and quatrain praising Omar, Osman and Abu Bakr have been checked out (Pic. 4) [4].

![Household ship, pre design for Shah Tahmaseb Shanama, Tabriz 932 (National Library, England)](image)

Melville explains that quatrains were omitted or changed in the books that were ordered by Shiite. Based on Melville’s assertion (Pic.4), there is a simplified image of “Progeny Ship” that has been introduced as the
primary draft ten years before implementing the main illustration and has been kept as a proof in the National Library of England (Pic.5).

Surveys show that Shahnama containing quatrains that had been prepared and produced in Isfahan (where the central government had a strict supervision) were far from Safavid Shiite thoughts. It seems that those works were prepared and printed under the impression of Sunni principles and Royal Workshop or Safavid governors had no supervision on them.

Conclusion:
The Safavid government put emphasis on Shiite principles as uniting factors of all the Iranian sects. However, growing conflict between Shia and Sunni at that point of time had an enormous impact on artistic works, too. Different version of Shahnama often indicates those conflicts more than any other works of the time. In other words, the verse adoring Prophet Mohammad in the introduction of the book has been the battlefield of Shia and Sunni authors.

In Shahnamas, the quatrains praising Omar, Osman, Abu Bakr and Ali who are called “four companions”, show that their client, supporter and writer must have been from the Sunni faith hence; these works probably prepared and illustrated in territories under the control of Sunnis.

The works prepared by followers of Ali and Progeny such as Tahmasb’s Shahnama, Shahnama numbered 2250, Shahnama 1946 preserved at Golestan Palace don’t have such quatrains and only Prophet Mohammad has been praised.

The above discussion clarifies that the Isfahan workshops hat were under the direct supervision of the Safavid rulers and the works prepared or illustrated are based on Shiite principles.

REFERENCES