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# ***The Most Important Performing Arts Arisen from Shahnameh of Ferdowsi: Shahnameh-khani and Naqqali of Shahnameh***<sup>\*</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi is the Iranian national epic, which reflects the history, cultural values, sense of nationhood, and ancient religions of Persia by the only use of Persian pure words in the age of Arabic influence on the literature and science language. The footprint of this voluminous masterpiece has been seen in the different kinds of arts since its compilation and up to now; one of them is the penetration of *Shahnameh*'s verses in the art of storytelling that resulted in the formation of two types of performing arts: "*Shahnameh-khani*—singing the exact verses of *Shahnameh* from memory or from a book without any manipulation—and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*—narrating the stories of *Shahnameh* with special tone, feelings, expression, gestures, and movements." These two forms of performing art have obvious differences but occasionally have been applied incorrectly. *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* have had a prominent position in Persia, and there is a lot of evidence, such as Iranologists' statements, travelers' reports, and Iranian kings' considerations, that clarifies their importance. Various formats and accompanied elements depend on the political policies of governments, time period, and geographical regions, which have led to creating four basic types of these two performing arts whose main differences are in the theme of the poems, accompaniment or non-accompaniment of music, and expression of the narrators and singers.

**KEY WORDS** *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi; Storytelling; *Shahnameh-khani*; *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*; Storyteller

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The *Shahnameh*,<sup>1</sup> or the “Epic of Kings,” is an epic poem consisting of nearly 60,000 verses written in a thirty-year effort (ca. 977–1010 AD) of the Persian poet Hakim Abul-Qasem Ferdowsi Tousi<sup>2</sup> and narrating Persia’s history from the formation of the world until the advent of Islam in the 7th century AD. It includes three sections<sup>3</sup>: mythical, heroic, and historical. The mythical section of *Shahnameh* starts after an introduction in commendation of God and prophet, and narrates the stories of Keyumars—the first man—and Siyamak, Hushang, Tahmuras, Jamshid, Zahhak, Kaveh, Fereydun, and Manuchehr. This section composes nearly four percent of *Shahnameh* (around 2,100 verses) and describes events with simplicity and swiftness. The heroic section covers almost two-thirds of *Shahnameh* and describes stories such as the romance of Zal and Rudaba, the seven stages of Rustam, the tragedy of Rustam and Sohrab, the tale of Siyavash and Sudaba, the tale of Rustam and Akvan Div, the romance of Bizhan and Manizheh, and the war of Rustam with Afrasiyab. It is remarkable that the tragedy of Rustam and Sohrab from this section is one of the most influential stories of the *Shahnameh*, showing the power of Ferdowsi in the art of storytelling, and is one of the most moving tales in the literature of the world. The third section—i.e., the historical section—takes a succinct look at the Arsacid dynasty, narrates the history of Sassanid with a good deal of accuracy, and at the end describes the fall of the Sassanids and the Arab conquest of Persia.

The two most important features of the *Shahnameh* are, first, the only use of Persian pure words in the age of Arabic influence on the literature and science language, which refers to Ferdowsi’s statement “Persian language is revived by this work” and, second, the reflection of Persia’s history, cultural values, sense of nationhood, and ancient religions. These are definitely the main reasons that Diya' ad-Din Ibn al-Athir, the most famous aesthetic and stylistic critic in Arabian literature, calls the *Shahnameh* the Persian Quran, though this title is not common among the Persian people but indicates the importance of this voluminous masterpiece.

The considerable points about the *Shahnameh* are the common use of this comprehensive book by scientists and researchers of different fields such as historians, astronomers, musicians, and poets. For example, the reflection of *Shahnameh* is obvious in the poems of famous poets such as Anvari, Asadi Tousi, Masud Sa'ad Salman, Sanai, Nizami Ganjavi, Attar, Sa’adi, and Jami; on the other hand, the penetration of *Shahnameh* has been seen in numerous artistic fields such as music, painting, calligraphy, storytelling, and poetry since its compilation up to now. This paper is focused on the penetration of *Shahnameh* in the art of storytelling, which has resulted in the creation of two types of performing arts, namely *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*.

The rest of the paper is organized in the following way. Discussion of *Shahnameh-khani*, *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*, and their difference; the history of storytelling, “the inheritance of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*”; and the historical background of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* will be given in the second, third, and fourth sections. The fifth and sixth sections represent the importance of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*, and the different types of these two forms of performing art.

### **SHAHNAMEH-KHANI, NAQQALI OF SHAHNAMEH, AND THEIR DIFFERENCES**

The Persian word *Khani* in the literary composition of *Shahnameh-khani* means singing; this composition totally means singing the exact verses of *Shahnameh*—without any manipulation—from memory or from a book, with special customs that have changed through history; for instance, during the life of Ferdowsi it was accompanied by music, but in the Islamic governments with strict enforcement of Islamic rules, music was forbidden and this art was accompanied only by special intonations and articulations of expression.

*Naqqali* is a dramatic kind of storytelling, and a *Naqqal*<sup>4</sup> is a person who narrates the stories with special tone, feelings, expression, gestures, and movements. In some cases, *Naqqals* accompany their performances with musical instruments and painted scrolls; also, a *Naqqal* plays several roles during a performance. A professional *Naqqal* needs to be aware of local cultural expressions, languages and dialects, traditional music, cultural values, and the history of Persia; he has to have a considerable talent, retentive memory, sense of nationhood, ability to improvise, and ability to captivate his audiences. The art of *Naqqali* is divided into two categories; the first one narrates all kinds of stories, and the second one focuses only on narrating the epic and mythical stories of *Shahnameh* and is therefore referred to as *Naqqali of Shahnameh*.

There is another difference between these two types of performing arts from the historical and social view that allocates the art of *Shahnameh-khani* to the courts and official associations, which may be due to the presence of poets, literati, and scholars in these societies. In contrast, the *Naqqali of Shahnameh* is allocated to people who don't have sufficient knowledge of complicated words for understanding the verses of *Shahnameh*; therefore, these persons are interested in the light narration of *Shahnameh*. Here, we have to remark that this difference is not absolute and that some cases of exception have existed.

All the mentioned explanations show that *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali of Shahnameh* are two separated forms of performing art with obvious differences, but unfortunately, these two have occasionally been applied incorrectly by Persian people.

### **HISTORY OF STORYTELLING: THE INHERITANCE OF SHAHNAMEH-KHANI AND NAQQALI OF SHAHNAMEH**

In surveying the historical roots of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali of Shahnameh*, in this section, we lead into the storytelling and its history, in which we will provide a succinct view of the historical evolution of storytelling from the initial generation of humans up to now.

The most primitive form of storytelling, in which the only goal of narrating the stories was to exchange experiences and knowledge of hunting wild animals, certainly existed among early humans, so the only aspect of this art was just to train, but by

passing the time, people also learned to enjoy these hunting stories; consequently, the entertainment aspect was added into the goal of storytelling.

Music and dance were added into the art of storytelling and played an important role while the entertainment aspect of this art was highlighted by humans. The dramatic form of storytelling was a more evolved style of this art in which storytellers played several roles simultaneously and accompanied the telling by dramatic movements and gestures. This form of storytelling has existed in various cultures and countries; for instance, *Gusans* or *Kusans* were the creative and performing artists, singers, instrumentalists, dancers, storytellers, and professional folk actors who lived in Persia before Islam and performed their art in ceremonies, celebrations, funerals, and rituals.

The joining of music, dance, and dramatic movements with the art of storytelling indicated that storytellers blended different kinds of arts and used them to entertain, capture, and stimulate the excitement and feelings of audiences. Unfortunately, after the Islamic conquest of Persia in the 7th century, religious restrictions were the main cause of the separation of music and dance from storytelling; consequently, the only kind of art that remained and accompanied the art of storytelling in this period was dramatic movement. On the other hand, the presence of Islamic limitations was the main cause of formation of the innovated branches of storytelling by talent and thoughtful storytellers. Nowadays, these new forms of performing art with domination of the religious content are called *Naqqali*; it is considerable that the first use of the words *Naqqal* and *Naqqali* was after the 13th century to represent the terms “storyteller” and “storytelling.”

### **THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF *SHAHNAMEH-KHANI* AND *NAQQALI* OF *SHAHNAMEH***

Referring to Julius von Mohl’s statements in the preface of his French translation of Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, we could deduce that *Shahnameh-khani* existed and were performed with special customs during Ferdowsi’s life; as soon as each story of the *Shahnameh* was written by *Ferdowsi*, it was sung for the king with accompanying music and dance, this form of storytelling being prevalent among Iranian people during that time. In addition, it is considerable that the characters of *Shahnameh* such as Sohrab, Rostam, and Esfandiar had existed among Iranians and were not innovated ones<sup>5</sup>; this fact was the core cause of Iranians’ enthusiasm in the use of the *Shahnameh*’s stories as a new source in the art of storytelling. Accordingly, it can be claimed that this conformance with Iranians’ minds assisted Ferdowsi in reaching his reputation as soon as the compilation of *Shahnameh* was complete and that the comprehensive content of this masterpiece was the main cause of its wide propagation in different situations, places, and regions.

We mentioned in the previous section that, after the Islamic conquest of Persia, because of the religious restrictions of this religion new to Persia, music and dance had been forbidden, so from this time, these two arts were also separated from *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*, so we have to attend that after the advent of Islam in

Persia, the footprints of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* have to be followed in the history of *Naqqali*.

After the separation of dance and music from *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* and *Shahnameh-khani*, *Naqqals* put excessive emphasis on their articulation, intonation, and rhythmic movement because these techniques helped them to transfer the heroism, epic, and national sense of *Shahnameh* to their audiences; we can thus strongly claim that if *Naqqals* didn't use these kinds of dramatic intonation and rhythmical movements, *Shahnameh* would not have penetrated to this extent into the hearts of Iranian and foreign people up to now and would not have had such influence in the history, culture, and art of Iran.

Referring to the evidence, we see that by attending the religious policies of the governments before the tenth century, *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* had a pale presence in the society. In the tenth century and later, however, with the establishment of the national and religious policies of the Safavid dynasty, *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* prevailed in the public gatherings such as teahouses, coffeehouses, family soirees, and others; the goal of the Safavid dynasty was to create national, epic, and heroic senses and spirits, to stimulate homeland sympathies of people, especially *Qizilbashes*—a military group of people whose key task was to participate in and fight in the wars.

The Qajar dynasty emerged after the Safavid, and in this period, religious policies didn't have a highlight effect in politics; therefore, *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* were propagated and regularly showed up as the major program of main teahouses of big cities.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF SHAHNAMEH-KHANI AND NAQQALI OF SHAHNAMEH**

*Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* have had a prominent position in Persia; there is a lot of evidence that clarifies their importance easily, such as Iranologists' statements, travelers' reports and Iranian kings' consideration, and trends to these two important arts, some of which will be mentioned here.

The most famous king of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Abbas I (1587–1629), had a lot of interest in the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi, and there were a lot of virtuosos and talented poets in his court whose duty was only to sing the *Shahnameh* for him. It is considerable that these persons had really good salaries. For instance, one of them was Abdolrazzagh Qazvini Khoshnevis. (The word *Khoshnevis* means “calligrapher” in Persian,<sup>6</sup> and as Abdolrazzagh Qazvini was a master of calligraphy, he was called Abdolrazzagh Qazvini Khoshnevis.) His annual salary was three hundred Tomans (Iranian currency). Another of these virtuosos was Molla Bikhoo di Gonabadi, who was very famous for singing the *Shahnameh*; his annual salary was forty Tomans.

The British ambassador of India in Persia during the Fat'h Ali Shah Qajar<sup>7</sup> period, Sir John Malcolm, has written a history book about his observations from Persia during

his mission in this country. He describes the entertainments of Persian people during the Qajar dynasty in some pages of this book. He stated, “Persian people have a lot of performing arts for entertaining, but these are not exactly the same as the European theaters; in fact, the Persian performance art is storytelling which depends on the type of story—amorously, tristful, heroic ... the storytellers have different body movements and gestures.” Malcolm’s statements in his book clarify the importance and propagation of *Shahnameh-Khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* during the Fat’h Ali Shah period.

Referring to Elwell Sutton’s explanation in his paper about the history of theater in Persia, Edward Scott Waring traveled to Shiraz in 1217 AH; he mentioned the art of *Shahnameh-khani* in his report and declared, “Listening to the *Shahnameh-khan* is one of the Iranian entertainments; *Shahnameh-khan* is the person who reads and describes different stories of *Shahnameh*—especially the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab<sup>8</sup>—for audiences with an expressive and fervent tone.”

At the advent of Islam, Nasr Ibn Hares—an Arab merchant who traveled to Persia during the time of the prophet Muhammad—had learned the stories of Rostam, Sohrab, and Esfandiar of *Shahnameh* from Persian people and narrated them for Arab people; it is remarkable that these stories really fascinated Arabs, but when the Prophet Muhammad felt the Arab people were distracted and kept away from learning the principles of Islam by these stories, he requested Nasr Ibn Hares to stop narrating them. There are too many examples showing the effect on the people of other countries of narrating *Shahnameh*; this indicates the high power of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* in impressing people of other countries, even though these two arts are strange for them.

#### **TYPES OF SHAHNAMEH-KHANI AND NAQQALI OF SHAHNAMEH AND THEIR DIFFERENCES**

There are four types of singing and narrating *Shahnameh* depending on the style, accompanied elements, theme, and expression of *Naqqals* and *Shahnameh-khans*: (1) coffeehouse style of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*, (2) *Zurkhaneh-i* style of *Shahnameh-khani*, (3) *Rajaz-khani* style of *Shahnameh-khani* or *Shahnameh-khani* in the form of *Rajaz*, and (4) chamber style of *Shahnameh-khani*. These types will be described in this section.

##### *The Types*

1. The coffeehouse style of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* was called *Shahnameh-khani-e-Qahveh-khaneh-i*<sup>9</sup> in Persian. In this style, the *Naqqal* (the person who narrates and sings the stories of *Shahnameh*) stands on a platform in the middle of the coffeehouse or in a place where audiences and customers can easily see him, and starts narrating an adapted story from the *Shahnameh* with his own choice or on the audience’s request. It is considerable that in different regions of Iran, *Naqqals* change the story of *Shahnameh* depending on their situation, time, artistry, aesthetics, and talent.

For instance, in some cases, *Naqqals* narrate stories of *Shahnameh* in their own language, such as Kurdish or Turkish. It is worth mentioning that there are some remaining manuscripts of *Shahnameh* in Kurdish from the Afshar period (1736–1750).

In this style of the *Shahnameh* narration, *Naqqals* have to follow the special techniques. For example, while narrating and singing the poems, they have to increase the excitement by walking, sitting and getting up, clapping their hands, moving their hands and feet, and moving a wand. Also, *Naqqals* have to attract audiences with their specific expressions, slogans, increase and decrease of tone, and word accenting. The other technique is repeating the important words and verbs; in writing if we want to emphasize a word, we use some techniques like underlining, highlighting, or putting in quotation marks, but *Naqqals* use a technique for emphasis in their narration by repeating words; for example, they repeat a verb (“go and go and go” or “come and come and come”). In fact, a professional *Naqqal* knows which part of the story is most exciting for audiences and how audiences are fascinated and charmed. Applying some pauses, prolonging, yelling, vibrating their tones, and suspending are the main techniques of *Naqqals* in this style. Indeed, *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* is a monologue theater, and the *Naqqal* has to play several roles in his performance.

2. To clarify the *Zurkhaneh-i* style of *Shahnameh-khani*, first, we have to explain what the *Zurkhaneh* and the goal of its foundation are. The word *Zurkhaneh*, literally meaning “house of strength,”<sup>10</sup> refers to a traditional gymnasium of urban Persia and neighboring countries, such as Azerbaijan, Iraq, Turkey, and Afghanistan. The Iranian national sport, *Varzesh-e Pahlavani*, or *Varzesh-e Bastani*, is practiced in this place with accompanying epic rhythms of a handheld drum<sup>11</sup> and songs from a singer.

The foundation of Iranian *Zurkhanehs* refers back to the Mongol invasions in the 13th century. The Mongols destroyed the major cities of Iran, such as Hamadan, Ardabil, Maragheh, Neyshabur, and Qazvin, and killed almost all of the inhabitants as punishment for resistance. The largest and most important cities of Iran, such as Ray and Tus, were destroyed. The Mongols also devastated many regions, especially Khorasan and Mazandaran, by destroying irrigation networks and croplands. During these invasions, books were thrown into rivers; the libraries, books, manuscripts, historical buildings, and hospitals were burned; and scientists and artists were killed by Mongol soldiers.

The extraordinary physical abilities of the Mongol soldiers were the main reason for the Iranian failure in these invasions, so to improve the physical abilities of men, the Iranian *Zurkhanehs* were established from that time. Moral atmosphere and athletic aggressiveness are the main features of these



traditional centers. We have to mention that physical exercising in *Zurkhanehs* is accompanied by singing the epic poems and rhythms. Some of these poems describe Iranian legendary kings, athletes, and gallants which are adapted from *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi.

Boosting moral championship and encouraging to manhood is the considerable goal of exercising with epic poems of *Shahnameh* and rhythms of handheld drums in *Zurkhanehs*; we have to pay attention that music has an important role in this style of *Shahnameh-khani*.

3. To describe the *Rajaz-khani* style of *Shahnameh-khani*, or *Shahnameh-khani* in the form of *Rajaz*, first, we have to explain what *Rajaz*, *Rajaz-khan*,<sup>12</sup> and *Rajaz-khani*<sup>13</sup> mean. The epic poem sung in the pitched battles for self-praising was called *Rajaz*; *Rajaz-khan* is the person who sings the *Rajaz*; and *Rajaz-khani* is the action of *Rajaz-khan*.

Demoralizing the enemy and arousing national sentiment, sense of patriotism, valor, and self-confidence are the main goals of *Rajaz-khan*. As *Rajaz-khan* needed the poems with epic contexts, it led to the vast use of *Shahnameh* in *Rajaz-khani* and to widespread application of this art.

4. In the chamber style of *Shahnameh-khani*, the *Shahnameh-khan* sits in a chair or in the corner of a room and starts to read the poems of *Shahnameh* with an expressive voice. It is important to note that intonation and articulation have an important role in chamber *Shahnameh-khani*.

Family soirees, house parties, the small coffeehouses of main cities, and rural coffeehouses were the main centers for performing the chamber style of this art; it is considerable that *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* (item 1, above) was performed only in the major coffeehouses of the main cities such as Tehran and Shiraz, with the special habitudes.

### *Their Differences*

Depending on the theme of the poems, accompaniment or non-accompaniment of music, expression of the narrators and singers in the context of the cultural and geographical differences, period of time, and political policies of governments, these styles of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* differ. In the following charts, we take a succinct look at the differences of these four styles separately.

<b>Style</b>	<b>Theme of the Poems</b>
Coffeeshouse style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> and <i>Naqqali</i> of <i>Shahnameh</i>	In this style, the derived stories from mythical and heroic sections of <i>Shahnameh</i> have an epic and heroic content. It is considerable that because of the male-dominated atmosphere of coffeeshouses and teahouses, the more exciting and eventful stories have more enthusiasts.
<i>Zurkhaneh-i</i> style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i>	The poems in this style have epic and mythical themes, so most of the poems have been taken from the heroic and mythical sections of <i>Shahnameh</i> .
<i>Rajaz-khani</i> style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> , or <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> in the form of <i>Rajaz</i>	The epic theme is dominant in this style, so it has been understood that the second section—heroic—of <i>Shahnameh</i> is the main source for <i>Rajaz-khans</i> .
Chamber style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i>	The main narrated stories in this style are the romances of Zal and Rudaba and of Bizhan and Manizheh; the birth of Rostam (the most romantic of all the heroes of the <i>Shahnameh</i> ); the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab (the most influential stories of the <i>Shahnameh</i> ); the story of Bahram Gur, who cruelly punished his beloved Azadeh; and the story of Borzu (Sohrab's son). These stories have been derived from all three sections of <i>Shahnameh</i> ; the dominance of their tragic and romantic themes indicates the family atmosphere of these gatherings.

<b>Style</b>	<b>Accompaniment or Non-accompaniment of Music</b>
Coffeeshouse style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> and <i>Naqqali</i> of <i>Shahnameh</i>	During the life of Ferdowsi, it was often accompanied with music. In the first decades after Islamic conquest of Persia, it was almost never accompanied with music. In later decades—Safavid and Qajar dynasties up to now <sup>14</sup> —depending on the <i>Naqqals'</i> and <i>Shahnameh-khans'</i> taste, in some cases, it is accompanied with music.
<i>Zurkhaneh-i</i> style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i>	It has always accompanied with epic rhythms of a handheld drum called <i>Tonbak-e-Zurkhaneh-i</i> , a special kind of bell called <i>Zang</i> , and songs from singers. It is considerable that <i>Tonbak</i> and <i>Zang</i> have been played by the singer so there is only one musician who performs music in the <i>Zurkhaneh</i> .
<i>Rajaz-khani</i> style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> , or <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> in the form of <i>Rajaz</i>	In most cases, it isn't accompanied by music, although in some cases, it is accompanied by special war instruments—once always wind and percussion—which are played by the fellow fighters of <i>Rajaz-khan</i> .
Chamber style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i>	During the life of Ferdowsi, it was often accompanied with music and dance, but in the Islamic governments with strict enforcement of Islamic rules, music was rarely used in performing this style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> .

Style	Expression of the Narrators and Singers
Coffeehouse style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> and <i>Naqqali</i> of <i>Shahnameh</i>	Heroic, brave, and championship expressions exist in this style, which advises the audiences and invites them to chivalry and gallantry.
<i>Zurkhaneh-i</i> style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i>	Championship and self-devoted expression of singers, celebrating of the champions and the moral atmosphere and athletic aggressiveness in the <i>Zurkhanehs</i> invite the athletes to sacrifice, valor, and gallantry.
<i>Rajaz-khani</i> style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> , or <i>Shahnameh-khani</i> in the form of <i>Rajaz</i>	The fighter who sang the poems of <i>Shahnameh</i> had an epic expression, which helped him to arouse national sentiment and sense of patriotism while also demoralizing the enemies and achieving self-confidence.
Chamber style of <i>Shahnameh-khani</i>	Depending on the kind of story, the singer has specific expressions. For example, in the tragic stories, he has a plaintive tone, or in the romantic stories, he has an amorous tone.

## CONCLUSION

*Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* are two of the most influential arts in the history of Persia, having training and entertaining roles and also familiarizing Iranians with their national narratives. These matters lead to popularity of these arts and are the main cause of the scholars' and researchers' efforts in researching and studying *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*.

There are some reasons that the popularity of *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* has increased day by day:

1. Iranians' interest, enthusiasm, and excitement at hearing epic, heroic, romantic, and tragic stories of the *Shahnameh* for a period of time in which not all of them have knowledge of writing and reading.
2. Despite religious restrictions, Iranians' passion and enthusiasm in showing up at the *Naqqali* meetings was the real cause of the *Naqqals'* efforts in reviving these arts by applying religious themes and elements in their narration, such as sending blessings and greetings (*Salawat*) on Prophet Muhammad and his family during their performance, or using the stories with the themes of imams and prophets. In this way, *Naqqals* could legitimize their arts within all of the existing restrictions and limitations.
3. Forming a new style of painting called *Qahveh-khaneh-i* painting or coffeehouse painting with the theme of the *Naqqals'* stories form the heart of tea- and coffeehouses. Additionally, the reflection and penetration of *Shahnameh* themes, stories, and characters in the poems of famous poets such as Masud Sa'ad Salman, Sanai, Nizami Ganjavi, Attar, Sa'adi, and Jami have increased *Shahnameh's* popularity.

4. The effects of these performing arts have propagated a series of proverbs among Iranians—for example, “*Haft-khan-e Rostam*”<sup>15</sup> or “*Noosh-daru pas az marg-e Sohrab*”<sup>16</sup>—and also were the main cause of Iranian enthusiasm in using the characters of *Shahnameh* in naming their children.
5. At the end, we have to mention the Iranian women’s efforts in learning *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh*, which shows the important position and prevalence of *Shahnameh* among all segments of this society. It is considerable that Iranian women avoided *Naqqali* or *Shahnameh-khani* because of the religious restrictions and the feminine modesty created by religion but the power of these wonderful arts could attract Iranian women in learning them.

Unfortunately, nowadays, *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* are rarely performed in Iran, and these two forms of performing arts have followed a descending trend because of the propagation of new entertainment devices such as radio, television, and cinema.

## ENDNOTES

1. The Persian composition *Shahnameh* contains two words: *Shah* (meaning “king”) and *Nameh* (meaning “letter”), literally meaning “Book of the Kings.”
2. Ferdowsi Tousi (935–1020) is considered to be one of the greatest Persian poets to have ever lived. Among the national heroes and the literary greats of all time, Ferdowsi has a very special place. He was born into a landowner family in the village of Paj (in the district of Tabaran), near the city of Tus in the province of Khorasan and is buried in his own garden in Tus. His grave was rebuilt between 1928 and 1934 on the order of Reza Shah and has now become the equivalent of a national shrine.
3. Russian orientalist Bertels has divided *Shahnameh* into three sections: (1) the mythical section, from the beginning of the book to the appearance of Rostam, (2) the heroic section, from the appearance of Rostam to his death, and (3) the historical section, from *Eskandar* Rumi to the death of Yazdgerd III.
4. The Persian word *Naqqal* literally means “the person who carries the objects from a place to another place.”
5. Ferdowsi used several references in writing the *Shahnameh*, such as Abu-Mansouri’s prose *Shahnameh*, and also applied a vast treasury of ancient stories and folklore.
6. *Khosh* means “well,” and *Nevis*, “writer.”
7. Fat’h Ali Shah Qajar (1772–1834) was the second Qajar king of Persia. He reigned from 17 June 1797 until his death.
8. Rostam is the national hero of Persia and one of the favorites of King Kaykavus. He married princess Tahmina when he was searching for traces of his lost horse in the kingdom of Samangan, but very soon, he left there and never came back. Meanwhile, Tahmina gave birth to their son and named him Sohrab. Rostam and Sohrab had never met each other until many years later in the war between Iran and Turan. By then, Sohrab had become the best fighter of Turan’s army. As no one else dared to fight

Rustam and Sohrab didn't know his father, he went to wrestle with the Persian hero. After a very long and heavy bout, Sohrab was killed by his father; when Tahmina arrived to save them from bloodshed, she found Sohrab lying dead in his mourning father's arms.

9. *Qahveh* is "coffee," and *Khaneh*, "house."
10. *Zur* means "strength," and *Khaneh*, "house."
11. This kind of handheld drum is called *Tonbak-e-Zurkhaneh-i* in Persian.
12. The Persian word *Khan* in this literary composition (*Rajaz-khan*) refers to the action of the singer.
13. The Persian word *Khani* in this literary composition (*Rajaz-khani*) means "singing."
14. Nowadays, *Shahnameh-khani* and *Naqqali* of *Shahnameh* are rarely performed in Iran; this descending trend started after the Qajar dynasty.
15. "The seven labors of Rustam," which means doing unendurable and torturous work.
16. "The healing potion finally arrived; alas, it was too late, as Sohrab had already died" means doing a vain action.

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