



# Shahnameh: The Epic of the Persian Kings

*Abolqasem Ferdowsi*

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***Shahnameh* is a lengthy epic poem which vividly intertwines the mythical and historical history of Persia, thereby enchanting and impressing readers for many centuries.**

Originally composed by Abolqasem Ferdowsi in the 10th century, the Shahnameh enjoys the distinction of being the longest epic poem by a single author in existence. The verses took Ferdowsi over three decades to complete. Although it draws heavily from established mythology and the historical archives of Persia, Ferdowsi also imbues the poem's story with his own vivid inventions and plot devices.

The entire poem is intended as a history of Persia from the earliest times until the Islamic Conquest of the country, which occurred about 350 years before Ferdowsi composed his epic. The verses proceed chronologically, beginning with the creation of the Earth, through the establishment of Zoroastrianism as the first monotheistic faith in the region, with the principle characters being various great generals and rulers.

Ferdowsi divides his masterpiece into three parts:

The Mythical Age; which accounts for God creating Earth and the earliest emergence of man in the Middle East, and the establishment of early traditions such as feasting.

The Heroic Age; wherein the Persian Empire's conquests, triumphs and battles are detailed, alongside the lives and exploits of its greatest heroes.

Finally, the Historical Age; which relates the Sassanid Empire's history of with much attention to accepted facts and overall accuracy.

This edition of the Shahnameh contains the verses in English, plus explanatory narrations of the general plot and a series of informative notes which explain certain passages. The authoritative and well-informed translation to English by James Atkinson sensitively ensures that the subjects and the message of each part is clearly communicated.

In modern-day Iran, the Shahnameh is regarded as a great work of literature for its encompassing plot. The heroism, valiance and achievements of the Persian civilization are retrospectively grouped together in a splendid chronicle of the nation's finest times. Taken as a whole, the great poem offers people living in Persia and modern-day Iran ample reason for national pride.

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