Faranak in the *Shahnameh*; the Woman with Three Faces
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**Introduction**

In the religions of the ancient world, especially those of Mesopotamian origin, gods of both genders worked in a familial way together to create a balanced and harmonious world.\(^1\) What was seen in the house of gods reflected what was going on in the society. The rules of religion could mirror the rules of the agricultural states of Sumer, where the weather was not hostile, the soil and the animals were fertile, food was accessible, and people did not need to kill each other in order to survive.

In the ancient Iranian religion Zruvānism, reflecting the rules of a pastoral society, women were not considered important in terms of creation.\(^2\) Zruvān,\(^3\) the God of infinite time was regarded as a neutral God who alone conceived

\(^1\) One of the most notable goddesses was the Sumerian love deity Inanna, who was later equated with the Akkadian Ishtar who was the basis for the Aramean and Phoenician Asta.

\(^2\) During the second half of the second millennium BCE, two groups of culturally and linguistically related peoples who called themselves *arya* (“nobles”) migrated from the steppes down into the...
Faranak in the Shahnameh

The cosmological dichotomy of chaos and order figured in both Iranian mythology and worldview. Unlike the Sumerian gods and goddesses, who were human and acted like men and women, only more powerfully, Zrvān had a fierce appearance resembling a man-beast and could conceive children with his mind, without any female interaction.

In the Avesta, the holy book of Zoroastrians, AhurāMazdā too, is the sole creator of the world. Nevertheless Anāhitā, the greatest goddess of Middle East, the Iranian plateau, and the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent. One group settled in Anatolia and India. The other settled in greater Iran. These people were originally semi-nomadic pastoralists whose chief economic base was cattle primarily, but also sheep and goats. They bred horses, which they used for riding and pulling chariots in warfare and sport. It is not at all clear how rigidly their society was originally segmented. There were specialists in religious matters, and men who could afford horses and chariots were reckoned as warriors and leaders. By the Achaemenian period there developed a more rigid division of society into four basic classes: priests, nobles, farmers/herdsmen, and artisans. Society generally was patriarchal, and male dominance was strongly reflected in the religion. Like the ancient Israelites, as the Iranians occupied the land, they became increasingly dependent on agriculture and settled in villages and towns.

Zrvān is also the god of destiny, light, and darkness. Zrvān is a normalized rendition of the word, which in Middle Persian appears as Zrvān, Zrvān, or, Zrvān. The Middle Persian name derives from Avestan zruvan-, "time" or "old age."

Ahurâ Mazda (ا هرم ازدا), also known as Ohrmazd, Ahuramazda, Hourmazd, Hormazd, and Hurmuz; Sanskrit: अश्वर मेघा (Ashvra-Medhā), Lord, or simply as God, is the Avestan name for a higher divinity of the Old Iranian religion who was proclaimed as the uncreated God by Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism. Ahura Mazda is described as the highest deity of worship in Zoroastrianism, as well as being the first and most frequently invoked deity in the Yasna. The literal meaning of the word Ahura is "light" and Mazda means "wisdom."

Aša "truth" in Avestan, from Indo-Iranian *ṛtá-, a neuter noun having the same meaning; the word is attested in Old Persian as ārta and in Old Indian as ṛtá-.

Angra Mainyu (also: AŋraMainiiu) is the Avestan-language name of Zoroastrianism’s hypostasis of the “destructive spirit.” The Middle Persian equivalent is Ahīiman.

Druj, meaning lie, in Avesta is the opposite of aša or truth.

Avesta is the name the Mazdean (Mazdayasnian) religious tradition gives to the collection of its sacred texts.

Aredvi Sura Anahita is principally addressed in Yasht 5 (Yasna 65), also known as the Aban Yasht, a hymn to the waters in Avestan and one of the longer and better preserved of the devotional hymns. Yasna 65 is the third of the hymns recited at the Ab-Zohr, the “offering to the waters” that accompanies the culminating rites of the Yasna service. Verses from Yasht 5 also form the greater part of the Aban Nyashes, the liturgy to the waters that are a part of the Khordeh Avesta. In the Bundahishn, the two halves of
fertility and victory, was worshiped even by AhurāMazdā, the greatest God of wisdom and order. Anāhitā, who was not mentioned in the *Gathas*,\(^{10}\) in the newer parts of the *Avesta*, especially in *Abān Yašt*, appeared as the personification of Divine Fortune, whose approval of a Persian king brought victory and sustained Cosmic Order.\(^{11}\) Attested by many scholars and textual and archeological evidences, the powerful presence of Anāhitā in the religion of Iranians was the result of the powerful presence of women at the house of kings, in the society and at homes. Besides, historical evidences show that the Aryan semi-nomads settled in Mede and Persia. Later they founded stable and powerful empires that lasted for almost half a millennium. In the beginning they had the norms of pastoral societies, but gradually their norms married to the norms of agricultural societies (Cf. Frye, R. N., 1983: 143–50; Grishman, R., 1895: 88–96).

In this article, which is part of a bigger study, I intend to show that in the *Šāhnāmeh* the Divine Fortune, symbolized both by a sacred female animal and a sacred woman, represent the female side of AhurāMazdā.\(^{12}\) My emphasis is on the fact that, based on the textual evidence in the *Šāhnāmeh*, a civilization cannot be built and develop without the contribution of both male and female elements. And the decline of a civilization begins when one gender forces the other into hiding. In this article I present a new reading of the legends of Jamšid, Żahhāk, Farānak, and Ferīdūn.\(^{13}\)

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Jamšīd the Beautiful King and Cosmic Order

The Birth of a Civilization

In the Avesta, Jamšīd,14 “the beautiful” and “the owner of good cattle” was born immortal. In the Šāhnāmeh, Jamšid had Divine Fortune, radiated from him. He had his commanded rules obeyed by not only people but also by demons, birds, and fairies. During his time the wealth and security of the world increased. In the first fifty years he built a strong defense in order to keep the nature from harm. In the following fifty years he dedicated his mind to the making of clothes for the people. Then for another fifty years he ranked people into four classes, as the society shifted from nomadic rules into the regulations of a new civilization. This also happened at the time of Achaemenid. By the Achaemenian period there developed a more rigid division of society into four basic classes: priests, nobles, farmers/herdsmen, and artisans.

In the Šāhnāmeh, Jamšid in building his new empire implemented geometry and labor in order to construct buildings; he encouraged artwork and creativity and above all he found cures for illnesses. During his time, traveling across the world was no difficult task and nothing was hidden from his wisdom. The picture given to us from his time is close to the picture historical and archeological evidence give from the time of Ancient Persia, as well as the agricultural Sumerian era. Today we know that the Sumerian civilization was incredibly advanced. As well as inventing writing, the Sumerians invented early forms of mathematics, early wheeled vehicles, astronomy, astrology, written law, organized medicine, advanced agriculture and architecture, as well as the calendar. In this agricultural era the contribution of men and

14In the Avesta (q.v.), several myths are associated with Yima. He ruled the world in a golden age; he saved living beings from a natural catastrophe by preserving specimens in his var- (fortress); he possessed the most Fortune (xwarənah, Mid. Pers. xwarrah) among mortals but lost it and his kingship as a consequence of lying.
women were found in the house of gods, in the society, and in the homes of the people (Kramer, S. N., 1971).

This also applies to the time of the Achaemenid Dynasty. They created one of the greatest civilizations of all times, which included religious freedom, respecting diversity of languages and nations, inventing a new form of writing, and many other things which make a civilization bloom. And all these could not take place without the close contribution of female power. Although in Persepolis there is no obvious sign to show the contribution of the female element, tablets excavated testify to the fact that women worked at every level and had a strong presence in the house of kings, in the society, and even in religion (Cf. Koch, H. M., 1992). For example, Artaxerxes II (404–359 BCE)\(^\text{15}\) was the first king of Achaemenid Dynasty who in his inscriptions also invoked Anāhitā and Mehr, of course after invoking AhurāMazdā. He also set up cult statues in the honor of Anāhitā.

\(^{15}\)The Achaemenid king was given the title Mne-mon, meaning “full of memory,” and his name means “whose reign is through truth.”
According to Plutarch, the great Greek ancient biographer, Artaxerxes II was himself a calm and wise man (Les Vies Des Homes, the fourth book, Artaxexes II). Plutarch did however not consider the queen mother Parysatis to be a good person. He would nevertheless approve the fact that Parysatis was a woman of authority and influence and by doing so he illustrated the closeness of powerful women to the central power. Mary Boyce believed in the role of the queen mother, Parysatis, in the return of Goddess Anāhitā to the trinity of gods; AhurāMazdā, Mehr, and Anāhitā (Boyce, M. vol. II, 1982). She also emphasized that the worship of Anāhitā went back to the time of Artaxerxes’s father. Although the queen mother might not have represented the positive female power of AhurāMazdā, her presence implied that the society allowed women to have a powerful presence.

The worship of Anāhitā continued during the time of Sassanid. Anāhitā was the one whose protection could bring victory and wealth to Iranians and their

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Parysatis (/poʊˈrɪsətɪs/; Ancient Greek: Παρύσατις) was the fifth-century BCE illegitimate daughter of Artaxerxes I, Emperor of Persia and Andia of Babylon. She was the half-sister of Xerxes II, Sogdianus, and Darius II. She married her half-brother Darius and had four sons, Artaxerxes II, Cyrus the Younger, Ostanes, and Oxathres. Her favorite was Cyrus and it was on account of her influence that the then teenager was given supreme command in western Anatolia in around 407 BCE. When her husband died, she supported her younger son Cyrus. When Cyrus was defeated in the Battle of Cunaxa she blamed the satrap Tissaphernes for the death of her son. She later had Tissaphernes assassinated.
kings. When kings adopted Anāhitā as the goddess of war and victory and worshiped her, she took on the warlike nature of Ishtar. Besides the libation of water and the sacred potion of haoma,17 she became involved in blood sacrifice. Kings, before going to battle, sacrificed an animal in her honor in order to have her motherly protection.

Hear, O good, most beneficent Anāhitā! I beg of thee this favor: that I, fully blessed, may conquer large kingdoms, rich in horses, with high tributes, with snorting horses, sounding chariots, flashing swords... that I may have at my wish the fullness of the good things of life and whatever makes a kingdom thrive (Abān Yašt 1:26).

In the history of Iranians the powerful presence of Anāhitā continued toward the end of Sassanid Empire,18 before the advent of Islam.

In the Šāhnāmeh, the golden era of Jamšid, however, comes to an end when Jamšid loses his truthfulness and lies, saying he is the sole creator of order. And he claims to be the one who introduced the skills and arts of living to mankind, an allegation which dimmed his Divine Fortune. And like a drop out of the ocean he became finite. In other words, as long as Jamšid has respect for universal law and was appeased by

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17Homa is the Avestan language name of a plant and its divinity, both of which play a role in Zoroastrian doctrine and in later Persian culture and mythology. The Middle Persian form of the name is hōm, which continues to be the name in Modern Persian and Pashtu and other
the feminine side, his Divine Fortune guided him. When Jamšid denied the female side of the universe and what was attributed to her like order, truth, security, and love, as a result he lost Divine Fortune’s heavenly protection, which resulted in his defeat and murder at the hand of the Evil King, Žahhāk.

**Żahhāk the Evil King and Chaos**

In the Šāhnāmeh the mythical figure Žahhāk was an Arab ruler who reigned for one thousand years. During his time, the world suffered from his tyranny and so did the people, the animals, and the earth. In order to become the ruler of his own country, Žahhāk had to kill his own father Mardās, who was a

4. Nerseh receives his ribboned royal diadem—the symbol of the king’s divine election—from the hand of Anāhitā.

other living Iranian languages. Sacred *haoma* has its origins in Indo-Iranian religion and is the cognate of Vedic Soma.

19The Sassanid Empire (/səˈsæn.dɪn/ or /səˈseɪn.tən/; also known as Sasanian, Sassanid, or Sassanid) or Neo-Persian Empire, known to its inhabitants as Ėrānshahr[ and Ėrān in Middle Persian and resulting in the New Persian terms Iranshahr and Iran, was the last Iranian empire before the rise of Islam, ruled by the Sassanid Dynasty from 224 CE to 651 CE. The Sassanid Empire, which succeeded the Parthian Empire, was recognized as one of the main powers in Western and Central Asia, alongside the Roman-Byzantine Empire, for a period of more than four hundred years.

19Žahhāk (pronounced [zahhɑːk]) (in Persian: دَهَاحَک) is an evil figure in Iranian mythology, evident in ancient Iranian folklore as Ažidahāka, the name by which he also appears in the texts of the Avesta. In Middle Persian he is called Dahāg or Biwarasp.
benevolent, wealthy herder king. So Żahhāk was not even a good leader of a pastoral society as he had no respect for patriarch, he kills his own father, and he has no offspring, perhaps as a punishment for his crime. The committing of this crime was advised by Eblīs. When Żahhāk met Eblīs for the second time, Eblīs played the role of a very skillful cook. As a cook he made Żahhāk foods of flesh and blood in a very tasteful way. When Żahhāk wanted to reward him Eblīs only wished to kiss Żahhāk’s shoulders. As soon as he did so, two black snakes grew from where his lips had touched. Eblīs appeared a third time, now disguised in the garb of a physician. He told Żahhāk to kill two young men every day and to feed his snakes with their brains. The story and the symbolism illustrate the beginning of a Dark Age in which there is no room for mercy and justice. The evil king is neither in touch with the feminine side of the world, nor with himself. Żahhāk as a ruler killed to remain on the throne resulting in the Dark Age continuing with the cruelty of those who had power over the people. In the absence of a wise advisor Żahhāk dictated a plan consisting of black magic and war in order to control the people.

In the Šāhnāmeh, Żahhāk with titles like Dragon or Dragon-like (Eždehāfash) and Biwarasp (the owner of ten thousands horses) symbolizes different evil things. This includes an evil ruler who employs black magic in order to empty the brains of his people as well as his opposition. Or a long period of dry weather followed by poverty and misfortune. It also shows a military society in which hostility is in control. This is depicted in the Šāhnāmeh’s verses, where Żahhāk hears that his throne is endangered. “Enraged, he orders that his swift, keen-sighted horses be saddled, and with a massive army of warlike demons he set off for his palace” (Shahnameh, English trans. D. Davis, 2007: 25). The environment Żahhāk and his army of demons have created has led to a crueler society in which people kill in order to survive and violence accelerates in a way that “the wise conceal themselves and their

\(^{20}\)Eblīs, or Satan, is Arabic name for Ahriman Lord of Evil.
deeds, and devils achieve their heart’s desire. Virtue is despised and magic applauded, justice hides itself away while evil flourishes; demons rejoice in their wickedness, while Goodness is spoken of only in secret.” (Shahnameh, English trans. D. Davis, 2007:13).

In the Šāhnāmeh, a point is mentioned which seems relevant for this discussion. It is said that if Żahhāk wished to kill a warrior for no reason, he did so by accusing the soldier of being in touch with Evil. And if someone had a beautiful daughter hidden away, Żahhāk would have the girl brought to him as his slave. He acted without regard for the customs of kings or the laws of religion. Moreover it is said that during his reign people hid themselves in the mountains or in the plains far from town, because they were scared for their lives. He did exactly the same with the two daughters of King Jamšid. It is described in the Šāhnāmeh that “two innocent young women were dragged from Jamšid’s house, trembling like the leaves of a willow.” The way Żahhāk treated people shows how far he was from truth and mercy. He used violence to achieve dominance and those who shared his attitude would join him in order to rob other people. This is illustrated in the Šāhnāmeh, about the same time as Persia was filled with dissension and revolt. “Seeking a king, Persia’s horsemen approached Żahhāk: they greeted him as a sovereign, hailing him as the ruler of Iran.” It would seem that having a horse and an evil commander made it possible to shape an army of demons against common people who demanded only security and wealth.

Żahhāk personifies an era in which there is no security for people, no room for art, wealth, health, or happiness. His only tool in dealing with people was black magic and violence. In a situation like this when war has broken out, famine has attacked society, and everyone is terrified for their lives, women, children, and those who are not physically ready to confront violence have no other choice than to go into hiding. As a result of a vicious circle the more people fear, the more aggression accumulates and the increase of
violence results in less respect for human rights. In such a society, where the value system has turned upside-down, men as well as women have no other choice than to either turn into little tyrants or get silent and camouflage in order to survive. An era personified by Żahhāk also stands for a foreigner ruler who has occupied Iran. Iran after Alexander’s attack and the downfall of the Achaemanid Empire, which lead to the reign of Seleucid, is one example. The other is the Arab conquest after the decline of the Sassanid Empire. It has always been the same pattern, in the security of a civilization women grow, and art, law, and organization flourish to the point that the civilization reaches its full potential. While in a chaotic and warlike society, women always pay the highest price to survive. In a warlike society women are forced to be hidden since the dangerous situation never allows them to jeopardize their life or the life of their children. It is therefore suggested that the more society grows warlike, the more women lose their power. And the more women are forced to camouflage themselves, the more society suffers the absence of wisdom and security.

In the Šāhnāmeh Farānak, the widow of Ābtūn, and the mother of Ferīdūn is a woman of unconditional love, vision, protection, and wisdom. She with her strong perception plays a very important but indirect role in the defeating of chaos and restoring order. Symbolizing three aspects of maternal love, she reminds of the powerful female deities of Ancient Egypt, where women had strong positions and were present next to men in the restoration of order.

21The Achaemanid Empire (/əˈkiː.məntd/; Old Persian: Pārsa; New Persian: شاهنشاهی هخامنشی) c. 550–330 BCE, or First Persian Empire (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid_Empire#cite_note-GCS-11), was an empire in Western and Central Asia founded in the sixth century BCE by Cyrus the Great. The dynasty draws its name from King Achaemenes, who ruled Persis between 705 BCE and 675 BCE. The empire expanded to eventually rule over significant portions of the ancient world, which at around 500 BCE stretched from the Indus Valley in the east to Thrace and Macedon on the northeastern border of Greece.

22The name appears in the Avesta (Y. 9.7) asāθwyya-, equivalent to Skt. āptya-. From it is derived the adjective āθwīyay-, applied to the family of Ferīdūn. In Pahlavi literature the latter appears as the name of Ferīdūn’s father in the form Āswīān or Āsbīān (written ʾspydʾn or ʾspykʾn; Dēnkard, pp. 319.19, 438.15; Zātspram, 53.12.)
and the building of a new civilization on the foundation of the old one. Farānak, like Egyptian goddesses, appears in different shapes to illustrate the collaboration of male and female elements in the restoration of order.

**Farānak the Wise Mother with Three Faces**

As the Egyptian Goddesses gain different shapes to symbolize different aspects of female elements in the cycle of life, in the Šāhnāmeh Farānak too represents different aspects of the female element. The legend shows that Ābtīn’s husband died early and she was as a single mother solely responsible for the life and care of her child. Described with four epithets—Blessed (farxonde), Clear minded (pākmagz), Very talented (porhonar), and Wise (xeradmand)—Farānak appeared to be the most respected woman in the Šāhnāmeh. And in the legend it was shown why she was worthy of such epithets. Her listening for one helped her realize the danger of Žahhāk and, additionally, in the protection of her son she always acted wisely and quickly.

Unlike many other myths, in the legend of Ferīdūn it is his mother, instead of the father, who plays the role of his Fortune. This also associates Ferīdūn to an agricultural society, where women can play a deceiving role in the life of their own and their children. In this legend Farānak is once associated with a cow which is the most splendid of all cows: the Pormāyeh Cow.

**I. The Pormāyeh Cow**

In the Šāhnāmeh, when Žahhāk still had forty years to live, in a dream he saw three young men who appeared in his imperial palace. The youngest of the three was as tall as a cypress tree. He was carrying a buffalo-headed mace that he attacked Žahhāk with and by tying his hands and chaining his neck dragged him to Mount Damavand. Terrified by this dream, Žahhāk called his interpreters. A sage told him about a certain “Afarīdun,” who would end his reign. When the evil king inquired about the man’s motivation, he was told that Žahhāk would kill the young man’s father and a cow called Pormāyeh.
When Ferīdūn was born to Farānak and Ābtīn, somehow his birth coincided with the birth of the most splendid cow of all, the Pormāyeh Cow. Ferdosī introduces this cow by saying that wise men, astrologers, and priests all had gathered around her. And they said that no one had ever seen such a cow or ever heard of any like her from ancient sages. In the same context Ferīdūn was described as necessary to the earth in the same way rain is, and as fitting to the soul of a human being as wisdom was, having Jamšīd’s Divine Fortune (Farr) radiated from him.

In the Avestan Hōm Yašt (Y. 9.7) (The Avesta, Persian trans. J. Doustkhah, I: 1370), the father of Ferīdūn was called Asāšwya, or Atbīn. He seemed to be a priest or medicine man who pressed the plant of haoma to make a sacrifice potion. Through his offering he fathered Θraētaona (Persian Ferīdūn). In Dīnkard the seventh, we learn about the way Zarathustra’s father, Pourusaspa Spitamā, prepares haoma and mixes it with cow’s milk in order to conceive a worthy son (Dīnkard 2:46). It is also in the Avesta that the genealogy of Ferīdūn and the relation between his family name and cattle is mentioned.

Thus in the Avesta, the importance of Ferīdūn is due to his father, although he and his family are related to the cow. And the cow has been a symbol of wealth in agro-pastoral society, likewise the manifestation of benevolence and Divine Fortune as well as the embodiment of unconditional love. But this aspect of maternity has always been cherished and worshiped mostly in agricultural societies. In Ancient Egypt both Hathor and Nut, two very important goddesses, appear in the form of a heavenly cow.

23 Or the Barmāyeh Cow.
24 Hathor (ˈhæθɔr/ or ˈhæθər; Egyptian: hwt-br, “mansion of Hours”) is an Ancient Egyptian Goddess who personified the principles of joy, feminine love, and motherhood. She was one of the most important and popular deities throughout the history of Ancient Egypt. Hathor is commonly depicted as a cow goddess with head horns in which is set a sun disk with Uraeus.
25 Nut is the sky goddess depicted as a cow. She is the mother of gods and goddesses of the Ancient Egypt.
Hathor, along with the Goddess Nut, was during the third millennium BCE associated with the Milky Way. During the autumn and spring equinoxes, it aligned over and touched the earth where the sun rose and set. The four legs of the celestial cow represented Nut or Hathor and could in one account be seen as the pillars on which the sky was supported, with the stars on its belly constituting the Milky Way (James, E. O., 1967: 66).

Illustrating the female power of the universe in different shapes defines the real role women play in their own lives and the lives of others. If in a rich agricultural society a woman is useful, productive, benevolent, and strong, then she is pretty much like a female buffalo. A female buffalo serves a perfect role in depicting a motherly aspect of a woman. In the same manner
Hathor appeared in the shape of a female buffalo as the representation of milk, life, and motherhood, symbols of wealth and health in an agro-pastoral environment, where floods and rivers were the most vital part of daily life. She was also associated with joy and feminine love. Then after this Isis, the mother of Horus and the wife of Osiris, gained her attributes.

Although the Pormāyeh Cow culturally belongs to Iranians, she has her equal in Ancient Egypt. The description of the Pormāyeh Cow in the Šāhnāmeh is very much reminiscent of a female buffalo and a sacred cow. The buffalo-headed mace Ferīdūn carried to avenge his father and his nurse was also a reason to believe that the Pormāyeh Cow is a cultural production of a society in which different aspects of the female element are considered to be sacred. This is a contrast to those patriarchal Bedouin societies, in which whatever is related to the female element is considered to be demonic.

II. Caracal

After three years when the news reached Žahhāk about the life of Feridūn and the cow, Farānak hurried in order to send her son to the meadows for protection, long before the soldiers of Žahhāk found Feridūn. She said to the owner of the cow that “God has put a wise notion into my heart, and I
must act on it” (Shahnameh, English trans., D. Davis, 2007: 17). She then proclaimed that she would “disappear” from men’s sight and take her child to the Mount Alburz. And along with her son she traveled to India and climbed up the mountain as quick as a courier and was in her agility described as a mountain sheep. The way she was alert and heard things from a far distance makes it likely to believe that her name is her title, describing her function as a symbol of maternal protection. The meaning of her name; Farānak, bears the same meaning as Caracal, a word derived from the Turkish term kara-kulak, which means “black-eared.”

In northern India, the caracal is known as syahgosh. In Persian, it is known as stāhgūš, which means black-eared; a panther-kind. The characteristics of caracal’s natural habit as living in solitary, living in the highlands, and being extremely protective of their young allude to some connections between Farānak’s life as a single mother, who has a high house. The caracal is also renowned for its high-coursing speed and for its agility in hunting. It hunts in the same way as the cheetah. When walking, it conceals its tracks. Caracals have no natural enemies and as soon as they feel danger, they climb up a tree and into hiding. This very characteristic has some similarities with what Farānak mentioned to the owner of

11. Caracal

12. Bastet the goddess of cats
the Pormāyeh Cow: “I must abandon this land of black magic, depart unmarked to India and bear him to Mount Alburz.”

The caracal is also known in classical Persian by the name (or nickname) of parvāna(k) (from Mid. Pers. parwānag) or its variant farāna(k), arabicized as forāneq, literally meaning “leader, guide, vanguard” (“forāneq: an army’s guide,” and “forāneq, arabicized from Pers. parvānak/g: somebody who guides a courier on his route (A’lam, H. 1990: -Caracal). Farānak’s name, her behavior, and the way she is praised in the Šāhnāmeh are similar to the Egyptian goddess Pakhet, who is likely to be a regional lioness deity; it may be possible to see some connection between the epithets of Farānak and the goddess of protection in Egypt. Moreover, the cat in Ancient Egyptian religion was respected highly, partly due to its ability to combat vermin such as mice, rats—which threatened key food supplies—and snakes, especially cobras.

In a warlike condition, when women are most harmed and threatened, Farānak is an exceptional woman. She is the embodiment of unconditional love in one aspect, represented by the cow, and her alertness and protection in the other aspect, represented by the caracal. With her prophetic power, she could read the minds of her enemies before they had time to act. With her strong sense of identity, she stayed calm and powerful. Instead of being passive or petrified, she acted, strongly and wisely. She confronted the evil king in her own way, and her intelligence was not affected by the norms of the hostile conditions, created by the war. Therefore she could find the best solution in order to protect herself, her son, and the future of her land. It was also through her actions that the dark age of black magic turned into the age of white magic; personified by Ferīdūn, a young man who was raised in the mountains under the guidance of a master. In other words, she knew how to bring up her son without spoiling him with the overprotection of a mother. Therefore she culturally belongs to an agricultural society, where women can produce wealth and can be their Fortune and their children’s Fortune as well. The
very presence of Farānak at the time, when her son wanted her blessing before going to battle, and the way she greeted her son as a king, is something of great remark.

III. The Queen

In the Šāhnāmeh, Ferīdūn sets out to avenge his father Abtīn and his nurse the Pormāyeh Cow. But before going into battle with Žahhāk, he makes his way to his mother and asks her to pray for him. His mother prays to God to keep her son from evil and clear the world of the unwise. This is reminiscent of Horus, the Egyptian God setting out to avenge his father Osiris with his mother’s wings around him (Rundle Clark, R. T., 1995: 129).

When Farānak hears that her son has become king of the world, she acts as a wise and strong queen in gratitude. She does a ritual where she first washes her body and then prays, with her head bowed to the ground, praising God for the new days. She secretly feeds hungry people for a week, “as no beggar would remain.” She celebrates for another week, decorates her house like a garden, and invites the nobles. As Ferdošī mentions, she is so grateful for her son’s kingship that she takes up all the treasures and wealth that she for many years had accumulated and sends them to her son’s court. The gifts like “Arab horses, golden gear, armor, helmets, javelins, swords, and belts” imply that she was a woman of very high rank. Otherwise she would not be able to have such hidden treasures. This kind of woman, who culturally belongs to an agricultural society, helps the new king to bring back the prosperous days of wealth and health.

Ferīdūn the Blessed King and the Rebirth of Order

Ferīdūn, with his Divine Fortune radiated from him, defeats his enemies with the least bit of violence. This can be exemplified step by step in the Šāhnāmeh, from the moment he comes down the mountain to meet his mother to the point where he sits on the throne and becomes the sacred king of the world.
Holding in his hand a mace with the head of a cow or a buffalo, “Gorz-e Gavsar,” or Gavmis,” and in his heart the desire for justice, Ferīdūn sets off toward Babylon. He enters the city of Babylon and makes his way to the Palace of Žahhāk. And with each step that he takes, Divine Fortune guides him toward victory.

The way Ferīdūn treats women at the court of Žahhāk is also noteworthy; “he commanded those beautiful women to wash their heads; he cleansed their souls of impurity.” Likewise the way he treats the two wives of Žahhāk illustrates his respect for women as partners. This is depicted in the words of Kondrow, Žahhāk’s treasurer: “Ferīdūn had seated Jamšid’s daughters (Žahhāk’s wives) on the thrones beside him like his queens.” This report made Žahhāk to go to his palace to kill his wives; when he arrived he was captured and dragged in fetters to Mount Damavand. Afterward Ferīdūn sat on the throne and became king. The beginning of the new era of order was celebrated as Mehregān festival, and a fire was lit to honor the contribution of farmers to the world.

Thus the birth and rebirth of vegetation and animal as the happiest time of life is one side of the interpretation of order and restoration of order is another side. In an agricultural society, the weather plays the most important role in the growth of earth and in the fertility of cattle. The symbolism of a sacred king and an evil king explain the point of view that people of the ancient world had of the universe. Then from this platform they launched their cultural journey to create more complicated images to contain their social, religious, political, and cultural views. In this context it is possible to read that the king of darkness is an embodiment of a cold

26Some translators of the Ṣāhnāmeh, including Dick Davis, have chosen ox.
27It is important to explain that “to wash head” in Persian کشتی سر is a ritual of purification for women. In the Zoroastrian belief, a woman is considered impure and demonic during certain times, and then she must be kept away from good creation. When the time is past and she is “clean,” she then has to “wash her head.” It is used in a situation when a woman washes herself after the time of childbirth or at end of menstruation, it is also for prostitutes who marry a man and start a family life.
time when vegetation does not grow. Also it may stand for a time when a foreign ruler had occupied the country and had turned people into slaves. In whichever way the symbolism is interpreted, the key role of a woman in the rebirth of an orderly society cannot be denied. In fact, the legends show that a sacred kingship had no meaning without the contribution of female elements. In this legend, Farānak was the embodiment of this female element with four epithets of “wisdom, clear-minded, blessed, and skillful”. This female contribution was evident, appreciated, and praised in an agricultural society, where women had their feet on the farms and their hands working in the fields. Having the power to create life and wealth and the ability to protect their children as well as themselves made women grow wise and powerful. As a result of the female and male elements working together, great civilizations were born.