



The Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings

By Abolqasem Ferdowsi

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The Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings By Abolqasem Ferdowsi

The great national epic of Persia—the most complete English-language edition and definitive translation by Dick Davis, available in a deluxe edition by Penguin Classics.

Wherever Persian influence has spread, the stories of the *Shahnameh* become deeply embedded in the culture, as amply attested by their appearance in such works as *The Kite Runner* and the love poems of Rumi and Hafez. Among the greatest works of world literature, this prodigious narrative, composed by the poet Ferdowsi in the late tenth century, tells the story of pre-Islamic Iran, beginning in the mythic time of creation and continuing forward to the Arab invasion in the seventh century. The sweep and psychological depth of the *Shahnameh* is nothing less than magnificent as it recounts classic tales like the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab.

Now Dick Davis, “our pre-eminent translator from the Persian” (*Washington Post*), presents a comprehensive translation of Ferdowsi’s masterpiece in an elegant combination of prose and verse, allowing the poetry of the *Shanameh* to sing its own tales directly, interspersed sparingly with clearly-marked explanations to ease along modern readers.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Composed more than a thousand years ago, this national epic of Persia tells the story of Iran from the first "lord of the world," Kayumars, through the seventh-century Arab/Islamic conquest of the Sassanid dynasty. With a foreword by Azar Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, and illustrated with Persian lithographs, Davis's translation of this epic poem is an accessible combination of poetry and prose.

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From [Booklist](#)

This immense volume translates into clear, accessible prose the bedrock work of Iranian literature. Compiled and cast into verse by a tenth-century bard, *Shahnameh* contains the stories of the kings of ancient Iran before Islam overwhelmed the land in the seventh century. The first half deals primarily with mythical and semimythical figures, chief among them the great hero Rostam, while the latter half, beginning with the conquest of Sekandar--that is, Alexander the Great--records historical persons and events. In the concise, informative introduction, Davis calls attention to the entire book's recurrent themes of father-son conflict and contrast between kings and heroes, the latter of whom are nobler in character than the former; indeed, so noble that they invariably decline the throne when it is proffered to them. Davis encourages viewing both themes as reflections of a detached and critical attitude toward formal power and markers of a humane spirit that has allowed the epic to persist as the supreme classic of its nation. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"Dick Davis [is] our pre-eminent translator from the Persian...Thanks to Davis's magnificent translation, Ferdowsi and the *Shahnameh* live again in English." –Michael Dirda, *Washington Post*

"Accessible...A poet himself, Davis brings to his translation a nuanced awareness of Ferdowsi's subtle rhythms and cadences. His "Shahnameh" is rendered in an exquisite blend of poetry and prose, with none of the antiquated flourishes that so often mar translations of epic poetry." –Reza Aslan (author of *Zealot*), *New York Times Books Review*

"Davis's wonderful translation will show Western readers why Ferdowsi's masterpiece is one of the most revered and most beloved classics in the Persian world." –Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner*

"A magnificent accomplishment . . . [Davis's translation] is not only the fullest representation of Ferdowsi's masterpiece in English but the best." –*The New York Sun*

"Reader-friendly...essential reading" – *Kirkus Review*

"Marvelous . . . It represents the best of Persian culture." –Azar Nafisi, from the foreword

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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