

Archetypal Heroes of *The Epic of Kings* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*: Rostam and Gilgamesh are Mirroring Myths

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ABSTRACT

The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the earliest works of an ancient Mesopotamian civilization that its protagonist, Gilgamesh in many aspects is comparable with Rostam, the protagonist of Iranian mythology, and *Shahnameh* which is known as *The Book of Kings* written by Ferdowsī. Comparing both characters, we encounter loads of similarities that can be considered as archetypes that are untrained tendency to experience things in a certain way and contain images and phenomena from their ancestors. The similarities in both epic heroes show that the heroic mythology—though very different in detail—have explicitly common structural and infrastructural analogies. Although archetypal heroes are different in details, the more they are recognized, the more their structural and infrastructural similarities come to light. They all follow a global pattern that suggests the existence of examples in the collective subconscious mind of two authors. The human mind digests events of the world, imagines, and interprets the myths as the mystery. Thus, the ability to arouse humankind against the phenomena is the beginning of humanity's attempt to learn myths.

1. INTRODUCTION

In epic stories, the hero is born uncommonly; and from childhood, he experiences a lot of physical exertion because he should have a large hickey to defeat enemies. This example, in addition to its high frequency, also has a particular psychological significance, because each society needs the hero in the process of rebuilding the epic to compensate for its ethnical indignities. The hero who is the ministrant of the community, at the climacteric and dilemmas, is always protected by the goddess and moves towards the goal he wants to achieve. These heroic myths are very different in detail, but the more we examine them, the more we see their constructional similarities. All of them have a universal pattern, though they are invented by groups or individuals that did not have any direct cultural contact with each other. (Vahed-Doost, 215)

2. LEGENDARY ROSTAM OF IRANIAN MYTHOLOGY

Shahnameh, written in the seventh and eighth centuries, begins with the description of the world and ends by the fall of the Sassanid dynasty. Rostam is the most magnificent hero of *Shahnameh: The Epic of Kings* who is the son of Zāl and Rudabeh. Zāl wrote his father, Sam, asking him to let him marry

Rudabeh. Sam asked the astronomers about coming events. Bring to a successful conclusion, they got married. Rudabeh got pregnant, and at the time of giving birth, she became anaesthetized. Zāl, who was scared, called Phoenix to help. Phoenix told Zāl to butterfly the Rudabeh's stomach and pull the kid out of her side, put the plant which phoenix gave on the wound. Eventually, Rostam was born, and when he was taken away from the milk, he was eating a five-maned food. Rostam was a miracle baby and had grown into a boy within five days and to the strength of a young man within weeks. He was famous for his coarse limb, he took a tree like a kebab and took a zebra like a piece of meat on a tree and held a rock from the mountain with his feet. Ferdowsī describes Rostam in these lines: "For he put forth the power of a lion, and his shadow extended for miles. And from that day men named him Tehehten (which being interpreted, meaneth the strong-limbed), for he did deeds of prowess in the sight of men." (Ferdowsī, 120-21)

Hassanabadi mentioned that Indian gods such as Indra, Krishna, Arjuna, and sometimes Rāma, have variously been considered the origin of Rostam in Indian mythology. Based on their qualities that are recognized in Rostam's character and life, they

reflect Rostam's characteristics. (Hassanabadi, 69) He wrote, "Rostam is a multifaceted mythical, and epical prism and different elements of his character may be found in different times, places, and the various neighbouring cultures." (Hassanabadi, 82) Hassanabadi explained that considering Rostam and Zāl as Sagzi people, they belonged to the Scythian heroic tradition and should be searched for in the Scythian exposes (Hassanabadi, 71). Some researchers believe that Rostam was a mythical hero of remote tribes (probably Scythian) who mixed with Iranian people and the stories of his adventures entered into Iranian national legends. They conclude that Rostam and Zāl's descendants were from the Scythian race, perhaps Parthian tribes, and were the rulers of Sistān around the first century B.C. and the early A.D. centuries and gradually entered into the Iranian national and epic stories. Hassanabadi reviews other scholars by stating that the etymon form of Rostam's name should be Iranian and his legendary altitudes belonged to the ancient inhabitants of Zarankā (Drangīāna), and Arachosiā and the Sakā tribes invaded the eastern part of Iranian plateau in the late second century B.C., a region that has been named after them: Sakastān/ Segestān/ Sistān later. (*Ibid.*) Hassanabadi concludes that "Rostam (*Raota+ Staxma*) could be the title or epithet of a great god or an eminent hero of the native inhabitant of the eastern part of Iran, close to Hāmūn (later, Sistān) Lake. After the conquest of this region by Aryan Scythians, his legends were collected in the ancient Aryan myths." (Hassanabadi, 77)

3. GILGAMESH, THE ANCIENT BABYLONIAN HERO OF MESOPOTAMIAN MYTHOLOGY

The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the oldest and most famous epic literary works of the ancient civilization dating back to four thousand years ago. David Damrosch calls the Gilgamesh epic, "perhaps the first true work of world literature" (Damrosch, 49). This epic consists of significant themes and contains philosophical and ethical ideas about the ancient humans' perspective towards the world. It is one of the first examples of epic stories, written about one thousand and five hundred years before Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. This time, Gilgamesh aimed to the heart of Asia; he "travelled over the wilderness, he wandered over the grasslands, a long journey, in search of Utnapishtim, whom the gods took after the deluge; and they set him to live in the land of Dilmun, in the garden of the sun; and to him alone of men they gave everlasting life." (Sanders, 16) Gilgamesh was the king who knew all the countries of the world. He as a wise man who knew the mysteries and was aware

of the classified stories. The gods made Gilgamesh physically indiscriminate when they were creating him. Shams, the glorious sun, gave him a beautiful look; Adad, the god of the storm, gave him courage; gods of beauty made him pure, and placed him in a higher position.

Gilgamesh is a tyrannical kingdom and a skull with a semi-heavenly existence. Gilgamesh is a creature whom a "goddess made him," and he is as strong as "a savage bull," that "none can withstand his arms." (Sanders, 4) *The Epic of Gilgamesh* begins with a hero's success, introducing him as a great man in the field of knowledge and wisdom. He can predict the occurrence and do wondrous things. Two-thirds of his existence was divine, and a third of him was human. In the epic story, Gilgamesh puts on a long journey to seek immortality, then hard-pressed, he returns home, describes the sufferings he has drawn on the inscription. When Gilgamesh's tyranny is unlimited, the citizens of Uruk—the land that Gilgamesh ruled—are complaining him to the goddesses, and the goddesses responded to their complaints and created a twin king as the rival of Gilgamesh who called Enkidu.

Later, when Gilgamesh does not accept Ishtar's request for marriage, Ishtar, the goddess of love and war, goes to her parents on the sky and tells them how she is insulted by Gilgamesh. Getting the death penalty from the gods sends Gilgamesh off for immortality. In search of immortality, he went on a long journey and met many people who tell him that his journey is pointless; but, he could not get what he is searching for. In the story, Gilgamesh does not listen to anyone, and pushes forward; He is so determined to find Utnapishtim, the only human who is immortal, as he says, "I have travelled here in search of Utnapishtim my father; for men say he has entered the assembly of the gods, and has found everlasting life: I have a desire to question him, concerning the living and the dead." (Sanders, 16) Being exhausted, Gilgamesh says, "How can I rest, how can I be at peace? Despair is in my heart. [...] Because I am afraid of death I will go as best I can to find Utnapishtim whom they call the Faraway, for he has entered the assembly of the gods." (Sanders, 16) He finally meets Utnapishtim, who tells him that there is no permanence in this world. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh that instead of obtaining immortality, he should obtain youthfulness. Gilgamesh finally accepts his fate, and after Enkidu's death, he lives his normal, mortal life.

5. AVAILABILITY SEARCH OF ROSTAM AND GILGAMESH

Many psychologists and, above all, Jung considers the similarities and commonalities of the myths of different nations as the common heritage of human psyche or collective subconscious. Although myths do not have a defined unified structure, the minds of the authors of mythological works are influenced by ancient patterns. The contents of the collective subconscious of mankind are archetypes that are an untrained tendency to experience things in a certain way. Archetypes cannot be organized and presented in a regular format; preferably, the patterns will be characterized by comparing and adapting the literature of two or more nations. Jung discovered a very close relationship between dreams, myths, art and literature. He believed that art and literature were like dreams, the place of manifestation of exemplary forms and the emergence of collective unconsciousness. According to Jung, great poets such as Ferdowsi, Hafez, Rumi or writers such as Hedayat are persistent because their works represent the collective unconscious manifestations and the ancient mythological insight of all nations (Shayganfar, 142).

Hassanabadi describes that according to Bahār, from the point of view of traditional societies, all important deeds were originally performed by the gods and heroes. In the subsequent periods, people just constantly repeat or imitate these archetypes. Everything has to have an archetype, and if it does not, it is meaningless and has no reality. From the point of view of ancient mankind, history was indeed the rehabilitation and return of an ancient epic adventure, and this means turning history into myth and epos. Another factor in the evolution of myths is the limitation of the collective memory of nations. A historical event, even the most important one, does not remain in the memory of people on its own because the collective memory is a non-historical institution, full of limitations. And because of this limitation, the memory of a historical event or a real person cannot remain in people's memory for more than two or three centuries. The function of the collective memory is different from other types of memory; it deals with general issues and principles instead of minor events, eternal archetypes instead of historical characters. Due to the anti-historical features of collective memory with regard to identifying a mythical archetype, the historical aspect of traditional characters were destroyed, and mythical or epical elements were attributed to the character instead. Sometimes the hero is considered to be a contemporary of characters who lived a long time before or after him. Consequently, he becomes their enemy or even their friend and as the

result, it is impossible to recognize him. Thus, the collective memory changes and transforms the memory of historical events and characters in such a way as to match the foundations of ancient ontology and adapt to the framework of ancient archetypes (Hassanabadi, 74-75).

Enkidu calls Gilgamesh as a creature whose "countenance" is "like a lion" (Sanders, 10) Gilgamesh also mentioned, "I will wander through the wilderness in the skin of a lion" (Sanders, 15) He tells how he "killed the lions in the passes of the mountain." (Sanders, 17). He described as, "Gilgamesh laid a veil, as one veil the bride, over his friend. He began to rage like a lion, like a lioness robbed of her whelps." (Sanders, 15) Likewise, in *Shahnameh*, to reach his goal and to free Kay Kāvus, Rostam stays ahead and encounters a lion—which is later killed by Rakhsh, his horse. Vahed-Doost describes that in old time, stones, iron, and fire, have been an indispensable must for human beings and men were using a tool not as an artificial one, but as an inventory which is possessing inherent strength. Instead of being an artefact, it becomes God or Deaconess that the will of humanity hinges on it. The man feels that he is subjected to this tool and worships it through a religious ritual. Thoroughly, instruments such as axe and hammer, have long been of such a religious significance." (Vahed-Doost, 394) Rostam's wand has also had such a value and sanctity. At his youth on, he puts this mace in all the crucial moments. Gilgamesh also has a battle tool, including an axe that helps him. In the battle, he uses instruments that are a cover of animal skin. Gilgamesh wears a dress from lion skin, and Rostam wears armour of tiger skin that was protecting them as perilous of death. Distinct from ordinary bumps, they are not affected by fire and water, do not burn or get wet. Wearing it—in the seven labours that he passes through—Rostam finds himself eternal and wears this dress (Vahed-Doost, 407).

In the seven labours of Rostam, the final labour that he must fulfil is the killing of the demon. After leaving behind the previous labours, he goes to kill the white devil, the symbol of evilness. Kay Kāvus, the king, is blinded now, and the cure to his eyes is the white devil's blood of heart and brain. Rostam seized the devil, separated the liver from its body to cure the King Kay Kāvus's eyes. An epic hero should have something more than other people to distinguish him from other humans and heroes. Thus, the epic writer brings forth superpowers and makes him immortalize with Olympian powers. Vahed-Doost reminds that "the description of his power and his courage and delusions, as well as his conversion from a historical face to a fictional and epic portrait, and his

introduction as a gladiator, made him less aware of his glorious godliness—as Iranians only believed in kings' godliness—but the precision in the life of Rostam from his birth time to the death, confirms his Olympian face." (Vahed-Doost, 254) By contrast, Khatibi imports the fact that despite some details about Rostam's fate seem different in different texts, but the source of these rumours is *The Shahnameh of Abu-Mansur*. Although the prediction of Rostam's nebbishness and death are fascimiled, there are some differences between texts. In *Shahnameh*, Zal predicts Rustam's fate before fighting with Esfandiar, but in *Gorar al-Akhbar* after the battle, Zal speaks about his fate. Rostam has to change a way: to be killed or be prisoned. The beautiness of *Shahnameh* is in the awareness that Rostam is choosing his fate, but in *Gorar al-Akhbar* the tragedy is narrated differently. The question is which mentioned story is more similar to *The Shahnameh of Abu-Mansur*? It seems that Ferdowsi's story is closer to the spirit of an epic story (Khatibi, 140).

In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, after Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh became an obsessive quest for immortality and apart from his qualities—like all men—he eventually died. George wrote, "For the poet of Gilgamesh, perhaps Sin-leqi-unninni, perhaps another, the wisdom attained by his hero, the archetypal searcher after immortality, permits the hero to see that mankind's destiny—eternal life—is the essential compensation for the pain of individual oblivion. Acceptance of this as the truth of the human predicament thus brings ultimate peace and reconciliation even to those, like Gilgamesh, who go most in fear of death." (George, 239) The story ends with the grief of Gilgamesh's death":

The king has laid himself down and will not rise again;
The Lord of Kullab will not rise again;
He overcame evil, he will not come again;
Though he was strong of an arm he will not rise again;
He had wisdom and a comely face, he will not come again;
He is gone into the mountain, he will not come again;
On the bed of fate he lies, he will not rise again,
Front the couch of many colours he will not come again. (Sanders, 24)

An ancient water symbolic pattern in epics and myths is also found in Seven Labours of Rostam and in the Gilgamesh's story. Rostam has to pass blue water to

save King Kay Kāvus. It seems that water and sea and pass through them as a large stage to reach the light in life. Besides, the sea symbolizes the infinite mystery of our hopes and desires, death and rebirth, eternity and the duration of the unconsciousness. The river symbolizes the death and rebirth of time and the integration of time into eternity, the transitional stages of life and the embodiment of the gods in human forms. Naturally, this water encryption is never objectively visible, but it is formed of a set of related codes in a single and factual component.

Shayganfar explains after the great cold, Aryans moved toward the noon land—where the sun shone on the shafts of the sky—the Sun held a holy place and kept its value in Iranian civilization. Iranians praised the sun as the most celebrated patron saint. He reminds that in *The Histories of Herodotus*, worship of the Sun among the Persians has been remembered as the oldest tradition in history. (Shayganfar, 158) After Zoroaster, Mehr—Mithra, one of the great Gods of that time—became an angel or what is called "izad," similar to a saint. Vahed-Doost wrote, "Rostam also believes in the Divine if we see signs of prayer and belief in Isadmayer (Sun) in *Shahnameh* Which represents ancient beliefs. The most significant feature of it is hidden in *Shahnameh*, in the belief of the Pahlavan of *Shahnameh*, Rostam, who is a Sun-worshiper and has been mentioned many times." (Vahed-Doost, 274) Besides, Shamash, God of Mehr, always supports Gilgamesh and calls on him to destroy evil. As we read, "The tears, ran down his face and he said, 'Alas, it is a long journey that I must take to the Land of Humbaba. If this enterprise is not to be accomplished, why did you move me, Shamash, with the restless desire to perform it? How can I succeed if you will not succour me? If I die in that country I will die without rancour, but if I return I will make a glorious offering of gifts and of praise to Shamash.'" (Sanders, 8) Enkidu said Gilgamesh, "O my lord, if you will enter that country, go first to the hero Shamash, tell the Sun God, for the land is his. The country where the cedar is cut belongs to Shamash." (Sanders, 7) Similarly, Skjaervo compares Zarathustra and Rostam's stories;

The Sogdian Rostam fragment does not correspond exactly to any particular story in the [*Shahnameh*], although Davidson has pointed out several parallels. It is a short fragment, describing one of the Rostam's encounters with the *divs* sent out by their leader to harm and kill Rostam. What is of greater interest here, however, is the stylistic aspect of the Sogdian fragment. There is one of the

famous part of the Avesta, chapter 19 of the *Videvdad*, in which the hero, namely Zarathustra, encounters and confronts the *daeuias* sent out by the leader, Anra Maniu, to harm and kill him. Both the Zarathustra and the Rostam stories begin with the *daeuias/dews* plotting the hero's death, but more interesting is the description of the *daeuias* and their confusion in the *Videvdad* passages expressed by the accumulation of synonymous or similar terms and repetitions, rhymes, alliterations, and refrains. (Skjaervo, 167)

Animals are symbolic in the myths of all nations. They have a mysterious face contain traditional mysteries and in the puzzle of the Totemian tendencies, the image of man and beast mixes. "The beast is replaced by father, teacher, guardian, witch and many others." (Vahed-Doost, 295) There is no role for the reader of Rostam in *The Epic of Kings*. When he is asleep, Rakhsh fights with lion and destroys it. In the third labour, when Rostam sleeps, the dragon is shown several times, and each time Rakhsh tries to wake Rostam from sleep. Rakhsh will later help Rostam to kill the dragon. In the fifth labour, Rakhsh is always a companion of Rostam to rescue him from the darkness. In the second labour, when Rostam is lost in the warm and burning desert, and he cannot continue his journey and endure with the intensity of thirst, the eagle appears as a guide, and guides Rostam to the water. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Enkidu is also ancestor and companion of Gilgamesh. Enkidu is like animals at the beginning as mentioned: "the goddess conceived an image in her mind, and it was of the stuff of Anu of the firmament. She dipped her hands in water and pinched off clay, she let it fall in the wilderness, and noble Enkidu was created...Enkidu ate grass in the hills with the gazelle and lurked with wild beasts at the water-holes; he had the joy of the water with the herds of wild game." (Sanders, 4) Rakhsh and Enkidu, two symbolic creatures, talk to their owners and help them in difficult times. For example, in the third building, Rakhsh sees the dragon who sees Humbaba as part of Enkidu's story hidden from Rostam's vision and also the guardian of the forest, which turns into a colour every moment.

Another common example in both Rostam and Gilgamesh's epics is the passage of darkness. The world system in mythology is based on the dual foundation. This is also the case in creation from the point of view of Iranian mythology. From the very beginning of the creation of the world, its system is a dual system. After Urmazd and Ahriman—which the

first is the result of patience and the second is the doubtfulness [...] are born, (first of all, Ahriman is born), Ahriman is a symbolizes devil, darkness and ugliness, and Urmazd symbolizes light, beautifulness, and embody all the goodness. (Amouzgar, 14) Shayeganfar states that the world is composed of light and darkness, good and evil, black and white, without which one of these two systems of creation is destroyed. For this reason, "in myths, there are always two opposing forces opposing each other." (Shayeganfar, 149) In the two epics of Rostam and Gilgamesh, this is an example of an ancient pattern. The turning point is darkness which is a symbol of filth and ugliness: "the darkness was thick, and there was no light, he could see nothing ahead and nothing behind him. After ten leagues the end was near: After eleven leagues the dawn light appeared. At the end of twelve leagues, the sun streamed out." (Sanders, 16)

6. CONCLUSION

Without any historical relevancy or being affected and regret, a comparison between authors of literary works does not fit into the field of comparative literature. Investigating the similarity between different literary works does not mean to study these works in the category of comparative literature. (Neda, 25-26) Both storytellers in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Shahnameh: The Epic of Kings* have generalized the collective subconscious of mankind. Comparing the protagonists of two mythical heroes, we can partly be familiar with the contents of the collective subconscious of mankind, clarify the dark and vague cornerstones of the old cultural and social constructs, and comprehend the thoughts and beliefs of ancient people. As Bahar mentioned, primitive people in ancient times had practised every tradition through imitation—a traditional culture—because all human activities in the form of human terms have distinct sketches, and over the centuries, the same patterns have been practised continuously. (Bahar, 34)

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