



## Extended Abstract

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# The Reasons for the Femininity of the Sky in Naser Khosrow's Perspective

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### Introduction

the ancients considered the sky as the father and the earth as the mother, a belief that we can see in the works of many poets and writers, including Naser Khosrow. However, Naser Khosrow himself, in some poems, refers to the sky as the "mother" of people and, in another instance, as the "sister of Ahriman (the demon)", thereby alluding to its feminine nature. In this article, the author attempts to explain and analyze Naser Khosrow's statements about the feminine nature of the sky, considering ancient Iranian thoughts and beliefs. Naser Khosrow, as a Muslim, was undoubtedly a follower of the Ismaili Shia branch. Despite their adherence to Islam, the Ismailis were not unaffected by ancient Iranian beliefs, and it can be accepted that "the Ismaili worldview is rooted in ancient Iranian thoughts" (cf. Riahi, 1993: 77; Dadbeh, 2003: 112). Apparently, it was due to this nationalistic inclination that their invitation was accepted by many Iranians (cf. Safa, 1992: 253). Consequently, some Sunni Muslims accused them of reviving the customs and beliefs of their ancestors (cf. Ardestani Rostami, 2020a: 53-55). Therefore, it is natural that ancient Iranian ideas, such as Mithraism and Manichaeism, are reflected in the words of Naser Khosrow, an Ismaili. It seems that the feminine nature of the sky in his words is a result of these kinds of thoughts.

### Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

in this descriptive-analytical research, an attempt has been made to provide justifications for Naser Khosrow's personification of the sky as feminine, which are related to ancient Iranian perspectives. Previously, some, such as Mehdi Mohaghegh, merely pointed to this point (comparing the celestial sphere to a cruel mother) and provided limited evidence in this regard. Others, such as Jafar Shoar and Ali Asghar Halabi, have only spoken of the influence of the celestial spheres on human destiny. Meanwhile, Gholamrezaei believes that Naser Khosrow "called the sky mother because each of the mentioned stars that are effective in the creation of the human body has a celestial sphere."

Other commentators (Mohammadi, Barzegar Khaleghi), in explaining a verse in which the celestial sphere is called "mother," have stated: "According to ancient beliefs, the celestial sphere and the sky were considered the father, and the earth the mother; however, in the above verse, the celestial sphere is used in the general sense of time." Baghbani also believes that "Naser Khosrow's intention from the rotating dome without a green window was the fire sphere, and since the fire sphere is located below the lunar sphere and is part of the Earth's sphere, the attribute of mother applies to it."

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### Discussion

Naser Khosrow, in his *Divan* (poetry collection), contrary to his prose works, has called the sky in one instance the "cruel mother of mankind":

ای قُبَّه‌ی گردنده‌ی بی‌روزن خضرا با قامت فرتوتی و با قوت برنا  
فرزند تویم ای فلک، ای مادر بدمهر ای مادر ما چون‌که همی کین‌کشی از ما؟

And in another instance, he has called it "sister of Ahriman" and considered it feminine:

ای ستمگر فلک، ای خواهر اهریمن چون نگویی که چه افتاد تو را با من؟

This matter can be justified considering ancient Iranian belief, such as Mithraism and Manichaeism: belief from which Iranian Ismailis like Naser Khosrow, were greatly influenced.

1. During their worship of Mithra, Iranians also remembered the sky. Since some considered Mithra to be female and compared her to Greek goddesses, it seems that this group also considered the sky to be feminine because it was constantly mentioned alongside the female Mithra. It appears that this idea also influenced the subconscious of Naser Khosrow.
2. Another point is that ancient Iranians considered the sky to be made of stone, and Mithraists believed that Mithra was born from this rock, thus attributing the role of a birthing woman to it and portraying it as a mother. Apparently, this idea has also found its way into Naser Khosrow's *Divan* (collected poems). Of course, since the ancients recognized woman as a symbol of cunning and infidelity, it was natural for them to consider the sky a cruel and deceitful mother who does not love her children and torments them; as Naser Khosrow holds such a view.
3. From Naser Khosrow's words, it can be understood that he considers the feminine sky to be the same as Az (Azi, Ahriman's female consort or a demon of greed/desire) and believes their essence to be of fire. The roots of Naser Khosrow's view can be found among the Manichaeans. The Manichaeans consider the sky to be composed of the body of a demon whose mother is the demon Az. This female Az apparently possesses an essence of fire that has fallen from the sky upon all material existence and plunged it into suffering. In another instance, Naser Khosrow introduces the celestial sphere (or "Falak," often translated as "fate" or "fortune") as the sister of Ahriman. This view is also connected to Manichaean ideas, meaning that just as the Manichaeans placed the female demon Az in an independent and, of course, highly malevolent position alongside her brother Ahriman, Naser Khosrow also calls Falak, which is either Az itself or filled with it, the sister of Ahriman.

### Conclusion

from what has been discussed, we understand that ideas from Mithraism and Manichaeism had influenced the minds and consciousness of Iranians who had converted to Islam. This influence likely led Naser Khosrow, a Shia Muslim, to consider the sky feminine, contrary to his contemporaries.

He seems to consider the sky feminine due to its association with the god Mithra, who was considered female by ancient Iranians, and like the Mithraists, he regards the stony sky as a woman from whom Mithra was born. Furthermore, just as the female Az is mentioned alongside Ahriman in Manichaean texts, he also calls the feminine sky, full of Az, the sister of Ahriman.

**Keywords:** Naser Khosrow, femininity of the sky, woman in Naser Khosrow's poetry, woman in Mithraism and Manichaeism.

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