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Extended Abstract

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# Piran of Turan and Gudarz of Iran: A Comparative Study of Two Symbols of Wisdom in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* Based on Jung's Archetype of the Wise Old Man

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## Introduction

Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is more than a heroic epic; it is a multilayered work that reflects psychological, philosophical, and ethical concepts within its mythological and historical narratives. This monumental text not only recounts the history and culture of Iran through heroic tales but also symbolically portrays the structures of the human psyche. One of the most effective approaches to uncovering the hidden layers of the *Shahnameh* is the application of Carl Gustav Jung's theory of archetypes. Jung argued that within the collective unconscious of humanity, primordial and universal patterns exist that recur across cultures in the form of characters and narratives. Among these archetypes, the "Wise Old Man" stands out as a symbol of wisdom, experience, and guidance, appearing in critical moments as counsellor and mentor. In the *Shahnameh*, two figures, Gudarz of Iran and Piran of Turan, despite standing on opposing sides of the battlefield, share striking similarities in their wisdom, prudence, and social roles. This article focuses on comparing these two characters, aiming to demonstrate how Ferdowsi reimagines wisdom within the epic framework and elevates it as a force distinct from physical strength and military valor.

## Method, Review of Literature, Purpose

The methodology of this study is descriptive–analytical, based on textual analysis of the *Shahnameh* within the framework of Jungian analytical psychology. First, the narrative portrayals of Piran and Gudarz are outlined; then their shared and divergent traits in political counsel, crisis management, ethical conduct, and their roles in prolonging or resolving conflicts are examined. Previous research has largely concentrated on historical, narrative, or moral aspects of *Shahnameh* characters, with limited attention to psychological and archetypal readings. While some studies have noted the role of wisdom in decision-making or Piran's conciliatory actions, no comprehensive comparative analysis of Gudarz and Piran as manifestations of the "Wise Old Man" archetype has been undertaken. The purpose of this article is to

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fill this gap by analyzing the two figures across opposing fronts and revealing how each embodies a distinct dimension of wisdom within the collective unconscious. Thus, the study seeks to provide a fresh perspective on the psychological structure of these characters and to highlight their ethical and mythological implications in Ferdowsi's narrative.

**Discussion**

Gudarz and Piran are two prominent figures from the opposing camps of Iran and Turan who appear contemporaneously in the *Shahnameh*. Their destinies are intricately intertwined: Gudarz serves from the reign of Kay Kavus to the end of Kay Khosrow's rule, while Piran serves under Afrasiyab until the battle of Davazdah Rokh (twelve faces). Both exit the narrative at the same juncture. Piran is slain by Gudarz, and Gudarz subsequently disappears from the epic. This parallelism and shared fate signify the confrontation of two balanced forces across the battlefield.

In terms of lineage and social standing, Gudarz is the most distinguished son of Gashvad and holds a prominent position within his clan. He is consistently portrayed as elder, counselor, and commander, with his descendants collectively referred to as the "Gudarzians." Piran, likewise, is the foremost son of Viseh, ruler of Khotan, and enjoys high rank in Afrasiyab's court. As chief counsellor and commander, he plays a vital role in maintaining the cohesion of Turan's army.

Both figures assume pivotal roles in critical historical moments. Gudarz repeatedly guides Iran's army with prudence, resolving crises and ultimately defeating Piran. Piran, on the other hand, restrains Afrasiyab from rash decisions, supports Siavash and Kay Khosrow, and even faces death with dignity. These traits render him a manifestation of the Wise Old Man archetype within the realm of darkness.

The commonalities between Gudarz and Piran include wisdom, experience, advisory capacity, and crisis management. Both act as restraining forces against the impulsive decisions of younger warriors. The difference lies in their contexts: Piran is often constrained by Turan's political pressures and fails to secure lasting peace, whereas Gudarz, backed by his firm position in Iran, demonstrates greater authority in directing events.

From a Jungian perspective, Gudarz represents the Wise Old Man aligned with light and truth, serving justice and collective wisdom. Piran, though intelligent and benevolent, is bound to the destructive power of Turan and ultimately perishes due to this allegiance. This duality illustrates Jung's notion that archetypes are neutral and can serve either growth or distortion depending on context. Ferdowsi, through these two figures, conveys that wisdom is not confined to one nation but is inherent to humanity itself.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal that both Gudarz and Piran embody the archetype of the Wise Old Man: Gudarz in the realm of light and righteousness, and Piran in the realm of darkness and uncertainty. Their confrontation reflects the inner structure of the human psyche, symbolizing the tension between conscience and shadow within the collective unconscious. Ferdowsi, by crafting these two characters, elevates wisdom as a vital force alongside courage and physical strength. Each demonstrates, in distinct ways, that the survival of society and the endurance of human values depend upon rationality and experience.

Thus, the *Shahnameh* is not merely an epic of battles and heroism but also a philosophical testament to wisdom and prudence embedded within its narratives and characters. The comparative analysis of Gudarz and Piran underscores that wisdom can manifest across opposing fronts and even within the enemy's camp as a symbol of rationality.

**Keywords:** Shahnameh, Gudarz, Piran Viseh, Wise Old Man, Archetype, Jung

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