

# Iran's Shahnameh

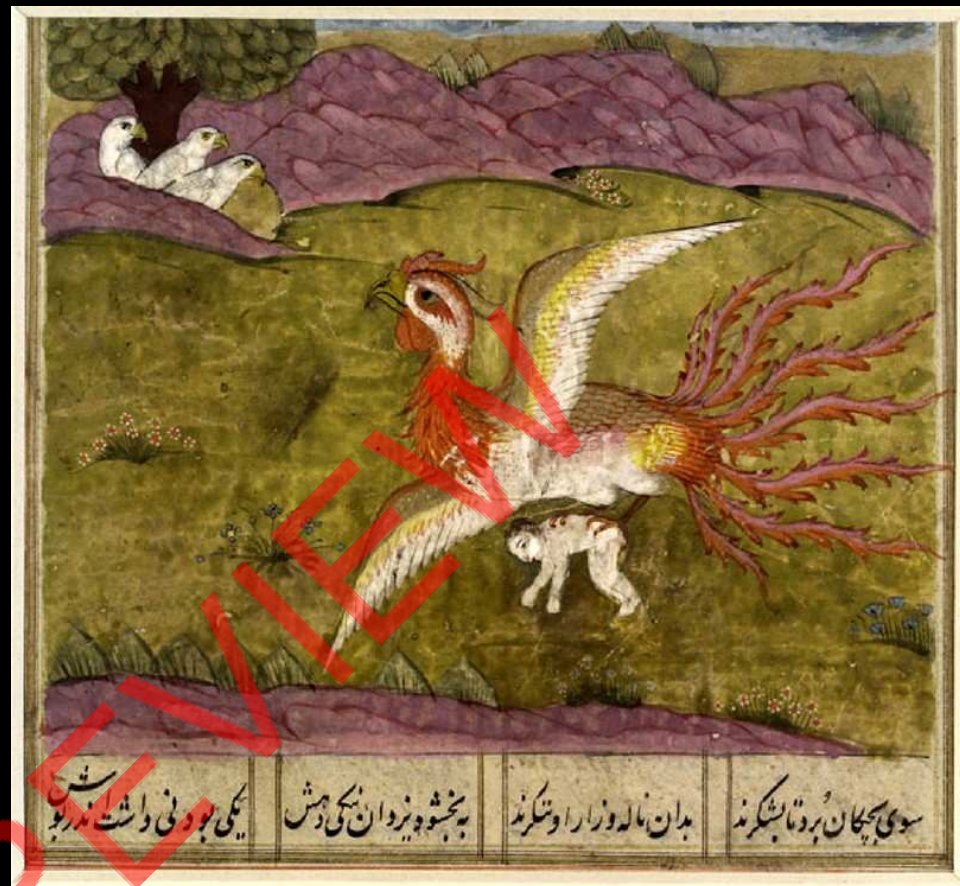


Illustrated Legendary Stories - Pishdadian Dynasty

Ervad Jal Dastur



Tur and Salm were both filled with hatred for Manuchehr and Faridun, as they prepared for the battle. They plotted the battle by deciding to ambush Manuchehr's army at night. But Manuchehr's spies got wind of this plot. Manuchehr hid his 3000 brave men in a place where they would be able to attack the enemy from behind. Tur set off with 100,000 troops in the darkness of the night, but as they neared the camp, they came on the Iranian forces drawn up behind their banner, ready for war. They had no choice but to attack. Tur had no means to escape – he tugged at his reins and turned to flee. Manuchehr sped after him, and when he closed on him, sprung a spear at Tur's back. The sword dropped from Tur's hand, and Manuchehr grasped and threw him on the ground. He then severed his head and left the body for the animals to devour. He ordered that Tur's head be sent to Faridun.



Sam, one of the champions of Manucehr, had no child, and his heart grieved at this. However, his fate allowed him to have a child by a beautiful woman living in his private quarters. This woman gave birth to a beautiful boy, whose radiance lit the world. Although his face was bright, his hair was completely white. Sam was ashamed and embarrassed to raise a child with white hair, whom he considered to be an ill-omen. He gave orders that the child be taken far away in the forest, where the *Simurgh* lived.

When the *Simurgh's* chicks grew hungry, she flew down from her nest; she saw an unweaned, crying baby lying on the ground. His cradle was of thorns; he was naked and no milk had touched his lips. The *Simurgh* flew down, stretched out her claws and clutched him, and flew with him back to her nest in the Alburz Mountains. She intended to have her chicks feed off him and paid no attention to his cries. But God had other plans, so that when the *Simurgh* and the chicks saw the weeping child, something wonderful happened: they took pity on him, staring in astonishment at his lovely face. She sought out the most delicate morsels of the chase for the child, touching them to his lips, and in this way many days passed and the child grew into a young boy.



When Nauzar was executed, there were numerous other unarmed captives with him. Afrasiyab, at the time, wanted to kill all of them, when Aghriras intervened and suggested that it wouldn't be noble to kill unarmed captives. Instead, he would chain and imprison them in a cave where they would perish on their own. Afrasiyab agreed and so Aghriras led the captives to Sari.

When the Iranian captives learnt that Zal was preparing to settle the score with Afrasiyab, they sent a message to Aghriras saying *"You are a great lord and because of you, we are still alive. Zal and other warriors have set off to fight with Afrasiyab and they will not hesitate to use their strengths to harm him. This will infuriate Afrasiyab who may very well order us killed. If you agree to set us free, we'll scatter all over the country and always bless you."*

The wise Aghriras replied *"I can't do that, but I shall try to help you in another way. When Zal and his troops come close to Sari, I shall hand you all over to him and evacuate the area without any fighting, and so bring shame to my head."*

The captives sent the message to Zal of this plan. Zal sent Keshwad, his faithful warrior, to lead his troops to Sari and free the captives. Everything went as planned. When Afrasiyab learned what Aghriras did, he was very angry and humiliated him. Aghriras said *"A little shame and sense of honour are not out of place. Whenever you think of doing evil, fear God."* Afrasiyab sprang up like a mad elephant, and to answer, drew his sword. And then, this faithless fool slashed his brother in two with a blow to the neck.

# Iran's Shahnameh



Illustrated Legendary Stories - Kayanian Dynasty, Part 1

Ervad Jal Dastur



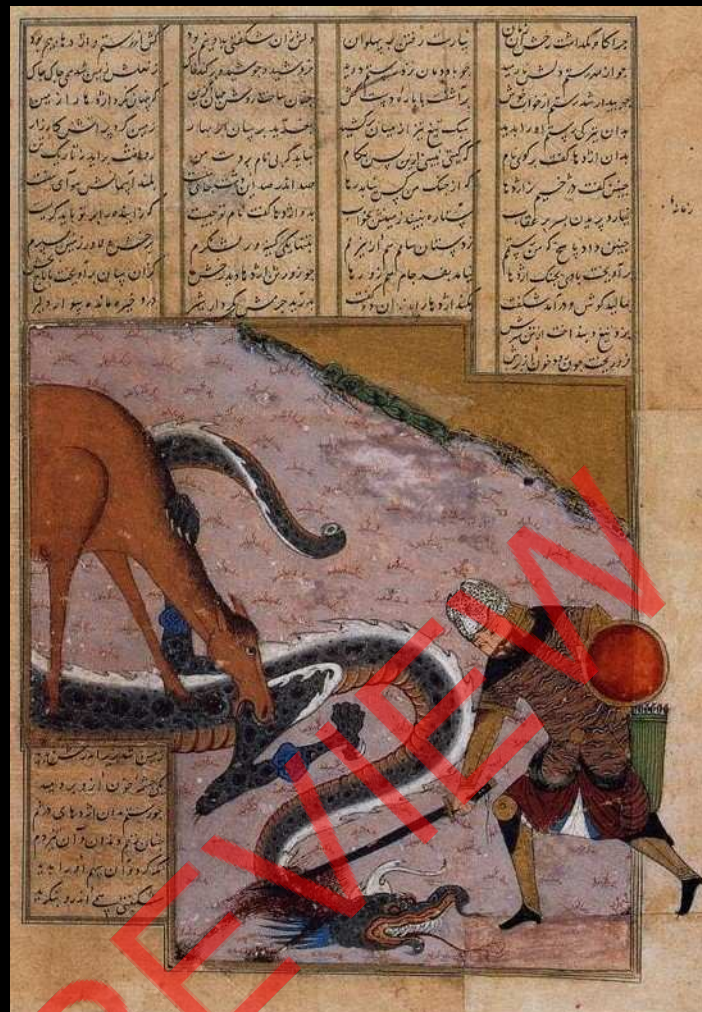
The next day, Kaus marched with his army. As the sun set, he pitched his camp before Mount Aspruz. This place was the home of monstrous demons; Kaus had decided to rest and sleep there. At dawn, the army rose and came belted and helmeted before the King, who ordered Giv to take a thousand warriors and lead the way into Mazanderan. He said *“Whoever you see, young or old, kill them, and turn the day into night, so that these demons will understand that the world is to be emptied of sorcery.”* Giv and his men did exactly that. They burned and plundered the towns and spared nobody.

The news of looting and massacre reached the king of Mazanderan. The king’s heart was filled with pain and anxiety. He called one of his demons, Sanjeh, and ordered him to go to the White *Div* (demon) and ask him to come to his aid. He said *“Tell him that if he doesn’t come fast enough, he will soon see no one left alive here.”* Sanjeh took the King’s message to the White *Div* who replied *“Do not despair, I will come immediately with a mighty army and drive the Iranians out of Mazanderan.”*

When night came, a huge black cloud spread over the army. The earth seemed like a sea pitch, from which all light had gone away. A huge tent of smoke started to loom over the army and men’s eyes were baffled by the darkness. Many men perished because of the mysterious smoke, and the King was also blinded. Kaus’ arrogant actions brought evil onto his army, and his soldiers were led into captivity. In this way, they suffered for a week and now, none of the army was able to see.

On the eighth day, the White *Div* roared *“Kaus, you’re like a willow, fruitless and afraid. And you once thought that your army could invade Mazanderan? Here is the end of everything you sought and here is the punishment for which you fought.”* Then he chose 12,000 demons, armed with daggers, to guard the Iranians and took all the King’s treasures, including his crown and gave them to the army commander of Mazanderan, Arzhang. The White *Div* said to him *“Tell the King that Kay Kaus and his army will never look on the bright sun and moon again. I have not killed them, so that they’ll know how pain differs from pleasure. They will die slowly, groaning in despair.”* Arzhang set off for the King of Mazanderan with this message.

Sick at heart, Kaus sent a warrior, who was amongst those luckily not yet captured, with a message to Zal in Zabulistan. He made him write on his behalf: *“I did not act wisely, I didn’t follow your advice and my lack of wisdom has brought disaster on all of us. I need your help now, because if you don’t, all will be lost.”* Zal received the message and sent his son Rostam to rescue the King and instructed him to take the shorter, but more dangerous of the two possible routes. This is where Rostam underwent seven major trials (*Haftkhan*) before he reached King Kay Kaus.



A dragon, from which no elephant had ever escaped, appeared on the plain. Even demons were afraid to cross its path. As it approached, it saw Rostam asleep and Raksh standing awake, alert as a lion. It turned towards Raksh, who trotted over to Rostam and woke him. Rostam immediately got up, gazed around him in the darkness, and the fearsome dragon disappeared. Rostam was annoyed by Raksh for waking him. He slept again, and again the dragon emerged from the darkness. Raksh pawed at the ground, and once more Rostam woke up. He sprang up, looked around him and again saw nothing except the darkness. He said to his wise horse *"You should sleep as well, and not disturb me like this."* For a third time, he laid his head down to sleep, and the fearsome dragon roared, with his breath seeming to flicker with flame. Raksh neighed, reared up and his hooves pawed violently at the ground. Rostam woke from his sweet sleep, furious with his horse, but this time God produced a light so that the dragon could be seen, and Rostam quickly drew his sword. The dragon leaped at him, but in the end, he could not escape from Rostam, as Raksh sank his teeth into the dragon's shoulders. He tore at the dragon's flesh, and Rostam was astonished at his ferocity. Rostam smote the dragon with his sword and cut off its head. The whole dark desert appeared to flow with blood and poison. Rostam thanked God, saddled Raksh, mounted, and went on his way to the land of sorcerers.

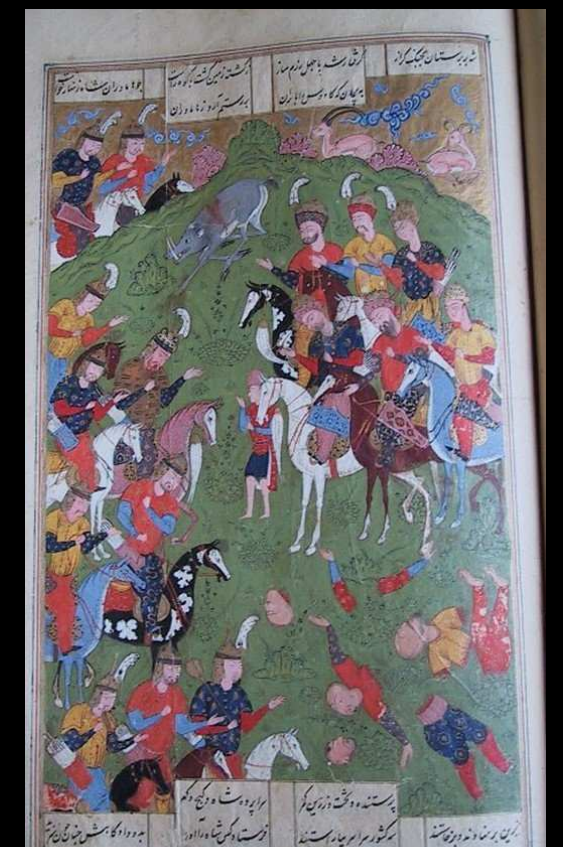
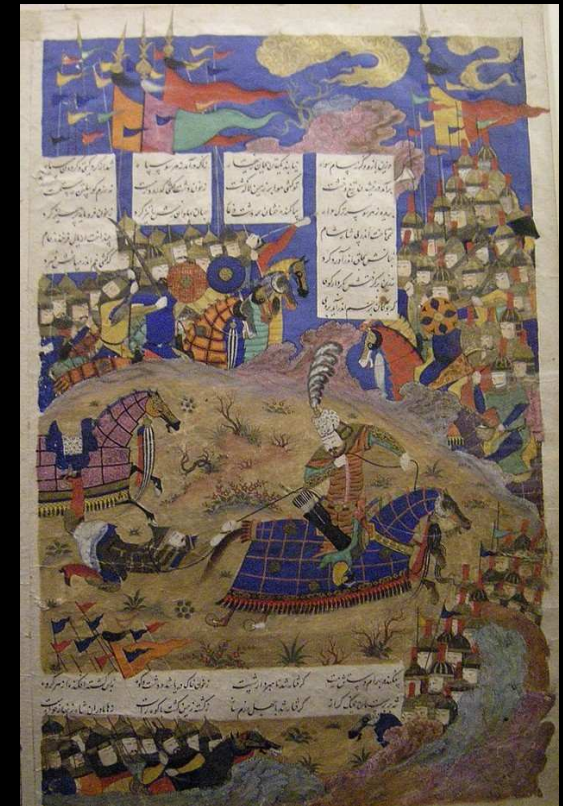


Next day, the armies were drawn up in battle order; on the side of Hamaveran, the army stretched for two miles. When Rostam saw this, he said to his men "You see their mounts' necks and manes, but keep your eyes on the points of their lances; though they are one hundred thousand, and we are but a hundred horsemen, it is not greater numbers that will win this battle."

Spears and arrows glittered in the air, and many lances thronged the sky, with abandoned armour and severed heads. Rostam urged Raksh forward and rode after the Arab king; he flung his lariat, catching the king by the waist and jerked him down from the saddle. Sixty of the king's noblemen were taken prisoner, and the king of Barbary was also captured. The king of Hamaveran was defeated and he promised to hand over Kaus and his noblemen to Rostam.

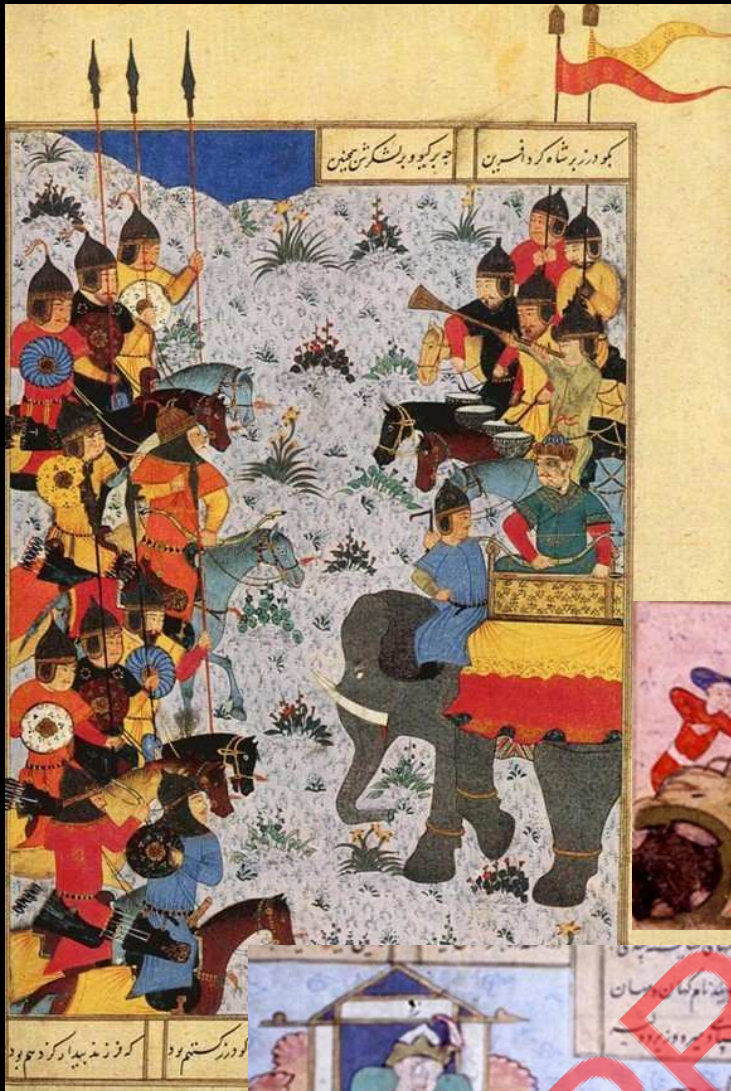
Kaus, along with Sudابه and their entourage, led the army out of the city to their camp. The number of Kaus' forces was now augmented greatly by the troops of Hamaveran, Egypt and Barbary.

They then started to plan dealing with Afrasiyab, who had taken control of Iran.





After a few days of rest and getting acquainted with the formalities, Kay Khosrau set out on a hunting expedition. He requested that Rostam accompany him. The hunt, however, served as a cover for King's real intentions - a full fledged survey of the Iranian marches and of the devastated lands. After this assessment, Kay Khosrau ordered refurbishing of cities that had fallen on bad times. The town-by-town inspection finally brought Kay Khosrau to Azerbaijan, where he visited the Azargashasp fire temple and prayed to the Creator. Kay Khosrau swore by the Holy Fire that he would be steadfast in his resolution, and nothing would distract him from avenging the death of his father, not even the fact that he was the grandson of Afrasiyab. As a token of his integrity in this matter, he had his solemn pledge recorded and witnessed by Rostam, Zal and other Iranian warriors.



Kay Khosrau's champions promised their whole-hearted support to their King's brave endeavour. Rather than mobilizing the armies at once, the King gave a feast and bestowed wealth and titles to the prospective heroes, along with their assignments. The task of beheading Palashan, Afrasiyab's mighty champion, went to Bizhan. Giv undertook killing Tazav, another Turanian supporter, and burning the wooden barricades at Kasseh Rud. Gurgin was assigned the most important task of taking the King's message to Afrasiyab, which called for the handing over Garsivaz, Gorzizareh, and Damur for the killing of Siyavakhsh. Finally, as suggested by Rostam, the reclaiming of two provinces adjoining Zabulistan was assigned to Rostam's son, Faramarz. Kay Khosrau promised the kingship of those provinces to Faramarz.

Manizeh hurried to Rostam like the wind and spoke to him as Bizhan had instructed. When Rostam saw her come running and heard what she said, he knew that Bizhan had entrusted her with their secret. He said *"My child, yes, I'm Raksh's lord sent by God to save Bizhan. Tell him, but let no one else know of this; in the darkest night, listen to the least sound. Spend the next day gathering firewood in the forest, and when night comes, light a huge bonfire."*

Overjoyed at his words, Manizeh went running back to Bizhan and told him the good news. She said *"I'm to build a huge fire so that the rock and the pit's whereabouts shine like the daytime; he'll be able to use the glow as a guide to us."* Bizhan thanked God and started to praise Him for his help, and also Manizeh, for her love and sacrifice. Manizeh set about gathering firewood, and when she saw the sun disappear and night approach, she lit the fire. Her heart pounded as she listened for the iron hooves of Raksh.

Rostam and his companions set out for the distant glow and travelled expeditiously. When they reached there, Rostam told his heroes to remove the rock from the mouth of the pit. But no matter how hard the warriors tried, they could not shift the rock. When Rostam saw how they struggled to no avail, he dismounted, hitched up his skirt above his waist and with a lion's power, lifted the rock and flung it into the forest. He peered into the pit and sighing in sympathy, addressed Bizhan *"How did such a misfortune happen to you? How is it that the goblet you took from her hands was filled with poison?"* Bizhan replied *"When I heard that you were coming, all the world's poison turned to sweetness for me."* Rostam then said *"I have one request of you; that you drive from your heart all thoughts of hatred for Gorgin."* Bizhan answered *"What do you know of how Gorgin treated me? If I ever set eyes on him again, my vengeance will be like God's last judgement."* Rostam said *"If you persist in your hatred, I shall leave you chained in this pit."* A cry of grief rose up from the pit, and Bizhan said *"The evil that came to me was from Gorgin, and now I must suffer this too; but I accept, and drive off all hatred for him."*

Rostam lowered his lariat into the pit and brought Bizhan out of its depths. He was horrified to see that Bizhan had wasted away with pain, his legs still shackled, his head uncovered, his hair and nails grown long, and his body was caked with blood where the chains had eaten into his flesh. Rostam broke the shackles with his bare hands. They made their way home, with Bizhan on one side of Rostam, and Manizeh on the other; the two young people recounted their sufferings to the hero.



After the 'Battle of Yazdarokh', the King decided to launch a fresh attack on the Turanians. He made his contingent very strong by getting other rulers under his sovereignty to send their armies. On the other hand, Afrasiyab was devastated by the news of Piran's death and his best warriors in single combat. He swore that he'd retaliate against Kay Khosrau. Just then, he received news that Kay Khosrau's army had reached the Jaihun river and were swarming all over the place. He immediately prepared his army into two main divisions, one under the command of his older son, Shideh, and the other with his younger son, Jehan.

Each army waited for the other to attack. Both Kings had consulted their respective astrologers who advised them to adopt a defensive approach. Three days went by without any action. On the fourth day, Afrasiyab's son, Shideh, got impatient and told his father "I denounce your dependance on astrologers. Brave men don't wait for astrologers to tell them when to fight." Afrasiyab tried to pacify his son, and asked him to be tactful, and not impulsive against powerful foes.

However, Shideh did not budge, and Afrasiyab relented. He therefore sent a message to Kay Khosrau, asking him to relinquish the war. If not, then he had to wrestle with his son, Shideh. Kay Khosrau decided to go for combat, as he knew that he had the divine glory to fight a warrior like Shideh, who possessed the powers of black magic and sorcery. He met Shideh near the border of Kharzam and started his combat. Shideh was no match for the mighty Kay Khosrau, who didn't take too long to drop Shideh on the ground. The King then pierced his dagger straight into his opponent's heart.

Afrasiyab was greatly distressed with the news, and he renewed his pledge to fight the Iranians.

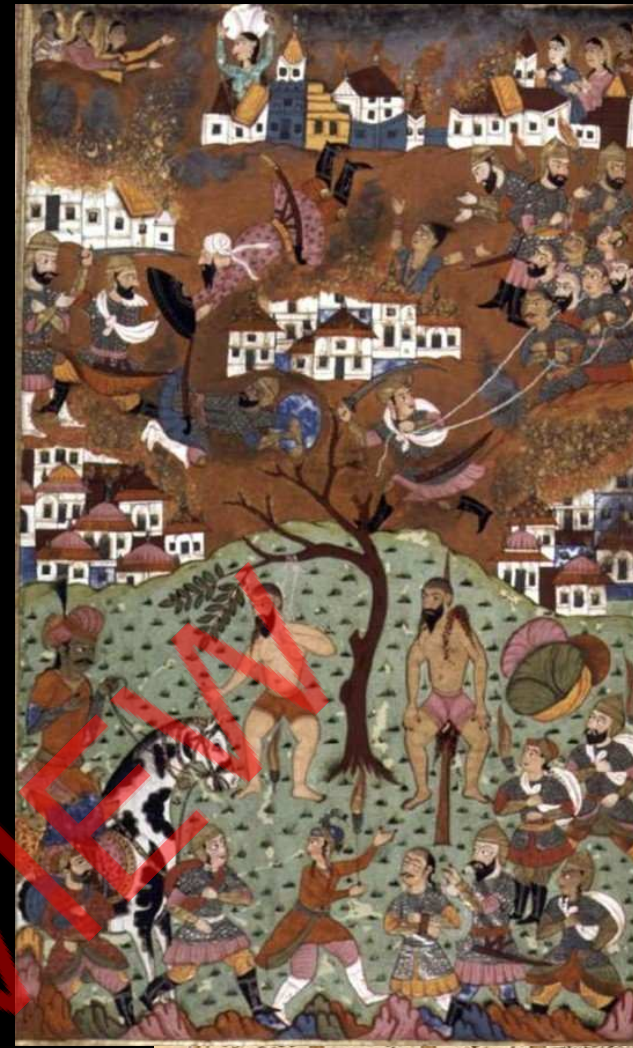
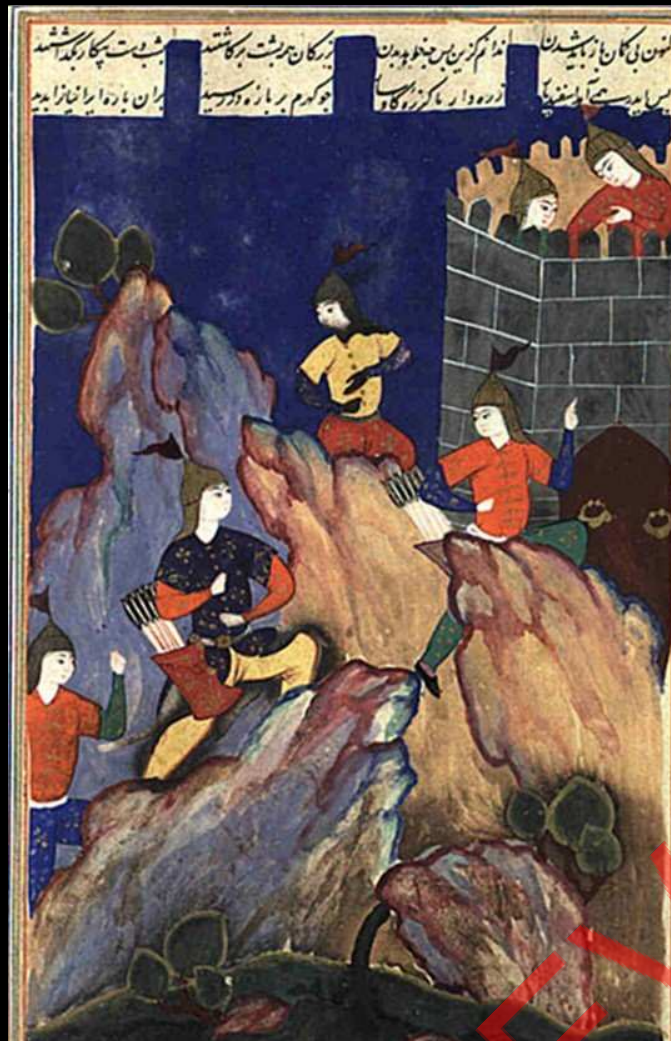


# Iran's Shahnameh



Illustrated Legendary Stories - Kayanian Dynasty, Part 2

Ervad Jal Dastur



On hearing the tumult caused by the victorious troops of Esfandiyar, and the death of their brother, Kohram and Andariman rushed back to the fort, only to find the Iranian troops waiting for them. As the Iranian soldiers saw the two brothers with their troops coming close to the gates of the fort, they hurled the head of Arjasp over the battlements and into the enemy's troops. This angered the Turanians and they started to fiercely battle with Esfandiyar's army. Esfandiyar confronted Kohram, seized him by his belt and swung him on to the ground. The Iranian warriors bound him and led him away. After the capture of Kohram, they got hold of his brother, Anadariman, and held him, as well. Esfandiyar's forces mopped up the Turanian army, giving no mercy, and they accumulated the spoils of the battlefield. After the massacre, Kohram and his brother Andariman were both hung on the gallows. Esfandiyar got his two sisters and prepared to return back to Iran. The Iranian army then set the Ruindez fort ablaze, and left in triumph.





When Rostam reached his palace, his kinfolds clustered around him; Zavareh and Faramarz wept to see his wounds, and his mother Rudabeh tore at her hair in grief. Zal pressed his aged face against Rostam's wounds and said "Woe that I, with my white hair should ever see my noble son in this state." Rostam asked that Raksh be brought to him, and that farriers be called to treat his wounds. He looked at his father and said "I don't know whether I'll be able to survive these wounds, and that may mean Esfandiyar could well sack Zabulistan." Zal said "My son, listen to me, and think carefully about what I'm going to say: I know of a remedy and you should seize on it. I shall summon the Simurgh, and if she helps us, we may yet save our tribe and country. If not, our lands will be destroyed by this malevolent Esfandiyar, who rejoices in the evil he does." Rostam agreed to the plan.



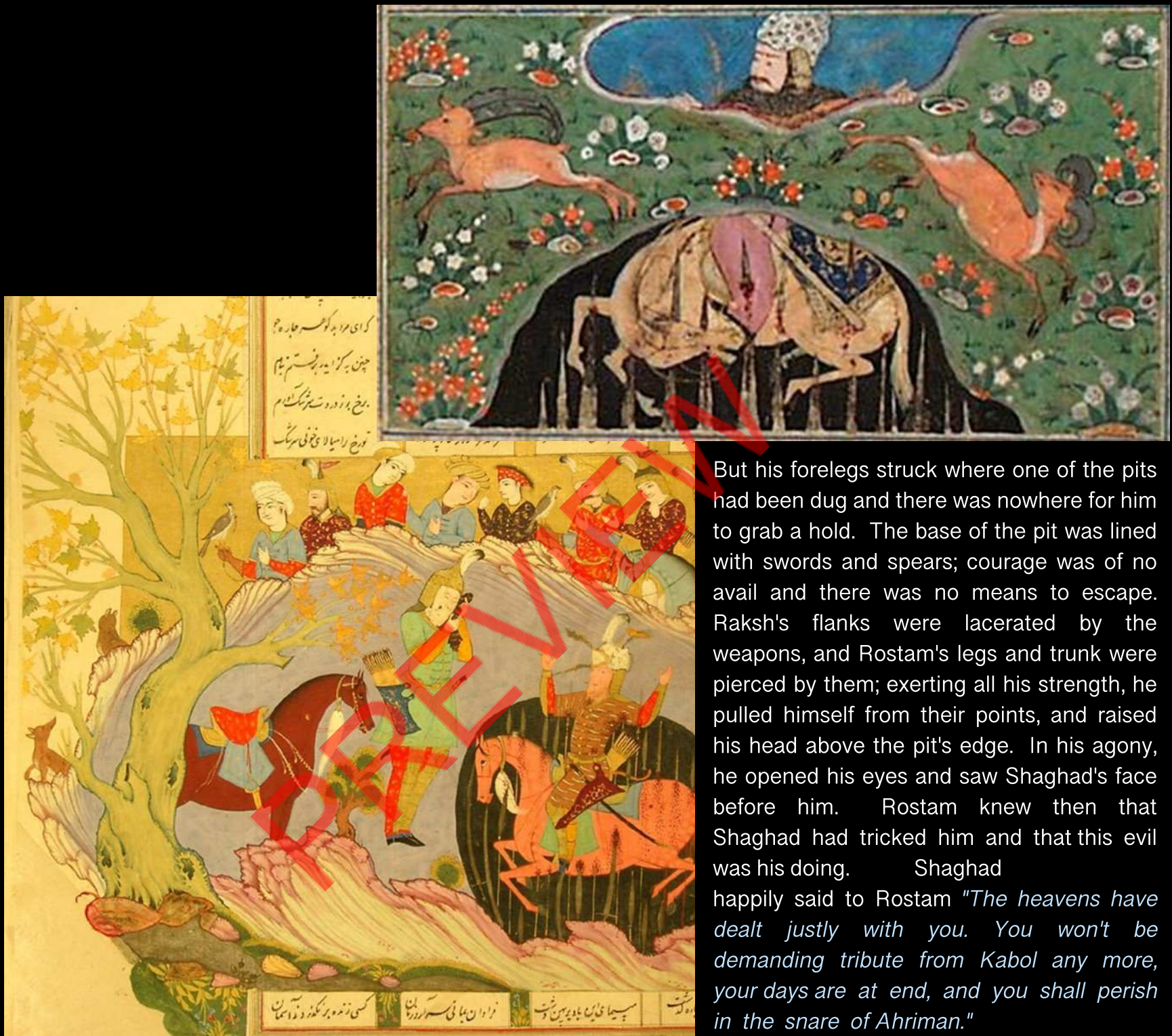
Zal filled three braziers with fire, and with three wise companions, set out from the palace. They climbed to a high peak, and there Zal drew a feather from its brocade wrapping; and fanning the flames, he burnt a portion of the feather in the fire. Suddenly the air turned much darker, and it seemed as if the fire and the Simurgh's flight were liquefying the air; then Zal caught sight of the Simurgh and the flames flared up. Zal sat and watched as the bird drew closer; next, he threw sandalwood on the braziers and went forward making his obeisance to the *Simurgh*. Perfume rose up from the fires, and the sweat of fear shone on Zal's face.

The *Simurgh* said to him "O King, explain to me what you desire, that you have summoned me in smoke and fire." Zal explained the whole crisis to the *Simurgh*, who said "Great hero, put away all grief and fear, bring Raksh and noble Rostam to me here." Zal sent one of his companions to get Rostam and Raksh up the mountainside. When Rostam reached the summit, the *Simurgh* saw him and said "O mammoth-bodied warrior, tell me who has laid you low like this, and wounded you? Why did you fight with Iran's prince and face the fire of mortal combat and disgrace?"



Esfandiyar lost consciousness and fell to the ground. Slowly he came to himself, grasped the arrow and pulled it out from his eyes; when he withdrew it, its head and feathers were soaked in blood. As soon as Peshotan and Bahman saw this, they rushed near him and saw him lying soaked in his blood, a bloody arrow in his hand. Rostam came weeping to his side, with tears of shame flowing from his eyes. News reached the palace: Zal came like the wind, and Zavareh and Faramarz approached, bewildered with sorrow. Zal said to Rostam *"My son, I weep heart's blood for you, because I've heard from the astrologers that whosoever spills Esfandiyar's blood will die a miserable and painful death."*

Esfandiyar called Rostam near him and said in a faltering voice *"Do not grieve, O mighty Rostam! For I do not hold you, but my father responsible for this predicament. I ask you to accept my son, Bahman, to raise him in Sistan, to teach him manhood's ways: he's a wise and willing youth; from you he'll learn the skills of war, and how to negotiate or stand his ground; and everything that suits the education of a king."* When Rostam had heard him out, he stood and laid his hand on his chest and said *"If you die, I swear to fulfill what you have said: I shall sit him on the ivory throne and place the royal crown upon his head myself. I shall stand before him as his servant, and call him my lord and king."* Esfandiyar thanked Rostam, he then paused, caught his breath and said once more *"It was Gushtasp, my father, who destroyed me."* And at that moment, his pure soul left his wounded body, which lay dead in the dust. Rostam said in agony *"To the high Heavens, your pure soul has flown, may your detractors reap what they have sown."* Zavareh said to Rostam *"You shouldn't have accepted this trust. An ancient saying says that, if you rear a lion cub, when it cuts its teeth and the instinct for hunting grows in it, the first person it will turn on is its keeper. Mark my word, when he becomes the king, he'll seek vengeance for his father's death."* Rostam replied *"No one, good or evil, can deflect what the Heavens will. I shall do what is wise and honourable; if he turns to evil, fate will answer him. Don't provoke disasters with your prophecies."*



But his forelegs struck where one of the pits had been dug and there was nowhere for him to grab a hold. The base of the pit was lined with swords and spears; courage was of no avail and there was no means to escape. Raksh's flanks were lacerated by the weapons, and Rostam's legs and trunk were pierced by them; exerting all his strength, he pulled himself from their points, and raised his head above the pit's edge. In his agony, he opened his eyes and saw Shaghad's face before him. Rostam knew then that Shaghad had tricked him and that this evil was his doing. Shaghad happily said to Rostam *"The heavens have dealt justly with you. You won't be demanding tribute from Kابل any more, your days are at end, and you shall perish in the snare of Ahriman."*

At that moment, the king of Kابل reached them: he saw Rostam's open, bleeding wounds and said *"My lord, what has happened to you here on our hunting grounds? I shall hurry and bring some healers to heal your wounds, and to dry my tears of sympathy for you."* Rostam replied *"Devious and low born wretch, the days when healers could help are over; no one passes to the Heavens while still alive. I possess no more glory than Jamshid, who was hacked in two by Zahhak; and Golvizareh slit Siyavaksh's throat when his time had come. All the great kings of Iran, all those who were lions in battle have departed, and we are left here like lions at the wayside. Bear in mind, it will not be too long that my son Faramarz will demand vengeance from you for my death."*



# Tales of the Persian Past



Historical Glimpses - The Achaemenian Dynasty

Ervad Jal Dastur

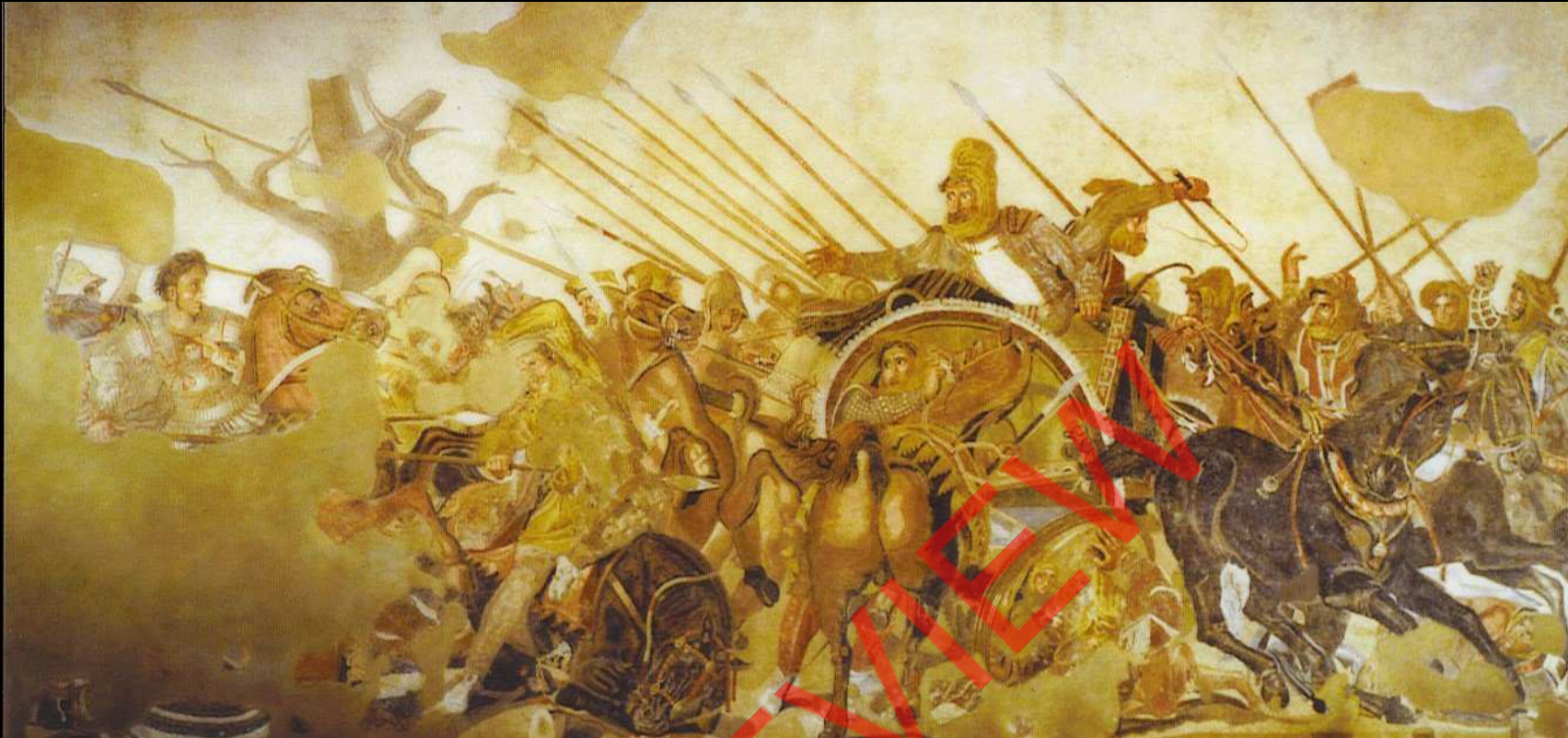


Cambyses II, Cyrus' first-born son, became King of the Empire in 530 BCE. He put his plan in place that Cyrus II had drawn out for the conquest of Egypt. Five years later, Cambyses II conquered Egypt and defeated Pharaoh Psammenitos. From that time onwards for 124 years, the Persian Kings made up the 27th dynasty of the Egyptian Pharaohs.

While Cambyses II was still in Egypt, a man named Gaumata, an imposter who claimed to be Smerdis (a half-brother to Cambyses II who had disappeared), seized power in Media and proclaimed himself emperor. On hearing the news, Cambyses II hastened towards Pasargadae but died on the way. One story has it that he fell off his horse onto his own spear and was killed. Confusion followed the revolt of Gaumata and the accidental death of Cambyses II. Within eight months, the Empire started to fall apart and the conquered countries rebelled and declared their independence.







On the 1st of October, 331 BCE, Darius III fought his last battle on the plains of Gaugamela - near Irbil in modern Iraq. The King had learnt his lesson from the two previous battles, and the Persians took to the field with an improved and more efficient army than in the past. For some time, the battle hung in balance, but not for long. Darius III just had bad luck - he was facing a confident genius who was probably the most able commander of antiquity.

The Persian King soon anticipated that he was fighting a losing battle. He fled from the battlefield with a few of his *Satraps* (commanders) and nobles. In an attempt to capture Darius III, Alexander and his men started their pursuit of the King. In the meantime on the battlefield, the Persians continued to press the Macedonian forces. However, as word got out that the Persian King had abandoned his army, it took the fight right out of the Persians. Soon, the Persians' withdrawal turned into panic, and this made the job of the Macedonians that much easier to cut down their rivals. The remains of the Persian warriors were found laying around by Alexander and his cavalry when they returned back from their unsuccessful pursuit of Darius. In the end, the Persians were killed or dispersed. Thus, the battle of Gaugamela was lost by the last Achaemenian King, and with that, for all intents and purposes, it marked the end of the Persian Empire.