

A Formulaic Analysis of Samples Taken from the *Shâhnâma* of Firdowsi

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Milman Parry's working definition of the formula is as follows: "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (1971:272). This definition, devised by Parry on the basis of his work on Homeric poetry, before he even started work on the living poetry of the South Slavic tradition, has proved both useful and enduring despite the need of one small adjustment. Ironically, this adjustment has been prompted at least partly by the evidence of Homeric poetry itself: it can be shown that the metrical conditions of the formula can vary, although this variation itself is systematic (Ingalls 1972:111-14). Thus it may be useful to revise the phrase "under the same metrical conditions" in Parry's working definition and to read instead "under fixed metrical conditions." It is also useful to stress the phrase "to express a given essential idea," since this aspect of Parry's definition has often been undervalued or even missed altogether.

For Parry, the formula is not simply a repeated phrase that is repeated merely for its metrical utility (1971:304), rather it is the expression of a traditional *theme*. To quote Parry, "the formulas in any poetry are due, so far as their ideas go, to the theme, their rhythm is fixed by the verse-form, but their art is that of the poets who made them and of the poets who kept them" (1971:272). For the word "theme," I cite the working definition of Albert Lord: "a subject unit, a group of ideas, regularly employed by a singer, not merely in any given poem, but in the poetry as a whole" (1938:440; 1974:206-7). In other words, the Parry-Lord theory of oral poetry is founded on the proposition that the traditional formula is a direct expression of the traditional theme; in oral poetry, there is a formulaic system that corresponds

to a thematic system.¹ In a recent book by Ruth Finnegan (1977), however, which purports to present the overall subject of oral poetry to the general reader, this basic aspect of the Parry-Lord definition of the formula goes unmentioned. She consistently treats the formula as if it were merely a repeated phrase, repeated simply for its metrical utility. In discussing Homeric epithets, for example, she writes that they “are often combined with other formulaic phrases—repeated word-groups—which have the right metrical qualities to fit the [given] part of the line” (1977:59). In the same context, she quotes Parry for support: “in composing [the poet] will do no more than put together for his needs phrases which he has often heard or used himself, and which, grouping themselves *in accordance with a fixed pattern of thought* [emphasis mine], come naturally to make the sentence and the verse” (Parry 1971:270). We see here that Parry is saying much more than Finnegan: the formula is not just a phrase that the poet is free to choose according to his metrical needs,² since the formulas are regulated by the traditional themes of the poet’s composition. By contrast, Finnegan seems to assume that formulas and themes are separate ingredients in the poet’s repertoire: “*As well as* formulaic phrases and sequences [emphasis mine], the bard has in his repertoire a number of set themes which he can draw on to form the structure of his poem” (1977:64). Working on the assumption that formulas are simply stock phrases repeated to fill metrical needs, Finnegan offers the following criticism of the Parry-Lord theory of oral poetry: “Does it really add to our understanding of the style or process of composition in a given piece to name certain repeated patterns of words, sounds or meanings as ‘formulae’? Or to suggest that the characteristic of oral style is that such formulae are ‘all-pervasive’ (as in Lord 1960:47)?” (Finnegan 1977:71). In light of what I have adduced from the writings of Parry and Lord, I find this criticism unfounded; if the formula is the building-block of a system of traditional oral poetic expression, then I cannot find fault with Lord’s observation that formulas are “all-pervasive” in oral poetry.

Another important point of disagreement between Finnegan and Lord is her insistence that, on the basis of what we know of oral poetry in such cultures as that of the Bantu of South Africa (both Zulu and Xhosa), the oral poet can not only *compose* poetry but also *write it down* (Finnegan 1977:70, citing the work on Bantu oral poetry by Opland 1971). It is tempting, of course, to extend

such findings to medieval European poetry, where the fundamentals of what is freely acknowledged as oral poetry are preserved and transmitted by *literati* in the context of a vigorous scribal tradition. Finnegan's point of contention with Lord provides ammunition for medievalists like Larry Benson, who has argued that an Old English poem like the *Beowulf* cannot be considered oral poetry on the basis of the formulas that we find as its building-blocks, simply because we can find comparable levels of formulaic behavior in other Old English poems which were clearly written compositions and some of which were even translations from Latin originals. As Benson concludes, "To prove that an Old English poem is formulaic is only to prove that it is an Old English poem, and to show that such work has a high or low percentage of formulas reveals nothing about whether or not it is a literate composition, though it may tell us something about the skill with which a particular poet uses the tradition" (1966:336).

There is an important modification of Benson's position, however, that has been proposed by Michael Zwettler: applying the work of the medievalist H. J. Chaytor (1967:10-13 and chapters 4 and 6), Zwettler argues that even when an Old English poem is written down, it is not meant to be *read* by an individual but to be *performed* before an audience (1978:15-19). In other words, as he points out, there is no such thing as an "audience of readers" in medieval European poetry (1978:15-19). To quote Chaytor: "the whole technique [. . .] presupposed [. . .] a hearing, not a reading public" (1967:13). The mechanics of this poetry, written or not, are those of oral poetry. Zwettler extends this principle to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, and I for my part hope to extend it to the New Persian poetry of Ferdowsi, by arguing that the building-blocks of his *Shâhnâma* are formulaic. If the argument is successful, there is room for arguing further that this poetry is based on the mechanics of oral poetry.³

The *Shâhnâma* or "Book of Kings" of Ferdowsi, reportedly completed about A.D. 1010, is the authoritative version of the national epic of the Iranians, presenting itself as an all-inclusive narration of the reigns of the whole line of Iranian shahs from the primordial founders all the way down to the last of the Sassanian dynasty.⁴ As Mary Boyce has shown, there is a lengthy prehistory of Iranian oral poetic traditions on the subject of the reigns of shahs (1957), and there are numerous references in the *Shâhnâma* itself to the oral performance of such traditions by wise men who

are heard by the poet Ferdowsi.⁵ Besides such sources, however, the *Shâhnâma* also claims another source, a “Book of Kings” that Ferdowsi acquired through “a friend” (Davidson 1985:111-12). As I have argued in detail elsewhere, the *Shâhnâma* not only claims as its sources the combination of many performances and one archetypal “book”: it also presents itself as a combination of performance and book, so much so that performance and book are actually interchangeable concepts in the *Shâhnâma* (Davidson 1985:121). In other words, the very notion of a book, both the “archetype” claimed by Ferdowsi and the *Shâhnâma* of Ferdowsi itself, is represented in terms of performance.⁶

In order to present my argument that the building-blocks of his *Shâhnâma* are formulaic, I have used as a test-case a passage concerning the theme of writing a letter. This theme is particularly appropriate for my present purposes, since the notion of reading and writing is not incompatible, in the poetics of the *Shâhnâma*, with the notion of oral performance.

What I hope to illustrate with the formulaic analysis of one passage is that every word in this given passage can be generated on the basis of parallel phraseology expressing parallel themes. The degree of regularity and economy⁷ in the arrangement of phraseology will be clearly suggestive of formulaic behavior. Moreover, as we shall see, the regularity extends to the actual variation of phraseology. This factor may well be an important additional clue to the formulaic nature of Ferdowsi’s *Shâhnâma*. As Parry and Lord had noticed in their fieldwork on Yugoslav oral poetry, *each new performance/recomposition of a song involved variation in the deployment of formulas*. This principle has been applied successfully by Michael Zwettler in his study of classical Arabic poetry (1978). He extends the observations of the Romance philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal, who had drawn attention to the curious fact that three of the earliest manuscript versions of the *Chanson de Roland* do not share a single identical verse with each other (Menéndez Pidal 1960:60-63), and who had inferred from this and other such facts that this kind of poetry, is “a poetry that lives through variants” (Zwettler 1978:189). “How ironic,” Zwettler remarks, “that scholars of Arabic poetry have so often cast doubt upon the ‘authenticity’ and ‘genuineness’ of this or that verse, poem, or body of poems, or, sometimes, of pre-Islamic poetry in general, because they have found it impossible to establish an ‘original version’” (1978:189).

In a related passage he writes:

The multiplicity of variants and attributions and of formulaic phrases and elements attested for the great majority of classical Arabic poems may undermine our confidence in ever establishing an “author’s original version” — as indeed they should! But they ought to convince us that we do have a voluminous record of a genuine and on-going oral poetic tradition (even if in its latest stages), such as no other nation can match in breadth of content and scrupulosity of collection and documentation. (Zwettler 1978:212)

The conscientiousness of those who preserved all these variants in their editions is a reflection of an attitude that we also witness in the context of the *Hadith*, and Zwettler insists that the editors’ quest for authenticity by way of examining and collecting all variants was due not so much to any need of determining the author but to the desire of recovering the authentic poetic traditions of Bedouin poetry (1978:203).

The same principle of variation, I propose, can also be applied to the text tradition of the *Shâhnâma*. We must note, however, an important difference between the patterns of variation in the text of the *Shâhnâma*, as revealed by its textual tradition, and those in the Arabic poetry studied by Zwettler. In the case of the Arabic evidence, the variants seem to have been collected *while* the given poem was evolving into a fixed text in the process of continual performance/recomposition. In the case of the *Shâhnâma*, on the other hand, the variants seem to have gone on accumulating even after the composition had become a fixed text by way of writing. Thus I suggest that, side-by-side with the written transmission of the text, the oral transmission of poetry continued as well. Each new performance could have entailed recomposition, and the oral poetry could have continually influenced the text.

In that case, however, we cannot reconstruct the original composition of Ferdowsi, if it really kept getting recomposed with each new performance in a living oral tradition. All we can say about the original is that if it is capable of being recomposed, it too must be a product of oral composition. And the continual recomposition on the level of form was matched by recomposition on the level of content, leading to new accretions that are

anachronistic to the ideology of earlier layers.⁸ We may compare the accretion of Muslim elements in the pre-Islamic poetic traditions studied by Zwettler:

... we must reconsider the alleged “inconsistencies,” “anachronism,” and “Islamic emendations” that do crop up in our received texts and have so frequently been adduced as proof of the “corruption” of the tradition. Such phenomena as the introduction of post-Islamic expressions or other neologisms into archaic poems, elimination of pagan theophoric names or substitution of the name Allâh, allusions to Qur’anic passages or Islamic concepts or rituals, and so on, can all legitimately be seen as a natural result of the circumstance that versions of those poems were derived from oral renditions performed by Muslim renderants conditioned now to the sensibilities of Muslim audiences. (Zwettler 1978:221)

Similarly, we find the accretion and eventual dominance of Shîite elements in the poetry of Ferdowsi, originally aimed at Sunni audiences (Davidson 1985:110-111). But even if we cannot reconstruct the original composition, its authenticity or authority as tradition could still survive the countless accretions and reshapings of each recomposition in performance. That is the nature of oral poetry.

Let us begin, then, with the passage that I have selected from the *Shâhnâma* concerning the theme of letter-writing. Applying the dictum of Parry and Lord that the formula is the expression of a given theme, I shall compare this passage with others involving the same context of letter-writing. My purpose is to test whether these passages, involving a regular system of thematic development, also involve a regular system of phraseology, which would be indicative of formulaic behavior. The passage in question is the following (each hemistich of the couplet, shaped o--o--o--o-, will be shown as a separate line).⁹

- #1.1 cho ân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht
- #1.2 padid âvarid andaru khub o zesht
- #1.3 nakhost âfarin kard bar kerdegâr
- #1.4 kazu did nik o bad-e ruzegâr

- #1.1 He quickly had a reply written to that letter,
 #1.2 in which he showed himself both gentle and harsh.
 #1.3 First he praised God the omnipotent,
 #1.4 who grants him good and bad fortune.

As we shall see, every word in this passage, to which I shall refer henceforth as #1, can be generated on the basis of parallel passages involving the same context of letter-writing. But first, it is important to add that even the *sequence* of the four hemistichs in #1 is indicative of formulaic behavior. I have found parallels of sequential arrangement in the following four passages (##2-5), each likewise involving four hemistichs:

- #2.1 *marân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht*
 #2.2 *beyârast qartâsrâ chun behesht*
 #2.3 *nakhost âfarin kard bar dâdgar*
 #2.4 *khodâvand-e mardi o dâd o honar*
 VII 94.1603-4
- #2.1 He quickly had a reply written to that very letter
 #2.2 on a leaf that was decorated like paradise.
 #2.3 First he praised God the all-just,
 #2.4 lord of mankind and justice and knowledge.
- #3.1 *marân nâmarâ khub pâsokh nevesht*
 #3.2 *sokhanhây-e bâ maghz o farrokh nevesht*
 #3.3 *nakhost âfarin kard bar kerdegâr*
 #3.4 *jehândâr dâdâr parvardegâr*
 VII 9.46-47
- #3.1 She had a good reply written to that very letter.
 #3.2 She had words written with substance and happiness.
 #3.3 First she praised God the omnipotent,
 #3.4 possessor of the world, distributor of justice, the all-powerful.
- #4.1 *be eyvân shod o nâma pâsokh nevesht*
 #4.2 *bebâgh-e bozorgi derakhti bekesht*

- #4.3 *nakhost âfarin kard bar kerdegâr*
 #4.4 *kazu bud rowshan del o bakhtyâr*
 IV 266.887-88
- #4.1 He went to the palace and had a letter written in reply.
 #4.2 In the garden of greatness he planted a tree.
 #4.3 First he praised God the omnipotent,
 #4.4 from whom there is clarity of mind and good fortune.
- #5.1 *dabir-e kher admand benvesht khub*
 #5.2 *padid âvarid andaru zesht o khub*
 #5.3 *nakhost âfarin kard bar dâdgar*
 #5.4 *kazu did paydâ begiti honar*
 II 110.636-37
- #5.1 A wise scribe wrote well [a letter],
 #5.2 in which he showed himself both harsh and gentle.
 #5.3 First he praised God the all-just,
 #5.4 who makes manifest knowledge in the world.

The italics provided for these four passages show the word-for-word correspondences with the first passage. These correspondences are not just a matter of repetitions: rather, as we shall see, they indicate a system of regular word-placement. From the further correspondences that we are about to explore, it will become clear that the regularity is not a matter of modeling one set of phrases on another, but rather of generating fixed phraseological patterns from fixed thought-patterns. Such a process is the essence of formulaic behavior as described by Michael Nagler (1974).

In the case of the first hemistich of #1 (#1.1), the parallelisms provided by #2.1/#3.1/#4.1 account for every word except the first:

- #1.1 *cho ân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht*
 #2.1 *marân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht*
 #3.1 *marân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht*
 #4.1 *be eyvân shod o nâma pâsokh nevesht*

Even for the first word, we can find other passages with the same word in a parallel context of letter-writing:

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|------|---|--------------|
| #6.1 | <i>cho ân nâma</i> benvesht nazdik-e shâh | |
| #6.2 | gozin kard guyanda'î zân sepâh | |
| | | VIII 372.957 |
| #6.1 | Then he had a letter written to the shah. | |
| #6.2 | He chose a singer from among his army. | |
| #7.1 | <i>cho ân nâmarâ</i> u beman bar bekhwând | |
| #7.2 | por az âb dide hami sar feshând | |
| | | IX 264.164 |
| #7.1 | When he read that letter out loud to me, | |
| #7.2 | my eyes began to shed tears. | |

In the case of the second hemistich of #1 (#1.2), the parallelisms provided by #5.2 account for every word except the last three:

- | | |
|------|---|
| #1.1 | <i>cho ân nâmarâ</i> zud pâsokh nevesht |
| #1.2 | <i>padid âvarid andaru</i> khub o zesht |
| #5.1 | dabir-e kheradmand benvesht khub |
| #5.2 | <i>padid âvarid andaru</i> zesht o khub |

The order of *zesht o khub* at #5.2 allows rhyming with . . . *khub* at #5.1, while the inverse order of *khub o zesht* allows rhyming with . . . *nevesht* at #1.1. But the order of *khub o zesht* after *padid âvarid andaru* at #1.2 is just as regular as the order of *zesht o khub* that we see after the same phrase at #5.2. For example, we may compare the following passage:

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|------|--|--------------|
| #8.1 | <i>pas ân nâmarâ</i> zud pâsokh nevesht | |
| #8.2 | <i>padidâr</i> kard andaru khub o zesht | |
| | | VII 395.1593 |
| #8.1 | Then he had a reply written to that letter, | |
| #8.2 | in which he showed himself to be gentle and harsh. | |

The parallelism between #8.2 and #1.2 extends beyond the phraseological match *padid . . . andaru khub o zesht*. It involves also the identical rhyme of final . . . *o zesht* / . . . *nevesht* at

#8.2/1 and #1.2/1. Even more, it involves the phraseological match . . .
ân nâmarâ zud pâsokh . . . preceding the final rhyming . . . *nevesht* at
 #8.1 and #1.1. I append the following further parallels to #1.1:

- #1.1 *cho ân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht*
 #9.1 *marân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht* VII 20.250
- #10.1 *marân nâmarâ khub pâsokh nebesht* VIII 375.1009
- #10.1* *marân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht* VIII 375.1009 mss. I, IV, VI
- #10.1** *marân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nebesht* VII 375.1009 ms. K
- #9.1 He quickly had a reply written to that letter.
 #10.1 He had a good reply written to that letter.
 #10.1* He quickly had a reply written to that letter.
 #10.1** He quickly had a reply written to that letter.
- #10.1*** *marân nâmarâ khub pâsokh nevesht* VIII 375.1009 ms.L
- #11.1 *marân nâmarâ niz pâsokh nevesht* IX 130.2044
- #11.1* *hamân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nevesht* IX 130.2044 mss. I, IV
- #11.1** *hamân nâmarâ niz pâsokh nevesht* IX 130.2044 mss. I, IV
- #12.1 *hamân nâmarâ zud pâsokh nebesht* VIII 418n20
- #10.1*** He had a good reply written to that letter.
 #11.1 Again he had a reply written to that letter.
 #11.1* He quickly had a reply written to that very letter.
 #11.1** Again he had a reply written to that very letter.
 #12.1 He quickly had a reply written to that very letter.

It is worth noting that the variations that we find between variant lines in different manuscripts correspond to those between variant lines in different passages; compare #10.1* and #10.1*** to #2.1

other passages involving the themes of letter-writing. Another exact parallel to the couplet #1.3/4 comes from a variant in one of the four original passages that we have considered:

- #4.3 *nakhost âfarin kard bar kerdegâr*
 #4.4 *kazu bud rowshan del o bakhtyâr* IV 266.888
 #4.4* *kazu did nik o bad-e ruzegâr* IV 266.888 mss. K, I, IV, VI
 #4.4* who grants him good and bad fortune.

There is still another exact parallel from another variant:

- #14.1 *nakhost âfarin kard bar dâdgar*
 #14.2 *kazu did mardi o bakht o honar* IX 129.230
 #14.1* *nakhost âfarin kard bar kerdegâr*
 #14.2* *kazu did nik o bad-e ruzegâr*
 #14.1 First he praised God the all-just,
 #14.2 from whom there is manliness, fortune, and wisdom.
 #14.1* First he praised God the omnipotent,
 #14.2* who grants him good and bad fortune.

Now we turn to the variant of #1.3/4:

- #1.3* *nakhost âfarin kard bar dâdgar*
 #1.4* *khodâvand-e piruziy-o zur o farr* V 141.985 ms. K
 #1.3* First he praised God the all-just,
 #1.4* lord of victory, chiefs, and luminous glory [*farr*].

At first, #1.4* seems idiosyncratic, but if we take a sample of hemistichs that rhyme only with either

- nakhost âfarin kard bar dâdgar* (#1.3*)
 or
nakhost âfarin kard bar kerdegâr (#1.3),

we shall see that the wording of #1.4* belongs to the overall system of phraseology that has characterized all the passages surveyed so far. In what follows, parallelisms among phrases to be found in hemistichs that rhyme with the type #1.3* (. . . *dâdgar*) will be marked with an underline, in contrast to parallelisms with the phrases of #1.1/2/3/4, which have all along been marked with italics. The first example to be compared comes from a variant in one of the four original passages that we have considered:

- #1.4* khodâvand-e piruziy-o zur o farr
- #2.4 khodâvand-e mardi o dâd o honar VII 94.1604
- #2.4* khodâvand-e piruz o dâd o honar VII 94.1604 ms. L
- #2.4* lord of victory, justice, and wisdom.

We note the close parallelism with the following example (to repeat, the hemistichs that are now being considered rhyme with a preceding hemistich that is identical in phraseology to #1.3*):

- #14.2 kazu did mardi o bakht o honar IX 129.2030

We have already considered a variant of this hemistich, #14.2*, which corresponds exactly to the phraseology of #1.4:

- #14.2* *kazu did nik o bad-e ruzegar* IX 129.2030 VI

To repeat, the crucial difference in this variant is that it rhymes with the phraseology that we saw in #1.4, whereas #14.2 rhymes with the phraseology that we are now examining, parallel to what we saw in #1.4*. Yet another example of the latter type is the following:

- #15.2 kazu did niruy o farr o honar III 59.901

#15.2 from whom there is strength, luminous glory (*farr*), and wisdom.

This line has a manuscript variant with a striking formal parallelism to the phraseology of #1.4*, our point of departure:

#15.2* kazu did piruziy-o ruzegâr

III 59.901 ms. VI

#15.2* who grants him victory and fortune.

In fact, since we have already seen that

khodâvand-e

and

kazu did

are interchangeable (#2.4 and #14.2), the only difference between #1.4* and #15.2* is the final phraseology that effects the rhyme with the preceding

nakhost âfarin kardbar dâdgar

and

nakhost âfarin kardbar kerdegâr

respectively. We come to the conclusion that the phraseology marked by the underlines is actually a part of the system of the phraseology marked by the italics:

#1.4* khodâvand-e piruziy-o zur o farr
 #2.4* khodâvand-e piruz o dâd o honar
 #2.4 *khodâvand-e mardi o dâd o honar*
 #14.2 *kazu did mardi o bakht o honar*
 #5.4 *kazu did paydâ begiti honar*
 #15.2 *kazu did niruy o farr o honar*
 #15.2* kazu did piruziy-o ruzegâr

#16.2 *kazu* gasht piruz be *ruzegâr* (III 45.663)

#16.2* *kazuyast* piruz be *ruzegâr* (III 45.663 mss. I, IV)

#16.2, who gives glory to one's fortune.

16.2*

#13.2 *kazu did nik o bad-e ruzegâr*

#14.2* *kazu did nik o bad-e ruzegâr*

#4.4* *kazu did nik o bad-e ruzegâr*

What I hope to have illustrated, to repeat, with this exercise in the formulaic analysis of one passage is that every word in this given passage can be generated on the basis of parallel phraseology expressing parallel themes. We have noted the degree of regularity and economy in the arrangement of phraseology, a quality which is clearly suggestive of formulaic language behavior.

Having observed on a small scale the principles of variation in the text tradition of the *Shâhnâme*, I note the need for similar investigations on a larger scale. An exhaustive study, of course, is at this point impossible, since there is no available centralized collection of all the variants as could be collected from the entire textual tradition. Such a collection would be a monumental task indeed! Still, the limited experiment of formulaic analysis that I have attempted illustrates the principle of compositional variation as reflected by textual variation.

As another illustration, however limited, let us consider the ornamental epithet *shir'owzhan* "lion-slayer" and its variant *ru'intan* "brazen-bodied." The two are isometric, in that they are always found in identical metrical positions within the *bayt* [hemistich] of the *mutâgarib*, the canonical meter of the *Shâhnâme*:

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc} \circ & - & - & \circ & - & - & \circ & - & - & \circ & - \\ [& a & &] & & & [& b & &] & & & [& c & &] \end{array}$$

Let us number these positions *a*, *b*, *c*, as indicated above. The number of occurrences of these two epithets in the entire *Shâhnâme* is as follows:

	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>
<i>shir'owzhan</i>	1	16	5
<i>ru'intan</i>	1	2	10

The numbers for the occurrences are based on the figures gleaned from the Paris edition of the *Shâhnâma* as checked against the Moscow edition. In one passage (VI 51.679), however, at position *c*, manuscript K of the Moscow edition reads *ru'intan* instead of *shir'owzhan*, which we read for this passage in all other manuscripts used by the Moscow edition.

From the overall patterns of distribution here, we see that K in this case is just as “correct” as the other manuscripts, and that such textual factors as manuscript predominance cannot settle the matter. The examples could be multiplied hundreds and even thousands of times, and by then we would start to see clearly that there are legitimate formulaic variants attested for vast portions of the *Shâhnâma*. We may postpone any questions about how these considerations may affect our evaluation of the Moscow edition. What is important for now is that even a limited test reveals such patterns of variation in the text of the *Shâhnâma*—the surest available sign that we are dealing with oral poetry.

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Notes

¹ For an excellent survey of recent scholarship on the interrelationship of formula and theme, see Cantilena 1982:41-73. On p. 56, he offers this summary: “Ogni formula, dalla più stereotipa alla più consapevolmente usata, è motivata semanticamente.”

² Cf. Finnegan 1977:62: “He can select what he wishes from the common stock of formulae, and can choose slightly different terms that fit his metre ... and vary the details.”

³ I have presented various arguments for the oral heritage of the *Shâhnâma* of Ferdowsi in Davidson 1985; in this previous article, however, the formulaic nature of the diction of the *Shâhnâma* was not examined.

⁴For documentation of the authoritative status of the *Shâhnâma* as the national epic of the Iranians, see Davidson 1985:103-5.

⁵For a collection of such passages in the *Shâhnâma*, see Davidson 1985:112-16.

⁶Note especially the myth, discussed in Davidson 1985:122-23, about the survival of the "archetype" on the occasion of a grand performance where the "archetype's" scattered "fragments" are reassembled.

⁷For this concept, see Lord 1960:53.

⁸Such a possibility is emotionally and sarcastically resisted by Minovi (1972:110).

⁹In the following paragraphs, I adhere to the policy of showing each hemistich as a separate line: I have transcribed the passages so as to show metrical length. Translations have been provided. In terms of New Persian metrics, the full line or *bayt* is divided into metrically equal *misra*'-s. The name of the meter used in the *Shâhnâma* is *mutaqârib*.

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