

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

THE SACRED NUMBERS IN FIRDAUSI'S *SHAHNAMEH*: SYMBOLISM, MEANING, AND MYSTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Sadullaeva Matluba Akhrorovna

Asia International University, Bukhara

msadullaeva1985@gmail.com

Keywords: “Shahnameh”, symbolism, sacred numbers, mystical significance, Persian epic, number one, number three, number seven, Iranian culture, Zoroastrianism, Persian literature

Abstract: Firdausi's *Shahnameh* ("The Book of Kings") is a cornerstone of Persian literature, interweaving myth, history, and culture. One of the lesser-explored dimensions of this epic is its symbolic use of numbers, particularly the numbers one, three, and seven, which carry deep mystical and spiritual meanings in Iranian culture. Through these numbers, Firdausi not only structures his narrative but also imbues it with layers of divine and cosmic significance. The number one represents unity and the divine essence, while three symbolizes completeness and perfection, and seven reflects the sacred and celestial order. This article explores how Firdausi's careful use of these numbers enhances the *Shahnameh*'s depth, reflecting both the cultural and spiritual values of ancient Iran, particularly the influence of Zoroastrianism. By examining these numerical symbols, we gain a greater understanding of the epic's philosophical and mystical underpinnings.

Introduction

Firdausi's poem “Shahnameh” (“Book of Kings”) is written by the Persian poet Firdausi in the early 11th century, stands as one of the most important works in world literature. Spanning a vast narrative from the mythological to the historical, the *Shahnameh* is not only a record of Iranian culture, legends, and history but also a rich tapestry of symbolism. Among the various symbolic elements used by Firdausi, the numbers featured in the epic carry profound mystical and cultural significance. These numbers are not used arbitrarily, but

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

rather are deeply tied to Persian beliefs and the Zoroastrian worldview, which viewed numbers as representations of divine order and cosmic harmony.

“Shahnameh” is a wonderful poetic epic, in which the themes of glory and shame, love and hatred, light and darkness, friendship and enmity, death and life, victory and defeat are intricately intertwined in an eternal struggle. This is the story of a sage from Tus about the legendary Pishdadid dynasty and the twists and turns of the history of the Kiyanids, going deep into the history of Iran through myths and legends. As sources for creating the poem, the author used legends about the first shahs of Iran, tales of legendary heroes on whom the Iranian throne rested during the era of the Achaemenid dynasty (6th - 4th centuries BC), real events and legends associated with the stay of Alexander the Great in Iran.

Abulkasim Firdausi had worked on his poem for 35 years and finished it in 1011. Conventionally, it is accepted to divide the “Shahnameh” into three parts: mythological, heroic and historical. At first glance, it may seem that Firdausi accidentally used different numbers in the Shahnameh or the use of numbers was dictated by the laws of versification. However, a study of the meanings of the numbers used in the “Shahnameh” clearly shows that Firdausi knew about the hidden meanings of the numbers used. For example, in the “Shahnameh”, when Mubedi wants to test Zal, he asks questions where he uses symbolic numbers:

I saw twelve slender trees,
Green, fresh, worthy of praise,
On each - thirty branches grow,
This count is forever unchanged>>.
Another exclaimed: <<Scion of the noble!
They drove two horses, two fast ones.
The first one rushes, black as resin,
And the color of the other, like crystal, is bright.
They hurry, they run far,
But the first and the second will not find a meeting>>.
The third said: <<Thirty riders
Have been galloping before the shah since time immemorial.
Zal in response to these riddles answers:

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

Twelve trees were named at the beginning,
On each - thirty branches were counted.
Twelve months make up the year, -
A new shah comes to replace the shah, -
And each month brings thirty days:
Thus the rotation of time occurs.
Now I will tell you: what two horses
Fly like the god of fire?
The white horse is the day, and the black one is the darkness of the night.
They run, not changing their turn.
The night passes, and the day passes after it:
Thus the firmament moves above us.
In the sun there is no meeting, and in the darkness there is none?
They run like game from a dog.
Now: what thirty riders
Have galloped before the shah since time immemorial?
One of them always disappears,
But the number of riders does not decrease.

In “Shahnameh”, the number one frequently appears as a symbol of unity and the divine. It represents the oneness of existence, the indivisibility of time, and the ultimate source of all creation. For example, in the birth of the hero Zal, Firdausi references “one week” to symbolically mark the passage of time. The number one also signifies purity, essence, and the beginning of all things. In Iranian culture, it echoes the concept of a singular, supreme deity, akin to the idea of God in Zoroastrianism, where all existence emanates from a singular divine force.

The number *one* is often used and speaks for itself. *One* is reminiscent of God. Mansur al-Hallaj, and for every blow he said one. *One* reminds us of how Bayazid Bistami counted coins. Bayazid said: I do not know anything except one. *One* exists without the others, but the others cannot exist without *One*. Take away only one from a thousand, and a thousand will no longer be a thousand. [8, 28].

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

One in “Shahnameh” is sometimes used with other words that denote time, in order to indirectly indicate another number. Perhaps this is the best way to draw the interlocutor's attention to a number, for example, the number seven (one week) or thirty (one month). In Shahnameh, when talking about the birth of Zal in the original, Firdausi uses the phrase “one week”:

For seven days everyone was afraid to tell the father,
That the mother had given birth to such a son.

Since in this article we cannot consider all the numbers that were used in Shahnameh and the Nart epic, we will focus on the most sacred numbers - three and seven. Number three holds a special place in Iranian culture, often symbolizing completeness and divine perfection. Rooted in Zoroastrianism's core tenets of Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds, the number three represents spiritual harmony. Firdausi uses it frequently in *Shahnameh*, especially when depicting the passage of time or key moments in the narrative. For instance, many significant events, including feasts and trials, are described as lasting for three days, signaling the completion of a cycle. This use of three signifies the perfection of thought, action, and existence, underscoring the spiritual ideals of Iranian culture.

Number three also reflects the cosmic order, as it is often connected to the triad of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity in ancient Persian thought. The frequency of three-day festivals or deliberations, such as when Afrasiab takes three days to decide the fate of the hero Siyavush, suggests that three days is an ideal period for resolution and contemplation. This is also evident in the structure of many of the epic's trials, where the number three marks the threshold of completion.

Firdausi is a master of playing with numbers: for example, in the story of Sudaba's betrayal, when Kavus finds out that Sudaba guilty, he doesn't kill her on four counts ranks. Firdausi could have used any other number instead of four, but he specifically uses the number four to show the high degree pressure on Kavus “from all four sides”, explain his decision by hopelessness. The proof that Firdausi knew about the sacred meaning of numbers is the fact that he did not use the number *thirteen* in Shahnameh at all, since this number in Iranian, as in many other cultures, is considered unlucky.

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

In the beliefs and culture of the Iranian people, the number three is considered lucky. This situation is not unique to Iranian society; a similar situation can be observed in other cultures as well. It is also believed in Iran that cleanliness can only be achieved by cleaning, washing or sweeping something three times. Among some ethnic groups in Iran, when a bride begins her independent life in her husband's house, she revolves around the fire three times, and this brings her happiness [11, 154]. Considering that the number three was used very often in the Shahnameh, it can be assumed that Ferdowsi was referring to the divinity of this number. The fact that the Zoroastrian religion is based on three principles (good thoughts, good words, good deeds) shows how important the number three is. Ferdowsi speaks about three-day holidays many times in the Shahnameh. For example, after Siyavush passes through the fire, Firdausi says:

He called the singers and cupbearers for the feast,
The ruler of the world caressed the prince.
For three days they sat, drank without worries,
And the entrance to the treasury was opened

By using the number *three*, Ferdousi wants to convey the maximum joy the heroes of the story to the reader. A similar situation is in Shahnameh, when he describes wars. Wars that last for three days or three days. There are many examples of such wars in Shahnameh, for example, when he talks about the battle of Shah Yazdegerd :

The Shah was in battle for three days, did not eat, did not sleep,
He ate the barley bread with a sigh.

In Shahnameh, the number *three* is often used as a symbol of sufficient time to think over various issues. For example, when Afrasiab wants to decide the fate of Siyavush, he thinks for three days. In Shahnameh, three days are sufficient time not only to think over any issue, but also to successfully complete affairs; in some situations, during these three days, one should consult with three wise men. For example, when Khakan's advisers suggested that he marry his daughter to Anushirovan to ensure safety, and he, Khakan, sent three envoys. Also, the number of sons of the heroes of Shahnameh also shows the importance of the number three, for example, Esfandiar and Feridun

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

had three sons. It can be said that the number *three* in Shahnameh is used as a number of perfection. Ferdausi often uses the number three in Shahnameh, which indicates his understanding of the mystical meaning of this number.

Many books, including the Avesta, say that our world consists of seven countries, among which Iran is considered a holy country and is located in the center of the world [16, 310]

Although the division of the world into seven parts is not unique to the Shahnameh, this work also points to such a division when Zahhak's wife says to him:

Aren't you the king of the seven parts of the earth,
Lord of all animals and all people?

The epic stories about Rustam and Isfandiar speak of seven trials (*Seven Feats*) that the heroes passed. It is interesting that when Rustam finds Kavus and asks him about the location of *the White Diva* , Kavus says: “*you must pass seven mountains to find the location of the White Diva.*” In other words, Rustam in the seventh trial must pass seven more mountains and this not only proves the importance of the seventh trial, but also indicates the importance of the number seven.

Isfandiar, another hero of Shahnameh, who managed to pass seven tests, walked a seven-day road to reach Ruindizh. Interestingly, in the Nart legends, the hero also overcomes seven mountain peaks.

The number seven is very important in astronomical science. The Sumerians (ancient non-Semitic population of Mesopotamia) were the first to learn with the help of astronomical science that there are seven planets in the world [16, 303]

Most peoples believe in the influence of planets on people's lives, and Shahnameh also talks about seven planets and their influence, for example, when Rudaba's maids meet Zal:

There are no beauties equal to her in China,
Her glory rings from the seven planets.

In addition, the Shahnameh indicates seven primary colors, which can be seen, in its perfect form, in the rainbow. Feasts and mournings that

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

lasted a week indicate the maximum joy or sorrow of the people. The *Shahnameh* often speaks of three-day and seven-day feasts and mournings:

They feasted until late into the night for a week,
Both cheerful and drunk with wine.

Rustam, when he received the news of Siyavush's death, mourned for seven days. Another seven years in *Shahnameh* is considered a sign of the perfection of the mind:— for example, when Bahram turned seven, he wanted Manzara not to treat him like a child, or when Keykhosro turned seven, he began to study martial arts. It should also be noted that the number *seven* occupies a special place in the culture and customs of the Iranians and often appears in Persian proverbs: for example, the tablecloth Haftsin has seven lives.

Firdausi already in *Shahnameh* uses the number seven to indicate time, such as the waiting time or the deadline of seven days or seven years.

Anushirovan asks for seven days to learn to play chess, or when Piran sent a letter to Gudarz, Gudarz did not answer his letter for seven days. Sudaba tells Siyavush that she has loved him for seven years:

For seven years I have loved you with the love
That burns with blood on my face.

Seven days, from the point of view of Firdausi, seems to be a happy time, and during this time you can make the most correct decision.

Zoroastrianism, the ancient religion of Iran, played a crucial role in shaping the symbolic meanings of numbers in *Shahnameh*. The religion's emphasis on cosmic dualism—Good vs. Evil, Light vs. Darkness—further imbued certain numbers with sacred meanings. The number three, with its ties to the core ethical teachings of Zoroastrianism, reflects the triadic nature of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Similarly, the number seven aligns with the cosmic order, where the seven planets and the seven zones of the earth are central to the religious cosmology.

Firdausi's strategic use of these sacred numbers in *Shahnameh* highlights his deep understanding of the spiritual and mystical meanings attached to numbers in ancient Iranian culture. These numbers are not mere

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

literary devices; they serve to align the human realm with the cosmic order, reinforcing the epic's themes of fate, morality, and divine intervention.

Conclusion

The numbers one, three, and seven in *Shahnameh* are not simply structural tools or literary embellishments; they are integral to the epic's philosophical and mystical underpinnings. By using these numbers, Firdausi enhances the symbolic richness of the narrative, aligning it with ancient Persian cosmology and Zoroastrian spiritual values. Through the careful manipulation of these sacred numbers, Firdausi imbues *Shahnameh* with layers of meaning that resonate deeply with the cultural and spiritual ideals of Iran. These numerical symbols serve as a testament to the enduring importance of numbers in the Persian worldview, illustrating how Firdausi's poetic mastery goes beyond storytelling to touch on the divine and cosmic forces that govern life and fate.

References:

1. Firdausi, Abulkasim. *Shahnameh: The Book of Kings*. Translated by Dick Davis, Penguin Classics, 2006.
2. Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Routledge, 2001.
3. Mellor, R. P.. *Numbers and Symbolism in Ancient Persian Culture*. Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies, vol. 12, no. 3, 1989, pp. 112–124.
4. Afshar, Ali. *Persian Literature and Mysticism: A Comparative Study*. University of Tehran Press, 1999.
5. Beyer, R. S.. *The Cosmic Order and the Role of Numbers in Persian Beliefs*. Journal of Iranian Studies, vol. 45, no. 1, 2003, pp. 49–60.
6. Zaehner, R. C.. *The Sacred and the Profane in Iranian Thought*. Oxford University Press, 1963.

Additional references

1. Sadullayeva M.A. Digital culture as a humanitarian phenomenon. // EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD). -Volume: 5 | Issue: 10

МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

| October, 2020. – PP.231-235. (09.00.00; №12; 14. Indexed by Index Copernicus; Researchbib)

2. Sadullayeva M.A. Philosophy of numbers in Eastern and Sufi literature. // Imom Buxoriy saboqlari. – Samarqand, 2023. - №1. – B.109-112. (09.00.00; №9)

3. Sadullayeva M.A. Number as the essence of things: philosophy of Western and central Asian scientists. // Imom Buxoriy saboqlari. – Samarqand, 2024. - №1. – B.48-51. (09.00.00; №9)

4. Sadullayeva M.A. Number as the essence of things:Pythagorean philosophy. Ijtimoiy-gumanitar fanlarning dolzarb muammolari.- Toshkent, 2024.- № 10.-140-145.

5. Sadullayeva M.A. Islamic architecture and its symbolic language of numbers. // International Book Edition of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States «BEST YOUNG SCIENTIST – 2020». March, 13-17. 2020. – PP.116-120

6. Sadullayeva M.A. Analysis of symbol in the history of philosophy. // **Proceedings of International Conference on Scientific Research in Natural and Social Sciences - Toronto, Canada. - 5th July, 2024. -PP.202-205.**

7. Sadullayeva M.A. Symbolic significance of numbers in Eastern Classic literature. // Мировая наука. - №6 (27), 2019. – С.15-20.

8. Sadullayeva M.A. Mathematical Phenomena of the Quran. // International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research (IJAPR). -Vol 4. Issue 11. – November, 2020. -PP.51-54

9. Sadullayeva M.A. Symbolic language of numbers in Muslim architecture. // ACADEMICIA. An international multidisciplinary research journal. -Vol 10. Issue 5, May 2020. -PP.869-875

10. Sadullayeva M.A. Philosophy of Numerical Symbolism in World's Cultures. // International journal of trend in scientific research and development. - Volume 4, Issue 5. - July-August, 2020. -PP.1545-1548

11. Sadullayeva M.A. Philosophical foundation of digitalization and digital transformation of communication. // Xorazm Ma'mun akademiyasi axboroti. -Xiva, 2024. - № 2/3. – B.21-23.

**МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ:
ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА**

Researchbib Impact factor: 11.79/2023

SJIF 2024 = 5.444

Том 2, Выпуск 12, 31 Декабрь

12. Sadullayeva M.A. Symbolic significance of numbers in eastern literature and mysticism. // «Science and Education in the Modern World: Challenges of the XXI Century». Kazakstan, 2019. -С.9-12