

ATTRIBUTES OF THE LADY ENVOYS AND THEIR DIPLOMATIC ETIQUETTE IN FERDOWSI'S SHAHNAMEH

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Shahnameh is a precious historical document including details about the diplomatic relations between Iran and other outstanding governments in ancient times. In this wonderful volume, one can observe the diplomats' role in expanding political relations between governments. The present article addresses the small number of cases where lady diplomats were sent from one court to another. Here, ten lady envoys were found throughout the stories of *Shahnameh*. After reviewing the missions accomplished by each lady envoy and analyzing the events occurring in the stories, the author elaborates on the envoys' behaviour and how they carried out their missions. According to the study's results, although women were not commonly sent as envoys in those times, the diplomats identified in the *Shahnameh* stories completed their missions successfully. It can also be seen in all the stories that, without resorting to masculine behaviours, the lady diplomats did their jobs correctly and maintained their feminine character. Apart from the three main attributes of 'perspicacity, confidentiality, and peace-building', the envoys discussed in this article were characterized by wisdom, ingenuity, intelligence, knowledge of political affairs, eloquence, neatness, honesty, and awareness of diplomatic etiquette.

Keywords: Shahnameh, lady envoys, diplomatic etiquette, Sindokht

For citation: Tishehyar M. Attributes of the Lady Envoys and their Diplomatic Etiquette in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. *Vestnik Instituta vostokovedeniya RAN*. 2024. No. 4. Pp. 118–131. DOI: 10.31696/2618-7302-2024-4-118-131

ДАМЫ-ПОСЛАННИКИ И ОСОБЕННОСТИ ИХ ДИПЛОМАТИЧЕСКОГО ЭТИКЕТА В ПОЭМЕ «ШАХНАМЕ» ФИРДОУСИ

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«Шахнаме» — ценнейший исторический документ, содержащий подробные сведения о дипломатических отношениях между Ираном и другими известными государствами в древние времена. В этом замечательном произведении можно проследить роль дипломатов в расширении политических отношений между государствами. В данной статье рассматривается несколько историй, когда дамы-дипломаты отправлялись посланниками от одного двора к другому. Анализ «Шахнаме» выявил десять случаев направления женщин в качестве дипломатических посланниц. Рассмотрев миссии, выполненные каждой из них, и проанализировав события, происходящие в рассказах, автор подробно останавливается на поведении посланниц и на том, какие методы и приемы они использовали для выполнения своих миссий.

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Согласно результатам исследования, несмотря на то, что в те далекие времена женщин нечасто отправляли в качестве посланников, дипломаты, о которых идет речь в рассказах «Шахнаме», успешно выполнили свои миссии. Во всех историях видно, что, не следуя нормам «мужского» поведения, женщины-дипломаты умело выполняли свою работу, демонстрируя женский характер. Помимо трех основных качеств — «проницательности, конфиденциальности и миролюбия» — посланникам, о которых пойдет речь в этой статье, были присущи мудрость, находчивость, ум, знание политических дел, красноречие, аккуратность, честность и осведомленность о дипломатическом этикете.

Ключевые слова: Шахнаме, женщины-посланники, дипломатический этикет, Синдохт

Для цитирования: Tishehyar M. Attributes of the Lady Envoys and their Diplomatic Etiquette in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. *Вестник Института востоковедения РАН*. 2024. № 4. С. 118–131. DOI: 10.31696/2618-7302-2024-4-118-131

Introduction

Apart from being a science drawing on international laws and procedures to define different forms of communication between governments, diplomacy is an innovative art arising in diplomats based on their personality traits and behavioural and speech training. In other words, diplomacy is an art with the potential to make peace [Berridge, 2002, p. 5]. Although the modern-day sending of envoys and political representatives to other countries began with the creation of nation-states and such institutions as 'Foreign Affairs ministries', and diplomacy and diplomatic etiquette were presented in their modern sense, the relations between governments and the movement of envoys between different territories have a long history. By examining the diplomatic etiquette and relations prevailing in previous centuries, one would discover that political relations were defined according to the prevailing principles and values in each period and that the present-day customs and principles for diplomatic relations between governments are rooted in ancient traditions and values.

Since the establishment of the first governments in ancient times, knowledgeable people with experience in various positions were sent to other lands and courts as envoys and expanded the ties between kings and politicians. Today, 'ambassadors' are the highest-ranked representatives and political officials of every country sent to host countries or international organisations. The ambassadors' primary mission is to defend the rights of their fellow citizens and respective governments in the host country or institution [Zul-Ain, 1388]. In ancient times, this role was carried out by a person called the 'envoy' (in Persian *ferestadeh*). Although the envoys mostly did not have permanent residence in the host country and returned to their respective countries after a short period, their work resembled the modern-day ambassadors: to defend their fellow citizens and secure the interests of their respective governments.

The principles of contemporary consular and diplomatic relations were mostly defined in the Vienna Agreement (1815) and the Vienna Convention (1961), approved by numerous governments. Innumerable volumes have also been published in various languages on diplomatic etiquette and taught in many scientific institutes and universities worldwide. However, the diplomatic customs and ceremonies practiced by significant governments in the ancient times are still unknown, and, except for a few stories and reports, very little research has been conducted in this field. Therefore, re-reading ancient texts to get familiar with the envoys' attributes and diplomatic customs in ancient times can provide us with new hints about the procedures and trends currently practiced in diplomatic relations between countries and familiarise us with the ancient traditions in the relations between nations and governments.

One of the most famous ancient books, *Shahnameh* (Persian: شاهنامه, Romanised: *Šāhnāme*, lit. 'The Book of Kings', pronounced [ʃoːhnoː'me]), also transliterated *Shahnama*, is a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between 977 and 1010 CE. Consisting of some 50,000 'distiches'

(or couplets), *Shahnameh* is one of the world's longest epic poems. It relates mainly to the mythical and, to some extent, the historical past of the Persian Empire, from the creation of the world until the Muslim conquest in the seventh century.

Many countries and regions in the Persian cultural sphere including Iran, Republic of Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, South of Russia, Georgia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, India, West of China and Uzbekistan celebrate this epic. The work is of central importance in the Persian language and culture, regarded as a literary masterpiece.

The book recounts the history of various kings and dynasties that came to power in different parts of the ancient world and examines the social, economic, and political relations between the people in those times. Apart from the official relations between governments, the *Shahnameh* has also dealt with the scientific, cultural, social, and economic relations between nations and its stories even shed light on peoples' common beliefs and values.

Drawing on Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, the present study has tried to investigate the attributes of lady envoys in ancient times. The study's central question is how the lady envoys in the stories of *Shahnameh* carried out their roles and how they defended the interests of the governments, nations, and officials they represented. The author chose *Shahnameh* as the corpus of the study because *Shahnameh* is one of the significant and precious ancient sources for identifying diplomatic etiquette and foreign relations between world powers in the ancient periods. However, political science and international relations scholars less frequently study *Shahnameh*, the name of which indicates its political orientation, and mostly literature and language researchers who focus more on the literary and historical aspects of the volume investigate it.

Despite numerous articles and books published in different languages on the topics of diplomatic etiquette and ambassadors and envoys' attributes, both in the area of diplomatic etiquette in the world today [Zul-Ain, 1400] and the valuable studies dealing with the analysis of historical texts [Eslami, 1392], women's role in promoting diplomatic relations is understudied. Moreover, notwithstanding a few studies dealing with diplomatic etiquette in the *Shahnameh* [Menshadi & Bahrami Einolghazi, 1393], they have not addressed the lady envoys' diplomatic missions either. Accordingly, it can be said that the present study provides a way to understand better women's role in the diplomatic relations between governments in ancient times.

Among the ten lady envoys mentioned in *Shahnameh*, only Sindokht, the queen of Kabulistan, has attracted researchers' attention and, in their writings, researchers have dealt with her personality traits, both from a psychological point of view [Famarzi Kaffash, 1392; Akbari & Masih Far, 1394; Rozatian, 1389], and from a political perspective [Valipour Hafshejani & Parsian, 1399; Afghani, 1360]. However, in most of these studies, Sindokht's role has been investigated more as a lady politician than an envoy [Yahyapour & Nowruzi, 1386; Shahsavari, 1394; Safinia, 1393].

The present research has tried to investigate the attributes of women sent to diplomatic missions in the stories of *Shahnameh*. Although some of these women had a minor role, and sometimes even their names were unknown, studying their practices as envoys is particularly important. In other words, as diplomacy is a public phenomenon and is pursued for the society's public good and securing the countries' interests, and given the fact that it is significantly different from private, family or political relations between rulers, one can argue that in most *Shahnameh* stories in which women were sent to missions as envoys, especially in the stories of Sindokht and the envoy from the city of Horum, it can be observed how the envoys prevented war and bloodshed and established peace and reconciliation between countries. However, since the main topic of this research is to examine the envoys' efforts to observe diplomatic etiquette in their behaviour and speech, the stories have been studied from the viewpoint of diplomatic

relations (with an emphasis on the public good) and private ties between the courts, seeing if the missions aimed to secure political or personal interests.

According to this research, the diplomatic relations existing in the analysed *Shahnameh* narratives can be explained in a classic or official diplomatic framework. Starting since antiquity by ancient governments, classic diplomacy was pursued realistically and through official channels. In classic diplomacy, diplomatic relations and dialogues were exchanged less obviously and behind closed doors. In this type of diplomacy, skilled and experienced diplomats assumed the primary responsibility. Thanks to their acute intelligence, individual talents, high bargaining power, political and cultural experience, and their familiarity with international history and law, the diplomats or envoys chosen for these missions fulfilled the goals and interests of their respective governments and leaders in the best way by pursuing classic diplomacy. In this type of diplomacy, diplomats or envoys usually visited a political leader in another territory on a specific, short-term basis, delivered a message or carried out a mission. In other words, the envoys were rarely sent on permanent missions, as observed nowadays. The diplomats usually enjoyed special rights and diplomatic immunities and were responsible for communicating between the parties [Wolpert, 2001, p. 75].

In this type of political relations between governments, it can be seen that, on the one hand, the host's hospitality and its respect for the envoy's rights were of particular importance. On the other hand, the envoy's behaviour, speech, clothing, exchanged gifts, and morals required them to have appropriate education and training so that skilled diplomats could carry out important missions [Campbell, 2001, p. 13]. The main point here is that, while trying to establish peace, the envoys had also to be responsible for the particular task of protecting the interests of their respective governments [Mesbah, 1393/2014, p. 14].

It should also be noted that in ancient times, envoys were mostly male figures, and only a small number of women could be seen who found the opportunity to carry out diplomatic missions and play the role of envoys. Therefore, although all the women who were sent to diplomatic missions in the *Shahnameh* stories successfully fulfilled their duties, the general trend of those times in the various lands mentioned in the *Shahnameh* was to send **men** to diplomatic missions. Therefore, it is not possible to specify a distinguishing feature for the periods when women could rarely find the chance to serve as envoys.

To investigate the attributes of lady envoys, the present research has chosen the stories of *Shahnameh*, regardless of the place to which the envoys belonged, the study intends to show what particular task the envoys fulfilled, how they were chosen, behaved, and performed the missions entrusted to them.

Moreover, to reveal these political constructions, especially in the area of foreign policy, the research has chosen an ancient historical text as its corpus and used *Annales School of historiography* as its framework. To this aim, the main features observed in the missions are first specified, and general accounts of the stories are provided in footnotes. Then, the missions conducted by each envoy are discussed, the envoy's behaviour and speech are analysed, the section is summarised, and the next section starts.

Among the various versions of the *Shahnameh*, this research has chosen to use the critical edition published by Djalal Khaleghi Motlagh. [Khalghi Motlagh, 1393] The edition has been prepared over thirty years by comparing the oldest *Shahnameh* manuscripts. According to several thinkers, writers, and historians, it is one of the world's most authentic versions of the *Shahnameh*²

A. Perspicacity

The art of diplomacy requires reasoning, unriddling, shrewdness, sharpness, and eloquence. All these features can be summarised in the single word 'perspicacity'. Considering politics as the science

² The author would like to express her gratitude to Rose Fazli, a Faculty Member at the Research Institute for Cultural and Communication Studies at Allameh Tabataba'i University, and Mandana Sajjadi, a faculty member of University of Tehran, for reading the latest draft of the article and helping the author to enrich the content with their valuable suggestions.

and art of making government efficient for improving the conditions, perspicacity is the means for implementing policies and planning to achieve desired goals. In the following two stories, an attempt has been made to show how perspicacious the lady envoys in the *Shahnameh* have been in implementing their desired policies and achieving their goals.

A-1. The Envoys Whom Rudabeh Sent to Zal³

In the story of Rudabeh and Zal, Rudabeh sent five of her handmaidens (nurses and maids), to go and deliver her love message to Zal. According to Ferdowsi, the handmaidens were kind, secretive, skilled, and wise. They tried to stop Rudabeh from marrying Zal and reminded her of the dangers of this union by enumerating Rudabeh's advantages. But when they faced Rudabeh's annoyance and insistence, they promised her they would do their best to attract Zal's interest and bring him to Rudabeh.

Seeing no choice but to carry out the mission of going to Zal, they dressed in beautiful clothes and, due to the mission's confidentiality, left the palace under the pretext of picking flowers and went to the orchard near Zal's camp. Rudabeh's envoys knew very well that to carry out their mission correctly, before telling Zal about their lady's attachment, they should behave so that Zal himself would be eager to meet Rudabeh. For the same reason, they cautiously asked Zal's soldiers and servants about him and his camp and spoke about their lady's virtues so that the news would indirectly arrive at Zal. Finally, they were perspicacious and gave messages to Ridak, Zal's servant, so he would tell Zal and motivate him to rush to meet them.

Then, the news of the messengers' arrival reached Zal, and his servants told him about the news they had heard about the beauty of Rudabeh. The interesting point to note here is Zal's manners in front of the envoys: Zal sent valuable gifts to Rudabeh and all five envoys and adequately performed the customs of welcoming the envoys. Knowledgeable diplomats are usually equipped with eloquence, intelligence, and promptness in reacting to others' speeches. In this story, the ladies are quite eloquent and prompt in reacting to others' speeches. In meeting and talking with Zal, they first showed respect to Zal. The ladies praised Zal's courage, knowledge, and beauty and spoke confidently about their lady, so Zal fell in love and asked them to take him to their lady and help him to meet Rudabeh.

In their meeting, although Zal had not trusted the envoys entirely and threatened that they would have deserved death if they had lied, they continued to praise their lady confidently. However, they played their role so well that, rather than expressing Rudabeh's plea to see Zal, they encouraged Zal to hurry to see Rudabeh. They even told him how he could throw his lasso on the battlements of palace walls and go to Rudabeh's palace. They then asked him to allow them to return to Rudabeh's Palace.

³ The story of Zal and Rudabeh: One day, Zal, a famous Persian warrior, traveled with his troops from Zabul, which was ruled by his father, Sam, to Kabul. Mehrab, the king of Kabul, went to see him. Zal was informed that Mehrab had a beautiful daughter named Rudabeh. After hearing from his father about Zal, Rudabeh fell in love with him. Then she asked her worshipers to go near Zal's camp and bring her news about Zal. The five worshipers went to pick flowers near Zal's camp, spoke to Ridak, Zal's servant, and gave him their message. Then they were taken to Zal, received Zal's message, and returned to Rudabeh with gifts. Then Zal chose a soft-spoken lady as the messenger between Rudabeh and him. In the meantime, Zal and Rudabeh's love story reached Manouchehr Shah, the king of Iran, and he sent a message to his commander, Sam, to attack Kabul, destroy the Mehrab family, which was a descendant of Zahhak, and prevent this union, lest an Arab family would rule over Iran again. When the news reached Mehrab, he decided to kill his daughter to get rid of this difficulty and keep his throne. In the meantime, Sindokht, Mehrab's wife and Rudabeh's mother, a wise and courageous woman, asked Mehrab to allow her to go to Sam's court in Zabul, on behalf of Mehrab, and talk to him to provide a basis for reconciliation. Then, Sindokht, as an envoy from Kabul's Shah, moved to Zabul with several gifts. In this travel, she could both prevent the war and bloodshed and make a pact with Sam that her daughter would marry Sam's son. In the end of this story and as a result of the marriage of Zal and Rudabeh, the famous Iranian warrior, Rostam, was born. What stands out more than anything else in the story is the role enacted by lady envoys in reducing enmity and establishing friendship and love between people and kings [Khaleghi Motlagh, 1393, vol. 1, pp. 97-158, verses 41-161].

Another feature of this mission was its confidentiality. Since it was late at night, the envoys returned to the palace by holding some flower bunches and deceiving the palace guard, bringing Zal's gifts and message to Rudabeh.

Finally, after returning to Rudabeh's palace and having told her of Zal's messages and the whole story, one of the envoys returned to Zal to give him good tidings that he could visit their lady.

In general, in this story, the envoys' attributes can be categorised as follows:

- The envoys were entirely trustworthy, secretive, and benevolent (it can be seen in Rudabeh's conversations with the envoys);
- The envoys were patriotic (they tried to stop Rudabeh from connecting with foreigners);
- They cared about their clothing (they dressed before going to Zal's camp);
- With their intelligence and eloquence, the envoys managed to visit the highest officials in their missions (In the conversation with Ridak, Zal's servant, they acted in a way they were finally able to meet Zal himself);
- The envoys knew the etiquette about how to meet officials (when meeting Zal, they first respected him and then started a conversation and returned home with his permission);
- The envoys took care of the interests of the lady of their homeland and motivated the other side to bond with her (this point can be seen in their conversation with Zal);
- They were self-confident (although Zal threatened them and then persuaded them, they did not lose themselves before his threats, nor did they stop pursuing their mission due to his persuasion);
- They were honest and well-spoken (in their conversation with Zal, while hiding the primary purpose of their mission, they did not utter any false words and used good words to persuade the other side and act according to their wishes);
- The envoys were satiated to the full (they did not lose heart after receiving the valuable gifts presented to them and their lady, and sought to reach their goal until the end of the mission);
- The envoys kept their mission confidential (when they went to Zal's camp, they acted as if they had gone there by accident; moreover, when returning to the royal palace, they did not tell the palace guard about their mission);
- And finally, the most crucial attribute of the five lady envoys was their pre-emption; that is, doing something to make the other party ask for something instead of asking it yourself. In other words, the envoys had perspicacity, the art that is characteristic of outstanding diplomats. Surprisingly, they knew the trick and were secretly happy to see their plans go smoothly.

A-2. Manijeh's Envoy Sent to Bijan⁴

In this story, Manijeh, a Turani princess, sent one of her handmaids as an envoy to Bijan, a young Iranian commander, to prepare the ground for their meeting. Manijeh's envoy was a good-looking, good-minded woman who was familiar with diplomatic etiquette and knew how to respect the other side before starting a conversation and conveying the message to Bijan without revealing the primary intent.

⁴ The story of Bijan and Manijeh: One day, a number of Armenians came to the court of Kay Khosrow, the famous Iranian king, and said their land, somewhere near the border of Iran and Turan, was full of boars, and their crops were destroyed. They asked Kay Khosrow for help, and he, from among his troops, sent Bijan, the son of the Commander-in-Chief Giv, along with another Iranian commander, Gorgin, to battle the boars. After killing the boars, Bijan went to Turan at the suggestion of Gorgin to watch the Turani women's festivity. Bijan went well-dressed to the festivity held near the residing place of Manijeh, the daughter of Afrasiab, the king of Turan. In the meantime, Manijeh saw him, who was a handsome young man, from inside the tent and sent her handmaid to Bijan to ask who he was and what he was doing there. Bijan asked Manijeh's envoy to help him go to his lady. The envoy played her role so well and introduced them to each other. In the end, after many difficulties and enduring several years of suffering, Bijan and Manijeh finally got married [Khaleghi Motlagh, 1393, vol. 1, pp. 639 to 869, verses 1 to 1279].

After introducing himself, Bijan asked the envoy to show favour and do something so that he could visit Manijeh. He promised to give the envoy several gifts instead. After returning from Bijan, the envoy said nice words about him, making Manijeh eager to meet him. After hearing the envoy's report, Manijeh sent her to Bijan again, and the envoy conveyed Manijeh's answer to Bijan so well that he immediately went with the envoy to Manijeh's tent.

In this story, the behavioural and speech characteristics of the envoy can be summarised as follows:

- The envoy played a crucial role in promoting the relations between the Turani princess and the Iranian commander. She could also succeed in completing her mission thanks to her soft-spoken words, intelligence, and good-minded behaviour;
- The envoy did not merely play the role of a messenger. She entered into a diplomatic dialogue to obtain the primary purpose of her mission and invite both sides to friendship and empathy.

B. Confidentiality

Apart from being a moral virtue, confidentiality has long been considered a fundamental principle for envoys carrying out missions. It is one of the significant milestones in diplomatic studies, and any diplomat sent to carry out a diplomatic mission is expected to keep the details of the mission confidential until the goal is achieved. The following stories show clear examples of how the envoys carried out their diplomatic missions with strict confidentiality.

B-1. Zal's Envoy to Rudabeh

In the second part of the story of Zal and Rudabeh, Zal sent an eloquent woman to deliver his message to Rudabeh. While delivering Zal's message to Rudabeh and taking Rudabeh's answer to Zal, the woman was arrested by Sindokht, Rudabeh's mother. Sindokht tried to force the envoy to tell her secret and purpose, but she resisted the pressure and did not reveal her secret. When Sindokht asked her what she was doing in her palace, the woman replied she had come to sell some ornaments to Rudabeh. When Sindokht asked her to show the goods, the woman said they were with Rudabeh. Sindokht asked how much she sold them, and the woman complimented that they were of no worth before Rudabeh! When Sindokht asked to see her money, the woman replied she would get the money for the goods tomorrow. Then, Sindokht doubted and threw her to the ground violently, forcing her to reveal her secret. Since the woman was silent, Sindokht called her daughter, Rudabeh, to clarify.

When Sindokht discovered that the woman was a messenger from Zal, she pretended nothing had happened and started to console her.

The major attributes of the woman who came to Rudabeh as an envoy from Zal can be summarised as follows:

- The envoy was eloquent, intelligent, loyal, and kept her purpose confidential;
- The envoy in this story had the necessary skills for diplomatic dialogue and persuading her audience. On the one hand, she fulfilled her mission correctly and conveyed Zal's message to Rudabeh. She did it so well that Rudabeh decided to send precious gifts to Zal;
- The envoy did not reveal her secrets. When she was in trouble, she tried to hide her purpose in various ways. The secret was only revealed when Rudabeh told the story to her mother;
- It is interesting that the envoys in this story enjoyed diplomatic immunity. When Sindokht found out that the woman was an envoy from Zal, she tried to alleviate the woman's sadness, apologised to her, and said that she would not have treated her harshly if she had known the woman was an envoy.

B-2. Malekeh's Envoy to Shapur⁵

In this story, the wet nurse of Malekeh, daughter of the King of Ghassan, acted as an envoy. She had a serious mission. At the climax of the war between the Iranian and Arab armies, while Iranians had besieged the Arab fortress for a month, Malekeh decided to send a message to Shapur, the Shah of Iran. In that situation, she found no one more secretive than her wet nurse.

In addition to entrusting her message to the envoy, Malekeh also entrusted her with the duty to conclude an agreement with the Shah of Iran. In fact, the envoy was in such a high position to make an agreement with the Shah of Iran on behalf of the Yemeni Princess.

After receiving the message, the wet nurse had to think of a way to accomplish the mission in that problematic situation. She had to risk her life because if the guards while leaving the fort caught her or in case someone saw her, she would undoubtedly be sentenced by the King to death for an act of treason. Therefore, she chose to pass through the fortress's gates and go to the enemy's army overnight.

Then, by promising to give jewels to the army commander, she found the chance to meet the Shah of Iran. At the beginning of the meeting, according to diplomatic etiquette, she showed respect to the Shah. Then she delivered her message in full and received the King's reply.

Apart from making an agreement with her and swearing that he would keep his agreement in that difficult situation, the King also followed the customs of accepting the envoy and presented gifts to her to dispatch to Malekeh. He also asked the envoy to convey his message to Malekeh in a way that a friendship would be established between them. As seen, even the other party trusted the envoy and asked her for help.

In the end, the envoy returned to the fort, delivered a full report of what she had seen and heard, and provided the basis for the cooperation of Malekeh and Shapur to open the fort's gates.

In general, the following characteristics can be observed in the behaviour and speech of the envoy in this story:

- Malekeh's envoy was a loyal and secretive lady who, thanks to her intelligence and accepting the difficulties of a diplomatic mission during a war, survived a calamity and completed her mission;
- The envoy knew how to communicate with authorities in the host country and prepare to meet the highest official in the other party;
- Being aware of diplomatic etiquette and appropriate behaviour in the presence of the political leader of the opposite country, the envoy conveyed her message correctly and completely and managed to influence the King's decision;
- The envoy was a benevolent person. Even after returning to her country, she sought to find a way to finalise the official talks and did not limit her mission to exchanging messages;
- She had a particular position and deserved to represent her respective leader and conclude an essential agreement with the other party;
- The most critical feature of the envoy was her secrecy, as she guarded the most important political and war secrets and completed the mission entrusted to her without revealing its confidential information.

⁵ The story of Malekeh and Shapur: when Shapur, the Sassanid King, sat on the royal throne as a child, a man named Tayer, leading the Tazi tribe named Ghassan, marched with a large army to Ctesiphon, and, after killing and plundering the Sassanid capital, took Shahpur's aunt, named Nusheh, as a captive. After a while, they had a daughter named Malekeh. Years after this event, Shapur, now a young and strong king, attacked the Ghassan land, located in the vicinity of present-day Yemen, in retaliation for what Tayer had done earlier, and besieged the fortress where Tayer and his troops resided. After a month, Malekeh asked her wet nurse to go to Shapur and tell him that Malekeh considers herself Iranian, of the same race as Shapur, belongs to the royal family, and is ready to help him open the gate of the fortress. Shapur welcomed the offer and promised to give a proper position to Malekeh to show his gratitude for her cooperation. In this way, Malekeh put her father and his soldiers into a deep sleep, opened the gates of the fortress, and helped Shapur to win over Tayer of Ghassan [Khaleghi Motlagh, 1393, vol. 2, pp. 421–426, verses 45–78].

C. Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is an act to bring about agreement and understanding between the parties involved in a conflict. It is usually attained in a conciliatory manner and by providing the basis for better understanding between the parties. One of the duties of diplomatic officials is to reduce the tensions between parties and create the basis for the establishment of peace and reconciliation between nations by showing the parties' goodwill and reducing misunderstandings between them. The following stories show how lady envoys acted as peacekeepers and completed their diplomatic missions.

C-1. Queen Sindokht as a lady envoy

As we saw in the story of Zal and Rudabeh, after finding out that the two young personages loved each other, Manouchehr, the Shah of Iran, sent a message to Sam, Zal's father, and asked him to send an army to Kabul and kill Mehrab, who was a descendant of Zahhak. The news reached Kabul, and Mehrab, who accused his daughter of all the disasters, decided to follow the Arab customs and kill his daughter. However, Sindokht, Mehrab's wife and Rudabeh's mother, convinced him first to allow her to go as an envoy to Sam's court in Zabul, and try to establish a reconciliation between the two kingdoms.

From this moment, we have a readable story of Sindokht's diplomatic efforts to convince Sam to refrain from war and conclude a peace treaty. Although it was not customary in that era to send a woman, on behalf of a king, to visit another king, and given Ferdowsi's efforts to point to this by showing Zal's surprise at seeing Sindokht, it can be observed that Sindokht used her intelligence, eloquence, and shrewdness to achieve her goals. Sindokht's major characteristics as an envoy can be summarised as follows.

Sindokht was well acquainted with the subtleties of diplomatic etiquette and knew that an envoy's attractive appearance effectively reduced her stress and other adverse conditions. Therefore, she wore a formal, magnificent dress that signified her dignity and beauty. Then, she prepared the best gifts and took them to Sam's court.

Afterwards, she sat on a horse and moved in front of a caravan of companions and gifts from Kabul towards Sam's court in Zabul. In fact, the mission was so crucial that Sindokht herself went to Sam's court as Mehrab's envoy.

Before arriving in Zabul, she sent a few companions to convey the news of the arrival to an envoy from Kabul to Sam's court so they could prepare for their official reception. In other words, she entered the court of Sam in a decisive manner [Rezaeian, 1389, p. 1017].

After Sam allowed the envoy and her companions to meet him, she dismounted her horse, showed full respect to Sam, and offered all the gifts she had brought from Shah Mehrab to Sam. Well aware of the impact of gifts on the talk process, she tried to highlight the value of the gifts to Sam.

Sam was surprised to see so many valuable gifts and, according to Ferdowsi, asked himself why, despite such a remarkable amount of gifts, Mehrab had sent a woman as an envoy. It can be seen that sending a lady envoy was, at that time, an insult or an underestimation of the message and mission by the Shah who sent the lady envoy. However, Sindokht highlighted the importance of the message and her position by bringing numerous gifts from Shah Mehrab.

As soon as the gifts were accepted, Sindokht asked three lady companions to cast gems and rubies before Sam's feet, as was a custom at that time. As it can be seen, there were other women in her diplomatic delegation.

After completing the rituals, the companions of both sides left the hall, and the official conversation started. Sindokht began her speech with self-confidence and spoke clearly and eloquently. She told Sam how much she considered him a wise man as well as a mighty warrior who was able to win over his enemies. Then, she said to Sam that if Mehrab had a mistake, why should the people of Kabul be subjected to war

and bloodshed and their lands were destroyed? She said they were loyal to Sam and had never incurred enmities towards him. Then she warned Sam that the war and killing of innocents would displease God.

Sindokht conveyed her message to Sam in three parts; (1) she emphasised the wisdom, knowledge, and powers of the interlocutor; (2) she reviewed the existing conditions and proposed reconciliation and friendship; and (3) she asked Sam to refrain from violence and hatred.

Sam then asked Sindokht to tell him how her son, Zal, had visited and fell in love with Rudabeh and what qualities the girl had displayed which caused Zal to fall in love with her.

On the one hand, Sindokht was aware of Iranians' hatred towards Zahhak and his descendants; on the other hand, she was familiar with the warriors' loyalty to their pacts [Rezaeian, 1389, p.1018]. Accordingly, she first cautiously asked Sam to promise he would not harm her and her companions if she told him the story. Then, she warned that she was from a famous family and that if she was attacked, it would not remain unanswered. Therefore, while asking for diplomatic immunity, she also warned Sam from a position of power that if the envoys' diplomatic rights were not respected, Sam would receive a harsh response.

Sam shook hands with Sindokht and promised he would not harm her. It is one of the first cases in the stories of the *Shahnameh* where a ruler makes an agreement with an envoy from another land. It is also the first case of granting diplomatic immunity to envoys in the *Shahnameh*. The story can also be said to be the first official agreement, in the *Shahnameh* stories, between a man and a woman from two lands representing two governments.

Sindokht introduced herself and said that she was Zahak's descendant, Mehrab's wife, and mother of Rudabeh, the girl to whom Zal had lost his heart. She said, 'If you have any grudge or enmity with our royal family and think that because we are from the Zahhak lineage, we do not deserve to sit on the royal throne of Kabulistan, I am here, and you can order to kill me. But please do not harm the innocent people of my land.' As Sindokht had received Sam's promise that her life would be spared and as she knew that heroes would never break their promise, she tried intelligently to be honest and faithful to her promise and save her and her companions' lives. In this way, Sindokht aroused Sam's sense of altruism and stopped him from waging war on Kabulistan.

Observing such a wise and clear-sighted lady standing before him in full majesty and eloquence to protect the interests of her homeland's people and government (here Ferdowsi emphasises that Sindokht did not act in a manly manner, but with the characteristics of a powerful woman), Sam replied that he would keep his promise, refuse to march to Kabul, and agree to the union of Zal and Rudabeh. Therefore, Sindokht could achieve all she wanted with her measured, thoughtful behaviour and speech.

But the story did not end here. Sam then told her that he would like to see Sindokht's daughter. Sindokht followed diplomatic etiquette and invited Sam to go to the Kabulistan Palace as a guest. Having accepted the invitation, Sindokht first sent a swift-footed messenger to Kabul to inform Mehrab that the mission was accomplished.

Sindokht and the accompanying delegation spent that night in Zabulistan. On the second day, they went to revisit Sam. This time, knowing she was the queen of Kabulistan, the courtiers respected Sindokht and called her the 'Lord of the Ladies'. In their second meeting, Sindokht showed great respect for Sam once again and talked with him for a long time. Then, she followed diplomatic etiquette and asked Sam for permission to return to Kabul and prepare to host Sam and his son, Zal. Sam asked her to take his message to Shah Mehrab and presented Sindokht with a rich robe encrusted with jewels and the best belongings from his treasure. Moreover, Sam presented Sindokht with everything he had in Kabulistan, including the land, cattle, and other things. It shows Sindokht's success in that mission. At

the end of the visit, Sam and Sindokht shook hands again and made a new pact: Sam chose Sindokht's daughter to marry his son.

In the end, Sam sent two hundred brave men to accompany Sindokht to Kabulistan. While exchanging farewell, Sam assured Sindokht once more that there would be nothing to worry about and Kabul would remain safe.

Sindokht's achievements in her mission can be counted as follows:

- Sam promised to stop Shah Manouchehr from attacking Kabulistan;
- Sindokht received a well-deserved, rich robe and several other valuable gifts from Sam;
- Sam gave Sindokht all his property in Kabulistan as a present;
- A peace treaty was signed between them, so the fire of war and hatred would be extinguished afterwards;
- The union between Zal and Rudabeh was finalized [Shahsavari, 1394, p. 188].

In this story, the characteristics of the envoy who succeeded in creating peace can be summarised as follows:

1. Nice-natured and good-looking; 2. Happy and cheerful; 3. Brave and selfless; 4. Advice-giving and freethinking; 5. Familiar with travel etiquette; 6. Familiar with ceremonial etiquette; 7. Familiar with the political talks' etiquette; 8. Eloquent; 9. Honest; 10. Having dignity, equanimity, and modesty; 11. Wise; 12. Aware of the latest political affairs; 13. Prudent and thoughtful; 14. Intelligent and knowledgeable; 15. Skilled in finding the best solutions to problems [Faramarzi Kaffash, Esfand 1392, pp. 1352–1364].

In an article entitled 'Nice Words from Women in the *Shahnameh*', Kia analysed Sindokht's mission in protecting the interests of her homeland. In this article, she writes: "We believe that a faint outline of an old belief has been remembered in this scene, and that is the role played by women in protecting the city. In the sphere of such a belief, the real protector of the city is Sindokht and not Mehrab. Protecting Kabulistan is a part of the measures taken by the lady of the city. She followed the ancient custom in which mother goddesses were responsible for protecting the city and the nation. In matriarchal societies, women were in charge of defending their city, and Sindokht assumed the same position. Queen of Kabul did not visit Sam to ask him to marry his son to Sindokht's girl; she goes to save the city of Kabul from destruction" [Kia, 1371, pp. 65–66].

After all, Sindokht was an envoy with a beautiful face and character, the two features, which are the main requirements for every envoy (male or female) (see: [Yahyapour and Nowruzzi, 1386, p. 452]).

In this way, the lady envoy's tact and wisdom prevented a bloody war between the two lands, led to a marriage bond between Zal and Rudabeh, and resulted in the birth of Rostam, the legendary Iranian hero.

C.2- The Queen of Harum's Envoy to Alexander (or Sekandar)⁶

In this story, Alexander sends a letter to the Queen of Harum, declaring himself the king of Iran and Rome and issuing a commanding order from a position of superiority, demanding that they open the way for Alexander and his army to enter the city. The women of the city consult with one another and draft a firm yet composed response: 'Now that you boast of your military exploits, know that if you

⁶ The story of Alexander's arrival at the city of Harum: During Alexander's travels to various parts of the world, he and his army reached the region of present-day Caucasus. In this region, there was a city called Harum where all the inhabitants were women, renowned for their warrior skills. Alexander wrote a letter to the queen of the city, and a Roman philosopher delivered the letter. Having appraised the situation, they wrote a response and an envoy from the queen, along with ten other women, took the reply to Alexander, warning him that if he intended to seize the city, he would be defeated. Alexander responded once again with a letter, stating that his only goal was to visit the city and become acquainted with its people. Eventually, Alexander and his army were granted permission to enter the city, where they were warmly received, and they continued on their journey from Harum [Khaleghi Motlagh, 2014, pp. 313–317].

set foot in our city, thousands upon thousands of brave women will stand against you and fight. In case you lose the battle, everyone will mock you, and if you win, they will say Alexander can only triumph over women. However, if you wish to pass through our city in peace and friendship, we will gladly welcome you'.

In this way, while asserting the strength and capacities of the city's forces, the women of the city of Harum preserved the possibilities for dialogue and cooperation. Accordingly, instead of handing the letter to Alexander's envoy, they send an experienced woman, accompanied by ten other female riders, to deliver the message and negotiate with Alexander, ensuring that no assault would be launched on their city.

Having read the letter, Alexander wrote a softer response, stating that his visit was merely to gain better acquaintance with the people and their way of life. Ultimately, he and his army were granted permission to enter the city, and the women welcomed them with many gifts in a green location. The important points in this story are as follows:

- The woman envoy was eloquent, well-spoken, and knowledgeable about diplomatic techniques; She wore fine clothing and, as Ferdowsi describes, adorned herself with a crown and regal attire;
- Accompanying her was a diplomatic delegation consisting of ten noble female riders;
- When they approached Alexander's army slowly and confidently, Alexander observed the protocol for receiving major envoys, sending forces to greet them;
- Apart from delivering the letter, the renowned and distinguished woman spoke of the bravery and fighting spirit of the women of her city. She then reminded Alexander that even if he entered the city by force, defeating an army of women would not bring him any honour.

Thus, it can be seen that, firstly, although Alexander's army far outnumbered the women of Harum, the female envoy first spoke of the courage and capabilities of her peers. Secondly, she did not consider attacking the city to be a significant achievement for Alexander. And thirdly, she invited him to enter the city peacefully and be hosted by them. Of course, her wisdom proved effective, and the guests entered the city and soon after departed for another land without any harm befalling them or their city.

CONCLUSION

This research investigated the attributes of ten ladies whose stories are brought in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. Among the envoys, seven were skilled servants or handmaidens from the court; one was a queen, one was a commander, and the tenth one's (the lady Zal sent to Rudabah) relationship was unknown.

Moreover, in eight cases, the envoys were mandated by women to visit men, and in two cases, they were sent by men (Mahrab and Zal). It should also be noted that in other *Shahnameh* stories where women are on the throne, men are sent on missions as envoys in several cases.

To the three major characteristics of lady envoys in the *Shahnameh*, namely the attributes of perspicacity, confidentiality, and peacebuilding, we can add wisdom, eloquence, political knowledge, skillfulness, intelligence, loyalty to the interests of the person on whose behalf they are mandated, beauty, good manners and appearance, knowledge the current state of affairs, honesty, and familiarity with the diplomatic etiquette.

Besides, in these stories, we face a type of female diplomacy and politics characterised by a female discourse. The principal manifestation of such discourse can be found in the "preparatory measure" (both in behaviour and speech) they take in advance of their conversations. It seems that the focus on these preparatory measures was sometimes a sort of dominance of the margin over the text. Evidently, in the socio-historical period where *Shahnameh*'s stories took place, women were mostly marginalised from

political relations, and the same marginality characterised their minds, language, and politics and was the key to their success in carrying out diplomatic missions.

The lady envoys did not try to show masculine behaviour or use feminine appearances to accomplish their missions. Instead, they exercised grace and competence, did not move away from their feminine nature, and tried to finalise their missions. Other parties also respected the envoys' appropriate speech and behaviour, sometimes even choosing them as their advisors, and asked them for help in advancing their talks, achieving mutual goals, or signing peace and friendship treaties with other lands.

To categorise the diplomacy used by these envoys according to the classifications used nowadays, it can be said that they performed their missions in the form of traditional diplomacy [Bijani, Bahman and Esfand 1384], where the envoys had only to be responsible before the King. The public rarely monitored their performance, and diplomatic relations were often carried out secretly and in the form of a limited flow. In these stories, the envoys' central mission was to exchange messages and conduct official talks with other parties. They had enough power and authority to negotiate, make agreements, establish peace, or instigate wars. Therefore, people with high qualifications and trusted by kings were chosen to carry out diplomatic missions.

In this way, it can be concluded that drawing on ancient Iranian stories and myths, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* provides a perfect model to understand the various functions and characteristics lady envoys had in their diplomatic missions. This understanding can be effective in defining diplomatic relations between governments in the world today.

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