



Key Khosrow and Perceval: Crossed and Parallel Destinies*

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SINCE the 19th century, several authors have considered an Iranian influence on the chivalry novels of medieval Europe, of course in studies that often yield to speculation and fantasy. The subject is nevertheless promising, and this article aims at illustrating it by a precise comparison, already suggested by Sir J. C. Coyajee (*Studies in Shahnameh*, 1939) between the destinies of the knight Perceval, hero of several medieval texts (Chrétien de Troyes' *Conte du Graal*, *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach, the *Troisième Continuation du Conte du Graal* by Manessier, the *Haut Livre du Graal*), and the Iranian king Key Khosrow, a prominent figure in the central part of Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*, completed in the early 11th century. Based on a new comparative mythology proposed by Dumézil's, it is by comparing several texts and through the comparison of their common motifs that we can define the character of a mythical text or literary form, and identify a fixed core of motifs.

Thus, one can find striking similarities between the key moments of Key Khosrow and Perceval existences, suggesting the presence of canvases and similar mythical patterns or various crossed or mutual influences in history between different literary or oral re-expressions of older myths. Key Khosrow and Perceval both have mothers of royal ancestry.

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They both lost their fathers before or shortly after birth. In their youth, Key Khosrow and Perceval lived in seclusion, the former in a mountainous region, and the latter in a forest. From an early age, despite their ignorance of the world, Key Khosrow and Perceval have shown remarkable qualities, which testify to their noble origin. Key Khosrow and Perceval are ignorant of the world, but the natural ignorance (of Perceval before King Arthur) or the feigned ignorance (of Key Khosrow before king Afrâssiâb of Turân) has a positive result for both. Perceval and Key Khosrow are both objects of prophecy and they are announced as saviors. There are motives for revenge to Key Khosrow and Perceval: Key Khosrow must take revenge on his father Siâvosh murdered by Afrâssiâb, and Parzival must take revenge for the kingdoms that were taken from him. Key Khosrow and Perceval belong to guardians' lineages: the *farr* (the "Divine glory") for Key Khosrow, and the Grail for Perceval. Key Khosrow, like Perceval, had to go through several trials, one in order to fulfil his mission of pacifying revenge, the other before conquering the Grail. The nature and consequences of some trials faced by Key Khosrow and Perceval also have many similarities. Key Khosrow and Perceval traveled a lot, and their itineraries were undoubtedly symbolic, but they are made, like the *Book of Kings* as in the Arthurian romances, in an imprecise, sometimes incoherent geography, and which does not seem to obey any other logic than that of the symbolic or imaginative representation. After many adventures and trials, Perceval is elected king of the Grail, and Key Khosrow king of Iran. After exemplary reigns, Key Khosrow and Perceval abandoned their royal authorities and withdrew from the world. The cup (Jam-e Jam) of Key Khosrow and the Grail disappeared after their deaths: after the death of Perceval, the Grail and the Holy Spear were carried to Heaven, and in the *Book of Kings* we no longer hear about the miraculous cup of Jamshid after the death of Key Khosrow, its last holder.

These resemblances between Key Khosrow and Perceval, between their lineage, their orphaned youth far from the world, their spiritual and royal qualities, the trials they went through, their consecration, and their relationship to the sacred, suggest if not influences of Iranian traditions on medieval European literature, at least the common Indo-European origin of the cultures underlying these epic stories. It is known that the Indo-European peoples, whose origins, migrations and ideologies are widely debated, share the origins of both the Aryan traditions of North India and ancient Iranian culture, as well as Western cultures such as Celticism, which has most directly influenced Arthurian novels. One could even imagine a combination of the two hypotheses: the similarities between stories in the *Book of Kings* and episodes in the Grail romances could be explained both by the common Indo-European origins of their underlying

culture, and later through partial influences that came to the West through the Muslim world.

Keywords— Ferdowsi, *Book of Kings*, Arthurian romances, Perceval, Key Khosrow

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