

V4

JULY 2022

MUSE

The Official
Student
Publication of
English
Language and
Literature of
Persian Gulf
University





EDITOR'S NOTE

"To the medieval mind a liberty was a right to the enjoyment of a specific property. It was a freedom to do something with one's own without interference by the king or any other man."

Arthur Bryant

This volume will continue the discussion of the mediaeval epic that you read about in the previous volume. You will encounter something quite unique and fascinating in this one. **The Persian epic, Shahnameh** and other materials that have been gathered for you are available for your enjoyment.

Hope you enjoy my fellow literatis!

Fateme Shirdel

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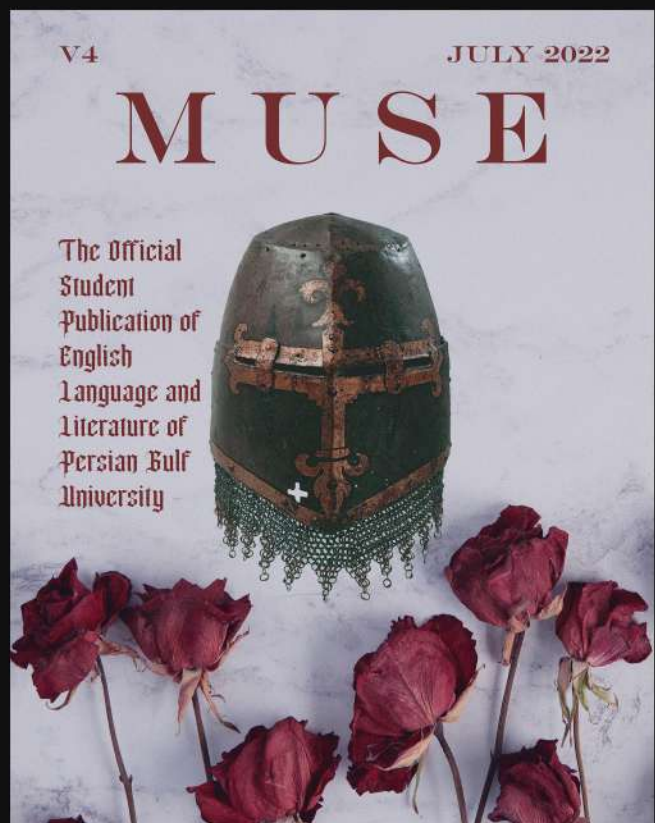
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As you have witnessed in the previous issue, we have been discussing **the Medieval Ages**. Therefore, this issue also has a medieval icon on its cover, **Hans Rieter's Greathelm**, mid-14th century, **Germanic National Museum in Nuremberg**.



MOVIE *By Ashkan Zanheneh* TIME ANDREI RUBLEV

As you may guess from the title of the movie, I'm going to introduce a biographical historical drama, released in 1966, about a Russian artist. Andrei Rublev (1360-1430) was an iconographer and monk in Medieval Russia who had blessed many cathedrals with his art, and many of his paintings have survived thus far. The movie is directed by Andrei Tarkovsky and portrays a gloomy Russia brimming with famine, sickness and war. Although it carries the artist's name as its title, it is loosely based on his life; it can be considered a masterpiece that gives us an accurate and realistic look of 15th-century Russia. The most necessary elements of "Andrei Rublev", which make it an influential movie, are the realistic Medieval Russia, Rublev's faith as a monk, his artistic life and the relation of the film to modern life.

The 15th-century Russia portrayed in "Andrei Rublev" is a country filled with violence. Hunger and starvation can be found everywhere. Famine and plague have compelled people to abandon their cities, and the ones who have stayed have nothing to eat but rats. We witness a religious society with strict beliefs that would punish sinners harshly. There is also a corrupt government that uses violence to reach its desires. The story occurs during the war between rival princes and the Tatar invasion. In such a world, artists like Rublev have to struggle for artistic freedom and make art for a society that might not be worthy enough to appreciate it.

SPOILER ALERT

Following paragraphs
will spoil some details of

the story





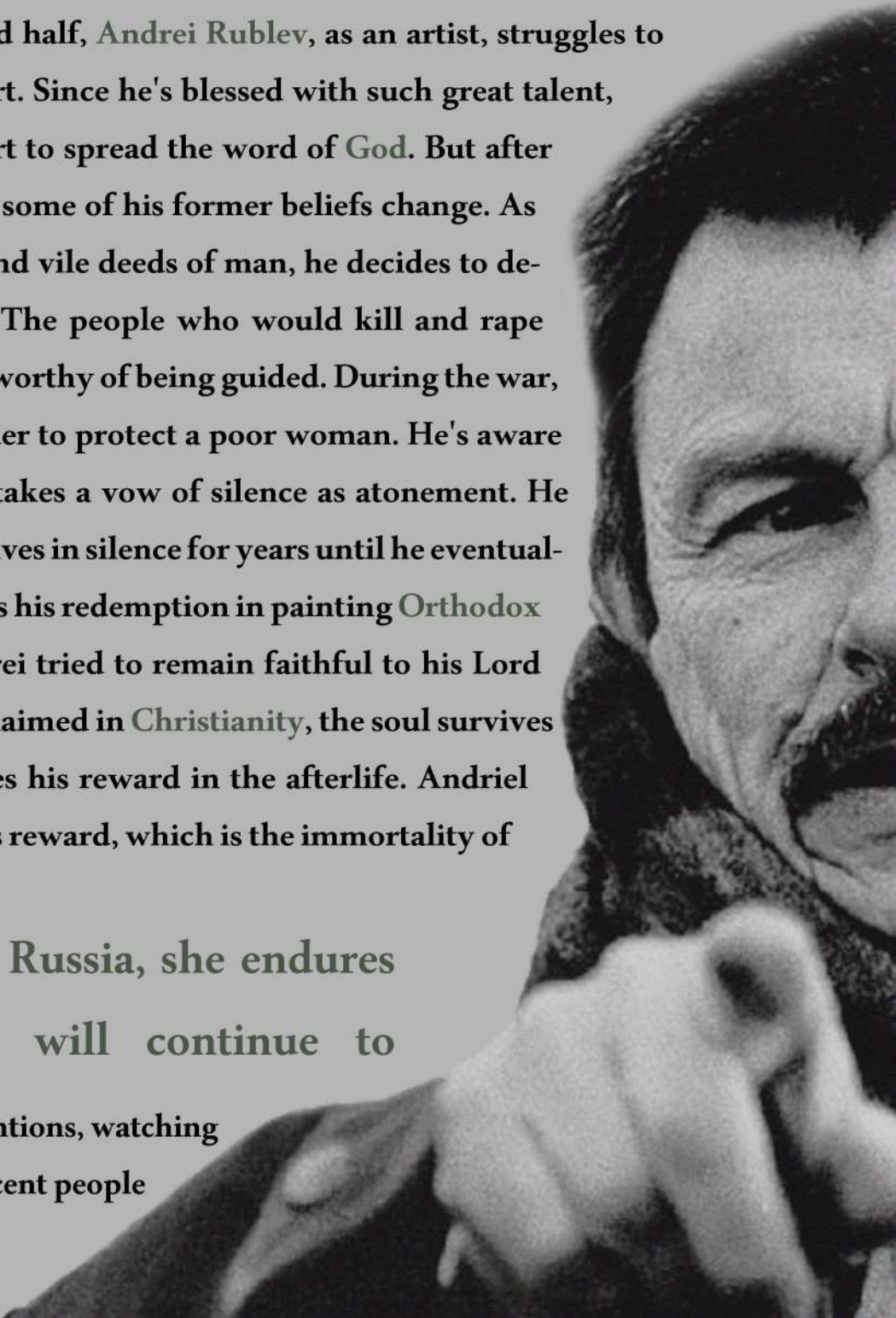
During the first half of the film, Rublev, as a young monk, is constantly questioning his beliefs. He's unable to consider some sins offensive as he's told to. He believes that some sins may not be regarded as some sort of disrespect to God, and the Creator may not be offended by them. "It's true, people do evil, too. And it's very sad... the Russian man gets more and more misfortunes. The Tartars raid him thrice a season, then comes a famine or a plague. But he keeps working and working, bearing his cross with humanity. Never despairing, but enduring it silently. And only praying to God to give him enough strength to endure. Can the Almighty not forgive such men their ignorance?" Rublev says. He doesn't wish to terrify people with religion; subsequently, he refuses to paint "The Last Judgment" painting, which includes the picture of sinners boiling in tar. He even believed that the crucifixion had been the will of God, so Judas, Peter and society should not be blamed for their ignorance.





During the second half, **Andrei Rublev**, as an artist, struggles to help people with his art. Since he's blessed with such great talent, he tries to utilize his art to spread the word of **God**. But after the invasion of **Tatars**, some of his former beliefs change. As he witnesses the war and vile deeds of man, he decides to deprive them of his art. The people who would kill and rape each other may not be worthy of being guided. During the war, he kills a soldier in order to protect a poor woman. He's aware of his great sin, so he takes a vow of silence as atonement. He gives up painting and lives in silence for years until he eventually reconsiders and finds his redemption in painting **Orthodox** cathedrals again. Andrei tried to remain faithful to his Lord all his life, and as it is claimed in **Christianity**, the soul survives after death and receives his reward in the afterlife. Andrei Rublev has received his reward, which is the immortality of his works.

“Russia, Dearest Russia, she endures everything and will continue to endure”, Rublev mentions, watching the dead bodies of innocent people

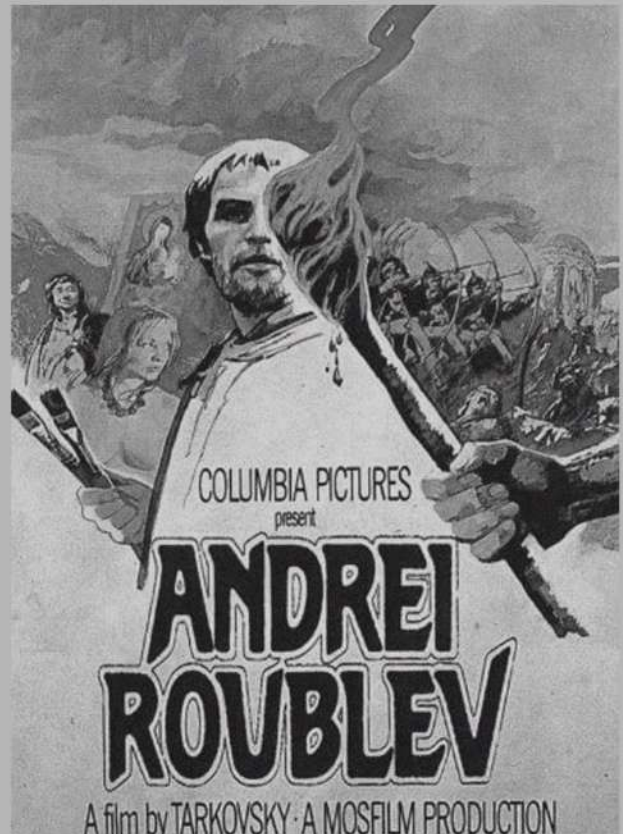


While watching such movies from such a great director, the audience should sometimes try to insert some meanings beyond what the film is displaying. At some points, the similarities between **Andrei Rublev** and **Andrei Tarkovsky** are undeniable. They even have the same name. Tarkovsky was an artist who tried

to create art under the domination of a repressive regime.

And for whom? For the people who may not appreciate art as they're suffer-

ing from poverty! In Soviet communist society, a movie about religion and faith was rare. Back then, religion in movies was only in the shape of satire or anti-religion propaganda, and the Soviet regime could not allow such anti-communist movies to be released. "Andrei Rublev" portrays Christianity as an inextricable part of Russian identity, so the Soviet government censored the film, and it was screened only once in Moscow (1966). After years of censorship, the movie eventually became popular all around the world. It won the FIPRESCI prize and was praised by many critics. I guess we can conclude that Tarkovsky also received his reward, the immortality of his work.



Picture: **Andrei Tarkovsky** Soviet Russian film director, screenwriter, and film theorist

Shahnameh

AND ITS SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER
EPICS AND SAGAS

Ali Abedi

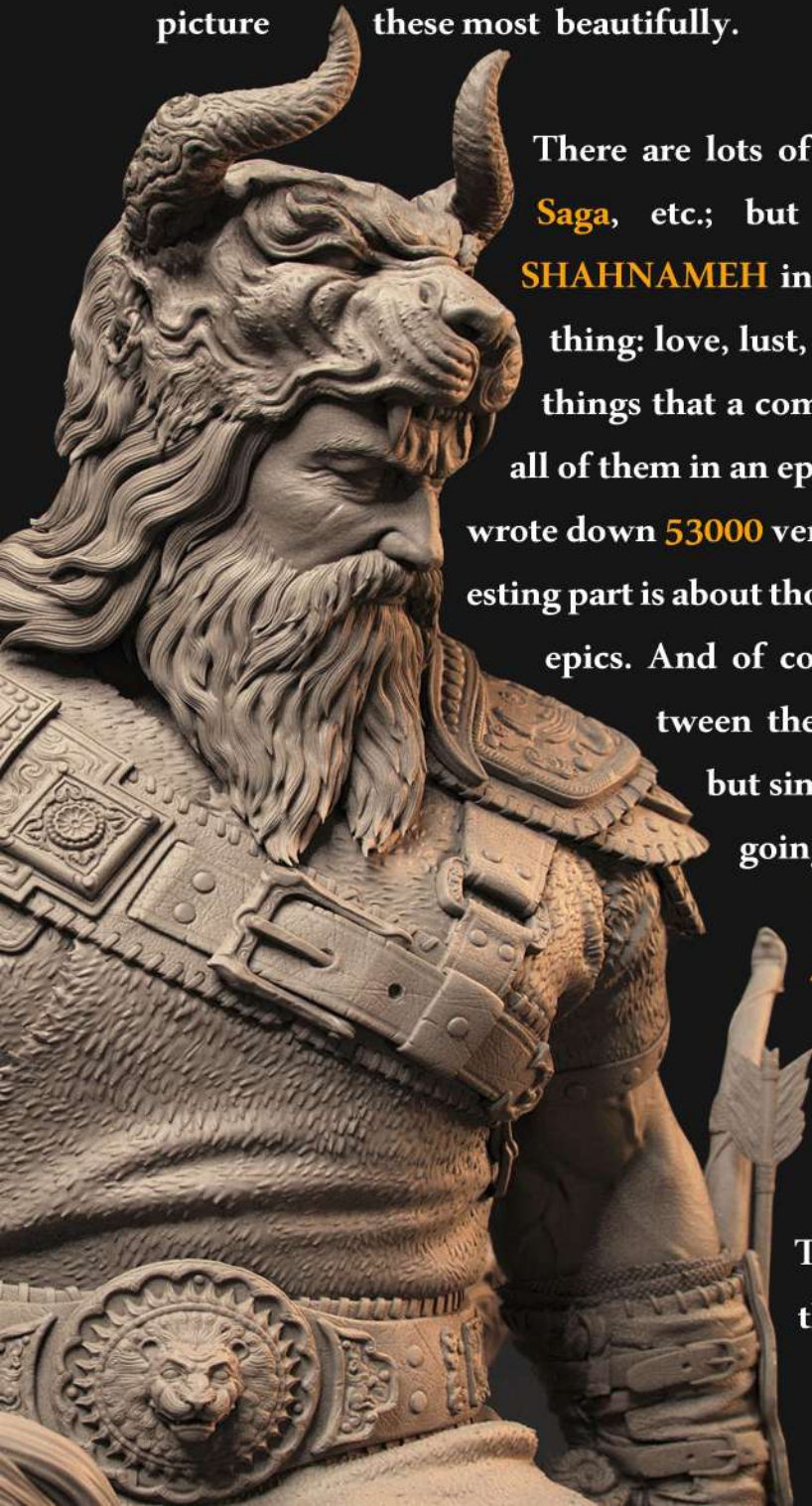
As battles and wars have always been an important part of men's culture and the battles were filled with both brave and coward generals, leaders, and champions, there are also many epics and sagas out there that are trying to picture these most beautifully.

There are lots of epic stories, **Ilyad**, **Odyssey**, **Volsungs Saga**, etc.; but none of them is even close to **SHAHNAMEH** in any possible way. The book has anything: love, lust, vengeance, tragedy, sports, and all the things that a complete civilization might have had, but all of them in an epic way. It's unbelievable how **Ferdowsi** wrote down **53000** verses all-around one story. But the interesting part is about those archetypes in **Shahnameh** and other epics. And of course, there are lots of differences between them, like the purpose and philosophy, but similarities are undeniable. And here, I'm going to compare some of them together.

Rustam:

جهان افرین تا جهان آفرید
سواری چو رستم نیامد پدید

This couplet means, that since the day that God created this world, there has



never been a greater hero and paladin than **Rustam**.

Rustam was the son of **Rudabeh** and **Zal** and is known as the one that shall never be defeated. He was an extremely massive warrior that everyone used to call “**Pil-tan**” which means someone as big as an elephant. He was so strong that not an entire fully armed army was enough to take him down, he was also brilliant that nobody could match his intelligence. Simply, Rustam was best at being best. But besides all these, Rustam is mostly known for one thing, **patriotism**.

Everything that he did, every man he killed, every step he took, every battle he won, wasn't for money or fame, but only for saving his country and people.

Hercules:

As one of many sons of **Zeus**, **Hercules** is acknowledged as the strongest hero in **Greek sagas**. He was strong, brave, massive, and in some ways, very similar to Rustam.

Similarities:

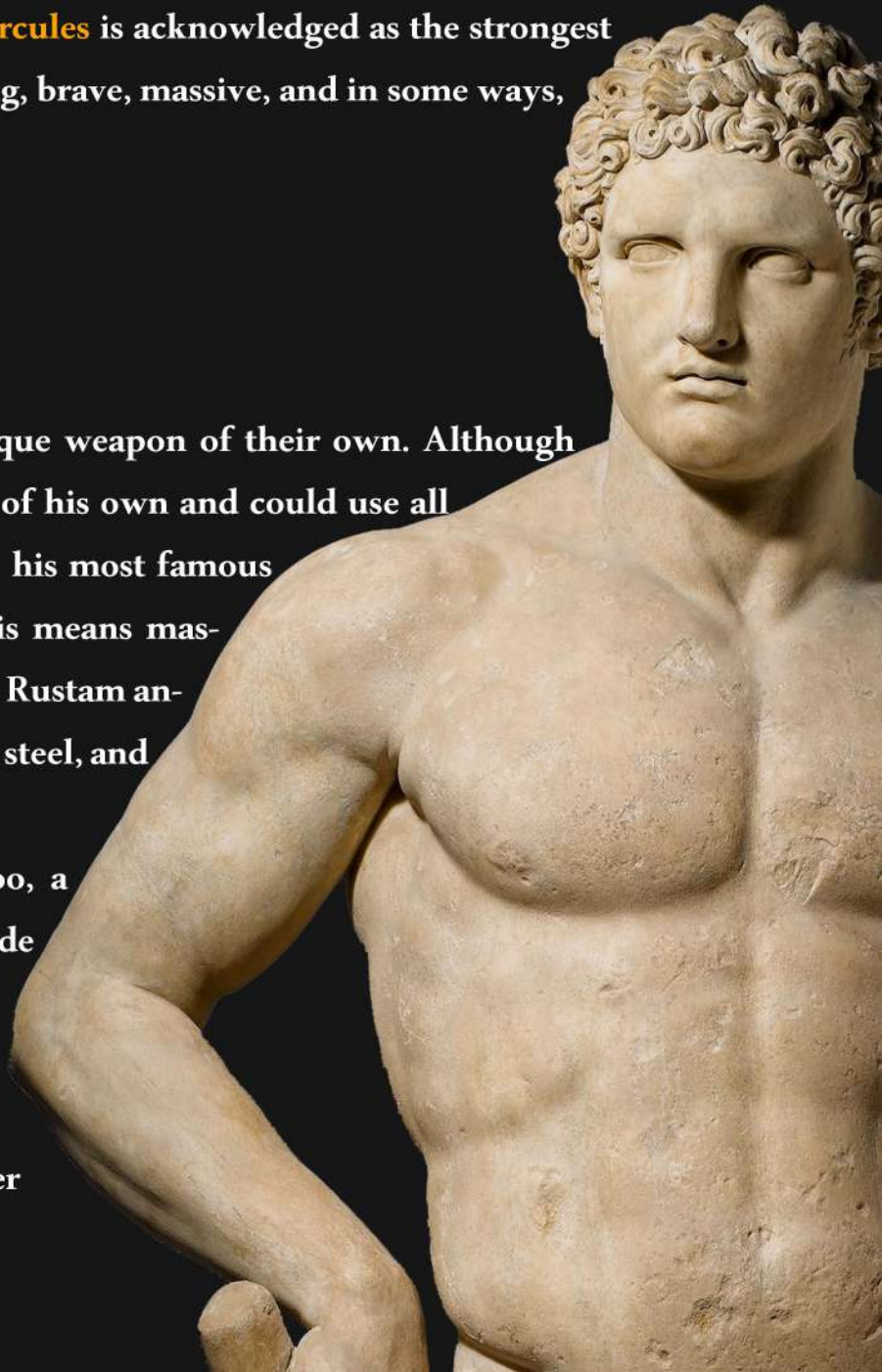
Weapons:

both of these champs had a unique weapon of their own. Although Rustam had a very large arsenal of his own and could use all the weapons better than anyone, his most famous weapon was “**Gorz-e-Geran**” This means massive mace and it used to belong to Rustam ancestors and was made out of gold, steel, and jewelry.

Hercules had such a weapon too, a massive strong mace that was made of olive wood.

Armors:

as a child, Rustam killed a tiger



known as '**Babr-e-baian**'. No weapon could pierce the skin of that tiger, Rostam broke the neck of the tiger very easily and took the skin off using the tiger's claws and made armor out of it, and named it '**Babr-e-baian**', the name of the tiger.

It was said that not even the fire can damage this armor and there is nothing that can pierce through it. And not every opponent was worthy enough, to see this armor, as Rostam was so confident in his power that he wore only it in front of mighty opponents such as **Sohrab** and **Esfandiar**. **Hercules** had such armor when he faced a lion named **Nemean** lion that also nothing could pierce its skin, Hercules did the same thing as Rostam and made his armor out of that skin.

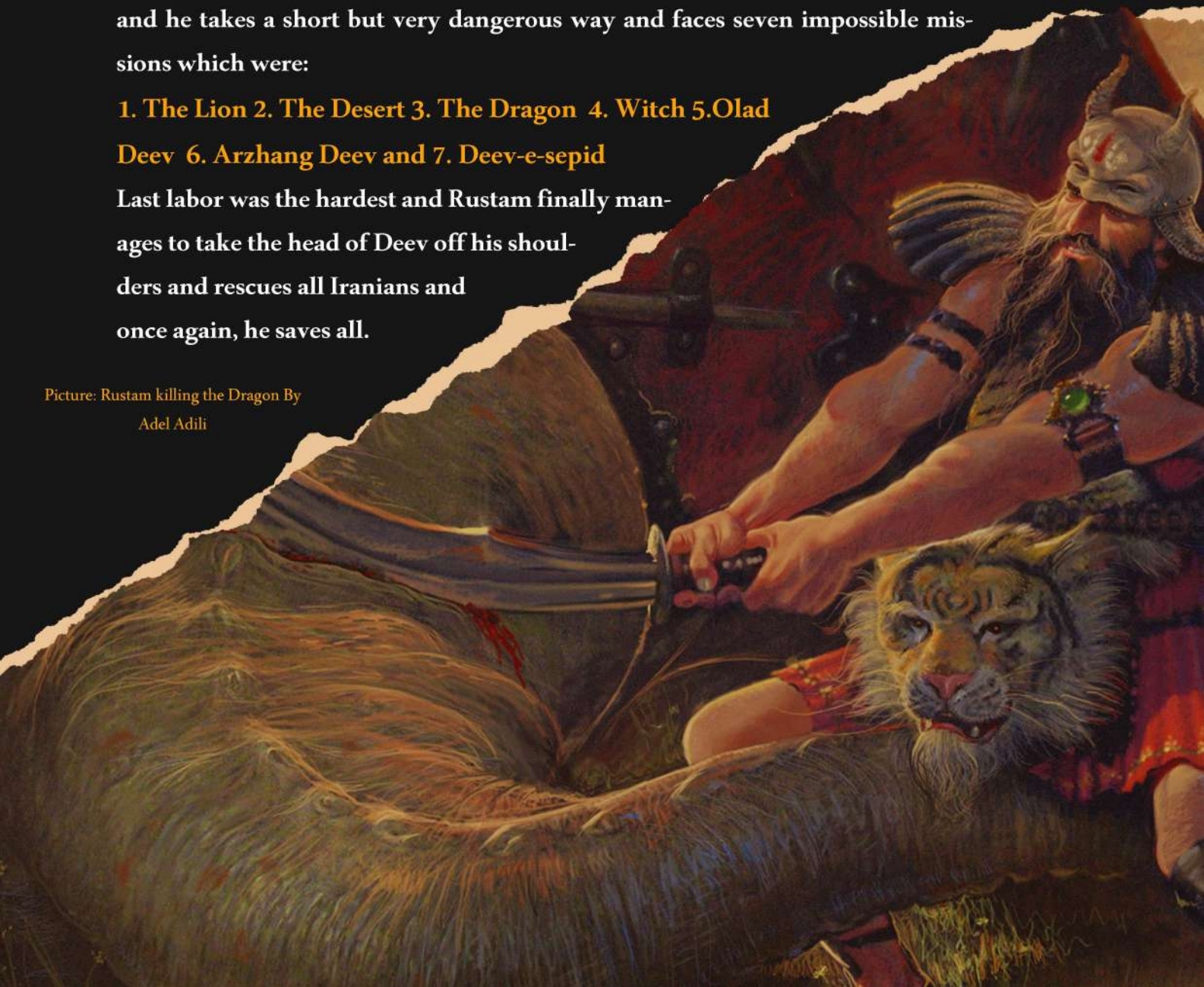
Labors:

Rostam was a man of battle and hardships, through the story of **Mazandaran** when all Iranians are defeated by **Deeves** which were evil creatures, Rostam rushes to aide them in battle and he takes a short but very dangerous way and faces seven impossible missions which were:

1. The Lion 2. The Desert 3. The Dragon 4. Witch 5. Olad Deev 6. Arzhang Deev and 7. Deev-e-sepid

Last labor was the hardest and Rostam finally manages to take the head of Deev off his shoulders and rescues all Iranians and once again, he saves all.

Picture: Rostam killing the Dragon By
Adel Adili



Hercules had **12** labors and they were a series of hard, almost impossible missions carried by Hercules in service of **King Eurystheus**, as means of concerning penance.

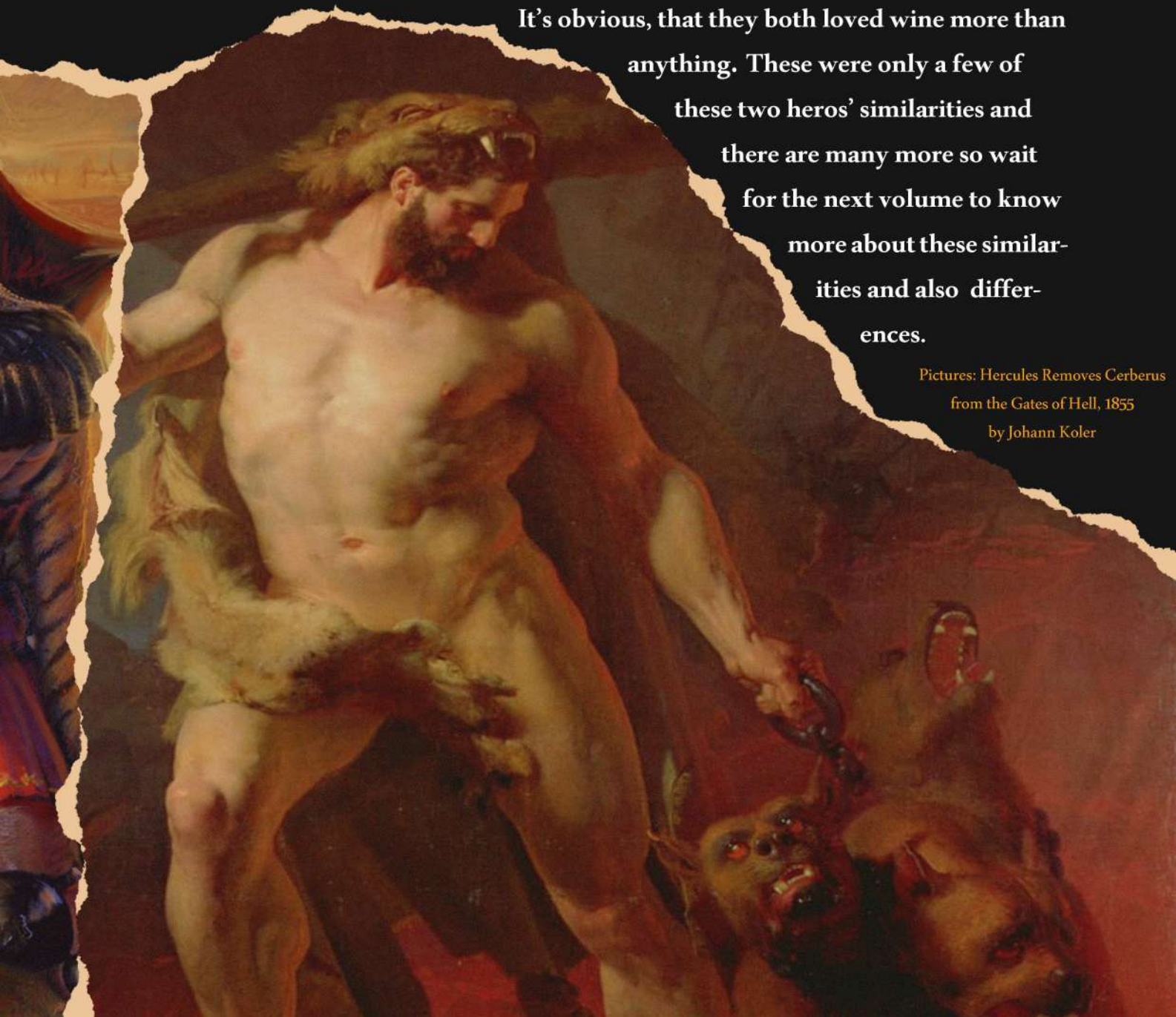
The labors included:

1. **slay the Nemean lion**
2. **Slay the hydra**
3. **Capture the ceryneian hind**
4. **Capture the Erymanthian Boar**
5. **clean the stable**
6. **Sly the stymphalian bird**
- 7 **capture the Cretan bull**
8. **Steal the Mares of Diomedes**
9. **obtani the gridlr of Hippolyta**
10. **obtani the cattle of the three-bodied giant Geryon**
11. **steal three apples of the Hesperides**
12. **capture of Cerberus**

Wine:

It's obvious, that they both loved wine more than anything. These were only a few of these two heros' similarities and there are many more so wait for the next volume to know more about these similarities and also differences.

Pictures: Hercules Removes Cerberus
from the Gates of Hell, 1855
by Johann Koler



MEDIEVAL WARS THROUGH HISTORY

By Fātemeh Sadeghi

When it comes to warfare in **the Middle Ages**, the common belief is that it was always motivated by feudal concerns, religious convictions, or by what **Thucydides** called the eternal drivers of “honor, fear and interest.” The reality is that medieval wars have been often the politics of the state- (and empire) building.

Constitutive wars: England vs Scotland

The wars fought by **England** and **Scotland** between **1296** and **1337** provide an illustrative example of a constitutive war. On one hand, the **Plantagenet** kings of England (**Edwards I, II and III**) were seeking to incorporate Scotland into the political unit that **Rees Davies** has called the “**first English empire**”. As Davies argues, English monarchs had long seen themselves as high kings of a state that encompassed all of the **British Isles** as well as **Aquitaine** in southwestern **France**. Prior to the mid-twelfth century, they had worked at subduing **Wales** and **Ireland** but had not pressed their claims in Scotland too forcefully, contenting themselves with a loose feudal overlordship that conferred little real authority and not approaching sovereignty. Two developments, however, were to alter this situation in the late-twelfth century in ways that exacerbated the antagonisms between the kingdom



A 14th-century illustration showing an English herald approaching a troop of Scottish soldiers

of Scotland and the English empire. First, **Edward I** embarked on an ambitious project of building and consolidating the government of this English empire. This, predisposed the king and his officials to look for opportunities to assert sovereignty over, and tighten their administrative hold on those territories that they viewed as naturally or lawfully falling within their empire. Second, a succession crisis in Scotland provided Edward I with the leverage the English needed to press their




claims to sovereignty over the Scottish kingdom. In the **mid-1290s**, the extinction of the Scottish royal line forced the magnates of the realm to appeal to England's Edward I to arbitrate competing claims to the throne (and thus avoid civil war). Seizing the opportunity, Edward agreed, but only on condition that the successful claimant recognizes his sovereignty over Scotland. Thus, when **John Balliol** assumed the throne in **1292**, he swore homage to Edward, effectively reducing the kingdom of Scotland to a province of the English empire. When, chafing under this new dispensation, the Scottish king defied Edward and entered into an alliance with France. The English invaded Scotland. Both sides saw their war as a **"just war"**. The English understood their invasion in terms of the legitimate assertion of the rights of the English crown in Scotland; the Scots as a war for the very existence of the patria against a hated foreign enemy. The war ended in **1328** with the sign of the **Treaty Northampton**, which was formally recognized as a sign of sovereignty and independence of the kingdom of Scotland. In **1332**, however, the fight was renewed by England's **Edward III** as part of his general effort to assert,

defend and recover the rights of the English crown throughout the territory of the English empire. This second war concluded in **1357** with the sign of the **Treaty of Berwick**. This treaty named Edward as the successor to the Scottish throne, thus creating the kind of dual monarchy that brought Scotland definitively (if only temporarily) into the English empire.

Configurative wars: England vs France

The second form of medieval political warfare was **"configurative wars"**. These were wars fought not over the existence of political units, but over the territorial configuration of mutually recognized sovereign states. They were the result of horizontal antagonisms — that is antagonisms between states with reciprocally recognized claims to sovereign statehood. In most cases, these wars involved violent conflicts between principalities or kingdoms that, while recognizing each other's right to exist, disagreed about the territorial boundaries or borders separating them.

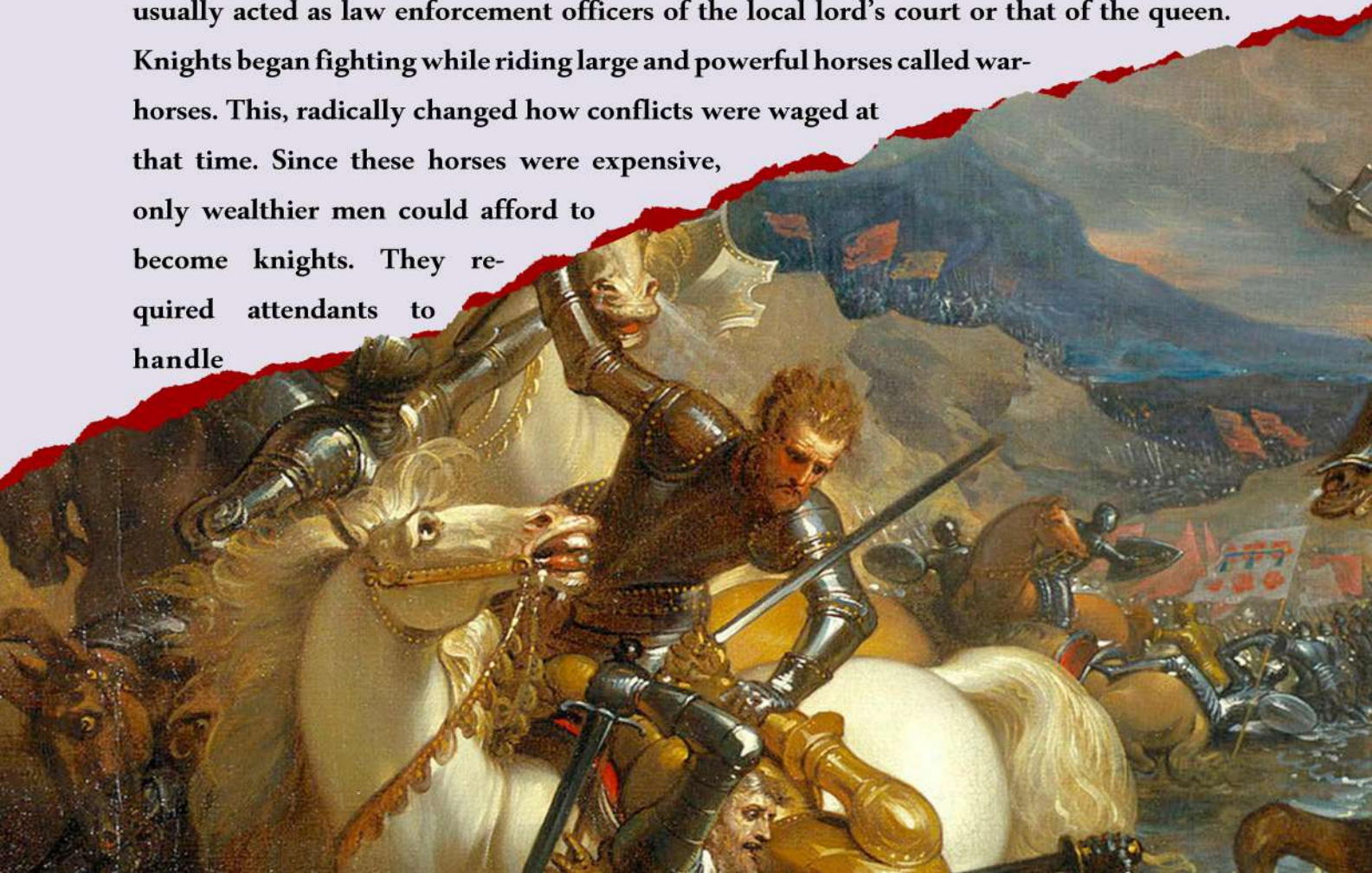
Perhaps the quintessential example of a late medieval constitutive war was **the Hundred Years War** between England and France (**1337-1453**). This war erupted as a result of the collision of two state-



building projects that were accelerating in the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the English crown was working to consolidate its hold on all the territories believed to belong to its empire. The French crown was also working to restore its sovereign authority over the territories it viewed as properly part of the kingdom of France. The flashpoint was **Aquitaine**, a large territory in southwestern France held by the English crown as a vassal state of the king of France. As the French attempted to assert their control over the principality (through the use of judicial appeals and the exploitation of previously only lightly exercised feudal rights) they clashed repeatedly with English kings seeking to minimize the French authority in the territory and avoid the subordination entailed in feudal acts of homage.

Soldiers

Kings or lords would raise a soldier to a knight by lightly striking (dubbing) the knight's shoulder with the flat of their sword. The knight was given a sword, a pay raise and, frequently, a plot of land. Most knights were required to be at least **21** years old. Knights were considered elite soldiers in battles, wars and crusades, but when not in such situations, they usually acted as law enforcement officers of the local lord's court or that of the queen. Knights began fighting while riding large and powerful horses called war-horses. This, radically changed how conflicts were waged at that time. Since these horses were expensive, only wealthier men could afford to become knights. They required attendants to handle



the their several horses, maintain and hand them heavy weapons and shields, assist them in mounting and dismounting the horse and guard their prisoners. Squires assisted the knight in battle training and exercises, and often became knights themselves. Knights typically wore better than average clothing, but wore chain mail, helmets and partial suits of armor only in battle. Swords, daggers and sometimes lances were the weapons of choice. Each knight had his own flag or banner that identified him on and off the battlefield, called a coat of arms. The patterns and colors of the flags were often repeated on their shield and on other items belonging to the knight. The principles and customs of the medieval knight were categorized as chivalry. A knight's code of conduct included: mercy, humility, honor, sacrifice, faithfulness, courage, utmost graciousness and courtesy toward women.

Greatest soldier

Audie Leon Murphy (20 June 1925 – 28 May 1971) was an **American** soldier, actor, songwriter, and a rancher. He was one of the most decorated American combat soldiers of **World War II**. He received every military combat award for valor available from the **United States Army**, to French and **Belgian** awards for heroism. **Murphy** received the **Medal**

of Honor for valor that he demonstrated at the age of **19** for single-handedly holding off a company of **German** soldiers for an hour at **the Colmar Pocket** in France in January **1945**, and then leading a successful counterattack while wounded and out of ammunition.

Joan of arc

Joan of Arc, nicknamed "**The Maid of Orléans**", was born in **1412**, in **Domremy**, France. The daughter of poor tenant farmers **Jacques d' Arc** and his wife, **Isabelle**, also known as **Romée**. Joan learned piety and domestic skills from her mother. Never venturing

A painting of hundred year war by Benjamin West



far from home, Joan took care of the animals and became quite skilled as a seamstress. At the time of Joan of Arc's birth, France was embroiled in a long-running war with England known as the Hundred Years War; the dispute began over who would be the heir to the French throne. By the early 15th century, northern France was a lawless frontier. A national heroine of France, at age 18 Joan of Arc led the French army to victory over the English at Orléans. Captured a year later, Joan was burned at the stake as a heretic by the English and their French collaborators. She was canonized as a Roman Catholic saint more than 500 years later, on May 16, 1920. In 1415, King Henry V of England invaded northern France. After delivering a shattering defeat to French forces, England gained the support of the Burgundians in France. The 1420 Treaty of Troyes, granted the French throne to Henry V as regent for the insane King Charles VI. Henry would then inherit the throne after Charles' death. However, in 1422, both Henry and Charles died within a couple of months, leaving Henry's infant son as king of both

realms. The French supporters of Charles' son, the future Charles VII, sensed an opportunity to return the crown to a French monarch. Around this time, Joan of Arc began to have mystical visions encouraging her to lead a pious life. Over

time, they became more vivid, with the presence of St. Michael and

St. Catherine designating her as the savior of France and encouraging her to seek an audience with Charles—who had assumed the title Dauphin (heir to the throne)—and ask

his permission to expel the English and install him as the rightful king. In May 1428, Joan's visions instructed her to go to Vaucouleurs and contact Robert de Baudricourt, the garrison commander and a supporter of Charles.

At first, Baudricourt refused Joan's request, but after seeing that she was gaining the approval of villagers,

in 1429, he relented and gave her a horse and an escort of several soldiers. Joan

cropped her hair and dressed in men's clothes for her 11-day journey across enemy territory to

Chinon, the site of Charles's court. At first, Charles

was not certain what to make of this peasant girl who asked for an audience

and professed she could save France. Joan, however, won him over when she correctly identified him, dressed incognito, in a crowd of members of his court. The two had a private conversation



A painting of Joan of Arc by Albert Lynch (1903)

during which it is said that Joan revealed details of a solemn prayer Charles had made to **God** to save France. Still tentative, Charles had prominent theologians examine her. The clergymen reported they found nothing improper with Joan, only piety, chastity and humility. Finally, Charles gave the **17-year-old** Joan of Arc an armor and a horse, and allowed her to accompany the army to Orléans, the site of an English siege. In a series of battles between **May 4** and **May 7, 1429**, the French troops took control of the English fortifications. Joan was wounded, but later returned to the front to encourage a final assault. By mid-June, the French had routed the English, and in doing so, their perceived invincibility as well. Although it appeared that Charles had accepted Joan's mission, he did not display full trust in her judgment or advice. After the victory at Orléans, she kept encouraging him to hurry to **Reims** to be crowned king, but he and his advisors were more cautious. However, Charles and his procession finally entered Reims, and he was crowned Charles VII on **July 18, 1429**. Joan was at his side, occupying a visible place at the ceremonies. In the spring of **1430**, King Charles VII ordered Joan to **Compiègne** to confront the Burgundian assault. During the battle, she was thrown off her horse and left outside the town's gates. The Burgundians took her captive and held her for several months to negotiate with the English, who saw her as a valuable propaganda prize. Finally, the Burgundians exchanged Joan for **10,000** francs. Charles VII was unsure what to do. Still not convinced of Joan's divine inspiration, he distanced himself and made no attempt to have her released. Though Joan's actions were against the English occupation army, she was turned over to church officials who insisted she be tried as a heretic. She was charged with **70 counts**, including witchcraft, heresy and dressing like a man.

Initially, the trial was held in public, but it went private when Joan bettered her accusers. Between **February 21** and **March 24, 1431**, she was interrogated nearly a dozen times by a tribunal, yet she always kept her humility and steadfast claim of innocence. Instead of being held in a church prison with nuns as guards, she was held in a military prison. Joan was threatened with rape and torture, although there is no record that either actually occurred. She protected herself by tying her soldiers' clothes tightly together with dozens of cords. Frustrated, they could not break her, the tribunal eventually used her military clothes against her, charging that she dressed like a man. On **May 29, 1431**, the tribunal announced Joan of Arc guilty of heresy. On the morning of **May 30**, she was taken to the marketplace in **Rouen** and burned at the stake, before an estimated crowd of **10,000** people. She was **19** years old. One legend surrounding the event tells of how her heart survived the fire unaffected. Her ashes were gathered and scattered in **the Seine**. After Joan's death, the Hundred Years' War continued for another 22 years. King Charles VII ultimately retained his crown, and he ordered an investigation that in **1456** declared Joan of Arc to be officially innocent of all charges and designated a martyr. She was canonized as a saint on **May 16, 1920**, and is the patron saint of France.

Medieval Epic IN DIFFERENT DECADERS

By Mona Bagheri

1. The invocation of a muse. At the very beginning, these poets ask gods for the power to end their stories with strength, though some pretend to do so to claim they are divinely empowered.

3. Numerous ventures into the underworld are mentioned in these poems.

5. Many will feature the battle scenes and might of armies in using weapons in wars.

Here is a list of 10 of the greatest Epic poems in the tradition:

1: The Epic of Gilgamesh

(~2000 BCE)

"The Epic of Gilgamesh" is an epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia and one of the oldest known literary writings in the world. This poem is about the story of Gilgamesh, the mythological hero-king of Uruk, and his half-wild friend, Enkidu, and how they undertake a series of dangerous quests and adventures; then it continues with Gilgamesh's search for the secret of immortality after his friend dies. The story of a flood very similar to the one that is mentioned in the story of Noah in "The Bible" is included in this poem. Based on the actual Assyrian king, Gilgamesh confronts many of the themes that Homer will tackle in his epic poetry: the human/deity divide, mortality, seduction, and legacy.

Epic poetry—heroic poetry, as some of the medieval poets have called it—follows a certain time-tested formula to portray such grand representations of heroes and their supporters. Here are a few recurring patterns to keep in mind when considering these texts:

2. a lot of these poems start within the middle of the story and may stray into the past afterward in the poem.

4. There are grand battle scenes punctuated by extended similes, and ambitious analogies that stretch the imagination but strive for literary glory.

2: The Iliad

(~800 BCE)

The Iliad is a tragic epic poem written by the Greek poet Homer. This poem tells us about the final year of the 10-year Trojan War which was fought between the Trojans who were protected by the great walls of their city Troy, and the Greek army. Sparked by the abduction of Helen from Sparta, the Greeks, led by Achilles, advance toward Troy to destroy their enemy. While there are some involvements from the gods, it is the human factor that is much more significant. Many common phrases have their origin in this poem, including the hero's vulnerable "Achilles' Heel", as well as the famous symbol of deception, "the Trojan horse" which was a receptacle used to bring the soldiers into the Trojan stronghold.

3: The OdySsey

(~800 BCE)

"The OdySsey" is an epic poem in 24 books written by the ancient Greek poet Homer. The poem is about the struggles of **Odysseus**, king of **Ithaca**, who wanders for **10 years** (although the action of the poem covers only the final six weeks) trying to get home after the Trojan War. Not only must he fend off the malevolence of gods and the seduction of **Calypso**, but he must also get home before the suitors who are vying for his wife's hand, coerce her into a marriage and get the Ithaca's throne.

5: The Aeneid by Virgil

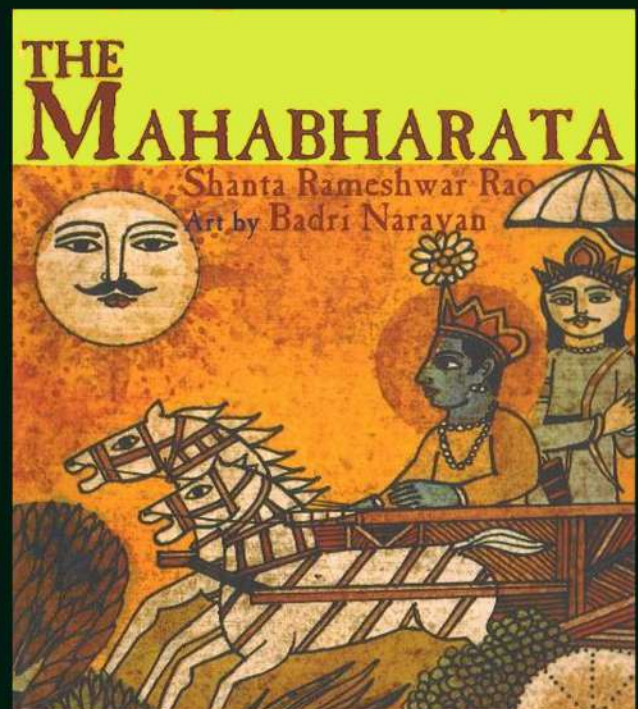
(19 BCE)

Starting where the **Iliad** ends, the poem describes **Aeneas**, the Trojan prince, and the remaining Trojans' travel from Troy to **Carthage**, where Aeneas has a brief relationship with **Queen Dido**. After he abandons her to follow his destiny of finding a new city, Dido commits suicide. Aeneas and his men then continue their journey to **Italy** to ward off enemies and then he finds **Rome**. **Virgil** was alert to literary censorship under the reign of **Augustus**, Rome's first emperor, so he had to be careful while writing this poem.

4: The Mahabharata

(350 BCE)

The Mahabharata is one of the greatest epic poems of **India**. This great poem is one of the longest pieces of literature in the world's history. Even though it has an exhausting length, it's still a foundational literary text in the formation of **Hindu** identity. Narrated by **Vyasa**, an ancient Indian sage, this **220,000-line** poem follows a human incarnation of the **God Vishnu** as two branches of a family - the **Pandavas and Kauravas** -, battle for the throne of **Hastinapura** in the **Kurukshetra War**. Not only does the poem itself contain another seminal Hindu text, **The Bhagavad Gita**, but its panoramic view of everything from spirituality to morality has had an impact on Indian society for thousands of years.



6: METAMORPHOSES BY OVID

(8 AD)

Ovid's epic does not contain as much bloodshed and travel as Homer's and Virgil's because Ovid intended to create something new. therefore, he starts his poem by invoking the gods instead of calling on a muse for inspiration as Virgil does. Ovid's reconfiguration of the Greek and (slightly different) Roman myths emphasize how gods change into men. Some of the selections include the story of **Pygmalion**, the sculptor that makes an ivory statue of his ideal woman and then falls in love with his creation, as well as the unforgettable transformation of **Daphne** into a tree while escaping a malicious suitor called **Apollo**.



One tale of transformation in the *Metamorphoses*. *Apollo and Daphne* (c. 1470–1480) by Antonio del Pollaiuolo
XIX

7: THE SHAHNAMEH BY FERDOWSI

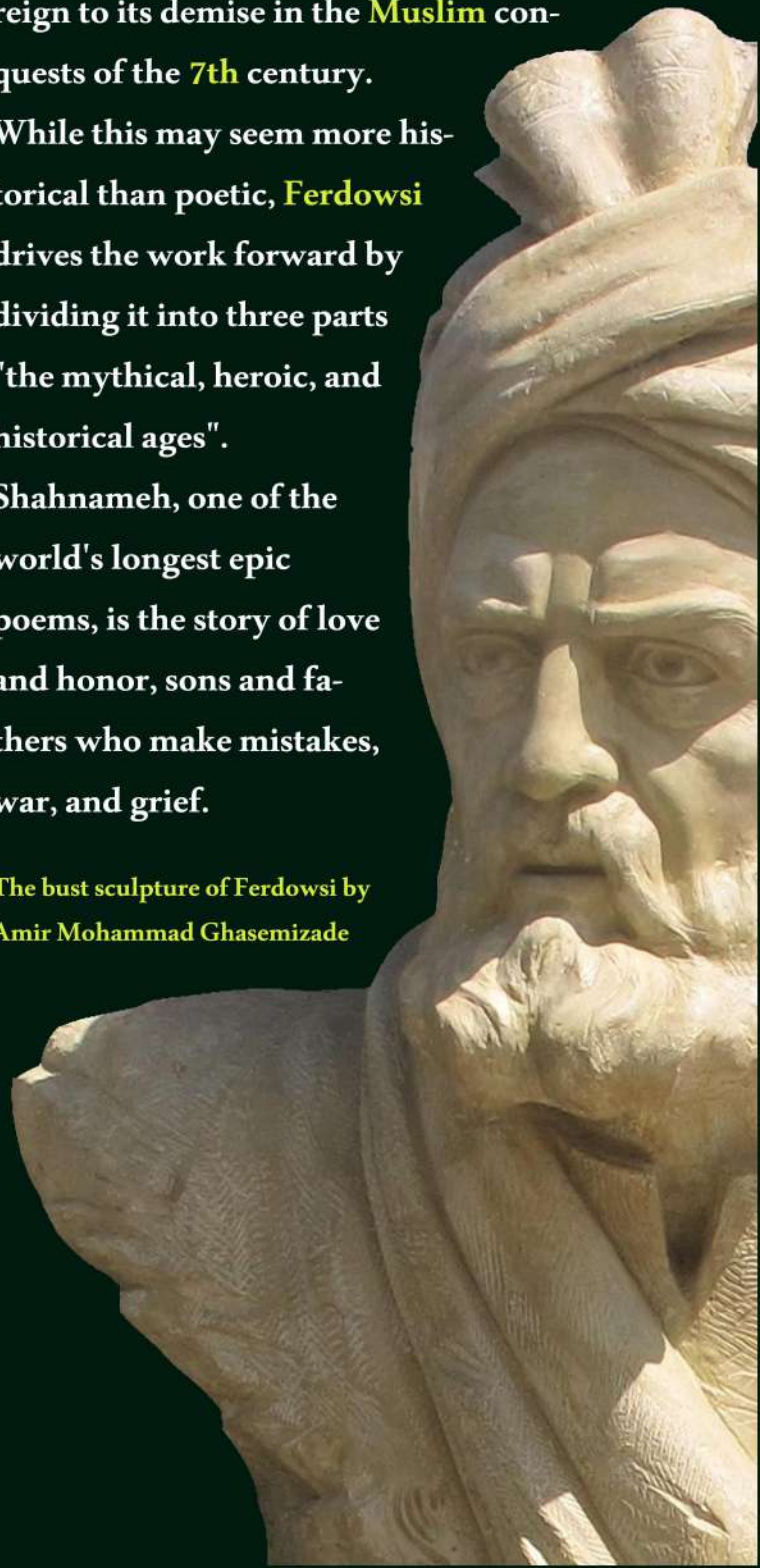
(11th century)

Also known as **The Book of Kings**, **The Shahnameh** recounts the old **Zoroastrian** traditions of **Persia** or **Iranshahr** (**Greater Iran**) while chronicling the entire history of the Persian Empire from its **Eurasian** reign to its demise in the **Muslim** conquests of the **7th** century.

While this may seem more historical than poetic, **Ferdowsi** drives the work forward by dividing it into three parts "the mythical, heroic, and historical ages".

Shahnameh, one of the world's longest epic poems, is the story of love and honor, sons and fathers who make mistakes, war, and grief.

The bust sculpture of Ferdowsi by Amir Mohammad Ghasemizade



8: BEOWULF (~8th-11th century CE)

Some may know **Beowulf** as **Britain's** national epic, but it is celebrated as a national text in most **Nordic** countries. The strongest man that ever lived, Beowulf, is hired by king **Hrothgar**, the king of the **Danes**, to protect his domain from a grotesque swamp creature, **Grendel**. Beowulf is a warrior from another **Germanic** tribe called **the Geats**. Not only does he vanquish the monster, but he also confronts Grendel's angry mother, and a scary dragon as well. The poem was at first lauded for its fantastical elements, but further criticism revived its more important cultural values such as bravery, loyalty, honor, and hospitality.

9: The Nibelungenlied (13th century)

The **Nibelungenlied**, translated as the song of **the Nibelungs**, is a fragmented collection of several thousand stanzas that was only rediscovered several centuries after it was written. The **Nibelungenlied** combines two stories, each long-standing in the **German** tradition. About the slow but inevitable decline of the **Burgundian** people of **the North Atlantic**, the majority of the poem follows **Siegfried**, an Achilles-like figure who fights dragons, conquers Nibelungen land, and uses his invisibility cloak to defeat enemies. **19th-century** composer **Richard Wagner** would later use material from this poem to produce his masterpiece **Der Ring des Nibelungen**, translated as **The Ring of the Nibelungs**, which is a cycle of four German language epic music dramas. This story is known as one of the most impressive, and certainly the most powerful, of the German epics of the Middle Ages.

10: The Song of Roland (11th-12th century)

La Chanson de Roland, as it is known, tells the story of the **8th-century** battles between **Christianity** and **Islam** as they vie for position in **Iberia** and **the Pyrenees**. The poem glorifies Christianity and its defeat over Islam during the **Crusades**. French epic poems like **The Song of Roland** were inspired by historical events and celebrated heroic deeds. The story of this poem is about the chivalric death of Roland and his companions, how he is betrayed by **Ganelon**, his stepfather, and how he is avenged.

INTRODUCTION OF ILIAD AND ODYSSEY BY HOMER

Yasamin Mostlemi Haghighi

Homer, regarded as the ancient Greek writer of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, is considered one of the greatest epic poets in western history. It is believed he was born either on a Greek island named Chios or in Ionia, a region on the western coast of present-day Turkey, sometime between 750 B.C. and 850 B.C. Yet, Homer is an unknown mystery throughout history. Was he alone, or was Homer the name of a group of poets? There are no valid answers to these questions. However, by reading the poems, some scholars believe he was a bard who received these legendary stories from previous generations orally and recited them from one city to another. He finally wrote down his version of them after the development of writing in Greece. It is said he got blind in his old age and died on the Greek island of Ios.

The *Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are the oldest Greek writings that have survived until today. They were composed in **Homeric Greek**, which is a combination of the four main Greek dialects. These epic poems were written in a rhythmic scheme called dactylic hexameter. Perhaps the fact they were to a rhyme would have made memorization and oral delivery effortless for the performers. The *Iliad* is one of the greatest pieces about warfare. It is **15 thousand** lines long, said in **24 books** (chapters). The *Odyssey* is a sequel to *The Iliad*. It is also divided into **24 books** with **12 thousand** lines.

The word *Iliad* means **song of ilium** or **song of troy**. The poem delivers the famous tale of the **Trojan war**. But it begins in the middle of the story and only covers about **50 days** in the last year of this **10-year** siege. It all started at the wedding feast of the mortal king, **Peleus**, and the sea nymph **Thetis**. All gods and goddesses were invited to **Olympus** except the evil goddess of **Discord**, **Eris**. Resentful Eris decided to make trouble. She threw a golden apple into the feast marked with "For the Fairest". Three goddesses, **Athena**, **Hera**, and **Aphrodite** claimed the



apple. They asked **Zeus** to decide between them. But he refused and addressed them to the most handsome man on Earth, **Paris**. So, the three goddesses came to Paris and asked him to choose the most beautiful among them. Each offered him a gift as a bribe. Athena Offered wisdom, Hera offered Power, and Aphrodite promised him the most beautiful woman in the world. He chose Aphrodite and gave her the apple. The only problem was that his gift, the most beautiful woman, was already married. **Queen of Sparta, Helen**, was married to **Menelaus** but it didn't stop Paris. He went to their palace as a guest and stole away Helen. Menelaus together with his brother, **Agamemnon**, raised a great army of their allies including Greek commanders **Odysseus**, **Achilles**, **Diomedes**, **Nestor**, and **Ajax**. They all sailed their ships to Troy to win back Helen. After nine years of fighting with the Trojans, The Iliad begins with the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles behind the mighty wall of Troy.

Homer in his Second epic, The Odyssey, turns his attention to Odysseus and his journey home. Like The Iliad, it also covers a short period, about 40 days. **Ten years of fight** and the fall of Troy have brought the wrath of Gods to Greek Survivors and caused them all horrible fates. Among them, Odysseus, king of **Ithaca**, longed to return home to his faithful wife, **Penelope**, and his son, **Telemachus**, after that long war. He faced a series of misfortunate events on his homecoming adventure caused by the gods, especially by **Poseidon**, whom he was revengeful after Odysseus blinded his **Cyclops** son. The poem begins **ten years** after Odysseus' disappearance. He got captive by the goddess **Calypso** on the island of **Ogygia** while his house was filled with suitors who wanted to win his wife and crown but finally, Athena had a little mercy on him and helped him.

Last but not least, the fate of mortal men being in the hands of the gods is a bold theme in these two epic poems. In The Iliad, mostly the gods were responsible for arising the war or the fact that **Olympians** took side in the war and assisted mortals. Or as they caused Odysseus' journey more challenging, which made his one-week trip into ten years.

Odysseus and Polyphemus by Arnold Böcklin
(1896)



Vol.4 -July 2022

THANK YOU ALL

Fatemeh Shirdel
Mohammad Behrouzi
Farhad Afsharian
Leila Hajjari
Motabhareh Andarkhor
Rabele Dorahaki
Mona Bagheri
Faezeh Karami
Neda Bahmani
Ali Abedi
Yasamin Moslemi
Fatemeh Sadeghi
Ashkan Zangeneh



دانشگاه خلیج فارس
معاونت فرهنگی و دانشجویی

