

## Introduction

The focus of this presentation is the scene from the Shāhnāmeḥ where Sohrāb describes the seven pavilions of the Iranian camp to his guide Hojir, in the hope to find his father Rostam. This scene immediately precedes the tragic father-son combat. It is argued that the description encodes a complex astrological chart, and that the great poet Nezāmi was aware of it when composing his romantic epic, the Haft Peykar some 200 year later. The following therefore highlights Ferdowsi's knowledge of an aspect of ancient epic wisdom which has hitherto not attracted much attention in discussions of the Shāhnāmeḥ.

Nezāmi completed the Haft Peykar 'The Seven Images' in 1197. Its hero is the Sasanian king Bahrām Gur. In the words of Julie Meisami, it is "a complex allegory of spiritual and moral growth."<sup>1</sup> In the prologue, Nezāmi describes his search for sources, and gives pride of place to the Shāhnāmeḥ of Ferdowsi (# 4: 19-20, 24-5). He took the story from Ferdowsi, improving on what the latter had left "half-said" (#4: 24). But the central idea of the seven images is believed to be his own. Thus, George Krotkoff, in his groundbreaking decipherment of the esoteric schemes and symbolism encoded in the Haft Peykar, noted that "The most important feature of the HP, the building of the seven coloured pavilions and the visits with the seven princesses is not part of the preexisting legend, but Nizāmī's own invention. It also provides a tangible link with Hermetic literature."<sup>2</sup>

To recall, the central part of the Nezāmi's Haft Peykar consists of the seven romantic stories of King Bahrām's brides, the princesses of the Seven Climes, for whom he had built a palace containing seven domes or pavilions, each dedicated to one day of the week, and governed by that day's planet and bearing its emblematic color (# 4: 30-31). Bahrām modeled the palace in memory of the Khawarnaq, the palace and observatory which had been built for his Arab mentor King Nu'mān, and in which he discovered the room with the images of the seven princesses. Since Nezāmi's seven pavilions are the main reference point here, the respective days, planets, colors, and climes, are listed in Table 1.

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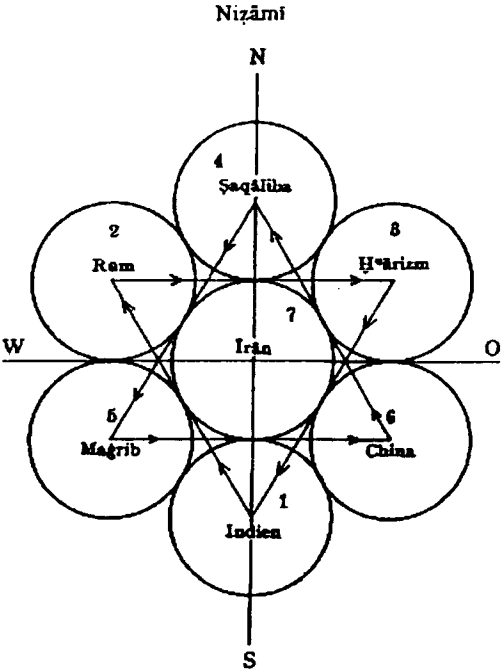
<sup>1</sup> Meisami 1995, xi.

<sup>2</sup> Krotkoff 1984, 100; cf. also Meisami, 1995, 'Introduction,' and her extensive commentary.

<u>Day</u>	<u>Planet</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>Clime</u>	<u>Direction</u>
1 Saturday	Saturn	Black	India	S
2 Sunday	Sun	Yellow	Rum/Byzantium	NW
3 Monday	Moon	Green	Khwārezm	NE
4 Tuesday	Mars	Red	Saqālebe/Russia	N
5 Wednesday	Mercury	Turquoise	Maghreb	SW
6 Thursday	Jupiter	Sandal	Chin	SE
7 Friday	Venus	White	Iran	Center

**Table 1**

Diagram 1. The Seven Climes, Mechthild Pantke, 1974, 172.



The arrangement of the pavilions as reconstructed by Mechthild Pantke is shown in **Diagram 1**.<sup>3</sup>  
**Diagram 1 here**

As can be seen, they form a hexagon when arranged schematically by their geographic location. Pantke also recognized that there is an encoded pattern of two interlocking triangles, which appears when connecting the climes according to the days of the week. Thus, Saturday-India, Sunday-Rum, Monday-Khwārezm form the lower triangle, S-NW-NE, while Tuesday-Saqālebe, Wednesday-Maghreb, and Thursday-Chin form the upper triangle, N-SW-SE; Friday-Iran is in the center.

## **Ferdowsi's Seven Pavilions**

### **Part 1: Overview**

To begin with a brief overview of the context of the scene from the Shāhnāme:

Sohrāb is seeking his father Rostam. He has amassed an army against the Iranians, and has captured the White Castle on the border. The Iranians are now camped near the castle, finally joined by Rostam from Sistan. During the night, Rostam reconnoiters the Turanian camp, and in the dark unbeknownst kills his uncle Zhande Razm, who was to identify Rostam for Sohrāb. Having lost this guide, in the morning Sohrāb mounts his horse, and from an elevation looks over the vast Iranian camp together with captive Hojir, who is to identify the owners of the seven pavilions. One by one, Sohrāb describes the pavilions of the Iranian champions, first citing their colors, then their heraldic features, and the troops surrounding the tents. But Hojir, afraid that the young champion might kill Rostam, identifies Rostam as a noble from Chin. Whereupon Sohrāb continues to question Hojir's honesty, and enraged finally charges into the Iranian camp, which leads to the tragic father-son combat.

The scene itself is some 112 or 114 lines long, depending on the edition,<sup>4</sup> but the actual description of the pavilions takes only 45 or 47 lines, beginning with line 20 or 21 and ending in the middle of the episode. They are described symmetrically, such that two sets of three

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pantke 1974, 172, with detailed discussion of the sources of the complex schemes involved in Nezāmi.

<sup>4</sup> The two editions consulted are Khāleghi-Mottlagh 1988-, 2, 157-166, and Bert'els 2, 1962, 211-119; for translations, cf. Warner & Warner 2, 1906, 152-59, and the text with facing translation in Clinton 1987, 88-107.

descriptions each frame the description of Rostam's pavilion, and it may not be coincidental that Hojir's lie, identifying Rostam as a noble from Chin, is found in the exact numerical center of the 45/47 lines.

From the comparative view, this scene is a perfect example of a teichoscopy, which literally means "wall-watch," and is one of the devices found in Indo-European epic. Already Nöldeke identified the relevant ones.<sup>5</sup> To cite only two, from Greek tradition the scene, which is considered the "mother of all teichoscopies,"<sup>6</sup> and found in the third book of the Iliad (3.316 ff.).<sup>7</sup> There Helen, sitting with Priam on the wall by the Skaian gates of Troy, identifies for him Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Ayas below. From Germanic tradition, and most similar to the Sohrāb story, the scene in the Middle High German romance Gudrun Lied (1366 ff., 27<sup>th</sup> Aventure), an epic which may ultimately go back to Sarmatian-Iranian themes.<sup>8</sup> There Hartmut identifies for his father Ludwig the princes from a good 20 lands by their colored banners, although only four banners are actually mentioned.

In the Shāhnāmeḥ, the teichoscopy of Sohrāb is most closely mirrored in the story of Forud, where Tokhwār identifies for Forud the colored banners and emblems belonging to 13 Iranian champions.<sup>9</sup>

From the descriptive view, the teichoscopy of Sohrāb offers a succinct catalog of Iranian heraldics, and together with Forud's teichoscopy and a number of troops reviews in the Shāhnāmeḥ, it has been an important source for the study of Iranian heraldics, which includes the

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<sup>5</sup> Nöldeke 1896-1904, 179 = 1920, 62.

<sup>6</sup> So characterized by Sinz 1984, 242-3, in his study of the Gudrun saga.

<sup>7</sup> Teichoscopia is the title given by the scholiasts to the third book of the Iliad. The term teichoscopy has recently been revived, and redefined in literary theory, cf. Jerry Garret, in Language and Visuality, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Sinz 1984. This Gudrun Lied is to be distinguished from the Nordic Gudrun Saga.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Sarrāmi 1968, 340-41, who noted the close connection between the Sohrāb and Forud stories, and pointed out the considerable length of the teichoscopy in the former, some 10 % of the total lines, compared to the some 26 lines in the latter.

imperial banner known as axtar-e kāviān, that is, the Kavian Star-Banner.<sup>10</sup> But the Sohrāb story stands out among all by mentioning the colors of the pavilions.

From the literary view, one of the outstanding features of this scene is the functional use of colors. As Jerome Clinton notes in his article on the Tragedy of Sohrāb:<sup>11</sup> “Descriptions of the physical setting of the scene, or the appearance of the characters are brief and conventional. Only when Suhrab describes the appearance of the pavilions of the Iranian nobles ranged before him in an effort to discover that of his father do Firdawsī’s descriptions become vivid and detailed. But here the art of description has been used to very practical ends. For only those formal and heraldic features of each pavilion that are emblematic of their owners are mentioned.” And in his article on language and visuality in the Shāhnāme:<sup>12</sup> “At times images command the foreground of the poem, but always to some practical narrative end. To paraphrase Shafī’i-Kadkani, Ferdowsi, contrary to the practice of other poets, does not create images for themselves alone, but as a means of revealing the events and circumstances of the narrative.”

The question arises why entire pavilions or compounds would be colored, i.e. color-coded, and why only seven colors have been selected, and only seven pavilions, whereas in other scenes more sets are listed. As mentioned, there are an ominous number of 13 sets in the Forud story.<sup>13</sup>

On a more mundane level, one wonders how the seven pavilions might be arranged, knowing that the traditional military camp and army had a cross-form in its basic, underlying arrangement, though not in its elaborate complex of army and multiple attached quarters.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Shahbazi 1994; Ackerman 1964; Sarre 1903, 358-61; also Roes 1933, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Clinton 1984, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Clinton 1984, 69, and in press, Ferdowsi and the Illustrations of the Shāhnāme, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Shahbazi 1994 points out the consistency of colors and emblems. One should mention, however, that Fariborz’s emblem is the moon in the Sohrāb story, but the Sun in the Forud story, evidently taken over from his father Kāus.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the diagram in the commentary the Sohrāb story by She’ār and Anvari 1363/1984, 123. For more detailed discussions, cf. Bivar 1972, 288-90; Anvari 1967, 129, 131-2, 135, 137, 138-9; and the five elaborate diagrams in Mubārakshāh, ed. Soheyli 1346/1967, 222-27.

All this leads to the fundamental question of the dramatic function of Sohrāb's teichoscopy. It will be shown that important clues to answering this question lie in the arrangement of the pavilions, in their colors, and in the heraldic emblems themselves.

## **Part 2: Main Characteristics of the Seven Pavilions**

There are seven pavilions. All are identified first by their color, then by their banner and emblem, and some also by their banner filials, thrones, and location.

Focussing on the main characteristics, the seven owners of the pavilions are identified in the following sequence: 1. Kāus; 2. Tus; 3. Gudarz; 4. Rostam; 5. Giv, the son of Gudarz; 6. Fariborz; 7. Gorāze of the Givgān clan.

Their respective colors are given as follows: 1. seven- or multi-color; 2. black; 3. red, sorx; 4. green; 5. gold; 6. white; 7. red, sorx. Note that red, sorx, appears twice.

Their respective banners are as follows: 1. Sun on purple, with gold Moon filial; 2. elephant; 3. lion, with center jewel; 4. dragon, with gold lion filial; 5. wolf; 6. Moon; 7. boar, with gold Moon filial. In addition, there is the Kavian Star-Banner, axtar-e kāviyān, in front of the mighty throne of Rostam. In synopsis, these main characteristics, together with adjunct features, are shown in Tables 2a and b:

**Table 2a**

	<u>Pavilion</u>	<u>Banner</u>	<u>Filial</u>	<u>Throne</u>	<u>Location</u>
1 Kāus	(7)colors	Sun on purple	gold Moon	turquoise-indigo	center
2 Tus	black	elephant			stretching right
3 Gudarz	red	lion, jewel			
4 Rostam	green	dragon	gold lion	mighty, Kavian	Star-Banner in front
5 Giv	gold	wolf (on black)			on side
6 Fariborz	white	Moon		white and teak	direction of rising Sun
7 Gorāze	red	boar	gold Moon		

**Table 2a**

<u>Troops</u>	<u>Front of Pavilion</u>	<u>Around Tents</u>	<u>Other</u>
1 Kāus		100 elephants	leopard-skin tents
2 Tus	war steeds; back, elephants	many horsemen, elephants gate, gold-shoed horsemen horsemen	gear
3 Gudarz			
4 Rostam	army guard & elephants		Rakhsh, before Rostam
5 Giv		many horsemen, elephants	trumpets
6 Fariborz	1000 horsemen	infantry with shields, spears	
7 Gorāze	some guards on foot	yellow, red, violet banners	

## Arrangement of the Pavilions

### Option A

The reconstruction of the arrangement of the pavilions requires some detective work, but it can be deduced from references to the relative orientation of four of the pavilions. There are two options, or levels of encoding. Option A is as follows:

The pavilion of Kāus, # 1, is said to be in the center.

The pavilion of Tus, # 2, is said to be on the right, meymane. That is the technical term for the right wing of the army, and suggests that the camp had a cross-form arrangement, consisting of five sections, hence called xamis or laškar-e pani-jehat: center, qalb, right and left flank, meymane, meysare, advance guard, moqaddame, and rear guard, sāqe. In addition, there were two wings, janāh.

The orientation of the camp can be assumed to be north, so that right is also east. Accordingly, the next mentioned pavilion of Gudarz, # 3, the senior champion, should be on the left, and west.

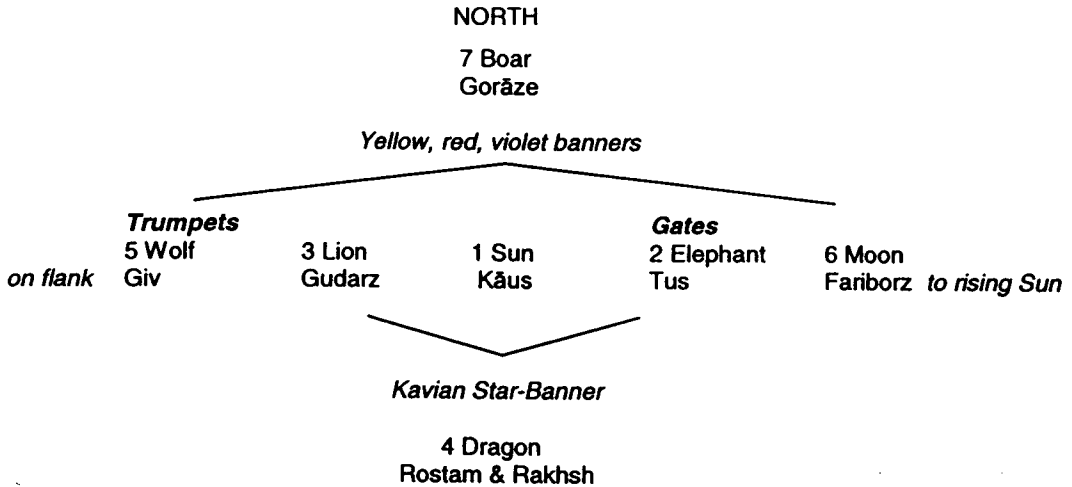
Next mentioned is the pavilion of Rostam, # 4, which must represent the rear guard. That position would be particularly meaningful. It would reflect his role as the protector of the empire and of the royal glory, farr. That role is “visually” underlined by the location of the Kavian Star-Banner in front of Rostam’s mighty throne, which implies that the banner is directly behind the shah in the center.<sup>15</sup>

Of the remaining three pavilions, the pavilion of Fariborz, # 6, must represent the right wing, since it is said to be in the direction of the shining Sun, su-ye tābande šid; and the pavilion of Giv, # 5, must represent the left wing, since it is said to be stretched out on the side, kešide bar karān. There Giv would also be on the side of his father Gudarz.

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<sup>15</sup> Usually, the position of the banner is in front of the king; cf the summary by Sarre 1903, 359: “In times of peace the standard stood beside the throne of the king (Mohl II 135), and together with the crown and the imperial sword represented the imperial insignia (Mohl VII 387). In all battles the imperial standard played an important role. Five mobeds, appointed by the king, carried it in front of the army on marches (Mohl II 251.441), and during battle the ruler entrusted it to his best paladin, who also has the right to wear golden shoes and enter the battle with tympanons (Mohl II 537. 553 ff.). Power and might are associated with the ownership of the banner. A supernatural shine is emitted from it, and it shines in the night like the sun, filling all with hope (Mohl I 91).”

Diagram 2. Arrangement A of Pavilions



Finally, the pavilion of Goraze, # 7, with only a few guards around, and yellow, red, and violet banners flying, must represent the advance guard, which has the traditional function of the lookout.

Thus, in overview, the arrangement is as follows: The main line has two flanks and two outer wings. There is an advance guard, led by the most junior champion Gorāze, who is probably the son of Giv, or the grandson of Gudarz, and a rear guard, led by the most senior champion Rostam. That Rostam is far in the back, rather than in front,<sup>16</sup> is indicated later in the story. When after his teichoscopy Sohrāb attacked the front of the Iranian camp, Rostam was unaware of the disturbance, and had to be told. The emerging pattern is shown in Diagram 2. A closer look at the characteristics of the champions reveals two triangles: One is the triad of the junior champions Giv, Fariborz, and Gorāze; the other is the triad of the senior champions Gudarz, Tus, and Rostam at the bottom:

#### **Diagram 2. Arrangement A of Pavilions.**

#### **Option B: The “Logic” of the Arrangement**

Thus, the arrangement of the pavilions does not appear to be haphazard. It reflects the natural division between the two sets of junior and senior champions, and their proper placement according to their relative strength within the traditional array of the army.<sup>17</sup>

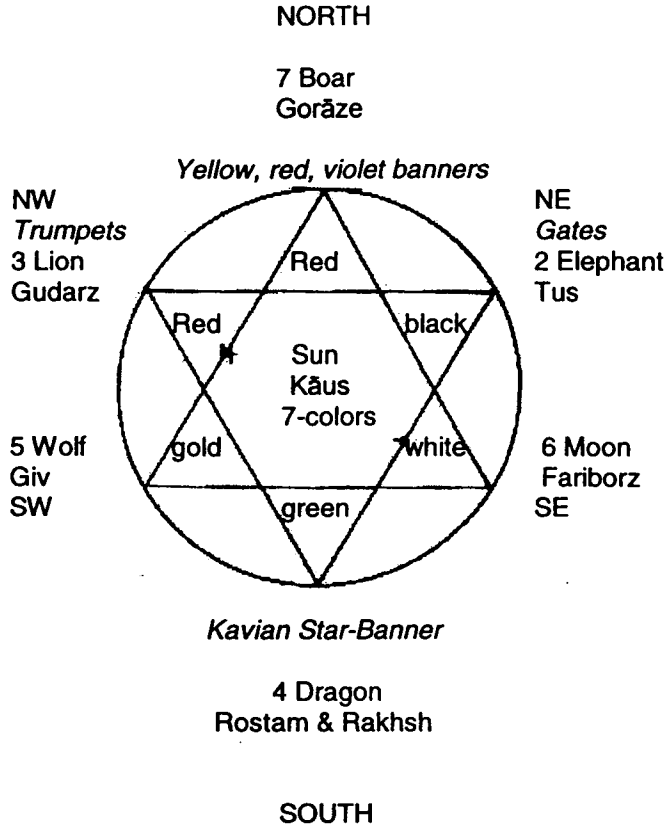
It should be noted, however, that this reconstruction is based on the assumption that su-ye tābande šid for Fariborz ‘towards the Sun’ and kešide bar karān ‘on the side’ for Giv imply the outer wings of a single attack line. In that case, to note, they do not immediately function to protect the shah in the center. Therefore, it is likely that Ferdowsi envisioned a more sophisticated arrangement, by which the shah would be protected evenly on all sides. This would imply an arrangement which consisted of two parallel lines, as discussed by Bivar, with Kāus in

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<sup>16</sup> Going to battle, Rostam is usually in front; cf. the citations of the battle arrangements in E'temādi 1970, 135-143, specifically 127, where Kāus placed Rostam in the front, but Tus on the right and Gudarz of the left, just as in the teichoscopy scene discussed here.

<sup>17</sup> At the same time, there is a diagonal logic: When a diagonal is drawn, west of it are the pavilions of Giv, Gudarz, and Gorāze, who represent the Giv clan, while east of it are the pavilions of Tus, Fariborz, and Rostam, all three of whom are loyal to the king, but each in their own circumstances were denied the imperial crown.

Diagram 3. Arrangement B of Pavilions



the center.<sup>18</sup> In that case, the pavilions of Giv and Fariborz would not be on the outer flanks, but behind the frontal right and left wings. That is, Giv would be behind his father Gudarz, and Fariborz would be behind the right hand side of his father Key Kāus. In this arrangement, the six champion would indeed evenly protect the shah on all sides. The resulting figure is that of a hexagon within a circle. A closer look reveals that it is defined by two intersecting triangles around a center, as shown in Diagram 3: one constituted by Gorāze-Giv-Fariborz in the N-SW-SE, the other by Rostam-Gudarz-Tus in the S-NW-NE, respectively.

### **Diagram 3. Arrangement B of Pavilions.**

### **Some Hexagons-in-Circle in Iranian Tradition**

The following explores the possibility that this hexagon-in-circle encodes patterns that are found in analogous geometric figures in Iranian tradition.

The Seven Continents. In geography, there are two well known such patterns. One is the mythical Seven Continents, Haft Kešvar, of the Zoroastrian tradition. It is defined by a central continent, surrounded by six others. However, that circle is defined by an east-west axis, as opposed to the north-south axis here, and so does not appear to have been the main referent intended.

The other hexagon is the hexagon in Nezami's Haft Peykar, which is geographically defined, as shown in Diagram 1 above. However, geography does not appear to be the logic of the distribution of the seven pavilions in the teichoscopy of Sohrāb, considering the home bases traditionally assigned to the six champions involved. The only exception may be Rostam at the bottom of the circle, which could reflect his base in the south in Sistan.

The Calendar. Another such pattern is that of the Iranian calendar, which has 12, that is, twice six, divisions. As has been shown, the 12 month of that calendar, when drawn in form of a circle, form a double hexagon. It is defined by four intersecting triangles, each of which is anchored on one of the four cardinal points of the year, and compass.<sup>19</sup>

When those six months which would correspond to the six outer pavilions in the Iranian camp are superimposed, as shown in Diagram 4, the correlation between champion and constellation would be meaningful. It should be noted that the top is Summer, and that the ancient calendary

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Bivar 1972, 289.

<sup>19</sup> Windfuhr 1997, 266.

scheme here reflects that of the Age of Taurus, with Taurus at spring quinox, Leo at summer solstice, Scorpio at fall equinox, and Aquarius at winter solstice.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Diagram 4. The Six Champions and the Calendar.**

The triangle of the three senior champions would correspond to the three following month and their spiritual guardians: Gudarz to Ordibehešt, Avestan Arta Wahishta 'Best Truth, Order'; Tus to Shahrivar, Avestan Khshathra Wariya 'Desired Realm, Rule'; and Rostam to Dey, Avestan Dadwah 'Creator'. In the Zoroastrian calendar, this is the basic triangle of the organizing powers, defined by the Creator together with Arta, who is also the guardian of Fire, and Khshathra, who is also the guardian of the Sky and Metals.

The triangle of the three junior champions would correspond to the following three months: Giv to Esfand, Avestan Spantā Aramati 'Holy Proper Thinking, Devotion' who is also the guardian of Earth; Fariborz to Abān, Avestan Apānām '(month) of the Waters'; and Gorāze to Tir, corresponding to the rain-bringing and brightest star Tishtrya 'Sirius'. In the calendar, this is the triangle of generation and fertilization.

The correlation with the constellations, and with the Zoroastrian divine entities who guard those months, could reflect certain characteristics associated with the six champions. Two possible connections must suffice, focusing on the N-S axis: Gorāze at the top would correspond to the summer constellation Tishtrya, that is Sirius, who is also known as the arrow star.<sup>21</sup> This correlation could reflect Gorāze's role as advance guard. On a deeper level, it could also reflect Warāza, i.e. the Boar's mythological origins in the deity Wrthragna, Persian Bahrām, behind whom is Mars, and whose other celestial correlation is probably with the north-polar Boar, Ursa Minor.

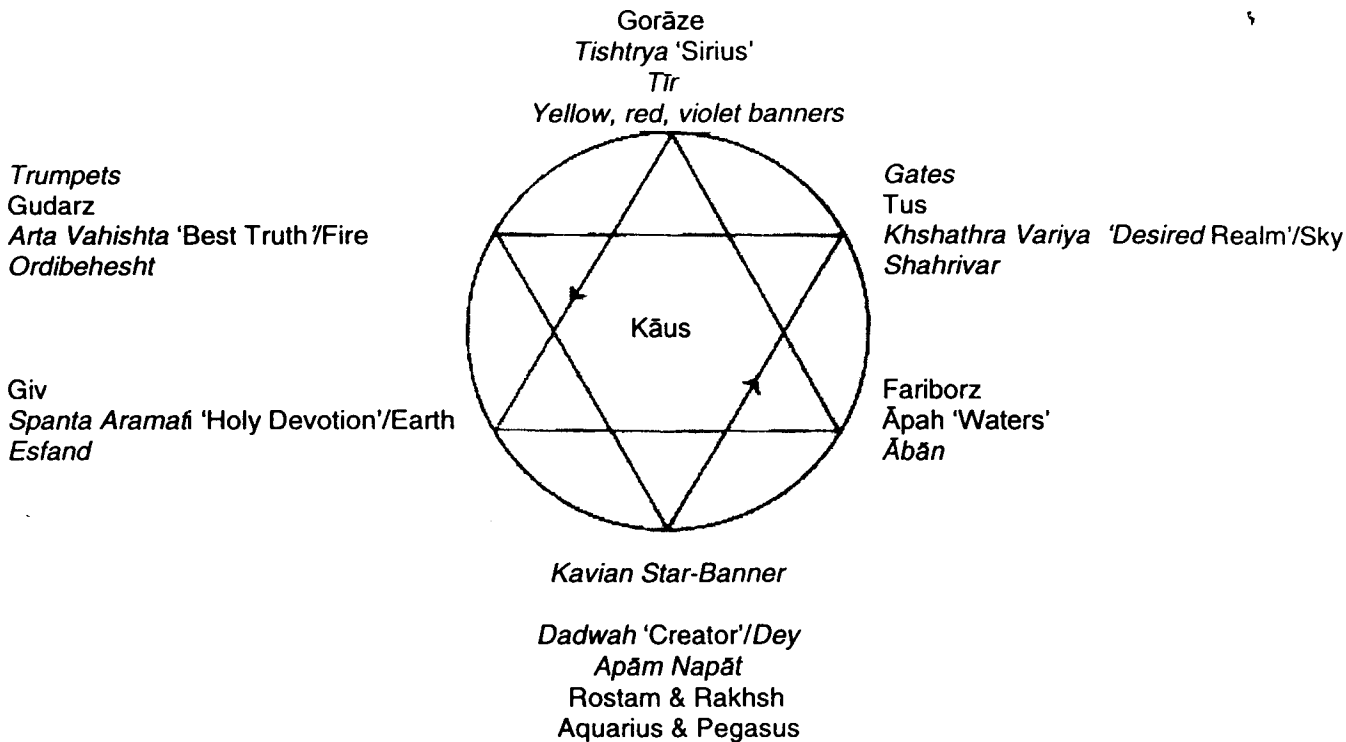
At the bottom of the diagram, Rostam is correlated with what in our system is Aquarius, and in the calendar is the month of Dey/Dadwah 'Creator'. This correlation would also be quite fitting: The Creator meant is Apām Napāt 'Offspring of the Waters', who is one of the three ahuras, besides

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<sup>20</sup> As in the Babylonian calendar, each direction defined by one of the four Royal Stars, respectively, Aldebaran in Taurus, Regulus in Leo, Antares in Scorpio, and either Fomalhaut in Piscis Austrinus or Altair in Aquila for the winter, the latter being better visible from northern latitudes; cf. Sesti 1991, 36, and 362.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Panaino 1995.

Diagram 4. The Six Champions and the Calendar



Ahura Mazdā and Mithra, in Younger Avestan texts. He is said to be the creator of heroes.<sup>22</sup> He also holds the shining hwarnah, Persian farr, for safe-keeping deep in the waters of the cosmic ocean.<sup>23</sup> There the Turanian Frahrasyan, Persian Afrāsiāb, failed thrice to catch what appears like the bright reflection of the Moon.<sup>24</sup> In turn, the Moon is the celestial bestower,<sup>25</sup> and measurer, of time. Similarly, Rostam is the bestower of kings, keeper of the Kavian Star-Banner, and protector of Iran. The hidden hexagram in the Sohrāb story, thus, would seem to encode and support what Olga Davidson, in her study of Rostam as the bestower of kings, has so convincingly demonstrated, that Rostam's mythological origin is to be found in, or is closely associated with, Apām Napāt.<sup>26</sup>

### Part 3: The Color Scheme and the Seven Planets

The colors of the pavilions are the first features identified by Sohrāb. As far as can be seen, that fact has so far been taken as a clue for the troops, just as have the heraldic features, but not as a clue for the reader: Seven colors together with seven pavilions have a long history. They are reminiscent of numerous schemes, known since antiquity, which correlate colors with planets. Best known, in terms of structures, are the colors of the seven walls of Ecbatana-Hamadan, and the seven planetary temples of the Harranian Sabeans. Biruni, Ferdowsi's contemporary,

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<sup>22</sup> Yasht 19. 52

<sup>23</sup> Yasht 19. 51.

<sup>24</sup> Yasht 19. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Dādīstān ī Dēnīg, 71.2; on the theory of the moon as bestower of all benefits, cf. Pingree 1963, 241, in reference to Scheftelowitz 1926, 326-331, 344.

<sup>26</sup> Davidson 1985, 100-103. - One may add that the celestial correlate of Rakhsh, Rostam's famous horse which stands in front of him in the teichoscopy of Sohrāb, and similarly a good number of other such horses like the horse Xanthos of Achilles, should be found in the celestial Pegasus north of Aquarius, or in the alternative Sagittarius, where one of the shores of the celestial "ocean" is located, appropriately corresponding to the Zoroastrian-Iranian month Ābān.