



## Extended Abstract

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# An Analysis of the Myth of the Abandoned Child in the Folktale “Zarraban” with an Emphasis on Its Similarities and Differences with the story of “Zaal” in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*

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### Introduction

Stories and legends are an important part of the folklore of every nation. The oral literature of every nation is a full-view mirror of the beliefs, thoughts, customs and aspirations of that nation. The efforts of great people such as Sadegh Hedayat, Enjavi Shirazi, Sobhi Mohtadi and many other great people made this part of literature attract the attention of researchers in Iran and over several decades, valuable efforts were made to record and analyze this treasure. However, with each passing second, a part of this treasure is lost forever. The death of every old man and woman in this land is the death of a part of this treasure forever.

The myth of the abandoned child is a source that can be seen among some nations that have ancient myths and legends. One of the most famous written narratives in Iran is the story of Zaal's birth in *Shahnameh*. This tale has counterparts in Iranian folklore literature, too. One of these narratives, which has not been recorded anywhere before, is the story of "Zarrabaan" in the village of Bahareh in Fars province. The findings of the research show that this narrative is basically the same as the story of

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Zaal in *Shahnameh*; however, there are also fundamental differences that have created a completely indigenous and different narrative.

### **Research Method, Literature Review and Purpose**

The author first recorded this story by the use of field method and through interviews with elderly people, and then by library method and descriptive-analytical approach and relying on the similarities and differences between folktales and stories. No research has been done before on the story of Zarrabān; however, researches have been done on Zaal and the motif of abandoned children in mythology. The researches related to Zaal can be reviewed in general in several parts: first, the researches that have investigated the story or character of Zaal from a psychoanalytic point of view or with new approaches of literary criticism, for example, the article "Criticism and review of Zāl's character from the perspective of Alfred Adler" by Hossein Ali Qobadi and Majid Houshangi (2008). In the second category are researches that have examined a part of Zāl's life such as his birth, death, his connection with Rudabah, or an aspect of his personality. The article "Farjam-e Zāl" (2006) by Yahaghi and Barati is one of these types of researches. In the third category are researches that have compared Zāl's character and other epic or mythological characters. The article "Comparative study of the character of Zāl and Indra in *Shahnameh* and *Rig-Veda*" by Saeed Shahrouyi et al. (2021) is in this category.

Researches have also been conducted on the myth of the abandoned child. Kuyaji (2019) investigated the similarities between Laodzu and Hao-Ki. Leila Chehel Amirani and Jamal Arabzadeh (2018) in "Analysis of the representation of the mythical (abandoned) child Zāl in the narrative of the story of Sam Nariman and Zāl's birth from Tahmasbi's *Shahnameh* with an intertextual approach" assess the degree of success of illustrators in representing the theme of the abandoned child in Tahmasabi's *Shahnameh*.

The author's purpose in the article is to record and review a popular mythical narrative on the motif of the abandoned child, which has not been recorded or reviewed in any source.

### **Discussion**

In the folk narrative, the child's mother becomes pregnant after many years by eating half of a pomegranate/apple seed. Getting pregnant by eating apples is one of the most frequent elements in the legends of the world, which is recorded in Arne and Thompson's classification with code 302 and 303.

Examining the beliefs of the people of this region also shows that the old people consider "Hamzad" to be a genie. In the belief of the people of this region, "Jinn" are divided into two categories, good and bad. Good jinns have a peaceful coexistence with humans. On the other hand, bad jinns can be very damaging, and their damage is mostly directed at pregnant women and their children; however, lone passers-by and people who pass under the trees at night are not safe from their harms, too.

Another belief that can be seen in this narration is the belief in twins. Goblins have sometimes abused children. This means that they have replaced the beautiful children of people with their ugly

children. The presence of defects or unnatural signs strengthened the belief that their child was kidnapped by demons. In this narrative, because the child has white hair, he is considered a demon.

In this story, the crow has a very short but effective role. According to the logic of the story, the kidnapping of half of the apple causes the child to be born with white hair, and from this point of view, it can be said that it has a negative role in this story.

In the folk narrative, the child's name is Zarrabaan, which is the folk pronunciation of Zorvan. The first similarity between the story of Zaal in *Shahnameh* and the folk tale is in the way of naming and the similarity of both names. In the narrative of *Shahnameh*, there is no mention of who names the child Zaal; However, in some *Shahnameh* manuscripts, historical texts and oral narratives, this naming is attributed to Saam, Manouchehr and Simorgh. In the folk narrative, only the child's name is given and it is not clear who chooses this name. In the folk narrative, the name of Zarrabaan's mother is not known. There is no name of Zaal's mother in *Shahnameh*, too.

In the folk narrative, when a mother sees her child's white hair, she becomes sure that the child is not her child. However, because she has become pregnant after many years, she does not want to disappoint her husband; therefore, she tries to keep the child a secret. But this attempt remains fruitless and the father learns about the birth of a child with white hair, and of course the father has no doubt that the child is a boy. In the narrative of *Shahnameh*, after the birth of Zaal, no one dares to inform the king and finally a nanny informs Sam.

Finally, Sam orders to take Zal away from there. Zal is left on top of the mountain that is the Simorgh's nest. Simorgh takes Zal to Alborzkoh to feed his children. But Simorgh's children treat him with kindness and Simorgh decides to raise Zal with them. In the folk narrative, a man is faced with two paths; on the one hand, the fear of the revenge of the demons prevents the child from being killed; On the other hand, he cannot tolerate the existence of a demon's child in his house; therefore, he leaves the child to the shepherds to take care of him. In both narratives, sleep plays an essential role in restoring the child. In *Shahnameh*, Sam dreams twice and in the folk tale, the man dreams three times.

## Conclusion

Analytical survey of the story of Zarraban shows the following points: 1) This story is based on the theme of the myth of the abandoned child, whose examples are seen in some myths and legends of nations. The child is rejected because of his white hair and of course being a demon, and in the end, he is raised with the support of a cow and a Simorgh. 2) In the narrative of *Shahnameh*, Zāl's mother's pregnancy is normal but in folk tales, a mother becomes pregnant by eating apple/pomegranate seeds, or a child comes out of a pumpkin bush. The name of Zāl and Zarrabān's mother is not known. In the folk narrative, the father's name is not mentioned. 3) The name Zarrabān is chosen for a white-haired child, which is the popular pronunciation of Zorvan. Zorvan and Zāl are from the same root. In both narratives, it is not clear who chooses the child's name. 4) In both narratives, the child is rejected because of his white hair, with the difference that in the oral narration, the parents have no doubt that the child

is a demon. In the narrative of *Shahnameh*, the child is left on top of the mountain where Simorgh nests; in the oral narrative, the child is first given to a shepherd to be raised and then left in the wilderness by the shepherd. In the oral tradition, before the arrival of Simorgh, the cow takes care of the child. In the narration of *Shahnameh*, there is no mention of shepherds and cows. 5) In *Shahnameh*, after dreaming twice, Sam goes to Alborz Mountain and returns Zāl. In the oral narrative, the man dreams three times, which is not similar to the dreams in *Shahnameh*. 6) In the folk tale, some creatures such as the shepherd and fairy appear contrary to their usual function and behave contrary to their nature.

**Keywords:** Zaal, Zarrabaan, child, white hair

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