Contents

Preface
vii

Foreword
x

Introduction
1

Chapter I
The Shahnama and the Early Tradition of Illustration
7

Chapter II
The Timurids and their Patronage
22

Chapter III
The Manuscript: RAS, MS. 239
38

Chapter IV
The Illustrations
51

Chapter V
Intentions and Achievements
137
Foreword
Gordon Johnson

The copy of Firdausi's epic Shāhnāma made in Herat in the 1440s for Timur's descendant Muhammad Juki is the finest Persian manuscript to have survived from the fifteenth century. It is in remarkably good condition, with thirty-one illustrations and two pages of exquisite illumination. Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, took the manuscript to India, and Firdausi is one of several great writers Babur used as a stylistic model and as a source of aphorisms for his Memoirs. The manuscript remained in the Mughal imperial collection until the eighteenth century when, with the decline of Mughal authority, it passed to the Nawabs of Awadh. From Awadh it was presented to the British in the person of the Marquess of Hastings, Governor-General of Bengal 1813–23, and he in turn gave it to his Military Secretary, Lt. Col. Charles Doyle. The Shāhnāma then formed part of a collection of books and manuscripts which Doyle gave to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1834. The Society has since deposited the manuscript in the British Library to ensure its proper conservation and to make it more easily available for study.

Muhammad Juki's Shāhnāma has already attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, and has featured in several exhibitions of Persian art. But this is the first monograph to consider the manuscript as a whole, and to publish the illustrations in full colour. Until recently, the costs of doing so would have been prohibitively expensive and the resulting book would have been bought by only a few institutions or wealthy collectors. Changes in print technology, however, have made possible the production of a book which brings the manuscript in all its glory, together with a scholarly commentary within reach of individual students and the general public. The purpose of the RAS is 'the encouragement of science, literature and the arts in relation to Asia'; making an important manuscript widely available fulfils an essential part of that purpose. Moreover, the study of classical Persian literature, and knowledge of the extraordinarily complex cultural history of the Iranian plateau and the surrounding regions, are of enormous importance for a better understanding of our contemporary world.

The Society is grateful to the Islamic Manuscript Association which bore the cost of making new digital photographs of the whole manuscript. Philip Wilson Publishers, specialists in the publication of art books and catalogues, agreed to be the co-publisher of this edition and the Society has benefited enormously from the collaboration. Many people have contributed to the preparation of the volume, but a special thanks must go to Mr A. H. Morton for new work on the Mughal seals in the manuscript. Above all, the Society is profoundly grateful to Dr Barbara Freeth who ten years ago undertook the task of overseeing the project. Her own research for this edition of Muhammad Juki's Shāhnāma has ensured that the book is not only an aesthetic delight but a significant contribution to scholarship.

Gordon Johnson
President of the Royal Asiatic Society
November 2009
Preface
Barbara Brend

The Illustrated Šahānmaḥ manuscript made for Muhammad Juki has been in the possession of the Royal Asiatic Society for some one hundred and eighty years and has been discussed by scholars in print for some eighty. Thus the present volume must open with an expression of consciousness of the debt owed to previous work, both in the matter of identification and of interpretation. For this basis one cannot but be grateful. Beyond points of detail, the scholars' respect for this manuscript, particularly its illustrations, is evident in the carefully chosen words of their generalizations. In his preface to J. V. R. Wilkinson's book of 1931, Laurence Binyon assesses the painted pages' function as illustration: 'in the finest of these designs we find, with all the elaboration of lovely detail, an impressive presentation of the subject'. While in 1979 B. W. Robinson quotes from Basil Gray for the pictures' aesthetic quality: 'that superb combination of crisp and faultless execution, romantic and evocative atmosphere, and dazzling colour that makes one, literally, catch one's breath'. Following on from such scholarship, it may seem an act of temerity to have embarked on a further publication. I can only say that to them I dedicate this monograph.

The main purpose of the new project, as conceived by Andrea Belloli, formerly Publications Officer at the Royal Asiatic Society, was to make all the illustrations available together in colour; the idea has been brought to a conclusion under her successor Anna Leithbridge. Meanwhile, with regard to the RAS, thanks are due to Helen Cordell, former Hon. Librarian, for her encouragement, and for help with associated material, to the former Librarian Michael Pollock, to the present Librarian Kathy Lazenbatt, who has also checked the index meticulously, and to the Assistant Librarian Alice McEwan. I should like to thank succeeding Councils of the RAS for favouring the project, Francis Robinson and Tony Stockwell, former presidents, for their support for it, and Gordon Johnson, President, for his foreword. In particular I wish to thank Alison Ohta, Curator, for sustained encouragement and advice.

The manuscript is on long-term loan at the British Library; I first became acquainted with it there in the 1970s, when it was in the care of Miss Norah Titley, and to her I am ever grateful for numerous opportunities to see it. More recently I have studied it in its present separated condition: its pictures under the supervision of Jennifer Howes, Helen George, Jodie Butterworth and Malini Roy of the British Library, and its text under the supervision of David Jacobs, Senior Conservator of the Library, to whom I am grateful for various comments and sorts of technical assistance. It is through the good offices of Susan Whitfield, the British Library's Head of Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, that the illustrations and other features were photographed digitally by Rachel Roberts, with great skill and under considerable pressure of time.

On renewed study of the text section I became apparent that the verso of the last folio was covered in notes, which had been lost to view since it was stuck to a later endpaper. A separation was performed by David Jacobs. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to
A. H. Morton of the RAS for his scholarly reading of these notes and seal imprints and his placing of them in their Mughal context. I also thank A. H. Morton for preserving me from committing various errors to print, and I am also grateful to him for accepting a mode of transliteration which would not have been his choice.

I am very grateful to Teresa Fitzherbert for reading the text at a time when it had become rather set in its ways, and for her academic precision and kindness of expression. In the few instances where I have not followed her advice the consequences will be on my own head.

For various corrections and for points of information I thank Manijeh Bayani, Pip Dodd of the National Army Museum, Robert Skelton, Nabil Saidi, Andrew Wilton, and Eva-Maria von Kemnitz. For administrative and technical assistance I thank Manijeh Bayani again, and Ali Asghar Bakhhtiar, Caroline Finkel, Francesca Galloway, Judith Kolbas, and Keith Ostler. I also thank Julian Collis who has guided me through tangled thickets of word-processing to the sunny uplands of Jughani diacritics and farsi in Nishapur.

I am grateful to Philip Wilson for his enthusiastic acceptance of the proposal for his eponymous publishing company; to the designer Linda Wade who has been creative and diligent; to Stephen Rose for deploying his expertise in colour-matching, Matthew Hartley for organisation; and to David Hawkins for his exemplary copy-editing.

My thanks are due to all the institutions that have permitted the reproduction of images from their collections: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; British Library; Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Golestan Palace Museum, Tehran; Harvard Art Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum; National Army Museum, London; School of Oriental and African Studies, London; Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin; State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg; Topkapis Sarayi Müzesi, Istanbul; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Serindia Publications—and also to a private collector. I am grateful to all their administrative staff who have seen me through the various ordering procedures.

I am of course more than grateful to the RAS for having permitted me this opportunity. And with the RAS, I am very grateful to the Islamic Manuscript Association for a generous grant for the digital photography.

Along the way various choices have been made. The illustrations of the RAS manuscript are reproduced almost as in life, but because they have been remargined with a blue ruling near the outer edges of the margin paper, a feature that would have created an unsteady effect in reproduction, the folios have been very slightly enlarged in order to avoid this problem. A sample page with blue margin is included.

However, the illustrations from the RAS manuscript (though not the comparative pictures) have been set in according to their Persian recto or verso position. This is in order to respect the intentions of the artists who used extensions into the margin with deliberate intention, those towards the fore-edge sometimes indicating expansion or liberty, and those towards the gutter sometimes resistance or confinement. Measurements of text space and of pictures have been taken with rulings included. Where there is an extension into the margins the main picture size is given in brackets.

The opportunity afforded by the new photography to include details and considerable enlargements has been taken. Though the results are rather beyond the aesthetic of the originals, these are instructive in showing that, even much enlarged, the brushwork appears exceedingly fine. The question so often raised again presents itself: how could the artists see to do their work? A satisfactory answer is yet to be presented.

We know that the Arab scientist, Ibn Haytham, wrote his Kitab al-Manazir (Book of Optics) in 1021, and that a Mughal painting shows a Persian painter wearing glasses in the 1550s, but it is not clear what comes in between. Perhaps a form of microscopic vision was a necessary physical attribute of painters, and, if so, perhaps it ran in families.

Following the lead of Wilkinson's publication, the pictures are accompanied by condensed accounts of the relevant portions of the narrative, in the endeavour to supply a general background for the understanding of the pictures as illustrations. Then, in consideration of more recent scholarship's interest, the 'break lines', those couplets that immediately preclude illustrations and may in consequence sometimes be the proximate stimulus for an artist's work, have been emphasised by verse translation. The versification is somewhat free, aiming to reproduce the spirit rather than the letter, and if it contains errors or laxity it is no one's fault but my own. With these preliminaries the attempt is made to interpret the artists' intentions and methods.
Manuscripts often have a many-layered history that requires multiple expositions. In the case of the Shāhnāmeh, it seemed useful to start with some account of the times of the author, when the text in its abstract sense came together, in order to show the broad outlines of the narrative and its conceptions, against which subsequent patrons and artists would make their art-historical choices. Timurid patronage is treated in greater detail in order to situate the production of the manuscript. The second phase of its existence is in the context of Mughal history; and here, through notes read and interpreted by A. H. Morton, detail is added to a known framework. Thirdly, as discerned by Robinson, nineteenth-century Lucknow must be the setting where it came into British hands.

It has been the policy of this monograph to push beyond the dry recital of data towards interpretations, whether of intentions and approximate identity of the artists, or the intentions and state of mind of the patron. This is of course a potentially risky procedure. In places I may have erred, but I hope that I shall have provided material for further discussion.

Note on transliteration

Transliteration has been used as is the custom in publications of this material by the Royal Asiatic Society. It is sometimes said that transliteration is not of interest to the general reader and is not needed by the specialist, but it is useful to those of us who may be somewhere between those states. The mode employed here was acquired in SOAS, and is used with an inclination to Persian rather than Arabic. Place names that are likely to occur in newspapers are not transliterated; however, Iran, when referred to in the narrative and as the counterpart to Tūrān, does bear diacritics. In rendering the names of the Turkman Sheep confederations I have proceeded from the spelling in published Persian histories of the period.
Introduction

The greatest treasure of the Royal Asiatic Society is the Shāhnāmah of the poet Firdausi made for Muhammad Žūkī. The importance of this manuscript is many faceted. The patron was a descendant of Timūr; the manuscript is datable c. 848/1444 and is in the style of Herat, the Timurid capital of the fifteenth century. It is one of the most classically beautiful Persian manuscripts, and it has survived in good condition to the present day. Finely written on good paper, it contains illustrations that are of strikingly great beauty not only for their colour and design, but also for their narrative verve and range of feeling. In addition to these qualities—the manuscript has an importance as a document with a history of its own, which is certain in outline if sometimes unclear in precise detail. When Bābur, a later scion of the Timurids, led his followers into Northern India in 1526 and founded the Mughal dynasty the manuscript was taken there. It was in the possession of successive Mughal rulers, as shown by the prints of their seals, and the notes of their librarians. In the eighteenth century it passed to the successor state at Lakhnau (Lucknow), whose capital was Avadh (Oude). From thence it came as a gift into British hands, at a period when scholarly interest in the culture of India and Persia was burgeoning, and it was presented to the Royal Asiatic Society. Pre-eminent in the society’s collection, the manuscript is now on long-term loan at the British Library.

The manuscript has been studied by some of the foremost scholars of Persian painting: Basil Gray, Laurence Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinston, B. W. Robinson, Eric Schroeder, Ivan Stchoskine, Ralph Pinder-Wilson, and others. A great deal of what it has to offer is already understood, but the rich source is not exhausted.

Entry into the collections of the Royal Asiatic Society

To begin relatively late in the manuscript’s history with a number of intersecting stories:

The Shāhnāmah was presented to the Royal Asiatic Society, 15th March, 1834, by the then Lt. Col. C. J. Doyle. His bold and sweeping signature appears on a flyleaf, formerly attached to the last folio of the manuscript (pl. 1). A more restrained hand has added the fact of presentation and its date. The same hand, which may well be that of the librarian at the time, Sir Graves Chamney Haughton, also records the presentation on a flyleaf that precedes the text (pl. 2). The Society had been founded in 1823, by the Sanskrit scholar Henry Thomas Colebrooke, following the model of the then Asiatic Society that had been founded in Calcutta in 1784 by Sir William Jones, puisne judge at the Supreme
Court of Bengal and philologist. The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland received the first element of its title by charter from George IV in 1824. Its purpose was:

'the investigation of subjects connected with, and for the encouragement of, science, literature and the arts in relation to Asia.' Its members were administrators, soldiers and scholars, many of whom had served in India. Doyle was one such. Charles Joseph Doyle, known as Carlo, was of a military family. Born in 1787 in Warsaw, where his father was temporarily a military envoy, and so receiving his second Christian name in honour of his godfather emperor Joseph II, he was gazetted to the Coldstream Guards in 1803 and saw service in the Peninsula War. In 1813, when in the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers, he was taken to India as Military Secretary to the then Lord Moira, Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief in British India, under whom his father had served in America. Doyle's military duties were in part active and in part as a staff officer. In 1817, following success in the Nepalese war, Moira was created Marquess of Hastings; he resigned in 1821 and left India in 1823. Doyle also returned, by way of Persia and Russia. He had left his savings in a bank in Calcutta; when this failed he was obliged to seek further employment, and in 1827 went to Jamaica as Private Secretary to Lord Sligo. He had evidently been in London for a period when the Shahnameh was presented in 1834, but he was then on the point of returning to Jamaica. He became Governor-General of Grenada. Returning to England in 1845, he was made Major-General, and died in 1848.

The question of how Doyle came by the manuscript has been answered with a fair degree of probability by Robinson by dint of matching the events in Doyle's life with notes in the first volume of the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, produced in 1834, where the donation is recorded no fewer than three times. It was not of the Shahnāma alone, but of eighteen Persian manuscripts and two Arabic, together with 187 printed books—many from Russia, and perhaps gathered during his overland return from India—173 maps and plans, and numerous drawings and prints. The fullest account of the Shahnāma in the RAS offers some scraps of history, which must have been relayed by Doyle himself:

'The most interesting specimen in the collection is, perhaps, a splendid copy of the Shah Nameh of Firdousi, which, besides its intrinsic worth as a most beautiful manuscript, possesses a peculiar value as a relic of the Moghul sovereigns in India; containing internal evidence of having been in the Imperial Library at Delhi for many centuries, being stamped with the signet of every emperor from Bāber to Aurangzeb, and having a long autograph note of the emperor Shāh Jahan at the commencement. This literary treasure was taken from the Imperial Library when the fortunes of the Moghul dynasty sank beneath the power of the Marathas, from whom it passed into the hands of the Navāb Vizir of Oude; and by the late supporter of that dignity it was presented to the Marquess of Hastings, Governor General of India. The volume is encased in rich crimson velvet and gold cloth cases.'

The splendid 'cases' are, alas, no longer present; they were probably of the eighteenth century. Robinson conjectures that Hastings gave the manuscript to Doyle as a parting gift. This seems very probable since, among the Persian items of Doyle's donation, is:

'A Poem written in praise of the Governor-General of India (Marquis of Hastings), richly illuminated, Svo. in case.'

This slim manuscript, which is beautifully illuminated in the style of Lakhnau, was already in Doyle's possession in 1820, as shown by his autograph ex libr.
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Navvāh Vāzīr, but it may well have been in 1814. Lord Moira, who would be created Marquess of Hastings in February 1817, had travelled to India in 1813, accompanied by his wife, Flora, Countess of Loudoun in her own right, and three children. In the course of his governor-generalship he made two extended tours of inspection that included Lakhnau; the first was of 1814–15 and the second of 1817–18. The first tour was intended in part to assess the threat posed by the Gurkhas, and indeed it was following the successful conclusion of the Nepal war in 1816 that Moira was granted his marquessate. On the first tour Moira was accompanied by his wife; in Lakhnau they steadfastly refused numerous gifts of jewels, though some more modest gifts were accepted, and some swords that were eventually handed over to the East India Company. At the time, the Naqib Vāzīr, Ghāzi al-Dīn Haydār (1814–27), was in a considerable state of tension in consequence of the high-handedness of the British Resident. In 1818 the Navvāh Vāzīr appeared glad to see Hastings again, and the atmosphere seems to have been more relaxed. Loudoun is not mentioned as having been present on the second tour; but Doyle is mentioned as having been present on the second tour and, as will appear, must also have been present on the first. The Shāhīnāmah might have been presented to the Governor-General on either occasion.

The tour of 1814 was the subject of pictorial record. A painting in the British Library by a Lakhnāwī artist (pl. 3) shows the Naqib Ghāzi al-Dīn Haydār entertaining the Governor General and his wife—because she is present, this is almost certainly the visit of 1814. However, it has been observed that since the Navvāh Vāzīr is represented wearing a crown with surrounding nimbus, an attribute that would only be his after he was awarded kingship in 1819, the painting may be of the 1820s. A second picture is by Doyle himself. As his descendant Col. Arthur Doyle tells us: ‘About 1817 or 1818, Carlo Doyle painted a great picture upon pocket handkerchiefs of Lord Hastings [sic] entry into Oude’, and he supplies the size as 15ft by 2ft—piecing together was presumably necessary to achieve this length. The picture was formerly kept at Loudoun Castle.
but it may be identifiable with one labelled ‘March of Francis Marquess of Hasting Govr. Genl. of India Commander in Chief’ that now hangs in the Hastings Room at Sandhurst. Unless Doyle painted more than one long picture of the tour, this would appear to be the work in question. Contrary to Col. Arthur Doyle’s assertion, it does not show the entry into Avadh on 25th October, 1814, but two days’ march on 23rd and 24th December with a crossing of the Ganges and advance towards Hardwar. Since the label on the picture refers to the Marquees of Hastings, as does the heading of a key to it (now in the National Army Museum) that seems to be in Doyle’s hand, the painting would have been done after February 1817. In addition to this, a whole series of pictures of the tour was produced by Sita Ram, an Indian artist employed by the Governor-General; one among these is entitled: ‘Entrance into Lucknow with a view of the Paunch Mahal’ (see appendix E). The tour of 1814 was thus considered to be of considerable significance, and might well have been the occasion of the gift of the Shāh-nāma.

Entry of the Shāh-nāma into the collection of the Navrāb of Avadh

The assertion in the JRAS that the manuscript was removed from the Mughal library when the Mughals’ sank beneath the power of the Marhattah may well be a reflection of what Hastings was told in Lakhnaub but it does not offer a very certain date. The Marhattah/Maratass, a Hindu tribal confederacy, were powerful in varying degrees through much of the eighteenth century, though their most expansive period was in the second quarter of the century and up to their defeat at Panipat in 1761 by the Afghan Ahmad Shah Durrani. A low point of the Mughals in relation to the Marathas might have been the reign of Alamgir II (1754–59), whom they had assisted to power, and who in consequence was in their debt, or of his successor, Shāh Jahan III, who reigned for less than a year before he was deposed and imprisoned by the Marathas in favour of Shāh ‘Alam II. This is probably the period alluded to. However that may be, it remains unclear whether we are to understand that the Shāh-nāma actually passed into Maratha hands, or whether their ascendency simply marks the moment when some other agency possessed themselves of it. The latter may be the more likely, since the next evidence shows the manuscript being passed on to Avadh.

At some point in the eighteenth century, the Shāh-nāma manuscript was remarried—the central portion of the folios with text or illustration being set into frames of new paper. Such renovation might well be undertaken at a change of ownership, either by a new owner wishing to enhance his possession or by someone desirous of improving an intended gift. There is indeed evidence that the manuscript was made a gift, at or after the time of the remarriage. It is in the form of a note on the marginal paper of 3a: Shāh-nāmah-yi māsārvan; gusarāndah-yi navrāb sālār jang bahādur, ‘Shāh-nāmah with illustrations: Gift of the Navrāb Sālār Jang the warrior’. Rather cramped in the upper left-hand corner of the page, this appears less likely to be the declaration of a donor, and more probably the record of a librarian. Wilkinson identifies the Sālār Jang in question as a dignitary who died in 1786 or 87; he speculates that the manuscript might have left the Mughal library as a gift from Muhammad Shah (1719–48) to a cour ṣier who was kin to him, though this is to ignore the JRAS reference to the period of the Marathas. However it reached the Navrāb Sālār Jang, the manuscript would have passed from him either to Shuja’-al-Daulah, who reigned in Avadh from 1754–75, or to ‘Asf al-Daulah, his successor from 1775–97.

The manuscript was transferred on long-term loan to the British Museum in 1946 and, following the creation of the British Library in 1973, the loan status has continued there.

Twentieth-century exhibitions

The manuscript or illustrations from it have been exhibited:

1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art, Burlington House, London
1967 Victoria and Albert Museum, London
1973 Royal Asiatic Society, London
1976 Hayward Gallery, London
1977 Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh
1998 British Museum, London
Notes


5 RAS, Ms No. 234, Merley cat. 175.

6 Robinson, RAS579, p. 84, and RAS598, p. 1, with increased conviction.


9 A. Doyle, Sir Garnet, p. 182.

10 I thank Andrew Wilman for the information that London castle suffered a fire in 1401.

11 I am most grateful to Pip Dodd of the National Army Museum for drawing my attention to the continued existence and present location of this picture (NAM, 1954–12-21.1-1; associated material 1954-12.21.1-2 and 1954-12-21.2). He informs me that the Sandhurst picture measures 73.6 cm (30 in) by 47.5 (18 ft 8 in), and that it has been backed with canvas so that the original structure is not visible.


13 I thank A. H. Morton for assistance with this note. Below the two lines and in a different pen a word which might be 'may', 'limit', to indicate the end of the note.

14 Wilkinson, pp. 5–6. Curiously, Wilkinson also ignores the I.R.S. reference to the gift of the manuscript from the Nawab of Awadh to the Marquess of Hastings; instead he sees it as passing from Sikandar Jang to 'one of the Doyleys'.

15 A similar trajectory was followed by the Pishāhshāh, Royal Library, Windsor Castle, MS. 1368. Made for Shah Jahan, this went by unknown means from Delhi to Lucknow, and it was accepted there by Lord Teignmouth on behalf of George III, to whom it was presented in 1799 (Milo Cleveland and Ethel Coch, King of the World: the Pishāhshāh: an Imperial Moghul Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, 1997, London and Washington, D.C., p. 13). A comparable case is that of a Persian Shah-nama, also presented to Queen Victoria in 1839 by Kimrān Shah Durranī of Afghanistan (B. W. Robinson, Eleanor Sims, Manjik Bayani, The Windsor Shah-namas of 1648, London, 2007, pp. 18–21).
Chapter I
The Shāhnāmah and the Early Tradition of Illustration

The Shāhnāmah of Firdausi

Begun and largely executed in the later years of the Samanid dynasty, which favored the furtherance or revival of Persian culture, the Shāhnāmah ('Book of Kings') is a literary epic. It is notionally of 60,000 couplets, though the actual number, varying from manuscript to manuscript, may be rather lower; and, though dependent on earlier sources, the form in which it has been known since the fifth/eleventh century is almost entirely the work of one man. His appellation of fatherhood (kunya) was Abū'l Qasim and his hon promote (tekhallus) was Firdausi ('The Paradisal'); his personal name and patronymic are not known for certain, though they may have been Mansūr b. Hasan.¹

The most secure facts about the poet and his composition are found in the prelude and epilogue to the epic, and in reflective verses that he interpolates between sections of the narrative, but even these remain problematic as to dating and precise meaning. The epilogue most usually appended to the text presents Firdausi as an elderly man, who completes his poem (after many years of work) on the Persian day of ard of the month yfficirnw, in the year 400 of the Hijrah, which probably intends 8th March, 1010.² This date appears to be that of a final revision, since some manuscripts give an earlier completion in 384/994-95. Firdausi incorporates into his work some thousand couplets by a contemporary, the poet Dasqīqi, who had begun the project of versifying accounts of the kings of old but had been killed by a slave. Dasqīqi's lines come in the second part of the work; they are principally concerned with the propagation of the religion of the prophet Zardusht (Zoroaster) during the reign of Gushchap.

Some century and a half after the completion of the epic, the Chahār Maqāla (Four Discourses) of Nizāmī 'Arūzī offers further details, which may not be entirely reliable, and subsequent sources elaborate the tale.³ Taking this information together with Firdausi's interpolations, it appears
that he was born in or about 329/940 in the village of Bāzīr, in the Tābarānī district of Tūs, and that he was a minor land-owner (dīḥān). Thus he probably had at first a degree of financial independence that would have permitted the pursuit of scholarly interests and literature; however, his interpolations in the Shāhnāma show him as impoverished and urgently in need of princely patronage. Daqiqi had worked from a prose Shāhnāma, compiled in 957 at the behest of the then governor of Tūs, Abū Mansūr Muhammad b. `Abd al-Razzaq. This was a translation from middle Persian (Pahlavi) of traditions collected in the pre-Islamic, Sassanian, period. Following the death of Daqiqi, Ferdowsi acquired this or a copy and beginning his poem in the later 970s, he continued for some thirty-five years, incorporating material from other written or oral sources. At first he received support from Mansūr, the governor's son, and when this patron was executed in 987 he could still look to other inhabitants of Tūs, `Ali Daylamī for cooperation in the work, and Husayn Qutib for material needs. When, however, Simāʿīd power was brought to an end in 999 by Mahmūd of Ghazni, the most obvious source for a financial reward for the work was removed. Ferdowsi was obliged to entertain the idea of acquiring the patronage of the rising power; and, perhaps by the agency of the new Ghaznavid governor of Tūs, Arslān Jaḥb (pl. 4), Ferdowsi's name became known in Ghazni. Probably at this time Ferdowsi began to introduce verses lauding Mahmūd into his work, and he may also have received and acceded to a request to send a book, presumably as a sample. Ferdowsi does appear eventually to have gone to Ghazni to present his Shāhnāmah in person. With the favour of various notables he seems to have enjoyed some success at first; later, his footing in Ghazni became less secure, whether because protectors were no longer there, or because of calumnies, or because Mahmūd of Ghazni, an adherent of sunni Islam, had become aware that Ferdowsi's belief was shi`i. The outcome, as Nizāmī `Arūzī relates it, was that Mahmūd rewarded Ferdowsi for his poem with a sum of money that he deemed derisory.1

Ferdowsi left Ghazni. He may have spent some time in Herat and some in Tabaristan before returning to Tūs; and he may have composed a satire against Mahmūd, though his authorship of this largely lost work is disputed. The date of Ferdowsi's death may be 411/1020 or 416/1025. According to Nizāmī `Arūzī, Mahmūd regretted his lack of generosity to Ferdowsi and sent him a camel caravan of indigo, which, however, entered the town by one gate as Ferdowsi's body was carried out at another. In an interpolated passage Ferdowsi laments his son who predeceased him; another such passage a beloved figure, commemorated as playing the harp and reading to him from an ancient book, may have been his wife; Nizāmī `Arūzī tells of a daughter who refused Mahmūd's tardy bounty.

The Text

The text is found in various lengths, and in addition it may sometimes be accompanied by subsequent epics that expand the role of minor characters, such as the Ganshāpīnāmah or Razāūnāmah. There may also be minor variations in the position of couples or their precise wording.3 In keeping with its ancient sources and the poet's intention to celebrate the glories of Iran, the Persian vocabulary is in part archaic for its time, and uses very little Arabic.

The metre used is muntashrī, which has a forthright beat:

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—the metre is here expressed as though it were read from the left. In their efforts to convey something of the work to a western public, scholars for the most part confined themselves to the translation of selected passages and to prose abridgements—it may be noted in passing that the rendering of Persian names varies considerably from one authority to another;5 but for readers of English, fullest access to the Shāhnāmah is gained by way of the monumental verse translation by the brothers Arthur George and Edmond Warner, which reproduces the whole epic and adds a rich explanatory background.4

The main text of the Shāhnāmah is usually preceded by one of three prefaces in prose: an old preface, containing material from Arūzī Mansūr's prose version; a preface of intermediate period; or the preface composed by or for the Timurid prince Bayqunghur b. Shāh Ruh in 829/1425–26.4 The last owes much to the Chahār Maqālah of Nizāmī `Arūzī, the sole known illustrated copy of which was indeed made for B. by Ferdowsi on creation and `Ali, ta` & the role and Sulaiman.

The earlier known to April or Ma. Cl. III. 24), only, suggests intended, as also some of the beginning division marked on another.1

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made for Baysunghur. The preface is followed by Firdausi’s prelude, which praises God, reflects on creation, praises the Prophet Muhammad and ‘Ali, touches on the compilation of the epic and the role of Daqiqi and praises Abū Mansūr and Sultan Mahmūd.

The earliest dated manuscript of the work known to survive is a copy of Muharram 614/ April or May 1217 (Florence, Bibl. Naz. Cent., Cl. III. 24). It contains the first half of the epic only, suggesting that a two-volume copy was intended, and is unillustrated. Later manuscripts also sometimes mark the end of a first part and the beginning of a second, though the place of division may not be identical from one to another.

The Epic Narrative

The narrative of the Shāhānshāh recounts the reigns of kings and the deeds of their paladins from the beginnings of civilisation to the Arab Muslim conquest and the end of Persian rule. Its moral background is informed by Zoroastrianism: underlying human action at the personal and national level is the struggle between good and evil, the Deity and the Devil. The Deity is named in general terms, so that a Muslim reading is not denied; occasional interventions into human affairs are attributed to the angelic spirit, Surūsh. The Devil is named as the Ahriman of Zoroastrian cosmology or occasionally as iblis of the Islamic, while the generality of demons are known as dhīr. The power of fate coexists with these forces, acknowledged but unexplained. Since the king is God’s representative on earth, the question of legitimate rule is ever recurring. The reigns of kings frame sequences of action, but, within these, princes and paladins are more active than rulers. The heroic values are celebrated: courage, loyalty, perseverance and, eventually wisdom. Then the heroic rewards are reaped: an honoured name, companionship at the king’s table and luxurious goods. The first part of the narrative is very largely mythological and the second more historical.

The narrative begins with a primordial world under King Gāyumars, in which, though men wear skins, the beasts are tame. Gāyumars, like other figures in this part of the epic, is found in an earlier form in the Avesta. This body of Zoroastrian scripture developed in the course of the first millennium BC, but its roots extend back into the second as a product of the East Iranian branch of the Indo-European peoples.

The period of the historical Zoroaster is very unsure, c. 1000 BC has some support, though opinions vary significantly to either side of it. Zoroaster tends to be seen as clarifying an "existing" religious tradition, rather than initiating one. Gāyumars and his successors of the Pishdadian dynasty are at risk from the enmity of Ahriman, who establishes the rule of an Arab usurper, Zāḥḵāk. The true line is restored with Faridun, who, however, divides the kingdom between his three sons, Tūr, Salm and Iraj. The elder two murder the youngest for his inheritance, an action that sets Iran, the land granted to Iraj, and Tūrân, the land beyond the Oxus, to Tur, at enmity. The theme of warfare between the peoples of Iran and Turan runs through both parts of the epic. Living in the tenth century, Firdausi sees the threat of Turan as that of Turkic peoples from beyond the Oxus, who from the early centuries AD had exerted continual pressure on the eastern lands of greater Iran, though sometimes, indeed, like the family of Mahmūd of Ghazni, accepting Islam and adapting themselves to Persian ways. It has, however, been suggested that these tales developed in northwestern Iran and at an earlier date when nomadic Scyths crossed the Araxes, rather than the Oxus, to penetrate the settled lands beyond; and Scyths, once considered a Turkic people, are now seen as Iranian on linguistic grounds. The Pishdadians were succeeded by the Kayanid dynasty, under which the destinies of several individuals link the opposing lands of Iran and Turan. This is notably the case of Siyavush, who is also found in the Avesta. A prince of Iran, whose mother is from Turan, he chooses exile in Turan where he finds a wife and is done to death—the description of his end carrying the echo of a divine sacrifice. His widow and son are brought back to Iran; the latter, Kay Khusrau, addresses himself to avenging his father and then reigns as the last of the Kayanid line. Before his end he names Luhrasp, who is of Pishdadian descent, as his successor.

A great hero is Rustam, born during the reign of the Pishdadian Manuchir; he outlives that dynasty and the Kayanids and succumbs only after serving nine kings, the account of his deeds extending into the second part of the epic.
Rustam's family rules the vassal state of Zábulistán in the southeastern province of Sísán, whose name derives from Scythian (or Sák) tribes from Central Asia, who had settled there. Rustam has some of the characteristics of a folk hero—longevity, a gargantuan appetite, super-human strength, an insouciance with regard to danger, and a propensity to rustle horses—but his story is lifted to an epic and tragic level. At one point Rustam experiences ḫafí khván, variously rendered as Seven Courses, Stages, Trials or Exploits. The forebears of Rustam and the hero himself enjoy the protection of a mythical bird, the Simurgh.

The second part of the epic is more heterogeneous in content. The reign of Luhrāsp is followed by that of his son, Gushńasp, in which the emergence of the prophet Zardusht, as recounted in the lines of Daqiqi, is a pivotal moment for the narrative as a whole. In addition, to this slightly more definite religious background, there is in the time of Luhrāsp a shift in geopolitical interest, since before Gushńasp comes to the throne he is in exile in Rúm, which is ruled by the Qaysar (Caesar). Rúm might mean the Classical world, or its Byzantine successor, but Firdausi is not concerned to distinguish between phases of the western power. Though an early western imperium would fit better with the epoch of Zoroaster, the Luhrāsp-Gushńasp sequence contains, in a gesture towards realism, a side action against the Khazars that should properly be located in the seventh century AD. Turan remains the major foe; but when Isfandiyar, son of Gushńasp, ventures there to rescue his sisters, there is a subtle shift of emphasis from the previous epic mode, with numerous heroes engaged in the national cause, to a greater concentration on the story of one man. Like Rustam, Isfandiyar faces ḫafí khván, but a growing fascination with the psychology of the individual is again evident in his long journey with Rustam, and this is reflected in the increased importance of dialogue.

A second field of narrative in the second part of the Šáhnāmeh is the story of Iskandar (Alexander the Great), derived from various eastern sources. Though born in Rúm, Iskandar is son and rightful heir of Dárāb of Iran. Iskandar defeats his half-brother Dára, who cedes the kingdom to him. Iskandar's subsequent life is a wandering quest during which he encounters many of the world's wonders.

The rule of the Ashkánians (the Parthians) from the third century BC to the second AD is passed over extremely rapidly, since Firdausi is aware of a few names only. He then moves to the Sásánian period where more historical material is to hand. Rúm is still important on the western frontier, while the challenge in the East is now certainly from Türk peoples, but the main focus is on the lives of a few individuals. The deeds of Bahram Gur still have elements of the mythological in the slaying of strange beasts, but the account of his reign also introduces a much wider range of human occupations than had been noticed hitherto. Nūshirván and Khusrau Parviz are great kings, but a whole drama is played out in the career of Bahram Chubínah, a hero with tragic flaws. At the close of the Sásánian period, the caliph 'Umar is mentioned very briefly, and the Muslim conquest is then treated in terms of an Arab invasion.

An impassioned lament for what Iran will lose is placed in the mouth of the commander of the Sásánian army, and a plain statement of what Islam will offer follows from the Arab commander. The death of Yazlagird, the last Sásánian, is a very sympathetic picture of splendour brought low by squalor but ultimately not obscured by it.

Šáhnāmeh illustration and the classical tradition

It is not known when Firdausi's Šáhnāmeh was first illustrated. It was very probably not in his own day, though Islamic historians report the survival of Sásánian manuscripts with illustrations down to the tenth century, so the poet himself may have encountered illustrated histories. It is, however, clear that he was familiar with wall paintings. The evidence for this lies not so much in the story that Mahmúd of Ghazni provided him with a room with pictured walls, which is less than sure though not impossible, but in his description in the Šáhnāmeh of the palace that Siyavush builds for himself, Siyavushgād. This is decorated with pictures of battles, banquet scenes and figures from this part of the Šáhnāmeh. This rather self-referential situation clearly shows that for Firdausi the wall paintings...
appropriate to a palace are those that illustrate the epic of the kings. Some survivals of such a tradition remain. Datable to about the first half of the eighth century, a sequence of Sogdian wall paintings from Panjikent is generally accepted as portraying the heroic deeds of Rustam according to the Sakā epic. In a recent study Marshak interprets the horizontal sequence as derived from a picture scroll.\textsuperscript{23} Warriors on powerful horses dash in flying gallop parallel to the picture plane. The hero, sometimes accompanied by followers in serried rank, combats foes, dragon or div. Weapons are bow, spear, sword and lasso.

Landscape is minimal, though vague mountains create some spatial depth, since watchers look from behind them; extraneous elements are almost absent, though dismembered bodies may lie below the horses’ hoofs. Through later wall painting or manuscripts that are lost to us, this visual tradition is reflected in some degree in the slim-waisted riders on pottery of tenth-century Nishapur.\textsuperscript{24} Similarly, it has long been recognised that Shāhnāmah subjects are represented on mina’i pottery of the thirteenth century, and here the coloured figures on a white ground clearly suggest a relation to manuscript illustration, as represented by the Varqah va Guibār of ‘Ayyūqī (Topkapi Sarayi Kütüphanesi, H. 841) of c. 1250.\textsuperscript{27} This romance is illustrated with pictures in horizontal format: figures are colourful, supple and jaunty; backgrounds may be plain or in one conventional colour, with occasional built structures, such as walls and doors, or tents.

The earliest surviving illustrated Shāhnāmah manuscripts appear to be the group known as the ‘Small’ Shāhnāmah. These are not dated certainly, though Simpson has made a case for Baghdad c. 1300.\textsuperscript{28} Their cycle of illustrated subjects is extensive.\textsuperscript{29} Pictures are predominantly in horizontal format but scenes involving numerous figures, and landscapes, may be treated in some detail, often against gold skies. The influence of...
Chinese or Mongol textiles and armour is apparent; the eagle-owl-feather headdress is sometimes worn. Probably later than the Small Shahānāmah are the ‘Red ground’ Shahānāmahs produced between 1330 and 1352 in Shiraz under the环卫 dynasty. Their illustrations are more spacious than those of the Small style; they are still mostly in horizontal format, but there is sometimes a stepped top or bottom line of the picture that allows for a more expressive composition. Grounds are indeed often red, though sometimes ochre, and these colours dominate the palette. There is less evidence of eastern influence than in Small Shahānāmahs and figures are less rounded. There is in fact an angularity in drawing, and a roughness which suggests a hasty version of something already known. It seems possible that they are scaled down from an indigenous tradition of wall painting. Another style of the first half of the fourteenth century is known from separated examples, chiefly those of the Diez Albums in Berlin. Possibly from Isfahan, this may result from a fusion of the previous two styles. The palette is dominated by red and blue, figures are rounded, and there is use of Chinese-inspired tonal variation, and occasional cheek colour.

One nºḥi manuscript excepted, the patronage of these works is uncertain, but it may be supposed that they were produced for members of minor courts. The compositions that they present include many riders parallel to the picture plane, frontal throne scenes, and persons standing in rows, though early forms of more elaborate composition are to be found. Over approximately the same period, and with no doubt occasionally influencing these manuscripts, a smaller number of greater works were produced at the dominant courts. Though not a Shahānāmah, the jami‘ al-Jawārīkh (World History) of Rabīd al-Din, made in Tabriz in 1314–15, shares the topics of war and kingship, and prepares the way for the first great example. Its style is important for the adoption and adaptation of Chinese ink-painting, together with East Christian elements, and beyond this the scale and quality of its illustrations declares a new view of the significance of this aspect of a manuscript. A generation later, probably under the Il-Khanid Abī Sa‘īd (r. 1316–35), and doubtless in Tabriz, the monumental, but sadly dismembered, Great Mongol Shahānāmah, lifts illustration to a majestic level (pl. 5). The name of its leading painter, Ahmad Musa, is offered in the preface to a sixteenth-century album composed by a court librarian, Dūst Muhammad. Colour is more intense and sometimes rich, and Chinese influence has been well assimilated. The picture format is still sometimes horizontal, though even in these cases height has increased in relation to width. Many pictures, however, are square or of upright form. This changed proportion that opens up a greater space has manifold effects. Whole armies can be suggested in battle, while throne scenes gain in majesty from greater height and a more detailed portrayal of courtly surroundings. Landscape plays a greater role, framing action or reflecting feeling. More secondary characters are introduced to observe or react to the main action. In several scenes such figures are mourners, a tragic chorus that makes a significant contribution to the tone of the whole. In the present state of investigation, the Great Mongol Shahānāmah is the earliest in which selection of the cycle of subjects for illustration has been studied for what it might be intended to express. The themes of kingship and mourning have long been recognised; a more recent study has argued that the subjects selected are intended to refer to comparable instances in the life of Abī Sa‘īd, and hence that he was the manuscript’s patron.

Though opening new possibilities, many of the illustrations to the Great Mongol Shahānāmah are too individual and challenging to have served as models for subsequent works, so the next great examples are different in character, though linked by a tradition. In Dūst Muhammad’s preface, we read that Shams al-Din, a pupil of Ahmad Musa, worked on a Shahānāmah, under and apparently for the Jalayirid, Shaykh Ulays (r. 1356–79), using a ‘square format’—the older, horizontal picture shape evidently no longer favoured at court. The Istanbul Albums have a number of pictures that, though bereft of text, are recognisable as Shahānāmah illustrations by their contents. In square or upright formats and with some variation in style they appear to be from more than one manuscript. Datable perhaps about 1370, is ‘Islandiyir fighting two rhino-wolves (karg)-pl. 6). Colour is here more evenly spread than in the Great Mongol Shahānāmah so that the clarity that was to typify

The classical tradition of Persian painting begins to be apparent. There is less interest in rendering volume, and more in the use of composition to convey meaning. This picture would be closely imitated by an illustration in the *Shāhnāma* made for the Timurid prince Baysungur in 833/1430. The *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārikh*, or at all events its style, is also found in fourteenth-century pictures, in Istanbul and the Diez Albums of Berlin. Often on reserve grounds, sometimes in thin colour, and with a palette that favours red and blue, these appear to be of several sets. Their subjects are often too general for identification, but an unusually detailed scene reveals the ‘Mongol capture of Baghdad’ (pl. 7).

In addition to these *Shāhnāma*, there are manuscripts of other subject matter whose influence is too significant to ignore. Dust Muhammad mentions a *Kalila wa Dimna*, a book of animal fables, produced under Abū Sa‘īd. Surviving pictures have been identified in an album in the Istanbul University Library. In the present context this work is important not for its animal drawing, but as showing some...