ON THE TRACK OF THE "DEMOTE" SHAHNAME MANUSCRIPT
Sheila S. BLAIR

In 1980 Oleg Grabar and I published a monograph on one of the most sumptuous Persian manuscripts, the "Demote" Shahname, further work allows me to refine our original conclusions. Examining the folios once in the Vever Collection and not available for our original publication confirms our suggestion of page splitting and our original reconstruction. However, I can only express our surprise about the original format and show that the entire manuscript must have had approximately 190 miniatures (not the 120 we had originally postulated) and was done in two volumes.

I can also chronicle the manuscript’s later provenance. A recently-discovered photograph taken at the Qajar court shows the bound manuscript, suggesting that the Qajar librarians had included the Shahname manuscript repaired, revocating some of the damage. The Ilkhani manuscript was one. Around 1910, the manuscript was brought from Iran to the West, where, failing to sell it as a whole, Demote broke it up. In addition to having folios split, he commissioned text pages of unusual format. Reconstructing the manuscript’s quires suggests that these text pages were made to be sold as individual with the illustrated ones. Demote quickly dried this time-consuming process of splitting, reshaping, and reorganizing folios and by 1915 turned to the more profitable business of selling.

In 1930, O. Grabar and myself were able to study it on the one of the finest manuscripts, the Shahname of Demote, of the miniatures which we were able to make a copy using some of the text pages and studying their style. This manuscript, which I have called the "Shahname" manuscript, was done in two volumes. The folios were taken at the Qajar court, and Demote, discovering, made the manuscript into a total of 190 miniatures (not the 120 which were originally postulated) and it was done in two volumes.

One of the most sumptuous manuscripts produced in Iran is a dispersed copy of the Persian national epic, the Shahnameh, probably made at Tabriz in the first half of the 14th century and generally known after the French dealer G. J. Demote who first offered its miniatures for sale in the West. Ten of the manuscript’s surviving 58 miniatures were first published in Shah’s 1914 study of Islamic miniature painting, and were included in the major exhibition of Persian art held at Burlington House, London in 1931. The miniatures soon entered the scholarly literature, with experts identifying the subjects illustrated and debating hands, provenance, and date. Most of these earlier studies concentrated on art historical questions concerning the paintings, and was it was only in a 1975 seminar at Harvard University that attention turned from the miniatures to the manuscript. Oleg Grabar and I published the rather startling results in the first monograph on the manuscript.

In examining the manuscript as a whole, we uncovered two sorts of problems: split and pasted pages. In reading the text, we found three continuous series of text (e.g. 20, 19, and 33) on miniatures located in the separate manuscripts respectively, the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, Missouri; the Harvard University Art Museums in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. While two continuous sides could simply be explained as the verso of one folio and the recto of the succeeding folio, this explanation was inadequate for three continuous text sides. Scouring the watermarks, stains, creases and other features of each side, we determined that two of the sides (20 and 19) had originally been recto and verso of the same folio but had been split apart and had irrelevant text sides pasted on the back. Altogether, we encountered six such split folios, making a total of 12 illustrated sides with irrelevant texts pasted on the back. Such splitting was obviously a dangerous process and in one case (33-36) damaged a large triangular area.

Splitting of folios was the only irregularity in the manuscript. We also uncovered 8 illustrations which were pasted on irrelevant texts. It seemed that the miniatures had been pasted on complete text folios, as in all cases the miniatures overlapped the columnar rulings and the text was missing the appropriate number of hemistiches covered by the miniatures. Surprisingly, however, examination showed that there was no text underneath the miniatures; rather each of the text folios omitted exactly the right number of verses to make blank spaces the size of each of the illustrations.

On paleographic grounds we were able to divide the text into two hands. Type 1 occurred on all the "altered" sides, that is, the irrelevant text sides pasted to the back.

of split folios or the text folios with pasted-on miniatures. Type 2 occurred on all other, "normal" folios. Four characteristics distinguished the two hands:

The altered sides used three dots below ifr to distinguish it from ifn whereas normal sides used a comma-like mark over ifr. On the altered sides a mark like a stylized rd or pd typically filled the end of a hemistich whereas this production ran right to normal sides. The letter rd was pointed with two dots below on the altered sides whereas it was undotted or pointed with two dots above on the normal sides. The letter bdr on the altered sides was embellished with a tail, whereas this was only used at the beginning of a hemistich on the normal sides.

Several other features also distinguished the two hands. The letters chaf and phf usually had three dots on the altered sides but only one on the normal sides. The altered sides had many more mistakes than the normal ones. Repairs to the manuscript were always done in the Type 1 hand. Finally the intercolumnar rulings were different, those on the altered sides measuring three millimeters whereas those on the normal sides measure seven.

We were further able to prove that the alterations to the manuscript were done in the 20th century. Photographs taken by the Archives Photographiers show two folios (36 and 44) with large blank spaces as now visible in the Keir Collection in London, the two fragments of text pasted over the blanks. The fragments are taken from a cut-up text folio now in the Chester Beatty Library.

We explained all these irregularities as the dismemberment of the manuscript by an unscrupulous dealer. Possessing folios with miniatures on both sides, he simply split the folios lengthwise. This explanation readily solved the problem of the six split folios which were divided by the dealer who then commissioned 12 text sides to paste on the backs. The splitting was possible because the original folios were so large that they had to be made of pasted pieces of paper, but the damage to miniatures 35 and 36 shows that it was still difficult. The dealer must have tried the same procedure with the other altered folios, but damaged so much of the text around the miniatures that he needed to commission whole new folios on which to paste the miniatures. He must have had original text folios to copy, as the pasted-on folios bear numbers in the lower left corner. By setting the altered folios in order according to text, rather than miniature, the numbers fell into sequence and showed that when the manuscript was still bound, it had been paginated.

These numbers allowed us to reconstruct the layout of the original manuscript. We established it as a luxury production of some 280 folios with 120 illustrations. The rate of illustration was extremely variable, with some episodes like the Alexander sequence heavily illustrated but other, more fanciful ones like the Rasmian cycle less represented. Engravings of various minor kings were also included. Based on a combination of ideological and historical arguments, we concluded by attributing the manuscript to the patronage of the vizier Ghānīya b. Rāshīd b. Dā'ūd b. Arba'a who was appointed vizier in 1286 under Nasir al-Din al-Ma'nī, the last great vizier of the Mongol Ilkhanid dynasty. The manuscript was written in the 13th century.

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The only place we had to modify our original pagination was at the end of the first section where we had under-calculated by five folios. The text folio pasted under illustration 13, for example, is numbered 48, not the 43 we had estimated, and therefore the first section should end with folio 51, instead of folio 46.

This minor modification to the pagination does not alter our original reconstruction of a major luxury manuscript with some 280-300 folios. Further study, however, does show that we made a mistake in calculating the number of illustrations. We were able to reconstruct about half the original manuscript (approximately 150 of the 300 folios). Thinking of the 58 known illustrations, we had simply doubled the number and suggested that the manuscript originally had some 120 illustrations. Instead, we should have doubled the number of illustrations we were able to posit in the reconstructed half (95), giving a total of 190. The manuscript is thus more monumental than we had assumed, in line with the one made for Shah Tahmasp in the 16th century with 250 illustrations.

Furthermore, I can suggest that the original manuscript was bound in two volumes. Volume II would have begun with folio 142, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (pl. XIX A), with the heading ‘‘The Story of Rusam and Arba’’ (13). It is the only surviving illuminated folio. As it is numbered, it is, and always was, verso. Its recto (pl. XIX B) now contains the end of the preceding story about the seven exploits of Ibn-Idris, but this is a modern addition. The recto is penned in a dark hand that is different from the original manuscript but not of the altered pages but one with a bolder line and smaller characters. While folios and creases on recto and verso are consistent and suggest that the two were joined some time ago, nevertheless, close scrutiny shows that they were not originally the same folio. The last line of the plain recto, for example, is damaged, while there is no damage in the corresponding place on the illuminated verso. Holding the folio up to the light shows that the two were joined after the gold rulings were done, on the other side of the illuminated panels. We can compare the division of the ‘‘Demonte’’ Shāhmāna manuscript into two volumes to some of the other contemporary ‘‘small’’ Shāhmāna manuscripts, as expertly reconstructed by M. S. Simpson. Although much smaller in size, the folios from these manuscripts resemble those from the ‘‘Demonte’’ (text written in six columns by approximately 30 lines per page) making manuscripts of approximately the same number of folios as the ‘‘Demonte’’ (300). The first ‘‘small’’ Shāhmāna, like the ‘‘Demonte’’, is a rare paginated manuscript, and Simpson has reconstructed it as some 300 folios. Both it and the second ‘‘small’’ Shāhmāna, are divided into two volumes. In the second ‘‘small’’ Shāhmāna, the number of lines per page shifts from volume 1 to volume II. In the first ‘‘small’’ Shāhmāna, the division is marked by illuminated pages with verses about the beauty of the volume’s covers and paintings. In the ‘‘Demonte’’ Shāhmāna, there is no such division between the reigns of Kay Khusraw and Lutfānā (Rus-
Demotte then had all the folios remargined, using a cream colored paper slightly lighter than the original brown one. The paper he chose bears the watermark 1895 c.e., perhaps referring to the year 1895, when the manuscript was acquired from C. Edward Wells, and the two form an appropriate bifolio. Likewise, folio 20 in the Chester Beatty Library forms one with folio 15, the cut-up text page in the same collection.

Using these eight bifolios as guidelines, we can neatly divide the manuscript into 30 gatherings (apparently). Volume one, folios 1-141, would have filled 18 gatherings. Volume two, beginning with folio 142 and extending to folio 233, would have filled gatherings 19 to 30, but the complete manuscript probably extended to gathering 36 or 37. There are seven quires of volume I (1-5, 7, and 15) and from eleven quires of volume II (19-20 and 30). In each volume extra folios might have been used to fill the first quire: in volume I a blank folio would have preceded folio 142 with the illustrated frontispiece on the verso; in volume II I the first three folios could have been blank or could have contained the frontispiece to the epic before the double page frontispiece on folios 1-2 verso of the middle of the quire. This quire must have been almost totally destroyed, for only the last two folios, folio 5 with illustration 1, survives and it is badly damaged.

When he needed new text pages for his split miniatures, Demotte must have given the end quires of volume I to his calligrapher to copy, for all but one of the altered pages attached to split miniatures (folios 27, 28, 30, 33, 35, 40-51, and 100-115) come from the end of quire 4 and quires 5, 7, and 15. These seem to have entirely textual quires, without any known or postulated illustrations and strengthen our earlier argument about the uneven nature of the illustrated cycle.

In contrast, all the text folios of unusual format (folios 16, 20, 145, 147, 163, 167, 173, 179, and 180) were copied from other sections of the manuscript. They come from the beginning of volume I (quire 3) or from volume II (quires 19, 20, 21, 23 and 25). Another peculiarity of these text folios of unusual format is that all but one of them form bifolios with extant folios. Demotte ob

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9. Eric Schneider knew of this letter, for he notes that according to D. G. Kolekian, one of the first people to see the manuscript in Europe, it was extracted from the old royal library in Tehran, because Demotte's property was and then dispersed (Provenance Miniatures in the Fogg Museum of Art [Cambridge, 1942], p. 35).

10. Edgar Blöcht, Les Peintures du Manuscrit Ornemental de la Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris, 1917), p. 7 and 11, 10 already mentions that he hadn't seen the manuscript before Demotte's death, although he believes that it was finished.

11. See Simpson, p. 61 for split folios from the "famous" Sháhí manuscript.

12. In our 1980 publication we had included folio 142 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, with the illuminated heading as a text folio. Instead it should have been a blank page, for, unfortunately for us, the manuscript is missing, and as far as different from all other folios in that its verses are original, but its recto was added as a different time in a third hand.

13. In addition to the six already noted in our 1980 publication (two in the Chester Beatty Library and the Musée d'Art et d'histoire, Geneva, one in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the Fogg Library of Art) the Schmids have also acquired one as part of the Vevey Collection: folio 16 with a checkered border and a full verso. It is attached to folio 19 containing illustration 10.

14. Marjorie Gohn, Paper Conservator at the Harvard University Art Museums, tells me that the have never seen such a watermark, but that it might indicate a Greek origin for the paper.

15. One can determine illuminated frontispieces folios 173 attached to folio 180 with illustration 40, and folio 179 attached to folio 174v with illustration 36.

16. These bifolios are obviously modern for they were made after remargining, but they are not easily divided into flat pages due to the original gatherings. The older prole page is not used in the Chester Beatty Library, but does occur in the 1330 and 1341 miniatures described in Shiraz (Simpson, p. 61). Only the list of kings from the end of the prolece is preserved in the 1335 manuscript in Leiden (A. T. Adamson and L. T. Guillaumin, "Monastère Royal de Fars" "Sháhí" 1335 Codex (Leiden, 1985).
vously valued bifolios, for he sold one to Henri Vever with a real text folio (folio 166) attached to an illustrated one (folio 171 with illustration 32, "Taymash before Alexander and the Visit to the Brahmanas"). He must have wanted to make other bifolios to sell, for it was a popular arrangement to mount an illustrated page beside a text one to give the impression of an open book.

Demotte thus gave the calligrapher the folios that were pairs to other extant folios. The original text folios must have had blank spaces for miniatures, if there is insufficient text to fill the sides. The calligrapher looked for ways to stretch out the text. He tried the central column format, but in one case (folio 163v in the Freer Gallery) the lines of text did not end up symmetrical. He also tried the checkerboard arrangement, but ruling these pages was obviously very time consuming.

The rulings confirm the hypothesis of Demotte's commissioning the text folios of unusual format to make bifolios. Two of the unusual-format text folios are unruled. One (folio 20 in the Chester Beatty Library) forms a bifolio with folio 15, a real text folio also in the Beatty Library which was cut up and pasted on two other miniatures, 36 and 37, after they were photographed by the Archives Photographiques. The other unruled text folio (179v, once in the Béchage collection) forms a bifolio with 174, which originally contained miniatures 35 and 36 but was split and now an irrelevant text side (folio 113v). It has been pasted on the back of 174v with miniature 36. In other words, the partner to each of these two fake text folios was no longer available (in one case it was cut up and in one case it was a pastiche) and Demotte could not make these two fake text pages into bifolios, so the calligrapher abandoned ruling these two fake text pages because they were no longer needed.

The problem of making bifolios is evident in the one alternate text page with pasted-on miniature that does not come from the text queries: folio 150 with miniature 33 pasted-on, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. As mentioned above, all other text pages with split miniatures were copied from the text queries at the end of volume 1; only this folio was copied from volume 11, the section wherein the unusual-format text page was copied. In the reconstructed manuscript, it forms a bifolio with folio 155, originally containing miniatures 23, "Rustom Slaying Shahzad" in the British Museum and 24, "Picture of Rustom and Zavara's Bier" in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Having ordered folio 155 split, Demotte must have put aside its counterpart, folio 150, for a bifolio. Somehow folio 150 got mixed in with the pile of folios from text queries 4, 5, 7, and 15 and used as a model for a fake text folio on which to paste miniature 23. The folio ended up in the same collection as its partner from the original bifolio, and the two may even have been paired originally.

It is easy to see why Demotte got tired of this time-consuming process of splitting, recopying, and remargining folios and soon turned to the more profitable business of selling. According to Kelkian, Demotte acquired the manuscript around 1910; he started selling individual folios ca. 1915. Some of the first buyers were French. Georges Mariette died in 1916, bequeathing his three illustrated folios to the Louvre and later the illuminated one with attached text folio to the Bibliothèque Nationale. M. H. Vever was another early buyer. He seems to have acquired most of his folios before Demotte held an exhibition in 1918 in his gallery at 27, Rue de Berri. Echkani Kelkian also claimed to have had an early copy, picking the four best miniatures (16, 41, 53, 56) but at least two were still in Demotte's hands in his early exhibition.

Demotte moved his galleries to New York and North American collectors soon entered the scene. The 22 exhibited at Burlington House, London in 1931 included all eight from the Vever Collection and six still in the hands of Demotte, New York (miniatures 5, 11, 22, 45, 51, and 57). The remaining eight were in American and Canadian collections: Edward Forbes had bought three (19, 30, 47, now at Harvard); E. Wells, New York; and the four from Minneapolis (folios 16, 17, 27, 29) were still in the hands of Demotte in 1931.

21. H. Khan Moafi apparently mounted the folios of the second "small" Shāh-nāma manuscript in this fashion (Simpson, p. 89). She notes that the text folios do not follow sequentially with their illustrated partners, but one wonders whether some of them were bifolios like those from the "Demotte" manuscript. The two folios from Brussels (DTS 9-70), for example, come from the same story.

22. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts acquired the two folios at different times, one (folio 155 with miniature 24) directly from Demotte in 1922 and the other (folio 150 with miniature 33 pasted-on) from Donnison Ross in 1950. However, knowing how closely Ross worked with the museum, it is quite possible that in 1922 Ross initiated the acquisition of the whole bifolio with two illustrated folios, keeping one half for himself and having the museum take the other.

23. Two of these two, then, might have formed a bifolio originally, there is one unusual-format text folio which does not form a bifolio: folio 189 in the Chester Beatty Library. The reconstructed manuscript, it is joined to folio 196, a missing folio but one whose text fits into space between two known folios, folio 195 with illustrations 46 and folio 197 with illustration 87. It has no idea why Demotte set it aside for remargining.

24. My thanks to the Conservators in the Oriental Department of the Louvre who informed me that the three miniatures were bequeathed to the museum on December 20, 1916.

25. Chadwyke-Adle kindly provided a copy of the catalogue by Galerie G. J. Demonte, Exposition d'Art Iran (Paris, 1916)]. The only entry of Vever's miniatures which was on show is no. 32, "Taymash before Alexander and the Visit to the Brahmanas", listed as number 15 and according to precedents in the catalogue, sold for 20000 francs. Mariette's three miniatures were also not part of the exhibition.

26. Letters to John Thacker dated October 14 and November 5, 1937.

27. The eight miniatures (Beyan, Wilkerson, and Gray, 296), "Battle Exploit of Idrisidarrī" is also listed as being in the collection of Edward Forbes and then through the Fogg Art Museum. However, it cannot refer to "Idrisidarrī's Son being Killed by Rustam's Brother and Son" (19), for this is number 150. Perhaps it refers to 19, "Rustam and Idrisidarrī's father each other", now in Kansas City.

28. New York had bought two (12 and 21, now at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and Harvard); Mrs. Rainey Rogers had bought one (49, now in Cleveland; one (30) had already entered the collection of McGill University. By this time we are no longer talking about a manuscript, but rather individual miniatures.