34. The miniatures are as follows:

Makhzan al-Azar
1. The veiled woman pulling the hem of Sultan Sanjar's robe.
2. The pilgrim who entrusted his purse to a Sufi.

Ilkandername
1. Ilkander enthroned, with guest and attendants.
2. A warrior's head being split in battle.
3. Battle scene with Ilkander spearing one of his enemies.
4. Ilkander and a princess being entertained by female musicians.
5. Ilkander comforting the dying Dara.
6. Ilkander and his army in battle with the Habashis.
7. Ilkander observing Khor at a tournament to put a dried fish into the Water of Life.

£18,000-22,000
€23,750-30,750

36. Lu'f Ali Beg, Atashkadeh, Illustrated and illuminated persian Manuscript on paper with thirty miniatures and a fine contemporary lacquer binding, copied by Mirza Rahim, son of the late Mirza Muhammad, Qajar, Persia, dated A.H. 1216/A.D. 1801.

265 leaves, 25 lines per page written horizontally and diagonally in one or four columns of neat shikasteh script on cream paper, significant words picked out in red within gold-ruling panels, margins ruled in gold, catchwords in black. 30 miniatures, finely illuminated opening double page, some leaves with repairs mostly restricted to margins, fine contemporary floral lacquer binding.

28 by 19cm.

PROVENANCE
A bookplate on the upper doublure reads 'Kitabkhaneh Firouz' probably referring to General Firouz, a collector in Tabriz in the middle of this century or Prince Firouz.

£10,000-15,000
€14,900-22,300

EXHIBITED

LITERATURE
Falk, 1985, no. 193, p. 262.

The text compiled between 1770 and 1775, is a biography of Persian poets with examples of their work, and illustrated copies are very rare. The author Lu'f Ali Beg, was in service of the Aftashad dynasty and is reported to have been at Mashhad when Nadir Shah returned to his campaigns in India, and it is interesting to note that five of the thirty miniatures depict scenes of Nadir Shah himself.

The miniatures are of high quality and show unusual compositions, with great attention to the detail of flora. Illustrated manuscripts from the early Qajar period such as the present one are rare. There are thirty miniature paintings in early Qajar style, incorporating some late Safavid elements of costume and landscape. For a list of the miniatures please contact the department.

34 • ARTS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD

35 • ARTS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD

LONDON, 11 OCTOBER 2006 • 30
AN ILLUSTRATED LEAF FROM THE SHAHNAMA OF SHAH TAHMASP (KNOWN AS THE "HOUGHTON" SHAHNAMA)

36 BURZUY PRESENTS THE BOOK OF KAULAH WA DILLAH TO KING NUSHIRVAN,
ILLUSTRATED LEAF FROM THE ROYAL SHAHNAMA OF SHAH TAHMASP, FOLIO 649,
ATTRIBUTED TO ADA KIYAK, TABRIZ, SAFAVID, PERSIA, CIRCA 1530-40

ing, gouache and gold on paper, text above and below in four columns of fine nasta’liq script in black ink on gold-sprinkled cream paper, double intercolumnar rules in gold, reverse with text in four columns of fine nasta’liq script with double intercolumnar rules in gold, one large illuminated panel with heading in white thuluth script, eight smaller triangular illuminated panels; wide margins of gold-flecked cream paper

miniature 27.6 by 26.7cm.
leaf 47 by 31.8cm.
text 28 by 18.5cm.

PROVENANCE
Commissioned for the Safavid Emperor Shah Tahmasp, circa 1535-40
Presented in 1668 by Shah Tahmasp to the Ottoman Sultan Selim II (reigned 1566-16)
in the collection of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, 1903-1934
By Descent to Baron Maurice de Rothschild, 1934-1957
Taken as war loot by the Nazis from Paris, circa 1940
Returned to Baron de Rothschild, 1946-48

EXHIBITED
Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris, 1963
Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva, 1986

LITERATURE
Dickson and Welch, vol.II, no.246
Geneva 1986, no.59
The Shahnama manuscript made for Shah Tahmasp of Persia (1514-76, reigned 1524-76) is universally acknowledged as one of the supreme illustrated manuscripts of any period or culture and among the greatest works of art in the world. Probably no other Persian work of art, save architecture, has ever involved such enormous expense or taken so much artists’ time. No expense was spared, and the burnished paper, gold leaf, calligraphy, gilted leather binding and 258 large-scale illustrations occupied all the artists and artisans of the royal atelier for twenty years, a period when Persian painting and calligraphy was at its absolute zenith.

The Shahnama, or ‘Book of Kings’, is the Persian national epic, telling the history and mythology of Persia from prehistoric times until the seventh century. The author, Firdusi, presented his epic poem of 30,000 couplets, the result of thirty-five years work, to Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna in 1010 AD. It quickly became a revered and popular text associated intimately with kings and princes, and a symbol of royal sovereignty.

The Shah Tahmasp Shahnama is thought to have been started by Tahmasp’s father, the first Safavid emperor Shah Isma’Iil (r 1502-24). By 1522, the probable date of the commissioning of this copy of the text, Shah Isma’Iil had completed his conquests and established his empire, and was devoting more time and energy to art and culture. Shah Isma’il died in 1524 and his son, Tahmasp, continued his father’s artistic projects, including this copy of the great Persian epic. The manuscript does not have a colophon, but the dedication states definitely that it was made for the library of Shah Tahmasp. One of the miniatures is dated 934 A.H./1527 A.D.

The provenance of this copy of the Shahnama is one of the most interesting of any manuscript. It was commissioned by one emperor, Shah Isma’il, by another Shah Tahmasp, gifted to a third, Sultan Selim II of the Ottoman Empire, and was later owned by one of the great bibliophilic families of the modern era, the Baron de Rothschild, whose Western manuscripts included such masterpieces as the Belles Heures of the Duc de Berry and the Hours of Catherine of Cleves. Its history is not without drama. During the Second World War the manuscript was taken from Paris by the Nazis as war loot and was later returned to Beren Maurice de Rothschild as a result of the restitution efforts of the Allied Command following the end of the war. The manuscript was acquired in 1957 by Arthur A Houghton Jr., the noted American bibliophile. The manuscript was disbound in order to exhibit the illustrated folios, but in 1971 seventy-six folios were transferred to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Thereafter further folios were separated and offered on the market. In 1994 the last block, illuminated, binding and remaining 116 miniatures were returned to Iran in a debt exchange for a Willem de Kooning painting.

In addition to those returned to Iran and the 78 in the Metropolitan Museum, there are illustrated folios from this manuscript in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, the David Collection, Copenhagen, the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., the Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The Episode Illustrated on Folio 649

The scene illustrated here shows the moment when Burzuy, after his travels and investigations in India, presents the finished book of the Fables of Kalilah wa Dimnah to King Nushirvan.

The story which leads up to this point relates how Burzuy, a wise and highly respected man of science and learning, had heard of a magical plant growing in the mountains of India, which, when applied as a salve to corpses, brought them back to life. This he related to King Nushirvan, and asked permission to travel to India to seek out this amazing herb. Nushirvan gave his blessing to the venture and sent Burzuy on his way with precious gifts and treasures for the Rajah of India. On arrival in India, and having presented his diplomatic gifts to the Rajah, Burzuy turned towards the mountains and set off on his quest. However, after many months of searching and testing every herb he could find, he had still not discovered the magical plant. Dispirited, and nervous about the potential displeasure of King Nushirvan, he was brought to a great and wise sage of advanced years. The sage told Burzuy that the object of his quest was not a plant, but a book of knowledge and wisdom called the Kalilah wa Dimnah. By reading the book a man without knowledge is brought to wisdom and understanding – the lifeless man is revived. Thus Burzuy realised that the magical plant was a metaphor for the Kalilah wa Dimnah, and the story of the reviving corpse was symbolic of the power of science and learning.

Burzuy returned to the Rajah’s palace and asked to be allowed to copy the Kalilah wa Dimnah, but the Rajah allowed him only to read it to himself. However, realising the importance of the wisdom contained in it, Burzuy read out as much every day as he could remember, and by night he would copy out what he had memorised. Every time he wrote to King Nushirvan he included a chapter of Kalilah wa Dimnah, so that eventually King Nushirvan wrote to him, saying “The sea of knowledge has reached our shores.” Burzuy then departed for Iran and was received with great ceremony and praise by King Nushirvan, who told him: “By virtue of your Kalilah, I feel my spirit revived and filled with life.” The king commissioned Burzuy to translate the text into Pahlavi, and the resulting manuscript was kept in the royal treasury.

The symbolism of this scene has three levels. The first is the stated one concerning the magical plant and the book of Kalilah wa Dimnah, representing the power of science and learning. The second is the fact that the magical plant and the book of Kalilah wa Dimnah are to be found in India, a source of wisdom and knowledge throughout the ancient and medieval epochs. It is pertinent that this episode in the Shahnama follows immediately that of the arrival of the game of chess at the court of Nushirvan, also from India, sent as a gift and riddle from the Rajah of Hind to the same king of Persia. The third is that of the presentation of a treasured book of literature by an author to a King of Iran. In this we may see Firdusi creating a parallel to his own situation as a poet about to offer his own masterpiece of literature to a powerful Sultan, a literary self-portrait in a manner similar to that of other western artists who included themselves in group scenes.
The episode of Buzurj comes near the end of the Shahnama, and the riches and approbation conferred on Buzurj by his king was perhaps a timely hint to a potential patron to reward Firdausi in a like manner. That Firdausi was to receive a dramatically different reward is ironic. When Firdausi finally presented his 20,000 couplets to Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, he was rewarded so meagrely that, in high dudgeon, he divided the coins between the bath-house attendant and a passing sherbet seller. A further irony is that Firdausi’s epic was to become a touchstone of Iranian literature, the text which, above all others, was to be revered by future kings as confirmation of their sovereignty, and in turn surpassing the fame and popularity of the Kullah ve Dimma.

This text of Kullah ve Dimma, also known as the "Fables of Bqai", was based on a third century Sanskrit work, the Pancatantra. As its name implies, it was a set of five books, each a series of stories of practical wisdom and sagacious conduct, with an animal tone, demonstrated by the animal characters such as the jackals, lion, bull, crows and so on. As well as Pahlavi, it was translated into Syriac, Arabic, Greek, Latin and Castilian by the thirteenth century, and was hugely influential on a wide variety of eastern and western literature.

The Artist

Aqa Mirak was one of the leading royal artists of Shah Tahmasp’s reign and is thought to have been the director of the atelier during the later years of the production of this manuscript. Many of the illustrations in this crisp, clear style, with a vibrant palette and large figures, are to be found in the later pages of the Shahnama. Nevertheless, such was his reputation amongst his fellow artists and his patron that he was given the honour of painting the first illustration in this copy of the Shahnama; the scene of Firdausi and the Court Poets of Ghazna, on folio 7. He was a boon companion of Shah Tahmasp himself and contemporary sources indicate how highly he was regarded by his fellow artists. S.C. Welch gives a lengthy and perceptive account of Aqa Mirak in the first volume of the great two-volume publication with Martin Bernhard Dickson, published in 1981 (pp.95-117). Therein we discover that Dust Muhammad, another of the artists of the royal atelier, describes Aqa Mirak thus:

"the austerity of the community of Sayyids, the genius of the age, the proclivity of our era....the Heir to the Khans....among those privileged to approach the Shah....At the House of Painting he but picks up his brush and depicts for us pictures of unparalleled delight. As for limitlesseness - where are they like? - as the tasseled view them, they are foremost in sight. God grant him his pictures and paintings! Good Lord! The glory of this painter! What God-given might!" (Dickson and Welch, Vol I, p.95).

Sam Mirza, another of his contemporaries, describes him as "a genius of the age, as peerless in designing as in painting....the guiding spirit of the corps of artists" (Dickson and Welch, Vol I, p.95).

Finally, Qabat al-Qin, writing in 1566-7, describes him as "the peerless paragon..." and S.C. Welch explains that he was "the soul" of the Tabriz School of artists.

Aqa Mirak also contributed to the other great royal manuscript of Shah Tahmasp’s reign, the Khamsa of Nizami, now in the British Library (IO-2251). His career continued after the decline of Shah Tahmasp’s interest in painting in the 1550s, and he subsequently painted for Prince Ibrâhim Mirza.

The principal works on the Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp and other royal manuscripts of the period are as follows:

Welch, S.C., Royal Persian Manuscripts, London, 1976
Welch, S.C., Wonders of the Age: Masterpieces of Early Safavid Painting, 1501-1576, Harvard, 1979

Other publications relating to this miniature or to early Safavid Painting include:

G.F.C. Répertoire des Bains Scolaire on France Durand de Guerre 1929-45, VII, p.34, no.398
Bernard O’Kane, Early Persian Painting, Kzilla and Dimra Manuscripts of the Late Fourteenth Century, London, 2003

£700,000-1,000,000
£6,040,000-1,490,000

LONDON, 15 OCTOBER 2008 • 45
The majority of leaves from this manuscript are in the Freer Gallery, Washington, while others are in the Art and History Trust Collection (Soudavar 1990, nos. 10-6) and several have been sold in those rooms, 18 October 2001, lot 95; 14 October 1999, lot 39; 22 April 1980, lot 191; 21 April 1980, lots 32-33; 23 April 1979, lots 34-37; 3 April 1979, lots 19-26; and in our New York rooms, 25 March 1997, lot 201, and 10 December 1981, lot 130.

£ 8,000-10,000
€11,900-14,900

38 ILLUSTRATED LEAF FROM A MANUSCRIPT OF FIRDUSI'S SHAHNAMA; KAY KHUSRAU SLEYS AFRASIYAB, SHIRAZ, SAFAVID, PERSIA, CIRCA 1560

gouache heightened with gold on paper, text written in four columns of nasta‘liq script in black ink, interlinear and intercolumnar illumination, margins ruled in colours and gold, borders decorated in gold with flora, vermicilli, with 16 lines of text, illuminated on the diagonal in black nasta‘liq on cream paper with small triangular panels of illumination within the text area, margins ruled in colours and gold
miniature 25cm.
leaf 38.2cm.
text area 24.5cm.

This episode from the Shahnama occurs during the ongoing war between the Iranians and the Turanians. The army of Afrasiyab, the evil king of Turan, who had betrayed Sivasah and had him executed, had suffered several defeats, but Afrasiyab himself still survived. In this incident Kay Khusru, King of Iran, personally leads the army to fight the Turanians, who once again call on the emperor of China for help. But the Iranian armies rout their enemies and pursue the fleeing Afrasiyab. Afrasiyab is caught and duly executed for his crimes of murder and treason, but he is given a royal burial as befits his rank.

£ 8,000-10,000
€11,900-14,900

37 ILLUSTRATED LEAF FROM THE ‘FREER SHAHNAMA’; SHIRAZ AND QURAYZEH IN COMBAT, BAGHDAD OR PERSIA, CIRCA 1300-1340

gouache heightened with gold on paper, text in six columns of nasta‘liq script above and below the miniature, headings in gold with black outlines, margins and intercolumnar rules in red, the reverse with 21 lines of text
miniature 73 by 16.7cm.
leaf 39.1 by 21cm.
text area 24.3 by 17.4cm.

PROVENANCE
Formerly part of the Hoppo Keworkian Fund, sold in these rooms 21st April 1980, lot 33

This miniature originates from a dispersed copy of Firdusi’s Shahnama generally known as the ‘Freer Shahnama’, which in turn belongs to a group known as the ‘small Shahnamas’. Over the years these manuscripts have been attributed to Western India, Shiraz and Tabriz about 1340, but detailed study in the late 1970s pointed to an origin in Baghdad at the turn of the fourteenth century (Simpson 1979). For a recent reference to this group of Shahnamas see the exhibition catalogue Komaroff and Carbon, 2002, pp. 150-156.
Rustam is arguably the greatest and certainly the most popular character in Firdausi’s Shahnama, whilst all of Firdausi’s characters are complex - some of the most evil have moments of humanity, and some of the kindest have moments of cruelty. Rustam is the closest to the archetypal hero. His legendary deeds include slaying the madonned white elephant of King Manuchehr with a single blow, and taming his faithful stallion Raksh. In this episode we find Rustam again exhibiting his legendary strength and cunning, lassoing Kamus, the Khagan of China.

$ 60,000-9,000
€89,000-13,400

Manuchehr was the first of the Shahs to rule Iran after its fragmentation from a world empire. His rule was overcast by the blood feud between himself and his two avaricious uncles, Salm and Tur, who had murdered his father. It is from this story that the second cycle of the Shahnama begins, with the war of vengeance between the Tiranans and the Turanians only ending with the reign of Kay Khusrau many years later. This particular episode captures the moment of Manuchehr’s revenge.

$ 60,000-9,000
€89,000-13,400