

SHĀH-NĀMAH

PARTS OF A MANUSCRIPT DATED 741 (1340/1)

*A fragmentary manuscript of the Shāh-nāmāh of Firdausī*

**SUBJECT AND ARRANGEMENT.** These disconnected portions of a manuscript of the Epic comprise about one-fourth of the original total. The text starts with part of

the archaic preface of the *Shāh-nāmāh* of which only two folios have been preserved here. This archaic preface was the one composed in the 5th or 6th century for the work of Firdausī, but it embodies also the introduction to the prose Book of Kings composed in 345 and 346 (956 and 957) by order of Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Razzāq, the Governor of Tūs. It was this prose work which Firdausī rendered into verse, and the introduction in question is all that remains of it.<sup>1</sup> The preface commences with the history of the *Katīla wa Dimna* and Rūdakī's rendering of this into Persian verse, of the Chinese painters who illustrated it, and of how Abū Maṣṣūr, desiring that some book should be written in his name, requested his minister to gather together four learned men in order that they should compose in Persian the account of the deeds and exploits of the ancient kings and heroes of Iran. In the present manuscript the accounts of Firdausī's life and of the circumstances attending the writing of the Epic and of his satire on Sultan Maḥmūd, are all missing. There follows a list of the Pīshdādī kings, preceded by one of 'Muḥammad's Dynasty', added to fill a blank page. It is unnecessary to describe the remainder of the text in detail.

**MEASUREMENTS, ETC.** 37.5 × 30 cm.; the written surface generally measures 28.5 × 25 cm.; 6 columns of 30 lines; 85 folios.

**WRITING AND PAPER.** The writing is a clear *Naskh* enclosed within red lines. The headings are in red and black. The text is written on a soft-sized cotton paper, of a biscuit tone; the edges have been torn and repaired.

**BINDING.** The cover, which is of excellent craftsmanship, belonging originally probably to a contemporary manuscript of the Koran, is of blind-tooled and gilt leather, ornamented with intersecting rectilinear patterns within a border of gold lines. This style occurs in Persia in the early 14th century and in Egypt in the Mamlūk period.

**DATE AND SCRIBE.** Other portions of this manuscript are in existence in various collections. One portion, formerly belonging to M. H. Vever, contains a colophon with the date A.H. 741 (1341) and a dedication to Qivām al-Dīn Ḥasan, Vazīr of Fars, the friend and patron of the poet Ḥāfiẓ.

The scribe is not known.

**ILLUMINATION AND ILLUSTRATIONS.** On fol. 1b are two *sarlawhs* finely illuminated in gold with lotus and other floral and geometrical patterns, and 'plaited' ornament in the side margins; on the next page is another in the same style.

There are fourteen pictures, designed as narrow bands, running across the full breadth of the text.

They are of a rare and peculiar type, and are to be associated with those in another manuscript of the epic of the same style at Leningrad (dated A.H. 733), and with one in the Top-qapu Serai Library in Istanbul (dated A.H. 731); with a manuscript (undated) of a Persian novel, *Kitāb i Samak 'Ayyār*, in the Bodleian (which may, however, be earlier), and a few others. It seems probable that all were executed at Shiraz, the capital of Fars.