

102. Persian 9, Safavid Iran, late 16th-17th century

Contents: *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī.

Folios: 441 fols. (with 2 fly leaves at both front and back); paper, meas. 36.5 x 23.5 cm. Folios are numbered in a Persian hand on the bottom left of each verso, and also in Arabic (later) between folios

17-133 inclusive, on the upper left of rectos. The folios have been repaired and the binding restitched, perhaps when the Arabic numbers were added.

Ruling: 29 lines, ruled in four columns in a frame (26 x 16 cm) edged in gold, blue and brown. At 1.80 cm from the edge of the folio thin black lines define the page.

Script: *Nasta'liq* in black ink with titles in red. The scribe worked first, leaving the appropriate space for the artists.

Quiring: [2+]1 bifolio [+1]; [2+]4; 2 x 5; 3; 5; 2 x 3; 1 bifolio; 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 2 x 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 4; 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 2; 5; 3; 5; 3; 5; 4; 3; 5; 3; 5 x 4; 5; 3[+1].

Stamps: There are stamps on the fly-leaves at the front and back.

Binding: Contemporary lacquer binding (same front and back) with gilded floral motifs on a dark brown ground. Red and green floral motifs occupy a central block-stamped medallion, and there are deep-set cornerpieces with flowers against an orange-gilded ground. The spine has a floral cloth binding strip, now removed and restored.

Conservation: Since 1994 the manuscript had been conserved and rebound, using the original cover, and boxed.

Provenance: The illuminated frontispieces, painted predominantly in gold, red and blue, are reminiscent of Safavid *Qur'ān* manuscripts. The narrative scenes are of two styles, attributable to different painters. One, who worked at the beginning and end of the

manuscript (miniatures between fols. 15v-93v; 392-426r)-painted in a bright, colourful style, relying on detail and pattern (e.g. plate 43 of fol. 416r). The other artist, to whom miniatures between fols. 94r-378v and fol. 431r at the end can be ascribed (e.g. plate 42 of fols. 98v-99r), worked in a heavier, less subtle manner, with less detail and reliance on stock formulae and uniform pink grounds. The latter style has been compared by B. Robinson with those of a *Shāhnāma* in London (B.L. Or. 12084-12086) made at Ashtarabad and dated Rajab 972 A.H./February 1565 A.D., although he thought the Birmingham manuscript 'clearly later'.⁶² But this latter style, especially in the faces, armour, and the way in which figures emerge from behind rocks etc. is also not unlike a style attributed to Isfahan in the mid-17th century.⁶³ More recently a 19th date has been suggested.⁶⁴

⁶² Robinson (see under bibliography for this manuscript), 114.

⁶³ For example a *Shāhnāma* (Manchester, Ryl. Pers. 909) of AD 1650 reproduced by B. Robinson, *Persian Painting in the John Rylands Library: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Sotheby's, London, 1980), 330-45. Fol. 266b, reproduced 338, fig. 1538, has Gushtasp slaying the dragon. His face and helmet are comparable, as is his stance, half-way out of the frame. Two figures peer over a hill at the top of the picture, also just as in scenes in Mingana Pers. 9.

⁶⁴ Waley, *List*.

Illustration: A double frontispiece (fols. 1v-2r) and 72 miniatures distributed through the manuscript: fols. 15v, 20r, 22r, 26v, 37r, 45v, 49v, 50v, 52v, 65r, 76v, 84r, 86v, 89r, 93v, 98v (plate 42), 99r (plate 42), 101v, 107r, 115v, 121r, 134r, 135v, 142r, 149v, 154r, 155v, 161v, 170v, 177v, 180v, 181v, 192r, 207r, 213v, 218r, 219r, 221v, 229r, 233v, 237v, 238v, 242r, 246r, 247r, 247v, 256v, 261r, 265r, 268r, 270v, 277v, 279v, 283r, 288v, 293v, 312v, 314v, 320v, 324v, 325v, 332v, 352v, 364r, 370r, 378v, 392r, 397v, 404r, 416r (plate 43), 426r, 431r.⁶⁵

The miniatures are in rectangular panels varying between approx. 12-19 cm x 14.3 cm, stepped across the columns of text. The colour range includes light and dark green, orange, red, blue, yellow, pink, black and gold. Inscriptions have been added in black ink to miniatures in the earlier part of the manuscript but discontinued after fol. 261r. The miniatures are in good condition, with the exception of fol. 293v. The silver of helmets, swords etc. has oxidised throughout.

Bibliography: B.W. Robinson, *Persian Miniatures from Collections in the British Isles* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1967), 114 no. 183.

⁶⁵ A partial list identifying the miniatures made by B. Robinson, 16 August 1976 is deposited in the Library. Here Robinson observed that 'a considerable number of obscure incidents are illustrated ... whilst others of which illustrations are normally found in copies of the epic ... are omitted.'