

## The Last Qajar *Shahnama*: The *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* (1319-26/1901-8)

Ulrich Marzolph

The first complete edition of the *Shahnama* in print is the one published by Turner Macan in four volumes in Calcutta in 1829. While this text was printed in movable type, the vast majority of the subsequent editions of the *Shahnama* were printed by means of lithography.<sup>1</sup> Their exact number still remains unknown today. Starting with the Bombay edition of 1262/1846, probably some thirty lithographed Oriental editions of the *Shahnama* were published, most of them in Indian cities such as Bombay, Lucknow and Cawnpore. The first published in Iran – in fact the third lithographed edition ever prepared, after a second Bombay edition published in 1266/1849 – was produced in 1265-7/1848-50. Referring to its calligrapher, Mustafa-Quli b. Muhammad Hadi Sultan Kajuri, this edition is known as the *Shahnama-yi Kajuri*.<sup>2</sup> Following this, altogether five Iranian editions were prepared in the Qajar period. These editions in terms of their general characteristics fall into two distinct groups. The first comprises the first four editions, published in 1265-7/1848-50, 1275/1858, 1307/1889, and 1316/1898, two each in Tehran and Tabriz, respectively. The second group consists of the fifth and last *Shahnama* published in Qajar Iran, known by the name of its sponsor, Husain-Pasha Khan Amir Bahadur, as the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*.

This *Shahnama* differs from all other Persian editions in several regards. First, the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* is larger than any other previous edition of the *Shahnama*. Second, its illustrative programme is less voluminous than any of the previous editions, comprising altogether 40 (against the usual set of at least 57) illustrations related to the *Shahnama*'s text. And third, its illustrations in terms of both content and style differ decisively from the previous editions. I have dealt with the first group of lithographed Iranian *Shahnamas* in my contribution to the First *Shahnama* Conference in Cambridge in 2001.<sup>3</sup> This presentation, then, is to introduce the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* in more detail.

1 See Ulrich Marzolph, *Narrative illustration in Persian lithographed books* (Leiden, Boston & Köln, Brill, 2004), at 24, 261 ff.

2 Javad Safi-nizhad, "Shahnama-ha-yi chap-i sangi", *Miras-i farhangi* 14 (1374/1995), 24-30.

3 Ulrich Marzolph, "Illustrated Persian lithographic editions of the *Shahname*", *Edebiyat* 13/ii (2002), 177-

I propose do so in four steps: Following (1) a physical description, (2) the illustrations to the book's text will be presented. After this, I will focus on (3) problems relating to the chronology of the book's production. In a final step, I will (4) recount the political events contemporary with the production of the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* and relate it to the historical circumstances of the time as well as to its sponsor.

#### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE EDITION

The *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* contains 684 printed pages on a total of 343 folios: It starts on the unnumbered fol. 1b with a two-page laudatory passage on the Qajar ruler Muhammad-'Ali Shah (1324-7/1906-9). This is followed by an equally unnumbered four-page introduction (*dibacha*) containing laudatory passages on the previous Qajar ruler Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1313-24/1895-1906) and mentioning the circumstances of the edition's production. After these six unnumbered pages, fol. 4b is the first numbered page; the pages 1 to 16 contain a prose introduction compiled by Muhammad Sadiq al-Husaini al-Farahani 'Adib al-Mamalik'. Incorporating the so-called Baysunghuri preface, the introduction treats Firdausi (*sharh-i ahval-i Firdausi-yi Tusi*; pp. 1-9), the satirical poem on Sultan Mahmud (*hajv-nama*), allegedly composed by Firdausi (pp. 10-11), and the history of Sultan Mahmud (*mukhtasar-i tarikh va tarjuma-yi Yamin al-Daula Sultan Mahmud Sebuktigin Ghaznavi*; pp. 11-16). Two more unnumbered pages (fols. 12b-13a) reproduce a poem in praise of Muzaffar al-Din Shah.

The *Shahnama's* actual text starts on fol. 13b. Its four books cover 172, 124, 153, and 133 pages, respectively. As each book starts on a right-side page, chapters three and four end in a blank page. The text is followed by the usual appendix (*mulhaqat*), comprising 55 pages (plus one blank page), a glossary of difficult terms (pp. 1-16), and a list of kings (*fihrist-i salatin-i 'ajam*; pp. 16-17). The volume is terminated on fol. 343a with a portrait of its sponsor, Amir Bahadur.

The *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* measures 32 x 43 cm, with a written area of 19.5 x 32 cm. The written space is framed by a total of three fine lines and one bold one, grouped in pairs. The outer couple of lines on the outer corners lead into graphic ornaments that are repeated more or less identically throughout the whole work. The text is written in six columns with a maximum of 33 lines each, separated from each other by two fine lines. It is structured by occasional chapter headings written in a slightly larger pen and placed within the two centre columns. A centred running header written in a fairly bold pen mentions the *Shahnama's* respective volume on the right side and the respective ruler treated on the left. Below the running header, in the space between the two pairs of framing lines, each of the *Shahnama's* four volumes – as well as the introduction and the appendix – is numbered in Arabic



Fig. 1 'Portrait of Muhammad-'Ali Shah',  
by Musavvir al-Mulk, *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, book 1, fol. 1b

numerals. Outside the framing lines on the inward lower left, the pages normally contain the first word of the following page (custodian, catchword).

The text of the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* was prepared under the supervision of the Parsi-speaking *mubad* 'Abd al-'Aliy Bidgeli, who also compiled the glossary. Its calligraphy was prepared by Muhammad-Husain 'Imad al-Kuttab,<sup>4</sup> and the printing was achieved in the establishment (*taft-khana*) of Aqa Sayyid Murtaza,<sup>5</sup> together with his two masters of printing, Aqa Mirza Hasan and Aqa Mirza 'Abbas, the latter being a former member of the palace guard (*az sar-bazan-i qadim-i gard-i nusrat*).

4 Mehdi Bayani, *Ahval va asar-i khushnvisan*, 4 vols. in 2, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1363/1984), II, 697-700, no. 995 (the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* is mentioned at p. 699).

5 Husain Mirza Gulpayagani, *Tarikh-i chap va chapkhana dar Iran (1050 qamari ta 1320 shamsi)* (Tehran, 1378/1999), 44-50.



Fig. 2 'Portrait of Muzaffar al-Din Shah',  
by Musavvir al-Mulk, *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, book 1, fol. 12b

As mentioned in the initial passage, the final phase of production was looked after by Mirza Isma'il Khan 'Imad al-Mamalik Tafrihi, the first secretary at the imperial court (*mustaufi-yi avval-i divan-i a'la*), with the general assistance and financial support of the experienced publisher Mirza Mahmud Khvansari.

In terms of adornment not directly related to the text, the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* contains three life-like portraits. The portraits are signed by Mirza Mahdi Musavvir al-Mulk (fol. 1b: Muhammad-'Ali Shah [see fig. 1], fol. 12b: Muzaffar al-Din Shah [see fig. 2], fol. 343a: Amir Bahadur [see fig. 3]), an artist famed for the realistic portraits he prepared above all for the newspapers *Sharaf* and *Sharafat*.<sup>6</sup> An unsigned realistic illustration purports to represent Firdausi's tomb (*maqbara-yi Firdausi*) in

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad-'Ali Karimzada Tabrizi, *Ahval va asar-i naqqashan-i qadim-i Iran va barkhi az mashahir-i nigar-gar-i Hind va 'Usmani*, 3 vols. (London, 1985-91), III, 1247-51, no. 1295.



Fig. 3 'Portrait of Amir Bahadur',  
by Musavvir al-Mulk, *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, book 1, fol. 343a

Tus (on the bottom of fol. 12a, below the final passage of text [fig. 4]). As Iraj Afshar has pointed out, the ruined building depicted is not Firdausi's tomb but rather the building known as *Haruniya*.<sup>7</sup> This building is situated in the vicinity of Firdausi's tomb and allegedly contains the tomb of the prominent scholar and mystic Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111).

The text blocks of the two pages following the introduction are framed by vegetal ornaments that are topped by winged *putti*. The page opposing the portrait of Muzaffar al-Din Shah (fol. 13a) is headed by Qajar symbols [see fig. 5]. Two male lions facing the spectator are lifting the Qajar crown. Each of them is also holding a sword and is backed by a radiant two-eyed sun. The lions are standing on a ribbon

7 Iraj Afshar, "Shahnama, az khatti ta chapi", *Honar va mardom* 14, 162 (2535/1976), 17-45.

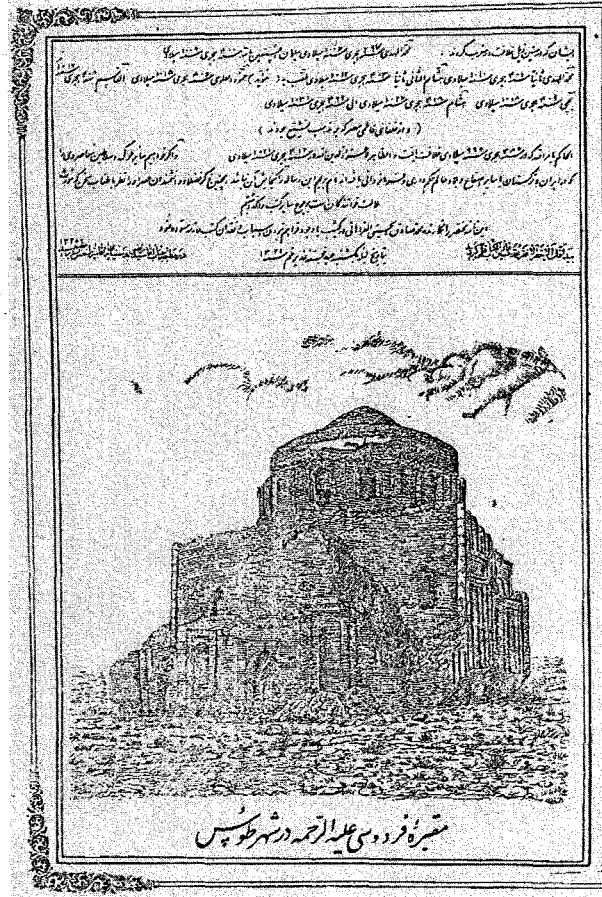


Fig. 4 'Firdausi's tomb' (*maqbara-yi Firdausi*) in Tus, *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, book 1, fol. 12a

mentioning the year 1319/1901 as the third year of Muzaffar al-Din's reign. Between the lions there is a globe showing Iran in its centre. Both Muzaffar al-Din and the lions are framed by a garland of laurel and oak-leaves.

The opening pages of each of the *Shahnama's* volumes are adorned by graphic ornaments. The text of book 2 is moreover headed by an illustration depicting two men each stabbing a unicorn monster; this book's text is followed by a full page of illustrations, depicting Shapur Ardashir and Ardashir Babakan on horseback on top, and Isfandiyar together with Gushtasp facing Zarathustra (*timsar-i Zardusht*). Book 3 is headed by a depiction of Shapur Ardashir Babakan on horseback, accompanied by seven armed men standing to his rear. Book 4 begins with a depiction of (Khusrau) Parviz, with Qaisar to his left and Shirin to his right side. The top of the first page of the appendix is structured in squares, obviously so as to contain some



Fig. 5 Qajar symbols,  
Shahname-yi Bahaduri, book 1, fol. 13a

sort of adornment which, however, is not executed. The illustrations of the historical characters are quite obviously modelled on the rock-carvings at Takht-i Sulaiman, such as they had been available to the Iranian public by way of Fursat Shirazi's *Athar al-'ajam*.<sup>8</sup>

#### ILLUSTRATIONS TO THE TEXT

While the above-mentioned adornment and illustrations are printed on the same pages as the text, the *Shahname-yi Bahaduri* is supplemented by a total of 40 illustrations related to the text. These are printed on separate sheets that were later

8 Muhammad Nusair Mirza Aqa Fursat Shirazi, *Athar al-'ajam* (Bombay, Matba'-i Nasiri, 1314/1896), see illustrations no. 11 (following p. 102), no. 29 (following p. 199), and no. 45 (following p. 388).

inserted into the text. The printed space of the illustrations varies and often comes close to filling the full printed page. The illustrations are framed by lines in a similar way as are the text pages, while here all four corners are embellished with ornaments executed in a variety of styles. An inscription outside and to the bottom of the illustration on the right side supplies the respective scene's identification and on the left side mentions the page and volume to which it belongs (*muta'alliq bi-safha-yi ... jild-i ...*). While the majority of illustrations are prepared in a horizontal format, four illustrations are in a vertical format, the identification of the initial three illustrations being placed on the outward left.

The illustrations have been prepared by at least three artists, signing themselves as Husain-'Āli (seven pictures [see fig. 6a, 7a]), Muhammad-Kazim (two [see fig. 6b]) and 'Ali-Khan (one [see fig. 7b]). The illustrations have been printed in a separate print-run on single sheets of relatively solid paper that prior to printing had been folded in the middle. The reverse sides of these sheets are blank, and the sheets have always been inserted and bound together with the text so as to show their reverse side first, regardless of which page they might belong to. For the present discussion, only these illustrations are considered.

As has already been mentioned, the illustrative programme of the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* differs from all previous lithographed editions of the *Shahnama* in several aspects. After (a) introducing the three artists that collaborated in illustrating the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, in the following I will briefly discuss the illustrations in terms of (b) their production on separate sheets and their size, and (c) the programme of illustrated scenes.

#### *The artists*

The author of the *dibacha*, Adib al-Mamalik, refers to the main artist responsible for illustrating the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* in the following way: 'Mirza 'Ali-Khan from Isfahan, who is the 'Second Mani of the East', with his work of illustration has invested fresh vigour into this multifarious tapestry and seven-coloured book'.<sup>9</sup> Short as this characterization is, it demonstrates the author's preference for antiquated terms and colourful, if not pompous, imagery. The comparison of a talented artist with Mani, the legendary Iranian master-painter, serves as a standard expression of perfection. In a similar way, it has been used by other artists, contemporary and historical, even when introducing themselves.<sup>10</sup> The boastful comparison is further accentuated by mentioning the *Arzhang* (also called *Artang*; here simply translated

9 'Mirza 'Ali-Khan Sipahani niz ki divvumin Mani-yi Khavaristan ast dar kar-i nigar-gari an parda-yi arzhang va nama-yi angalyun-ra taza namud.'

10 See Eleanor Sims, with Boris I. Marshak and Ernst J. Grube, *Peerless images: Persian painting and its sources* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2002), 6, mentioning the Qajar artist Muhammad Isma'il, who signed himself as 'a man from the line of Mani'; see also 20, 60, 85.





Fig. 6a 'Rostam kills the white elephant',  
by Husain-'Ali, *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, after book 1, p. 46



Fig. 6b 'Rostam mourns Suhrab',  
by Muhammad-Kazim, *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, after book 1, p. 101

as ‘multifarious’), a denomination linked to a notion of a colourful masterpiece of art produced by Mani. The exact characteristics of that masterpiece are not clear, as some sources mention his house while others refer to a lavishly illustrated manuscript.<sup>11</sup> In view of this magnificent introduction, it is surprising to see that ‘Ali-Khan signed only a single illustration (no. 25). Moreover, the other two artists who participated in illustrating the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* are not mentioned at all by Adib al-Mamalik, even though their signatures appear more often. As only a quarter of the illustrations bear a signature, and as the characteristics of style do not allow an unambiguous attribution of the illustrations to specific artists, the quantity of each artist’s contribution remains unclear. At any rate, Adib al-Mamalik’s wording appears to denote ‘Ali-Khan as a kind of master or supervisor. As is known from his other works, ‘Ali-Khan was a prominent artist of lithographic illustration, who illustrated numerous copies of cheap narrative literature in a period extending from 1298/1880 to 1332/1913.<sup>12</sup> Considering his production, he must have been a prominent senior artist at the time when the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* was commissioned.

Husain-‘Ali b. ‘Abd-Allah-Khan, whose signature appears a total of seven times (nos. 5, 7, 9, 22, 23, 26, 31), is also known from illustrating various lithographed books. His active period extends from 1317/1899 to 1323/1905, and thus he appears to have been a junior to ‘Ali-Khan. As I have argued elsewhere, Husain-‘Ali might have been a student of Mirza Nasr-Allah, a prominent artist active in lithographic illustration for almost two decades between 1289/1872 and 1316/1898.<sup>13</sup> Husain-‘Ali is also known to have contributed political cartoons to *Chap-i sangi*, a journal published under the directorship of Adib al-Mamalik and printed in the same establishment as the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*. This journal’s first issue was published on 27 Rajab 1321 (24 May 1903).<sup>14</sup>

The third artist, Muhammad-Kazim al-Hamadani, signed a total of two illustrations (nos. 10, 13). Whether or not he is identical with the Muhammad-Kazim who is mentioned as the son of Muhammad-‘Ali Sultan al-Kuttab, a famous calligrapher and illuminator active in the reign of the last Qajar ruler Ahmad Shah (1327-43/1909-24), remains open to speculation.<sup>15</sup> In addition to his participation in the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, Muhammad-Kazim is known to have signed two single-leaf illustrations representing scenes from the martyrdom of Husain at Karbala’.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Sims, 20 ff.

<sup>12</sup> See Marzolph, *Narrative illustration*, 42-3, no. 3.15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 44, no. 3.18.

<sup>14</sup> Gulpayagani, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Marzolph, *Narrative illustration*, 44-5, no. 3.19; Karimzada Tabrizi, III, no. 1128.

<sup>16</sup> Jules Vinchon, “L’imagerie populaire persane”, *Revue des arts asiatiques* 2/iv (1925), 3-9; reprinted in Marzolph, *Narrative illustration*, 154, fig. 90.

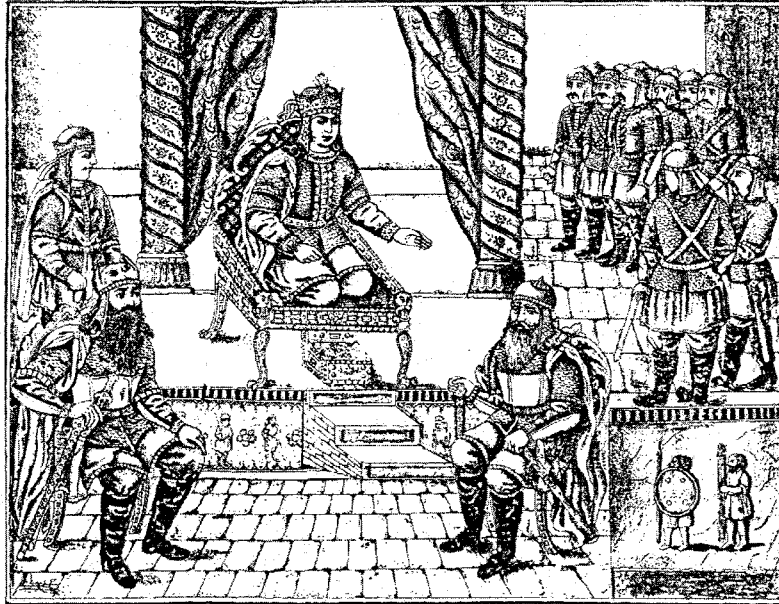


Fig. 7a 'Kay Khusrau enthroned',  
by Husain-'Ali, *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, after book 2, p. 104



Fig. 7b 'Isfandiyar kills Bidarafsh',  
by 'Ali-Khan, *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*, after book 3, p. 8

*Production*

The illustrations to the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* are the largest ever prepared for any lithographed copy of the *Shahnama*. Their size would not, however, have necessitated their printing on separate sheets, as the even larger illustrations executed by Bahram Kirmanshahani in the 1280/1863 edition of *Tuhfat al-zakirin* show.<sup>17</sup> Rather to the contrary, the illustrations appear to have been produced separately on purpose, though the exact rationale for this procedure remains enigmatic. At any rate, the *Shahnama*'s text at first appears to have been printed without a specific agenda of which scenes were to be illustrated. Even though the illustrative programme later chosen is fairly traditional, the production of the illustrations on separate sheets not only allowed their independent inclusion at a later date, but could also have served as the basis of a flexible treatment of which illustrations to include and which ones to leave aside. On the one hand, this decision might simply have been related to the quality of the respective illustrations, as items of an unsatisfactory quality might be redone before they were included. On the other, the lack of indications referring to the illustrations within the printed text also allowed for a particular narrative programme to be formulated just before the printed books were bound. In consequence, each single copy of the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* might potentially include a different illustrative programme. Whether or not this potential was exploited will have to be shown by a close examination of as many copies as possible. As for the two copies presently available to me, the only difference is the missing first illustration in one of them; this lack is, however, most probably not due to a conscious omission but simply to the book's wear.

*The illustrative programme*

The *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* contains 40 illustrations within a body of 583 pages of text, thus averaging one illustration every 14 to 15 pages. In comparison with the standard programme of some 57 illustrations in the previously published lithographed editions, the present one is much less comprehensively illustrated. As is demonstrated in Table 1, about half of the illustrations belong to the standard illustrative programme of the *Shahnama*'s previous lithographed editions. The other half illustrates scenes of lesser prominence that had probably never before been included in lithographed editions. While a detailed analysis of the illustrative programme remains to be undertaken, probably the most obvious fact is the lack of any illustrations between the scenes of 'Rustam kills the white elephant' (fig. 6a) and 'Rustam mourns Suhrab' (fig. 6b). Most of the previous lithographed editions of the *Shahnama* would here render some seven illustrations, including the highly popular one of 'Rustam kills the white demon.'<sup>18</sup>

17 See Marzolph, *Narrative illustration*, 39 and 138, fig. 74.

18 Jill Norgren & Edward Davis. *Preliminary index of Shah-nameh illustrations* (Ann Arbor, 1969), no. 109.

In terms of style, a detailed analysis and comparison with the previous models is beyond the present context. Suffice it here to mention that the illustrations to the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* betray a strong influence of Western art. Besides a clear practice of perspective, one of the most obvious features is the prominence of large blank areas within the illustrations, or, in other words, the lack of *horror vacui*.

Table 1: List of illustrations in the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*

no.	bk/p	space	ND	lith.	scene	artist
1	1/4	4	003	–	Kayumars	
2	6	2	009	x	Jamshid enthroned	
3	10	4	014	x	Zahhak enthroned	
4	13	3	026	x	Faridun enthroned	
5	19	6	032	x	Tur and Salm murder Iraj	Husain-'Ali
6	23	4	035	x	Manuchihr kills Tur	
7	27	4	038	x	Manuchihr enthroned	Husain-'Ali
8	45	18	063	–	The birth of Rustam	
9	46	1	066	x	Rustam kills the white elephant	Husain-'Ali
10	101	55	151	x	Rustam mourns Suhrab	M.-Kazim
11	108	7	158	x	The fire ordeal of Siyavush	
12	140	32	c189	–	Giv on his way to Turan to find Kay Khusrau	
13	155	15	202	–	Kay Khusrau reviews his troops	M.-Kazim
14	160	5	c208	–	Giv by his horse, killed by Farud	
15	2/15	12+15	245	x	Rustam kills Ashkabus and his horse	
16	33	18	c262	–	Afrasiyab flees from Rustam	
17	49	15	276	x	Rustam rescues Bizhan from the pit	
18	56	7	c282	–	Human challenges the Iranians	
19	61	5	285	x	Bizhan kills Nastihan	
20	73	12	c305	x	Gudarz fights and kills Piran	
21	77	4		–	The Turanians seek protection	
22	85	8	318	–	Kay Khusrau throws Shida to the ground	Husain-'Ali
23	104	19	336	–	Kay Khusrau enthroned	Husain-'Ali
24	114	10	343	–	Luhraasp enthroned	
25	3/8	10+8	362	–	Isfandiyar kills Bidarafsh	'Ali-Khan
26	17	9	c384	x	Isfandiyar fights Arjasb	Husain-'Ali
27	25	8	384	x	Isfandiyar kills Arjasb	
28	31	6	391	x	Rustam, roasting the onager [...]	
29	43	12	402	x	Rustam shoots Isfandiyar in the eyes	
30	49	6	405	x	Rustam kills Shaghad before dying	
31	61	12	425	x	Iskandar attends the dying Dara	Husain-'Ali
32	83	22	457	–	Iskandar mourned	
33	99	16	c480	–	Shapur [I] enthroned	

no.	bk/p	space	ND	lith.	scene	artist
34	109	10	c488	x	Shapur's brother Ardashir enthroned	
35	117	8	494	–	Bahram Gur snatches the crown [...]	
36	141	24	c518	–	Bahram Gur travels with Sipinud	
37	4/20	13+20	c554	–	The Khaqan fights Ghatqar	
38	39	19	573	x	Anushirvan receives Caesar's locked chest	
39	58	19	582	x	Bahram Chubina defeats and kills Sava	
40	119	61	635	x	Mihr Hurmuzd murders Khusrau Parviz	

no. = chronological sequence of illustrations

bk/p = placement within the edition in terms of book and page

space = text pages between two illustrations

ND = no. in Norgren & Davis

lith. = mention of whether the illustration has been rendered in previous lithographed editions or not

c = approximate placement of the illustration, as no exact equivalent in Norgren & Davis is available

#### CHRONOLOGY

Reconstructing the dating of the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* is an intricate affair. It requires particular attention, as the dating of its various parts is not mentioned consistently, and different methods of dating are employed at various points. Besides the dominant way of mentioning the *hijri qamari* year (at times including the month or even the day), the methods employed include the dating systems of *yazdagirdi* (relating to the enthronement of the last Sasanian ruler Yazdagird in 632 A.D.) and *jalali* (relating to the system introduced by the Saljuq ruler Malikshah in 471/1078). The following dates are mentioned at various points within the book:

10 Shahrivar 1273 *yazdagirdi* = 10 January 1903, said to correspond to 7 Bahman 825 *jalali* = 9 January 1903: at the end of the prose passage of the *dibacha* compiled by Adib al-Mamalik;

1321 (begins 30 March 1903): in the final verse of a laudatory poem concluding the *dibacha*;

1322 (begins 18 March 1904): in the calligrapher's signature at the end of the *dibacha*;

Rajab 1326 (begins 30 July 1908): at the end of the first passage in the introduction, before the *Hajvnama*, in the calligrapher's signature;

1321, Sunday night, the festival of *Ghadir-i Khumm* = 18 Dhu 'l-Hijja = 6 March 1904: at the end of the introduction;

1326 (begins 4 February 1908): in an additional line at the end of the introduction, mentioning the calligrapher and the printing establishment;

- 1319 (begins 20 April 1901): in the text on the ribbon placed on the left side of the two opening pages, fol. 13a;  
 Day 1319 *jalali* (begins 28 September 1901): in the calligrapher's signature at the end of book 1;  
 2 Murdad 1271 *jalali yazdagirdi* = 3 December 1901, said to correspond to 14 Rabi' II, 1320 = 22 July 1902: in the final passage concluding book 2;  
 1321 (begins 30 March 1903): in the final passage concluding book 3;  
 Friday (*adina*) 26 Safar 1322 = 12 May 1904, said to correspond to 826 *jalali* (begins 7 March 1904): in the final passage concluding book 4.

This multitude of dates is confusing at first and needs to be sorted. It is particularly necessary to distinguish dates concerning the calligraphic work from those referring to the compilation of the introductory passages by Adib al-Mamalik. In doing this, it is possible to arrive at a fairly clear picture of the edition's chronological development.

The main body of text of the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* was written between some time before September 1901 (end of book 1) and May 1904 (end of book 4) at an average of roughly one page every other day. Only when the calligrapher's work had well progressed and the text of the third book was close to being achieved, were the various introductory parts compiled, starting around early 1903. Adib al-Mamalik appears to have compiled both the *dibacha* and the introduction within a relatively short time, albeit stretching over a period of some 14 months. Besides the available datings, this presumption is corroborated by the author mentioning at the end of the introduction that he has written the draft version within one night, neither equipment nor any necessary sources being available to him.<sup>19</sup> While their text had been available for some time, the *dibacha* and, probably, some of the undated parts of the introductory passages were only committed to calligraphy after the introduction had been compiled. This having been achieved on 6 March 1904, the calligrapher's signature at the end of the *dibacha* mentions the year 1322 (beginning 18 March 1904).

As of spring, 1904, the edition appears to have remained in a state of suspension. The introduction was only committed to calligraphy well after Muzaffar al-Din's death, around Rajab 1326 (begins 30 July 1908), and the total process of both calligraphy and printing was finalised during the same year (ending 22 January 1909).

In evaluating this chronology, it is by no means unusual for a large lithographed book to be produced over a number of years. The first ever Iranian edition of the *Shahnama*, the above-mentioned *Shahnama-yi Kajuri*, to name but one example, was

<sup>19</sup> 'in nama-yi mukhtasar-ra nigaranda ... dar yik shab ba vujud-i faraham nabudan-i asbab va-muqsan-i kutub-i lazima musavvida namud.'

produced over a period of three years.<sup>20</sup> In the present case, however, a few points remain puzzling. One of the unsolved (and probably unsolvable) problems concerns the exact sequence of the various steps of calligraphy, printing, and publication. The most startling point, however, relates to the long interval of more than four years (ranging from March 1904 to July 1908) in which the process of printing appears to have been more or less achieved while the final touches permitting publication were only added later. In order to solve this enigma, it will be helpful to cast a short glance at the political events in Iran contemporary with the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri*'s production. The following survey, while leaving aside numerous details, aims to highlight those events that are later argued to relate to the present question.

#### POLITICAL CONTEXT

When Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated in May 1896, the state of Iran was more or less bankrupt, and the treasury barely held enough funds to arrange for his pompous funeral. Even though the question of succession that had been debated for a certain period was soon decided, the new ruler, Muzaffar al-Din Shah, faced severe financial problems. Muzaffar al-Din had previously been governor of the northwestern province of Azarbaijan, and when he ascended to the throne, he was – even though being 44 years old – inexperienced in coping with the problems of running his country. Moreover, his physical condition was fairly weak. In 1897, his health is actually quoted as being ‘so poor that his death was expected any time’.<sup>21</sup> In order to solve his country’s financial problems, Muzaffar al-Din Shah negotiated with the foreign powers of Belgium, Britain and Russia for several years. Finally, in January 1900, he reached an agreement on a Russian loan of 25.5 million rubles;<sup>22</sup> already in 1902, he was granted another loan of 10 million rubles. Meanwhile, the Shah’s major concern appears to have been his own well-being. Following the advice of his physicians, in summer 1900, he set out for a journey to Europe that resulted in an absence of more than seven months; a second European journey in 1902 lasted for more than six months, and in 1905 he visited Europe a third time. Back in Iran, both the fact that the Shah had to concede a major part of the country’s customs income as a security for the Russian loans and his prolonged absence had contributed to the growing civilian unrest. In the words of Edward G. Browne, the Shah was faced with a ‘growing discontent at [his] ever-increasing extravagance and love of foreign travel’.<sup>23</sup> Further instigated by British interference, the situation resulted in the so-

20 See Safi-nizhad (cit. note 2).

21 Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A study in imperialism*. Yale Russian and East European Studies, 6 (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1968), 306.

22 *Ibid.*, 325.

23 E.G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London, Frank Cass & Co., 1910, repr. 1966), 111.



called Constitutional Revolution (*mashrutiyat*), and the Shah was forced to ratify the 'Fundamental Law' (*qanun-i asasi*) on 30 December 1906, only a few days before his death on 10 January 1907 (24 Dhu'l-Qa'da 1324).

Muzaffar al-Din's son and successor, Muhammad-'Ali Shah (born 1289/1872), proved a stout opponent of the constitutional movement. The series of frictions and severe conflicts between him and the constitutionalists culminated in summer 1908, when Muhammad-'Ali Shah in a *coup d'état* had the army dissolve the *majlis* by force on 24 June 1908 (23 Jumada II, 1326). Opposition to the Shah and civilian unrest continued, however, to such a degree that he decided to seek asylum in the Russian embassy on 18 May 1909 (28 Jumada II, 1327). He was later forced to abdicate and leave the country.

Seen against this backdrop, it is clear that the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* was produced in a period of severe political turmoil in Iran. Moreover, at the same time that the very existence of Iranian monarchy was jeopardised, its monarch enjoyed the pleasure of having dedicated to him the ultimate epic of Iranian monarchy, Firdausi's *Shahnama*. In terms of chronology, two points are particularly noteworthy. Work on the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* began only after Muzaffar al-Din Shah had been granted his first Russian loan in 1900. While a direct link between the availability of funds and the *Shahnama*'s production cannot be proven, it appears plausible that an extravagant and self-concerned ruler such as Muzaffar al-Din Shah would be pleased to see his money spent in ways to augment his praise. The constant shortage of funds may also account for the fact that the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* remained unfinished during the final years of his reign, besides the absence of both the Shah and the patron of the book (see below), as well as the turmoil of the revolutionary years of 1905-7. Moreover, the printing and subsequent publication of the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* was achieved at a time (in August 1908) when the new ruler, Muhammad-'Ali Shah, had just dealt a severe blow to his constitutionalist opponents by abolishing the parliament (24 June 1908) and might have felt reassured enough to document his apparent victory by advertising the monarchy's ultimate praise. Yet it was neither Shah who commissioned the production of this particular *Shahnama*. Who then was the person under whose name this edition of the *Shahnama* came to be known? In order to elucidate Amir Bahadur's rationale, it is necessary to take a closer look at his personal background and career.

Husain-Pasha Khan had entered into the service of Muzaffar al-Din in 1301/1883-4 when the latter was governor of Azarbaijan. In the following years, step by step he acquired important positions, in fact positions vital for his master's immediate security.<sup>24</sup> In the years 1303-8/1885-91, he held the post of chief of Muzaffar al-Din's guards (*ra'is-i ghilman*). He was appointed what appears to be the post of responsible

24 Mehdi Bamdad, *Sharh-i hal-i rijal-i Iran dar qarn-i 12 va 13 va 14 hijri* (Tehran, Zavar 1371/1992), I, 384-6.

military commander of the province of Azarbaijan (*ajudan-bashi-yi Azarbaijan*) and received his honorary title of *Amir Bahadur* ('valiant commander') in 1310/1892-3. He became a close intimate to the Shah after Muzaffar al-Din's accession to the throne, and in fact accompanied him on all of his European journeys. In the Shah's later years, he was appointed chief of the Shah's personal guards (*kishikchi-bashi*), general (*sardar*) and secretary of state (*vazir-i darbar*) in 1321/1903. During the reign of Muhammad-'Ali Shah, he even held the post of minister of war (*vazir-i jang*) in the third and fourth cabinets of Mirza Ahmad-Khan Mushir al-Daula. In 1908, the British *chargé d'affaires* Marling rated his influence so high as to label him 'virtually dictator of Persia'.<sup>25</sup> Much as he was close to the Shah, Amir Bahadur was stoutly opposed to the constitutionalist movement, which in turn repeatedly demanded his dismissal as belonging to 'the most stubborn reactionaries who were regarded as chiefly responsible for the Sháh's constant intrigues against the Constitution'.<sup>26</sup> Amir Bahadur earned his final rejection when his troops looted private houses after the *coup d'état* of June 1908.<sup>27</sup>

The chronicler of the constitutional movement, E.G. Browne, in various places voiced his utmost contempt for Amir Bahadur, labelling him anything between one of the Shah's 'unworthy favourites' to a member of the 'present camarilla' and a 'notorious reactionary'.<sup>28</sup> As a devout nationalist, Amir Bahadur is also famed for his strong affection for Firdausi's *Shahnama*, whose verses he is mentioned to have recited at various opportunities.<sup>29</sup>

Considering the biography of its sponsor, then, the *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* was commissioned by a stout defender of imperial rule at a time when the very concept of monarchy in Iran was dissolving. From a psychological perspective, his initiative might be understood as both a valiant call to return to and uphold traditional monarchical values, a call probably even directed at the sovereign himself, and an ignorant attachment and adherence to the glory of a royal past that was about to be irrevocably lost. Whatever Amir Bahadur's rationale might truly have been, it reveals a person unwilling to accept the exigencies of his contemporary political development, trying to outsmart political reality by producing a lasting vision of the fading never-never-land of the glorious royal past. Even so, Amir Bahadur's failing sense of reality ('Realitätssinn') succeeded in producing the most splendid printed edition of Firdausi's *Shahnama*, which undoubtedly constitutes a masterpiece of Iranian lithographic production.

<sup>25</sup> Browne, 261, n. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>27</sup> Kazemzadeh, 523.

<sup>28</sup> Browne, 162, 261, 321; see also Kazemzadeh, 539.

<sup>29</sup> Bamdad, I, 386.