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The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp: A 16th Century Royal Persian Manuscript

Sheila Canby, Patti Cadby Birch Curator in Charge, Department of Islamic Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Key Terms

Shah Tahmasp: second shah of the Safavid dynasty, ruled 1524-76, patron of the arts of the book, defender of Iran against the Ottomans and Uzbeks

Shah Isma‘il: first Safavid shah, ruled 1501-24; established Shiism as the state religion of Iran, unified the country within roughly the same borders as today

Tabriz: capital of Safavid Iran under Shahs Isma‘il and Tahmasp until 1555; located in Azarbaijan province, northwestern Iran

Shahnama: literally, Book of Kings, the Persian national epic, completed in 1010 A.D., written by the poet Abu'l Qasim Firdausi; 50,000 couplets of verse; tells the history of Iran from prehistoric times to the Arab conquest in 642 A.D.

Mahmud of Ghazna: ruler (971-1030) of the Ghaznavid Dynasty in Eastern Iran, Afghanistan and India, patron of Firdausi

Ilkhanids: Mongol rulers of Iran, 1220-1335

Timurids: Tamerlane and his successors, rulers of various parts of Iran and Central Asia, 1370-1506

Baisunghur: Timurid prince (1397-1433), lived at Herat, commissioned a new preface for the Shahnama in 1430

Aqqoyunlu Turkmen: rulers of western Iran including Azarbaijan 1465-1501

Sultan Muhammad: first supervisor of Tahmasp's Shahnama project; native of Tabriz; one of the founders of the Safavid school of painting

Bihzad: most important painter at the Timurid court of Sultan Husayn Baiqara at Herat; moved to Tabriz and the Safavid court around 1522

Bazm u razm: the feast and the fight, related to the cycles of battle alternating with great feasts when the battles are over

Battle of Chaldiran: disastrous 1514 defeat of Shah Isma‘il at the hands of the Ottomans, resulting in the sack of Tabriz and forced emigration of many Safavid craftsmen

Rustam: most famous and long-lived hero in the Shahnama; he led the Iranians against the Turanians under a number of shahs (kings) and was supposed to be a giant and have superhuman strength

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