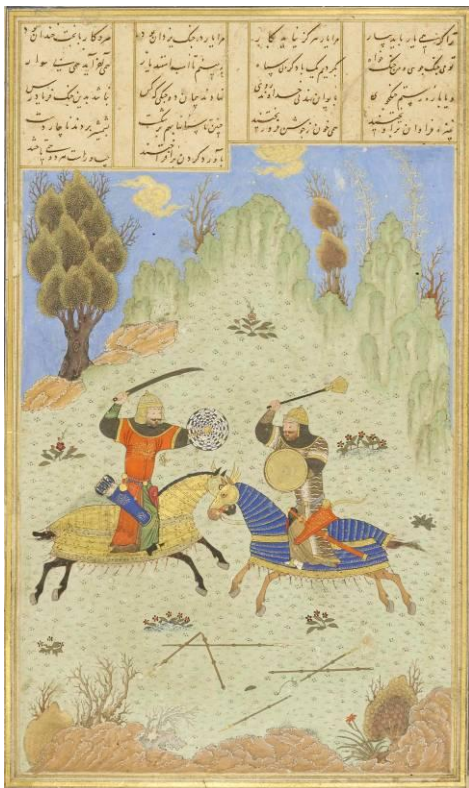


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## ASIA SOCIETY PRESENTS EXHIBITION OF ONE OF THE FINEST SURVIVING PERSIAN MANUSCRIPTS

A PRINCE'S MANUSCRIPT UNBOUND: MUHAMMAD JUKI'S SHAHNAMAH

On view at Asia Society Museum, New York  
February 9 through May 1, 2011



Rustam in combat with Isfandiyar, c. 1440s.  
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper.  
H. 7.2 x W. 5 in. (H. 18.4 x W. 12.8 cm).  
Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland,  
MS. 239, 291b: No. 24.

Asia Society Museum presents an exquisite fifteenth-century manuscript commissioned by the Timurid prince Muhammad Juki (1402–1444). This rarely exhibited volume, now in the collection of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, features more than thirty richly painted and illuminated miniatures that illustrate scenes from the Persian national epic, the *Shahnamah* (*Book of Kings*). This is the first time that the illustrations in the manuscript—recently unbound and conserved—have all been exhibited together.

Although it is not known when the epic was first illustrated, countless copies of this poem have been made through the ages. The intricately colored and gilded manuscript illustrations on view are among the finest examples of Persian painting.

Written by the Persian poet Firdausi (ca. 935–1026), the nearly 60,000 couplet poem is based on a history of the kings of Persia, depicting legendary accounts of the beginnings of civilization until the Arab Muslim conquest that ended Persian rule in the seventh century.

“This is one of the most superb Persian manuscripts of its day,” said Asia Society Museum Director and Vice President of Global Art Programs Melissa Chiu. “The rich colors, striking compositions, and intricate detail make the work truly remarkable in the long tradition of miniature painting. It has been one thousand years since this story was

first written, and we are so pleased to celebrate this anniversary with a manuscript of such artistic and historical importance.”

The exhibition is organized by Adriana Proser, Asia Society Museum’s John H. Foster Curator for Traditional Asian Art, in consultation with independent scholar Barbara Brend. The exhibition is accompanied by Brend’s book *Muhammad Juki’s Shahnamah of Firdausi*, published by the Royal Asiatic Society/Philip Wilson Publishers, 2010, the first complete study of the manuscript.

### About Muhammad Juki's *Shahnamah*

Prince Juki's *Shahnamah* was produced in the 1440s in Herat, the fifteenth-century capital of the Timurid empire located in present-day Afghanistan. When Babur, a later descendant of the Timurids, founded the Mughal dynasty in Northern India in 1526, the manuscript was taken there, where it remained until the eighteenth century. It later entered British hands as a gift to the Marquess of Hastings, Governor General of India. Presented to the Royal Asiatic Society by Lt. Col. C.J. Doyle in 1834, the manuscript is thought to have been a parting gift to him from Lord Hastings on leaving India. It bears the seals of Mughal emperors Babur, Humayun, Jahangir and Awrangzib, as well as the seal and an autographed note by Shah Jahan.

Juki's *Shahnamah* boasts sumptuous colors, striking compositions and elegant calligraphy. The manuscript contains thirty-two miniatures created by several different hands as well as two pages of intricate textual illumination, all of which are on view in the exhibition. As is typical in court painting from Iran in this period, the influence of both native and foreign traditions is seen in the style of the illustrations. For example, landscape elements derived from Chinese painting appear in the stylized rock and mountain formations, while Chinese influence is also found in the depiction of clouds and flames.



Firdausi encounters the court poets of Ghazni, c. 1440s.  
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper.  
H. 6.4 x W. 6 in. (H. 16.3 x W. 15 cm).  
Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, MS. 239, 7a.

### Timurid patronage

Iran and much of Central Asia were ruled by the Timurid empire from 1363–1506. The Timurids, who were great patrons of the arts, presided over an empire that stretched from Anatolia to India at its height. They supported important architectural projects and the production of decorative arts and, under their patronage, Persian painting was elevated to a major form of artistic expression. Their reign is still considered as the time when Persian book arts reached their height. Prince Juki was a grandson of Timur and the seventh son of Shah Rukh. This manuscript is the only work he is known to have commissioned. It was left unfinished when he died; indeed, its later pages show some signs that additional planned pictures were sacrificed in the endeavor to finish before his passing.

### Exhibition support

Support for this project is provided by The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund.

### Related programs

A series of related programs will be held in conjunction with the exhibition.

*Lecture: Muhammad Juki's Shahnamah: A Manuscript with a History*

Wednesday, February 9, 6:00 pm

Independent scholar Barbara Brend discusses Muhammad Juki's *Shahnamah*.

*Panel Discussion: Art & Patronage: The Middle East*

Wednesday, March 9, 6:30 pm

Leading collectors to discuss the complexities of art patronage in the Middle East today, followed by a reception for a new book edited by Hossein Amirsadeghi and Maryam Homayoun Eisler.

*Family Day: Spring into Norouz*

Saturday, March 12, 1:00 to 4:00 pm

Celebrate Norouz, the Persian New Year, with family activities marking the beginning of spring.

*Shahnamah Live*

Thursday, April 21, 6:30 pm

Persian storyteller Iraj Anvar enacts a live performance of the tale of Rustam and Suhrab, in an intimate teahouse atmosphere.

*Film Series: A Tribute to Jafar Panahi*

February 25–March 11

A film series highlighting the global artistic and social significance of the work of acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, including three films Panahi directed, one film he edited, and a panel discussion exploring creative expression in Iran. For schedule, to view trailers, and reserve tickets, visit [AsiaSociety.org](http://AsiaSociety.org).

For all program details and to purchase tickets, visit [AsiaSociety.org](http://AsiaSociety.org)

**About Asia Society Museum**

Asia Society Museum presents groundbreaking exhibitions and artworks, many previously unseen in North America. The Museum is known for its permanent collection of masterpiece-quality works gifted to the society by Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd. Through its exhibitions and related public programs, Asia Society provides a forum for the issues and viewpoints reflected in both traditional and contemporary Asian art. Founded in 1956, Asia Society is a nonprofit educational institution with offices in Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai and Washington, D.C.

Asia Society Museum is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Closed on Mondays and major holidays. General admission is \$10, seniors \$7, students \$5 and free for members and persons under 16. Free admission Friday evenings, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

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