MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

“Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh”
(Prince Bayasanghor’s Book of the Kings)

Ref 2006-13

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

Abolghassem Mansour-ibn-Hassan Firdausi Tousi (Ferdowsi) was a prominent figure in Iranian poetry and the nationalist poet of the Persian Empire. He was born in the Iranian city of Tous in 941 and died in 1020, ten years after he finished his major epic work, the Shâhnâmeh (Book of Kings). This is one of the classics of the Persian-speaking world and is on a par with the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Aeniad’ of the Greco-Romano cultural communities. An important feature of this work is that although during the period of its creation, Arabic was the main language of science and literature, Ferdowsi used only Persian and therefore helped to revive and maintain this important world language. Today Persian is spoken by over 65 million people in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan and diaspora communities.

The Shâhnâmeh has also become an important text throughout Central Asia, India and the former Ottoman Empire. It has been copied countless times and three of these copies could be said to have universal value: the “Demotte Shâhnâmeh” made in the early 1300s for the Il-Khanid patron, Giyath al-Din; the 16th Century “Houghton Shâhnâmeh”; and the “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh”, which was made in 1430 for Prince Bayasanghor (1399-1433), the grandson of the legendary Central Asian leader Timur (1336-1405).

Only the “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh” has survived and is kept under lock and key in the Imperial Library of the Golestan Palace in Tehran. The Shâhnâmeh represents the quintessence of aesthetic and literary values of the elite rulers of the Timurid Renaissance who dominated Central and Western Asia in the 15th Century.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO)

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

ICHTO is the institution responsible for the Golestan Palace and its contents, which include the “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh”

2.3 Contact person

Ms F. Farzam, Director, Documentation Centre, ICHTO

2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

Documentation Centre, ICHTO, Azadi Avenue, Zanjan Intersection, Tehran, Iran.

1 All dates refer to the Christian calendar unless otherwise marked H. This is simply to facilitate the application procedure.
2 Also known as the Great Mongol Shâhnâmeh; Demotte was the Belgian art dealer who dismembered the manuscript, the first credible archetype of the Shâhnâmeh genre, to maximize his profit.
3 Sheila Blair and Oleg Grabar, Epic Images and Contemporary History, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980
4 Also known as the Tahmasp Shâhnâmeh; Houghton was the ex-head of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum in New York who dismembered the manuscript.
IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated:
Name: “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh”
(Prince Bayasanghor’s Book of the Kings)
Kept in: The Imperial Library, Golestan Palace, Tehran, Iran.
Identification No: MS 716.

3.2 Description
- Category: Illustrated manuscript, ms 716.
- Name: “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh”
- Author: Abolghassem Mansour-ibn-Hassan Firdausi Tousi (Ferdowsi)
- Patronage: Made for the Library of Prince Bayasanghor, grandson of Timur (Tamerlane).
- Calligrapher: Ostad Ja’far Al-Tabrizi (Bayasanghori)
- Painters: Anonymous.
- Date of the colophon: 5 Jamadi I 833 H, (30 January 1430 AD)
- Size: 26 x 38 cm.
- Paper: Creamy “khânbâleq” (Peking) paper.
- Page numbered (not folioed): 700 pages, 31 lines.
- Miniature paintings: 22 miniature painting in the style of the Herat School
- Gilded frontispiece and pages: Numerous.
- Cover: gilded.
- Incipit: Eftetâh-e sokhan beh ...
- Explicit: … ke tokhm-e sokhan man parakandeham.

The manuscript contains both the Book of Kings and an introduction to its original text.

The Book of Kings contains about 60,000 rhyming couplets, making it more than seven times the length of Homer's Iliad. The poem deals first with the legendary Persian kings: Gayumars, Hushang, Tahmures and the most famous of the group, Jamshid. The Golden Years of their rule is followed by the era of the evil tyrant Zahhâk who is tempted by Ahriman (the Devil), his own ancestor. He becomes more and more despotic until Kâveh, a blacksmith, deposes him after a reign of a thousand years. Ferydun is crowned and he rules over a vast empire which he divides among his three sons. He gives the Iranian lands to Iraj; the Turkic to Tur and the Arab ones to Salm (i.e. Semite). At this point in the poem, a beautiful vignette is inserted, which tells of the love of the Persian Prince Zâl, and Princess Rudâbeh, the daughter of the King of Kabul (Afghanistan). They have a son, the hero Rostam – the Iranian Hercules. The epic progresses through Persian legend to historic times, tracing the reigns of the Sassanid kings to the introduction of Islam to Persia and the death of Yazdegerd III in 651.

When commissioning this magnificent manuscript in 1426, Prince Bayasanghor also commanded that an account of the life of Ferdowsi and of the composition of the epic be added to the original text. His instructions were executed and established an archetype of that genre.

Bibliographical details:
A deluxe edition of the manuscript was printed in extenso in Tehran to mark the 2500th Anniversary of the Persian monarchy. The original manuscript is described in detail in the Catalogue of the Manuscripts kept in the Imperial Library and is cited extensively in scholarly books on Islamic art.

Visual documentation: See the attached pictures.

5 Badry Atabay, Fehrest-e Kotob-e khatti-ye Ketâbkhâneh-ye Saltanati, no 341, pp. 840-46 and 5 colour plates
History:
Abolghassem Mansour-ibn-Hassan Firdausi Tousi (Ferdowsi) was a prominent figure in Iranian poetry and the nationalist poet of the Persian Empire. He was born in the Iranian city of Tous in 941 AD and died in 1020 AD. His major epic work, the *Shâhnâmeh* (Book of Kings) is based on a work by Persian poet Daqiqi, who died about 980, and on popular legends of the four great pre-Islamic empires of the Persian-speaking world – the largely mythical Pishdadian and Kayanian dynasties, the semi-historical Ashkanians (including the real Seleucids and Parthians) and the Sassanians. Although early attempts at collating these legends occurred in the 6th Century, it was not until 400 years later that their codification was achieved when Ferdowsi was commissioned by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni in Afghanistan to transcribe the legends into an epic poem. Ferdowsi spent 35 years on the *Shâhnâmeh* and completed it in 1010, when he was about 70 years old.

The *Shâhnâmeh* is one of the classics of the Persian-speaking world (incorporating the current Dari/Farsi/Tajik-speaking communities of Central Asia) and is on a par with the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Aeniad’ of the Greco-Romano cultural communities. Poems from the epic were even inscribed on tiles adorning the Mongol Palace at Takht-e Soleyman, a World Heritage site in northern Iran. Just like epic poems across the world, the *Shâhnâmeh* served an overtly political function of legitimizing ruling dynasties and it soon became a favourite subject for royal commissions. Hundreds of copies of the poem were produced, but few attained the status of masterpieces and of those that did, even fewer survived the depredations of Western collectors.

Just as the *Shâhnâmeh* is a product of cosmopolitan folk legends as well as dynastic ambitions, so its production symbolizes the melting pot of cultures that became the great empires of West and Central Asia. Mongol rule facilitated contacts between Persia and China, and the influence of Chinese painting is easily recognizable in the miniatures which developed in Samarkand and Herat.

The “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh” was commissioned in 1426 and the master calligrapher Ja’far Al-Tabrizi took the charge of copying the book, which was finished on 30 January 1430. Ja’far performed his task that he was awarded the title ‘Bayasanghori’. The manuscript has always remained in royal hands, passing from the Timurids to the Safavids in the 16th Century and the Afshars two hundred years later. Agha Mohammad Khan, the founder of the Qajar dynasty at the end of the 18th Century, set about gathering together the treasures of previous dynasties. However it was under Nasseroddin Shah Qajar (1848-1896) that Imperial Library reached its zenith with the acquisition of books such as the “Rose Garden Album” (*Moraqqa-e Golshan*), a courtly volume of dazzling illuminated paintings and calligraphy made for the 17th Century Mogul Emperor Jahangir. The “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh” was kept in a private sub-division (*andarun*) of the Imperial Library accessible only to the family and close friends of the Shah. During the Pahlavi Period the Imperial Library continued to function as it does presently.

4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Authenticity

The authenticity and provenance of Prince Bayasanghor’s *Shâhnâmeh* has never been questioned. The workmanship and calligraphy are magnificent and in the elaborate roundel (*shamseh*) contains the statement, inscribed in characters of gold, that the manuscript has been produced for the “Treasury/Library (*khazâneh*) of the Sultan … Bayasanghori”. The name of Bayasanghor also appears on the cornices of buildings illustrated in its miniatures and the name of the calligrapher, Ja’far al-

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Bayasanghori, and the date of the manuscript, 833 H, are recorded in its colophon, or concluding section.

4.2 World significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability

World significance: This arises from both the manuscript itself and its provenance. The Shâhnameh to the Persian-speaking world is on a par with the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Aenid’ of the Greco-Romano cultural communities. It is the epic history of Central Asia whose creation not only consolidated the identity of ancient empires, but revived the Persian language itself.

Its provenance is also deeply significant. Tamerlane, also known as Timur, is known for his military prowess, but he was also a patron of the arts and greatly involved in social reform. By bringing craftsmen from different conquered lands to his capital in Samarkand, Tamerlane initiated one of the most brilliant periods in Islamic art, known as the Timurid Renaissance, which was known for its magnificent and eclectic architecture and for its intellectual, scientific and cultural achievements.

Travellers flocked to the city and brought back stories – and ideas – to far-off lands and thus the Timurid Dynasty influenced art and architecture from Anatolia to India. Tamerlane’s descendants became leading patrons of art, science and architecture - Bayasanghor’s brother, Ulugh Beg, for example, was one of the greatest astronomers that the world has ever seen. Through their patronage, the eastern Islamic world became a prominent cultural centre, with Herat, the new Timurid capital where Bayasanghor was wazir, as its focal point. Due to the flourishing of manuscript illumination and illustration, the Herat School is often regarded as the apogee of Persian painting.

Uniqueness and irreplaceability: The monumental architecture of the Timurids has survived, albeit badly damaged in some cases, in cities such as Herat and Samarkand. However the volatile history of the Central Asian region, and the greed of private art dealers, has meant that fewer fragile manuscripts from the era are still extant, and fewer still of the provenance or quality of the “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh”. With the criminal dismemberment of the “Demotte” and the “Houghton” Shâhnâmehs, no such manuscript is left in the world.

Beyond the intrinsic value of the text and the role of the Shâhnâmeh in confirming Persian as an intellectual language, the manuscript is both unique and irreplaceable. The Herat School of calligraphy and miniature painting was established under Bayansanghor’s patronage and artists flocked to the city. Different styles of Kufic script were developed as masters vied with each other to catch the eye of the wazir and strict regulations were established governing all aspects of the profession. Bayasanghor established a coterie of over forty painters, illuminators and calligraphers under Ostad Ja’far al-Bayasanghori, the calligrapher of the Shâhnâmeh. Among the artists who entered history as a result of their association with the Herat School were Sultan Ali Shustari, Ebrahim Tabrizi, Dervish Hossein Naghash and Farrokh Beig. One of the most important masterpieces of this age, the “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh”, was directly sanctioned by the royal court and established the Herat School as an influential new force in the arts.

4.3 Criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style

a) Time: Tamerlane, who died in 1405, established the last of the vast transnational eastern empires. By bringing craftsmen from different conquered lands to his capital in Samarkand, he initiated one of the most brilliant periods in Islamic art, known as the Timurid Renaissance, which was famous for its magnificent and eclectic architecture and for its intellectual, scientific and cultural achievements. His descendants became leading patrons of art, science and architecture - Bayasanghor’s father, Shah Rokh (1377 -1447), was the fourth and youngest son of Tamerlane, but he seized control of the empire in 1409 and controlled the main trade routes between East and West, including the legendary Silk Road. Shah Rokh moved his capital to Herat, which became the political centre of the Timurid Empire and the intellectual heart of the Timurid Renaissance. His wife, the Persian princess Gauhar Shad,

funded the construction of two outstanding mosques and theological colleges in Mashhad and Herat and the mixed ethnic origins of the ruling dynasty led to a distinctive character in its cultural outlook, which was a combination of Persian and Central Asian, with literature written in Turkic and Persian. Bayasanghor’s brother, Ulugh Beg, was one of the greatest astronomers that the world has ever seen. He built the Observatory in Samarkand and Bayasanghor established the Herat School of calligraphy and miniature illustration. His Library became an archetype of its kind and was copied by Kâmrân, the son of the Moghul Emperor Barbur, in Kabul and Homâyun, his elder brother, in Delhi as well as by the Ottomans in Istanbul.

b) Place: Herat was the intellectual heart of the Timurid Renaissance and influenced the science and culture across West and Central Asia and beyond. The Herat School of calligraphy and miniature painting, the apogee of Persian art of its kind, was established under Bayasanghor’s patronage and the “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh” was the pearl of his famous Library. By commissioning this secular epic, Bayasanghor both established the School and asserted the importance of Persian as a monumental language and Persian history as a monumental subject.

c) People: The social and cultural contexts of the creation of the “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh” reflect significant aspects of an artistic and literary development and show the impact of key individuals and groups on global culture. The Timurid Dynasty influenced the arts and sciences of the world, and the manuscript therefore represents an international intellectual and artistic patrimony.

d) Subject and theme: By commissioning this secular epic, Bayasanghor asserted the importance of Persian as a monumental language and Persian history as a monumental subject. The Shâhnâmeh to the Persian-speaking world is on a par with the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Aeniad’ of the Greco-Romano cultural communities. It is the epic history of Central Asia whose creation not only consolidated the identity of ancient empires, but revived the Persian language itself. Moreover this particular manuscript contains the original text of the introduction, known as the “Bayasanghori Introduction”, and was therefore key in establishing the seminal text of the epic.

e) Form and style:

The “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh” was commissioned by a world famous patron of the arts in the heart of a cultural empire. It is therefore an astonishingly beautiful work of art, with rich illuminations and gilded calligraphy. The manuscript contains 22 full-page miniatures dating to 1426-1430. International art historians consider this text as one of the most important of its kind ever produced. The text is also of critical significance, establishing as it did not only Persian as a monumental language, but also the seminal text of an epic of empire.

4.4 Issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management

Rarity: The “Bayasanghori Shâhnâmeh” is not just rare, it is unique. There were two similar manuscripts, the “Demotte Shâhnâmeh” and the “Houghton Shâhnaâmeh”. The former, a 400-page masterpiece made in Tabriz, was dismembered by a Belgian art dealer, G.J. Demotte, in 1909 so that he could sell the illustrations individually at a higher price. As a result only 58 of the original 200 or so miniatures are in existence\(^{10}\) and what art scholars have called, ‘the earliest surviving masterpiece of Persian painting’ (Blair and Grabar, 1980: xi) has been lost to the world.

The “Houghton Shâhnaâmeh” is also named after its mutilator, the American art dealer Arthur Houghton, although it was commissioned for the founder of the Safavid Dynasty, Shah Isma’il and commonly eponymous for his son, Tahmasp, under whose rule most of the 25 years of production took place. It was introduced to the Western art market by Baron Edmond de Rothschild in 1903. According to Blair and Bloom (1997) Mr Houghton dismembered the manuscript in 1959 and sold off single folios piecemeal. After his death in 1994 Houghton’s heirs exchanged the remaining pages (501

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\(^{10}\) Shiela Blair and Jonathon Bloom, *Islamic Arts*, Hong Kong: Phaidon Press, 1997
with text and 118 with illustrations) with the Iranian Government for a painting by de Koonig. The original masterpiece had had 258 illustrations and in the years between 1903 and 1959, the miniatures had only been carelessly catalogued and studied by a few art historians. It was not until historian Martin Dickson and Stuart Welch, the curator emeritus of Islamic art at Harvard University, undertook the Herculean task of tracking down and duplicating the original 258 miniatures that scholars had any real idea of the enormity of Houghton’s crime – although the entry in the Sotheby’s catalogue documenting the sale of four of the illustrations (netting just over USD3 million) in 1996 did note that, “The manuscript made for Shah Tahmasp of Persia, (1514-1576 reigned 1524-1576) is universally acknowledged as one of the supreme illustrated manuscripts of any period or culture and among the greatest works of art in the world.”

Integrity: The manuscript is extremely well preserved and is paginated from 1 to 700. There are 16 pages missing (pp.179 – 185 incl; pp. 506 – 512 incl) and five pages have been displaced in the book itself.

Threat: No foreseeable danger threatens this masterpiece.

5 LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)
Golestan Palace, Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO), Iran.

5.2. Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)
Ms P. Seghatoleslami, Director, Golestan Palace
Golestan Palace, 15 Khordad (Arg) Sq. Tehran, Iran.
Tel. +98 21 33 91 20 59, fax. +98 21 33 11 18 11.

5.3 Legal status:
(a) Category of ownership: National

(b) Accessibility: Access to the Golestan Palace Library Reading Room is restricted to those with special permission. A full colour facsimile of the manuscript is available and miniatures from the manuscript are freely reproduced in books dealing with the art of the Islamic World.

(c) Copyright status: © Golestan Palace. Rights to reproduce the miniatures are usually granted free of charge when the illustrations are for scientific or educational use.

(d) Responsible administration:
Ms P. Seghatoleslami, Director, Golestan Palace

(e) Other factors

6 MANAGEMENT PLAN

Like many other items in Golestan Palace, the “Bayasanghori Shāhnāmeh” is subject to two management plans: the general management plan for the Imperial Library and specific regulations concerning manuscripts of particular concern.

**General management plan**

The Imperial Library is currently housed in the Emarat-e Khābgāh (Dormitory Palace), a VIP guesthouse which has hosted the Heads of State of Britain, China and France, among others. The building has been retro-fitted to ensure earthquake resistance and there are underground vaults for the storage of national treasures during an emergency. The building is divided into three sections: Manuscript Department, Photo Archives and General Archives.

**Specific management plan**

Access to the “Bayasanghori Shāhnāmeh”, and to other national documentary treasures such as the Rose Garden Album, is restricted to national and international experts. Short exhibitions are planned for the general public, as are new publications. The manuscript is regularly inspected and humidity levels checked. Handling is kept to a minimum.

**CONSULTATION**

Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional Memory of the World Committee

(a) The owner: Golestan Palace  
(b) The custodian: Ms P. Seghatoleslami, Director, Golestan Palace  
(c) National or regional Memory of the World Committee:  
(d) Iranian National Nomination Committee for the Memory of the World Programme

**ASSESSMENT OF RISK**

There is no foreseeable risk to this manuscript. It is stored under lock and key in the Library of the Golestan Palace. The building has been reinforced to resist earthquakes and during the Iraqi war against Iran, a complex of reinforced concrete and air-conditioned vaults was built under the Palace for safe storage of national treasures.

**ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION**

- The main threat is from handling of the manuscript and this has been minimized  
- The manuscript is kept separately and horizontally.  
- The illustrations of the manuscript on each page are protected and separated from the next folio by sheets of special paper.

**LODGEMENT**

This nomination is lodged by:

(Please print name) Dr. Seyyed Taha Hashemi  
(Signature)  
(Date) March 11, 2006