



# BĀYSONĠORĪ ŠĀH-NĀMA I. THE MANUSCRIPT

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The Bāysonġorī *Šāh-nāma* manuscript was commissioned by the Timurid prince [Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn Bāysonġor b. Šāhrok](#) (d. 837/1433) in 829/1426 and was completed on 5 Jomādā 833/30 January 1430. According to page nine of the introduction, the Bāysonġorī manuscript was not copied from one manuscript, but was prepared by comparing several copies of the *Šāh-nāma*. The purpose of this comparison was not to achieve greater fidelity to Ferdowsī's original and to prune spurious verses; rather it was to modernize the language of the text and to add verses to it. The resulting manuscript is thus one of the most voluminous of all *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts, with more than 58,000 verses. The introduction is likewise full of accretions about the epic and its author in which even known historical figures are misidentified. For example, [Abū Maṣṣūr 'Abd-al-Razzāq](#) (d. 350/961) is said to have been a contemporary of Ya'qūb b. Layṭ (d. 265/879). Despite these inadequacies, the Bāysonġorī manuscript and its introduction have served as the basis of many subsequent manuscripts ([Plate I](#)).

The value of the manuscript lies not in its text but in the artistry that went into its production. It was under Bāysonġor, himself a connoisseur and a capable calligrapher (a sample of whose hand has survived in an inscription over a door and in an archway in Mašhad's Gowharšād mosque), that the Herat school of painting, the third important school of painting in medieval Iran (after those of Tabrīz and Shiraz), came into being. The Bāysonġorī manuscript



was one of the most important works of this school. The manuscript's illuminations, full and half-page miniatures, contain accurate depictions of a variety of animals, and, true to the general style of the Herat school, realistic scenes of palaces, their decorations, glazed tile work, and architecture, placed in imaginary landscapes. The use of colors, especially shades of red, green, brown, gold, sienna, black, white, and various blues, is particularly skillful. The first and the last pages of the introduction to the work as well as the opening and the final pages of the text have been set off by strikingly beautiful margins; a large decorative medallion containing the name and title of the book's owner appears on one page of the double-page frontispiece. Each page is ruled into six columns and has thirty-one lines; the inside rulings are set off by gold inking. Surrounding the headings and on some pages, e.g., those on which verses are written in cruciform fashion, there is floral ornamentation in gold; a great deal of gold has also been used in the manuscript's miniatures (for a detailed description of the decorative aspects of the work, see 'A. Ḥabībī, *Honar-e 'ahd-e Tīmūrīān*, Tehran, 2535 = 1355 Š./1976, pp. 449-80). But for the name of the scribe, Mawlānā Ja'far Bāysonġorī, which appears at the end of the manuscript, nothing is known from the work itself about the other craftsmen who collaborated on it; however, from a note by this same scribe, we know that the miniatures were executed by Mulla 'Alī and Amīr Kalīl and the binding done by Mawlānā Qīām-al-Dīn (ibid., p. 451). In its book craftsmanship, gilding, miniature work, calligraphy, and binding the Bāysonġorī *Šāh-nāma* is second only to the Ṭahmāsbī *Šāh-nāma*, famous as the Houghton *Šāh-nāma*. The manuscript was published in a facsimile edition in Tehran on the occasion of the 1350 Š./1971 celebration of the 2500-year anniversary of the founding of Iranian monarchy.