

“THE BOOK OF SHAMQĀL AND RUSTAM”: A KURDISH MANUSCRIPT

Kurdish manuscripts are our most important source of knowledge about Kurdish intellectual, religious and everyday life in the late medieval and early modern periods, and anyone wishing to engage with Kurdish history needs to know about the manuscripts themselves, how to study them, and the literary genres to which they belong. The collection of medieval and modern manuscripts at the Islamic Consultative Assembly Library I contains some valuable materials on the Kurdish literature and history which helps to the present aim [1]. They are written in many different dialects and exist in hundreds of copies throughout the Kurdish world, but some items have one thing in particular: “unique manuscript”. Let us dwell on a single example.

The *Kitāb Shamqāl [wa] Rustam* (“The Book of Shamqāl and Rustam”) is an anonymous unique manuscript (call No. 9787, 8 fols., 19.5×11 cm) mentioned neither in the *Fihrist-i Makhtūtāt-i Majlis* [2] nor in any other available catalogue [3]. “The Book of Shamqāl and Rustam” is a Southern Kurdish verse version of “Shaghād and Rustam”, a well-known episode of *Shāh-nāma*. The story describes the killing of the victorious knight Rustam by his brother, Shaghād [4]. The *Shāh-nāma* and accompanying texts were very popular in Kurdistan and, as we already have said, the popularity and the importance of Firdawsī’s principal *Shāh-nāma* to Kurdish poets and writers was no sudden occurrence but

the result of a long process that had begun nearly in the late 17th century [5].

The work we see here was copied by an anonymous Kurdish poet in 29 Dhu al-Qa‘da AH 1308. The manuscript is written in the Arabic script in the Southern Kurdish dialect, including some important Gōranī words, by a professional scribe, and begins with the *basmala*. The text is written in a type of *nasta‘līq*, and takes up both sides of the folio, with 14—17 lines on each side. The first and the last folios (i. e. fol. 1r and fol. 8v) include two librarian seals. The arrangement of the text is uniform across the entire folio. But at the fol. 6r, the text is contained in a different frame divided in five columns. Unfinished words are encountered, with letters missed out and there are some lines and letters which were left out or did not fit in the line. The exact date when the manuscript of the “Book of Shamqāl and Rustam” came to the library and its original depository is unknown.

The Kurdish version of Persian “Shaghād and Rustam” is simple, rarely displaying the rhetorical adornments so typical of its counterparts. The present manuscript contains a series of hemistiches not included in the original version and lacks any specific introduction. It is also worth noting that in some cases the manuscript employs Gōranī technical terms while the secondary structure makes do with vague descriptions.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Mr. Hussein Marashi of Majlis Library for giving me various comments on this newly-found Kurdish collection.

2. See: ‘A. Ḥ. Ḥā’irī, *Fihrist-i Makhtūtāt-i Majlis-i Shurā-yi Millī* (The Catalogue of the Manuscripts of National Consultative Assembly) (Tehran, 1967).

3. On the other treasures of the library and their catalogues, see: Y. I’tišāmī, *Fihrist-i Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shurā-yi Millī* (The Catalogue of the Library of National Consultative Assembly) (Tehran, 1932); F. Rāstkār, *Fihrist-i Nusakh-i Khaṭṭī-yi Majlis* (The Catalogue of the Majlis Manuscripts) (Tehran, 1969); ‘A. Ṣadrī Khu’ī, *Fihrist-i Nuskhā-hā-yi Khaṭṭī-yi Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shurā-yi Islāmī* (The Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Islamic Consultative Assembly Library) (Qum, 1997); and S. M. Ṭabāṭabā’ī Bihbahānī, *Fihrist-i Nusakh-i Khaṭṭī-yi Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shurā-yi Islāmī* (The Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Islamic Consultative Assembly Library) (Tehran, 2002 — in progress).

4. For the original version of the present Kurdish episode, see: Abu al-Qāsim Firdawsī, *Shāh-nāma*, ed. by J. Khālīqī Muṭlaq (Tehran, 2007), v, pp. 439—467.