



Persian Myths (Legendary Past)

Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis

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The traditional tales and stories of ancient Iran, which occupied a vast area of Central Asia, describe confrontations between good and evil, the victories of the gods, and the exploits of heroes and fabulous supernatural creatures such as the magical bird Simergh and the *dev* or black demons. Much of our information about Iran's pre-Islamic past comes from the holy book of the Zoroastrian religion, the *Avesta*, which was not written down in its present form until the thirteenth or fourteenth century A.D. but dates back originally to between 1400 and 1200 B.C. As well as the words of the prophet Zoroaster and stories about the wise lord Ahura Mazda, it also incorporates earlier pagan myths which reappear in the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), a magnificent epic in rhyme complete in A.D. 1010 by the poet Firdausi and featuring his most famous hero, Rostam. Dr. Curtis draws upon all of these sources to retell for modern readers the stirring legends of ancient Iran, which have inspired centuries of manuscript illustrations.

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