

**Shāhnāmeḥ of Ferdowsi**

A fragmentary manuscript with paintings of varying quality of which seventeen miniatures are known. Even with this small sampling it is evident that more than one painter contributed to the volume. The number of paintings and folios that were originally in the completed manuscript before it was dispersed is not known. However, seven of the miniatures have numbers written in the margin that by their sequence suggest a miniature count rather than folio numbers. 93 is the highest number so written, next to miniature no. 14, which illustrates a subject that occurs towards the end of the *Shāhnāmeḥ*. Thus, one might construe that the complete count may have been in excess of 100 miniatures. The page size is 36.2 x 22.6 cm. The text is written in for column *nasta'liq*. Among the known paintings ten are signed by Mo'īn Moṣavver and, with some exception, are good examples of his work:

- The King of Māzandarān Changes into a Rock (no. 3)
- Rostam Pulls the Khāqān of China from His elephant (no. 4)
- Rostam Rescues Bizhan from the Pit (no. 5)
- Subject unknown (no. 7)
- Rostam Kicks Aside the Rock Pushed by Bahman (no. 8)
- Bahrām Gur Wrestles before Shangol (no. 9)
- The Cremation of Ṭalḥand (no. 11)
- Bahrām Chubineh Defeats and Kills Sāveh (no. 12)
- Bahrām Chubineh Before the Palace of the Prophetic Princess (no. 13)
- Benduy and Gostaham Blind Hormozd (no. 14)

Four other miniatures, which are not signed, are virtually indistinguishable in style and quality from the six cited above. Although the absence of signatures may be due to other reasons, the possibility of an assistant having painted all, or part of them, is quite plausible. Nevertheless, they should be attributed to Mo'īn Moṣavver:

- Zāl by Rudābeh's Castle (no. 1)
- Zāl Meets Rudābeh (no. 2)
- Esfandiār's Fifth Exploit: He Kills the Simorgh (no. 6)
- Bahrām Gur Kills a Dragon (no. 10)

Three other unsigned miniatures, not illustrated here, are not the work of Mo'īn, but rather the accomplishment of one or more artists who had been influenced by the master and might be considered within his stylistic orbit:

- Rostam Kills Alkus in Battle  
(Welch, AK2, Ir.M.43/A)
- Bahrām Gur Snatches the Crown from between Two Lions  
(Welch, AK2, Ir.M.43/D)
- Khosrow Parviz Visits Shirin in Her Castle  
(Welch, AK2, Ir.M.43/J)

**Location:**

The present whereabouts of miniatures 3, 4, 7 and 8 are not known. All the other miniatures cited are in the Collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, Geneva, and were formerly in the Collection of the Olsen Foundation in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

**Dating:**

No dates appear on any of the miniatures, and there is no colophon. Based only on stylistic and circumstantial considerations, a date of circa 1660 is suggested.

**Bibliography:**

- Grube, MM, #114-116
- Welch, AK2, p. 200, Ir. M. 43-43/J
- Welch, SA, #56
- Denny, Image, p. 31, #12

Grube first published three of nine miniatures which he indicated were at that time in the Olsen Foundation, and claimed that three additional leaves were in the Binney Collection, and another leaf in the Springfield Museum. Welch (AK2) subsequently published twelve miniatures in the Collection of Sadruddin Aga Khan, and stated that all were previously in the Olsen Foundation. Whether one of these authors was mistaken, or three of the miniatures actually changed hands from the Binney Collection to the Olsen Foundation prior to ending up in Geneva, is uncertain. Be that as it may, the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts miniature has been published by Denny. The painting is unsigned, but it is clearly far removed from Mo'īn's style, and cannot be attributed to him. In addition, the smaller size (9 5/8 x 5 1/8"), the wider spacing between text lines, and the different sequence of rules that constitute the frame, all suggest that the page is not from the manuscript here being considered.

A number of other miniatures have been cited in the literature as deriving from this manuscript. In reality, however, paintings from this manuscript have, on occasions, been confused or intermingled with the miniatures from two other *Shāhnāmeḥs* also painted by Mo'īn: a dispersed manuscript dated 1059/1649, and Chester Beatty P 270. The reader is therefore advised to also consult manuscripts B and D for some of these attributions.