
History of Shāh Esmā‘il

The text of the manuscript relates the following story not known from other sources. In all the neighboring Arab countries the accomplishments of Shāh Esmā‘il were by this time well known. One day at the beginning of spring, the Mamluk ruler of Egypt, Sultan Ghānisāy Khādem al-Haramin, gave a big celebration where there was in attendance a certain Ethiopian slave named Sa‘adān Gholom-e Ḥabashi Solṭān, also known as Żujondin. This Ethiopian was well respected and admired by all the warriors of Egypt, Syria and Arabia for his ability in combat. At this festivity Żujondin began boasting of his abilities, and claimed he could even beat Esmā‘il himself in combat. By coincidence, there was at this same celebration a *ghāzi* from Iran, who became incensed by these boasts, and chastised Sa‘adān for not following the proper rules of conduct and boasting idly about a king who was well above his station. If Sa‘adān felt himself a noble warrior, the *ghāzi* taunted, he should challenge a person of equal station such as Khān Moḥammad Khān (Khān Moḥammad ‘Ostājlu, the Safavid governor of Diār Bakr). Upon hearing these words Sa‘adān became angered, and asking Sultan Ghānisāy for permission to go with 300 slaves and bring Moḥammad Khān back to Egypt.

Permission granted, Sa‘adān departed with 300 men for Ḥamid via Ḥalab in Syria, where they were detained three days at a banquet given in their honor by the governor, Khir al-Din Pāshā. Then, festivities completed, they continued once more toward the fortress of Ḥamid. It was by coincidence that the *dārugheb* of the *molāzem* of Khān Moḥammad with 70 men had arrived at the castle of Orfeh (spelled Āufeh in the text) to meet Sultan Qājār (Eje Sultan Qājār, the governor of Orfeh). It was such a beautiful spring day that he and his men were wandering about admiring the flowers and scenery, when suddenly they came upon the 300 black men.

A messenger from Sa‘adān soon explained their mission to the *dārugheb*, to whom he replied in the following manner. “It is indeed a coincidence that you, Sa‘adān, should arrive before me. I am also a slave,... of Khān Moḥammad,... and having heard of you had asked to be sent to Egypt to confront you. What good fortune that I will not have to travel all that way. But now that I am with only 70 men and you have 300, it is best that we not now fight together, but rather you should proceed on to the fort at Ḥamid and confront Moḥammad Khān.”

The messenger returned to Sa‘adān and related the words of the *dārugheb*, whereupon the Ethiopian became very proud, and with his men advanced on the outnumbered Safavids. There was some skirmishing with lance and sword, and after a few had been injured or killed, Sa‘adān moved toward the middle of the field of combat. The *dārugheb*, seeing this, went after him. First they exchanged words, then parries, and finally the *dārugheb* got very upset, and screaming the name Mortazā ‘Ali he cut the *zangi’s* pride separate from his body with the edge of his sword. Upon seeing this the other *ghāzi’s* all joined in the battle and the ground soon became as red as tulips from the blood. many of the Ethiopians were killed, twenty were

captured, and the remainder fled.

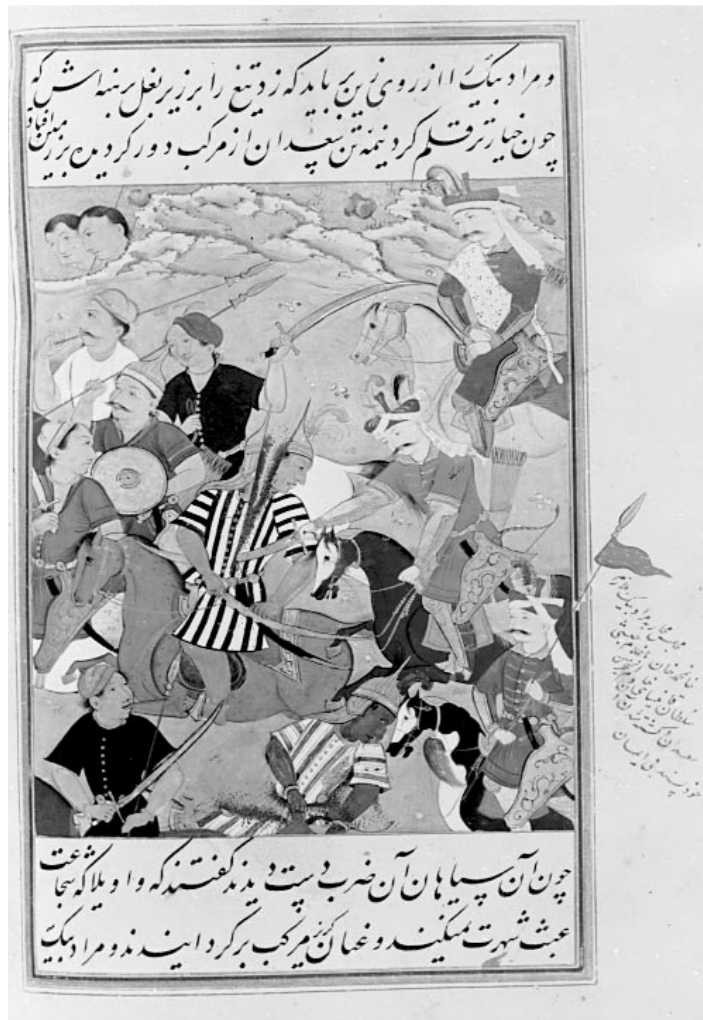
In this manuscript the miniature is located between the death of Sāru Qaplān in 913/1507-8 (folio 87), and Bābur’s encounter with Shāhibeg Khān (folio 135v), the latter having died in 915/1510. That would suggest that the event currently under consideration took place between the years 913-915/1507-10. However, another variant of this miniature in the British Library, also in Mo‘in’s style (cf. Ms. L, folio 242), suggests quite a different date for the event. In that manuscript this subject follows by 10 folios the defeat of Abu’l Kheyr Khān (folio 232) which took place in 919/1513, and precedes by five folios the Battle of Chālderān (folio 247v) of Rajab 920/November 1514. Since the text mentions twice that the event took place in the spring, it clearly can only be the spring of 920/1514. Another discrepancy between the two versions can be found in the identification of the individual responsible for the death of Sa‘adān. The text of manuscript L states him to be the *dārugheb* (governor or police chief) of the *molāzem* (aide-de-camp) of Khān Moḥammad, but does not give his name. Manuscript M gives his name as Morād Beg, and his title as *molāzem* of Khān Moḥammad.

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folio 114v

Morād Beg Kills the Ethiopian Slave

Morād Beg, in a vermillion tunic and astride a brown horse, lunges forward to “slice up like a fresh cucumber that person without any religion, the Ethiopian slave”. The Ethiopians are here portrayed as warriors with helmets, shields, weapons and outlandish uniforms, but in Ms. L, f.242 are portrayed as aborigines wearing loin cloths and armed with crude weapons. It would seem that Sa‘adān is the more prominent figure being split vertically by Morād’s sword - he is dressed in a black and white striped knee-length coat and pointed helmet. Blood gushes out but he has not yet fallen from the saddle of his light brown horse. A second Ethiopian, dressed identically, lies in the foreground having already been severed in two parts at the waist. An inscription identifies him as Sa‘adān, but this inscription may have been erroneously placed on the wrong figure. Five other slaves, variously dressed in gray, white, or maroon, and brandishing swords or lances, are tightly bunched together fleeing to the left. The heads of two more Ethiopians appear on the ridge in the upper left, moving in the same direction. Altogether nine slaves with skin rendered in gray and features conventionalized as Indians rather than Africans, are portrayed fleeing before the onslaught of Morād Beg. Morād is accompanied by only two other Safavids. In the lower right is a standard bearer, dressed in maroon on a black and white horse. In the upper right, dressed in purple and astride a gray horse, is a Safavid of higher rank who observes the scene. He wears a leopard skin cape, which seems to be the mantle of the local governor. If this interpretation holds true here, it would suggest that this personage is Khān Moḥammad ‘Ostājlu, the governor of Diār Bakr, but the text clearly states that Khān Moḥammad was at Ḥamid at the time. Alternately, one might identify him as Sultan Qājār, the governor of Orfeh, who is mentioned in the text as having been in that vicinity, but it is not clear whether he was present at the battle scene. The backdrop is simply rendered as a light pinkish-mauve hillside, with a rocky ridge near the top, and beyond it a gold sky.



Miniature: 20.3 x 15.5 cm. Two lines of text above and below the miniature. Frame encloses miniature and text; only a Safavid standard protrudes into the right margin. No signs of damage or retouching. A marginal inscription in red, presumably of later date, describes the event. Inscriptions in black on two of the figures, identify them as Morād Beg and Sa‘adān.

Miniature references:

Mahboubian Cat., #923 folio 114v (illustrated).

Text references:

Muntazar, pp.234-39.