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FORM AND CONTENT: A HISTORICAL AND ARTISTIC
ASSESSMENT OF A 17TH CENTURY ILLUSTRATED
MANUSCRIPT OF SHAHNAMEH FROM S. M. N. A.
LIBRARY, MALAYSIA¹

Amir H. Zekrgoo

Abstract

Shahnameh illustrated manuscripts are among the most sumptuous manuscripts produced in the history of Iran and within Persianate

¹ Article received: February 2017; Article accepted: March 2018. The International Institute of Islamic Thought & Civilization (ISTAC) was established in 1987 by its Founder-Director Professor Syed Muhammad Al-Naqib Al-Attas in Kuala Lumpur as an autonomous postgraduate institution associated with the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The institute moved to its main campus in Damansara Heights in mid 1990s; the campus was designed specifically to fit ISTAC's vision and needs: a building for the academic staff that accommodated scholars with different specializations and from various Muslim schools of thought from different countries; a library that housed, among books and journals, special collections of personal libraries of scholars purchased from scholars of international repute to strengthen the Institute's backbone, a rich collection of Islamic manuscripts; and, of course a beautiful mosque – all designed with visible inspiration from Alhambra, set in a tranquil area with a nice courtyard with tall old trees and water fountains, perfect for contemplation and serious scholarship. In 2008 ISTAC moved to a new campus, more grand and spacious. The new compound that resembled a castle was adorned with fine dark brown wooden interior decorations, huge oil paintings in orientalist style, exquisite Chinese vases, and Persian carpets, set up on a hill in Jalan Duta area that could be seen as a unique landmark from distance. Architecturally, it followed the old building's Moorish style of architecture. The library, which was later named "Syed Mohammad Naquib Al-Attas Library" after its founder, is house to a fine collection of Islamic manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, Urdu and Jawi. In 1998 the number of manuscripts in the collection was estimated at eight thousand. The collection grew gradually and soon became famous as being among the best of its kind in Southeast Asia. The subject of this paper is a 17th century illustrated copy of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, a remarkable item in the Persian manuscript collection of the said library.

societies. The purpose of this research is to introduce and provide a multifaceted assessment of a 17th century illustrated manuscript of the Shahnameh, preserved at the Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Library MSS collection. In this study, after a brief introduction of the Shahnameh, the manuscript in hand is evaluated from historical, codicological and artistic perspectives. It identifies the calligraphic style(s), discusses the form of page layout and provides a compositional categorization of its 29 illustrations painted in Isfahan school style. In order to establish a meaningful text-image relation in terms of layout and composition the images are analyzed and categorized into three main divisions to facilitate artistic assessment. A graphic approach has been adopted to display the three categories in the format of schematic drawings which appear next to the images from the original illustrations. An overall evaluation of the physical condition of the manuscript is also provided to encourage taking measures for its preservation.

Keywords: ISTAC, *Shahnameh*, Malaysia, Syed Naquib Al-Attas Library, Persian manuscripts, Codicology, Miniature painting, Visual analysis

***Shahnameh* and the Persian Culture**

Shahnameh (The Book of Kings), composed in rhyming poetry by Abu al-Qasim Ferdowsi (940-1020) is the enormous national epic of the Persian speaking world including Afghanistan and Tajikistan, as well as the significant Iranian diaspora. It combines myth and history, idealism and realism, ethics and politics. “The Book of Kings” provides a chronicle account of all the kings of Iran from the primordial founders all the way to the Arab conquest of Iran of the Iranian Sasanian Dynasty in 651. Thus, it is part mythology, part history.

Beyond its multilayered stories of heroism, battles, love and loyalty the *Shahnameh* introduces values of divine and individual nature; it promotes monotheism, loyalty, piety, patriotism and the love of one’s wife, family and children. It puts emphasis on helping

the poor, hospitality, seeking knowledge and attaining wisdom.² Rostam is the central hero-figure of the *Shahnameh* who is an embodiment of many such virtues. Though he is supposedly a servant of the kings, the very kingdom he defends depends on his mythical/divine authority! He is introduced as the ‘*Tajbakhsh*’ (crown-bestower). He is often a living challenge to the idea of kingship even though his whole epic life is dedicated to upholding it.³ Despite the fact that all the events narrated in the epic takes place in a mythical or, in many cases, historically pre-Islamic era, Ferdowsi expresses his reverence towards Prophet Muhammad and his household (the *Ahl al-Bayt*).⁴ In this sense Ferdowsi and the Epic he created together act as a compound link connecting the pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran and creating a comfortable balance between the glorious pre-Islamic heritage of the Persians and their Islamic identity.

Shahnameh is also important as an essential source for reviving the Persian language. It took Ferdowsi some 35 years to complete the *Shahnameh*, starting after 975 AD and finishing around 1010 AD. It has 62 stories, 990 chapters, and contains 60,000 rhyming couplets, making it the largest poem ever written in any language. In terms of presenting the Iranian identity in its totality the *Shahnameh* can be compared to Homeric Iliad which is known to portray Greek cultural identity though the former surpasses the latter by far in sheer length by seven times.⁵

² Jalal Khaleqi Mutlaq, "Iran Garai dar *Shahnameh*" (Iran-centrism in the *Shahnameh*), *Hasti Magazine*, Vol 4, (Tehran: Bahman Publishers, 1993).

³ Olga M. Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁴ *Shahnameh*, Section 7, under "An Account of Praise for the Prophet"; For elaboration see Rastgar-Fasaei, Mansour, "Imam Ali and his Household in *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi and Epic Stories," *Adabestan-e Farhang va Honar* 54 (Khordad 1373 SH. / 1994 CE): 14-17, Tehran.

⁵ Islami Nadushan in his "Epic values of *Shahnameh*: A comparison of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and Homer's Iliad" discusses the two epics in the context of their Aryan origin. He also introduces the Hindu epics of Ramayana & Mahabharata and states that these books mark the pinnacle of epic literature the world over, and that they are representatives of three prominent Aryan cultures, namely Greek, Indian and Persian. *Honar va Mardom* 138 (Farvardin 1353 Sh./1974) 16-24.

About the Manuscript

This manuscript of *Shahnameh* is complete with 340 folios with 29 magnificent miniature paintings in Isfahan style. The book measures 23.6 cm x 37.5 cm and the text area – which is framed with a few delicate lines in black, gold and green – measures 15.8cm x 28.2 cm. The full pages have an average of 25 lines organized within four columns. (Image 1)

The name of the scribe –Ibn Mohsin (Hassan!) Al-Kermani – as well as the date of completion (14th of Shawwal, 1021 A.H. / December, 8, 1612) is penned in black ink, set within an inverted triangle at the lower part of the colophon (Image 2). It reads:

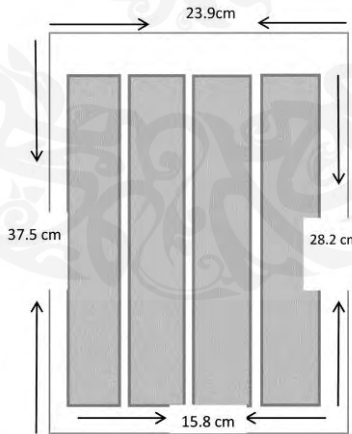
کنون تاج و اورنگ لهراسب شاه

بیارایم و بر نشانم بگاه

تمه جلد کتاب شاهنامه حکیم گرامی سخنان العجم حکیم فردوسی طوسی

نور الله مرقدہ

کتبه ابن احمد محسن (حسن؟) الکرمانی بتاريخ 14 شوال سنه 1121



(Image 1)

Above this text, in an empty space within the lower right hand box of the text area another date appears in red ink and in a careless handwriting, dating “18th of the month of Dhulqada of year 1032 AH” (September 13, 1623) – some two decades after the date of completion of the manuscript. Letters M (م) and N (ن) also appear next to the date – probably abbreviations of the name of the second owner.

On the lower right hand corner appears a large rectangular seal impression –from late 18th or early 19th century – probably pointing to the third owner of the manuscript before it entered Barker’s collection in the 20th century. The following words that are composed in two lines can be read off the seal impression. It must be noted here that in the case of this seal the text begins from lower right and ends on the upper left.⁶:

Lower line: الوثوق بالراجی سیجی

Upper line: بالله - عیده

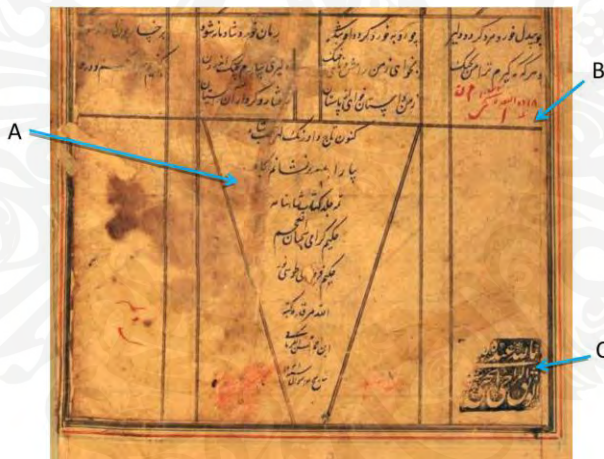


Image 2: Colophon containing: A) Name of the manuscript, the author, the scribe and date of completion B) Date and initials of the second owner C) Seal impression of the third owner

⁶ Arrangement of scripts in Persian seals and the way to realize where the text begins or ends depends on a variety of factors, including, among other things, shape, calligraphy style, period etc. M. Javad Jeddi, *Seals and Engravings in Persia* (Persian), 2008 (1387 HS) Iran Academy of Art, pp. 117-129.

A remark in Arabic and Urdu, penned in green ink – most probably by the hand of “Muhammad Abdul Rahman Barker” – confirms that the manuscript had entered his collection not later than “June 3, 1966” while he was residing in “Montreal Canada.” (Image 3) It reads:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
محمد عبد الرحمن باركر
مانتريال - كنيڊا
مجلد 3 جون سنه 1966

This was the manuscript’s last home before it was moved, along with Barker’s entire collection of books and manuscripts, to Malaysia and was housed in the SNA Library of ISTAC.

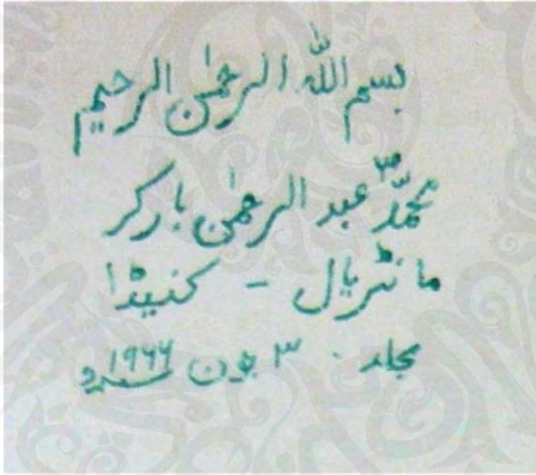


Image 3: Handwriting of Muhammad Abdul Rahman Barker

Calligraphy & Text Layout

The scribe, Ibn Mohsen (Hassan) Kermani, whose name appears at the colophon, has penned this manuscript in fine Nasta’liq style. The main body of the text (the poetry), as well as the prose introductory pages, appear in black ink could either be carbon ink, or most

probably a carbo-tannate based ink (fusion of carbon ink and iron-gall ink in set proportions and measurements) commonly used in Persia.⁷ The headings and subheadings are always penned in red ink; this also includes the subdivision titles within the running text of the introduction, which have been emphasized in red. All the red-inked headings are penned in Nasta'liq style with the exception of one of the headings in folio 26b which contains two headings: the top one is in Nasta'liq while the lower one appears in stylish Naskh (Image 4). The full page texts are arranged within four ruled columns. Certain pages are adorned with *chalipa* panels – a diagonal arrangement of hemistiches of a poem mainly in Nasta'liq calligraphy – fitted into the 4-column grid. (Images 5 & 6)

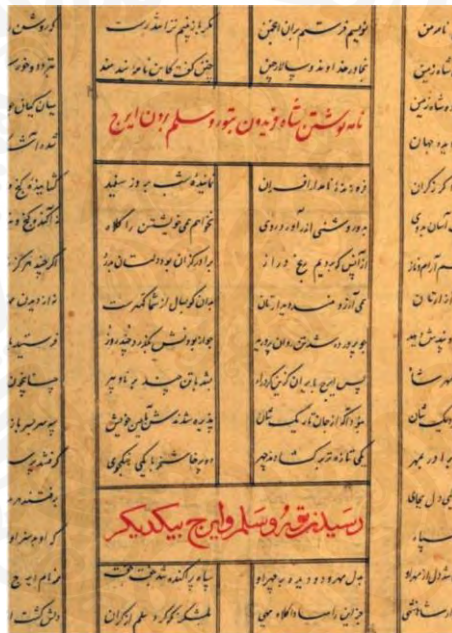


Image 4: folio 26b, Two styles of calligraphy (Nasta'liq & stylized Naskh) used for headings.

⁷ Sadra Zekrgoo, Methods of Creating, Testing and Identifying Traditional Balck Inks, *Restaurator, International Journal for The Preservation of Library and Archival Material*, 2, p. 133.



Image 5: Folio 196a



Image 6: Folio 259b

Illumination

The manuscript begins with a simple – somewhat sketchy – *sarlawh* in gold, followed by three and half leaves of prose introduction. The main body of poetry begins yet with another *sarlawh* – this one lavishly decorated with escutcheons and floral motifs with dominant hues of gold and lapis-lazuli, and delicate strokes of cinnabar. (Image 7) A close study of the page shows that the present *sarlawh* has been pasted over the top of the page; it was probably cut off from another manuscript and used masterfully on this one. As the breadth of the illuminated *sarlawh* is almost exactly that of the text area the two blend perfectly. After the process of pasting the artist had extended the gold, cinnabar, green and black rule lines around the text to create similar effect around the *sarlawh* making the patchwork almost invisible.

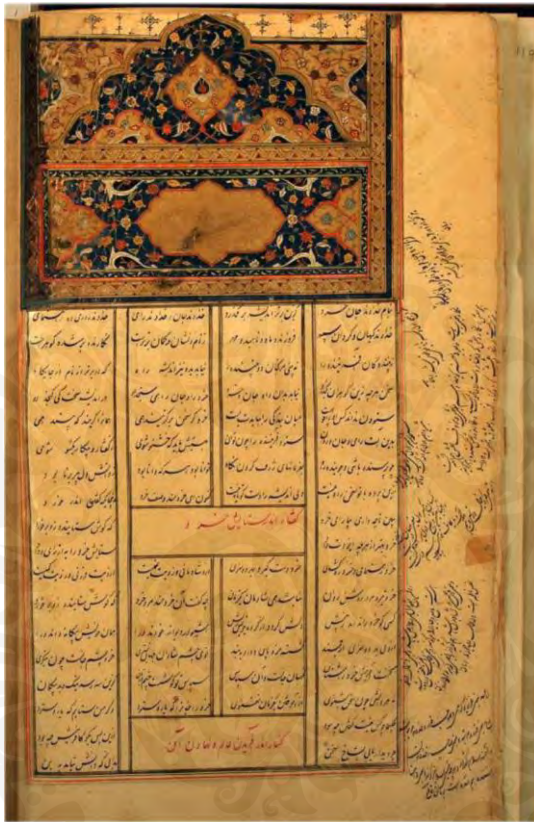


Image 7: Folio 6a: The *sarlawh* (illuminated section) was taken from another manuscript and pasted over this page

Illustrations

There are 29 miniature paintings in this volume. A close inspection of the manuscript indicates that the artist/patron had initially targeted for 30 illustrations, as is the case for a number of illustrated manuscripts of *Shahnameh*. This is confirmed by an empty space in folio 7b. The space was initially meant to house the very first illustration, which was never painted. (Image 8). The intended number of illustrations could symbolize the 30 years that took Ferdowsi to compose this great epic. Also it can refer to the 30 year

period of the ruling of the first king, Keyumars,⁸ which is referred to in the red heading on the opposite page that reads “The ruling period of the first monarch was 30 years,” as well as the text that follows. In fact the number could have been inspired by both. From the location of the missing image within the text one can imagine that the intended theme for the missing illustration could have been the coronation of Keyumars.⁹



Image 8 (folio 7a-b) the empty space was allocated to the accommodate the first illustration of the manuscript which was never painted

The illustrations of this manuscript play a key role in creating an imaginable space in which the events of the epic take place. The images are fitted within the text and are tightly related to the couplets

⁸ Keyumars or Gayomart, according to Zoroastrian creation myth and the Avesta , is the first human being that ruled earth. The period of his ruling is said to have been 30 centuries. See Shaki, Mansour, “Gayōmard”, in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 10, ed. E. Yarshater, 2001.

⁹ Coronation of Keyumars has been the subject of illustration in numerous copies of the *Shahnameh* manuscript.

in the close vicinity of the images. Though the illustrations have not been complemented with captions the theme of the paintings can be guessed relatively easy when viewing of the images is accompanied by reading of the text in the proximity – usually a page or two before the appearance of the illustration. In a few cases, however, the topic of the headlines that appear in red ink are helpful as they correspond directly to the image within the same or the opposite page, making it easier to grasp the theme of the painting.

Trace of an early attempt to identify the images and provide a title for them is detected. This appears in an old style – probably 19th century – free handwriting in four lines on the flyleaf before the opening page of the manuscript. (Image 9) I suspect that the handwriting was added during the time in which the volume was in possession of “Al-Raji Yahya” whose name appears on the seal impression on the colophon (Image 2-C)

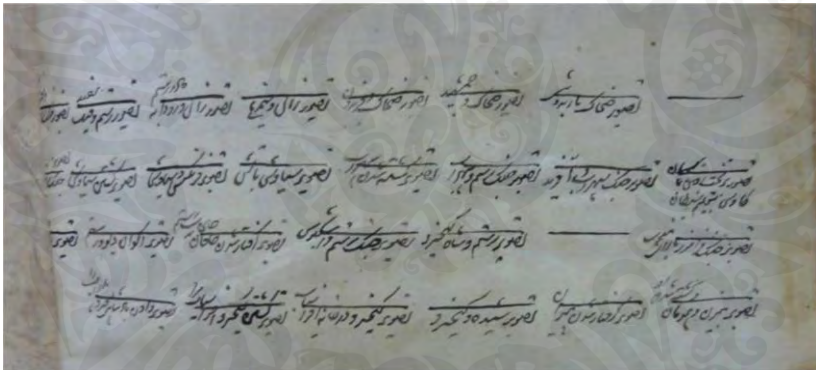


Image 9: A 19th century Persian list of illustrations on the flyleaf of the manuscript has 29 entries (including 2 blank spaces). A translation of the list is provided below:

1. (blank)
2. Picture of the snake-shouldered Zahhak
3. Picture of Zahhak and Jamshid
4. Picture of Zahhak and Fereidoon
5. Picture of Zaal and Simorgh
6. Picture of Zaal and Rūdābeh, mother of Rostam
7. Picture of Rostam and the white elephant

8. Picture of Battle of Rāj
9. Picture of Kavous flying to the heavens on his throne
10. Picture of Battle of Sohrab and Gordāfarid
11. Picture of Battle of Rostam and Sohrab
12. Picture of Sohrab being Slain
13. Picture of Siyavash and Fire
14. Picture of Farangis and Siyavash
15. Picture of Siyavash being Slain
16. Picture of Battle of (... illegible/faded)
17. Picture of Battle of Faramarz and Indian Rāy
18. (blank)
19. Picture of Rostam and King Kai-Khosrow
20. Picture of Battle of Rostam and Ashkboos
21. Picture of Chinese Khaghan captured by Rostam
22. Picture of Akvan the Demon and Rostam
23. Picture of (... illegible/faded)
24. Picture of Bijan, Hooman and his execution
25. Picture of Captivity of Piran
26. Picture of Shideh and Kai-Khosrow
27. Picture of Kai-Khosrow at the house of Afrasiab
28. Picture of Afrasiab being slain by Kai-Khosrow
29. Picture of Kai-Khosrow passing on the kingship to Lohrasb

A close comparison of the above list with the actual illustrations reveals inconsistencies between the two in a number of cases. I have made an effort to come up with an accurate list through the study of the relevant anecdotes in the manuscript. Table 1 contains the list of the 29 illustrations, the folios in which they appear, and the type of layout/compositional category to which each belong. It provides a bird-eye's view of the illustrations in their entirety. A number of the following titles correspond to the related headings in the proximity of the images.

All the 29 illustrations have been painted in the Isfahan school style. In the Isfahan school of miniature painting more emphasis is given to three dimensionality and free movements of body. Individual figures receive more attention and are presented larger. Nature is presented in a more realistic manner. Rocks and mountains

are depicted with hues of purple. Cypress and Juniper trees occupy a remarkable place in the compositions. Also certain traditional features such as use of gold in depicting background (especially sky) and emphasis on ornamentation of costumes, etc. were maintained.¹⁰ The illustrations in this manuscript show a consistency in technique and treatment of color indicating that they have been painted by the same artist.

Composition and Layout

A comparative analysis of the 29 illustrations shows that the miniatures can be compositionally categorized into three main types: A) Closed (conservative) composition, B) Semi-open composition and C) Open (creative) composition. The terms “closed” and “open” in this categorization refer to the miniatures framework and its layout in relation to the text area and the text-block. A detailed explanation follows.

A) Closed (Conservative) composition

Illustrations in this category are confined within a square or rectangle which itself is set inside the text-box. The two sides of the illustration and the side borders of the text in this category usually overlap; that is to say the multiple-line-border of the text-box touches the side borders of the painting. The top and bottom edges of the miniatures in such cases are marked with the double thin gridlines that match those (in thickness and color) of the columns – in the text area – that divide the poems into four vertical sections. Images 10-a and 10-b respectively display a schematic drawing of a closed composition followed by the image of an actual page of the manuscript. Out of the total 29 illustrations the following six fall in this category: 101-b, 299-a, 312-a, 320-a, 330-b and 339-a

¹⁰ See Mohammad Khazaei, “Avamel Mo’ather dar Shekl Giri-e Maktab-e Negargary-e Esfahan” (Influential Factors in Formation of Isfahan School of Miniature Painting) in *Congress of Isfahan School: The Collection of Essays on Painting*, (Tehran: Farhangestan-e Honar, 1386 SH/2007) 1-10.

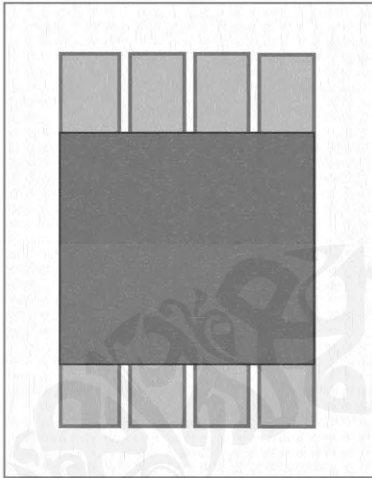


Image 10-a Schematic drawing for closed Composition

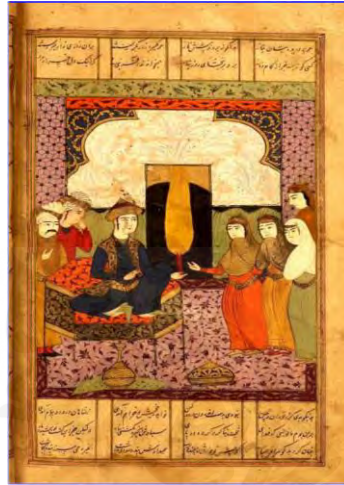


Image10-b (folio 320-a): King Kaikhosrow at Afrasiyab's house

The illustrations in this category do not share any thematic values. Two of the images depict indoor scenes with formal/ceremonial settings (folios 320-a and 339-a), three of them are set in outdoor landscapes with battle scenes or the like (folios 299-a, 312-a and 330-b) while one features King KaiKavoos on his thrown ascending to the heavens (101-b).

B) Semi-open Composition:

Illustrations in this category are confined from three sides, i.e. top, bottom and one other side – which in all cases is the side towards the spine of the manuscript – within the borderlines of the text-box. The fourth side of the painting moves out into the margin of the paper towards the fore-edge – the exposed side opposite the spine. The illustrations that are in this category follow a somewhat calculative and rigid composition; that is to say the visual surface is divided into structured geometric sections. Moreover, the painting area on the margin of the paper is often extended from top and bottom, giving the overall setup of the page a more vivid look. Images 11-a and 11-b

respectively display a schematic drawing of a semi-open composition followed by the image of an illustrated page of the manuscript. Out of the total 29 illustrations the following four fall in this category: 12-b, 53-b, 107-a, 134-b and 235-a. Unlike the case in group Type A (Closed Composition), the illustrations in this group are related in the following aspects:

- All four are indoor scenes.
- A wide decorative arched ceiling imposes a strong sense of symmetry upon the scene; it literally frames the main event.
- There is a rectangular opening, right on the axis of the arch, which leads to a garden behind.
- A tree in the garden appears on the axis of the opening; it reinforces the sense of symmetry.
- The characters are arranged in a theatrical, formal, or even ceremonial manner.
- The sections of the paintings that extend outside the text-box on the right or left are compositionally independent from the main event. They often depict a narrow double story building with ornamented roof – in this case a domed canopy form.



Image 11-a Schematic drawing
for Semi-open Composition

Image 11-b (folio 134b): Piran
asks for Farangis's hand in
marriage

C) Open (Creative) composition:

This category shares certain similarities with those of Category B (semi-open composition) in that the images of this type are also confined from three sides – top, bottom and one other side - within the borderlines of the text-box. The treatment of the fourth side, which moves out of the text-box into the margin of the paper on the side of the fore-edge, however, is different. The forms in this type are more organic and therefore treated with more fluency. The majority of the illustrations of this manuscript, nineteen out of the total 29, fall into this category. These include illustrations in folios 14a, 21-b, 37-a, 56-a, 85-b, 91-b, 107-a, 112b, 115-a, 123-b, 143-a, 149-b, 157a, 177-b, 242b, 251a, 260a, 275-a and 286-a. Images 12-a and 12-b respectively display a schematic drawing of an Open Composition followed by an image of an actual illustrated page of the manuscript.

The illustrations share the following common features that are conceptually and artistically harmonious with the ‘Open Composition’ setting.

- All 24 illustrations depict an outdoor setting.
- They are all set in a hilly landscape with rocks, bushes and trees
- Juniper trees are dominant features in the landscape
- In the majority of the illustrations – with the exception of two (143-a & 275-a) animals of some sort are present. Horses constitute the majority followed by elephants and mythological creatures.
- Skies are always in gold with whirling white clouds
- Unlike the dominating formal and static arrangement of visual elements in ‘semi-open composition’ category, people, animals and the entire landscape in this compositional category are arranged creatively with a strong vibrant flow.

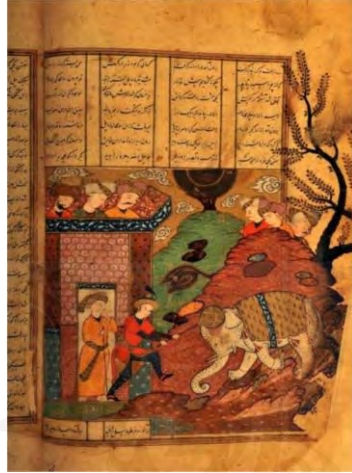
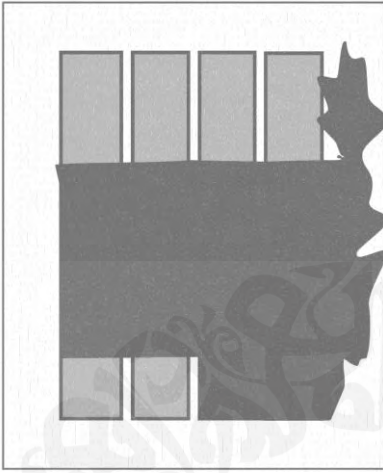


Image 12-a Schematic drawing for
Open Composition

Image 12-b (folio 143a):
Young Tahamtan (Rostam)
Slays the White Elephant

Conservational remarks

The manuscript is generally in a good condition. Through the passage of time, signs of deterioration, including stains, chars, flaking of paint, smudges of ink and pigment have developed; and to these may be added deficient binding. The original binding has not survived but the present leather binding is still in good condition. The binding, however, is a bit too tight; the pressure on the pages has caused damages on certain areas close to the spine (Figure 12), and has led to tears and chars especially on the borderlines that frame the text area. (Images 13) Five or six border-lines of different thicknesses and colors frame the text area; the text area in the illustrated pages includes, in all cases, either the entire image (illustrations with closed composition) or most of its surface (illustrations with semi-open or open compositions). The lines appear in green, gold, red and black, with the black being repeated and in some cases thicker. It appears that the chemical components of the pigments in the border-lines have reacted and damaged paper fibers making the area weak and brittle, causing tears and chars especially in the areas near the spine

where paper is under more stress. Looking at the manuscript with naked eyes and magnified glass one can see two different behaviors of green used in border lines of the manuscript and the illustrated areas. Though scientific analysis has not been done on the materials used in this manuscript, it seems that the charring effect and destruction of the border lines are due to the corrosive reaction of green verdigris pigment (copper acetate). On the other hand, green colors used in the miniature painting in part of the illustrations are in perfect conditions. A research on recipes from historical treatises shows that Safawid painters often used green verdigris pigment mixed with saffron to prevent the destructive effect of copper acetate on paper fiber.¹¹ This has been scientifically proven by laboratory analysis of original sample of pigments from original Safawid miniature paintings.¹² Since the charring effect is observed on the borderlines while the painted areas do not show signs of corrosion (where green color is applied) one can assume that there is a possibility that the green verdigris pigment was used in its pure in drawing the borderlines is in its pure form where as in the illustrations the pigment was is mixed with saffron. This can justify different behavior of green color of the manuscript, though for a factual confirmation scientific analysis needs to be carried out to confirm the chemical composition of the green pigments used in border line and in the illustrated areas.

¹¹ Mandana Barkeshli (2013) Paint Palette Used by Iranian Masters based on Persian Medieval Recipes, *Restaurator, International Journal for the Preservation of Library and Archival Material*, Volume 34, Issue 2, pp. 101–133, ISSN (Online) 1865-8431, ISSN (Print) 0034-5806, DOI: [10.1515/res-2013-0007](https://doi.org/10.1515/res-2013-0007), Munich, Germany.

¹² Mandana Barkeshli, “PH Stability of Saffron Used in Verdigris as an Inhibitor in Persian Miniature Paintings,” in *Restaurator, International Journal for the Preservation of Library and Archival Material*, Volume 23, 2002, issue dedicated to the 13th ICOM Committee for Conservation Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 22-28 September, ISSN : 0034-5806.



(Figure 12) Folio 242 a-b, Tight binding has stressed pages on the side of the spine



Image 13: Chemical reaction of pigments used on the border lines of text area has severely damaged the paper, causing corrosion of paper fabric, discoloration and charring.

The manuscript had undergone restoration(s) while in the possession of its previous owner(s). Traces of basic conservation treatment, mainly in the form of repairing of the lower edges of the pages and the fore-edge side are observed. Such treatments have helped maintain the physical wellbeing of the manuscript in general, while, as discussed earlier, the tight binding, or rather rebinding, had a somewhat negative effect.

Deterioration of the illustrated pages, however, has developed into a serious issue. The evidence of poor, careless and impatient mode of restoration in some cases has caused severe damages. Certain sections of number of the illustrations have been repainted. The detected repainted areas are mainly evident in the Juniper trees, faces and parts of the architecture. The use of thick wet paint while retouching the damaged areas in some cases has penetrated the paper fiber and has left prominent brownish stains on the reverse of the page. (Images 14, In certain areas the chemical effect of the fresh paint on the paper has started a chain of non-reversible destructive reactions. (Images 12 & 14).



Image 14: Penetration of wet paint used in restoring Juniper trees on folio 37-a (left) on its reverse page, folio 36-b (right).



Image 14 a (top) and 14-b (bottom): Penetration of wet pigment while repainting the beam above the arch, decorative brackets on the sides of arch, and the dotted mosaic decorations on both sides of the illustration of folio 53-b (image 14-a) has left chemically active stain marks on the reverse page (folio 54-a), a sign of an ongoing process of deterioration.

Table 1. Title, location and Composition of the Illustrations in the Manuscript

Image NO.	Folio NO.	Theme/Title of Illustration	Composition Type
Image 1	12b	Zahhaak in the Court Receiving Advice from Physician	Semi-open
Image 2	14a	Jamshid and Zahhaak on the Battleground	Open
Image 3	21-b	King Fereydoon Captures Zahhaak,	Open
Image 4	37-a	Simorgh brings Zaal to Saam	Open
Image 5	53-b	Romantic Union of Zaal and RoodaabeH,	Semi-open
Image 6	56-a	Young Tahamtan (Rostam) Slays the White Elephant,	Open
Image 7	85-b	Battle of Rostam and Afrasiaab	Open
Image 8	91-b	Rostam and Rakhsh fight the Dragon	Open
Image 9	101-b	King KavooS's Journey to the Heaven	Closed
Image 10	107-a	Battle of Gordafarid and Sohrab	Semi-open
Image 11	112-b	Battle of Rostam and Sohrab	Open
Image 12	115-a	Sohrab is killed by his father, Rostam	Open
Image 13	123-b	Siyavash tests his Integrity Against Scorching Flames	Open
Image 14	134b	Piran asks for Farangis's Hand in Marriage	Semi-open
Image 15	143-a	Slaying of Siyavash	Open
Image 16	149-b	Rostam and Afrasiab in battle	Open
Image 17	157-a	Kaikhosrow Crossing the Jeyhoon (Oxus) River	Open
Image 18	177-b	Battle of the Indian General	Open

		Raay and Faramarz	
Image 19	235-a	King Kaikhosrow offers the Imperial Treasure to Rostam	Semi-open
Image 20	242-b	Battle of Rostam and Ashkboos	Open
Image 21	251-a	Rostam Captures the Chinese Khaqan	Open
Image 22	260-a	Battle of Rostam and Akvaan the Demon	Open
Image 23	275-a	Rostam Rescues Bijhan	Open
Image 24	286-a	Bijhan Slays Haman	Open
Image 25	299-a	Battle of Piran and Goodarz	Closed
Image 26	312-a	Battle of Kaikhosrow and Shideh	Closed
Image 27	320-a	King Kaikhosrow at Afrasiyab's House	Closed
Image 28	330-b	Kaikhosrow Beheads his Grandfather Afrasiab	Closed
Image 29	339-a	King Kaikhosrow Bestows the Royal Crown upon Lohrasb	Closed

Conclusion

Illustrated manuscripts of *Shahnameh* outnumber all other Persian illustrated manuscripts, as the epic is tightly associated with Persian identity, both as a nation and as a culture. The *Shahnameh* manuscripts produced in Safavid era are most famous for their high artistic qualities and fine craftsmanship. The present manuscript is completed in December 8, 1612 in fine Nasta'liq script by Ibn Mohsin Al-Kermani whose remarks appear in the colophon. With 340 folios of 25 lines per page arranged in four columns, adorned with two illuminated pages – on the top of the opening page of the prose introduction and the opening page at the beginning of the epic – and also 29 illustrations in Isfahan school of miniature painting, the manuscript is complete. The illustrations have been carefully studies and, based on a text-image study of the manuscript, titles are

developed for easy identification of the illustrations and their relative themes.

A new approach to the study of the illustrations adopted in this paper was to categorize them according to their composition in relation to the text-box and the page. Based on a comparative visual analysis of the illustrations three principal type of compositions have been identified, namely Close (Conservative), Semi Open and Open (Creative) for whom schematic drawings have been prepared to exhibit the format and layout structure of the three types. Each compositional category was then studied in relation to the themes of paintings within that category to explore whether the illustrations within a specific type of composition share certain thematic and/or artistic feature. The result shows a high degree of consistency of themes and visual features among the illustrations within two of the three compositional categories, namely the Semi Open and Open (Creative) compositions, while the paintings in the Closed Composition category do not share specific visual arrangement, nor do they link thematically.

Conservational consideration was part of the study of the manuscript. Through a page by page inspection a report of the physical condition and deteriorating features of the manuscript has been prepared, a concise version of which have been presented in the paper. Although the condition of the manuscript is generally well, three main issues have been identified as hazardous. Number one is the tight binding that affects the overall physique of the volume each time it is opened for study. The second problem is charring of the borderlines due to destructive chemical reaction of what has been suspected as green copper acetate pigment or verdigris. The third and the most problematic issue is a careless restoration – or rather repainting – of the areas illustrated areas that, in some cases, has caused irreversible damages. This conservational study of the manuscript can be taken further by the way of a thorough scientific assessment of the damages that could eventually lead to preparation of a guideline for curators and conservators who look after the well-being of the manuscript.

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I was invited by Professor Syed Naquib Al-Attas to join ISTAC in 2001 and have felt fortunate for having been associated with the institution for over fourteen years. Spending long productive time within its beautiful, serene and conducive atmosphere, benefitting from its rich collection of books and manuscripts, and breathing among fine scholars and students that taught, studied and researched was a source of inspiration and creativity for me. I am grateful to Hajja Normala Harun, head librarian of Syed Naquib Al-Attas Library, for providing access to the manuscript and the assistance provided by her staff. ISTAC management supported the research by providing high resolution images that were essential to this research for which I owe them a vote of thanks. The research (only part of which is presented in this paper) was funded by a grant from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) for which I must express my sincere appreciation. I am also thankful to Dr. Leyla H. Tajer whose constant assistance guaranteed the smooth and systematic process of this research. Part of the research was done in Tehran at the Iran Academy of Art, where I was provided with a working space and technical support by Mr. Alireza Esmaili, deputy of culture and head of publication of the Academy, who deserves my gratitude.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	'	'	'	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ʀ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	p	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ʃ	ه	h	h	h'	h'
ث	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ʃ	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḏ	ḏ	ʒ	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a ²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	'	'	'	—	—	—	—	—
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh	—	—	—	—	—
ڈ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k	—	—	—	—	—
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	—	—	—	—	—

¹ – when not final
² – at in construct state
³ – (article) al - or l-

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	īy (final form ī)	īy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
		uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	i	o or ö
	ا	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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