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An Example of Shahnameh Prepared for a Ruler (Promotion and Evaluation)

Hükümdar Örneği Bir Şâhnâme Nüshası (Tanıtım ve Değerlendirme)

Gulzoda MAKHMUDJONOVA AKAY*

Abstract

Ferdowsi' *Shahnameh*, which has been the subject of debate for a thousand years since it was written, is one of the most important works of world literature. There are examples of the work, of which we have encountered illustrated examples since the 14th century, that have not yet been discovered and have not reached a wide readership. The *Shahnameh* copy, which is the subject of our study, was prepared by artists from Samarkand for Ish Mohammad, who reigned in the Khiva region for a short time between 1556 and 1557. The work is preserved in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, where the original examples of Central Asian painting are kept. The importance of the copy stems from the fact that the work has survived to the present day as a complete text without fragmentation and the name of the miniaturist is mentioned in a few of the existing paintings. This indicates that the work has been preserved in an original way. In the copy, we encounter 115 paintings by another artist and a manuscript illumination bearing period characteristics. The copy contains several paintings by Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî, who represents the original Samarkand painting school, as can be understood from his signature. Some researchers claim that most of the unsigned paintings belong to Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî in terms of style, while the remaining paintings belong to the 17th century. The main purpose of this study is to introduce the work, which is not well known among the copies of *Shahnameh*, to introduce it to the masses, to evaluate it in terms of style, to give information about the content of the work, to introduce the artist, to explain the formation of the painting program, and thus to contribute to the literature.

Keywords: *Shahnameh*, Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî, painting program.

Öz

Yazıldığı süreçten itibaren, bin yıllık zaman diliminde halen tartışmalara konu olan Firdevs'in *Şâhnâme*'si, dünya edebiyatının önemli eserlerinin başında gelmektedir. 14. yüzyıldan itibaren resimli örnekleriyle karşılaştığımız eserin, henüz keşfedilmemiş ve geniş okuyucu kitlesine ulaşmamış örnekleri mevcuttur. Çalışmamıza konu olan *Şâhnâme* nüshası, 1556-1557 yılları arasında Hive bölgesinde kısa bir hükümdarlık sürecinde bulunan İş Muhammed için Semerkand'lı sanatçılar tarafından hazırlanmıştır. Eser Orta Asya'da resim sanatının özgün örneklerinin saklandığı Özbekistan Cumhuriyeti Bilimler Akademisi Ebü'r-Reyhân Birünî Doğu Araştırmalar Enstitüsünde, No. 1811'de

* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Karabük Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Sanat Tarihi Bölümü, Batı Sanatı ve Çağdaş Sanatlar Ana Bilim Dalı, e-posta: gulzodamakhmudjonova@karabuk.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-7758-9210.

korunmaktadır. Nüshanın günümüzdeki önemi, eserin parçalanmadan tam bir metin halinde günümüze dek gelmiş olması, mevcut resimlerinden birkaçında nakkaşın isminin yer alması, bize eserin özgün bir şekilde korunmuş olduğunu gösterir. Eserin zamanla oluşan tahribatlardan dolayı birkaç kere restore edildiği gözlemlenir. Nüshanın Semerkand'lı sanatçılar tarafından hazırlanması, eserde Semerkand kâğıdının kullanmış olduğu fikrini güçlendirir. Nüshada farklı sanatçılar elinden çıkan 115 resim ve dönem özelliğini taşıyan serlevha tezhibiyle karşılaşırız. Nüsha içerisinde, imzasız resimlerin çoğunun üslup açısından Muhammed Murad Semerkandî'ye ait birkaç resim bulunur. Bazı araştırmacılar, imzasız resimlerin çoğunun üslup açısından Muhammed Murad Semerkandî'ye, kalan diğer resimlerin ise 17. yüzyıla ait olduğunu ileri sürer. Bu çalışmanın ana amacı, *Şâhnâme* nüshaları arasında pek de bilinmeyen eseri geniş kitlelere tanıtmak, üslup açısından değerlendirmek, eserin içeriği hakkında bilgi vermek, nakkaşı tanıtmak, resim programının oluşumunu anlatmak, böylece literatüre katkı sağlamaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Şâhnâme*, Muhammed Murad Semerkandî, resim programı.

Introduction

From the 14th century onwards, Ferdowsi' *Shahnameh*, which was considered one of the favorite works of the ruling class, continued to maintain its early fame even after centuries. The illustrated copies prepared by various art centers between the 14th and 19th centuries continued to be the leading works of private workshops inside and outside the palace. Since the day it was written, hundreds of copies have taken their place in museums and private collections around the world.

The art of painting, which has continued from Bukhara and Samarkand since the 16th century (Adigüzel, 2023, pp. 6898-6899; Altier, 2007, p. 145; Bahari, 2003), together with a group of qualified artists, has made a name for itself not only in the main centers, but also in various centers, especially Khiva and India, for new patrons. The work that is the subject of our research is Ferdowsî *Shahnameh*, prepared by artists from Samarkand for Ish Mohammad (d.1563), a family member of the ruler of Khiva. As a result of research, the text of the work was completed, but the illustrations were not finished due to the unexpected death of the patron. The fact that Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî's name is mentioned in only a few paintings in the work supports the idea that it was painted between the third quarter of the 16th century and the first quarter of the 17th century, following the artist's life. As a result of our analysis, it is possible to say that the sources stating that the other untitled paintings in the work belong to the same artist are not correct, and that the work was interpreted by different artists in the process of passing from hand to hand.

As the main method of our study, it was deemed appropriate to use descriptive, comparative and field survey models from quantitative research models.

Shahnameh Copy No. 1811

The copy, which is described as a masterpiece of Central Asian painting, has survived to the present day in full text, with the damages caused over time. *Shahnameh* manuscript numbered 1811 in the library of the e Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan f. 522r contains the sentence “*Dar Hive ba-sai İsh Muhammad Sultan dar nohsadı şaştı çar gardid tamam*”/It was completed in 964 with the efforts of Ish Mohammad in Khiva’.

It was completed by Hamdami (d.?) in 964H/1556-1557M. in the classical Nastalîk line in Khiva for the library of Ish Mohammad, who reigned in Khiva for a short time.



Fig. 1. Ketebe page. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 522r.

There is a seal on f.1v and 552r of the work. The name “*Suleiman Khalak Djahanga ibn Bik Âmin Sahibqiran*” is included in the seal. This seal tells us about the process when the work passed into the hands of a new protector. There is no note indicating the date or identity of the person obtained. The manuscript is preserved in a gilded cherry colored leather. It consists of 522 leaves on ‘aharlı Samarkand paper’, 335 mm long and 230 mm wide. Dolinskaya mentions that the copy consists of 552 pages, “the text is written in black and the headings are written in red ink” (1955: 54). Each page contains “25 lines of text in 4 columns, 245 mm long, written in Nasta’liq. The manuscript has a two-page illuminated frontispieces and 115 pictures” (Khairullayev, Pugachenkova, Khakimov, Urunbaev & Ikramov, 2001, p. 141).



Fig. 2. Frontispieces. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 1r-2v.

A different page arrangement is encountered among the text on pages 69b-70a of the copy. The fact that the leaf, which was added to the work later, was designed without a ruler and that it came from the hand of a calligrapher, unlike the original text, supports the idea that the copy was renewed during the restoration process, and the unreadable text was rewritten and added (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Rustem comes to Mâzandarân and saves Kai-Kavus' soldiers. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 70r-69v.

The exact dates when the 115 paintings in *Shahnameh* were prepared are not clear. Dolinskaya says “that a total of eleven paintings in the copy (f.18v, 19r, 31r, 38v, 49v, 62v, 93v, 160v, 207r, 243v ve 299r) belong to Muhammed Murad” (1955, pp. 55-59). Nizamuddinov thinks that “all the pictures in the manuscript belong to Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî” (1969, p. 121). Khairullayev et al, in the catalog they prepared describing the works preserved at the Institute of Oriental Studies, named Abu Rayhan Beruni, of the Academy of Sciences, state that “only five signed paintings in the copy are from the pen of Mohammad Morâd” (2001, p. 141). Pugachenkova also “supports this idea” (1994, p. 13). There is no information about Mohammad Morâd's birth and death dates or where he came from. The use of the 'Samarqandî' in his signature indicates that the artist was born in Samarkand or at least worked there for a long time. Biographical information about muralist is extremely scarce. The first work in which the name of the muralist is encountered is the *Shahnameh* that we studied.

Although researchers think that the text of the work was created at the same time as the pictures, there are also those who defend the idea that it was prepared in the second quarter of the 16th century. Tajikistani researcher Ashrafi states that the text of the work was completed while its patron was alive, and the copy images were prepared in Samarkand between 1604 and 1616 (1974, pp. 112-113). The death of the patron of the work in 1563 confirms Ashrafi's determination, thus strengthening the idea that the paintings were completed after the date when the text of the work was written. The fact that “his name is mentioned among the miniaturists in Sa'di's *Bostan*, written in 1570 by Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî, whose signed picture is included in the work, Chester Beatty Library No. 297, shows that the painter painted various works for nearly sixty years” (Pugachenkova & Rempel, 1982, p. 116). Pugachenkova says, “It strengthens the fact that the depictions he prepared for the *Shahnameh* were completed by the artist before he went to the Delhi palace, that is, they date back to before 1605” (1994, p. 14).

Within the work, more than one picture is placed on a single page in a thin horizontal format (f. 82r, 84r, 225v, 226v ve f. 227v). The first is the scene of “Rustam and the Turanians do Battle” (f. 82r), which is the main theme of all the *Shahnames*. Other subjects chosen to illustrate: “The meeting of Rustam and Samangah Shah” (f. 84r, middle), “Rustam's meeting with Tahmina” (f. 84r, bottom), “The Struggle of Siyamak and Gorazeh” (f.225r), “The Struggle of Furuhil and Zangala” (f. 225r, below), “The Struggle between Ruhham and Barman” (f. 226v, upper), “The Struggle of Bizhan and Ruyin” (f.226v, bottom), “The Struggle between Zanga and Akhvasht” (f. 227v, upper)

and “Gurgin's Struggle with Andarimân” (f. 227v, bottom). Considering the similarity in style in the painting program placed on a single page, the idea that it was created by a single muralist becomes stronger.



Fig. 4. The Struggle of Siyamak and Gorazeh and The Struggle of Furuhi and Zangala, *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f.225r.

Another example of a *Shahnameh* written and illustrated at a close date to this work is preserved in the Topkapı Palace Library H. 1488 dated 1564. The work prepared by the calligrapher Muhammad Baqi al-Kātib in Bukhara for the library of the Uzbek ruler Abu'l Ghazi Abdullah Bakhadır Khan (r.1557-1579) is an important example of the Bukhara court style (İnal, 1976, pp. 303-307). There are a total of 28 pictures in the copy, which is considered to be of high quality and palace workmanship. The presence of 115 pictures in the *Shahnameh* of N. 1811 reveals the differences between the two ruler examples prepared in recent times. The big difference between the Tashkent and Bukhara copies is that one of them must have been kept in the palace library and the other one must have passed from hand to hand after the death of its patron, and must have been completed over a long period of time in non-palace or local workshops.

Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî

Apart from naqqash Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî, no other artist is known to have worked on the work. The name of the miniaturist is not found in the written sources that mention the artists that have survived to the present day. Some of the foreign researchers state that the muralist was a representative of the Bukhara art school, working in the Indian Mughal palace. Researchers such as Martin and Schulz, “mention that the artist was placed in the service of Akbar Shah (d.1605), a member of the Mughal dynasty, by the ruler of Bukhara” (1912, pl. 163; 1914, p. 85). Strzugovski states that “Mohammad Morâd was sent from Samarkand to the palace of Jahangir (d. 1627)” (1932, p. 201).

Dolinskaya states that “the muralist was sent to India with a few artists from the palace of Abdullah Khan, the ruler of Bukhara, in order to strengthen diplomatic relations with Indian Mughals and that the *Shahnameh* paintings of the muralist were completed between 1570 and 1580, before the expedition to India. It is possible to see that, as a result of the Delhi expedition, the artist went beyond the style we encountered in *Shahnameh* and adopted the art of Indian painting” (1955, p. 54). Skelton says, “It is not known when the artist returned to Samarkand, it is thought to have been probably in the 1610s. It is seen

that the period in which muralist produced the most works was the reign of Imamquli Khan (d.1642), who came to power in Bukhara. His highly creative style, characterized by imagination, is clearly evident in his works from this period” (1995, pp. 279-282). There is no clue as to whether the Shahnameh paintings were completed in Khiva or in the Samarkand workshops. The unexpected death of the patron strengthens the possibility that the artist returned to Samarkand or Bukhara, where he continued his activities.

The artist's signature varies slightly within the copy. In the picture on f.86a, which includes the subject “Sukhrab and Khadjtr going to war”, the muralist's signature is included in a piece of stone surrounded by plants on Sohrab's left hand. The signature was prepared by Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî / The sentence 'ر'قم محمد مراد سمرقندىحرره' is included (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Sukhrab and Khadjtr going to war. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 86r.

In the copy, in the depiction of “Furud and his mother Djartra in a coffin” (f.149b), the muralist noted his name as Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî / محمد مراد سمرقندى . Dolinskaya, “on f. 258v, in the picture containing the “Execution scene of Garsivaz by Afrasiab”, the note “Written by Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî” / 'حرره محمد مراد سمرقندى' is encountered (f.262v). The signature includes the sentence 'From the pen of Mohammad Morâd / قلم محمد مراد' (1955, p. 54). The signature is decorated with a stone placed between Kai-Khusraw and the Iranian heroes on the right side of the picture and surrounded by green plants. A flower emerging from a branch is depicted on the area where the signature is located.



Fig. 6. The delayed meeting of Kai-Khusraw and the Persian heroes. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 262v.

Last signature of the artist is included in f.520r. of the copy, the description of “*Bahrâm Çubîne captures and kills Nastuh*”. The signature content is as follows: “Mohammad Morâd / محمد مراد”. The presence of different signatures on a copy of *Shahnameh* strengthens the idea that the artist completed these depictions not at the same time, but when he was available during the painting of other works.

In naqqash's style, hills bordered by dark black contours, one of the distinctive features of the Bukhara school of painting, large human figures, simple compositions and the widespread use of the vivid orange color stand out. It is observed that the naqqash moved away from the subject matter and expression of the usual *Shahnameh* compositions. Instead of compositions with crowded battle scenes, he prefers a small number of figures attacking each other. The sudden interruption of the scene with a frame gives the viewer the feeling that the scene is a continuation. The facial expression of the figures pays attention to the emotional state of the images. The mindset of the people, the dynastic disputes that resulted in wars, the social decadence of the period and a new stance against the raids. He prefers to leave the background blank in his works. In the manuscripts prepared from 1535 onwards, when the Herat painting style began to be applied in Bukhara, the avoidance of blank lines and detail in the depiction of space are not seen in the works of the artist. In his descriptions of landscapes, his interpretation completely reflects the Central Asian style.

Analysis Of A Few Descriptions in *Shahnameh*

Among the illustrated Islamic manuscripts, the *Shahnameh* examples, which contain the most illustrations, have not lost their importance over time. A few image analysis in the copy, which has a rich picture program, have been selected for interpretation.



Fig. 7. Manuchehr kills Tur. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 31r.

In the *Shahnameh* iconography, in the scene depicting Manuchehr's fight with his uncle Tur, a mounted warrior is seen on a horse, killing his opponent with a sword. In the text, Manuchehr, who grew up next to Faridun, enters the struggle to avenge the death of his grandfather İrec after reaching a certain age. Lugal says about this subject “Selm and Tur, his grandfather's brothers, declare that they are afraid of this situation and try to prevent Manuchehr, from taking revenge on them. Faridun, who is aware of the situation and insists on accepting it, sends Manuchehr, to fight Selm and Tur. Manuchehr,

determines his first target as Tur to take revenge for Irec. He catches Tur at an unexpected moment and takes his revenge by cutting her throat” (2009, pp. 133-140).

In the depiction of Manuchehr, killing Tur, the golden sky, dark green, high mountains, rarely growing vegetation on the hill, and the blackened river waving in the lower left part of the scene are depicted. On the left, Manuchehr, is depicted on a white horse, under a greyish, fish-scale-looking, gold-embroidered cover. Manuchehr, wears black embroidered boots reaching up to his knees and orange clothing, holds his bow with his left hand, points at Tur, who is trying to escape on the blue horse, and causes injury with the arrow he shoots. Tur, depicted with his pinkish clothes and black boots, shaken by the arrow blow and his headdress falling under the feet of his horse, is depicted hugging his horse. By highlighting the main heroes instead of the crowded composition, the artist fully expresses the dynamism of the war and the fear and excitement on the faces of the figures with the colors he uses (Fig. 7).



Fig. 8. Kai-Kavys listens to Div coming from Mazandarın accompanied by music. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 65b.

After ascending to the throne, the Iranian ruler Kai-Kavus gathered the wrestlers around him and explained that he was a powerful ruler, while a giant from the country of Mazandarın joined him in his conversation with an instrument in his hand to show his respect to him. Div impresses Kai-Kavus with his song praising his country. The ruler also wants to seize this region (Ferdowsi, 2003, p. 70).

In the picture, Kai-Kavus is sitting on a high cushion, holding a glass in his right hand and chatting with the person in front of him. The ruler is depicted with an angular crown on his head, an embroidered garment consisting of several layers, and black boots. The figure sitting opposite the ruler and participating in the conversation wears yellow clothing, and his arms hidden in the clothing are depicted meeting towards his knees. He is depicted with a white turban on his head. There is a high crown gate behind Kai-Kavus and this figure. In the middle of the two figures, in front of the open door of an embroidered mansion, a long, thin-throated, gold-embroidered jug is depicted in the middle, with pomegranates on either side. There is a green ground behind the door and a tree on the bank of the stream. On the left and right sides of the mansion, the beautiful country of Kai-Kavus is depicted with the composition created by the artist. The two figures depicted side by side on the right are depicted with different headdresses in

similar clothes. The right hand of one of the two figures and the left hand of the other are hidden in long sleeves. Based on their facial expressions, it can be seen that they represent different cultures. On the left of the composition, on the edge of the embroidered carpet, Div is depicted dressed in orange, wearing a white turban with red stripes on his head, and playing the ruda. There are two cypress trees behind Div and the two figures. A band of blue sky surrounds the open horizon behind the golden mountains. As a result of the destruction in the picture, it becomes difficult to understand the expressions on the figures' faces (Fig. 8).



Figure 9. Afrasiab Kills Nauzar. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 58v.

Afrasiab, who took Nauzar captive, does not kill him for a while. In the heat of revenge, she orders the executioner in her palace to bring Nauzar. Nauzar's arms are tightly tied. He is brought before Afrasiab, naked and stripped of his clothes. "Afrasiab, unable to control his greed and anger, draws his sword against Nauzar and beheads him" (Lugal, 2009, pp. 249-251). Unlike the text, in the depiction, the naqqash tried to illuminate the event in the composition not in the palace but in the open field with five figures. In the center of the composition, the artist depicts Afrasiab rising from his throne and moving quickly to unsheathe his sword. Instead of anger on the monarch's face, the artist expresses anxiety and fear. On either side of Nauzar are two attendants wearing different headdresses, with swords at their waists. The red-robed attendant binds Nauzar's hands with a rope and offers them to the ruler, while the other turbaned figure holds his beard with his right hand and astonishment is seen in his eyes. The figure witnessing the event behind the throne is bearded, turbaned, dressed in light gray, with his arms hidden. It is thought that this person belonged to the scholarly class, not the military class. The artist has kept the scene free of dramatization, so that the scene of accountability, not punishment, stands out. He avoided a crowded composition, the focus was on the ruler and Nauzar (Fig. 9).

'The birth of Khormoz, the son of Shapur' is not one of the most frequently depicted subjects. According to Pugachenkova, this painting belongs to the pen of Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî. The painting composition consists of simple and few figures in open nature. In the center of the painting, a baby is depicted lying in a cradle in a black cover on a golden throne. It is known that in Central Asian and Iranian culture, family members celebrate the birth of a child for forty days and the artist used only four figures for this composition and analyzed it as a daily composition. A crown is depicted on the cradle representing this child, a descendant of the Sassanid ruler Shapur. On the

right of the composition is a long-handed, white-veiled female figure in a brown dress, possibly the mother of Khormoz.



Fig. 10. Birth of Shapur's son Khormoz. *Shahnameh*, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan N. 1811, 1556-1557. f. 373r.

On the left side of the painting, there is a figure on a throne with his hands open in prayer. The figure depicted wearing a simple crown on his head and a simple dress is probably the baby's father, the ruler Shapur. Although the facial expressions of the two figures witnessing the event cannot be seen due to the damage, their surprise and happiness can be observed through their hand gestures. Along with the high mountains, trees and vegetation, the artist also rendered the water flowing under the throne in detail.

Conclusion

Shahnameh, a copy of a sovereign, has managed to maintain its fame from the time it was prepared until today. A codicological analysis indicates that the work by Samarkand and Bukharan artists is authentic, and the pages have survived intact and in full text. Traces of damage over time can be seen on the renewed page edges. It is seen that the subjects chosen for painting were highly valued by the patron, and after the unexpected death of the patron, a rich painting program was created by Samarkand and Bukharan artists.

According to the information obtained, it is known that the paintings mentioned in the articles written on different dates are attributed to the only known artist Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî. In a few paintings in the copy, the signature of the naqqash is placed within the roots of the plants in the composition. The fact that researchers attribute the entire work to Mohammad Morâd does not reflect the truth. The use of color, the subjects chosen to be illustrated and the varied compositions support the fact that the work was handled by various artists. When paintings attributed to Mohammad Morâd Samarqandî are examined, it is observed that, in coloring, the contrast of sharp contours and contrasting colors in bright and gloomy tones are applied. Vivid and gloomy colors are used as auxiliary elements to make the dynamism better felt in the work.

“The Struggle of Sıyamak and Gorazeh” and “The Struggle of Furuhil and Zangala” (f. 225r), which we encounter in the extensive picture program of the Tashkent copy, can be seen in the *Shahnameh* dated 1478-1479, prepared in Shiraz and numbered TSMK H. 1515, consisting of 46 pictures (İnal, 1972, p. 11, f.266r and 266v). It is observed that this copy prepared in Shiraz was influential in the formation of the Tashkent copy, and that it

went beyond the usual topics. The sample of *Shahnameh*, which is considered as the Tashkent copy, is one of the important copies of the sovereign that survived intact. It is observed that it touches on different subjects from the usual painting program and is shaped by various artists and patrons. In this study, the general introduction of the copy and its evaluation on the illustrations were made. The new findings on the preparation process of the copy of the Sovereign are supportive of further studies.

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