



ḲĀVARĀN-NĀMA II. THE ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS

ḲĀVARĀN-NĀMA

ii. The Illustrated Manuscripts

This sub-entry discusses illustrated manuscripts of *Ḳāvarān-nāma* from Iran, Turkey, and India.

Iran. The earliest extant, richly illustrated, copy of *Ebn Ḥosām's Ḳāvarān-nāma* is partly preserved in a later binding, with the folios not in the original sequence, for a while in the Golestān Palace Library (MS 5750) and now in the Museum of Decorative Arts (*Muza-ye honarhā-ye tazyini*) in Tehran. It contains 645 folios with 115 illustrations (Anvari; *Dokā'*); some forty more illustrated pages from the same manuscript are scattered in various collections in Europe and the United States (see bibliography, below).

The paintings are of a good standard of execution and preservation, apart from some instances where faces have been clumsily repainted. Some of the paintings are signed with the name Farhād and are dated in the same hand between 881/1476-77 and 892/1486-87 (Digby et al., p. 346, nos. 574a-b). Stylistically, they belong to the class of the so-called Commercial-Turkmen style originating in the third quarter of the 15th century Turkmen dominions of southwest Iran, mainly Shiraz, where the style produced a large number of illustrated manuscripts between ca. 1475 and 1505 (for the generally accepted



attribution of the Golestān volume to the Commercial-Turkmen style, see Robinson, 1954, pp. 105-12; idem, 1973, p. 118; idem, 1980, pp. 89-94; idem, 1991, p. 39; Grube, 1962, pp. 61-62, Grube, 1963; Gray, 1977, pp. 104-7; Hillenbrand, 1977, pp. 18, 50, 55-56, 79-80, 82, 89-90. On stylistic issues related to Farhād's work and the Commercial-Turkmen style as compared to specific *Šāh-nāma* illustrations, see Shani, 2017).

All this would mean that the epic, composed by Ebn Ḥosām in the eastern region of Qohestān in 830/1426-27, reached western Iran without much delay. It may have reached the west with the *Āq-Qoyūnlū* troops of Uzun Ḥasan, who during their raids in Khorasan, between 874/1469 and 874/1470, indeed stayed for a while in Qohestān (Minorsky, pp. 35-65, esp. 53) The illustrated *Kāvarān-nāma* was made about three decades after Ebn Ḥosām completed the epic, thus suggesting that there was no earlier illustrated copy that might have served Farhād as a model. The interest of the Tehran manuscript thus lies to a large extent in the artist's original perception of the episodes related in a text that he was the first to illustrate. He invented a combination of two frames of reference, similar to those used by the author: like Ebn Ḥosām, who drew on the *Šāh-nāma* as a model, he imitated the pictorial iconography that had been in use in the Shiraz region since the early fifteenth century to illustrate the *Šāh-nāma* and other heroic cycles of the kind. This is evident, for example, in the episode of Abu'l-Mehjan, companion of 'Ali (see 'ALI B. ABI ṬĀLEB), using his lance to lift a foe from the saddle, keeping him suspended in mid-air while the riderless mount bolts away (Anvari, p. 88), a formula culled from the Shirazi *Šāh-nāma* tradition representing Rostam lifting his enemies Pilsam and Šangol with his lance (for example, a folio at the British Museum, OA 1949.10-9.048, detached from a *Šāh-nāma* manuscript at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 22-1948, made in Shiraz in about 839-844/1435-40 or on fol. 191b of a *Šāh-nāma* dated 841/1437 at the University Library of Cambridge, Or. 420; for other examples in which Farhād may well have consulted corresponding episodes as depicted in *Šāh-nāma* paintings traditional in the region, see Shani, 2017).

At the same time, as Ebn Ḥosām transcended his probable literary model by making it an Islamic heroic narrative about 'Ali, so also did the illustrator: he bestowed the traditional roles of Rostam and other heroes on 'Ali, manipulating episodes retrieved from *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts to emphasize the religious aspects of 'Ali's personage. This procedure is seen, for example, in the episode of 'Ali lifting Nawšād off the saddle and keeping him suspended in



mid-air by holding his belt (Anvari, p. 101), a formula associated with the traditional *Šāh-nāma* episode of Rostam lifting *Afrāsīāb* by the belt (depicted, for example, in Bodleian Library, MS Ouseley, Add. 176, fol. 63b, or the State Collection of the Academy of Sciences, Tashkent, inv. M-287-27109, fol. 22b, made in Yazd about 900-901/1494-96; for other examples, see Shani, 2017). By comparison, ‘Ali in the *Kāvarān-nāma* illustration assumes the role of Rostam, but instead of the latter’s lion/tiger-hat, ‘Ali has the fiery halo of a sanctified hero whose deeds are part of a divinely-ordained mission. He also grasps a double-pointed sword representing the famous *Du’l-Faqār*, and his mount is dappled, thus adhering to literary descriptions of *Doldol*, ‘Ali’s mule/stallion in the early wars of Islam. *Doldol*, like the *Du’l-Faqār*, was given to ‘Ali by the Prophet, as Ebn Ḥosām himself points out in the text that accompanies another painting (Anvari, p. 71), where ‘Ali encourages his mount to kill a lion by saying to him: *Oh faithful Doldol, you are my memento from Moṣṭafā* (i.e. Moḥammad [*To-i yādgar-e man az Moṣṭafā*]). By giving ‘Ali the *Du’l-Faqār* and the dappled steed, as well as the flame-halo, the artist signified two prominent aspects of ‘Ali, his heroic prowess, and his mission as propagator of the Islamic faith.

The adaptive process can also be followed through the large group of paintings illustrating the supernatural events attending ‘Ali’s journey to the far-off lands of *Kāvarān*. First of type is the *Kāvarān-nāma* episode of ‘Ali fighting a dragon emerging from fantastic multi-colored rock clusters (Anvari, p. 69); drawing here on an iconographic tradition used in the region to illustrate the numerous fanciful encounters in the epic cycles between a hero and a dragon (PLATE I), it is based on a counterbalanced composition, switching the focus back and forth between the hero and a dragon entangled with craggy rock-formations (for the traditional iconography in early 15th century paintings made in Yazd, see, e. g., a *Šāh-nāma* manuscript dated 844/1441 at the Bibliothèque nationale, Suppl. persan 493, fol. 272b; further examples in Shani, 2015, 2017).

Depictions of mythical creatures surrounded by fantastic rock formations were indeed part of the stock-in-trade of Persian painting. Farhād used them, inter alia, for the various episodes in which ‘Ali fights crowds of demons (*div*) on mountainous heights. In one variation (Anvari, p. 70; PLATE II), ‘Ali leaps over cliffs and narrow valleys brandishing his sword in all directions, killing every demon that stands in his way. The monstrous demons, partly following the description in the text, also follow a long-standing iconographic tradition,



irrespective of place and date, where they are shown as large, robust, half-naked hybrid figures, usually with two horns, wearing short skirts and large bracelets around their arms and ankles (e.g., the depiction of a *div* in a rocky landscape accompanying the episode of Rostam fighting a sea-monster in a *Šāh-nāma* manuscript dated 841/1437, Cambridge University Library, Or. 420, fol. 203a, and other examples in the Commercial-Turkmen style in British Library, Add. 18188, fol. 92a [dated 892/1486]; Bodleian Library, Elliott 325, fol. 218a [dated 900/1494]; or ‘Aṣṣār Tabrizi, *Mehr o Moštari*, Bibliothèque nationale, Suppl. persan 1964, fol. 80a.) The *Kāvarān-nāma* artist could thus well have borrowed his demon figures in their rocky wilderness from stock images. He also exercised his own inventive talents by adding a pair of angels to the scene, thereby referring to the angels of the given text who encouraged ‘Ali in his battle with a large army of demons. The sanctified stature of ‘Ali vis-à-vis the horned beasts is again shown by the flaming halo rising to the sky and by the *Ḍu’l-Faqār* driven deep into the bestial enemy.

Perhaps the best instance of Farhād’s ability and ingenuity in illustrating a new text is the episode of the archangel Gabriel (Jabra’il) inviting the Prophet to watch from his mosque in Medina the miraculous deeds performed by ‘Ali in the far-off land of *Kāvarān* (Anvari, p. 91; [PLATE III](#)). Moḥammad is shown standing on what seems to be the roof of the Medina mosque, while ‘Ali, mounted on *Doldol*, is wielding his sword, the *Ḍu’l-Faqār*, in a distant space. The two protagonists are held together by the archangel Gabriel, situated between them at the apex of a triangle, one hand stretched towards Moḥammad, the other towards ‘Ali. Both figures carry the same fiery halo, symbol of their common spiritual nature (on the Shi‘ite concept of *nur-e moḥammadi*, which holds that the divine light, symbolized here by a fiery halo, was transmitted to ‘Ali as to Moḥammad through their common grandfather, ‘Abd al-Moṭṭaleb, see Rubin, p. 43). The dramatic center of the painting is clearly ‘Ali, to whom the artist gave about two-thirds of the surface, with a single enemy lying dead under *Doldol*’s hooves. Scattered corpses and battered limbs are in fact a traditional feature used by Farhād for conveying the martial aspect of the scene (traditional warring scenes with scattered corpses and battered limbs appear in many illustrations of other works as well as throughout Farhād’s *Kāvarān-nāma* scenes of battlefields: Anvari, pp. 27-29, 37-38, 40, 56-57, 61, 62, 65, 78, 81, 83-84, 87-89, 91, 94, 100-101, 104, 107, 119-121, 133, 135, 137; for more examples, see Shani, 2017). However, in this particular painting (Anvari, p. 71), a single corpse seems to have been calculated to fit between *Doldol*’s fore and hind legs, epitomizing ‘Ali’s victory.



Here more than anywhere else the portrayal of ‘Ali is a concise and icon-like representation, the action not being attached to a specific narrative. It could be understood as representing ‘Ali’s divine designation, symbolized by the presence of Moḥammad, whose right hand is stretched towards ‘Ali, and by that of Gabriel, God’s messenger. The artist successfully integrated here a traditional feature of a battlefield scene in an original composition that adheres to the spirit of the accompanying text. In view of the general atmosphere of esoteric mysticism which due to Sufism pervaded Iran at that time, the corpse under Doldol’s hooves might well be regarded as symbolizing the evil forces overcome by the [Perfect Man](#), ‘Ali, the propagator of Islam and the enemy of all manner of evil, as indeed is strongly emphasized throughout the epic. In devising a suitable image, Farhād expressed strong piety and deep devotion to ‘Ali, whose supernatural powers and feats are shown to derive from divine inspiration, mediated through Moḥammad and the Archangel Gabriel.

The anonymous patron who commissioned the manuscript, perhaps a wealthy merchant or a dignitary of some kind, would thus seem to have belonged to a pro-‘Alid group, perhaps an indication that Shi‘i-oriented circles were already flourishing in Iran during the 15th century as if to set the stage for the adoption of Shi‘i Islam as the state religion by the Safavid [Esmā‘il I](#) in 1502.

Copies made in Anatolia: Admiration of ‘Ali is again apparent in an undated *Kāvarān-nāma* manuscript in Turkish at the Topkapi Palace Library, Hazine 677, whose paintings are attributed by some scholars to the late 15th century (Karatay, p. 98; Bağci, pp. 252-54), by others to the first half of the 17th century (Stchoukine, p. 94, pl. Xa-b). The illustrations, some left unfinished, are of great importance as regards the portrayal of ‘Ali, for his status is expressed not only by a halo of flames but often also by replacing the face with the *Yā ‘Ali* (O ‘Ali) in gold coloring. Otherwise, the paintings in this copy show certain iconographic connections with the late 15th century Tehran manuscript; one episode illustrated in both, for example, is that of ‘Ali encouraging Doldol to repel a marauding lion on the Crystal Mountain, Billur Dagi (Bağci, fig. 15).

Copies made in India. The *Kāvarān-nāma* was presumably brought to the Indian subcontinent by Persian migrants of all classes and aptitudes, who went there during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see INDIA, vi, xx, xxviii; Soudavar, pp. 52-53). The earliest known copy made in India is at the Reza Library in Rampur, divided in two volumes with 5 miniatures. According to Barbara Schmitz and Ziyaud-Din A. Desai, the manuscript was possibly



copied in Shiraz, some of the miniatures having been painted there in a provincial Turkmen style, while others were added in India in the second half of the 15th century. The paintings, often dull and crudely executed, were probably influenced by a late 15th century *Kāvarān-nāma* copy of the kind represented by the Tehran manuscript. Stylistically, the latter's impact is most obvious in the outdoor scenes (see Schmitz and Desai, plates 284, 286, 288, 289). Some of the paintings also show iconographical connections with the Tehran manuscript: examples of scenes related to the earlier work are those of 'Ali trapped by lasso (compare Anvari, p. 39 with Schmitz and Desai, pl. 288), of Ṣalṣāl challenging 'Ali to a game of wrestling (Anvari, p. 39; Schmitz and Desai, pl. 289; [PLATE IV](#)), and to a certain extent that of 'Ali killing a dragon (Anvari, p. 69; Schmitz and Desai, pl. 284). Also, following the Tehran copy, Qanbar is often shown with his usual black complexion watching the scene from behind the hill (Schmitz and Desai, pl. 289; [PLATE V](#)).

Although to some extent indebted to Persian idioms, and particularly to the iconography of a Turkmen model such as the Tehran *Kāvarān-nāma*, the Shi'ite-oriented spirit is lacking in the Indian copy; for instance, 'Ali seldom has a fiery halo, and when he does, as in the scene of his confrontation with the dragon (Schmitz and Desai, pl. 284), it is blue rather than blazing and seems a faint echo of a model copied without any understanding of its iconological significance. The same applies to the episode of 'Ali armed with a mace attacking a foe (Schmitz and Desai, pl. 285), where he appears as a helmeted warrior rather than a dignified Muslim with a fiery halo. The *Kāvarān-nāma* was apparently conceived here as an adventure-story with no real glorification of 'Ali as a divinely-ordained messenger of God. This may suggest a patron who was interested merely in the sensational aspects of the text.

A similar narrative approach characterizes three other lavishly illustrated copies of the *Kāvarān-nāma* made in India, one now held by the Buhar Library and two by the British Library (Add. 19,766 and India Office MS 3443). MS Add. 19,766 is dated 1097/1686; according to the colophon, it was copied by the scribe Muḥand Moltānī, and the 156 miniatures are by the artist 'Abd-al-Ḥakim Moltānī, leading one to suppose that the manuscript was produced in the city of Multan in the Punjāb. Jeremiah Losty (1982, p. 133, no. 105) points out that there is a close architectural resemblance between the buildings depicted in the manuscript and those of the city, particularly the famous domed octagonal tombs of the Sohrawardi Shaikhs, made of brick and covered with polychrome tiles. Neither the India Office nor the Buhar Library



manuscripts are dated or signed, but they are almost identical to Add. 19,766 in terms of text and illustrations. They were probably made in the same school at approximately the same time.

The paintings in the British Library Add. 19,766 and the India Office MS 3443 are laid out on a grand scale, mostly in T-shaped frames, also utilizing the upper and lower margins with vitality and originality. Opulent glitter is furnished by the lavish use of gold and silver, perhaps indicating that the manuscripts were made for a wealthy patron. The pictures display a vigorous, fully developed local style descended from Sultanate painting with various overlays of Mughal or Safavid styles, especially in physiognomy and costumes. Made in northwest India, the manuscripts offer evidence for the existence of a well-developed provincial school derived from Sultanate styles, itself originally based on 15th century Persian painting. Thus, some reliance on the iconographic program of the Tehran copy is possible: an example is the lion prostrating itself before the mounted 'Ali (Anvari, p. 42; Titley, pl. 42). That said, only some 20 of the 156 illustrations in the Indian copies taken together more or less match the iconographic program of the Tehran manuscript, the others are very different from the original scheme, let alone from the general layout and style of the paintings. In the Multani paintings, moreover, 'Ali frequently appears in Rostam's idiosyncratic lion or tiger-hat, as do some of his companions as well (e.g. MS Add. 19,766, fols. 15b, 168a, 178a). 'Ali's sanctity, although sometimes indicated by a fiery halo (e.g., MS Add. 19,766, fols. 52b, 59b, 146b, 163a, 166b, 241b, 248a, 259a), is of secondary importance to his and his companions' adventures (meaning not clear).

An entirely different approach can be seen in a much later Indian copy, namely a *Kāvarān-nāma* manuscript at the National Library in New Delhi (Acc. 89.1065). Copied by Maḥbub Šāh Musavi Ḥosaynī, and containing 38 paintings, it was completed on 21 Moḥarram 1127/27 January 1715, for Mir Moḥammad-Mahdi Khan, a nobleman at the Mughal court of Moḥammad Farroḳsiār (r. 1713-19). According to Schmitz and Akhtar, the paintings were made by a Kashmiri-trained artist, representing the 18th century Kashmiri style (*qalam*); it is probably the earliest dated manuscript to show the hallmarks of this simplified style, which developed in a provincial school working away from the Mughal Empire. As in most Kashmiri paintings, both the Prophet and 'Ali are portrayed with veiled faces and high flames surrounding their heads; for example, in the episode of the two meeting in Medina towards the end of the epic, where the painter also added 'Ali's two sons, rendered in a similar



manner as the two main protagonists (National Museum, New Delhi, Inv. No. 89.1065, fol. 280). The veneration of 'Ali is also expressed by the fact more than half of the 38 paintings illustrate 'Ali's battlefield feats: e.g., he lifts the enemy by the belt while wielding the *Dhu'l-Faqār* against a whole army (fol. 144a), in a manner rather like that depicted in the Tehran manuscript (Anvari, p. 101), and he cuts his mounted enemy in two, with decapitated corpses and battered limbs sprawled under the chargers' hooves and trumpeters celebrating his victory from behind a high rolling hill (fol. 156b). The influence of the iconographic plan of the Tehran copy on the Kashmiri one is evident also in other of the paintings; for example, the illustrations of Abu'l-Meḥjan bathing beside the encampment of Golandām (fol. 112a; Canby, 1998, p. 32, pl. 11 [from Sadruddin Aga Khan Collection Ir.M.13]) and 'Ali releasing Qanbar from captivity by the king of *Ķāvarān* (fol. 133a; Anvari, p. 125).

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