



MO'IN-E MOŞAVVER

MO'IN-E MOŞAVVER (مومنین مومنان, lit. Mo'in the painter), Safavid manuscript and album painter, arguably the most prominent Safavid artist of the second half of the 17th century (b. ca. 1610-1615; d. probably 1104/1693).

LIFE AND STYLE

Mo'in's extant work, which includes more than 300 paintings and drawings, spans almost sixty years from 1635 to 1693. Mo'in's style, which remained remarkably consistent over his lifetime, represents a return to the more conservative and traditional values of earlier generations of Persian painting; as such, it is a marked reversal in values from that of his prominent predecessor Rezā 'Abbāsi, and a rejection of the Western values that became the vogue of many of his later contemporaries. Because of the large number of works that can be associated with his name, it is generally accepted that Mo'in had a workshop, where less distinguished artists assisted him, at least in the creation of the many manuscript paintings.

None of the contemporary chronicles of the time makes any mention of Mo'in, so little is known about his life except what can be gleaned from his numerous extant works. Mo'in's single-page images, particularly the drawings that often reflect the life and realities of his personal surroundings, are often accompanied by lengthy inscriptions, which relate information about events concerning their creation, the subjects' identity, or other relevant conditions. They are executed with a keen sense of draftsmanship and observation, and quite often are dated. One outstanding example is the drawing of A Tiger



Attacking a Youth (Figure 1, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 14.634); it has both a lengthy, detailed inscription and unusual subject matter. The nearly illegible inscription suggests that it was drawn from an event that he had witnessed, or which, perhaps, had been described to him; together, drawing and inscription reveal a true sense of the artist's revulsion at the horror of the event—a rarity for Persian painting. Unlike other contemporary accounts of the period, which are primarily historical chronicles with little information on everyday life, Mo'in's inscription "offers a rare personal glimpse of life in Isfahan" (Farhad, 1992, p. 116). Tiger Attacking a Youth is not an isolated example in Mo'in's oeuvre; other works—such as Woman Milking a Cow, A Lion and His Keeper (Figure 2), Adolescent with a Rooster—just to cite a few examples (see the list below), provide additional, unusual views of the details of everyday life, fully documented in images and words.

Perhaps the most important Mo'in inscription, at least from a historical perspective, is on a portrait of Rezā 'Abbāsi (Princeton University Library, no. 96G, dated 1084/1673). It is a lengthy inscription signed by Mo'in, attesting that the portrait was painted by him a month before the death of his master (*ostād*) Rezā in 1044/1635 and completed years later on the fortieth anniversary of his passing. Most scholars seem to accept that Mo'in was speaking in the literal, not figurative, sense in referring to Rezā as his master, and that he indeed learned his art directly from Rezā in a master/student workshop relationship. Additional credence to Mo'in's having been in the workshop of Rezā is Mo'in's apparent knowledge of, and access to, a number of Rezā's works, such as a drawing attributable to him in Tehran (Poet Attacked by Dogs, Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran, no. 33-421; Behzād. To this, one might also add Mo'in's depiction of Shah 'Abbās and a Page (Welch, 1973, no. 85), which is in turn inspired by Rezā's depiction of Shah 'Abbās and the Mughal Khan 'Ālam (Mirza Bark'ardār), now in St. Petersburg. Presumably, Mo'in may have joined Rezā as his apprentice around 1630, a few years before the elder artist's death in 1635, which would place his birthday in the period 1610-1615.

The earliest securely signed and dated work attributable to Mo'in, a Portrait of a Youth (Figure 4, Freer Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, no. 53.57; Atil, p. 70, no. 34), is dated 1[0]47/1638, only three years after Rezā's death. Several other drawings in similar style have unsigned inscriptions in Mo'in's hand and can be assigned to about the same time. The subject matter of these early drawings is not far removed from that of Rezā, but they are not slavish copies of his master's style. If Mo'in was indeed a student of Rezā, he digested what he

chose from Reżā, and transformed that style into something else. Mo'in's mustachioed, stocky, virulent men are far removed from the svelte types and languid poses of Reżā's figures that made Reżā's art quite unsuitable for illustrations of the *Šāh-nāma* and historiographical works.

EXTANT WORKS

Mo'in's known works are grouped below in the following manner: first, manuscript illustrations, including seven *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts with 161 paintings, three historiography manuscripts (histories of Shah Esmā'il I) with 68 paintings, and 3 paintings from miscellaneous manuscripts; second, individual loose pages, including at least 29 paintings and 11 drawings.

Manuscript Illustrations.

There are twelve or more manuscripts that include paintings attributable to Mo'in or his workshop. Only two of these manuscripts provide any mention of the patron's name or the place of production, or any indication that it was produced for a royal patron. Some of the manuscripts are complete, others fragmentary and/or dispersed. It is not by coincidence that eleven of these manuscripts are epics, either the *Šāh-nāma* or histories of Shah Esmā'il, for which Mo'in's style was more appropriately suited than those of his other contemporaries from Reżā 'Abbāsi's workshop. Conversely, very few of the romantic epics can be associated with his name.

Šāh-nāma manuscripts. Mo'in's extant *Šāh-nāma* manuscripts include three complete manuscripts with ninety-three paintings and four fragmentary manuscripts with sixty-eight paintings. There is also one painting that may be the early work of Mo'in, circa 1630-40; British Library, London, Ms. 1256, folio 79a (<http://www.persianpainting.net/MoinMsA/index.html>).

(1) A complete or nearly complete *Šāh-nāma* with 42 known paintings by Mo'in has a colophon dated 1058/1648 and one painting dated 1059/1649. The manuscript is characterized by gilt interlinear decoration and calligraphy written on the diagonal. Paintings are all signed and are excellent, perhaps even the best, examples of Mo'in's manuscript work. The re-bound volume containing 27 paintings is in the David Collection in Copenhagen; 15 individual leaves with paintings that were separated from the original volume are dispersed in several collections including the British Museum, London, the Khalili Collection in London, and the Sackler Art Museum, Boston. Other



paintings from this manuscript have occasionally turned up at auction (see Canby, 2010, for an excellent article on this manuscript; reproduced online at www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsB/Canby_article.html; for illustrations of the “reassembled” manuscript, see www.persianpainting.net/MoinMsB/index.html).

(2) A complete manuscript that constitutes the first half of the *Šāh-nāma* includes thirty paintings, of which twenty-eight are signed by Mo'in in the lower margin; several are dated 1065/1654-55. Most of the paintings are in good Mo'in style (Welch, 1978, illustrates six of them). They are presently in the Aga Khan Museum, in Toronto, AKM00274; formerly they were in the collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, Geneva, Ms. 22 (www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsC/index.html). The matching volume that constitutes the second half of the *Šāh-nāma* is in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (see below).

(3) A complete manuscript that constitutes the second half of the *Šāh-nāma* contains twenty-one paintings, all of which are signed by Mo'in; one of them is dated 1066/1655. The paintings are all in good Mo'in style and for the most part exhibit clever solutions to unique compositional problems (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ms. 270; www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsD/index.html).

(4) A dispersed, fragmentary *Šāh-nāma* manuscript originally contained 104 or more paintings, of which thirty-four (and counting) paintings are known at present. Twenty-one of the paintings are signed by Mo'in. The paintings vary from fair to excellent Mo'in style; this variance in quality suggests the possible involvement of a workshop. Paintings date from circa 1660. The rebound core of the original volume, the so-called Gutman *Šāh-nāma*, in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, contains twelve paintings. Nine additional paintings formerly in the collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan (Geneva, Ms. 4) are now in the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto. Others are dispersed at various collections around the world (www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsE/index.html).

(5) From a dispersed, fragmentary *Šāh-nāma* manuscript, sixteen (and counting) paintings are known. All of the paintings are in the style of Mo'in, including two that are signed and dated 1077/1666-67. There is evidence of other hands being involved in the production of the paintings, which appears to be a collaborative effort of studio assistants. Some of the paintings have been severely damaged and suffered even more from very crude retouching (Grube, 1972, nos. 163-72, illustrates most of the paintings; Ex-Kraus Collection,

New York). Eight paintings are in the Khalili Collection in London; three are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The remainder is dispersed (www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsF/index.html).

(6) A complete manuscript of the *Šāh-nāma* contains forty-two paintings, of which twenty-one can be associated with the style of Mo'in (Robinson, 1972, pp. 73-86). The remaining paintings are signed by, or attributable to, Moḥammad-al-Zamān 'Ali-Naqi b. Shaikh 'Abbāsi, and an unknown Pir Beg (or Gōlām Parmāk). The calligraphy was apparently accomplished in six years, being dated 1074/1663 and 1079/1669. The paintings are of later period and are dated between 1104/1693 and 1109/1698. Fourteen of the twenty-one paintings are signed by Mo'in; five are dated 1104/1693. Curiously, eighteen of these twenty-one paintings bear the miniscule signature of Fażl-'Ali in obscure places, often in addition to the signature of Mo'in Moşavver that appears in the lower margin. That Mo'in had artists of lower status assisting him in the studio has long been taken for granted. Eighteen paintings bear the signature of one artist, which is rather unusual. This and the fact that a number of artists with different styles were engaged in finishing this manuscript leaves the impression that perhaps the death of Mo'in in 1104/1693 left the patron little option but to allow studio assistants to finish those paintings already near completion and to commission other artists to execute those not yet started (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acq.13.228.17 [Cochran 4]; all paintings are illustrated and supplemented with further references, at www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsG/index.html).

Historiographical manuscripts (histories of Shah Esmā'il I). It is not clear why there should have been a sudden and profound interest in the reign of Shah Esmā'il I (r. 907-30/1501-24) during the last quarter of the 17th century. All three of these Esmā'il manuscripts with 68 images are illustrated by Mo'in-e Moşavver. Unlike conventional *Šāh-nāma* illustrations, which had a long established iconography to emulate, there were no prototypes for the Esmā'il manuscripts. The compositions, often static with battles reduced to a contest of individuals, draw upon Mo'in's prior experience with *Šāh-nāma* illustration, but the details often reveal that the artist was familiar with the text, and he adhered to the text in his illustrations.

(1) A bound incomplete copy of the *Tāriḳ-e 'ālāmārā-ye Šāh Esmā'il* with twenty-one paintings is in good Mo'in style. One painting has an inscription in Mo'in's handwriting and a date; the signature is smudged and illegible, but a later attribution next to it claims the paintings to be the work of Mo'in



Moşavver. The date in the inscription, 1010/1601, is stylistically impossible, but the year is written “10 10,” with a definite space between the first “0” and the second “1,” suggesting that the date has been altered or damaged. If the second “1” was originally something else, it could only be a “6” or “9,” making it either 1060/1650 or 1090/1679. The latter date fits chronologically well with the other histories. The Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran (formerly in the Negrestan Museum [no. 77.1.7], which had acquired it from the Mahboubian Collection, New York [Mahboubian cat. no. 93]) lists all paintings with two illustrations. In addition there are seven detached leaves with paintings in exactly the same style that were extracted from the bound unit, perhaps when it was rebound, dispersed in various collections. All 28 paintings are illustrated, along with further references, at www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsM/index.html.

(2) A complete copy of the *Tāriḳ-e jahāngoşā-ye kāqān-e şāhebqerān*, written by a certain Bijan circa 1680, contains twenty-one paintings in the style of Mo'in. None of the paintings is dated, but they were probably done circa 1685. Four paintings are signed in the lower margin by Mo'in; fifteen others can be attributed to him, perhaps with studio assistance. A. H. Morton was the first one to identify the author and title of the manuscript, for long known as the Ross Anonymous (Morton, 1990; British Library, London, Ms. Or. 3248; Storey, I/2, pp. 1278-79). All nineteen paintings of Mo'in are illustrated, along with further references, at www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsL/index.html.

(3) A dispersed, larger, more elaborate and revised version of the same *Tāriḳ-e jahāngoşā-ye kāqān-e şāhebqerān* with thirty-one paintings (and still counting) have been identified (Sims, pp. 54-57; and personal correspondence, 23 May 2010). All of the paintings have been mounted, in the late 18th or early 19th century, on different colored mounts with a collar of contrasting colors. The text is set off by gold ornamentation (*taḥrir*), which distinguishes it very clearly from the other Esmā'il manuscripts. One of the paintings is signed by Mo'in and dated 990, which should probably be read 1099/1688. All thirty-one paintings are illustrated, along with further references, at www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsN/index.html.

Miscellaneous manuscripts. This category of Mo'in's works includes:

(1) A single leaf from a *Haft paykar* of Neẓāmi Ganjavi, circa 1660 (Philadelphia Free Library, no. P106; www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsI/index.html).

(2) A single leaf from a *Ḳosrow va Şirin* of Neẓāmi reportedly in the Iran

Bastan Museum, Tehran (Kubicova, p. 68 and pl. 36), circa 1660, perhaps from the same manuscript as the preceding (www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsJ/index.html).

(3) A single leaf from an unknown manuscript reportedly in the Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran (Kubicova, pp. 67-68 and pl. 37), circa 1660 (www.persianpainting.net/Mo'inMsK/index.html).

Individual Loose Pages of Paintings and Drawings.

As one might expect, the paintings are more carefully executed and reserved than the drawings. The largest single group of paintings consists of portraits of various dignitaries, probably executed for a commission. The remainder is a collection of various subjects, including genre, youths and cupbearers, studies of birds, and fanciful subjects that intrigued the artist. The drawings are, by comparison, looser in execution, by virtue of the medium as well as purpose; they appear, for the most part, to be records or detail studies, some of which might have been intended for incorporation into some later painting. The following listing does not intend to be all-inclusive, and for the sake of brevity, many attributions lacking a signature have not been included.

Paintings. The extant Mo'in paintings include the following 29 works:

(1) Portrait of Ƙalifa Solţān, E'temād-al-Dawla, ca. 1650, with unsigned inscription in Mo'in's handwriting (Christies, 22 April 1981, Lot 120).

(2) Portrait of a Princely Youth, 1063/1653 (Sotheby's, 15 October 1998, Lot 65).

(3) Youth in a Pink Turban, circa 1660 or later (Welch, 1978, Ir.M.44).

(4) Loving Couple, 1081/1670 (Farhad, 1990, no. 7).

(5) The Piper, 1082/1672 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms. Arabe 6075, fol. 8; illus., Blochet, pl. CVII).

(6) European Youth Standing Holding a Jar, dated 1084/1673 (Anthony and Stuart Welch, no. 40).

(7) Portrait of Reżā 'Abbāsi, 1084/1673 (Princeton University Library no. 96G; illus., Welch, 1973, no. 76).

(8) Young Lady Smoking a Waterpipe, 1084/1673-74 (Topkapi Saray Library,



Istanbul, Hazine 2142. F. 12; illus., Stchoukine, pl. LXXVI).

(9) Portrait of Ḥakim Şefā'i Eşfahāni, 1085/1674 (Anthony and Stuart Welch, no. 41).

(10) Portrait of Navvāb Mirzā Moḥammad-Bāqer and His Son, 1085/1674 (Aga Khan Museum, AKM00081; illus., Welch, 1972, Ir.M.48).

(11) A Lion and Its Keeper, 1086/1676 (Sotheby's NY, 10 December 1981, Lot 138).

(12) Woman Milking a Cow, 1087/1676 (Staatliche Museen, Berlin, L6756; illus., Kühnel, p. 114, fig. 6).

(13) Adolescent Seated Drinking Wine, 1087/1676 (British Museum no. 1920-9-17-0298,1; illus., Stchoukine, pl. LXXIXa).

(14) Man Attacked by a Dragon, 1087/1676 (British Museum no. 1949-7-9-011; illus., Stchoukine, pl. LXXXIIIb).

(15) An Old Shepherd Leaning on His Staff, 1087/1676 (Sotheby's, 12 October 2000, Lot 66).

(16) Lady Reclining Against a Cushion, 1089/1678 (Sotheby's, 1 June 1987, Lot 43).

(17) A Circle of Sufi Boys, 1089/1678-79 (Sotheby's, 16 October 1996, Lot 65).

(18) European Youth Standing with a Dog, 1089/1679 (Binney, 1966, no. 55).

(19) Darvish Seated Under Some Rocks, 1091/1680 (Staatliche Museen, Berlin, J.6820; illus., Kühnel, fig. 1).

(20) Youth Standing Pouring Wine, 1093/1682 (Los Angeles County Museum, M.73.5.570; illus., Binney, 1973, no. 255).

(21) Youth Seated Drinking Wine, 1094/1693 (Fitzwilliam Museum, Marlay bequest no. 22; illus., Robinson, 1967, no. 90-22).

(22) Portrait of Timur Khan Torkmān, 1095/1683-84 (Oriental Institute, St. Petersburg, Ms. D181, p. 16; illus., in Akimushkin and Ivanov, no. 74).

(23) A Bird Perched on a Rock, 1097/1685 (Sotheby's 20 November 1986, Lot

185).

(24) Equestrian Portrait of Mirzā Moḥammad-Tāqi Tabrizi (facing left), 1097/1685, Hashem Khosrovani Collection (Farhad, 1990, pl. 10).

(25) An Old Man Kneeling by a Tree Stump, 1097/1685 (Sotheby's, 14 October 1999, Lot 52).

(26) A Couple Kneeling, 1098/1687 (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, no. W690; illus., Grube, 1962, no. 121).

(27) Indian Lady with a Gazelle, 1099/1688 (Fitzwilliam Museum, Marlay bequest no. 25; illus., Robinson, 1967, no. 90-25);

(28) White Bird Sitting on a Rock, 1100/1689 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 14.635; illus., Welch, 1973, no. 79).

(29) Shah 'Abbās and a Page, uncertain date 1041/1632-33 or 1082/1671-72. The event depicted took place at the earlier date; stylistically, the work conforms to the latter date (Sackler Museum, Cambridge, no. 1960.48; illus., Welch, 1973, no. 85).

Drawings. The extant Mo'in's drawings include the following eleven works.

(1) Young Man Wearing a Hat with a Feather, 1047/1638 (Freer Gallery, no.53.57; illus., Sarre and Mittwoch, pl. 47, fig. 12).

(2) Shah Şafi I Meeting with an Uzbek (?), 1048/1638, unsigned (Los Angeles County Museum, no.73.5.469; illus., Binney, 1973, pp. 136).

(3) Two Lovers, 1052/1642, unsigned (Freer Gallery, no.53.41; illus., Sarre and Mittwoch, pl. 30).

(4) Old Man with a Beard Holding a Pair of Glasses, 1063/1653 (Topkapi Saray Library, Hazine 2168, fol. 8v).

(5) Adolescent Walking with a Rooster in His Arms, 1066/1656 (Chester Beatty Library, Ms. 265(ii); illus., Wiet, pl. XL left).

(6) Man with a Moustache Holding a Sheet of Paper, 107(?)/1660-68 (illus., Martin, pl. 146b).



(7) Tiger Attacking a Man, 1082/1672 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 14.634; illus., Welch, 1973, no. 75).

(8) Lion with Four Bodies and One Head, 1088/1677 (illus., Welch, 1973, no. 77).

(9) Camel Seen from the Rear, 1089/1678 (illus., Grube, 1962, no. 120).

(10) Man with a Moustache Seated, unsigned, undated; attribution circa 1670. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 14.619; illus., Coomaraswamy, pl. XLVIII).

(11) Equestrian Portrait of Mirzā Moḥammad-Taqi Tabrizi (facing right), 1097/1685, Hashem Khosrovani Collection. (Farhad, 1990, pl. 9).

For the most complete, fully illustrated review of the manuscript painting of Mo'in-e Moşavver to date, with further references, see www.persianpainting.net.

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