

# AMIR MOHTASHEMI



## Rustam Saves Bizhan from a Well

Bukhara, Central Asia, circa 1670

Opaque pigments on paper, heightened with gold

Folio 10 x 18 cm

Stock no.: A5985

Provenance:

Collection of Octave Homberg (1876–1941);

His sale, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 'Collection de Octave Homberg', 3-5 June, 1931, no. 103.

This fine folio depicts Rustam, the hero of the *Shahnameh*, saving his grandson Bijan from a well. Bijan has been imprisoned by the Turanian king Afrasiab for falling in love with his daughter. Rustam's men are unable to lift the heavy stone covering the mouth of the well, but a prayer to the creator grants Rustam the strength to lift it and free Bijan. Rustam is depicted in his traditional war attire, known as *Babr-e Bayān*, comprising a white leopard head helmet and a tiger skin jacket. The panels of text, written in black *nasta'liq*, are divided by gold columns.

This page comes from a rare compendium of chronicles (*Majma' al-tavarikh*), owned by the French diplomat and financier Octave Homberg until 1931. It contained 85 now-dispersed folios, featuring extracts from the *Shahnameh*, the *Faramouznameh*, the *Bahman Nameh*, and the *Nariman Nameh*. The frontispiece of this manuscript and several of the paintings were signed by the artists Muhammad

Muqim and Muhammad Salim, two of the leading court artists of Bukhara, the former Central Asian khanate and city in modern-day Uzbekistan.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript was produced during the Janid dynasty (1599–1785), probably commissioned by Abd al-Aziz, Khan of Bukhara between 1645 and 1680. Only a small number of court artists from this period are known. A work of 1696 includes the names of four artists, of whom one is Muhammad Muqim.<sup>2</sup> Three other artists were known to have enjoyed royal patronage, of whom one is Muhammad Salim.<sup>3</sup> The two artists also collaborated on a copy of Abu Tahir's *Qiran-i Habashi*.<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Muqim also illustrated folios of a Khamsa of Nizami in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (accession no. [276.205](#)), dated 1081 AH (1671 CE), and a Shahnameh dated 1074 AH (1664 CE), held in the Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, Tashkent (inv. no. [3463](#)).<sup>5</sup>

This miniature features many of the characteristics of Bukharan miniatures under Abd al-Aziz, as described by Yves Porter. The men have stockier silhouettes, dressed in a long robe covered by a short-sleeved tunic of contrasting colour. The faces are oval, and they wear turban helmets with black aigrettes.<sup>6</sup> The miniature shows stylistic influence from Mughal India, which may originate from Muqim, who reportedly worked in Kashmir sometime before 1666.<sup>7</sup>

[1] 'Features of Oriental Miniatures in the 17th Century in Bukhara', *The Cultural Legacy of Uzbekistan*, retrieved online via <https://legacy.uz/en/features-of-oriental-miniatures-in-the-17th-century-in-bukhara/> on 02/07/2025.

[2] Muhammad Amīn, Mohīt al-tawārīk, completed in 1109/1697-98, cited in Schmitz, Barbara. 'Bukharan School of Miniature Painting', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. IV, fasc. 5, pp. 527–530. Retrieved online via <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bukhara-vi/> on 02/07/2025.

[3] Schmitz. *Op. Cit.*

[4] Porter, Yves. 'Farhad le peintre : à propos des ateliers de peinture de Boukhara à l'époque de 'Abd al-'Aziz Khan, 1645-1680', *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 3.4 (1997), pp. 267–279: p. 274.

[5] The Collection of the Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Volume XXV, part 5. Tashkent: East Star Media, 2020. pp. 192–199.

[6] Porter, Yves. 'Le kitab-khâna de 'Abd al-'Azîz Khân (1645-1680) et le mécénat de la peinture à Boukhara', *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 7 (1999), pp. 117–136: p. 120.

[7] Skelton, Robert. 'Relations between Mughal and Central Asian painting in the seventeenth century', in J. Guy (Ed.) *Indian Art and Connoisseurship, Essays in Honour of Douglas Barrett*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995, pp. 277–296: pp. 283–285.