

Eleanor Sims

Editor of Islamic Art and Independent Scholar

More from Mashhad? A recently re-discovered illustrated *Shahnama* manuscript of the 17th century

India Office Islamic MS 3682 has lain, largely unnoticed, among the Persian MSS of this important collection until late in 2013. On December 30 of that year, Ursula Sims-Williams posted an entry ([link](#)) on the British Library Asian and African studies blog in which she called attention to the large, but overlooked, illustrated 17th-century copy of Firdausi's *Shahnama*. Its illustrations number 48 and are rich in gold and still-untarnished silver. In style, they do not so much resemble that of Mu'in Musawwir as that associated with the *équipe* of painters who contributed to a densely illustrated *Shahnama* completed in 1058/1648, and now in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle. Only two painters' names actually appear on the paintings of this celebrated manuscript--and only once, each: one is the somewhat protean Muhammad Yusuf, although the late B. W. Robinson had attributed over a hundred of the unsigned Windsor illustrations to his hand. So it is a matter of no small interest that, among the IOL manuscript's 48 paintings, six should also be signed by this same painter, including one of the finest of the ensemble.

My presentation will offer a description, and an aesthetic evaluation, of IO Islamic 3682, including the reinterpretation of its date. I shall then consider its position vis-à-vis the Windsor volume and others that, taken altogether, may direct us toward distinguishing a 17th-century style of painting to be associated with Mashhad, rather than with Isfahan.