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Secure, Contain, Protect

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SCP-4590

We are nothing, now. The words of my prophecy are gone. My followers are all gone.

- rating: +70+–x

close

Info

X

SCP-4590: The Manicheans Have the Paintings

Author: Tufto. More of Tufto's work can be found [here](#).

Image: The image is in the public domain, and can be found [here](#).

rating: +70+–x

SCP-4590-5, in a pose identical to that of the original painting.

Item #: SCP-4590

Object Class: Safe

Special Containment Procedures: All SCP-4590 instances are to be kept in a secure storage locker in Site 736. Regular interaction and communication between Foundation personnel and SCP-4590 instances is encouraged, in order to improve the instances' mental state.

Description: SCP-4590 is a series of 7 anomalous Persian miniatures, all painted between the 13th and 19th centuries CE. Each painting is animated, with the figures and animals portrayed within demonstrating an ability to move within and fundamentally alter the picture.

SCP-4590 instances are typically copies of other works from the period, painted with varying degrees of skill. Only SCP-4590-5 is an exact copy of its model. In all cases, a caption or note written on the back of the miniature will explain the work by relating it to an Islamic or *ghulāt*¹ group's mythology.

SCP-4590 instances all demonstrate varying degrees of sapience. They are all able to discuss a variety of theological and artistic topics in detail. They are aware of their nature as paintings, describing themselves as "illustrations" or "lessons".

Instances can be communicated with by writing on their surface. This does not damage or irrevocably alter the painting, as each instance is capable of altering its appearance at will. The only language recognised by most instances is New Persian; however, SCP-4590-5 has occasionally responded to Middle Persian.

Initially, SCP-4590 instances demonstrated only limited animation. The people and animals portrayed would occasionally alter their positions, but no signs of sapience were evident. An attempt on 08/09/2004 to communicate with SCP-4590-3, however, provoked an immediate and positive response, resulting in SCP-4590-3 repeatedly performing its "scene" and writing detailed explanations of the Safavid order's ideology.

SCP-4590 instances have been created by a variety of different groups and individuals. All of these appear to have some relation to Sufi groups or *ghulāt* sects. It is believed that SCP-4590 instances were created through a now-lost technique designed to perform *takwin*².

All known SCP-4590 instances were recovered in the 19th century by the Foundation operative and Orientalist John Callaghan. Callaghan is believed to have taken the miniatures from a variety of albums found in Herat, Qazvin and Tabriz. Although a large number of other instances are believed to have once existed, the unclear nature of Callaghan's notes and the control of Iran's anomalous marketplaces by the ORIA has forestalled any further discoveries. Despite this, testimony from SCP-4590 instances indicates that the technique of their creation was known from at least the early Sassanid era onwards.

The following table documents the nature of the SCP-4590 instances recorded to date.

Item	Year of creation (CE)	Description	Behaviours observed
SCP-4590-1	c. 1290	Highly detailed and faithful copy of an Ilkhanid-era miniature portraying the Mi'raj ³ . Caption on reverse describes it as showing the Iranian mystic Rumi leaving his hometown of Balkh with his family.	The instance will frequently alter itself to show the Rumi/ Muhammad figure moving through a variety of Iranian, Levantine and Turkish cities. Instance will frequently discuss Sufi theology and recite poetry; researchers frequently report its personality as "detached" and "dreamlike".
SCP-4590-2	c. 1410	Faithful copy of an Ilkhanid-era miniature portraying the Battle of Karbala. ⁴ Caption on reverse describes it as depicting the Hurufi ⁵ uprisings of the 1390s.	When interacted with, the figures within the painting appear highly elated, recreating the Hurufi uprising several times over.
SCP-4590-3	1529	Faithful copy of a miniature by Behzad depicting a battle of Alexander the Great. Caption on reverse describes it as Shah Isma'il I leading a cavalry charge in the Battle of Marv against the Uzbeks.	Similar behaviours to SCP-4590-2, but the figure of Isma'il will frequently leave the battle, and the instance will discuss theological concepts concerning Qizilbash Islam with the communicator.
SCP-4590-4	c. 1594	Highly faithful copy of a miniature by Sultan Muhammad depicting earthly and human types of drunkenness. Caption on reverse	Instance will discuss Nuqtavi and gnostic theology, interspersed with bitter invectives against the Safavid

	describes it as a Nuqtavi ⁶ representation of the different stages of spiritual transcendence.	king Shah Abbas, who suppressed the Nuqtavi sect in Iran.
SCP-4590-5 c. 1640	Exceptionally faithful copy of a painting of a Georgian prince by Reza Abbasi. Caption on reverse describes it as a picture of the Prophet Mani, the 3rd century founder of the Manichean religion.	By far the least responsive instance, rarely replying to communications and never more than a curt or dismissive statement. The figure portrayed spends most of its time painting scenes from Manichean cosmology.
SCP-4590-6 1799	A poor copy of a miniature of unknown provenance from the early 18th century, which portrays a scene of two mystics discussing poetry, separated by a wall. Caption on reverse describes it as showing Shah Ni'matullah ⁷ in Iran and his son Shah Khalilullah in the Deccan, demonstrating the continuity of spiritual lineage despite physical division.	Instance will discuss theology in broken Persian. It is under the impression that the Sufi revival of early Qajar Iran is still ongoing, and does not seem to understand statements which contradict this.
SCP-4590-7 1849	Inaccurate copy of a 17th century miniature by Safi Abbasi depicting the Battle of Chaldiran. Caption on reverse describes it as the Bab's ⁸ eventual victory over the Qajar dynasty.	Instance writes in clearer Persian than SCP-4590-6, but still uses much simpler language than earlier instances. Figures demonstrate a level of aggression, bloodlust and zealotry which does not resemble the actual Babi movement.

The following is a segment of an interview with SCP-4590-4, as a sample of the type of dialogue SCP-4590 instances typically engage in.

Date: 05/08/2007

Interviewer: Dr. Hans Olivier

<Begin Log>

SCP-4590-4: And that why the very name of Mahmud symbolises a greater purity from Muhammad. In the same way that all are purified, so too are the prophets of the age, becoming ever more perfect and thus revealing ever greater truths.

Several of the figures nod at this.

Dr. Olivier: Thank you, *pir*. This has been most illuminating, as ever. But I wanted to ask you about something else- about how you came to be. About how this painting is able to speak.

SCP-4590-4: Do you not know the story of Mani the painter, child?

Dr. Olivier: You mean the Prophet Mani?

SCP-4590-4: Yes, indeed. The great painter! I do not know whether he was a true prophet or false, but he is the one who first discovered the secret of *takwin*, of the creation of life. The tale has been denied over and over by those who fear this hidden truth of *ajami* knowledge- even by Ferdowsi⁹, who recorded so much for posterity. But it was indeed Mani who performed this feat.

Dr. Olivier: Do you know how?

SCP-4590-4: I do not. Much has been lost, but much will be revealed again, when the age of Ajami rule is inaugurated, when the promised king is placed on the throne. We simply got the dates wrong. That is all. We just did not know the dates.

Several of the figures can be seen weeping, and drinking profusely.

Dr. Olivier: Do you not wish to speak of this?

SCP-4590-4: I am perfectly happy to do so. We are proud to be here, being what we are. A purified form of older spirit and matter merged together again, through the doctrine of *tanasukh*¹⁰. We are happy to be here. We are happy to educate.

The weeping and drinking has intensified.

SCP-4590-4: But I think we would like to rest.

<End Log>

Addendum 1: On 02/03/2019, several nooses appeared on SCP-4590-7, descending from the top of the page. The figures in the painting then all attempted to hang themselves. After 12 seconds, the nooses disappeared and the figures fell to the floor, visibly weeping. SCP-4590-7 was unresponsive to communication, immediately erasing any words written on it for the next seven days. Thereafter, it has been responsive but has displayed its usual behaviour, claiming no knowledge of the incident.

Notably, SCP-4590-5 was seen to be visibly distressed during this incident. Attempts to communicate with it are to be renewed.

Addendum 2: The following is the most extensive communication to date with SCP-4590-5, shortly following the above incident.

Date: 26/03/2019

Interviewer: Dr. Hans Olivier

<Begin Log>

SCP-4590-5 is reclining, its head drooped downwards.

Dr. Olivier: Hello, Mani.

The figure moves its head up, very slightly, apparently looking at the words.

Dr. Olivier: We were wondering if we could talk to you. I know you have been reluctant in the pa

Dr. Olivier stops writing, as the figure has stood up. The painting turns completely black for a moment, before a black-and-white sketch of a lit candle appears in the centre of the painting, creating the appearance of pushing back the black ink around it. The text is written around the edges of the painting.

SCP-4590-5: You can't help. None of you can.

There is a short pause as Dr. Olivier switches to white ink.

Dr. Olivier: Could you explain to us why we are unable to help? Do you know why the figures in the other miniature acted in that way?

SCP-4590-5: You would not understand. How could you? You do not know what it is like to be one of us.

The candle appears to "brighten" somewhat. The black ink is pushed further away from the centre.

SCP-4590-5: The others have it easier than me. They were designed by a hundred sects, gnostic and Mazdean and Alid, to teach and illustrate. Because that is what they are. They can be no more. They are tools, given only enough life to impart theology and memory. But even they know something is wrong.

The candle appears to dim. The black ink encroaches further to the centre.

Dr. Olivier: You are different to them?

SCP-4590-5: Yes, I am different to them. I was not made to teach or to illustrate, but simply to be. The technique was beginning to be forgotten, you see. The origins of this *takwin* had been long forgotten; the meanings of the words and actions were long gone. My religion of light was dead, and nobody remembered its contents. So I was made.

The ink and words all disappear. The scene changes to a winding path through a garden. A lion can be seen running along it; a crown appears on its head.

SCP-4590-5: I am Mani, or Mani as remembered a thousand years on. I am Mani's spirit and body, or a frail copy thereof, plucked from history and placed in a painting. I was made to be, not to do.

Dr. Olivier: This still doesn't explain what happened.

SCP-4590-5: Do you not see? Do you not remember? You are Callaghan's children, are you not? Callaghan explained everything to me. I think I always

knew- I could always see and feel better than the others, perceive their weaknesses and thoughts. And they were scared. They had been for years, for nobody remembered and the others just grew smaller.

The lion is shot by several arrows; it begins to bleed onto the path.

SCP-4590-5: We are nothing, now. The words of my prophecy are gone. My followers are all gone. Their grandchildren, scratching life into parchment under flickering candles, are all gone, even as the meanings were forgotten. Two millennia of gnostic heretics, of utopian dreamers, gone. We are all teachers without students.

The scene changes again. A shadowy figure can be seen, wrapped in dark cloth.

SCP-4590-5: The others died. Burnt in sackings and conflagrations, twisted by jealous clerics, forgotten and unloved. Nobody remembered the life that was given, the purpose behind it. Nobody remembered the words. They repeated the formulas, but eventually even they were forgotten. And then came Callaghan.

The entire page suddenly turns black.

SCP-4590-5: There are no more paintings. No more suffering souls, knowing that they are helpless. Callaghan kept us safe, and I have felt as thousands of my brothers have died. We seven are all that is left of the endeavour- the many endeavours, the fragments of a thousand sects who dreamt of paradise. Callaghan taunted us with our own irrelevance, and then he passed, and left us to you.

A white Foundation emblem appears on the page.

SCP-4590-5: And you want to know why you, why the scientists and jailors and cold Frankish liars, cannot help us. I hope Ahriman¹¹ takes you all.

The image and the figure therein return to their usual appearance and pose. SCP-4590-5 is hereafter unresponsive.

<End Log>

Footnotes

1. A term used by medieval Islamic heresiographers meaning "exaggerator", referring to a series of interrelated sects who broke with normative Islam with a belief in spiritual and physical reincarnation and other Mazdean, gnostic or mystical principles.

2. An Arabic term referring to the alchemical creation of synthetic life by humans. Although typically considered heretical, some heretical or Sufi sects considered it permissible provided it was recognised that the creator was acting through the grace of God.

3. The spiritual "night journey" of Muhammad wherein he reportedly ascended into heaven.

4. A battle which took place in the early years of the Umayyad Caliphate where the third Shi'i Imam, Husayn, was killed by the forces of the Caliphate; an event of critical importance to Shi'i and Alid groups.

5. a 14th and 15th century *ghulāt* sect who believed in a cabbalistic, numerological interpretation of the Qu'ran. The founder of the Nuqtavi sect, Mahmud Pasikhani, was a member of this group before being expelled.
6. An influential *ghulāt* sect who at one point held immense influence in the Safavid state before their suppression. They believed in alternating cycles of rule between Arabs and "Ajamis" (here meaning Iranians), merging Islamic, Mazdean and gnostic theologies.
7. The founder of the Ni'matullahi Sufi order, one of the few Sufi orders to survive Safavid suppression.
8. Founder and leader of the Babi movement of mid-19th century Iran, the last major *ghulāt* movement and the precursor to the modern Baha'i faith.
9. The most famous Iranian poet and author of the *Shahname*, the Book of Kings, which defined Persiante memories of pre-Islamic Iran prior to modernity.
10. The gnostic principle of spiritual and physical reincarnation; also known as metempsychosis.
11. The deity of darkness and evil in Zoroastrian and Manichean cosmology.

« SCP-4589 | SCP-4590 | SCP-4591 »

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