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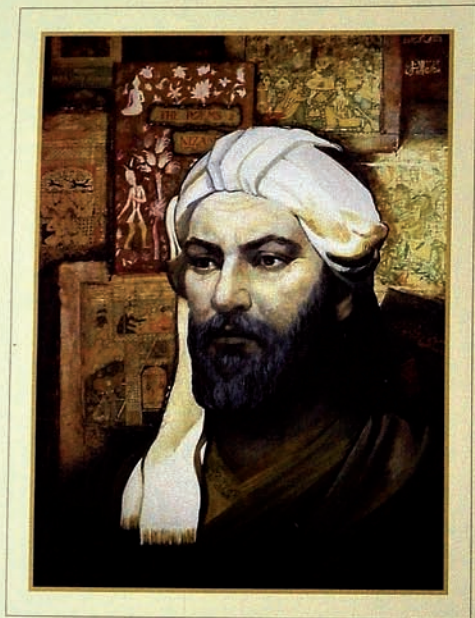
NIZAMI GANJAVI

miniatures

AZERBAIJAN

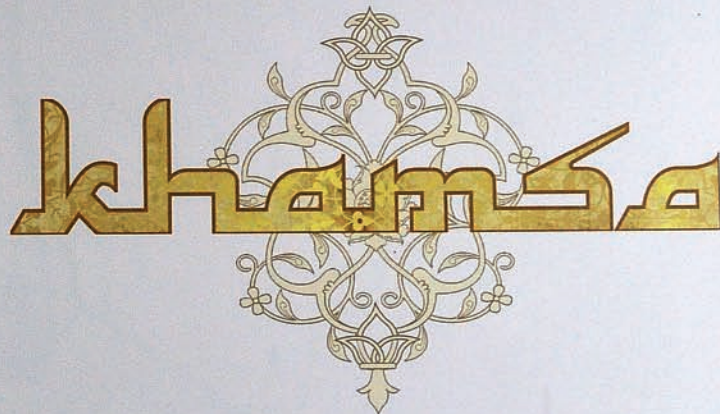


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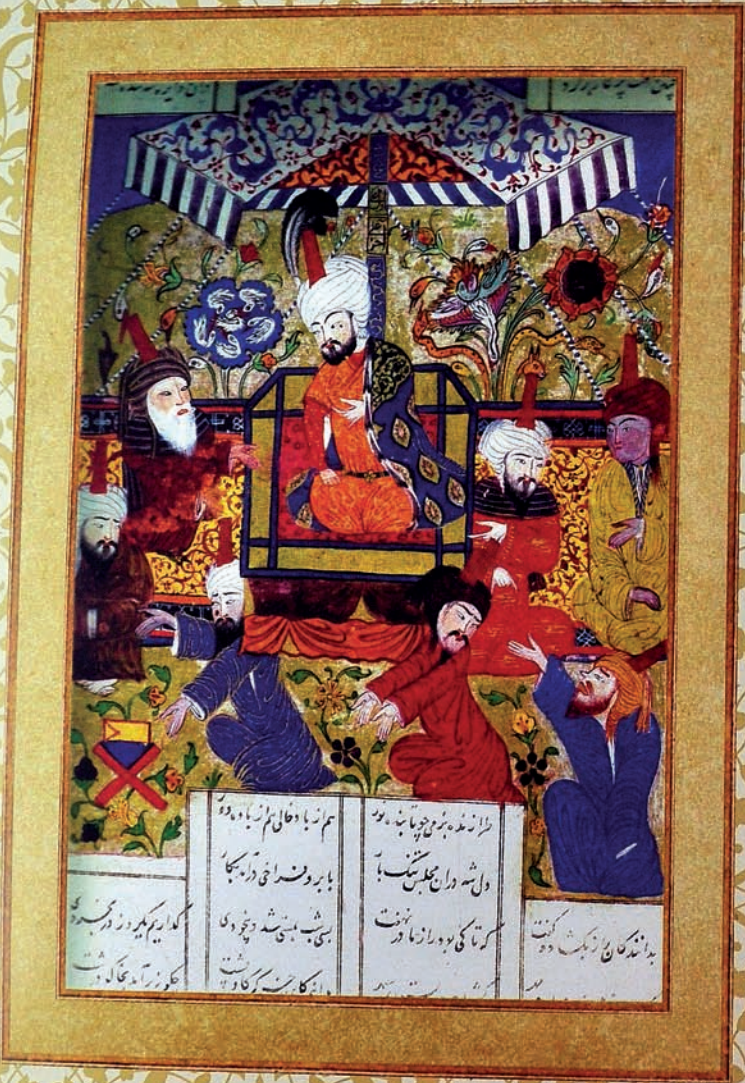
NIZAMI GANJAVI



miniatures

A Z E R B A I J A N

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In 2012, Azerbaijan marked the 870th anniversary of celebrated Azerbaijani poet and philosopher, author of world-famous classical verses Nizami Ganjavi. The event prompted President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to make the following official statement recognizing the poet's importance. "Nizami's extraordinary expression of humanity's artistic ideals has been a central element of our people's creative heritage for more than eight hundred years. All of the great poet's works are linked inextricably with the city of Ganja, which was not only the main city of Azerbaijan and the whole Caucasus at the time, but also a major cultural centre of the Near- and Middle-East. The town was the poet's home for his entire creative life, bequeathing the repertoire of world poetry major works, one after another."

His writing on topics, which touch upon all of human life, in verses with magical poetical quality, enriched the artistic, philosophical and scientific thinking of the Oriental world, raising poetry to previously unknown heights. His major work – the Quinary known as "Khamsa" – marks a zenith in mankind's search for spiritual enlightenment, earning its place among the greatest works of the world literature. Nizami's works adorn the world's richest and most famous libraries, in addition to providing an impetus to the development of Oriental illustrative arts, most notably in the sphere of the Oriental miniature.

It's been established that the most frequently-illustrated work of Oriental literature – alongside the poetry of Firdowsi – are Nizami's Khamsa. It fed the demand – typical of medieval Oriental authors – for illustration and other forms of art. His poems feature characters – artists and portraitists, such as Shapur – who later play a crucial role in the story of the poem; architects and decorators such as Simnar, who decorate palaces with mosaics and symbolic frescoes, and also sculptors such as Farhad; and their art, and its symbolical connection with the real world have had great philosophical resonance.

During the Middle Ages in Azerbaijan, just as in several other kingdoms of the Islamic East, there was a growth in culture, science, and interest in Classical art and poetry – which manifested itself in the swiftly-developing genre of the hand-written book. This genre became one of the most prominent outlets for artistic creativity. In view of the fact that Islam treats both the word and books as sacred, greater and greater attention was paid not only to the calligraphy of the writing, but also to the artistic appearance of books overall. The content and significance of written works were augmented by their presentation – pages, bindings, title pages and covers.

"If earlier manuscripts created in Azerbaijan had come down to us – particularly those of a spiritual nature – they would be copied out and bound by calligraphers themselves. But from the 15th century to the 17th century, the artistic processes involved in creating books began to be divided among different specialist craftsmen – calligraphers, painters of miniatures, illustrations, gilders, and masters of artistic binding", writes Professor Adil Gaziyev in his landmark paper on the topic.

Creation of a manuscript was a lengthy and laborious task involving a number of people – the renderer, who laid out pages in black or red outline; the artist; the calligrapher; and the gilder, who went through decorating pages with gold ornamentation. After all this, the pages

Khamsa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Shiraz. 1508. (St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 340, Page 290) Iskander and the seven sages.



of the future book were carefully ironed flat with a polished agate or ovoid crystal, which gave the surface of each page an elastic and shiny appearance, as though it had been varnished.

A whole generation of miniaturist painters repaid their grateful thanks to Nizami for his deep understanding of their work, and created thousands of miniatures to illustrate his poems. Even today, taking into account all of the invasions, uprisings, conflagrations and lootings that have lain waste to the Orient for eight centuries – and the resulting loss of manuscripts – there remain more than six thousand documented miniatures, which illustrate Nizami's poetry. During the great poet's jubilee year, it's particularly interesting to survey his work through the prism of the miniatures which illustrate it.

The Herat School was one of the principle centers of Oriental miniatures – specializing primarily in illustrating hand-copied books, and flourished during the 15th century in the capital of the Timurid dynasty – Herat. Its first flowering is connected with the establishment of a Royal Scriptorium (kitabkhana) in the 1410s, while its end came due to the fall of Herat, in 1507, to the forces of Khan Shaybani. The growth of the civic life and culture of Mediaeval Herat fulfilled all the conditions needed for the emergence of a school of miniaturist painting. Book illustration, which followed in step with monumental painting and applied art, made previously unprecedented advances in the overall application of design to literary manuscripts.

By the early years of the 15th century, the Timurid dynasty had transformed the Eastern Islamic world into a burgeoning centre of culture. Outstanding achievements in Persian and Turkic literature date from their reign (1370-1506) – alongside developments in the genre of the artistic miniature. In the 1440s, Sultan Shahruh (1405-1447) commissioned artist Mahmud to create 38 miniatures for his *Divan*, based on Nizami's *Khamsa*. Today these miniatures are preserved in the collection of the Russian State Hermitage in St. Petersburg. It's been established that Shahruh sent a decree in 1420 to the besieged city of Tabriz, bringing the finest of the city's artists to his royal court, amongst whom was Jaffar Tabrizi, who was to head the royal scriptorium. Baisankur's workshops were called an "Academy" by art historians – they were inheritors because of the exceptional achievements of the Tabriz School during the 14th century, and their continued work at Shiraz after their flight from Tabriz. There it became the model for painting in the late Timurid era, the second half of the 15th century – the epoch of Behzad, under which this academic line drew to its inevitable close.

Faithful copies of Tabriz originals created by the craftsmen of Baisankur's scriptorium enable us to see how the style went through a metamorphosis – turned into academic examples with smooth floral areas, tranquil scenes of paradise with immaculately worked-out sections of leafy trees and flower petals, and heroes emotionlessly fighting and perishing. The technical perfection and scrupulous finishing of established approaches offers us magnificent images, which, however, have entirely abandoned the boldness of spirit of the earlier pioneers, with whom the work of the Tabriz school of painting had begun in the late 14th and early 15th centuries.

Great poet of the 15th century Alisher Navoi wrote that the last Timurid Sultan, Husseinmirza Baikara, was a benefactor of the arts, and that "thanks to his beneficence, a great number of incomparable calligraphers, artists, musicians and singers had appeared, and it



seems doubtful they could even have flourished under any other monarch". Among these representatives of the Late Herat school of the late 15th century was artist Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād (also anglicised as Kamaledin Behzad), whose art, inspired with humanistic interest, took shape against the background of close friendship with great poets Abdur-Rakhman Jami and Alisher Navoi.

A constellation of artists grew around Behzad and his teachers – Mirak Naqqash, and Tabrizi master Pir Seid Ahmed Tabrizi.

Many commentators have mentioned Behzad's habit of inserting scenes from everyday life into his miniatures – often without any direct relation to the subject of the picture, and in-



tended breath life and diversity into the picture. Behzad also possessed a keen sense of humour, which we see manifested in his works. One such example is the miniature "Harun ar-Rashid and the Barber" painted on the topic of the fable concerning appointment of the Baghdad Caliph, Harun ar-Rashid, with his barber. In the miniature we see the Caliph's royal crown atop his discarded clothes before his bath.

The manuscripts of the Herat school are known for their flat, decorative style so characteristic of Oriental miniatures. But new features now arise associated with the humanist ideals of the 15th century poetry. The tendency of showing a human figure in motion begins, along with giving the poetry a human spirit, which becomes illustrated in the richness of plastic movement. Along with his master Mirak Naqqash and his pupil Qasim Ali, Behzad illustrated the manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsa* (1494/1495, British Library, London) – a work, which is considered a *tour de force* of the Late Herat School, in which artists working in close cooperation produced a uniform collaborative style. The miniaturists of the closing quarter of the 15th century were attracted to subjects with strong dramatic possibilities – complex multi-dimensional compositions were often inserted into the margin areas of pages (such as the illustration for *Bahram Gur Defeats The Dragon* from Nizami's *Khamsa* – 1493, British Library) or were even unexpectedly cut off by the frame. This innovative aspect of



the Herat School arises from the acute observations of people by the artists; from the artists' efforts to portray their subjects' emotional states through the use of the surrounding space; and through expressive gestures and poses.

The Late Jalayirids period of the Tabriz Style is one of the most difficult for researchers to cover. It represents the final developmental flowering of the 14th century Tabriz Style – the last manifestation of all the searches of the periods which preceded it. However, this does not compromise the significance of this school. The great masters of this period display such a range of expressive elements that they exceed all previous examples, as well as exceeding those who followed them. These achievements may seem impossible to us, given a deep knowledge of the historic background, during which development of the Tabriz School of miniatures continued without interruption. Yet the Late Jalayirids School represents a benchmark for the masters of Tabriz, a powerful impetus for the appearance of artistic centers such as the Baisoukur Academy in Herat, or Sultan Iskander's scriptorium in Shiraz, or Timur's manuscript workshops at Samarqand.

We should bear in mind that only the scantiest information survived about Tabriz at the end of the century – and this is hardly surprising. The sack of Tabriz by Timur (Tamerlane) in 1384 and abduction of the artists to Timur's new capital of Samarqand (we can only imagine the splendor of Timur's palace decorations, painted by Arabshakh) was a colossal blow to the cultural life of the Jalayirids Court.

Artists working in Tabriz were continuously deported, with the result that the artistic styles prevalent in Samarqand, Herat and Shiraz expanded greatly.

Miniatures copied from "Khosrow and Shirin" (1405-1410) – from the Freer Gallery in Washington DC – from the many "Khamsa" in history – are among the three most important and the first among those three. The primary copy, as we have already mentioned, is a manuscript from 1405-1410 in the collection of the Freer Gallery in Washington. The second is a copy from the end of the 15th or early years of the 16th centuries (in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, H 762), the so-called "Khamsa of Yaqub-Bey". The triad is completed by the elaborate copy from the Saffavid period in the British Library in London, dating from approximately 1539-1543.

If the second of these two miniatures continues the late 15th century School, spanning the gap occasioned by the fall of the Jalayirids Dynasty, then the third represents the zenith of the Tabriz Safavid period – while the first is important for displaying many of the artistic developments of the school during its most difficult and persecuted period, and its efforts to reach accommodation with the new aesthetics of the Timurid epoch.

The miniatures from approximately 1405-1410 in the manuscript preserved in the Freer Gallery were first published by outstanding Azerbaijani scholar M. Agha-oghlu in 1937, and cannot be specifically dated, but the date ascription to the first decade of the 15th century and their place of creation as Tabriz cannot be called into serious question, owing to their clear expressive and stylistic characteristics.

The name of calligrapher Ali ibn Hassan al-Sultani is a testimony to the known information that he was an artist of Sultan Ahmed's scriptorium. Intense academic scrutiny of the calligrapher's handwriting undertaken on the "Khosrow and Shirin" manuscript in Washington and the scribe of Kermani's poetry, legendary khattat Mir Ali ibn Ilyas al-Tabrizi enabled M. Agha-oghlu to identify the calligrapher, due to the unique similarities of the handwriting.



The manuscript is decorated with five miniature illustrations, each of which typifies an example of the already-established iconographic tradition, and a unique representation of the final result of this style's development. This all serves as a proof of the continuity of the illustrative tradition, and the preservation of the continuously high standards of the masters of this school. When M. Agha-oghlu gave his assessment of this manuscript's importance in the context of its age, he concluded: "The importance of the manuscript in the Freer Gallery is that it confirms our hypothesis of the Tabriz School of art, exceeding the work being produced at the same time in Shiraz and Baghdad, along with setting the scene for the



development of the Herat School of the early 15th century. These are things that many researchers have emphasized, but they had not been proven before by facts".

The first miniature to appear in the manuscript illustrates "Khosrow sees Shirin bathing in a stream" and is of captivating beauty – it shows one of the most lyrical moments in the poem when Khosrow becomes an unwitting witness to this moment. The subject offers the artist an opportunity to create a broad landscape scene which embodies the lyrical qualities of the landscape and his own personal understanding of the scenery.

We don't lack a proof that this Tabriz artist had a particular grasp of landscape as an element of his work. We see it too in the miniature "Shirin visits Farhad in the Mountains". The landscape background is achieved as a complete silhouette of the mountains that dominate not only the landscape, but the entire picture. The huge solid rocky slab of cliffs is like a gigantic stone wave hanging above the figure of Shirin, composed of huge number of scalloped rocky outcrops. The sky is golden anew, but with frosty blue shades that play upon the grey rocks. The main figures are in orange, red and blue robes, while the smaller figures at the foot of the cliff cannot stand the main symbolic meaning of the picture. Once again here the finest heroic aspects of the landscape, the special relationship of Tabriz artists to nature, a theme of pathos, which runs through the whole lifetime of this school, come to the fore. At the purely professional level, this was the part of their work, in which their most



intense creative searches were conducted and their most revolutionary discoveries made.

The gradual process of recovering the best practices of the Tabriz tradition, and the process of “self-clarification” in the post-Shahrukh period is focused on three Istanbul manuscripts. These are *Khamsa* created for the lordly Herat nobleman Muhammad Juki of the Timurid clan; the second created on the commission of Pir Budag ibn Jahan-Shah Gara-Goyunlu; and the third of the Istanbul examples made for Yaqub-Bey Ag-Goyunlu in 1481, which has been mentioned here in above. Stretched out as they are over a period of time, they form a “bridge”, which stretches from one period to another, highlighting with exceptional clarity the process of the revival of the school, which took place at the turn of the 16th century, and which has been unfairly ignored by miniature experts.

The first of these – the *Khamsa* of 1445-1446 – was written by calligrapher Yusuf al-Jami and illustrated by Khoja Ali al-Tabrizi – the very same Ali, who had been brought to the scriptorium in 1420 from Tabriz. It was a manuscript created for Ismat ad-Dunya, the wife of Muhammad Juki. The miniatures in it confirm that after Baisankur's death his team of artists continued producing the highest-quality works. This manuscript today is kept in the Topkapi Palace, H 781. Three miniatures in the manuscript immediately indicate the Tabriz style unmistakably, although the others are a hotchpotch of different regional



styles. It was usual that the principle artist would make a number of illustrations, and distribute the work among others. He would decide the number of illustrations and their subjects, and he made a *tarkh* – a provisional sketch of the miniature, on which the workshop artists would then work.

The miniature “Iskander before Nushabe” is a bright and lavish scene of a palace interior, which leads us to look back to Baisankur in the 1430s, to the Lisbon anthology of Sultan Iskander of 1411, to the “Khosrow and Shirin” in the Freer Gallery in Washington of 1405, to Kermani's work of 1396, and the Istanbul and Berlin albums, that document the inception of the style in the Ilkhani period.

We can follow the same retrospective view through “Majnun at the Kaaba” and back to the most moving miniatures on the pages of the *Miraj-Nameh* in the album of Bahram-Mirza, the brother of Shah Tahmasib (Topkapi Museum, H 2154). The delicate palette range, the perfect drawing, and the use of familiar elements from the Ilkhan and Jalayirids period of the style's development are unmistakably those of Tabriz. This is typified by a bright blue sky, and the flaming gold of the Holy Fire above Kaaba, and angels soaring above. The small ligature of the fortress brickwork leads off to the right onto an area of peculiar rocks of the strangest shapes and colors, dissolving away into a mist at the bottom. The warm pink, muted purple and pale-blue hues, with daubs of orange make a rich and delicate gamut of color.

The second – after the Washington example – of the famous miniatures of “Khosrow and Shirin bathing” exhibits a delectable variation on the theme, with delicious emerald-green and purple hills against the bright blue sky.

The two later manuscripts present a completely different style. One of them illustrates the Bahram Gur's battle for the crown and throne, with two lions. The other shows Iskander's search for the Water of Life in the Land of Darkness. All of the characters and their manner of dressing are typically Ottoman in origin. It's interesting to note that all the horses are shown in a variety of angles and movements. They deal with space in a broad and free way, confirming their ability with perspective. Further space-oriented illusions are achieved with the gradual alteration of depths of the same color.

The next of the three Istanbul manuscripts of the *Khamsa* (the second half of the 15th century) is similarly preserved in the Topkapi Museum (H 761) and consists of two sections written at different times. The first of these comprises 200 pages from 1461 written for Pir Budag ibn Jahan, the Shah of Gara Goyunlu – a philanthropist as well-known as his father had been. His rebellious character and early death (he was executed) deprived the history of art of yet another devotee and admirer of painting. The remaining 109 pages were compiled in 1476 on the orders of Abul-Fath, Sultan Halil (also known as Halil-Bey Ag-Goyunlu), for his father Abul-Nasr Sultan Hasan Bahadur-khan (Uzun Hasan Ag-Goyunlu). The manuscript was illustrated only in the period of Gara Goyunlu – when Shah Jahan had already taken Tabriz, conquered Baghdad from the Timurids in 1461 and appointed his son, Pir Budag, as ruler.

Here the Tabriz style fully recovered its former magnificence; the pictures are complex and in a large format, with spacious compositions in a specific color-scheme, which differs from the previous Herat examples. These were the principle changes that took place in this period. From among the miniatures, the large miniature “Farhad fetches Shirin from the Mountains



by Horse” attracts our attention. Just as in the Washington miniature of “Shirin visits Farhad in the mountains”, the tiny figures almost disappear against the pale-blue and purple contours of the mountains. These are incandescent mountains, which shimmer like corals towards the horizon, blotting out the sky; they are the dominant feature, and they leave the action to take place at their feet.

The most remarkable rebirth of the Tabriz School can be seen in the *Khamsa* of Yaqub Bey. Following a long hiatus occasioned by the enforced relocation of the Azerbaijani painters to the Timurid capital of Herat, Tabriz was once again restored as a major cultural centre at



the end of the 15th century during the rule of Yaqub Ag-Goyunlu. The famous manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsa* was created there in the closing decades of the 15th century – in 1481 (now in Istanbul, in the Topkapi Museum). The *Khamsa* miniatures created for Yaqub Bey expand our incomplete perceptions of the art of that period, as well as being a testament to the earliest developments of art in the earliest years of the Saffavid School during the dynasty of Ag-Goyunlu. Later there appear miniatures which were completed during the reign of Shah Ismayil I.

The miniatures of Yaqub-Bey's period can be stylistically attributed to the hands of courtly painters Sheikhi and Dervish Muhammad, although there are numerous elements of Chinese influence on them. They are accurately painted, with rich coloration, imaginative and lush landscapes which are typical of the era of Yaqub Bey. They show the image of Bahram Gur in several miniatures – visiting the Palace of Seven Beauties. Notably in the miniature titled “Bahram Gur Visits The Green Palace” we see a young man leant over the books and writing-implements of a calligrapher, while one of the ladies is reading poetry aloud, and another is giving him a foot-massage. This manuscript is considered the peak of stylistic achievement in the court style of Ag-Goyunlu. It's rich in illustrations of genre scenes, with numerous depictions of everyday life, among which are found the visits of Bahram Gur to the Seven Beauties. Especially interesting are the paintings of Bahram Gur visiting the red,



yellow, green and sandalwood palaces, in which we see magnificent palaces against spectacular landscape backgrounds decorated with ceramic facings, carpets and similar luxurious furnishings.

Researchers generally consider that the picture “Bahram Gur In The Yellow Palace” is in fact a portrait of Yaqub Bey. “Despite the level of completeness and sophistication, this miniature has a dynamic impulse, which sets it apart from the more static style of Behzad. Perhaps they fall short of the Herat examples of the same period at the level of technical perfection and jeweled decoration. But the Tabriz School artist offers recompense in his representation of a fantasy-world presented to us in lustrous detail – lapis lazuli, yellow and pink, orange, many shades of tan, pale pistachio, light turquoise violet. The clouds that inhabit this world are curved like a dragon's claws; there are mountains that rise like astounding silhouettes of bestial heads and monsters, stones and cliffs. It's like a scattering of precious stones highly stylized in colors inspired by the Far East”, writes SK Welch, a renowned expert on the art of Tabriz miniatures.

Further eleven miniatures were added to the manuscript during the reign of Shah Ismayil I, – of which several can be attributed to the personal hand of Sultan Muhammad. It is these particular works, that carry the Tabriz tradition into the Renaissance period of the early 16th century.

This same manuscript, although somewhat later, in the early 16th century and during the rule of Shah Ismayil, was decorated with additional miniatures, among which our interest turns to “Iskander and the Shepherd” and “Iskander and Nushabe”. In the first of these two miniatures, almost the entire area of the page is given over to showing the palace, from whose roof Iskander is conducting his conversation with the shepherd. There are a number of unusual angles, multicolored mosaics and paintings, that make this miniature of the very best examples, from which to study the art of oriental architecture. Look at the group gathered at the foot of the palace – a shepherd, his sheep, the sheep-dog who is guarding them; it creates a genre image of exceptional beauty. Recently published is another monument of this era – closely related to the miniatures of the *Khamsa* of 1481 – a separate miniature on the subject of “Khosrow in front of Shirin's Palace”. It's presumed to have been removed from this manuscript and sold separately, along with two other miniatures from the same collection, to English collector Keir. The old scheme, which had been established by the painter Junayd Sultani at the end of the 14th century is here filled out with new meanings that accord more closely to the spirit of the new era. It's an excellent representation of the way in which a system in the Middle East does not shackle the creativity of an artist.

As has been mentioned above, in accordance with the cataloguers of the Keir Collection, this miniature was originally removed from the above *Khamsa* manuscript of Yaqub Bey. It's a miniature, which astounds us by the breadth of its world view, monumental form and the completeness of its significance through rich detail. It's one of those miniatures that we can consider to be obligatory for the formation of its creator's artistic skills, and similarly for the establishment of the entire School. The expanse of scale and grandiose landscape of the image seems to be infinite, which allows the image to escape the confines of the margins of the page. It also removes the existence of clear boundaries between the picture itself and the overall page, whose light coloration seems to become an extended area of the composition. There's a unique approach when linking one picture to another. Shirin's fortress and the



garden around it are shown in the shades of the night sky, lit by starlight. On this dark blue background we see a silhouette of ochre, and the warm colors of the palace, lavishly decorated and surrounded by its garden.

It seems as if this picture has been mounted to another, separated from the external marginal composition of a narrow frame. The horseman who stands before the palace and accompanied by musicians, we find shown moved by the artist into the margins. The overall light sandy color of the hills, highlighted with hints of turquoise, silver-grey cypress trees and the chestnut-colored horse, on which Khosrow is riding, comprise the gamut of colors of the borders of the image, which surround the central composition.

This short overview of the development of this School offers a solid basis, on which to conclude that many of the endemic features of the Tabriz Miniaturist School of the 14th and 15th centuries such as richness of color, a tendency towards making sharp contrasts between strong colors, a dynamic compositional approach, sophisticated and elegant design, grace and elongated proportions of the figures, poetry of the landscape elements laid the basis for the birth of the style of the Saffavid Period, and consequently became the basis for the artistic schools, which followed in the 16th century.

Important problems are raised by the miniature "Miraj" attributed to the brush of Sultan Muhammad. Just as with the preceding miniature "Khosrow at Shirin's Castle", "Miraj"



was created for the legendary Khamsa of Yaqub-Bey (1481) – and was intended as the frontispiece illustration of this manuscript. It shows a traditional scene of the Prophet taking the saddle of the holy mare Burak, accompanied by a host of angels. The Tabriz artist has solved this situation in ways, which are sharp and dramatic. In common with all truly great works, this "Miraj" (ca. 1505) enlivens a traditional iconographic scene with new meaning, which makes it a landmark in the development of Tabriz miniatures. In this illustration, just as in miniatures of the late 15th century of "Khosrow at Shirin's Castle" (the miniature now in the Keir Collection) we are faced once again with the combination on a single page of two images showing a transformation of time and location. The shining, sun-drenched landscape of palm trees, with small homes amid the trees creates a natural border for the scene of the ascension in a separate frame.

At the bottom of the page is a panoramic depiction of Mekka, showing the Kaaba and other



buildings along with large crowds of people, who are utterly indifferent to the scene, happening in the second picture above. The view of the city is shown as if seen from a bird's-eye view, with a ridge of rocks that separates the sky, and thus this image is even more alienated from the other.

The night sky of the Ascension scene is shown in dark blue tones filled in with decorative clouds so typical of Tabriz painters and known as "chi". Here, however, this traditional approach adds an additional level of expression and pathos. The golden clumps of cloud, puffed out and fantastic like some gigantic dragon, fill the entire space and inject it with their dynamism. The troubled and dramatic character of the scene is even further underscored by a large number of angels in all kinds of different poses, who are peeking through the gaps between these clouds. Their elongated wings, which slice through the space and fragment it, contribute greatly to the dynamic quality of the composition.

A second miniature from the opening of the 16th century is also found in the Keir Collection – "The Suicide of Shirin", a large-scale and multi-faceted work of complex composition. The tragic aspect of the subject dominates the dynamic composition and color-scheme of the work.

We see a night sky penetrated by the dome of the building, and strange swirling clouds. There are storms whose movements are twisted into unusual and difficult positions, as if windswept by gales. The combination of these contrasting colors – Shirin's wine-colored dress, the dark-turquoise tiles which pave the hall, the deep ultramarine sky and the golden clouds – creates a tension and intensity of color which almost screams aloud. The miniature's imagery devotes all its resources towards the dramatic subject, foreshadowing the coloristic and compositional styles of works from the middle of the century.

The powerful emotional nature of the picture and the artist's unprecedented courage in dealing with difficult coloristic and compositional demands give strong reason to agree with authors, who have ascribed this work to Sultan Muhammad, who headed the Tabriz School at this time.

Miniatures painted to illustrate Nizami's poetry were painted by masters of the Tabriz school for two hundred years, and they offer us a full understanding of how this School's style developed over that period. Without them, it would be inconceivable how the London example of the Khamsa of 1539-1543 developed – which was examined in great detail by renowned expert on Azerbaijani miniatures Kerim Kerimov.

It's a matter of fundamental importance that these works refute the incorrect hypothesis that the flowering of the Tabriz School of Miniatures was connected with the relocation of the workshop of artists to Tabriz in 1522 under Kamaleddin Behzad, and his appointment as the head of the Shah's scriptorium. Exceptional, Azerbaijani researchers A. Gaziyev and K. Kerimov have repeatedly observed in their publications the completely separate existence of the Tabriz School from that of Herat, during the times when Herat school dominated all over the Muslim Orient.

The artistic output of Sultan Muhammad is another refutation of the Western opinion in the history of art that Islamic miniatures are devoid of emotion and psychology, and that such works were created merely to demonstrate the technical skill of the master, for the decoration of the manuscript, and to provide a simple illustration of the key points of the story in question. The artist's miniature, alongside these criteria, is primarily an independent work



of art, which is shorn of the so-called "detachment" of the Oriental miniature. We should also note that this example, along with others, was created as a commission for the highest members of the nobility; it was conceived to be viewed by the most highly-educated readers, who would have certainly known the entire poems of classical poetry by heart. For this reason it's clear that miniatures in these manuscripts were not intended primarily as illustrative and narrative, but, as artworks for the courtly and aristocratic elite, as art objects of a purely aesthetic and artistic nature.

The latter half of the 1520s and 1530s is the period of the most intensive advancement of the Tabriz style, a period from which we have a great many important artistically-illuminated manuscripts. In the 1540s and 1550s the Tabriz style reaches the apex of its development, and during this period the scriptoria reached their most productive and highly-skilled level. The sons of Ismayil I – Shah Tahmasib, Sam-Mirza, Bahram-Mirza, and the second son of deceased Ibrahim-Mirza – were not only patrons of the arts, but were themselves active in poetry and music, as well as in calligraphy and painting. The courts of these Crown Princes in Tabriz, Qazvin, Herat and Mashhad were centers for a wide variety of cultural pursuits. During these years one of the most notable masterpieces, not merely of Oriental art, but on a world level, the illustrations for the Khamsa of Nizami of 1539-1543 was created. They are housed at the British Library in London. The miniatures, which illustrate this manuscript, were created by six of the most brilliant artists of their age – Sultan Muhammad, Mir-Musevvir, Agha-Mirek, Mirza Ali, Muzaffar Ali and Mir Sayyid Ali.

The "Miraj" by Sultan Muhammad, illustrating the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad, remains the summit of this artist's work, and the most accomplished work on a religious subject in medieval Middle-Eastern art. Nizami took this subject from the poem "The Treasury of Mysteries" (Mazkhan al-Asarar) just like as an episode Shirin bathing at the river, inspired countless imitations. In poetry it inspired the appearance of similar moments in the Khamsa of Amir Khosrow Dekhlevi, the Haft Av-Rang of Abdurrahman Jami, and many other poets.

The pictorial tradition similarly encompassed a vast range of identical subjects, amongst which we should note especially the "Miraj" by Behzad in his Khamsa of Nizami of 1494, being preserved in the British Library in London.

When we compare these two masterpieces, the characteristics of each of their artists become clearer, along with the overall style of the artistic schools they led. Mr. I. Schukin, when comparing the approach to painting the flaming halo – the divine "aura" around the figure of the Prophet in both of these mirage portrayals – wrote as follows. "In the first case, the farr covers the entire figure of the Prophet and ends in tongues of flame – but overall, the area of the halo is left complete. It can be compared with a flame, which is a light, but barely flickering. However, in the second case, the flames, which form the halo appear as a great number of flickering tongues of fire. We see the Prophet Muhammad as though he is at the centre of a blazing fire."

If Behzad's Miraj displays, for all its artistic merits, what is essentially a simple basic act, then Sultan Muhammad's Miraj shows us the spirit of the soul in a rapid and dizzying ascent – a sacred act. In an almost incomprehensible way, the artist returns to a subject that has been depicted hundreds of times before in strict and canonical iconography, in which each character already has a pre-determined location, and each item carries a strictly ordained function.



At the centre of the composition we see a depiction of Prophet Muhammad riding the sacred mare Buraq. The background is a dark blue sky speckled with stars and clouds of the "chi" type, and the images of angels surrounding the Prophet. These angels are wrapped in a spiral pattern around the central figure, and they all face him. One of the angels wears a garment of sacred green color – another wears a wreath, a third carries a dish of fire and so on. Yet all of these elements are lost into endless starry night illuminated by the huge fiery halo like flowering golden flames. The clouds left far below would normally be shown as calmly floating billows but here we see them as sharp contours with an elongated shape, and like everything else in this picture, they are rushing upwards, leaving a comet's tail of dust behind them. The restless flutter of the angels' wings, the long ribbons of their dangling belts, the cloud, the flame, it all creates a state of exaltation, of religious enlightenment, which characterizes the very best works on religious topics.

The clothes of the characters, despite the restraint in the use of color, show a countless gradation in tonal timbre, from dark crimson to pink and mauves-red, and gradually brightening to cream and rose tones.



In this work, the artist returns once more to the topic of the Ascension, without repeating what was previously said. Here, as in the Miraj of 1505 in the Keir Collection, the master achieves the same result; we observe all the things as in the earlier work with the same pathos, the same sublimation of feeling, the same state of heightened mental tension. Yet if the first is expressed in a spontaneous way, then here there is a kind of cosmic height.

Great French researcher I. Schukin writes in his monograph about Saffavid art - "Here we see how Sultan Muhammad reveals his genius in all its facets. In the Ascension of the Prophet he develops a sacred theme, which was often found in Timurid art, but he brings greatness to this theme, which had never previously been seen."

The Khamsa brought together the finest painters in the Shah's scriptorium in Tabriz. The range of subjects was extremely broad, covering everything from formal receptions and royal festivities, through landscape panoramas and genre scenes. It included a miniature by



Khamsa of Nizami. Tabriz. 1539-1543.
 (London, British Library, Or. 2265)
 Miraj or Heavenly Ascent of Prophet Muhammad.
 Artist: Sultan Muhammad



Khamsa of Nizami. Herat. 1494.
 (London, British Library, Or. 6810)
 Miraj or Heavenly Ascent of Prophet Muhammad.
 Artist: Behzad

Mir Seyyid Ali of "Majnun before the tent of Leyli", which offers a broad picture of nomadic life, created with wonderfully vivid observation. The miniatures of this manuscript represent the culmination of this style. Shortly after its completion, the work was transferred to the city of Qazvin – the entire royal court and the Kitab-Khane (royal library) moved there. This prompted a considerable reduction in the pace of work of the scriptorium.

The features of evolution in the style of Sultan Muhammad, which could be noticed as early as his miniature "The Execution of Zahhak", based on the Shahname of Shah Tahmasib, can be seen even more clearly in the miniatures of the Khamsa of 1539-1543. Each miniature in this manuscript, with all their integrity of style, reveals the mastery of the artist in a wide range of genre styles, in each case resolving the task posed by the narrative of the subject.

The miniature "Khosrow sees Shirin bathing" is one of the most lyrical scenes of Nizami's Khamsa, and has occasioned the greatest number of literary and pictorial imitations, the so-called Nazira or special references to this story, which has become a classic. The number of paintings on this topic amongst the artists of the Middle Eastern school is uncountable. Yet despite their great number, in each case the artist has adhered to a firmly established canon, with only slight variations in composition and color-scheme. These items are Shirin herself, sitting under a tree by the riverside in the lower corner of the page, and her trusty horse Shabdiz, who is as blue-black in color as his name suggests.

For a century-and-a-half, the finest artists brought this lyric moment to life in their paintings, but it was only genius of Sultan Muhammad, which was capable of raising the story to the level of a masterpiece.

Sultan Muhammad was an innovator, and his innovations are primarily noticeable in his distinctive art and figurative language. Even when dealing with traditional subjects, he didn't use



approaches that had been tried before, and instead preferred to work with an entirely new figurative scheme.

His works became larger and more lavish, often covering an entire page, and sometimes even the facing pages too. They were freed from the literary text, and were quite often entirely independent of it too.

Of course, this tendency initially played a great role in the development of the artistic miniature, but would later produce diametrically opposite results. Once gained its independence, the miniature progressively began to lose the specific elements of book illustration and slowly, instead, became merely an adornment in the manuscript.

In all of the miniatures painted to poems of Nizami's by masters of the Tabriz School for two hundred years, we are able to discern the evolution of the style and development of this school. Finally, now, in the final decades of the school's work and the greatest masterpieces of the pre-Saffavid Tabriz school, it became undoubtedly clear that the work of Sultan Muhammad provides the unbreakable link between the previous centuries of development. As a result, there arises an interesting question about the early stages of the artist's work – "Miraj", along with "Suicide of Shirin", and how these works relate to the mature style of this artist in works such as the illustrations to the Shahname of Firdowsi, in the collection of A Houghton, from the 1520-1530s, and his final works such as the illustrations for the Khamsa of 1539-1543. We must consider the creative evolution of this outstanding master. Nizami's five-part masterpiece had a profound influence on the advancement of artistic culture in the Orient. Not only were these five epic poems at the heart of Azerbaijan's literature of his time, they were at the centre of the literature of the entire Middle East.

Starting with the great Indian poet Amir Khosrow Dehlavi (1253-1325), imitation of Nizami and advancing his tradition in creating the poems of his great Quintet was followed by such famous poets as Abdurrahman Jami, Alisher Navoi, Fuzuli, and many others.

The popularity of this poetry and its heroes led to the development of illustrated books, sometimes including only the lyrical and didactic elements of Nizami's Khamsa alongside the "Haft Avrang" of Jami's, and lavishly illustrated works of Navoi and Dehlavi. The Tabriz miniature played a great role in such volumes, and thus the verses of Nizami went on to play a part in the development of the Turkish classical miniature. In fact, from the rule of Suleiman Gannuni in the 16th century several manuscripts created in the royal scriptorium of the Sultans have survived. The earliest of these can best be called the Khamsa of Alisher Navoi (1530-1531). It comprises sixteen miniatures and adorned calligraphy, adhering to the Tabriz pictorial tradition of the 16th century; they are easily identified from their stylistic elements as belonging to the Tabriz Schools.

Two years later was created (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace, H 806) another one example of the Divan of Alisher Navoi (1534), which evidences a fully-formed Ottoman style, although some elements of the Tabriz School can still be clearly determined. The miniatures of this volume faithfully copy the examples, which were at that time created in the workshops of Tahmasib.

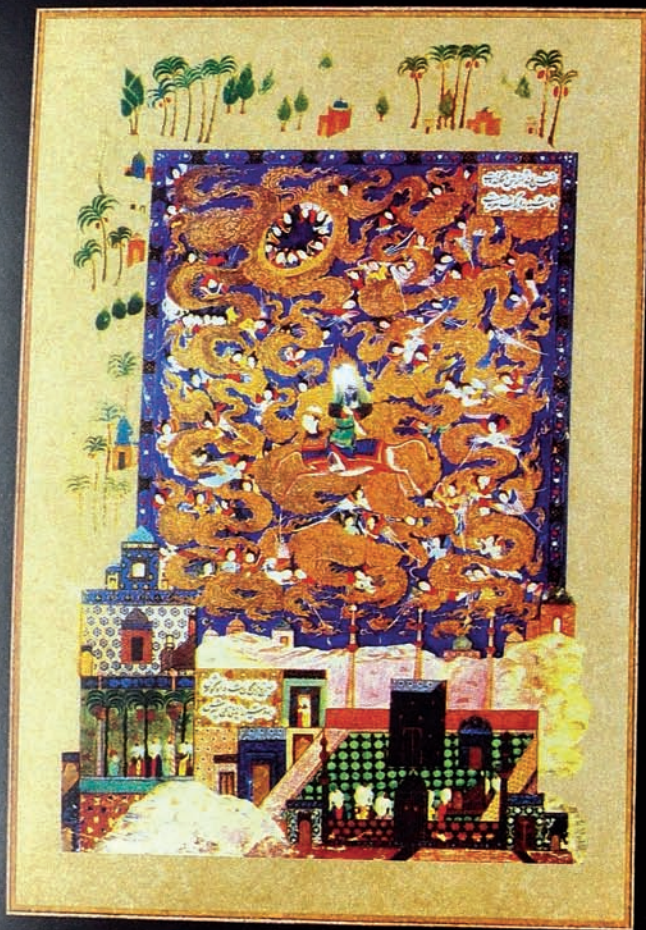
These include hunting scenes with galloping horsemen cutting their prey with sabers, or shooting arrows at gazelle in the frontispiece of the miniatures. All this copies the diptychs, which we find in early Saffavid manuscripts.

The album, which was created to mark the anniversary of great Nizami continues a number



of differences, and is laid out rather differently to the work published by K. Kerimov under the title "Nizami. Khamsa. Miniatures". The primary differences involve the full roster of illustrations, which, except for less than dozen miniatures, are primarily new material. Even so, we will leave the structure of the former album unaltered.

In this album we follow the intention of recreating a complete and chronologically accurate picture of the miniature paintings of the Orient, which illustrated the poetry of Nizami. The rich heritage of illustrated manuscripts of the Khamsa permits us to trace the evolution of miniature art in Azerbaijani (Tabriz), Iranian (Herat and Shiraz), Turkish and Central-Asian examples.



Khamsa of Nizami, 1481.
(Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H 762. Miniature is kept in the Keir Collection, London.)
Miraj or Heavenly Ascent of Prophet Muhammad.

Nizami Ganjavi's main work – the Quinary known as the Khamsa consists of five epic poems. "The Treasury of Mysteries" (written between 1173 and 1180), "Khosrow and Shirin" (1181), "Leyli and Majnun" (1188), "The Seven Beauties" (1197), and "Iskander-name" (approx 1203).

Throughout cultural history there have been many examples of writers who have not written their works in their native language. The Uzbek scientist and thinker, Abu Reikhan Biruni, for example, wrote entirely in Arabic, while remaining true to his native Khwarezian (Central Asian) culture and people.

To take another example from our own generation, famous Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov produced all of his output in Russian, while remaining authentically Kyrgyz by both nationality and inspiration.

In just the same way the finest authors of the medieval Islamic world produced their scientific works in Arabic, while writing their literary, poetic and prose works in Farsi. It all goes to show that in spite of the geopolitical or imperial affiliations of the age, while writers may have written their works in the language of the prevailing majority at the time, they have still not lost their own national identity.

Nizami was born in Azerbaijan and developed his talent in his home town of Ganja. It provided him with the rich sources of the Azerbaijani folk tales and furnished him with the character of his national heroes. Nizami's entire life and output is inextricably linked with the Azerbaijani people.

The people of Azerbaijan have recently built a great mausoleum at the site of his grave, built as a fifteen-meter tower in the style of the great architecture of Azerbaijan of the 12th century. There is a monument to the poet similarly in Baku, and a literary and historical museum in his name.



The Treasury of Mysteries

The first of Nizami Ganjavi's works, which makes up the opening poem of the Quinary, is "Makhzan al-Asrar" – "The Treasury of Mysteries". It was written, we believe, between 1173 and 1179 AD, in a dialectical-philosophical genre that was extremely popular in the Middle East, especially amongst poets.

The Treasury of Mysteries contains scenes of injustice and cruelty. Nizami employed great skill in presenting the sufferings of ordinary and oppressed people. We see honest young workers who are saved from oblivion by the great poet, who saw the pride and power in their souls while in the face of tyrants to whom human life meant nothing.

His title "Treasury of Mysteries" refers to the didactic and philosophical genre employed, and has a mild Sufi overtone. The flexible composition of this poem is linked to associative thought-transitions, as new and advanced as Oriental sermons seasoned with moral parables. Nizami Ganjavi exhorts monarchs to offer justice and concern for the subjects welfare, and he threatens them with punishment if resort to oppression or violence. He condemns avarice, and praises true friendship. All of Nizami's imprecations and teachings are written with a religious tone, but remain unusually brave. The entire poem is most certainly a secular work, which has humanitarian aims.

The book consists of a prologue and twenty chapters named magala – a term which translates literally as "discussion" or "speech". The first of these "discussions" – about the creation of Adam – develops in the style of traditional Quranic legends, but is permeated with the idea of man's dominion over the world, the concept of human nature, and man's understanding of his role in the world. The second discussion concerns the upholding of justice. Here the poet addresses advice to monarchs, advising them to learn humility, and take care in the spiritual matters, which will lead them on a righteous path. The third discussion is on the vicissitudes of life. The poet talks of his own era – a difficult time, in which virtues are absent. Then the poet asks questions, that may seem abstract, but are of great philosophical meaning – about old age; about the significance of "god's creatures"; about the relationship between human and animals; and about the relationship of mankind with the world.

In the story "Sultan Sanjar and the Old Woman", an old widow who has no fear of the cruel Shah, hurls the most brutal truths into the monarch's face. She complains of the Shah's harassment and treachery. The composition of the poem is arranged so that each conversation follows on logically from the preceding one – creating a chain of thought. Each discussion is illustrated by a fable, often borrowed by the poet from the oral tradition.



Anushirwan and Two Owls

Once, while out hunting, Anushirwan and his Vizier happened to meet two talking owls. When the Shah inquired what the owls were discussing, the Vizier told him that one of the owls was giving her daughter in marriage and demanded a dowry from her suitor in the form of several run-down villages. The other owl hooted

Whooh! What piffle you are prattling! Just take a look, how many villages the Shah has already ruined! You won't need to wait long! I can find you a hundred thousand ruins easily!



Khamsa of Nizami. "The Treasury of Mysteries". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
Anushirwan and two owls.
Artist: Mir Musavvir



Sultan Sanjar and the Old Woman

There was once an old woman who saw Sultan Sanjar passing by. She wrestled him to the ground, and harangued him with tales of the ills he and his satraps had done her. She accused the Shah of all his crimes, saying:

I can't see in you justice's crown
I see endless oppression's scorn
You tore the homes down in our town
And didn't leave us an ear of corn.

This sharply controversial subject was also illustrated by other artists, but the masterful insight and artistic expression of the work of Sultan Muhammad remains the benchmark among miniatures on this subject.



Khamsa of Nizami. "The Treasury of Mysteries". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
Sultan Sanjar and the old woman.
Artist: Sultan Muhammad

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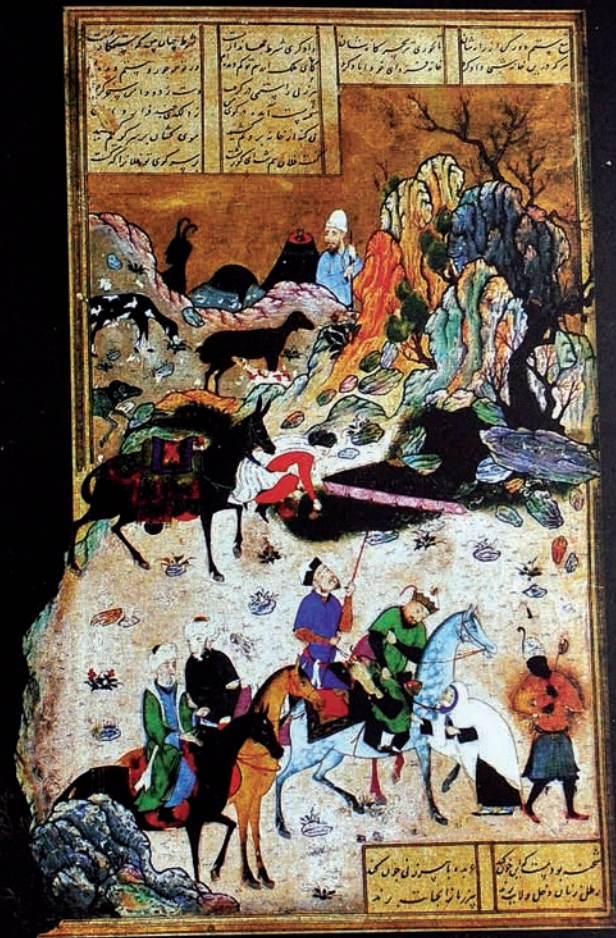
Khamsa of Nizami. "The Treasury of Mysteries". Herat. 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Sultan Sanjar and the old woman.



Khamsa of Nizami. "The Treasury of Mysteries". Tabriz. 1530s.
 (USA, private collection)
 Sultan Sanjar and the old woman.



Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "The Treasury of Mysteries". Tabriz. 1481.
 (Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, II 762)
 Sultan Sanjar and the old woman.



Khamsa of Nizami. "The Treasury of Mysteries". Herat. 1494.
 (London, British Library, Or. 6810)
 Sultan Sanjar and the old woman.



The Competition of Sages

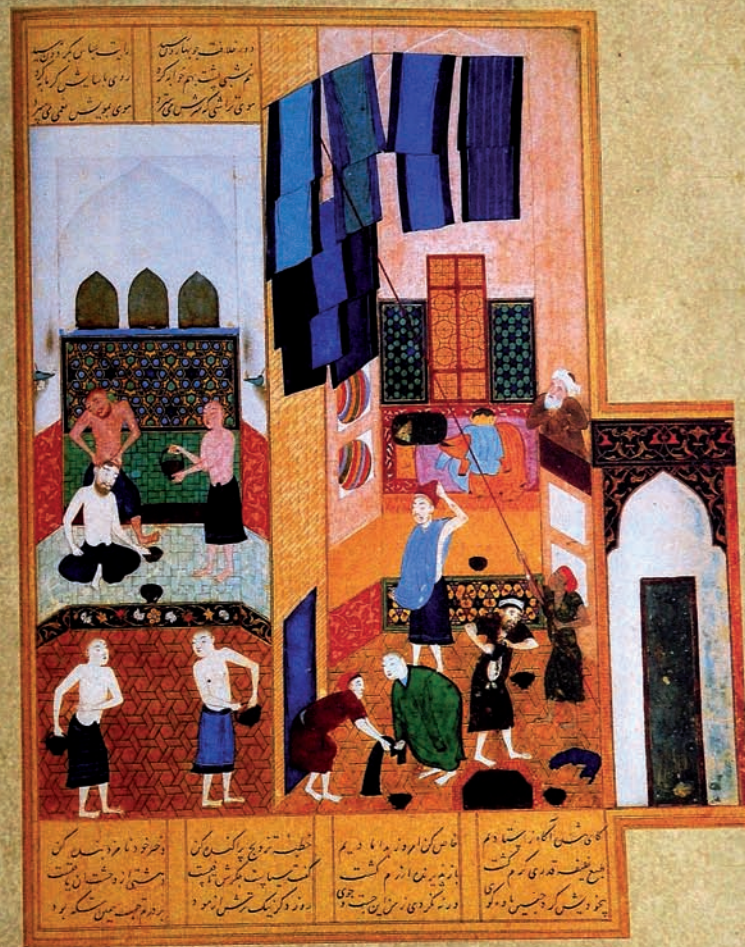
The twelfth discussion of The Treasury of Mysteries concludes the volume with an educative fable. Two wise men argue about which of them is wiser and begin a strange and dangerous standoff. The first brings his opponent a cup of deadly poison. But the latter downs it, yet remains alive. Then the second brings the first a freshly picked flower, upon which he whispers some incantation. The frightened wise man is so terrified of such magic that he falls dead when he sniffs the flower, even though the flower was perfectly harmless.



Khamsa of Nizami. "The Treasury of Mysteries". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
The competition of sages.

The Khalif Harun ar-Rashid and the Barber

Harun ar-Rashid's barber, having completed his obligations, suddenly forgot his place and, with unwarranted freedom, he asked for the hand of his master's daughter in marriage. When the Caliph consulted his Vizier on the matter, the Vizier gave this answer that when the barber committed this affront, he was probably standing upon a treasure-trove. The reason being that if a man stands upon a hoard of treasure, even if he doesn't know it's there, becomes gripped by a pride that loosens his tongue. When they excavated the spot where the barber had stood, a hoard of treasure was indeed found.



Khamsa of Nizami. "The Treasury of Mysteries", Herat. 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
The Khalif Harun ar-Rashid and the barber.



Khosrow and Shirin

In 1180, Nizami completed his second poetic epic "Khosrow and Shirin". The subject-matter of this romantic epic was taken in part from Sassanid chronicles. Both of the leading characters were people from real life. The name "Shirin" is known from Byzantine, Syrian and Arabic sources. Khosrow was the last famous ruler of the Sassanid Dynasty – killed in 628 AD.

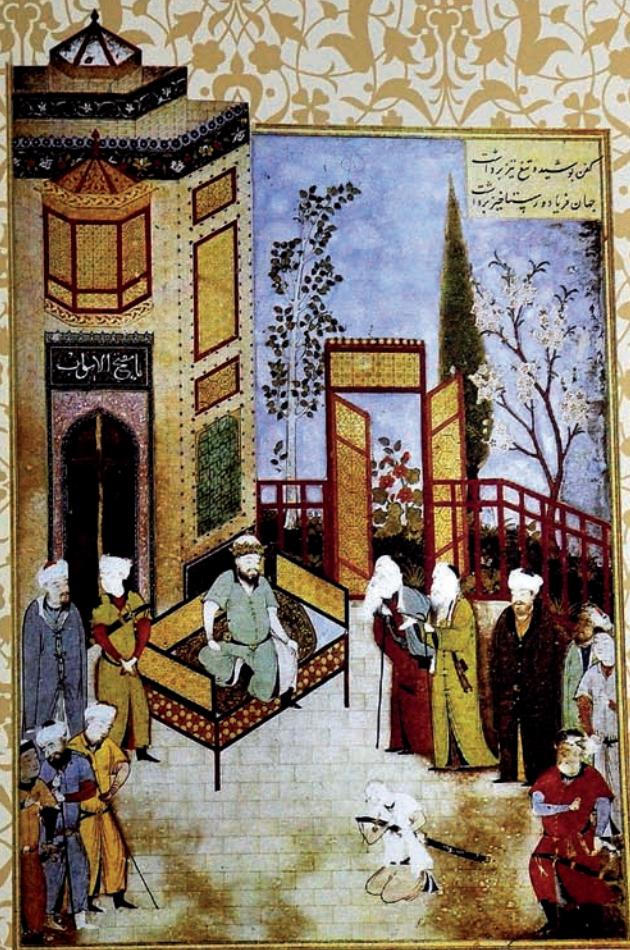
Unlike Firdowsi, Nizami extensively developed a deep motif of love between Khosrow and Shirin. The poet sees love as the genuine reason for the maintenance of human life. The true innovation and courage of Nizami here lies in shifting the principle role in the poem not to Shah Khosrow, but to Shirin – the niece of Azerbaijani Queen Mehin-Banu. The poet endows Shirin with intelligence, beauty, and strength of character. She is the principle character of the poem, and all of the action is connected with her. Shirin loves the Sassanid Crown Prince, Khosrow. Her love is heartfelt and boundless, despite knowing all the shortcomings of her beloved – she cannot forget him. Shirin undergoes many sufferings because of her passionate and all-consuming feelings. Her beauty is tempered with a strong will, and great courage. She is able to withstand Khosrow's unbridled advances – to stand up for herself, and for her honor. Yet Shirin is, at the same time, a perfect Queen. She is just and humane. Following the death of her aunt Mehin-Banu, she restores order in the country, and begins caring for her people.

The vapid, immoral and selfish Khosrow is ennobled by his love for Shirin shortly before his death, and is roused to a feat of self-denial. The role of the noble Farhad is unusual in this poem – he embodies the virtues of the worker, and of work itself. The figure of Farhad the Sculptor is one of the most persistent images in world literature. This is one of the first monuments to Man the Creator, the innovator, the seeker after truth. In the light of Farhad's great love Shirin's beauty palls – just as the precious stones palled before her that had been thrown to her feet. Such is the greatness and beauty of his artistic achievement. Farhad destroys the cliffs for love, and remains among the living – he would have destroyed the old world, but Nizami is a creator, poet, and a son of his own times – his powers are limited. Farhad perishes, and with him Khosrow and Shirin perish too.

Repentance of Khosrow

One day after the hunt, while Khosrow was amusing himself, his horse trampled the crops of the house's owner, and his slave stole his grapes. The following morning, Khosrow's father Hormuz was informed what had happened, along with a hint that if the Shah's wrath were to fall on anyone other than his own son, then a dreadful fate lay in store for him. Hormuz was stung by this reproach, and he punished his son severely. Khosrow acknowledged his guilt, put on a tunic, and went with two elder men as intercessors to beg his father's forgiveness.

The way the story is presented, and the psychological expressiveness of the main characters of the story give a faithful account of the story illustrated in this episode.

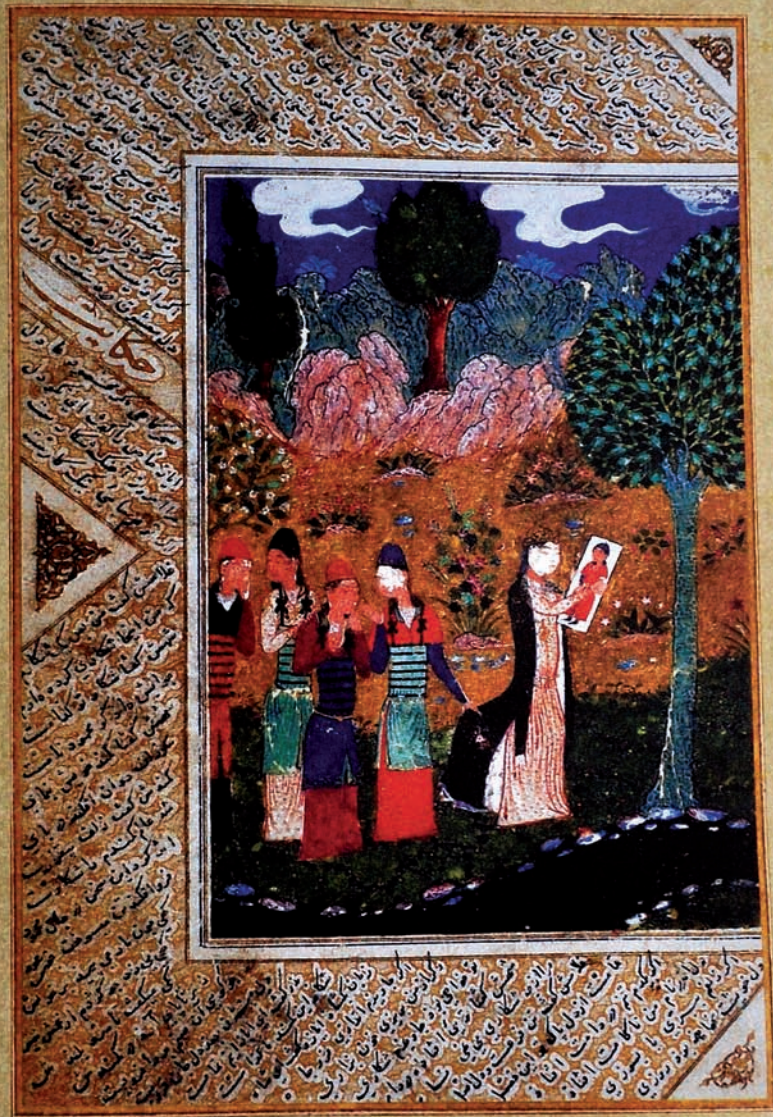


Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
Repentance of Khosrow.



Shapur Shows Khosrow's Portrait to Shirin

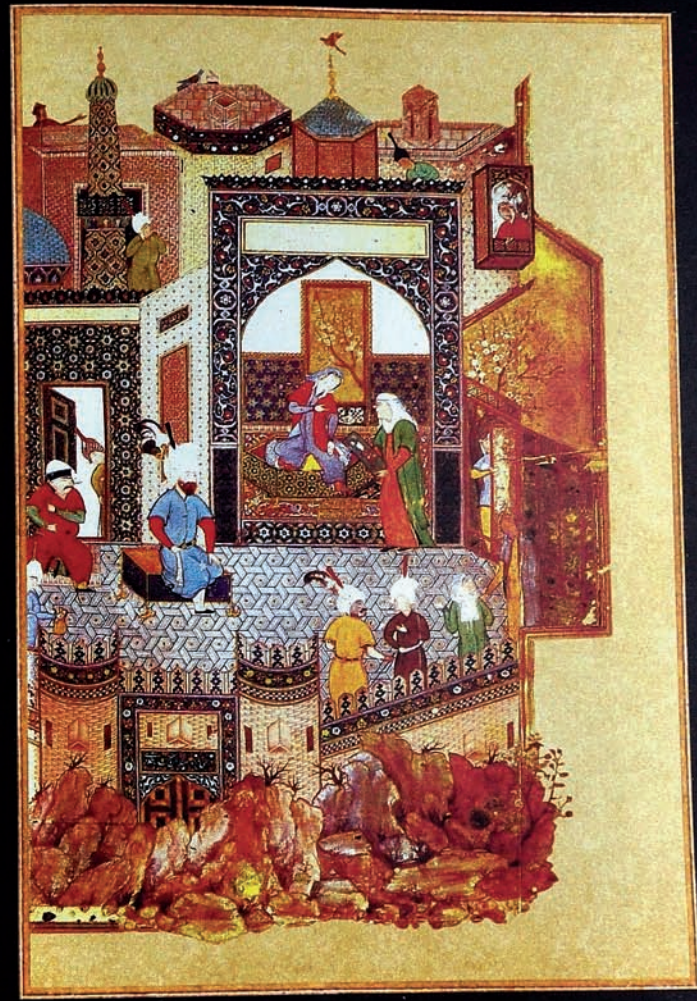
Shapur casts a portrait of Khosrow thrice upon the grass, where Shirin is walking with her friends. Seeing that the portrait of the young has the intended effect upon Shirin, Shapur makes himself known to her in the guise of a priest. He shows maps to her, and disclosing himself as a friend and messenger of Khosrow's, tells her that Khosrow is insanelly in love with her.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Khosrow and Shirin". Anthology of Iskander-Sultan. 1410-1411.
(London, British Library, Add.27261)
Shapur shows Khosrow's portrait to Shirin.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat, 1494.
 (London, British Library, Or. 6810)
 Shapur shows Khosrow's portrait to Shirin.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat, 1490s.
 (London, British Library, Add. 25900)
 Shapur shows Khosrow's portrait to Shirin.



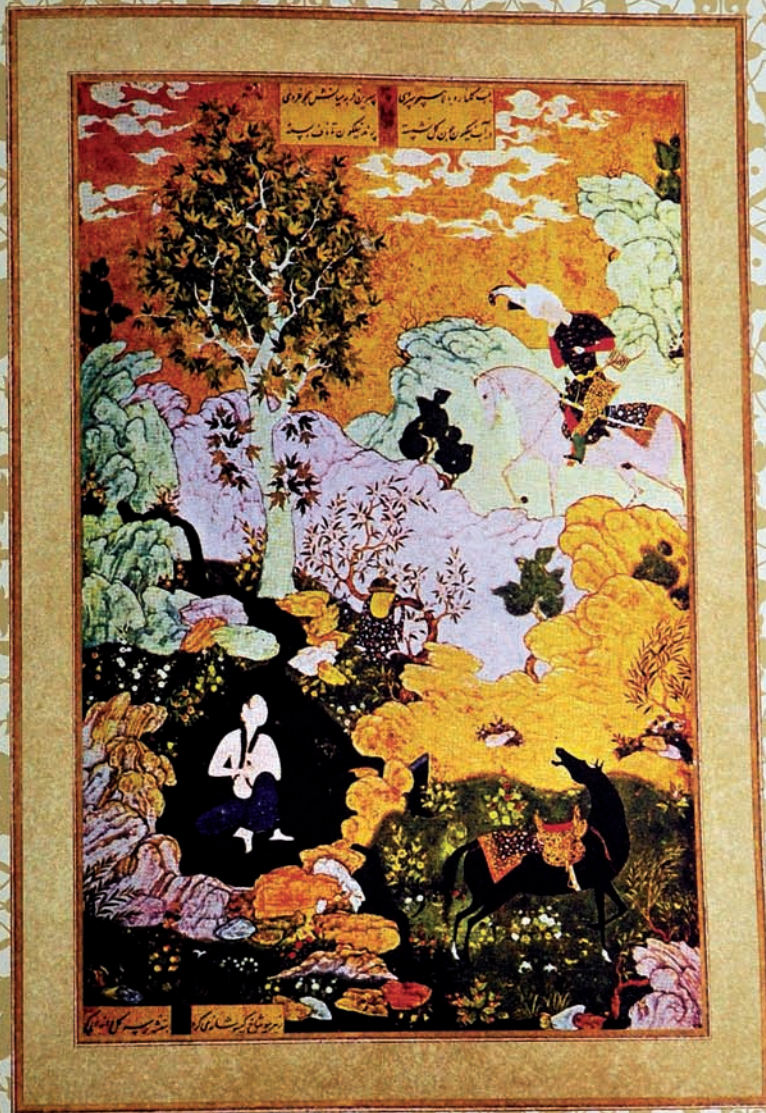
Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin", Tabriz. 1539-1543.
 (London, British Library, Or 2265)
 Shapur shows Khosrow's portrait to Shirin.
 Artist: Mirza Ali



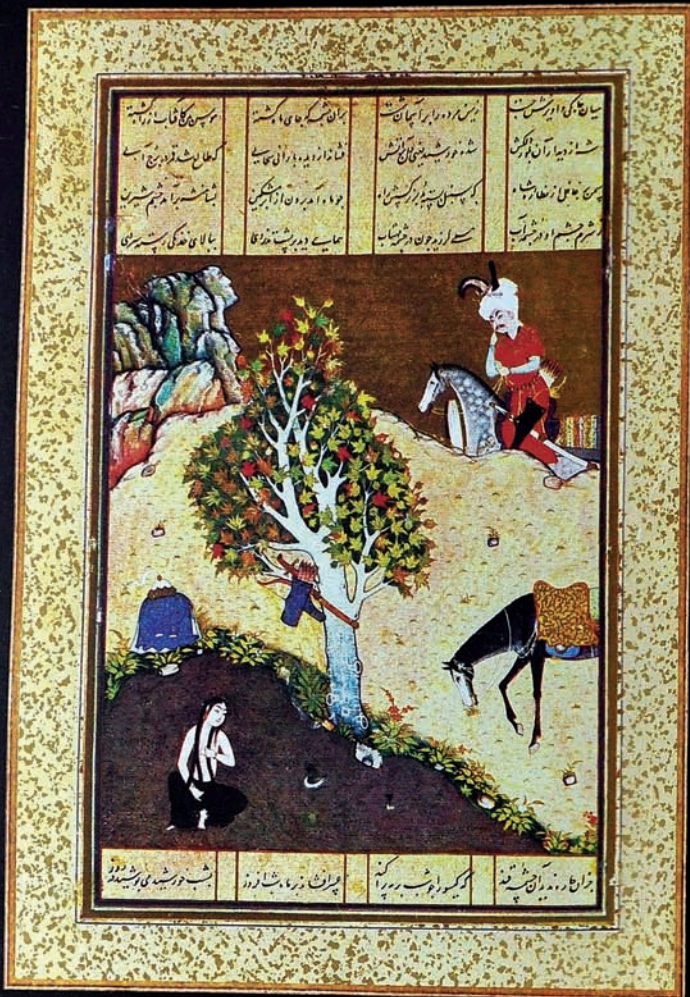


Khosrow's First Sight of Shirin Bathing

Dreaming of their meeting, the lovers set off on their journeys – Khosrow goes to Barda, while Shirin goes to Medayin. Along the way Shirin finds a spring, where she decides to bathe. Meanwhile, the disguised Khosrow comes near to the self-same spring. He does not see Shirin's face, but she succeeds in glancing him, without knowing that he is Khosrow. Thus the lovers pass each other without knowing that they did so. Of all the miniatures, which have been painted on this theme, the depiction by Sultan Muhammad is distinguished by its unequalled craftsmanship, its glowing decoration and the expressiveness of the main characters.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
Khosrow's first sight of Shirin bathing.
Artist: Sultan Muhammad



Khamsa of Nizami, "Khosrow and Shirin", Tabriz, 1525.
 (Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery)
 Khosrow's first sight of Shirin bathing.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Khosrow and Shirin", Isfahan, 1020/1611-1612.
(India, Hyderabad, Museum)
Khosrow's first sight of Shirin bathing.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Khosrow and Shirin", Herat, 1490s.
(London, British Library, Add. 25900)
Khosrow's first sight of Shirin bathing.



Khosrow and Shirin Meet at the Hunt

Khosrow is forced to escape from Iran, having failed to stop the revolt of Bahram Chubineh, and lost his throne. He makes for Azerbaijan, for the court of Queen Mehin-Banu, knowing that he will be offered refuge, and will find his beloved Shirin there. While on their way there, Khosrow and his courtiers amuse themselves in hunting. One day, during one of their hunts, Khosrow sees a billowing dust-trail in the distance – it's rushing towards the hunt's prey of wild game, and is led by beautiful girl Shirin. And this, dear readers, was how the two lovers finally met for the first time.

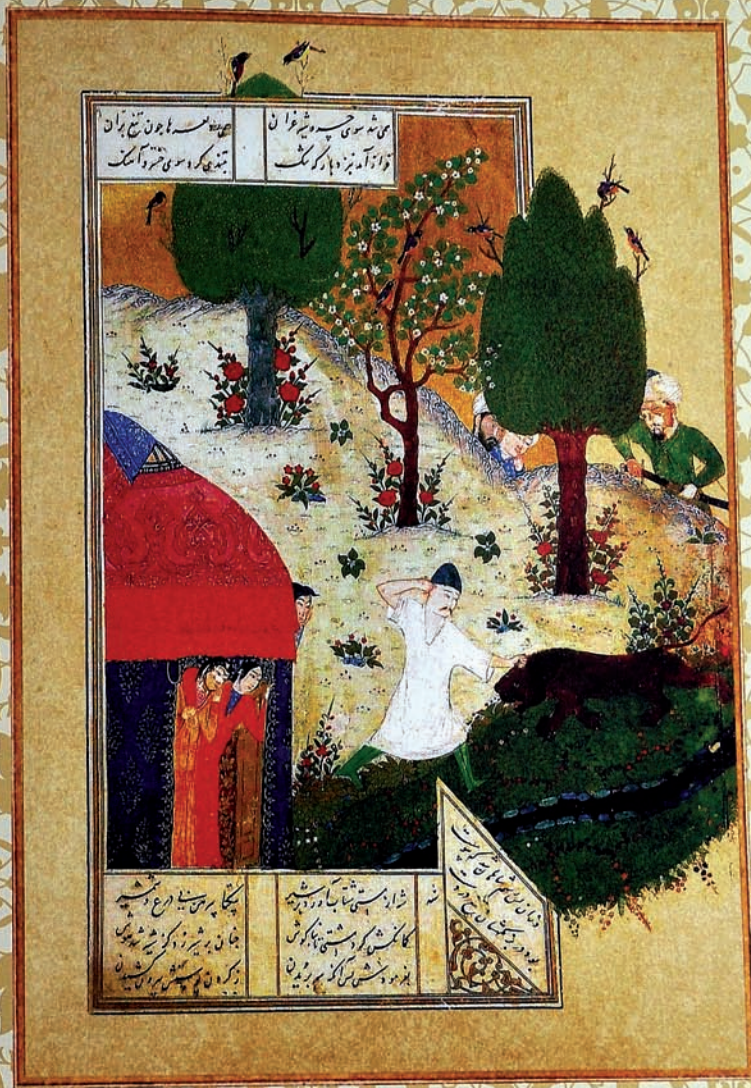


Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Khorasan. 1570s.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 341, p.51.)
Khosrow and Shirin meet at the hunt.



Khosrow Kills a Lion in front of Shirin's Tent

Shirin is unable to part with Khosrow. Shirin, on a relay of horses sends news of her noble guest. In a grand royal tent Khosrow enjoys the delight of a meeting with Shirin. Mehin-Banu decides to "protect firewood from the fire". Shirin assures Mehin-Banu that she will not retire with Khosrow alone, but will speak with him only in the presence of others. Khosrow and Shirin go hunting together, and enjoy themselves. However, at the very summit of the feast a lion bursts into Khosrow's tent – he kills the lion with his bare hands..



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1431.
(St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
Khosrow kills a lion in front of Shirin's tent.



Legendary Musician Barbad Plays for Khosrow

Saddened by his separation from Shirin, Khosrow throws lavish banquets and parties. But he cannot drown his gloom and sorrows in wine. The Shah summons celebrated singer and musician Barbad to perform at his revels. Barbad's charming and enchanting music serve to calm Khosrow's troubled soul a little.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
Legendary musician Barbad plays for Khosrow.
Artist: Mirza Ali



Khosrow and Shirin Listen To the Stories of the Servants

At Queen Mehin-Banu's palace, Khosrow and Shirin engage in the witty social life of the Queen's court. By day they go hunting, they play at chougan (polo game), and then by evening they enjoy themselves in amusing games, and with music. One evening, Khosrow gathered ten young beauties at these musical entertainments, and had each of them, along with Shapur and Shirin, relate a tale. When he had heard the girls, Shapur and Shirin, Khosrow himself began to tell a story, about his own life. Miniaturists who have depicted this favorite scene have most usually taken the opportunity to show the courtly life of their own times.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
Khosrow and Shirin listen to the stories of the servants.
Artist: Aga Mirak

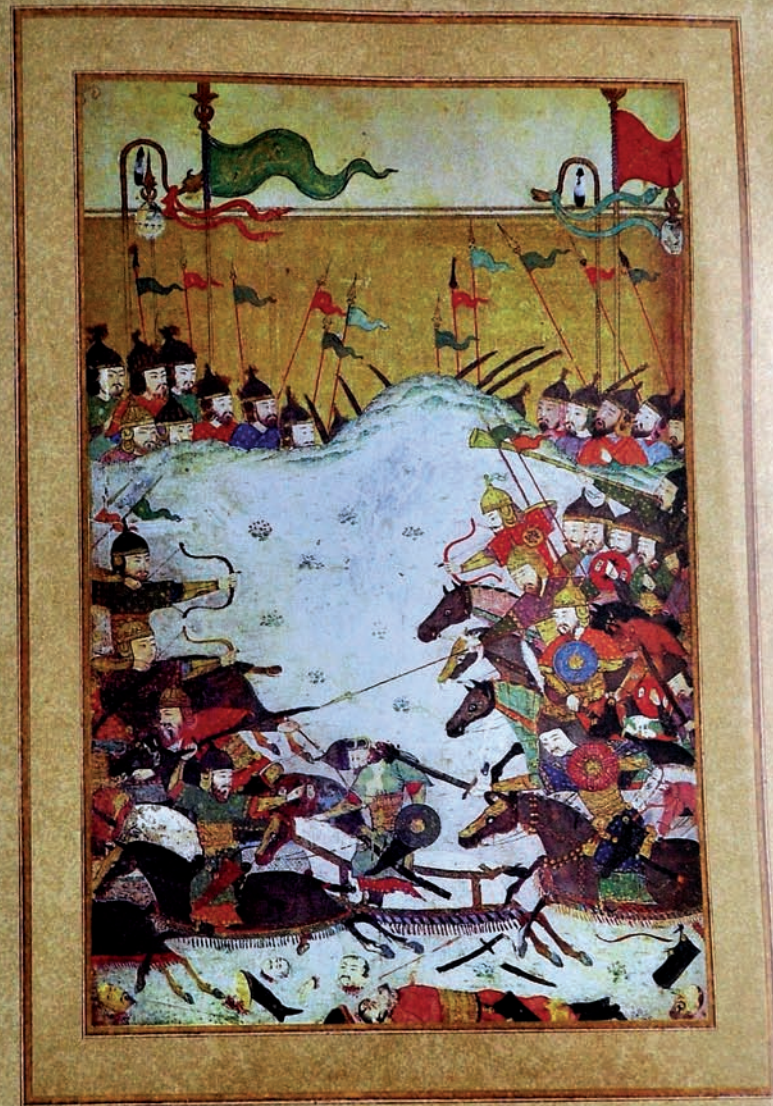




The Battle between Khosrow and Bahram Chubineh

Hearing of the death of his father, Khosrow is greatly saddened, and meditates on the cruelty of fate. He returns to his father's throne. At first he charms the oppressed with his just rule, but he slowly moves out of the ambit of affairs of State. He spends each day hunting, and not a moment passes without amusement and wine. Meanwhile, the iron will of Bahram Chubineh vilifies all of Khosrow's failings, including his intemperate love for Shirin, using secret denunciations to cause Khosrow's political downfall. Declaring "My head is more valuable than the crown!" Khosrow takes refuge on his horse, Gulgun. Exchanging his crown for a warrior's helmet, Khosrow sets off on Shabidze to enlist the aid of the Byzantine (Roman) Emperor at Constantinople. The Roman Caesar is pleased with this successful young man, to whom he gives his own daughter, Mariam. Khosrow sets off for his homeland, supported by a Roman legion – seeking the head of Bahram Chubineh. Chubineh is overthrown, and forced to flee to Cathay.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1431.
(St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
The battle between Khosrow and Bahram Chubineh.





Khamsa of Nizami, "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1539-1543.
(Edinburgh, Royal Museum of Scotland, Detached page)
The battle between Khosrow and Bahram Chubineh.





The Battle between Khosrow and Bahram Chubineh

Khosrow's military commander, Bahram Chubineh, had organized a plot against his own Shah, and had him expelled from Iran. But Khosrow, supported by troops sent by the Byzantine Emperor, smashes Chubineh's forces and takes back the Iranian throne. The poem's text describes how Khosrow's throne was mounted on an elephant's back, how the astronomer Buzurg-Umid used an astrolabe to determine the most auspicious moment to begin the assault, and how Khosrow, mounted on his war-elephant, smashed Chubineh with a club. However, the miniature shows only a battle of two armies. The clothes of the people in the picture are shown decorated with a small floral pattern, and the royal characters are distinguished only by having a broad gold collar.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1490s.
(London, British Library, Add. 25900)
The battle between Khosrow and Bahram Chubineh.





Khosrow Enthroned

Whilst at Barda under the protection of Queen Mehin-Banu, Khosrow hears of his father's death. In order not to lose his family's ancient throne, Khosrow departs immediately for Medain, where he seizes the throne and is crowned King of Iran. This miniature illustrates the poet's couplet:

His mind was filled with brightest hopes of loving Shirin alone
Yet he couldn't somehow turn down the chance of ascending to the throne.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1525.
(Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery)
Khosrow enthroned.



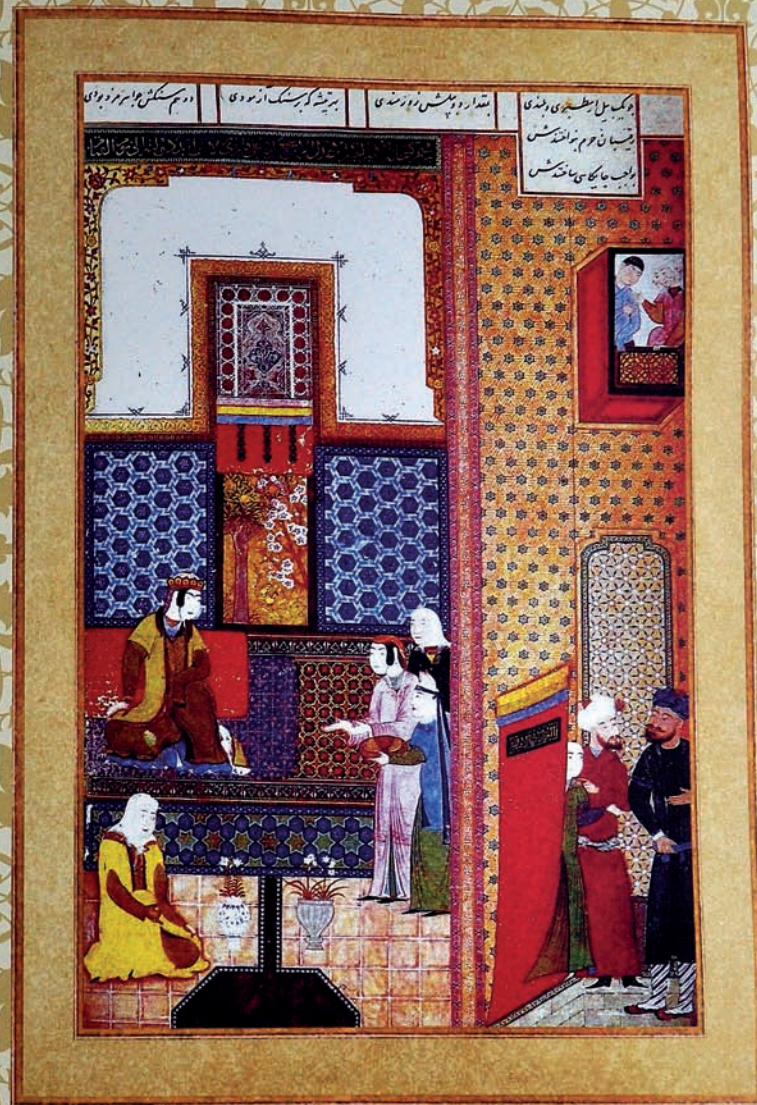


Farhad Visiting Shirin

In order to provide Shirin with fresh milk, it had to be brought over a difficult rocky mountain pass which connected the palace with the nearest pastures. To do it, Shapur invited the legendary hero and skilled sculptor, Farhad. Once he was inside the castle, Shirin was not shown to him, and all their discussions took place from behind a curtain. However, the captivating voice of the beautiful girl was so charming that Farhad fell unconscious from it.

Shirin spoke with Farhad, and so sweet was her voice
That even Plato could have lost his senses.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1431.
(St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
Farhad visiting Shirin.





Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1405-1410.
 (Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery.)
 Farhad at the Shirin's castle.





Farhad in front of Khosrow

In this miniature the subject is treated as a traditional scene of a Shah's audience held in the open air. The young Shah sits on a golden throne, and is accompanied by his courtiers to give audience to Farhad. The tense mood of their dialogue is presented by the artist by the Shah's gesture-of-hand, contrasted with the free and relaxed pose adopted by Farhad. The quality of artistry in this miniature makes it one of the very finest in the manuscript.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Isfahan, 1636.
(Baku, Institute of Manuscripts named after M.Fuzuli, M-207)
Farhad in front of Khosrow.



Shirin Visits Farhad during the Construction of the Canal

Farhad completes his enormous task in just one month, building a canal from the pastures to Shirin's castle, so that milk flows along it. Shirin and her companions come to the mountain to see Farhad's magnificent project for themselves. Shirin apologizes that she is unable to thank him adequately for such a marvelous achievement, and instead she makes a gift of her earrings to Farhad. But for Farhad, the finest reward is that he was able to fulfill Shirin's request. He declines her costly gift and departs for the steppes so as to conceal his love and sadness.



Khamsa of Alisher Navoi. "Khosrow and Shirin". Qazvin, 1580s. (Tashkent, Institute of Manuscripts named after Kh.Suleyman, 2630)
 Shirin visits the launching of the canal.



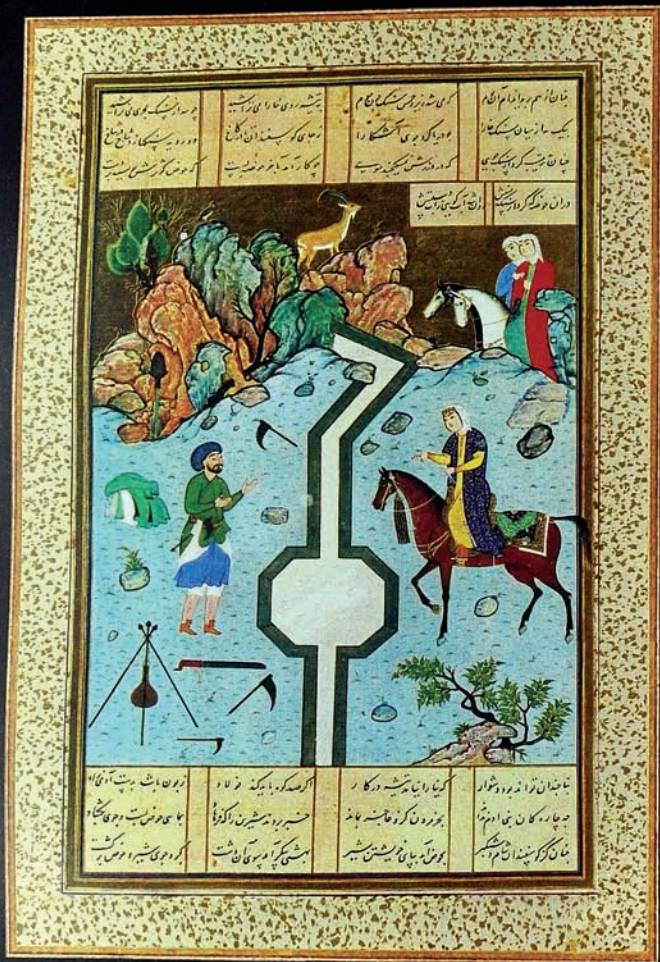
Shirin Visits Farhad at the Bisutun Mountain

Khosrow becomes convinced that Farhad cannot renounce his love for Shirin, and resorts to a deception. He claims that he will give up Shirin if Farhad can extend his work to Mount Bisutun. Inspired by his dream, Farhad completes the superhuman task. The cliffs crumble, and mountains fall under his mighty pick-axe. Shirin hears of the phenomenal labors of Farhad, and comes to take a look, accompanied by her retinue of companions. Farhad accomplishes his task in just a month, and builds the milk-channel from the pastures all the way to the castle. Shirin and her companions come to Mount Bisutun to admire the work Farhad has achieved. She apologizes that she is unable to reward him adequately for his great labors, and Shirin gives Farhad her golden earrings. Yet Farhad's true reward was in being able to fulfill Shirin's dearest wish. He declines the offer of this rich gift, and flees to the steppes where he can hide his sorrow and love.

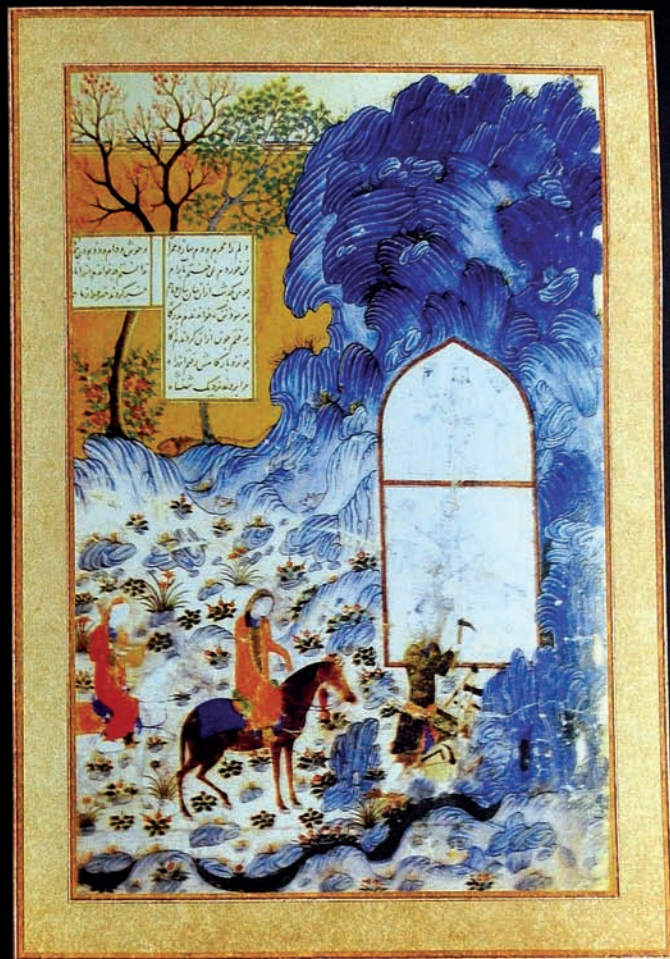
Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. Mid-16th c.
(Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H. 2161)
Shirin visits Farhad at the Bisutun Mountain.







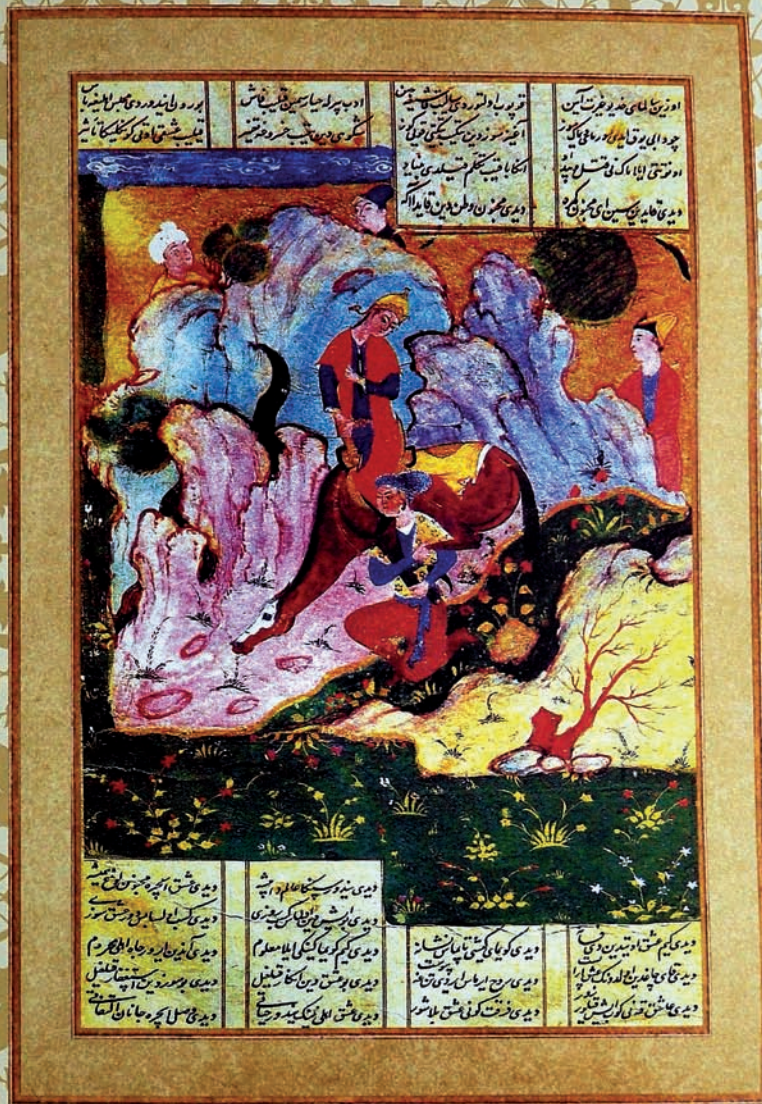
Khamsa of Nizami, "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz, 1525.
 (Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery)
 Shirin visits the launching of the canal.



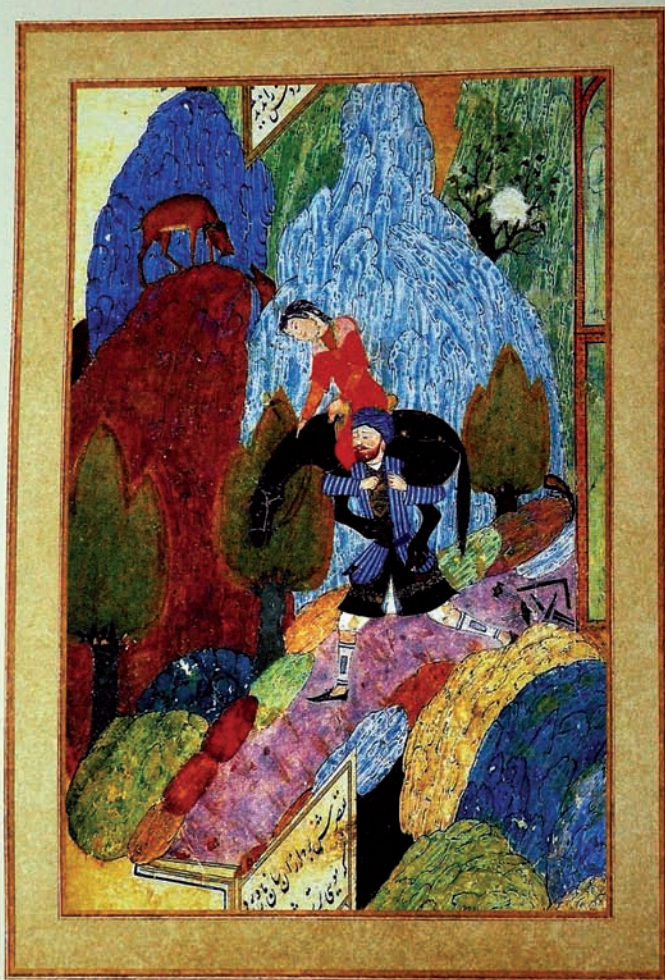
Khamsa of Nizami, "Khosrow and Shirin". 1405-1410.
 (Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery)
 Shirin visits the launching of the canal.

Farhad Carrying Shirin and Her Horse

In order to behold the titanic labors Farhad has undertaken, in digging a tunnel through the rocky mountain, Shirin mounts her war-horse, and rides to Mount Bisutan in the company of her retinue. But when she approaches Farhad, her horse's hooves begin to slip on the smooth rock-face. Farhad, who sees that her horse is about to fall, quickly catches the horse along with its fair rider, and bears both steed and rider on his mighty shoulders to the safety of the castle.



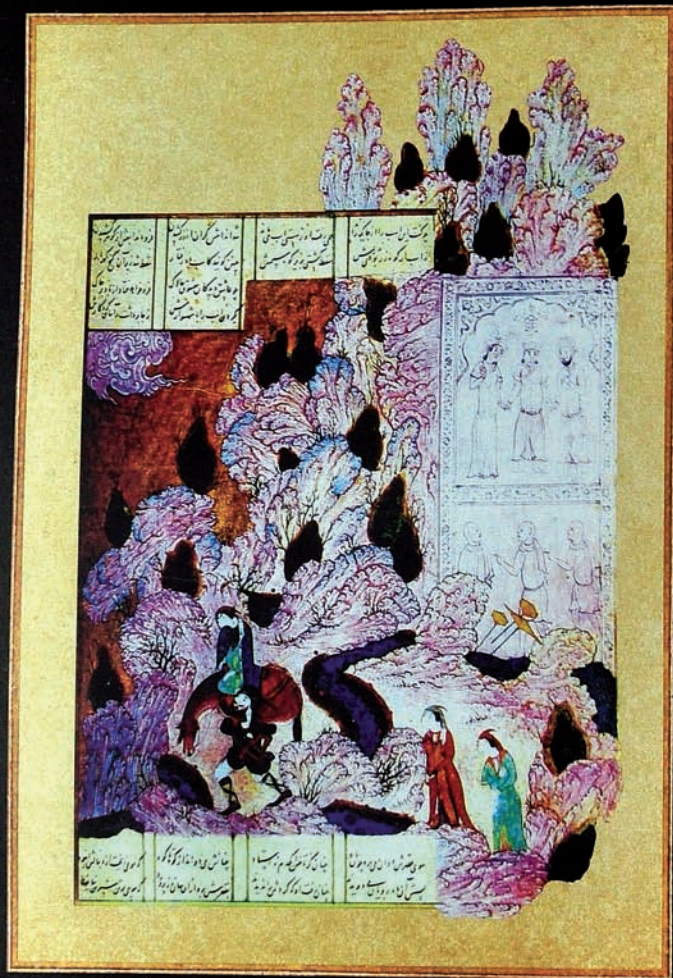
Khamsa of Alisher Navoi. "Khosrow and Shirin". Qazvin, 1580s.
(Tashkent, Institute of Manuscripts named after Kh.Suleyman, 2630)
Farhad carrying Shirin and her horse.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Farhad carrying Shirin and her horse.



Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1481.
 (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H 762)
 Farhad carrying Shirin and her horse.



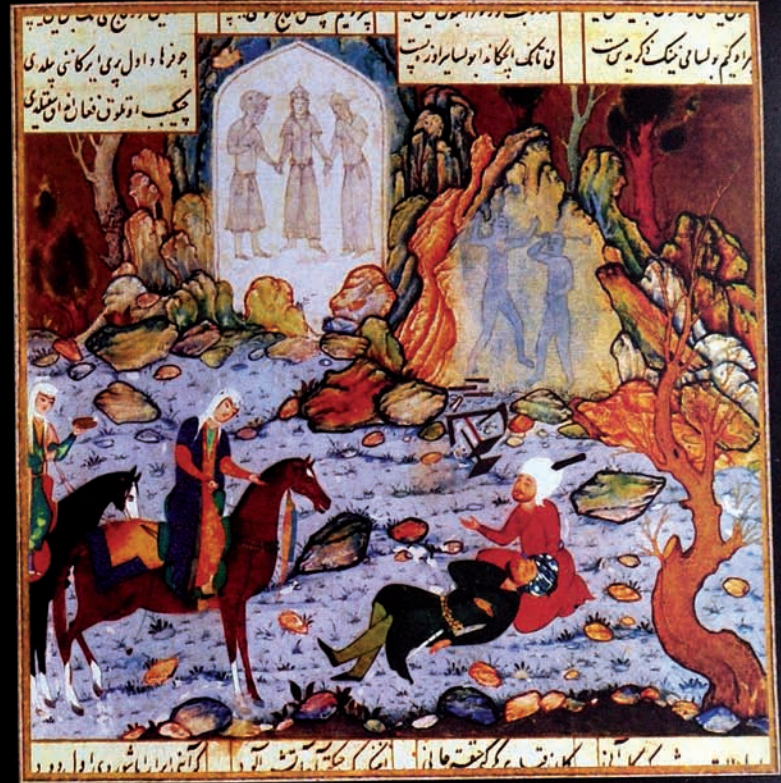
Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1480s.
 (Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, H 761)
 Farhad carrying Shirin and her horse.





The Death of Farhad

Khosrow sees that Farhad has won the bargain, and that he will have to renounce Shirin to Farhad, and so he resorts to base treachery. He sends a messenger to Farhad, who bears a false message that Shirin has been killed. The honest-hearted and trusting Farhad does not even suspect that the message is a lie. The appalling news breaks the hero's heart, and he falls dead upon the spot.



Divan of Alisher Navoi: "Khosrow and Shirin", Tabriz, 1527.
(Paris, National Library of France)
The Death of Farhad.

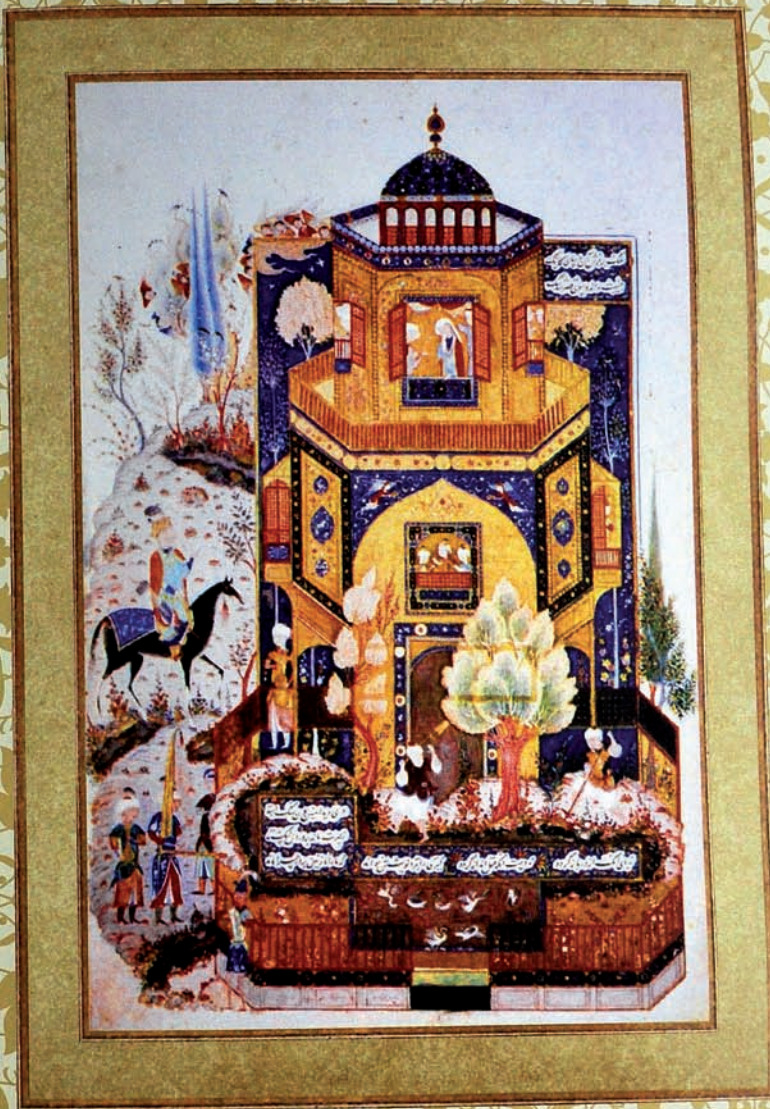


Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1490s.
 (London, British Library, Add. 25900)
 The Death of Farhad.

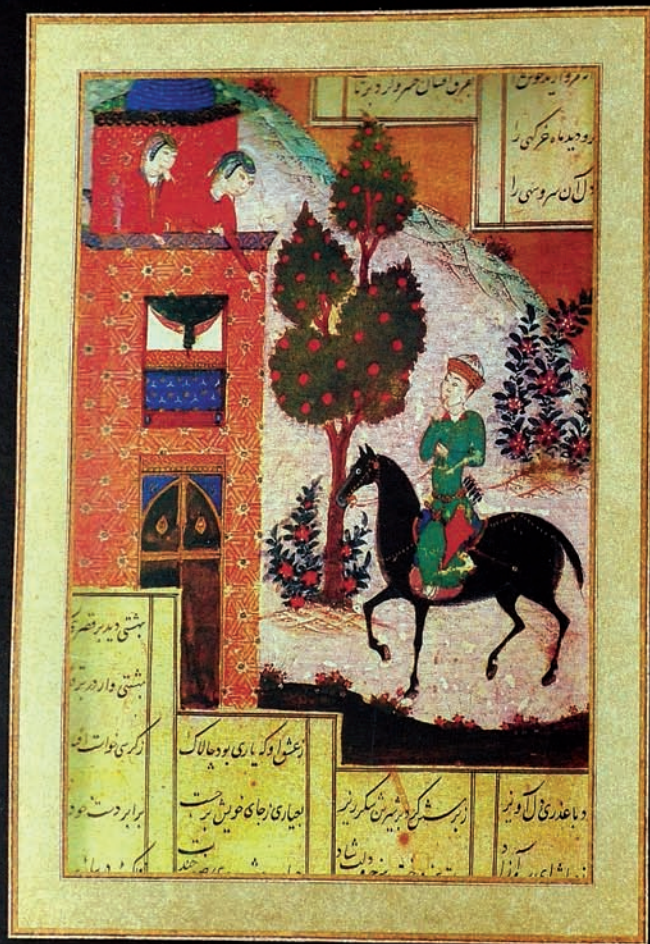


Khosrow in front of Shirin's Castle

One day while out hunting, Khosrow happened to come near Shirin's castle. By the time he arrived at the castle it was almost dark, and snow was falling. Khosrow hoped to enter, but the gates before remained shut. Barring the gates to him, Shirin explains that she will not admit him, because of the stain upon his reputation. After a long and fruitless discussion, the disgruntled Shah departs.



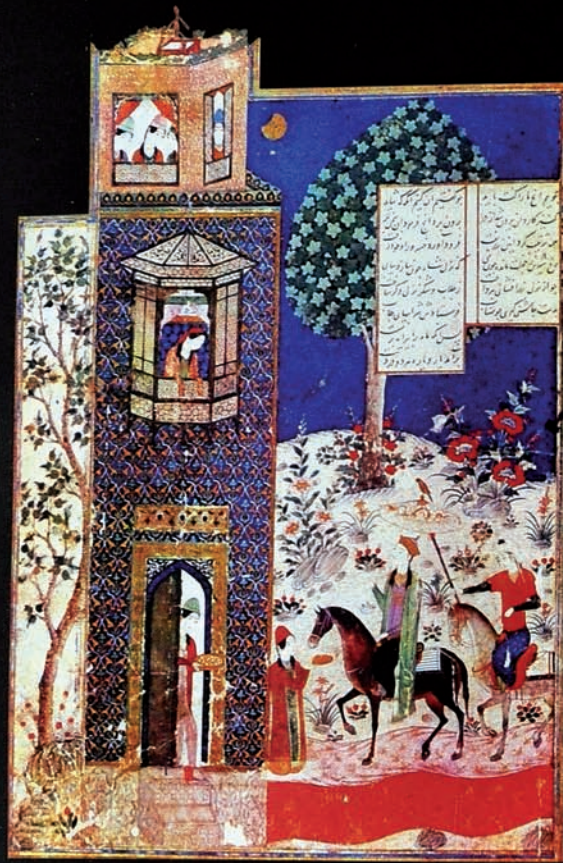
Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu.
"Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1481. Detached page.
(London, the Keir Collection)
Khosrow in front of Shirin's castle.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat style. 886/1481-1482.
 (St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 338)
 Khosrow in front of Shirin's castle.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin".
 Early Herat style. Early 15th century.
 Khosrow in front of Shirin's castle.



Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1481.
 (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H 762)
 Khosrow in front of Shirin's castle.





The Musical Entertainments of Khosrow and Shirin in the Garden

Faced with this unexpected refusal from Shirin, Khosrow finds it hard to forget the insult – so he holds a banquet in his war-tent. Nor does Shirin's heart beat easily either, the face of the angered Khosrow is not something she can easily bear. And so she sets off to his war-tent in secret, taking with her the famous singers Barbed and Nekisa, she wants them to sing about what had happened between the two lovers, and Khosrow's misunderstanding. Khosrow understands everything, and becomes truly joyful. And then Shirin herself appears at that very moment. Khosrow calls forth the noblemen of the court, and orders them to begin the marriage ceremonies immediately.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat, 1431.
(St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
The Musical Entertainments of Khosrow and Shirin in the garden.



Khosrow on the Nuptial Bed

On the day of the wedding Khosrow orders a magnificent feast. However, he drinks too much wine, and becomes very drunk. Shirin is appalled by his behaviour, and resolves to teach him a lesson; she uses his drunken stupor as an opportunity to place a vile old woman in the nuptial bed, instead of herself. When Khosrow wakes the next morning, he understands the meaning of the lesson which Shirin planned for him.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Isfahan. 1636.
(Baku, Institute of Manuscripts named after M.Fuzuli, M-207)
Khosrow on the nuptial bed.

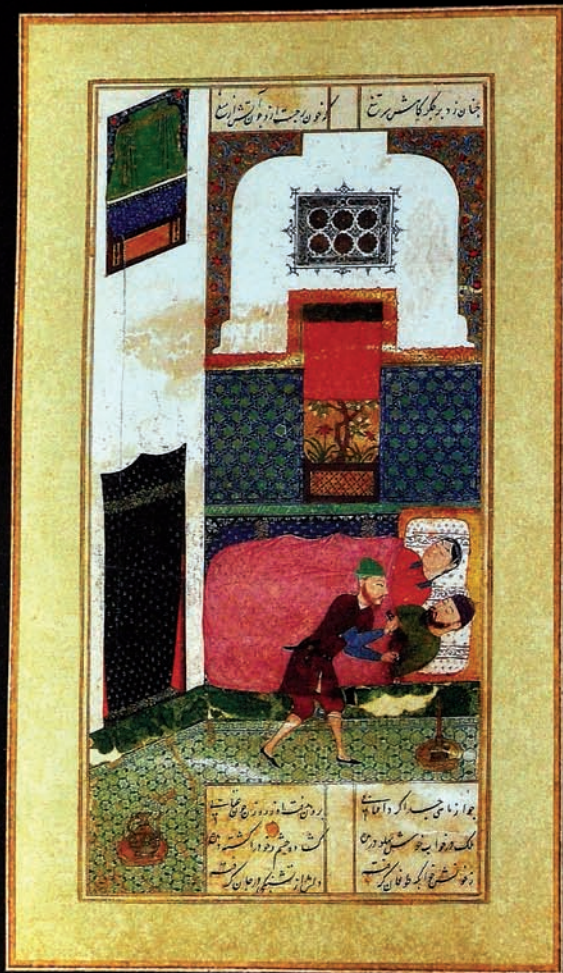


The Death of Khosrow

Shiruye, Khosrow's son by his other wife Maryam, falls in love with Shirin. In order to remove the rivalry from his father, he seizes the throne and claps his father in prison. When Shirin rejects Shiruye's advances, and goes voluntarily to prison to share Khosrow's fate there, Shiruye sends an assassin to the prison too. Khosrow is fatally wounded, yet does not want to alarm the sleeping Shirin, and silently dies.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
The death of Khosrow.





Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Herat. 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 The death of Khosrow.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Isfahan. 1636.
 (Baku, Institute of Manuscripts named after M.Fuzuli, M-207)
 The death of Khosrow.



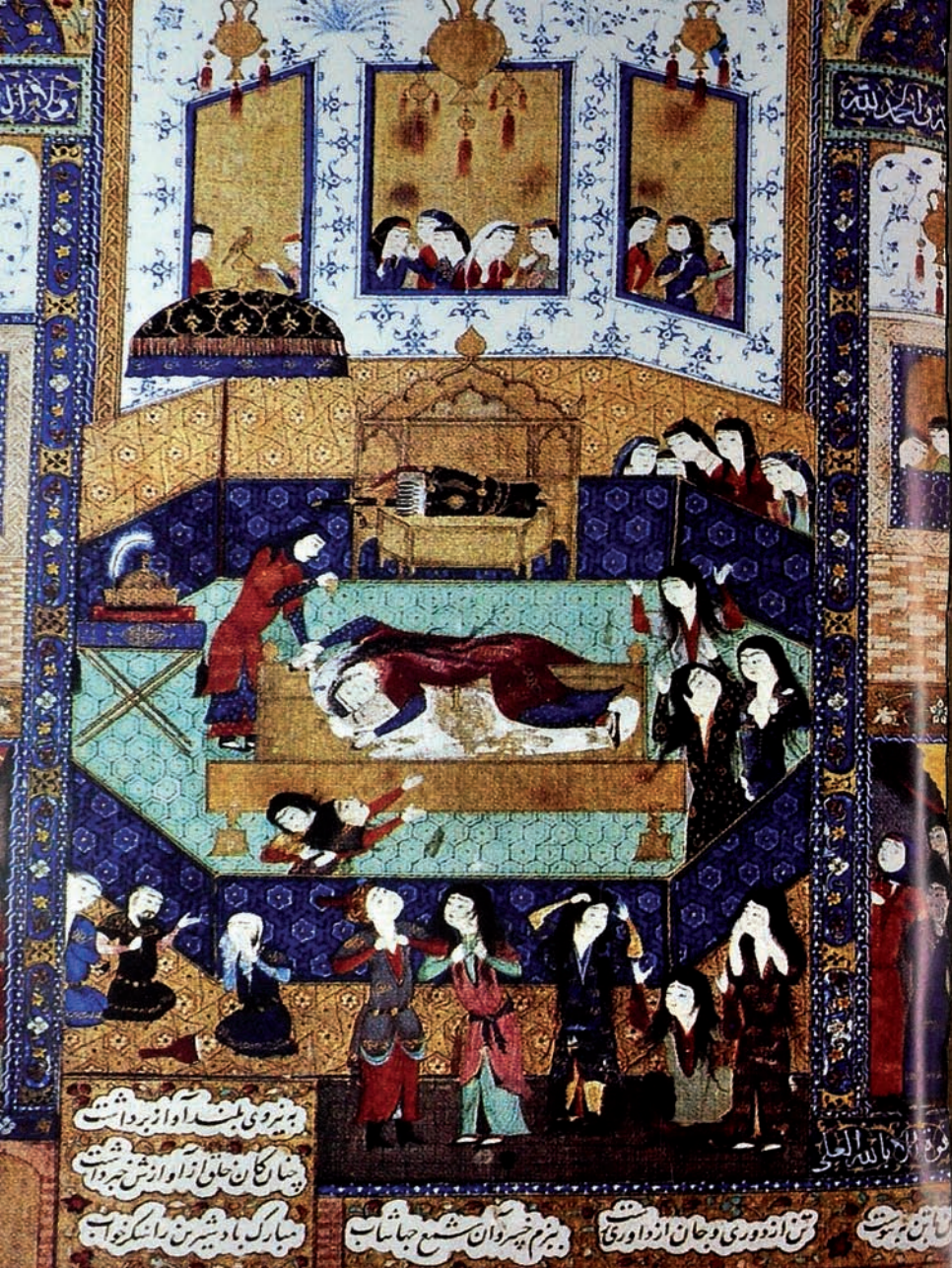
The Suicide of Shirin

After Khosrow's murder, Shiruyeh steps up his attempts to possess Shirin. She pretends to go along with this, adding a demand that Shiruyeh must first destroy everything, which reminds her of Khosrow, his palace, his favourite horse, and that it must all make a great funeral pyre for his father. When Khosrow's body is taken to the crypt, Shirin creeps in behind and shuts the door. Hugging her lover's body for a last time, she takes her own life with a dagger.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Khosrow and Shirin". Isfahan, 1636.
(Baku, Institute of Manuscripts named after M.Fuzuli, M-207)
The Suicide of Shirin.





Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Khosrow and Shirin". Tabriz. 1481. Detached page.
 (London, the Keir Collection)
 The Suicide of Shirin.



Leyli and Majnun

Nizami's third epic poem, "Leyli and Majnun" was completed in 1188 AD, it had been commissioned by Shirvanshah Akhsitan I. "Leyli and Majnun" is a retelling of an ancient Arabic legend of the unhappy love of a young man named Kays, whom Nizami renames as "Majnun" ("the obsessed") for the beautiful girl Leyli.

The story unravels around the details of the passionate lyrical poems of tormented love written by Kays. Nizami Ganjavi fleshed-out the story to completeness, and added psychological motivation for the development of the characters that feature in the story. The underlying concept of this tragic poem is infinite love, which finds its path through the highest poetry, resulting in a spiritual fusion of love, and this concept was similarly the work of Nizami Ganjavi. It's Nizami's concept which renders the entire poem complete.

Leyli and Majnun glow in the darkness like comets in the darkness of the southern sky, whose brilliance continues to dazzle our eyes. Their lives are divided by external events, but these are events which also shatter the quietude of those who would approach them with threats, or attempts to turn them into ordinary mortals... humbled by the brutality of real life in those times. They do not cow down, just as Nizami himself did not cow down, and continue to seek the road to happiness for abandoned and woe-stricken mortals.

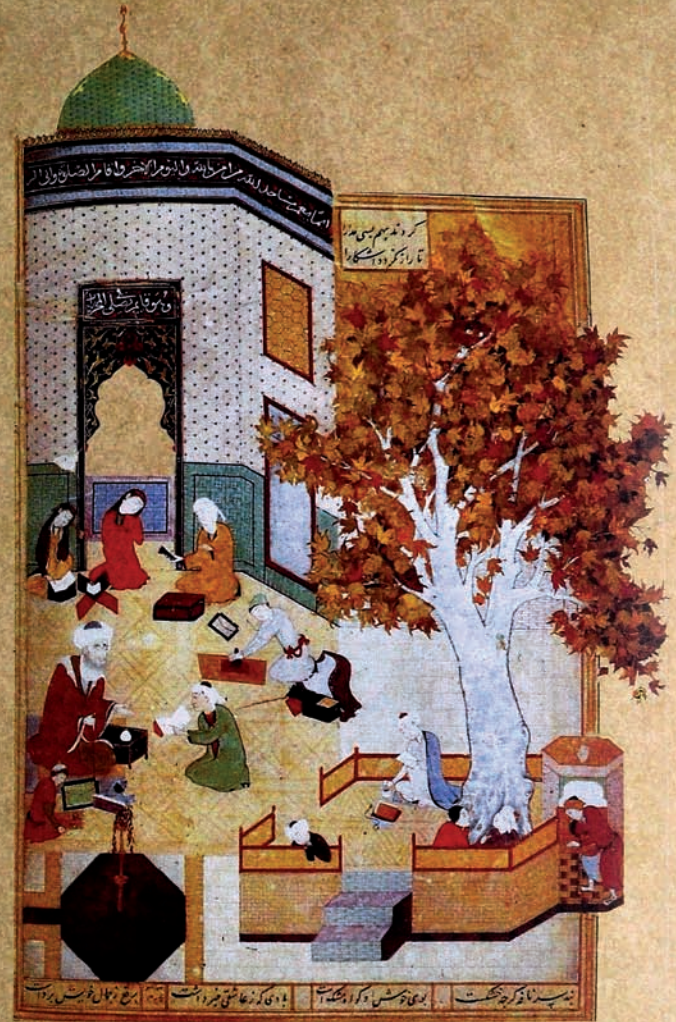
Why cannot Leyli and Kays, who love each other so strongly, be happy together? Nizami puts forward convincing reasons. Leyli is forbidden to marry Kays because he is a poet, a man unwilling to live by the standards of sanctimonious morality which prevailed in society. His poetry acts just as much as a flame and inspiration as does his love. Kays throws down his challenge to society, which declares him to be "possessed" or "obsessed" ("Majnun"). In his poem, Nizami sets out to ask essential questions about the spiritual freedom of mankind, about free will, and the right to personal happiness.

As in his previous epic of Khosrow and Shirin, Nizami presents us with a picture of his central hero, Majnun, in a process of development. The entire poem is split into a sequence of episodes. In each of them the attempts to bring events to a successful conclusion result only in failure, failure that prompts renewed passion, and make passion irresistible. These episodes are intentionally inserted to prolong the story. The hero's passion results in catastrophe. Majnun breaks all his bonds with human society forever. The reader begins to believe that no matter what may happen, a disastrous ending is unavoidable. Leyli's husband dies, it may seem that at least all obstacles have been eliminated? At last Leyli and Majnun can be together? But no, it's too late. Majnun has broken his bond with humanity, and no longer even needs Leyli, she is his ideal, his divinity. Thus Leyli dies, as if surrendering her life for an ideal image which lives on in Majnun.



Leyli and Majnun in the Madrasa

When Kays, the son of tribal ruler Bani Amir, was ten years old, his father sent him to school. There were several other boys and girls studying at the school, and among these was a beautiful girl called Leyli. Kays and Leyli met every day at school, they became close friends, and loved each other. Soon the story of their love had reached even far-away places. Kays, who lost his head for love, became famous as "Majnun", the "obsessed".



Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Herat. 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
Leyli and Majnun in the medrese.

Marriage Proposal of Majnun

When he found out about his son's love for Leyli, Majnun's father gathered his entourage and solemnly set out to address Leyli's father. They were well greeted. But Leyli's father refused to give his daughter's hand to Kays, who was widely considered to be obsessive and unstable. Majnun's father was bitterly despondent, and set out on his journey home again.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Tabriz, 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265; the miniature is kept in the Fogg Museum, Cambridge)
Marriage proposal of Majnun.
Artist: Mir Seid Ali

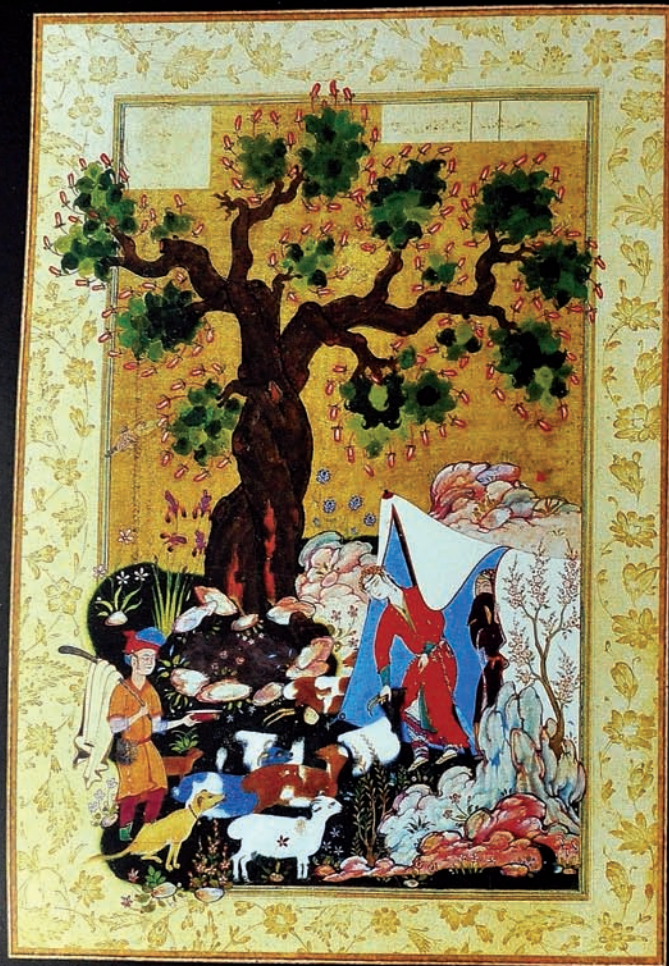




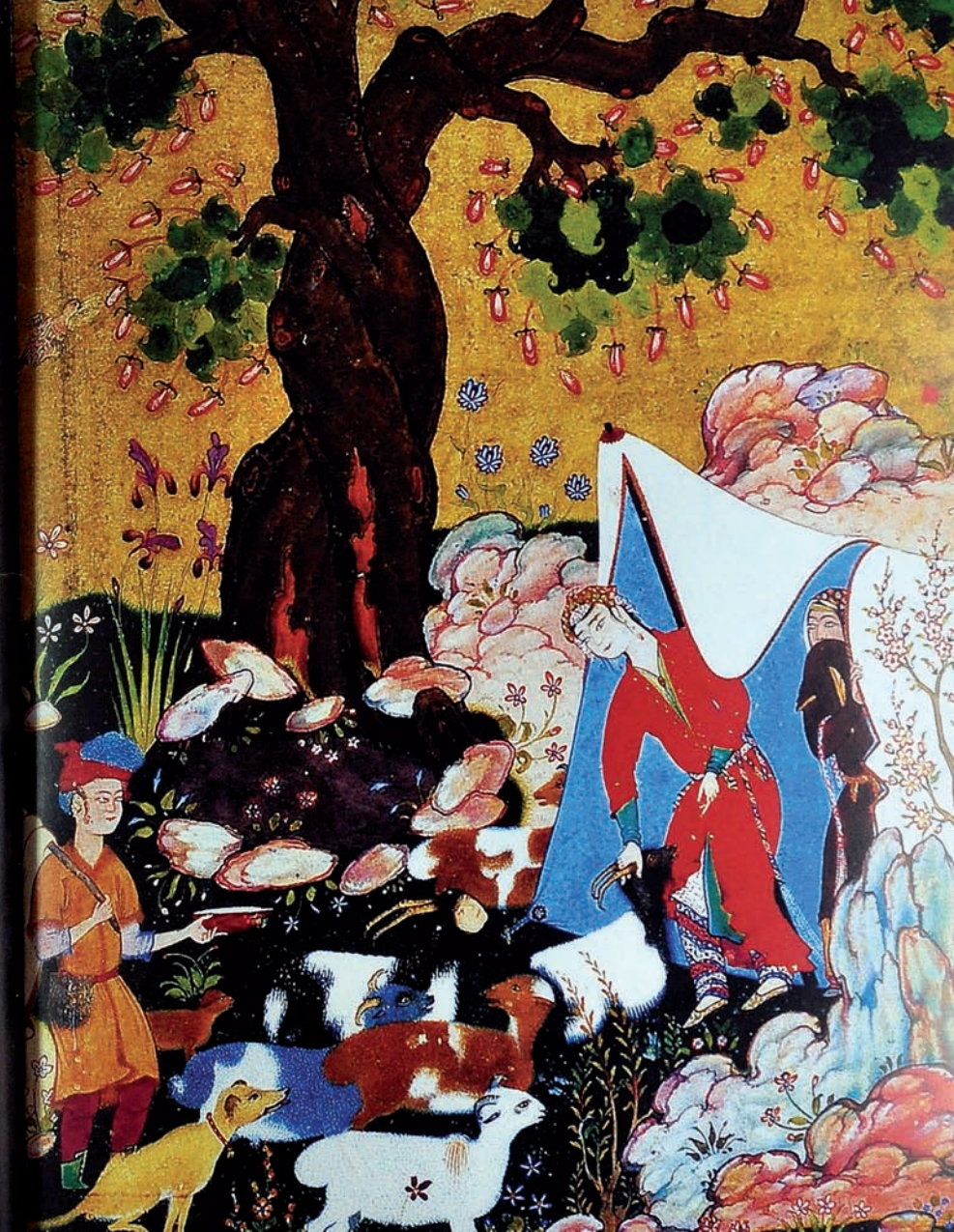
"Haft Awrang" of Abdurrahman Jami, Mashhad, 1556-1565.
 (Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery.)
 First meeting of Leyli and Majnun.



گفتار کرده بود یکس گلگون



"Haft Awrang" of Abdurrahman Jami, Mashhad, 1556-1565.
(Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery.)
Majnun at the tent of Leyli in sheep's clothing.





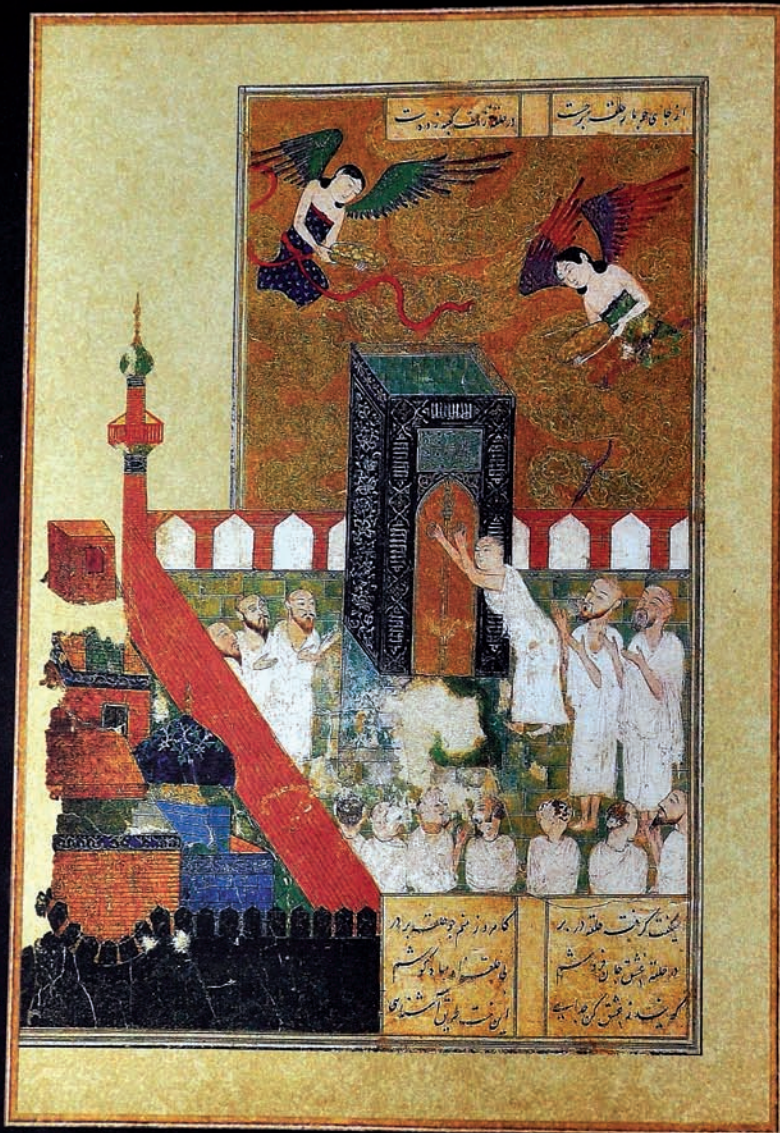
Majnun at the Kaaba

In enforced separation from Leyli, Kays's condition grew worse. Placing all his hopes in Allah, his father took him to Mekka. There he commanded his son to ask to be relieved of his obsessive love. But, with an insane laugh, Majnun began to pray that his love for Leyli would only be strengthened.

They tell me to forget the girl I cherish!
I tell them I would sooner perish!



Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Tabriz. 1445-1446.
(Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H 781)
Majnun at the Kaaba.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Leyli and Majnun". Herat. 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Majnun at the Kaaba.



Majnun in Chains

After returning from Mekka, Majnun's condition worsened further, and when he discovered Leyli had married another man, he lost his reason. His madness drove Leyli to despair, and her father decided to kill Majnun. When Majnun's relatives heard of this plan, and clapped him in chains for fear of further catastrophe.

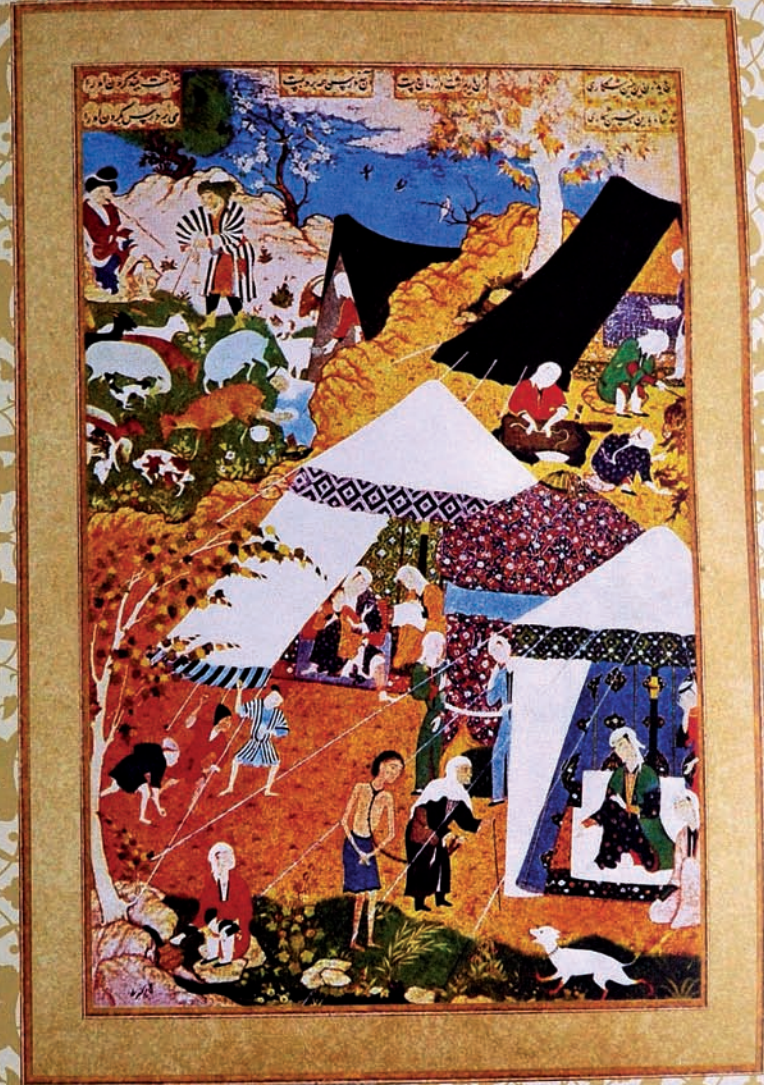
Khamasa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Herat style. 886/1481-1482.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 338)
Majnun in chains.





Majnun Brought to Leyli's Tent

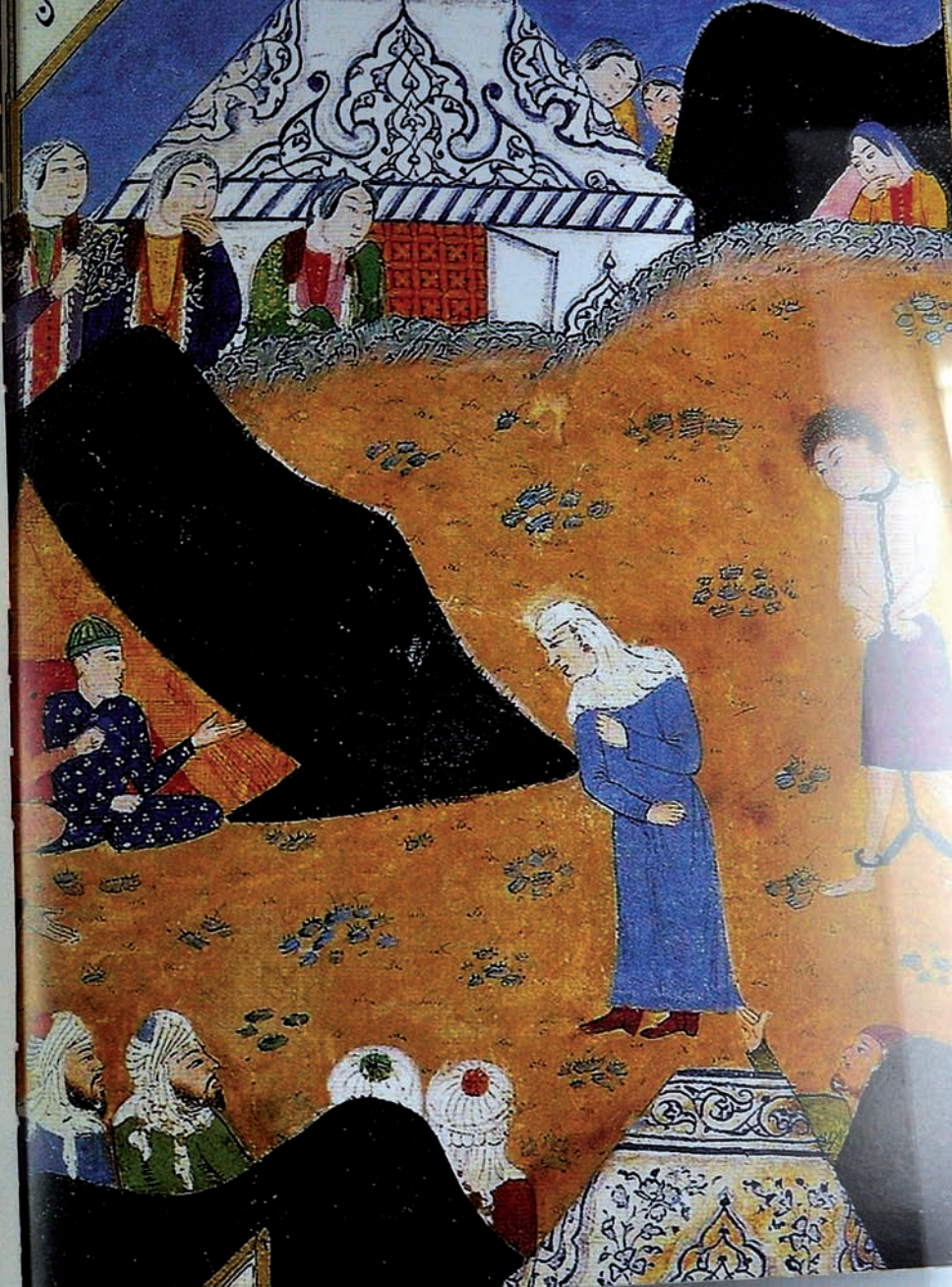
When going towards Leyli's settlement, Majnun met an old woman, leading a madman in chains. When he heard that this unhappy pair made their living by collecting donations and splitting the proceeds, Majnun fell at the feet of the old woman, and begged her to put him in chains too, and lead him to Leyli. He promised he'd give the entirety of whatever donations they received to her alone. The old woman agreed to his profitable proposal, she clapped the chains on him, and led him to the tent where Leyli lived. The artist shows this dramatic story in the context of a broad panorama showing the life of nomadic people, and is usually considered a genre scene.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
Majnun brought to Leyli's tent.
Artist: Mir Seyid Ali



Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Herat. 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Majnun brought to Leyli's tent.



The Meeting of Lovers

Anguished by the pangs of love, Leyli and Majnun suffer while separated. But then one day, in front of Leyli's home there appears unexpectedly an emaciated boy dressed in rags, it's Majnun. He's accompanied by wild animals who have befriended him in the desert. The lovers faint when they see each other, and lie in a swoon for some time.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Shiraz commercial style. Late 15th century.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, PNS 83)
The meeting of lovers.

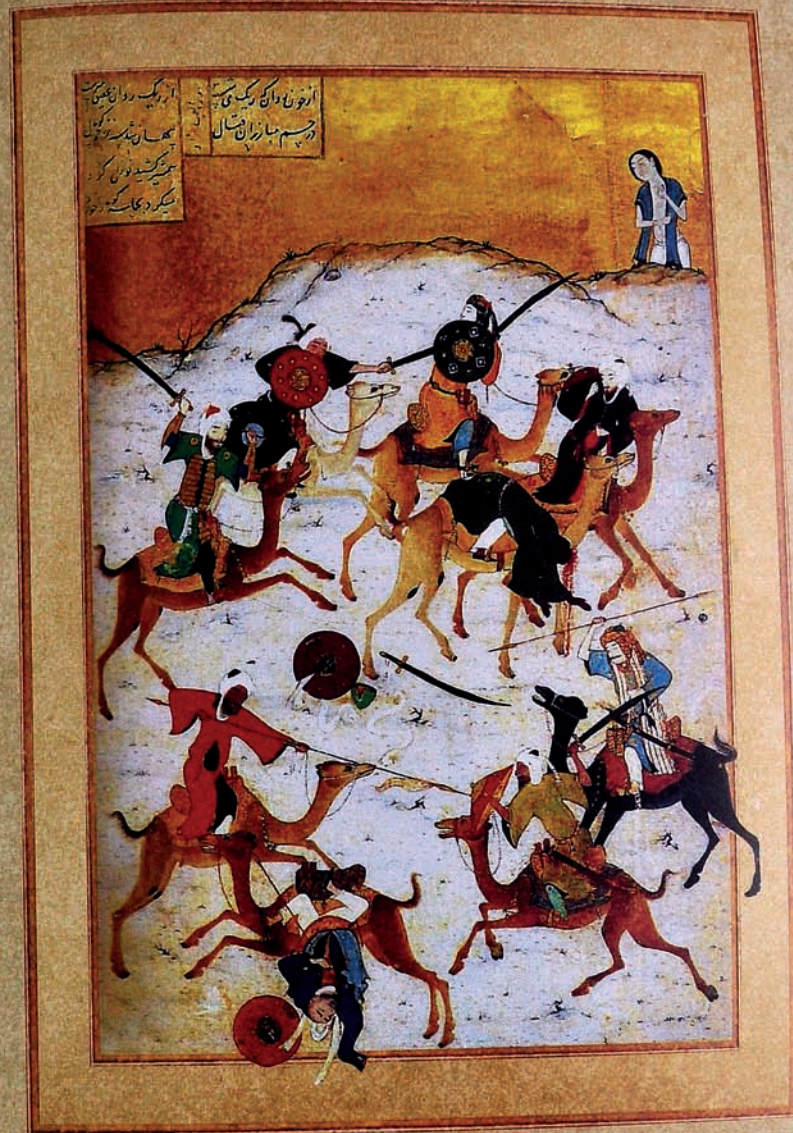


Noufal's Battle with Leyli's Tribe

Brave soldier, Noufal learns of the sad story of Majnun's unrequited love, and decides to help him. He tries to use force to compel Leyli's father to give her to Majnun, he gathers his fighters and wages war on Leyli's tribe. However, just as Noufal and his men are fighting bravely, Majnun is watching the battle and praying for Leyli's countrymen, and thus aiding the enemy.

The artistic depiction of this episode as a miniature varies greatly. Depending on the artistic school, the period and the individual artist, the scene is variously shown as a show-down between two armed horsemen, or as a scene involving many participants. Yet whichever approach was taken, the interpretation of the scene was a major development in the depiction of battle scenes, within the artistic output of the Near- and Middle-East.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Herat, 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
Noufal's battle with Leyli's tribe.





Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun", Herat, 1431.
(St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
Noufal's battle with Leyli's tribe.





Leyli with Her Friends in the Garden

Leyli is saddened, and goes into the garden with her friends. She suffers from being in love with Majnun, but kept her suffering a secret from her friends; she only talked in whispers about flowers with them. But suddenly at that moment, someone sang a ghazal about the burning love and suffering of Majnun.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Herat. 1431.
(St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
Leyli with her friends in the garden.



Majnun in the Desert

After fleeing from people, Majnun seeks refuge among wild animals. Animals – lions, deer, wolves and gazelles – flock towards him from every direction. Even the most terrifying predators become calm in his presence, and all the animals live in peace and harmony. Like King Suleyman, Majnun ruled over the animal kingdom. He gives them what food he has, and they in turn, like loyal friends and servants, guard him. For fear of these wild beasts, no human now dares come near Majnun.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
Majnun in the desert.
Artist: Agha Mirak





Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Herat, 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Majnun in the desert.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Leyli and Majnun". Herat, 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Majnun in the desert.

The Last Meeting of Lovers

Ibn-Salam, Leyli's husband, has died. Tradition demands that Leyli stay at home for two years in mourning, and receive no guests. Depression saps Leyli's strength. She senses the approach of death, and sends for Majnun. He comes accompanied by his wild animals to the meeting, which is destined to be their last. At the sight of the emaciated boy Leyli momentarily faints. When she comes round, she falls at the feet of her beloved and invites him into her tent. This was the last time the two lovers met.



Khamsa of A.Kh. Dehlevi. "Leyli and Majnun". Herat. Late 15th century.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 394, page 23)
The last meeting of lovers.



Seven Beauties

Nizami ascends the ladder of achievement further in "Seven Beauties", where new horizons open before him. This is the fourth epic poem of his Quinary. The mirages of life pass before the eyes of Shah Bahram. He lives in a world of astonishing images in seven palaces, where there is a continual stream of fascinating stories of things which are amusing or great, monstrous or gentle, good or evil. Here white can turn to black, where every kind of wealth is proffered like colored string. Here you can lose the difference between fairy-tales and real life, between dreams and reality.

The story-line works on two levels. The first is the story of Shah Bahram. The second is a series of inserted short stories which have no links with the main plot, and are really entertaining diversions which date back to the traditions of oral story-telling. In his youth, Bahram lived in a castle, where he found one room where he'd never been before. On its walls was an astonishing fresco, which depicted seven wonderfully beautiful girls. Bahram took the throne after his father died, and he took as his wives seven princesses, whose portraits he had seen in the mysterious room in Havarnak Castle. They were an Indian Princess, a Chinese Princess, a Khorezmian Princess (Khorezm was a Central Asian khanate near to the Aral Sea – its main city was Khiva - Translator), a Slavic Princess, a Maghreb Princess, a Byzantine Princess and an Iranian Princess. Bahram engaged a fine architect, and commanded him to build seven palaces, with dome-crowned pavilions. Each of these domes had its own color, determined by the astrological auspices of the weekday and the planet connected with it. It's curious to note that the calendars used by Europeans also employ such symbolism, apparently connected to the astrological practices of ancient Babylon. We know that Babylonian temples were built on seven levels, with their walls of seven colors correlating with the days of the week, and with the planets. (In Nizami's time, only seven planets were known – Translator).

Bahram would spend one day and night of each week in each of the palaces, clad in robes of the appropriate color for that day. The interior designs and furnishings of each palace similarly matched the astrological plan. The princesses would regale Bahram with tales of their home countries, to the accompaniment of music. The poet uses this device to include seven tales from foreign lands, each full of fantastical detail. The central theme of each of the tales, of course, is love. In parallel with the idea that black can mutate to white, in each of these love stories the coarse sensuality becomes transmuted into a theme of enlightened and harmonious love. Nizami's great genius didn't shrink from the challenge, and in the process, he created seven masterpieces.

The life story of Shah Bahram Gur provides the framework for these stories. Only a poet could express these tales within the context of the monarch's duties. A monarch, Nizami tells us, must be humane and educated; he must care for his subjects; and he should exercise his rule on the basis of wise experience. Bahram Gur provides us with a complex and unusual example. He sincerely wishes to make his people happy – to punish their enemies and oppressors, and to repeal many harsh laws. But Bahram Gur creates an extensive harem, spends much of his time in hunting, feasting and entertainments, and frequently neglects his responsibilities. Given this opportunity his Vizier, Rast Rovan, exploits the peasants, steals from the people, and betrays the country to its enemies. Bahram only learns of his mistake when a wise shepherd opens his eyes to the tyranny and lawlessness going on in his country. The wise shepherd teaches the Shah a valuable lesson.

The wise shepherd... the repentant monarch... the wonderful singer and dancer Fitna, who is cleverer and more able than the Shah... the loyal and hard-working Kurd and his daughter... Nizami depicts these images of ordinary people with true love and affection. Nizami turns all the clichés of human experience inside out. We find that a simple shepherd is wiser than a monarch – Shah Bahram can't understand important tasks, and when he confronts them, just as when he confronts another man, fate is determined by the common people.





Construction of Khawarnak Palace

Old Shah Yazdegird well knew how greatly he was hated by his entourage. He feared they might make an attempt on the life of his only son and heir, Bahram, which was why he brought Bahram back from Iran, and placed him, for protection, under the care of his loyal vassal, Numan, King of Yemen. However, the hot and humid climate of Yemen took its toll on the young prince's health – a topic which was repeated from the story of the building of Shirin's castle. Instead, it was decided to build a castle for the young Prince Bahram in the mountainous part of the kingdom instead. The legendary architect Simnar, the most famous architect of his era, and builder of many buildings in Egypt and Syria, was summoned. This architect's name is of interest to us. It's clearly of Babylonian origin, and its ancient version – Sin-Immar – can be easily reconstructed. It seems clear that Nizami possessed some sources relating the story of the building of ancient temples in Babylon.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Seven Beauties". Herat. 1431.
(St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
Construction of Khawarnak Palace.



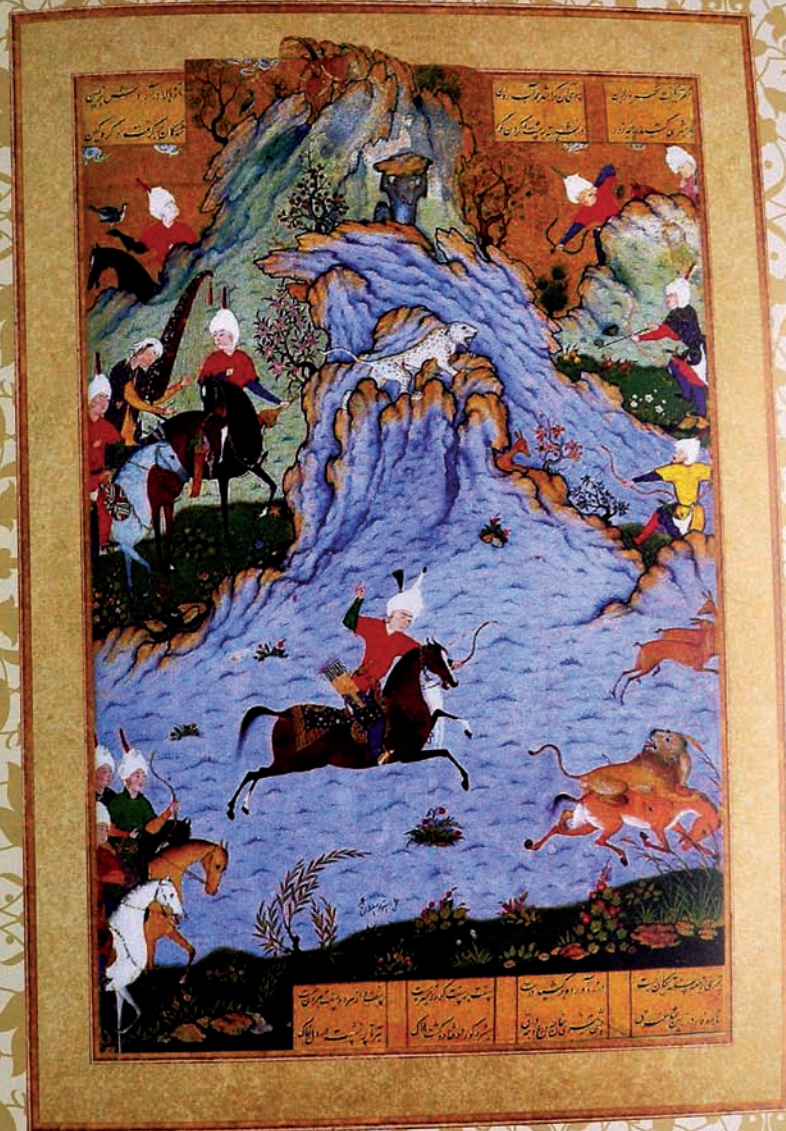


Bahram Gur Hunting the Lion

Bahram Gur enjoyed hunting wild asses in his youth. The name for a wild ass in Nizami's original is "gur", and this is how Bahram got his nickname – Bahram Gur, Bahram the Ass-Hunter.

One day, while he was out hunting, he saw a huge lion as it pounced upon a wild ass. He loosed his bow, and with a single arrow he pierced both animals. The arrow flew with such force that it went through both the lion and ass, into the ground, and stuck in as deep as the flight-feathers. This legendary hunting achievement was depicted on the walls of Bahram's Havarnak Castle.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Seven Beauties". Tabriz. 1539-1543.
(London, British Library, Or. 2265)
Bahram Gur hunting the lion.
Artist: Sultan Muhammad





Bahram Sees the Portraits of the Seven Beauties

Havarnak Castle, a castle of many rooms and chambers was built especially for Bahram. There were chambers in which Bahram had never set foot. And it happened on one day that he went into one such unvisited chamber and saw an astonishing fresco on its walls. His own face featured at the centre of this fresco, where he was depicted surrounded by the faces of Seven Beauties. Soon Bahram began going to this chamber often, and loved to look at this wonderful fresco, which somehow seemed to foretell his future.



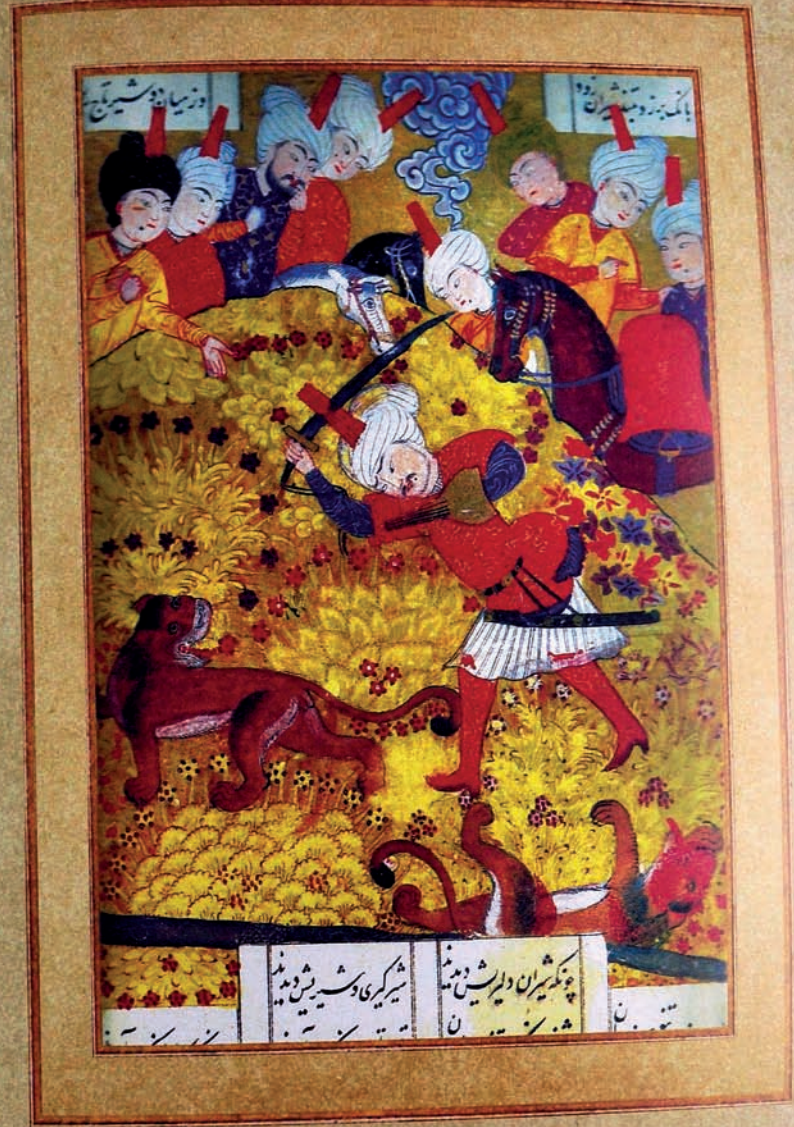
Khamsa of Nizami, "Seven Beauties". Anthology of Iskandar-Sultan. 1410-1411.
(London, British Library, Add.27261)
Bahram sees the portraits of the Seven Beauties.

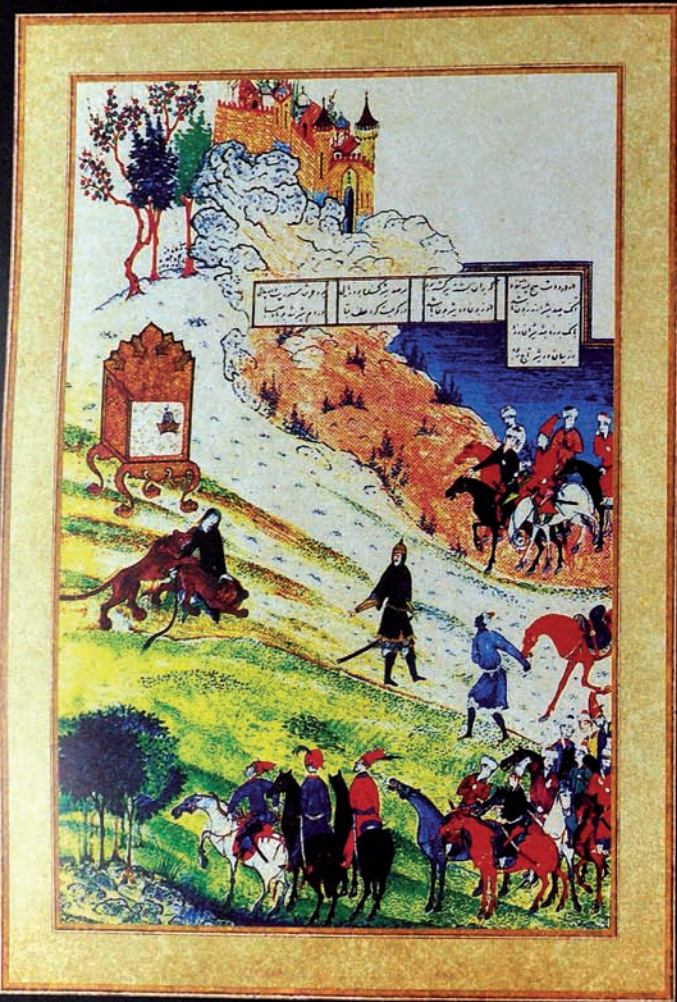


Bahram Defeats the Lions and Assumes the Crown

Fearing that Bahram will prove as tyrannical as his late father, the nobles instead place an old man on the royal throne. Even though Bahram swears that he be a fair and just Shah, the nobles do not support his claim, saying that they may not break their word. Bahram makes a suggestion to place the crown between two lions, and whoever is able to snatch it from them will be the new king. The nobles agree on condition that Bahram is first to try. If he fails to take the crown, it will pass automatically to the old man. Bahram enters boldly into the fight with the lions, kills them both, and is able to take the Shah's crown for himself.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Seven Beauties", Shiraz. 1508.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 340)
Bahram defeats the lions and assumes the crown.





Khamsa of Nizami, "Seven Beauties", Tabriz, 1445-1446.
 (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, II 781)
 Bahram defeats the lions and assumes the crown.





Bahram Gur in the Red Palace

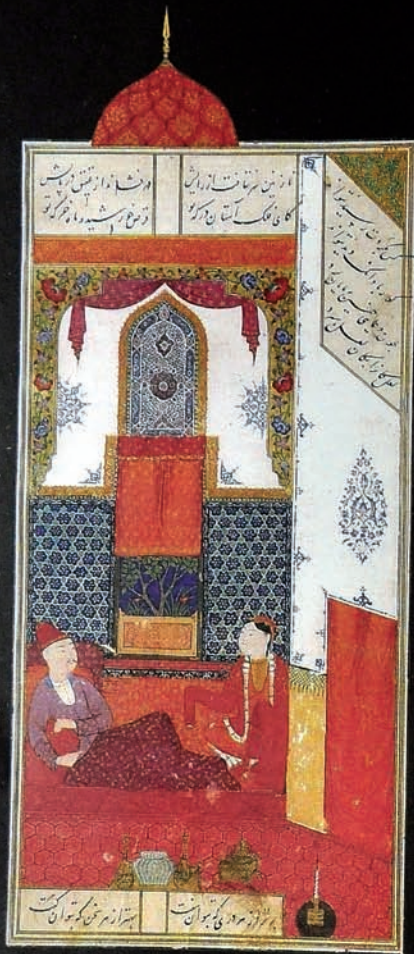
Each day, clad in robes of the appropriate color for that day, Bahram would go to one of the beauties. The clothes of the beauties and the interior furnishings of their pavilions would also match this same ordained color. Bahram would spend time at the banquet table and listening to music, and then he would ask the princess to tell him an interesting story. The content of these stories was connected with the color of the pavilion concerned, and as the stories progressed from the black pavilion to the white one, so did the theme of the stories become progressively nobler, coarse sensuality gives place to pure and sublime love.

We should note that almost all artists who illustrated this volume gave primary prominence to Bahram's entertainments in the seven pavilions, and only very rarely illustrated the stories told by the Seven Beauties. The story was recognized as a genuine picture of court life, and these episodes are depicted as domestic scenes, featuring banquets, music-making and love scenes. During the process of illustrating this popular subject for Oriental miniatures a specific compositional and iconographic scheme became established, which changed to some extent depending on the period it was painted, the school, and the individual artists concerned. If mediocre artists have sometimes dealt with these topics in trivial or boring ways, the more talented artists have gone beyond the traditional canon to show the real life of the times, and create truly sumptuous miniature masterpieces.

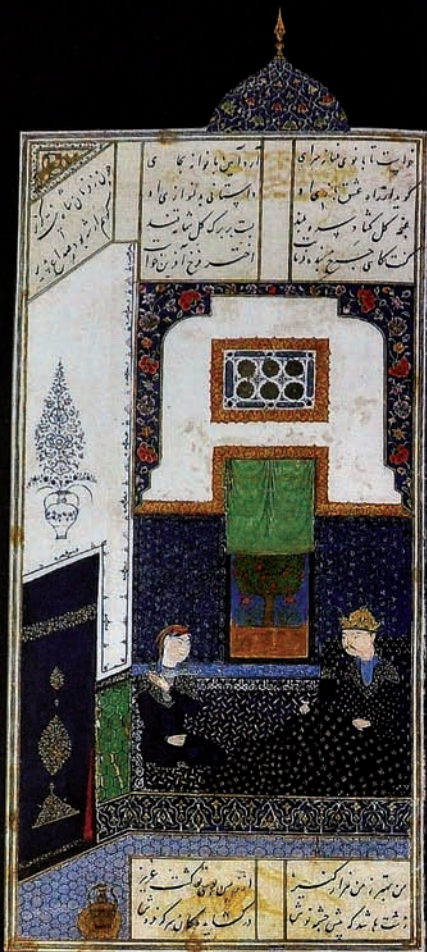
The order, in which Bahram visited the Seven Beauties, was as follows. His week began on Saturday, whose astrological color is black. On this day, Bahram dressed in black robes, and went to the Black Pavilion. There his Indian Beauty would await him, and tell him a tale of a love adventure of one of the Shahs. Then his visits would be – on Sunday, the day of the Sun, to the yellow pavilion, to his Byzantine Beauty. On Monday, or Moon-Day, to the Green Pavilion to his Beauty from Khorezm; on Tuesday, Mars's Day, to the Red Pavilion to the Slavic Beauty. Then on Wednesday, on Mercury's Day, to the Turquoise Pavilion to his Maghreb Beauty; and on Thursday, Jupiter's Day, to his Chinese Beauty in the Sandalwood Pavilion. Finally on Friday, Venus's Day, his Iranian Beauty would await him in her White Pavilion.



Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Seven Beauties". Tabriz. 1481.
(Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H 762)
Bahram Gur in the Red Palace.



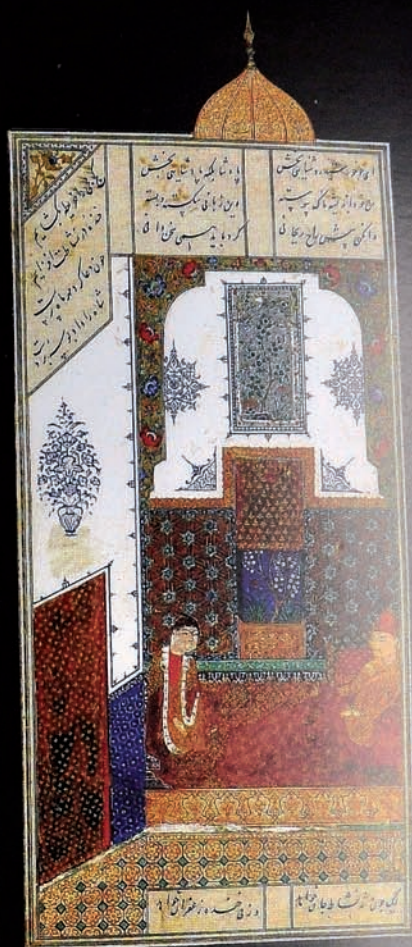
Khamsa of Nizami, "Seven Beauties". Herat, 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Bahram Gur in the Red Palace.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Seven Beauties". Herat, 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Bahram Gur in the Black Palace.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Seven Beauties". Herat, 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Bahram Gur in the Green Palace.



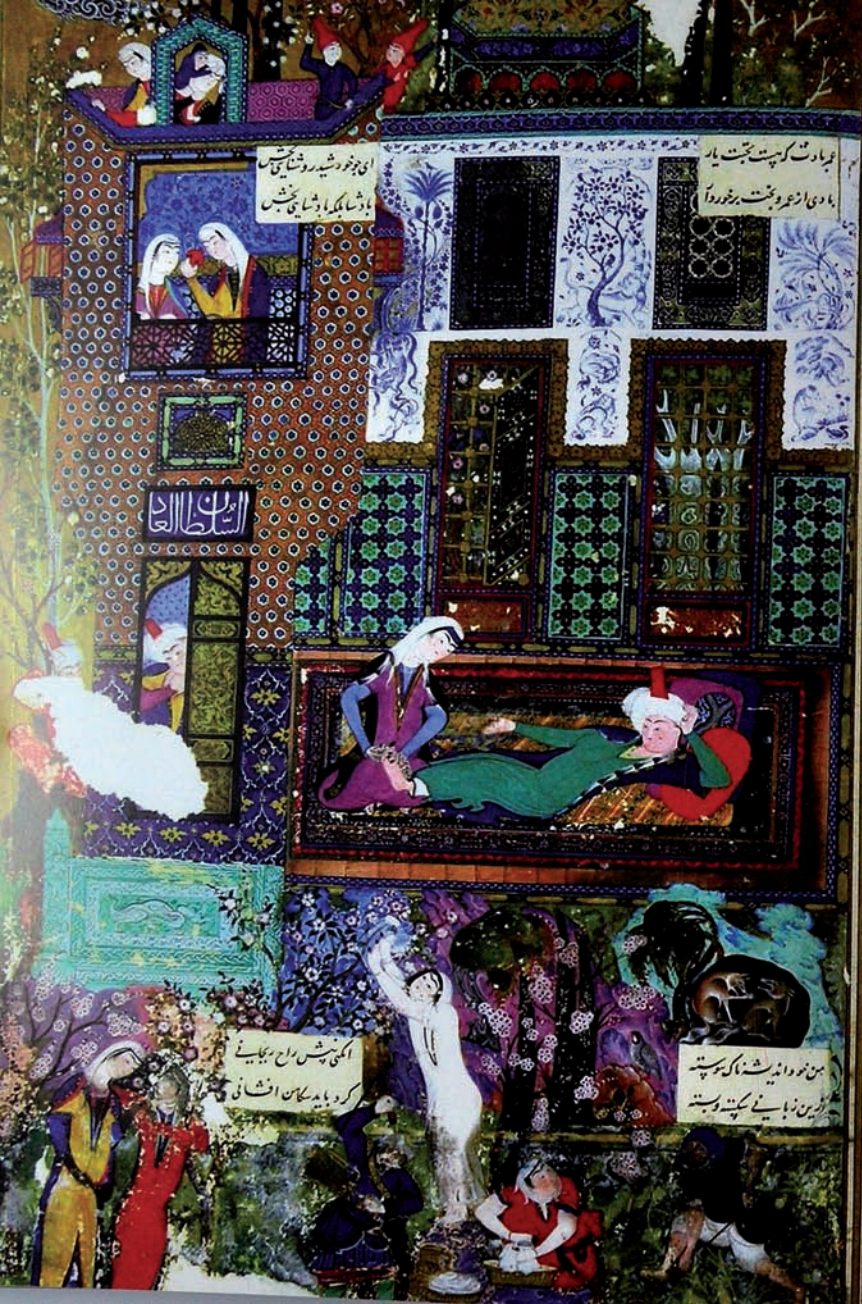
Khamsa of Nizami, "Seven Beauties". Herat, 1431.
 (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
 Bahram Gur in the Yellow Palace.

Makhan in the Enchanted Garden

This miniature illustrates the tale told by the Maghreb Beauty, the Mistress of the Turquoise Pavilion, which Bahram Gur visited on Wednesdays. There once lived a merchant in Egypt, named Makhan. It happened that by night he was in the desert, where he was drawn into the doings of evil forces – demons and spirits. After many adventures the young man met a heartsick old man. The old man hid him in a gazebo perched on a tree, where he punished him severely so that he didn't come down again. But Makhan saw some girls feasting below, and couldn't resist the urge to come down and join in their feast. There he drank wine which made him bold, and he embraced one of the girls. Suddenly he found himself in the arms of a vile old Ifrit. He fainted, and when he awoke he found himself in the steppes, surrounded by animal skeletons. His adventures made him pensive and sad, and in memory of them he ever after wore only dark blue clothes – the color of mourning.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Seven Beauties". Herat. 1490s.
(London, British Library, Add. 25900)
Bahram Gur in the Blue Palace. Mahan and demons.





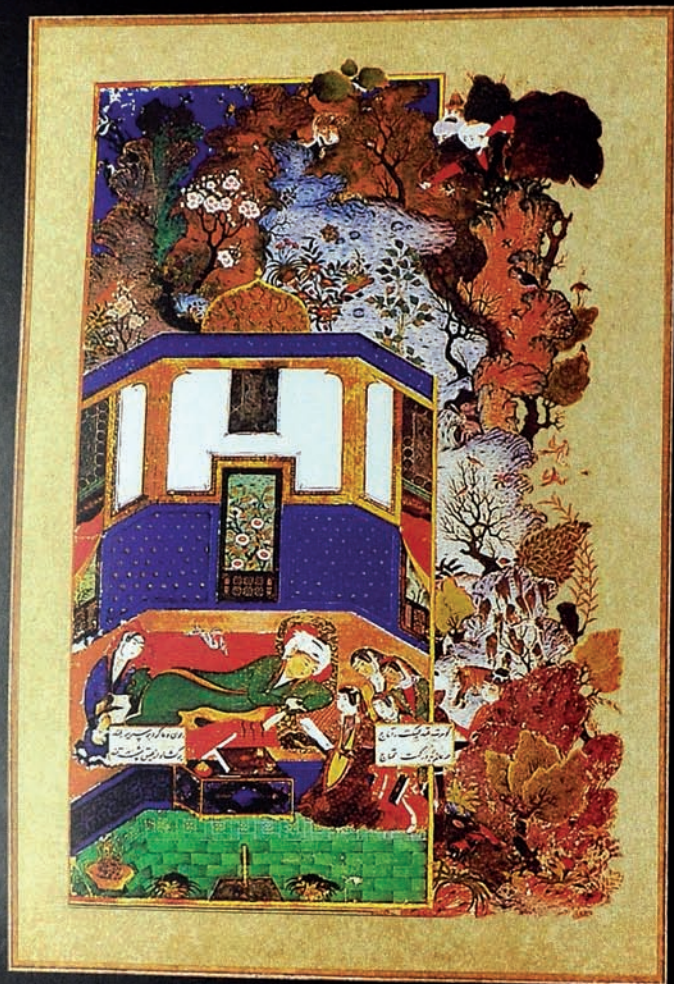
ای ز خود شیر و شایسته
 بادشاه که از شایسته
 خرداوت که پشت بخت یار
 با دای از غر و بخت بر خوراد

بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم

اگر چه پیش از این
 کرد با دیر کسان اشانی
 مین نمود اندیشه ناک سوخته
 کزین نایبانه کشته و بسته

بچه که در زمین خوار می‌نشست گوشه‌ایم که از پشت ووس ساسینه از صدای می‌ناید بزیوشه جو فصل نیانی گشتن سخن خرم ای ندای پرت دست خود را از پاره از پاره دست خود را پاک بپوشاناد	با کسب لب گمان برانگیخت توست هم در نهان بیکس روی در رخسار گاه می‌ناید صبح رو سپه جو خج نورانی آدم تمام آرا یکسرم دست دید بر سر سینه و در کشت او به در دست در دران بکنان	کای کشت اینده کار من بکنای نور از دست می‌نمایند چون که بر سر بگفت از بر خویش کت گاهی خوابی که بر تو پشته نیت نیکت کای همیش بوکمانان بپشت خسته بدو تو در ان سلامت کای	بخت را در دست او که شایسته سینه‌اش را از زانو بر خوراد کت با او پشته از پیش تمام از تنی پشته بود در کت چون ملک رنگ در کت آفتابش بر تن خوان کرد کل از تنی کوان چنان کت کت با او پشته از پیش تمام از تنی پشته بود در کت چون ملک رنگ در کت آفتابش بر تن خوان کرد کل از تنی کوان چنان کت
مرچند از خود تو قسم تمام شش پستان از تنی کت رنگ از تنی بود در کت سر که در کت پستان کرد پرسوست کاشتابه پروا قصه چون کت روز کت پشته روزی کت	بخت را در دست او که شایسته سینه‌اش را از زانو بر خوراد کت با او پشته از پیش تمام از تنی پشته بود در کت چون ملک رنگ در کت آفتابش بر تن خوان کرد کل از تنی کوان چنان کت	بخت را در دست او که شایسته سینه‌اش را از زانو بر خوراد کت با او پشته از پیش تمام از تنی پشته بود در کت چون ملک رنگ در کت آفتابش بر تن خوان کرد کل از تنی کوان چنان کت	بخت را در دست او که شایسته سینه‌اش را از زانو بر خوراد کت با او پشته از پیش تمام از تنی پشته بود در کت چون ملک رنگ در کت آفتابش بر تن خوان کرد کل از تنی کوان چنان کت

Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Seven Beauties", Tabriz. 1481. (Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, H 762) Bahram Gur in the Sandal Palace.



Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Seven Beauties". Tabriz. 1481.
 (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, II 762)
 Bahram Gur in the Yellow Palace.



Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Seven Beauties". Tabriz. 1481.
 (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, II 762)
 Bahram Gur in the White Palace.



Bishr Looks for Malikha in the Well

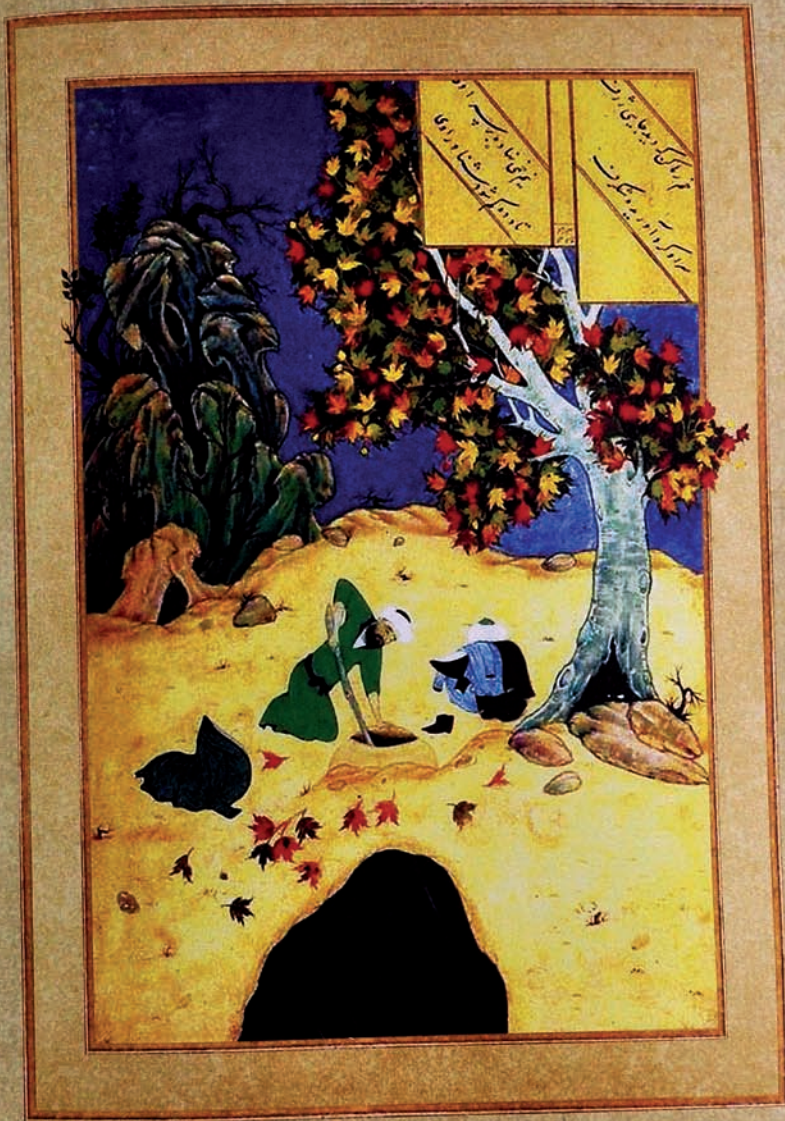
In the town of Rhum there was once an upstanding man named Bishr. He was walking along the street when he saw a beautiful girl, and was immediately smitten with love for her. But he did not follow her around the town, and instead tried to rid himself of the thoughts he had about her, which he believed were impure. Making a journey is always the best medicine for ridding oneself of the pangs of love, and so he set off on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Al-Quds). On his way home again, he fell in with a fellow-traveler, whose name was Malikha. Although this Malikha had all the outward signs of a sensible and educated man, in reality he was tricky and unpleasant. He claimed he was the possessor of deep knowledge—and he tried to interpret every event along their journey in his own special way. Bishr, however, tried to prevent his twaddle, saying that there are many things in the world which are beyond human understanding.

Their way lay through a blazing and arid desert. They were tormented by thirst, and though they might soon die, but then they saw a tree in the distance. As they approached, it seemed as though a large pottery basin stood at the foot of the tree, filled to the brim with clear water. Bishr wondered if it hadn't been put there by some godly person, to relieve the sufferings of travelers. Malikha didn't agree. In his opinion it was certainly a trap, laid by a hunter to catch animals. The two travelers took their meal there, and drank the delicious cold water.

Malikha decided he'd like to bathe in the basin, and then break it. Bishr said this was a bad idea, Malikha should think of others who might come by, who would not be able to enjoy this water. But Malikha never wanted to listen to sense, and couldn't be dissuaded. He stripped off his clothes, and jumped into the basin. It turned out that it wasn't a basin, but a deep well, which had been reinforced by a basin at its top. Malikha fell down the well, where he drowned. Bishr spent much effort trying to recover his body, which he solemnly buried nearby. He picked up his fellow-traveler's belongings, and set off again on his way, now alone. As he went, a purse of gold fell out of Malikha's clothes, it contained a thousand gold dinars. Bishr decided he must return such a valuable item to Malikha's relatives.

It took Bishr much effort to discover where Malikha's house was. There he found that Malikha's only relative was his widow, whom he asked to accept the belongings. "He was a nasty and unpleasant man" she said. "It was very hard for me to live with him, I am pleased that he is gone from my life at last." The widow suggested that Bishr could become her new husband. But when she lifted her veil, Bishr saw that she was the very same girl who had so greatly moved his heart. They were wed in great happiness, and Bishr was so happy that he ever after wore robes only of green, the color of paradise.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Seven Beauties". Tabriz, Herat, 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
Bishr looks for Malikha in the well.





Bahram Gur Slays the Dragon

Once Bahram Gur was out hunting his favourite wild asses (onagers) until it was almost dark. One onager fled into a cave in the hunt, and Bahram followed the ass into the cave. There in the cave he found an enormous dragon, which was guarding a great treasure. Bahram entered into battle with this dragon, and killed it. So great was the treasure hoard, three hundred camels were needed to bring it back to Bahram's castle.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Seven Beauties". Tabriz, Herat. 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
Bahram Gur slays the dragon.



Bahram Gur and Fitna Hunting

Bahram Gur had a favourite female servant named Fitna. One day he wanted to show her his prowess as an archer. The playful girl replied to him thus: "My love, if you hope that your hunting skills I'll cheer, then bring me as your trophy a wild ass's ear!" Shah Bahram soon fulfilled her request. But when he asked Fitna for her opinion of his skills, instead of lavish praise she simply said that it was nothing out-of-the-ordinary. It was simply a question of practice, and anyone who spent a long time practicing such ability would eventually do them well. Bahram was enraged, and gave orders for Fitna to be killed.



Divan of Alisher Navoi. "Seven Beauties". Tabriz. 1527.
(Paris, National Library of France)
Bahram Gur and Fitna hunting.



Bahram Gur and the Shepherd

While Bahram Gur was spending his time in merrymaking, his Vizier ransacked the entire country. Bahram had gone hunting, for fun, and while hunting he saw a strange sight. There was an old herdsman, who was hanging his own dog. Bahram was taken aback, and questioned the old man about this. The herdsman said that the dog had once been a valuable sheep-dog, but then it had fallen into the company of wolves, and turned predator instead.

If you have a thieving dog, will you simply close your eyes?
No-one will thank those who continue with such lies.

And Bahram Gur understood the meaning of the herdsman's words.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Seven Beauties", Herat style, 886/1481-1482.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 338)
Bahram Gur and the Shepherd.



Iskandername

The pinnacle of the poet's artistic achievement is the epic poem Iskandername. Nizami created a work of encyclopedic scope, in syncretism style. He synthesized Zoroastrian traditions, Muslim belief, Sassanid chronicles and Ancient Greek philosophy. His multi-faceted historical overview is merged with the topic of love, and with an account of the philosophical concept of existence, and thoughts on the meaning of life. The poem divides into two sections – the Sharaf-Name, the Book of Glory; and the Iqbal-Name, or Book of Happiness. The Iskandername is the fullest and deepest reflection of the social ideals and philosophical deductions of Nizami. He began work on this book when he was already sixty – a great age for that time. It's a poem which places particular emphasis on the great creative scope of his artistic thoughts. Iskander – the hero of Nizami's poetic epic – differs in significant ways from his historic prototype, Alexander the Great (Alexander of Macedon). Nizami's character of Iskander is an idealized monarch and military leader; he is wise and just; he brings order throughout his kingdom; he frees his people from poverty and oppression; he undertakes public building works; he takes advice from the learned; and he thinks deeply. In transforming the historical prototype into the image of Iskander, the ideal monarch, Nizami still manages to remain true to history in many ways.

The Tale Of Queen Nushaba is one of the most remarkable sections of this epic poem. We know that Alexander the Great never visited the Caucasus, but in telling this tale of a meeting between Iskander and Queen Nushaba in Barda (Azerbaijan), Nizami hymns the beauty and splendor of his homeland's natural beauty.

Queen Nushaba is an intelligent and just monarch. She is a strong-minded Queen who manages her country's affairs masterfully. The people of Barda live in peace and prosperity under her rule. Their days are happy, because their monarch safeguards them from poverty and the attacks of enemies. Nizami was immune to bigotry and asceticism – his hero is mankind, and mankind's lusty love for life.

The feast scene, in which Queen Nushaba pays honor to Iskander, is symbolic and instructive. Instead of food, the Queen orders gemstones to be served. When the confused and surprised Iskander asks the meaning of this, he receives this reply:

The moon giggled brightly, in humorous tone,
Saying: Why do you refuse to eat precious stones?
Would you rather pointlessly build up your store
Of things you don't need, that you won in your wars?

Nushanba's words convey Nizami's own thoughts about the cruelty of warmongers, who live only to invade and ransack foreign lands and peoples. Iskander established new order and new laws in the countries he came to. He helped their peoples, saved them from disaster, ruin and poverty, and protected them from the attacks of marauders. It was only in Barda, where Queen Nushaba ruled, that his help was not needed. It was in Barda that Nizami witnessed justice, prosperity, flourishing culture, peace, and quiet life. His portrayal of Queen Nushaba shows the highest accomplishment of woman – intelligent and free, and unfettered by prejudice.

The second section of the book is called Iqbal-Name, in which Nizami portrays his hero Iskander as an educated and philosophical prophet. In Iqbal-Name Nizami deploys a richness of folkloric and literary sources to create fascinating philosophical and moral fables hallmarked by their deep philosophical meaning. In these stories we see much of Nizami's own personal life, and his understanding of history.

The principle themes of these stories are the idea of justice, and the man's calling to inspired works of art in the name of happiness and well-being. Here too the importance of science, philosophy, music and various forms of art to our lives is stressed. Nizami exalts intelligence, wisdom and the dignity of the working man.

The author shows his hero's deep reading amid the main figures of science and philosophy. Iskander organizes debates at his palace, in which he defeats famous men of learning. Seven major Greek figures dispute questions with Iskander. They are Aristotalis (Aristotle), Valis (Thales of Miletus), Bulinas (Apollonius of Tyana), Shoucrates (Socrates), Furfurius (Porphyrius of Tyre), Hormus (Hermes Trismegistus) and Aflatun (Plato).

Nizami inserts into the mouth of his hero Iskander the immense corpus of knowledge of Greek Philosophy. The anachronistic order – these learned men lived over widely differing periods – permits Nizami the opportunity to acquaint his readers with the principle ideas of ancient philosophy, whilst adding his own point of view.

Iskander's extraordinary ability as an enlightened monarch places him very highly. A divine messenger brings him news that he has been honored with the rank of prophet. Iskander sets out again on a great journey, but this time, to call the world to follow the true path of science and human wisdom.

Nizami touches upon the characteristics of an ideal monarch in nearly all of his works. He finally created such an example in the Iskandername. However, coming to the end of this work, even Nizami is forced to admit that such an ideal ruler would still be unable to alter life on earth. "Giving advice to monarchs is like sowing seed on a salt-marsh".





Iskander Reads Fortunes on the Fighting Birds

Before his military assault on Iran, Iskander follows an old tradition, and guesses his fortune on birds.

During a walk in the hills he comes across two partridges fighting. Iskander imagines one fighting for himself, and the other fighting for King Darius. The Shah watches the birds fight for a long while, and is delighted when 'his' partridge wins the fight. It is his fate too, and he is not too despondent when a hungry eagle makes off with the victorious partridge.



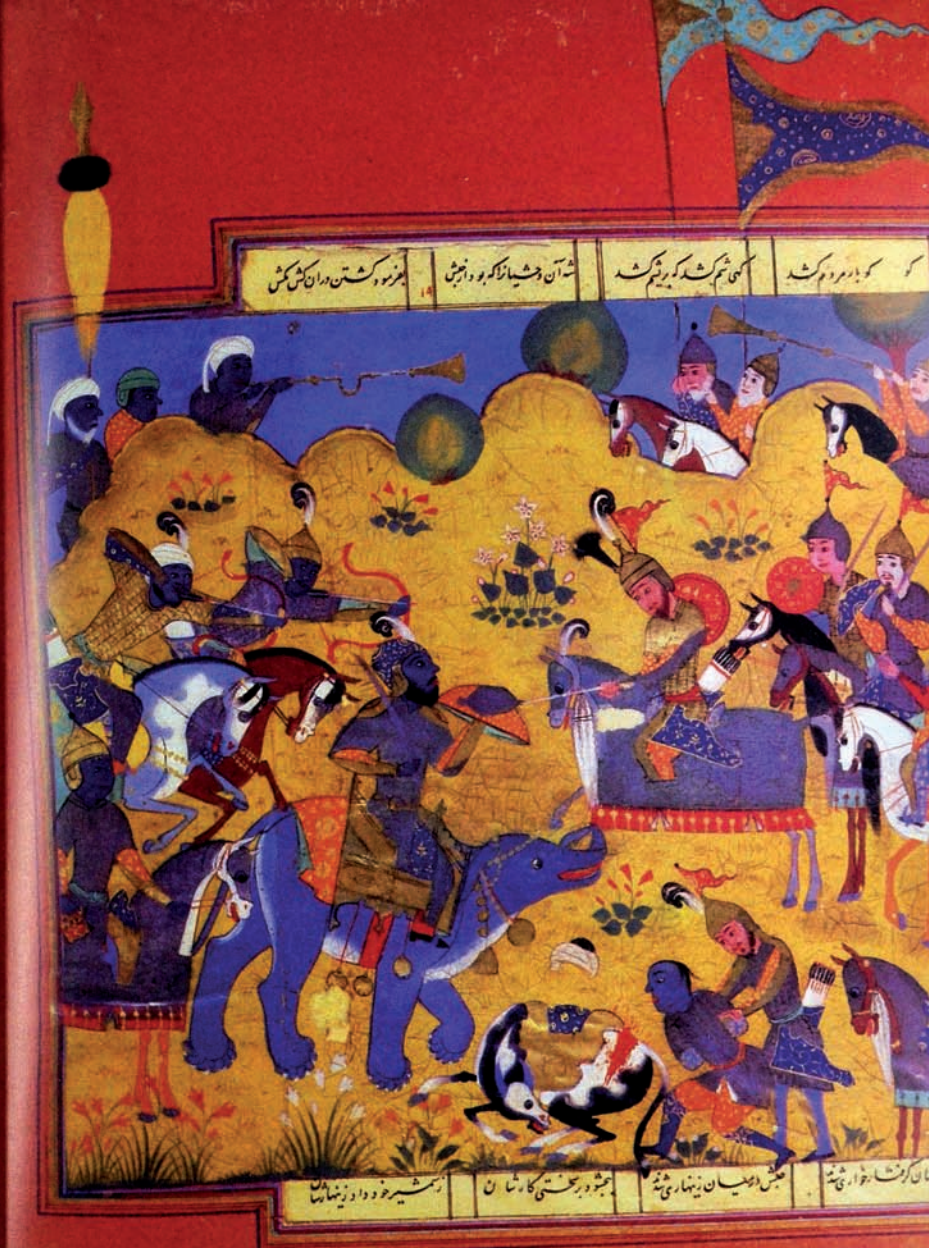
Khamsa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Bukhara. 1648.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, PNS 66)
Iskander reads fortunes on the fighting birds.



Battle between Iskander and Zanj Tribe

According to Nizami, Iskander's military career began with this assault on the dark-skinned warriors of the Zanj tribe. However, the aim of this battle is not the conquest of Egypt. Local people had sent a message to Iskander by delegation, begging him to relieve them of the predatory attacks of Zanj robbers on their community. In this vicious war against a cannibal tribe, Iskander takes the advice of his wise Vizier in a cunning military ruse; he himself pretends to be a ferocious cannibal too. This wise stratagem sends panic through his enemy's ranks and saves many lives among his own troops.

Khamasa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Bukhara, 1648.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, PNS 66)
Battle between Iskander and Zanj tribe.



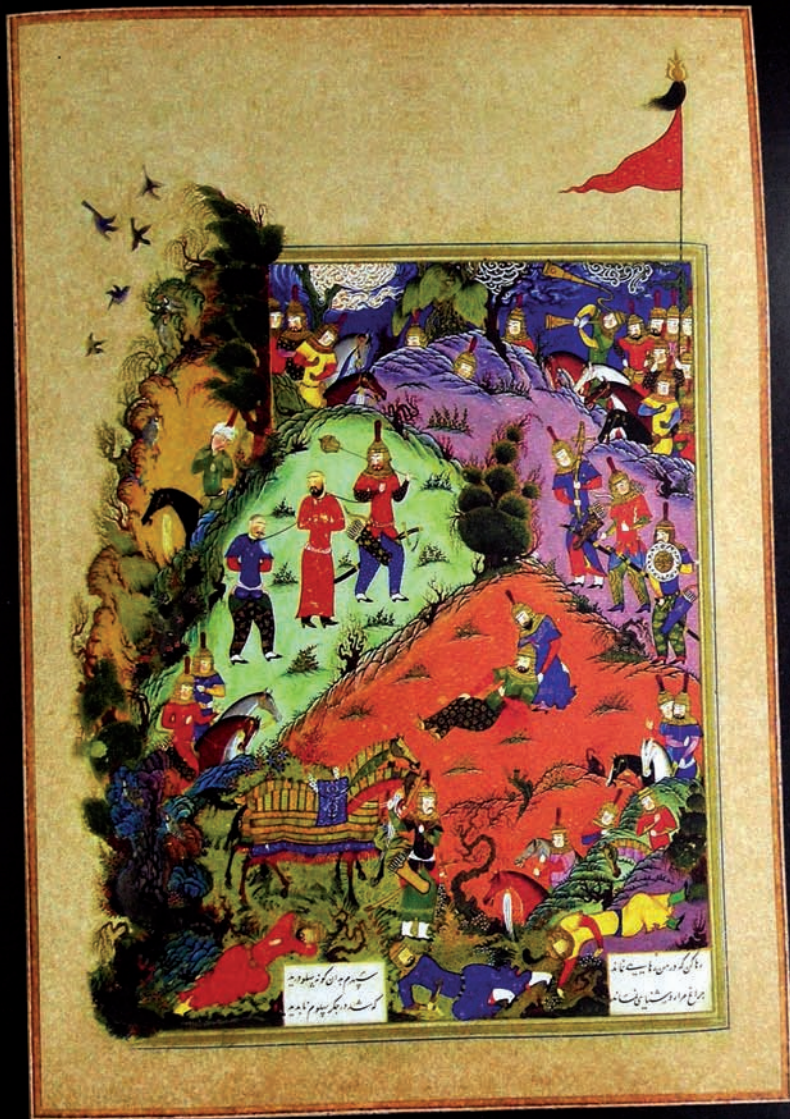


The Death of Darius (Dara)

After the first vicious battle at Mosul, two Iranian generals come to Iskander and offer to kill their Shah in exchange for preferment later. Iskander fears what the result of the battle might be otherwise, and so he agrees to their proposal.

During the bloody battle that follows, Darius is left on the battlefield alone. The two generals rush him, and kill him with their swords, in return for the reward Iskander has offered. A couplet accompanies this miniature, reading:

The tree of Kaveh lies on the battle-place
His squirming body is blood-red in the face.

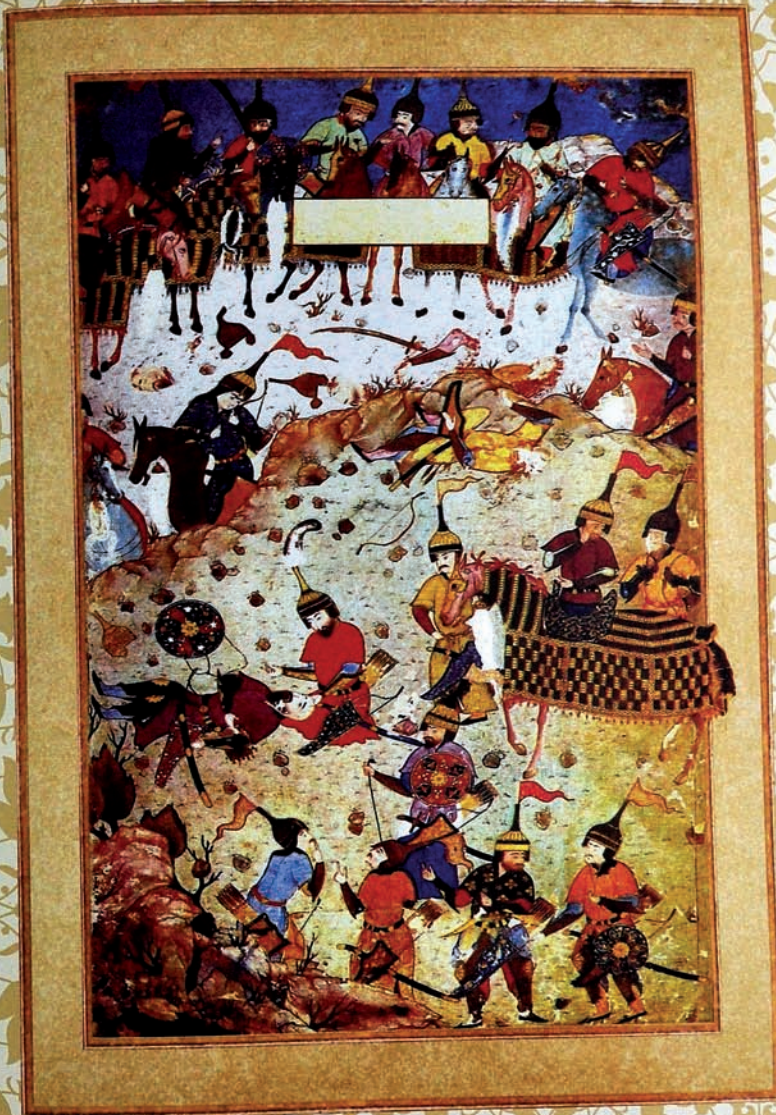


Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Iskandernama". Tabriz. 1481.
(Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, H 762)
The Death of Darius (Dara).



Iskander and the Dying Darius (Dara)

Having treacherously killed their own Shah, the two Iranian generals go to Iskander to receive their reward. Iskander orders their arrest, while he himself rushes to the mortally wounded Darius. The heartfelt conversation of the victorious Iskander with the dying Shah is one of the most dramatic in Nizami's poem.



Khamsa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Herat. 1490s.
(London, British Library, Add. 25900)
Iskander and dying Darius (Dara).

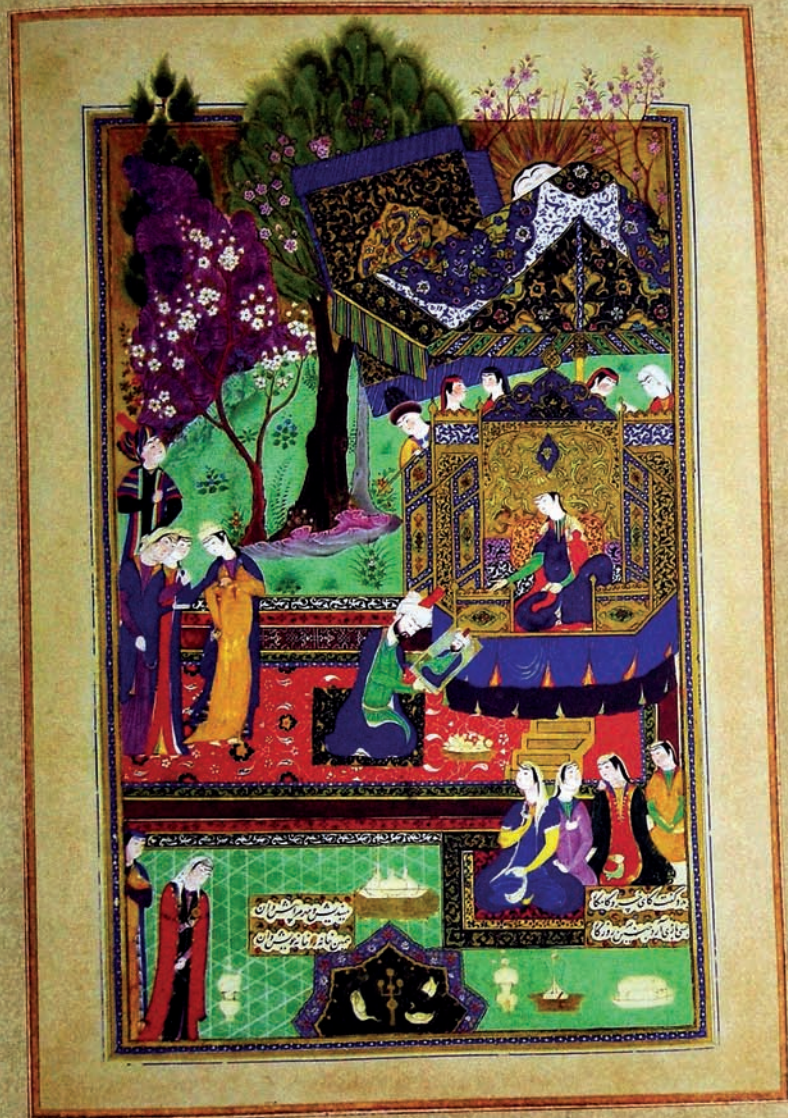


Iskander before Nushabe

Coming to Azerbaijan, Iskander hears that Queen Nushaba rules at Barda, where she has a palace inhabited only by girls, which men may not enter into. In order to see if this is really so, Iskander goes to Nushaba dressed as the Ambassador of the Macedonian King. However, the wise and observant Queen Nushaba quickly notices that he entered into the palace with the pace of "a walking lion" and has forgotten to put off his sword, and to bow before her throne. Realizing Iskander's tricks, she commands him to bring a portrait of the Macedonian king, which was prepared some time before. Iskander is astonished at the perspicacity of Queen Nushaba, and is compelled to admit to his deception.

Queen Nushaba organizes an elaborate banquet. The king is served a goblet full of precious stones. When he remarks to Queen Nushaba that such stones are not edible, she laughs and says:

Why do you refuse to eat precious stones?
Would you rather pointlessly build up your store
Of things you don't need, that you won in your wars?



Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Iskandernama". Tabriz. 1481.
(Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H 762)
Iskander before Nushabe.

Iskander Visits the Hermit

In order to make his way past the Derbent Gorge, Iskander must seize an impregnable mountainous castle, the hideout of bandits who make their living robbing travelers. Iskander's army of one hundred thousand men storms the castle for forty days, but still he cannot take it. Iskander hears that there is a hermit living thereabouts in the mountains, he finds the hermit's cave and asks his assistance. The hermit's prayers have the required effect, the walls of the castle crumble, and Iskander massacres the bandits.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Herat, 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
Iskander visits the hermit.







Iskander Talks to Shepherd

Iskander is anxious over his beloved girl's illness. To escape from his misery, he climbs to the roof of his palace. From there he sees a grey-bearded old herdsman and summons him to the palace so that he might hear his story. As soon as the old man finishes his story about a Shah who has a sick girlfriend, news is brought to Iskander. The danger has passed, the sickness has receded and his beloved girl is recovering.

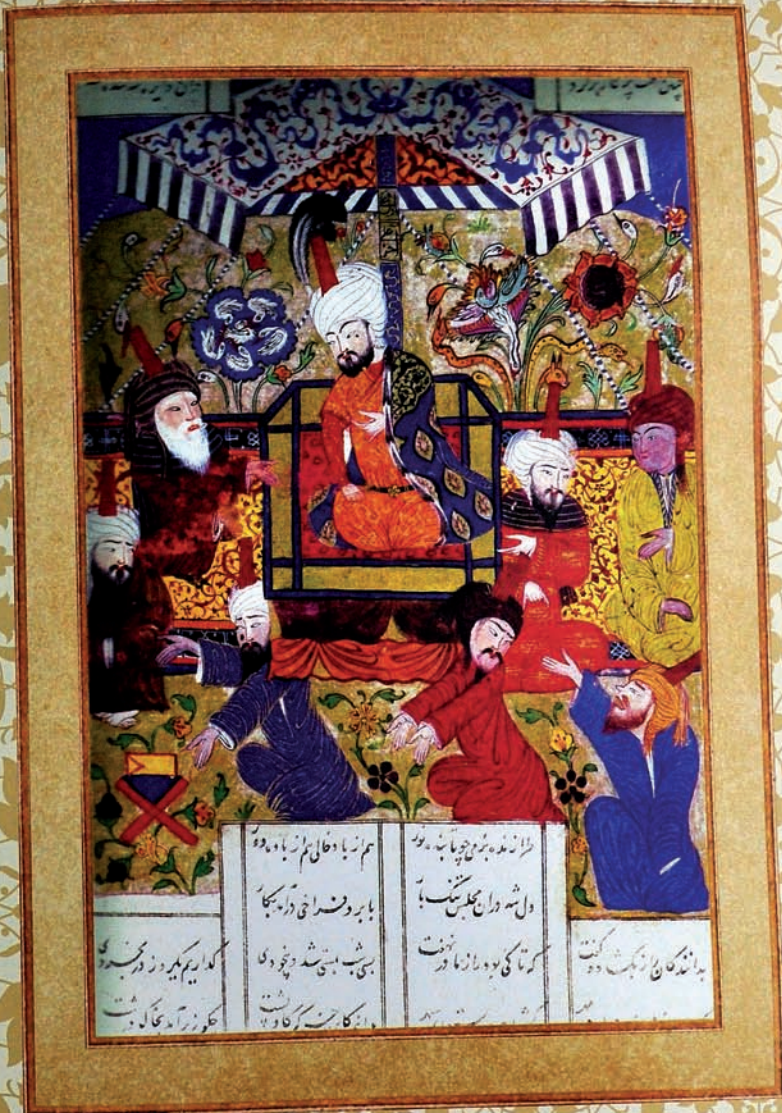


Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Iskandernama". Tabriz. 1481.
(Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, H 762)
Iskander talks to shepherd.

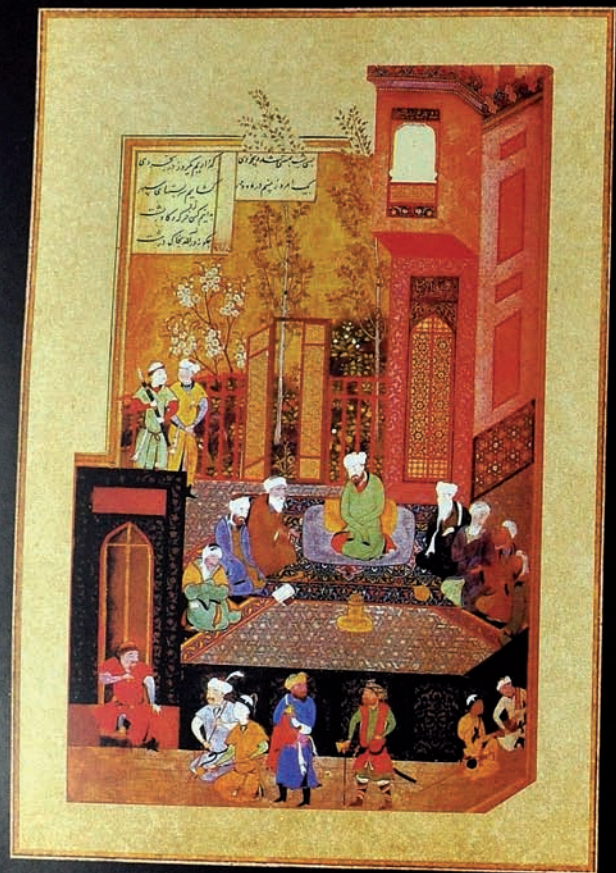


Iskander and the Seven Sages

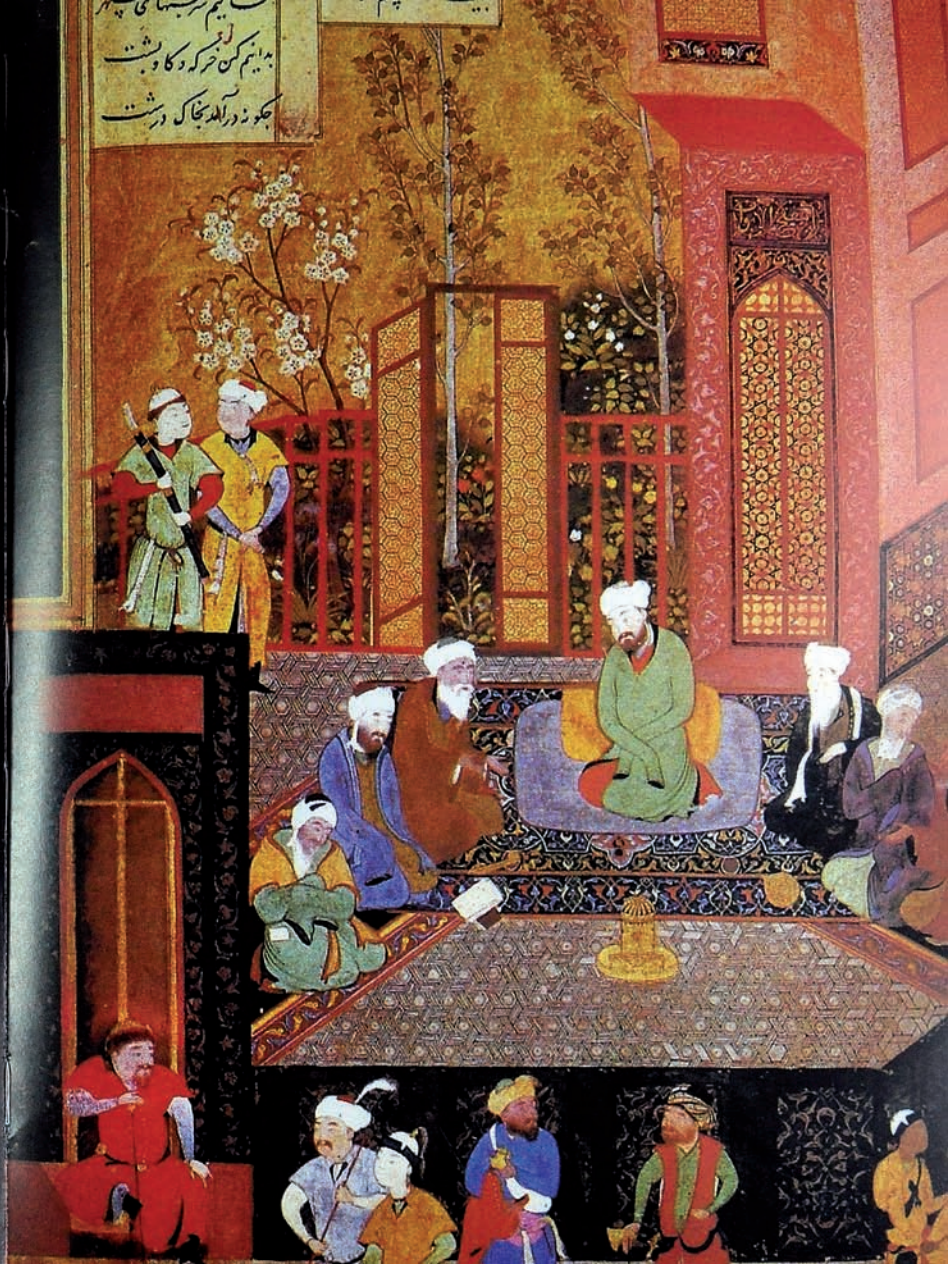
Iskander invites the Family of the Wise to visit his chambers in order to discuss the question of the origin of the earth and the heavens. The family members are Aristatalis (Aristotle), Valis (Thales of Miletus), Bulinas (Apollonius of Tyana), Shoucrates (Socrates), Furfurius (Porphyrius of Tyre), Hormus (Hermes Trismegistus) and Aflatun (Plato). The meal for these learned men is very modest; we see no sign of lavishness in the table settings, or an excess of wine. The wise men that surround the king are honest and open in their conversations with him.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Iskandernama". Shiraz. 1508.
(St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 340)
Iskander and the seven sages.



Khamsa of Nizami, "Iskandernama". Herat, 1494.
 (London, British Library, Or. 6810)
 Iskander and the seven sages.



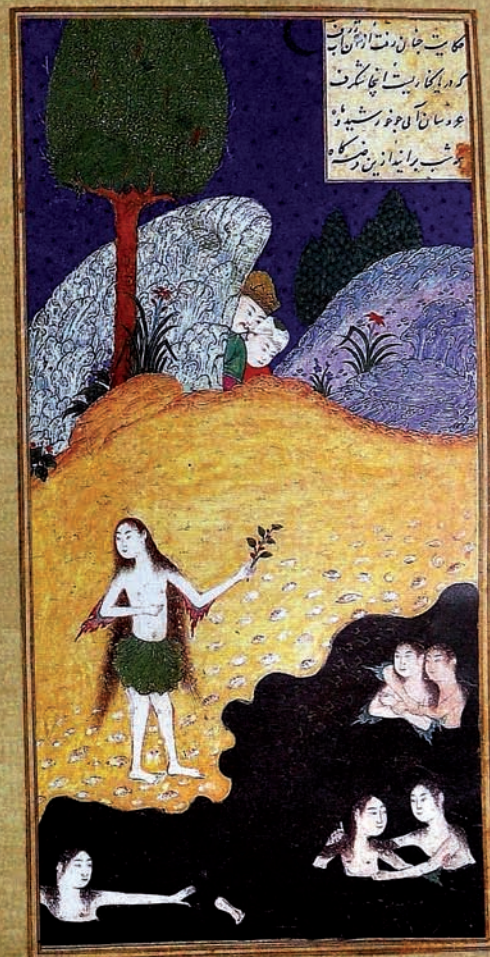
سیدیم سر سیمای چاه
 بد اینم کن حرکت دکا و پشت
 کوز در لاله چاک در پشت

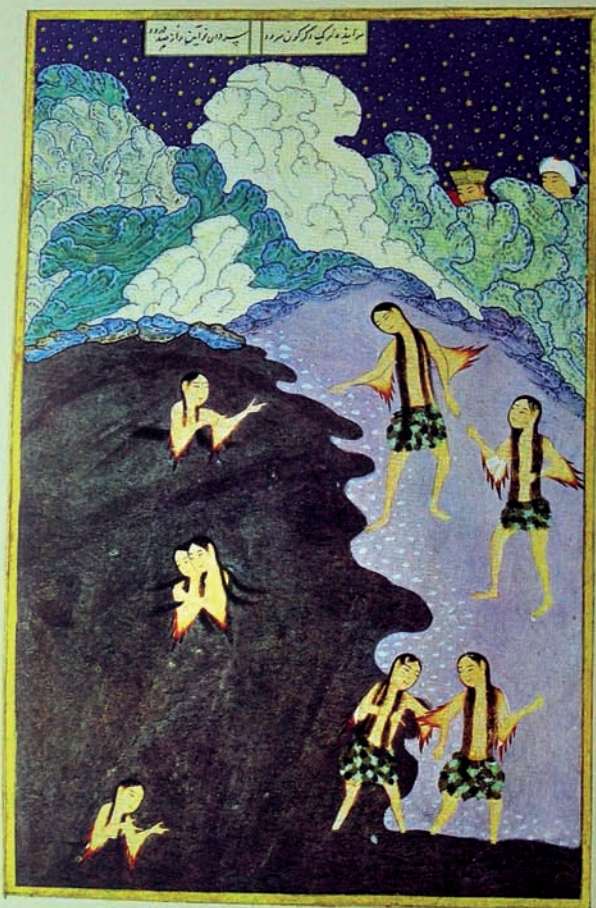


Iskander Meets the Sirens

A Chinese magus leads Iskander to an enchanted shore, inhabited by sea-maidens – the Sirens. Iskander goes on alone, without his troops or bodyguards, and he sets his small tent on the sea shore to wait the onset of night. Then he sees that the whole of the sea is filled with a line of beautiful maidens. They sing songs – “hundreds of sweet hymns, in which love is heard”. (It seems that the tradition of the Sirens luring men to their doom was not something Nizami knew).

Khamsa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Herat. 1431.
(St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, VP1000)
Iskander meets the Sirens.





Khamsa of Nizami, "Iskandernama". Anthology of Iskandar-Sultan. 1410-1411.
 (London, British Library, Add.27261)
 Iskander meets the sirens.





Iskander's Sea Travel

During his long voyages at sea on the way to China, Iskander had to choose the longer and safer route, or risk the shorter route with a notorious whirlpool known as "the lion's mouth". Iskander chose the riskier way, but by using the suggestions offered by the wise Bulinas (Apollonius of Tyana) he carefully skirted this fatally dangerous obstacle.

بدر اول در صبح اولی ایام طیب
 ازین آورد و فرستاد تا قریب
 کجا بحسب هر که ایستاد بولان
 جزایر رسد که قسم نام بولان
 بر سکنی نیت حق مدد چرخ سیر
 کسی قطع راهی بسته از سیر
 سر آمد از فتح جاد بولان
 بسته از دریا کشت و بولان
 بیایع بودست مدد از سیر
 بیایع بودست مدد از سیر



محل بر کایر کس نه پدید
 قیاس می گوید و بیانی ساد
 بر است یکنی هم و در بیتی تیغ
 سینه زش اوت مور قلیبی
 مکان بودی سوزن یاری کجا
 موه ابدان لطیف باری کجا
 اگر نوبت زمین کلبه ای اعظم بود
 ای شمس اعظم فیه ای کجا

Divan of Alisher Navoi. "Iskandernama". Tabriz. 1527.
 (Paris, National Library of France)
 Iskander's sea travel.

The Statue Warning Seafarers of Danger

Leaving the khaghan (King of China) on the shore, Iskander sets off across the sea. They reach a point, beyond which they can sail no further, because of the fierce current, which would wash them out into the ocean.

On Iskander's orders, Bulinas stands by a statue on a small island, put up to warn seafarers of danger. On the return journey they encounter a deep whirlpool, from which they only escape by using all of Bulinas's resourcefulness.

Returning once more to dry land, they set off on their homeward way. They find a silver-colored city, whose residents are tormented by a terrible din that comes up at sunrise. Scientists explain this phenomenon as water's containing mercury.



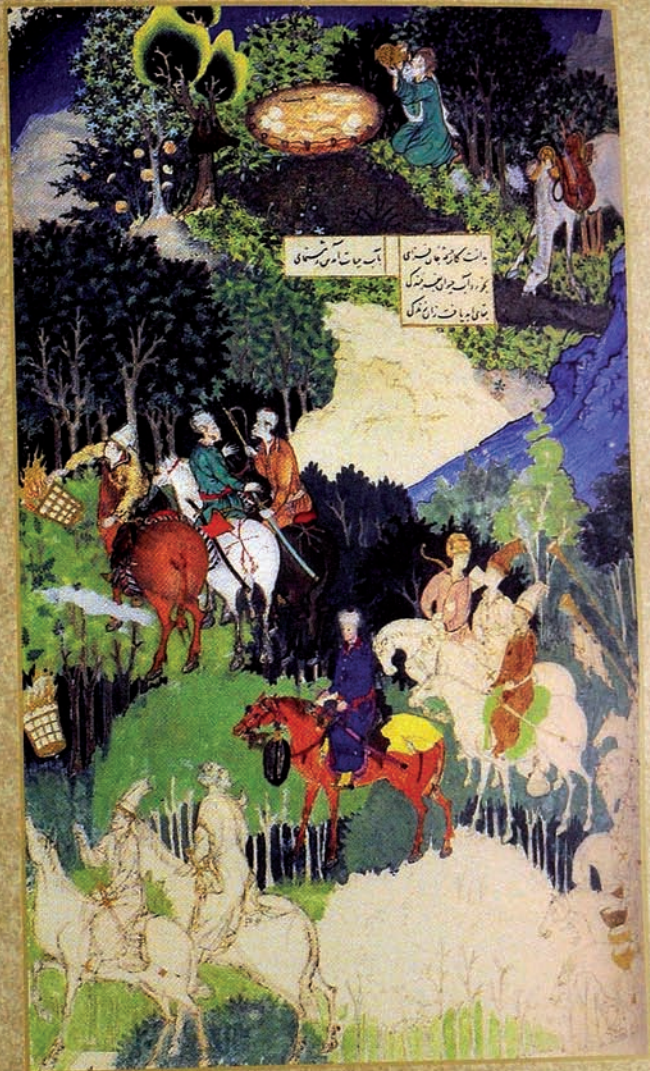
Khamsa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Herat. 1494.
(London, British Library, Or. 6810)
The Statue warning seafarers of danger.



Iskander Seeking the Water of Life in the Land of Darkness

The final, seventh part of the Iqbal-Name, the Book of Glory, is the story of the Living Water, water that can bestow the gift of life, which comes from an enchanted spring concealed in the Land of Eternal Darkness. Iskander learns this secret by chance, from an old man. The old man decides to tell Iskander his secret. On going to the Land of Eternal Darkness, he finds that the dangers of entering are very great, finding the way back again would be impossible. The difficulty is solved by the old wise man, whom the young warrior, despite the Shah's warnings, had taken with him. He offers this advice – to take with them a newly-foaled mare, slaughter the foal at the very edge of the Land of Darkness, and then proceeded into the dark. The motherly instinct of the mare will always be able to find her way back to the place where her foal was killed. Hyzr accompanies Iskander into the darkness, to find the Living Waters and achieve immortality. But he feels that it is not Iskander's fate to achieve this, and he runs off, without returning to the Shah. Nizami relates that according to the legends of the town of Rum, Elias the Prophet was also there. They found the Spring of Living Waters together, by chance. They rest by the Spring and relieve their hunger – but when they drop their lump of dried fish in the water, it comes to life and swims away. Since they are now both immortal, their duty now is to help travelers who lose their way – Hyzr by earth, and Elias by sea.

Khamsa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Turkey, 1560s.
(Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H 781)
Iskander seeking the water of life in the Land of Darkness.





Khamsa of Nizami. "Iskandernama". Tabriz. Mid-16th century.
 (USA, collection of T.Kraus.)
 Iskander seeking the water of life in the Land of Darkness.



"Fahname" of Shah Tahmasib. Turkey. Mid-16th century.
 (Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, H. 1702)
 Iskander seeking the water of life in the Land of Darkness.



Mani Draws a Dead Dog Beside a Water-Pool

According to legend, Mani had witnessed a revelation. His early preaching was in India – later he taught in Babylon, and among the Medes and the Parthians.

In those days Mani had already become famed in the Sassanid realm, and he was received at the highest level. Mani presented his writings, and preached in front of Shah Shapur. Manichean sources suggest that Mani's sermons induced a profound impression upon Shapur. Shapur permitted Mani to preach throughout his realm.

By the 3rd century, Zoroastrianism had become sufficiently established to be able to repel Manichaeism. Coptic sources confirm that necromancers complained against Mani. This led to Mani and his followers becoming more ingenious, they preached in both the West and the East, and undertook proselytizing missions to various outposts of the empire.

Islamic tradition considers Mani to be the founding father of painting, and an exceptional and unrivaled artist. And in truth, Mani was a truly talented artistic figure; he admired music and painting, with a high opinion of these arts. In fact the legacy for which Mani became most greatly known was as an artist. Mani came to the aid of many missionaries, both to painters and artists. As he said himself, the paintings which illustrated his writings were supplementary material for the learned, and visual aids to enlightenment for the illiterate. Mani created not only illustrations for his books, but also large paintings on wooden backgrounds which greatly delighted those who saw them. He is also credited with painting the earliest frescoes, a genre which later becomes popular throughout Central Asia. One Turkish source mentions that there was a Manichean shrine at Chigil which Mani had decorated with paintings. Eastern Islamic tradition praised Mani as an artist, and Islamic writers commended him as an inspired creator of wondrous works.

In this miniature we see a scene, in which Mani paints a dead dog by the side of a water-pool, and it is so realistic that people won't come to the pool for water.



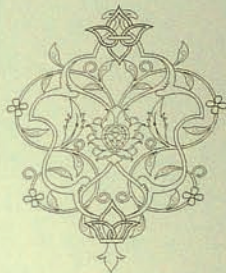
Khamsa of Nizami. For Yagub-bey Aq-Qoyunlu. "Seven Beauties". Tabriz. 1560-1570.
(Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum, II 781)
Mani draws a dead dog beside a water-pool.

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2013

NIZAMI GANJAVI

khamse

miniatures



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TRANSLATED BY

Neil McGowan

PORTRAIT OF NIZAMI GANJAVI BY

Elmira Shakhtakhtinskaya
People's Artist of the Republic of Azerbaijan

This book includes miniatures created by Azerbaijani and other
Oriental painters.

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