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## *Manuscript Studies*

### **Who is the Bearded Man and the Young Boy Standing Next to Him?**

Fresh Findings from an Illustrated Manuscript  
of Nāmī's *Leylī va Majnūn* & *Khosrow va Shīrīn*

*Amir H. Zekrgoo\**

#### **Abstract and Introductory Remarks**

The SMNA Library<sup>1</sup> is custodian to an interesting manuscript that contains two interesting poetry books bound in a single leather binding. The manuscript is both exciting and – in almost every instance – misleading! Its peculiar features are riddle-like, confusing and alerting at the same time. The volume is incomplete from both ends; the beginning of the first part (*Leylī va Majnūn*) is missing, and so is the end of the second part (*Khosrow va Shīrīn*), and several sections in between. And whatever remains also is not in right arrangement. And to these major imperfections, I may add a consistent terrible handwriting all-through! One may therefore conclude that the volume is of no significance. Yet, a careful assessment of the text, illustrations, seal impressions, marginal writings, and doodling sketches, will bring the manuscript to a new light of literal, historical, social, and artistic significance.

Unlike the common practice with other manuscripts of the sort, this volume was never commissioned, nor did the scribe-cum-illustrator compiled it to quench his own literary-artistic thirst. The manuscript is but a manifestation of a genuine noble effort by a man – Mahdī – to present to his beloved nephew - Luṭf-'Alī – a unique gift of love and wisdom that “he may keep, and benefit from

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<sup>1</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (SMNA) Library, also known as ISTAC Library, located in Jalan Duta Campus in Kuala Lumpur, is a prominent feature of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

it throughout his life.” Mahdī achieved this by selecting a newly composed version of two well-known love stories and adopting his own creative imagination and artistic spontaneity to create an exciting package for the love tales. Uncle Mahdī – whoever he was – must be commended for his compassion, courage, artistic skills, and unharnessed creativity; since such level of freedom and spontaneity in reproducing a manuscript such as this one, is indeed rare!

This research is divided into two main sections and few subdivisions. Under the first section, ‘About the Author’, we have provided a brief biography of Nāmī Isfahānī – an illustrious, but less-known, 18th century Iranian poet and historian from the Zand dynasty – who composed the two unpublished diwans included in this volume. His Khamsa (quintet), which has been composed and compiled following the lead of Nizāmī Ganjavī, is discussed under the same heading. The second section, ‘About the Manuscript’, comprises the main body of the research. Its seven subheadings provide a comprehensive survey of the manuscript. Information about the scribe (and perhaps the illustrator) of the volume, the date, and the person for whom the manuscript was put together is available under ‘The Colophon’. ‘Illuminations’, and ‘Illustrations’, deal with artistic and aesthetic values of the work. ‘Who is the Bearded Man and the Young Boy Standing next to Him’ discovers the identity of two individuals that have been portrayed in one of the pages. A brief account of the seal impression is provided under ‘Seals’. ‘Binding’ deals with technical, artistic, and other aspects of the leather cover; it also questions its authenticity in relation with the manuscript. And finally, ‘Physical Condition’ points at pagination defects, traces the locations of missing pages, identifies the types and areas of physical deterioration, and restoration.

The paper is complemented with images taken by the author. Translations to English of the Persian texts are also by the author.

**Keywords:** *Laylī va Majnūn, Khosrow va Shīrīn, Nāmī Isfahānī, Persian Poetry, Illustrated Manuscript, Qajari Painting.*

### **About the Author**

Laylā/Laylī va Majnūn and Khosrow va Shīrīn – the two diwans

included in this volume – are usually associated with Nizāmī (1141-1209), the greatest romantic epic poet in Persian Literature,<sup>2</sup> whose Khamsa (quintet) is famous throughout the Persianate cultural arena that includes Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan. No wonder then, that the existing catalogue states ‘Nizami Ganjavi’ as the author (poet) of the present manuscript.<sup>3</sup> The language is harmonious and refined, and the symbols and metaphors are adopted skillfully and effectively. But something happened that raised my curiosity. While reading the beginning and ending couplets of certain folios – with the intention of identifying the missing passages (a list of the missing passages is provided under ‘Restoration’) – I got carried away with a tale that ended up with disappointment; part of the narrative was missing. So, the evening of the same day at home, I tried to find the missing passage in a printed copy from my personal library. Strangely the passage was not found! Additional library efforts followed by online researches<sup>4</sup> proved that in fact none of the passages in the entire manuscript were composed by Nizāmī!

After a while of desperate searching, and with the valuable help of a friend who pointed me to the right direction, it became clear that the two dīwāns in the present volume are unpublished compositions by an 18<sup>th</sup> century poet, known as Nāmī Isfahānī. No wonder then that no traces of him or his works were available in digital or printed media, except for a few research papers, which I have benefited from in this paper.

Mirza Moḥammad Ṣādiq Mūsavī Isfahānī (d. 1204 H./1790), better known by his nickname Nāmī, was a secretary and historian in the court of the Iranian monarch and the founder of Zand dynasty,

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<sup>2</sup> See Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, “Iran: Classical Persian Literature” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1982, ed. Ehsan Yarshater.

<sup>3</sup> *Persian Manuscripts in the Library of The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 1994, Prepared by Haji Ali Bin Haji Ahmad, Library of The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1994, p. 2. The very brief introduction of the volume states "This catalogue was compiled based on the previous collector of the manuscripts."

<sup>4</sup> Search was conducted in *Ganjur* and a few other sources, but to no avail. *Ganjur* (گنجور) is a comprehensive search engine that contains the enormous corpus of Persian poetry.

Karīm Khān (r. 1751-1779).<sup>5</sup> He chose Nāmī (illustrious / celebrity) as his pen-name and bragged about it in his *Khosrow va Shīrīn*.

به ردف شاعران، شخصی از این پیش      نهاده گرچه «نامی» نام بر خویش  
به مُلک نظم نام آور نبوده است      عبث بر خویشان تهمت نموده است...  
به من می زبید این نام گرامی      که هستم من به مُلک نظم نامی<sup>6</sup>

Translation:

*In the line of poets who lived before me,  
Was a man who also called himself 'Nāmī.'  
With no eminence in the land of poetry,  
He glorified himself – an empty glory!  
In the kingdom of poetry, I'm a celebrity;  
Hence the title 'Nāmī' is worthy of me.*

Nāmī was inspired by Nizāmī and, following his lead, composed his own *Khamsa* (Quintet), and named it after his pen-name *Nāmī Nameh* (نامی نامه = The Book of Nāmī).<sup>7</sup> The five books in the *Nāmī Nameh* include:

درج گهر (Dorj-e Gohar) = The Casket of Wisdom / Chest of Gem(s)  
خسرو و شیرین (Khosrow va Shīrīn) = Khosrow and Shirin

<sup>5</sup> See Mohsen Zaker Alhosseini (Muḥsin Ḍākir al-Ḥussaini), “Wāmaq va 'Azrā-e Nāmī Isfahānī” in *Nameh Farhangestan Quarterly*, Academy of Persian Language and Literature, No. 23 Summer 1383 HSh (2004), p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> Mohammad Amir Mashhadi (et. al), “Comparing the flow of Narration between the 'Khosrow va Shīrīn' of Nāmī Ishahānī and Nizāmī Ganjavā”.

(مقایسه سیر روایی منظومه های خسرو و شیرین نامی اصفهانی و نظامی گنجوی) in *Pazhuhesh Nameh-e Adab-e Ghenaei Sistan and Balouchestan University*, Summer 2015, pp. 249-266)

<sup>7</sup> Nizāmī's most famous poetical work – widely known as the *Khamsa* (Quintet), also called *Panj Ganj* (Five Treasures) – is in fact a compilation of five independent volumes namely *Makhzan al-Asrār*; *Khosrow va Shīrīn*; *Leylī va Majnūn*; *Eskandar-Nāmeḥ*; and *Haft Peykar*.



لایلی و مجنون (Laylī va Majnūn) = Layla and Majnun

وامق و عذرا (Wāmaq va 'Adrā) = Wamaq and Adra

یوسف و زلیخا (Yūsof va Zulaykhā) = Yusof and Zulaykha

### About the Manuscript

In the present volume two incomplete manuscripts (of two bitter-ending love stories), namely Laylī va Majnūn and Khosrow va Shīrīn are bound in a single volume.

Laylī va Majnūn or Laylā va Majnūn<sup>8</sup> is a tragic love story – based on an old Arabic account – between two cousins, Qays and Laylā. Laylā's father stands firm against their marriage and this pushes Qays into deep despair. Obsessed with Laylā's love, Qays starts singing love lyrics for his beloved in public; an act that was regarded both as disturbing and offensive to social norm. Qays eventually leaves town, and continues the rest of his painful life, roaming naked in the wilderness among the beasts and chanting Laylā's name. He was hence called Majnūn, i.e. “the possessed” or “the mad.”<sup>9</sup>

Khosrow va Shīrīn or Khusraw va Shīrīn is a pre-Islamic love story of Persian origin. It is based on an old true story; love story of Persian Sassanian king, Khosrow Parviz (r. 590-628) for an Armenian princess, Shīrīn. The story was gradually romanticized, and eventually found its most attractive form of poetic expression in Nizāmī's work. Khosrow endures long physical, emotional, and spiritual sufferings to defeat his love-rival Farhād, and to win over the heart of his beloved Shīrīn. Though the two lovers finally unite in marriage, the story does not end well. King Khosrow gets killed by his own son, and princess Shīrīn commits suicide over the body of

<sup>8</sup> The name of the female character appears in a variety of transliterations. Many western sources record it as Laylā which is an Arabic version of the name. In Persian poetry, in almost all instances, the name is written and pronounced Laylī – with ī vowel at the end not ā. This becomes clearer when heard in rhyming. Rumī's couplet, where the words meylī and Laylī are rhymed, is a good example:

اگر با دیگرانش بود میلی      چرا ظرف مرا بشکست لیلی

Transliteration: Agar bā dīgarānash būd meylī / Cherā Zarf-e marā beshkast Laylī

<sup>9</sup> See “Leyli O Majnun” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1982, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, online version, accessed 29-06-2020; also, Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, “Iran: Classical Persian Literature” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1982, ed. Ehsan Yarshater.

his beloved husband. The poetic account comprises some 6500 couplets. It was composed based on the request of the Seljuk Sultan Toghrul II, and his brother Qizil Arsalān, and was dedicated to them.<sup>10</sup>

The beginning part of the first manuscript (Laylā va Majnūn) is missing, and so is the end part of the second manuscript (Khosrow va Shīrīn).

The volume is penned, in a poor handwriting, casually written in a mixed style of Nasta‘liq, Naskh, and Shikasteh. Main body of the text is penned in black ink, while headings appear in red. A brief report of the specifications of the volume follows.

Mss Title	Leylī va Majnūn and Khosrow va Shīrīn ( لیلی و مجنون - خسرو و شیرین )
Accession No.	SMNAL. Persian MSS-8
Date	19 Jmamādi -al-Thānī 1281 (17 April 1816)
Language	Persian / Farsi
Author	Nāmī Isfahānī
Script	Casual below-average mixed style of Nasta‘liq, Naskh, and Shikasteh.
Scribe	Mahdī, son of Āqā Hādī Isfahānī
Folios Line Per Page	149 folios 13 line per page in two columns
Dimensions H X W (Cm)	Page size: 21x15.5 cm Text area: 14.5x9.5 cm
Binding / Auxiliary Support	Worn-out high quality ornamented brown leather binding with gold-stamping

### The Colophon

Folio 26-L is the last page and colophon of the first of the two books (Leylī va Majnūn). It records the date of completion of the MSS as 19<sup>th</sup> Jumada al-Thānī 1231 (17 May, 1816), and the name of the

<sup>10</sup> See “Kosrow O Širin” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1982, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, online version, accessed 29-06-2020; also, Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, “Iran: Classical Persian Literature” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1982, ed. Ehsan Yarshater.

scribe, i.e. Mahdī, son of Āqā Hādī Iṣfahānī – who was perhaps also responsible for creatively illustrating the volume. The scribe also states, in harmonious words and touching phrases, the purpose of putting together the manuscript. According to this passage the manuscript was meant as a gift for Mahdī's nephew Luṭf-'Alī, son of his brother Āqā 'Alī. And, towards the end of the passage, the scribe seeks for du'ā (prayer), and concludes his words with a rhymed couplet, pleading for recitation of surat al-Ḥamd for the sake of happiness of his soul. (Fig. 1) It reads:

تمت الكتاب بعون الملك الوهاب  
بتاریخ 19 جمادی الثانی تمام شد کتاب لیلی و مجنون به خط حقیر فقیر، خاک راه خلق  
الله، زرّ بيمقدار مهدی، ولد مرحوم آقا هادی اصفهانی، از برای نور چشمان عزیز و جان عمرم  
لطفعلی، ولد اخوی نور چشمی قرّة العینی آقا علی، که انشاءالله تعالی به سلامتی مطالعه نماید و  
این حقیر را به دعای خیر یاد نماید.  
غریق رحمت یزدان کسی باد که کاتب را به الحمدي کند یاد  
سنه 1231

Translation:

*The book ended with the help from the Compassionate King (God).*

*This book of Laylī va Majnūn was completed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of Jumāda al-Thānī by the humble hand of this poor person – the dust of the passage of Allah's servants, a worthless particle – Mahdī, son of Āqā Hādī Iṣfahānī, (as a gift) for the light of my eyes, who is dear to my heart as my own life – Luṭf- 'Alī, son of my dear brother Āqā 'Alī – with the hope that he would read it in complete health, and that he would extend his well-wishing prayers to this humble man.*

*May the person who recites al-Ḥamd in my memory*

*Be drowned in the ocean of God's grace for eternity*

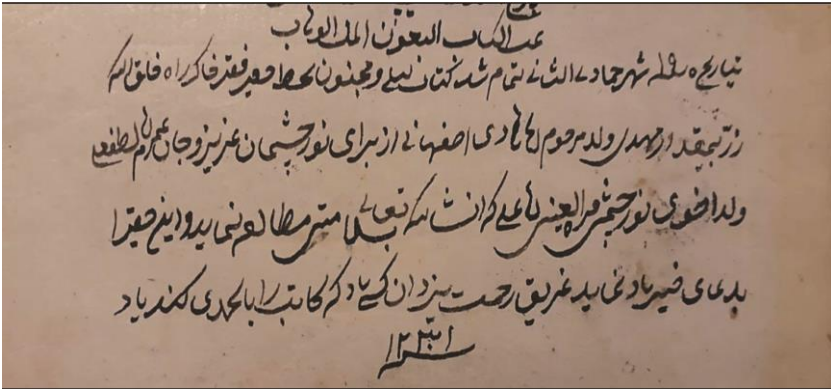


Fig. 1 Part of the Colophon: Folio 26-L

### Illuminations

The volume is decorated with two sarlowḥs,<sup>11</sup> both in black ink. One of the two, which marks the beginning of a chapter of Leylī va Majnūn, shows a familiar traditional style of illumination. (Fig. 2-a) The other one that marks the beginning of Khosrow va Shīrīn, on the other hand, with two human-figures right at its center, is an unorthodox or avant-garde treatment of sarlowḥ. (Fig. 2-b)

<sup>11</sup> Sarlowḥ or sarlawḥ (سرلوح) is a technical name for a decorated heading that appears on the opening page of a book and/or a chapter.



**Fig. 2-a** (left): Using floral motifs and decorative linier patterns in a symmetrical setting, this sarlowh displays a traditional style of illumination; albeit executed in an uncommon spontaneous freehand fashion. (Folio 18-R)  
**Fig. 2-b** (right): This is a clear departure from traditional illumination style, as depicting human figures within a sarlowh is extremely rare. Here the artist presents a freehand sketch of a couple; a man presents a flower bouquet to a woman. The minimalistic representation of figures while maintaining correct proportions is remarkable. Despite its speedy execution, it is evident that the work is a hand-product of a skilled artist. (Folio 28-R)

### Illustrations

Twenty interesting illustrations adorn the manuscript; 19 of the 20 are in black and white, and a single one, which is of an inferior

quality (folio 86-L) is colored. (Compare figs. 3-a and 3-b) The illustrations appear on folios 3-R, 4-L, 7-R, 12-R, 13-R, 15-R, 17-R, 17-L, 22-L, 50-R, 59-R, 77-R, 82-L, 86-L, 95-R, 124-L, 132-R, 143-R, 144-L, and 147-R.



*Figs. 3-a and 3-b. A comparison of a black and white sketch from folio 124-L (right), and the colored image of folio 86-L (left) shows a more mature and expressive quality of the former.*

All illustrations, despite their rough appearance, display strong features of Qajari style – a school of painting developed in Iran during Qājār period (1789-1925). The peculiar realism of this style is born from the marriage between the idealized representation of figures in Safavid art of miniature painting on the one hand, and the romantic realism of European oil painting on the other. In Qājār style of painting, anatomy, movements of body, and expressions on faces are both realistic and idealistic.

As a general rule, best examples of Persian art were produced with the support of royal court, and Qajari paintings were no exception. What makes Qajari painting distinct (beside the style) is that Qājār kings and nobles were often subject matters of this art. To make the works more aristocratic, special attention were given to details, such as furniture, apparels, and decorations. While faces were depicted with the intention of reproducing likenesses of the characters, the

idealized version of beauty – that has been expressed in Persian poetry for ages – never left the artists’ subconscious. Face of the beloved, for instance, is often compared to “full-moon” in Persian lyrics, hence the round face of the depicted ladies. Such exaggerations, along with overwhelming attention to details, gave way to creation of a stylized, as well as idealized, version of reality in Qajari paintings.

A comparison between the rough illustrations of our manuscript, with the refined examples of Qajari court paintings, shows the commonalities. (See figures 4-a and 4-b; also 5-a and 5-b)



**Fig. 4-a** (top-left) *Nāṣir al-Din Shah (Qājār King)*  
Artist: *Mirzā Abu'l Ḥassan Ghaffārī (Ṣanī' al-Mulk, 1814-1866)*,  
*Louvre Museum, Paris*

**Fig. 4-b** (top-right) *Khosrow Parviz (Sassanian King)*  
*Detail of folio 86-L*

*The two kings portrayed above have a historical gap of some 1400 years, yet they are both depicted in Qajari attire and aesthetic values that*

*dominated the actual historical period and geographic location they were created in! The shape of the head-wears is identical, and so are the special ornaments that appear in front of the hats. Treatments of eyes and eyebrows, mustache, and the overall face expressions also follow the same formal idealism that is a distinguishing feature of Qajari art. This is despite the fact that one painting is hand-product of a royal master, and the other one by an anonymous artist!*



**Fig. 5-a** (top-left) Qajari princess and her old maid (detail)

Artist: Mirzā Abu'l Ḥassan Ghaffārī (Ṣanī' al-Mulk), Golestan Palace Museum, Tehran

**Fig. 5-b** (top-right) Shīrīn her old maid

Detail of folio 82-L

Similarities between the faces of the two young ladies – the court-lady in bright red dress (fig. 4-a), and princess Shīrīn (fig. 4-b) – is obvious. Roundness of the faces, joined bow-shaped eyebrows, and large deep eyes, all reflect the idealised beauty of woman as described in Persian poetry. The two aged maids on the other hand – with their hooked noses, protracted chins, and wrinkle lines at mouths' corner – share similar facial structure as well.

Let's now leave aside the stylistic similarities between the Qajari court paintings and the unpolished sketches in this manuscript, and concentrate instead on the distinct characteristics of the images in



the latter. Despite their obvious crudeness and somewhat primitive look, the sketches are vivid, bursting with primitive energy. The artist achieved this quality by passionately dedicating himself to the touching events narrated in the love stories, without feeling obligated to follow the conventional norms of refined aristocratic craftsmanship. To elaborate on the effectiveness of artist's spontaneous approach, I have selected two illustrations from *Laylī va Majnūn*, and one from *Khosrow va Shīrīn*:

From the illustrations of *Laylī* and *Majnūn* the episodes depicting 'the Death of Laylī' (fig. 6), and 'the Demise of Majnūn' (fig. 7), are more dramatic than the other images. They possess a raw energy that can be categorized – using European art terminology – as Naïve art, or rather Primitivism.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The term Naïve Art usually refers to a type of visual art that is created by an artist without formal training. However, if a trained artist, who already possesses the knowledge of perspective and anatomy, adopts basic or primitive forms as a medium of his artistic expression the produced work is sometimes called Primitivism. Primitivism aspires to recreate primitive experience. See Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*, 2009, University of North Carolina Press, p. 223



**Fig. 6.** Death of Leyli (folio 12-R).

Lifeless body of Leyli is shown with a peaceful face, wrapped in a patterned shroud, placed on a decorated wooden bed. The woman on the left, shedding tears and tearing her hair in devastation is her mother, while the maid on the right, looks at the grieving mother and tries to calm her. The maid's left hand is lifted, her fingers pointing to the sky; perhaps an indication that we should all surrender to fate, a destiny ordained in the heavens. An ornamented column on the top centre of the picture, marks the borderline that separates veranda and courtyard. A small animal (most probably a cat) sits in a relaxed position under the bed.



Fig. 7. Demise of Majnūn (folio 17-R).

In this impressive scene, the artist, using simple lines, narrates efficiently an episode that involves multi-layered emotions. The composition is brilliant. The thin body of the deceased lover on the top, occupies the entire breadth of the picture. Two men support his exaggeratedly long body. His head rests on the lap of a young man to the left, whose eyes are closed and tears rolling down his cheeks. His arms are raised, with palms facing his face in a prayer posture. The bearded man to the right, is looking at the deceased whose legs rest on his lap. The expression on his face and the movement of his arms and hands hint to some sort of discussion, as if the lying man in

*front of him is not dead! On the other hand, the raised arms of Majnōn (in prayer posture) suggest that he still has life force in him, while his peaceful face is indicative of complete submission to fate. The event is taking place in wilderness, with a variety of wild beast, nine in total, who seem very alert about the incident. Two lions and two lambs appear in the foreground. The other beasts in the middle ground include mouse, turtle, lizard, rabbit and snake. At the top of the painting, right above Majnōn's body, the only flowering plant of the scene, stands at the highest point in the picture. It symbolizes the departure of soul to an elevated state in paradise; this is further emphasized by the couplet on top of the page that reads:*

چون طایر روح ترک جان کرد      منزل به بهشت جاودان کرد

*The bird of the soul that left his body  
Now resides in the paradise of eternity*

*Another couplet below the painting informs of the unity of the two departed souls in their heavenly abode.*

شد طایر روحشان به پرواز      در خلد برین بهم هم آواز

*The birds of their souls glided high  
To sing love songs in their heavenly abode*

From the illustrations of *Khosrow and Shīrīn*, I have selected ‘Shīrīn visiting Farhād in the Mountains’, a famous episode of the love story (Fig. 8). A brief summary of the background of the story may come useful.

Farhād, a master sculptor, falls in love with Shīrīn. This happened through his involvement in a masonry project in the mountains, commissioned by Shīrīn – a princess from Armenia. Impressed by hearing about his extraordinary skills, one day the princess decides to pay the artist a visit at the site. Farhād, passionately greets the beautiful princess and enjoys her company while discussing his project. Farhād is saddened when the time arrives for the princess to return. Upon riding her horse through the steep rocky passage, the horse slips and gets injured, and injury was about to harm the princess as well. Farhād rushes to rescue Shīrīn. He could not touch her as they were not married. So using his immense

physical strength acquired in the course of years of rock carving, the sculptor carries the horse – together with the princess – on his heroic shoulders and returns his beloved to safety.

Figure 8 illustrates an early stage of the episode. The sizes of characters, or their location within the pictorial surface, follow their status, rank, or importance. As such, Farhād – who has dominated the mighty mountain and, using his physical strength, creativity and skills, transformed its rough rocks to a beautiful palace – is presented with a large body standing victorious over the top. Princess Shīrīn and her attendant who are mere spectators of the scene, on the other hand, are depicted in minute sizes – following their value or importance in this episode. This peculiar composition in Persian traditional painting is known as ‘Value-based/Rank-based Perspective’. In this system the sizes of the pictorial elements are indicative of their importance or status in the narrative, rather than how we see them with our naked eye!

An overall study of the human figures in the illustrations confirms that the artist knew anatomy well. Figures are proportionate, with the exception of specific characters that were exaggerated in size to put them in the focal point. (See for example the oversize body of Majnūn in fig. 7, and that of Farhād in fig. 8). The artist has chosen to execute the illustrations in a sketchy spontaneous manner to let the energy flow freely.



Fig. 8. Princess Shīrīn on her way to visit Farhād in the mountains (folio 132-L).

Princess Shīrīn (riding a horse on the lower right) is on her way to visit the mason Farhād; she is followed by a female attendant who carries an umbrella, a sign of her master's royal status. The two figures and their mounts are intentionally presented very small in size to show the enormity of the mountain in the background. Farhād's oversize body, on the other hand, appears on the top of the mountain busy in chiseling out of the hard rocks the beautiful mansion on his right. The size difference between him and the ladies is despite the fact that Farhād is located at a much greater distance from the spectator. This peculiar composition in Persian traditional painting is known as 'Rank-based Perspective'. As such, the tall rough mountain is Farhād's rival; he has to tame its wild nature and turn it into an aesthetically pleasing monument. The task is completed, and the hero is standing victorious over the top. In this scene princess Shīrīn appears somewhat insignificant. This was an intentional consideration to give

*special attention to the Farhād and his art. After all, the artist and his artwork in an exhibition, outshine the rich spectators! Considering this logic, every element in this picture is depicted in its rightful size, and together they display a true perspective.*

### **Who is the Bearded Man and the Young Boy Standing Next to Him?**

Among the 21 illustrated pages of this manuscript, folio 17-L stands out due to its distinct characteristics. (Fig. 9) A study of the illustrated pages and the related passages leaves this page out, for the following reasons:

- a) This is the only page where the illustration is not accompanied by text.
- b) The two depicted personalities (especially the bearded man on the right) have the largest size among all other drawn figures; the average height of a fully standing figure in the manuscript is about 80 mm, while the height of the seated man with beard measures 122 mm. A comparison between the illustration on this page and the opposite one (fig. 7) can provide an idea of the size differences.
- c) The figures were not drawn against a background that would provide a meaningful context for the scene; the two characters are simply hanging in the space.
- d) A study of the content of previous pages does not show any indication that this drawing was meant to illustrate an event mentioned in a passage of the text. In fact, the figures depicted on this page have no relation what-so-ever, to any event of the love stories! Moreover, this is the last page of a section of Leylī va Majnūn; the reverse page (folio 18-R) marks the beginning of another section of the same manuscript, which is made distinct by a sarlowḥ (fig. 2-a)

While studying the manuscript the question of the relevance of this illustration was becoming a major issue. There was the boldest illustration of the book, with no relation to the text or the other images! After much searching and examining the marginal notes, eventually the answer unveiled itself; not in some faded writing on

the margin of a fly-leaf, but in the most obvious, yet unexpected place – the Colophon! (fig. 1) The deep affection of a man for his nephew, which was expressed through writing in the colophon, found visual manifestation in this page. I am convinced that two characters in this page are none other than the scribe (Mahdī) and his beloved nephew (Luṭf-‘Alī).



**Fig. 9:** This page (folio 17-L) stands out among the 20 illustrated pages of this manuscript due to distinct categorical differences. A comparative study of the illustrations, and an assessment of text-image relation leaves no doubt that the two personalities depicted in this folio have no relation to either manuscripts. The bearded man on the right have been identified as Mahdī (scribe-cum-illustrator) of the manuscript who, according to the colophon, has prepared the manuscript as a gift for his beloved nephew Luṭf-‘Alī – the young boy standing next to his uncle on the left-hand side of the folio.



## Seals

The number and variety of seal impressions in this manuscript is remarkable. I have counted a total of 43 seal impressions of seven different categories. The seals appear in four main shapes, i.e. vertical-oval, horizontal-oval, square, and drop-shape. Their writings, calligraphic styles, decorations, and their cultural significance requires a separate study. I have already embarked on the task, and am hoping to dedicate a separate paper to the seals of this volume.

## Binding

The volume has a worn-out, yet high quality, brown leather binding. Two toranj motifs,<sup>13</sup> adorns front and back of the cover. They are connected with delicate lines to two small identical decorative elements at top and bottom. (Figs. 10-a, 10-b, 10-c)

The binding is cracked open on the edges, exposing the layers of paper within. This technique – that has given the cover a 4 mm thickness– was adopted to add to the firmness and better protection of the volume. (Fig. 11) The paper layers inside the body of the cover are sandwiched between the leather-surface of the binding (that wraps around the edges to protect the edges), and the colorful glossy marble paper that protects it from inside. Cracks, tears, and hole are also observed on cover as well as the spine. (Fig. 12)

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<sup>13</sup> Toranj (Persian) is a certain variety of citrus (*Citrus Bergamia* Risso), and is freely used for lemon or orange as well. The term is used for a decorative motif or medallion that is fashioned symmetrically in a stylized shape of lemon. Toranj may be compared to escutcheon in European art.



**Fig. 10-a** (left) and **10-b** (middle) show toranj motifs, decorated with floral designs stamped on the front and back of the leather binding. The residue of old paint and faded glitter of gold confirms that the binding was once elegantly gilded. **Fig. 10-c** (right) shows a large crack and a hole on the spine binding.



**Fig. 11** Serious traces of damages along the edges, and on the surface of the binding.

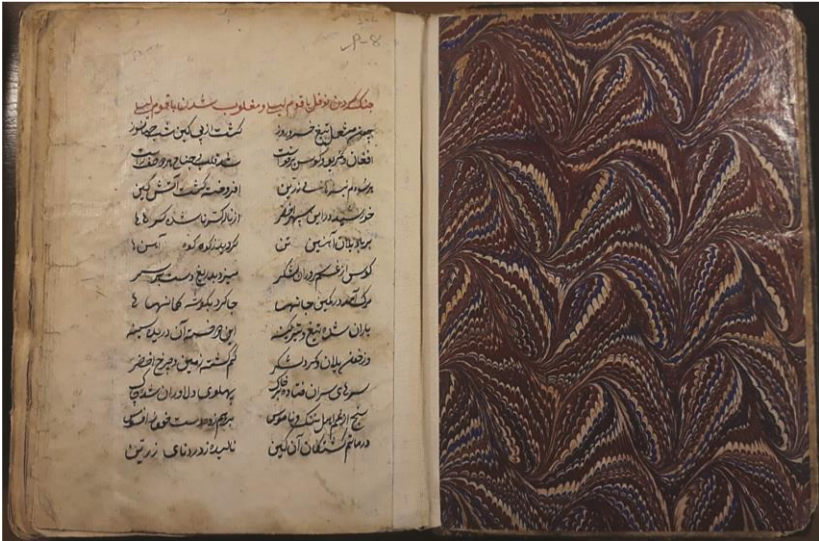


Fig. 12: Glossy marbled paper that decorates and protects the inside of the leather binding is most probably a later addition. Traces of major restoration can be seen on the side of the spine.

### Physical Condition

The manuscript is in an overall decent condition with some expected suggestions of deterioration. A physical assessment of the main body of the manuscript reveals traces of tears and losses of small sections of certain pages (e.g. folio 44-R, 48-R), and opening of binding stitches as a result of frequent use. In some places the inner section of the spine is exposed (e.g. folios 9-R-L; 149-R-L).

Traces of restoration are observed on the upper edges, outer edges, and inner edges (side of the spine) of certain folios (e.g. folio 1-L & 2 R; folio 3-R; folio 21-L 7 22-R; folio 22-L & 23-R; 147-L & 148-R; folio 148-L & 149-R)

Checking the catch-words of the rekābeh<sup>14</sup> to ensure the

<sup>14</sup> Rekābeh (ركابه), sometimes referred to as ‘catch-word’ is recording the first word(s) of the first line of the left-hand page on the bottom left corner of the right-hand page’s margin. This system helped binders organize loose papers of manuscripts in the right order before stitching them together.

correct arrangement of pages reveals that not only many pages are missing, but also the existing arrangement is incorrect. The existing passages of *Leylī va Majnūn* are located in the beginning and the end of the manuscript, i.e. folios 1-L to 26-L and folios 145-R to 148-L. The passages of *Khosrow va Shīrīn*, on the other hand, is sandwiched between the two parts of *Leylī va Majnūn*, in the middle of the volume, in folios 28-R to 144-L. Folios 27-R and 27-L have been left blank. After a careful assessment of the order of the pages, the following seven places are marked as locations of the missing folios.

- a) Between folio 142-R & 143-L (both pages are from *Khosrow-Shīrīn*)
- b) Between folio 143-R & 143-L (143-R belongs to *Khosrow-Shīrīn*; 143-L belongs to *Leylī-Majnūn*)
- c) Between folio 144-R & 144-L (from *Leylī-Majnūn*)
- d) Between folio 145-R & 145-L (from *Leylī-Majnūn*)
- e) Between folio 146-R & 146-L (from *Leylī-Majnūn*)
- f) Between folio 147-R & 147-L (from *Leylī-Majnūn*)
- g) Between folio 148-R & 148-L from *Leylī-Majnūn*)

The above facts also indicate that the volume has been opened from its spine during restoration(s), and that the defective pagination had occurred during the rebinding process. This takes us to yet another point. The colophon indicates that *Mahdī* (scribe-cum-illustrator) had prepared only one manuscript (*Leylī va Majnūn*) as a gift for his nephew *Luṭf-‘Alī*. So, the two manuscripts were originally separate. The presence of two blank pages (folios 27-R and 27-L) right after the colophon page (folio 26-L) supports this claim. Moreover, the meticulously crafted leather binding, that was once lavishly ornate with colorful pigments and gold-stamping, does not match the spontaneous and somewhat sloppy treatment of the pages inside the volume. This indicates that, most probably, the present leather-cover is not the original cover of the volume, and that it was added at a later stage.

### **Appreciation**

My special vote of thanks goes to Dr Mahmoud-Reza Esfandiar, Rector of the Islamic Azad University (Islam-Shar Branch) for his

generous assistance in the process of identification of the less known author of the manuscript in hand, and for providing two research papers on Nāmī Isfahānī. In the process of assessing the originality of the leather binding, I presented my findings to Dr. Mostafa Rostami, from the University of Mazandaran, Iran, who is an authority of Persian Book Binding. He was kind to provide his expert opinion through a few message exchanges, for which I am grateful. The serene and conducive environment of Syed Mohd. Naquib al-Attas Library at ISTAC, and the helpful staff who made available the manuscript upon my regular visits, were factors that contributed to the smooth progress of the work, for whom I'm thankful. I should also express my appreciation to Dr Sadra Zekrgoo, a conservation scientist of Islamic manuscripts from the University of Melbourne, for accepting to review the semi-final draft of this paper and for his valuable suggestions.



## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

### CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	ء	ء	ء	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ʀ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	—	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h <sup>1</sup>	h <sup>1</sup>
ث	th	th	th	ص	ş	ş	ş	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḏ	ḏ	ḏ	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a <sup>2</sup>
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al <sup>3</sup>	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	—	—	—	—	—
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh	—	—	—	—	—
ڈ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	q	—	—	—	—	—
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	—	—	—	—	—

<sup>1</sup> – when not final

<sup>2</sup> – at in construct state

<sup>3</sup> – (article) al - or l-

### VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
	و	uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	i	o or ö
	ا	i	i

### URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

# AL-SHAJARAH

Vol. 25, No. 2, 2020

## Contents

ARTICLES IN VOL. 25, No. 1, 2020

### ARTICLES

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDIA: AN EXPLORATION OF ITS ROOTS, RISE AND HISTORY 1  
*Thameem Ushama*

REPRODUCING THE HUMANITIES: MEVLANA RUMI'S CORPUS 31  
IN RESTRUCTURING THE STUDY OF MAN AND SOCIETY  
*Ahmad Murad Merican*

PROBING THE THEORY OF SUBJECTIVE DEVELOPMENT IN MULLĀ ŞADRĀ'S 59  
EPISTEMOLOGY  
*Abbas Kharabi*

NEITHER CREATED NOR DESTRUCTIBLE: IBN SĪNĀ ON THE ETERNITY OF 85  
THE UNIVERSE  
*Syamsuddin Arif*

THE STUDY OF SPIRITUAL EDUCATION IN SEYYED HOSEIN NASRS' 107  
WORKS AND COMPARING IT WITH SOME CURRENT DEFINITIONS  
*Babak Shamshiri, Saeed Rahimian & Hosein Ali Tajali Ardekani*

MORE THAN TOLERANCE: THE ISLAMIC CALL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS REVERENCE 127  
*Tarik Quadir*

**MANUSCRIPT STUDIES** 155

**BOOK REVIEW** 191

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS 215

ARTICLES IN VOL. 25, No. 2, 2020

### ARTICLES

REMEMBERING THE COVENANTS OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD: SHARED 219  
HISTORICAL MEMORY OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE  
*Ibrahim Zein & Ahmed El-Wakil*

MAQĀŞĪD AL-SHARĪ'AH: MEANING, SCOPE AND RAMIFICATIONS 263  
*Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi*

MAPPING THE TRENDS OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION: 297  
A COMPARATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW  
*Zaleha Kamaruddin, Nadhilah A.Kadir & Azizah Mohd.*

ISSUES OF HINDU-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN THE WORKS OF SYED AHMAD KHAN 315  
*Md. Yousuf Ali & Osman Bakar*

**MANUSCRIPT STUDIES** 335

**BOOK REVIEW** 361

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS 391

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