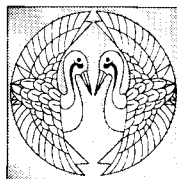


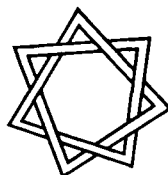
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## PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

O. F. Akimushkin

### A MANUSCRIPT OF *YŪSUF WA ZULAYKHĀ* BY JĀMĪ IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

Among numerous manuscripts preserved in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies there is an illustrated one (call number B 2325) which represents the famous poem *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* by Jāmī. In my view, it is worthy a note of specialists, since it is executed in the Qājār style of the manuscript miniature painting, which has hitherto been but poorly studied. Before giving a description of the manuscript some words should be said about this work by the outstanding Persian poet.

The poem *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (817–898/1414–1492), which was completed by him in 838/1483, comprises 4,000 *bayts*, or 8,000 lines. It was dedicated to the Timūrid ruler in Khurāsān Ṣultān Huṣayn and represents the third part of the poet's famous *Khamsa* finished by him on 8 Dhū'l-Qa'da 889/27 December 1484.

As one can judge from the place the poem occupies in the *Khamsa* composition, as well as from the poem's metre (*hazaj*), judging also from the words by Jāmī himself, who tells in the second part of one of the poem's chapter about the motives which lay behind his work, the poem was aimed to replace, and had really replaced, the poem *Khusraw wa Shīrīn* occupying traditionally the corresponding place in *Khamsa*. Jāmī, quite transparently, points to this circumstance, saying:

The power of Shīrīn and Khusraw has become decrepit,  
With rapture I shall enthrone a new *khusraw*.

That is the end of the turn of *Laylī wa Majnūn*,  
The other will be brought forward by me [1].

In fact, this poem by Jāmī is a versified commentary on “the most beautiful tale” of the twelfth Sūra of the Qur’ān, which is entitled “Yūsuf”. This poetical commentary was composed by Jāmī in the pure Muslim mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) vein. It is known that the poet was a celebrated mystic and one of the connoisseurs of *taṣawwuf*, who contributed greatly to the elaboration of its theory. The main point of Jāmī's poem is his interpretation of the *taṣawwuf*'s notion of spiritual love. The Qur’ānic story of Yūsuf is treated by Jāmī only in symbolic and abstract way. Spiritual, lofty, and non-sensual love for the Divine Beauty is presented as the best mean to comprehend God and to attain the union with the Truth. That was the path of Zulaykhā who, moving from her sensual love and passion for Yūsuf to purely spiritual love, attains ultimately the true knowledge by adopting Islam.

The poem *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* by Jāmī had won an extreme recognition and become widespread in Iran, Central Asia, Kashmīr, and India in the Great Moghul age. More than three hundred manuscripts of the poem, which came down to us, testifies to its great popularity among the Muslim peoples, a refined language of the poem having contributed much to the popularity. No less than twelve poets, following Jāmī, wrote their versions of the poem.

#### A description of the manuscript

The manuscript contains 150 folios. The folios' size: 20.6 × 13.1 cm. The text is written in two columns, 14 lines each, and framed with gold and black Indian ink line (*tahrīr*). The written surface: 15.3 × 7.1 cm. The hand is cursive *nasta'liq* with noticeable elements of *shikasta* script. It is obvious that the manuscript was copied out by a professional copyist. The text is written in black, the headings — in red Indian ink. The manuscript has Oriental (*custodia*, *hāfiz*) and European pagination.

Paper: European, white and dense, well glossy. Watermarks can be seen on the paper: the design of a large vase,

of a basket with the eight-ray star in the centre and with a trefoil in the upper part. On folios 38 and 113 there are water-marks with Latin inscription — LEVELRATTO, on folio 115 — BC & C.

The manuscript is exquisitely illuminated. As it has already been mentioned, its folios have gold and black Indian ink *tahrīr*, as well as a similar but a little broader text frame. On folios 1b–2a there is a frontispiece (15.6 × 7.9 cm on fol. 1b and 15.7 × 7.9 cm on fol. 2a) which is lacking the side vertical cartouches and general frame line.

The arrangement of pages reveals three different parts — a usual cartouche with wave-lined edges in the upper part of the pages and rectangular one in the lower; between these ones the third part — the text comprising four lines, separated by golden stripes (*tarsī'*) and dotted line in black Indian ink along the edges (*mushdandān*), is placed. The palette of miniatures is not very rich, gold, dark red, and blue predominating. The cartouches contain floral designs (flower buds). The margins are also decorated with the designs of convolvuluses, interweaving of which produces a sort of decorative rhombuses and ovals.

The binding of the manuscript is made of painted leather covered with slightly goldish lacquer. Exterior and interior of the binding are beautifully decorated. The Bordeaux colour of exterior, painted on grounded leather, tones with the black and gold frame stripes of *ṭariq*. There is the *turunj* in the centre, and two palmettes (*sarturunjs*), against black background of which a coloured floral design is made.

The interior of the binding is painted green on grounded leather. There are also border gold lines and spi-

erals on the inner surfaces of the cover. The flower of narcissus in blossom fills the centre of each of these surfaces.

The manuscript is unbound a bit. The lower cover of the binding is slightly torn. Because of a copyist's oversight the heading of one of the poem's section remained unfilled (fol. 3b). The inner edge of fol. 41 is torn off. There is also a hole on the margins of fol. 103. The manuscript had been once rebound, the binding being by mistake turned upside-down.

The manuscript comprises the whole text of Jāmī's poem. There is no colophon in the manuscript, so it lacks the date of its execution. However, in the centre of a lower rectangular cartouche of the frontispiece, on fol. 2a, numeral 122 can be discerned, which may be considered as the date of the completion of manuscript's illumination. It may be 1202/1787—1788 or 1220/1805—1806. The last date seems more preferable, since it corresponds to the palaeographic data of the manuscript.

The copy was executed in Iran at the very beginning of the Qājār rule, most probably, in Isfahān. The special way of its execution and illumination is characteristic of the commercial style of the Isfahān school of that period.

### The miniatures of the manuscript

There are ten miniatures in the manuscript. All of them are placed within the text frame and don't run out of it.

1) fol. 42a (8.1 × 7.8 cm). Ceremonial reception of Zulaykhā on her arriving in Miṣr.

2) fol. 56a (7.0 × 7.8 cm). Fettering of Yūsuf by his villain brothers before dropping him into the well.

3) fol. 61a (8.2 × 7.8 cm). Merchants rescuing Yūsuf on their way to Miṣr with a caravan.

4) fol. 63a (5.8 × 7.8 cm). Yūsuf being sold by the merchants among the merchandise presented to Zulaykhā.

5) fol. 72a (8.8 × 7.8 cm). Yūsuf shepherding Zulaykhā's flock of sheep.

6) fol. 80b (6.7 × 7.8 cm). Zulaykhā sending Yūsuf as a gardener to her gardens.

7) fol. 90b (8.9 × 7.8 cm). Zulaykhā bringing Yūsuf to her Seventh Palace where he rejects her courting.

8) fol. 102b (7.7 × 7.8 cm). Zulaykhā's maidens struck by the beauty of Yūsuf, some of them being fainted.

9) fol. 128a (9.1 × 7.8 cm). Yūsuf returning to his native land and paying no attention to Zulaykhā who came to see him off.

10) fol. 132a (7.7 × 7.8 cm). Obeying heavenly command Yūsuf who marries Zulaykhā after her adopting Islam.

All of the miniatures represent the Qājār style of the manuscript book painting in Iran, namely, its early stage of development. The style took its name after the Qājār dynasty in Iran (1779—1925), under which court painting underwent some essential changes. From the chronological point of view, the style coincides partly with the period of the Qājārs' reigning, since its origin goes back to the late eighteenth century. Its zenith falls in the 20s of the nineteenth century, and the style had decayed to the 60s of the same century.

In its early period the Qājār style borrowed (and had successfully assimilated) much from its predecessors — the Afshārid (1736—1795) and Zand (1750—1794) styles of

Persian miniature painting. It adopted many elements of the European painting technique — treatment of light and shade, demonstration of subjects' volume and perspective, putting a landscape in the background of a miniature, which the Persian painters began to use in their work, first at the court ateliers and then in the provinces, as far back as the late seventeenth century.

It should be noted that the most characteristic feature of the Persian painting in the eighteenth century was an obvious decay of the art of book-painting and of illuminated manuscript as a whole. It is hardly possible to explain this phenomenon by the internal political situation in Iran, with its instability, turmoils, and internecine wars, for many Persian painters continued to work at that period, creating their pictures, executed in the easel painting technique, and numerous albums (*muraqqa'*) where, using usual methods of European painters, they made on separate folios miniature portraits and copies (in colour) of European engravings and pictures. They also painted various art items made of lacquered papier-mâché or of wood: pen- and mirror-cases, incense boxes, manuscripts bindings, and so on. It seems that introduction of European painting technique into the art of Persian miniature had resulted in appearing of a somewhat disharmony in the artistic unity of Persian manuscript book which followed the two-dimensional convention. The principle of plane depicting and the two-dimensionality always reigned both in artistic arrangement of manuscript's folios and in classical Persian miniature. That gave illuminated Persian manuscript its special charm, unity, and national peculiarity. Consistent introduction of European painting technique gave rise to a certain eclecticism which destroyed the absolute harmony of Persian manuscript as a piece of art. Most likely, it was soon understood both by the masters, who created the Persian manuscripts, and by the audience that worshipped the art of manuscript book. The European painting style which penetrated into the Persian art looked much more natural and harmonious in other articles of art than in such a traditional

thing which an illuminated Persian manuscript was. The Persian masters, with their refined sense of art, revealed it soon, and the new style had rapidly come to decay.

As it has already been noted above, the miniatures illustrating the text of the poem *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* by Jāmī are typical of the early Qājār style as it can be judged from their eclectic combining of painting methods of two different art traditions. The European elements can be clearly seen in the entourage of the scenes depicted and in the cloths of the personages as well. In the background of many of the miniatures one can also see landscapes with trees presented in perspective (fols. 61a, 72a, 80b, 128a). It

is very characteristic, too, that among the colours used contrast and rich orange, violet, yellow, pink, and green, without half-tints, are predominating. The picture of interior in the miniature on folio 90b, executed under the evident European influence, draws our special attention. Portière and curtains in the upper part of the door and on the windows are very significant.

We can suggest that both the miniatures and the manuscript were most probably executed in Isfahān, or they may have been made at the very beginning of the nineteenth century by a master who worked in the Isfahān early Qājār style.

#### Notes

1. Jāmī, *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā*, a manuscript from the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (call number B 2325), fols. 15b–16a.

#### Illustrations

##### *Front cover:*

Zulaykhā's maidens struck by the beauty of Yūsuf, a miniature from the manuscript *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* by Jāmī (call number B 2325), fol. 102b, 7.7 × 7.8 cm.

##### *Back cover:*

- Plate 1.** Merchants rescuing Yūsuf on their way to Miṣr with a caravan, a miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 61a, 8.2 × 7.8 cm.
- Plate 2.** Yūsuf shepherding Zulaykhā's flock of sheep, a miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 72a, 8.8 × 7.8 cm.
- Plate 3.** Zulaykhā bringing Yūsuf to her Seventh Palace where he rejects her courting, a miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 90b, 8.9 × 7.8 cm.
- Plate 4.** Obeying heavenly command Yūsuf who marries Zulaykhā after her adopting Islam, a miniature from the same manuscript, fol. 132a, 7.7 × 7.8 cm.
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