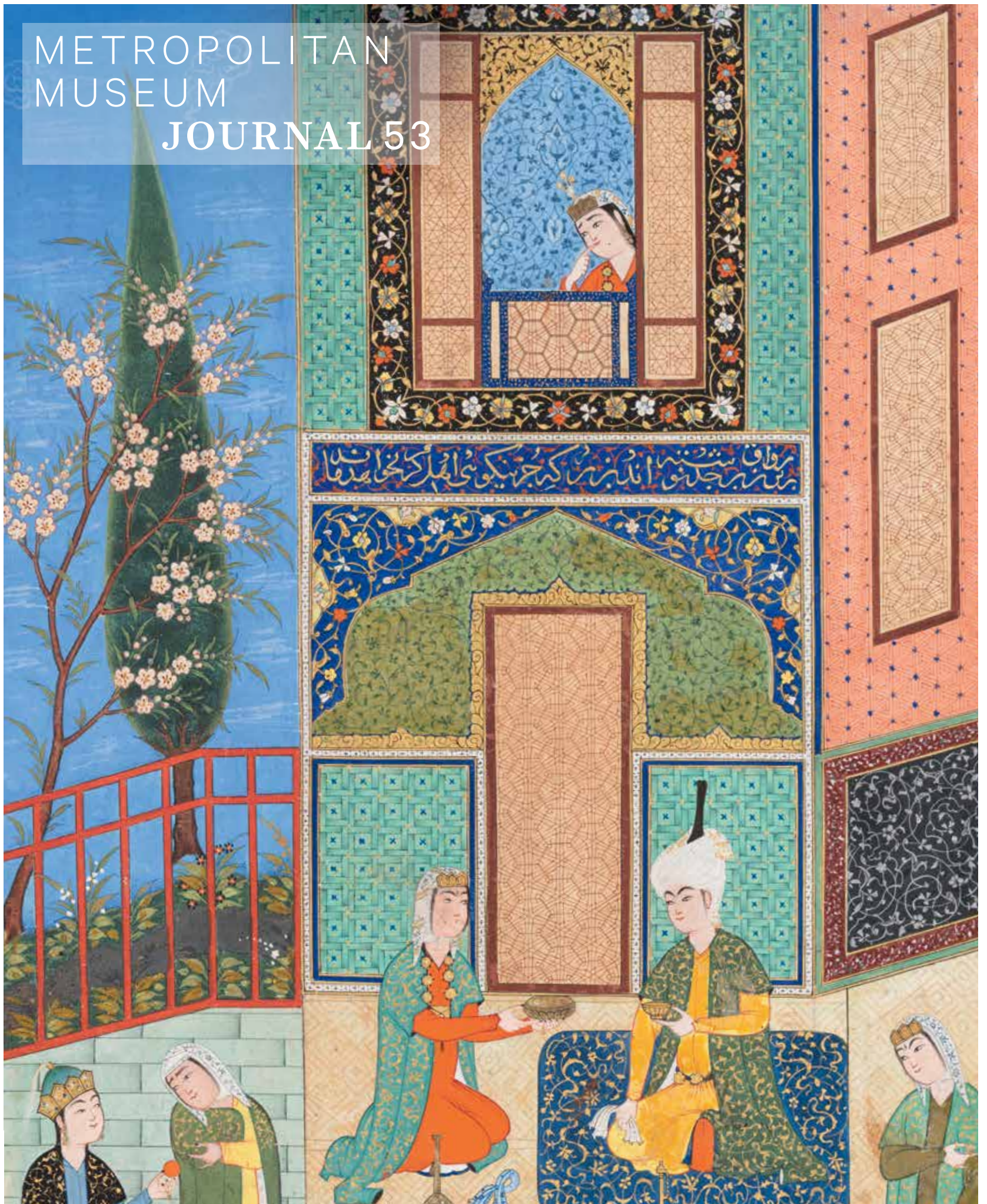


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Back cover illustration: Julia Margaret Cameron (British [born India], 1815–1879). Detail of *Beatrice*, 1866. See fig. 1, p. 162.

Illustration on p. 2: Ruan Zude (Chinese, 16th or early 17th century), Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Portrait of the Artist's Great-Granduncle Yizhai at the Age of Eighty-Five*, 1561 or 1621. See fig. 1, p. 48.

Opposite: Attic red-figure bell-krater attributed to the Persephone Painter. Greek, ca. 440 B.C. Terracotta, H. 16½ in. (41 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1928 (28.57.23)

For Joan Mertens

IN HONOR OF HER YEARS OF DEDICATION TO THIS PUBLICATION
AND HER EXEMPLARY ERUDITION, GENEROSITY, AND WIT



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ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*

MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.

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BARRY WOOD

Inscriptions on Architecture in Early Safavid Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum

Figures 1–7 are folios from a *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizami. Nizami (Ilyas Abu Muhammad Nizam al-Din of Ganja) (probably 1141–1217) (author). Shaikh Zada (painter), A.H. 931/ A.D. 1524–25. Made in Herat (present-day Afghanistan). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 1913. The calligraphers for figures 1–7 are Sultan Muhammad Nur (ca. 1472–ca. 1536) and Mahmud Muzahhib (fl. ca. 1500–1560).

fig. 1 Bahram Gur in the White Palace on Friday. Folio 235b. Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper, painting $8\frac{13}{16} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ in. (22.4 × 11.4 cm); page $12\frac{3}{8} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ in. (32.1 × 22.2 cm). (13.228.7.14)

Of the many details the viewer is invited to scrutinize in a Persian painting, among the most compelling and evocative are the textual inscriptions occasionally found adorning the buildings the painter has depicted. Some are just a couple of words over a doorway, while others form a lengthy frieze running along the walls of a sizable structure like a fortress. Texts like these, with their introduction of explicit verbal meaning into the painting's finely tuned array of visual details, raise questions about aesthetic reception and readership. The use of image-internal inscriptions in the Persian painting tradition waxed and waned over the years, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art holds paintings from two manuscripts made at a point when the practice was at its peak. The Museum's copy of the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizami of 1524–25, and its collection of pages from the now-dispersed *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp

offer a window into a little-studied aspect of the Persian art of the book at a time when it was flourishing.

The use of calligraphic inscriptions on buildings in book illustrations extends back to the fourteenth century, with the genesis of the classical Persian style at the court of the Jalayirids.¹ The tendency to adorn buildings with texts continued at various levels of intensity and sophistication throughout the fifteenth century. Manuscripts made for Baysunghur in the early decades include some beautifully fluid and occasionally lengthy textual insertions,² whereas the mid-century *Shahnama* of Muhammad Juki has but a few simple panels.³ Later in the century, the so-called Big Head *Shahnama* contains illustrations that are vigorously inventive, but devoid of architectural inscriptions.⁴ The inclination to place texts on buildings proliferated in the sophisticated court milieu of the Timurid prince Sultan Husayn Bayqara in Herat in the last decades of the century, when literary culture flourished so greatly.⁵ The renowned manuscript of Sa'di's *Bustan* now in Cairo, with its paintings attributed to Bihzad, is perhaps the best-known instance,⁶ but other important works from the period exist, including a manuscript of the poetic *Divan* of Sultan Husayn Bayqara as well as the *Khamisa* of his vizier 'Ali Shir Nava'i.⁷ When the Safavids took over Herat at the dawn of the sixteenth century, they also assumed the ateliers and standards of the city, with important consequences for the emerging painterly style of the dynasty. Notably, for all the florescence of literary culture and sophisticated painting in late fifteenth-century Herat, two poems conspicuous for their lack of illustration are the *Shahnama* and the *Khamisa* of Nizami.⁸ The two manuscripts under consideration here thus represent the earliest application of the fully developed repertoire of miniature painting to the greatest monuments of Persian literature—including the use of inscriptions on architecture.

It is true that architectural inscriptions in Persian painting are often, as Oleg Grabar noted, "pious banalities or praises of a princely patron."⁹ However, some inscriptions, especially those that include poetic verses, offer us a deeper appreciation of the aesthetic of the paintings, the way they were "consumed" by their contemporaries. This article investigates what kinds of texts get written on the buildings of the painted world, and for whom they are intended—either for the figures in the scene, or for the reader of the manuscript—and what messages they convey. It further questions the role that the inscriptions play in the activity of reception, the processes of perception, comprehension, recognition, and appreciation undertaken by beholders in the period

and the present day. The study of text-image relations in Persian miniature painting is still in its early stages, and texts within paintings raise a number of their own fascinating issues.¹⁰ In recent years, Marianna Shreve Simpson in particular has provided valuable analyses, especially in her short book on the famous copy of the *Haft awrang* (Seven Thrones) by the poet Jami now in the Freer|Sackler in Washington.¹¹ In that book, she provides translations of painting-internal inscriptions and offers ideas on how to interpret them in relation to the imagery. The present study continues this line of inquiry. In addition to providing translations and interpretative suggestions, this article corrects some long-standing errors, points out new finds, and calls attention to the inscriptions in the paintings as clues to the kind of thinking that went into the creation and appreciation of these magnificent art objects.

THE 1524–25 KHAMISA OF NIZAMI

The *Khamisa* is the magnum opus of the twelfth-century poet Nizami, and it influenced countless poets after him. In this quintet of poems (*khamisa* means "five"), Nizami treats subjects ranging from divine love to astrology, in language as poetically masterful as it is philosophically erudite. Several of the poems deal with figures well known in the Islamic world, such as the tragic lovers Layli and Majnun or the world-conquering, wisdom-seeking Iskandar (Alexander the Great). This particular manuscript of Nizami's opus, which came to the Museum in 1913, has rightly been called "one of the most sumptuous manuscripts ever produced in Persia."¹² It was penned and illustrated in the city of Herat in 1524–25 and is testimony to the superbly high standards of bookmaking achieved at the late fifteenth-century Timurid court there and carried over after the city fell to the ascendant Safavid dynasty in 1506.¹³

The manuscript contains an unusually large number of paintings that include inscriptions on architecture. The emphasis on such inscriptions is apparent from a consideration of the illustrative program. The five poems of Nizami's quintet are illustrated as follows:¹⁴

Makhzan al-Asrar: 1 painting, no inscriptions

Khusraw u Shirin: 4 paintings (originally 5), 1 with architectural inscription

Layli u Majnun: 1 painting with architectural inscription

Haft Paykar: 7 paintings, 6 with architectural inscriptions

Iskandarnama: 2 paintings, no inscriptions

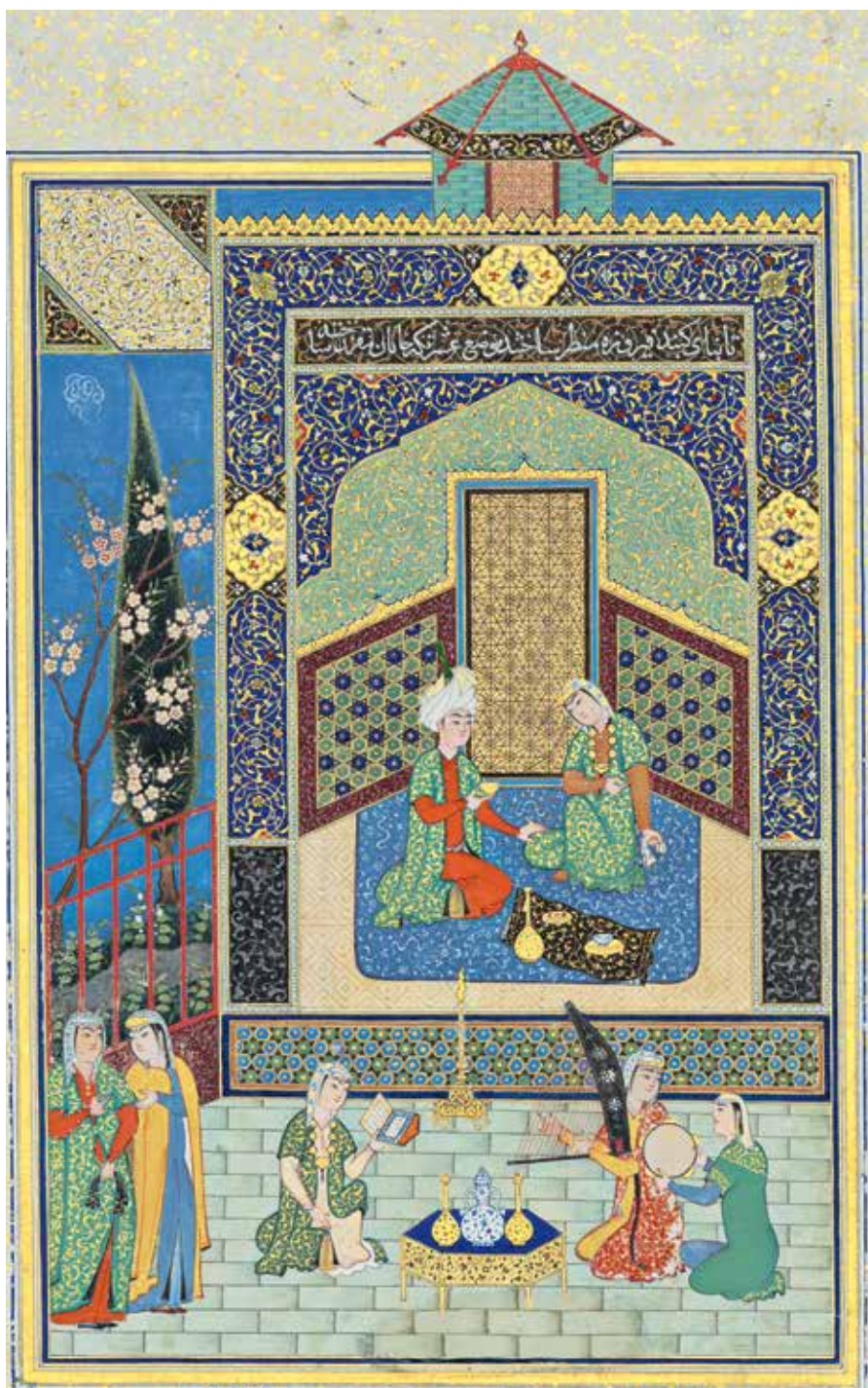


fig. 2 Bahram Gur in the Turquoise Palace on Wednesday. Detail of folio 216b. Ink, opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper, painting 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (20 × 12.4 cm); page 12 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (32.2 × 22.2 cm). (13.228.7.10)

The first and last poems are illustrated sparingly and do not depict architecture. Of the remaining three poems, *Khusraw u Shirin* is relatively densely illustrated, originally with five paintings, one of which has a building with an inscription. Given that the now-missing painting probably depicted Khusraw going to Shirin's palace,¹⁵ it would likely have included a textual frieze. It is suggestive as well that although the section relating the story of Layli and Majnun has only one painting, the scene that was selected for illustration was one that

included the school where the two ill-starred lovers met, and an inscription is prominent, as will be discussed below.

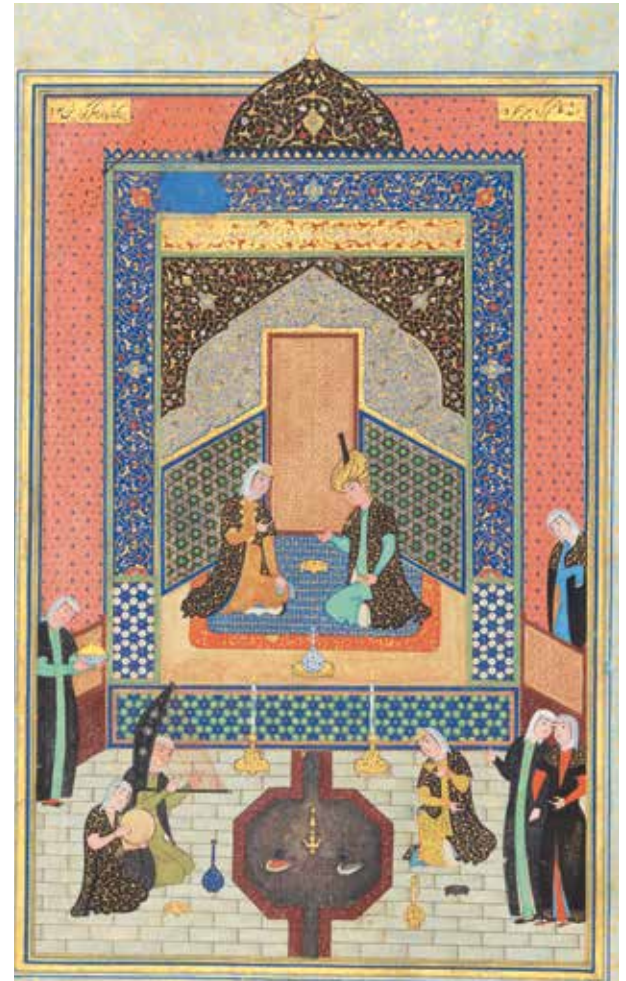
The manuscript's emphasis on *Haft Paykar*, the story of Bahram Gur and the Seven Princesses, stands out most strongly. In this tale, the quasi-legendary Iranian monarch Bahram Gur spends seven consecutive nights in seven palaces, each a different color and each housing a princess from a different clime who regales him with a wisdom-imparting story.¹⁶ Rather than simply including one painting of a colored pavilion to stand for the whole story, as was the usual practice, here the designer has allotted each of the seven nights a full-page illustration. All but two of the seven pavilions are adorned with a prominent inscription in verse; the exceptions are the Red Palace (fol. 220a), which bears merely the stock phrase "O opener of doors" over a doorway, and the Sandal Palace (fol. 230b), which does not have inscriptions. All five inscriptions on the remaining palaces reveal a poetic reference (direct or indirect) to the color of the respective buildings. Notably, the poetry is never that of Nizami, but of other poets, a choice reflecting the aesthetic of literary connoisseurship and recognition that characterized late Timurid and early Safavid bibliophile culture.

Two of the inscriptions appear to be by anonymous poets. The first is in the painting on folio 235b (fig. 1), *Bahram Gur in the White Palace on Friday*.¹⁷ The rear wall of the palace is white with blue arabesques, forming a striking contrast to the arch and dome that surmount it, which have decorative motifs on a black background. In keeping with Nizami's story, the characters' clothes, from Bahram Gur to the attendants, are color-coordinated with the palace. The inscription is written in white calligraphy on a gold background in a rectangular panel just below the dome. It reads:

چشم من اندک سودای داشت آن نیز گریه شست
ساختم این خانه را بهر تو سراسر سفید

This may be translated as "My eye had a little bit of melancholy, and even that I have cried away. Because of you, I have made this house white from top to bottom"—that is, "I have washed it clean with my tears."¹⁸

The second anonymous verse appears in folio 216b (fig. 2), *Bahram Gur in the Turquoise Palace on Wednesday*.¹⁹ Here the painter has depicted Bahram Gur and the princess of the Maghrib in a pavilion whose walls and cupola are turquoise with gold decorative



patterns. These are made to stand out by the juxtaposition of deep blue and black panels of arabesque decoration punctuated with gold cartouches. The panel above Bahram Gur and his companion reads:

تا بنای گنبد فیروزه منظر ساختند
موضع عشرتگه جانان مقرر ساختند

When they made this turquoise dome, they created a pleasure-house for lovers.²⁰

The line would seem to have been selected for its inclusion of the color word that matches the key color in the scene. Verses like this one and that in figure 1, which has obscure origins, may have been written to order by a local poet; poets were not in short supply in Iran at the turn of the sixteenth century.

Other inscriptions in this manuscript are attributable to known authors, in fact to the most famous Persian poets. A third episode from the Bahram Gur storyline is illustrated on folio 224b (fig. 3), which shows the prince in the Green Palace on Monday.²¹ As previously,

the artist has rendered key elements of the composition in the appropriate color, here jade-green. The calligraphy in the space between the palace's balcony and its main arch is a verse that can be identified. It is a line from the fourteenth-century master poet Hafiz of Shiraz; it comes from his ghazal no. 179.²² In Persian, it reads:

برین رواق زبرجد نوشته‌اند به زر
که جز نیکویی اهل کرم نخواهد ماند

On this emerald portico they have written in gold:
"Nothing shall abide but the goodness of
generous people."²³

The placement of the verse, clearly chosen for its use of the word *zabarjad* (emerald), makes a visual link not only to Nizami's subject matter, the Green Palace, but also to the use of green in the painting. The point about the goodness of generous people may be a more abstract compliment paid to Bahram Gur, but seems more likely to be a general ethical observation the reader would recognize.

fig. 3 Bahram Gur in the Green Palace on Monday. Detail of folio 224b. Ink, opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper, painting 7¼ × 5 in. (18.4 × 12.7 cm); page 12¼ × 8⅞ in. (32.4 × 21.9 cm). (13.228.7.12)

fig. 4 Bahram Gur in the Dark Palace on Saturday. Detail of folio 207a. Ink, opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper, painting 8 × 4½ in. (20.3 × 11.4 cm); page 12½ × 8⅞ in. (31.9 × 22.2 cm). (13.228.7.8)

Hafiz is not the only Persian poet quoted on buildings in the paintings of the manuscript. The fifteenth-century poet Jami is cited on folio 207a (fig. 4), which depicts a painting of Bahram Gur in the first pavilion he visits in the story, the Dark (or Black) Palace.²⁴ In keeping with the subject matter, the painter has rendered key elements of the composition in black, including the background color of the dome and the spandrels of the arch underneath it, the outer garments worn by the figures, and even the sounding board of the *chang* (harp) played by one of the palace's attendants. The inscription, written in white on a gold ground among red arabesques in a panel above the arch, reads:

فرخ آن محفل که شاهی را بود در وی نشست
روشن آن منزل که ماهی را بود در وی گذار

Happy is that assembly where the royal seat is placed.
And bright is that mansion over which the moon
is passing.²⁵

Perhaps curiously, the poem does not use any of the color words associated with this palace in the poetic tradition, such as “black” (*siyah*) or even “dark” (*muskhin*); the associations of nighttime evoked by the reference to the moon may have been deemed sufficiently appropriate to the Dark Palace.

A verse by Jami is also found on folio 129a (fig. 5), in the single illustration of Nizami's poem *Layli u Majnun*. The painting is a depiction of the star-crossed lovers Layli and Majnun at a school that is depicted as a mosque; a muezzin performs the call to prayer atop the building, where he is surrounded by Nizami's verses.²⁶ Next to him is a turquoise dome sitting atop an arch densely decorated with flowering arabesques on a dark blue ground. Underneath is a white-bearded teacher who appears to be quizzing a young boy about his studies, and at the ready should the student's performance (or attitude) need adjustment. Most of the school's students are engaged in reading or writing, although one has dozed off and one is chasing a schoolmate and threatening him with what appears to be a rock. It is difficult to determine just which two are Layli and Majnun, a diffusion of focus typical in Persian painting. Priscilla Soucek suggested that they are probably “the girl in brown and blue and the boy in blue [*sic*] seated opposite each other on the Persian carpet,” in part because “Layli” has a golden headdress like those worn by court attendants in Iran in this era.²⁷ It is also tempting to identify Layli as the girl in dark blue on the patio pointing to a friend's book, and Majnun as the boy in

lighter blue seated between two schoolmates and seeming to reach toward Layli, at whom he is clearly depicted as looking. His gesture of reaching toward her, restrained by his friend in a black baton-cap, may be the painter's way of indicating that he has fallen in love at first sight.

The inscription above the arch, in an elegant white script on a black background with coiling orange arabesques, reads:

معلم گو مده تعلیم بیداد آن پری رورا
که جز خوی نیکو لایق نباشد روی نیکورا

This has been translated as “O teacher, give no instruction of an unjust kind to that fairy-faced girl / Nor anything but good; for nothing else is worthy of that beautiful face.”²⁸ Interestingly, although Jami wrote his own version of the Layli and Majnun story, this line is not taken from that work. Rather, it is the first verse of an unrelated ghazal.²⁹ The reference to a teacher, however, makes it appropriate for inclusion in this scene.³⁰

A final architectural inscription in the manuscript requires closer scrutiny because its text has given rise to some mistaken interpretations. It appears in the painting on folio 213a (fig. 6), which depicts Bahram Gur in the Yellow Palace on Sunday.³¹ In white letters among gold arabesques on a blue background, the calligrapher has written:

شنیده‌ام که در این طارم زراندود است
خطی که عاقبت کار جمله محمود است

This verse has proved nettlesome for scholars working on this painting, a problem due in no small part to the prominence of the word *mahmud* in the inscription. When the manuscript was donated to the Museum, the catalogue of the bequest included this translation: “The command regarding this gold-encrusted dome has been obeyed, and the inscription, which is added, is altogether the work of Mahmud.”³² This reading, however, is not feasible. Aside from the absence in the original Persian of anything about a “command,” the more problematic point is the reading of the last word, *mahmud*. While it is a common Muslim name, it is not meant as such here; the meter and syntax of the verse make it impossible for *mahmud* to be a proper name. It should be read instead with its literal meaning of “praiseworthy” or “laudable.”³³ Further, no artist's signature would ever be this prominent; painters in the Persian tradition, when they signed a painting at all, did

fig. 5 Layli and Majnun at School. Detail of folio 129a. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, painting 7½ × 4½ in. (19.1 × 11.4 cm); page 12½ × 8¾ in. (32.1 × 22.2 cm). (13.228.7.7)





fig. 6 Bahram Gur in the Yellow Palace on Sunday. Detail of folio 213a. Ink, opaque watercolor, silver, and gold on paper, painting 7½ × 4½ in. (19.1 × 11.4 cm); page 12% × 8% in. (32.1 × 22.2 cm). (13.228.7.9)

so in highly discreet, often hard-to-find places—certainly not in a bold inscription near the center of the reader’s attention.

Priscilla Soucek, apparently aware of the impossibility of this being a signature, but continuing to read the word *mahmud* as a reference to a person, posited that the “enigmatic” inscription was meant to refer to the originator of the particular style of calligraphic script being used. Using the translation “I have heard that on this golden pavilion, there is a script which

ultimately belongs to Mahmud,” she followed the purported implication and found one Mahmud Harawi, a calligrapher mentioned in the late fifteenth-century biographical dictionary compiled by the Timurid courtier and intellectual ‘Ali Shir Nava’i.³⁴ While an improvement on the previous interpretation, the reading is still ultimately vitiated by a mistaken understanding of the Persian verse.

Taking the term *mahmud* to be an adjective and not a name, the verse may be properly translated: “I have heard that underneath this gilded dome there is writing that is ultimately altogether praiseworthy.”³⁵ As with the other inscriptions discussed thus far, it seems clear that the verse was selected for its use of an opposite word, here *zar-andud*, “gilded.” This is an apt word for the painting, as the dome of the Yellow Palace has been rendered in a brilliant gold against the dark blue background of a starry night sky. The spandrels of the arch below are gold as well, with the back wall of the palace’s interior and the figures’ clothes rendered in more or less muted shades of yellow.

The use of this line in another early Safavid painting may explain its appeal to the illuminators of the day. Folio 77b of the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp is now separated from the others (including those at The Met), and was sold at a Christie’s London auction in 1988.³⁶ The subject of the painting is “Mihrab Hears of Rudabeh’s Folly.” The page is unusually rich with architectural inscriptions, and one of them, at the top left above a gossiping woman in a window, is this same verse about praiseworthy (*mahmud*) writing.³⁷ Two of the other inscriptions praise the page itself. One is placed quite centrally, over the three chambers of the upper gallery of Mihrab’s palace. It claims that this page (*in safha*) is the envy of the fairy-house of China, that Mani himself never painted a better picture, and that the lines (*khatt*) therein remind one of the beautifully adorned faces of the fairies.³⁸ Another inscription, in the main palace chamber above Mihrab and his wife, claims that the page is the envy of the beauties of Taraz and a veritable gateway to paradise open before the reader.³⁹ The inclusion of verses like these in the painting is a form of boasting on the part of the artist(s), and it may well have been so in the *Khamsa* painting of the Yellow Palace as well. In this period, it would seem, an actual signature was frowned upon, but pride in one’s work was not, and a painter or calligrapher might cleverly insert some self-praise via poetic inscriptions.

As it happens, the “mahmud” verse can be traced to a known poet, albeit not a very famous one. The author is Kamal al-Din Isma’il Isfahani, a

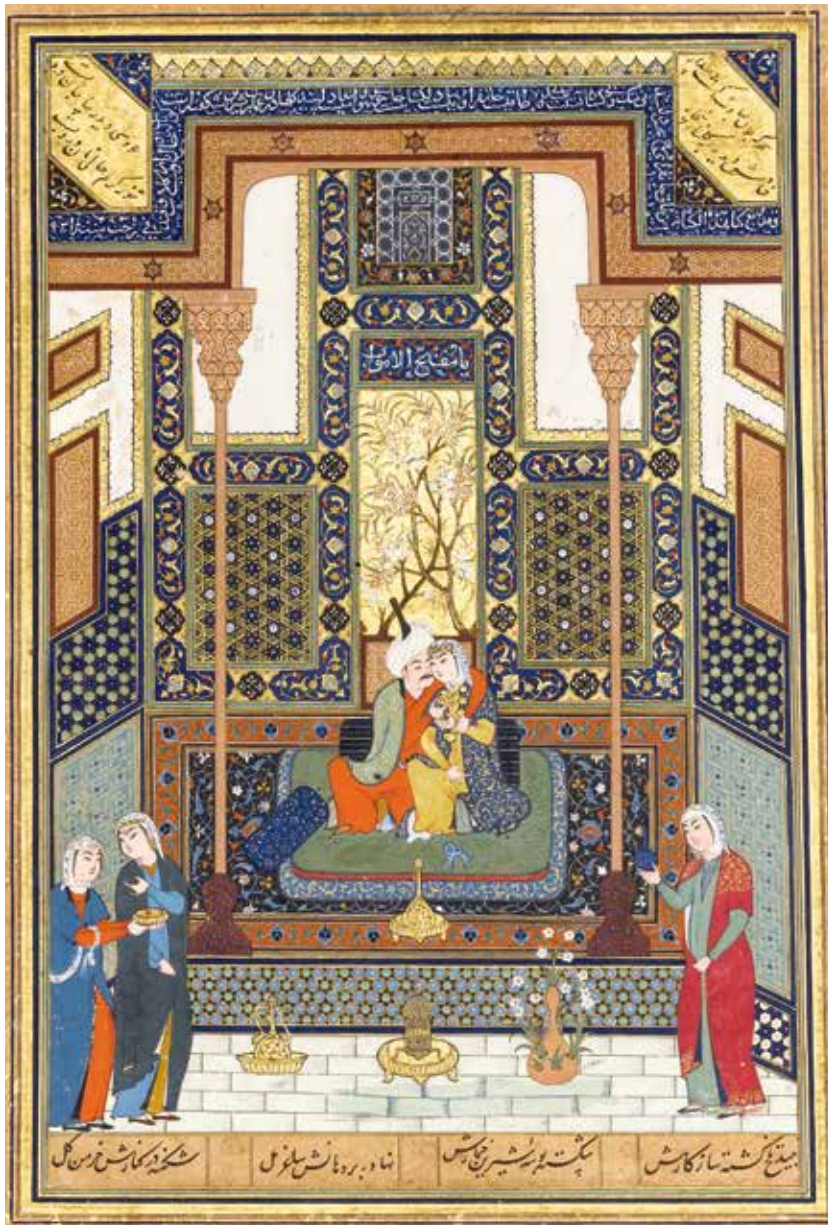


fig. 7 *The Marriage of Khusraw and Shirin*. Folio 104b. Ink, opaque water-color, and gold on paper, painting 7 × 4 3/4 in. (17.8 × 12.1 cm); page 12 1/2 × 8 3/4 in. (32.1 × 22.2 cm). (13.228.76)

thirteenth-century Iranian panegyrist and mystic nicknamed the “Maker of Meanings.”⁴⁰ The poem itself is unremarkable, a short meditation on the theme of generosity, both man’s and God’s. One term for generosity in Persian is *jud*, and Kamal al-Din Isma‘il wove several rhymes on it into his poem, with *zar-andud* being the one that seems to have caught the eye of whoever planned this painting.

A final, almost equally problematic inscription in the *Khamasa* manuscript is in the painting on folio 104b (fig. 7), which depicts the marriage of the historical Iranian king Khusraw II Parviz and his beloved Shirin after a long and eventful courtship.⁴¹ The two lovers are shown seated in a tender embrace inside a pavilion exquisitely decorated with geometric panels and

arabesque coils; the painter has even ventured into more verisimilitude than is usual for this period, in that he has depicted wooden pillars with elaborate capitals holding up the roof, similar to those on the portico of the seventeenth-century ‘Ali Qapu in Isfahan. A long inscription runs the length of the page from right to left, zigzagging to follow the right angles of the arch over Khusraw and Shirin. It is actually two inscriptions; the short horizontal segments at right and left form a continuous phrase in Arabic that gives the date Rajab 931 (April–May 1525).⁴² The rest of the inscription is a poem in Persian. The author appears to be unknown. The poem reads:

این طاق جانفزای فرحبخش دلپسند
نی تنگ و نی گشاده نه پستست و نی بلند
طاقیست جانفزا و بنائیست دلگشا
جانیست خوش هوا و مقامیست دلپسند
کلهها درین عمارت شیرین شکفته است
گویا که آب و خاک ویست از گلاب و قند

The verses were originally translated as: “This soul-refreshing, delightful, and most perfect vaulted recess is neither small nor large, but it is a lofty chamber of nuptial bliss, a soul-inspiring recess, a heart-entrancing mansion, a place of delightful air, a most perfect abode; the roses in this palace have blossomed out as Shirin; the mole on her cheek is like rosewater and sugar.”⁴³ This translation has formed the basis for interpretations of the painting for years.⁴⁴ However, it is faulty and requires emendation.

First, there is no mention in the poem of “a lofty chamber of nuptial bliss”; the hemistich in question reads literally, “[This arch] is neither narrow nor expansive, neither low nor high,” thus expressing the building’s perfection in terms of its correct proportionality. Secondly, the roses have not blossomed “as Shirin”; they have blossomed sweetly (*shirin* means “sweet” in Persian). And finally, what is being compared to rosewater and sugar are the water and earth (*ab u khak*) of the building itself; the word *khak* (meaning “earth”) was apparently misread as *khal* (“mole, beauty spot”). Far from being a paean to Shirin or the wedding, as some have suggested, the inscription is simply praise of the building, no doubt selected for this particular scene because it has the term *shirin* in it. Moreover, it was not necessarily written to commemorate a particular building, as the inscription is not original. This is indicated by the fact that the second verse (beginning with “soul-inspiring recess”) can also be found, with its adjectives rearranged, in an earlier copy of the

Figures 8–14, 16 are folios from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, ca. 1535. Abu'l Qasim Firdausi (935–1020) (author). Made in Tabriz, Iran. Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970

fig. 8 The Assassination of Khusraw Parviz. Detail of folio 742b. Attributed to 'Abd al-Samad (Iranian, ca. 1505/15–ca. 1600) (painter). Painting 11³/₁₆ × 10³/₁₆ in. (28.4 × 27.3 cm); page 18¹/₂ × 12¹/₂ in. (47 × 31.8 cm). (1970.301.75)



Khamsa of Nizami, this one dated 1494–95 and containing paintings attributed to the great artist Bihzad; the verse is written atop a building from which a man is peeking out at women frolicking in a pool.⁴⁵ It would seem that these verses in praise of a generic building were on file, so to speak, in the atelier in Herat, and were chosen for use in both of these manuscripts.

The inscriptions found in the architecture in the exquisite *Khamsa* of 1524–25 contribute to the aesthetic of connoisseurial recognition that was the pride of the cultured elite of late Timurid and early Safavid Iran. A facility for citing apt verses was prized in these circles, and the designer of the book’s paintings appears to have been playing to that taste with no small amount of his own ingenuity. In examining these pages, then, we are granted a kind of entrée, albeit at a distance, into a world of witty and clever referentiality that provides

a broader intellectual context in which to understand the exquisite painting and calligraphy they offer the eye.

In the years when this manuscript was being created, an even greater one was coming into being at the other end of the Safavid realm, and in that work we may observe a similar play with poetic references. This was the *Shahnama* made for the second monarch of the Safavid dynasty, Tahmasp (r. 1524–76).

THE SHAHNAME OF SHAH TAHMASP

This manuscript, also known as the *Shahnama-yi Shahi* or “Royal *Shahnama*,” is thought to have been commissioned in 1522 by the founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Isma‘il I, for his young son Tahmasp upon the latter’s return to Tabriz after several years of upbringing in Herat.⁴⁶ Although Shah Isma‘il did not live to see the



fig. 9 Parable of the Ship of Shi'ism. Detail of folio 18b. Attributed to Mirza 'Ali (act. ca. 1525–1575) (painter). Painting 12½ × 8¹⁵/₁₆ in. (31.7 × 22.7 cm); page 18½ × 12½ in. (47 × 31.8 cm). (1970.301.1)

book's completion, young Tahmasp was an avid devotee of the arts, including painting, and under his continuing patronage the book was finished over the course of at least a decade, probably more. It stands as the greatest copy of the Iranian national epic ever made, and one of the supreme works of the bookmaker's art anywhere in the world.⁴⁷

Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*, when complete, had 258 paintings. When the codex was broken up in the 1970s, 78 of those paintings came to the Museum.⁴⁸ The following analyses may thus be taken as a selection of a representative sample, providing an idea of the nature and quality of the now-dispersed corpus. The discussion is limited to illustrative examples from The Met's collection, with some references to paintings from the manuscript now held in other collections.

Architectural inscriptions seem to have been viewed as an important element of the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp, at least during the planning phase. Analysis of 78 paintings from this manuscript in the Museum reveals that more than a quarter of them (21) feature architecture; of these, only three of the buildings depicted have neither inscriptions nor any blank spaces left for them.⁴⁹ Folios that have spaces left blank for inscriptions that were never written include *The Wedding of Siyavush and Farangis* (fol. 185b) and *Rustam Blames Kai Kavus for the Death of Siyavush* (fol. 202b). One of the very last paintings in the manuscript, *The Assassination of Khusraw Parviz* (fol. 742b; fig. 8), has a total of seven eye-catching empty blue cartouches. Given that this painting was presumably executed late in the life of the manuscript, a process that is assumed to have taken a decade or more, one wonders whether there was a growing sense of the need to finish the book, which made touches like adding poetic inscriptions seem inessential.⁵⁰ That so many architectural inscriptions were planned in advance, though, speaks to their importance in the minds of the designers of these exquisite pages.

One is on a painting that appears early in the manuscript, on folio 18b (fig. 9), the so-called Parable of the Ship of Shi'ism. The painting illustrates a story told in the beginning verses of the *Shahnama*, in which Firdausi, by way of declaring his loyalty to the Prophet and his House, tells how God launched seventy ships (representing the various sects into which humankind would be divided) onto a wind-blown sea. The wisest choice, the poet says, is to ride in the ship "adorned like the eye of a rooster," in which Muhammad and 'Ali are to be found, and which will be saved from the storm.⁵¹

The painting depicts an imaginative rendering of three ships at sea. The main vessel, which takes up most of the scene, is indeed richly adorned, although the prow resembles a goose more than a rooster. Various figures are busily sailing the ship, climbing the mast, maneuvering with oars and poles, and so on. The ship has a prominent forecastle in the form of a pavilion in which two large figures with flaming halos, their faces veiled, sit facing each other. Two similarly veiled figures stand behind them. These four must be identified as Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan, and Husayn, the primary holy figures of Shi'i Islam. The pavilion bears an inscription in white calligraphy on a red background:

چه غم دیوار امترا که دارد چون تو پشتیبان
چه باک از موج بحر آنرا که باشد نوح کشتیان

fig. 10 *The Iranians Mourn Farud and Jarira*. Detail of folio 236a; Mirza Muhammad Qabihat (artist); attributed to 'Abd al-'Aziz (act. first half of the 16th century) (painter). Painting 11¼ × 7⅝ in. (28.6 × 18.6 cm); page 18¾ × 12½ in. (47.3 × 31.8 cm). (1970.301.35)

The verse is widely recognized as having been taken from the prologue to the *Gulistan* of Sa'di, one of the most beloved of Persian poets. Wheeler Thackston translated the line as, "What worry can the wall of the community have when it has one like you [Muhammad] as a supporter? What fear of the waves of the sea harbors he who has Noah as his captain?"⁵² Some scholars read the text in a political light, with the reference to the ship's captain forming an implied parallel to the captain of the ship of (the Safavid) state, namely the shah.⁵³ In the absence of evidence that the metaphor of the state

as a ship, with the ruler as its captain, was in use in early sixteenth-century Iran, such claims must be viewed with skepticism. It is safer to conclude that the obvious applicability of this verse to a painting featuring a ship is logically prior to any alleged political or religious symbolism. Noah, it may be noted, is nowhere to be seen.

The ship's forecabin has no walls, but it does have a door-like entrance, above which is a panel with a mosaic pattern spelling out a second inscription arranged in square Kufic script. It may be deciphered as

گشاده باد بدولت همیشه این درگاه

The hemistich means, "May this doorway ever be open to good fortune." It was long popular as an apotropaic inscription placed over doorways in the Persian-speaking world, both real and pictorial. It is found, for example, in other paintings in this manuscript, such as *Rudaba's Maids Return to the Palace* (fol. 71b) and *Sindukht Comes to Sam Bearing Gifts* (fol. 84b).⁵⁴ It also appears as far abroad as the Ottoman lands, including at the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, where, among other places, it is written in gold over the entrance to the *Sünnet Odası* (Circumcision Chamber). The appearance of this inscription on the door of the "Ship of Shi'ism" is a testament to its popularity as well as to the predilection of Persian painters for placing scene-relevant texts in their paintings.

Sa'di's poetry also found its way into an inscription on folio 236a of Tahmasp's manuscript (fig. 10), *The Iranians Mourn Farud and Jarira*. Again, the citation is from the prologue to the *Gulistan*.⁵⁵ Written in a somewhat expansive hand, the white letters tumble across the blue panel inside the building where Farud and Jarira lie. The verse reads:

هر که آمد عمارتی نو ساخت
رفت و منزل بدگری پرداخت
آن دگر پخت همچنان هوسی
وین عمارت بسر نبرد کسی

Thackston translates the lines as: "Everyone who has come here has built a new structure; each departed, turning his dwelling over to another; / And that one also had desires and whims, but no one has completed this structure."⁵⁶ As a meditation on the transitoriness of life, the verse's appropriateness to a painting of a funerary gathering in a building is clear, and its well-turned philosophical expression gives deeper meaning to the anguished faces and gestures of those gathered to mourn the doomed couple.



Sa'di's poetic corpus was not the only one tapped for use in the inscriptions in this manuscript. The architecture in the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp also features verses taken from the poetry of Hafiz. The verse about the "emerald portico" and the goodness of the generous, found in the Green Palace of the 1524–25 *Khamsa* (fig. 3), seems to have been popular in early Safavid Iran, or at least in the royal atelier, as it also appears in several places in the Tahmasp *Shahnama*. Curiously, perhaps, none of these paintings contains elements resembling emerald porticos. The verse is found, for instance, in the painting on folio 183b (fig. 11), *Siyavush and Jarira Wedded*, on a panel spanning the interior of the pavilion in which Siyavush and Jarira sit.⁵⁷ The same verse is used again on the painting *Nushirvan Greets the Khaqan's Daughter*, on folio 633b (fig. 12). Here,

Hafiz's verse appears in a panel above Nushirvan's head. With its bold and sharp-edged white calligraphy, two letters high, on a black background with green arabesque tendrils and naturalistically colored flowers, the panel is visually striking in its architectural setting, the palette of which is mainly lapis blue and light brown or salmon pink (making the red of the two doors stand out strongly). Contrary to the wording of the verse, there is no emerald green on this portico, other than the border of the inscription panel. Perhaps the verse was merely intended as a reference to the generosity expected of rulers, including those in the story.

Hafiz's line appears once more on folio 83b (fig. 13), *Mihrab Vents His Anger upon Sindukht*, where it is displayed on the horizontal panel atop the palace in which a cross-looking Mihrab addresses Sindukht.

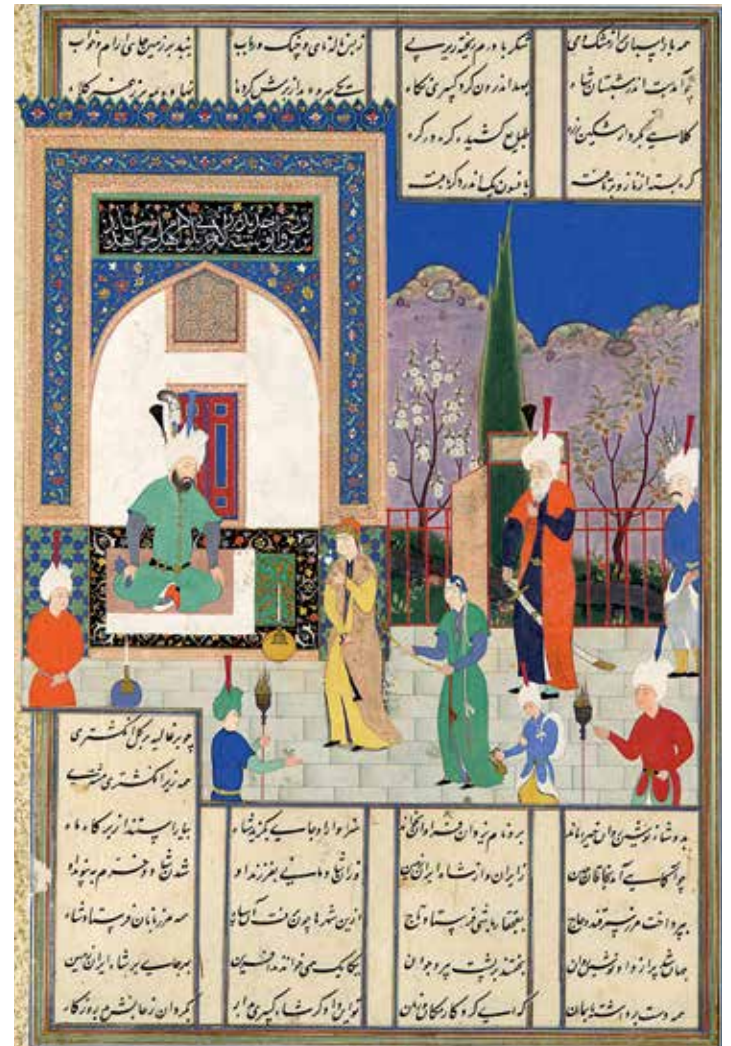


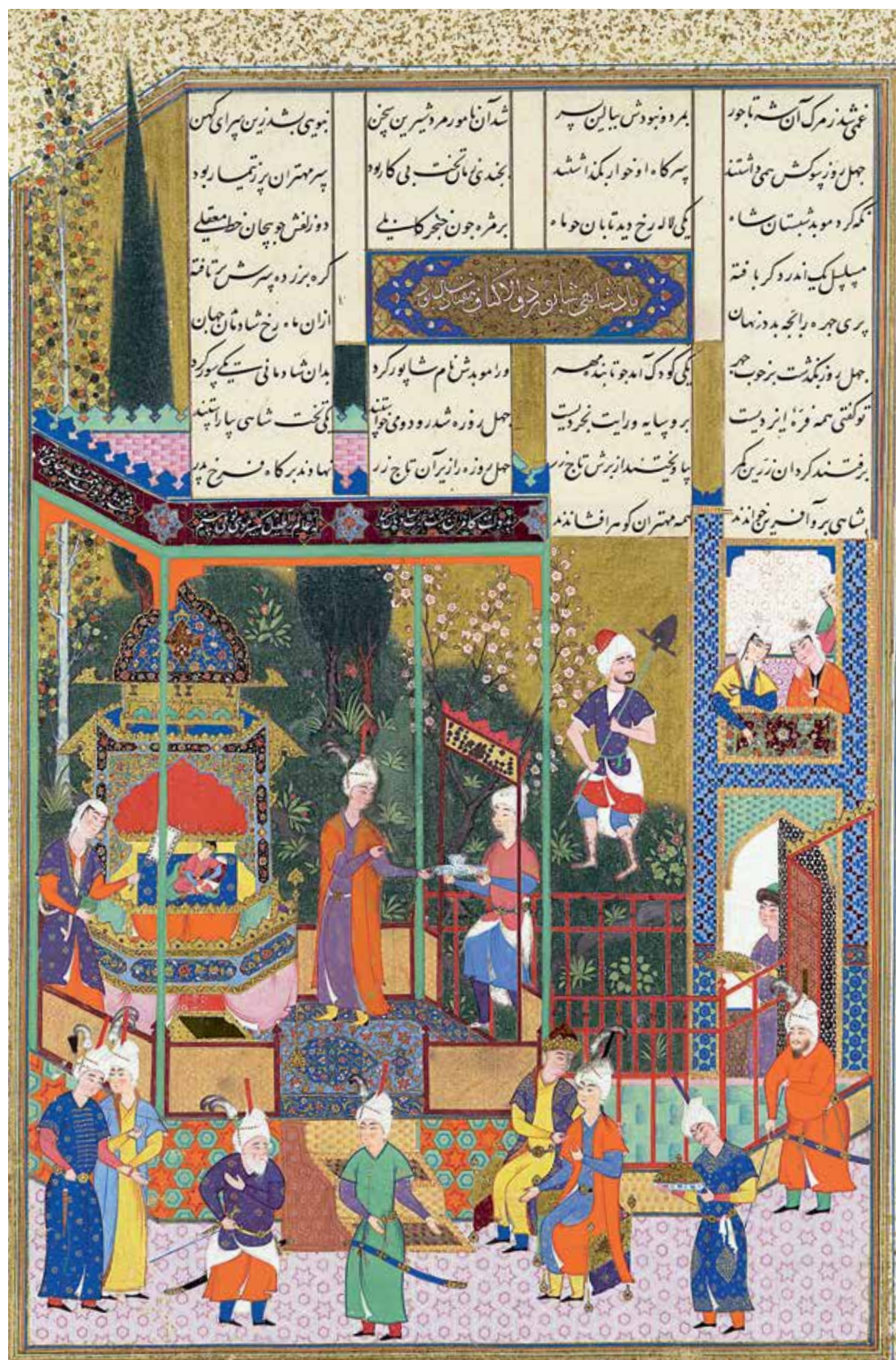
fig. 11 *Siyavush and Jarira Wedded*. Detail of folio 183b; attributed to 'Abd al-Vahhab (painter); Mir Musavvir (act. 1525–1560) (workshop director). Painting 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 8 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (28.3 × 21.7 cm); page 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (47.3 × 32.1 cm). (1970.301.27)

fig. 12 *Nushirvan Greets the Khaqan's Daughter*. Detail of folio 633b; attributed to Dust Muhammad (ca. 1490–ca. 1565) (artist). Painting 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 7 in. (18.7 × 17.8 cm); page 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (47.3 × 31.6 cm). (1970.301.70)

fig. 13 *Mihrab Vents His Anger upon Sindukht*. Detail of folio 83b; attributed to Qadimi (act. ca. 1525–1565) and attributed to 'Abd al-Vahhab (painters). Painting 10¹⁵/₁₆ × 7⁷/₈ in. (27.8 × 18.1 cm); page 18¹/₂ × 12⁷/₈ in. (47 × 31.6 cm). (1970.301.11)



fig. 14 Coronation of the Infant Shapur II. Detail of folio 538a; attributed to Muzaffar 'Ali (act. late 1520s–1570s; d. ca. 1576) (painter). Painting 13¼ × 8⅞ in. (33.7 × 22.1 cm); page 18⅞ × 12½ in. (47.1 × 31.8 cm). (1970.301.59)



In addition to this verse, the painting has a second Hafiz verse, in the palace's inner chamber. The verse comes from ghazal number 411:⁵⁸

شاه‌نشین چشم من تکیه‌گه خیال توست
جای دعاست شاه من بی تو مباد جای تو

My eye's royal seat is the resting-place of your image; /
It is a place of prayer—O my king, let not your place
be empty!

The relevance of the verse to its pictorial context is easier to discern, placed as it is in the building where the king is, in fact, seated.⁵⁹

Two verses of Hafiz are also found on the now-dispersed folio 89b of this manuscript, *Sam and Zal Welcomed into Kabul*.⁶⁰ The painting depicts the two men, accompanied by a host of horsemen dressed in typical Safavid garb, approaching a city, where they are welcomed by locals bearing gifts. A large inscription directly above the city's arched entrance has the first line of Hafiz's ghazal no. 397:⁶¹

ز در در آ و شبستان ما منور کن
هوای مجلس روحانیان معطر کن

Come in the door, and make our bed-chamber bright;
perfume the air of the assembly of lovers.

Above it, a panel over a window next to a balcony displays in smaller script the first line of ghazal no. 34:⁶²

رواق منظر چشم من آشیانه توست
کرم نما و فرود آ که خانه خانه توست

The portico of my eye's pupil is your dwelling place;
be generous and dismount, for my house is your house.⁶³

Both of these verses contain words appropriate to the scene, such as “door,” “portico,” and “dismount”—the last being the most clever inclusion, since Sam and Zal are shown on horseback.

It is possible to conclude, then, that Sa'di and Hafiz were valued as sources for the inscriptions on buildings in the *Shahnama* made for Shah Tahmasp. Notably, in contrast to the *Khamsa* of 1524–25 examined above, no verses by Jami are found in this manuscript. This is likely due to the fact that both Shah Isma'il and, after him, Shah Tahmasp were said to feel a strong antipathy toward Jami—Isma'il supposedly ordered Jami's tomb

razed, and Jami's nephew, the poet Hatifi, complained that Shah Isma'il had people go through manuscripts of poetry and change the dot in Jami's name wherever it occurred, so that instead of جامی (Jami) it read خامی (Khami), meaning “raw” or “immature.”⁶⁴ Tahmasp, for his part, reportedly banned the reading of Jami's poetry on pain of death, and was talked out of burning the poet's bones only at the last minute.⁶⁵ Both monarchs were apparently under the impression that Jami had written anti-Shi'ite verses. Jami, then, seems to have been persona non grata in Tabriz. In Herat, though, where he had been a figure of major importance,⁶⁶ he retained enough of his reputation that his verses were inserted in the paintings of a volume of Nizami.

One of the painting-internal inscriptions in the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp seems particularly mysterious at first. The painting on folio 538a (fig. 14) depicts the coronation of the Iranian king Shapur II, who took the throne as a mere infant upon the death of his father. True to the story, the painter has depicted the new shah as a tiny figure wearing a miniature crown. He sits on an elaborately decorated, multitiered, bejeweled throne on a hexagonal base. Some courtiers mill about as others come to bring gifts; meanwhile, the infant king's nurse waves a fan to keep him comfortable. The throne area is sheltered by a four-posted pavilion, the crenellated roof of which carries three inscription panels with white letters on a black background with flowering arabesques. Two of these panels bear generic expressions of good wishes for the new shah. The rightmost inscription reads:

بدولت کامران تخت عزت شادمان نشین

It may be translated as “Successful in your fortune, sit happily on the throne of glory!” The pendant to this inscription, in the leftmost panel, reads:

تخت دولت همیشه جای تو باد

May the throne of state [or: fortune] ever be yours!

While these two panels are germane to a coronation scene, it is the curious central panel that is of particular interest. The hemistich reads:

که عالم‌را طفیل یکسر موی تو می‌بینم

By itself, this means, “[For] I see that the world [is but] a speck, upon one strand of your hair.”⁶⁷ At first glance, this hemistich seems out of place: it is clearly the second half of a verse, but the panel to its right does not

contain the first half, nor are the other two inscriptions even recognizable as poetry, as distinct from simple good wishes. The meaning of the central hemistich, too, is difficult to understand, in the sense that the verse is an expression of mystical devotion, a meaning not appropriate to the infant in the painting. The logic of the inscription's presence becomes less mysterious when we consider that the third word in the hemistich, *tufayl*, can also be read as the Arabic diminutive form for the noun *tifl*, "child." A "little child" is exactly what Shapur is in this scene. Notably, this is not what the word means in its poetic context; the reader would likely be expected to see it in proximity to the infant king and, prompted by the visual context, make the connection himself. It appears that the designer of the page selected this verse for the punning visual link between an element of the iconography and the calligraphic decoration of the scene, adding an enjoyable jolt of recognition for those who noticed it.

This particular verse seems to have been known to royal artisans in Safavid times. Evidence comes

from a series of metal lamp stands of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The presence of this verse (with more of its original context) on Safavid metalwork was pointed out by A. S. Melikian-Chirvani in an early article, as well as in his seminal book on Iranian metalwork.⁶⁸ Melikian-Chirvani identified the author of this hemistich as the relatively obscure eastern Iranian poet Ahli Turshizi, who died in 1528.⁶⁹ The full poem reads:

چراغ اهل دل را روشن از روی تو می بینم
همه صاحبان را روی دل سوی تو می بینم
توئی سلطان عالم کم مبادا از سرت موئی
که عالم را طفیل یکسر موی تو می بینم

I see the lamp of the true believers is illuminated by your presence; / All the true believers, I see them turn their hearts toward you; / You, O Sultan of the World, may not even a single hair fall from your head; / [For] I see that the world [is but] a speck, upon one strand of your hair.⁷⁰

fig. 15a Engraved lamp stand with chevron pattern, dated A.H. 986/A.D. 1578–79. Attributed to Iran. Brass; cast, engraved, and inlaid with black and red pigment, H. 13¼ in. (33.7 cm); Diam. (base) 6⅝ in. (16.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1929 (29.53)

fig. 15b Engraved lamp stand with interlocking circles, probably 16th century. Attributed to Iran. Brass; cast, engraved, and inlaid with black compound, H. 11⅞ in. (30.1 cm); Diam. (base) 7¼ in. (18.4 cm); Diam. (rim) 4 in. (10.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Joseph W. Drexel, 1889 (89.2.197)



The lamp imagery Ahli Turshizi invokes is common in Sufi poetry, indeed in Islamic mysticism generally, but this particular poem, for reasons that remain unclear, became fashionable in the ornamentation of Safavid metalwork. It is found on a new type of metalwork that appeared during the mid-sixteenth century, the “pillar” candlestick or torch stand (*mash'al*), a tall cylindrical lamp with a spreading foot. The earliest dated example of such a torch stand, on which is engraved (among others) this verse from Ahli Turshizi, is a large (90 cm high) one in Mashhad dated 1539.⁷¹ The type, often adorned with Ahli Turshizi’s verse among others, remained popular in Safavid metalwork through the seventeenth century. The Museum holds three such examples; two are shown in figures 15a, b.⁷²

In addition to metalwork, Ahli Turshizi’s poetry found its way into other Safavid works of art. Two paintings from the sixteenth century, one in Los Angeles and the other in London, feature figures sitting on carpets on which a verse by Ahli Turshizi is legible—though in these instances the verse speaks, appropriately enough, of a carpet (*farsh*), not a lamp (*chiragh*).⁷³ Ahli Turshizi evidently held the respect of the principals in the workshops and ateliers of Safavid Iran, or at least enough to prompt the inclusion of his verses in objects that survive to this day.

The poetical quotation over the infant Shapur’s throne in the Tahmasp *Shahnama* (fig. 14), then, affords a glimpse into the world of early Safavid art and artists, linking poets, painters, and metalworkers. We can even appreciate the fortunes of a specific individual. Ahli Turshizi was from Khurasan, in eastern Iran, and spent the early part of his career in Herat at the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara. After that prince’s death, the poet moved west to Tabriz and ingratiated himself at the court of the newly established Safavid dynasty—a journey also made by numerous painters who joined the Herati style of painting to that of Tabriz.⁷⁴ If he died in 1528, and the Tahmasp *Shahnama* was begun in 1522 or 1524, Ahli Turshizi may well have lived to see a fragment of his writing included in the greatest illuminated manuscript project ever undertaken in Iran. Moreover, his verse lived on for many decades in the decoration of engraved brass candlesticks.

Thus far the poetic verses placed in these paintings may be seen as part of the aesthetic of connoisseurship and appreciative examination that prevailed in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries at the courts of Timurid and Safavid Iran. The inscriptions seem to have been inserted as details that linked them to a broader

sphere of culture with which the consumers of the manuscripts would be expected to be familiar, including the works of great Persian poets and more recent figures like Ahli Turshizi. The domain of references inhabited by these inscriptions was well established and circumscribed. One last painting, though, may go beyond the boundaries of literary recognition and touch on current events. This is folio 80b of the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp (fig. 16).

The subject is “Manuchihr Welcomes Sam but Orders War upon Mihrab.” Manuchihr, the ruler of Iran, and the paladin Sam sit conversing and enjoying wine and music in a palace with four prominent text panels. The largest of these is the frieze at the top. It includes two inscriptions, one in large white letters and a smaller one in gold letters woven into the verticals of the former. The gold letters are in Arabic, and are excerpted from the Qur’an, verse 2:127:⁷⁵ “And remember Abraham and Isma’il raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): ‘[Our Lord!] Accept (this service) from us: For Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-knowing.’”⁷⁶ The white letters among which the Qur’an verse is nestled are also in Arabic and read:

تَيْمَنًا بِاسْمِ الْمَلِكِ الْعَلِيِّ الْأَعْلَى الْعَالِيِّ الْمُتَعَالَى

Auspiciously in the name of the supernal, the supreme, the sublime, the superlatively divine king.⁷⁷

The inscription is remarkable not merely for the cascade of fulsome adjectives, but for the fact that all four of them are based on the Arabic root ‘-l-y, from which is derived the name ‘Ali, First Imam of Shi‘i Islam and the figure to whom the early Safavids, Shah Isma’il in particular, were passionately devoted. The play on the letters ‘-l-y would have been immediately apparent to a contemporary Safavid reader and undoubtedly interpreted as an expression of Shi‘i piety.

Strikingly, however, it can be shown that this formula was known to and used by Sunnis as well, in fact long before the Safavid dynasty even existed. It is found atop the mihrab of the Green Mosque in Iznik, Turkey, albeit in slightly truncated form (the term “auspiciously” and one of the adjectives have been left out). The Green Mosque bears a plaque stating that it was built in A.H. 780–794 (A.D. 1378–1392). The founder was Hayreddin Pasha, also known as Çandarlı Kara Halil, grand vizier to the Ottoman sultan Murad I; when Hayreddin Pasha died in 1387, his son finished the mosque.⁷⁸ The Ottomans, famously, were staunch



fig. 16 Manuchihr
Welcomes Sam but Orders
War upon Mihrab. Detail
of folio 80b. Attributed to
'Abd al-'Aziz (act. first half of
the 16th century) (painter).
Painting 11 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (28.1 ×
18.4 cm); 18 $\frac{9}{16}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
(47.1 × 31.8 cm)

Sunnis, to whom excessive devotion to ‘Ali was anathema; it was one of the official grounds on which they later excoriated the Safavids and justified their wars with them, not to mention their oppression of the Safavids’ supporters and coreligionists in Anatolia. Nor, of course, is ‘Ali the one to whom any inscription over a mihrab would be devoted. To the Sunni Ottomans, it seems, the supernal king invoked by this formula was God. The specifics of Hayreddin Pasha, his own ideological context, and his patronage of this mosque require further investigation.

Returning to the painting in the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp, the juxtaposition of the name Isma‘il in one inscription with the multiple plays on the name ‘Ali in its pair quite possibly indicates a connection to the original patron of the manuscript.⁷⁹ As mentioned above, it is thought that this *Shahnama* was commissioned in 1522 by Shah Isma‘il I as a lavish gift for young Prince Tahmasp. If so, Isma‘il was at once the founder of the “house” of the Safavid dynasty as well as the one responsible for the existence of Manuchihr’s “house” on this painted page. His affinity for, indeed self-identification with, the Imam ‘Ali⁸⁰ makes the juxtaposition of the two inscriptions even more resonant.

The other inscriptions in Manuchihr’s palace are united around the theme of good wishes for the king. Along the wall of central space where Sam and Manuchihr sit is an inscription in gold on blue that reads:

شاهای بقای عمر تو بادا هزار سال و اقبال در پناه تو بادا هزار سال
سالی هزار ماه و مهی صد هزار روز و روزی هزار ساعت و ساعت هزار سال

O king, may your life last a thousand years, and may you spend those thousand years as the shelter of good fortune; may every year last a thousand months, and every month a hundred thousand days, and every day a thousand hours, and every hour a thousand years!

At right, three attendants wearing Safavid baton-turbans look through a gated arch. The panel above it contains the following couplet:

جهانت بکام و فلك یار باد
جهان آفرینت نگهدار باد

May the world be as you desire, and the heavens your friend; may the Creator of the world preserve you!⁸¹

Finally, at left, an archer and his companion stand within a doorway topped by a panel with another couplet:

بکام تو بادا سپهر بلند
ز چشم بدانت میادا گزند

May the celestial sphere be as you desire; may the evil eye cause you no harm!

Unlike most of the other inscriptions considered here, these three do not appear to have been chosen for the clever juxtaposition of a single word with a clearly discernible referent in the painting. The panels instead possess a thematic unity unusual in groups of image-internal texts: they are all good wishes directed at the king. It is conceivable that all the inscriptions are intended to be read as existing in the world of the painting, where the king Manuchihr sits surrounded by texts inviting the beneficence of God and Fate. Alternatively, however, and more in keeping with the evidence from other paintings, these inscriptions may be intended for the reader, and their consistent message of wishing auspicious fortune may be meant for the benefit of the beholder.

Who might this have been? Given the purported chronology of the manuscript, the painting may have been under way in 1524, when Shah Isma‘il died and Tahmasp ascended the throne. As noted by Eleanor Sims,⁸² the only dated painting in this *Shahnama* is found well into the manuscript, on folio 516b, where an inscription mentioning the year A.H. 934/(A.D. 1527–28) appears above the arch over the lovemaking couple in *Ardashir and the Slave Girl Gulnar*.⁸³ The prominent placement of Isma‘il’s name on folio 80b (fig. 16), in context of having “raised ‘the House,’” might then mark the passing of the dynastic founder and originator of the manuscript itself, while the good wishes to the shah in the other inscriptions would be for the benefit of the newly installed young Tahmasp, a known bibliophile and, at least while he was young, enthusiastic patron of his court atelier. The inscriptions would then not be aimed at a generic or anonymous reader, but at the actual boy-king who frequented the workshop (in fact, a mobile studio in a tent) where his masterpiece was taking shape under the hands of his artists.⁸⁴ A nearby page in the manuscript (the aforementioned folio 77b) similarly features the Qur’an citation with Isma‘il’s name. Might these two pages mark the point at which the throne passed from the original patron of the manuscript to his bibliophile son?

CONCLUSION

Classical Persian manuscript painting was, at root, an art for aristocrats. Those who moved in princely circles were expected to develop skills of observation, recognition, and connoisseurship to go along with the privilege they enjoyed of viewing these exquisite and inherently private objects. Paintings made in a context of such expectations are, first and foremost, demonstrations of virtuoso skill, made for people who could appreciate details like the inclusion of an apposite verse.

The assumption of such connoisseurial appreciation may even have formed the basis for a kind of in-group amusement. Simpson, in her discussion of a minuscule signature she discovered in a later manuscript, hypothesizes that in hiding his signature, the artist was playing a game with his patron, possibly anticipating that he would “let out a great eureka of astonishment” when he discovered the inscription.⁸⁵ Those contemporaries who were lucky enough to turn the pages of the 1524–25 *Khamsa* of Nizami or the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp may or may not have cried “Eureka,” but it is surely plausible to think that a smile of recognition crossed their faces when they noticed, embedded in a painted building, a line from a poem they knew, beautifully written and judiciously chosen for the scene in which it was found.

This play with texts within images is on full display in the peak flowering of the classical style of Persian painting under the late Timurids and early Safavids, and the two manuscripts examined here contain many of the finest examples. The tendency continued for a while under Shah Tahmasp, as can be seen in manuscripts like the Freer Jami and the *Khamsa* made for Tahmasp in 1539–43. After that ruler’s “repentance” and concomitant rejection of the arts, the conditions under which such exercises could flourish were lost as artists left his court and went to work for patrons with different sets of standards and expectations. As the decades passed, the particular combination of literary sophistication and painterly skill that gave rise to the interweaving of poetry and painting, the play with expectation and recognition, faded. Architectural inscriptions continued to appear for a while in Bukharan painting, but they never became part of Mughal or Ottoman painting, while Safavid painting of the seventeenth century developed in different directions as well. Manuscripts like the *Khamsa* of Nizami and the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp examined here are thus left to us as traces of an especially rich period in Islamic art history.

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NOTES

- 1 For example, the painting dubbed the *Wedding Night of Humay and Humayun* from the *Khamsa* of Khwaju Kirmani made in Baghdad in 1396 includes an inscription in Arabic praising the building, another inscription in Persian, and a signature by the artist; see Grabar 2009, pl. 32, and Sims 2002, pl. 114.
- 2 For example, see the inscription atop a building in a manuscript of the *Gulistan* of Sa'di now in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (Sims 2002, pl. 52), or the inscription running along the length of the fortress walls in the painting *Isfandiyar Slays Arjasp in the Brazen Hold* in the Baysunghur *Shahnama* (Gulistan Palace Museum, Tehran, MS 716; *ibid.*, pl. 90); for more on this understudied manuscript, see Hillenbrand 2010.
- 3 See the reproductions on the University of Cambridge Shahnama Project website, <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/card/cemanuscript:179045746>, or on the University of Cambridge Digital Library, <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-RAS-00239-00001/1>.
- 4 The manuscript is dispersed, but images from the first half may be seen on the University of Cambridge Shahnama Project website, <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/card/cemanuscript:996690996>.
- 5 Sims 2002, p. 57.
- 6 See, for example, the double-page frontispiece reproduced in Grabar 2009, pls. 24, 25.
- 7 See Roxburgh 2005, no. 201 (a double-page painting from the *Divan* of Sultan Husayn Bayqara including a lengthy inscription beginning on a pavilion and continued on a tent on the following page) and no. 205 (a painting from the *Khamsa* of 'Ali Shir Nava'i depicting a learned gathering, with a couplet from Hafiz over the arch of the building in the garden in which the men sit).
- 8 As noted in Sims 2002, p. 57.
- 9 Grabar 2000, p. 136.
- 10 See Wood 2002, pp. 165–92, especially pp. 187ff.
- 11 Simpson 1998b. See Simpson 1998a, especially p. 108, where she briefly discusses the architectural inscriptions in a Freer Jami painting (Freer | Sackler, 46.12, fol. 120a).
- 12 Richard Ettinghausen in Chelkowski 1975, p. viii.
- 13 A detailed description of the entire manuscript may be found in Williams Jackson and Yohannon 1914, pp. 58–67.
- 14 This information is taken from *ibid.*, pp. 64–67.
- 15 As suggested in *ibid.*, p. 65.
- 16 See Chelkowski 1975, pp. 69ff.
- 17 See *ibid.*, pp. 106–9.
- 18 My translation makes slight corrections to that given in Williams Jackson and Yohannon 1914, p. 66: “My eye had slight ambition and even that has been washed away by tears. I have therefore made this house for thee plain white throughout.” The word for “melancholy” is the same as the word for “black” (*sawda*), which may also be a play on how much black the painter includes in the “White” Palace.
- 19 See Chelkowski 1975, pp. 95–100.
- 20 My translation improves slightly upon that given in Williams Jackson and Yohannon 1914, p. 66: “The foundation of this turquoise dome they have laid and have made a place to entertain the lovers together.”
- 21 See Chelkowski 1975, pp. 83–88.
- 22 This is the number under which it is listed in Hafiz Shirazi 2013, as well as at <http://ganjoor.net/Hafiz/ghazal/sh179>.
- 23 In some versions this verse begins *darin* rather than *barin*; the variation (“in this” versus “on this”) makes no difference to the meaning. My translation slightly alters the one in Williams Jackson and Yohannon 1914, p. 66. Dick Davis translates the line much more elegantly (2013, p. 113): “In words of gold they’ve written / on the emerald sky, / ‘Only compassion does not die / but stays like this.’”
- 24 See Chelkowski 1975, pp. 73–79.
- 25 Williams Jackson and Yohannon 1914, pp. 65–66. This line is cited as an example of the poetic use of the word *manzil* in Dehkhoda’s great Persian dictionary; see <http://www.parsi.wiki/fa/wiki/topicdetail/251f2c686759460284a73c8735a8313b>.
- 26 See Chelkowski 1975, pp. 49–65.
- 27 Soucek 1975, p. 18.
- 28 Williams Jackson and Yohannon 1914, p. 65.
- 29 Afsahzad 1999, vol. 1, p. 213 (Jami’s *Fatiha al-Shabab*, ghazal no. 44).
- 30 Soucek (1975, p. 18) notes that the verse’s theme is unrelated to Nizami’s text and “appears rather to be a commentary on the painting itself,” a judgment with which I concur.
- 31 See Chelkowski 1975, pp. 79–83.
- 32 Williams Jackson and Yohannon 1914, p. 66.
- 33 “Praised” and “laudable” are, indeed, the first two meanings listed under this word in Steingass’s definitive dictionary of Persian, only then followed by “a proper name” (Steingass 1930, p. 1190).
- 34 Soucek 1975, p. 19.
- 35 I am indebted to Wheeler Thackston for his help with this line.
- 36 Christie’s London 1988, pp. 26–27, lot 8.
- 37 The first word has been changed from “[I have] heard” to “[It is] written.” This appears to create a metrical problem, which the scribe may not have realized.
- 38 Mani, the historical founder of the Manichean religion in the third century A.D., was famous in Islamic lore for his extraordinary skill as a painter. This verse also appears on the base of Faridun’s throne on the now-dispersed folio 35a of the same *Shahnama* (Falk 1979, pp. 16–17, no. 3).
- 39 According to Steingass 1930, p. 811, Taraz is the “name of a city on the confines of China, celebrated for the comeliness of its inhabitants and the excellence of its musk.”
- 40 For the verse, see <http://www.nosokhan.com/library/Topic/1MNP>, accessed October 1, 2017, part of an online edition of the *Kashkul* of Shaykh Baha’i, a seventeenth-century compendium of anecdotes and verses. For background on Kamal al-Din Isma’il Isfahani, including extensive references, see Durand-Guédy 2010.
- 41 See Chelkowski 1975, pp. 21–45.
- 42 وقد واقع كتابة هذه الكتابة في رجب سنة ٩٣١
- 43 Williams Jackson and Yohannon 1914, p. 65.
- 44 See, for example, Soucek’s entry in Ekhtiar et al. 2011, p. 198.
- 45 British Library, Or. 6810, fol. 190a; reproduced in Grabar 2000, p. 106, fig. 55, and, on a larger scale, in Grabar 2009, p. 111. The scene is taken from the tale of the princess in the White Palace; see Chelkowski 1975, p. 108.
- 46 This is the prevailing theory, first expressed in Welch 1976 and, in greater detail, in Dickson and Welch 1981. Sheila Canby suggests (in Ekhtiar et al. 2011, p. 203) that Shah Isma’il, whose descent into the alcoholism that killed him was terminal by 1522, would not have ordered a manuscript like this *Shahnama*, and that the book was instead commissioned by Tahmasp upon his accession to the throne in 1524, perhaps at the urging of his painting teacher, Sultan Muhammad.
- 47 See Dickson and Welch 1981. See also Canby 2011, a deluxe facsimile produced by The Met to commemorate the epic’s

- millennial anniversary; a smaller version was published as well (Canby 2014).
- 48 Thompson and Canby 2003, p. 84.
- 49 The three are folios 174a (*Kai Kavus Upbraids Siyavush in a Letter*, MMA 1970.301.25), 535a (*Hurmuzd I's Last Testament to Prince Bahram I*, MMA 1970.301.58), and 602b (*Nushirvan Promulgates His Reforms*, MMA 1970.301.68). Some of the most ambitious renderings of architectural structures in the manuscript, such as the city of Kirman in the painting *Haftvad and the Worm* (now in the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto) and the tyrant's palace in *The Nightmare of Zahhak* (now in the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha), also have no spaces left for any text.
- 50 Eleanor Sims also observes the effect of a hectic production schedule, noticing that "Towards the middle of the volume the need to produce many illustrations at great speed appears to have dictated a pictorial formula," resulting in some "compositionally banal, even boring" paintings. Sims 2002, p. 64.
- 51 For a detailed analysis of this painting and of others depicting the same subject, see Shani 2006.
- 52 Thackston 2008, p. 2.
- 53 Shani 2006, pp. 28–29.
- 54 For the former, see <https://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452115>; for the latter, see Christie's London 1988, p. 20, lot 5.
- 55 See <https://ganjoor.net/saadi/golestan/dibache/>.
- 56 Thackston 2008, p. 5.
- 57 A second prominent inscription, over a doorway right of center, reads simply, "Happiness and health to its owner."
- 58 See <https://ganjoor.net/Hafiz/ghazal/sh411/>.
- 59 There are two more smaller inscriptions at the right, forming sections of the decorated area above the door in which a bearded guard is standing. They read:
- در خزانه رحمة بقفل حكمة بود
زمان دولت ما درسيد در واشد
- The door of the treasury of mercy was padlocked with wisdom. / The time of our good fortune arrived, and the door was opened.
- (I thank Wheeler Thackston for untangling this inscription for me.) The verses are not by Hafiz, and seem to be anonymous. They were likely chosen for their reference to a door, and perhaps as well for the satisfaction they offered to the reader who could decipher these difficult inscriptions.
- 60 The painting is now in a private collection, but was reproduced on the cover of Falk 1979.
- 61 See <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh397/>.
- 62 See <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh34/>.
- 63 This last line also appears in another classic early Safavid manuscript, the *Divan* of Hafiz in the Harvard Art Museums (Arthur M. Sackler Museum, 1999.300.2), where it is used to illustrate a painting featuring an "Incident in a Mosque."
- 64 Jamali 1997, p. 72.
- 65 Dickson 1958, p. 190.
- 66 Jami enjoyed tremendous prestige and influence in the last decades of his life, becoming virtual ruler (as part of a "triumvirate" including also Sultan Husayn Bayqara and 'Ali Shir Nava'i) of Khurasan; see Losensky 2008.
- 67 Translation given by Denise-Marie Teece in Ekhtiar et al. 2011, p. 237, no. 163.
- 68 Melikian-Chirvani 1974, especially p. 557; Melikian-Chirvani 1982, pp. 326–27, no. 148.
- 69 For a brief entry on Ahli Turshizi, see Browne 1924, pp. 233–34. There is a short mention of the poet, with sample verses, in the early Safavid anthology compiled by Shah Tahmasp's brother Sam Mirza; see Dastgirdi 1935, pp. 107–9.
- 70 Translation given by Teece in Ekhtiar et al. 2011, p. 237, no. 163.
- 71 Melikian-Chirvani 1982, p. 263.
- 72 The third object is MMA 91.1.573.
- 73 A painting attributed to the painter Mir Sayyid 'Ali, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.90.141.1). *Barbad Playing before Khusraw*, in the *Khamsa* of Nizami made for Shah Tahmasp in 1539–43, The British Library, London (Or. 2265, fol. 77b); Soudavar 2008, pp. 265–66. Sam Mirza's entry on Ahli Khurasani, as he calls the poet, includes this verse among the examples provided (in Dastgirdi 1935, pp. 107–9).
- 74 As argued in Welch 1976 and Dickson and Welch 1981.
- 75 I have used the Yusuf Ali translation. The inscription actually omits the word "Our Lord!" (*rabbana*), for which reason I have put it in square brackets. The inscription also omits the particle *'innaka*. Neither of these omissions materially affects the meaning.
- 76 The same Qur'anic verse appears in folio 77b, *Mihrab Hears of Rudabeh's Folly*, cited above; on folio 77b it is fairly prominent, being the topmost inscription on the page, but it is not intertwined with any other inscription.
- 77 I thank Wheeler Thackston for help with the beginning of this inscription. The rest of it is taken from the translation provided in Dickson and Welch 1981 (accompanying vol. 2, pl. 66). See Wood 2002, p. 216.
- 78 See "Yesil Cami, Iznik, Turkey," Archnet.org, accessed October 1, 2017, <https://archnet.org/sites/2039>.
- 79 See Wood 2002, p. 200.
- 80 For Isma'il's self-identification with 'Ali and the ways in which Tahmasp dealt with his messianic inheritance, see Babayan 2002, especially chap. 9.
- 81 The same couplet appears on folio 86b, *The Shah's Wise Men Approve of Zal's Marriage*, on the king's throne.
- 82 Sims 2002, p. 63.
- 83 The painting, now in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (MSS 1030.8, fol. 516b), is reproduced in Thompson and Canby 2003, p. 102, no. 4.18.
- 84 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
- 85 Simpson 1998a, p. 113. She also aptly notes that the artist may have been "indulging in one-upmanship" with another artist, exactly the kind of in-group self-referentiality characteristic of this kind of aesthetic.

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