# Making the Invisible Visible

## Text-Image Relations in an Illustrated Manuscript of Niẓāmī's *Khamsah* from Turkmen Shiraz (Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, MS 4715)[1]

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The study of text-image relationships in illustrated manuscripts of the Islamic world is still in its infancy. Indeed, for a very long time, the majority of historians of Islamic art had only a limited knowledge of the languages of Islamic cultures and saw no interest in studying them and the corresponding texts in any depth. For instance, in 1953, Bishr Fares claimed the following about one of the first extant illustrated Arabic manuscripts, the famous *Kitāb al-Tiryāq* dated Rabīʿ I 595/January 1199 at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter BnF):[2]

> "Je me désintéresse totalement de l'objet de ce traité, n'étant point spécialiste de la pharmacopée ni de la thérapeutique. Je suis loin de regretter mon incompétence, car l'histoire de la médecine arabe n'avancerait guère et la science grecque se trouverait amoindrie si l'on s'avisait de prêter une attention spéciale au texte"[3] ("I have no interest whatsoever in the subject of this treatise, as I am not a specialist in pharmacopoeia or therapy. I am far from regretting my incompetence, because the history of Arab medicine would make little progress and Greek science would be weakened if special attention were paid to the text").

More recently, Marianne Barrucand was adamant that, in the *Maqāmāt* of the 13th century, "la relation entre texte et miniatures d'une manière générale est ici des plus distantes, et ni les images ni leur architecture n'ajoutent à la compréhension

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[2] BnF, Arabe 2964. For recent publications cf.: *Kitāb al-Diryāq (Thériaque de Paris)* [Fac-simile edition with commentaries]. Sansepolcro: Aboca Museum Edizioni, 2009; Micheau, Françoise: "La calligraphie du Kitāb al-Diryāq de la Bibliothèque nationale de France: Entre sens et esthétique". In: *Les non-dits du nom. Onomastique et documents en terres d'Islam. Mélanges offerts à Jacqueline Sublet*. Eds. Christian Müller – Muriel Roiland-Rouabah. Damascus/Beirut: IFPO, 2013, pp. 29–52; *Gallica*: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8422960m.r=arabe%202964?rk =21459;2 (last viewed 21. 10. 2021).
[3] Fares, Bishr: *Le livre de la Thériaque. Manuscrit arabe à peintures de la fin du XIIe siècle conservé à la Bibliotheque nationale de Paris*. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1953, p. 4.

du texte littéraire"[4] ("The relationship between text and miniatures in general is very distant here, and neither the images nor their architecture add to the understanding of the literary text"). Still more recently and in a volume dedicated to the study of *Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, Oleg Grabar came to the conclusion that: "to the historian of art the Arabic of texts is secondary, merely an excuse for illustration and decoration," hence proposing that "paintings [...] be classified together with other contemporary creativity, metalwork for example. Or else the illustrations and the decoration could be identified through the quality of its manufacture [...]. We can indeed apply different categories of thought for paintings in manuscripts than the ones we use for texts."[5] In other words, he argued for a clear distinction, if not a separation, between text and image.

These few quotes illustrate the fact that in Arabic and more generally speaking Islamic illustrated manuscripts, the majority of researchers were only interested in the paintings. They did not hesitate to dissociate them from their original context in the codex, either physically, by dismantling and dispersing the volumes — such as the well-known case of the so-called "Demotte *Shāhnāmah*" and many others — or virtually, by publishing only reproductions of the images, without the text, or obviously conceptually by excluding the text and the relations between image and text from their analyses. Fortunately, this approach, which is reductive to say the least, is beginning to subside. In this article, I would like to start with a brief historiographical and methodological review of the study of text-image relations in Islamic illustrated manuscripts before proposing a case study about text-image relations in an illustrated manuscript of Niẓāmī's *Khamsah* from Turkmen Shiraz (Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, MS 4715).

## The Study of Text-Image Relations in Islamic Illustrated Manuscripts

In the late 1960s, scholars began to address the issue of the pictorial or illustrative cycle, or iconographic program of a given text with regard to the greatest classics of Persian poetry and painting. The first studies focused on the *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawsī.[6] As for the *Khamsah* of Niẓāmī, following Priscilla Soucek's PhD on the earliest illustrated codices,[7] Ivan Stchoukine, then Larisa Dodhudoeva published lists of illustrations, the first referring to holdings of the Topkapı Palace Library

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[4] Barrucand, Marianne: "Les représentations d'architectures dans la miniature islamique en orient du début du XIIIe au début du XIVe siècle". *Cahiers archéologiques* 34 (1986), pp. 119–141, here p. 121.

[5] Grabar, Oleg: "What Does 'Arab Painting' Mean?". In: *Arab Painting. Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*. Ed. Anna Contadini. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007, pp. 17–22, here p. 22.

[6] Norgren, Jill – Edward Davis (eds.): *Preliminary Index of Shahnameh Illustrations*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies, 1969.

[7] Soucek, Priscilla: "Illustrated Manuscripts of Nizami's Khamsah: 1386–1482". [PhD dissertation, unpublished]. New York University, 1971. Unfortunately, Soucek's dissertation was not available to me.

(in 1977), the second to a corpus of 245 volumes from the 14th to the 19th century (in 1985).[8] The constitution of such corpora could develop on a much larger scale thanks to the possibilities offered by digital technologies, which enabled the creation of large-scale databases. The most comprehensive database available so far is the Cambridge "Shahnama Project", which records ca. 1.500 manuscripts and single pages, 15.000 images and 20.000 paintings from all over the world, "accessible with a few clicks of a mouse."[9]

These tools obviously open up promising perspectives for the study of illustrated manuscripts and text-image relations, even if such studies are still quite rare[10] and are often limited to two main approaches or questions: First, a statistical approach that consists in inventorying the illustrated episodes and classifying them according to their frequency, as popular, rare or unique;[11] and second a diachronic and/or synchronic study of selected iconographic themes.[12] These approaches have the advantage of taking the text into account, and even starting from it, allowing for comparisons between manuscripts, but they also present the risk of not paying enough attention to each individual manuscript to the point of losing sight of the internal logic of each volume, which, in my opinion, is another way of virtually dismantling the manuscripts. However, each manuscript is, by definition, unique.[13] All studies that have been carried out on coherent corpora such as *Kalīla wa Dimna*, the *Shāhnāmah* or the *Khamsah*, have demonstrated

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[8] Stchoukine, Ivan: *Les peintures des manuscrits de la "Khamsah" de Niẓâmî au Topkapi Sarayı Müzesi d'Istanbul*. Paris: Geuthner, 1977; Dodhudoeva, Larisa: Поэмы Низами в средневековой миниатюрной живописи [Poèmy Nizami v Srednevekovoj Miniatjurnoj Živopisi]. Moscow, 1985. These lists have been supplemented by: De Blois, François: *Persian Literature. A Bio-Bibliographical Survey Begun by the Late C. A. Storey*, Vol. V, 2. London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1994, pp. 449–479.

[9] *Cambridge University Library–Shahnama Project*: http://shahnama.lib.cam.ac.uk/ (last viewed 21. 10. 2021).

[10] With the exception of the *Shāhnāmah*. Cf. notably the publications that stemmed from the "Shahnama Project": Hillenbrand, Robert (ed.): *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004; Brend, Barbara – Charles Melville (eds.): *Epic of the Persian Kings. The Art of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh*. Cambridge/London, 2010; and the series *Shahnama Studies*: three volumes edited by Charles Melville and Gabrielle R. van den Berg between 2011 and 2017.

[11] For instance: Mehran, Farhad: "Frequency Distribution of Illustrated Scenes in Persian Manuscripts". *Student* 2, 4 (1998), pp. 351–379; Graves, Margaret S.: "Words as Pictures: The British Library's 1386–8 Khamsah of Nizami, and the Development of an Illustrative Tradition". *Persica* 18 (2002), pp. 17–48.

[12] For instance: Lukens Swietochowski, Marie: "Some Aspects of the Persian Miniature Painter in Relation to his Texts". In: *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East*. Ed. Peter Chelkowski. Salt Lake City 1974, pp. 111–131; Barrucand 1986; Abdullaeva, Firuza: "Kingly Flight: Nimrud, Kay Kavus, Alexander, or Why the Angel has the Fish". *Persica* 23 (2009–2010), pp. 1–29.

[13] "Le manuscrit est le domaine de l'un". (The manuscript is the domain of one), Bourgain, Pascale: "L'édition des manuscrits". In: *Histoire de l'edition française* 1. *Le livre conquérant. Du Moyen Âge au milieu du XVIIe siècle*. Eds. Roger Chartier – Henri-Jean Martin. Paris, 1989, p. 53, quoted by Cheikh-Moussa, Abdallah. "Considérations sur la littérature d'*Adab*. Présence et effets de la voix et autres problèmes connexes". *Al-Qantara* 27, 1 (2006), pp. 25–62, here p. 37, n. 44; cf. also p. 49.

that, in spite of certain phenomena such as the existence of compositions and motifs that are repeated from one manuscript to another[14] or of stylistically homogeneous schools or groups, with very rare exceptions, which, I believe, require specific analysis, no two codices are identical. The choice of pictorial cycles seems to be unique to each volume; and the same episode is almost never represented twice in exactly the same way. In other words, exact copies seem to be the exception and variations the rule.[15] Therefore, and as formulated by Sandrine Hériché-Pradeau and Maud Pérez-Simon, "each work founds its own code [...], it is also necessary to read a given iconographic program in relation to a given other."[16]

In her various publications, Anna Contadini has defended the importance of considering the illustrated manuscript as "a consciously designed whole."[17] In her monograph on the only extant copy of *Kitāb Naʿt al-Ḥayawān* now at the British Library,[18] she analysed absolutely every aspect of the codex: its physical composition — paper, ink, pigments, scripts and condition; its text, which she defined as a new, anonymous compilation, replacing it into a complex intertextual network; and finally its paintings, i. e. double-frontispieces and illustrations, which she examined in relation to the text as well as in comparison to the existing

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[14] Lukens Swietochowski 1974; Titley, Norah: "Persian Miniature Painting: The Repetition of Compositions during the Fifteenth Century". In: *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für Iranische Kunst und Archäologie, München, 7.–10. September 1976.* Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1979, pp. 471–491; Adamova, Adel T.: "Repetition of Compositions in Manuscripts: The *Khamsa* of Nizami in Leningrad". In: *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century.* Eds. Lisa Golombek – Maria Subtelny. Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 67–75; Bağcı, Serpil: "Old Images for New Texts and Contexts: Wandering Images in Islamic Book Painting". *Muqarnas* 21: *Essays in Honor of J. M. Rogers.* Eds. Doris Behrens-Abouseif – Anna Contadini (2004), pp. 21–32; Tanındı, Zeren: "Repetition of Illustrations in the Topkapı Palace and Diez Albums". In: *The Diez Albums. Contexts and Contents.* Eds. Julia Gonnella – Friederike Weis – Christoph Rauch. Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 163–193.

[15] In fact, this is what emerges even from the studies mentioned in the previous footnote. Cf. also, for instance, Adahl, Karin: *A Khamsa of Nizami of 1439. Origin of the Miniatures, a Presentation and Analysis.* Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell Int., 1981, p. 39; Ben Azzouna, Nourane: "What is a Painter in Medieval Islam? Reflections Based on Medieval Illustrated Manuscripts of *Kalīla wa Dimna*". In: *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* VII. Ed. Martina Müller-Wiener. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag 2021, pp. 7–23. The reasons behind the repetition of compositions and motifs are multiple: economic; educational, for the training of the painters; or performative, in order "to demonstrate his skills in repeating models with varying degrees of exactitude. [... I]nvent new compositions [... and] deal with subjects not depicted before," and, for the viewer, "to 'recognize' a favorite image in a new and unexpected form". (Adamova 1992, pp. 69, 74.)

[16] Hériché-Pradeau, Sandrine – Maud Pérez-Simon: "Du texte à l'image et de l'image au texte: en pratique et en théorie". In: *Quand l'image relit le texte: Regards croisés sur les manuscrits médiévaux.* Eds. Sandrine Hériché-Pradeau – Maud Pérez-Simon. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2013, pp. 11–38, here pp. 25–26, translated by the author.

[17] Contadini, Anna: "The Manuscript as a Whole". In: *Arab Painting. Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts.* Ed. Anna Contadini. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007, pp. 3–16. The quote here is from: Contadini, Anna: *A World of Beasts. A Thirteenth-Century Illustrated Arabic Book on Animals: The Kitāb Naʿt al-Ḥayawān in the Ibn Bakhtishūʿ Tradition.* Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 9.

[18] Contadini, *A World of Beasts.*

typological, compositional, iconographic and stylistic pictorial traditions. This very detailed study allowed her to draw highly solid conclusions about the date, provenance, patronage and milieu of production of this *unicum*. As Anna Caiozzo puts it, this book can be regarded as "a fine lesson."[19]

While Contadini has chiefly focused on the Arabic zoological tradition, Aya Sakkal has mainly worked on literary texts, especially the *Maqāmāt*. The originality of her work stems from her background as a historian of Arabic literature and her very detailed knowledge of the extremely rich text of the *Assemblies* of Ḥarīrī and of *adab*. In a series of articles published since 2012, Sakkal has taken this *adab* masterpiece as her starting point.[20] She has identified a number of recurring themes and structuring motifs, such as travelling, clothing or the human body, which she has analyzed from a literary point of view, notably taking into account medieval commentaries on the work, before considering how they were visually translated by the illustrators of 13th-century copies. This allowed her not only to assess more precisely the "literal" or "interpretative" character of the illustrations, but also to better understand the discrepancies between text and image in light of certain "commonplaces of the *Maqāmāt* and *adab* in general,"[21] for instance the contrast between indigence and oratory talent or the literary topos of "*al-adab ḥulyā*" (*adab* as an ornament). Thus, Sakkal has, for instance, demonstrated that literary talent could be represented in different ways: by a "gesture of orality," the evocation of Greek masters, or the canons of elegance of the "*ẓurafā*'" (refined men) of Baghdad, hence opening new perspectives for reflection on this very intriguing work.

Such challenging studies, whether they take the manuscript or the text as their starting point, encourage us to attempt to be systematic, holistic or integrative in several ways. First by undertaking detailed research on every individual manuscript. In this regard, I, like other art historians,[22] believe that every manuscript is interesting and deserves a comprehensive study. Second by considering each manuscript as a multi-faceted whole. And third by analyzing

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[19] Caiozzo, Anna: "Compte-rendu de: Contadini, Anna: A World of Beasts. A Thirteenth-Century Illustrated Arabic Book on Animals: The Kitāb Naʿt al-Ḥayawān in the Ibn Bakhtishūʿ Tradition. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012". *Bulletin Critique des Annales Islamologique*s 27 (2012), pp. 123–124, here p. 124.

[20] Cf. in particular Sakkal, Aya: "La représentation du héros des Maqāmāt d'al-Ḥarīrī dans les trois premiers manuscrits illustrés (XIIIe siècle)". *Annales Islamologiques* 48, 1 (2014), pp. 79–102, https://doi.org/10.4000/anisl.3080 (last viewed 21.10.2021); Sakkal, Aya: "Représentation du dromadaire dans le livre illustré des séances". In: *L'animal: Une source d'inspiration dans les arts*. Eds. Sandra Costa – Claire Maître. Paris: Editions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2018, pp. 79–89.

[21] Sakkal 2014, translated by the author.

[22] Cf. for instance Ada Adamova's pioneering work on Injuid illustrated manuscripts: Adamova, Adel T.: "The St. Petersburg Illustrated *Shahnama* of 733 Hijra (1333 AD) and the Injuid School of Painting". In: *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*. Ed. Robert Hillenbrand. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, pp. 51–64.

each of these facets using the most appropriate methodology in order to understand it in depth. These methods include codicology and, if necessary, and possible, scientific analyses of materials (inks, pigments, etc.), palaeography, textual and literary analysis, and visual analysis. In this respect, it is important to stress that each manuscript is unique both in its text and its images. Therefore, the analysis of the text implies paying attention to the text not as it is established in a given translation[23] or even edition, but as it appears in each handwritten volume, especially since research on certain corpora has highlighted the widely diverging nature of some manuscript traditions.[24]

Moreover, especially as far as narrative texts are concerned, studies on text-image relations have generally focused on the so-called pictorial cycles, i. e. the episodes selected for illustration, and whether the illustrations are placed at the right place in the text generally limited to the few lines or even the one verse, called *breakline verse*, placed immediately before, i. e. above, or after, i. e. below the image.[25] However, it seems to me that this approach is still reductive. Even though a specific verse often gives or corresponds to the subject of the image, the subject matter is far from being the only or probably even the key component of a painting. I think that focusing on the "breakline verse" may prevent us from considering other significant aspects of the story and the text. In any case it can only be one facet of the problem. Several examples show that what the patron, the copyist or the painter chose to illustrate is at least as important as what they chose to leave aside.[26] Examining the whole text and breaking it down into illustratable units seems to be the best way to really understand the selection of paintings, and how far or close they are from the structure of the text and/or the narrative. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the image often condenses several moments or at least aspects (narrative, descriptive etc.) of the text, which cannot be limited to one or two verses. The second is that, by trying to adopt the position of the original reader/illustrator/viewer, and breaking down the text into as many

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[23] For instance, in Graves's article mentioned above (Graves 2002), the author relies only on translations.

[24] Cf. for instance the ongoing project "AnonymClassic" on *Kalīla wa Dimna* manuscripts: https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/en/e/kalila-wa-dimna/index.html (last viewed 20. 10. 2021).

[25] For instance: Mehran, Farhad: "The Break-Line Verse: The Link Between Text and Image in the 'First Small' Shahnama." In: *Shahnama Studies* I. Ed. Charles Melville. Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 152–169.

[26] James, David: *A Masterpiece of Arab Painting. The 'Schefer' Maqāmāt Manuscript in Context*. London: East and West Publishing, 2013, especially pp. 35–43. Cf. also Kruk, Remke: "Elusive Giraffes: Ibn Abi l-Ḥawāfir's Badā'i' al-Akwān and Other Animal Books". In: *Arab Painting. Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*. Ed. Anna Contadini. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007, pp. 49–64. Esp. Melville, Charles – Abdullaeva, Firuza: "Text and Image in the Story of Bizhan and Manizha I". In: *Shahnama Studies* I. Ed. Charles Melville. Cambridge: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 2006, pp. 71–96; Mahdavi, Amin: "An Event-Driven Distribution Model for Automatic Insertion of Illustrations in Narrative Discourse: A Study Based on the Shahnama Narrative". [PhD dissertation]. University of Edinburgh, 2004. *Edinburgh Research Archive*: https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/1249 (last viewed 28. 10. 2021).

illustratable units as possible, one is better able to understand the possibilities and choices of illustration vs. non-illustration. As for visual analysis, it should examine the typology, composition, iconography and style of the paintings. The ultimate purpose is to try to understand "each cycle of images [as] a coherent whole, conceived and thought of as a whole"[27] before replacing it in its intertextual and intericonic network.[28]

## Case Study: An Illustrated Manuscript of Niẓāmī's *Khamsah* from Turkmen Shiraz (Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, MS 4715)

It is inspired by this methodology that I looked at an illustrated manuscript of Niẓāmī's *Khamsah* now held at the *Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire* (hereafter BNU) in Strasbourg under shelfmark MS 4715. In the work of Niẓāmī (d. 605/1209 [?]), the *Khamsah* (literally meaning "five" or "quintet") is rightly considered as his masterpiece.[29] It is a compilation of five poems (*maṣnavīs*) titled: *Makhzan al-asrār* (The Treasury of Mysteries or The Treasury of Secrets), *Khusraw and Shīrīn, Laylī and Majnūn, Haft Peykar* (The Seven Portraits), and *Iskandarnāmah* (The Book of Iskandar). The *Quintet* met with immense success: it was one of the most frequently copied and illustrated texts in the Persian-speaking cultural area from the 14th up to the 19th century.

The Strasbourg manuscript bears an anonymous colophon (fol. 352r) in a clumsy mixture of Arabic and Persian, suggesting that its author only has a shaky command of the Qur'anic language. It reads:

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| 1. | tammat (sic) al-kitāb khamsah (sic) iftikhār al-ḥukamāʾ khᵛājah niẓāmī ganjah (sic) | The book Khamsah [of] the glory of philosophers, Master Niẓāmī [of] Gandjah, has been completed. |
| 2. | ʿalayh al-raḥma wa al-ghufrān | On him [be] the mercy and forgiveness [of God]. |
| 3. | bi-tawfīq allāh taʿālā wa ḥusn taysīrih wa al-ṣalāt | With the assistance of God, who is exalted, and the goodness of his help; may his blessing |

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[27] Sakkal 2014, translated by the author.
[28] Hériché-Pradeau – Pérez-Simon 2013, p. 30.
[29] On Niẓāmī and his work cf. notably de Blois 1994; Chelkowski, Peter J.: "Niẓāmī Gandjawī". In: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*, Leiden: Brill, 1960–2009, vol. 8 (1995), pp. 76–81; Parrello, Domenico: "Ḵamsa of Neẓāmi". In: *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*. Originally Published: 2000. Last Updated: 2010. *Iranica Online*: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kamsa-of-nezami (last viewed 21. 10. 2021).

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|---|---|---|
| 4. | ʿalā nabiyyih muḥammad wa ālih ajmaʿīn fī al-tārīkh (sic) | Be upon his Prophet Muḥammad and his entire family, on the date of |
| 5. | shuhūr (sic) sanat tisʿa wa thamānīn wa thamānimāʾa (sic) | The months of the year 889 |
| 6. | al-hijra al-nabawiyya (sic) | [From] the Hijra of the Prophet. |

It is written in a pentagonal panel, which is framed by a large gilded inscription in Persian: a prayer for the success of the conquests (*fatḥ, ghazw*) of an anonymous dedicatee.

Thus, the colophon specifies the date: 889/1484, but not the place of production or the dedicatee of the manuscript. However, the style of the paintings allows it to be attributed to Shiraz during the reign of Āq Quyunlū Sultan Yaʿqūb (r. 883–896/1478–1490).[30] The so-called "Turkmen commercial school/style of Shiraz" presents the paradox of being famous but little known. Apart from a few general essays,[31] only one manuscript has been the topic of a detailed study.[32] This school is neglected because its production is generally considered commercial and its

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[30] Bourgeois, Marie Laure: "Sur quatre manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg". *Studia Iranica* 16, 2 (1987), pp. 238–255, esp. pp. 239–243; Richard, Francis: "Le manuscrit des cinq poèmes de Nizâmî (1484)". In: *Métamorphoses: Un bâtiment, des collections* [Exhibition catalogue]. Strasbourg: BNU, 2015, pp. 210–211; Ben Azzouna, Nourane. "Le Khamsah de Nezâmî: Un manuscrit du XVe siècle conservé à Strasbourg". Special issue of: *Art de l'enluminure* 67 (2018). The manuscript is accessible online: *Numistral – La bibliothèque numérique patrimoniale du site universitaire alsacien*: https://www.numistral.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b102352370/f1.planchecontact.r=nizami (last viewed 24.10.2021).

[31] Cf. esp. Grube, Ernst J.: "The Miniatures of Shiraz". *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, 21, 9 (1963), pp. 285–295, esp. pp. 292–294; Robinson, Basil William: "The Turkman School to 1503". In: *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th–16th Centuries*. Ed. Basil Gray. London/Paris 1979, pp. 215–247, esp. pp. 243–244; Robinson, Basil W: *Fifteenth-Century Persian Painting. Problems and Issues*. New York/London: New York University Press, 1991, pp. 21–43; Brend, Barbara: "Manuscripts in Turkmān Styles". In: *Perspectives on Persian Painting: Illustrations to Amīr Khusrau's Khamsah*. London/New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 101–148, esp. pp. 110–148; "Illustration. E. Iraq and Iran, c. 1450–c. 1500" and "Shiraz [Shīrāz] II. Art life and organization". In: *The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*. Eds. Jonathan M. Bloom – Sheila S. Blair. Oxford University Press, Online Version, 2009; Hayashi, Norihito: "The Turkman Commercial Style of Painting: Origins and Developments Reconsidered". *Orient* 47 (2012), pp. 169–189. On the so-called "brownish style", which overlaps with the "Turkman commercial style," cf. Brend, Barbara: "A Brownish Study: The *Kumral* Style in Persian Painting, its Connections and Origins". In: *Islamic Art* 6 (2009), pp. 81–98 and plates. Simon Rettig's PhD focused on various aspects of manuscript production but included very little on the paintings of this school: Rettig, Simon: "La production manuscrite à Chiraz sous les Aq Qoyunlu entre 1467 et 1503". [PhD dissertation, unpublished]. Aix-Marseille University, 2011.

[32] Anvari, Saeed (ed.): *Khāvarān Nāmeh: Ibn Ḥusām Khusifī Birjandi. Miniature Paintings and Illuminations by Farhād Naghāsh, 15th Century*. Tehran: 2002. Unfortunately, this facsimile edition has not been made available to me. In addition, it must be noted that the *Khāvarānnāmah's* attribution to Shiraz is not unanimously accepted: cf. Shani, Raya: "The Shahnama Legacy in a Late 15th-Century Illustrated Copy of Ibn Husam's Khavaran-nama, the Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran, Ms. 5750". In: *Shahnama Studies III. The Reception of the Shahnama*. Eds. Gabrielle R. van den Berg – Charles Melville. Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 216–265, here p. 224.

style judged as stereotypical and simple.[33] The commercial scale/activity is first attested by the considerable number of codices that were either illustrated in Shiraz in the second half and especially the last quarter of the 15th Century or attributed to it on stylistic grounds. As regards *Khamsah* volumes, it is interesting to note that the oldest known illustrated copy, though fragmentary (it contains only the last three books), was probably made in Shiraz in 718/1318, and illustrated shortly afterwards (Tehran, University Central Library, no. 5179),[34] which suggests a long tradition of illustrating this text in Shiraz before the Turkmen dynasties. According to the lists compiled by Stchoukine, Dodhudoeva and de Blois evoked above, no less than fifty illustrated *Khamsah*s are attributed to Shiraz during the last quarter of the 15th Century.[35] Several are signed by the same copyist: Shaykh Murshid al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kātib,[36] which supports the idea of abundance, and even suggests a form of serial production. Moreover, according to the data provided by Stchoukine, the formats of these codices appear to be fairly standardized and rather small, with two categories measuring ca. $32 \times 20$ and $26 \times 15$ cm respectively, which further supports the idea of *mass* production. The Strasbourg volume appears to be one of the smaller copies.

In its current state, the BNU manuscript consists of 352 folios measuring $23 \times 15.5$ cm. However, the folios must have been trimmed by at least 1 cm on the gutter margin side. The dimensions of the pages and the vertical orientation of the laid lines indicate that they are octavos. This is a medium-size fold, common in ordinary manuscripts. The paper is thin, sometimes translucent, but quite dark in colour. The sheets have been sized and polished, but have a frayed, medium-quality appearance. This is probably due to their poor state of conservation. The manuscript opens with an illustrated double frontispiece, which is followed by a richly illuminated frame presenting the title, the author and the beginning of the text.[37] The beginning of each poem is also marked by a richly and finely illuminated title panel (fols. 30v, 107v, 163v, 223v, 307v). The

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[33] Hayashi 2012, pp. 172–173.

[34] Titley, Norah M: "A 14th-Century Niẓāmī Manuscript in Tehran". *Kunst des Orients* 8, 1/2 (1972), pp. 120–125.

[35] According to Francis Richard, this list is not yet exhaustive. Other manuscripts held in libraries that are not catalogued or are in the process of being catalogued, notably in Central Asia and Afghanistan, may be added. I would like to thank him for this information.

[36] Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 754, dated 888/1483–84; H. 1008, copied in Shiraz in 895/1489; and H. 784, dated 909/1503–04 (cf. Stchoukine 1977, no. 14, 17, 29). This copyist also produced other manuscripts, e. g. at least three copies of ʿAṣṣār's *Mihr wa Mushtarī* dated 876/1472, 881/1476–77 and Shiraz, 882/1478 (British Library, Add. 6619; Walters Art Museum, MS. 627; and Freer Gallery of Art, FGA 1949.3, cf. Brend 2009, p. 81, fig. 1); Fattāḥī's *Dīwān* in Shiraz in 885/1480 (Cambridge University Library, Or. 1280, cf. Brend 2009, p. 81); and Amīr Khusrū's *Dīwān* in 893/1488 (British Library, Or. 5770, cf. Hayashi 2012, p. 173).

[37] As with the colophon, the title and the name of the author indicated here are in a rough mixture of Arabic and Persian: "hadhih (sic) kitāb / khamsah [-yi] niẓāmī / ʿalayh al-raḥmat (sic) / wa al-ghufrān" (This is the book / the Khamsah [of] Niẓāmī, on him the mercy / and forgiveness [of God]).

palette is dominated by gold and blue. On all pages, the text is framed by a succession of gold, black and blue lines. The text is written in a table of four columns delimited by golden lines. An ordinary page shows twenty-one lines, i. e. forty-two verses, but many pages show fewer verses due to the presence of subtitle panels.[38] In addition, a few pages, especially at the end of each book, present more original layouts with verses written in oblique lines (fols. 29v–30r, 43v, 48v, 107r, 163r, 222r–223r, 307r); and 35 pages show illustrations, which are also framed with gilded lines. The written surface measures $163 \times 106$ mm. The verses are penned in black ink, in a small module (ca. 8 mm), in *Nastaʿlīq*. The anonymous copyist has an expert but not a perfectly neat hand. Here and there appears an overly inked letter, a trembling line or an empty space that is too wide. The poem was probably copied quite quickly.

As mentioned above, each manuscript is unique. The table below shows the number of verses in the Strasbourg codex and according to Domenico Parrello's article on the *Khamsah* in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.[39]

| | Folios in BNU, MS 4715 | Number of verses in BNU, MS 4715 | Number of verses in Parrello 2000/2010 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Double-frontispice | 1v–2r | | |
| Makhzan al-Asrār | 2v–30r | 2108 | ca. 2260 |
| Khusraw and Shīrīn | 30v–107r | 6060 | ca. 6500 |
| Laylī and Majnūn | 107v–163r | 4469 | ca. 4600 |
| Haft Peykar | 163v–223r | 4782 | ca. 5130 |
| Iskandarnāmah | 223v–352r | 10475 (6699 + 3776) | ca. 10500 |
| Colophon | 352r | | |
| Total | 352 | 27894 | ca. 28990 |

Fig. 1: Number of verses of the *Khamsah* in the Strasbourg codex and according to Parrello 2000/2010

In comparison to Waḥīd Dastgirdī's edition of the text,[40] our volume shows many gaps, displacements and additions. However, in the absence of a reference critical edition, it is difficult to assess these particularities. Are they errors or variants that

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[38] The titles of the poems are in "floriated Kufic" and the subtitles of the sections in Thulth. The subtitles stand out against fine spiral scrolls on a dotted background. The palette is essentially limited to gold, black and blue, thus creating continuity between the illumination and the text.

[39] Parrello 2000/2010.

[40] Niẓāmī: *Khamsah*. Ed. Waḥīd Dastgirdī. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1962. This edition has the advantage of bringing the five poems together in a single volume.

correspond to a particular manuscript tradition? Is the transmission of the text in our case secondary to the paintings? Is it possible to identify intentional changes to the text in relation to the choice of the pictorial program?

With a double frontispiece and thirty-five paintings, though badly preserved, the Strasbourg manuscript appears as one of the most abundantly, but also, I think, one of the most subtly illustrated of the Turkmen school of Shiraz. The interweaving of text and image seems particularly strong, but also multi-faceted. It is possible to distinguish between several distinct, though often concomitant modes. Through a few examples, mainly taken from the second book, *Khusraw and Shīrīn,* I will address the question of how Niẓāmī's narrative genius and philosophical-mystical conceptions could be translated into images. I will limit myself here to observations on the Strasbourg manuscript, leaving the comparisons to a forthcoming monograph on the *Khamsah*s of the Turkmen school of Shiraz.

| Poem | Painting | Fol. | Dimensions of the painting in mm |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Double-frontispice | 1v–2r |  |
| I. Makhzan al-Asrār (fol. 2v–30r) | 1. Sultan Sanjar and the old woman | 16v | 60 × 110 |
| II. Khusraw and Shīrīn (fol. 30v–107r) | 2. Khusraw surprises Shīrīn bathing in a spring | 44r | 57–78 × 127 |
|  | 3. The first encounter between Khusraw and Shīrīn | 51v | 66 × 109 |
|  | 4. Shīrīn and her companions hunting | 48r | 67–88 × 137 |
|  | 5. Khusraw and Shīrīn feasting in the countryside | 55r | 80 × 108 |
|  | 6. Khusraw kills a lion with a single punch | 55v | 55–74 × 133 |
|  | 7. Khusraw fights and defeats Bahrām Chūbīn | 58r | 70–90 × 138 |
|  | 8. The controversy between Khusraw and Farhād | 67r | 65–110 × 140 |
|  | 9. Farhād cutting through Mount Bīsutūn, visited by Shīrīn | 74r | 109 × 147 |
|  | 10. The union of Khusraw and Shīrīn | 95v | 48–154 × 134 |
| III. Laylī and Majnūn | 11. Laylī in a garden | 125r | 49–97 × 147 |

| (fol. 107v–163r) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 12. An old woman leads Majnūn in chains to Laylī | 132r | 42–88 × 146 |
| | 13. Majnūn in the desert | 139r | 64–91 × 138 |
| | 14. Laylī and Majnūn about to meet in a palm grove | 147v | 48–108 × 143 |
| | 15. The last meeting between Laylī and Majnūn, lying unconscious | 155r | 57–90 × 148 |
| IV. Haft Peykar (fol. 163v–223r) | 16. Bahrām Gūr kills a lion and an onager with a single arrow | 174r | 74–81 × 128 |
| | 17. Bahrām Gūr kills a dragon | 175r | 64–109 × 150 |
| | 18. Bahrām Gūr kills two lions and seizes the crown of Iran | 179v | 77–98 × 150 |
| | 19. Bahrām Gūr in the black pavilion | 188r | 56 × 108 |
| | 20. Bahrām Gūr in the yellow pavilion | 194r | 57 × 108 |
| | 21. Bahrām Gūr in the red pavilion | 200r | 54 × 109 |
| | 22. Bahrām Gūr in the sandal pavilion | 209r | 49 × 108 |
| V.1. Iskandarnāmah 1: Sharafnāmah (fol. 223v–307r) | 23. Iskandar slaughters the Zang warrior Zarātshah | 239r | 78–97 × 132 |
| | 24. Iskandar fights the Zangs | 239v | 77 × 131 |
| | 25. Iskandar routs the Zang chief Palangar | 241r | 64 × 108 |
| | 26. Iskandar and the partridge fight | 243v | 54–74 × 136 |
| | 27. The death of Dārā | 254r | 62–94 × 137 |
| | 28. The marriage of Iskandar and Rūshanak | 260v | 83 × 109 |
| | 29. The enthronement of Iskandar | 261v | 70 × 108 |
| | 30. Iskandar gives a banquet in honour of Queen Nūshābah | 269v | 90 × 108 |
| | 31. Nūshābah receives gifts from Iskandar | 270v | 104 × 110 |
| | 32. The marriage of Iskandar and the daughter of the king of India | 279v | 64 × 110 |

| | 33. Iskandar lassoes his Russian enemy | 296v | 66–76 × 111 |
|---|---|---|---|
| V.2. Iskandarnāmah 2: Iqbālnāmah (fol. 307v–352r) | 34. Iskandar and the seven wise men | 325v | 82 × 108 |
| | 35. Iskandar and the peasant | 337v | 48–92 × 148 |

Fig. 2: The iconographic program of the Strasbourg *Khamsah*

## 1. The right image in the right place: sequential and rhythmic effect

As mentioned above, the question of the "breakline verse," i. e., as Marianna Shreve Simpson puts it, that "a single or a very few critical verses" correspond to the central action of an illustration,[41] is of course interesting, but it remains *atomized* because it is focused on single images and within each image on actions at the expense of other aspects of the text, such as descriptions or narrative structure, without really answering the question of the role of the image in the narrative or in the reading experience.[42] If one adopts the position of the reader of the manuscript, it appears not only that the paintings are generally placed extremely precisely in the text, but also that they introduce a break, interrupt the poem and cut off reading at a particularly significant moment: either a powerful moment in a speech or a turning point in a narrative, and by highlighting these textual nodes, they introduce an additional sequential and rhythmic effect.

For instance, *Makhzan al-Asrār* is, according to some, one of the most complex and enigmatic works in Persian literature. It is a didactic, ethical and philosophical-mystical text. After a long introduction in which Niẓāmī praises God, the Prophet, his patron Fakhr al-Dīn Bahrāmshāh b. Dāwūd, the ruler of Arzinjān (r. 558–622/1163–1225), but also the speech, rhetoric, poetry, and his own book, the poem consists of twenty homilies or "discourses" (*maqāla*) dealing with various subjects such as justice, world instability or renunciation, and each discourse is illustrated by a brief apologue (*ḥikāyat*).[43] In our manuscript only the fourth discourse and story are illustrated (no. 1). This discourse on "the highest value that [the king] must pursue,"[44] i. e. justice, urges the ruler to listen to the complaints of the oppressed. This is illustrated by the story of the Seljuq Sultan

[41] Simpson, Marianna Shreve: "*Shahnama* as Text and *Shahnama* as Image: A Brief Overview of Recent Studies, 1975–2000". In: *Shahnama. The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*. Ed. Robert Hillenbrand. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, pp. 9–23, here p. 15.
[42] Cf. for instance Lukens Swietochowski 1974 who came to the essentialist conclusion that "the relationship of the artist to his text [...] remained fundamentally unchanged throughout the history of Persian manuscript illustration" (p. 111).
[43] On this text cf. notably de Fouchécour, Charles-Henri: *Le sage et le prince en Iran médiéval. Morale et politique dans les textes littéraires persans, Xe-XIIIe siècles*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009, pp. 275–283.
[44] De Fouchécour, *Le sage et le prince*, p. 281.

Sanjar and the old woman. During an outing, the sultan is brutally stopped in his tracks by an old woman who complains that she suffered injustice and asks him for redress:

پیرزنی را ستمی درگرفت / دست زد و دامن سنجر گرفت

کای ملک آزرم تو کم دیده ام / از تو همه ساله ستم دیده ام

شحنه مست آمده در کوی من / زد لگدی چند فرا روی من

بی گنه از خانه برویم کشید / موی کشان بر سر کویم کشید

در ستم آباد زبانم نهاد / مهر ستم بر در خانم نهاد

گفت فلان نیم شب ای کوژپشت / بر سر کوی تو فلانرا که کشت

خانه من برده[45] که خونی کجاست / ای شه ازین بیش زبونی کجاست

شحنه که در شب طلب خون کند[46] / عربده با پیرزنی چون کند

رطل زنان دخل ولایت برند / پیرزنان را به جنایت برند

آنکه درین ظلم نظر داشتست / ستر من و عدل تو برداشتست

کوفته شد سینه مجروح من / هیچ نماند از من و از روح من

گر ندهی داد من ای شهریار / با تو رود روز شمار این شمار[47]

An old woman suffered injustice; she laid hold on the skirt of Sanjar,

Saying: "Oh king, I have seen little of thy justice, and all the year long I have suffered thy tyranny.

A drunken watchman came down my street and kicked me sorely.

I was innocent, but he forced me from my house and dragged me to the end of the street by my hair.

He abused me shamefully and placed the seal of oppression on the door of my house.

He said: 'Oh hunchback, who killed such a one at midnight in thy street?'

He [destroyed] my house, saying: 'Where is the murderer?' Oh king, what humiliation could exceed this?

[When the watchman seeks blood at night.] Why should he violently accuse an old woman?

The drunkards consume the revenue of the country; they carry off old women on false accusations.

He who has condoned this tyranny, has destroyed my honour and thy justice.

My wounded breast was smitten; there is nothing left of me, body or soul.

Oh king, if thou dost not do me justice, it will be counted against thee on the Day of Judgment."[48]

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[45] In the edition: جست: searched.
[46] In the edition: شحنه بود مست که آن خون کند: "When the watchman is intoxicated, a murder is committed".
[47] Niẓāmī: *Khamsah*. Strasbourg, BNU, MS 4715, fol. 16v.
[48] Neẓāmī: *Makhzanol Asrār*. *The Treasury of Mysteries*. Translated by Gholām Hosein Dārāb. London: Arthur Probsthain, 1945, pp. 167–168.

Fig. 3: Sultan Sanjar and the old woman, Strasbourg, BNU, MS 4715, fol. 16v © photo et coll. BNU Strasbourg.

The image (fig. 3) is placed after this verse, i. e. at a particularly powerful moment in the complainant's speech. After explaining that she was unjustly accused of murder, mistreated and dishonored by the drunken watchman, she demands justice from the sovereign while declaring him responsible and even guilty before God. These words also mark a turning point in that they shift the guilt from the watchman to the person he serves: the sovereign. According to Fouchécour, this story is "of a rare violence in Persian literature."[49]

We can say that this story must have been popular, as it is illustrated in seventy-two of the 245 manuscripts inventoried by Dodhudoeva, including several volumes of the Turkmen school of Shiraz.[50] However, we do not know why this theme is, here, the only one to be illustrated in the first book; probably because it deals with the supreme value of justice, or because this fourth discourse is itself a turning point in the book: While the first four chapters are, for the most part, an address to the prince, the following chapters present his mirror: the ascetic.[51]

The other four poems of the *Khamsah* are narrative. It seems to me that the question of popularity is secondary, or it should at least be posed differently in the case of lengthy cycles where we need to question the role of the image in the narrative. For example, does it introduce the main characters of the story, or highlight the turning points of the narrative, or anticipate the future events or reveal possible hidden interpretations...?

*Khusraw and Shīrīn* stages the loves of the last great prince, then sovereign of the Sassanid dynasty: Khusraw II Parvīz (r. 591–628), with a Christian princess: Shīrīn, the niece of the queen of Armenia. The painter Shāpūr describes the incomparable beauty of the Armenian princess to his young friend Khusraw. This eulogy turns the prince's heart upside down. Shāpūr is then sent in search of the beauty to whom he shows, three times, a painted portrait of his master. Shīrīn is so troubled that she leaves her kingdom to find Khusraw in his capital, but Khusraw has travelled in the opposite direction. On his way, he watches Shīrīn bathing in a spring but does not recognize her. Once in Armenia, he sends Shāpūr again to look for Shīrīn but in the meantime he learns of his father's death and must himself return to Iran. He ascends the throne, but only for a brief moment. The rebellion of his general Bahrām Chūbīn forces him to seek refuge in Armenia, where he finally meets his beloved by chance, on a hunting ground. The two lovers spend happy days together, but Shīrīn refuses to give in to Khusraw's advances until he has regained his kingdom. He succeeds with the help of the Byzantine Emperor and marries the Byzantine princess, Maryam. Shīrīn in turn becomes queen of Armenia. A brilliant engineer, Farhād, pierces

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[49] De Fouchécour, *Le sage et le prince*, p. 281.
[50] Dodhudoeva 1985, pp. 110–114.
[51] De Fouchécour, *Le sage et le prince*, pp. 280–283.

Fig. 4: Khusraw kills a lion with a single punch, Strasbourg, BNU, MS 4715, fol. 55v © photo et coll. BNU Strasbourg

the mountains out of love for her, which provokes Khusraw's jealousy: He makes Farhād believe that Shīrīn is dead. The desperate Farhād throws himself from the top of the mountain and Maryam dies shortly afterwards, but instead of regaining the chaste Shīrīn, the frivolous Khusraw is tempted by a courtesan from Esfahan whom he marries. This last adventure is not enough to shake the infallible love of the two heroes. They end up getting married, but their happiness is fleeting. Khusraw and Maryam's son falls in love with Shīrīn and kills his father. Shīrīn decides to kill herself to join her beloved in eternity.

During their happy days in Armenia, one day, Khusraw and Shīrīn feast in the countryside. The text mentions a pavilion, a court with attendants and "cups of nectar." Khusraw gets drunk: "And when love and wine came together, the king was intoxicated with both of them."[52] It is then that a fierce lion bursts in:

برامد تند شیری بیشه پرورد / که از دنبال می زد برزمین گرد

چو بدمستان به لشکرگه درافتاد / وزو لشکر به یکدیگر برافتاد

فراز آمد به نزد بارگه تنگ / به تندی کرد سوی خسرو آهنگ

شه از مستی شتاب آورد بر شیر / به یکتا پیرهن بی درع و شمشیر

کمانکش کرد مشتی تا بناگوش / چنان بر شیر زد کز شیر شد هوش[53]

> But suddenly a furious lion came along, whipping the air with its tail – a child of the jungle.
> Like the wicked drunkard, he ran into the camp, turned all those who were there upside down.
> He arrived very close to the royal pavilion, rushed towards Khusraw in a hurry.
> Without a sword, without a coat of mail, having only a tunic, the king, although he was drunk, ran to the lion.
> The fist touching the ear like a bow is banded, struck the lion so well that he lost his life.

The painting (no. 6, fig. 4) is placed precisely after this verse, i. e. at the very moment Khusraw kills the lion. This episode is also a very popular one,[54] probably because beyond the prince's feat, his gesture earned him the first kiss from his beloved, adding to the intoxication of wine and victory that of desire, which is probably suggested here by the pink hue of the landscape: "And he hugged her so tightly that her thin white skin was all blushed."[55]

These two examples are associated with two different types of narratives: an isolated allegorical story and an episode in a long and continuous sequence of events. They show that in both cases the illustrations play an active role by accentuating

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[52] The verses of *Khusrū and Shīrīn* are translated by the author.
[53] MS 4715, fol. 55v; Niẓāmī: *Khusrū va Shīrīn*. Ed. Bihrūz Tharvatyān. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1365 SH/1987, reprinted 1392/2014, p. 229.
[54] Stchoukine 1977, 168; Dodhudoeva 1985, pp. 137–140; Graves 2002, p. 37.
[55] The association between desire and pink appears in another painting in this manuscript (no. 32).

the decisive moments and emphasizing the dramatic turns, hence echoing the rhythm of the narrative and even introducing subtle visual comments that heighten the suspense by opening up perspectives and foreshadowing what is to come (i. e. the pink hue of the hills foreshadowing the first kiss of Khusraw and Shīrīn).

## 2. Structural and homological translation[56]

Another particularly interesting aspect of the dialogue between text and image is that paintings can generally be read in the same order and direction as the text. In other words, the characters enter the scene in the order in which they appear in the text and they move forward in the pictorial space in the direction of reading, i. e. from right to left. This makes the painting respond not only to the narrative drive of the story and its theatrical rhythm, but also to the graphic layout of the text, by rendering the idea of movement and often instantaneity. As stated by Rose-Marie Ferré, "reading the image is also a diachronic experience,"[57] like in the first two paintings presented so far.

In *Sultan Sanjar and the old woman,* it is the old woman who is mentioned first, before the Sultan. In spite of a probably deliberately constrained space, the composition is very effective in rendering the idea of movement and of a sudden and even brutal encounter. The composition is centered on the characters. The sultan pulls the bridle of his horse which, head down, body arched and right foreleg raised, stops just in front of the old woman coming from the opposite direction. The king's companions stop behind him. The first turns to the last two. His gesture underlines the surprising aspect of the event and of the speech that interrupt the royal ride. The last two horsemen barely arrive in the space of action. They are largely cut off by the frame, which accentuates the effect of movement, temporality, and even immediacy.

If we compare this painting with that of a manuscript signed by a copyist named Sulṭān Ḥusayn b. Sulṭān ʿAlī in 890/1485, i. e. one year after our volume (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. or. quart. 1665,[58] fol. 15v, fig. 5,) we notice first of all that this one is placed immediately after the first verse: its purpose seems to be less about underlining the dramatic accent than arousing curiosity. The protagonists are almost identical, but the sovereign pulls the bridle with one hand, which is less evocative of the sense of surprise. Similarly, the royal suite is reduced to a single rider holding a parasol over the sultan's head, thus depriving us of the internal commentary in favour of a more anecdotal and aesthetic treatment, while

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[56] Hériché-Pradeau – Pérez-Simon 2013, p. 25–26.
[57] Ibid, p. 29.
[58] *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Digitale Sammlung* https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN756272408&PHYSID=PHYS_0001&DMDID=&view=overview-info (last viewed 11. 10. 2021).

another male figure, presumably the assassin, runs to the left. This example shows that despite the use of iconographic motifs: the old woman, the sultan, the two central horses, which are almost identical, variations in the location and internal details of the images offer different possibilities of reading. In *Khusraw kills a lion with a single punch*, Niẓāmī's narrative genius is also captured by the painter, translated into a very effective composition. It shows the setting: the charming plain, the pavilion and the court; the course of events: the lion that appears from the right, "whipping the air with its tail," passes the royal guard and rushes towards Khusraw; and the climax of the action: the triumph of the king who, although *naked* and drunk, runs outside the tent and with a single blow of his fist kills the wild beast. It is this single-second moment or, in Karin Adahl's words "arrested moment"[59] that is represented. The only element that can be felt moving is the air that lifts both the lion's tail and paws and Khusraw's feet: The two drunk protagonists (Khusraw and the lion) appear as if floating. The rapidity of the monstrous attack and of the royal reaction is also underlined by the figure of the guard who has not finished drawing his sword. Khusraw's gesture is very neat: His fist hits the lion's ear with the speed and power of an arrow. Shīrīn, in the tent, and her followers, outside, barely have time to raise their hands to their mouths, as a sign of surprise.

In the Berlin Manuscript (fol. 53r, fig. 6) the painting is placed in exactly the same place, but again it is larger and slightly different. The guard is relegated to the background, no longer playing any role in the action. Khusraw is firmly planted on the ground, but his dress seems lighter and his gesture weaker. The overall treatment is more decorative, although the pink hue is omitted, which supports the hypothesis of a less fine reading of the poem.

### 3. Modifying the poem for an alternative iconographic choice

Sometimes the painter goes so far as to modify or manipulate the poet's own verses in a more or less consequential way. For instance, in *Khusraw and Shīrīn,* in the episode that relates the first encounter between the two lovers, which happens by chance on a hunting ground, the poem says:

طریق دوستی را ساز جستند[60] / ز یکدیگر نشانها باز جستند

چو نام خود[61] شنیدند آن دو چالاک / فتادند از سر زین بر سر خاك

گذشت از ساعتی سر برگرفتند / زمین از اشک در گوهر گرفتند

به آیین تر بپرسیدند خود را / فرو گفتند لختی نیک و بد را[62]

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[59] Adahl 1981, p. 40.
[60] I am not sure about the reading of this word in the manuscript (fol. 51v). The reading proposed here follows Tharvatyān's edition (p. 218).
[61] "*Ham*" in Tharvatyān's edition (p. 218).
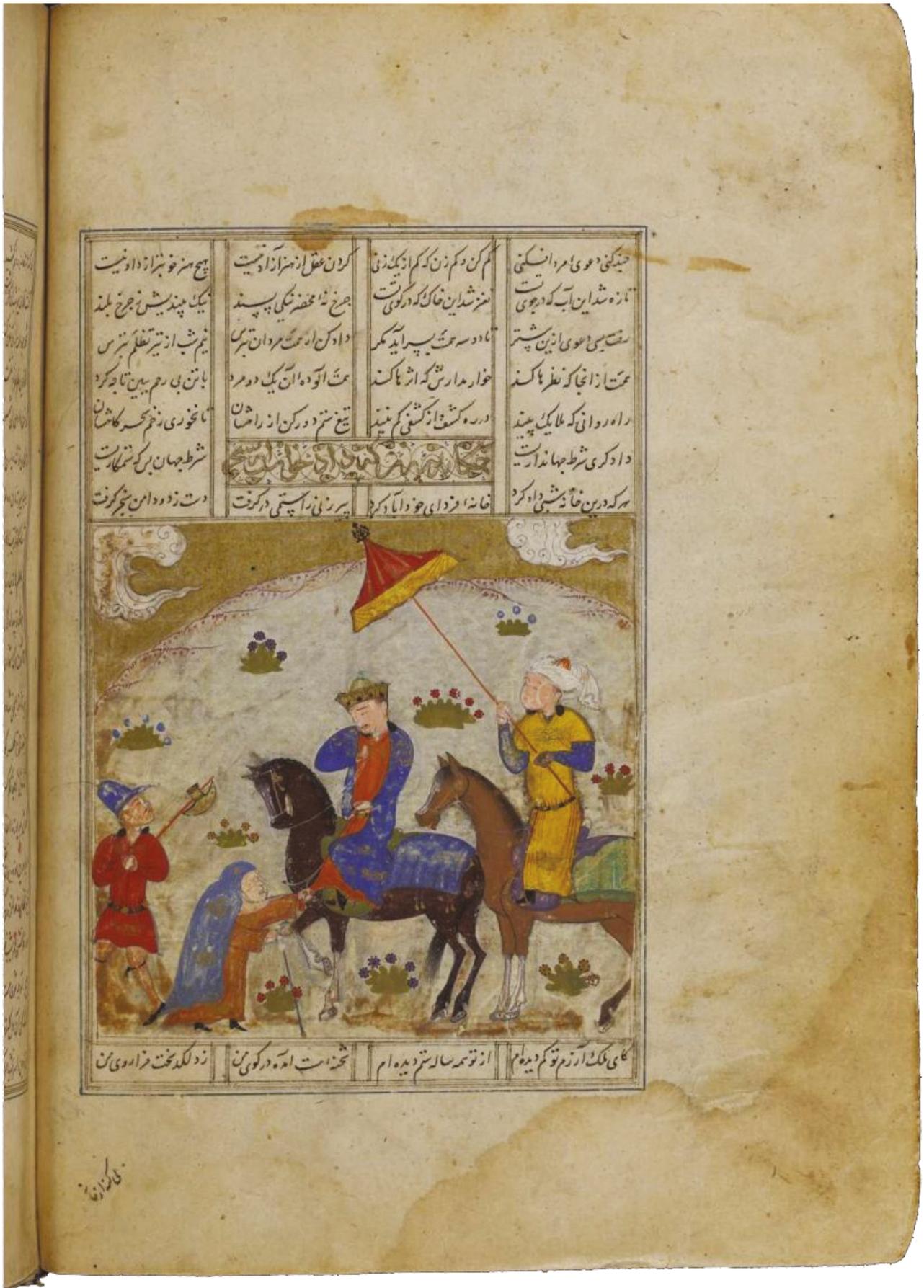[62] MS 4715, fol. 51v; Niẓāmī/Tharvatyān 2014, pp. 218–219.

Fig. 5: Sultan Sanjar and the old woman, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. or. quart. 1665, fol. 15v © Berlin Staatsbibliothek
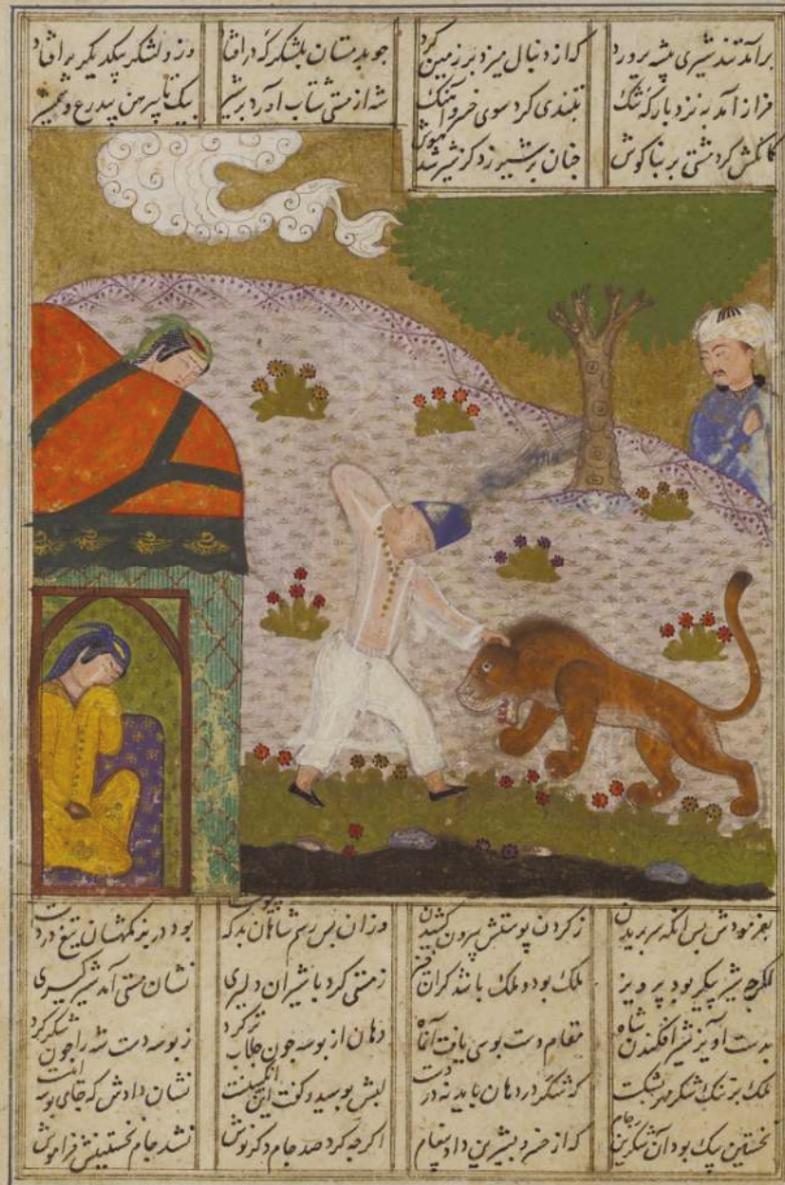
Fig. 6: Khusraw kills a lion with a single punch, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. or. quart. 1665, fol. 53r © Berlin Staatsbibliothek

Fig. 7: The first encounter between Khusraw and Shīrīn, Strasbourg, BNU, MS 4715, fol. 51v © photo et coll. BNU Strasbourg

> Seeking to prepare the way for love, they wondered who they were, each other.
>
> When these ardent beings each heard their own name, they fell to the ground slipping from their saddles.
>
> An hour having passed, they came to themselves; with the pearls of their tears they covered the ground.
>
> Then, more fully, they questioned each other; they talked a little bit about their good, about their ills.

However, the last two verses were covered by the painting (no. 3, fig. 7), but they can still be deciphered underneath the pictorial layer. This gap in the text is very significant. This is precisely what makes the poem line "When these ardent beings each heard their own name, they fell to the ground slipping from their saddles" and the painting a perfect match. Indeed, the image shows Khusraw and Shīrīn fainting. This change in the text reflects the existence of two possibilities of illustration: either Khusraw and Shīrīn fainting or the two lovers in conversation, and the painter obviously chose the first option, going so far as to compromise the continuity and even the coherence of the poem, as the following verse, after the painting, is: "But thinking that they had so much to say, they took patience by speaking much less." This change is therefore very revealing. First, as in the previous examples, the iconographic choice highlights the most dramatic moment. This episode is very rarely illustrated. It appears in only three manuscripts, all from the late 15th century.[63] This underlines both the originality of the Strasbourg codex and its attribution to a very specific context. Moreover, this example shows that the very high precision in the placement of the paintings is the result of carefully considered iconographic choices. Lastly, it suggests that the ultimate raison d'être of this volume and this kind of manuscript is probably not the transmission of the text but the paintings.[64]

## 4. Mise-en-page, format and composition as interpretative bias

Another interesting aspect of the relation between text and image pertains to mise-en-page or page layout. It very often happens that the image extends towards the margin,[65] in which case its format and composition take advantage of the distinction between text area and margin.[66] For instance, once again in *Khusraw and Shīrīn*, after defeating Bahrām-Chūbīn, Khusraw must face an even more formidable rival: Farhād. After the battlefield, and after trying to seduce Farhād with

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[63] Stchoukine 1977, p. 91; Dodhudoeva 1985, p. 134.

[64] Verses are also omitted for ill. no. 7, and covered by the painting in no. 26 and 33.

[65] This phenomenon is called "frame-breaking" by Hillenbrand (Hillenbrand, Robert: "The Uses of Space in Timurid Painting". In: *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*. Eds. Lisa Golombek – Maria Subtelny. Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 76–102, here pp. 84–92) and "margin invasion" by Graves 2002, pp. 39–41.

[66] Cf. Brend, Barbara: "Beyond the Pale: Meaning in the Margin". In: *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars*. Ed. Robert Hillenbrand. London 2000, pp. 39–55.

"gold [...] piled up as high as an elephant," the confrontation takes place on the field of love. This meeting is not only the first, but also the only one between the two rivals. It is a confrontation between two giants, and two universes: the king and the man, around a crucial question: love. If the king has been swept away by victory and seduced by pride by giving his heart to his ally's daughter, the Byzantine princess, what will become of the humble mortal? Described by the poet as being "like a mountain," "like a lion," and an "elephant man," he appears unbeatable because, "having chosen his way, being out of himself," he is ready to renounce even his soul, his existence. The verses above the painting read:

نخستین بار گفتش کز کجایی / بگفت از دار ملک آشنایی

بگفت اینجا[67] بصنعت در چه کوشتی[68] / بگفت آنده خرند و جان فروشی[69]

بگفتا جان فروشی در ادب نیست / بگفت از عشق بازان این عجب نیست

بگفت از دل شدی گفتا[70] بدینسان / بگفت از دل تو میگویی من از جان

بگفتا عشق شیرین بر تو چونست / بگفت از جان شیرینم فزونست

بگفتا هر شبش بینی چو مهتاب / بگفت آری چو خواب آید کجا خواب[71]

To begin with, the king asked, "Where are you from?" He replied, "I come from the land of love."

— So what is the job you do here? — One buys torment and sells one's soul.

— Putting your soul up for sale is not appropriate. — When you are in love, it's not surprising.

— Would you have such a heart as they say? — You talk about the heart; I talk about the soul. – Tell us how your love for Shīrīn is made. — Shīrīn is more than the soul to me.

— Do you see her every night, like the moonlight? — Yes, if sleep comes; but how will I sleep?

After the painting (no. 8, fig. 8), the dialogue continues: "— If you see her happy demanding your head? — Hurry, I will free my neck from this debt!" This meeting also proves to be decisive because, having unsuccessfully tested Farhād using gold and eloquence, Khusraw decides to resort to cunning, ordering him to cut a road through Mount Bīsutūn. Farhād agrees on the condition that the king renounces his love for Shīrīn. The king accepts as he believes that the task will be impossible, thus adding duplicity to pride.

The painting shows the audience in a garden. As usual, the movement of the image goes from right to left, but it can also be read in the light of the confrontation between the two rivals and the strength of their love. Khusraw is pushed towards the margin on the left by Farhād, who has entered from the right

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[67] "*Āndjā*" in Tharvatyān's edition (p. 317).
[68] "*Kūshand*" in the edition.
[69] "*Furūshand*" in the edition.
[70] "'*Āshiq*" in the edition.
[71] MS 4715, fol. 67r; Niẓāmī/Tharvatyān 2014, p. 317.

Fig. 8: The controversy between Khusraw and Farhād, Strasbourg, BNU, MS 4715, fol. 67r © photo et coll. BNU Strasbourg

to sit in the center of the scene. In addition, Khusraw is depicted as a king, wearing a crown and a luxurious coat, sitting on a throne under a parasol, but he only has authority over one person in the margin, whereas Farhād looks more corpulent and he is followed by the crowd. Farhād is humbly dressed, with a short robe, low shoes, and he is armed with his working tool, his pick with which he carves the mountain. This reflects his social and professional status, but it also testifies to his choice: renunciation. His inconvenience, his "lamentable state" are the sign of his true love, also visible in his afflicted expression. Khusraw's only horizon is the gold above his head, while Farhād has swapped the gold of the world for the greenery of paradise. Moreover, at his feet, the painter replaced the piles of gold mentioned in the text with three blue-and-white porcelains in a golden tray. The painter probably intended to offer a literal translation of the verse: "Gold *(zar)* and dust *(khāk)* were one for him": The gold of the tray is equaled with the dust, the clay of ceramics, unless it is a representation of Farhād's gaze: Gold turns to dust in his eyes. Like the composition,[72] the adoption of Farhād's gaze suggests that the painter has clearly grasped what is at stake in the scene. Despite its importance both in the plot and in its mystical reading, this episode is very rarely depicted,[73] which once again underlines the originality and relevance of our painter's choices.

### 5. Staging the gaze

Niẓāmī displays an extraordinary talent in describing the visual encounters and the intense and complex emotions they spark in the heroes, and the painter also strove to render these effects in the images. For example, again in *Khusraw and Shīrīn*, in the famous episode where Khusraw surprises Shīrīn bathing in a spring,[74] the poet describes a vision of divine nature that overturns the sky and the earth, making the moon appear in broad daylight on the surface of the earth.[75] The painter responded (no. 2, fig. 9) by depicting Shīrīn in a frontal position with one leg bent forward, the other stretched to the side, which would evoke, if not for the stretched leg, an East-Asian deity, like a Buddha.[76] This is probably why

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[72] The same device is used for instance in paintings no. 2, 18, 35.
[73] Graves 2002, pp. 32–33.
[74] About this episode and its illustrations cf. for instance Graves 2002, pp. 36–37.
[75] Shīrīn is masterfully described as a moon: "the moon of Nakhshāb," a legendary artificial moon: a basin filled with mercury, illuminated by a refraction process, made by a false prophet in the city of Nakhshāb, near Bukhara, in the 8th century; "a mirror coated with bright silver;" the spring is her "mansion" etc.
[76] Cf. for instance the much earlier painting "Abraham destroys the idols of the Sabeans" in Bīrūnī's *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiya* in Edinburgh University Library, Ms. 161, dated 707/1307 (Hillenbrand, Robert: "Non-Islamic Faiths in the Edinburgh Biruni Manuscript". In: *Ferdowsi, the Mongols and the History of Iran: Art, Literature and Culture from Early Islam to Qajar Persia: Studies in Honour of Charles Melville.* Ed. Hillenbrand, Robert – Andrew Charles Spencer Peacock – Firuza Abdullaeva. London: I. B. Tauris, 2013, pp. 306–315, here p. 308).

Fig. 9: Khusraw surprises Shīrīn bathing in a spring, Strasbourg, BNU, MS 4715, fol. 44r © photo et coll. BNU Strasbourg
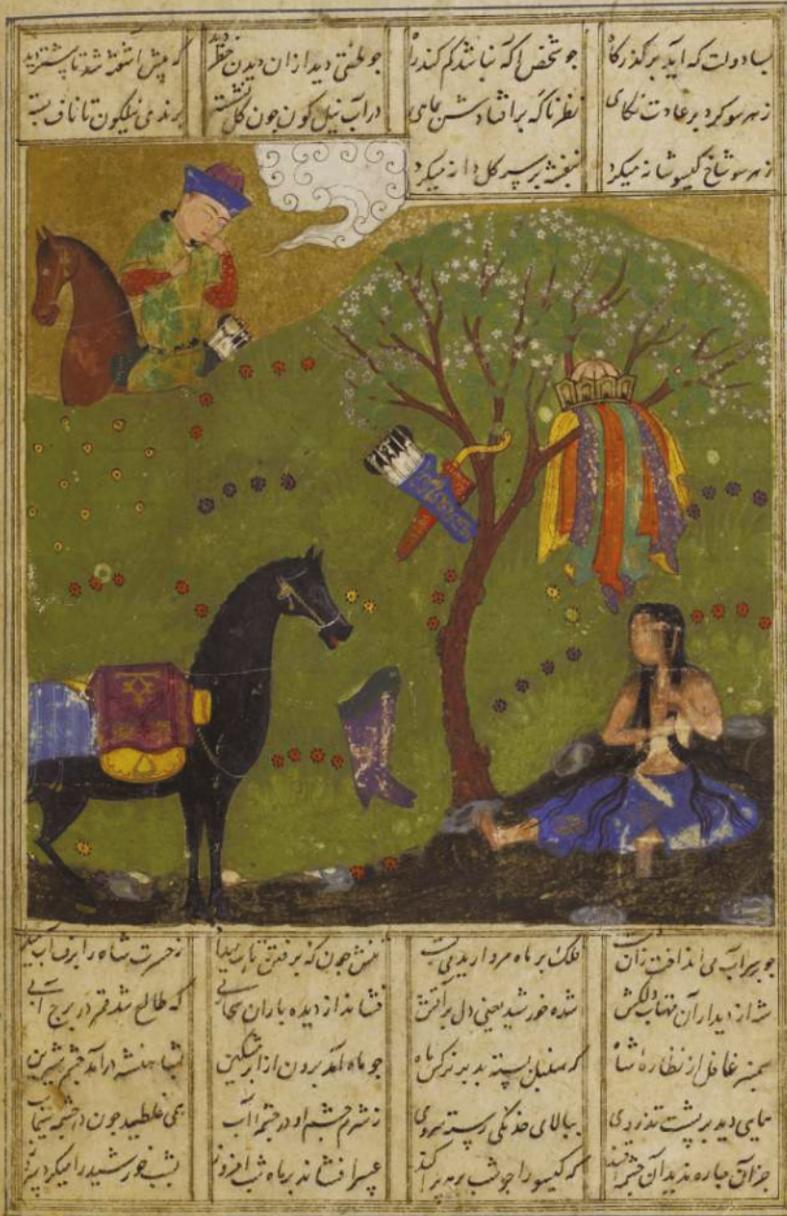
Fig. 10: Khusraw surprises Shīrīn bathing in a spring, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. or. quart. 1665, fol. 44v © Berlin Staatsbibliothek

her head was erased by an obviously iconoclastic hand at a later stage.[77] Moreover, the weight of the image seems to lean on Shīrīn's side, in the lower right, barely counterbalanced by Khusraw in the opposite corner. While his horse is just going his way, the prince "deviated from his path," in the margin, is caught up in this idyllic apparition. The extension of the image to the margin accentuates Khusraw's feeling of upending and upheaval.[78] In addition, while Shīrīn is a moon, Khusraw's heart is "burning like the sun" and "beating like when one mixes molten gold and silver," and the diagonal, unstable composition threatens to spill the gold from the sky in the upper left over the silver of the moon in the lower right corner. The metaphors of vision, upheaval and outpouring are thus rendered with great finesse.

In the Berlin Manuscript (fol. 44v, fig. 10), the figures are very similar, but the composition, which is more vertical, does not take advantage of the possibility of extension towards the margin. The result is therefore more stable.

In addition to the main characters, the painter often adds additional, secondary characters that turn towards each other, look at each other or watch the scene, and converse, thus playing several different roles. First, in a culture where direct contact was still generally considered the strongest guarantee of authenticity, particularly for the transmission of texts, these characters can be interpreted as eyewitnesses who guarantee the authenticity of the stories transmitted, bearing in mind that in the case of Niẓāmī, several stories are based on historical characters and facts. These marginal actors, often placed in the margins of the scene, at the sides or in the background, thus play a role in the narrative by witnessing and transmitting the story, but also by emphasizing the fact that it is worthy of transmission. They may also echo and pay tribute to the transmitters of these stories par excellence, the poet, the copyist, but also the painter.[79]

In addition, as mentioned above, the oral narrative[80] and the gaze have a strong presence in the poem. Orality is represented by the hand gestures, and even when hands are silent, eyes are speaking. The main figure is not necessarily at the center of the stage but at the center of the gaze (for instance in the double frontispiece, ill. no. 5, 13, 15, 28). In some cases, the painter even seems to adopt the protagonist's gaze, state of mind or feelings, as in the cases of Farhād

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[77] On Islamic "partial iconoclasm" cf. Balafrej. Lamia: "Islamic Iconoclasm, Visual Communication and the Persistence of the Image". *Interiors. Design/Architecture/Culture* 6–3 (2015), pp. 351–366.

[78] For a similar composition and a different interpretation cf. Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 781, fol. 40a (dated 849/1445–46) and Hillenbrand 1992, p. 87, fig. 14.

[79] Esp. in illustrations no. 16, 17, but also 19–22.

[80] According to Graves' words, "there is almost always a voice speaking directly in the narrative" (Graves 2002, p. 33).

mentioned earlier. Thus, the gaze of the secondary characters directs that of the viewer.

Lastly, even if the eyes of the marginal characters remain focused on the scene, they form a link between the scene and the viewer. This process of viewer inclusion is accentuated by the fact that these figures are often cut by the frame, a device that suggests to the viewer that the pictorial space continues beyond the limits of the image, towards him. As stated by Dominique Donadieu-Rigaut, "the circular arrangement of the characters populating [the] cavities [in the image] provides an empty space in front of the scene," [81] a space for the viewer who is "absorbed [...] in the places of the story [...] and thus further invested."[82] He is therefore invited to read, recite, listen, look and undoubtedly also comment. He is involved as a witness as well as a transmitter in a *mise-en-abîme* that ensures a continuous dynamic life for the poem.

## Conclusions

The various examples examined here relate both to the modes of interaction between text and image and to the functions of images. In the case of the Strasbourg manuscript, the images offer a visual translation of not only the primary, literal meaning of the text, but also several of its literary properties: its sequential structure and breathless rhythm, the jolts of the narrative, the movement of the characters, and the suspense of the action. Often, the visual translation also reflects the implicit, especially the mystical meaning of certain episodes, sometimes in a temporal intercalation of narratives that links the time of the story to that of the viewer. This suggests that despite the undeniable influence of external visual sources, i. e. standardized compositions and iconographic motifs within a well-established pictorial tradition, our painter's iconographic and chromatic choices were carefully considered and often very original.

The functions of the images are manifold: To make the invisible visible; to enhance the reading experience by accentuating the pace of the narrative and the suspense of the action; to direct the understanding or interpretation of the poem towards its implicit, mystical meaning; and to invite the reader/viewer to react and interact. Indeed, it is necessary to imagine these manuscripts being read and viewed not so much individually as in the context of collective reading, declamation and debate sessions, in other words in literary and artistic circles such as those held in the princely courts, but also in the intellectual circles of the urban centers. In other words, like poetry, images appear as an object of learned and refined sociability. It is important to try to perceive them not in terms of

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[81] Donadieu-Rigaut, Dominique: "Les images médiévales à la recherche de nouveaux cadres". *Perspective* 1 (2009), pp. 146–151, here p. 149, translated by the author.
[82] Ibid.

inferiority and dependency but in terms of interaction with the text. The examples of deletion of verses even suggest that the images were probably the real purpose of such manuscripts. As we try to understand them, we may get a better sense of the thoughts, questions and debates that could be sparked by such illustrated copies. The illustrated manuscripts do not mark the end of oral literature,[83] but each of them is a starting point for ever-renewed oral interactions, because "the modes of relations that are internal to the figurative discourse interact with the social situations that are played out in front of the works."[84]

## Sources of Illustrations

Fig. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9: © photo et coll. BNU Strasbourg — Fig. 5, 6, 10: © Berlin Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz

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[83] Graves 2002, p. 42.
[84] Donadieu-Rigaut 2009, p. 149, translated by the author.