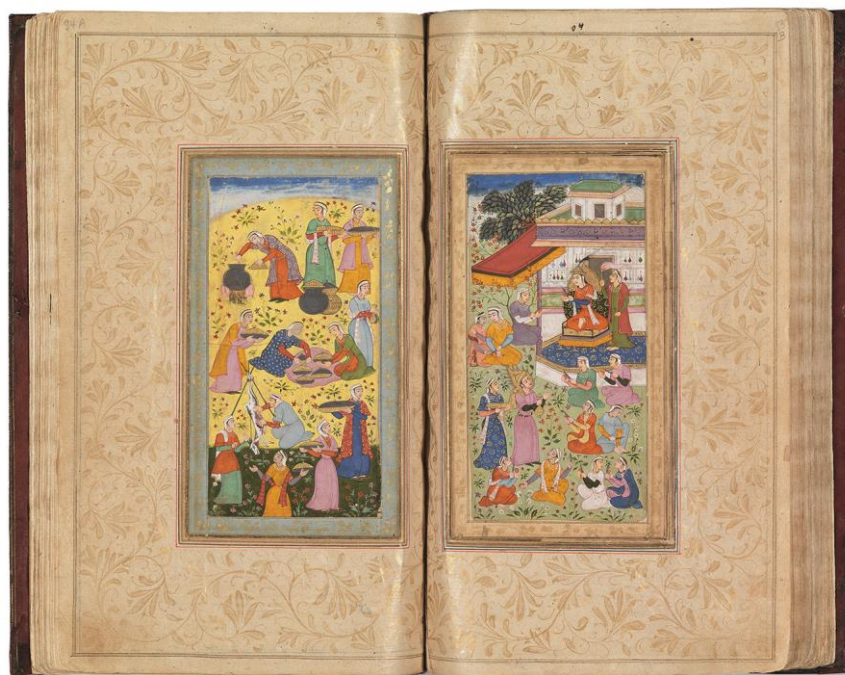


Yusuf wa Zulaikha* ‘Joseph and Potiphar’s wife’*by Nur al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman Ben Ahmad Jami’****The text dated AH 952 / 1545 CE, with 8 paintings added in Mughal India, c. 1600–1610**

Manuscript in Persian on paper, 142 folios, 26.5 x 16 cm, 15 lines of Persian in black nasta'liq in 2 columns to the page, chapter headings in red nasta'liq, opening illuminated double page with sarlawh (heading) and borders filled with gold floral scroll, eight paintings 15.5 x 8.5 cm, in opaque pigments and gold, some replacements (leaves 3 and 124 – 137) and some repairs, water damage and staining on some pages, contemporary tooled, embossed and gilded binding without flap, restored, with some decoration missing.

Provenance

Essayan Collection;

Homberg Collection;

Boisgirard, Paris, 31st January 1985, lot 40

Though this extremely rare copy of Jami's *Yusuf and Zulaikha* bears a colophon dated 6th Safar 952 / 19th April 1545, the illumination and eight illustrations clearly belong to Mughal India in the early years of the seventeenth century. It is not clear whether the manuscript was originally written in Khurasan (roughly modern day western Afghanistan) or in India by a Khurasani emigré. The calligrapher is a certain Maqsud Turbati, whose nisbah would suggest that he was of Khurasani origin. It would be tempting to identify him as the Mawlana Maqsud of Herat mentioned by Abu'l-Fazl in the *A'in-i Akbari* as a skilled calligrapher and seal-engraver at the court of Humayun (Abu-Fazl 'Allami, *A'in-i Akbari* (3 vols.), trans. H. Blochmann, 1927, vol. 1, p. 55).

The 8 paintings in the manuscripts are in a style known as “sub-imperial” Mughal, a style associated with manuscripts made in the early seventeenth century for courtiers, nobles and

local grandees rather than for the emperor himself. The sub-imperial category in fact denotes several different styles that were used to illustrate the Persian classics such as Firdawsi's *Shahnamah* and Nizami's *Khamsah* (see John Seyller, *Workshop and Patron in Mughal India*, Zurich, 1999, Chapter One, "The Formation and Diffusion of the Imperial Mughal Style", pp. 13-45). It is to be distinguished from the "popular Mughal" style which is distinctly more Rajput in character and is a term that is best reserved for categories of texts of Hindu inspiration such as *Ragamalas* and *Rasikapriyas*.

Though illustrated copies of works by Jami were rare, the style of the illustrations here is very close to those used for other Persian classics. This can be described as a distilled version of the imperial style, and is characterized by small figures and high, flat landscapes painted in several bands of distinct colours and decorated densely with flowering plants. Very close in style is a *Khamsah* of Nizami in the Chester Beatty Library, Ms. 14, made for Nawab Bahadur Khan in Agra between 1613-1614 (see Seyller 1999, fig. 7), and a *Shahnamah* from c. 1605 in the British Library (*ibid.*, fig. 11).

Of particular quality in this manuscript is the final illustration, which touchingly depicts children bringing the news of Yusuf's departure to the repentant Zulaikha standing in front of her hut. The treatment of the central figure of Zulaikha and the landscape, particularly the tree growing beside Zulaikha's house, is unusually sensitive and raises the quality of the manuscript above sub-imperial *Shahnamahs*, in which the illustrations tended towards the schematic and routine.

Jami's *Yusuf and Zulaikha* (Joseph and Potiphar's Wife) is a mystical retelling of the Qur'anic story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Jami (1414-1492), born in Kharjerd in Khurasan, was the preeminent Persian poet of the Timurid period. He was an established figure in Herat during the sophisticated reign of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, and was a friend of luminaries such as the politician and poet 'Ali Shir Nava'i. *Yusuf and Zulaikha* is one of seven *mathnavis*, romances in rhyming couplets that make up his *Haft Awrang* (Seven Thrones).

Illustrations:

- f. 56v: Zulaikha, accompanied by a servant, looks out at the surrounding countryside from a palace terrace
- f. 57: Zulaikha, disguised as an old woman, meets Yusuf
- f. 75v: Yusuf is approached by beautiful young ladies sent by Zulaikha
- f. 76: Zulaikha, accompanied by a servant, looks out at the countryside from a palace terrace while a male servant waits below
- f. 93v: Zulaikha sits on her throne and her followers peel oranges, cutting their hands as they are dazzled by the beauty of Yusuf.
- f. 94: A banquet is prepared by Zulaikha's women.
- f. 117v: Yusuf rides his horse in front of his troops. Note the rock in the form of a human head
- f. 118: Children bring the news to Zulaikha who is standing in front of her house on the outskirts of a town