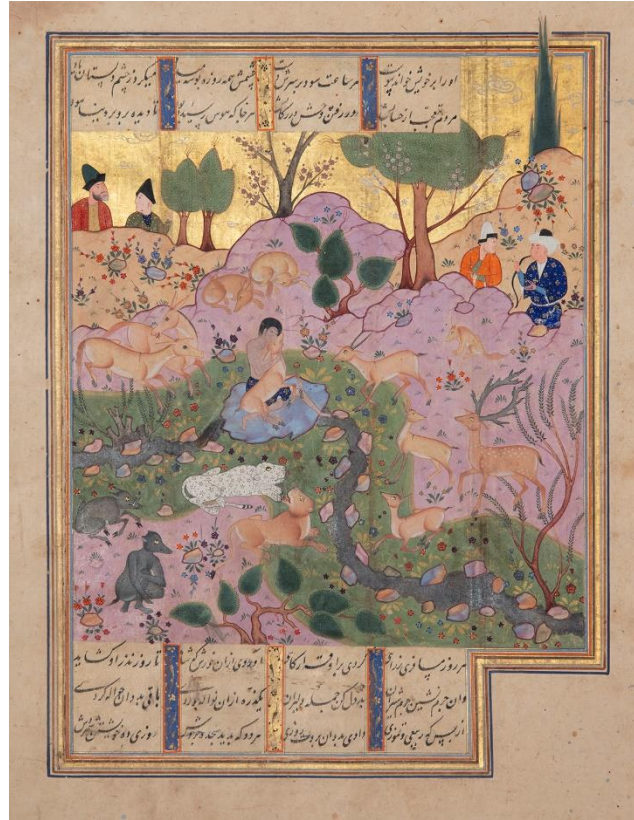


Majnun in the Wilderness
From the Layla wa Majnun section of Nizami's Khamsa (Quintet)
Shiraz, Iran
c. 1575



39.3 x 25.4 cm (folio); 21 x 17.5 cm (painting); ink, ppaque watercolour, silver and gold on paper

Provenance:

Private Collection, UK

The influence of royal Safavid manuscripts led to an increase in size, iconographic complexity, richness of illumination and variety of palette of Shiraz manuscripts in the period c. 1565-1580. According to Lale Uluç, the first manuscripts to be produced in a larger format were copies of the Firdausi's *Shahnama*,; however other popular works such as the *Khamsa of Nizami* also began to be made in larger dimensions during the 1570s.¹ Many of these developments are visible in this large and colourful leaf from the Layla wa Majnun section of *Nizami's Khamsa*, though they are perhaps not taken as far as some of the *Khamsa* manuscripts of the 1580s which occasionally exceeded 40 cm in height.²

The scene in this folio comes from the episode in *Layla wa Majnun* in which Majnun is depicted as a hermit in the wilderness, taking refuge with the animals of the desert. This part of the story takes place after his separation from Layla and after the death of his father. The

¹ Lale Uluç, *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artisans and Ottoman Collectors: Sixteenth Century Shiraz Manuscripts* (Istanbul, 2006), 225-226.

² Lale Uluç, *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artisans and Ottoman Collectors: Sixteenth Century Shiraz Manuscripts* (Istanbul, 2006), figs. 246, 303, 306, 313-314, 315; Mary Williams (ed.), *In Harmony: The Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art* (New Haven, 2013), nos. 104-111

animals here are instinctively drawn to Majnun and his kindness had a miraculous effect on the animals' treatment of each other. Following his example, they ceased to fear and attack one another. The text immediately preceding the painting recalls a particularly restless gazelle that Majnun would call and caress, and this is depicted in the centre of the scene – the gazelle a poignant reminder of Majnun's longing for his beloved Layla.

Rumours spread of Majnun's strange situation and travellers came from afar to witness for themselves his remarkable court amongst the animals. An interesting feature of the painting is the onlooker carrying a bow in the upper right corner of the landscape, whose round face and sharp eyes are reminiscent of Bukhara painting of the period. They peer out from the rocky landscape at the idyllic scene below.

Literature:

Mary Williams (ed.), *In Harmony: The Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art* (New Haven, 2013).

Lale Uluc, *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artisans and Ottoman Collectors: Sixteenth Century Shiraz Manuscripts* (Istanbul, 2006).