



# *The Heavenly Court*

## Persian Poetry and Painting

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by

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*In Cooperation with*

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&  
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*Come, whoever you may be, come.  
Be you a heathen, a pagan, or not at all, come.  
This court of ours is not a court of dejection,  
May you a hundred times break your vow, come.*

Mawlana Jalal'ud-din Rumi

Persian poetry has deeply marked every facet of life in Iran for a thousand years. Poets have played a significant role in shaping attitudes regarding history, philosophy, mysticism, social values, popular ethics – the domains both sacred and profane that collectively constitute the Persian heritage. The dynamic role of poetry is manifested in art – monumental, decorative and mundane. Sacred monuments are adorned with verses not only from the Koran but also with those composed by venerated poets. Ornamental tiles used in palaces and pavilions, mosques and madrasas are adorned with verse, as are carpets, cups and candlesticks. Persian miniature painting is perhaps the most prevalent art form in which poetry serves as both inspiration and objective. This last category – poetry in painting – constitutes the theme of this exhibition. A selected number of art objects revealing poetic composition as an integral part of their design have likewise been put on display. The selection emphasizes the poetic tradition that in time evolved into one of the most significant components of Persian miniature painting. The exhibit comprises works whose execution is mostly attributed to court patronage and exemplifies the heights of perfection reached by artists in this medium.

The poetic tradition here brought into relief is a representative formulation of the concept of existence in Persian thought, a concept that transcends periods of historical time and courts of temporal rule. It is a celebration of an ideal realm of being, *the heavenly court*. This is the existence for which the Persian poetic soul so yearns, an eternal abode prevailing upon the vicissitudes of the temporal and the profane.

The paintings displayed in this exhibition depict archetypal man in *the heavenly court*, created by six poets who collectively represent the Persian *paideia*: the mythical heroes of Firdawsi's *Shahnameh* externalize ideal manhood and grant a cosmic dimension upon humanity, while the chivalrous lovers of Nizami's *Khamseh* display the depths of love which human beings may ideally reach. The drunken poet of Hafiz' *Divan* defies the presumed order, leading us to the deepest conflicts and contradictions in Persian poetic consciousness, while Sa'di's sober sage promotes a practical philosophy that puts him equally at ease with prince and pauper. Khayyam's skeptical soul, tormented by life's paradoxes, rejects all conformity in favor of a divine moment, while Rumi's persona transcends every paradox as he stands *here and not here*, gazing into *spaceless space* and beckoning us to follow him into *the heavenly court*. This exhibition is idealism in essence and manifestation.

N.B. Unless otherwise indicated, descriptive texts accompanying the exhibit and translations of poems and inscriptions are by Hossein Ziai.

1. **Abu'l Qasim Firdawsi Tusi (935-1020) #1-12**

Firdawsi is the celebrated author of the Iranian national epic *Shahnameh* 'The Book of Kings,' a lifetime's achievement completed in 1010 A.D. comprising 50,000 rhyming couplets. The *Shahnameh* is based on an oral tradition that reaches back to the Avesta and is the single most important collection of Persian mythology and epic. It begins with the creation of the world and narrates Persian history – legendary and real – down to the Arab conquest. It is the most outstanding representation of the concept of Iranian nationhood and the place of the ideal man, the hero, in the nation. Indeed, the most apparent inspiration of the work derives from Firdawsi's objective to present a cohesive account of the renewal of Iranian national identity. But the work is also philosophical in its portrayal of the cosmic principle of the eternal battle between Light and Darkness and the ethical ideals of the perfect man in this arena. Kay Khosrow, the possessor of the Cup of Jamshid, is the archetypal king who, guided by the cosmic light (*farreh-e izadi*), leads the battle against evil, fulfilling his own heroic destiny. Over nearly ten centuries, the *Shahnameh* has found patronage at royal courts, urban and country tea-houses and nomads' tents alike.

#1 Bizhan hunting Wild Boars; #2 Bahram Gur Fights the Karg; #3 Bahram Gur Hunts with Azadeh; #4 Battle of Rashnawad against the Rumis; #5 Rustam's Brother and Son Kill Isfandiyar's Sons; #6 Iskandar's Iron Cavalry Battles the Fur of Hend; #7 Rustam Shoots Isfandiyar in the Eyes; #8 Ceramic Tile; #9 Hushang Slays the Black Div; #10 The Nightmare of Zakhak; #11 Fereydun Crosses the River Dijla; #12 Fereydun in the Guise of a Dragon Tests his Sons.

2. **Omar Khayyam (1022-1123) #37**

Born, bred, and buried in Nishapur, the brilliant scholar, teacher and poet Omar Khayyam was immortalized by his *Ruba'iyat*, a collection of quatrains promoting a mystical spirit of rebellion against the rigidities of organized religion, religious piety, and hollow saintliness, while in H. Ritter's words, simultaneously assuming "agnosticism, criticism of God, insolence towards God and deep piety". The contradictions serve to preclude conventionality. Khayyam's ideal man is the tormented soul yearning to unveil the mysteries of life, shunning authority – divine and human – resorting to a Sufi's solitude which finds solace only in wine and women. He is both defined by, and transcends, religion, philosophy, history and morality. In spirit and form, the quatrains are 'the poetry of the people', a people oppressed, insolent, skeptic, scornful, and sad – suppliant 'fools', wise to the ways of faithless Fate. The despairing pessimism is lifted only by the beauty of the word – of thought, and of man.

#37 Lovers

3. **Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1209) #13-17**

Born Ilyas b. Yusuf Nizami in Ganja, Azarbayjan, Nizami is the unrivalled master of Persian romantic epic. A man of vast learning, he worshipped his native Ganja, leaving it but once to meet with Qizil Arsalan Shah a few miles away. This isolated genius lived 'by and for poetry alone'. Devoted pilgrims have never abandoned visiting his grave, creative admirers have never stopped imitating his works.

Nizami's *Khamseh* 'quintet' is a collection of five romantic epics ranging from the ascetic to the romantic to the didactic and the ideational, every one profound, each unmatched in its imagination and technical superiority. Nizami departs from the earlier epic tradition in his use of the living language. His heroes foster chivalrous values of a feudal, increasingly urbanized society rather than those of a heroic age. The *Khamseh* comprises the *Makhzan'ul-asrar*, *Khusru u Shirin*, *Layli u Majnun*, *Haft Paykar*, and the two-part epic, the *Sharafnameh/Iqbalnameh*. Each poem has been a source of inspiration for exquisite miniatures throughout the ages.

#13 Frontispiece of Nizami's *Khamseh*; #14 Unhappy Lovers; #15 Layli and Majnun at School; #16 Camp Scene; #17 Night-time in a Palace.

#### 4. **Mawlana Jalal'ud-din Rumi (1207-1273)** #33-38

Commonly known to his compatriots as Mawlavi, Rumi is among the most revered, celebrated, and prolific of Persian poets. When Rumi was still a youth, his father, from a long line of scholars of Balkh, left his native soil in fear of the Mongol invasion and eventually settled in Konya. There, Rumi met Shams of Tabriz, the inspired, ecstatic dervish who marked his life and work thereafter. A multitude of Muslims, Christians and Jews congregated at Rumi's burial in recognition of his 'immense spirit of tolerance'.

Rumi's most widely read works are *Mathnavi-e Ma'navi*, often referred to as the Persian Koran, and the prodigious *Kulliyat-e Shams-e Tabriz*, which Jan Rypka calls "the Bible of Sufism". The *Mathnavi* comprises 27,000 couplets and is a compendium of Sufi philosophy and worldview presented in forms varying from meditation to anecdote and folktale, each of which evinces a moral. The *Kulliyat* or *Divan-e Shams'* nearly 37,000 distichs and 2,000 quatrains contain the most magnificent, profound, and transcendental outpourings of a soul's mystic journey towards an end where Lover and Beloved become one – where the All begins.

#33 Bearded Figure; #34 Mystic Journey; #35 Man with Monkey; #36 Black Rose; #38 Youth with Iris.

#### 5. **Sa'di (1213-1292)** #19-24

Shaykh Muslih'ud-din Sa'di was born into a cultured family in Shiraz. Flying from Mongol raids and seeking erudition, he travelled widely in the Near East and North Africa before returning to his birthplace Shiraz to compose the *Bustan* 'Orchard', followed by another masterpiece, the *Gulistan* 'Rose Garden,' which intersperses poetry with matchlessly economical rhymed prose. Other collections include *ghazals*, *qasidas* and *risalas* that pass from panegyric to politics to

mystical love poetry. Sa'di's mastery of the *ghazal*, lyric poetry, remained unchallenged for a century until the rise of Hafiz, another native of Shiraz. None have excelled the two before or since.

Sa'di teaches applied wisdom in forms variably lyrical, anecdotal, plastic, often didactic, direct, witty, and almost always realistic. His *heavenly court* is a projection of an ideally functioning human society organized into distinct strata with its people practicing respective values that ensure stability: pragmatism rather than heroism, order rather than adventure, expediency rather than absolutism, obedience rather than authorship, and 'soothing lies' rather than 'stabbing truths'. Fearful of impending violence and repeatedly violated, the Persian mind has found Sa'di's morality a most practical tool for survival.

#19 A Page from the *Gulistan* of Sa'di; #20 A Fantastic Forest; #21 Album Leaf. Folio from a *Gulistan* of Sa'di; #22 Folios from Sa'di's *Gulistan*; #23 Verses from a *Bustan* of Sa'di; #24 The Philip Hofer *Bustan*.

#### 6. **Hafiz (1325-1389)** #27-32

Khajeh Shams'ud-din Muhammad Hafiz lived in times of a constant interplay of peace and turbulence in his native Shiraz which he left briefly only once and where he died. His mausoleum a site of veneration, Hafiz is alive in virtually every Persian household, rich or poor, learned or not. Equally well versed in Persian and Arabic letters, a courtier and a madrasa professor, he was favoured by kings and berated by clerics in protean succession. Apart from a few quatrains, *qasidas*, *qit'as* and *mathnavis*, the *Divan* consists entirely of *ghazals*, each one a unique masterpiece, whose conflicting testimonials have received literal, mystical, and often controversial exegeses among scholars, with the general public commonly reserving a preference for the latter interpretation.

The *heavenly court* of Hafiz is a circle bound by a string of truths which knows no bounds to the depths of love, friendship, vision and trust. Rejecting preachers and professors, Sufi Orders and pious pretenders, the circle is open to any who will follow the Magi Master away from the mosque and into the tavern. Skepticism may be admitted there, but nihilism is not, the ascetic may linger here, but the enthusiast is welcomed. The world is vain and human intention frail, the riddle of existence unknowable, and the doings of Fate preordained, but God is just, life a celebration, and poetry a revelatory act of faith. Hafiz submits to God, sins against his Word and knows the miraculous worth of his own. Paradox and prophecy, belief and heresy pour from the poet's pen into sheer lucidity. It is not possible to imagine the land of Iran without this passionate *rind* to whom she once gave birth.

#27 Hafiz: *Divan*; #28 Double Page Frontispiece; #29 An Incident in a Mosque; #30 Royal Lovers Picnicking in a Garden; #31 Allegory of Drunkenness; #32 Verses from the *Divan* of Hafiz.

## A LISTING OF THE PAINTINGS AND OBJECTS

#1

### **Bizhan Hunting Wild Boars**

From a MS. of the *Shahnameh*

Tabriz, Iran, Mongol, first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century



The romance of Bizhan and Manizheh, originally independent from the epic cycle, is a much-celebrated episode in the *Shahnameh*. Bizhan, son of Giv, a hero in the Iranian army, goes on a voyage in search of Manizheh, daughter of Afrasiyab, king of the Turanians. When Bizhan finds his way to the tent of Manizheh he is seized by the Turanians and remains in their captivity until he is finally rescued by Rostam. Here he is depicted on the hunt killing a wild boar.

#2

### **Bahram Gur Fights the Karg**

From the Demotte *Shahnameh*

Tabriz, Iran, ca 1330-40



Bahram V, son of Yazdgird I, is otherwise known as Bahram Gur for his celebrated wild ass (*gur*) hunts. Among his numerous incredible feats is his slaying of the ferocious monster, the Karg.

#3

### **Bahram Gur Hunts with Azadeh**

From the Demotte *Shahnameh*

Tabriz, Iran, ca 1330-40



The youthful Prince Bahram chooses the beautiful harpist Azadeh from among forty Rumi slave girls to ride with him when he hunts. Once he insists that she select the prey and proceeds to show his expertise in accomplishing her request. Feeling pity for the deer, Azadeh calls the feat 'madness', not 'manhood'. Angered at her words, Bahram throws her off the horse and she is killed.

#4

#### **Battle of Rashnawad against the Rumis**

From the Demotte *Shahnameh*

Tabriz, Iran, ca 1330-40



Rashnawad is the commander of the Iranian army. He helps Darab, the rightful heir to kingship, ascend the throne of Iran by informing Queen Hodaya of Darab's identity. Upon Darab's coronation by Hodaya, the war with Rum is resumed. The Iranian army, led by its commander Rashnawad, fights a fierce battle against the Rumis led by Filicus (Philip). On the fourth day, Filicus is defeated and forced to flee to his capital, Ammoria. From there he sends an emissary to Darab imploring him to uphold his honor in a way befitting a true monarch. Following an agreement, Filicus gives his daughter Nahid to Darab in marriage, sending her along with a hundred thousand golden eggs, each containing a royal gem. Eventually, however, Darab sends the pregnant Nahid back to Rum. There she gives birth to a son whom she names Sekandar (Alexander the Great). Sekandar becomes heir to the throne of Caesar and in time defeats Dara the son of Darab and ascends the throne of Iran.

#5

#### **Rustam's Brother and Son Kill Isfandiyar's Sons**

From the Demotte *Shahnameh*

Tabriz, Iran, ca 1330-40



The tragedy of Rustam and Isfandiyar is among the most renowned and moving episodes of the *Shahnameh*. Reluctant but forced to follow his father King Gushtasp's bidding, Isfandiyar leads an army to Zabolestan to capture Rustam. Among the ensuing battles is the one depicted in this painting where Zavareh and Sohrab, Rustam's brother and son, kill Bahman and Iraj, Isfandiyar's two sons. In the final battle Rustam overcomes Isfandiyar himself.

#6

#### **Eskandar's Iron Cavalry Battles the Fur of Hind**

From the Demotte *Shahnameh*

Tabriz, Iran, ca 1330-40



Eskandar (Alexander the Great), son of Darab and Nahid (Darius II and the daughter of King Philip of Macedon, respectively), defeats the army of Dara, the young son of Darab, and ascends the throne of Iran. Subsequently, Eskandar (top right-hand corner) invades India with his Iranian army. His engineers construct metal horses and riders, fill these with naphta, and having ignited them, send them against the army. The contraption sets man and mount afire, causing the army to flee from the battlefield.

#7

### **Rustam Shoots Isfandiyar in the Eyes**

From the Demotte *Shahnameh*

Tabriz, Iran, ca 1330-40



The tragedy of Rustam and Isfandiyar is unrivalled in its pathos among the legends of the *Shahnameh*, excepting, perhaps, the story of Rustam and Sohrab. Unwilling to step aside for his son, Isfandiyar, King Gushtasp sends him on a mission to capture the greatest hero Rustam who is forever loyal to the court. Isfandiyar resolutely questions his father's decision, but a king has to be obeyed, and therefore he leads an army to Rustam's abode, Zabolistan. On the other hand, Rustam is also bound by the heroic code and therefore refuses to submit. In the ensuing battle Rustam and his horse, Rakhsh, are badly wounded. Overcome by the invulnerable Isfandiyar, Rustam proposes an overnight truce, then seeks help from the legendary bird Simorgh who heals his wounds by rubbing a feather over them. She then provides Rustam with a two-pronged arrow and tells him to aim for Isfandiyar's only vulnerable spot, his eyes. Thus is the upright prince slain by the great hero. This tragic episode has inspired many a painter and poet of later times.

#8

### **Ceramic Tile**

Iran, Seljuq, 12<sup>th</sup> century

#9

### **Hushang Slays the Black Div**

From Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnameh*

Attributable to Sultan Muhammad

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1522

Gayomars is the first of the Pishdadi kings whose reign begins the mythical narrative of the *Shahnameh*. Siyamak, Gayomars' son, is killed in battle against the Black Div, son of Ahriman, the evil

principle incarnate. Gayomars gathers an army for his grandson, Hushang, who goes on to avenge his father by slaying the Black Div. Hushang's army which includes peris, tigers, lions, and daring wolves, is here depicted fighting and defeating the host of divs, while Gayomars keeps watch over the battle scene.

#10

### The Nightmare of Zahhak

From Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnameh*

Attributable to Mir Mussavir

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1525-35



Zahhak was the son of the noble Merdas and came from the desert where men rode horses and wielded spears. The devil, Iblis, disguised as a cook, tricked the noble Zahhak into allowing him to kiss his shoulders from which spots two ferocious snakes then sprouted. The snakes were to be fed the brains of Iranian youths if Zahhak wished to be left in peace. So commences one of the darkest periods in the Iranian national epic. The usurper King Zahhak's long reign of terror promotes lies, treachery, immorality, and the sacrifice of Iranian youths. The episode here depicts Zahhak in his old age recounting a dream which foretells his defeat at the hands of Fereydun wielding an ox-headed mace. The dream does indeed materialize and the divine *farreh* that had left Jamshid, resulting in the most tyrannical periods of Iranian history, returns in the person of the benevolent king Fereydun. Order is once again restored and light prevails over darkness.

#11

### Fereydun Crosses the River Dijla

From Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnameh*

Attributable to Sultan Muhammad

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1525-30



Zahhak's nightmare comes true. People revolt against his tyranny, and led by Kava the blacksmith who fashions the 'Kaviani Banner' from his leather apron, Fereydun gathers an army and sets out against Zahhak. On his way, he has to cross the Arvand River (Dijla, the Tigris). The episode here depicts Fereydun and his army at this junction. Fereydun, wielding the ox-headed mace, demands that the boatman ferry the army across, but is refused on the grounds that he does not carry Zahhak's sealed permission. At this Fereydun becomes enraged and fearlessly enters the deep waters of the river

followed by his troops. The entire army safely crosses the river and sets out for Jerusalem where Zahhak has erected his palace.

#12

### **Fereydun in the Guise of a Dragon Tests his Sons**

From Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnameh*

Attributable to Aqa Mirak

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1535

Fereydun overcomes Zahhak, chains him in Mount Damavand, and rules in justice. Shahnava and Arnavaz, daughters of Jamshid whom he had freed from Zahhak's bondage, bear him three sons. In time, one of Fereydun's wise counsellors, Jandal, is sent out to seek brides for his sons, and he decides upon the three daughters of Sarv, the king of Yemen. When the sons return to Iran in the company of their brides, Fereydun decides to test them. He disguises himself as a dragon and confronts them on their path. The oldest son flees in terror, proclaiming that no one in his right mind would fight a dragon. The second son draws his sword, saying a cavalier and a raging lion are equal adversaries in his mind. The third son approaches the dragon, calls it a 'mere crocodile,' and warns it against certain death unless it leaves the path open to Fereydun Shah's three sons. Having thus ascertained their respective qualities as cowardly, bold, and wise, Fereydun leaves the scene and reappears as the king, revealing the dragon's secret to them. He then names his sons Salm, Tur, and Iraj.

#13

### **Frontispiece of Nizami's *Khamseh***

Isfahan, Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

In the middle of this frontispiece appear the opening verses of *Makhzan al-Asrar*, 'The Treasure-House of Mysteries', which is the first of the five *mathnavis* included in the *Khamseh*:

*The Name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate,  
Is the wise man's key to the treasure-house;  
With it does thought begin and speech end.  
Begin in the name of God, and end with it.*

Verses in praise of Nizami appear in the top and bottom sections. They include a pun on the name Nizami and its cognate, *nizam* 'perfect order'.

*No one has bestowed perfect order as has Nizami,  
Upon the glistening, knotted, pearls of speech.  
May God's a-thousand mercies rest upon his soul,  
For poetry has reached perfection in him.*

#14

### **Unhappy Lovers**

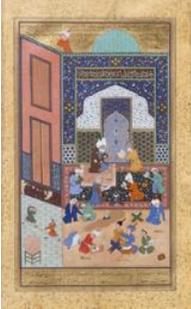
From an Album of Poetry and Calligraphy

Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

The romantic epic *Layli u Majnun* is the third poem in Nizami's *Khamseh*. Set in Arabia, it recounts the tragic love affair between Qays and his schoolmate Layli. Her father rejects the lover on account of his wildly extreme passion which has earned him the epithet Majnun, 'madman', and gives her in marriage to Ibn Salam. The despondent Majnun abandons himself to the desert and solitude, keeping company with the animals of the wild and singing of his beloved wherever he roams. In time Layli becomes mortally ill. Upon her death Majnun comes to her grave and fatally overcome by grief, dies mourning her.

#15

### Layli and Majnun at School



The scene depicts an early episode in *Layli u Majnun* when the two were at school together.

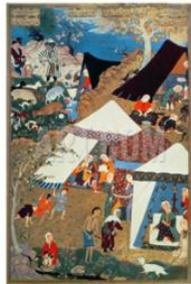
#16

### Camp Scene

By: Mir Sayyid Ali

From the *Khamseh* of Nizami

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1540



The scene is believed to be an illustration of one of the episodes of the romantic epic of *Layli u Majnun*. It depicts Majnun's father having gone to Layli's tribe to ask her father for her hand in marriage.

The poem along the borders of the rug on the tent floor is a couplet with only three hemistiches showing:

*One cannot fill the shoes of the grand,  
Unless one provides for all in grandeur.  
Should you rely on God's benevolence,*

...

#17

### Night-time in a Palace

From Nizami's *Khamseh*  
Attributable to Mir Sayyid Ali  
Isfahan, Iran, ca 1950

A palace scene from the *Khamseh*. The inscription at the lower right is a poem by Hafiz (translated by Martin Bernard Dickson):

*The pupil of my eye is your resting place.  
Be kind, alight, for it is your house.*

In the upper left-hand corner of the painting the following *hadith* (a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad) is inscribed:

*God will build a dwelling place in Paradise  
For he who builds a mosque for God.*

#18

### Safavid Textile

#19

### A Page from the *Gulistan* of Sa'di

The first story on this page (top right-hand corner) is the last in the VI<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the *Gulistan*: *On Old Age and Weakness*. Unlike most other stories of the *Gulistan*, this one is all in verse, a synopsis of which follows:

*I have heard, not long ago,  
An old man sought a dame.*

*A lovely lass he found himself, and Jewel was her name.  
Then his jewel did he veil, from all men's eyes for shame.*

*As must be in every wedding, his eyes he set upon her,  
But at the very first attempt, the old man's stick went lame.*

The next story is the first in the VII<sup>th</sup> Chapter: *On the Influence of Education*, of which the following is a synopsis:

A vizier had a slow-witted son whom he sent to a learned man to be educated. The man exerted himself for some time, but to no avail. The youth was sent back to his father, "This boy of yours has failed to sharpen his own wits and has robbed me of mine as well".

*When the core is qualified,  
Learning will endure.*

*A scrap of steel can not be glazed,  
Should its substance be impure.*

#20

### **A Fantastic Forest**

Folio from a *Gulistan* of Sa'di

Scribe: Sultan Ali

Margins illustrated by Sultan Muhammad

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1520

A page from the 29<sup>th</sup> story of Chapter III: *On the Virtues of Contentment*. One of the longest stories of the *Gulistan*, it recounts the adventures of a poverty stricken professional puncher who sets out on a journey in the hope of gaining a fortune but gains instead one single moral: money over matter!

#21

### **Folio from a Gulistan of Sa'di**

Two stories from Chapter II appear on this page from the *Gulistan: On the Character of Dervishes*. The synopsis of the first story is as follows:

A king invites a pious man to his court. The man thinks it best to drink a potion with an emaciating effect so that he may appear even more pious when in audience. The potion turns out to be poisoned and he dies:

*What I had believed to be a kernel whole,  
Turned out onion-like to be a layered soul.*

*True ascetics then pray while facing men,  
While the **qibla** they with their backs cajole.*

The second story is one of many tales related of the famous sage, Luqman. When asked, "From whom did you learn proper conduct?" he replied: "From ill-mannered folk. Whatever act of theirs I perceived as improper, I did not repeat".

*From one single word uttered in mere jest,  
A wise man contrives to learn a true lesson.*

*If a hundred wise lessons be read to a fool,  
He learns only words uttered in mere jest.*

#22

### **Folios from Sa'di's Gulistan**

The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India 1600-1660

Above: **The Undoing of the Ill-Natured Vizier** (*Gulistan*: Chapter I, 1)

By: Manohar



The synopsis of the story is as follows:

A king orders the execution of a prisoner. In his hour of despair, the wretched man mutters curses against the king. The king asks his vizier to repeat what the man had said. The kind-hearted vizier gives a favorable account. Forthwith an ill-natured vizier proclaims the truth, whereupon the king states: "We are more inclined to the lie our other vizier has said and care not much for the truth which you have uttered. For he spoke out of compassion, and you, out of malice".

Below: **Fraudulent Pilgrim Rejected from Court** (*Gulistan*: Chapter I, 32)

By: Ghulam Reza

The synopsis of this story is as follows:

A fraudulent pilgrim comes to town claiming to be an *Alavi*, a descendent of the Prophet's line. He goes on to present a panegyric poem to the king, passing it off as his own composition. A few courtiers expose his true identity and his poetic claim to fame. Having suffered a good beating, the man confesses. This must be the truest word the man had ever uttered, concedes the king, and forthwith grants him pardon.

#23

### **Verses from a *Bustan* of Sa'di**

Iran, 18<sup>th</sup> century

The verses are in the ornamental style of *shikasta*; the calligraphy is dated 1189 A.H.

The page contains several *ghazals* of Sa'di.

#24

### **The Philip Hofer *Bustan***

Bukhara, 15<sup>th</sup> century

This page from the magnificent Hofer *Bustan* depicts a king at court. The story is from the chapter called: The Impudence of Dervishes and the Patience of Kings. The verse narrative (starting from the beginning of the story on the previous page) is as follows:

*Malek Saleh the king who reigned in Syria once,  
Every dawn left court, a page close by his side.*

*Met he two dervishes once sleeping in a mosque,  
Both suffering anguish and both heavy of heart.*

*The next day the king asked the two to court,  
Seated on his throne he gave them guidance.*

*Lavished upon the two many bounteous gifts,  
Wiped off their lowliness cheered their woeful brow.*

*One of them declared aside to the king:  
"O you, sole enslaved to wisdom of the world,*

*The eminent alone are received by lords.  
What eminence was it you found in your slaves?"*

*The king thus exalted did bloom like a flower,  
He smiled upon the man and this to him did say:*

*"I am not a man who out of pride of wealth  
Turns away his eyes from the needful throng.*

*The gate of peace I have flung wide on this morn,  
Lest you close it shut, on me some yonder day".*

#25

**Pen-box**

Iran, Qajar period

#26

**Safavid Tapestry**

#27

**Hafiz: *Divan***

Isfahan, Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

#28

**Hafiz: *Divan***

Iran, Qajar period

The following is the translation of a *ghazal*:

*This word shall not please the town preacher:  
He becomes not a Muslim without lies and delusion.*

*Learn the art of the **rind** and learn grace.  
For what is a beast that refusing wine, fails to become a man?*

*Purity of essence is the condition for refinement,  
For not every rock and pebble becomes pearl and coral reef.*

*The Great Name will do what it must, O heart, fear not,  
Though anguished and cunning, no demon becomes a Muslim.*

*I seep myself in love and hope this noble craft,  
Will not cause despair as do the other arts.*

*Yesteryear she vowed to please me on the morrow,  
I beseech thee, Lord, let her cherish not regrets.*

*I pray that God may grant you a sweet, gentle temper,  
That we lie in anguish no more because of you.*

*Unless the atom hold supreme resolve, Hafiz!  
It will not seek the source of the radiating sun.*

#28

**Hafiz: *Divan***

Double Page Frontispiece

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1526-27

The celebrated first *ghazal* of the *Divan* adorns this magnificent page:

*O cup-bearer! Pour a cup and drink.  
Love seems easy at first, yet trials befall thereafter.*

*The morning breeze unfolds her locks with musky scent,  
The hearts of men are slain by her camphored curls.*

*Wherefore my sheltered pleasures in the beloved's nest,  
As caravan-leaders cry: 'Break down the standing tents!'*

*Bathe thy cloak in wine if the Magi Master tells you,  
For the seeker knows the stations' trails and traditions.*

*Dark is the night, dreadful the waves, wheeling the maelstrom,  
How shall carefree men on the shores ever discern our plight?*

*Willfulness has at last brought disrepute upon my deeds,  
A secret that breeds coteries never remains concealed.*

*Hafiz, if you yearn to see, remove your veil before Him.  
At the sight of what you sought, forsake the world and take it.*

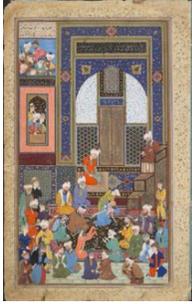
#29

**An Incident in a Mosque**

By: Shaykh Zadeh

From the *Divan* of Hafiz

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1520



Three opening lines of different *ghazals* of the *Divan* are inscribed on the painting (translated by Martin Bernard Dickson):

Upper left-hand corner:

*Preachers preening on the pulpit loudly for us all,  
Take their vows and the quiet answer to a different call.*

Over the main portico:

*Mind your own business preacher man, what are you yowling for?  
I've lost my heart in love and you – what are you prowling for?*

On the roof balustrade on the far left:

*There's a ready site where you may nest in the recess of my eyes.*

Also on the balustrade of the main central door the following Koranic inscription appears:

*O you who open the gates (**ya mufattih'al-abwab**)*

#30

### **Royal Lovers Picnicking in a Garden**

Attributable to: Sultan Muhammad

From the *Divan* of Hafiz

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1626-26



The verse from Hafiz at the top of the painting reads (translated by Martin Bernard Dickson):

*A rose without the glow of a lover bears no joy;  
Without wine to drink the spring brings no joy.*

#31

### **Allegory of Drunkenness**

Signed: Sultan Muhammad

From the *Divan* of Hafiz

Isfahan, Iran, ca 1526-27



Worldly and otherworldly intoxication, the sacred and the profane, the temporal and the timeless come together in this painting. The inscription at the top reads (translated by Martin Bernard Dickson):

*The angel of mercy took the reveling cup and tossed it down,  
As rose-water, on the cheeks of houris and angels.*

#32

### **Verses from the *Divan* of Hafiz in the *shikasta* script**

Signed: Musali

Isfahan, Iran, 18<sup>th</sup> century

The central poem is one of the most celebrated *ghazals* of the *Divan*:

*Joseph long lost will return to Canaan, grieve no more.  
The den of woes will turn into a rose garden, grieve no more.*

*O afflicted heart, you shall heal again, do not despair,  
This disheveled mind shall come to be restored, grieve no more.*

*When the spring of life shall spread afresh on meadows,  
O sweet song-bird, the rose shall shelter you, grieve no more.*

*Though the Wheel of Fortune turned not our way these rounds,  
The round of times stays not unchanging, grieve no more.*

*Do not despair, you do not know the mysteries of the unseen,  
Many a secret game unfolds behind the veil, grieve no more.*

*Should the deluge of oblivion consume the source of life,  
With Noah commanding your ship, fear not the tempest, grieve no more.*

*And if yearning for the Ka'ba, you tread upon the desert,  
When thorns and thistles take you to task, grieve no more.*

*Though the station be perilous, the harbour out of sight,  
There is no path to which there is no end, grieve no more.*

#33

### **Bearded Figure**

Isfahan, Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

The selection of this painting is based on its depiction of the essence of the mystic realm as revealed in the following poem by Rumi: (*Kulliyat*. Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1351. #1526, p. 583).

*By virtue of good wine, I know not oblivion.  
By virtue of non-place, I know not my place.*

*One moment arrives, I fall to ocean depths.  
Another instant hence, I bear men like she.*

*Nowhere in the world did I fit a place,  
I do befit in truth that friend of no place.*

*I am a drunken **rind**, who is inflamed by love.  
Above all the **rinds**, my ecstasy rings out.*

*I saw Beauty flushed with wine and crying,  
I am affliction, affliction, affliction.*

*A hundred cries replied from all directions,  
I am yours, yours, yours.*

*Thou art the light that cried to Moses oft,  
I am God, God, God.*

*"Who art thou, Shams-e Tabriz?" I asked,  
I am thee, thee, thee.*

#34

### **Mystic Journey**

Isfahan, Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

The following poem is chosen from Rumi's *Divan-e Shams-e Tabriz*. (*Kulliyat*. Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1351. #1802, p. 679)

*I will circle so about the heart,  
That neither body nor soul shall defend.*

*I will circle so about the soul,  
That every warp and woof of mine shall rend.*

#35

### **Sufi, Monkey, Bird, and Horse**

#36

### **Black Rose**

Iran, Qajar period, 18<sup>th</sup> century

The following poem is from Rumi's *Divan-e Shams-e Tabriz*.  
(*Kulliyat*. Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1351. #2991, p. 1106)

*I reached a land where the scent  
Of magic and miracle never blows.*

*The scent of the Beloved led me there,  
Which smells not of musk, nor of camphor.*

*Your feet shall not endure the walk, my friend,  
Your wings shall not endure the flight, they burn.*

*Though the fire burn you through all black,  
He beholds only a pure, translucent, ruby.*

#37

### **Lovers**

Isfahan, 16<sup>th</sup> century

A quatrain by Khayyam:

*Khayyam! If you be drunk with wine, rejoice.  
If you be at a maiden's side, rejoice.*

*For if the end of life be non-existence,  
Now that you are, as if you were not, rejoice.*

#38

### **Youth with Iris**

Isfahan, Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

A poem by Rumi (*Kulliyat*. Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1351. #2892, p. 1070)

*O eternal king! O heavenly light!  
O spring of life, O orchard in No Place!*

*I witnessed your translucence, the tales of souls I heard,  
Unseen like souls I turned, alone with no trace.*

*Your eyes so ecstatic, are you jinn or peri?  
Alike as sweet honey, are you a garden bloom?*

*No other path is there, no other king is there,  
No other life is there, all else shall fade in doom.*

#39

### **Brass Candlestick**

Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

A similar candlestick appears in the painting "Night-time in a Palace". Popular verses are inscribed on this:

*Like a candle am I, nightly does my life burn.  
Should I sigh but once, both worlds will burn.*

*Beware the smoke of my burning heart,  
For surely from my burning all being will burn.*

#40

### **Brass Bowl**

Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

A similar bowl appears in the painting entitled "Camp Scene".

#41

### **Star Tile**

Iran, 12<sup>th</sup> century



This tile is a vivid example of the role that Persian poetry has played in inspiring master craftsmen. Depicted on this tile which would have adorned a pavilion or home, are two lovers seated facing each other. The tile is signed and dated 627 A.H.

#42

### **Brass Pen-box**

Iran, 16<sup>th</sup> century

#43

### **Bird-shaped Ink-well**

Iran, 13<sup>th</sup> century

#44

### **Metal Rosewater Container**

Iran, 12<sup>th</sup> century