

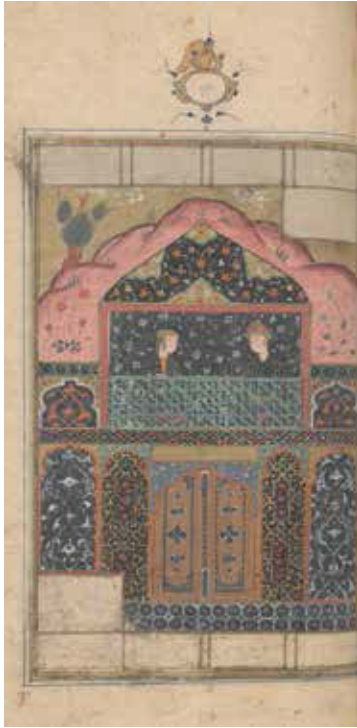
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*From Persia and Beyond: a discussion of the
illustrations to a Khamsa of Amir Khusrau
Dihlavi in the State Library of Victoria*

THE NAME 'PERSIA' is a westernised version of Fars, the name of a single province within the polity known as the Persian empire. At its greatest, about 513 BCE under the Achaemenian ruler Darius, the empire extended considerably beyond this dominant province, and beyond modern Iran, to the Oxus, the Indus and into Anatolia. Though over time the memory of the Achaemenian dynasty faded in these lands, some traces of the cultural impact of the empire remained, or were reinforced or reintroduced by later conquests. In consequence, with regard to the geo-political sphere it is not easy to define what is 'beyond' Persia, even when referring to territory that is adjacent and related to it. In order to manage discussion of this state of affairs with regard to the cultural sphere, the academic world has devised the adjective 'Persianate': this describes manifestations of Persian culture that are not rooted in the heartlands.

The Persianate 'beyond' can perhaps best be applied to the culture of lands that were never under Persian rule, but which received Persian cultural forms as transmitted by successions of Persianised Turkish conquerors. To the west, Seljuq Turks entered Anatolia in 1071; the Seljuqs of Rum flourished with Konya as their centre in the early-13th century; their eventual successors, the Ottomans captured Constantinople in 1453, and progressed through the Balkans until they threatened Vienna in 1683. To the east, Ghurid Turks entered northern India in 1192, and they, their successors, or former vassals ruled for some three centuries in a tract of history that can loosely be called the Sultanate Period. The Turko-Mongol Mughals first entered northern India in 1526, and they were not extinguished until 1858. The third ruler of the dynasty was Akbar (ruled 1556–1605); among his many other achievements, he was patron of a great number of fine illustrated manuscripts, examples of which will be mentioned below.

In the late-12th century, the celebrated Persian poet, Nizami, composed his *Khamsa*, a quintet of books. The first book contains a set of didactic essays reinforced with brief parables; the other four books are romances, three of which have a quasi-historical background. At the turn of the 13th to 14th century, Amir Khusrau Dihlavi – who was born in India and lived there, though he was of Central Asian extraction and Persian culture, and who was thus a paradigm of 'Persia and beyond' – composed a *Khamsa* of his own that in some respects follows that of Nizami, and in some departs from it. From the 16th century onwards, the works of both poets were illustrated in both Iran and India. In consequence, there is a great wealth of illustrations that might be compared and contrasted. The purpose of the present essay is to focus these large



Bahram Gur in the *Mushkin* pavilion.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau,
Khamsa, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 175r.



Bahram Gur in the *Bunafsh* pavilion.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau,
Khamsa, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 195v.

questions on a discussion of the illustrations of one particular manuscript: the *Khamsa* of Amir Khusrau in the collection of the State Library of Victoria (hereafter SLV).¹

As is clear from its style, this volume was produced in Iran; it is of good, though not royal, quality. It was copied by a scribe named Mu‘izz al-Din Husayn Langari, and is dated 1007–1008 (1599–1600), thus during the reign of the Safavid Shah ‘Abbas I (ruled 1587–1629). Its place of production is not mentioned: this might be the new Safavid capital of Isfahan, but a certain insouciant charm in the illustrations may suggest an origin in one of the centres of production in the easterly province of Khurasan.²

A considerable amount of the narrative of the two *Khamsas* is broadly similar, and this is particularly true of what may be described as the more structural elements, whose iconography tends to remain stable over time and place. This is especially evident in the illustrations that give a framework to the tale of the Sasanian prince, Bahram Gur, which Nizami calls *Haft Paykar* (‘Seven fair forms’ or ‘Seven portraits’) and Amir Khusrau calls *Hasht Bihisht* (‘Eight paradises’). Day by day in the week, Bahram visits the pavilion of one of seven princesses of the seven regions of the world, and the princess



Bahram Gur in the *Kafuri* pavilion.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau,
Khamsa, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 208v.



Khusrau received by Mihin Banu.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau,
Khamsa, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 66v.



Shakar entertained at Khusrau's lodging
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau,
Khamsa, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 80r.

tells him a story. These stories, structurally subordinate but aesthetically dominant, are largely different in the work of the two poets. The additional number in Amir Khusrau's version is a notional sum of the seven parts, and is an instance of the variations that he introduces to outdo his predecessor, while remaining within the bounds of decorum. The pavilions are characterised by different colours. The pavilion that Bahram Gur visits on Saturday is Black in Nizami's version; Amir Khusrau designates it the Musky Pavilion, since musk is a *topos* in Persian poetry that implies blackness and fragrance. The SLV manuscript shows the domed pavilion in a composition that emphasises symmetry; Bahram and the princess sit behind the lattice of an upper gallery (see p. 98); black is predominant though not the exclusive colour of the structure, and within it Bahram Gur and the princess are robed in black. Were it not for the surrounding text, the picture could illustrate Nizami's story.³

The next pavilion, that of Sunday, is Yellow for Nizami, but Saffron for Amir Khusrau. Some manuscripts of either poet confine themselves to the illustration of the Black pavilion, with the possible addition of its successor. The artists (or their directors) who make this choice may often be wise to do so, since there is a distinct risk of repetitive dullness when all the pavilions are shown. It is one of the remarkable achievements of the artist of the SLV manuscript that he takes us through all the pavilions of the week with well-modulated invention so that the changing succession becomes a delight. The Saffron Pavilion in the SLV manuscript necessarily repeats the general iconography to the first picture, though a servant has been added. There is, however, a variation in the treatment of the architecture, in the form of an audaciously small dome set on a high collar, and the couple are sitting in their more usual place at ground level. On Monday, when a Nizami pavilion would be Green, Amir Khusrau's is Verdant: Bahram reclines at ease, cypress and willow fronds echo the thematic colour, and the interior wall is itself decorated with a tree. On Tuesday, when Nizami's pavilion would be Red, Amir Khusrau's is Pomegranate-coloured: the designation taken up by a pomegranate tree growing beside the pavilion. On Wednesday, when Nizami's pavilion is Blue, Amir Khusrau's is Violet: the painter here interprets the pavilion as a delicate gazebo, with Bahram reclining and the princess apparently massaging his foot (see p. 98).⁴

It appears that in the matter of Thursday, where Nizami has already claimed the term Sandalwood, for what is in effect brown, Amir Khusrau can think of no more elevated epithet and is obliged to use the same word: the painter renders this pavilion as another gazebo, with the couple sitting more decorously. The pavilion of Friday, the holy day, is White for Nizami, but Camphor for Amir Khusrau. The illustration in the SLV manuscript is interesting in several respects (see p. 99). It is the last in the volume and, being unfinished, it shows an intermediate stage in the production of a picture; in addition its intended dome, which extends into the upper margin, underlies a unit of illumination, such as is found above each illustration, and thus proves beyond doubt that these result from a later intervention. The development so far as Bahram is concerned is that this princess is shown to be massaging his thigh. We may wonder whether this

greater degree of intimacy might have caused work on the picture to be halted. At all events, this departure seems rather out of keeping with the story told by the princess of the Camphor pavilion, which concerns the conduct that distinguishes a chaste and pious wife.

The illustrations to the story of Bahram are very easily identified by their colours. If we move in the SLV Amir Khusrau *Khamsa* to the treatment of the story of Khusrau and his love for Shirin we find a number of scenes of a more generic character, where the narrative in question is less evident. Like Bahram, Khusrau was a Sasanian prince; in Amir Khusrau's version he has succeeded to the throne, but, defeated in battle by a usurping rival, he rides into exile. In Armenia, he encounters and immediately falls in love with the princess Shirin. She conducts him to the palace of her aunt, Mihin Banu, who receives him hospitably. In the first illustration to this story, we see a prince and a lady sitting in a pavilion; on the left a female servant brings in a dish of food; on the right are two female musicians (see p. 99).

The scene is charming but rather unspecific: it is not clear whether the lady portrayed is intended as Shirin or her aunt, and indeed the picture could be taken for one of Bahram Gur's pavilions, were it a little more definite in colour. This demonstrates the fact that some pictures have a generic iconography that could well be used for other subjects in other works. Similarly, the two following illustrations, which have a charming *fête-champêtre* character, could be applied interchangeably. Indeed, it is not impossible that the artist has got them the wrong way round. The first shows a flowering landscape with Khusrau and a lady sitting on a throne, while music is provided by male and female musicians, and a woman dances. This illustration is used at a point where Khusrau and Shirin are indeed enthroned, but they have before them ten youths and ten maidens. Khusrau invites the attendants to pair off with the promise that he will unite them. However, Shirin and Khusrau themselves quarrel and fail to follow suit. The next illustration shows the prince and a lady in a yet more floriferous landscape, but here six attendants are shown as three pairs (see p. 99). In this case, as the text shows, the lady is not Shirin but Shakar. Khusrau has journeyed to Isfahan to find solace with the beautiful Shakar. She comes to visit him at his lodging, and they are entertained by the musician, Barbad. Shakar then invites Khusrau to her house and on the following day she marries him.

A little later in the narrative, we come to a point where Shirin has heard of Khusrau's marriage, and Khusrau has heard that a young sculptor-cum-engineer named Farhad has fallen in love with Shirin. Khusrau has caused the death of Farhad; and an aged servant of Shirin has poisoned Shakar. Khusrau comes to the door of Shirin's castle to plead with Shirin for admittance (see p. 102). Shirin looks down from her tower on the left, while Khusrau approaches on horseback from the right. The composition may thus be described as L-shaped.⁵ Amir Khusrau has here broadly followed the narrative as told by Nizami. It is thus not surprising that this composition is also found illustrating this moment in volumes of Nizami's *Khamsa*. It is, however, not confined to these



Khusrau before Shirin's castle.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau, *Khamsa*,
dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 98r.



Bahram Gur listens as Dilaram
enchants the animals.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau, *Khamsa*,
dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 172v.

works since a particularly fine example was used in a manuscript of the poems of Khwaju Kirmani, whose illustrations are probably of the early 1390s.⁶ The importance of the L-shaped composition surely lies in the fact that it so clearly conveys the lovers' situation as though in a diagram. Though the distance between the lovers is not realistic in spatial terms, their relation in terms of narrative, he in motion and she static; and in terms of emotion and moral stature, he a supplicant and she an ideal. The SLV picture is thus of a generic type which might be found in a number of different texts, but whose meaning is immediately legible, laid before us in a form that can be assimilated without conscious thought.

At some points the narratives of Amir Khusrau follow the arc of those of Nizami, while diverging considerably from them in detail. Naturally such differences give rise to different illustrations. One such is the case of Bahram Gur's hunting companion, who makes her first appearance, even before the versions of Nizami and Amir Khusrau, in the *Shahnama* ('Book of Kings') of Firdausi.⁷ In brief, for Firdausi, the companion is a slave-girl harpist named Azada, for Nizami she is named Fitna, and for Amir Khusrau she is not specifically a slave musician and is named Dilaram. Invited to challenge his



Layla visits Majnun.
From a manuscript of
Amir Khusrau, *Khamsa*,
dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 149v.



The pilgrims who die of thirst.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau,
Khamsa, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 35r.

marksmanship, this personage raises Bahram's ire and he casts her off. Azada is trampled to death; Fitna is dismissed but by commencing training with a calf she acquires the capability to carry a full-grown animal up a tower, and so confounds Bahram with the power of practice and is re-united with him. Dilaram, on the other hand, learns from a wise man how to play the harp so that wild animals are drawn into an enchanted sleep, and so wins back Bahram by a superior skill. The SLV volume illustrates the episode of the enchantment of the animals (opposite). In a flowery mead, Dilaram and Bahram sit by a stream, on either side of a blossoming prunus that unites rather than divides them; she is playing her harp, he is 'biting the finger of surprise'. Four gazelles are beginning to feel the effect of the music, one having already lowered its head.

The three illustrations to the story of Layla and Majnun in the SLV manuscript demonstrate the varying degrees in which Amir Khusrau's treatment differs from that of Nizami. Set in pre-Islamic Arabia, the main narrative tells of the tragic loves of Qays, who is known as Majnun ('possessed by the jinn') because his passion has driven him mad, and Layla, who belongs to a different tribe. The first illustration occurs when Majnun, whose madness causes him to wander in the desert, has been befriended by Naufal, a

bedouin chieftain. Naufal offers to obtain Layla as Majnun's bride, and a tribal battle ensues. In illustrations to the battle in the work of both Nizami and Amir Khusrau, it is usual to distinguish this scene from a purely generic battle by the inclusion of camels: here one is shown. The further distinguishing feature for Nizami illustrations is the presence of Majnun near the horizon watching in anguish.⁸ In Amir Khusrau's version, Majnun is not present at the initial battle, and hence he is not shown in the SLV picture. Other Amir Khusrau manuscripts may portray a later phase of this episode, when, hearing of a plot to kill Layla, Majnun clutches at Naufal's stirrup to beg him to desist from fighting.⁹

Some of the more poignant illustrations to Nizami's tale show Majnun in the wilderness visited by his father, his uncle, and his uncle escorting his mother.¹⁰ In Amir Khusrau, there is again a visit by his father,¹¹ but later by friends, who seek him out and invite him to join their joyful gathering. In the SLV manuscript this scene gives rise to an endearing scene of affection, with five figures clustered round Majnun, and beyond them the desert animals that are his usual companions.

At a climactic point in the story as found in Nizami manuscripts, a well-wisher brings Majnun to Layla's tent and the lovers both faint with emotion; this subject is found in several important manuscripts.¹² In Amir Khusrau's narrative, it is Layla herself who takes a camel and places a covered litter (*mahmil*) upon it; she then goes to search for Majnun in the desert. She finds him sleeping and takes his head on her lap. On waking, Majnun faints and they stay thus for a while; then both revive and tell each other of their love. This is the scene in the SLV manuscript (see p. 103). From the 17th century onwards and especially in the Mughal world, separate pictures intended for albums show Majnun and Layla in conversation in the desert. When Layla's camel is included in the scene, it is clear that the painter is working in the tradition of Amir Khusrau illustrations.

The parables told in *Matla' al-Anvar* ('The Ascent of Lights'), the first book of Amir Khusrau's *Khamasa*, are different from those told by Nizami, and so the question of similarities in illustration does not arise. There are, however, interesting links to be found to the earlier Amir Khusrau tradition in Iran, or to contemporary work in India. The persistence of Persian tradition is demonstrated by a picture that shows a group of travellers stricken with thirst in a desert; the man who comes upon them offers water, but, since each refuses to drink and passes the water to his friend, they all die of thirst (see p. 103). In the SLV picture, the would-be rescuer has come from the right, he has dismounted from his camel, and he carries a water bag; four travellers in various states of distress are disposed in a rough circle. It appears that this subject was rarely illustrated, but a version in the style of Bukhara of about the 1520s can be taken as a folio detached from a manuscript copied in Balkh in 909 (1503-04).¹³ In this the travellers are six in number, but the postures and the distribution of colour in garments suggest a model type from which the SLV picture descends. This association tends to support the suggestion that the SLV manuscript was produced in an eastern area of the Persian lands.

Another of the parable pictures characterises 'Youth and Age' (see p. 106 and detail

on cover). A young man wanders in a garden and an old man makes an approach to him. The young man taunts the old man for his stooped posture; the old man replies that he is looking for the coin of lost youth, and this will one day be the lot of the other. In the SLV picture the young man and the old are shown separated symbolically by a tree. A tree between two figures as a symbol of division or opposition has, of course, a long history;¹⁴ however, a grand manuscript of similar date, the *Khamsa* of Amir Khusrau produced for the Mughal ruler Akbar in 1597-98, invites particular comparison.¹⁵ The Mughal painting adds a great deal of luscious detail and background, but the essentials are the same. Youth and Age are again separated by a tree. As in the SLV picture, Youth wears a bright vermilion garment; Age still wears a blue gown, though he has taken off his yellow coat. It does not seem possible that there could be a cross-transmission between these two manuscripts, especially since the Mughal copy is marginally the earlier, so we must conclude that their illustrations derive from the same tradition in parallel developments.

Sometimes both Persian and Mughal comparisons can be brought to bear. This is the case for one of the parables whose iconography seems to remain fairly stable. The point of this very brief parable is the longing of the soul for the divine. A furnace-stoker looks at a king, loves him, and weeps. The king understands and smiles. In the SLV picture (see p. 107), the stoker sits facing right before a dark and cave-like furnace; he is surrounded by smoke and flames; the king comes from the right, wearing red and mounted on a white horse. The smoky heat of the furnace is to be identified with the mystical passion experienced by the stoker. The composition of the SLV picture is quite close to that of an illustration, probably from the Caucasus, that precedes it by some 100 years, though the king here wears blue and the furnace seems to be a combination of structure and cave.¹⁶ The fundamental elements are also to be found in the Mughal manuscript of 1597-98,¹⁷ though at first sight this is a confusing mass of figures in a much more complex landscape. If we consider the central focus, the treatment of the furnace is realistic, rather than symbolic, but the stoker is still surrounded by an aura of smoky fire, and the king still comes from the right wearing red and mounted on a white horse.

The question of parallel traditions of illustration in Persia and India is demonstrated again in the SLV Amir Khusrau in 'Shirin visits Farhad at work' (see p. 107) and 'Khusrau gives Farhad false news of the death of Shirin'. Shirin has asked Farhad to carve a channel through the rocks to bring to her the milk from her mountain flocks. Farhad has asked Shirin to visit him while he works, but, since he loves her, these visits are a source of torment to him. In the first of the pair of illustrations we see near the foot of an outcrop of rock Farhad crouching with his knees drawn up; there is no sign of the milk channel. Shirin approaches from the right on a black horse; she is wearing an orange coat over a blue gown, and her tall headdress is draped with a scarf. The illustration of this subject in the Amir Khusrau of 1597-98 for Akbar is at first sight very different.¹⁸ Farhad stands on the right and the milk channel is shown; Shirin comes from the left, she is again riding



Youth and Age.

From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau, *Khamsa*, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria, RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 47r.

a black horse. A curious element of this comparison is that aspects of Shirin's costume in the Persian tradition, as illustrated in the SLV manuscript, have been transferred in the Mughal painting to an attendant lady: she wears an orange robe, a blue shawl, and a high draped headdress.

In the second subject, Khusrau has heard of Farhad's infatuation with Shirin and he has become jealous. According to Nizami, having previously examined Farhad, Khusrau sends his rival a messenger who gives him false news of the death of Shirin, and thus causes his death. In Amir Khusrau's version, Khusrau first comes disguised as a shepherd to Farhad to investigate the strength of his love, and only then sends the fatal messenger. The SLV manuscript shows us Khusrau's visit, the prince and Farhad standing in conversation before a rocky outcrop. Since Khusrau is in disguise—a soft bonnet and



The king and the stoker.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau,
Khamsa, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 29r.



Shirin visits Farhad at work.
From a manuscript of Amir Khusrau,
Khamsa, dated 1007–08 (1599–1600).
State Library of Victoria,
RARESF 745.670955 AM5K, fol. 82r.

a walking stick—he might pass for the messenger in a Nizami manuscript, and so the scene is to an extent generic.¹⁹ The Mughal manuscript omits Khusrau’s visit but has a very specific treatment for the visit of the messenger.²⁰ It is interesting, but incidental to the present discussion, to note that the messenger is dressed as a cleric. What is germane is that Farhad is portrayed in the crouched posture used in the SLV manuscript in Shirin’s visit. The transposition of Shirin’s costume and Farhad’s posture to slightly different uses in the Mughal work demonstrates that the Mughal painters had access in some form to the Persian tradition for the illustration of Amir Khusrau’s *Khamsa*. It is in the highest degree unlikely that this could be transmitted verbally. It therefore appears that the painters had access, presumably in the royal library, to a manuscript illustrated in the Persian tradition, and that they felt free to adapt what it offered.

The SLV *Khamsa* of Amir Khusrau is thus an interesting piece in relation to both Persian and Persianate traditions.