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A RARE JAMI MANUSCRIPT

By Muhammad A. Simsar

Those who are lovers of rare books and manuscripts know the thrill and excitement of a new discovery. On the eve of the Firdausi celebration, when I located the Jami manuscript in the archives of the University library, I was overcome with joy and lost no time in examining the volume. I very soon struck upon a verse which revealed plainly the year, the month, the day, and the hour of the completion of this precious work of art. The time given was the 10th of Shawwal of the year 878 Hijra five hours after the daybreak (March 1, 1474). We know that Jami's dates were 1414-1492; therefore the manuscript was completed eighteen years before his death, when he was sixty years old. Before going into the description of the manuscript it will be appropriate to mention a few words about its author.

Mulla Nurud-Din Abdur-Rahman Jami was born at the little town of Jam in Khorasan, Iran, and hence adopted the pen name of Jami. He was one of the most remarkable poets Iran ever produced. The six greatest poets of Iran are considered to be Firdausi for epic poetry, Nizami for romances, Rumi for mystical poetry, Sa'di for his verses on ethical subjects, Hafiz for lyrics, and Jami for general excellence in all these forms. He was educated in Herat, but disliked the disciplinary methods of instruction. He was not studious as a boy, and preferred games to the study of books. However, he was adept and quick in learning. It is said of him that he used to snatch a book from his fellow students while on his way to school and excel them all when they recited in class. Later he studied at Samarkand under the well-known master of letters Kazi-i-Rum. On one occasion he outwitted his master in a public discussion before a large gathering. Whereupon, the learned man described Jami thus: "Since the building of this city no one has crossed the Oxus and entered Samarkand who is equal to young Jami in intelligence and in power of reasoning." This and other recognition early in life gave him an exaggerated feeling of his own importance, and he was never cured of this disease of egotism. He acknowledged his indebtedness to no one but to his father and
thought there was no master in the art of learning superior to himself. However, he was not as original as he professed to be. The traces of the influence of Nizami and of Sa‘di are quite evident throughout his writings. Of his works the most important were his three diwans or collection of lyrical poetry, and his seven masnawi poems, the Haft Awrank or “The Seven Thrones.” He also wrote numerous prose works. The best known of the seven masnawi is the “Yusuf-u-Zulaykha.” The story is that of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife and was first used in verse by Firdausi. The manuscript at the University Library is an illuminated edition of this last mentioned work.

The volume is 8 3/4 inches by 4 1/2 inches and is slightly injured by insects. The first four pages have been badly damaged and stained by dampness. There are 430 unnumbered pages beautifully written in Nasta‘lik style by the famous calligrapher Kasim Ali Shirazi. Another poem entitled Mehr-u-Mushtari or “The Sun and Jupiter” is embodied in the manuscript, written in excellent small Nasta‘lik on three margins of each page in the hand of the above-mentioned calligrapher. The authorship of this poem has not yet been determined. It is of course the work of one of the contemporaries of Jami, or of an earlier poet. Each page of the manuscript is 5 1/2 inches by 2 1/2 inches and has 20 lines of “Joseph and Potiphar’s wife” in the center of the page; each line is 3/4 of an inch in length, written on gold-sprinkled paper. The story of “The Sun and Jupiter” on the margins of each page has approximately 24 lines, each line of which is 3/4 of an inch long. All the headings of the main text, of which there are eighty-four, are nicely illuminated. The pages are gold lined and ruled in red ink with four triangular ornaments on each page. The first two pages are richly illuminated in gold, as are the eighteen pages containing the miniatures and the pages facing them. Nine of the miniatures belong to the embodied text, while the remaining nine depict scenes from the main text.

According to an annotation on the flyleaf the volume was originally in a royal library of a certain city (the name is not legible) and was given to a certain bookbinder by a person named Ghulam Hussein in the year 1105 Hijra (1693 A.D.) to be rebound. The bookbinder—if the present bind-
The manuscript must have been in bad condition when he rebound it, for he has trimmed and mounted each page on either dark brown or blue thick paper. The back and corners of the cover are in brown leather decorated in gold. The flyleaf also bears evidence of several notes and seals of successive owners. Most of these are not legible. One of them, however, is legible and states that the manuscript was bought for a modest sum of eighty Tumans in cash ($50.00 at the present rate of exchange), but no date of the purchase is given.

The paper of the manuscript is the product of Samarkand, the mother city of the paper trade in Islam. Chinese paper had become known to the Muslims about the middle of the seventh century, but they mastered the art of paper making some hundreds of years later. Certain Chinese slaves who were expert paper-makers were brought to Samarkand and were put to work at their trade for the profit of their masters. Later the Persians of the province of Khorasan took up the trade and developed it in Samarkand. They were the first to use linen rags as material for the fabrication of paper. The fame of the Samarkand paper spread rapidly and continued for centuries. Several brands of paper were developed. Among these we find the "Ja'far" named in honor of the Persian Vizir of Harun-al-Rashid. The "Pharao" was a quality designed to compete with the Egyptian papyrus. The "Sultan" and the Samarkand "Silk" paper also became famous. This last brand, on which the manuscript is written, was not made from silk, but from linen rags, and received its name from the soft silky touch which it obtained from a light sizing of soap and the use of a glassy polishing stone. It was generally gold-sprinkled before being used.

A facsimile page of the manuscript which is reproduced here, shows how the same letters in the same line are uniform in size. The length of each line and the width of the margins and the spaces between the lines present a harmonious appearance. Such an absolute precision in writing is the result of years of patient and conscientious work and is one of the outstanding characteristics of the works of the master painter and calligrapher Kasim Ali. Even single pages of his work
are much sought in Iran today by collectors of rare manuscripts.

The miniatures of the manuscript are in the late Timurid style and were probably painted in Herat where the author of the poem, Jami, spent most of his life. The painters of this school represent a distinctive transition of the art of miniature painting from that of the Mongol influence to that of a more brilliant and perfect style of the Bihzad School which followed the Timurid School. The Timurid School first flourished in Samarkand under Tamerlane (1369-1404), a descendant of Genghiz Khan, who made that city his capital, and it continued to flourish under his followers. His son Shah Rukh, however, preferred Herat, and moved his court there. The Timurid school of painting was based on the Mongolian traditions, but it marks the beginnings of the development of the Persian style of miniature painting. The painters of this school showed a preference for miniatures of small size, and while retaining some of the Chinese motives, excelled in color scheme and in combining it harmoniously with their own decorative qualities. These features are evident in the miniatures of the Jami manuscript. The Chinese clouds, the big lotus tree, the Mongolian figures, and the costumes and armors which they wear, are easily identifiable, but the traces of the influence of the Persian national style strike the eye immediately. For instance, gold is lavishly applied to the costumes, the armor, and to the furniture, and the beginnings of a new Persian technique are quite noticeable.

Of the eighteen miniatures in the manuscript, three have been selected for reproduction. They are all 3 inches by 1 3/4 inches. The first depicts Joseph in the slave market. He is shown standing on a gilded stool, and the slave merchants are eagerly bidding for him. He has a halo of flame around his head. In the rear is Zulaykha, Potiphar’s wife, on horseback with her attendants and a footman holding an ax. In the foreground is an old woman, an agent of Zulaykha, who is represented bidding for Joseph. According to the story she makes the final bid and buys Joseph for Zulaykha. The costumes worn by women, and especially the gold embroidered outfit on Zulaykha, are remarkable.
The second shows Joseph, Zulaykha, and her maids. The halo of flame is again around Joseph's head. Zulaykha is shown seated on a divan surrounded by her maids who are peeling apples for her. Again, according to the story, they are so dazzled by his beauty, that forgetting themselves they cut their fingers instead of cutting the fruit. The color scheme of this painting is excellent, and the whole arrangement of the interior gives a feeling of romance.

The third is a religious scene and is inserted in the beginning of the poem in connection with the poet's eulogy of the Prophet. It shows Muhammad on his journey through the seven heavens to the throne of God. He is on the back of Borak, his famous steed, and is accompanied by Gabriel and other angels. Both the Prophet and Borak are surrounded by a halo of flame, and the Prophet's face is left blank. This of course, is quite in keeping with the custom of the times when the reproduction of the likenesses of holy personages was considered a great sin. This miniature is very expressive, and shows a marked animation worthy of the master painters of the late Timurid School.

An analysis of these and other miniatures of the manuscript leads us to conclude that they are all of high quality. The extremely effective color scheme of these paintings, in which blue, red, and green predominate, show that they have been executed by a skillful master.

The manuscript was acquired by the University Library through the gift of the late Mr. Clarence S. Bement in July 1900. It is a masterpiece of calligraphy, illumination, and painting, and the Library may be considered fortunate in possessing it.