

A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ILLUSTRATED
TURKISH MANUSCRIPT IN THE
JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

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DEPUTY KEEPER OF ORIENTAL PRINTED BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS IN
THE BRITISH MUSEUM

THIS is an improved and more detailed account of some miniatures in a Turkish manuscript which formed the subject of a paper read by me at the Second International Congress of Turkish Arts held at Venice in September 1963. The manuscript (Turkish no. 61)¹ was originally in the collection of Nathaniel Bland (d. 1865), the author of the anthology entitled *A century of Persian Ghazals*, from whom it passed into the possession of the 25th Earl of Crawford and Balcarres. In 1901 it was purchased by Mrs. Rylands and has been exhibited in the Library from time to time.

It is a copy of the Turkish *meşnevî* poem *Yūsuf u Züleikḥā*,² written in 897/1491-2 by Aq Şems-ed-Dīnzāde Ḥamdī Çelebi. According to Gibb,³ Ḥamdī took the first part of his version from the earliest Persian *Yūsuf u Zulaikḥā* said to have been written by Firdausī. This attribution has been questioned in recent years by Professor Minovi and others. The poem is based on the Oriental legend of Joseph (Yūsuf) and Potiphar's wife (Zulaikḥā) as told in Surah XII of the Koran. This theme, in the more famous poem by Jāmī, written in 888/1483-4, acquired a mystical significance, Yūsuf representing the type of the Celestial Beauty, and Zulaikḥā a constant and overwhelming Love. Other parts of Ḥamdī's poetical version, which was the first in classical Ottoman Turkish, were derived from Jāmī, and it became the most celebrated work of its kind written up to that time. The number of manuscripts which are still in existence

¹ Bibliotheca Lindesiana *Handlist*, pp. 250, 268.

² Sometimes pronounced *Zelikḥā* by the Turks.

³ Gibb, *HOP*, pp. 142 etc.

is a proof of its popularity.¹ Ḥamdī, indeed, improved on Jāmī's work by omitting a number of moralizing passages towards the end which impede the progress of the narrative.

The manuscript consists of 255 folios and measures 18.4 × 11.3 cm. It was transcribed in a neat but not superlatively good *Ta'liq* within gold borders by Aḥmed b. Meḥemmed el-Üskübī in 965/1557-8 and contains twelve full-page miniatures, all of which have suffered damage to some extent. Some of the folios are tinted, both pink and yellow, and the section headings are in gold or coloured inks. At the beginning of the text is a fairly good *'unvān*. The original binding appears to have survived. It is decorated with a gilt inlaid medallion bearing a simple floral design.

Since the manuscript is dated, the miniatures are of considerable value for the study of Turkish painting. The most striking feature about these miniatures, in which the work of two artists (A and B) is represented, is their very Persian appearance. In general the palette is reminiscent of the Bukhārā style. The colours are soft yet rich and the range is far wider than in most Turkish miniatures—crimson, orange red, pale blue and pale green, beige, dark blue and violet. The influence from Bukhārā may have come through the manuscripts which were brought by Badī' az-Zamān to Istanbul c.1507 or at a later date. There is, however, no record known of a painter associated with Bukhārā working in the reign of Süleyman I. Another element derived from Bukhārā is the type of head-dress with a gold frontlet worn by the ladies. In addition to this, there are here and there suggestions of the Turkman style and of course, the underlying later Herāt style which formed the basis of early Ottoman miniature-painting. Perhaps the nearest parallel to the Rylands miniatures can be found in a copy of the *Divān* of Amīr Khusrau which was formerly in the Jeuniette Collection at Paris but has since been acquired by Sir Chester Beatty. According to the *Catalogue*,² the ten miniatures were executed

¹ See *İstanbul Kütüphaneleri Türkçe Hamseler Kataloğu*, pp. 22-27. Copies are found in most of the principal libraries of the world. Despite the large number of good manuscripts available, the poem remains unpublished.

² *The Chester Beatty Library. A catalogue of the Persian manuscripts and miniatures*, vol. iii (Dublin, 1962), p. 11, no. 233. One of the best miniatures is

“ possibly by Persian artists in Turkey ” c. 1500, and this may well be the case with some in the Rylands’ *Yūsuf u Zūleikḥā*.

The illustrations are by no means mere imitations of Persian work¹ nor are they of a markedly Ottoman type like those in the *Khusrev ü Şīrīn* manuscript at Uppsala.² In the latter, not only the colours used, but also the dress and the architectural details betray the Turkish artist. On the other hand, the Turkish atmosphere is less perceptible in the Rylands manuscript except in the work of the artist B who painted three of the miniatures (nos. 7-9). He uses a far more limited range of colour than A. His figures are almost invariably dressed in crimson or dark blue brocades with elaborate designs, and he has a preference for boldly-patterned tile-work. There is an unusual dark-coloured carpet in one scene which looks distinctly Turkish. The difference between artists A and B is further emphasized by the presence of gold cloud-bands surrounding the text only on the folios which bear illustrations by A.

As Ḥamdī drew upon the earlier *Yūsuf u Zulaikḥā*³ for his poem, so the Turkish artists were inspired by the same work when they came to illustrate these scenes. This was inevitable since several episodes (e.g. the miracle of the talking wolf and the dragon emerging from the Nile) are not found in Jāmī’s version, and thus never occur in the many fine and lavishly illustrated copies of this poem. In the crowd scenes, such as the sale of Yūsuf, the composition is simple compared with some of the parallel illustrations in manuscripts of Jāmī. These reproduced by Kühnel (*Miniaturmalerei im islamischen Orient*, 2nd edition, Berlin, 1923, Pl. 44).

¹ For example, the miniature in the *Ḥamzanāme* in the British Museum (Or. 12966, 18a) where the artist who based his illustration of Ḥamza in battle on a figure of Rustam seems to have lived in the reign of Süleyman I.

² C. J. Lamm, *Miniatures from the reign of Bāyazīd II in a manuscript belonging to Uppsala University Library (Orientalia Suecana, vol. i, Fasc. 3/4, 1953)*.

³ Copies of the poem attributed to Firdausī with miniatures are rare but I have recently been able to examine a copy in a private collection. This contains a series of miniatures in the Shīrāz style painted c. 1430. Mr. B. W. Robinson, to whom I am greatly indebted for advice, has drawn my attention to two other copies—at Paris (Blochet, *Supplément persan* 1360, dated c. 1520) and one in the India Office Library (Royal Society MS. *P. & A.*, 28) which dates from “ before 1000 A.H.”. All these three groups of miniatures include the talking wolf but, apart from this, they have little in common with those in the Rylands manuscript.

often contain as many as fourteen or more figures against an elaborate background in which various secondary incidents are taking place.¹ In the Rylands copy, the miniatures, as it were, harmonize with the plain narrative quality of the 'Firdausī' version, and this simplicity is retained even when Ḥamdī is working from Jāmī's poem.

Only a very few illustrated copies of Ḥamdī's poem are recorded in the catalogues. Perhaps the finest of these is the Chester Beatty MS. 428² which Professor Minorsky assigns to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. This, Wilkinson says, is a sumptuous copy "distinguished by its twenty-two delicately executed miniatures which are clearly the work of a Turkish artist, one too with an exceptionally fine colour sense". He goes on to speak of the originality of the artist in his treatment of well-known themes. The painting in the Rylands copy is slightly less original but many of its scenes admirably reflect the pathos of the poem. In this respect it compares favourably with the Chester Beatty manuscript which has a much more Turkish appearance.

Another copy of the *Yūsuf u Zūleikḥā*, also undated, is in the British Museum (Or. 7111).³ This belonged at one time to Gibb and is probably of earlier date than the Chester Beatty manuscript. It contains nine rather crude quarter-page miniatures most of which have been defaced, and later retouched. The peculiar convention by which some of the stocky figures are shown with heads large in proportion to their bodies detracts from any artistic merit they may possess.⁴ In general, this copy is much inferior to both the Rylands and the Chester Beatty copies, and has very few points in common with either of them.

¹ Compare the treatment of the scene in which Yūsuf is sold in the marketplace with that in the Safavid Or. 4122 in the British Museum (illustrated by Mr. Basil Gray on p. 144 of his *Persian Painting* (Lausanne, 1961)).

² See *The Chester Beatty Library: A Catalogue of the Turkish miniatures and manuscripts* (Dublin, 1958) pp. 50-51.

³ Or. 2172 (Rieu, p. 169) has lost a few folios "probably abstracted for the sake of miniatures". Another copy with two damaged miniatures is described by Pertsch (Berlin, no. 388).

⁴ Similar disproportionate figures occur in a handsomely illuminated copy of the poems of 'Attār with a colophon in Uighur script dated 1461 (British Museum, Or. 11325).

As the Rylands miniatures have never been published, a full description follows:

- (1) (34b) Ya'qūb (Jacob) is persuaded by his sons to allow Yūsuf to accompany them when they go to pasture their flocks in the spring. He is shown entrusting Yūsuf into the hands of his eldest brother. Here an attempt has been made to show a landscape in spring with the trees in blossom on the bank of the stream, and the surface of the desert carpeted with flowers. The contrast between the colourful figure of Yūsuf who is wearing a diadem, and the group of brothers, two of whom are carrying on an animated conversation in the foreground, is very marked. In both this and the next miniature, Ya'qūb is seated on the same white cushion or carpet which bears a faint blue floral design. (Artist A.)
- (2) (57a) (Pl. 1(a)). Yūsuf's brothers bring a captured wolf to Ya'qūb, alleging that it has devoured Yūsuf. A miracle happens, and the wolf says that he is innocent of the blood of Yūsuf and has come to Canaan in search of a lost brother. The action shows the moment when the wolf is produced, the spokesman of the brothers is telling the fictitious tale and Ya'qūb is overwhelmed with grief. The simple landscape formula is almost identical with no. 1. The ground is coloured mauve and yellow and is intersected by the stream. In the right background are rocks of a late Timurid type. Over his shoulders Ya'qūb wears a pale blue cape edged with black as in no. 1—a feature reminiscent of the miniatures by Bihzād. (Artist A.)

In Or.7111, 49a the same scene occurs but the position of the figures is reversed so that the wolf stands on the left instead of on the right. A touch of realism is provided in this manuscript by the bloodstained shift of Yūsuf.

- (3) (75a) (Pl. 1(b)). Yūsuf, weeping and praying at his mother's tomb, is forcibly removed by Eflaḥ, the black slave of Mālik, the merchant who bought him. A terrible storm arises and an enormous snake attacks Eflaḥ, who is thereby convinced that Yūsuf is no ordinary person. In the Chester Beatty copy (61b) the snake is shown entwined round

Eflaḥ. The tree in the background is of a typical bushy Timurid type while the camels are painted in a very realistic manner. The sky is pea-green (to suggest an approaching storm?)¹ and the ground is mauve. One of the spectators cannot restrain his tears at the poignancy of the sight and is wiping his eyes. The tomb of Rāḥīl, the mother of Yūsuf, is surmounted by a blue-tiled pyramidal dome supported on four pillars. A lamp is burning on the sarcophagus. Another less impressive monument stands in the foreground. (Artist A.)

(4) (86a) (Pl. 2(a)). Yūsuf is shown praying on the bank of the Nile. Later, while he bathes in the water, a dragon comes out of the river and watches over him. The dragon appears in the Chester Beatty copy (67b), menacing a group of onlookers who are fleeing in terror. The artist displays an unerring eye for architectural detail in his elaborate representation of the city walls on the left with gilt pointillé decoration. These resemble city walls in some Timurid manuscripts. Garments decorated with a pattern of swimming swans like the robe worn by the man in the right bottom corner are frequently encountered in sixteenth-century Turkish paintings but they also occur in Timurid and Safavid miniatures. (Artist A.)

(5) (111b). Züleikhā, distraught with love after seeing Yūsuf in a dream, sits disconsolately in her bower. She had become so much out of her senses that her attendants were forced to fetter her with golden chains, but these are not seen here. As in all the other miniatures, the brickwork is minutely shown, and the figures are cut off by the frame in which the illustration is enclosed. The alcove or window in which Züleikhā sits is coloured pale blue. Her listless attitude is well expressed by the painter. It is difficult to understand the presence of the woman and child in this illustration. These would seem to have been introduced from a later episode in which a child three months old is vouchsafed the gift of speech by a miracle, and bears

¹ In nos. 5, 10 and 12, however, the sky is also painted green instead of the usual blue, perhaps to convey a note of sadness.

witness to the innocence of Yūsuf. This scene of Zūleikhā in her bower also occurs in the Chester Beatty manuscript (88a) where the secondary figures are shown in more vigorous motion. (Artist A.)

- (6) (135a) (Pl. 2(b)). Yūsuf leaves the bath and appears in fine clothes before the people of Egypt. All the bystanders are struck by his extraordinary beauty, including Zūleikhā (who is visible in the top left-hand corner with her nurse, peeping from behind a dark red (leather?) curtain. The dishes are full of jewels—presumably the price offered for Yūsuf as a slave. The tiles are pale green and pale blue as in no. 5. The dado is black with lighter markings. Yūsuf is dressed in an exquisitely gold-embroidered pale blue robe and wears a diadem. Some of the faces have a Turkish quality, especially those in the bottom left corner. (Artist A.) This scene is found in the Chester Beatty MS. (107a) and in Or.7111 (131a) where Yūsuf enters on the left.
- (7) (145b) (Pl. 3(a)). Here Yūsuf is being sold by auction. Various bidders offer his weight in musk and jewels. One poor old woman offers a bundle of yarn, her only possession. The treatment of the old woman is effective. Her bowed figure stands aloof in the extreme foreground of the picture. At length Zūleikhā outbids all the others with her own jewels and buys Yūsuf. The object at the bottom on the right, which is dark green with a red band following the outline, is probably a rostrum upon which slaves were placed so that all could see them. In most Persian versions of the scene, the action is taking place in the open air and the same convention is followed in Or. 7111 (112a). The artist in this case attempts to impart a dramatic and supernatural significance to the incident by including a flying bird carrying a flower in its bill in a golden sky on the left and an angel in the top right-hand corner.

In this, the first miniature in the manuscript by Artist B, the figures are slimmer and more gorgeously attired. Crimson and dark blue are much in evidence, and Yūsuf's halo is different since it is not divided into five points of flame and is outlined in a darker shade.

- (8) (171a) (Pl. 3(b)). Yūsuf, wearing a robe with a pattern of swimming swans, preaches Islām to the young maidens who had been instructed by Züleikhā to lead him into temptation. He has been talking to them all night—hence the lighted candles. This painting, also by Artist B, contains an elaborate tile-work background and on the right, outside the pavilion, is a dark green parterre with flowers. The same scene occurs in the Chester Beatty MS. (134b) and in Or. 7111 (149a), which seems to be unfinished.
- (9) (194a). The ladies of Egypt, peeling oranges (here pears are shown) cut their fingers at the sight of Yūsuf's beauty. This miniature, the last in the twelve by Artist B, has a pale green background and a carpet with a very dark blue border ornamented with a bold floral design in gold. This has a very Turkish appearance, for similar colours and designs were frequently used in the chapter-headings of Turkish manuscripts in the sixteenth century; but otherwise, the composition is entirely Persian. As in the other miniatures by B, the same distinctive red and dark blue predominate in the dress; and here, as in nos. 7 and 8, Yūsuf wears garments of the same colours as the ladies. This favourite scene is absent from the Chester Beatty manuscript but is found in Or. 7111 (156a), where Yūsuf wears a robe with swimming swans similar to those in some items of this series.
- (10) (221a). Züleikhā, grown prematurely old and blind with grief, meets Yūsuf on the road. When Yūsuf's cavalcade rode by, she left the hut of reeds where she lived in self-abasement and came forth to see him. The hut is shown as a pale green arch in accordance with the usual convention. Two realistic touches are the *çavuş* in a pale blue plumed hat, who seems to be looking back to ascertain his companion's reaction to the extraordinary behaviour of his master in stopping to see the crazy old woman, and the patched garment of Züleikhā. All the figures are very large in proportion to the composition here and in no. 12. (Artist A.) This is also in the Chester Beatty series (175a).

- (11) (238a) (Pl. 4(a)). The brothers of Yūsuf, coming to Egypt for a second time, are entertained by him. Benyāmīn sits at the right hand of Yūsuf, who wears the same type of dress as in no. 10, together with a gold-embroidered turban. Dark borders with white specks divide the two registers of the scene—perhaps to suggest dark wood (ebony?) inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The black object between Benyāmīn and Yūsuf may be a tablecloth. The unclasped girdles lying beside the guests give a realistic air of after-dinner relaxation to the scene. In the upper register, the tiles are coloured pale green with a central floral ornament. The cushions upon which Yūsuf and Benyāmīn are sitting have stylized markings which resemble the tiger-skin coat worn by Rustam. This illustration, by Artist A, occurs in the Chester Beatty manuscript (186b).
- (12) (249a) (Pl. 4(b)). Yūsuf receives his father Ya‘qūb when he comes to Egypt. Before this, Yehūdā had restored the sight of his father Ya‘qūb by placing Yūsuf’s shift over his head. The mauve landscape differs from no. 10 in the group of trees which appears, and here the *çavuş* wears a red copatain hat with plume. Yūsuf, who is making obeisance to his father, wears a robe of office embroidered with red flowers and a golden cloud pattern, characteristic of the Shīrāz and Turkman styles, which later became a motif popular among Turkish book-binders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In addition to this, his small turban has gold borders. Ya‘qūb’s turban, on the other hand, is of a larger and more elaborate pattern than those worn by Yūsuf and his retinue. (Artist A.) This scene is omitted by the artists of the Chester Beatty manuscript and Or. 7111.

The effect of these miniatures is very pleasing and they compare favourably with contemporary illustrations to the *Yūsuf u Zulaikhā* of Jāmī. It is to be hoped that further examples of this unusual style, which is neither entirely Persian nor Turkish, will come to light among the unpublished material in the Istanbul collections.

PLATE I.



(a) The miracle of the talking wolf (fol. 57a)



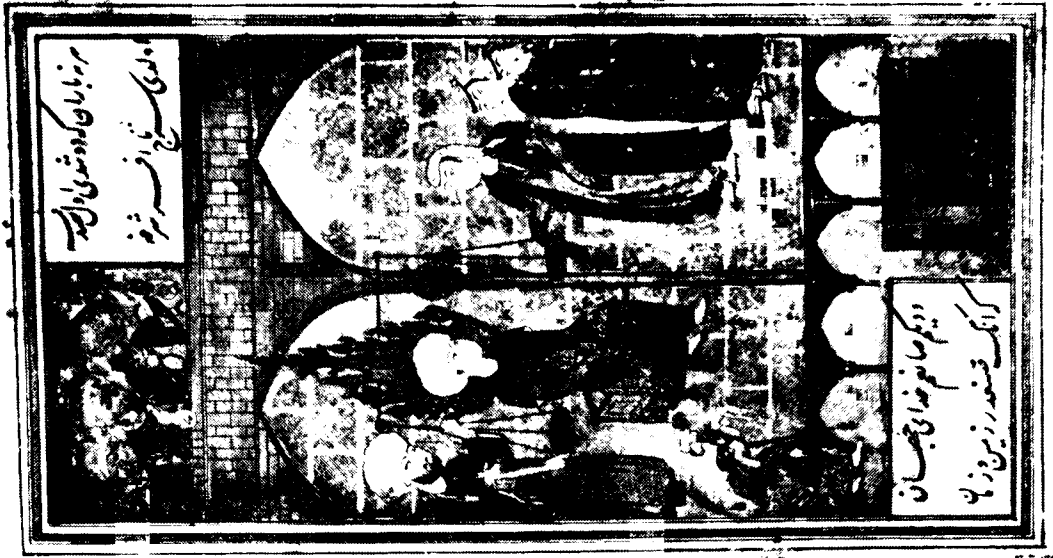
(b) Yūsuf at the tomb of his mother (fol. 75a)



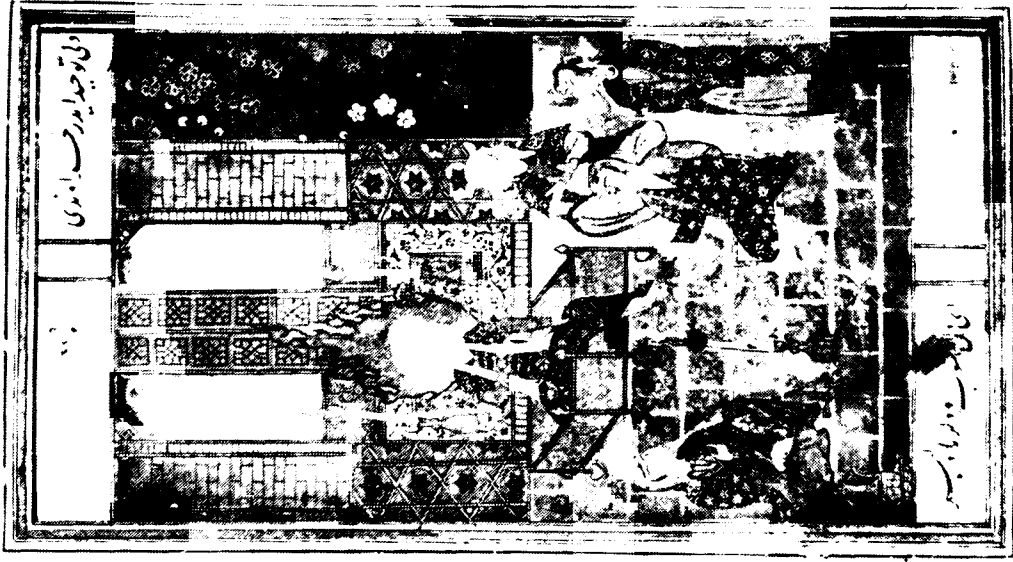
(a) Yūsuf praying on the bank of the Nile
(fol. 86a)



(b) Yūsuf exposed for sale before the people
of Egypt (fol. 135a)



(a) Yūsuf sold as a slave (fol. 145a)



(b) Yūsuf and the young maidens (fol. 171a)



(a) Yūsuf entertains his brothers (fol. 238a)



(b) Yūsuf receives his father (fol. 249a)