
Three Ways of Reading a Frontispiece: The Example of the Cairo Būstān*



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Abstract

The double-page frontispiece to the manuscript of Sa‘di’s Būstān transcribed for the penultimate Timurid ruler Sultan Husayn (r. 1469–1506) and now in the National Library of Egypt (Adab Farisi 22) is well-known and oft-published. Reproduced repeatedly since the turn of the twentieth century, it has become part of the canons of Persian painting, Timurid art, the oeuvre of Bihzad and his circle, masterpieces of the Cairo Library, and more. Connoisseurs and scholars have repeatedly discussed its period details. Barbara Brend, the scholar we honour in this volume, who has written so mellifluously about Persianate painting, analysed the identity and pose of several figures in it. Here I should like to continue the lengthy isnād, suggesting three ways of examining the frontispiece in the context of the manuscript to which it belongs, first structurally as the opening spread in a codex, then literarily as the introduction to a specific text, and finally, historically as a pictorial encomium to the princely patron for whom the manuscript was produced. Altogether, the article looks at three different ways of reading this and other pictorial frontispieces.

Keywords: Cairo; Būstān; Bihzad; canons of Persian painting

The double-page frontispiece to the manuscript of Sa‘di’s Būstān transcribed for the penultimate Timurid ruler Sultan Husayn (r. 1469–1506) and now in the National Library of Egypt (Adab Farisi 22; see [Figure 1](#)) is well-known and oft-published. Reproduced repeatedly since the turn of the twentieth century,¹ the illustration has become part of the canons of Persian painting.²

*I thank the anonymous reviewer, whose suggestions I have gratefully followed up here.

¹A. Gayet, *Art Persan* (Paris, 1895), p. 279 reproduces the right half of the frontispiece. F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India, and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century* (London, 1912), pl. 71 reproduces both halves. I. Stchoukine, *Les Peintures des Manuscrits Timûrides* (Paris, 1954), p. 74 gives a full bibliography of early publications.

²L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson and B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting, including a Critical and Descriptive Catalogue of the Miniatures Exhibited at Burlington House January–March 1931* (Oxford, 1933), no. 83 and pl. LXVIII [hereafter BWG]; E. Sims, *Peerless Images: Persian Painting and its Sources* (New Haven, 2002), no. 34, pp. 117–119; S. Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Persian Art* (Edinburgh, 2014), p. 201 and fig. 5.17.

Timurid art,³ works by the artist Bihzad and his circle,⁴ masterpieces in the Cairo Library,⁵ and more.⁶ Scholars regularly cite its period details, from metalwork vessels to trellis tents.⁷

Barbara Brend, the scholar we honour in this volume, who has written so evocatively about Persianate painting, analysed the identity and pose of several figures in it.⁸ Here I should like to continue this lengthy *isnād* by examining the frontispiece in the context of the manuscript to which it belongs, first structurally as the opening spread in a codex, then literarily as the introduction to a specific text, and finally, historically as a pictorial encomium to the princely patron for whom the manuscript was produced. My point is to pose, if not necessarily answer, questions about three different ways of reading this and other pictorial frontispieces,⁹ to suggest reasons why such information can be useful, and to show how erudite this particular example is.

Codicology

In contrast to the long-standing interest in miniature painting, codicology—broadly defined as the study of the book as a physical object—is a relatively new focus in the study of manuscripts made in the Islamic lands. The first manual about it was published only at the start of the twenty-first century, a hundred years after the earliest reproductions of the *Būstān* frontispiece.¹⁰ The codicological method has quickly gained traction, as shown by two very recent and very weighty publications that illustrate contrasting methods of applying it to manuscripts that bracket the Cairo *Būstān* chronologically: Nourane Ben Azzouna's overview of 125 manuscripts made under the Timurids' predecessors, the Ilkhanids and Jalayirids; and Elaine Wright's monograph on a single, large, and exquisitely decorated Qur'an manuscript produced by the calligrapher Ruzbihan at Shiraz in the mid-sixteenth century under

³T. W. Lentz and G. D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, 1989), no. 146, pp. 260–261; D. Roxburgh, "Art and literature in Timurid Herat 1469–1506: The life and times of Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi", in *Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets of the Great Islamic Courts*, (ed.) A. S. Landau (Baltimore, 2015), pp. 115–117 and fig. 4.1.

⁴J. V. S. Wilkinson, "Fresh light on the Herat painters", *Burlington Magazine* 58.335 (Feb. 1931), pp. 60–69; T. W. Lentz, "Changing worlds: Bihzad and the new painting", in *Persian Masters: Five Centuries of Painting*, (ed.) S. Canby (Bombay, 1990), fig. 9; E. Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London, 1996), pp. 102–103; M. Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzād of Herāt (1465–1535)* (Paris, 2004), pp. 22–23.

⁵N. el-Terazi, *Catalogue descriptif des manuscrits et miniatures persanes de la bibliothèque nationale* (Cairo, 1968), pls. 11–12; H. N. Barakat, *Treasures of the Illustrated & Illuminated Persian Manuscripts: National Library of Egypt* (Cairo, 2008), pp. 50–51.

⁶The latest addition to this extensive literature is L. Balafrej, *The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting* (Edinburgh, 2019), which uses this copy of the *Būstān* as the centrepiece of an investigation into how artists represented artistic work and authorship in Persian painting.

⁷L. Komaroff, *The Golden Disk of Heaven: Metalwork of Timurid Iran* (Costa Mesa, CA, 1992), p. 56; B. O'Kane, "From tents to pavilions: royal mobility and persian palace design", *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), p. 252 and fig. 12.

⁸B. Brend, "A kingly posture: the iconography of Sultan Husayn Bayqara", in *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, (ed.) B. O'Kane (Edinburgh, 2005), pp. 81–92.

⁹M. S. Simpson, "In the beginning: frontispieces and front matter in Ilkhanid and Injuid manuscripts", in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, (ed.) L. Komaroff (Leiden, 2006), pp. 213–247 discusses the varied meanings of the term "frontispiece". In manuscripts produced in the Islamic lands, it is typically a picture, sometimes called an author portrait or a dedication/presentation miniature by specialists of Western manuscripts.

¹⁰F. Déroche, *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe* (Paris, 2001), translated into English as *Islamic Codicology: An Introduction to the Study of Manuscripts in Arabic Script* (London, 2006).



Figure 1a and b. Double-page frontispiece (folios 1b–2a) in a manuscript of Sa'di's *Būstān* produced at Herat in 893–94/1488–89. Source: Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, ms. Adab Farisi 22.

the Timurids' successors, the Safavids.¹¹ These publications and other recent studies show how codicology can inform us not only about how a manuscript was made but also about how it was used and preserved.¹²

The Cairo *Būstān* confirms the novelty of the codicological approach, because—in contrast to the many reproductions and discussions of the frontispiece—relatively little information has been published about the codex itself.¹³ It is a fair size (30.5 × 21.5 cm, about the same dimensions as modern typing paper) but slender (54 folios) volume.¹⁴ Virtually nothing has been reported about the paper on which the text was copied, but it is likely very fine,

¹¹N. Ben Azzouna, *Aux origines du classicism: Calligraphes et bibliophiles au temps des dynasties mongoles (les Ilkhanides et les Djalaïrides 656–814/1258–1411)* (Leiden, 2018); E. Wright, *Lapis and Gold: Exploring Chester Beatty's Ruzbihan Qur'an* (Dublin, 2018).

¹²See, for example, M. S. Simpson, "At the outset of illustrated *Shāhnāma* manuscripts: the volume dated 731/1330 in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul", in *The Arts of Iran in Istanbul and Anatolia*, (eds) O. M. Davidson and M. S. Simpson (Boston, 2018), pp. 80–112; K. Overton and K. Rose-Beers, "Indo-Persian histories from the object out: the St Andrews Qur'an manuscript between Timurid, Safavid, Mughal, and Deccani worlds", in *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation*, (ed.) K. Overton (Bloomington, 2020), pp. 256–335.

¹³When I examined the manuscript briefly decades ago as a graduate student, I looked only at the paintings, an indication of the lack of interest in codicology at that time. The best descriptions of the manuscript are the entry in the catalogue by el-Terazi, *Catalogue descriptif*, pp. 21–28 and Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 11–15.

¹⁴El-Terazi, *Catalogue descriptif*, p. 22 (repeated in Barakat, *Treasures*, p. 47) gives dimensions of 17 × 21 cm, which Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 12 identifies as the dimensions of the ruled area (*jadval*). These measurements do not seem to be correct, as they yield nearly square proportions (1:1.2), whereas the written area measured off reproduced pages yields proportions of 1:1.7. The disparity shows how important it is to confirm earlier data, especially given the importance of correct measurements in discussions of proportionality; see, for example, Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 129.

like that used in many other high-quality manuscripts of the Timurid period such as the contemporary copy of 'Attar's *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* completed on 1 Jumada 892/25 April 1487 (Metropolitan Museum of Art 63.210).¹⁵

To prepare the paper for writing, the bifolios in the *Būstān* were ruled with a *mastar*, a set of strings stretched over a frame to provide a grid for writing.¹⁶ Following the pictorial frontispiece and a double-page of illumination with blank octafoils in the centre, perhaps intended for the poem's title or the patron's name (fols. 2b–3a), the text proper opens on folios 3b–4a with an elaborately decorated spread.¹⁷ Each regular page has four columns with 23 lines. This layout is typical of other contemporary manuscripts of the same size and quality such as the *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*, which has 22 lines in a manuscript now of similar size (33 × 21 cm). This arrangement allowed the 4,110 lines of Sa'di's poem to fit comfortably within the codex's 103 text pages.

The next step in preparing the manuscript was to gather the sheets into quires. Since the manuscript has been rebound, we do not know the original arrangement, but it was likely quaternions (gatherings of four bifolios). They were the most common arrangement in fifteenth-century Persian manuscripts, although quinions (gatherings of five bifolios) were also used.¹⁸ It would be useful to have an accurate collation, since some adjustment must have been made to reach the requisite number of 54, which is not a multiple of eight (nor of ten). It is theoretically possible that the frontispiece was added by laminating a sheet to the original text block, as the opening folios of a manuscript are often adjusted when it changes hands or is rebound. For example, when the poems in a well-known copy of Khwaju Kirmani's *Khamsa* made for the Jalayirid prince Ahmad passed to the Safavids, a new large dedicatory roundel (*shamsa*) was added on what had been folio 1a and a new heading (*'unwān*) added on folio 1b.¹⁹ In the case of the Timurid *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*, the opening two folios were replaced when it was rebound in the Safavid period.²⁰

These changes can become even more complicated when a manuscript is repeatedly moved. Close examination of a large Qur'an manuscript once thought to be a product of mid-fifteenth century Timurid Herat, but actually an early Safavid work that travelled to the Deccan, showed that the opening was a composite of parts, hands, and eras: both folios of the frontispiece are laminates, the right a triple laminate and the left a double.²¹ In the case of the *Būstān*, it is highly unlikely that the double frontispiece was added since the style of painting fits so well with the date of the manuscript, but for many manuscripts with a complicated history, it is a subject worth investigating.

¹⁵J. Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven, 2001), pp. 68–70. For the 'Attar manuscript, see Y. Kamada, "A taste for intricacy: an illustrated manuscript of *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art", *Orient* 45 (2010), pp. 129–175. Images of many folios from the manuscript are available online at <https://www.metmuseum.org/search-results#!/search?q=63.210> (accessed 13 April 2022).

¹⁶Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 129–130 reconstructs the hypothetical *mastar* and discusses its effect on laying out the paintings.

¹⁷Despite the many reproductions of the paintings, the illuminated pages are rarely reproduced. Lentz and Lowry, *Timur*, pp. 190 and 237, and Barry, *Figurative Art*, p. 190 illustrate the opening text side (fol. 3b), probably because of its rich illumination, but Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pls. V–VIII is the first to reproduce both spreads.

¹⁸Déroche, *Manual*, pp. 87–88.

¹⁹Blair, *Text and Image*, p. 178 and fig. 5.24 and S. Blair, "The archeology of a manuscript", in *Adle Nāmeḥ: Studies in Memory of Chahryar Adle*, (ed.) A. Anisi (Tehran, 2018), pp. 15–34.

²⁰Kamada, "A taste for intricacy".

²¹Overton and Rose-Beers, "St. Andrews Qur'an".

Likewise, nothing has been published about the opening page (fol. 1a) of the *Būstān*. It was often the place for notes by later readers or owners. This is the case not only with contemporary *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* (see Figure 2), but also with a copy of Sa‘di’s *Gulistān* finished by the same calligrapher in Muharram 891/January 1486, whose opening and closing pages are covered with later inscriptions and seals showing the manuscript’s warm reception at the Mughal court.²²

Once the codex for the Cairo *Būstān* was prepared, the next step was to transcribe the text on it. We have more information here, as the manuscript ends with a detailed colophon at the bottom of folio 54b saying that the poor, sinful slave Sultan ‘Ali al-Katib, may God forgive his sins and pardon his faults, finished it at the end of Rajab 893/early July 1488.²³ Despite the humility used, the calligrapher was a favourite at Sultan Husayn’s court who had transcribed the *Gulistān* and *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* manuscripts in the preceding two years.²⁴ Several scholars have argued that the lack of phrases such as the “royal calligrapher” (*al-kātib sulṭānī*) or “for the treasury of Sultan Husayn” in these manuscripts suggest that they were made not for the sultan but for his vizier and boon companion, ‘Ali Shir Nava’i.²⁵ Such arguments seem less convincing in face of the wording in the colophon of the *Būstān*, probably the finest manuscript indubitably made for the prince. This phraseology was typical, and the humility on the part of the calligrapher should be seen as a coy conceit, particularly as calligraphers were typically deemed the artists with the highest status.

In copying the *Būstān*, Sultan ‘Ali left space for four nearly full-page illustrations: “Dara and the Herdsman” (fol. 10a), “A Beggar in a Mosque” (fol. 26a), “A Discussion at a Qadi’s Court” (fol. 30a), and “The Seduction of Yusuf” (fol. 52b). To get the appropriate break-lines that encapsulate the subject for each illustration, the calligrapher wrote some verses on the preceding pages on the diagonal, as he had done in other manuscripts. For example, on folio 43b of the *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* (see Figure 3b), Sultan ‘Ali penned seven verses diagonally so that they took up the equivalent of 12 lines on a regular page. He manipulated the text in this way so that the anecdote about the man who fell into the water starts on the facing page, just above the miniature depicting that subject (see Figure 3a).²⁶

Sultan ‘Ali manipulated the text in the same way in the *Būstān* manuscript to provide the appropriate break-lines for the first painting of Dara, the left side of a double spread.²⁷ It illustrates the poem’s second tale, which begins at the bottom of the facing page on the

²²A. Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts: Selections from the Art and History Trust Collections* (New York, 1992), no. 36.

²³Both Stchoukine, *Manuscripts Timūrīdes*, p. 74 and Barry, *Figurative Art*, p. 191 note the month. El-Terazi, *Catalogue descriptif*, p. 22 gives the exact text of the colophon, as does Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 14 and pl. XIV. The term used—*awāḫhīr*—indicates the last ten days of the month, corresponding to 1–10 July 1488.

²⁴S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 280–282 outlines Sultan ‘Ali’s career and style, with reference to other works, especially his copy of ‘Attar’s *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*. See also Roxburgh, “Art and literature in Timurid Herat”.

²⁵Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, pp. 102–103; Kamada, “A taste for intricacy”, pp. 146–147.

²⁶M. L. Swietochowski, “The historical background and illustrative character of the Metropolitan Museum’s *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* of 1483”, in *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (ed.) R. Ettinghausen (New York, 1972), pp. 39–72 correlates the relationship between text and images in this manuscript.

²⁷Published by the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation in Cairo, the *Museum Handbook* (Cairo, 1439/2018), pp. 183–186 seems to be the only source to show double spreads from this manuscript and others. I thank Ana Beny for obtaining a copy of this handsome publication for me.



Figure 2. Opening page (folio 1a) from a copy of 'Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayr* produced at Herat in 892/1487. Source: New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 63.210.

right.²⁸ The story recounts that one day while hunting, Dara was separated from his entourage. A herdsman rushed toward him, and fearing lest he be an enemy, Dara drew his bow and arrow. After the man explained that he was in charge of the royal horses, Dara calmed and admonished the herdsman that he was lucky not to have been shot. To this, the

²⁸The text around the painting of "Dara and the Herdsman" contains lines 494–496 in G. M. Wickens, *Morals Pointed and Tales Adorned: The Būstān of Sa'dī* (Toronto, 1974), p. 31; M. 'A. Furughi and 'A. Iqbal (eds), *Kulliyāt-i Sa'dī* (Tehran, 1354/1975), pp. 29–30. For a discussion of the painting, see Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 110–111.

herdsman retorted that good counsel cannot be withheld from a benefactor. The herdsman continues with the moral of the story (the text is on the reverse side of the folio) that it is neither laudable nor good judgement when a king cannot distinguish friend from foe and that since he, as a herdsman, can recognise all the king's horses, the king in turn should be able to recognise his own flock.

To have the lines of dialogue between king and herdsman bracket the painting on the left page, the calligrapher wrote two lines of text sloping upwards on the diagonal in the middle of the right page to fill an area normally occupied by six lines of text. These diagonal lines not only space out the text, but their forward slant also directs the reader's eye toward the centre of the blank space left for illustration on the facing page. The painter took advantage of the arrangement by filling that area with the torsos of Dara and the herdsman, the protagonists of the scene. Text and image therefore work together to enhance meaning.

In laying out the following three illustrations, Sultan 'Ali manipulated the text in the *Būstān* differently by inserting lines on the diagonal around or in the areas left for illustration. The final illustration showing "The Seduction of Yusuf" provides a telling example (see Figure 4).

The horizontal lines at the top of the painting contain the end of the previous tale about a man surprised in a guilty act.²⁹ The story of Yusuf and Zulaykha begins in the diagonal line in the middle of the image.³⁰ It says that Zulaykha, drunk with the wine of love, hung by her hand onto Yusuf's skirts. The next line of the poem, written diagonally at the bottom left of the space for illustration, continues that she had so yielded to appetite's demon that she fell on Yusuf like a wolf. The painter took up the verbal clue of these two lines, depicting exactly that scene of Zulaykha clinging to Yusuf's skirts.³¹ This arrangement of text and image of Zulaykha clutching Yusuf's robe struck a chord, for it is repeated very closely in another manuscript of the *Būstān* perhaps transcribed at Herat but illustrated several decades later in Bukhara, a place where the paintings in the Cairo *Būstān* seem to have had particular resonance.³²

To judge from their locations within the text of the Cairo *Būstān*,³³ the four paintings are not equally distributed throughout the codex but appear at irregular intervals, likely in different quires. The arrangement suggests that the subjects of illustration were not random but

²⁹Tale 153, lines 3941–42 in Wickens, *Morals Pointed*, p. 236; *Kulliyāt-i Sa'dī*, p. 236.

³⁰Tale 154, line 3943 in Wickens, *Morals Pointed*, p. 236; *Kulliyāt-i Sa'dī*, p. 236.

³¹Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 91–96 notes that the illustration coincides with these verses but contends that it does not illustrate the rest of the story recounted on the elaborately illuminated facing page. It describes how Zulaykha covered her marble idol so that it could not witness her seduction of Yusuf and his subsequent rejection of her, a scene shown in another copy of the poem made at Shiraz in 1527 (her fig. 2.7). She is correct that the painting in the Cairo *Būstān* does not encapsulate the moral of the story, but it does illustrate exactly the moment described in the lines in it, just as in the scene of "Dara and the Herdsman". In the case of "Yusuf and Zulaykha", however, the artist elaborated the scene with a complex architectural composition as described in the version of the story recounted in Jami's mystical poem written just five years before this copy of the *Būstān* was transcribed (see section "Setting", below).

³²Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974.294.4, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search#?q=1974.294.4> (accessed 13 April 2022). Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 218–222 discusses other Bukharan copies of the illustrations in the Cairo *Būstān*, but does not mention this one.

³³They illustrated tales 2, 47, 66, and 154 of the 160 tales in the poem, corresponding to pp. 30, 106, 127, and 236 in Wickens, *Morals Pointed*; *Kulliyāt-i Sa'dī*, pp. 39, 107, 127, and 236.



Figure 3a and b. Double-page spread (folios 43b–44a) from a copy of ‘Attar’s *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* produced at Herat in 892/1487, with text on the right describing the anecdote about the man who fell into the water and the illustration on the left. Source: New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 63.210.

chosen wilfully to illustrate specific points, in the same way as those in the contemporary copies of the *Gulistān* and the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*.³⁴

The last two paintings in the *Būstān* are also dated, and combining their dates (894/1488–89 and 893/1487–88, respectively) with the date in the colophon, we can estimate that making the codex was a two-year project. Work must have begun early in 893/1488 to allow several months for the atelier to prepare the paper and text block and for Sultan ‘Ali to finish the transcription by late Rajab/early July of that year. Adding the paintings continued into the following year, after which the illumination and binding must have been completed.

The dates on the paintings in the *Būstān* tell us, furthermore, that they were not done in sequential order: the fourth image of “The Seduction of Yusuf” is dated one year before the third showing “A Discussion at a Qadi’s Court”. In manuscripts made previously for the Jalayirids, paintings were often added sequentially,³⁵ so it would be helpful to ascertain whether Timurid ateliers followed a standard procedure. This is particularly interesting as

³⁴Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, p. 105 suggests that the first illustration in the *Gulistān* showing “Two Wrestlers” illustrated the ministerial rivalries at the Timurid court, but does not discuss why the other two scenes were selected. The reason for the choice of illustrations in the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* has given rise to much speculation. Kamada, “A Taste for Intricacy” gives the most comprehensive discussion.

³⁵Blair, “Archeology of a manuscript”, p. 21 and n. 27 gives examples.



Figure 4. Folio 52b with a scene of Yusuf fleeing Zulaikha in a manuscript of Sa‘di’s *Būstān* produced at Herat in 893–94/1488–89. Source: Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, ms. Adab Farisi 22.

in the case of the *Mantiq al-Tayr*, the last four illustrations are contemporary with the copying, but the first four were added or replaced in the Safavid period.³⁶

Codicological information in the *Būstān* also helps us track the manuscript’s later peregrinations. The codex passed from the Timurid royal library to the Safavids, where several

³⁶Kamada, “A taste for intricacy”, p. 141 and n. 38.

changes took place.³⁷ One was the addition at the end of the text block of a page with excerpts from Nizami's *Khamsa* copied at Urdubad al-Tabriz on 15 Muharram 919/23 March 1513 by Shams al-Din Muhammad *al-kātib al-kirmānī* (fol. 55a).³⁸ A renowned calligrapher who worked at the court of Shah Tahmasp, he is mentioned in the prefaces to several albums assembled for the Safavids and in the chronicle of court practice written for the Mughal emperor Akbar.³⁹ The artist transcribed both calligraphic specimens and complete manuscripts, including a copy of the *Būstān* dated to the first day of 1509/21 April 1509, with space for three illustrations.⁴⁰ In preparing it, he might have examined the Cairo *Būstān* as exemplar.

The page bound into the Cairo *Būstān*, however, seems to be a calligraphic specimen, not part of a complete manuscript. The text comes from the *Sharafnāma*, the first part of the Alexander tale (*Iskandarnāma*), the fifth book in Nizami's *Khamsa*. The page contains most of the story of Alexander and the Chinese slave girl, but the last two distiches at the bottom left contain the invocation to the cupbearer (*sāqīnāma*) from a much earlier section of the poem.⁴¹ The text, furthermore, is laid out most unusually, with extremely lengthy paratextual information about the scribe scattered around the page in triangular boxes. In a manuscript, by contrast, a colophon usually comes in a single block at the end of a complete poem, as is the case with the Cairo *Būstān*. And, most tellingly, there is no text on the reverse side of the page with verses penned by Muhammad al-Kirmanī.

We do not know why or where Muhammad al-Kirmanī's calligraphic specimen dated 919/1513 was added to the text block of the Cairo *Būstān*. One might speculate that, had the calligrapher consulted the earlier manuscript as exemplar, he might inadvertently have left the loose calligraphic page in the manuscript into which it was later bound, but this is just a conjecture.⁴² The date of Muhammad al-Kirmanī's calligraphic specimen, however,

³⁷There are many ways that the manuscript could have moved to Safavid territory. For example, it could have passed to Sultan Husayn's son Badi' al-Zaman, who reportedly took his book collection to Tabriz. See Z. Tanındı, "Safavid bookbinding", in *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran 1501–1576*, (eds) J. Thompson and S. R. Canby (Milan, 2003), p. 156.

³⁸BWG, *Persian Miniature Painting*, p. 98 gives the date; el-Terazi, *Catalogue descriptif*, p. 22 and Barakat, *Treasures*, p. 47 identify the text and add the epithet *kirmānī*. Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 216 and pl. XV gives the date as late March, but the term *muntasaf* means the middle or fifteenth of the month. The place is indicated as *urdūbād al-tabrīz*, meaning either the royal encampment of Tabriz or possibly the site of Ordubad located about 150 km north of Tabriz.

³⁹W. M. Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 21 and 34. Professor Thackston, whom I thank profusely for much help about glosses, foliation, and many other matters in preparing this article, also informs me that the calligrapher is described in Abu'l-Fazl, *A'in-i Akbārī* (1: 114 of the Persian text) as one of those who "spent their lives practicing this art".

⁴⁰Mahdī Bayānī, *Alḥwāl wa āthār-i khushnīvisān* (Tehran, 1363/1985), Vols 3–4, pp. 824–825, no. 1217 lists several works copied by Muhammad al-Kirmanī, including a calligraphic specimen done at Herat in Jumada I 916/August 1510 in the Husayn Beg Album (H2151, fol. 39b) and one done at Tabriz in 918/1512–13 in the Bahram Mirza Album (H2154, fol. 129b) as well as a copy of Nizami's *Khamsa* transcribed at Tabriz in 915–18/1509–13 held in the Parliamentary Library in Tehran. For his copy of the *Būstān*, see A. J. Arberry, J. M. Minovi and E. Blochet, *The Chester Beatty Library: A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts and Miniatures* (Dublin, 1959–62), Vol. II, p. 40, no. 181; Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 216. A comparison of the texts in the two manuscripts would clarify the relationship between them.

⁴¹*Kulliyāt-i Khamsa-yi Ḥakīm Niẓāmī-yi Ganjavī* (Tehran, 1351/1972), pp. 1134–1136 and p. 870.

⁴²This is not the only fine Persian manuscript where a calligraphic specimen has been added to the end of the text block: the well-known copy of Jami's *Haft Awrang* made for the Safavid prince Sultan Ibrahim around 1550 (Freer Gallery of Art 46.12) has a calligraphic specimen penned a generation or two earlier by the Timurid calligrapher Sultan Muhammad Khandan bound in as the final folio (fol. 304a). See M. S. Simpson, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's Haft Awrang: A Princely Manuscript from Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Washington, DC, 1997), p. 38 and fig. 23. I thank her

provides a *terminus post quem* for other changes to the *Būstān* manuscript that took place in the Safavid period.⁴³ One was to re-margin all the folios, including that with Muhammad al-Kirmanī's calligraphic specimen, with gold-flecked paper, likely made by stippling with a brush.⁴⁴ The gold-flecked margins are carefully fitted around the illustrations, as in the tip of the tree in the right side of the frontispiece (see Figure 1b) and the finials of the cupolas in the "Seduction of Yusuf" (see Figure 4). At the same time, the manuscript may have been rebound in the present binding of pressure-moulded and stamped brownish-red leather with gold tooling and doublures of leather filigree (*munabbatkārī*) cut in a floral grid and pasted against a multi-colour ground.⁴⁵ This combination was popular in the Safavid period, used for the rebinding of other fine manuscripts such as the Timurid copy of the *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*, refurbished by the Safavids *circa* 1600.⁴⁶

The re-margining and binding of the Cairo *Būstān* must have taken place before the mid-seventeenth century, for the reverse side of Muhammad al-Kirmanī's calligraphic specimen (fol. 55b) bears the impression of an octagonal seal in the name of Pir Budaq, slave (*ghulām*) of Shah 'Abbas II, with the date 1053/1643–44.⁴⁷ The seal suggests that the manuscript had moved to Isfahan, seat of the Safavid court since the turn of the seventeenth century. It also shows that the manuscript was not part of the royal collection, but was in the hands of a *ghulām*, a new type of courtier who rose to power in the later Safavid period.⁴⁸ Such courtiers, who often served as provincial governors, were also wealthy collectors and patrons. For example, Qarachaqay Khan, an Armenian whom 'Abbas I had appointed as governor of Khurasan, owned a collection of fine Chinese porcelain that was endowed to the shrine at Ardabil, along with that of the monarch himself. Other slaves patronised the arts of the book. At some point, likely when the rebound *Būstān* codex was in Safavid hands, someone carefully added glosses in and around the paintings in a fine *nasta'liq* script, different from the *shikasta* used in later, particularly Qajar, times.

for bringing this to my attention and for her thoughtful suggestions. In the case of the Freer Jami, the calligraphic specimen replaced the final text page, which contained the end of the poem, probably with a colophon, as shown in Simpson's meticulous collation of the manuscript (Appendix A.II, pp. 347–360).

⁴³Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 216 calls it a *terminus ante quem*, but I assume this is just a slip of the pen, as the date of the calligraphy provides the earliest possible date that the manuscript could have been refurbished.

⁴⁴Overton and Rose-Beers, "Indo-Persian histories", p. 276 and n. 50 discuss the use of stippling for gold marginal decoration. Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 216 assumes that this work was done in the early Safavid capital, Tabriz. This is certainly possible, but all we know for certain is that Muhammad al-Kirmanī's page was transcribed at Urdubad al-Tabriz and it may have nothing to do with the manuscript itself.

⁴⁵The binding is illustrated in Barakat, *Treasures*, pp. 52–53 and discussed and illustrated in Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 216–217 and pls. I–II.

⁴⁶For Safavid bindings, see Tamindi, "Safavid bookbinding", pp. 155–184. The *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* binding is illustrated and discussed at <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search#!?q=mantiq%20al-tayr%20binding&offset=0&perPage=20&pageSize=0&sortBy=Relevance&sortOrder=asc&searchField=All> (accessed 13 April 2022).

⁴⁷Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pl. XVI. There has been much misreading of this seal. BWG, *Persian Miniature Painting*, p. 98 read the name as Yar Budaq, but correctly identify him and give the date. Stchoukine, *Manuscripts Timūrīdes*, p. 74 does not give a name, just calling him a servant of 'Abbas II with the correct date. El-Terazi, *Catalogue descriptif*, p. 22 notes that it is a royal seal in the name of Shah 'Abbas and suggests that it refers to 'Abbas I. Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 216 gives the correct date but identifies it as the seal of the ruler himself.

⁴⁸S. Babaie, K. Babayan, I. Baghdiantz-McCabe and M. Farhad, *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London, 2004) gives a good overview of the artistic patronage of this new class, including the examples cited here. A preliminary troll through Safavid sources reveals several individuals named Pir Budaq, but none fits the correct time frame. Further investigation of the many Safavid chronicles might shed light on this particular individual named Pir Budaq.

From Iran, the *Būstān* manuscript moved west to Cairo where it entered the collection of the Khedival Library, founded in 1870 and later the National Library of Egypt, as shown by an undated circular stamp in purple also on folio 55b.⁴⁹ The caption to the frontispiece in Gayet's publication attests that the manuscript was there by 1895.⁵⁰ While in the collection, a librarian used blue pencil to write the shelf number Adab Fa[risi] 22 on the upper corner of the frontispiece (fol. 1b) and foliation numerals in the upper left corners of the rectos of all the folios. The librarian also added a note in Arabic in the upper right corner of folio 55b saying that "the number of its folios is 55", followed by an illegible name. Copyists in the Islamic lands rarely foliated their manuscripts, and the earliest examples often display alpha-numeric (*abjad*) numerals.⁵¹ The ones in the *Būstān* are written using digits typical of the Ottoman lands, the same type found on many manuscripts in the Topkapı Library.⁵²

These internal clues show that the *Būstān*'s peregrinations were quite different from those of its Timurid contemporaries, the *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* and the *Gulistān*, both of which also passed to the Safavids but then travelled east to India.⁵³ The *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* belonged to Shah 'Abbas I when the codex was revamped *circa* 1600 with the addition of 15 folios, the first four illustrations, and a binding.⁵⁴ A large round seal on folio 1a, reading *waqf-i āstāna-i mutabarrika-i ṣafīyya-i ṣafāviyya* (*waqf* of the blessed, pure shrine of [Shaykh] Safī[uddin]), alongside a defaced inscription mentioning the Prophet's son 'Ali b. Abi Talib and ending with the year 1017/1608 (see Figure 2), shows that the codex was part of the collection of illustrated manuscripts that Shah 'Abbas bequeathed to the dynastic shrine at Ardabil.⁵⁵ Another oval seal with a few undecipherable words written diagonally was also added in the Safavid period.⁵⁶

The *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* manuscript did not remain in the Ardabil shrine until its sacking by the Russians in 1826, as is sometimes suggested.⁵⁷ By the eighteenth century the manuscript was in a private collection, since a note in the middle of folio 1a says that on 5 Jumada I 1156 (27 July 1743), it was owned by (*mālīkuhu*) someone whose name is illegible.⁵⁸ The manuscript was likely in the Indian subcontinent by this time, as the figure 6 in the date leans over in typical Indian style. While in India, someone else added other notes in the upper left corner that the number of folios is 66 and the number of illustrations is eight. The way of writing *hasht* ("eight") is Indian, and the note uses the term *majālis* (sing. *majlis*), standard in the

⁴⁹ *Museum Guidebook*, pp. xvi–xxv gives a brief history of the library, with excellent old photographs.

⁵⁰ Gayet, *Art Persan*, p. 279.

⁵¹ Déroche, *Islamic Codicology*, pp. 95–96.

⁵² See the many examples in L. Uluç, *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artists and Ottoman Collectors* (Istanbul, 2006). The same forms are used in the *Shāhnāma* dated 731/1330: Simpson, "At the outset".

⁵³ The same eastward trajectory was true of another famous Timurid manuscript, the copy of Nizami's *Khamsa* made for Amir 'Ali Farsi Barlas: British Library Or. 6810; T. Da'adli, *Esoteric Images: Decoding the Late Herat School of Painting* (Leiden, 2019); and for the Safavid copy of the *Haft Awrang*: Simpson, *Sultan Ibrahim's Haft Awrang*.

⁵⁴ Kamada, "A taste for intricacy".

⁵⁵ For the donation, see S. R. Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (London, 2009), pp. 120–123.

⁵⁶ I thank my colleague Professor John Seyller who pointed out that the seal is likely Safavid because of its shape and style.

⁵⁷ See, for example, the information on the website of the Metropolitan Museum: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/455249?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ff=mantiq+al-Ṭayr&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1> (accessed 13 April 2022).

⁵⁸ Kamada, "A taste for intricacy", p. 132 correctly noted the annotation, but mistook the date as 5 Jumada I 1106 (22 December 1694).

region for crowd scenes but used here to refer to illustrations in general. The codex then passed to the collection of someone named Farid Parbanta, whose surname is surely a variant of the Indian surname Pravanta. He sold it at Sotheby's London on 9 December 1963 (Lot 111), when it was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum.

The contemporary *Gulistān* had a more straightforward trajectory.⁵⁹ It was acquired by Akbar's mother, Hamida Banu, perhaps while she was in exile at the Safavid court in the 1540s with her husband Humayun. She gave it to her son Akbar, and the codex was annotated by several Mughal court librarians. In 1913 an Armenian dealer Monsieur Yermant of the Telefan Company bought it "for export", presumably to Europe, where it passed to the Rothschilds and then to the American bibliophile John Goelet from whom it was acquired by the Art and History Trust Collection. These prize codices thus travelled far and wide, but following different pathways.

Content

In addition to looking at a frontispiece as the opening spread in a codex, one can also examine it as the pictorial introduction to a specific text, in this case the *Būstān*, the moralistic and anecdotal poem that Shaykh Muslih al-Din Sa'di completed in 655/1257 for the atabeg of Shiraz, Abu Bakr ibn Sa'd ibn Zangi.⁶⁰ The poem, whose name is often translated as "Kitchen Garden" or "Orchard",⁶¹ belongs to the genre known as a "mirror for princes", didactic tales intended to give advice to rulers and inculcate a code of conduct, combining the realistic and pragmatic with the mystical and high-minded. Its 4,110 couplets are divided into ten chapters on justice and good government, beneficence, earthly and mystic love, humility, acceptance, contentment, and other excellences. The morals in them develop out of 160 tales, and the poem's immediacy and originality have made it a favourite, regularly read in primary schools and mined for its pithy epigrams.

Already in the Ilkhanid period, painters had tailored some frontispieces to the texts they open, particularly in the case of the traditional author or literary *topos*.⁶² A good example is the double-page illustration at the end of the introduction (fols. 3b–4a) in a copy of the *Rasā'il Ikhvān al-Ṣafā'* (Epistles of the Sincere Brethren) transcribed at Baghdad and finished in Shawwal 686/November 1287.⁶³ The five figures with turbans depicted in the double story-arcade can be identified as the five philosophers who compiled the text, including the one responsible for the book (*alfāz al-kitāb*), al-Maqdisi, the figure on the left side of the right page writing it down. The sixth figure, the one in the centre of the right side who wears different headgear (a shawl), must be the type of revered figure from whom the sages collected their information orally.⁶⁴

⁵⁹Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Court*, pp. 101–103.

⁶⁰The best discussion of the poem is the introduction to the translation by Wickens, *Morals Pointed*.

⁶¹*Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn (Leiden, 1954–2005): "Būstān" by S. Naficy.

⁶²Simpson, "In the beginning", pp. 226–228.

⁶³Süleymaniye Library, Esad Efendi 3638. R. R. Esad Efendi, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1977), pp. 98–99.

⁶⁴S. Blair, "Baghdad: calligraphy capital under the Mongols", in *Islam Medeniyetinde Bağdat (Medinetü'ş-Selam) Uluslararası Sempozyum / International Symposium on Baghdad (Madinat al-Salam) in the Islamic Civilization*, (ed.) I. Safa Üstün (Istanbul, 2011), pp. 299–303.

By the early fourteenth century a new type of frontispiece had become standard in Persian manuscripts: the princely *topos* that shows an enthroned prince on the left and various princely courtiers and activities, especially hunting, on the right.⁶⁵ Perhaps inspired by the popularity of the *Shāhnāma*, the Persian national epic that recounts the history of Iran from creation to the Arab conquests, this type of frontispiece was also used in other manuscripts, including fables and the “mirror for princes” genre.

The double frontispiece in the *Būstān* is an elaboration of the royal *topos* that riffs on the text of the *Būstān* (and the historical setting in which it was made: see ‘Setting’ below). Like earlier double frontispieces of this type, it shows the prince on the left and courtly activities on the right, but the scene has been updated to a palace beside a stream in a garden with flowering trees and bushes, a botanical setting that recalls the title of the poem. The prince, positioned in the centre of the inner courtyard, kneels on a carpet. In front, his boon companions gather in a circle. Musicians play a *kamānchay* (a type of spike fiddle) and an *oud* (a lute),⁶⁶ while a beardless youth holds an open book, an allusion to the manuscript in which the scene is depicted. Some courtiers listen in rapt attention, but many are overcome by emotion. One rips open his shirt, while another sobs into his kerchief. A third has fainted, his turban cloth and skull cap tumbled to the ground. An elderly man has nodded off. They are all reacting to the emotional power of the text.

The sultan’s pose can be “read” as a visual allusion to the name of the poem: he is not enthroned, facing frontally, but rather kneeling sideways proffering a rose, a pun on the literal meaning of the title *Būstān*, a place of fragrance. The same allusion occurs in another double-page painting that shows the sultan reclining in a garden holding a rose.⁶⁷ The painting is now detached from its parent manuscript and mounted in the Gulshan Album in Tehran, but Brend astutely suggested that it had been prepared several years earlier for a copy of the *Gulistān* for which the *Būstān* would have followed as a companion piece.⁶⁸

The courtiers in the outer courtyard on the right of the *Būstān* frontispiece extend the bucolic scene. Servants carry out another companion overcome with emotion, or perhaps with the red wine that is being liberally decanted from skins and vessels into glass and metal bottles. Another courtier holds an elaborate blue ewer decorated with a flowering vine. In the foreground, servants tote in more provisions, including a basket of fancy fruit. Two scenes beyond the palace courtyard recall the type of tales that form the structural backbone of the poem. In the upper right a black couple distil alcohol in front of a winehouse. In the bottom right, an aged gatekeeper thrashes a poor man to prevent him from entering the palace. These are the type of action scenes illustrated in the *Būstān* paintings, and one can easily imagine the morals that these stories might evoke.⁶⁹

Even the architectural setting of the palace in the frontispiece echoes the structure of the poem.⁷⁰ The scene is constructed around a series of gateways, in Persian *bāb*, the same word

⁶⁵Simpson, “In the beginning”, pp. 228–242; Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 43–74 also traces the history of the pictorial frontispiece but gives a different interpretation of this one in the Cairo *Būstān*.

⁶⁶I thank my colleague, Professor Ann Lucas, for her detailed advice about the correct terminology for these instruments.

⁶⁷BWG, *Persian Miniature Painting*, pl. LVII.

⁶⁸Brend, “Kingly posture”, p. 84.

⁶⁹See also Blair, *Text and Image*, pp. 202–203.

⁷⁰Barry, *Figurative Art*, pp. 192–193.

Sa‘di used for the ten chapters in his *Būstān*. One enters the outer courtyard as architecture, the painting as illustration, and the poem as text at the bottom right. The text over the doorway plays on the idea of gateways: “the gates of kings are where one turns in need” (*abwāb al-mulūk qiblat al-ḥājāt*).⁷¹ The viewer’s gaze continues to the left side of the painting, where a courtier in another doorway bows towards the palace’s inner courtyard. It is accessible also by a third reddish portal in the front that is inscribed “O, opener of Gates” (*yā mufattiḥ al-abwāb*), a reference to God but also to the gates of the palace and the opening of the text. The metaphor of doorways continues in the final illustration in the manuscript (see Figure 4), in which Yusuf miraculously flees through the seven gateways of Zulaykha’s palace. The painters deliberately underscore the links between the two illustrations, the first and the last in the manuscript:⁷² the artists give both palaces similar paved and walled courtyards with reddish entrance portals and inscribe the entrance to the courtyard of Zulaykha’s palace with the phrase “God and none but Him” (*allāhu wa-lā sawāhu*), the same one inscribed on the right panel of the hexagonal pavilion in the frontispiece.

Verbal and visual analogies interweave through these first and last paintings in the codex. The outer gateway on the right in the frontispiece has cartouches inscribed with verses saying that the paving (*farsh*) below the arch (*tāq*) is so high that it surpassed the seven gem-studded ceilings, referring to the seven climes. The frieze below the hexagonal pavilion on the left evokes the palace (*qaṣr*) and the brick (*khishṭ*) of its pavement (*farsh*). The cartouches on Zulaykha’s palace pick up the metaphor of gateway, with the couplet: “If a spectator were to pass through there, he would drool from being deprived [of it]. In it were only lover and beloved and no one else—no fear of being disturbed by the police or interrupted by the nightwatchman”.⁷³ The line recalls the scene in the lower right of the frontispiece in which a gatekeeper prevents a poor man from entering.

Altogether then, the painters of both the frontispiece and the other illustrations in the Cairo *Būstān* encourage the reader to meditate on the text by adding sophisticated visual and verbal glosses to the words that these pictures embellish. They encourage the reader to go back and forth between text and image, and in this way, they set the stage for the elaborate architecture inscriptions added to the paintings in the most ambitious illustrated manuscript of the Safavid period, the *Shāhnāma* prepared for Shah Tahmasp in the early sixteenth century.⁷⁴

Setting

A third way of reading the frontispiece to the *Būstān* is to place it in its contemporary context. Already in the Ilkhanid period, painters had adapted some frontispieces to fit the

⁷¹Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, p. 64 gives a slightly different translation. For a mystical reading of the gateway in Timurid painting, see Da‘adli, *Esoteric Images*, pp. 136–138.

⁷²Given the complex organisation of princely book ateliers in this period, it is likely that multiple people were involved in the many steps of making an illustration, from preparing pigments to layout, faces, dress, and the like, so I prefer the plural “artists” or “painters”. On the thorny question of authorship, about which much ink has been spilled, see D. J. Roxburgh, “Kamal al-Din Bihzad and authorship in Persianate painting”, *Muqamas* 17 (2000), pp. 119–146 and Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*.

⁷³I thank Wheeler Thackston for the translation. See below, note 81 for the source.

⁷⁴M. Farhad, “Reading between the lines: word and image in sixteenth-century Iran”, in *By the Pen and What They Write: Writing in Islamic Art and Culture*, (eds) S. Blair and J. Bloom (London, 2017), pp. 177–204.

architectural settings in which the manuscripts were produced. In the author portraits at the beginning of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* dated 686/1287, for example, the painters updated the locale from the tenth-century Basra of the text to a thirteenth-century brick building with segmented arches in the upper story that is set next to a river, possibly an allusion to the major centre of learning in Ilkhanid Baghdad, the Mustansiriyya Madrasa.⁷⁵

Two hundred years later, the artists of the *Būstān* frontispiece made even more specific references to the contemporary setting, not only geographical and architectural but also societal and personal. The scene is set in a riparian garden estate (*bāgh*), the type that developed in the Timurid period northeast of Herat along the new Royal Canal (*jū-yi sulṭānī*) that Sultan Husayn's predecessor Abu Sa'īd (r. 1459–69) had built and which led to the shrine of the mystic 'Abdallah Ansari (1006–88) at Gazur Gah.⁷⁶ The brilliantly glazed portal on the right side of the frontispiece is typical of the Timurid architectural style, as is the polygonal pavilion on the left, whose rows of vases over the doorway evoke the type of *chūnī-khāna* ("house of porcelain") known from historical sources.⁷⁷ The tent and accoutrements are not only typical of the period, but even depict known objects: there are many similar pouring bowls of the type used to decant the wine in the frontispiece, including one dated 893/1487–88, the year mentioned in the *Būstān*'s colophon, and the blue-and-white flask faithfully depicts a unique example from the early Ming period now in the Percival David Collection or a now-lost counterpart.⁷⁸

The architectural setting in the *Būstān* frontispiece clearly resonated with the reader who added the glosses in the Safavid period. These glosses enumerate the major elements in the paintings. For example, the line beneath "Dara and the Herdsman" says "Image of the prince and a depiction of the herdsman, the *dugh* [a drink of fermented yogurt] sack, the mountains, and the plain" (*ṣūrat-i malikzāda u taṣvīr-i īlqībān u khek-i dogh u koh u hāmūn*). These all enumerate people or things readily identifiable in the image.

In the frontispiece, the glosses describe architectural elements exclusively. Beginning in the lower right, the open door is inscribed "entrance" (*dāramād*). To the right of the portal the vertical inscription reads "in the gateway to the *charbāgh*, over which is a lattice, and in the middle of the lattice is a structure like a windcatcher, and on top of that ..."
(*dar dārakhāna-i chārbāgh ki bālā-yi ān shabaka dārad u dar miyān-i shabaka hamchun khāna bādḡr numā karda u bālā-yi ...*). Above it, another vertical inscription says "lattice above the room that is located on one side of the *chahārbāgh*" (*shabaka-i bālā-yi khāna ki dar yak taraf-i chahārbāgh wāqi' shuda*). The gloss below the outer courtyard identifies it as a "platform or sitting place with a balustrade" (*ṣuffā yā nishīman du taraf-i panjara karda*).

The glosses on the left half identify even more architectural elements. At the top, the construction is described as "a canopy, and below that is a domed tent (*shāmiyāna u pāyān-i ān*,

⁷⁵In addition to the references cited in notes 63–64, see R. Hillenbrand, "Erudition exalted: the double frontispiece to the epistles of the sincere brethren", in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, (ed.) L. Komaroff (Leiden, 2006), pp. 199–200 and n. 75.

⁷⁶T. Allen, *Timurid Herat* (Wiesbaden, 1983). On the shrine, see L. Golombek, *The Timurid Shrine at Gazur Gah* (Toronto, 1969).

⁷⁷L. Golombek and D. Wilber, *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan* (Princeton, 1988), p. 177.

⁷⁸For the bowl, see Komaroff, *Golden Disk of Heaven*, p. 223, no. 32; for the porcelain flask (British Museum PDF, A.612), see R. Krahl, "Chinese ceramics in early Safavid Iran", in *Hunt for Paradise*, (eds) Thompson and Canby, p. 266. I thank Linda Komaroff for this reference.

khāna-i khargāh budast”), and the pole supporting the canopy is labelled “tent pole” (*sulūq-i shāmiyāna*). The green doorway is identified as the “door of the domed tent” (*dar-i khargāh*), and the word *ṣuffā* (raised platform) is written beneath the rug. The building on the left side of the courtyard is termed “a two-storey hexagonal building with lattice on the upper story, on top is a windcatcher, and the top of the windcatcher is covered with green canvas” (*dar dārakhāna shish du-āshyāna bālā shabaka miyān-i ān bādḡir karda, bālā-yi bādḡir-rā ba-karbās-i sabz poshīda*). At the bottom is the sentence “this black is the wall” (*īn siyāh dīvār būda*), and the text below the portal seems to repeat the word “entrance” (*dāramād*).

Whereas in the case of “Dara and the Herdsman”, the later reader was able to rattle off the major elements, this was not the case with the frontispiece. Comments such as “this black is the wall” show that he had difficulty “reading” space. Having puzzled it out, he then took pains to explain it for others. His comments point out how unusual this frontispiece is.

The elaborate architectural complex depicted in the frontispiece provides the setting for a literary soirée (*majlis* or *ṣuḥbat*) at which the sultan and his courtiers traded intricate riddles (*mu’ammā*), often veiled in literary allusions.⁷⁹ Mystical poetry was popular at Sultan Husayn’s court, especially that of the Naqshbandī shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414–92).⁸⁰ He was such a close companion of the ruler and his vizier Mir ‘Ali Shir Nava’i that the three men are said to have constituted a religious, military, and administrative “triumvirate” governing Khorasan. In the early 1480s, a few years before the *Būstān* manuscript was made, Jami had completed his seven long *mathnavīs* known collectively as the *Haft Awrang* (“The Seven Thrones” or “The Constellation of the Great Bear”). It is the source of the two lines decorating the cartouches on the *iwan* of Zulaykha’s palace (see Figure 4),⁸¹ and inscribing them there connects Jami to his predecessor Sa’di. The year before this manuscript of the *Būstān* was begun, Jami had completed his *Bahāristān*, an anecdotal and moralistic work of *belles-lettres* modelled on Sa’di’s *Būstān*.⁸² The cartouches at the top and bottom of the elaborately illuminated opening text page of the *Būstān* manuscript (fol. 2a) are inscribed: *ṣurat-i būstān-u tadhlhībīsh / az gulistān namūdārī* (“the form of the *Būstān* and its illumination point to the *Gulistān*”).⁸³ The artists may well have intended the analogy to extend to Jami’s *Bahāristān* whose verses are inscribed on Zulaykha’s palace, the final illustration in the codex.

The figures at the *majlis* depicted in the *Būstān* frontispiece represent real people. The protagonist is Sultan Husayn, identifiable as he wears his distinctive plumed turban and silk robe and sits beneath a canopy inscribed with praises to him.⁸⁴ He presents a rose to his beloved,

⁷⁹The best description of these events can be found in M. Subtelny, “Scenes from the literary life of Timūrid Herāt”, in *Logos Islamikos: Studia Islamica in Honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens*, (eds) R. Savory and D. A. Agius (Toronto, 1984), pp. 137–155; see also Roxburgh, “Bihzad”, pp. 122–123; Roxburgh, “Art and literature in Timurid Herat” and Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 96–101.

⁸⁰On him, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York, 2012): “Jāmi. i. Life and Works” by P. Losensky. On mysticism at Sultan Husayn’s court and its connection to painting, see also R. Milstein, “Sufi elements in the late fifteenth century painting of Herāt”, in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, (ed.) M. Rosen-Ayalon (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 357–370; Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 58–62 and Da’adli, *Esoteric Images*.

⁸¹The lines come from sections 40 and 52 of *Yusuf and Zulaykha* in Jami, *Haft Awrang*, (ed.) A.-M. Mudarrīs-Gilani (Tehran, 1361/1982), pp. 674 and 679.

⁸²*Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York, 2011): “Bahārestān (1)” by G. M. Wickens.

⁸³Barry, *Figurative Art*, pp. 191–192.

⁸⁴Da’adli, *Esoteric Images*, pp. 49–78 further identifies Sultan Husayn as Alexander/Iskandar in contemporary paintings.

named as one Mir Baba in the *Majālis al-'ushshāq* ("Gatherings of lovers"), a Sufi treatise composed in 1503.⁸⁵ Brend identified the figure wearing a gold-embroidered blue robe and fur-trimmed hat on the right side of frontispiece as the sultan's eldest son Badi' al-Zaman, arguing that the prince's isolation, tense posture, and averted face underscore his estrangement from his father, an enmity that culminated in Badi' al-Zaman's rebellion in 1506.⁸⁶ The frontispiece not only shows contemporary actors, but also underscores the political tensions at Sultan Husayn's court and sets the scene for the manuscript's following four illustrations chosen to show the sources of his princely authority: the hunt,⁸⁷ the mosque, the judiciary, and the palace.⁸⁸

Along with the real people depicted in the *Būstān* frontispiece, the manuscript contains an unusual number of informal 'signatures' by artists, written in different sizes.⁸⁹ In addition to the colophon mentioning the calligrapher Sultan 'Ali, the opening page contains a teeny-weeny 'nano' signature of the illuminator Yari, likely Yari Haravi, the master illuminator working at Herat who also signed the illumination in several contemporary manuscripts copied by Sultan 'Ali, including the *Gulistān*.⁹⁰ The inscription "work of Bihzad" is included on all four paintings: two 'micro' signatures on the quiver in "Dara and the Huntsman" and on the book in a "A Beggar in a Mosque", and two 'mini' signatures in the architectural revetment in "A Discussion at a Qadi's Court" and "The Seduction of Yusuf" (see Figure 4). The architectural revetment on the entrance portal on the right frontispiece also ended in a 'mini' signature that is now defaced. Arménag Bey Sakisian, who saw the painting in 1931 when it was being exhibited in London, made out the words 'amal (work of) and *naqqāsh* (painter/designer) and suggested that the inscription contained the name Mirak.⁹¹ A calligrapher, illuminator, and painter, he is said to have been the director of Sultan Husayn's atelier and Bihzad's mentor.⁹² The name Mirak would make sense following

⁸⁵S. Blair, "Writing as signifier of Islam", in *By the Pen and What They Write*, (eds) Blair and Bloom p. 33.

⁸⁶Brend, "Kingly posture", p. 83.

⁸⁷T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Cambridge, 2006) makes the case for the hunt as a means of expressing kingly authority over the country.

⁸⁸Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, especially p. 69, n. 1 argues that the frontispiece marginalises the ruler and signals the shift from patron to artist, but given the specificity of the people, objects, setting, and positioning of the sultan in the exact centre of the composition beneath a canopy with his name inscribed in gold, I disagree and follow Brend's interpretation of the historical specificity of the image.

⁸⁹By 'signatures', I mean inscriptions that include the names of the people credited with producing the work of art, typically added in inconspicuous places after the rest of the work was completed and written in the form "work of" ('amal). See S. Blair, "Place, space, and style: craftsmen's signatures in medieval Islamic art", in *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, (ed.) A. Eastmond (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 230–248. M. S. Simpson "Who's hiding here? Artists and their signatures in Timurid and Safavid manuscripts", in *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New Studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Art and Culture*, (ed.) K. Rizvi (Leiden, 2018), pp. 45–65 distinguishes among the sizes of mini, micro, and nano or tiny, teeny, and teeny-weeny signatures. Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 184–213 also discusses those in the *Būstān*.

⁹⁰Stchoukine, *Manuscripts Tīmūrides*, p. 74 and Barry, *Figurative Art*, pp. 191–192. On Yari's other work, see O. F. Akimushkin and A. A. Ivanov, "The art of illumination", in *The Art of the Book in Central Asia*, (ed.) B. Gray (Boulder, 1979), p. 52; Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, p. 103; and Simpson "Who's hiding here?", pp. 53–54.

⁹¹A. Sakisian, "La miniature à l'exposition d'art persan de Burlington House", *Syria* 12.2 (1931), p. 169 and n. 4; Roxburgh, "Bihzad", p. 141, n. 6.

⁹²See the brief biography in Brend, "Kingly posture", p. 81. Contrary to the claims of A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "Khawāje Mīrak Naqqāsh", *Journal asiatique* 276 (1988), pp. 110–112, the artist's name is not found in the poem on an architectural frieze on folio 28a in the Metropolitan's *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* as the suggested reading *mīrak* rather than the usual *manzil* disrupts the obligatory rhyme. See Kamada, "A taste for intricacy", pp. 146–147.

Ada Adamova's suggestion that the first painting in a manuscript was often attributed to a major artist in the court studio, typically of the older generation.⁹³ Putting Bihzad's name on the following paintings then illustrates the master-pupil chain of transmission that chroniclers used in album prefaces to record the histories of calligraphy and painting.⁹⁴ Dust Muhammad, librarian and calligrapher at the Safavid court, composed the most famous of these prefaces in 951/1544–45 for an album dedicated to the prince Bahram Mirza, but such album prefaces were already being written at the Timurid court in the late fifteenth century. The earliest known is that composed by Murvarid in 897/1491–92 for an album for the Timurid vizier Mir 'Ali Shir.⁹⁵ Through careful analysis of these albums, David Roxburgh showed that the authors arranged the varied material in their albums to pictorially complement the chains of transmission described in the prefaces.⁹⁶ The signatures of Mirak and Bihzad in the *Būstān* would illustrate a similar chain of transmission, especially as Mirak's occurs on the portal opening the frontispiece and would have been particularly appropriate given the multiple contemporary references in it.

Artists' informal signatures typically occur on expensive objects made for courtly patrons,⁹⁷ but the Cairo *Būstān* is unusual among manuscripts in having so many—and one can question why.⁹⁸ One clue may be the exactitude of the events depicted in the frontispiece: it shows not only a contemporary setting but also many identifiable figures and recognisable objects. Such specificity suggests that the manuscript may well have been made at a given moment for a particular purpose. This suggestion provokes two corollaries: might other figures or objects in the frontispiece represent specific people or things, and might other objects with multiple signatures similarly have been made to mark specific events? This is certainly the case with the splendid *minbar* commissioned by Nur al-Din Zangi in 564/1168–69 and signed by four artisans: it was ordered as an ex-voto for the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in the hope of retaking the city from the Christians.⁹⁹ Scholars of Timurid history might profitably explore the exact time at which the *Būstān* manuscript was created, and scholars of Islamic art might investigate similar explanations for other objects with multiple signatures.

Brend's detailed analysis of the pose and identity of figures in the frontispiece to the Cairo *Būstān* opens a window into ways of looking not just at frontispieces in Persianate manuscripts but also of thinking about other objects made across the Islamic lands over the centuries. Examining in detail the codicology, content, and setting of the *Būstān* and its contemporaries by the same calligrapher—the *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* and the *Gulistān*—shows how much information can be gleaned from the manuscript itself. Some information,

⁹³A. Adamova, *Medieval Persian Painting: The Evolution of an Artistic Vision* (London, 2008), pp. 38–42.

⁹⁴Many of these prefaces are transcribed and translated in Thackston, *Album Prefaces*. They have been analysed in D. J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden, 2001).

⁹⁵Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, pp. 22–24.

⁹⁶D. J. Roxburgh, *The Persian Album, 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven, 2013).

⁹⁷S. S. Blair and J. M. Bloom, "Signatures on Works of Islamic Art and Architecture", *Damascener Mitteilungen* 11 (1999), pp. 49–66 gives many examples. Simpson, "Who's hiding here?", p. 60 notes that signatures occur often in manuscripts made for royal, princely, or court patrons.

⁹⁸Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, pp. 184–207 interprets signatures somewhat differently, as signs of wonderment and artistic creativity, but she does not address the question of why some objects are signed but not others.

⁹⁹S. Blair, "Votive giving in Islamic societies", in *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*, (ed.) I. Weinryb (New Haven, 2018), p. 227, fig. 9.8, and n. 17 with references to many previous publications.

such as paper quality and collation, require first-hand examination, but other facts such as owners' notes and seals can be read, even at times more easily, from photographs. The reproductions need to show entire folios, as minor details written at the extreme edges of the folios, such as the style of writing or numbering in foliation, can inform us about later provenance.¹⁰⁰ It is also essential to publish spreads (not just illustrated pages), as sophisticated calligraphers took pains to organise the text on facing pages. This is the view readers see when perusing an open book, a leitmotif in this manuscript. In the left side of the frontispiece, the courtier holding the open book gazes directly at the sultan, with the diagonal line of the book's gutter pointing directly to the sultan's face. The open book reappears in a vignette in "The Beggar at the Mosque", where the connection between books in general and this very manuscript is cemented by the artist's signature "work of Bihzad" written on the open pages and coyly highlighted by the reader's pointed finger.¹⁰¹ As Brend perspicaciously showed, manuscripts—and other objects—have much to say.

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¹⁰⁰The *Gulistān* appears to have been foliated using Western-style numbers, as a 3 is visible at the end of the illuminated frontispiece shown in Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, p. 102, but the margins of the other folios are cropped. The *Mantiq al-Tayr* is foliated along the lower gutter in red with the accession numbers of the Metropolitan Museum clearly visible in the photographs available on their website.

¹⁰¹Balafrej, *Making of the Artist*, fig. 5.2.