

BAHRĀM GŪR'S SPECTACULAR MARKSMANSHIP
AND THE ART OF ILLUSTRATION IN QĀJĀR
LITHOGRAPHED BOOKS

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Bahrām Gūr, ruler of Persia from 420 to 438, in Persian legend, literature, and folklore is remembered as a pleasure-loving hero, famed most of all for his spectacular hunting feats. The stereotype attribute of legendary marksman is aptly illustrated by the anecdote about Bahrām Gūr and his favourite slave girl, who challenges him to shoot the foot and the ear of an onager with a single arrow. Bahrām succeeds in doing so by first hitting the animal with a pebble, making the onager scratch its ear with its hind leg. At that very moment, he shoots an arrow penetrating both leg and ear.¹

The basic content of this anecdote in variant readings is recorded in Arabic and Persian sources from the late ninth century.² The earliest known version, given in Ibn Qutayba's (died 276/889) *Uyūn al-akhbār*, is a prose text of a few lines. Other versions which are more or less elaborated testify to the lasting prominence of the anecdote at least until the 16th century: in Arabic sources it is mentioned or alluded to by various authors of geographical, historical, and *adab*-literature, such as Ibn al-Faqīh, al-Tha'ālibī, al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, Yāqūt, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qazwīnī, al-Damīri, Ibn Iyās, and al-Ibshīhī. Yet the versions most influential insofar as a popular repercussion and spread of tradition are concerned are those in Persian poetry incorporated in Firdausī's (died probably 411/1020) *Shāhnāma* and Niẓāmī's (died 605/1209) *Haft paikar*, the latter being imitated numerous times in such widely appreciated versions as the ones by Amīr Khusrau Dihlavī (died 725/1325),³ Mīr 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī (died 906/1501),⁴ or 'Abdallāh Hātifi (died 927/1521).⁵ Through the

¹ Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Āzāda"; Hanaway, "Bahrām Gūr".

² References for the following are given by Fontana, *La leggenda di Bahrām Gūr*, 103–120; Marzolph, *Arabia videns*, vol. 2, no. 135.

³ Amīr Khusrau Dihlavī, *Hasht Bihist*, 47–70; Aliev, *Temy i sjuzhety Nizami*, 45–58.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 151–161.

⁵ Bernardini, "La caccia di Bahrām Gūr"; Hâtefi, *I sette scenari*, 127–141, 291–297, verses 252–461; Aliev, *Temy i sjuzhety Nizami*, 244–248.

intermediary of Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Palestinian Acre from 1216 to 1226, the anecdote also passed into Western literature where it eventually became a well known tall tale.⁶ Meanwhile, in Near Eastern literatures, notably in Persian literature, it continued to constitute a romanticized, though serious element of mythical history. Considering the exemplary character of Bahrām Gūr's spectacular marksmanship, it is not surprising to see this particular anecdote belonging to the most often illustrated scenes in Persian art.⁷ In addition to numerous representations on seals, ceramic objects, tiles, and metalwork, dating as far back as Sasanian times, it is represented on modern carpets⁸ and on contemporary popular paintings,⁹ besides constituting part of the standard corpus of scenes represented in miniature illustrations of Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*¹⁰ and Nizāmī's *Khamsa*.¹¹

The illustrations of both works have been published and studied many times, yet almost exclusively manuscript tradition with its beautifully inspired coloured illuminations has been taken into consideration.¹² However, there is no obvious reason why illustrations in printed books should be neglected. It may be true that illuminated manuscripts are often of a high artistic standard, appealing to Western taste, but there is no reason to justify why researchers were lured into supposing that the art of illustration in printed books ceased to

⁶ Wesselski, *Märchen des Mittelalters*, 107, no. 38; Spies, "Drei arabische Lügengeschichten", 587–590; Thompson, *Motif Index*, N 621.

⁷ Numerous references in Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor"; Fontana, *La leggenda di Bahrām Gūr*.

⁸ Fontana, *La leggenda di Bahrām Gūr*, fig. 44; Taghyjeva, *Nizami obrazlary khalchalarda*, no. 36, 49.

⁹ Painting by Fathallāh Qullar Āqāsī reproduced in Fontana, *La leggenda di Bahrām Gūr*, fig. 45, Maison de l'Iran, *Les Peintres populaires*, no. 30, cf. also nos. 29 (detail), 31 (by 'Abbās Bulūkfār); Saif, *Naqqāshī-yi qahva-khāna*, no. 18, 48.

¹⁰ Norgren and Davis, *Shah-Nameh Illustrations*, list 32 representations of the scene "Bahram Gur hunts in the company of Azadeh"; another seventeen illustrations depict the subsequent scene "Bahram Gur's Mount Tramples Azadeh".

¹¹ Dodkhudoeva, *Poemy Nezami*, 212–214, no. 178, lists 40 representations of the scene "Bahrām and Fitna hunting" in manuscripts of the 14th through 17th centuries.

¹² The literature concerning illuminated Persian manuscripts is vast, and many illustrated monograph publications probably contain one or more reproductions of the particular illustration discussed here, see e.g. Binyon, *The Poems*, plate 16; Stchoukine, *Manuscrits tūmūrīdes*, plate 47; idem, *Manuscrits safavis*, plate 69; idem, *Manuscrits de Shāh 'Abbās*, plate 5; Robinson, *Bodleian Library*, no. 1292; idem, *India Office Library*, nos. 108, 287, 1140; idem, *John Rylands Library*, no. 628; Nizami Gānjāvi, plates 88, 89; Duda, *Persische Handschriften*, plate 126; Titley, *Persian Miniature Painting*, fig. 37; eadem, *Miniatures from Persian Manuscripts*, subject index s.v. Āzādeh, Bahrām Gūr, Dilārām, Fitneh.

be of an attractive quality. The introduction of printing to Iran in the first decades of the nineteenth century eventually resulted in the superseding of the manuscript tradition. On the other hand, it also resulted in a new genre of books, whose illustrations are not devoid of a similar, even though admittedly more humble charm, to those in illuminated manuscripts. In some ways, these illustrations are comparable to woodcuts in European incunabula, with which they share the aspect of experimenting with a new technique, yet they are much more refined. The artists who produced them could, on the one hand, profit from many centuries of experience and expertise in splendid book illumination and drawing; on the other hand they were facing a new medium of drawing, unfamiliar and strange at first, which they then explored, and soon mastered to produce a number of beautiful books. These stand up in their own right in comparison to illustrated books of any other style, period, or region.

Unfortunately, the history of printing in Iran is a highly under-represented area of research, though a number of short surveys¹³ and at least one detailed publication exist. The latter is an extensive study by the Russian Persianist O.P. Shcheglova, which has been neglected in previous research.¹⁴ It is based mainly on her catalogue of the extensive holdings in the Oriental Department of the St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) Branch of the Russian (formerly Soviet) Academy of Sciences.¹⁵ It should be pointed out that publishing in Iran for about a century (from 1840 to 1940) was mainly achieved by lithograph printing. Printing in moveable types was known and practiced more than two decades earlier than the process of lithograph printing, a printing press having been established in Tabriz as early as 1227/1812,¹⁶ but books printed with lead characters were not very successful and therefore this mode of production was largely abandoned after the middle of the nineteenth century until it made another more successful appearance in the first decades of the twentieth century. Besides the fact that the crude shape of

¹³ Afshār, *Sair-i kitāb*; Maḥbūbi Ardakāni, *Tārikh-e mu'assasāt*, 209 ff. See also the recent series of articles by Gulpāyḡānī, "Tārikh-i chāp".

¹⁴ Shcheglova's publications are not mentioned in the two recent encyclopedic surveys Floor, "Čāp", 762 f., and idem, "Maṭba'a".

¹⁵ Shcheglova, *Katalog litografirovannykh knig*; idem, *Iranskaya litografirovannaya kniga*.

¹⁶ With this summary statement I do not intend to participate in the discussion on when the first book in Iran ever was printed, for which see Floor, "First Printing-Press".

lead characters did not appeal to the Iranian aesthetic sentiment, the main reason for the failure of printing in moveable type in the nineteenth century is most probably to be seen in the strong aversion of the writers' guilds defending their position against the threat of the new technique. Lithograph printing, on the other hand, achieved a smooth continuation of previous modes of book production both for its aesthetic standards as well as for the artists involved, calligraphers and illustrators alike, and only later led to new developments.

Another advantage of lithograph printing was the possibility of incorporating illustrations into any given text without major organizational restraints. There was no need for separate clichés, woodcuts, metal engravings or the like—the artist would draw the illustration onto the very same surface the calligrapher had been writing on.¹⁷ Obviously, it took Persian publishers a while to grasp and put into practice this combination. Evidence for this assumption is supplied by the fact that early lithographed copies of books later published in standard illustrated editions are still devoid of illustrations. The copy of *Alf laila wa laila* printed in 1261/1845 (written by 'Alī Kh^ushnavīs) does not contain any illustrations, neither do the 1257/1841 or 1264/1847 editions of Sa'dī's *Kulliyāt*; and the 1261/1845 de luxe edition of Niẓāmī's *Khamsa* (written by Naṣrallāh Tafrishī) contains free spaces for illustrations to be included, yet the illustrations are not executed¹⁸—the most plausible reason for this lack appears to be the publisher's inability (or maybe only impatience?) to hire a competent artist in the early years of lithograph book illustration. Besides, publishers kept experimenting with other combinations to produce illustrated books. The 1261/1845 edition of the *Rauzat al-mujāhidīn* (commonly known as *Mukhtār-nāma*) is printed with lead characters and contains eight illustrations executed as metal

¹⁷ There are various pieces of evidence for determining the sequence in which different artists worked. At first, lines would be drawn to fix the size of the page and shape of the layout—this was most probably done by a person of minor rank other than the calligrapher. In the case of illuminated headings, triangles (on the margins) or other decorative illuminations, this step might already have involved the artist, who would either fit his illustrations later in designated areas left free or draw first, leaving it up to the calligrapher to cover any additional space by stretching the calligraphy (which often was done by writing lines diagonally).

¹⁸ The edition is termed "de luxe" because of its lavishly decorated binding. The illustrations are not executed in all of several different copies examined, in libraries in Munich (Staatsbibliothek), Paris (École des langues orientales), and Tehran (National library).

engravings,¹⁹ while the 1272/1856 folio edition of the *Tūfān al-bukā'* contains eight full page lithographed illustrations incorporated into a book otherwise printed with lead characters.

The first Persian illustrated lithographed book ever produced, according to the pioneer studies by Sa'īd Nafīsī,²⁰ is a 1259/1847 edition of Maktabī's *Lailī va Majnūn*. It contains four illustrations which in their crude execution document the fact that artists still had to familiarize themselves with the new technique.²¹ Ten years later, the calligrapher of the 1267–8 edition of Sa'īd's *Kulliyāt*, Muṣṭafā-Qulī b. Muḥammad Hādī "Sulṭān Kajūrī", in a personal note added in the margins of the introduction, asked the reader's forgiveness for any mistakes he might have produced due to the unfamiliar handling with viscid ink he was forced to use for writing on the special paper employed for lithographic printing. Yet, as the rapidly growing range of production shows, obviously customers were fond of the new genre of illustrated books. Items produced at first were of small size and popular content, evidently requiring minimal investment and promising large readership—such as the popular romances *Nūsh-Āfarīn Gouhartāj*, *Salīm-i Jawāhiri*, *Chihil Tūṭi*, or *Dalla-yi Mukhtār*, all of which were printed in 1263/1847.²² These ventures must have met with approval and success, since only a few years after the first publications a large number of illustrated books were available and publishers even dared to risk large investments in the time-consuming production of voluminous works. The production of the illustrated edition of Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma* (written by the above mentioned Muṣṭafā-Qulī b. Muḥammad Hādī "Sulṭān Kajūrī" and containing 57 large illustrations by 'Alī-Qulī Khū'ī) eventually published in 1267/1850 lasted for almost two years,²³ and Mīr Kh'ānd's *Rauzat*

¹⁹ See Gulpyāygānī, "Tārīkh-i grāvūr-sāzī".

²⁰ Nafīsī, "Šan'at-i chāp"; idem, "Nakhustīn chāphā".

²¹ Some of the illustrations of this book are also reproduced by Afshār, *Sair-e ketāb*, and Gulpyāygānī, "Tārīkh-i grāvūr-sāzī".

²² On Persian popular romances see Marzolph, *Dāstānhā-ye šīrīn*; on specific compilations see idem, *Die vierzig Papageien*, and idem, "Social values".

²³ Šaft-Nizhād, "Shāh-nāmahā", 30, has drawn up a table comparing the respective book (chapter), number of pages, amount of illustrations and illuminated chapter headings in correspondence with the year of completion. It is interesting to note that books 1–4 of the *Shāh-nāma* were first produced consecutively from 1265 to 1267 (1265: 309 pages; 1266: 490 pages; 1267: 349 pages), while the introductory *Hajv-nāma* and the preface (*dībācha*) are signed in 1266 and 1267 respectively, and thus were probably written only when production of the book was almost achieved.

aṣ-ṣafā took the calligrapher ‘Alī Aṣḡar Tafreshī almost five years to complete (1270–74/1853–57).

Books published in illustrated editions were almost exclusively of a narrative (and thus predominantly fictional) character. In the first place they comprised such Persian classics as Firdausī’s *Shāh-nāma*, Nizāmī’s *Khamsa*, the *Kulliyāt* by Sa’dī, or Hablarūdī’s popular book on proverbs and their tales, *Jāmi’ at-tamsīl*; next in number came religious narratives about the tragic events of Kerbela, of which the *Ḥamla-yi Ḥaidariya* by Mullā Bamūn-‘Alī, the *Asrār al-shahāda* by Ismā‘īl Burūjirdī and the *Tūfān al-bukā’* by Jauharī were the most widely appreciated. Besides, imaginative narrative compilations such as the Persian translation of *Alf laila*, the Persian version of *Katīla va Dimna* (*Anwār-i Suhailī*) or the prose epics *Iskandar-nāma* and *Hamza-nāma* were produced, plus a large and ever growing number of less extensive popular works.²⁴ Masterpieces of lithograph book illustration include the 1264/1848 edition of Nizāmī’s *Khamsa* illustrated by ‘Alī-Qulī Khū‘ī;²⁵ the profusely illustrated 1267/1851 edition of a collection of religious legends in poetry, *Akhhār-nāma*, prepared by an unknown artist, probably the same ‘Alī-Qulī; the 1275/1859 edition of *Alf laila*, illustrated by Mīrzā Ḥasan; and the 1280/1863 edition of *Tuḥfat az-zākirīn* by Mīrzā Muḥammad b. ‘Alī-Muḥammad Chelābī “Bīdil”, containing more than one hundred full page illustrations executed by Bahrām Kirmānshāhānī. However, until now neither the titles nor the overall amount of lithographed Persian books produced in the nineteenth century are known, nor is the number of various editions of specific works. More than two hundred illustrated books in sometimes up to about a dozen different editions might have been produced, but the few definite answers available as to modes of production, artists involved, distribution, and readership are outnumbered by a large amount of unsolved questions, most of which have not even been considered yet.

Thus, though it appears fairly easy to supply a rough sketch of the development of Persian lithographed books, it is extremely difficult to judge whether such a sketch will retain its apparent reliability when more data become known. As for the present situation, and this statement will increase in relevance in the future, Persian lithographed books ought to be treated with the same respect and care

²⁴ See Bertel’s, “Persidskaja ‘lubochnaja’ literatura”.

²⁵ Robinson, “The Tehran Nizami”.

as manuscripts. Many of the books which were probably printed in some 300 or 400 copies might well survive in only a single copy in some unknown private collection, and though the plain text of many a book compiled may be preserved in other editions, each lithograph edition contains a specific layout, and, if illustrated, a number of at times highly individual illustrations. Printed books in Iran until very recently were treated with little respect, and public awareness of their value is only just emerging at a time when huge amounts of books have already decayed. Fortunately for research, considerable collections of nineteenth century Persian lithographed books besides those in Tehran are available in the specialized public libraries of St. Petersburg,²⁶ London,²⁷ and Paris.²⁸ About half a dozen serious studies have been published,²⁹ indicative of the fact that the actual importance of the thousands of lithographed drawings available for understanding the historical development of drawing and narrative illustration in the Qājār period remains greatly underestimated, if not totally neglected.³⁰ Above all, these illustrations constitute a prime source of information for specific questions concerning a wide range of topics, including iconography and symbolism, costume, music, manners, technical development and numerous other aspects of everyday life in the Qājār period.

Among the different ways to analyze the data available, the following presentation proposes to discuss a number of lithographed illustrations of the anecdote about Bahrām Gūr's spectacular marksmanship quoted above, in order to point out some questions of more general concern. The plates reproduce altogether sixteen illustrations of the same scene, taken from various editions of Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma* and Niẓāmī's *Khamsa* published in a period covering the complete range of Persian lithograph illustration (1840–1940). The publication details are as follows:³¹

²⁶ See Shcheglova, *Katalog litografirovannykh knig*; eadem, *Iranskaya litografirovannaya kniga*.

²⁷ See the list given by Robinson, "The Tehran Nizami"; to be supplemented by a thorough check of Edwards, *Persian Printed Books*.

²⁸ Massé, "L'Imagerie populaire".

²⁹ In addition to those already quoted see Afshār, "Shāh-nāma"; Safī-Nizhād, "Shāh-nāmahā-ye chāp-i sangī". The ongoing series by 'Anāsurī, "Mu'arriḡ-i kutub-i chāp-i sangī", is a predominantly superficial presentation of one item per issue.

³⁰ Cf. e.g. the blunt final statement by Swietochowski, "Drawing", 547 that "artists of the 19th and 20th centuries continued to draw subjects evolved in the 15–17th centuries".

³¹ Not all of the books considered could be inspected with care in public libraries,

1) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Tehran, 1264/1847–8; written by ‘Alī Aṣghar Tafrishī; no. 24 out of a total of 38 illustrations, four of which are signed by ‘Alī-Qulī Khū’ī; original size appr. 11,9 × 8,3 cm;³²

2) Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, Bombay, 1264/1949; written by Sayyid Rizā b. Aḥmad al-Ḥusainī al-Shīrāzī; no. 46 out of a total of 57 illustrations; original size appr. 13,8 × 12 cm;³³

3) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Tehran, 1269/1852–3; written by ‘Alī Aṣghar Tafrishī; no. 23 out of a total of 37 illustrations, two of which are signed by ‘Alī-Qulī Khū’ī;

4) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Tehran, 1270/1853–4; no. 28 out of a total of 44 illustrations, three of which are signed by ‘Alī-Qulī Khū’ī; 14,5 × 9,8 cm;

5) Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, Bombay, 1272/1855–6; written by Muḥammad Ḥusain Khān “Auliyā’ Samī’”; no. 44 out of a total of 58 illustrations; original size appr. 13,6 × 11,8 cm;³⁴

6) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Tehran, 1276/1859–60; written by ‘Abd al-Ḥusain Farīdanī; no. 24 out of a total of 41 illustrations; original size appr. 11 × 7,3 cm;

7) Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, Bombay, 1276/1859–60; written by Muḥammad Ḥusain Khān “Auliyā’ Samī’”; no. 35 out of a total of 47 illustrations, one of which is signed by Sayyid Muḥammad b. [. . .] Mīrzā Kāẓim al-Ḥusainī al-Shīrāzī; original size appr. 16 × 11,1 cm;³⁵

and for some of those in private possession which I had the opportunity to examine, I neither had the leisure to write down all the important details, nor was there the possibility to arrange for a copy of more than the actual illustrations. Thus, I apologize for any lacuna in detailed bibliographical documentation. The data supplied should, however, suffice to facilitate exact identification.

³² On this edition see Robinson, “The Tehran Nizami”, 61–67. It is interesting to see that the copy in the Tehran National Library differs in its first part, the *Makẓan al-asrār*, from the copy in Robinson’s possession; though the rest of the book is exactly the same in both copies, obviously the plates for the first part were produced twice in their entirety. The most obvious change occurs in the first illustration (Nūshīrvān and the owls in the ruined village), which in the Tehran copy does not bear the artist’s signature.

³³ This is probably the second illustrated lithographed *Shāh-nāma* produced, the first one according to Ṣaffī-nīzhād being published in Bombay, 1262/1846, written by the same calligrapher, who signed as Sayyid Rizā al-Ḥusainī al-Shīrāzī; see Ṣaffī-Nīzhād, “Shāh-nāmahā”, 27–28; Shcheglova, *Katalog litografirovannykh knig*, vol. 2, 405, no. 1012; Edwards, *Persian Printed Books*, 249, this edition, 248.

³⁴ On this edition see Afshār, “Shāh-nāma”, 32–3, this illustration reproduced *ibid.*, 23.

³⁵ This edition referred to by Afshār, “Shāh-nāma”, 33 as being produced 1276 shamsī/1897 (?).

8) Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, Bombay, 1276/1859–60; written by Āqā Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusain Shīrāzī; no. 46 out of a total of 58 illustrations; original size appr. 16 × 11,5 cm;

9) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Tehran, 1286/1869–70; written by Mīrzā Āqā Kamra'ī; no. 28 out of a total of 43 illustrations; original size appr. 12,8 × 8,6 cm;

10) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Tehran, 1299–1300/1881–3; no. 32 out of a total of 50 illustrations, this one signed “‘amal-i Muṣṭafā 1300”; original size appr. 10,2 × 7,2 cm;

11) Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, 1306–8/1888–11; written by Sayyid Nāẓim Ḥusain Riẓavī; no. 42 out of a total of 54 illustrations; original size appr. 17,5 × 11,4 cm;

12) Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, Tehran 1307/1889–90; written by Muḥammad Riẓā Ṣafā, nicknamed “Sulṭān al-kuttāb”; no. 45 out of a total of 60 illustrations, this one signed “Muṣṭafā 1307”; original size appr. 16 × 12,2 cm;³⁶

13) Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, Bombay, 1308–15/1890–8; (partly) written by Murtaẓā al-Ḥusainī Mīr Barẓaqānī; no. 44 out of a total of 56 illustrations; original size appr. 18 × 15,8 cm;³⁷

14) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Tehran, 1316/1898–9; written by Zain al-‘Ābidīn b. Mīrzā Sharīf Qazvīnī; no. 32 out of a total of 49 illustrations, this one signed “rāqima-yi Javād 1316”; original size appr. 11,1 × 7,5 cm;

15) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Bombay, 1328/1910–1; written by Mīrzā ‘Alī-Khān Shīrāzī; no. 30 out of a total of 49 illustrations, this one signed “rāqima-yi ‘Alī Akbar naqqāsh zargar-i shīrāzī”; original size appr. 13,5 × 9 cm;

16) Niẓāmī, *Khamsa*, Shīrāz, 1312 shamsī/1933–4; written by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm “Mishkīn-qalam” Shīrāzī; no. 32 out of a total of 52 illustrations; original size appr. 12,9 × 8,2 cm.³⁸

A combination of the above bibliographical data, even though they are scarce, with a careful iconographical analysis of the illustrations, leads to a number of interesting results. It should be kept in mind

³⁶ Shcheglova, *Katalog litofografirovannykh knig* 2, 407, no. 1017.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 407, no. 1019.

³⁸ This is the copy concerning which Sa‘īd Nafīsī in an inimitably sarcastic tone remarked that “it were better had it never been produced”; see Nafīsī, “Ṣan‘at-e chāp”, 35.

that the above listing is not complete, and does not aim to be.³⁹ However, care has been taken to choose representative examples within the range of editions available for close inspection, and at least for Nizāmī's *Khamsa* the listing is close to being comprehensive.⁴⁰

It is a slightly frustrating situation that most of the artists remain anonymous. While calligraphers would normally mention their name in the colophon of the book, or in the colophons at the bottom of each chapter, artists rarely cared to sign their illustrations. Moreover, when they did, we know only rarely of other works they illustrated.⁴¹

The most prominent illustrator of the early years of lithographed illustration, as has rightly been pointed out by Basil Robinson, appears to have been 'Alī-Qulī Khū'ī. Robinson based his evaluation predominantly on the magnificent copy of Nizāmī's *Khamsa* of 1264. Yet, 'Alī-Qulī was not only a brilliant and inventive but also a most prolific and productive illustrator, who signed some 28 works in the decade between 1263/1847 and 1272/1856;⁴² besides, many illustrations in other works dating from the same period might also be his work, although there is no possibility of ascertaining this. It was by no means unusual that an artist would illustrate the same book more than once. 'Alī-Qulī himself illustrated twice Sa'dī's *Kulliyāt* (1267-8/1850-1 and 1268/1251) and Jauharī's *Tūfān al-bukā'* (1269?/1852 and 1272/1855), and of Nizāmī's *Khamsa* even three different editions bear illustrations signed by him. And yet again it is extremely difficult to be sure whether all of the illustrations in a book containing illustrations bearing his signature were prepared by the same artist. Faithful copying of earlier illustrations was the common rule to such an extent that almost identical replicas were (re)produced. This mode of production in many cases makes it almost impossible to judge the authorship of illustrations from stylistic criteria, since not only the motif of a given illustration would be copied,

³⁹ The present author is conducting a large scale research project indexing and cataloguing Persian lithographed illustrations which has resulted so far (1999) in more than 10,000 items filmed or copied, scanned and ready for reproduction and analysis by electronic device.

⁴⁰ To compare with the listing of lithograph editions of the *Khamsa* as given in Rādfarr, *Kūtābshināsi-yi Nizāmī Ganjavī*, 34-5.

⁴¹ See the relevant entries in Karīmzāda Tabrīzī, *Ahvāl va āsār*, most of which for the lesser known artists concerned here, besides a limited number of additional items, do not even contain basic information.

⁴² Meanwhile, an extensive study on 'Alī-Qulī has been prepared by the present author, containing updated and additional data; see Marzolph, "Mirzā 'Alī-Qulī Xu'ī".

but also the style of the copy would be made to resemble the original as closely as possible.

Besides, it was by no means unusual that a book was illustrated by different artists. A beautiful example of this kind of cooperation is the 1272/1855 edition of *Alf laïla*, jointly illustrated by 'Alī-Qulī (who, judging from his mature style, was the senior artist), Mīrzā Ḥasan and Mīrzā Rizā-yi Tabrīzī. Fortunately, in this case most of the illustrations are either signed or can clearly be attributed to 'Alī Qolī by means of stylistic peculiarities. But even then, the attribution of two illustrations which do not bear a signature remains uncertain, and the perspective is much less clear in the numerous cases of books where none of the illustrations included is signed at all.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that some owners of the copies preserved today, besides using the illustrations as a convenient inspiration for crude sketches executed on the margin, obviously took pleasure in adding to the original illustration a caption or signature not originally intended. For instance, illustration no. 31 (Bahrām Gūr and the shepherd who hanged his dog) in the 1269 copy of Nizāmī's *Khamṣa* in the Tehran National Library bears a signature reading "‘amal-e Mīrzā 'Alīqulī Khū'ī", executed in thin dotted lines, which is not present in the copy of the same edition in the possession of the New York Public Library. Considering the crude and atypical execution of the signature, it was most probably added at a later date by a person other than the original artist.

Given these considerations, it remains mysterious whether all of the illustrations in the 1269 edition of Nizāmī's *Khamṣa* (no. 3) were produced by 'Alī-Qulī. As for this particular illustration, it gives the impression of a slightly careless and crude copy of the previous illustration in the 1264 edition (no. 1). Moreover, it appears strange that just one year later, in 1270 (no. 4), the same artists should illustrate the same scene in a completely different style.

The illustration in the 1270 edition of Nizāmī's *Khamṣa* (no. 4) shows a number of significant differences in details, most of all in costume: the earlier illustrations show Bahrām Gūr wearing a crown, which—alluding to the reign of Muḥammad-Shāh (1250/1834–1264/1848)—is commonly known as Tāj-e Muḥammadī. While this symbol of royal representation is retained in the Indian style illustrations (nos. 5, 6, 8, 11, 13), in illustrations of books produced in Iran during the reign of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (1264/1848–1313/1896) it became fashionable to portray important characters of the narratives in the

likeness of the present ruler Nāṣir al-Dīn himself, wearing a uniform and the typical high felt hat. This remained the standard (nos. 7, 9) until Muṣṭafā introduced a flat hat as head cover in 1299 (no. 10), which in subsequent years, in accordance with the growing awareness of the historical crowns of the Sasanian kings, was further modified by Javād (no. 14) and those who copied him (no. 15). Besides, Javād introduced the iconographical peculiarity known as “angusht-i taḥayyur”, namely the slave-girl putting the index finger to her lips in bewilderment (taḥayyur), admiration and surprise.

A general disparity in the various illustrations is concerned with the dress and habit of the spectating slave girl (and her companions). While in the early illustrations by ‘Alī-Qulī (nos. 1, 3) she has partly covered her face and discreetly watches from behind a hill, in most later illustrations she has been moved to the foreground close to participating in the action. In the Indian illustrations her head at most is covered by a thin scarf, while in the Iranian illustrations her veil is thrown back, uncovering her face (nos. 4, 7, 9) or she wears a scarf casually arranged around her shoulders.

Compared to the large variety of landscapes and scenic representations encountered in manuscript illuminations of the scene, the scope of variation in the lithographed illustrations of Bahrām Gūr’s spectacular shot is restricted. In all cases but one (no. 7) the arrow has hit the animal, which in most cases is portrayed as an onager/gazelle, only sporadically in the Persian tradition (nos. 1, 10, 14, 15) rendered with horns. The animal is always heading for the far end of the picture, either left or right, yet the rider is pictured in three out of four possible positions: (a) either heading towards the left and shooting to the right (nos. 1, 3, 4, 7, 9), or (b) heading towards left and shooting to the left (nos. 1, 5, 13), or (c) heading towards the right and shooting to the right (nos. 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16); a possible representation (d) heading to the right and shooting to the left is nowhere to be found. This detail is not as superficial and insignificant as it may seem at first glance, since an analysis underlines the identification of the different strands of tradition as well as the various origins that contributed to the formation of the later hybrid forms. All the different ways of representation ultimately derive from the two earliest known lithograph illustrations, while (a) is encountered exclusively in the Persian tradition as well as only in illustrations of Niẓāmī’s *Khamsa*; (b) is specific to illustrations of the *Shāh-nāma* first encountered in the Indian strand of tradition; and (c)

in this rendering is the faithful mirror image of (b) which, though originating as an illustration of the *Shāh-nāma*, later—probably by the intermediary of Muṣṭafā, who is the only artist known to have illustrated the scene concerned in both the *Shāh-nāma* and the *Khamsa*⁴³—also replaced the earlier version of illustrations in Nizāmī's *Khamsa*.

The most obvious point, however, in the range of illustrations representing the historical development of lithograph illustration over a period of roughly a century, is the appalling decline in artistic quality. Besides the early illustrations (nos. 1, 2, 4) only those prepared by Muṣṭafā (and, to a lesser degree, Javād, who imitates Muṣṭafā in his own peculiar way) can claim to result from original inspiration. All other illustrations, though some of them are executed in a careful manner, are copies (or rather, to a Western understanding, plagiarized versions) of earlier illustrations. This may sound a rash conclusion, since it appears to be based on the analysis of only one topic, but in any case it is evident that both inventiveness and care degenerated, in India as well as in Iran.

The illustration of Bahrām Gūr's spectacular marksmanship is but one example of how to employ Persian lithographed illustrations for decoding aspects of cultural and art history in the golden age of the Qājār period. Much remains to be done, and in fact the enterprise has not yet started. Libraries in Iran are just about to acknowledge the precious value of lithographed books by arranging specialized sections (similar to those for manuscripts), by preparing catalogues or initiating relevant studies. Yet even basic questions have not even been considered, such as the definition of Iranian incunabula.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the major work on the history of printing in Iran has passed almost unnoticed by scholarship, Western and Iranian alike,⁴⁵ and—most important of all—no comprehensive collections of Persian lithographed books exist. Yet, though some cultural treasures

⁴³ 'Alī-Qulī also illustrated a *Shāh-nāma* (Tehran, 1265–7/1848–50), but it does not contain the illustration under consideration.

⁴⁴ For India cf. Priolkar, "Indian Incunabula", proposing to fix the time limit for Indian incunabula at 1867, the year in which the 25th Press Act was passed. Priolkar mentions that from "this year onwards quarterly lists of all publications in India have been published, but no comparable record is available of the books published prior to that year" (133). If one were to apply similar considerations to Iran, this would encompass a major part of the period of lithograph production, since regular lists of publications only started to be published in the Pahlavī era (1924–1979).

⁴⁵ Shcheglova, *Iranskaya litografirovannaya kniga*.

are only acknowledged once they have been lost for good, it may not be a vain hope that there is still time for an adequate evaluation of Persian lithographed illustrations.

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III. 1



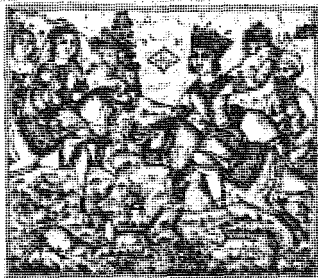
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