

PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

O. F. Akimushkin

A MANUSCRIPT OF *YŪSUF WA ZULAYKHĀ* BY JĀMĪ IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

Among numerous manuscripts preserved in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies there is an illustrated one (call number B 2325) which represents the famous poem *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* by Jāmī. In my view, it is worthy a note of specialists, since it is executed in the Qājār style of the manuscript miniature painting, which has hitherto been but poorly studied. Before giving a description of the manuscript some words should be said about this work by the outstanding Persian poet.

The poem *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (817—898/1414—1492), which was completed by him in 838/1483, comprises 4,000 *bayts*, or 8,000 lines. It was dedicated to the Tīmūrid ruler in Khurāsān Ṣultān Huṣayn and represents the third part of the poet's famous *Khamsā* finished by him on 8 Dhū'l-Qa'da 889/27 December 1484.

As one can judge from the place the poem occupies in the *Khamsa* composition, as well as from the poem's metre (*hazaj*), judging also from the words by Jāmī himself, who tells in the second part of one of the poem's chapter about the motives which lay behind his work, the poem was aimed to replace, and had really replaced, the poem *Khusraw wa Shīrīn* occupying traditionally the corresponding place in *Khamsa*. Jāmī, quite transparently, points to this circumstance, saying:

The power of Shīrīn and Khusraw has become decrepit,
With rapture I shall enthrone a new *khusraw*.

That is the end of the turn of *Laylī wa Majnūn*,
The other will be brought forward by me [1].

In fact, this poem by Jāmī is a versified commentary on “the most beautiful tale” of the twelfth Sūra of the Qur’ān, which is entitled “Yūsuf”. This poetical commentary was composed by Jāmī in the pure Muslim mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) vein. It is known that the poet was a celebrated mystic and one of the connoisseurs of *taṣawwuf*, who contributed greatly to the elaboration of its theory. The main point of Jāmī's poem is his interpretation of the *taṣawwuf*'s notion of spiritual love. The Qur’ānic story of Yūsuf is treated by Jāmī only in symbolic and abstract way. Spiritual, lofty, and non-sensual love for the Divine Beauty is presented as the best mean to comprehend God and to attain the union with the Truth. That was the path of Zulaykhā who, moving from her sensual love and passion for Yūsuf to purely spiritual love, attains ultimately the true knowledge by adopting Islam.

The poem *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* by Jāmī had won an extreme recognition and become widespread in Iran, Central Asia, Kashmīr, and India in the Great Moghul age. More than three hundred manuscripts of the poem, which came down to us, testifies to its great popularity among the Muslim peoples, a refined language of the poem having contributed much to the popularity. No less than twelve poets, following Jāmī, wrote their versions of the poem.

A description of the manuscript

The manuscript contains 150 folios. The folios' size: 20.6 × 13.1 cm. The text is written in two columns, 14 lines each, and framed with gold and black Indian ink line (*tahrīr*). The written surface: 15.3 × 7.1 cm. The hand is cursive *nasta'liq* with noticeable elements of *shikasta* script. It is obvious that the manuscript was copied out by a professional copyist. The text is written in black, the headings — in red Indian ink. The manuscript has Oriental (custodia, *ḥāfiẓ*) and European pagination.

Paper: European, white and dense, well glossy. Watermarks can be seen on the paper: the design of a large vase,

of a basket with the eight-ray star in the centre and with a trefoil in the upper part. On folios 38 and 113 there are water-marks with Latin inscription — LEVELRATTO, on folio 115 — BC & C.

The manuscript is exquisitely illuminated. As it has already been mentioned, its folios have gold and black Indian ink *tahrīr*, as well as a similar but a little broader text frame. On folios 1b—2a there is a frontispiece (15.6 × 7.9 cm on fol. 1b and 15.7 × 7.9 cm on fol. 2a) which is lacking the side vertical cartouches and general frame line.