

ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS OF KARL FABERGÉ. IV: POETRY AND MINIATURES (PART 1)

World literature has chapters that can vie in popularity with the legend of Khusraw and Shīrīn. The prototypes for the tale were provided by one of the last Sassanid emperors, Khusraw II Parwīz (Pehlavi *Abharvēz* — the Victorious) (590—628) and his Christian wife, Shīrīn (Pehlavi *Shīrēn* — the Sweet). It soon became a legend and spread throughout the folklore of the Near and Middle East, Transcaucasia, Central Asia, and India. It is possible that one of the initial reasons for the tale's popularity was that it combined the eternal charm of romance, loyalty and betrayal with memories of a vast and wealthy empire, its traditions and culture, all virtually eliminated by the expansion of Arabic-speaking Muslim civilization.

The story appears in Byzantine (Th. Simocatta), Armenian (Sebeos) and Syriac historical chronicles of the seventh century; a century later it finds its way into a work by al-Jāhīz (773—869), the famed chronicle of al-Ṭabarī (838—923), and later a number of other historical and geographic works. The eighth and early ninth century witnessed the rapid growth of folkloric variants of the legend, as well as literary versions, which reached their heights in the works of Firdawsī, Nizāmī, Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī and 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī. The legend of the beautiful Shīrīn, her beloved Khusraw, the architect Farhād — Persian Hercules and craftsman whose image first appears in works of the late tenth century but goes back to a cycle of stories rooted in the most ancient Babylonian strata [1] — becomes an integral part of international culture.

This poetic tradition continued without interruption for nearly eight centuries up through the twentieth century, when the Iranian author Zabih Behruz published the screenplay "The Iranian Shah and the Armenian Queen". In 1942 the Azerbaijani poet Samed Vurgun created the romantic drama "Farhād and Shīrīn" using a number of motifs from the poem by Nizāmī. Six years later, Nazım Hikmet wrote the play "Legend of Love", based on a Turkish folkloric version of the legend. In 1961 Leningrad Kirov's Ballet hosted the lovely premiere of an eponymous ballet created in a collaboration between the composer Arif Melikov, choreographer Yury Grigorovich, and artist Simon Virsaladze. In late April 2002, the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow presented a new choreographic treatment of the ballet.

Numerous issues related to the legend itself and its historical, folkloric, literary and artistic incarnations have given rise to a vast scholarly literature [2].

Among the Eastern manuscripts in the Fabergé collection, a lovely codex of the Qājār era in an adorned lacquer binding is especially elegant. The codex (call number A 910) [3] contains a romantic poem *Farhād wa Shīrīn* by Kamāl al-Dīn Bāfiqī Waḥshī (born in Bāfiq, Kirmān, spent nearly the whole of his life in Yazd, died in 1582) and Muḥammad Shafī' al-Shīrāzī Wiṣāl (1783—1846), a great cultural figure in Iran during the nineteenth century. The former began the work, a *mathnawī* in the metre of Nizāmī's *Khusraw wa Shīrīn* with the details taken from Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī [4], and left us 1,000 *bayts*. In general, it "is lyrical rather than narrative: the sentimental incidents are in some respects reminiscent of the inspirations of Western poets of love and chivalry" [5]. This is a rare example of a work which was completed (1,800 further *bayts*) over some two and a half centuries and presents a certain level of inner unity.

The manuscript (113 fols., 15.7×10 cm, text: 10.7×5.6 cm, 2 columns of 10—11 lines to the page), a beautiful example of a handwritten book from Iran in the second half of the nineteenth century, was copied probably in Shīrāz in Indian ink in a lovely *shikasta-nasta'liq* on glossy thick crème-coloured paper of Eastern origin by Muḥammad Ismā'īl al-Anjawī al-Shīrāzī, from the family of *sayyid* al-Ḥusayn, during Rabi' I 1284/July 1867. The *ḥāfiẓs* — pagination "holders" — consist of the first word on the next page and are placed in the middle of the lower margins of each even page.

It is richly illuminated: the text is separated by gilded areas in black bands (*tarṣī' wa tahrīr*); fols. 1b—2a contain a Qājār style '*unwān*' (14.3×8.8 cm) (see back cover of the present issue, *Plate 1*) are decorated over a gold and blue background with numerous interwoven motifs (*islīmī-i bargī, gul-i khaṭā'ī*) and indentations (*shurfā*) on the margins.

Three folios contain colour miniatures illustrating the text. They were produced in the Qājār style with obvious traces of European influence. The miniature on fol. 48b (4.9×3.2 cm, see back cover of the present issue, *Plate 2*) presents Farhād in the castle of Shīrīn. The one fol. 51b (6.4×4.2 cm, see front cover of the present issue) is devoted to the scene of Shīrīn bathing in the river when Khusraw accidentally sees her half nude sitting on the bank and combing her long black hair (it became obligatory for every illustrator of the poem). In the miniature on fol. 65b (4.8×5.1 cm, see