It is a day of celebration. Zulaikha, who will later fall passionately in love with the biblical and kinship hero 'Joseph', arrives in Egypt to meet Aziz, the handsome man whom she believes she loves. These two figures appear in the center of the picture—Zulaikha, modest in her luxurious palanquin, while Aziz prances about on his white horse, preparing to dismount her with the gold and jewels piled in large gold dishes carried by servants. All around, scattered among the rocks in the landscape and the buildings, are about 100 men, women [all veiled] and attendants playing music, dancing and observing the main scene, gesticulating strongly and exchanging glances of friendship and love. The inscription on the city gate also proclaims Zulaikha's beauty.

Though it may appear confused, the composition is in fact skillfully structured around an oblique axis, echoing the movement of the principal protagonists and surrounded by spectators visible on all sides except in the foreground, where a horseman introduces the main characters. The image as a whole resembles a brilliant opera scene with masked choir surrounding the protagonists, gesturing towards the center or expressing various sorts of relationships linked to the image's subject. For the viewer, the interest lies in discovering and interpreting this multitude of small events that sometimes seem more appealing than the postures seen in the center of the image.
The story is a simple one. On the roof of a house, an old man expresses his passion for a young man. The latter encourages him to look away and, when the old man turns his back, he pushes him over the edge and he falls on the garden paving. The moral of the story is that one should confine one's passions to matters of the mind and avoid carnal desire.

This image is interesting for the variety of reactions to what is in fact a tragic event. Apart from the handsome young man and his companions together on the roof, indifferent to the old man's fate, we also see courtiers wearing turbans with the red stick or qīlībāsh (a term used to describe soldiers), attached to the Safavid court; scholars in simple white turbans; and servants expressing their astonishment at the drama unfolding. Possibly some of these groups may have had a more precise and complex significance. The colors used are particularly well chosen and original, as is the inscription on the façade in honor of emperor Shah Tahmasp, which refers to the noble of Isfahān, who produced the manuscript. It is possible that all these figures may have been specifically created on members of the court.
Sodomy and Satan
Page from the Haft Awrang or "The Seven Thrones" or "The Constellation of the Great Bear" by Jami (1414-1492)
1555-1559 (Khurasan region, north-west Iran)
Washington, The Freer Gallery and Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, F. 1946.12, fol. 30

This painting illustrates one of the more curious of Jami's stories. A man, alone in the desert, is suddenly overcome by sexual urges and couples with a shikar-i- naqsha [in the lower left of the image, note also the Indian architecture he creates to achieve his purpose]. Satan appears (the figure wearing a curious turban, concealed behind a rock slightly above the animal) and expresses his contempt for the man, saying that he, Satan, would never have committed such an act, but that everyone will accuse him of raping it and in the process his reputation will be ruined.

This event is depicted in a blue landscape surrounded by rocks and populated by richly dressed canons. The rest of the miniature contains a dozen or so more or less independent scenes in which men and women, and children in particular, are seen engaged in household chores, amusing themselves watching acrobats, dancing, playing music, endeavoring to seduce one another and telling stories. It is almost as if a traveling circus had set up its Big Top not far from the place where this immoral act is taking place. This image can be seen as a social lesson showing the life and customs of the disdained. It also reveals an artist who—like certain Flemish ones—displays his talent as a painter and draughtsman while taking his inspiration from everyday life.

We may well wonder why a woman and child are watching all this concealed behind a tree; what the man with the red hat is telling the well-dressed figure spinning flax or wool; and what intentions the flute player in the center has towards the young boy listening to him. In fact, the original subject of the illustration appears to be overcome, drowned in the midst of all these other scenes. We can choose to seek a moral lesson here or simply enjoy the scene of pleasure we find at discovering and explaining the astonishing details piled on to this page.