Alf leile va leile (Hezár-o yek shab)

Tabrīz 1275/1858

288 ff., 21 x 34.5 cm, written space 17 x 29 cm, 41 lines, 42 illustrations

calligraphy by Mohammad Ja'far al-Golshyeghani, illustrations by Mirzâ Hasan b. Ağâ

Seyyid Mirzâ
modern cloth binding

Private collection

The Persian translation of the Arabian Nights, known in Persian both by its Arabic title as well as its Persian equivalent, was prepared by Mollâ 'Abd al-Latif Tusi, together with the poet Mirzâ Sorush of Esfahan and was completed in 1259/1843. Soon after, the translation was published in a two-volume lithographed edition completed in 1261/1845. After his accession to the throne in 1264/1847, young Naseroddin Shah, who is said to have yearned for a finely-illustrated copy of the book ever since he first listened to the stories, ordered the calligrapher Mohammad Hosein Tabrīzī to copy the text. When this job was achieved in 1269/1852, a team of more than 40 leading artists including the studio of Abu l-Hasan Ghaflî supplied the illustrations and illuminations and prepared lacquerwork covers. The resulting work, now preserved in the Golestan Palace Library, was finished in 1276/1859 and comprises a total of 2280 pages in large folio format, about half of which bear illustrations. This manuscript represents the last outstanding specimen of the traditional art of the book in Qajar Iran.

When the Arabian Nights' first lithographed edition was prepared in 1261/1845, lithographic illustration had not yet become a regular phenomenon. Soon after the preparations for illustrating the luxurious royal manuscript had begun, a second lithographed edition was ordered to contain illustrations. This task was achieved much faster than the manuscript, and the result was published in 1272/1855. This first illustrated lithographed edition contains a total of 71 illustrations executed by Mirzâ `Ali-Qoli Khu'î and two of his apprentices, Mirzâ Reza Tahmîzî and Mirzâ Hasan. This edition in turn appears to have created an increasing demand, since only three years later Mirzâ Hasan, son of the well-known court painter Ağâ Seyyid Mirzâ, all by himself illustrated another edition, albeit with a less extensive iconographical program. Starting with another edition dated 1293/1876, numerous illustrated lithographed editions of Hezár-o yek shab were published, usually modelling their iconographical repertoire on the editions of 1272/1855 or 1275/1858.

The illustration shown here relates to the beginning of the romance of Seif al-Moluk (nights 759 ff.). It shows Fāris, the vizier of King 'Asim, Seif al-Moluk's future father, in the presence of King Solomon. According to iconographical tradition, Solomon's throne, held aloft by angels and demons, is surrounded by an array of creatures, including those animals bearing a particular relation to Solomon: the ant (below the angels' feet), the hoopoe (to Solomon's left), and the Simorgh (flying above Solomon's head).


U.M.
Eskandar-nāme

Tehrān 1283-84/1866-67

316 ff., 22 x 35 cm, written space 17 x 28.5 cm, 41 lines, 140 illustrations
calligraphy by Naṣūrallāh al-Tafṣeshī al-Kabūrī; illustrations by Mirzā Ḥidār-‘Allī Shīrāzī, Ḥāfiz al-Maḥbūb Shīrāzī, Mūḥammad-Taqī al-Khāvānī; illustrations by Mūḥammad Muṣṭaḥṣar, contemporary brown leather binding with stamped gilt medallions
Private collection

The image of Alexander the Great in Persian literature has gone through various stages. While in times close to the historical conquest of Iran (and the ensuing cultural devastation), he was regarded as an ‘evil destroyer’ who had seriously damaged Persian religious and cultural identity, after the Islamic conquest of Iran he was gradually transformed into an ‘Islamic hero’ (Yamanaka 1993). Pahlavi literature does not convey a comprehensive picture, but its general attitude to Alexander is hostile and negative. Coherent Persian romances focusing on Alexander are only preserved from Islamic times, starting with the versified version in Ferdowsi’s Shāh-nāme (late 10th century) which was further elaborated by Neẓāmī (12th century) and Jāmī (15th century), and the long prose romance by Tārūsī (12th century). All of the Persian romances of Alexander belong to the first five recensions of the so-called Pseudo-Callisthenes, an anonymous Greek Alexander-romance believed to have been written sometime before 400 C.E.

Neither the authorship of the long prose version printed in the Qajar period nor its exact relation to the previous narrative tradition are clear. Judging from details of content such as the representation of the ‘trickster warrior’ (rāyīd), its compilation has been posited in the Safavid period. Some of the lithographed editions mention a certain Manuchehr-Khān Ḥakim as the author of the prose romance, yet a person by this name is not historically identifiable. On the other hand, even early in the twentieth century, the Alexander-romance is known to have belonged to the repertoire of the professional storyteller (naqqāl). These storytellers would perform in popular coffeehouses or open spaces, at times reading or reciting from written sources, and sometimes accompanied by visual aids such as large oil paintings on canvas (purde). The prose Alexander-romance was first printed in an illustrated lithographic edition in 1273-74/1856-57, and the exhibited edition is the second one produced. The Alexander-romance continued to remain popular until the latter half of the twentieth century when abridged versions still belonged to the stock of itinerant book-sellers.

In depicting warfare and battle, the illustration shown here closely follows conventional patterns. Notably, neither of the competing armies can be identified by way of uniforms, standards or the like, nor are the warriors portrayed in detail so as to reveal individual features. Traditional patterns also show in the exemplification of death by symbolic features such as exposed tongue and teeth.

Hosein Vâ’ez Kâshefi: Anvâr-e Soheili

Teheran 1298/1880
216 ff., 17 x 27 cm, written space 13 x 22 cm, 25 lines, 13 illustrations
calligraphy by Seyyid 'Ali al-Hoseini al-Golpayegâni, illustrations by 'Abd al-Hosein Khvânsârî
contemporary leather binding
Private collection

Hosein Vâ’ez Kâshefi’s Anvâr-e Soheili is one out of several Persian versions of the
dependent Kullâ va Dinna. Contrasting in style with a Persian translation done by Abu l-Ma‘âli Nasrallah Monshi early in the 12th century, Kâshefi’s version, compiled in the late 15th century, corresponds to the baroque style of its time. It remained popular notably in India and was translated into French as early as 1698 (and subsequently into English, in 1699). In the first half of the 19th century, a number of editions of the Anvâr-e Soheili were printed in London and various places in India. While the publication of the first illustrated lithographed edition of Nasrallah Monshi’s Kullâ va Dinna only appeared in 1282/1865, the first Iranian lithographed edition of Anvâr-e Soheili was already published in 1261/1845. This edition, besides constituting the first illustrated edition of this work, was also the most voluminous illustrated lithographed book of its time, comprising a total of 45 illustrations. Up to 1300/1882, at least half a dozen further editions of the Anvâr-e Soheili were published, ranging from 1263/1846 to the edition presented here. Most of the illustrators of the early editions remain anonymous. Only two editions – those of 1274/1857 and 1281/1864, respectively – bear an artist’s signature, in both cases referring to Mirzâ Hassan (see also cat. no. 35).

‘Abd al-Hosein Khvânsârî, the illustrator of the present edition, is one of a number of artists in the later years of Nâseroddin Shâh’s reign producing large amounts of illustrations of a comparatively modest artistic quality. Besides illustrating the 1291/1874 edition of the small booklet of entertaining anecdotes, Lâtâ’if va zarâ’et, ‘Abd al-Hosein Khvânsârî is known to have joined the prolific artist Mirzâ Nasrallah in illustrating an edition of Hegâr-o yek shab (see no. 35) prepared in 1289-93/1872-76. ‘Abd al-Hosein’s latest known work is witnessed in the 1316/1898 edition of Ferdowsî’s Shâh-nâmé (cf. no. 38).

Anvâr-e Soheili is a compilation of fables and moralizing stories, a large number of which were already included in the collection’s Indian prototype. The story illustrated here (Grebe 1990/91: C 29) reads like a satirical rendering of the ancient Greek tale of Alkestis that was already known in the 5th century B. C. E. In the Greek drama, both mother and father refuse to sacrifice their lives for their son; hence it is left to his wife Alkestis to demonstrate her faithfulness by being willing to die in his place. In the scene pictured here, the mother takes a cow that has got its head stuck in a pot for the angel of death, instantly forgets her previous oaths of faithfulness and withdraws her offer to die in place of her sick daughter.


U.M.
Ferdousi: Shâh-nâme

Teheran 1307/1889

634 + 58 + 10 pages, 21.5 x 34 cm, written space 16.5 x 28 cm, 33 lines, 61 illustrations, calligraphy by Mohammad Rezâ al-motakhalles be-Safâ al-molaqqab be-Soltân al-kotâb, illustrations by Mostafa contemporary brownish leather binding

Private collection

The Shâh-nâme by Abu’l-Qâsim Ferdousi, whose compilation was achieved early in the 11th century, is generally acknowledged as Iran’s national epic. Following the chronology of rulers, the text treats Iranian history from a legendary past up to the Islamic conquest. In accordance with its value as a monument of national identity, hundreds of copies of the Shâh-nâme have been prepared over the centuries, a large number of which were adorned with at times extremely fine miniatures. Considering the Shâh-nâme’s position in manuscript production, it is surprising to see that the work was printed only at a comparatively late date. Moreover, the first editions were not prepared in Iran but rather in India, where British colonialists had prepared the first scientific editions and where the wealthy expatriate community of Persia had become aware of its own glorious past.

The Shâh-nâme’s editio princeps was prepared by Turner Macan and printed in movable type in Calcutta in 1829. The first lithographed edition, which at the same time is the first printed edition adorned with illustrations, was published in Bombay in 1262/1846. It is interesting to note that the first Iranian edition was not prepared until after Nâser al-Din Shâh’s accession to the throne in 1264/1847. While a second Indian edition was published in Bombay in 1264/1847, the preparation of the first Iranian edition lasted for almost three years. The various parts of the final publication, prepared by the calligrapher Mostafâ-Qoli Soltân Kojari and the illustrator Mirzâ ‘Ali-Qoli Khû’î, bear dates ranging from 1265/1848 to 1267/1850. Another interesting point is the fact that out of the roughly 30 lithographed editions that were published, apparently no more than five editions were prepared in Iran. Besides the first one, already mentioned, they comprise the following editions: Tabriz 1275–76/1858–59 (calligraphy by ‘Askar-Khâla Ordûbâdi, illustrations by Ostâd Saktâr); Teheran 1307–8/1889–90 (as exhibited); Tabriz 1316/1898 (calligraphy by Mohammed-‘Ali Delkhu, illustrations by ‘Abd al-Hosein, Hassan Kerbelâ’î); Teheran 1319–22/1901–04 (calligraphy by Mohammad-Hoseîn ‘Emdîr al-Kotâb, illustrations by ‘Ali-Khân, Mohammad Khâzer, Hoseîn-‘Ali).

The edition exhibited is the first one published after Iranians by way of such publications as Jalâl al-Din Mirzâ’s Nâmeh-ye Khosrovân (1285–88/1868–71) had become aware of the historical attire of the Sasanian rulers and would strive to present historically faithful costumes. The illustrator Mostafa is also to be noted for his particular liking of playful arrangements in the ornamental chapter headings, often revealing a strong European influence.


U.M.
Mostafâ b. Mirzâ Mohammad-Hasan Áshtiyâni Eftekhâr al-"Olâmâ': Eftekhâr-name-ye Heidari

Teherân 1310/1892
16 + 268 + 168 + 24 pages, 21 x 34 cm, written space 15 x 27 cm, 25 lines, 49 illustrations

calligraphy by Mohammad Rezâ al-motakhalles be-Sofâ al-molaqqab be-Soltân al-kotâb, illustrations by Nasrallah; modern synthetic binding

Private collection

Besides classical literature and popular narratives, religious literature constitutes a third large group of Persian books produced in illustrated lithographed editions. In the Qajar period, most representatives of the latter genre belonged to the subgroup of the so-called rouz-e-khvâni, treating the cardinal tragedy experienced by the Shiite world, the martyrdom of the prophet Mohammad's grandson Hosein at Kerbelâ' in the 61st year of the Muslim era (680 C. E.). The generic term rouz-e-khvâni (literally: recitation of the [book called] Rouz) itself derives from the book Rouzat al-Shohada' (The Garden of Martyrs) by Hosein b. 'Ali Vâ'ez Kâshfî (died 910/1505), an author better known for his Amâr-e Soheili, a Persian adaptation of the tales of Kâlila wa-Dimna (see cat. no. 37). While Kâshfî's Rouzat al-Shohada' was never printed in an illustrated lithographed edition, a large number of similar works compiled during the Qajar period were subsequently published in contemporary illustrated lithographed editions. Other popular representatives of the genre include Esmâ'il Sarbâz Borsanjerdî's Amâr al-Shohada' (The secrets of martyrdom), Jowhari's Tafân al-Bolâ' (The tempest of tears) and Mollâ Banum-'Ali Râjî Kermânî's Hamle-ye Heidariye (The Lion's [i.e., 'Ali's] attack). The compilation of these books went together with the great popularity the Shiite passion play, the ta'ziye, enjoyed in the Qajar period.

Works of the rouz-e-khvanî genre often begin by discussing events preceding the tragedy of Kerbelâ'. This device leaves room for praising Mohammad's nephew and son-in-law 'Ali as well as the latter's sons Hasan and Hosein, all of whom through their blood-relations to the prophet Mohammad are regarded as his rightful successors by the Shiite community. In this manner, the way is also paved for lamenting the fact that 'Ali and his descendants were unlawfully deprived of their position. It is to this category of rouz-e-khvanî that the present item belongs.

The illustration chosen for representation depicts the conversion of a former enemy to Islam. Conversion was a common act in the early days of Islamic history, constituting a submission both in religious as well as in political terms. In accordance with the topic illustrated, the artist represents the vanquished ruler as well as his army in an inferior and humbled position in the foreground. Meanwhile, Mohammad and 'Ali are prominently placed in the illustration’s upper half, with 'Ali (on the illustration’s left side) seated to Mohammad’s right. 'Ali, due to his peculiar two-pointed sword Zu'l-Faqir, besides Rostam is the only character in Persian miniatures whose representation is easily identified.


U.M.
Naqib al-Mamâlek: Amir Arsalân

Tehran 1317/1899
678 pages, 16 x 24.5 cm, written space 11 x 19.5 cm, 17 lines, 21 illustrations
calligraphy by Ja‘far-Qoli Faridani, illustrations by Hosein-‘Ali valad-e ‘Abdollah-Khân
contemporary red leather binding

Private collection

Storytelling relies on a long tradition in Persian culture. Well into the twentieth century, numerous works of literature as well as a thriving oral tradition demonstrate the importance of storytelling as a major source of inspiration and entertainment. A great many romances are preserved in manuscript copies from Safavid times, and the social structure they represent often suggests that they were composed even earlier. While the oldest Persian romance might derive from the tradition of the Alexander-romance (see cat. no. 36), several long and intricately composed epics were clearly composed by drawing on Persian tradition. Their characters bear Persian names, and their world-view and value-system bespeak their Persian origin. According to Zoroastrian belief, the course of the world is determined by a constant struggle between the forces of good and bad. Hence, romance and epic characters are outlined as clearly belonging to either side. While this device implies a certain psychological shallowness in the story’s characters, spice is added to the narrative plot by the introduction of the character of ‘ayyûr – a trickster, cheat, spy, and ingenious alter ego of the hero. Earlier romances such as Samâk-e ‘ayyûr, the Dârâb-nâmeh, or the Romanc-e Hamez, and even later ones such as that of Hosein-e Kord employ this character to develop a colourful narrative dominated by the concept of khan-e baqân – martial competition and joyful relaxation. The later the romances were composed, the more the chivalrous elements of earlier romances were abandoned in favor of magic, the influence of supernatural elements, and romantic love.

Both the author and the genesis of the romance of Amir Arsalân are determinable with great certainty. Apparently, the romance was narrated by Mirzâ Mohammad-‘Ali Naqî al-Mamâlek, chief storyteller at the court of Nâser al-Dîn Shâh (reigned 1264/1847–1313/1895), in order to assist the Shâh fall asleep at night. The monarch’s daughter TurânÂgh Fakhr al-Doulâ is said to have written down the text while listening to the performance from behind a curtain. The oldest manuscript preserved dates from 1307/1887 and appears to be close to the narrative’s completion. The present edition, the first one published, is the beginning of a long tradition eventually resulting in the story’s adaptation for film (1955, 1956), a theater play, and a television series in the late 1960ies. The romance of Amir Arsalân is exceptional in that its characters are not Persian, the eponymous hero being a prince from Istanbul. While focusing on the love between Amir Arsalân and his beloved Farnoosh-Leqû, the narrative introduces numerous obstacles and phantastic adventures before the lovers are finally united, a scene that is depicted here in its moderate, yet charming delight.

Chehel Tuti

Teheran 1332/1913

about 22 ff., 15.5 x 21.5 cm, written space 12.5 x 18.5 cm, 17 lines, 10 illustrations
calligraphy by Mohammad-Taqi, illustrations by Ali-Khān
modern polythene binding; bound together with the popular romances Doza va Qa‘izye
Private collection

Narrative literature in booklet or chapbook form remained popular throughout the period of
lithographed book production in Iran. While the genre had already contributed some
of the first items produced by way of the new technique, it also supplied some of the
best-selling items of the later years of lithographic book production. Due to difficulties
of documentation, both the number of different texts as well as the amount of different
editions produced still remain unknown. Even though these booklets were produced in
large quantities, they have often not been preserved until the present day. After all,
popular literature was meant to be read, and while being read, the booklets become torn
and tattered, eventually going out of use. Contrary to lithographic book production in
neighbouring countries such as Turkey, the illustrations in Persian lithographed
chapbooks retained a comparatively high quality throughout the whole period of their
production. Admittedly, many items succumbed to lower standards of detail and,
probably, ingenuity. Yet the subject matter depicted remained clear and esthetically
appealing while the illustrations never lost the charming naiveté characteristic of the
early specimens.

The chapbook Chehel Tuti (literally: Forty Parrots) is a popular descendant of the
Persian Tutā-nāme (Book of the parrot), a collection itself adapted from the Indian
Shudaspand (Seventy tales of a parrot). The common device of all ‘Books of the
parrot’ consists in a frame-story in which a parrot prevents a married woman from
committing adultery by arousing her curiosity through the telling of tales. Both the
amount of tales as well as their content differ decisively in the book’s various revisions,
translations and adaptations. The chapbook version was compiled by an unknown author
not much earlier than its first lithographed edition in 1263/1846. The Chehel Tuti neither
tells of forty parrots nor does it contain forty tales. The reference to the number forty
rather serves as a symbolic indicator of multitude and perfection.

One of the tales contained in many of the published versions of the Chehel Tuti is an
adaptation of the ancient tale of the blinded ogre, widely known as the tale of
Polyphemos mentioned by Homer. The illustration shown here renders the ogre as
having two eyes, even though he is often imagined as a Cyclops. ‘Ali-Khān was an
extremely productive artist in the later years of lithographic book production. Besides
numerous minor items, his more impressive work can be witnessed in the illustrations he
supplied to the large lithographed edition of the Shah-nāme known as Bahādorī that was

E. E. Bertel’s, “Persisko-ys ‘literatūros’ literatūrą,” Sergejaus Federovicjaus, O. d. Mitkau ir A. Juzefavičiaus
kultūros-istorikos konferencijos dalyviai 1938 m. 15–22, Utena 1938, 25–31; U. Markelj, Die Zerleg
Papagei: Das persische Volkstuch Chehel Tuti, Wahlstorf 1977; G. Deirman, Beispiels für islamische

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