

MINIATURE ART IN EASTERN LITERATURE AND THE
ILLUSTRATIONS OF NAVOI'S KHAMSA EPICS**Shokirova Khilola**

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Annotation: This article is devoted to the issues of the harmony of oriental literature and the art of oriental miniatures. The article analyzes the scientific and theoretical sources devoted to this reality. A scientific analysis of a miniature entitled "Conversation of the Shah with the Imam" written for the poem "Confusion of the Righteous" and a miniature titled "Zoli Makkora Announces the Death of Shirin Farhod" written for the poem "Farhad and Shirin" is conducted.

Key words: miniature, art, decoration, clerk, artist, craftsman, book printing, tradition.

Eastern classical literature cannot be imagined without miniatures. Decorating manuscripts with illustrations corresponding to the content of the work became a tradition in Eastern literature. In the miniatures created for literary works, the events of the text were explained and interpreted through visual means.¹ The miniaturist is a painter who animates colors and infuses them with life.² In the East, miniature art emerged and developed within the framework of medieval visual arts. Among Iranian peoples, it appeared in the pre-Islamic period.

"In the medieval during the 9th–13th centuries, the peoples of the Near and Middle East, including Iran, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia, maintained close cultural ties with one another. Cities such as Baghdad, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Samarkand became centers of cultural and literary development, renowned worldwide for their distinguished scholars, poets, and intellectual institutions."³

the medieval East, literature, science, and art reached their peak of development. From that era, many unique manuscripts have survived to the present day. Their uniqueness lies in the fact that they were prepared by skilled calligraphers and scribes, while talented painters decorated the manuscripts with beautiful artistic ornaments, margins, and miniatures corresponding to the content of the text. An important aspect is that all inks and various colors were

¹ Oriental miniatures. Vol.III: The 19th-20th centuries. Madraimov Abdumajid, Musaev Shahnayaz and Ismailova Elvira(eds.).Tashkent, 2004.

² Ашрафий М. Темур ва Улуғбек даври Самарқанд миниатюраси, Т.: Фафур Ғулом, 1996, Б – 40 (886)

³ Шарабатов П.П. "Миниатюра" Т.: ТАФАККУР,2011 – Б.19

prepared from natural materials, which is likely why such unique manuscripts have preserved their quality so well up to the present time. At this point, it is necessary to explain what a miniature actually is.

“The primary function of the miniature was to clarify the meaning of the text and, more broadly, to decorate works of a secular character. Miniatures were mainly created for prose and poetic works, as well as historical chronicles..”⁴ By examining the period in which miniatures were created, one can also discern the cultural environment of that time and the prevailing attitude toward literature. In this regard, distinct schools of miniature painting emerged, each reflecting the unique culture of its nation. Among them are the Arab, Persian, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Indian, and Herat schools of miniature art. Each of these schools stands out for its specific artistic style and aesthetic values, and they have preserved their significance up to the present day.

By the medieval period, miniature painting had become one of the principal genres of Persian visual art. With the emergence of the tradition of composing *Khamsa* works in Eastern literature, illustrating them with miniatures also turned into a well-established custom..⁵

These are the miniatures that have continued since Nizami’s *Khamsa*. In some cases, several miniatures were created for a single scene or episode from Nizami’s quintet, and in this way, a particular tradition was formed.⁶ For example, in Nizami’s poem *Khusraw and Shirin*, the scene where Khusraw beholds Shirin bathing in the spring has been illustrated in 126 miniatures, created from 1384 up to the beginning of the 19th century.⁷

Regardless of the city in which they were created, the repetition of the same participants in this manner indicates that compositional traditions on a specific theme had already been established.⁸

In Eastern miniature art, the generalization of the idea of a literary work and its expression through symbolism holds primary importance. As a result, the poets’ and painters’ pursuit of deeper meaning became more pronounced.⁹ For example, in Khusraw Dehlavi’s *Majnun and Layli*, Majnun meets his father in the

⁴ Шарабатов П.П. “Миниатюра” Т.: ТАФАККУР, 2011 – Б.19

⁵ Эркинов А “Алишер Навоий “Хамса”си талқини манбалари (XV-XX аср боши)”Т.: ТАМАДДУН, 2018 – Б-231.

⁶ Эркинов А “Алишер Навоий “Хамса”си талқини манбалари (XV-XX аср боши)”Т.: ТАМАДДУН, 2018 – Б-236.

⁷ Додхудоева Л. “Поэмы Низами в средневековой миниатюрной живописи”. М.: ИВЛ, 1985 – Б-127-133.

⁸ Ашрафий М. Темур ва Улугбек даври Самарқанд миниатюраси, Т.: Фафур Фулом, 1996, Б – 50 (886)

⁹ Эркинов А “Алишер Навоий “Хамса”си талқини манбалари (XV-XX аср боши)”Т.: ТАМАДДУН, 2018 – Б-231.

desert. However, the painter depicted this meeting in a garden within the miniature.¹⁰

Until the 15th century, the collection of mainly scientific literature was a priority. Only from the 15th century onward did the gathering of poetic compilations, decorated with miniatures and illustrations, gradually become predominant.

In Eastern poetry, the motif of two characters recognizing or falling in love with each other through an image is a well-known literary device. Heroes such as Firdausi's Farhod, Shirin, Bahrom Gur, and Som, as well as the protagonists of Nizami, Amir Khusraw Dehlavi, and Alisher Navoi, come to recognize or fall in love through portraits copied from real-life figures (nature).¹¹

The miniatures created for Nizami's *Khamsa* in 1446–1447 provide a broad understanding of the approach taken by the Samarkand school in resolving various themes, including depictions of palace interiors, natural landscapes, and interpretations of human and animal figures.

Within this collection, five illustrations adorn the poem *Khusraw and Shirin*, three miniatures embellish *Layli and Majnun*, seven are dedicated to *Haft Paykar*, and three illustrate the *Iskandarnama*.

The most favored themes in the miniatures created for Nizami's *Khamsa* include: "Khusraw seeing Shirin while she bathe", "The battle between the tribes of Layli and Majnun", "Majnun among the animals in the desert", "Bahram with one of the beauties in the palace", "Iskandar visiting a dervish" "Iskandar and the water nymphs" and others of similar nature¹². In all illustrated copies of Nizami's *Khamsa*, miniatures depicting the above-mentioned themes can be found.

In the East, the *Khamsa* epics of Nizami Ganjavi are the works most frequently illustrated with miniatures and paintings. This shows that, regardless of the era, Nizami Ganjavi's *Khamsa* was regarded as one of the most popular works.

In addition, the study of historical manuscript works belonging to Eastern literary heritage shows that Herat had become a true center of master craftsmen, artisans, architects, calligraphers, and painters—great figures whose names have remained in history. As Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur stated, there was no city in the world like Herat. The person who guided Herat to reach such

¹⁰ Шукуров Ш. "Искусство средневекового Ирана". М.: Наука, 1989 – Б-170.

¹¹ Ашрафий М. Темур ва Улуғбек даври Самарқанд миниатюраси, Т.: Ғафур Ғулом, 1996, Б – 37 (886)

¹² Ашрафий М. Темур ва Улуғбек даври Самарқанд миниатюраси, Т.: Ғафур Ғулом, 1996, Б – 49 (886)

heights was none other than Hazrat Alisher Navoi¹³. On this matter, very just words are said in the *Baburnama*: “No patron and supporter of people of knowledge and art has ever appeared like Alisherbek. Master Qulmuhammad, Shaykhi Noyi, and Husayn Udi—who were leaders in music—achieved such progress and fame through his nurturing and support. Master Behzad and Shah Muzaffar became so renowned and celebrated in painting thanks to the effort and patronage of the bek. Few people have ever been granted success in accomplishing so many virtuous deeds as he did”.

There are numerous miniatures created for the manuscripts of Navoi’s works, and they can be found across manuscript collections worldwide.

In the 1591 manuscript copy of Navoi’s *Khamsa*, several miniatures are found, though they are rather simply executed.¹⁴ Nevertheless, these miniatures are significant due to their relative closeness to the time of the composition of the *Khamsa* and their depiction of unconventional scenes.¹⁵

In the 1824 manuscript copy of Navoi’s *Khamsa*, transcribed by the order of Kokand Khan Amir Umar Khan, a miniature is included in the epic *Farhod and Shirin*, depicting the scene where Khusraw beholds Shirin bathing in a spring.¹⁶ In the East, when illustrating literary works with miniatures, it was not considered essential for the image to correspond precisely to the text of the work. This may be related to the fact that stereotypical compositions had formed, which more broadly reflected the established literary tradition”.¹⁷

In 1983, based on the collection of the Hamid Sulaymonov Institute of Manuscripts (now part of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan), Muhammadjon Hakimov, in his book “Description of Navoi’s Manuscripts”, noted that there are three manuscripts of Navoi’s epics decorated with miniatures preserved in the collection.

1. The “*Khamsa*” manuscript with inventory number 2630-I contains eighteen miniatures. The paintings bear no artist’s signature. Based on the manuscript’s paleography and the style of the miniatures, it can be attributed to the 16th-century Bukhara school of miniature painting¹⁸. This work represents a unique copy adorned with exquisite calligraphy, fine book art, and miniature painting. After the completion of the *Khamsa* epics, *Lison ut-Tayr* was also

¹³ Шабаратов П.П. Миниатюра. Т.: Taffakur, 2011 – Б-42

¹⁴ Алишер Навоий. Хамса. ЎРШИ-3, № 2752

¹⁵ Эркинов А “Алишер Навоий “Хамса”си талкини манбалари (XV-XX аср боши)”Т.: ТАМАДДУН, 2018 – Б-236.

¹⁶ Алишер Навоий. Хамса. ЎРШИ-3, № 23/2; Алишер Навоий дostonларига ишланган расмлар(альбом). Тузувчи Х.Сулаймон. Т.: Фан, 1970 – Б-275.

¹⁷ Додхудоева Л. “Поэмы Низами в средневековой миниатюрной живописи”. М.: ИВЛ, 1985 – Б-29

¹⁸ Хакимов М. Навоий асарлари кўлёмаларининг тавсифи. – Тошкент: Фан. 1983 – Б-9 (200 б)

copied, and at the end of each epic in the manuscript, the date of transcription is recorded. The manuscript contains 18 miniatures corresponding to the plots of the epics.

2. The *Khamisa* manuscript with inventory number 2752, copied in 1591, contains several miniatures, though they are rather simply executed. It is one of the ancient and esteemed, yet incomplete and worn, copies¹⁹.

3. The next manuscript is the copy of Navoi's *Khamisa* preserved today at the Alisher Navoi State Museum of Literature of the Republic of Uzbekistan. It was transcribed in 1824 by the order of Kokand Khan Amir Umar Khan. This manuscript also includes a miniature in Navoi's *Farhod and Shirin*, depicting the scene where Khusraw beholds Shirin bathing in a spring²⁰. "While illustrating literary works with miniatures in the East, it was not regarded as important for the image to fully correspond to the text of the work. This phenomenon may be connected with the broader expression of literary tradition through the formation of stereotypical compositions".²¹ We also find it necessary to provide brief information about the paintings created for Alisher Navoi's epics, compiled by Hamid Sulaymon. The illustrations included in the album, made for Navoi's epics *Hayrat al-Abror*, *Farhod and Shirin*, *Layli and Majnun*, *Sab'ai Sayyor*, *Saddi Iskandariy*, and *Lison ut-Tayr*, represent classical examples of Timurid painting art, which reached its peak of development in Khorasan and Central Asia during the 15th and the first half of the 16th century. These works were produced as illustrations to the epics and are attributed to Kamoliddin Behzod—the founder of the Herat school of painting, a great painter of the East and a genius artist—as well as his disciples Qosim Ali, Mirak Naqqosh, Dust Muhammad, and Mahmud Muzahhib.

In conclusion, it can be stated that miniature art and its study hold significant importance in the classical literature of the East. This is because in the Eastern tradition, it became customary to illustrate many epics and literary works with miniatures corresponding to their content. In this way, miniature art developed as a means of enriching manuscripts and enhancing their expressive power. Particularly in the decoration of the *Khamisa* epics, miniatures occupied a special place and gradually evolved into an independent artistic direction.

¹⁹ Эркинов А "Алишер Навоий "Хамса"си талкини манбалари (XV-XX аср боши)"Т.: ТАМАДДУН, 2018 – Б-236.

²⁰ Алишер Навоий. Хамса. ЎРШИ-3, № 23/2; Алишер Навоий дostonларига ишланган расмлар(альбом). Тузувчи Х.Сулаймон. Т.: Фан, 1970 – Б-275.

²¹ Додхудоева Л. "Поэмы Низами в средневековой миниатюрной живописи". М.: ИВЛ, 1985 – Б-29

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