



*The Henna Page*TM
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HENNA

The Patterns of Persian Henna



Catherine Cartwright-Jones

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I would like to thank the John Rylands Library in Manchester, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the British Library in London, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for permitting me to view original Persian manuscripts and works of art in person. This is a rare privilege and I am very grateful to have had this opportunity.

I would also like to thank the Iranian Heritage Society for providing assistance and funding for this research.

In this paper, I propose that women's hand and foot markings in pictorial and literary Persian art between the 13th century and the mid 19th are representations of henna body art, and that the henna patterns mirror the arts of the period that would have been familiar to women in their daily lives: ceramic tiles from the mosque and the baths, the woodwork in their homes, their clothing, carpets, amulets, and talismans. I propose that the manuscript representations are idealized but plausible representations of henna patterns within the limits of scale of miniature art. I propose these depictions can also be read for class, gender, and the narrative of social relationships. These also reflect the evolving Persian concept of ideal women's beauty into the period of increased European influence on style in the Qajar dynasty.

I have supplied images and experience from my own work as a henna artist to support my interpretations of henna patterns, and offer them as an approach to reconstructing the original patterns.

Foreword:

One might assume from the examples presented here that all Persian women wore extravagantly patterned henna at all times, because of the many examples presented. However, in an overview of all illustrated Persian texts from 1000CE to 1900 CE, the percentage of women with hand and foot markings consistent with henna are very small. Few texts have images of women. Though many images of women have stained fingertips and fingernails, less than five percent of the women represented have patterned henna.

This paper does not include all the images of hennaed Persian women that exist. This paper only includes manuscript images from which I have been able to access high-resolution scans, or been allowed to view in person and sketch. There are many other museum and library collections such as the Smithsonian, the Topkapi Saray, the Hermitage, the Freer, and others in the Middle East that have extensive collections of Persian manuscripts. I have seen in small grainy reprints of their holdings in books; in many there is enough resolution to show that henna is present in the images, but not enough to show detail, so there is a vast open area for further research and analysis of images.

When I began this project in 2001, the only way to find out what henna was like in previous centuries was submit research proposals and letters of recommendation to great libraries such as the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the British Library in London, the John Rylands Library in Manchester and the Victoria and Albert Museum, hope for approval, make appointments, put on gloves, go through security checks, order one manuscript at a time, wait patiently for it to be brought up from archives for a brief time, and then examine it with a jewelers loupe and a high magnification hand lens, and take the best notes possible with a soft pencil in a limited amount of time.

In the intervening years, the libraries have made high-resolution scans of the original manuscripts, and then put the precious and fragile pages into vaults. Collections are now available through electronic media, and scholars can study them in great detail and at great distance. The original works will now be preserved far longer, and not be subject to reader's fingertips, accidental damage, and temperature and humidity changes. However, students will not experience the rare joy of touching the life, loves, and henna of a person who lived half a millennium before.

I hope these two research papers will show scholars and henna enthusiasts that there is a vast history of henna ready to show itself to them to those who persevere with curiosity and discipline.

Catherine Cartwright-Jones

The works featured in this investigation are:

Ilkhanate Manuscripts:



Maqamat al-Hariiri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v



Shahnama of Abu'l-Qasim Firdawsi known as Demotte Shahnama, dated 1335-40, Vever Collection, S86.0102, Smithsonian

Timurid Manuscripts



"Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait", late 1400's, Iran, plate 2, Khamsa of Nizami, Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, s1986.140



Khusraw and the Lion: Khamasa of Nizami Dated 1505-10 India Office, MS 387 fol 65b, British Library, London

Safavid Manuscripts:



Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, Harvard University,



“Bilqis visiting Solomon”, about 1530, Iran, from Assembly of Lovers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Ouseley ADD 24, Folio 1270



“A Nomadic Encampment”, (1539 – 43, Iran), folio from a manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75



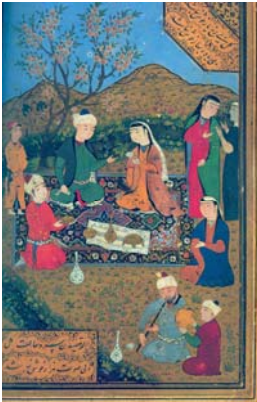
“Nighttime in a Palace”, (1539 – 43 Iran), folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76



Portrait inscribed to Abdullah, “A Prince and a Princess Embrace”
Dated Bukhara 1550 Vever Collection, S86.0301, Smithsonian



Timur Holds a Great Feast with Amir Husayn, After They Have Raised a Chinghisid to the Rank of Great Khan: Painting from Sharaf a-Din 'Ali Yazdi's *Zafanama*, Shiraz, 1552, London, The British Library, OR. 1359, Folio 35V



Folio 2a from *Tuhfat al-ahrar* of Mawlana Nuruddin Abdul Rahma Jami
Dated 1558, Vever Collection, s86.0040, Smithsonian



A Seated Lady in an Orange Dress and Green Mantle
Topkapi Sarai Museum Library, H. 2165, fol. 54v, Istanbul

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Note:

In this paper, I use the terms "Persia" or "Persian" and "Iran" or "Iranian". For the purpose of this paper, I use "Persia" to refer to a region ruled by one of the Persian empires. I use "Persian" to refer to the dominant culture of the Persian empires, as opposed to Kurdish or Turkic, which also existed in the region of "Persia". I use "Iran" to refer to the region defined by the political boundaries of the modern Iranian state, and "Iranian" to refer to places and practices within the boundary of that modern state.

The general periods covered are:

- Ilkhanate: 1256–1353
- Timurid Empire: 1370–1506
- Safavid dynasty: 1501–1722



Figure 1: Detail: “Nighttime in a Palace” (1539 – 43, Iran), folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76

Henna in the regions of the Persian empires

Henna is an indigenous plant where temperatures never fall below freezing, such as exist in southern part of the region generally encompassed by the Persian empires. One may assume that people will examine plants in their area, and if they can find a use for a plant, it will put to purpose, so the earliest use may not have been long after the initial Holocene warming. Because henna is plant material, and the stain on skin is temporary, historic use of henna must always be read from indirect evidence. Evidence of henna in Persia is sporadic, but supports women’s continuous use of henna for hair and body art.

Assyrian women used henna to ornament their hands and feet for weddings by the 8th century BCE:

Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave, s’appuyant sur les travaux de Gaston Maspero, signale en effet que “des texts assyriens du VIII^e siècle avant J.C., décrivant les

préparatifs du mariage notent que la jeune fille se teint la paume des mains et les ongles avec la pâte de "Henneh" (Tauzin 1998, p.11)

The statue of Queen Napir-Asu of Elam, from the temple of Ninhursag, Susa, 14th C BCE, currently held in the Louvre, has marks on the fingers that are consistent with henna stains. Pliny's first century record of *Regale Unguentum*, Royal Parthian ointment, includes henna (camphire) as one of the ingredients, and was probably used to stain skin, and cover gray in beards and hair.

Persian poets Roudaki, Sadi, and Jami, referred to henna in their works between the 11th and 15th centuries:

"The tulip, from afar, laughs among growing things ... dyed with henna, as is a bride's hand"

Roudaki, 11th C quoted by Said Naficy (Massé...79, S-5)

*"... hands
Perfect and small; but stained upon the palms
With henna's russet-red, the Persian way..."*

Sa'di, 13th century, *"With Sa'di in the Garden, the Book of Love. 23"*
(1258, tr. Sir Edwin Arnold)

*"... new-bathed,
Painted and henna-stained, and scented sweet."*

Sa'di, 13th century *"With Sa'di in the Garden, the Book of Love: 138"*
(1258, tr. Sir Edwin Arnold)

"O wipe the woman's henna from thy hand, ..."

Jami, 15th century, *"Salaman and Absal, XXII"*, tr. Edward Fitzgerald,
1904 p. 38)

Tavernier, when traveling in Persia during the 17th century, mentions the existence of henna mills in Yazd, and describes henna being used for body art and hair dye throughout the region. High dye content henna grows in areas near the Persian Gulf, and Iranian henna is still cultivated as a commercial crop. There are still mills grinding dried henna leaves harvested from farms in southern Iran, presently for domestic use and import as hair dye through Russia and Eastern Europe.



Figure 2: a henna plant with new leaf buds: the red shows the presence of lawsone

I believe evidence such as that presented above demonstrates that henna body art was practiced as a social art form among women in the region described as Persia, and was part of social reproduction among privileged class women from the Bronze Age to the present centuries in that region. There also is also evidence that women had access to high quality henna and that they understood the additives and techniques necessary to create extremely dark stains.

These markings are within the range characteristic of henna stains, positioned on hands and feet henna stains most readily. Women's fingertips and fingernails are the most consistently marked in the manuscripts: henna stains nails and fingertips easily, strengthens nails, and prevents cuticles and fingertips from chapping. It is doubtful that the marks represent lace gloves because gloves do not fit only on fingertips. The marks are not paint, because painted fingertips would soil food and other objects touched. The marks are not tattoos, because fingernails cannot be tattooed. They are unlikely to represent indigo, because indigo stains only last a day or two on palms, and indigo stains skin blue.

These markings are consistent with henna, though they are not red. Henna stains can be darkened or blackened. Persian henna darkening techniques were described by Pietro della Valle, and observed in 1618 at the court of Shah Abbas, translated by Pinkerton¹

¹ The manner of applying it is as follows: after supper, just previous to their retiring to bed, they moisten the alcanna with water, and with the paste cover the hands, or as much of the body as they are desirous of staining, binding it on with linen bandages. The evening is therefore chosen for the application, as in the daytime it would be inconvenient for the ladies to have their hands confined. The paste remains thus fastened during the night, and in the morning, on removing the bandage, the paste is reduced again to powder, and the part to which had been applied is stained of a bright orange color; sometimes if a greater quantity be used, it is more inclined to red; and sometimes again, so much is used to make it a very dark

(1811, vol 9, pp 48-9) and Olearius (Adam Ölschläger)², who traveled to Persia and was received by the Shah in 1637,³ where Olearius would have had first-hand knowledge of henna practices.



Figure 3: Nearly black henna stains from henna applied thickly, and wrapped overnight, photograph by author

The fingertips in most representations of Persian henna are the same color that high quality henna produces today, mixed and applied in about the same way as described by Olearius and della Valle. If henna was mixed with a mildly acidic mix and an organic solvent such as perfume, applied and wrapped overnight, the stains will darken to nearly black. Under ideal conditions, high quality henna will stain palms and fingertips nearly black, though stains on the backs of hands are normally brown. The representation of henna stains as uniformly black in most Persian illustrations is more likely to be an idealized henna color rather than a reflection of reality.

Henna patterns in Persia

There are many depictions of women's hands and feet with markings in Persian manuscripts between 1200 and 1900, but these have not, as far as I am aware, been systematically examined and cataloged for representations of henna art body art. In the cannon of Persian art, women's are usually depicted as clothed, so body art on the chest is covered. In the scale of Persian book illustration, the hands and feet of persons depicted are so small (usually ¼" wide or less) there is only room to approximate a henna

color, approaching to the black. This dye is the most esteemed by the Persians, as it serves to set off the whiteness of the skin.

² "This color is made of the herb, which they call Chinne, which hath leaves like those of liquorice, or rather, those of myrtle. It grows in the Province of Erak [sic] (Iraq), and it is dry'd and beaten, small as flower, and there is put thereto a little of the juyce [sic: juice] of sour pomegranate, or citron, or sometimes only fair water, and therewith they color their hands. And if they would have them to be a darker color, they rub them afterwards with wall-nut [sic] leaves. This color will not be got off in fifteen days, though they wash their hands several times a day."

³ Olearius was court mathematician to Frederick III, sent by the duke to Muscovy and Persia, as secretary to the ambassadors Philip Crusius and merchant Otto Bruggemann, to secure the overland silk trade.

pattern. Observers wrote about the henna patterns, and their descriptions add what was not possible to represent in such a small space.

One of the most informative literary mentions of Persian henna comes from an editor's footnote on a satire on Persian women's superstitions and social manners, "*Kitabi Kulsum Naneh*". J. Thonnelier translated this as "*Kitabi Kulsum Naneh ou le livre des dames de la Perse*", adding explanations based on first-hand experience. The book was further translated into English as "Customs and Manners of the Women of Persia" by Atkinson, James. This epigram was a lampoon of women's society, and was as acutely and irreverently observed as "Absolutely Fabulous" by Jennifer Saunders, and like any humor, required some "insider knowledge" to understand the jokes. Thonnelier wrote an explanation of Persian henna (and his disapproval of henna body art) into the section on women's visits to the hamam, so French readers of the satire could "get the jokes". Atkinson's translation of the French explanation is as follows:

"The Persian ladies regard the bath as the place of their greatest amusement; they make appointments to meet there, and often pass seven or eight hours together in the carpeted saloon, telling stories, relating anecdotes, eating sweetmeats, sharing their kalyouns, and embellishing their beautiful forms with all the fancied perfections of the ease, dyeing their hair and eyebrows and curiously staining their fair bodies with a variety of fantastic devices, not infrequently with the figures of trees, birds, and beasts, sun, moon and stars. This sort of pencil-work spreads over the bosom, and continues down as low as the navel, round which some radiated figure is generally painted. All this is displayed by the style of their dress, every garment of which, even to the light gauze chemise, being open from the neck to that point; a singular taste and certainly more barbarous than becoming." (p.16, UMI facsimile of Atkinson 1832 translation)

Another commentator on "*Kitabi Kulsum Naneh*", Mahmud Katirā'i, offers more information on henna at the hamam:

"A woman might henna herself, or her friends, drawing negar (henna patterns), or a negārband (henna artist) might be employed to draw butterflies, sparrows, or flowers."

These descriptions tell us what the miniatures do not show: that women did their henna in a social atmosphere with their friends: in the women's bath, or in the secluded women's area of the house, between naps, while telling stories, eating and relaxing. The henna work was done in a space only inhabited by other women, so women were the artists. There was enough demand for elaborate pictorial henna work beyond the skill of a woman and her friends, that a *negārband* might be hired for special occasions. Persian art rarely included images of women bathing, and I have never found an indigenous illustration of a woman applying henna. European Orientalist painters produced prolific imaginings of the women's baths, but I have never seen one of a woman applying henna, probably because the male painters never had an opportunity to observe this being done.

James Atkinson states that women had henna patterns over much of their bodies, but this was not shown in the formalized miniature paintings: women's were usually painted as clothed so this intimate art was covered. Henna body art over the bosom and belly would have been known to a woman's friends and her husband, but never seen by anyone else. Men were have been the observers (and appreciators) of the end product, but they would not have participated in the process. If a man saw a woman's hennaed fingertips, he might have imagined patterns under her silks that he could not see: thus Sa'di's momentary passion inspired by a woman's hennaed hand (1258, tr. Sir Edwin Arnold),

*“Negārinā ba šamšir-at če hājat
Marā kod mikošad dast-e negārin”*

“O sweetheart, thou needst not a sword (to kill me), thy negārin hand itself killeth me”

Men painted the illustrations of women with henna, and wrote about it, but they viewed henna through the lens of male experience. Henna was largely women's art and experience, but their voicing of henna was not recorded. Therefore, as we examine the evidence of henna art in Persia from 1000 CE to 1700 CE, we must recognize that we are viewing henna through a partial, rigidly constructed, greatly reduced, and gendered series of filters. We are not viewing henna as it was, we are viewing scattered remnants from the periphery of what was a robust art form, and we must be cautious about reading that evidence and drawing conclusions from it.

Henna from Seljuq to Ilkhanate: 1037 - 1353
Hennaed Women Listening to the Theologian, 1237

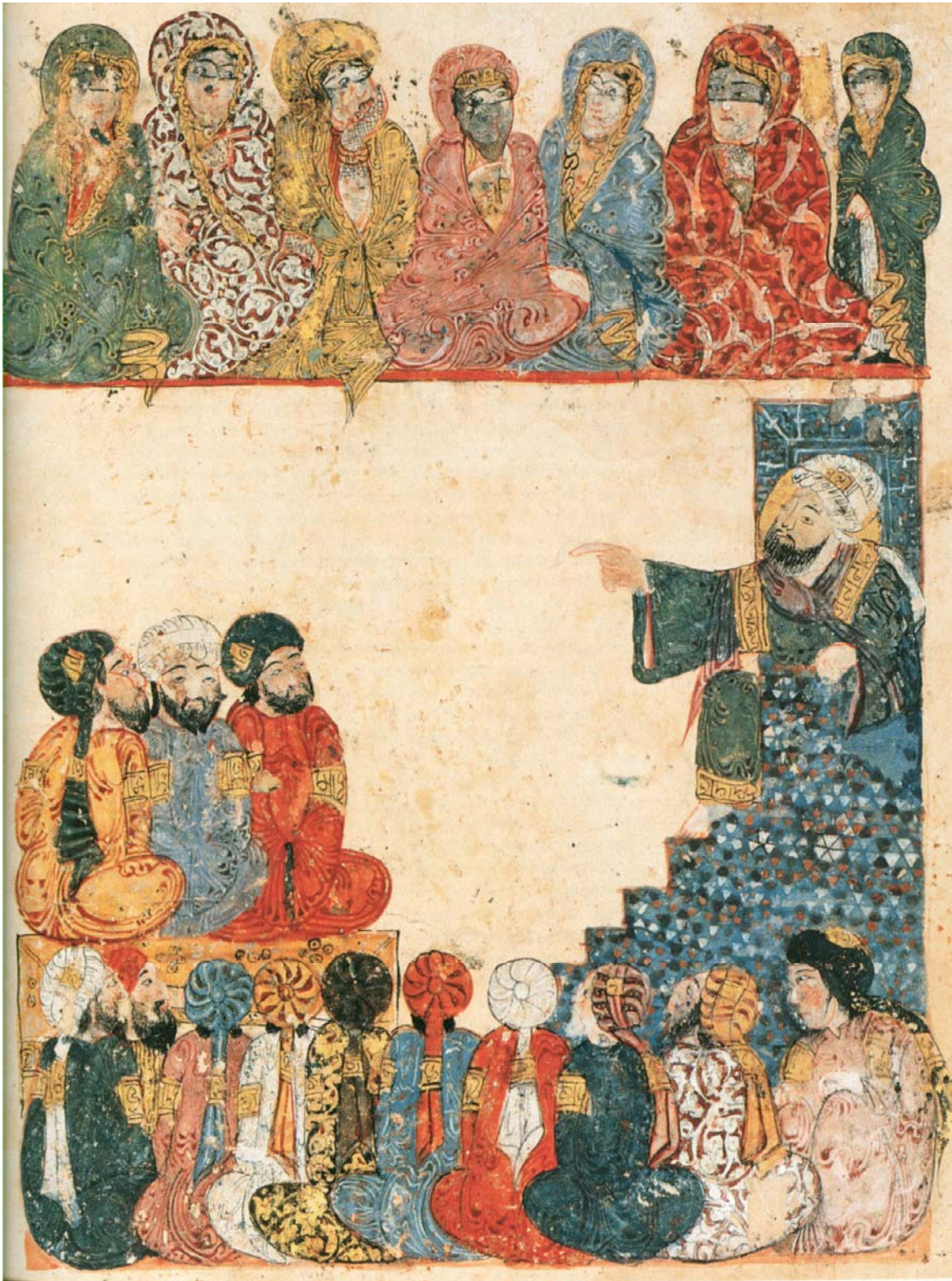


Figure 4: “Listening to the Theologian”, Maqamat al-Hariri dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v

Figure 4 is an illustration of ‘Listening to the Theologian’ from a Maqamat al-Hariri from Baghdad, 1237 CE, presently in the Paris Bibliotheque. Al-Maqamat was a collection of fifty adventures by Abu Muhammad al Qasim ibn Ali al-Hariri (written 1054-1122). The Maqamat was enormously popular, and was copied many times; dozens of fragments and whole editions still survive. The illuminations on these manuscripts provide a view of the prosperous middle class of the Arab world who loved, sponsored and purchased these books. The illustrations were created to please and reflect their style, their tastes, their interests their inventions and possessions, and, in one case, their henna.



Figure 5: Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”,Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v: Woman at upper left in green robe

In “Listening to the Theologian”, people listen to a learned man. Though the background is not clearly defined, the space may be a mosque, with the women sitting in a gallery apart from the men, as is customary. The women have representations of blackened henna patterns on their hands. All of the people’s hands and fingers are outlined in red, so

it is easy to distinguish the representation of henna patterns from the natural folds of the hands.



Figure 6 Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”, Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v, hand of woman at upper left in green robe

The woman wearing a green gown at the upper left extends her hand to the woman next to her, as if gesturing in response to some comment made by the theologian. Her hands have blackened henna on the fingertips and thumb, and a few blackened lines on the fingers paralleling the tips. The dots on the palm may be a simple pattern, and there may once have been a dot and swirl pattern on the little finger⁴.

⁴ This pattern is similar to one on hands of two people with swords in the “Book of Fixed Stars” by Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi, written in 964 CE, British Library PS6 2279.OPB.64 OR 5323 F.21v

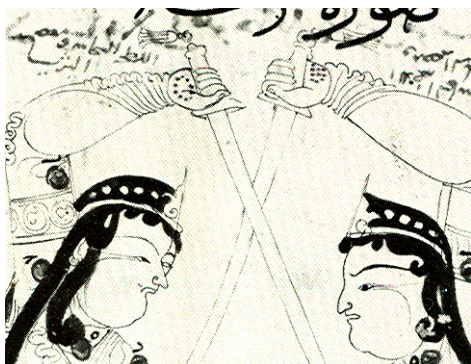




Figure 7: Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”, Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v, woman at upper left in red and white brocade robe

The woman in green extends her hand towards her companion, who also seems to gesturing an opinion of the theologian. She has more complex patterns, which seem to be rows of inscriptions written in henna across the backs of her hands, with separating lines in between. These appear similar to the calligraphic scripts woven into the textile bands

worn by men in the other parts of “Listening to the Theologian”. Her fingertip is blackened with henna, and she has line extending up her index finger. The red outlines of her hands and fingers distinguish the henna markings from the definition of her hand shape.

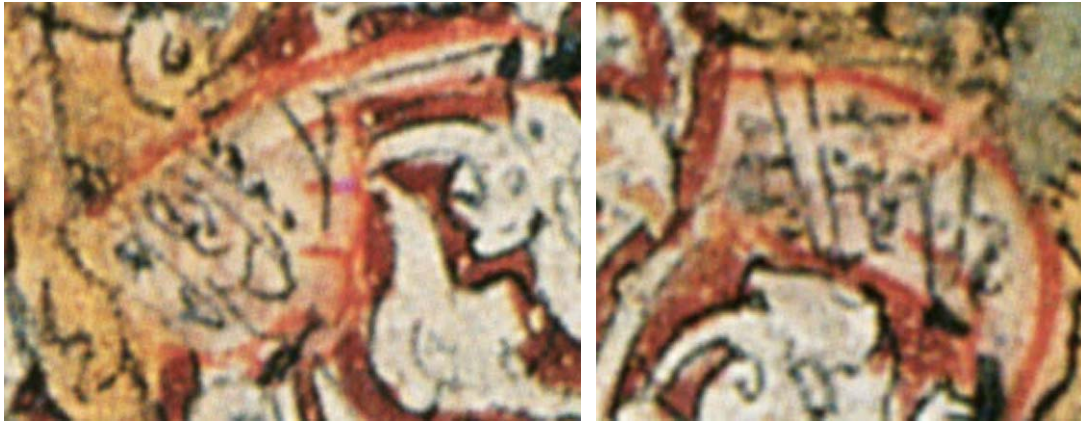


Figure 8: Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”, Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v, hands of woman at upper left wearing red and white brocade robe



Figure 9: Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”, Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v, theologian with tiraz bands

These calligraphic textile bands, shown in Figures 9, 10 and 11 are *tiraz*, embroidered or woven silk panels with text in stylized formal scripts. Tiraz were often honorific, stating “Good fortune and prosperity to the bearer”, “All victory and glory to the bearer”, or “Sublimity and Magnificence to the bearer”, and were composed and worn according to the prestige of the wearer. Tiraz were fashionable at the lavish ‘Abbasid court, though discouraged at later courts as lacking sobriety and humility. Fatimid tiraz more often proclaimed political or religious affiliation (Baker 1995, p. 50 - 59).



Figure 10: Tiraz fragment, Linen and silk tapestry in a linen tabby ground, Egypt, mid-12th century, "good fortune" and "prosperity" in Naksh script, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada



Figure 11: Detail: "Listening to the Theologian", Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v, men with tiraz bands

Women would have known and valued these embroidered bands as part of their family's most prestigious items. They might have produced the embroidery themselves, memorized the scripts and used them in their henna. If they were not themselves literate, they might have copied the patterns in henna line for line from the turban ties, robes and banners, to bestow upon themselves with the luck and honor carried in the text.

The men in this scene are depicted as wearing their finest clothing and honorific tiraz on their turbans and as armbands. The women are beautifully robed as well. We might infer from this that the henna represented on the women is as prestigious as their garments. If this is so, what we see in this image, was considered the finest henna styles of Baghdad in 1237.



Figure 12: Persian 13th century calligraphic text copied in henna and blackened

The henna stains are represented as black, as opposed to reddish-brown henna stains. Very high dye content henna can darken to a color approaching black, as seen in Figure 12. Henna with high lawsone content, mixed and applied under ideal conditions can produce extremely dark stains, virtually black on palms and fingertips. Henna that produced virtually black stains on my own hands, Ancient Sunrise Purity 101509 - AP#: FC29209TD, was submitted to Alchemists Pharmaceuticals for testing: the lawsone content was measured to be 2.30%, and the level of henna purity was 99.3%. The mean lawsone content for henna from the Pali district in India in 2004 was calculated to be 1.78%, and ranged from 0.3% to 2.9% (Jindal et al, 2005, p.20). An assay of "Superior Quality Henna Jamila" 2008 by Alchemists Pharmaceuticals AP# AL80027246 measured 1.74% lawsone. The Jamila 2008 henna produced dark reddish-brown, but not near-black results on my skin.

Based on this, and the frequent representation of henna stains as black on hands and feet in Persian art, one may assume that Persian women had access to henna with 2.3% lawsone content, or higher. Since all the patterns on their hands are represented as black, and that their henna would have been carefully chosen to represent prestige as much as the rest of their attire, high dye content henna with blackened stains was the most desirable and stylish henna of the day.



Figure 13: Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”, Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v, woman in yellow robe

The third woman from the left, listening intently with her chin cupped in her hand, wears a yellow robe, and has a heavy gold bracelet over her blackened henna. She has henna on her fingertips, and a criss-crossing henna pattern that extends past her wrists. Her fingers and edges of her hand are defined by red lines, as are her nose and cheek.

This pattern resembles the traditional woodworking patterns used in Islamic domestic architecture known as *mashrabiya*⁵. Mashrabiya is complex latticed woodwork used throughout the Arab world, often used to create extended window coverings that permit cooling breezes to flow through the house, allowing the women in the home to view the street outside while maintaining their modesty and privacy.



Figure 14: Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”,Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v , woman in pink robe and woman in light blue robe

⁵ The windows behind the women in Figure 18, Sindukht Becoming Aware of Rudaba's Actions, Shahnama of Abu'l-Qasim, are latticed with mashrabiya. There are several examples of mashrabiya partitions in “Nighttime in a Palace” (1539 – 43, Iran), folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76, most clearly in Figures 48 and 49.

The woman at the center in the pink robe, Figure 14, fiddles with her veil, as one might do as a nervous habit. The hand to her veil has two dots that appear to represent henna patterns when examined at high resolution. She has no patterns on the hand resting on her knee, nor on her fingertips. She. The pattern appears similar to a woman's henna pattern shown in Figure 16, a Seljuk bowl, dated to approximately the same period, the 13th century. She wears a strip of tiraz across her forehead. Her neighbor in the light blue gown, smiling and rocking slightly to the side, does not show her hands.



Figure 15: Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”: Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58, detail of hand of woman in pink robe



Figure 16: 13th century Seljuk overglaze painted ceramic bowl, with a henna knotwork pattern on the back of the lute player's hand

At high resolution, the pattern on the pink-robed woman's hand appears very similar to the pattern on a lute player's hand, done at about the same period in figure 16. The pattern on the bowl would confirm that the pattern in “Listening to the Theologian” is

intended to represent a small knotwork pattern done in henna, rather than an accidental drop of ink, as appears to be the case in the black spot by the nose of the woman in Figure 7.



Figure 17: Detail: “Listening to the Theologian”, Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v, woman and her servant at upper right

The people at the upper right of “Listening to the Theologian” Figure 17 appear to be a woman accompanied a young female slave or attendant. The woman in the red robe, looks sidelong at her companions, and pulls her hand up to her chin, in a gesture of doubt

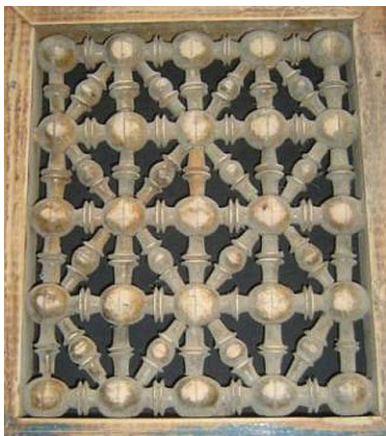
or concern. She has a pattern resembling *mashrabiya*⁶, as does the women in a yellow robe, extending to just below her knuckles, and an eye or fish-shaped pattern between her knuckles and her wrist.

This lattice pattern in henna might have been created by one of several techniques. If henna paste is naturally very stringy, or mixed with sugar or okra, a long thread of henna may be pulled from a small blob of henna, as one might pull out a thread of hot mozzarella from a pizza, and drape it across the skin. The artist may dip her thumb and index finger into henna, spread them apart and then drape the henna that stretched between them onto the skin in a neat line. The artist may also pick up a small blob of henna on a pic, touch it to the skin, and raise up a long thread of henna, then drape that down across the skin. A skillful henna artist may manipulate these lines into a delicate pattern. This can be repeated, to create a criss-cross pattern⁷.

A henna artist can also make long straight lines by rolling a flexible broomstraw or thick grass stem onto a plate of henna paste, then pulling it across the skin. It is possible to make such a pattern with a single direct application, by saturating a net with henna paste, draping it carefully onto the skin, allowing it to dry, and wrapping it to the skin, but this is very difficult to manage without smearing.⁸

The serving girl, wearing a green robe fans her; her thumb tip is stained with henna; her lesser amount of henna may reflect her youth and lower social status.

The Paris Bibliotheque version of the Maqamat was illustrated by one artist, Yahya ibn Mahmud ibn Yahya ibn Abi al-Hasan ibn Kuwwarih al-Wasiti, who seems to have had a penchant for drawing the people of his world with a rare sense of humor and accuracy. He painted the women in “Listening to the Theologian” expressing different reactions to the sermon, questioning, doubtful, reflective, and possibly paying more attention to each



6

Example of traditional *mashrabiya*, author's collection

⁷ In my experience, henna from Iran does have a relatively stringy texture, and is easy to pull out and drape a thread of henna paste. In exceptionally stringy henna, it is not difficult to pull out and drape a 4" long string.

⁸ I have heard descriptions of women kneading and rolling henna paste into thin lines, as one would do with clay, and applying henna that way, but I have not had any success with that technique.

other than to the religious lesson at hand. He also seems to have taken an interest in women's henna patterns, drawing each woman's pattern differently. If this is to be considered a meaningful and deliberate choice, this may record a variety of henna styles existing at the same place in the middle of the 13th century. The artist may have intended to critique the conspicuous display of wealth and power and wealth through tiraz honorifics to all the men's clothing and complexity of the women's henna, or he may simply have intended to record the fashion of the day ... or both.

Sindukht's Henna, 1335-40 CE



Figure 18: Detail: Sindukht Becoming Aware of Rudaba's Actions, Shahnama of Abu'l-Qasim Firdawsī known as Demotte Shahnama, dated 1335-40, Vever Collection, S86.0102, Smithsonian

This miniature Sindukht Becoming Aware of Rudaba's Actions, Shahnama of Abu'l-Qasim Firdawsī known as Demotte Shahnama, dated 1335-40, Vever Collection,

S86.0102, Smithsonian, Figure 18, illustrates a section of the *Shahnama* wherein Zal, the son of a king falls in love with Rudaba, the daughter of a rival king, and Sindukht, the queen and mother of Rudaba, finds out that the maid has assisted the lovers' exchange of gifts. Sindukht calls her daughter and the maid before her and reproachfully gestures to them. The queen's hands are ornamented with henna patterns. Her daughter and the maid do not have ornamented hands.



Figure 19 Detail: Sindukht Becoming Aware of Rudaba's Actions, *Shahnama* of Abu'l-Qasim Firdawsi known as Demotte *Shahnama*, dated 1335-40, Vever Collection, S86.0102, Smithsonian, Sindukht reproaches her daughter and the maid

Her upheld hand has fingertips and palms elaborately ornamented with henna patterns on the palm and fingers, but damage to the manuscript has obscured the detail. The pattern does appear to be an all-over floral pattern rather than a netting, dot, or calligraphic as was seen in the women in “Listening to the Theologian”. Her other hand, at knee level, shows floral ornamentation on the fingers and blackened fingertips and fingernails, and a pattern on the back of her hand opposite from her thumb. If this pattern is assumed to be a half view of an isolated symmetrical pattern, it could be a flowering tree, perhaps a ‘tree of life’ pattern.



Figure 20: Detail: Sindukht Becoming Aware of Rudaba's Actions, Shahnama of Abu'l-Qasim Firdawsi known as Demotte Shahnama, dated 1335-40, Vever Collection, S86.0102, Smithsonian, Sindukht reproaches her daughter and the maid, her hand at her knee

If the pattern is judged to be extending from the palm side around to the back of her hand on the side opposite of the thumb, it might be an extension of a floral pattern such as Sindukht has on her opposite palm.

Wrapping patterns from the palm to back side of the hands creates an interesting visual contrast in henna: the palm has deeper, more keratinized skin, and has little pigmentation. The back of the hand has thinner, more lipid-filled skin cells, pigmentation, and hair follicles. Henna will nearly always stain the palm a darker color than the back of the hand, and if the rest of the skin is pigmented, the henna stain will be a greater contrast in color. If an artist takes advantage of this change in skin structure, the pattern will have a subtle gradation across the barrier between palm and dorsal skin. Palm and fingertips may have virtually black stains against very pale skin, and the back of the hand may have a dark brown stain against a light brown skin tone.

Shirin's henna, Khamsa of Nizami, late 1400's



Figure 21: “Shirin Examines Khusraw’s Portrait”, late 15th century Iran, plate 2, Khamsa of Nizami, Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, s1986.140

“Shirin Examines Khusraw’s Portrait”, Figure 21, is done in the Turkmen style of Timurid courts of centered in Tabriz, from between 1380 to 1468 CE. This image has further examples of wrapping a henna pattern from the palm to dorsal side of a hand, both from the thumb side and from the side opposite, and triangular or lozenge shaped motifs. The

four women who have henna patterns in this illustration all have designs that seem to wrap across the boundary between the front and back of the hand. The scale of this painting limits the representation of henna designs: each hand is about ¼” across. The artist may have meant to depict patterns that were much more complex than these, but been unable to represent them because of scale.



Figure 22: Detail: “Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait” late 15th century Iran, plate 2, Khamsa of Nizami, Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, s1986.140

The large triangular shapes (diamond shaped, if they are assumed to continue to the opposite side of the hand) are accompanied by what appears to be calligraphy and other independent patterns. The women’s fingertips are stained with henna, with lined around the fingers below the top joint. Figures 23, 24, and 25 show the same sort of patterning, with variations. In a similar henna pattern in figure 26, “Khusraw and the Lion”, the dark lozenge pattern is not solid: it is itself filled with ornament, so the areas in “Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait”, though represented as solid, may have been filled with pattern, but the areas on the illustration were too small for the artist to include further detail, and not to be judged necessarily a solid expanse of henna.



Figure 23: Detail: “Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait” late 15th century Iran, plate 2, Khamsa of Nizami, Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, s1986.140



Figure 24: Detail: “Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait” late 15th century Iran, plate 2, Khamsa of Nizami, Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, s1986.140



Figure 25: Detail: “Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait” late 15th century Iran, plate 2, Khamsa of Nizami, Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, s1986.140

There are similar fifteenth century henna patterns in other manuscripts from the courts in Tabriz:

- There are similar henna patterns on an illustration of two seated women in the The Court of Ya’qub Beg, by Shaykhi, 1478 – 90, Tabriz, held in the Topkapi Saray, H. 2153; Sals 90b – 91a.
- Another similar pattern is shown in the Divan of Amer Khusran Dihlan, 1430, Bahram Gur in the Green Pavilion, Khamsa of Nizami, 1475 – 81, from Tabriz, Topkapi Saray library, Istanbul, H.762, fol. 189.5
- The hands of Shirin in Shirin Presents a Jug of Milk to Farhad, late 15th – early 16th century, Arthur M Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution S86.0179 have a nearly identical pattern to those in “Shirin Examins Khusraw’s Portrait”.

These lozenge shaped patterns may reflect the aesthetic of the tiling patterns in the Blue Mosque in Tabriz, constructed during the time these henna patterns were drawn. The ornamental tiling that covers the faulting has similar features: triangular shapes define the dome sections and *mihrab*, the prayer niches, with ornamental sections bordered by calligraphic bands. There is no particular reason to assume that women were patterning

their henna in emulation of the Blue Mosque, but it is reasonable to guess that areas of ornament within geometrically defined spaces, bordered by calligraphy and other elements may have been considered beautiful and elegant in the Turkman courts, both for major architectural design and minor arts such as henna.

Shirin's henna in Khusraw and the Lion: 1505-10



Figure 26: “Khusraw and the Lion”, Khamsa of Nizami, 1505-10, India Office, British Library, London: MS 387 fol 65b

Figure 26 is an illustration of “Khusraw and the Lion”, from a Khamsa of Nizami, done in Shiraz in the Turkmen style, (Robinson, 1965, p. 26). In this image, Khusraw defends his beloved Shirin by killing a lion barehanded, at night, wearing only his nightclothes. Shirin has henna pattern on both of her hands. The pattern resembles ornamental triangular inset just below and to the right of the manuscript page. If the pattern interpreted as wrapping from the front to the back of the hand, the whole pattern would be diamond or lozenge. In the enlargement in Figure 27, the ornament inside the diamond shape is visible. There is some patterning around the diamond shape and some additional patterning on the rest of her hands, and her fingertips are hennaed.



Figure 27: Khusraw and the Lion, Khamsa of Nizami, 1505-10, India Office, British Library, London: MS 387 fol 65b

In the story of Shirin and Khusraw, Shirin is a Christian Armenian princess. The frequent depiction of henna on Shirin may support the proposal that Armenian Christian women used hennas far back as the 15th century, and as frequently as did Persian Muslim women.

Majnun Hears of Layla's Marriage, 1450 – 60, Khamsa of Nizami, Shiraz, Oriental Beitung der Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Diez A., folio 7, also shows this sort of henna pattern. With all of these manuscripts showing similar henna patterns, one may guess that combining lozenge shapes with calligraphy was a favored sort of henna pattern in the late 1400's through the early 1500's in the court in Tabriz, and in other areas dominated by Turkmen culture. Architectural tiling may have inspired this kind of motif, or they may be derived from lozenge shapes in textiles such as kilims, inlaid woodwork, ornamental inserts in manuscripts, or all of the above.

Henna in the Safavid Dynasty: 1501- 1722

Henna on a Wife, Dancers and Feminized Males in the Diwan of Hafiz, 1527



Figure 28: “Lovers Picnicking”, Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, Harvard University

“Lovers Picnicking” from the Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, Harvard University, attributed to Sultan-Muhammad, illustrates a Sufi poem about the

bliss of being with one's beloved in the springtime. This poem describes the transcendent bliss of lover and the beloved, a mystic Sufi theme that elaborates on the surrender of physical and emotional love as being a metaphor for the surrender of human devotion to divine love.

*How can the rose be beautiful without the cheeks of the beloved?
And without wine, of what use is spring?
Basking on the lawn and breathing garden air are joyless unaccompanied by tulip
cheeks.
For there is no beauty apart from her embraces and sugar-lipped kisses.
True her dances are lacking without the songs of nightingales;
But even masterful painting is drab when she is not the subject.
Without love-making, the garden, roses, and wine are joyless;
But your two-bit life, Hafiz, is an unworthy love offering. (tr. Welch, 1976, p 63)*

Figure 28 shows a man and his pregnant wife or concubine, accompanied by female dancers, two male musicians, two wine-servers, an archer and another bearded man. Though there is clearly henna on some of the figures, analysis of the patterns, even in high resolution, is difficult because of the scale: the hands are all less than ¼" wide, so the artist had a very limited field for work. The placement of the henna is identifiable, though detail of the ornament is scant. Even with very little detail presented in the patterns, the henna in "Lovers Picnicking" is remarkable in that it appears to include henna patterns on three beardless feminine males, as well as the dancers and the pregnant woman.

This illustration may be intended to show parallel loves, and paths to divine love through earthly love, a frequent Sufi theme. The man loves the woman carrying his child. Pairs of birds gambol in the sky, flying in mating circles. Clouds gather in the sky, and through gathering, make lightning and fertility bringing rain; the canopy over the lovers has a thunderbolt pattern, implying the energy and fertility brought by ecstatic union (Welch, 1976, p 63). The poet Hafiz sits at the lower left of the painting, and his attendants gaze at him lovingly. Musicians gaze lovingly at the dancers, and the women dance in joy at the music. The steward pours wine for the man, and the wine brings him joy. If henna is a marker of the beloved female, then appearance of henna on people in this image may be the indicators of parallel loves, the lover loving the hennaed beloved, and the beloved being not necessarily a wife nor even a female. The lover-beloved relationship is a polarity which of active and passive, masculine and feminine, but not always man and woman.

In Sufi poetry, god and the divine is often cast as female, and a man loving a woman is a metaphor for a human seeking the ecstasy of spiritual bliss.

There are many reasons for women to have hennaed hands and feet: henna was considered festive, it was considered an enhancement to beauty, and it was a mark of female sexuality, and henna is applied to women for their weddings, and for social celebrations.

In Figure 29, the woman seated on the dais with the man appears to be pregnant, judging by her expanded belly, reaches across to what seems to be her husband and rests her hand on his shoulders. Her fingertips are hennaed, but we can't see more of her hand than just the fingertips. Her husband holds her other hand, and her fingertips are hennaed there as well, but her husband's loving gesture obscures any other henna patterns she may have. The husband has some lines across his fingers, but these seem to define the thumb ring he would have worn to draw a bow, and another ring on his little finger.



Figure 29: Detail: “Lovers Picnicking”, Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, Harvard University

Her husband reaches for a bowl, offered by a beardless male servant in a light blue robe, Figure 30. It is plausible that this servant is a eunuch, because women of status were kept apart from intact men other than their husband and young sons, and male servants permitted to serve in the harem were castrated. The male in blue robe has no beard or moustache, and has a plump, feminine face, corroborating the possibility that he is not

virile. In high resolution, it is just possible to make out a henna pattern on the servant's right hand, a triangular shape across the back of the hand like those seen in Timurid manuscripts. His fingertips also seem to be stained.



Figure 30: Detail: “Lovers Picnicking”, Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, Harvard University

It is not unknown for Persian men to have henna on their hands: men had a “night of the henna” before their wedding, and boys had a little henna for circumcision and holidays. In this setting, the Sufi metaphor for a wine steward as a beloved, and hennaed, is a more probable explanation. In Figure 30, the effeminate male servant in the blue robe may simply be hennaed to show that without wine, spring is joyless, and that as he brings wine, divine joy, to the man, he is metaphoric female to the wine-drinker's male.⁹

⁹ Hafiz wrote other poems using wine as a metaphor for divine bliss, and the person serving wine (or the wine itself) as a metaphor for the feminine beloved connecting the lover to bliss.

*Cupbearer, it is morning, fill my cup with wine.
Make haste, the heavenly sphere knows no delay.
Before this transient world is ruined and destroyed,
ruin me with a beaker of rose-tinted wine.
The sun of the wine dawns in the east of the goblet.
Pursue life's pleasure, abandon dreams,
and the day when the wheel makes pitchers of my clay,
take care to fill my skull with wine!
We are not men for piety, penance and preaching
but rather give us a sermon in praise of a cup of clear wine.
Wine-worship is a noble task, O Hafiz;
rise and advance firmly to your noble task.*

Tr. English version by Bernard Lewis



Figure 31: Detail: “Lovers Picnicking”, Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, Harvard University

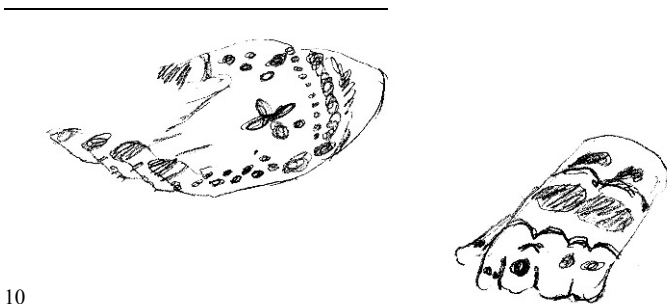
The dancing women in the foreground hold scarves, and may be performing some form of *raqs-e dastmal*, a scarf dance traditional among the Qashqai near Shiraz. The musicians do not appear to have any henna on their hands, so the dancers and musicians might be considered to be paired lovers in this extended Sufi metaphor of lovers, with henna markings on the feminine members of the couples. Similarly, the dancers may be hennaed and paired with the musicians to show that without music, dance has no joy, and without music, dance has no purpose.

Henna for dancers is functional as well as ornamental and metaphorical. When dancers henna their hands, it draws attention to their gestures, and when they henna their feet, it makes their soles tougher and suppler, prevents heels from cracking, and accents the elegance of their steps. The dancers in “Lovers Picnicking” Figure 31 and 32 have hennaed hands. Their fingertips are hennaed. They seem to wear slippers, so if their feet were hennaed, we could not see them. The woman in the yellow gown has a pattern that outlines the front and back of her hands, with lines and possibly flowers. The woman in the red cloak has a similar pattern, though the detail on her hands is less easily visible. These patterns that outline the perimeter of the hands patterns are similar to those in “The Imam Fa’far Sadiq Conversing with a Woman”, Majalis al-Ushshaq (Assembly of

Lovers) of Sultan Husayn Mirza, a Sufi collection of 75 stories of lovers meeting, from about 1530 CE, held in the Bodleian Library, MS Ousley ADD 24, 19b.¹⁰



Figure 32: Detail: “Lovers Picnicking”, *Diwan of Hafiz*, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, Harvard University



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Hand drawn notes of henna patterns on woman's hands from “The Imam Fa’far Sadiq Conversing with a Woman”, *Majalis al-Ushshaq* (Assembly of Lovers) of Sultan Husayn Mirza, MS Ousley ADD 24, 19b, made by author during visit to the Bodleian Library in 2002¹⁰



Figure 33: Detail: “Lovers Picnicking”, Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, Harvard University

Figure 33, a detail of the lower left section of “Lovers Picnicking”, shows three males, two of whom appear to have markings consistent with henna on their hands. These markings are more difficult to place as henna than on the dancers hands, and the patterns are not as clear as that on the male in the blue robe. These might be considered to be blurs rather than implied patterns, though the blurring does not extend to the surrounding area.

The bearded man has no markings on his hands, and may be a representation of Hafiz, the Sufi poet who urged people to surrender themselves to mortal love to achieve divine love. Though it would be reasonable to interpret the male in the orange cloak and the male in

the dark blue cloak as eunuchs or *khanith*¹¹ attending the man and his wife, in the context of a book by Hafiz, they are more likely to be cast within the Sufi metaphoric framework as beloveds to the lover. The beardless males who listen to him, and offer wine to him, have feminized features; if they are parallels for the divine beloved, the interpretation of henna on their hands is not only plausible, but also appropriate.

The male in the orange robe clearly has a hennaed thumbnail on the hand where he has a ring on his thumb. Persian archers wear a thumb ring to pull their bowstring, and this may be a metaphor for the divine beloved piercing Hafiz's heart with an arrow. The orange robed male's face is young and feminine, and he gazes at the bearded man with a smile and gesture that is almost flirtatious. His left hand, in high resolution, appears to be patterned rather than just blurred by an ink spill. A second plump-faced beardless man wearing a dark blue robe pours wine. He extends his index finger as he holds cup, and that fingertip is darkened, consistent with having henna stains on that finger. His left hand, pouring wine from a bottle is darkened, with what might be a representation of a dense, blackened henna pattern. The man in orange appears to be reaching for the cup of wine being poured, to pass it to Hafiz. These feminized males may be to the man with the pink robe, and in another relationship parallel to all the other loving couples in this image: the poet is inspired by the wine-bringers, the audience for and inspiration for his poetry, and as such, and they are embodiments of the feminine divine¹².

¹¹ Khanith or *Xanith* (Arabic: خانيث) is a term for an effeminate male, a man who has feminine social behaviors and feminine preferences rather than masculine behaviors. Khanith were often allowed to mix socially with women without being considered a threat to their modesty, because it was assumed that khanith would have no sexual interest in them and vice versa. Khanith did not wear women's clothing, but they often did use henna (Wikan, 1977: 307).

¹² "From the Large Jug, Drink" From: Drunk on the Wine of the Beloved
Translated by Thomas Rain Crowe

*From the large jug, drink the wine of Unity,
So that from your heart you can wash away the futility of life's grief.*

*But like this large jug, still keep the heart expansive.
Why would you want to keep the heart captive, like an unopened bottle
of wine?*

*With your mouth full of wine, you are selfless
And will never boast of your own abilities again.*

*Be like the humble stone at your feet rather than striving to be like a
Sublime cloud: the more you mix colors of deceit, the more colorless
your ragged wet coat will get.*

*Connect the heart to the wine, so that it has body,
Then cut off the neck of hypocrisy and piety of this new man.*

*Be like Hafiz: Get up and make an effort. Don't lie around like a bum.
He who throws himself at the Beloved's feet is like a workhorse
and will be rewarded with boundless pastures and eternal rest.*

“Bilqis visiting Solomon”, about 1530

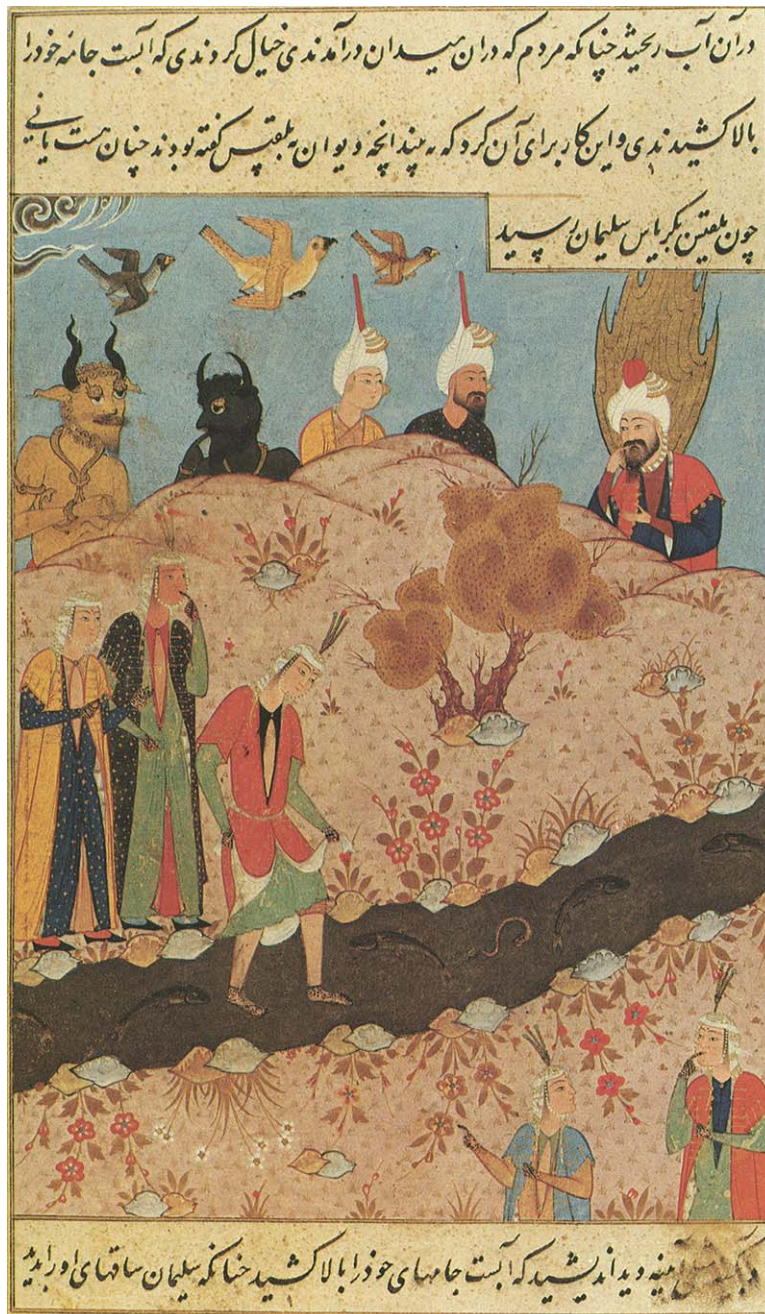


Figure 34: “Bilqis visiting Solomon”, about 1530 CE, Safavid Persia, from Majalis al-Ushshaq, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, MS Ouseley ADD 24 Folio 1270

I have had the privilege of examining Majalis al-Ushshaq (Assembly of Lovers) of Sultan Husayn Mirza, MS Ouseley ADD 24, 19b, twice at the Bodleian library, in 2002 and 2003. Three artists produced the illustrations. One artist included no henna in any of his illustrations. One included only fingertip stains. A third lavished henna patterns on many of his female subjects, and this artist produced “Bilqis Visiting Solomon”.



Figure 35: Detail: Attendants behind Bilqis in “Bilqis visiting Solomon”, about 1530 CE, Safavid Persia, from Majalis al-Ushshaq, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, MS Ouseley ADD 24 Folio 1270

This artist always portrayed henna patterns as being a diagonal band across a hand or foot, and surrounded by dots, with darkened fingernails and fingertips, or toes. The size of the hands is never more than $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide, so we may propose that the actual henna patterns were more elegant than a simple slash and dots, and that the artist simply had no room to record greater detail. For pattern scale, we can compare the henna patterns to the embroidery patterns on the women's headscarves: we know embroidery patterns from the period are intricate and delicate, but here they are reduced to dots and slashes just as is the henna. The henna patterns seem to be slightly smaller in scale than the embroidery.



Figure 36: Detail: Bilqis in “Bilqis visiting Solomon”, about 1530 CE, Safavid Persia, from Majalis al-Ushshaq, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, MS Ouseley ADD 24 Folio 1270

In Figure 35, two of Bilqis’s attendants gesture doubt and concern, and their hands show henna patterns on both palm and the back of their hands, up to their wrists. Figure 36 shows Bilqis barefoot, with hennaed toes, pattern ending just above the ankle. The dots seem to be in swirling patterns as are seen in swirling floral ornamentation in manuscripts and ceramics of the Safavid period. Bilqis also has the diagonal band across the back of her hand, patterns up the fingers, ending in stained fingernails and fingertips. Figure 37 and 38 show two more women gesturing concern as they observe Bilqis.



Figure 37: Detail: Woman Pointing, “Bilqis visiting Solomon”, about 1530 CE, Safavid Persia, from Majalis al-Ushshaq, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, MS Ouseley ADD 24 Folio 1270

This diagonal feature with surrounding dots is found in many Safavid manuscripts other than “Assembly of Lovers”. Rylands library has several Safavid pieces with similar representations of henna in their manuscripts.

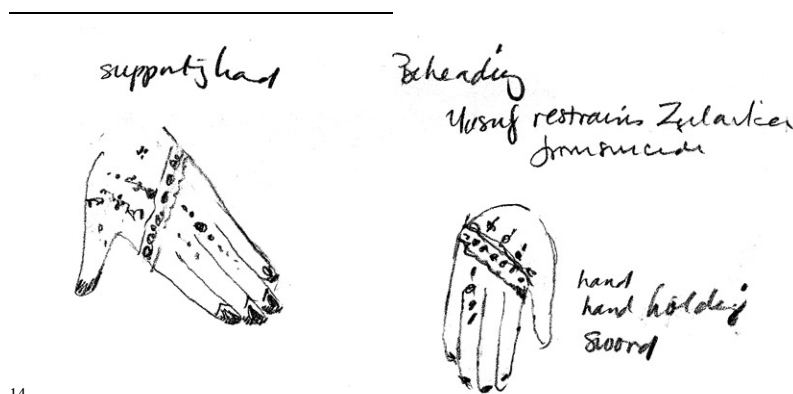
One of Zulaykha’s attendants has a similar banded pattern on her hands and her foot in “*Zulaykha, having seen Yusuf in a dream, is mad with love for him ...*” from a manuscript of the Haft Awrang produced in 1560 - 99, presently in the Bodleian Library, Oulis2007-bin0012, fol. 179a¹³.

A similar pattern exists in the illustration of “*Yousef Restrains Zulakha from Suicide*”, from *Yusuf u Zulaykha* from another Haft Awrang of the Jami, produced in 1518, Robinson 563, Ryl Pers 20, folio 107 versa. In this image, Zulaykha is hennaed for her

¹³ This manuscript page was available as of November 21, 2009, in high resolution at <http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~23~23~100300~137478:Zulaykha,-having-seen-Yusuf-in-a-dr>

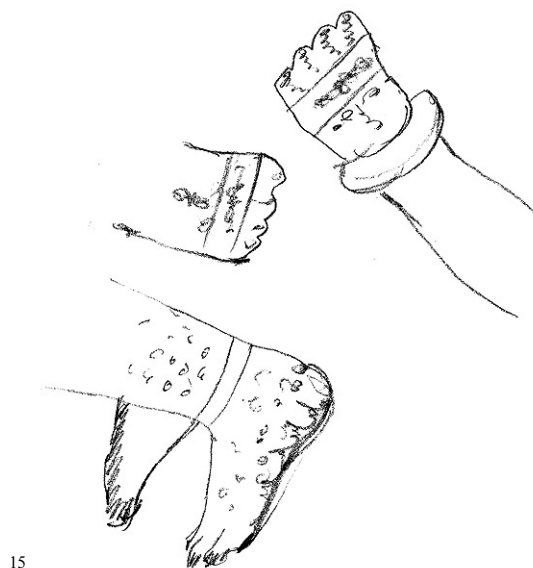
suicide. She has similar diagonal patterns across the backs of her hands, hennaed fingertips, and patterns surrounding the diagonal bands¹⁴.

“Shirin Bathing”, a Khamsa of Nizami done in Shiraz 1575, Ryl Pers 856, Folio 25a, Robinson 638, shows Shirin wringing the water out of her hair with hennaed hands. The bands go across her hands parallel to her knuckles, not diagonally, but they are also surrounded by bits of patterning. Her feet are crossed in the water; they have hennaed soles and toes, bands at the ankles, and patterning that resembles delicate floral patterning¹⁵.



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Hand drawn notes on henna patterns from Zulaykha in “Yusuf Restrains Zulaika from Suicide ” 1518 CE, Robinson 563, Ryl Pers 20, folio 107 versa, done in 2002 by author at The John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, Manchester UK.



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Hand drawn notes on henna patterns on Shirin in “Shirin Bathing”, a Khamsa of Nizami done in Shiraz 1575, Ryl Pers 856, Folio 25a, Robinson 638, done in 2002 by author at The John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, Manchester UK.

“Kushraw at Shirin’s Palace”, from the same Khamsa of Nizami, Ryl Pers 856, f 39b, Shirin has diagonal banding with dotted ornaments on her hands¹⁶.

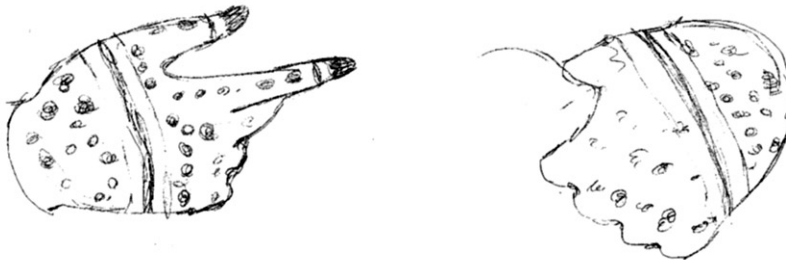
The artist of “Bilqis visiting Solomon” drew similar henna patterns in another episode of Majalis al-Ushshaq, in “Iskander Dhul-Qarnayn Enthroned with Courtiers, and a Woman Before Him”. MS Ousley ADD 24, 135a¹⁷

The banded henna pattern is again drawn on a woman’s hands reaching for a bowl in “Bahram Gur in the Red Pavilion, done in a Khamsa of Nizami produced in Shiraz in 1575 CE, Robinson 646, folio 121 verso, Ryl Pers 856, presently held in the John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK.¹⁸



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Hand drawn notes on henna patterns on Shirin in “Khusraw at Shirin’s Palace”, a Khamsa of Nizami done in Shiraz 1575, Ryl Pers 856, Folio 39b, Robinson 639, done in 2002 by author at The John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, Manchester UK.



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Hand drawn notes of henna patterns on woman in “Iskander Dhul-Qarnayn Enthroned with Courtiers, and a Woman Before Him” MS Ousley ADD 24, 135a done in 2002 by author at the Bodleian Library, Oxford UK. Hand at right is $\frac{1}{4}$ ” wide in the original manuscript illustration.



18

Hand drawn notes of henna patterns on woman reaching for bowl in “Bahram Gur in the Red Pavilion, done in a Khamsa of Nizami produced in Shiraz in 1575 CE, Robinson 646, folio 121 verso, Ryl Pers 856, done in 2002 by author at The John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, Manchester UK.



Figure 38: Detail: Woman Observing, “Bilqis visiting Solomon”, about 1530 CE, Safavid Persia, from Majalis al-Ushshaq, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, MS Ouseley ADD 24 Folio 1270

This pattern again appears in Timur Holds a Great Feast with Amir Huseyn, Dated 1552, British Library, OR. 1359, fol 35v, London, figures 56 to 58.

With the number of henna patterns that included a band and flowering patterns alongside that were represented between 1530 and 1575, one might imagine that all henna patterns during that period were done in this style. The intervening folio pages of “A Nomadic Encampment”, “Nighttime in a Palace”, 1539 – 43, Iran, folio from a manuscript of the Khamsa of Nizami, figures following, show this to not be the case. These show many arrangements of henna patterns during that period. It is more probable that the ordinary artists in manuscript ateliers adhered closely to a cannon of “what courtly henna should look like” (as they did with depictions of women’s faces and gestures) and that cannon was to have banded patterns with floral patterns alongside to make the manuscripts as consistent as possible as a consumer item for the elites.

“A Nomadic Encampment”: Romanticized Henna from Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, 1539-40



Figure 39: “A Nomadic Encampment”, 1539 – 43, Safavid Persia, folio page from a manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75

In “A Nomadic Encampment” and “Nighttime in a Palace”, Mir Sayyid ‘Ali displays the range of henna patterns in his world as he displays his skill at observing, analyzing and reproducing the Safavid Persian world around him. These two images have greater detail, more variation and nuance of henna pattern than any other that I have found produced during the Safavid period. The larger scale of these images, and the artist’s

expertise with a fine brush make depiction of henna patterns unique. Though he worked within the stylistic confines of Safavid courtly manuscripts, he had an eye and wit akin to Mort Drucker¹⁹.

“A Nomadic Encampment”, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75, may be one of Mir Sayyid ‘Ali’s s bravura pieces done not simply as an illustration in a story, but to show potential clients his range of skills.²⁰



Figure 40: Detail: A woman washing clothing from “A Nomadic Encampment”, (1539 – 43, Iran) folio from a manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75

¹⁹ Mort Drucker, skilled observer, artist and caricaturist, b. 1929, Brooklyn, NY

²⁰ As of November 21, 2009 a high resolution scan of this image could be retrieved from http://socialscience.tjc.edu/mkho/MEOC/Newletters/Camp_Scene_1.htm and further discussion of content from http://socialscience.tjc.edu/mkho/MEOC/Newletters/muslim_life_in_miniature.htm by Barbara Petzen and Negin Sohrabi, with advice by Mary McWilliams of Harvard University’s Sackler Museum. Images from Nomadic Encampment, folio from a manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the collection of Louis J. Cartier [1958.75], photo by Photographic Services. Images from Nighttime in a Palace, folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the collection of Louis J. Cartier [1958.76], photo by Photographic Services.

Figure 40 shows a woman washing clothing who has henna patterns on the backs of her hands. These patterns are not strictly symmetrical, but her right and left hands are similar. Both have lines across the knuckles, and swirling patterns on the backs of the hands. The patterns in the embroidery on her headscarf and woven pattern in her skirt provide a useful comparative scale for the henna patterns: they are not just dots and dashes as in smaller scale paintings. The artist may have taken liberties with reality in this depiction: henna is generally festive, and the elegant pattern may be more than a woman would usually wear for doing the laundry. Also, water and scrubbing exfoliate the skin, and the henna patterns on the skin usually suffer for the loss. Of course, the clothing and jewels of the washing woman are also grander than one might expect: the woman wears cloth brocaded in gold, she has jeweled bracelets, and she washes the clothing in an ornamented golden basin.



Figure 41: Detail, Woman Feeding Horse, “A Nomadic Encampment”, 1539 – 43, Safavid Persia, folio from a manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75

Figure 41 also shows an idealized scene of a woman feeding a horse or donkey: she has a long gold necklace, jeweled bracelets, and beautifully hennaed hands. The donkey has a beautiful tapestry feed bag, more elegant than one would usually expect for animal fodder. These patterns show Mir Sayyid ‘Ali’s fondness for swirling floral patterns. If these designs can be claimed as actual henna patterns as done during the Safavid period, then henna was done in swirling vine patterns known as “*Saz*”²¹; fantastic plant forms of blossoms, curving stems, and jagged leaves, understood to be “enchanted forest” or “heavenly garden” patterns. The women’s henna patterns appear to be in non-repeating saz forms, the most difficult form to produce in textiles such as lampas²² and brocades (repeating forms being easier to set up and reproduce on draw looms) Intertwining saz scrolls with blossoms and leaves became a popular ornamental feature after the 1540’s.

‘Ali used saz frequently in his work, for manuscript borders²³, in tent textiles²⁴ and in carpets²⁵. He may have intentionally created a self-referential set of henna patterns

²¹ Though saz style is closely associated with Süleyman’s court, particularly the Iznik tile making center, the style previously existed in the Persian Empire, and continued under Safavid patronage in tile making, pottery, textiles, miniature painting, bookbinding, and rug weaving. The style was introduced to the Ottoman court by introduced by the painter Sahkulu around 1530, when exiled from Persia.

²² Lampas fabrics are a form of brocade with a plain ground and supplemental weft pattern: the woman’s robe in figure 47 appears to be lampas. Lampas was a highly developed textile art form during the Safavid period, and saz lampas were among the most valued because of pattern complexity.



23 Manuscript border from “A Nomadic Encampment”



24 Saz patterns on a tent canopy from “A Nomadic Encampment”, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75

mirroring ornaments from “A Nomadic Encampment” and “Nighttime in a Palace” each to the other. The henna patterns in Figures 40, 41 and 42 mirror the sleeve in Figure 48 and tile ornaments in “Nighttime in a Palace”. The henna pattern in Figure 48 repeats the embroidered cloth covering a dish in “A Nomadic Encampment”.

Perhaps these saz patterns represented actual henna patterns of the time, or perhaps they were only ideals of ornamental henna created in the mind of Mir Sayyid ‘Ali. It is not possible to prove that this pattern was actually hennaed by women, or if it was a pattern imagined by ‘Ali and used as a device to tie together ornamental elements within his own paintings. We can propose that these swirling designs possibly represent henna as it existed among wealthy and fashionable women of his time, and support the proposal: ‘Ali’s representations of jewels, textiles, architecture, and architecture can be confirmed as accurate, though idealized, representations because artifacts remain from the Safavid period. If he represented these other objects accurately, would he not have represented henna accurately?

Technically, there is no reason to assume that saz could not have been real henna patterns, they would be achievable only by skillful henna artists with excellent henna, fine tools, sure and steady hands and patient subjects. If women really did wear these swirling floral designs as henna patterns, it would have been because they were familiar with these ornaments in their daily life, proven by their placement on rugs, ceramics, tiles, and clothing.

The nursing woman in “A Nomadic Encampment” is hennaed with the same saz patterns as the woman tending the horse, and the woman laundering. The soles of her feet are ornamented as beautifully as her hands. Again, this henna would be unusual in real life: the child is swaddled, and the woman supports the child’s head, implying that the child is less than 3 months old. Tending such a young child is constant work, because they nurse frequently, often crying to nurse every hour or two. To get a stain as dark and pattern as complex as shown in the illustration, a woman have to have her hands and feet free for at

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Carpet from “Nighttime in a Palace”, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76

least three hours to have the henna applied and for it to dry. Then, her hands and feet would have to be wrapped overnight. A woman would have to have to go least twelve hours without walking, picking up a crying child, or nursing the child to have this sort of henna done, and this is inconsistent with caring for a child less than three months old.



Figure 42: Detail: Nursing woman from “A Nomadic Encampment”, (1539 – 43, Iran) folio from a manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75

Other paintings by Mīr Sayyid ‘Ali show the same patterns on women: “*Majnun Being Brought by a Beggar Woman to Layla’s Tent*” in a Khamsa of Nezami done for Shah Tahmasp I, 1539–43; in the British Library (OR. MS. 2265 fol 157v) shows these swirling designs on one woman, and all of the women’s hands have these patterns in “*Khusrau and Shirin, in a garden at night, listening to Shirin’s maids recite poetry*”.



Figure 43: Detail, hands and feet of a nursing woman from “A Nomadic Encampment”, (1539 – 43, Iran) folio from a manuscript of the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75

One woman, Figure 44, in “A Nomadic Encampment” does not have saz patterns on her hands and feet. These patterns are similar to those in Figure 27: *Khusraw and the Lion*, *Khamsa* of Nizami, 1505-10, India Office, British Library, London: MS 387 fol 65b, but show greater delicacy of detail. These patterns resemble geometric wood inlay patterns²⁶ or kilim²⁷ patterns. These triangle or diamond shaped geometric patterns wrap from the front to back across the perimeters between her palm and sole skin to dorsal skin.

²⁶ Khatam is a Persian form of marquetry, with different colors of bone and of wood layered, glued and put under pressure, thinly sawn, and assembled into geometric patterns. These were often used for pen boxes, jewel boxes, mirrors, and other functional but highly valued objects.

²⁷ Kilims are weft-faced flat weave rugs, woven in Persia and adjacent countries, often woven with diamond-shaped patterns to accommodate the disproportional grid of warp and weft.



Figure 44, Detail, “A Nomadic Encampment”, (1539 – 43, Iran) folio from a manuscript of the Khamisa (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75

Nighttime in a Palace; Idealized Courtly Henna by Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, 1539-44



Figure 45: “Nighttime in a Palace” (1539 – 43, Iran), folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76

“Nighttime in a Palace” (1539 – 43, Iran), is another folio page attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali. This painting is believed to be paired with “A Nomadic Encampment” though they were separated and not in a book together. The ornamentation one certainly mirrors the other, and this may offer a perspective on how women derived their henna patterns. Details of carpets, ceramic tiles, bowls, brocaded clothing, embroidery, ewers,

mashrabiya and draperies, particularly saz ornamentation are reflected in the women's body art²⁸.



Figure 46: Detail: “Nighttime in a Palace” (1539 – 43, Iran), folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76

In this detail, a young woman has fallen asleep watching the festivities, leaning on the mashrabiya separating the men's party from the women's harem. A woman touches her shoulder with her hennaed hand, perhaps to rouse her enough to go off to bed. The sleeping woman's eyebrows are dyed with indigo, creating blue arches across her forehead, with a small tattoo or bit of cosmetic paint above the meeting point. There is no indication of henna on her hands, only on her companion's hand.

The hand on the sleeping woman's shoulder has the saz swirling vine pattern frequently drawn by Mir Sayyid ‘Ali. Her fingers are marked with lines, and the floral pattern extends between the wrist and the first knuckles, and does not include blackened fingertips. The pattern is approximately the same as figures 40, 41, and 43 from “A Nomadic Encampment”, and 47 and 49 in “Nighttime in a Palace”.

²⁸ As of November 21, 2009 a high resolution scan of this image could be retrieved from http://socialscience.tjc.edu/mkho/MEOC/Newletters/Nighttime_in_a_Palace_1.htm and further discussion of content from

http://socialscience.tjc.edu/mkho/MEOC/Newletters/muslim_life_in_miniature.htm

by Barbara Petzen and Negin Sohrabi, with advice by Mary McWilliams of Harvard University's Sackler Museum. Images from Nomadic Encampment, folio from a manuscript of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the collection of Louis J. Cartier [1958.75], photo by Photographic Services. Images from Nighttime in a Palace, folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the collection of Louis J. Cartier [1958.76], photo by Photographic Services.



Figure 47: Detail: “Nighttime in a Palace” (1539 – 43, Iran), folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76

The woman’s blue robe in figure 47 has a saz pattern, and probably represents a lampas or velvet garment, as does the woman’s blue sleeve in figure 48. Wealthy, courtly Safavid women wore clothing of saz-patterned velvets, embroideries and lampas. They ate from saz patterned bowls, they wove and rested on saz patterned carpets, they walked along saz ornamented palace walls, bathed in saz tiled hamams, viewed the domes of great mosques covered with saz patterned tiles²⁹, and they prayed at saz patterned prayer



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Palace archway with saz patterned ceramic tile from “Night time in a Palace”

niches.³⁰ They even visited their departed loved ones in funerary complexes decorated in saz-patterned tile such as Darb-I Imam,³¹ in Isfahan. The great buildings of the day, such as the Blue Mosque at Tabriz and the Maydan Mosque at Kashan, were covered in saz-patterned tile. The saz “enchanted forest” motif dominated the language of visual ornamentation mid-century in Safavid Persia, no less than it did in Ottoman Turkey. The saz curving tendrils, lush leaves and heavy blossoms symbolized Jannah (جنة), or paradise, which was said to be a blessed, fragrant, and abundant garden.

Though Mir Sayyid ‘Ali uses the saz pattern on most of his representations of women’s henna, he includes others. The quatrefoil pattern on the woman’s hand in Figure 48, looking down through her mashrabiya screen at a party below, is the same pattern as in the double weave cloth in the lower left area of “A Nomadic Encampment”³². Her sleeve, in turn, has the same non-repeating saz pattern as most of the henna patterns in figures 46, 47, and 49.



³⁰ Saz-patterned tile work, Safavid Mihrab Prayer Niche, Isfahan, Iran, Cleveland Museum 1962.23

³¹ The shrine of Darb-i-Imam in Isfahan, is a funerary complex, with a cemetery, shrine structures, and courtyards belonging to different construction periods and styles. The first structures were built by Jalal al-Din Safarshah, during the Qara Qoyunlu reign in 1453.



³² Two men bearing gifts or serving food with covers: the white cloth has a red double weave quatrefoil pattern identical to the henna pattern in figure 48.



Figure 48: Detail: “Nighttime in a Palace” (1539 – 43, Iran), folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76

The pattern on the woman’s hand in Figure 48, seen in the embroidered cloth in “A Nomadic Encampment” is simple flowering pattern that is has been worked for many centuries in embroidery and carpeting having a square warp and weft ground.³³



33

Quatrefoil flowering plant woven into Hamedan carpet from Iran, author’s collection

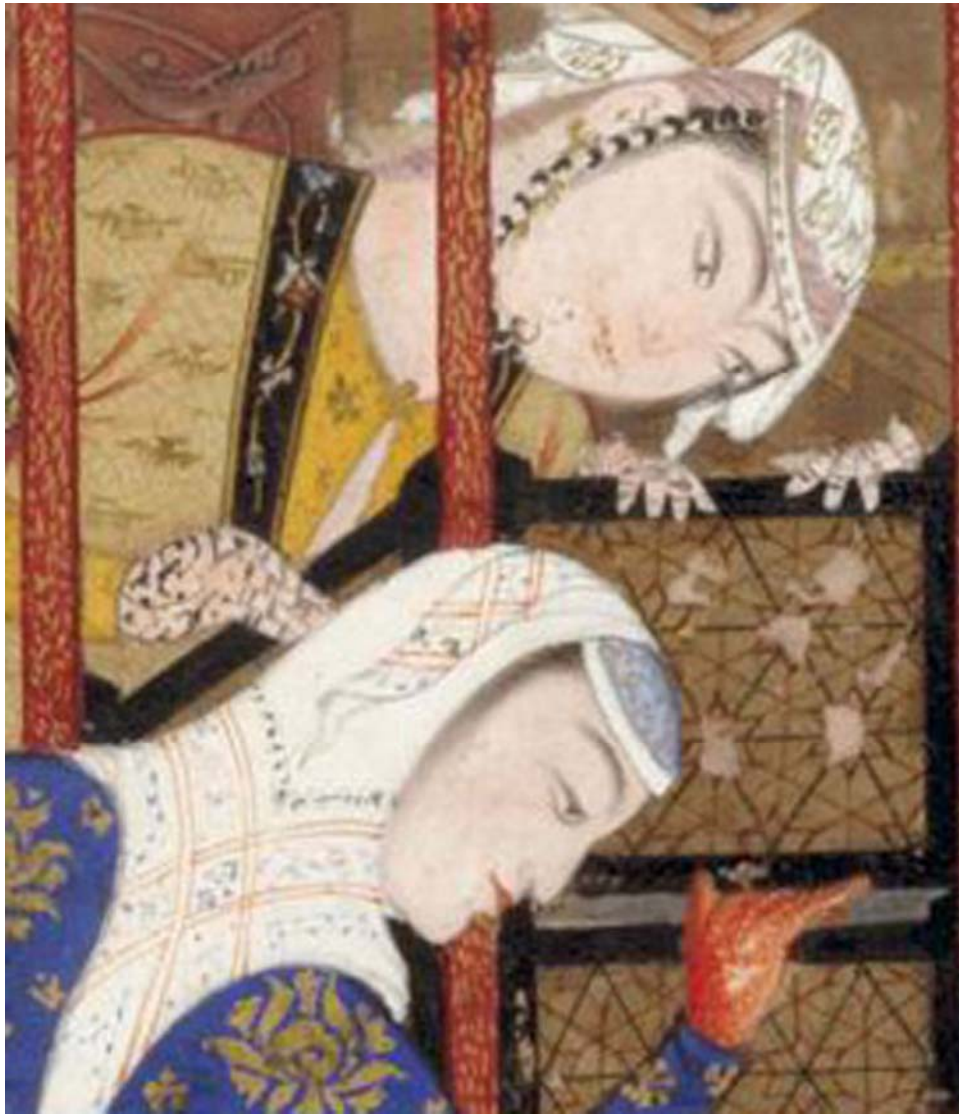


Figure 49: Detail: “Nighttime in a Palace” (1539 – 43, Iran), folio from a manuscript, attributed to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (Persian, 16th century), Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76

In figure 49, just to the left of the woman in figure 48 in “Nighttime in a Palace”, two women peer through their *mashrabiya* privacy screen to view the festivities going on in the men’s area beneath the harem, the women’s quarters. The woman in the yellow gown and robe has saze-patterned henna. The woman in the blue robe the other has a different pattern: a very dense pattern that is still in the red stage of development, as if the paste has just been removed and is just beginning to darken. If it can be accepted that some henna patterns were so dense as to make clear representation impossible in manuscripts, then the obscure patterns in figure 33, detail of two feminized males with hand markings consistent with henna in “Lovers Picnicking” could be interpreted as similar to the woman in blue in figure 49. Her henna pattern is so dense that the bare area, a triangle on the back of her hand, becomes the dominant shape in the pattern.

Bukhara 1550 - 1558: Henna as magic



Figure 50: "A Prince and a Princess Embrace", Bukhara, 1550, Vever Collection, S86.0301, Smithsonian



Figure 51: Detail of princess's hand "A Prince and a Princess Embrace", Bukhara, 1550 Vever Collection, S86.0301, Smithsonian

"A Prince and a Princess Embrace", figure 50, is one of several portraits attributed to Abdullah, an artist who worked for ruler Abdul -Aziz in Bukhara. Masse's *"Persian Beliefs and Customs"* (1954), *"Kitabi Kulsum Naneh"* and many others have commented that Persian women had a vast array of practices linked to a belief in the supernatural, including wearing amulets, talismans, writing magical scripts and symbols, and that henna was considered to have blessedness capable of deterring malevolent spirits, "A Prince and a Princess Embrace" is one of the rare instances showing henna patterns that seem to have been created with magical intent.

This album page illustrates three couplets that speak of love and longing, and may be interpreted as having erotic ambitions:

"Your figure is like the delicate cypress,

*O my beloved, your stature is like the fir.
 Even if the Cyprus (sic) reaches the height of the heavenly lote tree³⁴
 When will it be equal to your stature?
 Without embracing the sapling of your stature,
 When shall I eat the fruit of the tree of hope?"*

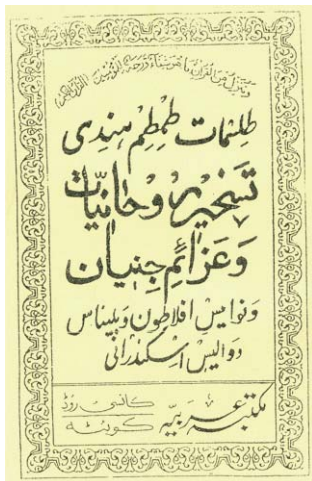
(Tr. from Lowry and Nemanzee, 1988, p. 190)

The henna patterns on the princess's are unlike usual Saravid ornamentation. They are not Farsi, Arabic, or any other regularly written language: they resemble Malachim³⁵ magical script, and may be sigils³⁶ constructed from a variant of Malachim. Such magical scripts were written on Persian talismans to gain supernatural assistance in achieving a goal. "Persian Charming Talisman Genie White Magic Book" is a reprint of an old text of spells and symbols meant to manage supernatural spirits and has figures, has figures similar to the patterns on the woman's hand³⁷. If the poem implies a

³⁴ The Lote Tree is not an earthly tree, it is a mystical Islamic metaphor for the highest point in heaven a human can go when approaching God: a man can go no higher. (Qur'an 53:10–18):

³⁵ The Malachim alphabet is a magical script based on the Hebrew alphabets, Malachim being a word for "angels or messengers" in Hebrew. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, an astrologer and alchemist in the early 1500's, published a Malachim alphabet.

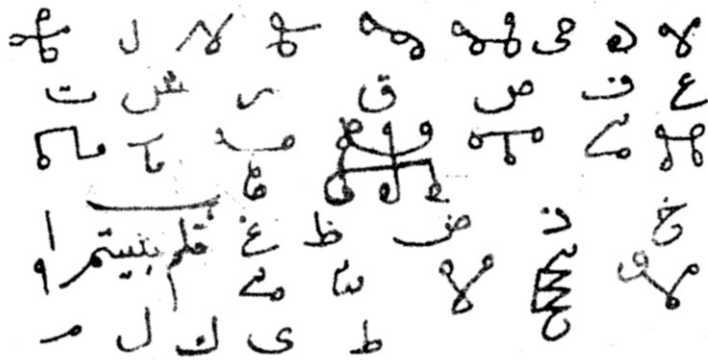
³⁶ A sigil is a symbol constructed to manage supernatural beings for a specific purpose. A sigil usually combines several symbols, elements or units of magical script, such as Malachim or other magical script.



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(cover) "Persian Charming Talisman Genie White Magic Book" has talismanic symbols that are very similar to the henna patterns in "A Prince and a Princess Embrace". The author purchased this book from Iranian source on Ebay in August 2009. The book has writing in Arabic and Farsi, and appears to illustrate the management of love, benevolent and malevolent spirits by means of through magical scripts. The seller, <http://stores.ebay.com/lionnsun>, describes the book as, "A Pictorial White Magic Book on how to stop & control Genie & Black Magic. It also teaches how to make plates to use to put love in hearts of 2 persons & many other actions."

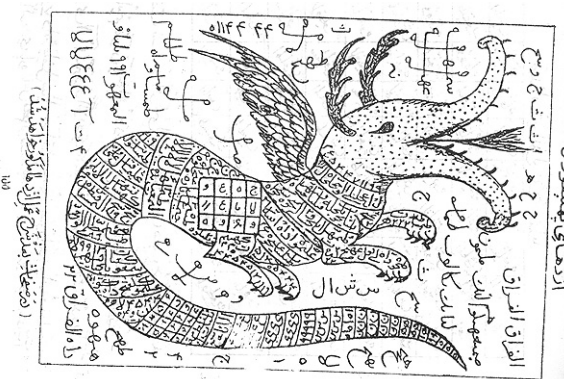
woman's hope for union with her beloved, her henna pattern sigils may be intended to gain the assistance of the spirit world to achieve her desires.



Magical scripts with accompanying Arabic and Farsi explanation from "Persian Charming Talisman Genie White Magic Book" resembling henna patterns in "A Prince and Princess Embrace". These patterns are similar to the Malachim alphabet. "Malachim" is from Hebrew, meaning "angels" or "messengers". They are magical writing and are often names of genie to be invoked and managed.



Figures of embracing couples from "Persian Charming Talisman Genie White Magic Book" to insure success in love through talismanic scripts



Figures of genie and malevolent spirits from "Persian Charming Talisman Genie White Magic Book" to be controlled, enlisted or averted through talismanic scripts

More Henna and Magic in Bukhara 1558

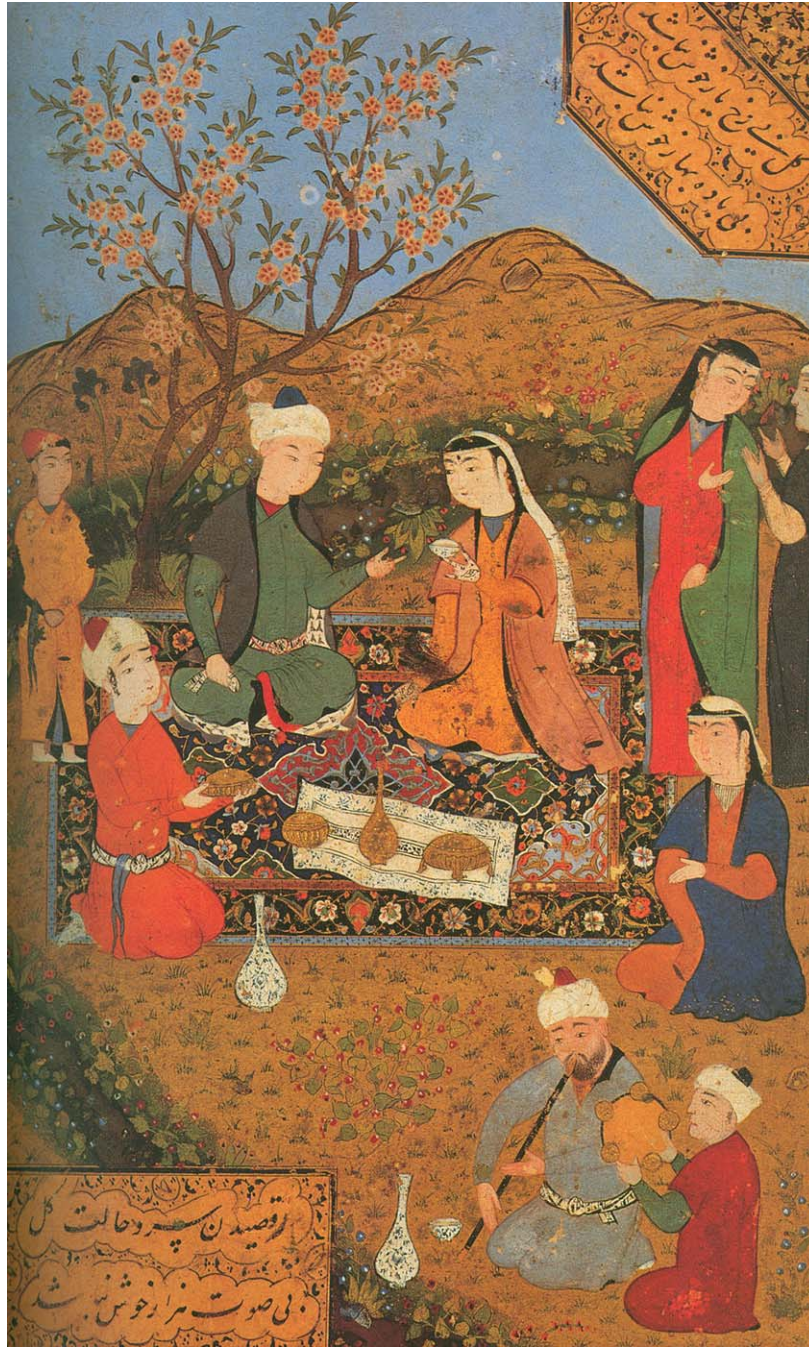


Figure 52: “A Prince and a Princess Seated on a Carpet in a Golden Landscape” from *Tuhfat al-ahrar* of Mawlana Nuruddin Abdul-Rahman –Jami, Buhkara, 1558, Folio 2a, Dated 1558, Vever Collection, s86.0040, Smithsonian

The *Tuhfat al-ahrar*, Gift of the Free, is the fifth chapter in the Haft Awrang by Jami. In this images a prince and princess sit together, and they share a cup of wine. The princess has hennaed hands. The prince has some markings consistent with henna on his extended hand, but they are indistinct, and may only be damage to the manuscript page.

The other people in the illustration do not have hennaed hands; they glance and gesture towards the royal couple and appear to be doubtful or concerned about the interaction.



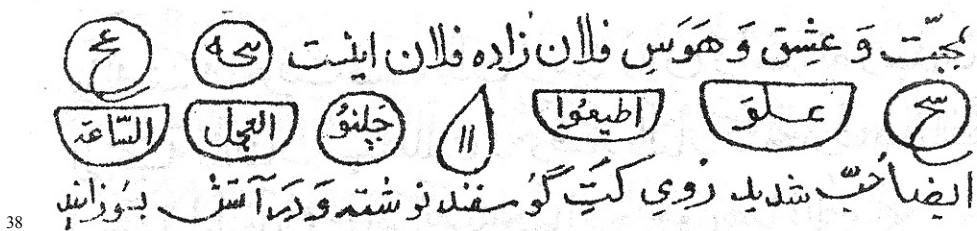
Figure 53: Detail of Prince and Princess: “A Prince and a Princess Seated on a Carpet in a Golden Landscape” from *Tuhfat al-ahrar* of Mawlana Nuruddin Abdul-Rahman –Jami, Bukhara, 1558, Folio 2a, Dated 1558, Vever Collection, s86.0040, Smithsonian

The princess has clear patterns on both of her hands. She has line patterns on her fingers and her fingernails are henna-stained. Like the other Bukharan princess’s patterns in figure 50, her patterns resemble magical scripts and talismans in “Persian Charming Talisman Genie White Magic Book”. Both of her hands have eye-shaped forms with

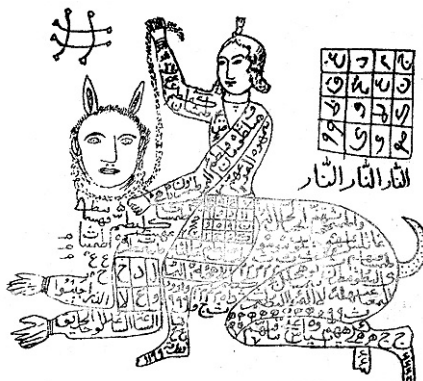
glyphs inside³⁸, similar to symbols constructed with the intent of gaining supernatural assistance for fulfillment of desires. Perhaps these exist on her hands to ensure that the prince would love her.



Figure 54: Detail of Princess's raised hand: "A Prince and a Princess Seated on a Carpet in a Golden Landscape" from *Tuhfat al-ahrar* of Mawlana Nuruddin Abdul-Rahman –Jami, Buhkara, 1558, Folio 2a, Dated 1558, Vever Collection, s86.0040, Smithsonian



Encircled words from "Persian Charming Talisman Genie White Magic Book" which resemble the henna patterns on the princess in "A Prince and a Princess Seated on a Carpet in a Golden Landscape", though the eye (perhaps "evil eye" shape) encircles the word rather than a cup, drop, or circle shape.



Talisman of a magic square and patterns to enable a woman to control her husband, from "Persian Charming Talisman Genie White Magic Book"



Figure 55: Detail of Princess's lowered hand: "A Prince and a Princess Seated on a Carpet in a Golden Landscape" from Tuhfat al-ahrar of Mawlana Nuruddin Abdul-Rahman –Jami, Buhkara, 1558, Folio 2a, Dated 1558, Vever Collection, s86.0040, Smithsonian

Figure 55 is a detail of the princess's lowered hand. There are blackened henna markings, and there are also brown markings. Though this may simply be damage or discoloration to the manuscript page, it is possible that she has two tones of henna on this hand. It is not difficult to create two colors of henna stain on one hand: a new dark pattern can be applied over a fading pattern; henna may be applied, scraped off after a few minutes to create the lighter tone, then more henna applied and left on for a longer time to create the darker tone; or two different henna mixes can be applied at the same time: one mix being formulated to achieve a darker stain than the other. Her lowered pattern has an eye shape enclosing markings, as does her raised hand. Her thumbnail and forefinger nail are stained. There are surrounding markings that are not consistent with any Safavid ornamental style, but which may be script or symbols.

In Safavid Persia, women of respectable social status did not openly declare their feelings for a man, and their opportunities to do so were extremely limited. Marriages were arranged, and women were to be passive and cooperative in these arrangements. Women were expected to be chaste before marriage, and thereafter faithful and obedient to their husbands. Wives often feared losing the love of their husband to a co-wife, or to a concubine (Walther, 1995). Inevitably, not every marriage was a good match, and women often were attracted to men other than their husband. The prolific repertoire of superstitions and magic spells practiced by women, recorded by Masse' in *"Persian Beliefs and Customs"* (1954) and lampooned by *"Kitabi Kulsum Naneh"* was an avenue for women to pursue their desires when overt declarations and actions were not permitted.

Henna on Musicians, Timur Holds a Great Feast with Amir Huseyn: 1552



Figure 56: "Timur Holds a Great Feast with Amir Huseynafter they have Raised a Chinghisid to the Rank of Great Khan", from a manuscript of Sharaf al-din 'Ali Yazdi's Zafarnama, Shiraz, 1523 – 52, British Library, OR. 1359, fol 35v, London

The Zafarnama is “The book of Victories”, a history of the Timurid Dynasty, and a biography of Timur. Figure 56 is a depiction of a feast in Samarkand staged before he had consolidated power. The construction of the illustration is the ideal of a princely Safavid court entertainment.



Figure 57: Detail: Timur Holds a Great Feast with Amir Huseyn, dated 1552, British Library, OR. 1359, fol 35v, London

Entertainers in the foreground, a dancer, a daf or dayereh³⁹ player, and the chang player⁴⁰, are all hands hennaed in the same Safavid style of ornamentation as seen in “Bilqis

³⁹ A Daf is a Persian frame drum, with zills attached, may be called a dayereh

⁴⁰ A Chang is a Persian harp

visiting Solomon”, about 1530, Iran, from Assembly of Lovers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Ouseley ADD 24, Folio 1270, and other manuscripts produced around that time. They have a dark line crossing the hand with detail surrounding, stained fingertips and fingernails. The dancer’s hands and feet are hennaed; her slippers are cut low enough for her foot henna patterns to be visible. Her fingertips are hennaed above the top joint. No other people at the event have markings consistent with henna.



Figure 58: Detail of musicians with women playing a Daf and a Chang (frame drum and harp); Timur Holds a Great Feast with Amir Huseyn, Dated 1552, British Library, OR. 1359, fol 35v, London

The pink and red carpet spread over the ground shows what may be an expanded view of the henna patterns usually expressed only as a line and a few dots in the tiny area allotted to hands and feet. The carpet has bands of color with swirling saz floral patterns on either side.

The henna on the Daf and Chang players are functional as well as beautiful. Harp playing can blister the skin on fingertips, and playing a frame drum through a long performance can make hands swell. Henna stains strengthen the skin and is mildly analgesic, and can prevent swelling, pain and blistering.

A Princess's Henna in Isfahan at the Beginning of the 17th century

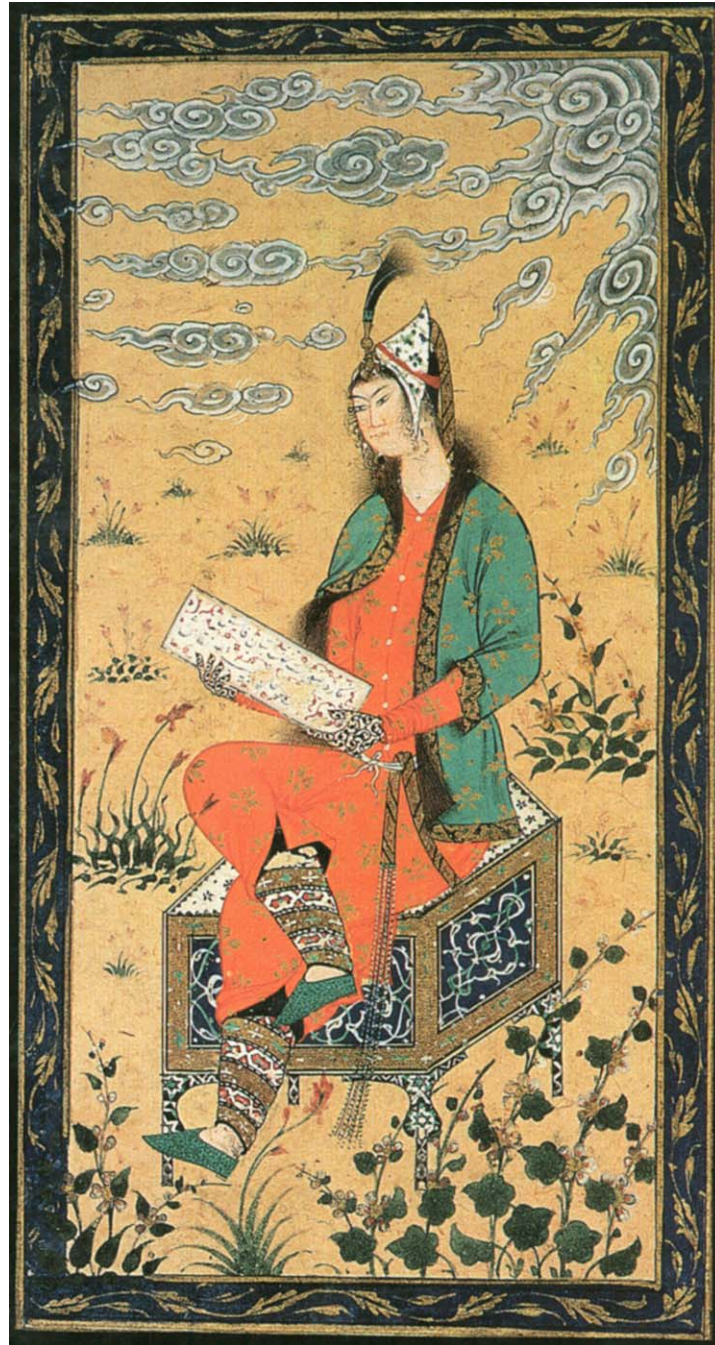


Figure 59: “A Seated Young Lady in an Orange Dress and Green Mantle” by Habib Allah, 1598-1606, Isfahan, Topkapi Sarai Museum Library, H. 2165, fol. 54v, (H3) Istanbul

The young woman in figure 59: “A Seated Young Lady in an Orange Dress and Green Mantle” is drawn in a larger format than many other illustrations, and the artist has slightly exaggerated the scale of her hands. We can see the saz patterning on her hands in more detail and complexity than other images which barely have room for a few swirls on from side to side of the hand.

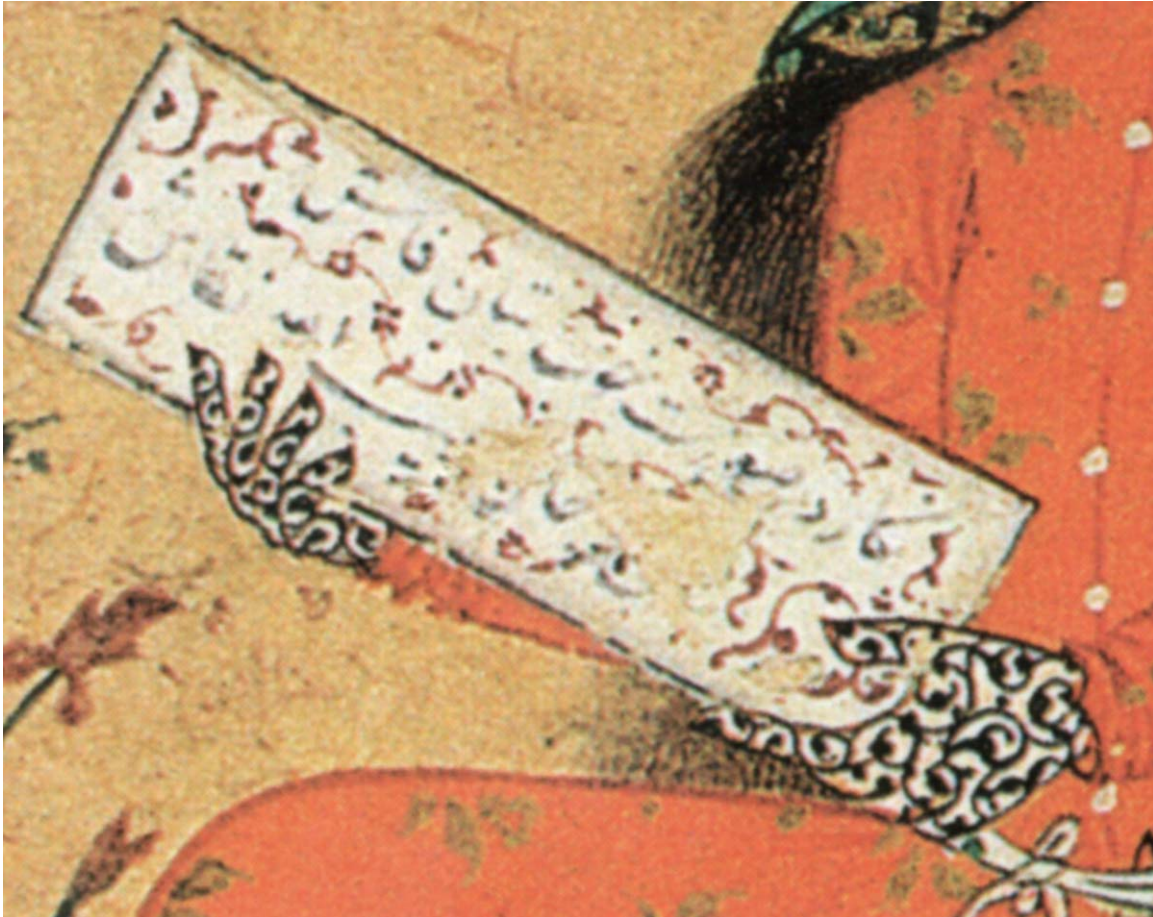


Figure 60: A Seated Lady in an Orange Dress and Green Mantle, Topkapi Sarai Museum Library, H. 2165, fol. 54v, (H3) Istanbul

Her fingernails are hennaed, and she has non-repeating saz patterns on her hands, with swirling vines extending up the fingers. Most other illustrations of saz patterning have simple lines across the fingers, possibly due to lack of workspace. If these paintings had been portrait sized images rather than manuscript illustrations, we might know a great deal more about the history of henna patterning in Persia.

During the Qajar period, the European style of life size portrait painting became popular in the court, but that same European contact seemed to discourage the traditions of henna patterning. A few of the Qajar portraits of court women seem to have henna patterns overpainted⁴¹, and the original patterns might be discovered in palimpsest examination.

⁴¹ "Two Harem Girls", attributed to Mirza Baba, Iran 1811-14, Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society London, 01.002 and "A Female Acrobat", Tehran, about 1815, 151.5 cm by 80.4 cm, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 719-1876 6 appear to be palimpsest.

Conclusion:

Westerners may conveniently locate the Safavid henna work in these examples as being done during the lifetimes of Henry VIII and of Queen Elizabeth I of England. Though there was trade between the English and the Persian empires (particularly in textiles), henna as body art did not seem to make the journey. Evidence exists that Persian women have created complex patterning on their hands with henna for at least one thousand years, and the techniques and traditions may extend further back into history. A comparison of images of women from India and Persia from the same period, 1000 CE to 1700 CE show no evidence of patterned henna in India (though fingertips were often stained red), and that blackened henna patterning was widespread in Persia. Henna traditions at present have largely gone dormant in Iran.

If we may assume that the hand and foot patterns in Seljuk, Timurid, Ilkhanid and Safavid Persian illustrations are representations of henna, though idealized to the taste of the manuscript patron or canons of the court atelier, as are the clothing, jewelry, carpets, tents, and the people themselves, and though representation is often severely constrained by the scale of the drawing, what we see on the hands and feet are examples of what Persian henna was intended looked like. It is not unusual for a hand to be no more than ¼” wide in one of the Safavid manuscript paintings, and though the henna pattern may be painted in with a single-hair brush, there simply isn’t room for much detail.

These representations of henna are idealized, as are the women (always portrayed with almond-shaped eyes, a budlike mouth) the handsome men, the rich fabrics and the orderly landscapes. Practical experience tells us that henna applications yield varying results, and are not always perfect. Henna can be lumpy, can smear, and can leave a poor stain, but these illustrations show us what people wanted henna to look like: fine, neat lines, lovely complex patterns, very dark or blackened stains that showed off pale skin. This painting of ideal rather than real does not detract from the veracity of the patterning: we can read in these patterns what the books’ patrons believed was beautiful and desirable, and what was valuable in their lives.

Some of the patterns appear similar to *mashrabiya*, the complex ornamental woodworking that sheltered the women’s quarters of the house, as seen in figures 13 and 17, (Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v). Other patterns resemble *khatam*, the intricate inlaid wood patterns that ornamented women’s mirror and pen boxes, such as figures 27 (Khusraw and the Lion, British Library, London: MS 387 fol 65b), 30 (“Lovers Picnicking”, Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto), and 44 (“A Nomadic Encampment”, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75) s.

Women also had henna patterns with Arabic and Farsi scripts, possibly segments of poetry, or honorifics from *tiraz* or precious objects in their homes, such as figures 7 and 8 (“Listening to the Theologian”, Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v), 22, 23, 24, and 25 (Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait” Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, s1986.140). These imply that the women who wore the patterns

were literate, and that the henna artists may also have been literate (or at least carefully copied texts put in front of them.)

Saz, images of the enchanted gardens of paradise, seem to have been a favorite form of henna pattern through out the 16th century and into the 17th: if paradise was conceived to be a bountiful and perfect garden, the women seem to have been fond of transferring that heavenly imagery to their bodies, or at least courtly fashion wanted to apply that metaphor to women. Larger, non-repeating saz vines are on women's hands and feet in figures 40, 41, 42 and 44 ("A Nomadic Encampment", Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.75), 46, 47, and 49 ("Nighttime in a Palace" Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum 1958.76), and 60 ("A Seated Lady in an Orange Dress and Green Mantle", Topkapi Sarai Museum Library, H. 2165, fol. 54v, (H3) Istanbul). A different sort of saz pattern, with a dark band across the hand or foot and smaller swirling flowering patterns is in figures 35, 36, 37 and 38 ("Bilqis visiting Solomon" Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, MS Ouseley ADD 24 Folio 1270), 57, and 58 (Timur Holds a Great Feast with Amir Huseyn, Dated 1552, British Library, OR. 1359, fol 35v, London). Both of these variants seem to mirror ceramic and textile saz ornamentation.

There are two examples that seem to be henna used as talisman for magical intentions, specifically for securing of a man's affections, figures 51 ("A Prince and a Princess Embrace", Bukhara, 1550 Vever Collection, S86.0301, Smithsonian), 54 and 55 ("A Prince and a Princess Seated on a Carpet in a Golden Landscape" Folio 2a, Vever Collection, s86.0040, Smithsonian).

The henna patterns are gendered: all henna patterns are on women except for those in "Lovers Picnicking", Diwan of Hafiz, 1527, Fogg Museum of Art, folio 67 recto, where beardless males are metaphorically linked to the divine beloved, and have henna.

The henna patterns sometimes denoted class. Though more complex and dense henna patterns are accorded to higher status women, and the simplest patterns are usually on servants such as in figures 17 ("Listening to the Theologian", Maqamat al-Hariri Dated 1237 Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f 58v) and 18 ("Sindukht Becoming Aware of Rudaba's Actions", Vever Collection, S86.0102, Smithsonian), many simpler patterns and the frequently seen fingertip dip henna are not necessarily indicative of low status.

The representation of henna on pre-pubescent females is largely absent, and I have found no representations of henna on post-menopausal women. Women of childbearing age are the most likely persons to have henna patterns on their hands and feet.

This paper has many examples of henna patterns in Persian manuscripts, but the actual percentage of manuscripts showing henna on women is very small, certainly less than five percent. Women wore henna for special occasions, and they hennaed more often than only for their weddings. There is evidence that they hennaed for Eids, celebrations, and even for suicide ("Yusuf Restrains Zulaika from Suicide", 1Robinson 563, Ryl Pers 20, folio 107, John Rylands University Library).

Persian women's henna patterns reflected their daily lives, the things they valued, and their fears and loves, and the culture they lived in. We can only view a shadow image of their lives and henna, seen through the eyes of the men who painted the miniatures, constrained by the artistic canons of courtly patronage, with many images lost through accident, age, and episodes of piety when books with images of humans were destroyed, but even that faint, fleeting shadow is rich and lovely.

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