

## Persian Allegory of *Chinoiserie* Motifs-Peonies, Lotuses, Clouds and Water

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### Abstract

Persians adopted many Islamic and pre-Islamic art motifs because the region was provided with rich art heritage like Zoroastrian art of the Achaemenian period which adopted certain Babylonian techniques and forms but certainly altered them into something distinctly Zoroastrian. The gardens have an explicit customary and emblematic character in Persia. Iranian art was the source through which Chinese decorative motifs were circulated throughout the Islamic world. Although, for a long time, Chinese wares specially ceramics, had been expensive imports in Islamic lands. Only after 1250, *Chinoiserie* motifs were integrated into the decorative repertory, where they were applied as major elements of design. In *Chinoiserie* motifs, plant motifs, various patterns of vegetations and nature such as peonies, lotuses, clouds and water were constantly used to embellish environment as well as architectural settings and other objects from many centuries. Various plants appear in many dissimilar forms in later Persian arts ranging from single motifs to extensive patterns and natural representations. Stylized plant and natural motifs provided an impact of Persia's possessing a direct symbolism and serving as models of paradise for the later Persians.

**Keywords:** Emblematic, Natural Motifs, Zoroastrian Philosophy, Paradise, Sense of Mysticism, Stylization.

### Introduction

The conquest of Iran by Arabs in 7<sup>th</sup> century brought Islam in contact with Zoroastrianism and intermingling of a rich influx of ancient Iranian culture with Islamic ideology took place. This merger of Islamic and pre-Islamic theology provided Persian artist to grasp the possibilities that opposites are merely the obverse and reverse of a celestial mind. To solve this theological problem Persians demonstrated the degree to which mysticism had saturated through the understanding and interpretation of the Islamic faith. This theory caused an intimate association between Persian mysticism and literature. The gratification of soul at the moment of reunion with the creator expressed by Persian poets Rumi, Attar, and Hafiz who brought symbolic spiritual appearance to its highest point of sophistication in their poetry. This paper is extracted from my unpublished MPhil thesis titled "Persian Allegory of *Chinoiserie* Motifs" which is submitted to Higher Education Commission, Pakistan.

Persia's supremacy in art of books was phenomenal and Persian manuscript illustrations flourished under aristocracy where the subjects were dictated by the rulers or aristocratic patrons. Persian artists culminated to perfection in this art - from the translations from Pahlavi to Arabic and later Persian literary works were the basis of this remarkable art and Persian artists decorated them

with remarkable skills and kept their boundaries of inspirations open to adapt to foreign motifs. These motifs especially *Chinoiserie* motifs were created in Persian manuscript illustrations with extreme clarity and degree of consciousness while transforming them according to the requirement of their own literary taste. Persian artist selected literature that most suited to his art either from a national epic to romantic or pathetic poem.

Manuscripts were commissioned by rulers of different dynasties. There were no fixed or defined boundaries for the artists so the diversified aesthetics were expressed in a range of artistic manuscript illustrations with a variety of concepts from epic to romantic. Therefore, a loose cohesion and a continuity of adapted designs and motifs are apparent in Persian manuscript illustrations. For centuries long, non-Persians ruled over Persia but Persians remained loyal to their own identity which was kept alive in their arts. Invasions and migrations helped to disseminate various artistic ideas and Persian miniatures have a strong tendency to surface decoration where the themes are symbolic and representational. Probably, this tendency was a psychological reaction against imposed orthodox religion or of the barren landscape of the region and by ornamenting each part of illustrations exhibits a subconscious effort to evoke a sense of beauty and comfort and a link of Persians with their roots and bonds. A continuous effort of artist was to keep folklore alive through art and literature.

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Physical geography of Iran had strong influence on the course of its history. Unfortunately the land was not blessed with large rivers. The barren plains, harsh climate and hostile environment generated some mystic ideas like gardens, mainly derived through religious inspiration, as earthly reflection of Paradise. Gardens with lush-green vegetations and divided with planned geometry and running watercourses that nurtured rich vegetations of blossomed and fruit trees, plants and beds of flowers were frequently depicted themes in Persian manuscript illustrations. Clouds in Chinese mythology represent good luck and heavens and as a frequently seen design in paintings, and when repeated in a pattern it symbolizes a never-ending fortune. Clouds and Water has been integral elements of Persian miniatures. Persian artists painted most delicate miniatures in garden settings, depicting the scenes from pre-Mongol literature including *Shahnameh* and twelfth century Nizami's *Khamsas*, and the paradisiacal quality of the illustrations complemented both epic and romantic poetry. These miniatures concentrate on physical, spiritual and moral aspects. Plants in these miniatures also provide botanical details of the period as well as symbolic meanings and narration of historical records. Gardens with rich watercourses represented the wealth and affluence of rulers and nobles which as a history is recorded in Persian miniatures. To represent this idea Persian artists generously evolved motifs of vegetations like Lotuses, peonies, water, cloud and trees.

On the other hand functions of Persian paintings are reflected through symbolism which is an integral part of these illustrations. In Persian manuscript illustrations representation of symbols from Zoroastrianism and Islam are knit together to the extent that they bring harmony in whole pictorial space. Paradise-like garden settings richly decorated with swirling clouds, blossomed trees and watercourses and heterogeneous division of two dimensional spaces that symbolize a state of being as well as a degree of consciousness, all were conscious efforts of Persian artist. Though these motifs are only drawn from Chinese models but their identity in the manuscript illustrations shows that Persian artists have involved these motifs consciously in these illustrations and they are modified to describe pure Persian subject matter. Persian artists are not only creating highly aesthetical miniatures, they were equally aware and responsive to the ideology that was present distinctively in these illustrations. Rather recognizing themselves with influences from distant regions Persian artists used talent and integrity to initiate and relate their own imaginative behaviour with unadulterated local approach and behaviour.

#### **Peonies, Lotuses, and other flowers and trees in Garden Setting**

Persian artists customarily engaged flowers and trees as decorative motifs in manuscript illustrations. Their designs were highly elaborated and complicated art form.

Floral designs engaging entire surface were regularly used as the source for endless pattern type decoration.

Iranian art was the source through which Chinese decorative motifs were circulated throughout the Islamic world. Although, for a long time, Chinese wares specially ceramics, had been expensive imports in Islamic lands. Only after 1250, *Chinoiserie* motifs were integrated into the decorative repertory, where they were applied as major elements of design. [1] The inestimable rhythms created with replication of curve lines, generate a soothing effect that can be customized and improved by variation in lines, colour and texture.

In Persia, plant motifs and various patterns were constantly used to embellish architecture and other objects from many centuries. Various plants appear in many dissimilar forms in later Persian arts ranging from single motifs to extensive patterns and natural representation of flowers to complicated and stylized plant appearance. Different types of plants and flowers caused inspiration for artist at different times and applied in the manuscript illustration. Plant motifs were used in varied manners with different techniques and formations to create patterns by following repeat, grid, rotational and free-hand applications.

Persian art has not left much documentation of their intention in using decorative motifs; primarily the intention behind rendering of plant motif was not an attempt towards symbolic representation. A sense of simplification and stylization was opted to draw or carve plant motif, typically spring sideways from stem, very conventional in style and application. Persian art inherited various motifs and different ways of using them from other artistic civilization that include the art of the Byzantine and Sasanian Empire of Iran and Roman art. Vine scroll is a common motif since centuries as a decorative plant form. Many centuries have passed but the Persians' love for plants by using floral motif, twisting grapevines, and intertwining branches in architectural decoration and art books still continues unabated.

Persians adopted many Islamic and pre-Islamic art motifs as the region was provided with rich art heritage like Zoroastrian art of the Achaemenian period which adopted certain Babylonian techniques and forms but certainly altered them into something distinctly Zoroastrian. The architectural forms and the gardens have an explicit customary and emblematic character in Persia. In pre-Islamic Persia as far as Zoroastrianism is concerned, the form of square garden looking inwardly towards the centre were also of sacred character. Certainly they are among the most important form of the pre-Islamic traditional art of Persia possessing a direct symbolism and serving as models of paradise for the later Persians. [2] Word paradise is derived from Old Persian language and its meaning is walled compound or garden. Meaning of *ferdous* in Persian or Farsi language is paradise and as also garden as a connotation of heaven or paradise. In Bible the translation in Greek for the term Garden of Eden has been described as *paradeisos* and the Persian word

*pairidaeza* has been translated by Xenophon breaking the word into two parts as *pairi* and *daeza* respectively as 'around' and 'wall' which also means Paradise. [3] *Pairidaeza baghs* were places that could include medicinal plants like Haoma which is a health giving plant with the correct selection of trees and the vegetation grown within. *Pairidaeza baghs* were sacred places where inner voice can be heard for spiritual nourishment and contemplation.

In the history of Persia, gardens are of fundamental importance since the time of Cyrus the Great, when gardens began to assume great importance in the cultural life of rulers. Before this era luxury and material comfort was unheard. Cyrus's gardens offer foundation to the later garden development. The ruins of Pasargadae and romantic gardens in Shiraz and Isfahan, amazing oasis gardens have survived on the central plateau. (Plate.1) Illustration of *Laila and Majnun* from Nizami's *Khamseh*, was painted in 1431 in Herat for Shah Rukh, shows oasis garden in desert setting. *Laila* sitting in a richly decorated Palm groove filled with wild flowers whereas *Majnun* is standing distant and lonely.



Source: Hobhouse, *Gardens of Persia*, 25.

**Plate.1** *Laila and Majnun* in Oasis Garden, *Khumseh* Nizami, Herat, 1431

Folk tales and written stories were to be restored to life in later epics such as *Shahnameh*, and later Nizami's *Khamseh* which bring to mind the palace gardens of the Sasanian era. [4] After the Islamic conquest, Persia was ruled by Umayyad until 750 who failed to reveal establishment of any garden. Later under religiously tolerant Abbasids, Baghdad turned out to be a cultural mix of Christians, Jews, Turks and Persians and they contributed in the development of gardens. [5]

Gardens inspired other forms of art predominantly poetry, painting, and many other decorative arts. Persian poetry in its *sufi* and romantic form gave foundation to

the depiction of mysticism and concept of paradise. Persian miniatures that are closely bound with illustrations are mainly depiction of paradisiacal narration through gardens. The idea of growth, profusion, and productiveness is linked religiously with floral motifs and abstract and geometrical Patterns resulting from the twining branches of vines. [6] Persian illustrations are richly covered with a variety of plants and trees. Where some of them are a part of landscape-setting but many plant motifs seem as filler in the pictorial space. In Persian miniatures many trees that are grown in gardens are part of structural composition. Cypresses, almonds and elms are frequently painted. From second century BC, following the military conquest and the flourishing of trade and commerce, the army and the traders crossed Persian lands via the Silk Road, the main trade routes between China and the West, and that is there is concept of garden spreads among themselves because of the beauty of the nature spread all around there. [7]

In Persian manuscript illustrations, during fourteenth century these motifs appeared in new forms, familiarizing influence from the Far East. Artistic development continued when Mongols settled down as another Iranian dynasty. Artists and poets were inspired from the palaces and luxury gardens and wrote *ghazals* in which the gardens are representation of worldly success and flowers and fruit descriptions for both spiritual and romantic love. [8] Terms used to describe plants disclose a fascinating interest of the Persians in nature, perhaps due to the shortage of water in that desert area. In Persian literature word *gol* has a key role in poetry which means both flower and rose. Physical characteristic of lover are recognized with rose whereas rose water is used for tears and rose garden stands for lover's dwelling. Metaphoric meanings of rose as described in *Gulistan e Sa'di* are in fact, piece of wisdom and suggestion to happiness. Sa'di's *Bustan* of 1257 interpret the meanings of *bustan* as a simple walled orchard of fragrance or scents and *bolbolestan* is a garden which is favored by *bolbol* (nightingale). [9]

In Persian illustration depiction of plant motif in garden settings is conventionalized rather than natural. In these plant motifs most frequently seen are palmettes, a freely conventional motif showing flower but not a true copy of any specific floral species. In ancient oriental art we find various depictions of palmettes, one derived from lotus and the other from palm tree, frequently seen in the enormous works of sculpture at Persepolis. Reliefs on the Northern stairs case of Tripylon represent procession of People holding lotus buds for the ceremony. Hall of a Hundred Columns represents decorative carved lotus palmettes on the bases of many columns. In these carvings lotus palmettes are carved with regular intervals as decorative patterns around processional bands. A variety of stylization with palmettes is present in the arts of Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Christian, Byzantine and Sassanid arts, primarily blending with other motifs such as acanthus and vine. A wide range of stylization of

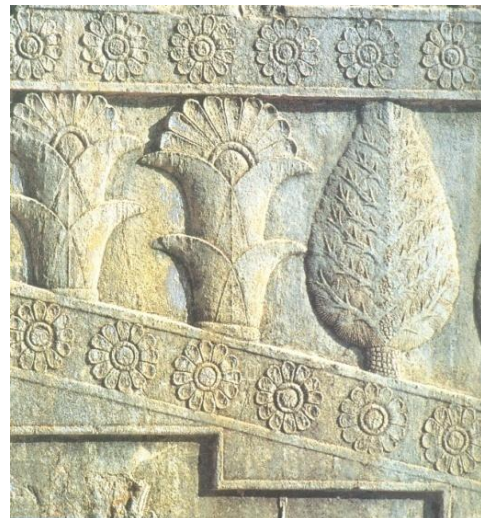
palmettes developed a range of palmettes motifs that can be identified as lotus palmettes, fan palmettes, peony palmettes. Where these palmettes are decorated with floral stems, with rosettes and large floral motif resembles a peony.

After the initiation of Islam in Persia, decorative arts notably extended with dissimilar characteristics of its own comparative to earlier artistic traditions. Surface decoration on architectural buildings and on objects of different kinds became popular and plant motifs were frequently used for such decorations that lead to a range of design ethnicity. Primarily Islamic depiction of plant motif with arabesque and geometry was due to Islamic view of the world. The function of ornamental elements, such as the spiral arabesque combined with split palmettes and Chinese cloud scrolls, is more prevailing in the decorative arts, illumination and architectural ornamentations of early western Iran than in the art of Timurids. [10]

Islamic conquest of Persia gave a rise to the depiction of plant motif in a variety of arts. In Persia shifting language from Pahlavi to Arabic many texts on medicine and plants were translated from Latin and Greek into Arabic included Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*, which became first botanical reference work. Islam dejected image making and the representation of floral, herbal and vegetal motifs was allowed for surface decorations in different art Medias like textile, carpets and art of books. With amalgamation of geometry, arabesque, floral and vegetal motifs artist manipulated plant motif into new complex patterns derived from grapevines, leaves and flowers. There are all kinds of flowers in Persia that one finds in Europe and France. All grow up according to the conduciveness of the weather. Lotuses and other native plants that are prominently seen in Persian manuscripts have their origin in Persia. A large number of Persian manuscript illustrations take place in garden setting. Green tufts of grass, filled with flowers and trees of various kinds, rich in colour and mood give a vibrancy and beauty to the pictorial space and create a romantic atmosphere. This garden setting appeared frequently from late fourteenth century Persian manuscripts.

Egyptians brought their plants to the east when occupied Syria and part of Levant between 1530 and 1200 BC. Egyptian plants were adopted as decorative motifs in Mesopotamian arts. Assyrian reliefs depict rulers in gardens with trees and plants that invested symbolic meanings such as sacred lotus represent rebirth and palm tree had association with gods and royalty. [11] Later these motifs that were derived from Egypt were frequently used for the decoration and predominantly appeared in relief carvings at Persepolis. Within bands of rosettes decorative lotus and pine tree lined in the ceremonial staircase of Darius I's palace, which was built towards the end of 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, at Persepolis. (Plate.2) Stone carvings of lotus flower and leaf, cypress, palmetto, pine, and palm trees repeatedly, in arranged rows demonstrate Persians' love for nature and brilliance of craftsmanship

of bas relief carving. The method of using motifs in the carvings on the palace walls were firmly assorted, representing the degree and power of the Persian Empire, with craftsmen and plants brought from all the regions. [12] Mongol court was established in Iran from 1258 to 1330's that led to an emphasis on highly ornate structures in gardens with flowery trees, peonies and chrysanthemums. Most of these floral motifs were familiar in Chinese arts such as peonies and lotuses which started emerging after Mongol invasion in Persian arts. Lotuses and peonies appeared with more stylization in more striking and implausible forms and were developed with more sophistication and frequently seen in the decoration of borders around Persian illustrations. Though representation of lotus in Persian manuscript illustrations has its origin in Persia, nonetheless these motifs are drawn on Chinese models that appeared on blue and white porcelain of Sung, Yuan and Ming dynasties.



Source: Hobhouse, *Gardens of Persia*, 43.

**Plate.2** Decorative lotus within bands of rosettes, Darius I's palace, 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Persepolis

Persian painters produced fine miniatures in which celebrated heroes and heroines, people, walled gardens with pavilions, pools, flowers and trees are integral part of the composition. A vast area was covered by the golden hordes; new cultural contacts were recognized between Europe and the frontiers of distant China. [13] Persian artists adopted Chinese floral motifs but they were not satisfied with meagre replication. In Persian manuscript illustrations, peony flower is derivative from China. During Tang dynasty the emperor's concubines would often wear peonies in their hair to solicit favour from the emperor.

Persian artists created new varieties of lotus and peony palmettes in Persian illustrations and both are depicted in conventional and natural manner. Additions

of more leaves with spiral lines is frequently seen with repeat pattern for borders or single flower and are elaborately applied in landscape setting that give richness to illustration and addresses both aspects of mysticism and worldly pleasure. Sung, Yuan and Ming period porcelains were the source for the intricate and subtle representation of dragons, birds, and flowers. Various landscape essentials like dead pesky trees with thorny branches and hovering clouds on sky were equally rendered in more structured and fine form. All these inspiration came from the Blue and white porcelain images that appeared in Persian manuscript illustration of thirteenth century. (Plate.3)

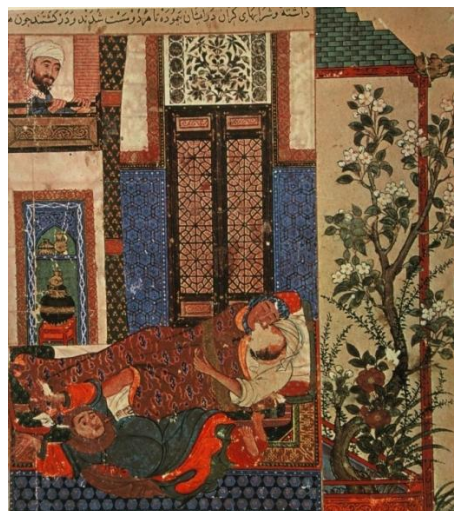


Source: Canby, *Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*, 140.

**Plate.3** Chinoiserie motifs on Blue and White porcelains, Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368

Literature provided with the opportunity to depict such scenes that complement not only the text to describe the allegory but also to give richness and vibrant effects of idealization to the picture. In manuscript illustration Persian painters borrowed small secluded elements from Chinese painting and restructured and incorporated them in their own customary aesthetics and applications. A blossomed branch of a plant, behind a railing or screen, is a motif borrowed from Chinese painting and it was frequently united with a figural composition in a more traditional manner as can be seen in “a challenged murder frustrated,” *Kalila wa Dimna*, Tabriz, 1360-1374. (Plate.4) This illustration richly involves patterns for the decoration of interior and exterior and represents a mixture of diverse foreigner and native influences.

Interior is generously decorated with Islamic geometric patterns and arabesque on walls and window screen. A blossomed branch near railing outside room generates an atmosphere which addresses the love of Persians for nature. An assorted application of motifs applied for interior as well as exterior, a blend of floral and geometric patterns, is subtle and impressive and shows the conscious effort of the artist to balance many adopted motifs in a pure Persian style.



Source: Gray, *Persian Painting*, 40.

**Plate.4** *Kalila wa Dimna*- an attempted murder frustrated, Tabriz, 1360 -1374.

Sense of harmony applied by Chinese artists in scenery or painting various surroundings had resulted in the development of landscape painting, while the Persian artists were familiarized with a dull and coarse setting and later depicted romantic paradise settings and address their spiritual aspects. Sometimes plant motifs are used as a border in repeated manner around illustrations. Plant motifs have not been used only as part of landscape in the pictorial composition to create environment but the buildings drawn in these illustrations also involved in similar motifs for surface decoration and lavishly decorated with a combination of plant motif with arabesque. Beside animals and bird, Chinese landscape painting inspired Persian painters to imitate their pesky dead trees with entangled trunks and dry branches. Stylized rocks and mountain formations and whirls of moving water generating a pattern with crested waves and elaborate clouds were also imitated. These all elements were known in Sung and Yuan paintings and emerged as decoration on fourteenth century blue-and-white porcelains and textiles.

**Clouds and Water in Garden Settings**

In Persian manuscript illustrations, Persian artist avoided emptiness in pictorial space. Each part of the illustration elaborately decorated with details in their own symmetries, independent from entire work that represent a true imaginary world of spiritual poetry. Such sophistication is involved in these illustrations that it complements the sense of mysticism, a fluctuation between worldly and divine. Artist engaged in these illustrations from arabesque to floral descriptions of nature in garden scenes and elegant references of classical Arab and ancient Persian, from folklore to epic. An apparent amalgamation of colour and harmony to concentrate on concepts and messages of mystic and material world from Zoroastrianism to Islam in Persia,

with intensified and multifaceted images have been the credits of Persian artists.

Along with decorative plant motifs, clouds and water in Persian painting are also represented in a highly stylized manner. Clouds in Chinese mythology represent good luck and heavens and as a frequently seen design in paintings, and when repeated in a pattern it symbolizes a never-ending fortune. The lands over which Islam succeeded during its early era were desert countries that depended upon the concept of watered oasis. A number of Persian illustrations correspond to earliest gardens that were desert oases and later gardens for pleasure that flourished in more artificial situations. In these illustrations a variety of trees have been painted in such garden settings and the aim of the artist is to make these illustrations so appealing that they convey the mystic message of paradise. (Plate.5) In Persian manuscript illustrations water is an integral part of the compositions. Water as an important part of the picture does signify symbolic meanings. In the Holy Quran, 'gardens underneath which rivers flow', is a term used many times which perhaps signifies *qanat* system which means water management system where water is abundantly available for irrigation, for drinking and other use by human beings and animals. But in other words 'water flowing underneath' suggest the satiation of the garden of the heart i.e., the garden within oneself which by dint of the overflowing waters of the spirit purifies the soul of the faithful on the journey through life. Rumi has very aptly and metaphorically described that the purity of the soul that the real garden and flowers are in man's heart and not outside.



Source: Yassavoli, A Kings Book of Kings: an Album of Miniatures from The Shah Tahmaspi Manuscript of Shanameh, 7.

**Plate.5** Firdowsi encounters the court poets of Ghazna, *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp. c. 1530.

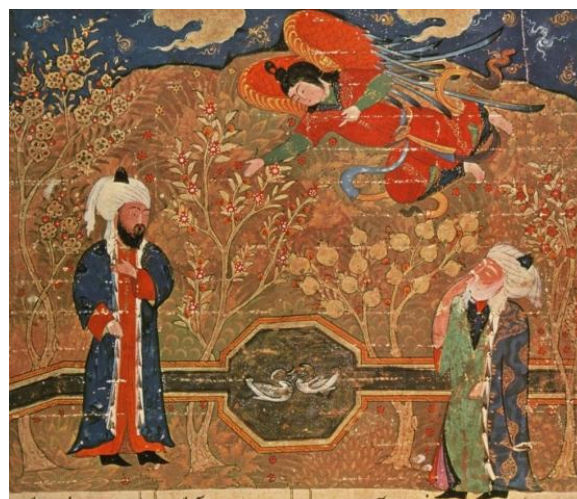
Water with surf in a more stylized form is illustrated in many Persian paintings such as 'Zal shooting a water bird before the Turkish maids of Princess Rudaba', *Shahnam*, Tabriz, 1370. Chinese style of illustrating water is engaged

with such distinction in strong lines that it fabricates the images of violent flow of boiling water. [14] In this illustration a design like repetitive patterns can be admired due to its combination of blue and white like Chinese porcelains decoration present in a rich landscape with all natural elements like water, plants and trees. (Plate.6) Water in most of the illustration has been depicted in form of fountains, rivers and ponds in garden setting. In an illustration of *Khawar-nama* of Ibn Husam 'Gabriel announces the Apotheosis of Ali' Shiraz, 1480, showing garden setting with central fountain. Liveliness has been added to the illustration by using harmonious colours in the rendering of plants and other landscape essentials. (Plate.7)



Source: Gray, *Persian Painting*, 42.

**Plate.6** Zal shooting water bird before Turkish maids of Princess Rudaba, *Shahnam*, Tabriz, 1370.



Source: Gray, *Persian Painting*, 42.

**Plate.7** Gabriel announces Apotheosis of Ali, Shiraz, 1480.

Clouds and Water has been integral elements of Persian miniatures. Persian artists painted most delicate miniatures in garden settings, depicting the scenes from pre-Mongol literature including *Shahnameh* and twelfth

century Nizami's *Khamsas*, and the paradisiacal quality of the illustrations complemented both epic and romantic poetry. These miniatures concentrate on physical, spiritual and moral aspects. Plants in these miniatures also provide botanical details of the period as well as symbolic meanings and narration of historical records. Persian poetry that include *Gathas* of Zarathustra, *Rubaiyat* of Omer Khayyam, verses celebrating the beauties of garden as in Firdowsi's *Shahnameh*, in which stories of Shah's evoke the gardens of Sasanian era, Sa'di's *Bostan* and *Gulistan* became the main source of subject for miniatures rich with natural beauties. These elements equally complement to the mystic and romantic poetry by Rumi, Sa'di, Hafiz and Jami.

Persian artist is not only creating highly aesthetical miniatures but is equally conscious and aware of principles that lie beneath these illustrations and tried to make them known to others. Instead of identifying himself with foreign applications of influences Persian artist used his talent and integrity which made it possible to introduce his own artistic personality with pure regional narration.

Clouds that are the most significant elements in Chinese paintings as well as Persian manuscript illustrations were frequently used as a decorative motif in picture plane or as an integral part of landscape. In Chinese mythology it is believed that the dragons are able to create clouds with their breath. Dragons are associated with storm, clouds and rain and symbol of good fortune. Chinese symbolic motifs used in Persian paintings complement to the environment created in the court scenes or landscape. Chinese landscape reunion in Persian paintings and various motifs applied were gradually incorporated, but primarily they did not amend conventional Persian subject matter, style, iconography, and method of Persian manuscript painting. Clouds represent different moods in Persian illustrations. In some paintings they are rendered in lines and by adding little tone look as soft as silk. Floating clouds create a movement in the sky and with varied colours to generate soft and furious moods according to the subject that is described. In manuscript illustration 'Indian army fleeing before the Iron warriors of Iskandar,' Tabriz, 1330-1336, (Plate.8) two forms of clouds with varied palette have been depicted. Clouds on the sky are lighter in shades a combination of warm browns with light reflecting out of them and the clouds of smoke coming out of horses' nostrils are darker in shade as more dusty and suffocating with a real feel of battlefield. The depiction of clouds in this illustration is creating the forcefulness in the composition and generating a brutal atmosphere and mood is present in manuscript illustration 'Banquet scene,' Shiraz, c. 1444. (Plate.9) Hovering clouds over blossomed trees are prominently painted with cool blues and whites. Banquet scene in a garden setting richly drawn with landscape rudiments in vibrant colours is giving a heavenly feel. Movement of figures in different

directions create interest in the whole pictorial space and the richness of coloured costumes worn gives a vibrancy to whole image that are the recognitions of Persian artist.



Source: Gray, *Persian Painting*, 29.

**Plate.8** Indian army fleeing before the Iron warriors of Iskandar, Tabriz, 1330-1336.



Source: Gray, *Persian Painting*, 103.

**Plate.9** Banquet scene, Shiraz, c. 1444.

A vivid stylization can be admired in the cloud and halo depiction of Timurid *Mirajnama*. An illustration 'The *Miraj*' Tabriz, c.1505 is rendered with highly stylized cloud forms. (Plate.10) Upper portion of the illustration is richly decorated with highly stylized golden clouds and a number of angels appearing from these clouds around Muhammad P.B.U.H who is riding on his horse *Buraq*. Image of Muhammad (PBUH) is placed exactly in the centre as a focal point of the composition. The lower portion shows *kaa'ba* and other architectural structures, stylized and geometrical divisions that create a total contrast in the composition. The beautiful bold curves of the clouds are creating strong movement whereas the

architectural part is comparatively static with barren desert landscape around the picture as border.



Source: Robinson, *Islamic Painting and the Arts of The Book*, 169.

**Plate.10** The *Miraj*, *Khamsa* of Nizami, Tabriz, c. 1505.

Persian admiration for the Chinese clouds and water is dominant in various Persian illustrations but fundamentally it does not modify the theme or style of pure Persian manuscript paintings. Persian artist is conscious and aware of the principles with which he was creating these remarkable illustrations and introduced his own talent and truthfulness to develop pure regional style.

### Conclusion

Persians adopted many Islamic and pre-Islamic art motifs because the region was provided with rich art heritage like Zoroastrian art of the Achaemenian period which adopted certain Babylonian techniques and forms but certainly altered them into something distinctly Zoroastrian. The gardens have an explicit customary and emblematic character in Persia. Iranian art was the source through which Chinese decorative motifs were circulated throughout the Islamic world. Although, for a long time, Chinese wares specially ceramics, had been expensive imports in Islamic lands. Only after 1250, *Chinoiserie* motifs were integrated into the decorative repertory, where they were applied as major elements of design. In *Chinoiserie* motifs, plant motifs, various patterns of vegetations and nature were constantly used to embellish architectural settings and other objects from many centuries. Various plants appear in many dissimilar forms in later Persian arts ranging from single motifs to extensive patterns and natural representations. Stylized plant and natural motifs provided an impact of Persia's possessing a direct symbolism and serving as models of paradise for the later Persians.

In Persian manuscript illustrations, Persian artist avoided emptiness in pictorial space. Each part of the illustration elaborately decorated with details in their own symmetries, independent from entire work that represent a true imaginary world of spiritual poetry using symbolically motifs such as peonies, lotuses, clouds and trees. Such sophistication is involved in these illustrations that it complements the sense of mysticism, a fluctuation between worldly and divine.

Artist engaged in these illustrations from arabesque to floral descriptions of nature in garden scenes and elegant references of classical Arab and ancient Persian, from folklore to epic. Folk tales and written stories were to be restored to life in later epics such as *Shahnameh*, and later Nizami's *Khamsah* which bring to mind the palace gardens of the Sasanian era. Persian poetry in its *sufi* and romantic form gave foundation to the depiction of mysticism and concept of paradise with plants, flowers, hovering clouds and watercourses.

Persian miniatures that are closely bound with illustrations are mainly depiction of paradisiacal narration through gardens. The idea of growth, profusion, and productiveness is linked religiously with floral motifs and abstract and geometrical Patterns resulting from the twining branches of vines. Artists and poets were inspired from the palaces and luxury gardens and wrote *ghazals* in which the gardens are representation of worldly success and flowers and fruit descriptions for both spiritual and romantic love.

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