

KHAMSAH OF NIZĀMĪ

DATED 915 (1509-10)

The Khamsah or Five Poems of Nizāmī, copied in 915 (1509-10)

SUBJECT AND ARRANGEMENT. The poems are arranged in the following order: (fol. 1b) *Makhzan al-Asrār*; (fol. 30b) *Khusrau u Shirin*; (fol. 104b) *Lailā u Majnūn*;

(fol. 158b) *Haft Paikar*; (fol. 216b) *Sharaf-nāmah*; and (fol. 292b) *Khīrad-nāmah*, the first and second books of the *Iskandar-nāmah*.

MEASUREMENTS, ETC. 34.4 × 21 cm.; the written surface measures 22.2 × 14 cm.; 4 columns of 23 lines; 332 folios.

WRITING AND PAPER. The writing is a fine *Nasta'liq*, enclosed within gold and blue rulings. The paper is polished and thin. The rubrics are in red and gold.

BINDING. The binding is sumptuous. It appears to be later than the date of the manuscript, and to belong probably to the middle years of the 16th century. The outside covers and flap are lacquered, and the whole surface (except for a gold border with Chinese S-shaped cloud forms in black) is occupied by varied hunting scenes—the two covers being different—depicted among trees and foliage in hilly landscapes, painted in gold and colours on a black ground. On the front cover an elderly prince, mounted, over whom an attendant on foot holds a red umbrella, is preparing to aim an arrow. Numerous other figures, on horseback or on foot, are armed, usually with bows and arrows, or guns. One man has lassoed a deer, one is spearing another deer, and one is being mangled by a lion.

The doublures are elaborately decorated. The outer borders are of dark green leather, with two inner borders composed respectively of filigree panels in gilt, with coloured grounds, and sunk gilt panels with gilt arabesques. Within these is another green leather border with gilt floral decoration, and the centre panel has a sunk gilt ground with raised cloud forms and scrolls; in the centre is a large medallion, with filigree patterns in gold and colours, mainly blue and green. The corner-pieces are similar, and there are six other full or half-medallions. The spine is plain.

DATE AND SCRIBE. The manuscript is dated (fol. 29b) Sha'bān 915 (1509) and signed, on fol. 331b, 'Alī Kātib.

ILLUMINATION AND ILLUSTRATIONS. Foll. 2b and 3, each containing nine lines of the beginning of the text in two columns within cloud forms, are fully and splendidly illuminated, mainly in blue and gold with touches of black, red, green, and yellow. The *ansae* are particularly striking, with an unusual colour scheme in which emerald green and a lighter blue than usual, and touches of brick-red, strike the eye. These pages closely resemble those of the great *Nizāmī* at the British Museum (Or. 2265),¹ which was written in 1539-43.

The text portion of most of the pages containing miniatures is decorated in gold and colours between the columns and elsewhere.

The twenty-nine illustrations have most of the typical characteristics of the earlier Ṣafavī style; they are not, however, as accomplished as the illumination, though often well composed, and the colours are usually admirable, though some miniatures are rather thinly painted. They may be the work of two or more different painters: the figures, for instance, in the miniatures on foll. 114 and 149 are drawn noticeably smaller than elsewhere. Skies are sometimes of a rather pale blue, sometimes golden, and the hilly backgrounds are often mauve. Many figures wear the Ṣafavī turban-*kulāh*, or cap with a long rod, typical of the costume of the first half of the 16th century.