

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Bahram Gur Visits the Sandalwood Pavilion on Thursday from Haft Peykar, from a manuscript of Khamsa of Nizami

Shiraz, Iran, c.1560-80

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

29cm high, 19cm wide

Provenance: From the collection of a European family since mid-19th century.

Stock No.: A5300

This illustration depicts the Sasanian king Bahram Gur sitting with a princess in a pavilion and is surrounded by courtly companions who are entertaining him with food, music and dancing. The main scene is framed by a building to the right-hand side, and verses above and below it. There are onlookers from the building peeping through the door and window onto Bahram's banquet. The dome of the building sits above the verse and the title in the top margin. The title of the illustration is written in white *thuluth* and illuminated with gold background. It reads "*raftan-i Bahrām rūz-i panj-shanbi bi gonbad-i şandālī* (Bahram's visit to the Sandalwood Pavilion on Thursday)." This scene is finely illustrated and illuminated, as seen from the individualistic depictions of figures' facial features and clothing, as well as the rich array of patterns on various surfaces of the building. The reverse side of the folio continues the verses from the illustrated page, with fine illuminations embellishing the page.

This painting depicts an episode of the *Haft Peykar*, an epic romantic poem which is a part of a *Khamsa* (a collection of poems) from the renowned Persian poet, Nizami Ghanjavi (d.1209). The *Haft Peykar* tells the story of the Sasanian king, Bahram Gur (ruled AD 420–38), whose architect constructed seven domed pavilions for each of his beautiful brides who came from different parts of the world. The architect tells him that each of the climes is ruled by one of the seven planets and advises him to assure his good fortune by adorning each dome with the colour associated with the clime and planet of its occupant. On each day of the week, the king visited one princess and enjoyed her company, and in turn, the princess would tell Bahram a moralistic story. In this scene, Bahram is accompanied by the bride from *Rūm* who lives in the Sandalwood Pavilion.

The high quality of the manuscript is reflected in the illumination, calligraphy and the highly detailed illustration. They all point to a likely origin of a royal workshop from the early Safavid period.

The text on the painting page reads:

قصه چون گفت ماه زیبا چهر	در کنارش گرفت شاه به مهر
روز پنجشنبه است روزی خوب	وز سعادت به مشتری منسوب
چون دم صبح گفت نافه گشای	عود را سوخت خاک صندل سای
بر نمودار خاک صندل فام	صندلی کرد شاه جامه و جا

Reference:

Blois, François de. 'HAFT PEYKAR'. In *Encyclopedia Iranica*, XI:522–24, 2002. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/haft-peykar>.

Folios from the same manuscript are dispersed among American institutions:

Bahram Gur Visits the White Pavilion, Cleveland Museum of Art ([2006.146](#));

Bahram Gur Visits the Black Pavilion, National Museum of Asian Art, Washington D.C. ([S1986.182](#));

Bahram Gur Visits the Yellow Pavilion, National Museum of Asian Art, Washington D.C. ([S1986.180](#)).