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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

A Study of Female *Javānmardī* in the Premodern Persianate World (945-1800)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Interdisciplinary Humanities

by

Amanda Caterina Leong

Committee in charge:

Professor Sholeh Quinn, Chair
Professor Aditi Chandra
Professor Humberto Garcia
Professor Susan Amussen

2024

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Professor Sholeh Quinn, Chair

Professor Aditi Chandra

Professor Humberto Garcia

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University of California, Merced

2024

Abstract of the dissertation

A Study of Female *Javānmardī* in the Premodern Persianate World (945-1800)

by

Amanda Caterina Leong

Doctor of Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Humanities

University of California, Merced, 2024

Professor Sholeh Quinn, Chair

This dissertation re-examines the concept of *javānmardī* ("young-manliness") within the premodern Persianate world. While typically translated as "chivalry," *javānmardī* encompassed a broader ethical ideal encompassing courage, generosity, and even trickery, highlighting its protean nature. It shapes how Persianate people understood themselves and others. The Persianate historical, visual, and literary landscape is rich with female figures celebrated as *javānmard*s (manly youths). Regardless, scholars have taken the etymology of the word quite literally and predominantly associated *javānmardī* with the sexed male body, causing a lack of focused understanding of how women embodied and expanded the concept while also outperforming men in being *javānmard*s.

This dissertation recovers how female *javānmardī* were represented, received, and used in visual and textual sources created and commissioned by both men and women during the "middle periods" (945-1501) and the "early modern period" (1501-1800). Sources collected from various archives are placed in conversation with one another. Traditionally studied separately and siloed into disciplinary and temporal constraints, my interdisciplinary approach to analyzing these sources allows a more comprehensive picture of female *javānmardī* to emerge, resulting in a better understanding of premodern Persianate female power and a vibrant female intellectual tradition. It also reveals the complex interplay of gender, race, class, and kinship structures within the premodern Persianate world. Specifically, I uncover how Chinese women were recognized as *javānmardī* exemplars in Persianate sources. Focusing on tensions governing romances between Chinese female *javānmard*s and Iranian men provides another window to understand a Persianate Sinophilia central to emerging gender and sexual discourses of patriarchal kingship.

My dissertation shows the premodern Persianate world was much more topsy-turvy than indicated, with *javānmardī* practiced and understood as a gender-fluid performative model. It further uncovers a previously obscured matriarchal dimension in premodern patriarchal Persianate kingship, and the different ways "female *javānmard*s" and "anxious patriarchs" sought to invert each other to assert dominance. To better understand the complexity of female *javānmard*, this

dissertation explores both their transgressions and limitations. Female *javānmardī* complicates existing Euro-American centered theories of gender, sexuality, and power, revealing their constraints and enriching them with insights from the premodern Persianate world.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Leong Ieng Tak and Natericia António, my sister Samantha António Leong, my husband, Ismail Ouaissa, our two children in paradise, the members of the Ouaissa, António, and Leong families, as well as Gulbadan Begum. Thank you all for your inspiration, love, support, and care that have empowered me to take various journeys and live different lives.

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manliness, and your endless patience. My achievements are ours, and I cannot wait for more adventures with you and for us to build and live in new worlds together.

VITA

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- "How Iranian Princess Taj al-Saltana Saw a 19th Century Global Pandemic" published in *Ajam Media MC*, https://ajammc.com/2020/11/15/taj-al-saltana-global-pandemic/ (peer-reviewed)

- "Hope for Middle East Reforms" and "امید برای تحول در خاورمیانه: بازبینی حمله ۱۳۵۸ به "مسجدالحرام، چهل سال پس از واقعه published in IranWire, https://iranwire.com/en/blogs/26/6562, https://iranwire.com/fa/blogs/215/34873
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- "Re-thinking Race, Class, and Female *Javānmardī* in the Illustrated Manuscripts of the

Kitab-i Samak ‘Ayyar and Nizami’s *Haft Paykar*” in Historians of Islamic Art Association, Expanding Contexts, March 2-4, 2023, The Museum of Fine Arts and Rice University, Houston, Texas.

- Histories of Race Workshop at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, on paper “Re-thinking Medieval Race in *Haft Paykar*: An ‘Interracial’ Epic Romance between a Persian King and his Chinese Musician Slave Girl”. June 1, 2022.
- Respondent for Philology / in / Persian Symposium, University of California, Berkeley. April 14, 2022.

Notes on Transliteration

The transliteration system used in this dissertation follows the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES). Titles of primary sources, even popular ones, are rendered with diacritics. Other words, such as names and places, will follow the IJMES system without diacritical marks. Pinyin transliteration is used for Chinese words whenever possible.

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Introduction

The Persianate notion of *javānmardī*, with '*javān'* meaning young and '*mardī',* or manliness, is typically translated as chivalry in English. It is an ethical concept of human perfection and has been used in literature from the Persianate world ever since the time of Firdawsi's *Shāhnamah* (1010), or *The Book of Kings*, to describe an ideal person who possesses manly virtues ranging from courage, physical prowess, integrity, honesty, hospitality to generosity, self-sacrifice, and fortitude.[1] A person capable of embodying various *javānmardī* virtues is called a *javānmard* (manly youth). The Arabic word *futūvat* (young-manliness) was frequently used as a synonym in Persian texts exploring the concept of *javānmardī*. My understanding of the term 'Persianate' is informed by the work of Marshall G.S. Hodgson, who defines it as "cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian aspiration, 'Persianate' by extension."[2]

One of the most famous female *javānmard* in Persian literature is Fitnah, a Chinese musician slave girl from Nizami's (d.1209) renowned 1197 Persian epic romance titled *Haft Paykar* (Seven Beauties). Fitnah is well known for her intelligence, outspokenness, defiance against unjust kingship, and most importantly, her extraordinary strength stemming from her ability to lift an ox sixty steps up a tower. After witnessing Fitnah's ox-lifting performance, the Sasanian king Bahram Gur acknowledges her superiority in embodying manliness and then begs for her forgiveness. Fitnah's popularity is seen in how she has been illustrated "hundreds of times" in royal manuscripts across

[1] Emma Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan," in *Ethical Life in South Asia*, ed. Anand Pandian and Daud Ali (Indiana University Press, 2010), 153.

[2] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 3: The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 293-294. It is important to note that the main term Hodgson coined and used was "Islamicate," and he was using Persianate in a similar fashion but only mentions it once in his *Venture*.

the premodern Persianate world and how later Persianate writers composed imitations and spin-offs based on her character. Annemarie Schimmel describes "heroines" like Fitnah as exceeding characters of the *Shāhnamah* when it comes to being "ciphers of specific states of mind."[3]

Despite the timeless hold female *javānmards* like Fitnah have on the Persianate imagination, the scholarly consensus has taken the etymology of the word quite literally and predominantly associated *javānmardī* with the sexed male body, thus producing an overwhelmingly known corpus associating *javānmardī* with male figures.[4] As a result, the workings of *javānmardī* in the female body have been overlooked. My dissertation recovers how female *javānmardī* was represented in both visual and textual sources created and commissioned by both men and women during the "middle periods" (945-1501) and the "early modern period" (1501-1800) of the Persianate world.[5] These sources reveal the different ways both fictional and historical women were celebrated in middle and early modern Persianate culture as exemplars of *javānmardī*, some even surpassing their male counterparts. Crucially, this study uncovers how these women also redefined qualities and expanded behaviors associated with this ethical ideal, offering a new perspective on the extent of female power in the premodern Persianate world. In doing so, not only are we able to better understand *javānmardī*, but also other related

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[3] Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992)., 30.

[4] Mohsen Zakeri, "JAVĀNMARDI," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill, August 26, 2020), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-iranica-online/javanmardi-COM_3959.

[5] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 2: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 3; While Hodgson have chosen to call the period of 1501-1800 "gunpowder empires", I will instead use "early modern", see Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 3*, 8-10.

concepts such as Persianate kinship, kingship, race, class, and many others that I will be discussing more below.

Why Study Female *Javānmardī*?

One of the reasons *javānmardī* has been predominantly understood as a male-only concept is because there has been no study in recent years devoting itself exclusively to analyzing female *javānmardī* in the middle and early modern Persianate contexts. Unfortunately, scholarly discussions of female *javānmardī* in these periods have been either absent, dismissive, or relegated to brief mentions in footnotes or suggestions for further study within works focused on epic and folktale genres, or the arts of the book. This existing scholarship tends to focus on fictional women's association with *javānmardī*, neglecting the potential for a deeper exploration of female *javānmardī* as a lived experience in the middle and early modern Persianate contexts.[6] Moreover, it has also caused scholars like William Hanaway to see female *javānmardī* as "suggestive than definitive."[7] Nonetheless, these studies have been vital in enabling the context and foundation for my dissertation focusing on female *javānmardī.*

While vast studies have been conducted on "making visible" the presence of powerful historical women from these two periods, there is a relative dearth of research on how these women wielded power within the specific framework of *javānmardī*

[6] For a list of these scholarship, see John R. Perry, "Blackmailing Amazons and Dutch Pigs: A Consideration of Epic and Folktale Motifs in Persian Historiography," *Iranian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1986): 155–65, Marina Gaillard, *Le livre de Samak-e 'Ayyâr: structure et idéologie du roman persan médiéval* (C. Klincksieck, 1987), 23; Parvaneh Pourshariati, "The Ethics and Praxis of Mehr and Mithras and the Social Institution of the ʿayyārs in the Epic Romance of Samak-e ʿayyār," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6, no. 1–2 (2013): 1, 28; Marina Gaillard, "Alexander the Great or Būrān-Dukht: Who Is the True Hero of the Dārāb-Nāma of Ṭarsūsī?," *Iranian Studies*, September 26, 2023, 1–14; Sahba Shayani, "The Representation of Women in Premodern Persian Epic Romance Poetry: A Study of Ferdowsi's Šāhnāme, Gorgāni's Vis o Rāmin, and Neẓāmi's Ḵosrow o Širin" (UCLA, 2020), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7ct4x2tn.

[7] William L. Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances before the Safavid Period" (Columbia University, 1970), 175.

regardless of the explicit evidence revealing premodern Persianate women's relationship with this concept.[8] Understanding female power vis-à-vis the lens of female *javānmardī* offers a unique perspective on how historical women not merely reflect traditional *javānmardī* virtues, but also reshaped them by establishing new associations to assert their power over authoritative male figures during the middle and early modern periods. *Javānmardī* offers a more nuanced and concrete lens to analyze the reach and expressions of premodern Persianate female power. To elucidate this concept's wide temporal span, I use the word "premodern" when describing materials and discourses from these two periods.

Understanding *javānmardī* as a male-only concept presents a historiographical limit on premodern Persianate discourses of gender and sexuality. Consider, for example, *javānmardī* manuals written in the fourteenth century by Mirza Abd al-Azim Khan Qarib-i Garakani stating how:

> *futuwwat* is not for the hermaphrodite, and neither for a woman, because the two are equal. The hermaphrodite is the person who is neither a man nor a woman, and is imputed to [engage] in shameful acts, which are despised among men. And there is no *futuwwat* for women because the Prophet said, "They are incomplete in intelligence and in religion."[9]

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[8] See Gavin Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, The New Middle Ages, volume 6 (Basingstoke London: Macmillan, 1998); Guity Nashat and Lois Beck, *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800* (University of Illinois Press, 2003); Bruno De Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran: The Khatuns, 1206-1335* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 248; Ṭāʾif Kamāl al-Azharī, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*, Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Fatima Mernissi, Mary Jo Lakeland, and Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 5. printing (Minneapolis: Univ. Minnesota Press, 2009); Edited by Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain, eds., *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Leslie Penn Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, Studies in Middle Eastern History (New York Oxford: Oxford university press, 1993); Sarah F. D. Ansari and Vanessa Martin, eds., *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*, First issued in paperback, Royal Asiatic Society Books (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

[9] Lloyd V. J. Ridgeon, *Jawanmardi: A Sufi Code of Honour* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 6,8.

Using Garakani's manual as an example, I argue that the way he equates women with hermaphrodites hints at the fact that women were transgressing gender norms by embodying virtues and participating in activities associated with *javānmardī*– something he was not happy about.[10] Moreover, scholars working on *javānmardī,* such as Emma Flatt, have stated the way youth was understood as a period of "dangerous liminality" in the Persianate tradition. At a time of transition and potential transgression, the "*javān*" (youth) becomes a gender-ambiguous figure because, unlike adults, they lack the defining characteristics that differentiate male from female bodies.[11] Flatt's historical blind spot comes across in the way her research acknowledges the inherent gender ambiguity within *javānmardī*, which she nonetheless defines as a male-only concept.

Lloyd Ridegeon has argued for the need to understand *javānmardī* as an elastic concept that changes according to "social, economic and political factors" and how it transcends "gender distinctions."[12] Moreover, Ridegeon also states how the "ideal of *javānmardī* (bravery, loyalty, hospitality and so on) was appropriated by and for women. This is indicated in the Persian medieval romance literature *Samak-i ʿayyār*, in which females play a prominent role and adopt the attribute themselves."[13] While Ridgeon talks about the protean and gender-transgressive nature of *javānmardī*, he sees women's

[10] For more information on hermaphrodites, see Paula Sanders, "Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law," in *Women in Middle Eastern History* (Yale University Press, 2008), 74–96.
[11] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan.", 155.
[12] Lloyd Ridgeon, "Introduction: The Felon, the Faithful and the Fighter: The Protean Face of the Chivalric Man (Javanmard) in the Medieval Persianate and Modern Iranian Worlds," in *Javanmardi*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, The Ethics and Practice of Persianate Perfection (Gingko, 2018), 19-20.
[13] Ridgeon, *Jawanmardi*., 8. For more information on the different ways women embodied *futuwwah* from a Sufic perspective, see Lloyd V. J. Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran*, First published, Routledge Sufi Series, [Neue Serie], 10 (London New York: Routledge, 2010)., 33-34.

participation in *javānmardī* as confined to the realm of the spiritual, specifically to Sufism.[14] This narrow focus causes him to overlook how women used other means to embody and even outperform men in not just spiritual, but also physical aspects of *javānmardī*, such as hunting, wrestling, horse-riding, and martial combat, thereby redefining and expanding its virtues.[15]

Overlooking *javānmardī*'s gender-ambiguous nature and its strong connection with women has further limited scholarly understandings of other concepts related to *javānmardī* that have predominantly been studied from a male-centered perspective or even ignored. These range from kingship, martial arts, the 'mirrors for princes'/*adab* genre, and love, exemplifying masculine honor (*ghayrat*), coquetry (*nāz),* and eloquent speech (*sukhan*)– concepts that I explore throughout my dissertation. Thus, as demonstrated from my treatment of primary and secondary sources, like Garakani, Flatt, and Ridegeon, I will be "casting a queer eye on familiar texts."[16] This allows me to re-read various old texts in new ways, thus revealing previously unrecognized references to female *javānmardī.*

How to Study Female *Javānmardī*

The approaches I will be using to study female *javānmardī* are as follows: revealing the Persianate kingship as an integrated matriarchy and the premodern Persianate world as topsy-turvy, understanding *javānmardī* as a protean and performative

[14] Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism*, 34, 115.
[15] For more information on how women were seen as more heroic than their male counterparts, see Gaillard, "Alexander the Great or Būrān-Dukht."
[16] I borrow this phrase from Valerie Traub, "The Past Is a Foreign Country? The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies," in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, ed. Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 39 (Cambridge, Mass: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2008),15.

concept, creating new words to understand female *javānmardī,* and using a transmedia approach. To gain a deeper understanding of the importance and impact of female *javānmardī,* it is first important to understand the nature of Persianate kingship and its relationship with female *javānmardī* in the premodern Persianate world. Ridgeon blames the "patriarchal cultural nature of the Persian world in the post-Mongol period" for being the reason why women could not participate in associations linked to *javānmardī*.[17] However, premodern Persianate societies were not wholly patriarchal. In fact, they exhibited intriguing paradoxes in their construction of kingship and cultural norms. A closer examination of creation myths, origin stories, and rituals associated with Persianate kingship reveals a surprising dynamic: many middle and early modern Persianate kings relied heavily upon women to consolidate and legitimize imperial power.[18] In the pre-Islamic context, kings from the Sasanian empire (224-651) worshiped Anahita as their patron goddess and saw her as the one providing *farr* (divine legitimacy) for their kingship.[19] Interestingly, Anahita is also associated with fertility, warfare, and *javānmardī.*[20] Anahita is an example showing how female *javānmard*s were interlinked with Persianate Sasanian kingship. Other empires from the middle periods, such as the Seljuks (1040-1157), believed the creation of the world was only made possible by the help given by Goddess Aq-Ana (white mother).[21] The Mongols (1206-1368) also understood themselves as descending from Alan Qo'a, a mythical female figure. Similarly, the founder of the Timurid dynasty (1370-1507), Timur (1336-1405), could

[17] Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism*., 83.
[18] For more information on paradoxical patriarchy, see Susan D. Amussen and Jordan R. Collver, "Unruly Women and Failed Patriarchs: Paradoxical Patriarchy in Early Modern England," October 1, 2023, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/76p774sp.
[19] Gaillard, "Alexander the Great or Būrān-Dukht.", 6.
[20] For more information, see chapter 4 of my dissertation.
[21] Azharī, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*, 287.

only legitimize his rule by marrying women from the house of Chinggis Khan, the founder of the Mongol empire. The early modern Safavids and Mughals, descendants of the Timurids, inherited and continued their predecessors' tradition of intermarriages and relying on women to expand, legitimize, and defend their kingship against rival contenders.[22] These historical evidence point to how Persianate kingship had integrated matriarchal elements where a king reigns, but his power is significantly influenced or even dependent on his powerful royal female counterparts who arguably were *javānmard*s themselves. Perhaps one can go so far as to say that royal women were expected to be *javānmard*s so that they can effectively contribute to empire building– something this dissertation demonstrates especially in Chapter 2.[23]

Realizing the integrated matriarchal elements embedded within Persianate kingship and its relationship with female *javānmardī* sheds light on the fluidity of gender roles amongst royal and non-elite classes in middle and early modern Persianate

[22] See Natif, Mika, "Preliminary Thoughts on Portraits of Mughal Women in Illustrated Histories from Akbar's Time," in *Reflections on Mughal Art & Culture*, ed. Roda Ahluwalia and K.R. Cama Oriental Institute (Seminar on 'Mughal Art and Culture', New Delhi, India: Niyogi Books : The K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 2021), 39–52; Maria Szuppe, *Status, Knowledge, and Politics: Women in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran* (na, 1800); Balkrishan Shivram, "Imperial Wet Nurses in the Reign of Mughal Emperor Akbar," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33, no. 2 (April 2023): 351–68; Lisa Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia*, Paperback edition (London New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016); Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Lisa Balabanlilar, "The Begims of the Mystic Feast: Turco-Mongol Tradition in the Mughal Harem," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69 (2010): 123–47; Amanda Leong, "'If Only That Pitiless Blade Had Pierced My Own Heart and Eyes': Mughal Royal Women's Grief as a Form of Political Rhetoric," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 2024.

[23] I find Theresa Earenfight's idea of "moving beyond women in power as exceptional," useful in helping me come up with this analysis. See Theresa Earenfight, "Where Do We Go From Here? Some Thoughts on Power and Gender in the Middle Ages," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 51, no. 2 (April 15, 2016): 124; Allyson M. Poksa's concept of agentic gender norms, specifically the way early modern women were expected to act independently, achieve success, and exert power and authority in many aspects of their lives useful. See Allyson M. Poska, "The Case for Agentic Gender Norms for Women in Early Modern Europe," *Gender & History* 30, no. 2 (July 2018): 1-2.

societies. It also allows us to understand why women were depicted as icons of masculine perfection in different mediums created, commissioned, and even used by men to showcase their own associations with *javānmardī*.[24] Furthermore, it allows us to understand how women were able to carry out various transgressions within the framework of *javānmardī* and even sought to transmit its related virtues to their male and female descendants.

Most importantly, these women, their male counterparts, and even the general public from the middle and early modern periods were also aware that they lived in a topsy-turvy world that did not conform to the ideal of a stable and orderly society.[25] While many kings were men, not all of them were able to live up to the ideal masculine virtues associated with *javānmardī.* In fact, middle and early modern Persianate history is filled with examples of "unmanly kings" failing to live up to the ideals of *javānmardī.*[26] There are also various examples of women outperforming their male counterparts in embodying *javānmardī*, as demonstrated throughout my dissertation. Moreover, some of these female *javānmard*s even took over male kingship and became female rulers, revealing how Persianate kingship was for some time a matriarchal enterprise.[27]

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[24] For more information on how gender roles were depicted as fluid in medieval Persian literature, see Shayani, "The Representation of Women in Premodern Persian Epic Romance Poetry.", 13.

[25] For more information on definitions of topsy-turvy, see Susan Dwyer Amussen and David Underdown, *Gender, Culture and Politics in England, 1560-1640: Turning the World Upside Down* (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 13.

[26] One example is emperor Humayun (1506-1556) from the Mughal empire. See Ali Anooshahr, "The King Who Would Be Man: The Gender Roles of the Warrior King in Early Mughal History," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18, no. 3 (July 2008): 327–340.

[27] For examples of female rulers during the Sasanian, Ilkhanid and Safavid contexts, see Jenny Rose, "Three Queens, Two Wives and a Goddess: The Roles and Images of Women in Sasanian Iran," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. Gavin Hambly, The New Middle Ages, volume 6 (Basingstoke London: Macmillan, 1998), 29–54; De Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran*, 65-129; Shohreh Gholsorkhi, "Pari Khan Khanum: A Masterful Safavid Princess," *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 3/4 (1995): 153.

To gain a better understanding of how both historical and fictional women utilized and reshaped the concept of *javānmardī* to show power, one should acknowledge its performative and protean nature. The archetype of the *javānmard* has roots in Sassanian and pre-Islamic Arab warrior traditions of the champion (*pahlavān*), whose primary duty consisted of protecting their kingdom through selfless acts of valor. Due to its military roots, *javānmard*s were expected to perform a kind of physical perfection encapsulated in the concept of *adab* (proper conduct) so that they can defend their kingdom from invasions.[28] This ranges from knowing how to dress and eat, how to hunt and wrestle, use weapons and ride horses, how to recognize good poetry and have knowledge of good musicianship, and how to be a good companion to a king, amongst many others.[29] In other words, *javānmardī* was understood as a malleable performance to be refined through habitual physical and mental exercises.[30]

Judith Butler, in her study of gender performativity, argues how gender identities are established through iterations and performances of normative gender codes.[31] Building on Butler, we can understand that in the premodern Persianate sphere young-manliness was understood as not something inherently possessed by males, but as a set of behaviors and expectations that could be performed by anyone regardless of their class, race, or gender to various extents. Understanding *javānmardī* as a gender performative concept allows us to see how women could adopt the associated codes of

[28] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan.", 165.
[29] Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 77.
[30] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan.", 153.
[31] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006), 15.

conduct and excellence of *javānmardī*, using its performative aspects to assert their own power and influence within premodern Persianate society, from Iran to China.

An early text that discusses *javānmardī* is the *Qābusnāmah*, a notable advice/ "mirror for princes" manual written by the eleventh-century Ziyarid (931-1090) ruler, Kaykavus (1021-1087) for his son.[32] This helps us understand the significance of *javānmardī* to kingship and *javānmardī*'s relationship with the "mirrors for princes" genre. In the thirteenth century, *javānmardī* became a significant concept within Sufism. From a Sufi perspective, the ideal *javānmard* should embody both outward and inward perfection. This included qualities like wisdom, piety, generosity, magnanimity, and the ability to resist the temptations of the carnal soul (*nafs*).[33]

Despite *javānmardī*'s associations with perfection, Lloyd Ridegeon has mentioned that 'chivalry' falls short of an adequate definition for *javānmardī* because icons of *javānmardī* are not simply celebrated for their ability to adhere to virtue. One example of a traditional Persianate *javānmardī* icon is the *ʿayyār* (trickster) figure, who is renowned for being strong and brave but also for using "deviousness," specifically "cunning and trickery, drugs and disguises" in the name of pursuing justice.[34] The way trickery is a *javānmardī* virtue is a good example of the topsy-turvy nature of *javānmardī*. In addition to the *ʿayyār*, other *javānmardī* archetypes are champion wrestler (*pahlavān*), the warrior (*gẖāzī*) and the bandit (*luṭi*).[35] Another famous female *javānmard* in Persianate culture is Gurdafarid, a female warrior from the *Shāhnamah* celebrated for using not just her

[32] Ridgeon, "Introduction.", 2-3.
[33] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan.", 156-157.
[34] Ridgeon, "Introduction.", 3-4.
[35] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan", 156; Ridgeon, "Introduction.", 1-27.

military prowess, but also tricks that enabled her to defeat her male foe and defend her homeland.[36] Gurdafarid is a good example demonstrating the multifaceted and overlapping ways women performed *javānmardī* that this dissertation looks at.

Ridegeon has proposed categories like "the felon, the faithful, and the fighter" to understand "disparate individuals who have been associated with *javānmardī.*"[37] Apart from showing how these categories also apply to female individuals as seen from my examination of female wrestlers, female *ʿayyār*s, female warriors and many others, my dissertation seeks to create new words to reimagine the disparate ways women embodied and redefined the ideals of *javānmardī.* In order to do this, much like Hodgson coined the term "Persianate," I will introduce new phrases such as "textual trickery," "glamor politics," "bejeweled female crossdressing warrior," and other coinages throughout the chapters of my dissertation. However, it is important to remember that these new words are not arbitrary. In fact, they are rooted in traditional understandings of *javānmardī* but reflect the various conditions of their time. This can help prevent what Ridgeon calls the trap of "incoherent relativism" where female *javānmardī* can be anything and everything to the point it becomes meaningless.[38] To further avoid falling into the trap of incoherent relativism, my dissertation, especially Chapter 2 and 3, provide examples of what is not female *javānmardī* as well as other examples of un-*javānmardī* behavior that deviate from the concept's ideals.

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[36] For more information on Gurdafarid's story, see Dick Davis, "Women in the Shahnameh: Exotics and Natives, Rebellious Legends, and Dutiful Histories," in *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity*, ed. Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), 74-75.
[37] Ridgeon, "Introduction.", 3.
[38] Ibid., 19.

Ruby Lal has described the invention of new words as a "rather desperate solution" to understanding female power in the early modern Persianate context. Instead, she argues that scholars should engage in new ways with existing vocabularies and debates.[39] I do not completely agree. Instead, I argue both approaches should be employed for a more nuanced understanding of female *javānmardī*. Due to the protean nature of *javānmardī,* putting new phrases in conversation with "existing vocabularies" allows us to get closer to the different ways women not only adhered to the original language of *javānmardī*, but also created new associations and discourses with this concept that is a result of the various political, social, and economics factors of their time. Furthermore, when it comes to existing vocabularies, I bring to center stage understudied and overlooked terms associated with the concept that have such as beauty, *sukhan* (eloquent speech) that can help us better understand female *javānmardī*. Lastly, apart from using empirically based evidence, my dissertation also embraces ambiguity as an interpretative framework for recovering representations of female *javānmardī* in these visual and textual narratives, especially those of unknown provenance.[40]

Scholars such as Afsaneh Najmabadi and Babak Rahimi have explored how women were praised as *javānmard*s due to their ability to embody its virtues, such as zeal and courage in the Qajar period (1789-1925), and in connection to the 2009 post-election street protests in Iran, also known as the "Green Movement."[41] Expanding on Najmabadi

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[39] Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*., 14.
[40] For more information on how the way scholars have been using ambiguity to reimagine female power, see Ruby Lal, *Vagabond Princess: The Great Adventures of Gulbadan*, 1st ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024).
[41] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 219-222; Babak Rahimi, "Digital Javanmardi: Chivalric Ethics and Imagined Iran on the Internet," in *Javanmardi*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, The Ethics and Practice of Persianate Perfection (Gingko, 2018), 292.

and Rahimi's work, my dissertation shows female *javānmardī* was not unique to the nineteenth-century or modern-day context. Instead, it has always been a traditional part of middle and early modern Persianate cultures and societies.

To demonstrate this, my dissertation uses a "transmedia" approach where visual representations of female *javānmardī* are put in conversation with textual sources– created and patronized by both men and women or of unknown provenance. The visual sources include illustrated manuscripts, paintings, and lusterware. The textual sources, on the other hand, encompass travel accounts, poems, chronicles, advice literature, and memoirs. This transmedial approach presents a broader, richer archive for understanding how female *javānmardī* was depicted and performed across various mediums in different periods.[42] Given how the middle and early modern Persianate world was multidimensional and topsy-turvy, applying a transmedial approach where I put fictional sources in conversation with historical sources brings us closer historically to how female *javānmardī* manifested in the everyday lives of various individuals during those periods. My dissertation functions as a tapestry weaving together various archives that have traditionally been studied separately according to academic discipline. When understood side-by-side, my archival sources present a larger picture of female *javānmardī* that would otherwise be difficult to apprehend.

Roxana Zenhari's work on the Oxford *Samak-i ʿayyār* (Samak the *ayyar*) illustrated manuscript, particularly her observation on how illustrators would convey female *ʿayyār*s as *javānmard*s by drawing them with "a shawl around [their] waist," has been useful in enabling me to explore other symbols adorning different female figures to

[42] For more information on how textual-visual analysis is carried out in medieval Persian art, see Sheila Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Persian Art*, Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

convey their *javānmardī* identities. These range from tattoos and mustaches as well as beards– symbols that I will be delving into in chapter one of my dissertation.[43] My dissertation brings her visual art/fictional insights into conversation with historiographical evidence. By close-reading historical accounts, I examine the other ways real-life Persianate women from the middle and early modern periods adorned themselves to convey their *javānmardī* identities.

Scholars have collaborated with other scholars across disciplinary fields to produce edited interdisciplinary volumes uncovering the different ways women asserted their power and also to understand sexualities across the Islamicate world.[44] My dissertation builds on this established approach by demonstrating how interdisciplinary exploration in the Persianate context does not need to be done on a mass collaborative scale but can be effectively conducted within a focused study. The interdisciplinary nature of my dissertation does not simply lie in the 'transmedia' sources I use, but in how I use them to narrate the various stories of female *javānmardī*. One example can be found in the way in Chapter 1 where I use accounts written by Chinese travelers passing by Iran during the twelfth century, specifically their observations regarding women with facial hair, in conjunction with visual representations of bearded female figures to argue that female *javānmard*s did not simply exist in the fictional realm, but were in fact historical figures. Moreover, by showing how Chinese female *javānmard*s were adorned with

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[43] Roxana Zenhari, *The Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār: Analysis of an Illustrated Inju Manuscript*, Beiträge Zur Kulturgeschichte Des Islamischen Orients, Bd. 42 (Dortmund: Verlag für Orientkunde, 2014), 62.

[44] Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*; Nashat and Beck, *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*; Kathryn Babayan et al., eds., *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 39 (Cambridge, Mass: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2008).

mustaches by Iranian painters, my dissertation shows how we can see Sino-Iranian connections differently. By using different sources from two seemingly unrelated fields, my dissertation confronts the various scholarly oversight in Persianate studies towards female *javānmardī* and demonstrates the value of an interdisciplinary approach that can reveal new insights and challenge traditional assumptions. Another example is where I use premodern Persianate sources to expand theories of gender and sexuality and feminist criticism. My dissertation demonstrates the practical application of a robust interdisciplinary framework, moving beyond simply paying lip service to the concept of interdisciplinary. As a result, my work not only contributes to Persianate studies but also offers a model for interdisciplinary research that can be adapted to other disciplines and subfields.

Having first-hand evidence from women of various social classes in the middle and early modern periods demonstrating their literacy and intellectual concerns regarding manliness is crucial for my dissertation. This approach allows me to reimagine female engagement and reception to various 'transmedia' representations of female *javānmardī* created and commissioned by both men and women. Dick Davis, Maria Szuppe, and Dominic Brookshaw's scholarship have enabled me to uncover the ways female poets from different social backgrounds, ranging from rulers, princesses to courtesans to courtly female scribes to enslaved people and officers' wives from the middle and early modern periods, were highly literate. Their poems showed a deft mastery of different poetic techniques usually coded as masculine.[45]

[45] Dick Davis, ed., *The Mirror of My Heart: A Thousand Years of Persian Poetry by Women* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021); Maria Szuppe, "The Female Intellectual Milieu in Timurid and Post-Timurid Herāt: Faxri Heravi's Biography of Poetesses, 'Javāher Al-'Ajāyeb,'" *Oriente Moderno* 15 (76), no. 2 (1996): 119–137; Didem Z. Havlioğlu and Mihri Hatun, *Mihrî Hatun: Performance, Gender-Bending, and Subversion in Ottoman Intellectual History*, First edition,

Even though the work done by scholars mentioned above does not directly tackle female *javānmardī,* they have shown me how manliness was a concept female poets were exploring and redefining in the middle and early modern Persianate contexts. Some used their poems to explore their connections to sovereignty, to manly virtues and challenge the perception of manliness as an exclusively male domain.[46] Others used their poems to assert superiority over their male counterparts and express dissatisfaction with 'unmanly' men and patriarchal traditions, such as arranged marriages.[47] Interestingly, we also have evidence showing how female poets were not only inspired by male poets.[48] In fact, they also read and credited the works of other 'manly' female poets as their influences.[49] Nasrin Askari's foundational scholarship on "mirror for princesses" has revealed the ways elite Persianate women from the middle and early modern periods, aware of maternal influence in the upbringing of future male monarchs, patronized male writers to construct entertaining instructive manuals that could teach women virtuous behavior so that ideal kingship can prevail.[50] While these scholarships focus on looking at how premodern Persianate elite women wrote poems and commissioned illustrated manuscripts, my dissertation expands on these scholarships by looking at women's acts of writing and patronage in relation to female *javānmardī.* The availability of historical

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Gender, Culture, and Politics in the Middle East (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2017); Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, "Odes of a Poet-Princess: The Ghazals of Jahān-Malik Khātūn," *Iran* 43 (2005): 173–195.

[46] See Davis, *The Mirror of My Heart*., 144; Havlioğlu and Mihri Hatun, *Mihrî Hatun*., 116

[47] See Davis, *The Mirror of My Heart*., 138, 143, 144, 145; also see the male-female rivalry between the Timurid female intellectual Bije Monajjeme and Jami, see Szuppe, "The Female Intellectual Milieu in Timurid and Post-Timurid Herāt.", 132

[48] Szuppe, "The Female Intellectual Milieu in Timurid and Post-Timurid Herāt.", 133.

[49] See Brookshaw, "Odes of a Poet-Princess.", 177-178.

[50] Nasrin Askari, "A Mirror for Princesses: Mūnis-Nāma, A Twelfth-Century Collection of Persian Tales Corresponding to the Ottoman Turkish Tales of the Faraj Baʿd al-Shidda," *Narrative Culture* 5, no. 1 (2018): 121–40; Nasrin Askari, "Élite Folktales: Munes-Nāma, Ketāb-e Dāstān, and Their Audiences," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 12, no. 1 (December 5, 2019): 32–61.

evidence demonstrating the way historical premodern Persianate women conceptualized, discussed, wrote about, and enacted manliness is crucial. It reveals how women did not need their male counterparts or even scholars like myself to speak for them. This positions my dissertation as a work of recovery where I investigate how, why, where and when premodern Persianate women articulated, embodied and expanded understandings of *javānmardī*.

Ridegeon has argued how women were not able to participate in Sufi *futūwah* groups and thus, female *javānmardī* had "no association with a structured organization."[51] However, my dissertation reveals a different story. Building on the different scholarships mentioned above, especially Szuppe's work on the presence of different Timurid female intellectuals in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth Herat and Didem Havlioğlu's use of Mihri Khatun's poems to explore Ottoman intellectual history, my dissertation demonstrates the existence of a vibrant middle and early modern Persianate female intellectual culture centered around female *javānmardī*.

Going beyond the realm of poetry, my dissertation explores other transmedial ways by which women shaped and participated in this culture. Some examples include an illustrated manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsah* commissioned by a Timurid princess, ʿIsmat al-Dunya, a mirror for princesses titled *Humayunnamah* (Book of Humayun) written by Mughal princess Gulbadan Begum (1522-1603), the *Kitāb-i-dāstān* (Book of Tales), a mirror for princesses illustrated manuscript possibly commissioned by a Safavid royal woman and a painting of Safavid king, Shah Tahmasb (1514-1576) painted by a seventeenth-century Mughal female painter Sahifa Banu Begum. By paying attention to the way these female *javānmard*s used various resources to build on, explore, convey, and

[51] Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism*., 83. 34-35.

pass on their understandings of female *javānmardī*, my dissertation not only offers a feminist perspective on their remarkable civic agency but also reveals their contribution to Persianate ideas of kinship and kingship.[52]

Moreover, by analyzing articulations of *javānmardī* by female intellectuals alongside those of their male counterparts, this dissertation illuminates both shared and divergent understandings and usages of female *javānmardī.* This comparative approach provides a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics and how it influenced the cultural and political landscape during the middle and early modern periods of the Persianate world. Most importantly, paying attention to the concept's transmission and adaptation by different groups across the middle and early modern periods allows us to realize female *javānmardī'*s continuous relevance better.

Rethinking Islamicate Sexualities

My dissertation on female *javānmardī* expands feminist criticism, theories of gender, sexuality, race, and power beyond a Western/Eurocentric paradigm as well as research on "the Persianate world." Joan Scott emphasizes the value of gender as a "useful category of historical analysis" for generating "new perspectives on old questions."[53] My dissertation extends Scott's methodology by not just paying attention to gender in a bounded geography or linguistic tradition, but also correcting misgendered concepts like *javānmardī* that have been understood from an exclusive male focus.

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[52] For more information on intellectual history in the Persianate context, see İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Amin Razavi, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[53] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1075.

Interestingly, Scott also argues how "in medieval Islamic political theory, the symbols of political power alluded most often to sex between men and boys, suggesting [...] the irrelevance of women to any notion of politics and public life."[54] Scott is a good example showing the limitations in highly celebrated but Eurocentric theories making up gender and feminist studies, especially when they try to engage with women in Islamicate societies without specialist knowledge in the respective languages or literature.[55]

For this reason, my research on female *javānmardī* joins the work of other scholars working on the Islamicate world to engage with and expand dominant theories of gender and sexuality.[56] One of these scholars, Valerie Traub, calls for fellow scholars working on gender and sexuality in the Islamicate world not to be like their Euro-American counterparts working on lesbian/gay/queer studies who are "reluctant to take on, attempt to understand, and most of all find their knowledge, terms, and central concepts challenged and transformed by other cultural paradigms, models, and questions."[57] Instead, she argues that scholars like myself should engage with Western queer theory, while "radically refigur[ing] them according to specific cultural and political exigencies."[58]

My dissertation exemplifies Traub's approach, one example being the way I use Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to better understand female *javānmardī*. However, my dissertation goes beyond simply applying these theories. I expand queer

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[54] Ibid, 1071.
[55] For more information on how scholars working on gender and sexuality from Euro-American traditions are reluctant to engage with other cultural paradigms, models and questions, see Traub, "The Past Is a Foreign Country? The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies.", 12.
[56] For more information on how other scholars have used Islamicate texts to engage and refine Western theories and concepts, see Babayan et al., *Islamicate Sexualities*.
[57] Traub, "The Past Is a Foreign Country? The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies.", 12.
[58] Ibid., 9.

theories by scholars like Gayle Rubin, Eve Sedgwick and Michael Foucualt. Rubin's "traffic in women" posits that patriarchal societies exchange women as "gifts" among men to solidify male kinship. Sedgwick's theory of asymmetry and erotic triangles between men explores women as conduits enabling the facilitation of male homosocial desire rooted in homophobia.[59] Michel Foucault, in his study of ethics, has seen it as male, specifically "by men [...] to men [...] in which women figured only as objects, or at most, as partners that one had best train, educate and watch over when one had them under one's power, but stay away from when they were under the power of someone else (father, husband, tutor)."[60] While these scholars' theories are mostly based on Euro-American contexts, premodern Persianate societies, with their less rigid patriarchal structures and matriarchal influences, exhibit a more malleable and integrated view of gender roles. Unlike the static roles of "gifts," "conduits," and "objects" for men as suggested by Rubin, Sedgwick, and Foucault, women in premodern Persianate societies had nuanced and multifaceted roles and were capable of agency and even dominance, exemplified by the female *javānmard.* My dissertation calls for a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in historical contexts and highlights the importance of considering non-Western, specifically Persianate perspectives in feminist and queer theory.

For a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in the middle and early modern Persianate world, my dissertation also utilizes the paradigms of "failed

[59] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York London: Monthly review press, 1975), 157–210; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Wayne Koestenbaum, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Thirthieth anniversary edition, Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016)., 1139–1144.
[60] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 22.

patriarchs" and "unruly women" developed by Susan Amussen and David Underdown, originally applied to seventeenth-century England. Amussen and Underdown use these paradigms to examine from a gendered perspective how various ineffective men and disruptive women challenged, or "inverted" the patriarchal social order and hierarchy that governed seventeenth-century England. They explored the pervasive anxieties society felt regarding these inversions reflected in print media, plays, street performances, and other cultural expressions.[61] Similarly, in the Qajar context, Najmabadi has observed how "women's presence on the streets (women-out-of-place), was a sign of things gone-wrong; gender-out-of-order signified general sociocultural disorder." By "calling patriotic women manly," writers of the Qajar period tried to use it as a way to shame men into action, to get women off the streets and restore a gendered order so as "to prove that not all Iranians are shameless and women-tempered."[62]

My dissertation builds on and revise Amussen and Underdown's paradigms by exploring "female *javānmard*s" and "anxious patriarchs" in the unique context of the middle and early modern Persianate periods. While Najmabadi's observation of the Qajar context offers valuable insights, I delve further back in time. Unlike seventeenth-century England or the Qajar period, the dominant order in the middle and early modern Persianate contexts was not strictly patriarchal, evident in the integrated matriarchal aspects woven into the concept of kingship during the middle and early modern periods, creating an inherent fluid dynamic regarding gender roles. As a result, the transmedia sources I look at from this unique time period reveal various inversions carried out by both fictional and real life "female *javānmard*s" and "anxious patriarchs." These

[61] Amussen and Underdown, *Gender, Culture and Politics in England, 1560-1640*, 3-4.
[62] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 220-221.

transmedia sources further reveal a "battle of the sexes" where both sides sought to invert or subvert each other, to tip the scales in their favor and redefine their positions in society, sometimes in a playful way.

On the one hand, we have examples of women like the enslaved Chinese female musician Fitnah, who uses her bull-lifting performance to showcase her *javānmardī* association and reverse power dynamics between her and Bahram Gur.[63] On the other hand, we have "anxious patriarchs" seeking to dominate or co-opt female *javānmard*s to assert patriarchal hegemony, exemplified by how Bahram Gur tries to kill Fitnah. The various inversions, evident across various media, contributed significantly to the topsy-turvy nature of the Persianate world. This constant negotiation of power and the blurring of gender lines fostered innovation and intriguing artistic and literary phenomena, offering a richer understanding of fluid power dynamics in the middle and early modern Persianate world.

Crucial to my study is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, in which carnivals function as temporary class inversions leading to the reestablishment of the hegemonic sociopolitical order.[64] Building on Bakhtin, my dissertation uncovers the carnivalesque nature of female *javānmardī*. I observe that these "unruly" women, while transgressive, did not necessarily seek to entirely dismantle Persianate patriarchy. In fact, its ultimate goal was to use inversions to restore and stabilize a patriarchal Persianate kingship amenable to feminine virtues and matriarchal values.

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[63] For more information on how Fitnah was able to reverse power dynamics by making Bahram Gur beg for forgiveness, see Alyssa Gabbay, "Love Gone Wrong, Then Right Again: Male/Female Dynamics in the Bahrām Gūr–Slave Girl Story," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (December 2009): 684.

[64] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, 1st Midland book ed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 1-58.

The story of Fitnah and her "interracial romance" with Bahram Gur also exemplifies the different ways Persianate culture explores and conveys not just gender but also racial and class inversions. Why should Fitnah be labeled a Persianate woman when her ethnicity is Chinese? Scholars working on the Persianate world have called for the need to go beyond an Iranian nationalist paradigm.[65] One example is seen in Mana Kia's work where she has shown how different ethnic groups from West, Central, and South Asia in the tumultuous period roughly between the fall of the Safavid empire in the early eighteenth century and the early Qajar era about a century later saw each other as kins linked by the shared cultural idiom of *adab*, or what she calls "proper forms of aesthetic style and ethical conduct."[66] My dissertation expands Kia's scholarship and provides new understandings of the Persianate world by showing how Chinese women, due to their ability to embody *javānmardī***,** were also viewed as Persianate kin by West, Central, and South Asian groups. The Chinese female *javānmard* reveals another frontier of the Persianate world located in East Asia, specifically China.

Davis, in his study of the women and ethnicity in the *Shāhnamah*, has argued how most of the strong female characters who enjoy more agency in Persianate culture are foreign and non-Iranian.[67] My dissertation expands on Davis' observation by showing how out of all foreign women, Chinese women from both royal and enslaved

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[65] An unexhaustive list of such works include the following: Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds., *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, Iran Studies, volume 18 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019); A. C. S. Peacock and D. G. Tor, *Medieval Central Asia and the Persianate World: Iranian Tradition and Islamic Civilisation*, I.B. Tauris & BIPS Persian Studies Series 7 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019); James Pickett, *Polymaths of Islam: Power and Networks of Knowledge in Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2020).

[66] Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020), 9.

[67] Davis, "Women in the Shahnameh.", 73-74.

backgrounds stand out. This is seen from how they are frequently depicted visually and textually in the Persianate context not simply as "one of us," to borrow the phrase from Davis, but as "better than us," particularly due to their ability to outperform their Iranian male partners, or what I term as "anxious patriarchs" when it comes to embodying *javānmardī* ideals.[68] The figure of the Chinese female *javānmard* not only reveals the topsy-turvy nature of the premodern Persianate world. In fact, she also inverts the dialogue on race within premodern Persianate studies that have traditionally focused on South Asia to pay attention to East Asia.[69] Moreover, the way Chinese women from royal and non-royal backgrounds are celebrated as *javānmard*s also answers to scholarship like that of Emma Kalb, who has complained about "a relative neglect of gender norms beyond elite circles" in the middle and early modern Persianate contexts.[70]

Scholars of medieval critical race studies such as Geraldine Heng have relied heavily on European sources and focused primarily on understanding racial xenophobia in the medieval context, as seen from how she describes medieval romances as reinforcing essential differences among people.[71] By paying attention to how the Chinese female *javānmard* complicates understandings of "us" versus "other," my dissertation expands critical race theory from beyond a Eurocentric focus and shows how paying

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[68] Ibid, 75.

[69] Sunil Sharma, "The Indian Woman in a Persianate World," in *Reflections on Mughal Art & Culture*, ed. Roda Ahluwalia and K.R. Cama Oriental Institute (Seminar on 'Mughal Art and Culture', New Delhi, India: Niyogi Books : The K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 2021), 309–22; Supriya Gandhi, "Locating Race in Mughal India," *Renaissance Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (December 2022): 1180–1220, https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2022.330; Juan Cole, "The Imagined Embrace: Gender, Identity and Iranian Ethnicity in Jahangiri Paintings," in *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors*, ed. Michel, Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2003), 49–62.

[70] Emma Kalb, "Framing Gender in Mughal South Asia," *History Compass* 19, no. 11 (2021): e12691, 10.

[71] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 7; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108381710.

attention to sources from the Persianate world instead of focusing on European medieval romances can reveal the fluidity of premodern race relations beyond racial xenophobia and as coextensive with gender inversions, while also expanding Bakhtin's carnivalesque beyond feudal Europe.

The historian Nile Green advocates for a focus on the Persianate's limitations, specifically "what forms of social interaction or organization Persian could not cope with, and the political, social, and semantic fault lines that the language was unable to bridge."[72] For a different understanding of the westernmost frontier of the Persianate world located in nineteenth-century England and Ireland, Humberto Garcia reveals how Persianate male travelers' relationship with Englishwomen's beautiful bodies allows for an alternative understanding of imperial differences and similarities beyond an Anglocentric worldview.[73] Building on and expanding Green and Garcia's approaches, my dissertation focuses on the tensions making up the love stories between Iranian "anxious patriarchs" and "unruly" Chinese female *javānmard*s. Their combative romance, I argue, demarcates the "limits" of the Persianate world, specifically how cultural exchanges were not merely harmonious but also fraught with discord, particularly in the context of Iran's interactions with powerful adversaries like China.[74] In doing so, my dissertation provides an interactive performative model for studying the middle and early modern Persianate world, where power dynamics, gender identity, and political boundaries were constantly shifting.

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[72] Green, *The Persianate World*, 2-3.
[73] Humberto Garcia, *England Re-Oriented: How Central and South Asian Travelers Imagined the West, 1750-1857*, First edition, Critical Perspectives on Empire (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 6-7.
[74] For more information on the ambiguity surrounding Persian husband/foreign wife topos in Persian epic romances, see Davis, "Women in the Shahnameh.", 70.

Chapter overviews

Each chapter of the dissertation presents a case study, delving into a particular theme related to female *javānmardī* and unconstrained by chronology. Chapter 1, "Recovering the Many Faces of Female *Javānmardī* in the 'Transmedia' Sources from the Topsy-Turvy Premodern Persianate World" deciphers symbols adorning female figures in illustrated manuscripts and lusterware from the middle and early modern periods that visually convey their identities as *javānmard*s. These symbols range from tattoos, mustaches, luxury objects, and textiles with specific motifs like the griffin, alongside depictions of female wrestlers, female cross-dressers, and female warriors. By comparing these portrayals with historical accounts, this chapter explores how real-life women adorned themselves with such symbolism, demonstrating that female *javānmardī* was not merely a fictional concept but a lived historical reality. This chapter also examines specific illustrations found in a manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsah* commissioned by a Timurid princess, ʿIsmat al-Dunya, and the Shah Tahmasb *Shāhnamah.* By examining the different choices made when it comes to depicting female *javānmard*s, especially in relation to their male counterparts in both manuscripts, alongside how the manuscripts themselves were used, this chapter further explores the weaponization of female *javānmardī* by both male and female patrons to further their various "inversions," from intimidating their enemies to conveying their power via artistic dominance and contributing to a female intellectual tradition centered around female *javānmardī.* Lastly, this chapter analyzes how a Mughal female painter, Sahifa Banu, used texts and images in her portrait of Shah Tahmasb to invert his masculine

dominance, showcasing her identity as a female *javānmard* capable of defending the glory of the Mughal empire while also contributing to this female intellectual tradition.

Chapter 2 "'I'd rather be married to someone I can control': Female *javānmardī* in Gulbadan Begum's *Humayunnmah* as a Mirror for Princesses" moves beyond the visual medium and explores how early Mughal princess Gulbadan Begum built on and expanded her male and female predecessors' literary legacy and intellectual traditions through creating a mirror for princesses geared toward female readers of the *Humayunnamah*. By remembering her own experiences and those of the women around her, Gulbadan Begum uses her memories to demonstrate how women embodied not only traditional *javānmardī* virtues but also established new associations with the concept itself, deploying "textual trickery," "coquetry," and "glamor politics" to ensure survival, contribute to empire building, and showcase power, especially during the reign of an "unmanly king" like Humayun (1508-1556), the second Mughal emperor. Through her memories, she crafts an instructional manual, a mirror for princesses to teach women how to be *javānmard*s to ensure dynastic continuation and restore ideal patriarchal rule that adheres to matriarchal values. Gulbadan Begum's *Humayunnamah* allows us to understand better how *javānmardī* operated from a historical female perspective while also "inverting" our understanding of *javānmardī* and its other related concepts such as masculine honor (*ghayrat*), which has also been studied from strictly male-centered perspective. Gulbadan Begum's *Humayunnamah* as a mirror for princesses disrupts Foucault's understanding of ethics by showing how it can be what I call "by women to both men and women" and the way women were not only objects, but powerful ethical subjects.

Given the existence of historical evidence of premodern Persianate women in reading and commissioning illustrated manuscripts of Nizami's *Haft Paykar*, Chapter 3, titled "Reinterpretating Nizami's *Haft Paykar* as a Mirror for Princesses" investigates how female *javānmardī* is narrated from a feminine, if not entirely female, perspective. By applying the "mirror for princesses" framework inspired by Safavid women and Gulbadan Begum's contribution to this genre, this chapter challenges traditional interpretations of the *Haft Paykar,* which has primarily been studied as a "mirror for princes."[75] Applying this "mirror for princesses" in the *Haft Paykar* approach allows a deeper understanding of how the text provided valuable lessons and inspiration for elite women. Furthermore, it also reveals *Haft Paykar*'s multifaceted role in enabling female power that reshaped the premodern Persianate world. This chapter also provides a new way of looking at Mikhael Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque and Gayle Rubin's "traffic of women."

Chapter 4, titled "Chinese Women as Models of *Javānmardī* in Premodern Persianate Illustrated Manuscripts," returns us back to visual representations of Chinese female *javānmard*s found in illustrated manuscripts from the Ilkhanid, Jalayirid (1335-1432), Timurid, Mughal, and Safavid periods. This chapter spans a broad temporal range to demonstrate the enduring significance of the Chinese female *javānmard* from the middle period to the early modern era. Ladan Akbarnia uses the concept of *khitā'ī* (of Cathay) to understand how the Ilkhanids asserted their dominance by bringing Chinese objects to Iran and imbuing them with new meanings.[76] Building on Akbarnia's concept,

[75] Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, Course Book (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 178.
[76] Ladan Akbarnia, *Khita'i: Cultural Memory and the Creation of a Mongol Visual Idiom in Iran and Central Asia* (Harvard University, 2007), 14-15.

this chapter examines *khitā'ī* from a gendered perspective, or what I term "gendered *khitā'ī*." I focus on how male rulers utilized the figure of the Chinese female *javānmard* to carry out various inversions towards their male rivals and convey their anxieties. Chapter 4 also focuses on how the defacement of Chinese female *javānmard*s in a Timurid illustrated manuscript brings into relief the potentially subversive power these women can embody. I will also be showing how the Chinese female *javānmard* complicates Sedgwick's concept of an "asymmetrical erotic triangle" where women are suppressed in order to facilitate male bonding.

Lastly, it is important to remember that this dissertation on female *javānmardī* focuses on texts and visual mediums in Persian in order to thread important themes into a coherent picture. Outside its purview are texts and illustrated manuscripts in Arabic, Sanskrit and Turkish that discuss commensurate concepts to female *javānmardī*.[77] Nonetheless, my dissertation can attune scholars working in art history, media, ethnic, gender, Islamicate, Iranian, South Asian, East Asian, and Central Asian studies, feminist, as well as comparative literature, to explore connections to Persianate gender norms.

[77] For an example, see Geoffrey Lewis, "Heroines and Others: In the Heroic Age of the Turks," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. Gavin Hambly, The New Middle Ages, volume 6 (Basingstoke London: Macmillan, 1998).

Chapter One

Recovering the Many Faces of Female *Javānmardī* in the Transmedia Sources from the Topsy-Turvy Premodern Persianate World

During his journey to the court of Genghis Khan in 1220, upon passing by Tabaristan, Iran, Wu-ku-sun Chung Tuan, a Chinese envoy for the Kin emperor, wrote how "[...] amongst [some of the women] there are some who have beards. The women do nothing but sing, dance [...]. Sewing and embroidery are executed by men."[78] Likewise, in a separate narrative by Li Chi Chang, chronicling the journey from 1221-1224 undertaken by his master, Chang Chun (1148), a distinguished Taoist monk whom Genghis Khan extended an invitation to his court, he recounts an interesting tradition in Samarkand:

> If a man grows poor, his wife takes another husband. In the case of the husband going on a journey and not returning home within the space of three months, his wife is allowed to marry another husband. But there is one thing very odd about these people. Some of their women have beards and mustaches.[79]

From both travelers' accounts, we can see how Ilkhanid women assumed masculine authority and in no way were submissive in their relationships with their male counterparts. Most importantly, some of these powerful Ilkhanid women are described as having mustaches and beards. Facial hair has been studied in connection to manliness and, most importantly, gender ambiguity in the Persianate context.[80]

Inspired by these historical bearded and mustached Ilkhanid women from the accounts of Chinese travelers, this chapter's first focus is on recovering unconventional

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[78] E. Bretschneider, *Mediæval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Volume I Chinese Intercourse with the Countries of Central and Western Asia during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Company, Limited, 1910), 31-32.
[79] Ibid., 90.
[80] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*.; Fateme Montazeri, "Who Says Only Men Have a Beard?: Revisiting the Question of Gender Ambiguity in Persian Poetry," *Anthropology of the Middle East* 16, no. 2 (December 1, 2021): 128–47.

visual symbols used to depict *javānmardī* in women in various media ranging from illustrated manuscripts, lusterware, and chronicles of the middle and early modern periods. Some of these symbols include beards and mustaches, tattoos, griffin-themed clothing, jewelry, as well as wrestling.

The second focus shifts to the role of elite women in shaping the narrative of female *javānmardī*. By examining elite women's paintings as well as their patronage and collection of illustrated manuscripts featuring female *javānmard*s, we can start to reconstruct a female intellectual tradition centered around this concept. The chapter also explores various carnivalesque "inversions" in the context of female *javānmardī*. This includes showing women utilized representations of female *javānmard*s to invert their male authority and claim their own identities as equal, if not manlier models of Persianate perfection. Furthermore, how male kingly patrons used the image of the female *javānmard* to invert the power dynamic with rival monarchs will be examined. All these allow us to see how female *javānmardī* was a multifaceted social norm and the way visual and textual, or what I call 'transmedia' representations, actively worked together to construct a topsy-turvy world and disseminate a broad cultural acceptance of female manliness, valor, and leadership.

Beards, Mustaches and Cross-dressing

In a fifteenth-century illustrated manuscript of twelfth-century poet Nizami's *Khamsah*, which was first produced in one of the Turcoman courts of Western Iran and repainted in the Mughal court in the sixteenth-century period, we find an illustration (Fig.1) that depicts Fitnah lifting an ox.[81] To make sure that viewers are aware that this

[81] For more information on the manuscript's Timurid origins and how it was repainted in the Mughal context, see Glenn D. Lowry and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Smithsonian Institution), *An Annotated and Illustrated Checklist of the Vever Collection* (Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,

cow-lifting symbol of *javānmardī* is not a man but is in fact an enslaved girl, the captions in gold ink label Fitnah as a *kanīzak*, a slave girl. The artist's depiction of Fitnah ascending the stairs with a full-grown ox slung over her shoulder while maintaining direct eye contact with the enthroned Bahram Gur serves as a powerful visual metaphor conveying her identity as a female *javānmard* who is physically strong and unafraid to challenge unjust patriarchs.[82] Most importantly, to make sure viewers pay attention to Fitnah's identity as a female *javānmard*, Fitnah is painted with a mustache and manly clothing that is similar to what the other male figures are wearing. She is also positioned in the central part of the illustration. The way Bahram Gur is painted, having his hand extended as if to show amazement, further highlights the powerful nature of Fitnah's performance. The way that the slave girl Fitnah is repainted as a mustached youth in the Mughal period is not surprising and reflects the historical conditions of its time. In the nineteenth-century Qajar Iranian (1789-1925) context, the mustache was a symbol of both female and male beauty and eventually, later in the era, a troubling sign of ugliness because of how it made women look like men.[83] I assert that during the middle and early modern Persianate contexts, the mustache and beard on women actually signified female *javānmardī.*

The ethnographic evidence from Chinese travelers mentioning mustached and bearded women offers a compelling window into how it was not just royal women, but also non-royal women from non-elite backgrounds who possessed a level of authority brought upon by *javānmardī* in the Ilkhanid context. Mughal emperors like Jahangir

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Smithsonian Institution in association with University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1988), 207-208.

[82] I will be exploring more of Fitnah's *javānmardī* performance in the *Haft Paykar* story in Chapter 3.

[83] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*.,233.

(1569-1627) also recorded in his memoir the "strange" encounter he had with a gardener's daughter, whom he describes as having "had a full mustache and a good handful of beard. Outwardly she resembled a man. [...] Apparently she did not differ from other women by an iota."[84] This further allows us to see the way early modern women from non royal status were leveraging the symbolism of the mustache and beard to empower themselves. Through this display of *javānmardī* associated visual symbols, her actions could be interpreted as tricks to gain recognition and even awe from the emperor, challenging traditional gender and class dynamics in the Mughal context. The image (Fig.1) is not the only example of female *javānmard* figures like Fitnah adorned with mustaches. In Chapter 4, I will be examining the mustache as a primary visual identifier for Chinese women embodying the ideals of *javānmardī* in various illustrated manuscripts produced during the middle and early modern periods.

Fitnah depicted as using the act of cross-dressing to challenge patriarchal kingship also reflects historical conditions. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, the early Mughal empire owed its existence and development to female *javānmard*s, some of whom were cross-dressers. Furthermore, prior to the Mughals, cross-dressing has always been a part of Ilkhanid elite women's way to invert patriarchal norms and participate in kingship. Rashid al-Din, a vizier from Ilkhanid Iran, in the *Jamiʿl al-tavārīkht* (Compendium of Chronicles), recorded, in a matter-of-fact manner, the way Ilkhanid women such as Qutulun Chagan (1260-1306), a cousin of Kublai Khan (1215-1294), "went around like a boy and often went on military campaigns, where she performed valiant deeds. She was listened to by her father, and she handled the administration for him. Her father refused to

[84] Emperor Of Hindustan Jahangir, *The Jahangirnama Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India* (Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 320-321.

marry her off." When Qutulun's other brothers tried to prevent her from leading the military and running affairs by saying "You should mind your scissors and needles. What have you to do with kingship and chieftainship?", Qutulun Chagan took revenge by stirring "sedition and strife" in their domains.[85] Similarly, another royal woman from the Qutlugh-Khanid dynasty (1222–1306), the beautiful and talented Padishah Khatun (1290-1256), is said to have been raised by her equally formidable mother, Turkhan Khatun, "as a boy among all boys." This strategic upbringing aimed to safeguard her from being married off by the Mongols as a pawn to enable their alliances. Padishah Khatun ultimately became the ruler of Kirman.[86]

Historical cross-dressing female *javānmard*s like Qutulun Chagan and Padishah Khatun allow us to gain deeper insight into how depictions of cross-dressing female *javānmard*s were not simply creations of a male fantasy. Rather, they mirrored a social reality where royal women, by being literal *javānmard*s, used the virtues associated with *javānmardī* to not just reshape the political landscape, but also challenge patriarchs in the middle periods and even rule as ideal rulers, political advisors, and military commanders.

Ink and Adornment: Female Tattoos and Armbands

Apart from the mustache and manly clothing, other symbols used to convey *javānmardī* status on female characters were tattoos and *tiraz* bands, as exemplified by the Sarikhani fragment of a lusterware dish made in the second half of the twelfth century in Kashan, Iran, that depicts two figures (Fig.2).[87] This fragment is said to stand out for

[85] Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh: A History of the Mongols*, trans. Thackston (Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1998), 309-310.
[86] Lakeland and Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*., 100. For more information on Turkhan Khatun, see Karin Quade-Reutter, "QOTLOḠ TARKĀN ḴĀTUN," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, n.d., https://iranicaonline.org/articles/qotlogh-tarkan-khatun.
[87] For more information on how *javānmardī* is articulated in medieval Nishapur ceramics, see Raya Y. Shani, "*La Fata illa 'Ali wa la Sayf illa Dhu'l-Faqar*: Epigraphic Ceramic Platters from

its remarkable scale, thus, calling for a closer look into the details adorning it.[88] Scholars have commented on gender uncertainty in examining Kashan lusterware since male and female figures are depicted similarly with long hair, hats, and *tiraz* bands on the sleeves of their clothing.[89] Oya Pancaroğlu has also mentioned how in the later decades of the twelfth century, there was an impetus in the Eastern Islamic world, to create new figural representations of ethical ideals, with chivalry being one of the main themes. The way chivalry and gender ambiguity form the backbone of Kashan lusterware calls for a detailed understanding of how female *javānmards* are represented within the context of this fragment.

Both figures in the fragment are painted with tear-shaped ornaments in the center of their headdresses, alongside their makeup, specifically the rosette beneath their small pursed mouth that men are not usually painted with, as seen from other examples of Kashan lusterware (Fig.9) depicting two women. Kashan lusterware was greatly developed and supported by the Seljuks (1040-1194), a Turkic-Persian dynasty who was famous for giving prominence to the female figure in the art they patronized.[90]

Medieval Nishapur Documenting Esteem for 'Ali ebn Abi Taleb as the Ideal *Fata"* in Lloyd Ridgeon, ed., *Javanmardi: The Ethics and Practice of Persianate Perfection* (The Gingko Library, 2018), 28-65.

[88] Oliver Watson, Moujan Matin, and Will Kwiatkowski, *Ceramics of Iran: Islamic Pottery from the Sarikhani Collection* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2020), 219.

[89] Metropolitan Museum of Art, ed., *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs [Exhibition, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, April 27-July 24, 2016]* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 122. Also see Robert Hillenbrand, "Robert Hillenbrand 'Images of Authority on Kashan Lustreware', in Islamic Art in the Ashmolean Museum, Part I, Ed. J.W.Allan (Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, X) (Oxford, 1995) 167-98.," 179. For more information on gender ambiguity in Iranian art from the Qajar period, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Gendered Transformations: Beauty, Love, and Sexuality in Qajar Iran," *Iranian Studies* 34, no. 1/4 (2001): 89–102.

[90] Mehreen Chida-Razvi, "Power and Politics of Representation: Picturing Elite Women in Ilkhanid Painting," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, January 1, 2021, 6. The Seljuks' reverence for women can be traced from their origin story where they believed the creation of the world was only made possible because of the help of given by Goddess Aq-Ana (white mother), see Azharī, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*, 287.

The positioning of both figures in the Sarikhani fragment is intriguing: the figure on the right gazes at the face of the figure on the left, while the latter looks downward at the clothing of the former. This arrangement prompts viewers to focus on the faces and clothing of the two figures. Moreover, in the left figure, while the line of inscribed verse is unclear, the sole discernible word is "*māh*" (face), thus prompting us to pay further attention to the markings on the face of the left figure, or what we call today, tattoos.

In premodern Iran, the deliberate placement of bodily markings, particularly on the face, served as potent symbols conveying the wearer's exceptional identity.[91] Scott Redford has mentioned how tattoos were widespread in the Rum Seljuk era (1077-1307) alongside other medieval Islamic realms and were symbols of power, prestige, and even ownership vis-a-vis the human body.[92] While scholars have predominantly viewed premodern Persianate women's tattoos as a kind of beauty enhancement, a closer look at their symbolic meaning reveals how some face tattoos functioned as a kind of visual language communicating female *javānmardī*.[93]

In Rumi's (1207-1273) story a man who wants the image of a lion to be tattooed on his shoulder, the ability to endure the pain of tattooing is a metaphor for an ideal stoic masculinity. Furthermore, the custom of tattooing is said to have roots in medieval *ʿayyār* brotherhoods that are guided by the ethos of *javānmardī*.[94] Archaeologists have uncovered pins used by women from ancient Iran to create facial tattoos. This allows us

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[91] Farzin Vejdani, "Branded Bodies: Judicial Torture, Punishment, and Infamy in Nineteenth-Century Iran—ERRATUM," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 65, no. 2 (April 2023): 325.
[92] Scott Redford, "A Grammar of Rum Seljuk Ornament," *Mésogeios. Méditerranée*, 2005, 305-306.
[93] Ṣādeq Sajjādī, "DĀĞ," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill), accessed July 2, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_7949.
[94] Willem Floor, "ḴĀLKUBI," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill), accessed July 2, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_10850.

to see how women since ancient times have always been able to embody perseverance and strength, virtues associated with ideal manliness.[95]

Moreover, in the earliest complete illustrated Persian manuscript, which is a copy of ʻAyyuqi's *Varqa va Gulshāh*, a famous love epic of two Arab lovers that was painted by ʿAbd al-Mu'min b. Muhammad during the mid-thirteenth Rum Seljuk period, it contains representations of female *javānmard*s who are adorned with face tattoos.[96] One of the most notable examples is Gulshah (Fig.3), who is painted with red facial tattoos decorating her eyes and chin. Gulshah's *javānmardī* identity is not only conveyed in the way she is painted as wearing male clothing.[97] It also communicated to viewers textually as seen from the golden calligraphy on top against the blue background stating "Gulshah kills Ibn ʿAdnan to save Varqa."[98] These lines call for us to pay attention to how Gulshah's ability to perform *ghayrat* (masculine honor) is what makes her a *javānmard.*

In the Persianate cultural context, *ghayrat* represents a gendered societal concept based on a man's honor, possessiveness, and protective instincts toward certain female relatives.[99] It is associated with *javānmardī,* an admired quality in an ideal man, particularly in relationships with women.[100] Although *ghayrat* has predominantly been

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[95] Sergey Yatsenko, "The Tattoo System in the Ancient Iranian World (Zurich, 2013)," Philippe Della Casa & Constanze Witt (eds) Tattoos and Body Modifications in Antiquity. Proceedings of the sessions at the EAA annual meetings in The Hague and Oslo, 2010/11. Zurich Studies in Archaeology vol. 9, 2013, 100.

[96] Just like their predecessors, Rum Seljuk's dynastic ethos was governed by chivalry, see Redford, 291-306.

[97] On how other scholars have interpreted this illustration, see Layla S. Diba, "Lifting the Veil from the Face of Depiction: The Representation of Women in Persian Painting," in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat and Lois Beck (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 209.

[98] Original Persian here: ورقه را | رهانیدن | کشتن گلشاه | ابن عدنان

[99] Mostafa Abedinifard, "Persian 'Rashti Jokes': Modern Iran's Palimpsests of Gheyrat-Based Masculinity," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 4 (August 8, 2019), 566.

[100] See footnote 27. Amina Tawasil, "Towards the Ideal Revolutionary Shi'i Woman: The Howzevi (Seminarian), the Requisites of Marriage and Islamic Education in Iran," *Hawwa* 13, no. 1 (May 6, 2015), 119.

studied as a male-only attribute, Gulshah visually exemplifies how women were seen as capable of surpassing men in demonstrating this trait.[101] This is seen from how she is depicted with furrowed brows and a determined stance as she quite literally penetrates her enemy Ibn ʿAdnan with a lance – a punishment for harming her beloved Varqa. Notably, Gulshah is pictured as having more *ghayrat* than her male lover Varqa, whose pathetic state is conveyed in the way he is positioned as standing behind her, bound and naked. The choice to position Gulshah in the center of the illustration can also be seen as a way to direct viewers into focusing on her performance of *ghayrat,* which makes her a superior manly figure and even an erotic penetrator of the defeated male body. The contrasting difference in the visual depictions of Varqa and Gulshah is a good example of the topsy-turvy nature of the Persianate world during the middle periods where women were seen as more masculine than men.[102]

Much like Gulshah (Fig.3), the left female figure (Fig.2) in the Sarikhani fragment is distinguished by a scorpion face tattoo, accentuating her identity as a formidable female *javānmard*. Within the pre-Islamic milieu, the scorpion serves as a symbol of fertility and prosperity, closely associated with Ishara, the goddess of warriors and victory.[103] Additionally, during the middle periods, the scorpion holds a profound

[101] I will be expanding more on *gharyat*'s relationship with female *javānmardī* in Chapter 2.
[102] Another good image that deserves more study when it comes to understanding the topsy turvy gender bending nature of Gulshah is https://warfare.x10host.com/Turk/19-Varka_wa_Gulshah.htm
[103] E. Douglas Van Buren, "The Scorpion in Mesopotamian Art and Religion," *Archiv Für Orientforschung* 12 (1937): 1–28. For more information on how the scorpion is viewed as a solely female tattoo in some parts of rural Iran, see Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, "The Scorpion in Muslim Folklore," *Asian Folklore Studies* 63, no. 1 (2004): 116.

connection to apotropaic magic, serving as a protective charm against malevolent spirits, and finds application in healing practices and talismanic arts.[104]

Expanding on the multifaceted symbolism of the scorpion, viewers of the Sarikhani fragment are prompted to perceive the left female figure (Fig.2) as an extraordinary *javānmard*, worthy of reverence. This perception is heightened by the scorpion's historical associations with therapeutic qualities. Those who engage with this visual narrative are encouraged to venerate the depicted figure, not only for her strength but also for her potential to provide healing and protection. Importantly, the scorpion motif suggests an association with victory, serving as a powerful talisman for ensuring the triumph and continuity of dynastic lineage.

In addition to the scorpion, the other face tattoo on the left side of her cheek is the bold double cross. Besides serving as a solution to mask a construction flaw in the Sarikhani fragment, the design of the facial tattoo closely mirrors a *tamgha*. In Central Asian traditions, *tamgha* (animal brand) originally identified the communal property of a kinship group or tribe. It frequently appeared on objects such as vases. In Turkic empires during the middle periods, *tamgha* came to mean "the stamping of a document as the ruler's property," hence "originating from the ruler," hence "seal." *Tamgha* is also the term used to describe the supreme seal of the Mongol Ilkhans of Iran.[105] Redford aptly characterizes the *tamgha* as a "discrete, individual symbol of power."[106]

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[104] Bihter Esener, "'Reflect-Wear' Art and Healing in Medieval Anatolia: Two Bronze Mirrors in the Detroit Institute of Arts," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 97, no. 1 (November 2023): 84–91.
[105] G. Doerfer, "ĀL TAMḠĀ," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, n.d., https://iranicaonline.org/articles/al-tamga-red-seal.
[106] Redford, "A Grammar of Rum Seljuk Ornament.", 305.

Further research is needed on the double-cross *tamgha* to pinpoint the left female figure's exact family affiliation. Nevertheless, the *tamgha* serves to visually mark her as an individual of distinction, wielding authority linked to royalty. Of significant note among the facial tattoos is the *chintamani*, marked by three dots on the visages of both female figures. Rooted in Sanskrit, '*chintamani*' translates to 'auspicious jewel,' and its three dots symbolize pearls and flames. These dots are emblematic of virtues associated with *javānmardī,* representing both physical and spiritual fortitude. The *chintamani* is believed not only to bestow these *javānmardī* virtues upon its wearer but also to shield them from malevolence and harm.[107]

In the Persianate visual tradition, heroes embodying *javānmardī*, such as Rustam from the *Shāhnamah*, are frequently illustrated in manuscripts adorned with *chintamani* patterns in their attire and accessories, underscoring their courage and strength (Fig.4). Thus, the *chintamani*, with its *javānmardī* connotations, becomes an integral part of medieval kingly visual language, as noted by Redford, serving as a symbolic expression of power and an invocation of good fortune, particularly during the Seljuk period.[108] A compelling instance is evident in the Rabenou bowl, where the male ruler is depicted with a *chintamani* on each hand (Fig.5), thereby heightening the ruler's status and authority. The presence of *chintamani* face tattoos serves as a kind of visual language connecting these women to a broader narrative of *javānmardī,* protection, prosperity, and kingship.

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[107] Nazanin Hedayat Munroe, "Silks from Ottoman Turkey | Essay | The Metropolitan Museum of Art | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History," The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, accessed December 9, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tott/hd_tott.htm.
[108] Redford, "A Grammar of Rum Seljuk Ornament.", 301.

Another intriguing aspect concerning the women's faces relates to the circular makeup applied to their chins (Fig.2). While this makeup can be perceived as the artist's stylistic portrayal of the women's chins, an alternative approach is possible. Given how this Sarkhani fragment was made in the second half of the twelfth century and the way we have documented evidence of real-life women with facial hair from same time period found in the Chinese travelers' accounts I have mentioned above, alongside the fashion trend of "mascara-painted mustaches" in Qajar Iran, where women would use mascara to draw a thin line of facial hair over their upper lip to associate themselves with the *amrad* (young adolescent male), the makeup on both figures' chins in the Sarikhani fragment could also be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to simulate facial hair, notably a goatee, reinforcing both women's connection to young-manliness.[109]

Clothed in Courage: The Griffin Motif

Going beyond the realm of makeup, using griffin motifs to decorate the garment worn by the female figure on the right (Fig.2) serves to visually affirm her *javānmardī* status. This tradition of adorning oneself with animal-related motifs has roots in ancient Sassanid Iran (224-651), where royalty, particularly those of the highest nobility, draped themselves in garments embellished with symbolic elements. Animals, chosen for their inherent meanings and associations, became a powerful visual language through which Sassanian royalty conveyed their political authority.[110] In a thirteenth-century portrait of Chabi, Khubilai's wife, the collar of her dress is of cloth of gold patterned with heads of griffin like birds.[111] Many of the "craftsmen" so valued by the Mongols were women. It

[109] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 233.
[110] UNESCO and China National Silk Museum, *Textiles and Clothing along the Silk Roads. Thematic Collection of the Cultural Exchanges along the Silk Roads* (UNESCO, 2023), 156-7.
[111] James C.Y. Watt, "A Note on Artistic Exchanges in the Mongol Empire," in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353*, ed. Linda Komaroff, Stefano

was women who wove textiles, in particular the cloth of gold prized by the Mongol court. They and their households received the same privileges and exceptions as male artisans.[112] This allows us to better imagine how different women ranging from queens to craftswomen, actively participated in shaping the visual language of female *javānmardī.*

The practice continued through dynasties like the Abbasids (750-1258), the Seljuks, and the Ilkhanids who not only maintained but also expanded upon the use of luxurious textiles adorned with animal motifs. This was not merely a means to assert political legitimacy but also a reflection of cultural sophistication encapsulated in the concept of *adab* (etiquette).[113] Among the various animal motifs, the griffin–a mythical creature that is an amalgamation of a lion and an eagle– emerged as the favored choice. With its associations spanning loyalty, generosity, and strength, the griffin was regarded as a symbol of ascension, implying the ruler's elevation to a god-like status. Consequently, kings strategically utilized the griffin as a symbol to convey both power and legitimacy.[114]

Expanding on this historical context, the symbolic integration of griffin motifs on the female figure's garment not only signifies her identity as a *javānmard* but also elevates her to a divine status. The right female figure's use of textiles and fashion to

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Carboni, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) (New York : [New Haven]: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; [Distributed by Yale University Press], 2002), 70.

[112] Morris Rossabi, "The Mongols and Their Legacy," in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353*, ed. Linda Komaroff, Stefano Carboni, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) (New York : [New Haven]: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; [Distributed by Yale University Press], 2002), 30.

[113] Metropolitan museum of art, *Court and Cosmos*, 39, 95-98. For more information on griffins in Ilkhanid textiles, see Robert Hillenbrand, *The Great Mongol Shahnama* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 272.

[114] "Throne Leg in the Shape of a Griffin," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed October 14, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452270. For more information on the different virtues the griffin is associated with, see Adrienne Mayor and Michael Heaney, "Griffins and Arimaspeans," *Folklore* 104, no. 1/2 (1993): 40–66.

assert authority and *adab* is a reflection of how women from the middle periods, like the Abbasid *qiyān* (slave girl), were highly respected for their pioneering role in shaping fashion trends.[115] Interestingly, the griffin is also associated with gender-transgressive female power. Pre-Islamic Iranian stamp seals reveal a winged cross-dressing goddess wearing a garment that "resembles the dress for Persian men" as she holds two lion griffins by their tails and heads downward, suggesting her ability to embody *javānmardī* virtues of courage, strength, and bravery.[116]

Examining instances where the griffin is linked with gender-transgressive divine female strength offers a plausible interpretation for the right female figure on the Sarikhani fragment, suggesting her embodiment of female *javānmardī*. Lastly, the griffin was an esteemed symbol within and beyond the boundaries of the medieval Islamic world.[117] Portraying the right female figure alongside this cosmopolitan symbol allows for the strategic communication of female power to diverse audiences across different contexts.

Another significant visual element contributing to our understanding of female *javānmardī* is the *tiraz*, or embroidered armband, on the right female figure's sleeve (Fig.2). Reserved for elite individuals favored by rulers, *tiraz* armbands were embroidered with names of rulers, well wishes, and even lines of poetry.[118] In the medieval artistic tradition, individuals depicted with *tiraz* armbands represented an ideal

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[115] Fuad Matthew Caswell, *The Slave Girls of Baghdad: The Qiyān in the Early Abbasid Era*, Library of Middle East History 28 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
[116] John Boardman, "Pyramidal Stamp Seals in the Persian Empire," *Iran* 8 (1970): 27.
[117] Anne Laura McClanan, "Illustrious Monsters: Representations of Griffins on Byzantine Textiles," in *Animals in Text and Textile*, 2018, 133–46.
[118] Yedida Kalfon Stillman and Norman A. Stillman, *Arab Dress: A Short History: From the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times*, Rev. 2nd ed, Themes in Islamic Studies, v. 2 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2003), 120-137.

that individuals aspired to be.[119] The deliberate depiction of the left female figure turning her torso to prominently display her armband to viewers serves as a blatant indication of her revered status stemming from her ability to embody ideal Persianate perfection, that viewers should give attention to. The *tiraz* armband adorning the right female figure in the Sarikhani fragment is adorned with an embroidery of the Arabic phrase "*al-'izz al-dā'im*" (perpetual glory) inscribed in Kufic script typically reserved for public texts.[120] This choice of script implies her esteemed status as an honored figure, publicly acknowledged and celebrated. In this nuanced interplay of textual and visual elements, there is a deliberate effort to pay explicit homage to female *javānmard*s.

A similar illustration of the strategic use of *tiraz* armbands can be witnessed in the portrayal of the seated queen in the Freer bowl (Fig.6). Here, the *tiraz* armbands underscore the queen's authority, proclaiming her esteemed position that was publicly known. A comparable instance can be observed in the portrayal of the seated queen in the Freer bowl, where *tiraz* armbands distinguish her from attendants standing behind her, serving as a tangible marker of her superiority that was publicly accepted. Finally, akin to the griffin, the *tiraz* is recognized as a form of "international art" that also found popularity and usage among audiences extending beyond Eurasia.[121] Adorning the right female figure with not only one but two cosmopolitan symbols of authority—the griffin

[119] Stillman and Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 120. For more information on *tiraz* arnbands, see Finbarr Barry Flood, "A Turk in the Dukhang? Comparative Perspectives on Elite Dress in Medieval Ladakh and the Caucasus," in Eva Allinger et al., eds., *Interaction in the Himalayas and Central Asia: Processes of Transfer, Translation and Transformation in Art, Archaeology, Religion and Polity: Proceedings of the Third International SEECHAC Colloquium 25-27 Nov. 2013, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna*, Denkschriften (Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse), 495. Band (International SEECHAC Colloquium, Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2017), 227-253

[120] Watson, Matin, and Kwiatkowski, *Ceramics of Iran*, 219. For more information of the Kufic script, see Flood, "A Turk in the Dukhang?", 234.

[121] Arielle Winnik, "The Creation and Spread of Tiraz Textiles Across the Silk Roads," in *The World of the Ancient Silk Road*, by Xinru Liu, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2022), 524–41.

and the *tiraz* armband signifies a desire for diverse audiences to marvel at the embodiment of female *javānmardī* and the Persianate female-centered authority.

Grappling with Gender: The Untold Story of Female Wrestlers

The glory of the female *javānmard* certainly continued to persist as wished by the Sarikhani lusterware fragment. While male symbols of *javānmardī* such as Rustam, also known as the *Pahlavān-i-Jahān* (World Champion), is frequently illustrated for his wrestling prowess, middle and early modern illustrated manuscripts also celebrated women as *javānmard*s whose wrestling prowess enabled them to dominate and inspire awe among their male counterparts. The art of wrestling is heavily linked to *javānmardī* because it not only demonstrates physical strength but also the ability to embody moral and religious metaphors of the learned, ranging from the good use of force, humility, control of passion, and respect for social hierarchy.[122] Emma Flatt has described the wrestler as "a shorthand for the ethic of *javānmardī*. [...] It may be that the sign itself can become so well known that there is no longer any need of overtly naming the ethic for which it stands."[123]

These depictions of female wrestlers reveal multifaceted ways women performed *javānmardī*. One example can be found in another illustration (Fig.7) of Gulshah in the Rum Seljuk *Varqa va Gulshāh* manuscript I examined earlier. Gulshah's *javānmard* status is visually highlighted in how she is depicted as engaging in a wrestling match with one of her male enemies, Ghalib. Though Gulshah is portrayed similarly to Ghalib, emphasizing her equivalence to a man, by putting name labels written above their heads,

[122] Philippe Rochard and Denis Jallat, "Zurkhaneh, Sufism, Fotovvat /Javanmardi and Modernity:," in *Javanmardi*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, The Ethics and Practice of Persianate Perfection (Gingko, 2018), 241.
[123] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan,", 161.

the illustration distinctly indicates a woman is wrestling with a man. Additionally, the way Gulshah is painted as having her hand on the front of Ghalib's robes is suggestive of her superlative wrestling skills that have enabled her to threaten her male enemies' manhood. This portrayal presents an alternative view where the collaboration of text and image was employed not only in lusterware but also in illustrated manuscripts to convey the female *javānmardī*.

A deeper understanding of how elite Persianate women perceived and interacted with artworks featuring female *javānmard* wrestlers can significantly enrich our comprehension of the different ways female *javānmardī* was depicted in the Safavid Iranian context beyond the archetype of cross-dressing female *javānmard*s. One example is found in the sixteenth-century Safavid manuscript of the *Kitāb-i-dāstān* containing an illustration of the physically powerful Persian princess from Ardabil engaging in a wrestling match with one of her suitors, the prince of Rum, to determine his eligibility to be her future husband (Fig.8). Similar to, but also unlike the depiction of Gulshah in the Rum Seljuk manuscript (Fig.7), the princess of Ardabil's identity as a literal female *javānmard* is seen in how she is clad in female clothing and a wimple.

Furthermore, the symbolic representation of her prowess as a *javānmard* becomes evident in the nuanced details of the illustration. The prince's limited ability to merely hold her arms stands in stark contrast to the princess whose hand lies on his belt buckle as they grapple. This portrayal serves as a deliberate statement, aimed at reminding observers of the formidable real-life female *javānmard* wrestlers who played influential roles in shaping Safavid male kingship. Moreover, the depiction of the Prince of Rum also serves as a way to belittle the Ottomans, who were the rivals of the Safavids. Tajlu

Khanum, the wife of Shah Ismail I and mother of Shah Tahmasb, mentioned above, was also said to be a famous wrestler as well as a fencer who applied her skills to battle especially against the Ottomans.[124] Shah Tahmasb's most trusted advisor was his beloved sister, Shahzadah Sultanum, who he consulted on every decision and was the director of many state affairs. In her will, Shahzadah Sultanum wrote about the various military weapons and horses she possessed, providing an additional testament to her martial prowess that makes her a *javānmard*.[125] Shahzadah Sultanum is a good example of exemplifying royal female *javānmard*s' role in Safavid kingship.

Askari has proposed how this *Kitāb-i-dāstān* illustrated manuscript was possibly "commissioned by a woman or prepared for a woman as a gift or, [...] was meant to be read aloud to women" as a kind of mirror for princesses.[126] Mirrors for princesses are defined as education literature produced for elite women on ideal conduct considering the significant role both medieval and early modern Persianate women had in the upbringing of prospective rulers and the great influence they had on their male companions at the royal court.[127] The way the *Kitāb-i-dāstān* manuscript opens with this illustration of a royal Iranian female wrestler *javānmard* suggests a clear agenda: to instruct other noblewomen readers to perfect the art of wrestling so that they can learn ideal *javanmardī* virtues capable of containing what their female predecessors did: surpassing men and asserting agency while also expanding the ongoing legacy of Safavid Iran.

A better understanding of the way the female *javānmard* wrestler figure circulated not just among the Safavid elite in textual form, but also among the commoner class

[124] Ansari and Martin, *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*., 67-68.
[125] Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics: Women in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran", 156. I will be talking more about Shahzadah Sultanum in Chapter 2.
[126] Askari, "Élite Folktales.", 55.
[127] Askari, "A Mirror for Princesses."126.

vis-a-vis oral storytelling allows us to see how female *javānmardī* transcended both gender, class, and textual boundaries and resonated across the social spectrum of Safavid society. A prominent figure in renowned romantic tales like the quasi-historical exploits of Shah Ismail I, recounted by professional storytellers (*naqqālān*) in the flourishing coffeehouse scene of seventeenth-century Safavid Iran, was the female *javānmard* wrestler. Beyond her remarkable attributes of "unsurpassable beauty, coquetry, courage, and daring," she is widely celebrated for her wrestling skills, enabling her to dominate her male counterparts, decide on her potential husband, and even ascend to queenship. Interestingly, this female wrestler's name was Tajlu.[128] Apart from these stories of early Safavid kings, stories from the *Shāhnamah* and the *Hamzanamah* were also performed in these coffeehouses. It was not just men, but also women from different social and even foreign backgrounds who were also present alongside men in these coffeehouse spaces in seventeenth-century Isfahan.[129] Building on this, perhaps it is not so farfetched to conclude that different female *javānmardī* phenotypes, ranging from the female wrestler to the cross-dressing female warrior, were widely circulating amongst women from a wide variety of backgrounds in both oral and textual forms.

Female *javānmard* wrestlers also played an important role in Mughal aesthetics, providing us with a new way of understanding early modern Mughal-Safavid connections beyond the framework of immigration of Safavid Iranian painters to the Mughal court or

[128] For more information on the female *javānmard* wrestler found in popular oral romances told in coffee houses during seventeen century Iran, see Barry Wood, *The Adventures of Shāh Esmā'il: A Seventeenth-Century Persian Popular Romance*, Studies on Performing Arts & Literature of the Islamicate World, Volume 8 (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2019), XV, 67-68.
[129] See footnote 72, Farshid Emami, "Coffee Houses, Urban Spaces, and the Formation of a Public Sphere in Safavid Isfahan," *Muqarnas* 33 (2016). Also see 190, 204.

fusion of styles.[130] The *Hamzanamah* is one of the most famous illustrated manuscripts produced during the reign of Akbar (1542-1605) that ultimately became the supreme achievement of Mughal art. Not only did Akbar commission, but he also supervised the immense task of illustrating the entire romance of the *Hamzanamah*.[131] The *Hamzanamah* narrates the fictional exploits of Amir Hamza Sahib Qiran, a historical figure who was known as the uncle of the Prophet Mohammad, alongside the adventures of his male and female *ʿayyar* followers as well as his descendants. Unlike other illustrated manuscripts, the Akbar *Hamzanamah* is said to be performed with the oral storyteller narrating the story of each illustration from behind.[132] While we are not sure of the original story of the Akbar *Hamzanamah,* a closer look at the surviving illustrated folios, specifically those that depict female *javānmard*s, provides a way to reconstruct these unidentified folios and showcase the power these women had in shaping the early modern kingly imagination, like that of Akbar.[133]

An illustration (Fig.9) in the Akbar *Hamzanamah* depicts the moment when "Saʿid arrives with Khosh-Khiram on the roof of a castle and sees two girls wrestling." This caption is written in calligraphy below the image. The two girls in the illustration, Malak Mah and Sheda Begum, were kidnapped and placed under a spell by a sorceress who mistook them for men. John Seyller has labeled this illustration as "something of a

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[130] For more information, see Priscilla P. Soucek, "Persian Artists in Mughal India: Influences and Transformations," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 166–81; Abolala Soudavar, "Between the Safavids and the Mughals: Art and Artists in Transition," *Iran* 37 (1999): 49–66.
[131] Milo Cleveland Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court* (Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, 1981), 44.
[132] Zahra Faridany-Akhavan, "The Mughal Manuscript of the Ḥamza-Nāma in the Context of Oral Storytelling and Performance," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 10, no. 2 (July 8, 2019): 151.
[133] John William Seyller and Wheeler McIntosh Thackston, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington (Wash.): Freer Gallery of Art Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Smithsonian Institution in association with Azimuth Editions, London, 2002)., 272-273.

narrative enigma." This is because in the original text, the girls' tussling was only tersely indicated and is not the main focus. Moreover, to Seyller, the image appears to be disconnected from the primary narrative focus, which is the enchantment cast upon the two girls. Moreover, when it comes to the figures in the illustration, Seyller labels them simply as "an afterthought" and less "scintillating" than the architecture in the illustration. However, a better understanding of the artist and the intentional way he chooses to illustrate the two female wrestlers and other figures shed light on the fascinating ways female *javānmardī* was deliberately depicted. While the architecture and the figure of Khosh-Kiram are done by Shravana, one of the most accomplished artists of Akbar's atelier, the female wrestlers are done by Mithra, who was famous for his skill in depicting youths, specifically "rounded, doll-like faces with doleful eyes, and smooth forms with little modeling." As Seyller astutely observes, Mithra deliberately painted the wrestling girls slighter and younger in this illustration. Elsewhere in the manuscript they are painted as fully-grown women.[134]

The supervisor's decision to delegate Mithra, an artist whose specialization lies with youthful figures with the task of depicting the two female wrestlers, alongside Mithra's intentional effort to '*javānize*' them, to make them younger than their usual depiction, reveals the intricate dynamics at play within the illustration to convey female *javānmardī*. Moreover, this deliberate divergence from the central theme of the illustration, choosing instead to focus on gender confusion and the world of female youth wrestling, invites contemplation on whether there was a conscious endeavor to showcase different performances of female young manliness beyond cross-dressing bejeweled female *javānmard*s, like the unknown heroine I have mentioned above.

[134] Seyller and Thackston, *The Adventures of Hamza*, 206.

While Seyller's astute observation regarding figures like Saʿid being painted over is correct, the strategic positioning of these figures at the apex of the illustration speaks volumes about their significance, dispelling any notion of them being mere "afterthought" as characterized by Seyller. Saʿid, reaching out as though directing the viewer's attention towards the female wrestlers, and Khosh Kiram, with a finger to her mouth—an artistic convention denoting awe—serve as deliberate visual cues, urging viewers to follow their lead in silently admiring the exceptional embodiment of *javānmardī* ideals by the young female wrestlers. In essence, the artistic decisions made in the portrayal of these elements go beyond mere aesthetics. They hint at a deliberate intention to captivate the audience with a familiar cultural narrative that extends beyond the central theme, offering glimpses into how Akbar saw female *javānmardī* as vital for his kingship.

Akbar was known for being a wrestling fan. He maintained a large number of Persian and Turani wrestlers whose matches he would watch daily. These athletes received salaries and rewards for their performances, highlighting the esteem in which wrestling was held at the Mughal court. By merging strength with perfect knowledge and justice, a wrestler represented not only the king but, by extension, the whole kingdom in his body.[135] The portrayals of female wrestlers in Akbar's *Hamzanamah* manuscript provide us with a way of seeing how among the wrestlers patronized by Akbar, some of them could have been women. Most importantly, the inclusion of female *javānmard*s in his manuscript can be seen as a way to reflect the perfection of Akbar's own kingdom, where exceptional qualities were recognized and celebrated regardless of gender, potentially showing Akbar as an ideal, just, and superior king.

[135] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan.", 164.

Lastly, the different ways women and men are depicting as wrestling each other in these different illustrated manuscripts can be seen as a visual metaphor bringing to focus what I call the continuous age-old battle between "anxious patriarchs" and "female *javānmard*s," specifically the way they sought to invert each other and assert masculine dominance from the middle to early modern periods and even beyond. Male-female and even female-female wrestling in illustrated manuscripts provide a tangible way for us to visualize the topsy-turvy nature of the premodern Persianate world.

A Royal Mughal Female Painter's Vision of Female *Javānmardī*

The presence of well-preserved and highly valued artworks by elite Mughal women like Sahifa Banu, sheds light on the way these women incorporated and expanded artistic techniques from traditionally male-dominated fields, to assert their identities as *javānmard*s capable of stepping up and defending the Mughal empire especially when their unmanly male counterparts have failed to do so. One particularly intriguing example is Sahifa Banu's portrait of Shah Tahmasb of Iran (Fig.10), painted in the early seventeenth century and understudied by scholars to date.[136]

The most humiliating episodes that haunted the Mughal imperial memory for generations involves Shah Tahmasb symbolically uncrowning Humayun during his time as a refugee at the Safavid court. This humiliating incident was a consequence of Humayun's defeat by the Afghan Shir Shah Suri (1472-1545) in 1540. Abandoned by his brothers, Humayun found himself wandering in destitution through Sind and Baluchistan, accompanied by a dwindling group of loyal supporters until the Safavids agreed to help him out. By publicly uncrowning Humayun and reducing him into a disciple and slave of

[136] For a more detailed understanding of Sahifa Banu's other paintings, see Mika Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism: Artistic Encounters between Europe and Asia at the Courts of India, 1580-1630*, Studies in Persian Cultural History, Volume 15 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2018), 77-84.

Safavid Sufi kingship, Shah Tahmasb dismantled the power of the Mughals, the Safavids' formidable rival dynasty.[137] Moreover, during the reign of Jahangir, he was engaged in a fierce rivalry with the Safavid king, Shah Abbas (1571-1269), who wanted to take over Qandahar, a Mughal territory and fortress in Afghanistan.[138] Unlike Shah Abbas, who managed to take Tabriz and Baghdad from the Ottomans, while also extending Iran's rule into Central Asia, Jahangir failed to add any major territory to the Mughal empire. Moreover, he was also heavily dependent on alcohol, drugs, and his Iranian wife Nur Jahan (1577-1645), who played a major role in running the empire.[139]

The Mughals, driven by humiliation and territorial rivalry with the Safavids, were spurred to create imperial propaganda that would enhance their masculinity and promote Mughal superiority. This is seen in the famous fantastical portrait of Jahangir embracing Shah Abbas (Fig.11) painted in 1615 by the acclaimed painter Abu al-Hasan, who was also known as the "*Nādir al-Samān*" (Wonder of the World). Juan Cole, in his study of this portrait, has commented on how Shah Abbas is reduced from a hypermasculine world conqueror into a willowy, seductive Iranian youth on lambskin whose hand is suggestively placed on Jahangir's crotch. On the other hand, Jahangir is promoted from a passive figure castrated by his powerful wife into a cosmic chieftain with the lion as his hypermasculine totem while he dominates Shah Abbas by giving him a bear hug.[140]

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[137] A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 140-144.
[138] Milo Cleveland Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court* (Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, 1981), 169-170.
[139] Juan Cole, "The Imagined Embrace: Gender, Identity and Iranian Ethnicity in Jahangiri Paintings," in *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors*, ed. Michel, Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2003), 57.
[140] Ibid., 59.

During Jahangir's time, poverty is symbolized again by the very dark figure of the Hindu mendicant. Furthermore, according to Cole, in the Mughal aesthetic tradition, there was a tendency to depict the ruling class as fairer than the Indian peasantry. Building on this, painting Shah Abbas as a dark-skinned youth and the half-Rajput, half-Chagatai Jahangir as fair-skinned, serves to emphasize Jahangir's superiority.[141] His inability to embody the "chivalric, courtly codes of masculinity" as described by Cole enabled royal women such as Nur Jahan to step in as masculine leaders capable of running the empire. This historical background provides a better understanding of how other elite Mughal women like Sahifa Banu were able to utilize their artwork as a kind of imperial propaganda to assert themselves as superior *javānmard*s capable of defending the Mughal empire from enemies like the Safavids, especially when their male counterparts failed to do.[142]

Sahifa Banu's portrait of Shah Tahmasb might have been inspired by a preceding Safavid prototype dating back to around 1575 (Fig.12).[143] Stronge notes that Sahifa Banu's closeness to Iranian artist Aqa Reza, who, apart from being the father of Abu al-Hasan, was also a notable painter in Allahabad. Aqa Reza migrated from Iran to India and became part of Jahangir's studio before the years 1586 or 1587 – a plausible avenue through which elite Mughal women might have gained access to Safavid paintings like that of the Shah Tahmasb portraiture. In the sixteenth-century Safavid prototype (Fig.10), Shah Tahmasb is presented as a fair-skinned, wise, glamorous, and contented figure. Positioned as kneeling at the carpet's center, supported by a bolster pillow adorned with

[141] Ibid., 51-57, 60.
[142] Ibid., 54-44.
[143] "Shah Tahmasp I (1514–1576) Seated in a Landscape," accessed January 18, 2024, https://jstor.org/stable/community.24561634.

gold sprigs and cloud motifs, a gold-plated book is placed beside him as he gazes serenely into the distance with a small smile. Adorned in luxurious robes crafted from opulent fabric, his turban's fine white cloth is adorned with a golden trim, crowned by a small cluster of jewels.[144]

However, in Sahifa Banu's seventeenth-century portraiture of Shah Tahmasb (Fig.10), the shah's portrayal diverges from the celebratory themes of its original prototype. In fact, in Sahifa Banu's version, he is emasculated. This is seen from how he is depicted as a dark-skinned, sad, hesitant figure frowning at the distance as he sits in the corner of the carpet. In her brief examination of (Fig.9), Laura Parodi mentions that while the shah's attire adheres to its sixteenth-century Safavid prototype, his remaining features belong to the seventeenth-century Mughal artistic tradition.[145] In the Mughal artistic tradition, painting figures in a dark skin tone was a Mughal artistic convention to denigrate poverty and non-elite status. By painting Shah Tahmasb as a dark-skinned figure, Sahifa Banu is able to convey Shah Tahmasb's inferiority. This is further reinforced in how Sahifa Banu omits items symbolizing intelligence and luxury, specifically the book and bolster pillow that was found in the Safavid prototype.

Apart from using visual elements to convey to invert Tahmasb's image, to depict as a regretful and sorrowful figure, Sahifa Banu also uses textual means. This is seen from how the shah is textually encased in a *ghazal* by Amir Shahi Sabzavari (d.1453), who was greatly favored by the Timurid prince Baysunghur.[146] Sabzavari's *ghazal* can be

[144] For more information about the illustration, see https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1917.1078
[145] Parodi, "Two Pages from the Late Shahjahan Album", 272.
[146] Beatrice Forbes Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 83.

understood as a lament on the heartbreak of unattainable love, questioning the very existence of true love and happiness in a world devoid of true companionship:

> My life has passed, and my heart can think of nothing but love.
> It looked for help from friends, but it found no help.
> O heart, take from this place the capital of pain and need.
> This merchandise has found no market here.
> Until the breeze opened their hair to catch hearts,
> That snare of temptation found no one caught like me.
> For years, my heart wandered through the gardens of the world like the breeze.
> In its space, if it found a flower, it found no thorns.
> Shahi made a home of solitude from his friends,
> For when he told anyone his heart's sorrow, he found no one to sympathize.[147]

The speaker expresses profound sorrow from a lifetime of chasing an unfulfilled love. The speaker's heart, fixated on love, finds no solace in friendship or the world itself. They paint a desolate picture of seeking love among friends, only to be met with indifference, leading him to conclude that love is a worthless, disregarded "merchandise" (*matā'*). This is a typical convention in Sufi poetry and the ghazal; the values of manly asceticism and worldly renunciation are celebrated in the quoted verses. His search through life mirrors a fruitless breeze searching for thornless flowers in a world seemingly built on pain (*Dar fazā-yi ū guli gar yāft, bī khārī nayāft*). Ultimately, the speaker retreats into solitary confinement (*Shāhī az yārān-i khod bā konj-i tanhāyī basākht*), disillusioned by the lack of empathy and understanding he found while sharing his sorrows. Beyond the poem by Sabzavari, other Timurid visual elements found in Sahifa Banu's portraiture of Shah Tahmasb that are not found in the original version include a silver stream bordered by boulders and plants and a gold sky with clouds reminiscent of Chinese *qi*.[148] By seamlessly weaving together Timurid visual and textual

[147] Translation by me. For the Persian original, see https://ganjoor.net/shahi/divan/ghazal/sh41
[148] Laura Emilia Parodi, "Two Pages from the Late Shahjahan Album," *Ars Orientalis* 40 (2011): 272.

elements just as how she did in her version of Bihzad's paintings, Sahifa Banu further asserts her status as a superlative artist well-versed in not just visual, but also Timurid and Sufi literary traditions that held significant value within Mughal culture.

Sahifa Banu shows how she is able to skillfully blend Timurid, Mughal, and Safavid visual-textual elements to dominate her rival Safavid Iranian kingly male counterpart, a figure of historical significance who was a source of humiliation for the Mughals. The way the portraiture is labeled as "*shabīh-i Shāḥ Tahmāsp, raqm-i-Ṣaḥīfa Bānū"* (A likeness of Shah Tahmasp*,* by Sahifa Banu)*,* can be seen as a way to reiterate Shah Tahmasb's identity as Sahifa Banu's subject while simultaneously highlighting her power to shape and redefine it through a public visual medium.

Despite the historical rivalry between Safavid Iran and Mughal India, the term "Iranian" held a spectrum of positive connotations in the Mughal court, from heroism and wealth to wisdom and ideal beauty.[149] One of the most powerful figures in the Mughal court superior to the king and capable of embodying ideal masculinity and virtues associated with *javānmardī* is Nur Jahan, who is of Iranian ethnicity. Stronge has suggested that Sahifa Banu herself was also Iranian.[150] Building on this, Sahifa Banu's choice to depict Shah Tahmasb takes on a strategic significance especially when it comes to conveying her superiority over him. Regardless of the way he humiliated Humayun, Shah Tahmasb played a pivotal role in providing military assistance, enabling Humayun's second vital assault on India that consolidated his rule over the Mughal empire.[151]

Through painting Shah Tahmasb, who in a way is seen as the 'savior' of the Mughal empire, Sahifa Banu purposefully aligns herself as a 'savior' *javānmard* figure

[149] Cole, "The Imagined Embrace.", 50.
[150] Stronge, 118.
[151] Cole, "The Imagined Embrace.", 51.

whose bravery and loyalty enables her to restore the glory of the Mughal empire when her male counterparts, like Jahangir, have fallen short. Moreover, her decision to depict a Safavid Iranian king in her portrait can be interpreted as a deliberate cue to viewers, signaling her connection not only to the positive qualities linked with being "Iranian" but also to the influential Iranian elite. Nur Jahan, a tangible embodiment of a female *javānmard*, stands out as the most prominent figure in this regard. As a result, not only does Sahifa Banu connect herself with the iconic Iranian female *javānmard* of Jahangir's reign but she also showcases her remarkable ability to embody various *javānmardī* virtues, including cunningness and artistic knowhow (*adab*), that further solidifies her persona as a *javānmard.*

This is further amplified in her choice of genre for her painting. In the Mughal context, the portraiture genre was understood as a political tool requiring technical expertise and sharp intellect. Not every artist could fully excel in this genre, as evidenced by the criticism directed at renowned artists like Bihzad by rulers such as Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire. Jahangir played a significant role in evaluating portraiture, going so far as to threaten artists with the severing of their fingers if they failed to produce ideal portraits of his father, Akbar.[152] Peroli has mentioned that Payag's paintings bear "a close resemblance to Sahifa Banu's work, suggest[ing] a common source of inspiration, if not direct filiation."[153] Sahifa Banu's capability to gain mastery in an artistic genre that acclaimed male artists like Bihzad have struggled to do so, evident in how her Shah Tahmasb portraiture was preserved and even hypothesized to inspire the

[152] Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism*, 215.
[153] Parodi, 272.

works of other famous male artists, further reveals her *javānmard* identity rooted in both intelligence and capability to outperforming and inspiring her male counterparts.

Elite Women Commissioning and Collecting Illustrated Manuscripts

Apart from using their paintings, elite women from the middle and early modern periods also actively used the act of patronage, specifically of illustrated manuscripts of Persian poetry, to communicate their understanding of female *javānmardī*. Royal Timurid women like ʿIsmat al-Dunya, the wife of Timurid prince, Muhammad Juki (1402-1445), commissioned one of the "finest" examples of late Herati-style illustrated manuscripts.[154] The text she chose for her illustrated manuscript was Nizami's *Khamsah*. This literary masterpiece was frequently commissioned into illustrated manuscripts by other Timurid men as well, who sought to demonstrate their refined taste and legitimacy as Persianate rulers. The fact that she was able to commission one of the finest illustrated manuscripts not only reveals her financial power but also her superior taste. As a result, ʿIsmat al-Dunya can be seen as just as manly, if not manlier than her male counterparts.

While Fitnah's cow-lifting is not illustrated, a closer examination of two illustrations from the ʿIsmat al-Dunya manuscript, one being Bahram Gur with the Indian princess from *Paykar* (Fig.13) and the other (Fig.14) of Queen Nushaba looking at Alexander's portrait in Nizami's *Iskandarnamah* (Book of Alexander) (1194), reveals how Timurid women visually communicated their understandings of female *javānmardī.*

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[154] Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989)., 114. For more information on 'Ismat al-Dunya's *shamsah* found in the illustrated manuscript of Nizami's Khamsa that was identified by Priscilla Soucek, see Barbara Brend and Teresa Fitzherbert, *Muhammad Juki's Shahnamah of Firdausi*, Royal Asiatic Society Books (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland : Philip Wilson, 2010), 34-35. For more information on the Herati style, see H. R. Roemer, "BĀYSONḠOR, ḠĪĀṮ-AL-DĪN," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill), accessed June 29, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_6769.

(Fig.13). It specifically allows us to reimagine how Timurid women saw themselves as wise mentors guiding and transforming men into *javānmard*s, requisite for ideal kingship. In the illustration, the Indian princess, who is the first princess Bahram Gur meets after the building of the seven domes, is depicted as an instructive figure seated upright as she gesticulates with her hands. On the other hand, Bahram Gur is painted as lying down, attentively listening to her with a focused look while also looking up at her, implying that she is a figure who commands respect from men.

As communicated to us in the story, the Indian princess' influence is not solely attributed to her physical beauty; rather, it predominantly emanates from her storytelling skills, vividly showcasing her intelligence– qualities associated with *javānmardī.*[155] The central theme of the Indian princess' narrative revolves around Turktaz, the fairy queen, skillfully navigating the king of boundless munificence's deviation from the virtues of *javānmardī* by lapsing into unrestrained desires and attempting to assault her. Turktaz's adept use of strategic trickery, another virtue intricately linked with *javānmardī*, makes her an icon of female power. In outsmarting and outmaneuvering the king, she not only delivers justice for the wrongs committed against her but also disrupts the prevailing power dynamics that uphold male dominance. The figure of the Indian princess, in addition to her story involving Turktaz and the repercussions faced by the king, who has to spend his entire life donning black robes of regret and mourning, serves as a cautionary tale for kings to honor and emulate female *javānmard*s.[156]

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[155] Persianate women have always been celebrated for using their storytelling skills to guide kings. One of the most famous being Shahrazad from Arabian Nights. See Ulrich Marzolph, "Arabian Nights," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online* (Brill), accessed July 1, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0021.

[156] Cameron Cross, "The Many Colors of Love in Niẓāmī's 'Haft Paykar:' Beyond the Spectrum," *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures*, May 4, 2017, 52-96 Paginazione, https://doi.org/10.13130/INTERFACES-7663.

"Queen Nushaba of Bardaʿa looking at a picture of Alexander" (Fig.14) allows us to see how Timurid women like ʿIsmat al-Dunya understood themselves as superior to their male counterparts. According to Nizami's *Iskandarnamah*, Queen Nushaba is a beautiful and wise queen who commands a large army and has thousands of slaves. She rejects all kinds of lust and lives with women in a place where men are not allowed.[157] All these reveal her connection to *javānmardī* virtues.

The way Queen Nushaba is painted as planning a cunning defense against Alexander's planned invasion conveys her wisdom, resourcefulness, and strategic planning that makes her a *javānmard*. Seated on her throne, she is depicted as gathering intelligence about him from his portrait found in a "scroll with the portraits of all living rulers" handed to her by a maidservant to disrupt Alexander's potential trickery.[158] The tension is evident: the maidservants, clad in blue and purple, huddle together murmuring as if conveying the secretive nature of the plan. In the bottom center of the illustration, a flurry of activity unfolds to carry out Queen Nushaba's plan. Two manservants seem to have placed a table laden with jars and containers– one manservant in green is even depicted as holding a white handkerchief as if to make sure they are clean. Other maidservants in the bottom right open a chest, possibly containing the jewels needed for Nushaba's plan. Even the musicians in the bottom right corner, playing their harp and tambourine, appear focused. A deeper understanding of the events following this scene

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[157] Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance* (BRILL, 2003), 117; Minoo S. Southgate, trans., *Iskandarnamah: A Pers. Medieval Alexander-Romance*, Persian Heritage Series 31 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). 176.

[158] Johann Christoph Bürgel, "Nizāmī's World Order," in *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm: Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizāmī Ganjavī's Khamsa*, ed. Johann Christoph Bürgel and Christine Van Ruymbeke, Iranian Studies Series (Amsterdam: Leiden Univ. Press, 2011), 24.

would further elucidate the effectiveness of her wisdom and cunningness in defending her kingdom:

> When [Alexander] went to her as a messenger, she recognized him, because she had his portrait. She told Alexander that he had better not fight her because there was no honor in defeating a woman; and if she defeated him, he would be disgraced. When they sat down to eat, she placed a plate full of gold and rubies before him. "Bring us some food, for these are but stones," said Alexander. "Why, then, have you caused so many wars for these stones?" asked Nushabah. Alexander replied that she deserved more blame than himself: he had jewels only in his crown, while she had so many that she filled her dishes with them. [...] He profits from this lesson and revises his prejudice against the female sex. [...]The two signed a peace treaty.[159]

Even though scholars have recognized the significance of 'Ismat al-Dunya's manuscript, there has been a tendency to merely acknowledge its importance without delving into how it can help us recover 'Ismat al-Dunya's perspective on female *javānmardī* as well as her economic and diplomatic power. Through Queen Nushaba's visual depiction in the illustrated manuscript she commissioned, ʿIsmat al-Dunya could be offering a subtle critique of the folly of war driven by men's greed and the underestimation of women's leadership in peacemaking. Additionally, Queen Nushaba's successful use of diplomacy could resonate with ʿIsmat al-Dunya's own identity as a diplomatic and influential figure within the Timurid court.

Equally notable is how the image (Fig.14) from the ʿIsmat al-Dunya manuscript is modeled on an illustration (Fig.15) from another highly valued "luxurious" manuscript of *Humāy va Humāyun* (Humay and Humayun), commissioned by her brother-in-law, Baysunghur Mirza (1397-1433).[160] *Humāy va Humāyun* revolves around the adventures undertaken by Humay, the prince of Syria, to be with his love, Humayun, the princess of

[159] Southgate, *Iskandarnamah*, 176; Bürgel, "Nizāmī's World Order.", 24.
[160] See Theresa Zischkin, "Khwaja Kirmani, Mahmud Ibn-Ali, Humay u Humayun (Humay and Humayun)," Museum With No Frontiers: Discover Islamic Art, n.d., https://islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=object;EPM;at;Mus24;4;en;

China.[161] (Fig.15) depicts the pivotal moment Humay falls in love with a picture of Humayun shown to him by the Queen of Fairies and decides to set off and find her. This sets off his growth from a boy into a man and eventually the ruler of the Chinese empire.[162] Chinese princess Humayun is also a character very much associated with *javānmardī* in the story, something I will be discussing in-depth in Chapter 4.[163]

Sholeh Quinn has argued that it is important for us to "read a historical work alongside its model" because the various changes writers make provide a way for us to understand their political agendas.[164] The same can be said for visual texts like illustrated manuscripts. Thus, the decision to model Queen Nushaba's female *javānmardī* performance in ʿIsmat al-Dunya's manuscript on a scene from Baysungur's manuscript that is about a female *javānmard,* like Humayun inspiring a prince to become a man, is particularly intriguing. This act of artistic referencing suggests a gendered connection between the two narratives. It can be seen as a way to legitimize Queen Nushaba's *javānmardī* performance with a well-established female embodiment of the concept that could validate her actions. This association also serves to amplify Queen Nushaba's identity as a powerful *javānmard* who is vital for ideal Persianate kingship and to call out men for their superficiality and arrogance.[165] ʿIsmat al-Dunya's "visual trickery" as I have demonstrated previously, is further proof of her own identity as a *javānmard.*

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[161] I will be talking more about *Humāy va Humāyun* in Chapter 4.

[162] Ursula Sims-Williams, "An Illustrated 14th Century Khamsah by Khvaju Kirmani," *British Library Asian and African Studies Blog* (blog), accessed July 4, 2024, https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2013/07/an-illustrated-14th-century-khamsah-by-khvaju-kirmani.html.

[163] For more information, see Hamidreza Jayhani, "Bāgh-I Samanzār-I Nūshāb: Tracing a Landscape, Based on the British Library's Masnavī of Humāy U Humāyūn," *Muqarnas* 31 (2014): 103-104.

[164] Sholeh Alysia Quinn, *Persian Historiography across Empires: The Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*, First edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 8.

[165] Humay falls in love with a portrait of Humayun and Alexander thinks that he can easily fool Nushaba.

Moreover, Baysungur Mirza is known to be a connoisseur and a patron of high rank known for fostering the development of Herati style in the Timurid context.[166] By showing her ability to model, invert, and develop his artistic style, ʿIsmat al-Dunya aligns herself with being just as manly and refined as her famous brother-in-law capable of challenging and expanding his achievements. It also provides a new way of understanding Timurid familial dynamics, especially between brother and sister-in-laws. ʿIsmat al-Dunya's illustrated manuscript is also a good example of how women used visual means to contribute to a female intellectual tradition around female *javānmardī.*

Early modern Mughal women, descendants of the Timurids, continued the tradition of using illustrated manuscripts to monumentalize their power. One example is Mughal empress Hamidah Begum (1527-1604), Emperor Akbar's mother who was born in Khurasan and was of Central Asian origin. Apart from being one of the most powerful persons in the Mughal court, she also owned one of the most valuable manuscripts of Timurid polymath Mir 'Ali Shir Nava'i's (1441-1501)'s Chaghatay Turkish imitation of Nizami's *Khamsah* is seen from her seal found in the opening page.[167] This manuscript contains the story of *Sab`a-yi Sayyār* (The Seven Planets), which is Nava`i's reinterpretation of Nizami's *Haft Paykar* and Amir Khusraw's *Hasht Bihisht* (The Eight Paradises). In Navai's rewrite, the maid named Dilaram, who is also Chinese, becomes the central figure of the story and is even more celebrated for her ability to lead Bahram Gur to achieve perfect kingship.[168]

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[166] Roemer, "BĀYSONḠOR, ḠĪĀṮ-AL-DĪN."
[167] I will be talking more about its value later.
[168] For detailed information regarding the story of *Sab'a-yi Sayyar,* see Marc Toutant, "What Is at Stake in the Frame Story? A Timurid Reshaping of the Romance of Bahrām Gūr," *Iranian Studies*, August 22, 2022, 1–18.

We cannot be sure of the illustrations that existed during Hamidah Begum's time in the manuscript considering how all but one of the earlier paintings were removed with new paintings added.[169] Nonetheless, her possession of this highly valuable manuscript reveals how royal Mughal women were not just reading about female *javānmard*s but valued them greatly by collecting and preserving them in their libraries. Mughal kings were bibliophiles and saw their Timurid predecessors' books as the most precious because they "were perceived as part of the ruling elites' imperial charisma: symbols of current rule and reminders of a fabled past."[170] Interestingly, while her husband, Humayun, was more interested in collecting works by Safavid artists for his library, Hamidah Begum was more interested in acquiring Timurid manuscripts from Khurasan.[171] Building on this, it is arguable that the deliberate collection and preservation of illustrated manuscripts, particularly those narrating the tales of female *javānmard*s from the Timurid context, served as a strategic means for elite Mughal women, such as Hamidah Begum, to prominently display their *adab*– a key quality of *javānmard*– which included knowing how and what to read and collect. As a result, Hamidah Begum uses her artistic sensibility to assert superiority over her husband.[172]

Hamida Begum's male descendants, such as Jahangir, saw his grandmother's manuscript as the finest Chaghatay Turkish manuscript and valued it at a colossal 10,000 rupees. His son, Shah Jahan, would further double the valuation of Hamida Begum's manuscript when he inherited it.[173] This sequence of valuations and appreciations across

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[169] Emily Hannam, *Eastern Encounters: Four Centuries of Paintings and Manuscripts from the Indian Subcontinent* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2018), 99.
[170] Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*., 321.
[171] Soudavar, "Between the Safavids and the Mughals.", 49.
[172] I will be talking more about Hamidah Begum's *javānmardī* performance in Chapter 2.
[173] Hannam, *Eastern Encounters*, 98.

generations underscores how historical and fictional female *javānmard*s were increasingly valued by their kingly male counterparts, as independent artists, patrons, and art collectors.

Anxious Patriarchs and the Gifting of Illustrated Manuscripts Depicting Female *Javānmard*s

Having explored the use of illustrated manuscripts depicting female *javānmard*s by women themselves, I turn to examine two illustrations from the Shah Tahmasb *Shāhnamah* manuscript. Doing so allows us to understand how Iranian female *javānmard*s were perceived as symbols of masculine power that Iranian male kings, or what I call "anxious patriarchs," used as symbols of masculine power to defend their kingship and intimidate rival monarchs from other empires. Safavid Iranian king Shah Tahmasb (1514-1576) gifted one of the most opulent and exquisitely illustrated of all *Shāhnamah* manuscripts to his rival, the Ottoman Sultan Selim II (1524-1574). Robert Hillenbrand, in his study of illustrations in the Shah Tahmasb *Shāhnamah*, argues that it is mainly about "the enmity between Iran and Turan (land of the Turk)". Moreover, it also serves to convey how Iran appears to Iranians and the fierce determination to protect Safavid Iran's frontiers from Turkish invasions at all costs.[174] Expanding on Hillenbrand, I argue that representations of Iranian female *javānmard*s defeating Turkic male rivals were also used as visual symbols of military intimidation to convey Iranian imperial superiority.

[174] Robert Hillenbrand, "The Iconography of the Shah·nama-Yi Shahi," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. C. P. Melville, Pembroke Persian Papers, v. 4 (International Round Table on Safavid Persia, London : New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed by St. Martin's Press, 1996), 63, 69.

Regardless of the Ottoman's military might, the Safavids were able to dominate culturally by asserting themselves as the undisputed heirs of medieval and Timurid Iran's literary and artistic traditions, which served as the main aspirational reference point for the Ottoman courts' own literary and artistic identity. The Safavids often used the act of gift-giving, especially that of illustrated manuscripts like the *Shāhnamah* they produced, to threaten Ottoman superiority by showcasing their unique dynastic prestige and cultural cachet.[175] Moreover, considering how various Ottoman royal women were well known for being powerful and greatly influenced Ottoman kingship, depicting Iranian female *javānmard*s in diplomatic gifts of illustrated manuscripts can be seen as a way of showing the primacy of Safavid Iranian female *javānmard*s over elite Ottoman women.[176] Moreover, it also reflects the masculine power embodied by Safavid Iranian women that Iranian kings sought to align themselves with.

The illustration (Fig.16) in the Shah Tahmasb *Shāhnamah* depicts the battle scene between Iranian female *javānmard* Gurdafarid and Suhrab, Rustam's son and a warrior of the Turanian army, aiming to seize the White Fortress–an armed outpost of Iran that Gurdafarid belongs to. Gurdafarid can be translated to "glorious warrior" (*gurdā* means 'warrior' and *farīd* means 'glory'). The depiction shows Gurdafarid cross-dressing in a similar battle armor resembling Suhrab, which is also painted in an orange and blue color scheme. Moreover, the way they are illustrated as mirror images battling each other suggests that Gurdafarid is equal to Suhrab in young manliness due to her bravery and martial prowess. The deliberate marginalization of the Iranian male warriors, depicted as mere observers cowering within the tower of the White Fortress, underscores

[175] Sinem A. Casale, "Iconography of the Gift: Diplomacy and Imperial Self-Fashioning at the Ottoman Court," *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 1 (2018): 97–123.
[176] For more information on the power of Ottoman women, see Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*.

Gurdafarid's exceptional martial prowess and her role as the singular champion of Iran against the Turanian threat. This stark visual contrast serves to amplify her courage and skill, positioning her as an exceptional *javānmard* who redefines traditional gender norms. Additionally, the calligraphy on the illustration describes Gurdafarid's martial abilities that are said to shame (*nang*) Suhrab, further solidifying him as a lesser warrior, a lesser man who is not as manly as Gurdafarid.[177]

Apart from Gurdafarid, another female figure also illustrated in the Shah Tahmasb *Shāhnamah* as a *javānmard* is Gurdyeh, whose name means "female warrior" and shares the same root as Gurdafarid. Gurdyeh is the sister of Iranian commander Bahram Chubineh, who tried to challenge the rule of Iranian king Khosrow Parviz. Once his rebellion against Khusrow failed, he fled to China (Chinese Turkestan) where he even became the Emperor of China's son-in-law. Bahram was ultimately killed by a Turk named Qalun, one of Khosrow's henchmen.[178] In Fig.17, Gurdyeh, is portrayed as a literal *javānmard*, a beardless manly youth cross-dressing in her brother's armor as she soundly defeats and stabs Tovorg's back with her lance in a match they have.[179]

Tovorg is the Emperor of China's brother who was sent to negotiate marriage with Gurdyeh on behalf of the Emperor of China. Similar to Gurdafarid, Gurdyeh's status as a manlier *javānmard* stemming from her martial prowess, bravery, and ability to defend Iran and defeat its enemies like China is depicted visually in the manuscript. She is depicted as looking down on Tovorg from her horse as she quite literally penetrates him

[177] Firdausī, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, ed. Dick Davis, Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007). The Persian original is نگه کرد سهراب و آمدش ننگ, see https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/sohrab/sh7
[178] Ibid., 905.
[179] Ibid., 910.

with her long lance as he lays sprawled, bleeding on the battlefield while attempting to crawl towards his men.

Moreover, Gurdyeh's identity as a manlier *javānmard* compared to other men is seen from how the male figures in this illustration are portrayed as mere spectators witnessing the fight from behind the rocks. The character of Gurdyeh is celebrated in the *Shāhnamah* for her strong belief in preserving traditional hierarchies propping up Iranian kingship, allowing us to better understand why her character was illustrated as part of the Shah Tahmasb *Shāhnamah*. In her speech to her brother after hearing of his plans to rebel against King Hurmuzd, and become the King of Iran instead, she warns him how:

> "We should follow the customs of the ancient kings, we should listen to their words. [...] A stranger to the royal blood would disgrace the crown, and it is lineage that makes a man worthy of greatness. [...] The King of Kings chose you as his commander, and was right since your ancestors successfully fought against their enemies, and you return evil for good fortune. Well, you should realize it's yourself you are hurting. Don't make ambition king over good sense [...]. "[180]

Gurdyeh's dedication to maintaining the status quo, in this case, the purity of Iranian lineage, is further seen in the way after her brother's death, she simply marries Gustahm, another Iranian commander simply because she does not want her Iranian familial bloodline to die out: "If I take a Persian husband, my family won't die out."[181] Gurdyeh's ultimate dedication to Iranian patriarchal kingship is seen in how at King Khosrow's command, she kills her newlywed husband Gustahm who, just like her brother, was perceived by Khorsow as a threat to his rule and even joins his harem as one of his wives.[182]

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[180] Ibid., 873-874.
[181] For more information on Gurdyeh, see footnote 31, Davis, "Women in the Shahnameh.", 90.
[182] Firdausī, *Shahnameh*., 914-915.

Considering the ongoing rivalry between the Ottomans and the Safavids, the Shah Tahmasb *Shāhnamah*'s portrayal of female *javānmard*s like Gurdafarid and Gurdyeh is politically suggestive. These heroines, depicted throughout the manuscript (both earlier and later folios), consistently triumph over their Turkic male adversaries. This recurring theme can be interpreted as a deliberate act of "gender performativity" aimed at the Ottoman Sultan Selim II. This strategic deployment of gender serves as a multifaceted message, subtly warning the Ottomans of the dire consequences awaiting those who underestimate Safavid hegemony while simultaneously projecting Safavid imperial authority and resilience through their ability not just to mobilize traditional male warriors but also formidable female *javānmard*s like Gurdafarid and Gurdyeh.

According to legend, when the Ottomans captured Tabriz in the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, they found that many Safavid women like Tajlu Khanum, who was also Shah Tahmasb's mother, were fighting on the battlefield dressed as men. Tajlu Khanum was subsequently captured by the Ottomans but managed to escape and return to Tabriz.[183] Considering the legendary status of the cross-dressing Tajlu Khanum, who managed to outsmart the Ottomans, the presentation of an illustrated manuscript featuring characters like Gurdafarid—both martially and mentally strong and bearing a striking resemblance to Shah Tahmasb's mother—can be seen as a deliberate Safavid strategy. This symbolic inversion of Ottoman dominance served to remind the Ottomans of their subordinate status while simultaneously seeking to establish diplomacy rather than further conflict.[184] Accordingly, we can see how the Safavids utilized the power of narrative and symbolism surrounding female *javānmardī* to resolve their anxieties and

[183] See footnote 7, Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, "Economic Activities of Safavid Women in the Shrine-City of Ardabil," *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 2 (1998): 249.
[184] Hillenbrand, "The Iconography of the Shah·nama-Yi Shahi.", 71.

outman their adversaries. A better understanding of Gurdyeh and Gurdafarid's stories in relation to their visual representations sheds light on the carnivalesque nature of female *javānmardī*, specifically how their gendered inversions functioned to both legitimize the rule of their anxious patriarchal counterparts.

Beyond the Bling: Female Fashion and Jewelry

Travel accounts by European officials, such as Venetian envoy Michel Membre, reveal from a European perspective how during the reigns of Shah Tahmasb (r.1524-1576) and Shah Ismail I (r.1501-1524), real-life Qizilbash women and other elite Safavid women behaved in ways that we can call *javānmardī* to defend their kingdoms. The wives of Qizilbash amirs and other royal Safavid women, played a vital role in diplomatic functions and were used to impress and potentially intimidate early modern European foreign officials who came from places like Portugal and Venice that Safavid Iran had military rivalries or trade partnerships:

> The Shah's maidens pass on fine horses; and they ride like men and dress like men [...]And I have seen that there were about fourteen to fifteen of those maidens, and they were beautiful, though their faces could not be fully seen. But what could be seen was beautiful and very fair. And sometimes they galloped and performed marvels with their horses, making them jump and do many other skillful tricks. They went thus behind the court, where the Shah's tents were pitched. [...] [The Qizilbash's] wives are very beautiful and wear beautiful, big, round pearls at their necks. These ladies are very agreeable and keep all their husbands' money. When the husband wants something he has to ask his wife for the money, so the Qizilbash is said to love their wives a great deal. The ladies ride through the town like men and go with maids instead of grooms; and they go with their faces covered with a white kerchief, so only the eyes are seen.[185]

Membre's account, similar to the Chinese travelers from the middle period, reveal from a European perspective, the way premodern Persianate women were "like men." What made them manly to Membre was not simply due to their equestrian skill or

[185] Michele Membré, *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia (1539-1542)*, trans. A. H. Morton, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust (Warminster: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1999)., 25-31.

masculine attire, but because of their ability to dominate their husbands by controlling the finances. Membre's repeated emphasis on how these Qizilbash women were "like men" and were also "beautiful," provides us with a way of envisioning real-life female *javānmard*s from the Safavid context beyond the realm of fiction. Membre's observation regarding the way these Qizilbash women, or what I call female *javānmard*s, were stationed behind Shah Tahmasb's tent further showcased the integrated matriarchal aspect that formed the backbone of Safavid male kingship.[186]

Other envoys before Membre, such as António Tenreiro, who was part of the Portuguese ambassador's retinue to the court of Shah Ismail I, also in a similar way to Membre wrote in his travelog about the way glamorous and manly Safavid women were part as part of Shah Ismail I's entourage in diplomatic functions:

> When he [Shah Ismail] breaks camp, all the wives of the servants of the Sufi join, to one side, behind his wives. They are very well dressed, and [ride] on the best horses which their husbands have, and with the best accouterments, riding on them as the men do; and in their attire, they do not dress differently than the men, save they wear some *garauins*-head dresses on the head with *trançado*s-beads in back, and the face veiled. [...] Their garments are very tight through the sleeves and embroidered on the arms, fitted to the body, and they reach to the foot, [and] open front from the breasts to the waist, and thus even the blouses and underneath draws of silk worked in gold and seed-pearls on the frontside, over which they suit leggings of scarlet purple-red cloth, with very delicate little shoes of silk and of leather. Over these garments, they wear some upper garments fitted with tight and long sleeves, which hang free. They are lined with ermine and marten and with other linings.[187]

The accounts by both Membre and Tenreiro during the reigns of Shah Ismail I and his son, Shah Tahmasb, reveal the existence of a tradition where elite women served as

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[186] For more information regarding the power Safavid women yielded, see Szuppe, *Status, Knowledge, and Politics: Women in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran*, 140-169.

[187] Ronald Bishop Smith, *The First Age of the Portuguese Embassies, Navigations and Peregrinations in Persia (1507-1524)*. (Decatur Press, 1970)., 75. For more information on the Portuguese words, see footnote 20 in Rudolph (Rudi) Matthee, "From the Battlefield to the Harem: Did Women's Seclusion Increase from Early to Late Safavid Times?," 113-114.

potent manly symbols conveying Safavid imperial power. During the reign of Ismail I, the Portuguese were infamously well-known by the Iranians for their military might due to their long-held occupation of Hormuz.[188] On the other hand, during Tahmasb's reign, the Venetians were important trading partners.[189] Scholars have looked at how Safavid kings such as Shah Tahmasb and Shah Abbas used luxury textiles as propaganda. While I have mentioned previously the way fictional female *javānmard*s like Gurdyeh and Gourdafarid were part of Safavid propaganda against the Ottomans, little has been said on how early Safavid elite female manly youths were also contributing to imperial propaganda in relation to the Europeans.[190]

Membre's tone of fascination in describing the "beautiful, big, round pearls" decorating the Qizilbash women's necks and Tenreiro's detailed approach when it comes to documenting the outfits of Shah Ismail's female entourage for us to pay attention to the ways these women used glamorous objects, such as "pearls, silk, gold, leather, ermine and marten lined garments," to demonstrate their cultural sophistication and Safavid Iran's economic prosperity enabled by a strong male ruler.

As I have mentioned earlier, the archetype of the *javānmard* stemmed from the martially powerful warrior defending their kingdom. The strategic way Qizilbash and other Safavid royal women used what the Europeans term as "manly" virtues ranging from exceptional equestrian skills, cross-dressing, financial independence, alongside their

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[188] Rudi Matthee, "Between Aloofness and Fascination: Safavid Views of the West," *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 2 (1998): 219–246.
[189] Ahmad Guliyev, "'Giving What They Hold Dear': Safavid Diplomatic Gifts to Venice," *Diplomatica* 5 (May 8, 2023): 24–45, 31-32.
[190] Shenasa, Nazanin Hedayat and Munroe, Nazanin Hedayat, "Donning the Cloak: Safavid Figural Silks and the Display of Identity" (2008). Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings. 264.
https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/264

female beauty and use of glamorous adornments to intimidate their European rivals, shows the multifaceted ways early Safavid elite women, redefined and aligned themselves with the traditional *javānmard* ideal protecting their realm.

The cross-dressing bejeweled female *javānmard* also became an important part of Mughal aesthetics, exemplified by the Akbar *Hamzanamah* illustrated manuscript. In "A Heroine Forcibly Enters a Jail to Liberate Heroes" (Fig.18), while we are not sure of her name, the heroine's identity as a cross-dressing female *javānmard* is made evident in the way she is painted as wearing a male battle armor.[191] She also has distinctly female features that are different from the other male figures in the same illustration. Moreover, spatial and figurative choices serve to further emphasize her as a manlier *javānmard* compared to other male figures in the illustration. While she is placed on the top of the illustration, her male counterparts are depicted at the bottom of the illustration confined to the dark pit, thus establishing a visual hierarchy. In contrast to this unknown female *javānmard*, the men are depicted as passive characters bound, slumbering, and vulnerable. Wine jugs scatter around the male figures, suggesting their identities as vulnerable, helpless figures who were deceived and drugged. Her martial skills and bravery that make her a *javānmard* are evident not only in her ability to wield a sword but also in using her bare hands to kill her male enemy while he bleeds out.

In the Mughal artistic tradition, adorning male and female subjects with precious jewelry and luxury objects was a convention to showcase their importance and power.[192] The adornment of this courageous unknown female *javānmard* in the illustration with an

[191] For more information on this illustration, see Lowry and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Smithsonian Institution), *An Annotated and Illustrated Checklist of the Vever Collection*., 30-33.
[192] Annemarie Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art and Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 175.

array of glamorous jewelry—ten pearl and gold necklaces adorning her neck, gold, and pearl earrings gracing her ears, complemented by gold hair ornaments and a feathered hat, along with a pearl bracelet and a gold ring decorating her hand, compel viewers to focus on her exemplary performance of *javānmardī* as approved and enjoyed by Akbar himself.

Female *javānmard*s with significant martial prowess capable of saving their male counterparts, akin to the portrayal of the unknown female *javānmard* in Akbar's *Hamzanamah*, were not merely fictional but constituted a historical reality of the Mughal milieu. In her memoir titled the *Humayunnamah*, Akbar's aunt, Gulbadan Begum, recalls how it was a female *javānmard* named Haram Begum was the leader who led the army that soundly defeated Humayun's rival, Kamran Mirza, thus solidifying his ascent to the throne.[193] Moreover, during a fatal illness in the midst of a grave political crisis, Akbar's father Humayun was protected by Bibi Fatima, who was the chief *urdubegi*, or armed female retainer responsible for protecting the emperor and his harem.[194] Just like his father, Akbar himself was also protected by his wet nurse and foster mother, Mahim Anaga, who risked her own life to save him from the treacherous plans of his uncles when his father Humayun, and mother, Hamidah Begum, escaped to Safavid Iran.[195] In these cases, we can see how Mughal kingship was enabled and sustained by martially powerful female *javānmard*s.

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[193] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah*, 68; trans 63.
[194] Balkrishan Shivram, "Thicker Than Blood: The Social and Political Significance of Wet Nurses in Mughal Empire of North India," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 69 (2008): 412.
[195] Natif, "Preliminary Thoughts on Portraits of Mughal Women in Illustrated Histories from Akbar's Time.", 41-44.

Conclusion

Through looking at various representations of female *javānmardī*, I have demonstrated how the premodern Persianate world was a topsy-turvy place. This is evident in the way premodern women from the premodern Persianate world were recorded and represented by Persianate male artists and chroniclers, Chinese male travelers, and European male diplomats. Not only were they mustached and even tattooed models of masculine authority, but they were female wrestlers and even bejeweled cross-dresssing female warriors superior to their male counterparts. The way female *javānmard*s served as imperial propaganda disseminated in different mediums and genres for anxious patriarchs across various premodern Persianate empires convey these women as major power brokers and even power players. I have also highlighted the visual inversions related to female *javānmardī* carried out by elite women, such as 'Ismat al-Dunya, Hamidah Begum, and Sahifa Banu, especially in relation to other visual works produced by their male counterparts enabled by the integrated matriarchal nature of the middle and early modern periods. The visual works associated with these women allows us to better understand the women centered innovations that contributed to the creative aspects of this topsy-turvy world and an intellectual tradition surrounding female *javānmardī*.

Lastly, while this chapter has revealed various symbols of female *javānmardī*, further exploration is necessary. One of these symbols is the horse that is seen to frequently appear alongside the female *javānmard.* Moreover, the existence of a metal bag said to be owned by an Ilkhanid elite woman, also known as the Courtauld Bag, suggests the potential for uncovering other symbolic languages of female *javānmardī* and

female inversions.[196] Shifting gears, the next chapter explores how a Mughal princess expanded and redefined the textual genres of her time to create a mirror for princesses instructing and inspiring future generations of female *javānmard*s.

[196] For more information, see R. M. Ward, *Court and Craft: A Masterpiece from Northern Iraq [Exhibition, Courtauld Gallery, Londres, Feb. 20-May 18, 2014]* (London: Courtauld Gallery in association with Paul Holberton Publishing, 2014).

Chapter Two

"I'd rather be married to someone I can control": Female *javānmardī* in Gulbadan Begum's *Humayunnamah* as a Mirror for Princesses

The mischievous quote making up this chapter's title comes from the *Humayunnamah*, a historical text written around 1587 in Persian by Gulbadan Begum (1522-1603). Gulbadan is a Mughal princess of Timurid heritage and the daughter of the founder of the Mughal dynasty, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur (1483-1530).[197] In the *Humayunnamah,* Gulbadan recounts the response Hamidah Begum (1542-1605) gives upon receiving a chastisement from her future mother-in-law, Dildar Begum:

> "Look whether you like it or not, in the end, you are going to be married to somebody. Who could be better than the Emperor?"
> "Yes, you are right. But I'd rather marry someone whose collar my hand can reach."[198]

Hamidah Begum's refusal to be impressed by the status of the second Mughal emperor, Humayun (1508-1556), and her explicit declaration of marrying a husband she could control, provides an example of when elite women from the Mughal empire asserted themselves as superior to their male counterparts. It also further highlights the active role elite women played in challenging the patriarchal norms that governed their lives. How were some Mughal women more powerful than their male counterparts? One answer lies in the concept of *javānmardī* (young-manliness). In the *Humayunnamah,* Gulbadan devotes significant attention to remembering the multifaceted ways elite

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[197] I have chosen to abbreviate Gulbadan Begum's name to Gulbadan throughout the article.
[198] This line is idiomatic for controlling someone. Gulbadan Begam, *Humayunnama*, trans. W. M. Thackston, Bibliotheca Iranica, no. 11 (Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Publishers, 2009). Citations of *Humayunnamah* will include the page reference to the Persian text followed by the page number of Thackston's English translation preceded with the word "trans"; 37, trans 37, translation slightly modified.

Mughal women embodied *javānmardī* in ways superior to their male counterparts. Her recollection of this event raises another critical question: to what extent was Gulbadan effective in harnessing literature, specifically the "mirror for princesses" genre, as a weapon to assert their authority and navigate the prevailing male-centric order?[199]

Gulbadan was ordered to construct the *Humayunnamah* by her nephew, Akbar, the third Mughal emperor and the son of Humayun and Hamidah Begum. He wanted her to record events that happened during his father and grandfather's reigns so that they could be used as reference material for his vizier, Abu'l Fazl (1551-1602), who was responsible for writing his chronicle, the *Akbarnamah.* In her study of the *Humayunnmah*, Taymiya Zaman has argued how it is a genre-crossing memoir that functions as a form of "instructive memory" where Gulbadan seeks to use her memories of Humayun to instruct Akbar on ideal virtues found in his father worth emulating.[200] As mentioned earlier, Askari coined the term "mirror for princesses" to describe literary works produced during the medieval and early modern contexts aimed at imparting lessons of ideal behavior to elite women through exemplary female characters.[201]

Expanding upon Zaman and Askari's scholarship, this article explores the multifaceted role of the *Humayunnmah* as more than just a guide for elite males, but also as a "mirror for princesses:" an instructional manual for elite Mughal women. By looking at the *Humayunnamah* through the lens of this genre, I demonstrate how Gulbadan

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[199] The original manuscript has two titles. One of them is the *Humayunnamah* and the other is *Ahvāl-i Humāyūn Pādishāh*. See Gulbadan Begum and Annette Susannah Beveridge, *The history of Humayun (Humayun-Nama)*, Facsim. ed. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2001), see 82.

[200] Taymiya R. Zaman, "Instructive Memory: An Analysis of Auto/Biographical Writing in Early Mughal India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54, no. 5 (2011): 677–700.

[201] Askari, "A Mirror for Princesses.", 140.

employs and redefines the prevalent literary conventions of her time to remember not only her own but also other remarkable displays of *javānmardī* by other elite Mughal women during the reign of Humayun, given that he was well-known for having fallen "short specifically in fulfilling gender roles appropriate to a warrior king."[202] The *Humayunnamah* magnifies how an integrated matriarchy of female *javānmard*s (manly youths) vastly contributed to the fabric of early Mughal empire-building. Furthermore, this approach of looking at the *Humayunnamah* as a mirror for princesses can broaden the definitional scope of Persianate kinship and kingship structures of intellectual exchange.

Scholars working on gender and *javānmardī* in the Mughal context, such as Rosalind O'Hanlon, Ali Annoshahr, Flatt, and Kalb, have predominantly looked at how the concept of *javānmardī* was understood and redefined by kings and male courtiers to communicate imperial power from a male-centered perspective.[203] Sunil Sharma, in his study of seventeenth-century Persian poetry written by the Iranian male poet Nauʿi Khabushani (1563–1610) for Akbar's court, has uncovered how *javānmardī* was applied to the figure of the Hindu woman who has shown unswerving fidelity to her beloved till the end.[204] Anooshahr has also pointed out how female cross-dressing during the reigns of Humayun and Sultan Bahlul Lodi (r.1451–1489) was not only condoned but also praised by male-composed Indo-Persian chronicles of the sixteenth-century, especially in times

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[202] Anooshahr, "The King Who Would Be Man.", 328-329.
[203] Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42, no. 1 (1999): 47–93; Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Kingdom, Household and Body History, Gender and Imperial Service under Akbar," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2007): 889–923; Kalb, "Framing Gender in Mughal South Asia"; Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan"; Anooshahr, "The King Who Would Be Man."
[204] Sunil Sharma, "The Indian Woman in a Persianate World," in *Reflections on Mughal Art & Culture*, ed. Roda Ahluwalia and K.R. Cama Oriental Institute (Seminar on 'Mughal Art and Culture', New Delhi, India: Niyogi Books : The K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 2021), 313.

of dire need during combat.[205] Sharma and Anooshahr's scholarships demonstrate the fluidity of gendered concepts like *javānmardī* and gender roles during the reigns of Akbar and Humayun. This allows us to see how manliness was understood as a performative act that could be embodied by both men and women from different backgrounds in various ways, especially during the early Mughal period.

Expanding on these various scholarships, this chapter carries out a close reading of Gulbadan Begum's *Humayunnamah* allows us to better understand how *javānmardī* operated from a historical female perspective as well. Mughal royal women not only embodied traditional *javānmardī* virtues but established new associations with the concept itself, oftentimes to assert their power. Foucault, in his study of ethics, has seen it as male, specifically "by men [...] to men [...] in which women figured only as objects, or at most, as partners that one had best train, educate and watch over when one had them under one's power, but stay away from when they were under the power of someone else (father, husband, tutor)."[206] Gulbadan Begum's the *Humayunnamah* disrupts Foucault's Eurocentric understanding of ethics by showing how it can be creatively redeployed by women to both men and women. As such, women were not only objects of male exchange, per Gale Rubin, but powerful ethical subjects who treated male kin as exchangeable objects. This is exemplified by Hamidah Begum's words that I have mentioned in the beginning of the paper where she views marriage not as a duty but as an exchange market beneficial to female *javānmard*s like herself. Her description of placing a "collar" over a husband implies such as objectification of men in terms of economic value.[207]

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[205] Anooshahr, "The King Who Would Be Man", 338-339.
[206] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*., 22.
[207] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 37; trans 37.

Contextualizing Gulbadan's *Humayunnamah*

To understand Gulbadan's gender politics in the *Humayunnamah,* one must consider the historical circumstances surrounding her life, the *Bāburnamah* and other female-centered literary traditions, such as the mirror for princesses genre. In her study of the *Humayunnamah*, Ruby Lal asserts that "we cannot know, therefore, what literary models Gulbadan drew upon to write her own text. It certainly does not show any adherence to any available format [...]. It is without any didactic purpose and lies outside the 'mirror for princes' genre, which seems to be prevalent then. [...] [It] might thus be classified as an "open" text belonging to no recognized genre."[208] While Lal is right about the uniqueness of the *Humayunnamah*, she has overlooked the broader literary and historical context within which Gulbadan crafted her authorial persona. I seek to demonstrate how just as Gulbadan was not writing in a vacuum, the *Humayunnamah* is not a purposeless, unrecognizable anomaly. In fact, Gulbadan's purpose is to write in mixed genres in order to influence the historical memory/commemoration of Mughal imperial lineage and legitimacy, a memory made "official" during Akbar's reign.[209]

Akbar and Unmanly Men

Firstly, it is important to remember that Akbar was the one who requested his aunt Gulbadan to write the *Humayunnamah*. Akbar was well-known for being innovative when it came to expanding and even breaking free from imperial traditions.[210] Thus, it is not surprising that he would ask his aunt, who was close to both his father and grandfather, to contribute to the official history of his reign. Furthermore, Timurid

[208] Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, 58-59; Lal makes a similar argument in her other book, see Lal, *Vagabond Princess*, 482.
[209] I will be expanding more on the *Humayunnamah*'s purpose in later sections.
[210] For more information on Akbar's various innovations, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*,132-172.

women like Gulbadan were highly revered by their male counterparts not just for supplying legitimacy for their Turko-Mongol lineages, but also for their ability to excel and even surpass men in various literary, scientific, and architectural traditions.[211] Most importantly, some Timurid women were even remembered for their ability to utilize *javānmardī* to defend kingship. In *Habib al-siyar* (Beloved of Virtues), a chronicle written by the early modern historian Khvandamir (d.1535/6), he describes Agha Begi as a lioness whose manliness amazed Shah Rukh to the extent that he regarded her as manlier than other men.[212] Given Gulbadan's Timurid lineage associated with intelligence, legitimacy, and even *javānmardī,* incorporating her work into the official history would have helped enhance Akbar's prestige.[213]

Gulbadan would have also been aware that Akbar was deeply invested in *javānmardī*, which formed the backbone of his imperial ideology.[214] Not only did he maintain a large number of wrestlers, who are traditionally understood as *javānmardī* icons*,* but he also commissioned the production of illustrated manuscripts, such as the *Tutīnamah* (Tales of a Parrot), that was concerned with instructing ideal womanhood.[215] Another example is the *Hamzanamah,* which contained visual representations of cross-dressing female *javānmard*s and female wrestlers discussed in Chapter One.

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[211] Priscilla Soucek, "Timurid Women: A Cultural Perspective," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. Gavin Hambly, The New Middle Ages, volume 6 (Basingstoke London: Macmillan, 1998), 199–226.

[212] Khwandamir, "Habib Al-Siyar," in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, Mass: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989), 141.

[213] Akbar also commissioned portraits of Central Asian/ Timurid women to showcase his association with cultural prowess and charisma that were essential for bolstering the legitimacy of his kingship, see Natif, Mika, "Preliminary Thoughts on Portraits of Mughal Women in Illustrated Histories from Akbar's Time.", 39.

[214] O'Hanlon, "Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India."

[215] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan", 164; Lal, *Vagabond Princess*, 480-481; Gayane Karen Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: Whose 'Best Story'?," 486.

Akbar's interest in instructing women on ideal behavior and female *javānmardī,* along with his reverence and reliance towards women of Timurid heritage can be seen as the factors enabling Gulbadan to create a mirror for princesses instructing female readers on how to be *javānmard*s.

Most importantly, a major catalyst driving Gulbadan to create a mirror for princesses within the *Humayunnamah* originates from her firsthand encounters with the failure of male counterparts, particularly their male leader, Humayun, in embodying *javānmardī* qualities expected of an ideal king. It was well-known that in the last years of his life, Humayun's father, Babur, was plagued by uncertainty regarding Humayun's ability to be a manly leader– to keep the empire and his brothers united.[216] Bayazid Bayat, one of Humayun's soldiers whom Akbar also ordered to write down what he knew about his father, describes Humayun in his chronicle as a "delicate king" lacking in manliness compared to his father Babur and rivals, like Shir Shah and his half-brother Kamran Mirza.[217]

Gulbadan herself sheds light on Humayun's deficiencies as a *javānmard*. She recounts the tragic fates of royal women, particularly Humayun's wives, and children, who perished due to his deficiency in martial prowess. He was unable to secure his kingship in his battles against Shir Shah (1472-1545), an Afghan nobleman who sought to gain control of northern India:

> During these troubles absolutely no trace could be found of several persons. Among them was Sultan-Husayn Mirza's daughter Ayisha Sultan Begim, my father the Padishah's deputy Bichka, Bikä-Jan Koka, Afifa Begim, Chand Bibi, who was seven months pregnant. Three of these were wives of the emperor. In no

[216] Munis D. Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719*, First paperback edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 26.
[217] Anooshahr, "The King Who Would Be Man.", 331.

way how they searched, what happened to them was never discovered. The emperor was ill for forty days, but he recovered.[218]

Gulbadan's detailed recollection of various types of royal women, ranging from pregnant women to those who served two kings and even female children, all who met tragic ends, allows us to see how the *Humayunnamah* also had a commemorative purpose: to remember female *javānmard*s who gave up their lives for Mughal empire building. Through this rhetorical setup, Gulbadan teaches readers to be *javānmard*s capable of using their literary talents to help women who would otherwise have been forgotten by history.

Humayun's lack of *javānmardī* is further seen in how Gulbadan remembers how he could be rude to his female family members. She describes him as being "very annoyed" (*bisyār a'rāẓ*) and showing "vexation" (*kalfatī*) when royal women like Afghani Agacha, one of his father's wives and Mahchuchuk Begum, one of his wives, made mistakes like falling off and failing to control their horses that affected the flow of his sightseeing outings.[219] Moreover, he would even get "angry" (*qahr*) at his other wives' request to spend more time with him, as seen in the case of Bikä Begum.[220] Apart from the various consequences Mughal women had to bear due to their male counterparts' lack of *javānmardī*, elite Mughal women also frequently found themselves as the linchpins that kings, such as Humayun and Babur, heavily depended on when performing *javānmard*s defending and enabling their rule.[221] A better understanding of

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[218] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 31; trans 30.
[219] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,*63-64; trans 59.
[220] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 25; trans 27. For more information regarding an analysis of this story, see Leong, "'If Only That Pitiless Blade Had Pierced My Own Heart and Eyes': Mughal Royal Women's Grief as a Form of Political Rhetoric.", 12.
[221] I will be talking more about this in the later part of my paper. See the part on Khanzadah Begum and Haram Begum.

the various anxieties surrounding royal Mughal women, exemplified by Gulbadan's own experience with an unmanly king like Humayun, allows us to see why she would have seized this opportunity to create a mirror for princesses within the space of the *Humayunnamah* aimed not only to teach women how to be *javānmard*s , but also to ensure Mughal women's own survival in the various struggles within the court for Mughal dynastic continuation.

Like father like daughter: Gulbadan as Babur's literary heir

Examining how her father's memoir, the *Babūrnamah,* functioned as a model for Gulbadan's the *Humayunnamah* enables a better understanding of her ability to craft a memoir that also serves as a mirror for princesses. Lal asserts that while Gulbadan read her father's self-authored memoir*,* "it was clearly not the literary model for" the *Humayunnamah.*[222] But this might not be the case. Quinn has mentioned how "imitative writing" was a standard practice of early modern historiographical writing. Imitative writing involves a chronicler choosing an earlier history as a model, then proceeds to not just imitate it, but also change it for political or stylistic purposes."[223] Gulbadan makes it clear to her readers at the beginning of the *Humayunnamah* that she intents to repeat what her father did in the *Bāburnamah*:

> In the first part of this story, the story of his Holiness the king, my dear father, shall be written. Although events are recorded in the memoirs of his royal Highness my dear father. Nevertheless, with blessing and fortune, I will write them down here.[224]

Stephen Dale has stated how the *Bāburnamah*'s uniqueness lies in its complexity: not only does it function as a memoir, but also as an "unusual example" of a mirror for

[222] Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, 58-59.
[223] Quinn, *Persian Historiography across Empires*, 7-8.
[224] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,*1; trans 1, translation slightly modified.

princes.[225] Unlike traditional texts such as the *Qābusnamah*, which are overtly didactic, the *Bāburnamah* uses an intimate tone and candid writing style that fosters a sense of intimacy and subtly that encourages a greater receptiveness to his lessons. Furthermore, it is also a "self-serving piece of propaganda."[226] Lisa Balabanliar also points out that "the very structure of Babur's memoir reflects an extraordinary degree of public respect for the position of women in his own family and dynasty."[227]

Moreover, the mirror genre is "almost infinitely flexible" and can range from brief sentences to collections of stories to long epic poems. In addition to providing advice to monarchs, the mirror for princes has always been used by writers to suit different purposes ranging from "intervening in dynastic politics [...] to professional advancement."[228] The flexible nature of the mirror genre, coupled with the *Bāburnamah*, paved the way for Gulbadan to unapologetically create a memoir that would also serve as a mirror for princesses, in which both she and her female counterparts were main characters of *javānmardī* on a quest to promote masculine perfection in kings.

While Humayun never wrote his own memoir, Akbar appears to have been "unlettered."[229] With the *Humayunnamah*, Gulbadan was thus able to assert her identity as a *javānmard* superior to her father's male descendants, who failed to produce self-authored works in the manner of the *Bāburnamah.* She becomes Babur's literary heir

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[225] Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Bābur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483-1530)*, Brill's Inner Asian Library, v. 10 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2004), 27.
[226] Ibid., 27. For more information on how the Akbar and Babur's other descendents understood Babur's text as a mirror for princes, see Ibid., 43-44.
[227] Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire*., 129.
[228] Louise Marlow, *Medieval Muslim Mirrors for Princes: An Anthology of Arabic, Persian and Turkish Political Advice*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2023), 5-6.
[229] I have chosen to follow how Zaman uses the word "unlettered" to avoid the pejorative modernist connotations of the adjective "illiterate." See Zaman, "Instructive Memory", 682.

capable of continuing and expanding his mirror for princes literary legacy. Building on this collaboration, the first lesson the *Humayunnamah* teaches, as a mirror for princesses, is for women to embrace literacy not solely for the sake of asserting superiority, but also as a means to perpetuate and preserve the various virtues and literary traditions linked with female *javānmardī.* Only by doing so can they secure patriarchal continuity in the Mughal dynasty.

Gulbadan died in 1603 and the *Akbarnamah* was completed by Abu'l Fazl in 1590. This would mean she, along with other Mughal court ladies, would have been aware of the enduring legacy of her work during her lifetime. Ram Sharma has observed that Gulbadan's account regarding Babur sacrificing his own life for Humayun stands out as the "more important" and was used by other chroniclers, including Abu'l Fazl, as one of the most crucial for legitimizing Humayun's and Akbar's kingship.[230] The significance of the *Humayunnamah* in shaping the *Akbarnamah* demonstrates Gulbadan's triumph in using her literary talents to solidify her identity as a Mughal kingmaker.

"Mirrors for princesses" and the *Humayunnamah*'s female readers

Gulbadan follows in the footsteps of a long tradition of medieval elite women, aware of their power in the upbringing of future monarchs. These women patronized male writers to construct mirrors for princesses, so that other elite female readers could learn virtuous qualities embodied by its exemplary characters. In her study of an illustrated manuscript of folk tales titled *Kitāb-i-dāstān,* Askari mentions that it was produced during the reign of Safavid king Shah Tahmasb (1514-1576). She hypothesizes that it could be seen as a mirror for princesses and probably was meant to be read aloud

[230] Ram Sharma, "The Story of Babar's Death," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1926): 296-297.

to women.[231] Following his expulsion from India in 1540 by Shir Shah, Humayun, along with female members of his family, sought refuge at Shah Tahmasb's court. During this period up to 1555, both Humayun and Hamidah reportedly looked at various illustrated manuscripts in the libraries of Herat.[232] Not only did Gulbadan document in the *Humayunnmah* the tour Humayun and his entourage had in Safavid Iran, but she was also very close to Hamidah.[233] It is plausible that Gulbadan was aware of the mirror for princesses genre that was part of medieval and early modern Persianate cultures.

Despite her scepticism, Lal has shed light on how Gulbadan was educated by female teachers to grasp allusions and lessons from didactic poems such as Persian poet Sa'di's *Gulistan* (Rose Garden) and his *Bustan* (The Orchard).[234] Moreover, Gulbadan would have known mirrors for princes texts and other instructional literature, such as the *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* and the *Qābusnamah*.[235] Gulbadan's familiarity with the mirror genre is evident in the advice offered in one of her surviving poems: "Be sure that girls who treat their lovers badly/ Are apt to find their lives will end up sadly."[236]

During Akbar's reign, Maria Szuppe suggests how his wet nurse, Mahim Anaga Begum, stands out as an example of a powerful woman who commissioned the male chronicler Fakhri Heravi (d. 1563) to create a compendium titled *Tazkirat al-nisā* (Biographies of Women).[237] This work details legendary poetesses and saintly women from across the Muslim world who lived in the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, providing subsequent generations with a valuable reference when it comes to fostering

[231] Askari, "A Mirror for Princesses.", 125, 122; Askari, "Élite Folktales.", 55.
[232] Soudavar, "Between the Safavids and the Mughals.", 49.
[233] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,*50; trans 48.
[234] Lal, *Vagabond Princess*, 94.
[235] Ibid., 205, 482.
[236] Davis, *The Mirror of My Heart*, 155.
[237] Szuppe, "The Female Intellectual Milieu in Timurid and Post-Timurid Herāt.", 49.

knowledge regarding women's contributions.[238] Mahim Anaga was amongst Akbar's highest-ranking officials and is described in the *Akbarnamah* as striding "in wisdom like a man."[239] Mahim Anaga's patronage of the *Tazkirat al-nisā* is an example of how 'manly' powerful women of Gulbadan's time were leveraging their influence to textually record the achievements of other women for later generations – something that Gulbadan was also participating in with the *Humayunnamah* as a mirror for princesses.

Regardless of how she was writing the *Humayunnamah* under the orders of Akbar for him and his vizier, Gulbadan makes it clear how she had a female reader who was involved in creating the *Humayunnamah*. Gulbadan's repetition of "Hamidah Begum says" (*Hāmidah Bãnu Bīgum mīgūyand*) throughout the Humayunnamah shows how Hamidah was a secondary source substantiating the authenticity of various events.[240] Hamidah's role as a reader, fact-checker, and even one of the main characters in the *Humayunnamah*, allows us to see the different ways Mughal women not only preserved but also enriched the mirrors for princesses legacy of their medieval female predecessors. Considering the homosocial dynamics prevalent among Mughal elite women, and the oral tradition of political discussions and storytelling in the Mughal domestic space, it is reasonable to suggest that women familiar with Gulbadan's *Humayunnamah* potentially participated in reading or listening to–and even editing– its narratives.[241]

On women being *javānmard*s and writing about *javānmardī*

To further understand how the *Humayunnamah*'s goal is to remember and teach female *javānmardī,* it is also crucial to remember Gulbadan's elite female predecessors'

[238] Ibid., 124.
[239] Henry Beveridge, *The Akbarnama of Abul Fazal Vol 3* (ASIATIC SOCIETY, 2010), 307.
[240] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 33, 48; Beveridge trans., 145, 166.
[241] Lal, *Vagabond Princess*, 90.

relationship with *javānmardī.* One example mentioned earlier is Padishah Khatun (1256-95), who ruled Kirman in the thirteenth century and was raised by her formidable mother "like a man," as a *javānmard.*[242] She was also a talented poet.[243] Even after her death, she continued to inspire other elite female poets. Jahan Malik Khatun (c.1324-c.1382), a princess from the Injuid dynasty (1335-1357), credits her as an influence. By skillfully using "the language and style of her male contemporaries" in her poems, Jahan Malik Khatun asserted her connections with manliness.[244]

Davis believes that Jahan Mailk Khatun's work was relevant to the powerful Timurid empress, Gohar Shad, and also influenced the works of other Timurid poetesses like Mehri, an intimate of Gohar Shad. Mehri utilized her poems to articulate her discontent with patriarchal norms and unmanly men, notably her forced marriage to a much older court doctor and his lack of virility.[245] Early modern elite women such as the Ottoman poet Mihri Khatun continued to write poems to showcase how "manliness does not inherently belong to the male gender; [...] it happened to be historically claimed by men. [...] based on her skills as a poet, it can also legitimately belong to a woman."[246]

The interconnectedness evident in the poems by medieval and early modern elite Persianate women writers reveals how they enabled and influenced each other to use literature to challenge traditional gender norms; a literate woman can also be an ideal man, a *javānmard.* Gulbadan was able to contribute to this intellectual tradition of female *javānmardī* and expand these women's legacy by writing poems *and* creating a mirror for princesses that remembers how both her and her female counterparts outperformed men

[242] Mernissi, Lakeland, and Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*.100.
[243] Davis, *The Mirror of My Heart*, 113-115.
[244] Brookshaw, "Odes of a Poet-Princess."177-178.
[245] Davis, *The Mirror of My Heart*, 138.
[246] Havlioğlu and Mihri Hatun, *Mihrî Hatun*, 116-117.

in embodying *javānmardī.* In doing so, she exemplifies the need to know how to adhere to and expand patriarchal modes of writing. This is further seen from how the *Humayunnmah* teaches not only the traditional virtues of bravery, intelligence, kindness, gender-bending, and martial prowess to female readers. Instead, given the flexible nature of *javānmardī,* it also instructs other 'unconventional' virtues ranging from "textual trickery." "glamor politics" and coquetry for women to be *javānmard*s– lessons I will be delving into further in the following sections.

Textual Trickery

In the Mughal context, being able not just to imitate a master's model, but also surpass it by incorporating innovations is considered a hallmark of accomplishment (*adab*).[247] Moreover, being adept in trickery is seen as another attribute for one to be considered a *javānmard*. Through showcasing her ability to come up with innovations, or what I call "textual tricks" in the *Humayunnamah,* from rule-breaking, intimate language, re-writing, diversions, selective memory, and paradoxically, adherence to literary norms, Gulbadan asserts her own identity as an accomplished *javānmard*. Gulbadan's textual trickery is seen in the opening paragraph of the *Humayunnamah:*

> A royal order was issued to me saying 'Write down whatever you know of the lives of Firdawsi Makani and his Majesty Jannat-Ashyani." When his Majesty Firdawsi Makani departed this mortal world for the realm of eternity, this poor one was eight years old, and events may not have remained so well in my memory. In obedience to the royal order, however, what I heard and remembered will be written. In the first part of this story, the story of his Holiness the king, my dear father will be written. Although the events are recorded in the memoirs of his royal Highness my dear father nevertheless, with blessing and fortune, I will write them down here.[248]

[247] Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism*.77-84. Also see Paul E. Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal*, Bibliotheca Iranica, no. 5 (Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Publishers, 1998).
[248] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,*1; trans 1, translation slightly modified.

Typically, mirror for princes texts begin with a "profession of humility" and "an insistence in the author's lack of relevant qualifications."[249] Gulbadan seemingly adheres to these norms by describing herself as a "humble servant" (*ḥaqīr*) obeying Akbar's "royal command" (*ḥukm*) to craft the *Humayunnamah*. This is further seen in how she highlights her limitations by mentioning that she was merely eight years old when her father passed away and that her recollection of events might be somewhat vague. Rebecca Gould, in her study of Gulbadan, describes her as "alienated from formal historiographical conventions."[250] However, a detailed examination of Gulbadan's self-effacing rhetoric, in addition to her assertion that she is carrying out imitative writing based on her father's work, reveals that not only was she familiar with formal historiographical conventions but that she was also adept at utilizing them to assert her identity as a powerbroker of the elite literati. Through her opening lines, Gulbadan teaches female readers the need to be well-versed with literary conventions to legitimize their work.

However, Gulbadan's textual trickery is seen in how she immediately subverts these conventions in the following sentence by intimately calling Babur "His Royal Highness My Dear Father" (*ḥażrat-i pādshāh-i bābām*), something she continues to do throughout the entire text.[251] Addressing a king like Babur in such an intimate manner is something no official chronicler could do. Gulbadan's use of intimacy, especially in

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[249] Louise Marlow, "Advice and Advice Literature," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Brill, June 1, 2007), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/advice-and-advice-literature-COM_0026.

[250] Rebecca Gould, "How Gulbadan Remembered: The 'Book of Humāyūn' as an Act of Representation," *Early Modern Women* 6 (2011): 191.

[251] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,*1; trans 1, translation slightly modified.

relation to her father, who was also famous for his use of intimacy in the *Bāburnamah*, can be interpreted as a strategic move to assert a superior kinship in her "uncensored" text that possesses greater authority compared to works of other non-kin male chroniclers who documented Humayun's life.[252] In just a few opening sentences, Gulbadan performs a rhetorical power stemming from her knowledge of literary conventions and her ability to push their boundaries without facing any repercussions, something female readers should emulate.[253]

Gulbadan becomes bolder with her textual trickery as seen from how she rewrites memories from her father's *Bāburnamah*. In her rewrite, she recenters women as the superior *javānmard*s crucially driving the inception of the Mughal empire. In the *Bāburnamah*, when recounting his loss of Samarkand to the Uzbek leader, Muhammad Shaybani Khan (1451-1510), Babur depicts the event in the following manner:

> The second time I took Samarkand, although I had suffered a defeat at Sar-i-Pul, I held the fortress for five months. The Padeshahs and Begs from the surrounding territories gave me no aid or assistance whatsoever. Despondent, I gave up and left. During that interregnum, Khanzada Begum fell captive to Muhammad Shaybani Khan.[254]

Gulbadan's recollection of the Samarkand incident shares similarities with her father's account. However, while Babur downplays his sister Khanzada Begum's role, merely stating that she "fell captive" to his enemy, Muhammad Shaybani Khan (1451-1510), Gulbadan places her aunt, Khanzadah Begum, at the center of the story:

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[252] Other chroniclers who wrote about Babur's life include the Timurid historian Khvandamir who wrote the *Qanun-i Humāyūni* (1534), Jawhar Aftabchi who wrote the *Tazkirat al-vaqi'at* (1587) and Bayazid Bayat who wrote the *Tarikh-i Humāyūn* (1590).

[253] For more information on how the how Akbar honored his aunt when she passed away, see Lal, *Vagabond Princess*, 498.

[254] Babur and W. M. Thackston, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, Modern Library pbk. ed (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 11.

> [The last time] he was besieged (in Samarkand) for six months. The likes of Sultan-Husayn Mirza "Bayqara", his uncle, was in Khurasan; he was unhelpful. Sultan-Mahmud Khan, who was his maternal uncle, was in Kashgar, and he was unhelpful also. When aid or assistance was forthcoming from any quarter, he despaired. At such a time Shahi Beg Khan had sent a message saying, "If you would marry your sister Khanzada Begum to me, there will be peace and unity between us and you, and a relationship of unity will be established. Finally, he was forced. He married Khanzada Begum to the khan and departed with two hundred persons on foot, shepherds' cloaks over their shoulders, rough boots on their feet, and clubs in their hands. Under such conditions, unarmed, they put their trust in God and set out for Badakshan and Kabul.[255]

Due to her Timurid-Chaghatay heritage, Khanzadah was highly valued by Uzbek leaders like Muhammad Shaybani Khan. She could bolster their Jochid ancestry, legitimizing their rule in the Timurid-Chaghatayid territories of Mawarannahr and Mughulistan.[256] In her narrative, Gulbadan highlights how it is Khanzadah's selfless act of marrying the enemy that enabled Babur's escape from Samarkand and his acquisition of manpower as well as weaponry to build his empire in South Asia.

Regarding imitative writing, Quinn has highlighted the importance of carefully studying the way a writer added a single word or short phrase or even significant passages compared to its model because it may reveal the author's political agenda.[257] By further describing Babur's uncles as being unhelpful, or more precisely, "did not send help" (*kumak nafiristādand*) after her father's own words, and juxtaposing their action with Khanzadah's act of sacrifice, Gulbadan implicitly casts elite Mughal women as manlier exemplars of *javānmardī* than men. By repositioning Khanzadah as the pivotal figure in the Mughal empire's establishment, Gulbadan disrupts the dominant narrative of early Mughal history, as narrated by her father. Moreover, she reminds readers that

[255] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah*, 1-2; trans 1-2, translation slightly modified.
[256] Balalinbar, *Imperial Identity*, 162.
[257] Quinn, *Persian Historiography across Empires*. 8-14.

Mughal women's power does not merely lie in their lineage. Of greater importance is the ability to embody *javānmardī* virtues superior to men, exemplified by Khanzadah's unwavering loyalty and self-sacrifice for the greater cause of Babur's empire-building.

To further motivate female readers to become a *javānmard* like Khanzadah, Gulbadan employs the literary trick of diversion in her recollection of Humayun's coronation party, known as the Tilisim Feast. Rather than making Humayun the central figure, Gulbadan draws attention to the way Khanzadah was celebrated as the co-sovereign in his coronation: "His Majesty the Padeshah and Khanzadah Begum sat together on one cushion in front of the throne." (*ḥażrat-i pādshāh va Äkäjanïm dar pish-i takht dar yak tushk nishastand)*.[258] In doing so, Gulbadan demonstrates how adhering to the principles of *javānmardī* can enable Mughal women to be publicly celebrated as Mughal co-rulers. Humayun eventually bestowed the imperial title of "Padishah Begum" to Khanzadah to express his gratitude for the enormous sacrifices she made on behalf of Babur and other members of the royal family.[259] Furthermore, by textually surrounding Humayun with a long list of the various *begum*s who were present at the coronation party and leaving out the male guests, Gulbadan further emphasizes the way kingmaking was a female-led enterprise.[260] Gulbadan's textual tricks can also be seen as examples guiding women on specific ways to use and break literary conventions to distinguish themselves as accomplished *javānmard*s capable of contributing to the development of literary traditions, specifically the mirror for princesses genre.[261]

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[258] Khanzadah Begum was also affectionately called Äkäjanïm by Gulbadan. Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 20; trans 20.
[259] Balabanlilar, "The Begims of the Mystic Feast: Turco-Mongol Tradition in the Mughal Harem.", 133.
[260] For a detailed list of the different and only royal women who sat beside Humayun, see Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 20-21; trans 20.
[261] For more information on tricks and *javānmardī,* see Davis, "Women in the Shahnameh.", 75.

Political Wisdom and Rhetorical Cunning

Possessing intelligence is one of the crucial lessons taught in mirrors for princes for one to become a *javānmard.* Gulbadan reminds readers that what makes Khanzadah a *javānmard* enjoying such kingly treatment stems from not just her sacrificial spirit, but her wisdom. Right until her death, she was traveling around the Mughal domains at the request of her several nephews who greatly relied on her to resolve their various conflicts regarding succession and alliance-building.[262] By describing how Khanzadah was further perceived by the royal Mughal family as possessing insight into "the truth behind the *khuṭbah*" (*ḥaqīqat-i khuṭbah*), Gulbadan presents Khanzadah's wisdom in such a way as to make her appear divine. The *khutbah*, literally meaning 'sermon,' is delivered during Friday prayers. In doing so, Gulbadan writes Khanzadah into history not merely as a pawn sacrificed for alliances between men, but as a *javānmard* possessing a divinely ordained wisdom defining legitimate kingship.

Gould also argues that Gulbadan "is concerned with lives other than her own, and she narrates them to the exclusion of herself."[263] However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that Gulbadan also strategically selects memories that would showcase herself as a *javānmard* role model, from whom female readers can glean new ways of knowing how to be brave, tricky, and intelligent. One such instance is her recollection of a critical moment when Kamran Mirza, her and Humayun's half-brother, captured and attempted to coerce her into supporting his fight against Humayun for kingship, seeking backing from her husband, Khizr-Khwaja Khan:

To me he said, "This is your house. You stay here."

[262] For some examples of how Khanzadah Begum was helping her nephews, see Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 44; trans 44.
[263] Gould, "How Gulbadan Remembered.", 188.

> "Why should I stay here?" I asked. Wherever my mother is, there will I be too!"
> In reply to me he said, "Then you write a letter to Khizr-Khwaja Khan and tell him to come join us and to be easy of mind. Just as Mirza Askari and Mirza Hindal are my brothers, he too is my brother, and this is a time when I need his assistance."
> "Khizr-Khwaja Khan doesn't know how to read that he could recognize my writing," I said in reply to him. "I have never written anything to him. When he is away he writes me through his sons. You can write whatever you want."
> In the end he sent Mahid Sultan and Sher-Ali to summon the khan. Straightaway I said to him, "Your brothers are with Mirza Kamran. I hope you don't think you'll do the same and go to him to join your brothers. Don't imagine you can separate yourself from the emperor! Thank God, the khan did not go against what I said.[264]

Gulbadan's bravery is seen in her fearless defiance of her captor, Kamran Mirza, despite her status as his prisoner. Her refusal to comply with his demands, cleverly exploiting her husband's illiteracy (*nīsāvād*), demonstrates to female readers the power of trickery and utilizing men's weaknesses as strategic tools for self-preservation.[265] This incident underscores the importance of literary skills for women, as Gulbadan's proficiency in writing becomes her shield, making her valuable to Kamran. Furthermore, Gulbadan's ability to influence her husband's decisions in political matters once again highlights the significance for royal women to choose a spouse whom one can exert control over. Gulbadan's narrative underscores how the pen can be a weapon. Elite women are urged to embrace literacy as it can enable them to control their male counterparts and potentially even safeguard their political future.

Masculine honor in Royal Mughal Women

During Humayun's twenty-six-year reign (1530-1556), Gulbadan and her female counterparts endured various hardships. They were constantly on the run from his other enemies, wandering the wastelands of Sindh and Baluchistan, in exile in Iran, and were

[264] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 58-59; trans 55-56.
[265] For more information on stories of female tricksters and the positive effect they have on female readers, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Reading: And Enjoying: 'Wiles of Women' Stories as a Feminist," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 203–222.

caught amidst the rivalry and wars between him and his brother, Kamran, who also aspired to be king.[266] Given the number of royal women who were captured, perished, and dishonored as a result of Humayun's reign, Gulbadan draws on the martially powerful and honorable figure of Haram Begum to instruct elite women on how to become manly *javānmard*s capable of safeguarding their honor, especially when their men are unable to do so.

Haram Begum was wedded to Babur's cousin, Sulayman, who was the governor of Badakhshan. However, other sources have claimed that Haram Begum was in fact the real ruler of Badakshan.[267] Haram Begum was the sister-in-law to both Humayun and Kamran, the latter being married to her sister. Moreover, her lineage was traced back to illustrious men such as Timur and Alexander the Great.[268] Rather than dwelling on her lineage, Gulbadan attributes Haram Begum's greatness as derived from her ability to be an honorable *javānmard*. This is evident in Gulbadan recounting Kamran's futile attempt to seduce Haram Begum in his bid to gain her support for his challenge against Humayun's kingship:

> While Mirza Kamran was in Kolab, there was a woman named Tarkhan Bika who was a trickster. She persuaded Mirza Kamran, saying, "Make a proclamation of love to Haram Begum which will benefit you." Acting on this weak minded woman's advice, Mirza Kamran sent a letter and a handkerchief to Haram Begum by Begi Agha. She took the letter and handkerchief and placed them in front of Haram Begum, expressing the Mirza's deep desire for her. "Keep this letter and handkerchief," Haram Begum said, "and bring them when the mirzas return." Begi Agha wept and wailed, trying to coax the lady saying, "Mirza Kamran has sent this letter and handkerchief to you. He has been in love with you but you are unmanly to him". Haram Begum vexed and with vehemence, immediately sent for Mirza Sulayman and Mirza Ibrahim and said, "Mirza Kamran must think you both are wimpy to think he can send such a letter to me. Do I truly deserve to be

[266]Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 108.
[267] See Bayazid Bayat, *Tarikh-i Humāyūn*, W. M. Thackston et al., eds., *Three Memoirs of Humayun*, Bibliotheca Iranica, no. 11 (Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Publishers, 2009), 60.
[268] Gulbadan Begum and Beveridge, *The history of Humayun (Humayun-Nama)*, 242.

> written to in this manner? Mirza Kamran is your older brother, and I am to him a younger brother's wife. Send off a letter for me about it and rebuke him. As for this woman, tear her to pieces so that no man can have bad thoughts coming from the evil eye seeking to corrupt the wife of others. How can it be right for anybody to bring such unworthiness to me, a humane woman, and have no fear of me or my son?"[269]

Mūrūvātī, a term synonymous with *javānmardī*, comes from the Arabic word *mūrūwā* (manliness). It is used to describe a collection of traits to define the honorable man or young man.[270] Begi Agha's use of the adjective "*bīmūrūvātī*" (unmanly) in her attempt to persuade Haram Begum into accepting Kamran's proposition reveals, through a female Mughal perspective, how manliness was equally associated with the female identity.[271] Haram Begum's bristling response towards being called "*bīmūrūvātī*" (unmanly) shatters *javānmardī* as a purely male-only ideal. She reveals how elite Mughal women like herself demonstrably held themselves to the same ethical code and aspired to be what she calls, a "humane woman" (*zān-i ādamzād*).[272]

The word *ādamzād* (humane) is derived from the Persian term *ādamī* which can be translated as "humanity" or even "humanism."[273] In the Persianate context, that word refers to the upholding of *javānmardī* ethical codes of conduct, especially in the face of evil.[274] By calling herself a "humane woman," Haram Begum implies her identity as *javānmard* who safeguards the empire through her unwavering commitment to patriarchal morality.

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[269] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah*, 66-67; trans 61-62, translation slightly modified.
[270] Cyrus Ali Zargar, "Virtue and Manliness in Islamic Ethics," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4, no. 1–2 (December 15, 2020): 1-2.
[271] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah*, 67; trans 62, translation slightly modified.
[272] I have based my translation of "humane woman" on Thackston's who uses the phrase "respectable woman". See Thackston et al., *Three Memoirs of Humayun*. 62.
[273] Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 6.
[274] Rahimi, "Digital Javanmardi.", 293-294.

As a mirror for princesses, the *Humayunnamah* offers concrete strategies for female *javānmard*s to navigate potential traps. This is seen in the way Haram Begum, to avoid any misunderstandings, tactfully redirected Kamran's tokens of affection, ensuring they were kept with Begi Agha and later passed on to her husband and son upon their return. The grim fate of Begi Agha, the messenger, who is described as being "torn to pieces", seeks to warn the unforgiving consequences awaiting women from lower social backgrounds who partake in ploys seeking to corrupt female members of the Mughal imperial class.[275] Acts associated with adultery can be regarded as the threshold that will cause someone to lose their *javānmardī* status and be punished by death.

Due to Kamran's inappropriate behavior towards Haram Begum, her husband and son, who were his crucial allies, [she?] shifted their allegiance to Humayun. This caused Kamran to lose Balkh.[276] Balkh carried profound importance in Humayun's battle for kingship, primarily due to its strategic position along the Uzbek border. It served as a crucial demonstration of Humayun's capability to be a strong leader reconnecting the Mughals back to their Central Asian roots.[277] Through the figure of Haram Begum, Gulbadan underscores the considerable influence female *javānmard*s wielded in shaping military conquests, diplomacy, and the fate of kingship.

It is intriguing to note the absence of any consequences Takhan Bika may have faced, despite being the instigator planting the idea of seducing Haram Begum in Kamran Mirza's mind. The way Gulbadan calls Tarkhan Bikar an "*ʿayyār*" provides us with a clue.[278] By associating Tarkhan Bikar with this celebrated icon of *javānmardī*, Gulbadan

[275] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 67; trans 62.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Richard Foltz, "The Mughal Occupation of Balkh 1646–1647," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (1996): 49–461.
[278] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 66; trans 61.

implicitly suggests that her tricks, while unconventional, were deemed virtuous since they enabled Humayun to gain new alliances. The figure of Takhan Bika highlights the complex interplay between loyalty, cunningness, and the pursuit of power within the Mughal court, shedding light on the acceptance of unconventional tricks, especially the utilization of men, as a means for women from lower social standings to participate in empire-building.[279]

Haram Begum's lament where she criticizes her husband and son for being "wimpy" (*nāmardi*) and bringing "unworthiness" (*nālāyiq*) to her, reveals the anxiety felt by Mughal women regarding their men's ability to have masculine honor, also known in Persian as *ghayrat*, briefly mentioned in Chapter 1. In the Persianate context, *ghayrat* is a gendered social construct based on a man's sense of honor, possessiveness, and protectiveness towards certain female kin.[280] For one to be considered a *javānmard*, they are expected to have *ghayrat* towards their female family members.[281] Gulbadan's recollection of Haram Begum's retaliation against Kamran Mirza provides a new understanding of *ghayrat* as a virtue not solely confined to men:

> The emperor sent a message to Haram Begum saying, "Tell our sister-in-law to equip and send the army to Badakshan as quickly as possible." In only a few days, the begum gave several thousand men horses and arms, outfitted and equipped them, and escorted them herself as far as the pass. From there she dispatched them forward while she turned back. The army came and joined the emperor. [...] The emperor's forces were victorious, and Mirza Kamran was defeated.[282]

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[279] In folktales, it is women, and especially lower class women that make excellent trickster-heroes. See Margaret Mills, "Whose Best Tricks? Makr-i Zan as a Topos in Persian Oral Literature," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 261–70, 265.
[280] Abedinifard, "Persian 'Rashti Jokes.'", 566.
[281] See footnote 27. Tawasil, "Towards the Ideal Revolutionary Shi'i Woman.", 119.
[282] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 68; trans 63.

The way Haram Begum "outfitted, equipped and escorted [her army]" (*iḥtimām va samān namūda va bahamrāh khud tā kutal āvardand*) that caused Kamran to be "defeated" (*shikast dādand*) is a good example showing how some Mughal women utilized their military knowledge to be *javānmard*s who exemplify *ghayrat*. In doing so, they were able to punish men who sought to undermine their honor.[283] Rather than passively waiting for men to avenge them, Gulbadan uses Haram Begum as an example to instruct royal Mughal women to have *ghayrat* and avenge themselves. Moreover, they should develop martial skills to defend themselves and their male counterparts who lack the same level of *javānmardī* exhibited by women.[284] One of them is Humayun, who is depicted as relying heavily on Haram Begum to provide him with military support to defeat Kamran Mirza so that he can consolidate his kingship. Haram Begum also reveals women's active contribution to warfare and kingship in the early Mughal context that continued in the later Mughal period.[285]

Homoeroticism and Female Cross-dressing

In light of their male counterparts' shortcomings in embodying ideal *javānmardī* virtues, the *Humayunnamah* guides women on ways to redefine gender norms and even embrace female homoeroticism to become ideal *javānmard*s safeguarding themselves and the Mughal empire. This is evident in Gulbadan's description of the cross-dressing

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[283] Ibid.

[284] For more information on Mughal women's participation in military activities, see Ellison Banks Findly, *Nur Jahan, Empress of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 116.

[285] For more information on Central Asian female guards who were responsible for protecting the king and his harem in the later Mughal period and were highly prized for their skills with weapons, their no-nonsense temperament and strong physical frames, see Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire*, 89; Gavin Hambly, ed., "Armed Women Retainers in the Zenanas of Indo-Muslim Rulers: The Case of Bibi Fatima," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, by Gavin Hambly, The New Middle Ages, volume 6 (Basingstoke London: Macmillan, 1998), 429–67.

female *javānmards*, Shad Begum and Mihrangez Begum, who were present at Humayun's coronation feast, the Tilism Feast:

> Shad Begum, granddaughter of Sultan Husayn Mirza on her mother's side and the Padeshah's paternal aunt; Mihrangiz Begum, daughter of Muzaffar Mirza and granddaughter of Sultan Husayn Mirza. They loved each other a lot, and wore manly clothes. They were adorned with all kinds of arts like carving thumb rings, polo-playing, archery, and they also played all kinds of musical instruments.[286]

According to Balabanlilar, the Tilism Feast was Humayun's way of "affirming Mughal imperial power and a public display of grandeur but also, and perhaps more importantly, a celebration of dynastic survival. The honored guests at the feast were the descendants of the Central Asian empire builders Timur and Chingis Khan."[287] Owing to their direct lineage to the esteemed late Timurid ruler of Herat, Sultan Husayn Mirza, whom the Mughals held in high regard, both women naturally commanded respect from both Mughal males and females and were part of the honored guests of this feast. Instead of merely listing their names and lineages just as she did with other elite women in the Tilism feast, Gulbadan chooses to describe their attributes and actions in detail. This nuanced portrayal highlights Gulbadan's perception of their power, attributing it to their ability to bend gender norms, or as she eloquently puts it, how they "adorned" (*ārāstah*) themselves with virtues and practices associated with *javānmardī*. Shad and Mirhangez Begum embellished themselves with *javānmardī*-related practices drawn from the domains of sports, fashion, and musical arts.

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[286] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah,* 20; trans 21, translation slightly modified.
[287] Balabanlilar, "The Begims of the Mystic Feast: Turco-Mongol Tradition in the Mughal Harem.", 123.

In the premodern Persianate tradition, polo-playing and archery are known as "chivalric sports" that were practiced by royalty.[288] Having the ability to carve thumb rings (*zihgir*) worn on the right hand for protection during archery is regarded as one of the achievements in the "knightly arts."[289] Moreover, women who knew how to play music were seen as embodiments of moral perfection.[290] However, Gulbadan reveals it is their bravery that makes them stand out as *javānmard*s, evident in their fearless public display of gender-bending identities as female *javānmard*s cross-dressing in "manly clothing" (*libās-i mardānah*) while also openly displaying intense homosocial desires, as seen from how they are described as "liked each other a lot." (*bisyār dūst mīdāshtand*).

The concept of *javānmardī* is strongly associated with male homosocial bonding.[291] Gulbadan's description of Shad and Mihrangez Begum and their relationship is a good example of the ways *javānmardī* was used by women to publicly engage in female homosocial behavior allowing us to and how gender was understood as performative in the early modern Mughal context.[292] This is seen from how despite their perceived transgressions, Shad and Mihrangez Begum are among the honored guests invited by Humayun to attend his coronation feast. Gulbadan emphasizes their celebration within the Mughal court by elaborating on their seating arrangement, positioning them close to the emperor himself. Gulbadan's memories of Shad and

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[288] V. G. Lukonin and Anatoliĭ Ivanov, *Persian Art: The Last Treasures* (New York, USA: Parkstone International, 2015), 42.
[289] See footnote 2, Gulbadan Begum and Beveridge, *The history of Humayun (Humayun-Nama)*., 120.
[290] Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 238-239.
[291] H. E. Chehabi, "Gender Anxieties In The Iranian Zūrkhānah," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 51, no. 3 (August 2019): 395–421.
[292] It is not just elite women from the Mughal context, but also Safavid elite women who invoked the language of *javānmardī* in their homoerotic relationships. See Kathryn Babayan, *The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2021), 186.

Mihrangez Begum complicates Sedgwick's concept of asymmetrical erotic triangle by revealing how Mughal patriarchs like Humayun greatly valued not just elite Mughal women, but also the strong homosocial bonds between female *javānmard*s of esteemed lineages. These bonds were seen as vital for supporting the Mughal kingship.

Chivalrous Love for the Enemy

Surprisingly, another noteworthy woman whom Gulbadan elevates in the *Humayunnamah* as an exemplar of *javānmardī* worth emulating is Shah Tahmasb's sister, Shahzadah Sultanum. Gulbadan's decision to put Shahzadah's performance of *javānmardī* with that of Hamidah's provides a different window to understand female power, tensions and even female bonds in both Safavid and Mughal contexts. Humayun's repeated military failures led his brothers to abandon him. As a result, he had to seek refuge from his rivals in Safavid Iran. Seizing the opportunity, the Safavids exploited Humayun's circumstance and humiliated him to assert their superiority.[293] However, Gulbadan notes an exception found in Shahzadah Sultanum, who exemplified the core tenets of *javānmardī*. Gulbadan reminds readers that it is not simply her ability to ride and hunt alongside her brother that makes her a *javānmard.*[294] In fact, what makes Shahzadah Sultanum a *javānmard* stems from her ability to be "very kind and chivalrous" (*bisyār mihrabānī va muruvvat*) to her rivals, like the Mughals, through being a good hostess.[295] This is seen in her orchestration of a lavish party to make Hamidah Begum feel valued:

> One day Shahzada Sultanum invited Hamida Banu Begum to a party. [...] All the shah's relatives, his aunt, sisters, and wives, the wives of all the khans, sultans,

[293] For detailed information on how Humayun was humiliated by the Safavids, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 107.
[294] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah;* 50; trans 48.
[295] Ibid.

> and amirs, around a thousand in all, were present, all beautiful and adorned. [...] They spent the whole day enjoying a pleasant outing and gathering. When it was time for food, all the amirs' wives stood to serve, and the shah's wives placed food before Shahzada Sultanum. Also, they were hospitable with gifting at this party – all sorts of gold spun brocade and many more, to Hamida Banu Begum, as was fitting.[296]

Shahzadah Sultanum's ability to be "hospitable" (*mihmānī*) that makes her a *javānmard* is demonstrated through entertaining Hamidah with different outings and activities and most importantly, gifting her with lavish presents such as "gold-spun brocade" (*parchā-i zarduzi*), a notable and esteemed luxury commodity from Safavid Iran.[297] Her party's shiny exterior further sheds light on how Safavid women engaged in what I term "glamor politics." In Chapter 1, I have discussed how Shah Tahmasb used the gifting of his illustrated *Shāhnamah* to his Ottoman rivals for this very purpose. Here, I seek to show how Safavid women, through gifting luxurious objects and feasting rituals, not only emphasized their connection to Islamic ideals of hospitality and virtue, where "welcoming often requires material wealth or goods to be given away or to be spent on others," but also asserted dominance over female rivals.[298]

By inviting a "thousand" (*hazār*) elite women to witness Hamidah's plight as a destitute refugee seeking aid, Shahzadah Sultanum orchestrates a powerful spectacle showcasing her family's superiority during her feast. The way the Safavid female guests are described as being "beautiful and adorned" (*zibā va ārāstah*) shows how elite women strategically used the conspicuous presence of wealth, luxury, and beauty to reinforce the

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[296] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah*, 50-51; trans 48-49, translation slightly modified.
[297] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah*, 51; trans 49, translation slightly modified. For more information on gold brocade, see Willem Floor and Patrick Clawson, "Safavid Iran's Search for Silver and Gold," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 3 (2000): 345–68.
[298] Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam: Welcoming in God's Name* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 41-42.

vast disparity between Hamidah's current state and the opulent world of the Safavid court. The act of being served food ahead of the amirs' wives also serves to communicate Shahzadah Sultanum's superior status within the court hierarchy to Hamidah.[299] Gift-giving within the Safavid court was not only seen as a diplomatic activity that served to create, preserve, and strengthen political relations but also a strategy to demonstrate the wealth, position, strength of the giver, and *adab*.[300] Shahzadah Sultanum's act of presenting lavish gifts to Hamidah can be seen as a way to intimidate and even indebt her for future endeavors according to the Islamic rituals of hospitality.

Gulbadan's decision to include this event in detail within the *Humayunnamah* can be seen as a way of emphasizing the need for elite women to learn about and engage in glamor politics from Shahzadah Sultanum. Regardless, what solidifies Shahzada Sultanum's status as a *javānmard* in Gulbadan's eyes is seen in her ability to employ the principles of *taʿāruf* to demonstrate solidarity, to humble herself for the sake of Hamidah's honor and comfort. This is evident in a conversation that transpired during the party between Hamida and Shah Sultanum, Shahzadah Sultanum's aunt:

> That day Shah Sultanum asked Hamida Banu Begum: "In India do they have such parasols and arches?" "They call Khurasan two sixth[s] of the world," the Begum replied, "and they call India four sixth[s] of the world. Now, what is in the "two sixths' will certainly be done better in the 'four sixths.'" Shazada Sultanum, the shah's sister, then eloquently spoke in reply to her aunt and in support of Hamida Banu Begum's words, saying "Aunt, it is quite surprising that you would ask such

[299] For more information on feasting and its political significance in the Safavid context, see Sussan Babaie, "Cookery and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2018): 129–153.

[300] For more information on how gifting can be seen as a way to indebt others, see Michael Morony, "Gift Giving in the Iranian Tradition," in *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. Linda Komaroff, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1st ed (Los Angeles] : New Haven [Conn.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2011), 33-47.

a thing. What is 'two sixths' in comparison to the 'four sixths'? It is obvious that things are better there."[301]

Mughal and Safavid societies are hierarchical, such that the complex concept of *taʿāruf* heavily guards social interactions. *Taʿāruf* can be translated as "politeness", specifically, the use of "polite language." It is the symbolic social elevation (other-raising) of the addressee and the symbolic lowering of one's self and is used to perform hospitality, generosity, and face-saving in relation to *adab*.[302] Shahzadah Sultanum performing *taʿāruf* is seen from how she admonishes her aunt for asking such a "surprising" ('*aja'īb*) question to their guest, while also replying how it is "obvious" (*zāhir*) that things are better in Mughal India compared to Safavid Iran.[303] While *taʿāruf* has often been understood as being insincere, Gulbadan shows Shahzadah Sultanum's *taʿāruf* as a kind of genuine "support" (*muqavvī)* for Hamidah by elaborating on how she "eloquently spoke" (*sukhan*) against her aunt and even denigrated her kingdom's reputation to defend Hamidah's honor. This deliberate focus demonstrates how Gulbadan views Shahzadah Sultanum as a genuine *javānmard*, a role model that female readers can learn diplomatic skills from.[304]

Gulbadan's recollection of Hamidah's reply to Shah Sultanum, Shahzadah Sultanum's aunt, emphasizes to female readers the importance of being brave *javānmard*s through embracing rule-breaking. Upon realizing the underlying implication in Shah

[301] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah*, 50-51; trans 48-49, translation slightly modified. Thackston has noted how there seems to be a mistake, a mix up of names in Gulbadan's account. I have corrected the mistake in the English translation. See footnote 1 in Thackston et al., *Three Memoirs of Humayun*, 49.
[302] William O. Beeman, "Ta'ārof: Pragmatic Key to Iranian Social Behavior," in *Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Jan-Ola Östman and Jef Verschueren (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2020), 203–224.
[303] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah;* 51; trans 49.
[304] Ibid. Shahzadah's political ideology becomes evident through the correspondence exchanged between her and Hürrem Sultan, the Ottoman queen. Their letters often emphasized the importance of preserving peaceful relations. See Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*., 221.

Sultanum's inquiry, Hamidah deliberately rejects adhering to the norms of *taʿāruf*, opting instead to provide a straightforward response despite her vulnerable position within her rival's territory: "They call Khurasan two sixth[s] of the world [...] and they call India four sixth[s] of the world."[305] In the premodern Persianate imagination, India has always been perceived as a realm of marvels, enchantments, the exotic, and opulence.[306]

By leveraging this stereotype of India as a land of extraordinary phenomena, Hamidah capitalizes on it to establish Mughal preeminence, to counter the politically charged question posed by Shah Sultanum, as further evidenced by her continued response: "Whatever is found in the 'two-sixths' will undoubtedly be executed even better in the 'four-sixths'."[307] Hamidah's departure from the conventions of *taʿāruf*, driven by her commitment to safeguarding the Mughal empire's honor, presents a compelling exemplar of being a bold and tricky *javānmard* but within the normative conventions of hospitality between strangers. Given Humayun's humiliation by the Safavids and the absence of any documented affirmation from Shahzada Sultanum regarding Mughal India's superiority, Gulbadan's adeptness in "putting words in her enemies' mouths" becomes apparent. By directly citing Shahzadah Sultanum's response, Gulbadan seemingly provides impartial validation of Mughal superiority. This can be seen as another textual trick that Gulbadan teaches female readers to employ in rewriting history according to their agendas.

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[305] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah;* 51; trans 49.
[306] Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court* (Harvard University Press, 2017), 63.
[307] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah;* 51; trans 49.

The Imperial Politics of Love and Romance

In the Persianate poetic and mirror traditions, being a good lover, behaving fearlessly and courteously regardless of all challenges love brings is what makes one a *javānmard*.[308] Gulbadan not only continues the Persian literary tradition of depicting strong women but re-positions women as heroic *javānmard* figures capable of determining the trajectory of their own romances in the *Humayunnmah*. Through revisiting the love triangle involving Hindal, Hamidah, and Humayun, the *Humayunnamah* as a mirror for princesses imparts the need for female readers to be active agents fighting for their own beloved while also knowing how to love themselves through prioritizing their aspirations and demands.

Humayun met Hamidah for the first time at Hindal's residence, where, according to Gulbadan, she was a regular guest.[309] This suggests that Hamidah and Hindal, who was her father's student at that time, may have been involved.[310] Hamidah's responses to Humayun when he orders her to be involved with him instead, demonstrates her as a *javānmard* capable of asserting herself and protecting her interests– one being with her beloved Hindal. In her first response, she states, "If it was to pay my respects, I was exalted by paying my respects to his Eminence the other day. Why should I come again?"[311] After Humayun's persistent demands, she retorts, "To see kings once is lawful;

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[308] Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 300-301. For more information on love and *javānmardī*, see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*., X-XI.
[309] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah;* 36; trans 36.
[310] Abraham Eraly, *Emperors of the Peacock Throne: The Saga of the Great Mughals*, Rev. ed, A Penguin Book History, India (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), 65. Hamidah's romance with Hindal further reveals the freedom Mughal women had when it came to pursuing their own romances.
[311] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah;* 36-37; trans 36-37.

a second time is a breach of propriety. I am not a consort. I shall not come."[312] Hamidah's responses to Humayun further demonstrate her as a *javānmard* capable of being brave, honest, and wise, as seen from how she uses her knowledge of "laws" (*jā'iz*) governing courtly protocol to maintain her virtue, to tactfully reject unwanted advances from men, including the king.

Gulbadan's inclusion of Hamidah's response to Humayun can be seen as serving an additional pedagogical purpose: to educate female readers on using tricks like *nāz*. The term "*nāz*" is often translated as "coquetry."[313] One of the most renowned heroines in Persian literature, Shirin from Nizami's twelfth-century romance epic, *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, is celebrated for her ability to perform *nāz*. Through being a coquettish figure, Shirin not only intensifies Khusrau's longing for her but also skillfully deflects his unwelcome advances, thereby preserving her ideals.[314] Hamidah's strategy of doing *nāz* becomes apparent in various instances as seen from the repeated rejections she gives in turning down Humayun's request to attend his party and be with him. Another evident example of her doing *nāz* is seen in her rejecting Humayun's initial marriage proposal by stating that he is unsuitable, considering that she wants a partner she can exert control over. Simultaneously, she keeps him in anticipation by prolonging the marriage negotiations for forty days.[315]

To entice readers to learn how to use *nāz*, Gulbadan reveals its effectiveness by divulging Humayun's reaction to Hamidah's *nāz.* She recalls his willingness to become

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[312] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah;* 37; trans 37, translation slightly modified.
[313] Robert Surieu, *Sarv-é Naz: An Essay on Love and the Representation of Erotic Themes in Ancient Iran*, Unknown Treasures, v.6 (Geneva, Paris [etc.]: Nagel; distributed by Lyle Stuart, New York, 1967).
[314] Paola Orsatti, "Ḵosrow o Širin," in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (London, 2012 1985), https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kosrow-o-sirin.
[315] Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnamah;* 37; trans 37.

the submissive partner who will "accept" (*qabūl*) anything Hamidah and her family want. This ranged from paying any amount of dowry (*maʿāsh*) to making her his official wife, the empress of the Mughal empire, instead of a casual partner.[316] Gulbadan shows how using tricks strategically like *nāz* can empower female *javānmard*s to assert dominance in a predominantly male-controlled political realm. After Humayun's death, Hamidah would go on to even act as the Mughal empire's de facto ruler for her son, Akbar, when he was engaged in political and military campaigns.[317]

Conclusion

By contextualizing Gulbadan's *Humayunnamah* within its historical context, literary models, the mirror for princesses genre, and other elite female writers, this chapter offers a fresh perspective on the concept of *javānmardī* from a female viewpoint and sheds new light on the influential dynamics of female kinship relations within the Mughal court. Given how the *Humayunnamah* was even made into an illustrated manuscript by the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, and the ways other powerful Mughal women such as Jahanara Begum (1614-1681) and Nur Jahan (1577-1645) knew of Gulbadan Begum and probably even read the *Humayunnamah*, more work needs to be done on how royal Mughal women from the later period were able to put Gulbadan's teachings of *javānmardī* into practice.[318] In my next chapter, I will be applying the "mirror for princesses" framework to study Nizami's *Haft Paykar*, which was also widely read by elite premodern Persianate women. Furthermore, I have also shown how royal Mughal women used male kin as mediums for exerting and defining imperial power. What this chapter has laid bare is that patriarchal men could also be "trafficked" between

[316] Ibid, translation slightly modified.
[317] Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, 30-31, 67.
[318] Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire*, 59.

powerful women--an important correction to Gale Rubin's theory as well as Sedgwick's account of male-to-male homosociality during the rise of British imperialism in the nineteenth century. In fact, Gulbadan's emphasis on female homosocial bonding is a rhetorical counterweight to the strong male homosociality evident in Babur's memoir and Akbar's chronicle.

Chapter 3

Reinterpreting Nizami's *Haft Paykar* as a Mirror for Princesses

As examined in Chapter 1, 'Ismat al-Dunya, the wife of the Timurid prince, Muhammad Juki, patronized an illustrated manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsah* that became one of the most important Herat-style illustrated manuscripts. It is made up of five poems, the *Makhzanm al-asrar* (The Treasure House) (c.1165), *Khusrau and Shirin* (c.1180), *Layla and Manjun* (1188), *Haft Paykar* (Seven Beauties) (1197) and *Iskandarnamah* (The Book of Alexander) (c.1200-2?).[319] After the middle periods, Nizami's poems continued to be popular among elite women in the early modern Ottoman court. One of the books female courtiers purchased for these Ottoman elite women from Shiraz, Iran, is Nizami's *Khamsah*. Records show that two copies of it were bought for fifty gold coins from the estate of Shah Sultan (1509-1572), Selim I's daughter, and Süleyman I's sister.[320]

Shah Sultan is well recorded in Ottoman historiography for her compassion towards other women, especially those who had fallen on hard times. One example is seen in how she challenged her husband; she chastised Lutfi Pasha for his inhumane treatment of a prostitute, whom he punished by having her genitals mutilated. Not only did he refuse to listen to Shah Sultan, but he also beat Şah Sultan after she lost her temper with him. As a result, Shah Sultan divorced him, and he also lost his position as grand-vizir, thus ending his political career.[321] Shah Sultan is a good example of how

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[319] Kamran Talattof and Jerome W. Clinton, eds., *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2000), 3-5.
[320] Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 78-79.
[321] Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 201-202.

Ottoman women were not just using poetry to assert their connection to ideal manliness, as seen from Mihri Khatun as discussed in Chapter 2. In fact, Ottoman women's actions served as testaments to their identities as *javānmard*s capable of standing up against injustice and punishing patriarchal thinking on behalf of the marginalized, especially women from the lowest classes–prostitutes. Apart from the Ottomans, upon looking at a travelog written in seventeenth-century Safavid Iran by the nameless widow of Mirza Kahlil, we encounter evidence of her using Nizami's lines and associating herself with characters found in Nizami's poems to "speak about her attachments, love, loss, delights, and mood swings" during her *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca. In her account, we also see how this nameless widow reveals how she strived to be a *javānmard,* to be unafraid of facing the various difficulties stemming from traveling across the challenging and rough terrain towards Mecca and Medina.[322] Similarly, Zib un-Nissah, a seventeenth-century Mughal princess, uses Nizami's characters to convey her emotions in her poems.[323] Apart from her wisdom and beauty, Zib al-Nisa's identity as a *javānmard* is seen in how she was "skilled in the use of arms, and several times took part in war."[324] It becomes evident that Nizami's poems and the ethics of *javānmardī* significantly appealed to Persianate women from different social classes throughout the Timurid, Ottoman, Mughal, and Safavid dynasties. he patronage and investment of Nizami's poems suggest these women

[322] Kathryn Babayan, *The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2021), 185-186.
[323] For an example, see Sunil Sharma, "Forbidden Love, Persianate Style: Re-Reading Tales of Iranian Poets and Mughal Patrons," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (2009): 774.
[324] Princess Zeb-un-Nissa, Magan Lal, and Jessie Duncan Westbrook, *The Diwan of Zeb-Un-Nissa, the First Fifty Ghazals Rendered from the Persian by Magan Lal and Jessie Duncan Westbrook, with an Introduction and Notes*, Wisdom of the East (London J. Murray, 1913), http://archive.org/details/diwanofzebunniss00zebuuoft.http://archive.org/details/diwanofzebunniss00zebuuoft, 14.

viewed his works as repositories of valuable ideas, worthy of cultural preservation and dissemination.

While scholars have talked about the way Nizami's female characters were powerful and different, less work has been focused on the extent of their power in appealing to female readers. Building on these different facts, this chapter reassesses how *Haft Paykar* could have functioned as a "mirror for princesses" that portrays characters like Fitnah as models of *javānmardī* for female readers to emulate not only for personal empowerment but also for justice and ideal rule to prevail. In doing so, I argue that Fitnah can expand our understanding of *javānmardī* from a feminine, if not female perspective. In her study of stories regarding Abbasid slave women, Jocelyn Sharlet mentions how "stories circulated by court writers offered an opportunity to contemplate, comment on, and criticize aspects of social life, including the careers of historical figures, events, or practices. As a result, these stories can be a rich source for social history."[325] Expanding on Sharlet, I argue how Fitnah's *javānmardī* performance offers a new lens through which we can examine how historical women asserted their agency and wielded power in relation to the geopolitics of the Persianate world before and during the Seljuk context.

Nizami and the mirrors for princesses genre

Interestingly, in Askari's study of one surviving mirrors for princesses from the medieval period, the *Munisnamah* written by Nursat al-Din Abu Bakr "at the end of the twelfth century or in the first decade of the thirteenth," she has shown us how Abu Bakr made it clear that he was not just writing for royal men, but also royal women in the court of Eldigüzid Atabegs of Azerbaijan in the Seljuk empire who were also his patrons.

[325] Jocelyn Sharlet, "Educated Slave Women and Gift Exchange in Abbasid Culture," in *Concubines and Courtseans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2017), 280.

Using the *Mūnisnamah* as an example, Askari argues that medieval courts like that of the Eldigüzid Atabegs produced educational literature to install ideal virtues not just into princes but also for princesses. This is due to the significant role of women in the upbringing of prospective rulers and their great influence on their male companions at royal courts.[326] Nizami wrote the *Haft Paykar* in 1197 and dedicated it to Ala al-Din Körp Asrslan (r.1169), who was also one of the members of the Eldigüzid Atabegs of Azerbaijan.[327] Abu Bakr and Nizami were contemporaries.[328] Thus, he was most likely aware of how mirrors for princesses were produced for eliciting patronage from elite women in these courts.

Kamran Talatoff has mentioned that "Nizami wrote during a period when women were strongly believed to be impaired in intelligence. His humanistic approach to rhetoric and his understanding of women as equals sets him apart from the dominant literary discourse of the time." While Talatoff's observations are valid, we cannot deny that Nizami lived in a time when elite women of the Seljuk empire had always been active in politics and greatly influenced kings.[329] Moreover, Nizami would also have been aware of instances when these elite Seljuk women even became rulers through their various superlative performances of *javānmardī*, several of which I have explored in Chapter 1. Julie Scott Meisami further describes Nizami as having lived during "an age in which the gap between the ideal of kingship and the actualities of politics was a wide one, rule was

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[326] Askari, "A Mirror for Princesses."126.
[327] Ilyās Ibn-Yūsuf Niẓāmī Ganǧawī and Julie Scott Meisami, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995)., xiii.
[328] I would like to thank Nasrin Askari for pointing this out to me during a conversation we had in MESA 2023.
[329] For more information on Seljuk women, see Carole Hillenbrand, "Women in the Seljuq Period," in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat and Lois Beck (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 103-120.

based on power, and political instability was endemic. [...] By Nizami's time the Seljuks themselves were in disarray, their unity driven by succession disputes, fragmented by the growing power of local princes, and threatened both by internal conflicts and by rival dynasties in Egypt and Syria." Moreover, according to Meisami, the esoteric teachings of *javānmardī* significantly influenced various artworks and poetry during the time Nizami was writing the *Haft Paykar*.[330] Furthermore, Meisami argues that "Nizami intended that the *Haft Paykar* be read, on level, as a princely mirror; he also intended– as is clear from both his treatment of sources and the career of his royal protagonist– that it transcends the limitations of such works and the epic tradition from which he took much of his matière."[331]

The failure of kings to be ideal rulers embodying *javānmardī* virtues, elite women's own relationship with kingship, *javānmardī* and their patronization of the mirror for princesses genre– are all factors that could explain why Nizami may have crafted the *Haft Paykar* as a dual mirror for princes and princesses. Through female characters like Fitnah, *Haft Paykar* instructs female readers how to be *javānmard*s enabling the restoration of ideal Persianate kingship that was lacking during Nizami's time. As Meisami observes: "[Fitnah's] role is to restore, not upset, order, as is made clear by the transferral to her of the function of guidance."[332] It is interesting to note Nizami's repeated comparison of his work, *Haft Paykar,* to his "brides" (*'arūsān*) in both

[330] In fact, Nizami is said to even have been associated with a *futūwah* brotherhood that drew their members from the artisan class and received his education from one of their masters, see Ilyās Ibn-Yūsuf Niẓāmī Ganǧawī and Julie Scott Meisami, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), xiv-xv. For more information on Nizami's exploration of *javānmardī* through his male characters like Majun, see Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*. 299-310.
[331] Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 178.
[332] Ibid., 218.

the chapter explaining its composition and the conclusion.[333] Nizami's use of this metaphor hints at *Haft Paykar*'s feminine undertones– allowing us to better understand the way *Haft Paykar* also celebrates a topsy-turvy world where manly women temporarily rule over unmanly and impotent patriarchs.

J. Christopher Bürgel has also commented on how Nizami's female characters, such as Fitnah, are often superior to men: "his female protagonists are as endowed with noble features and dignified character traits as men. They are even more virtuous than their male counterparts."[334] However, scholars like Bürgel have overlooked the depiction of female characters like Fitnah as *javānmard*s, specifically how they were celebrated for outperforming their kingly male counterparts in embodying and demonstrating *javānmardī*. This aspect, which I will expand more on in the next section, likely resonated with female readers of the middle and early modern periods, especially given their male counterparts' inability to live up to *javānmardī* ideals.

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, I seek to show how it can help us better understand female *javānmardī* and the extent as well as limits of Fitnah's power. The carnival is a folk tradition generally associated with the European Middle Ages. During a carnival, performers would mimic and mock social rituals as well as official ceremonies. Inspired by the medieval European carnival, Bakhtin came up with the concept of the "carnivalesque" to describe events or spaces that enabled the marginalized to challenge "prevailing truth and the established order temporarily; it

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[333] See line 34, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh4. Also see line 42, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh38. From here on, the link to the Persian original will be followed by the page number of Meisami's English translation preceded with the word 'trans', 12, 276.

[334] Bürgel, "Nizāmī's World Order.", 21.

marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal."[335]

While Fitnah's *javānmardī* performance disrupts the status quo and compels Bahram Gur to question current norms, it is crucial to remember that Fitnah's carnivalesque inversions are not completely about dismantling the existing order. Rather, they serve a more nuanced purpose: the restoration of a more integrated matriarchal order where the kingly figurehead is a just and discerning ruler who not only recognizes the capabilities of women but also adheres to their advice. As mentioned by Bakhtin, carnivalesque inversions are temporary. Despite allowing mockery of power structures, carnivalesque rituals do not aim to dismantle them. They serve as a controlled release valve, allowing spectators and performers to vent frustrations and ultimately reaffirm the existing hegemonic order.[336] However, while Bakhtin views power from the binary framework of dominance and submission, the premodern Persianate world's integrated matriarchal system and paradoxical patriarchal elements expands his analysis. In this context, power is not merely a matter of one group dominating another but is instead characterized by a dynamic and ever-changing interplay of societal forces. This perspective allows us to extend Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to encompass a more intricate and less hierarchical understanding of power.

Proper conduct between the sexes in *Haft Paykar*

Haft Paykar has several storylines, the most important of which recounts the love story between Fitnah, a Chinese musician slave girl, and Sasanian king Bahram Gur.[337]

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[335] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.
[336] Renate Lachmann, Raoul Eshelman, and Marc Davis, "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture," *Cultural Critique*, no. 11 (1988): 130; Paul Bouissac, *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach*, Advances in Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 8, 37.
[337] Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 174.

Ashgar Seyed-Ghorab has observed how Fitnah's relationship with Bahram Gur is elaborately described in more than ten couplets.[338] Meisami argues how *Haft Paykar* exemplifies allegorical romance at its peak, where every element contributed to its multileveled meaning.[339] Expanding upon Meisami and Seyed-Ghorab, I will explore the diverse allegorical expressions of female *javānmardī* within the romance between Fitnah and Bahram Gur with the goal of elaborating on an under-examined topic: Persianate sinophilia.

Fitnah and Bahram Gur's romance opens against the backdrop of a hunting excursion. Even before her name is revealed, Fitnah's identity as a *javānmard* takes precedence, stemming from her physical prowess such as her beauty, being "moon-like" (*chun māh*). In Persian poetry, the moon is a conventional metaphor to describe a beautiful woman. Intriguingly, in the Persian poetic tradition, physical attractiveness reflects one's inner nobility, as outward beauty mirrors the inner light of the soul.[340] Fitnah's physical prowess, which makes her a *javānmard,* is magnified through her portrayal as possessing exceptional equestrian abilities, a hallmark of *javānmardī*. She is described as riding her horse in a "swift" (*chast*) and "agile" (*chābak*) manner during the hunt:

> With him a moon-like maid did ride/ Swift and agile, her lord beside.[341]

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[338] Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "A Mystical Reading of Nizāmī's Use of Nature in the Haft Paykar," in *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm: Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizāmī Ganjavī's Khamsa*, ed. Johann Christoph Bürgel and Christine Van Ruymbeke, Iranian Studies Series (Amsterdam: Leiden Univ. Press, 2011), 188.
[339] Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 200.
[340] Bürgel, "Nizāmī's World Order.", 162.
[341] See line 12, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 76, translation slightly modified.

The repetition of how she is riding "with" (*bīh*) Bahram Gur and "beside" (*bīh*) further suggests she is on par not only with a man but with the king himself, making her a manly youth.[342] Fitnah seldom occurs as a name for female characters. The concept "*fitnah*" carries many connotations ranging from physical charm, seductiveness, and temptation to revolting against the true faith and rightly designated authority. It is also associated with the supernatural and with magic.[343] The deliberate use of wordplay, not only to reveal but also to repeatedly mention Fitnah's name four times in the following lines, can be interpreted as a strategic move to prompt readers to focus on how *javānmardī* could be exemplified by an ambiguous and controversial character of foreign, specifically Chinese ancestry:

Fitnah her name, of a thousand lures;/ the king's temptress, he charmed by her.[344]

She is also referred to as "the slave girl of Chin" (*kanīzak-i chīnī*).[345] In Persian literature, China is associated with magic and superior artistry. It is also the birthplace of the ideal beloved.[346] Moreover, as I will show in Chapter 4, before Nizami's time, Chinese women were seen as models and teachers of *javānmardī.* Fitnah's Chinese ethnicity is an important factor contributing to her unique and youthful manliness.

Moreover, the traditional reverence Persianate culture has towards China grants her a certain freedom to challenge societal norms when her unconventional behavior – which might be unacceptable for others – is tolerated, or even seen as a mark of her

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[342] Here is the Persian original, همرکابی شاه **به** خود کنیزکی چون ماه/ چست و چابک **به** داشت, I have chosen to use boldface to show the words that are repeated.
[343] Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 216.
[344] The Persian original is as follows: **فتنه** نامی هزار **فتنه** در او/ **فتنهٔ** شاه و شاه **فتنه** بر او
, see line 13, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans, 76.
[345] See line 27, 37, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans., 77-78. Translation slightly modified.
[346] A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Magic in Classical Persian Amatory Literature," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 1 (1999): 71–97), 81.

resourcefulness and defiance. In this way, Fitnah's ethnicity allows her to navigate the limitations placed upon women and operate as a *javānmard* who disrupts expectations– another lesson that *Haft Paykar* teaches as a mirror for princesses. This lesson is something that women, especially those from Timurid and Mughal courts would have greatly appreciated, considering how their heritages and bloodlines were one of the reasons why they were able to exert influence and defy limitations.

To guide kings, *Haft Paykar* emphasizes the importance of women knowing how to charm their way into the hearts of kings, as Nizami puts it, "*shāh fitnah*" so that they can shape their minds. For this to happen, women would have to be like Fitnah, to embody outer and inner perfection, encapsulated in the concept of *adab*. In premodern *javānmardī* manuals, a key idea emphasized is the significance of mentorship between a teacher and student. The teacher should be an ideal *javānmard* who can embody the highly particularized codes of *adab*, serving as a role model of elocution to guide their student towards becoming ideal *javānmard* models themselves.[347]

Serving as a mirror for princesses, *Haft Paykar* illustrates the various facets of Fitnah's *adab*, highlighting how her qualities render her a teacher for Bahram Gur. Firstly, knowing how to present herself to be "bright-faced" (*tāzi-rūyī*). It is also seen in her athleticism and her charisma, being "quick" (*chābukī*) as well as "sweet and smooth" (*charb u shīrīn*). Her *adab* is further seen in the way she is well-versed in performing arts– specifically singing, dancing with elegance (*chābukān*), and most importantly playing the harp (*chang*).[348] It is also seen in her ability to deliver powerful and eloquent speeches that sway her male listeners, which I will be discussing later in this chapter.

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[347] Emma Jane Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 273.
[348] See lines 14,15,16, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 76.

It is understandable why Nizami underscores the significance of women mastering music, especially considering historical examples of powerful female musicians from the Seljuk period. For instance, there is evidence of a singing girl captivating the fifth Artuqid ruler of Hisn Kayfa (d.1185), leading to their marriage. Remarkably, she was able to influence his kingdom and take control of his finances.[349] Moreover, female musicians of the Seljuk period were not merely relegated to the sidelines. They were esteemed companions of the king and were frequently depicted in lusterware, showcasing their importance and influence beyond that of queens and other royal women.[350] Furthermore, before the Seljuk period, in the early centuries of Islam, foreign musical slave girls (*qiyān*) were seen as the source of earthly pleasure and the embodiment of moral virtues.[351]

Haft Paykar illustrates how Fitnah's *adab* enables her to get close to the king, to the extent that he would "request" (*khvāstī*) her presence to accompany him and perform music during his hunting expeditions and feasts. Their connection is made evident in the syntactical parallelism of these lines, in which the king and Fitnah are mirror images:

The harp her weapon, the king's the bow/ She struck up tunes, he game laid low.[352]

Moreover, just like poetry, music is understood as having the power to incite various types of action.[353] By comparing Fitnah's harp to a "weapon" (*sāz*), *Haft Paykar* teaches readers how mastery in music–a part of *adab*– not only empowers women but also enables them to dominate kings. This power reversal becomes more evident in

[349] Hillenbrand, "Women in the Seljuq Period", 115.
[350] Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 158.
[351] Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 238-239.
[352] See line 19, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 77.
[353] See footnote 43; trans. 217.

Bahram Gur's depiction, who is shown to be undertaking various hunting feats to impress Fitnah while also eagerly seeking her praise for his hunting abilities:

> "Say then: do not those narrow eyes/ know how such skills as mine to prize?
> Yet how should such abundant prey/ be compassed by such narrow sight?"
> "This new beast: tell me, how shall I/ attack it? Where my arrow try?"[354]

The way Bahram Gur scolds Fitnah by labeling her as having "narrow sight" (*chishm tang*), foreshadows his flaws as a king, stemming from his ego and emotions. It is also important for us to pay attention to these highly satirical lines for their irony: Bahram Gur is shown to be too narcissistic to serve as a selfless manly king and husband. In other words, Bahram Gur's scolding of Fitnah for having "narrow sight" is actually a reference to his own deplorable and sexist attitude toward women, whom he treats as objects of male self-validation.

Fitnah in a topsy turvy world

In the Persianate tradition, music is also associated with harmony and divine order.[355] By ironically associating Fitnah, whose name means disruption, with positive meanings ranging from divine order, harmony, *adab*, and *javānmardī*, *Haft Paykar* carnivalizes the concept of *fitnah*, imbuing it with new and even positive meanings. *Haft Paykar*'s subversion prompts, or in this case compels readers to go beyond a conventional framework, to pay attention to how seemingly 'negative' terms associated with Fitnah in fact function as 'positive' allegories to convey her identity as a *javānmard.*

Some of these 'negative' terms range from "*nāz va 'ayyāri*" (coy and tricky). As I have mentioned throughout this dissertation, the *'ayyār* (trickster) is seen as a type of

[354] See lines 26-29, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 77.
[355] See footnote 43, Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry,* 217.

javānmard.[356] The blatant way *Haft Paykar* characterizes Fitnah as being *ayyāri* underscores her *javānmardī* status. In Persian poetry, coquetry is seen as a manipulative trick used by a beloved to increase their lover's suffering and desire.[357] However, in the context of *Haft Paykar,* Fitnah's coquetry takes on a different meaning and showcases her alignment with *javānmardī.* This is evident in the way she chooses to "restrain" (*khvīshtandārī*) herself from giving Bahram Gur the flattery he demands of her.[358] Instead, to deflate his ego, she chooses to use the trick of "speak[ing] outrageous things" (*gizāfi-gui*), such as telling Bahram Gur to join the onager's hoof to its head.[359] Moreover, she also chooses to be honest to Bahram Gur:

> The prince is quite well versed/ in this; what's hard that's oft rehearsed?
> Whate'er a man's by teaching trained/to do, though hard, is always gained
> Your royal bolt the hoof transfixed/ through practice, not by strength unmixed.[360]

By highlighting the role of dedication in perfecting any skill, she criticizes Bahram Gur for his egoistical thinking with the hopes he can become a good king. Fitnah's act of trickery and coyness aligns perfectly with the ideals of a *javānmard*, who strives for honesty and does not indulge flattery, but rather seek to foster genuine growth in others. The playfulness of these lines and their comical undertone reveals a inversion of social order where an enslaved foreign musician is mocking an Iranian king and can be seen as an example of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque.

Bahram Gur's failure in being a *javānmard* becomes apparent not only in his inability to comprehend the wisdom of Fitnah's teachings but also in his anger towards

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[356] While the meaning of *'ayyār* can come with negative connotations, In medieval Persian popular literature of Nizami's time, it usually refers to a smart, brave, generous, virtuous young man. See Askari "Mirror for Princesses",130.
[357] Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade,*12.
[358] See line 25, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans, 77.
[359] See line 25, 30 , https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 77.
[360] See line 30, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 78.

her for rejecting his need for self-validation. This is evident in his portrayal as consumed by "wrath" (*sakhtī*), having "a hardened heart without pity" towards Fitnah (*dil bidān māh bī-mudarā kard*) and filled with "rage" that "was clear in every limb" (*kīnah khvīsh āshkārā kard*).[361] Furthermore, Bahram Gur goes to the extent of employing a cowardly tactic, dispatching his officer to assassinate Fitnah, all the while justifying his actions with misogynistic thinking:

> "For lion-brave warriors do not slay/ weak women; they are unequal prey."
> An officer of noble line– [...]/ he summoned secretly, and said,
> "Go you and rid me of his maid.
> She has disturbed our stately court:
> Death to disturbers reason supports.[362]

While Bahram Gur's extraordinary feats, such as reclaiming his throne in Iran, battling two lions, slaying a dragon, and managing a famine, are impressive, his cowardly actions and misogynistic mindset shows that he still lacks the vital *javānmardī* qualities that define an ideal king.[363] These vital qualities are associated with the wisdom, humility, respect, and self-control that Fitnah seems to embody. The stark contrast between both characters underscores the need for female *javānmard*s to "disturb" male rulers, to make them face new challenges regardless of the repercussions they might face so that kings can rise to the ideal of *javānmardī* and become "man" enough to dispense justice. Bahram Gur's words also reflect the anxiety that governed the minds of patriarchs, especially when facing a female-induced topsy-turviness capable of destabilizing their dominance.

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[361] See line 42, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 78.
[362] See lines 46-49, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 78.
[363] For more detailed understanding of Bahram Gur's various achievements before his relationship with Fitnah, see trans. 44-76.

Eloquent Rhetoric and Gift-giving as Trickery

By revealing Bahram Gur's reaction to Fitnah's lesson on 'practice makes perfect', *Haft Paykar* cautions women that being a *javānmard* is not without challenges and may even cost them their lives. To safeguard their lives, *Haft Paykar* employs Fitnah as a model, instructing women on the strategic use of emotional manipulation through various tricks, such as eloquent rhetoric and even gift-giving. *Haft Paykar*'s characterization of Fitnah's strategies as "honest words" (*namūnash-i rāst*) highlights how her tricks align with the principles of *javānmardī*.[364]

Fitnah is depicted as wielding emotional manipulation with practiced ease. This is seen in how she uses her "tear-filled eyes" (*āb dar dīdah*) to stir sympathy from the officer who was ordered to kill her. It is also seen in her rhetoric, where she cautions him that harming an innocent "guiltless" (*bī-gunāh*) person like her will only invite negative repercussions upon himself.[365] Her rhetoric is underscored by a veiled threat stemming from how she is not just simply a "slave girl" (*kanīzak*). Rather, she is the "privileged consort of/ the king (*Munis-i khās*), his choice all else above; his sole companion in the chase/ and feast [...]; none takes [her] place."[366] To soften her threat, Fitnah proposes a wager: if the king remains unmoved by news of her death within days, then the officer may carry out his sentence and kill her. A key point to consider is the use of the term "*sukhan*" to describe Fitnah's rhetoric when it comes to dealing with the officer:

After her *sukhan*, and then her chain unclasped;/laid seven rubies in his grasp.[367]

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[364] See line 65, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 79.
[365] See line 53, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 79.
[366] See line 54,55 https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 78.
[367] See line 63, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 79, translation lightly modified.

Sukhan has many meanings ranging from speech, words, or letter. However, Kamran Talatoff argues that for Nizami, the term *sukhan* refers to a much deeper concept, specifically the art of "eloquent rhetoric." *Sukhan* was a concept that held significance to Nizami, evident in how he devoted twenty-five thousand out of thirty thousand verses of his poetry to exploring this concept. Nizami views *sukhan* as a form of immortal art that reflects one's high status.[368] Talatoff argues that female heroines in Nizami's other poems, such as the Shirin and Layli, are praised for their mastery of *sukhan,* for being able to write and recite eloquent speeches.[369]

The way Fitnah's rhetoric is described as a form of *sukhan* in *Haft Paykar* highlights her identity as a noble figure regardless of her 'enslaved' status. Moreover, Fitnah's success in using *sukhan* to manipulate elite men offers a potential blueprint to encourage women to develop rhetorical prowess for empowerment and self-preservation. This is further emphasized at the end of the story which talks about Bahram Gur's other wives, the seven princesses hailing from India, China, Khwarazm, Slavonia, Maghreb, Rum, and Persia.[370]

These seven princesses are all celebrated for their mastery of *sukhan* is seen in the stories they tell to teach Bahram Gur ideal virtues associated with *javānmardī* to be a good king.[371] Unlike the detailed portrayal of Bahram Gur and Fitnah's relationship, the relationship between Bahram Gur and the seven princesses is given less focus. Instead,

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[368] Kamran Talattof, *Nezami Ganjavi and Classical Persian Literature: Demystifying the Mystic*, Literatures and Cultures of the Islamic World (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 18, 30, 40.
[369] Ibid. 31-32.
[370] Meisami, *The Haft Paykar*, xvii-xix.
[371] For more information on how the princesses' stories reflect the inferiority of men, see Talatoff and Clinton, *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi*, 55.

Haft Paykar prefers to give detailed attention to the stories they tell.[372] Expanding on this aspect, it becomes evident that as a mirror for princesses, *Haft Paykar* once again emphasizes the importance of elite women, particularly princesses, to master *sukhan* so that they can guide kings into becoming *javānmard*s and ideal rulers. The success of these seven princesses' *sukhan* is seen in how Bahram Gur ultimately transcends his personal desires for worldly glory and fully dedicates himself to the pursuit of justice by the conclusion of *Haft Paykar*.[373] The portrayal of Fitnah and the seven princesses in relation to *javānmardī* offers insights into why *Haft Paykar* might have resonated with diverse readers across different eras from various parts of the Persianate world, providing opportunities for readers to identify with these varied female *javānmard*s.[374]

Sukhan's importance is further emphasized in how *Haft Paykar* ends the story of Fitnah and Bahram Gur by showing how *sukhan* empowered Fitnah to completely invert the power dynamics between her, a Chinese slave girl, and him, a king. Fitnah's *sukhan* is seen in the way she "reproaches" (*tashnī'*) Bahram Gur:[375]

> Am I, who to the roof have borne,./ an ox, for "practice" to have be known?
> Why, when *you* shoot a wild ass small/ should no one *your* deed "practice" calls?[376]

Fitnah masterfully crafts her reproach through rhetorical questions and direct syntax. These are not mere inquiries, they are strategic satirical jabs designed to prod Bahram Gur into introspection, to confront the double standard in his sexist judgments. While he readily describes Fitnah's feat of ox-lifting as the result of daily practice, he

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[372] Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 240.
[373] Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 232-234.
[374] I acknowledge that further research is necessary to delve into the teachings imparted by the seven princesses and their portrayal of female *javānmardī*. This is something I seek to develop in a later project.
[375] See line 75, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 85.
[376] See line 73, 74, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 85.

refuses to attribute the same to his hunting prowess.[377] Fitnah's rhetorical questions can be seen as a way to criticize the unfair assumptions embedded within the gender roles of the time: that a man's skill is inherent, not a product of practice, while a woman's accomplishment requires exceptional effort to be recognized.

What further makes Fitnah's reproach a form of *sukhan* is seen in how she uses these rhetorical questions to boast of her ox-lifting feat, to assert herself not just as the king's equal, but an exceptional female *javānmard* capable of reducing a king to a state of humility and supplication. This is seen from how Bahram Gur is described as "begged her pardon" (*dar kināri̇sh girift va ʻuẕr angikht*) for his mistakes.[378] Indeed, Bahram Gur's act of "begging for pardon" is repeated twice. The second one is found in Bahram Gur's speech, underscoring Fitnah's superiority:

"If in this house you have been in prison,/ a thousand times I beg your pardon."[379]

Haft Paykar ends the story of Fitnah and Bahram Gur by showing how Fitnah's mastery of *sukhan,* epitomized by the public lament she makes, is what enables her to have the last word, to dictate the course of her relationship with Bahram Gur. Lament can be defined as complaints of the transience of life and the cruelty of fate, of disasters, or of personal grievances.[380] Olga M. Davidson, in her analysis of female laments within the *Shahnamah*, focuses on those made by Tahmina over the death of her son Suhrab at the hands of his father, Rustam. She highlights the potential of female laments to challenge "institutions that depend on the solidarity of men [...]. Tahmina's lament is a threat not

[377] See line 68-70, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84-85.
[378] See line 77, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 85.
[379] See line 79, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 85.
[380] For more information, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Elegy," Encyclopedia Iranica, accessed May 7, 2024, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/elegy.

only to the army, 'the aggregate of Iranian warriors: it is also a threat to the heroic status of the warrior who is the paragon of the 'army'."[381] Fitnah's lament has a similar effect:

> Fitnah sat down, her speech began:
> "O king, who sets disturbances down,/whose separation caused my death,
> Whose love has brought me back to life./ This sorrow that has made me waste
> Away, would mountains turn to dust./ My loving nature nearly caused
> My life to end; and all for love./ When the king, hunting onager,
> With arrow joined hard hoof to ear,/ At such a loosing of his bow
> Not earth, but sky as well, bowed low./ I, who was slow to praise, thereby
> Did keep him from the Evil Eye;/ For what man's eye has worthy found,
> The harmful Sky-dragon, who falsely showed/ my love as hate, my crime is owed."[382]

In Persian love poetry, the appellation of *javānmard* is usually used to refer to the lover, who despite the cruelty of the beloved and the pangs of separation, still behaves courteously and fearlessly. It is believed that not everyone can possess love, only those who possess manliness (*mardāngī*) can embark on love's journey although full of perils and threats. For a lover to be considered a *javānmard*, they should possess virtues such as to grow blameworthy by receiving a bad name; to live as an exile; to gamble everything, including [their] head for the beloved, to be patient and endure the pain of separation and the beloved's oppression, and above all, to be possessed by the demon of love.[383] Knowing how to love, being a good lover, is one of the important lessons taught in mirrors for princes texts.[384]

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[381] Olga M. Davidson, "Women's Lamentations As Protest in the Shahnama," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. Gavin R.G. Hambly, The New Middle Ages, volume 6 (Basingstoke London: Macmillan, 1998), 142-143. It is also important for us to remember that *Haft Paykar* is a rewriting of the same story told in Firdawsi's *Shahnamah*, see Gabbay, "Love Gone Wrong, Then Right Again.", 682.
[382] See lines 82-90, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 85-86.
[383] Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 300-301. For more information on love and *javānmardī*, see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, X-XI.
[384] Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, X-XI.

In her lament, Fitnah overturns gender binaries governing romantic relationships. She recasts herself as the lover, the ideal *javānmard* who is selfless and not afraid to use her "love" (*mīhr*) and "loving nature" (*mihrabānī*) to shield her beloved, Bahram Gur from the "Evil Eye" (*chashm khamī*) and "Sky Dragon" (*azhdahā-yi sipihr*), even at the cost of her own emotional well-being, life, and reputation.[385] Through her lament, she redefines *javānmardī* as a female-dominated enterprise better at embodying compassion and selflessness than male rulers like Bahram Gur.[386]

Interestingly, the term *mihr* that Fitnah uses to describe her feelings for Bahram Gur can mean "love/kindness" or "union/marriage."[387] In the Persian tradition, different terms are used to describe various forms of love.[388] By using the specific term of *mīhr* to describe her love for him, Fitnah not only expresses the depth of her love but also hints at her desire for a deeper commitment. This could be interpreted as Fitnah's strategic use of rhetoric to 'trick' Bahram Gur into proposing marriage and solidifying her position as Queen of Persia. The way *Haft Paykar* describes Fitnah's "*sukhan*" as a kind of weapon capable of "piercing the king's soul" and his "heart" (*kaz dilash dar miyān jān bigirift*), serves to convey to female readers the need to similarly exercise agency in a patriarchal system.[389] Now completely enthralled by Fitnah, Bahram Gur perceives her as the embodiment of "truth" (*rāst*), "loyalty" (*vafā*), and "love so great" (*mihrahāyi chunān be*

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[385] See lines 85, 86, 88, 89, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 85-86.
[386] For more information on how real-life historical Persianate women from the early modern Mughal context have been using lament to assert power, see Leong, "'If Only That Pitiless Blade Had Pierced My Own Heart and Eyes': Mughal Royal Women's Grief as a Form of Political Rhetoric.", 1-16.
[387] See footnote 488, Shayani, "The Representation of Women in Premodern Persian Epic Romance Poetry.", 238, 241.
[388] Cross, "The Many Colors of Love in Niẓāmī's 'Haft Paykar:', 64-93; Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, "Love and Desire in Pre-Modern Persian Poetry and Prose," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (December 2009): 673–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/00210860903305988..
[389] See line 91, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 86.

aval bār).[390] He readily acquiesces to her desires, prompting their "marriage" (*nikāḥ*) on the spot with "priests" (*mawbidān*).[391] By making Fitnah his lawful wife and queen, Bahram Gur legitimizes her rhetoric and prior criminality by acknowledging her as an equal and perhaps superior partner.

What makes Fitnah stand out from the seven princesses is seen in the way she is able to not just *sukhan* to manipulate emotions, but to use gifts strategically– something readers can learn from. To further entice the officer into accepting her wager and becoming her servant instead, she even gifts him "seven rubies" from her "chain" (*ʿaqd*) that are described as "each worth a kingdom's ransom; twice the value of all Oman's price."[392] In the Seljuk context, "jewelry, together with clothing, remained an important signifier of wealth and rank."[393] Moreover, in the Persianate context, the ruby is one of "the most precious stones" often only worn by kings to "display their splendor and power."[394] Fitnah's ability to possess such an exorbitant bracelet containing stones symbolic of kingship highlights the effectiveness of Fitnah's *adab* in enabling her to attain status and wealth. Fitnah's chain of seven rubies can be seen as a lesson for women to invest in and know how to use jewelry, as it can save their lives and help them achieve their goals. Fitnah's character embodies a complex interplay of deviance and virtue, where the lines between criminality and heroism blur. Her act of bribing the officer with rubies, ostensibly a gift, is in reality a covert transgression, a criminal act masked as royal generosity. This suggests that eloquent speech, a cornerstone of her power, is inextricably

[390] See lines 92, 93 https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 86.
[391] See line 100, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 86.
[392] See lines 63-64, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 79.
[393] Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 101.
[394] Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, "The Red Stones of Light in Iranian Culture. I. Spinels," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 15 (2001): 102-103.

linked to a degree of moral ambiguity. While such behavior is undeniably reprehensible, it also aligns with the chivalric ideal of *javānmardī*, which often celebrates cunning and audacity.

This paradoxical nature distinguishes Fitnah from her peers. Unlike other princesses who may adhere to strict societal norms, she operates in a moral gray area. Her ability to manipulate and deceive, while morally questionable, is also a testament to her political acumen and survival instincts. Fitna's character, therefore, can be viewed through the lens of Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory. Bakhtin, in his study of carnivals, has observed how people used masks to assume new identities, to challenge those in power: "These masks take on an extraordinary significance. They grant the right not to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right not to be taken literally, not to be oneself."[395]

Like a skilled carnival performer, her "gift" of rubies becomes a potent symbol of this duality, a bribe, or even a criminal act that masquerades as a royal gift-giving ritual. Her use of masks is further seen in how she portrays herself as the privileged consort (*Munis-i khās*) of Bahram Gur the king to the weak and gullible officer who is quite oblivious about her political cunning.[396] By blurring the lines between reality and performance, Fitnah exercises a form of power that is both transgressive and compelling.

This lesson of gift-giving is once again repeated in the later part of the poem, where *Haft Paykar* mentions the way Fitnah removes from her "bejeweled ears four gems" (*Chār gohar zi gosh gohar-kash*) for the officer so that he can sell them to raise

[395] Mihail Mihailovič Bahtin, Caryl Emerson, and Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, University of Texas Press Slavic Series 1 (Austin: University of Texas press, 1994), 163.
[396] See line 54,55 https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 78.

money for Fitnah's feast, where Bahram Gur would once again learn his lesson.[397] Interestingly, in the Seljuk context, we have evidence of historical women such as Zümre (Dhimra) Khatun, a goldsmith or a jeweler who also owned a caravansary in Konya.[398] Their lives show how the ownership and trade of jewelry empowered Seljuk women to gain both economic independence and social standing within Seljuk society. Fitnah is a good example of how enslaved foreign musicians in the middle periods could have been financially powerful and the different means they used to rise to power with their male consorts.

The repeated success of Fitnah's *sukhan* and her usage of gift-giving is made evident in the officer's complete capitulation, where he not only refuses to kill her but also swears a "binding oath" (*ʿahd raftishān sūgand*) to become her ally and even hides her in his own house.[399] Again, we have another example of Fitnah spreading lawlessness and disorder in the kingdom, overturning the class hierarchy. This inversion also reveals indirectly how these men (including the officer) are weak, emotionally and mentally, and how unstable is the king's command over his subjects.

In the premodern Iranian context, gift-giving was understood to be asymmetrical and "involves such ideals and concepts of ritual exchange as the equal or greater value of the countergift, honoring a guest or host, the display of gift and regifting."[400] Fitnah would have been aware of how upon accepting her extravagant gift of a seven rubies chain, the officer would have been obliged to honor her and provide her with a

[397] See line 88, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 80.
[398] See footnote 7, Morony, "Gift Giving in the Iranian Tradition."43.
[399] See line 69, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 79.
[400] Morony, "Gift Giving in the Iranian Tradition", 33. For more information on gift-giving in the early modern Ottoman and Safavid contexts, see Sinem Arcak Casale, *Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500–1639*, Silk Roads (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2023).

countergift, which would be his allegiance and protection.[401] Fitnah's strategic use of gift-giving rituals exemplifies the intelligence, sagacity, and resourcefulness expected of the female *javānmard* ideal, which is also connected to criminal and immoral actions. Fitnah's enobled bribery as a royal gift can be seen as an instructive example, urging female readers to leverage their intellectual and material resources to overturn power dynamics, navigate courtly hierarchies, and establish alliances with influential men. This lesson draws on historical reality. One example can be seen from Inanch Khatun, a royal woman from the later Seljuk period who proposed marriage to Sultan Tughril II (1109-1134) and lured him by mentioning her financial assets: "Now that God has made you ruler of your father's territories, I am one of your servants. I have a large amount of treasures and tremendous riches." Tughril took the bait and duly married her.[402]

While royal women have been recorded for using gifts to empower themselves, lower-class, 'enslaved' women, have predominantly been studied on how they were used as gifts to forage alliances and build kinship between men in a patriarchal system– in the words of Gayle Rubin, "trafficked between men."[403] Fitnah is a good counterexample showing how 'enslaved' elite women in the Seljuk context were not only simply 'gifts'. In fact, her strategic manipulation of gift-giving rituals, coupled with her mastery of other *javānmardī* associated tricks, exemplifies how these women actively carved out new gender identities for themselves. In doing so, they were able to challenge patriarchal kingship. Fitnah hints at the possibility that women from lower social backgrounds, such as those of 'enslaved' status, might have wielded more power in the Seljuk court than

[401] For more information on gift-giving in the Seljuk context, see Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 101.
[402] Hillenbrand, "Women in the Seljuq Period", 114.
[403] Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", 157–210.

previously thought and were socially mobile.[404] Fitnah's ability to climb social ranks so efficiently is further seen in her access to education in *adab,* which equipped her with the skills necessary to gain the king's attention and earn immense wealth.

Physical and Psychological Prowess in Female Athletes

As mentioned in my introduction, the *javānmard* figure was inspired by "Sassanian and pre-Islamic Arab warrior traditions of the champion (*pahlavān*) whose duty consisted of protecting his kingdom by his selfless acts of valor."[405] The *pahlavān* is known to be both physically and mentally strong. As a result, *javānmardī* became intertwined with martial arts and exercises ranging from weight-lifting to wrestling to sword fighting. These repetitive practices were believed not only to build discipline and strength but also to refine the soul and cultivate the moral qualities expected of a true *javānmard*. Some of these expected qualities include fidelity, guidance, and confidence.[406]

When it comes to early modern illustrated Persianate mirror for princesses like the *Kitāb-i dastān*, I have shown in Chapter 1 how wrestling was one of the important lessons taught to female elite readers of the Safavid court. *Haft Paykar* demonstrates how, in the pre-Safavid medieval Seljuk context, weightlifting was seen as another crucial martial skill women should learn to deal with kings on their quest for *javānmardī* virtues. Fitnah's weightlifting is described as follows: every day, she would lift a calf from the ground and carry it up:

> a tower sixty steps in height/ "day after day she did not quit/ this practice,
> but continued it,/ until– the calf an ox become/of six years' age [...]

[404] For more information on the educated slave woman in the Abbasid literary context, see Sharlet, "Educated Slave Women and Gift Exchange in Abbasid Culture", 287.
[405] Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*, 271.
[406] Ibid., 271-275.

that rose-limbed idol still could bear/ the ox from palace grounds to tower./
Its burden troubled her no whit,/ fort she had grown quite used to it.[407]

Through her weightlifting, Fitnah demonstrates more than just physical prowess. She also showcases the mental fortitude and unwavering commitment expected of those who guide others towards achieving the *javānmard* ideal. By further stating how "as the ox increased in weight/ her own strength ever grew more great", *Haft Paykar* teaches readers how an increase in physical strength can also lead to a corresponding increase in mental strength.[408] Her increase in mental strength is first seen in her ability to come up with a strategy to entice Bahram Gur. Aware of how the king would be hunting soon and his inevitable hunger, she envisions a "paradisal feast" (*majlisī rāst kun chū rawżah-i ḥūr*) overflowing with "incense, wine, sweet fruits, and meat" that would entice him to witness her extraordinary ox-lifting performance.[409] Again, it is important to note the playful and comical undertone of this passage, all of which contributes to a carnivalesque atmosphere at Bahram Gur's court.

Her intellect is further evident in the diplomatic rhetoric she uses to persuade Bahram Gur's officer to carry out this other task for her. In advising him that "when he your entreaty hears,/ he'll seek to raise you over your peers," Fitnah suggests that by assisting her to prepare her feast, the officer will gain the king's favor and potentially rise in rank. She reinforces this idea with lines like "and if this deed will bring us gain,/ we both will high deed attain," implying a mutually beneficial outcome and a future filled with rewards for their cooperation.[410] The officer's willingness to readily contribute from his own "secret treasure" (*ganjhā-yi panhani*) to prepare her "paradisal feast" highlights

[407] See lines 73-86, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 80.
[408] See line 86, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 80.
[409] See line 91, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 81.
[410] See line 94-97, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 80-81.

the success of Fitnah's politically strategic rhetoric that can be seen as a form of *sukhan* and how weak mentally these men are in so easily falling for these tricks.[411] This marks the second instance when Fitnah's rhetorical eloquence is highlighted, stressing the need for women to be strong speakers and intelligent political leaders. Bakhtin sees the carnival as different from "official feasts" that were sponsored by the state that "asserted all that was stable, unchanging and perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political and moral values, norms, and prohibition."[412] Firstly, Fitnah's elaborate "paradisal feast" that I have mentioned above is an example of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque found in a non-European context. In the Seljuk context, formal feasting served as a platform for kings to showcase their "exalted position and lofty ambition."[413] Fitnah not only co-opts what is normally done by kings but also carnivalizes the concept of the official feast by subverting its intended purpose, using it as a means to destabilize patriarchal power structures, as seen from how she uses it to trick Bahram Gur into watching her ox-lifting performance so that he will realize his mistakes.

Fitnah's ox-lifting performance, which blends masculine strength and feminine beauty, epitomizes what I call female *javānmardī.* Through being a female *javānmard,* Fitnah mocks the established binary of masculinity and femininity. Bahram Gur's reaction in being "amazed" (*'ajab*) and even questioning "what might [her ox-lifting performance] mean?" (*ki-īn chih shāyad būd*?) reveals the success of Fitnah's gender-inverting performance.[414] Not only is she able to force the king, and particularly Bahram Gur, to re-evaluate the established order, particularly regarding traditional gender

[411] See line 99, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 81.
[412] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*., 10.
[413] Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 72-73.
[414] See line 64, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84.

roles and patriarchal dominance, but Fitnah also emerges as a teacher who guides kings toward being critical thinkers.

While Fitnah's performance disrupts the status quo and compels Bahram Gur to question current norms, it is crucial to remember that Fitnah's carnivalesque inversions are not completely about dismantling the existing order. Rather, they serve a more nuanced purpose: the restoration of a more integrated matriarchal order where the kingly figurehead is a just and discerning ruler who not only recognizes the capabilities of women but also adheres to their advice. As mentioned by Bakhtin, carnivalesque inversions are temporary. Despite allowing mockery of power structures, carnivalesque rituals do not aim to dismantle them. They serve as a controlled release valve, allowing spectators and performers to vent frustrations and ultimately reaffirm the existing order.[415] However, while Bakhtin views power from the binary framework of dominance and submission, the premodern Persianate world's integrated matriarchal system expands his analysis. In this context, power is not merely a matter of one group dominating another but is instead characterized by a dynamic and ever-changing interplay of societal forces. This perspective allows us to extend Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to encompass a more intricate and less hierarchical understanding of power.

Haft Paykar further challenges gender norms by demonstrating how *javānmardī* is not solely a male domain. This is seen from the way Fitnah's ox-lifting is advertised by the officer to Bahram Gur as a "rare" (*'ajab*) feat that no "man in the army" (*dar īn sipāh kasī*) can do:

"By God! no man in this army/ could ever raise it from the ground./

[415] Renate Lachmann, Raoul Eshelman, and Marc Davis, "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture," *Cultural Critique*, no. 11 (1988): 130; Paul Bouissac, *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach*, Advances in Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 8, 37.

But when a woman brings it up here,/up sixty steps, is this not rare?"[416]

To justify Fitnah's assassination, Bahram Gur uses the excuse that she is a woman who is "unequal to warriors" (*ham-nabardān nīst*).[417] Fitnah's extraordinary feat of weightlifting, which surpasses the strength of any warrior in Bahram Gur's land, refutes the belief that only men can be *javānmard*s. Fitnah informs readers that women can excel as *javānmard*s, embodying virtues like physical strength with equal, if not greater, prowess than men. By showcasing a woman embodying the *javānmardī* virtue of physical strength with such prowess, the epic compels readers to question ingrained gender roles and redefine masculinity and femininity. Fitnah's ox-lifting costume that she uses to assert her identity as a female *javānmard*, which I will explore further, exemplifies this challenge to the status quo–a topsy turvy world where a slave woman displays greater virtues than the men around her.

Cosmetic Beauty in Fitnah's Glamor Politics

In the Persian poetic tradition, it is a common trope for the male to be depicted as the hunter and the female beloved as the hunted.[418] *Haft Paykar* inverts this binary and expands our understanding of *javānmardī* by demonstrating how in addition to virtues ranging from trickery, physical prowess, and intelligence, women can leverage other unconventional virtues associated with *javānmardī,* such as beauty, to subvert traditional power dynamics and gender norms, to make kings "their prey". This is seen from how Fitnah's beauty routine in preparation for her ox-lifting performance begins with the

[416] See lines 38, 39, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 81, translation slightly modified.
[417] See line 46, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 78, translation slightly modified.
[418] Shayani, "The Representation of Women in Premodern Persian Epic Romance Poetry.", 129.

lines: "before the king could hunt or slay./ his victim made the king her prey."[419] It is important for us to note the social inversions at play in this line, especially since effective hunting was considered the specialty of Persianate kings.

As mentioned above, outer beauty is believed to reflect noble character. Icons of *javānmardī,* such as the wrestler, are not just celebrated for their martial prowess, but also their physical perfection. Moreover, writers of *javānmardī* treatises saw physical perfection as a sign of the true *fatan* (young man).[420] Knowing how to dress, to adorn oneself is important to signify one's *javānmardī* identity. In *javānmardī* organizations, especially those from the middle Persianate periods, different kinds of attire are used to showcase various virtues associated with *javānmardī*. Some examples include breeches that were also worn to showcase moral chastity and "the presentation and the wearing of the trousers (*zīr-jāma*) as a symbol of *javānmardī.*"[421] Apart from clothing, particular forms of jewelry are symbolic of one's specific social ranks in the Seljuk context. For example, ring-shaped earrings could have been a symbol of servitude.[422] Talatoff has explored the different uses of jewelry as a potential metaphor for female genitalia in *Haft Paykar* and how it reflects a more liberal approach to sexuality in Nizami's work.[423]

While Talatoff's argument is insightful, a deeper understanding of Fitnah's adornment practices in the *Haft Paykar*, specifically the deliberate way she uses jewelry and textiles to create a costume for her ox-lifting performance allows us to better understand the visual language premodern Persianate women used to challenge patriarchy and showcase their unique identities as female *javānmard*s. Fitnah is not the only

[419] See line 2, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 81.
[420] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan.", 162.
[421] Flatt, "Young Manliness: Ethical Culture in the Gymnasiums of the Medieval Deccan.", 163.
[422] Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 102.
[423] Talattof, *Nezami Ganjavi and Classical Persian Literature*, 70.

example. Other female characters like Sindukht in the *Shāhnamah* are celebrated for adorning themselves with jewelry and other precious ornaments to project power and defend their territory against male adversaries.[424] This strategy, which I refer to as "glamor politics," is further explored in Chapters 1 and 2 of my dissertation, where I examine visual and historiographical evidence of premodern Persianate women's strategic use of adornment. Looking at fictional representations of women's use of adornments provides a richer understanding of female *javānmard*s' use of glamor politics.

Fitnah's costume consists of "beautiful Chinese ornaments" (*zīvar va zīb-i chīnīyān*), "a veil of white" (*naqāb-i kāfūrī*), and a "wimple with seed-pearls bound" (*farqash az dānah-hā-yi durr-i khūshāb*).[425] She also has "jewel-hung ears" (*gūsh-i gawhar-āvizash*) and "Pleiades' necklace" (*ʿaqd-i Parvīn*).[426] Parvin is the Persian term for Pleiades, the seven sisters born to Atlas and Pleione in the Greek tradition. In the Islamicate tradition, it is often used to describe precious pearls on a string.[427] Pearls were traditionally associated with wisdom in the premodern Persianate context. The color white symbolizes purity, devotion, fealty, the planet Venus, Islam, pure, selfless love, and the generous intercession of revelation.[428] While I have already mentioned China's association with magic and artistic perfection, Chinese ornaments were also highly

[424] Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 100.
[425] See lines 46, 56, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84.
[426] See lines 50, 57, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84.
[427] F. D. Lewis, S. Sharma, and Heshmat Moayyad, eds., *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on His 80th Birthday ; 24 Essays on Persian Literature, Culture and Religion*, Iranian Studies Series (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), 1.
[428] Meisami, *The Haft Paykar,* 285; Gabbay "Love Gone Wrong, The Right Again", 684; Cross, "The Many Colors of Love in Niẓāmī's Haft Paykar.", 52-59.

sought after in Iran in the Seljuk period.[429] By strategically adorning herself with Chinese ornaments that convey her revered ethnicity, along with pearl accessories and a white veil, Fitnah establishes herself as a wise *javānmard*.

Fitnah's make-up ranges from using "musk" (*mushk*) perfume, darkening her eyes with "kohl" (*surma*), dying her cheeks "a rosy hue" (*arghavānī*), and using the "seven adornments" (*haft az ānchi*).[430] The seven adornments refer to henna (to dye the hands and feet), indigo (to dye the eyebrows), rogue, white powder, collyrium, talc (to improve the luster of the face), and galia (a mixture of perfumes).[431] What is most interesting here is the repeated emphasis on Fitnah's hairstyle, specifically her curls and the moles decorating her face:

> Her hair, a crown of amber, swept/ from head to ears, and graced her neck.
> Her Hindu mole and Ethiop curls/ were ranged as if prepared for war.
> (A king whose throne was made of ivory,/was forced from the throne and crown.)
> Her jet-black mole on ruby lips.[432]

J.T.P. de Brujin has commented on how it is a convention in Persian poetry to use martial vocabulary, specifically comparisons involving weaponry, such as swords, daggers, and arrows, were meant to showcase the aggressive character of the beloved.[433] Similarly, Seyed-Gohrab has also commented on how martial vocabulary was used to comment on the striking appearance of the beloved and is strongly colored with eroticism.[434] While these interpretations hold merit, I contend that the description of Fitnah's hair and moles in martial terms, specifically described as "ranged as if prepared

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[429] See Akbarnia, *Khita'i.,* 219; Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos,* 184.
[430] See lines 47,48,49, 59 https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 83-84.
[431] Meisami, *The Haft Paykar,* 288.
[432] See line 52-55, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84, translation slightly modified. I have also changed the sequence of the lines according to the Persian original.
[433] J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Beloved," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1989, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/beloved.
[434] Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 221.

for war" (*har du bar yik taraf sitāda bih jang*), serves to capture themes of strength, authority, and rebellion against injustice, as embedded in Fitnah's beauty, that exemplify the ideal traits of a female *javānmard*.[435]

The way Fitnah's mole and curls are juxtaposed with an image of a dethroned king "forced from his throne and crown" (*nāguzīrash būd az takht va zi taj*), hints to readers how her beauty functions as a weapon to disrupt patriarchal power structures, foreshadowing what will happen later on to Bahram Gur.[436] In the Islamic context, hair was understood to have symbolic significance and was linked to power. Treatment of hair, specifically shaving or growing it was also something that some *javānmardī* manuals prescribed.[437] While studies have predominantly examined women and hair within the framework of veiling, I assert that *Haft Paykar*'s focus on Fitnah's curls is more than just a literary technique to describe her beauty. It provides us with a way to see women's usage of facial hair (as discussed earlier) and various hairstyles for self-empowerment.

Apart from Fitnah's hair, her mole is another important symbol communicating her *javānmardī* status. In chapter one concerning the drawing of moles alongside other facial markings on Seljuk lusterware, I examined how they were used to convey female figures' association with *javānmardī*. The way Fitnah is described as adorned with a "mole" (*khāl*) on her "ruby lips" (*ʿaqīq labhā*), an uncommon position, can be seen as a deliberate foreshadowing technique used to draw readers' attention to Fitnah's other instances of *sukhan* in challenging patriarchal kingship.[438]

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[435] See line 86, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh20; trans. 84.
[436] See line 54, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84.
[437] Lloyd Ridgeon, "Shaggy or Shaved? The Symbolism of Hair among Persian Qalandar Sufis," *Iran and the Caucasus* 14, no. 2 (2010), 235-237, 245.
[438] See line 55, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84.

Ethnic markers for Female Cosmopolitanism

While Fitnah is identified as Chinese, *Haft Paykar* employs a fascinating array of other ethnic markers to depict her beauty. These markers – Hindu, Ethiopian, Syrian, Turkic, and others – go beyond mere poetic conventions. A closer examination reveals a deliberate strategy that complicates, and ultimately enriches, our understanding of her character as a *javānmard*. Fitnah's mole is referred to as a "Hindu mole", her hair as "Ethiop curls" and her body as a "Syrian rose" (*gul-i sūri*).[439] Schimmel has noted how ethnic markers in Persian poetry reflect historical and social reality. "Hindu" is associated with the color black and also connotes a lowly slave. "Ethiop" alludes to blackness with Ethiopians remembered for their curly hair.[440] Syria also used to be part of the Persian empire under the Achaemenids (546-330 B.C.).[441]

However, as I have already mentioned in Chapter 2, Hindustan has also been perceived as a realm of marvels, enchantments, the exotic, and opulence in the premodern Persianate context.[442] Moreover, in the pre-Islamic context, Ethiopia is known for its rebellious and outspoken resistance, particularly in defying Persian king Cambyses' demands (d.522 BC).[443] In fact, Cambyses' campaign against Ethiopia ended in disaster with heavy losses and he even went mad after its failure.[444] This exemplifies Ethiopia's reputation for resilience and defiance against Persian authority.[445] Furthermore, Fitnah is

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[439] See line 58, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84.
[440] Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade,* 138-139.
[441] Marie-Louise Chaumont, "ANTIOCH (1)," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill), accessed June 24, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_5507.
[442] Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia,* 63.
[443] Edward Farr, *History of the Persians* (Robert Carter, 1850), 146-148.
[444] E. van Donzel, "ETHIOPIA," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill), accessed June 22, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_9341.
[445] From the time of the early Greek literary sources until the Hellenistic period Ethiopia was idealized by the Greeks, who considered the Ethiopians to be a semi-mythological people. See ibid.

also described as Bahram Gur's "Turk" (*tūrk*).[446] In Persian poetry, the Turk is the binary opposite of the "Hindu" and is associated with the color white, angels, beauty, cruelty, the beloved, and even rulers.[447]

The way Chinese musician Fitnah's beauty is associated with Hindu, Ethiopian, Chinese, Turkic, and Syrian cultural markers– each carrying various ambiguous meanings such as deviance, slavery, rebellion against Persian kingship, lost land, magic, beauty, and artistic superiority. Besides adhering to Persian poetic conventions, these qualities demonstrate how the ideal of female *javānmardī* manifests in unexpected ways that muddles geographical boundaries or simplistic categorizations. Through Fitnah, *Haft Paykar* conveys how anyone and everyone regardless of their ethnicity, class, or gender can be a *javānmard,* leave their mark on Iranian kingship, and even become celebrated Iranian figures. Moreover, it also encourages women to embrace the synthesizing of diverse influences so that they can forge unique cosmopolitan identities. Fitnah's complexity enriches our understanding of the premodern Persianate world, revealing a more nuanced and dynamic concept of female heroism.

Fitnah at the limits of the Persianate

Fitnah and Bahram Gur's relationship also provides a different understanding of the Persianate world. Talatoff has described Nizami's poetry as "marked by a renewed attempt to redefine the concept of Iranian-ness more from a philosophical perspective. It is a reflection of his place, an area marked by tolerance of several cultures."[448] To gain a more holistic understanding of the "Persianate," Nile Green advocates for a departure from a purely celebratory framework, as exemplified by Talatoff's analysis. Instead, one

[446] See lines 58, 75, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21; trans. 84-85.
[447] Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade,* 138.
[448] Talattof and Clinton, *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi*, 76-77.

should focus on the Persianate's limits, specifically "what forms of social interaction or organization Persian could not cope with, and the political, social, and semantic fault lines that the language was unable to bridge."[449] While Green's exploration of the Persianate centers on the Persian language, my analysis reveals that love stories between Iranian kings and foreign slave girls like Fitnah offer a better understanding of the limits of the Persianate, especially when it comes to Iran interacting with powerful adversaries like China.

Regardless of their happy ending, it is essential not to overlook how Fitnah and Bahram Gur's relationship is characterized by misunderstandings, power struggles, and even violence. Their depiction can be seen as a reflection of an underlying desire in *Haft Paykar* to assert Iranian dominance, to exceed Chinese superiority embodied by Fitnah. This is evidenced by the wordplay *Haft Paykar* uses to describe Fitnah and Bahram Gur's reunion where she is described as being "put down" (*Fitnah nishādan*). Fitnah ultimately disappears from the narrative after fulfilling her role of guiding Bahram Gur, replaced by his other wives, the seven princesses that he becomes enamored with. Fitnah's disappearance from the story the limits of the Persianate and shows how foreign female *javānmard* is a kind of self-serving gesture for marking the borders of different cultures and ethnicities. In other words, Fitnah's cosmopolitanism has epistemological limits, even her character shores up Persianate gender and political norms.

Furthermore, Nizami would have been aware that while the Seljuk empire was crumbling, the Mongols were, as Hamid Dabashi puts it, "flexing its overextended muscles".[450] Fitnah's depiction as the dominant masculine figure superior to Bahram Gur

[449] Green, *The Persianate World*, 2-3.
[450] Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism,* 7.

in their relationship hints at the underlying anxiety with the emergence of an unexpecting powerful force like the Mongols and the inevitable union between the Mongols and Iran in the medieval Persianate context.[451] These concerns come to the fore in the subsequent chapter, which focuses on Fitnah and Bahram Gur's story about the invasion of Iran by the Chinese army.

Conclusion

By contextualizing *Haft Paykar* within the mirror for princesses genre that existed in the middle periods, I have revealed how it uses female characters like Fitnah to teach female *javānmardī* and provide new alternatives for gender roles. I have also shown how Persian texts like *Haft Paykar* expand theories on gender and power such as that of Gayle Rubin and Mikhail Bakhtin. Moreover, the notion of female *javānmardī* offers a valuable lens through which to examine power dynamics within the Persianate realm, thereby enriching our understanding of the concept of the Persianate. By also putting Fitnah's performance of *javānmardī* in conversation with real-life historical figures and events, I have provided a new way of looking at female power, gender, race, and class in the medieval context. The historical evidence of works by poets after Nizami's time, such as Sa'di's *Gulistān* (1258), becoming educational tools for royal *javānmardī* women, further demonstrating the need for exploring how other texts functioned as mirrors for princesses enabling an integrated matriarchal dominance with a ideal patriarch as the figurehead.[452] In my next chapter, I will be looking at how Chinese women were visually celebrated as models of *javānmardī* in premodern Persianate illustrated manuscripts.

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[451] This union did eventually happen with the start of the Ilkhanid dynasty in Iran from 1256–1353.

[452] The Mughal empress Hamidah Begum is said to have owned a copy of the Gulistan, see John Seyller, "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library," *Artibus Asiae* 57, no. 3/4 (1997): 243–349.

Chapter Four

Chinese Women as Symbols of *Javānmardī* in the Illustrated Manuscripts of the Premodern Persianate World

How Chinese 'enslaved' female musicians like Fitnah were celebrated as *javānmardī* figures in Persian literature (Chapter 3) speaks to the broader scholarship on the formative presence of Chinese visual elements in Persian art. Nonetheless, Fitna's striking "masculine" features have never been considered in connection to representations of different Chinese women in premodern Persianate illustrated manuscripts. A closer examination of this connection will reveal a sinophilia that helped consolidate Persianate ideals of kingship and kinship since at least 945-1800.[453]

Art historian Yusen Yu has shown that fifteenth-century paintings of Chinese women preserved in the Topkapi and Diez albums function as"proto-ethnographic" knowledge culled from disparate travel accounts by Timurid writers. Older stereotyped forms of knowledge regarding Chinese women are also found in the Persian literary tradition.[454] While Yu focuses on understanding how Chinese women were celebrated in Timurid paintings due to their beauty, I seek to expand his understanding of their role in

[453] See Akbarnia, *Khita'i*; Yuka Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran*, Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

[454] Yusen Yu, "Representing Ming China in Fifteenth-Century Persianate Painting," *Ming Studies* 2018, no. 78 (October 2018): 57–73. For more information on the way Chinese women are depicted in Persianate paintings, see Lisa Golombek and Maria E. Subtelny, "Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century," in *Repetition of Composition in Manuscripts: The Khamsa of Nizami in Leningrad*, ed. Ada Adamova, vol. 6, Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1992), 67–75; Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, "Chinese Ladies In The Istanbul Albums," in *Between Iran and China: Paintings from Four Istanbul Albums*, Colloquies on Art & Archaeology in Asia 10, 1980, 77–84; Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, "Siyah Qalem and Gong Kai: An Istanbul Album Painter and a Chinese Painter of the Mongolian Period," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 59–71,; Necipoğlu, Gülru, "Persianate Images between Europe and China: The 'Frankish Manner' in the Diez and Topkapı Albums, c. 1350–1450," in *The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents*, ed. Julia Gonnella, Friederike Weis, and Christoph Rauch, The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents (BRILL, 2017).

Persianate paintings. By carrying out a close-reading of folios from the various illustrated manuscripts from 945 to 1800, I reveal how these women were also celebrated for their ability to embody *javānmardī* and to guide their royal Persianate male partners into becoming *javānmard*s for ideal Persianate patriarchal kingship to thrive.[455] A better understanding of Chinese women as models of *javānmardī* provides another window on the topsy-turvy cultural dynamics of the premodern Persianate world.

In my previous chapters, I have uncovered the different ways women, especially in the Indo-Iranian Persianate context, were represented and presented themselves as models of *javānmardī* in material culture, visual arts, and written texts. By focusing on female *javānmardī* beyond Indo-Iranian exchanges, this chapter explores how 'foreign', specifically Chinese women like Fitnah, have also been perceived as figures exemplifying bravery, trickery, intelligence, martial prowess, beauty, strength and other manly virtues. Examining visual representations of Chinese female *javānmard*s from illustrated manuscripts expands our understanding of the carnivalesque nature of female *javānmardī,* race, and class in the middle and early modern periods in the Persianate world.

The Evolvement and Longevity of the Chinese Female *Javānmard*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Iran's fascination with China existed even before the Mongols. China was associated with rare beauty, captivating but mysterious inhabitants, super artistry and even magic.[456] According to art historian Basil Gray, "so far back as the

[455] For more information of women as educators, see Fatemeh Keshavarz, "Taming the Unruly King: Nizami's Shirin as Lover and Educator," in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat and Lois Beck (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 186–205.
[456] Fore more information on understandings of China in Iranian history, see Nile Green, "From the Silk Road to the Railroad (and Back): The Means and Meanings of the Iranian Encounter with China," *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 168.

time of [the poet] Firdausi (eleventh century), 'Chinese' was used as equivalent to 'Parisian'."[457] While scholars such as Yuka Kadoi and Ladan Akbarnia have focused on how Chinese objects and knowledge were perceived and utilized in the Mongol-Iranian context, this chapter, however, broadens the scope. This is seen in how this chapter begins by looking at the Oxford manuscript of *Samak-i ʿayyār* (1330-5), an illustrated manuscript produced during the late Ilkhanid context, specifically during the Inju dynasty (1335-1357). This manuscript was described by its purchaser, Sir William Ouseley (1767-1842), as being "most rare and curious" among other illustrated manuscripts.[458] This Oxford manuscript will be analyzed alongside folios from five renowned illustrated manuscripts, mainly:

1) Add.18113 from the British Library depicting the story of *Humay va Humayun* (1396) by Khvaju Kirmani (1290-1349).
2) the Cartier manuscript of *Haft Paykar* that was patronized by the second Timurid ruler, Shah Rukh (1377-1447).
3) the Vienna manuscript of *Humay va Humayun* that was commissioned by Shah Rukh's son Baysunghur Mirza (1397-1433).
4) the Gulbenkian anthology commissioned by Sultan Iskandar (1384-1415).
5) the Walters manuscript W.604 of Nizami's *Khamsah* produced during the Timurid period in 1481.

By shifting our attention to the late Ilkhanid, Mughal, and Safavid eras, we can gain a richer understanding of Sino-Iranian synthesis. I argue that the evolution of the Chinese female *javānmard* figure dates from the late Ilkhanid period and continues into the Jalayirid (1335-1432) and Timurid (1370–1507) eras. Afterwards I will shift to folios from Mughal Emperor Akbar's illustrated manuscript, which contains thirteenth-century poet Amir Khusrau's *Ā'īnah-i Iskandarī* (Alexander's Mirror), housed in the Walters'

[457] Basil Gray, *Persian Painting* (Rizzoli, 1977), 19.
[458] Will Stockland, "The Kitab Samak-'ayyar," *Persica 15*, 1993, 143.

Museum. Its story resonates with a Safavid-era folio illustration of a scene from Nizami's *Sharafnamah* (Book of Honor) (c.1200), found at the Al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait. Examining these diverse sources will allow me to assess the longevity of the Chinese female *javānmard* figure within the evolving aesthetics and gender norms of the early modern Persianate world.

Gendered Sinophilia and Race

Scholars working on Sinophila in the premodern context have mostly studied archival sources that promote a European and male-centered perspective.[459] Other scholars working on Chinese artistic influences in Iranian visual arts during the Mongol context, such as Yuka Kadoi, have mentioned that, unlike European artists who used Chinese visual elements to amplify their artistic superiority, Iranian artists were sincere and consistent in learning Chinese pictorial and decorative artistic techniques. as well as developing them in conversation with their techniques.I doing so, they have created a synthesis of Sino-Iranian art that Kadoi calls "Islamic Chinoiserie."[460]

Other scholars such as Ladan Akbarnia came up with the concept of *khitā'ī* (of Cathay) to comprehend the strategic maneuvers employed by the Ilkhanids to assert their dominance over their realms. *Khitā'ī* refers to the purposeful relocation of highly regarded objects from China, spanning human talents to inanimate artifacts and the attribution of new significance to these items upon their resettlement in Iran. Through *khitā'ī*, the Ilkhanids were able to transform the material culture and create a distinctive visual language that serves as a symbol of the Ilkhanids' authority.[461] Nevertheless,

[459] Peter J. Kitson, "Romantic Sinopolitans: Natural Philosophers, Travelers, Diplomats, and Missionaries," in *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter*, by Peter J. Kitson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), 143–73, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-10920-0_6..
[460] Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie,* 9.
[461] See Akbarnia, *Khita'i*, 14-15.

Islamic Chinoiserie, as conveyed in the visual language of *Khitā'ī,* was highly gendered. My research aims to address this neglected topic in scholarship by extending the paradigm of Islamicate sexualities to the borderlands of Sino-Iranian relations. By examining the visual representations of romance between Chinese female *javānmard*s and Iranian male partners found in these illustrated manuscripts commissioned by Persianate elite male patrons, this chapter explores how "gendered *Khitā'ī"* functioned as a language by these patrons to assert legitimacy, communicate anxieties, express homosocial bonds, and subvert other patriarchs' authority.

As mentioned in my Introduction, scholars working on critical race studies such as Geraldine Heng have mostly focused on using European medieval romances to understand medieval race mainly from the framework of racial xenophobia:

> By allowing fantasies of race and nation to surface with remarkable freedom, [...] medieval romance becomes a medium that conduces with exceptional facility the creation of races, and the production of a prioritizing discourse of essential difference among peoples, in the Middle Ages.[462]

Through closely examining how these Chinese female *javānmard*s were visually depicted not just as "one of us," but "more than us", particularly due to their ability to outperform their Iranian male partners in being *javānmard*s, I seek to provide a new way of understanding premodern race from a visual, Persianate perspective beyond a Eurocentric, text-based focus on racial otherness like that of Heng. Garcia, in his study of Persianate travelers' relationships with the British elite women, has called for scholars especially those seeking to provide a "new imperial history," to reorient analytical frameworks towards "gendered bodies in situ," to "pay attention to female bodies through

[462] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 7.

which reciprocal agencies were formed and disparate imperial ideologies."[463] Inspired by Garcia's methodology, I argue a better understanding of the dynamics between Chinese female *javānmard*s and their Persianate kingly partners in their 'interracial' romances enables us to broaden our understanding of the interconnectedness between Persian and Chinese cultures within the broader Persianate sphere. Representations of Chinese-Iranian interracial romances provide a better understanding of the "frontiers" or borderlands of the Persianate world and reveal China's place in it.[464] In other words, premodern Iran's love for China was instrumental for forming imaginary cultural and familial bonds to revitalize "Persianate selfhood."[465] However, it is important to be aware that these Sinophilic representations of Chinese female *javānmard*s, while not driven by racial animosity, are still self-serving during a period of deep political instability in the pre-and post Mongol period. The way Ghenghis Khan was able to unite vast territories including China, Persia, and Central Asia further highlights the complex interplay of power, culture, and identity formation in the region. By examining these interracial romances, we can unpack the strategies employed by Persianate elites to legitimize their rule and construct a desired national identity, while simultaneously engaging with and appropriating elements of Chinese culture.

[463] Garcia, *England Re-Oriented*, 7.
[464] For more information on frontiers, see Green, *The Persianate World,* 9.
[465] My definition of Persianate selfhood stems from Mana Kia's own definition, specifically the way she describes how as long "variations sometimes mapped onto modern categories of difference, but because the overarching criterion of inclusion was social and aesthetic form, selves could possess differences and still be Persian [...] At the very least, Muslim space accomodated non-Muslims, who were even expected to share it. [...] Imperial service or knowledge of Persian need not be limited to Muslims." See Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 176.

Patronage and the *Samak-I ʿayyār* Oxford Manuscript

Samak-i ʻayyār was first narrated orally by professional storytellers and belongs to the genre of popular romance. Its story was collected and written down in the twelfth-century Seljuk period (1040-1157).[466] Its main story is about Iranian-Iraqi Prince Khurshid Shah who, after falling in love with the Chinese princess Mah Pari in a dream, sets out from his homeland of Syria to China in order to be with her. Khurshid Shah faces various difficulties throughout his journey and is supported by both female and male *ʻayyār*s. Based on the style of its calligraphy and its illustrations, scholars like Roxana Zenhari and Will Stockland have dated the Oxford manuscript of *Samak-i ʻayyār* as produced during 1330-5, no later than the fourteenth century during the reign of Abu Ishaq (r.1343-1357), the last Inju dynasty ruler of Shiraz, the capital city of Fars province.[467]

Stockland has credited the patron of the Oxford manuscript to be Haji Qiwam al-Din Hasan, the vizier of Abu Ishaq who was beloved by the Shirazis for being a great patron who was praised by Persian poet Hafiz (1325-1390) as "the vizier of kingly rank."[468] The Injuids (ca. 1325-1353) was an Iranian dynasty that ruled over the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan during the fourteenth century. The term Inju means crown territory in Mongolian, so the Injuids' fortunes depended on the capricious good will of the Ilkhanid rulers that they were always trying to please.[469] In understanding the purpose behind

[466] Pourshariati, "The Ethics and Praxis of Mehr and Mithras and the Social Institution of the ʿayyārs in the Epic Romance of Samak-e ʿayyār.", 30.
[467] Stockland, "The Kitab Samak-'ayyar", 144; Zenhari, *The Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār*., 20.
[468] Stockland, "The Kitab Samak-'ayyar",161.
[469] John Limbert, "INJU DYNASTY," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill), accessed June 28, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_3449.

different illustrations of the Oxford manuscript, Stockland had characterized them as having "obvious political and didactic leanings," specifically a bias against the Chinese because many of the stories depicted illustrate "the various wrongdoings of Chinese kings and their miscreant sons and viziers."[470] Stockland credits this anti-Chinese sentiment in the Oxford manuscript as a reflection of the anger the people of Shiraz felt towards their Mongol and Injuid rulers because of how they subjugated the people of Shiraz physically and fiscally.

Abu Ishaq was seen as an alcoholic "whose life was in perpetual dissipation" and "who redoubled his orgies."[471] Regardless of how the people of Shiraz, especially the Shirazi *pahlavān*s (popular heroes), another *javānmardī* symbol, supported him and his family, he distrusted and oppressed them.[472] As a result, the Shirazis saw their rulers as failing to embody *javānmardī* virtues that they highly valued and expected to find in good kings. These virtues ranged from pious devotion to morality, religious adherence, humility, and courage against injustice.[473]

Stockland views the Oxford manuscript as distinct from other Shirazi illustrated manuscripts, attributing its uniqueness to an "experimental and flexible" painting and design style enabling it to effectively impart moral lessons to readers.[474] Building on Stockland, I seek to better understand the unique, experimental visual approach the Oxford manuscript of *Samak-i ʿayyār* uses, specifically its depiction of Chinese female *javānmard*s to teach 'unmanly' kings like Abu Ishaq proper governance.

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[470] Stockland, "The Kitab Samak-'ayyar", 159.
[471] Ibid., 160.
[472] Zenhari, *The Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār*, 73.
[473] Stockland, "The Kitab Samak-'ayyar", 160.
[474] Ibid, 152.

While Stockland is correct that the Oxford manuscript is "unusually open" about showing disapproval towards the Chinese male nobility, he has also overlooked the unusually open way Chinese women were celebrated for their ability to embody *javānmardī* virtues and guide their male counterparts toward *javānmardī*.[475] This can be seen from the first illustration of the Oxford manuscript (Fig.19) depicting the initial meeting between Chinese princess Mah Pari and Khurshid Shah. Mah Pari's superiority is conveyed in the way she is seated on a chair in her tent as Khurshid Shah kneels before her, his eyes lowered as if awaiting her permission to drink the water she gives him from the jug (*saqrāq*) to quench his thirst.[476]

As told in medieval *futuwwa* manuals, *javānmardī* is often likened to the "water of life." Thus, chivalric leaders who embodied the highest level of perfection were known to bestow water to their followers to drink in initiation rituals so that they could change their lives and become ideal *javānmard*s.[477] In that respect, Mah Pari can be viewed as a chivalric leader-like figure initiating royal Persianate males like Khurshid Shah to venture beyond the comforts of home, face different challenges so that they can learn *javānmardī* virtues, and be transformed into ideal Persianate kings. In a rock relief found in the *Tāq-i Bustān* (Fig.20), the pre-Islamic water goddess, Anahita, is depicted as holding a water jug in her left hand as she bestows *farr* (divine glory) to legitimize the king standing beside her.[478] Looking at iconographical similarities between representations of Chinese

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[475] For a deeper understanding of the different ways Chinese women are celebrated in Persian literature for their ability to change their male counterparts, see Seyed-Gohrab, "Magic in Classical Persian Amatory Literature.", 81.
[476] Zenhari, *The Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār*, 110.
[477] Ridegeon, *Jawanmardi,* 48-49.
[478] Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship*, Bibliotheca Iranica, no. 10 (Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 53-66; William L. Hanaway, "Anāhitā and Alexander," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, no. 2 (1982): 292.

princess Mah Pari in relation to Anahita helps contextualize Mah Pari's connection to female *javānmardī*.

Her iconographical association with Anahita in (Fig.19) is not surprising since the *Samak-i ʿayyār* has Parthian roots, as demonstrated in Parvaneh Pourshariati's study of how Mithraic conceptions permeate the narrative of *Samak-i'ayyār*.[479] In fact, Mah Pari's name, specifically the term 'Pari,' is not just used to describe beautiful and seductive foreign women, but also fairy-like creatures like nymphs swimming in waterways, springs, and rivers. This highlights Mah Pari's connection to foreignness, desire, water, fertility and civilization, and by extension, Anahita.[480] Anahita's connection to *javānmardī* is evident in Zoroastrian texts like the *Ābān Yasht,* where she is described as a martial hero driving a war chariot like a typical Indo-European mythical hero. Anahita is also revered as the guardian of Iranian kings and warriors capable of providing them with victory. All these allow us to see her as a female *javānmard* that men looked up to.[481]

Anahita's connection to *javānmardī* is made even more obvious in Iranian architecture, specifically the *zūrkhānah* (House of Strength): a gymnasium where heroic sports associated with *javānmardī* are practiced. Right beside the entrance of the *zūrkhānah*, a fountain can be found, which is a symbol of Anahita.[482] Furthermore, in other examples of Persian popular romance such as the eleventh/twelfth century *Dārābnāmah* (Book of Darab), female *javānmard*s such as Buran-dukht are often

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[479] Pourshariati, "The Ethics and Praxis of Mehr and Mithras and the Social Institution of the ʿayyārs in the Epic Romance of Samak-e ʿayyār.", 27.
[480] Her association with civilization is seen in how water was a very precious resource necessary for sustaining human settlement in arid environments.
[481] Manya Saadi-nejad, *Anahita: A History and Reception of the Iranian Water Goddess* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 179-180.
[482] Mohammad Mohammadi, Bisotoon Azizi, and Nima Deimary, "The Role of Ancient Sports and Zurkhaneh in Ethical Promoting and Religious Virtues," *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 17, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 168.

associated with water and show a number of Anahita's iconographic characteristics.[483] Mah Pari's connection with female *javānmardī* vis-à-vis Anahita is further seen through visual symbols like the water jug she gives to Khurshid Shah and the other water jug that is decorating the wall of her tent seen in (Fig.19).

Mah Pari's association with *javānmardī* is further seen in the way she is visually depicted in (Fig.21) as a guiding force, inspiring Khurshid Shah to embrace challenges to develop the *javānmardī* virtues to be an ideal Persianate king. Her superior status is seen in how she is the only figure sitting on a throne in a confident posture, one bent leg resting on the seat with the other one on the ground. Moreover, her superiority is seen from how she is also wearing the most elaborate crown amongst all the other figures in the illustration. Mah Pari's success in nurturing Khurshid Shah's transformation into a *javānmard* is visually conveyed in the way Khurshid Shah stands before her, clad in a white shawl, which Zenhari interprets as a cipher signifying his newfound *javānmardī* status.

Their mirrored hand gestures signify their bond, hinting at the effect she has on him. The text in the folio provides information on his transformation from a thirsty boy asking Mah Pari for help to a courageous *javānmard* telling her that he has to leave on a quest so that he can demonstrate to her father, the Emperor of China, his ability to protect Mah Pari from Qizil Malik, a formidable enemy of Mah Pari's father, the emperor of China.[484] Khurshid Shah's depiction as a changed man, a *javānmardī* prince willing to grow and embrace challenges, reflects the yearning of the fourteenth-century Shirazis,

[483] Saadi-nejad, *Anahita,*159-182; Gaillard, "Alexander the Great or Būrān-Dukht.", 6.
[484] Zenhari, *The Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār*, 324.

specifically for their oppressive Mongol male rulers to undergo a similar transformation and growth.[485]

The portrayal of Chinese Mah Pari embodying female *javānmardī* and guiding Khurshid Shah towards its ideals reflects the real-life historical Chinese and Mongol Ilkhanid royal female *javānmard*s who existed before and during the creation of the Oxford manuscript. As I have already mentioned in Chapter 3, before the Ilkhanids, Iranian historical texts have shown how China was understood as an extraordinary place associated with beauty, talent, and magic.[486] Furthermore, before the Mongols, Persianate merchants and occasionally scholars living in port cities such as Canton (Guangzhou) intermarried with Chinese women.[487] Most importantly, Chinese princesses since the Western Han period (202 BC-9AD) have always been marrying Turkic rulers to build alliances, enable cultural exchange, and maintain peace between the Chinese and Turks. However, they were not simply pawns. In fact, they were powerful figures who actively synthesized Turkic and Chinese elements to participate in political and military affairs, advise their Turkic kingly husbands, and even leverage their influence to pursue their

[485] For more information on how Shirazis were treated by their Mongol rulers, see Muḥammad Ibn-ʿAbdallāh Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325-1354. Volume 2 / Edited by H.A.R. Gibb*, ed. Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb (London New York: Routledge, 2016)., 306.

[486] For more information on how China was perceived historical and literary texts before and after the Mongols, John Michael Rogers, Zeren Tanındı, and Filiz Çağman, *The Topkapi Saray Museum: The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts* (Boston: New York graphic society book, 1986). 114-156; Kaveh Louis Hemmat, "Children of Cain in the Land of Error: A Central Asian Merchant's Treatise on Government and Society in Ming China," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (December 1, 2010): 434–48; Francesco Calzolaio, "China, the Abode of Arts and Crafts: Emergence and Diffusion of a Persian Saying on China in Mongol Eurasia," *Ming Qing Yanjiu* 22, no. 2 (March 12, 2019): 136–54; Kaveh Louis Hemmat, "Citations of ʿAttār and the *Kanz al-Haqāyeq* in ʿAli Akbar Khatāyi's *Book of China* : A Sufi Path of Bureaucracy," *Iranian Studies* 51, no. 5 (September 2018): 667–91.

[487] Green, "From the Silk Road to the Railroad (and Back).", 168.

agendas.[488] Chinese records also provide evidence detailing how a Persian prince married a Han Chinese princess.[489] Most importantly, scholars have attributed the northern Chinese legacy of female leadership as the archetype for the Mongols' own establishment of women's regency.[490]

Northern Chinese women, dating back to the initial Liao dynasty (907-926) and extending through the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), were well-known rulers well known for their resistance to patriarchy, courage, intelligence, and military prowess. From the Persianate perspective, they embody the ideal traits of *javānmard*s. Northern China's first medieval powerful female ruler, Empress Dowager Ying-t'ien from the Liao dynasty, was known for refusing to follow the tradition of being buried with her husband when he died. Instead, she cut off her hand. In the *Samak-e 'ayyār*, Mah Pari is described as the "*Dukhtar-i Shāh-i Chīn*" (Daughter of the Emperor of China), suggesting a possible resemblance not just to the ancient Chinese princesses, but also the female *javānmard* rulers of medieval northern China familiar to Mongol-era readers.[491]

The Many Meanings of China

While Stockland seems to equate Chinese with Mongols in his analysis of the Oxford manuscript mentioned above, his perspective overlooks the Ilkhanid

[488] See David Curtis Wright, "A Chinese Princess Bride's Life and Activism Among the Eastern Türks, 580-593 Ce," *Journal of Asian History* 45, no. 1/2 (2011): 39–48; Pan Yihong, "Marriage Alliances and Chinese Princesses in International Politics from Han through T'ang," *Asia Major* 10, no. 1/2 (1997): 95–131; Baatar Urgunbuyan, "Princesses of the Central Plains Married into the Turkish Khaganate," *Mongolian Diaspora. Journal of Mongolian History and Culture* 3, no. 1 (August 28, 2023): 37–51.

[489] Samuel Beal Xuanzang, *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World* (K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1906), 300-301.

[490] Northern China's first medieval powerful female ruler, Empress Dowger Ying-t'ien from the Liao Dynasty, was known for refusing to follow the tradition of being buried with her husband when he died. Instead, she cut off her hand and placed it in her husband's tomb and continued to control the army and determined succession, see de Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran,* 53-57.

[491] Farāmarz b Ḫodādād Arraǰani, *Samak-e ayyar: Faramarz fils de Khodadad* (G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1972), 22.

understanding where China was viewed as a separate entity consisting of Chīn and Machīn.[492] Ilkhanid vizier, Rashid al-Din (1247–1318), elucidates this distinction in his History of China within the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* (Compendium of Chronicles), highlighting that "Chīn" and "Khitay" refer to the same place, namely Northern China.[493] Interestingly, Rashid al-Din's compendium also documents the way a Chīn woman, Dauqai Yabudaq, "mounted a donkey and set out from Cathay, determined to find a husband", thus leading her to marry Misär Ölüg and thus starting the Mongol clan that was named after her, called Eljigan (a Mongol term for Donkey). The Eljigan clan became widely known for having "well-known officers and great ladies."[494] Moreover, not only did Rashid al-Din have a Chinese chef working for him, but various Chinese of other professions including doctors, craftsmen, agronomists, artists, and translators have been working in Ilkhanid Iran due to its demand for various Chinese goods and knowledge.[495] Thus, to Hajj Qiwam al-Din Hasan, the patron of the manuscript, and Abu Ishaq, the intended reader of the Oxford manuscript, Mah Pari would likely be seen as a northern Chinese princess. Renowned for her ability to embody *javānmardī* in superior ways to men, she produced virtuous male and female descendants for dynastic continuation.

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[492] For more information on different definitions of China throughout different medieval time periods, see Francesco Calzolaio, "A Boundless Text for a Boundless Author,", *Studi e ricerche*, 2017; Liu Yingjun, "Possible Connections between Historical Events and the Plots of Iranian Princes Exiled in Chīn and B.Sīlā Depicted in Kūshnāma," *Acta Koreana* 21, no. 1 (2018): 37–63.
[493] See footnote 16. Karl Jahn, "Rashīd Al-Dīn and Chinese Culture," *Central Asiatic Journal* 14, no. 1/3 (1970): 134–47.141. For more information, see footnote 2 in Allah, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh,* 24; Yingjun, "Possible Connections between Historical Events and the Plots of Iranian Princes Exiled in Chīn and B.Sīlā Depicted in Kūshnāma.", 43.
[494] Thackston uses the term Cathay to describe Northern China, see Allah, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, xvi.
[495] Rossabi, "The Mongols and Their Legacy.", 35.

While the fourteenth-century Shirazis greatly disliked their Mongol male rulers due to their oppressive policies, they greatly respected royal Mongol women for their ability to embody *javānmardī* virtues. One example is Tarkhan Khatun, the wife of Saʿid II Atabek of Fars (r.1260-62), who was well known for her religious and literary patronage. While the acclaimed poet Saʿdi Shirazi (1209-1291) was critical of the Mongol male rulers and used elaborate verse and esoteric metaphors to express his dissatisfaction with them, he was straightforward in his praise towards Mongol women like Tarkan Khatun and described her as a woman of "piety and generosity" who could protect Fars' religious values.[496] Moreover, when the manuscript was created during the time of the last Ilkhanid ruler, Abu Saʿid (r.1317-35), another notable Mongol woman, Tarkan Khatun's granddaughter, Khurdujin Khatun (d. 1338), was highly respected for dedicating the revenue of Shiraz to fund the construction of numerous public edifices, including mosques, madrasas, and a hospital.[497] It was also during the same time when Abu Saʿid's greedy vizier, Shaikh Husain, imprisoned another Mongol women, the pious Tash Khatun with the intention of using her as leverage to impose his unbearable tax on the Shirazis. Tash Khatun's generosity was what made her known as "the supreme *khātūn.*" As a result of this, the men of Shiraz staged a bloody uprising against Abu Sa'id's troops and liberated both her and her sons. Tash Khatun's bravery and intelligence–the traits expected of a *javānmard*– is evident in the speech to rally the Shirazis to fight against their oppressor.[498] Tash Khatun would have been known by Hajj Qiwam al-Din Hasan, the presumed benefactor of the Oxford manuscript and the current

[496] Stockland, "The Kitab Samak-'ayyar", 160; Bruno De Nicola, "Patrons or Murīds? Mongol Women and Shaykhs in Ilkhanid Iran and Anatolia," *Iran* 52 (2014): 149
[497] De Nicola, "Patrons or Murīds?", 149.
[498] Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325-1354. Volume 2 / Edited by H.A.R. Gibb*., 307-308.

vizier of Shiraz, who was also against this crippling tax put on his domain and people that he would have to procure.[499]

Another Mongol woman, Sati Beg (1330-45), who was for a short time, an Ilkhanid ruler, was described by male poet Ahmadi for her ability to embody ideal manhood due to her "generosity, intelligence, and piety" to the point she is seen as a "man."[500] The perception of historical royal Mongol women as embodying *javānmardī* in ways superior to their kingly male counterparts, coupled with their popularity among Shirazis, allows us to better understand the blatant depiction of women in the Oxford manuscript as models of *javānmardī* that men should emulate.[501]

Davis, in his study of female characters in the *Shāhnāmah*, has noted that while it is true that the Persian husband/foreign wife topos reflect a celebration of Persian male superiority, it also functions as an unfolding of the foreign and feminine into the heart of Persian polity, where both are celebrated and produce new life.[502] The same can also be seen in (Fig.22), which depicts the literal physical union between Persianate king Khurshid Shah and the highly revered northern Chinese princess Mah Pari. Intriguingly, Khurshid Shah is not positioned in a dominant stance; rather, he is portrayed as embracing Mah Pari from the side, revealing the politics behind pleasure. Moreover, the way she is drawn in front of him further suggests her importance. Her Chinese/northern Chinese heritage promises to bring new life to Persianate kingship by embodying and

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[499] Stockland, "The Kitab Samak-'ayyar", 161.
[500] Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*., 23.
[501] For more information on how Fars province had a tradition of female rulers, one being Abesh Khatun, the Selghurid ruler of Fars who was the first female ruler officially to reign over Persian territory in Islamic times, see Sheila Blair, "The Religious Arts of the Ilkhanids," in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353*, ed. Linda Komaroff, Stefano Carboni, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) (New York : [New Haven]: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; [Distributed by Yale University Press], 2002)., 127.
[502] Davis, "Women in the *Shahnmameh*", 68-70.

transmitting *javānmardī* virtues to Khurshid Shah through their 'interracial' physical union and sexual propagation. A new life, not just under a *javānmardī* king, but one in the form of a mixed-race heir, would ascend the throne and ensure a stable reign–something that the oppressed fourteenth-century Shirazis' greatly desired.

Notably, according to Roxana Zenhari, this 'interracial' lovemaking scene has also been studied for deviating from traditional representations of intimate scenes in contemporaneous illustrated manuscripts of other Persian romances. In contrast to the conventional approach of drawing bed covers up to the lovers' necks, this portrayal features a topless Khurshid Shah's arm and Mah Pari's exposed breasts.[503] Expanding on Zenhari, I assert that this departure from artistic conventions in the Oxford manuscript can be interpreted as a strategy to convey dissatisfaction with established norms set by the unpopular Mongol rulers.[504]

Nonetheless, I contend that this uniqueness extends beyond its painting style; it lies in the way it paints non-royal women from Machīn as exemplars of *javānmardī c*apable of rooting out corruption and facilitating the establishment of ideal kingship. The positive portrayal of commoners in the Oxford manuscript is also not surprising considering how its alleged patron, Hajj Qiwam al-Din Hasan, was known for his stance against the exploitation of the common man of Shirazi by the Mongol rulers and their lackeys. He was also well-known for using his wealth and status to patronize local artists like Hafiz so that they could freely express their discontent with the current Mongol leadership.[505]

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[503] Zenhari, *The Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār*, 133.
[504] Stockland, "The Kitab Samak-'ayyar", 161.
[505] Ibid., 162; also see footnote 120, Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325-1354. Volume 2 / Edited by H.A.R. Gibb*., 307.

The manuscript's uniqueness is seen from (Fig.23) where Ruzafzun is depicted as stabbing her father, Kanun to death because he is a corrupt *ʿayyār* supporting an unjust monarchy that abuses its people. Apart from the white shawl and the male attire adorning Ruzafzun, despite the smudges in the painting, we see that she is also painted with a beard. All these can be seen as symbolic visual cues communicating her *javānmard* identity.[506] In Chapter 1, I have mentioned how Chinese travelers during the Ilkhanid period noticed how powerful Iranian women had facial hair. Interestingly, we find a similar representation in premodern Persianate illustrated manuscripts, where not only Ruzafzun but also other Chinese female *javānmard*s are depicted with facial hair. Facial hair can be seen as a gendered symbol allowing us to understand Sino-Iranian relations in the premodern Persianate context.

Moreover, the deliberate placement of Khurshid Shah behind Ruzafzun, as she stabs her corrupt father, can be interpreted as a conscious effort to convey that Persianate kingship is not solely facilitated by northern Chinese princesses like Mah Pari. Instead, it also owes its existence to courageous, devoted, and just female *javānmard*s from the commoner class, as exemplified by Ruzafzun. While it is true that Machīn means "beyond Chīn," within the Ilkhanid context, it specifically refers to southern China, specifically south of the Yangtze.[507] Thus, we can assume that Ruzafzun could be seen as

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[506] As mentioned in chapter 1, medieval Chinese writers traveling across the Mongol Empire have also written about the way powerful Iranian women had beards. See E. Bretschneider, *Mediæval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Pt. 3. Explanation of a Mongol-Chinese Mediæval Map of Central and Western Asia. Pt. 4 Chinese Intercourse with the Countries of Central and Western Asia during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Company, Limited, 1910), 34, 349.

[507] For more information on Machin and Southern China, see Jahn, "Rashīd Al-Dīn and Chinese Culture."141. For more information, see footnote 2 in Allah, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh,* 24; Yingjun, "Possible Connections between Historical Events and the Plots of Iranian Princes Exiled in Chīn and B.Sīlā Depicted in Kūshnāma.", 43.

a southern Chinese commoner female *javānmard* to Hajj Qiwam al-Din Hasan, the presumed patron of the manuscript, and to Abu Ishaq, the supposed target audience of the manuscript.

Interestingly, similar to the Shirazi southerners of Iran, the southerners of Song China (960-1279), shared a profound disdain for Mongol rule and were the last people in China to submit to Mongol rule in 1279. As a result, they were severely punished for their resistance and were placed at the bottom of the ethnopolitical hierarchy, even lower than the Northern Chinese and Iranians who were placed above them.[508] Moreover, one of the most famous Chinese female warriors associated with the Southern Song dynasty was Yang Miaozhen (1193-1250).[509] Not only was she martially capable to the point she commanded her own army that backed the Southern Song Dynasty, but she was also highly intelligent and even managed to convince the Mongols to install her as the governor of Shandong in northern China when the Southern Song dynasty fell. The specific motive behind the overt portrayal of non-royal women from Machīn, like Ruzafzun, as *javānmard*s remains elusive. Nevertheless, being aware of the different meanings of Machīn, while also understanding Ruzafzun within the history of the defiant Southern Song China and female warriors like Yang Miaozhen, provides us with a method for uncovering Sino-Iranian connections through the lens of female *javānmardī*.

Ruzafzun's continuous celebration in the Oxford manuscript as a symbol of *javānmardī* is further highlighted in another illustration (Fig.24), in which she is vividly

[508] Paul J. Smith, "Fear of Gynarchy in an Age of Chaos: Kong Qi's Reflections on Life in South China under Mongol Rule," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 1 (1998): 5.

[509] I use the word associated because Yang Miaozhen is originally from the North of China who moved to the South. See Pei-Yi Wu, "YANG MIAOZHEN: A WOMAN WARRIOR IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY CHINA," *NAN NÜ* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 2002): 137–169.

depicted strangling the neck of Anbar, a servant of the corrupt king. Mirroring the previous portrayal, her *javānmardī* status is reflected in the way she is adorned in a white shawl and donning manly attire. The recurrent representation of Southern Chinese commoner female *javānmard*s such as Ruzafzun, engaging in acts of violence against corrupt leaders, serves as a potent expression of discontent against unjust male rulers and their associates. This visual narrative not only aims to emasculate these figures, warning them to rectify their ways if they wish to avoid a brutal demise like the male characters at the hands of formidable female *javānmard*s.

As I have mentioned earlier, Akbarnia uses the concept of *Khitā'ī* to understand how the Ilkhanids used their ability to move Chinese objects to Iran to create a distinctive visual language communicating their Ilkhanids' authority.[510] However, I seek to delve deeper into how *Khitā'ī,* a concept initially related to the circulation and appropriation of Chinese materials in Iran, acquires new meanings in the context of gender. The Oxford manuscript also employs the concept of *khita'ī*, evident in the portrayal of both royal Chīn and non-royal Machīn women as mentors and exemplars of *javānmardī* challenging injustice and promoting ideal kingship in their interactions with Persian kings. Butin this context, the *khita'ī* epitomized by the Chinese female *javānmard*, operates as a weapon wielded by the oppressed Shirazis to repurpose the cherished visual language of their Mongol overlords and their Inju vassal to fervently advocate for resistance against their oppressive rule.

The Chinese Female *javānmard*'s Evolvement under the Jalayirids

Depicting Chinese women as *javānmardī* models was not simply a fad, instead, it was continued by the Ikhanids' successor, the Jalayirids (1335-1432). The Jalayirids are

[510] Akbarnia, *Khita'i*, 14-15.

descendants of the Mongolian tribe of Jalayir and they ruled part of the former Ilkhanid domains in the middle of the fourteenth century.[511] However, the Jalayirids are famous for the way they vastly contributed to medieval Persianate culture through the developments they made in the realm of manuscript painting. A fundamental feature of Persian manuscript illustration during the time of the Jalayirids is the influence of Chinese painting, specifically Chinese-inspired landscape settings that were adapted to Persian figure drawing.[512] Examining how the Jalayirids used Chinese elements beyond simply landscape settings, specifically the different ways they depicted Chinese women as *javānmards* in their interracial romances with Persianate kings, provides us with an alternative understanding of how the royal Chinese female *javānmard* figure was further developed and symbolically employed by the Jalayirids. In fact, she was used as *khitā'ī* to showcase themselves as rightful heirs to the Ilkhanids capable of upholding Islamic and Mongol dynastic justice.[513]

This can be seen in two illustrations (Fig.25 and Fig.26) found in one of the most famous Persian illustrated manuscripts from the Jalayirid period, the British Library's *Masnavi* manuscript containing the story of Khvaju Kirmani's *Humay va Humayun.* The illustrated manuscript was produced in 1396 during the reign of Jalayirid Sultan Ahmad (r.1382 -- 1410) and the illustrations' artist is credited as Junyad Naqqash-i Sultani (c.1396). *Humay va Humayun*'s plot bears resemblances to the tale of *Samak-i ʿayyār.* It revolves around the adventures undertaken by Humay, the Prince of Syria, to be with his love, Humayun, the princess of China, who is described as the "daughter of the Emperor

[511] Patrick Wing, *The Jalayirids: Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016)., 1.
[512] Ibid., 185.
[513] Ibid., 2.

of China" (*Dukhtar-i Faghfūr-i Chīn*).[514] Sheila Blair has noted that in the British Library manuscript, the illustrations of *Humāy va Humāyun* place the greatest emphasis on women.[515] Building on Blair, a closer look at (Fig.25) illustrating the battle between Humay and Humayun triggered by Humay sleeping with another woman, allows us to see how royal Chinese women were emphasized as *javānmard*s due to their martial prowess and ability to stand up for themselves.[516]

Humayun's *javānmard* identity is symbolized through the golden armor (Fig.25) she is wearing, which mirrors that of Humay hinting at her being just as manly, if not manlier than him. The depiction of Humayun removing her helmet in front of Humay creates a suspenseful moment that invites viewers to experience her ambiguous identity as a gender-bending female *javānmard.* Moreover, her portrayal as a beardless youth stands in deliberate contrast to Humay, who, according to Hamidreza Jayhani, in this particular depiction, notably sports a mustache—a departure from his earlier representations.[517] This deliberate contrast can be seen as a way to accentuate and underscore Humayun's identity as a *javānmard*.

The artist Junyad is renowned for contributing to Persianate painting through his strategic use of paired elements and figures, employing configurations of pairs, face-to-face arrangements, or side-by-side placements to craft intricate pictorial metaphors.[518] Junyad's deliberate choice to portray the two lovers as mirror images at the

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[514] Mahmud ibn 'Ali Khvaju Kirmani, *Humay u Humayun*, ed. Kamal S. 'Ayni (Tehran, 1969),147.
[515] Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Perisian Art,* 205.
[516] For more information on the story, see Hamidreza Jayhani, "Bāgh-I Samanzār-I Nūshāb: Tracing a Landscape, Based on the British Library's Masnavī of Humāy U Humāyūn," *Muqarnas* 31 (2014): 103.
[517] Ibid, 111.
[518] Ibid., 115-116.

pivotal moment when Humay realizes that the formidable warrior opposing him is his beloved Humayun serves as a powerful metaphor for kingly male viewers to recognize and even emulate the virtues such as bravery and honor embodied by royal Chinese female *javānmard*s like Humayun.

Basil Gray has observed how a "strong circular tendency" shapes the composition of the painting.[519] Beyond simply being an aesthetic style, I believe that this circular composition can also be seen as a metaphor suggesting the Jalayirid view of China and Iran as interconnected counterparts within a larger Persianate sphere, influencing and reflecting each other.[520] Furthermore, this circular composition can also be seen as a powerful metaphor for ideal rule, echoing the "circle of justice" concept.[521] Lessons on maintaining the "circle of justice" is often taught in mirror texts, hinting a didactic intent implicit in this illustration where deal Persianate kings must embrace the qualities embodied by formidable Chinese female *javānmard*s like Humayun, only then can they establish harmony within their own realms.

However, it is important to also recognize that (Fig.25) is also a scene where the Chinese princess Humayun is defeated by Humay, a Syrian prince.[522] The various tensions making up the illustration (Fig.25) prompt us to acknowledge how the royal Chinese female *javānmard* figure operates as a form of *khitā'ī* imperial propaganda used

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[519] Ibid., 103.

[520] For more information on Jalayirids' interaction with Ming China and how they were influenced by Chinese artistic techniques, see Lamia Balafrej, *The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting*, Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 175.

[521] For more information on the circle of justice concept, see Jennifer A. London, "The 'Circle of Justice,'" *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 3 (2011): 425–47.

[522] For more information on how Syria was part of the Persian empire under under the Achaemenids, see Marie-Louise Chaumont, "ANTIOCH (1)," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill), accessed June 24, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_5507.

to commemorate Jalayirid superiority and assert their legitimacy as successors to their Mongol predecessors. Interestingly, the Jalayirids had every right to claim superiority and legitimacy vis-a-vis their ability to dominate China. This comes from how the most prominent Jalayir individual of the early period of the Mongol empire was Muqali (1170-1223), who became the supreme commander and virtual ruler of northern China by the time of his death in 1223.[523] The illustration found in (Fig.26) portraying the celebration after the consummation of Humay and Humayun's marriage serves as another instance where the royal Chinese female *javānmard* figure is employed as *khitā'ī* imperial propaganda.

In contrast to the lovemaking scene (Fig.22) in the Oxford manuscript, which is more sensual, pleasure in this consummation scene (Fig.26) is conspicuously absent. That absence may have political implications illustrating the literal and physical dominance of Humay over Humayun, the Chinese royal female *javānmard.* The bloodstain, a symbol of lost virginity, painted on the sheet in (Fig.26) further reinforces this interpretation and acts as a visual marker of Persianate patriarchal control. This is further emphasized by the way the maidservants are painted crudely raising the sheet, seemingly directing the viewer's attention to Humayun's submission. The calligraphy lines on the top right side of (Fig.26) further amplify Humay's sexual dominance and by extension, manliness, stemming from his ability to "mix" (*dar āmīkht*) and "penetrate" (*forū bord)* the body of the Chinese female *javānmard* princess.[524] These words likely reference not only the sexual act but also a broader concept of Sino-Iranian racial "mixing" and the establishment of Iranian dominance. The act of penetration becomes symbolic and

[523] Wing, *The Jalayirids*, 40.
[524] For the original Persian text and English translation, see Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Persian Art*, 210. I have slightly modified her translation.

Humayun's lost virginity politically coded, extending beyond the physical realm to encompass the cultural and political spheres.

The depiction of Humayun as a coy, smiling figure, discreetly concealing herself behind her sleeve upon seeing her blood on the sheets, contrasts starkly with her earlier portrayal as a martial warrior. This appears to symbolize the rupture of China's masculine power and her submission to becoming Jalayirid Iran's imperial possession. Similar to the Ilkhanids, who demonstrated power through *khitā'ī*, the Jalayirids employed the defeated Chinese female *javānmard* to assert their superiority and legitimacy, grounded in historical connections with China and their ability to continue their Mongol predecessor's prized visual language of *khitā'ī*.[525] Humayun's representation in (Fig.26) is also a good example of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, where her *javānmardī* performance that inverts gender norms in (Fig.25) is only temporary and is ultimately used to reinforce Iranian patriarchal dominance.

However, a closer examination of the spatial composition in (Fig.26) challenges the singular reading of the Chinese female *javānmard* as a mere symbol of patriarchy. The illustration is split vertically, placing Humayun on the left and Humay on the right, demarcating what Sheila Blair calls, the private from the public sides of a palace.[526] This spatial arrangement seems to suggest how events in the private are what enable the public, kingly affairs. This is reflected in the way Humay's manliness and kingly legitimacy are acknowledged by his male subjects, who are depicted as bowing to him. Their recognition only takes place after he can successfully consummate his marriage

[525] For more information on how Chinese elements were used to assert Iranian superiority in the later early modern Safavid context, see Friederike Weis, "How the Persian Qalam Caused the Chinese Brush to Break: The Bahram Mirza Album Revisited," *Muqarnas Online* 37, no. 1 (October 2, 2020): 63–109.
[526] Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Persian Art*, 174.

with Humayun. The royal Chinese female *javānmard* figure also emerges as the one who determines ideal masculinity and kingly legitimacy. The visual and textual overemphasis on Humay's sexual prowess may indicate an underlying anxiety regarding manliness and monarchical succession, particularly when their foreign royal female *javānmard* spouses are more than capable of embodying ideal Persianate masculinity.[527]

Fitnah as a Symbol of Timurid Masculine Power: Father, Son, and Nephew

The Timurids were well-known for their reverence towards women, especially Mongol women, who provided the legitimacy needed to justify their kingship and enable cohesion within the royal family.[528] A better understanding of how historical royal Timurid women were remembered for their ability to embody *javānmardī* virtues in ways superior to men and the way they assisted Shah Rukh's kingship can provide insights into the overt depiction of women like Fitnah as female manly youths in the Cartier manuscript. One example is Shah Rukh's niece, Agha Begi. In his chronicle titled *Habib al-siyar*, early modern historian Khvandimir (d.1535/6) describes her as an "intelligent woman" who armed and commanded her army to kill all of Shah Rukh's enemies. Khvandimir likened Agha Begi to a lioness whose manliness amazed Shah Rukh to the extent he regarded her as manlier than other men. This sentiment is reflected in the letter Shah Rukh wrote to Qom warning his potential adversaries: "Were all women like this one, women would be superior to men."[529] Moreover, Shah Rukh's consort was Guhar Shad (d.1557) who was renowned not just for her lineage that bolstered her husband's

[527] For more information on anxities especially regarding race, see Edmund Hayes, "The Death of Kings: Group Identity and the Tragedy of 'Nezhād' in Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh,'" *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2015): 369–393.
[528] Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Women in Timurid Dynastic Politics," in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat and Lois Beck (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 121–139.
[529] Khwandamir, *Habib Al-Siyar*, 141.

legitimacy as a ruler, but for being the most formidable political figure of the period that princes respected and feared.[530] Furthermore, the Timurids are also well-known for their Sinophilia to the point that "at the Timurid court nothing was valued so highly as a Chinese painting".[531]

Shah Rukh (1405-1447) is known for transforming "a battle-hardened and rapacious Turkic military class into a celebrated princely cult of patronage" to the extent that it served as revered royal models for contemporary and later dynasties in the eastern Islamic world.[532] Illustrated manuscripts of poetry like those of Nizami's *Haft Paykar* were commissioned by elite Timurid males like Shah Rukh to reflect the "supreme expression of Timurid taste."[533] Moreover, when it comes to asserting their legitimacy, the Timurids, just like their predecessors, looked not just to traditional Iranian or Islamic symbols, but also 'far Eastern' materials and decoration.[534] By looking at illustrated manuscripts patronized by royal males from the later Timurid period starting from Shah Rukh, I seek to show how their Sinophilia was quite gendered, as seen from the way they represented Chinese female *javānmard*s.

An illustration (Fig.27) from the Cartier manuscript provides valuable insight into how Chinese female *javānmard*s like Fitnah continued to be valued as a kind of *khitā'ī* embodying ideals of masculine perfection that Timurid rulers like Shah Rukh commissioned to assert legitimacy. Other illustrated manuscripts of Shah Rukh's reign, such as Sultan Iskandar's Gulbenkian anthology produced during 1410-1411, convey the

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[530] Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 106.
[531] Gray, *Persian Painting*, 18-19.
[532] Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 69,74.
[533] Ibid, 114.
[534] Sheila S. Blair, "Timurid Signs of Sovereignty," *Oriente Moderno* 15 (76), no. 2 (1996): 551–76.572.

same message. In a scene depicting Fitnah and Bahram Gur's hunting date, her femaleness is visually coded through her attire– specifically her distinct headdress that differs from those of other male figures next to her (Fig.28).[535]

In the illustration (Fig.27) of the Cartier Shah Rukh manuscript, Fitnah's gender appears ambiguous. She is depicted as a literal manly youth, a *javānmard* dressed in male clothing consisting of long robes and a cap that is associated with that of male courtiers and attendants.[536] Priscilla Soucek, in her study of the Cartier manuscript, has described Fitnah as a vertical element simply used to stabilize the composition of the illustration.[537] The triangular placement of Fitnah alongside the main figures of this illustration—Bahram Gur and the *gūr* (onager)—emphasizes her significance as one of the main players in one of the pivotal scenes of *Haft Paykar*. Additionally, the attendants in the uppermost right corner, with their arms pointing toward Fitnah, guide viewers to her relationship to Persianate kingship–symbolized by Bahram Gur.

Contextualizing the Cartier manuscript with Timurid historical accounts produced during Shah Rukh's reign allows us to understand better why they continued to be depicted in visual mediums as powerful figures associated with kingship. During Shah Rukh's reign, Ming China and Timurid Iran improved their relations. Thus, active ambassadorial exchanges existed between both empires. Among Shah Rukh's retinue to Ming Emperor Yongle's court in 1419 was Ghiyathuddin Naqqash (fl. 1419–22), who

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[535] For more information on how Fitnah is depicted in different Timurid illustrated manuscripts, see Priscilla Parsons Soucek, "Illustrated Manuscripts of Nizami's 'Khamseh': 1386-1482." (Ph.D., United States, New York, New York University, 1971).; To know more about women's headdresses, see Jennifer M. Scarce, "The Development of Women's Veils in Persia and Afghanistan," *Costume* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 1975): 6.

[536] Claus-Peter Haase, "Royal Insignia in the Periods from the Ilkhanids to the Timurids in the Diez Albums," in *The Diez Albums* (Brill, 2017), 276–291.

[537] Soucek, "Illustrated Manuscripts of Nizami's 'Khamseh'", 410.

documented their trip. In his account, Naqqash was upfront about the beauty of Chinese women: "Although most of the girls of Cathay are beautiful, that town could be known as Husnabad because of the extraordinary beauty of its woman." However, what is interesting is how he concluded his account by recording the 'supernatural' power yielded by one of the emperor's deceased wives.[538] Naqqash attributed significant events to her, such as the sudden lightning-induced blaze that engulfed and burnt the emperor's new palace, resulting in mass casualties and incapacitating the emperor to the extent that his son had to assume the role of ruler.[539] Naqqash's account reveals from a Timurid male perspective how Chinese women were not only seen as beautiful. In fact, Chinese women from the royal class were remembered by the Timurids as powerful due to their capability to shape royal events and dictate the destinies of kings even after their demise.

Baysunghur Mirza (1397-1433), son of Shah Rukh and Guharshad, stands as a pivotal figure in Timurid art history. He was not only a renowned bibliophile but also a generous patron, fostering the development of a distinctive artistic style known as the Herati style. This style was particularly known for incorporating Far Eastern elements, likely reflecting the cultural exchange facilitated by embassies between the Timurid court and China. In recognition of his contributions, the Herati style is often referred to as the "*Bāysunghurī* style." Regardless of his achievements, scholars have labeled Baysunghur as an "underrated" prince who needs to be further studied.[540] By carrying out a close reading of two illustrations (Fig.15 and Fig.29) from the manuscript of Kirmani's *Humāy*

[538] Naqqash, Ghiyathuddin, "Report to Mirza Baysunghur on the Timurid Legation to the Ming Court at Peking," in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, Mass: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989)., 286.
[539] Ibid., 296.
[540] H. R. Roemer, "BĀYSONḠOR, ḠĪĀṮ-AL-DĪN," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* (Brill), accessed June 29, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_6769.

va Humāyun patronized by Shah Rukh and Gohar Shad's son, Baysunghur Mirza (1397-1433), I explore the innovative way Baysunghur used Far Eastern elements, specifically the Chinese female *javānmard*.

Firstly, Baysunghur's "love" for the Chinese female *javānmard* is seen from the first illustration (Fig.15) in the manuscript depicting the moment when Humay falls in love with Chinese princess Humayun. Her portrait is shown to him by the Queen of Fairies, who is standing beside Humay. The extent of Humay's love is seen in his mesmerized gaze towards her Humayun's portrait hanging above him and his outstretched hands. It is also seen in how he is not paying attention to the fairy queen who is illustrated as gesticulating to him with her arms. Humayun's superiority is seen in how she is painted on the top most part of the illustration, quite literally looking down at Humay. The way Chinese princess Humayun is depicted as Syrian prince Humay's superior object of desire probably reflects how the Timurids yearned for marriage alliances with the Chinese as a good way to further improve Sino-Iranian relations and ease tensions– this was something that the Chinese were not willing to provide since they perceived the act of forcing Chinese women into intermarriages with rival nations as humiliating.[541] The fact that Baysunghur's sister-in-law, ʿIsmat al-Dunya, saw (Fig.15) and even used it as a model for the illustrated manuscript she commissioned suggests how this gendered Sinophilia towards Chinese female *javānmard*s extended to Timurid women.

[541] Yihong, "Marriage Alliances and Chinese Princesses in International Politics from Han through T'ang.", 125-126. For more information on the tensions that between China and Iran during Shah Rukh's time, see Felicia J. Hecker, "A Fifteenth-Century Chinese Diplomat in Herat," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, no. 1 (April 1993): 85–86.

Interestingly, to further assert his superiority in the Vienna manuscript, Baysunghur not only resituates Chinese female *javānmard*s like Fitnah from *Haft Paykar* into the *Humāy va Humāyun* story In doing so, he is able to promote his own associations with masculine perfection and dominance. This is seen in (Fig.29) which depicts a scene from *Humāy va Humāyun* illustrating the Emperor of China hunting. What makes this image intriguing is that it is modeled on Bahram Gur and Fitnah's hunting date scene in *Haft Paykar*.[542] Furthermore, in his illustration, Fitnah is depicted as a bearded youth wearing a turban and attire similar to that of Bahram Gur, strumming her harp as she watches him hunt. Scholars such as Soucek, in her study of the Vienna manuscript, have suggested that the figure of Bahram Gur/the Emperor of China was [not?]a portrait of Baysunghur and Fitnah but a possible depiction of Yosef Andakani, also known as Yosef Amiri, the court musician and close companion of Baysunghur.[543] While Soucek's point is valid, prior precedents, like the Cartier Shah Rukh manuscript, point to other interpretive possibilities. Considering that Fitnah is explicitly depicted as a manly youth, it is not odd for Baysunghur to mimic and even expand prior traditions of depicting female *javānmard*s to assert his identity as his predecessors and father's legitimate successor.[544] As mentioned above, the Jalayirids commissioned one of the most famous Persianate illustrated manuscripts of *Humāy va Humāyun*. By showing how he is able to

[542] Scholars have different perspectives on whether the hunting scene from the Vienna manuscript is modeled on the Metropolitan manuscript. For more information, compare Soucek, "Illustrated Manuscripts of Nizami's 'Khamseh'" and Thomas Woodward Lentz, "Painting at Herat Under Baysunghur Ibn Shahrukh (Iran)" (Ph.D., United States, Massachusetts, Harvard University), accessed February 24, 2024, 561-564.
[543] Priscilla Soucek, "Comments on Persian Painting," *Iranian Studies* 7, no. 1–2 (1974): 77-78.
[544] For more information on various scholarship covering imitation in the Timurid aesthetic context, see footnote 32. Balafrej, *The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting,* 145-46.

continue and even expand their legacy of depicting Chinese female *javānmard*s, Baysunghur is able to assert his artistic dominance.

Soucek has also mentioned how "the manner in which the patron of the manuscript affected the process of illustrating the text must have varied considerably with the personality of the patron and significance of the text," allowing us to see how representations of literary figures and artistic choices in the Vienna manuscript can reveal the patron's mindscape and intentions.[545] Yusuf's association with Fitnah allows us to see how the Chinese female *javānmard* functioned as a symbol that valued courtiers would have associated themselves with in order to project masculine authority and their ties to the Timurid ruling family. Baysunghur's choice to paint himself as the Bahram Gur to Yusuf's Fitnah, shows how heterosexual interracial romances between Persian kings and Chinese female *javānmard*s were utilized to reflect elite Timurid male homosocial bonds, especially those between kings and their male companions. The image (Fig.29) further exemplifies the artistic innovation fostered by the topsy-turvy nature of the premodern Persianate world, where Chinese women from a lower social position could become kingmakers.

This resembles what Sedgwick calls an asymmetrical erotic triangle where women are positioned as objects of exchange, ultimately strengthening homosocial bonds between men. To Sedgwick, male homosocial desire is rooted in homophobia actually channeled and even validated by the normative institution of heterosexual marriage. Sedgwick proposes that a man's true marital partner might be seen as the other man, with

[545] Soucek, "Comments on Persian Painting", 77.

the woman serving as a symbolic bridge between them.[546] The Baysunghur manuscript complicates Sedgwick's concept. Instead of male bonds being strengthened solely through the marginalization or exchange of women, these bonds are also forged and reinforced through the recognition and admiration of female *javānmard*s. And these women, as I have shown in Chapter 2, were apt to use royal men as mediums for forming homosocial bonds with like-minded women, creating powerful matriarchies. This suggests a more complex interplay of gender dynamics where male homosocial bonds in the Timurid context are not exclusively formed in opposition to women but are also inclusive of women's strengths and capabilities, even women who are non-kin and hail from faraway lands.

However, the Vienna manuscript is primarily about the story of *Humāy va Humāyun*. By visually depicting himself not simply just as the familiar Bahram Gur from *Haft Paykar,* but also as the Emperor of China from *Humāy va Humāyun*, who is, in fact, the father of the Chinese princess *javānmard* Humayun, Baysunghur asserts himself as the creator of a *javānmard* figure. The duality of Baysunghur as both a Persian and Chinese king suggests a strategic use of gendered *khitā'ī* to strengthen his importance, especially when he did not manage to inherit his father's (Shah Rukh's) throne. Furthermore, Baysunghur's grandfather, Timur, had ambitions of becoming the Emperor of China, a dream he never realized due to his sudden death right when he was about to march to China with his army.[547] By depicting himself as the kingly Chinese figure, his grandfather yearned to be accompanied by Fitnah, the Chinese female *javānmard* icon,

[546] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Wayne Koestenbaum, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Thirtieth anniversary edition, Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 21-27.
[547] Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 26.

Baysunghur mixes both elements as a form of fusion gendered *khitā'ī* propaganda to elevate his status.

Fitnah and the Rebellious Timurid Prince Iskandar Sultan

A better understanding of several illustrated folios (Fig.30 and Fig.31) from Iskandar Sultan's anthology– a less explored genre, offers a fresh perspective on the enduring significance of Chinese female *javānmard*s like Fitnah. These iconic figures continued to emerge as beloved symbols of rebellion among the Timurid male elite, reflecting the political and cultural landscape of the era. One example can be found in Iskandar Sultan (1384-1415), Shah Rukh's nephew who ruled Shiraz until 1414. Shah Rukh greatly feared his nephew due to his rebellious nature, as reflected in his "expansionist policies, autonomy and strong likelihood of sedation."[548] Apart from his rebellions, Iskandar Sultan is also famous for his contribution to Persianate paintings through his patronization of anthologies. One of his most famous is the Gulbenkian anthology, which mainly comprises excerpts from longer literary texts as well as excerpts from astronomy, astrology, medicine, prosody, religious obligations, Islamic law, and even from a dictionary.[549] The classical ways that Iskandar Sultan symbolically expressed his revolt against his uncle's rule are well-documented, ranging from the "use of stamping his name in coins (*sikkah*) and in Friday prayer (*khutbah*)."[550] The Gulbenkian anthology offers a unique lens for understanding how rebellious Timurid princes like

[548] Roxburgh, David J., "The Aesthetics of Aggregation: Persian Anthologies of the Fifteenth Century," in *Islamic Art and Literature*, ed. Oleg Grabar and Cynthia Robinson (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001), 123.
[549] Priscilla P. Soucek, "The Manuscripts of Iskandar Sultan: Structure and Content," in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lisa Golombek and Maria E. Subtelny, vol. 6, Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1992), 122.
[550] Brend, *Perspectives on Persian Painting*, 50.

Iskandar Sultan used the concept of *khitā'ī*. By decoding the deliberate choices in both the visuals and text, particularly those surrounding the portrayal of Fitnah, I aim to reveal how Iskandar Sultan weaponized the visual representation of the rebellious Chinese female *javānmard* as a way to convey his own rebellious nature and desire to invert the hegemonic authority held by their kingly male relatives, such as Shah Rukh.

David Roxburgh describes the Gulbenkian anthology as a "portable" text that gives Iskandar Sultan "highlights of [his] favorite works."[551] The way all scenes involving Fitnah are illustrated in the Gulbenkian anthology, ranging from her hunting with Bahram Gur (Fig.27) and her bull-lifting performance (Fig.30), reveals the way she was seen as important and even one of Iskandar Sultan's favorite characters. Interestingly, Fitnah's ambiguous name has a wide range of meanings, with one of them being "of civil disturbance and sedition."[552] This allows us to understand why the rebellious Iskandar Sultan held her in high regard. In (Fig.31), Fitnah's significance is implied by her portrayal as the largest figure in the illustration and the way she is also painted exactly the way Nizami describes her, as wearing a "veil of white."[553] This faithful rendition of Fitnah not only reinforces her significance but also serves as a clear indicator for readers, ensuring they recognize her as one of the main characters from *Haft Paykar*. Moreover, the clear spatial demarcation with Fitnah positioned on the left side of the illustration and all other male figures on the right seems to suggest how her strength, demonstrated through her bull-lifting, establishes her superiority over men.

[551] Roxburgh, "The Aesthetics of Aggregation", 127.
[552] Meisami, *The Haft Paykar,* 286.
[553] Meisami, *The Haft Paykar,* 84. For the Persian original, see line 58, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21

Soucek has also mentioned how the Gulbenkian anthology has a didactic tone and functions as a kind of "mirror for princes" with the goal of "providing members of the Timurid family with a basic introduction to Iranian Islamic culture."[554] Building on Soucek, the gaze of Bahram Gur and his officer that is directed upon Fitnah, with the latter gesturing towards his mouth–an artistic convention denoting surprise– illuminates Fitnah's status as a figure of surprising power that elite men should pay attention to and even mimic to be ideal *javānmard*s. In so doing they can challenge hegemonic kingship as embodied by Bahram Gur. This defiance is further emphasized in the way Fitnah's bull-lifting prowess is not just visually, but also textually illustrated: the four verses of calligraphy that form a part of the wall on top of the officer and Bahram Gur states, "She bent her head and raised the ox /see what a jewel adorned the beast!/ Step by step she sped to the roof, drew near the foot of Bahram's couch."[555] The shared admiration for the Chinese maid Fitnah as a *javānmard* icon by both Shah Rukh and his enemy, Iskandar Sultan, transcends their rivalry. This appreciation sheds light on a potential common ground among Timurid elites, one that extends beyond political conflict.

Roxburgh also characterizes the Gulbenkian anthology as containing an "unprecedented variety of visual types and subjects, which challenge any attempt to categorize them. They not only collapse categories like narrative illustration, but also visual genres and structural contexts; as we have seen, they confront our expectations with surprise."[556] Roxburgh's observations regarding the 'rebellious' structure of the Gulbenkian anthology call for a deeper analysis of (Fig.31) and how it reflects Iskandar

[554]Soucek, "The Manuscripts of Iskandar Sultan: Structure and Content," 128.
[555] Meisami, *The Haft Paykar,* 84. For the Persian original of the verses, see lines 61-62, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21
[556] Roxburgh, "The Aesthetics of Aggregation", 127.

Sultan's own rebellious identity. Scholars have labeled the male and female figures in (Fig.31) as the lover and beloved from Awhadi Kirmani's *Dah-nāma*.[557]

I contend that an alternative interpretation is also plausible. Firstly, it is important to note how (Fig.31) is placed right after Fitnah's bull-lifting scene.[558] Secondly, the depiction of the male and female figures bears resemblance to the subsequent events in *Haft Paykar*, particularly Bahram Gur's asking for Fitnah's forgiveness after witnessing her bull-lifting performance, or as described by Nizami: "begging her pardon."[559] In this context,the lover and beloved from Awhadi Kirmani's *Dah-nāma* can also be seen as an illustration of Bahram Gur begging Fitnah to forgive him. This interpretation gains further credence from the presence of verses in calligraphy written right in the center of (Fig.31) that detail Bahram Gur's winter feast and his building of the seven domes. These verses are also positioned right beside the illustration.[560] This visual-textual positioning in (Fig.31) suggests a thematic connection between the illustration in (Fig.31) and the story of *Haft Paykar*.

Fitnah's superior position in (Fig.31) is made obvious in the way she is painted as smiling as she looks down on Bahram Gur, who prostrates himself at her feet. She remains adorned in a white veil, suggesting a continuity with her previous depiction.[561] The arrangement of the two wine jars and the two pairs of decorations behind her, as seen

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[557] Karin Rührdanz, "Illustrated Messages of Love in the Diez Albums," in *The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents*, ed. Friederike Weis and Christoph Rauch (BRILL, 2017), 517-518; Soucek, "The Manuscripts of Iskandar Sultan: Structure and Content," 124.
[558] Soucek, "The Manuscripts of Iskandar Sultan: Structure and Content," 129.
[559] Meisami, *The Haft Paykar,* 85. For the original Persian, see line 77, https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh21
[560] Meisami, *The Haft Patykar,* 97-101. For the original Persian, see https://ganjoor.net/nezami/5ganj/7peykar/sh25
[561] Fitnah and Bahram Gur are depicted differently throughout the Gulbenkian anthology, so it is not surprising that they are also depicted differently in Fig.13.

as the symmetric backdrop, serve to accentuate a sense of social harmony. All these aesthetic details that center around symmetry seem to suggest how stability is achieved when the Persian king acknowledges the Chinese female *javānmard*'s superiority.

Bearing in mind the didactic intent of the Gulbenkian anthology as mentioned by Soucek above, it is not too far-fetched to say how royal male viewers are subtly reminded of the need to acknowledge the power wielded by female *javānmard*s. Sultan Iskandar would undoubtedly learn this lesson, considering how after his failed rebellion against Shah Rukh's rule, it was Shah Rukh's powerful wife and his aunt, Guhar Shad (1376-1475), who advocated for his blinding and imprisonment in Herat until he was put to death in 1415, soon after a second rebellion where he failed to take back Shiraz.[562]

Thus far, I have found no precedents for the illustration depicted in (Fig.31). The Gulbenkian anthology's innovative portrayal of scenes like Bahram Gur's plea for Fitnah's forgiveness in (Fig.31) challenges our conventional grasp of structural context and narrative expectations, as Roxburgh elucidates. Moreover, it sheds light on Iskandar Sultan's patronization of innovative storytelling techniques, such as the introduction of novel scenes open to varied interpretations, to assert his superiority over male rivals like Shah Rukh who also patronized works of similar themes. The Gulbenkian anthology was later ranked as one of the finest illustrated books ever produced from the first half of the century, even higher than some of the other illustrated manuscripts patronized by Shah Rukh and Baysunghur.[563] This reveals Iskandar Sultan's success in using 'rebellious' genres, like the anthology, in addition to both traditional and unprecedented aesthetic depictions of Chinese female *javānmard*s like Fitnah, to outman his rivals to the throne.

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[562] Roxburgh, "The Aesthetics of Aggregation", 123. For more information on Iskandar Sultan's failed rebellion, Khwandamir, "Habib Al-Siyar.", 138-139.
[563] Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision,* 114.

Defacing the Chinese Female *Javānmard*

While I have predominantly focused on how Chinese female *javānmard* figures were celebrated and preserved in medieval royal manuscripts, paying attention to illustrations of bull-lifting where Chinese female *javānmard*s like Fitnah in Timurid manuscripts were defaced also provides us with another way of looking at the power of Chinese female *javānmard*s. One example can be found in an illustration (Fig.32) in the Walters manuscript. In his study of iconoclasm, Finbarr Barry Flood has mentioned how these sorts of "defacements constitute an unexploited resource for histories of reception, even if their utility is complicated by the difficulties of dating."[564] Moreover, in the premodern Persianate tradition, it is not just feared figures that are defaced in illustrated manuscripts, but also figures of virtue and ideal behavior such as the Prophet Muhammad. That is notably the case in an illustration of him found in the same Walters manuscript. This suggests Fitnah's association with virtues the Prophet himself was said to embody.[565]

Furthermore, defacement, according to Flood, is also highly gendered. He discusses the occasional pricking of the Turanian princess Manizha's eyes in premodern Persian paintings as a way to protect the subject of her gaze, Bizhan, whose modesty is threatened by how he is depicted as semi-naked and a prisoner.[566] Expanding on Flood's understanding of defacement as a gendered act, I argue that the defacement of Fitnah in

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[564] Finbarr Barry Flood, "Iconoclasm," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Brill, April 1, 2019), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/iconoclasm-COM_3236, 37.
[565] See https://art.thewalters.org/detail/83174/khusraw-declines-the-prophet-muhammadaos-attempt-to-covert-him-to-islam-in-a-dream/
[566] Flood, "Iconoclasm," 38.

the illustration (Fig.32) reflects a fear of Chinese female *javānmard*s surpassing their male consorts in strength and intellect. Unlike Bahram Gur's figure that is untouched, Fitnah is violently defaced by a finger or a tool– common methods of defacement– to the point that the legibility of the text surrounding the image is affected. This suggests a desire not to have Fitnah's exceptional feat of bull-lifting from upstaging Bahram Gur's manliness. Ironically, Fitnah's defacement brings to center stage the power of Chinese female *javānmard*s stemming from their ability to threaten patriarchal order. Her defaced figure, then, symbolizes an attempt to end the topsy turviness implicit in Persian sinophilic literature and art.

The Afterlife of the Chinese Female *Javānmard* in the Early Mughal and Safavid Illustrated Manuscripts

Early modern Persianate dynasties such as the Safavids and Mughals continued to celebrate not just Fitnah, but also other Chinese female *javānmard*s.[567] In Chapter 1, I examined the illustrated manuscript of the *Hamzanamah* patronized by Mughal Emperor Akbar that contains representations of female *javānmard*s ranging from the youthful female wrestlers (Fig.10) to the cross-dressing female *javānmard* saving her male counterparts (Fig.18). Interestingly, another illustrated manuscript that was also commissioned by Akbar and is housed in the Walters, Indo-Persian poet Amir Khusrau's (1253-1325) *Khamsah,* provides us with other examples of how early modern emperors like Akbar viewed Chinese women as models of *javānmardī.* These images shed light on

[567] For more information on how other early modern empires such as the Ottomans viewed China, see Pinar EMİRALİOĞLU, "Relocating the Center of the Universe: China and the Ottoman Imperial Project in the Sixteenth Century," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 39, no. 39 (2012): 160–187; Yuan Julian Chen, "Between the Islamic and Chinese Universal Empires: The Ottoman Empire, Ming Dynasty, and Global Age of Explorations," *Journal of Early Modern History* 25, no. 5 (October 11, 2021): 422–456.

the anxieties surrounding 'foreign' female powerbrokers who were potentially a threat to Mughal kings. Ashok Kumar Srivastava's seminal work has traced different Chinese influences and Chinese motifs in Mughal paintings.[568] Other scholars have paid attention to the royal Mughal men's fascination with Chinese ceramics.[569] A closer look at Mughal representations of Chinese female *javānmard*s allows us to better understand the early modern Persianate world from a gendered Indo-Iranian-Chinese perspective.

One example is Kanifu from Khusrau's *Ā'īnah-i Iskandarī*, included his *Khamsah*. The story of *Ā'īnah-i Iskandarī* is a response to Nizami's *Iskandarnamah* (Book of Alexander) and fills in on what Nizami skipped over, which is Alexander's conquest of China.[570] Due to his association with universal kingship, Alexander was a figure Akbar sought to identify with to promote his image as a universal ruler.[571] In one image (Fig.33), Alexander is lassoing an opponent from Chin. John Seyller has labeled the image as "odd and unprecedented" because it does not line up with the preceding text.[572]

[568] Ashok Kumar Srivastava, "Some Aspects of Chinese Influences on Mughal Painting," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 49 (1988): 257–265.

[569] For more information on scholarship working on Mughal's connection with Chinese ceramics, see Amrita Sen, "Jahangir's China and Other Toys: Mughal Collecting and the Early East India Company," *Renaissance Studies* 37, no. 5 (November 2023): 719–35,; John Guy, Geoff Wade, and James K. Chin, "China in India: Porcelain Trade and Attitudes to Collecting in Early Islamic India," in *China and Southeast Asia* (Routledge, 2018), 22-44; Ebba Koch, "Jahangir's Hazelnut and Shah Jahan's Chini Khana: The Collections of the Mughal Emperors," in *Collecting and Empires: An Historical and Global Perspective*, ed. Maia Wellington Gahtan and Eva-Maria Troelenberg, Collectors and Dealers, vol. 4 (London: Harvey Miller publishers, 2019), 135–61; Asok Kumar Das, "Chinese Porcelain at the Mughal Court," no. Silk Road Art and Archaelogy 2 (February 1991): 381–409.

[570] Piemontese, Angelo Michele, "Sources and Art of Amir Khosrou's 'The Alexandrine Mirror,'" in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on His 80th Birthday ; 24 Essays on Persian Literature, Culture and Religion*, ed. F. D. Lewis, S. Sharma, and Heshmat Moayyad, Iranian Studies Series (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), 31-32.

[571] For more information on Akbar and universal kingship, see Jos Gommans and Said Reza Huseini, "9. Neoplatonic Kingship in the Islamic World: Akbar's Millennial History," in *Sacred Kingship in World History*, ed. A. Azfar Moin and Alan Strathern (Columbia University Press, 2022), 192–222.

[572] John William Seyller, *Pearls of the Parrot of India: The Walters Art Museum, Khamsa of Amīr Khusraw of Delhi* (Baltimore, MD: Walters Art Museum, 2001), 78.

Barbara Brend has commented on how this scene follows a character type that is often used to illustrate the scene of Iskandar defeating Kanifu, a woman who is also one of the strongest warriors from Chin in the *Ā'īnah-i Iskandarī* (Fig.33).[573] Similar to Seyller, Brend has labeled the image as an 'error' and a possible 'confusion' because Alexander's lassoed opponent should be depicted as a female.[574] I seek to shed light on how this image, which has confused scholars, can be seen as a depiction of the gender-confusing figure of the Chinese female *javānmard*.

Taking into account the visual tradition of adorning Chinese female *javānmard*s like Fitnah with facial hair, as evidenced in the Timurid (Fig.29) and Mughal illustrated manuscripts (Fig.1) discussed earlier and in Chapter 1, it is not surprising that this Akbar-era illustrated manuscript would adorn Kanifu with a mustache. It conveys to readers her *javānmard* identity, which stems from her martial prowess and bravery during her duel with Alexander. Perhaps Kanifu's depiction can be seen as a way to playfully 'confuse' viewers into perceiving Kanifu being as much of a man as Alexander.[575] Najmabadi has mentioned how in nineteenth-century Qajar Iran, "the single most visual marker of manhood [...] was not a mustache, but a full beard."[576] The same phenomenon can be found in the early modern Mughal context. This is seen from how the contrast between Kanifu's mustache and Alexander's full beard differentiates Kanifu as more

[573] Image is repropduced and taken from Brend, *Perspectives on Persian Painting,* 144.
[574] Barbara Brend, "Akbar's 'Khamsah' of Amīr Khusrau Dihlavī: A Reconstruction of the Cycle of Illustration," *Artibus Asiae* 49, no. 3/4 (1988): 291.
[575] For more information on Kanifu, see Piemontese, Angelo Michele, "Sources and Art of Amir Khosrou's 'The Alexandrine Mirror,'" in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on His 80th Birthday ; 24 Essays on Persian Literature, Culture and Religion*, ed. F. D. Lewis, S. Sharma, and Heshmat Moayyad, Iranian Studies Series (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), 32-35.
[576] Najmabadi, *Women With Mustaches and Men Without Beards*, 233.

youthful, or in this case, the manly youth, as opposed to Alexander (the superior masculine figure).

Interestingly, this depiction of Alexander dragging the mustached royal Chinese female *javānmard* Kanifu by the neck, effectively defeating her in this duel, forms the first illustration of the *Ā'īnah-i Iskandarī* story in this Akbar manuscript. Yet, the defeat of the Chinese female *javānmard* does not conclude here. The subsequent illustration in the manuscript (Fig.35) attributed to the painter Sanvala further depicts Alexander's capture of Kanifu, the most valiant champion of Chin, and the revealing of her gender.[577] I have chosen to use the word 'gender' to reflect the portrayal of Kanifu as a female *javānmard*, evident in her feminine facial features, juxtaposed with her male attire found in her armor. As mentioned previously in chapter one, the Mughals promoted a pictorial tradition of adorning female subjects with jewelry and luxury objects to convey their power. Kanifu's elite status is conveyed in how she is adorned with gold earrings and a necklace.

Regardless, one cannot overlook how this is a scene of Kanifu's willing submission to the superior Persianate king symbolized by Alexander, indicated through her downcast eyes and what Brend calls "unruffled" look. She stands below Alexander, who is seated on an elevated throne looking down on her.[578] Furthermore, the portrayal of Kanifu as a passive spectacle of defeat, her body under the control of men, is exemplified by the way she is undressed by a male servant in red while being gazed upon by a multitude of male audiences. Kanifu and Alexander's depiction can be seen as a form of gendered *khitā'ī* propaganda to reinforce the dominance of Mughal patriarchal

[577] Brend, "Akbar's 'Khamsah' of Amīr Khusrau Dihlavī.", 291.
[578] Ibid.

kingship.[579] The text in the image, as seen from the line: "Alexander ordered their armor to be removed" (*silāḥish bifarmūd tā barkīshand*), further highlights Alexander as the one in control.[580]

The fact that (Fig.33) and (Fig.35) in the Akbar manuscript are both about the patriarchal ruler defeating the foreign female *javānmard* calls for us to pay attention to how Akbar's rule was threatened by two real-life foreign female *javānmard*s that he ultimately managed to defeat. One of them was the Rajput queen Rani Durgavati, who opposed Akbar's rule in Gondwana and was finally slain in battle against the Mughal troops in 1564 due to her refusal to surrender.[581] Another example is the Bijapur Shia queen Chand Bibi, who defended Ahmadnagar against Akbar's troops until she was forced to accept a treaty in early 1596.[582] The Mughals are descendants of the Timurids. Through (Fig.33) and (Fig.35), the Mughals showcase their ability to perpetuate and even expand the Timurid tradition of portraying Chinese female *javānmard*s. This becomes a form of *khitā'ī* propaganda for them to solidify their claim as legitimate heirs to the Timurid legacy.

In Chapter 2, where I examined Gulbadan Begum's *Humayunnamah*, I demonstrated how she provides us with valuable insights regarding royal Mughal women's various performances of *javānmardī* and the different ways these Mughal royal female *javānmard*s enabled Akbar's father's kingship and by extension, that of Akbar's own reign. Illustrations of the *Ā'īnah-i Iskandarī* story found in the Akbar manuscript

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[579] For more information on Kanifu's ability to outperform men in embodying *javānmardī* virtues, alongside her declaration of submission to Alexander, see Brend, Perspectives on Persian Painting, 18-19.
[580] The Persian original is سلاحش بفرمود تا برکشند as seen from the illustration.
[581] Nandini Sengupta, *Rani Durgawati: The Forgotten Life of a Warrior Queen*, First published (Gurugram: Penguin Random House India, 2022), 22.
[582] Brend, *Perspectives on Persian Painting*, 235.

further proves how 'foreign' elite women, who were not from the Mughal royal family, behaved in ways that could be termed as *javānmardī* to challenge hegemonic male rule embodied by Akbar. Kalb has rightly emphasized the need for frameworks that consider the "non-elite and non-Islamicate" elements, which could offer new understandings of gender and female power within the Mughal context.[583]

Understanding depictions of Chinese female *javānmard*s in Akbar's manuscript in relation to historical 'foreign' non-Islamicate female *javānmard*s like Rani Durgavati and Chand Bibi exemplifies the framework that Kalb advocates. This approach can illuminate the complex and multifaceted nature of female agency within the Mughal world, revealing how gender and racialized anxieties shaped the kingly mindset. Furthermore, in her study of race in the Mughal context, Supriya Gandhi mentions that "while Mughal texts do not rigidly demarcate different kinds of social categories, they regularly attribute to caste and ethnic groups certain fixed and inherent traits." Certain groups were featured more prominently in courtly writings within the Indo-Persian sphere. Foremost among them were the Brahmans, linked with virtues such as piety and loyalty. Additionally, the Hindu Rajputs were notable for their association with qualities like fearlessness, as well as their proficiency in armor and weaponry. The tropes involving Brahmans and Rajputs in courtly writing perpetuated essentializing stereotypes about these communities, while also offering a route to Persianization and incorporation into the domain of courtly civility. Such portrayals also bolstered a certain vision of imperial sovereignty.[584]

Examining the different depictions of Fitnah (Fig.1) and Kanifu (Fig.33 and Fig.35) from different social backgrounds in Mughal illustrated manuscripts reveals

[583] Kalb, "Framing Gender in Mughal South Asia," 10.
[584] Supriya Gandhi, "Locating Race in Mughal India," *Renaissance Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (December 2022): 1209-10.

another prominent group in the Indo-Persian context: Chinese female *javānmard*s from both elite and non-elite backgrounds. These women were perceived as distinctly Persianate, embodying ideals of masculinity to the extent that Mughal kings saw them as threats whose submission was crucial for bolstering their own patriarchal authority. Moreover, during Akbar's time, in the early modern world, one of the Mughal empire's rivals was the Ming empire of China.[585] Building on this, Akbar's patronage of an illustrated manuscript containing the story of *Ā'īnah-i Iskandarī* about the conquest of China and the Chinese female manly youth also offers insights into the other anxieties that shaped the Mughal royal ideology, particularly when confronted with powerful rivals like Ming China that would have challenged the legitimacy of Akbar's claim to universal kingship.[586]

Similar to how the *Samak-i ʿayyār* Oxford manuscript has been studied for having anti-Mongol sentiments, Angelo Piemontese postulated that Amir Khusrau wrote the *Ā'īnah-i Iskandarī* to take "revenge on the Mongols [...] by relating the conquest of the empire of China by Alexander." Under Mongol ruler Qubilay Khan (1274-1294), who assumed the Chinese name Yüan for his dynasty in Beijing, the Mongols menaced the Sultanate of Delhi where Khusrau lived. He was even taken prisoner by the Mongols during their incursions in the region of Multan.[587] Although it remains uncertain whether Khusrau had any direct encounters with Mongol women, his portrayal of Kanifu in terms of virtues associated with *javānmardī* implies a perception of Mongol women as ideal

[585] Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals*, 7.
[586] This is made obvious in how the third image in Akbar's manuscript is that of the Emperor of China bowing to Alexander the Great, see https://art.thewalters.org/detail/3234/the-khaqan-of-china-pays-homage-to-alexander-the-great-2/
[587] Pietmontese, "Sources and Art of Amir Khosrou's 'The Alexandrine Mirror", 32-33.

masculine figures capable of recognizing Persianate superiority and upholding Persianate values, in contrast to their male Mongol counterparts.[588]

Beyond Chinese ceramics: Gendered Sinophilia in the Safavid context

Similar to the Mughals, significant scholarly attention has been devoted to the Safavids' relationship with Chinese ceramics. The Safavids perceived the act of donating highly prized Chinese ceramics for public benefit as a way to showcase the donor's social, political, and spiritual superiority– notions associated with *javānmardī*.[589] By carrying out a closer look at the (Fig.36) portraying Alexander with the Chinese maiden from Nizami's *Sharafnamah*, I argue that it was not just Chinese porcelain, but also Chinese female figures that were very much connected to *javānmardī* in the Safavid context. The *Sharafnamah* is the first part of Nizami's *Iskandarnamah* and concentrates on Alexander's physical activities as a ruler.[590] While the illustrated manuscript containing this folio does not have any information about the patron, the flyleaf contains information about how it was once in the library of the last Safavid king, Sultan Husayn (1668-1727).[591]

Similar to the lovemaking scene in the *Samak-i ʿayyār* Oxford manuscript (Fig.21), (Fig.35) also depicts Alexander making love to a Chinese maiden, who is one of the most powerful ladies in the *Iskandaranamah*. The Chinese maiden is a neglected and forgotten musician slave girl (akin to Fitnah) whom Alexander received from the Chinese

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[588] For more information on how Kanifu is textually depicted as a *javānmard,* see Brend, *Perspectives on Persian Painting*, 18.
[589] Yuka Kadoi, "From Acquisition to Display: The Reception of Chinese Ceramics in the Pre-Modern Persian World," in *Persian Art*, ed. Yuka Kadoi, Image-Making in Eurasia (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 69.
[590] Christine van Ruymbeke, "Iskandar's Bibulous Business: Wine, Drunkenness and the Calls to the 'Sāqī' in Nizāmī Ganjavī's 'Sharaf-Nāma,'" *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2013): 271.
[591] Adel′ T. Adamova and Manijeh Bayani, *Persian Painting: The Arts of the Book and Portraiture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 382.

emperor. To prove her worth to Alexander, she resolves to showcase her ability to be a *javānmard* by donning a male disguise and bravely fighting many battles for Alexander against the Rūs or Varangians who lived in the Caucasus.[592] Keeping this story in mind, the depiction of the Chinese female *javānmard* having intercourse with Alexander showcases how *javānmardī* could have been seen as a way for non-elite foreign slave girls like the Chinese maiden to climb social ranks and serve as court advisors. This is seen from how she is visually depicted as becoming 'one' with the king, merging her identity with his.

(Fig.35) further reflects how the physical union between foreign women and Persianate kings was widespread in sixteenth-century Safavid Iran and was understood as vital for dynastic continuation. Intermarriages with foreign women beyond Iranian and Turkic backgrounds such as those from Georgia and Circassia were one of the most widely used means to create kinship networks by the ruling house with other politically or socially important groups in the Safavid context. These foreign women would become mothers of royal children and had immense influence in imperial politics.[593] Sultan Husayn himself was a product of intermarriage and had a Circassian mother.[594] Moreover, women with 'foreign' heritage such as Pari-Khan Khanum II (1524-1576), whose mother was from an important Circassian family, was well-known for her ability to live up to virtues associated with *javānmardī:* intelligence, intuition, and political acumen. Indeed, Safavid historians labeled her as "distinct from the females".[595] Pari-Khan Khanum II was

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[592] For more information on the Chinese maiden, see H. Wilberforce Clarke, *The Sikandar Nama, E Bara Abu Muhammad Bin Yusuf Bin Mu, Ayyid-i-Ni-Zamu-`d-Din* (Low Price Publications, 2011), 728-745.
[593] Suzppe, "Status, Knowledge and Politics", 144.
[594] Rudi Matthee, "Sulṭān Ḥusayn," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, April 24, 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/*-SIM_7180.
[595] Gholsorkhi, "Pari Khan Khanum", 146.

also heavily involved in succession issues after her father, Shah Tahmasb's death and had the full intention to rule herself with the new king simply being a placeholder.[596] A better understanding of how historical 'foreign' *javānmard* were interconnected with Safavid kingship provides a possible insight into why foreign Chinese female *javānmard*s and Persianate kings were depicted visually as an integrated 'one' in illustrations (like Fig.36) highlighting the politics behind pleasure.

To ensure dynastic continuation, (Fig.36) conveys how male virility is necessary during the intermixing with the Chinese female *javānmard,* a hypermasculine icon of Persianate perfection. This is exemplified not just by the illustration where Alexander is depicted as penetrating the Chinese maiden, but also by the text around the illustration that conveys to readers how Alexander is deflowering the Chinese maiden with him "breaking the seal of the treasure box" and experiencing "a pleasant garden with a closed gate, filled with apples and pomegranates."[597] In pre-Islamic Persianate culture, pomegranates are a symbol of fertility and also a symbol of the female *javānmard* goddess Anahita whom I have studied earlier.[598] By placing a bowl of pomegranates in front of the lovers engaging in lovemaking, the illustration registers the emergence of new life from the union between a foreign Chinese female *javānmard* and a Persianate king. This "interracial" lovemaking scene, observed by female figures positioned both above and below the tower, underscores once again, the political nature of this lovemaking scene. It serves to convey the Safavids' ability to continue the *khitā'ī*

[596] Suzppe, "Status, Knowledge and Politics", 157.
[597] Adamova and Bayani, *Persian Painting,* 406.
[598] Giulia Caneva, Alessandro Lazzara, and Zohreh Hosseini, "Plants as Symbols of Power in the Achaemenid Iconography of Ancient Persian Monuments," *Plants* 12, no. 23 (November 27, 2023):,15.

language of their predecessors, and thus their legitimacy as virile patriarchal rulers capable of dominating their hypermasculine female counterparts.

Conclusion

This chapter explores Sino-Iranian connections by examining how a gendered Sinophilia emerged in the familiar figure of the Chinese female *javānmard* in the middle and early modern Persianate periods. Li Shunxian's (c.900-926) account allows for a broader perspective from the other side of the Iranian-Chinese synthesis. Li Shunxian is a Chinese-born Iranian woman who was the concubine of Emperor Wang Zhongyan (899–926) of the Former Shu dynasty. She made significant contributions to the visual-literary and political landscape of medieval China.

The way her various accomplishments were preserved and became part of the poetic and artistic canon of Chinese culture raises intriguing questions: Were Iranian women similarly celebrated as chivalric ideals in Chinese traditions? How can female *javānmardī* provide a new way of understanding commensurate concepts such as *junzi*, or 'noble person' from the Chinese context, which has also been predominantly studied from a male-focused perspective in the Chinese context? One good place to start would be the Iranian/Turkic female heroine Hua Mulan from the Chinese tradition.[599]

While this chapter has focused on exploring Sino-Iranian interracial romances within the realm of Persian fiction, it is important to acknowledge the existence of real-life Sino-Iranian interracial romances as well. Chinese sources, for instance, reveal a fascinating example of transcultural exchange found in a documented romance between a Chinese man and an Iranian woman. In 1376, Lin Nu met an Iranian woman in Hormuz, converted to Islam and brought her back to Quanzhou. Due to the Ispah Rebellion

[599] Sanping Chen, "From Mulan to Unicorn," *Journal of Asian History* 39, no. 1 (2005): 23–43.

(1357–1366) where Arab and Iranian Muslims fought against the Han Chinese to control Quanzhou, anti-Iranian sentiment was strong.[600] As a result, Lin Nu and his descendants were erased from the family genealogy by his relatives who even changed their surnames to avoid being associated with him– this historical account offers a valuable historical counterpoint to the fictional narratives examined in this chapter. It provides a new way of looking at race, anxieties, Sino-Iranian connections, and the epistemological limits of the Persianate, per Green.[601] Nonetheless, my analysis in this chapter broadens what counts as "evidence" across a broad range/time span of visual mediums for expressing female *javānmardī*. By exploring a broader range of visual and textual mediums, we can potentially uncover a richer understanding of female agency and masculine ideals across cultures.

[600] Hans Kühner, "'The Barbarians' Writing Is like Worms, and Their Speech Is like the Screeching of Owls' - Exclusion and Acculturation in the Early Ming Period," *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 151, no. 2 (2001): 419.
[601] Da-Sheng Chen, "CHINESE-IRANIAN RELATIONS Vii. Persian Settlements in Southeastern China during the T'ang, Sung, and Yuan Dynasties," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, December 15, 1991, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/chinese-iranian-vii.

Concluding remarks

"A Study of Female *Javānmardī* in the Premodern Persianate World (945-1800)" has embarked on a geographically and temporally vast journey, especially in terms of their scope and their depth. It has not only explored the depths of individual case studies, but also put various transmedic evidence in conversation with each other that range from visual representations, literary works, historical chronicles, and theories that have traditionally been studied separately in order to recover the pervasive way women, both historical and fictional, were also seen as models of *javānmardī* and the different ways various women reshaped and expanded this concept. This transmedic, interdisciplinary approach offers a new way of understanding not just the extent of premodern Persianate female power, but also the very fabric and frontier of premodern Persianate society, culture, kinship and kingship that future scholarship can apply and expand.

The dissertation started by unearthing forgotten aspects of female *javānmardī*, such as the use of mustaches, beards, tattoos, wrestling, griffin textiles, pearl-necklaces, cross-dressing and many others. One under-explored area I have touched upon briefly and deserves more attention is the connection between female *javānmard*s and horses.[602] By examining specific horse breeds, ornamentation, rituals, and the broader circulation of horses in relation to women, we can gain deeper insights into this concept.[603] Building upon Donna Landry's groundbreaking work titled *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses*

[602] For more information on women and horses in the Chinese and Mongol context, see Eiren L. Shea, "Riders in the Tomb: Women Equestrians in North Chinese Funerary Art (10th–14th Centuries)," *Arts* 12, no. 5 (September 15, 2023): 201, 1-15.

[603] For information on how the eighteenth century Afghan princess Nawab Shah Jahan Begum (1838–1901) talked about the importance of equestrianism to install ideal behavior in women, see Barbara Daly Metcalf, "Islam and Power in Colonial India: The Making and Unmaking of a Muslim Princess," https://www.historians.org/, 2010, https://www.historians.org/presidential-address/barbara-d-metcalf/.

Transformed English Culture, scholars like Elizabeth Lambourn have utilized the horse to delve into the intricacies of Indic chivalric traditions. Moreover, by examining the horse as a cultural mediator, they offer fresh perspectives on the cultural dynamics between Middle Eastern and South Asian civilizations. The existence of extensive Persian language horse manuals and treatises on horsemanship as well as the different illustrations of ethnically diverse women in relation to horses from the middle and early modern Persianate contexts, will be a valuable addition to our understanding of the female *javānmardī* and cosmopolitanism.

This dissertation also unveils a world where premodern Persianate women, through their reading, writing, painting and patronage practices, formed a vibrant network that fostered a distinct female intellectual tradition centered around the concept of female *javānmardī*. This dissertation has also provides new methods on how to recover and amplify the various *javānmardī* performances carried out in different ways by real-life female *javānmard*s like ʿIsmat al-Dunya, Hamidah Begum, Gulbadan Begum, Sahifa Banu, Shazadah Sultanum, and many others. Paying attention to female *javānmardī* has also allowed us to re-perceive other concepts such as *ghayrat* (masculine honor) that, just like *javānmardī*, have also been studied from a male-only perspective. Moreover, it has also allowed me to uncover overlooked concepts related to *javānmardī* such as beauty, *naz* (coquetry), textual trickery and many others. Moreover, female *javānmardī* also shows how we can go beyond a Euro-American centered focus on theories exploring gender, power, and feminist criticism such as Foucault, Rubin, and Gayle. In Chapter 2, I examine how Rubin's paradigm of women as objects of exchange, Sedgwick's notion of women as conduits for male homosocial desire, and Foucault's exclusion of women from

ethical discourse, can be challenged by exploring the trafficking of men between premodern Persianate women and the expression of homosocial love and kinship between women through male intermediaries in the premodern Persianate world. This analysis contributes to a broader understanding of gendered dynamics in the region and aligns with the emerging field of Islamicate sexualities, which critiques Eurocentric assumptions in feminist and queer studies. My dissertation also further demonstrates how engaging with scholars from other fields, as seen with Amussen and Underdown's various paradigms of inversions, paradoxical patriarchy and topsy turvy can be used to examine seventeenth-century England, can enrich our understanding of gendered dynamics in premodern the Persianate world.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore how Chinese women, both elite and non-elite, were perceived as models of *javānmardī*. The analysis examines how such portrayals were employed by "anxious patriarchs" to bolster their legitimacy, while simultaneously revealing the tensions and anxieties that shaped the Persianate kingly mindscape. This nuanced approach exposes a complex interplay between patriarchal structures and the matriarchal elements woven into the concept of Persianate kingship during the middle and early modern periods. I have also shown how we can apply and expand Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to better understand the limits of female *javānmardī*'s transgressive nature. Recognizing this complexity allows us to move beyond simplistic interpretations of female power, inversions, power struggles, and gender roles within this dynamic historical context. By proposing a two way analysis of how Chinese and Iranian women were perceived in both cultures, I have offered an example of innovative scholarship that explores female power and global, transcultural connections.

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Illustrations

Fig 1



Fitnah carrying a fully grown cow up the stairs towards Bahram Gur, ca.1470 (?) and later. Washington DC, Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, S86.0061.

Fig 2



Two women. 12th century. Oxfordshire, Sarikhani Collection, I.CE.2240.

Fig 3



Gulshah kills Ibn ‘Adnan to save Varqa, ca. 1200–1250. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace, Museum Library, H. 841, f.22r.

Fig 4



Rustam with a chintamani hat, ca. 1480-1490. Copenhagen, The David Collection, 48/2006.

Fig 5



A royal couple, ca. 1210. Hamburg, MKG Museum for Applied Arts, 1964.60.

Fig 6



Bowl with queen, 13th century. Washington DC, Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, F1967.24.

Fig 7



Gulshah struggles with Ghalib, ca. 1200–1250. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace, Museum Library, H. 841, f25b.

Fig 8



Wrestling match between a Princess from Ardabil and Prince from Rum, from the Ketāb-e dāstān. 1565. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ouseley Add. 1, 1565/972.

Fig 9



Sa'id and Khosh Khiram arrive at a castle and see two girls wrestling on the roof, from the *Hamzanama,* attributed to Shravana and Mithra, ca. 1570. Washington DC, Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, F1960.14.

Fig 10



Shah Tahmasp of Iran, attributed to Sahifa Banu, early 17th century. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, IM.117-1921.

Fig 11



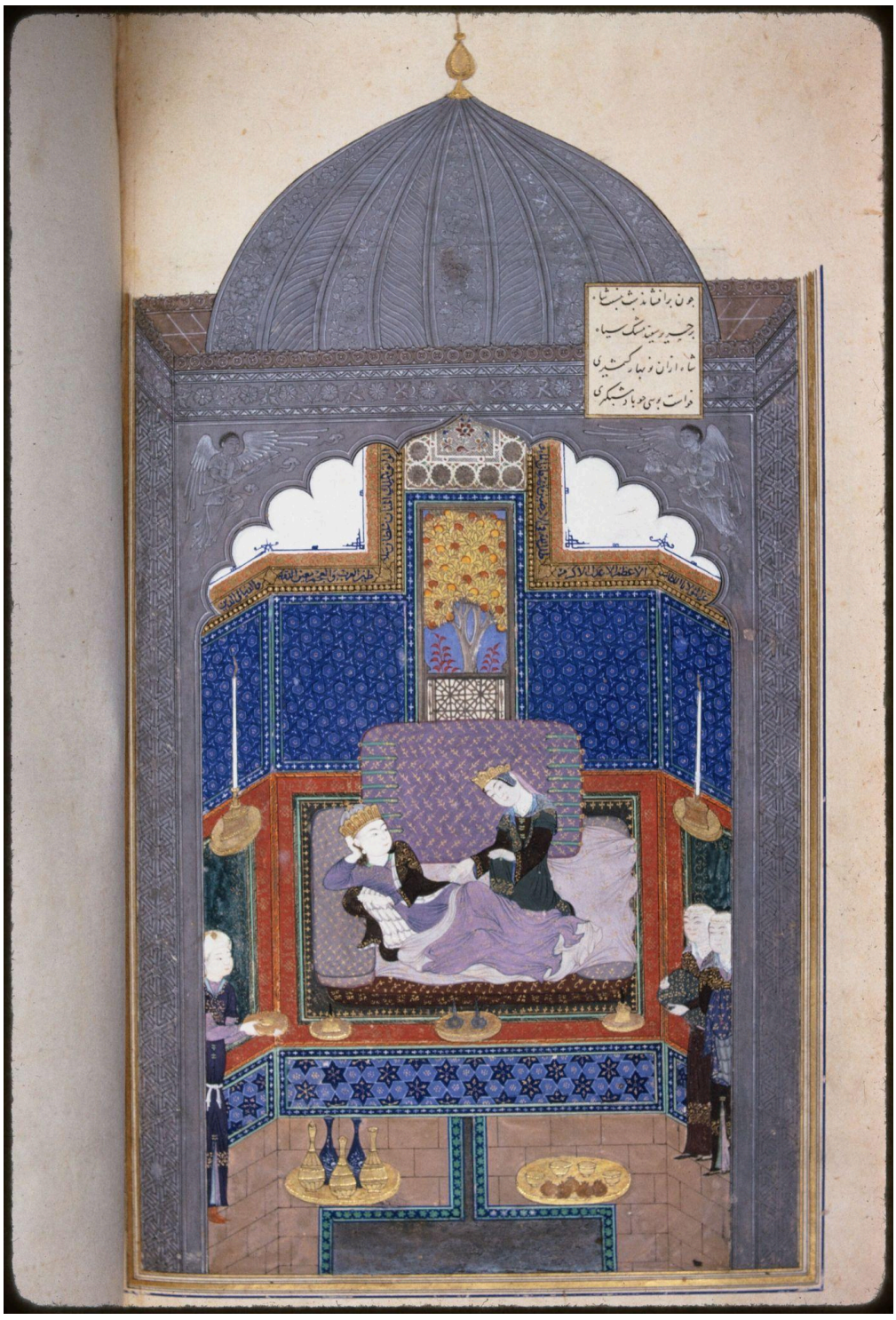
Emperor Jahangir Embraces Shah Abbas, attributed to Abu'l Hasan and Muhmammad Sadiq (margins), ca. 1618, margins 1747–48. Washington DC, Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, F1945.9a.

Fig 12



Shah Tahmasp I (1514–1576) Seated in a Landscape, ca. 1575. Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1917.1078.

Fig 13



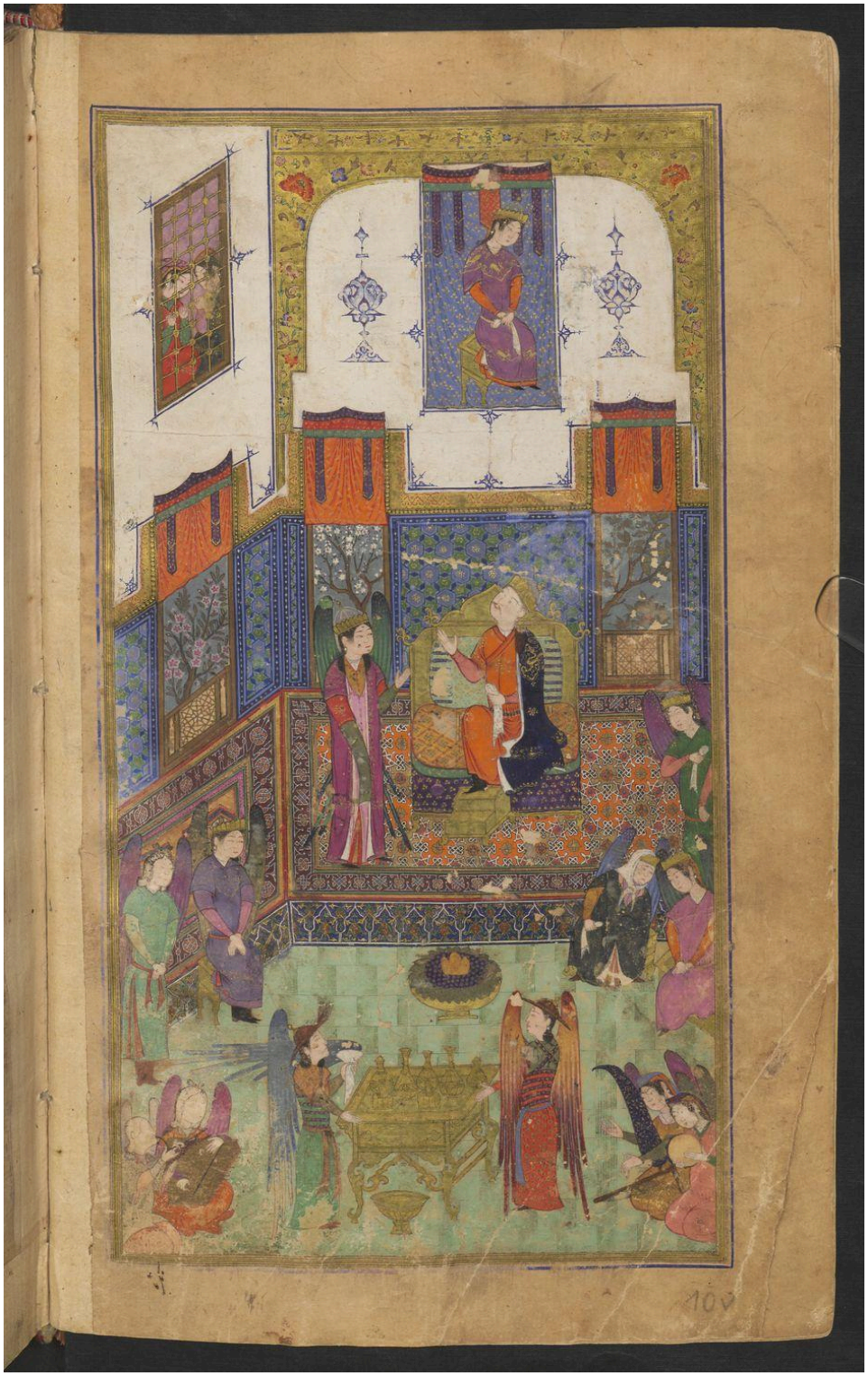
Bahram Gur with the Indian Princess of the Black Pavilion. 1445–1446. Topkapi Sarayi Muzesi. Kutuphane, Istanbul, TSK H. 781, fol.167b.

Fig 14



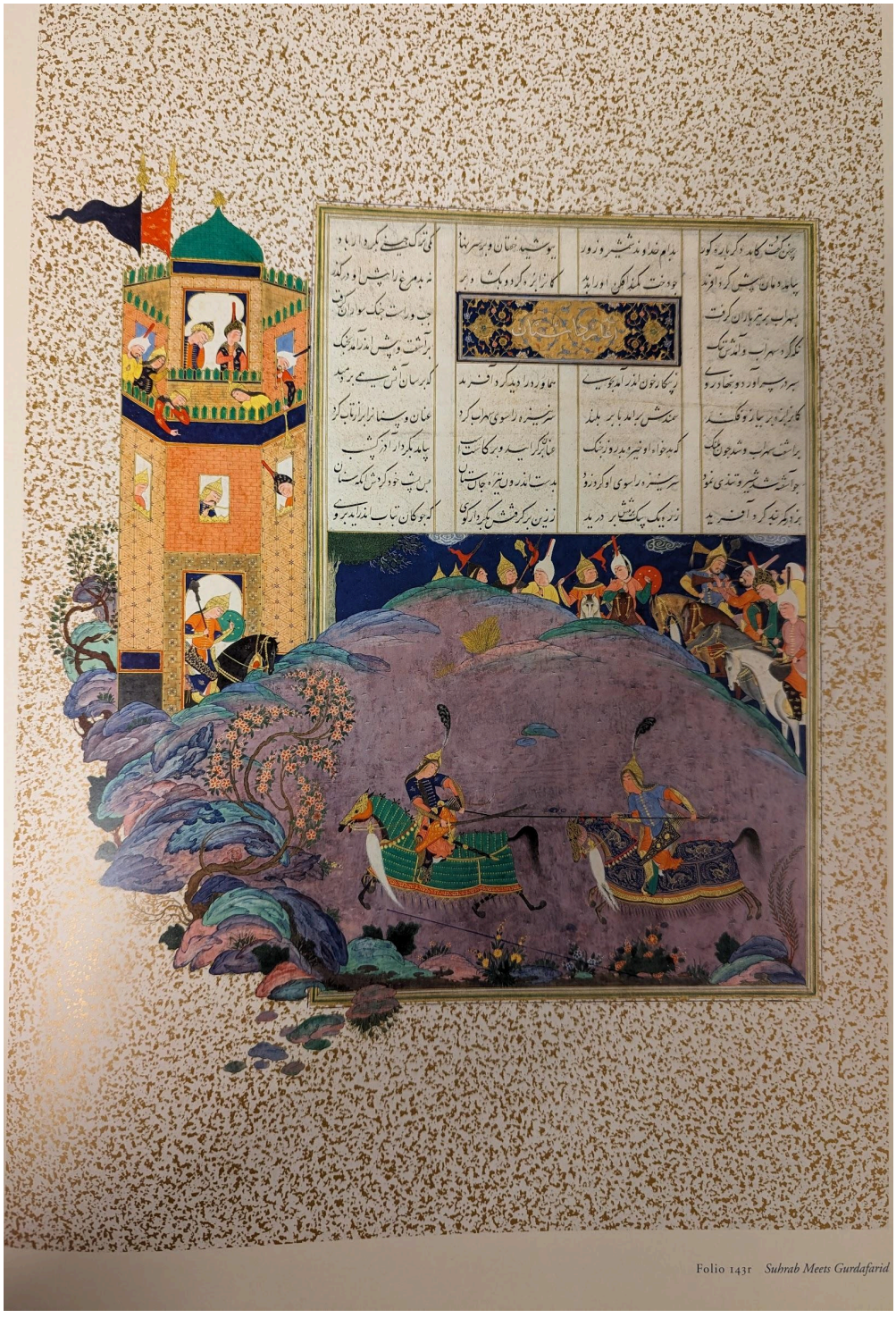
Nushaba looks at the portrait of Iskandar. 1445–1446. Topkapi Sarayi Muzesi. Kutuphane, Istanbul, TSK H. 781, fol.244b.

Fig 15



Humay beholding the image of Humayun in the Fairy (Pari) Palace. 1427-1428. Vienna, Austrian National Library, N.F. 382, fol.10b.

Fig 16



Sohrab battling with Gordafarid, ca.1525-30, attributed to ‘Abd al-’Aziz, Iran, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts.

Fig 17



Gurdyeh stabs Tovorg, ca.1525-30, attributed to ‘Abd al-’Aziz, Iran, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts.

Fig 18



A Heroine Forcibly Enters a Jail to Liberate Heroes, from a Hamzanama. 16th century, Washington DC, Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, S1986.399.

Fig 19



The first meeting of Mah Pari and Khorshid Shah. 14th century, ca. 1330. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley 379, fol. 006 b.

Fig 20



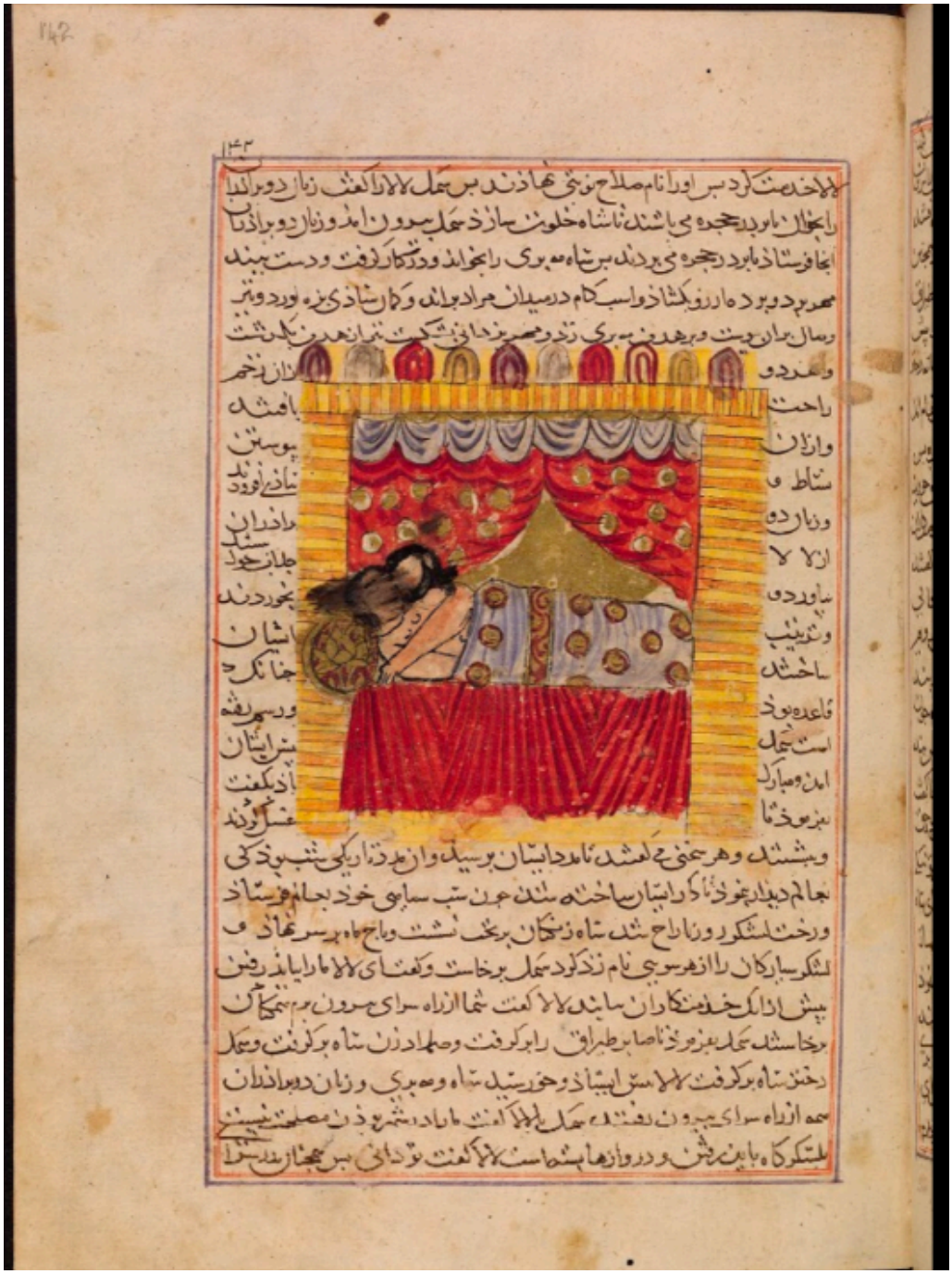
Taq-e Bostan, Kermanshah, Iran, 590 CE–628 CE, rock relief carving of Anāhītā.

Fig 21



Khorshid Shah informs Mah Pari of his departure. 14th century, ca. 1330. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley 379, fol. 61b.

Fig 22



Mah Pari and Khorshid Shah in bed together. 14th century, ca. 1330. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley 379, fol. 142a.

Fig 23



Ruzafzun kills her father in the presence of Khorshid Shah. 14th century, ca. 1330. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley 379, fol. 169b.

Fig 24



Ruzafzun attempts to choke a servant. 14th century, ca. 1330. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley 380, fol. 417b.

Fig 25



Humay recognizes Humayun as she removes her helmet after their fight, by Junayd Baghdadi, ca.1396. London, British Library. Add. 18113, fol. 23.

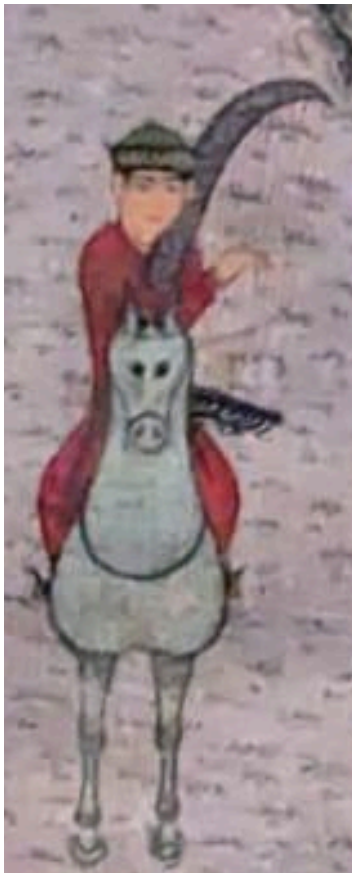
Fig 26



Celebration of the consummation of Humay's marriage to Humayun, by Junayd Baghdadi, ca.1396. London, British Library. Add. 18113, fol. 45v.

Fig 27





Fitnah hunting with Bahram Gur. 15th century, ca. 1415-17. Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, Hossein Afshar Collection.

Fig 28



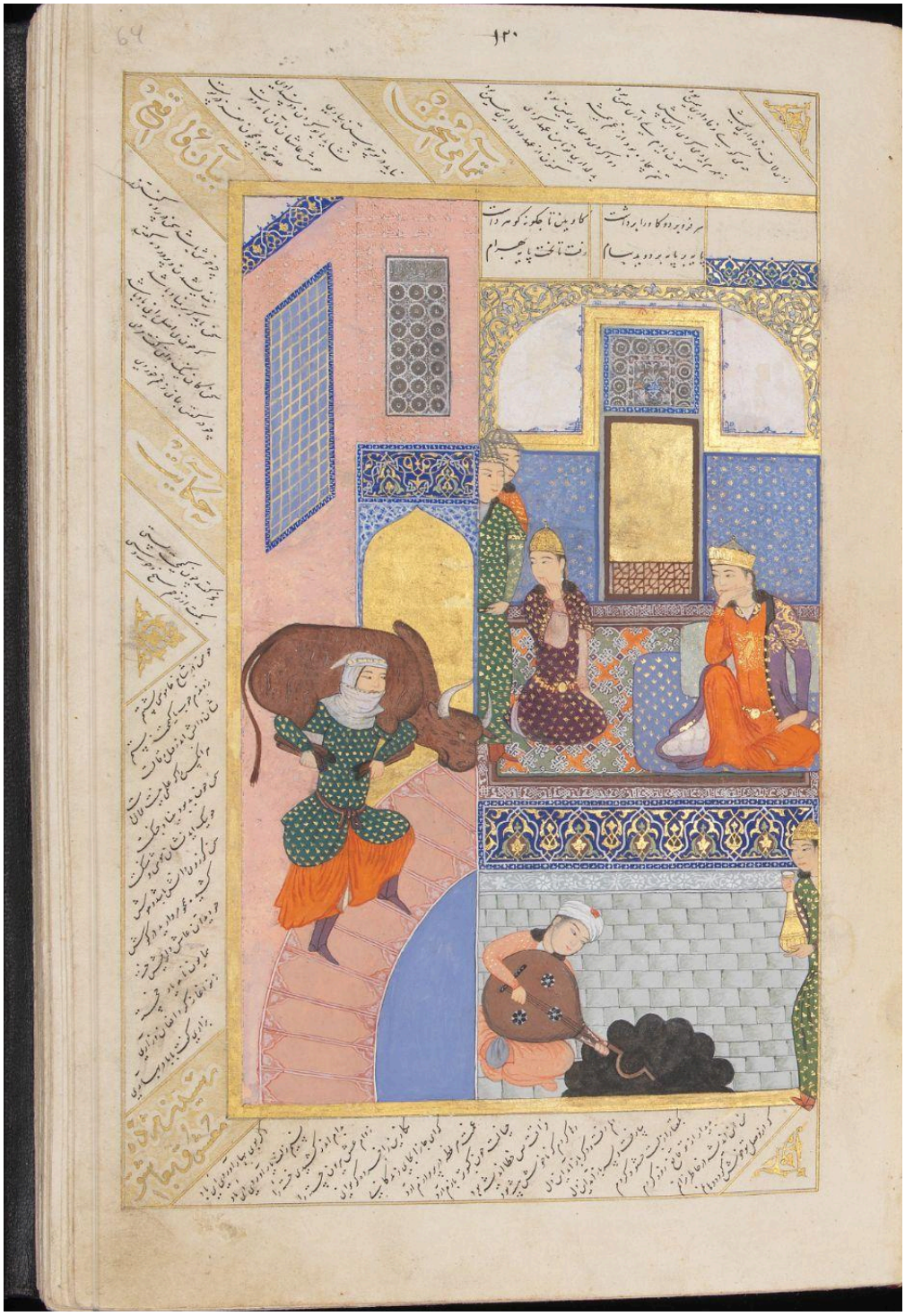
Fitnah hunting with Bahram Gur. ca. 1410-11. Lisbon, Gulbenkian Foundation, L.A. 161, fol.62v.

Fig 29



Emperor of China hunting from Humay va Humayun. 1427-1428. Vienna, Austrian National Library, N.F. 382, fol.32b.

Fig 30



Fitnah lifting an ox. ca. 1410-11. Lisbon, Gulbenkian Foundation, L.A. 161, fol.64r.

Fig 31



Two lovers. ca. 1410-11. Lisbon, Gulbenkian Foundation, L.A. 161, fol.65v.

Fig 32



Fitnah Carries a Bull on her Shoulders Before Bahram Gur. 1481. Baltimore, the Walters Art Museum, W.604, W.604.163A.

Fig 33



Alexander the Great Lassoes an Opponent from the Khamsa (Quintet) of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi. 1597-1598. Baltimore, the Walters Art Museum, W.624, W.624.128A.

Fig 34



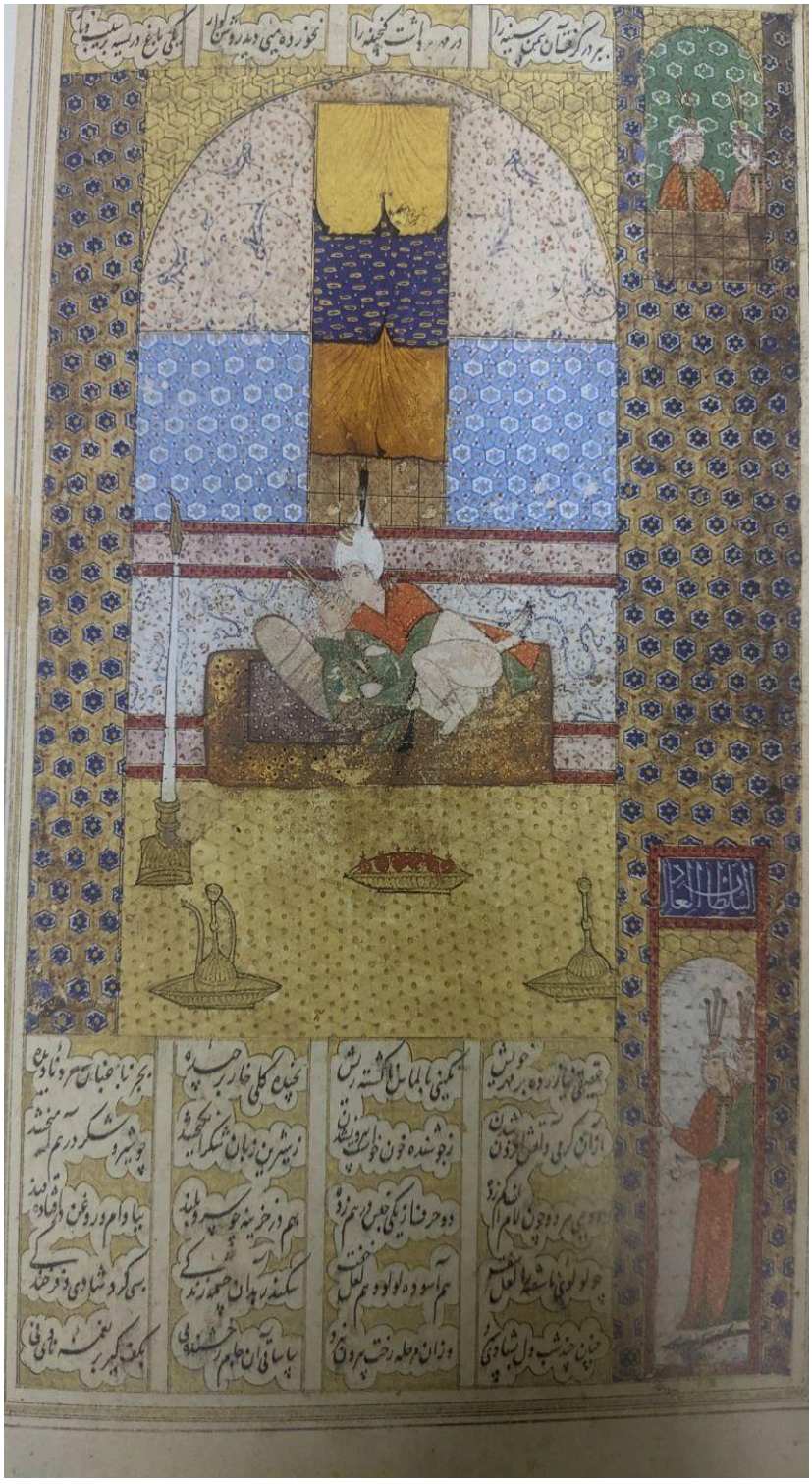
Iskandar defeats Kanifu. Topkapi Sarayi Muzesi. Kutuphane, Istanbul, H.801, 271a.

Fig 35



Alexander the Great Discovers Kanifu's Identity. 1597-1598. Baltimore, the Walters Art Museum, W.624, W624.135A.

Fig 36



Iskandar and the Chinese maiden. 1537. Kuwait, Al-Sabah Collection, Cat.24, LNS 4MS, fol.309v.