

AN ILLUSTRATED WORK BELONGING TO THE TIME OF IBNI SINA

By Ord. Prof. A. SÜHEYL ÜNVER

Director of the Institute of the History
of Medicine, University of Istanbul

To my friend Prof. Ettinghausen

Prof. Richard Ettinghausen is a well known and well liked figure in our country for his numerous works on Islamic and Turkish art. We have met in 1952 in Bagdad and in 1954 in Persia at the ceremony held for the millenary of Ibni Sina, and on several occasions in Istanbul. Our scientific contact with him on Turkish art has been continuing since ten years

During the millenary of Ibni Sina at Theran in 1954, Prof. Ettinghausen gave an interesting lecture on the art works in the East at Ibni Sina's time and their contemporaries. The color slides of rare pieces like tapestry, cups, and all sorts of ceramics located in various museums all over the world aroused our interest.

The collection that I have today consists of certain illustrations and manuscripts of Ibni Sina's time. Among these there is one work I have examined carefully which I hope will be interesting for Prof. Ettinghausen to observe. Here is presented to him the results of my studies :

The work I am going to analyze is the ryhmed tale of "Varaka and Gülşah" written in Persia for the personal library of the Gazne ruler, Sultan Mahmud Sebutekin of Bukhara (967-April 30, 1030). It is located at the treasury library (No. 841) of the Topkapı Palace Museum and has been kept there for nearly five centuries, following the conquest of Istanbul by Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror. The manuscript then passed to the rich library of his son and successor, Sultan Bayezid the second, who, according to his method wrote the title of the book and stamped his seal on the first and the last pages.

The manuscript is enlightening to us on many important points about the past. Sultan Mahmud Gaznevi, a great political leader and

the establisher of the Gazne Empire adopted the Persian culture and aided its progress. He got poet Firdevsi to write the Shah nameh (Book of kings) in Persian, gave great significance to science, literature, and art, chiefly miniature and decorative design, and supported all the artists and scholars. One point he failed to do was to use his own language on these fields which was Turkish. His Palace and universities had a great number of scholars, poets, and artists. No other Asian Turkish capital had such richness of knowledge as his. One of the great personalities of his palace was Ebu Reyhan of Birun. In spite of his efforts to get İbni Sina he was unsuccessful.

In the improvement of the Gazne city the powerful Sultan Mahmut built the most original palaces, mosques, water ways, and social foundations. He began building his cities especially after the great Indian campaign in 1005. The frontiers of his empire extended from Lahore to Semerkand and Isfahan. After the capture of Gazne in 553 (1161) by Goris, the capital was transferred to Lahore. The empire ended in 579(1183) during the reign of Ali Sebutekin.

The earliest original edition of the Varaka and Gülşah that belonged to the private library of the great Gazne emperor is in our possession today. The prologue, which is the eulogy of the emperor is very just for he really was a great man and a soldier who opened the caravan ways and the first ruler ever to attain the title of a Sultan

The manuscript is important from the view that shows Turkish art and way of living in the Central Asia between the dates 980-1037, which dates the same times İbni Sina lived. With this point in mind we can find many other similar works written and illustrated through a careful research.

These works are mostly found in Istanbul.

The miniatures and decorative designs of this work are done by a Persian born painter called Mehmed, who at the time must have been the chief of the palace painters. His signature on leaf 58b appears as Abdul Mü'min Mehmed ül Hôyî en Nakkaş'.

Varaka and Gülşah consists of 70 leaves or 140 pages, and contains 71 miniatures which are fine examples of the Central Asia influences on the XII and XIIIth century Bagdad style. Therefore, the Central Asia Turkish painting style is one of the four elements which helped establish the Bagdad school.

The bases of some of the miniatures are gold. The ladies' hair are braided. Each has four braids of which two are in the back and two in the front. Their robes that have colorful floral designs called 'Hatai' are so short that the undergarments can be seen. The sleeves are long and wide at the cuffs and have gold and colored Bazu-bent (armlet) signs. The ornaments of the collars look like single rows of pearls. One lady wears a necklace with two rows. Shoes are narrow and flat. Feet are sometimes bare. Ladies' breast lines could be seen. On leaf 55b a woman's golden robe is so short that her pant's rolled up edges show up. Her breasts are bare.

The mens' types are variable. Clothes have much ornament and all have different head wears. They have halos around their heads. The sofas and pillows are noteworthy, with exquisite designs on their covers. The horse harnesses are very graceful. The miniature contains all sorts of 'Rumi'' decoration and geometric forms in rich quantities and in beautiful shapes. Trees have many peculiarities. Details of the tents reveal the similar style the Uygur and China Hatayı Turks used. The 'Rumi' motifs, or the stylizations of the animal and bird wings are used in beautiful harmonious colors.

The tombs are built with small stones cut in pyramidal shapes and are interesting to note for their striking resemblance to the pyramid in Sakkara, Egypt.

The many designs symbolizing lion heads on the whole have played an important role in the history of Turkish designing. The influence of Central Asia on Seljukian Turks can be observed on the many decorations they have done.

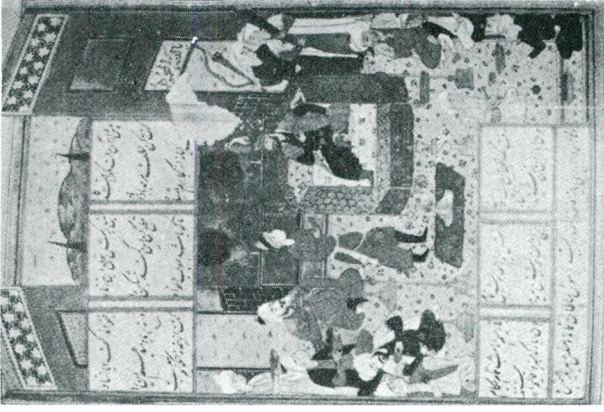
Among the many decorations of the miniatures we can see some of the fundamental curves of the ceramic motifs used by the Seljukians. This shows how widely stylized flowers and animals were used in the East.

The pictures are documentary in the fact that they reveal to the smallest detail of how the Sultan, his suite, and his people dressed at the time.

Shown On leaf 3b is a pharmacy and a small market.

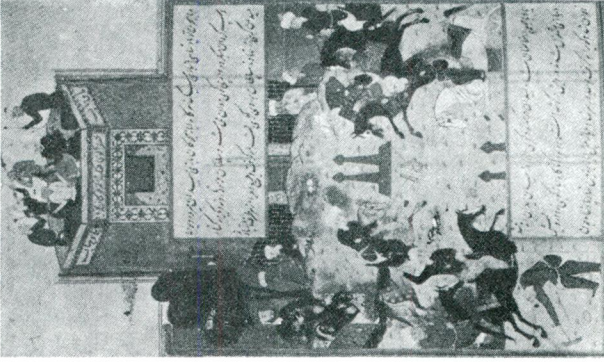
The cover of the book is probably not done at the period but is one of the first having a 'Şemse' on it.

It would be a real benefit to the literary and the artistic world to have this manuscript redone and printed with a true translation of its love story.



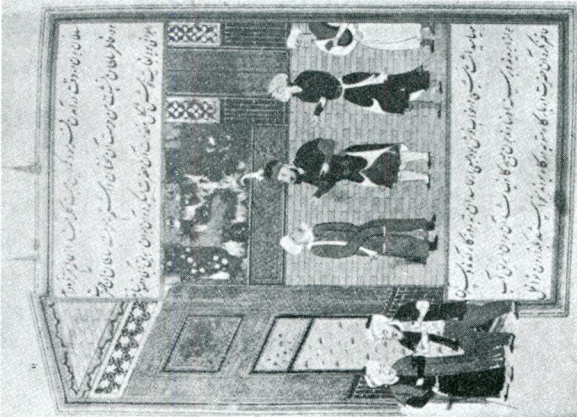
Res. 3 — Sultan Mahmud Sebüktekin'in
işret meclisi, aynı eser, v. 164 b.

Fig. 3 — Sultan Mahmud Sebüktekin's
festival company. From the same book
on leaf 164 b. The size is 13x18.



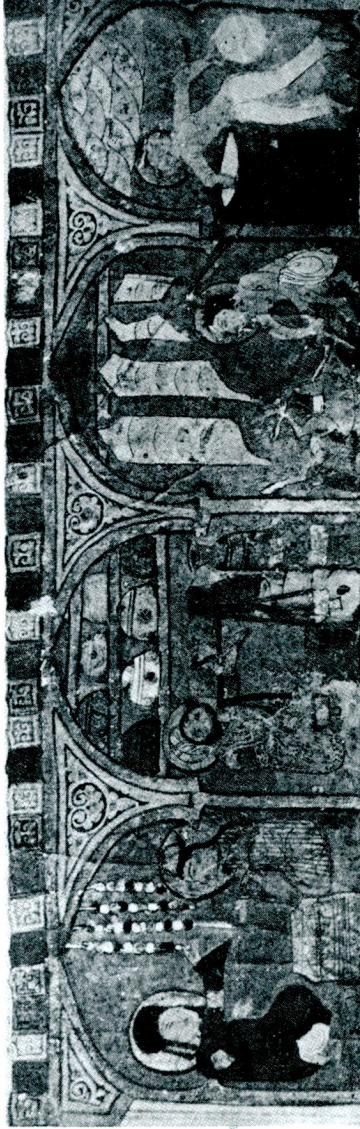
Res. 2 — Ayaz'ın Sultan Mahmud
Sebüktekin önünde top ve evkan
oynadığı meclis T. K. S. Hazine
K. 829. 166 a v.

Fig. 2 Sultan Mahmud and Ayaz
kneeling before balls and sticks
with bells on them. From the same
book. Leaf 166 a The size is 13x22,5



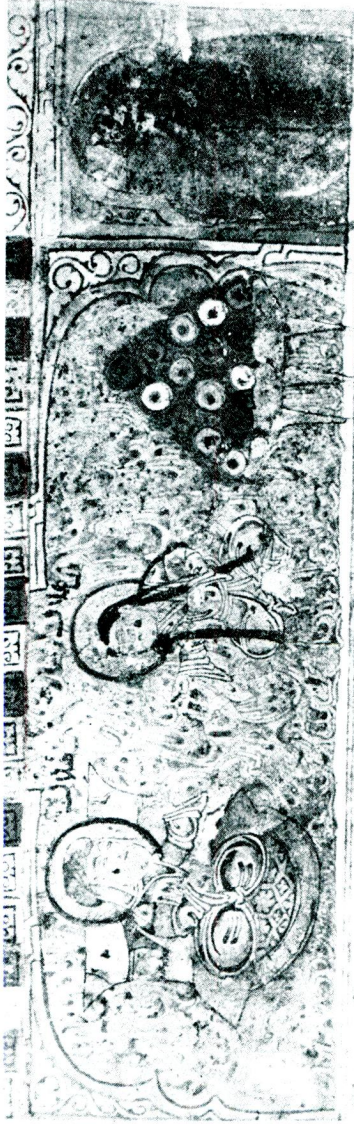
Res. 1 — Sultan Mahmud Gaznevî ve
şeyh Ebül Hasan al Harkânî, Topkapı
Sarayı M. Hazine K. No. 829.

Fig. 1 — Sultan Mahmud Gaznevî and
Şeyh Ebül Hasan al Harkani Meccalisül
Uşşak To be found at the treasury
library, No: 829 at the Topkapı Palace
Museum



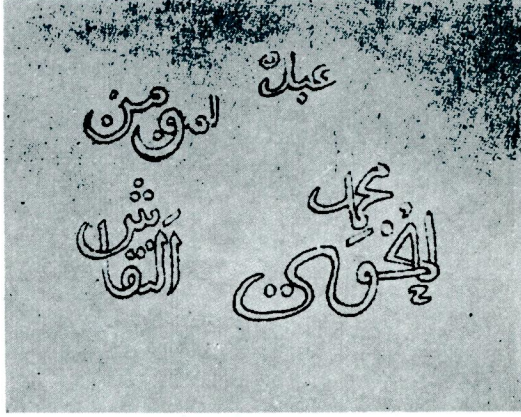
Res. 4 — Sultan Mahmud Sebüktekinine ithaf olunan zamanı Varaka ve Gülşah hikâyesi başında devrimin Türk minyatürlü sahifesi Topkapı Sarayı M. Hazine K. N. 841 v. 3b

Fig. 4 — A picture from the Varaka and Gülşah. At the Topkapı Palace Museum. The treasury library no: 841, leaf 3b.



Res. 5 — Aynı eserde devrinin Orta Asya Türk minyatürü bir diğer sahne v. 31 a

Fig. 5 — An other picture of the same book leaf 31 a.



Res. 6 — Bu eserin resimlerini çizen ressam Hoylu Muhammedün Nakkaş imzası aynı eser v 58 a
Fig. 6 — The signature of the painter. From the same book, leaf 58 a.