A Monkey Tale: Visual Evidence for a Fourteenth-Century Version of a Persian Folktale in the Berlin (Diez) and Istanbul (Hazine) Albums

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Abstract

The present contribution discusses a small series of images prepared in the Ğalā'irid/Ğalāyirid period, *i.e.*, in the second half of the 14th century. The images are contained in the albums preserved in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek (Diez) and the Istanbul Topkapı Palace Manuscripts Collection (Hazine). Illustrating the tale of a sexual encounter between a human man and a female monkey, the images treat a taboo theme whose possible source text has rarely been discussed. The narrative that most likely served as the source of inspiration for the images is now identified as corresponding to an episode of the Persian romance of *Salīm-e ğavāherī*.

Keywords

Ğalā'irid/Ğalāyirid painting – Diez Albums (Berlin) – Hazine Albums (Istanbul) – Monkeys – Bestiality – Salīm-e ğavāherī

Every now and then, the historical exploration of folktales in the Persian realm leads to the identification of fascinating new data.[1] An incidental find such as Nasrin Askari's (re-)discovery of the *Mūnes-nāme* ('The Book as an Intimate Friend'; Askari 2018; Askari 2021), a twelfth-century collection whose tales largely

[1] Nasrin Askari, Mariame Clément, Christiane Gruber, Christoph Rauch, Marianna Shreve Simpson, and Lale Uluç kindly read earlier drafts of the present essay, and I gratefully acknowledge their helpful comments. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers for their corrections and suggestions.

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correspond to those of the Ottoman Turkish compilation *Faraǧ baʿd aš-šidda* ('Relief after Hardship'), is spectacular as it adds a deep historical dimension to the Persian collections of the type *Ǧāmeʿ al-ḥekāyāt* ('Collection of Tales') that were particularly popular from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (Marzolph 2017a: 47–48). But even well-explored works of Persian literature such as the anonymous twelfth-century *Moǧmal at-tavārīx va 'l-qeṣaṣ* ('Compendium of History and Tales') may offer new insights relevant for the early history of tales, such as an early Persian version of an adventure that is best known from its integration into the travels of Sindbād the seafaring merchant in 'The Thousand and One Nights' (Marzolph 2017b). And if one interprets the data of other disciplines, such as the history of Islamic art, from the perspective of folk narrative research, one may arrive at surprising results.

It is the latter approach that I explore in the following considerations concerning a small series of images contained in the Berlin (Diez) and Istanbul (Hazine) albums. Whereas previous research has discussed the images without being able to identify the tale that is illustrated, I now identify that tale as being a close equivalent to a Persian folktale whose recent versions are known under the name of the tale's main protagonist as *Dāstān-e Salīm-e ǧavāherī* ('The Romance of the Jeweler Salīm'). My considerations mainly relate to the narrative that is illustrated and therefore do not address the artistic and art-historical dimensions of the images. Even so, a brief introduction to the albums is necessary in order to appreciate their historical relevance.

For the present purpose, suffice it to mention that the albums preserved in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek (Diez) and the Istanbul Topkapı Palace Manuscripts Collection (Hazine) contain paintings, drawings, and calligraphy dating from the thirteenth up to the eighteenth century, many of them clipped from old manuscripts. The five Berlin albums known under the name of their former owner, the Prussian diplomat and orientalist scholar Friedrich Heinrich von Diez (1751–1817), were 'rediscovered' and exhibited in 1956. Since then, historians of Islamic art such as Ernst Kühnel (1882–1964) and Mazhar Şevket İpşiroğlu (1908–1985) «made important early contributions relating to the taxonomic aspects of their paintings and drawings» (Roxburgh 1995: 112). Both the Diez and Hazine albums have repeatedly been the object of detailed study since the

mid-twentieth century, and more recently they were analyzed in the proceedings of a 2013 Berlin symposium cum exhibition (Gonnella *et al*. 2016). The Diez albums are currently available online in the digitized collections of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek; for the Hazine albums, Turkish historian of Islamic art, Lale Uluç, had projected a complete facsimile publication (Uluç 2016: 121 n. 2) whose current fate is, unfortunately, not secured.

Visual Analysis of the Images

Scholars of Islamic art agree that the four images under consideration here were prepared in the Ğalā'irid/Ğalāyirid period, *i.e*., in the second half of the fourteenth century (Duda 1971–1972: 163; Clément 2000). Two of the images are contained in the album Hazine 2153, with another one each in the albums Diez A fol. 71 and Diez A fol. 72. The three images (FIGURES 1, 2, 3) illustrating scenes of 'The tale of the man with the female monkey' were described by Clément in considerable detail (Clément 2000: 74–91).



FIGURE 1. The Man among the Monkeys (24.0 x 25.0 cm). Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, Hazine 2153, fol. 155v. © The Directorate of National Palaces, Topkapı Palace Manuscripts Collection, Istanbul, Turkey.

Four monkeys are climbing down from trees and surrounding a white-bearded man, who wears a great ornamental turban on his head and a leather belt adorned with silver around his waist. In his right hand he holds a club in threatening fashion over his shoulder, as he looks sideways at one of the monkeys, which approaches close to him.

Gnarled trees with serrated and intertwined branches, abundant foliage, and pomegranate trees laden with fruit render the surrounding landscape. A few rows of grasses and plants give the ground, from which an outcrop of rock sticks up, a positively furrowed appearance (Ipsiroglu 1967: 100).



FIGURE 2. The Man Mates with a Female Monkey (25.5 x 17.5 cm). Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Diez A fol. 71, p. 12.
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In a hidden arbor in front of a rock wall, a bearded man wearing a large decorated turban mates with a human-sized female monkey. Leaves and large, egg-shaped fruits lie on the ground. Outside the arbor stands a pomegranate tree with gnarled, fruit-bearing branches (İpşiroğlu 1964: 52; author's translation).



FIGURE 3. The Man, the Female Monkey, and her Young One (24.5 x 24 cm). Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Diez A fol. 72, p. 19. © Staatsbibliothek Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Germany.

The female monkey appears before the same bearded man [as in image no. 2] and, as the outstretched hand seems to indicate, speaks to him. With her right hand she holds her young one that is sitting astride her shoulder and holding onto her head with one hand. The man again wears a large turban and holds a club over his shoulder with his right hand. As he prepares to walk on or even flee, his eyes are directed, as if in shock or embarrassment, at the female monkey, who looks at him with a broad grin, her head tilted. Trees with

> gnarled branches, two curved, intertwined trunks of a vine with full red grapes and bizarre rock formations represent the landscape surroundings. As in the previous image [no. 2], the rocks are broken up into irregular blocks by jagged, white-bordered black lines that are shaded. Some rows of grasses and plants make the ground appear to be divided into furrows (İpşiroğlu 1964: 53; author's translation).

The fourth image was only summarily referred to by İpşiroğlu as illustrating «the same man's meeting with a devil» (Ipsiroglu 1967: 100). As the present assessment argues, it cannot be taken for granted that this image belongs to the same narrative as the other three images. The image can be described as follows (FIGURE 4):



FIGURE 4. The Man Meets a Demon (exact size unknown, but likely similar to the size of the three other images). Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, Hazine 2153, fol. 72r. © The Directorate of National Palaces, Topkapı Palace Manuscripts Collection, Istanbul, Turkey.

A young man wearing a white turban and a violet gown stands on the right side, facing a black demon on the left side. Apparently in awe, the man clutches to the long sleeves of his green undergarment as the demon addresses him. The demon's menacing face is shown in full profile, with exposed teeth and a long tusk pointing upwards, a white beard and white hair, and two curved and furrowed black horns. His hands correspond to human hands with five long and thin fingers with short fingernails; his feet are similar to those of birds, albeit with four toes facing forward and a single one pointing backward; all toes have long talons. With his right hand, the demon holds a wooden club over his shoulder. He is devoid of any clothes, with a white belly and a long black tail, and wearing golden rings around his upper arms, wrists, thighs, and ankles as well as just below his knees. The surrounding landscape is represented by a centrally placed gnarled tree and two smaller trees, equally gnarled, growing on rocks at the image's outer sides. Except for small tufts of grass and flowers with prominent white and yellow petals, the ground is barren and relatively flat. The blue sky holds three clouds in different shades of grey. In the void space on the left side of the upper part of the young man's body, there is a signature reading *kār-e Aḥmad-e Lāğīn*.

With the exception of image no. 4, so far unpublished, the other three images have been repeatedly published. İpşiroğlu reproduced the images together with his descriptions as belonging to «adventure stories and seafarers' yarns which were abundantly illustrated» (Ipsiroglu 1967: 55) since the fourteenth century. In fact, both albums contain a number of images whose narrative context has not yet been identified. In an early contribution on Ğalā'irid book illustrations, Dorothea Duda cursorily referred to images nos 1 and 3 as featuring a «representation that is extremely pressed into the expanded area» («extrem in die Fläche gepreßte Darstellung»; Duda 1971–1972: 163). In his survey of Persian painting, Oleg Grabar lamented the fact «that it has not been possible so far to reconstruct a story from this series of images. We do not even know what order they belong in, though it is clearly evident that they tell a story» (Grabar 2000: 97; see also Grabar 1999:

108). Shortly after, Mariame Clément studied the images in great detail, suggesting a tale in Bozorg *b.* Šahryār's *ʿAǧāʾib al-Hind* ('The Marvels of India') – to be discussed subsequently – as a possible, even a «more than likely» («plus que vraisemblable»; Clément 2000: 115, see also 74–118) source. At the end of her detailed interpretation of a Ghaznavid marble relief, Maria Vittoria Fontana wondered whether images nos 1 and 3 might illustrate a scene from «*ʿajāʾib* literature relating to the collection of fruits with the help of monkeys» (Fontana 2011: 456). Finbarr Barry Flood apparently took Fontana's tentative classification as fact and interpreted the two illustrations as «images of fruit-gathering apes and humans ... which may well have been inspired by ... oral or textual accounts of *ʿajāʾib*» (Flood 2011: 264). In detail, Flood further described image no. 1 as depicting «a standing figure ensnared by snarling pairs of apes or monkeys inhabiting the fruit trees that form a backdrop to the image. Despite the sense of menace that pervades it, the scene is curiously devoid of dramatic content» (Flood 2005: 265). In image no. 3, Flood discerned «a more dramatic variant on the same scene, with the menaced figure appearing to be in motion beneath a fruit tree, perhaps startled by the single pair of simians confronting him to his right» (Flood 2011: 265). Summarily, Flood judged that «both album images lack the sense of enjoined struggle and strong diagonal composition common to ... Jalayirid painting» (Flood 2011: 266). In addition, Julia Gonnella included the two images from the Diez album (nos 2 and 3) in her short catalogue of 'Masterpieces from the Serail', describing the former somewhat bashfully as «Man with Female Ape in an Embarrassing Embrace», and the latter as «Man with Female Ape and Offspring»; Gonnella tentatively attributed the images to an «unidentified episode from a popular story or seafaring tale» (Gonnella 2016: 648, nos 11 and 12). With the notable exception of the little-known thesis by Clément (Clément 2000), all previous assessments of the images content themselves with referring to an unidentified tale. As will be shown, the sexual encounter between a human man and a female monkey is key to identifying the narrative that the images illustrate.

Bestiality in Middle Eastern Narrative Tradition

Gershon Legman, the grandmaster of research on the 'dirty' joke, has argued beyond reasonable doubt that bestiality or sexual congress between humans and

animals is a standard feature in international narrative lore (Legman 1968: 191–216; see also Braun 2007). Middle Eastern Muslim narratives are no exception to the rule, in both popular and elite literature. Premodern Arabic jokelore tells of men having sex with sheep or donkeys (Marzolph 1992: 124, no. 495; 195, no. 849); the thirteenth-century Persian mystical poet Ǧalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī does not shy away from citing the tale of the mistress and her maid enjoying penetration by a mule's huge penis (Nicholson 1934: 82–86, corresponding to verses 1331–1429 of Rūmī's book 5); in an episode in the *Haft avrang* by the fifteenth-century Persian poet Jāmī, a lustful man has intercourse with a she-camel by mounting her with the help of a stick bound across the animal's legs (Simpson 1997: 92–97); in the undomesticated manuscript tradition, the Turkish jester Nasreddin Hodja has a very special relationship to his donkey (Başgöz and Boratav 1998: 29–32); and 'The Thousand and One Nights' includes stories in which a woman has sex with a monkey or a bear (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 2004: 262–263 no. 102, 442–443 no. 101; Bazzi 2002; Marzolph 2015a).

Already the oldest known compilation of travel accounts and yarns collected from Muslim seafaring men, the Arabic *ʿAǧāʾib al-Hind*, compiled in the first half of the tenth century (see, most recently, Ron-Gilboa 2022), supplies an important parallel for the sexual encounter between a man and a female monkey under consideration here (see also Clément 2000: 100–118). In a section of marvelous tales about monkeys, the compiler, the Persian captain Bozorg *b*. Šahryār ar-Rāmhormozī, tells the tale of «A sailor seduced by a monkey» (Freeman-Grenville 1981: 40–41 no. XL). The tale was narrated to him by a certain Muḥammad *b*. Bābišād, a person who contributed a considerable percentage of the tales Bozorg *b*. Šahryār published (Šahāb 2010: 51–77). Muḥammad *b*. Bābišād cites the tale as a personal experience story conveyed to him by «a sailor on a ship that belonged to him» (Freeman-Grenville 1981: 40) in the year 309/921.

The actual narrator happened to be part of a crew apparently trading at the Eastern shores of the Bay of Bengal. When his companions went to the city and he was left alone to guard their ship, he defended the ship against a band of monkeys. He was, however, impressed by the docile attachment of a female monkey who brought him bananas and even spent the night on the boat at his side. Eventually, he says, «She stirred my desire, and I had congress with her» (Freeman-Grenville

1981: 40). When, after a couple of months, it became apparent that the monkey was pregnant by him, he felt so much ashamed that he fled the place at a moment when the female happened to be absent. Having reached home after an adventurous journey, he eventually met his former companions who informed him «that when they got back to the bay, they had found a female monkey on board, who had given birth to a monkey or two with a human face, a hairless chest, and a shorter tail than is common among monkeys. They had not failed to imagine that the sailor was the father of the little monkeys, and that he had escaped in the ship's boat, with its appurtenances» (Freeman-Grenville 1981: 41).

Although the described adventure is generally close to the scenes illustrated in images nos 2 and 3, there are decisive differences making it unlikely that the images actually illustrate this particular tale (Clément 2000: 112–113). To mention only the most important variations: the sailor has sex with the monkey on the ship, and not in a 'hidden arbor'; the offspring they produce is likely more than one; and the sailor leaves the scene in a boat when the female monkey is not around.

The *Dāstān-e Salīm-e ǧavāherī*

There is, however, another tale of closely similar content to which I suggest the illustrations actually belong (see also Marzolph 2015b: 51). This is a Persian tale that is commonly known under the name of its main protagonist as *Dāstān-e Salīm-e ǧavāherī* ('The Romance of the Jeweler Salīm'; see Marzolph 1994a; Ẕu 'l-Feqārī and Ḥeydarī 2012: 1623–1660; Ğa'farī 2018). The relatively short romance, comprising some forty pages in the lithographed editions prepared in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has been popular in Iran since long, its earliest documented version dating from the Safavid period.

The romance begins with the opening of the frame tale in which the governor of the city of al-Wāsiṭ in Iraq, al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ *b*. Yūsuf (d. 95 AH / 714 CE), is so distressed that he requests someone to tell him a tale that will make him both laugh and cry at the same time. They find Salīm, who is lingering in prison, and bring him to the governor's presence. There, Salīm proceeds to tell the tale of his own adventures, every now and then being interrupted by al- Ḥaǧǧāǧ either laughing or crying. The tale has been studied in detail several times (see Mills 1991: 95–158; Marzolph 1994a; Ğa'farī 2008), so suffice it here to point out that Salīm's life is divided into

two distinctive periods. As the son of a wealthy jeweler, Salīm at first squanders his inheritance. This beginning features the profligate son as a stock character of pre-modern Middle Eastern storytelling who appears repeatedly in the Arabic tales of the 'Nights' (see Marzolph and van Leeuwen 2004: 808 *s.v.* W 131.1). Having repented, Salīm henceforth lives a pious life. The first part of Salīm's narrative is, essentially, a heroic tale in which he demonstrates his prowess in warfare.

The second part, of interest here, is devoted to the protagonist's marvelous adventures. It is partly similar to the tales of Sindbād the seafaring merchant with which it even shares the encounters with the strap-legged monster, the *dovāl-pā* (see Meier 1967; Tornesello 2002) and with the cannibal giant whom the hero blinds with a heated spit (Marzolph and van Leeuwen 2004: 383–389). When traveling in distant lands, Salīm at one point steals the marvelous 'night-shining jewel' (*gavhar-e šab-čerāġ*; Yāḥaqqī 2007: 711) from a sea cow. Right after, he arrives in the realm of the monkeys. It is this section of his adventures that the three images relate to. In the English translation by Reuben Levy the tale is sanitized beyond recognition (Levy 1923: 33–54, specifically 45–46), and the French translation by Auguste Bricteux relegates the explicit («inconvenant») sections of this «joli conte» to footnotes containing a faithful transcription of the Persian text that would only be available to scholars (Bricteux 1910: 237–303, specifically 270–273, 302 nos 30 and 31). The text's modern Persian editions are censored, due to the currently reigning cultural guidelines in Iran. For this reason, the following translation renders the text in full, following the version of an undated chapbook published in the first half of the twentieth century (see Marzolph 1994b: 22–26, 64–65 no. 90). The manuscript versions I was able to compare differ only in minor details (FIGURES 5.1 and 5.2). This is what Salīm narrates to al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ as a first-person narrative:

> After a day's walk, I came to an island that was full of fruits. In the trees, there were monkeys eating fruits. They picked some of the fruits and threw them down to me to eat. I said to myself, «What a strange place this is. It will be difficult to stay safe from the monkeys' claws». Whenever the monkeys gathered around me, I kept them at a distance with my club. The farther I went, the more numerous the monkeys got. Finally, I arrived at an open space (*ḥayāṭī*) and saw a

hundred thousand huts built from wood and plastered with mud. Having picked pistachios, almonds, and nuts, the monkeys brought them and filled their houses with it. When they came and saw me, they laughed. Having no choice, I stayed in their midst, but they did not molest me and went after their own occupation.

When I walked on, I saw a fine castle that they had adorned. A white monkey sat on a throne and numerous monkeys were around her at her service. When they saw me, they all laughed. The white monkey was the daughter of the king. She signaled her servants so that they took my hand and brought me to her. She took my hand and made me sit at her side. She gave orders to bring cooked fish (*māhī-ye poxte*), almonds, and coconuts, and I ate. She treated me very kindly. When the night fell, they prepared a bed of palm tree fibers on a platform. She took my hand and made me lie down. Then she sat beneath my feet, rubbed my feet, and worked her way upwards to my thighs until her hand reached my member. She took it, rubbed it against her breast, and kissed its head. Then she lay down by my side and gradually pulled me over her belly. [At this point, al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ laughs heavily and remarks that Salīm must really have been on fire].

Desire overcame me, so I grabbed her and had intercourse with her. I found such pleasure with her as you would (only) find with a human virgin. I pierced her so intensely that I fainted from pleasure (several times) until I was finished. When I regained my senses, she played with me again and did not let me sleep until the morning, and I did her several times. When the day rose, she got up, took my hand, and led me to the water. There, she rinsed water on me from the skin of a (dried) pumpkin and gave me a proper washing until I was finished. Then she dressed me up and kissed me a thousand times, following which she took my hand and led me to the house where we both installed ourselves on the throne. [The following passage repeats the events from having dinner to intensive intercourse until intense orgasm, euphemized as «I brought the judge to Bagdad»].

> At this point, I said to myself, «Hey, Salīm, you acquired a fine bride! You became a fine master! Would that I knew where the realm of Islam [= the civilized world] is, and which way to take to flee from here». Since I had nowhere to go and had no other plans, I submitted to fate and lived with the monkey until she gave birth. The servants gathered around her, and she gave birth to a son. A servant wrapped him in a cloth and brought him to me. They hugged me, led me to the bride and told me to hug her and to kiss her face to make her happy. I hugged her another time. [Al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ laughs again and marvels at Salīm's strange experiences]. After a couple of days, I said to myself, «How silly it is to waste my time living with the animals! However long I live here, I will have to be the monkey's husband. And when the son grows up, he will not let me stay alive. It is better to leave»!
>
> One day, when the monkeys had gone to a far-away place to fetch provisions, I profited from the occasion, took my club, and started to flee. I walked with utmost haste until the afternoon. When I turned around and looked back, I saw my monkey wife with the child on her shoulders running after me and wailing loudly. When she came close to me, I thrust the club in the direction of her head so that she turned back. As I walked on, she again ran after me until dusk, crying and lamenting. When she realized that this was to no avail and that I would not return, she threw the child from her shoulders to the ground, stamped her foot on it, and ripped it apart. She threw one half towards me, grabbed the other half by the neck and left, all the while wailing aloud. I praised God that my relation to her had ended and that I was free.

If one compares the events mentioned in the above text with the scenes depicted in the album paintings, their close correspondence is evident. Even if the protagonist of the images might not be the very same Salīm but another unknown character, the adventures this character experiences are still the same. The initial image shows the man arriving in the jungle and encountering the fruit-gathering monkeys for the

first time. Holding onto his club with his right hand and ready to defend himself, if necessary, the man's left hand signals a self-assured caution. Although the monkey at his back appears to address him, the man does not make the impression of being afraid or attempting to run away. The monkey is obviously not attacking or menacing the man, but simply gesturing towards him as monkeys do. The second image depicts the man's intercourse with the monkey princess in one of the huts constructed by the monkeys. In this image, the artist has devoted special attention to the fruits gathered in the foreground as provisions and to the comfortable bed of leaves prepared for the lovers. The hut, although a simple construction, is effectively covered with a roof of leaves. With its backside, the hut appears to lean against the rocks while its front consists of two open doors on hinges. And the third image depicts Salīm as he flees the scene. His upper garment is partially tucked into his belt so as not to hinder him while running away. As he looks back, his monkey wife with their common offspring astride her shoulders implores him to stay. The helpless grin on her face signals her emotional despair and imminent murderous reaction. The centrally placed rock stresses the couple's separation.



FIGURES 5.1 and 5.2. Two illustrated scenes in an early twentieth-century lithographed chapbook version of *Salīm-e ğavāherī*. © National Library and Archives of Iran, Teheran, Iran.

Particularly in images nos 2 and 3, the depicted fruits emphasize the respective image's central point: the pomegranates in image no. 2 stand for a woman's breasts as well as her vulva (Naaman 2013); and the fully grown grapes in image no. 3 might symbolize sin and transgression, as Muslim commentators of the Qur'ān at times interpret the «tree which Ādam and Ḥawwā' were ordered to stay away from [as in sūra 2: 35] ... and refrain eating the fruit of» (Kister 1993: 146) as grapes. In this manner, the three images clearly illustrate a story corresponding to that of Salīm, supplying visual evidence that such a tale was already known towards the end of the fourteenth century. Moreover, the high artistic standard of the illustrations indicates that the tale was appreciated by members of a wealthy and likely highly educated social stratum that could afford to pay for the preparation of a precious illustrated manuscript. So, obviously, this is another «elite folktale» (Askari 2019).

A different narrative?

Obvious as the correspondence between the text and images is, it only holds valid for the three images illustrating a consecutive narrative or, at least, a clearly structured episode from a longer narrative. It is not valid for the fourth image. Although it is tempting to relate the fourth image, with the man meeting the demon, to another episode in the romance of Salīm, there is no event offering a close correspondence. Notably, the demons Salīm meets during his travels appear after his adventure in the monkey realm. At this point, one must pay attention to the fact that the character in the three images illustrating the adventure with the monkeys is an old man. His hair, mustache, and a fully grown, although fairly thin beard are white. Contrasting with this, the character meeting the demon is a young man whose youthfulness is emphasized by his oval, almost round face, full black hair, and a barely grown mustache and beard. If İpşiroğlu is right in presuming that the depicted character is the same one as in the other scenes, the depicted event must have taken place several years before the adventure with the monkeys. Since there is no such event in the romance of Salīm, one remains at a loss to identify the event's exact nature.

The fourth image is also fascinating for several other features. First, the demon is depicted in a manner reminiscent of the demons in the style of the artist known

as Siyāh Qalam, whose images are frequent in Hazine 2153 (İpşiroğlu 1976; Weis 2021). In particular, one of the oft-reproduced demons by Siyāh Qalam in Hazine 2153, fol. 46v, similarly wears golden bangles around his upper arms, wrists, and ankles. It is tempting to imagine both artists as drawing on shared notions of what a demon should look like (Figures 6.1 and 6.2).





Figure 6.1. A demon, detail from Hazine 2153, fol. 72r. © The Directorate of National Palaces, Topkapı Palace Manuscripts Collection, Istanbul, Turkey. Figure 6.2. A demon, Hazine 2153, fol. 46v. Public domain.

Second, the demon in Hazine 2153, fol. 72r, has the same type of bird feet as the monkeys, with four toes facing forward and a single one pointing backward. This gives rise to the interpretation of either the demon being similar to the monkeys or the monkeys being some kind of demonic creatures.

And third, it is this very image, the only one of the four images considered here, that bears an artist's signature, giving the name of a certain Aḥmad Lāğīn. The bearing of the latter feature is, however, limited, since Dorothea Duda in her survey

of the Ǧalā'irid paintings in the Istanbul albums made it repeatedly clear that most signatures in the paintings are of a dubious nature and are likely to have been added at a later date (Duda 1971–1972). Altogether, the signature of Aḥmad Lāǧīn appears in a total of seven additional images in the Hazine album (Necipoğlu 2016: 548 with n. 44). Art historians will have to decide whether the individual execution of these images justifies the attribution to the same artist.

That the exact scene illustrated in image no. 4 cannot be identified leads to another question that can presently not be solved: what tale is actually illustrated here? The romance of Salīm is a fairly short text. In the lithographed editions prepared in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it would have been published separately as a chapbook. However, in previous centuries, the romance would likely have been part of a larger compilation of narratives, such as the *Ǧāmeʿ al-ḥekāyāt*, for which the inclusion of the romance is actually documented in various versions (Bricteux 1910: 237–303; Haag-Higuchi 1984: 51–53, no. 15a = Xādīš and Ǧaʿfarī 2011: 227–246, no. 15). The earliest known example for this type of compilation, the twelfth-century *Mūnes-nāme*, does not contain the romance. But since the repertoire of these compilations was fluid, it is not unlikely that an unidentified fourteenth-century version might have contained the romance. On the other hand, since the character in image no. 4 is considerably younger than the one in the other three images, the former might as well belong to a different tale, and the stylistic similarities in the image's execution should not mislead one to presume that the image belongs to the very same 'monkey tale'.

An elite folktale

As Nasrin Askari convincingly argued in her discussion of the *Mūnes-nāme* and similar works (Askari 2019), this kind of literature was by no means popular literature in the present sense of being commodified, *i.e.*, produced and distributed in hundreds of copies. It was rather a type of instructive and entertaining literature enjoyed by the elites in copies of superb calligraphy and exquisite illustrations. In the present case, the elite context of the narrative is additionally emphasized by the relatively large number of images corresponding to a short text. In other words: the illustrations follow one another in a rapid sequence, with at least one illustration on every other page, maybe even on consecutive pages. Altogether, this feature suggests

a lavishly illustrated precious manuscript with probably several dozens of images (FIGURES 7.1 and 7.2).





FIGURES 7.1 and 7.2. Fragments of foliage: Diez A fol. 71, fol. 4, no. 2 and fol. 44, no. 6. © Staatsbibliothek Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Germany.

As a matter of fact, two fragments in the album Diez A fol. 71 (fol. 4, no. 2, and fol. 44, no. 6) display a foliage strongly reminiscent of the foliage in the two images in the album Hazine 2153 (here nos 1 and 4), probably indicating that the fragments belong to images illustrating other scenes from the same larger narrative. Be that as it may, it will only be possible to identify the larger narrative once additional evidence is found.

Narrative Analysis of the Images

So much as for the visual aspects of the images. As for the narrative aspects, the very nature of the tale about the man's encounter with the monkeys appears in a different light when interpreted from an anthropological or ethnographical perspective. In both the tale and the images, the creatures the protagonist meets are monkeys, *i.e.*, non-human animals. But what kind of animals are they exactly? The Iranian scholar Maʿṣūme Ebrāhīmī suggests that the monkeys actually correspond to the mythical creatures known as *nasnās* (Ebrāhīmī 2010: 73–75; see Viguera 1974; Vilozny 2018). The (now extinct) *nasnās* is usually imagined as having had only a single foot and a single arm, hence the popular etymology *nesf nās* ('half a human being'). Since a scientific approach explains the *nasnās* as a monkey species (Viré 1986: 133–134), this suggestion does not lead to a promising understanding.

Already the fourteenth-century Arab traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (Gibb and Beckingham 1994: 851–852) was amazed at the alleged social stratification and hierarchical organization of monkey society (in Ceylon). In the present text, the monkey society is also organized hierarchically, as Salīm has his sexual encounter not just with a randomly available female monkey but with the daughter of the monkey king who consciously singled him out, obviously enjoying a privileged position. Notably, the alleged monkeys display truly astonishing emotional and technical capacities. The monkey infant is taken care of by the community who not only share their compassion with the exhausted mother but also urge the baby's father to console and hug the mother. The huts the creatures live in are not simple shelters but diligently constructed buildings with solid roofs and plastered walls. The creatures also do not sit or sleep on the barren ground or in the trees but use a specifically designed platform (*taxt*) as either seat or throne or as an elevated structure to prepare their bed.

Most fascinating of all, however, is the fact that in addition to the raw fruits that constitute their main diet and provisions, the creatures prepare cooked food, as evidenced by the explicitly mentioned cooked fish Salīm is served. Cooking relies on the control of fire, this being a capacity that not a single animal in this world is capable of. As a matter of fact, anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss identified the capacity of preparing a cooked meal as germane to human beings only, hereby setting human 'culture' apart from the world of 'nature' in which animals

consume their food raw (Lévi-Strauss 1969). If one consequently applies this assessment to the present narrative, the creatures the protagonist meets are not monkeys but humans. Not making any effort to understand their unfamiliar language and ignorant of their technical and cultural achievements, however modest they might have appeared to him in comparison to those of his own society, the protagonist solved the apparent incongruity between perception and fact by relegating the strange humanoids to the realm of *ʿaǧāʾib*/marvels and identifying them as monkeys, an interpretation the illustrator follows. But whereas the creatures in the narrative cited by Bozorg *b*. Šahryār appear to have been actual monkeys, the term 'monkey' in Salīm's narrative is but a code resulting from the protagonist's ignorance and anthropocentric arrogance.

Salīm's perception of the unknown creatures as animals also justifies his ruthless ethics of survival that, in addition to the adventures both protagonists share, links to Sindbād's ethics of violence (Molan 1978) in which ultimate success retrospectively justifies even the protagonist's most abominable deeds. Taking the imagined future event of being killed by his own offspring as solid fact, Salīm feels entitled, even obliged, to desert his monkey wife whose favors as an object he had previously exploited for the narcissistic satisfaction of his sexual needs. Although not primarily intended, Salīm also accepts the violent dismembering and death of their offspring without remorse, instead ruthlessly praising the event as concluding the definite rupture of his unpromising relation with his monkey wife. Similar to his active killing of the strap-legged monster and the cannibal giant in the following adventures, Salīm's passive acceptance of the events arises from his limited capacity to perceive and comprehend the strange creatures he considers to be monkeys as what they actually are: human beings living in harmony with nature and requiring nothing less than love and loyalty from their partners.

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