The Harvard University Art Museums own two well-known and often reproduced sixteenth-century Persian paintings whose subject matter seems to be quite clear and yet has never been elucidated. One (fig. 1) is usually entitled “A Camp Scene”, the other one (fig. 2) has been provided with many titles, including the romantic “Nighttime in a Palace.” Because of their almost identical size (28.6 cm x 20 cm for the “Palace,” and 28 cm x 19 cm for the “Camp”) and stylistic compatibilities, these paintings are usually considered together, as though they came from the same original source—the same book or the same workshop, perhaps even the same hand. When mentioned, as they frequently are, in scholarly or popular literature, they elicit general admiration for the quality and visual luxury of their artistry. Large numbers of human figures, animals, buildings or tents, and in general “things” of all sorts executed in brilliant colors fill their spaces organized along powerful vertical and diagonal compositional patterns. A faded inscription (fig. 3) on one of the tents in “A Camp Scene” attributes it, and by extension its companion, to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali (fl. 1550–74), a painter about whose life and works a great deal is known. Regardless of the validity of this attribution, rather than signature, made at some early but unspecified time, these images truly belong with the masterpieces of Safavid painting of the middle of the sixteenth century such as the illustrations of the Diwan of Hafiz, dated ca. 1525, at the Harvard University Art Museums, the Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp, datable to 1525–35 and spread among many collections all over the world, the Khamsa of Nizami dated 1529–43 at the British Library, the Haft Awrang of Jami in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., completed around 1565, and an undated Falnama shared by many libraries and museums. They differ significantly in style and in quality from the sixteenth-century works usually attributed to Shiraz, Baghdad, or Tabriz.

The paintings have remained puzzling for two reasons. One is their physical appearance. Both paintings had been cut into half and, after having been acquired by the Fogg Museum, repasted together to make them again into single images.

Cutting them in two was, at first glance, senseless, even if alterations are known in the complex process of preserving paintings which developed in the traditional libraries and collections of India, Iran, and Ottoman Turkey. This maiming leads, however, to fascinating questions about the early history of these paintings and, by extension, about the function of painting in Safavid and later Persian art.

The other puzzle posed by these paintings is displayed by our inability to provide them with titles, or at least difficulty in doing so. As a rule, all Persian paintings have a primary subject matter, which is relatively easy to identify by any student of pictorial art, even by one with little experience in small-size images and the prevailing range of illustrations. This is so because classical Persian painting, especially at its highest level of development in the sixteenth century, operated through the manipulation of a restricted set of features. Tents, buildings, open landscapes, and enclosed gardens comprise a small number of spatial type forms around which individual artists develop variations. Figures can easily be divided into three groups. There are active agents or participants involved in some concrete and discrete action; these are usually identifiable through a denotive sign (e.g., an item of clothing or a weapon), a gesture, a pose, or location within the painting. Then, there are attendants accompanying or surrounding participants: soldiers on horseback with their prince, ladies-in-waiting surrounding a princess, musicians or boon companions around an enthroned ruler. A third category consists of witnesses who are not part of the action but who observe it from somewhere. They are at times provided with movements or gestures (the most common one is the finger to the mouth) indicating their function as observers. At other times, they are noth-
Fig. 1. Camp scene. Mid 17th century. 28.4 cm × 20 cm. Harvard University Art Museums, 1958.75. (Photo: courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the collection of Louis J. Cartier)
Fig. 2. City and palace. Ca. 1539-43. 28.6 cm x 20 cm. Harvard University Art Museums, 1958.76. (Photo: courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the collection of Louis J. Cartier)
ing more than extras or *figurants* added for compositional purposes, but without connection to the main scene, such as the individuals appearing behind the landscape in many miniatures.

Gestures, clothes, poses, attributes of all sorts, or conventional signs like the finger to the mouth allow the identification of specific narrative subjects, even if the topic is provided with a lot of extraneous materials or deals with a narrative topic—such as the old woman in front of Sanjar or the hidden Bahram Gur observing women frolicking in a pool—which is not self-evident but requires detailed knowledge of unusual stories from Persian literature. In addition to subjects taken from oral or written lore, there were paintings, often used as frontispieces, which illustrated generic themes—a feast, an audience, or a hunt. They used the same cast of characters and the same settings as narrative illustrations, but they usually contained fewer original or unexpected iconographic details. The two paintings in the Harvard University Art Museums can, at least at first glance, neither be explained as typological examples of some well-known motif nor shown to be particularly obvious illustrations of an identifiable story.

From the immediate and superficial evidence provided by the paintings themselves and in the absence of any external document about them, we can propose four logical explanations of their subject matter, each of which requires a different kind of supportive investigation. One is that the paintings may indeed illustrate a narrative which cannot be understood because we are unable to identify the key players of each image and no commonly known story immediately comes to mind as we look at them. But, if one cannot read the image with the mental recollection of a particular story, can one imagine a story from the indications of the painting? A detailed analysis can, perhaps, bring out features leading to an existing but less frequently illustrated narrative. The justification of this hypothesis requires a careful untangling of the components of the paintings and then a search for possible sources of literary inspiration.

A second hypothetical explanation derives from a mode of representation present in Western art since antiquity and flourishing from the Renaissance onward. It is the allegory, a composition seeking to express abstract ideas. Our images could be illustrations of nomadic life as an ideal or of a peaceful city as a symbol of good government executed for the edification or glorification of a prince or patron or for some other ideological or personal purpose. At a lesser level of iconographic sophistication, what seems to be an allegory might simply be a genre painting, the illustration of some theme pleasing to viewers and collectors. Examples of genre painting certainly existed in the sixteenth century and can probably be found earlier as well. In order to check this hypothesis, we need to seek examples which pose the same problem in interpretation and propose the existence of a particular genre in Persian painting, that of the image message, as opposed to image illustration, in which topics of many sorts serve to visualize an idea, to reflect a personal need or an event, or simply to provide visual pleasure.

A third hypothesis is that these are atelier exercises, comparable to our own contemporary portfolios and combining a large number of independent visual units (tent with camel, breast feeding, mosque, reception in a palace) arranged like an exhibition of models in order to demonstrate the wealth or artfulness of a painter's repertoire. Such exercises were often kept in albums, perhaps even made for them. A single composition of exemplars could well have been ordered by a collector or even by the master of a *kitabkhāna* (an atelier with a library attached to a princely court), who would have kept samples of the work of available artists.
Finally, a fourth hypothesis is that they are forgeries which picked up a set of motifs from sixteenth-century painting and made a pastiche or a collage of everything that could fit. For this hypothesis to be maintained, one would need to demonstrate that, around 1900 at the latest and possibly as early as in the seventeenth century, such high-quality forgeries of sixteenth-century masterpieces could have been made. For practical purposes, it is not a hypothesis we shall consider in this paper, because it is contrived by the mastery of all details in the two Harvard paintings.

Narrative, allegory, exercise, collage, and forgery seem to be our a priori choices in interpreting these paintings. To justify any one of them, we must first identify and absorb what we can see in the paintings themselves. In this sense, our procedure is akin to the contemporary approach of art criticism which involves the beholder in the interpretation of the work of art, in matching what one sees with what one understands. Both are based on a set of more or less conscious assumptions about the impact a work of art can have on its observer. In other words, we are concerned with the original intention of a work of art confronted with the limitations of its contemporary observer. We have to assume that any work of art meant something to its patron and creator and that therefore it was conveyed in a language that they shared, but that we probably no longer share with them. Our difficulty lies in bridging the uncertainty of that gap in an acceptable way.

This difficulty can best be illustrated when we contrast understanding Persian miniatures with the complex iconographic analyses carried out on more or less contemporary late Gothic book illustrations and Flemish paintings, whose relatively small size and passion for details have many parallels in our examples. But the investigation of the Iranian Islamic tradition has so far not yielded the intellectual framework of philosophical and related texts or of ritual behavior that would allow for the establishment of patterns of thought and categories of symbols applicable to the visual arts.

Such considerations did not trouble the two or three generations of investigating connoisseurs who have written about these paintings. A rapid survey of their work will set the stage. We will continue with an analysis of each painting, with three purposes in mind: to lead viewers and readers into the details of the paintings; to propose and, in one case, we hope to demonstrate, the subject of the illustration; and to provide arguments useful to any one of our working hypotheses. We will concentrate on the precise analysis of the two paintings and, for the most part, limit our parallels to the high Safavid art of the middle of the sixteenth century. Then we will make a number of observations about the physical state of the two paintings. These observations will lead us to propose a history of the fate of the paintings over the centuries, to review the attribution to Mir Sayyid 'Ali, about which so much has been written, and to propose our own explanation for the original significance and function of the paintings.

The paintings were first known as the property of the French jeweler Louis Cartier. There is no available record of when he acquired them or from whom, but, in line with a pattern followed by other Parisian craftsmen-collectors like Henri Vever, it was probably shortly before World War I, even though they do not seem to have been shown in the major exhibitions of Persian or Islamic art held in the earlier years of the century. When they came into his possession, they had already been cut in two so he owned in fact four miniatures. They are mentioned and illustrated for the first time in A. Sakisian's survey of Persian painting published in 1929. Sakisian's primary concern was to establish and confirm Mir Sayyid 'Ali as the artist who made them. The London exhibition of 1931 did not include these pages, although it did exhibit other paintings attributed to Mir Sayyid 'Ali. The learned editors of the catalogue add, however, to their mention of the pages that "none of these can be said with any confidence to be genuine," a view still expressed to one of us in the seventies by one of the authors of the catalogue.

The paintings were exhibited in New York in 1933 and Maurice Dimand recognized that the "four miniatures" were in fact only two. Dimand identified the subject of one as "Khusraw in his palace, with a street scene behind" and the other one as the birth of Majnun, thereby associating them, rather highhandedly, with well-known heroes of Persian legendary history and lyrical literature, more specifically with characters from Nizami's Khamsa, written in the late twelfth century and frequently illustrated after the end of the fourteenth. The Survey of Persian Art in 1938 published all four halves together, but curiously without matching upper and lower segments on the same plate and without saying anything in the text about their belonging together. The first fairly
thorough description by Ivan Stchoukine came out in 1959. The titles he provides—“Scènes de la vie d’une tribu nomade,” and “Scènes de la vie urbaine”—are, of course, unusual for Persian miniatures and suggest genre rather than allegory. Stchoukine was troubled by their subject matter and does not return to them in his later chapters dealing with the visual components, the basic morphology, of Persian painting in the second half of the sixteenth century. He did not relate them to Nizami’s text and stated explicitly, after Dimand, that these four compositions originally were two, that each one was framed with an illuminated border, and that the halves are easy to put together.

The next step in dealing with these paintings was taken by S. Cary Welch, Jr., long-time curator of Islamic and Indian art at the Harvard Museums, in the masterful presentation he and the late Martin Dickson made of the Shahnāma of Shah Tahmasp, and, in a more summary form, in one general book, Persian Painting, Five Royal Manuscripts, published in 1972, and in the catalogue, Wonders of the Age, of the great exhibition of Safavid art held in London and Cambridge in 1979. His main objective was to define the life and art of Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, known mainly through his years in India. His views on that painter were systematized and extended in an essay by Anthony Welch.

The painter’s oeuvre, insofar as it pertains to our miniatures, is defined first of all by one miniature, signed or attributed by a later hand, in the magnificent 1539–43 Khamsa of Nizami in the British Library (fig. 4). Through it, Cary Welch identifies a style of painting, a manner in which details of things (beards or clothes) are depicted with great precision and technical energy, but without deep human content. Because of the apparently close parallels which exist between the Harvard “camp scene” and the British Library page, Cary Welch even thought that the former was originally meant to be an illustration for the 1539–43 manuscript, just as seems to be the case with a battle scene in the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, where a small text passage from Nizami is incorporated into the miniature. He further suggested that it would have been removed from the manuscript when it was refurbished in the seventeenth century. The subject would have been “A Family Council in Progress,” transforming some unidentified episode from Nizami’s account of the loves of Layla and Majnun into a formal gathering around a family legal problem. Cary Welch is less precise in attributing a subject to what he calls a “nocturnal palace scene,” but posits that it was by the same hand and could have belonged to the same manuscript.

Cary Welch and Anthony Welch’s proposed explanation is the operating hypothesis of the moment. Some skepticism has been voiced about it, but other recent surveys, while acknowledging and accepting the attribution of the paintings to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali and recognizing the parallelism between the camp scene and a painting from the London Nizami manuscript, do not commit themselves as to the actual physical provenance of the miniatures. Nor do they propose alternative explanations for, or identifications of, the subject matter of the paintings. In a thoughtful essay, Günner İnal used them to argue for certain ways of realism in Persian art and understood the palace scene to be an illustration from Nizami, but without specifying the exact subject it illustrated. Her arguments, especially the astute one that this miniature illustrates the passage of a subject matter from being an illustration to a genre, have not been picked up by subsequent scholarship. In line thus with decades of scholarship devoted primarily to sorting out and organizing the mass of materials found in libraries, museums, and private collections according to traditional methods of connoisseurship and with the aim of attributing as many paintings as possible to individual artists or hands, there is, then, general agreement on the qualities and authorship of the two paintings. But this agreement is combined with a great deal of uncertainty about the source from which they came and with studied vagueness about their subject matter and about the context in which such images would have been made and appreciated. Why would so much effort by a particularly talented painter have been spent on illustrating something so apparently different from the usual topics found in Persian painting? Were these images made for a book, for an album, or for some other purpose? Why would they have been maimed so carefully and so senselessly?

Such are questions to which we will try to provide answers that may help to explain more than just the time and processes that made these paintings possible. They may also help elucidate why the paintings continue to attract attention, even in cultures and times that are quite different from those of their creation and why they are used in such unexpected ways—as jigsaw puzzles for the amusement of thousands, as
TWO SAFAVID PAINTINGS

illustrations with few comments in general books on Persian or Islamic art, or, cropped by a few centimeters and mirror-reversed, as totally anachronistic illustrations for Anatolian Turkic nomadic encampments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in a recent volume on Anatolian architecture; or accompanied by vacuous comments about the "labyrinth of pleasure" (palace scene) and the "eternal movement of man between this world and the next" (camp scene).

Let us turn now to the two paintings and try to ex-
plore their subject matter through the analysis of their basic components. They are completed compositional units—what semiotists call syntagms—as well as the morphemes or “optemes,” the smallest visually perceived units of meaning. The placement, articulation, and relationship to each other of these two types of components organize the image and create visual statements. We shall begin with the camp scene, which turns out to be easier to understand visually and to explain iconographically.

CAMP SCENE

The camp scene acquired its name for the obvious reason that it depicts nine prominent tents, more than any contemporary miniature, aside from a few battle scenes. Four are relatively large, basically semicircular yurts with a single central pole, known as trellis tents. Many such tents are found in Persian painting, and all of them exhibit more or less the same technical and ornamental variants. Four are the low and lengthy type called tunnel tents; they resemble traditional Arabian tents, except that only one of them is in the usual black color. One tent is conical and white, a rarer, but not uncommon occurrence. The encampment is crowded with people and animals. There are twenty men, ten women, two children and one infant, two camels, two donkeys, two sheep, one lamb, one ram, one goat, one cow, one ox, one dog, one cat, one duck, and two generic birds.

Tents, people, and animals are depicted on a hilly, arid-looking, pastel-pink terrain with a few stones. At the top of the page is a narrow strip of blue sky with two clouds and in the middle a blank bluish rectangular patch which was added later for reasons to be explained. The upper part of the landscape is rocky and set diagonally across the miniature, so as to allow for a second light-colored terrain to rise to the right, preceded by a brook and a tree with a twisted trunk. The brook flows down to the center of the composition and then veers to the right behind a tent. At the bottom of the picture, the terrain changes abruptly into a lush dark-green meadow with flowers, birds, and a pond covered by a patch in the lower right corner.

This green meadow serves as the forecourt or garden for a large and fancy tent which is the anchor of a U-shaped composition of seven tents set one above the other in two groups and includes two tents to the right which are located beyond the edges of the main section of the landscape. The eighth and ninth tents, in white and light brown, are almost completely hidden behind the rocky edges of the landscape in the upper middle part of the painting. The artist’s name, Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, appears in dark blue ink on the upper part of the uppermost white tent.

Six of the nine tents shelter or exhibit an activity which usually extends beyond the tent itself. In the largest one (fig. 5), two bearded older men sit on decorated carpets with poetic inscriptions of a type known both in other miniatures and among actually preserved rugs. They appear to be conversing or, perhaps more accurately, one of them is expounding on something to the other one. The man on the right is accompanied by three other men seated behind him and forming a diagonal line starting in the lower middle part of the painting and stretching to the lower right corner. Three younger men stand behind the line of seated men and one of them wears a distinctive and unusual pointed cap as well as a striped tunic (fig. 6). A similarly dressed personage appears two more times in this miniature. Across from the group to the right are four men: two sit just below the man inside the tent. Their gestures tell us that all seven principals are engaged in animated conversation, and it is possible that an exchange of gifts is about to take place. All but one of them sport beards, and they wear a type of robe and turban with a strap around the chin often used in Persian painting to indicate Arabs in or from the desert. Two pitchers, two books, a pencase and an inkwell are negligently strewn on the grass around them, but the neat highlighting of seven covered cups (one of which has lost its lid) emphasizes the more or less equal importance of the seven men in the half-circle in the lowest part of the picture. Behind the two personages sitting on the grass to the left, two attendants are shown standing; one holds a large covered dish, the other a piece of cloth.

Behind the main white yurt and to the left is an open red yurt handsomely decorated with simurghs; its top hood is partly open for the circulation of air. A young woman sits there, holding a handkerchief and attended by a maid. She rests her head against her left hand, and behind her head there is a profile of another person (fig. 7). The next yurt is large and painted in simple green with geometric borders. Its entrance is open just enough to allow a crouching woman to take a dish out. In front of her is a big cooking pot over a fire, and a cat hisses nearby. A
Fig. 5. Two bearded men seated on carpets. Detail of fig. 1.

Fig. 6. Two of the three standing men. Detail of fig. 1.

Fig. 7. Woman and her maid in a yurt. Detail of fig. 1.
young shepherd or maybe simply a child is shown hugging or leading a sheep; he seems to be moving toward the woman at the entrance of the green yurt. Behind that yurt another woman is milking a goat shown with a striking attempt at perspective, and a younger woman is feeding a saddled donkey. A laden camel is quietly hiding behind the tent.

In the upper middle part of the painting two men are talking in front of two largely invisible tents. They are almost entirely hidden as they stand behind the edges of the landscape. One of them wears the same unusual cap and striped coat as the personage in the lower right corner, while the other one carries a turban around a red baton, an item of clothing usually reserved for the representation of court attendants. A twisted tree trunk separates these men from a woman with henna-covered hands washing clothes in a large round bowl (fig. 8). Behind her stands a smaller blue-and-white ceramic bowl apparently filled with already washed clothes. Further to the right a young man, dressed in undergarments and wearing a small skull cap, feeds the fire under a big cauldron. An older man who holds prayer beads in his right hand approaches the washerwoman; he may have come on the donkey whose head alone appears. The lower part of the man’s body is blocked by two tents: one is a fancy yurt with an open hood, and the other a conical tent.

In front of these tents are two men conversing. One is dressed like the people in and around the main tent, while the other one wears the strange cap already seen twice in this painting. An ox, with a bell around his neck and a richly decorated saddle on his back, is also visible. The lower parts of these personages and of the ox are hidden by the landscape. Close to them, almost in the middle of the upper part of the page, a young boy fills a vessel with water from the stream. Next to him a saddled camel is tied to a bush. In front of the camel there is a small black tunnel tent that is almost completely open. It shelters two women (fig. 9). One, with henna decoration on her hands and feet, is holding one of the wooden posts of the tent. The other one, also adorned with henna on hands and feet, is breast-feeding a baby.

Farther down, in front of a small white tent, a man is seen pouring something into a dish from a leather pouch strung on two poles (fig. 10). The woman at the entrance to the tent is waiting to receive what-
ever he pours and she holds out her hand in anticipation. Her slippers are placed at the entrance to the tent. The interior of this tent exhibits decorated fabrics which resemble Turkmen carpets. A barking dog appears behind the tent, facing a sheep feeding her lamb (fig. 11). It is a particularly striking image for the tender precision with which the mother is shown licking her young one and for the use of an unusual, almost impressionist, pointillism in the representation of the sheep’s coat. Another woman, in front of the tent, is shown rolling wool wrapped around her left arm.

Such are the components of the paintings. Most of them belong to the vocabulary of mid-sixteenth-century Safavid art, and the only iconographic oddities possibly worthy of further investigation are the clothes and cap of three personages and the combination of people and things around the washerwoman. On a totally different level, the technical skills exhibited in the representation of animals deserves some special attention which is beyond the purpose of this study. However interesting and important the elucidation of these features may eventually be, they are all details in a painting whose main features and peculiarities can be defined in a different way.

On the formal level, there is tension between a diagonal axis from the lower right to the upper left and two large open spaces. One, the lower one, is a fairly rigid half-circle of standing and seated men.

The other, in the upper part of the picture, contains a motley assortment of people, animals, and landscape features. The diagonal composition is further emphasized visually by the rigid ropes holding the tents up. A secondary diagonal direction, in the upper right quadrant of the painting, leads in the opposite direction from the first one. The viewer’s eye can follow any one of these routes and encounter
the mass of things and living beings filling the image from different angles.

It is beyond our purpose to dwell further on compositional complexity. Suffice it to say that most of its principles and features underlie some of the more striking paintings of the time, like several illustrations to the Freer Jami, the British Library Nizami, and the Shahnāma of Shah Tahmasp. What differentiates the Harvard page from most of these parallels is the looseness of the relationship between components and the transformation of five of the nine tents into discrete settings each with its own story to tell. The spatial looseness of the painting allows for its extraordinary population of animals and human beings, hardly any of which are repeated except for the main personages in the large tent. All are involved in actions of various sorts, but these actions are all ends in themselves, nor do they make—once again with the partial exception of the main tent—a sequence or depend on each other. Women are working, breast feeding, or being idle (only two instances). Most of the men are talking. The animals are shown in different positions, often indicating, as with camels, donkeys, oxen, or sheep, their practical functions in daily life. The cat and the dog are the only two actors free to express their own feelings.

As far as we have been able to make out, no other Persian painting shows this combination of a dynamic and spatially open composition sheltering such a wealth of activities. The closest parallels are in contemporary Nizami illustrations and in a few unusual miniatures elsewhere, but none exhibits the equilibrium between parts found in the Harvard miniature. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the primary objective of the painter was to display and make available every detail of the painting rather than to enhance a main topic of illustration with a rich collection of extraneous materials. It does not seem to us, although the matter may be debatable, that, once one has left the large tent, there is a visual hierarchy of meaning in these details, nor are the details a clear commentary on a narrative.

This observation and this judgment become particularly pertinent when we turn to the question with which we began our discussion. What is the subject matter of this painting? Events in or around Arabian camps are frequently found among the subjects illustrating the story of Layla and Majnun, the saga of a passionate and unfulfilled love. It began when the two heroes were children at school, but then it drove Qays, its hero later to be called Majnun, the “mad one,” to poetic creativity and to madness in behavior, shown, among other ways, by his withdrawal into the desert to live with animals. Eventually the two lovers, who could never achieve the union they yearned for, die from their pain. The story is a tragic one because the failure of fulfillment does not derive from external circumstances, but almost exclusively from the emotional and psychological make-up of the heroes. Their surroundings, the families of both lovers, the tribes to which they belonged, assorted actors coming in and out of the story, eventually the animals following and protecting Majnun in the desert, were never inimical to the lovers; except for the animals, they only failed to understand their love.

The dramatic and mystical implications of the story are obvious enough and were used by Nizami in the twelfth century and by many later poets such as Amir Khusraw Dihlavi, Hatifi, and Jami for some of the most powerful Persian lyrical poetry ever written. Nearly all the events of the story as told and retold by Persian poets take place in the Arabian world of deserts and oases and around more or less romanticized tribal camps. But, even though the basic structure of the story remains the same in all versions, each one provides a different emphasis, highlights different events, and even supplies different, but always tragic, endings. Only Nizami’s version has received iconographic attention, and the Harvard page has been specifically connected with a Nizami manuscript in the British Library (BL Or. 2265). Some 48 different subjects have been identified within the vast repertoire of Nizami illustrations. Some of these stories exist in dozens of examples; others in only a few. Unfortunately no comparable evidence exists for illustrations of Jami’s version, or for any other author’s.

From the painting itself, one would have to conclude that, if it has a narrative subject, that subject lies in the meeting under the big tent. And there is indeed an episode in Layla and Majnun as told by Nizami which could have inspired this composition. Early in the poem, Majnun’s father goes with his kinsmen to ask for Layla’s hand from her father. Our miniature would simply represent that meeting which includes that, if it has a narrative subject, that subject lies in the meeting under the big tent. And there is indeed an episode in Layla and Majnun as told by Nizami which could have inspired this composition. Early in the poem, Majnun’s father goes with his kinsmen to ask for Layla’s hand from her father. Our miniature would simply represent that meeting which seems friendly and polite. The presence of writing tools strengthens the argument for a formal gathering expected to end with the signature of a contract. Layla would be the beautifully dressed young woman in the small tent adjoining the large tent to the left and the personage in the upper right who is shown
feeding the fire could indeed be Majnun dressed in simple clothes and exhibiting a conduct unbecoming to his social position. The rest of the image would consist of fill-ins depicting an idealized nomadic camp.

At this level of generality—the meeting of the two fathers and their kinsmen—the conclusion is valid, but is it the illustration of a concrete passage from a specific text? Nizami's account of the event is sparse. It gives no particular setting for the event, and, most important, it was never illustrated in the hundreds of known manuscripts of the poem. On the other hand, the meeting between the two fathers is an important episode in Jami's account of the story, where it is originally requested by Majnun himself, and where the speeches of the principals, Majnun and the two fathers, are particularly extensive and significant in demonstrating the failure of an attempt to legalize a relationship of love. That failure liberated the lovers from social norms and justified, or at least explained, their ultimately tragic fate.

In short, we have here the illustration of a very precise moment in the evolution of a narrative and, if one is to look for a book in which this illustration would have been found, one should look at manuscripts of Jami's works, not of Nizami's. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that, illustrated or not, manuscripts of Jami's works were quite popular in the sixteenth century, but we cannot a priori exclude the possibility that some other version of the story would have inspired our painting.

An interpretation of this image as the illustration of a specific narrative made for a precise book is possible, but there are arguments against restricting it to being a simple illustration. One is that only three or four other instances are known of comparable representations of elders meeting and, while the Harvard miniature shows a few features in common with a slightly later painting of the same subject executed in Tabriz, it differs from it in composition. Furthermore, nothing in the Harvard miniature indicates that it was meant for a book; there is no text on the back of the picture page and its patches are repairs, not places for the insertion of text. Another argument against seeing our painting as simply an enlarged illustration is that the very construction of the painting, as we have analyzed it, argues against a distinction between a story and a setting or a background. There is here a sort of thematic equality between all parts which requires, we believe, a different explanation than the simple search for a concrete, restrictive, illustrated topic. Even if inspired first by Jami's version of the story, the artist, whether Mir Sayyid 'Ali or someone else, created a painting with a different impact than that of a miniature in a book. As all those who have written about it have pointed out, it is really a camp scene, for it combines in one image all the possible participants of a camp: various kinds of people, animals, tents, a very special selection of activities not found elsewhere. The iconographically significant details like the gifts to be distributed, the contract to be signed, and the cups of a shared drink, are secondary to generic tents, animals, and activities rather than people. The message of the painting is not the narrative that may have inspired it originally, but the vision of an idealized camp, or the talents of an artist who demonstrates his skills in masses of details, or both.

Some may argue that this sort of extension of a specific subject into a rich and even exuberant depiction of natural, architectural, or animated settings is a characteristic of some of the most remarkable sixteenth-century miniatures in actual books. Such is the story of Hafswad and the worm from the Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp (fol. 521v), where all sorts of fascinating things happen which have little direct connection with the women spinning in the lower left who are presumably the subject of the story (fig. 12). Several illustrations from the Freer Jami are also transformed into festivals of people and things by features only remotely connected with the initial subject. Were there other signs like fragments of writing or dimensions fitting those of a known book, we might well have adopted the illustration of a narrative as the explanation for our page. At this stage of our argument, we prefer to remain skeptical and to argue that the specific subject of a formal meeting of notables based on Jami's text gave a visual anchor to the representation of a camp. It is the latter that has to be explained.

THE PALACE AND THE CITY

In the second Harvard painting to be considered (fig. 2), there are buildings instead of tents, and these buildings are inhabited by colorful people covering the whole surface of the painting without, at first glance, a clear beginning or focal point. In reality, this painting can be divided into three independent sections. The first two are a residential or palace courtyard and a city street. They are clearly separated from...
Fig. 12. Dust Muhammad. The story of Haftwad and the worm. From the *Shahnūma* of Shah Tahmasp, fol. 521v. Ca. 1540. Collection Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan. (Photo: reproduced by permission of H. H. Sadrudin Aga Khan)
The palace. Four two-dimensional vertical flats set at various angles from each other identify the wall between the palace area and the street. From right to left, they are: a frontal simple and low wall section, another similar low section set at an angle to the first one, an elaborate high iwan façade, and finally a high wall with a window set at an oblique angle. The low walls are shown as built of large units of dried brick, the pahsa of traditional Central Asian architecture. The iwan and the high wall are of baked brick, with colored tiles in the spandrels of the arch and the lower parts of the walls and with a design of hexagons in brick or stucco on the upper part of the last wall panel to the left. The tile patterns are geometric everywhere except in the spandrels, which are adorned with a vegetal arabesque. The back of the iwan is covered with a pastel-blue landscape. A half-opened window shows a tree and suggests a garden beyond the iwan. The high wall and the iwan are topped with a crenellation in brick and the iwan also has a hexagonal balcony-pavilion on top. In front of it there is an open space divided into three parts: a tiled floor with light blue hexagons; a flower garden separated from the tiled floor by a water channel with a pool which is not on the same axis as the iwan; and, to the right, a floor of green tiles on which stands a large domed building with an elaborate threshold and an inscription above the doorway. The inscription is a verse from Hafiz: “The pupil of my eye is your nesting place, be kind, alight, for it is your home.”

A feast is in progress inside the palace. A large rug occupies most of the iwan. On a smaller rug sits what appears to be a prince, an elaborately dressed youth with a sleeveless red robe over a fancy embroidered tunic (fig. 13). His conical white turban covers the baton (tāj-i haydārt) so common in sixteenth-century painting and is further adorned with a feather and an aigrette. The gesture of his right hand indicates conversation. Next to him, and on a smaller round rug, is a candlestick with a long, lighted candle.

External participants at this feast are three women in elaborate clothes and head scarves who slouch on top of the iwan and peek down from the pavilion (fig. 14). All of them have hands decorated with henna. The presence of onlookers rather than actors in such a location is not unusual. That the painter wanted to give particular importance to the happenings on top of the roof may be further indicated by the clearly visible green cover of the roof, which connects the three observing women to a standing woman farther to the left. She holds a candle in one hand and grasps the hem of her overcoat with the other; she is preceded by a youth with whom she may be conversing and who carries a strange object which looks like a gold nugget.

Ten males are settled in the court. Six of them are seated on the paved floor. One, seated on his folded legs, is addressing the prince and offering him something in a dish. Two pairs of men, also seated, are drinking or about to drink, as one pours a drink from an elongated pitcher, while a sort of “loving cup” seems shared by the other two. The sixth personage to the right is standing; he has a sword to his side and is leaning on a thin staff. He, alone in this group, is bearded and seems to be observing the scene. Such personages appear frequently in court scenes...
and are probably to be identified as hājils or major-domos supervising the proper conduct of the feast and controlling access to it. Four young men are entertainers: one tambourine player, two string players, and one dancer. Five of these ten personages are dressed in the same way in a tight, short-sleeved tunic held at the waist by a belt over a long undergarment. Three have only an elaborately embroidered, tight, long-sleeved tunic. Two, the second one from the right and probably the one to the left who has been cut off, are dressed like our prince, with a robe over the tunic. All of them wear turbans with a usually red (there are two exceptions) baton, but three have an additional feather. Whatever the variants that occur from one to the next, they all reflect a type found in hundreds of miniatures dealing with the lives and activities of princes, so we shall refer to them as "courtiers."

The theme of the feast is further emphasized by three trays with fruits and pitchers, presumably of wine, depicted on the tiled floor, while a tall candle in a candlestick proclaims that it is nighttime. Although details may vary, companions and performers are frequently represented, and there is nothing original and peculiar about the personages represented here, their clothes, or their actions, nor even about the ways in which they are assembled in four closed groups anchored on the single standing major-domo to the right. The only exception to this conclusion lies in the depiction of a pencase, a key, and a fruit at the feet of the two personages to the left (fig. 15).

A third component of the palace complex is what we might call the kitchen or, more generally, the commons. It is the domed structure built of brick with the colorful inscription of Hafiz’s poetry. A procession emerges from it: in front a heavy-set bearded man carries a tray with some fancy gastronomic concoction; he is followed by two men bringing additional trays of food; a boy holding a candle closes the procession. The two men in the middle wear short tunics, and the older one seems to have gathered his outer garment up a bit in order to move more easily. One cannot identify them as servants because two of them have a red baton in their turban, a feature associated with courtiers, and one has an elaborately embroidered knee-length tunic. Such groups of attendants bringing food from some dark kitchen or pantry appear in many frontispieces and illustrations of feasts. This particular group is awkwardly set in the composition, as it seems to be marching toward the musicians rather than the prince.

An unusual group of people appears on top and behind the dome of the commons. Two boys sit on the roof, engaged in conversation or simply pointing to the main event. One of two torches apparently attached to the walls of the building seems just to have been lit by an almost completely hidden attendant.

The dominant theme of the palace unit is clear. A feast is going on at night in the abode of a youthful
prince. Drinks have been passed around, musicians play, a dancer performs, and more elaborate food is on its way. A couple of children and three women are surreptitiously observing the scene. Taken individually, as “optemic” units, none of the features of this segment of the painting is original in form, nor does it obviously suggest any concrete meaning. But as one looks at the details of the palace, inconsistencies and contradictions emerge. Some, like the squeezed women on the roof, are peculiar to the formal arrangement of this particular painting. Others, like the woman with the candle, are seemingly unique and may indeed suggest a reference to a particular story or event. Why, for instance, are a key and a pencase lying on the tiled floor of the court?  

The open space in front of the iwan is divided into tile-, grass-, and flower-covered areas, an arrangement we have failed to find anywhere else. While one can divide the figures into three social or functional groups—courtiers, performers, servants—clothing does not consistently differ among the various groups, as it usually does in other contemporary miniatures. Nearly all the figures (the exceptions are the standing ones in the center right of the painting) are organized into closed units of two to four people, as is typical enough, but there is no sense of a functional relationship between the groups. In most comparable examples, the prince, not the majordomo, is the figure directing activities in the composition.

Why is the fancy poetic inscription on a secondary building rather than on the main one? There are other examples of writing in such locations, but usually only when the main building is also adorned with writing. On a possibly trivial level, why is there a container for water or wine on the grass, just below the musicians, at the bottom of the image? And, in a more general way, there is a curious paradox in the composition of this segment. Traditional axes of vertical spatial symmetry like the iwan and the pool do not control the dynamic of the scene. Instead, it is the partially visible torch holder on the extreme right that initiates a meandering movement of hands and of heads leading up to the prince, then to the attendant in a green tunic on the extreme left, and eventually weaves its way to the partially hidden boy in the door of the commons. It is as though a stage director had placed a random collection of conventional groupings of people and of samples of architectural elements and practical implements associated with a palace or with rulers in a narrow and awkward space,
thereby diminishing the iconophoric value of any one of them.

The only exception to the apparently low semantic charge of most of this section’s elements is the woman holding a candle and preceded by a boy who is apparently talking to her. She alone cannot be explained as a variant on established and functionally definable types like musicians, servants, drinkers, observers, even youthful princes, and we have not been able to find any place a comparable grouping of personages. She could indeed be considered as illustrating or evoking a specific event or an otherwise known narrative. But, if so, why is she in such a remote corner of the picture?

City street. The street which meanders above the palace has five distinct elements. There is, first of all, a covered, domed, cistern or pool (sardab) fed through a faucet in the shape of a lion’s head (fig. 16). The cistern is built of brick and is minimally decorated. A woman with a head kerchief falling over her shoulders is crouching by the cistern and filling a jar from the faucet. Another figure, certainly a male because his tunic only goes down to the knees, is approaching from the right carrying two empty jars.

Next to the cistern is a shop with carefully depicted shutters. A bearded man seated behind a large set of scales seems to run the shop (fig. 17). Grapes, grape leaves, and various other items are hanging from the white wall. Other products are laid out on a red cloth and seen from above; a large earthenware bowl in front is filled with flour and a basket with loaves of bread. To the right of the shop, a young man in a short tunic is looking for change in his wallet, while another young man, dressed like a courtier, takes money from his purse to buy something from a woman with a scarf around her head and holding a white bowl. A blooming tree is planted in the street, perhaps a part of the palace. The construction of the shop is quite elaborate, with fancy decoration and a crenellation. The space in front of the shop seems to have been painted in dark red, very different from the light-colored surface of the street elsewhere. A lit lamp is fixed onto the outer wall.

A mosque is depicted above the cistern. Its brick walls are decorated with tiles in their lower part and with a colorful frieze and crenellation above. An inscription cites a well-known hadith, “He who builds a mosque for God, God will build for him a dwelling in Paradise,” frequently found in representations of mosques. The mosque has an elaborate entrance with tiled spandrels and a paneled door further adorned with a frame painted in red. A decorated minaret and a colorful tiled dome cover the mosque. In front of the building a slightly caricaturized old man with a white beard stands in profile leaning on a cane and carrying a lit lamp (fig. 18). His mouth is open and he seems to be making a speech to a little boy holding prayer beads and wearing a turban around his cap and a scarf over his shoulders. Representations of mosques from the outside are rare in fifteenth-
and sixteenth-century painting. But there is nothing original about the architectural and decorative features of the mosque. Its two attendants, on the other hand, form an unusual pair for which we have not found a model or a parallel.

To the left of the mosque, a bearded man dressed like a courtier is shown carrying a candle in his left hand and a mace over his right shoulder. He is marching forward forcefully while looking back toward one of two vignettes: the first is that of a man carrying a large load of wood out of a domed shed; the second, a stray white dog with his tongue hanging out has found its way to the top of the building and seems to be barking at the people below (fig. 19). Or else our marching courtier with a candle is looking toward a smaller and less fancy shop covered with a low dome. Like the first shop, it is filled with all sorts of items hanging from the wall and a large vat sits in front of it. A young merchant is weighing some pomegranates, while a young boy is bringing in an empty white dish (?). Behind this second shop is yet another domed building, only partly visible, with walls of elaborate brickwork forming geometric patterns, with a single window and no visible door. The nature of the wall decoration suggests that it was a building meant to attract attention, a feature of mausoleums from an earlier period in Iranian and Central Asian architecture. Or, perhaps, such groups of domed buildings are simply a visual type for the representation of urban structures, shops, dwellings, or monuments.51

The attendant is clearly shown walking in a street bound by a wall which makes an unexpected zigzag and separates the city from a natural setting with flowers, a blossoming tree, a tall *chenâr* (plane tree) with
autumn leaves, two smaller trees, one tree trunk, and pastel-colored ground with vaguely rocky edges.

Although they seemingly do not tell a story, these five units form a coherent whole both thematically—a selection of urban activities along a thoroughfare—and compositionally in the sense that it is fairly easy to reconstruct the street with its selected components and with the outer world beyond. The shops are not original to this painting; they exist in many narrative contexts and almost always look somewhat like ours. The sardāb, on the other hand, is very rarely represented, if at all, and, even if dogs are fairly common, we have failed to find another instance of a dog on the roof of a building. Taken together, there is no clear explanation for this ensemble of activities going on in the street. The people are dressed differently from those in the palace, though it is two courtiers who, by the nature of their movement and location, serve as pivots for the street scene. The nature of their activities seems almost absurd, however: the man with the mace is also holding a candle, as though showing the way to the very standard image of a carrier of wood; the one in front of the shop is apparently buying something from an old woman and not from the shopkeeper. It is curious and perhaps not accidental that in one other painting, the striking “Haftwad and the worm” miniature from the Shahnāma of Shah Tahmasp (fig. 12), shops adorn another fancy architectural ensemble, a whole city in this occurrence, and there, too, the iconographic function of most of the personages has not been figured out.55

The upper left. This particular zone of the image is much more difficult to understand and thus to describe. There is a house with an elaborate balcony on which one woman is languorously lying and looking out toward the city, while one or two other women stand behind her. Inside the building, in an open iwan, lit by a lamp attached to the wall as in one of the shops below, an elaborately dressed young woman is talking to an old man in a turban seated on a small rug (fig. 20). A charming little cat is curled up in front of him. Although the point of these various features is difficult to understand, they are visually and iconographically coherent and clear. We may recall that the woman holding a lit candle and the young man or boy addressing her described earlier as being part of the palace proper, could possibly be
associated with the features shown above them. There are traces of writing in the white space to the upper right, possibly, for the camp scene, a place where some librarian made an attribution of the miniature to a painter. It is impossible to read Mir Sayyid 'Ali in the remaining bits of letters, but Aqa Mirak is possible.

The topics depicted in this corner are all unusual. While the contemplation of a lover or of a beautiful garden is common enough, a cityscape with nothing particular happening in it does not seem to warrant the attention of an elegant woman. And the lecturing of an old man by a young woman is equally unexpected. In both cases the possibility of a narrative reference cannot be excluded, and even the curled-up cat is rare enough at least to suggest a more concrete meaning than that of filling a gap.

Yet, neither in literature nor through comparisons with other paintings were we able to provide an explanation for these features. It is, of course, true that the careful reading of a poem like Nizami’s Layla and Majmun does bring out stories or details of stories which could have been illustrated here. Layla deals several times with old men who send or receive messages to and from Majmun, and letters play a major role in these exchanges. But by definition the story itself takes place in the wilderness and not in the city. Other stories, like those of Khusraw, Yusuf, and Iskandar do take place, in part at least, in cities, but we have not been able to find a single reference in them that would fit with our picture. Most of the time, the iconographically charged part of a Persian miniature is found in the lower left quadrant of a painting. But here what is visually the largest unit of composition is also the most conventional one, except perhaps for the mysterious key on the floor. Thus, we cannot exclude an eventual explanation of the image as the illustration of a story, but so far we have not been able to find one.

To sum up, this picture can be interpreted at the simplest level as an attempt to squeeze into a single page a large number of distinct and probably unrelated elements or morphemic units. Most of them, like the picture of three musicians and a dancer, or the one of the outside of a mosque with an old man, or even of the cat, were probably standard set groups easily adapted to any subject. Others may be original and even unique to this painting. In any event, an arbitrary whole was created in order to include as many elements associated with a city and with a palace as possible. Awkwardness in crowding people into an architectural space, like the three women over the palace or the man in front of the carrier of wood (curiously, an iconographic unit often found in camp scenes), would have derived from the artist’s inability to squeeze coherently all the desired elements into an architectural construction.

At a more complex level, one can identify compositional units that are unusual and unexpected and therefore could require a narrative iconographic meaning. Such are all the women in the upper left quarter of the painting, including the ones looking down into the palace. The rest of the painting can be explained as a stage set enhancing and enlarging hitherto unidentified references to a story or an event. The high visibility in the city of the two courtiers—one carrying a candle, the other buying something from a woman—and their compositionally striking location and gestures could reflect some story involving a courtier or even a prince in an urban setting.

Finally, throughout there is an emphasis on light. We counted at least nine lamps, candles, or torches, even though, in the traditional ways of Persian painting, their light is never reflected on people or on space. It is a light which does not create shadows, but which becomes an iconographic vehicle of its own. Under these lights, courtiers and commoners, men and women, adults and children, act out the behavior or function by which they are identified: feasting, selling and buying, visiting a mosque, carrying wood, fetching water, snooping on each other. Why this emphasis? Could there be, in line with common mystical imagery, a symbolic meaning attached to all these activities through the sources of light which surround them? Such an explanation could be connected with common images in mystical discourse. Altogether, however, our judgment is that, in contrast to the camp scene, the possible narrative and symbolic specificity of this painting is too weak to warrant more than passing consideration.

This picture is also a forceful composition of bands arranged diagonally from lower right to upper left. The first one, the palace, occupies something like a third of the painting and dominates it visually because of its wide open space of a court and an iwan and because of its location on the page. The second band, the street, is also fairly wide but less visible in all of its details; it ends with the house in the upper left. The third strip consists primarily of the landscape in the back and ends with the woman looking
down from a balcony. On the right side, three buildings—the commons, the sardāb, the mosque—are set above each other and face the viewer directly; they are the beginnings of three visual sentences imbricated into each other. They also occupy the first third of the picture with their entrances; the large second third to the left consists of interiors, and the middle one includes people and buildings. Through this framework of buildings, thirty-nine persons meander, from the little boy on the lower right to the standing woman on the upper left. Perhaps more accurately, they weave through and hold together the constructed space.

There are several ways of explaining this painting, from a formal definition of its structures to possible stories or narratives which would have inspired its creation, even to a mystical symbolism attached to some of its features. We can define something of the mood of the painting: at night, people are active in a street adjoining a palace where a feast is in progress. But, we still have no clear explanation of its subject. Was it meant simply to evoke a mood? Could it have been an allegory, a genre scene, or else a portfolio page documenting some artist’s skills? If it was not meant to be an illustration of a text, could it have been a frontispiece?

One last set of clues which issued from the painting itself will provide us with a possible answer and explain why and how it came to be associated with the camp scene. Before dealing with these clues, we can propose one definite conclusion. The two Harvard paintings are far more different from each other than has usually been argued. One of them is the illustration of a specific episode in Layla and Majnūn, probably as related by Jami, not by Nizami, with an unusual extension of the appropriate setting for an Arabian camp. The other one is an artful composition of palatial and urban features and activities with no clear subject, but with common or original vignettes squeezed into an artificial composition of architectural fragments.

When seen hanging on a wall or neatly spread on a table, but without the matting in which they are usually set, the two paintings have more or less the same dimensions, they are framed by the same two borders of repeated floral motifs, and the two halves seem to fit properly with each other. Only in the camp scene is there a narrow band of gold between the two halves added by the restorers at the Fogg Museum.

Closer observation of the front and of the back of the images reveals, however, a large number of oddities and discrepancies. The borders have different widths in the upper and lower sections of the paintings and in both Dimand’s catalogue and Pope’s Survey these borders are on all four sides of the four half-paintings. In the camp scene, the gold band seems like an unnecessary addition to the tunnel tent to the right, since the contours of the tent fit perfectly with each other, while no such fit exists for the top of the main tent, with or without the gold band. The red tent fits nicely, as does the sheep feeding its lamb. In the palace scene, the two halves do not match at the extreme right, as their edges and the right wall of the sardāb are not in line with each other.

Both images have been cropped, probably on all four sides. The cropping seems to have been minimal in the camp scene, a few millimeters at most, especially on the left, where the upper half of the painting was certainly wider than it is now, on the bottom where the small brook is hardly visible, and on the right in the middle where the white shoes of the nursing woman are awkwardly located (figs. 9 and 10). Cuts reached several centimeters on the upper part of the palace scene where only half of a standing woman is shown; her henna-painted hand is resting on the shoulder of the woman leaning over the balcony (fig. 19); trees and buildings end quite suddenly and somewhat senselessly. All other sides have been affected to some degree. The feet of one person are missing at the bottom and, in the lower left and lower right, persons have been cut quite drastically and arbitrarily.

Two patches of paper have been introduced into the camp scene (above center and lower right; the former has been colored in a light and rather messy blue) and one such patch exists in the lower left of the palace scene. In their present state, these patches are not spaces for texts such as occur frequently in Persian miniatures, because they were not designed with the original page, but are repairs. The spaces they occupy could not have originally been assigned to text either; the palace band is too narrow, the upper one in the camp scene disrupts the composition in an unusual way, and the lower one is too small. There are some paint losses and probable repainting, but none seemed major on close examination, and we saw no trace of earlier drawings under the present ones. Faint traces of writing exist in several places—
in the camp scene under the robe of the man in a red tunic inside the main tent; in the palace scene, twice under the tunic of the man coming out of the kitchen. None could be read with any degree of certainty, but they seem to belong to the category of instructions to artists identified in several contemporary Persian and Indian manuscripts.\textsuperscript{54}

If we turn to the back of the pages as reconstructed, the halves are shown to fit quite awkwardly together, particularly on the right and left edges of each painting, suggesting that at some point in their history they were altered when they were already separate halves. The backs of the halves of the camp scene have, in rather poor handwriting, \textit{panjom} (fifth) and \textit{shastom} (sixth), written on, respectively, the lower and upper parts; \textit{nehom} (ninth) and \textit{dehom} (tenth) are written on the back of the palace scene (figs. 21–22). A faintly visible sketch for a drawing is also found on the back of the camp scene, not the back of the paper on which the paintings are painted, but a separate white sheet of paper that was pasted to the back of the paintings.

The following scenario for the history of these two pages can now be proposed. Some time in the middle of the sixteenth century, two paintings were executed in or around the court of Shah Tahmasp. One was inspired by an episode in Jami’s version of \textit{Layla and Majnun}; the other has no apparent literary source. They were of different sizes and their original function was not the same. There is no trace of written text associated with either one of them. Probably while kept in a library, at an unknown but fairly early date, and following a process known for many other pages in albums, some learned librarian, well versed in the Persian literature dealing with painters and calligraphers, attributed the camp scene to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali and the palace scene to the same painter or to another one, perhaps Aqa Mirak, two well-known and often mentioned artists. Then, at an equally unknown time, possibly in order to fit them into an album or
a manuscript in the making, someone cropped the paintings to the same approximate size and repaired such areas near the edges as had been damaged. Then, for reasons probably inspired by greed, someone else (or the same person) cut the paintings in two, and surrounded the mutilated images with a new floral border.\textsuperscript{55} From the numerical notations on the back of the paintings ("fifth", "sixth", "ninth", and "tenth"), we can suggest that at least five large miniatures were cut in this manner.\textsuperscript{56} The images then entered the mercantile domain, and eventually two pairs of pictures were reconstructed as two pictures in the conservation laboratory of the Fogg Museum of Art. As it turns out, according to our reconstruction of their history, they were not reconstituted to their original and different sizes, but as two similar artifacts, almost as a set of twins. This transformation has affected scholarship in that it required a single explanation for both images.

One instance of such a common explanation has been the attribution to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali of at least one painting and, for many connoisseurs, of both of them. Is such an attribution justified? And is it justified to consider a single artist for both of them?

Mir Sayyid ‘Ali’s work has often been characterized as preoccupied with minute details, sensitive to textures, with elegant human figures who have “fan-like” fingers and eyelashes and are psychologically trapped inside themselves.\textsuperscript{57} However, these observations and distinctions are not characteristics of the work of Mir Sayyid ‘Ali alone, but can be applied to the works of a group of major contemporary artists at the Safavid court, such as Aqa Mirak, Mir Musavir (Mir Sayyid ‘Ali’s father), Abd al-Samad, Mirza ‘Ali, and Sultan Muhammad, under whom Mir Sayyid ‘Ali was trained and with whom he cooperated on several projects. Several paintings by Aqa Mirak in the \textit{Shahnāma} of Shah Tahmasp are, like ours, outstanding in their execution of tiny details.\textsuperscript{58} From the \textit{Khamsa} of Nizami made for Shah Tahmasp, a miniature such as the one of Khusraw enthroned, attributed to Aqa Mirak,\textsuperscript{59} also shows wonderfully fine details in various patterns and embroideries on textiles, as well as graceful hands and gestures. From the same manuscript, a miniature attributed to Mirza ‘Ali showing Barbad playing music for Khusraw\textsuperscript{60} exhibits many features also found in our two paintings: a variety of tilework represented on architecture, a diversity of elegant gestures performed by the figures, and the “poetic carpet” on which Khusraw sits. The features and qualities selected by several writers to describe the work of Mir Sayyid ‘Ali were not unique to a particular artist but rather to a group of elite artists at a specific time and place.

Our first conclusion, then, is that the attribution to Mir Sayyid ‘Ali was made arbitrarily for the camp scene and extended unnecessarily to the palace one. The stylistic features shared by these two paintings were shared by most mid-sixteenth-century court painters or, at the very least, could be used by any one of them.

A more important implication of seeing the two miniatures as a pair was the need to find for them a common iconographic and functional purpose. On the iconographic issue, our initial hypothesis was that these paintings could be illustrations of a narrative, broad genre scenes echoing some theme common to Persian art of the time, allegories depicting a specific abstract idea, or portfolios exhibiting the skills of an artist. Our conclusion about the camp scene is that it was the illustration of a passage in Jami’s version of the story of Layla and Majnun, but an illustration that went beyond the narrative into a genre scene of a nomadic camp. It is possible to argue that in the sixteenth century the iconographic lines between the illustration of a story and the evocation of a number of themes independent of a story were occasionally blurred. Examples are the brilliant representations of courtly life or feasts in which standardized features and details often obscure the narrative \textit{raison d’être} for the painting:\textsuperscript{61} several school scenes only vaguely related, if at all, to the meeting of Layla and Majnun in a school (fig. 23),\textsuperscript{62} and camp scenes that may have led to representations of gatherings in rustic settings.\textsuperscript{63} Our painting would be an example of a calculated blurring of visual impressions, whereby the genre of the camp scene almost overwhelms the illustration of a story. It is impossible, at this stage, to know whether this painting can also be understood as an allegory, as a visual lesson in ethical, social, or religious matters, but the possibility of an allegorical meaning should not be excluded. At the same time, the studied way in which so many people, animals, tents, and objects of all sorts are depicted in the camp scene suggests that an artist was showing off his talents and that the painting was an exhibition of available models for other images.

Matters are much more difficult with respect to the palace scene, for which we were unable to find a narrative as a source for the image or as an interpre-
In the abstract, it is possible to imagine an allegorical meaning for the painting, but we are not aware of any parallel of a palace in an urban context which could be understood as an evocation of something like good government, or, perhaps, as an illustration of themes of urban life arranged, from the palace to the mosque through the city, in some sort of structural hierarchy. Nor is it possible to propose that it was a genre scene, since there are no even remotely iconographically comparable single paintings that could be interpreted in this fashion. On the other hand, our painting's tightly and artfully composed repertoire of architectural representations, people, and a cat and a dog for good measure, can be explained as a portfolio made for an atelier, a library, or a patron. Although they never reached the same level of compositional sophistication, a number of sketches in earlier albums were probably exercises or models. But a more striking illustration of the possible use of our page as an assemblage of models is made clear in the Hamzanāma compiled at the court of Akbar in India between 1557 and 1572. Many pages of this manuscript, from among which we provide one example (fig. 24), show quite clearly the presence of features that could have been chosen from a model like the Harvard painting, and we may recall that Mir Sayyid 'Ali was one of several painters from the Safavid court to have been involved in the planning and execution of this stupendous work of art. What distinguishes the Harvard painting is the quality of its composition into which various and even incompatible elements were thrown in.

Our conclusion, then, is that our paintings should be understood within a spectrum of iconographic purposes ranging from direct illustration to genre, allegory, and portfolios or model pages. One of the paintings, the camp scene, is closer to being an illustration, but inches its way toward genre and portfolio. The other one is a portfolio with possible allegorical and genre implications.

How were these paintings used? Two ways come to mind regardless of their subject matter. They could have served as frontispieces for books, or they could have been planned as independent paintings made and collected for their own sake.

Frontispieces tend to use a clear and relatively limited selections of subjects, often depicted on pages facing each other at the beginning of a manuscript. These subjects are usually confined to royal activities such as enthronements and royal feasts and they focus on an enthroned ruler surrounded by the attributes of his power. Scenes can take place indoors or outdoors, where the ruler is depicted sitting on his throne amidst a magnificent court and iwan or in a garden, surrounded by courtiers, concubines, viziers, luxurious objects, food, musicians, dancers,
Fig. 24. King of Kalud receiving a prisoner. From a *Hamzanāma*, India, Mughal, ca. 1567. The Art and History Trust, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, LTS 1995.3.145. (Photo: reproduced courtesy Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)
and so on. Other common themes of royal activities for frontispieces are polo games and hunting, which also tend to spread onto a double-page format and have many participants related to the court or to the ruler, the ruler’s amirs and his soldiers, and occasionally examples of his wealth, for instance, depicting his magnificent horses.

A few frontispieces represent religious figures, not only in hagiographies or historical texts, but also in poetic works. Thus we may find Solomon and Bilqis, hardly a surprising choice, since Solomon embodied the ideal and legitimate ruler, a model for the wise, just, and powerful sovereign, and a source of inspiration as patron of the arts. A rarer example of a frontispiece depicting a religious figure out of religious context is the painting of Yusuf as an infant, in a double-page frontispiece for Yusuf wa Za’laykha, dated to 1574. This frontispiece serves as a preview to the miniatures of the manuscript, introducing to the readers the cast of characters of the story they are about to read and to view. It is possible that our camp scene was made for a comparable purpose, as a preview to the story of Layla and Majnun.

Double-page frontispieces tend to be crowded and rich compositions, even though their “iconographic center” is always clearly and easily identified. There is usually a continuity and flow of elements and ideas between the two pages, as the two parts react to one another. For example, a river flowing in one page will continue its course in the page facing it, or a garden blooms across the two pages as it does in the Topkapi frontispiece. In most instances the two pages are treated as one surface, and actually create one painting which is then artificially divided into two to conform with the manuscript’s format. Some examples are the “Literary Party in Nature,” dated 1575–76, in the Topkapi, which can be seen as one painting: a garden-pavilion scene stretching over two pages, from the Gulistan Library in Tehran; and an enthroned king with courtiers and musicians in a paved pavilion attached to a palace, which can easily be assembled by our eyes into one large painting.

A variant of double-page frontispieces shows two separate activities, one on each page, which are related to each other but can also function as independent works. This type is often used for paintings of court life, for example, the frontispiece from the catalogue of the Rothschild-Binney collection in which one page depicts food preparation and the other one young princes playing in a tree house overlooking a pool, guarded by their masters and court officials. The two pages are unified by the same landscape and garden background, but they could as well have been separated from each other without harming the completeness of each scene. Is it reasonable to think of our paintings as two halves of a double-page frontispiece contrasting sedentary and nomadic lifestyles? Could they have been created to compose such a pair?

We know already that our two paintings were not originally planned as a single frontispiece, but it is theoretically possible that they were trimmed to the same size in order to be made into a double-page frontispiece, before they were cut in two. This hypothesis is, however, unlikely, just as it is unlikely that each one of them had a twin which has disappeared. They might have been meant to be single-page frontispieces, which probably did exist, but there is no compelling reason to assume that.

We prefer at this stage, therefore, to conclude that these two paintings were made independently of each other but at the same time, as illustrations and portfolios transformed into works of art to be collected and kept in libraries and in albums. They were made as ends in themselves, but they did not originally have the same ends. Or, rather, they expressed a similar range of purposes with different intensity and different visual charges.

In this sense, both of our paintings reflect the multiplicity of functions expected of the art of painting in the middle of the sixteenth century as well as the fate which befell them. They were exhibitions of artists’ abilities and knowledge, reflections of commonly known stories and of idealized settings, evocations of romantic ideals of nomadic or courtly life, perhaps even allegories for some hitherto hidden idea. At the same time, the later history of these pages provide lessons on the history of taste, as their preservation did not prevent their mutilation as they became items for sale to satisfy a market for art. The interplay of these various strands in explaining Persian miniatures is a clear subject for further investigation.

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NOTES

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1. This, at least, is the title given to it in its latest version as a jigsaw puzzle; its "official" title in the files of the Harvard University Art Museums is "Palace Scene." In its first publication, as fig. 190 in Armenag Bey Sakisian, Les Miniatures persanes du Xème au XVIIIème siècles (Paris, 1929), the caption calls it "Night Scene"; in one of its more recent appearances, in A. Kevorkian and J.-P. Sicrè, Les Jardins du Désir (Paris, 1983), it is "Night Feast in a Palace."

2. These are the dimensions of the miniatures; the sheets are 33.4 cm x 26.5 cm for the camp scene and 33.9 cm x 26.9 cm for the palace scene. Since the sheets have been trimmed more than once, these dimensions are not the original ones.


6. This is particularly true of some of the miniatures in the Freer Jami, where the identification of the illustrated subject sometimes demands great feats of observation; Marianna Shreve Simpson, Persian Poetry, Paintings and Patronage (New Haven and London, 1998), for instance pp. 33 and 66.


10. Theoretically at least, a search for older parallels would have made sense if one could demonstrate archaisms or other willful recollections of older ways or of older subjects. We have been unable to do so.

11. Sakisian, Les Miniatures Persanes, pp. 115-17, figs. 152 and 190.


23. Tepe Architectural Center, Housing and Settlement in Anatolia: A Historical Perspective (Istanbul, 1999), p. 106; it should be added that the collection in which the painting is found is also misidentified.


25. For instance Ernst Grube, Islamic Painting in the Collection of Hans P. Kraus (New York 1972); fig. 111 for a 1515 Shakhnama; Kevochkin and Sicrè, Les Jardins du Desir, p. 21 for a 1539 Shakhnama.

26. The type is common in Central Asia; see Peter A. Andrews, Nomad Tent Types in the Middle East (Wiesbaden, 1997), vol. 1, figs. 42-43.

27. Ibid., figs. 60 ff.

28. For instance, British Library Or. 4122, a Jami manuscript, fol. 87v, illustrated in Dickson and Welch, Houghton Shahnameh, pls. 40, 67, and more. This type of tent seems
to occur only once in any one illustration and probably reflects some traditional feature of a nomadic camp. As an exception, two of them appear on fol. 352 of the Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp, p. 185 in Dickson and Welch, *Houghton Shahnameh*.  
29. These have been discussed in an unpublished essay by Daniel Walker, “A Group of Sixteenth-Century Carpets from Tabriz, A Preliminary Study,” Department of Fine Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1975. We are grateful to Dr. Walker for giving us permission to use his manuscript of many years ago.  
30. In the discussion of a miniature from the Freer Haft Awrang, they have been interpreted as the gypsies or entertainers who allegedly were traditional participants of camp life; M. S. Simpson, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza’s Haft Awrang: A Preliminary Manuscript from Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Washington, D.C. and New Haven, 1997), p. 96.  
31. Such pouches are frequently represented, most of the time propped on three poles rather than two.  
36. Ibid., pp. 170–203, for a remarkably complete list.  
39. The only exception in Dodkhodaeva’s list (*Poemy Nizami v Srednevekovoi Miniaturnoi Zhiznici*) is from the middle of the nineteenth century, p. 175.  
42. X-rays showed no text on the back of the miniatures, but the possibility suggested to us by Yves Porter that a page of text may have been spliced off from our miniature cannot be excluded, even though it seems unlikely to us. It is also true that separate illustrations were made and occasionally inserted into texts. But there does not seem, at this stage of available comparative evidence, any need to raise this possibility for our painting.  
44. Dickson and Welch, *Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 2, no. 218; *idem*, *King’s Book of Kings*, pp. 172–73.  
45. Fols. 30, 52, 105, and 231, as in Simpson, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza’s Haft Awrang*.  
48. While the clothes of these figures are those of court attendants, the figures themselves need not always be interpreted as court attendants. Thus in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, persan 1572, fol. 2, “courtiers” are shown employed in all sorts of prosaic activities.  
49. Pencases on the ground are relatively common, especially in school or audience scenes. As to keys, we have so far found only one other example, also attributed to Mir Sayyid Ali, in the Vever Collection of the Sackler Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. See Glenn D. Lowry and Susan Nemazee, *A Jeweler’s Eye* (Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 182–83.  
50. The closest parallel we found is a page from a Bukhara manuscript of 1522–23, Ernst Grube, *The Classical Style in Islamic Painting* (New York, 1968), fig. 46.3, where a crosstipped tiled area is located between four corners with grass and flowers.  
55. Because of fragments of cloth remaining at the bottom of the two halves of the camp scene, it is possible that these sections were set in the concertina fashion of some album gatherings, as in the St. Petersburg example.  
56. John Seyller suggests that in Mughal India these numerical notations indicated a judgment on the quality of the miniatures. This possibility does not apply to these paintings, since it is unlikely that there would have been ten levels of grading.  
58. For instance, fol. 42, “Faridun testing his sons,” for landscape details, and fol. 120v, “Rustam finds Kay Qobad,” for figures.  
60. Ibid., pl. XI.  
61. Such are fols. 26v, 60v, and 66v of British Library, Or. 2265 (Binyon, *Poems of Nizami*, pls. 5, 9, 110).  

64. Such allegories do exist in Mughal painting; Richard Ettinghausen, “The Emperor’s Choice,” in his Collected Works, ed. Miriam Rosen-Ayalon (Berlin, 1984), pp. 642-73; Ebba Koch, Shah Jehan and Orpheus (Graz, 1988). But can one assume for them an Iranian Safavid precedent?

65. For the Timurid period, see the instances provided by Lentz and Lowry, Timur and the Princely Vision, p. 177, and for the Safavid period an album such as BN persan 129 mentioned earlier.


68. The following are a few examples: in the Vever Collection, pp. 155 and 158–59 of Lowry and Nezamee, A jeweler’s Eye; a double-page frontispiece in St. Petersburg, in Robinson, Studies in Persian Art, pl. IV; another one from a Shahnâma in Oleg Grabar, “Toward an Aesthetic of Persian Art,” The Art of Interpreting: Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University 9 (1995), figs. 6-2 and 6-3; a Divan of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi in Vienna, as in Hillenbrand, Imperial Images, fig. 73.


70. Kevozjian and Sicr, Les Jardins du Desir, fig. 195.

71. Robinson, Studies in Persian Art, pl. IV.

72. Rachel Milstein et al., Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of the Qisas al-Anbiya’ (Costa Mesa, Calif., 1999), fig. 42.

73. Ibid., fig. 56.


75. Hillenbrand, Imperial Images, fig. 73.


77. Other examples can be found in Grube, Kraus Collection, figs. 148 A-B, and the Vever Collection, Lowry and Nemazee, A jeweler’s Eye, fig. 47.