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A GHAZNAVID NARRATIVE RELIEF
AND THE PROBLEM OF PRE-MONGOL PERSIAN BOOK PAINTING

I would like to express my gratitude to David Knipp and Claus-Peter Haase for the invitation to deliver this paper. I would also like to offer my thanks to Maria Vittoria Fontana, Bernard O'Kane, and Sheila Blair, for help with gathering textual and visual material for my paper.

In a publication on Siculo-Arabic ivories, a contribution on Ghaznavid art will inevitably appear as something of a wild card, not least because of its geographical remoteness from the topic. Nevertheless, my subject, the evidence for eleventh- and twelfth-century Persian painting, has at least an historiographic relevance to the theme of this volume. In his pioneering discussion of the ivories, published in the 1920s, Luigi Biagi dated the Siculo-Norman caskets to the twelfth century, citing Persian miniature paintings as the likely source of their figural iconography, along with that of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo.¹ There are two obvious problems with the proposition. First, the lack of any extant illustrated Persian-language manuscripts before the mid-thirteenth century, despite the fact that Biagi dated the ivories to the twelfth. Second, a failure to explain how such hypothetical Persian models circulated westward or to provide evidence for their presence in the Mediterranean. The terms of this hypothetical relationship between Persian and Siculo-Arabic painting were thus left necessarily vague, more indicative of the centrality afforded Iran in early narratives of Islamic art than of any empirical factors linking both traditions.

Nevertheless, since the question of early illustrated Persian manuscripts and their circulation has been raised in connection with the Siculo-Norman ivories, this volume seemed an appropriate place to reconsider the matter, and to present some new evidence from an unlikely source. This assumes the form of a marble relief in the Islamic collections of the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart (fig. 1). In its present state, the relief measures 55 by 40 cms. It depicts a bearded male figure, dressed in a long tunic and wearing a turban with a rod or stick raised in his right hand, attempting to fend off a rampant ape or monkey who lunges at the bucket or kettle held in his left. The contents of this bucket are visible as a series of stylized ridges rendered with sufficient care to establish a relationship with the fruits or seeds hanging from a branch of the tree that frames the left of the scene, dangling above the monkey's head. The lower frame is defined by a narrow frieze of overlapping split palmettes, while the terminal right side is defined by a narrow pillar crowned by a bifoliate capital. The left-hand side of the carv-

ing is, however, truncated and the frieze of running animals and birds on what may have been a pediment above is also damaged.

In his brief description of the relief in the catalogue of Islamic Art in the collections of the Linden-Museum, Johannes Kalter attributed the relief to Ghazni and dated it to the twelfth century, both of which are I think correct.² Dr. Kalter also noted both that the scene was unusual in Ghaznavid art and that the column and capital that frames it were typically Indian. The bifoliate capital is in fact a stylized *pūrnaghaṭa* or overflowing vase capital of a type that was standard in north Indian architectural and architectonic carvings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (fig. 2). It was this rather than the figural composition that first attracted my attention to the relief as part of a broader study on the reception of north Indian architectonic elements in Ghaznavid and Ghurid stone carving.³

The reason for the attribution to Ghazni is not given, but is presumably based on similarities in scale and content between the Linden-Museum relief and a series of marble figural reliefs of roughly the same scale from Ghazni, published by Alessio Bombaci in the early 1960s.⁴ These reliefs depict hunting and dancing scenes, or static rows of human figures sometimes set within arcades (figs. 3–5), which in terms of their dress and demeanor are comparable to the well-known frescoes excavated in the south Palace at Lashkari Bazaar in southern Afghanistan.⁵ One of these reliefs is particularly close to the Stuttgart image in both subject and details. It depicts a standing figure who holds a rod or stick held in his raised right hand and wears a head-dress in the form of a knotted turban (fig. 3), which differs from the more usual two- or four-winged *kulabs* worn by the other figures (where heads are preserved); even the fold falling across the left shoulder recurs in the Stuttgart relief.⁶ Like the Stuttgart relief, some of the figural reliefs published by Bombaci also make use of bushes, plants, trees or wisps of vegetation to punctuate individual scenes (fig. 4).⁷ In addition, both the upper frieze of running animals and the

¹ BIAGI 1927–28, p. 554. See also COTT 1939, pp. 3, 7 for comparisons to early Islamic manuscript and ceramic painting, including late twelfth and early thirteenth-century Rāy (i.e. mina'i) ware.

² KALTER 1987, p. 64, fig. 55.

³ FLOOD 2009a, chapter 5; FLOOD 2009b.

⁴ BOMBACI 1959, pp. 3–22; BOMBACI 1961, pp. 68–70. These were among the subjects of Martina Rugiadi's recent doctoral thesis: RUGIADI 2006.

⁵ SCHLUMBERGER/SOURDEL-THOMINE 1978, vol. 1A, pp. 61–65, pls. 121–24.

⁶ Ibid., p. 10, fig. 1.

⁷ BOMBACI 1959, pp. 10–11, fig. 2.6.



1. Carved marble relief with stylized pūrṇaḥaṭa (overflowing vase) capital, 55 × 40 cm. Stuttgart, Linden-Museum (photo Linden-Museum)



2. Detail of Jain marble relief dated VS 1226/AD 1170 from Mount Abu, northern Gujarat, featuring pilasters with pūrṇaḥaṭa capitals. Current location unknown (photo American Institute of Indian Studies, Neg. no. 213.13)



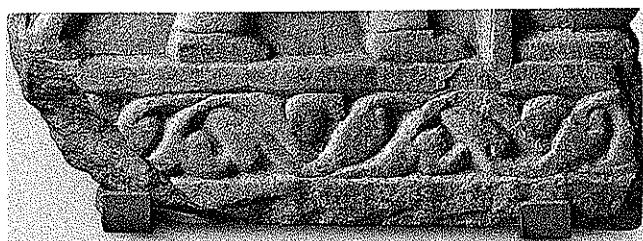
3. Fragmentary carved marble slab from Ghazni with standing figures within an arcade, 51 × 58 cm. Formerly Kabul Museum (after SCERRATO 1959, fig. 1)



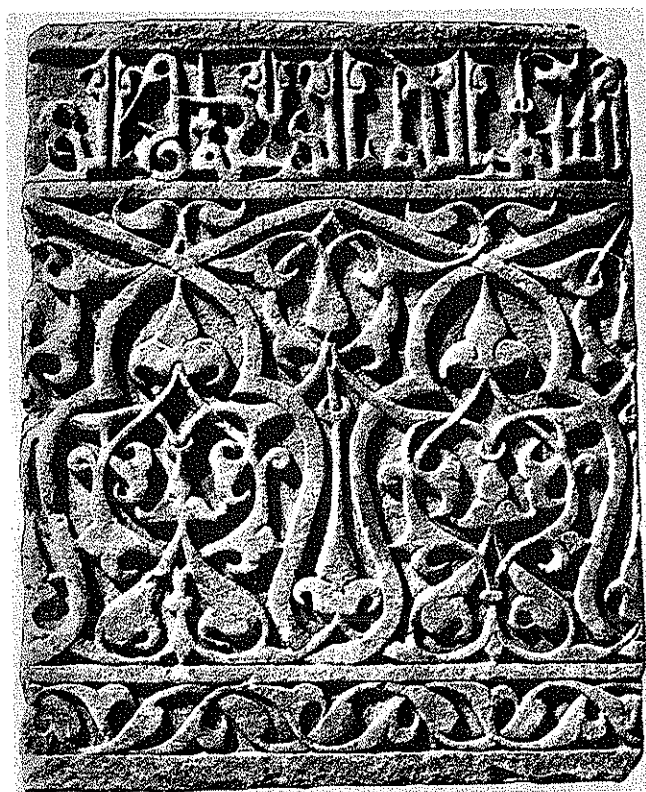
4. Fragmentary carved marble slab from Ghazni with standing figure, plant, and remains of Persian inscriptions, 42.5 × 41 cm. Formerly Kabul Museum (after SCERRATO 1959, fig. 2)



5. Lower border of a fragmentary carved marble slab from Ghazni, 23 × 34 cm. Formerly Kabul Museum (after SCERRATO 1959, fig. 7)



6. Lower border of the relief depicted in figure 1 (photo Linden-Museum)



7. Carved marble slab from the palace of Mas'ud III, Ghazni, dated 505/1112 (after BOMBACI 1966)

lower border of overlapping split palmettes on the Linden-Museum relief recur on many of the Ghazni reliefs whether or not they depict figural scenes (figs. 5–7).⁸

While the similarities to this group of figural reliefs from Ghazni indicate a likely provenance for the Stuttgart relief, the Ghazni carvings are undated. In a communication to the First International Congress of Turkish Art in 1959, Bombaci suggested that they cannot be later than the first half of the twelfth century and, in light of the iconographic similarities with the Lashkari Bazaar frescoes, might even date to the eleventh.⁹ An early twelfth-century date seems probable in light of the flat two-dimensional style of the figural reliefs, which is closely related to that of the marble dadoes in the palace of Mas'ud III (505/1112); fig. 7), and to that of a mihrab or niche-head that bears the name of the same sultan.¹⁰ Despite stylistic similarities, and the use of analogous border elements, however, the quality of the figural carvings is markedly inferior to that of the palace ornament (although even here the quality is variable). As Bombaci noted, "The treatment of these figures, taken as a whole, is elementary. The absence of relief and the scanty modeling gives the figures a clumsy and awkward appearance. The attempt to give expression to the faces, or a dancing motion to the bodies, is only timidly adumbrated."¹¹

The original function and provenance of the marble figural reliefs from Ghazni are unknown, but there is no evidence that they ever adorned the palaces of the Ghaznavid sultans. By analogy with the earlier depiction of animal fables on the walls of domestic structures at Panjikent, it is possible that they decorated the palaces of an elite or merchant class.¹²

One objection to an early twelfth-century date for the Stuttgart relief might be the rarity of Indic elements in Afghan stone carving before the last decade of the twelfth century. Introducing the figural reliefs from Ghazni, Alessio Bombaci argued against André Godard's suggestion that the widespread use of marble in the Ghaznavid capital reflected the impact of Indian architecture on the Ghaznavids. As Bombaci pointed out, it is only at the end of the twelfth century, during the floruit of the Ghurid sultanate, the Ghaznavid successor state that extended its dominion into north India, that Indic elements begin to proliferate in Afghan marble carving.¹³ However, although rare, earlier examples of Indic elements are not

⁸ BOMBACI 1959, pp. 10–12, figs. 3, 5, 7; idem 1966, figs. 9–15, 18.

⁹ In proposing this date, Bombaci pointed to reports that Mas'ud I (1031–41) was an avid hunter: BOMBACI 1961, 70. It is worth noting that while we have abundant evidence of Ghaznavid figural imagery, nothing of this sort survives from the successor Ghurid dynasty, whose floruit was in the last decades of the twelfth century. This may, however, reflect little more than the dearth of extant Ghurid objects.

¹⁰ BOMBACI 1959, pp. 19–20, fig. 17.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹² AZARPAY 1981, pp. 68, 178–79.

¹³ BOMBACI 1961, 67–68.

unknown.¹⁴ A series of terracotta colonnettes crowned with *pūrnaghaṭa* capitals similar to those depicted on the Linden-Museum relief were recovered from the palace of sultan Mas'ud III at Ghazni.¹⁵ Although similar capitals become common in Afghan stone carving (principally from Bust and Ghazni) only at the end of the twelfth century, after the Ghurid conquest of north India,¹⁶ the cumulative evidence suggests that Indic elements may have been more pervasive in Ghaznavid architectural decoration than has previously been thought.

The occasional presence of Indic elements in Ghaznavid architecture is perhaps not surprising in light of reports that (wooden?) beams or columns (*judhū*) from Sind and al-Hind were imported for use in the celebrated 'Bride of Heaven' Friday Mosque that Mahmud built at Ghazni around 1018, largely from Indian booty.¹⁷ The existence of an Indian community in Ghazni during the eleventh century is well attested in a variety of sources. This community was apparently free to follow its own cultural practices, for a chance reference to Ghazni in a contemporary Syrian text mentions the practice of *sati* or self-immolation in Ghazni, informing us that the wives of Indian soldiers would commit themselves to the flames when their husbands were lost in battle, fighting for their Ghaznavid masters.¹⁸ The presence of Hindu temples serving this Indian community can probably be assumed, even if the sources do not herald their existence. In addition, contacts of a different nature and tenor are suggested by the discovery of a one-meter high marble statue of Brahma in the palace at Ghazni; the pattern of wear on the former led its excavator to suggest that it had been set into a threshold or pavement.¹⁹

If the presence of a *pūrnaghaṭa* capital does not rule out the early twelfth-century date and provenance suggested by similarities with the carvings from Ghazni, the Stuttgart relief is distinguished as previously noted by the quality of the modeling of the figures (compare, for example, figs. 1 and 3). In fact the Linden-Museum relief is the most technically and stylistically accomplished of the published figural reliefs. In addition, it is differentiated from the rather static court scenes, or even scenes of pleasure witnessed in the other Ghazni reliefs by the care taken to convey a sense of drama and movement: the rod



8. Fragmentary carved marble slab from Ghazni with nimbate horseman (now defaced) attacked by a lion, 44.5 × 64 cm. Formerly Kabul Museum (after SCERRATO 1959, fig. 4)

poised just at the moment before it falls, to impede the progress of the monkey, who lunges impatiently at the contents of the bucket.²⁰ In its emphasis upon action, the relief bears some comparison to a hunting scene among the figural reliefs from Ghazni, which stands out from the others for a certain refinement in the drawing (fig. 8). In its present state, the relief consists of a defaced image of a nimbate rider or hunter being attacked by a lion, his right hand holding a sword raised to strike the beast.²¹ However, by contrast to the fairly generic hunting scene, the close attention to detail on the Stuttgart relief – the rod raised, the bucket withdrawn, its contents establishing a connection with the tree to the left of the monkey, fruit or seeds of similar form still hanging from its branches – all contribute to an *a priori* sense that this is not only a narrative scene but that it illustrates a specific narrative.

At first glance, the iconography of the scene bears a superficial resemblance to a Buddhist Jataka story or to the illustration of a tale like that of the Monkey and the Carpenter in *Kalīla wa Dimna*, several fourteenth-century depictions of which survive (e.g. fig. 12).²² The closest parallels for the Stuttgart scene are, however, offered by a painting in a copy of the *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt* (The Marvels of Created Things and Singularities of Beings), dated 1 *rabīʿ al-awwal* 790/10 March 1388, and now in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (Suppl. Persan 332).²³ The iconographic similarities between the Ghaznavid relief and a folio of this manuscript that

¹⁴ For a full discussion see FLOOD 2009a, pp. 184–226, and FLOOD 2009b.

¹⁵ Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, Rome, Accession no. 7103, among others. These are unpublished, but are now being studied by Simona Artusi of the University of Naples as part of her doctoral dissertation.

¹⁶ FLOOD 2009a, chapter 5.

¹⁷ UTBI 1869, vol. 2, p. 292. In the thirteenth-century Persian translation, the term is glossed by *dirakht* (tree): JURFADIQANI 1978, p. 387. See also BOMBACI 1964, pp. 25–26, 32.

¹⁸ WORMHOUDT 1997, Arabic text p. 317.

¹⁹ SCERRATO 1959, pp. 39–40, fig. 39. Despite the suggestion, the faces of all the figures on the sculpture are worn equally, even though they would presumably have appeared at different levels had the image been set into a horizontal surface.

²⁰ The subject matter and impressionistic rendering is comparable to that of a group of limestone reliefs, which Eva Baer has suggested was produced in the Seljuq territories of western Iran in the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries: BAER 1967.

²¹ BOMBACI 1959, p. 11, fig. 4; ROWLAND 1966, fig. 99.

²² O'KANE 2003, pp. 81–82.

²³ GRAY 1977, pp. 45–48.



9. Depiction of the Lubiya tree, 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS Supp. Pers. 332, fol. 158v (photo Paris, Bibliothèque nationale)

illustrates an entry on the Lubiya Tree (fig. 9) are sufficient to identify the former as a depiction of man and ape gathering beans from the Lubiya. Working independently, the same conclusion had been reached by Professor Maria Vittoria Fontana in an excellent article published in 2005.²⁴ The identification is of considerable interest, since it offers the first concrete evidence for the existence of narrative illustration in Ghaznavid art.

Predating its better known namesake, the Arabic 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt of Zakariyya ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini by almost a century, the Persian text of the Paris manuscript was written by Muhammad ibn Mahmud ibn Ahmad Tusi Salmani, a Khurasani resident in Hamadan, and dedicated to the Seljuk sultan Tughril ibn Arslan (r. 1166–1177/78).²⁵ Descriptive and anecdotal, Tusi's work is marked by an intersection between

²⁴ FONTANA 2005.

²⁵ Internal evidence suggests that it was completed around 570/1175: RADTKE 1987, p. 280.

what might be crudely termed the folkloric and the scientific, its alphabetical entries on subjects ranging from the celestial bodies to miraculous statues and everything in between structured according to an Aristotelian logic and punctuated by a proliferation of narrative stories (*hikāyat*).²⁶ The reference to the Lubiya occurs in the fifth of ten chapters, a chapter on the Trees and Fruits and Edible Grasses, arranged alphabetically. It occupies just a few lines appended to a longer entry on the almond (*lauz*): "*Lūbiyā*: a tree that grows in the middle of brackish water and may reach a great height. No one can reach its top unless a monkey happens to bend it down and he would take it from him. Were it not for monkeys bringing the top down, no one would ever obtain *lūbiyā*. Its seed is half red and half black, of a lustrous and amazing colour."²⁷

The *Lūbiyā* (*vigna sinensis dolicos lubia* also known as the *Hyacinth* or *Indian Bean*, and *lablab purpureus*) is a bean-vine originally native to the Indian subcontinent whose bushy stems trail upright, to reach a height of up six meters or more. It produces bright red curving seed pods between five and twenty centimeters in length.²⁸ In India, the bean serves both for food and for medicinal purposes, being used to treat high cholesterol, diabetes and afflictions ranging from cholera and diarrhea to gonorrhea, alcoholic intoxication and even globefish poisoning.²⁹ The image in the Paris manuscript illustrates the dependence of humans upon monkeys for the harvesting of the bean, going beyond Tusi's brief text to depict the ensuing struggle as the monkey (not unreasonably) resists human attempts to deprive him of the fruits of his labour.

According to its colophon, the copy of the *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* in Paris was completed by Ahmad Harawi (whose Herati *nisba* is worth drawing attention to) for the *kitāb-khāneh* of Ahmad Khan on the 1st of *rabī' al-awwal* 790 (March 10th, 1388).³⁰ Ahmad Khan is Ahmad Jalayir, last scion of one of the most important regional dynasties that arose in the wake of the disintegration of the Ilkhanid sultanate around 1336. Ahmad Jalayir reigned between 1382 and 1410 and, despite the vagaries of his reign (which involved being forced to flee Iraq on several occasions), is reported to have been a bibliophile, a patron of the arts of the book, and an artist: the

well-known illustrated *Dīvān* of Khwaju Kirmani of 1396 was, for example, produced at his court and folios from a contemporary copy of the sultan's *Dīvān* survive in the collections of the Freer and Sackler Gallery in Washington.³¹ Ahmad's capital was in Baghdad, and it seems likely that the manuscript was produced there. In his study of the Paris manuscript, Stchoukine believed that the scene of the Lubiya was one of only three paintings in the manuscript that were contemporary with the colophon, and therefore products of a Jalayirid workshop, an idea not generally accepted.³²

The iconographic and compositional similarities between the depiction of the Lubiya in the Paris *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* and the scene represented on the Ghaznavid relief in Stuttgart are striking (compare figs. 1 and 9). They include not only the main subject, a contest between man and monkey, but also the strong diagonal structuring the composition and the relative positions of man and beast within it, the ferociousness with which the struggle is enjoined, and the focus on the bucket, which is not mentioned in Tusi's text. In the Ghaznavid relief this is filled with fruit or seeds of similar form to those suspended from a branch of the tree, and dangling right above the monkey's head, a detail that recurs in the Jalayirid painting. Indeed, so close are the similarities, that one is tempted to hazard a guess that a second monkey may once have appeared in the branches of the tree to the left of the Ghaznavid relief when complete, as is the case in the image from the *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*.

There are also differences between the two scenes, even apart from the distinct dress of their chief protagonists. The water that is mentioned in Tusi's text and that features prominently in the Jalayirid painting is absent from the Ghaznavid relief, in which the monkey is wild (in every sense) rather than constrained on a leash, necessitating the threat of a rod or stick that is absent from the Jalayirid image. In the latter, the lower body of the human protagonist faces forward rather than away from its attacker as is the case with the relief. Nevertheless, in both cases, the direction of the upper body and face is identical.

As Maria Vittoria Fontana has demonstrated, marvelous fruit-gathering apes and monkeys are among the phenomena that manifest the wonders (*'ajā'ib*) of India in pre-modern Arabic and Persian texts, a theme that stretches back to late antiquity. Such tales may have their ultimate origin in a South Asian milieu, since tales of fruit-gathering monkeys are found in Tibetan Buddhist texts as early as the eighth century.³³ In her

²⁶ VESEL 1986, pp. 33–34; FOTOUHI 1988; PANCAROĞLU 2003. For a discussion of this work in its broader context see BERLEKAMP 2003.

²⁷ *Lūbiyā*: dirakht-i vay dar mīyān-i āb rūyad dar daryā va-buland buvad. Kas bar sar-i ān na-tavanad raft, magar būzīnah ānrā bi-zīr ārad az vay bi-sitanad. Va-agar nah būzīnah bi-zīr avardī kas bi-lūbiyā na-rasīdī. Danah-i buvad nīmī surkh va nīmī-siyāh, rangī barīq va-shigift: TUSI 1966, p. 323. I am very grateful to Maurice Pomerantz for advice with the Persian translation and transliteration. A legible copy of the text of the Bibliothèque nationale manuscript was unavailable to me, but the poor quality copy supplied suggests that it differs slightly from the published version.

²⁸ KAY 1979.

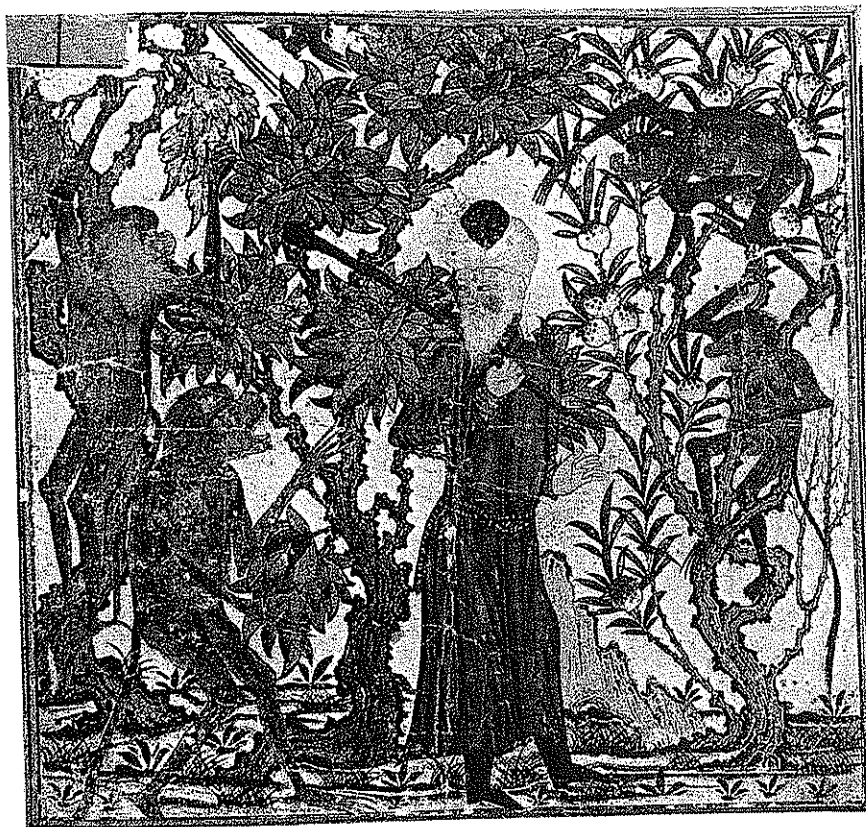
²⁹ <http://www.pfaf.org/database/plants.php?Lablab+purpureus>, accessed July 5th, 2008.

³⁰ FOTOUHI 1988.

³¹ ROBINSON 1982, pp. 13–25, especially pp. 22–23; FITZHERBERT 1991.

³² STCHOUKINE 1954, pp. 32–33; FOTOUHI 1988, 41. By contrast, RICHARD 1997, p. 33 argues that all of the 254 images in the manuscript are contemporary with its colophon.

³³ FONTANA 2005, pp. 445–48.



10. Untitled folio with man and monkeys.
Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Museum,
H. 2153, fol. 155b (photo Topkapı
Sarayı Museum)

analysis of the Stuttgart relief, Professor Fontana suggested that the presence of the *pūrṇaghāṭa* column discussed above was intended to evoke the Indian milieu of the tale, a suggestion that raises important questions about visual cognition in twelfth-century Ghazni.³⁴ Another possibility is that both the tale and the iconographic conventions of its depiction are ultimately of Indian origin, hence the appearance of this distinctive feature. Certainly, the stylistic distinctions between the Stuttgart relief and its Ghaznavid contemporaries, and the uniquely narrative content of the former, suggest that the inspiration for it lay elsewhere than the rather formulaic and uninspired courtly and hunting scenes depicted in the other published figural reliefs from Ghazni. There would of course be precedents for the westward circulation not only of narrative tales, but of the Indian iconographies developed to illustrate them, as Julian Raby's work on the iconography of the *Panchatantra* and medieval Arabic *Kalīla wa Dimna* manuscripts has shown.³⁵

It is not, however, eastward that I want to look, but westward, to speculate about the similarities between the Ghaznavid relief and the Jalayirid painting and their likely implications. There are two possible a priori explanations for these similarities. The first is that both images were inspired by similar oral or textual narratives. In her analysis of both images, Maria Vittoria Fontana concluded that both the Ghaznavid and Jalayirid images were probably inspired by the narrative content of the tales that they illustrate, so that the similarities between them stem from the graphic nature of the textual content, from the imagery of the text itself.³⁶ An alternative possibility, one that I would like to consider here, is that the similarities result from a common indebtedness to similar (although not necessarily the same) models. In the first scenario, the relationship would be generic and contingent, in the second, genetic (or at least genealogical) and necessary.

The resemblances between the Stuttgart relief and the Paris painting are much greater than those between either and the more generic fourteenth-century images of fruit-gathering apes and humans that are found in the Diez or Topkapı Sarayı albums, which may well have been inspired by similar oral or textual accounts of *'ajā'ib*, as Maria Vittoria Fontana suggests.³⁷ Top-

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 448–49. For a full discussion, see FLOOD 2009a, pp. 200–02; FLOOD 2009b.

³⁵ RABY 1987–88. The likelihood of an Indian connection is perhaps heightened by the proliferation of tales concerning India in Tusi's compendium. For example, in a section on strange images in the chapter following that in which the entry on the Lubiya appears, six of twenty-two descriptions take India as their location.

³⁶ FONTANA 2005, p. 448.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 449, figs. 3–4.



11. Untitled folio with man and monkeys. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Orientabteilung, Diez A fol. 72, p. 19 (photo Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin)

kapı Sarayı H. 2153, fol. 155v depicts a standing figure ensnared by snarling pairs of apes or monkeys inhabiting the fruit trees that form a backdrop to the image (fig. 10).³⁸ Despite the sense of menace that pervades it, the scene is curiously devoid of dra-

matic content. Diez A fol. 72, S. 19 offers a more dramatic variant on the same theme, with the menaced human figure appearing to be in motion beneath a fruit tree, perhaps startled by the single pair of simians confronting him to his right (fig. 11).³⁹ However,

³⁸ İPŞİROĞLU 1966, fig. 15.

³⁹ İPŞİROĞLU 1964, p. 53, fig. 22.



12. *The Carpenter and the Monkey*, *Kalila wa Dimna*. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, H. 362, fol. 30a (photo Bernard O'Kane, reproduced by permission of Topkapı Sarayı Museum)

both album images lack the sense of enjoined struggle and strong diagonal composition common to the Ghaznavid relief and Jalayirid painting. In both respects, the closest analogy is provided by a depiction of the tale of the Monkey and the Carpenter from a copy of *Kalila wa Dimna* now in Istanbul (fig. 12), an image that Bernard O'Kane suggests is also the product of a Jalayirid atelier operating in the 1370s or 1380s.⁴⁰

The human figures depicted in the folios from Diez and Topkapı albums clutch a stick absent from the Jalayirid painting. However, they lack the presence of features not mentioned in Tusi's text on the Lubiya but common to both the Ghaznavid relief and Jalayirid painting. These features range from the general – the struggle between man and beast – to the specific, most obviously the bucket, which forms the focus of the struggle depicted in both scenes but is neither mentioned in the text nor depicted in renderings of analogous scenes.

The extensive detail and narrative content of the image accompanying the entry on the Lubiya in the Jalayirid copy of Tusi's *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* distinguish it from the more schematic 'scientific' images that accompany the section on edible grasses (including the Lubiya) in the well-known illustrated Munich copy of Zakariyya ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini's work of the same name, produced in Iraq in 1280 (fig. 13). This suggests that the sources of the Jalayirid image

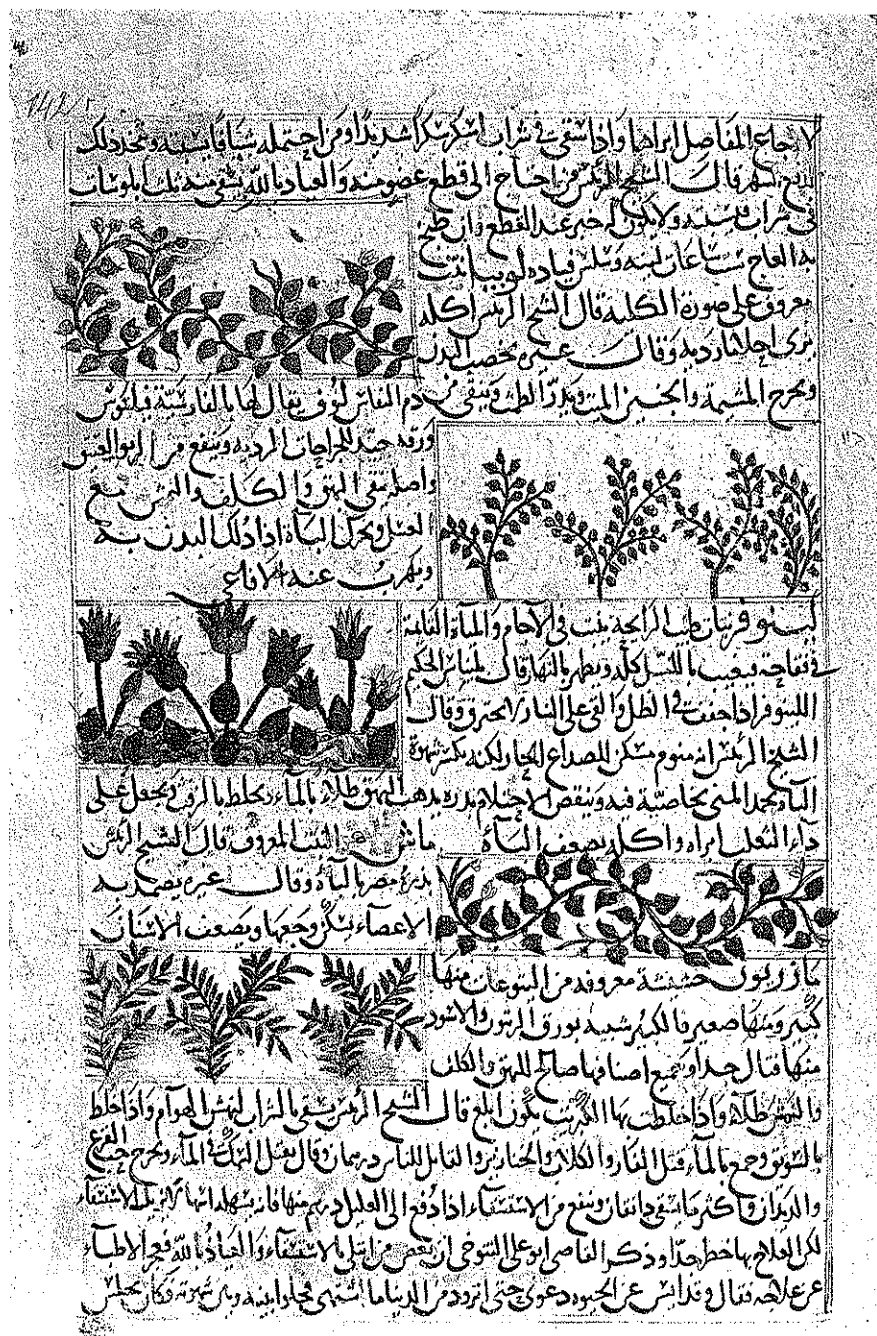
lay elsewhere than the Greek herbals upon which earlier Arab artists drew. In his discussion of the *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*, Francis Richard noted that the manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale is the only known illustrated copy of Tusi's work, and suggested that it employs an original iconography.⁴¹ The similarities to the Ghaznavid relief suggest, however, that the Jalayirid artists may have made use of pre-existing models for at least some of the images that illustrate the text.⁴² If one accepts the existence of a genetic rather than a generic relationship between the Ghaznavid relief and Jalayirid painting, the most obvious explanation is that both stem from common or related sources. Such sources would have had to have been mobile or portable. One obvious possibility is that illustrated Ghaznavid or Seljuq manuscripts containing narrative scenes like these were available to Jalayirid painters in later fourteenth-century Baghdad either directly or mediated through later copies.

I realize that I am on dangerous ground in trying to make a case based on formal analysis alone. However, analysis of the visual material may be bolstered by appeal to a myriad of cir-

⁴¹ RICHARD 1997, p. 33.

⁴² Although the dress of the human protagonists in each case differs, this does not preclude a genetic relationship. Raby notes the inherent conservatism of animal depictions compared to those of human figures in Arabic and Persian manuscript painting: RABY 1987–88, p. 396. The 'updating' or 'modernisation' of dress is a well attested phenomenon, even where earlier models were used: SEYLLER 1994.

⁴⁰ Topkapı Sarayı H. 362, fol. 30a; O'KANE 2003, pp. 81–82, 113, 213.



13. Entries on edible grasses, including the *lubiya*, in Zakariyya ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini's *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt*, Iraq, 1280. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Arab 464, fol. 142r (photo Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich)

cumstantial evidence. It has long been recognized, for example, that stylistic and iconographic overlaps between figures depicted on twelfth-century Iranian ceramics (especially polychromatic enameled or *mina'i* ware) and *Varqa wa Gulshāh*, the earliest extant illustrated Persian text, produced in Anatolia around 1250, offer circumstantial evidence for the existence of illustrated Seljuq manuscripts before the thirteenth century.⁴³ A

vogue for humorous images among the Seljuq sultans of Iran (to one of whom Tusi's text is dedicated) is suggested by a report in the *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr* that the uncle of its author, al-Ravandi, created a poetic anthology for Sultan Tughril II in 1184–85, which was illustrated not only with royal portraits but also depictions of humorous stories included in the text as an appendix.⁴⁴

⁴³ MELIKIAN-CHIRVANI 1970; HILLENBRAND 1994.

⁴⁴ O'KANE 2003, p. 43.



14. Mahmud conquering India, Jāmi' al-tawārīkh. Edinburgh, University Library, Or. Ms. 20, fol. 179b (photo University Library, Edinburgh)

In addition to evidence for Seljuq painting, contemporary Ghaznavid art was also marked by a proliferation of imagery across a wide range of media. Surviving examples occur as wall-paintings, in stucco, metalwork and glass. Among the more outlandish examples of a Ghaznavid penchant for the figural that do not survive was a throne on which gilded bronze human figures held a crown above the seated sultan, a feature described by Bayhaqi at the Ghaznavid court in the 1030s.⁴⁵ This dynastic penchant for figural imagery has long been recognized. However, as mentioned above, there is nothing to associate the Stuttgart relief (or any of the other figural reliefs from Ghazni) with a courtly milieu. It seems likely, therefore, that figural imagery permeated Ghaznavid artistic production even outside the context of royal patronage.

The identification of the Stuttgart relief as a twelfth-century narrative depiction indicates that tales such as those incorporated into Tusi's text were already circulating in eastern Iran and Afghanistan by the first decades of the twelfth century, along with images illustrating them. In light of the interrelationships between the arts of the book and other media, some

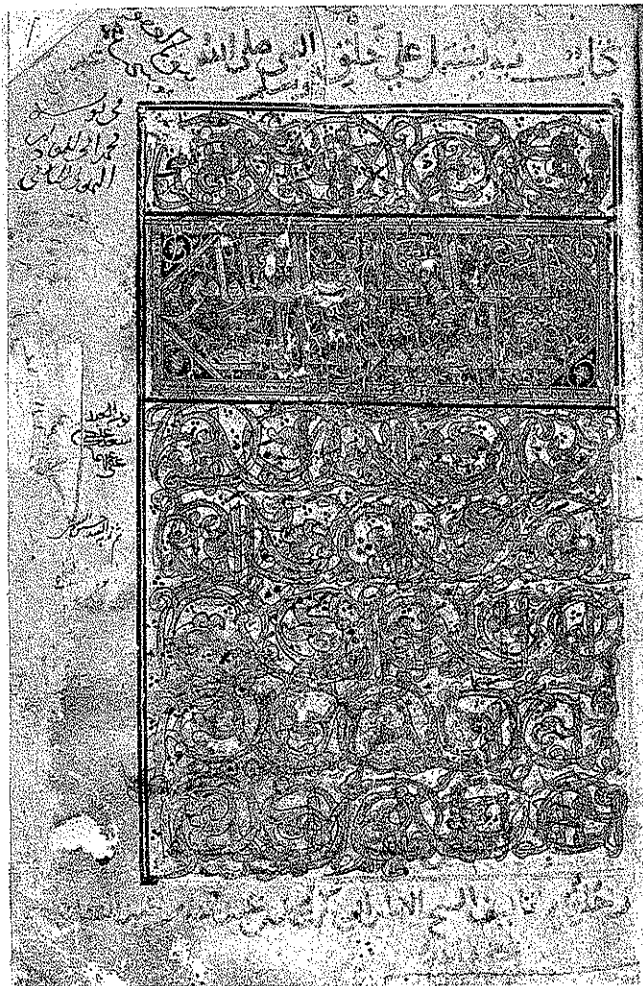
of these images may also have been incorporated into illustrated Ghaznavid manuscripts, none of which are known to survive. The existence of illustrated manuscripts at the Ghaznavid court is suggested by a discussion of Manicheanism contained in the *Bayān al-adyān* of Abu'l-Ma'ali Muhammad ibn Ubaydallah, probably written in Ghazni in 485/1092, in which the author refers to the fabled *Arhang* of Mani, which he reports was a book composed of a variety of illustrations, a copy of which was kept in the Ghaznavid treasury.⁴⁶ In addition, an interest in animal fables on the part of the Ghaznavids is suggested by Abu'l-Ma'ali Nasr Allah ibn Muhammad's production of a Persian version of *Kalila wa Dimna*, probably between 1144 and 1152 for the Ghaznavid sultan Bahram Shah, patron of one of the two minarets still standing in Ghazni.⁴⁷ Although it has been claimed that Nasr Allah's preface expresses the hope that his text will be illustrated, this is not in fact the case.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it remains an open possibility that

⁴⁵ GABRIELI 1932, p. 607.

⁴⁶ BROWNE 1951, pp. 349–52; ARBERRY 1958, pp. 95–97.

⁴⁸ RABY 1987–88, p. 386 and note 27 seems to be the earliest to assert this, as O'KANE 2003, p. 27 notes. For the Persian text and a recent German translation, see SACY 1818, and MUNSHI 1996, pp. 369–86.

⁴⁵ Cited in MELIKIAN-CHIRVANI 1992, pp. 111–12.



15. Ex libris of the Kitāb khalq al-nabī wa-khulqihū. Leiden, University Library, UBLOHS, Or. 437, p. 001 (photo University Library)



16. First folio of the Kitāb khalq al-nabī wa-khulqihū. Leiden, University Library, UBLOHS, Or. 437, p. 002 (photo University Library)

illustrated copies were produced at the Ghaznavid court, especially in light of reports that the Samanid ruler Nasr ibn Ahmad (r. 913–42) had ordered a Persian version of the same text, and had it illustrated.⁴⁹

Further circumstantial evidence for the existence of Ghaznavid illustrated manuscripts is provided by the subject matter of Ilkhanid painting. Noting the unusual number of illustrations to the chapters on the Ghaznavids in the Arabic version of Rashid al-Din's early fourteenth-century *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* (fig. 14), Sheila Blair has drawn attention to a tradition of luxury book production and rich illumination attested by a few surviving Ghaznavid manuscripts (among them Qur'ans). She also invokes a tradition of figural painting exemplified by the frescoes excavated at Lashkari Bazaar and otherwise known from textual accounts of Ghaznavid palaces painted with hunting, feasting

and even erotic scenes. Blair concludes that "it is quite probable, therefore, that Ghaznavid manuscripts with narrative scenes, including battle scenes, existed and provided models for the paintings of the Ghaznavids in the Arabic copy of the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*."⁵⁰ In light of what we know about the subject matter of both Ghaznavid wall-paintings and the kind of 'dynastic' imagery reflected (or refracted) in the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, the likelihood of a relationship between such hypothetical manuscripts and the figural scenes that adorned contemporary Ghaznavid architecture seems strong. If, as I am suggesting, animal fables or 'ajā'ib tales were also illustrated in eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscripts, this would extend the range of narrative scenes beyond the illustration of dynastic histories.

Blair's suggestion not only points to the likely existence of Ghaznavid and Seljuq illustrated manuscripts, but also to the

⁴⁹ COWEN 1989, p. 12; O'KANE 2003, p. 37.

⁵⁰ BLAIR 1995, p. 55.

possibility that they circulated westward to serve as models for fourteenth-century painters active in the central Islamic lands. If Ilkhanid artists had access to illustrated Ghaznavid manuscripts in early fourteenth-century Tabriz, then this would increase the likelihood that similar sources were available to Jalayirid artists working in Baghdad later in the same century, especially in view of the genealogical connections between the Ilkhanid and Jalayirid ateliers.⁵¹ Such a scenario would offer one possible explanation for the similarities between the Ghaznavid relief in Stuttgart and the Jalayirid painting in the Paris manuscript.

There is in fact some evidence for the westward circulation of Ghaznavid manuscripts, although it concerns illuminated rather than illustrated texts. This is provided by an Arabic text, the *Kitāb khalq al-nabī wa-khulqihū* (*Book of Physical and Moral Characteristics of the Prophet*), produced in Ghazni for 'Abd al-Rashid, the son of sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi around 1050 (figs. 15 and 16). The extended *ex libris* of the manuscript indicates that it was in the possession of an individual with the *nisba* al-Himṣi by the twelfth century and then owned by Musa ibn Yaghmur, who Samuel Stern suggested should be identified as the vizier of al-Kamil, the Ayyubid ruler of Egypt who reigned between 1218 and 1238.⁵² In other words, the manuscript seems to have traveled westwards at some point after the death of its owner (who reigned for only 3 years) and to have reached Egypt or Syria by the first half of the thirteenth century.

The westward migration of Ghaznavid manuscripts is perhaps not surprising in light of the number of scholars from Ghazni who are reported to have studied in Damascus during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, drawn perhaps by the strength there of the Shafi'i *madhhab* also favoured in Ghazni.⁵³ Some of these acted as native informants for the tales concerning the Ghaznavid capital (and its Indian residents) that one finds in works such as the *Risālat al-ghufrān*, written

by the Syrian poet Abu 'Ala' al-Ma'arri some time before 1051.⁵⁴ The appearance of tales about contemporary Ghazni in an eleventh-century Syrian text, and the movement of human agents upon which this depended, remind us that long distance mobility and transregional information flows are not the exclusive prerogative of modern global societies. A notable feature of these premodern information flows is the mutual self-awareness of medieval elites in different frontier regions of the eastern Islamic world. Writing around 1031, for example, it is to the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus that the Ghaznavid court historian al-'Utbi compares the Friday Mosque built by Mahmud Ghaznavi in 1018.⁵⁵ Similarly, on the twelfth-century Anatolian frontier, a panegyric penned in favour of the Mengujekid Turkman ruler Fakhr al-Din Bahram Shah of Erzinçan compares him to his namesake in the Panjab, the Ghaznavid sultan Bahram Shah (511–546/1118–52).⁵⁶ Half a century later, the historian Juzjani (who was raised at the court of the Ghurid sultans of Afghanistan) makes explicit comparison between the military victories of Salah al-Din against the Fatimids and Christian Franks in the eastern Mediterranean and those of the Ghurid sultan Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam against the Ghaznavid and Hindu kingdoms of northern India in the East during the same period.⁵⁷

Afghanistan may seem remote from Sicily today, but such references remind us that between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the western end of circuits linking Afghanistan with the central Islamic lands lay in the eastern Mediterranean. Along such circuits, the inhabitants of Ghazni, tales concerning the city, and even artifacts that originated there circulated westwards. This is not, of course, to insist that Ghaznavid or Seljuq manuscripts in fact inspired the artisans of Norman Sicily, but merely to point out that the suggestion made by the pioneering scholars of the Siculo-Arabic ivories is perhaps less implausible than might at first appear.

⁵¹ ROBINSON 1982, pp. 13–18. See the suggestion that the Jalayirids inherited manuscripts from the Ilkhanid ateliers in Tabriz: O'KANE 2003, p. 33.

⁵² STERN 1969, pp. 21–23.

⁵³ The significance of these exchanges awaits further investigation, but see FLOOD 2001, p. 6 note.

⁵⁴ See note 18 above.

⁵⁵ 'UTBI 1869, vol. 2, p. 290.

⁵⁶ SHUKUROV 2001, p. 269.

⁵⁷ RAVERTY 1970, vol. 1, p. 214. The minting of Ghurid coins that were apparently based on Ayyubid prototypes suggests that these sorts of comparisons were more than topoi: FLOOD 2005, pp. 283–84.

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