

Multivalent Cultural Forces in the Siyah Qalam Lion Rider: A Case Study in Visual  
Transmission from the Persianate World

Alexander Cichan

Supervisor: Professor Cecily Hilsdale  
Examiner: Professor Jeehee Hong

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Department of Art History and Communication Studies  
McGill University  
Montreal, QC

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## Table of Contents

Abstract/Resumé	2
Acknowledgments	3
Introduction: Siyah Qalam and the Saray Albums	4
Section I: Content, Origins, Iconography, and Copying Practices	6
Section II: Literature Review on Siyah Qalam and <i>Lion Rider</i>	8
Section III: The Medieval Persianate World	10
Section IV: <i>Lion Rider</i> : Subject Matter and Narrative	14
Section V: Origins: Central Asian and Jalayirid Scenarios	18
Section VI: Islamic and Christian Sources	23
Section VII: Iconographic Precedents	25
Section VIII: Siyah Qalam, <i>Lion Rider</i> , and Chinese Copying Practices	29
Section IX: Persianate Manuscript Practices and the Context of <i>Lion Rider</i> in H. 2153	33
Section X: Copying Practices Between H. 2153 and H. 2160	38
Conclusion: Visual Transmission in the Persianate World	40
Figures	42
Bibliography	51

## Abstract

This thesis investigates a miniature known as the “lion rider” that is part of the enigmatic group of manuscript images bearing the signature of Siyah Qalam, an artist or school of artists thought to be active Persianate lands from the late 14th to mid-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. By analyzing the cultural influences of this single scene, the thesis draws upon previous scholarship to highlight possible origins, source material, and copying practices of manuscript painting. Each of these factors is used to show the dynamic abilities of late medieval Persianate artists to incorporate a diversity of visual approaches into their work. In all, this thesis is an effort to shift the discourse on the Siyah Qalam paintings from the circumstances of creation to their long-term trajectory through a synthesis of origin theories and iconographic precedents with the complexities of copying practices in the Islamic and Chinese traditions.

## Resumé

Cette thèse étudie une miniature connue sous le nom de « lion cavalier », qui fait partie du groupe énigmatique d'images manuscrites portant la signature de Siyah Qalam, artiste ou école d'artistes considérés comme actifs sur les territoires persans de la fin du 14<sup>ème</sup> au milieu du 15<sup>ème</sup> siècle. En analysant les influences culturelles de cette scène unique, la thèse s'appuie sur des travaux antérieurs pour mettre en évidence les origines possibles, le matériel source et les pratiques de copie de la peinture manuscrite. Chacun de ces facteurs est utilisé pour montrer la capacité dynamique des artistes persans de la fin du Moyen-Âge à intégrer une diversité d'approches visuelles dans leur travail. Dans son ensemble, cette thèse s'efforce de déplacer le discours sur les peintures de Siyah Qalam des circonstances de la création vers leur trajectoire à long terme, à travers une synthèse des théories d'origine et des précédents iconographiques, avec les complexités des pratiques de copie dans les traditions islamiques et chinoises.

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## Introduction: Siyah Qalam and the Saray Albums

The name “Siyah Qalam” (black pen) refers to approximately sixty-five paintings and drawings inscribed with some variation of the signature “Master Muhammad of the Black Pen.”<sup>1</sup> Among the most perplexing subjects in Islamic art history, these images primarily depict demons, wanderers, and dervishes. Over the years, the paintings have elicited numerous interpretations, but the general consensus is that the Siyah Qalam signature refers to a painter or school of painters active in Persianate lands from the late 14th to mid-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Siyah Qalam paintings are mostly contained within two albums in the Topkapı Palace Library that are known by their call numbers from the Hazine library, abbreviated as Hazine 2153 and Hazine 2160.<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that the Siyah Qalam group represents a fraction of the images contained in the Saray albums.<sup>3</sup> The larger album of the two is H. 2153, which includes

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<sup>1</sup> Zeren Tanındı, “Some Problems of the Istanbul Albums H. 2153 and 2160,” *Islamic Art* (1981): 37. Other versions include, *kar-i ustad Muhammad siyah qalam*, *kar-i Muhammad siyah qalam*, *kar-i siyah qalam*, *mashq-i muhammad siyah qalam*, *amal-i Muhammad siyah qalam*, *kar-i Muhammad siyah*, *ustad Muhammad siyah qalam* mostly written in what Tanındı considers “very clumsy” Nastaliq script. Pictures with these signatures are known as the “Siyah Qalam group.” Due to the muddled penmanship of the Siyah Qalam signatures, their authenticity has been brought into question by multiple scholars and some believe them to be forged. There are other images bearing the Siyah Qalam signature outside of the albums, such as *Two Demons Playing Musical Instruments* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art or *Demons in Chains* from the Claude Anet collection. It is believed each of these were torn out of the albums at an unknown point in time.

<sup>2</sup> David Roxburgh, *The Persian Album, 1400-1600: Dispersal to Collection*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 93-106. The Hazine Library is the former Ottoman imperial treasury and the home to the manuscripts since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. H. 2153 and H. 2160 are part of a group known collectively as the “Saray albums.” This designation also refers to two additional, related albums that arrived in Istanbul at the same time: Hazine 2152 and Hazine 2154. Hazine 2152 is known for its variety of material that appear to be scraps from a Timurid workshop, leading David Roxburgh to nickname it the “Timurid Workshop Album.” Hazine 2154 is the most distinct and easily identifiable of the four as it was compiled by the court calligrapher and proto-art historian, Dust Muhammad, at the Safavid court in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3</sup> Gülru Necipoğlu, “Persianate Images Between Europe and China: The ‘Frankish Manner’ in the Diez and Topkapı Albums, c. 1350-1459” in *The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents*, ed. Julia Gonnella, Friederike Weis, and Christoph Rauch (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 531. At various points in time the Saray albums (H. 2153 and H. 2160) have been known as the “Fatih” or “Yaquub Beg” albums because of dedicatory inscriptions referencing the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II Fatih (conqueror) and the Aqqoyunlu

approximately 546 large-scale images, while H. 2160 is comprised of 131 smaller-scale works, bringing the total number of images between the two albums to 677. H. 2153 is the only one to contain large-scale works, and H. 2160 is mostly comprised of calligraphy and smaller-scale works. Because multiple images are repeated in both albums, we should view them as closely interconnected projects: scholars have argued that most of the small-scale paintings in H. 2160 are scraps and leftovers from H. 2153. Among the hundreds of images in the albums are works collected from throughout the Islamic world, especially the Jalayirid, Turkoman, Timurid, and Safavid courts, paired with more contemporary images from the Ottoman court of Mehmed II. The high degree of diverse imagery in the Saray albums makes them emblematic of the intense volume of exchange between each of these cultural centers.

While neither album preserves a preface, detailed colophon, or patron name, the first and last folios of H. 2160 feature a sovereignty seal from Selim I, indicating the album was completed by 1514 and in Ottoman possession no later than 1520. H. 2153 also includes a sovereignty seal from Selim I, but it is not located on the first and last folios, as was standard practice in the Ottoman court. Due to the clear parallels between the two albums, scholars have traditionally considered them contemporaneous with one another.<sup>4</sup> Although the albums were likely collected and bound in Istanbul during the reign of Selim I, much of the content, including the Siyah Qalam paintings, is generally believed to have been acquired after Mehmed II's victory over the Aqqoyunlu in 1473 or after Selim I's victory over the Safavids in 1514.<sup>5</sup> It is possible

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ruler Yaqub Beg. Scholars today reject these labels because there is no evidence to indicate the albums or most of the images were commissioned specifically for either ruler.

<sup>4</sup> To clarify, this means H.2153 is more difficult to definitively date, but because of its glaring parallels to H. 2160 most scholars believe it was in Ottoman possession at the same time.

<sup>5</sup> Zeren Tanındı, "Repetition of Illustrations in the Topkapı Palace and Diez Albums" in *The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents*, ed. Julia Gonnella, Friederike Weis, and Christoph Rauch (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 163-165; Bernard O'Kane, "Siyah Qalam: the Jalayirid Connections," *Oriental Art* 49 (2003): 15-16. The first theory is largely put forward based upon the strong connections to the Aqqoyunlu court of Yaqub Beg and the second is connected to the sovereignty seals of Selim I. Most of the texts and images

they were bound before their arrival in Istanbul, but some scholars such as Basil Robinson have argued the contents were brought in folders as loose papers from Tabriz and subsequently bound at the Ottoman court.<sup>6</sup>

The Siyah Qalam paintings represent the truly globalized nature of the Persianate artistic tradition in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Much of the scholarship on these paintings focuses on how they are outliers within a highly regulated and monolithic Persianate visual culture, where artists were customarily held to strict standards and rarely allowed to deviate into more experimental areas.<sup>7</sup> While I am not disputing the validity of these observations, I hope to contribute to scholarship from more recent years that emphasizes the dynamic aspects of Persianate art during this period. The Siyah Qalam paintings challenge the traditional perceptions of Persianate art by illuminating the multi-cultural, dynamic character of Islamic art in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Content, Origins, Iconography, and Copying Practices**

In this paper, I will explore a prototypical example of this dynamism by examining the Siyah Qalam image sometimes known as the “lion rider” [Fig. 1]. Throughout my investigation into the context and source material for this image, I will demonstrate how the *Lion Rider* sits at a nexus of visual and religious traditions that encompasses material from Christian, Persianate, and Chinese visual and literary cultures. For example, instances of Christian iconography in the

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were likely torn out of other albums and collected as loose papers from around the eastern Islamic world before being brought to Tabriz and collected as booty by the Ottomans. This means the creation of the albums came decades after the creation of most of the images. Bernard O’Kane believes it is possible they were originally collected by a Jalayirid noble and later used as didactic material for artists in the Aqqoyunlu court.

<sup>6</sup> Basil Robinson, “The Turkmen School to 1503,” in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, ed. Basil Gray (New York: UNESCO, 1979), 248-249.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Lentz and Glenn Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Architecture in the Fifteenth Century* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 163-169. An example of this is Thomas Lentz and Glenn Lowry’s account of Timurid miniature painting.

Siyah Qalam corpus are not unusual, but one significant aspect of *Lion Rider* is its explicit invocation of a biblical figure drawn from the Old Testament that is found in the Islamic tradition as well.<sup>8</sup> Although the rider is depicted according to the visual conventions of the Islamic world, he is shown atop a *qilin*, a recognizable figure from ancient Chinese mythology that is known for having the body of a lion, wings of fire, and a unicorn-like horn on its forehead.<sup>9</sup> The *qilin* has its basis in ancient Chinese mythological tales but is primarily known for frequent appearances during the lifetimes of great sages or leaders.<sup>10</sup> In its combination of Christian, Islamic, and Chinese references, the *Lion Rider* image provides an ideal case study for thinking about cross-cultural interaction because it demonstrates how artists from the Persianate world melded traditional forms common to the lands of Islam with European and Chinese visual cultures.

By utilizing material from H. 2153 and analyzing the album's diverse visual sources, I will argue that the *Lion Rider* is best understood through a focus on the role of Chinese and Islamic copying practices that are crucial conduits for the adoption of visual forms. Following a brief explanation of historical context, the first section will introduce the *Lion Rider* painting by

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Brend, "Christian Subjects and Christian Subjects: An Istanbul Album Picture," *Islamic Art* (1981): 122-129. The most notable example of this is *The Monastery*, one of the most complex Siyah Qalam paintings. It shows a large two-domed building that draws on an assortment of Christian, Islamic, and Chinese architectural material and visual motifs. The Christian elements include wall paintings with subject matter and bells in the style of Romanesque France. Two figures standing in the foreground are believed to be a reference to the Virgin and Child. Brend contextualizes the Christian imagery within the Syriac and Nestorian traditions because of their ubiquity in the Eastern Islamic world of the time. Another Siyah Qalam painting shows a black woman in a shawl holding her baby in a protective manner against an approaching demon. It is possible an image like this refers to a story that is lost to us now, but the mother and child bears close resemblances to Virgin and Child imagery from the Christian world. For reference these are figures 409 and 121 in the *Islamic Art* journal.

<sup>9</sup> Feliz Çağman, "Glimpses into the Fourteenth Century Turkic World of Central Asia: The Paintings of Muhammad Siyah Qalam in *Turks: A Journey of One Thousand Years*, ed. David Roxburgh, (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005) 405.

<sup>10</sup> Kathlyn Liscomb, "How the Giraffe Became a Qilin: Intercultural Signification in Ming Dynasty Arts," in *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture*, ed. Jerome Silbergeld and Eugene Wang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 346-348.



presenting a visual description of the work's subject matter with the aim of explicating its compositional structure and narrative while briefly showing the close connections to material components from the Chinese tradition. The next part of the thesis will move toward a discussion of possible origins followed by an assessment of visual and textual sources primarily from the Islamic world, medieval Europe, and Ancient Rome.

The final part of the paper will address the issue of copying practices in *Lion Rider* and the broader Siyah Qalam corpus. The first section will focus on likely instances of copying from various Yuan period paintings by Gong Kai and Zhao Mengfu before shifting to address the tension between Siyah Qalam images and their subsequent placement in the Saray albums. The latter part of this section will feature similar drawings from H. 2153 to situate *Lion Rider* within the context of copying practices in Islamic manuscripts. More specifically, this section will grapple with the seemingly deliberate choice by the Ottoman album compilers to place images from other visual traditions near *Lion Rider*.<sup>11</sup> Throughout, I will take an adamantly contextualist approach and use culturally specific imagery to show how hybrid visual characteristics were realized in *Lion Rider* through the integrative tendencies of Persianate artists in the 15th century.

### **Literature Review on Siyah Qalam and *Lion Rider***

The Tenth Annual Colloquium of the Percival David Foundation in 1980, published as the first volume of *Islamic Art* in the subsequent year, continues to be the seminal source for scholarship on the Siyah Qalam paintings.<sup>12</sup> At this conference, some scholars argued for a Central Asian connection involving contacts with shamanistic and esoteric dervish sects of

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<sup>11</sup> For clarification purposes, we do not know that Ottoman compilers collected all the images and bound the albums. Although there are many Ottoman era images in the Saray albums, the Siyah Qalam paintings likely predate them and were not created in Istanbul. The heavy presence of Ottoman era images has led me to believe that the album compilation process took place primarily in Istanbul.

<sup>12</sup> Led by Islamic art historian Ernst Grube, the proceedings included contributions by Julian Raby, Emil Esin, Basil Gray, Feliz Çağman, Basil Robinson, and Zeren Tanındı, among others. These proceedings were later re-printed as the first volume of the *Islamic Art* academic journal in 1981.

Turkic affiliation and parallels to Uyghur visual culture, specifically their presence at the court of Mehmet II in Istanbul.<sup>13</sup> Others emphasized possible associations with royal courts outside of Istanbul, such as the court of Timur in Samarkand and the various Turkoman courts of Tabriz.<sup>14</sup>

In more recent years, most scholars underscore the connection of the Siyah Qalam corpus to court scriptoria during the reigns of the Jalayirids, Timurids, and the Turkoman confederations. The most prominent studies by Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, J.M. Rogers Bernard O’Kane, Feliz Çağman, and Gülru Necipoğlu respond to one or multiple theories put forward at the conference. While Steinhardt builds upon her own conference paper by focusing on parallels between stylistic elements in the Siyah Qalam paintings and the Chinese paintings of Gong Kai, subsequent studies authored by Rogers and O’Kane provide evidence for dismissing the Central Asian shamanistic theory and instead point to links with visual culture found at the Aqqoyunlu and Jalayirid royal courts. The most recent published source to address the Saray albums is an edited volume on the Diez albums featuring essays from Gülru Necipoğlu and Zeren Tanındı.<sup>15</sup> Rather than focusing on a single strand of cultural influence or possible circumstances of creation, my intention with this thesis is to unite much of this past scholarly

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<sup>13</sup> Emil Esin, “Muhammad Siyah Kalam and the Inner Asian Turkish Tradition,” *Islamic Art* 1 (1981): 90-105; Beyhan Karamagarali, “The Siyah Kalam Paintings and Their Relation to Esoteric Muslim Sects,” *Islamic Art* 1 (1981): 106-109. Although derived from Z.V. Togan’s work, Emil Esin and Beyhan Karamagarali were the two main scholars to articulate these views at the David Foundation conference.

<sup>14</sup> Ernst Grube and others initially pushed for a connection to the court of Timur at Samarkand, but later admitted this was a misguided effort to fill in the blanks regarding the lack of miniature painting during Timur’s reign. In addition, this theory ignored Timur’s preference for architectural patronage over miniature painting.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Gonnella, Friedrike Weis, and Christoph Rauch, eds., *The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents*. Leiden: Brill, 2017. The Diez albums are an assortment of folios containing images extracted from late medieval Turkoman workshop albums, including the Saray albums with a few Siyah Qalam examples, by German nobleman Friederik von Diez in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were brought back to Berlin and are currently held in the State Museum. Harking back to an idea advanced by Richard Ettinghausen decades before, some essays in the volume use the Diez albums to shed new light on material from the Saray albums, especially H. 2153.

work by using a holistic approach to demonstrate the diverse cultural forces at play in the Siyah Qalam *Lion Rider*.

One seminal model for my thinking on *Lion Rider* comes from Richard Ettinghausen's theory on cultural transfer between Byzantium and Sassanian Iran that posited distinct stages for how images move across cultural boundaries by outlining three successive processes: transfer, adoption, and integration.<sup>16</sup> Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt broadened and amended his theory for the purposes of demonstrating how the Siyah Qalam paintings are representative of visual transmission from East to West Asia.<sup>17</sup> Steinhardt's process begins with copying practices, moves toward the adoption and reinterpretation of motifs in a new cultural context, and finishes with the full blending of Chinese and West Asian figural form that simultaneously creates entirely novel compositions while still showing visible signs of each respective tradition. As this paper will mainly focus on copying practices and source material, my motive for selecting the *Lion Rider* image as a critical case study is its remarkable capacity to unite all three of Steinhardt's steps thereby providing a window into the vibrant nature of the Siyah Qalam paintings and the wider cultural dynamism of the Persianate world.

### **The Medieval Persianate World**

In *The Venture of Islam*, Marshall Hodgson coined the term "Persianate" in reference to both the lands of Persian-speaking peoples and the panoply of cultural traditions influenced by them.<sup>18</sup> Persianate is an umbrella term that can refer to Turkic ethnic groups like the Ottoman or

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Ettinghausen, "Three Modes of Artistic Influence" in *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*, eds. Richard Ettinghausen and Otto Kurz (London: The Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1997) 3:1-10.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, "Siyah Qalam and Gong Kai: An Istanbul Album Painter and a Chinese Painter of the Mongolian Period," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 59-71.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall Hodgson, "The Bloom of Persian Literary Culture and its Times," in *The Venture of Islam*, ed. Marshall Hodgson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 2:293-294.

Turkoman peoples as well as the remains of the Mongol ruling class in Persia, such as the Jalayirids. Some of these groups may not have exclusively spoken Persian, but the influence of Persian-speaking culture, especially in the realm of literary arts, was fundamental to the development of their societies.

As primarily Persianate artworks, the Siyah Qalam paintings are firmly situated within the aftermath of the Mongol invasions of Central Asia and Iran during the mid-13th century and show close connections with visual cultures from the various successor regimes that followed the establishment of the Mongol Ilkhanate. Each of these successors, including the Jalayirids, Timurids, Qaraqoyunlu, and Aqqoyunlu, exchanged material extensively and the borders between them were remarkably porous, with artists often traversing and exchanging material between courts.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the beginning of the 16th century witnessed the precipitous rise of the Ottoman and Safavid dynasties, which swiftly destroyed the remains of the post-Mongol states like the Aqqoyunlu while looting much of the artistic material from centers like Tabriz and Shiraz.<sup>20</sup>

The Ilkhanate was the regime installed by the Mongols following their conquest of Iran. It encompassed all of Persia, Iraq, northern Afghanistan, the southern Caucasus, and various parts of Anatolia.<sup>21</sup> In terms of the arts, the Ilkhans were responsible for facilitating a massive increase in the prestige of manuscript painting, developing a tradition that greatly expanded the practices of earlier Persian regimes like the Abbasids and Seljuks. They developed a tightly

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<sup>19</sup> Oleg Grabar, "The Visual Arts, 1050-1350" in *The Seljuk and Mongol Periods*, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 5:645.

<sup>20</sup> Robinson, "The Turkmen School to 1503," 248-249.

<sup>21</sup> J.A. Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Ilkhans," *The Seljuk and Mongol Periods*, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 5:311.

regulated bookmaking tradition defined by a standard visual vocabulary: manuscript painters were increasingly expected to use a consistent repertoire for their works.

As is the case with many conquerors, the Ilkhans merged the traditional artforms of their newly subjugated peoples with visual culture from their own background to reinforce the regime's political legitimacy.<sup>22</sup> One primary way they accomplished this was through the well-documented legacy of ancient Persian literary works like the *Shahnama* that the Ilkhans appropriated by inserting likenesses of themselves into the accompanying images, with the greatest example of this being the *Great Mongol Shahnama*.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most significant change in manuscript painting during the Ilkhanate, and most relevant to the development of the Persianate world preceding the Siyah Qalam paintings, came in the incorporation of visual forms from East Asia, specifically material that was readily available from their counterparts and overlords, the Yuan dynasty in China.<sup>24</sup> As demonstrated by the presence of Chinese characteristics in the Siyah Qalam paintings, the circulation of handscrolls and other works on paper and silk from China left an indelible impression on Persianate artists.<sup>25</sup> This infusion of visual forms under the Mongols had a permanent impact on the tradition of manuscript painting that continued to be codified under the Jalayirids, Timurids, Aqqoyunlu, Ottomans, and Safavids, where these pictorial practices became even more established.

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<sup>22</sup> Grabar, "The Visual Arts, 1050-1350," 657.

<sup>23</sup> Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History: The Illustrations of the Great Mongol Shahnama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 10-12, is the standard work on this manuscript. The *Great Mongol Shahnama* is perhaps the most important text in Ilkhanid manuscript painting because it is a seminal example of the superimposition of Chinese visual culture onto a quintessential Persian literary narrative.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Melville, "The Mongols in Iran," in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353*, ed. Linda Comaroff and Stefano Carboni (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 36-38.

<sup>25</sup> Toh Sugimora, *The Encounter of Persia with China: Research into Cultural Contacts Based on Fifteenth Century Persian Materials* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka Press, 1985), 30-32.

After the dissolution of the Ilkhanate, the Jalayirids emerged as their immediate successors in Persia during the early 14th century. The Jalayirid dynasty was originally descended from a Mongolian people allied with Genghis Khan prior to his invasions.<sup>26</sup> After the conquest of Persia, the family was granted a sultanate in northwestern Iran where they were expected to pledge allegiance to the Ilkhan, but as the regime became successively weaker amid the impending collapse of the wider Mongol empire, the Jalayirids declared an independent sultanate and ruled much of Persia and Iraq until the coming of Timur in the mid-15th century. The sultanate ultimately collapsed due to the onslaught of the Timurid invasions and a deadly revolt by the Turkoman confederation of the Qaraqoyunlu in the mid-15th century. Nevertheless, a crucial aspect of the Jalayirid legacy was their extensive patronage of literary activities and the visual arts, primarily seen in the establishment of two flourishing miniature painting schools in Baghdad and Tabriz, the latter of which is often connected to the Siyah Qalam paintings.<sup>27</sup>

Like the Ilkhanate and their Jalayirid successors before them, the Timurids conquered Persia by force and appropriated the rich cultural tradition for political legitimization, resulting in further codification of manuscript painting practices.<sup>28</sup> The Timurid elite quickly realized the importance of patronizing Persian culture as a vehicle for social and cultural legitimacy. One crucial method for accomplishing this was the development of the *kitabkhana*, royal bookmaking workshops and libraries that became ubiquitous institutions in Timurid society and further facilitated the Timurid immersion into the cultural complex of the Persianate world.<sup>29</sup>

In their newfound role as rulers of Persia, the Timurids used art for the functional purpose of communicating an imperial ideology to their recently conquered aristocracy. To accomplish

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<sup>26</sup> Patrick Wing, *The Jalayirids* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 29-31.

<sup>27</sup> O'Kane, "Siyah Qalam: the Jalayirid Connections," 2-4.

<sup>28</sup> Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 166.

<sup>29</sup> Lentz and Lowry, *Ibid.*, 168-169.

their assimilation, the Timurids needed to duplicate the conventional visual vocabulary of the Ilkhans based on familiar forms that were grounded in past patronage traditions.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the Timurids mandated the Persian language as the exclusive medium for literature and poetry. Each of these political and linguistic factors produced a highly conservative visual tradition as seen in the frequent repetition of stories and themes as well as established sets of artistic concepts and values emphasized by the ever more frequent depictions of an ideal, Timurid-led world order. Artists working in *kitabkhanas* were largely governed by a circumscribed set of models dictated to them by officials affiliated with the royal house.

The traditionalist nature of the cultural milieu that produced the Siyah Qalam paintings explains why scholars have always regarded them as outliers.<sup>31</sup> They defy the prevailing conventions of Persianate visual culture established primarily by the Ilkhanate, Jalayirids, and Timurids by reaching outside the standard visual vocabulary in institutions like *kitabkhanas*. The Siyah Qalam paintings reveal the ability of Persianate artists to incorporate a number of different visual sources and further contribute to recent scholarship demonstrating how ateliers in the Persianate world were far more creative and experimental places than previously imagined.

### ***Lion Rider: Subject Matter and Narrative***

Among the many distinctive paintings in the Siyah Qalam corpus is one well-known example, distinguished by its remarkably dynamic yet perplexing hybrid composition [Fig. 1]. Found on the twenty-ninth folio of H. 2153, this painting has often been nicknamed the “lion rider” due to the distinctive rider figure and his mount on the right side. The multi-figure composition can be sufficiently divided between the two groups of polychromatic figures, namely the three nomads dressed in dark colors on the left and the crouching shrouded woman

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<sup>30</sup> Lentz and Lowry, *Ibid.*, 168-169.

<sup>31</sup> Grube, “The Problem of the Istanbul Albums,” 1-3.

next to the rider and creature on the right. Their contrasting coloration likely indicates that the figures were meant as two distinct groupings associated with each other.

The man riding the beast on the right dominates the composition as he attempts to bring it into submission by rending its jaws with his hands. Curiously, even as the rider is in the midst of what appears to be a distressful and dangerous act, a smirking, almost relaxed half-smile appears on his face. A windswept piece of fabric wrapped around his neck forms the focal point of movement as it flutters in the wind. While at first glance, this appears to be a flame, due to the undulating lines on its periphery that evokes a flickering blaze, it is clearly tied around the rider's neck.

Although the beast and rider are almost melded into one another, the body of the mounted creature stretches across nearly half the picture plane, from its right leg to the tip of its distressed tail. At least three of the beast's feet are in the air, accentuated by fearsome-looking claws. Its long mane and tail are rendered in a matching shading technique frequently used by Chinese artists.<sup>32</sup> The beast is agitated as its head gyrates back toward the rider in a frantic attempt to demount him. Its head is contorted directly upward, accompanied by an eye looking in the same direction. Each figure is drawn from a slightly different vantage point, and the play on two-dimensionality further reinforces a fragmented pictorial quality, a signature Siyah Qalam trope meant to emphasize the distressed nature of the scene that is further underscored by the contrast with the rider's sly facial expression.

The shrouded woman at the bottom holds a staff and is rendered in a matching color to the rider. She is the most diminutive figure and is cloaked in heavily ribbed drapery as her garments envelop her squatting body. The similar coloring to the rider and her small stature

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<sup>32</sup> Sugimora, *The Encounter of Persia with China*, 33.



suggests she is an extension of the action between the rider and the beast. She holds her three middle fingers in the air with her right hand, apparently flashing them to the nomad directly to the left in a coaxing motion.<sup>33</sup> The two figures make eye contact, indicating they are conversing with one another, perhaps discussing payment in exchange for the spectacle.<sup>34</sup>

On the left, the three men in dark clothes are shown with beards, heavy garments, and headdresses lined with fur, sitting in what appears to be a two-dimensionally represented semi-circle on the ground. In the same style as the shrouded woman and the rider, the ribbed styling of the clothing is carried over onto the face of each nomad. Forming another focal point of movement in the composition, the nomad at the center appears to be suspended in the air, likely indicating intoxication as he waves the handkerchief in the agitated beast's face. Furthermore, there is a garment knotted around his waist similar to the rider's cape-like apparel flying off the back of his neck, positioning them as analogous focal points of movement.

The nomad to his left is shown with bare feet splayed outward, demonstrating tension with the ground, as he holds out what appears to be a cup, perhaps offering payment to the shrouded woman. Noticeably, his eyes are no longer visible, but his head is directed toward the rider. On the far left, the final nomad figure is shown in a crouching position, mirrored by the shrouded woman, with identical attire to his two other companions. His eyes are clearly illustrated as he stares in the direction of the shrouded woman, with both hands held outward. Between the waving handkerchief and the flame-like fabric on the lion rider's backside, the shrouded woman and far-left nomad remain as almost an afterthought.

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<sup>33</sup> I am primarily drawing this observation from Gurze Erginer, "New and Different Interpretations of Siyah Qalam," *Studies on Inner Asian Languages* 19 (2004): 119-127, who is followed by Feliz Cağman.

<sup>34</sup> Cağman, "Fourteenth Century Turkic World," 405. The narrative articulated in this section is largely based on Feliz Cağman's reading of the scene.

The brief description sketched out here shows the split nature of the composition, firmly divided between the two sets of figures. Although the nomad figures on the left are part of a standard group of characters in the corpus, the rider figure is distinguished for his uniqueness and will be the primary concern of this paper going forward. The Chinese characteristics of the image must be noted as well.<sup>35</sup> These can mainly be seen in the shading technique of the *qilin*'s tail, which uses a charcoal-like material to show it flying around in stress. Additionally, the ribbed lines on the skin and drapery are also linked to Chinese practices that usually suggest hunger, world weariness, or agedness.

Another connection to Chinese practices is the paper, a medium pioneered by artisans in China since its introduction during the Han period.<sup>36</sup> *Lion Rider* is drawn on extensively repaired, creased paper with a tear in one corner. In conjunction with many Siyah Qalam paintings, this paper is excessively worn, evincing indications of extensive restoration efforts, including spots covered by independently applied, pasted paper.<sup>37</sup> Similar to Yuan period painting practices, the original artist used opaque pigment accompanied by ink and gold to form each character.<sup>38</sup> The original paper was positively identified as ramie (*Bambusa arundinacea*), grown in the north and

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<sup>35</sup> Identifying Chinese characteristics in the *Lion Rider* or virtually any images from the contemporaneous Persianate world is a difficult task because so many traditional aspects of Chinese visual culture were infused into the Islamic world, (Persianate art especially) following the Mongol invasions. Often what was considered Chinese also becomes Persianate. Nevertheless, if it is possible to rank the degree of external cultural influences from outside the Islamic world, Chinese art is the first and foremost, making it important to identify a few elements. It should also be noted that Chinese influence primarily comes in the form of physical properties, with the exception of the *qilin* figure, as will be further outlined in the thesis.

<sup>36</sup> Tsuen-Hsueh Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 145-146.

<sup>37</sup> Feliz Çağman, "On the Contents of the Four Istanbul Albums H. 2152, 2153, 2154, and 2160," *Islamic Art* 1 (1981): 31-35; Necipoğlu, "Persianate Images Between Europe and China," 577. Later restoration efforts are suggested by the pasted paper itself. These material observations are drawn from Feliz Çağman and Gülru Necipoğlu who have both studied the *Lion Rider* directly.

<sup>38</sup> Erginer, "New and Different Interpretations of Siyah Qalam," 120.

west of China as well as the Himalayas, revealing a likely Chinese or Central Asian origin.<sup>39</sup>

These material components of *Lion Rider*, and the narrative sequencing of the subject matter, suggest strong associations with Chinese practices.

### **Origins: Central Asian and Jalayirid Scenarios**

In addition to the lack of accompanying documentation, many of the formal qualities highlighted in the previous section stand in contrast to traditional Persianate manuscript practices, making it difficult to attribute definitive origins. However, Feliz Çağman, Gülru Necipoğlu, and Bernard O’Kane have offered contextual information and alternative theories on *Lion Rider* and the Siyah Qalam paintings that are split between an emphasis on connections to a distant, Central Asian atelier and an earlier origin in the Jalayirid or Turkoman courts in Tabriz, a divide reflected in the broader scholarly work.

To support her belief in a Central Asian origin, Çağman offered a valuable contribution that focused on the material components of the Siyah Qalam paintings. For instance, she divided the entire Siyah Qalam corpus into distinct categories based on the nature of their material: images painted on sized paper, unsized paper, and silk.<sup>40</sup> *Lion Rider* falls squarely within the second category, indicating the image was likely created in an arbitrarily selected size and cropped indiscriminately preceding its placement in H. 2153.<sup>41</sup> Due to its lack of coordination with other Siyah Qalam paintings, the use of unsized paper made with the floating mold papermaking technique implies it could have arrived in the Turkoman or Jalayirid courts from a distant location because these papermaking methods had largely fallen out of favor in the

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<sup>39</sup> Erginer, *Ibid.*, 120. The scientific information in this section comes from Gurze Erginer’s work who led an effort to scientifically analyze many of the images in the Saray albums to better discern their origins.

<sup>40</sup> Çağman, “Fourteenth Century Turkic World,” 405.

<sup>41</sup> Çağman, *Ibid.*, 405.

Persianate world.<sup>42</sup> By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, floating mold papermaking was primarily found on the Indian subcontinent, the Indochina peninsula, and Nepal, with only rare examples of its usage in China and the Timurid, Jalayirid, or Turkoman courts.<sup>43</sup>

Because Çağman reads the *Lion Rider* scene as a “feat of courage” by the rider done for the entertainment of the nomads, she argued for its connection to Central Asian minstrel troupes who roved the countryside putting on productions in random locations. In this scenario, paintings like *Lion Rider* served as banners displayed before an audience to illustrate significant scenes from theatrical productions.<sup>44</sup> This idea opens the possibility that some Siyah Qalam paintings should be understood within the tradition of storytelling images, which flourished on the Indian subcontinent before spreading to China and Central Asia.<sup>45</sup>

In all, a few definitive conclusions can be reached about the unsized group of paintings in the Siyah Qalam corpus.<sup>46</sup> Most Siyah Qalam images were not meant for close viewing because it is clear the artist(s) did not attend to minute details of the visual composition as demonstrated

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<sup>42</sup> Çağman, *Ibid.*, 148-149. This is merely a point of speculation, but it is reasonable to proffer that the distinct stylistic differences from other Siyah Qalam paintings could indicate it was made in a distant atelier before joining other images in a similar style at the Jalayirid court.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). 67-69. Floating mold papermaking is the oldest form of Chinese paper production. It involved using a “mold” (woven cloths stretched on a wooden frame) that floated in a vat of water. Ground-up plant fibers were poured into vats of water that were slowly drained, producing a thin, moist mat or “rag.” Afterward, the mold and rag were dried in the sun until the latter was separated from the mold, which could be recycled. Because the drying process took an excessive amount of time, the floating mold largely died out by the Song dynasty and became a novelty.

<sup>44</sup> Çağman, “Fourteenth Century Turkic World,” 151-155. Floating mold techniques were primarily used in India, Vietnam, and Transoxania, where the sifting device often combined with matter from different plants rather than just one.

<sup>45</sup> Esin, “Inner Asian Turkish Tradition,” 90-105; Karamagarali, “Esoteric Muslim Sects,” 106-109. Çağman’s theory here is an outgrowth of the wider “Central Asian thesis,” which I believe is less credible but still worth acknowledging. Esin and Karamagarali were the two main scholars who published in English that argued for connections to Central Asian shamanism. Esin’s conference paper grapples with how to understand Siyah Qalam in relation to many of the Chinese features in the images and their possible links to Turkic peoples of Central Asia. A central part of most works arguing for the Central Asian origin is a later date in the 15th century and connection to the diplomatic embassy of Ghiyath al-Din that traveled through Xinjiang on its way to northern China. Beyhan Karamagarali also wrote about the possible connections between Siyah and esoteric dervish sects in Central Asia.

<sup>46</sup> Çağman, “Fourteenth Century Turkic World,” 151.

by the apparent presence of preliminary sketch marks which show the artist adjusting small features of the images while still leaving visible markings behind.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, the patched-up areas of *Lion Rider* show how the artist(s) and future restorers often made alterations to the original sketches. The disjointed pictorial aspects of *Lion Rider* and many other Siyah Qalam paintings could be the result of artists working at different points in time on different pictures. Lastly, the importance of paper as a valuable commodity cannot be understated, a point that is especially true for images containing multiple independent sketches that were converted into one composition at a later point. Each of these conclusions supports the idea that *Lion Rider* was an object in frequent circulation and under the care of several different owners before its placement in H. 2153.

Another important source for information on *Lion Rider* is Gülru Necipoğlu's analysis of European elements in the Saray albums where she noticed how the *Lion Rider* image was mounted upon a page in H. 2153 with no text. It is pasted next to a black ink landscape drawing from the Jalayirid court depicting a royal procession with angels overhead, along with a Chinese handscroll from the Ming Dynasty, inviting an intentional juxtaposition by the album compilers among Persianate, Chinese, and European pictorial traditions. Necipoğlu believes the careful placement of *Lion Rider* next to a Jalayirid image likely indicates the compilers wanted the viewer to think about the images together.<sup>48</sup> Although never explicitly stated by Necipoğlu, this juxtaposition suggests the Ottoman compilers may have had reasons to associate *Lion Rider* with other images from the Jalayirid sultanate.

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<sup>47</sup> Cağman, *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>48</sup> Necipoğlu, "Persianate Images Between Europe and China," 575-577. Although this could mean the compilers were inferring the images had some association with the Jalayirid court, Necipoğlu also believed in the possibility of a Qaraqoyunlu connection that has not been sufficiently explored yet.

In harmony with Necipoğlu's inference of a Jalayirid connection for the origin of *Lion Rider*, Bernard O'Kane presented convincing evidence for a link between *Lion Rider* and elements found in contemporary visual culture from the Jalayirid court, a theory I find to be the most credible.<sup>49</sup> O'Kane posited an earlier date of creation somewhere between 1356 and 1375, with the exact place of origin in the Jalayirid court during the reign of Sultan Uvays. Some of the threads between Siyah Qalam, the Jalayirids, and traditional Chinese painting are the peculiar rocky grounds, horse nostrils filled with hair, figures showing bared teeth, the presence of wind-blown reeds, linings depicted with a cross-hatching aesthetic, and the frequent appearance of insects.<sup>50</sup> One critical basis for O'Kane's connection to the Jalayirid court is A.A. Ivanov's essay at the David Foundation conference focusing on the unusual depictions of hillocks in the background of certain Siyah Qalam images in addition to the curious lack of ground, both signature characteristics of Jalayirid painting practices.<sup>51</sup>

Working out of these observations, O'Kane reached some conclusions about the Siyah Qalam paintings that can be applied to *Lion Rider* in particular. It is likely that because the paintings were found among treasures from Ilkhanid, Jalayirid, and Timurid ateliers, *Lion Rider* was connected to one of these royal courts. If *Lion Rider* and the other Siyah Qalam paintings were meant to be viewed outside of a didactic setting in workshops, they were likely made for display before large courtly audiences. A possible reason why the paintings were never mounted

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<sup>49</sup> O'Kane, "Siyah Qalam: the Jalayirid Connections," 2-4.

<sup>50</sup> O'Kane, *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> A.A. Ivanov, "Some Observations on the Miniatures of Muhammad Siyah Kalam," *Islamic Art* 1 (1981): 66-68, points toward the shared formalistic elements, particularly the treatment of hills in the background of ten images which he believes represent a school or an atelier. Ivanov holds out the possibility that perhaps these Muhammad Siyah Kalam paintings are products of a single, short-lived atelier, which produced only a few paintings, and were collected and deposited in the Saray albums. Based on depictions of natural elements like trees and flowers it is also possible to connect them to Turkoman schools from either the Qaraqoyunlu or Aqqoyunlu sultanates too.

but transferred to H. 2153 as single scraps is because they were not part of the more formalized post-1380 album-making practices at the Jalayirid court.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the many conflicting theories on the origins of the Siyah Qalam paintings, it remains critical to lay out a convincing theory concerning where they may have originated. The formal qualities of *Lion Rider*, and its placement next to Jalayirid images in H. 2153, suggests there is at least some connection to the court of the Jalayirid sultanate in Tabriz. While Feliz Çağman's focus on the material components of the Siyah Qalam paintings is an important contribution that adds a great deal of knowledge to our understanding, I find much of the work associated with a Central Asian origin to be without sufficient evidence and overly dependent on questionable factors like shamanism and ancient Uyghur ethnology.<sup>53</sup>

Based on my reading of the scholarship, *Lion Rider* was produced at a Timurid atelier in the greater Khorasan region between 1350 and 1380 before its transfer to the Jalayirid court in Tabriz where it was inherited by the Aqqoyunlu and Safavids.<sup>54</sup> After the Safavid overthrow of the Aqqoyunlu, Ismail I made his capital at Tabriz and kept many of the treasures from the Jalayirid and Turkoman courts before they were seized by the Ottomans following Selim I's victory at the Battle of Chaldiran. It is highly likely that the Ottoman compilers in Istanbul placed *Lion Rider* next to other Jalayirid images because they were working off the assumptions

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<sup>52</sup> Massumeh Furhad, "The Divan of Sultan Jalayir and the Diez and Istanbul Albums," in *The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents*, ed. Julia Gonnella, Friederike Weis, and Christoph Rauch (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 163-164. Additional support for a connection with the Jalayirid court is provided by the presence of images originally drawn from the divan of Sultan Ahmad Jalayir.

<sup>53</sup> J.M. Rogers, "Siyah Qalam," in *Persian Masters: Five Centuries of Painting*, ed. Sheila Canby (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1990), 37.

<sup>54</sup> Here I am endorsing the idea that the lion rider image spent a significant amount of time at the Jalayirid court but was not created there. I believe much of the physical and scientific evidence presented by Çağman and Erginer is convincing enough to believe the image was created further east, possibly in Timurid Herat. However, I still believe it is possible *Lion Rider* was seriously altered by artists or restorers at the Jalayirid court.

of the Aqqoyunlu and Safavids who understood it as an image associated with the Jalayirid court.

### Islamic and Christian Sources

At the David Foundation Conference, Julian Raby proposed the possibility of a Christian source for *Lion Rider* and pinpointed relevant aspects of Christian iconography from medieval Europe in the composition.<sup>55</sup> Raby concluded that the rider and his mount is a rendition of the biblical story Samson and the Lion. To justify this, he showed images and sculptures from the Graeco-Roman and medieval Christian traditions that are either significant iconographic precedents for the image or illustrate different versions of Samson attacking the lion.

The adversarial dynamic between the rider and mount situates the image closer to medieval European and Islamic depictions of Samson and the Lion, a biblical story from the Book of Judges. In this narrative from the Old Testament, a young Samson encounters a lion at the city of Timnah at which point, “a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat.”<sup>56</sup> This passage establishes Samson as a young man of courage and conviction who consistently faces fear through his steadfast faith in God.<sup>57</sup>

In medieval Islamic art and literature from the medieval period, Samson was not a commonly depicted character, but Muslims were familiar with him primarily through the *Isra'iliyyat*, a body of prophetic narratives extracted primarily from Jewish scripture by Muslim theologians and intermittently used in Hadiths as a way to expand upon the role of certain

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<sup>55</sup> Julian Raby, “Samson and the Siyah Qalam,” *Islamic Art* 1 (1981): 160-163.

<sup>56</sup> Judges 14: 5-6 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>57</sup> After Samson slays the lion, he discovers bees and honey in its corpse, giving way to his famous riddle a few verses later, “Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong something sweet” with the answer, “What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?” (Judges 14:14, NRSV).



Biblical prophets.<sup>58</sup> One of the few appearances in Persian literature before 1380 is by the Persian theologian al-Surabadi in one of his commentaries on the Quran.<sup>59</sup> In the story, al-Surabadi tells of how the Prophet Muhammad deploys the Old Testament narrative of Samson in response to questions from his followers regarding the revelation of Chapter Ninety-Seven of the Quran.<sup>60</sup> The Prophet is quoted as saying, “God sent down this Surah and said: ‘It is fitting that I did not grant you so long a life. I granted you a life that is better than a thousand moons of Samson’s life.’”<sup>61</sup> In the last sentence, al-Surabadi again refers to Quran 97:3, in which the Prophet remarks, “The night of power/decreed is better than a thousand months.” Al-Surabadi reports that Muhammad’s followers were inspired after hearing the story of how Samson lived a long life and stayed obedient to God.

During the Ilkhanate, the vizier Rashid al-Din notably included stories from the Old Testament in his *Compendium of Chronicles*.<sup>62</sup> Around the time of the production of the Siyah Qalam paintings, stories from the Old Testament slowly made their way into Persian literature, as seen in Jami’s allegorical romance poem written in Timurid Herat called “Yusuf and Zulaykha.”<sup>63</sup> The narrative retells Chapter Twelve of the Quran, specifically its extended

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<sup>58</sup> Attahir Shehu Mainiyo and Muhammad Dahiru Shuni, “The Position of *Isra’iliyyat* in the Islamic Tradition,” *Galaxy Interdisciplinary Research Journal* 4 (2016): 5-18.

<sup>59</sup> I would like to thank Professor Prashant Keshravmurthy from the McGill Islamic Studies Institute for sharing the following information with me by email on 15 November 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Chapter Ninety-Seven otherwise known as the *al-Qadr* (power) decree is a sura celebrating the night God revealed to Muhammad that the Quran would be sent down to him. Al-Surabadi was an 11<sup>th</sup> century Persian theologian known for his commentaries elaborating on Quranic passages.

<sup>61</sup> Translations of the Quran passage and al-Surabadi were provided by Professor Keshravmurthy.

<sup>62</sup> Sheila Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid al-Din’s Illustrated History of the World* (London: Nour Foundation in association with Oxford University Press, 1995). *The Compendium of Chronicles* was written by court historian Rashid al-Din Hamadani during the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Persia under the Mongol Ilkhanid regime. It purports to cover all the major world historical events in Europe and China with a focus on establishing the cultural legacy of the newly installed Mongol regime.

<sup>63</sup> Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (New York: Reidel Publishing Company, 1968), 105-107. Nur ad-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492) was a mystical Sufi poet active in Timurid Herat during the reign of Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r. 1469-1506). This poem is from his famous work, *Haft Awrang*, a collection of poems written in the *masnavi* format that involves a succession of rhyming couplets.

narrative on the prophet Joseph.<sup>64</sup> While none of these stories were necessarily direct sources for *Lion Rider*, they speak to the cultural milieu of the Siyah Qalam paintings. It remains possible that the artists behind images like *Lion Rider* may have been exposed to similar material. Samson may not have been a common figure in medieval Islamic art and literature, but depictions and references to him were clearly present in the intellectual discourse of the Persianate world.

### Iconographic Precedents

Upon closer inspection, Julian Raby found several areas of European influence and widespread precedent for lion rider images within the traditions of European and Asian visual cultures stretching back to antiquity. East Asian iconography tends to view the mounted animal as an ally of the rider, as opposed to depictions from Islamic and European lands, which usually portray it as an opponent or obstacle to overcome. While each tradition has a longstanding practice of showing riders mounted upon wild beasts, Raby separates them into three categories: the “Eastern lion rider, the Islamic lion tamer, and the Western lion-slayer.”<sup>65</sup> Although there is variation depending on the context, these labels are meant to capture the dominant approach found in each culture.

Typically in the arts of Islam, lion tamers are shown using serpents to rein in their foe. An image in an Egyptian manuscript from the 15<sup>th</sup> century shows one of the seven kings of the *jinn*, al-Mudhib, mounted upon a lion while controlling it with two snakes [Fig. 2].<sup>66</sup> Another

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<sup>64</sup> This Biblical and Quranic narrative is about a romance between the prophet Joseph and Zuleikha who was the wife of the Pharaoh’s chief guard Potiphar (Genesis 39: 5-20 and Quran 12:22-35).

<sup>65</sup> Raby, “Samson and the Siyah Qalam,” 160.

<sup>66</sup> Victor Donner, “Arabic Literature in Iran,” in *The Period from the Arabic Invasion of Iran to the Saljuks*, ed. R.C. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 4:584-586. Al-Mudhib is choking one snake while the other is wrapped around the lion’s neck. This image is an illustration from a 15<sup>th</sup> century copy of the *Kitab al-Bulhan* otherwise known as the *Book of Nativities*. Although the artist and circumstances of its creation are murky, the original *Book of Nativities* is attributed to the Abbasid astrologer and astronomer Abu Ma’shar al-Balki who was known for making astronomical manuals.

example comes from Anatolian dervish mythology.<sup>67</sup> It tells the story of a dervish named Hajji Bektas who engages in a miracle contest with his enemy, Sayyid Mahmud Hayran, who is typically mounted upon a lion while carrying a serpentine whip to keep his mount in submission. However, the lack of a taming device in *Lion Rider* leads Raby to conclude that while the image has some basis in Islamic iconography, the rider is clearly attempting to slay the *qilin* rather than keep it in submission like al-Mudhib.

Another aspect is the flame-like appearance of the rider's cape. At first glance, this appears to be a flame, as it is outlined in undulating lines evoking a flickering blaze. However, this fire-like aesthetic is rendered in a highly similar manner to the golden aureole, a visual device common to Persianate book arts involving a flame that signifies righteous holiness, often emanating from the head of a holy figure, such as the Prophet Muhammad [Fig. 3].<sup>68</sup> In some contexts, the golden aureole is depicted without a human figure suggesting the transcendent presence of the Prophet. While there are no recorded instances of the aureole being utilized to depict Samson, it does add credence to Raby's idea that the rider is a holy figure. It is possible the Siyah Qalam artist(s) meant to use the aureole associated with the Prophet Muhammad to

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<sup>67</sup> Raby, "Samson and the Siyah Qalam," 160.

<sup>68</sup> Christiane Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 68-73. The golden aureole was a common pictorial device used in Persian manuscripts to depict holy figures and is tied to light as a metaphor for the power of God. The aureole is often a cranial adornment but can sometimes encompass whole groups of people as seen in images of the Rashidun (four holy successors of the Prophet Muhammad). Among other meanings, the golden aureole is primarily meant to suggest sacred protection. As it emanates from Muhammad and other holy figures, its basis is in the idea of the "light of prophethood" marking the presence of God on Earth. This pictorial development was an outgrowth of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is connected to metaphors used in Sufi mystical texts that analogize Muhammad as the light of the world. The image I have selected to illustrate the aureole is a Persian manuscript painting likely created at the Aqqoyunlu court of Shiraz around 1450. It is a composite scene possibly meant to show the unity of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in three separate vignettes. On the right, Moses is shown slaying the giant 'Uj b. 'Anaq with a spear, on the left is Mary and the Christ child, while on the bottom is the Rashidun. Each of the holy figures is shown with a golden aureole.

suggest sacrality. In that sense, the rider's cape could be read as an attempt to communicate with an Islamic audience by referencing a familiar visual vocabulary.

From a European perspective, there are four primary iconographic types of Samson and the Lion in artworks from medieval and Early Modern Europe, which often used Graeco-Roman models as their source material.<sup>69</sup> One involves depicting Samson as he confronts the lion from a frontal, more oppositional position. Here Samson tackles the lion and strangles it with his bare hands, a visual formula with longstanding precedence stretching back to stories of Heracles' struggle against the Nemean Lion. An example of this in a Christian context is found in a Byzantine manuscript painting from the Vatican Octateuch, showing Samson strangling the lion with a long flowing cape, that resembles the *Siyah Qalam Lion Rider* [Fig. 4]. However, this image and others show Samson attacking the lion from the front rather than mounted on his back.

Other renderings display Samson attacking the lion from behind, pressing his knee into its backside and lifting the front of its body in the air. Most medieval European examples rely heavily upon Graeco-Roman depictions of Heracles' third labor, where he struggles against the Ceryneian Hind [Fig. 5].<sup>70</sup> Additionally, some images show Samson pressing his knee against the backside of the lion, but instead of raising the front of the lion's body, he lifts it by the jaw as seen in Graeco-Roman sculptures of Mithras and the Bull, otherwise known as the Tauroctomy.<sup>71</sup> One noteworthy example is a Roman sculpture from the third century showing

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<sup>69</sup> Raby, "Samson and the *Siyah Qalam*," 161-162.

<sup>70</sup> Kirk Ambrose, "Samson, David, or Hercules? Ambiguous Identities in some Romanesque Sculptures of Lion Fighters," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 74:3 (2005): 131-132. Stories of Heracles are commonly considered possible sources for the story of Samson who was also faced with a series of labors to overcome.

<sup>71</sup> Roger Beck, *Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire: Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10-12. Tauroctomy is the name given to the relief sculptures of the Roman god Mithras killing a bull. These images were associated with the Mithraic Mysteries, a cult dedicated to the

Mithras with a flowing cape as he presses his knee into the back of the bull and pulls it by the jaws [Fig. 6]. Nevertheless, in these depictions, Mithras uses a knife to dispatch the bull rather than his bare hands like traditional renderings of Samson and the Lion.

The final type further elaborates upon the third and is considered the closest to *Lion Rider*. Like the previous iconographic precedent, these works show Samson holding the lion by the jaw, but instead of digging a knee into its back, he is shown mounted upon the lion, rending its jaws. These are further reinforced by sculptural depictions found in cathedrals from Romanesque France. One example is this narthex capital at Vezelay Abbey showing Samson mounted upon a lion pulling back its jaws with his signature flowing cape [Fig. 7].<sup>72</sup> This version of Samson and the Lion appears in late medieval Germany, where Samson even acquired a turban-like headdress. Likely derived from illustrations in the *Biblia Pauperum*, artists like Israhel van Meckenem started creating engravings around 1470 that bear a striking resemblance to the Siyah Qalam rider, especially in the subject's posture and combative rendering [Fig. 8].

The emphasis on the lion's tail is another visual parallel. Northern European artists tended to show it gracefully wrapped around the lion's rear leg in a sinuous, circular fashion despite slight differences in its posture. But as with all the other source images, it should be emphasized that Northern European engravings are not necessarily direct sources or evidence for a possible date of creation. Alternatively, they represent the types of images in circulation during or after the production of *Lion Rider*.<sup>73</sup>

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worship of Mithras. The image referenced here is from a Mithraeum (Mithraic worship center) in modern-day Wiesbaden, Germany. It is a standard depiction of Mithras shown from the front as he slays the bull in a grotto.

<sup>72</sup> Ambrose, "Samson, David, or Hercules," 136-137.

<sup>73</sup> Raby, "Samson and the Siyah Qalam," 162. One final idea postulated by Raby is the possibility that *Lion Rider* belonged to a later generation of painters, possibly created by an artist attempting to learn the Siyah Qalam style, a notion reinforced by Necipoğlu's work that correlates *Lion Rider* with other images in H. 2153.

As it is a remarkably complex image, prototypes from Antiquity or medieval Europe certainly do not provide exact parallels. *Lion Rider* represents a longstanding tradition of European artists depicting the Samson and the Lion story, which may have developed from the iconography of Herakles and Mithras. It is my contention that this image was a further adaptation of forms encountered by artists working in the Jalayirid court who were in possession of images imported from Europe, other parts of the Islamic world, and China.

### **Siyah Qalam, *Lion Rider*, and Chinese Copying Practices**

The issue of Chinese copies from the Southern Song, Yuan, and early Ming periods remains the most significant aspect of understanding most Siyah Qalam paintings, *Lion Rider* in particular.<sup>74</sup> The heavy presence of copied Chinese paintings in H. 2153 and H. 2160, along with the evident Sinicizing visual traits in the Siyah Qalam paintings, make Chinese visual culture the most significant influence from outside the Islamic world.<sup>75</sup> For example, one miniature painting in H. 2153, probably a Yuan or Ming period copy of a Southern Song original, shows a herdsman pursuing a water buffalo while wearing a remarkably similar windswept cape to the one found in *Lion Rider* [Fig. 9].<sup>76</sup> Although the perspective, color scheme, and dynamic between the herdsman and the water buffalo are entirely different, the presence of the windswept cape in both images from H. 2153 opens the possibility that they were based on a much earlier

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<sup>74</sup> Basil Gray, "The Chinoiserie Elements in the Paintings of the Istanbul Albums," *Islamic Art* 1 (1981): 85-89, uses the heavy presence of Chinese copies to argue that most material from H. 2153 and H. 2160 was gathered in Tabriz in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century by collectors imported from Herat at the behest of Baysunghur as a gift for his father, Shah Rukh. Some of the Chinese copies in the albums attest to the taste in Persianate urban centers for Chinese goods such as porcelain, lacquer furniture, and silks. Gray believes this fondness for Chinoiserie was more prominent in Persianate urban centers like Herat than previously believed.

<sup>75</sup> Grube, "Problem," 1-3, divides the Siyah Qalam corpus between three groups, with the second reserved for the Chinese copies. This group includes true Chinese paintings in the provincial style as well as direct copies of Chinese paintings, both showing a familiarity with Chinese arts from the Southern Song, Yuan, and Ming periods. They were often executed on ecru silk in bright, vivid color schemes including shades of blues, greens, yellows, reds, and golds as the dominant hues.

<sup>76</sup> Necipoğlu, "Persianate Images Between Europe and China," 580.

Southern Song or Yuan prototype, perhaps an image on a portable object or in a Chinese manuscript that is no longer accessible. In addition, there was a well-established tradition of similar images from the Song period that depicted analogous bulls and oxen.

Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt identified a series of subjects from the Siyah Qalam paintings that have unmistakable parallels with late Yuan literary and visual culture, most importantly the *Emaciated Horse*, *Zhong Kuehi Traveling*, and the *Lion and the Bull*.<sup>77</sup> These scenes are especially prevalent in the work of Yuan period literati Gong Kai and his contemporary Zhao Mengfu. These visual similarities help establish the Siyah Qalam paintings in relation to its probable Chinese sources and provide pivotal information on issues surrounding the transmission of forms, symbols, and meaning across the Asian continent.<sup>78</sup>

Gong Kai's *Emaciated Horse* [Fig. 10], is strikingly similar to *Lion Rider* in its treatment of rib cages, garment folds and anatomical details. In *Lion Rider*, the ribbed patterning found on skin and drapery is a noticeable and defining characteristic that often functions to merge visual features from clothing with anatomy like physiognomy or skin texture. It also uses the same shading technique for the tails of horses that we see for the tail of the *qilin* from the *Lion Rider* image. While Tang artists generally considered the horse a metaphor for a strong and unified China, Gong Kai intentionally inverts the symbol to stand for the squalid remains of the Southern Song regime in South China under the purportedly barbarous Yuan dynasty. Extending from this observation, it is possible to understand Gong Kai's *Emaciated Horse* as a form of political

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<sup>77</sup> Steinhardt, "Siyah Qalam and Gong Kai," 60-68; Sugimora, "Encounter," 35-40. The following information is primarily drawn from Steinhardt's observations on the possibility of Chinese sources for the Siyah Qalam paintings. Although past scholars have written extensively on the heavy presence of Chinese copies in the Saray albums, Steinhardt is the first and only to offer original work on direct connections between specific Chinese works and Siyah Qalam.

<sup>78</sup> Steinhardt, *Ibid.*, 59-60.

protest against the Yuan dynasty indicating the Siyah Qalam artists may have had access to other artworks meant to protest the newly installed Mongol regimes.<sup>79</sup>

Another Gong Kai original with striking visual similarities to the demon genre from the Siyah Qalam paintings is the scene of *Zhong Kuei Traveling* [Fig. 11]. Originally a legend from the Six Dynasties period, the story of Zhong Kuei came to prominence under the Tang dynasty and was commonly found in Chinese imagery until the end of the Ming period. Gong Kai's painting of the scene is divided in two, one showing a royal parade surrounded by demonic figures carrying wooden palanquins, the other a procession-like setting with a group of demons carrying what appears to be luggage. A parallel Siyah Qalam image from H. 2153 shows a group of demons carrying luggage and wooden palanquins on their backs with similarly rendered demonic figures shown in a much larger, magnified fashion [Fig. 12]. The size of this album leaf and its format are much closer to Chinese handscrolls than the smaller, miniature paintings found in Islamic manuscripts.<sup>80</sup> Like *Lion Rider*, the canopy of the second palanquin in *Demons Carrying Wooden Palanquins* features a composite version of a Chinese *qilin* next to a winged creature decorating the roof with clouds.<sup>81</sup>

The most notable similarity between Gong Kai's Zhong Kuei handscroll and the Siyah Qalam silk painting, which supports the idea that the Siyah Qalam artists copied Gong Kai images in circulation throughout Central Asia and the eastern Islamic world, is the treatment of the demonic figures with swollen rib cages, small waists, bare chests, and horns. In addition, Gong Kai and the Siyah Qalam painter both position the demons as minions carrying expensive

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<sup>79</sup> Steinhardt, *Ibid.*, 68, posits this possibility primarily in relation to many of the demon Siyah Qalam paintings and the possibly political implications of these images.

<sup>80</sup> Steinhardt, "Siyah Qalam and Gong Kai," 60-61.

<sup>81</sup> Steinhardt, *Ibid.*, 62. Directly beneath them appears to be Arabic writing in a decorative band inscribed on elongated cartouches that may spell out the word "Allah" further reinforcing the Islamic nature of these paintings and the intended audience who might have expected to see something familiar in the composition.



luggage for powerful people likely associated with the royal house.<sup>82</sup> Even the shading techniques and depiction of fur in Gong Kai's *Emaciated Horse* exhibits similarities to the Siyah Qalam demon's fur and ribcage curvature. These formal similarities suggest a complex transferral process from images like the Gong Kai prints to the Siyah Qalam paintings and indicate that Persianate artists were skilled at incorporating elements from other visual traditions into their images.

Further evidence for the presence of copying practices involving Chinese images is found in striking similarities between Yuan literati Zhao Mengfu's handscroll painting of a sheep and goat and a Siyah Qalam sized painting on paper showing a lion and bull [Figs. 13, 14] *Sheep and Goat* displays the animals from a three-quarter frontal perspective in a circular formation. On the left is a rotund creature with rounded horns staring at a hairier, darker animal on the right. These figures are almost mirror images of one another, with an intentional ambiguity as to whether they are about to engage in combat or mundanely interacting with one another. In *Lion and Bull*, two large animals are presented in typical Siyah Qalam fashion against a blank background, giving no indication of their location or context. It is a meticulously painted picture of a black bull facing off against a tan-colored lion shown in a seemingly more combative rendering than the Zhao Mengfu handscroll. Using distinctive Siyah Qalam perspective and narrative style, the bull is shown frontally with his legs splayed as the lion walks in the opposite direction of the viewer.

The notion that *Lion and Bull* was created through a reinterpretation of Zhao Mengfu's handscroll involving the direct copying of the circular formation between the animals, is well-grounded in the tradition of painters working in the broader practice of Persianate black ink drawing. Artists working in this painting style were expected to copy the works of past masters,

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<sup>82</sup> It is unclear who the demons are carrying luggage for in the Siyah Qalam version, but the luxurious nature of the palanquins indicates they are serving someone from the nobility.

especially when making scenes of animal combat.<sup>83</sup> There is no shortage of images showing lions and bulls in combat from Graeco-Roman, Christian, and Islamic contexts. Within these traditions, the lion and bull are enemies, but in the Chinese context, painted animals typically served as metaphors for human action. With this observation in mind, it is possible to read *Lion and Bull* as the transferal of Chinese compositions inlaid onto a traditional theme with precedents in art from Europe and the Islamic world, creating an entirely novel idiom.<sup>84</sup> Like *Lion and Bull*, *Lion Rider* uses aspects of Chinese drawing practices like shading techniques and ribbing for iconographical subjects that are drawn from the Christian and Islamic traditions.

Steinhardt terms the Siyah Qalam paintings “studied interpretations or reinterpretations” of Chinese originals, showing how Islamic artists from the Persianate world transformed certain symbols and trademarks from a peripheral context to fit their milieu.<sup>85</sup> It is possible this transmission of imagery was not a simple transaction but rather occurred in several different places at different points in time before reaching the Siyah Qalam painters. The Siyah Qalam artist(s) who worked on *Lion Rider* may not have been aware that their depiction of a *qilin*, or the heavily ribbed drapery on the figures, was based on Chinese models. Evidence of copying practices that draws upon the Chinese tradition becomes a crucial perspective for understanding paintings like the *Lion Rider* image because it explains and reinforces how the Siyah Qalam incorporated imagery from a different visual tradition and social context into their own work.

### **Persianate Manuscript Practices and the Context of *Lion Rider* in H. 2153**

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<sup>83</sup> Çağman, “Fourteenth Century Turkic World,” 148-149; Steinhardt, 66-67. The Siyah Qalam paintings are closely linked to the technical components of the Persian drawing style “black pen painting” (*qalam-i-siyali*). This tradition of painting which uses black ink to form the outline of figures on paper is likely the basis for the “Siyah Qalam” designation in the signatures added at a later date by compilers in Tabriz or Istanbul. In addition, painters working in this style were expected to copy past masters especially when composing scenes of animal combat.

<sup>84</sup> Steinhardt, “Siyah Qalam and Gong Kai,” 66-67.

<sup>85</sup> Steinhardt, *Ibid.*, 67.

For anyone seeking to better understand Siyah Qalam paintings, the conflict between the images themselves and their presence in the albums constructed many years after their creation is an unavoidable point of tension. For this reason, a consideration of the makeup of the Saray albums is pivotal in comprehending *Lion Rider* and the Siyah Qalam paintings as mobile imagery in frequent circulation. As there is something close to sixty-five Siyah Qalam paintings, scholarship on *Lion Rider*'s physical placement in the album is virtually non-existent outside of Necipoğlu's recent article. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize the breadth of copying practices in Persianate manuscript painting as fundamental to the transmission and integration of its diverse visual characteristics.<sup>86</sup>

Manuscript illustrations were one of the most widespread artistic mediums in the Persianate world. When new versions of a book were created in *kitabkhanas*, it was common for original images to be copied alongside textual content.<sup>87</sup> Designs originally crafted for one text were often transferred to others thereby illustrating different texts over time. One apparent explanation for this amount of image transfer is the well-known migration of artists to different settings who often brought portfolios with them to demonstrate the rigor of their artistic skill.<sup>88</sup> In other situations, materials from one manuscript such as its binding, calligraphy, and imagery are found perfectly duplicated in another album from a distant location. As a way to improve their skills, calligraphers and illustrators were known to copy the work of past masters, even duplicating the name of the original signature on the illustration.

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<sup>86</sup> For clarification purposes, I am using Persianate as all-purpose that also applies to the Ottomans.

<sup>87</sup> Tanındı, "Repetition of Illustrations," 159-239.

<sup>88</sup> Serpil Bağcı, "Old Images for New Texts and Contexts: Wandering Images in Islamic Book Painting," in *Muqarnas: Essays in Honor of J.M. Rogers*, ed. Doris Behrens-Abouseif and Anna Contadini (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 21-32.

In terms of the Saray albums, Gülru Necipoğlu has recently demonstrated the presence of Europeanizing tendencies in *Lion Rider* by returning to Julian Raby's reading of the image. *Lion Rider* is one of three examples Necipoğlu identifies to show the presence in H. 2153 of the "Frankish manner," otherwise understood as Islamic renderings of European subject matter.<sup>89</sup> Her overall approach involves contextualizing the images by showing how the Ottoman albums compilers placed them while analyzing other images that are in close proximity.

In contrast to much of the previous scholarly work, which considered albums like H. 2153 and H. 2160 as essentially "scrapbooks" containing images in a random order, Necipoğlu noticed a "rather consistent visual logic governing the compositional schemes of many facing pages in H. 2153, which was previously assumed to have been assembled haphazardly."<sup>90</sup> Accordingly, the consecutive sequencing of the current folio numbers can help us reconstruct the original appearance of the fully assembled bifolios, thereby corresponding to their original order before being torn apart.<sup>91</sup> The symmetrical arrangement of each folio invites comparison while eliciting noticeable visual parallels. The significance of this observation lies in what it tells us about the possible programmatic methods used by the compilers in their construction of the albums, namely through strategic groupings of images.

There are two other brown ink drawings found on folio 115v of H. 2153 linked to *Lion Rider* that could support the idea of a Jalayirid connection and provide further context for the workshop practices of copying models in the Turkoman courts. Each of these sketches resembles

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<sup>89</sup> Yves Porter-Brown, "From the 'Theory of the Two Qalams' to the 'Seven Principles of Painting': Theory, Terminology, and Practice in Persian Classical Painting, *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 115.

<sup>90</sup> Necipoğlu, "Persianate Images Between Europe and China," 533-534; Gray, "Chinoiserie Elements," 85-89. The "scrapbook theory" is a common idea pushed by previous generations of Islamic art historians when there does not seem to be coherent organization to an album. Necipoğlu proves in her essay the profound importance of attentive looking. Gray lays out the "scrapbook," "haphazard" thesis in his entry from the David Foundation conference.

<sup>91</sup> Necipoğlu, *Ibid.*, 584-585. Only a few bifolios of H.2153 and H. 2160 were not torn apart by Ottoman restorers in the Hazine library during restoration efforts in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

the Siyah Qalam *Lion Rider* to such a degree that the latter may have been used as a model by later artists. The first image is an unfinished version of *Samson Rending the Lion* [Fig. 15]. This extensively repaired sketch was done on creased paper with a tear in one corner and several patched areas. The faded figures are rendered in brown ink and touches of red and gray, covered by brown wash. As it lacks framing rulings and is unfinished, Necipoğlu proposes the image is an experimental study sheet with two nearly identical rider figures, each rending the jaws of their respective lions. The artist used gray and brown washes for the more finished rider on the right while utilizing simpler lines of brown and red for the more preliminary figure on the left. The rider on the right has a reworked hand, along with his upper front leg and the juncture between his skirt and the lion's mane, although each spot has been redrawn over patches. Parallels with *Lion Rider* are especially evident in the fluttering ribbons on his forehead and the pointed headgear topped by two feathers.

The second image is from folio 115v of H. 2153 and is titled *The King Getting Undressed in Front of a Reclining Female Nude* [Fig. 16]. The treatments of the drapery folds in particular tie this image to the Siyah Qalam *Lion Rider* with *Samson Rending the Lion*. The page itself is worn out, and the brown, black, and gray ink used to render the figures is exceedingly faded.<sup>92</sup> The drawing depicts a standing male nude figure impatiently pulling off his robe while a composed, partially covered woman reclines on a couch in front of him. In comparison with similar figures, the woman has highly Frankish physiognomy and hair, while the man has standard Persianate facial features, although his lower body is depicted in a common stance employed in European drawing practices.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Drapery folds are the most evident formal characteristics that ties the Siyah Qalam lion rider with *Samson Rending the Lion* and *King Getting Undressed*.

<sup>93</sup> Necipoglu, "Persianate Images Between Europe and China," 573. In this sense, Frankish refers to the ways Persianate artists used European styles to depict certain bodily features.

The male figure wears a pointed helmet-crown with two long feathers on top that might suggest an identification as an ancient king or prophet. According to Necipoğlu, this element allows for the possibility that the artist was incorporating a biblical image into a scene from romantic Persian literature.<sup>94</sup> Adding to the unusual nature of this image, scenes of literary narratives from medieval Persia rarely show nude men and only occasionally show women.<sup>95</sup> *King Getting Undressed* is also mounted on one of the few surviving bifolios in H. 2153, and Necipoğlu notices how it is accompanied, and effectively marginalized by, another Persianate ink drawing showing two warriors on horses next to a fragment of a Ming period painted paper handscroll probably from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>96</sup> On the facing page of this bifolio and mirroring *King Getting Undressed* are two more Ming decorative handscroll fragments that similarly dominate the page layout. These are likely missing parts from the Ming period image on the opposite page. Here too, Necipoğlu argues, the compilers intentionally redirect the viewer's attention away from the Persianate ink drawings to Chinese imagery. These strategic placement choices could indicate the growing prominence of images from Ming period China in the Ottoman court. As the Ottomans and Safavids became intense cultural and political rivals during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the choices by the compilers seem to indicate a preference for more contemporary Chinese images instead of the antiquated paintings that were likely associated with Persian culture, as evidenced by the grouping together of images from the post-Mongol courts.

The striking juxtapositions featuring images from three autonomous art traditions (Persianate, Chinese, European) demonstrates the growing visual independence of images from text, as all three are vertically stacked in a tripartite layout without the presence of calligraphy.

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<sup>94</sup> Necipoğlu, *Ibid.*, 574.

<sup>95</sup> Necipoğlu, *Ibid.*, 574.

<sup>96</sup> Necipoğlu, *Ibid.*, 574-575.

While there are deep stylistic and iconographical connections between each image, their placement in the albums indicates the Ottoman compilers, working in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, wanted to emphasize the growing distinctiveness between the increasingly independent practices of painting and calligraphy. In addition, the similarities and differences between these juxtaposed images is a demonstration of the ways Persianate artists used foreign idioms as inspiration even while exercising their longstanding preferences for naturalistic depictions. Nevertheless, these images are a showcase for the internationalist dimensions of Persianate art from the post-Mongol courts that still embody distinctive cultural, regional, and dynastic characteristics.

### **Copying Practices between H. 2153 and H. 2160**

Outside of images that bear formal resemblances to *Lion Rider*, there are further indications of the importance of copying practices, as seen in the duplicates that occur across both Ottoman albums, which underscores how the *Lion Rider* was clearly enmeshed in the culture of copying practices.<sup>97</sup> For example, one duplicate Siyah Qalam image is *Old Man Riding A Donkey and His Young Servant*, painted on fabric in H. 2153 and sized paper in H.2160 [Fig. 17, Fig. 18]. Both can be dated to the 15th century, with the second version likely originating from the Aqqoyunlu court in Tabriz.<sup>98</sup>

The picture on fabric from H. 2153 is a more intricate composition with a bull running down a hill and a man sitting under a tree, most likely playing a musical instrument. To further demonstrate the interconnectedness between images in the Saray albums, this bull bears a striking resemblance to the water buffalo from the previously mentioned *Water Buffalo Running Across a Landscape*, a Southern Song or Yuan copy [Fig. 10]. Each of the significant characteristics of this work, namely the hills, plants, and bull, are drawn using the black pen

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<sup>97</sup> Tanındı, “Repetition of Illustrations,” 13-14.

<sup>98</sup> Tanındı, *Ibid.*, 13-14.

technique. The attribution to Muhammad Siyah Qalam is inscribed at the top part of the fabric, separated from the picture plane.

The second version in H. 2160 lacks figures behind the hill but features a sizable blue sky packed with clouds and a tree displaying lush-looking green foliage contrasted against groupings of blooming plants on the ground. At the lower edge, a cutoff inscription reads “the work of...” indicating the attribution predates the pasting of the picture in the album. Although these images are quite different from the Siyah Qalam *Lion Rider*, they are indicative of the high number of copies found throughout the Saray albums.

Formal similarities between images like *King Getting Undressed* and *Lion Rider* or the two versions of *Old Man Riding A Donkey* in the Saray albums point to an extensive copying culture involving painters seeking to grow their skillset by studying images from the past. In contrast, other copies and preliminary sketches may simply be drawing exercises by young artists. The dynamic behind either of these scenarios was that artists took old copies and translated them into a new style. The well-established copying process allowed artists to practice compositions and create new styles, taking details from one image and combining them with another, even inserting an old figure(s) into an entirely new composition.

### **Conclusion: Visual Transmission in the Persianate World**

Possible origins, copying practices and source material help us illuminate and better understand the diverse cultural forces at play in *Lion Rider*. Each of these perspectives show the ways visual characteristics from China and Europe are echoed and realized in the Siyah Qalam *Lion Rider*. Persianate artists clearly used copying practices to incorporate motifs from Europe, as evidenced by the iconographic source material and Frankish style figures in H. 2153. In addition, the visual parallels seen in the Yuan period paintings of Gong Kai and Zhou Mengfu



illustrate the extensive relationship between Siyah Qalam and Chinese imagery, further reinforced by the volume of Chinese copies in the Saray albums.

*Lion Rider* and its intense mixture of visual cultures is a fundamental example of this underlying dynamic in the Siyah Qalam corpus. Hybrid characteristics, especially the depiction of the rider and *qilin* are instances of the remarkable dynamism of Persianate artists to incorporate visual traits from faraway places into their artworks. These figures use shading techniques and figures from China that are melded with Islamic and Christian motifs and iconography. The form of a *qilin* is substituted for the lion described in the Book of Judges while the artist likely copied stylistic components from Chinese painting to reinterpret the sinuous tails found in European depictions of Samson and the Lion.

Each of these Chinese stylistic aspects is combined with European and Islamic modes that are clearly demonstrated in parallel images of Samson and the Lion from medieval Europe. Moreover, the importance of copying practices in this process of cross-cultural visual transmission is reinforced by formal similarities between Yuan period paintings and other works from the Siyah Qalam corpus. Study drawings from the Saray albums speak further to the prominence of copying practices in the Persianate world and the ways *Lion Rider* sits at a nexus of different cultures.

The purpose of this paper has been to highlight the globalized nature of Persianate arts through a focus on the diverse cultural forces at play within the Siyah Qalam *Lion Rider*. Despite the perception of Persianate art as a highly regulated and monolithic tradition, the imagery in this thesis reveals a much more innovative approach. Persianate artists experimented with a wide range of diverse sources to produce unique images that attest to the complexity of cultural influence.

Images not included due to copyright.

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