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Persian Manuscripts Association

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Timurid Music and its Transmissions Across the Persianate World

Queen Mary Hall

The Coral Room
16-22 Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3NN

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Persian Manuscripts Association

Prof. Owen Wright
Emeritus Professor, Musicology of the Middle East
SOAS, University of London

KEYNOTE TALK
Timurid Music: An Introduction

This introductory survey attempts to outline what we know of musical thinking among intellectual circles associated with the Timurid courts, and the extent to which texts of the period shed light on the characteristics of art music as practised by court musicians. Accordingly, it considers the analyses offered by Timurid theorists of the structural fundamentals of modes, rhythmic cycles, and forms, and the extent to which they differ both from contemporary analyses elsewhere and from those offered in both earlier treatises and in later Safavid and Ottoman writings. Allied to this is a consideration of whether the high esteem in which the Timurid musical heritage would later be held reflects a dissemination of Timurid practice and a preservation of Timurid repertoire or is an ideological construct designed to validate later developments by providing for them a prestigious if mythical ancestry.

Owen Wright pursued his academic career at SOAS University of London. He was appointed Lecturer in Arabic, then Reader in Arabic, and finally Professor of Musicology of the Middle East and was at various times Head of the Department of the Near and Middle East and Chair of the Centre of Music Studies. He is now Emeritus Professor of Musicology of the Middle East. His research concentrates on the historical development of the art-music traditions of the Islamic Near and Middle East, with at its core an engagement with both the theoretical literature, initially in Arabic and subsequently also in Persian and Turkish, and the extant documentation of practice as recorded in notations and song-text collections.

Dr Amir Hosein Pourjavady
Editor of Encyclopedia Iranica
University of California, Irvine

The Music in the Gardens of Samarqand and Herat and the Dispersal of Their Legacy

This paper explores previously overlooked musical developments in the gardens of Samarqand and Herat during the fifteenth century, with particular attention to the role of patrons, performance practices, and the contributions of both male and female musicians. These dimensions, often absent from the period's formal musical treatises, offer a richer and more nuanced understanding of the cultural landscape of the Timurid courts. Special emphasis is placed on the position of the Naqshbandi Sufi order in the region—their close relationships with Timurid rulers, and the ways in which their ethical, spiritual, and political influence intersected with, and at times constrained, musical expression during this period.

In the second part of the paper, I discuss the aftermath of the Timurid court's collapse in Herat and Samarqand, investigating the extent to which musical patronage under the immediate Shibanid and Safavid dynasties in Bukhara and Herat sustained or diverged from the sophistication and support characteristic of their Timurid predecessors.

Amir Hosein Pourjavady earned his PhD in Ethnomusicology from the CUNY Graduate Center. He has taught at both the University of Tehran and UCLA for several years. His scholarship includes editions of several musical treatises, numerous articles, encyclopedia entries, book reviews, and CDs. His previous projects have produced significant results, notably his book Music-Making in Iran from the Fifteenth to the Early Twentieth Century (Edinburgh University Press, 2024), as well as his forthcoming publication Music in the Safavid Era (1501–1736) (Brill, 2026). Currently, he is the music editor of Encyclopedia Iranica.

Marie Huber
Assistant Professor, Persian and Comparative Literature
Stanford University

Echoes of Herat:
The Legacy of Timurid Musical Practice in Khorāsān

Poems are performed to music and understood as part of the spiritual practice of the Mojaddedi Naqshbandi Sufi order in Torbat-e Jām, Iran. The practice of the dotārīs of Torbat defies the modern notion that texts can be separated from the matrix uniting poet, singer, and audience in a performance where poem (as aesthetic artefact), music (as the unfolding of a structure in time), and ethics (as the "I" facing a "you" in devotion) become an indivisible whole. Located on the margins of the Islamic Republic of Iran and belonging to a Sunni order within a Shiite state, the continued existence of the dotārīs is a token of the unassimilable. Through their dialect and their practice of maqām music, they offer a quiet resistance to the homogenising forces of modernity. My paper has three aims: 1) conceptually, to deepen our understanding of "the Persianate" as a transnational framework of investigation; 2) historically, to trace how certain musical, poetic, and mystical ideas that flourished at the Timurid court of Herat were carried on by the Naqshbandis of Khorāsān; and 3) theoretically, to offer an in-depth analysis of the performance setting itself.

My hypothesis throughout is that the foundations of dotārī practice can be traced back to the intellectual circles of Navā'ī and Jāmī, two figures that are invoked time and again by the dotārīs. To substantiate this claim, I draw on 1) musical treatises produced under the Timurids (al-Marāghī and Jāmī); 2) compendia (e.g., Risāla-i Musiqi by Darwish 'Ali Changi); and, finally, 3) notebooks (beyāz) circulated among the dotārīs, as well as interviews conducted in Torbat-e Jām. Thus, combining fieldwork, archival studies, and theoretical analyses, I elucidate the foundations of dotārī performance to account for a practice whose origins extend beyond the intellectual, geopolitical and societal ruptures of the 20th century.

This paper contributes to the conference's focus on the transmission of musical and poetic practices across the Persianate world, particularly those rooted in the Timurid period. By tracing the legacy of Timurid intellectual and musical thought—especially that of Jāmī and Navā'ī—within the living practice of the Mojaddedi Naqshbandi dotāris of Torbat-e Jām, the paper offers a case study in the longue durée of Persianate performance traditions. It engages several core themes of the conference: interregional musical exchange, the intersection of courtly and Sufi music, performance practices, and the social role of musicians. Combining archival research, musical treatise analysis, and fieldwork-based ethnography, the paper also responds to the conference's call for interdisciplinary approaches, demonstrating how Persianate musical and poetic thought has been embodied, preserved, and transformed. In doing so, it deepens our understanding of "the Persianate" not only as a historical-cultural formation but also as a living structure sustained through sound and collective memory.

Marie Huber is a scholar of Persian and Comparative Literature with a particular interest in poetics and poetic performance across the Persianate world. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from Harvard University and is currently Assistant Professor at Stanford University. Her first book, Memories of an Impossible Future, examines temporal structures in the poetry of Mehdi Akhavān Sālles. Her ongoing project, Infinite Events: Poetry, Music, and Spiritual Practice in the Shadow of Sheykh Ahmad-e Jām, investigates the role of musical and poetic expression in devotional contexts in Eastern Khorasan. Besides her academic work, she has translated Turkish poetry into German. Her broader interests include comparative mysticism, vernacular performance traditions, and the transmission of cultural memory through sound.

Shiva Mihan
Curator of Islamic Collections (Persianate World)
The British Museum

Imaging Music: The Representation of Music in Timurid Manuscripts

This paper explores the visual representation of music in fifteenth-century Timurid manuscripts produced at the court of Prince Baysunghur (1397–1433). In addition to their literary and artistic richness, these manuscripts contain remarkable illustrations of musicians, singers, and musical instruments, which testify to Baysunghur's personal passion for music and his active patronage of performance and composition.

Notably, the images include depictions of female musicians, offering valuable insight into gender and performance practices at the Timurid court. Through a close reading of these visual sources in dialogue with contemporary texts such as the *Tazkirat al-Shu'ara'*, the paper identifies some of the represented figures with historical personalities, including the singer Yusuf Andikani and possibly the eminent theorist and composer ʿAbd al-Qadir Maraghi, who authored several music treatises for Baysunghur. These representations point to the prominent place musicians held within the intellectual and artistic circles of Baysunghur's court, where music was valued as both a refined art and a mode of scholarly exchange.

Shiva Mihan (PhD, Cantab) is Curator of Islamic Collections (Persianate World) at the British Museum. She received her PhD from the University of Cambridge in 2018, where her award-winning dissertation examined Timurid manuscript production at Baysunghur's library in Herat. She has held prestigious post-doctoral fellowships at the Harvard Art Museums and the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and taught Islamic art as Visiting Professor at Washington University in St. Louis. Her research focuses on Persian manuscript culture, artistic patronage, and the transmission of texts in the Persianate world. She is also the founder and President of the Persian Manuscripts Association.


در سر طرفی یاری با کاری بکار رفته و فرصتی از دست ایام خود کام ربوده و در سر کوی
ظریفی با خوش چرخی در رامش و راحت و آرامش و استراحت عاشق با معشوق هم زانو
صبا با غنچه دمساز بیت سر کجا طلعت خورشید رخی سایه فکند
عاشق خسته کمر بسته جو جوزا بر خاست سر کجا سرو قدی چهره جو یوسف بنمود
بید بی سوخته خرمن چو زلیخا بر خاست
بار خشک لاله ندانم بچه رونق بشکفت
با قدکش سرو ندانم بچه بالا بر خاست

Giovanni De Zorzi
Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology
Classical and Sufi music of the Ottoman-Turkish and Central-Asian area
University of Venice 'Ca' Foscari'

Musicians at the Timurid Court

As is well known, the Timurid period saw the creation of numerous important musicological treatises by what we call the 'Systematist School'. Rather than examining these highly theoretical works, my paper descends to a more practical level, focusing instead on the musicians and their status at court. This will be achieved by analysing sources that are not primarily musicological, all composed around the first half of the 16th century. As the esteemed colleague Will Sumits wrote in his PhD Thesis many years ago, '(...) the names of many lesser-known singers and instrumentalists of the time have also been preserved in biographical dictionaries, political histories, poetic works, and later musical treatises'.

After a closer look to these sources, my paper will first examine the biography of Timūr written by Ibn ʿArabshah (1389–1450), the ʿAjāʾib al-maqdūr fī nawāʾib Timūr ('The Wonders of Destiny Concerning the Calamities Wrought by Timur'). Subsequently, it will draw upon the acute observations made by Emperor Bābur in his Bāburnāma. Although his famous visit to the court of Herat is perhaps unconfirmed, his remarks nonetheless offer valuable insights that help reconstruct the status of musicians.

Expanding the focus, the paper will then lead to a general consideration of the status of musicians in various post-Timurid courts, perhaps influenced by these patterns of behaviour. This will be possible thanks to observations made at the Ottoman court by Wojchiech 'Ali Ufukī Bobowski (1610–c. 1675) and by Venetian Jesuit Abbott Giambattista Toderini (1728–1799). The discussion will conclude with an anecdote from Khiva under the reign of Muhammad Rahim Khan II (1845–1910). Finally, Timurid-era miniatures, which frequently depict musical scenes, will help us piece

together a vivid picture of music and musicians within the environment of the Timurid court. By combining these diverse textual and visual sources, the aim is to reconstruct a comprehensive understanding of music and musicians at the Timurid court.

Giovanni De Zorzi (PhD) is currently Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. He is mainly interested in classical and Sufi music of the Ottoman-Turkish and Central-Asian area. He alternates between his activity as a musician (ney flute of the Ottoman typology as a soloist or with the Ensemble Marâghî), field research, scientific writing and the artistic direction of various musical programmes, which he has carried out so far mainly with the MiTO Settembre Musica Festival (Milan and Turin) and with the Intercultural Institute of Comparative Music Studies (IISMC) of the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice.

Among his publications we may mention the monographs: Musiche di Turchia. Tradizioni e transiti tra oriente e occidente (2010); Maqām. Percorsi tra le musiche d'arte in area mediorientale e centroasiatica(2020); Introduzione alle musiche del mondo islamico (2021); Samā'. L'ascolto e il concerto spirituale nella tradizione sufi (2021). He edited the volumes Con i dervisci. Otto incontri sul campo (2013) and he co/edited, with Thomas Dähnhardt, Journey among Dervishes between Past and Present (2023). Among his recordings: Ensemble Marâghî, Anwâr. From Samarqand to Constantinople on the Footsteps of Marâghî (2010); Ensemble Marâghî, Sounds from the Saray. The Young Bobowski at the Ottoman Court (2021). Since 2024 he is co/investigator of the study group dedicated to the art music (maqām) of the Middle Eastern and Central Asian world entitled maqām beyond Nation. The project won an ERC Horizon award that become, post Brexit, UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) International. See: https://www.maqamproject. uk/

Dr William Rees Hofmann
Research Associate, South Asian Studies Unit
Institute for Ismaili Studies

Only The Mystics of Unity Truly Understand: Translation and Equivalence in Persian Texts on Music from South Asia c. 1400–1660

This paper explores the reception of Khorasan-derived and Timurid theoretical elements in late-Sultanate and early Mughal musicology in India, and theoretical trends which sought equivalence between Indian (Hindustani) and Persian musical systems. Although the subject of Indo-Persian equivalences has been studied with reference to its most famous theoretical exponent (Baqiya Na'ini), and seeking musicological recourse in primarily Systematist texts, translational efforts were in fact evident from the turn of the 14th/15th century onwards, not only in Persian texts, but also in Sanskrit and early Hindi. Such texts often utilised obscure and undefined methods of modal division, evident primarily in Khorasan-origin theoretical texts, to move between the two systems. Such translational strategies have led to the description of Hindustani court music as exhibiting a synthetic or syncretic impulse in its historical development.

However, the ambiguity with which these equivalences are discussed theoretically render any concrete excavation of their musicological underpinnings difficult. By using the Khorasan-derived theoretical traces found in early texts of equivalence, the paper attempts a more in-depth study of the ways in which theorists, and musicians, sought either concrete or analogical translation between these two modal systems which often found simultaneous patronage within Indian courts. It posits that, for theorists, it was perhaps not practical equivalence but philosophical that defined such translations, an abstract method that influenced subsequent theoretical texts and ultimately our historical understanding of Indian and Persian musical practice in South Asia.

Dr William Rees Hofmann (PhD SOAS) is a Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies. He has published on the musical knowledge and Afghan biographies of the poet-musician Amir Khusraw, and the construction of Hindustani music history in Mughal texts. He is currently working on the connected textual and musical traditions of Nizari Isma'ili, Sufi, and Bhakti devotion in early modern Gujarat, Rajasthan, and the Deccan, as well as completing a monograph, tentatively titled *Amir Khusraw and Sufi Ecologies of Song: South Asian Musical Traditions from the Sultanate to Early Mughal Period*, under contract with EUP. Dr Hofmann is also a multi-instrumentalist specialising in both the Indian Sarod and the Afghan Rubab. William is the director of Ensemble Khusrawi, an Indo-Persian musical ensemble, recreating and recording some of the earliest known Sufi poetry in Hindi, early Hindustani *khayal* compositions, as well as the poetry of Fakhruddin 'Iraqi, Bidil, and Amir Khusraw.

Richard David Williams
Reader, Associate Professor, *Music and South Asian Studies*
SOAS University of London

Mughals Between Maqam and Raga: Paida Beg's Hindi Scholarship Under Shah Jahan

Paida Beg's music treatise, the Sabhāvinoda ("Delight of the Court") was written for Shah Jahan, but it travelled far beyond the reaches of the imperial court. Beg wrote his study in Hindavi, at a moment in time when the Mughals were especially interested in vernacular explorations of musical aesthetics. He envisaged his own contribution as a digest of ideas he had encountered "from a thousand works", in which he reconciled approaches to rāga, which he had read about in old Hindi sources, and maqām from Persian books on music. He enthusiastically proclaimed that his own synthesis was the son of this intermarriage between languages, the heir to two knowledge systems.

In this paper, I examine Beg's reflections on language, scholarship, and the comparative study of music. I then consider the reception history of his work and explore how this treatise became the primary reference for painters' workshops at the court of Amber-Jaipur, where they rendered his work as rāgamālā paintings. Finally, I introduce a manuscript copy of this treatise from the Kathmandu Valley, and consider how Beg's innovative work between languages was reinterpreted by listening communities in Nepal.

Richard David Williams (PhD) is Reader (Associate Professor) in Music and South Asian Studies at SOAS University of London. Focusing on early modern and colonial north India, his research explores music, sound, and performance in literary, courtly, and religious contexts. His first book, The Scattered Court: Hindustani Music in Colonial Bengal (2023), traced the musical connections between north India and Bengal in the nineteenth century, and considered how musical ideas and practices evolved in response to colonialism. He is currently working on several projects, including a history of rāgamālā literature in Brajbhasha, a translation of a seventeenth-century Dakkani Sufi romance (Gulshan-i-'Ishq), an edited volume on the cultural history of eighteenth-century South Asian literature, and a journal issue on music and manuscripts in global perspective.

Behrouz Amini
Manuscript Specialist, Malek National Library and Museum
Malek National Library and Museum

From Herat to Istanbul: Tracing Timurid Musical Heritage in the Manuscript *Nuzhat al-Arwāh*

The Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ bi Taṭrīb al-Ashbāḥ is a rare and under-researched musical manuscript by the otherwise unknown Yaʿqūb b. Muḥammad al-Ḥanafī, preserved at the Malek National Library (MS 1665) in Tehran. This work documents 322 songs attributed to Iranian composers or their students who served at the courts of Timurid, Safavid, and Ottoman rulers. Structured as both a theoretical treatise and a curated anthology, this manuscript offers a unique glimpse into the evolution of Persianate musical thought and practice from the late Timurid period onward. This paper explores the structural, theoretical, and stylistic features of Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ and its role in shaping the literary-musical prose tradition of the Safavid and Ottoman eras.

Particular emphasis is given to the manuscripts inclusion of numerous pīshrow compositions (instrumental preludes), which are almost entirely absent in contemporary anthologies. Moreover, al-Ḥanafī's stated intent to correct corrupt textual variants through direct oral transmission from trusted performers and authors suggests a critical engagement with notions of musical authenticity and preservation. This paper aligns with the conference themes by offering a case study in how a single manuscript can illuminate the transregional flows of Persianate music and its textualization in early modern Islamic culture. This article applies the ALA-LC Romanization standard for Arabic script transliteration.

Behrouz Amini holds a Bachelor's degree in Iranian Music Performance (Setar) and a Master's degree in Manuscript Studies. He is currently a Manuscript Specialist at the Malek National Library and Museum in Tehran. His primary research concerns historical music manuscripts, with a particular focus on the Timurid and Safavid periods. In 2022, he published a critical edition of the musical anthology *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ bi Taṭrīb al-Ashbāḥ*, an important collection of Timurid and Safavid musical compositions.

He has curated over forty specialised exhibitions of historical manuscripts, each accompanied by a descriptive catalogue, on a wide range of subjects including medicine, alchemy, astronomy, music, and mathematics.

Arastoo Mihandoust
Musician, Timurid-Safavid Musical repertoire, Researcher of Ethnomusicology
University of Tehran

Introducing a newly found Safavid Treatise on the eight Dastgahs

This talk examines a previously unidentified musical treatise copied in 1718, just four years before the fall of the Safavid capital, Isfahan. While the authorship is uncertain, internal evidence suggests its composition in Isfahan during the reign of Shah Sulayman (1666–1694). The text cites remarks from Aqa Muʾmin, chief musician under Shah ʿAbbas II (1642–1666), situating it firmly within late Safavid musical culture. What sets this treatise apart is its description of eight modal compounds explicitly named dastgah. Together, these eight encompass forty-two modal entities (six āvāzeh, twelve pardeh/maqām, and twenty-four shoʿba), echoing structures established in Timurid-Safavid theory. This demonstrates that the technical use of dastgah—central to modern Iranian practice—was already a Safavid innovation. To illustrate the modes, the author cites repertoire also preserved in Amir Khan Gorji's codex (c. 1697, Isfahan), Hafiz Post's song collection (c. 1680, Istanbul), and later Shashmaqom anthologies (nineteenth-century Bukhara). Significantly, analysis of Timurid compositions in early Ottoman anthologies shows that the modes most frequently set to music correspond to those elevated to dastgah status here. This unique source thus illuminates the historical formation of the dastgah system that continues to shape Iranian musical tradition.

Arastoo Mihandoust is a pianist, ʿud player, composer, and ethnomusicologist whose research centers on the Timurid–Safavid musical repertoire and the survival of compositions in Qajar, Ottoman, Central Asian, and Kashmiri traditions. His work seeks to place contemporary Iranian traditional music within a broader historical context. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Materials Science and Engineering from Tabriz University (2013) and a Master's degree in Ethnomusicology from the University of Tehran (2021).

Walter Feldman
Leading Researcher, Ottoman Turkish & Jewish Music
New York University

Mevlevi, Iranian Musicians and "The Science of Music" in Ibrahim Cevri's "Description of the Singers at the Court of the Sultan"

Written c. 1635, Ibrahim Cevri's "Description of the Singers at the Court of the Sultan" offers us a glimpse of the formative generation of what would become Ottoman music. Cevri distinguishes between the musical genres of the "Science of Music" and more popular forms. For the former, the dominant musical genres were still those that originated in Greater Iran. Turkish musical genres play a subsidiary role. The leading court musicians were either Iranians, Mevlevi and Halveti dervishes or their students. No non-Muslim musicians appear.

Walter Feldman is a leading researcher in both Ottoman Turkish and Jewish music. He is a performer on the Ottoman lute, the *tanbur*, and on the traditional klezmer dulcimer, the *cimbal*. Feldman's book, *Music of the Ottoman Court: Makam, Composition, and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire* (Berlin: VWB, 1996; revised Brill 2024) is taught as a basic text worldwide. His most recent book is *From Rumi to the Whirling Dervishes: Music, Poetry and Mysticism in the Ottoman Empire*, Edinburgh U Press, 2022.

Between 2011 and 2015 he conducted fieldwork in Moldova, Romania, Germany, Turkey and Canada on the interaction on klezmer and Moldavian Gypsy (*lautar)* music during the 18th to the mid-20th centuries, under the auspices of NYU Abu Dhabi. His book *Klezmer: Music, History and Memory,* was published by Oxford University Press, 2016. Feldman has also published extensively on Ottoman poetry, especially on the Indian Style of the seventeenth century, for which he had received an NEH grant in 1999.

Persian Manuscripts Association

The Persian Manuscripts Association (PMA) is an international academic organisation dedicated to the study of manuscripts from the vast Persianate world. This includes Greater Iran, and all regions historically engaged in the Persian language and culture.

The PMA is a welcoming institution supporting interdisciplinary research and discourse in Persian studies across all relevant fields, including but not limited to history, literature, music, art, architecture, archaeology, codicology, paleography, philosophy, and the sciences. We are particularly committed to the support of graduate students and early-career scholars in the field, particularly by awarding research grants and publication prizes. The PMA is and will remain a non-profit, non-political, and non-governmental organisation.

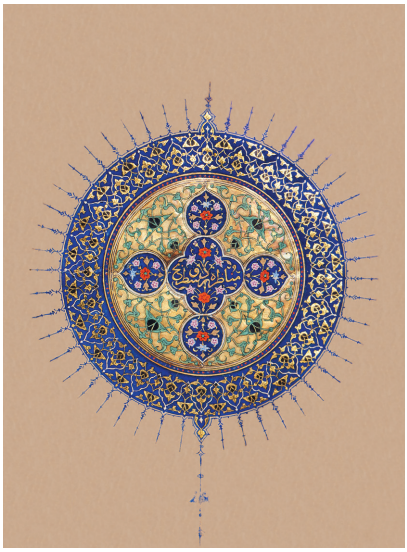
PMA Objectives

- Themed conferences to foster multi-disciplinary dialogues among scholars
- Monthly webinars, delivered in Persian or English
- Shamsa: Peer-reviewed journal of scholarly articles and research note
- PMA Press to publish monographs and conference proceedings quickly and elegantly
- PMA's digital manuscript archive facilitates access to crucial resources held in Iran and globally
- Awards and grants to support graduate students and early-career scholars



Shamsa: The Journal of the Persian Manuscripts Association

Shamsa is a scholarly journal that hopes to encourage rigorous and comprehensive studies into all aspects and periods of the historically Persianate world (including, but not limited to, Iran, Iraq, South Asia, Central Asia, and Turkey). The journal is a vital piece of the PMA's mission to provide a forum for specialist colleagues around the world to connect, discuss developments in the field and exchange ideas and information.



Wassily Kandinsky on Persian Art:

"Its simplicity is almost barbaric,
its complexity bewildering. Its elegance is that of a highly refined people lost in sensuous dreams."

Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst Exhibition, 1910

Front image: 'Baysunghur Enjoying Music in a Garden Excursion' from the *Rasayil* (Treatises), 1427, Herat, Berenson Collection, Florence.

Back image: 'Baysunghur Listening to Music in a Courtly Gathering' from the *Kalila va Dimna*, 1429, Herat, R.1022, Topkapi Palace Library, Istanbul.

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