



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010

THE FALNAMA

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, members of the ruling elite and commoners alike consulted pictorial Falnamas for guidance. The subjects chosen for inclusion in the works were meant to offer both insight into the world of the unknown and to encourage and inspire righteous and moral conduct. Only four compilations of “monumental” pictorial Falnamas, however, have survived. Folios from three are on view in this exhibition. The earliest known copy is the so-called dispersed Falnama, which includes at least thirty images created in the mid-1550s and the early 1560s at the court of Shah Tahmasb, the second ruler of the Safavid dynasty in Iran (reigned 1524–76). Its folios are now divided among several public and private collections. The second royal copy, here referred to as H.1703, was compiled from 1614 to 1616 by the vizier (minister of state) Kalender Pasha for the Ottoman sultan Ahmed I (reigned 1603–17). Written in Ottoman Turkish, most of the images were created between the 1570s and 1590s. The most extensive volume (H.1702), with fifty-nine illustrations and detailed prognostications in Persian, is housed in the Topkapý Palace Museum in Istanbul. A fourth volume (not on view here) is now in the State University Library in Dresden, Germany. No two compilations follow the same order or share an identical text. However, they all include images of Abrahamic and Islamic prophets, with particular emphasis on the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants. Sages, heroes, and villains, as well as signs of the Apocalypse and the Hereafter, are also depicted. All but the dispersed Falnama incorporate illustrations of planets and the zodiac, the oldest and best-known tool for prognostication.

Consulting the Falnama

According to the Preface in the Falnama of Sultan Ahmed I, the volume was created because “the history of past nations is a manual for people and that it is appropriate to learn a lesson in any and every affair from those who have preceded.” It was particularly important for those in power “to look upon the tales of prophets and saints and the adventures of past rulers” as a model and inspiration for their own actions. The rules for consulting the Falnama relate to those first devised for looking to the Koran for guidance. Seekers are instructed to recite three times the Fatiha (Koran 1:1–7) and the sura (chapter) Ikhlas (Koran 112), followed by blessings (salavat) upon the Prophet Muhammad. Only then should seekers focus on an intent (niyat) or a question and open the volume randomly. Each opening consists of an image on the right—the key to the prognostication—and a complementary text on the left. Together, the two facing folios constitute the seeker’s augury.

“O augury seeker, know and be aware . . .”

A verse introduces the subject of each omen, such as the splendor of the Sun or the grandeur of the prophet Joseph, and it is usually repeated in the first few lines of the prose section of the prognostication. Beginning with the phrase “O augury seeker, know and be aware,” the text offers good, bad, or occasionally middling outcomes to a wide range of questions and intents that might concern the seeker. Most frequently, the prognostications address the feasibility of travel, moving into a new home, beginning a business venture or entering into a legal arrangement, buying or selling livestock and property, and requesting favors from superiors, as well as issues of love, wealth, matrimony, the well-being of absent friends, and the health of relatives. Some auguries warn against keeping bad company or befriending individuals with suspicious physical traits, usually scars and blemishes or uncommon color of hair or eyes. Each augury concludes with a series of recommendations: performing ritual prayers, giving alms, helping the needy, visiting shrines, lighting candles, and wearing amulets to ward off evil. Only by following these prescriptions can seekers hope to secure their heart’s desire. Together, they offer an invaluable glimpse into sixteenth century daily life and common concerns that are rarely mentioned in other sources.



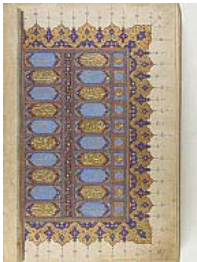
Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010

Words as Omens

Divination and the Word

For thousands of years, the art of divination—foreseeing future events or uncovering hidden knowledge—was practiced throughout much of the Near East. In Mesopotamia in the second millennium BCE, celestial bodies, such as the sun, moon, and planets, and the meteorological phenomena of rain, earthquakes, and thunder were studied and measured, leading to the development of astronomy and astrology. With the advent of Islam in the seventh century, the written word, in particular the Koran, became one of the most important vehicles to guide, warn, and help seekers navigate the realm of the unknown (al-ghayb). Special procedures were devised to ensure the proper use of sacred verses for divination. At least by the early fifteenth century, these conventions were formalized and codified in a series of tables known as falnamas. In Iran and Turkey, they were frequently appended to the end of Korans or copied as independent manuals. Secular texts, such as the celebrated *Mathnavi* by the poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) or the *Divan* by Hafiz (died 1392), were also used. Belief in the inherent protective or talismanic quality of words led to the addition of verses from the Koran to a wide range of personal, ceremonial, and functional objects. Elaborate inscriptions on shirts worn into battle or standards carried in religious and military processions were meant to invoke divine blessings and ward off evil and harm.



Koran

Iran, Safavid period, 1560-1570

Opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper

H x W: 36 x 24 cm (14 3/16 x 9 7/16 in)

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

Is 1548, 251b/252a

Like many of the finest sixteenth-century Korans, this volume is notable for the inclusion of a falnama at the end. The text begins by outlining the method of prognostication. Seekers are to perform their ablutions; obtain a complete copy of the Koran; repeat three times the Fatiha, the Koran's opening chapter, followed by sura 112, al-Ikhlās (Faith); and then offer a wish or intent. Finally, they must recite the following prayer and invoke blessings (salavat) on the Prophet Muhammad.

O God, I trust in you and take an augury from your book, so show me what is hidden in your innermost secret and knowledge of the unseen. You are the truth, and you sent down the truth, in your excellence and generosity through Muhammad, your servant and prophet. O God, pray [for] Muhammad.

Only then could seekers of auguries randomly open the Koran. The first letter of the first word they saw held the key to their prognostication. Its meaning was explained in the table at the back. The lavish illumination of this unsigned and undated Koran relates to other copies produced between 1560 and 1580 in Shiraz, a city that seems to have specialized in Korans with divination charts.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Standard (alam)

Ustad Ibrahim
Iran, Safavid period, Iran, Safavid period, 1711
Pierced steel
H x W: 94.5 x 46 cm
The Tanavoli Collection
no. 57

Originally associated with Imam Husayn (died 680), the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, standards were mainly used during military campaigns and religious processions in the sixteenth century. Carried on long shafts, they were believed to invoke divine protection but also must have been an imposing sight. This fine example, made from cut steel, has a central revolving sphere set with an intricate pattern of verses from the Koran. It is signed by Ustad Ibrahim and dated to 1711. This type of standard (alam) has been associated with the Safavid capital of Isfahan, which was known as an important center for the steel-working industry in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.



Taqwim

Turkey, 1513
Ink, opaque watercolor, gold on paper
H x W: 29 x 21 cm
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul
EH 1710

In Ottoman Turkey as in other parts of the Islamic world, taqwims (calendars) were compiled annually for the populace and the elite alike. Based on astronomical calculations, they included different systems of calendars, astronomical and meteorological predictions, horoscopes, the ideal times for planting and harvesting, and the identification of days most suitable for a variety of activities, from visiting friends to launching a military campaign. Prepared each March at the time of the vernal equinox (Nowruz), such almanacs provided guidance for the coming year.

This is first taqwim prepared for the Ottoman sultan Selim I (reigned 1512–20) following his accession in April 1512. The calculations predict much warfare and many conquests in the coming year. Also, theologians will be unhappy and neglectful of learning, women will worry and be discontent, and mystics will be rebellious and troublesome. Clearly, the year 1513 was deemed a tense and unsettled one, a view that must have anticipated the Ottoman confrontation with their neighboring Safavids, which culminated in the famous battle of Chaldiran in 1514.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Talismanic shirt

Turkey, late 16th century
Black and colored ink, gold on finished cotton
H x W: 85.5 x 115 cm (33 11/16 x 45 1/4 in)
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul
TSM 13/1184

In much of the Islamic world, undergarments adorned with Koranic verses and prayers, talismanic letters, or their numerological equivalents were worn as protection against misfortune, illness, evil forces, and enemies. Called a suit of armor (*zýrh* in Ottoman and *zirih* in Persian), they were associated with the magical power of the shirt worn by the prophet Joseph (Yusuf), which was used to restore the eyesight of his father Jacob (Yaqub), as mentioned in the Koran (12:93, 96). To increase their potency, such garments allegedly were started and finished on certain days and hours determined by an astrologer. The quality of the material and the design varied considerably, depending on the rank and status of the wearer.

Judging by the lavish design, extensive use of gold and lapis lazuli, and the range of motifs and styles of calligraphy, the owner of this short-sleeved shirt must have been a member of royalty. Both the front and back are covered with Koranic verses. Sura 48, "The Victory" (*al-Fath*), is repeated several times, suggesting the shirt was meant to be worn during battle.



Koran

Hasan ibn Abdullah
Turkey, Ottoman period, 16th century
Ink, gold, and opaque watercolor on paper
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul
TKS A5, f. 373b, 374a

Most Korans with falnamas were produced in Iran, but a few from Ottoman Turkey are also known. This elegant copy is written in naskh script on cream-colored paper of the finest quality. It is signed by the celebrated calligrapher Shaykh Hamdullah of Amasya (died 1520), who created it for Sultan Bayezid II (reigned 1481–1512). Hamdullah not only enjoyed the sultan's patronage but also instructed him in the art of calligraphy and served as chief court scribe. Known for his mastery of naskh, Hamdullah is associated with some forty-seven Korans, of which at least two include divination tables.

Inserted at the end of the volume, the falnama is written in fine nasta'liq script in Persian. It begins with an explanation for the popularity of divination tables by stating "kings and viziers were always delighted with auspicious auguries." The falnama terminates with an intricately illuminated panel that fills the lower half of the Koran's final folio. Hasan ibn Abdullah, who designed the final illumination, collaborated with Shaykh Hamdullah on three other Korans.



A Divan (collected poems) by Hafiz (d. 1390)

Sultan Muhammad Nur (fl. as early as 1494)
Herat, Afghanistan, Safavid period, 1523
Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper
H x W (closed): 30.4 x 19.5 cm (11 15/16 x 7 11/16 in)
Freer Gallery of Art F1932.45
Purchase



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Folio from a Divan (collected poems) by Hafiz (d. 1390); verso: Frontispiece; recto: inscription and seals

Sultan Muhammad Nur (fl. as early as 1494)
Herat, Afghanistan, Safavid period, 1523
Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper
H x W: 29.9 x 18.8 cm (11 3/4 x 7 3/8 in)
Freer Gallery of Art F1932.46
Purchase

With the exception of the Koran, the Divan (Collected works) by the poet Hafiz (died 1390) is the most popular source for auguries to this day in Iran. Its subtle language and elegant imagery evoke sentiments ranging from the mundane to the noble, the worldly to the spiritual. Infused with passion, desire, and stoicism, Hafiz's odes often are referred to as the "tongue of the unseen" and are considered ideal for prognostication.

The method of choosing an augury from the Divan was derived from the one devised for the Koran. The seeker either used specially formulated tables, arranged in multiples of seven or nine that keyed verses to letters, or the more common method of opening the book to a random page. The omen was the first verse seen or the last ode on the page. Any copy of the Divan, such as this fine example and its frontispiece (to the left) copied by Sultan Muhammad Nur, could have been used for prognostication.

In addition to Hafiz's Divan, this volume contains extracts from the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami (died 1209), the Rubayyat (Quatrains) of Omar Khayyam (died 1131), and the short poems of Ibn Yamin (died 1368). Between 1611 and 1615, it was in the library of Muhammad Qutb Shah, the ruler of Golconda, India, where the art of divination was also widely practiced.



Folio from a Divan (collected poems) by Hafiz (d. 1390); second folio

Sultan Muhammad Nur (fl. as early as 1494)
Herat, Afghanistan, Safavid period, 1523
Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper
H x W: 29.9 x 18.8 cm (11 3/4 x 7 3/8 in)
Freer Gallery of Art F1932.47
Purchase

With the exception of the Koran, the Divan (Collected works) by the poet Hafiz (died 1390) is the most popular source for auguries to this day in Iran. Its subtle language and elegant imagery evoke sentiments ranging from the mundane to the noble, the worldly to the spiritual. Infused with passion, desire, and stoicism, Hafiz's odes often are referred to as the "tongue of the unseen" and are considered ideal for prognostication.

The method of choosing an augury from the Divan was derived from the one devised for the Koran. The seeker either used specially formulated tables, arranged in multiples of seven or nine that keyed verses to letters, or the more common method of opening the book to a random page. The omen was the first verse seen or the last ode on the page. Any copy of the Divan, such as this fine example and its frontispiece (to the left) copied by Sultan Muhammad Nur, could have been used for prognostication.

In addition to Hafiz's Divan, this volume contains extracts from the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami (died 1209), the Rubayyat (Quatrains) of Omar Khayyam (died 1131), and the short poems of Ibn Yamin (died 1368). Between 1611 and 1615, it was in the library of Muhammad Qutb Shah, the ruler of Golconda, India, where the art of divination was also widely practiced.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Mu'nis al-Abrar fi Deqa'iq al-Ash'ar

Shiraz, Il-Khanid period, 1341

Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper

H x W (paper): 19.5 x 13.4 cm (7 11/16 x 5 1/4 in)

Freer Gallery of Art F1946.14

Purchase

This folio originally belonged to a rare poetic anthology dated 1341 that includes the earliest extant examples of illustrated auguries. The text was written and compiled in thirty chapters, but only the twenty-ninth chapter, "Lunar elections" (Ikhtiyarat-i qamar), is illustrated. At the top of the folio a cross-legged figure holding a crescent moon passes through the sign of Pisces. A gray fish, symbolizing Pisces, rests beside this personification of the Moon and looks longingly toward him. The related augury states,

With the moon in Pisces, study learning and theology,
Make requests from ministers and judges,
Wear whatever new clothes you possess,
Abstain from bleeding. The tale is ended.

In an unusual composition in the lower section, twelve birds, divided into two rows of six, stand facing to the left. They range from the domestic duck to the mythical huma, and each one symbolizes a human attribute.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



The Zodiac



Fragmentary plate

Abdul Vahid

Iran, Safavid period, 1563-1564 (971 AH)

Stonepaste ware with painted underglaze

Diam: 41 cm

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst

I. 1292

This fragment of an impressive blue-and-white plate is one of the few dated and signed pieces from later sixteenth century Iran. It is signed in the center by a certain Abdul Vahid in the year 971 AH (1563–64). The principal design element—the twelve signs of the zodiac—appears in a wide outer band and conforms to the long-established norms for depicting astrological emblems in the Islamic world. The artist has added a few of his own personal touches, such as the face of the Sun emerging in Virgo and the goat of Capricorn balancing on a three-legged stool. Although the zodiac appears frequently on metalwork from sixteenth and seventeenth-century Iran, this is the only known occurrence on a ceramic object. During this period, most blue-and-white vessels from Iran were decorated with Chinese-inspired animal and floral motifs. The fine execution and unusual design of this fragment suggest it must have been part of a special commission by a Safavid master potter.



Leo Rides a Personification of the Sun, from Metali al-sa'ada wa manabi'al-siyada (The Ascension of Propitious Stars and the Sources of Sovereignty)

Turkey, Ottoman period, ca. 1582

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 20.5 x 11.9 cm

Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum, New York

M.788, f. 15b

This unusual manuscript is an Ottoman translation of the *Kitab al-bulhan* (Book of wonderment) by the celebrated astrologer Abu Mashar al-Balkhi (died 886). It consists of treatises on astrology, physiognomy, demonology, talismans, and marvels as well as prognosticative texts. The manuscript was prepared for the library of Ayse Sultan (died 1605), the daughter of Murad III (reigned 1574–95), who was known for her support of charitable foundations for the poor. An identical copy of the text (now in Paris) is dedicated to Murad's other daughter, Fatma Sultan (died circa 1600). Together, these two illustrated manuscripts represent the only extant Ottoman works that identify their female patron in the dedication, and they attest to the interest of royal women in divination and other occult arts.

The image of the Sun in Leo belongs to the first section devoted to horoscopes. The text explains the physiognomy, personality, and destiny of a person born under the zodiacal sign governed by the Sun. Leo comes under the influence of three decans (subdivisions of the zodiac signs)—Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars—for ten-day periods. Those planets appear in the arched niches below: Mars holds a sword and a severed head, Jupiter wears the large white turban typical of an Ottoman scholar, and Saturn is a planter with a shovel.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Divination bowl

Iran, Safavid period, mid 16th century

Copper alloy

H x Diam: 5.1 x 18.3 cm

The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art

MTW 1378

Since at least the twelfth century, Islamic belief in the inherent healing properties of the word of God inspired, in part, the production of so-called magic-medical bowls. Examples from Safavid Iran frequently combine pious verses with astrological signs. The interior of this bowl is decorated with images of six planets (counterclockwise: Moon, Jupiter, Venus, Mars, Mercury, and Saturn) with a personified Sun in the center. In addition, the bowl is inscribed with densely packed prayers and Koranic verses.



Sun, from a Falnama

Probably Iran, Safavid dynasty, 1580s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: (overall) 39.5 x 24.5 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1702, f. 5b

Carried aloft by four angels, a majestic, human-faced sun disk illuminates a cloud-streaked sky with its golden rays. According to Islamic astronomy, the Sun is the fourth of seven planets, a calculation based on its distance from Earth in ascending order. It rotates within one of the seven spheres (falak) while the constellations, including the twelve signs of the zodiac, occupy the eighth. During the course of twelve months, the Sun travels through the zodiac. This movement allegedly affects human behavior and, in part, forms the basis of astrology, the most popular form of divination. The detailed augury is first introduced with Koranic verses (91:1–3), followed by two couplets.

By the Sun and his (glorious) splendor; by the Moon as she follows
him; by the day as it shows up (the Sun's) glory.
O you, in whose augury the Sun has appeared,
You have asked a good question, now listen to the answer:
"O you with a good reputation, the sun is auspicious, [it is] auspicious,
Your enemy will fall into torment."

The text on the facing page addresses specific issues, such as travel, marriage, the recovery of a lost object, and the condition of an ailing person, and is positive in its prognostications because the Sun is regarded as an auspicious sign. The augury, however, warns the seeker, "Know friend from foe, and do not feel secure from the plots of a sallow-faced, short man with a defect on his head or eye."



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Celestial sphere

Iran or Turkey, 1614-1616

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49 x 36 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 17b & 18a text pag

In this illustration from the Falnama of Sultan Ahmed I (reigned 1603–17), the seven planets and twelve signs of the zodiac are integrated into a celestial disk held in place by four angels. Set in medallions, the signs of the zodiac occupy the outer band, while six of the seven planets appear in the inner one. Saturn (zuhl), the seventh, the most negative, and the most distant planet from Earth, presides in the center. Shown as a dark, elderly figure with multiple arms, Saturn's personification, like that of the planet Mars on the adjacent wall, originally derived from Indian visual sources. In astrology, the continuously changing relationship of the constellations and the zodiac forms the basis for calculating, determining, and forecasting. As an augury in the Falnama, however, the meaning of the planets and the signs of the zodiac has been largely fixed. Still, the prognostications suggest an element of uncertainty and warn the seeker, "Although this omen is not devoid of inauspiciousness, do not worry, for it indicates that felicity will triumph over infelicity."



Mars (al-mirikh)

Iran or Turkey, 1614-1616

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49 x 36 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 30b & 31a text pag

Second only to Saturn in its malevolent influence, the planet Mars (al-mirikh) is known as the "minor misfortune" in Islamic astrology. As in Greek and Roman traditions, it is called the "red planet" because of its proximity to the Sun. This association is implied here in the figure's ruddy complexion and red beard. Derived from Indian sources, the multi-armed personification of Mars holds his attributes: a sword and the severed head that underscore his warrior-like persona but also relate to the constellation Perseus. The crown symbolizes Mars's power, while the flaming brazier refers to fire and heat. Cancer, one of two domiciles of the planet Mars, takes the form of a black scorpion.

Not surprisingly, Mars is an inauspicious augury. It concludes by recommending, "Let the augury seeker have patience for a few days and send candles and lamps to mosques and holy places on Friday eve. He should not omit obligatory prayers or neglect alms and charity in order that he may attain his desire."



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Moon, from a Ajaib al-makhlūqat

Zakariya ibn Muhammad ibn Mahmud, known as al-Qazvini
ca. 1595

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper
H x W: 25 x 17 cm (9 13/16 x 6 11/16 in)
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul
A.3632,f.12b/13a

A Turkish translation of Qazvini's Wonders of Creation, a thirteenth-century study of celestial and terrestrial bodies, was begun for Prince Mustafa, the favorite son of Sultan Süleyman I (reigned 1520–66), who was executed for suspected disloyalty in 1553. The translation was left incomplete until 1701.

The first chapter on "inhabitants of heavens" concerns constellations, angels, and the seven known planets. The Moon is shown as a cross-legged female holding a silver crescent that simultaneously shows two phases: the crescent (hilal) and the full (badr) moon. As the closest "planet" to Earth, the Moon was believed to be critical in determining daily activities and in calculating time in the Islamic lunar calendar. The meticulously drawn diagram on the facing page illustrates a lunar eclipse (husuf-i kameri).



Divination bowl

Iran, Safavid period, mid-16th century
Chased and engraved copper
H x Diam: 5.7 x 19.8 cm (2 1/4 x 7 13/16 in)
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1997.38
Purchase

Unusual in its combination of magic numbers, pious verses, and astrological signs, this divination bowl is inscribed with the names of the twelve imams below its rim. The exterior is further decorated with signs of the zodiac. Several similar vessels have been associated with Kashan, an important artistic, commercial, and political city in central Iran, where this vessel may have been produced



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010

Idolatry



Azure Monastery, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W x D (overall): 84 x 64 x 3.5 cm (33 1/16 x 25 3/16 x 1 3/8 in)

The David Collection, Copenhagen

79/2006

Like the illustration of *The Poet Sa'di Dressed as a Monk* to the left, this painting stands out due to its unusual subject matter. Instead of depicting a specific figure or event, it focuses on the more abstract notion of idolatry, which is strongly condemned in Islam. Both in the accompanying augury and in a later inscription at the upper edge, the subject is identified as *dayr-i mina* (azure monastery). In Persian literature, the term *dayr* refers to any religious space other than a Muslim one. When used in conjunction with *mina*, which means azure, enameled, or turquoise, it suggests the firmament, implied here by the illuminated spandrels that represent the sky or the heavens.

The accompanying augury begins by counseling the seeker to trust in God and “after this, wash from your heart the picture of any other.” This warning, together with the statues, identifies the space as a possible refuge or monastery for those who venerate images. *Azure Monastery* also differs stylistically from all other illustrations in the dispersed *Falnama*. Instead of wearing traditional Safavid costumes, the men are dressed in pale-colored robes with accentuated folds of the type first seen in the fourteenth century. The overall composition conveys a sense of foreboding, which amplifies the augury's inauspicious meaning.



The Poet Sa'di Dressed as a Monk

Attributed to Naksi Bey

Turkey, Ottoman period, 1614-16

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: (image) 38 x 21 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 6b

This first illustration in the *Falnama* of Sultan Ahmed I (reigned 1603–17) is based on a well-known anecdote in the *Bustan* (Orchard) of the Persian poet Sa'di (died 1292). It is attributable to the Ottoman artist Naksi Bey, who is known for his innovative style that integrates Persian, European, and Chinese pictorial conventions. The text relates how Sa 'di traveled throughout China in the guise of a monk. In the temple of Sumnat he encountered an ivory statue that occasionally raised its arms, which incited reverence and astonishment among worshipers. One night he remained in the temple and discovered a priest behind a curtain, pulling a rope to move the figure.

Although the elaborately garbed poet Sa'di dominates the composition, the principal subject is the small sculpture in the upper left. A golden ram stands behind it, and an open book rests on the platform. This scene may have been inspired by the biblical story of the golden calf, which is mentioned several times in the Koran, while the open book may symbolize the Covenant Code that the Israelites broke when they worshiped the idol.

The exact reason for including a scene relating to idolatry in this volume defies easy explanation, but the *Falnama's* large-scale format and boldly conceived compositions may have been considered sufficiently different from other illustrations to encourage worship—hence, the warning.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010

Abrahamic Prophets

Abrahamic Traditions

Much like Judaism and Christianity, Islam pays homage to the Abrahamic prophets, beginning with Adam and ending with Jesus and the much-revered Virgin Mary. First mentioned in the Koran, the lives and deeds of Abrahamic prophets were expanded and elaborated in scholarly and popular literary works and kept alive as part of a vibrant oral tradition. They exemplify moral and ethical conduct and were intended as inspiration for all Muslims.

The Falnama also incorporates key events from the Abrahamic traditions. The expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise, the martyrdom of Zachariah, or the sacrifice of Abraham were meant to remind seekers of the prophets' sufferings and their ability to overcome adversity. Their patience, generosity, faith, and compassion were inspiring qualities that those consulting the Falnama should emulate.

Shah Tahmasb

One of the most remarkable patrons of the arts of the book, Shah Tashmasb (reigned 1524–76) ascended the Safavid throne in the northwestern city of Tabriz at the age of ten. In the early years of his reign, the shah, known for his own skills as a painter and calligrapher, commissioned arguably the greatest masterpiece of Persian painting, the so-called Tahmasb Shahnama (Book of kings) with 258 illustrations. By the time he ordered his next major manuscript, a Khamsa (Quintet) by the Persian poet Nizami (died 1203), Tahmasb had firmly taken hold of the reigns of power. Confrontations with the Ottomans ended in the loss of Baghdad and eastern Anatolia in 1535, which eventually led the shah to move the capital of the Safavid dynasty to the more centrally located city of Qazvin in 1548.

Seven years later Tahmasb signed a treaty with the Ottomans, which secured peace for the rest of his reign and allowed him to shore up orthodox Shi'ism. After the 1550s, he grew increasingly pious, introspective, and preoccupied with his political and personal legacy. In 1562, Tahmasb completed his memoirs (Tazkira), comprising a series of dreams in which the Prophet Muhammad and his family played a key role in supporting and guiding him. According to several eyewitness accounts, in his later years the shah rarely left the palace and spent much of his time practicing divination with the women of the court. The dispersed Falnama belongs to this final phase of Shah Tahmasb's reign.



Moses Challenges Pharaoh's Sorcerers, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, 1550-1560
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
H x W: 59 x 44 cm
Bruschettini Collection, Genoa
f. 22



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



People of the Cave, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 58.4 x 45.1 cm (23 x 17 3/4 in)

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1935 (35.64.3) Photograph ©2006
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

35.64.3

According to the Koran and subsequent histories, some time before the birth of Christ, three youths fled a pagan town, identified by some as Ephesus in present-day Turkey. Soon they were joined by four others, including a shepherd and a dog called Qitmir. At first, they refused to take in the dog, but when the dog told them that it, too, was looking for God, they changed their minds. Once in the cave, the seven fell asleep, and the pagan king Daqyanus ordered the entrance of the cave to be blocked. The youths and the dog remained asleep for 309 years, until God breathed life into their spirits again.

One of the most visually powerful illustrations in the dispersed Falnama, the painting depicts a large, dark cave in which the interlocked figures of the seven sleepers create a crescent around the contented, slumbering dog. A crowned figure on an elegant white horse appears in the upper right, accompanied by a group of roaming soldiers. He probably represents Daqyanus, who is led by Satan, recognizable by his dark skin and iron collar. Surprisingly, he is the only one wearing typical Safavid headgear—a white turban with a tall, ribbed baton.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise, from the Ahmed I Falnama

Attributed to Nakkas Hasan Pasha
Turkey, Ottoman period, 1614-16
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
H x W: 49 x 36.4 cm
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul
TKS 1703, f. 7b

In the *Falnama* prepared for the Ottoman sultan Ahmed I (reigned 1603–17), Nakkas (painter) Hasan Pasha chose a slightly later moment in the narrative for his version of the expulsion of Adam and Eve. Firmly clasping Eve's hand, Adam leads her away from the gates of paradise, rendered as a richly tiled building with a marbled arcade. A crowned angel, possibly Rizvan, the custodian of paradise, stands in the doorway and watches as the two take small, hesitant steps into the unknown. A black snake follows them, while a peacock remains on the threshold, reluctant to venture outside.

Stripped of their garments and heavenly crowns, Adam and Eve wear short, leafy skirts. Eve holds a sheaf of wheat, identified in some historical and popular religious accounts as the fruit of a forbidden tree, and Adam's complexion has darkened as one of his punishments for defying God's will. This interpretation poignantly underscores the consequences of disobedience. Banished and isolated, Adam and Eve symbolize the moral dimension of the fall from grace.

Hasan Pasha was an Ottoman government official and artist under three successive sultans: Murad III, Mehmed III, and Ahmed I. He worked on several royal manuscripts, contributed numerous illustrations to the six volume biography of the Prophet Muhammad (*Siyer-i nebi*), and created portraits of the sultans.

Augury of Sa'di
Dressed as a Monk
From the H.1703 *Falnama*
Turkey, Istanbul, ca. 1614–16
Ink and gold on paper
Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul,
H.1703, f.7a

O augury seeker, know that there is a tale of Shaykh Sa'di entering the realm of Chin [China] during his travels in the guise of a monk. Although the beginning of this omen is indicative of a certain amount of erroneousness, its end is good. Your heart is not stable. There is loss in mingling with those who are not of your sort, but you are aware of their deceit and will triumph over them, just as happened to Shaykh Sa'di. . . .



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Ibrahim's (Abraham) Sacrifice

Iran or Turkey, Ottoman period, 1614-1616

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 48.5 x 34 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 11b

The Islamic version of Abraham's sacrifice relates closely to the Jewish one. Abraham's willingness to give up his son as proof of his loyalty and devotion to God is regarded in Islam as one of the most profound moral acts. According to Islamic tradition, when God appeared in a dream and asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael (Isma'il), he obeyed and took him into the mountains. With his son's consent, Abraham tied his hands and covered his eyes, but whenever he placed the sharpened knife on his son's throat, it would not cut. At that moment, a voice called out to Abraham, telling him he had fulfilled God's will and he should sacrifice a sheep instead of his son. Abraham then saw the angel Gabriel hovering above him, holding the animal.

The Falnama illustration represents the miraculous moment of God's announcement and the appearance of Gabriel. Suspended in midair, the angel cradles a beautiful white ram in its arms. A fourth figure on the right watches the scene; his dark complexion and iron noose identify him as Satan, who had been urging Abraham to disobey God's order. With its pastel-colored landscape, golden sky, and elegantly dressed figures, the composition has a sense of calm that emphasizes Abraham's absolute devotion to God.



Mary and the Infant Jesus, from the Ahmed I Falnama

Iran or Turkey, 1580-1590

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49 x 36.4 cm (19 5/16 x 14 5/16 in)

Topkapi Palace Museum Istanbul

TKS 1703, f.32b

One of the most revered figures in Islamic history, Mary (Maryam) is the only woman mentioned by name in the Koran and is the subject of one chapter. She also plays a critical role in Islamic popular piety, especially Shi'ism, as she is closely identified with Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter and Imam Ali's wife. This affinity, as well as her attribute of purity, may explain the frequent use of Mary in favorable pictorial auguries and auspicious omens in the Falnama.

Wearing a blue veil over an orange robe, Mary, who is identified in the accompanying augury as having given "birth to a child without a father," sits by a stream in a verdant landscape. The flames of a flickering halo frame her head and suggest her sanctity. A disproportionately small infant Jesus (Isa) sits on her lap. Lovingly, he offers her a small pomegranate with one hand and with the other points to her unnaturally elongated, exposed breast. Mother and child seem oblivious to their surroundings, but they are not alone: a figure wearing a headgear of serrated leaves, which is often associated with angels and other heavenly creatures, watches intently from behind a hill. While the image is auspicious, the omen advises "the augury seeker must not neglect worship or charity in order that he attain his desire, God willing."



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Prophet Zakariya in a Tree, from the dispersed Falnama

Qazvin, Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 55 x 44 cm

Worcester Art Museum

1935.16

The prophet Zakariya (Zachariah), the father of John the Baptist (Yahya), is described in the Koran as a righteous man, but in later Islamic lore he became a symbol of martyrdom within both Sufi and Shi'i circles. He was sent by God to the Israelites with a law (shari'a), and in his old age he was granted his most ardent wish and fathered a son, Yahya. After Yahya was executed on order of King Herod, Zakariya fled and took refuge in a tree that had opened miraculously in front of him. Satan, however, noticed the edge of his robe poking through a hole in the trunk. He revealed Zakariya's hiding place to his pursuers and advised them to cut the tree in half while the prophet was inside. Seen here is the moment of Satan's betrayal and Zakariya's imminent martyrdom.

The symmetrical composition is organized around a large plane tree. Flickering flames emanate from it and suggest Zakariya's sacred presence. A dark-skinned figure, identified by a later hand as shaytan-i la'nati (cursed Satan), sits at the foot of the tree and grasps the prophet's robe. He gestures to a crowned man, who might be King Herod. The animal heads protruding from the necks of the antagonists visually reinforce the tormentors' vile character. The inauspicious augury warns, "If you can, turn away from this intention and choose another matter, because there is no good in this omen."



Folio from a Falnama (Book of Omens); verso: Expulsion of Adam and Eve; recto: text

Qazvin, Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s

Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper

H x W: 59.7 x 44.9 cm (23 1/2 x 17 11/16 in)

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1986.251a-b

Purchase--Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Angels Bow before Adam and Eve in Paradise, from the dispersed Falnama

Qazvin, Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59.3 x 44.5 cm (23 3/8 x 17 1/2 in)

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1986.254

Purchase--Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler

In this joyful illustration, Adam and Eve are enthroned in a lush and flower-strewn landscape, attended by sixteen rainbow-winged angels. Flaming nimbi emanate from the couple's crowned heads, an indication of their status as prophets. Their idealized features and elegant garb, much like those worn by the adoring angels, are typical of sixteenth-century courtly figures. Only Satan (shaytan or iblis), the disobedient angel who refused to honor God's creation of Adam, regards the scene with dismay. He appears in the upper right as a gray-faced, bearded figure from whose collar protrudes a curved, snake-like form.

Omens accompanying such depictions of Adam and Eve in paradise are usually favorable for all sorts of future events, from financial and business success to the return of absent friends.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Joseph Enthroned, from the dispersed Falnama

Qazvin, Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper

H x W: 59.4 x 44.4 cm (23 3/8 x 17 1/2 in)

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1986.255a-b

Purchase--Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler

Based on the twelfth chapter of the Koran, this painting depicts the prophet Joseph (Yusuf), seated outdoors on a low dais and framed by a flaming nimbus, as he is reunited with his brothers. Jealous of their father's affection for Joseph, they hid their younger brother in a well, where he was found by traders and sold into slavery in Egypt. Years later, the brothers traveled to Egypt to buy food, but they did not recognize Joseph. On their second visit, Joseph contrived to keep his youngest brother Benjamin in Egypt by having a drinking cup secretly placed in his saddlebag and then accusing him of theft. This illustration

probably represents Joseph's revelation of his true identity during the brothers' third visit, when they beg for Benjamin's release. Dressed in fine Safavid attire, all eleven of Joseph's brothers, including young Benjamin (the boy next to Joseph, holding the royal handkerchief), seem to be represented at this royal banquet. Onlookers, guards, and servants are identifiable by their less sumptuous headgear.

The related augury praises Joseph's majesty and beauty, and it states the seeker has become "the ruler of the Egypt of the world." Joseph, the text promises, will bring all manner of good things, including the power to meet the needs of family and friends.

Augury of Bahram Gur Hunting, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Qazvin, Safavid period, mid-1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C.

S1986.255b

O augury user, know that the hunting ground of Bahram Gur has appeared in your augury. Let there be good news to you that the door of victory and success has been opened to you, and you have found freedom from sorrows and tribulations. And from a place that you do not expect, legal gain will come into your possession, and a great benefit will reach you from a wealthy man. If this intent is to buy, sell, become a partner, or travel, do it without hesitation, since it is favorable and there are many advantages in it. . . .



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010

Islamic Prophets

Islamic Traditions

The most frequently depicted subjects in the Falnamas are Islamic prophets, in particular the Prophet Muhammad, his cousin and son-in-law Imam Ali, and Imam Riza, the eighth Shi'i imam. Some of the scenes are familiar from earlier illustrated texts, such as the battle at Khaybar in 680 or the Prophet's celebrated miraj (ascension). Others depict obscure events that must have been drawn from popular literature or oral traditions. In most instances, the scenes represent miraculous occurrences that underscore not only the divinely inspired status of the prophets but also their rightful role as intercessors between the known and unknown realms.

Throughout the Islamic world, holy tombs and shrines commemorate the presence and powers of prophets, saints, and mystics. These memorials symbolize the point at which the earthly and the heavenly converge, and they play a critical role in popular religious culture. Images of shrines and sacred sites, such as those at Mecca, Najaf, and Nishapur, also figure prominently in the Falnamas and invoke the divine presence and protection of Muhammad and his descendants.

Sultan Ahmed I and Kalender Pasha

In 1609, on an auspicious day determined by court astrologers, the Ottoman sultan Ahmed I (reigned 1603–17) ordered the construction of a large complex (külliye) across from the Topkapı Palace and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Today the complex is known in the West as the Blue Mosque. The sultan appointed Kalender Pasha (died 1616) as the building supervisor of the complex and keeper of the revenue. Prior to this important promotion, Kalender had been an usher, a trustee of the endowment of Selim I, the steward of the gate, and a courtier of high rank. In addition to his administrative skills, he was an accomplished artist who must have enjoyed a close relationship with Sultan Ahmed. Kalender's artistic talents are confirmed by the three volumes he assembled for the sultan, including a Falnama. Completed between 1614 and 1616, it was intended as a royal gift to commemorate Kalender's appointment as vizier (minister of state). According to the preface, he personally gathered the illustrations, commissioned new text, and painted the illuminated borders to create a visually unified Falnama for the sultan.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Imam Ali Slays Murra bin Qays, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W (without mount): 59.7 x 45.1 cm (23 1/2 x 17 3/4 in)

© Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Geneva

IR M 65 f.23

O augury user, know that in your augury has appeared the sign of the miracle-manifesting, Khaybar-conquering two fingers of His Majesty the Lion of God, the Conqueror Ali ibn Abu Talib—upon him be mercy and peace—which appeared from the blessed grave of His Majesty and struck in two the accursed Murra ibn Qays. . . .

Glancing furtively over his shoulder and wielding a saber, a crowned, dark-skinned figure steals out of a mausoleum. All eyes turn toward him as two fingers emerge from a draped sarcophagus and shoot flickering flames toward the fugitive, Murra ibn Qays. Although Murra's exact identity has yet to be determined, he must have been one of Ali's fiercest adversaries, for the prophet pursued him even after his own death. The artist emphasized the dramatic demise of the villain, yet the principal subject of the composition remains Imam Ali, even if his presence and divinely inspired power are suggested only by two fingers emerging from the sarcophagus. The large mausoleum, with its central tiled dome and two tapering minarets, represents Ali's now much-restored shrine at Najaf, Iraq, a principal site of veneration in Shi'i Islam.

Augury of Moses Challenges Pharaoh's Sorcerers

From the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Qazvin, Safavid period, mid-1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Aga Khan Trust for Culture

IR. M.65

When the prophet Moses threw his staff, it became a serpent and annihilated the magicians. By manifesting this miracle, he gained the power of leadership. The Creator became pleased with him; he made the people happy.

O augury user, know that in your augury has appeared His Majesty, the prophet Moses, who threw his stick, and it became a serpent and swallowed the magicians. Let there be good news to you that the bad has vanished from your horoscope, your important affairs will turn out well, your enemies will be vanquished by the wrath of God, and your friends will be drowned in infinite blessings. The star of your prosperity has risen from the horizon of wealth, and the bud of your hope has blossomed in the meadow of joy. Buying and selling are excellent, and travel is blessed.

Entering a partnership is approved, and seeing kings and important people is good. Whatever matter you have in mind for this world or the next, begin on it. Do not allow hesitation, since this augury is too good to be described. But you must keep with you a prayer that counteracts sorcery, so that you will be safe from the evil of magicians and the tongue of those who say bad things, and you will attain your wish and desire if God—be He alone exalted, the mighty—be willing.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Plate

Iran, Safavid period, 17th-18th century

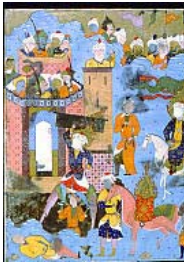
Stone paste painted under glaze

Diam: 42 cm

© Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Geneva

AgaKhanDish

The detailed design of this plate features a series of structures with bulbous domes of different sizes and shapes, seen in cross section in a verdant setting. A mimbar (pulpit) stands on the left, while a pavilion with long eaves, perched on a column (perhaps a minaret), is on the right. Two of the buildings carry illegible inscriptions, and most are illuminated with hanging lamps. An arcade, filled with vases of flowers and lamps, runs across the bottom, centered on a domed structure that holds a pair of footprints or sandals linked to the Prophet Muhammad. Immediately to the left is a double-headed sword (zulfiqar), the symbol of Imam Ali. Together, these emblems impart a distinct religious significance to this large blue-and-white plate, which must have been a special commission and probably intended to commemorate an important site. Its unique decoration of a shrine complex is reminiscent of illustrations found in pilgrimage manuals that were common in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The compartmentalization of the design on the rim relates to Chinese-inspired Safavid blue-and-white wares.



Ali and Muhammad at the Gates of Khaybar, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59.5 x 45 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

MS 395

In 629, the Prophet Muhammad attacked the oasis of Khaybar near Medina (in present-day Saudi Arabia), which was then inhabited by Jewish tribes. Muhammad entrusted Ali with command of the forces. During the ensuing battle, Ali lost his shield but proved his valor and supernatural strength by using the heavy fortress door for protection. The animated scene depicts the miraculous moment when Ali, carried aloft by the archangel Gabriel, wrenches the door off its hinges with his bare hands. On the right, the Prophet Muhammad sits on an elegant white horse and observes the action. Amid the almost audible clamor of battle, the nearly indistinguishable appearance of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali underscores their spiritual and sacred bond as well as Ali's exalted status as Muhammad's rightful heir, according to Shi'i belief.

Elsewhere in the scene, the groom Qambar firmly holds the reins of Ali's faithful mount Duldul in the lower right corner, while a graybearded astrologer with an astrolabe stands in the tower, probably calculating the hour of attack. A curious feature is the inclusion of a woman in the extreme upper left tower. She probably represents Saffiya, the soon-to-be-widowed wife of a Jewish chief whom the Prophet later marries.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Muhammad Revives the Sick Boy, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 58.6 x 44.5 cm (23 1/16 x 17 1/2 in)

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Francis M. Weld Gift, 1950 (50.23.1).

Photograph ©2006 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

50.23.1

The subject of this illustration traditionally has been identified as Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, but it represents a miracle performed by the Prophet Muhammad. According to several sources, on his migration from Mecca to Medina in 622, Muhammad stopped at the tent of the poor, elderly woman Umma Mabid and healed her ailing sheep. She then begged Muhammad to resuscitate her paralyzed son, which he did by reciting a long prayer. The grateful mother and son then converted to Islam.

In Islamic belief, the Prophet claimed to have the ability to perform only one miracle, that of revealing the word of God (Koran 6:50). Later accounts of his life, however, refer to several supernatural events, such as the celebrated miraj (night journey) and the splitting of the moon. The Prophet's healing of Umma Mabid's son must have been another popular story that recalls Jesus resurrecting Lazarus.

The Falnama artist has placed the divine intervention before a ruined structure and not in front of Umma Mabid's tent. As the crouching woman asks for assistance, the veiled figure of the Prophet has raised his hands in prayer, and the boy, with the help of a turbaned man, lifts his head from the coffin. A crowd, including an elegantly dressed and crowned figure, witnesses the miraculous event with astonishment and wonder.



Coffin of Imam Ali, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 56.7 x 42.8 cm

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Francis M. Weld Gift, 1950 (50.23.2).

Photograph ©2006 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

50.23.2

In this enigmatic illustration, a veiled figure leads a camel with a coffin, while two other veiled men watch from behind a hillside. Later inscriptions identify them as the imams Hasan and Husayn, the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad, and the figure in the lower left is their father, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib. Each one wears traditional Safavid headgear and is distinguished by a flaming nimbus. With no additional observers, the scene seems far more "quiet" and private than almost all other Falnama illustrations.

According to some traditions, Imam Ali not only predicted his own death but also told his two sons that when he died, a veiled man would come to their house, load his coffin on a camel, and carry it away for burial. Under no circumstance were they to follow the person or question him. When Ali's prediction came true, the brothers could not refrain from inquiring about the man's identity. The figure lifted his veil and revealed that he was in fact their father, who was carrying his own body to its grave. The story not only confirms the imam's divinely inspired, miraculous powers but also presents him as the ultimate "seer," who foretells and enacts his own death for his sons.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Standard (alam)

Iran, early 18th century

Silver with black inlay

H x W: 48.9 x 22.9 cm (19 1/4 x 9 in)

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Marilyn Jenkins, 1984 (1984.504.2).
1984.504.2

Standards (alams) in the shape of a palm were carried aloft on long wooden poles in religious ceremonies held in Iran and India. Referred to as a panja (which in Persian relates to the number five and the palm or hand), the shape recalls the powerful hand of Imam Ali, which is also depicted in Khaybar: The Conquering Palm of Ali on the adjacent wall.

Both sides of this silver palm, which is now missing a finger, are covered with elegant inscriptions. They include the names of the ahl-i bayt (people of the house), that is, the Prophet Muhammad and his immediate family—his daughter Fatima; Imam Ali, his cousin and son-in-law; and his grandsons Hasan and Husayn—and the twelve Shi'i imams and their attributes. Together with Koranic verses and Shi'i prayers and invocations, these inscriptions transform the palm into a protective talisman meant to invoke divine power and presence.



Uvays-i Qaran and the Camel, from a dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59 x 44.5 cm

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva

1971-107-36

The accompanying augury identifies the protagonist as the semi legendary Uvays-i Qaran. A camel herder from Yemen who preferred a solitary life, he was one of the Prophet Muhammad's closest companions, and he also may have fought with Imam Ali at the battle of Siffin in 657.

The composition centers on a large, agitated dromedary. Flickering flames emanate from its hump to imply the sanctity of its rider, probably Muhammad. A white-bearded man, perhaps Uvays, desperately tries to control the camel with a slender black stick. A second figure crawls along the lower edge of the painting in an effort to guide the camel as well. As in a number of other illustrations from the dispersed Falnama, several large figures stand along the horizon and gesture toward the protagonists, lending the scene a pronounced sense of theatricality. The auspicious augury warns the seeker should "by all means keep a talisman against the evil eye, so that you may be safe from the eye of wicked people, if God, be he exalted, be willing."



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Footprints of Imam Riza, from a dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59 x 44.5 cm

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva

Pozzi 35, f. 25

“Any place that Imam Riza sets foot, there hyacinth and basil always grow.” Taking a cue from the opening verses of the related augury, the artist of this remarkable scene created one of the most original and visually compelling paintings of the sixteenth century. It represents the ghadamgah (stepping place or station) of Iman Riza, the eighth Shi'i imam, who died in 818 and is buried in Mashhad in northeastern Iran.

The focal point of the composition is a large pair of decorated footprints set within an arch. A group of worshipers gestures and points to them; others pray and urge still others to do the same. The flattened interior also includes carefully arranged objects associated with holy sanctuaries, such as a gold mosque lamp, a folding bookstand with a Koran, and a gold candlestick. Four stylized cypress trees, alluding to the garden of paradise, add to the strong symmetry of the work.

Devotees throughout the Islamic world erected shrines around stones that were believed to carry traces of the Prophet's footsteps. Considered holy relics, such stones became the subject of popular veneration, as seen here. Several shrines associated with Imam Riza were built in Iran, but the most important one is still in Nishapur, outside of Mashhad. It originally was surrounded by a lush, fragrant garden.



Circuit of the Ka'ba, from a dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59 x 44.5 cm

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva

Pozzi 37, f. 19

The accompanying augury begins by stating, “The circuit of the Ka'ba of the heart is better than the circuit of the Ka'ba of clay,” thus identifying the subject as Islam's holiest sanctuary in Mecca. Situated in an octagonal courtyard, the Ka'ba is represented as a hexagonal building with colorful tiles and a bulbous dome engulfed in flames to indicate its sanctity. Curiously, the Ka'ba's iconic black cube has been transformed into a typical Persian tomb tower, one of the most unusual features of the illustration.

Four tall minarets stand at the perimeters of the large courtyard, and worshipers have gathered around the central structure. A bareheaded figure, dressed only in a blue skirt with a black scarf, knocks at the sanctuary's door. The youth might be a dervish, a Muslim mystic, much like the man to the right of him in a long-sleeved orange robe and a bell-shaped brown cap. Other worshipers standing around the outer walls at the top wear distinct headgear, probably to suggest different social and ethnic backgrounds. Scholars occupy three of the niches in the lower arcade, and two youths stand in another. Together, the pilgrims at the top of the composition and the figures in the niches below create an outer “circuit” around the Ka'ba, reinforcing the concept of a physical and spiritual circumambulation.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Imam Riza Saves the Sea People, from a dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59 x 44 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris

MAO 894

Galloping over dark, churning waves on a dappled gray horse, Imam Riza pierces the chest of a large div (demon) with a long lance. With its flaming eyes and mouth and its orange-colored skin, the demon looks both menacing and comical. Clearly, this imposing creature was meant to be seen and heard: it wears gold armbands, necklaces, and anklets adorned with bells, including three that dangle capriciously from a string between its horns. It is about to hurl a helpless female into the air with one hand, and with the other it tries to withhold the impact of the lance's thrust. In contrast to the demon's unruly, whimsical appearance, the veiled Imam Riza is the personification of grace and control. He clearly has arrived just in time to save the sea people in the waters below. Frightened and agitated, the naked figures scurry for shelter and beseech the prophet for help. Even the trees and shrubs on the far shore seem to have been drawn into the tense confrontation. An apparent altercation between two monkeys in the central tree further adds to the drama.

This scene of Imam Riza's miraculous powers probably represents a well-known story whose exact source is unknown today. The related augury is particularly auspicious for sea travel.



Standard (alam)

Iran, Safavid period, 17th century

Pierced steel

H x W: 96.5 x 28 cm (38 x 11 in)

The Tanavoli Collection

no. 58

Among Shi'i communities, standards (alam, pl. ala'm) are believed to be modeled on those used by Imam Husayn, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, during the fateful battle of Karbala in 680. By the the sixteenth century, they were carried during military campaigns and religious ceremonies to invoke protection and divine blessing.

Safavid standards usually were made from pierced, cut, and incised steel to create elegant designs and inscriptions. Decorated with elaborate Koranic verses, they served as portable memorials that called upon the power of God and his Prophet, the "opener." Placed atop long shafts for maximum visibility, the ornamental blades were typically flanked by arching leaves and projecting dragon heads that create a distinct and powerful silhouette. Occasionally, standards are signed and dated, as is the one with two dragon heads. The year 966 AH (1587), however, is about a century later than other signed works by Kamal al-Din Mahmud Nazuk, and the style is more typical of the seventeenth century, suggesting the signature was added later.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Standard (alam)

Kamal al-din Mahmud Nazuk
Iran, 17th century
Pierced steel
H x W: 95.5 x 26.5 cm
The Tanavoli Collection
no. 59

Among Shi'i communities, standards (alam, pl. ala'm) are believed to be modeled on those used by Imam Husayn, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, during the fateful battle of Karbala in 680. By the the sixteenth century, they were carried during military campaigns and religious ceremonies to invoke protection and divine blessing.

Safavid standards usually were made from pierced, cut, and incised steel to create elegant designs and inscriptions. Decorated with elaborate Koranic verses, they served as portable memorials that called upon the power of God and his Prophet, the "opener." Placed atop long shafts for maximum visibility, the ornamental blades were typically flanked by arching leaves and projecting dragon heads that create a distinct and powerful silhouette. Occasionally, standards are signed and dated, as is the one with two dragon heads. The year 966 AH (1587), however, is about a century later than other signed works by Kamal al-Din Mahmud Nazuk, and the style is more typical of the seventeenth century, suggesting the signature was added later.



Sulayman and Bilqis Enthroned

Iran or Turkey, 1614-1616
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
H x W: 49.5 x 36 cm
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul
TKS 1703, f. 8b

In the Islamic tradition, the biblical king Solomon (the prophet Sulayman) was one of four universal sovereigns. Revered as the embodiment of the ideal ruler, he reigned over a world of humans, animals, birds, jinns (supernatural creatures), and demons; even the wind was under his command. Solomon symbolized power, wealth, authority, wisdom, justice, and compassion—attributes of ideal kingship—and he possessed magical and esoteric knowledge.

Bilqis, the queen of Sheba, sits on his gold throne, constructed by the jinns. According to legend, the four sides of the throne were embellished with mirrors engraved with talismans. One side revealed whether a sick person would recover, while another reflected the true thoughts of a spouse whose fidelity was uncertain—concerns that also are addressed in the Falnama auguries. The vizier (minister of state) Asaf bin Barakhya sits to the left on a smaller replica of Solomon's throne. Legendary members of Solomon's court inhabit the rest of the scene: animals range from a rhinoceros, a tortoise, and birds, to such fantastic creatures as a phoenix, siren, and dragon. The jinn and demons, also part of Solomon's retinue, stand behind the hills. The augury is most auspicious but reminds the seeker that "it is necessary you not be slack in your daily prayers. Do good in giving charity to the poor and miserable so you may attain your desire."



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Imam Riza Save the Sea People, from the Ahmed I Falnama

Iran or Turkey, 1580-1590

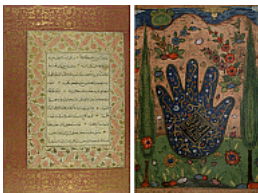
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 48.5 x 35 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 29b

The accompanying augury states, "With his blessed lance he struck the filthy demon in the breast so hard that the tip of the lance came out through its back, and thereby he delivered the sea people from the evil of the demon." Unlike the similar illustration (to the right), where the dark waters dominate half of the composition, here the sea has receded into a pool with white-capped curling waves. Purple-edged pink rocks in the middle ground create a backdrop for the combat between Imam Riza and his evil adversary, who clutches several long-haired sea people in its arms. With its bluespotted black hide, spiky horns, and partially pink face, the demon vividly contrasts with the prophet's restrained appearance. Two angels carrying trays of light stand in the back and calmly watch the unfolding scene.



Khaybar: The Conquering Palm of Ali, from the Ahmed I Falnama

Iran or Turkey, 1580-1590

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49 x 36 cm

Topkapi Palace Museu, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 33b & 34a text pag

At first glance, this composition recalls images of the "Hand of Fatima," the Prophet Muhammad's daughter and Imam Ali's wife. A popular symbol throughout the Islamic world, it long has been associated with talismanic and healing properties. In the related Falnama text, however, the illustration is connected to Ali's celebrated conquest of Khaybar in 629. Considered one of the most important victories in early Islamic history, the event also marked the recognition of Ali as a valiant hero worthy of succeeding the Prophet.

In the center of the monumental hand, the final letter of Ali's name, which is repeated four times, forms a diamond and encloses the names of the ahl-i bayt (people of the house). "Fatima," "Ali," and their sons "Hasan" and "Husayn" are written in an angular kufic script, as if carved into a seal. The names of the Prophet and the twelve Shi'i imams were added but in reverse.

On the left, the introductory verses claim that Ali's palm "has the form of the word Allah. This became in truth a sign of God's hand," thus equating the imam with God. The augury claims to be "excellent for all things," but it again reminds seekers not to forget their daily prayers, to give alms, and to repent their sins.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Standard (alam)

late 16th century

Gold

H: 59 cm (23 1/4 in)

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

I/1967

The distinct shape of this standard recalls representations of the Prophet's sandals, which were frequently depicted in popular pilgrimage manuals and also appear on the blue-and-white plate on view in this gallery. Like Imam Ali's palm or Imam Riza's footprints, the shape served much like an amulet and is associated with protective powers. A large scalloped medallion occupies the center of the finial and is decorated with a repeat triple-spot and tiger stripe design executed in black niello. Considered an emblem of strength and courage, the motif is commonly associated with the Ottoman Empire. On the standard, it lends the surface a subtle touch of color and enhances its function as a talisman.

Across the central medallion, a band of inscription in thuluth script carries the shahada (Muslim profession of faith), while verse 255 from the Koran's second sura (chapter) frames the finial. The names of Muhammad and the four caliphs (Ali, Omar, Othman, and Abu Bakr) also appear in smaller medallions at the top and along the sides, and the tip carries a small palmette with the word "Allah." This standard was probably carried in military campaigns during the reign of Sultan Selim II (1566–74).



Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey (miraj), from the dispersed Falnama

Qazvin, Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper

H x W: 58.9 x 44.9 cm (23 3/16 x 17 11/16 in)

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1986.253a-b

Purchase--Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler

The sacred ascent of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven is one of the most celebrated illustrations in the dispersed Falnama. Astride Buraq, his human-headed steed, the Prophet soars through a night sky dotted with flames. A brilliant white veil covers his face, and a flickering nimbus surrounds his head. The archangel Gabriel leads the way with a green banner, while six elegantly dressed angels carry trays of light, refreshments, an incense burner, the divine sword, and Muhammad's sandals.

A notable exception to most representations of the miraj is the crouching, growling lion in the upper left corner. Traditionally, the feline figure has been identified as Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and the first Shi'i imam. In a more nuanced interpretation, the Prophet encountered a fierce lion in his heavenly path, and God advised him to present the beast with a token. Muhammad took off his ring and threw it into the lion's mouth, and the animal humbly stepped aside. Some time later, Ali removed the same ring from his mouth and returned it to the Prophet. According to Shi'i belief, this simple interchange confirms Ali's role as Muhammad's rightful heir.

Depictions of Muhammad and other Islamic prophets with veils have been accepted as a standard iconographic feature in the pictorial arts of the Islamic world. The motif, however, was introduced only at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the Safavid dynasty came to power and Shi'ism was established as the official state religion.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Sages, Heroes, and Villians

Portrayals of secular figures celebrated for their knowledge, wisdom, and courage fill the folios of the *Falnama*. While most represent favorable omens, a few, such as Shaddad ibn Ad, who paid with his life for daring to recreate paradise on earth, herald inauspiciousness and serve as warnings against hubris and evil ways. The most popular hero is Alexander (Iskandar), the Macedonian conqueror who figures prominently in Persian and Turkish literature. Identified with Zulqarnayn, a legendary ruler in the Koran, Alexander is admired for his knowledge and justice as well as for defending the world against Gog and Magog, one of the signs of the Apocalypse. With his companions, the prophet-sages Khizr and Ilyas, Alexander searched for the water of immortality. Although he did not find it, some sources maintain he gained sufficient wisdom to serve as a model of spiritual perfection, which further explains his popularity as an auspicious pictorial omen.

The Greek physician Hippocrates, considered the father of modern medicine, and the learned Luqman, who knew the secrets of plants and allegedly chose wisdom over prophethood, represent two other sage-like figures worthy of emulation.



Alexander Builds a Wall Against Gog and Magog, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59.4 x 45 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

MS 395

The Koran as well as later historians and poets maintain that when the Macedonian conqueror Alexander (Iskandar) reached the end of the world, he encountered the villainous people of Gog (Yajuj) and Magog (Majuj), who also are mentioned in the Bible (chapter of Ezekiel) and are considered one of the ten signs of the Apocalypse. To protect the civilized world from these creatures, Alexander ordered the construction of an iron wall to contain them.

A curious feature of this painting is the inclusion of two prophets, identifiable by their flaming nimbi, seated next to Alexander under a tent. The text refers to one as Khizr, who is identified in the Koran as the anonymous guide of Moses (Musa) in his search for the confluence of the seas. In another source, Khizr leads Alexander as he travels in the land of darkness looking for the water of life. Alexander fails in his search, but as seen in the work to the left, Khizr succeeds in finding the source of immortality. The second seated but unnamed prophet is Ilyas (Elijah), another of Alexander's guides. This *Falnama* illustration is thus unique in incorporating the two prophets into the same episode as Alexander's encounter with the people of Gog and Magog. The artist clearly has conflated two different moments in the narrative to underscore Alexander's superhuman qualities and attributes.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Death of Darius in Alexander's Arms, from a dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59 x 44.5 cm

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva

Pozzi 34, f. 13

This poignant scene of Alexander of Macedonia attending the death of his half-brother Dara belongs to a small group of literary inspired auguries in the dispersed Falnama. According to the Persian poet Firdausi (died 1020), Alexander's parents were the Persian ruler Darab and the daughter of Philip of Macedonia. Darab sent his Greek wife home because of her bad breath, unaware she was pregnant. Their son Alexander (Iskandar) eventually became the ruler of Macedonia and traveled to Iran as an envoy, not then knowing Dara (Darias) and he had the same father. In a subsequent battle between the Persian and Greek forces, Dara was defeated, and two of his counselors killed him in retribution. Alexander rushed to Dara's side and told him of their kinship, which he had just learned from his elders. He promised to care for Dara's family and rule justly over Iran. Alexander also ordered the murderers to be hanged for their disloyalty.

The appropriation of this well-known literary episode as a pictorial augury is explained in the introductory verses, which focus on Dara as the object of treachery and betrayal. The omen advocates moral generosity by maintaining, "Since the world will be faithful to no one, if you do some good for the people of the world, it will be better." It also warns: "Complete awareness of unworthy companions is essential. . . . Keep with you an amulet against the evil eye, and on the eve of Wednesday, do not come out of the house." In general, the prognostication is inauspicious, except if the intention is charitable work.



Khizr and Ilyas Find the Water of Life

Iran or Turkey, 1614-16

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49.3 x 36 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 9b & 10a text page

Although not mentioned by name in the Koran, Khizr is one of the most important religious-spiritual figures in Islam. He is identified with the anonymous "servant of God" who guides Moses (Musa) during his spiritual journey, while his companion Ilyas (Elijah) is described as a messenger and prophet. The third protagonist is Alexander of Macedonia (Iskandar), who often is linked with Zulqarnayn, the sage-king first mentioned in the Koran.

The association of Khizr and Ilyas with Alexander's quest for eternal life is an integral part of a literary rather than a religious tradition. The Falnama illustration depicts the moment when, separated from the Macedonian conqueror in the land of darkness, the two sages sit by a spring to eat a meal of salted fish and bread. According to the story, one fish falls into the water, returns to life, and swims away. When they witness this miraculous event, Khizr and Ilyas realize they have found the fountain of life. They drink from it and gain immortality, as do their horses. Alexander and his men, who were distracted and failed to find the source, appear along the horizon, oblivious to the discovery.

As might be expected, the accompanying augury bodes well for the seeker. "Good news for you! This omen indicates that requests will be granted, important business will be done, and brightness will appear in your affairs." It is favorable for travel, commerce, buying land, and negotiations in marriage.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Folio from a Falnama (Book of Omens); verso: The Angel of Death (Israel) Slays Shaddad; recto: text

Qazvin, Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper

H x W: 59.3 x 44.8 cm (23 3/8 x 17 5/8 in)

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1986.252a-b

Purchase--Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler

Shaddad ibn Ad, a tyrant who tried to recreate paradise on earth, appears in a variety of literary sources, from the Koran to One Thousand and One Nights. According to one account, Shaddad ordered the construction of the legendary Iram, which included structures "built in the air supported underneath by pillars of topaz and sapphire, with chambers built of gold, silver, pearl, and chrysolite." His journey to visit the garden, however, was cut short by the appearance of Israel, the angel of death. The king asked for one chance to see Iram, but he was refused. Realizing his end had come, Shaddad dismounted his horse, and with one foot still in the stirrup, he expired, paying for his hubris with his life.

This is the earliest and most elaborate pictorial interpretation of Shaddad's demise. Before a walled garden planted with fruit-laden trees and inhabited by harpies and other exotic birds, the angel of death, in the form of a fire-breathing gray demon (div), hurtles through the air. With one hand he has grabbed the terrified Shaddad by the collar, and with the other he wields a flaming mace, a symbol of divine wrath. The king's companions watch in stunned disbelief. With its brilliant colors and richly patterned surfaces, the composition exudes a sense of excitement that belies its cautionary message. The related prognostication warns against travel, commerce, or moving into a new home, and the seeker must be wary of "depraved imagining and incorrect thoughts."

Augury of Imam Riza Saves the Sea People

From the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Qazvin, Safavid period, mid-1550s--early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C.

S1986.252b

O augury user, know that His Majesty Sultan Abu'l Hasan ibn Musa al-Riza, upon him be salutations and praise, has appeared in your augury. Let there be good news to you that the doors of gladness and felicity have been opened to you, and you have found freedom from troubles and grief, and you have been drowned in the sea of God's mercy. It seems that in these times a wrongdoer is hostile towards you and wants to injure you. Beware, a thousand times beware, not to allow trouble to reach you, and put anxiety and worry out of your heart, since His Majesty the divine God, be he exalted, surely by his power will make your enemies low and wretched, and your affair come out as your friends would wish. In brief, for whatever you have opened this augury, it is good, especially for sea travel, which is indicated for great profit and limitless tranquility. . . . And if anyone asks you for a pledge to Imam Riza, peace be upon him—do not skimp in what you give, so that, God willing, you attain your desire.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010

The Hereafter

Among the most unusual illustrations in the *Falnama* are those signaling the Apocalypse and the rewards and punishments associated with the final judgment. Based on descriptions in the Koran and in later scholarly treatises and popular accounts, the warning signs of the Apocalypse include the arrival of the Antichrist and the Beast of the earth as well as other natural phenomena, including choking smoke, landslides, fires, and sunrise in the west. Together with vivid images of Judgment Day and Hell, the *Falnama* clearly articulates the fate of those who choose a sinful life and fail to adhere to the principles of Islam. In contrast, illustrations of Paradise provide a glimpse of the reward awaiting the righteous.

As the Koran explains, God has foreknowledge of all deeds, but humans are free to choose their actions and determine their conduct in this world, which in turn determines their ultimate fate. Only by following the rightfully guided examples of the prophets, imams, and sages can humans hope to achieve their desires in this world and be redeemed in the next. The monumental *Falnamas* are also the first manuscripts to offer pictorial interpretations of the coming Apocalypse, which some predicted was to occur at the end of the first millennium of Islam, corresponding to the year 1591–92.



Carpet fragment with angels

Iran, Safavid period, ca. 1525-50

Knotted wool pile on sil foundation

H x W: 100.5 x 38.3 cm

Gift of Herbert L. Pratt in memory of his wife, Florence Gibb Pratt, Brooklyn Museum, New York

36.213g

In this fragment from what was once a large and lavish carpet, angels offer fruit, wine, and musical entertainment in a seemingly paradisiacal setting. Their multicolored wings, flowing garments, and gilt-brimmed or leafy hats resemble those of angels depicted in several *Falnama* folios.

Enough pile remains at the lower left edge of the fragment to determine the field color of the original carpet was white. The ornate rug most likely had a large central medallion. Safavid weavers followed drawings or cartoons in creating such carpets, but they had to make countless interpretative decisions in translating curvilinear designs to the grid of warp and weft. Despite its lack of linear finesse, the carpet's dynamic design and bold color convey a sense of rapturous celebration.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Day of Judgment, from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 58.5 x 43.7 cm

Harvard University Art Museums

1999.302

This complex depiction of the Day of Judgment is probably the earliest image of the event in the Islamic world. Kneeling on the right, the Prophet Muhammad gestures to Imam Ali. On the left, the archangel Raphael (Israfil) holds a large trumpet, and either Gabriel (Jabrail) or Michael (Mikail) balances the scale of justice across its shoulders. Israfil, the angel of death, watches from the lower right. A glimpse of paradise is offered along the upper edge of the painting, where two veiled and nine featureless figures look down from a verdant landscape.

According to Islamic tradition, once Israfil sounds the trumpet, all creatures will come alive, beginning with the Prophet Muhammad. They will carry books or scrolls inscribed with their past deeds, which will be weighed on the scales of justice. Most of the figures appear to have been already punished according to their earthly sins. Moving clockwise, those with dog-like faces are probably slanderers. The men with cut-off hands and feet have harmed their neighbors, while those with blackened faces and blue eyes “devoured the wealth of orphans unjustly.” Judgmental behavior is punished by blindness. Evil thinkers reappear with their heads upside down, and deceitful traders return as pigs. Those who spied on others wear garments of tar, and false theologians are condemned to chew their tongues for eternity.



Arrival of the Anti-Christ (Dajjal), from the dispersed Falnama

Iran, Safavid period, mid 1550s-early 1560s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 59.4 x 44.7 cm

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

85.237.72

In Christian, Jewish, and Islamic literature, the arrival of the Antichrist is one of the ten signs of the coming Apocalypse. This illustration, the earliest known depiction of Dajjal, adheres closely to textual accounts of the Antichrist, which describe him as a thickset man with a ruddy complexion, a mass of curly hair, and one blind eye. Allegedly, he will arrive from the east via Khurasan in northeastern Iran.

Boisterous musicians who reportedly lived with Dajjal on the island of Java accompany him as he rides a white donkey. The noisy arrival of this motley retinue has created such a commotion that horned men and women have come out to watch from rooftops and doorways. These unusual figures may represent Dajjal’s followers, who were deceived by his miracles in Syria. According to Islamic scholars, Dajjal met his end after forty days or forty years, when Christ descended in Damascus and killed him with a lance. The accompanying augury is most dire and warns against keeping bad company and being with those who are “outwardly friendly but inwardly extremely hostile.”



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Standard (Alam)

Mir Taj al-din

Iran, 1710

Cut and pierced steel

H x W x D: 296 x 45 x 42 cm (116 9/16 x 17 11/16 x 16 9/16 in)

Private Collection

Mohammad Afkhami

According to an eighteenth-century Russian observer, tall standards swayed gently when lifted into the air during Shi'i military campaigns and religious processions. This imposing example comprises three sections. In the lower half, a tapering shaft, which originally must have been fitted with a wooden pole, terminates in a pierced hexagonal box. The main panel, decorated with verses from the Koran, screws at one end into the top of the hexagon and at the other end into a pierced sphere. A tall, flat blade, nestled in the curve of a pair of dragon finials, rises from the sphere and ends in a round, pierced medallion inscribed with the names of Allah, Muhammad, and Ali. Slender rising blades affixed to the central panels add height, presence, and visibility to this ceremonial object. The central swiveling sphere also lends the standard a distinct kinetic dimension and must have heightened the drama and theatricality of processions and Shi'i rituals.



Garden of Paradise, from the Ahmed I Falnama

Iran or Turkey, 1580-1590

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49.5 x 35.5 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 12b & 13a text page

Seated on a richly patterned carpet in a small garden pavilion, an elegantly dressed angel accepts a tray of fruit from a winged attendant. Other winged beings and two demon-like creatures infuse the composition with an air of quiet festivity. The related augury states that this is a sign of the garden of paradise (bagh-i iram), a symbol of eternal reward and bliss in contrast to hell's fires of punishment. Like the depiction of hell to the right, paradise is divided into seven tiers, a cosmological concept that dates back to the Babylonian period. Its gardens are characterized by the qualities of peace, hospitality, and bliss, and they contain structures built of precious materials, ranging from white pearls to red gold. With its luxuriant garden setting and heavenly creatures, the composition conjures up the sensory pleasures of paradise, but it also departs from extant descriptions by including only winged creatures entertained by demon-musicians.

As stated in the auspicious augury on the facing folio, "This omen indicates pleasure, happiness, joy, and the gates of wealth and felicity in this world and the next are open to you. . . . Altogether this omen is good for all business, but the seeker . . . must not swerve from the path of chivalry to attain high position and wealth. . . ."



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Hell, from the Ahmed I Falnama

Iran or Turkey, 1580-1590

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49.5 x 35 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 21b

Islamic literature conjures up a complex and terrifying image of the seven layers of hell. Crackling flames continuously fanned by scorching winds fill hell with black, choking smoke. Sinners are tormented by scorpions as big as mules and snakes the size of camels. At the bottom of hell grows the dreadful Zaqqum tree. Its fruit—the heads of devils—burns the bellies of sinners like molten brass and can be washed down only by drinking boiling water, which intensifies the agony. According to one source, the seven gates of hell are supervised by zabaniya, fire-breathing guardians with black faces and cat-like eyes.

The image of hell in the Falnama of Sultan Ahmed I (reigned 1603–17) centers on a tree with yellow fruits, which must represent the Zaqqum tree. Two large, spotted demons holding flaming clubs resemble the cat-eyed zabaniya charged with ensuring the eternal suffering of hell's inhabitants. Flickering flames light up the dark, smoky atmosphere, as helpless naked figures flee from the torments of scorpions, snakes, and dragons. The augury begins, "Why do you foolishly make yourself ready for the fire of hell by following the devil?" Extremely inauspicious, it urges seekers to avoid legal agreements and to wait a few days before beginning any new venture. In the meantime, they should light candles at mosques and shrines and be overly generous in charitable acts.



Beast of the earth (Dabbat al-arz), from the Ahmed I Falnama

Iran or Turkey, 1580-1590

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49 x 36 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 22b

Dabbat al-arz (Beast of the earth), another sign of the imminent approach of the Apocalypse, is supposed to rise from the earth just before the arrival of the Antichrist (Dajjal). It is briefly mentioned in the Koran, but over time its physical features and attributes were elaborated into descriptions of a monstrosly large, horned beast with the head of an ox, the eyes of a boar, and the color of a tiger.

Inspired by these accounts, the artist of this Falnama folio offered his own pictorial interpretation of a winged half-human, half-demonic creature with horns and terrifying fangs. Bird feathers cover its upper body, but its limbs, terminating in feline paws, are those of a wild animal, perhaps a leopard. Its fantastic feathery tail is decorated with a lotus flower and bracketed by two golden hornlike leaves. The beast's most important attributes are the staff of Moses, which identifies and illuminates the faces of believers, and Solomon's miraculous seal, used to mark the nose of nonbelievers.

The lively depiction of this fierce beast differs considerably from the docile unicorn with elephant ears seen in an Ottoman manuscript in the adjacent case. Such different portrayals suggest the absence of an established iconographic model for the depiction of Dajjal as well as artists' efforts to develop their own pictorial interpretations.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010

Beyond the Falnama

In the third quarter of the sixteenth century, the scale and originality of the Falnama illustrations played a significant role in ushering in a new style of painting. Illustrated copies of the lives of the prophets (Qisas al-anbiya) and other religious texts became popular in Turkey and Iran in the 1570s and 1580s. Texts detailing the Apocalypse and the Day of Judgment and their warning signs were also produced for the Ottoman court.

The unusual format of the Falnama images may have also prompted experimentation with scale. Artists in Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India began creating large-scale manuscripts of distinctive content, such as an elaborate genealogy of the Ottoman dynasty created for Sultan Murad III (reigned 1574–95) or the fantastic adventures of the hero Hamza, prepared for the Mughal emperor Akbar (reigned 1556–1605). With their emphasis on impressive size and elaborate illustrations, these works provided a new model for the arts of the book.



Hakim Luqman

Iran or Turkey, 1614-1616

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 49 x 35.1 cm

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

TKS 1703, f. 23b & 24a text page

Allegedly, when God asked the legendary sage and physician (hakim) Luqman to choose between prophethood and wisdom, he opted for the latter and was given a thousand chapters on all kinds of knowledge. In addition, God granted him longevity. His sobriquet hakim and his long life account for his identification as a legendary physician to whom the herbs and flowers talked and revealed their therapeutic qualities. The covered silver bowl, which might contain a healing mixture or remedy, may allude to his knowledge of medicine. As Luqman's noble personal attributes would suggest, the accompanying prognostications are favorable for all kinds of endeavors, ranging from travel to marriage.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Hippocrates (Bukrat), from the Ahmed I Falnama

Iran or Turkey, 1580-1590
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
H x W: 47.5 x 35 cm
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul
TKS 1703, f. 38b & 39a text page

The prognostication for this composition begins:

O augury seeker, know and be aware that Hippocrates the Physician, seated on the neck of the simurgh and going to Mount Qaf for treatment, has turned up as your omen.

Sweeping through the cloud-streaked sky, Hippocrates (Buqrat) straddles the neck of the mythical simurgh and, while looking over his shoulder, gently holds on to the back of the majestic bird. Its long, serrated tail swirls through the azure skies, already animated by whirling knotted clouds. With its controlled palette of orange, blue, and purple hues highlighted with gold, the composition is a tour de force of color and movement.

The most celebrated physician of antiquity, Hippocrates (circa 460–circa 375 BCE) is responsible for the development of medical methodology and ethics, including the Hippocratic Oath that doctors still take today. Born on the Greek island of Cos, Hippocrates frequently is mentioned in medieval Arab sources as someone who cared for and healed the sick and as the builder of the first hospital. He was also highly respected for his knowledge of alchemy, astrology, and magic, which explains his inclusion in this Falnama. Although the physician is the focus of the augury, his association with the mythical simurgh and its abode on the legendary Mount Qaf, which allegedly is made of emerald, further increases his stature as the possessor of specialized knowledge.



Moses Challenges Pharaoh's Sorcerers, from a Qisas al-anbiya

Iran, 1570-1580
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
H x W: 36 x 24 cm
Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul
H. 1430

The Qisas al-anbiya (Stories of the prophets) recounts the lives and deeds of the prophets, beginning with Adam. Persian translations of the stories are believed to date to the early centuries of Islam, but the accounts were not illustrated until the late sixteenth century, when interest in popular religious narratives grew in both Iran and Turkey.

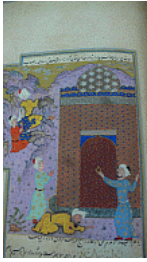
The story of Moses (Musa) and the pharaoh's magicians is one of the most frequently illustrated ones. As described in the Koran, the pharaoh of Egypt challenges Moses to show signs of his religious authority. Moses throws down his staff, which becomes a serpent, and reveals his right hand, which has turned into a golden disk of light, a sign of his prophecy. The pharaoh summons his sorcerers, whose staffs appear to move about like serpents. Moses's staff, however, transforms into an even larger serpent. Bested, the magicians embrace the god of Moses and renounce the pharaoh, who then puts them all to death.

This illustration is one of the most dramatic interpretations of the story. Although the pharaoh is missing, a mysterious man watches the scene from the upper left.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Abraham Praying at the Ka'ba, from a Qisas al-anbiya

Turkey or Iran, 1570-1580

Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

H x W: 36 x 23.5 cm (14 3/16 x 9 1/4 in)

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

H. 1226 f.47a

Like many stories in the Qisas al-anbiya, the prophet Abraham's construction of the Ka'ba in Mecca is mentioned briefly in the Koran and elaborated in later texts. According to the author al-Nishaburi, a cloud guided Abraham to the location where he should build the Ka'ba. Once completed, he and his family, visible on the hillside, performed a pilgrimage to the sacred site and invited all Muslims to do the same.

The most unusual feature of this illustration is the representation of the Ka'ba. Similar to its depiction in Circuit of the Ka'ba in the adjacent gallery, the iconic black cube has been transformed into a domed and tiled six-sided mausoleum. This particular depiction might be an attempt to give a Safavid/Shi'i appearance to Islam's holiest sanctuary, an iconographic convention that first appears in the dispersed Falnama and is assimilated into other illustrated manuscripts.



Beast of the earth (Dabbatu 'l-arz), from Tercüme-i miftah cefr-i cami

1597-1598

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

H x W: 12.7 x 19.4 cm (5 x 7 5/8 in)

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

B373, f. 292b

Gazanfer Aga (died 1603), the powerful chief white eunuch who oversaw the imperial Ottoman harem, commissioned the Turkish translation of the Arabic Key to the Comprehensive Prognostication and dedicated it to Sultan Mehmed III (reigned 1595–1603). The text includes a detailed description of the "Beast of the earth" (Dabbat al-arz), one of the ten signs preceding the Apocalypse, according to the Koran. It maintains that the beast has a head of an ox, eyes of a boar, ears of an elephant, cheeks of a cat, neck of an ostrich, horns of an ibex, chest of a lion, complexion of a tiger, tail of a ram, and hooves of a camel. One league in length, it takes three days for a third of its body to emerge from the earth. Dabbat al-arz appears just after Jesus (Isa) descends and visits the Ka'ba in Mecca.

Unlike its terrifying verbal description and ferocious depiction in the Falnama (see facing wall), the Dabbat al-arz appears here as a charming, unicorn-like creature. The docile, human-faced quadruped, however, carries two principal attributes that confirm its identity: the dragon-headed rod of Moses and the seal of Solomon to distinguish the righteous from the sinners.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Noah's Ark, from a Zübdetü't-tavarîd

Turkey, 1583

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

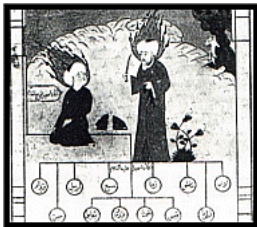
H x W: 19.5 x 30 cm (7 11/16 x 11 13/16 in)

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

T414.61

According to the Zübdetü't-tevarîh, when Noah (Nun) failed to call people to God, he was commanded to build the ark from the teak trees he had planted. The bow was to resemble a rooster with the head of an eagle, the stern was to look like the tail of a rooster, and the body was to be three stories high to accommodate pairs of animals, birds, and humans. Once they were all on board, God sent down torrential rains that submerged everything except the ark, which sailed for sixty days and finally landed on Mount al-Judi in the land of Mosul.

Silhouetted against a gray, rain-drenched sky and coiling white clouds, the ark seems to bob precariously among the dark swells that cover the earth. Under Noah's calm gaze, his three companions frantically try to steady the full sails. Pairs of animals, simply outlined in ink, appear at the windows in the hull. A bearded, horned man on the right may represent Satan, who managed to climb aboard clinging to the tail of a donkey. The painting's palette of gray tones offers an evocative and unusual pictorial interpretation of the legendary deluge.



Abraham's Fire Ordeal; Abraham's Sacrifice

ca. 1583

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

H x W: 18.9 x 34.5 cm (7 7/16 x 13 9/16 in)

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

T414.68

Written for Murad III (reigned 1574–95), the Zübdetü't-tevarîh is a genealogical world history that begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth and ends with an account of the Ottomans up to the sultan's reign. This folio is from the third copy dedicated to Mehmed Aga, the chief black eunuch of the imperial harem who served from 1574 to 1590.

The top scene depicts the encounter of Abraham (Ibrahim) with King Nimrud, whom the prophet derided for idol worship. In response, Nimrud orders his men to cast the prophet into a fire, which they do by using a catapult (seen in the distance) made with the help of Satan. According to the Koran, however, God transforms the fire into a rose garden watered by a spring. Here, a serene Abraham sits cross-legged in the middle of the fire, which forms a large flaming nimbus around him to indicate his prophetic status. Nimrud (now defaced) watches Abraham from a tower on the right.

Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac fills the lower half. Such scenes in the Zübdetü't-tevarîh satisfy several purposes. On the one hand, they create a sacred genealogy for the Ottoman rulers, and on the other, like the Falnama illustrations, they function as visual reminders of past exemplary lives and serve as moral and ethical guides for those in power.



Falnama: The Book of Omens

October 24, 2009 to January 24, 2010



Adam and Eve (Hawa) Expelled from Paradise, from a Qisas al-anbiya

1570-1580

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

H x W: 21.3 x 13 cm (8 3/8 x 5 1/8 in)

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

H.1228,f.8a

Much like the expulsion of Adam and Eve in the dispersed Falnama (on view in the adjacent gallery), the protagonists ride a dragon and a peacock as a warden chases them out of paradise. Here, Adam looks back furtively towards his somewhat bewildered companion. Satan, portrayed as an angel in a yellow robe, flees the garden with his hands raised in protest. By omitting other celestial figures, the composition focuses attention on the plight of Adam and Eve.

This particular interpretation of the expulsion first appeared in the dispersed Falnama and was subsequently adapted to the illustrated copies of the Stories of the Prophets.



Zardhang Khatni Bringing the Ring to Matlas, the Prison Keeper

India, Mughal dynasty, ca. 1570

Gold and opaque watercolor on cotton cloth

H x W: 67.5 x 51.6 cm (26 9/16 x 20 5/16 in)

Freer Gallery of Art F1949.18

Purchase

Zardhang Khatni Brings a Ring to Matlas the Prison Keeper

From a Hamzanama (Book of Hamza)

India, Delhi, Mughal period, ca. 1570

Opaque watercolor and gold on fabric

Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

F1949.18

The most ambitious illustrated text from Mughal India is arguably the Hamzanama (Book of Hamza) created for Emperor Akbar (reigned 1556–1605). Rooted in Iran's rich oral tradition, the Hamzanama originally comprised 1,400 folios divided into fourteen volumes. The paintings stand out for their monumental scale, original compositions, and artistic experimentation—characteristics that also define the almost contemporary paintings of the four monumental Falnamas.

Text and illustrations recount the fantastic and action-filled adventures of the folk hero Hamza, a character based loosely on Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib, the Prophet Muhammad's paternal uncle and one of his strongest supporters. This scene of the corrupt prison keeper Matlas is typical of the most successful compositions found in the Hamzanama.

Surrounded by an animated throng of guards, the corpulent Matlas, detached and aloof, sits against a bolster in the upper right. The gauzy white robe he wears, cinched at the waist, emphasizes his soft, overhanging belly. His dark palm lies open, ready to accept Zardhang's bribe of a gold ring for the release of two prisoners being untied in the upper left. Although the illustration is more naturalistic in the treatment of the figures and the architectural setting than those in the dispersed Falnama, the brilliant palette and sense of drama hark back to some of the Safavid pictorial auguries.