

# ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## An Analysis of Visual Narrative in the Medical Manuscript “*Lazzat Un Nisa*”

33

### Abstract

Most people believe that they are adequately aware of sex and its etiquette and hence, they don't need any education to improve their sexual knowledge. However, relevant issues that are often treatable, like sexual diseases or dissatisfaction, have made physicians write or translate various manuscripts and books to improve public knowledge of sex. The medical manuscript “*Lazzat Un Nisa*” is an example of such an educational resource. In this paper, the miniatures of the manuscript and their relationship with the text are analyzed. The purpose is to determine the method employed in this visual narrative. The results indicate that the Miniaturist has not resorted to the erotic art; he, rather based his illustration on a lyrical-realistic method. This illustration refers to the effects of sexual knowledge on the success of married life, the intimacy between man and woman, and the satisfaction of their relationship. Accordingly, he has used intelligently visual techniques to picture people, especially women, in the most physical and mental health. He aims to evoke such effects by visual narrative in the miniatures and present the content of the medical text in the manuscript attractively.

**Key words:** Illustration, Sexual knowledge, Medical Manuscript, *Lazzat Un Nisa*, Miniature, Female, Sexual Behavior

Received: 3 Jun 2023; Accepted: 7 Sep 2023; Online published: 1 Feb 2024

**Research on History of Medicine/ 2024 Feb; 13(1): 33-46.**

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### Citation:

Rezaeian, L., Zarezadeh F., 2024. An Analysis of Visual Narrative in the Medical Manuscript “*Lazzat Un Nisa*”, *Res Hist Med*, 13(1), pp. 33-46.

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## Introduction

It has been common throughout history to benefit from the experience of physicians, regardless of location. Civilizations, such as Iran, India, China, Rome, and Greece were pioneers in developing and using these experiences (Jahadi, 2017, pp. 45-49). For example, in the 7th Hijri century, when the Mongols attacked Central Asia and Iran, many thinkers and physicians, due to the unfavorable political situation, migrated to Asia Minor (Anatolia) and India. The Indian rulers welcomed the physicians. India, in fact, saved their lives and writing, helping them to conduct research in peace and safety. The Indian doctors' interaction with their Iranian counterparts led to the growth of traditional Indian medicine; on the other hand, Iranian physicians got acquainted with Indian medicine.

One of the characteristics of this era of Indian medicine is the production of medical texts in the Persian language (Mohammadi, and Ghaffari, 2012, pp. 207-231). "*Kām-i Sāstarī*" is one of these manuscripts that was translated from Sanskrit to Persian by the order of the Indian ruler of that time. Its translator is "Sheikh Ziauddin Nakhshabi", an immigrant doctor from Nakhshab to the Badiwan region of India (Moazzeni, 2001, pp. 33-52). According to the content of this manuscript, he chose the title "*Lazzat Un Nisa*" (lit. the pleasure of women) for its translated text. This manuscript was rewritten and published several times in the following centuries in India and Iran (Sharifi, 2012, P40).

There are now several versions of this manuscript. In this research, the version preserved in the American Medical Library has been examined. It is stated on the American Medical Library website that this version lacks the authorship date. However, the manuscript bears the signature of "Sheikh Muhammad", one of the painters and calligraphers of the Safavid era. Therefore, it is likely that this version was rewritten and illustrated during his migration from Iran to India. Historical evidence shows that this artist paid particular attention to the science and life-related issues of his people (Rohani, 2016, pp. 29-38). Despite the attractiveness of this manuscript, the text and miniatures of this medical manuscript have not been analyzed so far. Only Susan Kurtz has briefly introduced it in an article entitled "*Persian Treatises on Sexual Tendencies in the Context of Greco-Islamic Medical Tradition*". Other studies have also dealt with the methods of drawing the human body or the scientific morphology of plants in medical and scientific manuscripts. Examples of such studies comprise "*Study of the Images of 'Tashrih AL-abdan Medical Manuscripts*" by Mahtab Mobini and Sheyda Esmaili (2017); "*Comparative Study of Scientific Depiction of Alhashayesh Version in Astan Quds Razavi and its Former Counterpart's Versions*" by Aboozar Nasehi; "*Research on two illustrated manuscripts of pharmacopoeia (Ekhtyarat-ebadi I)*" by Shirin Zandi (2017); and "*Study of Science Illustration Zoology book in Islamic Era in Iran*" by Ali Nourpour (2015).

"*Lazzat Un Nisa*" is one of the manuscripts which, to our best knowledge, has not yet been examined and analyzed in detail. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to analyze the images of this manuscript. This research aims to answer the question of how the illustration facilitates the expression of the concepts and information presented by the text. The answer to this question shows how much an artist's work depends on the text and is bound to the content. In addition, it provides visual perception and new knowledge





of this scientific manuscript. It is hoped that the findings of this research can, to some extent, fill the present gap in the field of medical illustration history.

### **Research Method**

In this article, an attempt has been made to introduce the “Lazzat Un Nisa” manuscript first. Then, its miniatures have been analyzed aesthetically in accordance with the text. Finally, the artist’s narration method in expressing the content is examined to gain an understanding of the manuscript

### **Research Results**

“Lazzat Un Nisa” manuscript is an article with 54 pages. Its manuscript is mainly on the norms and rules of marriage and sexual relations. Originally, the Sanskrit version had 15 chapters, but only 10 are translated into Persian, as follows:

- 1- Getting to know the female body
- 2- Characteristics of female sexuality
- 3- Semen
- 4- Ejaculation and semen of women
- 5- Sex and its ways and knowing the uterus in pregnancy
- 6- The effect of nutrition on sexual relations
- 7- Sexual enhancement drugs
- 8- Excitement and lust
- 9- Sexual weakness
- 10- Sex time

All these chapters are written in Nastaliq script and are separated by red titles. The contents are in 18 x 27cm frames and are decorated with gilded borders and golden strips. Except for miniatures 2, 3, and 4, which are about the story stated at the beginning of the book, the frames are based on a set of rules that make the text and miniatures more readable (Nakhshabi, 2021, p. 10). In fact, the artist intends to induce the aesthetic distinction of the mentioned pages by the combination of text and image on one page. His goal is also to show the audience the importance of the story as the reason for writing this book. The story is narrated as follows:

*On one of the days of Nowruz, a young, beautiful, tall, and stubborn woman entered Bahram Shah’s banquet, stood in front of him, took her underwear off, and exposed her genital area. The king became very surprised and angry and rebuked her for doing so at his banquet. But the woman said, “I do not see a man to cover my private parts. There is no man among you whom I am ashamed of”. Her speech made the Shah ask for the reason for her behavior. He called out his minister, Kuka, and asked him to find out why the woman did so. He ordered Kuka to punish her so that she would not behave indecently among men anymore. To find a solution, Kuka asked the woman to sleep with him. Being alone together provided an opportunity for Kuka to perform special acupuncture on her body. Then, the woman fell in love with Kuka and asked him to become his maid; otherwise, she would burn herself to death. Bahram Shah heard this and asked Kuka to tell*





him why the woman fell in love with him. Kuka responded: "This woman has never been satisfied in having sex with any man so far. Since I have read a lot of books about marriage etiquette, I know their nature, desire, and temper. I am aware of their sexual needs. So I can satisfy her sexual desire". The king was amazed by Kuka's knowledge and asked him to write his knowledge. Kuka acknowledged this and wrote a book entitled "Kām-i Sāstari" (Nakhshabi, 2021, pp. 3-4).

This book is considered to be a brief guide to the art of flirting and courting. Despite its brevity, the author claims in the introduction that these few points have a great effect on improving sexual and emotional relationships with women. He states if a man doesn't know these points, he would enjoy a young, beautiful, and good-looking woman as much as the monkey enjoys nutmeg (Nakhshabi, 2021, p. 1). With this statement, Nakhshabi tries to highlight one of the most important components of a successful sexual relationship, namely sexual knowledge. This knowledge includes an individual's information and knowledge of gender and sexual issues from the physiology, reproduction, and performance points of view (Rastgo, Golzari, and Baratisede, 2015, pp. 35-48). This knowledge has always played a prominent role in the relationship between couples. This manuscript addresses men more than women to gain more knowledge about women and be able to change and improve how they interact with women and take a constructive solution in case of marital conflicts and problems. This is implied by the story presented at the beginning of the manuscript. The story shows that the abnormal behavior of the woman was due to not receiving a proper sexual response which, in turn, is because of a lack of awareness of marriage etiquette. However, the initial study indicates that the translated scientific text is part of the content of the manuscript, which emphasizes the importance of sexual intercourse for physical health. The translated part provides a detailed description of ways of eliminating sexual disorders. Another part of the manuscript includes poems by Hafez and Hazin Lahiji, which seem to have been added to the manuscript before illustration. Accordingly, the artist appears to be applying a special rule for illustration to create a link between the scientific and literary sections. To understand the book's miniatures and their relationship with the text, it is very important to study the features and visual qualities of all these paintings.

### Analysis of the Results

At first sight, it appears that there is no significant relationship between the text of the manuscript and its miniatures. Since the artist dealt with two types of text, scientific and literary, he has avoided depicting lustful or anatomical images. Instead, he applied lyrical imagery to show how to obtain sexual satisfaction in a meaningful relationship with the quality of life. He has engaged neither in the detailed illustration of the educational points nor using erotic art, but he has focused on the results that the audience can achieve from learning the content of the manuscript. In other words, these miniatures represent how awareness about sex can lead to satisfaction with married life as well as physical and mental health. (Khamse, Zaharakar, and Mohsenzade, 2015, pp. 41-51) This way of presentation creates visual harmony between the literary and scientific parts. Secondly, because of the cultural and ideological laws of society, the artist can avoid the naked





display of body parts. Thirdly, the artist shows the feelings between men and women and their ways of making love.

In this regard, he has applied his visual imagination to embody the excitement, pleasure, and satisfaction of a marital relationship in the miniatures of the manuscript. He has avoided showing women in inappropriate places with depressed faces, weak bodies, and low-quality clothes. Instead, he has depicted them with happy faces in green spaces full of flowers and blossoms while they are singing, dancing, having fun, making love, and nursing. Their clothes are very beautiful and full of decorations.

The artist considers paying attention to a woman’s feelings as an important factor in reducing her mental pressure and calming her down. Therefore, in the third and fourth miniatures, he shows Kuka as a therapist and a physician and also a woman who is sleeping peacefully; it seems that all her desires are satisfied.

Such attention can also be seen in the composition of the drawings. Although he has longitudinally and transversely divided the frames of all the drawings, in the same way, to create visual balance in the view of the audience, he composed the figures in a simple or rotating linear motion where only men or women are presented to evoke concepts such as calm, stillness, balance and mutual understanding. However, only in miniature two where the woman complains about neglecting her sexual needs, he turned the pattern of composition from a simple or rotating linear motion to the pattern of a triangle surrounded by a circle to express the aggressive, dangerous, and angry state of the woman in the story. Moreover, “since, in the visual arts, the triangle is associated with the sun and wheat and is considered a symbol of fertility” (Halimi, 2008, p. 224), the artist has not neglected this point and has based the composition on it in miniatures 3, 4, 11, and 13. This implies that sexual satisfaction can create stability and security in the lives of men and women and bring them fertility.

Another point is that since color is the most expressive and sensitive visual element and its quality of expression directly affects emotions and stimulates general perceptions (Ocvirk, et al, 2013, p. 205), in the studied medical manuscript, the artist has tried to improve the quality of his paintings by consciously using cool, warm and complementary colors. In this regard, one can mention the use of colored flat surfaces and dark lines around these surfaces, the lack of shadows and volumes, and no use of harsh and unhappy colors. Such features make the audience perceive brightness, softness, and subtlety, and the reading of the texts to be pleasant. In fact, the artist seems to know that colors easily affect the nervous system, visual acuity, and mental states of people and hence tries to consider their psychological effects. So, he has applied warm colors to paint the figures and cool colors for the sky in the upper half of the page to create a kind of perspective in the background. He has used warm colors in the foreground to instill health and the achievement of a desired life. Since, warm colors, in addition to emphasizing the subject of the story and characters, can be interpreted as an increase of self-confidence, improvement of logical thinking, stimulation of nervous and digestive systems, maintenance of energy, increase of appetite, improvement of physical health, increase of adrenaline and blood circulation, keeping calm and reduction of mental and physical pressure” (Eshaghabadi, Kolivand, and Kazemi, 2016, pp. 130-142), in most miniatures, the warm





colors have been arranged in a stepped or circular manner. Regarding the use of complementary colors, two colors - orange and purple- can be seen in most miniatures. Orange has been used in women's clothing, as a color indicating youth, youthfulness, and maturity of women, and purple in men's clothing, as a color indicating the harmony between reason and emotion, greatness, authority, and a source of peace and relief of emotions to somehow express the mental and physical characteristics of both sexes (Ayatollahi, 1988, p. 155). The other complementary colors used in these miniatures are red and green. These colors with extroverted and introverted forces have been used in the clothes of people, decorations, flowers, and plants in the background to introduce a sense of moderation while creating a strong visual effect in a harmonious relationship with other colors. The sense of moderation always has a great impact on the mental health of men and women to join each other and form their married life. Other colors have been used in a bright mode to give an emotional and passionate feeling to the audience.

The fourth point in the illustration of the studied manuscript is that one can see many ornaments in the clothing of figures, especially women, and at first sight, it is thought that the artist has only tried to represent a realistic picture of the daily life of Indian women. But the artist appears to intend to show people's satisfaction and happiness with these beautiful clothes. As the author believes that increasing sexual awareness and marital skills are so effective in the happiness, optimism, and life satisfaction of the couple (Heidary, 2018, pp. 205-228), the artist has tried to illustrate happiness by using many ornaments in the clothes, and this happiness is the result of learning about sex etiquette. Ornaments also provide a kind of aesthetic pleasure and pleasant visual perception (Trilling, 2001, p. 6). Therefore, the artist has used this visual element extensively in the clothing of women in the drawings to make the audience understand a sense of well-being and satisfaction. (Table 1)

It should be noted that the artist has illustrated the body of men in almost the same way. There are only two differences. First, he has drawn them based on their physical and mental characteristics, such as having a sense of power and superiority; hence, in the miniatures, they are drawn as a king, a hero, a physician, or a sheik working. Second, since the manuscript has been developed to educate men about sexual intercourse and the physical and mental characteristics of women, there are fewer figures of men than women. However, the artist has tried to show the men's need for kindness, compassion, and love. So, he has drawn men alone or with a woman at the golden points on the frame. Miniatures 10, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 are some examples of this. Or, in miniature 17, the only person at the golden point of its frame is Majnun (the lover). He is the main character of this drawing who has been drawn as a man who looks ill and has lost weight because of not receiving love and affection and not reaching his beloved, Layli. In this regard, scientific research also indicates that people who experience failure in love become frustrated, depressed, and involved with health problems. On the contrary, when someone has his love in his life, dopamine secretion increases in certain areas of the brain, creating a strong sense of power" (Bakhshayesh, Rezaei Sadrabadi, and Entezary, 2009, p. 25). Therefore, the research on the paintings shows that the artist has displayed the need for love, affection, and being together interestingly and he has depicted almost all the beasts





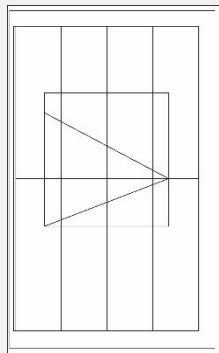
in pairs around Majnun. In other miniatures, he has also shown the desire for a romantic relationship in the form of loving glances, smiles, touching, and sitting together. The neural reward resulting from these actions and reactions makes the brain seek to repeat these behaviors and fulfill its needs. These needs are not met when a person has problems with his or her partner, leading to depression, psychosis, and behavioral disorders (Ramezani, and Shaker, 2020, pp. 430-435). Miniatures 6, 11, 13, 14, and 22 clearly show the mental health of men and women in marital and romantic relationships.

**Table 1:** The Composition of Drawings in the Medical Manuscript “*Lazzat Un Nisa*”, Analyzed by the Authors in Illustrator Software

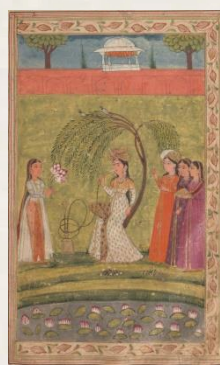
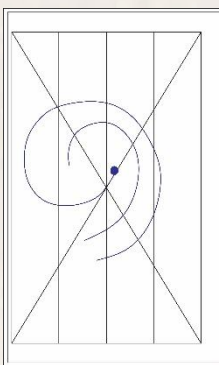
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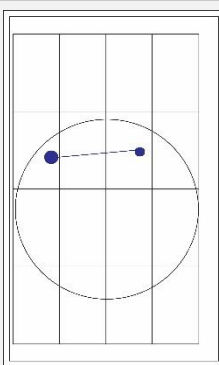
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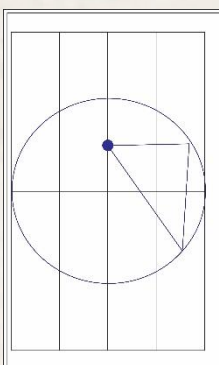
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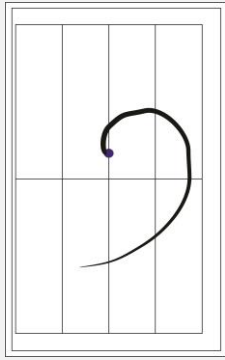


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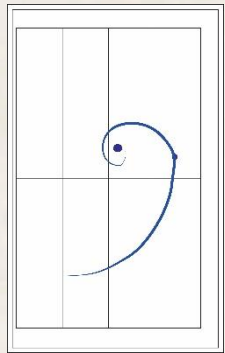




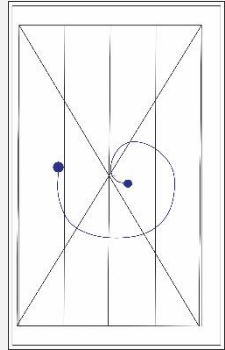
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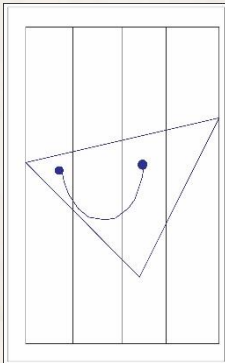
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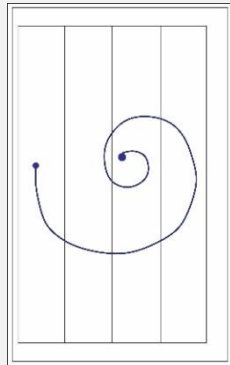


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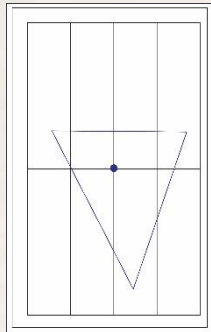




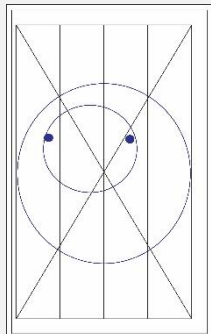
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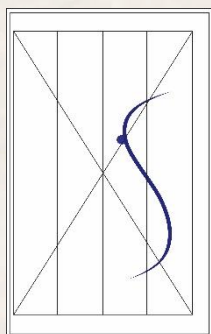
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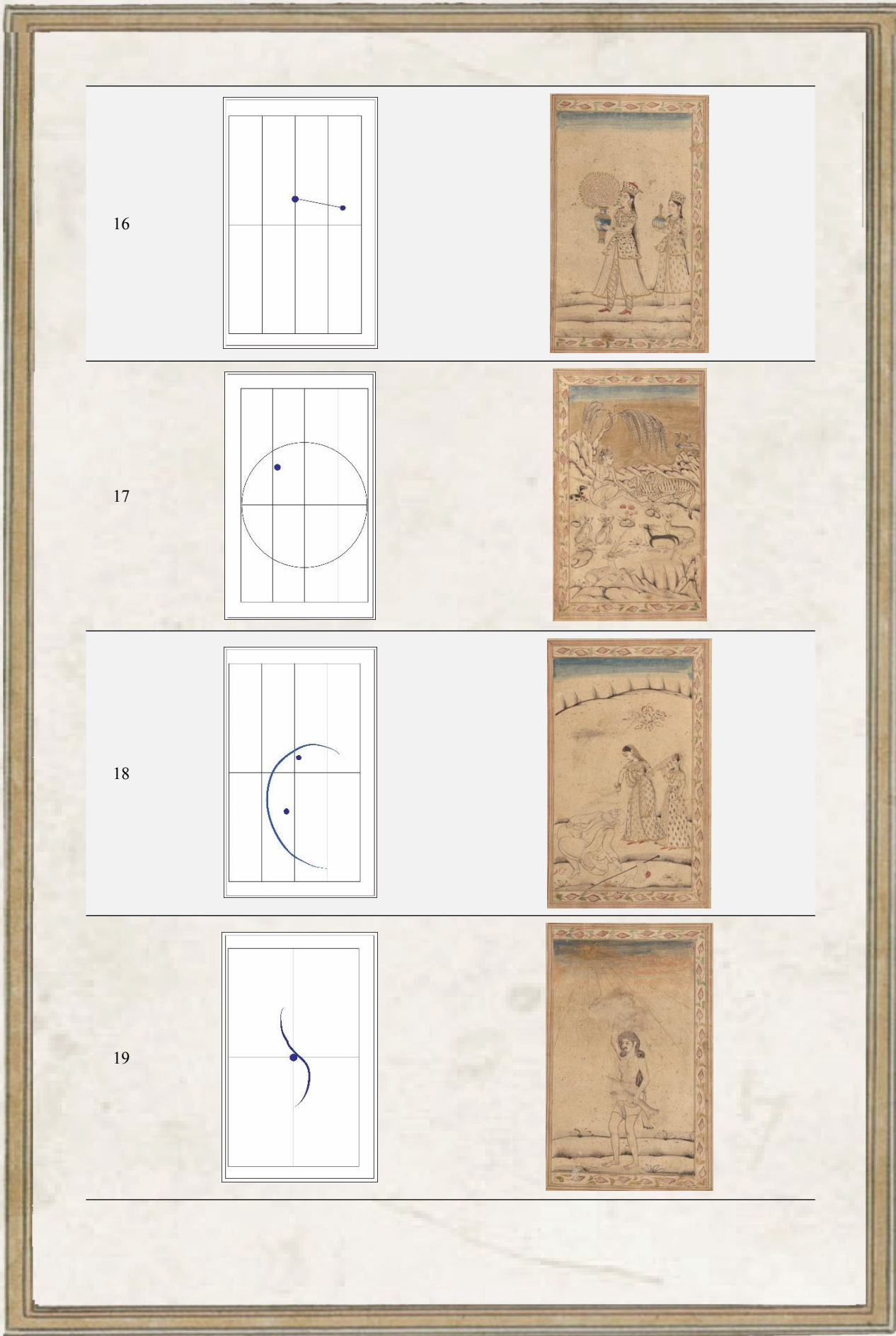
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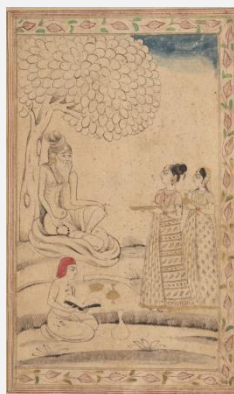
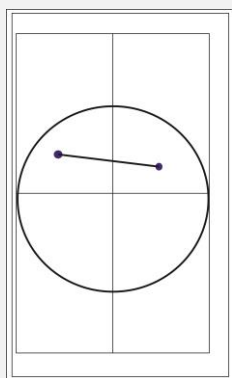




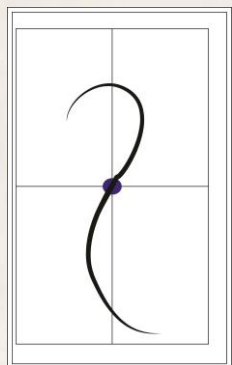




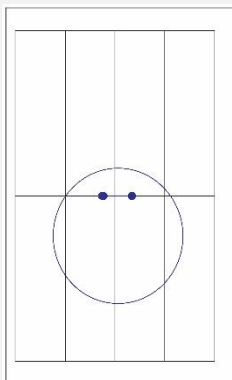
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### Conclusion

Having analyzed the features and visual qualities of the miniatures in the studied manuscript, the researcher shows how the artist has succeeded in expressing the main point of the book. The manuscript “*Lazzat Un Nisa*” aims to point out that one can feel satisfied and happy provided that they have adequate information on sexual behaviors, marital issues, and physiological features. The artist, on the other hand, has also adhered to this main point and has tried to depict people, especially women, as physically and mentally healthy. For this purpose, the artist has chosen a lyrical and at the same time realistic way of illustration so that the audience considers the miniatures to be scenes from real life and authentic documents for the points of the manuscript. In addition, the artist has sought to create visual appeal and create aesthetic desire in the audience to study the contents of





the manuscript and to acquire sexual knowledge.

### Acknowledgements

This paper is based on a master’s degree thesis titled “Comparative Study of the Structure of Two Medical Manuscripts (*Tohfat Al-momenin, Ekhtiyarat va khavas*)” written by Leila Rezaeian which was conducted under the guidance of Dr. Fahimeh Zarezadeh at Tarbiat Modars University.

### Authors’ Contribution

Both authors designed the study and revised its criticality for important intellectual content. Leila Rezaeian performed the data analysis and drafting of the work. Fahimeh Zarezadeh did the final approval of the version to be published. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

### Conflict of Interest

None.

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