



Inv. no. 34/2006

“SHEIKH SANAN AND THE CHRISTIAN MAIDEN” FROM ATTAR’S
CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

WESTERN IRAN; C. 1400

Conference of the Birds, written in 1187, is an allegory on several levels about the Sufi’s search. The frame story describes the birds’ mystical quest to find their king, the mythical *Simurgh*. Only 30 birds survive the many dangers of the seven valleys over which they fly – corresponding to the seven stages through which the mystic passes during his search. Finally the birds realize that they themselves are the one they seek; *Simurgh* means 30 birds in Persian.

The miniature illustrates one of the allegory’s tales, in which Sheikh Sanan’s pride stands in the way of his love of God. Not until he falls in love with a Christian princess, renounces his faith, and becomes her swineherd does he experience degradation and an earthly love that corresponds to the Sufi’s true love of God.

