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DOUBLE FRONTISPIECE PAINTING FROM A COPY OF JAMI'S *YUSUF WA ZULAYKHA*. 'PICNIC IN A TREE HOUSE'

IRAN, QASVIN; 1550-1570

EACH LEAF: 28.5 × 19 CM

As is so often the case in Persian manuscripts, this frontispiece has nothing to do with the main text. The subject of the painting is a preparation for a small gathering, where the protagonists are the two young men relaxing in a tree house erected in a plane tree.

What makes the painting so interesting is what happened after the manuscript was completed.

A later owner had religious scruples about owning a manuscript filled with figurative paintings. A closer look shows that he meticulously and with some care painted a thin red line across the necks of all the living persons (including the slaughtered animal). He symbolically killed them all. No one – neither God nor man – would be able to accuse him of owning images of living beings.

There is no actual prohibition against images in the Koran, but the *hadith*, traditions of the words and life of the Prophet Muhammad, note that those who make or own paintings would fare badly on the Day of Judgment

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