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MINIATURE FROM A COPY OF ASSAR TABRIZI'S *MIHR WA MUSHTARI*. 'MIHR IN A BATH HOUSE IN KHWARAZM'

IRAN, SHIRAZ; C. 1540-1550

LEAF: 25 × 20 CM

Assar Tabrizi, who was active under the Jalayirid sultan Uways and died in c. 1390, was inspired by Nizami's famous romances *Layla wa Majnun* and *Khusraw wa Shirin* when he wrote 'Mihr and Mushtari.' It tells the story of the love of Mihr, son of King Shapur, for Mushtari, the vizier's son.

In Persian mystical poetry, physical love is often a reflection of divine love, and the beauty of the beloved a reflection of God's beauty. The beloved was just as often a man as a woman, and although love did not have to manifest itself physically, the sexual ambiguity of works like this was enough to awaken displeasure in more morally oriented circles.

In contrast to the story of Khusraw and Shirin, who clearly have a sexual relationship, this does not seem to have been the case between

Mihr and Mushtari. In any event, Mihr marries Nahid, the daughter of the Khwarazm shah.

The bathing scene is unusual. The text explains that Mihr, the central seated figure, is having a knot in his long hair combed out.

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Kjeld von Folsach, Joachim Meyer: *The Human Figure in Islamic Art – Holy Men, Princes, and Commoners*, The David Collection, Copenhagen 2017, cat.no. 66;

Hanna Boghanim and Agnès Carayon (eds.): *Parfums d'Orient*, Institut du monde arabe, Paris 2023, cat. 56, pp. 115 and 215;