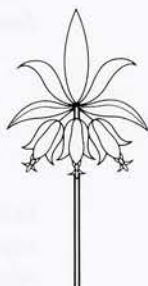


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A 17th-century Persian manuscript in The Asiatic Society, Calcutta

James J. White

Two manuscript volumes of a natural-history encyclopaedia in Farsi script and dedicated to the Emperior Aurangzeb (reigned 1658–1707 A.D.) are located in The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

Catalogued under the author Hidayatullah Muhammad Muhain al-Quray shi, the work is titled *Farhang-I-Aurang-Shahi* and contains descriptions and drawings of animals,

fish, birds, reptiles, insects, plants and minerals of India, a few including figures and man-made structures. Additional Society notes state that “al-Qurayshi al-Hashimi al-Ja’fari . . . dedicated the work of Aurangzib [that was] copied about 17th c AD in Indian Nastaliq.” Figures 1–8 are from the first volume and 9–11 are from the second volume.

Aurangzeb (1618–1707) was the third son

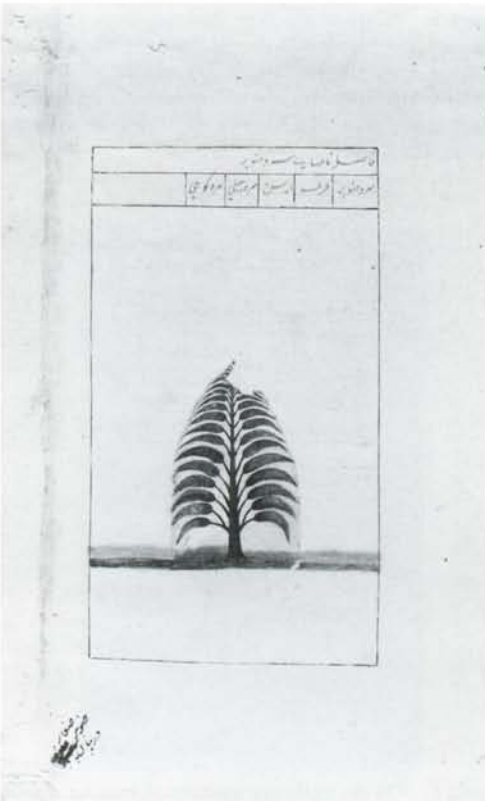


Figure 1. Cypress accompanied by its various names. Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.



Figure 2. “Taril which is an Indian tree and seeds once in a lifetime.” Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

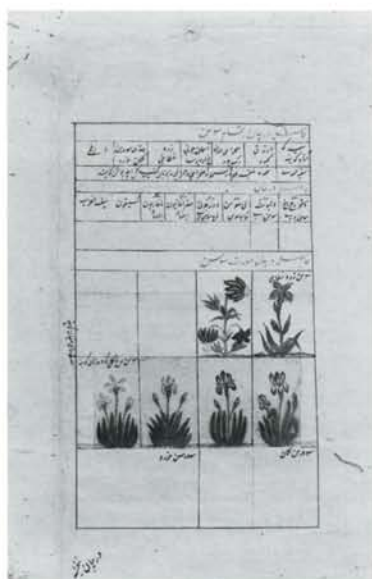


Figure 3. Descriptions and different names of lily. Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.



Figure 5. "Cypress and how Goshtasp Shah planted it and engraved Jamshid Shah and Freidoon Shah on it." Goshtasp Shah, Jamshid Shah and Freidoon Shah are very famous kings in Persian mythology and ancient history. Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.



Figure 4. "Hybrid tree obtained by grafting pear to the apple tree which is grown in Tashkent and Samarkand." Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.



Figure 6. On the medicinal qualities of, making of ointments from, and time of planting and cultivation of spruce. Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.



Figure 7. "Picture of weeping willow," "picture of willow" and different species of willow. Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.



Figure 9. Above: "Noon is the name of fish on which the first story of earth is rested. It is also called Hamnoon, Samnoon and Lioora." Below: "Fratis is the name of a fish in the Kosar Pool." Kosar is a pond or pool in the heavens or paradise where believers go after death and enjoy eternal life. Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

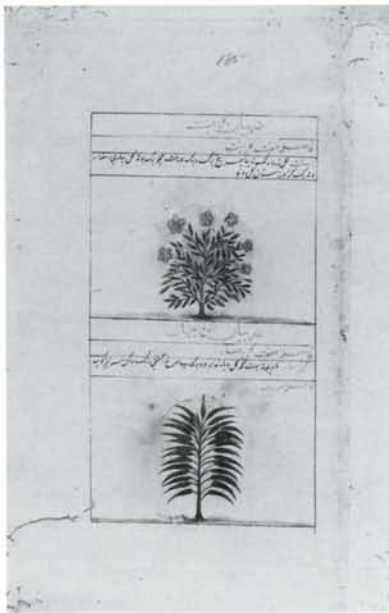


Figure 8. Description of two kinds of flowers. Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

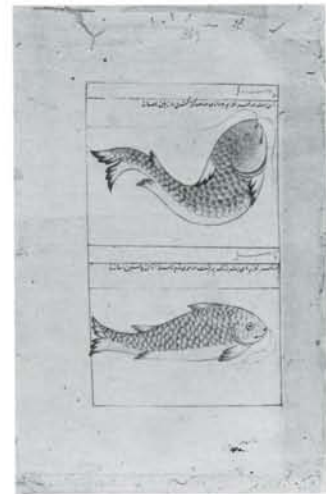


Figure 10. Above: "There is a fish in Gholzom sea as long as two hundred feet which destroys ships." The Gholzom Sea is a mythological sea, perhaps the biggest sea in the world, mentioned in many Islamic texts. Below: "In Gholzom Sea there is a big fish that on its back hair is grown and is used for making clothes." Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

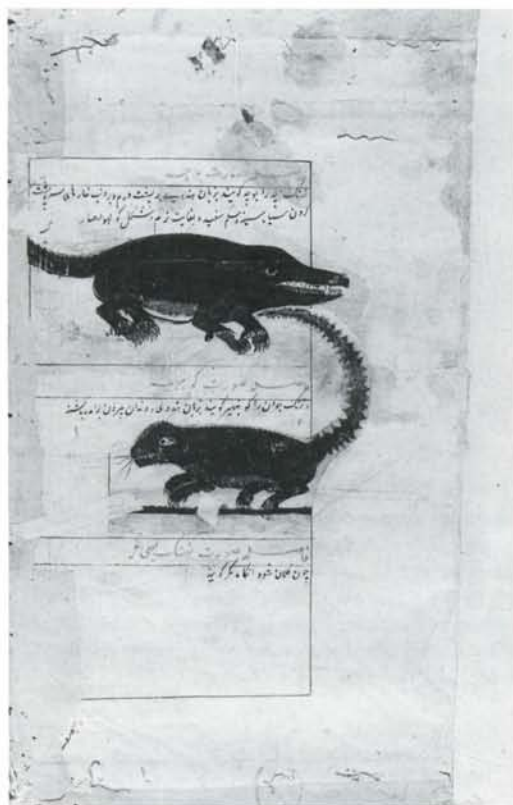


Figure 11. Above: "The crocodile which in Indian is called voocheh; on its tail and on its back there are spikes." Below: "And young crocodile is called benhir in Indian and its teeth are grown." Photo courtesy of The General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

of Shah Jahan and the sixth Moghul emperor of India. He killed or imprisoned family

members and destroyed countless Hindu temples. Wars depleted Aurangzeb's treasury, and at the time of his death the empire was disintegrating. His Muslim fanaticism, probably coupled with dwindling finances, contributed to a decline in the arts.

Perhaps some scholar will take note of this cursory description and undertake a thorough description of the manuscript. In the meantime I am grateful to The Asiatic Society of Calcutta and especially to R. P. Banerjee, curator, Manuscripts and Museum Section, for allowing me to examine the volumes; to Asoke Sinha for photography; and to Dr. Chandan Roychoudhuri, general secretary, for permission to reproduce the photographs. The article would not have been possible without Reza Saberi's examination of the photos and subsequent provision of captions. (Quotations indicate direct translations; others are paraphrased.) Kaveh Massoudian also made some helpful comments. Calcutta residents Mr. and Mrs. Shri Dhar, Mayor Prasanta Chatterjee and his public relations office Debajyoti Sen Gupta were extremely helpful in directing me to the Society and in introducing me to its staff.

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