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The Representation of Joseph and Zulaikha's Privacy in Abrahamic Traditions and Its Reflection in Painting Art

Mohsen Badreh¹ , Saleheh Khodadadi² 

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Abstract

The story of Joseph and Zulaikha is one of the most frequent stories in Muslim culture, and to a lesser extent, among Jews and Christians. This article uses a comparative analysis method, first presenting the story as narrated in the Old Testament, then examining the additions and embellishments made by Jews. Following that, it reviews the Quranic narrative and subsequent retellings by authors of the *Qaṣaṣ al-Quran* (Stories of the Quran) and some commentators. The two narratives, specifically the Torah and Quranic versions, and more broadly, the Jewish and Islamic ones, are then briefly compared. Next, the representation of Zulaikha's character and her adventures with Joseph in Jewish-Christian and Muslim art are analyzed comparatively using an iconological approach. In the works of Western painters, the focus is primarily on Joseph's rejection of Zulaikha's advances, and the inspiration from the Torah narrative is clearly evident. In Muslim miniatures, two events, Joseph's escape from Zulaikha and Zulaikha's banquet to change the judgment of the Egyptian women, have received more attention than other events. Although other

1 . Assistant Professor, Department of family and women's studies, faculty of social sciences and economics, Alzahra University, Tehran, IRAN (**Corresponding Author**). m.badreh@alzahra.ac.ir

2 . PhD in Women's Studies, University of Religions and Denominations, Free researcher of women's studies, Tehran, IRAN. s.khodadadi72@yahoo.com

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events, such as the reunion of Joseph and Zulaikha, have also been a focus for some Islamic artists, these events are inspired by the poems of Persian poets, especially Jami.

Keywords: Zulaikha in Judaism, Zulaikha in Islam, Zulaikha in art, Joseph and Zulaikha

Introduction

Due to the widespread misogyny in many human cultures, women are sometimes considered secondary, subordinate, evil, generally lacking human virtues, and inferior to men. Naturally, the representation of the female image in visual arts, especially painting, has been significantly negative. Specifically, misogynistic concepts in the two Abrahamic traditions of Judaism and Christianity have been linked to a kind of Pandora-like image from Greek myths, and Eve has become the representation of an intermediary of evil in art. This, along with some influences of *Isra'iliyyat* (stories and traditions of Jewish origin) on Islamic culture has led Western Orientalist feminism or Westernized Orientalist feminism in the East to equate the image of women in the Islamic Abrahamic tradition with the Jewish-Christian image of femininity, considering it secondary, evil, and inferior.

Of course, this view is not uncommon among some Muslim groups who, in their reading of the status of women in Islam, do not center the themes of the Quran. The same issue makes it necessary to comparatively analyze female characters shared in Abrahamic traditions and cultures, clarifying the similarities and differences in the portrayal of each, and the textual source of their characteristics in these traditions. The story of Joseph and Zulaikha

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may be one of the most widely recounted stories in Muslim culture, and perhaps also in the culture of the People of the Book. This story has also been widely reflected in the literature and art of these two cultures and has influenced popular culture for centuries.

In this article, the story as it appears in the Old Testament is first briefly narrated. Then, the embellishments and additions of Jewish religious literature are examined, followed by the Quranic narrative of the event. Subsequently, the retellings by authors of the

Qaṣaṣ al-Quran and some commentators are reviewed. The two narratives, specifically the Torah and Quranic ones, and more broadly, the Jewish and Islamic ones, are then briefly compared. Finally, the representation of Zulaikha's character and her adventures with Joseph (PBUH) in Jewish-Christian and Muslim art are analyzed comparatively.

1. Methodology

The research method is a comparative study, and data was collected by searching library documents, books, and art collections. It is divided into two main parts. In the first part of each chapter, the events related to the lives of the mentioned characters in the two main sources—the Quran and the Old and New Testaments—are explored and analyzed at a micro-comparative manner. This is because the issue of this research in both sources belongs to a larger structure, and there are fundamental similarities between the structure's composition and the functions of its elements (Pakatchi, 2011: 110). The existence of a common root in the main sources of this study in the first part (the main books of the Abrahamic religions) means that the comparison made is of a genealogical type (ibid: 112).

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For the second part of each section, which involves defining the relative scope of the mentioned sources in interpretive and literary books and artistic works, the comparative study is asymmetrical. This is because the information of the authors in each of these fields is not at the same level. While the comparative study conducted in the first part was symmetrical, the goal was to reach the main objective, which is to determine the position of each of the women in each of the two mentioned sources, despite abstracting the common aspects in the main events of the stories in the two main sources: the Quran and the Old and New Testaments (ibid: 127). Additionally, for the artistic section of the article, an iconological approach—a hermeneutical knowledge linked to the fields of psychology, philosophy, and theology and used in art history studies—is also utilized in the interpretation of the artistic works (Nasri, 2017: 10).

2. Background

Among the works that have compared the Quranic and Torah narratives of Joseph and Zulaikha, one can mention the book *Pain of Zulaikha's Love*, written by Jalal Sattari (1994), which paid more attention to this than other existing works. During the research, a number of significant research articles were found on the comparative study of poets' works with each other and the extent of their inspiration from the Quranic and Torah narratives, but they were not referenced because they were outside the scope of the present research. However, in the field of research articles on miniatures and painting, no work was found that examined the works of Western artists.

However, some case studies on certain works of Islamic miniaturists were found, as follows:

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"Interdisciplinary Research in Art with a Hirschian Hermeneutical Approach (Case Study: Analysis of the Miniature Painting of Joseph and Zulaikha)" by Jabbar Rahmani and Sepideh Nainee in 2015, "An Analysis of a Historical Fantasy: The Image of Joseph and Zulaikha" by Hassan Zein al-Salehin and other colleagues in 2022, and "Comparative Pictorial Decoration of the Painting of Joseph and Zulaikha with a Poem from Saadi's Bustan" by Zeinab Mozaffarikhah in 2010. These studies only examined the famous work attributed to Behzad in the narrative of Joseph's escape from Zulaikha. In addition, the "Comparative Study of the Joseph Narrative in Sacred Texts, Persian Literature, and Iranian Miniature Painting" by Marzieh Golabgir Isfahani and Zahra Fanaei in 2021 was used to introduce some of the works of those miniaturists.

Ultimately, among the existing research, no separate work was found that independently examined the story of Joseph and Zulaikha with a comparative Quranic and Torah narrative, along with the works of both Western and Muslim artists. Therefore, the present research is innovative because it addresses the narrative of this event in the two religious traditions of Judaism and Islam as part of a comparative iconology of Islamic and Western miniatures of Joseph and Zulaikha's private moments.

3. Zulaikha in the Old Testament

Regarding the representation of this character in Jewish tradition, we first present Chapter 39 of Genesis from the Old Testament, then proceed to more detailed descriptions in other Jewish texts. Chapter 39 of Genesis

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recounts what happened after Joseph was bought by Potiphar and honored in his house:¹

"His master's wife looked at Joseph, saying, lie with me."

"8: And although she spoke to Joseph every day, he did not listen to her...
11: And it came to pass one day that he came into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house were there."

"12: So she took his garment, saying, lie with me."

"But he left his garment in her hand and fled and went outside."

"13: And when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled out of the house, 14: she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, see, he has brought in a Hebrew man to mock us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice, 15: and when he heard that I cried out with a loud voice, he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside."

"16: So she kept his garment by her until his master came home."

"17: And she told him this story, saying, the Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came to me to mock me, 18: and as I cried out with a loud voice, he left his garment with me and fled outside."

4. Jewish Stories

The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife is narrated based on Jewish texts in the second volume of the collection "Ages and Characters of the Bible from

1. <https://www.bible.com/fa/bible/136/GEN.39.POV-FAS>

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Joseph to Exodus.¹ Adamo (2013) has summarized this narrative, which is presented in a Persian translation below:

Although Potiphar's wife is not named in the Old Testament, Jewish literature has given her the name Zulaikha. The medieval commentary *Sefer HaYashar* gave her this name in its commentary on the Torah. According to Jewish legends, because Zulaikha had no son, she pretended she wanted to adopt Joseph as a son and would go to him at night, trying to persuade him and showing her infatuation. When Joseph finally understood her trick, he prayed to God to turn his attention away from her.

...Every day, she would pursue Joseph with loving and seductive words. She would send luxurious and expensive gifts to Joseph. But Joseph would not agree to lie with her. When she saw that Joseph would not give in, she threatened to accuse him to her husband. Zulaikha took Joseph to a room and covered a statue of an idol so that Joseph would not see it. But Joseph saw it and said that nothing could prevent God's eye from seeing. She openly told Joseph what she wanted, and Joseph again refused. Zulaikha asked Joseph, "Why don't you fulfill my wish?"

...During the festival of the Nile, when everyone had gone to celebrate, Zulaikha feigned illness and did not go. When Joseph returned from the fields, he found himself alone in the house with Zulaikha. Zulaikha had almost convinced Joseph when suddenly, the image of Joseph's mother, Rachel, his aunt Leah, and his father Jacob appeared to him. They told him,

1. Jewish texts, including the **Mishnah** (Oral Torah or Jewish traditions), **Talmud** (Jewish law and theology), and **Midrash** (Jewish commentaries), are very detailed, and studying one story element across all of them is beyond the scope of this research. However, a source can be used here that has compiled Jewish stories based on a detailed study of these sources. This source, called *The Legends of the Jews*, was compiled in seven volumes in German by a rabbi named Louis Ginzberg and was then translated into English.

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"Do you want to throw away this honor with this sinful act? Now, in this association with harlots, he is corrupting his essence." Joseph immediately fled the house. But he returned to Zulaikha again, and this time, God Himself appeared and said these words: "If you touch her, I will cast away this rock on which the earth is built, and the world will fall and be destroyed." ...But Joseph put on his garment and escaped from her grasp. When the people returned from the festival, Zulaikha told the people and her husband that Joseph had been after her and requested that he be punished. Potiphar ordered Joseph to be mercilessly flogged. Joseph cried out to God, and God caused Zulaikha's eleven-month-old infant to speak. This child said to the men who were beating Joseph: "...My mother is lying."

5. Zulaikha in the Holy Quran

First, we quote the verses from the "Most Beautiful Story" in the Holy Quran, in the Surah of Yusuf, which deals with the story of the Aziz's wife:

"And she, in whose house he was, sought to have him yield to her desire. She locked the doors and said, "Come, I am yours." He said, "I seek refuge in God. He is my lord; he has made my stay good. Indeed, the wrongdoers will not succeed." (23)

"And she certainly desired him, and he would have desired her if he had not seen the proof of his Lord. Thus, it was to avert from him evil and indecency. Indeed, he was one of Our sincere servants." (24)

"And they both raced to the door..." (25)

"So when he [her husband] saw his shirt torn from the back, he said, "Indeed, this is from the deceit of you women. Your deceit is great." (28)

6. Zulaikha in the *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbīyā'* (Stories of the Prophets)

Since the story of Joseph and Zulaikha in Muslim culture is not entirely confined to its Quranic narration, we also explore the tradition of writing stories of the Quran based on historical sequence. The stories of the prophets have been one of the most important religious and literary traditions, serving as a source for literary and popular elaborations of the stories of the prophets among Muslims. Many books have been written under the title *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbīyā'* in the history of Islam, the oldest of which, according to reports, is *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbīyā'* by *Wahb ibn Munabbih* (34 AH - 114 AH), which has not reached us except for some excerpts by people like *Tabari* and *Ibn Ishāq*.

6.1. Kisā'ī

The oldest *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbīyā'* that has reached us almost completely is the book *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbīyā'* by *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kisā'ī al-Kūfī* (119 AH - 189 AH). In the story of Joseph, *al-Kisā'ī* quotes from three people; *Ka'b al-Aḥbār*, *Ibn 'Abbās*, and *Wahb ibn Munabbih*. He wrote: "*Wahb [ibn Munabbih] said... Zulaikha said, 'O Joseph, I am in love with you, and you must love me!'*" (*Kisā'ī*, 1922: 162)

Joseph refuses, and she once again decorates a house, adorns herself, and insists on having a relationship with Joseph. When Joseph again refuses, Zulaikha says: "If you do not do what I say, I will kill myself... Zulaikha threw herself on Joseph and loosened the seven knots of his trousers one by one, and she desired him and he desired her [Zulaikha intended Joseph, and Joseph also intended Zulaikha]. Then Gabriel descended and appeared in the form of his father Jacob, who was biting his fingers. When Joseph looked at

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the proof, he went toward the door, and Zulaikha went out behind him and grabbed his garment from the back and tore it." (ibid: 163)

And after Joseph's innocence was proven in the Pharaoh's palace and he was released from prison and became a minister ... Zulaikha, who had become poor, one day goes to Joseph and tells him of her need for food. When Joseph asks her name and recognizes her, he returns all her possessions to her and marries her in the presence of the king and other Egyptian nobles. "When Joseph went to her bed, he found her a virgin; so Zulaikha said to him, By God, I have not seen any man, and my husband Potiphar was unable to have intercourse with me." (ibid: 168)

6.2. Tha'ālabī

Another ancient work in *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* is *'Arā'is al-Majālis* by *'Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl* (350 AH - 429 AH), known as *Tha'ālabī Nīshābūrī*, which was written in Arabic. Tha'ālabī presents various interpretations of the meaning of "proof," whose chain of narrators reaches Ibn 'Abbās. For example, he narrates that "Jacob appeared to him and struck his chest with his hand". In another report, he quotes from *Ibn 'Abbās* that "*Rā'īl* [Zulaikha] intended Joseph and Joseph also intended her, at which point a single palm, which had neither a wrist nor a forearm appeared between them. Written on it was, "Over you are guardian angels, noble scribes who write down everything you two do," and "Joseph stood up to flee, and when the fear left him, he returned". This report mentions the appearance of this palm two more times between them, each time with a verse written on it, and each time Joseph returns until the event ends (ibid: 132).

6.3. Sūrābādī

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Another source well-known for its focus on the stories of the prophets is the commentary of *Abū Bakr 'Atīq Nīshābūrī*, a scholar of the fifth century AH, famous as *Sūrābādī*'s commentary. At the beginning of the story of Yusuf and Zulaikha, *Sūrābādī* states that there was no woman in all of Egypt as beautiful as Zulaikha, and that "She was a virgin who had not been touched by Aziz." (Nīshābūrī, 2002: 2, 1121)

After Yusuf had been in Zulaikha's house for seven years, "...Zulaikha was melting away from her love for him." Zulaikha confided her secret to her wet nurse, asking for a trick to make Yusuf look at her. The wet nurse suggested, "The trick is to build a house of bright white marble, and within that house, on all its walls, you should paint a picture of yourself and him together, with your arms around each other and sitting together." Zulaikha did this, and with the help of her wet nurse, they led Yusuf into the seven-chambered house they had prepared, and as they entered each room, "Zulaikha fastened the door with a nail." (ibid: 1125-1126)

"Zulaikha reached out and unfastened one of the ties of Yusuf's trousers. A hand appeared and wrote on the wall of that house: "Yusuf, throw you to the ground." Zulaikha unfastened another tie, and another inscription appeared on the wall: "And indeed, there are over you guardians". [al-Infīṭār: 10] And Zulaikha continued to tempt him, until he unfastened a third tie. Yusuf said, "I seek refuge in God from committing a sin by seeing her." Zulaikha persisted in tempting him, and Yusuf's eyes fell upon her beauty, adornments, and jewels... Gabriel called out to Yusuf from the air, and his lust left him. He jumped up and headed for the door." (ibid: 1128).

After recounting the other details of the story, *Sūrābādī* concludes by narrating that Yusuf married Zulaikha, and God restored her youth and sight,

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and she returned to her former beauty. Yusuf also fell in love with Zulaikha with the same intensity that she had once loved him. "Yusuf asked her, why did you torment me so much in those days?" Zulaikha replied, "Don't be surprised, for I was in love with you with a thousand hearts. And at that time, I did not know the Lord. Now that I have come to know Him and become close to Him, it would be a sin to have any love in my heart other than the love of Him." (ibid: 1154)

6.4. Quṭb Rāwandī

Another work of this kind is *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbīyā'* (Stories of the Prophets) by *Quṭb al-Din Rāwandī* (d. 573 AH), a sixth-century Shi'a scholar and a student of *Shaykh Ṭūsī*, the author of the commentary *Majma' al-Bayān*. *Quṭb Rāwandī* narrates that when the wife of Aziz asked Yusuf to be intimate with her, "Yusuf said: "I seek refuge in God, we are from a household that does not commit adultery." (al-Rāwandī, 1956: 127)

He also quotes Imam Ṣādiq (AS) as saying that when Yusuf married Zulaikha, he asked her: "Why did you do that?" She replied: "There were three qualities; youth, wealth, and the fact that I had no partner," meaning Aziz was impotent (ibid: 136).

6.5. Ibn Kathīr

Another *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbīyā'* was written by *Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr* (701-774 AH), a Sunni scholar. In the story of the king's question to the women of Egypt and the interpretation of God's saying, "That he may know that I did not betray him in his absence and that Allah does not guide the plot of the betrayers," he says, "It has been said that this is Yusuf's statement, meaning: I wanted the truth of this matter to become clear so that Aziz would know that I did not betray him in his absence. And it has also

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been said that this is Zulaikha's statement, meaning: "I confessed to this matter so that my husband would know that no betrayal had actually taken place on my part, but rather an attempt at intimacy that did not, in fact, lead to that very vile act." He also says, in his interpretation of God's saying, "And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except for what my Lord has mercy upon. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful," (Yūsuf: 53) "It has been said that this is Yusuf's statement, and it has also been mentioned that this is Zulaikha's statement, and here, as in the previous case, it is more apparent that it is a continuation of Zulaikha's speech. And God knows best." (Ibn Kathīr, 1968: 1, 321)

7. Differences in the Narratives of the Torah, Jewish Traditions, the Quran, and *Qaṣas al-Quran*

It can perhaps be said that the theme of Zulaikha's love for Yusuf is more prominent in the Quranic narrative compared to the Bible (Abdullahi, 2020). Also, since the story of the banquet of the women of Egypt and their cutting their hands is mentioned in the Holy Quran but is absent from the Torah (Genesis, chapter 39), it might be said that, if we only examine the story in these two holy texts, Zulaikha's sin is represented as more serious in the Torah. According to verse 26 of Surah Yusuf, a witness from the woman's family testifies to Yusuf's innocence, but according to the verses of the Torah, there is no such witness.

Sattari says, "The Torah narrative is dry and devoid of gentleness and tenderness." "The Quranic narrative, by mentioning the fact that Zulaikha confesses her sin, paves the way for the forgiveness of the repentant woman. And in their storytelling and fantasies, people seem to regret that all that

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love and sincerity from Zulaikha went unrequited; therefore, they do not want Zulaikha to be unjustly disappointed, but rather to reach union with Yusuf (the one with the flowery shirt)." (Sattari, 1994: 10)

Story of Yusuf and Zulaikha	Narrative of the Quran	Narrative of the Torah	Narrative of Muslim Miniaturists	Narrative of Western Painters
Zulaikha's three dreams about Yusuf	-	-	+	-
Yusuf's invitation to Zulaikha to Egypt in the third dream	-	-	+	-
Yusuf's promise of union in Zulaikha's third dream	-	-	+	-
Zulaikha's maids' attempts to tempt Yusuf	-	-	+	-
Zulaikha's invitation to an illicit relationship	+	+	+	+
Yusuf's refusal of Zulaikha's request for an illicit relationship	+	+	+	+
Zulaikha tearing	+	-	-	-

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Yusuf's shirt from the back				
Yusuf's shirt falling to the ground with Zulaikha	-	+	-	+
A witness behind the palace testifying to Yusuf's innocence	+	-	+	-
Zulaikha hosting a banquet and the women of Egypt losing control of themselves	+	-	+	-
The women of Egypt siding with Zulaikha	+	-	-	-
The women of Egypt confessing Yusuf's innocence	+	-	-	-
Zulaikha confessing Yusuf's innocence	+	-	-	-
Yusuf's prayer for Zulaikha's youth and beauty to be restored	-	-	-	-
The marriage and union of Yusuf and	-	-	+	-

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Zulaikha				
Zulaikha's impatience at Yusuf's death	-	-	-	-

Table: A comparison of the narratives of the Quran, the Torah, poets, Muslim painters, and Western painters regarding the story of Zulaikha and Joseph

Explanation: Regarding miniaturists and painters, it should be said that this negation or affirmation does not mean that each group has absolutely and without exception done so, but rather the intention is to find evidence of this matter.

8. Israeliyat in the Story of Joseph and Zulaikha

Muhammad Abū Shahbah says that various *Israeliyat* (tales of Israel) and diverse narratives have entered the story of Yusuf, which are considered fabrications (Abū Shahbah, 1987: 219). He provides a comprehensive critique of these *Israeliyat*, an excerpt of which is translated into Persian below (Abū Shahbah, 1987: 220-227).

Among the fabricated *Israeliyat* concerning "And she certainly desired him, and he would have desired her had he not seen the proof of his Lord" (Yūsuf: 24) is what *Ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī* in his commentary, *Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī* in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, and others have narrated, saying things that contradict the infallibility of the prophets and are too shameful to write.

It has been narrated from *Ibn 'Abbās* that when he was asked how far Joseph had gone, he replied: "He took off his trousers and sat between her legs. A cry was heard over his head, "O! Joseph, do not be like a bird whose

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wings for flying are cut off because of adultery, and it is no longer able to fly." And regarding the proof he saw, without which he would have fallen into that vile act, it has been narrated that a call was made to him: "Your name is written among the prophets, are you doing the work of fools?" It has also been said that he saw the image of his father, Jacob, on the wall, and it has been said that he saw this image on the ceiling of the room, on the door, while he was biting his thumb. The fabricators of these false

Israeliyats have gone to such an extreme that they have said that when he saw the image of his father Jacob biting his thumb, he still did not stop. His father hit him, and his lust came out from his fingers.

The source of all these reports are the Israelites and the lies they have fabricated about God and His prophets, which were then transmitted to some of the Companions and their followers. How can we reconcile what has been fabricated about the Prophet Yusuf with the words of God, who, after mentioning the "Desire," said, "Thus, that We might avert from him evil and indecency. Indeed, he was one of Our chosen servants?" (Yūsuf: 24) Is this praise befitting someone who would unfasten his trousers and sit between a woman's legs? How can we reconcile what has been narrated with the words of God from the lips of Zulaikha, who is the main character in this pursuit of intimacy: "I sought to seduce him, and indeed, he is of the truthful?" (Yūsuf: 51) This is a clear confession from Zulaikha that she used every trick in her quiver, but it was not successful.

However, the correct interpretation of "And she certainly desired him, and he would have desired her" (Yūsuf: 24) is that the sentence ends at "And she certainly desired him," and there is no doubt that Zulaikha's desire or intention was a vile act. And in "and he would have desired her had he

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not seen the proof of his Lord," the matter is a case of fronting and postposition, and in a simple form, it is like this: "And had he not seen the proof of his Lord, he would have desired her." Some have also said that the nature of Yusuf's and Zulaikha's "Desire" was different. Zulaikha's "Desire" was for the act of adultery, while Yusuf's "Desire" was to flee or even to fight back, meaning he was thinking of escaping from Zulaikha or getting into a struggle with her (Sattari, 1994: 109-112).

9. The Representation of Zulaikha in Painting

This section of the article deals with the theme of Yusuf's escape from Zulaikha from the perspective of Christian and Muslim artists. The subject of the banquet is also significant because it is found exclusively in the Quran among the first-hand sources of the Abrahamic religions, and because Western artists, drawing from the Torah, which lacks this story, do not depict it.

9.1. Yusuf and Zulaikha in Christian Paintings



Yusuf and Potiphar's Wife, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, c. 1640-1645,

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Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Kassel, Germany¹

In the Torah, it is said that as Yusuf was fleeing from Potiphar's wife, his robe fell to the ground because Zulaikha pulled it. Therefore, in Western works inspired by the Torah, Yusuf's robe is either shown falling or, in some works, completely on the ground. Yusuf and Zulaikha are both depicted as two young and beautiful individuals, one fleeing and the other pleading for union. In the painting above, there are traces of anger towards each other on both their faces, a feature not clearly visible in other paintings, where other emotions such as depression, despair, and affection can sometimes be interpreted from the faces of these two characters.

Zulaikha is still in a bed. Her being partially undressed and a red cloak or fabric wrapped around her lower body all suggests her readiness for intimacy. She is suddenly faced with Yusuf's refusal and rejection of her request. With bare feet and without prior readiness, she tries to forcibly pull Yusuf back to the bed. This is met with his strong refusal, and it is this reaction that has provoked her anger. The painter also attempts to more seriously represent Zulaikha's troubled state of mind by showing the disarray of the bed.

1. <https://altemeister.museum-kassel.de/33711/0/0/147/s1/0/100/objekt.html>

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Yusuf and Potiphar's Wife, Guido Reni, 1625-1626, Fitzwilliam Museum, no. PD.53-1993, Cambridge, England¹

1. <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/joseph-and-potiphars-wife-5601>

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In contrast to the previous painting, there is no sign of Zulaikha's plea or forceful attempt to be intimate with Yusuf. Instead, Zulaikha, with a sad and hopeless face, is making her last attempt to bring Yusuf back to the bed. To show Zulaikha's despair and depression, the painter has depicted her body in a drooping posture, so that it is clear that Zulaikha's spine is bent, and her body and face are in a state of hopeless supplication for a sexual relationship. Although Zulaikha is pulling Yusuf's robe with her left hand, which generally has less energy than the right, her right hand is released dejectedly by her side. Zulaikha's attire is also complete in this painting, which is another reason for her confidence in Yusuf's rejection of her request. Despite this, the thick red cloak on Zulaikha's shoulder suggests her previous attempts to persuade Yusuf. Zulaikha has tilted her neck to the left side of her body, which can indicate her humiliation and also her despair of union with Yusuf. Perhaps the viewer can imagine that this hopelessness suggests that she had made requests to Yusuf before, and each time he had rejected them.

Yusuf, with a slight effort in the opposite direction of Zulaikha's body, tries to move out of the frame. His inner shirt is blue, indicating his sexual purity throughout his life.

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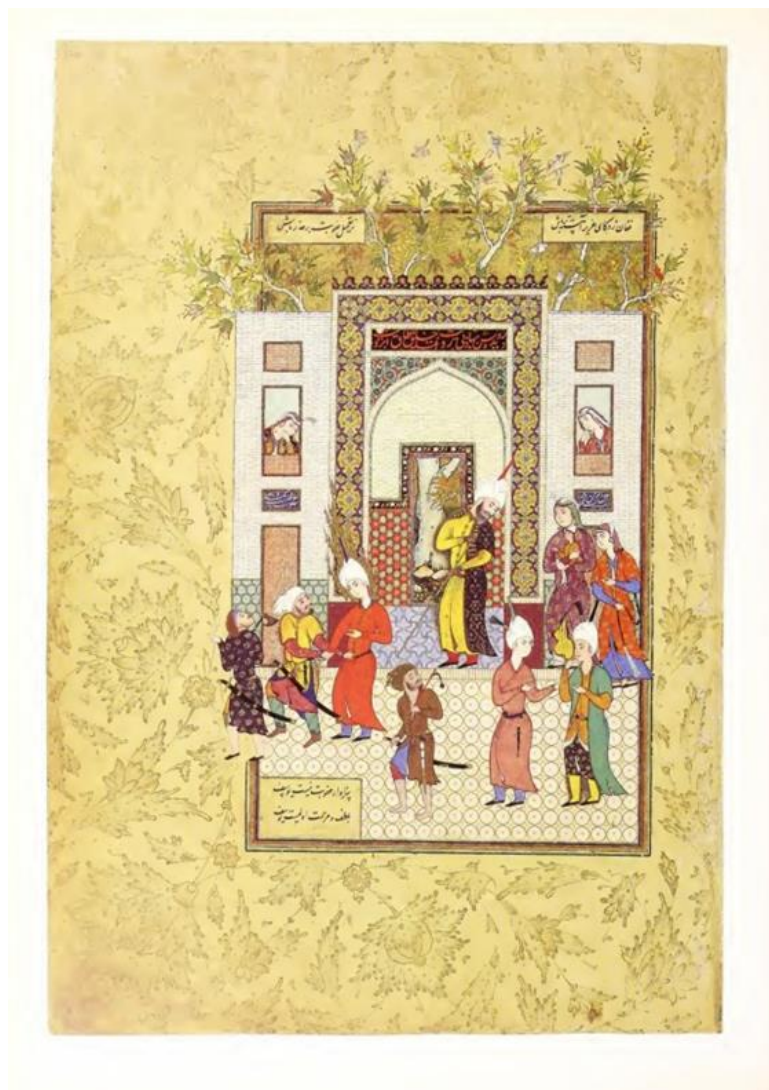
Yusuf and Potiphar's Wife, attributed to Jean Baptiste de Bartolomé (1631-1681),
Princeton University Art Museum, no. y1987-68¹

In many paintings depicting the moment of Zulaikha's sexual demand from Yusuf, contrary to the common expectation of Zulaikha wearing or using red attire, in this painting, and in a significant number of other works, it is Yusuf who is depicted in red attire. In some works, Zulaikha even appears in a blue shirt and with a relatively innocent expression while

1. <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/32189>

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requesting a sexual relationship. In these works, the painter, by depicting Yusuf in red attire, attempts to show his sexual attractiveness, a characteristic that was the reason for Zulaikha's request for intimacy. However, in all these works, Yusuf, regardless of his attire, is depicted as rejecting Zulaikha's request.

9.2. Joseph and Zulaikha in Islamic Miniaturism

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Aziz and Yusuf's Punishment, *Haft Awrang* (Seven Thrones) manuscript, Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, 963-973 AH, Mashhad, Iran, located in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington (Simpson; Farhad and Freer Gallery of Art, 1997, 138)

In this work, the painter has tried to depict all the narrative elements mentioned in the Quranic verses and stories. Aziz is placed at the center of the work in front of the open door of the room as the main subject of the story. In addition to his central placement, the verses written in the corners of the painting, which address Aziz, show the importance of his position in this part of the story. Aziz stands with a bent neck, which indicates his sadness at witnessing the event, and holds a long staff in his hand. The presence of this staff can have a disciplinary or vengeful purpose.

Zulaikha stands next to a woman who is in front of her on the right side of the painting, holding her left hand in a way that suggests she is still trying to justify and explain the incident in her favor. The woman next to her is holding a child, who, according to the stories in

Qasaṣ al-Quran is the very child who testifies to Yusuf's innocence. A noteworthy point in this work is the intactness of Yusuf's shirt. Given the painter's attention to the details of the story, this cannot be attributed to a lack of care on his part. Yusuf's red shirt also signifies his sexual attractiveness to Zulaikha, which recalls this verse by Hafez:

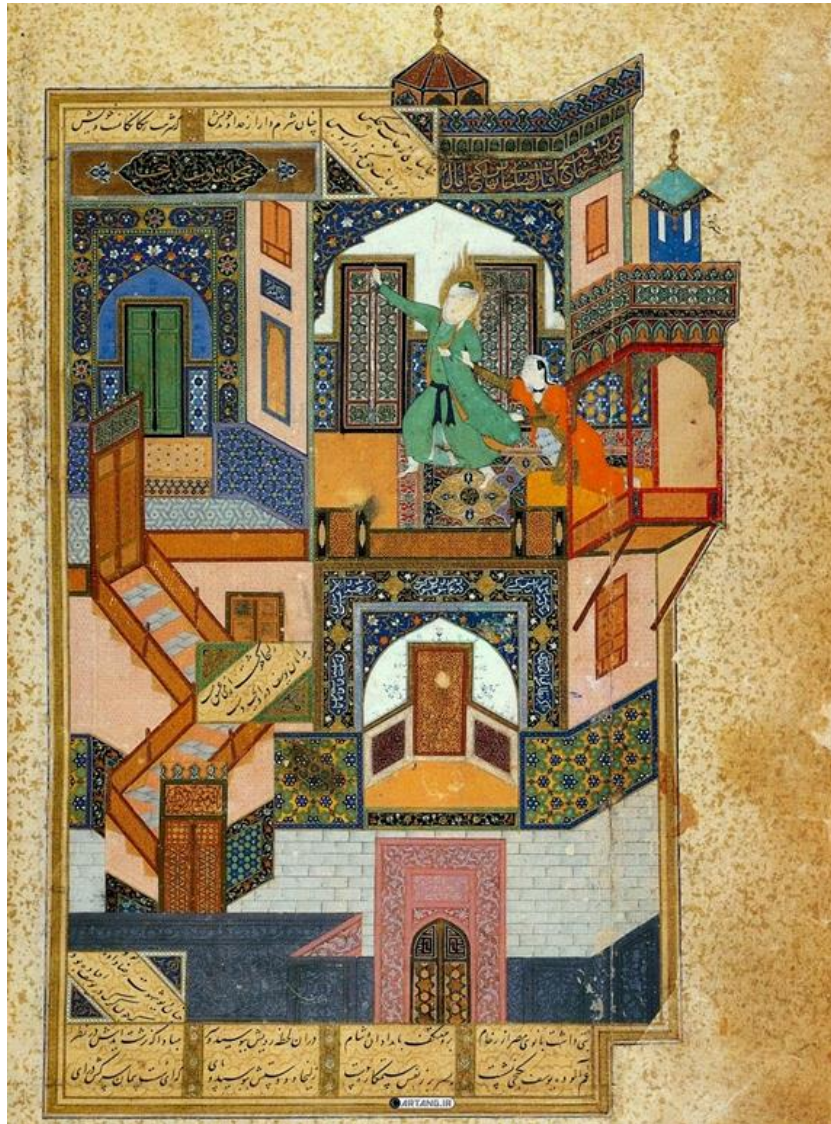
From the ever-increasing beauty that Yusuf possessed, I knew

That love would bring Zulaikha out from behind the veil of chastity
(Hafez, 1968).

The faces of the two women who have their heads in the window at the top of the painting represent the women of Egypt who criticized Zulaikha. These are the women who, at Zulaikha's banquet, will reverse their previous

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judgment and blame. The finger that they are now biting in the painting as a sign of blame for Zulaikha is the same one they will cut at her banquet.



Yusuf's Escape from Zulaikha, by Behzad, a miniature in the *Bustan of Sa'di* manuscript, Herat, 1488 AD, located in the Cairo Library, Persian Literature Section¹

1. https://brill.com/view/journals/mcmw/2/1-2/article-p55_4.xml?language=en

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The miniature of Yusuf and Zulaikha's escape by Behzad for Sa'di's *Bustan* was painted in Herat for Sultan Hussein Bayqara during the years 893-894 AH and is currently held in the Cairo Library (Rahmani and Zafari, 2015). In his work, Behzad has depicted a palace with seven nested rooms, each represented by a door, and the seventh room is the place for intimacy. The painter has used seven doors instead of seven rooms to show the subject (Yusuf) being lured in a stepwise manner to the "Woman-Zulaikha-stepmother". The house is a feminine symbol with the concept of a sanctuary, a mother, and a mother's breast.

Freud believed that in dreams, nested and empty rooms are usually symbols of women, and stairs, ladders, and going up and down them can be representations of the sexual act. In this work, the poetry of two poets, Sa'di and Jami, is also visible. The verses of Jami, which are in the body of the painting, convey a sexual and inciting message to the subject, Yusuf, with keywords such as "Purity of the platform," "Treasure of hopes," "Longing," and "Mouthwatering". In the outer frame of the work, Sa'di's verses address the subject like an "Other (father)" and define moral do's and don'ts for him, since the theme of these verses is negation and rejection and is the source of the subject's anxiety. Sa'di's verses are in tablets in the work that surround it from above, below, and in the middle, but with a different background. And because they are in the margins of the main painting, they are distinct like a bulletin board and a warning, while Jami's verses are faded into the patterns and decorations of the surfaces (Zeinolsalehin et al., 2020).

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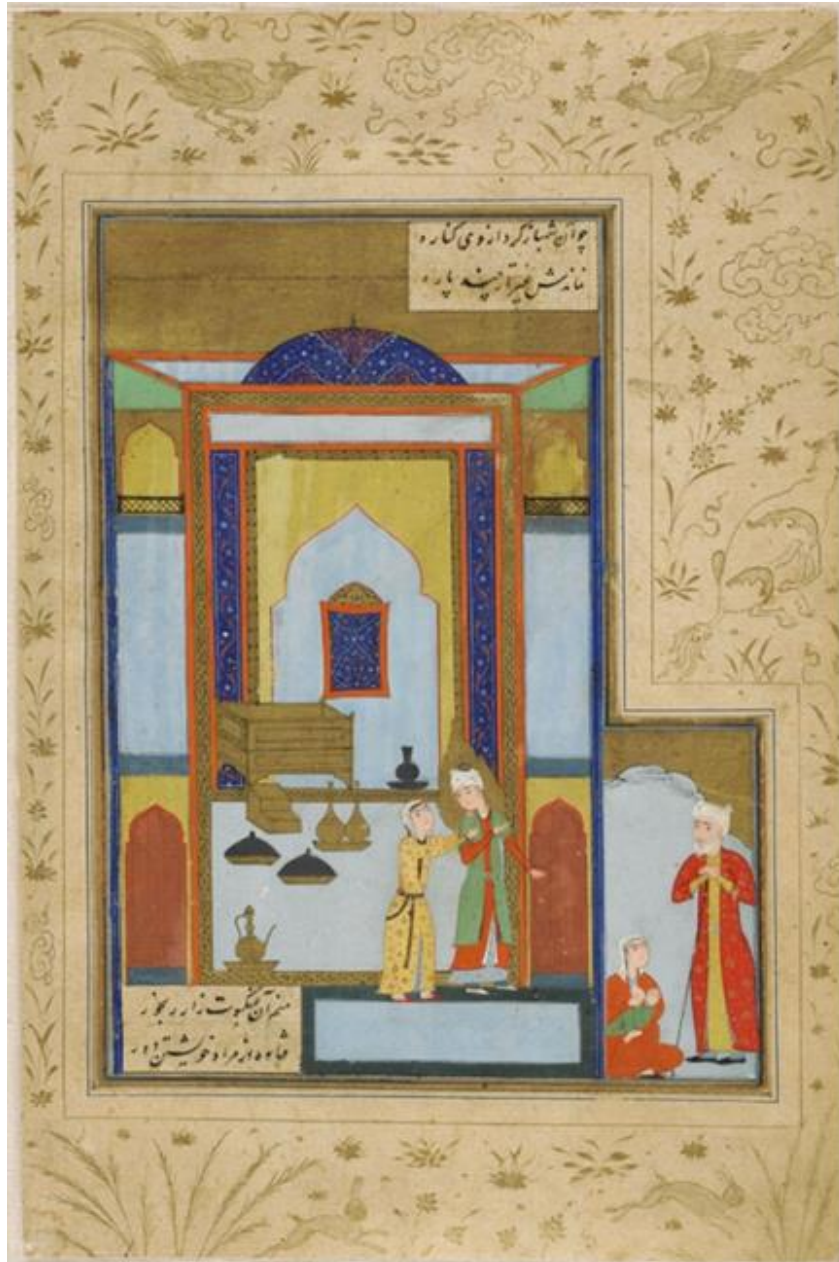
In other words, the walls of the palace are blended with Jami's longed-for words, so that the work is full of sexual attractions and invitations to intimacy, all surrounded by Sa'di's warnings.

In terms of the colors used in the work, the emerald blue and lapis lazuli blue in Behzad's work represent the celestial atmosphere of the court.

The green color of Yusuf's shirt also signifies his faith and belief, and also shows his turning away from worldly pleasures. On the other hand, the redness of Zulaikha's clothing, as the only warm color in the work, represents worldly pleasures and expresses excitement and satanic lust (Mozafarikhah, 2010).

In general, the color red in artworks has two separate meanings; it means both an invitation to a sexual act and also suggests a prohibition and warning against a forbidden act. In Behzad's painting, the red color of Zulaikha's shirt also includes both concepts; a kind of psychological dialectic of "Desire and anxiety" or "Attraction and repulsion." (Zeinolsalehin et al., 2022)

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Zulaikha's Temptation, a miniature in the *Yusuf and Zulaikha* manuscript by Jami, Bukhara, Shaybanid Era, 1575 AD, located in the Harvard Museum, no. 1998.15.19¹

In this work, the painter has depicted Yusuf with a warm-colored shirt and a halo of sanctity around his head. He has also drawn a green cloak to establish his chastity at all times, even when sin is possible. At the same moment, Zulaikha is depicted requesting intimacy from her servant. Also, in this work, unlike the majority of existing works, there is no sign of Yusuf's flight and fear, or Zulaikha's thirst for a sexual relationship. In this respect, it is similar to some Western works in which Yusuf calmly walks past Zulaikha's request. Also, in this work, Aziz is in the form of an old man, accompanied by a woman holding a baby in her arms, behind the last door of the nested rooms.

A feature of Iranian miniatures is the depiction of the remaining parts of a story in parallel frames next to the main frame of the work, and also the mention of verses around the work to provide a brief explanation of the miniature. In this work, two verses from Jami's poems have also been calligraphed:

When that falcon left her

Nothing was left but a few worn threads

I am that weary, weak spider

Fallen far from my own desire (Jami, 1999; Golab-Gir Isfahani & Fanai, 2022).

1. <https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/211341>

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The Chaste One, by Farshchian, 2001 AD

Twenty-seven years after his first painting of Yusuf in 1974, Farshchian painted his second narrative in 2001, titled "The Chaste One," and this time shows Yusuf and Zulaikha in the seclusion that Zulaikha has arranged. In

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this miniature, Zulaikha is at the center of the image, holding the back of Yusuf's shirt. Yusuf is in a Mihrab-shaped frame, wearing a white shirt, standing with his back to Zulaikha, and moving towards the outside of the frame. The elements in the image, according to Jami's narrative, include images of intimacy, suggested by the wet nurse to arouse Yusuf, in a gallery of romantic and sensual pictures; the veiled idol on Zulaikha's face, which takes up almost the top third of the page, angels above the image, one of whom has covered his eyes as a sign of modesty, and a room full of curtains, serving utensils, musical instruments, and so on.

This scene, in which a highly charged and extremely rich atmosphere is depicted, takes place in a secluded room that in every way revives the atmosphere of life in Pharaonic Egypt. In this painting, the artist has used Egyptian symbols such as the snake, the falcon, the Eye of Horus, the lotus flower, etc., and has even shown Zulaikha in the style of Egyptian women's makeup, which shows the depth and precision of the painter (Golab-Gir Isfahani & Fanai, 2022).

Conclusion

Although the character of Zulaikha and her story with Yusuf have found a serious reflection in the cultures and arts of both the Jewish-Christian and Islamic sides, it can be said that in a general view, in terms of the volume of religious, narrative, and lyrical literature that this story has received in Muslim culture, and consequently, the reflection of these themes in Islamic art, Muslims, especially the Persian-speaking world, have given Zulaikha a very important place. This importance is due not only to the repeated and profound portrayals of her character and her stories with Yusuf, but also to

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her happy ending in most of the Muslim narratives and the fact that her love and passion for this prophet were not in vain.

Furthermore, in the works of Western painters, the part related to Yusuf's rejection of the illicit relationship request has been the focus of their attention. By examining this group of works, the indebtedness of the creators of these works to the Torah narrative is clearly evident. However, among Islamic miniaturists, unlike Western artists, other parts of the story of Yusuf and Zulaikha are also of greater importance. Among the works of Muslim artists, two subjects, Yusuf's escape from Zulaikha and Zulaikha's famous banquet to change the judgment of the women of Egypt, have received more attention than other events. Although the remaining events, such as the union of Yusuf and Zulaikha, have also been the focus of some Islamic miniaturists, this group of events has been inspired by the poems of Persian poets, especially Jami.

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