

## Original Research Article

### Kamal al-din Behzad's Realism in "The Battle of Camels"

Bahram Ahmadi<sup>1\*</sup>, Sara Farahmand Drav<sup>2</sup>

1. Assistant Professor, Painting Group, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Yazd University, Iran.

2. Ph.D. Student in Art Reserach, Art University, Tehran, Iran.

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#### Abstract

Many scholars believe that Islamic arts do not intend to represent the real world. This view goes back to the Sufi view of Iranian-Islamic art, which emphasizes meaning than appearance. Even though studying an artwork from a religious and mystical view is generally not wrong, limiting the view to the mystical concepts while examining an Islamic artwork may prevent us from considering other aspects of this art. For this reason, Islamic visual artworks need to be analyzed from a variety of perspectives such as realistic. In this article, the painting "The Battle of Camels", attributed to Kamal al-din Behzad was selected. Camel fighting is popular entertainment in countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkey. Therefore, the painting "The Battle of Camels" was examined in a historical-analytical manner hypothesizing that Iranian paintings are not only images specific to texts and manuscripts but also have artistic values and historical and social concepts. Also, to answer the question of how this painting shows the painter's influence on the real world, similar types of paintings and real photos of this event were studied. Finally, we found that Kamal al-din Behzad probably observed such an event closely and was also influenced by similar drawings. Through his new perspective, he was able to portray this issue in the form of the principles of Iranian painting and managed to include the real aspects of this event in the work by showing realistic details

**Keywords:** *Iranian Painting, Negargary, Kamal al-din Behzad, Realism, Herat School, The Battle of Camels, Camels Fighting.*

#### Introduction

Artworks have been always influenced by various factors, but the problem with the works of Islamic art is that the descriptions and interpretations of Islamic art have always been from religious and mystical perspectives (Leaman, 2012, 17), while it seems that Iranian paintings are not only images specific to texts and manuscripts but also have artistic values and historical and social concepts. Mystical interpretations of works are also significant

but do not help to understand other dimensions of the work. Accordingly, in the study of Iranian-Islamic artworks, it is necessary to adopt various approaches so that the works can be studied from different views. Among these artworks, that need a new exploration, are the works of the famous Iranian painter Kamal al-din Behzad (1455-1535), a painter who, according to many researchers, recognized realistic and precise aspects of what he observed with complete clarity. In his works, he sketched and painted humans, animals,

\* bahmadi@yazd.ac.ir , +9893536224229

and elements of nature with their real features and characteristics. In addition to Behzad's attention to realism, his membership in the Naqshbandiyya sect<sup>1</sup> and the influence of Jami's mystical thoughts on him led many analyzes of his works to focus on finding and discovering hidden mystical and religious mysteries, and hence, ignore other possible meanings. Therefore, in this article, we try to read Behzad's painting "the battle of camels" from a realistic perspective (Fig. 1). In this way, we have not neglected to consider the fact that the artwork of each artist is the product of political, social, economic, and religious ideas of the society in which he had lived. But in this study, the main question is that how the elements that make up the "the battle of camels" painting show the painter's influence of the real world and a kind of realism, in addition to possible mystical meanings?

### Methodology

To achieve the goals of this study, which has a realistic approach to the painting of "the battle of camels" historically-analytically, data about this event was gathered from the geographical areas where this entertainment is held among tribes and nomads. Then, the types of drawings that deal with the subject of camel fighting were studied and finally the painting of "the battle of camels" was analyzed.

### Research background about the analysis of the painting of "The battle of camels"

One of the most detailed articles that have been written about Behzad's "The battle of camels" is an article entitled "Behzad portrayer of meaning (reflection on a mystical work by Behzad)" (Feyz, 2008) which interprets this work of Behzad from a mystical point of view. According to the author of this article, Kamal al-din Behzad is a painter who is considered an illustrator of mystical truths. The author has divided the drawing space into three general parts. He concludes that the painter's aim here is to make a mystical representation of the three worlds of the



Fig. 1. The Battle of Camels, attributed to Kamal al-din Behzad, the 1540s, Herat. Source: Tehran, Golestan Library, Muraqqa'-e Golestan.

Gheyb<sup>2</sup>, Barzakh<sup>3</sup>, and Shahadat<sup>4</sup>. The hazy space of the environment on the painting is a space that is not visible to the ordinary eyes, but the wise people see it clearly, and on the contrary, the transparent space inside, is full of complex allusions and belongs to the world of rationality. He considers the left part of the image, which shows the old man, the birds and their eggs, a representation of the spiritual courtyard, and the right side of the image (left of the viewer), which is a light-colored camel, a representation of the death. The author of this article considers camels as an allegory of day and night and a symbol of the sequence and passage of time. He interpreted camel keepers in the same way. The person on the left side of the viewer, who has beards and dark clothes, is a symbol of obedience, goodness, and submission, and the other with light clothes and a spindle hanging on the waist and a beard on the shoulder is a symbol of belonging or clinging to life. The position of the old man holding the spindle at a height shows the rank and status of this person and his spindle is a representation of the evolution of the earth and time. The deciduous season is a symbol of the autumn of the lifetime of Behzad, the birds on the right are interpreted as a sign of the nostalgia of the soul and their longing to fly to the heights of Mount Qaf. The author of the article also emphasizes, citing the inscription above the painting, that Behzad's

intention in drawing this work was not a picture of a camel fighting, but a depiction of creation in the form of an allegory and an invitation to learn from it. As can be seen from the text of this article, the author has attributed certain mystical meanings to this work which will be completely hidden from the viewer who does not have a mystical view. Such interpretations of artworks depend on having a specific approach while understanding a work does not necessarily have to do with the application of such meanings, as “to understand the beauty of Islamic calligraphy we do not necessarily have to learn Arabic” (Leaman, 2012, 112).

Another article that does not directly deal with the “the battle of camels” paintings but has useful points about the features of Iranian painting landscaping and its differences with Western landscape painting is an article entitled “Landscape painting in Iranian painting” written by Shohreh Javadi in In Bagh-e Nazar magazine in 2004. In this article, it is stated that in Iranian landscaping, the elements are depicted as the truth of the object and the painter’s imagination, not the reality that is seen. This is important in Negareh criticism because it cannot be expected that if a scene is not drawn from the perspective of an Iranian painter, it means that the painter could never have had a real scene in mind.

Another article that generally examines the various forms of the battle of camels in a historical course written by Adamov, entitled “The Iconology of a Camel fight” in Muqarnas magazine in 2004. This article, after reviewing various examples of camel fight images, eventually reminds us that countless images of this subject indicate its popularity among artists. This article cites examples of mirrored images of camel fights as a reason for employing them for albums commissioned by employers. Finally, it acknowledges that it is not yet time to give a firm answer to the meaning of the representations of this subject. The article mentions that the repetitions of the names of camels in the Avestā are pieces of

evidence that in Islam, these traditional motifs while preserving the symbolism of the camel as stated in Avestā, have been reinterpreted and given a new meaning.

The emergence of the same subject in such diverse works of Iranian art and its continuous representation, which is one of the main features of traditional Iranian art for almost three thousand years, clearly shows the importance of these images. Therefore, it seems necessary to return to the real world and re-read the subject of the battle of camels so that the secrets of these images will be revealed to us to some extent.

Emergence of a realistic approach in Iranian painting  
So far, many analytical works on Iranian-Islamic arts have sought to find the mystical and religious meaning of these works. Instead of an aesthetic study of the work of art, the mystical attitudes of artists have been described in the studies. Although the impact of religious and mystical issues on Islamic artists is not deniable, it seems better to examine Islamic artworks through other lenses. The form of the work, the geographical area of the creation of the work, social, economic, historical issues, etc. also influence the formation of a work of art. In the painting “the battle of camels” attributed to Behzad is also seems that paying attention to these factors is necessary because Behzad was a painter who paid special attention to his surroundings and the issue of realism became important in his works. The gradual process of the Iranian painter’s desire for external events was reflected in Behzad’s art very slowly. But during this tendency towards realism, the visual language of painting, which was characterized by the abundance of details, multi-level composition, the splendor of decoration, bright colors, and strong design, remained the same.

This organized visual language, in its classical sense, began with Ahmad Musā in the fourteenth century, according to Dust Mohammad in the introduction of Bahrām Mirzā. Until the end of the eighth century, Iranian painters absorbed elements of Chinese

painting such as the *Demutte Shāhnāmeḥ* <sup>6</sup>, but they were never satisfied with their style and developed their own style. Classical Iranian painting reached its peak of beauty and visual richness from the late eighth century to the middle of the eleventh century Hijri lunar (Fourteenth to seventeenth-century). It works in addition to the properties mentioned, has many details that make the viewer reflecting on them elicit deep meanings. This turned Iranian paintings from illustrations into works that could be considered independently of the book. In the meantime, the paintings gradually grew and occupied independent pages in the manuscript. The number of images gradually increased and the painters gradually and delicately involved their personal interests in choosing the subjects and the way they were represented. This intervention of personal taste gradually led to the formation of a kind of realism in Iranian painting. Of course, the difference between the realism noted here, and the Western realism is beyond the scope of this article to address (Ahmadi, 2013, 93).

“Realism”, which in Iranian painting before the fifteenth century was very little seen in versions such as the *Demutte Shāhnāmeḥ* or *Kalīlah va Dimnah* or small *Shāhnāmeḥ* and was very rare and negligible, by the second half of the fifteenth century in images many versions appeared more seriously. The artist’s attention to the real world in Iranian painting is more in the subject of works than in the form and style of performance (Graber, 2011, 144). This process gradually evolved until the painting era of Behzad. In fact, this change was a transformation of the old appearance of Iranian painting, not a revolution in it. At this stage of the Iranian painting, the story for which the image was drawn was in fact a means through which the painter spoke to the viewer about the real world around them, but using the same thoughtful visual language of the Iranian painting (Ahmadi, 2013, 93). Although the attention to the real world in Iranian painting has been attributed to Behzad; its synchronicity with the taste of the time should not be

overlooked. Kamal al-din Behzad with his approach to realism was able to connect the imaginary world of literature to the real world. He did this through differences in faces, costumes, human movements, architectural spaces, and the details he added to the work, while still adhering to the principles of the Iranian painting, two-dimensional flat spaces, bright colors, etc. was preserved. One of Behzad’s works, in which traces of realism seem to be found, is “The battle of camels”, and in this article, we seek to read it by referring to the historical, social, and geographical conditions of its creation.

### The battle of camels

Over a long period of time, camel-raising has been one of the main occupations of the inhabitants of the desert areas. Horses and camels were domesticated in Central Asia, Saudi Arabia, and southern Russia more than five thousand years ago (Amanollahi Baharvand, 1988, 32).

The game of “camel wrestling” or “camel fight” has long been considered a traditional entertainment of the people of some countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey, so that even its ban in the recent days in some of these countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, could not reduce its prosperity and this competition is still considered as one of the most popular entertainments of the people of these two countries (Fararu News Agency, 2012). Accordingly, camel owners prepare their camels to fight competitors by teaching them special skills (Mehr News Agency, 2010). “This game shows our culture”, said Mohammad Ali Jatawi, a local in Pakistan. “People gather here to greet each other and forget the anxiety of life.” The game of camel fighting dates back to thousands of years ago. Turkey, which has a 4,000-year history in the competition, is now seeking to inscribe it on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Rijan, 2019) (Fig. 2).

In addition to the annual camel wrestling event in these countries, there are other activities, including





Fig. 2. Camels fighting in Pakistan. Source:www. Afp.com.

business activities, special indigenous rituals, local costume shows, music, and dancing. Ordinary people are usually the organizers of these events. In Turkey, these competitions are held annually and legally in winter, between two male camels (Yilmaz, 2017, 235). The holding of these competitions is related to the mating time of these animals. In Iran, the mating season is in the cold seasons of the year, late autumn, and all winter, and the first month of the spring. Male camels often have a tough fight during the mating season and are therefore kept separate from each other (Moghadam, 2000). This is the characteristic of camels that have made it possible to hold these competitions at this special time. In these competitions, they also use ornaments and accessories such as pack saddle, leashes to control and guide camels, decorative neck beads, ropes to close the mouth, wad under the abdomen, and decorative fabrics. The racetrack is smooth and non-rocky. Two factors influence the location of these competitions; One is that the space should have features that make wrestling easy, and the second is that the necessary environment should be provided for spectators to watch the match. These areas are usually vast plains surrounded by slopes, and these slopes act as a place for spectators to watch the game (Yilmaz, 2017). The owners of the camels who participate in this festival today consider the celebration of the past and the remembrance of the days when the nomads traveled with the camels as the main reason for holding these competitions (Levine, 2000).

### Examples of “The battle of camels” paintings

Although the exact date and time of the camel wrestling cannot be determined with certainty, it is believed that the tournament dates back to ancient times and the Turk tribes of Central Asia. The oldest evidence of these battles is a 2000-year-old BC Talisman found near Russia, depicting two naked camels fighting. The second evidence is a fifth or sixth-century bronze plaque found in western Kazakhstan. The plaque, kept in Russia, shows two camels, one of which is biting another hump. Other specimens of these plaques depicting the battle of the camels are also found from this period (Yilmaz, 2017, 236) (Fig. 3).

In Iran and the ancient city of Susa, from the pre-Achaemenid period, the image of camels can be seen on pottery. In addition, reliefs of camel heads have been found in the ancient buildings of Kurdistan, which traces the history of camel use to the Median period and even earlier, to the period of Aryan migration to the plateau region of Iran. In the ruins of Persepolis, there are reliefs on the walls that show the passage of one of the tribes under the rule of the kingdom of Iran to the Shah (King). These tribes offer a two-humped camel as an offering to the Shah of Iran (Moghadas & PishnamāzZādeh, 1997, 74).

In the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, the subject of camel wrestling was one of the topics that attracted



Fig. 3. Southern Ural region, Russia. Source: Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, Ufa Scientific Centre, RAS.

the attention of Iranian and Mongol painters. Frequent paintings and drawings of camel wrestling from this period can be traced in miniatures from the album of Golestan. One of the drawings we are looking at in this article is signed by Kamal al-din Behzad (see Fig. 1).

As you can see in the painting, in the upper right corner of this picture, there is an inscription that contains the Quranic verse “Do they not see how camels were created?” and it is the signature of Kamal al-din Behzad. The inscription indicates that Behzad painted it when he was over seventy years old and had gained a wealth of experience. Also, Behzad’s name is accompanied by a humble phrase “Shekasteqalam”, characteristic of authentic signatures of Persian painters, and the signature ends with a request for forgiveness from God.

The picture also shows two one-humped camels in dark and light colors, which seem to be calmly fighting. The two camel keepers are restraining the camels with a string in their hands, on both sides of the drawing. On the top right, there is a fox and a bird next to a dry tree. Two ravens and a bird’s nest containing several eggs are also depicted on a fallen tree near the old man. Another design of the camel wrestling, which was made before Behzad’s painting, is in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul, which is also larger than the painting attributed to Behzad (23.7 \* 33.3, vs. 16.5 \* 26 cm) (Fig. 4).

In this version, two camels are engaged in a fierce battle with each other, while their restraints try to separate them with ropes attached to their mouthpieces. In addition to the camels and camel keepers, there is a figure with a spindle in his hands with dark skin on the left, and to the right is a man leaning on a stick, which has been removed from similar versions of this painting. These two figures do not pay any attention to what is happening in the drawing and instead look at someone or something outside of it (Adamova, 2004, 3). There is another scene of a camel battle in the Topkapi Museum,



Fig. 4. Camel wrestling, Second Half of the 15th Century.  
Source: Istanbul, Topkapi House Library, H2153, fol.82b.

which shows a symmetrical form of a battle between two Dromedary camels that is closer to a miniature attributed to Behzad. The bodies of the two camels are shown symmetrically and do not bite each other (ibid., 4) (Fig. 5). The high similarity of the camels in this picture with Behzad’s work also strengthens the possibility of seeing similar examples by him. In addition to the examples mentioned, there are other examples of camel wrestling that are attributed to the school of Isfahan or the Mongols. In some of these paintings, shortening and shading are seen, and in some cases, human figures are not seen. In addition to the subject of camel wrestling, other paintings have been found that deal with the subject of camels. One of these paintings is a painting of camels and rides by Molānā Valy Āllāh in which a camel is shown with its child and a rider is standing next to them. A man is seen in the background working with his spindle who does not pay attention to the scene. The figures with personality and realism are well felt in this painting (Fig. 6). Another example is a work attributed to Behzad with an inscription (Fig. 7). Such images can show that camels have long been considered by artists in various fields in prehistoric times. and different and varied topics related to them have been drawn with different performance techniques. In many paintings, there are similar elements (such as the man with the spindle) that can either indicate the presence



Fig. 5. The battle of camels, Miniature, Second Half of the 15th Century. Source: Istanbul, Topkapi Library, H2153, fol, 46a.



Fig. 6. Camels and keeper, Molānā Valy Āllāh, Timurid period, ink on paper, Mid-15th century, Herat. Source: Pakbaz, 2006.

of this event in the real scenes of these competitions or show the artists imitating a single example.

### Realism in “The battle of camels” painting

In this section, we try to achieve a new reading of the whole work by separating the image of “the battle of camels” into its components. This painting, unlike many of the camel wrestling that shows a violent struggle between two camels, depicts it calmly and bears Behzad’s signature. Since according to the introduction of Dust Mohammad in Bahrām Mirzā’s album, Behzad died in 1535, and this painting is dated around 1525, there is no reason the painting was not depicted by Behzad. But on the other hand, people like Ivan Stchoukine have decisively rejected

it as apocryphal and identified the painting as a work of the Tabriz school of the 1550s. (Adamov, 2017, 2). Therefore, there are still differences of opinion as to whether this painting is essentially Behzad’s work or not, and Behzad’s signature may have been added to this work later. However, considering the existence of examples of camel fight paintings by other painters such as Ā’bd al-Šamad or Nanha in the Mongol school, who have mentioned in their work that this painting was copied from Kamal al-din Behzad, We are sure that work has been painted in this way by Behzad (Figs. 8 & 9). The painting has shown this conflict in a decorative way, as it has always shown an ideal and calm world in Iranian painting. As can be seen in many of Behzad’s works, even when a real event is shown, adherence to the principles of the Iranian painting is still maintained. Another notable point about it is that no evidence has been provided so far, indicating that this painting was made for a specific book and commissioned by a king. Therefore, it can be concluded that this issue was probably drawn with Behzad’s interest. In this regard, there are two possibilities; First, Behzad witnessed the ceremony in which this event was held, which is possible according to Behzad’s place of residence in Herat, and the prevalence of camel fighting in that area. Another possibility is that Behzad saw a painting similar to this painting and was inspired by it.

As can be seen in the painting attributed to Behzad, we are faced with a space that is located in a frame. In this golden box, pictures of flowers and leaves are drawn. Making and polishing the border of an image or text frame with decorations such as flowers and birds, which is also called “Tash’ir<sup>7</sup>”, has a long history in Iranian painting and manuscripts. Composition and movement in Tash’ir are often such that they cause movement in the eye and direct it towards the central image. In addition, this decorative shapes in the margins create a kind of contrast with the space in the painting, which makes the work more





Fig. 7. Persian in black nasta'liq script; Fettered camel and the keeper, inscriptions; signed by Sultan Muhammad Khandan and Baba Muzahhab, Ascribed to Kamal al-din Behzad, Safavid period, late 15th century. Source: Afghanistan, Herat, collection: Freer Gallery of Art, F1937.22.



Fig. 8. The Battle of the Camels, Nanha, 1608, India, Mongolian School. Source: Golestan Library, Golestan moraqa'.



Fig. 9. Two Fighting Camels Ābd al-Šamad or Nanha, Date 1585, Hashem Khosravani collection. Source: Adamova, 2004.

beautiful. Therefore, the frame or margin of the work, especially in the case of drawings separate from the book, can have an aesthetic aspect and can be used in various forms, regardless of any philosophical concept. In addition, Tash'ir was usually considered a sign of the artist's skill and mastery due to the difficulty of painting with gold and silver, as well as the improvisation of the designs (Naderloo, 2007, 34).

The central part of the work includes autumn or winter scenes. Dry trees, fallen leaves, an atmosphere whose predominant color is orange and ochre are all proof of this claim. As mentioned earlier, camel fights always take place during the mating seasons which are autumn and winter. The scene of the game is the ground next to the ramp, that is, exactly as it was supposed to be in reality (Fig. 10). Here, sheik or an old man is standing on a hill, watching and thinking about the event that is going on in front of his eyes, and at the same time, he is spinning with a spindle in his hand. The spinning scene by one person has been seen in many Iranian paintings. The gender of these people was both female and male. Sometimes a camel or a sheep is seen next to the spinner, and through this one can get the yarn that is being woven. For example, in the painting Desert woman tent at the foot of the mountain<sup>8</sup> attributed to Mir Seyyed Ali, a woman is seen spinning next to nomadic tents with a middle-aged face (Fig. 11). In many pictures, it can be seen that the spinner is talking to another person while spinning. This shows the repetition of the spinning process and states that spinning does not require much precision and concentration. The abundance of the Iranian paintings, including various "spinning" images between the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, has well shown that the use of spinning by people of different ages and genders, along with daily work was common in this period. Also, Iranian painters, by depicting different components of spindles and spinning cycles among nomads, have pointed out its





Fig. 10. Watching the game of camel wrestling by people on a hill, Turkish coastal city of Izmir Source: January 18, 2015, Photo by Osman Orsal, avax.news.



Fig. 11. Desert woman tent at the foot of the mountain, Layla and Majnun (c. 1540), Part of a painting attributed to Mir Seyyed Ali from Khamseh Nezami, British Museum. Source: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

importance for providing different fibers. They have illustrated their technical differences and different stages of spinning yarn, and they have shown it in great detail in paintings. This is one of the miracles of the Iranian painting in drawing the real world in the form of common painting frameworks of that time. In these works, even hand movements and different spinning methods are displayed. Various examples of spinning in paintings such as Majnun with chains around his neck in Lily's tent<sup>9</sup> and Desert woman tent at the foot of the mountain by Mir Sayyed Ali, The appearance of the devil on a wicked man<sup>10</sup>, Mashhad school Qais enters Lily's tent<sup>11</sup> of the Qazvin school by Muzaffar Ali, Majnoon love<sup>12</sup> of the Herat school

by Mohammadi Mosavar, and many other paintings are evidence of this claim (Mojabi & Fanaei, 2010, 147).

Nomadic people have been self-sufficient and independent in various professions. In the painting of Behzad, the old man with a spindle can be an example of people in this community who sometimes bring their handicrafts and watch group games and events such as camel wrestling. Nowadays, this is very common on many occasions; for instance, women are knitting while watching TV series or while they are waiting in the doctor's office for their turn. Hence, this scene can be a symbol of the nomads' useful use of time.

In the center of this painting, two camels are depicted in two colors, light and dark, of the one hump type, which was more popular in Iran at that time, and they are facing each other symmetrically<sup>13</sup>. Two camel keepers, as we see in reality, are restraining camels; Two people with two different clothes and faces that are completely in line with Behzad's realism can also be seen, one holding a string and the other holding a wooden stick. According to the competition routine, camels have ornaments that here are almost the same, except for their color (Fig. 12).

The difference in the color of the camels can be due to the better visual differentiation that makes them recognizable and prevents the color uniformity of the effect. Some birds in the image are sitting and some others are seen to be flying, which allows the eye to rotate and reduces stagnation. The presence of eggs and the movement of birds, in addition to creating visual appeal, is a factor in inducing the fact that life is still going on due to the time of the work, which is autumn. Even the presence of another animal such as a fox, which is watching the competition from a distance, can be a reason for it. The fox is one of the native animals of Afghanistan and Iran, and species of it such as the Blanford's fox and the Rüppell's fox live in the region of Afghanistan. The fox that Behzad has drawn in the picture is Blanford's fox.



Fig. 12. Camel and its decorations in camel wrestling event.  
Source: Photo by Osman Orsal, avax.news.

The Blanford's fox is an animal that lives in the mountain pastures of Afghanistan, Iran, and some other parts of the Middle East. It is slightly smaller than a normal fox and has two distinct black stripes on the face that extended outward from the eyes. The body hair is thick and its tail is very long and quite hairy. This fox has large ears to dissipate heat. Its tail is about the size of its body and its skin color is light tan. In addition, the fox's body is white and has black spots on the tip of its tail. According to the mentioned characteristics about the Blanford's fox and comparing it with Behzad's painting, such as the white color under the body and the black lines around the eyes, it seems that Behzad, in addition to the symbolic concepts, once again, shows signs of his realism and sensitive vision. By mentioning the details in Behzad's painting and matching them with reality, it seems that he depicted an event that he himself observed in the reality, despite observing various images of camels. The same can be seen in the works of other nations, such as India. For example, the elephant and the elephant fight, which are native games of those areas, are depicted by Indian artists in paintings, and this shows the artists' attention to the events around them at that time (Fig. 13).

Now, we explore the inscription above the painting which has Behzad's signature and reads as follows: "Do they not see how camels were created?" According to the information available about Behzad's beliefs,



Fig. 13. Battle of the Elephants, 1650, Mongol school, Provenance: 1785, gift from Colonel Gentile to BNF. Source: <http://editions.bnf.fr/miniatures-peintures-indiennes-i-inde-du-nord>

he was a member of the Naqshbandiyya sect. It is one of the beliefs of this Sufi sect that they do not differentiate between worldly and spiritual matters, that is, they believe that one should remember God in any case and reflect on his creations. Therefore, Behzad may also have reflected on God's creation by seeing this event and drawing it in the form of a painting. This is because the camel is a creature that is sacred both in the scriptures and in terms of material values such as textiles, meat, and even in the creation of various hobbies. In addition to Behzad's painting, as we have seen before, camels have been mentioned in various forms in the works of many Iranian and non-Iranian artists and this has made the camel one of the most important motifs in our art of illustration.

## Conclusion

This article shows that Kamal al-din Behzad was able to depict this event in his way in the form of the principles of the Iranian painting through a careful look at his surroundings. This was achieved by comparing the images of camel wrestling events in recent years in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey with other images available from this event from prehistoric times to the nineteenth century. He was able to make references to this competition in the real world with the details he placed in his work. Elements such as:

- Using yellow, gold, and ochre colors to show the

camel fighting season.

- a scene with real features of camel fight, a hill next to a large plot of land that accommodates spectators. the native fox of Afghanistan.
- people with real costumes and different faces that show a kind of characterization, and do not show the puppetry of the previous figures.
- spindle with spinning which is a common practice among nomads.
- The text of the inscription which shows the painter's attention to the useful creations of God.

These details all show Behzad's sharpness in showing the real world in the form of an imaginary space of the Iranian painting. Behzad was able to connect the world of poetry, literature, and mysticism to the real world, with his approach to realism. Also, the analysis of this image showed that considering the subtleties that Behzad used in showing the real world, it is possible that he witnessed such an event closely and thought about it. Also, the similarities between Behzad's work and some paintings that had dealt with this event before him, showed that he had seen previous pictures of this event. In addition, the analysis of camel wrestling paintings from a new perspective and taking into account historical and geographical conditions prove the hypothesis that the Iranian painting is not just images specific to the text of books, and separately, has high artistic values that can be studied in many historical and social fields. Investigating Iranian-Islamic art only from a mystical and religious point of view will only ignore other meanings, and beauties but ultimately limit further exploration and analysis of such artworks. In this article, following the various images of camel fights throughout history reminds us how different artists in each era have dealt with a particular event and portrayed it from their point of view, as well as how these artists have influenced each other in presenting personal art.

## Endnotes

1. One of the most important sects of Iranian Sufism, which is Sunni and

was the most influential sect in the time of the Timurids and respected by the Timurid sultans, is the Naqshbandiyya sect. The Naqshbandiyya sect became known by this name due to its attribution to Bahā'al-dīn Muhammad Naqshbandiyya and is itself a descendant of the Khajagan dynasty.

2. Occult, the unseen world that is a part of the universe that cannot be seen by the five senses and is opposed to the intuitive world which is perceived by the five senses.
3. Purgatory, (in Roman Catholic doctrine) a place or state of suffering inhabited by the souls of sinners who are expiating their sins before going to heaven.
4. The world is the body and objects and material things, which are also called the realm of property and immortality
5. Qaf Mountain or Kuh-e Qāf is a legendary mountain in the popular mythology of the Middle East.
6. The Great Mongol Shāhnāme, also known as the Demutte Shāhnāme or Great Ilkhanid Shāhnāme, is an illustrated manuscript of the Shāhnāme, the national epic of Greater Iran. It is the oldest surviving illustrated manuscript of the Shāhnāme, probably dating to the 1330s, and in its original form, which has not been recorded, was probably planned to consist of about 280 folios with 190 illustrations, bound in two volumes, although it is thought it was never completed.
7. In Tash'ir, the margins of the pages are decorated with motifs of animals, chickens, flowers and plants. Gold color is often used in Tash'ir.
8. Kheyme-ye zani biābāngard dar kuh payeh, Mir seyed Ali, Khamse Tahmasbi, Tabriz school, 27.8\*19.3cm, 1542-1539, Harvard Art Museums.
9. Majnun bā zanjir dar gardan, Mir seyed Ali, Khamse Tahmasbi, Tabriz school, 32\*18.2 cm, 1542-1539, British Museum.
10. Padidār shodane eblis bar mard-e bad kār, Unknknown artist, Mashhad school, Haft orang- e Jāmi, 29\*19cm, Freer art gallery.
11. Vorud-e Qeys be kheyme gāh-e Leyli, Muzaffar Ali, Qazvin or Mashhad school, 31.5\*21cm, Freer art gallery.
12. Eshghe Majnun, Mohamady Mosavar, Selselato al-zahb Jami, Herat school, 12\*22.2 cm, Sustil Private Collection.
13. Studies in Iran have shown that over time, due to the greater adaptation of one-humped camels to the climatic conditions of the country, this breed was brought to Iran from Arab countries and replaced the two-humped camels (Hedayat Ayuriq & Maghsoudi, 2014, 36).

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