

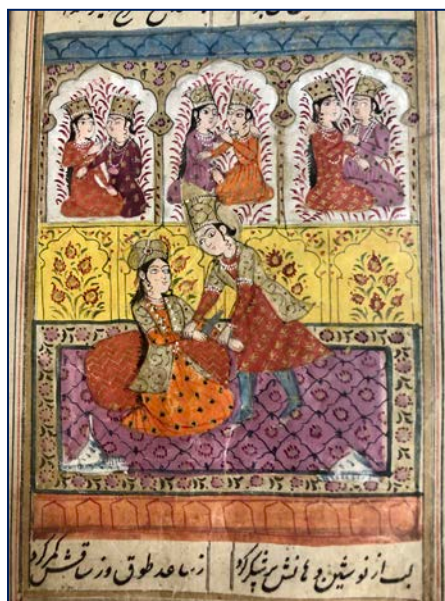
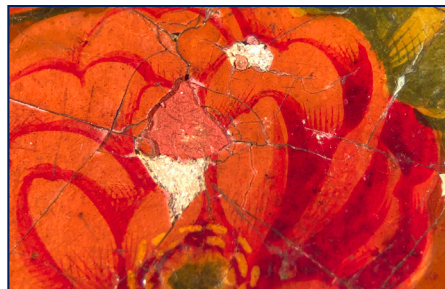


Art Conservation *and cultural sensitivity in treatment*

*The story of Joseph, who had 11 brothers, a coat of many colors, and was sold into slavery in Egypt, only to become the Pharaoh's most important advisor, is found in the Book of Genesis in the Christian Bible. But variations on this story are also part of many cultures in the Middle East, and a particularly popular version was told as a poem by the famed Persian poet Nūr ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī, or Jāmī, (died 1492). Titled *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā*, it tells the love story of Joseph (Yūsuf) and the wife (Zulaykhā) of the man who enslaved him.*

A late 18th-century, richly illustrated, 436-page copy of this poem, bound in lacquer covers that likely were taken later from another book to enhance the aesthetic appeal of this manuscript, is now part of the Free Library of Philadelphia's extensive collection of Islamic manuscripts. The volume became a treatment project this year for Rachel Bissonnette, a second-year Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow majoring in Library and Archives Conservation Education (LACE). Her special interest in Islamic art and culture has, she said, made this project a special treat, granting her the opportunity to learn more about Islamic manuscripts. Her plan is to stabilize the volume so that it can be safely handled and digitized.

Rachel began her treatment by cleaning and consolidating the flaking lacquer covers, with the intent of doing so in a culturally sensitive way. This led her to explore adhesives new to her that are not made from porcine products (derived from pigs, which is prohibited by Islamic law). After careful testing, she decided on an adhesive made from the bladder of a sturgeon, which she painstakingly applied beneath the individual flakes of lacquer while working under a microscope. She plans to apply a synthetic varnish to the entire cover once the consolidation is complete, and then inpaint areas of loss. Rachel will next turn to the textblock and mend the tears she has found using an appropriate adhesive and thin East Asian paper, which she will color to match the paper. The illustrations, made using a thickly applied type of watercolor, will require careful handling because they are water soluble and also contain toxic elements. Finally, she will make a custom housing to replace the slipcover that previously held the volume. This, along with appropriate environmental control of moisture, temperature, and light, will better protect the manuscript in the years to come.



ARTC Spotlight—March 2021

The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top and inset: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Rachel Bissonnette working at the microscope and using two brushes to deliver consolidant and solvent to a lifting lacquer flake. Left, above: Micrograph showing cracks and losses in the lacquer of the back cover before treatment. Left: Watercolor illustration in a late 18th-century copy of a poem by the famed Persian poet Nūr ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī, or Jāmī, (died 1492), showing the romance of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā. Images: A. Rodriguez and R. Bissonnette.