

ASPECTS OF ART LECTURE

PERSIAN PAINTING AND THE NATIONAL EPIC

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FOR every thousand people in this country who have heard of the *Iliad* of Homer there is probably only one who has heard of the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī. Yet no work in the whole of the world's literature exists in so many finely written, illuminated, and illustrated manuscript copies as the Persian national epic, the *Shāhnāma* or Book of Kings. These copies were produced at every period throughout the history of Persian painting, from the early fourteenth century right down to the 1860s and later, and their illustrations provide examples of every style which requires consideration in the study of that history. Not only that, but they also provide specimens of painting varying from the elaborate and meticulous pictures executed under the patronage of wealthy ruling princes down to comparatively crude provincial work commissioned by minor rulers in outlying parts, or else destined for trade or export to Turkey, India, and Central Asia.

It is a great advantage in the study of Persian painting to have this diverse yet homogeneous mass of material. Some of the favourite episodes in the poem are illustrated in almost every copy, and it is useful and instructive to be able to set side-by-side miniature paintings of, say, the combat of Rustam and the White Demon executed at Shiraz in 1397 (fig. 9) and in the same city in 1862, more than four and a half centuries later, or, alternatively, two contemporary representations of the fire ordeal of Prince Siyāwush, one from the sophisticated school of Herat and the other from the remote Caspian province of Mazandaran, both dating from the 1440s. Such comparisons enable us not only to appreciate the different attitudes to the epic in different periods and places, but to form a coherent idea of the main historical trends and local idiosyncrasies of Persian painting as a whole. But before proceeding to a consideration of this material, let us glance at the poem itself.

The *Shāhnāma*¹ was composed in some 50,000 or 60,000 couplets

¹ For the *Shāhnāma* in general, see Th. Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, (in

by the poet Firdawsī between about 975 and 1010, using earlier epic fragments and oral tradition. The poem has been known, quoted, and revered in Persia almost as much as King James's Bible in this country, and has inspired both eastern and western scholars with equal enthusiasm. Typical of the latter was Professor E. B. Cowell, one of our most eminent orientalisists of the nineteenth century, who wrote:

Augustus said that he found Rome of brick and left it marble; and Firdawsī found his country almost without a literature, and has left her a poem that all succeeding poets could only imitate and never surpass, and which, indeed, can rival them all even in their peculiar styles, and perhaps stands as alone in Asia as Homer's epics in Europe. His versification is exquisitely melodious, and never interrupted by harsh forms of construction; and the poem runs on from beginning to end, like a river, in an unbroken current of harmony.¹

On the other hand the late Professor E. G. Browne of Cambridge, perhaps the greatest Persian scholar this country has produced, was not quite so enthusiastic; he delivers himself as follows:

In their high estimate of the literary value of this gigantic poem Eastern and Western critics are almost unanimous, and I therefore feel great diffidence in confessing that I have never been able entirely to share this enthusiasm. The *Shāhnāma* cannot, in my opinion, . . . compare for beauty, feeling, and grace with the work of the best didactic, romantic, and lyric poetry of the Persians. It is, of course, almost impossible to argue about matters of taste, especially in literature; and my failure to appreciate the *Shāhnāma* very likely arises partly from a constitutional disability to appreciate epic poetry in general. . . . Yet, allowing for this, I cannot help feeling that the *Shāhnāma* has certain definite and positive defects. Its inordinate length is, of course, necessitated by the scope of its subject, which is nothing less than the legendary history of Persia from the beginning of time until the Arab conquest in the seventh century of our era; and the monotony of its metre it shares with most, if not all, other epics. But the similes employed are also, as it seems to me, unnecessarily monotonous . . . The *Shāhnāma* . . . defies satisfactory translation, for the sonorous majesty of the original [language] . . . is lost, and the nakedness of the underlying ideas stands revealed.²

Grundriss der iranischen Philologie, Strassburg 1896) translated by L. Bogdanov in *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*, No. 6 (Bombay, 1926); and E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (London and Cambridge, 1908–24, vol. i, pp. 110–23, 137–50, and vol. ii, pp. 129–46. The text varies considerably in length in different copies.

¹ In *Oxford Essays* (1855), quoted in Sir Percy Sykes, *History of Persia*, 2nd edn. (London, 1921), vol. ii, p. 62.

² Browne, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 142. The only complete translation of the *Shāhnāma* in English is A. G. and E. Warner, *The Shāhnāma of Firdausi* (9 vols.,

There is, indeed, much to be said on both sides, but of the enormous popularity and high reputation of the *Shāhnāma* in the country of its origin there can be no doubt.

Till comparatively recent times the narrative of the *Shāhnāma* was unquestioningly accepted by all Persians as a historical and factual account of their early history. It begins with the first king, whose subjects were dressed in the skins of beasts, and proceeds to a succession of subsequent kings under whose guidance the arts of civilization were acquired and cultivated, and the aggression of the neighbouring demons was curbed (fig. 25). A grim interlude is provided by the reign of the Arabian usurper *Zahhāk*, whose shoulders had been kissed by Satan, causing snakes to grow from them, which had to be fed daily on human brains. The tyrant was eventually dislodged and disposed of by a national revival, and the dynasty thus founded, and the one that followed it, were largely occupied with a series of wars against Turan, the northern neighbour.

The central figure in this long episode is Rustam, the national hero, of gigantic size and strength (figs. 1, 11, 15, 19, 24).¹ His career is a long succession of fights with demons (figs. 9, 13, 21), dragons (figs. 8, 22), and other monsters, and with various Turanian champions (figs. 12, 20), and he always arrives, like the United States Seventh Cavalry, in the nick of time to save his countrymen from disaster. His tragic killing of his son Suhrāb is well known from Matthew Arnold's poem. His death was finally brought about by the treachery of a younger half-brother, the hero being at that time (if we accept Firdawsī's chronology) well over six hundred years old.

After the death of Rustam a historical element becomes faintly discernible in the *Shāhnāma*. The kings Bahman, Dārāb, and Dārā have their historical counterparts in the Achaemenids Artaxerxes I ('Longimanus'), Darius II ('Nothus'), and Darius III ('Codomanus'); Artaxerxes II and III are passed over, or rather replaced by a queen, Humāy.

This brings us to Alexander the Great—Iskandar to the Persians (fig. 2). National pride was saved by making him the eldest son of Dārāb (Darius II) by the daughter of Philip of Macedon, or Failakūs as he appears in the epic. The Macedonian princess was sent home after only a few days of marriage, as she

London, 1905–25); abridged versions or selections are James Atkinson, *The Shāh Nāmeḥ* ('The Chandos Classics' London, 1886) (original edn., Oriental Translation Fund, 1832), and Reuben Levy, *The Epic of the Kings* (UNESCO Persian Heritage Series: London, 1967).

¹ See Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–20, 83–8.

suffered from a condition for which Listerine and Colgate's toothpaste are the approved modern specifics. So Alexander was born in Macedon, and when he invaded Persia it was as the rightful heir to the throne, claiming his heritage from his younger half-brother Dārā, or Darius III. The latter was murdered after his defeat, but his dying moments were comforted by Alexander, who then ascended the throne. His subsequent travels and adventures are of the most fantastic kind, derived from the narrative of Pseudo-Callisthenes (fig. 26); amongst other things, he visits the Land of Darkness and views the Well of Life and the Talking Tree.¹

The Parthians get very short shrift from Firdawsī, who writes them off as mere 'Kings of the Tribes' and dismisses their domination of five centuries in less than a hundred lines, but the Sasanians receive full and broadly historical treatment. In particular Bahrām Gūr, Varanes V to the Romans and 'that great hunter' of Omar Khayyām (figs. 3, 10, 14, 18), and Khusraw Parwīz, or Chosroes II, his wars with the usurper Bahrām Chūbīna, and his love of the Armenian princess Shīrīn, occupy very long passages. The epic closes with the fall of the Sasanian dynasty before the Arab attack, and the miserable death of Yazdagird III, the last of his line, at the hands of a treacherous miller with whom he had sought shelter in his flight. This summary outline of the subject-matter of the *Shāhnāma* will, I hope, provide a broad framework into which can be fitted the subjects of the paintings we shall be considering.

Two centuries elapse between the completion of the epic and the earliest surviving manuscript copy,² and another century before we find one illustrated with miniatures. This brings us well into the period of Mongol rule in Persia, and we may be rather horrified to find that the earliest surviving paintings of the national hero Rustam depict him in Mongol dress and with features of unmistakably Mongol type. The earliest known to me are not in a *Shāhnāma*, but in the manuscript of Rashīd al-Dīn's 'Universal History', dated to 1306, in the Library of Edinburgh University (fig. 1).³

Not long after this (though the exact date is still a matter of controversy) comes the so-called Demotte manuscript of the

¹ See Warner and Warner, *op. cit.*, vol. vi; also Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Alexander Book in Ethiopia* (London, 1933).

² Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS CI.III.24 (G.F.3), dated 614/1217.

³ MS Arab 20. See D. Talbot Rice, *The Illustrations to the World History of Rashīd al-Dīn* (Edinburgh, 1976), pls. 8, 19.

Shāhnāma (fig. 2).¹ This takes its name from the dealer through whose agency, or on whose behalf, it was spirited out of the Persian royal library about the beginning of the present century. When the complete volume was turned down by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Demotte cut it up and found no difficulty in disposing of the miniatures separately to collectors and museums on both sides of the Atlantic. Some authorities have held that this monumental set of fifty-eight paintings, despite damage and, in some cases, nineteenth-century repainting, constitutes the high point of Persian book-illustration. That must remain a matter of opinion; we all have our individual preferences, and are justified in maintaining them. But considered as illustrations of the Persian national epic, despite their undeniable aesthetic impact and historical importance, they are seriously handicapped by their conspicuously Mongol, non-Iranian, character. Dūst Muḥammad, a court painter of the mid sixteenth century and our most trustworthy literary source, attributes the formation of the true Persian style of painting to Aḥmad Mūsā, working during the reign of the Īl-Khān Abū Saʿīd (1317–36); his best pupil was Shams al-Dīn, and there is good reason to believe that the Demotte *Shāhnāma* miniatures were the products of a group of painters of this school.²

Next to be considered is a group of *Shāhnāma* manuscripts, all more or less dismembered, and of much smaller size than the Demotte manuscript but of much the same date, and hence often referred to as the 'Small *Shāhnāmas*'.³ They are illustrated with a large number of small miniatures in which the figures wear Mongol armour, clothes, and crowns. They have long proved puzzling to scholars, and a number of conflicting suggestions have been made as to their place of origin—Tabriz, Shiraz, Isfahan—the latest, and perhaps the least likely of which, is Baghdad.⁴ Though probably of much the same date as the Demotte miniatures, they form a complete contrast: where the latter are

¹ There is a vast literature on the Demotte *Shāhnāma*; the most important references will be found in B. W. Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting from Collections in the British Isles* (Victoria and Albert Museum: London, 1967), pp. 37f.

² The whole question is fully and admirably dealt with by Eric Schroeder, 'Aḥmad Mūsā and Shams al-Dīn', *Ars Islamica* vi (1939), 113–142.

³ For a good account of the 'Small *Shāhnāmas*' see E. Grube, *Muslim Miniature Paintings* (Venice, 1962), pp. 21–35 (though he places them at Shiraz).

⁴ Marianna Shreve Simpson, *The Illustration of an Epic: the Earliest Shāhnāma Manuscripts* (New York and London 1979), ch. iv. But Miss Simpson has done a splendid work in collecting, arranging, and listing all the scattered miniatures of this interesting group.

monumental and majestic, the former are small and fussy; the drawing of the latter is firm and assured, that of the former is spindly and sometimes inept; in the latter the colour-scheme is rich and variable, but in the former it is rather nondescript, with a somewhat excessive use of gold. Leaving out of account the Mongol clothes and faces, the Demotte miniatures are clearly of Persian origin, but those in the 'Small *Shāhnāmas*' have an unmistakably alien character. This comes out particularly in the weak drawing, the cluttered surfaces almost amounting to a *horror vacui*, and in certain recurring motifs, such as that of a vase of flowers, which are not found in authenticated Persian painting of the same period. But there is one of these miniatures that surely gives the game away. The incident of the Sasanian king Bahrām Gūr winning the crown by ordeal from between two raging lions is a very popular one in Persian painting, and appears in manuscripts of all periods. Persian painters invariably follow the poet's account: Bahrām clubs the two lions and seizes the crown from between them.¹ But what do we find in the 'Small *Shāhnāma*' version? Not lions, but *tigers* (fig. 3). To my mind this is sufficient to warrant the attribution of the whole group to India. The tiger—symbol of India—only occurs very rarely in Persia, and then only in the remote forests of the Caspian coast. I know of only one instance, in the sixteenth century, of the occurrence of a tiger in a Persian painting except where it is specifically demanded by the text, as in the *Kalīla wa Dimna*, or Fables of Bidpai (a work of Indian origin), and Qazwīnī's 'Marvels of Creation'. In this 'Small *Shāhnāma*' miniature, on the other hand, tigers are introduced *despite* the specification of lions in the text.² I cannot believe that any Persian artist would have illustrated the incident in this way.

This naturally leads us to a necessary, but necessarily brief, glance at the more general problem of miniature painting in India before the Mughals.³ As a sequel, then, to the 'Small *Shāhnāmas*' we

¹ See Warner and Warner, *op. cit.*, vol. vi, p. 410.

² Kansas City (Mo.), William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, No. 46-41. R. Hillenbrand, *Imperial Images in Persian Painting* (Scottish Arts Council: Edinburgh, 1977), No. 208, where it is placed at Tabriz. Since the lecture was given, additional support for an Indian origin for this miniature has been kindly brought to my notice. It hinges on the use of the word *shūr*. In Persia this word invariably means 'lion', but in India, where lions were rare, it was used for 'tiger' (we may recall the terrible tiger Sher Khan in Kipling's *Jungle Book*). Thus *shūr* in Firdawsī's text would convey 'lion' to a Persian painter, but 'tiger' to an Indian.

³ The pioneer work on this subject is I. Fraad and R. Ettinghausen,

find a body of manuscripts and detached miniatures, mostly *Shāhnāma* illustrations dating from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, which have long puzzled scholars because, like the 'Small *Shāhnāmas*', they do not fit in satisfactorily with any of the known styles of Persian painting of their time. They have been hopefully dubbed 'provincial', and a certain affinity with the Shiraz style has been occasionally noted; the problem they present is by no means solved as yet, but the grounds for placing them in western India seem fairly strong. Several distinct styles are noticeable among them (fig. 4).

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were, of course, several Muslim sultanates in western India where Persian was the language of court and culture. We may therefore assume, firstly, that there was at these courts a demand for fine copies of the Persian classics, and, secondly, that as in Persia itself a number of these copies, or parts of them, have survived. The demand was partially met, it may be suggested, by the import of Persian manuscripts produced at Shiraz (and perhaps elsewhere) on a commercial scale, so that when native artists undertook the illustration of home-produced manuscripts it would inevitably be the Shiraz style of the time that would provide their models. This hypothesis is in accordance with the surviving material, and that from the Timurid period shares certain general characteristics with the 'Small *Shāhnāmas*' of the previous century, such as the sometimes weak and spindly drawing, the unorthodox colouring, and the crowded and cluttered compositions. Unfortunately none of these manuscripts, which we have tentatively placed in western India, contains a colophon that informs us of the place of completion.

Returning now to Persia in the fourteenth century, we find two groups of *Shāhnāma* manuscripts produced in Shiraz. The first was under the Injū rulers between about 1330 and 1353, and the miniatures are easily identifiable. The style is primitive and crude, but vigorous, with the figures and accessories usually deployed in a single line against backgrounds of plain red or yellow, a convention which has led some authorities to see in them a survival or recrudescence of the pre-Islamic tradition of mural painting.

'Sultanate Painting in Persian Style' in *Chhavi*, Golden Jubilee Volume (Benares, 1969), pp. 48-66. See also Robinson op. cit. (1967), Nos. 110-13, and id., *Persian Paintings in the John Rylands Library* (London, 1980), pp. 95f. Karin Adahl, *A Khamsa of Nizāmī of 1439* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Uppsala, 1981), comprises a full discussion and analysis of an important manuscript of this group, but concludes by assigning it to Shiraz.

The format is shallow and wide, the text being written in six columns. The clothes, armour, and accessories are naturally of Mongol type, but the human features are Aryan, as befits the capital of Fars, the Persian heartland. We know of no immediate predecessors of this highly individual style, and when the Injū were overthrown by the Muzaffarids in 1353 it vanished without trace.¹

Two *Shāhnāma* manuscripts have survived from the Muzaffarid dynasty (1353–93).² In their illustrations, as well as in those of one or two contemporary manuscripts of different texts, we find a style as easily recognizable as that of the Injū, but in every other respect diametrically different from it (fig. 7). Injū miniatures, as we have seen, are normally of fairly shallow horizontal format; under the Muzaffarids, the compositions expand upwards. Injū figures are squat and thickset; Muzaffarid ones are tall and slim. The primitive Injū arrangement of figures standing more or less on the base-line gives place under the Muzaffarids to the 'high horizon' convention, whereby the figures are disposed in several planes. In fact in the Muzaffarid style we can clearly see the beginnings of the classic Persian miniature of the three following centuries.

However, it is, on the face of it, unlikely that this radical change, by which Persian painting was set on its true course, originated under the Muzaffarids, who were, after all, a minor dynasty in a provincial city. The capital city of Persian painting at this time was unquestionably Baghdad under the Jalayrids, as attested by Dūst Muḥammad, but we have unfortunately no firmly documented material from there till the 1380s. On the other hand, mounted in the albums of the Topkapı Library at Istanbul is a whole series of large and impressive paintings, many of them illustrating the national epic, which must have been cut from Jalayrid manuscripts, and probably date from the third or early fourth quarter of the fourteenth century.³ In these we can see how

¹ See I. Stchoukine, *La Peinture iranienne* (Bruges, 1936) pp. 93f. Stchoukine was the first to identify and place this style correctly. See also Robinson op. cit. (1967), p. 84 and the references there given.

² They are Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Library H. 1511, dated 772/1370, and Cairo, Bibliothèque Égyptienne, dated 796/1393. See for the former M. Aga-Oglu, 'Preliminary Notes on some Persian illustrated Manuscripts in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi', *Ars Islamica* i (1934), 191; and for the latter L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson, and B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London, 1933), No. 32.

³ Examples are reproduced in Basil Gray, *Persian Painting* (Skira: Lausanne, 1961), pp. 41–3; M. S. İpşiroğlu, *Das Bild im Islam* (Vienna, 1971), pls. 45–7, 52–4; and id., *Masterpieces from the Topkapı Museum* (London, 1980) pl. 16–20.

classical Persian painting grew out of the majestic but still not fully developed style of the Demotte *Shāhnāma*, and it must be from these, or from others like them, that the far less skilled and ambitious painters of the Muzaffarids derived their inspiration (fig. 5).

Muzaffarid Shiraz fell to Tīmūr in 1393, Shāh Manšūr, the last of his line, being killed in a gallant but vain attempt to reach and engage the great conqueror himself. The earliest epic illustrations that can be classed as Timurid occur in a pair of volumes of epics, including the *Shāhnāma*, dated to 1397, and undoubtedly executed at Shiraz, as shown by the characteristic style of the illuminations.¹ Their miniatures follow on naturally from those of the Jalayrid school of Baghdad, where the celebrated British Library manuscript of Khwājū Kirmānī's poems, dated to 1396,² had recently been completed for the last Jalayrid prince Sultān Aḥmad, an enlightened patron and connoisseur. In these volumes of epics the brilliancy of colour and masterly drawing show an enormous advance on the rather provincial work executed under the Muzaffarids (fig. 9). They are indeed royal painting, and it seems reasonable to suggest that the patron for whom they were produced was Tīmūr's young grandson Iskandar Sultān, then in his early teens and nominal governor of Shiraz for his father 'Umar Shaykh.³ Iskandar became a brilliant patron of painting during his short and stormy career, but apparently never commissioned another copy of the *Shāhnāma*. Selected passages from it, however, occur in two manuscripts of miscellaneous content executed to his order. These are the famous *Miscellany* of 1410-11 in the British Library,⁴ and a fragment of twenty-nine folios from a large encyclopaedic volume of 1413, dated 'at Isfahan' and bound up in one of the albums in the Topkapı Library.⁵ The miniatures in the former are fully coloured, but in the latter simple line-drawings appear. The *Shāhnāma* illustrations in these two manuscripts are of particular interest and importance, as they include the earliest representations of Rostam the national hero in his full traditional panoply (figs. 11, 12).

¹ Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, MS 114, and British Library Or. 2780. These volumes formerly belonged to the Comte de Gobineau. See Robinson, *op. cit.* (1967), Nos. 9 and 10.

² Add. 18113.

³ For an excellent account of Iskandar Sultān and his career, see Eric Schroeder, *Persian Miniatures in the Fogg Museum of Art* (Cambridge (Mass.), 1942), pp. 57 ff.

⁴ British Library Add. 27261, f. 298b, reproduced in A. Upham Pope (ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art* (Oxford, 1939), vol. v, pl. 858B.

⁵ Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Library B. 411, ff. 138-66.

We have seen that in the earliest surviving *Shāhnāma* illustrations he appears as a typical Mongol warrior. In the work of the fourteenth-century Shiraz schools of the Injū and the Muzaffarids he wears a tiger-skin over his body-armour, but it is not till we come to these early fifteenth-century works of Iskandar Sulṭān's patronage that we find him with the addition of a leopard's mask set on his helmet. In subsequent Shiraz miniatures this convention is usually followed, and in the Safawid period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it becomes universal; but in paintings of the Timurid Herat school, to which we shall come in a moment, he almost invariably retains a helmet of normal appearance,¹ but still with the tiger-skin over his body-armour. Iskandar Sulṭān certainly took a great interest in book-production and painting, and it seems not impossible that the idea of the leopard's head on Rustam's helmet originated from him. We know from the contents of the Topkapı albums that European works of art were by no means unknown in Persia during the Mongol and Timurid periods, and there are, of course, many classical and Hellenistic monuments in neighbouring Asia Minor. Perhaps Iskandar was shown, or heard about, some representation of Rustam's Greek counterpart Heracles wearing the skin of the Nemean lion with its mask on his head, and felt that Rustam himself should be similarly distinguished? We shall never know, but such an idea would not be out of character in this brilliant but wayward young prince.

His unruly and irresponsible conduct finally so exasperated his uncle and overlord Shāh-Rukh that he was imprisoned and blinded—a particularly bitter punishment for such a lover of the visual arts—and we hear no more of him. But his cousin Bāysunghur Mīrzā, Shāh-Rukh's fifth son, was by now ready to succeed him as the foremost bibliophile and patron of painting in the Islamic world.² He was at this time (1415) appointed governor of Herat for his father. He seems to have had a special interest in the *Shāhnāma*, and authorized a complete recension of the text, together with a new preface which is included in most subsequent copies of the epic. This great task was completed in 1426, and the obvious sequel was to enshrine the revised text in a monumental

¹ The only exception known to me occurs in the Royal Asiatic Society *Shāhnāma* of Muḥammad Jūkī, f. 145b (Rustam and Ashkabūs); for a reproduction see B. W. Robinson, 'The *Shāhnāma* of Muḥammad Jūkī, RAS MS 239', in *The Royal Asiatic Society, its History and Treasures* (Leiden and London, 1979) pl. III. But there are several instances of Shiraz influence in the miniatures of this manuscript.

² For Bāysunghur Mīrzā see Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–6; Browne, *op. cit.*, vol. iii, pp. 385f., 395f.

volume in keeping with the literary and artistic pretensions of the young patron. The result was the magnificent copy still preserved (we may fervently hope) in the Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran.¹ This manuscript is dated to 1431, and contains twenty-one miniatures, the finest work of the academy of book-production established by Bāysunghur at Herat. Among his staff were no doubt some of the painters who had worked for Iskandar Sulṭān, and this superb set of miniatures combines the brilliant colours and meticulous execution associated with the patronage of that prince with the monumental quality of the Demotte *Shāhnāma* of the previous century. Though sometimes perhaps a trifle stiff and academic, the miniatures in Bāysunghur's *Shāhnāma* are uniformly impressive and almost breath-taking in their precision and brilliance of execution.

With this magnificent volume Bāysunghur seems to have established a tradition, followed by numerous subsequent ruling princes, whereby a copy of the *Shāhnāma* was commissioned, usually at or near the beginning of the reign, as a sort of status-symbol or advertisement of regal power. It was natural that on the preparation of such volumes the very best talent available was employed, and no expense was spared to make the result as rich and splendid as the patron's resources would allow. We find the practice even among minor provincial rulers, as in a *Shāhnāma* prepared in 1446 for an obscure Sayyid prince in the Caspian province of Mazandaran (fig. 6).²

Bāysunghur's brother Ibrahīm Sulṭān was made governor at Shiraz on his father's behalf from 1414, and, obviously inspired by his brother's example, commissioned a manuscript of the *Shāhnāma* as soon as he had received the text and preface of the new recension; this copy is now in the Bodleian Library.³ The painters at Ibrahīm's disposal in Shiraz were inferior to those

¹ Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *op. cit.*, No. 49. There are also coloured reproductions in Basil Gray, *Iran: Persian Miniatures in the Imperial Library*, (UNESCO: Greenwich (Conn.), 1956), and the whole manuscript has been published in facsimile as *The Shāhnāmah of Firdowsī: the Bāysonghorī Manuscript . . . in the Imperial Library, Tehran* (Tehran, 1971), but in both these publications the coloured reproductions leave much to be desired.

² See B. W. Robinson, 'The Dunimarle *Shāhnāma*: a Timurid Manuscript from Mazandaran' in *Aus der Welt der islamischen Kunst: Festschrift für Ernst Kühnel*, (Berlin, 1959). The manuscript, which is bound in two volumes, is now in the British Library, Or. 12688.

³ Ouseley Add. 176. See Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *op. cit.*, No. 46; and B. W. Robinson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Paintings in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 16-22.

of Bāysunghur's academy in precision and finish, but contrived to invest Rustam and the other heroes and demons with a vigour and ferocity which we do not find in contemporary Herat work (fig. 8). The figures are on a comparatively large scale and, in contrast to the often crowded scenes in Bāysunghur's 'great book', as it was called, are generally confined to the minimum necessary to illustrate the incident in question. An almost equally impressive copy was commissioned by Ibrahīm's successor 'Abdallāh in 1444; it is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (fig. 13).¹ It is arguable that among these Shiraz manuscripts of the first half of the fifteenth century one finds some of the most truly epic illustrations of Firdawsī's poem. The Shirazi painters seem to capture completely the timeless heroic spirit of the *Shāhnāma* and to transfer it to the page whole and untrammelled by extraneous detail or distracting elaboration.

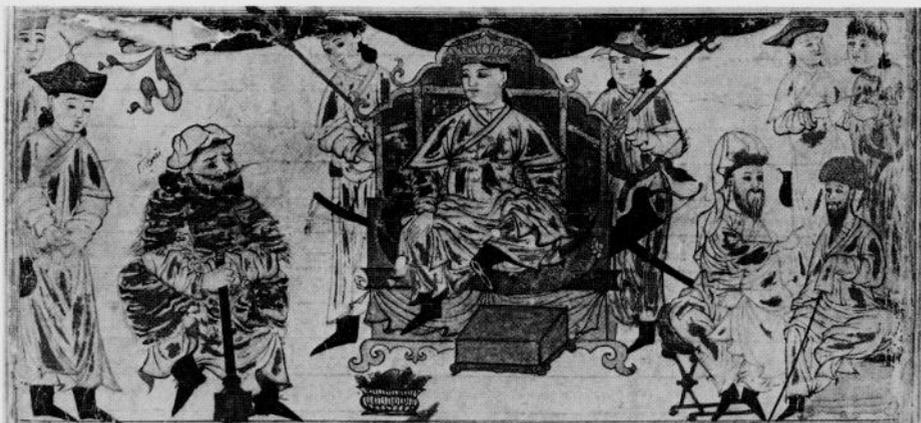
But in Shiraz there was also a tradition which can be traced back to the Injū period of the early fourteenth century, of providing illustrated manuscripts of less than royal quality for commerce and export.² A large number of these has survived. They might be bought by Persian patrons of comparatively modest means, or else exported to India and Turkey; and it is noteworthy that Indian and Turkish miniatures of the Timurid period are closer in style to those of Shiraz than to any other school of Persian painting. The miniatures in these manuscripts follow the royal style, but are on a somewhat smaller scale and fail to achieve quite the same panache. Even so they are never less than satisfactory as epic illustrations.

Meanwhile at Herat another splendid copy of the poem was produced about 1440 for Shāh-Rukh's seventh son Muḥammad Jūkī, who seems not to have lived to see its completion.³ Its brilliant miniatures exhibit some interesting stylistic variations. One of the painters employed on it must have been a man of fairly mature years, trained perhaps twenty years previously in the academy of Bāysunghur. Another was clearly younger and more original; his work looks forward to Bihzād, the greatest of all Persian painters, who flourished in the same city of Herat a generation later. A third betrays his Shirazi background by several

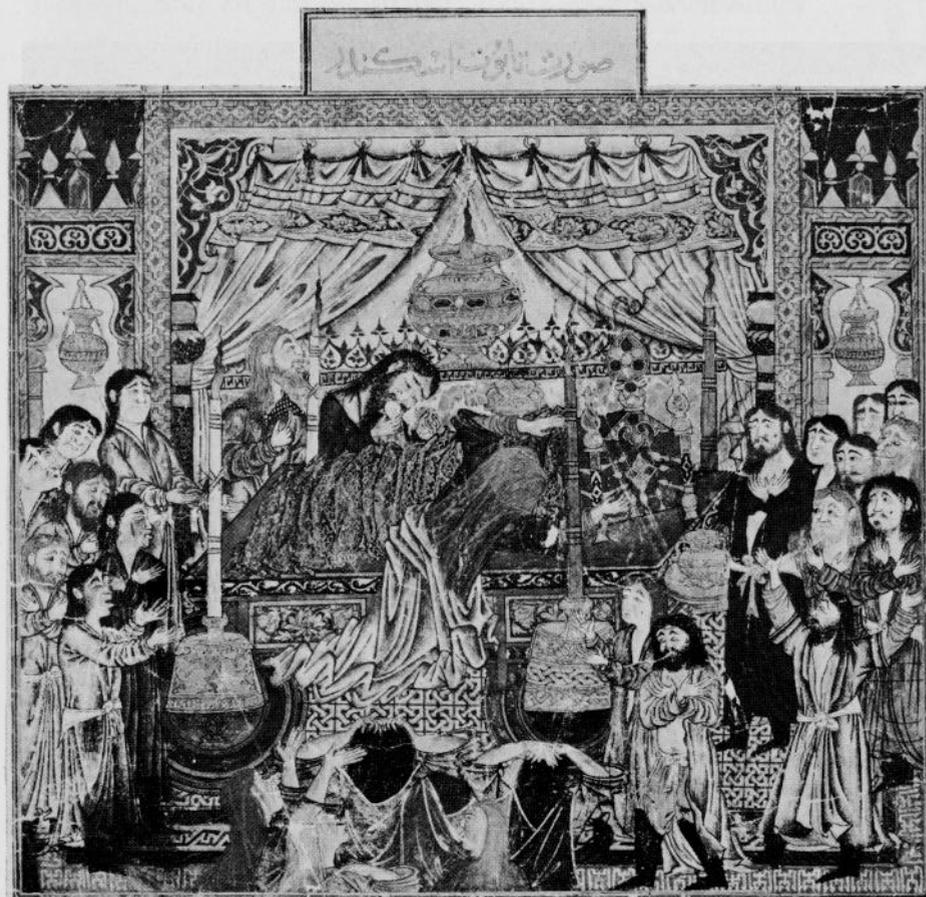
¹ Sup. pers. 494. See I. Stchoukine, *Les peintures des manuscrits Tīmūrides* (Paris, 1954), p. 46 and pls. xxxviii–xl.

² On the question of Shiraz as a commercial centre for manuscripts, see Robinson, *op. cit.* (1967), p. 91; *id.* (1980), p. 35; and M. B. Dickson and S. C. Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* (Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 1981), vol. i, p. 8.

³ See Robinson, *op. cit.* (1979).



1. RUSTAM BEFORE KING MINŪCHIHR. Tabriz (Rashidiyya), 1306.
Edinburgh University Library, MS Arab. 20, f. 6b.

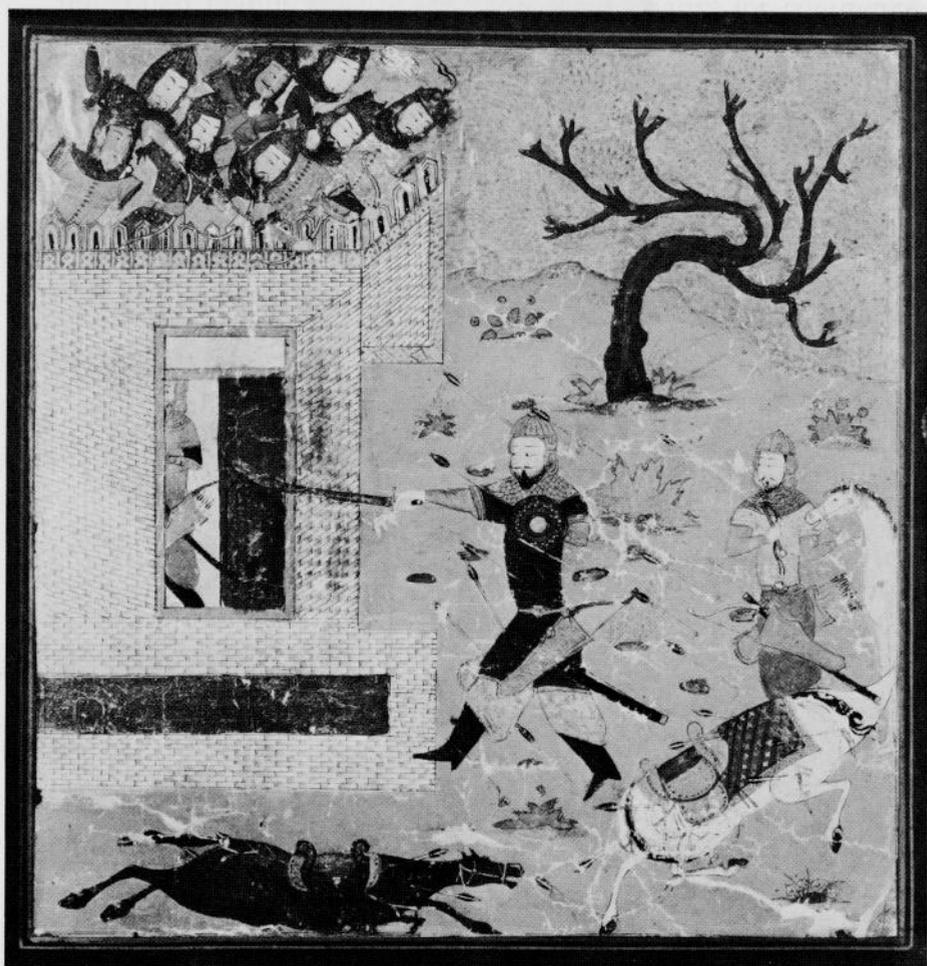


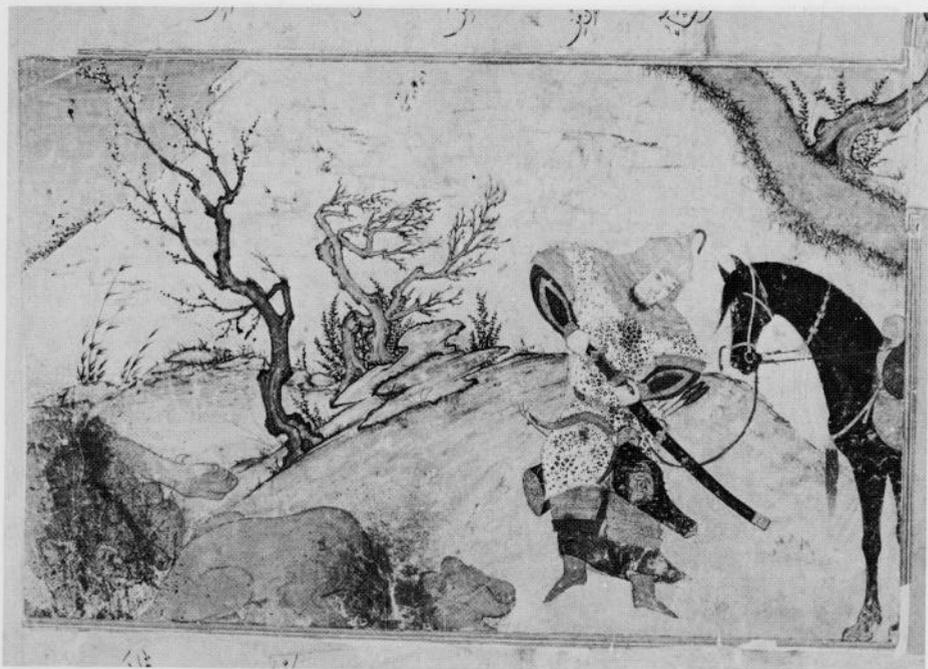
2. MOURNING FOR ISKANDAR. Baghdad, mid 14th century.
Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, No. 38. 3.

PLATE II

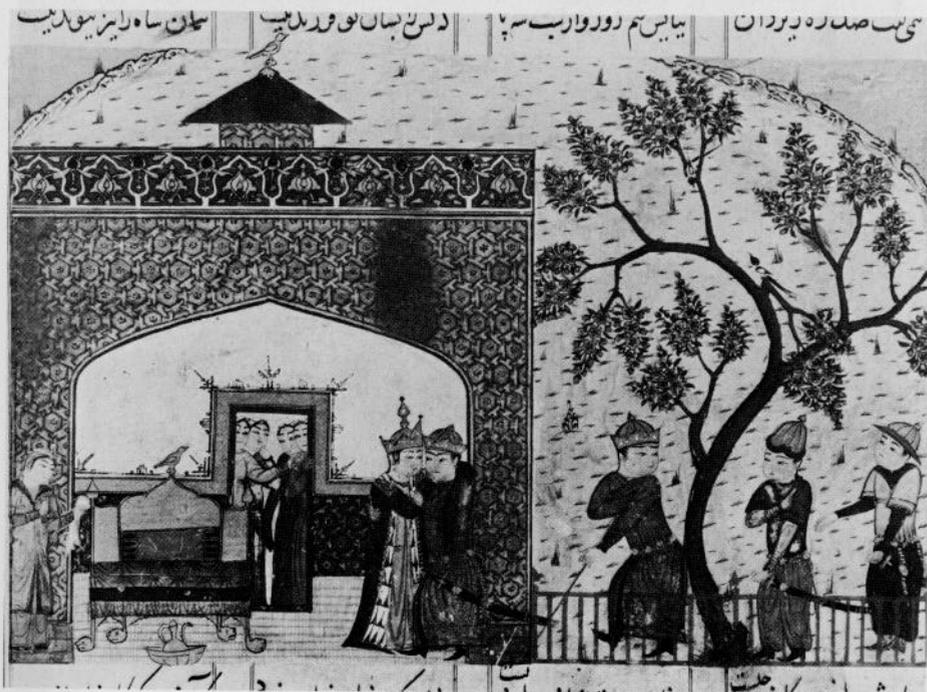


3. BAHRĀM GŪR AND THE 'LIONS'. Western India, mid 14th century.
William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, No. 46-41.





5. ISFANDIYĀR AND THE LIONS. Baghdad, third quarter 14th century.
Topkapı Sarayı Library, İstanbul, H. 2153, f. 16b.



6. SIYĀWUSH TEMPTED BY SUDĀBA. Mazandaran, 1446.
British Library, London, Or. 12688, f. 130b.

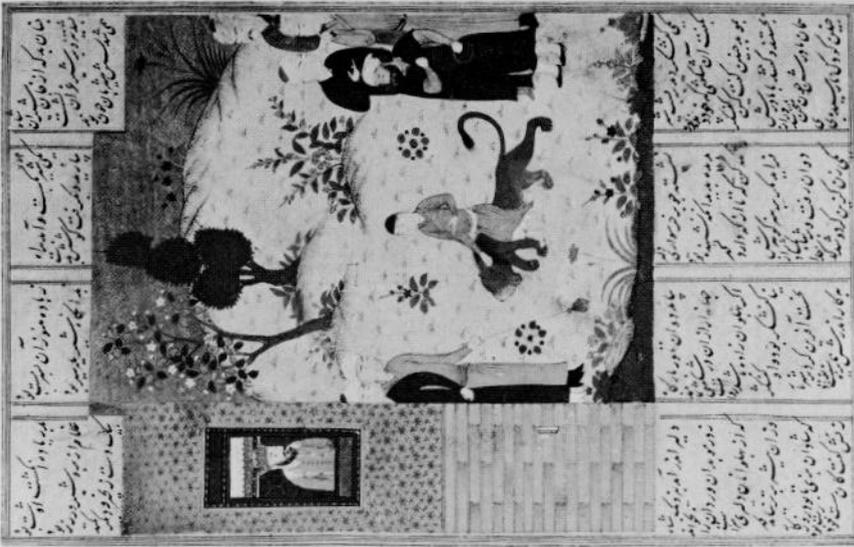


7. KAY KHUSRAW LEARNS OF THE DEATH OF FARŪD. Shiraz, 1393.
Bibliothèque Égyptienne, Cairo.



8. RUSTAM, RAKHSH, AND THE DRAGON. Shiraz, c.1433.
 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ouseley Add. 176, f. 68b.

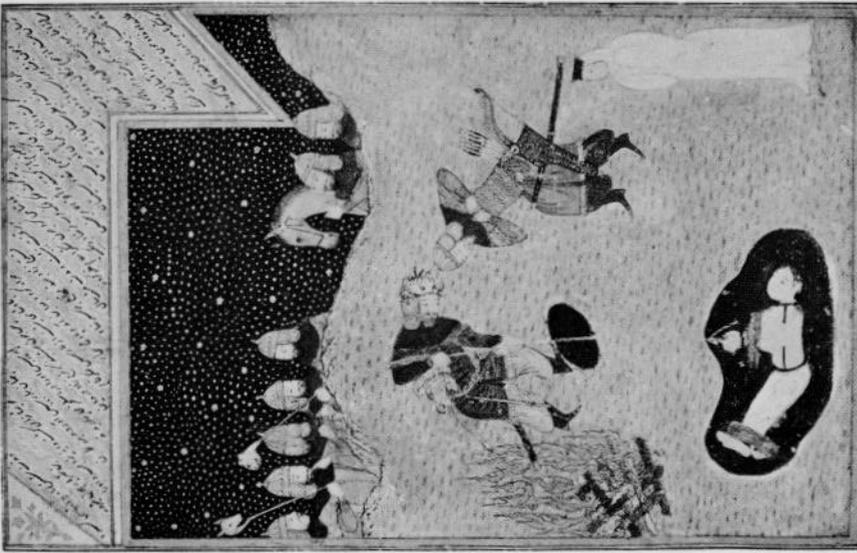
PLATE VI



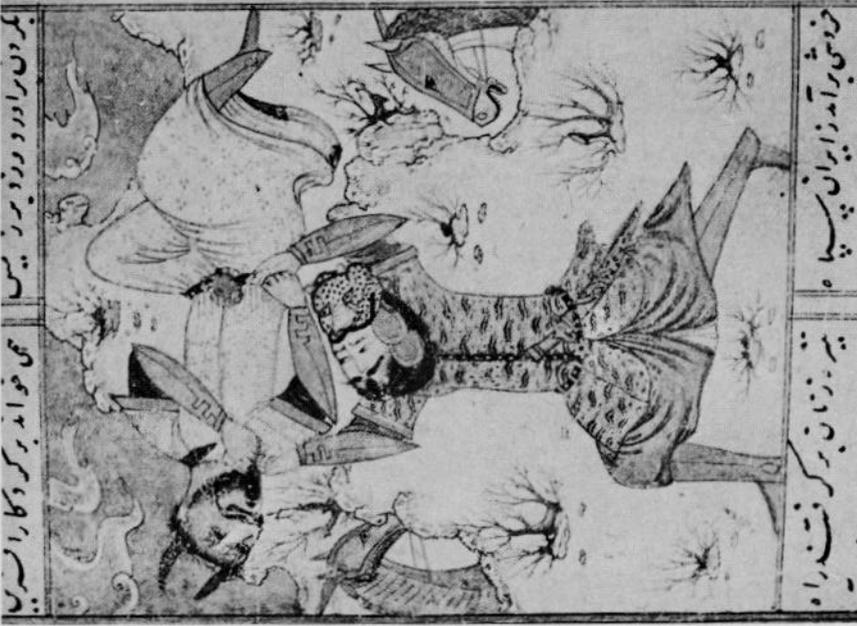
10. THE DRUNKEN SHOEMAKER RIDES THE KING'S LION. Shiraz or Baghdad, c.1460. University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, No. 1963.1.69.



9. RUSTAM AND THE WHITE DEMON. Shiraz, 1397. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, MS 114, f. 50a.



11. BIZHAN RESCUED BY RUSTAM. Shiraz,
1411.
British Library, London, Add. 27261, f. 298b.



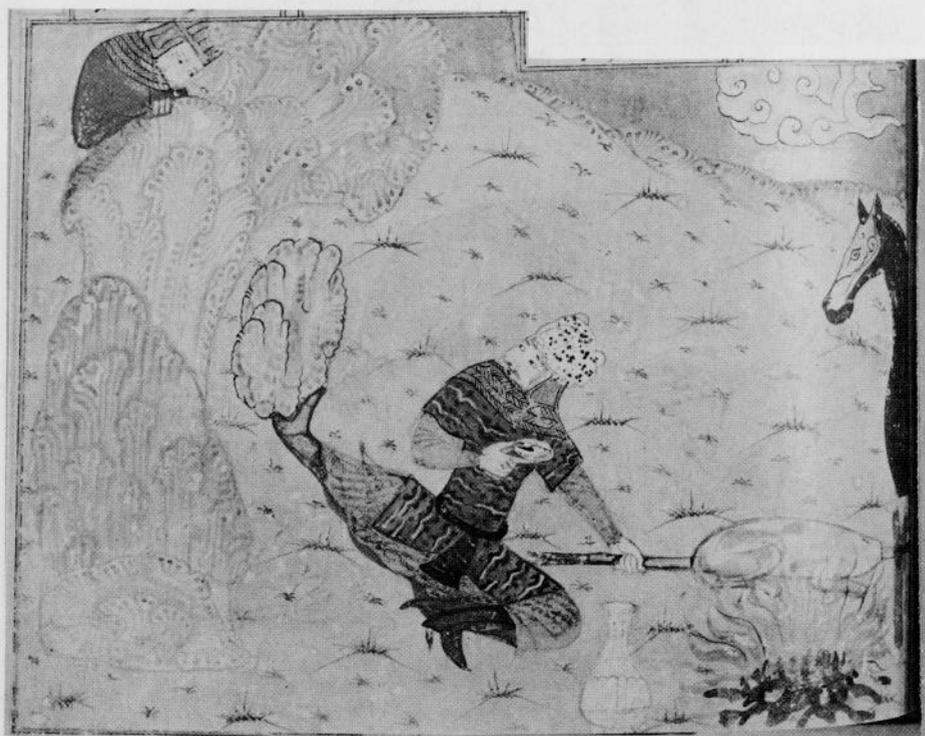
12. COMBAT OF RUSTAM AND POLADWAND. Isfahan,
1413.
Topkapı Sarayı Library, İstanbul, B. 411, f. 161b.



13. RUSTAM AND THE WHITE DEMON. Shiraz, 1444.
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Sup. pers. 494, f. 78a.



14. BHRĀM GŪR HUNTING OSTRICHES. Shiraz, mid 15th century.
(Formerly) Hakim collection *Shāhnāma*, f. 405a.



15. RUSTAM KICKS BACK THE ROCK. Shiraz (Turkman), mid 15th century.
(Formerly) Hakim collection *Shāhnāma*, f. 322a.

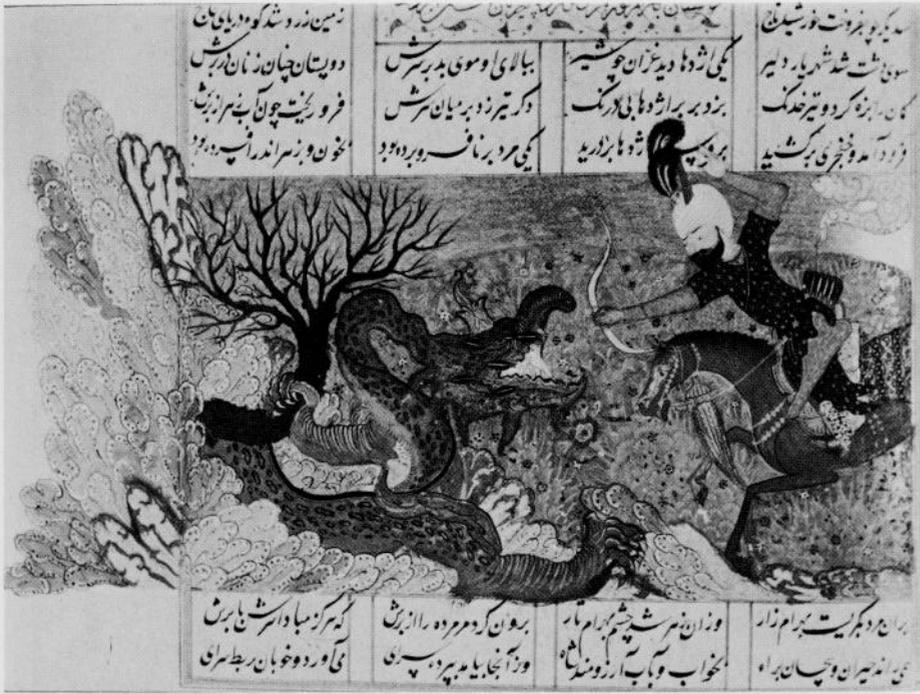
PLATE X



16. KAY KĀ'ŪS AND KAY KHUSRAW APPROACH THE SACRED FIRE.
Shiraz (Turkman), 1482.
Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, N. 40. 20.



17. KAY KHUSRAW LEADING HIS ARMY. Gilan,
1494.



18. BAHRĀM GŪR AND THE DRAGON. Shiraz, 1509.
Topkapı Sarayı Library, İstanbul, H. 1504, f. 372a.

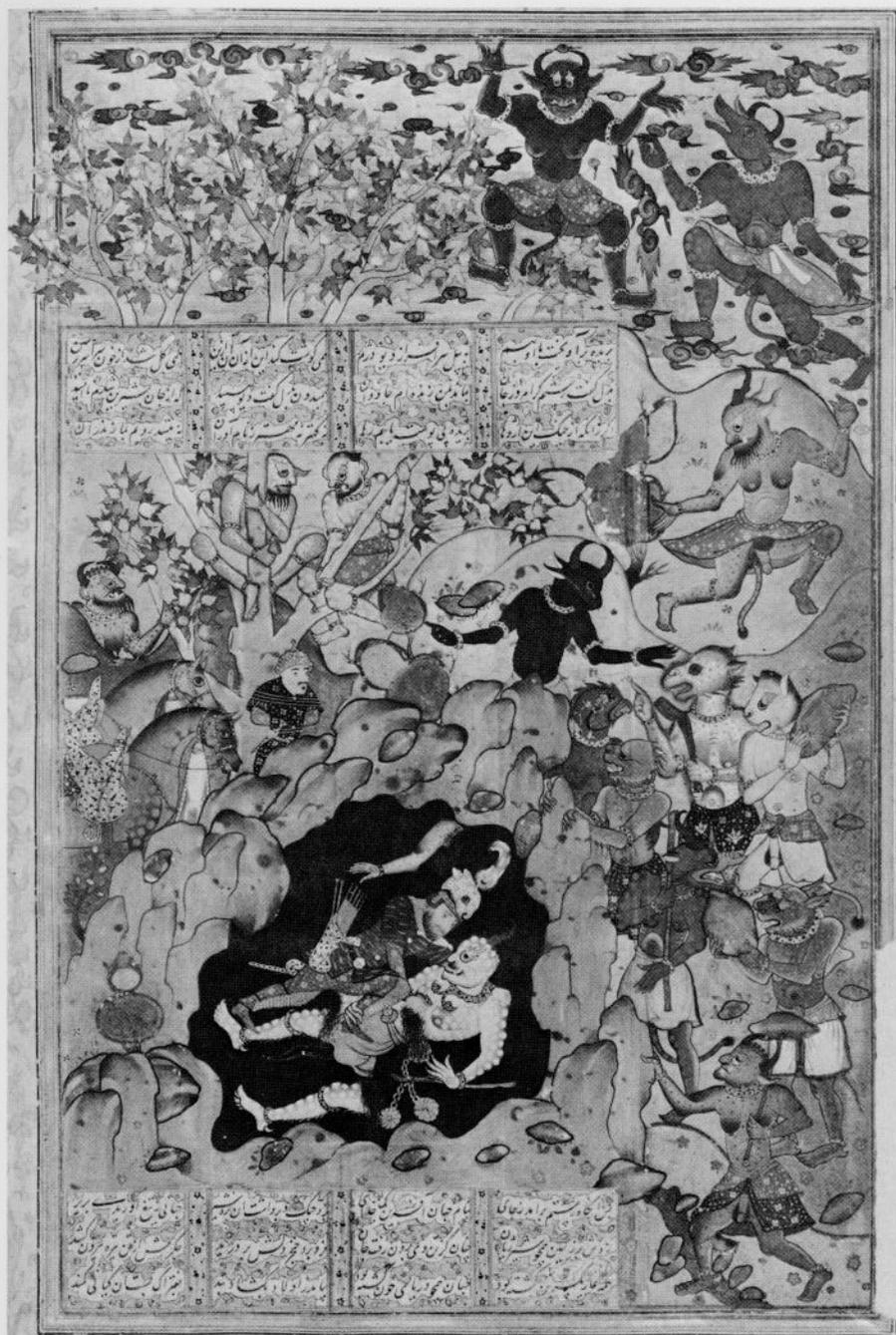


19. ISFANDIYĀR SLAIN BY RUSTAM. Astarabad, 1566.
Topkapı Sarayı Library, İstanbul, H. 1493.

PLATE XII



20. RUSTAM AND KĀMŪS, by Sulṭān Muḥammad (?). Tabriz, 1505-10.
 (Formerly) Kunstgewerbemuseum, Leipzig.



21. RUSTAM AND THE WHITE DEMON. Shiraz, c.1580.
India Office Library, London, *Ethé* 867, f. 94b.

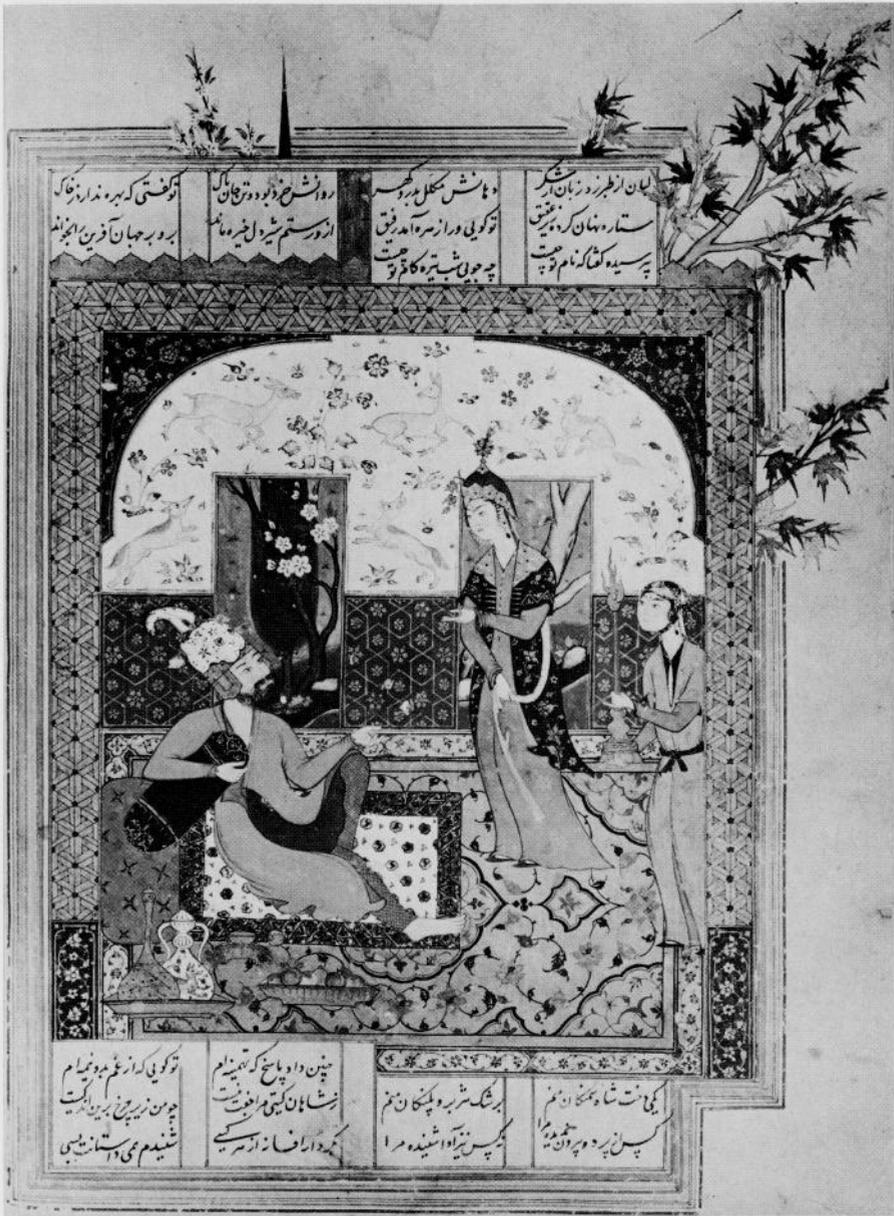
PLATE XIV



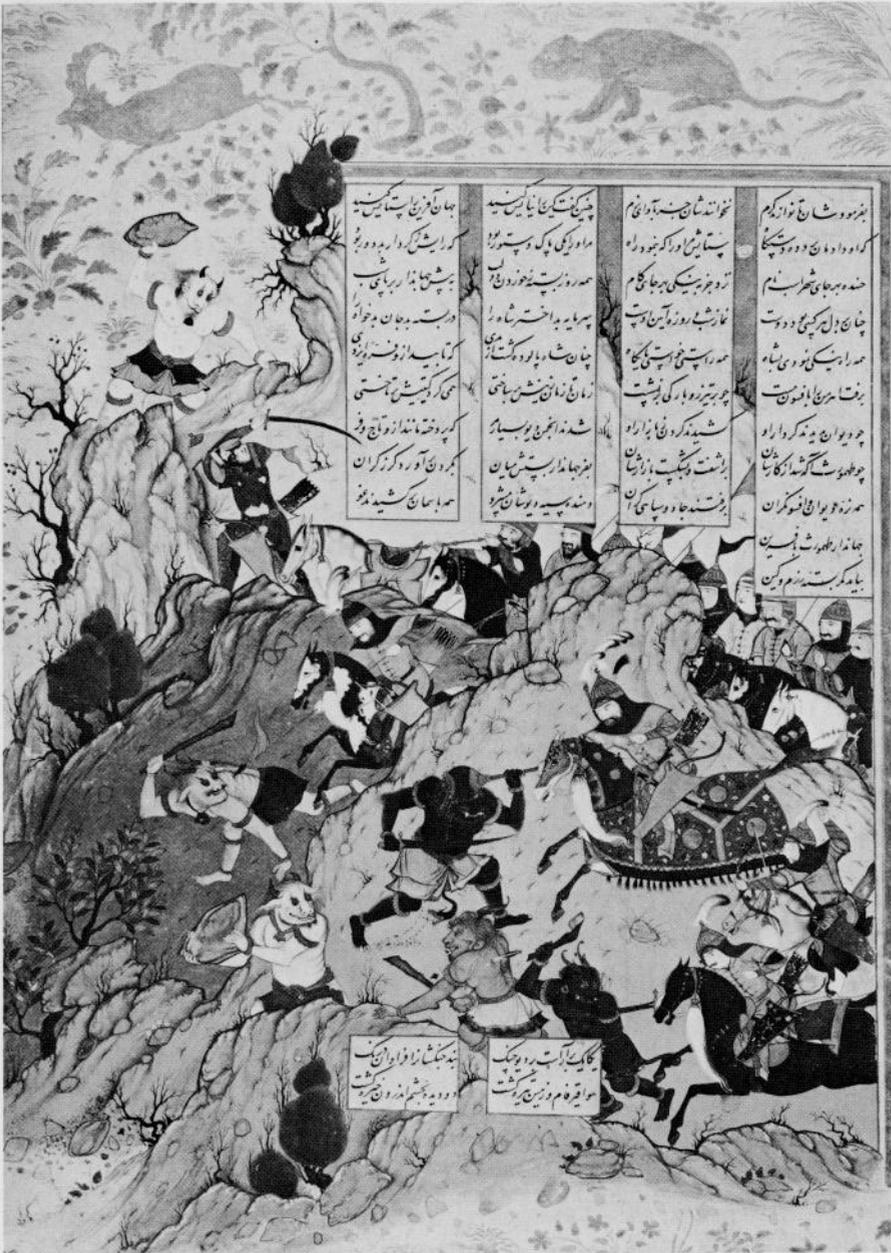
22. RUSTAM, RAKHSH, AND THE DRAGON, by Šādiqī. Qazwin, 1576.
HH Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan collection, Geneva, Ir. M. 69/A.



23. KAY KHUSRAW CONVERSING WITH HIS PALADINS, by Siyāwush. Qazwin, 1576.



24. RUSTAM AND TAHMĪNA, by Muzaffar 'Alī(?). Qazwin, 1569.
(Formerly) Kevorkian collection, Sotheby's 12.iv.1976, lot 185.



25. TAHMŪRATH CONQUERS THE DEMONS, by Riḏā. Isfahan, c.1590.
 Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, MS 277, f. 17.



26. ISKANDAR'S PORTRAIT PREPARED FOR QUEEN QAYDĀFA, by Muḥammad Qāsim. Mashhad, 1648. Royal Library, Windsor Castle, *Holmes* 151, f. 498a.



27. MANIZHA LOWERS FOOD TO BIZHAN IN THE PIT, by Mu'īn. Isfahan,
*c.*1693.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, MS Cochran 4, f. 176*b*.



28. WEDDING FEAST OF SIYĀWUSH AND FIRANGĪS, by 'Alī Naqī. Isfahan,
c.1693.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, MS Cochran 4, f. 102a.

details of treatment, though in his paintings the bold and dashing Shiraz style has acquired a respectable Herati veneer.

But towards the middle of the fifteenth century another political power was coming on the scene, gradually pushing the Timurids from the west, and eventually taking over all their dominions except Khurasan, the large and fertile north-eastern province which then included much of what is now Afghanistan. The Turkman clans of the Black and White Sheep were on the march. At first they had no tradition of court painting of their own, and apparently gathered up what artists they could in the course of their conquests. Thus we find a number of manuscripts of mid-fifteenth-century date containing miniatures in three different styles: that of Herat, stemming from the academy of Bāysunghur; that of Shiraz, deriving from the court of Ibrahīm Sulṭān; and a third, simpler, style of uncertain derivation, but which seems to have originated in the north-west. Good examples of this mixture of styles are to be found in two *Shāhnāma* manuscripts from the early years of Turkman domination. The first is a small, compact volume dating from the early 1450s (figs. 14, 15), and the other dated to 1457, larger and more pretentious, formerly in the library of Lord Teignmouth.¹

But the Turkman princes do not seem to have felt the same enthusiasm for the *Shāhnāma* as their Timurid predecessors. Apart from the Teignmouth manuscript I know of only one other copy, dated to 1494, that can be classed as a Turkman royal volume (fig. 17).² But the third style just referred to was apparently seized upon by the commercial establishments of Shiraz which, as we have seen, seem to have been turning out good illustrated manuscripts for both the home and export markets over the previous century and a half. From about 1475 till the early years of the next century we find innumerable copies of the *Shāhnāma* and other literary classics illustrated in this style, which we may term

¹ See B. W. Robinson, *Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of Persian Miniature Paintings from British Collections* (Victoria and Albert Museum: London, 1951), No. 14; Sotheby's, 16 June 1952, lot 12; *ibid.*, 1 Dec. 1969, lot 186; A. Welch, *Collection of Islamic Art* (of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan), (Geneva, 1978), vol. iv, pp. 12–22 (MS 11).

² This is the so-called 'Big Head' *Shāhnāma*, for which see B. W. Robinson, 'The Turkman School to 1503' in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, (UNESCO: London, 1979), p. 243. Another fine Turkman *Shāhnāma* of c. 1460 is illustrated in E. Grube, *The Classical Style in Islamic Painting* (Venice(?), 1968), pls. 26–30; it is in the University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, No. 1963.1.52/69 (fig. 10).

Turkman Commercial (fig. 16).¹ It was eminently suited to the purpose, being simple, straightforward, and perhaps a trifle stereotyped (fig. 10). To illustrate its prevalence we may note that during the last quarter of the fifteenth century the total of manuscripts containing Turkman Commercial miniatures is more than double that of all other styles put together; the Topkapı Library at Istanbul alone contains no less than twelve copies of the *Shāhnāma* illustrated in this style, and at least twenty-five have been noted elsewhere.

The chief glory of Persian painting in the latter part of the fifteenth century is to be found in the work of Bihzād and his school at Herat, under the patronage of Sultān Ḥusayn Mīrzā, the last great Timurid. But this does not concern us here, because, so far as I know, there is no copy of the *Shāhnāma* illustrated in this style. It was an elaborate, meticulous style, with a strong tendency to naturalism, and was therefore not well suited to illustrating the epic, copies of which required a large number of miniatures and therefore, usually, a simpler and less demanding style of painting.

The rise of the Safawid dynasty at the turn of the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries brought with it a mighty wave of fervent nationalism. After eight and a half centuries of domination by Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and Tartars, Persia was once more united under a Persian sovereign—one, moreover, who could trace his lineage to the Prophet on the one hand and to the pre-Islamic Sasanian dynasty on the other. To inspire and nurture this newly-awakened patriotism the *Shāhnāma* was ideally fitted, and many copies have survived from the early years of Safawid rule. Shah Isma'īl himself, the founder of the dynasty, commissioned a magnificent copy which, however, was destined to remain incomplete. Nevertheless it provides us with two of the finest epic illustrations in the whole of Persian painting: the famous 'Sleeping Rustam' in the British Museum, and its companion, 'Rustam and Kāmūs', formerly in the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Leipzig, but, alas, destroyed during the war (fig. 20). These two superb paintings, which must date from the first decade of the sixteenth century, are probably early works of Sultān Muḥammad, the greatest Persian painter after Bihzād.²

¹ For the Turkman Commercial style see B. W. Robinson, 'Origin and Date of Three Famous *Shāh-nāmah* Illustrations', *Ars Orientalis* i (1954), 105–12; id., op. cit. (1979), pp. 243f.

² Robinson, op. cit. (1954); also S. C. Welch, *Wonders of the Age*, (Harvard, 1979), pp. 23, 36, and an excellent colour-plate of the 'Sleeping Rustam' on p. 37. 'Rustam and Kāmūs' is reproduced in colour in P. W. Schulz, *Die persisch-islamische Miniaturmalerei* (Leipzig, 1914), vol. ii, pl. 47.

However at Tabriz, the first Safawid capital, Isma'īl's son and successor Ṭahmāsp carried on his father's plan, and the next twenty years saw the production of what was till recently the most lavish and magnificent copy of the epic to come down to us in its complete and pristine state.¹ Indeed, it would certainly rank among the half-dozen most splendid illuminated manuscripts in the world. It was presented by Ṭahmāsp in 1568 to the newly enthroned Ottoman Sultan Selim II, and passed the next three and a half centuries in the undisturbed peace of the Sultans' library in the Topkapı palace. From thence it was lured, exactly how we do not know, into the collection of the Paris branch of the Rothschild family, where it was guarded as strictly as a Vestal Virgin, being firmly denied to the prying eyes of the next two generations of scholars. From this jealous confinement it was liberated just over twenty years ago by the wealth of Mr Arthur Houghton, Jr. and the diplomacy of Professor Cary Welch, and we all envisaged a secure and happy future for it in the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Alas, this was not to be. It is now notorious that nearly a hundred of its miniatures have been cut out, some to be sold privately, some to be dispersed on the open market, and some presented to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Not unnaturally these proceedings provoked loud cries of outrage—there were even letters to *The Times*—but the damage was done. Whether or not the process of dispersal will continue remains to be seen: I can only say that Agnew's had a further fifteen of them on offer a couple of weeks ago.

In its complete state the manuscript contained 258 full-sized miniatures by the finest painters of the time—'Wonders of the Age' was the phrase used by Professor Welch. In fact it formed a sort of crucible in which were fused the various elements of Timurid and Turkman painting which went to make up the early Safawid court style. The earlier pages are dominated by the exuberant genius of Sulṭān Muḥammad, but as the volume proceeds this is replaced by a smoother and more courtly style evolved by his junior colleagues Āqā Mīrak and Mīr Muṣawwir. Sulṭān Muḥammad had been trained in the brilliant and fantastic

¹ The monumental publication of Dickson and Welch (p. 286, n. 2 above) reproduces all the miniatures, many in colour, and provides not only a full description, analysis, and history of the manuscript itself, but also a comprehensive and closely reasoned account of early Safawid painting as a whole. S. C. Welch, *A King's Book of Kings* (Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 1972), provides a very serviceable epitome.

style associated with the last great Turkman prince, Ya'qūb Beg, to which he added his own strong individuality and irrepressible sense of humour. Āqā Mīrak, on the other hand, seems to have been inspired by Bihzād and the more academic style over which he had presided at Herat, this style being expanded and elaborated by the painters of Shah Ṭahmāsp's court.

Meanwhile Shiraz continued to produce numerous fine copies of the epic which, though of just less than royal quality, often display great vigour and originality (fig. 18).¹ At first the style of their illustrations is a direct continuation of the Turkman Commercial style of the previous century, but later they are often of large size and great magnificence (fig. 21).

We must pause here to consider some manuscripts of the *Shāhnāma* produced in areas outside the main centres of Persian painting. The first of these is Transoxiana with its two great cities of Samarqand and Bukhara.² Samarqand had been Tīmūr's capital, and after his death it was ruled from 1410 till 1449 by his grandson, the astronomer-prince Ulugh Beg. We have no copy of the *Shāhnāma* known to have been executed under his patronage, but a detached double-page frontispiece, depicting his court, may well have formerly adorned such a manuscript,³ which may also have contained another remarkable detached miniature of cavalry in a rocky landscape.⁴ However, a small group of *Shāhnāma* manuscripts from the later fifteenth century may be tentatively placed at Samarqand. Their date can hardly be questioned, but in style, treatment, and choice of subject their miniatures differ markedly from contemporary work produced at Shiraz and elsewhere in Persia proper; and the faces in them are of a distinctly more Mongol cast than what we find in the latter.⁵ Throughout

¹ The Shiraz school of the Safawid period was first 'isolated' by Grace Dunham Guest, *Shiraz Painting in the Sixteenth Century* (Freer Gallery of Art: Washington, 1949), and all subsequent accounts of it rest on the foundation she laid.

² Timurid painting at Samarqand is still *terra paene incognita*, but a preliminary approach to it will be found in B. W. Robinson (ed.), *The Keir Collection: Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book* (London, 1976), pp. 139f.

³ Right-hand half, Freer Gallery of Art, No. 46.26; left-hand half, Keir Collection (see preceding note) No. III.76.

⁴ Keir Collection, No. III.77.

⁵ The most important of these are:

(i) Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Library H. 1509, undated, but probably third quarter fifteenth century. See Güner Inal, 'Topkapı Müzesindeki Hazine 1509 numaralı Şehnamenin Minyatürleri', *Sanat Tarihi Araştırmaları* iii (1970), Istanbul (with English summary, pp. 306–16). Dr Inal does not suggest a place of origin for the manuscript.

the following century Transoxiana was ruled by the Uzbek dynasty of the Shaybanids. Several of them, notably 'Abd al-'Azīz in the mid sixteenth century, were notable patrons of fine manuscripts, but their favourite authors were Sa'dī and Jāmī, and the few Bukhara *Shāhnāma* manuscripts known to us from this period are of rather second-rate quality.¹

The second provincial group we should consider flourished in Khurasan between about 1560 and 1630. At first it presents a much simplified form of the contemporary court style practised at Mashhad and Qazwin; it is found in a large number of manuscripts, suggesting that, as at Shiraz, such volumes were being produced in Khurasan on a commercial scale. But among them only one copy of the *Shāhnāma* has so far appeared.² The style is characterized by firm and highly competent drawing combined with an individual colour-scheme in which pale blue and olive green are often prominent, and a drastic simplification of landscape and architectural details, and of all forms of surface decoration. But in the early years of Shāh 'Abbās there was a break, and we find the Shāmlū governors of Herat patronizing a style of painting not far removed from the contemporary metropolitan style of Isfahan, though lighter in both colour and drawing. This can be seen in two or three fine copies of the *Shāhnāma* dating from the years about 1600.³

The third and last of these provincial groups was centred on Astarabad, now known as Gurgan, at the south-east corner of the Caspian Sea, where a highly individual style of painting was practised, again between about 1560 and 1630. Some half-dozen

(ii) Tehran, Malek Library MS 5986, undated, but probably late fifteenth century. The manuscript was described in a paper I read at the Ettinghausen Memorial Symposium, New York, 1980, but this has not yet been published.

(iii) A very similar but slightly inferior *Shāhnāma* manuscript sold at Christies, 12 Oct. 1978, lot 62, and now in the British Library, Or. 13859; see N. M. Titley, 'A *Shāhnāma* from Transoxiana', *British Library Journal* vii.2 (1981), pp. 158-71.

¹ The best of these is probably H. 1488 in the Topkapı Sarayı Library, dated 972/1564, with a dedication to Sulṭān 'Abdallāh the Shaybanid, who reigned at Bukhara from 1557 and took Samarqand in 1578. See *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesindeki Şahname Yazmalarından Seçme Minyatürler* (Istanbul, 1971), pl. 11, 12.

² Dublin, Chester Beatty Library MS 295; see Robinson, op. cit. (1967), No. 173, and pls. 50, 51.

³ Typical of these is a *Shāhnāma* in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, dated 1020/1611; see W. Lillys, R. Reiff, and E. Esin, *Oriental Miniatures* (London, 1965), fig. 2 and pl. 3, 5. A fine *Shāhnāma* of the same group, dated 'at Herat' 1008/1599 was sold by Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc., New York, 2 May 1975, lot 392.

manuscripts, all copies of the *Shāhnāma*, have so far been identified as Astarabad work. Their miniatures are rough and provincial in appearance, often with a startling colour-scheme, but original in conception and of vigorous execution (fig. 19).¹

Returning now to our 'main line', we find that the custom, which we have already noticed, of a prince signaling his accession by commissioning a manuscript of the *Shāhnāma* was continued by the Safawid monarchs throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ṭahmāsp's later years (he died in 1576) were marked by religious bigotry and a turning away from his early enthusiasm for painting, which may explain why he gave away the great *Shāhnāma*, on which his artists and library staff had laboured for more than twenty years, so soon after its completion. However his short-lived successor, Isma'īl II, began the production of a *Shāhnāma* on an ambitious scale, whose miniatures, notable for contemporary attributions to a gifted group of court painters, are now widely dispersed among public and private collections in both Europe and America.² This manuscript was another of those brought out of Persia by Demotte as a complete volume, but he soon gave it the usual treatment. The most noteworthy of these painters were Ṣādiqī (fig. 22), whose best work was done under Shāh 'Abbās, as we shall see, and Siyāwush the Georgian, formerly a slave, who evolved a simplified but effective version of the earlier court style, and was thus enabled to contribute nineteen miniatures to the manuscript in the short period of eighteen months between the accession of Isma'īl II and his murder (fig. 23).

Shāh 'Abbās the Great fought his way to the throne in 1587, and soon established his new capital at Isfahan. He too lost no time in commissioning a magnificent copy of the *Shāhnāma*, of which only twenty-one folios have survived, fortunately in excellent condition.³ The high standard of its illustrations and the scale of its production put it in the same class as the *Shāhnāmas* of

¹ See Robinson, *op. cit.* (1967), Nos. 182-4. To these should be added Topkapı Sarayı Library H. 1493 dated 'at Astarabad' 973/1566 (fig. 19), and India Office Library Ethé 874 of the early seventeenth century. See B. W. Robinson, *Persian Paintings in the India Office Library* (London, 1976), Nos. 1113-51. Yet another, very similar to Topkapı H. 1493 above, and dated 'at Astarabad' 971/1564, was published by its Persian owner at the time of the Cyrus Celebrations.

² See B. W. Robinson, 'Isma'īl II's Copy of the *Shāhnāma*', *Iran* xiv (1976), 1-8.

³ Dublin, Chester Beatty Library MS 277; see Robinson, *op. cit.* (1967), No. 60.

Bāysunghur and Shāh Ṭahmāsp, and the surviving miniatures are particularly interesting as reflecting the rivalry of two artists of genius, Ṣādiqī and Riḏā (fig. 12).¹ Both were of strong and independent character, somewhat difficult to get on with, and the atmosphere in the royal atelier at this time must have been positively explosive. Ṣādiqī was the senior. He had worked for Isma‘īl II, as we have seen, and was head of the new Shah’s library staff; he clung to the old style, which he brought to a very high pitch of perfection. Riḏā, on the other hand, was at the beginning of his career, probably still in his twenties, but was nevertheless able to rival his senior colleague in painting ability. We can see in these *Shāhnāma* miniatures of his the first signs of the seventeenth-century style associated with his name after he had assumed, or been granted, the honorific sobriquet of ‘Abbāsī (fig. 25). The figures become fuller, the faces softer, the drawing freer and more calligraphic, and the colour-scheme was later modified by the introduction of prominent browns, yellows, and purples.

In 1614, when he had already been on the throne for over twenty-five years, ‘Abbās commissioned a freak copy of the epic, which is now in the Spencer Collection in the New York Public Library.² In it his painters imitated very faithfully the style of Bāysunghur’s academy of two centuries earlier. So far as one can tell, many of these are original compositions, though others follow closely the compositions in Bāysunghur’s copy of 1431. Indeed, there seems to have been a short-lived wave of archaism in Persian painting at this time, of which the New York *Shāhnāma* is by far the most remarkable monument.

But in general the more languorous and, it must be admitted, decadent style initiated by Riḏā held the field. It was by its very nature unsuited to epic illustration, but none the less some of the *Shāhnāma* manuscripts illustrated by Riḏā’s followers are undeniably impressive. We may note in them that towards the end of his career Rustam is represented as an old man with a grey beard, a convention noticeable in the fourteenth-century Demotte *Shāhnāma* miniatures, but which is never found in the Timurid or earlier Safawid periods. There are two notable *Shāhnāmas* from the middle years of the seventeenth century. The first of these was

¹ This whole period is admirably dealt with by A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah* (Yale, 1976).

² See Gray, *op. cit.* (1961) p. 164, and Grube, *op. cit.* (1968), pl. 82.1-4. Grube’s pls. 83-5 illustrate inferior (and perhaps later) examples of the same type. It is now thought in some quarters that this whole manuscript (which I have not seen) is a skilled archaistic pastiche of the nineteenth century.

executed in 1648 for Qarājaghāy Khān, a celebrated governor of Khurasan with his headquarters at Mashhad. It was presented to Queen Victoria in 1839 by Kamrān Shāh, Prince of Herat, and is now in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle.¹ The miniatures, of which there are 148, are mostly by two of Rizā's best followers, Muḥammad Qāsim (fig. 26) and Muḥammad Yūsuf. Mr Arthur Houghton's remark on being shown it by Her Majesty's Librarian—'I've got a far better one back home'—may have been justified, but was, perhaps, a trifle tactless. Yet it contains some superb paintings. The other mid-seventeenth-century *Shāhnāma*, executed between 1642 and 1651 for Shāh 'Abbās II, is in the Leningrad Public Library, and is the largest copy of the epic that I have ever handled.² It comprises 875 folios with nearly 200 large miniatures, its bulk being swelled by the inclusion in the text of long passages from a number of apocryphal epics by later imitators of Firdawsī, relating to various heroes mentioned in the original. The best of the miniatures are by Afzal al-Ḥusaynī, another distinguished follower of Rizā, whose work usually takes the form of album-pictures of young men and women, often of a distinctly erotic character. Here, however, he rises splendidly to the occasion with a large number of broad and vigorous compositions. All the most prominent painters of the time contributed to this great manuscript—Muḥammad Qāsim, Muḥammad Yūsuf, and Rizā's pupil Mu'in being the most important.

Forty years later comes a lesser but still very splendid *Shāhnāma* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which may perhaps be associated with the accession of the last Safawid monarch, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, in 1694.³ In this manuscript we find towards the beginning a number of none too competent old-style miniatures, but the quality soon improves with a large number by Rizā's long-lived pupil Mu'in in his own fluent adaptation of his master's style, and two or three in the westernizing style (fig. 23) associated with the painter Muḥammad Zamān, which was becoming very fashionable at the Safawid court in the later seventeenth century (fig. 28).

The great Safawid dynasty came to an inglorious end in 1722 at

¹ See B. W. Robinson, 'Two Manuscripts of the *Shāhnāma* in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, II', *Burlington Magazine*, March 1968, 133-42.

² Dorn 333. See L. Gyuzalian and M. Diakonov, *Iranskīe miniatyury* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1935), pls. 35-45.

³ No. 13.228.17 (Cochran 4). See B. W. Robinson, 'The *Shāhnāme* Manuscript Cochran 4 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art' in *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York 1972), pp. 73-86.

the hands of the invading Ghilzai Afghans, and I know of no Persian illustrated manuscript of the *Shāhnāma* that can be dated in the turbulent eighteenth century, though Indian examples, mostly from Kashmir, are by means uncommon. But as the century closed comparative tranquillity was restored under the Qājār dynasty, whose second monarch, the picturesque latter-day Solomon Fath 'Alī Shāh, presided over a considerable revival in the arts, including that of book-illustration. But the superficially westernized style of painting that had evolved by this time, however successful in large and flattering oil-paintings of the monarch himself, cannot bear comparison with that of the classical periods as a medium for illustrating the national epic. *Shāhnāma* illustrations of the period of Fath 'Alī Shāh are chiefly notable for investing the hero Rostam with the long black beard and elegant wasp waist of the King himself.¹

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century began the long reign of Naṣr al-Dīn Shāh, whose visit to Europe in 1873 made him the first Persian monarch to cross the Hellespont since Xerxes. His reign saw an even stronger infusion of western influence, which he himself encouraged, and by which the native traditions of Persian painting were well-nigh swamped. It was in his reign too that the Persian classics began to be printed by lithography. Two editions of the *Shāhnāma*, both containing numerous illustrations, were published at Tehran. The first appeared in 1850, illustrated by 'Alī Qulī of Khuy, whose drawings are rather naïve exercises in the earlier Qājār style. The second was published in 1890, and the illustrations are by Mustafā, also known as a talented painter in lacquer. He has clearly become conscious of western advances in archaeology, and some of his illustrations are inspired by the Achaemenid bas-reliefs of Persepolis and by the sculptures and coins of the Sasanians.²

The last manuscript of the *Shāhnāma* which we need consider is one made in the 1860s for the family of the Shirazi poet Wiṣāl (d. 1846), with miniatures by the celebrated flower-painter Luṭf 'Alī Khān, and by two of the poet's sons, Farhang and Dāwarī. They are entertaining, and sometimes striking, but are devoid of true epic quality.³

¹ A very good example of a *Shāhnāma* with miniatures of the period of Fath 'Alī Shāh was sold at Christies on 21 July 1971, lot 121.

² See B. W. Robinson, 'The Tehran Niẓāmī of 1848 and other Qājār Lithographed Books' in *Islam in the Balkans: Persian Art and Culture of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Royal Scottish Museum: Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 61-74.

³ I saw this manuscript, an heirloom in the family of Dr Vesal of Shiraz

The *Shāhnāma* and Persian painting have always been mutually complementary. On the one hand, as we have seen, a survey of manuscript copies of the epic provides a panorama of Persian painting in all its aspects, and, on the other, it is through Persian painting that, even without a knowledge of the Persian language, we can gain a real insight into, and appreciation of, the spirit of the *Shāhnāma* itself. All the paintings we have been considering combine to show the Persian artist as an illustrator *par excellence*. A successful illustration must above all things be clear and straightforward, depicting the subject or incident selected in the most effective manner possible, and this is, throughout, the aim and object of the Persian painter. European critics often find this simple fact difficult to accept. They are not satisfied unless they can discover some abstruse symbolism or spiritual message, adducing as precedent the abundant symbolism, erotic and otherwise, that we are encouraged to detect in Indian painting. But in Persian painting my own feeling is that such a quest is vain. Persian painters were simply doing the job for which they were paid; they were not, consciously, expressing their own personalities or grinding some metaphysical axe. Their vocation was to give pleasure to their patrons and, incidentally, to us latter-day admirers of their work. Few would deny that in this unassuming and generous aim they succeeded, and continue to succeed, with consummate mastery.

To sum up: fourteenth-century *Shāhnāma* illustrations of the Mongol period are often magnificent, but most are marred by the alien physical characteristics of their patrons. In the Timurid period of the fifteenth century on the other hand, and especially in the school of Shiraz, we find works of timeless and truly epic quality. The miniatures in Safawid manuscripts of the poem, after a splendid start, tend to become over-courty and elaborate, and in the seventeenth century partake of the elegant decadence inseparable from the style of Rizā-i 'Abbāsī. The eighteenth century is a blank; and under the Qājārs in the nineteenth century the residual spark is quenched in ill-conceived efforts at westernization.

Let us conclude by looking once more at what have always seemed to me the most splendid representations of Rustam the national hero and his charger Rakhsh in the whole of Persian art (fig. 20). The hero, a magnificent figure in complete panoply of tiger-skin and leopard's head, the latter here surmounted, uniquely (a descendant of the poet), at his house in 1964. It was subsequently acquired from him by the former Empress Farah, but its present whereabouts are unknown.

and most effectively, with a towering sevenfold plume, drags his opponent from the saddle; and Rakhsh, his mane bristling fiercely, tackles a marauding lion while his master sleeps. The painter was in all probability the great Sulṭān Muḥammad in the flower of his youthful vigour, and his Rustam can match any Greek Heracles from the Aegina pediment or a black-figure vase by Execias. The destruction of the Leipzig painting in the last war must rank in the minds of all lovers of the art as a tragedy on a par with the dismemberment of the Demotte and Houghton manuscripts.