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Page 4:

Riza-i Abbasi, *Love Scene*, 1610s-1620s.

Gouache on paper, 7.4 x 10.4 cm.

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg.

Page 7:

Riza-i Abbasi, *Youth Holding a Jug*, 1627-1628.

Gouache on paper, 12.5 x 22.3 cm.

Museum of Western and Oriental Art, Kiev.

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"Epigrams succeed where epics fail."

— Persian proverb



# Chronology

749:	The Abbasid line of caliphs takes power from the Umayyads
762-763:	Foundation of Baghdad
9th century:	Birth of Persian language
945:	The Buyids take over Baghdad
Middle of 10th century:	Influence on Persian Art of the Fatimid patronage. Miniatures painted in brilliant colours. Naturalistic treatment of animals
c. 1010:	<i>Shahnama</i> of Firdawsi
1055:	The Seljuks become the new guardians of the caliphate of Baghdad
12th century:	Rise of manuscript production: medical treatises, books about animals
1200:	<i>Khamsa</i> of Nizami
1206:	Genghis Khan is recognized as supreme leader of all the Turko-Mongolian peoples.
1220s:	Mongol invasion led by Genghis Khan, end of the Abbasid line of caliphs
1229:	Ugedei is recognized as Great Khan of the whole tribal group
1250s:	Mongol invasion led by Hulegu Khan



- 1253: Campaigns of the Great Khan Möngke to take back the territories in western Asia that slipped from Mongol grasp after the death of Genghis Khan
- 1258: End of the Abbasid caliphate with the capturing of Baghdad by the Mongols, beginning of the Ilkhanid Empire in Persia
- 1295: Ghazan Khan becomes Ilkhan, reforms of the government and revitalization of the economy
- c. 1298: Death of the calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta'simi
- 1304: Death of Ghazan Khan, vizierate of Rashid al-Din, patron of the arts. Rise of book production
- 1304-1316: Reign of Uljaytu
- 1316-1335: Reign of Abu Sa'id
- 1501: Shah Ismail puts the Turkoman Aq Qoyunlu out of Iran and settles Safavid rule
- 1595: Isfahan becomes the new capital of the Safavid Empire
- 1601-1624: Safavid territory expands westward to include Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Shirvan, Armenia, Georgia, Kurdistan and Iraq
- 1648: Safavid territory expands to Afghanistan
- 1779: The Qajar Agha Muhammad takes control of northern Persia
- 1906: Persia becomes a constitutional monarchy





Miniature painting – decorating with illustrations the pages of a hand-written book with the aid of gouache – is one of the domains in which Persians excelled. It is owing to this art that many monuments have fortunately survived to this day.

In ordinary manuscripts, the artist sketched out the major elements of his composition with a black or red pencil before painting.

### Princess Humayun Spies Humay at the Gate

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Illustration from Khwaju Kirmani's masterpiece

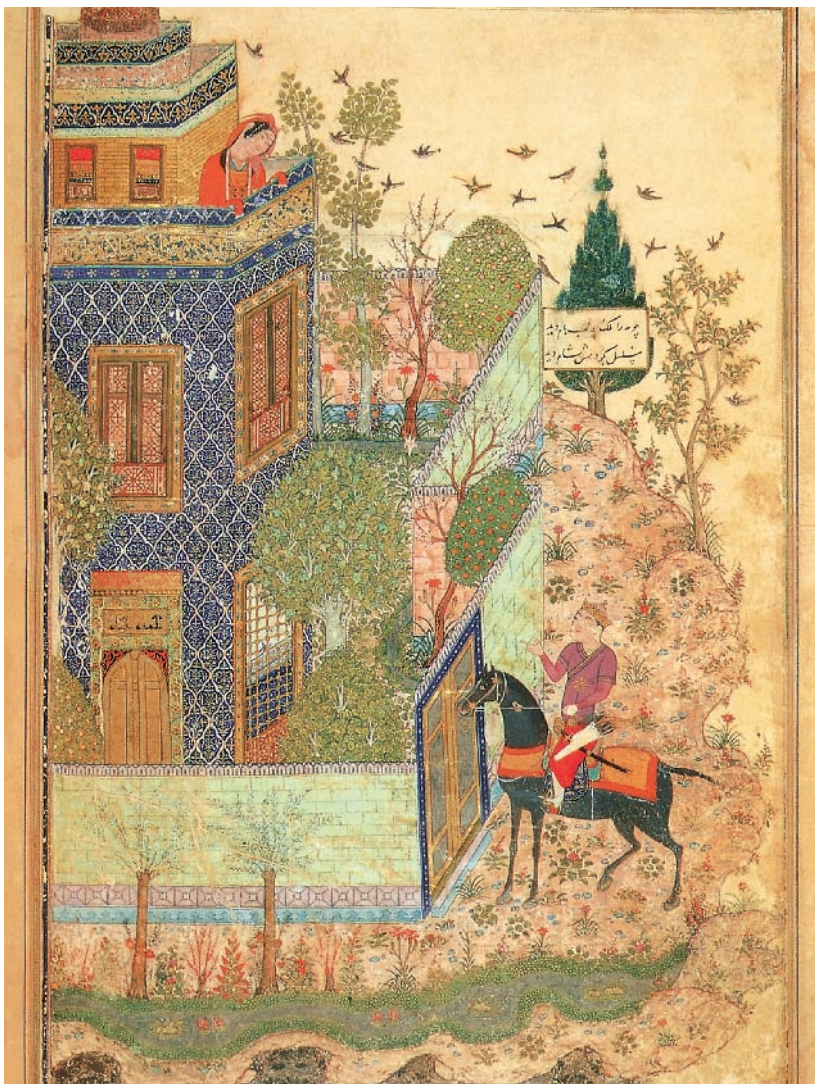
*Three Poems*

1396

38.1 x 24.7 cm (folio)

The British Library, London







In very elaborate manuscripts, the miniature was not done directly on the page where it had to appear. The copyist left the page blank, and then the artist would bring the special sheet on which he had painted and laminated it. This sheet was covered with a thin layer of plaster and finely coated with

### A Muslim Giving Alms

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Illustration by Bihzad from Sa'di's masterpiece

*Bustan (The Orchard)*

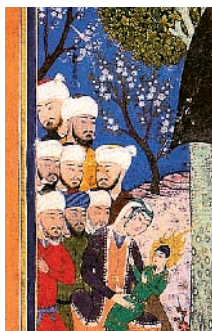
15th century

National Library, Cairo









acacis gum: it was on this primer that the artist drew and painted. The paintings on some sheets are so thick that they could pass for a type of relief. Some jewels were made of superimposed layers of gold sheets reworked with a stylus, as in some Venetian paintings. Should the artist append his name,

Frontispiece of an Account of the Lives of the Prophets, Depicting Moses Striking the Giant Og, Mary with the Baby Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad with His Two Grandchildren, Hasan and Husayn

---

Artist and source unknown

Early 15th century

38 x 24.4 cm

Khalili Collection





he did so slyly, in a corner of the miniature in Talik characters so fine that they are very difficult to decipher. Where the drawing is a representation of a house, the names of the monarch or artist comprise an inscription that runs the length of the border. The last page of a manuscript usually bears the year it was completed.



### Bahram Discovers the Hall with the Seven Portraits

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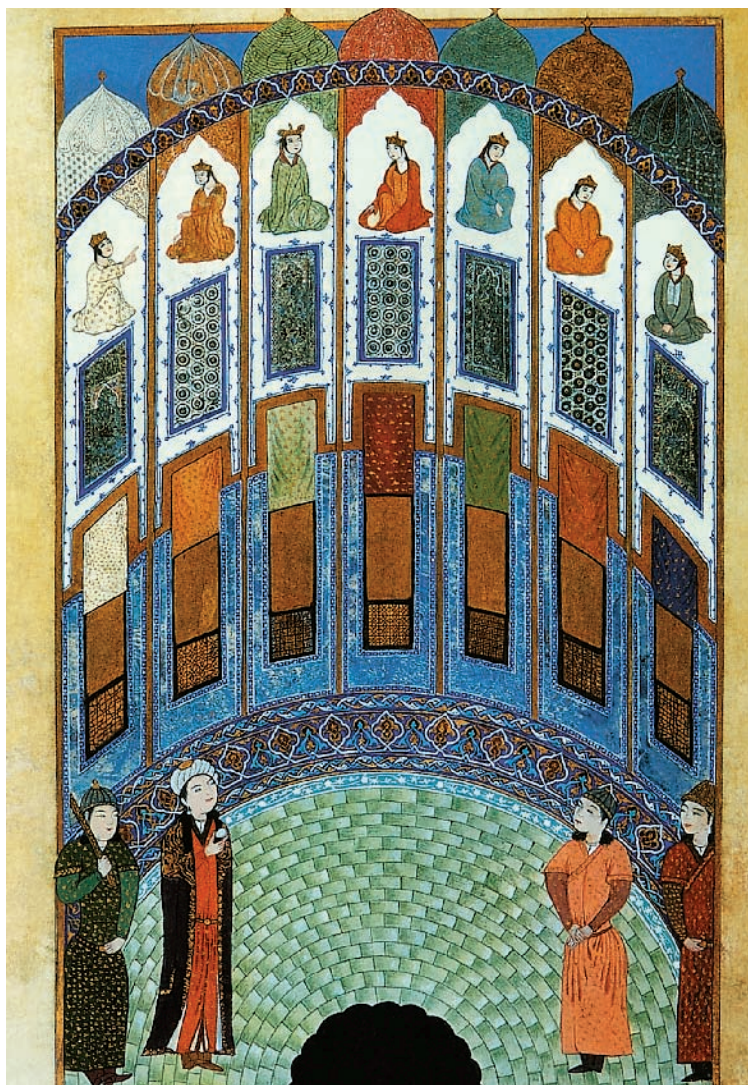
Illustration from Nizami's masterpiece

*Haft Paikar (The Seven Idols)*

1410-1411

Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon





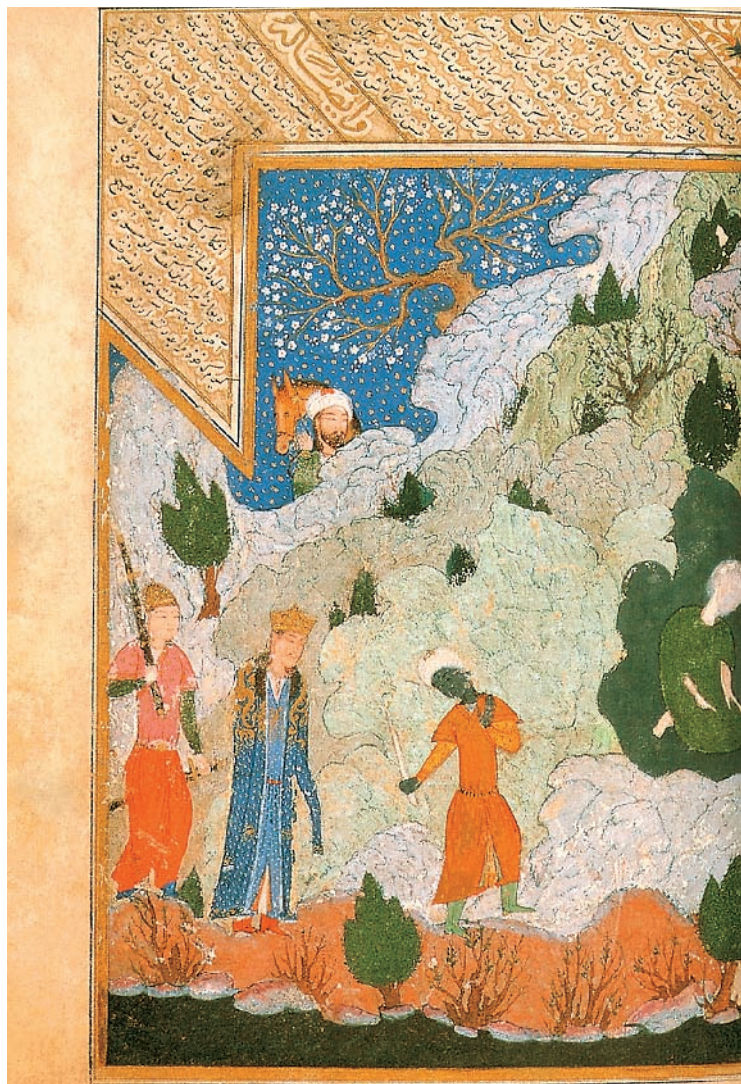


However, miniatures often were added after the manuscript itself was created. A mastery of these works and an attempt to classify all of them according to their countries of origin and schools is a very daunting task, as very few of the manuscripts are dated and signed by the painters.

### Alexander the Great Visits the Sage

---

Illustration from a miscellany by Jalal al-Din or  
Iskandar ibn 'Umar Shaykh  
1410-1411  
18.4 x 12.7 cm (folio)  
The British Library, London







They often have the names of calligraphers, but rarely those of illuminators. This implies that the work of the calligrapher was considered more important than the painter's. Equally noticeable in these manuscripts is the rather unscrupulous way in which the artists transgressed the law of the Prophet and scorned the prohibition against representing

### The Sages of China Bringing Books on History to Gházán Xán

Illustration from Hafiz-i Abru's masterpiece *Majma' al-Tavarikh*  
c. 1425-1430

33.8 x 23 cm (folio)

The British Museum, London

جبری ازان نصیب بدین ولایات رسیدند و درین وقت که بادشاه اسلام خلفا الله سلطانه و اعلامشاه فرموده که تا دینج  
 مبارک را تالیف کنند و بنویسند چون سایلک شد کرده را در قدیم لایام هیچ بادشاه بیگانه دستگیر داینب بود و در آن  
 مخالفت نیافتد چک بر خال و اروق نام دارا و امرا مستخلص گردانیدند و در تحت تصرف خویش آورده اند و بان سبب  
 حکایت آن درین تازیج آوردن ضروری بود بادشاه اشلام خلفا الله ملکه فرموده که تو تاریخ احوال آن مملکت و بادشاهان  
 آنجا برنسیل اینجا را و اختصار آنجا کرده شود بر وفق فرمان نافذ لازلان فاما و مطاعا از چک یخنای بساحی و مگون  
 نام هر دو بر علم ط و عجم و تاریخ خنای واقف اند و یعنی ازان کتب خنای با خود آورده و آن مملاتی را مستخرج کن و تاریخ  
 که داشتند حاضر گردانیدند و تقریر کردند که هر سید تاریخ اهل خنای عظیم قدیم است و عدد سالها را دوازا نشان بویجی  
 که پیش ازین با خواهر ضهرالدین فقر بر کرده اند لیکن تاریخی که انسانی بادشاهان ایجاد را ن شرح و مفصل است و بنیاد حکایت  
 را ن نهاده اند و درین وقت میان اهل خنای شهرتی دارد و تاریخی درست و محقق است و تمامت حکایت و ادایان بر ازان عباد







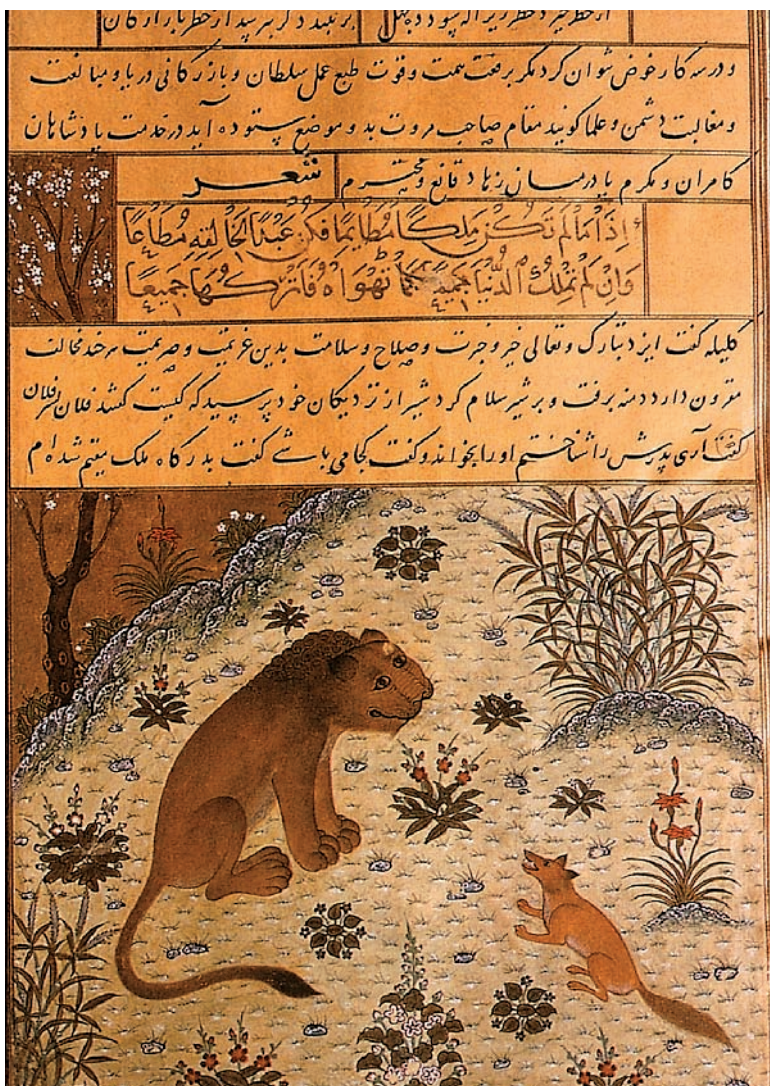
living forms, which Islam inherited from Judaism. Indeed, it is actually through these manuscript miniatures that we gain the greatest insight into the genius with which some of these oriental masters handled the human figure, better than in any other sector of their arts.

### The Jackal and The Lion

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Illustration from a Persian translation of the  
*Panchatantra: Kalila wa Dimna*  
1429

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul





There are representations of hunting or battle scenes which, for their mere heroic and picturesque character and sense of movement, can hardly be equalled. There are portraits which, based on an analytical study of the possession of the type, the profound individual character and the masterful

### The Persian Prince Humay Meeting the Chinese Princess Humayun in a Garden

---

Artist and source unknown

1430-1440

29.5 x 18 cm

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris









representation of the human figure, parallel the greatest masterpieces of this type in the West.

In Persia, the golden age of miniature painting dates from around the beginning of the 11th to the mid-14th century. This phase of Persian art (after the Mongol conquest) and this particular art form was subsequently to occupy a dominant position in figurative art.



### Kuyuk the Great Khan with Courtiers and Attendants

---

Illustration from 'Ata Malik ibn Muhammad Juvayni's masterpiece  
*Ta'rikh-i Jahan-Gushay*

1438

26.5 x 17.3 cm (folio)

The British Museum, London





The art of Iran at this period was the art of cities, of cultural centres, an art of master craftsmen, calligraphers and painters scattered throughout the country, an art for various customers – for the sultan, of course, but also for merchants and wealthy citizens. The first Persian manuscript with real miniatures that is known to us is the Persian poem of Ayyuqi,

### The Battle of Ruhham the Paladin and Bazur the Sorcerer

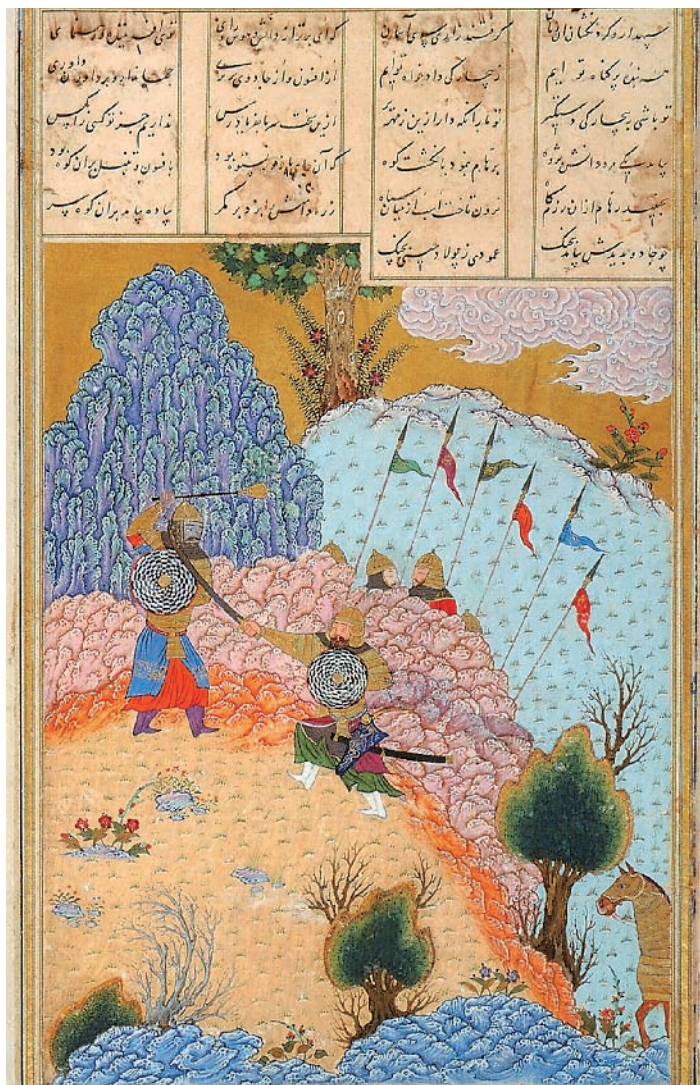
Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece  
*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

c. 1440

33.4 x 22.2 cm

Royal Asiatic Society, London









*Varqah and Gulshah*, commonly assigned to the early or mid-13th century. It was probably produced in Upper Mesopotamia (Jazira) or Anatolia.

The miniatures were painted by the artist Abd al-Mumin ibn-Muhammad al-naqqash al-Khowi, and some of the miniatures reveal



The Demon Akhwan Throws the Sleeping Hero  
Rustam into the Sea

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Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece

*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

1440

Royal Asiatic Society, London





the following characteristics: the frieze-like compositions of several miniatures are analogous to frescoes, with the interrupted action continuing beyond the frame in a linear development; some of them are painted against a vivid, often deep red, background which is characteristic of frescoes

### Courtiers by a Stream

---

Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece

*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

c. 1450

18 x 11.5 cm

The British Museum, London









and also, for example, of the miniatures of the Kyzyl Manichaean treatise; absolutely every detail of iconography and style in this group of miniatures coincides precisely with the details found on contemporary lusterware, especially on *minai* ceramics; finally, luxuriant plant

Isra or Muhammad's Night Journey to Heaven on  
His Steed Buraq

---

Artist and source unknown

1458

Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul





ornamentation serves as a background to some of the designs in this group of miniatures, as on ceramics.

It is the influence of the Iranian miniature which is cited as an explanation for the illustrations on metalwork and even the style of painting of Iranian ceramics.



### Majnun and Salim in the Palm Grove

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Illustration from Nizami's masterpiece *Khamsa*  
(literally "collection of five")

1462

Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul







But is there any evidence at all, even circumstantial, bearing witness to the existence of miniature painting in Iran before the end of the 13th century? We do have a manuscript treatise on astronomy, Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi's *Book of the Fixed Stars* (completed in 1009-1010 AD).

### Mi'raj or The Ascension of the Prophet

---

Illustration from Nizami's masterpiece *Khamsa*  
(literally "collection of five")

1463

32.4 x 21.7 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin



میس از غایت روشنایی  
 رفت ولی ز محنت پایی نماند  
 آید در منزل بی منزلی  
 هست ولی نصرت جانی نماند  
 غیرت ازین پرده میانش  
 چون سخن از خود بد را نماند  
 چهرت از آن گوشه غایت نماند  
 با بخشش یافت قبول سلام  
 جان نماند نه خطی بر رخسار  
 دیدن چشمت که نیایش نمود  
 آیت نوری که زوالش نبود



دیدن او دیدنی و دیدنی نیست  
 از بهشت چینی راه یافت  
 دیدن او بی عرض و جوی نیست  
 دیدن آن پرده مسکنی نبود  
 کفر بود نفی صفاتش مکن  
 دید محمد ز بخششی و کسر  
 است خرد را خدا چنان بسته  
 پشت قوی گشته از آن گنا  
 دیدن محمود پسندیده  
 سر که در آن پرده نماند  
 است و لیکن ز مغربهای  
 خورشید را که میامخته  
 سخن از کج نوا گشته شد  
 زان سخن عرش نماند  
 و ورنه را تا حیات مان  
 کر عیسی رضای او را سوز  
 رفت آن راه زمانی نبود  
 جای بود و وقف جفاکش مکن  
 بل همین چشم سر آن شمع  
 لب بیک خنده پیاده شده  
 روی در او رده با نماند  
 دیدن او دیدنی و دیدنی نیست  
 از بهشت چینی راه یافت  
 سر که خیز نیست نه باشد خای  
 چرا که آن در دل مار نماند  
 جمله مقصود میسر شده  
 در نفی رفته و باز آمده  
 نه سخن را انطیاس مان





It contains fine drawings and scientific illustrations which are of a set type and are treated exactly like all illustrations to scientific works of the time. These are not, of course, miniatures in the true sense of the word; they lack any artistic perception of the world.

Information about illustrations in early manuscripts is also extremely sparse in written sources.

### Moses Transforms his Staff into a Serpent before Pharaoh

---

Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Tarikh-i bal'ami (The Annals of Bal'ami)*  
1470

35.3 x 24.5 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin





In fact, only three references can be mentioned. Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi (12th century) relates that when Abu Nasr Arraq, the famous mathematician and nephew of the Khwarazmshah Abu al-Abbas Mamun, visited Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century, the latter ordered him to paint a



Sufis Performing Sama before Shaykh  
Nizam al-Din Awliya

---

Illustration from Amir Khusraw Dihlavi's masterpiece  
*Khamsa* (literally "collection of five")

1485

25.3 x 16.7 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin









portrait of the renowned scientist Abu-All ibn Sina, who not long previously had refused to work at the court of Mahmud and fled to Iraq. Mahmud wanted the portrait to be duplicated in order to send it to various provinces to identify the runaway. This reference is probably pure legend, and if it

## An Arrogant Clerk Engulfed under the Weight of His Own Beard

Illustration by Bizhad  
1487-1488

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York







is not, then the story may be of more interest to the history of criminology than that of the Iranian miniature! More reliably, al-Rawandi relates that in 1184 he copied a collection of various poets' works in which the artist (*naqqash*), Jamal-i Isfahani, had included the portraits of these poets.

### Fariburz Comes before Kay Khusraw

---

Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece  
*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

1494

24.4 x 16.2 cm

The British Museum, London





Finally, one source reports that during the siege of Merv by the Mongols in 1220, a list of artists and craftsmen of the city was compiled at the command of the captors. Naturally, it would be difficult to maintain that the term *naqqash* in this text includes miniaturists. Earlier accounts are just as sparse and imprecise.

### Funeral Procession for Layla's Dead Husband

---

Illustration attributed to Bihzad from Nizami's masterpiece  
*Khamse* (literally "collection of five")

1494

9.5 x 18 cm

The British Library, London







There are the accounts of the “official portraits” of the Sassanid rulers in the book of Sassanian history kept at Estakhr (Fars province) during the early 10th century and there is the information that the collection of fables, *Kalila wa Dimna*, translated in the eighth century from Middle Persian into Arabic, had been illustrated by Chinese artists.



### A Mature Man Watches Young Girls Bathing

---

Artist and source unknown

1494-1495

The British Library, London







Only this last report seems to be direct evidence of miniatures decorating a manuscript, but this example involves an Arab manuscript and Chinese artists. The reference is evidently credible, since it is known that Chinese artists, among other craftsmen, were captured by Arabs at the battle of Talas and taken to the Caliphate.

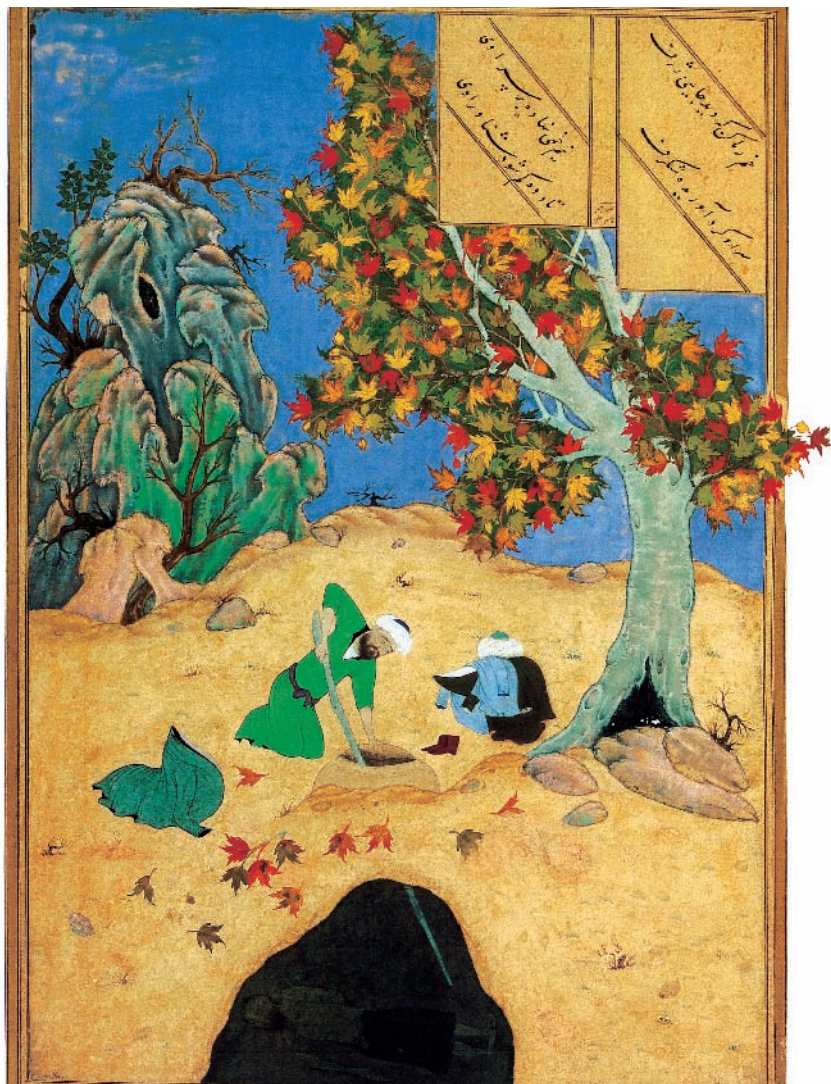
### Recovery of Malikha's Body by the Holy Man Bishr

---

Artist and source unknown

1494-1495

The British Library, London





From Chinese sources we even know the names of two of them – in the end they managed to return to their native land. All other reports speak not of early Iranian manuscript illumination but of portrait painting or scientific illustration.

The portrait miniature as a genre had already established itself in the Sassanian



### Alexander the Great and the Seven Sages

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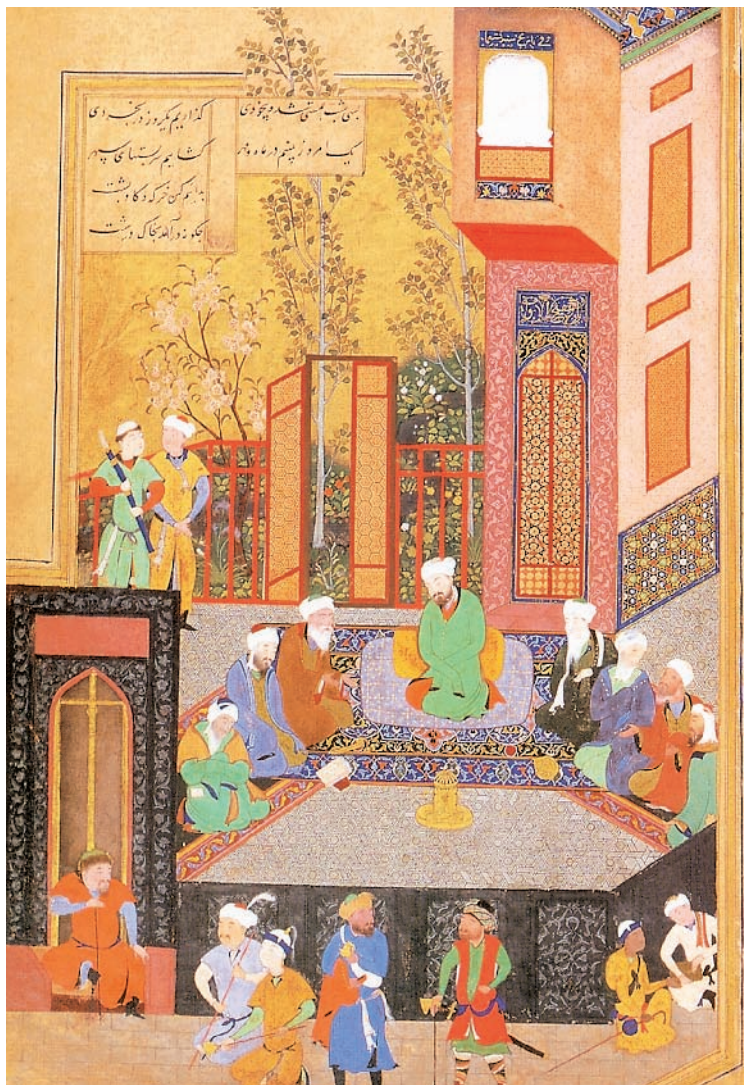
Illustration attributed to Bihzad from Nizami's masterpiece  
*Khamse* (literally "collection of five")

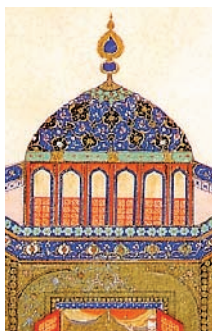
1494-1495

24.1 x 16.8 cm

The British Library, London







period (224-651 AD), and developed, even flourished, in Iranian painting during the following centuries. The facts available at present attest that fresco painting existed on Iranian territory in the 10th to 12th centuries, and that it was above all widespread in the northeast and beyond the borders of Iran;

### Khusraw at Shirin's palace

---

Illustration from Nizami's masterpiece *Khamsa*  
(literally "collection of five")

Late 15th century

29 x 19 cm

Keir Collection, London







we also know that portrait painting has existed in Iran since the Sassanian period, and that there are a number of illustrations of literary and epic subjects among works of applied art, even cycles of such illustrations. Finally, the very earliest manuscript miniatures in Persian works that are known to us (*Varqah and*

### Alexander the Great Fighting Against Darius

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Illustration from a work of Mir Ali Shir Nawai  
16th century  
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris





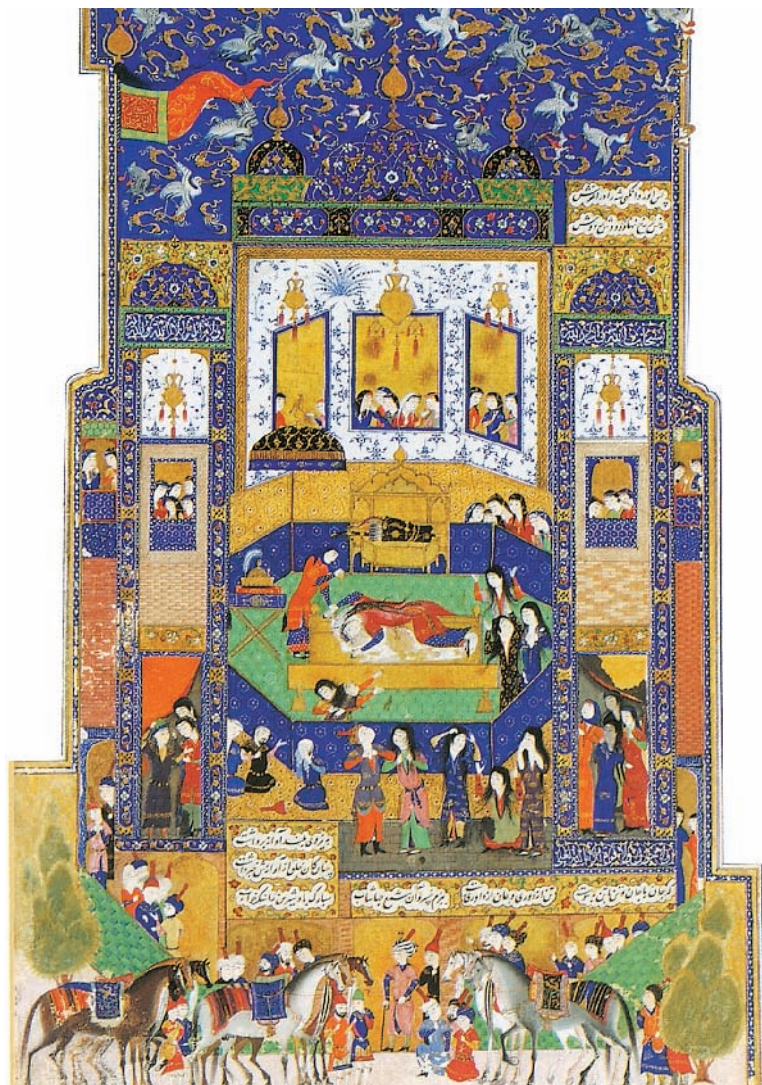
*Gulshah* and the *Shiraz Shahnamas*) bear witness to the influence of fresco paintings and the decoration of ceramics. One can assume that the illustrative, narrative quality, which had already been present for a long time in Persian art – in wall-paintings, metalwork, stucco and textiles – became

### Shirin's Suicide

Illustration from Nizami's masterpiece *Khamsa*  
(literally "collection of five")  
c. 1505

Gouache and gold on paper, 29.5 x 19 cm  
Keir Collection, London







widespread during the 11th and 12th centuries in ceramics as well (on vessels and lustre tiles, often forming what were, in essence, almost wall-paintings); only afterwards did those same artists, or at any rate artists with the same technical training, also create Iranian manuscript illustrations.

### Sam Bringing His Son Zal Back from Mount Alburz

---

Illustration, attributed to sultan Muhammad or one of his pupils,  
from Firdawsi's masterpiece *Shahname* (*Book of Kings*)  
c. 1522-1525

Gouache, gold and silver on paper, 28.2 x 18.5 cm  
Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin







This is all the more likely since, as scholars point out, one characteristic of Persian artistic perception is an extremely close connection between word and object, literature and fine art. As a rule, comparisons run both ways: life is breathed into objects, and human attributes and feelings are ascribed to them,

### Solomon and Bilqis

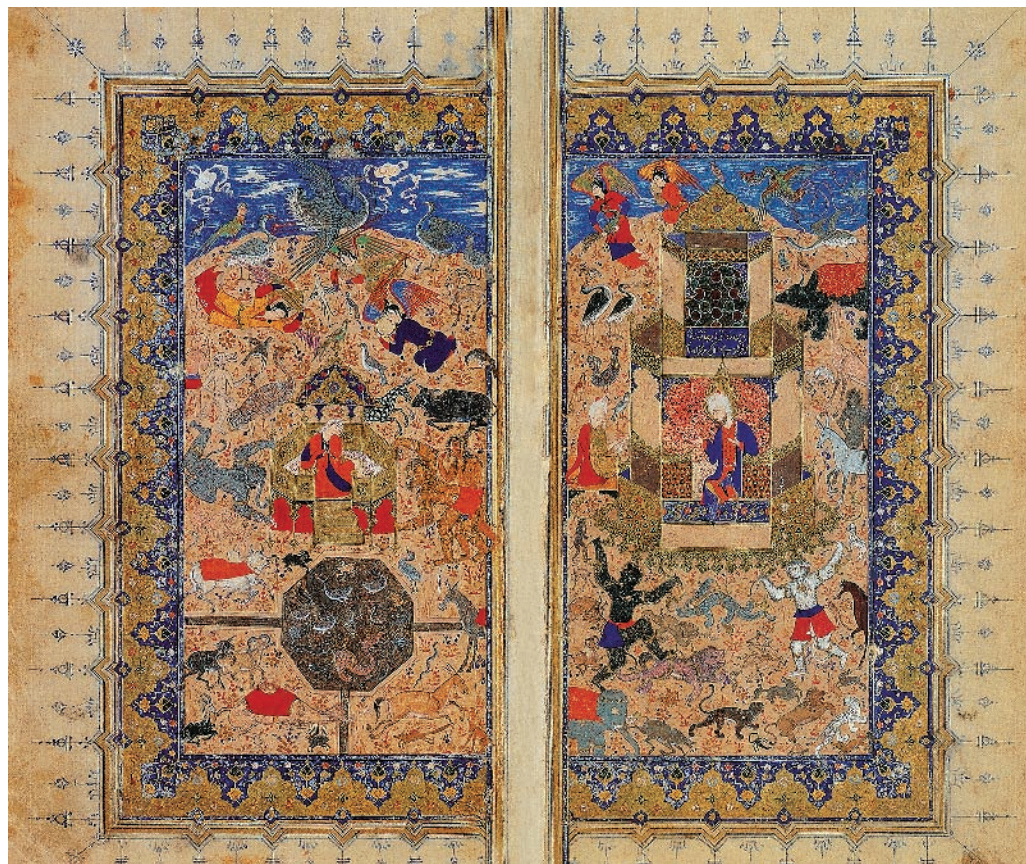
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Illustration from Nizami's masterpiece *Khamsa*  
(literally "collection of five")

1529

29.7 x 18 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin





while human experiences and states of mind easily find a precise symbol among objects in the immediate environment.

Thus, the actual circumstances of reading poetry take on another sense: the participants of the scene are no longer surrounded by everyday objects, but by



### Bahram Hunting a Lion

---

Illustration, attributed to sultan Muhammad,  
from Nizami's masterpiece *Khamsa* (literally "collection of five")  
1539-1543

Gouache, gold and silver on paper, 36.5 x 25.1 cm  
The British Library, London







object-symbols with all their various, and usually human, characteristics. A bowl in the hands of those listening to verse is no longer a simple bowl but a metaphor brought to life: the open tulips of wine bowls are hearts filled with blood, the lips of the cup are the lips of a beloved, the bowl itself is the bowl of the

### Prince Khusraw Watches Queen Shirin Bathing

---

Artist and source unknown

1539-1543

The British Library, London









heavens tilted above the world, and the turning of a round bowl repeats the whirling of the wheel of fate. It is interesting to cite the viewpoint of scholars studying comparatively early miniatures of the so-called Shiraz school (the miniatures in the *Shahnama* of 1333).

### Isra or Muhammad's Night Journey

---

Artist and source unknown

1539-1543

The British Library, London





These miniatures differ fundamentally in their draughtsmanship from what we are generally accustomed to seeing in later Persian miniatures (15th-17th century). What one might call a painterly basis dominates here. In terms of technique, these miniatures are on the one hand connected to fresco

### Sultan Sanjar and the Old Woman

---

Illustration attributed to sultan Muhammad  
from Nizami's masterpiece *Khamsa* (literally "collection of five")

1539-1543

36.5 x 25.1 cm

The British Library, London







painting and on the other – and this is of vital importance – to paintings on ceramics of the so-called Rey type, in which peculiarities of brushstroke and contour are explained by technical demands, that is, the need to paint the object rapidly. Of course, it is difficult to imagine a direct link between wall-painting

### The Flight of the Tortoise

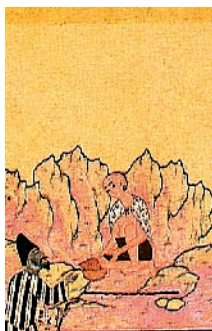
Illustration from Jami's masterpiece  
*Tuhfat al-ahrar* (*The Gift of the Free*)  
1548

28.2 x 18.2 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin







and designs on metal and ceramics that does not take book illustration into account. It is, of course, far easier to consider that early illustrated manuscripts have simply not survived to the present day. But all the facts cited above tell us that we have no right to insist categorically that Iranian illuminated manuscripts existed before the mid-13th century.

### Alexander at the Ka'ba

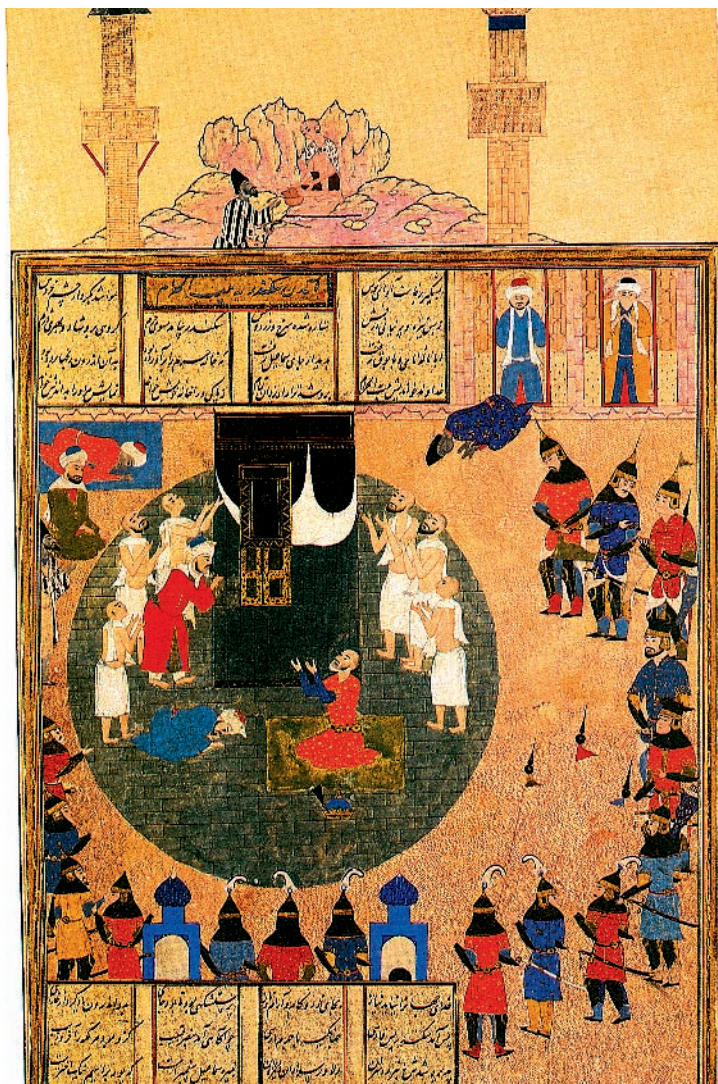
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Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece  
*Shahnama* (*Book of Kings*)

Mid-16th century

36 x 21.5 cm.

Khalili Collection





How, in actual fact, could absolutely all of the illuminated manuscripts have disappeared? Surely they would have been carefully preserved in court libraries. If they were all destroyed, why have a number of Arabic manuscripts with illustrations remained, produced in the middle of the Abbasid Caliphate?

### Ali Fighting to Take the Fortress of Qamus

---

Illustration from the masterpiece

*Falnama (Book of Divinations)*

1550-1560

59.7 x 45.4 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin







The total silence of early Persian sources on the subject of manuscript illumination is also strange. How many stories they tell of wall-painting! There are the anecdotes about Attar whose father, a merchant of perfumes (a fairly wealthy one), out of loyalty ordered a portrait of Mahmud of Ghazni to be set in

### Alexander the Great Oversees the Building of the Wall

---

Illustration from the masterpiece

*Falnama (Book of Divinations)*

1550-1560

59.4 x 45 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin









the state apartments of his house, or the story told by Baihaqi about the erotic paintings in Mas'ud's pavilion, or the famous verses of Farrukhi (although this poet greatly disliked both antiquity and pictures): "Painted at several noble places in that palace [the palace of Mahmud of Ghazni] are pictures of the King of the East [Mahmud]. At one place in

### Prince Bahram Listening to the Story of the Princess of the Blue Pavilion

---

Artist and source unknown

1553

Bodleian Library, Oxford





battle with a spear in his hands, at another place – at a banquet with a goblet in his hand.” And not a single reliable reference to Persian illuminated manuscripts or Persian miniaturists surfaces before the 14th century. In the 14th century, the feudal system was at its height in Iran.

### Angel

Artist and source unknown

c. 1555

18.1 x 10.2 cm

The British Museum, London







At the same time, from the middle of the century, it was the age of individual rulers each striving to create their own magnificent court, with their own poets, scholars and artists. But the “prestige” of such a ruler, which he could flaunt to his rivals and subjects, was no longer a matter of precious

### Camel and Its Keeper

---

Illustration signed by Shaykh-Muhammad

1556-1557

Painting mounted as an album page, 13.1 x 21.1 cm (folio)  
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







vessels of gold, silver or bronze inlaid with gold and silver, expensive ceremonial dinner services made in the lustre technique or painted in enamels, or tile work decorating the halls of palaces, mosques and tombs. These rulers were both weaker and poorer than their predecessors and there had long

### The Wise Old Man Chides a Foolish Youth

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

14.6 x 13 cm (painting)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





been no vast frescoes in their palaces, no stucco panels depicting the heroic exploits of their noble ancestors and no portraits of themselves. Therefore, miniature painting and calligraphy appear to have become the primary “prestigious” branches of art. Costly manuscripts of ancient narrative poems or verses written by the ruler’s court poets or by

### A Depraved Man Commits Bestiality and Is Berated by Satan

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Illustration from Jami’s masterpiece *Haft awrang*  
(*Seven Thrones*)

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







historians praising his or his ancestors' grandeur and decorated with miniatures executed by court painters or simply by skilled miniaturists involved in commercial production were highly prized.

As for ceramics and metalwork, they were "democratised". Craftsmen produced these articles for the middle ranks of society, so there were no longer ceramics bearing texts



### The Simple Peasant Entreats the Salesman Not to Sell His Wonderful Donkey

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece  
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*  
1556-1565

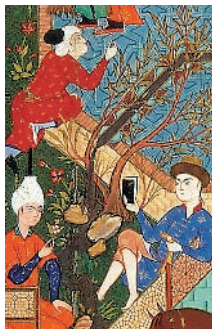
34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.









of great poems and decorated with pictures that were either themes from these poems or, much more frequently, pictorial equivalents of the verses; the inscriptions on metal objects, which were more durable and expensive, were popular quotations or specific catchwords – albeit from the works of great poets – and not poetic texts.

### A Father Advises His Son about Love

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

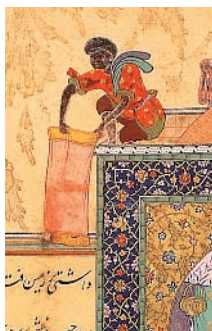
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





The social class of customers was changing and Persian miniature painting occupied the position of the most prestigious branch of art.

For many centuries, miniature painting was to be the leading genre in the Iranian fine arts. Oleg Grabar's assertion is perfectly correct: "The Rashidiyya School of painting did have a greater importance in the development of



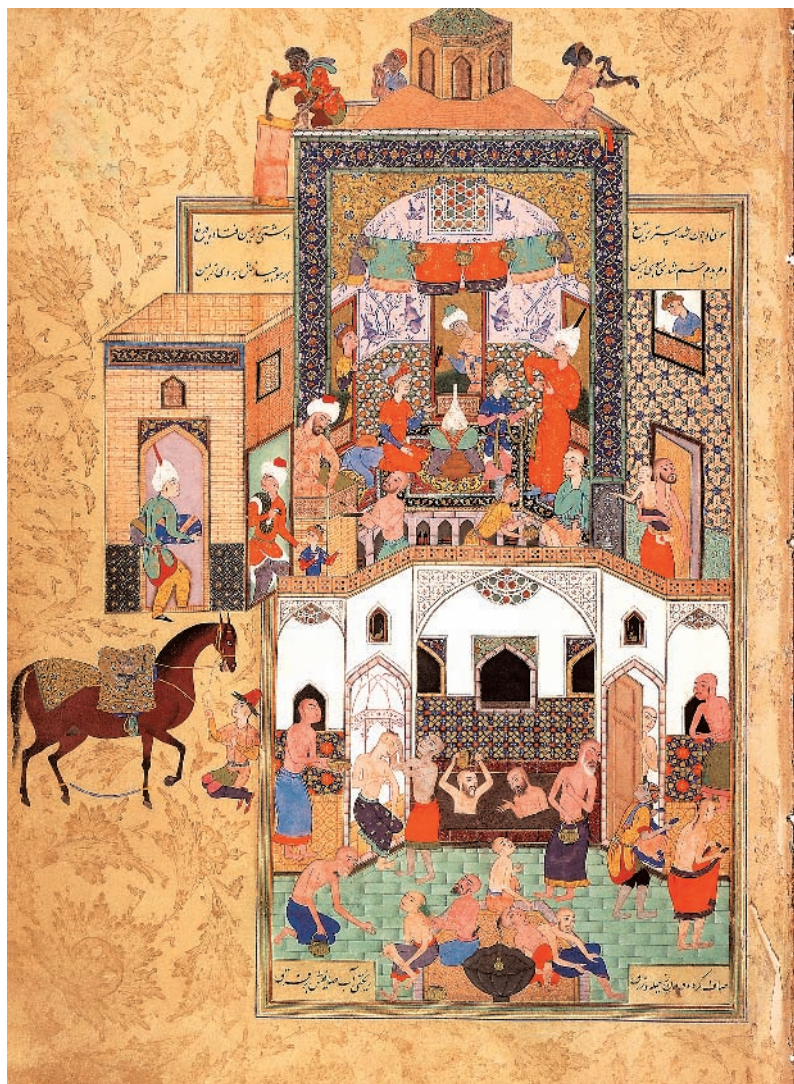
### The Dervish Picks Up His Beloved's Hair from the Hammam Floor

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece  
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*  
1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







Persian art after the death of its founder in 1318 than the architectural style of Azerbaijan in the 13th century”.

The Shiraz School of miniature painting is represented by illuminated manuscripts from the first decade of the 14th century onwards. Eight examples are known, four of them being Firdawsī's poem, the *Shahnama*. In the earliest copies the miniatures are executed in a flat



### Bandits Attack the Caravan of Aynie and Ria

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.









style with strong affinities to wall-painting and ceramic painting.

The large number of miniatures in these early manuscripts is interesting, but it is even more important to note that many of them are simple, standard compositions, scenes of a palace reception, a battle or various sorts of garden scenes or hunts. Thus, in the manuscript of the *Shahnama* dating from 1333,

The Aziz and Zulaykha Enter the Capital of Egypt and  
the Egyptians Come Out to Greet Them

---

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

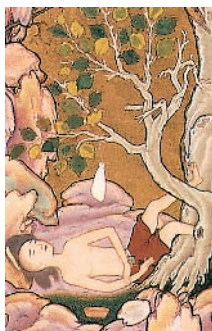
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





for example, more than 30 out of 52 miniatures are standard scenes of battles, hunts and “conversations”, etc. Such neutral, standard compositions have been aptly compared to the so-called *wasf* in literature. The *wasf* is obligatory in almost all genres of Persian literature; it is that part of a work which contains descriptions of nature, royal hunts and feasts, battles or, say, weapons, jewellery and carpets.

### Yusuf is Rescued from the Well

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

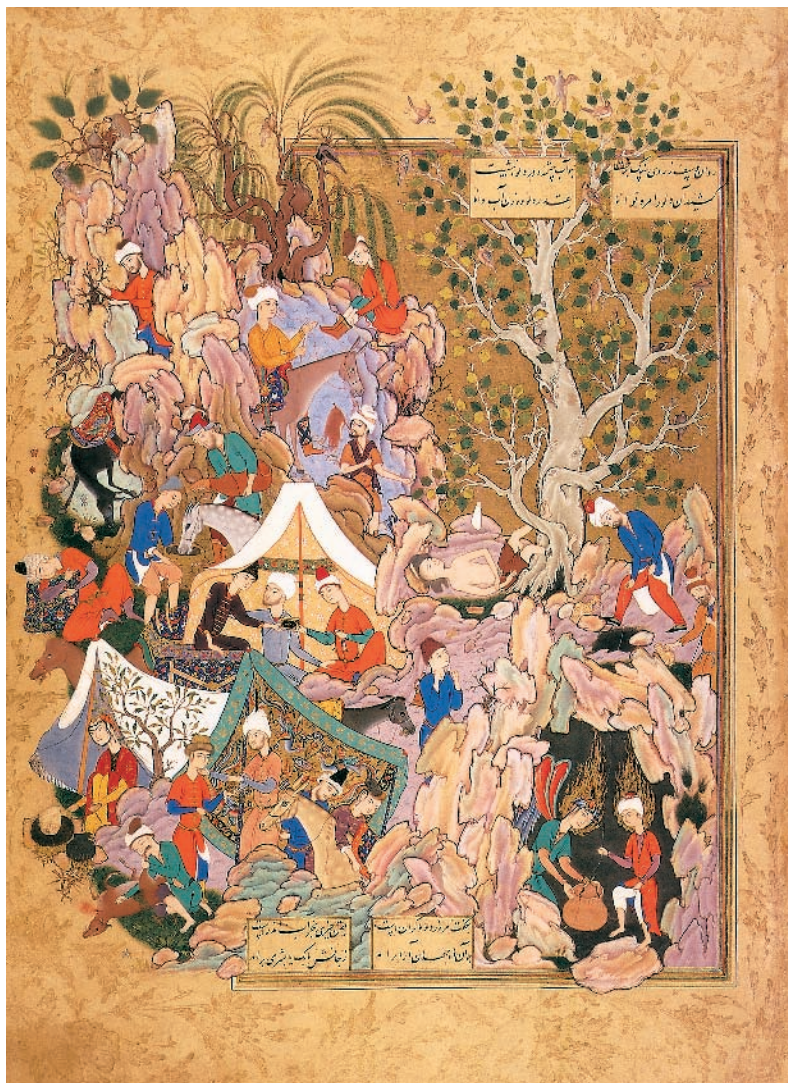
*Haft awrang* (*Seven Thrones*)

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







The descriptions had no independent significance at all. They were vivid literary pictures, like decorations against whose background the action unfolded. The beauty of these decorations in literature was often arrived at through "combinative methods": poets would from time to time interchange the same standard descriptions and motifs,

### Yusuf Tends His Flocks

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

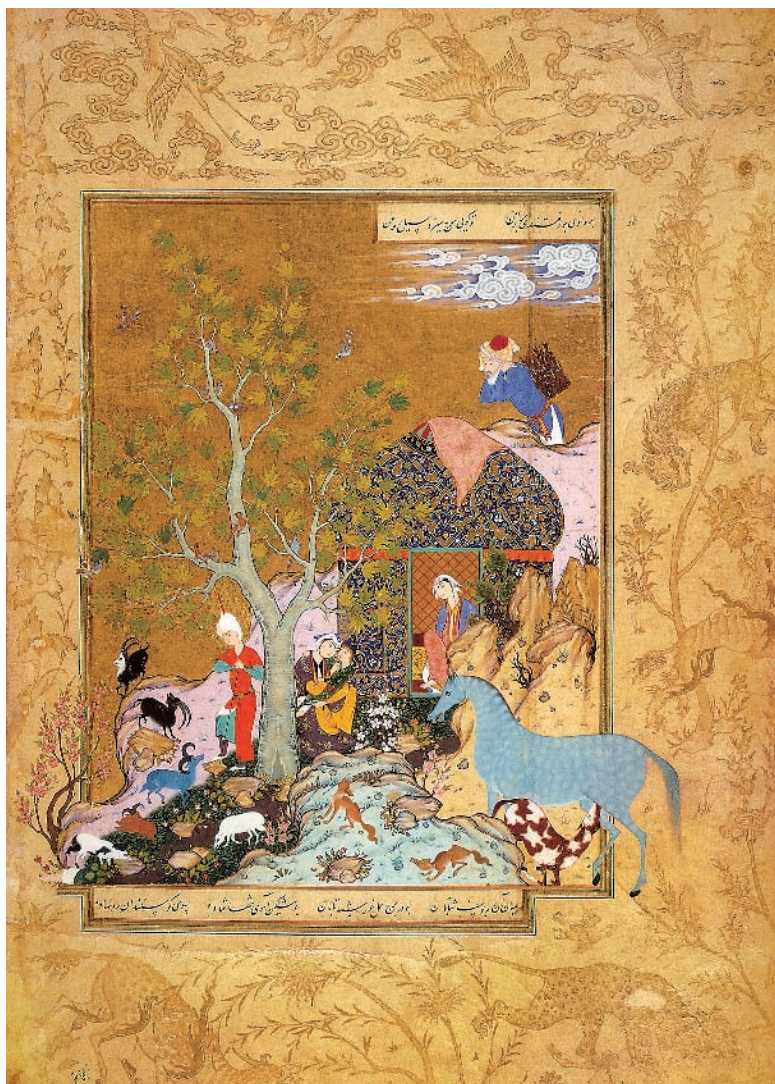
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.









complicating the images more and more and illuminating them in a clever play of words. Early miniatures are extremely exact illustrations of the text. Like those in western medieval manuscripts, they are based on a standard subject into which some significant concrete detail from the story they illustrate has been introduced.

### Yusuf Preaches to Zulaykha's Maidens in Her Garden

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





Therefore, when depicting Zahhak, the artist reproduced the standard scene of a king on a throne but added snakes growing from the king's shoulders. This manner of illustration develops from one manuscript to another and gradually establishes its own standards with subjects that were, initially, original.



### The Infant Witness Testifies to Yusuf's Innocence

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

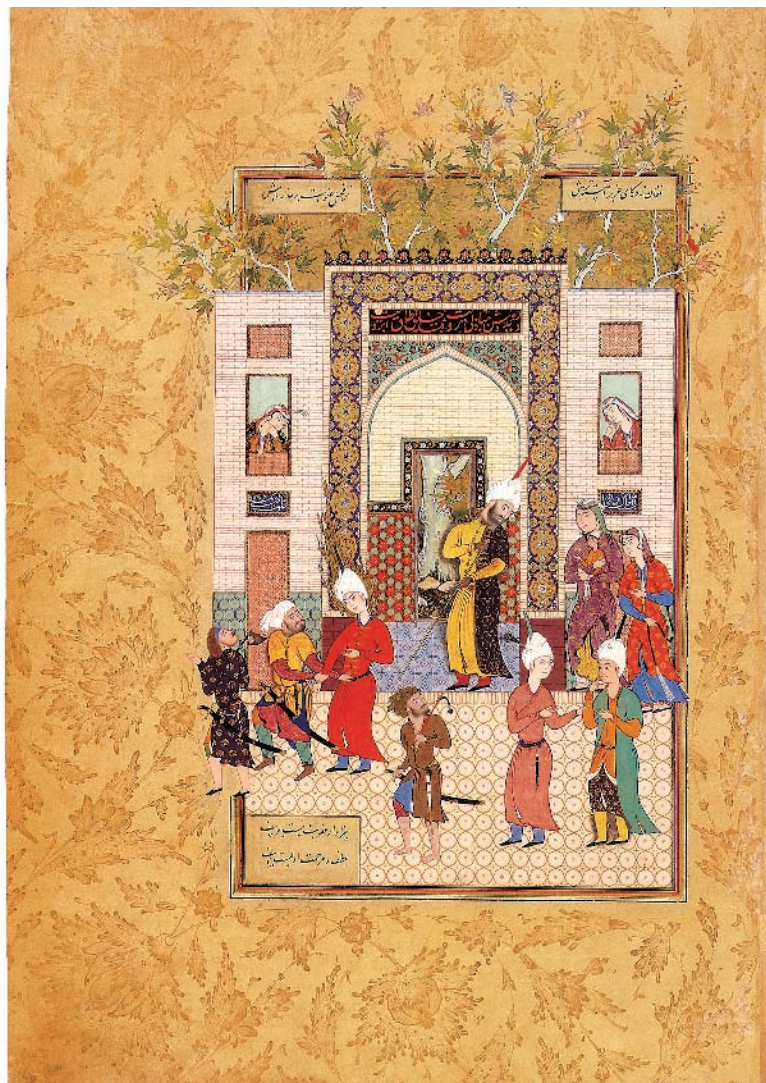
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







The miniaturist proclaims his identity in the character of the painting – in the colour scheme and the attention to intricate detail. Within this framework a great artist could rival a great poet. But all these features were to emerge later. To return to the Shiraz School in its first phase, it should be observed that these miniatures are marked by imperfection, coarseness and standardisation.

### Yusuf Gives a Royal Banquet in Honor of His Marriage

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







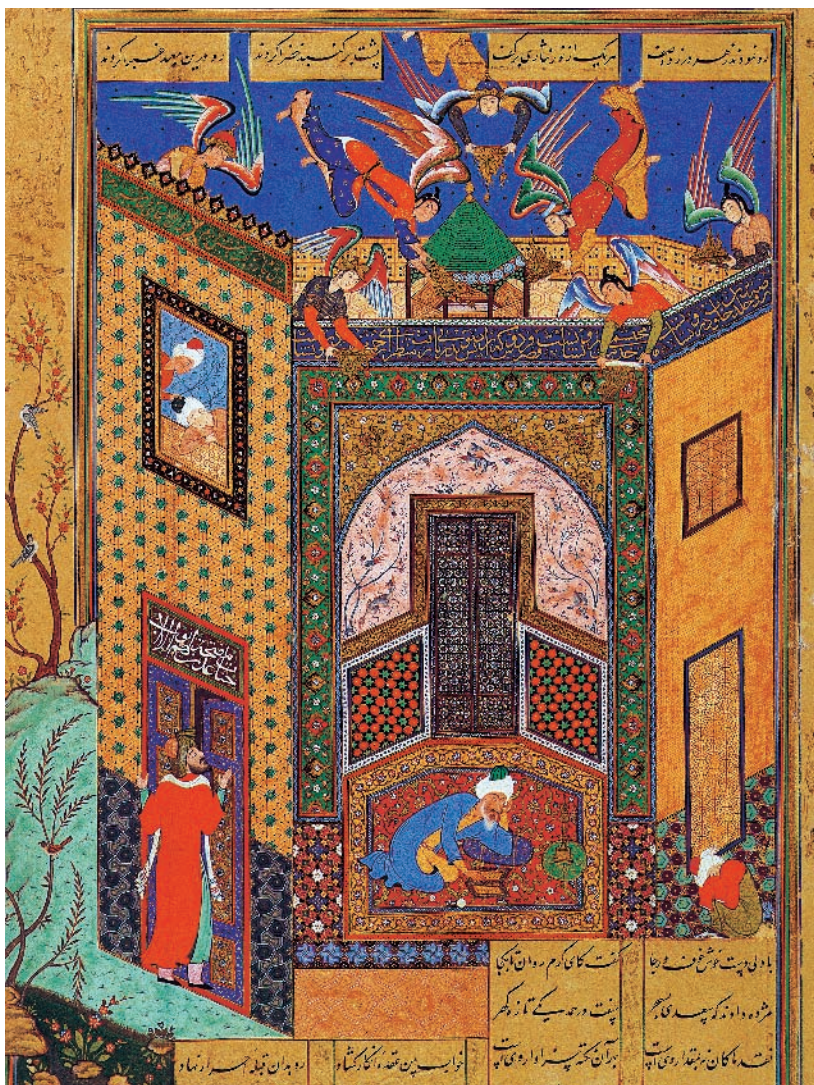
In artistic terms, they are not actually very interesting works. They are, so to speak, stereotypical miniatures. Yet at the same period in Tabriz, the masterpiece of Iranian illumination was produced, the Demotte *Shahnama*, which we have already mentioned. At that time the Mongol dynasty of the Ilkhans, or Hulaguids, ruled in Tabriz.

### The Gnostic Has a Vision of Angels Carrying Trays of Light to the Poet Sa'di

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece  
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*  
1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





These were the descendants of Hulagu, the grandson of Genghis Khan. One of them, Ghazan Khan (1295-1304), in an attempt to rescue the country from the cruel devastation that had been a consequence of Mongol invasion and rule, announced a series of important official reforms that were put into practice by his vizier, Rashid al-Din.

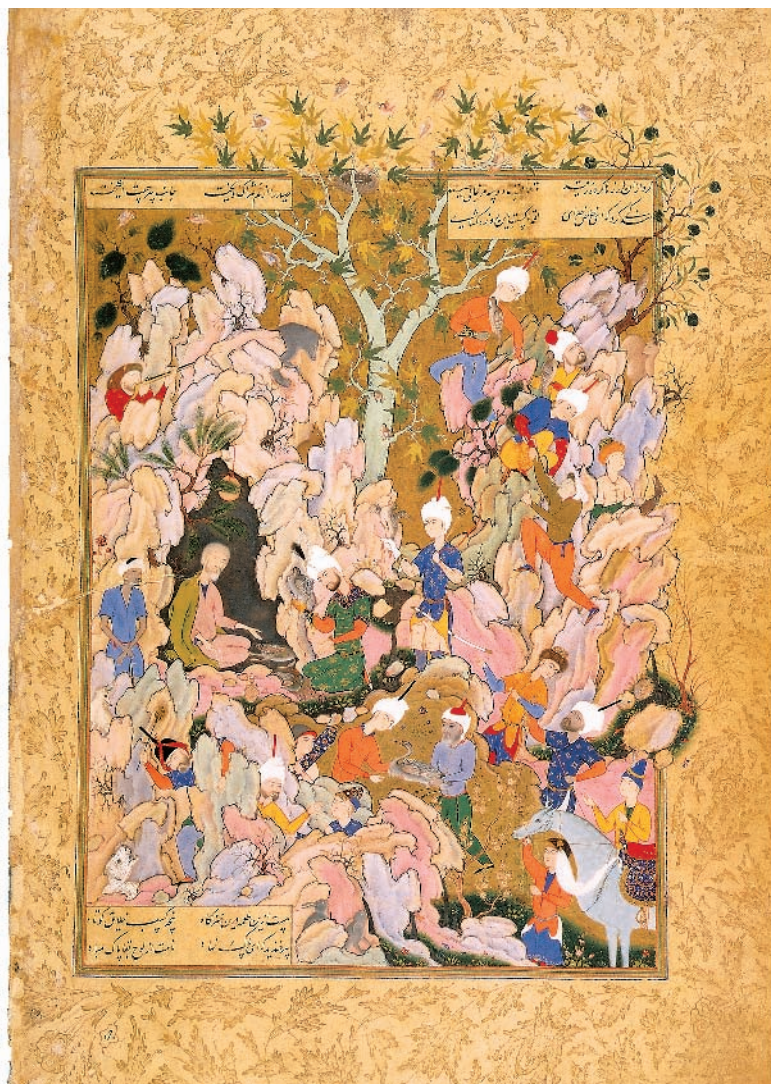
### The Pir Rejects the Ducks Brought as Presents by the Murid

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece  
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*  
1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







Rashid al-Din was an advocate of strong power and a centralised political system – ideas which, as it happened, were stubbornly opposed by the Mongol nomadic military aristocracy. In the consolidation of centralised power, Rashid al-Din was helped by the propagation of his own concept of an “Iranian empire of the Ilkhanates”.



### The Fickle Old Lover Is Knocked Off the Rooftop

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

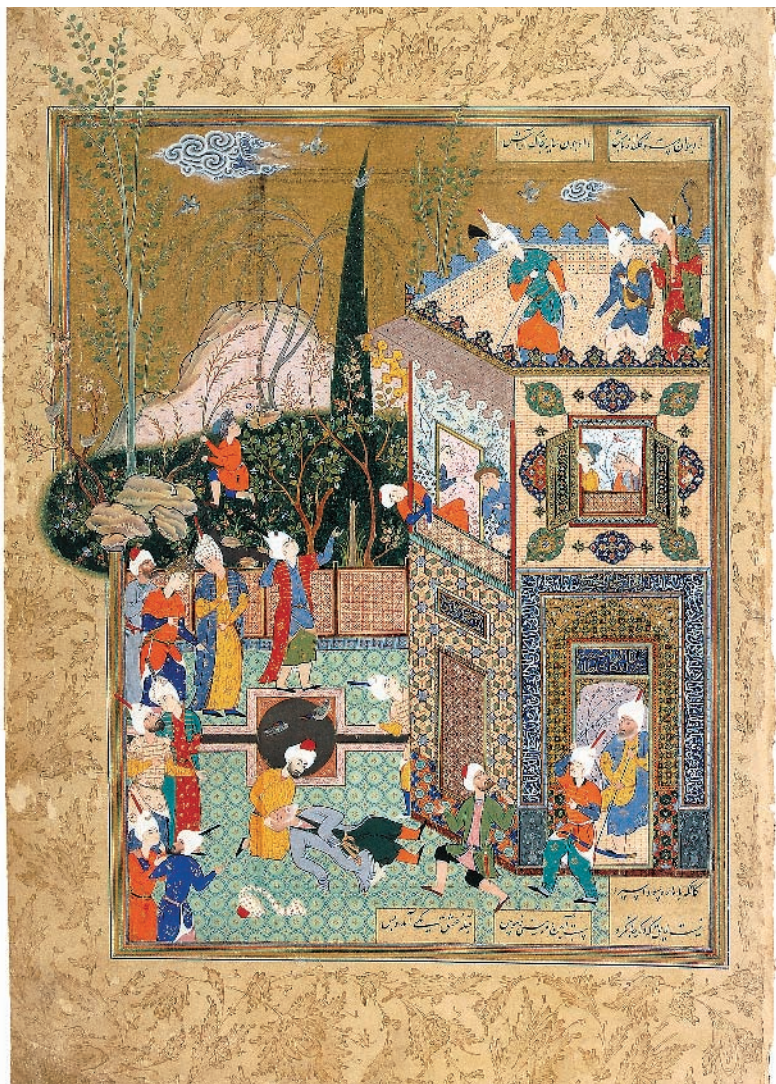
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.









He called the Mongol khan the refuge of the Caliphate, an Iranian Khosrau and successor to the Kayanid kingdom.

Rashid al-Din's chief work, *Jami al-tawarikh* (*Collection of Chronicles*), is permeated by these concepts. The work was conceived as a genuinely universal history which would include the history of all the then-known peoples, from the Franks to the Chinese.



The Arab Berates His Guests for Attempting to Pay  
Him For His Hospitality

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece  
*Haft awrang* (*Seven Thrones*)  
1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





To realise this grandiose plan, an entire “academy” was founded, which included scholars, calligraphers and artists. Among them were two Chinese scholars, a Buddhist monk from Kashmir, a Catholic monk from France, scholars of Mongol traditions, etc. The manuscript of the *Collection of Chronicles* was illustrated by artists who strove to portray “ethnographic pictures” of the various peoples.

### The Townsman Robs the Villager's Orchard

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







The very strong influence of Chinese painting is noticeable in the illustrations – there were many Chinese articles and craftsmen in Iran at that time, brought there by the Mongols.

Not long afterwards (perhaps during the third decade of the 14th century, at the court of Ilkhan Abu Sa'id) a sumptuous manuscript of the *Shahnama* was produced,

### Salaman and Absal Repose on the Happy Isle

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

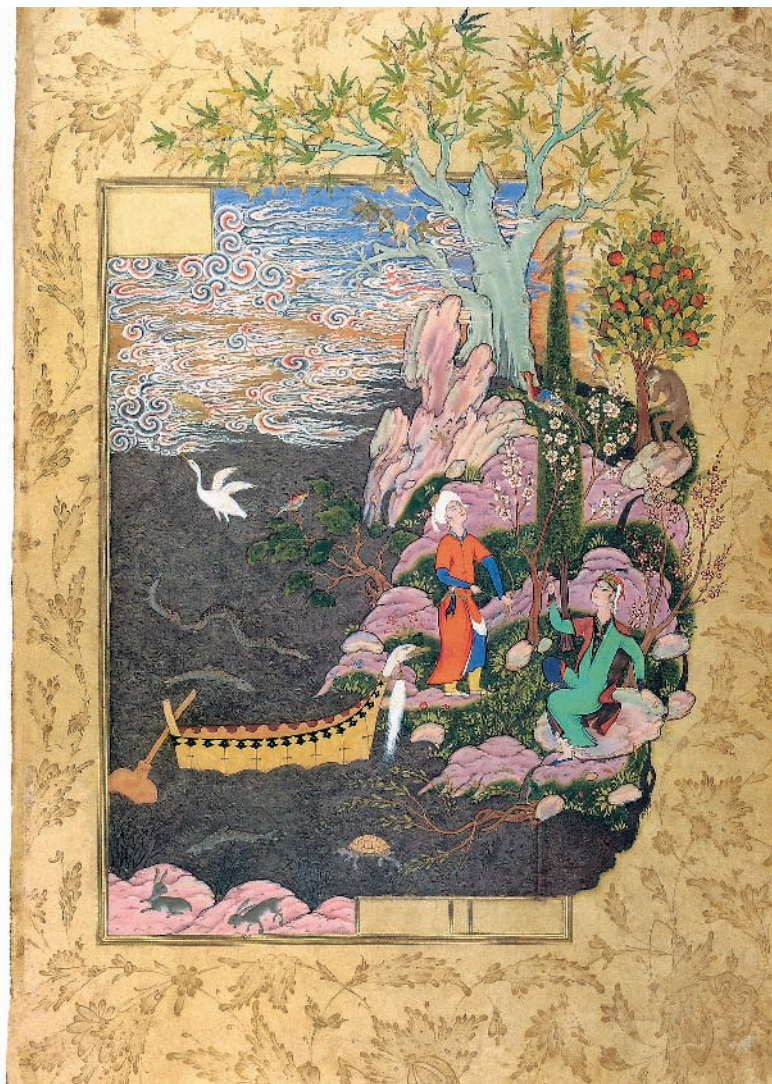
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.









astounding in the quality of its miniatures and the originality of its approach. It has been suggested that the choice of themes for its 120 or more miniatures was governed by a definite programme.

First of all this programme stressed the legitimacy of royal power, the same concept as Firdawsi's "divine Khwarnah (*farrah*)", which alone provides the strength and might of a legitimate lord and his divine right to power.



### The Murid Kisses the Pir's Feet

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece  
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





However, the important fact is that the miniatures are painted with overwhelming mastery; they are already far from being simply illustrations, although there are plenty of standard motifs in this *Shahnama* – throne scenes, hunts, banquets and battles. The miniatures of the Demotte *Shahnama* are the first to represent a new movement in Iranian miniature painting, one that has nothing to do with illustration, for “the elaboration of

### The Flight of the Tortoise

---

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







the narrative through the image of man leads the viewer to a highly moral interpretation of the epic". However, the Demotte *Shahnama* is a unique manuscript that did not give rise to any imitations. In essence, the style of Iranian miniature painting was laid down in the 1360s and 1370s in the cities of Baghdad and Shiraz, and this was the style which was to determine its development for several centuries.

### The East African Looks at Himself in the Mirror

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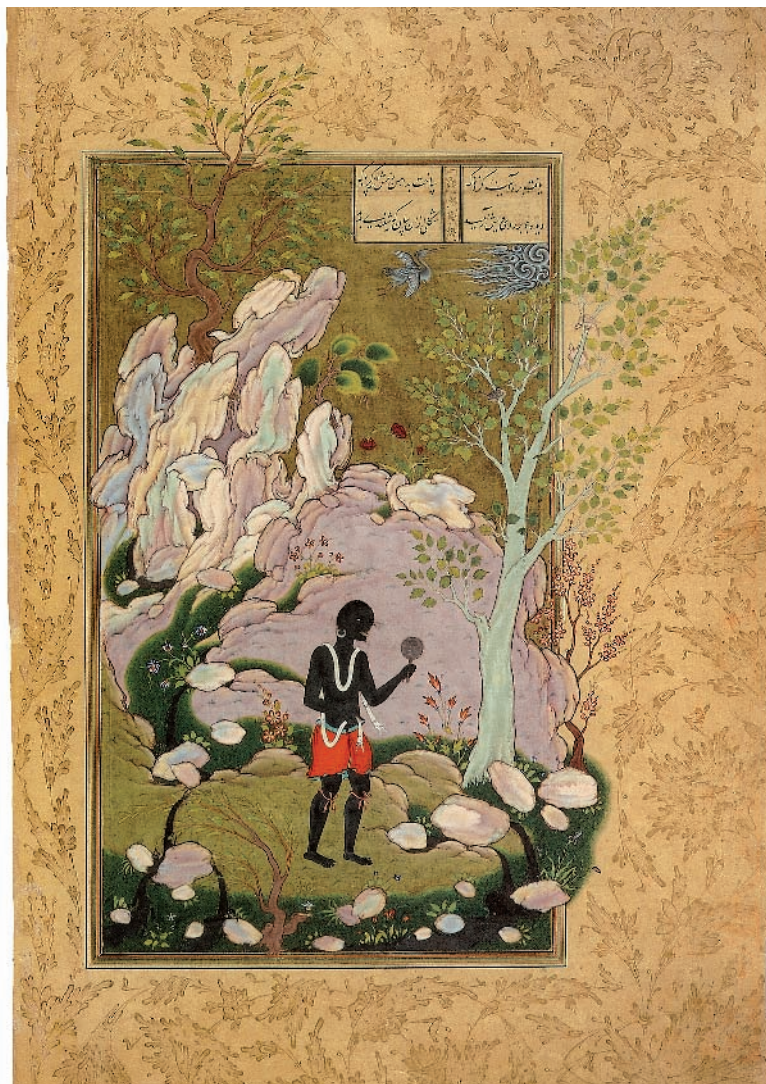
Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







The first manuscripts with miniatures clearly displaying this style are the Shiraz *Shahnama* of 1370 and the manuscript of poems by Khwaju Xirmani, copied in 1396 in Baghdad by the calligrapher Mir Ali Tabrizi. Around this time, the initial stage of development of Iranian miniature painting – the stage represented by the miniatures in *Varqah and Gulshah* or the Shiraz *Shahnamas* of 1330 and 1333, or by the so-called

### Qays First Glimpses at Layli

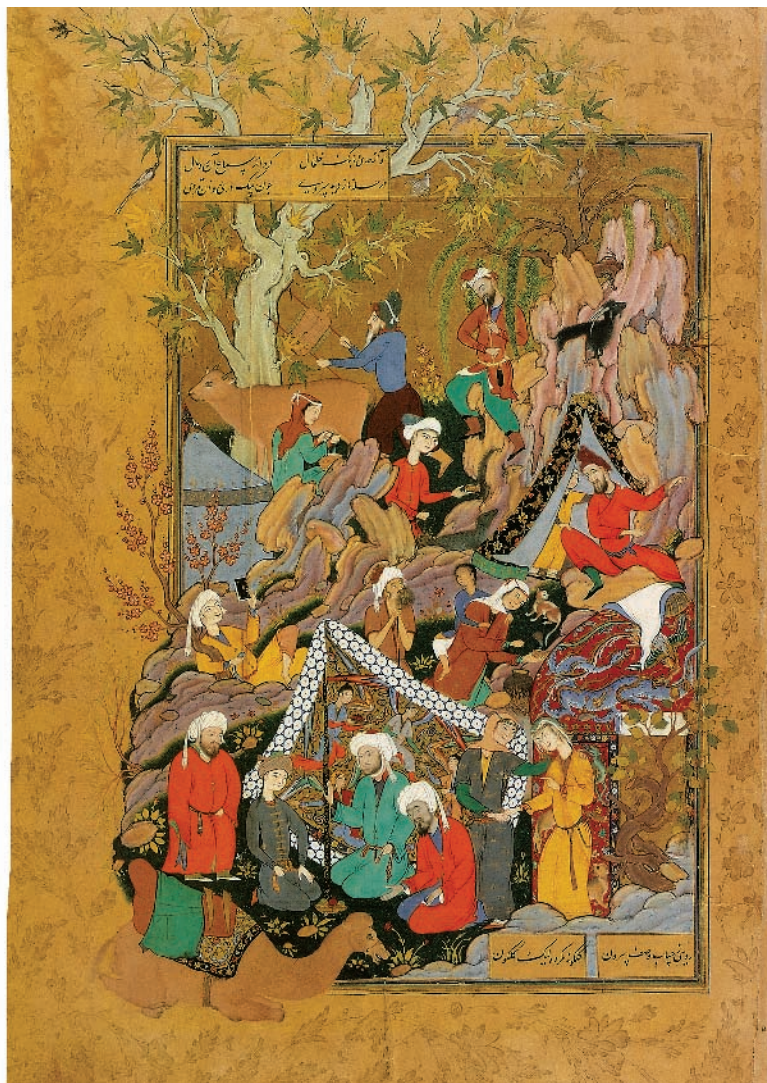
Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang* (*Seven Thrones*)

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





"Small *Shahnamas*" of the same period – was gradually but inexorably becoming a thing of the past.

Chinese painting of the Sung period played an important role in establishing the new style, especially in the depiction of landscape. Motifs from Chinese ceramics and textiles, widespread in Iran at that time, were equally important.

### Majnun Approaches the Camp of Layli's Caravan

---

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







Contemporary Arab miniature painting and Rashidiyya miniatures also played a large part.

During this period, manuscripts of the *Shahnama* were the most often illustrated texts. At that time, the *Shahnama* was arousing interest for the first time since it had been written, evidently for political reasons, both at the Mongol court of the Ilkhans (to which we have already referred) and at the court of their vice-regents, the Injuids in Shiraz.

### Majnun Comes before Layli Disguised as a Sheep

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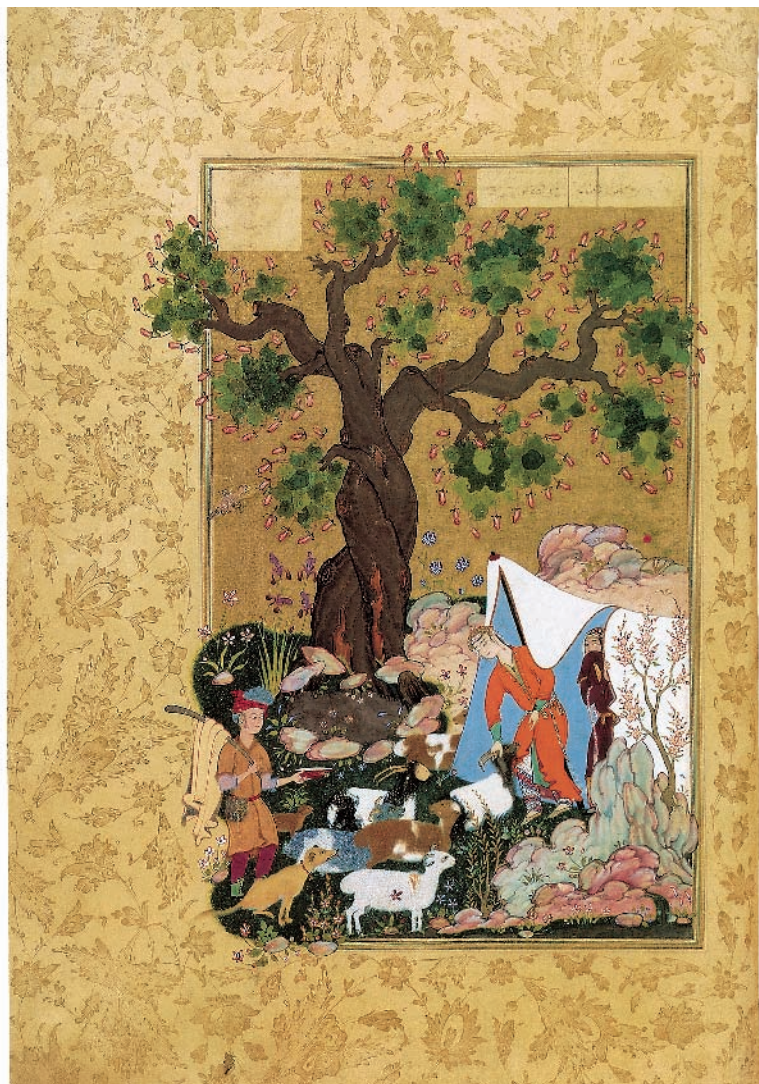
Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







One could even go so far as to say that the development of genres in Iranian miniature painting began with the illustration of this work, which was viewed at the time not from the angle of its poetical merits but above all from that of its legitimist ideas. Naturally, however, this process was much more complex than that described here.

### The Mi'raj of the Prophet

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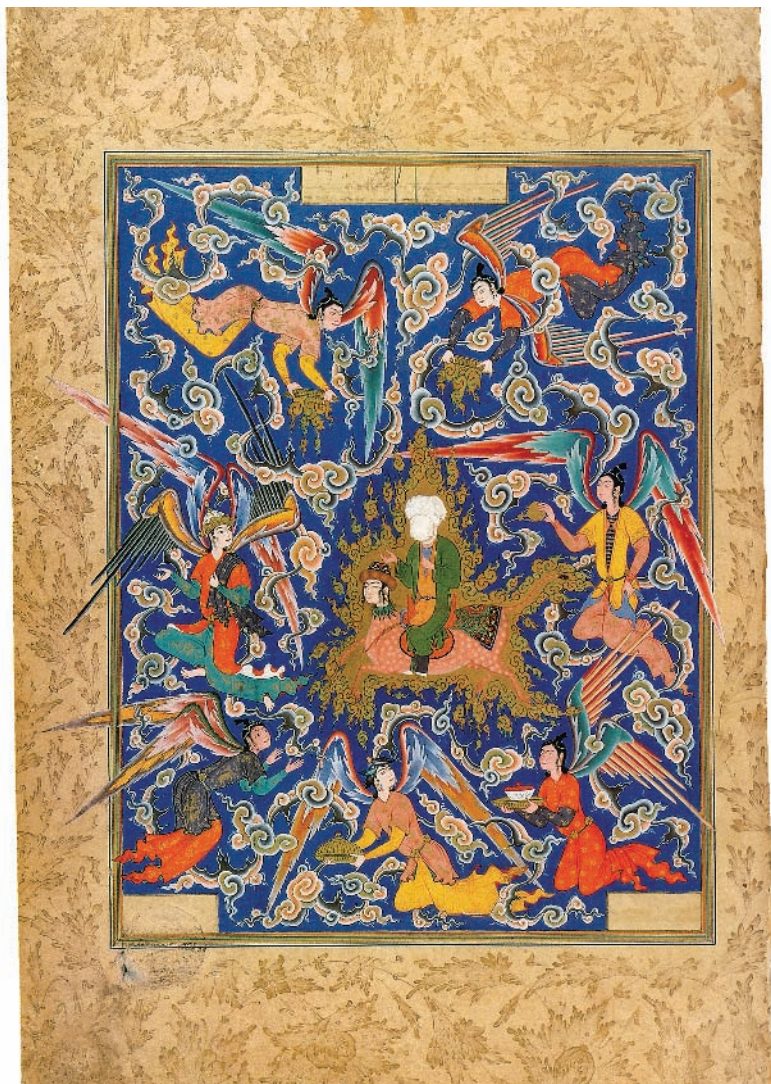
Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





It is important to stress that from the very outset, the illumination of manuscripts was concentrated at the courts of their owners and consequently, apart from their purely artistic aims, came to fulfil specific political functions.

Dust Muhammad (16th century) also dates the beginning of miniature painting to the time of Ilkhan Abu Sa'id: "It was then that Ustad Ahmed Musa... removed the veil from

### Khusraw Parviz and Shirin Deal with the Fishmonger

---

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

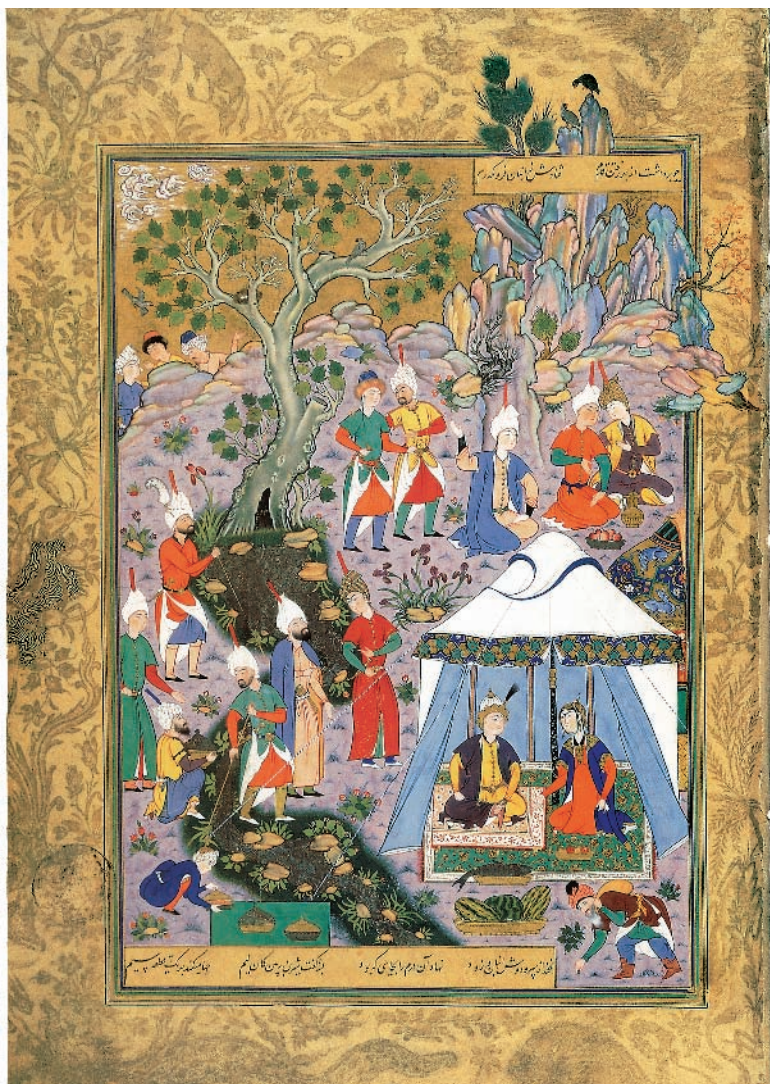
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







the visage of painting and introduced such a manner of drawing as is generally accepted to the present day". It was this same Dust Muhammad who described in detail the founding of the famous *kitabkhanah* (library) in Herat by Baysunghur, the grandson of Timur, who ruled in Herat during the 1420s and 1430s.



### Alexander Suffers a Nosebleed and Is Laid Down to Rest

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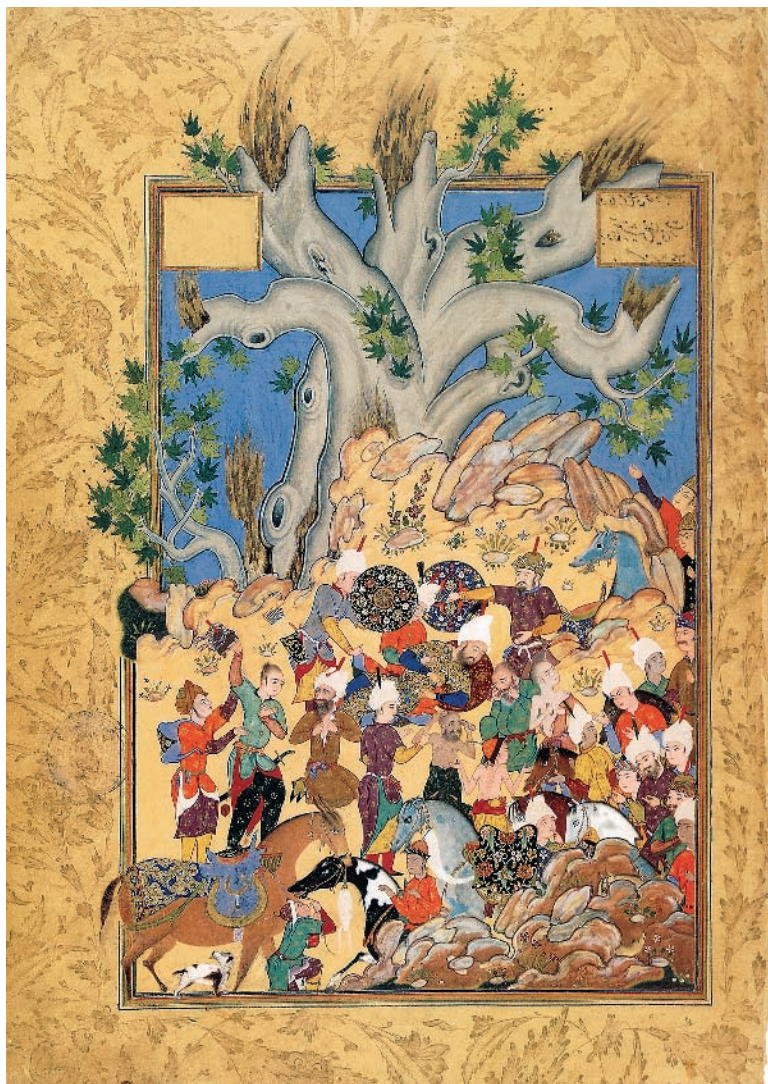
Illustration from Jami's masterpiece

*Haft awrang* (*Seven Thrones*)

1556-1565

34.5 x 23.4 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.







The best painters of the time, brought from Tabriz and Shiraz, were gathered there. The literature, painting and calligraphy of Iran developed in such *kitabkhanah* as those founded by Rashid al-Din and Baysunghur. As objects of pride for the rulers at whose courts they were founded, such *kitabkhanah* naturally reflected the tastes of their patrons and the actual problems of the day.

### Solomon and Bilqis Sit Together and Converse Frankly

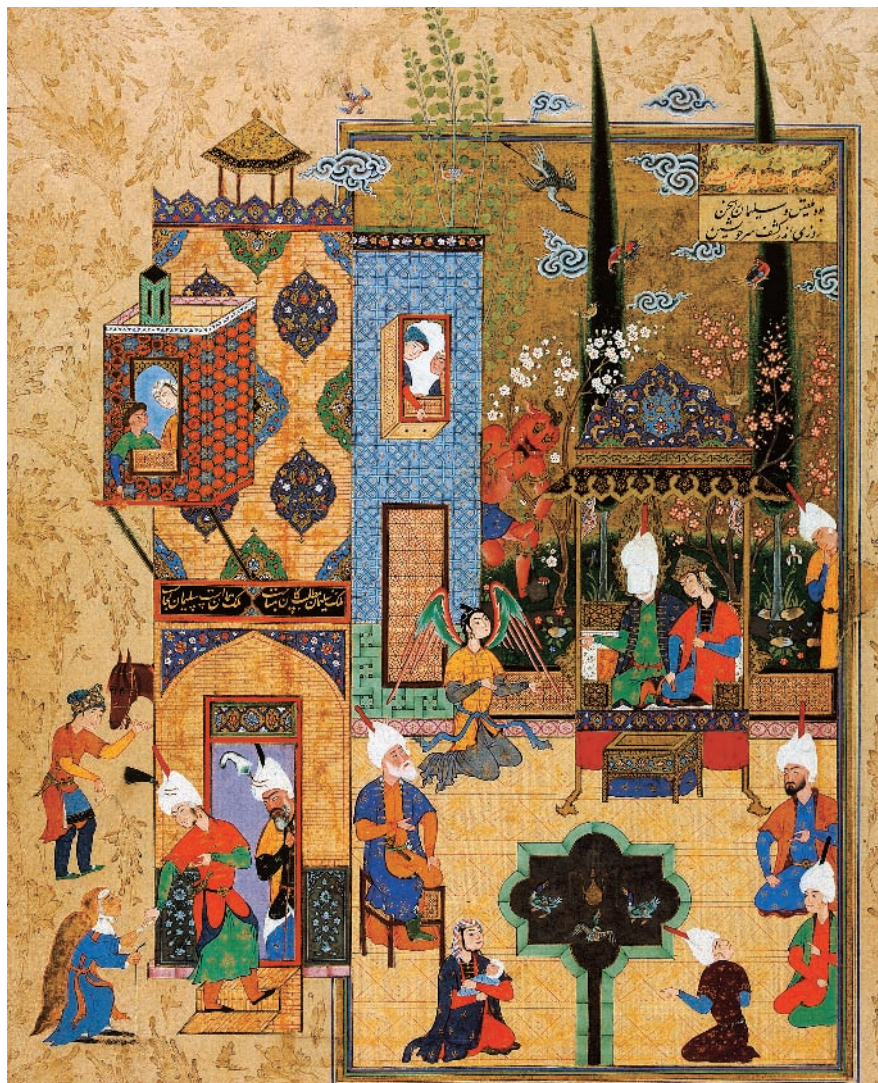
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Illustration copied by Ayshi ibn Ishrati from Jami's masterpiece  
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1556-1565

34.4 x 46.8 cm (folio)

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.





The history of medieval Iranian libraries is one of the most interesting chapters in the history of its culture.

In referring readers to the specialist literature, we would point out that the work of many scholars has established the existence of several schools of miniature painting at various times in Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashhad, Isfahan, etc.

### Old Man in Landscape

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Illustration signed by Abdullah al-Shirazi from Jami's masterpiece  
*Haft awrang (Seven Thrones)*

1564-1565

21.7 x 14.5 cm (folio)

Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon







These schools all passed through phases of flowering and decay. In the 15th to early 16th century, the Herat school reached the peak of achievement; miniature painting was dominated in the 16th century by the Tabriz School and in the 17th century by the Isfahan School.

Research on the Middle Ages reveals a number of complex and unresolved problems.

### Ali Fighting to Take the Fortress of Qamus

---

Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Athar al-muẓaffar (The Exploits of the Victorious)*  
1567

26 x 17.8 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin









It appears to us that the basis for their solution will be a substantiated relative chronology, tracing the periods of development in Persian art after the spread of Islam throughout the country. For a long time, historians of Persian art have adhered to a dynastic chronology. Such classification has a certain justification, for after a large territory had been unified under the control of a single dynasty that then ruled for a

### Muhammad and Ali at Ghadir Khumm

---

Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Athar al-muẓaffar (The Exploits of the Victorious)*  
1567

26 x 17.8 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin





century or more, a certain unity of style was created in that state. But a more detailed study of objects and a precise determination of their dates have shown that periods of change in art do not always coincide with the emergence or fate of dynasties.

In 1970, Ernst Grube suggested a new classification for the development of Persian

## Muhammad and Ali Destroying the Idols of the Ka'ba

---

Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Athar al-muzaffar (The Exploits of the Victorious)*  
1567

26 x 17.8 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin







art in the Middle Ages. He distinguished five periods from the appearance of the Arabs to the beginning of the 18th century. The first three periods, in his opinion, were common to the whole area dominated by Islam. These are: the period of its establishment (650-850 AD), the first inter-regional style (850-1050) and the second inter-regional style (1050-1350).

### Adam and Eve

---

Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Qisas al-anbiya (The Tales of the Prophets)*

1570-1580

31.7 x 19.9 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

بسیرون روید از بهشت که عاصی بهشت اندر نباشد تو که آدم و  
 و حوا و ابلیس و طاووس پس و مار همه دشمن یکدیگر بخانه خدا می  
 تبارک و تعالی در قرآن مجید و سفران حمید خبر میدهد



فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي هُوَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ  
 وَمَتَّاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ فَتَحْزَنُوا مِنْ أَكْثَرِ أَعْيُنِ النَّاسِ وَتَقْبَلُوا





After this, in Grube's opinion, art in Islamic countries follows separate lines of development in different regions. As regards Iran, he considers it possible to distinguish two periods: the art of Central Asia and Iran between 1350 and 1550 and the art of Safavid Iran between 1550 and 1700.

Grube sketches only the most general outline of each period's characteristics without supplying any details.

### Qabil (Cain) Carrying the Body of His Slain Brother Habil (Abel)

---

Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Qisas al-anbiya (The Tales of the Prophets)*

1570-1580

31.7 x 19.9 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

۲۶۸  
او میان آن بود چنانکه خدای تعالی فرمود و مَبْعَثَ اللَّهُ غُرَابًا  
يَحْتَفِ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُرِيَهُ كَيْفَ يُوَارِي سَوَاءَ أَحْيَاهِ  
خدای تعالی کلاغی را بفرستاد تا زمین را بکاوید که بنماید و برآمده



پنهان کردن بعد از آن برادر خویش را بپوشید و پشمان شد و گویند



This important work was written twenty years ago and its ideas have not been further developed, as far as we know, either in studies by Grube or those of other authors. It seems to us, however, that the periodic chronology suggested by Grube is correct. In his research into Iranian metalwork of the 14th to 18th century Anatoly Ivanov has come to the same conclusions with regards to the two final periods.

### Idris Instructing His Children

---

Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Qisas al-anbiya (The Tales of the Prophets)*

1570-1580

31.7 x 19.9 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin



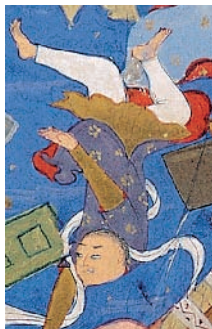
براهمن است چنانکه خدا می گفت وَ رَفَعْنَا مَكَانًا عَلِيًّا

و بعد از او پس منبران بودند و لیکن یک کدام صاحب شریعت نبودند تا آنکه



که نوح پدیدون نیاید و نوح از سر زاده نیل بود و بعد از او در

علیه السلام چهارصد و هفت و سال بود و الله اعلم بالصواب



In Grube's classification, the second inter-regional style (1050-1350) is the most interesting. In his opinion, it arises in various centres of Central Asia and eastern Iran at the end of the 10th century and reaches its full potential towards the mid-11th century. One of its chief distinguishing features is its attention to the depiction of people.

### The Destruction of Sodom

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Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Qisas al-anbiya (The Tales of the Prophets)*

1570-1580

31.7 x 19.9 cm

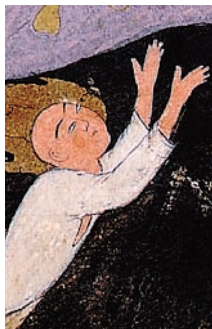
The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

تا آسمان ببرد و چنانکه اهل آسمان او از خروش او بشنود یک است  
بداشت فرمان امد از خدای تعالی که مکروان جبرئیل علیه السلام بگردانند



بر زمین آمدند جمله ناپیشتند و هر کسی از آن قوم پراکنده بودند بهتر  
دیگر خدای تعالی سنگ بفرستاد تا بر ایشان فرو بارید و هلاک گشتند





During this period wall-painting becomes very widespread, its style probably originating in eastern Turkistan. Perhaps there was miniature painting in eastern Iran at the time, but no examples have survived.

It used to be customary to end the history of the Iranian miniature with the fall of the Safavid dynasty.

### Jonah Cast from the Belly of the Fish

---

Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Qisas al-anbiya (The Tales of the Prophets)*  
1570-1580

31.7 x 19.9 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

تا زو بیکر بود که خدای تعالی مانی را الهام داد تا بکرا نه دریا اندویش را  
عبدی سلام بسلامت از شکم پیرون انداخت و همه اندام وی



چون کوشتی کشته بود و ضعیف شده و جهل روز طعام نخورد بود  
خدای تعالی در ساعت درخت کدورا بروماند و نزرک و نزرک



At the end of the twentieth century, this tendency began to change and 18th-century painting attracted ever greater attention. An abrupt alteration in the style of miniatures occurs in the second half of the 17th century, linked to the influence of European painting and, possibly, to that of the Indian miniature. The style of the Isfahan school of miniatures, known to us in the work of Reza Abbasi,

### Mary Shakes a Palm Tree to Provide Food for Baby Jesus

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Illustration from the masterpiece  
*Qisas al-anbiya (The Tales of the Prophets)*  
1570-1580

31.7 x 19.9 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

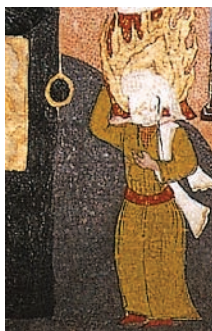






survives until the beginning of the 18th century but then vanishes completely.

Thus we can state that at the end of the 17th century Persian art entered a period of change, heralding the beginning of a new phase. Evidently the first half of the 18th century was a sort of transitional period and new elements were finally victorious in the mid-18th century.



## Muhammad and Ali Cleanse the Ka'ba of Idols

Illustration from Mir Havand's masterpiece

*Randat ai-Dafa*

1585-1595





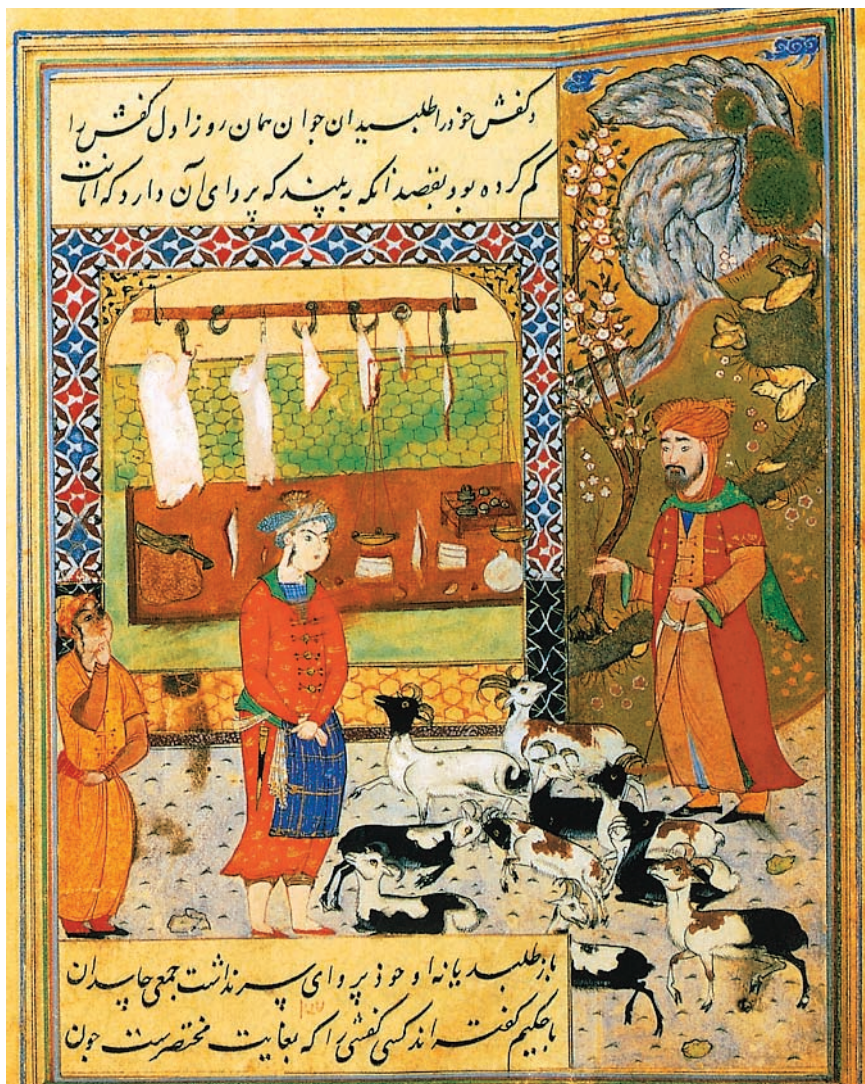


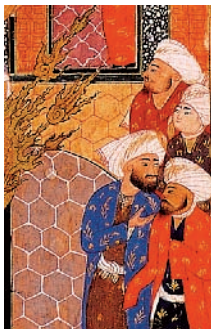
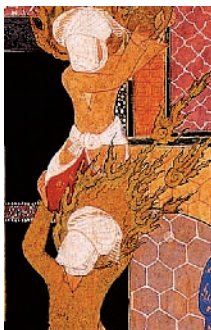
Unfortunately, the new phase began with a "dark age" characterised by a decline in technical skills. This was reflected in all aspects of applied art in Iran, but was not caused by any great social crisis in society; rather it was a result of the collapse of life in the cities where crafts were concentrated, largely as a result of the extremely unstable political situation in the country.

### Butcher's Shop in the Isfahan Bazaar

Illustration from sultan Husain's masterpiece  
1590

Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin





Wars and invasions brought desolation and ruin to the cities, something that is mentioned by all travellers in the second half of the 18th century and at the very beginning of the nineteenth century.

The unification of part of the country under the power of Karim Khan Zand did not last very long and therefore did not result in any resurgence of crafts.

### Muhammad and Ali Destroying the Idols of the Ka'ba

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Illustration from *Rawdat al-safa* (*The Garden of Purity*)

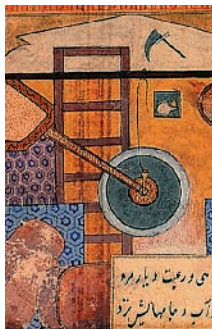
1595

35.5 x 25.4 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin



[illegible]



There were probably only miniatures and oil paintings – aspects of court art – which were of a comparatively high standard, although one should point out nevertheless that very few specimens of 18th-century miniatures and painting have survived: apparently here too the number of artists decreased.



### Yazdagird III at the Mill in Merv

Illustration from *Rawdat al-safa* (*The Garden of Purity*)

1595

35.5 x 25.4 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin









Turning to the new phase, which began more or less in the middle of the 18th century, we are treading on extremely unstable ground, composed of assumptions and hypotheses. Generally speaking, interest in nineteenth-century Persian art began to thrive only in the middle of the twentieth century and at first was only concerned with painting and lacquer ware.

Abu Bakr Carrying Muhammad on His Shoulders as  
They Approach the Cave in Mount Thawr

---

Illustration from *Rawdat al-safa* (*The Garden of Purity*)

1595

35.5 x 25.4 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin





Court art during the rule of Fat'h Ali Shah Qajar (1797-1834) experienced something of a renaissance. This affected painting, miniatures, lacquer ware – the work of court artists – as well as jewellery and weapons of various sorts. These works were produced for the upper ranks of society and show clear signs of ancient artistic traditions. This was probably dictated by some sort of imperial ambition on the part of Fat'h Ali Shah,

### Muhammad and the Rashidun

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Illustration from *Silsila-nama* (*Genealogy*)

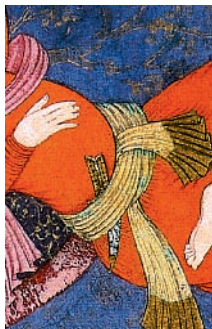
1598

26 x 14.4 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin







as is suggested by the creation of rock reliefs, a tradition lost since the time of the Sassanids but reborn during his reign. However, mass-produced objects such as ceramics and metalwork, which were used by a wide cross-section of society, bear witness to a clear decline in technical skill in comparison with the preceding phase in Persian art. The crisis as a whole began in the 1840s, when Persian art fell into a decline

### Young Man Lying Down

---

1600-1635

9.8 x 18.8 cm.

The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg







as a result of the factory goods from European countries that poured into Iran at that time. The total rejection of the old techniques of miniature painting and the definitive acceptance of European ones apparently date from the same period.

The new trend in miniature painting that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century took the 17th-century Isfahan School as its model.

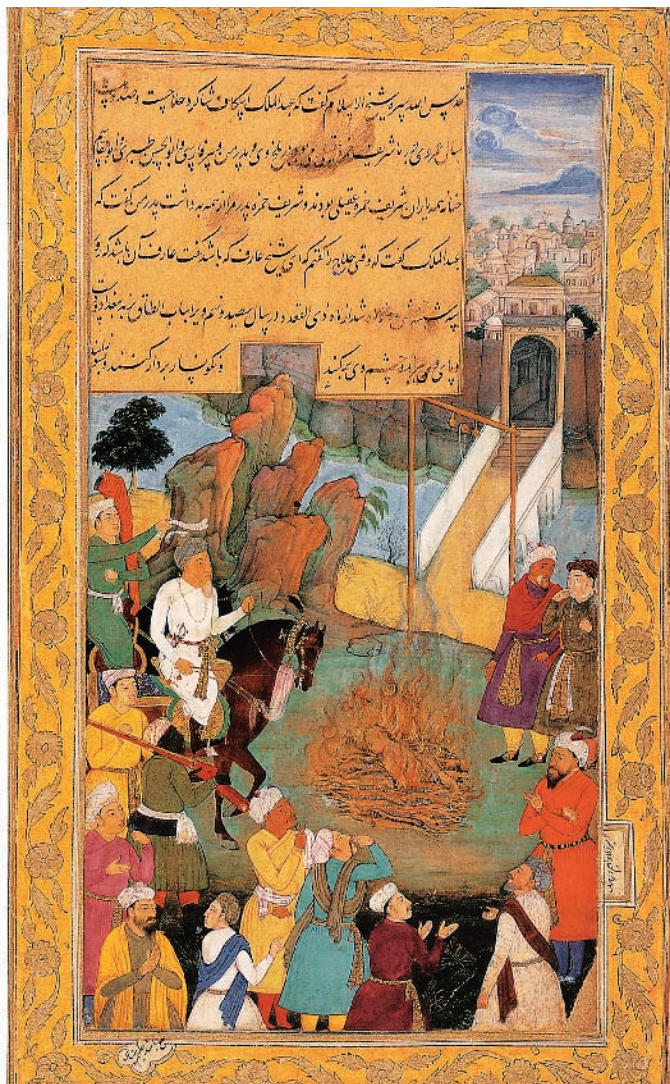
### The Martyrdom of al-Hallaj

Illustration from Jami's masterpiece  
*Nafabat al-uns* (*The Breaths of Fellowship*)

1604-1605

34.5 x 22.3 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin





It is not clear what caused this fascination for such a distant historical past, but this type of work continued to be manufactured through the twentieth century.

In examining the problems of a periodic chronological classification we have concentrated mainly on highlighting the provisional boundaries between phases and very little has been said about the reasons behind changes in art.

### Rustam Striking the Door of Afrasiyab's Palace

---

Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece

*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

c. 1610

22.7 x 15.4 cm (folio)

The British Museum, London







This question is even more complex than the chronology itself and very little is known about it.

Casting one's eye over the history of art in Iran in general after the consolidation of Islam one can say, if only by way of preliminary hypothesis, that its progressive development continued until the first half of the 14th century, when the art of medieval Iran reached its height. This is clearly seen in miniatures and other forms of art.

Rustam is Assisted by His Horse, Rakhsh,  
as He Fights the Dragon

---

Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece  
*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

1648

Royal Library, Windsor Castle, Windsor









The following centuries were a period of gradual decline, although at first glance this is contradicted by the flourishing of the miniature in the 15th century, when it developed and perfected those principles and devices that had been created during the preceding period. Such a deduction completely corresponds to ideas of the historical development of Iran in the age of

### Rustam Beside the Dying Sohrab

Illustration signed by Mu'in Musavvir from Firdawsi's masterpiece  
*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

1649

28.6 x 14.1 cm

The British Museum, London





feudalism; at any rate, it roughly coincides with the overall chronology accepted by historians.

Within the larger phases one can, of course, distinguish shorter periods during which there were intense developments within one or other art form. For the time being, it is interesting to note that the length of each phase gradually diminishes as one approaches the modern era.



### Alexander in the Land of Gloom

---

Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece  
*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

c. 1650

35.3 x 24 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin







This may be explained by the acceleration of historical development, but may also be the result of our as yet extremely limited knowledge of the art of earlier ages.

If a work on the history of eastern culture across several ages demands the drawing of conclusions, then we have probably not achieved that end. But in actual fact "deductions" set forth in one or two pages could only vulgarise and generalise,

Tarikh-i jahanara  
(The Chronicle of the World-Adorning One)

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Artist and source unknown

1683

26.5 x 18 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin





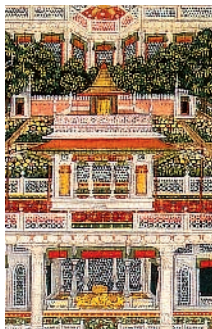


in effect reducing to banalities – or to excessively speculative categories – all the complexity and colour of the “motion” in the history of a culture; they would eclipse a multitude of unelucidated questions and unproved assumptions. Consequently we shall only allow ourselves one generalisation – a statement by Nikolai Konradina, *On the Meaning of History*:  
“In different lands, humanists have seen different aspects of the human personality as

### Jesus on a Donkey and Muhammad on a Camel, Riding Together

Illustration from a work by al-Biruni  
18th century  
Parliamentary Library, Tehran





constituting its value. Their views have naturally been contingent upon their historical circumstances. Participants in the Chinese Renaissance saw the value of the personality chiefly in the human ability to attain self-perfection; the humanists of Iran and Central Asia saw it, mainly, in the fact that the highest moral qualities are accessible to man: spiritual nobility, magnanimity, friendship; the representatives of the Italian

### Harem Garden

Artist and source unknown

18th century

David Collection, Copenhagen







Renaissance regarded human beings as, above all, the bearers of reason, considering reason to be the highest manifestation of humanity's essence."

Although its underlying meaning is to assert the existence of Iran's own special "renaissance", the description of Iranian humanism given here seems, nevertheless,

### Hafiz and His Spiritual Master

---

Illustration from Hafiz's masterpiece  
*Divan* (collected poems)

1838

15.4 x 9.3 cm

The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin









to be correct, despite the fact that a search for “renaissances” in various historical and cultural areas is not a problem that is particularly relevant to the history of Iranian culture. What is certain is the significance of the miniature art form in the history of Persian art and culture: these compact, richly-detailed illustrations captured the Persian spirit of revelry and reverence and beautifully preserved the traditions of the empire for subsequent civilisations and for us today.

### Bird and Flowers

---

Artist and source unknown

Mid-19th century

11 x 16 cm

The British Museum, London





## The Plates

The illustration of the manuscript of al-Ghazzali's *The Revival of the Studies on Faith* betrays the influence of an earlier period: the composition still divides into two separate parts not linked by the common frame; ornamented medallions are depicted in the left margins. However, new features appear at the same time, such as vertical cartouches that connect the upper and lower parts of the page decoration. The floral ornament is large. The interlace in the corners of the cartouches is characteristic of the 14th century.

The palette – gold, dark blue, green, white and brown (red?) – is traditional.

### Frontispiece of a Manuscript (left half)

Illustration from Al-Ghazzali's masterpiece  
*The Revival of the Studies on Faith*

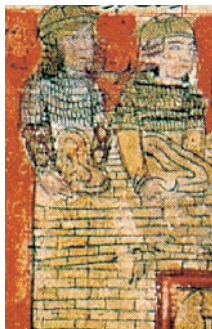
1330s

25 x 21 cm

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg







The miniatures of this manuscript illustrating the poem *Shahnama* were produced in Shiraz in the second quarter of the 14th century, during the rule of the Inju dynasty. They are characterised by rather crude draughtsmanship, large and somewhat clumsy human figures and a colour scheme in which red, yellow and gold predominate.

### Rustam Besieges the Castle of the Ogre Kafur

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Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece  
*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*  
1330s

Gouache on paper, 21.5 x 13 cm  
The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg









In Shiraz during the second half of the 14th century, a new style of miniature painting took over from that of the so-called Injuid school. During the early 1370s miniatures appeared which betrayed the influence of Chinese painting, but with their own idiosyncratic treatment of individual elements such as the horizon, water and vegetation. Chronologically, this style appears during the rule of the Muzaffarid dynasty (1356-1393). Though their format is small, the miniatures are more richly coloured than works of the second quarter of the 14th century; movement is more skilfully portrayed here and elements of the landscape are treated with more subtlety.

### Bahram Gur Falls into the Pit

Illustration from Amir Khusraw Dihlawi's masterpiece *Khamsa*  
(literally "collection of five")  
1370-1380s

Gouache on paper, 8.7 x 12.8 cm  
The Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, Tashkent

هر خدای که سوخت کرد شمشاد  
 بر آتش که بود دست جیتی در میان  
 شه به از کی به بی نداشت بگو  
 بر این خطاها سوار تا به دست  
 تا که از پیش چاهمان آمد تنگ  
 در سن شاه نیز در تنگ کی را

کور کیند و در حدیث است  
 موختی از بیکاه شکاف  
 و نانی شود و در جود و کوه  
 چیه می زند و هر شست شست  
 در فتادن نه داشت کور در تک  
 دست در چاه که کوه و کوه



آنکه در بیل از آن دوریست در  
 آن قصه که شد که پیش نه  
 هست در پرچم کمالی این چه کار  
 کور پیران که سوخت چاه آسمان  
 آنکه از چاه کور شود از آفتاب  
 آن چه کور کور کور کور کور  
 این چه شد که کور در خفته سیاه  
 در کور کور کور کور کور  
 آنکه که کور کور کور کور  
 آنکه که کور کور کور کور  
 آنکه که کور کور کور کور  
 آنکه که کور کور کور کور

هر که که دانی بیکان تک را و و  
 چاه آن پیرانی خویش نه  
 به پیرانی اولی از آسمان  
 کور به آن سوخت شاه آسمان  
 عاقبت هر چاه کور آفتاب  
 کور کور کور کور کور  
 به پیرانی و در درین چاه  
 به پیرانی و در درین چاه  
 ادنی که به اندیشه نماند  
 به پیرانی و در درین چاه  
 به پیرانی و در درین چاه



All the miniatures of this manuscript illustrate the Gulistan. Their small size and sparse scenery and the colour range dominated by yellowish-brown tones indicate that they belong to the Shiraz school of the first half of the 15th century, although they are not by the leading masters of that time. The manuscript's Shiraz origin is also indicated by the layout of the text on the page and the triangular medallion with plant ornamentation in the margins.



### Parrot and Raven in a Cage

Artist and source unknown

Mid-1420s

Gouache on paper, 8.2 x 4.2 cm

S. Khanukayev Collection, Saint Petersburg







The miniature reproduced here is an illustration to the poem *Khusraw and Shirin*. It depicts the meeting of Farhad and Shirin in the mountains. This episode is one of the most popular among illustrators of the story of king Khusraw, the beautiful Shirin and the stonemason Farhad. The miniature corresponds exactly with the story by showing characters against a background of steep, inaccessible mountains with sharp peaks, which take up almost the whole sheet and even overlap the margins. The posture and movements of a man carrying a heavy load on his shoulders are conveyed with great mastery.

### Farhad Carrying the Horse and Shirin

---

Illustration from Nizami's masterpiece *Khamsa*  
(literally "collection of five")

1430s

Gouache on paper, 16 x 12.1 cm

The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg







This large-format double composition is glued into a later manuscript of the mid-16th century in which it occupies the final pages. It is possible that it was cut into two parts at that time. Its palette of dark grey and brown tones is unusual in 15th-century miniatures of the schools known to us. The treatment of plants, clouds and mountains links it to Herat miniatures of the 1460s.

### The Shah's Hunt

---

Illustration by Shah-Mahmud al-Nishapuri from Jami's masterpiece

*Silsilat al-dhahab*

1460s-1470s

Gouache on paper, 27 x 37.5 cm and 25.5 x 37.8 cm

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg





Two miniatures of this manuscript have been well-known to scholars for a long time. The human figures, slim and elongated with small, rounded faces almost devoid of any expression, are all treated identically, which would indicate the work of a single artist. The landscape (especially the tree with variously coloured leaves) is characteristic of the work of artists of the Herat School of the late 15th century.

### Relatives Visit Majnun

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Illustration from Amir Khusraw Dihlavi's masterpiece

*Majnun and Laila*

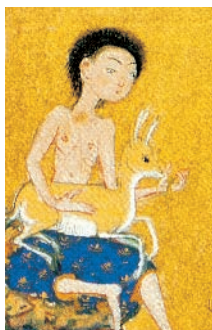
Late 15th century

Gouache on paper, 11.7 x 16.5 cm

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg







This small manuscript is a masterpiece of Persian book design during the early years of the 16th century. It is very probable that it was produced for some important person, which would explain such a high artistic level of calligraphy, illumination and binding. The colour scheme and the treatment of figures and landscape are evidence that the present work belongs rather to the Herat School of the 1520s than to that of Tabriz.

### The Lovers' Meeting

Illustration from sultan Husain Baykara's masterpiece *Divan*  
1520s

Gouache on paper, golden highlights, 7.3 x 12.8 cm  
Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of  
Sciences, Saint Petersburg







In the miniatures of this manuscript one can trace the process of consolidation of the Tabriz School of miniatures, which took place during the mid-1520s. In the early 16th century Tabriz already had its school of miniatures, whose most brilliant representative was Sultan-Muhammad Iraqi. Around 1520 Bihzad came to Tabriz, together with the future Shah Tahmasp, and he became the head of the court library (*kitabkhanah*).

### Alexander Sets Out in Search of the Water of Life

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Illustration from Firdawsi's masterpiece

*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

Mid-1520s

Gouache on paper, 20.5 x 24 cm

Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of  
Sciences, Saint Petersburg





The miniatures in this manuscript were executed over ninety years after the copy had been completed. There are 39 miniatures in the manuscript, four of them added later, possibly in the 18th-19th century. One of the 16th-century miniatures bears the signature of Qasim-i Ali, ie Qasim ibn Ali. This artist was a contemporary of Bihzad and not inferior to him in his artistry. Very little is known of his life, but judging by the less vivid palette of this copy's miniatures in comparison to those of Tabriz in the 1520s, one can assume that Qasim-i Ali worked in Herat and was still alive in the mid-1520s.

### The First Sermon of Hasan ibn Ali

Illustration by Qasim ibn Ali from Muhammad al-Husaini  
al-Varamini's masterpiece *Ahsan al-Kibar*  
1526

Gouache on paper, 21 x 15.8 cm  
The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg







One can assume that the miniatures in this manuscript copied by the young Shah Tahmasp I were executed by the best artists of his court workshop. Judging by the different styles, the miniatures were executed by various artists, although all were from the same school. The artist who produced this miniature painted two others with a similar theme. The particular treatment of landscape and faces – small, rounded, with bushy eyebrows – is characteristic of his style. He also conveys movement with great skill.

### Polo Game

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Illustration from Arifi's masterpiece *Khal-nama*

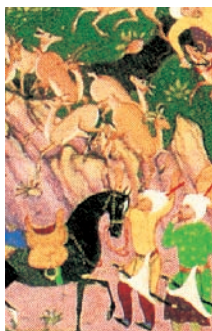
Late 1520s

Gouache on paper, 13.8 x 10.4 cm

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg







This large-format double composition is glued at the beginning of Jami's poem, but does not illustrate it. In its bright palette and treatment of figures, this miniature belongs among the late products of the Tabriz School.

### Shah's Hunt (left folio)

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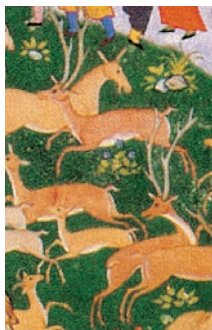
Illustration from Jami's masterpiece *Silsilat al-dhahab*

Mid-16th century

Gouache on paper, 21 x 31.7 cm

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg





It is possible that the treatment of the mountains already displays features which were to reach their full development in the workshops of Qazwin and Mashhad around the late 1550s and 1560s. This work by a talented, unknown artist is a true masterpiece of the Persian miniature.

### Shah's Hunt (right folio)

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece *Silsilat al-dhahab*

Mid-16th century

Gouache on paper, 21 x 31.7 cm

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg







This sumptuously decorated example of the *Lavaiḥ* was copied by the famous calligrapher of the second half of the 16th century, Ahmad Mashhadi, for the ruler of Mazandaran, Murad Khan. Apparently the artistic merits of this manuscript were so great that Qazi Ahmad Qumi, the well-known biographer of artists, mentions it in his work, which is an extremely unusual occurrence.

### The Shah Listens to the Teachings of a Sufi

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Illustration from Jami's masterpiece *Lawa'ih* (*Shafts of Light*)  
1570s

Gouache on paper, 9.3 x 16.3 cm  
The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg







The miniature *Youth with a Lute* belongs to the Qazwin School. The figures of the youth and the white horse are set against the clear ground of the paper, which is characteristic of Qazwin miniatures on separate sheets. At the bottom of the miniature is the artist's not-entirely-decipherable inscription: "Painted by a poor man, who trusts in the mercy of Allah Sharaf al-Husaini al-Yazdi, in the year 1003." No other work by this artist is known.

### Youth Playing a Lute

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Illustration by Sharaf al-Husaini al-Yazdi  
1594-1595

Gouache and gold on paper, 12 x 20.8 cm  
The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg





In the late 16th to early 17th century, new trends appeared in Persian painting, linked above all with the endeavour to convey a visual impression of the surrounding world. One of the artists who dealt with these problems was Reza Abbasi, considered the founder of the so-called Isfahan School of painting formed in the early 17th century. The artist's full name was Aqa Riza ibn Ali-Asghar Kashani.

### Girl in a Fur Hat

---

Illustration by Riza-i Abbasi  
1602-1603

Indian ink, watercolour and gold, 19.3 x 16 cm  
The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg







The outstanding master of artistic calligraphy Mir Imad was a pupil of the famous calligraphers Malik Dailami and Muhammad-Husaini Tabrizi. He was the last reformer of the *nastaliq* script style and was famed for his art in writing samples of large and medium *nastaliq*. He worked for many years at the court of Shah Abbas I.

### Three Samples of Calligraphy

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Illustration by Mir Imad  
Before 1615

Indian ink on paper, 45 x 29.5 cm (folio)  
Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of  
Sciences, Saint Petersburg







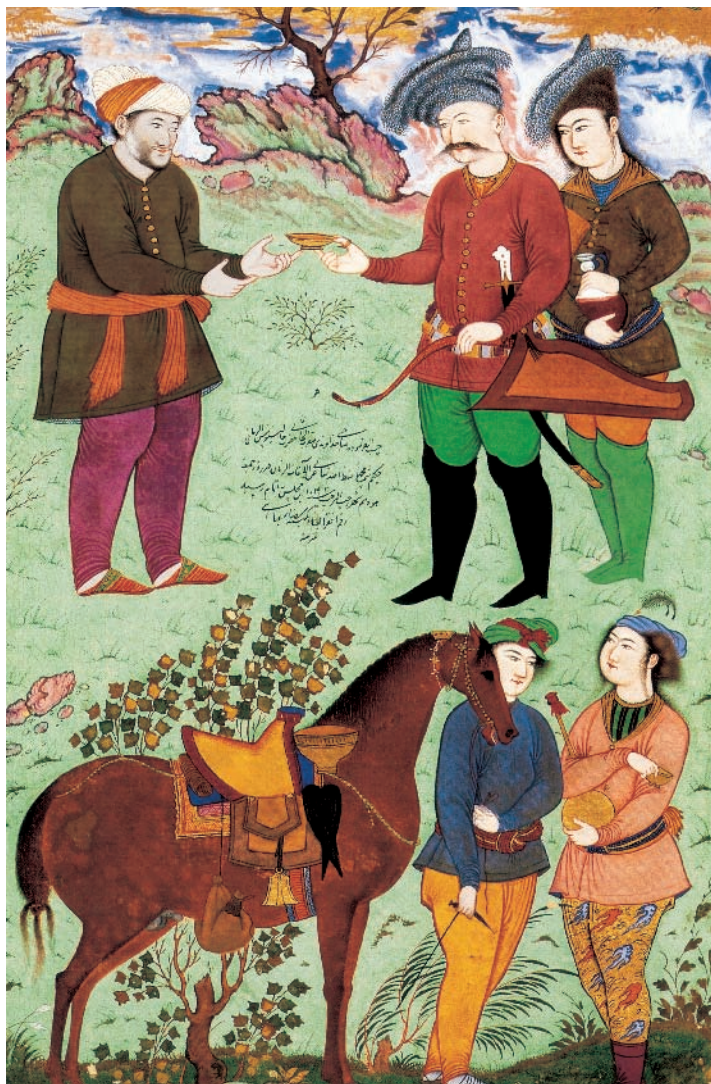
The art of the last great Iranian miniaturist, Reza Abbasi, is fairly well represented in this book. A well-known scholar of the Iranian miniature, I. S. Shchukin, has distinguished three periods in the artist's work. The majority of the miniatures reproduced in this book belong to the last (third) period in the art of Riza-i Abbasi. The large miniature *Shah Abbas and Khan Alam* is exceptional among his work; possibly it represents the genre of official ceremonial portraiture.

### Shah Abbas and Khan Alam

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Illustration by Riza-i Abbasi  
1633

Gouache on paper, 17.5 x 28.5 cm  
The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg





Reza Musawwir was another of the artists who worked on the miniatures for the copy of the *Shahnama* made for Abbas II. Although this miniature bears no signature, all the characteristics of the artist's style are present here – the use of light colours and the treatment of the sky in the form of blue-white patches – and this allows one to attribute the work to him.

### Rustam Battles with the Monster

Illustration by Riza-i Musawwir from Firdawsi's masterpiece

*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

1640s

Gouache on paper, 25 x 39 cm

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg







This portrait of the ruler of Bukhara, Imam-Quli Khan, is the only surviving picture of him. It was during his stay in Iran that this portrait was painted – a typical example of the Isfahan School of 17th-century miniature painting, as can be clearly seen in the treatment of the vegetation and clouds and the figure of the Khan himself.

### Portrait of Imam-Quli Khan

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Illustration by Muhammad Musawwir

1642-1643

12.7 x 16.3 cm

Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow







An enormous copy of the *Shahnama* was prepared as a gift to Shah Abbas II: it was illuminated with 192 miniatures. A group of artists worked on the illustrations of this copy, although not all of them left their signatures. Afzal al-Husaini was one of them and signed 55 miniatures (some of the unsigned works may also be attributed to him). A muted grey-blue palette and a somewhat grotesque treatment of human figures are the characteristics of his style.

### Girshasp Kills Afriqi in the Battle Against the Kirvan Padishah

Illustration by Afzal al-Husaini from Firdawsi's masterpiece  
*Shahnama (The Book of Kings)*

1645-1646

Gouache on paper, 31 x 22.5 cm

The National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg





European works were copied regularly in Iran from the 1670s on, but during the first half and middle of the century only isolated cases of Persian artists turning to European examples are known, one of them being this particular miniature. It is well known that “pure landscape” was never an independent genre in Persian painting, which is probably why the miniaturist supplemented the landscape with figures absent in the original.

### European Landscape

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Illustration by Ali-Quli ibn Muhammad

1649

Gouache on paper, 9 x 12 cm

The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg







The miniature *Shah and Courtiers* bears the signature: "He [i.e. Allah] ! Son of an ancient slave Ali-Quli Jabbadar". Although the term *ghulam-zade* signifies "son of a slave born in the master's house", it hardly follows that one should understand it literally in this instance. It is most probably simply a humbling formula. Above the two figures, to the left, are two Georgian inscriptions, greatly distorted. Although the draughtsmanship of the miniature is Iranian, it shows evidence of Ali-Quli's close acquaintance with the techniques of European painting.

### Shah and Courtiers

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Illustration by Ali-Quli beg Jabbadar

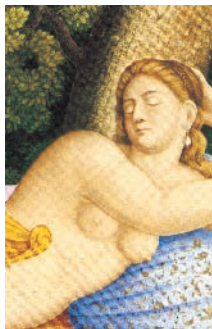
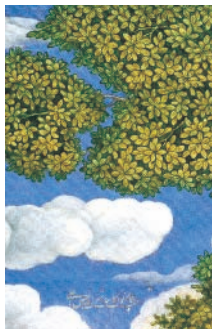
Second half of the 17th century

Painting on paper, 42.1 x 28.2 cm

Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of  
Sciences, Saint Petersburg







The subject is borrowed from an engraving by R. Sadeler. A comparison of the miniature and the print shows that Muhammad-Zaman did not slavishly copy the subject but only transferred to the miniature the figures of Venus and Cupid, meanwhile completely altering the background. He also left out the figure of a satyr, without which the posture of Cupid remains inexplicable. Meanwhile the painting technique remains purely Iranian.

### Venus and Cupid

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Illustration by Muhammad Zaman  
1684-1685

Painting on paper, 17.9 x 24 cm  
Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of  
Sciences, Saint Petersburg





Persian miniatures depicting flowers and birds appeared quite frequently in the mid-17th century. The miniature reproduced here is executed in the European style, which had become established in Iranian painting during the second half of the 17th century. The figure of the bird is rendered three-dimensionally by means of chiaroscuro modelling.

### Bird Perched on a Blossoming Branch

Illustration from Yusuf Zaman from an album of miniatures  
and samples of calligraphy  
1696-1697

Painting on paper, 14.3 x 8.7 cm  
The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg







The miniature illustrates an episode from the poem *Rawdat al-Anwar* (*Meadows of Light*) written in 1342 by Kamal al-Din Khwaju Kirmani (1281-1352): the great Seljuk Malik-Shah, accompanied by his retinue, sets out from his residence at Isfahan to go hunting; on the way he is stopped by an old woman who complains that his hunting pleasures are inflicting irreparable damage on the fields of his subjects. This incident was a favourite theme of medieval Iranian poets and artists.

### Old Woman and Shah Malik

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Illustration from the Isfahan school

Last quarter of 18th century

Painting with golden highlights on paper, 36.5 x 35.5 cm  
Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of  
Sciences, Saint Petersburg



چون ز جان که در کشتن  
رفت این نخل کی در  
بدر کشید که کوکب  
نخل از چشمت زشت  
که کار ز غمزه کرده  
ار که تو بگویند  
که کار ز غمزه کرده  
ار که تو بگویند  
که کار ز غمزه کرده  
ار که تو بگویند



# List of Illustrations

## A

<i>Abu Bakr Carrying Muhammad on His Shoulders as They Approach the Cave in Mount Thawr</i>	171
<i>Adam and Eve</i>	151
<i>Alexander at the Ka'ba</i>	75
<i>Alexander in the Land of Gloom</i>	185
<i>Alexander Sets Out in Search of the Water of Life</i>	213
<i>Alexander Suffers a Nosebleed and Is Laid Down to Rest</i>	139
<i>Alexander the Great and the Seven Sages</i>	53
<i>Alexander the Great Fighting Against Darius</i>	57
<i>Alexander the Great Oversees the Building of the Wall</i>	79
<i>Alexander the Great Visits the Sage</i>	17
<i>Ali Fighting to Take the Fortress of Qamus</i>	77, 145
<i>Angel</i>	83
<i>Arab Berates His Guests for Attempting to Pay Him For His Hospitality (The)</i>	117
<i>Arrogant Clerk Engulfed under the Weight of His Own Beard (An)</i>	43
<i>Aziz and Zulaykha Enter the Capital of Egypt and the Egyptians Come Out to Greet Them (The)</i>	99

## B

<i>Bahram Discovers the Hall with the Seven Portraits</i>	15
<i>Bahram Gur Falls into the Pit</i>	201
<i>Bahram Hunting a Lion</i>	65
<i>Bandits Attack the Caravan of Aynie and Ria</i>	97
<i>Battle of Ruhham the Paladin and Bazur the Sorcerer (The)</i>	27
<i>Bird and Flowers</i>	195
<i>Bird Perched on a Blossoming Branch</i>	245
<i>Butcher's Shop in the Isfahan Bazaar</i>	165

## C

<i>Camel and Its Keeper</i>	85
<i>Courtiers by a Stream</i>	31

## D

<i>Demon Akhwan Throws the Sleeping Hero Rustam into the Sea (The)</i>	29
<i>Depraved Man Commits Bestiality and Is Berated by Satan (A)</i>	89
<i>Dervish Picks Up His Beloved's Hair from the Hammam Floor (The)</i>	95
<i>Destruction of Sodom (The)</i>	157

## E

<i>East African Looks at Himself in the Mirror (The)</i>	127
<i>European Landscape</i>	239

## F

<i>Farhad Carrying the Horse and Shirin</i>	205
<i>Fariburz Comes before Kay Khusraw</i>	45
<i>Father Advises His Son about Love (A)</i>	93
<i>Fickle Old Lover Is Knocked Off the Rooftop (The)</i>	115
<i>First Sermon of Hasan ibn Ali (The)</i>	215
<i>Flight of the Tortoise (The)</i>	73, 125
<i>Frontispiece of a Manuscript (left half)</i>	197
<i>Frontispiece of an Account of the Lives of the Prophets, Depicting Moses</i>	
<i>Striking the Giant Og, Mary with the Baby Jesus and the Prophet</i>	
<i>Muhammad with His Two Grandchildren, Hasan and Husayn</i>	13
<i>Funeral Procession for Layla's Dead Husband</i>	47

## G

<i>Girl in a Fur Hat</i>	227
<i>Girshasp Kills Afriqi in the Battle Against the Kirvan Padishah</i>	237



<i>Gnostic Has a Vision of Angels Carrying Trays of Light to the Poet Sa'di (The)</i>	111
---	-----

## H

<i>Hafiz and His Spiritual Master</i>	193
<i>Harem Garden</i>	191

## I

<i>Idris Instructing His Children</i>	155
<i>Infant Witness Testifies to Yusuf's Innocence (The)</i>	107
<i>Isra or Muhammad's Night Journey</i>	69
<i>Isra or Muhammad's Night Journey to Heaven on His Steed Buraq</i>	33

## J

<i>Jackal and The Lion (The)</i>	21
<i>Jesus on a Donkey and Muhammad on a Camel, Riding Together</i>	189
<i>Jonah Cast from the Belly of the Fish</i>	159

## K

<i>Khusraw at Shirin's palace</i>	55
<i>Khusraw Parviz and Shirin Deal with the Fishmonger</i>	137
<i>Kuyuk the Great Khan with Courtiers and Attendants</i>	25

## L

<i>Love Scene</i>	4
<i>Lovers' Meeting (The)</i>	211

## M

<i>Majnun and Salim in the Palm Grove</i>	35
<i>Majnun Approaches the Camp of Layli's Caravan</i>	131
<i>Majnun Comes before Layli Disguised as a Sheep</i>	133
<i>Martyrdom of al-Hallaj (The)</i>	177
<i>Mary Shakes a Palm Tree to Provide Food for Baby Jesus</i>	161
<i>Mature Man Watches Young Girls Bathing (A)</i>	49
<i>Mi'raj or The Ascension of the Prophet</i>	37
<i>Mi'raj of the Prophet (The)</i>	135
<i>Moses Transforms His Staff into a Serpent before Pharaoh</i>	39
<i>Muhammad and Ali at Ghadir Khumm</i>	147
<i>Muhammad and Ali Cleanse the Ka'ba of Idols</i>	163
<i>Muhammad and Ali Destroying the Idols of the Ka'ba</i>	149, 167
<i>Muhammad and the Rashidun</i>	173
<i>Murid Kisses the Pir's Feet (The)</i>	123
<i>Muslim Giving Alms (A)</i>	11

## O

<i>Old Man in Landscape</i>	143
<i>Old Woman and Shah Malik</i>	247

## P

<i>Parrot and Raven in a Cage</i>	203
<i>Persian Prince Humay Meeting the Chinese Princess Humayun in a Garden (The)</i>	23
<i>Pir Rejects the Ducks Brought as Presents by the Murid (The)</i>	113
<i>Polo Game</i>	217
<i>Portrait of Imam-Quli Khan</i>	235
<i>Prince Bahram Listening to the Story of the Princess of the Blue Pavilion</i>	81
<i>Prince Khusraw Watches Queen Shirin Bathing</i>	67
<i>Princess Humayun Spies Humay at the Gate</i>	9

## Q

<i>Qabil (Cain) Carrying the Body of His Slain Brother Habil (Abel)</i>	153
<i>Qays First Glimpses at Layli</i>	129

## R

<i>Recovery of Malikha's Body by the Holy Man Bishr</i>	51
---	----



<i>Relatives Visit Majnun</i>	209
<i>Rustam Battles with the Monster</i>	233
<i>Rustam Beside the Dying Sohrab</i>	183
<i>Rustam Besieges the Castle of the Ogre Kafur</i>	199
<i>Rustam is Assisted by His Horse, Rakhsh, as He Fights the Dragon</i>	181
<i>Rustam Striking the Door of Afrasiyab's Palace</i>	179

## S

<i>Sages of China Bringing Books on History to Gházán Xán (The)</i>	19
<i>Salaman and Absal Repose on the Happy Isle</i>	121
<i>Sam Bringing His Son Zal Back from Mount Alburz</i>	61
<i>Shah Abbas and Khan Alam</i>	231
<i>Shah and Courtiers</i>	241
<i>Shah Listens to the Teachings of a Sufi (The)</i>	223
<i>Shah's Hunt</i>	219, 207, 221
<i>Shirin's Suicide</i>	59
<i>Simple Peasant Entreats the Salesman Not to Sell His Wonderful Donkey (The)</i>	91
<i>Solomon and Bilqis</i>	63
<i>Solomon and Bilqis Sit Together and Converse Frankly</i>	141

<i>Sufis Performing Sama before Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya</i>	41
<i>Sultan Sanjar and the Old Woman</i>	71

## T

<i>Tarikh-i jahanara (The Chronicle of the World-Adorning One)</i>	187
<i>Three Samples of Calligraphy</i>	229
<i>Townsmen Robs the Villager's Orchard (The)</i>	119

## V/ W

<i>Venus and Cupid</i>	243
<i>Wise Old Man Chides a Foolish Youth (The)</i>	87

## Y

<i>Yazdagird III at the Mill in Merv</i>	169
<i>Young Man Lying Down</i>	175
<i>Youth Holding a Jug</i>	7
<i>Youth Playing a Lute</i>	225
<i>Yusuf Gives a Royal Banquet in Honor of His Marriage</i>	109
<i>Yusuf is Rescued from the Well</i>	101
<i>Yusuf Preaches to Zulaykha's Maidens in Her Garden</i>	105
<i>Yusuf Tends His Flocks</i>	103

