The earliest surviving Islamic miniature paintings date from the late 12th and early 13th centuries, when Baghdad was the capital of the Muslim world and the seat of the Abbassid caliphs who had ruled there as successors of Muhammad since A.D. 630. During the late 8th and early 9th centuries Baghdad was the greatest metropolis in the world. Its rulers possessed an empire that made their European contemporary Charlemagne look like an upstart. But centuries of intersecine warfare changed that sapience. Successive dynasties, including the Seljuks in the 11th and 12th centuries, usurped the temporal power, leaving the caliph as titular ruler.

The pictorial art of the period reflects efforts to synthesize the double artistic heritage of the Muslim state—that of the earlier Persian Sassanians (ruled A.D. 226–641) and traditions of certain Christian, Byzantine, and East Christian Churches. The successful fusion of these traditions, with additional Far Eastern elements added, was not to take place until the 16th century, and in Persia rather than at Baghdad. Meanwhile, however, the Abbassid court had produced a series of illustrated manuscripts, particularly a
major translation of the De Materia Medica of Dioscorides, dated A.D. 1224 (cat. 16). The pictures, on plain ground, are explanatory figures rather than story illustrations, although contemporary manuscripts of the Maqamat of al-Hariri do present pictorial renditions of literary texts.

In Syria and in Egypt miniatures from surviving manuscripts have a similar explanatory rather than interpretive function. Notable are a series of copies of the Automata of al-Jazari (cat. 17). It was, however, in Persia, proud possessor of an already old literary tradition, rather than in Mesopotamia or Egypt, that miniatures were to flower as illustrations for literary texts.

16. Recto: A Gazelle Grazing under a Medical Herb
Verse: A Medical Herb
Mesopotamian school, dated 611 (A.H. 1214).
Recto and verso of a leaf from a manuscript of the De Materia Medica of Dioscorides written by the scribe Abdallah ibn al-Fadl.
The bulk of the manuscript remains in Istanbul (Codex Aya Sofya, no. 3717). Dispersed miniatures are in museums and private collections in Baltimore, Boston, Cambridge, Kansas City, New York, and Washington, and in Europe in Berlin, Breslau, Kiev, London, and Paris.
See Buchthal, Erzurumhurs, Arab, pp. 87-88; Grabar, pp. 2-4.

17. Design for an Automaton
Mamluk, probably Cairo, 15th-16th c. 153 x 97 in. Coll. Sultan Salih Shah al-Dunya wa-Din, who ruled 742-747 (A.H. 1341-1347). F. R. Martin (see Martin II, pl. 21); Adolphe Stoerke, Brussel, Philippe Stoerke.
An illustration to the Kitab fi ma'arifat al-biyah al-bumbaniyya (Book of the Knowledge of Geometrical and Mechanical Devices) written by Abul liz'at ibn Ismail ibn al-Razzaz al-Jazari.
Depicted is a domed building on a pedestal above which is a rudder which works off the hours with his lance. In the center is a standing dancer. Below, four musicians in a row above a crowned woman who pours out wine into a bowl. Inscriptions around the dome. To the most high one Er Salih Shah al-Dunya wa-Din.

Fourteenth-Century Persian Miniatures

The Abbasid caliphate was destroyed and Baghdad sacked in A.D. 1258 by the Mongol armies of Hulagu, grandson of Genghis Khan. The capital of the new dynasty, the Il-Khans, was moved to Tabriz in northwest Persia. Between that city and Karakorum, seat of Kublai Khan, ruler of another branch of the same Mongol family, there was a
16. Verso: A medical herb

17. Design for an automation
constant stream of trade missions and artistic borrowings. Chinese elements in decoration and landscape, seen in Persia from ceramics to scroll paintings, appear to compli
cate further the already tangled skein of the Iranian pictorial tradition.

The first manuscript that is known to be specifically Persian was produced for Ar
gun Khan, one of the successors of Hulagu. It dates from 1290 and is a history of the
Mongols (it is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris). A much more lavishly illu
strated manuscript, a *Book of Animals and Their Medicinal Uses*, from the last decade
of the 13th century, is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City. The
vizier or prime minister of several of the later Il-Khans was Rashid ad-Din who wrote
a major history of the world, the *Jami‘ at-Tavarikh*, and organized an atelier of artists
to produce manuscripts of his text (cat. 18). An even greater literary text was the *Shah
Nama*, the Persian national epic by the poet Ferdowsi (ca. A.D. 940–1020). By the early
part of the 14th century many manuscripts of Ferdowsi's huge poem had been made and
illustrated with miniatures that depicted events in the story: the kings of ancient Persia
and their enemies (cats. 19, 21, 22, and 23), and the deeds of Rustam, the great Iranian
hero, and his family (cats. 20 and 24).

Whether from the court artists or from principal centers like Shiraz in southwest
Persia, the miniatures of the 14th century all exhibit one major feature they share with
the previous Mesopotamian works—a flat background surface with no allowance for
depth. The gold backgrounds of the "little Shah Naumes" (cats. 19-22) and the figures
that act out episodes before them are as frieze-like in their static quality as the coarse
red and yellow backgrounds of the works produced for the provincial Inju court in
Shiraz (cats. 23 and 24). Only in one major royal manuscript of the 14th century, the
Demotte *Shah Nama* (cat. 25), so named for the French dealer who split up and dis
seminated the separate miniatures, is it possible to imagine the evolution of the succeed

18. Chinese or Tartar Kings Who Gained Their Thrones by Foreign Help

table, dated 714 (A.H. 1314), 39 x 25 in.
Col. Collection, Foundation, New York.
From a *Jami‘ at-Tavarikh* manuscript of Rashid ad-
Din. The portion of the original manuscript now
in the Royal Asiatic Society of London carries the
above date.
Numerous descriptions of and reproductions from
this manuscript have appeared: HWG, no. 26, pl. XXII a-b, Sources II, pl. 88 a-b, 89a; Gray, pp.
44-46.

19. Afrawshah Appears from the Lake

Shiraz, early 14th c. 7 x 7/8 in. (miniature
only).
Afrawshah has the voice of his brother Gathvaz
and appears from his watery hiding place. The
Shahs and Khosrow observe from the edge of
the lake. The miniature is a page from a dispersed
*Shah Nama* called the "Second small Shah
Nama" by Grube.
Other leaves from this manuscript are in museums
in Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, Cambridge, Cin
cinnati, Eugene, Orc, Kansas City, London, Min
neapolis, Providence, and in private collections.
21. King Ardashir hunting

22. The Sasanian King Khusraw enthroned

23. Bahram Gur puns the army of the Turanians to flight
10. Some Recognize His Son Zal in the Nest of the Simurgh
Shiraz, early 14th c., 13 × 8 1/2 in. (miniature only).
Page from a dispersed Shah Namah, also called the “Second small Shah Namah.” (From the same manuscript as cat. 16.)

21. King Ardashir Hunting
Isfahan or Shiraz, ca. 1325-55, 12 x 8 1/2 in.
Scenes of kings hunting have always been prized in Persian art, both before and after the Muslim conquest. “Hunting scenes” remain today the most desirable theme in Persian miniatures.
Other leaves from this dispersed Shah Namah are in the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. The manuscript is therefore called the “Freer small Shah Namah.” One is reproduced in Gray, p. 59.

22. The Sassanian King Kohad Enthroned
Isfahan or Shiraz, ca. 1334-36, 12 x 8 1/2 in.

23. Bahram Gur Puts the Army of the Turanians to Flight

The colophon of the manuscript, carrying the above date, is now in the Vever Collection, Paris. Other leaves are in museums in Baltimore, Boston, Cambridge, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dublin, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Montreal, New York, Seattle, Washington, and Westchester, as well as private collections in America and abroad. See Grosz, pp. 23-31; Gray, p. 59.

14. Rustam Defeats the Turanian Army of Afrasiyab

25. Faridun Questions His Mother about His Lineage
Leaf from the Demotte Shah Namah, which was reworked at the bottom and overpainted, probably during the 18th or 19th century. This is the only miniature from this manuscript in an American private collection. At least 15 leaves with miniatures are known in American museums, one in Canada, and 15 in Europe in both museums and private collections. The original manuscript must have contained many more.
For comments see Grosz, pp. 15-20; Brian, no. 1, fig. 3.
The 14th century witnessed the first of the two great periods of Persian miniature painting. The conqueror Timur-i Leng (Timur the Lame, the Tashkurghan of Christopher Marlowe) put an end to the warring petty dynasties that had replaced the Il-Khans, and ruled from Samarqand over an empire that stretched from Central Asia to northern India. He ruled as a warrior, not as an art patron, but his descendants reversed the process. His son Shah Rukh ruled Persia from Herat from 1404 to 1447 and made that city the most cultivated of its time. Three of Timur’s grandsons ruled as provincial governors and were among the greatest patrons that the art of the book ever had. The finest Persian manuscripts were assembled for the princes Iskandar Sultan, Ibrahim Sultan, himself a remarkable scribe, and the even more prudently Maceenas Baisunghur Mirza. This latter Timurid reedited the text of Firdousi’s Shah Nama. A manuscript of this work dated 813 (A.D. 1410) is the glory of the Gulistan Palace Library in Tehran. Other texts were prepared also—the Zafar Nama (History of Timur) (cat. 28) and the Majma al-Tavarikh (cat. 16), a continuation and extension of the history of Rashid al-Din.

The development of the classic style in Persian miniature painting begins during the time of these early Timurids. A comparison of two contemporary miniatures shows this evolution. Catalogue number 26, despite its large figures and more realistic trees and sky, resembles the pictures of the 14th century in shape and feeling. Number 28, in contrast, displays the format of most subsequent Persian paintings—a vertical rather than a horizontal major axis, a landscape graced by spongy rocks and tufts of vegetation that will shortly blossom into the flowers the Persians loved so much (compare cats. 32 and 34), and the presence of spectators in the background to witness the astonishing and edifying scenes. The high horizon enables the actors to perform against a complete backdrop. There is no need for the perspective accent so much a part of European art. The Persians felt no need to portray background figures smaller than those nearer to the reader. Even the simplest person knew of the optical changes wrought by distance, could tell that a night scene should be darker than a daytime one,
or realized that flowers were not as big as humans. Yet why should the examiners' pleasure he curtailed by looking at minuscule figures in the background? Why should he lack a lovely view just because of nighttime (the presence of a moon and stars in the sky could be sufficient); and flowers should never be ignored in a desert country where they could only bloom after the too short rainy seasons. These conventions remained in subsequent Persian miniatures.

The Timurids were expelled from Western Persia in the middle of the 15th century but continued to rule the eastern part from Herat, in present day western Afghanistan. Their artistic patronage was not curtailed. Under Sultan Husayn Mirza (ruled A.D. 1468-1506) artists of the book were welcomed as they had been by his older cousins. At his court the greatest Persian miniature painter Bihzad started his career, the poet Jami composed his narrative and lyric verses (cats. 13 and 46), and the vizier Mir Ali Shir Nawaz wrote in both Persian and Turkish (cat. 16). The fame of Bihzad did not rest on any revolutionary tampering with the pictorial conventions of his predecessors. He simply accepted them, using new color patterns and new placements of figures. (A somewhat later miniature in the "style of Bihzad" is cat. 39.)

16. Sakkiyammi, the Buddha Greets a Brahmin Wbu Her Comes to Ask Him the Way to Paradise.
From a dispersed manuscript of the Majma al-Tavarikh (Compendium of Histories) by Hafiz-i Abdi (died 1417). In 806 (A.D. 1403) the author wrote the above text in continuation of the Jani al-Tavarikh of Rashid ad-Din for Pirzad Buzanghut, son of Shah Rukh, who in turn was the son and successor of Timur in Persia. Miniatures from this manuscript have until recently been confused with those of the earlier Jani al-Tavarikh. Faringham (Hafiz-i Abdi) has resolved the problem of the similar but different texts. See also Stechow, New York, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

17. The Fire Ordal of Siyavash
Herat, ca. 1480. 8 5/8 x 11 3/4 in. (miniature only).
Coll. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.
From an unknown manuscript of the Shab Namah of Firdousi. The theme of children who have to contend with the animosity of their stepmother is common in most of the world's literature. In the Persian Shab Namah, Prince Siyavash must prove his innocence to his father, King Rukn Khan, when his stepmother accuses him of an illicit love for her. By riding through a fire unharmed, he attests his innocence and basings about the downfall of the wicked queen Sadebe who watches the scene from a window on the right.

Shiraz, dated 859 (A.D. 1456). 9 x 6 1/4 in.
From a Zafr Namah (History of Timur) by Sharif ad-Din Ali Yandi. The manuscript was written by the scribe Yaqub ibn Husayn, called Siyar ad-Husayn al-Bilani.
The bulk of the manuscript is in the Keckian Foundation, New York (Robinson cat. 13). Detailed miniatures are in museums in Cambridge, Cleveland, Montreal, New York, Seattle, Stettin (Koly-Berenson Collection), Washington, and Worchester, as well as private collections. See Robinson, Bodleian, p. 13; Grube, pp. 44-45. nos. 30-33.