inspiration it provided throughout the eastern Islamic lands, from Turkey to India. The model of Timurid architecture was disseminated through direct knowledge of the buildings themselves, plans and drawings of them, and the emigration of architects and craftsmen who worked on them. The concatenation of talent and resources in the Timurid capitals made it possible to create a dynastic style of architecture, and such subsequent imperial powers as the Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals emulated not only Timurid forms, but also the Timurid ideal, whatever they identified it to be.

CHAPTER 5

The Arts in Iran and Central Asia under the Timurids and their Contemporaries

As with architecture, the decorative arts created under the Timurids and their contemporaries set the standards of excellence for generations in Iran, as well as India and Turkey. Not only were Timurid models emulated, compositions repeated, and techniques followed, but works of art that had belonged to Timur’s followers were avidly collected by discerning connoisseurs. The Timurid style can be seen in a variety of media, but the arts of the book were preeminent, and the Timurids witnessed the classical moment of the Persian illustrated book. The atelier (Pers. kna’khvāna), an institution which can be traced to the scriptorium established by Rashīd al-Dīn at Tabriz in the early fourteenth century, was not only the center of book production but also the center of design from which motifs and compositions were disseminated to other workshops. As well as being exquisite objects, beautifully calligraphed, illustrated, decorated, and bound books were commissioned for political and propagandistic purposes.

EARLY PERIOD

The major evidence for Timur’s own patronage of the arts are fittings and furnishings for the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi at Turkestan. Virtually no illustrated manuscripts have survived from his reign, and few other objects can be attributed to his patronage. The size and superb quality of the Turkestan objects, however, testifies that his patronage of architecture was accompanied by patronage of the other arts. Two pairs of wooden doors survive in situ at the shrine, one at the main portal [72] and another at the entrance to the mausoleum. Each valve maintains the traditional tripartite division into three rectangular panels; a larger vertical one sandwiched between smaller ones. The upper panels are inscribed and the lower ones contain a geometric medallion, but the glory of the doors is the superb carving of the central panels. Those on the main portal contain arched cartouches of arabesque tracery and palmettes on a delicate scrolling ground. The spandrels are filled with an even finer naturalistic vegetal tracery of peonies, flowers, and leaves. The panels contrast with the framework of the valves, which is decorated with a strapwork pattern based on eight-pointed stars, filled and bordered with delicate arabesques. Many of these motifs developed from earlier woodcarving in Central Asia and Iran, such as those found on a cenotaph made in the mid-fourteenth century for the grandson of the celebrated mystic Sayf al-Din Bāhrāzī, and the folding Koran stand dated 1359 [28], but the integration of disparate elements into a harmonious composition is a distinctly new feature. Both sets of doors have bronze doorknockers inlaid with silver and gold and inscribed with verses from Sa‘di’s Golshan (“Rose-garden”):

May this door always be open to the Sincere;  
May it always be open to friends and closed to enemies.
Both are signed by ‘Izz al-Din b. Taj al-Din Isfahani, and those on the main portal are dated 1366–7.4

Several metal objects also survive from the shrine. The most impressive is an elephantine bronze basin [23], which originally held ritual purdah to mark the end of Ashura. The basin consists of an almost hemispherical bowl on a slender high foot. The top half of the exterior is decorated with two horizontal bands of cursive and angular inscriptions punctuated by bosses and pendant handles. The upper inscription in thuluth script says that Timur ordered it for the tomb on 20 Shawwal 802 (25 June 1390). Below, a smaller inscription states that it was the work of the master ‘Abd al-Ja‘iz b. Sharaf al-Din Tabrizi. The bottom half has pendant triangular cartouches of arabesque tracery. While the vessel’s size is unprecedented, its form and decoration were undoubtedly inspired by a somewhat smaller bronze basin ordered in 1373–4 by the Kari ruler of Herat for the congregational mosque there.5 The effort involved in assembling the necessary materials, fuel, and labor in this remote and desolate region is staggering to contemplate; indeed, to bring it to Leningrad in 1935 required the construction of a special railway.

Six inlaid brass oil lamps [24] are also associated with Timur’s patronage at the shrine of Ahmad Yasawi. They too are remarkable for their size (they average ninety centimeters high) and bear inscriptions with Timur’s name and titles. Essentially of similar baluster shape, three have cylindrical oil reservoirs and three have globular ones. All present a deeply indented profile which offers a variety of flat, concave, and convex surfaces for decoration. Bands with inscriptions set on a dense arabesque ground contrast with plain surfaces engraved with palmsets, knots, and cartouches.6

Elephantine manuscripts were also produced at the beginning of the fifteenth century, although they cannot be directly associated with Timur. Huge pages (177 by 101 cm) from a seven-line Koran [25] are in keeping with the other enormous works commissioned by the sovereign, although later marginal annotations on some folios attribute them to the hand of Timur’s grandson Baysanghur, the noted calligrapher and bibliophile. The manuscript may well have been housed in the congregational mosque that Timur ordered in Samarkand, for a large stone Koran stand (230 by 200 cm), originally in the domed sanctuary chamber and now in the court, was ordered by another of Timur’s grandsons, Ulughbeg, perhaps to hold this very manuscript. The folios are so large that the lines of jali al-mashqq script are on separate sheets of paper which have been pasted together.7 The majestic haste of the vertical letters are counter-balanced by the sweeping tails of the horizontals. The tails, which often nest inside each other, have the pointed terminals characteristic of mashqq script.

According to contemporary travelers and panegyристs, the walls of Timurid palaces and garden pavilions were decorated
graphers and established a workshop which became the preeminent center of book production in the Iranian world. A unique document in Istanbul, a report to Baysunghur presumably by the renowned calligrapher Jal'ar b. 'Ali Tabrizi, director of the workshop, details progress on twenty-two projects including manuscripts, designs, objects, texts, and architectural work. It mentions twenty-three artists, painters, calligraphers, binders, retouchers, and chest-makers, who worked individually and in teams. Baysunghur is associated with more than twenty manuscripts and numerous drawings. Of the ten illustrated manuscripts, seven dating between 1416 and 1431 are dedicated to the prince and suggest that he himself was actively involved in their planning and preparation. In contrast to his father's taste for historical themes, Baysunghur commissioned collections of the classics of Persian literature. Each volume shows the extraordinary taste of this discriminating bibliophile: the heavy creamy paper was specially prepared for the renowned calligraphers, and superb paintings and illuminations adorn the text, which was excised in elegant bindings of leather and cut and gilded paper. Each individual aspect was carefully planned to contribute to the creation of a total work of art.

The twenty-five illustrations to a Kalila and Dimna produced for Baysunghur and dated October 1429 epitomize the classical style of Persian manuscript painting: the illustrations are integrated into the page; text and image are interwoven. In the scene depicting The Fox and the Drunkard [27] the landscape forms the right and upper margins of the composition. The tree on the left grows behind the upper text-block and rounding to reappear in the upper margin. This sophisticated arrangement creates a strong three-dimensional space. Within the painting, figure and landscape elements are balanced: the intricate landscape never overpowers the subject. The palette is vibrant and rich, with a particular use of violet, although elements of the design are carefully modulated to draw the eye across the composition.

The Shāhnāma prepared for the prince several months later shares all of the features of the Baysunghur style, although it is quite different. The manuscript is larger (58 by 26 cm) and so are its twenty-one illustrations: in addition to the double-page frontispiece, several of them occupy the full height of the page. Baysunghur's interest in the epic is well known; a few years earlier he had ordered a new rendition of Ferdowsi's text and commissioned a new preface for it, but the first copy of this new edition is no longer extant. For this copy Baysunghur enlisted the services of Jal'ar, the greatest calligrapher of the day, and much of the text is embellished with cloud bands reserved against a gold ground. The splendid illumination underscores the princely vision: the book opens to a large rosette bearing the dedication in green and gold.

I admired the beauties and rarities of these verses, and arranged the pearls and jewels of these sentiments, for the library of the most mighty Sultan, Lord of the necks of the peoples. Defender of the weak places of Islam, the greatest of the Sultans, king of the kings, and master of the Sultanate and of things temporal and spiritual, Baysunghur Bahadur Khan; may God perpetuate his power.
has been subsumed by the balanced composition, crystalline clarity, and technical brilliance. It is hard to imagine a greater
contrast than with a comparable scene produced less than a century earlier [35].

Although the court workshops of Herat attracted the finest artists of the day, Shiraz remained a center of manuscript production, at first under the auspices of Ibrahim Sultan, second son of Shahrukh, who served as governor there from 1414 to his death in 1435. Ibrahim Sultan, also a calligrapher, maintained close relations with his younger brother in Herat, and even sent him gifts of illustrated manuscripts. An Anthology penned in Shiraz in 1420 by Mahmud al-Husayni, the calligrapher who had copied the Anthology for Iskandar Sultan six years earlier, was presumably offered by Ibrahim Sultan to his younger brother in Herat, for the dedication says that the volume was made for the Bayazungur’s library.[36] The format continues the traditions of earlier Shirazi manuscripts, but it too has a second text in the margin with a triangular thumbrest, and the twenty-nine rather simple paintings have high horizons and semi-fields. The empty landscapes serve as backdrops for a few tall, slender, and rather awkward figures. While the style of the paintings from the Anthology looks backwards, manuscripts produced later in the reign of Ibrahim Sultan develop many of the same elements into a new and distinctive style.

The full-blown style of painting identified with Ibrahim Sultan can be seen in two manuscripts dedicated to him. A Shahnama datable about 1435 has forty-seven illustrations, of which four are double-page, and five tinted drawings.[37] The first illustrated copy of the Zafarnama, Shahr al-Din ‘Ali Yaral’s panegyric life of Timur, was completed in 1436 after Ibrahim’s death. This dispersed manuscript has been reconstructed as having 355 folios, with thirty-seven paintings, of which at least twenty were double-page and all occupy almost the full page.[38] The compositions have been reduced to include only the essential figures, which are large and vigorous. Landscape consists of a series of hills defined by spongy outlines. The wasp-waisted and broad-shouldered figures inhabit their space uneasily. Distinctive costume includes a cock’s comb-like headdresd for ladies and a neatly tied turban for men. Timur appears throughout the manuscript, in battle, on campaign, under a paravol, and feasting. The palette is rich but subdued; pigments, however, are of poorer quality than those used in Herat: a particularly acid green has a tendency to eat away at the paper and has consequently destroyed many paintings [89]. The style associated with Ibrahim’s patronage continued in such manuscripts as a Shahnama dated 1444.[39] Its detached double-
page frontispiece is based on the composition of the earlier Zafarnama frontispiece [85] and copies many of the details of composition, landscape, and figural motifs. By the middle of the century, the style was superseded by the less ambitious production of the Turkoman Commercial style (see below).

Despite the individual style associated with Shiraz, Herat remained the center of luxury book production. One of the most magnificent and unusual manuscripts of the mid-fifteenth century is a copy of the Mir'ajnama, recounting the mystical night journey of the Prophet Muhammad from Jerusalem to Heaven and Hell on Burqah, his human-headed steed. The large-format manuscript (14.3 x 21.4 cm) was copied in Arabic and Uighur (Eastern Turkish) by Hari-Malika Bakhshi. Although it lacks a colophon, it is bound together with another manuscript penned by the same scribe and dated 1436, so it can be attributed to Herat in the same period. Some of the sixty-one illustrations depict the calm world familiar from contemporary painting. A scene such as Muhammad and Gabriel in the Garden of Paradise (fol. 45b) is set in a flat tripartite architectural composition whose illuminated patterns bring to mind the background in the earlier Mourning for Rustam [79], and the depictions of the Hevam in Paradise (fol. 44a and b) use most of the conventions of contemporary landscape painting. Much more striking, however, are the scenes depicting Muhammad visiting Hell. Distinguished by their black grounds, the images always show Muhammad, Burqah, and Gabriel on the right against a gold background. But the artist rendered his greatest imagination for the left side, where he depicted sinners suffering a variety of ingenious tortures for their misdeeds. The Koran (2:28) says that those who squander the inheritance of orphans will be encompassed by fire, and if they cry for relief they will be scalded with water like molten copper. The image of those evildoers [81] shows red demons pouring molten metal down the throats of the damned, while a guardian devil makes sure the job is done well. In other images adulterous women, traitors, and other wrongdoers are similarly punished. To create these startling images of Hell and torment, the artist had to search for models beyond the conventions of Persian painting to the imagery of Central Asian and the nomadic shamanistic life.

This world is best known through a group of individual leaves [82] depicting nomads, Devils, shamans, and monsters, many of which are illustrated as the work of Siyah Qalam ("Black Pen"). Painted in somber colors, predominantly blue and brown, the fantastic figures are set against the coarse unpolished paper without any indication of landscape or setting. They have dramatic gestures and expressive faces, and their garments are rendered with thick and heavy folds, but the meaning of any individual image is open to question. The consistency from one image to another suggests that many, if not all, were produced in one atelier, if not by one hand; but the localization of this production is still a matter of vigorous dispute. The most likely attribution of the Siyah Qalam paintings is to a Central Asian milieu in the early fifteenth century, but other scholars ascribe them to Turkoman patronage in western Iran in the late fifteenth century. A manuscript much more typical of the mainstream metro-politan style of Herat is the copy of the Shakhname made ca.

1459 for another of Shahrukh's sons, Muhammad Juk. Like those in the copy made for his brother Baysungur, the thirty-three images in Muhammad Juk's manuscript seem to belong to a consistent cycle, but whereas Baysungur's manuscript projected his regal aspirations, Muhammad Juk's is romantic, magical, and light-hearted. An image such as Tulmnama Entering Rustam's Badshahname [83] continues the compositional balance and enamel-like colors of the school of Baysungur, but in other images, particularly the large battle scenes, the figures are overemphasized by the setting. In some images, castles perch precariously on precipices and the spongy rocks of the landscaes invoke a fantasy world of make-believe. The manuscript was a prized possession of the Mughal court, and seals of the emperors from Babur to Aurangzeb were added along with an autograph note by Shahjahan and two paintings. The manuscript displays the technical skill of Timurid painting from the first half of the fifteenth century, but the paintings lack the brilliance of the earlier works commissioned by Baysungur or the later ones associated with the painter Biihad.

LATE PERIOD

The history of book production in Herat during the period of political conflict between the death of Shahrukh in 1447 and the accession of Husayn Baygara in 1470 remains obscure. Few, if any, manuscripts can be attributed with certainty, and painters as well as scribes may have changed sides. In 1447, for example, Timur moved west to the Turkoman courts when the Qaraqoyunlu Jahanshah occupied Herat in 1438. Under the munificent patronage of Husayn Baygara (r. 1470-1506), however, Herat rose once again because the court was a center of art and culture, especially a bright orange. The figures are lively, often humorous, and engage in such everyday activities as building, fishing, and hunting. Actions are depicted more realistically than in earlier paintings: the superimposed in the upper left of ill. 8a, for example, does not spare the rod. They are no longer types, but individualized personalities.

Perhaps the most brilliant of Biihad's compositions is the Seduction of Yusuf from the Cairo Biihad [85]. Biihad's text, written on uncolored paper in cloud bands at the top, is illustrated in the most famous of the Timurid illustrations of Yusuf, the Biblical Joseph, by Zulaykha, Potiphar's wife, but does not require Biihad's elaborate architectural setting. Instead, this setting is described in the mystical poem Yusuf and Zulaykha, written by the Timurid poet Jamil five years earlier. Four hemistichs from it are inscribed around the iwan in the center of the painting. According to Jami, Zulaykha built a palace with seven splendid rooms decorated with erotic paintings of herself with Yusuf. She led the unhappy Yusuf from one room to the next locking the doors behind her until they reached the innermost chamber. Then she entered, and Zulaykha grabbed through the seven locked doors, which miraculously opened before him. Biihad has chosen to illustrate the most dramatic moment of the story, when the enraged Zulaykha grabs for Yusuf. The illustration works on several levels simultaneously. It literally depicts the elaborately decorated palace with its many locked doors and convincingly conveys Yusuf's
sense of isolation and entrapment in it. Although based on a story recounted in Chapter 12 of the Koran, the event is depicted here, as in all Persian manuscript painting, in contemporary terms. The empty palace is built of baked brick and sumptuously decorated with tiles, tile mosaic, wooden screens, and carpets, like Timurid architecture. Jami’s text is also an allegory of the soul’s search for divine love and beauty, and Bihzad’s image is an appropriate starting point for mystical contemplation. The splendid palace represents the material world, the seven rooms represent the seven climaxes, and the beauty of Yusuf is a metaphor for the beauty of God. Surrounded with the lovely and eager Zohra, Yusuf could have yielded to her passion, since there was no witness. Yet he realized that the all-seeing and all-knowing God was ever present. The doors, which are so prominently displayed and lead the eye through the composition, are tightly shut and can be opened only by God. This brilliant image transcends the literal requirements of the text to evoke the mystical themes so prominent in contemporary literature and society. Bihzad was obviously proud of his creation, for he signed it on the architectural panel over the window in the room on the upper left and dated it 1488 on the cartouche to the left of the iwan.

None of the other manuscripts attributed to Bihzad is so securely signed as the images in the Cairo Būsān, but similarities of figural type, composition, and style — “the perfectly executed combination of the decorative and the realistic” — can serve as a guide to other Bihzadian paintings. This raises the complicated question of the distinction between an individual’s hand and a group style. Traditionally, the calligrapher’s greatest achievement was to flawlessly copy the work of past masters, and it is logical to assume that painters, who were often considered second to calligraphers, worked in the same manner. Thus, while scholars will continue to debate individual attributions and dates, a group of pictures can reasonably be considered the work of the master himself or of his close associates. The illustrations to the Zafarnāma made for Husain Bāyqara are a