29. Tālband dies during the battle against his brother, Gav (430b)

The story of the invention of chess follows. A king of Hind, Jamāḥūr, dies, leaving his realm to his infant son, Gav. Jamāḥūr’s queen marries the king’s brother, and has a son, Tālband. This king also dies, and the queen becomes regent. Each prince is educated by a counsellor. The boys grow, but they are jealous of each other, and the queen splits the patrimony between them. The country divides into factions, and Tālband arms himself for battle. Gav follows suit. The war elephants are prepared. Gav makes an offer of peace. Tālband refuses this and a second offer. After great slaughter Tālband is defeated. He assembles another army. Gav proposes that they should fight near the sea so that they can surround the field of battle with a trench of water to prevent flight, though captives will not be slaughtered. The armies are led to the sea, and the trench is dug. A terrible battle follows. Tālband looks over the scene of devastation from his elephant:

‘He gasped and died upon his golden seat,
To Gav relinquished Hindustan complete’.

A rider reports the death to Gav. He has a rich coffin prepared for his brother. The princes’ anxious mother sees Gav approaching but not Tālband. She burns Tālband’s palace and prepares a pyre for herself. Gav arrives and tells his mother that neither he nor his companions killed Tālband. She asks him to explain to her how Tālband died upon his elephant. Gav takes counsel as to how the explanation can be provided. A board marked with a hundred squares is constructed to represent the battlefield within its surrounding trench, and armies are carved from teak and ivory. Kings are placed in the centre, and different moves allotted to foot soldiers, ministers, elephants, camels, horses, and warriors: when the king’s way is blocked and his men defeated, he must die. The queen ends her days thinking of Tālband and poring over the game.

As with Nos. 21 and 22, the painting is taken a little wider than the text area and so its right side laps over margin paper. Instead of the limpid colour and lucid composition of the other illustrations we have a muted palette and a composition that manages to be at once complex and symmetrical, busy and static. Figures are smaller in the picture and much more numerous than heretofore. The Indian context is indicated by a variety of skin tones. In the Persian tradition, some faces are rendered as slaty in colour, but others are a more natural brown, while the brothers together with a few more persons have pale faces. Turbans have somewhat flat tops. The bulk of the opposing armies is densely massed down either side, while riders engage in a web of action in the centre. In the upper page each army has a pair of standards, and each has musicians fervidly active. In the middle ground at either side, the warring brothers are on their elephants in golden, throne-like howdahs—much like that used by the Khājān in No. 13. On the right, Tālband has collapsed. Water in the foreground, marking the trench, is busy with waterfowl. Important for the colouristic effect of the whole is a large central tract of green verdure, darkened by minute strokes to show grass; beyond this is an area in light blue with some scattered stones. At the horizon, rock is treated in a different mode from that of the other illustrations: it is in segments of various colours and tones, and contains a number of faces of humans and animals. The rock is surmounted by a central contorted tree. Horses differ from those in earlier battle scenes. They are unarmoured, and have rounder bodies and thinner legs; the colours of some are stylised towards blue or pink, but others have the speckled patches now associated with the Appaloosa.

Robinson lays out reasons for attributing the illustration to a Mughal painter, and it will be discussed further in the Mughal context.
30. Bahram Chubinah fights on foot (491b)

Nushirvan is succeeded by his son Hurmuz. When the kingdom is threatened by Savah of Herat, and also by forces from Rumi, the Khazars, and the Arabs, an aged paladin, Miran Sitad, tells the king that astrologers of Chin have foretold that Iran will be saved from Savah and his Turks by a warrior known as Chubinah. Bahram Chubinah is sought out, and duly defeats and slays Savah. Bahram Chubinah shows himself to be impetuous in his treatment of Savah’s son, Parmudia; Hurmuz comes to an understanding with Parmudia, and contemptuously sends Bahram a distaff and woman’s clothing. Following the prompting of a mysterious lady discovered in an isolated castle, Bahram Chubinah resolves to become king. To that end he has coins struck in the name of Hurmuz’s son, Khusrav Parviz, and asserts his allegiance to him; in consequence, the young prince is obliged to flee the court. Hurmuz imprisons Khusrav’s uncle Banuy and Gustaham; he sends an army against Bahram Chubinah, but his leader is murdered on the way. The kingdom is destabilized. Banuy and Gustaham escape and blind Hurmuz. Informed of this, Khusrav returns. Bahram Chubinah attacks him and Khusrav is forced to flee again; he consults his father, who advises that he should seek help from the Qaysar. As Khusrav sets out for Rumi, his uncle remains and strangles the king. Bahram Chubinah is able to seize power. The Qaysar gives Khusrav not only an army but also his daughter Maryam in marriage. Khusrav marches on Bahram Chubinah. In a first battle, a force of warriors of Rumi is defeated. For a second battle, reliance is placed on the men of Iran. Bahram attacks mounted on a white elephant. Khusrav bids his archers aim for its trunk, and to good effect:

‘Trunk of his beast so many darts had gashed, Blood from it like a mighty river flashed’. Bahram Chubinah fights on foot until a horse is brought to him; he then encounters his brother, Guruy, who is fighting on the side of Khusrav. During a lull, Khusrav comes to the view that it would be better for his renown not to employ the Rumi troops, and Gustaham advises him to accept a picked party of Iranian warriors. Bahram Chubinah decides that he needs three men only to combat this force, and indeed all but Bandiy, Gustaham and Guruy wither with desert Khusrav. The prince is pursued into a gorge, where he makes a desperate prayer to God. The angel Suriyah appears, robed in green and on a white horse, and bears him away to safety. Bahram Chubinah is taken aback at the disappearance of his foe, and Maryam and the watching soldiers of Rumi are distraught. Khusrav, however, appears on the further side of the mountain. Khusrav fights Bahram Chubinah a third time and defeats him. Bahram Chubinah retreats, receiving hospitality from an old woman; he moves on to Chin, where he performs various exploits. Khusrav sends an envoy to the emperor of Chin to ask for him to be handed over. He does not succeed in this, but instead finds an aged Turk, Qalum, to assassinate him.

This is a rare subject, so the painter probably has no particular model for it. Instead, he takes a standard type of battle composition, with armies massed at either side, and renders it singularly dynamic. A rolling sweep of action on the left is balanced against massed figures and some forward impetus on the right. As Bahram’s elephant crumples, its mahout collapses forwards, his ankus fallen to the ground. Bahram has sprung free. His figure is a pivot in the line of action: he has some downwards momentum, but he iscourting all his force to turn upwards, as shown in the thrust of his rear leg, his braced shoulder, and the arcing curve of his sword. In the visual logic of the picture, his effort might carry him as far as Khusrav, enrobed on the elephant on the left. The movement of Bahram’s trajectory is framed by the nearer rocky horizon and by the outcrop in the lower left corner. Both of these lines rise briefly as they emerge from the left margin, before falling: this may perhaps echo a moment when the stricken elephant remained standing before its fall. In the background both horizons are rimmed with watchers carrying spears. Thus the possible humiliation, which Bahram is able to avert, is very public. It is interesting that Bahram, who cannot rank as an approved hero of the narrative, though not entirely a villain either, is shown demonstrating both physical and moral courage.

The picture is probably by the painter of ‘Gustaham, having slain Farshidward, dispatches Lahbak’, given the chequered caparison, and the rock expressively disposed in carefully curled segments.

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Following the capture of Ctesiphon by the Arabs under Sa'Id ibn Ziyad, grandson of Khusrau, the caliph Yazdyār, govern from a lowly site, Tus and swears to Marz, Yazdyār, the imports of a friend to him. Bizhan, the Turk, is a friend to him. Bizhan seizes Yazdyār and 𝑀āḥīyā, who is forced to abandon his sword, which is raised. Yazdyār stays the miller, who is a friend to him. The miller offers him a cup of wine and asks who is 𝑀āḥīyā in gifts. Yazdyār asks his way to acquire some of 𝑀āḥīyā's warrior. In his stead, the warrior is 𝑀āḥīyā, who is cursed by Yazdyār. The warrior warns against the instances from persisting in his favor. The deed, and the royal regalia will be taken by the king, as the warrior. The other warrior is 𝑀āḥīyā, who is cursed into the body of Yazdyār's boon. Christian monk. Hearing of this, he assumes to say that the royal regalia will be taken by Yazdyār. Khusrau, giveth his eldest son; he that Bizhan on the sword Yazdyār. Bizhan is captured and cut off, he is seized.
31. Yazdagird hides in a mill (531a)

Following the defeat of the army of Iran by the Arabs under Sa’d b. Waqqas, Yazdagird, the grandson of Khusrav Parviz, flees towards Khusrau. He hopes to regroup with the aid of Mähüy, governor of Mary, whom he raised from a lowly situation. Mähüy meets the king at Tus and swears to protect him, but instead urges Bizhan, the Turkish ruler of Samarqand, to attack him. Bizhan sends an army that finds Yazdagird at Mary. Yazdagird fights, but his men desert him; he is forced to flee with the Turks in pursuit. Coming to a mill on the Zarq, he takes refuge, abandoning his horse, golden saddle, mace and sword, which are discovered by the Turks:

‘Finding this booty dropped, they raised a cheer,

Avid to seize his horse and all his gear’.

Yazdagird stays hidden until the morning, when the miller, whose name is Khusrau, discovers him. The miller is amazed at this kingly presence, and asks who he is. Yazdagird replies that he is of Iran and in flight from the army of Türan. The miller offers him coarse bread and cress, and Yazdagird asks him also to find a barsoom. On his way to acquire the latter, the miller meets some of Mähüy’s men and tells them of the warrior in his mill. The miller is taken before Mähüy, who understands that the fire warrior must be Yazdagird. Mähüy orders Khusrau to cut off the warrior’s head. His priestly counsellors warn against this course of action, citing instances from the kings of old. However, Mähüy persists in his scheme, sending the miller to do the deed, and men to follow to take off the royal regalia with care. Khusrau draws near to the king, as though to speak to him, and stabs him. The others strip the body, but begin to curse Mähüy. Mähüy orders Khusrau to throw the body into the stream. In the morning Yazdagird’s body is taken from the river by Christian monks and buried with honour.

Hearing of this, Mähüy has the monks killed, and he assumes the crown; he is advised to say that the royal insignia were entrusted to him by Yazdagird. Mähüy rules Khusrau, giving Balkh and Herat to his eldest son; he gathers an army to attack Bizhan on the pretext of avenging Yazdagird. Bizhan leads his men out; Mähüy is captured and, his hands, feet, nose and ears cut off, he is set on a horse to die in the desert. Guráz, the governor of Mary, son of Mähüy, is killed with his three sons. Bizhan goes mad and kills himself. And so the time of Umar begins.

Binyon recognised the Mughal style of this picture. The subject is relatively rare and so any painter, but more especially one of Indian background, would have needed to have had the story explained to him in some detail. In a mountainous landscape that is blue in the distance, the mill-stream runs past the lower left corner. The mill of Yazdagird’s concealment is small, and, though set over a mill race, it is a distinctly courtly, domed building in white marble, open at the rear. The painter may think that a princely death requires such a structure, or just possibly he may intend a reference to a Zoroastrian fire temple. Yazdagird is seen crouched within, wearing a golden cap, and golden armour or a garment of gold brocade. With his eyes turned away from the action, he appears to be listening. Two riders in the foreground carry his sword and lead his horse towards the main body of Turks, massed on the right, who await them eagerly. The right-hand rider and several of the group have been given faces of Turco-Mongol type.

The illustration will be further discussed in chapter VI.