the imposition of Shiism were marked by Isma`il's triumphal entry into Tabriz and ascent of the royal throne; the twelve Shiite imams and Isma`il were mentioned in sermons in the mosques of the city. In addition, new Safavid *divans* were stamped with the inscription, ‘There is no God but God; Muhammad is the Prophet of God, and Ali is the favourite friend of God’, and the full name of the new shah, Abul-Muzaffar Shah Isma`il Bahadur Khan. To his followers, Isma`il was not only *murshid-i kamil* and *padishtah*, spiritual leader and king in one, but also combined Turkman and Iranian heritage by virtue of his Iranian father and Turkman mother. Thus both the Turkmans who deserted the Aqquyunlu house in favour of the Safavids, and the Persian-speaking Iranian aristocracy who traditionally constituted the administration of the governments imposed on them, could consider Isma`il one of their own. While the Safavids and their Shiite creed met with some resistance in eastern Iran, the personal charisma of Isma`il, described as fair, handsome and of regal bearing, helped immeasurably to bend Iran to his will.

With Alvand deceased, Shah Isma`il turned his attention to another son of Sultan Ya`qub, Sultan Murad, ruler of Fars, Persian Iraq, Kirman and Khuzistan. In response to Sultan Murad’s bid for independence, Shah Isma`il engaged his forces in battle near Hamadan in Dhu'1 Hijja 908/June 1505; by winning he gained ‘untold booty ... swift Arabian horses, and other goods and commodities from far and wide, in limitless profusion’. As word of Isma`il’s victory spread, envoys from neighbouring regions began to arrive bearing gifts, a scene repeated by the local gentry when he pressed on to Shiraz. Hardly a year passed from 907/1501 to 920/1514 without a serious military engagement. Yet Isma`il maintained a transhumant pattern of summering in one region such as Hamadan and wintering in another such as Khuy. He is reported to have returned to Tabriz in 915/1507–8 after a three-day battle against ‘Ala al-Daula Dhu’l Qadar in Diyar Bakr before riding on to a ‘beautiful palace he had built at Csi [Khuy]’, but numerous other references to Isma`il’s love of hunting suggest that in this period of his life Isma`il spent more time in encampments than within the built environment.

Until 915/1509–10 Isma`il focused his activities in the western and southern areas of Iran and Anatolia that had formerly been controlled by the Aqquyunlu Turkmans. However, the death of the Timurid ruler Sultan Husayn Bayqara in 912/1506 and the subsequent invasion of Khurasan by the Uzbek Muhammad Shaybani Khan in 915/1507 had resulted in the Uzbeks gaining control of all of eastern Iran. In 915/1509–10 Shaybani Khan dispatched his army across the desert and seized Kirman. Diplomatic efforts having failed, Isma`il’s only option was to plan to march on Khurasan. From his summer quarters in Gurgan, he set out with his army in 916/1510. Passing through Mashhad, he visited the shrine of the eighth imam, ‘Ali al-Riza, and bestowed largesse on the shrine as he had done at Najaf, Karbala and Samarra after taking Baghdad in 914/1508. Meanwhile the Uzbek governors of Khurasan had fled to Herat and Shaybani Khan had decamped for Merv, where he holed up in the citadel while the Safavids besieged it. After some days Isma`il decided to feign a retreat, a ruse which succeeded in drawing out Shaybani Khan and resulted in a pitched battle twelve miles to the west. The Uzbeks were routed and Shaybani Khan killed. His treatment in death reflects either the intensity of Isma`il’s hatred for him or the shah’s capacity for barbarity: his limbs were severed and each sent to a different province of Iran; the flayed skin of his face was stuffed with straw and dispatched to the Ottoman sultan Bayazid; and his skull was ‘encased in gold and fashioned into a chalice that was circulated as a wine cup at banquets and festive occasions’.

At the request of Babur, the eventual founder of the Mughal dynasty of India, Shah Isma`il committed troops to help capture Samarkand in 917/1511. Not only was Babur unable to hold Samarkand, but also the Safavids lost a major battle to the Uzbeks at Ghujdavan in Ramadan 918/November 1512 which led to the Uzbeks overrunning much of Khurasan in the winter of 918/1512–13. Isma`il therefore resolved to lead a second expedition to Khurasan in the spring of 919/1513, but the Uzbeks withdrew across the Oxus without a fight. Meanwhile, in the west the Ottoman sultan Bayazid abdicated in favour of his son Selim II in Safar 918/April 1512. Shah Isma`il failed to recognize Selim’s legitimacy and instead supported another son, Ahmad b. Bayazid. In addition to his anger at Isma`il’s misplaced allegiance, Selim understood the threat to his empire posed by the restive population of Qizilbash sympathizers in eastern Anatolia. Dère economic conditions and the irresistible attraction of Shah Isma`il — holy warrior,
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tions the irresistible attraction of Shah Isma'il - holy warrior, 
spiritual leader and king - motivated a steady stream of Turkman 
troops to leave Ottoman territory and join the Safavid ranks in the first 
decade of the sixteenth century. The open rebellion of Qizilbash in 
Rum and the incursion on Ottoman territory by Isma'il's governor of 
Erzurum in order to go to the aid of the rebels precipitated Selim II's 
plans to march against Iran. On 22 Muharram 920/March 1514, 
Selim II commenced his campaign against Iran with an army of 
100,000 men.

By 920/1514 Isma'il had been fighting and winning battles 
almost annually for fourteen years, since he was twelve years old. 
His Qizilbash soldiers believed in his invincibility to the extent that 
they were said to enter the fray without armour, so certain were 
they of victory. To his men Isma'il was god-like, if not God 
Himself incarnate, a blasphemous idea that survived as long as he 
remained victorious. Possibly Isma'il had begun to believe in his 
own invulnerability. Otherwise, what could explain his decision to 
meet the Ottomans on the plain of Chaldiran, instead of in moun-
tains terrain, with 40,000 men, less than half the Ottoman force, 
having waited until a day after the Ottoman army had arrived and 
arranged itself for battle? The move by Durrush Khan, 
the vastly superior numbers of Ottoman soldiers and the Ottomans 
were so confident of their superiority that the Safavid military leadership suffered grievous losses and there 
were high numbers of casualties of foot soldiers and cavalry on both 
sides. Isma'il managed to escape with a few supporters, and Selim 
arrived to Tabriz; his army, however, refused to winter there, so 
he left after eight days. The Ottomans did not depart empty-
handed; they are reported to have returned to Istanbul with five 
hundred loads of treasure and a thousand artisans from Khurasan 
and other Iranian provinces as well as the Timurid prince Badi' al-
Zaman. Moreover, the Ottomans took control of Diyar Bakr, which 
the event of tipping the Safavid center of gravity to the east, 
away from Asia Minor and towards the central Iranian plateau. 
More than the actual loss of territory to the Ottomans, the 
Battles of Chaldiran had a calamitous effect on Shah Isma'il. The 
Turkman tribesmen who had affiliated themselves with the Safavid 
cause and had fought for their semi-divine spiritual and temporal 
leader could no longer believe that he was unbeatable. Both his 
religious and political authority was shaken. Not only did the latent 
friction between Turkmans and Persians in his government 
increased, but also Isma'il could no longer command the loyalty of 
the Qizilbash amirs. Isma'il himself 'went into mourning ... He 
wore black clothes and a black turban, and ordered all sayyids to do 
the same. The military standards were dyed black, and on them 
were written in white the word al-qisas ("retribution").' Although 
Iran lost Hormuz to the Portuguese in 921/1515, Balkh and Qandahar 
to Babur in 925/1517-18 and 928/1522 respectively, and Herat 
was twice besieged by the Uzbeks (927/1520 and 950/1525), Isma'il 
himself never again led his army into battle. Instead he idled away 
the last decade of his life hunting in Azerbaijan and Armenia, 
drinking and listening to music accompanied by young men. He also 
fathered four sons and a number of daughters; the eldest boy, 
Tahmasp, was born in 920/1514 and by the age of two had been 
sent to Herat as nominal governor of Khurasan under the tutelage 
of Amir Khan Mausili.

Isma'il conquered Iran without destroying its cities and adopted 
the Turkman capital Tabriz as his own center of government rather 

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12 Mihrab, Masjidi Jami, Suez, 1989. While the use of mosaics in this 
mihrabe has been viewed as an anachronistic 
reversion to a 14th-century technique, 
the arabesque in the mosaics and 
sandblasting is closely related to that on 
illuminations and 
carpetes of the 16th century.
than building a new complex elsewhere. For these reasons and a presumed lack of interest in commissioning new monuments, his reputation as a patron of architecture rests on a handful of standing buildings, most of which he ordered to be extended or renovated, not built from scratch. Other monuments such as the palace he built in Khayy are no longer extant and thus cannot be judged against their predecessors and successors. As a result of the paucity of notable monuments from the first quarter of the sixteenth century, scholars have considered the architecture of Isma'īl's reign to be a continuation of the Timurid and Turkman traditions. However, his renovation of religious buildings fits a general pattern based on the need to establish Shi'ism as the state religion of Iran. To this end, Isma'īl provided the wherewithal to refurbish the shrines of the imams at Najaf, Karbala and Samarra in 914/1508 and Mashhad in 916/1510. Moreover, he promoted the Ardabil shrine both as the dynastic centre of the Safavid family and as a pilgrimage site for the Qizilbash faithful. Probably as a means of coping with the increased number of people coming to the shrine, he constructed the Dar al-Hadith, a functional pendant to the Dar al-Huffaz, placed at the south-west end of the yard at the shrine. Additionally, Isma'īl had the remains of his father, Haydar, brought from Tabarsan near Darband in 915/1509 and interred at the Ardabil shrine; he may also have planned his own tomb there before his death. For the father of the founder of the Safavid order, Shaykh Jihrā'īl, the shah erected a mausoleum at Kalkhuran near Ardabil. The building consists of a high dome which meets the flat roof of the square building without transition. Deep axial arched portals provide access to the interior. According to Hillenbrand, 'Such mausolea replaced the tomb tower, offering a far more spacious layout which encouraged large-scale pilgrimages.'

While the constraints of adding on to existing buildings limited the scope for structural innovation, the decoration of the Safavid parts of such buildings as the Masjid-i Jami' at Saveh [fig. 12], restored in 927/1520, does indicate a refinement of arabesque that is paralleled in manuscript illumination and in the ornament on vessels of the early sixteenth century. Despite the archaizing use of moulded stucco in the mihrab, the lively light-coloured floral arabesque on a dark ground in the tympanum contrasts artfully...
with the dark arabesque on a light ground in the spandrels of the arch. Much of the decoration of the exterior has disappeared, but the dome and the two main icosi, south-east and north-west, exhibit masterly – even grand – proportions.

The outstanding surviving building from the period of Shah Isma’il was not a royal commission; it is the tomb of Harun-i Viliyat in Isfahan, built by Darnish Khan Shamlu in Bahri alavval 918/May-June 1512. Darnish Khan, Isma’il’s brother-in-law, had been appointed governor of Isfahan in 909/1505, but he chose to remain at court in Tabriz and to send a deputy in his place. His surrogate was Mirza Shah Husayn Isfahani, an architect who became vakil (head) of government bureaucracy after the Battle of Chaldiran in 920/1514 and an extremely powerful figure at the court of Shah Isma’il. Although the inscription on the tomb of Harun-i Viliyat states that it was ‘built by the work of the poor mason, Husayn’, he may well have been Mirza Shah Husayn, who is referred to in historical sources by the more elevated title mî‘mar (architect).  

Neither the plan nor the elements of the building – its dome on a high drum resting on an octagon which in turn rests on a square – are particularly novel. Yet the treatment of the façade [fig. 15] provides the interest that is somewhat lacking in the interior. The arched portal is echoed in the blind arches of the upper storey and recessed arches below them. Within each of the arches at the sides of the portal glazed and unglazed bricks are combined in geometric patterns. The spandrels above the side arches consist of profuse arabesques in gold on a cobalt blue ground in mosaic faïence. Strips of glazed mosaic tiles and unglazed brick frame the portal and side arches and give the façade compositional unity. The portal itself contains its most surprising features. A lifting spiral arabesque in black on a turquoise ground covers the outer spandrel with the exception of a square containing the names of Allah, Muhammad, and ‘Ali placed above the point of the arch. Inside the arch, the door itself is flanked by two panels containing tile mosaic vases out of which flowering arabesques grow. A poetic inscription in nastelq (hanging script) appears above the spandrel of the door and above it a band of thuluth runs around the three sides of the interior of the portal. Here, in gold directly above the door, the name of Shah Isma’il is written in musical script with titles befitting a holy warrior and descendant of the imams. Although the name of Harun is mentioned in a hadith in the inscription, his identity is unknown. The tympanum above the inscription band contains a pair of confronted peacocks surrounded by white Chinese cloud scrolls on a cobalt blue ground. The lively cloud scrolls provide a rhythmic counterpoint to the static birds, with their paradisiac associations.

While the decorative techniques employed on the façade of the
brass jug of this shape dated 916/1511 [fig. 15], one year after Shah Isma’il took Khurasan, indicates that production of these vessels continued in Herat by the same artisans despite the Safavid conquest. Although the popularity of this shape waned in Iran in the second decade of the sixteenth century, the Ottomans adopted the shape for both metal and ceramic objects, as well as the spiral arabesque which adorns the so-called ‘Golden Horn’ style of Iznik wares from the early sixteenth century.

Among the other items thought to have been taken from the Safavid treasury after the Battle of Chaldiran, two objects – a belt and a zinc flask – stand out. The belt of crimson velvet has six steel plaques overlaid with filigree gold plaques in different designs [fig. 16]. One of these is inscribed with the name of Shah Isma’il and the date 915/1507–8. The inscription reads: ‘The just, the consummate Sultan, the guide, the special friend (al-wali) Abu’l-Muzaffar [Isma’il] Shahzad al-Safavi, may God give him eternal life and exalt his realm and his reign and fill the world with his piety and his beneficence.’ While originally figures and soldiers in manuscript illustrations are often depicted wearing this type of belt, early sixteenth-century belts themselves are extremely rare. The exquisite filigree resembles that found on the doublures of bookbindings, which suggests that, as at the Timurid courts at Samarkand and Herat, artisans working for the shah had a common store of designs available through a courtly workshop system, or kitabkhaneh. Furthermore, the choice of ornament for the plaques – a wayqaq, or animal-headed scroll, and a hunting scene – recalls that of bookbinding.

Although the long-necked zinc flask with gold tracery and openwork gold armatures encrusted with precious stones and pearls does not bear the name of Shah Isma’il, it is assumed to be of Iranian workmanship from the early sixteenth century [fig. 17]. It is one of a unique group of zinc vessels in the Topkapi Saray Treasury documented from the reign of Sultan Bayazid II (886–918/1481–1512) and may have formed part of a diplomatic gift from Isma’il to the Ottoman sultan. The verses in cartouches above the plaques refer to the vessel and the wine-pourer, much as the ghazals written by Shah Isma’il do. Also, the flash with its elegant long neck and ovoid body is analogous to one depicted in an illustration in a collection of Shah Isma’il’s poetry, compiled during his reign.

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The goldwork and jewels on the Topkapi flask give some idea of
the opulence at both the Persian and the Turkish courts, and of
why the artistic ideas of one centre were so eagerly adopted else-
where.

The history of Safavid book illustration before the Battle of
Chaldiran is almost as sparse as that of the architecture and
decorative arts. However, certain manuscripts such as the
Khamsah of
Azami with illustrations by the two leading Turkmen painters of
the court of Sultan Ya’qub, Shaykhli and Darvish Muhammad,
were continued after Shah Isma’il’s accession. The style of painting
changed little, if at all, but the ten illustrations painted after
907/1501 include the tall red Safavid tag, with or without a white
turban wrapped around it [fig. 18]. For the first fifty years of the
sixteenth century this form of headdress remained in vogue and its
occurrence in paintings, carpets and some figural textiles is usually
a sure indication of an early Safavid date.

Another notable illustrated manuscript associated with Shah
Isma’il in the first decade of his reign is stylistically related both to
provincial Turkmen painting and to the painting of the Tabriz
court. The colophon of the Story of Jamal and Jalal of Muhammad
Ashi states that the manuscript was completed by the scribe Sultan
‘Ali in 908/1502-5 at Herat, which was still the capital of the
Timurid sultan Husayn Bayqara at that time. S.C. Welch has iden-
tified the scribe as Sultan ‘Ali Qayini, who taught the children of
Sultan Husayn Bayqara, rather than the more famous Sultan ‘Ali
Masikhah. Its first illustration contains figures who wear the stan-
dard Timurid turban with its low felt cap under the cloth turban,
whereas in the rest of the thirty-four illustrations a very wide form
of the Safavid tag appears.

Since Khurasan did not come under Safavid control until
916/1510, the manuscript must have travelled west before the
Safavid paintings were added. Welch’s explanation of this is that it
was brought to Iran by one of Sultan Husayn Bayqara’s rebellious
sons, Muhammad Husayn, who had joined Isma’il on campaign in
Mazandaran in Dhu’l Qa‘da 909/May 1504. The manuscript
contains two dated illustrations, one (fol. 55b) from the year 909
and the other (fol. 57b) from 910 [fig. 19]. Since Muhammad
Husayn met Shah Isma’il in the last month of the year 909, he
would have either already commissioned an artist to begin filling in

17 Long-necked flask, early 16th century, zinc, partially gilded, with applied
gold medallions and enameled stones, h. 52 cm, Topkapi Saray Museum,
Istanbul, no. 2877.

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18 'The Suicide of Shirin', from the royal Turkman Khamsah of Nizami, Tabriz, c. 1565, opaque watercolour, gold and ink on paper, 29.5 x 19 cm, Keir Collection. The inclusion of men dressed in the Safavid hat, or turban cap with a high batten, indicates that this is one of the ten illustrations added to this manuscript after the accession of Shah Isma'il in 1501. Despite the tragic nature of this scene, the gold cloud scrolls and dipping and rolling storks in the sky lighten and enliven the picture.
18 'The Suicide of Shirin', from the royal Turkman Khamseh of Nizami, Tabriz, c. 1505, opaque watercolour, gold and ink on paper, 28.5 x 19 cm, Keir Collection. The inclusion of men dressed in the Safavid tur, or turban cap with a high haton, indicates that this is one of the ten illustrations added to this manuscript after the accession of Shah Isma'il in 1501. Despite the tragic nature of this scene, the gold clouds scrolls and dipping and rolling storks in the sky lighten and enliven the picture.

By about 921/1515 the influence of man and animal inhabiting a natural world of roaring winds, lush and frenzied vegetation and rocks resembling grotesque faces was being honed by the director of Shali Isma'il's artists' workshop, Sultan Muhammad. A native of Tabriz, Sultan Muhammad may have contributed to the Jamal and Jalal manuscript and is generally thought to be the artist of 'Rustam Sleeping' from an unfinished Shahnameh [fig. 20]. Three other paintings of the same size and style are extant, which suggests that for some reason Isma'il's artists stopped work on the manuscript only to begin again on a new, very ambitious Shahnameh about 928/1522. Welch has proposed that the abandonment of the earlier manuscript and commencement of a new one were connected with the return of Prince Tahmasp, the crown prince, from Herat to Tabriz in 928/1522 at the age of eight. Having studied at Herat with the legendary Timurid painter Bihzad, young Tahmasp had developed a taste for the more sedate and subtle late Timurid mode, and so Sultan Muhammad and his atelier adapted their style to suit him. The synthesis that occurred, one of the highest achievements of all Safavid art, is more fittingly discussed as a product of the reign of Shah Tahmasp than of Shah Isma'il, despite the probability that Isma'il commissioned the great royal Shahnameh.

Just as the different artists who contributed to the Shahnameh of Sultan 'Ali Mirza Karkiya of Gilan did not suppress their stylistic differences to achieve visual unity within the manuscript, so the artists who worked for Shah Isma'il did not conform to a single court style. A Divan (Collected Poems) of Khata'i, Isma'il's pen-name, contains three illustrations in a style that differs markedly from that of the previously discussed Tabriz court manuscripts. Here the figures are extremely tall and slender with naive, hairless
faces. The vegetation in works such as 'Five Youths in a Landscape' [fig. 11] follows the Turkman/early Safavid norm of clumps of light green flowering plants on a darker green ground, flowering trees entwining tall, dark cypresses, and Chinese-style clouds like kites with tails depicted against a gold sky. Yet the scene is markedly calmer than either the illustrations of Jamal and Jalal or 'Rustam Sleeping'. This may be attributable to the subject matter, more a visual analogue than an actual illustration of Khata'i/Shaḥ Isma'il's verses:

I have never seen anyone on earth so beautiful as you,
never in the world anyone so gorgeous as you.
Truly, within the garden of the soul, there can be no stature so elegant as your tall, slender cypress.
Although there are many beauties among humanity, there is none so radiant as you.
In the garden of beauties there is no one with rose red cheeks like yours.

Never have I seen among the poets of the age, Khata'i, such a distracted nightingale as you."

Thackston has demonstrated convincingly how of the two princely figures with two feathers each in their turbans, the man at the left next to the cypress is the love object and the figure at the right who offers him a fruit is the lover, inclining slightly towards his beloved like the flowering branch that bends toward the cypress. At the lower right an attendant, the saqī, holds a gold wine cup and a long-necked suraki (wine bottle) comparable to the jewel-studded one from the Ottoman treasury [see fig. 17]. This, too, is a metaphor for the beloved: 'Your eyes are intoxicated, your stature is a suraki, your words are sweet tidbits, and your lips are our goblet.'

Because the inscription on a frieze depicted in another illustration from this manuscript contains the titles of Shah Isma'il, Thackston has proposed that the manuscript was produced during Isma'il's lifetime and probably was a royal commission. On the basis of style the manuscript has been dated to c. 1520. One might expect a more polished, less archaizing style of painting by this date, for the exaggeratedly tall figures and the compositions of two of the three illustrations recall in a general way the illustrations to the Jalayirid manuscript of Three Poems of Khwaju Kirmani,

20 'Rustam Sleeping while Raksh Fights a Lion', from an unfinished, dispersed Shah-nama of Firdausi, attributed to Sultan Muḥammad, Tabrīz, c. 1515, opaque watercolour and ink on paper, 51.6 x 20.8 cm, British Museum OA 1948.12-11.025.
e vegetation in works such as 'Five Youths in a Landscape' follows the Turkman/early Safavid norm of clumps of flowering plants on a darker green ground, flowering vines, tall, dark cypresses, and Chinese-style clouds like h stylized against a golden sky. Yet the scene is calmer than either the illustrations of Jamâl al Jâlî or Sleeping'. This may be attributable to the subject matter, usual analogue than an actual illustration of Khâtâb’s verses:

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ugh there are many beauties among humanity, there ione so radiant as you.

garden of beauties there is no one with rose red cheeks like yours.

have I seen among the poets of the age, Khâtâb’s
h a distracted nightingale as you. n has demonstrated convincingly how of the two princely feathers each in their turbans, the man at the left cypress is the love object and the figure at the right who a fruit is the lover, inclining slightly towards his beloved flowering branch that bends toward the cypress. At the right an attendant, the saqi, holds a gold wine cup and a red sarih (wine bottle) comparable to the jewel-studded the Ottoman treasury [see fig. 17]. This, too, is a metaphor loved: ‘Your eyes are intoxicated, your stature is a sarih, 3s are sweet tidbits, and your lips are our goblet.”

so the inscription on a frieze depicted in another illustration this manuscript contains the titles of Shah Isma’il, a has proposed that the manuscript was produced during lifetime and probably was a royal commission. On the other hand, the style the manuscript has been dated to c. 1520. One might more polished, less archaizing style of painting by this the exaggeratedly tall figures and the compositions of two illustrations recall in a general way the illustrations to the manuscript of Three Poems of Khwaju Kirmani, painted at Baghdad in 798/1596. Also, in a Gulistan of 919/1515–14 from Shiraz the same very high turban feathers as those in the Divan are found [fig. 21], whereas in Shiraz manuscripts of 927/1520 the feathers are smaller. On the other hand, the distinctive treatment of the turbans, which extend down the necks of their wearers, is found in some illustrations to a Shahnameh of Firdausi, dated at Tabriz Muharram 931/November 1524, several months after the death of Shah Isma’il. This suggests that an artist or artists worked in this ‘elongate’ style for the last five or ten years of Isma’il’s reign even as the influence of the painters from the newly appropriated Timurid court atelier at Herat was beginning to be felt at Tabriz.

During the winter of 916/1510–11 Shah Isma’il made his headquarters at Herat before campaigning in Transoxiana in the following spring. During this interlude he not only received local lords but also journeyed into the wilderness near Herat in order to meet Hatifi, who was the nephew of the poet Jami and, like his uncle, had been one of the poets in the court circle of Sultan Husayn Bayqara. Hatifi was a Shiite who had written an historical epic, the Timurnameh, celebrating the life and exploits of Timur. Either to honor Isma’il or because he was commissioned to do so, Hatifi embarked on a long poem about the shah, the Isma’il-nameh, but it remained unfinished at the time of his death in 927/1520. Possibly to commemorate Hatifi’s meeting with Isma’il, another luminary of the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the artist Bihzad, painted a small portrait of the poet wearing the Safavid taj [fig. 22]. The composition of the picture could not be more simple; against a bright blue ground Hatifi kneels in three-quarter profile, gesturing with his right hand while resting his left hand on his knee. His robe is plain, gathered at the waist by a red and white cloth sash over which a short sash is draped. Unlike Bihzad’s paintings of the 1480s and 1490s, the brushwork is relatively painterly or even rough, perhaps akin to the main tremblant one finds in the work of European painters in old age. Another sign of the artist’s advanced age.

21 ‘Game being Cooked for Anushirvan on the Occasion when there was no Salt’, from a Gulistan of Sa’d, Shiraz, dated 919/1515–14, opaque watercolour, gold and ink on paper, 9.5 × 7.2 cm, British Library, Or. 11847, fol. 19b.
maturity is the intensity of Hatifi’s gaze, as if Bihzad had discarded all superfluous details to home in on the essence of the poet. Whether the painting was produced in 916/1511 or later, it is a testament to Bihzad’s continuing mastery in the second decade of the sixteenth century.

Because of the ongoing threat of an Uzbek invasion in Khurasan, Shah Isma’il needed as strong a Safavid presence in the province as possible. Thus, in 921/1516 his first-born son, Tahmasp, was sent at the age of two to be nominal governor of Herat under the guardianship of Amir Khan Mansili. As the heir apparent, Tahmasp received the traditional education of a prince, that is, reading the Qur’an and other religious texts as well as Persian literature, philosophy and history, writing in the seven classical Arabic scripts as well as nasta’liq, learning marksmanship and horsemanship, for war and hunting, and whatever lessons of statecraft his guardian deemed necessary. Unlike his father who had received his schooling at a provincial court, Tahmasp had the pick of the scholars, artists and other luminaries who had stayed in Herat after its fall to the Uzbeks in 915/1507. The self-conscious refinement and intellectual ambience of the late Timurid court at Herat contrasted markedly with the politically preoccupied late Turkman court at Tabriz. This difference is reflected in the cool and rational compositions of Bihzad versus the ecstatic intensity of the Turkman Khamsch of 886-910/1481-1505. From his environment alone, therefore, Tahmasp could be expected to have developed a world view that diverged from that of his father. By nature, too, Tahmasp differed from his father. As a child he showed an aptitude for painting, and so Isma’il arranged for him to be taught by Bihzad and later Sultan Muhammad. Whereas Isma’il loved the chase, Tahmasp’s preferred form of hunting was going fishing. These two pursuits, fishing and painting, reflect his more sedentary nature, which became more pronounced in maturity. During his childhood he had few reported eccentricities, but as he aged he developed many peculiarities which ultimately had an impact on all aspects of Safavid life, including the arts.

For the history of painting and perhaps the other arts, Tahmasp’s stay in Herat was pivotal. When Amir Khan Mansili was recalled to Tabriz in 928/1522 for insubordination, Tahmasp returned as well. Although there is some question concerning the date, Bihzad was appointed nominal head of the royal artists’ atelier and most likely came to Tabriz in Tahmasp’s train. It is also likely that Shah Isma’il newly commissioned a royal Shahnameh for Tahmasp. The result was the major monument of Safavid painting, the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp, a manuscript of 380 folios and 258 illustrations. Dickson and Welch have estimated that the book took from 928/1522 to 941/1535 to complete and even then two miniatures were added in the 1540s. The project employed all the leading artists of the day who were in Safavid territory. Some had joined the service of the Uzbeks and worked at Bakhra. Sultan Muhammad was appointed the first director of the project and his superb contributions to the manuscript demonstrate how he adapted his own style, based in the Turkman court idiom, to the style practised at Herat by Bihzad and his followers both at Herat and Tabriz.

While dramatic developments were occurring in the artists’ atelier at Tabriz around 928/1522, manuscript production had continued unabated in the provincial centre of Shiraz. In the fifteenth century Shiraz was the primary source of illustrated manuscripts produced commercially, not necessarily for specific patrons. The artists of Shiraz at this time had worked in a simplified style that borrowed elements from Herat and Turkman painting. Although the materials and skills of Shiraz artists were rarely
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A Yusuf and Zulaykha manuscript of 924/1518 demonstrates the development of Safavid painting at Shiraz that paralleled the school of Tabriz. According to the colophon the manuscript was made at the holy tomb or foundation of Hazrat Maulana Husam al-Din Ibrahim at Shiraz. Neither the artist nor the scribe is named. Robinson has noted five other manuscripts which were produced at this foundation, suggesting that this type of establishment operated as an atelier for manuscript production. Although the inclusion of a number of figures and the extension of architecture into the border had occurred in the 919/1515-14 Gulistan, the profusion of small-scale patterns on the walls, in the carpet and on the figures' dresses in 'Yusuf Entering Zulaykha's Apartment' [fig. 23] is a harbinger of one of the salient features of sixteenth century Shiraz painting.

At the court level one must assume that Chinese ceramics continued to be preferred to local products. However, the production of Persian stonepaste imitations of Chinese blue and white porcelains persisted during Shah Isma'il's reign; two examples bear dates from the 1520s. One, a plate dated 922/1522-5 [fig. 24], depicts two birds perched on the branches of a rose bush. The composition derives from early Ming porcelains with pairs of birds on the single branch of a fruit tree. The inscription includes a poem and the statement that the dish was made at Nishapur. The other is a wine flask with a bird perched in a flowering peony. The bird has turned its head so that its neck and beak point upward. Around the border that joins the two sides of the flask runs an inscription with the date and a sort of drinker's plea:
Oh, my Lord, may my soul not reach a union with you, and may no word nor sign of my existence come to you, at the end of the time may I not for a moment be with you, in short, may the world not be with you! In this old tavern a drunkard said: may the end of all drunkards be auspicious!*

The affinity between the two pieces is clear, the artist of the flask having deleted the upper bird from the composition. In addition, the crosshatching and wave and rock motif on the rim of the dish relate it to a group of early sixteenth-century blue and white ceramics with the Nishapur petrofabric. Golombek and Mason have proposed that Nishapur continued as a centre of ceramic production into the sixteenth century, partly in order to supply Maahbad, home of the major Shiite shrine of Imam Riza, with souvenirs for pilgrims.* Since ceramics with similar motifs were also produced at Tabriz, it is possible that the same type of clientele which bought the illustrated manuscripts of Shiraz acquired Persian blue and white vessels such as these. They were not of royal quality, but often they were attractive and looked enough like the pots used at court to be considered fashionable.

As mentioned above, the strong tradition of metal casting continued in Khurasan after the Safavids took the province from the Uzbeks in 916/1510. The decoration on the Safavid bulbous-bodied brass jugs resembled that of the Timurid period in the use of small, tight arabesques and interlocking lobed cartouches with or without inscriptions. Whereas the inscriptions on Timurid vessels of this type were poetical and often from the oeuvre of poets active at Herat in the late fifteenth century, inscribed invocations to 'Ali appear only after 916/1510.* The inscriptions on very fine metal wares were supplied by scribes better known for copying manuscripts, and the combination of geometric framing devices, inscriptions and vegetal, floral and cloud motifs all relates to manuscript illumination. Bronze and brass objects attributed to western Iran after 916/1510, whether completely covered with decoration or with bands and cartouches of ornament and inscriptions alternating with undecorated areas, recall in some respects the façade of the tomb of Harun-i Vilayat. Silver inlay cloud scrolls in cartouches enliven the domed lids and sides of two inkwells (fig. 25) attributed to the second decade of the sixteenth century in much the same way as those on the tympanum of the tomb. Likewise the lobed medallion on the side of a western Iranian box loosely resembles the glazed eight-pointed stars in the framing panels of the tomb's portal. Although some types of early Safavid metal wares from western Iran imitate eastern Iranian shapes and others derive their decoration from Herati manuscript illumination, the metalworkers of western Iran initiated the move away from tight, linear all-over ornament towards a taste for balancing areas of decoration with voids. The most successful metal objects from western Iran are therefore visually consistent not only with the other types of portable objects but also with architectural decoration of the second decade of the sixteenth century.

Since the earliest dated Safavid carpets come from the reign of Shah Tahmasp (950–84/1544–70), the assignment of existing inscribed carpets to the first quarter of the sixteenth century is tenuous at best. From manuscript illustrations of the late fifteenth century [fig. 26] one can deduce that carpets with arabesque designs in the field had been introduced and were used at the same time as those with geometric patterns. On one extant carpet that may have been produced in the early sixteenth century [fig. 27] the field contains spiralling vines that terminate in split palmettes, while the sixteen-pointed star medallion in the centre and four corner pieces are filled with peony and vine motifs. An eight-pointed star enclosing a cross and octagon are the most geometric elements of this carpet. Possibly this type of carpet design originated in Azerbaijan and was stimulated by the
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refurbishing zeal of Shah Isma'il, whose renovated mosques and shrines would have required new floor coverings. The carpets represented in Herat court painting of the 1490s contain patterns of interlocking lobed medallions and cartouches analogous to illustrated headings in manuscripts, whereas in the 899/1494–45 Ilhan Shamsun's some illustrations contain carpets with repeating geometric patterns and others have carpets with arabesque and spiralling scroll motifs. Likewise, in the 900–10/1504–5 Jamshid and Jalal the scrolling pattern on the carpet of the first illustration, thought to have been painted in Herat, is contained within a medallion, whereas the split-leaf arabesque forms an all-over pattern on many of the carpets in the Safavid miniatures.

Many types of knotted and flat-woven early Safavid carpets have not survived. The striped mat on which Rustam lies in 'Rustam Sleeping' may have been a woven blanket or even dyed rush matting. In the Jamshid and Jalal illustrations one can observe many striped textiles, from horse blankets to cushion covers to the cloths on which enthroned figures sit. Some of these cloths contain floral or vine scrolls within their stripes. Other carpet-like textiles found in paintings include tent coverings; later extant fragments are made of velvet but more durable materials were probably used for the tent exteriors, and tent wall panels of matting or reed screens are depicted in early sixteenth-century paintings (Jamshid and Jalal, fol. 55b). Figures in trains and on thrones are often depicted sitting on flat rectangular cushions covered with fabrics with repeating all-over floral or geometric patterns. Since these patterned textiles closely resemble those used for clothing in early Safavid painting, it is possible that both represent silks of the type produced in Iran under Shah Isma'il. As silk cultivation and weaving for consumption in Iran and abroad were perennial and important sources of income in Gilan, Mazandaran, Azerbaijan and central Iran, it is all the more unfortunate that no textiles can be reliably attributed to the period of Isma'il.

Some industries, such as glassblowing, seem not to have figured at all in early Safavid Iran. Round glass windowpanes and glass bottles appear in paintings, but one must assume that glass was imported from Venice or perhaps Mamluk Syria or Egypt. By contrast, wooden objects and building components such as doors, columns and capitals are depicted in paintings and are to be found

21 (opposite) Blue and white stonepaste bowl, Nishapur, dated 929/1522–3, diam. 33.5 cm, Middle Eastern Culture Centre in Japan, Tokyo, no. 11820–75. This bowl is of singular importance as the earliest dated Safavid ceramic vessel.

25 (above) Inkwell, signed by Mirak Husayn, c. 1510–20, brass with silver inlay and black composition, h. 8.9 cm, diam. 4.7 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, 454–1888.