of another son of Bahram Mirza and his infant son. Although the shah’s mother prevailed upon Isma’il not to assassinate his blind brother Muhammad Khudabande, he did order the murder of his brother’s eldest son, Hasan. Muhammad Khudabande and three of his sons were placed under house arrest in Shiraz and the order went out for his other son, ‘Abbas Mirza, who was in Herat, to be executed. Before this order could be carried out, Shah Isma’il II died of a combination of poison and opium on 13 Ramazan 985/24 November 1577.

Although a slave girl had given birth to a son by Isma’il during his reign, only the guardian of the baby seriously considered him a claimant to the throne. Despite Muhammad Khudabande’s visual impairment, the amirs recognized the importance of his having sons who could succeed him and they believed that while he would be shah in name, the real power would be vested in his sister, Pari Khan Khanum. Even during her short interregnum, Pari Khan Khanum tried to undo some of her brother’s wrongs. She freed all the nobles and amirs that Isma’il had imprisoned and permitted those who had gone to Shiraz to present themselves to the new shah. Fortunately, the leaders of the various Qizilbash tribes made their peace with one another, though this proved to be short-lived. From a political and social point of view the best thing that can be said about the reign of Shah Isma’il II is that it lasted only eighteen months. His murder of almost his whole family set a terrible precedent for future Safavid kings, while his inattention to matters of state and his violent and erratic personality provided a shaky foundation for his hopelessly inadequate heir, Muhammad Khudabande.

One of the few unregrettable aspects of Isma’il II’s reign is his revival of the artists’ atelier and the patronage of poets and musicians at the Safavid court. Although Shah Tahmasp had re-appointed a librarian at the very end of his life, only one illustrated manuscript, the Garshaspnameh (Story of Garshasp) of Asadi dated 981/1575, can be safely attributed to the artists of his workshop [fig. 69]. Muzaffar ‘Ali, who had served Tahmasp for his whole career, painted the first of the eight paintings in the manuscript, and two younger artists, Sadiq Beg and Zayn al-Abidin, contributed at least two of the other illustrations. Some figures in the paintings recall the lithe, long-necked youths found in Qazvin.

69 ‘Nariman Killing the Khaqan of Chin in Battle’ from a Garshaspnameh of Asadi, by Zayn al-Abidin, Qazvin, dated 981/1575, opaque watercolour, gold and ink on paper, page 25 × 21.5 cm, British Library, Or. 12985, fol. 90b. The text of this manuscript was copied by Mir ‘Imad, an important calligrapher at the court of Shah ‘Abbas. Garshasp was one of the shahs chronicled in the Shakhnameh.
style portraits of the 1560s. However, other details such as the treatment of rocks and a greater preference for orange, mauve and light blue anticipate the one major manuscript thought to have been produced for Shah Isma’il II, a dispersed Shahnameh. The Garshaspnameh paintings exhibit a high level of action, but little tension. The myriad implied levels of meaning that characterize many of the illustrations to Sultan Ibrahim Mirza’s Haft Avarang have been replaced in the Garshaspnameh by paintings that present the narrative straightforwardly and without innuendo, as if the manuscript were to be read by a child, not a sophisticated adult.

In ordering the execution of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, Shah Isma’il II’s political aim may have been to minimize the chances of rebellion or diminution of his power, but he may have also wished to fulfil a cultural ambition. When he arrived in Qazvin as shah, Isma’il II may not have attended to the business of government, but he did immediately order the palace to be refurbished and new buildings to be constructed. Furthermore, Sultan Ibrahim Mirza formed a close relationship with the shah and may have been influential in his decision to restore the patronage of poets, musicians and artists at his court. Sultan Ibrahim Mirza himself was a skilled poet, woodworker, calligrapher, painter and musician, and he was at the centre of a circle of poets, scribes, artists and musicians. He also collected calligraphy, painting and porcelain. If Shah Isma’il II had schemed to expropriate his cousin’s collection and library, his hopes were dashed. Gauhar Sultan Begum, the wife of Sultan Ibrahim and sister of the shah, ‘destroyed most of the contents of his [Sultan Ibrahim’s] library by throwing the manuscripts into the water, so that they should not fall into the hands of the Shah; the china she smashed, and his other belongings she destroyed by fire’.

Sultan Ibrahim Mirza’s artists, however, did enter the royal atelier of the shah. Zayn al-Abidin, Sadiqi Beg, ‘Ali Asghar, Siyavush and other artists who may have been new to court service were commissioned, probably upon Isma’il II’s accession, to prepare an illustrated Shahnameh. Robinson has proposed that the manuscript was never completed because of the shah’s premature death, a point supported by the fact that the forty-nine paintings that survive do not include any illustrations of later parts of the epic. Although some illustrations by artists of the older generation show a certain compositional debt to the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp,
the figural types, palette and treatment of foliage are consistent with the Qazvin style of the third quarter of the sixteenth century. Possibly because of the unadorned borders that would have been sprinkled with gold, but also because of the reduced density of detail, the Shah Isma'il II Shahnameh illustrations appear somewhat flat, as if the patron was unable to inspire his artists.

Compared to similar works from the period of Shah Tahmasp, in Sadiqi Beg's 'Rustam Kills the Dragon' [fig. 70], a powerful scene in which Rustam cleaves the dragon's throat while his horse, Rakhs, crunches its spine with his teeth, all extraneous figures have been removed, the foliage of trees is sparse while the size of individual flowering plants has increased, and the rocks jut upwards rather than in a variety of directions. The figures are placed closer to the picture plane than previously, and Sadiqi Beg has not hesitated to portray Rakhs as an enormous mass of horseshoes, broader of beam than the dragon, hurtling across the page. This bit of artistic licence serves a dramatic purpose but deviates from the unwritten rules of proportion that governed court paintings of the Shah Tahmasp period. The technical quality of Sadiqi Beg's illustrations in this manuscript is as high as that of all but the most exceptional court paintings of the sixteenth century, but for overall conception the most compelling of the artist's works would not appear until the 1590s.

In the same period that Shah Isma'il II's Shahnameh was being produced, some artists continued to work in a style closely related to that of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's Haft Avarang. Although a manuscript combining the Khamsah of Nizami and Amir Khusrau with two colophons of Dhu'l Qa' da 984/January-February 1577 and Rabi' 1 985/May-June 1577 has been assigned to Mashhad, some artists, such as Shayk Muhammad, who worked in this style returned to Qazvin with Sultan Ibrahim Mirza in 983/late 1574. Thus a parallel mode of painting was practised in the mid-1570s which reflects the taste of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, even if he was not the actual patron of the manuscripts in which these paintings appear. A double-page composition of youths wading in a stream from the 984-5/1577 manuscript [fig. 68] depicts a princely figure seated before a canopy being served wine while small groups of young men frolic in and near a stream. The long, thin necks, wavy collars, pointed chins, puffy cheeks and wiry bodies of the young men all recall the works of Shaykh Muhammad rather than the stiffer figures of Sadiqi Beg in this period. As will be discussed, artists, perhaps in the circle of Shaykh Muhammad, who returned to Khurasan at some point after Shah Isma'il II's death, continued to employ the sinuous line and versions of this figural type in manuscript illustrations and single-page works through the period of Shah Muhammad Khudabandeh, while others perpetuated the more stolid Qazvin style of the Garshaspnameh and Isma'il II's Shahnameh.

Given the brevity of Shah Isma'il's reign, dated objects and textiles from this period are exceedingly rare. One torch stand bears a date that can either be read as 985/March 1577–March 1578 or 989/February 1581–January 1582 [fig. 71]. With its alternating bands of horizontal fluting and inscriptions of distichs from the Bustan of Sa'di and a ghazal of Khatibi Tabrizi, the candlestick is very similar in shape and decoration to at least one other extant example. It demonstrates the development of such torch stands after their introduction with the tall pillar candlestick of 946/1559 and the example from 969/1561–2, and points to the appeal in the 1570s and 1580s of alternating areas of fluting and engraved epigraphic and floral or foliate decoration. Ceramics, textiles and carpets that might have been made in the reign of Shah Isma'il II but are undated will be discussed with objects from the reign of Muhammad Khudabandeh.

In the three months between the death of Shah Isma'il II and the coronation of Shah Muhammad Khudabandeh at Shiraz, Pari Khan Khanum had attempted to run the government. However, the shrewd grand vizier, Mirza Salman, who had slipped out of Qazvin to join the shah in Shiraz, realized that Muhammad Khudabandeh took no decisions himself and that his wife, Mahdi-i Ulya Khayr al-Nisa Begum, wielded all the power with little or no reference to her husband. In the tradition
established by Shah Isma'IL II, Mahdi Ulya wasted no time having her rival dispatched, and so on the day of the shah's coronation, Pari Khan Khanum was strangled. Unlike under Muhammad Khudabande's predecessor, however, appointments were duly made, dividing up the provincial governorships between the different Qizilbash amirs. The shah then proceeded to make lavish payouts of robes of honour and coins from the treasury to all manner of government officials and the royal bodyguard so that soon corruption was rife and the treasury was bankrupt.

Because of the shah's weakness, the Qizilbash tribes renewed their internecine struggle almost as soon as his reign began. Although the governor of Mashhad, Murtaza Quli Khan, was able to repulse an Uzbek incursion in Khurasan in the spring of 968/1558, the Ottoman invasion in the same year had far more serious repercussions. Taking advantage of uprisings among the Kurds and Georgians, Sultan Murad III (982–1005/1574–95) ordered his vizier, Mustafa Pasha, known as Lala Pasha, to lead an army to Georgia. At first the Ottomans made small gains in Georgia, but in the years that followed the Persians suffered serious losses of territory in Kurdistan and Luristan, and in 995/1585 Tabriz fell to the Ottomans. Even in the face of such dire external threats the Qizilbash tribes continued their struggle against each other, the Shamlus and Ustajlus loosely joined against the Turkmans and Takkalus. By Jumada I 987/July 1579 the Qizilbash amirs had arranged the assassination of Mahdi Ulya which was followed by the persecution of her supporters from Mazandaran, the province of which she was a princess. Even in the wake of the murder of the mother of his four sons on whom he depended entirely, the shah did not punish the conspirators, but named his oldest son, Hamza Mirza, crown prince at the age of thirteen.

The shah's second son, 'Abbas Mirza, had been appointed governor of Herat as an infant in 979–80/1572 by Shah Tahmasp with Shahquli Sultan Ustajlu as his guardian. At the time of Isma'IL II's accession in 984/1576, the Ustajlus fell out of favour in Qazvin, giving the enemies of Shahquli Sultan an excuse to murder him. After this was accomplished, the five-year-old 'Abbas Mirza was left without a guardian until the shah appointed 'Aliquli Khan Shamlu, grandson of Darnish Khan Shamlu, to be governor of Herat and ordered him to assassinate the prince. This act was forestalled by the death of Shah Isma'IL II, and before 'Aliquli Khan could accede to Mahdi Ulya's command to return 'Abbas to Qazvin, she had been murdered. Thus, even though the Turkman and Takkalu amirs had gained the ascendency at court in Qazvin, 'Aliquli Khan Shamlu retained his governorship of Herat and guardianship of 'Abbas. Meanwhile, a power struggle between Murtaza Quli Khan Turkmans, governor of Mashhad, and 'Aliquli Khan led to open conflict. Despite being defeated in battle by Murtaza Quli Khan, 'Aliquli Khan and his allies decided to proclaim 'Abbas shah in Rabi' I 989/April 1581. This was too much for Shah Muhammad Khudabande and his all-powerful vizier, Mirza Salman, to countenance. The shah dispatched a large army to Khurasan which quashed 'Aliquli Khan's rebellion but allowed him to remain as governor of Herat.

In the aftermath of Mirza Salman's successful campaign against 'Aliquli Khan, the Turkman amirs increasingly distrusted the vizier. They resented his ascension, as an Iranian government official, into military matters which they considered to be the sole province of the Qizilbash. His military successes only aggravated their resentment. In 991/1585 the amirs prevailed over the shah and assassinated Mirza Salman. The obvious dissension in Iran was a clear signal to the Ottomans, who once again invaded north-west Persia in 992/1584. Although Prince Hamza led the Persian army against the invaders, he was hampered by disagreements among the Qizilbash, who failed to present a united force against the Ottomans. Finally, in Dhu'l Hijja 994/December 1586 Hamza Mirza was murdered in his camp in Azerbaijan by his barber.

Even though by the time Hamza Mirza was murdered 'Abbas Mirza had been carried off to Mashhad by its Ustajlu governor, the Shamlu and Ustajlu amirs at court threw their support behind his younger brother, Abu Talib Mirza, who was designated crown prince. Upon this news 'Abbas garnered the support of Turkman leaders, first in Khurasan and then in other parts of the country. With a small group of supporters 'Abbas and Marshid Quli Khan, governor of Mashhad, set out for Qazvin. Meanwhile Shah Muhammad Khudabande, Abu Talib Mirza and their bodyguard had left the capital, so 'Abbas entered the city unchallenged. On 14 Dhu'l Qa'da 995/16 October 1587 the shah re-entered Qazvin and handed his crown to his oldest surviving son, 'Abbas Mirza.
Unlike his uncle and his mother, ‘Abbas did not seek immediately to execute his brothers and father; rather, he imprisoned them at Alamut and in time his father returned to Qazvin, where he died peacefully in 1005–6/1595–6. Shah Muhammad Khudabandeh’s blindness and weakness essentially disqualified him as a patron of the visual arts. His son Hamza Mirza, who stayed in Qazvin, patronized at least two of Shah Isma’il’s artists, Siyavush and his brother, Farrukh Beg. Yet many of the employees of the royal library sought commissions elsewhere. Some provincial governors, such as Khan Ahmad of Gilan, were able to attract scribes and probably artists who had worked in the royal library in Qazvin. Meanwhile, Sadiq Beg gave up painting entirely and became a wandering dervish. Eventually he joined the retinue of Amir Khan Muzillus, governor of Hamadan, and later joined his fellow Afshar tribesmen in battle against the Turkmen at Astaraabad. With the accession of Shah ‘Abbas I he returned to painting.

Certain artists from the atelier of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza appear to have remained devoted to his memory and were retained to illustrate and illuminate two collections (Divans) of his poetry that had been compiled by his daughter Gauhar Shad Begun. One of these, ‘Abdallah Shirazi, had worked for twenty years in Sultan Ibrahim Mirza’s library and then served Shah Isma’il II. After Sultan Ibrahim Mirza’s death he moved to Mashhad to become a carpet spreader in the sanctuary of the shrine and attendant at the grave of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, but he did not retire from his artistic career. Most likely Gauhar Shad Begun herself commissioned ‘Abdallah Shirazi and other artists from her father’s circle to work on these manuscripts. The colophon of the earlier Divan states that ‘it was completed by Abdullah, “the old companion of the deceased prince,” in Mashhad in 989/1581–82.’ The second volume of the Divan contains ‘Abdallah Shirazi’s signature on the opening double-page illumination and on a rock in one of the illustrations in which the date 990/1582–3 is included. It seems likely that

73 ‘Ibrahim Mirza’s Garden Party’, double-page frontispiece from a Divan of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, fol. 88b–87a, Qazvin, dated 989/1581–2, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, page 23.8 x 16.6 cm. Age Khan Trust for Culture. Although the prince in the pavilion is not identified, it should be assumed that he is Sultan Ibrahim Mirza whose collected poems form the text of this volume.
Shaykh Muhammad, who also returned to Khurasan after the death of Shah Isma'il II, contributed illustrations to the 989/1581–2 manuscript. The double-page finispiece of the Divan depicts a prince, perhaps Sultan Ibrahim Mirza himself, in a garden pavilion being served by beautiful youths in the company of men conversing, making music, playing backgammon and shooting birds [fig. 75]. While neither as large nor as complex as the paintings in the prince’s Haft Avarang, this illustration retains the animated figures and generous inclusion of natural elements found in the earlier manuscript and the Khamsah of 984–5/1577.

Even as late as 994/1586 ‘Abdullah Shirazi and his former colleagues continued to produce illustrated manuscripts in the so-called Mashhad style. A painting of ‘Lovers in a Pavilion’ [fig. 74] detached from a Divan of Hafiz dated Ramazan 989–Rabi’ I 994/September 1581–February 1586 has been attributed on the basis of style to Bihzad Ibrahim who signed two other illustrations from this manuscript.” As Cağman and Tunindi have pointed out, although nothing is known from the written sources about this artist, the word ‘Ibrahim’ indicates that he had worked in the atelier of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza. The colophon of the manuscript also sheds light on patronage during the reign of Shah Muhammad Khudabande. It states that the manuscript was produced in the city of Tun in Khurasan for Sultan Sulayman. This was Sulayman Khalifa Turkan, governor of Tun from 989/1581 to 995/1587, the son of a Qizilbash amir and son-in-law of Murtaza Quli Khan, the powerful governor of Mashhad. Whether ‘Abdullah Shirazi, who was the illuminator of this manuscript, and Bihzad Ibrahim and two other painters actually produced the manuscript in Mashhad, as seems likely, or did the work in Tun, cannot be determined. However, for a manuscript containing eight illustrations to take nearly five years to complete suggests that the artists were not all working in the house of the patron.

In a similar fashion to ‘Abdullah Shirazi, ‘Ali Asghar seems to have left the capital after the death of Shah Isma’il II and returned to Kashan, of which he was a native. Although the names of specific patrons who might have acquired or commissioned illustrated manuscripts from ‘Ali Asghar during the reign of Shah Muhammad Khudabande are unknown, a number of works have been attributed to him on the basis of style.” With its large number
Muhammad, who also returned to Khurasan after the death of Isma'il II, contributed illustrations to the 989/1581-2 script. The double-page frontispiece of the Divan depicts a perhaps Sultan Ibrahim Mirza himself, in a garden pavilion served by beautiful youths in the company of men conversing music, playing backgammon and shooting birds [fig. 74]—not as large or as complex as the paintings in the Haft Awrang, this illustration retains the animated figures nervous inclusion of natural elements found in the earlier and the Khamsheh of 984-5/1577.

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Although the number of dated illustrated manuscripts from the decade of 984-94/1577-86 proves that a demand continued regardless of the chaotic conditions, the major development of this period was a new emphasis on single-page works, either painted or drawn, for inclusion in albums. A respected practitioner of this type of work, Muhammad of Herat, mentioned previously, apparently worked for 'Ali Quli Khan Shamlu, the guardian of Abbas Mirza in Herat, in the 1570s and 1580s, portraying his patron and others for inclusion in albums. Likewise, many of the former court artists also increased their output of single-page portraits and group scenes. These works were sometimes falsely inscribed with the names of well-known artists, but it is not certain whether this was done to indicate the artistic tradition of the painting or simply to fool an unsuspecting buyer. Needless to say, such a situation would not have arisen if the artists had been working under theegis of the court atelier. As the base of buyers of art broadened, so the repertoire of images expanded to include portraits of figures such as falcons, who may have been servants of the court but were not necessarily noblemen [fig. 76]. Portrayed alone, such figures stand on their own merits, not as part of a social pecking order. While the artistic movement towards more portraits and fewer illustrated manuscripts may have been motivated by economic necessity, it provided the groundwork for the major
seventeenth-century trend of painting works for albums. Moreover, the hardships of the 1570s and 1580s resulted in the continued spread of motifs used in book illumination and binding into decorative arts such as ceramics, metalwork and carpet-making without notable innovations. A number of scribes who had once worked at court moved to the great shrine cities of Mashhad and Qum, where they provided architectural inscriptions and copied Qur’ans and other religious books.

Because of the absence of dated carpets from the period 985–95/1577–87 stylistic comparison with earlier and later examples provides the only clue to what groups were in production. Carpets with hunting scenes and animal combats in the quadrupartite field around a central medallion continued to be produced in wool and silk. Some exceptional pieces have no medallion and have bisymmetrical designs derived from book illustration but more closely resembling the wall paintings in Na‘in. The general tendency in carpet design over the course of the second half of the sixteenth century is from central medallions outlined in a contrasting colour and set off from the field, to central medallions that are invaded by leaf and vine elements encroaching from the field and producing a broken outline. Likewise, the design of compartments of cartouche, lobed roundel and bell shapes placed separately in horizontal, vertical and diagonal rows in the field evolved into a pattern of overlapping compartments. The use of large palmettes and Chinese cloud scrolls in the so-called Herat carpets relates to similar ornament on ceramics from the last quarter of the sixteenth century, but both carpet makers and potters were probably influenced by similar designs on the borders of manuscript pages and the interiors of bookbindings. Although documentary evidence has allowed a group of small silk tapestry-woven carpets to be assigned to Kashan, the places of manufacture of other sixteenth-century carpets remains conjectural. Presumably the capitals, Tabriz and Qazvin, had luxury carpet makers, but Kashan and Yazd, with their established silk-weaving industries, must have also figured largely.

With textiles, as with carpets, the lack of dated examples and the continued appearance of figural motifs in actual examples but not in garments depicted in manuscript illustrations is puzzling. Furthermore, the Safavid taj seemingly continued to appear on figures in textiles when it had become far less common in painting.
Although the male lover wears the *taj* in ‘Lovers in a Pavilion’ [see fig. 74], he may be a portrait of the patron, Sulayman Khalifa Turkman of Tun, who could have been expected to wear the headdress of the Qizilbash. The robes of all the figures in ‘Lovers in a Pavilion’ are of solid colours with loosely spaced repeating gold patterns of flowers and foliage. Although these elements are not connected by vine tendrils, they resemble the gold flowers and leaves used for the edge of the pavilion roof and for many manuscript borders. Unfortunately, examples of this type of cloth have not survived, or have remained unpublished.

While no major new trends developed in ceramics in this period, blue and white and polychrome wares were produced which not only employed motifs introduced in the 1560s but also, like carpets and textiles, demonstrate an awareness of the decoration of illuminated book borders. The shape of a ewer [fig. 77] that may date from the 1570s is most likely based on a metalwork prototype. The scales that decorate its shoulder, however, relate to those that appear between the roundels in the astrological dish dated 971/1565–4 [see fig. 66]. The large blossoms connected by swooping narrow tendrils on the bulbous body of the ewer are more reminiscent of floral arabesques in illuminated borders of manuscripts than of Chinese blue and white wares, although floral scrolls certainly figure in Chinese ceramics of the first half of the sixteenth century. The tradition of ceramic tombstones also continued in this period. One dated 987/1579 is inscribed with a pious saying and the name of the deceased in blue and white under a transparent glaze.9

As for metalwork of the period, one dated pillar candlestick from 986/1578–9 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art [fig. 72] demonstrates how, now familiar with the faceted slightly conical form of the object, metalworkers expanded their decorative repertoire. Now *nasta’liq* inscription bands alternate with bands of arabesque. The fluting of an almost contemporary candlestick of 985/1577–8 is absent from the Metropolitan piece, perhaps indicating that two workshops were producing *nash’ab* at the same time. Bath pails with or without long spouts and handles, basins with flat rims and bases and no foot and other metal objects with engraved split-palmette arabesque decoration were also produced in this period, although the published examples are not dated.

Politically and economically the reigns of shahs Isma’il II and Muhammad Khudabandeh nearly brought the Safavid dynasty to a premature end. Architecture, the most expensive of all the arts, suffered the most in this period. Although the palace buildings sponsored by Shah Isma’il II might have proved interesting or innovative if they had survived, Muhammad Khudabandeh seems not to have made his mark on any city. The painters, calligraphers, illuminators and bookbinders who left royal service in 1577 worked for provincial governors and Safavid princes and princesses, but presumably they did not collect a salary. Thus their skills were available to those who could pay, which probably contributed to the dissemination of artistic ideas hatched in the court ateliers of Qazvin and Mashhad. On the other hand, without strong, sustained patronage the innovations in the arts of the book that were necessary to drive new developments in the ornament of carpets, textiles, metalwork and ceramics were absent, and the visual arts coasted on the strength of past glories until at least 1587.

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77 Ewer, north-west Iran, 1570s, stonepaste with underglaze blue decoration, h. 29.5 cm, Kier Collection. Despite its restored spout, the reliance of this piece on metalwork shapes is evident, though the profile is somewhat more squat than that of comparable metal ewers.
From Qazvin to Isfahan

The Glorious Reign of Shah 'Abbas I
1587–1629

Abbas, the Persian emperor was of stature low, of a quick aspect, his eyes small and flaming, without any palpabra or hair over them: he had a low forehead, but a high and hawked nose, sharp chin, and after the mode of Persia was upon the chin beardless.

The invasion of Khurasan in Muharram 996/December 1587 precipitated the events that led to Murshid Quli Khan Ushtaju’s advance across Iran to Qazvin with his ward, 'Abbas Mirza. Fearing that 'Abbas would be abducted from him in battle, Murshid Quli Khan saw his bid to have Shah Muhammad Khudabandeh abdicate in favour of 'Abbas as his best hope of retaining power and containing his rival 'Ali Quli Khan Shambu, governor of Herat. The selfish motivation of Murshid Quli Khan did lead to the coronation of 'Abbas and his own appointment to the most powerful Persian ministerial post, but it also resulted in the Uzbek capture of Herat in 997/1588–9. Although the loss of territory to the Uzbeks and Ottomans was a grave external threat to Safavid Iran, the most pressing problem from the outset of Shah 'Abbas’ reign was the need to find a way to control the feuding Qizilbash amirs. By the time of his accession 'Abbas had suffered the loss of his mother and brother at the hands of the Qizilbash and had been abducted in a Qizilbash struggle. Thus he was under no illusions as to the thirst of the Qizilbash amirs for power at any price. A conspiracy to replace Murshid Quli Khan within a year of 'Abbas’ accession confirmed his view of his amirs, and he did not hesitate to quash their rebellion. However, the shah’s patience with his overly ambitious guardian was wearing thin and within a year of his accession Murshid Quli Khan had himself been assassinated.

Shah 'Abbas knew that no offensive on his eastern front would be possible without securing the west. The Ottomans had already taken control of parts of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Shirvan and Khuzistan, including the cities of Tabriz, Erivan and Qarabagh, and in 1587 they added Baghdad to their empire. The only way that Shah 'Abbas could stem the Ottoman tide was to make peace, so on 14 Jumada I 998/21 March 1590 the Peace of Istanbul was signed, to the great disadvantage of the Safavids. Not only did they lose substantial territory but also they were forced to send a Safavid prince as hostage to the Ottoman court and to agree to a cessation of the ritual cursing of the Orthodox caliphs, which had been institutionalized in the time of Shah Isma’il I. Shah 'Abbas must have realized that such a peace, in which Tabriz, the first Safavid capital,

78 Pillar candlestick, signed by the servant of the house of Muhammad [ibn] Ahmad, dated 1007/1598–9, beaten, engraved and enamelled copper, h. 21 cm, diam. 15.5 cm, British Museum, ox 90.5-15.5. Although some controversy surrounds the authenticity of enamelled Safavid metalwares, pieces such as this suggest that experimentation in the technique began in the 16th century.
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Azerbaijan, Shirvan and Khuzistan, including the cities of
Tabriz, Erivan and Qarahagh, and in 1587 they added
aghadad to their empire. The only way that Shah 'Abbas
stem the Ottoman tide was to make peace, so on
la I 998/21 March 1590 the Peace of Istanbul was signed,
et disadvantage of the Safavids. Not only did they lose
l territory but also they were forced to send a Safavid
hostage to the Ottoman court and to agree to a cessation
al cursing of the Orthodox caliphs, which had been insti-
ed in the time of Shah Isma' il I. Shah 'Abbas must have
hat such a peace, in which Tabriz, the first Safavid capital,