had passed to the Ottomans, would not be sustained over the long
term. However, in the short term he achieved his aim of buying the
time in which to reform his army and to plan the assault on
Khurasan.

A first attempt to engage the Uzbek in battle in 997/1588–9
had been cut short by the need to return to Qazvin to protect the
northern and western borders of Iran against further Ottoman
incursions. In the meantime, the Uzbeks took advantage of more
Qizilbash in fighting and seized Mashhad, leaving only Ardabil and
Qum as major Shiite shrines still in Iranian hands. In addition
to the Uzbeks' horrific slaughter of soldiers and many of the clergies
connected with the shrine of Imam Riza, they thoroughly robbed
the shrine. The description of this desecration provides a glimpse
of the wealth of such an institution:
The holy shrine was plundered, and the jeweled
chandeliers of gold and silver, the candlesticks, the rugs,
and the china bowls and vessels were carried off. The
shrine library which housed a collection of books from all
parts of the Islamic world, including precious copies of the
Koran in the writing of the immaculate Imams and
masters of the calligraphic art such as Yaqut Mosta'emi
and the six masters, and other learned works of priceless
value, was pillaged; the Uzbeks sold these masterpieces to
one another like so many potsherdas.'

Whereas Shah Muhammad Khudabandeh had allowed the Qizil-
bash amirs to fight incessantly among themselves and jockey for
power, Shah 'Abbas spent much of the 1590s executing anyone he
suspected of disloyalty to the crown. He did not hesitate to replace
governors who ruled their subjects harshly. As a result, provincial
governorships changed hands with alacrity, but only in a few cases
did the shah award these posts to his young sons in the guardian-
ship of tribal amirs. 'Abbas realized early in his reign that using
physical force alone against the Qizilbash amirs was a temporary
measure and that something more was needed to change the social
balance of the Safavid political and military hierarchy. Otherwise,
the rivalry between the Turkmen and Tajiks, as the native
Persians were called, would continue to fester and cause instability.
Shah 'Abbas' solution was to build up a corps of ghulams, that is
Georgian, Armenian and Circassian Christians who had been
brought to the Safavid court as children, had converted to Islam
and who were loyal to the shah, not to a tribe or family. This prac-
tice had been initiated by Shah Tahmasp, but as his reign
progressed Shah 'Abbas systematically pursued it as a matter of
policy. While historians have noted that the erosion of Turkman
military and political power led ultimately to a weakening of
Safavid military might, it enabled Shah 'Abbas to gain control of
Iran and to regain the territories lost by his father.

Until 1004/1595–6 'Abbas focused his attention on the restora-
tion of order and the installation of loyal governors in the provinces
of Iran. By the ruthless suppression of rebellious amirs and close
monitoring of the effectiveness of the shah's appointees, the process
of pacifying such regions as Gilan and Laristan and strengthening
the rule of the central Iranian lands was well under way. None the
less, the pattern of gains and losses against the Uzbeks continued,
with the Uzbeks fleeing before the Safavid army only to return to
Khurasan again when the shah had left the area. The centralization
process in the political sphere was paralleled by a strengthening of
the religious hierarchy within the Twelver Shiite creed and official
disdain for the excesses of Sufism. Individual dervishes who gath-
ered large followings and preached heterodox ideas were expelled
from the mosques by the clergies and eventually arrested. Many of
those accused of being members of the heretical Nuzavi sect fled
to India to avoid persecution in Iran. Developments such as these
indicated the degree to which Safavid Shiism had moved away from
the ecstatic mysticism of Shah Isma'il I by the time of 'Abbas I, a
phenomenon that was linked to the demise of the Qizilbash in
Safavid society.

In 1006–7/1598 events in Khurasan finally favoured Shah
'Abbas: both the Uzbek khan 'Abdullah and his son Ab'd al-Mu'min
died, leaving no clear heir to the regions of Transoxiana and
Khurasan which they had controlled. Even before the death of Ab'd
al-Mu'min, Shah 'Abbas had resolved to muster a vast army for the
reconquest of Khurasan and set out in Ramazan 1006/April 1598.
Although the Uzbek amirs who had supported either 'Abdullah or
'Abd al-Mu'min laid claim to the governorships of the major cities
of Khurasan and Transoxiana, they were soon intimidated by the
Safavid armies marching east to reclaim Nishapur, Mashhad and
Herat. By Muharram 1007/early August 1598 Shah 'Abbas had
to the Safavid court as children, had converted to Islam and were loyal to the shah, not to a tribe or family. This practice began by Shah Tahmasp, but as his reign drew to a close, the effectiveness of the shah's appointees, the process of Turkman and political power led ultimately to a weakening of military might, it enabled Shah 'Abbas to gain control of the territory lost by his father.

1004/1595–6 'Abbas focused his attention on the restoration and the installation of loyal governors in the provinces. By the ruthless suppression of rebellions among the Ismailis and a tightening of the effectiveness of the shah's appointees, the process of Turkman and political power led ultimately to a weakening of military might, it enabled Shah 'Abbas to gain control of the territory lost by his father.

With Khurassan returned to Safavid hands, Shah 'Abbas could turn his attention to other regions lost to the Ottomans as well as to other matters of importance to him. As early as 999/1590–91 'Abbas had ordered a new royal bazaar, or qaisariyya, to be built in Isfahan and a new maidan or large open plaza to be cleared at its south-western edge near the existing palace of Naqsh-i Jahan. Although the maidan originally served as a polo ground and race-track, by 1595 it was partly or completely surrounded by a wall and was the scene of extravagant royal entertainments. Until 1006/1598 Qazvin remained the Safavid capital and Isfahan was the place to which Shah 'Abbas went 'for recreation, especially hunting'. However, having spent the winter of 1006/1597–8 in Isfahan, hunting and feasting, the shah decided to move the capital to Isfahan; in the spring of 1598 work began in earnest on the buildings, gardens and avenues of a new royal quarter north of the Zayandeh-Rud river and garden suburbs to the south.

Although the Safavids suffered the loss of Balkh in 1011/1602, by the spring of 1011/1603 Shah 'Abbas was prepared to start the reconquest of lands lost to the Ottomans. First, his men seized and razed the fort at Nihavand near Hamadan which the Ottomans had built as a garrison early in his reign. Then, when the Ottoman governor of Tabriz was absent from his city fighting a group of Kurds, 'Abbas led a surprise march on Tabriz and retook the city. This punishing defeat of the Ottomans encouraged 'Abbas to continue his campaign in Azerbaijan. While one of his generals accepted the surrender of Nakhchivan, the shah and his army besieged Erivan. More than six months after it had begun and after spending the winter in trenches, Shah 'Abbas and his men ended the siege of Erivan victoriously in Muharram 1015/June 1604. Over the course of the next eight years the Safavids persistently campaigned in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Shirvan, so that by 1022/1615 the Ottomans and Safavids signed another treaty at Istanbul which restored the Persian–Turkish borders to more or less what they had been at the time of the Treaty of Amasya, with the exception of the Baghdad region which remained in dispute. Not until 1052/1642–3 did another Safavid campaign restore Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf and the Kurdish territory around Mosul to their empire. Although these lands remained in Safavid hands for the rest of Shah 'Abbas' reign, his successor, Shah Safi, could not hold onto them.

A true lateral thinker, Shah 'Abbas incorporated his master plan for the development of Isfahan into his strategy for building up the ghalam regiments and other segments of Safavid society at the expense of the Qizilbash. In the reigns of shahs Isma'il I and Tahmasp the Qizilbash leaders whose troops were called up in time of war had been paid by land grant, not directly from the treasury. Although this kept the royal treasury healthy enough, it awarded too much regional power to the Qizilbash amirs and led to abuses of local populations as well as defiance of the shah. To curb the power of the Qizilbash, Shah 'Abbas greatly increased the ranks of the ghalams who formed a standing army and were loyal to the crown. He also systematically converted tracts of land and even provinces, such as Mazandaran, to crown lands. The income from the crown lands helped to a certain extent to defray the costs of the

70 'Ali Qpa palace, Isfahan, c. 1006–25/1598–1612, east façade. Built on the site of a 15th-century palace, the 'Ali Qpa was used for both administrative purposes and royal entertaining.
army, but other sources of income were sought. The building of the qaisariyya bazaar in Isfahan in 1501 may have originally been intended to cater to the court and its retainers when they were visiting Isfahan, but when Isfahan became the capital in 1598, this bazaar became the primary outlet for luxury goods and their production was subsidized by Shah 'Abbas.

Unlike Shah Tahmasp, Shah 'Abbas' welcoming attitude to foreign ambassadors and merchants from Europe and India stimulated trade, especially of silk, to both the east and the west. Whereas Iran had long maintained diplomatic and economic ties with India, the opening up of trade with Europe provided a new set of challenges which the shah solved by turning to one of his important minority populations, the Armenians. In 1015/1604, as part of his campaign to restore lands lost to the Ottomans, Shah 'Abbas pursued a scorched earth policy in the border lands of Armenia, displacing thousands of people, including the whole population of the city of Julfa, a city of wealthy merchants. The Armenian populations were dispersed throughout central Iran, but special attention was given to the Julians, for whom the shah ordered a new suburb of Isfahan to be constructed in 1014/1605 south of the Zayandeh-Rud river. In this quarter, New Julfa, the Armenians were allowed to worship openly in the churches that they built and were given free citizenship. The Armenians figured not only in Shah 'Abbas' political strategy but also as key players in his plans for trade with Europe. As Christians, polyglots and renowned merchants with pre-existing ties to Europe, they were the ideal group to open trade routes west of the Ottoman empire. Thus Shah 'Abbas decided to provide the Armenians of New Julfa with bales of silk at no initial cost to trade in Europe with the obligation to repay the shah upon their return. Once established, this silk trade brought wealth both to the shah and the Armenians and kept the controlling instincts of the European trading companies in check for at least fifty years. The tariffs paid into the royal coffers helped support the cost of Shah 'Abbas' army which in turn led to the reconfiguration of Safavid society.

Although Shah 'Abbas had added palaces to the royal complex at Qazvin, no trace of them survives and these alone would not have earned him the reputation as the greatest Safavid patron of architecture. Rather, his grand and inspired plan for the development of Isfahan has enchanted visitors to the city for nearly four hundred years. Iskandar Beg Munshi, 'Abbas' biographer, describes the genesis of the shah's design. The shah spent the winter of 1006/1597–8 in Isfahan at the Naqš-e Jahan palace. This had been built in the fifteenth century and renovated by Shah Isma'il I; it was completely rebuilt by 'Abbas between 1006/1598 and about 1025/1612 and renamed the 'Ali Qapu (Sublime Porte). Iskandar Beg Munshi continues:

In the spring of 1598, he approved plans for the construction of magnificent buildings in the Naqš-e Jahan district, and architects and engineers strove to complete them. From the Darb-e Dowlat, which is the name for the city gate located within the Naqš-e Jahan precincts, he constructed an avenue to the Zayanda-rud. Four Parks [Chahar Bagh] were laid out on each side of the avenue, and fine buildings adorned each. The avenue was continued across the river as far as the mountains bounding Isfahan to the south. The emirs and officers of state were charged with the creation of the parks and the construction of lodges on a royal scale within the parks, each to consist of reception rooms, covered ways, porticos, 80 'Ali Qapu palace, Isfahan, c. 1006–25/1598–1612, wall decoration, ground floor, west-facing wall.
Isfahan has enchanted visitors to the city for nearly four centuries. Iskandar Beg Munshi, ‘Abbas’ biographer, describes the mosque of the shah’s design. The shah spent the winter of 597–8 in Isfahan at the Naqsh-i Jahan palace. This had been the fifteenth century and renovated by Shah Isma‘il I; it was completely rebuilt by ‘Abbas between 1006/1598 and about 1602 and renamed the ‘Ali Qapu (Sublime Porte). Iskandar Munshi continues:

In spring of 1598, he approved plans for the construction of magnificent buildings in the Naqsh-e Jahan precinct, and architects and engineers strove to complete them. From the Darb-i Dowlat, which is the name for the gate located within the Naqsh-e Jahan precincts, he stretched an avenue to the Zayenda-rud. Four Parks (ahar Bagh) were laid out on each side of the avenue, fine buildings adorning each. The avenue was lined across the river as far as the mountains rising Isfahan to the south. The emirs and officers of court were charged with the creation of the parks and the decoration of lodges on a royal scale within the parks, to consist of reception rooms, covered ways, porticos, balconies, finely adorned belvederes, and murals in gold and lapis lazuli.

At the southern end of the avenue, there was to be a vast garden, terraced on nine levels, for the pleasure of the king’s guests; it was to be known as the ‘Abbasabad garden. The river was to be spanned by a bridge of special design: it was to have forty arches and, when the river was in spate, water would flow through all of them. On each side of the avenue, water flowed through channels, and trees were planted along them – planes, pines, and junipers. A stone conduit was also constructed down the center of the avenue to form another channel for water. The tree-lined avenues of the Chahar Bagh were surrounded by palaces built by Safavid noblemen which were separated from the maidan by the royal precinct and palace. Here the ‘Ali Qapu combined the functions of palace and government building [fig. 79]. On its north, west, and south sides it faced walled, private gardens and buildings of the royal household, whereas its east side gave onto the maidan. Here on the roof of the second storey the shah could observe entertainments from a viewing platform or just the swirl of humanity in Isfahan’s grand public piazza. Inside the ‘Ali Qapu, arrayed over six storeys, were rooms for administrative functions below the second storey, a reception hall with a fountain and pool at the platform level and on the top, and a music room with niches of moulded stucco in the shapes of the various porcelain objects which they contained. The walls of the lower rooms of the palace are painted with scenes of birds and animals in landscape and floral and vegetal arabesque decoration in pale colours that recall book illumination and some carpets of the period [fig. 80]. The walls of the rooms around the music room are adorned with pictures of beautiful youths drinking and entertaining one another, also in the style of artists working at the Safavid court.

By 1012–15/1602–4 construction had begun on a second storey of the arcade surrounding the maidan [fig. 81]. The order for this building had been issued in the wake of the refusal of the merchants whose establishments were in the vicinity of the Masjid-i Jam‘i of Isfahan, to the north-east of the Naqsh-i Jahan area, to agree to the rebuilding of the old maidan in their neighbourhood. They suspected Shah ‘Abbas of trying to seize control of the commercial life of the city. Whereas the maidan had previously served as a walled rectangular ground for sports and entertainments, now buildings containing shops were constructed on the
ground floor while the second storey contained storerooms and lodging.

Directly across the maidan from the ‘Ali Qapu lies the Masjid-i Shaykh Lutfallah, named for the shaykh who was the imam of the mosque and intended as the shah’s private mosque [fig. 82]. Designed by Muhammad Riza b. Husayn and built between 1011/1602–3 and 1028/1618–19, this is one of the gems of Safavid architecture. The mosque’s façade and entrance portal faced west, and its dome was placed off-centre to accommodate the entrance hallway leading to a door directly opposite the mihrab, which is placed in the south-eastern wall of the dome chamber. Although the single-shell dome appears somewhat squat from the exterior, on the interior it soars above the drum pierced with windows that admit a lovely filtered light [fig. 83]. The exterior of the dome is covered in a combination of unglazed buff-coloured bricks and glazed bricks that form a pattern of superimposed arabesques in turquoise and white rimmed with black. A *thuluth* inscription band encircles the drum below the dome and above Kufic inscription panels that separate the windows with their turquoise glazed exterior grilles. The effect of the dome from the exterior is both stately and luminous. Even so, it does not prepare one for the perfect harmony of the interior. Each of the four walls and four corners consists of a pointed arch bordered by a turquoise glazed cable above a dado of arabesque decoration punctuated by lobed ogives. A band of Qur’anic verses in white on cobalt blue ground serves as a border for each arch and runs around the mihrab. Likewise, the windows and arched panels of the zone of transition are set between two inscription bands that encircle the dome. The dome itself is decorated with rows of tiled ogives set within unglazed bricks and decreasing in size towards the top, which is decorated with a sunburst design in turquoise on white. The balance and simplicity of the architectural elements in this chamber are the perfect foil for the variety and intricacy of the decoration and the superb inscription bands written by the shah’s favourite scribe, ‘Ali Riza ’Abbasi.

Whereas in Iranian architecture the single-domed chamber without a courtyard is an unusual plan for a mosque, it is common for mausoleums and shrines. In the Safavid period there may have
been some blurring of these distinctions so that at Ardabil Shah Tahmasp’s Jamatkhana, also a large domed chamber, could have served as a prayer hall rather than a mausoleum, and the architect of the mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah may have followed suit. The other major monument facing onto the ma’dan at Isfahan, the Masjid-i Shah, also reveals novel variations on the standard four-ivan plan [fig. 84]. Work on this exceptionally large structure began in 1021/1612–13 with the entrance portal which was completed in 1025/1616. Inscriptions state that the construction was directed by Muhibb ‘Ali Kika Lala and carried out by Ustad ‘Ali Akbar.

84 (below) Masjid-i Shah (Masjid-i Imam) viewed from the ‘Ali Qapa, begun 1021/1612–13, completed c.1040/1630. This grand congregational mosque, commissioned by Shah ‘Abbas, has been called the culmination of Persian architecture.

85 (below, right) Courtyard and northern iwan, Masjid-i Shah (Masjid-i Imam). Looking in the direction of the entrance to the mosque from the courtyard, one can observe from the placement of the minarets how the entrance is at an angle to the rest of the building.

al-Isfahani. Muhibb ‘Ali was in charge of the administration of royal palaces in Isfahan and acted as chief engineer on various building projects of Shah ‘Abbas. Unlike the ma’dan and qasariyya bazaar, which were conceived as rivals to the existing ma’dan and bazaars to the north-east, the Masjid-i Shah was Shah ‘Abbas’ answer to ‘the temple at Mecca and the mosque at Jerusalem’. The site of the mosque on the south side of the ma’dan was cleared by demolishing a caravansarai. Although, as will be discussed, one of the dominant features of the building is the skin of blue tilework, the discovery of a marble quarry near Isfahan at the time the building was begun was viewed as highly providential, as the marble could be used to adorn the mosque.

Unlike most buildings commissioned by Shah ‘Abbas, the Masjid-i Shah took over thirty-five years to complete, in large part because of its exceptional size. Like the Shaykh Lutfallah mosque, its orientation is at an angle to that of the ma’dan. Thus one enters through the towering portal flanked by two minarets and turns right at an oblique angle to pass through an iwan into the courtyard [fig. 85]. There one encounters another lofty façade with minarets.

dado of arabesque decoration punctuated by lobed ogives. A Qur’anic verses in white on cobalt blue ground serve as a for each arch and runs around the muqarnas. Likewise, the s and arched panels of the zone of transition are set in two inscription bands that encircle the dome. The dome is decorated with rows of tiled ogives set within unglazed tile decreasing in size towards the top, which is decorated in a sunburst design in turquoise on white. The balance and rity of the architectural elements in this chamber are the foil for the variety and intricacy of the decoration and the inscription bands written by the Shah’s favourite scribe, ‘Ali Shamsi.

With the advent of the Safavid period there may have
to either side and an ʻivan leading to the prayer hall under a high double-shell dome. As if to echo the Ṣaʿda, a two-storey arcade connects the four ʻivans. Unlike most four-ʻivan mosques the subsidiary ʻivans on the east and west precede domed chambers, which in turn open in a south-westerly direction onto two madrasas with courtyards. These are separated from the sanctuary by two winter prayer halls, each covered by eight low domes [fig. 86]. Although the bent entrance to the mosque might appear awkward in plan, it allows people to see both the portal and the prayer hall dome from the Ṣaʿda. Inside the mosque the visitor is enveloped in a haze of blue and yellow cuerda seca tiles. Although the quality of the designs of the tile ensembles is somewhat coarse by comparison to those of the Shaykh Lutfallah mosque and of earlier Safavid buildings, the overall effect of the tilework in the Masjīd-i Shah is to induce a mood of serenity, which one imagines would have persisted even when the mosque was full of worshippers.

The Masjīd-i Shah and mosque of Shaikh Lutfallah have rightly been hailed as the pinnacles of Safavid architecture. However, Shah ʻAbbas and his most important courtiers excelled as patrons of architecture not only for the beauty and originality of their structures but also for the variety of buildings they commissioned. In Isfahan, as part of Shah ʻAbbas' development that ran
from the Chahar Bagh south to the Hazar Jabir gardens, the shah’s leading general, Allahwardi Khan, commissioned a bridge of thirty-three arches to span the Zayandeh Rud as a continuation of the avenue that intersected the Chahar Bagh [fig. 87]. This elegant bridge, built around 1008/1600, is a multipurpose structure; either side of the road that runs down its middle is lined with arcades containing niches large enough for people to sit or stand inside and observe the river passing below. Thus the notion of pleasant strolling, riding and conversation that were enjoyed in the Chahar Bagh and other gardens of the city was extended to the experience of crossing the river itself.

Shah ‘Abbas’ building projects touched every region of Iran. As part of his programme to stimulate trade and communications, he sought to make the roads safe and thus built many caravansarais at stages along the main trade routes. These buildings are as markedly devoid of decoration as the royal Safavid mosques and palaces of Isfahan are awash with it. Hillenbrand has supposed the existence of official blueprints issued by the shah’s planners, which would account for a high level of uniformity among the caravansarais said to have been built in the early seventeenth century.\(^9\) According to the standard plan, Safavid caravansarais followed the four-ivan scheme with a one-storey arcade running between the ivans. Often the four corners have turrets and the sides of the building would have differing numbers of bays. In cities, caravansarais were located adjacent to bazaars and had two or more storeys so that animals could be penned below and travellers could sleep and store their goods above. A requirement of all caravansarais was a water source or reservoir, space for animals and people, and protection from the threat of wild animals and brigands.

Shah ‘Abbas expressed his enthusiasm for regions such as Mazandaran by building at least six palaces and hunting lodges near the Caspian Sea. To improve access to the north from Isfahan, he ordered the building of a road, dubbed the ‘Stone Causeway’, which crossed the marshes of the Caspian littoral. While Shah ‘Abbas’ fondness for hunting in Mazandaran is often mentioned, he may have had several reasons for choosing this province as the site of a number of new garden and palace complexes of which two, Ashraf and Farahabad, are the most famous. First, he had taken the opportunity of a vacancy in the succession of local amirs in Mazan-

daran to convert the province to crown lands in 1005/1596–7. Certainly his real reasoning behind this was to gain control of the silk production centred there. However, the shah’s excuse for appropriating Mazandaran was that it was the hereditary fief of his mother’s family and that in the absence of any other rightful male heir, the province was his legitimate inheritance.

A very fertile region with an annual rainfall of 40–60 inches, Mazandaran offered the shah, whose fondness for gardens had already been demonstrated in Isfahan, an excellent setting in which to have his design ideas realized. These included the building of a huge artificial lake at Barfarush complete with man-made islands, bridges and pavilions accessible only by boat. In 1020/1611, at the village of Tahan on the Caspian, Shah ‘Abbas ordered a royal palace to be constructed on the banks of the local river. ‘Since he was always in a happy mood when he was there, he renamed the place Farahabad (place of joy).’\(^9\) As in Isfahan, the complex consisted of a large arcade maidan with a mosque on the south side and palace buildings on the north. Here buildings for official receptions and administration were separate from the private apartments, which included a palace near the sea called Jahan Numa (‘View of the World’). In 1021/1612–13 at Ashraf near Astarabad, the Shah laid the foundations of another palace, with all necessary ancillary buildings such as bathhouses, workshops, and houses. Ashraf lived up to its name in every respect; the Shah devoted an increasing amount of attention to it, and laid out gardens and parks in which nestled attractive residences, each equipped with a cistern. In the midst of each cistern fountain played, the water for them being brought down from the higher slopes of the mountains. The fountains were fashioned with cunning artistry, some taking the form of flames, others the shape of the cascade which firework makers make from gunpowder.\(^9\)

Known as Bagh-i Shah, Ashraf consisted of eight separate gardens of which six were positioned along the axis leading from the entrance up a series of terraces to a large pool, at the end of which stood a palatial building. Parallel to the central avenue ran water channels, and the gardens to either side were planted with towering cypresses and orchards of fruit trees. In one of these gardens,
The channels that cross the main pavilion run to the edges of the cultivated garden and are the source of its irrigation. It is not difficult to imagine the pleasure of entering this garden from the desert heat outside its walls. Great cypresses and plane trees provide shade and low fountains gurgle, inviting one to stroll or sit quietly, listening to the banquets and entertainments held in the days of Shah ‘Abbas.

As at the Mashhad shrine, Shah ‘Abbas commissioned various improvements to the Ardabil shrine. According to Iskandar Beg Manshi, he paid for a gold railing around the shrine of Shaykh Jibra’il, a silver railing ‘and other adornments’ around the sacred enclosure, the renovation of some tombs and the designing of a garden around one of the tombs. In addition, in 1015–16/1606–8 the shah placed many of his Persian books, his Chinese porcelains, celadon wares, ‘wine cups and other Ghurid and Chinese bowls’, and various livestock in a waqf (religious endowment) for the shrine. In order to accommodate the ceramics and books housed in the shrine, the building called the ‘Dome of the Princes’ was revamped with rows of niches with openings in the shape of the ceramics that were stored in them. The room was henceforth dubbed the Chini-khana, or ‘china chamber’ [fig. 89].

As is reported by European travellers to the various palaces of Shah ‘Abbas and those of his great lords, such as Allahverdi Khan and his son Imamquoli Khan, luxurious carpets covered the floors.
nels that cross the main pavilion run to the edges of the garden and are the source of its irrigation. It is not difficult to imagine the pleasure of entering this garden from the desert sun or shade trees. Great cypress and plane trees provide shade for the pavilions, offering a place of respite in the heat of the day. The Mashad shrine, Shah 'Abbas commissioned various buildings to the Ardabil shrine. According to Iskandar Beg he paid for a gold railing around the shrine of Shaykh Ali, silver railing 'and other adornments' around the sacred space, the renovation of some tombs and the designing of a crown one of the tombs. In addition, in 1015-16/1606-8, he placed many of his Persian books, his Chinese porcelain cups, jointed wine cups and other Chinese bowls in a vault (religious endowment) for the use of the women of the house in order to accommodate the ceramics and books housed in the building called the 'Dome of the Princes' which had rows of niches with openings in the shape of the crescent moon that were stored in them. The room was henceforth known as Chini-khan, or 'china chamber' [fig. 89].

Reported by European travellers to the various palaces of the Safavid kings, such as Anahid Khan, luxurious carpets covered the floors and were laid on the ground. In both the Shaykh Lutfallah mosque and the Masjid-i Shah the floors that are now bare would have been entirely covered with rugs, possibly made in near-identical pairs and designed to complement the tilework on the walls and ceilings. While some centres such as Kashan, Kirmanshah, and Herat continued to make carpets with designs similar to those on earlier sixteenth-century examples, the move of the Safavid capital to Isfahan stimulated production of new types of carpets in which silk and gold were used liberally. Workshops were established in Isfahan, and one of these was situated within the palace precinct next to the royal goldsmiths. These so-called 'Polonaise' carpets fall into two main design categories and are otherwise grouped according to technique. While production is thought to have begun in the late sixteenth century in Isfahan, the heyday of this type of rug occurred during the seventeenth century in the reign of Shah 'Abbas. The finest examples have silk warps and wefts, but the majority use either cotton or silk and cotton. The knots are always silk and are made by hand. Brocading is found in this type of carpet than in groups of the sixteenth century. Unlike sixteenth-century brocaded carpets, the metal threads of Polonaise carpets are passed over several rather than two warps at once, result in a weakening of the structure of the carpet. Because silk is not as absorbent of dye as wool, the palette of these carpets tends to feature pastel shades.

One type of Polonaise carpet has a central medallion and rows containing two alternating design elements [fig. 90]. Thick vines terminating in split palmettes and spiral vines with blossoms are bismethymetrically arranged on the field. In the second group of Polonaise carpets spiral vines and lancet leaves are the dominant design features and central medallions are either entirely absent or metamorphosed into vaguely medallion-shaped units. Unlike all classes of sixteenth-century carpets, the colour of the field of carpets in the Polonaise group is not uniform, but varies in the interstices between design elements. As Erdmann has noted, 'the outcome of this innovation is a broader enrichment of the surface picture ... at the expense of structural clarity'.

As the number of these carpets in European collections attests, their glittering surface and luxurious texture ensured their esteem as an item of trade and diplomatic exchange. Fortunately, the careful treatment of these carpets by their European owners has ensured
91 (left) Faridun Spurns the Ambassador from Salim and Tur', from a fragmentary Shahnameh of Firdausi, attributable to Riza, Qazvin, c. 995–1005/1587–97, opaque watercolour, gold and ink on paper, page 40.7 x 26.1 cm, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, MS 277, fol. 7b. Here Faridun, enthroned in a garden, rejects the peace proposal of his fratricidal son's envoy.

92 (opposite) 'Man Attacked by a Bear', attributable to Riza, falsely ascribed to Bihzad, Qazvin, c. 1000/1592, ink on paper, 7.7 x 9.3 cm, British Museum, OA 1920.9-17.0254(3). Despite the spontaneity of this drawing, it almost certainly was not drawn from life.
their survival, whereas the only examples now in Iran are those that were acquired in the twentieth century.

Oddly, single-page paintings and manuscript illustrations from the reign of Shah 'Abbas rarely include carpets that are depicted with enough detail to identify them according to type. Despite descriptions of carpets on the floors of reception halls or placed on the ground for sitting, figures in paintings of this period are infrequently portrayed seated on carpets. They either sit directly on the ground or in buildings with solid-coloured textiles covering the floors or on thrones or tabourets. Whether this implies a distancing of imperial carpet makers from artists, that is, a change in the dependence of carpet makers on the kizahkhaneh for designs, or simply the development of new artistic styles in which details as carpet design were unimportant remains unclear. The issue is further confused by the presence in paintings from the early seventeenth century onwards of cushion covers and clothing with figural designs rendered with great care and specificity. Furthermore, the designs of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century hookbindings do not parallel those of the Polonaise carpets, but develop more conservatively along the lines of sixteenth-century stamped, tooled and embossed models or are painted and lacquered. Only the pale colours of the carpets are duplicated in some Shah 'Abbas period bindings.

With the accession of Shah 'Abbas the royal artists' studio was quickly reconstituted. Artists such as Sadiqi Beg, Zayn al-'Abidin, 'Ali Asghar and his son Riza, Shakh Muhammad, Siyavush and Habibollah entered the service of the shah and soon were engaged in the production of an illustrated Shahnāme. Although the manuscript was never completed and paintings were added in 1086/1676 by Muhammad Zaman, its sixteenth-century paintings are attributable on the basis of style to Sadiqi Beg, whom Shah 'Abbas appointed director of his artists' workshop, Riza, who worked jointly on some pages with his father, 'Ali Asghar, and a third anonymous artist, possibly 'Ali Asghar working alone. Zayn al-'Abidin was the illuminator.

The illustrations to Shah 'Abbas' Shahnāme under Sadiqi Beg's leadership reveal a fondness for certain motifs, such as jutting rock formations, found in his contributions to the 984-5/1576-7 Shahnāme of Isma'il II. However, as a group the illustrations to the later manuscript contain a greater degree of detail and a sharpening of expression gained from a reduction of extraneous figures. In 'Faridun Spurns the Ambassador from Salm and Tur' by Riza the figures' gestures and glances carry meaning, while typical Qazvin-style elements such as the go-between's skirt billowing to the right or new touches such as the furled blue curtain drawn hastily from the gate imply movement [fig. 91]. All of these factors plus Riza's remarkably fine brushwork contribute to the dramatic tension of the picture and herald within the traditional medium of the illustrated Shahnāme the first stirrings of a new style of painting.

While Sadiqi Beg produced at least one other illustrated manuscript in the period of the Shahnāme (c. 995-1005/1587-95),27 he and Riza are best represented in the 1590s by their single-page drawings and paintings. Riza's earliest dated work from 1590/1591-2, a drawing of a seated middle-aged man holding a cup, contains an inscription stating that it is based on a design by Shakh Muhammad.28 From a stylistic point of view this is significant because it confirms Shakh Muhammad as the inspiration not only for the composition of this drawing but also for its calligraphic line of varying thickness. Throughout the 1590s Riza and at times

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From Qazvin to Isfahan 105