Shah 'Abbas I was one of Iran's most influential leaders. Combining his ruthless ambition with an acute desire for stability, he left a far-reaching mark on the country's society and artistic heritage of Iran. Expanding the country's spectacular shrines and transforming its trading relations with the rest of the world.

This richly illustrated book brings together an amazing array of treasures, including gifts to Iran's shrines during Shah 'Abbas's reign, traces the story of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722), a period of dynamic religious and political development in Iran. Art and architecture flourished and achieved new heights of beauty and brilliance with the enhancement of the magnificent shrines at Mashhad and Qum. During this so-called 'Golden Age' of Persian art, Shah 'Abbas endowed these shrines and donated to them priceless works of art including sumptuous carpets, silks, porcelains and albums, many of which are illustrated here in glorious detail.

He also created the new capital of Isfahan — a crowning artistic achievement — where he built his empire surrounded by an inner circle of great artists and thinkers. From here encouraged foreigners to come to Iran and welcomed the opportunity to open up trading links with Europe.

This fascinating book looks in detail at this turning-point in Iran's history, it investigates the context of Shah 'Abbas's gifts and innovations; it also explores how these shrines functioned in the early seventeenth century and the ways in which practices and beliefs initiated under the Safavids are reflected in the world-famous shrines at Mashhad and Qum today.

With 140 illustrations

£25.00
SHAH ‘ABBAS
THE REMAKING OF IRAN

SHEILA R. CANBY

THE BRITISH MUSEUM PRESS
CONTENTS

List of contributors 1
List of lenders 1
Iran Heritage Foundation Foreword Vahid Alaghband 2
Director’s Foreword Neil MacGregor 3
Acknowledgements 5
Map 7
Chronology Fathima Saleman 8

Introduction 12

1 Isfahan: The Public and Private Worlds of Shah ‘Abbas 22
Catalogue entries 1–49 38

The Ritual Life of the Shrines Robert Gleave 88

Sites of Pilgrimage and Objects of Devotion Kishwar Rizvi 98

2 The Ardabil Shrine 116
Catalogue entries 50–91 130

3 The Shrine of Imam Riza at Mashhad 186
Catalogue entries 92–108 198

4 The Shrine of Fatemeh Ma’sumeh at Qum 220
Catalogue entries 109–23 228

5 The Legacy of Shah ‘Abbas 252
Catalogue entries 124–8 256

Glossary 262
Bibliography 265
Illustration Acknowledgements 270
Index 271
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LENDEES

Apart from the British Museum, the objects exhibited have
been kindly loaned by a number of private and public collections
and institutions. The British Museum would like to thank all the
lenders for their generosity. The following is a list of lenders apart
from those private lenders who wish to remain anonymous:

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Decorative Arts Museum of Iran, Isfahan
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Mir Emad Museum of Calligraphy and Writing, Tehran
National Museum of Iran, Tehran
Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran
Vank Museum, Isfahan

Italy
Privèc collection, Italy; to be donated to MATAM, Museum
of Antique Textile Arts, Milan

Kuwait
Mr Hossain Alzahr, Kuwait

Russia
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The National Archives, Surrey
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Victoria and Albert Museum, London

United States of America
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore
SHAH 'ABBAS I was the most eminent ruler of the Safavid dynasty in Persia who, with his military successes and efficient administrative system, raised Iran to the status of a great power. When he died his dominions extended from the Tigris to the Indus. To establish Persia as a homogeneous state, he enforced adherence to Shiism.

Shah 'Abbas I was a skilled diplomat whose reign was marked by intense commercial and diplomatic activity. To his court came ambassadors from European countries, merchants seeking to establish trade relations, Roman Catholic missionaries and gentlemen of fortune, such as the English brothers Sir Anthony and Robert Sherley. The former was appointed the shah's ambassador, charged with making alliances with European leaders against the Ottoman Turks. The latter helped reform the army and later became his ambassador sent to Italy, Spain and England in order to create a pact against the Ottomans. In 1622 Shah 'Abbas defeated the Portuguese who had the monopoly on trade in the Persian Gulf, opening it up to a flourishing international trade. The Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean thus became the arena where the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the French and the English strove to make themselves masters of trade.

The Iran Heritage Foundation is pleased to collaborate with the British Museum on this exhibition which goes beyond the aesthetic and provides an insight into political, social and religious themes which continue to run through and shape events and opinions within Iran, the broader Middle East and Central Asia.

The last word on this visionary and far-sighted ruler should be left with John Chardin, the famous traveller to the Safavid Court who wrote:

"When this great prince ceased to live, Persia ceased to prosper."

Vahid Algabband
Chairman
Iran Heritage Foundation

THIS exhibition is one of a series devoted to rulers who have shaped the world, and whose legacy is still significant today. There can be no doubt that Shah 'Abbas I, who transformed Iran in the years around 1600, is one such ruler. Presenting him to a modern public is not entirely straightforward. European monarchs are generally familiar to us through mass-produced official portraits. Shah 'Abbas, as a Muslim ruler, left no public paintings or sculptures of his likeness, not even on his coins. So in this exhibition, apart from a few small, private portraits, we have to approach him and assess him on his achievements. They were remarkable.

Like his contemporary, Elizabeth I of England, he inherited in difficult circumstances an unstable country that had recently redefined its religion and was surrounded and threatened by powerful enemies. Like her, he was able to create a compelling sense of a distinctive national identity (of which Shiism was to be a key component); but 'Abbas's Iran, unlike England, accommodated other faiths, and the Christian Armenian communities are a significant part of his achievement, and indeed of this exhibition. Like Elizabeth, Shah 'Abbas also fought off foreign invasion, presiding over a series of critical military victories, and a huge expansion of international trade.

Elizabeth's England, however, was on the edge of the world she had to address. Iran was at its centre. Shah 'Abbas made his capital at Isfahan a crossroad, a crucible of international culture and commerce. Paintings on his palace walls show Turks and Chinese, Indians and Europeans: it is hard to imagine any other city of the world where they could have met and mingled with such ease.

It was during Shah 'Abbas's reign that Persia fully entered European consciousness, as trade, diplomacy and military expansion multiplied the contacts between Isfahan and the capital cities of Europe. Ever since, it has been of the greatest importance to Europeans to study and understand the history and culture of Iran. This exhibition will, we hope, contribute to that process. My colleagues and I are grateful to the Iran Heritage Foundation and its Chairman Vahid Algabband for their generous support of the exhibition, the latest in a long series of joint projects with the British Museum to present Iranian culture to the widest public in London.

Above all, we should like to thank our many colleagues and friends in Tehran who have encouraged and helped us, and have sent some of their great treasures to enable us to present this account of Shah 'Abbas and the country that he reshaped.

Neil MacGregor
Director
The British Museum
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran was born the day in 2005 that Vice-President Mashaal of Iran opened Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia at the British Museum. The months of preparation and anxious expectation that culminated in this memorable exhibition on ancient Iran gave way to joy and relief among the British Museum and National Museum of Iran curators and staff who had brought it to fruition. Not wanting to end our close collaboration, the National Museum of Iran and the British Museum agreed to cooperate on an exhibition on Safavid Iran. This would entail gathering objects from the sixteenth or seventeenth century and building a concept around one of the most artistically productive periods of Iranian history. The subject of the most compelling of all Safavid leaders, Shah Abbas I, who ruled from 1587 to 1629, offered the greatest opportunity for penetrating the glittering surface of the art and architecture that the Shah cultivated to seek a greater understanding of his impact on his own society and the world in which he lived. With these ideas in mind, this exhibition’s genesis began.

From the inception of this project to its finish many people have contributed their time and considerable expertise to both the catalogue and exhibition. Thanks to a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Religion and Society division, I was able to collaborate with Dr Robert Greaves, a historian of religion from Exeter University and one of the authors of this catalogue. This grant also provided funds for hiring a research assistant, Dr Fushida Saleh, whose intelligence, good cheer and hard work have been unfailing. Other scholars who generously agreed to contribute to the catalogue include Dr Kishwar Rizvi of Yale University; Dr Jon Thompson, formerly of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Dr Robert Elgood of the Wallace Collection; Mr Edward Faridani; Mahnaz Rahimi; and British Museum curators Dr Martin Rylton-Kisch and Jessica Harrington-Ball.

The major source of funding has come from the Iran Heritage Foundation, an organization that has tirelessly promoted the culture of Iran in the United Kingdom and beyond. In Executive Director, Valiollah Babakhanian, and board members have been generous with their time as well as funds. Their desire to educate a broad public about Iranian culture has made the job of organizing this exhibition easier and more pleasurable than it would have been otherwise.

A number of colleagues and willing volunteers contributed to the research and translation of the numerous pages of poetry in the exhibition. Maryam Montazerpour helped with source material and Rita Ghezelayagh provided translations, as did Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis. In the background two eminent Oxford scholars, John Guzney and Homa Katouzian, helped fine-tune the translations. Conversations with Massouheh Farhad have enlightened me and helped me keep my focus. In the British Museum Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, John Curtis and Venetia Porter have embodied collegiality and a
willingness to engage with the subject of Shah ‘Abbás and the great Shi‘i shrines of Iran. The Director, Neil MacGregor, has generously given his time, energy and authority to ensure the realization of this exhibition and its catalogue.

Our partners in Iran have been extremely helpful and uncomplaining in the complex business of arranging loans from eight different institutions. Mr. Mohammad Riza Mehmandish, Director of the National Museum of Iran, took on this project immediately after his appointment. With the help of Mahnaz Gorji, Nina Rezaie, Mahnaz Rahimifar, Miss Ahmadi, Mr. Shahidi and numerous other colleagues in the National Museum, the coordination and photography of loans have proceeded smoothly. Ebrahim Khadem Hajiyye photographed both objects and architecture in Iran, for which we are most thankful. I would like to express my gratitude to Mrs. Sepaghati Khoshki, Director of the Golestan Palace Museum, and the directors of the Carpet Museum, Riza-yi ‘Abbasi Museum, Mir Emad Museum in Tehran, the Chehel Sutun Museum and the Decorative Arts Museum in Isfahan, and finally Messrs. Behrouz and Toosi of the Museum of the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad for agreeing to provide photographs of objects in their care for this catalogue. I am especially grateful to Muhammad Hossein Yaadi-Nejad and Heshmat Kaffi, curators in the Museum of the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad, who have been stalwart friends throughout the development phases of this exhibition.

The lenders to the exhibition include both private collectors and institutions, all of whom deserve our wholehearted thanks for sharing their treasures with us. In the British Museum many colleagues have formed the ‘dream team’ that worked on the catalogue and the exhibition. Graeme Gurney and Laura Lappin edited the catalogue, Ray Wallace designed it and Anne Scargill drew plans for the four major monuments discussed here. Carolyn Marven, South and Claire Everitt in the Exhibitions Department kept the project on track with good humour. While Jill Maggs steered the loans to the British Museum, Joanna Mackie, Hannah Boulton and Mirza Hudson helped make the exhibition accessible to the public through advertising and press coverage, while David Prud'homme and Anna Vodickova enhanced the coherence of the exhibition with their work on labels and graphics within the space designed by Real Studios.

If Shah ‘Abbás: The Remaking of Iran has been the goal of a four-year marathon, family and friends have sustained me. John and Toby, Lisa and Marty and a legion of friends have supplied the perspective, jokes and love that make such a project personally worthwhile. I am more grateful to them than I can possibly express.

Sheila R. Canby

Note on Dates and the Transliteration of Persian and Arabic

The majority of dates in this catalogue are those of the Christian calendar. However, when two dates are given such as 1008/1599-1600, the first date refers to the Muslim calendar and the second, to the Christian calendar. The year 1 in the Muslim calendar is the equivalent of An 622, the year of the Hijra, Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina, where he established the first Muslim community. Since the Muslim year is based on the lunar cycle with each of twelve months consisting of 29 or 30 days, the months are not fixed to a particular season and in relation to the Christian calendar occur 11 days earlier each year. The Christian calendar is based on the annual rotation of the earth around the sun, which takes 365½ days.

For the sake of accessibility to people who do not read Persian and Arabic, diacritical marks have been omitted from this catalogue. Two letters of the Arabic alphabet that are represented by punctuation marks in English, the ‘ain and the hamza (‘), are included. The transliteration system used here is a simplified version of that provided in the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, although some words (like Hormuz) follow common English spellings.
### CHRONOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Safavid World</th>
<th>Rest of the World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1490</td>
<td>The master navigator and explorer Christopher Columbus discovers the Americas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1498</td>
<td>Vasco da Gama discovers a feasible sea route to India thus initiating Portuguese commercial dominance over the Indian Ocean for the next century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500</td>
<td>The first Safavid ruler Shah Ismail I (r.1501-24) defeats the Agugusun Turkman dynasty, establishes the capital city of Tabriz and proclaims Shiism as the state religion of Iran</td>
<td>1576 Accession of the third Safavid ruler Shah Ismail II (r.1576-77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1510</td>
<td>1512 Accession of Ottoman Sultan Selim 'The Grim' (r.1512-20). The victory against the Safavids and the addition of Mamluk Syria, Egypt, and the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina to the Ottoman realm leads to the increased presence of Iranian and Arab artists and intellectuals at the Ottoman court</td>
<td>1577 Accession of the fourth Safavid ruler Shah Muhammad Khushabendi (r.1577-87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1514</td>
<td>The Portuguese capture the island of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. It remains under their control for over a century until the reign of Shah 'Abbas I</td>
<td>1577 Prince 'Abbas is made governor of Khorasan province at the age of seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1518</td>
<td>The Ottomans under Sultan Murad III wage war on the Safavids from 1578 to 1590</td>
<td>1579 Accession of the Deccani Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r.1579-1626). A poet, calligrapher and musician himself, he is the dynasty's greatest patron of the arts. During his reign Bijapur becomes the most important centre of painting in the Deccan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1520</td>
<td>Accession of the second Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp I (r.1524-76)</td>
<td>1583 Accession of 'Abdulham Khan Uzbek II (r.1583-96). A distinctive school of painting develops at Bahkara in Central Asia under the Uzbeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1530</td>
<td>The Ottomans temporarily occupy Tabriz</td>
<td>1589 The Uzbeks seize control of Mashhad from the Safavids for the next nine years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1540</td>
<td>1555 Shah Tahmasp I transfers the Safavid capital from Tabriz to Qazvin</td>
<td>1590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1550</td>
<td>1555 Sultan Selim</td>
<td>1590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1556</td>
<td>The Magnificent establishes the Treaty of Amasya with Shah Tahmasp</td>
<td>1598 Shah 'Abbas I moves the Safavid capital from Qazvin to Isfahan. In the same year Robert and Anthony Shirley enter Shah 'Abbas's service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1560</td>
<td>1556 Accession of the Ming Emperor Wanli, whose long rule (r.1572-1620) witnesses the decline of the empire. China is one of the wealthiest and more populous nations in the world during this period, largely due to efficient production and trade in tea and luxury goods such as silk and porcelain</td>
<td>1598 The Safavids gain victory over the Uzbeks and reclaim Mashhad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1599</td>
<td></td>
<td>1600 Shah 'Abbas performs a barloated pilgrimage from Isfahan to the Shrine of Imam Riza at Mashhad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td></td>
<td>1601-5 Shah 'Abbas commissions the construction of Imam Riza's shrine, including the re-gliding of the golden dome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1603</td>
<td>1598-9</td>
<td>1603-4 Shah 'Abbas forces resettle thousands of industrious Armenians families in Iran to develop the luxury silk trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1607</td>
<td>1602-3 Shah 'Abbas presides a large donation to the shrine at Mashhad in the form of antique Qur'ans and other religious and scientific manuscripts. At the same time he makes a large charitable donation to the Ardabil Shrine, including over a thousand pieces of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, and orders the construction of the Chirri-khanah for their display in the shrine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1610</td>
<td>1607-8</td>
<td>1610-13 Construction of Shah 'Abbas's grand congregational mosque, the Masjidi-Shah, begins in Isfahan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1615</td>
<td>1612</td>
<td>1615 Shah 'Abbas I has his eldest son and heir-apparent Muhammad Baqi Mirza murdered on the mistaken suspicion that he is plotting rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1620</td>
<td></td>
<td>1616 Shah 'Abbas's army, aided by the ships of the English East India Company, expel the Portuguese from the island of Hormuz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1623</td>
<td>1620</td>
<td>1623 The Safavids conquer Najaf, site of the Shrine of Imam Ali in Iraq, from the Ottomans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1627</td>
<td>1620</td>
<td>1627 Shah 'Abbas endows the Shrine of Fatemeh Ma'sumeh with over a hundred precious manuscripts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1629</td>
<td>1625</td>
<td>1629 Shah 'Abbas I dies and his remains are interred in an important Shi'i shrine at Kadhif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1630</td>
<td>1629</td>
<td>1629 Shah Safi I becomes the sixth Safavid ruler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650</td>
<td>1620</td>
<td>1650 Accession of the Holy Roman Emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1665</td>
<td>1625</td>
<td>1665 Accession of Charles I as King of Great Britain and Ireland (r.1625-49). Known as a great collector of artworks and patron of many of the period's great artists such as the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

THIS catalogue and exhibition centre on the mercurial figure of Shah 'Abbas I of Iran, who ruled from 1587 to 1629. Known today as 'Shah 'Abbas the Great', this king transformed Iran from an inward-looking realm, riven by tribal strife and threatened by powerful enemies on its eastern and western flanks, to a secure, prosperous centre of international trade and cultural exchange. To achieve such success, Shah 'Abbas needed to operate on many levels — political, social, economic, military and religious. This book aims to show how, in the process of uniting his country, Shah 'Abbas also stimulated his artists to create a unified style manifested across the media, from tiles and wall decoration in his palace, mosques and shrines to carpets, textiles and the arts of the book.

The wide range of beautiful and unusual works in this book and exhibition includes artefacts of two types: those produced during and immediately after the lifetime of Shah 'Abbas and objects of earlier periods or similar pieces that he once owned and gave away as charitable donations. These pieces tell the story of a shift in perceptions of value, the political uses of charitable donations, and the development of a new artistic style that was an important badge of identity for Iran in the period of Shah 'Abbas.

The first chapter explores Shah 'Abbas's achievements in the context of Isfahan, the capital city he founded in 1598. Here the shah's vision for a new society took form. The city quarters he developed, the industries he promoted, and the religious monuments he sponsored all bear the imprint of a new approach to government, trade and faith. The visual manifestation of this change appears in the decoration of buildings and in a range of artefacts produced in the first three decades of the seventeenth century. Although Isfahan was not the only centre of production for textiles, carpets, ceramics or manuscripts, the distinctive artistic style of the period of Shah 'Abbas is associated most closely with its capital.

However, very few of the extant objects in the 'Isfahan style' can be linked directly with a precise context in the capital city. For such a context we must turn to the major religious shrines of the period, where the art and architecture of Iran's Islamic past intermingle with the renovations and furnishings of the period of Shah 'Abbas. The chapters on the shrines are introduced by two essays: in the first Robert Gleave outlines the ritual practices of the Safavids, while in the second Kishwar Rizvi describes the architecture of the major shrines in the period of Shah 'Abbas. The second chapter of this book examines the dynastic heritage of Shah 'Abbas in the context of the Shrine of Shaykh Salī al-Dīn at Ardabil in north-west Iran (fig. 1).
It was with Shaykh Sa'd al-Din, a fourteenth-century mystic, that the Safavid dynasty originated. He attracted a following of dervishes (Muslim mystics, also called Sufis) who stayed in Ardabil in order to be near their spiritual leader.

As the fifth Safavid shah, 'Abbās balanced his Sufi (mystical) lineage with his role as the spiritual and temporal leader of Iran. His gifts to the Ardabil Shrine follow a tradition practised by his sixteenth-century predecessors. Unlike Christian shrines and churches, which contain in their treasures books and objects directly related to Christian rituals and beliefs, the shrines at Ardabil and elsewhere in Iran received valuable gifts of all sorts, not just those with a religious connection. These charitable donations, called waqf, have a long tradition in the Islamic world. While the gift of valuable objects to religious institutions bestowed spiritual benefit on the person buried there or other blessed individuals, farms, shops or other income-producing establishments were also given as waqf in order to help support shrines, mosques and seminaries. In addition to making gifts of objects, Shah 'Abbās altered the fabric of the Ardabil Shrine in order to express his desire to emphasize his descent not only from Shaykh Sa’d but also from the Prophet Muhammad and the Prophet's son-in-law 'Ali. The first Safavid shah, Ismā’īl I, had declared Shi‘ism the state religion of Iran in 1501 (see box). While one of the primary aims of Shah 'Abbās was to ensure the standardization of the practice of this form of Islam, shrines such as the one at Ardabil attracted dervishes who followed the less orthodox teachings of the Sufi masters buried in the shrine. This meant that the function and rituals of this shrine differed from those of a more orthodox Islamic holy place such as Mashhad and Qum. Likewise, the gifts presented by Shah 'Abbās reflect the dynastic and specifically Iranian nature of the Ardabil Shrine. Although 'Abbās's gifts consist of artefacts from earlier historical periods, the decoration that he commissioned for the shrine was just as up-to-date as that of his Isfahan mosques and palaces.

The third and fourth chapters of the book focus on the two most important Shi‘i shrines in Iran, the Shrine of Imam Riza at Mashhad and the Shrine of Fatimeh Ma‘sume at Qum. Situated in the far north-east of Iran, Mashhad is the only city in the country to contain a tomb of one of the Twelve Shi‘i Imams. Both sites were and are major centres of Shi‘i pilgrimage. For this reason as well as the strategic location of Mashhad, Shah 'Abbās donated manuscripts to the shrine and commissioned extensive renovations to the complex of buildings around the tomb of Imam Riza. As with Ardabil, the manuscripts anedicate the reign of Shah 'Abbās, in contrast to the furnishings, which embody the decorative style of his day.

Historical background of the Safavids

Following the death of the Safavid mystic Shaykh Sa’d al-Din in 1334, his son, Muhayi al-Din, became the shaykh (leader) of the Safavid dervish order, establishing the principle of hereditary succession at the Ardabil Shrine. Over the next 150 years the number of adherents to the teachings of Shaykh Sa’d grew, as did the physical size of the shrine. Increasingly, in the second half of the fifteenth century Turkman tribal people from Eastern Anatolia who were disaffected with their Ottoman Turk-ish overlords joined the Safavid tariqa (Sufi brotherhood or order). While some people attached themselves permanently to the shrine, most, including these Turk- manh, would visit periodically, often in huge throngs.

In the second half of the fifteenth century the Safavid shahs began to espouse jihad, or holy war, against the Christian populations of regions such as Georgia and Shirvan. Their army consisted of the Turkman members of the Safavid order who were fanatical in their support of the Safavid shahs. Many of these Turkmans practised an extreme form of Shi‘ism, which may have influenced the Safavid shahs, who had followed Sunni Islam during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Nonetheless, one of these shahs did dream that ‘Ali, the First Shi‘i Imam, described to a particular hadith, which the Safavid shahs and their army then adopted. This consisted of a red cap with a vertical stick-like extension around which a turban would be wound. From this distinctive headdress the Turkmen tribes received the designation ‘Qizilbash’. Turkish for ‘red head’, from the late fifteenth century onwards ‘Qizilbash’ was used as a general term referring to members of a number of Turkman tribes who supported the Safavid shahs and played an important role in sixteenth-century Safavid Iran.

The Safavid policy of jihad and the wealth and political power of the Ardabil Shrine led the Aqquyunlu Turkmans, who ruled western Iran in the late fifteenth century, to try to suppress the Safavid dervish order by the imprisonment and assassi nation of the shahs and their followers. In 1501, however, the charismatic young leader of the Safavids, Ismā’īl, defeated the Aqquyunlu Turkmans, seized their capital at Tahriz, and was crowned Shah of Iran, the first Safavid shah. His ascension as Shah Ismā’īl I had two far-reaching consequences: he declared Shi‘ism the state religion of Iran and between 1501 and 1514 he and his Qizilbash army united the eastern and western halves of the country. As long as his army was victorious, he enjoyed the total, zealous allegiance of the Qizilbash. Unfortunately, in 1514 the Safavids suffered a rout at the hands of the Ottomans, and the Qizilbash began to question the invincibility and near-divine status of Shah Ismā’īl. Moreover, the leaders of different Qizilbash tribes began to vie with one another for power and influence at the highest levels of the government. Not only did the Qizilbash fight among themselves but they also threatened the authority of the ethnic Iranians appointed to important positions by Shah Ismā’īl.

Conflicts between the Qizilbash tribes, as well as the country’s resulting instability and vulnerability to foreign attack, informed the long reign of Shah Ismā’īl’s son and successor, Shah Tahmasp (1524–76). When Tahmasp was not defending his western and eastern borders against the Ottomans and Uzbeks, respectively, he was trying to maintain the upper hand over the Qizilbash. To this end, he devised several strategies. One was to issue two edicts of Sincere Repentance (in 1532 and 1555), in which he forswore all un-Islamic behaviour and prohibited gambling, prostitution and the drinking of alcohol. He also began to promote converted Christian slaves from the Caucasus, called ghulams, within his government in order to surround himself with more loyal officials than the Qizilbash. These measures were successful until near the end of Shah Tahmasp’s life when the tensions between the Qizilbash tribes flared up again.

The short reign of Shah Tahmasp’s son, Shah Ismā’īl II (1576–7), achieved very
little aside from the assassination of most of the Safavid family, excluding his brother, Muhammad Khudabandeh, who was half-blind and considered unfit to rule. Muhammad Khudabandeh's sons, including the future Shah 'Abbās I, had been targeted for elimination and only survived because Shah Ismā'īl II died before his order could be discharged. The ensuing ten-year reign of Muhammad Khudabandeh was disastrous on most levels. His indifference to the responsibilities of his office led to his wife seizing control of public administration from the grand vizier and nobles. This situation lasted until July 1579 when the leaders of the Qizilbash tribes strangled the queen and persecuted many aristocratic Iranians. From bringing order to the Safavid realm, these assassinations led to all-out civil war between the rival Qizilbash tribes. Alive to the instability in Iran, the Ottoman Sultan Murad III decided to wage war against the Safavids, and between 1578 and 1590 Iran suffered the loss of territory in the Caucasus, Kurdistan and Luristan to the Ottomans, who took Tabrīz in 1588.

In the north-eastern province of Khurasan trouble was also brewing. Prince 'Abbās had been appointed governor of the province at the age of seven in 1578, following a practice (established by Shah Ismā'īl I) of sending princes to the edges of the empire to serve as nominal governors. In 1581 his Qizilbash guard attempted to proclaim Prince 'Abbās shah but was defeated by Muhammad Khudabandeh's forces. The guardian nonetheless retained his position, most likely because of his Qizilbash ethnicity, but by 1586 Prince 'Abbās had been snatched away from him by the governor of Mashhad, who belonged to a rival tribe. Shortly thereafter 'Abbās's elder brother, Hamza Mirza, was murdered, leaving 'Abbās as heir apparent. At this point, Murshid Quli Khan Usūjū, 'Abbās's new guardian, decided to advance the cause of his charge and rode with him and a small retinue to the then Safavid capital, Qazvin (chosen by Shah Tahmasp), where 'Abbās forced his father to abdicate. 'Abbās was crowned shah on 16 October 1587.

**Shah 'Abbās at Qazvin, 1587–98**

In 1587 Iran was in a parlous state. Shah Tahmasp had shifted the Safavid capital to Qazvin in 1555 in order to minimize the chances of Ottoman sieges. However, at the time of 'Abbās's accession the Ottomans held Tabrīz, Baghdad and parts of the Caucasus and were a serious threat to all of western Iran. In 1588 the Uzbek seized Herat, but in order to counter the Uzbek threat, Shah 'Abbās needed security on his western border. To achieve this, he agreed to the loss of more territory to the Ottoman at the Peace of Istanbul in 1590 and in return gained a truce. Until 1598 Shah 'Abbās had mixed success in his efforts to drive the Uzbeks permanently out of Khurasan. Finally, with the death of the Uzbek amir and his son in 1598 (fig. 2), Shah 'Abbās's luck changed. In April he began the march towards Khurasan at the head of a vast army, and by August he had re-conquered Nishapur, Mashhad and Herat.

The territory lost to the Ottomans included Azerbaijan, Georgia, Shirvan, Luristan and parts of Gilan, Iran's prime silk-producing region. Despite this, raw silk continued to be the main export to Turkey. Likewise, Portuguese control of Hormuz, an island in the Persian Gulf strategically placed at the Straits of Hormuz, did not impede the trade of Indian goods, which arrived there in large quantities and were trans-shipped to the northern Persian Gulf, Arabia and inland in Iran. However, taxes levied by the Portuguese raised the cost of goods to all concerned.

The economic problems bequeathed to 'Abbās by his father Muhammad Khudabandeh stemmed from the latter's prodigal draining of the treasury as well as the absence of effective administration, which had a negative impact on the collection of taxes, limiting of corruption, and even the safety of the roads needed to enable merchants to bring their goods to market. By establishing a government administration that functioned well, Shah 'Abbās created the conditions in which commerce could grow and flourish.

As the descendant of Shaykh Sāli al-Dīn, Shah 'Abbās possessed a powerful Sufi pedigree. However, since Muhammad Khudabandeh was still alive when 'Abbās came to the throne, certain Sufi groups questioned his authority as their leader (fig. 3). These doubters were executed. Likewise, in 1593 Shah 'Abbās ordered the execution of the popular leader of the Naqāvī sect and the repression of his followers. According to their beliefs, this sect was set to achieve unity with God and therefore worldly dominion in 1592–3, near the beginning of the second Islamic millennium. To counter these threats to his authority and to bring Shi'i practice in line with the shari'a (Islamic law), Shah 'Abbās showed a preference for Shi'i 'ulama (clerics) over independent-minded Sufi movements. While honouring his descent from Shaykh Sāli al-Dīn with donations to and refurbishments at the Ardabil Shrine, he also stressed his Muslim lineage as a sīyāsī, descended from Imam 'Ali. As with many of Shah 'Abbās's strategies, his motives appear to have been mixed. In this case, concern for validating his own legitimacy was combined with viewing the restoration of the ascendancy of the 'ulama as a means to return stability to Iran.

**Shah 'Abbās the man**

The character of the shah contains some contradictions: for instance, his fiery temper, his imperiousness, his majesty and regal splendour are matched by his mildness, leniency, his ascetic way of life and his informality. He is equally at home on the dervish's mat and the royal throne. Shah 'Abbās inspired a strong fascination among Europeans and Indians, whose verbal and painted portraits are ever bit as colourful as the Persian accounts of him.
The Europeans who knew him noted his quick wit, athleticism, business acumen and mercurial temperament. This volatility resulted in some acts of extreme cruelty, including having two of his five sons blinded and another killed. Although he presided over an age of opulence, he himself dressed without ostentation. In 1618, the same year that the Mughal Indian artist Bishn Das painted Shah 'Abbas (cat. no. 1), the Italian traveller Pietro della Valle met him at Ashraf in Mazandaran. Della Valle described him as of medium height and build, with dark skin and bright eyes, and noted the drooping moustache that became a trademark of the numerous posthumous portraits produced in India and Europe (cat. nos 124–5).

While Shah 'Abbas's primary interest in his European guests may have centered on the desire to form alliances against the Ottomans, he also demonstrated a broad curiosity about European beliefs and customs. Moreover, he capitalized on the desire of the English to build up trade relations with Iran by enlisting their help in reorganizing the army in the late 1590s and in expelling the Portuguese from Hormuz in 1623 (see cat. no. 4). Unlike Shah Tahmasp, his somewhat neurotic and bigoted grandfather, Shah 'Abbas tolerated Christians and understood the ways in which they could be useful to Iran. As for his own faith, his close relationship with a handful of highly influential clerics suggests that his interest was more complex than a simple acceptance of mainstream Twelver Shi'ism (see box, p. 14). Through religion Shah 'Abbas perceived a way to introduce a more stringent rule of law to Iran. However, he was an observant Muslim only when it suited him, taking his pleasure and meting out punishment with little regard for the fine points of Islamic jurisprudence. The theological controversies that had informed the sixteenth century evolved but by no means evaporated in the seventeenth century. Moreover, the fact that two of the four monuments built by Shah 'Abbas on the Maidan Naqsh-i Jahan in Isfahan (fig. 6) are mosques (fig. 4) suggests that he wished to give form to his religious beliefs in the very centre of his realm.

The arts of the Safavids, 1501–98

When Shah Isma'Il came to the throne in 1501, two artistic styles existed in Iran. In the east, centred on Herat, the late style of the Timurids, the immediate predecessors of the Safavids, predominated, while in the west the Turkman style was found in its most refined form in Tabriz. At the Timurid court a centralized workshop produced designs for a whole range of artisans, including book binders, metal workers and stone carvers. Additionally, both the calligraphers who copied manuscripts and the painters who illustrated them worked in the royal library and were instrumental in making the drawings for artisans working in other media. At the end of the fifteenth century Timurid ornament was characterized by the very small scale and density of foliate forms. A preference for leaf decor over floral patterns is evident, as is a strong liking for geometric framing devices. Spatially logical compositions, extremely fine brushwork and emotional restraint typify paintings of this period. Unlike the Timurids, Turkman court artists worked in a more painterly, sensuous fashion. Space is ambiguous, colour is intense and geometric forms are muted. Turkman commercial or provincial painting reveals less stylistic discipline and greatly simplified compositions that show an awareness but not an internalization of Timurid painting. In the decorative arts such as metalwork Turkman artisans avoided the tight forms and geometry of their Timurid counterparts.

The royal Turkman style continued more or less unchanged under Shah Isma'Il until around 1532, when his son and heir, Tahmassp, returned to Tabriz from Herat, where he had spent his early childhood as governor. Tahmassp had imbied the artistic ideas of Herat and even as a boy he appears to have persuaded the artists of Tabriz to accept the ideas of Herat. This resulted in a synthesis of the two styles, brought about not only by Tahmassp's interest and patronage but also because artists from Herat moved to Tabriz and worked side by side with the artists there. While Tahmassp is best known as a patron of manuscript illumination, he also commissioned magnificent carpets and other items that were decorated in the prevailing style of his period. Features of this style included cloud bands, angels, pheasants and multiple layers of vine scrolls. Although geometric framing devices such as elliptical or stellarite medallions, lobed cartouches, quatrefoils and lobed circles continued to be used, floral, animal and figural ornament appeared increasingly as filler elements.

Around 1555 Tahmasp's interest in the visual arts waned. The artists found work with other members of the Safavid royal family and wealthy aristocrats, but the style became somewhat mannered. Attenuated forms and an expansion of the palette to include secondary colours marked the departure from the earlier style of Safavid painting. In the decorative arts pillar lamp stands (cat. nos 47–9) gained in popularity and the numbers of silk textiles with figures, some quite large scale,
increased. Under the two incompetent shahs who succeeded Shah Tahmasp, the Safavid style stagnated, as if artists and patrons had run out of ideas. Only with the accession of Shah 'Abbas were the artists of the reconstituted royal library able to turn the page on the past and begin to generate a new decorative style that came to fruition after the capital moved to Isfahan in 1598.

The new style

The first four Safavid shahs commissioned very few public buildings and thus the Safavid decorative style that developed during their reigns is most evident on portable items such as metalwork, textiles, carpets, manuscripts and book bindings. By contrast, when Shah 'Abbas established his new capital at Isfahan, the buildings he, his family and the upper class constructed were adorned with tiles and wall paintings that functioned as a broad canvas for the floral and foliate decoration that Shah 'Abbas favoured. Many of the design elements of this period had long featured in Iranian art. These include the split-palmette-leaf arabesque, the lotus blossom shown in section, the curved, serrated lancelet leaf, and a range of escutcheons, lobed ellipses and other quasi-geometric framing devices. How did these differ from the ornament of preceding generations?

One of the main distinctions of the period of Shah 'Abbas is the expanded scale of ornamental motifs. For example, the split-palmette leaf arabesque that appears on the dome of the mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah in Isfahan, on a prayer rug (cat. no. 45), on a doublure (inner cover) of a book binding (cat. no. 46) and in the corner piece of a page of calligraphy (cat. no. 83) is broad and bold in its sweeping spiral. The tight curl of late Timurid arabesques and the leafy tendrils of earlier Safavid vine scrolls have been replaced by a clean and muscular motif. Similarly, the lotus blossom seen on carpets (cat. nos 91 and 102), on the tiles of the Masjid-i Shah in Isfahan, on a silver door at the Ardabil Shrine (fig. 53) or on a metal-ground silk brocade (cat. no. 109) is large and exuberant. Each of the motifs mentioned underscores the new artistic confidence borne of their repeated use across a range of media. In addition to the form of these designs, a new palette was introduced. In tiles yellow becomes much more prevalent, while newer classes of carpets feature pale tones of pinkish beige, green, peach and light blue in contrast to the dark reds and blues of sixteenth-century carpets. The production of gold- and silver-ground textiles and carpets also had an impact on the hues of garments.

Finally, portraiture from the early seventeenth century indicates that, in addition to new types of textiles being used for apparel, the representation of fashionable people had changed. Now large almond eyes and bee-stung red lips replaced the small eyes and mouths of earlier Safavids. Large round cheeks, thick, arched eyebrows and short necks supplanted the small faces and long necks of earlier beauties of both sexes. Even the figures' bodies appear heavier, especially around the thighs, than those of their predecessors. Why this specific physical type should have come into vogue is a mystery, but the fact that a new fashion swept Isfahan after Shah 'Abbas and his court settled there is hardly surprising. To this day people emulate trendsetters and the gilded youth of Isfahan were no exception.

Of the predecessors of Shah 'Abbas, only Shah Tahmasp oversaw a highly organized artists’ workshop that produced paintings, textiles, carpets and other luxurious items to his taste and specifications. The artistic style of the period of Shah Tahmasp is distinct and recognizable as a result of his brilliant patronage. Yet, the most outstanding artworks of the period of Shah Tahmasp can be viewed as an expression of his taste, not as a method of establishing his dominance over every aspect of Iranian life. For Shah 'Abbas, on the other hand, the arts were a handmaiden in his ambitious quest to establish dominance in every aspect of Iranian life. From Isfahan to Mashhad and Ardabil the architectural decoration, not to mention new buildings and their furnishings, commissioned by Shah 'Abbas announce a new visual landscape identified with the person of Shah 'Abbas as well as his religious, economic and social policies. Iranians and foreigners alike reacted with awe at the monuments constructed and restored by Shah 'Abbas, and this only served to increase his power and the magnetism of his country.

NOTES
5. Elkakdar Yeg Mordhi/Savey 1978, 1099–1100, 1187, 1288. Shah 'Abbas had five sons: Muhammad Baqir Mirza, executed in 1614; Sultan Hasan Mirza, who died in infancy, 1588–9; Ismail-i Mirza, who died, aged twelve, in 1613; Rustam Quli Mirza, blinded in 1626–7; and Sultan Muhammad Mirza, blinded in 1620–21.
EARLY in the reign of Shah 'Abbas dreams of establishing a new capital at the ancient city of Isfahan began to take root. Familiar with the city from hunting expeditions that he had enjoyed in its environs (fig. 5), the shah ordered his agents to purchase large tracts of land to the south of the medieval city, which was centred on the Jam'i Mosque, bazaars and a maidan, or piazza. His new precinct included the Naqsh-i Jahan palace overlooking a large rectangular maidan of the same name, 510 metres long by 165 metres wide. In the early 1950s the maidan served as a polo field and place for entertainments, and in 1598 it was surrounded by a colonnade containing shops (fig. 6). Beyond the halfway points along each of the long sides of the maidan a major structure was erected. Thus, directly across from the refurbished Naqsh-i Jahan palace, renamed the Ali Qapu, Shah 'Abbas commissioned the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, a small mosque used by the Safavid royal family. At the southern end of the maidan a magnificent congregational mosque, called the Masjid-i Shah (or Masjid-i Imam after 1979), was constructed. At the opposite end stood a monumental portal leading to a new bazaar, the Qaysariyya, in which silks and luxury items were sold.

To the west of the Ali Qapu and beyond the palace precinct a garden quarter, the Chahar Bagh, was developed in which the most powerful and wealthy personages at the court of Shah 'Abbas built palaces. The central road that ran through this quarter extended to the Zayandeh Rud, the river that traverses Isfahan. On the south of the river Shah 'Abbas developed another area called 'Abbassabad, which contained palaces and agricultural land. Additionally, in 1604 he resettled the population of the Armenian city of Julfa in a district adjacent to 'Abbassabad and also assigned a quarter to refugees from the north-west Iranian city of Tabriz. Both Armenians and Tabrizis came to Isfahan because of ongoing hostilities with the Ottoman Turks in Armenia and Tabriz. Whereas the Chahar Bagh was designed to house the grandees of the realm in close proximity to the shah and his seat of government, the suburbs south of the Zayandeh Rud were intended for the populations who were most instrumental in the development of the luxury silk trade under Shah 'Abbas, the Armenians and European traders ready to exchange commodities and currency for silk.

Much of the reputation of Shah 'Abbas derives from his inspired development of Isfahan, still considered the most stunning city in Iran. On a very large scale Shah 'Abbas introduced rational planning to Isfahan that not only served various practical needs but also attempted to Engineer the use of public and semi-private spaces to fit with the shah's new social vision. By the 1660s, when the French jeweller and traveller John Chardin came to Isfahan, he estimated the population of the city to
be equal to that of London, which would have been between 600,000 and 700,000 people. A huge open space such as the Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan enabled the highly diverse population of Iranians, Armenians, Georgians, Circassians, Indians and Europeans to interact, conduct business and participate in public festivals and commemorations. Describing the Persian New Year’s celebration in 1609, Iskandar Beg Munshi, who wrote a history of the reign of Shah ‘Abbas, noted:

Space along the banks of the stream [that ran through the centre of the maidan] was allocated, on the basis of rank and status, to the distinguished citizens of Isfahan and its rural districts, and to the citizens of Khorasan, property owners of Tabriz, and merchants and members of guilds who happened to be in the capital, so that each group could congregate in its own allotted place ... In front of each group’s plot of ground a pavilion was erected; carpenters and engineers exerted their skill to fashion different designs and all were decked with lights. The whole night long the stars of the firmament looked down with envy at the brilliantly lit scene. Every night, the Shah would wander through the park, stopping to talk with whichever group he pleased.³

Foreigners and Armenians in the capital

Unlike his weak-willed father and intolerant grandfather Shah Tahmasp, Shah ‘Abbas encouraged foreigners to come to Iran. Two years before the establishment of the British East India Company in 1600, the Englishmen Robert and Anthony Sherley (cat. nos 15 and 18) journeyed to Iran and entered the service of the shah. Anthony Sherley soon returned to Europe as the shah’s ambassador seeking allies against the Ottomans; his brother remained in Isfahan as a very useful hostage. While the reports of his introducing firearms to Safavid Iran are untrue, Robert did help Shah ‘Abbas reorganize the army and eventually served as the Shah’s ambassador during several missions in Europe. Other Europeans who visited Isfahan during the reign of Shah ‘Abbas included Catholic priests, representatives of the Dutch and English East India Companies, and ambassadors from most of the countries between England and Russia. Although the desired joint attack on the Turks never materialized, the shah’s openness to trade with Europe expanded the market for silk from Iran in exchange for gold and silver, which were in short supply in Iran but plentiful in Europe, thanks to relatively new supplies of precious metal from South America that had been discovered and mined by the Spanish and Portuguese.

Much scholarly attention has focused on relations between Shah ‘Abbas and the realms of Europe. However, India was Iran’s largest trading partner and home to numerous expatriate Iranians. Iran and Mughal India enjoyed cordial relations, except when they were fighting over Qandahar, a key site on the east–west trade route, and the Sultans of Bijapur and Golconda in the Deccan often exchanged embassies with the Safavids. The Mughal embassy of Khan ‘Alam remained in Iran for five years, during which time the Mughal court painter Bishn Das and the Iranian Riza-yi ‘Abbasli depicted the shah meeting the ambassador (see cat. nos 1, 19–21). By 1611 Shah ‘Abbas had gained the upper hand in his relations with the Uzbeks to such an extent that Wali Muhammad Khan Uzbek, ruler of Transoxiana and Turkistan, sought Iranian aid in regaining his throne (fig. 7). The meeting of Shah ‘Abbas and Wali Muhammad Khan is commemorated in the Chihil Sutun palace, constructed during the reign of Shah ‘Abbas II (1642–66). Iskandar Beg Munshi described the scene as follows:

The Shah arranged a private banquet in his own apartments and invited the Khan and a few of his close companions. The Shah himself, with complete lack of formality, supervised the arrangements for the banquet, and rosy-faced pages circulated the wine. Dextrous musicians and melodious singers banished care from all hearts, and beautiful girls from Iraq and Khorasan delighted the guests by their dancing.⁴

A key component of the strategy of Shah ‘Abbas for improving his economy was based around the community of Armenians whom he forcibly relocated in 1603–4 from Julfa in Armenia to Isfahan. One reason for this evacuation was that Shah ‘Abbas was pursuing a scorched-earth policy as part of his larger strategy to win back territories lost to the Ottomans. Perhaps more significant were the Armenians’ pre-existing familial and trade networks across Turkey into Europe and in India,
which led to their being considered ideal agents for the development of the market for both raw silk and woven textiles and carpets (fig. 8). ‘Abbas also moved Armenians to the silk-growing province of Mazandaran, so they were involved in the silk business from start to finish. Silk weaving occurred in every region of Iran with weavers working in their own homes or in manufactories in towns and cities. However, the diversity of luxury silk textiles and carpets made for export differentiates the period of Shah ‘Abbas from those of his Safavid predecessors, who mostly exported raw silk. Moreover, master silk weavers such as Ghiyath al-Din Naqshband (active late sixteenth to early seventeenth century) enjoyed privileged access at the Safavid court, presumably in recognition of the profitability of his velvets and gold-ground textiles.’

The rise of the ghulam

Following a policy that Shah Tahmasp had originated, Shah ‘Abbas sought to contain the power of the Qizilbash by appointing ghulams to important government and military posts. Their allegiance to the shah was unquestioning and total in contrast to the dubious loyalties of some Qizilbash tribesmen. In return for this fealty, Shah ‘Abbas promoted the ghulams and made marriages for himself and his family with their female relations.

Although members of the Persian aristocracy and Qizilbash chiefs continued to hold important administrative and military positions, some of the ghulams rose to the highest levels of Safavid administration. Allahverdi Khan, for example, was an Armenian ghulam who demonstrated his loyalty to Shah ‘Abbas early in his reign by helping to assassinate the shah’s Qizilbash guardian. Not only did he become a successful general but he was also appointed governor of Fars province. He accumulated enough wealth to participate in the Safavid development of Isfahan by funding the construction of the Thirty-Three-Arch Bridge, which joins the Chahar Bagh with the southern suburb of ‘Abbasabad (fig. 9). Moreover, he commissioned his own mausoleum to be constructed next to the tomb of the Eighth Shi‘i Imam, Imam Riza, at Mashhad, at what is assumed to have been great cost.

Religious policy and its agents

The centralization that characterized the government and social policies of Shah ‘Abbas extended to his wish to normalize the practice of Twelver Shi‘ism and to suppress some Sufi groups who either threatened his authority or indulged in deviant practices. Unlike military or administrative matters, in which Shah ‘Abbas was both creative and decisive, he appears to have sought the advice of a group of exceptional theologians. One of these, Shaykh Baha’ al-Din Amill, known as Shaykh Baha‘i, has been called ‘the most remarkable figure of the Safavid renaissance’ (fig. 10). Shaykh Baha‘i was a mathematician, philosopher, theologian, physician and poet. Under Shah ‘Abbas he was appointed Shaykh al-Islam – the leading authority on religious law with judicial responsibility – in Isfahan in 1600 and was the most powerful Shī‘ī figure in Iran. His religious writings range from commentary on the Qur’an to treatises on Shi‘i law. He was also an architect and helped draw the plans for the Masjīd-i Shah in Isfahan. Additionally, Shaykh Baha‘i was a Sufi who sought to harmonize the law and the Sufi tarīqah, or path, the exter-
figures such as ʿAbd al-ʿAli al-Karaki, who came from Jabbal ʿAmil, Lebanon, were instrumental in interpreting laws in the context of Shiism. As a result, Shiʿi jurists with an ʿAmilī pedigree enjoyed special respect in Safavid Iran. Mir Damad, a grandson of al-Karaki, rose to prominence as a philosopher and specialist in Shiʿi law, as did Shaykh Lutfallah al-Mayṣī ʿAmilī who lived and led prayers in the precinct of the shah’s private mosque on the Maidān-i Naqsh-i Jahan.10

The legal rulings of Shaykh Bahaʾi and Mir Damad, among others, supported the politics of Shah ʿAbbas by distinguishing Shiʿi practice from that of the Safavids’ Sunni enemies, particularly the Ottomans. Moreover, as Rula Abuabab has demonstrated, the influx of Christians from the Caucasus heightened the sensitivity of the Safavid ruling elite to Christian customs that were deemed unacceptable to Shiʿi Muslims.11 In addition to criticizing some Christian practices, the judgements of Shaykh Bahaʾi and Mir Damad provided guidance for the formerly Christian populations whom Shah ʿAbbas ordered to be converted to Islam. Clear and consistent laws were a necessity for the cohesive, stable society that Shah ʿAbbas wished to create. The grand Masjid-i Shah and the two religious colleges it encloses gave form to Shah ʿAbbas’s goal of disseminating normative Twelver Shiism as broadly as possible, while the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, his private mosque, embodies the same vision on a smaller scale.

The Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah

The inscriptions of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah (fig. 11) also reflect matters that were preoccupying the shah around 1603, when work on the mosque began. In 1603–4, thirteen years after the humiliating Treaty of Istanbul with the Ottomans, Shah ʿAbbas went to war against the Ottoman Turks and regained Azerbaijan, Nakhrivan, Erivan, and the former Safavid capital of Tabriz. This victory may well have stoked the hostility of Shah ʿAbbas towards the Sunni Ottoman occupiers of the burial places of all but one of the Shiʿi Imams in Iraq, plus the Muslim holy sites of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. Another concern of Shah ʿAbbas, the influx of Christians from the Caucasus to Isfahan, underscored the need to define Twelver Shiism in contrast to the beliefs of infidels. The choice of Qur’anic passages confronted this issue.

As with the Masjid-i Shah, the orientation of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah is obscured by the tilework facade on the east side of the miydan (fig. 12). Above panels of floral and vegetal arabesque decoration, vases and stylized kābālis (begging bowls) runs an inscription in majestic, rounded thuluth script, produced by ʿAli Riza ʿAbbasi, the leading calligrapher at the court of Shah ʿAbbas. Directly above the door are the name and titles of Shah ʿAbbas, the Husaynī, the Musavi, that is, the descendant of Imams Husayn and Musa. Inside the entrance the visitor turns left, proceeds along a corridor (fig. 13) and then goes right before turning right again to enter an octagonal domed chamber, which is the prayer hall. From the

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**Fig. 10** Shaykh Bahaʾi’s false signature to Saduq Beg, signed by “the stār Muhammad ʿAlī”, dated 1657/1744–5; ink and gold on paper, Makk Museum, Tehran. This drawing is presumably a copy of a lost original by Saduq Beg, the artist who was head of Shah ʿAbbas’s library before ʿAli Riza ʿAbbasi took over in 1598.

**Fig. 11** The Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, Isfahan, 1603–19, designed by Muhammad Riza ibn Husayn.

**Fig. 12** Ground plan of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah. In order to maintain the alignment of the facade with the western side of the miydan, the architect designed an L-shaped corridor through which the visitor passes before entering the octagonal prayer hall.

**KEY**
- 1 Portal
- 2 Prayer hall
- 3 Mihrab
exterior the dome, covered in white, turquoise and black split-palm leaf arabesque on a golden yellow tiled ground, dominates the east side of the minbar.

The running inscription in white tile on a blue ground on the exterior drum of the dome, visible to the public, consists of three suras (chapters) from the Qur'an – al-Shams (91, the Sun), al-Insan (76, Man) and al-Ka‘bah (108, Abundance) – and a pious statement that ‘verily the mosques are God’s’. The suras emphasize the rightness of a pure soul and the fate in hell of those who reject God’s way. Al-Insan includes a description of paradise, reserved for the righteous. Al-Ka‘bah reads: ‘To thee have We granted Abundance. Therefore to thy Lord turn in Prayer and Sacrifice. For he who hateth thee, he is the one who shall be without posterity.’ The reference to ‘he who hateth thee’ would most likely apply to the Ottomans. The fact that this inscription would have been visible to the public, some of whom had recently fought the Turks, makes this interpretation likely.

Entering the prayer chamber from the north, one is confronted with walls and a dome covered with blue, yellow, turquoise and white tiles with intricate arabesque patterns, cartouches and geometric designs (fig. 14). The proportions of the building, its decoration and the subtle play of light contribute to the exceptional calm and beauty of this room. The bands of inscriptions that run around each of the eight arched sections of the walls and the drum of the dome shed light on the significance of the mosque. Qur’anic verses appear in each corner while the east and west walls contain poetry by Shaykh Bahá’í. Around the mihrab are the names of all the Twelve Shi‘i Imams.

Turning right at the entrance to the domed prayer chamber, one first encounters the full text of Sura 98, al-Bayyina, the Clear Proof. The message of this chapter is that clear evidence of the true scripture was not available to the People of the Book (Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians) until God sent his messenger. Muhammad to teach the worship of God, regular prayer and charity. Those who believe and do good works will go to paradise. The horizontal band of script at the bottom of the arch is not Qur’anic but states that God and his messenger have spoken the truth and God’s blessings are on the (Shi‘i) martyrs and on the best of his creation, Muhammad and his family, the pure ones. Thus the Shi‘i invocation echoes the Qur’anic verses in its stress on the truthfulness of God’s message.

The verse on the south wall eulogizes the martyred Imams and the suffering of Fatima, wife of Ali and mother of Husayn and Hasan. The inscription contains the name of Shaykh Lutfallah al-Maysí, the cleric who first preached in the mosque between 1618 and 1622, and the name of Baqi‘ al-Bana‘i, a calligrapher. The name of the builder, Muhammad Riza ibn Ustad Bana‘i Isfahání, is inscribed on the border of the mihrab (prayer niche). The south-west corner to the left of the mihrab contains Sura 82, al-Infitar, the Cleaving. This concerns the Day of Judgement, when all mankind will be brought before God who will decide their fate. The horizontal band at the foot of the panel describes the angel descending on the eve of the Sabbath and scattering golden pens with which the faithful will write only prayers to Muhammad and his family. This expands on one verse from the sura in the same panel, in which the angels who write down men’s deeds for the Day of Judgement are mentioned.

As noted above, the names of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones – Muhammad,
Fatima and the Twelve Imams—form the primary inscription around the mihrab along with the name of the builder. The south-east corner follows the model of the other corners with a Qur'anic sura, al-Lail, and a Shi'i inscription. This chapter stresses charity and truthfulness to avoid the fiery pit of hell. In a rather protracted war the horizontal inscription proclaims mosques to be God's favourite place. Unlike the previous two corner inscriptions, this has little direct resonance with the Qur'anic verse above it but may reinforce the desirability of the worshipper being in the mosque.

The poem of Shaykh Baha'i on the right wall again mentions the Shi'i Imams as well as the name of the poet and prays for help from the Fourteen Immaculate Ones. In the north-east corner the Sura al-Shams, seen on the exterior of the drum of the dome, has been repeated. Its language parallels that of al-Lail in the south-east corner, but its message concerns the purity of man's soul and recognizing true prophets. The inscription below relates to the night journey of Muhammad, when he rose to heaven and the angel Gabriel called him to prayer amidst the firmament of angels and prophets. This visionary inscription connects the idea of Muhammad's night journey with the language of the Sura al-Shams and its reference to the prophet al-Salih and other prophets in heaven. Rather than provide simple lessons, the combination of Qur'anic verses and Shi'i texts increases the associations available to the worshipper who reads them.

The inscriptions on the interior of the dome (fig. 15) concern the rightness of Islam and the erroneousness of the religions of the book, Judaism and Christianity. These would appear overly to refer to the non-Muslim populations of the Safavid empire. The Qur'anic suras in the corner inscriptions emphasize the virtues of charity, prayer and honesty, as well as the correctness of following Islam and its prophets versus the error of other religions. However, the specifically Shi'i passages and their prominent placement in the mihrab, on the two lateral walls and in the horizontal bands of each corner, underscore the pre-eminence of this creed in Safavid Iran.

The fact that two poems by Shaykh Baha'i grace the walls of Shah Abbas's private mosque also warrants scrutiny. No doubt along with Shaykh Lutfallah's opinions, his vision helped to determine what inscriptions would find their way onto and into the mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, but his two poems shed light on his interest in Sufism. Despite the suppression of the Naqavis in 1593, Sufism continued to play an important role in Safavid society. On the one hand, resistance to the increasingly legalistic approach to Shi'ism taken by the leading clerics was 'expressed in popular Sufism and mysticism'. On the other hand, scholars like Shaykh Baha'i were not only interested in Sufi literature but also at times affected the dervishes and asceticism of dervishes and wrote about Sufi groups. His own poetry is infused with mystical ideas. As the numerous drawings and paintings of dervishes by leading Safavid artists of the period of Shah Abbas suggest, dervishes remained a significant class in society and some still functioned as spiritual advisers to the upper classes.
The new style

Isfahan was the showcase for the new ideas and artistic style introduced by Shah 'Abbas. The monuments he built and the goods produced and sold in Isfahan's bazaars publicized the changes to the Safavid image. Although no carpets or lamps can be linked specifically to the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, prayer rugs that are contemporary with the mosque (cat. nos 43–5) display similar arabesque decoration. Likewise, the so-called 'Polonaise' carpets (cat. nos 43–4, 120–22) with gold and silver thread in the new style devised during the reign of Shah 'Abbas reflect the change in palette from red- or blue-ground carpets to warm hues of yellow-gold, peach and off-white with black accents. Although many of these carpets were produced for export, the English traveller and historian Sir Thomas Herbert remarked upon the floor of the royal palace 'spread with silk and gold carpets' in 1626. Presumably, they also covered the floors of the mosques commissioned by Shah 'Abbas.

In addition to the decorative motifs on the tiles of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah and other new buildings, the extensive inscription bands were carefully planned and executed. Shah 'Abbas appointed his favourite calligrapher, 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi, to be head of the royal library in 1598. This position entailed more than looking after the royal collection of books. 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi would have been responsible for a workshop of painters, calligraphers, bookbinders, illuminators and all the supporting cast of glue-makers, paper-makers and gold-sprinklers, to name a few of the people involved in producing manuscripts and albums for the shah and his circle. In addition, 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi designed the monumental inscriptions for the two mosques on the Maidan Naghš-i-Jahan and for the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad. He travelled with Shah 'Abbas wherever the shah went in his peripatetic life. The painter Riza-yi 'Abbasi also travelled with Shah 'Abbas on his campaigns in Khurasan in 1598 (fig. 16), but he did not remain constantly in the affections of the shah. Between about 1603 and 1610 he left the court and consorted with wrestlers, considered by the upper class to be contemptible. Keeping the company of people who were not acceptable to the court effectively cut off artists such as Riza-yi 'Abbasi from their main source of income. When out of necessity Riza returned to court, his painting style changed to reflect the prevailing fashion for large almond eyes, melon-shaped thighs and ornate textiles. His work embodies the period of Shah 'Abbas and exerted a powerful influence on other painters. The strong drive to centralization in this period encompassed every aspect of Safavid life from politics and religion to art. Not unlike modern leaders, Shah 'Abbas understood the power of a unified message and he did not shrink from imposing his will autocratically on his subjects to achieve his aims.

NOTES
1. Blake 1999, 15-27, disputes the dating of the development of Safavid Isfahan given by McChesney 1988, 162-34, and proposes that Shah 'Abbas moved the capital to Isfahan in 1590, whereas Eshkevari Beg Mousavi/Saëvory 1978, 724, dates the entry to 1606 (17/8-9). Up to this point, Qarvin had been Shah 'Abbas's capital, and Isfahan had been the place to which he had gone for recreation, especially hunting. The natural conditions of Isfahan, such as its favourable location and the abundance of water... had made a great impression on the Shah, and he had been planning to spend some time there, laying out and developing the city. This was the year in which he decided to implement these plans.(
2. Eshkevari Beg Mousavi/Saëvory 1978, 724, 177, estimated a population of 200.000 in 1626.
8. Noonan 2006, 53. Noonan notes that 'the balance of military and, hence, political, power over 'Abbasi' reign remained with tribal forces', despite the rise of the ghilanis.
11. Eshkevari Beg Mousavi/Saëvory 1978, 249. notes that Shaykh Lutfallah was born in Jabal 'Amal and studied at the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad, where he became proficient in the science and was appointed a lecturer in theology in the shrine. He moved to Qarvin in 1558 to escape the Turks and then took up residence in the neighbourhood of the mosque in Naghš-i-Jahan Square, opposite the royal palace... There he discharged the duties of an Imam (prayer leader), gave lectures on jurisprudence and hadji, and occupied himself with worship and obedience to God. (Saëvory, Bd., p. 24). identifies the mosque as the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, erected by Shah 'Abbas in honor of his father-in-law. Although Eshkevari Beg Mousavi (ibid., 1250), does not mention kinship with Shah 'Abbas when writing of Shaykh Lutfallah's death in 1622-3, it seems that Shah 'Abbas did marry one of the Shaykh's daughters. See Ahsan 2004, 82, where Ahsan 2004, 84, cites one source that refers to the mosque as a congregational mosque, the size and shape of the mosque indicate such an identification.
17. 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi had first been trained in Qarvin as a designer of inscriptions for buildings but later preferred his native script, which he used for copying manuscripts and pages of poetry. Recently two stone slabs inscribed with his name, 'Ali Riza, have come to light in Tez. These would have been made when he worked for Farhad Khan Qazvini in Khurasan before he joined the atelier of Shah 'Abbas.
THIS small portrait of Shah Abbas is a study for a group composition depicting the meeting of Shah Abbas and Khan 'Alam, the Mughal ambassador, in 1618. Bishn Das, one of the court artists of Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–27), had accompanied the embassy in order to record this event. While a later allegorical painting of Jahangir embracing his neighbour Shah 'Abbas portrays the Iranian as a downright puritan compared to the Mughals, this work provides an insight into the shah’s character. The simplicity of the green background, and the shah’s pose and garments encourage the viewer to focus on his face, which gives an impression of quiet confidence. Shah ‘Abbas had also instructed one of his court artists, Riza-ye ‘Abbasi, to record his meeting with Khan ‘Alam, but only a copy of Riza’s original painting is extant. Thus this painting by Bishn Das and a later painting by the Iranian artist Muhammad Qasim (cat. no. 123) are unique contemporary portraits of Shah ‘Abbasi.

By 1618 Shah ‘Abbasi had realized many of the ambitions of the first half of his reign. He had quelled a civil war, defeated his Uzbek enemies in the east, signed a peace treaty with the Ottomans and shifted his capital to Isfahan. His trade and fiscal policies had stimulated Iran’s economy. Although he had already begun to exert exceptional cruelty towards his own sons, his power in the second decade of the seventeenth century was unassailable. Yet, rather than stress his grandeur, the artist has evoked his intelligence and fitness. In reality, these traits differed distinctly from the addictive, emotional personality of Jahangir.

The larger composition for which this painting is a study spawned numerous copies both in India and Iran, suggesting that the image by Bishn Das was more successful than that of Riza-ye ‘Abbasi. Likenesses of rulers and dignitaries played a significant role in diplomacy, enabling servants and shahs to assess the physical characteristics of their allies and adversaries. Since Mughal artists painted in a more naturalistic style than their Safavid counterparts, a higher value may have been placed on their portraits. Certainly, Jahangir appreciated Bishn Das’s version of the embassy; he presented the artist with the gift of an elephant upon his return to India.

Horse and groom
Signed: ‘Riza-ye ‘Abbasi’
Quotation: c.1618–19
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper; page 33.4 x 23.9 cm, image 27.9 x 20.5 cm
Published: Gray 1952, 18; Hilsenrath 1972, 74, no. 168; Tylecote 1977, 35, no. 398;
British Museum, Bequest of Sir Bernard Eckstein, MI 1948.121.0.14

SHAH ‘ABBAS led an extremely peripatetic life, travelling around his kingdom at speed in order to attend to matters of government, to fight external enemies or quell local rebellions, to hunt and feast, and on occasion to visit shrines. According to Pietro della Valle, the shah rode the fastest horses. His mounts were ‘kept in his stables, constantly saddled, for it is not known at what hour or minute they will be needed, nor where they will be going’. Although the horse in this painting is not saddled, its blanket, feather emmurl and burdav are all suggestive that it is from the royal stables and being prepared for its owner.

Stylistically, this painting poses several problems. While a tradition of depicting individual horses with or without grooms existed in Persian painting from the fourteenth century on, horse ‘portraits’ made for inclusion in albums appear to originate only in the sixteenth century. This painting of a dappled grey stallion has been tightly fitted into its album page and the compositor has cut around its ears and both left hoof and laid them over the upper and lower margins that separate the painting from the calligraphy. The painting is inscribed with the name ‘Riza’. The authorship of the artist, later known as Riza-ye ‘Abbasi, has been questioned because of the awkward pose of the groom. There is a confusion with his arms and shoulders, since his right hand and head are drawn as if he is looking at the horse while his left arm is bent as if he is fetching the viewer. Even at the start of his career Riza did not make such elementary errors. Moreover, the figure appears to have been painted over the water stain that runs along most of the left side of the page. Although Schloenkre rejected the attribution to Riza, the skill and subtility with which the horse is painted suggest that Riza may have painted the horse and that another artist added the groom. Without the groom the painting of the horse would imply that it is hobbled and tethered so that it cannot run away, whereas the addition of the groom provides action but crowds the composition.

The verses, written in Persian with some lines in Arabic in coloured ink, concern generosity and do not relate directly to the painting.

2 Meirle 1993, 195.
3 Safonovskii 1964, 110–11.
ACCORDING to James Allan, the inscription indicates royal ownership:

"Below it is a lion and sun device within a cut-away circle, the lion bearing the Persian inscription and, meaning 'lion' (see detail). The lion and sun motif was an ancient Persian royal symbol revived by the Qajar ruler Fath 'Ali Shah in the early nineteenth century. Presumably Fath 'Ali Shah chose the best swords in his army for the addition of his own insignia. It is likely that the sword was made by Asadallah Isfahani, the famous sixteenth-century sword-maker during the reign of Shah Abbas I when Persian smiths were the best in the Islamic world. The hilt, of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, has walnut ivory grips and wrought iron mounts decorated with gold leaf (inlay) work. Long known for their excellence, Persian sabres appear in the verses of the twelfth-thirteenth-century poet Nizami where he describes the beautiful nose of Shirin (the Armenian princess in his poem, Khusrav and Shirin) as shaped like a silver shamsheer (sabre), the proudest curved nose being considered the epitome of female perfection. The Italian traveller D'Alazzendi wrote in c.1571 that they use for arms swords, lances, arquebuses... their arms are also superior and better tempered than those of any other nation."  

Meaningless wrote that he 'never did see better barrels of muskets than I did see there; and the king, hard by his court at Aspahan [Isfahan], above two hundred men at work, only making of pieces, bows and arrows, swords and targets.' Simon, a Carmelite priest present at court in 1608, described how 'Abbas I 'enjoyed making scimiters, arquebuses, and saddles for horses... and, in short, with all mechanical crafts, if not perfect, he was at least somewhat conversant.' Such an interest was entirely consistent with the traditional training for Persian princes, set out in manuals known as 'Miroirs pour Princes', and the kar-khaneh (court workshop) emulated similar establishments directed by earlier rulers of Iran, such as Timur and Uzun Hasan.  

We hear more about the kar-khaneh and about Shah 'Abbas's interest in it from Cartwright in 1609:  

After he [Abbas I] had viewed his horses, he passed into this armory; certain buildings near unto his palace, where are made very strong cuisines, or corselets; head-pieces and targets, most of them to keep out the shot of an harquebusuer, and much more to daunt the force of a dart. Here also the king furniseth his soldiers, not only with cuisines, head-pieces, and targets; but with bows and arrows, poudroutes, and gauntletts; and with lances made of good steel, armed at both ends, with sockets and shins of mail, most finely and soundly tempered; whereof both themselves and their horses are defended, in time of war.'  

John Chardin noted that the Ottoman sultan sent Shah 'Abbas a helmet and challenged anyone to produce a sword to cleave it in two. Asadallah; made a sword that achieved this, and as a reward of the Shah remitted the tax on sword-makers, which continued until Qajar times (nineteenth century). In memory of this once a year the Isfahani swordsmiths gathered at the grave of Asadallah Isfahani at Sichan near Isfahan. The practice was still continuing in 1937. 'The grave was in the swordsmiths' talavah (devotional lodge) and was ornamented with a shamsheer in profile but the talavah collapsed in about 1956. RE  

2. D'Alazzendi 1873, 227.  
3. Ross 1933, 222.  
6. This story gives credence to a similar one noted by J. Mansour in Mechanick Enquiries or the Science of Handy-Works. London 1783, 59 (cited by Allan and Gilmore 2006) concerning the reputed ability of a Khanian shamsheer to cut through an iron helmet.  
7. Lostine 1974, 19: Mount Polio Stayed in Isfahan and mentions the gold ladies, or gil, meaning 'markes superintendence'.

In 1623 Imam Quli Khan, the powerful governor of Shīrāz and Pars province, led the Anglo-Iranian attack on the Portuguese fort at Hormuz. This strategically-located outpost in the Persian Gulf had been in Portuguese hands since 1515. As a result the Portuguese had been able to collect duty on goods traded by sea, including shipments passing down the Gulf from Basra and the considerable amount of merchandise entering Iran from India. By the early 1620s Iran had consolidated its international standing as a commercial centre in the trade between Europe and Asia and as a supplier of luxury textiles. Moreover, the sea lanes in which the Portuguese had once enjoyed superiorly were now threatened by the English and Dutch. The presence of the Portuguese at Hormuz had become an obstacle to Iranian control of maritime trade along their Persian Gulf coast. However, Shah 'Abbas recognized Iran's naval and military inferiority to the Portuguese and the need for outside assistance in dissuading them from Hormuz. With the help of the English, who supplied ships to carry Iranian soldiers from the mainland, the Iranians besieged the Portuguese on the island of Hormuz, also called Jarun. Once they had defeated and expelled the Portuguese, the Iranians abandoned the island of Hormuz and built a new fort city, Bandar 'Abbas, nearby.

Qadri's Jārūmānakhir is written in verse in the form of a masnavī and concentrates on the role of Imam Quli Khan in the battle for Hormuz and later when he and his family were exiled on the order of Shah Sāli, who succeeded Shah 'Abbas. In the illustration Imam Quli Khan is depicted at the upper left astride a white horse holding a sword and shield. At the lower left the Safavid soldiers train their cannon on the fort, while sappers chip away at the fort's rocky foundation. Although smoke issues from the mouths of the Iranian cannons, no sign of damage to the fort is evident. The Portuguese, with their characteristic black and brown left hats, look down on their adversaries from the ramparts and a window high in the fortress wall. One cannon justs out from the wall. A rather awkwardly painted dome surrounded by a cross justs into the upper margin, as does the banner of the Safavids with its gold lion.

Although the manuscript was completed at the end of the seventeenth century, its style conforms to that of the mid-century. The uprooted rocks of the cag to the left of the fort, the pink ground and the white clouds streaking across a dark blue sky all recall the work of the premier seventeenth-century illustrator of Safavid manuscripts, Mir'in Musavvir. This style represents a conservative strain in late Safavid painting which suggests that the patron of this manuscript did not have access to royal artists, who were strongly influenced by European painting and prints from the 1640s onwards.
Pages of poetry from the *Haft Avarang* (Seven Thrones) of Nur al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman, b. Ahmad Jami

Signed by 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi
Isfahan, dated 1007/1598
Ink, gold and opaque watercolour on paper; each page 23 × 12.6 cm
Published: Soudavar 1992, 286–7
Lent by the Art and History Collection, Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, IS.1995.2.84

'Ali Riza 'Abbasi, who transcribed these lines of poetry, came to the attention of Shah 'Abbas early in his reign and occupied a favoured position throughout his career. As a result of the Ottoman invasion of Azerbaijan in 1585, he moved from Tabriz to Qazvin, where he produced the inscriptions in the refurbished Friday Mosque and copied several Qur'ans. For two years he served Farhad Khan Qaramanlu, a general, in Khuzestan and Mazar-as-Sarrand, and on 1 Shawwal 1001/1 July 1593 he joined the court of Shah 'Abbas in Qazvin. He was 'one of the circle of the most intimate among those who are awarded generous favours and is renowned and exalted by boundless attentions, gifts, and kindnesses'. By 1606 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi had been in the service of Shah 'Abbas for ten or twelve years and had been 'accompanying him on all his campaigns and journeys and he is one of His Majesty's intimates'.

In 1598 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi was appointed head of the royal khanah-e khosra, the library and production place of royal manuscripts. While he was a prolific calligrapher, as the numerous examples of his pages of *nasta'liq* or hanging script attest, he was also a master of *rubu'*, the more upright script used for monumental inscriptions. Shah 'Abbas relied on him to adorn the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah and the Masjid-i Shah Mosque in Isfahan, the dome and minaret of the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad and the gold plaques for the tomb cover of Imam Riza. Although no works by 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi are dated later than 1617–18, he is said to have lived until 1628–9, if not longer.

These elegantly written lines of *nasta'liq* come from an episode in the *Haft Avarang* in which a young man gazed across at a fourteen-year-old beauty from his rooftop, only to be approached by a bent old man proclamating love for him. The young man suggested that the old man regard the beauty instead. When the old man turned to look, the youth pushed him off the roof. The lines then state: 'It is not proper for him who undertakes the road of commerce with us to gaze anywhere else. / To be "double-sighted" is to be fickle; the object of love is one and only one.'

1 Qadkhakhani, 1959, 81–2.
2 Qadkhakhani, 1959, 171–2.
3 Soudavar, 1992, 287.
Of the life that has passed, only guilt has remained
As long as I was alive, I was asleep
All that is left are regret and a sigh
I am now awake and this [life] is no longer left

These lines of poetry express the wistful regret of one who has experienced life more intensely while asleep than awake. Many of the images of Persian poetry involve the reality of the unseen world in contrast to the unreality of material existence. Although the poet is anonymous, the sentiment is typical of Persian mystical poetry.

Having been trained first as a designer of tulip inscription for buildings, 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi applied a similar aesthetic to some of his letter forms when writing in nasta'liq script; as here. Each line contains one or more sweeping, elongated letters, which widen towards the end of the line. This provides drama and a variety of visual rhythms that are echoed from line to line.

The identity of 'Abu Sa'id', who is mentioned in the upper right-hand corner of the page, is not certain. One of the Safavid princes, who was first cousin once removed of Shah 'Abbass, was named Abu Sa'id. He had served in Zemun Dazar, the area around Qazan, after the death of Shah Isma'il II in 1577, but around 1593–4 he emigrated to India, which makes it unlikely but not impossible that this page was produced for him. On the basis of style the page could date from the period before Abu Sa'id left for India. The gold vegetation, clouds and arabesque decorating the spaces between the lines of poetry are characteristic renaissances of paintings and calligraphy in the late-sixteenth century. While 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi did move from Qazan to Khurasan around 1594, we have no way of knowing whether he could have encountered Abu Sa'id Mirza, the Safavid prince, before the prince moved to India.

1. Translated by Zora Saffosh Curtis.

'Imad al-Hasani, known as Mir 'Imad, was a prolific master of nasta'liq script during the reign of Shah 'Abbass. Born in Qazan around 1554, he was descended from a family of Sayf al-Hasani sayyids. According to one source, 'in all his writings he imitates the manner of Mir 'Ali'. Presumably this refers to Mir 'Ali Isaavi, a celebrated calligrapher of the first half of the sixteenth century who started his career in Herat but was forcibly removed by the Uzbek sultan in 1528. In the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries Mughal royal and noble collectors filled albums with the work of Mir 'Ali Hanzvi and his emulators.

Mir 'Imad travelled in Anatolia, the Riazi, Syria and Iraq but returned to Qazan where he worked on royal manuscripts from 1573 onwards. Two years after 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi left the service of General Farhad Khan Qaranjan, Mir 'Imad was working for the general in Semnan. Following the death of his patron, Mir 'Imad requested work at the court of Shah 'Abbass and joined the imperial library in Isfahan in 1599. He eventually fell foul of the shah, however, whether because of his arrogant belief in his superiority, his mixing with out-of-favour Sufi groups, or his rivalry with Shah 'Abbass's preferred calligrapher, 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi. Having allegedly sent 'unflattering poetry' to Shah 'Abbass, Mir 'Imad incurred the shah's displeasure. On 10 Rajab 1024/15 August 1615 he was assassinated because of his supposed Sunni leanings.

The composition of this page, with the first and last lines centred and shorter than the four lines in the middle of the page, indicates that the calligraphic specimen was not produced for inclusion in a complete Qur'an. Moreover, Mir 'Imad has signed and dated the piece in the lower right and left corners, also typical of pages copied for complete Qur'ans. Probably, given the context of the page and the fine illuminated 'taj' (headpiece) above the calligraphy, the page was placed at the beginning of an album. Both illumination and the Fatihis (opening) mark the commencement of the Qur'an, while the first line of the Fatiha (the asma'at) and illuminated pages or sections of pages also appear at the start of many books on a range of subjects.

1. Qafi Ahmad/Miskin, 1599, 167
THE two couplets read:

Seize the day, for the world is fleeting.
In the eyes of the wise the moment is
better than the whole world.
Alexander, who ruled a whole world,
At the very moment when he died,
left the world.'

This album page contains a Mughal
painting mounted above the calligraphy,
which suggests that the calligraphy
travelled to India at some point before the
middle of the seventeenth century when it
was added to an album. The couplets have
been separated from the floral illumination
of the page by being placed in tabirs, cloud-
lke forms often used by sixteenth- and
seventeenth-century Persian and Mughal
calligraphers and illuminators. The style
of illumination to the corners and around
the text developed in the period of Shah
'Abbas. Whereas geometric forms and
spiral arabesques dominated sixteenth-
century Safavid illumination, exuberant
floral sprays and the joining lobed form
called a 'ajr, rendered here in green at the
upper right and lower left, characterize
illumination in the time of Shah 'Abbas.

Today Iranians consider Mir 'Imad
to be the greatest exemplar of nasta'liq
script. The elegance of his long strokes
and consistency of his letter forms
certainly contribute to this perception.
His assassination, which was willed, if
not ordered, by Shah 'Abbas, adds to the
romantic history of this figure. Fortunately,
he had numerous followers who kept his
style and legend alive.

1 Translation, Rita Gebzeizyaph.

While calligraphers such as Mir 'Imad copied
whole manuscripts, single pages containing
one or more couplets of poetry were their
bread and butter. Scribes sold such pages to
a wide range of collectors in Iran and abroad,
especially in India. Librarians mounted them
in albums, often with highly decorative
borders, such as the ones that surround this
page. If the owner of such an album wished
to change the order of the calligraphies
and paintings in the album or wished to dispose
of one of them, he could do so by removing
either the folio or simply the calligraphy or
painting itself without disturbing the borders.

Often albums of calligraphy were organized
in order to demonstrate the chain of
development of a particular script by placing
the work of a scribe's student or master on
the page facing his work.

The gold lancet-leaf forms in the spaces
between the lines of script are typical of the
decorative style that developed under Shah
'Abbas. This replaced the small yellow and
red flowers and leaves associated with
manuscripts from Shiraz or the fine gold
sprinkling on Tabriz manuscripts in the
fifteenth century. The nasta'liq script itself
maintains the elegance and control that
characterize the work of Mir 'Imad.

Often the subject matter of such pages
of poetry centres on love, and in the Persian
context the love is usually unrequited or
embodies disappointment. These lines read:

A young man said to a wise old man,
What can be done, if the beloved will
flee from me when I get old?
The finely spoken wise old man replied,
When you get old you too will flee
from the beloved.'

1 Translation, Rita Gebzeizyaph.
A scribe
Signed: 'Riza drew it'
Isfahan, c.1600
Ink and opaque watercolour on tinted paper; page 15.75 x 12.4 cm, image 10 x 7 cm
Published: Cohn 1993, 98-100, fig. 65; Cohn 1996, 73-4, cat. no. 38; Adamova 2000, 33; Porter 2004, cat. no. 27; Porter 2004, 168, cat. no. 73; British Museum, ME 1920.0917.0.271.1

Page of nasta’liq calligraphy
Signed by Gauhar Shad, daughter of 'Imad al-Mansuri (Mir 'Imad)
Isfahan, dated 1030/1620-21
Yellow (or gold) ink on blue paper; page 32 x 19 cm, within margins 14 x 5 cm
Inscription: Agra Museum of Iran, Isfahan, inv. no. 38

These five couplets were copied by Gauhar Shad, the daughter of Mir 'Imad. Although far less is known about female calligraphers and artists in the Safavid period than their male counterparts, some texts do mention women who had developed proficiency in one of the arts connected with the production of manuscripts. Gauhar Shad married a calligrapher, Mir Muhammad 'Ali, and their three sons, Ruhid, 'Abd al-Razaq, and Yahya followed in their parents’ footsteps. After the assassination of Mir 'Imad, his family were persecuted and many of them emigrated to Turkey and India where they continued to practise their art. However, Gauhar Shad lived in Isfahan from the time of Mir 'Imad's death in 1615 until 1032/1623-7, when she moved to Qazvin for five years. The couplets have been translated as follows:

He is [God]:
You are the king of the beauties, and the Turks of Khiva your Hindu slaves,
The collars around the necks of the rebellious, your twisting curls
As soon as you left, the sun shone down ropes of gold
To pitch this turquoise tent in your army's camp.
Let's suppose that the pretender could become imperceptible like a mirage.
How could he ever stand even for one moment face to face with you?
The moon, which from time to time appears like a golden bow,
Ever desires to relocate itself next to you.
I have a prayer-laden heart, which seeks your protection.
Where is that hand
With which I can bind this talisman with the blood of my soul to your arm?
I have become like a cup overflowing with longing.
May this letter of longing, which the wind suddenly brings to you, be accepted.

1. Translation from Dennis French Brockman, Lecturer in Persian Studies and Iranian Literature, University of Manchester.
A caravan at the tomb of Hatam, from a Mahkāz al-Asrar (Treasury of Mysteries) of Haydar Khwarazmi

Painted by Riza-yi 'Abbasi, text copied by 'Imad al-Husaini (Mīr 'Imād)
Istanbul, dated 1023/1614
Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper; page 28 x 18 cm
Published: Soudavar 1992, 279, 281, no. 110g; Cadbury 1996, 187, cat. no. 60
Lent by the Art and History Collection, Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 251995.2.54

WRITTEN in Eastern Turkish, this poem consists of stories about great men. Hatam, or Hatun Tuq'ı, was a sixteenth-century Arab renowned for his generosity. After his death his grave in Arabia became a place of pilgrimage. With only six figures and one camel, this painting contains the bare minimum of elements to illustrate an encampment near Hatam's tomb. While the bearded figure at the lower right points to the tomb and acquires his companions with the story of Hatam, a youth drinks wine and eats fruit in the tent in the foreground (see detail), alluding to the dead man's hospitality. The tent in the middle ground contains three large bales, presumably of goods being transported by the caravan. One of them sits a rural dish and ewer for washing hands. Even the camel driven on the bottom gazes philosophically at the grave.

The tomb of Hatam resembles those found on the periphery of shrines in Iran. The actual caissies is set into a raised, tiled platform with an arched, upright headstone. Next to it is a smaller grave covered with stones and marked by a simple rock at its head. A lantern hangs above Hatam's grave and a small oil lamp sits at the side.

The painter Riza-yi 'Abbasi, whose signature appears on the flap of the tent in the foreground, was a highly significant figure at the court library of Shah 'Abbas. The son of 'Ali Aghar, who had worked at the court of Shah Isma'il, Riza earned the praise of his contemporaries in the last decade of the sixteenth century for the finesse of his brushwork and the beauty of his portraiture. Following the move of the Safavid court to Isfahan, he absented himself from the royal library from about 1603 to 1610, when he returned to court work, apparently because he had run out of money. Asola Soudavar has proposed that he and Mir 'Imad shared an interest in Sufism and an antagonism to the royal library. Since Mir 'Imad was assassinated one year after the completion of this painting (see cat. no. 7), and Riza-yi 'Abbasi continued to work for the Safavid court until 1635, the more likely situation is that the Sufi tendencies of the two artists were a more significant bond than a shared alienation from the court. Given the Turkish language of this manuscript, the patron may have been a member of one of the Qorghi tribes that Shah 'Abbas had

1 Qori, Ahmed, Istanbul 1899, 37.
The inscription at the top of this painting reads:

On the order of the prosperous, most noble, most pure
Highness, may God prolong his reign, is this likeness of the
work of Master Muhammad of Herat. [God’s] mercy be upon
him. The lovely, most comely of the slaves, I […] D was
made with the friendship of the most noble and decorated.
The work of the humble Riza-yi ‘Abbas.

Although the inscription states that the portrait is based on a
likeness by the sixteenth-century artist Muhammad, the figure’s
face conforms to Riza’s style of the 1620s. Not only the language
of the inscription but also the effaced seal beneath the seal point
to the patronage of Shah ‘Abbas himself.

Leaving aside the question of the sitter’s identity, the intrinsic
components of the painting provide an insight into several aspects
of art and society at the Safavid court in the 1620s. The choice of a
prototype by the artist Muhammad, who would have been active
at Herat when Shah ‘Abbas lived there as a prince, may reflect a
nostalgic selection of subject by the shah rather than by Riza. The
slight proportions of the figure as well as the taboret on which

he sits recall works of the 1560s to 1580s when Muhammad
was active. Despite these retrospective aspects of the painting,
the sitter’s luxurious gold brocade coat with its large blossoms
and curved fan-like, or asl, leaves reflects the style of Isfahan
and the type of opulent silk textiles available there in the
seventeenth century (see detail). Additionally, the gold plaques,
rocks, and cypress on either side of the youth are typical of portraits
by Riza throughout his career from around 1585 until 1635.

Although Persian texts are reticent on the subject of the
romantic life of Shah ‘Abbas, a portrait of the shah and a page by
Muhammad Qasim, dated 1627 (cat. no. 123), suggest that ‘Abbas
found handsome youths very appealing in the last years of his life.
This figure, however, also represents the fashion of the day, which
was characterized by large turbans, lavish silk textiles, and round-
cheeked young men and women. The safavī that the youth reads
would have contained poetry of the type written on single pages
in elegant nasta’liq script (see cat. nos 6, 11). Even if the identity
of the figure remains a mystery, he conforms to the image of the
gilded youth of Isfahan, whose styliness derived from and
depended on the trade and cosmopolitanism brought about by
Shah ‘Abbas.
Dish with image of a dandy
Northwest Iran, early 17th century
Ceramic, stoneware body with blue-and-black underglaze decoration; diam. 39.7 cm
Published: Cadbury 1999, 112, fig. 103;
British Museum, Gift of Sir A.W. Franks, ME 1896.0626.6

As Shah 'Abbas consolidated his power in Iran, trade expanded and boosted the economy. As a result of this relative prosperity and the move of the capital to Isfahan, a new class of dandies was born. Although these people were concentrated in Isfahan, the fashions associated with them, such as very large turbans and curling sideburns (see fig. 17), were imitated in provincial centres as well. This dish contains a mangiye of imagery: the head, shoulders and hands of a stylish youth in the centre; the eight panels with stylized auspicious symbols derived from Chinese Kraak-porselein (see cat. no. 78) on the sides; and the mediating band of blue-and-white overlapping petals associated with Safavid pottery from north-west Iran.

During the Shah 'Abbas period exports of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain to Portugal and the Netherlands increased significantly and large dishes with panels used as framing devices were especially popular. Iranian potters imitated this motif and often included versions of Chinese designs with figures or animals in landscape in the centre of their dishes. The inclusion of an unmistakably Safavid figure is thus exceptional. In addition, the central section contains several oddities and distortions. As if the potter wished to include the figure's hands at any cost, his small right hand waves in front of his chest while his tiny left hand holds a wine cup near behind his shoulder. While his fringed turban end flutters up behind him, another striped sash floats between his shoulder and his head at the left. Possibly what appears to be fringe was meant to be a feather and the floating sash is actually the turban end, misunderstood by the potter.

In a recent study of Safavid pottery Lisa Golombek has proposed that the Shah's taste shifted from the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century styles of Yuan and Ming porcelain to those of his own time, which included 'panelled borders and languid landscapes'. She suggests that in around 1625 Iranian potters began to add black outlines to designs that were formerly drawn in blue alone on a white ground. If these suppositions are correct, this dish could possibly be dated to the mid-1620s on the basis of its panels and the inclusion of black. However, it remains highly unusual in the range of seventeenth-century blue-and-white Iranian ceramics because of the image of the Persian dandy in its centre instead of a copy of a Chinese figure or landscape.

1 Golombek 2001, 255.
Robert Sherley
Unknown artist, British school, before 1628
Oil on canvas, 195 x 105 cm
Published: Toumaz 2008, 62, fig. 49
Travels of the Berkeley Will Trust

ONE of the truly novel policies of Shah Abbas was his openness to foreigners and non-Muslims. By 1598, when the capital moved to Isfahan, the Portuguese and, later, the Dutch had already established trade relations in India, China and Southeast Asia. The Portuguese had also taken control of Hormuz, the strategically located island in the Persian Gulf. In 1600, Queen Elizabeth I signed the charter of the East India Company and gradually the English began to sail or travel overland to Iran and the land beyond it to the east.

In November 1598 the eighteen-year-old Robert Sherley arrived in Iran with his elder brother Anthony, a soldier-adventurer who had already travelled to the west coast of Africa and Central America, and a party of twenty-three others, including eleven Europeans. Shah Abbas welcomed the brothers, sending Anthony in May 1599 as his representative to the rulers of Europe to promote a joint alliance against the Ottomans. Robert remained in Iran and married a Circassian Christian, Teresa. In 1608, with Anthony Sherley’s mission a failure, Shah Abbas dispatched Robert to Europe on a further embassy, promoting the anti-Turkish alliance and trade in European raw silk. Accompanied by his wife, Robert travelled first to Poland, Germany, Florence, the Vatican and, particularly, to Spain. Later, he went to Holland and England where he tried to encourage trade with Iran, but his efforts were blocked by the vested interests of the East India trading companies. In January 1613 he left again for Iran, arriving in Isfahan after surviving a gruelling two-year journey and an assassination attempt by the Portuguese. Keen to restore diplomatic relations with Spain and Portugal after recent hostilities on the Persian Gulf coast, Shah Abbas dispatched Robert again to Spain in December 1615. In 1627 he left England on his final journey to Iran, where he fell out of favour with the ageing Shah and died on 13 July 1628. Anthony Van Dyck was commissioned to paint the portraits of Robert Sherley and his wife Teresa in Rome during the Sherleys’ short visit between 22 July and 29 August 1622 (figs 4.1). It was Sherley’s third trip to Rome as Shah Abbas’s ambassador. The present portrait is also believed to have been painted during Sir Robert’s second mission to Europe, most probably when he was in England between January 1624 and March 1627. In this, as in the Van Dyck portrait, Sherley, now in his mid-forties, is depicted in a magnificent cloak with a design of stylized Persian female figures holding long-necked wine bottles, similar to the velvets produced at Mahan under Shah Abbas. This cloak is most likely the robe of honour presented to Sherley by Shah Abbas in 1598. To complete his Saraili image, Sherley wears a knee-length robe with a well-defined pattern showing men in a landscape lifting a large rock above their heads, which they hurl down on a dragon-slaying at their feet. Interestingly, while Sherley’s outer cloak conforms to the gold-ground silks produced during the reign of Shah Abbas, the pattern of the robe relates to silks produced in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. However, the robe has a completely different colour scheme from that of an exact copy in the Moscow State Armoury. For instance, which has gold and red on a pale blue ground. Sherley’s voluminous turban and silk and sash would have also been part of the gift of ceremonial costume presented by Shah Abbas. Although the Sherley brothers did not introduce firearms to the Salavah army, Sir Robert did help the Iranians in battle against the Ottoman Turks and around 1603–5 he was responsible for training Shah Abbas’s troops. 1 SGC and EKF

1 January 1607, 76.
2 Wheler, et al., 1940, 156–7
4 Geschiere et al., 1965, fig. 135.
5 January 1607, 79.

Fig. 18 Robert Sherley, by Anthony Van Dyck, 1622, oil on canvas 200 x 133.4 cm, Petworth Castle, National Trust, UK. acc. no 38.

Teresa Sherley
Unknown artist, British school, before 1628
Oil on canvas, 214 x 124 cm
Published: Toumaz 2008, 63, fig. 50
Travels of the Berkeley Will Trust

THE daughter of a Christian Circassian noble family, Teresa Sherley is depicted wearing a luminous silk dress with a repeated pattern of swaying pink flowers. The style of the dress with its tight sleeves, draped-in waist and organza cuffs, collar and bodice conform to that of the dresses worn by Englishwomen in the second decade of the seventeenth century. Her jewelled crown and veil represent a variation on the headdress of Isfahani women of the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The opulent, slitting silk of her dress and shawl, call to mind the very commodities that Shah Abbas wished to trade with Europe. Interestingly, portraits of Salavah women rarely ever depict them so luxuriously attired. Exotic in herself with her high arched brows and forthright gaze, Lady Sherley gives the impression of a serious woman of substance.

Her portrait shows her holding a jewelled pistol in her right hand and watch in her left, which may be allusions to Robert’s role in advancing the import of European technology to Iran, though E.K. Parshall has suggested that the firearm acknowledges Teresa’s dauntless courage, having intervened twice in her husband’s life to fend off assailants and save her husband’s life. 2 In November 1611 Teresa gave birth at the Sherley home in Sussex to a son, Henry, probably the first child born in England of Iranian descent. He remained in England during the Sherleys’ travels but died in childhood. Teresa’s exploits were not unknown in England and she became the subject of several Jacobean plays in her own lifetime. After a life of physical hardship and challenge Teresa faced her greatest ordeal after Robert’s death in Qazvin in 1628. She lost her worldly possessions and was accused of being an apostate for having converted in her early years to Christianity from Islam, for which she subsequently underwent arrest and trial. After three harvest years she was exonerated. Granted permission to leave Iran, she eventually reached Rome in December 1634, living out her days at her house near the Disraeli Carmelites convent of Santa Maria della Scala. She transferred Robert’s remains to Rome and died there in 1668, her tombstone recording that here lay ‘Teresa Sampsonia Amazonitis Sampfilli Circassiae Principis Filia’ (Teresa Sampsonia of the region of the Amazons, daughter of Sampfulus, Prince of Circassia). SGC and EKF

1 A print depicting Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia of 1612–13, rep. no. 1854.11317 and another portraying Princess Anne of Denmark from 1646, rep. no. O.8.179. In the Prints and Drawings Department of the British Museum show comparable designs.
2 Personal communication with Edward Petherick, May and July 2008. While Teresa Sherley did not actually share her husband’s activities, the piece may refer to her role in saving life from the Portuguese in Iran and when they set about on their way to Goa.

Fig. 19 Teresa Sherley, by Anthony Van Dyck, 1622, oil on canvas 200 x 133.4 cm, Petworth Castle, National Trust, UK. acc. no 38.
Letter from Robert to Anthony Sherley

Iznik, 10 September 1666
Ink on paper. 29.6 x 17 cm
The National Archives, ref. CO77/26, pp. 43-49

Robert Sherley, this letter's author, came privately to Iznik in November 1598 with his brother Anthony, later sent to Europe by Shah 'Abbas as his ambassador with the object of promoting a joint anti-Ottoman alliance. Anthony failed to return to Iran and the twenty-six-year-old Robert opens this letter of 10 September 1666 from Qazvin with a condemnation of his brother – now in Spain – for betraying Shah 'Abbas's trust as well as failing to honour other promises.

Robert's plea for artificers relates to his activities in modernizing the Safavid army. Besides Robert, several of the six Englishmen who remained in Iran with Robert served with distinction in the shah's forces, including the soldier-veteran Thomas Powell (about whose service Robert later wrote a personal commendation to James I) and John Ward, an un-named gunnery instructor.

The hope expressed by Robert that, of the three alternative postal routes being used, at least one will prove successful so that these letters 'will come to your hands' (i.e. Anthony's). The fact that this original letter is now British state property is evidence of its eventual interception by government agents, probably working for the English ambassador at Constantinople, and therefore of it never reaching Anthony (who was persona non grata with the English government).

Robert exhibits his knowledge of Farsi (Persian) by translating parts of 'Abbas's personal letter to Anthony, which Robert says he is enclosing. The shall lists his recent victories against the Turks at Tabriz, Marand, and Taur, last (all in Azerbaijan). Nakhchivan and Yerevan, stating how he intends to winter at Shervan (a district on the Caspian) and lay waste by fire territory around Van and Erzurum (to deny its usefulness to Ottoman forces).

Robert says he stayed on in Persia only in the hope of Angelo (Coitl) coming, referring to the dragonman (guide) who brought the Sherley party to Persia, and makes clear his impatience to return to England. The letter offers an insight into the two brothers' characters, with Anthony's failure to honour trust and friendship compared to Robert's honest amiability.

The pucelle letter style suggests Robert had little schooling before leaving England as a child to live in Italy. There are also signs of dyslexia, possibly accounting for the few surviving examples of Robert's writing. He left no personal accounts of his thirty years in the service of Shah Abbas, largely as envoy to Europe. Sherley died at Qazvin on 13 July 1628, aged forty-eight.

1. Until 1666, this could be a very early manuscript by Van Dyck.

The embassy of Khan ´Alam to the Safavid court

India, 19th century copy of original by Bishan Das
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper: page 38 x 26.5 cm, image 27.4 x 16 cm
Published: Grube and Sims 1995, 193, pl. III-d

In 1623 the Mughal ambassador to Iran, Mirza Bakht Khan, known as Khan ´Alam, set out for Iran in the company of the Iranian ambassador to India, who was returning home. Although the Mughals and Iranians enjoyed good relations and trade between the two countries was robust, the ever curious Jahangir dispatched a leading court artist, Bishan Das, to make a visual record of the shah, his courtiers and his meetings with Khan ´Alam. These three versions of Khan ´Alam’s embassy to Shah ´Abbas reveal how the original painting by Bishan Das achieved iconic status in the art of the Muslim courts of India. In fact, the Mughal emperor Jahangir remarked:

“When I sent Khan Alam to Persia, I sent with him a painter named Bishan Das, who was without equal in drawing likenesses, to take the likeness of the shah and his chief statesmen. He had drawn most of them and presented them for my inspection. He had drawn the portrait of my brother the shah in particular very, very well. Every one of the shah’s servants to whom I showed it said that he had drawn him very well.”

Although the original group scene by Bishan Das is now in a private collection, an accurate copy (cat. no. 19) was produced in the nineteenth century. Between early 1620, when Khan ´Alam returned to the Mughal court, and the nineteenth century, artists in the provincial courts of India produced numerous adaptations of the Bishan Das painting.

Jahangir reports that Shah ´Abbas and Khan ´Alam met many times, and in one passage he describes a hunt at Farahabad in Mazendaran where Khan ´Alam was particularly successful at shooting prey with a bow and arrow. The scene depicted here may well portray such a hunt. While Khan ´Alam, receiving a wine cup from Shah ´Abbas (centre), is the only figure wearing an Indian turban, the other figures who kneel to the right and left are notables from the court of Shah ´Abbas, identified by small inscriptions. In the right foreground the bearded figure is identified as Mirza Beg Taqar, while the man seated behind him is Isfandiyar Beg. The skin of this figure is darker than that of the other figures except for Khan ´Alam and his turban is tied slightly differently, which may support identifying him as Isfandiyar Khan, the ruler of Khwarazm. While Isfandiyar Khan reportedly visited the Safavid court in 1621–2, he had previously taken refuge in Iran on at least two occasions.

At the left the youth with a falcon is identified as “Yusuf Aqa”, the man seated behind Khan ´Alam as “Mehtar Haji”, and the two men at the lower left as “… Khan” and “Khwaja …”. Of these the only name that also appears on the original work is “Ist Khan qurshibash”. Connected to Shah ´Abbas through marriage, Ist Khan was appointed commander of the royal bodyguard (qurshibash) in 1612–13. “He was a courteous young man, endowed with many patrioneworthy qualities, shrewd and of a pleasant disposition.” By the time of Shah ´Abbas’s death in 1629 Ist Khan was among the two or three most powerful figures at the Safavid court.

Whereas the nineteenth-century copy of Bishan Das’s composition remains faithful in most matters of detail, a group of simplified works produced in Iran and India focuses on the two protagonists and the pageboy who serves them wine. Apparently, the Indian versions of this composition derive from a Mughal painting of the multi-figure composition from about 1630 with the pageboy standing at the right behind Shah ´Abbas, while the Persian rendition places the pageboy between the shah and the ambassador. Cat. no. 20 comes from an album that entered the British Museum in 1753 with the collection of the museum’s founder, Sir Hans Sloane. Despite the English inscription in the margin, “A Persian with his Arms”, the painting contains the characteristic details of the meeting of Shah ´Abbas and Khan ´Alam, the two kneeling figures exchanging a cup of wine, the azerkhan hat and long moustache of the shah and the Indian turban of the ambassador. The strip of sky at the top of the page suggests that the painting is unfinished and that the artist would have filled in the landscape even though the preserved prototype has no indication of a setting. As is evident, the facial features of Shah ´Abbas deviate markedly from those in the original Bishan Das portrait (cat. no. 1). Cat. no. 20 appears in an album containing portraits of the most illustrious sultans of the Deccan and of Mughal India, as well as a portrait of Shahs ´Abbas II and Sulayman of Iran who ruled from 1642 to 1694. Because of their Shi’i connections and at certain points a shared enmity towards the Mughals, the Safavids and sultans of the Deccan had enjoyed good relations and exchanged envoys for over a century by the time that the Mughals finally took control of Golconda in 1683. Thus the appearance of Khan ´Alam and Shah ´Abbas in a Deccani album made for commercial customers would have fitted into a general...
trend of imagery glorifying the past, exemplified by posthumous portraits of sultans and shahs.

By the eighteenth century what had originated as the representation of both a diplomatic visit and a rest on a hunt had metamorphosed into a picnic attended by Shah 'Abbas, Khan 'Alam, some Persian grandees, Indian servants, hunt attendants and now a male and female band (cat. no. 21). Where one horse and groom stood in the background of the Bishn Das painting, the artist of the later work has included five horses and grooms in the background of his picture. The hunt attendants now all wear Indian turbans. Despite the names of Shah 'Abbas and Khan 'Alam inscribed in the lower margin, the artist appears to have misunderstood the context of this scene. A similar version of this painting in Moscow contains inscriptions referring to Khan 'Alam as the ambassador of Shah Jahan instead of Jahangir and stating that the original was the work of Bichitr, another artist at the court of Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Instead of Bishn Das, Grube and Sims have proposed that the Moscow painting was the work of a Kashmiri artist, an attribution that may also apply to the painting shown here.

What these three later renditions of the meeting of Khan 'Alam and Shah 'Abbas demonstrate is the lasting impression that the successful Mughal embassy had in the public imagination of Mughal India. Although a certain number of Persian copies of the depiction of this meeting by the Safavid artist Riza-yi 'Abbasî were produced in Iran until about the 1670s, they tend to be extracts from the larger compositions. Only with the grand wall paintings of the palace of Shah 'Abbas II, the Chihil Sutton in Isfahan, do we find scenes of Safavid shahs entertaining ambassadors that glorify the dynasty in a similar fashion to the Mughal images (see fig. 7, p. 28). As with the portraits of the Sherleys, the job of revealing the scope of foreign diplomats, merchants and adventurers on Persian soil in the reign of Shah 'Abbas fell to chroniclers, both Iranian and foreign, and painters, more often foreign than local.


6 To ensure names, the identification of identical leg does not appear on the earlier version of this image, which is most probably the original work by Bishn Das. In 1602–3 Shah 'Abbas received an envoy from Peer Khizar, the future Shah Jahan, at the same time as Mughal Khan. Finally by the artists of the 17th-century copies evolved the 1618 version with the later art.
IN addition to dispatching ambassadors to the countries of Europe and Asia, Shah 'Abbas sent merchants to Europe with silk to be traded for silver. This letter is addressed to Charles, King of the Franks, a general term referring to Europeans, but almost certainly intended for Charles I of England, who ruled from 1625 to 1649. After a flowery introduction the letter notes that hospitality and assistance have always been extended in Iran to the merchants from England. Shah 'Abbas then goes on to ask Charles to 'depute your representatives to reciprocate and to treat my traders as well as possible and not to hinder their activities, to make life easy for them and always keep the doors of correspondence open.' Even if this was not carried by Robert Sherley himself, the letter is the type of document with which he would have been entrusted as the shah's emissary to the courts of Europe.

By the end of the reign of Shah 'Abbas the mechanisms for the trade of Iranian silk for European silver were well established. Following the forced migration in 1604 of the Armenian population of Julfa on the Araxes river, which runs between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Shah 'Abbas ordered a suburb of Isfahan to be built for the displaced Armenians. Called New Julfa, this area remains the Armenian quarter of Isfahan to this day. To help the Armenians establish businesses, the shah offered them interest-free loans. Because of their extensive pre-existing trade networks with Armenian merchant communities in Turkey, the Levant, India and Europe, they were perfectly suited to the expansion of trade that Shah 'Abbas envisioned as one of theynchins of his rejuvenation of the Safavid economy. In 1618 the Armenians took over the monopoly of the export of raw silk from the British and Europeans, so by the period of this letter they were overseeing a highly lucrative and expanding market. Their protection in the foreign lands where they traded was thus a serious matter.

The calligraphic style and format of this letter are typical of official Safavid documents. The nasta'liq script is legible and written on the horizontal rather than the diagonal used for a page of poetry. On the reverse is the royal seal of Shah 'Abbas, another standard feature of such documents.

1 Translation, Bita Gheissari, Welsh 1971, 56, given a slightly different translation.
As the Armenian population grew from the late 13th century, new churches were built in New Julfa, the community erected new churches, schools and other institutions to serve its people. Each church would have required sets of precious metal chalices, plates, crucifixes and other objects used in the practice of the Armenian Christian rite. Although these objects would have been made in Iran, they exhibit no influence of Sassanid metalwork. Rather, this chalice, from which the communion wine would have been drunk, more closely resembles late Byzantine metalwork with its bands of repoussé oval motifs.

Thanks to the business incentives that Shah 'Abbas granted the New Julfa Armenians and their monopoly on the silk trade, the community generated great wealth until the 1660s. Yet, on the basis of what remains of their church silver, one cannot accuse them of extravagance. Since the Armenian Church frowned upon the use of precious metals, many surviving metal religious utensils are made of bronze. Nonetheless, the Armenians included skilled gold- and silversmiths who produced precious-metal censers for holy books and some liturgical items. Most probably many of the silver and gold church furnishings were melted down in the eighteenth century when Isfahan fell to the Afghans and the extant pieces are a faint reflection of a more opulent tradition.

Like the chalice (cat. no. 24), this censer follows a style that was not current in the Islamic metalworking ateliers of Safavid Isfahan. Instead, its shape and decoration reflect a tradition that ultimately derives from Byzantine and Coptic censers of the sixth and seventh centuries and remained current in Armenian metalwork through the medieval period until the seventeenth century. A frieze of figures in relief decorates the side of the object. Faces punctuate the inscription band around the rim at the points below the three lugs to which chains would have been attached. Although the figures around the sides of the censer are very rubbed and difficult to read, the decorative programme of such pieces usually consists of scenes from the life of Christ. Vrej Nersessian has explained that the deacon would hold the censer in his right hand during the Divine Liturgy and the ark containing the incense in his left. The celebrant would spoon the incense out of the ark and into the censer. Each of them would say the appropriate prayer while performing these functions.

1. Nersessian 2001, 123, cat. 32. This censer is nearly identical to one from the Church of St Gregory in Ani from the thirteenth century.
THE Armenians who settled in New Julfa brought their own traditions of religious manuscript production with them. This gospel, copied in Isfahan one year after the foundation of All Saviours Cathedral, includes a lavishly illuminated double-page opening with St Mark copying a text, opposite a page with a pair of figures holding birds and animals forming the initial letter of a word and with other letters composed of birds. Above this is a richly decorated panel of quatrefoil devices surmounted by a pair of confronting lions in the upper margin.

The illuminated decoration of the headpiece closely resembles that of a New Testament cope in cilia (Lesser Armenia in modern Turkey) in 1280 but illuminated in 1618 in New Julfa on the order of Khwaja Stazir, the patriarch of a very wealthy Armenian family. The confronted birds and bowl in the upper margin of the 1618 manuscript recall the confronted lions found in this manuscript. According to Nersessian, New Julfa manuscript illumination was a conscious revival of the manuscript illuminations of thirteenth-century Cilician Armenia. 

These earlier manuscripts were brought to Isfahan and copied by a number of artists. While the decorative panels and animals of the seventeenth-century New Julfa headpieces resemble one another closely, the depictions of St Mark reveal the hands of different artists. In a 1618 painting the artist Mestrop of Khitan (c. 1590–1652) produced a two-dimensional rendering of the saint’s face, whereas this version includes stylized V-shaped wrinkles on his forehead. The treatment of drapery also diverges: in the 1618 painting the folds are dramatically highlighted with yellow, while the earlier artist has used gold to outline the drapery and darker paint to indicate the folds. That a number of artists were working in the service of the Armenians in New Julfa underscores the vibrancy of the arts of both the Armenians and the Muslims of Isfahan in the first half of the seventeenth century.

1 Nersessian 2005, 217.
2 Ibid.

26

Illustrated gospel: portrait and headpiece of the Gospel of St Mark

Copied in Isfahan, 1607

Gold, watercolour and ink on paper; page 19 × 13.3 cm

Yusuf Museum, Isfahan

THIS double-page opening contains two of the canon tables that are typically found in Armenian gospels. The tables are set within an architectural structure of two arches on each page separated by columns set in ornamental bases. On the right-hand page in the upper margin two birds hold fish in their beaks at the right and two others with their long necks at the left. In the right-hand margin a multicoloured bird perches on the horizontal extension of the ‘roof’ above the arches, while below it six more birds stand in the branches of a stylized tree. On the left in the upper margin two confronted cockerels are separated by a bowl on a foot that appears to contain pearls. A third cockerel stands on the extension of the band that forms the lower border of a panel containing concentric half arches. Below it in the left-hand margin is a tall vase and blossoms.

As with the gospel of 1607 (cat. no. 26), the decoration of this manuscript derives from the thirteenth-century prototype of Cilician gospels. The inclusion of birds, plants, a geometrized panel of vine-scroll decoration and the arches supported by columns ultimately derives from early Christian symbols of the altar, arched vault (ciborium) or Holy Sepulchre in which Christ was buried, and the fountain of paradise. The form of the canon tables dates back to at least the tenth century, if not to the earliest Christian manuscripts.

27

Illustrated gospel: double-page opening and cover (right)

Copied in Isfahan, 1627

Gold, watercolour and ink on paper; page 27.5 × 21 cm

Yusuf Museum, Isfahan
Silk brocade band
Isfahan, 17th century
Silk brocade with gold and silver threads: 14 x 58 cm
Vank Museum, Isfahan

Called a sulas, or amice, this strip of silk brocade would have been worn over the shoulders of an Armenian Christian priest, symbolizing the yoke of Christ. It exemplifies the textiles that were produced in Isfahan and traded by the Armenians in the seventeenth century. The design of a vine scroll with an assortment of flowers in red and blue derives from Safavid decorative vocabulary. Unlike the metal objects and manuscripts produced for liturgical use, these textiles were at the centre of the interaction between the Safavid leadership and indigenous Iranian population and the Armenians. The Armenians were involved at every level of silk production and trade, but the decoration of the silks was the point at which the new taste in design introduced under Shah 'Abbas and the marketplace converged. While this piece had a specifically Armenian liturgical function, its technique and decoration are the same as one would find on textiles produced for export and for wealthy Persians. Furthermore, since a number of Armenians served in similar jobs to those of the mamlaks, the lines of demarcation between the population groups in Isfahan by the 1620s were somewhat blurred. As long as these groups understood that their first allegiance was to Shah 'Abbas, they were allowed to prosper and accumulate the wealth with which they could acquire the luxury items that they also sold.


28 detail (below)

Edict of Shah 'Abbas I granting the land of New Julfa to the Armenians (facsimile)
Isfahan, 1028/1618
Ink on paper; 20 x 14.5 cm
Vank Museum, Isfahan

In the same year that the Armenians in Isfahan wrested the monopoly on the export of raw silk to Europe from the control of the English, Shah 'Abbas formally granted the land of New Julfa to its Armenian community. This firman, or edict, confirms this land grant and states that it will be registered in the official records of the Safavid government. Copied in nasta'liq script, the document bears five seals, some of which have been covered by later repairs.

The edict is highly important because it confirms the status of the Armenians of New Julfa as residents of Isfahan, not just as guests. Although the Armenians had been given citizenship and enjoyed many freedoms within their enclave, they were there at the pleasure of the shah. Since their society was orderly and law-abiding, the shah treated them with the greatest respect. Their contribution to Safavid Iran exceeded the purely monetary since their international trade networks encouraged foreign merchants to come to Isfahan and this in turn stimulated the economy and cultural life of Safavid Iran.
DURING the reign of Shah 'Abbas world trade conditions changed, a situation reflected in the foreign policy and economy of Iran. Raw silk and luxurious silk brocade and velvet fabrics, which Iranians had already been selling to the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, now formed a large proportion of their trade with Europe. The gold and silver that Iran received in exchange was crucial to its economy because not only were the precious metals melted down and retracted as Iranian coins, but also the coins were used to buy goods from India.

As William Florey and Patrick Clawson have noted, India was Iran’s largest trading partner by far in the seventeenth century. In exchange for textiles, sugar and indigo from India, Iran provided silk, fruits and horses. However, the value of commodities coming to Iran exceeded the outflow to India, leading to an imbalance of payments in India’s favour. As a result, the Spanish pieces of eight (cat. nos 38–9), Venetian ducats (cat. no. 37) and English crowns (cat. nos 40–2) brought to Iran by European traders played a very significant role in the Safavid economy. Moreover, no gold and very little silver were mined in Iran in this period, so the only option was to acquire foreign silver and gold.

By comparison to the large, impressive European coins, those minted under Shah ‘Abbas were small and not uniformly well struck. Nonetheless, European travellers admired their purity. The silver differential had several causes. First, whereas Europe was relatively awash in silver from newly discovered South American sources, Iran had to rely on foreign bullion. Secondly, not all foreign specie were melted down and transformed into Iranian coinage. Some were converted to wire, of the type used to wrap silk threads for luxury textiles. European accounts of Safavid court ceremonies describe silver and gold implements, platters and vessels, although no examples from the Safavid era are extant. Moreover, what Europeans perceived as silver and gold may have been highly polished brass and high tin bronze, not precious metals at all. Diverting silver and gold bullion from its use as money into objects for domestic use put further pressure on the currency and led to repeated attempts over the course of the seventeenth century to prohibit or curtail the export of silver and gold from Iran. These efforts were flouted and largely unsuccessful, so that by the end of the Safavid reign in the eighteenth century, the silver and gold content of coins was about 30 per cent less than it had been under Shah ‘Abbas.

1 Florey and Clawson 2000, 347.
2 Florey and Clawson 2000, 348.
3 Florey and Clawson 2000, 365, n. 56, quoting Jean de Thuyer, Der Ikhtiar, 1637, 175.
34 Silver leuwe daalder (lion dollar)
Dutch Republic, 1669
Diam. 4.5 cm, weight 27.09 g
British Museum, Bequest of Frederick William Handcock, CM 1920.0907.416

35 Silver leuwe daalder (lion dollar)
Dutch Republic, 1649
Diam. 4.0 cm, weight 27.01 g
British Museum, CM 1900.0503.2

36 Silver ducatoon of the Archduke of Austria
Antwerp, 1619
Diam. 4.4 cm, weight 31.86 g
British Museum, CM 1935.0504.68

37 Silver ducato (ducat)
Venice, first period of the ducal rule of Antonio Priuli, 1615–20
Diam. 4.1 cm, weight 28.06 g
British Museum, CM 1862.1001.429

38 Silver piece of eight
Spain, 1617, reign of Philip III
Diam. 4.9 cm, weight 27.22 g
British Museum, CM SSB 145.146

39 Silver piece of eight
Spain, 1618, reign of Philip III
Diam. 4.2 cm, weight 20.98 g
British Museum, CM C.0339

40 Silver crown, obverse
England, 1603–4, period of James I
Diam. 4.5 cm, weight 29.62 g
British Museum, CM Grober 568

41 Silver crown
England, period of Charles I, 1643–6
Diam. 4.3 cm, weight 29.82 g
British Museum, CM Grober 574

42 Silver crown, reverse
England, period of James I
Diam. 4.5 cm, weight 29.84 g
British Museum, CM E 710

43 Silver crown, reverse
England, period of Charles I
Diam. 4.8 cm, weight 28.06 g
British Museum, CM E 711
One of the most characteristic artistic expressions of the period of Shah 'Abbas and his successors is a group of silk carpets embellished with precious metal. They were produced for both export and local use, and they are mentioned in the accounts of European travellers in Iran, where they are referred to as 'carpets of silk and gold'. Thomas Herbert described this type of carpet in the palace of Shah 'Abbas at Agra, near the Caspian sea,' and Adam Olearius, secretary to the German ambassador who visited the Shah's court in Shah Safi in the 1630s, noted that 'the floor was covered all over with tapestry, whereof the ground-work was of gold and silver.'

The gold and silver effect seen in both carpets and textiles of this period was achieved by the use of a precious-metal thread, produced by winding thin strips of gilded silver on the diagonal around a silk thread. The edges of the strips were not contiguous but were spaced slightly apart so that the colour of the silk thread beneath was partially visible. For a gold effect the strips were wound around a yellow silk core, and for a silver effect, around a white silk core. The metal strips used to create this were actually the same. The eye integrates the gleam of the metal with the colour of the silk and the perceived difference between the gold and silver is actually an optical illusion.

Such silk and gold carpets can be seen as items of 'conspicuous consumption', but their brilliant appearance can be short-lived. Silk carpets do not wear as well as those made of wool, and the precious
metal strips wound around the silk, ever formed, contained insufficient gold to keep them from tarnishing. Furthermore, the colours of dyed silk are not as stable as those used for woollen carpets and tend to fade with exposure to light.

The weaving of carpets of this type had probably begun before the capital moved to Isfahan, but with the growth of the luxury silk trade promoted by Shah 'Abbas, their production soon increased. Although these two carpets are not identical, their designs and dimensions resemble each other closely enough to be considered a pair.

The central four-lobe form that overlaps a projection with a wide base at either end conforms to a compositional type common to this group of carpets. Moreover, a stylistic development from carefully articulated motifs to more fluid, flowing decoration is evident in the type, which suggests that these carpets continued to be made over a number of decades. The large, stylized lotus blossoms in the field are typical of a later stage in the stylistic progression of these carpets that may coincide towards the end of the reign of Shah 'Abbas or later.

1. Heberden 1677, 175.
2. Cockerell 1862, 271.
3. Flou 1999, 27. Dutch East India Company VOC documents from 1649 refer to this type of carpet being sold in pairs.
Prayer rug
Iran, late 17th or early 18th century
Woolen pile with precious metal thread on a silk foundation;
Published: Thompson 2000, pl. 22, with relevant bibliography
Private collection, Italy; to be donated to MATAM,
Museum of Antique Textile Arts, Milan

This carpet belongs to a group, now recognized as a distinctive type, known as ‘Salting’ carpets, named after the British collector who gave one to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1909. Carpet scholars originally considered the group to be sixteenth-century Persian until 1941, when Kew Frohman proposed that they were Turkish and from the nineteenth century. His arguments are no longer accepted, and the carpets are once again acknowledged to be Persian, though precisely when they were made remains a matter of debate.

The composition of this carpet follows the form recognized for prayer rugs, with the field in the shape of an arch with corner ‘spandrels’ in a contrasting colour. The borders have cartouches with Qur’anic verses alternating with lobed roundels containing the phrase, ‘Glory to my Most High Lord and to His Praise’. The outer border consists of all of Sura 2, verse 255, and the inner border, written in a very simplified nasta’liq script, copies verse 56 of Sura 33. The verse in the outer border includes these lines: ‘God! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-sustaining Eternal. No shamer can seize Him nor sleeper. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there who intercedes in His presence except as He permits? This reference to intercession can be interpreted in Shi’i light as a reference to the Imams who intercede with God ‘as He permitted’, which is of key importance for proving that this carpet and others in the same group were produced in a Shi’i context, most certainly Iran.

Thirty-five prayer carpets of the same general type remain in the collection of the Topkapi Saray Museum in Istanbul, the former royal palace of the Ottomans. All are in as similarly excellent condition as this example, which may also have been in the collection of the Topkapi Saray at one time. It is thought that a number left the collection during the reign of Sultan ‘Abdul Hamid II (r. 1876–1909). As a result of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–8, Istanbul was full of refugees and there was a general shortage of food and money. The sultan had moved his residence to the relative seclusion of the Yildiz Palace, and the Topkapi Saray was neglected. During this time of crisis some treasures were removed from the old palace and sold in the bazaar. Most likely a number of prayer rugs were among these items and, having entered the trade, were sold to wealthy families in Europe. Some clues as to their date is provided by the inscription on one prayer rug, now in a private collection. It appears to be dated AH 999, which corresponds to 1590–91. The wording of the inscription indicates that the carpet was a gift to the Ottoman sultan from the Safavid shah, but it is, from Shah ‘Abbas to Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–95). The circumstances of this gift must likely relate to the Treaty of Istanbul signed in 1590 between the Ottomans and the Safavids. Ishak Mirza Manuchi, the Safavid historian, refers to the embassy sent to conclude the treaty, which was led by Mahdudji Khan Ghaufili, son of the governor of Ardabil. He states: ‘The embassy set off, accompanied by the Sultan’s envoy, Veli Aga, the chief taster, taking with it a friendly letter from the Shah to the Ottoman Sultan and suitable gifts. What gifts were valuable? Persian specialties such as perfume and horses would probably have been included, though carpets, textiles and robes of honour are also known to have featured in previous Safavid diplomatic gifts. Descriptions of such gifts emphasize not only the preciousness of the offering but also the quantities of items in each category, all of which would demonstrate the wealth and largesse of the Shah.

Given the Shi’i nature of the inscriptions on this and related prayer rugs, the Ottomans would have had little use for them. By contrast, the Safavids would have employed such carpets in mosques, such as the Mosque of ‘Aliyeh Lutfallah, or wherever they wished to pray. The fact that they gave prayer rugs with Shi’i inscriptions to the Ottomans may have been a way of needing their Sunni enemy while making a show of Persian generosity. Fortunately, the Ottomans simply put the rugs away, so today they are among the best-preserved carpets from the later Safavid period.

2 Bayat 1999, 139.
3 Bayat 1999, 139, no. 37.
**D Naqsh** (inner cover) of a bookbinding

Persia, 15th century

Leather filigree cover multicoloured paper ground; 25.8 × 16.8 cm

Published: Lowey and Birch 1988, 376-5, 41, 474; Lowey 1988, 216-27, 41, 75

Acquired: M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Purchased: Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections 1986.13

The palette and design of the central field of this damaqshu embody the new decorative style introduced during the reign of Shah 'Abbas. Whereas sixteenth-century bookbindings and damaqshu usually contain a central medallion with pendants and corner pieces, the composition of this example more closely resembles those of the carpets of silk, silver and gold (see cat. nos 43-44) than the damaqshu of the previous century. Moreover, the palette of minute gold filigree on blue, red or green paper has given way to the warm peach, tan and maroon hues favoured in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. While the vines form a central lozenge, the more dominant elements of the field include four stylized blossoms at the cardinal points and curling vines terminating in white split-palmette leaves.

The gilded cartouches in the border contain the following lines of poetry, which suggest that the damaqshu comes from the binding of an album of calligraphy:

Ink was brought from the root of the night,

From the luminous morning,

The seven globes of the universe turn at the foot of your calligraphy by divine grace,

O Lord, what can the pen of your might do?

Calligraphy: worthy of sovereignty.

The white split-palmette leaves in the field recall the white vine and split-palmette leaves on the prayer rug (cat. no. 45) in their scale and liveliness, though their shape is broader than those in the carpet. Likewise, the cartouches of poetry around the field resemble those in the upper portion of the carpet border. Given the close relationship between carpets and bookbindings, one might ask whether the makers of both types of objects relied on a single design source. Such a possibility would be feasible in the early decades of the seventeenth century because of the strong centralizing impact of the court of Shah 'Abbas, but it cannot be confirmed without more documentary evidence.

1 Lowey 1988, 216.
Lamp stand

Iran, first quarter of the 16th century
Gilt, incised and inlaid with black composition; h. 60.5 cm
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, inv. no. IR 2202

This stately lamp stand would have been surmounted by a domical cover, which, when reversed, would serve as the receptacle for lamp oil. Six narrow inscription bands and stylized floral motifs decorate the whole surface of the lamp. As on many metal objects, the themes of the inscriptions on lamp stands of this type often ostensibly refer to the function of the object but actually carry a mystical meaning. The inscriptions have been read and identified by Anatoli Ivanov as follows. Near the rim is an extract from a shahad (love poem) of the fifteenth-century poet Khātīb Tūshzī:

On that night when the moon of your countenance
became the lamp of our solitude,
The candle melted, for it could not bear the fire of our
converser!
The instant when you throw the veil from your
moon-like face
Will be the sunrise of our happiness.

Additional verses by Abū Khuzasānī, Sa'dī, Amir Khusravī Dihlavī, Hāfiz Tūshzī, Hafiz, Khātīb Tūshzī and an unknown poet all concern light or the attraction of the moth for the flame as a metaphor for love. This in turn most likely has a mystical meaning.

While some examples of this type bear dedications to the most prominent Shi'i shrines, others would have been used in secular settings. This lamp bears the name of the owner, Sayyid Muhammad ibn Sayyid Jan Shīvānī, indicating that it belonged to a person claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad. The frequency of this kind of lighting implement in religious settings is difficult to determine since mosques such as the Mosque of Shaykh ʿAbdullāh al-Muzzammī do not contain any lamps that are not electric. A single seventeenth-century silver mosque lamp, which would have been suspended in the Shīr of Sa'd al-Dīn at Ardabīl, is extant (cat. no. 88). Otherwise, a small number of illustrations from manuscripts with religious subjects and some nocturnal scenes inform us of a narrow range of lighting implements that does not include lamp stands like this one. Two illustrations from the mid-sixteenth-century Fābānah, thought to have been commissioned by Shah ʿAbbās (r. 1534–76), contain gold or brass and silver mosque lamps hanging in shrines. A tall candlestick with a wide foot and no

1. Lockwood and Ivanov 1994, cat. no. 203.
3. Lockwood and Ivanov 1994, cat. no. 203.
5. Gubay 1993, 104.
Lamp stand
Iran, last quarter of the 16th century
brass, inlaid and incised with black composition;
h. 52.7 cm, diam. of base 27.7 cm
Published: Melikian-Chirvani 2007
Collection of Hossein Afsahi

UNLIKE the taller lamp stand (cat. no. 47) with four horizontal bands along the shaft of the pillar, this example has only two, one above the flaring base and one below the inscription and vine scrolls beneath the rim. The main decoration of the piece consists of plain ribbed zigzags alternating with floral scrolls and a central band of naskhi inscription. The space for this inscription is formed by shifting the zigzag of the upper band to form a lozenge in which the writing can fit. The lowest zigzag band consists of three rather than two ribs, lending interest to the overall design and the impression of weight to the lower part of the lamp stand.

A.S. Melikian-Chirvani has identified and translated the poetry inscribed on this object: 'The inscription band near the base of the lamp stand contains the text: cartouches, from a poem by a 17th-century poet, Mulla Hayrat Tun, and concerns the heart being consumed by a burning love like a butterfly circling a candle whose wings are consumed if it approaches too closely. The author of the second poem in the centre of the shaft of the lamp stand is Amir Khusraw Dihlavi. The theme involves the soul burning with love for the beloved and the jealousy one feels if the flame burns for someone else.

Melikian-Chirvani asserts that the inscription just below the rim indicates that this lamp stand was an endowment to the Shrine of Ali at Najaf. The lines read: 'Husayn, son of Abu Bakr, gave a vow to consecrate a flame to the pure spirit of the Prophet so that the memory of the sanctuary would be forever luminous [in] the funeral bed of the mausoleum of the Prophet, Friend of God. While the inscription is not specific enough to associate the lamp stand beyond a doubt with the Shrine of Ali, it does indicate that such lamp stands continued to be donated to Shi'i shrines at the end of the sixteenth century. This continued a practice that began at least as early as 1539, when the largest extant 16th-century example of such lamp stands was donated to the Shrine of Imran Riza at Mashhad.' Although the 1539 piece was produced in Lahore, its decorative motifs all derive from Salavid metalwork prototypes.

2. Zabowski 1997, fig. 130.
THE Safavid dynasty, of which Abbas the Great (Abbas I) was the fifth shah, was one of the few empires in the history of the Muslim world to have outwardly adopted and vigorously promoted Shi'i Islam. All the evidence suggests that the Safavid shahs took this responsibility very seriously. They often portrayed themselves as personally pious, as good Shi'i performers all the rituals of the religiously devout. They also gave money, gifts and patronage to Shi'i good causes. These included the construction, repair and decoration of shrines (fig. 21), the establishment of seminaries (madrasas), the sponsorship of religious scholarship, the suppression of religious dissidents and heretics, and the incorporation of Shi'i scholars into the organs of government.1 Shah 'Abbas was particularly successful in developing this religious sense of an Iranian Shi'i identity. As with his predecessor shahs, he missed few opportunities to present himself as the worthy leader of the Iranian nation, descended from the previous shah. He also exploited the idea that he was the 'Shadow of God' on earth, and therefore deserving of praise, perhaps even adoration, from his subjects.2 In this, his propaganda techniques were not so different from the previous Safavid shahs. What perhaps marks him out is the lengths to which he would go to demonstrate his religious as well as dynastic qualifications to rule.

The Safavids, though, were not merely a powerful clan or tribal federation who had happened to take control of Iranian lands: they were a militant religious order (a tariqa, or Sufi brotherhood) with political ambitions long before they became an Iranian dynasty. Their power relied on the loyalty of the devotees of that order—the famous Qizilbash ('Red Heads'). The Safavid dynasty had therefore created a problem for itself. As the leader of a Sufi brotherhood, Shah 'Abbas and the shahs before him had to fulfill certain roles within the order. The Qizilbash, the hardcore devotees of the order who had effectively become the armed forces of the Safavid empire, were divided into warring factions, and the shah had to control this destructive factionalism while maintaining his own power.

As a Shi'i monarch, however, the shah had certain responsibilities to the 'ulama, who provided, in the form of Shi'i Islam, the ideology with which he might rule. Adopting Shi'i Islam as the 'official religion' enabled the shah to bring a certain unity to the Safavid empire and also to have a rallying cry when forces for imperial expansion and internal stability were required. Shah 'Abbas is widely credited with having solved the contradictions inherent in holding these two positions (Sufi shaykh and Shi'i shah) by, on the one hand, subjugating the Qizilbash (through the creation of an alternative military force) and by, on the other, buying off the 'ulama (through his willingness to support their pet interests, while not allowing them serious power at court).3 Whether this is an accurate description is another matter, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that he was keen to engender the loyalty of the religious scholars by sponsoring the things that were important to them. The 'ulama's priorities included the preservation of the Shi'i shrines, the protection of Shi'i communities under Ottoman control (particularly in southern Iraq), the establishment and maintenance of the structures of Shi'i learning (the seminaries), the expansion of the influence of the religious law (shar'ia) and the preservation of Shi'i orthodoxy by stamping out 'heretical' groups (including Sunni Islam). In each of these areas Shah 'Abbas pursued policies from which the religious scholars would take heart. He oversaw and encouraged the entrenchment of Shi'i forms of religious life in Safavid Iran among both the elite and the general populace. In this chapter I examine these manifestations of Shi'ism, paying particular attention to the ritual activities associated with the shrines at Mashhad, Qum and Ardabil, but also the activities at smaller shrines.

When the Safavids came to power at the turn of the sixteenth century, they set about distinguishing themselves from the previous rulers of Iran. While these previous rulers had been nominally Sunni, the leader of the Safavid Sufi order at the time, and the first Safavid shah of Iran, Isma'il, declared Shi'i Islam the religion of the empire and claimed a line of descent from the Seventh Shi'i Imam, Musa al-Kazim.4 Exactly why Isma'il did this is debatable, but the declaration had a number of important historical consequences. First, Isma'il at once achieved a radical break with the amir regime and established the Safavids as a new order. Second, he set himself, and hence the nascent Safavid state, against the religious scholars active in Iran at the time (who were, in the main, Sunni). These scholars gradually converted to Shi'ism and mingled with some prominent Shi'i scholars who had come to Iran from elsewhere in the Muslim world.5 Third, in choosing Shi'i Islam, he had adopted a creed that

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1. This is the period of the Safavid shahs.
2. From the word 'shadow' in Persian.
3. The term 'shah' in this context can refer to both the shah and the 'ulama.
4. Musa al-Kazim is one of the Twelve Imams, the last of whom was declared to be the Chosen of God.
5. This process is known as the 'conversion of the shaykhs' or 'conversion of the ulama'.

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Fig. 33. Sahm-I Khaneh (Old Court), Shrine of Imam Riza, Mashhad. The gold dome over the tomb of Imam Riza, the golden minarets and the Imam-i Rida, or golden portal, built in the late 15th century by the Timurid vizier Mo 'Ali Shir Nava'i, are all illuminated.
placed a greater emphasis on millenarian themes than Sunni Islam. This proved to be highly advantageous as he was able to portray himself as a messianic figure, ushering in a new age. Such ideas were particularly popular among his Qizilbash followers, as they formed a natural development from their devotion to the leader of the Safavid Sufi order (which, incidentally, had not been explicitly Shi'i). These factors were particularly useful for Isma'il in his task of converting a religious brotherhood to a functioning monarchy. However, in different ways they all became problems for his successors.

Shah 'Abbas, who came to power around eighty-five years after Isma'il, inherited an imperial administration that had had impressive success in expanding the territory under its control, but was disintegrated in its internal organization. The divisions, particularly among the Qizilbash, had meant that the Safavids could conquer land, but not retain it effectively as internal strife became a crippling distraction. Shah 'Abbas began not only to implement a tranche of internal administrative reforms but also to set aside the elements of Safavid Shi'i millenarianism that were proving unstable. In their place, he wished to establish a more orthodox form of Shi'ism, in which he maintained power not because his subjects considered him a divine incarnation or Messiah, but because he was a worthy shah, placed on the throne by God and ruling in concert and cooperation with the traditional bastions of orthodox Shi'ism, the religious scholars. The outward manifestation of this policy was his encouragement of Shi'i religious activities, in particular at the Shi'i shrines within Iran.

Religious ritual at the Mashhad Shrine

At the beginning of Shah 'Abbas's reign Mashhad was under Uzbek control. He retook Mashhad from the Uzbeks during a campaign in 1598–9, and in order to stamp his authority in Khurasan, and to bolster support there, he sponsored restoration and new building within the Shrine of the Eighth Shi'i Imam, Riza. The role of the Imams in theology and popular devotion is, perhaps, the distinctive trait of Shi'ism. Ibna 'Ashari ('Twelver') Shi'ism, the version promoted by the Safavids, asserts that there were twelve Imams who were the spiritual heirs to the Prophet Muhammad. Each of these Twelve Imams is viewed as a sinless guide for the Muslims for the time he was Imam. Each was ignored (or, worse still, oppressed) by the majority (i.e. Sunni) community. The Twelfth of these Imams went into hiding (ghayba, or 'occultation') in 874 and will return at some future time to establish God's rule. The Imam is then absent (in the sense of not visible) but present (in the sense that he is in the world, but not recognized by us). The immanence of the Twelfth Imam leaves Shi'is in a state of Messianic expectation, a mood that the Safavids in the early years of the dynasty were able to use to great effect.

The Imams also have an intercessory quality for Twelver Shi'is, as one can pray to the Imams for protection and help. Shah 'Abbas, for example, is reported to have asked the Imams for aid in his campaigns on various occasions. Intercession most meaningfully takes place at the burial place of the Imam. Hence pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams, and the performance of particular rituals there, are essential elements of Shi'i devotional life. Shah 'Abbas expanded the shrine at Mashhad and supported it in other ways, such as by donating and sponsoring its decoration. He also performed the pilgrimage there himself on a number of occasions (the most famous being in 1601, which he completed from Isfahan on foot). By doing this, he was giving explicit support for these rituals and confirming Safavid power over Mashhad. By giving the shrine there such public patronage, Shah 'Abbas was strengthening the link between Safavid rule and orthodox Shi'ism. Whether intentionally or not, his promotion of the shrine reduced the influence of the unstable Qizilbash expression of religious militancy at court.

The rituals that a believer should perform when arriving at the Shrine of Imam Riza are nicely laid out by one of the scholars closely associated with the court of Shah 'Abbas, Bahá' al-Dín al-Amili (d. 1621), known as Shaykh Bahá'i. He wrote a handbook of Shi'i ritual and law in Persian called Jame-yé 'Abbasi. The work is dedicated to Shah 'Abbas, and Shaykh Bahá'i's work of Persian is significant. He clearly had an audience outside of the religious elite in mind. Ritual law books were normally written in Arabic, and their intended readership was clearly the 'ulama. The use of Persian, as well as his straightforward and practical style, demonstrates Shaykh Bahá'i's popularist intentions. In the section on visiting religious shrines (ziyarat) he describes the rituals that believers should perform when visiting the various shrines of the Shi'i Imams (fig. 22). These pilgrimages are seen as additional to (and in some circumstances, even replacing) the main religious pilgrimage of all Muslims, the Hajj to Mecca. The section on visiting Imam Riza's shrine is described in more detail than any other ziyarat, apart from the section on visiting the shrine of the First Imam, 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib in Najaf.

Shaykh Bahá'i outlines a ten-stage ritual that the believers must perform, with prayers (in Arabic) to be memorized and recited at particular points:

1. Before entering the shrine area, the believer should perform a full body wash (ghuš), during which they recite a prayer asking God to purify their body and their heart for the encounter with the Imam.
2. Having put on clean clothes, they enter the shrine area with reverence and piety, barefoot. Once inside, they declare that there is no god but Allah, that Muhammad is his servant and messenger, and that the First Imam 'Ali is God's appointed deputy.
3. They approach the tomb, and stand at the foot of the tomb and recite a lengthy prayer in Arabic.
4. They then sit on the cushion at the head of the tomb and recite a prayer wishing Imam Riza peace and describing him as the 'Proof of God,' the 'foundation of faith' and the inheritor of the past prophets Abraham, Isma'il, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, his daughter Fatima and the Twelve Imams.
5. They should then place their face on the tomb and recite another prayer, asking God to accept the requests Imam Riza is making on their behalf.
6. Their right hand should be raised to the sky, and their left placed on the...
tomb, and the pilgrim exclaims that his love for God is through the Imams and descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

7. He then returns to the foot of the tomb and curses all those who sought to kill the Imams. Imam Riza was, according to Shi'i belief, poisoned by the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun in 818.

8. At the head of the tomb, the believer prays two prostrations (rak'at) while reciting verses from the Qur'an.

9. The believer then prepares to leave, bidding farewell to Imam Riza with a special prayer in which he lists and praises all the Twelve Imams.

10. The believer leaves the shrine, without turning his back on the tomb until it is out of sight.

We do not know the extent to which the rituals laid out by Shaykh Baha'i were followed in all their detail, though we do know that the prayers he cites were derived from early Hadith collections and previous works of ritual law.

Shah 'Abbas's own pilgrimages to Mashhad are described in various historical chronicles, but never in the detail required to ascertain whether or not he followed the rules as laid out by Shaykh Baha'i in the above quote. We do know that on different occasions he entered Mashhad ‘barefooted and bareheaded’ and that he circumambulated the tomb, though this seems excessive, since the rules only require him to enter the shrine itself barefoot. The mention of him being bareheaded is probably not linked to a requirement of the ritual laid out by Shaykh Baha'i, and most likely a sign of his personal humility and piety (since it was always customary for the Shah to have his head covered with a headpiece appropriate to the occasion).

**Ritual life at the shrine in Qum**

The city of Qum, on the edge of the Dasht-i Kavir salt desert, is the site of the Shrine of Fatimeh Ma'sume, one of the sisters of Imam Riza (fig. 23). In orthodox Shi'i theology the relatives of the Imams are not accorded the same status as the Imams, though they may have special religious insight or powers. In popular Shiism, however, they attract a comparable level of devotion to that of the Imams themselves. Their burial places (imamzadeshas), like those of the Imams, are places of pilgrimage for Shi'is. The shrines of these relatives of the Imams are, of course, much more numerous, and generally regarded as of lower importance than the shrines of the Imams.

However, the shrine in Qum is particularly highly regarded due, in part, to the person of Fatimeh Ma'sume herself—her character and piety have led to her being considered ‘shahid’ (Ma'sume, an epithet normally reserved for the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and the Imams). Another reason for the rise in Qum’s popularity is the location there of a number of important seminaries of Shi'i learning (collectively termed the ‘Hawza’; fig. 24). The importance of this shrine is confirmed by the saying attributed to Imam Riza, ‘whoever makes a pilgrimage to her [shrine], will attain paradise’. The shrine and the seminaries bring large numbers of people to Qum on pilgrimage and in search of religious knowledge, and together they have established Qum as one of the major centres of Shiism. Shah 'Abbas visited Qum, though he does not seem to have patronized the shrine in the same manner as he did Mashhad. The shrine itself seems to have experienced a rise in importance only after Shah 'Abbas’s reign. There is some evidence that the pilgrimage to Qum was not considered of the same religious importance as that to Mashhad (or other shrines of the Imams). Shaykh Baha'i, for example, did not include any details about the rituals to be performed in Qum, though he does provide much detail on the rituals to be performed on a 'ziyarat to the shrines of the Imams proper (Najaf, Khoraba, Samarra, Mashhad). Even among those scholars of the 'sa'adi climate of pilgrimage to the shrine, and likewise, perhaps, the Shah did not view it as religiously significant as Mashhad.

Those who promoted the 'ziyarat to Qum cited sayings of the Imams to establish their case. The etiquette of pilgrimage to the shrine in Qum is derived from a statement attributed to Imam Riza, who described his own visitation: ‘When I came to the tomb, I stood at her head, faced towards the qibla [mihmar] and said al-lahu akbar [“God is Great”] thirty-four times, subhan al-lah [“praise be to God”] thirty-three times and al-hamdu lillah [“thanks be to God”] thirty-three times. Then I recited the following prayer ... ’ The lengthy prayer given next contains peaceful salutations to all the prophets from Adam, through Noah, Abraham and Moses, to Jesus and Muhammad, followed by similar prayers to the Twelve Imams. It ends with an extended prayer to Fatimeh Ma'sume exalting her as a descendant of the Prophet, 'Ali and 'Ali's wife (also called Fatimeh; fig. 25).

To these basic rituals have been added elements since the Safavid period that act as a prelude to the above prayer (including the completion of a full body wash before approaching the shrine, the donning of perfumed clothes and the stipulation to enter with the right foot). Also added into the ritual is the performance of...
two prostration units (rakat) following the completion of the prayers. Most of these additional elements are common to Shi'i pilgrimage rituals and can also be found in Shaykh Baha'i’s description of pilgrimage to Imam Riza’s tomb. Once again, the evidence for the performance of these rituals during the reign of Shah ‘Abbas is patchy. While the exhortation to perform a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Fatimah is found much earlier in Shi‘i collections of the Imams’ sayings dating from the ninth and tenth centuries, the detailed description of the words of the prayers at the Qum Shrine attributed to Imam Riza and recounted above seems to have first been given wide circulation in a collection of sayings that postdates the period of Shah ‘Abbas. This may be a sign of the increased importance of Qum following the restoration work of later Safavids. The burial of four subsequent Safavid shahs also indicates the increase in Qum’s ceremonial and religious significance during the later Safavid period.

Ritual life in the smaller shrines

As mentioned above, the reign of Shah ‘Abbas saw investment in various religious structures throughout the kingdom. Among these were the places of pilgrimage already mentioned (the shrines in Mashhad and Qum), but also many smaller Imamzadehs (shrines to the descendants of the Imams). A good example of Shah ‘Abbas’s patronage is his renovation of the place where he chose to be buried, the Imamzadeh Habib ibn Musa in Kashan. Shah ‘Abbas’s tomb was placed in the crypt of this place of pilgrimage (fig. 26). Habib ibn Musa was (allegedly) one of the sons of Imam Musa al-Kazim, the Seventh Imam of the Twelver Shi‘a. Kashan has a number of Imamzadehs that are associated with Imam Musa al-Kazim’s offspring. There are burial shrines for Musa’s sons Harun, Hasan and Ahmad, in addition to Habib. Unlike these others, however, Habib is not mentioned in the standard lists of the children of Imam Musa found in Shi‘i biographical literature. Standard Safavid genealogies record a fabricated descent from the Seventh Imam Musa through his son Hamza (whose shrine is in Lilla, Iraq). This genealogy was problematic and not universally accepted. One possibility as to why Shah ‘Abbas decided to be buried in the Habib ibn Musa Shrine is to offer an alternative lineage back to the Seventh Imam. This would not necessarily exclude the lineage through Hamza and might complement it. Habib was an excellent candidate for asserting such a lineage, since popular local belief in his descent was combined with a patchy textual record making an association less open to challenge. Furthermore, his Imamzadeh was safely inside Iran rather than in the difficult location of Lilla (a rival Imamzadeh Hamza is located in Rayy, near modern-day Tehran, and there are also claimed shrines to Hamza in Isfahan, Tabriz and Qum). The popular understanding within Kashan itself was that that Shah ‘Abbas decided to be buried there because he believed himself descended from Habib. How widespread this belief was is difficult to ascertain. Shah ‘Abbas’s choice of burial place, though seeming initially odd, could be explained through the ongoing Safavid desire to assert the Shi‘i heritage of the Safavids through their descent from Imam Musa al-Kazim.

The shrine itself was a natural site of pilgrimage. It was founded in the Seljuk period, with a notable mihrab dating from the mid-fourteenth century. It was embellished during the Safavid period, both prior to and after Shah ‘Abbas’s death. It functioned like any other Imamzadeh, as a place of visitation (mazaf), prayer and circumambulation of the tomb. It does not appear to have had its profile raised through its association with Shah ‘Abbas, and it continues to be a place of visitation today due to the location of the tomb of the minor cleric, Ayatollah ‘Ali al-Yathrabi al-Kashani (d. 1969), in its courtyard.

Ritual life at the shrine in Ardabil

Ardabil is the site of a burial of a number of the shaykhs of the Safavid religious order and hence constituted the most important place of pilgrimage for devotees of the Safavid religious order. The shrine complex itself houses the tombs of five Safavid shaykhs, including the so-called founder of the Safavid order, Shaykh Safi al-Din (1252-1334), and the first Safavid shaykh to become shah, Isma‘il I (r. 1501-24; fig. 27). Shah ‘Abbas, though not electing to be buried there, clearly followed his predecessors in visiting the shrine to pray for guidance on numerous occasions. As such, it was the site for religious pilgrimage of the devotees of the Safavid order, though not for the Shi‘i ulema. For this reason the religious handbooks contain no reference or guidance to the manner of performing any pilgrimage to Ardabil – prayer to the Safavid mashid-i kamili (perfect spiritual guide, or head of the order) was not in accordance with Twelver Shi‘ism. Each Shi‘i Shi‘ism reserved such veneration for the Imams themselves or (in a concession to popular belief) the descendants of the Imams. The Ardabil complex could not (it seems) be compared to the shrines of Mashhad and Qum in terms of veneration for the general populace. Visiting the tombs of the shaykhs there was, to a large extent, reserved for the current head of the Safavid order (the shah) and his Qajari followers.

For this reason there is little information on any specific rituals performed by the devotees within the Ardabil Shrine, though it is reasonable to assume that particular and specialized rituals were performed there. The tomb of Shah Isma‘il (fig. 28), for example, is not obviously laid out to be circumambulated, though the tomb of Shaykh Safi is more clearly a site of ritual circulation. This makes the shrine
layout unusual when compared with sites more central to Shi'i pilgrimage ritual (such as Mashhad, Qum and other Imamzadehs). The tombs at Ardabil are inscribed with prayers that could act as prompts for recitation by visitors but probably serve a primarily decorative function. Much of the shrine area was set aside for living quarters, as it was originally a Sufi lodge, and seems to have maintained a living religious community up until the late nineteenth century.

In terms of the known ritual activities at Ardabil, Shah 'Abbas is said to have reintroduced the ritual beating of drums at the gates of the shrine, though this may have only accompanied the occasions of his own visits (as head of the Safavid order) to the shrine and was not a regular institution. His visits to the shrine are variously described by Iskandar Beg Munshi as involving ziyar or 'prayers' (marasim-i da'wa). Both these terms are also used to describe the more orthodox religious rituals found within Twelve Shi'i handbooks. They are probably being used here to establish the pilgrimage to Ardabil as equivalent to the more commonplace pilgrimage and prayers associated with the shrines in Qum, Mashhad and the lesser Imamzadehs dotted around the country. Two buildings within the shrine complex have a clearly ritual function: the Jannatbara and the Dar al-Huffaz. The Jannatbara ('Heavenly Palace'; fig. 29), an octagonal structure that was domed in the period of Shah 'Abbas, is described as 'most likely for devotional ritual' by commentators. The octagonal space could have been used for the various customs associated with the Safavid order, such as the beating ritual (shub-i tariq). In different circumstances this ritual had both a disciplinary and an initiatory function. In the former a transgressing member of the order would be beaten by a representative (khulfa) of the marshid-i kamil. In the latter an appointee to high office would receive three symbolic strokes of the stick in an act akin to dubbing, before being handed a stick himself. The space, though, more probably indicates a shurik circle. The shurik (remembrance of God through the repetition of specific prayers) of the Safavid Qazisbeh is not recorded with precision, though the ceremony certainly included the recitation (presumably in Turkish) of the poetry of Shah Isma'il and Shah Tahmasp, and the distinctively 'alam (or Shi'i) recitation, 'there is no God but God; Muhammad is the Prophet of God; 'Ali is the wali [trustee] of God'. With regard to the Dar al-Huffaz (Hall of the Recitors), there is no precise description in the Persian sources (fig. 30). Adam Olearius, who visited the shrine around seven years after Shah 'Abbas's death, reports that there were twelve huffaz (reciters) in the room, reciting the Qur'anic passages continuously.²

**Conclusions**

The lack of detailed accounts of the rituals performed at the shrines during the Safavid period means that our knowledge is necessarily patchy. Hints here and there in the historical sources, and the odd endowed document supplement the formal description of rituals found within the books of the 'ulama. The formal accounts of ritual are, however, idealistic, in the sense that the regulations laid down there were what the 'ulama hoped the faithful would do, and what the 'ulama believed the regulations should do when visiting the shrines. They are not necessarily an accurate record of what actually happened at the shrines. Unfortunately, the travellers' accounts of the rituals at the shrines do not contain enough detail for us to compare actual practice with the pious hopes of the 'ulama. However, the architectural features of the shrines, and most importantly the objects taken from them and found in this exhibition – whether highly decorative or clearly for everyday use – enable us to make an assessment (albeit limited) concerning the nature and vibrancy of shrine life during the reign of Shah 'Abbas.

**NOTES**

1. Shah 'Abbas's various secular and religious building works are listed in Iskandar Beg Munshi's Savaray 1978, 535-8, and Safavid royal patronage of religious buildings generally are analyzed in Blake 1999, 137-74.
4. The genealogy of the Safavids is found in various places. See, for example, Ardabil 1376/1997, 70-5.
5. On this so-called migration of Arab scholars from Lebanon, see Aghamirza 2004.
7. Ikshandar Beg Munshi 1377/1998, 91-12 (Iskandar Beg Munshi's Savaray 1978, 772) in his pilgrimage of 1598. This account also mentions the shurik reciting 'the required prayers' (dawār al-'azm).
8. Iskandar Beg Munshi 1377/1998, 893. The circumambulation, a common element in the pilgrimage, does not seem to be a prescribed element of the 'orthodox' ziyar rituals, perhaps because of its closeness to the circumambulation in the Hajj.
12. See Kashi 'Ali 1341/1962, 429-31; mention of Huffaz's shrine is on p. 430. All of these are disputed locations.
13. See, for example, Mollá 1414/1993, 244.
20. See e.g. Weir 1997, 362; the octagonal structure can also be found in the recently discovered Isfahan, and one might speculate that it was modelled on the Dome of the Rock (Mousavi 2002, 18 n. 10).
23. Olearius 1662, 169.
SAFAVID imperial collections consisted of works on paper, decorative ceramics and metal wares. These objects were noted for their skillful craftsmanship, their historical value and their role in Iranian cultural life. When produced in royal workshops, they were associated with the princely prerogative of collecting and gifting aesthetically and intellectually pleasing books and objects. When endowed to religious institutions they were perceived as evidence of the givers' piety and generosity. In both cases, it is important to consider the relationship between the objects and the settings in which they were made, used and displayed. Palaces and shrines alike maintained a kitab-khanah to care for, and sometimes produce, manuscript collections. In addition there was the khazneh (treasury), which was a closely guarded repository of precious objects. On special occasions, such as diplomatic audiences or religious celebrations, the collections were brought out for use and display (fig. 31). As contemporaneous European and Iranian commentators observed, the manuscripts and objects were essential elements in rituals of devotion and sovereignty. The early seventeenth century was a time of prolific production of luxury goods and manuscripts. Interestingly, many of these were either made for, or were gifted to, religious institutions, such as shrines of religious figures. The aim of this essay is to introduce their architectural contexts, in particular during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I.

The three primary shrines in Safavid Iran were that of Shaykh Safi al-Din Ishaq in Ardabil, Imam 'Ali Riza in Mashhad and Fatimeh Ma'sumeh in Qom. Special rooms were built at the shrines for display and storage, and were sometimes as opulent and luxurious as the objects they contained. These commemorative shrines were important repositories not only of religious sentiment, but also of imperial collections. They were also powerful conduits for disseminating the ideology of the Safavid empire. The pilgrims who attended shrines were rulers and mendicants, rich and poor, women and men. The architecture of the shrines is evidence of the immensely powerful didactic function of these popular sites. Yet the functions of the buildings were also testimony to the intimate, and ultimately individual, piety that was the motivation for patronage.

In the sixteenth century the traditional sites of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem were under the control of the Ottomans, and travel to them was difficult for pilgrims coming overland from Iran. Pilgrimage to alternative sites within Iran was therefore encouraged by the Safavid Shahs, who propagated the belief that visitation to shrines in Ardabil, Mashhad and Qom would bestow religious benefits equivalent to that of the Hajj to Mecca. The shrines of Shaykh Safi and Imam Riza, situated in the northwestern and north-eastern edges of the empire, respectively, were potent symbols of Safavid authority: one marking the Safavids' spiritual past, the other the long history of Shi'ism in Iran. The Shrine of Fatimeh Ma'sumeh in Qom, situated interestingly between Mashhad and Ardabil, was a popular site for patronage by Safavid women. The cities in which these shrines existed benefited commercially, providing an added incentive for the shah to encourage pilgrimage and support it through the establishment of intimate travel networks.

The three great Safavid shrines were distinguished from each other through their history as well as the functions they fulfilled. Shaykh Safi's shrine was a zaviya, or dervish lodge, which served a Sufi community, and its secondary buildings were for the performance of rituals associated with the order. In contrast, the shrines of Imam Riza and Fatimeh Ma'sumeh were both monuments built in veneration of a member of the Prophet Muhammad's family and for the propagation of the Shi'i dogma. The secondary institution linked to them was the madrasa. Despite these important differences, there was a great deal of overlap in terms of devotional rites as well as architecture, a trend that has been established from before Safavid rule. Sunni rulers had been among the greatest patrons of Shi'i edifices: for example, the Tithurid Shah Rukh Mirza (d. 1447) and his wife Gauhar Shad (d. 1457) commissioned the construction of the Friday Mosque attached to the tomb of Imam Riza in Mashhad (fig. 32). Similarly, a madrasa was established at the Ardabil Shrine to disseminate the new Safavid doctrine, Shi'ism.
Shah 'Abbas I and the patronage of shrines

Iran during the reign of the fifth Safavid shah, 'Abbas I, was a Shi'i empire built on the foundations of Sufi praxis. During the first ten years, that is, from 1588 to 1598, the holiest Iranian city, Mashhad, was occupied by the Uzbeks. On regaining the city from the Uzbeks, Shah 'Abbas began consolidating the empire by enacting profound administrative changes. The harem dynamics were altered, as were the codes of loyalty towards the shah. As the leader of the Safaviyya Sufi order and a revered descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (through the Seventh Shi'i Imam, Musa al-Kazim), Shah 'Abbas negotiated the sometimes tense, but often harmonious, coexistence of what have in modern days been considered opposing religious tendencies, namely Sufism and Shiism. Sufi and tribal authority, already having undergone profound transformation over the course of the sixteenth century, were further altered to make room for a new cadre of clerical and conscripted bureaucracy. In addition, the establishment of Shiism as the state religion was a gradual process, despite the polemics in chronicles and didactic literature. Although scholars have often characterized the mature Safavid state as one in which very clear boundaries were drawn between Shi'i and Sufi worship, the multifaceted patronage of shrines calls into question such assumptions. The veneration of holy figures and their shrines and tombs during the reign of Shah 'Abbas must be seen through the lens of dynastic ambition, as well as political and religious ideology. Whether of modest scale or monumental proportions, whether of obscure genealogy or directly associated with the Shi'i Imamat, the primary attribute of the holy figures and sacred sites was their relationship to the Safavid dynasty. Safi shrines in the western province of Azerbaijan, for example, were given a great deal of attention by the Safavid elite, owing in part to their historical relationship with the Safaviyya order; Shrines of Shi'i Imams and their progeny (Imamzadehs) were equally revered. Shah 'Abbas was characterized by his historians as a repentant ruler and the supreme protector of the Shi'i faith. His chroniclers depicted a man who was deeply committed to his faith, using the appellation, 'Dog of the Threshold of [Iman] Allah' (kalīl-i 'stān-i 'Allāh), when writing of him. In contrast to this humility, they portrayed him as a historic figure who emulated both his grandfather, Shah Tahmasp, and Amir Timur Gurjan (d. 1405), known in the West as Tamerlane. Timur was well known for his military prowess as well as his urban and architectural constructions. Shah 'Abbas's patronage was similarly grand, as evidenced by the manner in which the old city of Isfahan was refashioned into a majestic world capital (see fig. 6). Shah 'Abbas must also be viewed in comparison to contemporary rulers, especially the Mughal emperors Akbar (d. 1605) and Jahangir (d. 1627) who were prolific builders and patrons of the arts. For all three, architecture was a potent means of highlighting their power and religiosity. Several monuments survive as a testimony to Shah 'Abbas's intention to propagate Shiism as the imperial religion. Friday Mosques, such as that in the capital Isfahan, were built; however, Shah 'Abbas's primary architectural commissions were commemorative structures, such as shrines and mausolea. Shrines were the ideal settings for the display of spiritual power and military strength. Shah 'Abbas undertook several well-publicized pilgrimages to Ardabil and Mashhad. These visits were attended with great fanfare, the shah arriving barefoot and performing mental tasks of supplication towards his hallowed ancestors. The model of piety and charity portrayed by Shah 'Abbas was not an unusual one; earlier, his grandfather Shah Tahmasp had been an active patron of shrines, in particular those at Mashhad and Ardabil. Likewise, Padshah Akbar was renowned for his barefoot pilgrimages to the shrine of the Sufi mystic, Mu'in al-Din Chishti, in Ajmer. Shah 'Abbas's patronage of the great shrines must be contextualized within the framework of early modern imperial ceremonial, and it is also important to note the way in which his patronage augmented his unique vision of Safavid kingship. In 1607-8 Shah 'Abbas made mortmain his personal property and his collection of precious books and objects, and gifted them to the Shrines of Shaykh Safi and Imam Riža in honour of the Fourteen Infallibles, or Fourteen Immaculate Ones. The spiritual benefit of the gift was for deceased family members, who included Shah Tahmasp and Shah 'Abbas's mother, Mahd-i Auliya. The division of the collection, consisting of manuscripts and porcelain, was an interesting one, and provides insight into the role of these two shrines in the religious imagination of early-seventeenth-century Iran. The shrine in Mashhad was endowed with Qur'ans and Arabic books on theology. The shrine in Ardabil were gifted books on poetry and history, as well as porcelains. Shah 'Abbas commissioned extensive renovation and expansion of both shrines, moves that changed the use and perception of these centuries-old institutions irrevocably.

The Shrine of Shaykh Safi al-din Ishaq in Ardabil

The Ardabil Shrine had its beginnings as a modest zawjān established by the Sufi shaykh, Safi al-din Ishaq (d. 1334). Safi's piety and religiosity gained him a large following, and long after his death the Safaviyya order continued to be influential in the region. By the end of the fifteenth century the Safi of Ardabil began to challenge the authority of the Aqquyunlu rulers of Azerbaijan, and in 1301 Shaykh Isma'il bin Haydar declared himself shah in Tabriz. With the changed status of the Safavids, the Shrine of Shaykh Safi also began a transformation, from a regional pilgrimage site to an imperial dynastic institution. Shaykh Isma'il was buried near the tomb tower of Shaykh Safi, in a small domed room that had been built by his wife Tajju Khanum (see figs 27-8). During the reign of Shah Tahmasp new construction was undertaken at the shrine, with the addition of a Dar al-Hadith (fl. 1627; fig. 33) and the Janatlasara (see fig. 29). The former was built in response to the growing attention being paid to Shi'i practice under the Safavids, and the latter as a reminder of the deeply rooted Sufi.

Fig. 33 The Dar al-Hadith from the

courtyard. Shrine of Shaykh Safi, Ardabil.
beliefs of Shah Tahmasp's supporters. With these reconstructions the formal and, to a certain extent, metaphorical focus of the shrine was changed in a way that drew attention away from the cult of Shaykh Safi and towards his royal progeny. For Shah 'Abbas the Shrine of Shaykh Safi was closely associated with his grandfather Shah Tahmasp and was an emblem of Safavid history. His visits there were to honour his ancestors and to pray for their assistance against his rivals, the Ottomans in Turkey and the Uzbeks in Transoxiana."

Shah 'Abbas's 1607-8 endowment was another turning point in the architectural history of the shrine. A room that had previously been known as the Gunbad-Shahzadeh (Dome of the Princess) was altered from a place that had most likely commemorated Safavid martyrdom to a grand repository celebrating the prestige and piety of Shah 'Abbas (fig. 34). The Gunbad-i Shahzadeh was renamed the Chini-khaneh (literally 'China house') and renovated in order to accommodate the imperial gift. The room was connected to the Dar al-Huffaz, which was the main hall through which one entered the tomb chamber of Shaykh Safi (fig. 35). Built soon after the death of Shaykh Safi in the early fourteenth century, the Dar al-Huffaz was an important artefact of Safavid history. The interior of the hall was renovated on the orders of Shah 'Abbas and painted in opulent colours, the gilding adding to the luminosity of the space. Phrases from the Qur'anic Victory verse were inscribed on the cornices and alcoves, as were Hadith exalting the Shi'i Imamate. The names and appellations of the Twelve Shi'i Imams were written on a band encircling the eastern alcove of the Dar al-Huffaz, while on the other side was the spiritual lineage of the Safavids, starting with Imam 'Ali. At the end on the Dar al-Huffaz a new platform, richly embellished and enclosed by a silver grill, led into the tomb of Shaykh Safi, flanked on one side by that of Shah Isma'il (fig. 36). The space, known as the Shah-nishin ('Seat of the Shah'), was a sacred threshold where the ruler would pray to his ancestors for intercession and support. The shrine was thus a public space as well as a private imperial sanctuary, where the shah displayed his authority and found solace to contemplate his future.

The Chini-khaneh was a massive octagonal structure, the interior of which was divided into four primary alcoves, the western one attached to the Dar al-Huffaz and serving as the entrance. In the middle of each wall was a deep, five-sided alcove with built-in cupboards below the niches (fig. 37). The lower zone of the dado was probably embellished with ceramic tiles, adding to its opulence and beauty. The upper zone consisted of a shell of finely carved wood and plaster and was painted and gilded in red, blue, and green floral designs. There was a little epigraphy inside the building, though carved into some of the niches were small epigraphs, such as ya Allah (Oh, God) and ya Safi (Oh, Safi). The decorative technique of the Chini-khaneh suggests a direct
connection with the fifth-floor atrium in the Ali Qapu gatehouse of the Isfahan palace, which was similarly embellished with wall paintings and carved niches (fig. 38). The collection of porcelains had been housed in this imperial treasury before its transfer to the shrines in Ardabil and Mashhad; thus the formal similarities come as little surprise. However, the Chini-khanes itself was replicated only in the Shrine of Shaykh Safi, not in that of Imam Riza. The conceptual affinities between the Isfahan palace and Ardabil Shrine, both linked immediately to the Safavid dynasty's past and present, were made visible through the means of architecture.

The interior of the Chini-khanes was illuminated by the light diffusing through the window grilles and refracting off the gilded niches. Such a space was designed for the reading and enjoyment of books, such as the beautifully illustrated Majmu' and Layla of Amir Khosrau Dihlavi (cat. no. 86) that was part of Shah 'Abbas's endowment to the shrine. Similarly, the porcelains at the Ardabil Shrine were among the most beautiful examples of Iranian and Chinese ceramics (see cat. nos 55–76). The play of words in the naming of the Chini-khanes may refer simultaneously to the ceramic tiles that embellished it (as in Timurid and Ottoman examples) and to the imperial porcelain collection. Regardless of this ambiguity, it is clear from its opulent decoration that the space was meant to display precious objects. The Chini-khanes was a symbol of a princely aesthetic that had been in vogue since at least the Timurids, as witnessed in a manuscript page from a 1488 poetic anthology, the Bustan of Sa'di (fig. 39). The painting shows a gathering of musicians and attendants at the court of the Timurid prince, Sultan Husayn Bayqara, in Herat. The prince sits on a dais above and to the right of a central arches, the interior of which is divided into rows of niches containing blue-and-white vases, both visual cues signifying sovereignty.

Shah 'Abbas’s endowment to the Shrine of Shaykh Safi was a consequence of his public piety and the association of rich collections with Iranian princely tradition. The books and wares were also intricately connected to the ceremonial functions that they served. Less is known about their original function, the patrons for whom they were originally commissioned, or about their reception at the court of the shrine. Nonetheless, some consideration must be given to the objects’ uses at the shrine and their significance. An opportunity is provided by the account of a visit to Iran in 1637 by the German scholar-diplomat Adam Olearius, who described an evening when “several Vessels of Porcelain, with Suger’d and Perfum’d waters” were brought out to the courtyard of the shrine and displayed with great pomp. The objects were used during

the entertainment of the foreigners and viewed by the pilgrims to the shrine. Although Shah 'Abbas was not present at that time, his presence was marked by his generous gifts to the shrine. The courtyard of the shrine, likewise, was the ideal setting for the display of Safavid diplomacy and sovereign power.

The Shrine of Imam Ali Riza in Mashhad

If the Shrine of Shaykh Safi was intimately associated with the cult of Safavid shaykhs and rulers, that of the Eighth Imam, ‘Ali ibn Musa al-Riza, defined the epitome of Shi‘i belief in Iran. The shrine was built in commemoration of the Imam, who died in 818 in a village in north-east Iran known as Sanabad. The area around the shrine came into prominence and was known as Mashhad. Among the greatest patrons of the shrine were the Timurid ruler Shah Rukh Mirza and his wife Gauhar Shad, who built the Dar al-Huffaz and the Dar al-Siyyada ('Hall of the Sayyids'), which are adjacent to the tomb chamber of Imam Riza (fig. 40). The princess also commissioned the architect Qavam al-din Shirazi to design the magnificent Friday Mosque that was built adjacent to the shrine.

The tomb chamber, or Haram, is a rectangular, domed room, from which lead numerous secondary halls and chambers. During the Safavid period renovations were made to the Haram's interior and exterior, and new buildings added to the shrine complex. Shah Tahmasp built the fortifications of Mashhad in 1526, constructed a minaret covered in gold at the northern entrance of the shrine, and had the tiles of the dome over the Haram replaced with plates of solid gold. According to a historian writing during the reign of Shah 'Abbas, 63 mana of gold were used for the gilding of the dome, and 80 mana of gold for the drum. In addition, an endowment was established, in the name of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, for food to be provided for pilgrims and for the officers of the shrine. At his death Shah Tahmasp's body was taken for burial in Mashhad, but the sources are in disagreement about its eventual interment. Rumours circulated about the possible desecration of the shah's tomb by the Uzbeks when they captured Mashhad in 1589, at which time they also looted the treasury and removed the gold tiles from the dome.

When Shah 'Abbas regained Mashhad in 1598, the re-conquest was seen as a highly charged religious event in which the just cause of retrieving for the Shi‘i their holy site, the Shrine of Imam Riza, was achieved. Safavid accounts of the ten years of campaigning against the Uzbeks were accompanied by invocations of religious zeal. When Shah 'Abbas finally saw the dome of Imam Riza, he was said...
to have wept and kissed the holy ground in veneration of the Imam. The Shah made subsequent visitations to the shrine, in order to ask for aid against his enemies as well as in thanks for his victories over them. Although entering the city of Mashhad in foot was a commonplace act for Shah ‘Abbas, in 1601 he embarked on an unprecedented barefoot journey from his new capital Isfahan.

The shah’s piety was on display through such public acts as well as through his monumental architectural commissions at the Shrine of Imam Riza. The reconquest was commemorated by the re-gilding of the golden dome, which was begun in 1601 and completed in 1606 (fig. 41). The epigraphy on the drum, in praise of Shah ‘Abbas, was designed by the famous calligrapher ‘Ali Riza Abbasi. The shah’s aim was to restore the Shrine of Imam Riza to its former glory, as it was in the times of his grandfather Tahmasp. Candelabra, lanterns and other revetment (tile cladding) of the Haram were gifted by the shah and his closest associates, such as Murtaza Quli Khan who gave money for the purchase of qandil (lamps) and also gave precious chinaware. Shah ‘Abbas himself established a new endowment and gifted jewelled doors for the Haram.

Shah ‘Abbas’s 1607-8 endowment, made two years after the completion of the
golden dome, augmented the shrine's prestige and wealth. Antiquity Qur'ans as well as theological treatises and histories were part of the collection, appropriating gifts to what was considered the pre-eminent Shi'i institution in Iran. The gifts also highlight the fact that the production of works of art was closely interrelated. That is to say, books, objects and even parts of buildings commissioned by the shah would have often been designed by the imperial atelier, and different media would bear the signature of a particular artist. Such was the case of the designer of the monumental epigraphy on the dome, 'Ali Riza Abbasi, who was among Shah 'Abbas's favourite artists and also designed the epigraphy for other imperial commissions, such as the mosque of Shaykh Lutfullah in Isfahan. The manner in which his oeuvre moved between scales, from monumental to small calligraphy collected in albums, is proof of his remarkable talent (fig. 42). In this context the Shrine of Imam Riza must be considered a work of art as well as devotion, its architectural magnificence worthy of the Imam and augmented through the attentions of the shah and his skilled artist.

Safavid elite were buried in the precincts of the shrine, which was a tradition made popular earlier at the Shrine of Shah Safi. Mashhad was the symbol of Shah 'Abbas's military victories in Khurasan, and it was understandable that he would honour those that had helped him achieve that goal by allowing them to be buried at the Shrine of Imam Riza. Two architectural commissions stand out as exceptional in the history of Safavid architecture, namely the tombs of the officials, Hatim Beg and Allahverdi Khan. In 1610–11 the grand vizier Hatim Beg Urudabadi died at Tabriz and his body was taken to Mashhad to be buried in a vault near the Haram. Allahverdi Khan, who died in 1613, was 'one of the most powerful emirs of this dynasty' and was buried in a large octagonal domed structure, in which the style and decoration of the intricate mosaics are comparable to the workmanship at the mosques in Isfahan built by Shah 'Abbas. The foundation epigraphy identifies the builder of the structure as the 'amir al-umara [commander in chief] of the age, Allahverdi Khan', and states that it was built during the reign of Shah 'Abbas. Thus the structures built by Shah 'Abbas's officials, even their own tombs, named the shah as the primary patron and the supreme authority.

Shah 'Abbas ordered major constructions and improvements to the city, such as the extension of the shrine complex, including lofty porticos and the buildings around them; the painting and decoration of the sanctuary; the building of new roads, and the construction of a water channel in the middle of the street; the construction of the large cistern within the main courtyard. The most remarkable expansion undertaken by Shah 'Abbas was the construction of the grand Khayaban, or thoroughfare, that ran from north-west to south-east through the city, with a stream running in the centre. The new urban plan of the shrine precincts and of the city itself may be viewed in comparison with the bold urban reconfiguration of Shah 'Abbas's capital, Isfahan, in which the centre of the city was shifted towards the new imperial maqam. The re-conceptualization of urban space was equivalent to Shah 'Abbas's transformation of Safavid polity and history; that is, the consoliation of a Shi'i empire focused on the cult of imperial authority.

Shrine of Fatimah Ma'sume in Qum

Safavid authority was not limited to the person of the shah but, rather, it included members of the Safavid household, in particular the women. Among the most favoured sites for their patronage was the shrine in Qum that commemorated the death in 816–17 of Fatimah Ma'sume, a sister of the Eighth Shi'i Imam, 'Ali ibn Musa al-Riza. Over time the city, which was renowned as a centre of Shi'i learning, prospered and the shrine became a popular pilgrimage destination. Safavid women were devotees of Fatimeh Ma'sume and donated generously to her shrine. For example, Shah Isam'il's wife, Tajju Khanum, was a wealthy woman who ordered the re-building of the dome over the tomb. A visionary patron of architecture, she was also credited with building the tomb of her consort at the Shrine of Shaykh Safi in Ardbil. The main entrance into the Haram, the Ivan-i Tala (Golden Ivan), at Qum was built at the same time, as evinced in the foundation inscription, dated 925/1519 (fig. 43). Although Shah Isam'il was named as the ruler, it may be that Tajju Khanum had a hand in its construction, owing to her extensive wealth and properties in the region of Qum. Her son Shah Tahmasp established an endowment in 1563 that included money for six hufaz to recite the Qur'an in the name of his sister Mahin Banu. The princess had been buried in Qum after her death in 1561, and the recitations were to take place at her tomb. The attention given to the shrine through both architectural and monetary endowments points to the central role of women in the propagating of the Safavid imperial vision.

For Shah 'Abbas the primary stages for the enactment of political and religious ideology remained the shrines in Mashhad and Ardbil. However, one endowment
deed, dated 1037/1627-8, is worth mentioning. Sealed by Mirza Rafi’al-Din Shahrastani (a relative by marriage of the shah), the document states that 109 manuscripts were gifted by ‘Ale ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib [Dog of the Threshold of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib] ‘Abbas al-Safavi al-Husayni’ to the holy Shrine of Fatimah Ma’sumeh and to the shrine’s madrasa (Fayziyyeh). “This endowment to the Qum Shrine, although modest in comparison to Shah ‘Abbas’s gifts to the shrines in Mashhad and Ardabil, nonetheless placed the shrine on a par with those two great institutions. It also signalled a shift in significance of the Shrine of Fatimah Ma’sumeh towards the end of the shah’s reign, one that was predicated on important changes in Safavid court culture.

During Shah ‘Abbas’s reign the consolidation of power was absolute.” In a move to centralize control over his empire the shah abolished the tradition of guardianship that had been the cornerstone of Safavid regal tradition. Earlier, young princes were brought up by hiz, or guardians, in provincial capitals such as Herat, where both Tahmasp and ‘Abbas resided before coming to the throne (and may provide another reason for their attachment to Khurasan and the Shrine of Imam Riza). However, Shah ‘Abbas altered both the system of tutelage and the heirarchy that supported it, such that his offspring were raised by their mothers in the imperial palace. Maybe the interest of Tahmasp and ‘Abbas in the Shrine of Fatimah Ma’sumeh was the motivation for the change in patronage patterns that favoured this shrine. It may also have been a result of the increasing geopolitical importance of Qum. The death of Shah ‘Abbas in 1629 was followed by increasingly tense military situations on Iran ‘s borders. In the west Baghdad and the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala were lost to the Ottomans. In the east Kandahar was lost to the Mughals and the Uzbek made continuous raids in Khurasan.”

The next two rulers, Shah Safi I (d. 1642) and his son Shah ‘Abbas II (d. 1666), were buried in the shrine at Qum, in magnificent tomb chambers flanking the Haram of Fatimah Ma’sumeh.” Shah Sulayman I (d. 1694) and Sultan Shah Husayn I (d. 1722) were buried on the south side of the courtyard (in the southern section of the Bala Sar Mosque). The tombs of Shahs Safi and ‘Abbas II were commemorated architecturally, but also through the invisible charity of Safavid women. In 1643-4 Shah Safi’s mother established an endowment for the recitation of the Qur’an in his name. In an opulent hall near the Haram a majestic cenotaph marked his burial, surrounded by rich textiles and lit by golden lamps (fig. 44). “The chamber had a marble dado, above which were tiles with epigraphy consisting of Hadith and eulogies to the deceased. Shah ‘Abbas II also made pilgrimages to the Shrine of Fatimah Ma’sumeh and performed rituals of devotion at the tomb of his father.

On his death Shah ‘Abbas II’s wife established Qur’an recitations at the grave of her regal spouse.” motioned remains one of the most magnificent examples of late Safavid architecture. The twelve-sided room, adjacent to the Haram of Fatimah Ma’sumeh, was embellished with marble dadoes, mosaic tiles and wall paintings (fig. 46). The Qur’anic and poetic epigraphy was designed by the famed calligrapher, Muhammad Riza Inami, who also designed epigraphy for the Shrine of Imam Riza.
in Mashhad. John Chardin described three massive gold lamps that hung from the ceiling and the richly woven carpets that were laid on the cenotaph and the floors (fig. 45). He also noted the various objects belonging to the Shrine of Fatimeh Ma'sumeh, such as vessels of gold and silver, platters to serve and distribute food in, and jars filled with perfumes. Chardin's description of the prosperity of the shrine ultimately highlights not only the precious objects or the grand architecture but also the multitude of rituals that took place within it.

The objects endowed to the shrines of Fatimah Ma'sumeh, Shahykh Safi and Imam Riza filled the spaces with light, colours and aromas. They were also deeply embedded within the social life of these majestic institutions. The tombs of the holy figures, as well as the Safavid shahs and their entourage, were examples of the finest architectural design and decoration of the time. The patterns on the opulent textiles covering their cenotaphs resonated with the tiles and wall paintings that covered the walls and ceilings (fig. 47). On the ground were finely woven prayer rugs, most probably gifted by pilgrims and benefactors. The juxtaposition of motifs, whether floral or calligraphic, once again highlights the interrelatiosh of art and architectural production in Iran in the early seventeenth century. The spaces cannot be studied simply in formal terms, devoid of the ritual objects that were housed in them. In the same way the manuscripts and other precious gifts to the shrines gain deeper meaning when viewed within their architectural contexts. Pious devotion and the imperial Safavid ceremonial connected the objects and architecture in a way that assured the continued glory of the three great Safavid shrines and secured the legacy of Shah 'Abbas I for posterity.

NOTES
2 This point was made earlier by Melville 1996, 191–230. Melville discusses Shah ‘Abbas’s visits to Mashhad in comparison to Ardabil, and also the possible motivations behind them, pointing that ‘were arising from a complex interplay of personal, dynastic, economic and political considerations' (Melville 1996, 192).
3 These three shrines were not only staples for pilgrims but provided asylum for the poor and those escaping punishment: Roozmehr 1986, 194; Ockerlitz 1986, 216.
4 For recent studies on Safavid history, see Newman 2006 and Babayan 2002. Many Safavids in the Safavid spiritual genealogy belonged to what are considered Sunni orders by sixteenth-century commentators themselves, complicating to a certain extent any rigid distinctions about the Safawiyah order. It is well known that the biography of Shahykh Safi was edited to accommodate Shi'i connections: Savory et al. 1995, 764–7.
5 Despite pedantries in which Safavi were derogated and certain orders, like the Nizamis, were persecuted, in general holy sites were treated with respect – sometimes by simply paying them little attention.
6 On the Nizamis, see Babayan 1996.
7 Thus, in addition to the shrine of Shahykh Safi in Ardabil, that of his father Amin al-Din Zahir al Khulthun was rebuilt by order of Shah 'Abbas in 1621. Twelve years earlier, the shrine of the renowned mystic, Shahykh Shihab al-Din Mahmoud, in Arbil had also been lavishly renovated. Shahykh Shihab al-Din's Shihabuddin's name is given in the biography of Shahykh Safi, Safar al-eqaf of Ibn Banu Nasr, and also inserted in the Zan-i-Ruf, the history of the Ardabil shrine; Rizvi, forthcoming.
8 Mushinji 1954/1963. The deciphering also appears on imperial orders and endowment seals.
9 The first one to Mashhad in 1587 and to Ardabil in 1592; see also Melville 1996.
10 On his pilgrimage to Ardabil, see Rizvi 2000. On Mashhad, see Parhat 2002.
11 They were recorded and illustrated in the Abbasmuara of Ablul Fadl. This point was also made in Melville 1996, 193.
12 Bekhardar Beg Mormi/Savory 1978, 761. For a discussion about the date, see McChesney 1981, 170. See also Causley 2007, 57–68.
14 The shrine building consisted of a series of chambers surrounding a main courtyard. The first burial within the precinct, which actually took place during the shaykh's own lifetime, was that of his son Mubayl al-Din. He was buried in a domed rectangular room, next to which was the tomb of the shaykh himself.
been sent to Ardabil. Only one member of the royal family is buried in Mashhad: Maryam Sultan Begum, the daughter of Shah Tahmasp, who died in 1608 and was buried ‘within the sanctuary of the Shadirvan’ (Esfarayeh Beg Mensh, Savory 1979, 305, 705, 1099). In 1621 the faqir Khiya Shafi al-din Amri died in Isfahan and his body was transported to Mashhad to be buried in one of the halls near the Imanhat (see fig. 56, p. 187).

Esfarayeh Beg Mensh, Savory 1979, 1034.

Alaeddin Khani had apparently commissioned an architect from Isfahan to oversee the construction. Esfarayeh Beg Mensh, Savory 1979, 1084.

Quoted in Parfor 2002, 193.

More on Alaeddin Khani may be found in Bhabbe et al., 2006, 93.

Esfarayeh Beg Mensh, Savory 1979, 735.

On the building of the mausoleum, see McClure 1988, 103–34.


Qummi 1359, 295.

Through a 1523 endorsement deed she also established a generous gift in the name of her deceased sister (Haji 2006a, 148).

Majlesi Tabatabaie 1976, 288. In 1543 repairs were made in the name of Shah Tahmasp by the vizier Qazi Jalal Qazvini. A brief biography of Qazi Jalal Qazvini is given in Newman 2006, 27.

Haji 2006a, 138.

Majlesi Tabatabaie 1976, 150.

Isharay 2002, 349.


Shah Sohrab was the grandson of Shah `Abbas I.

Isharay 2001, 514.

Majlesi Tabatabaie 1976, 152, 158.

Majlesi Tabatabaie 1976, 114. The date given is 1077 (1668), the date of Shah `Abbas II’s death.


‘All the vessels that belong to the chapels are of gold and silver. They consist in large flame-shaped branches of four and five hundred pieces a piece in flat dishes, whereby they serve the poor with victuals in proportion to their score’ (Chardin 1688, 409).
THE ARDABIL SHRINE

The Ardbil Shrine, the birthplace of the Safavid dynasty, was founded by Shaykh Safi al-Din Isma'il Ardabil, who was born in 1252 and died in 1334, a period that coincides almost exactly with the Il-Khanid (Mongol) heyday in Iran. From an early age Shaykh Safi had a spiritual bent, and while in his twenties he left Azarbaijan in order to seek his spiritual guide. He travelled all the way south to Shiraz, but the murshid, or leader, he had sought had just died. He then turned back towards the Caspian in search of another advise, whom he found in the person of Shaykh Zahid Gilani. Not only did Shaykh Zahid give Safi his daughter in marriage, but he also, before his death in 1301, designated Shaykh Safi as his successor (fig. 48).

Shaykh Safi and Sufism

At the root of the relationship between Shaykhs Zahid and Safi was the form of mysticism known in Islam as Sufism. Both men and their followers believed that they could approach oneness with God through prayer, rituals, visions and unfettering themselves from the material world. Murshids such as Shaykh Zahid and, later, Shaykh Safi helped their followers with spiritual advice and analysis of the effectiveness of the various paths to union with the Almighty. Although the later Safavids were Shi'i, Shaykh Safi and his immediate followers were Sunni Muslims who accepted various aspects of folk religion. The Safaviyya order was only one of many such dervish orders, each with its murshid and its own peculiar practices. Shaykh Safi himself was described as a man of great humility, not interested in wealth. Yet in his lifetime his following grew very large and he wielded considerable political power that extended into Anatolia, Syria and the rest of Iran. Thus he and his order would certainly have had the wherewithal to build significant structures at Ardbil, the centre of his dervish order.

When the Safavid tariqa transformed itself into the nucleus of a Shi'i political
dynasty, it encompassed a paradox. In its origins Sufism or the mystical path is ‘open to every Muslim’. The spiritual attainment promised by adherence to the practices of a Sufi tariqa may involve being taught by a shaykh, or spiritual guide, but there are no preconditions on who could achieve the highest religious knowledge. Since religious authority in Shi’ism depends on heredity and specifically descent from the Prophet Muhammad by way of the Imams, the only way that the Safavid shahs could square their Shi’ism with their Shi’ism was by declaring themselves shah as well as murtad-i kamii.

What the precise practices of the Safavid tariqa were at the time of Shaykh Safi is unknown, though the performance of certain rituals was widespread. These included samad, listening to music or poetry about love, often using human love as a metaphor for divine love and the love of God. This hearing exercise, often accompanied by dance, would produce an ecstatic state, much as is depicted in the sixteenth-century painting of Shaykh Safi hearing the words of another Sufi mystic (cat. no. 50). The idea of dhikr is also common to most Sufi groups. Sufis were expected to go into seclusion in order to observe the ritual of dhikr. However, until a Sufi reached the state of knowledge of a shaykh, he would follow the rules laid out for him by his teacher. The rules were supposed to be framed by the Qur’an and Muslim religious law, the shari’a.

By the sixteenth century not only did the Qizilbash supporters of Shah Isma’il I embrace heterodox religious ideas, but other groups such as the Nughtavis overtly challenged the control of the Safavid shahs. They believed in the idea of rebirth after death whereby a person is absorbed into the earth and reemerges as a plant or another object, which may then be consumed by an animal or person. Depending on the level of spiritual knowledge the dead person had attained, the deceased ends up assimilated into this animal or person. Believers who had a high enough level of virtue and knowledge could recognize these dead people in, say, the ear of a horse or the hand of a man. While such notions were deeply un-Islamic, they were not as threatening as the Nughtavis’ belief in their ability to predict the end of the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I. Having treated the Nughtavis leniently before this, the shah now had them brutally suppressed. This was followed by a bizarre incident in which the sighting of a comet caused the court astronomer to suggest that the shah give up his throne for three days in order to avoid disaster. Shah ‘Abbās did so, ceding it to a Nughtavi dervish. At the end of three days he returned to his imperial duties and the dervish was hanged. Since the Nughtavis consisted mostly of artisans and poets, they had no military power, most of those who survived Shah ‘Abbās’s purges fled to India where they had a better reception.

The growth of the shrine

Unlike Shah ‘Abbās’s I’dabāna, which was planned and built within a short period of time, the Shrine of Shaykh Safi at Ardabil in the early seventeenth century had been formed by accretion over nearly three centuries (fig. 49). At the time of Shaykh Safi’s death a khanaqah, or place where his followers came to serve and be instructed by him, was located where his tomb now stands. Tomb chambers for Shaykh Safi’s wife and son were constructed near his grave, while another domed chamber for unknown

members of the Safavid family was erected as a free-standing structure to the north of the shaykh’s tomb. Buildings in which people could congregate, pray, eat and sleep comprised the twenty odd structures of the shrine that were standing in the sixteenth century when the Safavids became the ruling dynasty of Iran. The followers of Shaykh Safi’s teachings chose to be buried near him, and so a vast cemetery grew up on the periphery of the shrine. The desire to be buried near the shaykh also applied to members of the Safavid family, as attested by the tomb of Shah Isma’il I, which is tucked into a constricted space next to that of Shaykh Safi (fig. 50).

When Isma’il became shah in 1501, Ardabil ceased to be his residence. Nevertheless, he and his successor, Shah Tahmasp, erected buildings at the shrine, which they evidently furnished. The most famous of these sixteenth-century furnishings is the pair of magnificent carpets, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Known as the Ardabil carpets, they are signed and dated 946/1539–40. While the donation of buildings to the Ardabil Shrine appears to have been the prerogative of the Safavid family, donations of Qur’ans and other precious books, not to mention charitable endowments, known as waqf, of agricultural land or income-producing businesses, came from devotees of Shaykh Safi and from society at large. Not only did such donations sustain the functions of the shrine, but they also reflected an established tradition in the Islamic world of broad-based support for charitable institutions, be they Shi’i or Sunni.
During the first decade of his rule Shah ‘Abbas visited the Shrine of Shaykh Safi three times to pray to his ancestors for their intercession in his efforts to defeat his enemies. Two of these visits, in 1592 and 1596, were incidental to his being nearby and the other was intended as a pilgrimage. Although Shah ‘Abbas returned to Ardabil in 1605, evidence for his making charitable donations to the shrine is available only from 1606 onwards. A gift of jewels, silver and inlaid utensils, ultimately destined for the Shrine of Imam ‘Ali at Najaf, was to be stored at Ardabil until the Safavids could wrest control of the Shi‘i holy sites in Iraq from the Ottomans. While the Safavids succeeded in conquering Najaf in 1623, the fate of the gifts intended for that shrine and kept on deposit at Ardabil is not known. From 1605 to 1611 Shah ‘Abbas travelled to the shrine five times, performing one pilgrimage in full.

The 1607–8 waqf

In 1607–8 Shah ‘Abbas decided to make a waqf donation to the Ardabil Shrine and the Astan-i Quds Razavi, or Shrine of Imam Riza, at Mashhad. To the former he decreed his library of Persian historical and poetry books as well as his collection of Chinese porcelains and other precious items. To Mashhad he sent his library copies of the Koran and scientific books in Arabic – works on jurisprudence, commentaries on the Koran, traditions, and the like. According to Iskandar Beg Munshi, the gift to the Shrine of Shaykh Safi consisted of his Persian books as well as his collection of Chinese porcelains, including large dishes, celadon ware, wine cups, and other Ghurid and Chinese bowls which were in the royal china store. The Shah’s jewels, jewelled weapons, and bowls of gold and silver; his studs of horses ... and his herds of camels, and flocks of sheep and goats, in number beyond computation ... The value of the Shah’s personal property described above is impossible to calculate.\(^1\)

\(^1\) al-Din Muhammad Mushajjir Yar?u in his Taiakah al-‘Abbas notes that Shah ‘Abbas presented 1,162 pieces of Chinese porcelain, Yemeni carnelian and jade cups to the shrine (fig. 51). The 805 porcelains that remain are now in the possession of the National Museum of Iran. The items in the shah’s gift included ‘goldware, copperware, large and small carpets, and throws (gallieh).’ While the gold, copper and carnelian objects have vanished, three jade cups (cat. nos 75–6) and two carpets (one is cat. no. 91) from this waqf are extant in addition to the collection of porcelain.

As Iskandar Beg observes, the items in the gift were considered to be of inestimable value, which begs the question of why Shah ‘Abbas chose to donate them to the Ardabil Shrine. Since such collections did not produce income and could not be used for the benefit of employees of the shrine, contemporary accounts stress the pious intentions of the donation. As Iskandar Beg puts it, ‘the spiritual reward for these acts was consigned to the spirits of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones’. Although the altruism of this act cannot be questioned, it could also be viewed as a consummate public relations move at a time when the power of Shah ‘Abbas was at its height.\(^2\) Waqfs: names for revenue-yielding property such as real estate were worded so that they provided two levels of benefit, the first to one of the Immaculate Ones, and the second, called thawb, to the souls of deceased but deserving members of the Safavid family.\(^3\)

Beyond the stated intentions of the waqf lies the question of what determined the precise choice of objects and books to be presented to the shrine. Aside from the small extant sample of jades and carpets, one can analyse the porcelains and manuscripts in terms of their style and date. The majority of the porcelains are blue-and-white glazed wares of the Yuan (1271–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties. As Persian paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries show, Chinese blue-and-white ceramics held a perennially high status and were part of the ensemble of precious vessels used at court (see fig. 35).\(^4\) Potters in Iran imitated the Chinese wares in the fifteenth century, but Persian blue-and-white wares in the sixteenth century are no more dominant than polychrome ones. One must assume that the customers for Persian copies of Chinese porcelains in the sixteenth century represented a lower social class than the wealthy collectors of Chinese porcelain.

In order to accommodate the shah’s porcelain collection, the free-standing tomb chamber to the north of Shaykh Safi’s tomb and adjacent to the oblong Dar al-Huffaz was converted and renamed Chini-khana. The room was furnished with plaster niches lining the walls above the dado level. Below, the books were stored flat on shelves. Sixteenth-century Persian and Indian manuscript illustrations\(^5\) attest to the

\(^2\) Fig. 51. The Chini-khana, Shrine of Shaykh Safi, Ardabil.
of such niches with their openings in the shape of bottles or other vessels in audience halls or other rooms in domestic settings. Assuming that the illustrations accurately depict sixteenth-century palatial settings, the porcelains and celadons placed in the niches would have been visible only to those with access to these rooms, that is, members of the court, their guests and their servants. While other illustrations indicate that Persian and Turkman nobility used their presumably Chinese, blue-and-white porcelains, their placement in the niches suggests that they were prized possessions, worthy of being put on display. In addition to the niches at the Ardabil Shrine, they continued to be employed in domestic settings such as Shah ‘Abbas’s palace in Isfahan, the ‘Ali Qapu, where they appear in the so-called ‘music room’.11

The renovations of the shrine not only introduced decorative techniques and motifs that typify the period of Shah ‘Abbas (fig. 52), but also provided an opportunity for dervishes and other people who would never enter one of the Safavid royal palaces to see the grand display of Chinese porcelains and new forms of ornament. A series of images, dating from about 1615 until the 1640s (cat. no. 80), depicts dervishes drinking and scooping wine from large blue-and-white vessels. Although their get-togethers are invariably set in the countryside, the introduction and continuing popularity of this composition may well reflect an actual situation in which dervishes deposited their Chinese porcelains in their shrines. Likewise, despite the previous Iranian production of blue-and-white pottery based on Chinese prototypes, the range and quantity of blue-and-white ceramics made in Iran expanded

enormously in the seventeenth century. This phenomenon cannot be ascribed to a single cause, since the growth of East-West trade between Europe and Asia, the political decline of the Ming dynasty and economic woes in China in the first half of the seventeenth century all contributed to the rise of Iranian ceramic production. However, certain styles that became prevalent in Iran in the mid-seventeenth century appear to owe a debt to the ceramics on view and perhaps in use at the Ardabil Shrine (cat. nos 77–8). Unfortunately, potters were not writers, so such a proposal relies mostly on visual evidence and the occasional reference to a potter who was also a dervish.12

The manuscripts deposited at the Ardabil Shrine also influenced artists, although in this instance the artists were attached to the Safavid court. At least two of the manuscripts given as waqf to the Ardabil Shrine contained illustrations attributed to the late-fifteenth-century Timurid artist, Bihzad, whose reputation as the paragon of Persian painting in the period of Shah ‘Abbas. On the one hand, these manuscripts may have been presented to the shrine because of their works by the illustrious artist or, on the other, Shah ‘Abbas or his librarian or adviser may have considered them to be in an old-fashioned style. Some evidence exists for a dialogue with, if not a revival of, Timurid art and architecture under Shah ‘Abbas.13 The monumentality of the buildings he commissioned and the insertion of illustrations by his court artists into Timurid manuscripts (cat. no. 82) support this suggestion. However, the works of Bihzad also inspired Riza-yi ‘Abbasii to produce a series of drawings in the 1620s based on them. At least one of the Bihzad originals had been on deposit at the Ardabil Shrine since 1611. Thus Riza-yi ‘Abbasii must have travelled to Ardabil, most likely in the court retinue of Shah ‘Abbas before he went to war with the Ottomans in Azerbaijan in 1618 or possibly in 1625, before the Safavid expedition to Baghdad.14 While Riza’s works after Bihzad are all drawings, they demonstrate the abiding interest of later artists in the oeuvres of famous masters. Also, assuming intermediate versions of Bihzad’s compositions were not in circulation in the 1620s, Riza’s group of works after Bihzad confirms that the collections were accessible after they entered the library of the Ardabil Shrine.

Other gifts and refurbishments

During the reign of Shah ‘Abbas many repairs at the shrine are recorded, but not all were made at the Shah’s expense. The earliest silver door in the Dar al-Huffaz is dated 1011/1602-3 (fig. 53). According to Alexander Morton, the door was called the door of Dhu’l-Fiqar Khan in reference to Dhu’l-Fiqar Khan Qaramanlu, who served as governor of Ardabil and Shirvan until his execution in 1610 and would have ordered the door for the shrine.15 The alterations that Shah ‘Abbas ordered in 1611 involved replacing the existing door to Shakh Sali’s tomb with one of gold, levelling the tomb of Rustam Mirza, the son of Shah Isma’il, so that the door could open, enlarging the platform, erecting a silver grille and placing a door in the middle of it. Shah ‘Abbas gave a large sum of money for the gold and silver doors and windows and renovations of the kitchen.16 A gold grille could still be found at the shrine until the mid-twentieth century but was sold in the 1950s.17
Renovations of this sort consisted not only of fixed elements such as doors and grilles but also of objects connected with the function of the shrine, such as lamp stands and mosque lamps. Fortunately, one silver mosque lamp from the shrine, dated 1023/1614, is extant (cat. no. 88). Inscribed with the name of Sahib Nazir ‘Ali Khan and ‘waqfi [waf of] Shaykh Safi’, this lamp and eleven others of gold and silver hung in the tomb of Shaykh Safi and the Dar al-Хuffaz. As with Qarachaghbay Khan (see cat. no. 51), the prestige of giving to the Safavid Shah’s dynastic shrine must have motivated Nazir ‘Ali Khan. The simple decoration of the door and lack of surface ornament on the lamp suggest that Shah ‘Abbas’s renovations combined luxury of materials with extreme decorative restraint. By all accounts the shah favoured simplicity in his style of dress, and his contribution to the refurbishment of the Ardabil Shrine may reflect his liking for quiet opulence.

Kishwar Rizvi has proposed that the shrine became the expression of Shah ‘Abbas’s claim to spiritual and political leadership of the Safavid world. Having overcome the scepticism concerning his claim to be the mamluk of the Safavid dervish order as well as Shah of Iran, he sought to transform the Shrine of Shaykh Safi into a complex in which his lineage would be in no doubt (fig. 54). The inscriptions in the Dar al-Хuffaz include the genealogy of Shaykh Safi going back to Imam ‘Ali. Implying, of course, the perfect Shī‘i pedigree of Shah ‘Abbas. Although he himself persecuted certain dervish orders, he nonetheless honoured the source of his own political and spiritual dominion, the shrine at Ardabil, burial place of his ancestor.

Transfer of the collection of the Shrine of Shaykh Safi to the National Museum of Iran

Mahmud Bahmanifar (trans. Bita Ghezelayagh)

The precious collection of the Shaykh Safi al-Din mausoleum is a souvenir of the famous savant Shaykh Safi, forebear of the Safavid dynasty. In 1300–1301 he succeeded Shaykh Zahid Gilani and decided to create a place for Sufis to live and meet. He was highly esteemed by the people and even by the Mongol kings who ruled Iran at that time. As his followers were taught by him, his Sufi lodge became a school for their guidance, and for this reason a library was established there during his lifetime with the donation of fine books from his followers, who came from a variety of places. After his death he was buried in a mausoleum built on the site of his lodge, which became a place of pilgrimage, and with the influx of people the library flourished.

When the Safavids came to power, the Safavid kings started to pay attention to their ancestral mausoleum, which was also the burial place of the shaykh’s children, and its importance and renown grew. The Safavid kings continued to develop and
enrich it (fig. 55). Because of war with the Ottomans, Shah 'Abbas often travelled to Ardabil and restored and changed some sections of the mausoleum. He refurbished the Chini-khaneh in the style of the Ali Qapu (his palace in Isfahan). In addition to porcelain from China and valuable manuscripts, he donated many precious objects to his ancestral mausoleum.

The octagonal Chini-khaneh is situated to the east of the Qadil-khaneh, or 'Lamp House' (also known as the Dar al-Huffaz), the main vaulted space. The Chini-khaneh has four royal seats and a superb dome ornamented with painted and gilded plaster stalactites. Harmony and colour balance are generated by the various roses and arabesques, which together with the lines of stalactite work make a striking ensemble. Around this were shelves for storing books and porcelains (fig. 51).

After the fall of the Safavid dynasty the contents of the mausoleum came under threat, so much so that the library ceased to prosper because of violence in the region. Nonetheless, it remained operational until the time of Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1794–1834) of the Qajar dynasty and the Russo-Iranian War (1804–13). Following the occupation of Tabriz by the Russian army in 1837, Ardabil was also occupied and the books in the library and some of the fine objects in the mausoleum of Shaykh Saffi were taken to Tabriz and then distributed among the libraries of St Petersburg and the Hermitage Museum. The ninety books that remained in the library were transferred to the Royal Library in Tehran during repairs to the mausoleum ordered by Naser al-Din Shah.23

During the Constitutional Period (1906–24) a Directorate of Antiquities was established on the orders of the Minister of Education, Murtaza Ghuli Hidayat, whose title was Sanah al-Dawleh, to regulate commercial archaeological excavations. The National Museum, or Museum of Education, was also set up at this time in one of the large rooms at the Ministry of Education. This museum contained items of bronze, clay and glass, as well as coins, antique firearms, seals, wooden and woven objects, books, and albums of miniatures, which had been collected by the Directorate of Antiquities or donated by individuals. The contents of the museum were transferred to the Hall of Mirrors in the Masoudiyeh Palace in 1935.

The articles of association of the Society for National Monuments provided for the establishment of a museum and a library in Tehran and for the listing and classification of national treasures. The concession for the design and construction of a museum and national library in Tehran was awarded to the French, and for this reason the French architect André Godard came to Iran in 1929. The construction of the museum began in 1935 and the building opened two years later.

Given the importance of the contents of the mausoleum of Shaykh Saffi and the threat they were under, the Minister of Education of the time, Dr 'Ali Aghbar Hikmat, set up a delegation to investigate and itemize the Chini-khaneh collection.24 The delegation was composed of a government representative, the police chief, the head of finance, the culture minister's representative, and Messrs Godard, Mehran.25

Safar and Khadem-bashi.26 This group became continuously engaged in identifying and itemizing the objects. They received them from Mt Khadem-bashi, packed the fine items in specially prepared containers and sent them to Tehran. Every day they produced minutes and an inventory, which was arranged according to categories, including Qur'ans, grave coverings, carpets, china and so forth.27 In this way the contents of the Shaykh Saffi mausoleum were transferred, after many vicissitudes, to Tehran and were conserved in the Museum of Ancient Iran (Iran Bastan Museum), today's National Museum of Iran. In past years some of the objects have been moved to the museums of Chihil Sutun and Talar Ashraf in Isfahan and the Astane-i Quds Razavi in Mashhad. The second floor of the Museum of Ancient Iran (Iran Bastan Museum) was given over to the Islamic period and some of the treasures of the mausoleum of Shaykh Saffi were displayed in its Hall of Ardabil. Following the opening of the Museum of the Islamic Period in 1996, a substantial number of these objects were transferred to this museum.

NOTES
7. Pope 1956, 10.
13. Welch 1979, 161; Rogers 1993, 92, fig. 58.
14. Cambry 1998, 124–5. In the Moghol Akbar/Nasir of 1596–1605 a 'music room' is depicted with the same type of niches, which implies that they also had acoustic properties.
22. The library of the royal palaces was founded by Aga Muhammad Khan Qajar who had purchased large numbers of books. The collection of books increased at the time of Fath 'Ali Shah, but it was at the time of Naser al-Din Shah that special attention was paid to the library and it was further developed.
23. A copy of the letter, no. 381/7612, dated 1314/24/14 (14th of Dariyabshah) [1935] from the Ministry of Education is in the collection of the National Museum of Iran.
24. Dr Ahmed Mehran at this time was technical director of the Ministry of Culture and in 1935, when the historical building of the Shrine of Shaykh Saufi al-Din came under the direct control of the Ministry of Culture, he was employed as an archaeologist for the preservation of the Ardabil Shrine and was sent to Ardabil. He was also among those who had an effective role in the completion of the building and the installation of artefacts in the Iran Bastan Museum, together with Mr Godard and Dr Farhadmandi (‘Alim al-Molk), the head of the Archaeology Office.
25. According to an inscription in one of the Qur'ans in this collection his complete name is probably Mirta Saiyid Muhammad Khadem-bashi.
26. Some of the correspondence relating to the sale of the collections together with the list of objects is in the National Museum of Iran.

Fig. 56 (overleaf) View of the tiled wall on the west side of the so-called 'Armenian' or courtyard, Shrine of Shaykh Saffi, Ardabil.
Shaykh Safi dances to the esoteric words of Shamsa al-Din Tuti, from the Ta'zkireh of Shaykh Safi al-Din Ishaq Ardbili

This manuscript was compiled in Shiraz, where the Shirazi style of painting, white distinctive, mirrored the style of the Safavid court and in turn influenced the artists of Mughal and Deccani India and Ottoman Turkey, which were markets for Shiraz manuscripts. The repetitve tile patterns, undifferentiated physiognomies and line work for shades of pink and other light colours found in this painting typify the Shirazi school. What sets the painting apart from other manuscripts is its subject matter. Firstly, the depiction of Shaykh Safi dancing to the esoteric words of a Sufi master sheds light not only on the rituals that sixteenth-century imams believed the shaykh to have practiced but also on who might have attended such a gathering. A central tenet of Sufism is the practice of dhikr, and while some Sufi orders limit their practice to this petition, many others, and apparently the Safaviyya, included physical procedures such as dancing, singing or howling to help achieve oneness with God. The listening to dhikr and the accompanying sama' could induce an ecstatic state, which appears to be the subject of this painting.

At the left two men beat tambourines and one claps and sings the words that have moved Shaykh Safi in the centre and other men in the foreground to dance. This ecstatic movement is but one of the forms of activity that Sufis believed could induce a mystical state. While one figure at the right appears to explain what is going on to his friend, four women and a child seated at the back of the room observe Shaykh Safi and his followers. These women, dressed entirely in white and fully veiled, provide an insight into the workings of devotional orders in the Safavid period. If not during the lifetime of Shaykh Safi, unlike sixteenth-century paintings of mosque interiors in which the women appear in separate spaces from the men, such as on balconies or looking on from second-storey windows, here they form part of the circle around Shaykh Safi. Although the women may not have joined in the rituals, their presence suggests that they were initiated into the esoteric practices of the Safaviyya order.

1 Mehlkin-Gothami 2007, 203, 207.
A gathering of grandees

Iltifat, c.1620-25
Opaque watercolour, gold and ink on paper;
59.5 x 24.4 cm
Published: Schmitz 1984, pl. 11
Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, W.691

This is the right-hand page of a double-page composition, probably a frontispiece of a manuscript. Presumably, the left-hand page depicted a princely figure or Shah 'Abbas himself, since the figures here are inscribed with names of known personages at the Safavid ruler's court. Of interest with relation to the Ardabil Shrine is Qaraqchagh Khan, who stands at the upper right with his hands crossed before him, wearing a distinctive turban with a vertical extension in the centre of the wrapped turban cloth. Schmitz has discussed this headdress, which was worn in the early seventeenth century by high-ranking officials known as shahverd, those whose first loyalty was to the shah.1

Qaraqchagh Khan 'was an Armenian Christian from Britvan, who had been taken captive as a child and enrolled among the ghalams (i.e. ghulams) of the royal household. Since he was an intelligent man, he rose rapidly through the ranks.2 After starting in the royal tailoring department, he became commander of a regiment of musketeers and then a field commander. Eventually he was appointed commander-in-chief of the Safavid army. After a short period as military governor of Azerbaijan province, including Ardabil, he was appointed governor of Mashhad and most of Khurasan, posts that he held when he died in 1624-5.3

Among the porcelains donated by Shah 'Abbas to the Ardabil Shrine, ninety-four are inscribed with the name of Qaraqchagh Khan. Massoumeh Forhad has analysed this group of blue-and-white wares and has concluded that they are stylistically consistent, dating from the early fifteenth century. She proposes that this type of Chinese porcelain was available on the market in Iran and that Qaraqchagh Khan had collected them. Some porcelains both Qaraqchagh Khan's mark and the waqf inscription of Shah 'Abbas (see cat. no. 60). This suggests that Shah 'Abbas acquired these from his governor, most likely as a gift, before or at the time of the donation. Out of loyalty to the shah and his family, Qaraqchagh Khan presented the others to the shrine, but possibly this gift did not enter the shrine until 1617-18, when he was made governor of Azerbaijan.4

1 Schmitz 1984, 110.
2 Hakimfar Beg Mardal/Servoy, 1260.
3 Forhad 2004, 123.
Dervish with horn and begging bowl
Ishshan-e Quvain, early 17th century
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper; page 23.5 x 15.2 cm, image 11 x 8.4 cm
British Museum, ME 1990,0607,0.15

DURING the reign of Shah 'Abbás, portraits of dervishes enjoyed great popularity. Despite his repressive policies towards the Naqšbandis in 1637, he tolerated dervishes from other tariqas, as a number of dervish paintings bearing the royal seal attest. In fact, the artistic record suggests that the role of dervishes in Safavid society under Shah 'Abbás was far more complex than the texts might imply. From paintings of fashionable youths meeting dervishes and depictions of dervishes by court artists one can deduce that these figures mixed in society and did not simply remain clustered in seclusion or in khanaqahs. Additionally, in the 1580s and 1590s, when the economy of Iran was in crisis, it is understandable that some people would have found itinerant dervishes, seeking spiritual uplift through mysticism.

The figure in this painting carries the accoutrements associated with dervishes: an ibex horn, which he blows, and a khatā. Moreover, he wears a sheepskin draped over his shoulders and a domed red cap with a fur border. The gold vegetation and white landscape elements are consistent with drawings and paintings of the decades around 1600. By portraying the dervish in profile, the anonymous artist has accentuated his large, hooked nose and the single cocked hat emerging from his chignon. In contrast to the portraits of young dandies who remained unidentified and undifferentiated, this and many other portraits of dervishes from the period of Shah 'Abbás are distinctly individualized and often the sitters are named in inscriptions.

Because Sufis rejected the material world, they were mendicants. Although the biographies of famous Sufis do not emphasize begging, they do recount the extensive travels of such figures as Shāhī Yarī Sadīq in search of a spiritual master. The begging bowl, whose form derives from pre-Islamic wine bowls, is a symbol of the asceticism of the dervish. Likewise, the sheepskin is an element of his rejection of luxury. The horn, of which an example is on view today in the Naqshbandi Shrine in Bukhara, was more probably used to make the dervish's presence known than to accompany the ritual dancing or singing of a dervish gathering.

Begging bowl (kashkul)

Iran, 1640s
Ceramic, stone paste body, underglaze-blue decoration; l. 31 cm, h. 12.5 cm, w. 11.5 cm
Private collection

This begging bowl is decorated on each side with a long, undulating winged dragon terminating in a very small head. As with other examples of this period, the dragon has a wide mane that rises up at the back of its head but is cut off by the edge of the border above it. The border consists of a band of scrolling leaves, typical Persian blue-and-white ceramics of the 1660s. Beneath the rim cartouches containing pseudo-lettered alternates with blank white cartouches. The two lugs for hanging a chain that were originally past of this vessel have broken off. Unlike later ceramic begging bowls, this one rests on a scalloped elliptical foot. Derived from Chinese regal marks, the blue tassel mark on the base resembles those found on numerous other Persian blue-and-white ceramic items.1

Most paintings of dervishes carrying begging bowls depict them with metal or wooden bowls. While few wooden ones from the seventeenth century are extant, some very fine metal pieces remain, but these are often quite large and presumably were not used by actual mendicant dervishes. Ceramic kashkul, however, would have been lighter and less expensive than metal ones. Melikian-Chirvani has claimed that ceramic bowls of this shape were intended for wine, not for begging. Not only does the shape derive from that of Persian wine bowls but he also notes the fragility of the material if used for begging. Since seventeenth-century paintings of dervishes drinking invariably show this happening from round bowls or tankards, ceramics bowls such as this one may not have been employed by dervishes at all. Instead, they may have been acquired by settled city-dwellers who sympathized with the dervishes without wishing to join them.2


Large serving dish

China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Yuan dynasty, c.1330–50
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 7.8 cm, diam. 46.9 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 66, 71, pl. 15, cat. no. 29-47
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 9257

This rare dish is decorated in the centre in uneven tones of underglaze cobalt-blue with a sinuous three-clawed dragon surrounded by a white cloud and densely patterned blue waves. The walls of the dish are decorated inside and out with lion scrolls and there is a cross-diaper border around the inner rim. In popular Chinese mythology dragons are an auspicious emblem. As supernatural creatures, they can ascend into the heavens and descend into the depth of the seas. It was believed that dragons controlled the water supply. They are thus often combined with clouds and waves. In the Yuan era (1271–1368), Chinese dragons have horns, whiskers, a scaly serpentine body, spiny back and three, four or five clawed feet.

All the ceramics in this section (cat. nos 55–72) were made at Jingdezhen, a town in the southern Chinese province of Jiangxi. Jingdezhen is one of the world’s earliest industrial towns. Kings have produced porcelain there for more than a thousand years, employing thousands of workers and producing millions of vessels and sculptures. No other kiln complex in the world can claim such a long and continuous history. Furthermore, Jingdezhen blue and white is one of the world’s most influential products, sparking copies in local materials across the globe.

The blue pigment used at Jingdezhen in the early fourteenth century was imported from the Near East or Central Asia. Chinese potters then applied a cobalt ore, rich in iron oxide and sometimes containing some arsenic, nickel and copper. Later, in the fifteenth century, manganese-cobalt pigments were used that were lower in iron.3 Yuan iron-rich cobalt diffused in patches through the transparent glaze and after cooling appeared black in certain spots and pale blue in others creating the “beaded and pitted” effect seen here.4


Large serving dish painted with a ‘mandarin’ fish swimming among water plants
China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. Yuan dynasty, c.1350-50
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 8.9 cm, diam. 40.8 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 67, pl. 9 and 19, cat. no. 29.42
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 9073

This magnificent serving dish is thickly potted from porcelain clay, with shallow rounded sides, a flattered rim and an unglazed base. The foot ring is cut at an angle on the inside. Inside it is painted in the centre in uneven tones of underglaze blue with a large fish known as a ‘mandarin’ or carp. It is surrounded by aquatic plants - ferns and waterweeds. John Alexander Pope identified the Chinese character chun meaning ‘spring’ carved into the fish beneath the glaze. The scrolls of the dish are decorated inside and out with lotus scrolls, some with white centres, and there is a cross-diaper border around the inner rim. The Chinese word for fish, jū, and the word for ‘abundance’ are both pronounced the same and thus in China the fish is a symbol for wealth and prosperity.

Large serving dishes represent the most common group of Yuan-dynasty Chinese porcelains in the Ardabil Shrine. These were more suited to Near Eastern living than Chinese cuisine, which requires a variety of smaller bowls and containers. Serving dishes of this pattern were exported to Southeast Asia and India as well as the Near East. Shards from dishes with minor variations were excavated at a palace complex, Kotla Mirzahab, in Delhi, which was built in 1554 for Sultan Fath Shah Tughluq, but not much lived in after 1388 and destroyed in 1398. A similar dish with a drilled dot-patterened owner’s mark in its wash-covered base is in the Topkapi Sarayi, Istanbul. This owner’s mark, illustrated by Pope, also appears on pieces in the Ardabil collection.

Although originally produced in large quantities for export, few porcelain dishes of this variety survive today. Slightly larger dishes of this type are in the private Mei Jingtang Collection and examples with the same design but with a bracket-shaped rim are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and in the British Museum.  

1. Pope 1956, pl. 9.
2. Smart 1977, pl. 79a and 80a.
4. Pope 1956, 38 from no. 29.82. The object itself is not illustrated in the catalogue.
6. Tomkinson 1989, pl. 56.
This large serving dish has rounded sides and a flattened bracket-lobed rim with a thickened edge. It combines painting in underglaze blue and reserved areas on a deep blue ground. Typical of Yuan porcelain made at Jingdezhen, the ornament is densely packed into contrasting concentric bands, probably inspired by Near Eastern metalwork inlaid with gold and silver. In the centre, a bracket-lobed medallion frames a single lotus flower and leaves. Surrounding this are eight emblems, four auspicious or Buddhist motifs alternating with four lotus blooms. The emblems are possibly coins, paired rhinoceros horns, wheels of the law and two conch shells. Beyond this is a broad band with two pairs of male and female phoénixes (distinguished by their different tails) flying with wings outstretched and surrounded by chrysanthemum scroll. This scene is framed by a band of white crested waves repeated on the rim and with peonies in the cavetto. From excavated shards we know that similar, thickly potted dishes with reserved decoration on blue grounds were made, for example, at Huian in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, in the Yuan period.¹


Although this large serving dish is typical in form for the Yuan dynasty, having a flattened bracket-lobed rim with a thickened edge, its decoration is highly unusual. It combines painting in underglaze cobalt-blue with reserved decoration on a deep-blue ground and some motifs in raised relief. In the centre, painted in underglaze blue, is a flying phoenix surrounded by various plants including morning glory, plantain, melon and grapes. The cavetto is decorated with white peony flowers and leaves in raised relief against a fine blue-line ground. The rim border is very rare with raised flowers and foliage covered with a blue-ttined glaze on a deep-blue ground. Pope identifies these flowers as chrysanthemum, gardenia and crab apple.²

1. Pope 1936, pl. 22.

². Pope 1936, pl. 22.
**Large meiping painted with flowers and a fabulous beast**

Mark of Qazaghay

China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Yuan dynasty, c.1330–50

Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 43 cm, diam. 27 cm

Published: Pope 1956, n2-3, 6, pl. 29, cat. no. 29.408

National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 9297

This large meiping (vessel, wider at the shoulders than the base) is decorated in horizontal bands with a peony scroll around the middle framed by an upper and lower band of classic scroll. Surrounding the shoulder a mythical beast is shown, surrounded by leafy lotuses, and around the foot lotus panels frame curlicue patterns. The base is unglazed. Thickly potted vases were practical for export. Their robust forms would have been well suited for travel, although their thick firing makes them heavy to lift.

The piece bears the drilled mark, "Qazaghay", on the shoulder and on the foot. This piece and other meipings with the same mark are the only fourteenth-century porcelains among the seventy-four at the Ardabil Shrine with this mark. The rest all date to the fifteenth century. Qazaghay Khan served as governor of Ardabil from 1613 to 1615. Since a number of the porcelains that bear his mark also have that of Shah 'Abbas, he may have donated these pieces to the shrine at the time Shah 'Abbas made his way, well before Qazaghay became governor.

Although the Topkapı Saray in Istanbul does not possess any meiping vase with the same shoulder decoration, Yuan examples of this shape and scale are known.1

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**Large guan wine jar painted with peonies and fabulous creatures**

China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Yuan dynasty, c.1330–50

Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 50.7 cm, diam. 37.7 cm

Published: Pope 1956, n2-3, 6, pl. 28, cat. no. 29.523

National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 8723

Despite being made of porcelain clay, this thickly potted jar is very heavy. It has an ovoid body, dish mouth and restored handles in the form of fish dragons. It stands on an unglazed base. In common with most Chinese porcelains of this era, its decoration, painted beneath a transparent glaze with cobalt-blue, is arranged in contrasting horizontal bands.

The broad central register is decorated with a flowering peony scroll with blooms viewed alternately from above or the side. Around the shoulder on either side are two fierce mythical creatures surrounded by flowering plants. The neck is painted with white foarn-crested waves and the rim with a diaper pattern. Below the peonies is a band of classic scroll and around the foot eight framed lotus flowers with leaves and circles.

Jars of this form were used for storing wine. They were made for both domestic and export purposes. A similar jar and cover with animal mask handles was excavated in the tomb of Tang He (1526–95), one of the military leaders employed by the first Ming emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang (lived 1328–98). Tang He's tomb is located in Bengdu (formerly Fengyang county), Anhui province. They were also exported to countries in the Near East and to Southeast Asia. The Ardabil Shrine contains another related example (reg. no. 29.522), and a further one was found in Wat Methathat, a temple at Lampang, Thailand. Two related examples are in the British Museum, London.2

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1 Pope 1956, n2-3, 6, pl. 29.
Large rectangular wine flask with mythical creatures, peahen and peacock

China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Yuan dynasty, c. 1330–50
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 36.2 cm, diam. 25.3 cm, depth 10 cm
Published: Pope 1996, 62–3, 68, pl. 28, cat. no. 29-475
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 8743

This heavily potted rectangular flask has a narrow neck with a thickened edge, curved shoulders and two loop handles attached on either side. It stands on a broad foot ring and has a slightly recessed base splashed with glaze. On one side it is painted with a peahen and peacock surrounded by blooming peonies and foliage. By contrast, the other side shows a phoenix flying down towards a fabulous beast, which is surrounded by leafy lotus. The sides are painted with cartouches framing chrysanthemum flowers with a ruyi-head terminal. Two of the four handles are restored.

This flask is far too large and heavy to have been a portable container but rather was made as an outsize decanter. A related Zhizhou-type flask (wares from Zhizhou usually have black designs on a white ground) made in Shaoxing province in northern China is in the British Museum. Its inscription includes the name 'Yang Gao wine' and 'Made by the Jia family of Baishan'. These stoneware versions have been discovered in Yuan dwelling sites within Beijing. A Western visitor to China in the thirteenth century, William of Rubruck, recorded that the Mongols enjoyed four varieties of wine: kemtar (fermented mare’s milk), rice wine, grape wine and honey wine.

Very few blue-and-white vessels of this type exist today. Others with variations in the form and design are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, in the Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia, in the Topkapı Sarayı.
Serving dish painted with fruiting grape vine

Hsing-nienh (chinese inscriptions) of Shah 'Abbas and underglaze Persian mark
China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Ming dynasty, c. 1403–24
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 8 cm, diam. 43 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 49, 85, 90, 94, pl. 37, cat. no. 29, 95
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 8949

Another dish of this period with a Xuanzang mark and flower border in place of the waves was excavated at Jingdezhen. Two dishes of similar design, one with a drilled owner’s mark, are in the Topkapı Sarayı. Others are in the Percival David Collection and the British Museum.

Large bulbous flask with three-clawed dragon among waves

Marks of Shibuld and Qaraqchaghayi drilled in the face of the dragon and a further inscription in Persian on the base
China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Ming dynasty, c. 1403–25
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue, reserved and incised decoration and transparent glaze; h. 42 cm, diam. 33 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 50, 54, 86 and 90, pl. 33, cat. no. 35, 47; Thompson and Cusley 2003, 295, cat. no. 11.5
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 8721

This heavily potted flask is one of two identical examples in the Ardashir Collection. It has a rounded body and thick tubular neck that flares slightly at the rim. It is decorated with a three-clawed dragon with incised details on a ground of denser white-crested waves depicted in underglaze blue. Around the rim is a band of classic scroll. The base is unglazed.

Such flasks were produced in both the Yongle (1403–24) and Xuande (1425–35) eras at Jingdezhen with minor variations to the decoration and shape of the neck. They were also made with blue dragons and leaves on a white ground. An example of both of these is in the Sir Percival David Collection. In 1994, archaeologists excavated a similar flask dating to the Yongle era at Dongmentou, Zhushan, Jingdezhen. A slightly larger flask of this type with a later Ottoman mount is in the Topkapı Sarayı.

The presence of marks with the names Qaraqchaghayi and Shibuld is of particular resonance because of the role of both men in the death of Shah ‘Abbas’s eldest son, Muhammad Baqt-i Mizra. Figures at court had convinced Shah ‘Abbas that his son was plotting to overthrow him, and, according to one European account, the Shah asked Qaraqchaghay Khan to assassinate his son. Qaraqchaghay refused, and the Shah turned to another ghulam, Bibuld Beg, who carried out the deed to February 1614. The two men, Qaraqchaghay and Bibuld Beg, would have known each other as ghulams in the royal entourage and Qaraqchaghay may have received this flask from Bibuld Beg through purchase or as a gift. Since the piece lacks the waqfnamah of Shah ‘Abbas, Qaraqchaghay may have given it to the Ardashir Shrine during his time as governor of Ardabil, between 1614 and 1616.

4. Pope 1956, 54-3, quoting Aslin Burtin. The story may be somewhat incorrect since Ozbekon claims that Bibuld Beg was murdered by his servants not long after this event. Ibn Dolkhor, Muntakhab al-Sawarī, 1186, reports that he was appointed governor of Ardabil in 1620-21.
Large serving dish painted with a river view and Chinese plants

China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Ming Dynasty, Yongle period, 1403–24
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration and transparent glaze. h. 8.7 cm, diam. 64.1 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 49, 85, 91, 95, pl. 43 and 44. cat. no. 29, 311
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 8712

This massive saucer-shaped dish is decorated in the center with a river or lake-shore scene. The plants in the center are identified by Regina Krähl as a flowering peach and bamboo among chrysanthemums and other flowers, millet and fern. The cavetto is further ornamented with eight separate groups of plants, each growing from its own bed, among them carnation, rose, morning glory, millet, chrysanthemum, narcissus and grasses. Outside, similarly, there are eight groups of flowering plants but they are each repeated twice. The base is unglazed.

Early Ming dishes of this size and pattern are very rare but a related example was excavated at Dongmengou, Zhushan, in Jingdezhen at the site of the early Ming imperial factory in 1994.1 Two other examples are in the Topkapi Sarayı one in the Palace Museum, Beijing,2 and one in the Idemitsu Museum, Tokyo. Potters found this type of dish hard to fire because of its size and the fact that it easily warped in the kiln.

Serving dish showing a three-clawed dragon among waves

Hausmann of Shah’s Abbas on exterior, mark of Qazaghkham on base
china, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Ming dynasty, 1403–24
unmatted with underglaze cobalt-blue, reserved and incised decoration and transparent glaze; h. 7.2 cm, diam. 41.2 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 91–2, 96, pl. 45, cat. no. 29,37. 
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 9070

Meiping with flowering and fruiting branches
Mark of Shibai and Qazaghkham on the base of the vase; mark of Shah’s Abbas on the base
China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Ming dynasty, c. 1525–35
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 25.2 cm, diam. 19.5 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 90, 96, 105, pl. 45, cat. no. 29,813. 
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 9314

According to Pope, this meiping is one of four broad-shuffled vases with identical decoration in the Ardabil Shrine. The waisted inscription (below) on the base of the vase states that ‘Shah’ Abbas, son of the King of Persia [i.e. Iran’s ‘All], endowed this to the threshold of Shah Safi and stresses the humility of Shah’s Abbas. It is painted with individual flowering and fruiting branches in the main register, with overlapping leaf patterns around the foot and densely decorated latticework around the shoulder. In China, plants were cultivated for food and ornament, of course, but were also used to produce domestic medicines. The Bencao Gangmu – an illustrated lexicon of plants – was published in 1596, three years after the death of its author, Li Shih-chen, and includes some 900 plants, many of which are used as decorative motifs on porcelain.

Here we see pomegranate, crab apple, ladybirds and lizards – also known as ‘dragon’s eyes’. The pomegranate is identified by its tightly clustered bloom and fruits with a spiny tip. There are generally depicted with split skins revealing the many seeds inside. The fruits with their abundant seeds became a symbol of fertility. Although the pomegranate is an important symbol in Chinese art, it was an imported plant. The pomegranate is first recorded in China in the late third century BC and probably arrived in China overland via Iran. Ladybirds identified by their spiny blister skin symbolize the wish for the birth of a son. The longan is a close relative of the lychee but is distinguished by its smaller fruits and larger leaves as well as its brown, as opposed to pink, rough skin.

While some of these fruits are native to Iran, their Chinese symbolism was not recognized in Iran. Rather, the beauty of the designs, the hardness and whiteness of the porcelain and the usefulness of these objects must have appealed to the Iranians who collected them.

1 Kushl 1987a, evile.

67 detail
This flask is one of three similar ones in the Ardabil Collection. It has a flattened round body with a central circular depression on either side, tapering neck, short handles at the shoulder and ingot-shaped knops on either side. It stands on a broad quadrifoil foot, glazed inside. Underglaze cobalt-blue decoration is arranged in concentric bands with a conch shell surrounded by octofoliate cartouches in the centre. These panels alternate with half flowers with three leaves each. The next band is filled with phoenixes mid a dense lorus scroll. It was probably used as a decanter for wine.

This type of very dense decoration with dark-blue outlines and pale-blue infill is typical of Hongzhi-period (1468–1505) ming yao, or non-imperial, wares. The deep-blue cobalt with pale blue infill began in the late Chenghua era, evidenced by a blue-and-white tripod incense burner dated by an ink inscription to 1484, unearthed near Shensi, Fungtai, Zhangshou city. The flask is also related to mid-fifteenth-century Chinese wares glazed along with Vietnamese ceramics in 1993 from the Pandanari shipwreck, also known as the Leng Jink, which sank off the coast of Palawan Island in the Philippines.

The shape of the flask derives from Islamic sheet-metal flasks, which ultimately have a leather prototype. There is a similar flask with a missing foot and damaged neck in the Topkapi Saray, Istanbul. Interestingly, the shape of blue-and-white decoration were developed again in seventeenth-century Iran. The British Museum possesses a box that is dated 1036/1626–7, was probably made in Mashhad and relates closely in shape and some aspects of decoration to this Chinese piece.1

Gourd-shaped bottle with auspicious characters and emblems

China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Ming dynasty, 1522-1668
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 55 cm, diam. 26.6 cm
Published: Pope 1936, 125, 127, 128, pl. 86, cat. no. 29.477
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 4614

THIS gourd-shaped bottle is decorated with auspicious characters and emblems throughout, the dominant features of which are those of the Auspicious Characters. The upper section features a pair of circular medallions framing a tree, while the lower section displays a circular medallion on either side, with a small character in the middle. The characters are written in a variety of scripts and are framed by floral motifs, likely representing the elements of life and prosperity. The bottle is decorated with cobalt blue glaze, which gives it a rich, blue color. The design is intricate and detailed, with the characters and motifs carefully executed, reflecting the skill of the artisans who crafted it.

Porcelain decorators used cobalt blue glaze to create a vivid, smooth, bright-blue tone in contrast to the earlier, irregular, 'braced and piled'. Yuan and early Ming cobalt blue.

In the Chinese tradition, the gourd is associated with longevity and immortality, as its shape resembles a human body. The bottle is a perfect example of the skill and artistry of the Jingdezhen potters, who were renowned for their ability to create intricate designs and intricate forms. The bottle is a symbol of good fortune and prosperity, and it is often given as a gift to celebrate important occasions.

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Bucket-shaped vessel decorated with auspicious images

China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Ming dynasty, 1490–1580
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration and transparent glaze; h. 35.2 cm, diam. 28.3 cm
Published: Pope 1936, 11, 131, pl. 96, cat. no. 28.69
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 8836

An abundance of fish in waters can also be an emblem of a good harvest.

According to the chief astronomer Hualal al-Din, who describes the decoration of the porcelains at Ardabil in the summer of 1611 and the listing of the 1,162 porcelains transferred to the fine china store, this gift included a 'quahal' (or grail). This had a wide top and narrow bottom and could thus be used as a milk container or chaf.

Pope suggests this refers to the present bucket-shaped vessel. In China this shape is very unusual indeed and, if used domestically, it is more likely it was to have been as an incense burner. The handles are found on contemporary Ming metal work and ceramics and the ribs may again refer back to a metal-work prototype. JH-H

1 Pope 1936, 8-11.
Dish decorated with a sinewy three-clawed dragon pursuing a flaming pearl

China, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, Yuan dynasty, c. 1320–50
Porcelain with applied, slipted, incised and glazed decoration; h. 8.6 cm, diam. 46 cm

Published: Pope 1954, 151, pl. 119, cat. no. 29.747
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 8711

This large dish is remarkable for its extremely rare decoration rather than for its shape. Potters first applied a sinewy three-clawed dragon pursuing a flaming pearl cut from thin clay. Details, including the dragon's scales, were incised and slip details added; its eyes were painted blue or greater realism. The monochrome glaze is a high-temperature glaze so potters could have fired the dish at about 1,250 degrees centigrade. Originally, the dragon may have been gilded. In contrast to the West, in China dragons are traditionally considered to be auspicious. They are regarded as the controllers of the climate and ultimately came to symbolize imperial authority.

Such dishes are extremely rare. Small, shallow dishes with flat bases and a similar design exist in the collections of the Palace Museum, Beijing; the Idemitsu Museum, Tokyo; the former Ataka collection; the British Museum; and the Percival David Collection, London. A dish of the same form as the Ardashir one but with an even greater gilding of the dragon and its flames is in the Topkapi Saray. The technique is also used to decorate meiping vases and jie (bowl with spout) salvers. This dish may have been the source of inspiration for Iranian potters in the mid-seventeenth century who produced a class of wares with striking designs in white slip on a monochrome ground (see below).

Guan jar with flowering peony decoration
China, Longquan area kilns, Zhejiang province, Yuan dynasty, 1280-1368
Porcelainous stoneware with green (celdes) glaze: h. 23.3 cm, diam. 33.2 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 157, pl. 130, cat. no. 29.634
National Museum ofirsch, Inv. no. 9279

THIS celadon jar has a compressed globular body with a short open neck. The sides taper inwards to a base that is smaller than the neck. It stands on a glazed base. The decoration is carried in high relief to show leafy peony with a band of lotus petals below. The method of constructing this squat, heavily potted jar distinguishes it as having been made in the Yuan dynasty. Described by Pope, the bottom of the jar was first left open; then, before firing, the potter placed a shallow dish, slightly larger in diameter than the opening, inside. This was covered with glaze and fired to seal it. The green colour comes from adding up to 7 per cent iron oxide to the glaze and firing in a reducing atmosphere of around 1,200 degrees centigrade.

This jar was made in kilns in the area of Longquan county, in the south-western part of Zhejiang province. As with porcelains made at Jingdezhen, Longquan pots were not creations of individual artists but the result of a factory process. In common with Jingdezhen, these Longquan green wares were sold within China and were also marketed to countries in Africa, Europe, the Near East, Southeast Asia and the Far East. Finished pots were distributed via the Ou and Songai Rivers to busy coastal ports such as Quanzhou and Wenzhou as well as inland cities.

Chinese people's appreciation of green wares is closely related to the national love of jade. 1 However, celadons were less popular abroad. For example, within the Ardabil Collection there are far fewer green than blue-and-white wares. As a group they represent approximately 7 per cent of the total collection.

1. Pope 1956, 157, pl. 130, cat. no. 29.634.

Large serving dish painted with a single peony
Northern Vietnam, Chu Dau kilns, Hai Duong Province, Red River Delta, c. 1430-70
Stoneware with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration, opaque green glaze and a dressed base: h. 9.2 cm, diam. 44 cm
Published: Pope 1956, 105-6, pl. 57, cat. no. 29.143
National Museum of Iran, Inv. no. 8662

THIS Vietnamese serving dish is the only one of its kind in the Ardabil Shrine. It is distinguished from the Chinese blue-and-white wares by its body material, firing method and decoration. In contrast to the other blue-and-white ceramics in this section, it has a stoneware rather than a porcelain body. Vietnamese potter left the rims and foot rings of such dishes unglazed, enabling them to economize on fuel by stacking them rim to rim in the kiln. Many differently shaped vessels were fired one on top of another in a single sagger and these saggers were then stacked. Vietnamese craftsmen made further economies by firing their wares at a lower temperature than their Chinese counterparts. The chocolate-coloured dressed base was used in Vietnam from the thirteenth century onwards and is a feature of green, blue, blue-and-white and cream wares. Some early Ming porcelains made at Jingdezhen in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries are also known with treated bases.

When John Alexander Pope catalogued the Chinese porcelains in the Ardabil Shrine in 1956, little was known of Vietnamese ceramics. Since then, kiln excavations and salvaged remains of shipwrecks have revolutionized our knowledge of blue-and-white wares made in Vietnam. Archaeologists have excavated sections of similar dishes with 'scalloped pot' borders around a central motif and with single peony designs at Chu Dau in Hai Duong Province within the Red River Delta in the northern part of Vietnam. This site is vast, with an estimated area of 70,000 square metres, although the greatest concentration of finds is in an area measuring just 3,000 square metres. Chu Dau products are of a high quality and were made for members of noble or wealthy Vietnamese families, for large pagodas in Vietnam or for export. These kilns were established along the That Binh River, and the ceramics were carried by water networks all the way to the coast. Chu Dau kilns prospered in the late fourteenth to sixteenth centuries but declined in the early seventeenth century as a result of civil war between supporters of the Le and Mac dynasties, which seriously affected the region.

Vietnamese blue-and-white wares were heavily influenced by earlier Chinese porcelains made in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. For example, the back of this dish is very similar to a fourteenth-century Chinese serving dish in the Ardabil Shrine. Vietnamese government forces had occupied Vietnam from 1406 until Le Loi, founder of the Le dynasty (1428-1788), finally defeated the Chinese army in 1428. Later, in the mid-fifteenth century, Vietnamese merchants took advantage of the political situation in China and set up in fierce competition to their neighbours. They exported locally made blue and white wares to other countries in Southeast Asia and the Near East. The same single peony design appears on a pilgrim flask found in Ternate in the Moluccas now in the National Museum, Jakarta, 2 while a fragment of a similar dish was excavated at the Arabised port of Jaffa (al-Madina). 3

Stylistically, this dish is similar to the large vase with globular body decorated with a peony scroll and dated by inscription to 1450 in the Topkapi Saray, Istanbul. 4 The Ardabil dish is also related to mid-fifteenth-century Vietnamese wares salvaged from a large ship that sank among a cluster of islands, 22 kilometres off the coast of Central Vietnam near Hai An, an ancient trading port. The wreck held 300 items, more than half of which were intact, and was dated by the site director of archaeology to 1430-80. 5

4. Tran 2007, 175.
**Jade cup with dragon handle**

Iran or Central Asia, 15th century

Dark green nephrite. h. 16.4 cm, w. 9.5 cm, l. 15.5 cm
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 8842

Although jade had been used in Iran since antiquity, its prevalence, or at least extant examples that point to an increase in collecting jade in Iran, dates from the late fourteenth century when Iran came under Timurid control. The types of objects made of jade reflect the traditional beliefs in the efficacy of the material for certain purposes. Thus jade pendants were believed to cure or protect the wearer from stomach ailments; the ability of jade to safeguard against lightning led to the production of jade hilted and quillons (cross-guards), which averted the lightning blows of enemy swords and brought victory; and ornate jade cups and bowls were luxurious vessels for wine-drinking.

The bowl of this wine cup is slightly oval, while its foot consists of four lobes. Its handle has been carved in the shape of a dragon's head and neck. Slightly above the foot is incised Bandeh-yi shah-i vilayat ‘Abbas waqf bar asylum-yi shah Saff namad, translated as “Abbas, slave of the king of saintliness [Ali] made endowment of this to the threshold of Shah Safi”. This is the long form of the waqf inscription that appears on the majority of the porcelains given by Shah ‘Abbas to the Ardabil Shrine. As the style of the nastaliq inscription is identical to those found on the porcelains of the waqf, one can assume that the same person,

Maslama Muhammad Husain Hakakk Khurasani, added the words to all of the ceramics and jade in the donation.

The traditional dating of such cups to the fifteenth century has been challenged by Melikian-Chirvani, who has broadened the periodization of jade production in Islamic Iran, claiming that jade vessels were available in Iran from the seventh century onwards. The shape, foot and dragon handle of this bowl closely resemble a smaller example in the collection of the British Museum. This, in turn, relates to a cup inscribed with the name of Ulugh Beg, the grandson of Timur, who for many years served as governor of Samarqand before reigning as the Timurid sultan from 1447 to 1449. Although thirteenth-century gold cups with dragon handles have been found in Siberia, the shapes of the bowl and dragon differ from those of the jade examples. Thus several stages of development most probably intervened between the gold Siberian cup and the jade versions from Central Asia and possibly Iran.

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**Jade wine boat**

Iran or Central Asia, late 14th to early 15th century

Dark green nephrite. h. 14.4 cm, w. 5.9 cm, l. 15.1 cm
National Museum of Iran, 8844

The elliptical shape of this wine cup closely resembles that of the Persian wine boat, a form with a very long history in Iranian art. The dragon handle on this piece has been carved in the centre of the long side, a characteristic that connects the piece with a jade wine boat dated by Melikian-Chirvani to the eleventh century. Although the shape of this example is rounder than the earlier wine boat, it retains the flanges at either end. Also, unlike the cup (cat. no. 75) the dragon’s snout rests on the rim of the wine boat rather than rising above the rim so that the rim ‘supports’ its lower jaw.

While these details suggest that this wine boat is earlier in date than the cup, other evidence suggests that it does not necessarily date from before the Timurid period (1370-1506). In a painting of a ‘Raysunghur ibn Shah Rukh seated in a garden’ from a manuscript (Kahk wa ittima) dated 833/1429, the Timurid prince and connoisseur Raysunghur holds an elliptical gold cup full of wine, while before him various bottles and two other gold cups rest on a table. One of the cups is low and elliptical, with no sign of a foot, much like the cup that Raysunghur holds, while the other is more rhomboidal in shape and has a foot. Although these examples are gold, jade was considered very valuable and would have been of equal status at a princely gathering. By the end of the fifteenth century wine vessels of this shape no longer appear in royal level manuscript illustrations, which implies that they had gone out of fashion. Similarly, one does find many examples of this shape in fourteenth-century paintings. The evidence thus indicates that while the form had a long and venerable tradition, its period of maximum esteem in Iran and Central Asia was the first half of the fifteenth century.

Like the porcelains that he donated to the Ardabil Shrine, these jades would have been considered high-value luxury items in the period of Shah ‘Abbas. However, wine drinking, a pastime in which he indulged with pleasure, had evolved by the early sixteenth century. Servants now poured wine from elegant long-necked bottles and ewers into small wine cups instead of boat-shaped bowls with dragon handles.

2. Lowney 1988, 83.
Assuming that this dish was produced at a major ceramic production centre such as Kirman in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, what inspired the potter to diverge from the fashion for copying Chinese Kraak wares? Is it possible that the potter travelled to Ardabil as a pilgrim and saw or even used the Chinese blue dish with the incised design of a white dragon (cat. no. 72)? Lisa Golombek has noted that Narehndi mentions a devirsh potter named ‘Arab Aqqa’, so a pilgrimage to Ardabil by a follower of Shaykh Sall who also happened to be a potter is not a far-fetched notion. As paintings of devirs getting drunk from blue- and-white and monochrome-blue bowls suggest, the porcelain depozi at Sufi shrines were put to use by pilgrims (see cat. no. 80); yet even if the porcelain at Ardabil remained in their shrines, they were still visible to the range of people who visited the shrine.

1. Lane 1937, 106–7, pl. 48b: the date is wrongly given as 1658–9, an error that I proposed to Cardy 1999, 112. Recently Meriam Rosen-Dove of the Victoria and Albert Museum has re-dated the date as 1649, although for consider ‘9 is blurry and could be a 9’.


THE decoration of this dish consists of a stylized blossom filling the centre of the interior up to the cavetto, which is ribbed. A band of split-palmate leaves forms a scroll around the rim between two white lines. The blue design elements have been carved through the blue underglaze and painted with white slip, which has ‘bled’, somewhat diminishing the sharpness of the lines that form the central pattern. Unlike the dish in cat. no. 77, the rim of this dish is reserved in white and bracketed, a treatment that follows Chinese prototypes. Around the sides of the exterior the potter has painted blue panels on a white ground containing a flower blossom and a small cloud. Vertical tassels separate each panel. In the centre of the base is a square mark imitating a Chinese regal mark and typical of seventeenth-century Safavid blue-and-white ceramics.

The central design exemplifies the Persian potter’s skill in combining the artistic vocabulary of Chinese and Safavid decorative arts. While the ogive formed of split-palmate leaves and their tendrils relates to Safavid manuscript illumination, bookbinding and carpet designs, the overall design of a symmetrical blossom recalls Chinese fourteenth-century plates of the type that were donated to the Ardabil Shrine by Shah ‘Abbās (cat. no. 57). Striking single split-palmate leaves have replaced the dense foliage that fills the petals of the Chinese examples. By adapting the structure of the Chinese design and employing the technique of carving through the blue slip, the potter has produced a piece that differs distinctly from Chinese wares. The panels and tassel decoration on the exterior derive from the so-called Kraak wares that were exported in large numbers from China to Europe and the Middle East from the second decade of the seventeenth century onwards. In Safavid blue-and-white wares the use of this panel design, which ultimately derives from the lotus petal, and the tassel characterizes a group of blue-and-white wares dubbed ‘Kraak F’ by Yolande Crowe. Although Crowe’s text is not too specific, she dates this group of wares to the reigns of Shah ‘Abbās I and Shah Sālīḥ, that is up to 1642. On this basis dating of the dish to the decade between 1630 and 1640 would be logical.

1. Crowe 2002, 65–6, see especially nos 32 and 36.
This large bowl, which has lost most of its tinning, resembles other examples from the late sixteenth century in shape. Its wide, squat body has no foot; it is indented below the rim, providing a wide band for an inscription; and its rim is everted, with an angled slope on its underside that joins with the neck. Beneath the neck on the shoulder is another inscription band from which half ogives with stylized palm-tree leaves are suspended. Small ogives containing stylized cloud bands are pendant to the half ogives. The lines forming the border of each half ogive meet between them and join to form the tops of pointed roundels enclosing animals on an arabesque ground. Deer, gazelle and other cervids are among the animals depicted on this bowl and are typical of metalwork of this period.

The baʿlāš inscription around the neck of the bowl gives the names of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones. The inscription on the narrower band below is written in nastaʿliq in cartouches and is presumably poetry. While the inclusion of the names of the Shiʿī Imams Muharram and Fatima on metal objects had been current at least since the reign of Shah Tahmasp, the combination of a religious inscription with poetry and images of animals suggests that the metalworker chose from his pictorial and epigraphic repertoire without considering the iconography of one to be at odds with the other.

Given the size of this bowl, it may have been used for serving food to large numbers of people. Bowls of related shape appear in paintings used as basins for washing, though such containers are often shown as ceramic, not metal. All of these functions were basic to shrines such as the one at Ardabil because of the influx of dervishes who came to worship there.
A gathering of dervishes
ibrahim, c.1640
opaque watercolour and ink on paper; page 41.9 x 26.9 cm.
image 26.9 x 19.3 cm
unpublished, q20009178.200

In a mountainous setting a group of dervishes drink, pray, wash and sleep beneath a dramatic cloud-swept sky. Unlike the wandering dervish with his horn and begging bowl (cat. no. 52), most of these men focus their attention on blue-and-white or metal bowls, jugs and storage jars. While two men sink their hands into large bowls, one white and one uncoloured, others appear to have dipped their jugs or metal bowls into the larger blue-and-white bowls in order to fill them with water. For some of the figures the wine drinking seems to be the primary reason for the gathering, while the young novice kneeling at the left, the dervish with a shawlskin over his shoulders at the upper left and the squatting figure behind the dervish with a blue hat all hold their hands up in a gesture of prayer. By including praying figures next to wine drinkers the artist may have had a satirical aim, reflecting the officially negative view of the excesses of Sufis during the reign of Shah 'Abbas.

Given the date of the painting to around 1640 on the basis of style, a decade after the death of Shah 'Abbas, such an interpretation would make no sense were it not for the fact that two other earlier versions of this painting are extant. One of these, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, bears a false attribution to Muhammad al-Ijrat. The composition differs from the later painting in the placement and types of figures as well as the inclusion of bowls decorated with red flowers on a beige ground. More significantly, the upper left corner of the page contains two areas of architectural assemblages, which resemble the buildings found in the background of Majkhal paintings rather than Safavid renderings of architecture. W. B. Robinson has noted that the attribution to Muhammad al-Ijrat is untenable and that the date of the painting is more likely to be c. 1615 than 1590. Additionally, even if the painting were produced in Iran, elements such as the monkey in the tree and the architecture strongly suggest that it travelled to India where alterations were made to the original.

A more likely prototype for the later work is a painting of the same subject in the Oriental Institute in St Petersburg (Fig. 57). Here the background consists of a rocky outcrop and a tree whose trunk ends before the edge of the page. Many figures perform similar actions in the same places in the composition, though a certain number are unique to one painting or the other. Although the earlier painting has been dated to c. 1580–90, the turban types and treatment of line suggest that this painting is also from the second decade of the seventeenth century. Given the date of this work, which is presumably the earliest in the series of related compositions, one must question whether the inclusion of such large pieces of blue-and-white pottery is a result of the sudden accessibility of the porcelain at the Ardabil Shrine. Since they were placed in niches in the Chah-Chin, for all visitors to see, they may also have been available for the dervishes who frequented the shrine to use. Interestingly, one dervish in the British Museum painting drinks from a monochrome blue bowl, which may not so much reflect the existence of Chinese blue wares at the Ardabil Shrine as the development of the new style of monochrome and white wares (cf. cat. nos 77–8) in Iran in the 1630s and 1640s. Although the artist has not precisely reproduced either Chinese or Safavid pots, the presence of such striking vessels in this series of paintings establishes an association between dervishes and blue- and-white wares that did not exist before the Shah 'Abbas donation of porcelains entered the Ardabil Shrine in 1611.

1 Gray 1927, rep. in colour p. 177.
2 Robinson 1962, 52.
3 Stos 2002, rep. in colour p. 264.
ALTHOUGH Shah 'Abbas's gift of manuscripts to the Shrine of Shaykh Sahl may have been unprecedented in its size, members of the Safavid royal family had endowed the shrine with precious manuscripts during the sixteenth century. This luxurious Qur'an contains an inscription stating that it had been presented to the library of Shah Isma'Il I, the first Safavid Shah, who ruled from 1501 to 1524. According to a waqf nanak at the end of the manuscript, his son Bahram Mirza donated it to the shrine in 1546/1539-40. Like his brother Shah Tahmasp,Bahram Mirza was a bibliophile and patron of the arts. Thus he would have had a personal library that contained old books as well as those he had commissioned or acquired from living scribes.

As was customary in the Safavid period, princes were appointed as regional governors, often under the tutelage of an important member of one of the Qajarsah tribes. At the time of this gift, 1539-40, Bahram Mirza was serving as governor of Lahijan, in Gilan province on the Caspian to the south-east of Arakb. This city played a significant role in Safavid history since its governor in the late fifteenth century had sheltered Prince Isma'il Safavi from his Qajarsah Turkman enemies. During the governorship of Bahram Mirza he had to contend with local unrest, but this does not seem to have influenced his decision to give this Qur'an to the Arakb Shrine in 1539-40. Rather, he may have wished to make a gift to coincide with the completion of the large domed structure, the Jamkaran, commissioned by Shah Tahmasp (fig. 29, p. 96). This building is considered the most likely destination for the two magnificent carpets associated with the Arakb Shrine.

The double-page frontispiece of this Qur'an exhibits the qualities that characterise the best Il-Khanid illumination. The main motif on each page consists of variations on a twelve-pointed star, radiating outwards from a white centre. As the stars move away from the centre, they incorporate gold interlocking and stylised vegetal motifs. In the corners of the square that encloses the stars are four lotuses, delicately painted and cleverly shaped to fit into an irregular four-pointed star. The brilliance of gold and lapis lazuli is intensified by the inclusion of greens, black, white and pink for details of the floral elements, borders and backgrounds. The balance of opulent colours and designs, on the one hand, and the restrained composition of rectangles and border illumination with the marginal ana (leaf- or dome-shaped decoration), on the other, exemplify the best of Il-Khanid manuscript illumination.

1 Carty 2007, 60.
The concourse of the birds, from a *Mantiq al-Tayr* (Language of the Birds) of Farid al-Din ‘Attar

The manuscript from which this painting was produced in 1485 at the Timurid court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara at Herat. It contains four illustrations that may or may not be by the hand of Bihzad, the most famous artist of that era, but represent his innovative, perfectionist style. For some reason, although the scribe, Sultan ‘Ali Mashhadi, apparently left spaces for more illustrations, they were not completed in the fifteenth century. Following the Safavid conquest of Iran in the early sixteenth century, Bihzad was appointed director of the royal *khadi-khany*. Additionally, the Safavids took control of Herat and the royal Timurid library came into their possession. What remains unknown is whether this manuscript was somehow kept in Herat and entered the library of Shah ‘Abbās when he was living there in the 1570s and 1580s or whether it was already in the Safavid royal library in Qazvin when he became shah in 1587. In any event, the manuscript was one of those that Shah ‘Abbās donated to the Amtābī Shrine in 1607-8. How it left the library of the shrine is unclear, since it apparently was not one of the 166 manuscripts that were acquired by Count Souzdaltski in 1828 and are now in the Russian National Library in St Petersburg.

The painting illustrates a point in ‘Attar’s mystical manuscript: the birds assemble to discuss their journey in search of a king. Here the booroo standing on a rock at the right addresses the other birds as one initiated into the “way of spiritual knowledge.” and urges the birds to seek the Simorgh, their true king. At the upper right a man holding a musket with a long barrel gazes at the scene from behind the rocks. The composition, with the different species of birds silhouetted on a blue ground, jutting rocks above and at the lower left, a towering plane tree extending into the margin, and a gold sky, is extremely rich in detail and color harmonies.

Both the musket, which is of a type made only from the late sixteenth century, and the signature of the artist, Habib Allah, on a rock between the duck and the geese confirm that this is one of the Safavid additions to the manuscript. According to the contemporary biographer and historian Qadi Ahmad, Habib Allah of Saveh lived in Qazvin where he presumably came to the attention of the governor Husayn Khan Shamlu. In 1606 Qadi Ahmad adds that Husayn Khan Shamlu ‘attended him to his person when he went to Herat, but the felicitous Prince took him away from the khan and now he is in the capital, Isfahan, employed by the court department as a painter.’ Anthony Welch has interpreted this as meaning that Habib Allah joined Husayn Khan Shamlu by 1578

and then transferred to the service of seven-year-old Prince ‘Abbās before 1581, when ‘Abbās was taken to Mashhad by Muntakhab Qadi Khan. However, this explanation confines Husayn Khan Shamlu with Sultan Husayn Khan Shamlu, who was governor of Qazvin, but was murdered in 1580-81. As Barbara Schmitz has noted, the more likely sequence of events is that Habib Allah went to Herat in 1598 when Husayn Khan Shamlu became governor. Probably in 1601, but certainly before 1606, the artist joined the service of Shah ‘Abbās.’ Since the reference to Habib Allah working in Isfahan comes from the 1606 recession of Qadi Ahmad’s text, the artist could have added his illustrations to the *Mantiq al-Tayr* at any point between 1598 and 1606.

The Safavid additions to this manuscript are painted in a conservative style, not the new mode that was introduced at Isfahan by artists such as Riza-yi ‘Abbāsi and Muhammad Qasim. Grube and others have suggested that the commissioning of Safavid illustrations that incorporate the figurative groupings and scale of Timurid painting in this manuscript reflects a broader interest in emulating the Timurids that is found in manuscript illumination and architecture as well as painting. ‘Shah ‘Abbās may have recalled the Timurid buildings of Herat from his childhood and the reputation of artists such as Bihzad and sought to replicate these monuments and luminaries in his own era. However, simultaneously his artists and architects were creating a new style that would come to be identified with ‘Abbās’s and by extension with the brilliance of his reign.

5. Schmitz 2001, 281-4. Shah ‘Abbās died in Herat in 1611. The only problem with this analysis is that ‘Abbās is referred to as ‘Prince’ rather than ‘Shah’; but this is a minor inconsistency.
Haji 'Abbas declared the charitable donation of his Persia
tical and historical manuscripts to the Ardabil Shrine in 1607–8
and the manuscripts entered the shrine in 1611 at the earliest,
when the refurbishment of the Chini-khanem was complete.

However, this manuscript contains a waqf-nameh dated 1022,
referred to 1613–14. Thus, instead of being part of the large
creation of 1607–8, this manuscript appears to have been a gift
made when the shrine was in the autumn of 1613,
in his way to campaign in Georgia.

This collection of ghazals has been copied in elegant nasta'lik
script by Shah Mahmud Nishapuri, one of the leading calligraphers
in the court of Shah Tahmasp. Born in Nishapur, Shah Mahmud
held the service of Shah Tahmasp in Tabriz. He excelled in
various scripts and copied calligraphic samples as well as full-
length manuscripts. According to Qadi Ahmad, when Shah
Tahmasp tired of painting and calligraphy, Shah Mahmud received
permission to move to Mashhad. He is said to have spent twenty
years in Mashhad and to have died in 1564–5, which would
dicate that he moved in the mid-1540s. Before this date he
owned one of the most important illustrated manuscripts of Shah
Tahmasp’s reign, the Manâzir of Nizâmi of 1539–43, now in the
National Library of Russia, born 124, fol. 78–8a.

2. Qadi Ahmad, 1956. 236–46. The date of his move may be not by ten
years, since Shah Tahmasp continued to patronize the arts until the 1570s and
never completely ceased to employ artists and calligraphers. The last manuscript
copied by Shah Mahmud with a colophon mentioning Shah is a Tâleemeh in
the Freer Gallery of Art, dated 1556. See Simpkin 1997, 255.
3. Pâl and Schmiedt 2001, 66. The Qur’an is in the Topkapî
Serâset Mezâr, Istanbul, II.2.7.
THOUGH this manuscript is not dated, the sumptuous double-page frontispiece reflects the style of illumination practised in the stern Iranian world. Somewhat sober and geometric, the design centres on intersecting lozenges outlined in white. A band of aubergine scrolling gold vine and flowers on a black ground borders a central field. Although not limited to one production site, this black band was preferred by illuminators in Bukhara and other Central Asian centres including Kish and Herat. The outer band on a field of blue contains alternating ellipses and lozenges with red and black centres.

In the sixteenth century, when the Safavid capital was at Tabriz and Shiraz was a major centre of provincial manuscript production, the style of illumination developed that differed from those of eastern Iran and Central Asia. Shiraz illumination displays a higher proportion of gold to blue than found in Tabriz or Herat, whereas illumination from Tabriz manuscripts is less geometric than that of the eastern Iranian world but extends less into the margins than at Shiraz manuscripts. As Olga Vasil’eva of the National Library of Russia has suggested, Shah ‘Abbas may have tired of the scripts in the royal library that were illustrated or illuminated in earlier styles. Although his stated aim in endowing these manuscripts as awake to the Ardabil Shrine was pious, the charitable donation may also have been a useful way to divert himself of items that were no longer in fashion. Under Shah ‘Abbas the style of manuscript illumination changed markedly from that of the sixteenth century. While the preference for gold over blue increased, so did the size of individual lotus blossoms and geometrised floral details, as well as the split palmettes in floral scrolls. Thus, while individual motifs found in sixteenth-century illumination continued to appear in seventeenth-century examples, the scale of these motifs in relation to framing elements transformed from very small to large. The new style of manuscript illumination resembles that of the stucco wall decoration commissioned by Shah ‘Abbas for the Ardabil Shrine, as well as bookbindings (cat. no. 46) and carpets (cat. nos 43–4) of the first half of the seventeenth century, all of which depart from the decorative modes of the sixteenth century.

1 A Qur’an in the Shrine Museum in Qom (inv. no. 1238) that was produced in Kish, modern Mahi’-e Sadeh (Urmia), contains this type of border, as do numerous examples of Shiraz Qur’ans.
2 Personal communication, January 2008.
A prince beside a river, from the Protocol of Conferences of Shah Tahmasp's Emisaries and the Ottomans

Copied by 'Ali Riza 'Abdul, illuminated by Zeyn al-'Abidin Tabrizi, dated 1091/1680–2
Opaque watercolour; ink and gold on paper; page 23.5 x 14 cm
National Library of Russia, Dom 302, fol. 46b

This unique and very fine manuscript contains two illustrations, this one and an enshrinement scene with Shah Tahmasp discussing going to war against the Ottoman Sultan Selim. This painting depicts a princely figure on horseback, possibly Shah Tahmasp, beneath a parasol held by an attendant and beside a river where two boys are fishing with nets. According to the text, it is the month of Ramadan. The prince gestures towards the fisherfolk, seemingly discussing when Muslims are allowed to eat during the month of fasting. Although fishing was the shah's favourite sport, the main figure describes himself as hunting (hajar karmur).

At the lower left a group of five men observe the encounter, while at the right a young servant claps a bulbous bottle. At the lower left a partly dressed man in a distinctive turban looks towards the prince. According to Barbara Schmidt, this kind of turban with an extension of the cap that rises out of the centre evolved from a type that was common in Khorasan in the 1560s and was worn by officials such as provincial governors or shahsavar in the period of Shah 'Abbas. The turban is a variant of the so-called Safavid jaj, worn in the first fifty years of the Safavid dynasty. However, rather than intending to refer to the earlier turban type, the artist probably intended to depict a person of a particular rank in modern dress.

The attribution of the painting to a specific artist is challenging. Zeyn al-'Abidin Tabrizi, who signed the illumination of the colophon page, had worked in the Safavid court since the 1570s. Although he contributed illustrations to the unfinished Shalchronam of 1576, his extant work suggests that he was more gifted as an illuminator and ornamental painter. The exceptional finesse of brushwork and subtlety of palette, especially in the treatment of the rocks, argues against Zeyn al-'Abidin as the artist of this painting, particularly as he must have been at the end of his career in 1601. Alternatively, this painting could be the work of a younger artist at the court of Shah 'Abbas. Before it is proposed who this artist might have been, the manuscript needs to be considered as a whole. By 1601 the scribe 'Ali Riza 'Abdul had been head of the royal library for three years and would have had access to all the royal artists. Zeyn al-'Abidin, the illuminator, was 'beloved by all' and 'painted only for royal princes, emirs and nobility'. In the early seventeenth century a number of the artists with whom he had collaborated on the Shalchronam were still alive and working at the court. One of these, 'Ali Agha, contributed to the Shalchronam that was probably commissioned by Shah 'Abbas on his accession and remained unfinished when work on it ceased, around 1597. The treatment of the faces in the enshrainment scene in this volume corresponds to that of 'Ali Agha, suggesting that he was chosen to produce the more formal of the two paintings in the manuscript. Since 'Ali Agha often worked with his son Rizaiy 'Abbas, the likelihood increases that the scene of the prince by the river is the work of the younger artist.

In addition to the overall refinement of brushwork and subtlety of composition, the painting contains several traits that are typical of Riza's work in the 1590s. The mustachioed men in the lower left resemble a similar figure in a drawing of the mid-to late 1590s. The conformation of the prince's horse, with its large, rounded hindquarters and disproportionately short legs, recalls another drawing by Riza, also of the 1590s. Finally, the small feather with two curls in the prince's turban can be found in a portrait of a young dandy that would be very close in date to this painting. The combination of these similarities and the absence of another artist's work in this period that is as closely comparable suggests that the painting is by the hand of Riza.

1. Schmidt 1984, 166.
2. Rizaiy 1576, pl. IIb.3, IIIb.3.
5. Carley 1996, cat. no. 16, 52.
Majnun, a dog and two travellers, from a Majnun and Layla manuscript of Amir Khusrau Dihlavi

The text of this manuscript was signed by the copyist Sultan Mohammad al-Husayn, which could refer to either Sultan Muhammad Naur or the elder Sultan Muhammad Khudan, both of whom worked at Herat in the latter years of the reign of the Timurid Sultan Husayn Bayqara and then for the Safavids. While the style of the four illustrations conforms to the Herat mode established by Bilqaz and his school, the paintings appear to be by at least two different artists. This illustration depicts the lovers, enamoured Majnun in the desert.1 Dropping an equally skinny dog in a wasteland near a bridge. On the horizon a traveller on foot turns his head back towards a figure riding an ass. This man is dressed in a green robe and has a blue turban over his head and shoulders, as if he were a Muslim holy man. The composition extends into the right margin, but at some point the margin was replaced and the trees were cut out and pasted onto the new margin.

If not by Bilqaz himself, this painting nonetheless remains true to his canon. The treatment of detail is extremely fine and the spatial logic has been maintained throughout the composition. As a result, each figure or landscape element is legible in relation to every other component. The large, leafless tree and two smaller stumps at the lower left and right are consistent, with Bilqaz’s skill at silhouetting forms against a contrasting ground. Oddly, although water flows under the bridge, the banks of the river are as barren as the desert beyond, whereas in most Persian paintings greenery grows beside streams.

1. The story concerns the Arab boy, Qasim, who fell in love with Layla. He goes mad when her father forbids him to marry her. He then returns to the desert and becomes known as ‘Majnun’, read row.

THE inscription at the upper left reads: ‘He [is God]. Design of the late Master Bilqaz, mercy be upon him. The work of the humble Riza yi ’Abbasi’. The drawing by Riza is one of at least four works executed between 1619 and 1628 in which he notes that he is copying an original by Bilqaz. The smudged surface may be the result of his having used a pounce to transfer the composition to the surface of his drawing. In the 1590s he had also borrowed a detail of a painting by Bilqaz, but the latter drawings are based much more closely on the works by Bilqaz. Although Riza has included rudimentary lines for the text blocks on the upper and lower right, all the other elements of the composition follow Bilqaz’s pencille, particularly faithfully.

As the most well-known and well-respected painter of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Bilqaz provided inspiration for artists at the Safavid, Uthik, and Mogul courts. His works and copies or pounces of them would have been available to artists such as Riza in the Safavid royal library. While Riza’s earlier works after Bilqaz demonstrate that he had access to them through the royal library, the Majnun and Layla manuscript (cat. no. 86) may have come to his attention only in the 1620s once it was in the Ardabil Shrine. An inscription dated 1627 in the Shah-nimish (fig. 36, p. 102), which Shah ‘Abbas had commissioned at the Ardabil Shrine, includes the Shah’s complete genealogy. Not only does this indicate his continuing interest in his dynasty but also suggests that he may have visited the shrine in the years immediately before 1627. Since his artists and calligraphers regularly accompanied the shah on his travels, Riza may have renewed his acquaintance with at least some of the works of Bilqaz as a result of such a visit.

As suggested elsewhere, Riza’s attraction to the works of Bilqaz may also have been stimulated by a broader awareness of Timurid art and architecture in the second and third decade of the seventeenth century. While the references to the Timurids were not necessarily a result of an openly stated royal policy, they must have been perceived in adding to the glory and magnificence of Shah ‘Abbas’s new capital and rejuvenated society. Riza, after over thirty years as a leading court painter, may have welcomed the challenge of emulating Bilqaz. Certainly in the centuries that ensued, Riza and Bilqaz have often been mentioned in the same breath as the greatest exemplars of Persian painting.

Silver mosque lamp

As well as making gifts to the Ardabil Shrine for display, Shah Abbas ordered furnishings in connection with his remodeling of the Dar al-Huffaz: the tomb of Shaykh Safi and the platform in front of it: and the Chini-khanah.

Along with painting and adding plaster ornament to the interior of the Dar al-Huffaz, Shah Abbas ordered the passage to Shaykh Safi's tomb to be enlarged and fitted with a gold door. 7 To accompany the opulent gold door and silver graining, twelve silver and gold lamps hung from the entrance to the tomb of Shaykh Safi. The only silver lamp to survive is dated 1614 and is inscribed with the name Sahib Nazir 'Ali Khan, a superintendent of the shrine, indicating that not all the furnishings of the shrine were contributed by the shah himself. In a similar fashion to the porcelain that was donated to the shrine by Qarachug Khan cat. nos 60, 64, 66, 67, grandees and important functionaries expressed their devotion to the shah and his family by contributing valuable items as part of an overall refurbishment or charitable gift.

Of unquestionable elegance, the gold and silver mosque lamps most probably would not have provided enough light alone to illuminate the long Dar al-Huffaz. Other lamps, either pillar lamps or bell-shaped candlesticks, would have supplemented the hanging lamps. However, European visitors to the shrine were struck by the hanging lamps. 5 By comparison to the lamp stands and candlesticks, simplicity of form and decoration characterizes this lamp. Since gold was used for the new door to the tomb of Shaykh Safi, the absence of ornament cannot be attributed to a reluctance to draw attention to the material of the lamps. Rather, the minimal decoration may reflect one strain of the taste of Shah Abbas, most often mentioned in connection with his understated style of dress. 6

89-90
Two fragments of a tomb cover

These two fragments come from what was once a very large textile, since the National Museum of Iran owns at least one more fragment 7 and another fragment is on view at the Shrine Museum in Qum. The design consists of interlocking lobed ellipses and circles with script written in two perpendicular directions. The vertical lobed forms contain verses 2 and 3 of Sura 110, Nasr, of the Qur'an, while verse 1 appears repeated in perpendicular script in the cartouches to either side of the second and third verses. To fit the words of the second and third verses into the repeating lobed forms, the designer has brought the last word of the second verse into the ellipse containing the third verse. The sura reads in translation: "When the help of God and victory come: And thou dost see the People enter God's religion in crowds. / Celebrate the praises of thy Lord, and pray for His forgiveness for He is oft-returning (in grace and mercy)."

Although the Qur'anic verses do not dwell on death or the afterlife, they are appropriate to a tomb cover at the Ardabil Shrine for several reasons. Once the Safavid dynasty came to power as a political force, it was pitted against enemies such as the Ottomans and Uzbeks who threatened the Safavids' very survival.

Moreover, victory in campaigns initiated by the Safavids against the Georgians, for example, enriched Iran with booty and slaves. Thus the reference to victory in a tomb cloth would have been fitting. Of equal relevance was the reference to people entering God's religion. By the time of Shah 'Abbas the conversion of Sunnis in Iran to Shia had been taking place for nearly a century. Aside from matters of sincere faith, Shia in Safavid Iran was a rallying point and one of the most significant characteristics that differentiated the Safavids from the Sunni Ottomans, Uzbeks and Mughals around them. Finally, a three-verse sura was more easily adapted to the requirements of the technique of silk-weaving, which relies on the repetition of design elements.

Tomb covers such as this one were produced to replace ones that had become worn out either from age or from the touch of worshippers. As luxury silk production expanded during the reign of Shah 'Abbas, such fabrics were given both to replace textiles that had a utilitarian function at shrines and as charitable donations. While Yazd and Isfahan were noted silk-manufacturing centres, more research is needed to pinpoint where such a piece was made.

1 Ins. no. 538d, see MS Irani, Citrani 2007, 373, no. 136.
2 Qur'an, tr. and ed. Ab 1978, 1602.
Tapestry from the Ardabil Shrine

Kashan, early 17th century
Silk with precious metal thread, 301 x 128 cm
National Museum of Iran, inv. no. 20830

This is one of two silk tapestries from the Ardabil Shrine. It was probably among the furnishings donated to the shrine in connection with the refurbishments ordered by Shah 'Abbās in 1611.

Four silk tapestries of this type were exhibited in Munich in 1911 and are now in the Residenz Museum. They had come to Bavaria in 1642 as part of the dowry of a Polish princess who married a member of the house of Wettin-Merseburg, a family whose domains included Bavaria and Thuringia from the twelfth century to 1918. A bill of sale exists, provided by an Armenian–Polish merchant who was sent to Iran in 1601 by the King of Poland. It shows how much he paid for three pairs of rugs he commissioned to be made in Kashan and that he paid extra for the king's coat of arms to be woven into two or more of them. This documentation highlights the role of the Armenians as traders and intermediaries.

At least three of these tapestries are extant today; two of them are in the Residenz Museum, Munich. In palette and technique they resemble this and the other tapestry known to have come from Ardabil. The design consists of a central ogive containing a lotus blossom and sprouting from a stylized vase above a heart-shaped motif. The corner pieces at one end contain cloud bands. At the other, outside the lobed arch above the ogive, are flowering plants with long stalks. The main border with alternating cartouches and quarterfoil relates to another example in the Residenz Museum.

Although tapestry weaving has a long history in the Middle East, only a few examples survive from before the seventeenth century. The complicated technique of toothed tapestry used here, characteristic of tapestries woven in Iran during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is both stronger and more flexible, in terms of design, than the better-known silk tapestry technique. Woven threads of two adjacent colours are looped alternately around a single common warp thread. This makes possible the use of curving lines, which are an essential element in the decorative style of the period of Shah 'Abbās. Moreover, the inclusion of metal thread parallel to its use in silk textiles in various classes of carpets made during the reign of Shah 'Abbās. The expensive materials and high labour costs involved in the production of these tapestries mean that they were available only to the wealthiest clients. One example is known to have been presented by Shah 'Abbās as a royal gift.1

1 Thompson 2006, 207, fig. 179. Provenance can be traced to the early seventeenth century.
2 Thompson 2006, 209.
The shrine before Shah 'Abbas

In 818 AH/1416 AD, the Eighth Shia Imam, died suddenly in a village near the present-day city of Mashhad in Khurasan province, northeastern Iran. The Shi'i faithful claim that the Abbasid caliph, al-Marwan, ordered the poisoning of Imam Riza, who was thus martyred. As the only Shia Imam buried in Iran, Imam Riza holds a special position. Around his tomb grew a shrine and the city that surrounds it. Because of its geographical position on the edge of Central Asia, far from the Shi'i shrines of Iraq or the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, the Shrine of Imam Riza has perennially attracted pilgrims from Afghanistan and South Asia as well as Iran. This made it a site of pilgrimage for both Shī'is and Sunnis.

Shī'is and Sunnis Muslims have travelled to the shrine to honour Imam Riza, in part because of his descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Until the advent of the Salavids in the sixteenth century the shrine was generally neutral in the sectarian sense, drawing Muslim pilgrims of all types. From at least as early as the eleventh century generous waqf supported and enriched the shrine, including that of Gauhar Shad, the wife of the Timurid sultan Shah Rukh. She commissioned a congregational mosque conceived as an extension of the shrine's space. The decision to build this mosque may have derived from the wish to appease a rebellious Shī'ī population in Mashhad, but it nevertheless represents a substantial monument constructed by a Sunni queen. At the end of the fifteenth century...
century the famous Timurid ruler, 'Ali Shir Nava'i, built a Dar al-Huffaz, a soup kitchen and a new courtyard, continuing Sunnī royal patronage at the shrine.

In 1506, with the fall of the Timurid dynasty, the fortunes of Mashhad suffered. Until 1511 the Uzbek controlled Khurasan and thus Mashhad. With the Safavid defeat of the Uzbeks in 1510 the new rulers of Iran won the greatest Shi'i prize in their domain. However, Mashhad remained a target for Uzbek raids, and control over the city and its shrine alternated between the two powers time and again over the course of the sixteenth century. When the shrine (fig. 59) was in Safavid possession, it functioned as a centre of Shi'i piety. Unlike the Sufi and dynastic significance of the Ardabil Shrine, the Shrine of Imam Riza attracted members of the Twelver Shi'i religious elite. Moreover, one of the stabilizing features of the shrine was that the group who managed its affairs were sayyids, and generally came from two families who had held these positions over the generations. By avoiding political extremism and welcoming both Shi'i and Sunni, the administrators of the shrine in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries escaped destructive raids and capitalized on the growing veneration of the Prophet's family. With the advent of the Safavids in the sixteenth century and the establishment of Shiism as the state religion of Iran, the Uzbeks came to view the shrine as a Shi'i outpost of their Safavid enemy.

Like the Ardabil Shrine, the Shrine of Imam Riza grew organically over the course of many centuries around the focal point, the tomb chamber of the Imam (fig. 62). Even in the fourteenth century a wooden structure covered with sheets of silver protected the tomb, above which hung silver lamps. Imam Riza was buried next to Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph. Best known today from the *Arabian Nights*, Harun had died in 809 while suppressing a revolt in Khurasan. After experiencing some destruction in the late fourteenth century at the hands of Timur (Tamerlane), the shrine flourished as the recipient of income from waqf and the addition of madrasas, tombs, prayer halls and courtyards (fig. 60). The wealth accumulated by the shrine itself and the city in general attracted the predatory Uzbeks, who raided Mashhad four times between 1548 and 1570 (fig. 61). In periods when Mashhad was under Safavid control, Shah Tahmasp and members of his family seized the opportunity to combine physical improvements to the shrine with reinforcing its symbolic position as the site in which the Safavid dynasty was identified with the Shi'i Imams and the established form of Twelver Shiism. In 1534 Shah Tahmasp proclaimed the Edict of Sincere Repentance, in which he repudiated all un-Islamic acts and essentially announced his independence from the Qizilbash leaders who had fomented civil war in Iran since his accession in 1524. Additionally, he paid to cover the dome over the tomb of Imam Riza with gold and erected a minaret, also sheathed in gold. Since the Safavids lost Iraq to the Ottomans in the same year, Mashhad's role was established as the main Shi'i pilgrimage site for Iranians.

Because pilgrims to the Shrine of Imam Riza wish to get as close as possible to the tomb of the Imam, they touch the so-called zarib, the ornate grating that surrounds the sarcophagus in which the Imam is buried (fig. 62). Given the numbers of people visiting the tomb chamber, this covering and the wooden sarcophagus with the silver or gold sheets attached to it wear out and need regular replacement. This maintenance provided an opportunity for the Safavid shahs to order new protective coverings for the tomb. In 1550–51 Shah Tahmasp commissioned a group of 166 gold plaques inscribed with the Qur'anic Sura al-Insan (Man) to cover the sarcophagus of the Imam.
Shah 'Abbās and the shrine

Shah 'Abbās was no stranger to Mashhad when he came to power in 1587. At that point he had held power in Khurāsan for nine years, since the age of seven, and had spent the last year of that period at Mashhad. Even as his guardian Murshid Quli Khan was riding with him to Qazvin to depose Shah Muḥammad Khudabande, the Uzbeks were laying siege to Herat, the other key city of Khurāsan. While the Uzbeks occupations of Khurāsan were often short-lived, the interest in booty remained constant. However, even by Uzbeks standards the sack of the Shrine of Imam Riza in 1590 was exceptionally destructive. In addition to stealing the treasures of the shrine and murdering everyone they could find, the Uzbeks also reportedly desecrated the tomb of Shah Tahmasp within the shrine precinct. This act of extreme disrespect towards the Safavids' ancestors weakened the position of Shah 'Abbās as the protector of his dynasty's lineage. Thus, when the Uzbeks appointed an officer to bring the bones to Central Asia and he carried them instead to Tabas in Iran, Shah 'Abbās made certain that they were brought to him in Isfahan and that he made a show of receiving them.6 Aside from the political and economic need to restore Khurāsan, and thus Mashhad, to Safavids' control, Shah 'Abbās would have keenly felt the need to restore his dynastic honour at the shrine.

By 1598 Shah 'Abbās was finally ready to retaliate against the Uzbeks. Although his two greatest Uzbeks adversaries had both died, the Uzbeks were still ready to defend Khurāsan against the Safavids. Shah 'Abbās devised a strategy whereby the Uzbeks who were marching in Herat would be drawn out into battle against his generals, Farhad Khan Qazamanni.7 The Shah's ruse worked and the Uzbeks were soundly defeated. This would resemble most other tales of battle were it not for the Shah's visit to Mashhad before encountering the enemy near Herat. On 29 July 1598 Shah 'Abbās performed the pilgrimage to the shrine of the Eighth Imam.

When the dome of the shrine came in sight, the Shah dismounted, prostrated himself with his forehead on the ground, and wept tears of joy. He then proceeded, barefooted and bareheaded, to the shrine. After he had completed the formalities of the pilgrimage, the Shah took stock of the shrine. He found it in bad condition, stripped of its gold and silver chandeliers. Nothing remained of the ornaments donated to the shrine during the Safavids' period except the gold railing around the tomb itself.8

Shah 'Abbās left Mashhad within three days of his pilgrimage, but the non-combatants in his retinue appear to have remained in the city for at least part of the month of Muḥarram, the holiest month in the Shi'i calendar. A drawing by Riza-yi 'Abbāsi dated the tenth of Muḥarram, 'Ashura, or the day of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at Karbala, is identified as depicting a pilgrim in Mashhad (fig. 63). For an artist who had been working in the library of Shah 'Abbās in Qazvin, the sheer scale of the Shrine of Imam Riza and the number and variety of pilgrims would have been
impressive. His drawings of the pilgrim and others from the same period convey more than the heat and dust of an August day in Khorasan: they elicit the emotion and profound belief experienced by pilgrims to the Shrine of Imam Riza, especially on the occasion of holy days.

As the passage describing Shah 'Abbās’s visit to the Shrine of Imam Riza in 1598 reveals, the performance of the religious ritual was only part of the fulfillment of his duties. He assessed the damage and losses that resulted from the Uzbek occupation and made appointments to the staff of the shrine. He replaced the chandeliers, candlesticks, carpets and cooking utensils lost to the Uzbeks. One wonders if the fine red-ground Isfahān carpet in the shrine today, said to have been the gift of Shah 'Abbās, was one of the carpets in the 1598 refitting of the shrine (fig. 64). Not until 1601 did the shah turn his attention to repairing and improving the buildings of the shrine. In this year he journeyed to the shrine as a pilgrim, travelling on foot some 600 miles (965 km) from Isfahān. According to Iskandār Beg Munshī, the shah and a small group of couriers reached Mashhad in twenty-eight days, which would amount to walking over 20 miles (32 km) a day. Charles Melville has calculated that the journey took sixty-six days.37 Tellingly, Iskandār Beg compares the speed and hardship of Shah 'Abbās’s itinerary with that of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, who walked from Constantinople to Jerusalem, barefoot but on carpets laid down before him.

Shah 'Abbās spent the months from December 1601 to March 1602 at Mashhad, where he reviewed the architectural and decorative needs of the shrine and performed menial tasks on holy days. In addition to presenting pairs of jewel-encrusted doors for the tomb chamber of the Imam, he ordered the regilding of the dome of the tomb and a 1.6-metre-high inscription commemorating his pilgrimage and stating that it was the work of Kamāl al-Dīn Mahmūd Yāzdi in 1015/1606-7 and that 'Ali Riza 'Abbāsī wrote the inscription. The dome is clad with gilded metal, brick-shaped plaques, whereas the inscription bands consist of enamelled green and blue metal plaques with white spiral scrolls and gold border decoration. Although the gold thulūth inscription appears to be gilded onto the enamelled plaques, photographs of repairs being made to the dome in the late twentieth century reveal that the inscription consists of letter-shaped sheets of gold attached to the enamelled ground (fig. 65). This technique is highly novel but effective since the inscription appears from the ground to be integral to the coloured band. Equally unusual for this period is the use of enamel.38 Scholars of Indian jewellery believe that enamel did not exist at this time in Iran and that European jewellers introduced it to India in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, after which it spread to neighbouring regions.39 However, the extensive use of enamel in such a prominent monument suggests either that an Indian craftsman was employed to do the work or that Iranian artists were familiar with the technique.

A candlestick made in Lahore, dated 1539 and intended for the Shrine of Imam Riza according to its inscription, adds to the evidence of a substantial exchange of goods with India during the Safavid period. A ceramic ewer inscribed with the name of Mahmūd Mi‘mar Yāzdi (cat. no. 107) and an Iranian metal ewer (cat. no. 108) derive their shape from a prototype (cat. no. 106) with a long history in Hindu and Muslim India. While the emigration of Iranian poets, artists and officials to India in the sixteenth century has led to an assumption that ideas flowed mostly from west to east, these artefacts and records of trade relations prove that goods travelled from India to Iran in substantial quantities. Moreover, while embassies from the Mughal emperors and sultans of the Deccan brought the most lavish gifts to Shah ‘Abbās, more mundane objects, from metalwork to textiles, were traded at Mashhad.

In addition to his work on the exterior of the dome, ‘Ali Riza ‘Abbāsī designed the inscriptions on a set of gold plaques that were affixed to the tomb cover of Imam Riza, of which eighteen are extant and are in the Museum of the Astan-i Quds Razavi. Unlike the openwork plaques from the period of Shah Tahmasp, those of ‘Ali Riza ‘Abbāsī consist of sheets of gold with nasta‘liq script on a ground of arzubesque in repoussé technique. The more floral, attenuated style is in keeping with the period of Shah ‘Abbās. From a Tabriz family, ‘Ali Riza ‘Abbāsī was first trained in Qazvin in the monumental thulūth script used for building inscriptions. Before joining the library of Shah ‘Abbās, he worked from 1591 to 1593 for Fathāl Khān Qarānlu in Khurasan and Mazandaran. Recently, a stone inscription has come to light in Khurasan on which the calligrapher signed his name ‘Ali Riza. ‘Abbāsī being appended only after
he joined the service of the shah. He became a close companion of the shah and travelled with him on campaign and during the shah's peregrinations around his empire. For his skill and loyalty, 'Ali Rza 'Abbas was not only rewarded with an appointment as head of the royal library but also received the commissions for designing the inscriptions for the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah and the Masjid-i Shafi in Isfahan. He also copied Qur'an and poetry. A beautifully illuminated Qur'an copied by him is in the library of the shrine in Mashhad.

During his 1601-2 sojourn in Mashhad Shah 'Abbas established a sliding scale of payments for people who wished to be buried in proximity to the Imam. Members of the Safavid family were exempt from payment, but everyone else was subject to a fee depending on where in the complex the person was laid to rest. The income would be used to repair buildings and defray the cost of lighting. Two of Shah 'Abbas's most illustrious officials, Allahverdi Khan and Hatim Beg Erudbadi, built tomb chambers next to the tomb of the Imam. Hatim Beg died in 1610-11 and Allahverdi Khan followed in 1613, the same year as the completion of his tomb. As Farhat has noted, the inscriptions in Allahverdi Khan's tomb include some sayings of Imam Riza that emphasize the merit of pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam Riza over the tombs of the other Shi'i Imams and Mecca. Apparently, Shah 'Abbas revived a Timurid idea that visiting Mashhad during the Feast of Sacrifice was the equivalent of going on the Hajj to Mecca.

While it has generally been accepted that Shah 'Abbas gave his Arabic books to the Shrine of Imam Riza in 1607-8, the inscriptions written by Shaykh Baha'i deeding the books to the shrine library tell a different story. Rather than being dated 1607-8, the waqf names bear dates of 1608/1599 and 1609/1600-1. Shaykh Baha'i was among those who accompanied Shah 'Abbas on his journey to Mashhad in 1598. He seems to have remained in Mashhad for several months after the summer of 1598, where his presence would have aroused the interest of the ulama and sayyids, who taught and ran the administration at the shrine. Given the dates of his waqf names to December 1598, he had apparently chosen the books to be given to the Shrine of Imam Riza before the shah and his entourage left Isfahan.

What is unclear is whether all the books given by Shah 'Abbas were part of the waqf made for the benefit of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones. Possibly, as McClenney has suggested, Iskandar Beg Munshi copied two or three waqf into one when he describes the waqf of 1607-8 (see pp. 120-21). The choice of early Qur'ans with 'signatures' of Imams 'Ali, Husayn and Hasan would obviously have had profound significance in the context of the Shrine of Imam Riza. Although one can only speculate about the motive behind the gift of these Qur'ans and scientific texts to the Mashhad Shrine, the Qur'an written on parchment in the early form of script called Kufic (see cat. no. 94) would have been fragile and difficult to read. More significantly, their association with the Imams and the willingness of Shah 'Abbas to donate them to the Shrine of Imam Riza would have reflected well on the seriousness of his religious policies. As an insider in the Shi'i hierarchy, Shaykh Baha'i would have understood what impact these manuscripts would have had at Mashhad and how the gift could help construct the image of Shah 'Abbas as the pious protector of the holy shrine.

The promotion of the Shrine of Imam Riza as an alternative to Mecca resulted in an increase in the number of pilgrims and necessitated some architectural changes. By the time Shah 'Abbas made a pilgrimage to the shrine in 1612, it was his tenth visit. He had had ample opportunity to analyse the architectural needs of the complex and in this year he set in train a number of important changes to rationalize the spaces of the shrine. He reordered a courtyard so that the Mir 'Ali Shir portico was directly opposite another portico. He also extended a courtyard linked to the city by an avenue with a water channel running down its centre. The covered fountain that he ordered for the courtyard nearest the Imam's tomb is still in use today (fig. 66). The extension of courtyards and provision of water improved what would be called today the visitor experience and enabled the shrine to accommodate large numbers of pilgrims.

As Charles Melville has noted, the royal patronage of the Shrine of Imam Riza most likely also had an economic angle. Encouraging pilgrims to travel to Mashhad instead of Mecca had the advantage of stemming the outflow of gold from Iran. Moreover, the investment in the refurbishment of the shrine helped to revive the local economy that had been so damaged by Uzbek occupation. Mashhad was a natural trading point on the east–west route from India, so all of the infrastructure projects, such as building roads and caravanserais, benefited traders as well as pilgrims. Unlike Ardabil, Mashhad has continued to attract millions of visitors annually. The shrine has grown and grown and the city has flourished. Although Shah 'Abbas used his restoration of the shrine to promote his political aims, the donations he made and the reorganization he effected laid the groundwork for the continued outpouring of generosity directed at the shrine. The end of the Safavid dynasty's tenure did not reduce the significance of the shrine since the importance of Imam Riza outweighed whatever political legitimacy the shahs could gain by identifying themselves and their dynasty with the Imam. Also, as more of Iran converted to Shī‘ism, major shrines served the religious needs of the population in accordance with the shari‘a and often with little reference to the dynastic claims of the shahs.

NOTES
1. Martyrsdom is a powerful factor in Twelver Shi‘i belief since all of the Twelve Imams are thought to have been martyred.
2. The Glimpsing behind the attack on Imam Riza in 995, but his successor Muhmad restored it.
9. At this time Forhad Khan Qazwini was the guard of the calligrapher, 'Ali Riza, later 'Ali Riza 'Abbas, and of Mir 'Izad.
10. Iskandar Beg Munshi/Surry 1978, 792.
12. Shrine officials assure one that it is enamelled and not glazed ceramic.
14. This consists of two stone slabs that are exhibited in the Imamzadeh in 'Isa but do not belong to the building.

Fig. 66 (overleaf) Sahr-i Kohneh (Old Court), Shrine of Imam Riza, Mashhad.
IN the second decade of the seventeenth century Riza-yi 'Abbas's style underwent a major modification. In portraits of young courtiers the facial types, palette and textiles all reflect a new fashion for rounder, heavier forms, fewer primary colours, and gold and silver brocaded jackets or trousers. In drawings of older shaykhs and divanies Riza adopted a heavier line and draughtsmanship, such as that beneath this figure's thigh, that often appears thick and viscous. Drawings of this period exhibit a greater interest in in variegated shapes and their weight. Perhaps intended as a gift, this drawing was produced on the eve of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, which to this day is a time of countryside celebrations in Iran. From the three pros, kUILT and book lying beside the figure, he can be identified as a scribe. This face closely resembles that of a figure in a work by Riza of 1622 and in a general sense he forms part of a larger group of bearded men by Riza from the 1620s. Despite the distinctive features of the scribe - his hooked nose, bristling eyebrows and beard - he is most probably an idealised type with traits associated with a group of men of learning. The intensity of his gaze and the almost rigid way in which he has brought his bent fingers to his head suggest intelligence and alertness, both of which are typical of Riza's portraits of older men.

In March 1626 Shah 'Abbas was in Iraq, where he had been on campaign for six months, defending Baghdad against the Ottoman army. While his eyes were focused on the front, his men were occupied by his painters. It is unlikely that Riza-yi 'Abbas, who by then had been practicing his art for nearly forty years, would have travelled to the Iraqi war zone. Rather, Riza seems to have stayed in Isfahan where he portrayed a range of social types from the young and fashionable to shepherds, divanies and wise older men.


BEARDED SCRIBE
Signed by Riza-yi 'Abbas
Isfahan, dated 21 Jumada II 1036/20 March 1626
ink and colors on paper, page: 36 x 23.5 cm
1 cm by the Art and History Collection, Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallerie, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1959.3.79
Page from a Qur'an section, with ten folios and sixteen lines to the page
Iraq, 9th century
ink on parchment; 23.3 x 16 cm
Private collection

The Qur’an page begins in the middle of Sura 6, verse 108, and ends in the middle of verse 108, followed by the "signature" of Husayn ibn ‘Ali (66-68-80), the third Shi‘a Imam. The text is framed by four marginal rulings in blue and red, which were added after the completion of the text. The left, right, and lower margins contain five seal impressions and four librarians' inscriptions. Two of the impressions have legible dates, 1052/1642-3 and 1213/1798-9, and one of the librarians' inscriptions contains the numerals 191, which may refer to 1091/1680-81 or 1191/1777-8. As on a Qur’an page in the Mashhad Shrine attributed to ‘Ali ibn Musa al-Rida, the Eighth Imam, the seals attest to the value and great significance of manuscripts that bear the signatures of any of the Shi‘a Imams. However, such pages present problems of dating, since the style of the script has been assigned to the eighth century and in many cases to the ninth century, which disallows the possibility of this and the related Qur’an pages with signatures of the Imams being in their hands.

Close inspection of this page reveals that the last line, which contains the first thirteen words of Sura 6, verse 108, and the words ‘katabahu Husayn ibn ‘Ali’, has been added onto the main body of the page. Likewise, on the page in the Mashhad Shrine Qur’an the "signature" of Imam ‘Ali ibn Musa al-Rida, five seal impressions and a two-line inscription in nakshi script appear in a strip at the bottom of the page, set off from the Qur’anic verses by a marginal line. Since the main body of the Qur’anic text on both the Mashhad page and this one are written in script that appears authentic, the question remains of when the Imams’ signatures and later seal impressions were added to these folios.

The Qur’an sections in Mashhad bearing the names of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib or Imam Husayn ibn ‘Ali were donated to the shrine in 1359-1600 by Shah ‘Abbas, the Qur’an section with the name of Imam Riza and the seal impressions was made waqf to the shrine by Muhammed Riza Shah Pahlavi in 1919-20. The format of the folios with the seals and "signature" of Imam Riza resembles the layout of this page with the name of Husayn ibn ‘Ali much more closely than the ones given to the shrine by Shah ‘Abbas. Without a thorough investigation of both pages one can only suggest that the Imams’ signatures and the seal impressions were added to the Qur’an sections at some point between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries.2

1 Ghazlani-Munir 1964, 17-21.
2 The seals on the Mashhad folio do not contain dates, which may indicate that the script with the signatures and seal impressions was added in the early nineteenth century. Assuming the last line of the page shown here was stamped with laid and later seals much later than these dates would indicate, the signature may have been added in the nineteenth century. However, the script conforms to the ninth-century style identified by Hensch 1992, 36, as J3E; the verses are separated by a dot in exactly the same way as a Qur’an page attributed to Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik in Samii 1984, 50. Here again the authenticity of the signature cannot be accepted on the basis of the script style which begs the question of whether the whole folio or only the signature is unreliable.

Developed in the seventh century in parallel to script with rounded letters, which was used for purposes requiring more fluid writing such as chariery documents, letters and bills. Although the script is named after the Iraq city of Kofa, founded by the Muslim conquerors in 638, the more likely source of the writing is Arabia itself where the Qur’an was first collated and copied in order to be disseminated to newly converted Muslims. Complete Qur’ans of this type consist of thirty sections, of which this is a segment. By the late sixteenth century Qur’ans believed to be in the hand of Imam ‘Ali were known to such figures as Qadi Ahmad, who wrote a history of calligraphers and painters. And there exist tracings by the miraculous qalam of ‘Ali, Hollis notes, the Shah, the Charter of Sainity [i.e. ‘Ali] which enlighten the sight of the soul and brighten the tablets of the heart. None wrote better than that Hollis – God’s blessing on him! – and the most excellent aquf is that which he has traced.3

Although Qadi Ahmad does not say that the Qur’an said to be copied by Imam ‘Ali belonged to Shah ‘Abbas, it may well be one that Shah ‘Abbas gave to the Mashhad Shrine. Qadi Ahmad also mentions a Qur’an in the possession of Shah Tahmasp copied by Imam Hosain, the son of Imam ‘Ali, which is perhaps also the same one in the Mashhad Shrine signed by Imam Hosain.

1 Blair 2006, 102.
2 Qadi Ahmad Mirsefizade 1959, 51-4.
3 Hollis 1934, 5.7-8.
The folio comes from a widely dispersed, well-known Qur'an copied in Eastern Kufic, a style of writing that developed in the Seljuk period. The script is characterized by the extreme elongation of the letters and the diagonal slant of the lines of some of the letters and represents a transitional phase between angular Kufic and rounded Arabic scripts. Although rare examples are written on parchment,1 most Eastern Kufic Qur'ans are on paper. The analogously Qur'an in the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad, also with fourteen lines to a page, is dated 466/1073, but the Qur'an from which this example comes is more likely to date from the twelfth century.2 It has been estimated that the preserved manuscripts originally consisted of 2,250 folios divided into thirty sections.3 Blair has noted that the colophon of the Qur'an of 1073 in Mashhad states that the copist was also the illuminator.4 Despite the absence of a colophon in the preserved Qur'an, Beatrice Saint-Laurent has proposed that all the known volumes were copied by the same person.5

She does not speculate about who produced the decoration between the lines of script but notes that the contour panels around the letters indicate that it was done after the text was copied and corrected. Saint-Laurent has compared the epigraphy and decoration of this dispersed Qur'an to a Qur'an in the Topkapı Saray Museum, dated 573/1177-8.6 Scholars such as Amineh Schimmel have pointed out the similarity between both the script and ornament between the lines of this Eastern Kufic Qur'an and the epigraphy and decoration of Islamic architecture of the same period.7 The white blossoms reserved on a ground of two tones of light brown recall the marco designs in such towers as the twelfth-century Alaviyan in Hama,8 as well as the decoration on Kishan Interwoven of the late twelfth to early thirteenth century.9 This suggests a broad unity of style in Iran in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that would have come about as a result of Seljuk control stretching from eastern Iran to Iraq.

One scenario for the history of the Qur'an would be that it was given to the shrine and dismantled, possibly as early as the early thirteenth century. This would explain the pages that are in Istanbul, Damascus and Cairo, which along with Karababa were in Ottoman control in the nineteenth century. With the break-up of the Ottoman empire folios were extracted from one of the sections of the manuscript and sold singly or in groups of as many as eleven sheets to private collectors. Many of the pages have now entered public collections such as the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Washington, and the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.

1. Linge and Sobott 1976, 32.
6. Saint-Laurent 1989, 121; this proposal that another volume is in the same style and with the same size in the National Library in Cairo is a separate volume of the same Qur'an.
Delphinium staphisagria (stavesacre, or mivizah, or al-zabib al-barr), from a De Materia Medica of Dioscorides (Syria, Iraq), ninth century. Ink and watercolour on paper; page 27.5 x 18.2 cm. Published: Robinson 1976a, 71, 11.3. Keir Collection, II.3

The two descriptions of plants on this folio come from Book IV of Dioscorides' De Materia Medica. The red title at the top of the page refers to al-qathu al-busan, the melon, but the text in black ink below it describes the squirting cucumber (al-qathu al-barr), which it says can also be called al-qathu al-busan. The second title, next to the root ball of the plant in the illustration, mentions al-nunayj, which must be an Arabic version of al-nunai, Persian for al-zabib al-barr, or stavesacre. Although the illustration does not conform closely to verbal descriptions of squirting cucumber, stavesacre plants, or Greek or Arabic renderings of the plants, the plant in the picture is more likely to be stavesacre than cucumber.

The artist has taken some liberties in his representation, rendering the seedpods as single lancel-shaped leaves rather than triangular pods, though he has maintained their green colour. The leaves, while serrated, have only three lobes in the illustration, whereas in reality they have five and in the Greek versions they have no lobes. The red hue of the root ball, stems and flowers also suggests artistic licence at work since Dioscorides’ description mentions black stalks, and the actual plant has lavender flowers. By comparison with illustrations in the Dioscorides manuscript donated to the shrine in Mashhad by Shah ‘Abbas, which is datable to 1152-76 and was compiled in Mayyadaqan in northern Mesopotamia, the style of illustration in this folio is stylized and two-dimensional. As Etinghausen and others have indicated, both the naturalistic and stylized approaches to illustrating Dioscorides and related manuscripts existed side by side in the medieval period.

As for the medicinal uses of stavesacre, whereas Dioscorides proposes using ten to fifteen seeds mixed with water and honey as a purgative, this text recommends using twenty-five. The seeds are recommended for bruises and itchy skin, and, when chewed, for toothache and painful gums. Finally, as its alternate English name, lace-bane, implies, the plant helps repel lice.

1. Dobler and Tonsor 1952-3, 572. My thanks to Polina Pukhina for her assistance and gathering information for this entry.
A 99 Two lines of nastālīq script from an album

Signed by 'Ali Riza 'Afsahi
Isfahān, dated 1015/1606
Ink on paper, varnished, page 16.3 × 23.4 cm.
Ravitz Collection, FR8039

Although 'Ali Riza 'Afsahi may have spent time in Mashhad around 1602–3 when the gold plaques with his nastālīq inscriptions were produced for the sarcophagus of Imam Riza (see cat. nos. 5), he had probably returned to Isfahān by 1606, the date of this calligraphy. His inscriptions for the Mosque of Shaykh Lutf'llah are dated 1012/1606–7, but the work on the mosque continued until 1619. One of the factors that ensured his success was his ability to work in a variety of scripts, from thulūh used on monuments to the nastālīq of his single-page qaṣida (pages of one or more poetic couples). A hallmark of 'Ali Riza 'Afsahi's calligraphic style was the practice of placing words or pairs of words with a terminal چ on a level above the main body of the text. Here the calligrapher's signature and date at the lower left contain three elongated terminal چ's above the main line of script, which are echoed by and balance the long چ in the right half of the same line.

The poetry consists of one and a half lines and reads:

First look to every side; eat less, speak less and sleep less. Make these your habits.

This pithy saying suits the format of writing across a page like this mounted in an accordion-style album. The content deviates from the usual love poetry copied on the diagonal, but its message has a perennial appeal.

Mashhad 297
SIXTEEN LINES OF NASTALIQ SCRIPT, FOLIO 7b, FROM AN ALBUM

Signed by 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi

Isfahan, dated 1057/1648-9

Ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper; page 31.2 x 21 cm, within borders 23.2 x 13.9 cm

Golestan Palace Museum, album 1630

FROM at least as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century patrons in Greater Iran had collected calligraphy, paintings and drawings in albums, called minaques. The flexibility of these volumes enabled their owners to reorganize and add or subtract folios with relative ease, particularly when they were mounted in concertina form, as here, rather than with a single, stitched spine. In the most carefully compiled albums calligraphies or paintings placed on facing pages related to one another either in subject matter or in style. Thus the work of one calligrapher might face that of his student or emulator, while paintings by the same artist or of the same subject would probably be positioned opposite each other. In this album two paintings of dervishes by Riza-yi 'Abbasi face one another on folios 1b and 2a, followed by seven double-page openings of calligraphy. These include writing by famous scribes such as Mir 'Ali (d.1476-1543), 'Abdih (active late fifteenth to early sixteenth century), and 'Imad al-Husani (d.1596-1619).

The lines of poetry here are contained in the form called naghsh. While the poetry refers to the difficulty of being an artist, its conclusion is ambiguous:

Whoever now writes hardest in art
Will suffer new pangs with each
breath in the world.
The artist is like a young reed,
The moment it grows it sprouts a new section,
The heavens grant the ignorant their every desire,
You're a sage and a scholar:
That's your portion in sin.

IN ADDITION TO THE MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS THAT 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi designed for the Mosque of Shaykh Lotfollah, the Masjid-i Shah in Isfahan, and the dome and minaret of the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad, he penned large numbers of qira'is. Long after 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi had died, collectors still sought his work for inclusion in albums such as this one. Since the latest calligraphy in this album dates from 1153/1740-1, the album in its final form could not have been compiled earlier than the eighteenth century. However, a calligraphy signed by Shah Mahmud Nishapuri (d.1516-54) on folio 7a (see cat. no. 83), a tinted drawing with a false attribution to Riza-yi 'Abbasi dated 1040/1630 (folio 2b), and a page of naghsh script concerning questions posed by Shaykh Balui (folio 10a) indicate the compiler's preference for Safavid examples of writing and drawing.

The poem here reads:

If the companions worship pleasure,
Come, cup-bearer, that I may worship
The cup-bearer! What would be better
Than to be delivered from the disgrace of
One's self.

MASHHAD 209
Knotted-pile carpet

16th century

Wool/pile on a cotton foundation; 590 x 253 cm
Exhibited: Tucson 2006, pl. 21, with relevant bibliography
Collection of M. Jaffari

This large carpet is an exquisite example of a type produced in Iran during the seventeenth century. They are made in several different qualities and their designs are based on a common theme with endless variations. They generally have a crimson-red ground, with a field filled with stylized lotus flowers, leaves and clouds, all connected by delicate floral tracery. The green or blue-green border is likewise filled with stylized floral forms and tracery. The finest-quality pieces often have silk in the foundation, are woven sometimes with metal thread and may incorporate birds into the design. The density of knotting varies according to the size of the carpet. A carpet of comparable size interwoven with plentiful metal thread and sharing some features of the type is in the Carpet Museum of the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad (fig. 64, p. 91); it may have been used in one of the courtyards of the shrine where people pray when the shrine is crowded. There is a local tradition that it was given to the shrine by Shah 'Abbas. Indeed, Iskander Beg MEMO1 records that ‘sumptuous rugs of Kirman and Jushagat’ were sent there by Shah 'Abbas in 1598.

The foundation of the carpet seen here is actually cotton, but a silk fringe was sewn on at both ends to give the impression that its foundation is silk. This was not unusual, but it is rare for the original silk fringe to be intact and still attached to the carpet; only the tassels have been lost. Such carpets were produced in great quantities, probably throughout the first three quarters of the seventeenth century. They were less precious than the carpets of silk and gold and hence were available to a wider clientele. Examples of this type appear frequently in European paintings, and the survival of many actual examples in European collections is evidence of their popularity outside Iran. Indeed, some are of substantial size, suitable for a palatial setting. One example 9.9 metres long, formerly owned by the Portuguese royal family, the Braganzas, is said to have decorated their palace in Lisbon.

For a long time there has been debate as to where they were made. This has been compounded by the belief in some quarters that some of them came from India. It is true that carpets using a similar colouring and decorative scheme, perhaps influenced by Persian carpets, were made in India during the seventeenth century, but there is no longer any need for confusion because those produced in Iran can be distinguished from the Indian pieces on technical grounds. As for where in Iran they were produced, this problem is still unsolved. There is no evidence to suggest that they came from a single centre, and, in view of their popularity during the seventeenth century, it is most likely that carpets of similar style were made in several places.

JT

1 Aga Oglu 1941, 13, n.39. 2 M. Memishky 1958, 440, n. 2.

opposite, 102 detail
The drum-shaped candle stand, the *shamdan*, has a much longer history in Islamic metalwork than its pillar-shaped cousins. From at least as early as the twelfth century such lamps were being produced in Iran, Syria and Egypt. The shape of the base changed according to period and context, so that the splayed base of this lamp differs from the truncated conical bases of Mamluk candle stands or the cinched waists of Anatolian examples. Unlike the pillar torch stands, which are absent from paintings depicting interiors at night, this type of candle stand occurs in Persian painting from the Gilanid period of the fourteenth century to the seventeenth century. The stability of the shape and possibility for sockets of differing heights must have contributed to the longevity of this form.

The inscription around the shoulder of the base states that the candle stand was donated to the shrine of the Seventh Shi'i Imam Musa ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq al-Kazim (d. 802) and his grandson, the Ninth Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (d. 834), at Kazimayn near Baghdad by Khizar ibn Baba Choloki (Nahavandi), the minister for Kazan. It is dated 1007/1988-9.

The decoration on the sides of the base consists of medallions and half medallions containing arabesques and lions below a rib that encircles the base. Above this, smaller half medallions rise up from the rib or hang from a band of five low relief ribs. A series of incised pointed arches forms the ornamental band below the everted shoulder of the base. The socket is devoid of decoration.

Although this is not a royal gift to a shrine in Iran, it does demonstrate the type of object that people of means donated to the major Shi'i shrines. In 1598 the shrine of Imam Riza would have only just returned to Safavid control, so the Shi'i shrines in Iran would have been a safer option for Iranian pilgrims even though they were under Ottoman control. Interestingly, the donor chose not to give his candle stand to the Shrine of Fatimah Mas'mum in Qum, which is much closer to Kazan than Kazimayn. Presumably, this is not only because Kazimayn contains the graves of two Shi'i Imams but also because the act of pilgrimage is less meaningful if it is easy to perform. Finally, the personal significance of a particular shrine to an individual would have determined how he or she would direct his or her generosity.


The decoration of this handsome torch stand consists of narrow bands of floral vine scrolls on a hatched ground below the rim on either side of a nastaliq inscription contained in cartouches. Below the upper rib and above the lower rib single bands of floral scrolls border the spirals that cover the main part of the shaft. Below the lower rib two different floral scrolls appear above and below an undecorated band. At the point where the foot fans out, half ogives enclosing arabesques are suspended from the edge of the floral scroll and rise from the edge of the foot. As on the torch stand from the Herat region, two lugs are soldered onto the sides of the object. These are more likely to have been used for carrying the torch stand than for suspending it.

The inscription consists of two couplets by Hāzīn 7uni, a fifteenth-century poet much favoured by Salavat al-Zahrawi.' The same couplets appear on the torch stand, cat. no. 48. They read:

- Bit by bit, my heart is consumed with love for beauty;
- bit by bit, it burns my heart.
- My heart burns me every moment with another
- hot branding iron.
- Like the moth I circle the candle.
- As soon as I approach, my wings and feathering will
- be consumed.'

As Melikian-Chirvani has emphasized, such verses embody a mystical meaning that not only concerns the desire to approach and reach oneness with God but also relates to the Sufi idea of *fana*, or attainment of a state of annihilation of the individual as union with the divine is achieved.

Regardless of whether such torch stands were given to shrines or used in a secular setting, the ideas expressed in the poetry that adorns them, while mystical, usually refer to the function of the object through references to burning. Some torch stands are identified as *qaher*, or "fire-holders," because in their original form they would have held lamp oil in the reservoir at the top of the column, which had a wick that was threaded out of a hole in the centre of a domed cover. Many of these covers are now lost, which has led to the assumption that the recess at the top was intended for a candle rather than oil.

THIS elegant flask on a high foot is decorated mostly with split-palmette leaf arabesques. On both the upper and lower part of the neck, above and below a flattened knob, the vines meet and a cypress springs from the trefoil at their juncture. On the upper section of the neck, the top of the cypress points downwards, while the larger cypresses below this point upwards. However, the upper 5.4 centimetres of the neck and spout have been replaced, so the original ornament may have deviated from its present appearance. A narrow inscription band with four cartouches containing sung script and one containing stylized blossoms separates the neck from the bulbous body of the flask. Covering the sides of the flask is a complex foliate vine scroll, with the pattern of leaves, cloud bands, blossoms and trefoils slightly raised against a hatched ground filled in with a black compound. Close inspection of the upper part of this section reveals a circular area, 2.2 centimetres in diameter, with a higher sheen than the rest of the bottle, which may have been marked for removal so a spout could be placed here. Below this section of the body lies a band of contiguous trefoils and a wider band of lappets above the point where the high, flaring foot meets the body. The foot is adorned with indented lotus blossoms pointing downwards and arabesque trefoils with a hatched and blackened background pointing upwards.

The decoration on the body of this piece closely resembles that of a ewer with a spout in the Victoria and Albert Museum that A.S. Melikian-Chirvani has assigned to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. He has noted that ‘a ewer, strictly identical in shape [to the Victoria and Albert Museum example] with its original spout’ is in the Museum of the Shrine of Ismail Riza in Mashhad (fig. 68). Even if the ewer in Mashhad were not a gift of Shah Abbas, it most probably entered the shrine during the reign of the Shah. As illustrated, the Mashhad ewer stands in the centre of a wide-rimmed basin, which would have caught the water poured over one’s hands or food before eating. The Iranian practice in which it appears assigns it to Isfahan, but without an explanation of the attribution. One of the many functions of shrines such as the one in Mashhad is to feed pilgrims. Not only did people provide endowments to pay for this provision, but also storerooms for foodstuffs and kitchens were constructed to accommodate large numbers of hungry visitors. Thus ewers and basins for washing would have served a very useful purpose at such a centre.

1 Melikian-Chirvani 1982, 316, no. 142.
2 Semel n.d., fig. 12.

**Fig. 68** Ewer, Iran, c. 1590, cast brass, engraved decoration, Museum of the Shrine of Ismail Riza, Mashhad.
FIRST published by Mark Zebrowski, this ewer conforms in shape to a group of 'at least sixteen Indian examples', including one dated in accordance with 1415. Although this unusual shape was previously considered an Iranian export to India, the earliest dated Iranian examples come from the seventeenth century. Thus the influence more likely flowed from east to west. However, by around 1600 Indian metalworkers had adopted Iranian motifs and techniques, so a piece such as this one has an Iranian appearance, even if some of its details point to India.

Set on a high, flaring foot, the bulbous body of the ewer comes to a point, producing an oval silhouette. The ends of the hollow, arch-shaped handle rise from the shoulders of the ewer and at the highest point is a rectangular opening with a hinged top. The liquid for the ewer would be poured in through this aperture and out of the faceted spout with an out-curving neck. As one finds in carpets, book bindings and illumination, a continuous design of spiral, split palmette-leaf arabesque covers the body of the ewer up to the space between where the spout and the handle joins the body. This ornament deviates from the Safavid examples because some of the leaves have metamorphosed into fish, perhaps an amusing reference to the water held within the ewer. Cypresses punctuate the arabesques on the foot and upper part of the body, lending verticality to these sections of the piece.

Although no evidence exists to suggest that this piece was donated to the Mashhad Shrine, a related ceramic ewer (cat. no. 107) with connections to Mashhad raises the possibility that such pieces may have been imported overland from India to Iran or at least that they were available in Mashhad in the early seventeenth century. A famous stand in the Mashhad Shrine, dated 946/1539 and produced in Lahore as a donation to the shrine, was unlikely to be an isolated example of metal objects from South Asia reaching the shrines of Iran. As the largest trading partners with Safavid Iran, the Indians were bound to be exporting goods of all types, including unusual ewers such as this one.

2. Zebrowski 1997, 145, fig. 130.
Ewer

The shape of this brass ewer is practically identical to that in cat. no. 106. If the attribution of this piece to Iran is correct, its close relationship to the Indian example would place this very close in time and artistic development to the Indian prototype. Since it is dated 1602–3, the Indian ewer shape must have been introduced to Iran around 1600.

Where this ewer differs markedly from the Indian one is in its decoration. Instead of covering the whole surface of the body, foot, and handle with arabesque decoration, the maker of this ewer has arranged quatrefoils and small horizontal cartouches on the body and foot with areas of plain metal between them. This produces a very simple visual rhythm different from that of the Indian ewer. Each quatrefoil on the body encloses one or two animals on a ground of vine scrolls, while those on the foot simply contain vegetation. The style of decoration here more closely resembles that on the cup (cat. no. 103) where animals are placed in medallions that are separated from one another by areas without ornament. The narrow band separating the body from the pointed top of the piece is decorated with a geometrical arabesque band, a more complex design than the simple, stylized floral scroll in the same position on the Indian ewer.

Although the date on this ewer situates it in time, its place of manufacture is not so readily discernible. What does appear to be certain, however, is that this ewer of this century when the shape was first copied in another medium (cat. no. 107).
Today the Shrine of Fatimeh Mas'ume at Qum is probably the most famous shrine in Iran (figs 69, 70). Located 97 miles (156 km) south-west of Tehran, Qum has developed as the theological centre of Iran with over thirty seminaries specializing in Shi'i religious education. The city's most renowned student in the twentieth century was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who studied there in the 1920s and later led Iran after the Revolution of 1979. Yet, from at least the mid-seventeenth century Qum attracted Shi'i theologians from inside and outside Iran. Unlike Ardabil and Mashhad, the Shrine of Fatimeh Mas'ume at Qum did not receive a great deal of attention or investment from Shah 'Abbas, but its role in the broader context of the Safavid dynasty deserves scrutiny, as do the gifts presented to the shrine. Moreover, from the last years of the reign of Shah 'Abbas onwards the shrine at Qum has played a key role in the politico-religious life of Iran. Even if 'Abbas did not patronize the Shrine of Fatimeh Mas'ume as assiduously as the shrines at Ardabil and Mashhad, the social changes that he set in train laid the foundation for its rise.

History of the shrine

While the city of Qum probably existed before the seventh century, in 872-13 a group of Shi'is from Yemen founded a new city next to the old one. Thus from the beginning of its Islamic history Qum was associated with Shiism and opposition to the Sunni caliphate. In 816 Fatimeh Mas'ume, also known as Hazrat-i Mas'ume, journeyed to Iran to visit her brother, 'Ali Ibn Musa al-Riza, the future Imam Riza who was in Khurasan. She became ill in Saveh and was invited to recuperate in a house in nearby Qum. Unfortunately, she died and her host buried her in a garden on his land. The site of her tomb and the grounds around it became her shrine and a surrounding cemetery. At first, Hazrat-i Mas'ume's grave was covered with a
waqf at the shrine of Fatimah Ma'sumah that included money for Qur'an recitation in her name, in order that the blessings from that devotion would benefit her spirit.'  

The reasons for this female interest in the shrine are more complicated than the simple fact of women supporting the site at which an eminent Shī'ī woman was buried. Qum served as a place to which Safavid women retreated at times of war or in order to separate themselves from the court. In her waqf of 1522–3 Tajju Khunan mentioned the soul of her deceased sister as a beneficiary of her endowment, much as Shah 'Abbas later on dedicated his waqf to the Fourteen Immaculate Ones and mentioned Shah Tahmasp and Isma'il I and his own mother, among others, as receiving the spiritual benefits of his gift. Thus it seems that the Safavid women not only looked to Fatimah Ma'sumah as a paragon of womanhood, but also compared their own or their relations' situations to hers. The death of Tajju Khunan's sister was paralleled, if not prefigured, by that of Fatimah Ma'sumah.

With the reign of Shah 'Abbas the role of women in the Safavid court changed. He married and arranged unions for his sons with women of Georgian or Circassian descent and the daughters of leading Shī'ī clerics. Whereas the earlier Safavid princesses had owned land linked to their Qu'bara'ah families and had travelled independently to the shrines that they endowed, the harem altered dramatically in the period of Shah 'Abbas. While he did appoint his eldest son, Muhammad Baqir Mirza, to the governorship of Hamadan as a small child, Shah 'Abbas chose to keep his other sons in the harem with their mothers and the other women of the court. The women of the harem may not have enjoyed as much freedom of movement as their sixteenth-century counterparts, but they exerted far greater influence over their sons. This was particularly significant with regard to questions of succession and contributed to Shah 'Abbas's distrust of his own sons. On the other hand, the women of the harem may have inculcated in the Safavid princes a strong veneration for Fatimah Ma'sumeh and her shrine, because all the shahs who followed Shah 'Abbas were buried there.

The geographical positions of Ardabil and Mashad may have played a part in the numerous visits that Shah 'Abbas paid to them and the nature of the endowments and refurbishments that he ordered for them. Qum, by contrast, sits in the centre of Iran, rarely under threat from either the Ottomans or the Uzbek. Thus, while Shah 'Abbas is reported as having passed through Qum and having prayed in the shrine, he issued no waqf in connection with the shrine until 1627–8. He then presented 190 volumes of Al-Sha'arajih al-Al'imiya ('The Tree of Theology') of Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Mahmud Shahri'uri to the Shrine of Fatimah Ma'sumeh and to the seminary of the shrine. Whether the gift had any connection with a historical event, such as the designation of Shah 'Abbas's grandson, Sami Mirza, as heir apparent in the same year is unknown.

Gifts to the shrine

Although Shah 'Abbas's presentation of books to the Shrine of Fatimah Ma'sumeh follows the practice established at the Ardabil and Mashad Shrines, records of gifts of other types of objects from Shah 'Abbas remain to be discovered. By the late 1620s Iranian notions of what was valuable had evolved. The donation of Chinese...
porcelains, not only from Shah ‘Abbās to the Ardabil Shrine but also from Mahbūb Rānu to the Shrine of Imam Rizā, was not repeated. Instead, if the collections of the Museum of the Shrine of Fatimeh Ma’ānumeh are an accurate indicator, gold and silver-ground textiles replaced the porcelains and jades as the type of object deemed valuable enough to dedicate to a major Shi‘i shrine. While written documentary evidence is sparse, a group of metal-ground silk textiles and silk carpets of silver and gold donated to the Shrine of Imam ‘Ali at Najaf in Iraq by Shāhs ‘Abbās I and II (between 1623 and 1666) support the proposal that the Safavid shahs considered Iranian-made silk textiles appropriately precious for the Shi‘i shrines. In Qum a shaped silk carpet was produced for the tomb chamber of Shāh ‘Abbās II in 1671 (fig. 71). Other gold- and silver-ground silks in the collection may date from the reign of Shāh Sa‘īd (1629–42) or the end of the reign of Shāh ‘Abbās (fig. 72). Imported items of the type that Europeans report the shahs wanting, such as clocks or glass goblets, were used at court but do not seem to have been offered to the shrines in this period. Most likely these novelties were too few in number to warrant being given as waqf to one of the major Shi‘i shrines.

Although the gifts to the shrines and the new decorative style introduced when the capital moved to Isfahan might not appear to be related, the gifts reflect what the royal household contained before the donations were made and were the backdrop against which fashion changed. According to Iskandar Beg Munsī, Shāh ‘Abbās ‘constituted his personal property into a trust’, including “every item in my [the Shah’s] household, and every item which it is possible to tax … even the two rings I [the Shah] am wearing”.” This provided the opportunity to send books and porcelain in bulk to Ardabil and Mashhad but obviously does not mean that the royal cupboards and bookshelves were left bare. What remained in the royal household would have presumably looked up to date.

Thomas Herbert’s famous account of a reception in Shiraz in 1627 at the palace of the governor, Imam Quli Khan, a man of great wealth, describes a household that would have closely resembled that of Shāh ‘Abbās himself. Herbert attended a banquet in a room open at the sides and supported by twenty gilded pillars, the roof embossed with gold, and so exquisitely painted … The ground was spread with extraordinary rich carpets of silk and gold; a state at one end of crimson satin was erected embroidered with pearl and gold, under which the Duke was to inthrone himself.

As the banquet progressed,

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young Gasymesdes array’d in cloth of gold with long crisp’d hairs … went up and down bearing flagons of gold filled with choice wine … Upon the carpets were spread fine colored pintado table-cloths forty ells long at least.
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When Imam Quli Khan arrived,
further, more elaborate pavilion Herbert reports a 'wall of golden vessels: most of the laggoms, cups and other plate were garnished with rubies, diamonds and like stones.' In neither the palace of Imam Quli Khan nor that of Shah 'Abbas does Herbert mention porcelain or pottery of any type being used at the formal banquets he describes. Despite or perhaps because of the scarcity of gold in Iran at this time, the shah, his grandees and their servants were enveloped in gold, from the carpets on the floor to the turbans on their heads and the cups in their hands (fig. 75).

The stylistic development of textiles under Shah 'Abbas involved more than the adoption of gold and silver thread. The motifs also changed and they echo designs found on the tiles of new buildings commissioned by Shah 'Abbas in Isfahan as well as renovations he ordered at the Ardabil Shrine. In the sixteenth century one group of silk textiles consisted of complex compositions with trees or plants, animals and often more than one figure in a repeat. Textiles without figures featured floral or vegetal motifs that are smaller in scale and less sinuous than those found in silks from the period of Shah 'Abbas I. While figures continue to appear on the metal-ground textiles of the Shah 'Abbas period, they are larger in scale and simpler in composition than those of the sixteenth century. As remarkable, and thus frequently illustrated, as these figured velvets and brocades are, the majority of seventeenth-century metal-ground silks contain floral decoration (cat. nos 109–12). Like the figured silks, the repeated motifs are bold in size and often form an S-curve. The lotus blossoms that adorn the tiles of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah and the slightly later Masjid-i Shah in Isfahan also appear in contemporaneous luxury silks, carpets and manuscript illumination. At the Ardabil Shrine the gilded stucco in the Dar al-Hufaz and the Chini-khaneh use the same large-scale floral ornament. The cumulative evidence of this decorative style in its many manifestations strongly suggests that Shah 'Abbas wished to imprint Iran with a new visual identity that would be the handmaiden of his sweeping social and political reforms. Long before our brand-obessed age, Shah 'Abbas understood the power of the visual message and how it could be harnessed to his centralizing ambition.

NOTES
1  Saidel 1977, 24.
2  Saidel 1977, 24. Identifies the patron as Shah Roshan. Sprague 1975, 117, notes that Tujj Khanum was also known as Shah-i Beg (Regis) (Khanum). The only other Safavid royal woman with a comparable name is Shah Roshan, the daughter of Muhammad Ilkhadshah, born in 1578.
3  Sprague 1994, 249.
4  Sprague 1994, 251.
5  Rizvi 2000, 143.
7  Mirdariz Tashabab 1976, 190.
8  The future Shah Zalih.
10  Eshkander Beg Moorad/Savory 1978, 954.
12  Herbert 1677, 175.
11th brocade

At first glance, the 11th-century brocade appears to be a simple textile. However, upon closer inspection, it reveals an intricate design featuring emerald-green, blue, and red blossoms against an ivory background. The brocade was likely used in clothing and other textiles, demonstrating the high level of craftsmanship during the 11th century.

Silver thread and gold thread were used to create a shimmering effect. The brocade was likely a precious item, given the high-quality materials used in its creation.

The design of the brocade is based on floral motifs, which were common in 11th-century textiles. These motifs were likely inspired by the natural world, reflecting the prevalent use of flora in artistic expression. The use of silver and gold threads highlights the value and prestige associated with these textiles.

In summary, the 11th-century brocade is a fine example of the high-quality textile production during the 11th century. The use of silver and gold threads, along with intricate floral motifs, demonstrates the skill and creativity of the artisans of the time.
VOIDED SILK-VELVET TEXTILE FRAGMENT

Iran, first quarter of the 17th century
Silk, gold thread with silk core, and cotton; 33 x 70.5 cm
Published: Neumann and Murza 1988, 199, 172, 277
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, 1879.1483

Elaborate exceptional textile comprises elegantly bending tulips, butterflies and small cloud motifs that are “voided”, i.e. in velvet on a silk (gold) ground. The design consists of rows of tulip plants with three blossoms bending alternately left and right. The plants grow out of small humps signifying the ground. Four different shapes of clouds float in the space between the tulips, which is also inhabited by butterflies, with one butterfly between each plant. The overall palette features warm hues of olive green, orange, red, yellow and white, in accordance with silk-weaving technique the design is repeated in alternate rows.

Although Neumann and Murza have noted the “Chinese” clouds, the dominant influence on the design of this textile comes from Europe. Album of drawings such as cat. no. 113 include images of tulips and other flowers with butterflies and bees hovering nearby. While some of the tulips are almost indistinguishable from European prototypes, other drawings of flowers are signed or attributed to Persians, such as Shahzādī Abūlāy, the son of Bīna'ī Abūlāy. Many of them are penciled, that is the outlines of the flowers and other motifs are punctuated for transfer to another surface, possibly to textiles or some intermediate medium. While fabrics such as this were used domestically to cover cushions, as well hangings and fine garments, they also represent the type of luxury silks that were produced as a result of Shah Abūlāy's stimulus to trade with Europe. One of the intimates of Shah Abūlāy, Ghiyāth al-Din Naqshband, was a textile designer from Yezd whose textiles were so famous that the mighty kings and rulers of India, Turkestan and Turkey sent him precious gifts asking for textiles from the workshops of his genius. Although there is no reason to believe that this textile is connected with Ghiyāth al-Din Naqshband, the fact that his textiles were internationally appreciated demonstrates the strength of demand for these luxury goods.

1 Neumann and Murza 1988, 199.
2 Croby 1999a, 55-56, 65.
3 Gray 1919, 225; Croby 2002, 64-71.
4 Sherbin 2000, 255.
Velvet fragment
Iran, early 17th century
Silk; 70 x 71.5 cm
Published: Neumann and Murat 1988, 104, fig. 109
Kunstgewerbe Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, 1897,92

Without too much concern for botanical correctness, this textile gives the impression of floral abundance. Individual plants with tall, S-curved stalks are heavy with lotus-type blossoms viewed in section. Small buds and blossoms of different species dot the secondary stems springing out of the main stalks. The design is repeated in alternately facing rows and is tightly spaced with little room between each flower.

The elegantly swaying flowers recall numerous early-seventeenth-century paintings of figures posed in order to emphasize the S-curve of their turbaned heads and swaying bodies. Whether this precise textile was used for their robes is unclear. However, many variants are extant, which suggests that the design was suitable for both garments and furnishings. While the fact that this piece is in a European collection may support the argument that it was produced for trade in the West, lengths of luxury textiles at the Museum of the Shrine of Fatimah Ma'ameh demonstrate that the value and beauty of such pieces warranted their contribution to Iran’s major shrines.

The dating of this piece to the early seventeenth century is based on the comparison of the floral motif with that found on a range of velvets and silk brocade textiles that include variations on the theme of the swaying flowering plant. Additionally, a velvet panel at Rosenborg Castle, Copenhagen, thought to date from the 1630s, contains a repeat of a suppliant figure alternating with tall, bending flowering plants that form an elongated S-curve vertically as a result of the reverse repeat of the design.1 Iranian diplomats presented such fabrics as gifts to the courts of Europe and India where they were greatly appreciated.


Silk brocade with gold ground
Iran, mid-17th century
Silk, compound twill, silver thread with silk core; 49 x 72.3 cm
The Nasir al-Din Khailf Collection of Islamic Art, inv. no. TXT 238

This opulent textile contains a repeating motif of a flowering plant with three blossoms, four buds, and three leaves in gold on a silver ground. The green stem provides another colour accent, but overall the palette is subtle and without startling contrasts. As is evident in the posthumous portrait of Shah 'Abbās in the Chihil Sutun Palace in Isfahān (fig. 7, p. 25), the shah and members of his court wore robes decorated with similar plants in bloom growing out of small mounds of earth and placed close to one another in diagonally repeating rows. Here the buds, leaves and interior of the blossoms suggest that these are poppies but the design is not botanically correct.

Like the textile in cat. no. 109, the use of silver thread for the ground and the tightness of the composition suggest that this piece dates from the middle of the seventeenth century or slightly earlier.

In later examples the flowers are spaced wider, and the ground is more often gold than silver. As the seventeenth century wore on, the floral motifs on luxurious silk textiles lose the plasticity and naturalism of the blossoms in this example and become stiff and stylized.

Said to have come from Tibet, this textile epitomizes the type of fabric traded by Safavid merchants in both Europe and Asia in the seventeenth century. Although Iran was always seeking new outlets for its merchandise, the ancient Silk Road stretching from Venice to Turkey and the Levant, then on to Iran and ultimately China was still the main overland artery linking East and West. Under Shah 'Abbās traders had made great progress selling silk to Europe, but the beauty of their products clearly also appealed to customers in Asia.
Tile panel with *Itlahal* inscription

Signed by Muhammad Riza al-Ismi

Ismi, 1628-30

Ceramic, ovoid body, cobalt and white underglaze, transparent colourless glaze

81.1 x 186 cm

Published: Picket 1984, pl. 1a

Victoria and Albert Museum, 620-221-1878

This tile panel consists of twenty-two tiles arranged over three rows. The inscription in the top two rows is mostly intact and legible, whereas the bottom row is missing the lower tier of tiles, which would have contained the beginning of all but one or two words in this passage. The inscription is of the two rows reads: ‘al-arrus(a)’ amir Abu Talib ibn m Carmel Tithe amir Abu Talib, son of the late Mir Ishkhan in one thousand and 179 (1628) and 180 (1629) (the clear-sighted amir Abu Talib son of the late Mir Ishkhan in one thousand and 179 (1628) and 180 (1629), and his teacher, Ali Riza Abasi, was designing the inscriptions for the Friday Mosque. However, Picket’s reading may be missing a word that would change our interpretation of when and where it was made.

As well as working on inscriptions for new buildings, Muhammad Riza contributed inscriptions to other recently pre-existing monuments. He was responsible for two inscriptions at the tomb of Shah Safi, who died in 1642 and was buried in the Shrine of Fatimah Ma’sumeh (Fig. 75). By the late 1640s he was designing inscriptions for the Shrine of Imam Riza at Mashhad in the south of Iran. In the two important, the Naqshbandi Khans and in several small chambers, dated between 1054 and 1059/1643 and 1648. While most of Muhammad Riza’s inscriptions for the next thirty years occur on buildings in Isfahan, he may have returned to Mashhad in the 1670s to repair inscriptions that had been damaged in the previous three decades.

The writing of the date on the London inscription panel compares with one on a panel now in the Museum of the Shrine of Fatimah Ma’sumeh in Qum. The calligrapher’s name is written perpendicularly to the main text of the inscription and because of damage only ‘al-Ismi in Qum. The inscription includes the name of Muhammad al-Ismi, who was also producing inscriptions for lesser mosques, mausolea and shrines in Isfahan in which he signed his name ‘katakhut Muhammad Riza al-Ismi’. The calligrapher’s name is written perpendicularly to the main text of the inscription and because of damage only ‘al-Ismi in Qum. The inscription includes the name of Muhammad al-Ismi, who was also producing inscriptions for lesser mosques, mausolea and shrines in Isfahan in which he signed his name ‘katakhut Muhammad Riza al-Ismi’.

The London tile panel was probably produced for a building in Isfahan, since it bears the name of Abu Talib, son of Mir Ishkhan, the presumed patron. Compared to the inscription in the museum in Qum, the London writing is looser and the letters more widely spaced. This style is consistent with Muhammad Riza al-Ismi’s inscriptions on buildings in Isfahan at the beginning of his career, which is more likely to have been the late 1620s and 1630s than the 1690s. In addition to working on the Mezrj-e-Shah with his teachers in the late 1620s and 1630s, Muhammad Riza al-Ismi was also producing inscriptions for lesser mosques, mausolea and shrines in Isfahan in which he signed his name ‘katakhut Muhammad Riza al-Ismi’. The inscription includes the name of Muhammad al-Ismi, who was also producing inscriptions for lesser mosques, mausolea and shrines in Isfahan in which he signed his name ‘katakhut Muhammad Riza al-Ismi’.

**Fig. 74** Detail of silk textile panel (Fig. 72).

[Image of a detail of a silk textile panel]

**Fig. 75** Detail of tile inscription panel from the tomb of Shah Safi, signed by Muhammad Riza al-Ismi, Shrine of Fatimah Ma’sumeh, Qum.

1 Picket 1984, 82-6. He also appears to have designed the inscription on a silk cloth over dated 1080/1670-71 and donated to the Shrine of Imam Riza at Mashhad. See Hayward Gallery 1976, 199, no. 82.

The standards carried in Shi'i religious processions, called 'alams, originated in battle standards where they indicated the presence of the ruler. As James Allan has noted, these standards were in use at least as early as the fourteenth century and in western Iran were often decorated with dragons' heads. When the standards started to be displayed in religious parades is unclear, but possibly the establishment of Siah Qom as the state religion in Iran in the sixteenth century and the subsequent increase in Shi'i forms of commemorations led to the adoption of this practice. Different quarters of Iranian cities in the Safavid period and later produced standards to be carried in processions before the residences of the relevant quarters. Additionally, large and small shrines owned collections of standards to be brought out on holy days.

This pear-shaped 'alam consists of a large ovoid section, made up of four parts, surrounded by an openwork lozenge with a solid border. A further element, held by a bracket that still remains, would have extended upwards but is now gone. A solid metal escutcheon with decoration in relief serves as a bracket at the base of the standard, where it would have been attached to a pole. Both the lozenge and the large ovoid contain elegant tughra-like inscriptions on a ground of stylized vine scrolls. The two inscriptions, read together, comprise Sura 110 of the Qur'an: 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. When the help of God and victory come, and thou dost see the People enter God's religion in crowds. Celebrate the praise of thy Lord and pray for His forgiveness, for He is ever ready to show mercy.' The ovoid inscription section is surrounded by a border of steel punctuated by open rounds containing discs that swivel. This band also contains an almond-shaped ornamental with a scalloped metal border where the ovoid rises to a point. An outer border of openwork split-palmate leaf and spiralling vines is set within the steel frame that terminates in two outward-facing dragons' heads. Another dragon's head emerges from the upper bracket, its partner now missing. At the lower left a damaged openwork roundel and what appears to be a dragon's head on a metal loop are affixed to the edge of the 'alam. Possibly, the standard originally had dragons' heads attached around the whole perimeter of its lower section, as is found on some later examples, or perhaps these were later additions.

Thanks to James Allan's work on 'alams, a typology exists into which this piece fits. Its various elements, particularly the two openwork inscription areas, the band with roundels containing discs and the two sets of dragons' heads, place this in Allan's Type B, of which the most notable example is an 'alam in the Ardabil Shrine (visible in fig. 36, p. 102). While the Ardabil example dates from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, this standard represents a later stage of development. The letters in its inscription are more slender and the vine scroll daintier. The silhouette of the standard is squat compared to the long-necked appearance of the Ardabil 'alam. Overall, the decoration is less muscular, though it has not yet acquired the embellishments of late-seventeenth-century types. This standard probably dates from the mid-seventeenth century. Its provenance is unknown, but standards of this type were almost certainly used at Qum as well as at the other major Shi'i shrines in Iran.
it was made for the tomb of a small child, the red rectangles would be too short to cover the top of all tombs. To either side of the red rectangles are narrow bands of nine yellow and blue cartouches containing the phrase, ‘Oh Husayn the martyred one’, written in reverse. The red rectangles contain seven cartouches with part of Surah 61, verse 13, in reverse, writing that is repeated in the cartouches at either end of the rectangles. This text reads: ‘Nasr min Allah wa fath qarib wa bishir al-mum’ina’ (Help from God and speedy victory and the joy of the believers). The nine cartouches with white writing on blue contain the names of ‘Ali and his two sons Hasan and Husayn. In addition to the calligraphic panels, the textile is adorned with split-palmette leaf scrolls around the red rectangles; quatrefoils and single leaves in white on a blue ground on one side of the yellow and blue cartouches; and blue half-carnation blossoms on a white ground on either side of the blue-ground inscription cartouches. Although Jon Thompson has suggested that stylized cartouches are a typical Ottoman motif, they appear in the album of flower drawings (cat. no. 113) by Safavid artists thought to have been designs for textiles as well as Safavid textiles themselves. Thompson proposed that a silk textile in Doha with carnations and Qur’anic inscriptions might have been intended for export to Ottoman Turkey; but the overtly Shi‘i invocations make it more likely to have been made for a Shi‘i tomb or shrine.

1 Safaii, i.e., figs. 4-8; Jabusch and Bensaid 1993, 28, 117, cat. no. 41;
2 Hayward Gallery 1976, 109, cat. no. 62.
3 Thompson 2004, 46, no. 10.
4 Thompson 1993, 15, 110, fig. 73.
5 Thompson 2004, 46, no. 10.

116 detail (right)
O God, may Thy blessings descend upon al-Mustafa Muhammad, al-Murtada 'Ali, the Pure Fatima, the grandsons al-Hasan and al-Husayn; may Thy blessings descend upon Zayn al-'Abid 'Ali, al-Naqi Muhammad, al-Sadiq Ja'far, al-Kazim Musa, al-Riza 'Ali, al-Tagi Muhammad, al-Naqi 'Ali, al-Zaki al-'Askari al-Hassan; may Thy blessings descend upon the Mahdi, the guide, lord of the period and all times. The year 11053.

The inscription ends abruptly with the letter sad, which would have started the word sahawat had the metalworker not run out of space. Not only does this inscription follow exactly that found on the Victoria and Albert Museum bowls of 1608-9 and 1643-4, but it also continues a preference for Shi'i inscriptions on metalwork that increased in popularity under Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-76).

Unfortunately, little is known about the context in which such a bowl would have been used. Were the relative austerity of ornament and the Shi'I inscription designed to appeal to a particular segment of Safavid society? The bowl of the same date bears the same inscription in an extended version but is also decorated with animals and scenes of couples, including one pair representing Layla and Majnun, a famous literary vignet. Does the addition of figures signify a difference in style or simply a more expensive version of the same bowl? What does seem certain is that no line existed between 'religion' and the rest of life in Safavid Iran. The same food containers could have Shi'I and poetic allusions, just as some mosques had both Qur'anic and poetic verses inscribed on their walls.

1 Irfan Bemkazi, Chirvani 1982, 234-5.

118 Bowl with high foot
Iran, dated 1032/1622-3
Tinned copper; h. 14.8 cm, diam. 23.5 cm
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Jr. 2293

The Safavid period tinned copper became a popular medium for bowls, which often bear inscriptions with Shi'I meaning and with allusions to wine and wine-drinking.7 Despite the Muslim prohibition, wine-drinking remained a ritual of many Shi'I orders and a social pastime of Shah 'Abbas and much of the rest of Safavid society. If the high incidence of wine-drinking depicted in paintings, tiles and other media is to be believed, the shah may not have tolerated the excesses of Qazibah drinkers, but he himself was known to have a taste for wine.

The decoration of this bowl with high straight sides consists of a continuous floral arabesque formed of split-palmate leaves, vines and five-petalled flowers. While the copper decoration on the exterior is raised, thus providing a colour contrast with the darker background, the plain interior is tinned. Below the rim is a narrow band containing a somewhat stiff floral vine scroll and above it are one major and four minor ribs topped by a narrow continuous S-band, like the links of a chain. The nasta'lq inscription beneath the everted rim contains the owner's name, Melayim Beg Sjahshagh, the date 1032/1622-3 and a poem:

Come, cup-bearer, with that purple wine,
Which is wisdom for the older and delight for the youth.
I do not know how reasoned is the world,
When it makes me older in [my] youth.
Give me help, too,
Rejuvenate me in the days of old age.

The shape of this bowl is nearly identical to that of a bowl dated 1030/1620-1 in the Victoria and Albert Museum.8 The decoration, however, is entirely different because the sides of the London bowl contain a menagerie of animals, including deer, fox, lion, zebu, rhinoceros and even an elephant. Its inscription refers both to the cupbearer bringing water from Kauzar, the river of paradise in the Qur'an, and 'Ali, the refuge from evil and light in the darkness. Thus the inscription refers to the use of the bowl but also communicates a mystical, or at least spiritual, meaning. Although one would not have drunk directly from the bowl, it probably contained either water to mix with wine or wine to be decanted into a bottle or ewer.

1 A.S. Melikian-Chirvani has investigated the significance of these objects extensively in Melikian-Chirvani 1982, 320; Melikian-Chirvani 1993, 120; Melikian-Chirvani 1995, 41-47; Melikian-Chirvani 1997a, 45-72.
Carpet of silk and gold
Iran, early 17th century
Silk pile, with wool and silk foundation; 201 x 149 cm
Published: Weizel 2003, pl. 84
Victoria and Albert Museum, Bequeathed by George Salting, 1840-1891

Compare this rug with the pair of silk and gold carpets seen earlier (cat. nos 43-4) and distinct differences in decoration are immediately apparent. Though both are of comparable size and to the same broad category, this example has a much more intricate, detailed and concise design with multiple overlapping layers. By comparison, the design of the pair is on a smaller scale, and the overall style is more expansive, even exotic. Here a stylistic progression can be detected. The intricate design with smaller-scale elements looks back to earlier style prevalent in the sixteenth century. In this respect, it resembles stylistically to a securely dated carpet that was given by Shah 'Abbas to the Doge of Venice, Marino Grimani (sometimes mentioned as Marco Giustiniani), in 1603 and that is still in the treasury of the basilica of San Marco in Venice.

The fashion leader in Safavid society was the royal court, and it wasobvious style on the empire that would be imitated with the reign of Shah 'Abbas. The silk and gold were perfectly exemplified, what can best be described as the ‘look’, and although the decoration of this example can be seen as having affinities with pre-existing forms, its overall style clearly belongs to the seventeenth century.

Its composition is organized around a pair of lobed escutcheons, each containing large, striped, leaf palmette motifs that resemble but are not, pomegranates. The centre is thus de-emphasized. The arabesque decoration in the field around these motifs is layered and complex and features large, golden-yellow, split leaves that surround lobed forms containing lotus blossoms. The colours have somewhat faded; nevertheless, the contrast between the velvety, silk pile and the silver areas is still evident. A similar combination of gold and silver occurs in the illuminated borders of manuscripts and would have been a familiar colour harmony to artists of all types working at the Safavid court.

A technical feature of note is the presence of a woolen warp, an exceptional finding in this group of carpets. The presence of wool in the weft is also unusual (the first and third are wool and the second silk) but, because it is not visible, one often finds oddities in the weft. A unique feature is to have areas, apparently distributed at random, where red silk is used in place of undyed silk, a practice that has no obvious function.
Carpet of silk and gold (fragment)

Iran, c.1600–1625
Silk pile, with precious metal thread, on a silk and cotton foundation; 145 x 259 cm
Published: Aqa-Oghli 1941, fig. 4; Bennett 1988, 43
Victoria and Albert Museum, formerly Collection of Lord Abberlineway, T.36–1954

This exceptional fragment of a silk and gold carpet relates to one of the key pieces in this group, a carpet that was at one time, and may still be, in the Shrine of Imam 'Ali at Najaf in Iraq. The Najaf carpet measures a massive 14.03 by 9.56 metres and consists of two pieces, each 14.03 metres long, sewn together down the centre of the carpet. Although the design of this carpet fragment is nearly identical to the Najaf example, its original size would have been considerably smaller, approximately 5.83 by 2.59 metres. Both this fragment and the Najaf carpet have an uncommon composition consisting of an overall arabesque pattern on a crimson ground. The wide, golden yellow arabesque-strapwork bands contain stems with leaves and flowers. At the points where the bands meet, white palmette shields encomposing stylized lotus blossoms punctuate the pattern. The main border includes lotus blossoms and palmettes joined by a scrolling stem. Mehmet Aqa-Oghli has pointed out that the pattern in the field resembles textiles from the middle to sixteenth century as represented in paintings, but in carpets it is unique to this fragment and the Najaf example.1

The association of the Najaf carpet, and by extension the Victoria and Albert fragment, with Shah 'Abbas, is based on two things. First is the presence of two other pieces in the collection of the Shrine of Imam 'Ali at Najaf, both of the highest quality. One is a multiple prayer rug (aşaf) and the other a border fragment. Both bear swag inscriptions referring to the 'dog of this shrine,' 'Abbas.' Aqa-Oghli has noted other instances in which Shah 'Abbas is referred to as the 'dog of 'Abi Talib' or the 'dog of the shrine.'2 The second is the massive size and fabulous quality of the silk and gold carpet at Najaf. Such a carpet was, by any stretch of the imagination, a commission requiring huge resources of time and money, and it is clear that the other royal donations it is reasonable to assume that this enormous silk carpet was also donated by Shah 'Abbas.

Najaf was in Ottoman hands until 1624, when the Safavids took Baghdad and other major Iraqi cities. After the capitulation of Baghdad Shah 'Abbas went on to Najaf, where he spent ten days in attendance at the shrine night and day', praying, sweeping the precinct (an act of humility repeated at the Shrine of Imam Riza) and ordering improvements to the water system. The account of this visit makes no mention of a gift of carpets to the shrine at Najaf, but two months later he is recorded as having given carpets worn with gold thread to the Shrine of Imam Riza at Karbala, and in the following month 'beautiful rugs' were donated to the Shrine at Karbala. Since the shrines of Karbala, Najaf and Karbala are all within a 200-mile (320km) radius of one another, it is logical to assume that Shah 'Abbas would have given carpets of silk and gold to the shrine at Najaf around the same time. If the carpet in the Najaf shrine that relates most closely to the one shown here was donated in 1624, the question remains as to when it was made. Shah 'Abbas may have assumed that he would occupy Iraq, but a carpet as huge as the one he gave to the shrine in Najaf would have taken longer to produce than the two months between the conquest and his visit. Perhaps this carpet was already in the royal carpet stores and was transported to Iraq once the territory had been secured by the Safavids. Since the Ottomans controlled Iraq until 1624, it is unlikely that the carpet could have reached Najaf before then. As is known from the text referring to the donations of Shah 'Abbas to the Astabul Shrine, certain precious items intended for the shrine at Najaf were placed on deposit at the Astabul Shrine until Najaf was freed from the Ottomans. Possibly the arabesque carpet of silk and gold in the Shrine of Imam 'Ali was one such gift brought from Iran almost as soon as the shrine fell under Safavid jurisdiction.3

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1 Aqa-Oghli 1941, 10.
2 Aqa-Oghli 1941, 15, n. 30.
3 Ehsanlar: Rinp Mindsj Surveys 1778, 1227.
4 Ehsanlar: Rinp Mindsj Surveys 1778, 1235.
composition of this prayer rug

Fig. 76  Prayer rug. 17th century, woolen pile, Museum of the Shrine of Fatimah Ma’sumeh, Qum.

verses 40–41.) These verses are particularly fitting for a prayer rug but also refer to the
day of judgement, which often figures in the inscriptions found in mosques. finally, the
inscriptions in the four squares on the secondary border contain part of a Quranic
verse that states, ‘There is no God but Thou, Glory to Thee. I was indeed wrong!’ (Surah
21, verse 87.) Not only do both of these Quranic inscriptions appear in many other
prayer rugs in this group, but also they function in the same way, in that the verses
from Surah 14 are invariably found in the band surrounding the arch, and the lines
from Surah 21 are written in seal Kufic in squares on the inner border.

These similarities support an attribution of the carpets to a single design
source, if not workshop. Moreover, the Quranic verses must have been acceptable
to the Shi’i ‘ulam who may even have had a role in choosing them.

JT
The intimate portrait of Shah 'Abbas depicts him being served wine by a beardless young man held in a near-embrace by the shah. Given the paucity of portraits of Shah 'Abbas painted during his lifetime, this work lends an exceptional insight into the ruler at the end of his life. Still sporting his long moustache, Shah 'Abbas shows little sign of ageing, despite his fifty-six years. As in the portrait by Bishn Dax (cat. no. 1), the hair on the shah's head is cropped short and the tuft of his beard is evident. In the 1627 portrait his neck is wide and unlined, whereas in the earlier painting it is narrow and slightly wrinkled. A difference that more probably stems from the Mughal artist's aim not to flatten the shah than from a radical change in his neck size.

In 1627 Shah 'Abbas made his only documented waqf donation to the Shrine of Fatimah Ma'sumeh in Qum, a gift of 109 volumes to the madrasa associated with the shrine (see pp. 110, 223). Unlike the 1607-8 waqf for the shrines at Ardabil and Mashhad, this donation is not mentioned in the histories of Shah 'Abbas's reign. Nevertheless, one can speculate that at the end of his life the shah's attention might have turned to Qum. By this time, although not old by modern standards, the shah may have been considering his succession. He had killed or blinded his own sons, so the next generation would need to provide his heir. The children of that generation had been reared in the harem, not in far-flung provincial capitals like Shah 'Abbas and his predecessors. The royal women and particularly the mothers of potential heirs to the throne wielded a great deal of power, implemented through the eunuchs who acted as intermediaries with the male world of the court. Since the Shrine of Fatimah Ma'sumeh had long been the recipient of Safavid royal female patronage, its significance would have been impressed on the seventeenth-century Safavid princes by their mothers. Shah 'Abbas, in turn, may have been convinced that this shrine, too, deserved his attention.

This portrait presents a very different side of the shah from that found in the diplomatic gathering with Khurshid Alas (cat. nos 19-21) or posthumous images of him fighting, hunting or feasting. The homoerotic implication of the pose is consistent with a trend towards sexual explicitness in painting that was initiated in part by Muhammad Qasim and becomes evident in the 1640s. Given the clustering of women and the preponderance of male-only socializing, as well as Shah 'Abbas's fondness for young men, such an image is not surprising. The two-line poem that appears above the date and signature reinforces the romanticism of the painting. Interestingly, it is the same poem that appears on a portrait of a single figure holding a sheet of paper, also by Muhammad Qasim. The poem reads:

May the world fulfill your wishes for three lips,
The lips of the beloved, the lips of a stream and the lips of a cup.

The painting contains all three subjects alluded to in the poem: the stream, the cup and the beloved. Despite the similarities between the youth with Shah 'Abbas and the single figure holding the page of poetry (mentioned above), they cannot be identified as the same person because their faces are so idealized and devoid of individual characteristics.

In the past decade the career of the artist Muhammad Qasim has been reassessed. Masoumeh Farhad has proposed that he worked in Mashhad, producing single-page paintings and some illustrated manuscripts for ghilams. A painting such as this, though, suggests that he also worked in Isfahan. Afsah Adamova has placed the artist's career earlier, claiming that, instead of being active from c.1630 to c.1660 or even c.1695, he was working from the last decade of the sixteenth century until 1659. As she rightly notes, he had reached artistic maturity by 1627, when he portrayed Shah 'Abbas and his page. Typical traits of his style include the extreme roundness of the boy's face, the hint of a smile on his face, the stippling of the ground, billowing clouds and a limited palette of light greens, blue, gold and touches of red and orange red. His many portraits of fashionable youths suggest he was a respected specialist in this genre.

Since the painting bears a royal seal impression, one would assume that the painting was produced for the shah for inclusion in an album. Like books, albums can be enjoyed by a limited number of people at one time and thus are personal items, not the place in which the ruler would project his public image. The multi-faceted Shah 'Abbas, whose political, military and religious exploits were recounted by Iranian historians and European visitors, was not insipid to desire. However, only rarely, as in this painting, was this side of the great shah ever represented.

1. Farhad 2000, 128f.
THE LEGACY OF SHAH 'ABBAS

The influence of Shah 'Abbas I endured within Iran and beyond long after his death in January 1629. Although the Ottomans reoccupied Baghdad and the Shi'i shrines of Iraq, the borders of Iran established by Shah 'Abbas remained otherwise more or less intact. The silk trade continued to play a crucial role in the economy, but when it was released from the government monopoly under Shah Safi, control shifted to the Armenians who were in effect the engine of this market (fig. 77). By combining ruthless ambition and an apparently sincere desire for stability, Shah 'Abbas ensured the survival of his dynasty for nearly a century after his death. In the religious sphere his suppression of extreme Sufi elements and his championing of theologians who insisted upon rationalizing the legal system led in the short term to a more just society. In the long run this policy endowed the 'Islam' with political power.

Isfahan remained the capital of the Safavids until their fall in the eighteenth century and continued to impress foreign visitors with its remarkable architecture, cosmopolitan population, and public entertainments on offer in the Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan (cat. nos 126-7). While Shah 'Abbas's Safavid successors commissioned palaces such as the Chihil Sutun (1647) and the Hasht Behshisht (completed in 1669), they were located in close proximity to the maidan, which served as the heart of the Safavid city. To this day artisans sell their wares in the arcaded bazaar that surrounds the maidan, and Isfahans and visitors alike enjoy the open space and its graceful monuments, all commissioned by Shah 'Abbas.

Of the shrines of Ardabil, Mashhad and Qum, the legacy of Shah 'Abbas is most marked at Mashhad. Once the Safavids had fallen from power, the Shrine of Shaykh Safi at Ardabil ceased to enjoy royal patronage. Earthquakes and other disasters caused the collapse of domes and destruction of some of the porcelain collection. The Sufi order that followed the teaching of Shaykh Safi shrank and in the twentieth century the site became a tourist attraction. Because Shah 'Abbas did not alter the fabric of the Shrine of Fatimah Ma'sumeh at Qum, his presence is almost invisible there. Only the textiles in its collection, which supplemented other types of gifts to the shrine from the 1630s onwards, remind one that Shah 'Abbas initiated the industry that produced these opulent fabrics.

The Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad, by contrast, has continued to expand to this day, and is visited by millions of people every year. 'Abbas was not the first shah to subsidize improvements there, but his overarching idea of organizing access to the shrine and providing water to pilgrims at a point near the Imam's tomb has informed subsequent developments (fig. 78). The impulse to give one's most precious possessions in the form of a waqf to the shrine persists. Along with a vast portfolio of property, factories and farms, the Shrine of Imam Riza has received collections ranging from paintings and stamps to Olympic medals. The most famous donor of sporting medals is Takhti, Iran's most successful twentieth-century wrestler and a national hero.

Today, the huge crowds that visit the Shrines of Imam Riza at Mashhad and

Fig. 77. Men loading bales onto a camel. Isfahan. c.1630, watercolour and ink on paper, 11 x 15.5 cm. British Museum, MR 1920.0917.0.279 (3).
Fatimeh Ma'suneh at Qum are heirs to a tradition promoted by Shah 'Abbas. By securing the border of Khurasan against the Uzbek, Shah 'Abbas ensured the survival and prosperity of the Mashhad shrine. Safavid support of madrasas around the shrine in Qum helped establish the city's position as a centre of learning, while its geographic location between Isfahan and Tehran has enabled it to function as a bridge between the old capital of the Safavids and the new one of the Qajars, Pahlavi and Islamic Republic during the past two centuries. After the Revolution of 1979 both Mashhad and Qum experienced renewed prominence, and images of the shrines began to appear on Iranian banknotes with pictures of protesters carrying banners with the face of Ayatollah Khomeini on the reverse.

Because of the fall of the Safavids in the eighteenth century, the image of Shah 'Abbas did not live on in Iran in the quasi-hagiographical way that it did in India and Europe. His drooping moustache and characteristic astrakhan hat or turban grace innumerable likenesses produced for albums in India, as do the posthumous portraits of the great Mughal emperors, from Babur to Shah Jahan. Taken together, these images perpetuate the glorious era of Safavid and Mughal history, which Indians recalled nostalgically in the more straitened times of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. European travellers' accounts of journeys to Iran include illustrations of Shah 'Abbas that are recognizable by the extreme length of his moustache and his extravagant turban (cat. nos 124–5). In English literature the Safavid shahs were referred to as 'the Sophs', probably due to Europeans mishearing 'Safavi' (Safavid) or 'Solfi' as 'Sophy', and make cameo appearances in the works of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan writers.

Beyond his exorbitism and the position of Iran as a commercial centre between Europe and East and South Asia, Shah 'Abbas and Safavid Iran were never as influential as the Portuguese, Dutch and English on one side and the Chinese and Indians on the other. Nevertheless, thanks to him Iran entered the collective imagination of Europe and maintained an active role in the culture of Mughal India. He established the rule of law and secured the borders of Iran, setting standards to which later Iranians could aspire. And by making Isfahan 'half the world' (Isfahan nif-i jahan), he ensured that the rest of the world would never forget him or his empire.

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Fig. 78 Prayer time at the Shrine of Imam Riza, Mashhad.
Portrait of Shah 'Abbas from the Atrium Heroicum Caesarum

Dominicus Custos, dated 1602
Germany, Augsburg, 1602
Engraving on paper: 18 x 11.6 cm
British Museum, PD 1873.0916.2788

SHAIB ABAS PERSIAN REX.

This portrait of Shah 'Abbas, identified as 'Shaib Abbas Persiariun Rex' ('Shah Abbas, King of Persia'), comes from a series of portraits of kings and heroes published by Dominicus Custos and his stepson Lucas Kilian between 1600 and 1604. Each plate contains verses written by M. Henningsius. The verse directly below the image has been translated as follows: The Massagetae did harm to Cyrus, and the Scythians to Darius; so Turkey harmed you, but Scythia submitted to you, Abbas.' The six lines below that translate:

As Cambyses hated Smerdis, and Cyrus Mnenem, so your brother Hamees was not precious to you. They say if the rumour is true, that you were the author of his death after he had been praised for his great deeds. Not saved by waging war against Turkey, which nourished you and your father, further warfare compelled Bactria to flee from you, Abbas.'

The first two-line verse draws parallels between the ancient history of Iran and the deeds of Shah 'Abbas. The lower six-line verse compares the ancient rivalries of the Achaemenid Cambyses (r. 530–522 BC) and Smerdis (a usurper of the Achaemenid throne in 522 BC), and of Cyrus and Mnenem, to that of Shah 'Abbas and his brother Hameez, referred to as Hameezes', whom Europeans believed had been murdered at the behest of Shah 'Abbas. Bactria is the ancient name of the territory partly occupied by the Uzbeks, whom Shah 'Abbas defeated in 1598. Although these lines do not flatter Shah 'Abbas, they recognize his nobleness and military prowess.

The image itself portrays the figures of Shah 'Abbas and produced by Mughal and Iranian artists (cat. nos. 1, 123) and may be the earliest extant likeness of 'Abbas. Yet the iconography of the engraving is at odds with any painting of royal Iranian figures around 1600. The Shah's large turban is rounded and bulbous, more similar in shape to the turbans of the Ottomans than those of the Iranians (see cat. nos. 13, 14). The small bulb at the top of the turban is encircled by a crown, consisting of a band of
One explanation of how this portrait of Shah 'Abbas came into being is that the fame of his name preceded that of his face. While a European artist could transform a verbal description of his moustache into its visual likeness, a frame of reference for Safavid turbans probably did not exist in Augsburg in 1600. Custon thus relied on the Ottoman examples, which supplied the requisite turban and other attributes that Europeans would not question. By the 1666 edition of Thomas Herbert’s account of his journey to Iran, equestrian and other portraits of Shah ‘Abbas reveal a dramatic but more authentic image of the Safavid. The Ottoman elements have disappeared, and details are more Iranian but exaggerate what is seen in the Indian and Iranian portraits of Shah ‘Abbas. Thus his moustache is now very long, his nose extremely hooked, his whiskers dramatically curved and the toes of his boots curled up implausibly. While such details may have conformed to a general European view of oriental potencies, the image of Shah ‘Abbas as a vigorous leader was by then firmly established in the European imagination.

1 The Managurte were one of the Saffilian tribes who lived to the east of the Caspian Sea. They killed the Achemenid king Cyrus in 530 B.C. when he was conducting a campaign against them. Daru’is (322-408 B.C.), who fought the Sakians, was the grandson of Cyrus. In the course of this engagement, the Sakians, who submitted to Shah ‘Abbas extended from Central Asia to the northern shores of the Black Sea. Thanks to Antony Griffiths for his translation.

2 This is an enigmatic reference to Cyrus and Memnon. Memnon was a four-century commander of Greek mercenaries who served the Achemenid Artaxerxes III (336-316 B.C.).

3 Adamson 1996, p. 187, where the illustration from a manuscript of the Shahi at Dumbarton 1387 includes a typical Safavid crown that has a domed top with a lobed gold band forming a crown.

4 Cagnoni 2000, 243. The discussion that follows assumes that these paintings reached Munich before 1600.

5 Böcher 1669, 226.
travel account of Dutchman Cornelius de Bruyn, published in 1716, chronicles a voyage to the East that began at Enosh in 1701 and continued overland through Russia to Iran ultimately India. By 1703 de Bruyn had reached Isfahan. In addition to meeting agents of the Dutch and English East India companies, de Bruyn visited caravanserais in various quarters of the city to see what was being sold. He mentions a caravaneraiy to the shah’s mother, which was of recent construction: it was “where all the Armenians have their shops and . . . inns.” Despite the economic decline of the late Safavid era, the Armenian population was still trading in a picturesque fashion in Isfahan.

De Bruyn’s description of the maidan that accompanies his account details the main monuments that face onto it: the mausoleum of Shaykh Lutfallah, seen on the left, the Masjid-i-Shah in the middle, and the Ali Qapu palace on the right. His account gives some idea of how the maidan had continued to attract all and sundry: “The greater part of this plaza is full of tents, where all kinds of things are sold . . . One continually sees a prodigious crowd of people and among other things a large number of people of quality who come and go to the court. One also finds there troupes of clowns and charlatans who . . . only amuse the passers-by with stories . . . There are people there who have monkeys whom they make do a thousand tricks that attract the people because there is no nation on earth that loves a bagatelle more than the Persians. Also, the cafés and bazaars are full of these clowns.”

For the celebration of Nowruz the maidan would be transformed into a stage in which wrestling matches, male dance performances and animal combats would take place while the shah watched from the porch, or talar, of his palace. By the early eighteenth century female dancers, jugglers and poet laureates were no longer welcome at this celebration. As long as the Safavids lived in the Ali Qapu palace, the maidan remained at the heart of what was happening in Isfahan. Even through de Bruyn’s text is mostly descriptive, he consistently credits Shah ‘Abbas with the buildings, gates, gardens and public spaces commissioned during his reign.

Once Shah ‘Abbas shifted the capital to Isfahan from Qazvin, none of his successors contemplated moving it again. Only with a change of regime and the desire of the Zandis in the eighteenth century to rule from their political base, Shiraz, did Isfahan cease to be the seat of Iranian government. Nonetheless, thanks to the vision of Shah ‘Abbas, the city has retained its ability to delight whoever wanders around its maidan, mosques, bazaars and bridges.

1 Le Bruyn 1716, 199; my translation from French.
LOSSARY

Kufic squared Arabic script found in Qur'ans, on coins and on buildings, often from early centuries of Islam
madrasa Muslim theological college or seminary
Malabath term applied to the 'Twelfth Imam who disappeared in 873 and will return to earth to establish Shi'a dominance in a specific way
doublet inner cover of a bookbinding
Fatima first child of the Qur'an
Fourteen Immaculate Ones/Fourteen Infallibles Muhammad, Fatima (her daughter) and the Twelve Imams
prayer niche in a mosque, indicates the direction of prayer
Shi'a Mosques of Shaykh Lutfallah small royal mosque on the Mandoi-i Naqsh-i Jahan, Isfahan, built 1603-18
mursali-i kalami spiritual leader, perfect spiritual guide
naskh rounded Arabic script, one of the six scripts codified in the 10th and 11th centuries
nast'ī 'hanging script', rounded Arabic script favoured in Iran and often used for poetry, one of the six codified scripts
New Islamic quarter of Isfahan, developed by Shah Abbas for Armenians Nowruz Persian New Year, occurs on the spring equinox
pith suc 'fat-burner', oil lamp stand
pir Sultan professional, handle-shaped or parrot-shaped dervish pipe
kar-khanē court workshop
khan'āneh garden whose shape derives from the ancient Iranian wine boat
karvanāser in the Islamic world a form of inn for merchants in which they can sleep and their animals and goods can be accommodated
vawad curved sides of a dish below the rim and above the base
shahbāz garden quarter in Isfahan with villas of Safavid aristocracy
shahīd 'martyr', member of Sufi brotherhood
shah-i imām 'rememberance of God by repeating certain prayers and recalling one's beatitude in a specific way
shahbāz-i ʿāqib Safavid ruling by fatwa
shahbāz-i naqš-i Jahan embroidered carpet
shamsul Qarnānī influence of a 16th-century theologian in Iran; in Jafari 'Amil, Lebanon
Talib Mirza younger brother of Shah Jahan, appointed Emperor of Mughal India in 1616
Talib Mirza younger brother of Shah Jahan, appointed Emperor of Mughal India in 1616
Takht Jahan estate of Nebuchadnezzar in Turkish
Dar al-Hadith Hall for Hadith, Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad
Dar al-Hujjar Hall of the Qur'an Reciters
Dar al-Siyāda Hall of the Sayyids
Dar al-Sūr Hall of a Qur'an, sura of a surah
Dar al-Mizān Hall of Sufis: member of a sufi brotherhood
Dar al-Mizān Hall of Sufis: member of a sufi brotherhood
Dar al-Mizān Hall of Sufis: member of a sufi brotherhood
Dār al-Mulk british Museum
Dār al-Mulk british Museum
Dār al-Mulk british Museum
Dār al-Mulk british Museum
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Shaykh Shī‘ī with a head shape like a stylised form decorated in decoration. Shaykh Safavi, relating to the Sufi Sufi, founded by Shaykh Safi al-Din and political dynasty initiated by Shah Ismail II, a multiple prayer rug Sufi, Sufism is a mystical strand of Islam common to both Sufi and Sufi. The true Sufi is a learned man, leader of a sufi...