The Shiraz School from 1415 to 1503

We have followed the development of the Timurid school in Shiraz up to the defeat and blinding of prince Iskandar in 1414. His cousin prince Ibrahim, another son of Shah Rukh, and also a man of literary and artistic tastes, was the governor for the twenty years from 1414 to 1434. He was noted as a calligrapher and himself wrote the monumental inscriptions on his two religious endowments in that city, which were reproduced in the glazed tiles. He continued the patronage of writers and artists, but the finest painters seem to have migrated to Herat after Iskandar’s death, for no Shiraz work after 1414 keeps the lyrical note of the earlier school. There appears indeed to be a return to the rougher, more vigorous style of late fourteenth century Shiraz in the earliest surviving manuscript which can be attributed to the library of Ibrahim, an Anthology finished in 1420 for his brother Baysunghur (Berlin Museum).

The best known work composed in Shiraz in his time was the Zafar-nama or life of Timur by Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, which was finished in 1425. Some large-scale miniatures survive from an early manuscript of this history, of which the finest is in the Freer Gallery, while others are in Montreal. The date is said to be 1434, and this cannot be far out. The page in Washington represents the triumphal entry of Timur into Samarkand; the balconies being covered with coloured silks hung out, and spectators looking down fearfully at the conqueror riding by under a state umbrella. Although this miniature occupies a regular rectangle the great height in proportion to the width gives it a special feeling of nobility. It is a finer historical style than that of his father Shah Rukh at Herat at this time.

A richly illustrated copy of the Shah-nama, dedicated to Sultan Ibrahim, is in the Bodleian Library at Oxford (Ouseley, Add. 176), and is datable to about 1435. The colophon is missing, and it is possible that it was unfinished at the date of his death, which probably occurred in that year. It retains in its illustration many of the features of the 1420 book, such as the simple landscape background, the high horizon, and the vigorous action; and the colouring remains mainly in a low key. Indeed the free use of green has proved fatal to some of the miniatures which show holes where the paper has been burnt by this arsenical pigment. Rough and homely compared with the miniatures of the Baysunghur Shah-nama, these show an economy of composition which can
be highly decorative and compensates for some clumsiness in such matters as architectural perspective. Many have a tendency towards symmetry, and some achieve a largeness, just because of the simplicity of the composition. Several double-page court and hunting scenes are richer in complexity and colour; but this exuberance is rather more than these artists can manage, so that they tend to be incoherent. Scenes like the Rustam catching his Horse Rathsh from the Wild Hord are more typical of the virtues of this manuscript, in the skilful use of colour contrast.

A very different feature of this book is the presence on the reverses of five pages of "capriccios," drawn in gold and silver only, with motifs of a kind of chinoiserie which clearly continue the tradition of the decoration of the two Iskandar Anthologies described above: indicating the continued presence in Shiraz of one artist, at least, who had been trained in the library of that patron. These drawings are deliciously free, but they derive, either directly or indirectly, from Chinese decorative art in porcelain or textiles, the vogue for which is also attested by the presence in the miniatures of this book of representations of blue-and-white vases of Chinese porcelain, which are most frequently found in Persian manuscripts of the first half of the fifteenth century. The animal drawing on these pages helps to authenticate the contemporaneity of the drawings in the same colour-scheme in the Divan of Sultan Ahmad. Pure pen and ink chinoiserie drawings occur in several mixed albums in the Topkapu Sarayi Library, and should be attributed to this period, rather than to the earlier or later dates sometimes proposed for them.

Clearly related to the Bodleian Shah-nama of Sultan Ibrahim, and therefore to be assigned to the school of Shiraz while it was still a Timurid city, are several other groups of vigorous miniatures, dated in the colophons of the manuscripts for which they were prepared to the years 1438 and 1444, or lacking now any date. Timurid rule in the province of Fars and in its capital, Shiraz, continued until 1452. In the Bibliothèque Nationale (Sup. Pers. 494) is another Shah-nama manuscript, dated 1444, and copied by Muhammad al-Sultani, the typical Timurid suffix, with a much larger page (14½ by 10¼ in.) and seventeen miniatures. The action is bold and spacious, and the colouring wonderfully rich in range and intensity. Figure drawing, cloud forms and foliage connect them with the Shiraz school, and all the particulars, as well as the size, confirm B. W. Robinson's guess that the pair of well-known frontispiece pages from the Goloubef Collection, now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, belong to this manuscript. The right-hand page bears on the reverse an illuminated shams, unfortunately without the name of the prince for whom it was prepared, filled in; and on the reverse of the left-hand page is the beginning of the Baysunghur preface to the Epic with a good illuminated heading. Although it might be thought that the subject, a royal feast in a garden, would not lend itself to movement, the forceful gesture of a single figure in each half of the double composition and the leaning stance of many of the figures do in fact give a sense of great energy to these pages. Figures and carpets almost float over the ground, while the rich vegetation and the sumptuous textiles, in which gold and silver are not spared, make the background like a tapestry. Certainly the Timurid school of Shiraz showed no sign of decline in vigour in its last decade.
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Shah-nama of Sultan Ibrahim: Rustam catching his Horse Raksh from the Wild. Shiraz, c. 1433. (46.715)
Ouseley, Add. 176, folio 62r, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
Exactly contemporary with this manuscript is a Nizami in the library of Princeton University (Garrett 77 6), copied at Aharquh, an ancient city of Fars north-east of Shiraz, with colophon to the Makhzan al-Asrar dated 1443, and nine miniatures, which Robinson has claimed as the earliest dated miniatures of his Turkman school, which we must now consider. In the fourteenth century two groups of Turkman tribes led a still largely nomadic life, which had from time immemorial been their habit in Central Asia, in a wide area between the Timurids and the Ottoman Turks, stretching between Mosul and the Syrian border. They had been feudatories of the Jala’îr Uways (1341-1374), who kept his court at Baghdad and, although a Mongol, was thoroughly Iranianized and himself a calligrapher and draughtsman of merit. Within little more than a generation the Black Sheep Turkmans (Qara Qoyunlu) had supplanted their overlords, and under Shah Muhammad, son of Qara Yusuf, ruled in Baghdad from 1411 to 1433. His younger brother, Jahan Shah, ruled in Tabriz from 1436, before eventually succeeding to the throne and transferring the capital there. He was a poet in his native Turki language but with a thorough mastery of the Persian poetical technique. His son Pir Budaq, who had actually been adopted by the last Jala’îr ruler, Sultan Ahmad, was installed as governor in Shiraz in 1453, but was deposed for plotting in 1459 and put to death for rebellion in 1465. He too was known as a patron of the book arts and of Persian culture. Beautifully illuminated manuscripts of the Divans of the poets Katibi, who was patronized by the Qara Qoyunlu house, and Qasimi, are preserved in Istanbul. We do not have any illustrated manuscripts from the court of Jahan Shah himself at Tabriz which he adorned with fine buildings between 1430 and 1467, when he died. After this date the other branch of the Turkmans, the White Sheep (Aq Qoyunlu), under their head Uzun Hasan (1453-1477), ruled from Tabriz for a decade, during which he was courted by the Venetians as an ally against the Ottoman Turks, who however soundly defeated him in 1473. His wife was a princess of the last Byzantine house, the Comnenes of Trebizond (as had been those of two of his predecessors), and this brought him into close connection with several leading Venetian families, with whom the Comnenes were related. In the Treasury of St Mark’s is a marvellous carved rock-turquoise cup bearing his name. Certainly he must have had opportunities for seeing and acquiring examples of Italian painting and prints, and probably also manuscripts. Several embassies from Venice visited him in Tabriz, and their accounts survive.

From the time of Uzun Hasan we do have some manuscripts to show the kind of miniatures preferred by the Turkman rulers; the earliest being an Anthology (British Museum, Add. 16 501) dated 1468, written in the city of Shirwan, or Shamakha, on the west side of the Caspian Sea. The style is much quieter than the mid-century work of Shiraz or Herat. But the book does include one remarkable composition, a miniature of the city of Baghdad in flood, a schematic aerial perspective view of considerable skill.

Uzun Hasan made his capital at Tabriz, not Shiraz, and there could have been a more advanced style there, possibly represented by some of the figure drawings in the Istanbul albums which are associated with the name of Mehmet the Conqueror (Fatih). These show the eclecticism to be expected of that cosmopolitan court, including Christian
Shah-nama of Sultan Ibrahim: Landscape with Animals in Gold and Silver. Shiraz, c. 1435. (10½ x 6½")
Ouseley, Add. 170, folio 32a, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
influence. There is Chinese influence also; and, judging from both style and costume, of the Ming dynasty rather than the Yüan. One or two pieces of early fifteenth century blue and white porcelain are introduced, and there are even direct copies of Chinese paintings as well as some originals, by artisans rather than by the painters whose work is considered by historians of Chinese painting. A difficulty in sorting out the contents of these mixed albums is that work of quite different periods has been indiscriminately put together and attributions to various names added by connoisseurs of the later sixteenth century or even more recently. Reference has already been made to miniatures from a fourteenth century Shah-nama (Hazine 2153) of large scale and remarkable force and invention, and there are also large drawings in almost pure line and very much in Chinese taste which must be attributed to the late Jalā'ir time about 1400. Everything in fact suggests that these albums represent the salvaged relics of the royal collection from Tabriz, gathered over a century at least, first by the Jalā'ir rulers and then by their successors at Tabriz, the Turkmans of the Qara Qoyunlu and then of the Aq Qoyunlu. Tabriz was in fact one of the clearing places of all the currents which were running across the Middle East in the hundred and fifty years of the greatest mutual influence of the Iranian world and the Chinese from about 1300 to 1450. In spite of the distrust of the Timurids for the new and nationalistic Ming dynasty which succeeded the Mongol Yüan in 1368, annual presents were exchanged between Timur and the Chinese court of horses from Farghana against precious stones and paper money, from 1387 onwards. Embassies on a more important scale were exchanged under Shah Rukh in which several of the Timurid princes joined, notably Ulugh Beg and Baysunghur.

It has been suggested that many of the fifteenth century miniatures in the Istanbul albums may have been produced in Transoxiana or Herat about the middle of the fifteenth century, in circles where Turkish culture was an important element. But in view of the history of these areas and of the fact that the work of Herat under Shah Rukh is well known, it seems preferable to put forward the suggestion that it was rather among the Iranianized Turkmans that this hybrid art may have flourished, especially under Jahan Shah and then under the White Sheep Turkman Uzun Hasan for another decade.

There is in particular among the contents of the albums a series of drawings of extraordinary virtuosity, sometimes with hardly any colour added to the calligraphic penwork, but sometimes completed in brilliant colours. These include decorative features like leaves and flowers, occasionally arranged in complex designs (as on the engraved and inlaid metalwork which originated in Khurasan in the latter part of the twelfth century), but now developed into elaborate symplegmatas of animal, fish, and bird forms incorporating also the dragon and phoenix of Chinese origin, not unlike those which we have noted in the Iskandar Anthologies of 1410, but far more elaborate. At other times we find animal studies which seem to be made from the life, a pair of horses or the head of a stag, and even a natural scene with bears, hares, and beasts of prey among trees. Such human figures as occur among this class of drawing are in costume of the first half of the fifteenth century, rather more squat than in the Herat manuscripts, less stiff and with freer movements. The few complete compositions which seem to go with these
Shah-name: Banquet Scene, Shiraz, c. 1444. (245 x 185) Left-hand page of a double frontispiece.
No. 56.10, John L. Severance Collection, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

sketches retain something of the large feeling of the fourteenth century, but their greater realism and Timurid landscape settings make their later date certain. A much larger proportion of the contents of these albums is of a stranger and more exotic kind. These are low-toned coloured drawings of grotesque-faced bearded men, in heavily quilted clothes, leading a nomadic life, with their skinny horses and asses; or of demons in similar colouring, shown dancing, fighting, or carrying off a horse, playing a guitar or humbly acting as porters.

These figures are related to a class of Chinese demon picture of Taoist origin, and their connections are certainly with the lands between Persia and China. The clothes suggest Mongolia rather than Turkestan, but the element of caricature in the drawing rules out that they should actually be Central Asian work, quite apart from the stylistic links with the other groups which we have been considering. Details forbid a date earlier than 1400, and draughtsmanship one after 1485. Once again one is driven to attribute these drawings to a circle in touch with the Far East and also with the Timurid school. The painter Ghiyath al-Din who accompanied the embassy of Shah Rukh to China in 1419-1422, as the agent of Baysunghur, left an account of all that he saw there and on the way, incorporated by Abdul Razzaq in his History. He describes the wall-paintings which he saw en route in Khotan and which at this period would have included Taoist as well as Buddhist work. He was also deeply impressed by the accomplishments of Chinese painting. These classes of drawing in the Istanbul albums seem to reflect this taste for the exotic rather than the native work of a Central Asian school, whether Turkish or Mongol. But it is important to recall that the patrons for whom these painters worked, whether Timurid or Turkman, were of Central Asian stock and recently leading nomadic lives. Many of them would have been addicted to the astrological and superstitious beliefs of their heathen past and only partly assimilated to the Islamic comity. Hence this disconcerting union of ferocious subjects with refined execution. It seems best to reserve the term "Turkman school" for this special type of painting rather than to apply it to the various styles current in the whole of western Persia by 1453 when they occupied Shiraz.

And so we return to the school of Shiraz in the middle of the fifteenth century. In the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, are twenty-six miniatures from a Shah-nama manuscript which are dated by the Museum to about 1470. They are nearly square, and have features reminiscent of the Herat school of Baysunghur, but the colouring is the stronger range of Shiraz and they have the large tailed clouds characteristic of that centre. The horses wear the surcoats which Robinson believes to be a sure sign of Shiraz, and the compositions tend to be on a diagonal axis, and the landscape conceptual. Nothing now remains of the perspective science of the previous century, except the high viewpoint which enables the artist to manage a scene with many people.

With a conceptual landscape the tendency is to revert to the basic Persian inclination to symmetry and to decoration. This is most clearly seen in a richly illustrated manuscript of the Khwar-nama of Ibn Husam, an epic life of the Shi'a Imam Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, composed in 1426, the last of the imitations of the Shah-nama.
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This manuscript was broken up not long ago and many miniatures are now in collections in America and the Chester Beatty Library, but the greater part has found a permanent home in the Museum of Decorative Arts recently founded in Tehran by the
Iranian government. The colophon is unfortunately missing, but a few of the miniatures bear dates (between 3476 and 1487) and artists’ names written very small in one corner, but these do not appear very convincing in spite of being plausible for the period of execution, which must be about 1480. They show what could be accomplished in this provincial centre by the use of bold colours to build up tapestry-like miniatures in which the principal figures stand out in epic splendour. It may be supposed that the circle for which it was produced was fervently Shi’i in sympathy and this is reflected in the fervid compositions. Clouds are quite unnaturalistic in colour as well as shape, gold and

Shīrāz, c. 1480. (95.) Folio 211. Museum of Decorative Arts, Tehran.
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blue in a slate-blue sky, for instance; and the picture plane is as opaque as in a tapestry.
In the garden scene illustrated the arrangement is purely formal and decorative. The
water-course is superimposed on the trees and the figures on top of all, but the resulting
scene is satisfactory as illustration as well as splendidly decorative. The danger of this
method comes where the problems set the painter have all been solved already and all
that he has to do is to copy some earlier miniature of the same subject. In the later fifteenth century Shah-nama manuscripts the figures are too often reduced to puppets playing a well-known part before a repeated conventional landscape. The miniature depends entirely on the subject for any charm that it may have, and instead of heightening the romance as it had done in earlier times, it reduces it to the level of the fairy story.

Of course not all late fifteenth century manuscripts illuminated at Shiraz were like this. Connected with the Khavas-name miniatures by its conceptual character is a painting of magic quality, the Rustam sleeping saved by his Horse Rakhsh from a Lion, now in the British Museum. It shows pre-eminently the tapestry-like surface, and even the same unnaturalistic blue clouds on a gold ground. This is a page long ago separated from its manuscript, which may never have been completed, for it is unmargined. There is a profusion and energy of natural life which go beyond any other Persian miniature, thus being the ideal example of the Sufi spirit.