The Safavi School under Shah Tahmasp

Shah Isma'il, the first Safavi Shah, destroyed the power of the Uzbeks in Khorasan in 1530, but this proved only a temporary check to their capacity for nuisance to his House. His barbarous treatment of the corpse of his enemy Shaibani Khan, whose skull he had mounted to serve as his drinking cup, illustrates one side of his character. Another is described by the Italian merchant who saw him when he was thirty-one, and called him "as amiable as a girl," and "as lively as a fawn." All agree in praising his courage, and he must have possessed great personal charm; but he was so continuously occupied with war that it is not surprising that there is little which can be attributed to his library atelier, to the control and direction of which Bihzad was appointed in the year 1522. Since he is said to have found Sultan Muhammad already engaged in teaching the Shah's son, Tahmasp, drawing when he arrived in the royal library, it is not likely that this can have been before about 1527, in which year the prince was seven years old. Presumably he must have stayed quietly meanwhile in his native Herat during the eleven years after the death of Shaibani. We know nothing of his activity at this time, but those who believe him to have executed a considerable number of separate figure-drawings would be inclined to attribute them to this period of unemployment, when he would have been free to accept private commissions. It would appear that his reputation remained at the highest at the end of the period, so that he must be presumed to have continued to produce fine work.

When the new reign of Shah Tahmasp opened in 1524, the influence of Bihzad was still decisive at Tabriz, as may be seen from the Nizami of 1525 in the Metropolitan Museum, in which the first thirteen miniatures continue the old tradition of Herat. The date occurs on the tenth of these miniatures, and the fourteenth and last may be an addition of a few years later.

The Khusraw seeing Shirin bathing and Shirin on Horseback watching the Labours of Farhad are obviously still in the Herat style, but the figure-drawing in these and the other old-fashioned miniatures has become much stiffer than at the end of the previous century, and it cannot be suggested that any of these could be by Bihzad himself. Nevertheless the connection with him is close, as can be seen by comparing the battle scene of Iskandar against Dara with the miniature in the British Museum Nizami manuscript.
of 1442 (Add. 25,900), which has been accepted as the work of Bihzad of about 1493. The foreground group of figures and horses is exactly repeated from this miniature; but instead of the curved line of the advancing army which is so effective in this composition, here there is nothing but three static horsemen, while a Bowman on the left, entering the picture at this point, quite spoils the effect of the strong movement in the other direction of the two central fighting pairs. This manuscript may be praised for the mastery of its well-preserved colours, but it is dead in feeling. Consequently it is hard to accept the attribution to the hand of Shaykh Zadeh which has been proposed by Kuehnel and Stiéoukine for these thirteen miniatures. For the only fully authenticated miniature by his hand is the vivid and even vivacious miniature of the moving sermon; one of the three signed miniatures in the Hafiz, formerly in the Cartier Collection and now divided between the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, and the Cary Welch Collection. The illustrations to this book show a greater mastery of composition, with extremely subtle relations between the figures, both spatially and psychologically. Shaykh Zadeh, in particular, was not afraid to show faces in profile (there are five in this preaching scene), nor figures from behind; but every figure has personality and each contributes something to the effect of religious exaltation or absorption which the artist has sought to convey. There is nothing of this kind in the Nizami of 1525, where the treatment is relaxed and decorative, even in a scene like the meeting of Farhad and Shirin at the conduit which he has built for her, where a certain romantic heightening of the situation would have been appropriate.

So too with the miniatures of the Diwan of Mir Ali Shir in the Bibliotheque Nationale, dated 1526, four of which are also attributed to Shaykh Zadeh by Stiéoukine. These are indeed much more lively, at least the Battle Scene of Iskandar and Dara and Iskandar shooting Duck from a Boat, but they have a decorative or formal beauty of quite another kind, with a minimum of indication of depth in the tapestry-like filling of the space. Both are of the new period which had now opened in their preference for light colours and rhythmic movement. The lyrical note so strong in this manuscript has superseded the dramatic which had been the main tradition of the Timurid school, even while Bihzad had emphasized the formal qualities of design. The science with which he had shown figures could be placed was not lost, but the tension of the design was now reduced, and there is no longer a tight internal rhythm. Instead there is a flow of line which can be called musical in its passage from one figure to another, a succession of notes which set up a harmony which the eye enjoys as it passes to and fro over the composition. The hunting scene of Bahram and his Court is an admirable example of this felicitous composing. Every scene in this manuscript has its spectator, even the Bahram Gan in the Passion of the Princess of the Black Hall. The greatest novelty is the illustration of the voyage of Iskandar in the Western ocean. The world conqueror is seen absorbed in duck shooting, drawing his bow with a fine gesture of accomplished skill, as the arrow pierces the duck in flight. He is enthroned in a boat that is hardly large enough to contain his dais with its canopy, and which has no apparent means of propulsion or steering. In the foreground are two other boats,
filled with his soldiers, one with a long paddle to propel it; the other with a large square sail. These soldiers are more concerned with the marvels of this new world than with their king’s doings and their attitudes suggest astonished wonder, which would come naturally to a Persian at Tabriz who had probably never seen the sea. The value of the composition lies in the gentle rhythm of the high-prowed ships against the dark oxidized silver of the water; and the restrained movements of the men in their crowded places. Again the note is lyrical, conveying a sense of enchantment, as of men contemplating a strange new world for the first time.

A manuscript with many miniatures in a relaxed but accomplished style, copied by the same scribe as the Nizami of 1525 in the Metropolitan, is the Zafar-nama describing the victories of Timur, in the Gulistan Library, Tehran, dated 1529. The colouring is in the same cool range, with low-toned blues and yellows predominating, as in the last miniature in that book, but the figures are on a much smaller scale, while the landscape encircles the compositions with a softly contoured piling up of rounded rocks that was to be characteristic of the style of Tahmasp’s capital. Here the decorative value of architecture and of various forms of outdoor canopy is exploited to the full; the guide-ropes of the tents making an amusing pattern of white lines in the foreground of the picture. But the most distinctive feature of Safavi painting in this phase is to be found in the elegant posing of the figures, whether sitting or standing, generally inclined out of deference, partiality or confidence towards one another; the angle of the head being the more marked on account of the tall Safavi head-dress, with the twelve-fold coil of the turban cloth, in memory of the twelve Shi’a Imams, wrapped around the red cap with its spike that gave the Sufi followers of the house of Shaykh Sa’i the name of Ūzilbash. Another feature of the miniatures of this manuscript and one which was to recur during the next thirty years, was the preference for architecture formed of hexagons or parts of hexagons; and another the introduction of a curious cloud convention, the tightly curled snail-like form which seems to be based on a Chinese decorative motif. But this last is only an occasional variant.

Undoubtedly the masterpieces of this early Safavi school are the five miniatures of the Haifız of Sam Mirza. This prince, a younger son of Shah Isma’il, was born in 1517 and was to be a notable patron of the arts until his imprisonment by Tahmasp in 1561. This volume belongs to his early years, the date being fixed by Stchoukine as about 1533 in accordance with the appearance of the enthroned prince beneath an arch on which his name and titles appear, which he takes to be a portrait of the patron of the book. This miniature also carries a signature of the painter Sultan Muhammad, who was at this time the leading painter at the Safavi court at Tabriz, according to his contemporary Rust Muhammad, who praises him for his skill in minute detail such as the spots in a leopard’s coat. This court scene is remarkable for much besides the skilled brushwork. Around the prince’s throne in a spiral curve are seated the courtiers, whose turbaned heads incline in different directions like flowers in a breeze, which seems to ruffle their charming variety. Indeed in the background they merge with a rose hedge, and the flower motif is picked up again by the floral carpet which covers the whole of the court.
filled with his soldiers, one with a long paddle to propel it; the other with a large square sail. These soldiers are more concerned with the marvels of this new world than with their king’s doings and their attitudes suggest astonished wonder, which would come naturally to a Persian at Tabriz who had probably never seen the sea. The value of the composition lies in the gentle rhythm of the high-prowed ships against the dark oxidized silver of the water; and the restrained movements of the men in their crowded places. Again the note is lyrical, conveying a sense of enchantment, as of men contemplating a strange new world for the first time.

A manuscript with many miniatures in a relaxed but accomplished style, copied by the same scribe as the Nizami of 1525 in the Metropolitan, is the Zafar-nama describing the victories of Timur, in the Gulistan Library, Tehran, dated 1529. The colouring is in the same cool range, with low-toned blues and yellows predominating, as in the last miniature in that book, but the figures are on a much smaller scale, while the landscape encircles the compositions with a softly contoured piling up of rounded rocks that was to be characteristic of the style of Tahmasp’s capital. Here the decorative value of architecture and of various forms of outdoor canopy is exploited to the full; the guide-ropes of the tents making an amusing pattern of white lines in the foreground of the picture. But the most distinctive feature of Safavi painting in this phase is to be found in the elegant posing of the figures, whether sitting or standing, generally inclined out of deference, partiality or confidence towards one another; the angle of the head being the more marked on account of the tall Safavi head-dress, with the twelve-fold coil of the turban cloth, in memory of the twelve Shi’a Imams, wrapped around the red cap with its spike that gave the Sufi followers of the house of Shaykh Safi the name of Qizilbash.

Another feature of the miniatures of this manuscript and one which was to recur during the next thirty years, was the preference for architecture formed of hexagons or parts of hexagons; and another the introduction of a curious cloud convention, the tightly curled snail-like form which seems to be based on a Chinese decorative motif. But this last is only an occasional variant.

Undoubtedly the masterpieces of this early Safavi school are the five miniatures of the Hafiz of Sam Mirza. This prince, a younger son of Shah Isma’il, was born in 1517 and was to be a notable patron of the arts until his imprisonment by Tahmasp in 1561. This volume belongs to his early years, the date being fixed by Stchoukine as about 1533 in accordance with the appearance of the enthroned prince beneath an arch on which his name and titles appear, which he takes to be a portrait of the patron of the book. This miniature also carries a signature of the painter Sultan Muhammad, who was at this time the leading painter at the Safavi court at Tabriz, according to his contemporary Bust Muhammad, who praises him for his skill in minute detail such as the spots in a leopard’s coat. This court scene is remarkable for much besides the skilled brushwork. Around the prince’s throne in a spiral curve are seated the courtiers, whose turbaned heads incline in different directions like flowers in a breeze, which seems to ruffle their charming variety. Indeed in the background they merge with a rose hedge; and the flower motif is picked up again by the floral carpet which covers the whole of the court.

Zadar-nama (Life of Timur) of Sha'ar al-Din Ali Yarsh: The European Envoys present the Son of the Ottoman Sultan Murad I, Tabriz, 1539. (11 x 7½") Folio 530, Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran.
Zalaz-nama (Life of Timur) of Sharaf al-Din Ali Yaradi: Hunting Scene. Tabriz, 1349. [105×8”]
Folio 44, Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran.
Khusrau and Shirin of Nizami: Battle between Bahram Chubin and Khusrau Parviz, c. 1540. (15½ x 10½")
Detached page, Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.
Iran and Shirin of Nizami: Battle between Bahram Chubina and Khusras Parwis, c. 1340. (13½ x 10½"
Detached page, Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.

Battle Scene, Attributed to Mahom Musavvir, c. 1339. (12½ x 8½"
No. 544. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
A group of four musicians on the left are expressively handled, and the party on the roof are perhaps pointing to the rising moon in the cool clear sky. The whole is poetically felt, a true lyrical work. A second portrait of Sam Mirza may be seen in a page of very different character depicting a prince seated with a girl on a carpet set in a flowering garden, where they are entertained by musicians and dancers, and enjoy a cup of wine poured for them by a page. They are shaded by an exceedingly elegant canopy, and are in a sentimental mood. The clown to the picture lies however in the pair of girls who sway towards one another as they work their castanets, silhouetted against the dark green grass. At first sight the composition is deceptively simple, and the flowering trees resemble those of a hundred years earlier. But every figure and plant is carefully placed, so as to build up a fête champêtre as rhythmical as the other more crowded scenes in this manuscript; while the simple conventions for hillside and clouds close this enchanted vision more suitably than a more naturalistic view could have done. This page seems not to be by the same hand as the signed miniature by Sultan Muhammad, nor as the other miniatures of this book.

Two of the other miniatures carry signatures, which have generally been accepted as genuine, and with good reason. The first is a scene of drinking and abandoned dancing, with the signature of Sultan Muhammad enclosed in an arabesque panel in the wall of the background pavilion, on the roof of which winged Peri are exchanging drinks with one another. This should be sufficient indication of the allegorical meaning of the scene, quite apart from the poems which it illustrates and from the fact that three of the musicians are dervishes in skins with shaved heads; no doubt the dance is one of intoxication with more than wine. In the background a bearded man reclines reading a volume which by its shape must be poetical.

There remains the last miniature to be discussed, the Sermon in a Mosque, which has already been mentioned as bearing the signature of the painter Shaykh Zadeh, who is not recorded in any of the few Persian sources which we have, but only in Turkish records of less authority. Nevertheless there is no need to doubt this signature for this very reason, although it is written on one of the floor tiles in the centre foreground, and not in an architectural setting, like the two signatures of Sultan Muhammad. It is true of the whole of the illustration of this manuscript that there is a remarkable intensive unity, in both composition and feeling.

In these respects this manuscript is unique; the masterly arrangement of large crowds was a lesson learnt, but the tendency towards the decorative and the subordination of feeling to refinements of detail proved far the strongest current during the rest of the period of Shah Tahmasp’s patronage of the book. This was not in any case very long; for it is known that he suffered a revulsion from aesthetic interest about 1545, in favour of greater attention to affairs of state. Earlier still he had given up his youthful addiction to wine, which he is said to have renounced for good in 1532-1533. But there are two sumptuous manuscripts which were prepared for the Shah in these years from 1537 to 1543. The first, a Shah-nama formerly in the Edmond de Rothschild Collection, contains more than two hundred and fifty miniatures, and is said to have been finished
A group of four musicians on the left are expressively handled, and the party on the roof are perhaps pointing to the rising moon in the cool clear sky. The whole is poetically felt, a true lyrical work. A second portrait of Sam Mirza may be seen in a page of very different character depicting a prince seated with a girl on a carpet set in a flowering garden, where they are entertained by musicians and dancers, and enjoy a cup of wine poured for them by a page. They are shaded by an exceedingly elegant canopy, and are in a sentimental mood. The close to the picture lies however in the pair of girls who sway towards one another as they work their castanets, silhouetted against the dark green grass.

At first sight the composition is deceptively simple, and the flowering trees resemble those of a hundred years earlier. But every figure and plant is carefully placed, so as to build up a fête champêtre as rhythmical as the other more crowded scenes in this manuscript; while the simple conventions for hillside and clouds close this enchanted vision more suitably than a more naturalistic view could have done. This page seems not to be by the same hand as the signed miniature by Sultan Muhammad, nor as the other miniatures of this book.

Two of the other miniatures carry signatures, which have generally been accepted as genuine, and with good reason. The first is a scene of drinking and abandoned dancing, with the signature of Sultan Muhammad enclosed in an arabesque panel in the wall of the background pavilion, on the roof of which winged Peris are exchanging drinks with one another. This should be sufficient indication of the allegorical meaning of the scene, quite apart from the poems which it illustrates and from the fact that three of the musicians are dervishes in skins with shaven heads; no doubt the dance is one of intoxication with more than wine. In the background a bearded man reclines reading a volume which by its shape must be poetical.

There remains the last miniature to be discussed, the Sermon in a Mosque, which as already been mentioned as bearing the signature of the painter Sayyid Zadeh, who is not recorded in any of the few Persian sources which we have, but only in Turkish records of less authority. Nevertheless there is no need to doubt this signature for this reason, although it is written on one of the floor tiles in the centre foreground, and not in an architectural setting, like the two signatures of Sultan Muhammad.

It is true of the whole of the illustration of this manuscript that there is a remarkable intensive unity, in both composition and feeling.

In these respects this manuscript is unique; the masterly arrangement of large rows was a lesson learnt, but the tendency towards the decorative and the subordination of feeling to refinements of detail proved far the strongest current during the rest of the period of Shah Tahmasp’s patronage of the book. This was not in any case very strong; for it is known that he suffered a revulsion from aesthetic interest about 1545 in favour of greater attention to affairs of state. Earlier still he had given up his youthful addiction to wine, which he is said to have renounced for good in 1532-1533. But there are two sumptuous manuscripts which were prepared for the Shah in these years from 1537 to 1543. The first, a Shah-nama formerly in the Edmond de Rothschild Collection, contains more than two hundred and fifty miniatures, and is said to have been finished

Diwans of Hafiz. Lovers entertained by Musicians and Dancers. Painted for Sam Mirza, c. 1550. (11¼ x 17¼) Private Collection, U.S.A.
in 1537. The second is the celebrated Nizami in the British Museum (Or. 2265), which was copied between 1539 and 1543, and contains seventeen miniatures, of which four were added in the next century. It was written by the royal scribe, Shah Mahmud of Nishapur, who was so peerless a master that he quite eclipsed his own uncle, Maulana 'Abdi, who was the best calligrapher at the court in the early days of the Shah. He seems in fact to have worked exclusively for the Shah, and received from him the title of "Zarin-qalam," or Golden Pen.

When Shah Tahmasp lost interest in the preparation of fine books, Shah Mahmud retired to the holy city of Meshhed. It is recorded that he wrote a copy of the Khamis of Nizami for Tahmasp in minute script, and that this was illustrated by Bihaiz. This cannot refer to the British Museum volume which is written in a rather large script and contains no miniatures which could be attributed to the hand of Bihaiz. The richness of its illumination has above all set this book apart from all others, for every page is painted in the wide margins with freely drawn pictorial subjects in gold, with occasional details in silver, generally of animals; natural and mythical being mixed on each page, and Chinese influence apparent in the very oriental chi-lins (unicorns), dragons, phoenixes and winged lions. There are however strong reasons for thinking that these margin paintings are not fully contemporary, because several of the miniatures show extensions into the margins which have been cut out and remounted, but which retain not only their old background, which can be seen to be a deeper coloured paper than that of the margins, but also slight traces of an earlier margin-painting in gold, beyond the edge of the painting. Moreover the illumination which is found round the colophons of each of the five poems is of a different character; an arabesque in a different gold, and with a heavier black outline. The musara or opening pages of the several poems also have apparently been extended into the new margins at the top of the page. Decorative margin-painting in gold became the normal fashion for larger manuscripts in the second half of the century, and we will be mentioning an example completed in 1565, but this is in a far simpler style than the Tahmasp Nizami.

Of the miniatures the Majnoun in Chains brought by a Beggar Woman to Layla's Tent, which bears the librarian's attribution to Mir Sayyid Ali, is the most advanced both in spirit and in composition. Built up on diagonals from the four corners, this is really a pastoral scene rather than a strict illustration of the subject, which occupies only a corner of it; though the small boys casting stones at the beggar and the dog with henna-dyed feet which is barking at him, serve to connect the Majnoun with all the background activities of the nomad settlement, of which however only the two distant tents show the black felt characteristic of the desert. This kind of idealized pastoral scene was to be taken up into favour in the second half of the century, when the artists, freed from work in the royal library, began to produce separate drawings, presumably for sale to less noble patrons.

A similar mastery of a diffused country scene is to be found in the famous painting on cotton of the ancestors of the House of Timur of the Imperial Mughal family, now preserved in the British Museum. One pair of figures in this large picture corresponds
n 1537. The second is the celebrated Nizami in the British Museum (Or. 2265), which was copied between 1539 and 1543, and contains seventeen miniatures, of which four were added in the next century. It was written by the royal scribe, Shah Mahmud of Mashhad, who was so great a master that he quite eclipsed his own uncle, Maulana Abdi, who was the best calligrapher at the court in the early days of the Shah. He seems in fact to have worked exclusively for the Shah, and received from him the title of ‘Zarin-qalam,’ or Golden Pen.

When Shah Tahmasp lost interest in the preparation of fine books, Shah Mahmud retired to the holy city of Mashhad. It is recorded that he wrote a copy of the Khamsa if Nizami for Tahmasp in minute script, and that this was illustrated by Bihzad. This cannot refer to the British Museum volume which is written in a rather large script and contains no miniatures which could be attributed to the hand of Bihzad. The richness of its illumination has above all set this book apart from all others, for every page is illuminated in the wide margins with freely drawn pictorial subjects in gold, with occasional tazels in silver, generally of animals; natural and mythical being mixed on each page, with Chinese influence apparent in the very oriental chi-lins (unicorns), dragons, phoenixes and winged lions. There are however strong reasons for thinking that these margin paintings are not fully contemporary, because several of the miniatures show extensions into the margins which have been cut out and remounted, but which retain not only their old background, which can be seen to be a deeper coloured paper than that of the margins, but also sligt traces of an earlier margin-painting in gold, beyond the edge of the painting. Moreover the illumination which is found round the colophons of each of the five poems is of a different character; an arabesque in a different gold, and with a heavier black outline. The marginal or open pages of the several poems also have apparently been extended into the new margins at the top of the page. Decorative margin-painting in gold became the normal fashion for larger manuscripts in the second half of the century, and we will be mentioning an example completed in 1550, but this is in a far simpler style than the Tahmasp Nizami.

Of the miniatures the Majmun in Chains brought by a Beggar Woman to Laia’s Tent, which bears the librarian’s attribution to Mir Sayyid Ali, is the most advanced both in spirit and in composition. Built up on diagonals from the four corners, this is really a pastoral scene rather than a strict illustration of the subject, which occupies only one corner of it; though the small boys casting stones at the beggar and the dog with ema-dyed feet which is barking at him, serve to connect the Majmun with all the background activities of the nomad settlement, of which however only the two distant tents show the black felt characteristic of the desert. This kind of idealized pastoral scene was to be taken up into favour in the second half of the century, when the artists, who were acting in the royal library, began to produce separate drawings, presumably for sale to less noble patrons.

A similar mastery of a diffused country scene is to be found in the famous painting of the ancestors of the House of Timur of the Imperial Mughal family, now reserved in the British Museum. One pair of figures in this large picture corresponds closely to the signed drawing of a young Safavi chamberlain in the same collection, by Mir Musavvir, and this connection would serve to strengthen the stylistic argument for attributing the Princes of the House of Timur to his son Mir Sayyid Ali.

We have the contemporary evidence of Dust Muhammad that Aqa Mirak was not only without equal as painter and portraitist, but also the confidant of the Shah himself. This was written in 1544, the year before that in which it seems that the Shah turned against the arts, and just after the conclusion of the Nizami. Consequently, when the author goes on to say that the two Sayyids, Aqa Mirak and Mir Musavvir, painted in the royal library a Shah-name a Khamsa of Nizami so beautiful that the pen is inadequate to describe their merits, it is natural to guess that this is the Khamsa which we are now describing. If so we would be justified in looking in it for the work of Aqa Mirak. We find that there are attributions of five of the miniatures to his hand, made by more than one librarian. Three of these are court scenes with garden backgrounds and one is specifically dedicated to the Shah by an inscription on the frieze above the iwan arch beneath which the young Khusrav is enthroned, which is the finest part of the miniature. The figure drawing in all these miniatures is rather stiff and heavy, but the effect is sumptuous. The only miniatures given to the master Sultan Muhammad himself by the librarian are two, the Bahram Hunting the Lion and Khusrav seeing Shirin bathing, which may be said to be two of the more old-fashioned miniatures in this book, but not of a quality to suggest the artist of the Hafiz of Sam Mirza. Shirin’s face is indeed more personal than usual in this book, or indeed at all for girls’ faces; she is of Mongoloid features, although in the poem she is an Armenian princess. Another thing which shows genius is that her horse Shabdia is depicted as turning back its head and whimpering to warn the princess of the presence of the stranger, or in greeting to Khusrav’s stallion. The hunting scene is a more ordinary composition, enlarged only by the white leg being broken in the chase, and the lion in the hunt of the leopard by throwing down a large rock at him; but we remember that Sultan Muhammad was believed to have excelled in drawing the skins of leopards. Perhaps that may explain the attribution of this miniature which shows skill rather than high artistic power.

There is indeed only one miniature in this book which rises above the level of great accomplishment, and that is the Ascension (or rather Night Ride) of the prophet Muhammad; a subject often treated before, but never with such a sense of the immensity of the night sky, and the presence of ministering angels far above the little earth. The layer of clouds below and the glory of flaming tongues which surround the principal figure and the angel Gabriel who precedes him are imaginatively conceived and not mere decoration, as was usual in this scene.

There are some other separate miniatures which must be given to the royal artists of the period of Tahmasp, as for instance a very large double-page hunting scene in the Leningrad Public Library, in which there are a row of beaters holding hands and executing an awkward dance to celebrate the end of the battle. They are treated with humour such as we shall find in the leading artist of the next reign, Muhammad. But otherwise this huge composition retains the heavy impasto which is characteristic of the miniatures.
Khamusa of Nizami: Iskander visiting a Hermit. Attributed to Mir Musavvir, 1335-1349. (7½" x 4")
in the royal Tahmasp Nizami. It is likely that the five Safavi miniatures added to the British Museum Nizami, dated 1442 (Add. 25 900), were executed in the royal library about this time; for although within the tradition of Bihzad, the landscape in them dominates the figures in a way that it never does in Bihzad’s time. Both clouds and trees have become more decorative, and it is even possible that the drawing of one, the *Ishandar visiling a HermiT*, is fine enough for it to be by Mir Musavvir. More advanced are two detached pages in Leningrad, one representing a prince resting under a tree in the country and enjoying some fruit while his groom holds his horse and two falconers wait for him to start hunting; the other of a hunt on horseback, with a groom holding camels behind and a cheetah on the crupper of one of the horses. Both have moved further towards a Baroque style, the trees have become more agitated and the frozen calm of the big royal manuscripts has been broken. Yet, judging from colouring and costume, they can hardly be much later than the five Safavi miniatures of the British Museum. But the irregular extension of the Leningrad miniatures into the margins on three sides was to become more common in the third quarter of the century.

Two other detached miniatures, both representing battle scenes, are of a quality justifying an attribution to the royal atelier. The earlier, of about 1530, is attributed to Mahmud Musavvir, who later worked under the Shaibani at Bukhara. A good colourist and draughtsman, he may well be the master of this decorative page, beautiful in its parts, but somewhat confused as a whole composition. In the Royal Scottish Museum is an even finer page, showing a stronger sense of structure and of the sway of battle. The rayed sun and knotted clouds indicate a date about 1540.

There is no doubt that the painters of Tahmasp’s court were occupied for the most part with the illumination of manuscripts, but we hear of some other commissions, such as the decoration of the walls of a pleasure house “of mirrors” by the royal artists Aqa Mirak and Mir Musavvir, and a number of the leading painters are recorded as excelling in portraiture. It seems likely that the earliest separate portraits may have been made under Sultan Husayn at Herat, in the last decade or so of the fifteenth century. One of the earliest to survive may be the portrait of Mir Ali Shir as an old man which bears a signature of Mahmud Muzahhib. The famous minister and patron died in 1500, and the style of the portrait is consistent with this date; but Mahmud, as we shall see, was working at Bukhara as late as about 1550, so that this is likely to be either a posthumous portrait or a copy by Mahmud of an earlier miniature, or it may be necessary to reject the attribution; for it must be admitted that the work does not much resemble the later work of this artist. In any case it may be accepted as evidence that portraiture was practised at Herat at the end of the fifteenth century. There are also portraits of Shaibani Khan who was killed in 1510; and several portraits of Safavi princes which appear from a comparison with figures in the miniatures to date from the reign of Tahmasp and probably from before 1545.

During the fifteen years succeeding 1545 Sam Mirza must to some extent have supplied the patronage at this time withdrawn by his uncle, the Shah, Tahmasp. But there is little which can be attributed to his atelier and it may well be that there had
already been a further exodus of painters at this time to Bukhara, as well as to the Mughal court. Certainly some of the best Bukhara manuscripts were produced between about 1544 and 1556, as we shall see.

After the fall of Sam Mirza in 1561, the principal royal patron of the Safavi house must have been his nephew Ibrahim Mirza, the son of Bahram Mirza (who had died long before in 1549), who seems to have remained a favourite of Tahmasp, perhaps because he was without political ambitions. At the age of thirteen (1556) he was given the Shah's daughter Gauhar Sultan in marriage and nominated governor of Meshhed, with which he was already associated as a home of his father, who was buried there. He took with him to his post the renowned master of calligraphy, Maulana Malik, as his personal instructor in this art, and as first head of his library staff. After three or four years however Malik was recalled by the Shah to Qazwin where he was required to write the inscription on the new government buildings then under construction. This was not later than 1561, but he had meanwhile set going one of the most famous surviving achievements of the period, the manuscript of the Haft Awrang of Jami, now in the Freer Gallery in Washington. With its twenty-eight miniatures this took nine years to complete, and the copying was completed by his successor in charge of the library, Muhibb Ali, his father Rustam Ali (who had previously worked for the prince's father, Bahram Mirza), Ayshī of Herat and Shah Mahmud, the most famous of them all. These scrivia are all mentioned with high praise by Qadi Ahmad, who was brought up in Meshhed where his father was a vizier for ten years, apparently just at the time of the preparation of this sumptuous manuscript. Consequently the account which he gives of the leading painters who were then working in the prince's library is likely to be accurate and inclusive. It is therefore to these hands that its twenty-eight miniatures must be attributed: Shaykh Muhammad, Ali Asghar, and Abdullah. The first-named was a pupil of a certain Dust-i-Divana, a pupil of Bihzad who is said to have sought his fortune in India, presumably with Humayun who returned there in 1549. After working in Ibrahim Mirza's library, he entered the royal library under Ismail II and remained there under Shah Abbas I. But he is likely to have stayed with Ibrahim during the rest of the reign of Tahmasp, and it should be possible to identify other work from his hand from this time. The other leading painters of Ibrahim Mirza's library staff were Ali Asghar and Abdullah; the first is said to have been a fine colourist and to have excelled in the rendering of streets and trees, the second in ornamental gilding. Might he have been responsible for the decorative margin painting which is found on every page of this book? This was, as we have seen, an established feature of Safavi book production, but is here freer in the development of the stylized foliage, the idea of which may have been inspired by Chinese blue and white porcelain decoration, but was now completely Persianized, though its origin is more apparent in the Haft Awrang than in the pictorial margin painting of the royal Nizami of Shah Tahmasp of 1539-1543. One mannerism common to both is the occurrence of a broken spray which falls across other foliage in a counterpoint movement.

Looking through the Haft Awrang, there is little at first sight to recall Chinese painting; except that on some pages the cloud-forms go beyond the stock knotted symbols
already been a further exodus of painters at this time to Bukhara, as well as to the Mughal court. Certainly some of the best Bukhara manuscripts were produced between about 1544 and 1556, as we shall see.

After the fall of Sam Mirza in 1561, the principal royal patron of the Safavi house must have been his nephew Ibrahim Mirza, the son of Bahram Mirza (who had died long before in 1549), who seems to have remained a favourite of Tahmasp, perhaps because he was without political ambitions. At the age ofirteen (1556) he was given the Shah’s daughter Gauhar Sultan in marriage and nominated governor of Meshed, with which he was already associated as a home of his father, who was buried there. He took with him to his post the renowned master of calligraphy, Maulana Malik, as his personal instructor in this art, and as first head of his library staff. After three or four years however Malik was recalled by the Shah to Qazvin where he was required to write the inscription on the new government buildings then under construction. This was not later than 1561, but he had meanwhile set going one of the most famous surviving achievements of the period, the manuscript of the Haft Awrang of Jami, now in the Freer Gallery in Washington. With its twenty-eight miniatures this took nine years to complete, and the copying was completed by his successor in charge of the library, Muhibb Ali, his father Rustam Ali (who had previously worked for the prince’s father, Bahram Mirza), Ayshi of Herat and Shah Mahmud, the most famous of them all. These scribes are all mentioned with high praise by Qadi Ahmad, who was brought up in Meshed where his father was a wazir for ten years, apparently just at the time of the preparation of this sumptuous manuscript. Consequently the account which he gives of the leading painters who were then working in the prince’s library is likely to be accurate and inclusive. It is therefore to these hands that its twenty-eight miniatures must be attributed: Shaykh Muhammad, Ali Asghar, and Abdullah. The first-named was a pupil of a certain Dust-i-Divana, a pupil of Bihzad who is said to have sought his fortune in India, presumably with Humayun who returned there in 1549. After working in Ibrahim Mirza’s library, he entered the royal library under Isma’il II and remained there under Shah Abbas I. But he is likely to have stayed with Ibrahim during the rest of the reign of Tahmasp, and it should be possible to identify other work from his hand from this time. The other leading painters of Ibrahim Mirza’s library staff were Ali Asghar and Abdullah; the first is said to have been a fine colourist and to have excelled in the rendering of streets and trees, the second in ornamental gilding. Might he have been responsible for the decorative margin painting which is found on every page of this book? This was, as we have seen, in established feature of Safavi book production, but is here freer in the development of the stylized foliage, the idea of which may have been inspired by Chinese blue and white porcelain decoration, but was now completely Persianized, though its origin is not apparent in the Haft Awrang than in the pictorial margin painting of the royal Qizams of Shah Tahmasp of 1539-1543. One mannerism common to both is the occurrence of a broken spray which falls across other foliage in a counterpoint movement.

Looking through the Haft Awrang, there is little at first sight to recall Chinese painting; except that on some pages the cloud-forms go beyond the stock knotted symbols
Yusuf and Zulaykha of Jami: Yusuf on the Market-place. Mashhad, c. 1570. (25x161")
Or. 4122, folio 76 verso, British Museum, London.
which had been in use for nearly two hundred years, and are in fact near to the curdled convolutions with comet-like tails which form the background to the dragon robes of official Chinese dress under the Ming dynasty. This is most notable on folio 147 (46.12) where the two lovers are shown landing on the island of terrestrial bliss, and the clouds even coil round the tree-trunk. Other features in this miniature are quite different; the sharply contoured figures here, and still more on the crowded page showing Majnu in before Laila’s Tent (folio 253), do suggest that the artist may have seen and been interested by some Flemish or French illuminated manuscript, with all-over tapestry effect. On this second page the features are quite unpleasantly realistic; while the first is much to be preferred on account of its delightfully sympathetic animal drawing. In this respect it recalls a manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library, The Wonders of Creation by Qazwini (p. 212), copied by Marshid al-Shirazi in 1545. This is a Shiraz manuscript and therefore not likely to have been illuminated by any of the same artists, although it is clear that at this period there may have been more than ordinary circulation of artists. The landscape backgrounds are however quite different in this manuscript, far less realistic and without the illusion of recession.

The Half Awarang manuscript was finished in 1565, and since Ibrahim survived for another twelve years there must have been much else produced for him which it is not now easy to identify. Another Jami manuscript copied by Shah Mahmud of Meshhed, and now in the British Museum, containing only the Yusuf and Zulaykha on large paper (15½ by 10½ in.) with twelve full-page miniatures shows a similar interest in complicated street scenes with many figures; but the more stylized landscapes explain Stchoukine’s attribution of these pages to Shiraz. If it is compared with a manuscript like the Nigaristan of Ghaffari in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, which is dated 1569 and is an undoubted Shiraz manuscript, we find a much greater interest in the structure of buildings, and in their relation to one another. This is most simply explained if the manuscript is attributed to Meshhed, where the scribe is stated to have remained for twenty years, following the change of heart of his old patron Shah Tahmasp, until his death there in 1564-1565. These miniatures may have been finished during the next five years or so by Ibrahim’s staff.