by the calligraphic tradition of Islam, though the only logical way this facility could be acquired was by constant practice. 

41. Brahmat Gar’s Battle with the Dragon, from the Shah-Nama (Book of Kings) of Firdausi, Tabriz, Iran. Second quarter of the 14th century. 7 1/4 x 4 1/2 in. Cleveland Museum of Art (Purchase, Grace Ramsey Rogers Fund). By using the frame as a window and placing the super-hero with his back to the reader, the artist creates the impression that the event is actually taking place before our eyes. This, as well as many aspects of the composition, and individual details, arises from contact with China.

42. Scene from the Masnavi Al-Hayawan (The Usefulness of Animals), Maragha, Iran, 1298-1299. 13 x 9 in. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. This miniature is from an early Ilkhanid manuscript which contains illustrations in a variety of styles. This one, showing Adam and Eve, continues the Mesopotamian traditions of the early 13th century: the figures stand on a narrow base line against a bluish background. The faces resemble those of Seljuk art and are surrounded by haloes, a common device in early Islamic art whose precise significance is as yet unknown.

that it was made to be used equally by the wealthy native bourgeoisie. This applies as well to Seljuk metalwork. The scenes on the famous Bobinski Bucket made in Herat in 1163 are taken from the courtly and power repertoire, though according to an inscription the recipient was a merchant.

Although the compositional structures of minai painting are part of the Mesopotamian and Seljuk traditions of pre-Mongol manuscript illustration, the rapid graphic style is relatively little used in those traditions. Minai ware was in production for at least seventy years, and this of course was quite long enough for the establishment of a separate tradition of pottery painting, related to, but not dependent on, contemporary manuscript illustration. Although the figures on minai and lustre pottery represent a particular Turkish racial type, we need not assume that this pottery was produced solely for the Seljuk nobility; all the indications are
are sometimes glazed in solid colours, at others covered in foliate and even other figures, as if no distinction was made between the decoration of figurines and utilitarian pottery. This can be explained in several ways, however. A foliate or geometric ‘environment’ superimposed on a figure would appear to be directly related to the converse situation, common in Islamic art, a figure superimposed on a foliate or geometric background. Perhaps the rigid control of space that this implies should be understood in terms of the total Islamic ‘world vision’ of a society living according to the dictates of divine law, existing in a controlled, ordered universe which functions according to divine command. Thus the space of a painting, or the surface area of a pot or piece of metalwork, is rarely free but usually defined and controlled in a reflection of the cosmic order. For example, even though foliate backgrounds have disappeared from many minai bowls, we will normally find the figures inhabiting them compartmentalised into geometric areas or, if this is absent, it is only because the bowl itself is treated as a spatial unit and its perimeter closed by calligraphy, decoration or a simple line.

Mesopotamia

In 12th- and 13th-century Mesopotamia there were two important centres of artistic production: Mosul in the north, and in the south Baghdad, capital of the now greatly reduced Abbasid caliphate. In Mosul there arose an important school of metalwork, known to us by a number of signed and dated pieces of quite outstanding craftsmanship. There is a certain amount of Seljuk influence in this metalwork, presumably brought by emigré craftsmen from Iran, particularly after the Mongol invasion. Like Seljuk metalwork, that of Mosul made wide use of figure decoration and in fact very few pieces without figures are known. Power and courtly themes abound, though once again there is no evidence that this metalwork was wholly produced for the local court. Some was, however, and bears the name of the ruler of Mosul, Badr Al-Din Lu’lu’ (1233–1259).

We can associate some of the illustrated manuscripts written in Mosul with the same man. Several of the manuscripts produced in Mosul for Badr Al-Din are from the same place, depict figures with distinctly Seljuk-Turkish features. Presumably in Mosul as in contemporary Persia these features represent an ideal type, for the city was not controlled by the Seljuks and Badr Al-Din was actually of Armenian origin.

Another group of illustrated manuscripts is usually attributed to Baghdad. These are copies of the Arabic work called the Maqamat (Assemblies) of Al-Hariri. The miniatures in these manuscripts are among the most impressive paintings of the entire Middle Ages. They represent the culmination of the tendency towards naturalism referred to above, and give a complete picture of life among the urban bourgeoisie of the 13th-century Islamic cities. It is strange that the Maqamat was chosen to be the vehicle for such a series of portraits of urban life, for the text is really an exposition of the niceties of the Arabic language and rather unsuitable for illustration. The explanation, it has been suggested, is related to the whole phenomenon of 12th- and 13th-century figurative art: that the urban middle classes developed a taste for representational imagery which they wanted to see reproduced in all media, including their favourite work of literature.

In addition there seems to have been a desire on the part of the Maqamat illustrators, presumably in answer to the demands of their patrons, for the creation of a far more elaborate form of image. We find them initiating a period of daring spatial experimentation, in the course of which the simple miniature composition of a group of figures tied to a base line was entirely transformed. Compositions were expanded over two pages and then enlarged to fill a double page. They also went beyond the pincer-like arrangement of spatially autonomous figures in a way that contains hints of the third dimension, probably explained by a dependence for models on local Christian iconography in which traces of the type of perspective used in Antiquity had been preserved in a formalised fashion.

The Mamlukes

Representational imagery was used in the art of the Mamlukes in both manuscripts and metalwork. On metalwork arabesque decoration and calligraphy gradually became prominent, but not before some magnificent figure decoration had been produced. Manuscripts continued to be illustrated throughout Mamluke times. The figures in these illustrations are rather stiff and formal, quite unlike those of Bagh

in works of natural history.

As a military caste the Mamlukes were greatly interested in works of warfare, many of which were illustrated, often only with diagrams but in several works with good quality miniatures.

Iran: developments after the 13th-century Mongol invasion

Persian miniature painting begins with the Mongol Ilkhanid dynasty. The later Ilkhanids tried to repair some of the destruction caused by their devastating invasion in the early 13th century; they built new cities and employed able native officials to administer the country.

Illustrated manuscripts were produced for the Ilkhanids and for their successors who controlled Iran and Mesopotamia until the conquests of Timur (Tamerlane) at the end of the 14th century. Painting begins with artists still following the Mesopotamian and Seljuk traditions where figures were tied to the base line on a blank or single-colour background. However, because the Ilkhanids had close links with China, Persian painters were exposed to the stimulating influence of Chinese works of art and perhaps even Chinese painters working at the Ilkhanid court. These contacts helped to bring about an entirely genuine experiment which makes the 14th century one of the most exciting periods in Persian painting.

Some of the effects of Chinese influence can be seen in the picture of Bahram Gur’s Battle with the Dragon from the famous Demotte Shah-Nama, illustrated in Tabriz in the second quarter of the 14th century. The mountains and landscape details are of Far Eastern origin as of course is the dragon with which the super-hero is locked in combat. Less obvious, but more important, is the vague undefined relationship of immediate foreground to distant background, and the abrupt cutting off of the composition on all sides. Chinese painters always left space imprecisely defined, with large areas of landscape untouched by the brush, and the extremities dissolving into thin air to create the impression of an ever-expanding vista.

But the unlimited freedom of Chinese pictorial space was so fundamentally at variance with the Muslim psyche that, although Persian painters experimented with it on a limited scale, ultimately it was the idea of defined space that reasserted itself in the ‘high-horizon’ composition which emerged at the end of the 14th century to become the basic format of painting throughout Islamic for the next several hundred years. It was not simply that the confined locale of this format was psychologically ‘safe’, it was the application of the principle of universal order to the visual arts as it was applied to poetry and music; in other words, that there was a definable aesthetic order or framework in which the artist operated—a specific number of modes for the musician, certain themes and metres for the poet, and a standard format for the painter. Once the basic framework had been mastered personal interpretation became possible: not freedom in our modern sense, but extemporisation within the formal structure of the art. For example, in the case of the painter, personal interpretation included the way in which the composition cut the surrounding border; it may have bowed out on three sides yet on the fourth remained firmly anchored in the traditional format.
44 Scenes from the Khamsat (Five Poems) of Amir-i Khusrav, Herat, 1485, 6½ x 6½ in. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. A fine example of the form of classical painting developed and refined at the courts of the Timurid rulers of Iran. The delicate naturalistic detail of the landscape, and the proportion of the figures to the high-horizon format are typical of the period. The composition is one of the simplest in this manuscript, and relies for its effect almost entirely upon an extremely subtle harmony of colours.

45 Scene from the Khusr-Nama, Iran, 15½ x 11½ in. 1477. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. The work is a poem dealing with the exploits of Ali against the Kings of the East. This scene shows Mir Sayaf in combat with a king of the East. The paintings in the manuscript are the earliest and finest of the Turkoman school, which lasted well into the 16th century and whose centre was probably Shiraz in southern Iran. The painting is "utilitarian" in character, using stock images and standardised backgrounds.
The Timurids
At the end of the 14th century Iran was incorporated into the domains of Timur, and during the next hundred years, thanks to the enthusiasm of certain Timurid princes, painting entered its finest, classic phase. The development of the classical style is first associated with Shahrak under the governorship of Iskandar-Sultan (1409–1414), a grandson of Timur, then with the capital Herat where it was patronised by Prince Baysunqur (1397–1433), bibliophile son of the Timurid monarch Shah Rukh, and finally with Sultan Husayn Bayaza (1468–1506), last Timurid ruler of Herat. It is this style with its rectangular format, approximate 5:1 proportion of figures to background, and fineness of detail that most people regard as typical of Persian miniature painting.

The classical painter deals in perfection: his landscape is a garden in springtime, his interior a sumptuous palace, his subjects idyllic and heroic. But he is no illusionist; the elements of his universe are shown exactly as he knows them to be, not as they appear to the eye, distorted by momentary optical and atmospheric effects. He is a narrator with absolute powers. He can open up the ground to show the events in a subterranean chamber, and can illuminate a nocturnal meeting with the brilliant light of noon.

This universe is clearly defined and reassuringly tangible, and it is through his description of the universe and the elements that inhabit it that his personal contribution is made, and his individuality as an artist emerges. The painters of Baysunqur rendered naturalistic detail with painstaking accuracy. Bihzad, the master-painter of Sultan Husayn’s Herat, introduced a new realism of iconography and an individualisation of figures by age, physical type and psychological involvement. But above all it was through the search for ever more perfect harmonies of design and colour that the artist projected himself.

Outside the mainstream of classical painting other forms existed, each with its own nuance of style. While Baysunqur’s artists worked to perfect the classical style, those of his father, the devout Shah Rukh, produced strange illustrations of apocalyptic and mystical visions. And in western Iran, as the Turkomans encroached, a new form of ‘utilitarian’ painting arose in that area, called after the conquerors the Turkoman style.

The Safavids
Herat was captured by the Uzbek in 1507 and many of the court painters carried off to their Central Asian capital, Bukhara. Some three years later the Uzbeks were defeated by the Safavid armies advancing from the west, and Herat occupied by Shah Ismail. All the painters remaining in the old Timurid capital were transported to the Safavid court in Tabriz. Thus the classical style of painting was to continue in existence for some considerable time yet. Bihzad’s influence was strongly felt in the painting produced in Tabriz, although the master himself was probably taken to Bukhara by the Uzbeks and did not appear in Tabriz until 1521. In the work of some of the best Tabriz painters, notably Mir Sayyid Ali, the realistic aspects of the classical style are brought to perfection and some of his scenes seen based on genuine observation.

During the 16th century the Safavid capital was changed twice to locations further away from the western border with the Ottoman Turks, who were bitter enemies of the Safavids. In 1540 the court moved to Qazvin and in 1589 to Isfahan, and with each new capital there was change in the course of metropolitan painting.

Persian miniature painting had always been heavily dependent upon royal patronage. Obviously the cost of production and materials was so great that only a ruler or rich prince could afford to maintain the necessary team of master craftsmen, calligraphers and painters. Therefore when in the mid 1540s the reigning Safavid sovereign, Shah Tahmasp, withdrew his patronage this had serious consequences. Many of the best artists left the court, some going to Bukhara, others to India where they were instrumental in the formation of a new style of painting, the Mughal school. Those artists who remained turned from the production of lavishly illustrated manuscripts to separate drawings and miniatures for less wealthy patrons.