The picture's principal interest lies rather in the fact that it is one of the first portrait miniatures that we have; in the next century these studies of individuals were to become one of the favourite themes of the Persian painter.

The paintings of the earlier years of the sixteenth century all owe a great debt to Bihzad; many of the artists had been his pupils, and so great was his fame, so definite his style, that he exercised a very widespread influence. Indeed the new school of Tabriz which was established by Shah Ismail to a great extent owed its development to the foundations laid by Bihzad. We know many of his masters by name - a number of them collaborated in the production of a magnificent copy of Nizami's works done for Shah Tahmasp between 1539 and 1543 and now in the British Museum.
228 Illustration from a Khamsa of Nizami showing Khusrav and Shirin sitting at night listening to stories told by Shirin’s handmaidens

229 The building of the famous castle of Khursanq from Nizami’s Khamsa. The manuscript was illustrated about 1494 and the miniatures are the work of Bihzad
It is a book of outstanding quality and richness, containing seventeen miniatures of the greatest beauty though four of them were added at a later date. Mirak, Mirza Ali, Mir Sayyid Ali and Muzafr Har Ali all did miniatures for it, in addition to painters whose names we do not know. Of the scenes that are not definitely attributed, one of the most delightful shows an old woman complaining to Sultan Sanjar (ill. 230); she comes to the king and tells him that she has been robbed by one of his soldiers; the king replies that he is much too busy to attend to such trivialities, and she answers him: 'What is the good of going out to war when you can’t even keep your soldiers in order?' A delightful Eastern illustration of the intimate relation existing between a king and his subjects. Kuechel thinks it may have been done by Sultan Muhammad. Perhaps the rather fussy, tumbled rocks that fill the background are to be regarded as characteristic of his style — they were later to become usual in Indian painting.

Of the painters known by name whose work appears in the British Museum Nizami, the most important, was probably Aga Mirak who came from Isfahan and had worked also at Herat. His style was rather more decorative and rather less humanistic than that of Bihzad, but he was certainly a great exponent of the more decorative manner. A magnificent Ascension of the Prophet in the British Museum Nizami has been attributed to him on stylistic grounds and it is certainly characteristic of his manner. More definitely to be attributed to him is the painting of Khusraw and Shurin sitting together at night listening to stories told by Shurin’s handmaidens (ill. 228). In this finely detailed and delicate miniature the couple are seen framed by a beautifully tiled façade and surrounded by attendants. Yet another by Mirak shows Nushirvan and his vizier at a ruined palace. They hear the owls hooting in the ruins and the vizier translates their conversation, one of which says that he can offer his mate a magnificent ruined tower as her marriage portion; the other replies that if the king continues his wars one thousand ruined homes would soon be available. The storks, the deer feeding in the ruins, the flowers

230 An old woman complaining to Sultan Sanjar from a Khamsa of Nizami done for Shah Tahmāsp, 1539-43. The work is by a number of different painters but the master responsible for this miniature is not known by name.
by the stream, all have the brilliant detail of a Vermeer, combined
with a delightful charm and phantasy that is essentially Persian. This
was a very favourite subject, but Mirak’s rendering is probably the
finest of all that have come down to us. The scene was especially
well suited to his particular capacities. The painting is signed by the
artist upon the wall of the ruined mosque.

Another fine page in the British Museum Nizami is the work of
Mir Sayyid Ali, son of a painter who brought him as a youth to
Tabriz to study under Bihzad. His work in the Nizami, characterized
by a penetrating interest in the country and its everyday life, illus-
brates one of the scenes from the love story of Majmun and Laila, an
old-established tale rewritten by Nizami, telling how Majmun is
made mad by his love for Laila. Their marriage is impossible because
of the circumstances and he flees to the desert and makes friends with
the animals. Longing to see Laila, he persuades an old woman who
is exhibiting a madman in order to earn her living to let him change
places with her performer. The woman brings Majmun in chains to
Laila’s tent (ill. 231), but on seeing his beloved, Majmun becomes mad
himself and rushes away in a frenzy. The scene was a favourite one
and the poem seems to have been one of those most often copied at
this stage. Its popularity is probably to be accounted for to a great
extent by the deeply religious mystical outlook of the Persians, the
story symbolizing the longing of the soul for some ultimate spiritual
power. In human relationships this ardent longing could never be
fully satisfied. In another painting in this volume Majmun is shown
at the Kaaba in Mecca, a final turn to faith at the end of his career.

Mir Sayyid Ali went in 1550 to Kabul and then to Delhi, where
he was responsible to a great extent for founding the important
Indo-Persian school of painting. His style, before he left, was a
distinct one, and quite a few paintings can be assigned to him with
considerable probability, more especially some in an album in the
Cartier collection. His manner may have changed in India, for taken

231 An illustration from the same Khamsa as ill. 230 by the painter Mir Sayyid Ali
who had been an apprentice of Bihzad in his youth. In 1550 he went to Kabul and
then to Delhi. This picture shows Majmun being brought by a beggar woman to
Laila’s tent.
as a whole Indian work developed along the lines of realism and the painters there took a greater interest in portraiture and actuality than did their Persian colleagues, leaving the dreamland and mysticism of Persia far behind.

Mir Sayyid Ali is probably to be distinguished from another painter with a rather similar name whose work also appears in the British Museum Nizami, namely, Mirza Ali. He was a native of Tabriz and was especially noted as a designer of arabesque ornament. He was responsible for illustrating another of the incidents from the story of Khusrav and Shirin, in which the portrait of Khusrav is shown to Shirin, Princess of the Armenians, by Khusrav's best friend (III. 232). A further scene, where Khusrav listens to a lute, is probably also to be attributed to him. Kuehnel also assigns to him the delightful double-page miniature of Joseph and the Ladies of Egypt in a Khamsa of 1522 at Teheran. He is to be distinguished from another miniaturist, Muzaffar Ali, who was responsible for painting a delightful scene from the Legend of Bahram Gur in the British Museum Nizami. This man was a pupil of Bihzad, who died soon after Shah Tahmasp in 1576. The theme of Bahram Gur is perhaps the most popular of all that were illustrated at this time, and it is to be found on textiles, on pottery or on metalwork just as often as in book illustrations.

Of the other painters of this era, mention must be made of Shayk Zada, a pupil of Bihzad, of whose work only one signed miniature, formerly in the Cartier collection, survives; of Abd al-Aziz, who executed a portrait in one of the albums in the Saray at Constantinople; of Abd as-Samad, who went as a young man to India, and of Siyavash the Georgian. The latter moved to Turkey where he worked for Süleyman the Magnificent. Afterwards he usually signed himself Rumi, a word in common use in the Islamic world to designate the region formerly controlled by the Byzantine Empire.

Vali Jan was another painter who began his life at Tabriz and later moved to Istanbul, while Kamal of Tabriz, one of the pupils of Mirza Ali, is to be distinguished primarily on the grounds of the

232 Miniature from the same Khamsa as III. 230 by the painter Mirza Ali. He is probably to be distinguished from Mir Sayyid Ali, though the names are similar. Here the portrait of Khusrav is shown to Shirin.
gracious, delicate, rather calligraphic quality of his work. The end of the Tabriz school was marked by Muhammadī, who flourished about 1580. His works were again individual, in that they are full of vivid life. He liked to depict open-air scenes, and his figures were usually shown jumping, capering or running. His more static manner is illustrated by a fine drawing of himself now at Boston.

Most of these men were centred on Tabriz. Herat, however, remained important until about 1534, in spite of being sacked by the Uzbeks in 1507. Thereafter its role was eclipsed by Bokhara. In the later part of the previous century work of a rather coarse type had been produced there under local patronage, but the school began to grow in importance around 1525. It was, however, not until the arrival there of artists from Herat in the 'thirties that any real distinction was achieved. Even so Bokhara remained conservative, and the experiments in composition, to be seen in a search for a multiplicity of planes, and a love of rather full scenes and tall figures, which had been introduced by Bihzad, never found much favour north of the Oxus, where the figures tended to be clumsy, and where strong primary colours were admired.

The same was probably true of other local schools at this time, such as that of Qazvin. Work continued at Shiraz, where decorative backgrounds were much in favour and where the figures or themes of the main painting often overlapped on to the borders. But on the whole, work of the middle of the century tended to be somewhat stereotyped, and it was not until the last quarter that any real developments of consequence took place. Then, under the patronage of Shah Abbas (1587-1629), there arose that tender, delicate, even exquisite style of Persian art which is perhaps more familiar today than any other. The old historical romance declined in popularity, the full illustrative scenes so typical of the Herat and Shiraz schools were forsaken, and studies of single figures or delicate pastoral scenes where landscapes played a major role became more popular. A delicate drawing of two oxen ploughing or a peasant at work satisfied the tastes of this new age more completely than one of the spirited combats or the enchanting adventures of the Shah-nama, where action or an event had the principal role to play.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Later Safavid Age

Though the Safavid dynasty was established as early as 1502 – it was to survive until 1736 – there was, as we have seen, no very marked break in art in the years just after 1500, and it was really only with the transference of the capital from Qazvin – which had for a time succeeded Tabriz – to Isfahan in 1598 by Shah Abbas (1587-1628) that the true Safavid style in art was fully developed. Though there is a fine mosque there, the city of Qazvin has little to offer the visitor in comparison with Isfahan, which is still entirely redolent of the spirit of the age of its last great patron, and literally teems with monuments of Safavid art. The great Masjid-i-Jami and many other buildings also do, it is true, go back to earlier times, but the extensive open area which now forms the centre of the city, the Maydan-i-Shah (III. 233), was laid out as a polo ground by Shah Abbas, and he grouped a whole series of new buildings around it. The most important of them are the Masjid-i-Shaykh Lutfullah (1662-3) (III. 234) and the Masjid-i-Shah (1612-13) (III. 235) in the religious sphere, and in the secular the Ali Kapu (III. 236), the Chigar Bagh (1598), and the Chihil Sutun (III. 237) palaces, their roofs supported on tall wooden columns. The bridge of Alahverdi Khan (c. 1600) (III. 238) some distance away must also be noted. Happily nearly all these buildings are in a good state of repair; all are rich and ornate, and the lovely tile-work on the domes and entrance façades of the mosques serves to indicate the spirit of luxury and delight which characterized the age. All is colour, delicacy and beauty, and the tone that was set by the architecture was borne out by the other arts. The metalwork showed a new inventiveness and imagination so far as the forms were concerned; the textiles were rich and of astonishing technical excellence; the tiles bright and gorgeous and admirably in tune with the buildings which they decorated, while glass vessels of great delicacy and originality were also made.
233 (above) View of the Maydan-i-Shah, Isfahan, from the Masjid-i-Shah. The Maydan was laid out as a great polo ground by Shah Abbas and surrounding it were built many of Isfahan’s most important buildings. The Ali Kapu can be seen on the left, opposite is the Qasr-i-iyeh, the entrance to the ‘Royal’ Bazaar, and to the right stands the Lutfullah mosque.

234 (below) Portal of the Majid-i-Shaykh Lutfullah at Isfahan, 1602–3. Its tiled entrance and dome are of great beauty and it is to be counted among one of the finest works of the great Safavid period.

235 The drum of the dome of the Majid-i-Shah mosque, Isfahan (1642–13), shows the richness and wealth of the tile-work of this period.
236, 237 (above) the Ali Kapu; (above right) the Chihil Sutun, Isfahan, c. 1598. Shah Abbas built several palaces, all close together, but in contrast to the mosques and religious structures they are mainly built of wood, and their tall slender columns are especially delightful.

238 (below right) Ahsaneddin Khan Bridge, Isfahan. Built by order of Shah Abbas by one of his viziers as an extension of the promenade of the Chigar Bagh, it is a most impressive bridge. Built soon after 1600.