The tile-work of the age follows on the lines established several centuries before, in the days of the Seljuks, although tiles with a painted design tended to replace those done in the old mosaic technique as the age proceeded. In the manufacture of vessels on the other hand, though fine lustre was still in favour, a number of fresh techniques were introduced and the majority of the potters sought new and distinct ends, the principal aim being to produce wares as near to Chinese prototypes as possible, both with regard to the body—the result was a sort of semi-porcelain—and with regard to decoration—which was either inspired by Ming blue-and-white or by celadon (Ill. 239). Again the vessels were usually of very elaborate shapes, many of them not ideally suited to pottery. In fact, admiration of the Chinese and the search for elaboration and originality tended to dull the natural taste of the potters, so that the instinctive feeling for form and decoration which had been so prominent in the earlier ages was no longer in control. There is no disputing the quality of the ceramics of this age, but they were intended to serve as decoration rather than for use; it is an art of the grand atelier, not of the individual, and as such fails to attract our sympathy today as readily as the more spontaneous, though in some ways clumsier works of earlier times. There is a great room in the Teheran Museum devoted to the pottery of this type—most of it comes from the Ardeheli shrine. Vessels formed an essential part of the decoration of the palaces of Isfahan; in one of them, the Ali Kapu, a room was entirely surrounded by shelves shaped to hold a mass of elaborate jugs and ewers. It delights the guides who show one around, and is truly ingenious, but must be counted a curiosity rather than a work of art.

One family of pottery at this age does, however, stand out because of its rather simple and wholly spontaneous character. It is that which we know as Kubachi, and is represented almost entirely by large plates or dishes, with a rather thick white body, bearing a polychrome under-painted decoration (Ill. 240). The glazes are thick and are distinguished by a characteristic crackle. Flowers, scrolls and similar motifs, and sometimes the busts of human figures, done in a style like the drawings of the age, constitute the decoration. The
designs were mostly done in black, blue, green, brownish-red and yellow, against a cream-coloured ground. The colouring is not unlike that of the later Iznik potteries of Turkey, but the designs are more flowing and the colours less brilliant, so that the general effect is less grand but gentler and more poetic.

A relationship between the Turkish and the Kubachi pottery has been suggested, but if it existed at the outset it was certainly not maintained, and the two types developed along distinct lines. The Kubachi ware was, however, shorter-lived, and so far as we know its production was more limited and its distribution restricted; its association with the region of Kubachi in north-west Persia is probably quite fortuitous; for some reason vessels of the type seem to have been treasured and preserved by the local inhabitants. The earliest piece we know is dated to 1469, and it would seem that the ware went out of production fairly early in the seventeenth century.
If the pottery of the age, apart from the Kubachi, tended to be somewhat derivative, the same is not true of the textiles, for it is to the Safavid period that some of the finest of Persian silk weaves and velvets are to be attributed. It is true that here too the formal designs of earlier times were discarded, and a whole new repertory closer to that of the miniature painter than to that of the designer was adopted, but the weavers seem to have known how to make best use of these designs, and while the pottery of the age seems rather over-sophisticated, like a Louis XV drawing-room, the textiles lose none of the old basic grandeur, yet add to it new delights of colour and technical excellence (ill. 242). Some of them bear decorative designs, where birds and small animals combine with the foliage to delight the observer, in a riot of rich colour, where gold and silver threads play a significant part; on others the same tales that inspired the miniaturists were illustrated, with almost the same subtlety and feeling. Indeed, the best of the miniature painters often turned to designing the patterns for the textile weavers. One of them, Ghiyath by name, worked mainly at Yazd, but Kashan and Isfahan were also important centres of silk weaving.

The silks (ill. 241) are often so like the miniatures that they can be dated very accurately by comparing them with the comparatively numerous dated examples of the latter art. But they were not necessarily made in the same places, for though Yazd and Kashan were important centres of textile weaving, the best miniatures were at first produced in centres like Bokhara, Samarkand or Shiraz, where schools had been established over a long period, and subsequently in the capital cities, first Tabriz and Qazvin and then Isfahan. The miniature paintings that were done in Isfahan after the transfer of the capital thither took on an entirely new character. Portraits and single figures of ladies, boys, lovers or dervishes now became more common than scenes, and line drawings more usual than paintings. The large head-dresses worn by the men serve to distinguish the work of the period, and the costumes quite often showed the influence of Europe. Some of the painters were even sent to study in Rome, but the manner of the West was never in any sense fully assimilated, as it was at rather a later date in India.

242 Brocade with birds and flowers. Brocades of this type were much in favour in Safavid times, and the products of the Persian looms were both numerous and of outstanding quality.
The most famous painter of the age, Riza-i-Abbasi, was an outstanding figure. As with Bihzad, his work and signature were both copied and forged; moreover, there seem to have been at least three other painters of the name of Riza living at much the same time, who worked in a closely similar style. The most important of these, Aga Riza, is a name which we find in attributive inscriptions only, and not in holographic signatures. Kuehnel thinks it is just another designation for Riza-i-Abbasi, though other authorities regard him as a separate individual, as for instance Martin. But Martin confuses him with a calligrapher by the name of Ali Riza, who died in 1573–4, whereas the painter lived well on into the seventeenth century. The second painter of the name was Muhammad Riza of Tabriz, who went to Constantinople. The third Aga Riza-i-Murid is more distinct; he worked both in Persia and India. A fourth painter, Muhammad Riza Mashadi, may also have been different from Riza-i-Abbasi.

As for Riza-i-Abbasi's work, Kuehnel cites a list of authentic and mostly dated pieces which provides us with a sure basis on which to found our conception of his style. He was a great master of line and his drawings (III. 243) have a delicacy and exquisiteness which, though much imitated, was never really equalled in the work of others of the period, delightful though it often is (III. 244).

In addition to the book illustrations, some large-scale wall-paintings have also been preserved. They are delightful in themselves and also help to give some idea of the wall-paintings which were, according to the records, being produced long before the period of Shah Abbas. Like the drawings and miniatures, they sometimes show the influence of western Europe and some of the wall-paintings at Isfahan even included the portraits of European travellers who visited Persia at the time. Most important are those in the Ali Kapu and the Chihil Sutun.

After the middle of the seventeenth century a definite decline set in so far as painting was concerned, and though much quite attractive
work was produced for another century or so, the majesty and glory of Persian painting was at an end. Only here and there, as for instance in some of the work of Muin Musaffar, the best of Riza-i-Abbasi’s pupils, did the style rise above mediocrity. A rather delightful portrait by him of his master (III. 246) may be cited. He lived all through the seventeenth century and works by him dated as far apart as 1638 and 1707 are known. Another artist, Muhammad Shafi, was Riza-i-Abbasi’s son; he is known mainly as a flower painter, though he also did some portraits of his father.

But if the art of painting saw a certain decadence, that of carpet weaving seems to have come into its own more at this period than at any other, thanks to some extent to the greatly intensified demand
which opened up as a result of trading contacts with the West. By
the seventeenth century a large number of centres were involved in
carpet production, and what had once been virtually a court preserve
had become a national industry of great extent and importance.
Once again the miniatures come to our aid in the problem of dating,
for the painters loved to depict carpets with the greatest care and
precision. Indeed, it is to the miniatures that we have to turn for our
information as to the early history of carpet weaving, for with one
exception early examples are non-existent. The one exception is a
well-preserved knotted carpet of an essentially Persian type from a
Scythian burial at Pazyryk in the Altai of about 500 BC; it is now
in the Hermitage Museum at Leningrad. But from about the middle
of the sixteenth century the carpets that survive are comparatively
numerous, and the expert can be reasonably sure as to where and
when examples were made, though classification of older carpets in
Persia is more often made on the basis of design rather than on that
of locality. Thus it would be more usual to speak of a ‘garden’,
‘floral’, ‘animal’, ‘vase’ or ‘medallion’ carpet of the seventeenth cen-
tury than of one from Tabriz, Sine, Farahana or Kashan. Only after
the mid-eighteenth century does a distinction according to locality
become possible. But the so-called Sine knot was universally
employed in contrast to the Gördes knot of Turkey.

The Persian carpets vary from small prayer rugs to carpets of
immense size, like the superb Ardeil carpet (ill. 247) in the Victoria
and Albert Museum, which dates from 1540. The material most
generally used was wool, but the warps were sometimes of cotton.
A series of specially rich carpets, where silk was used for the pile
instead of wool, are known as ‘Polish carpets’. They were made and
used in Persia itself, but seem to have been especially valued in
Poland, and were exported thither from Persia in quite large num-
bers in the later sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries. Most of
the best-preserved examples came from Poland and so gave a name
to the group.

246 Portrait of Riza-i-Abbas by his pupil Muin Musaffar, dated 1676. Realist
drawings of this period were often of very high quality and even the minor masters
produced exquisite line drawings
The carpets really mark the end of our story. Long after the superb potteries, the fine metalwork, the glorious silks and the enchanting miniatures had ceased to be produced, carpets and rugs which were of the first artistic quality were being made in Persia, in Turkey, and in the region between the two, where a distinctive type usually known as Caucasian, was woven (Ill. 248, 249). With their severe, geometric patterns, these belong neither to Persia, where the designs were suave and poetic, nor to Turkey, where, in spite of a marked degree of stylization, motifs that were basically naturalistic were still most often employed. The severe geometric abstractions of the Caucasian carpets is something quite distinct from either, and represents the last survival of the purely non-representational arts of the nomad world of Central Asia which we encountered in the tile-work of the Seljuk age and in some of the early pottery or the textiles of Turkey.

It was a style wholly opposed to the naturalism of Hellenistic art, which dominated at the outset in Umayyad Syria, and distinct too from the basically representational, even if stylized art, of the Sassanians which left so important a Legacy in Abbasid Mesopotamia and in Persia. But the role of the non-representational style of inner Asia exercised an influence as time went on which was little less important. The tile mosaics of the Seljuks, the interlacing designs of the end pages of the korans, the marble closure slabs of Egyptian architecture all owe a debt to this art, and if, at the end of this survey, the elements that went to form the art of Islam may be enumerated, the non-representational art of Middle Asia must share the glory with the legacy left on the one hand by Hellenism and on the other by the Sassanians. It was the blend of these all influences that produced Islamic art, the patronage of the diverse rulers that nurtured it, and the genius of the individuals, few of them giants, but all endowed with great sensibility, that made its flowering possible. We know but few of these men by name, and we know still less of their personalities and their lives. Like the Paladins in the Snow (Ill. 224)

247 Detail of the Ardabil carpet originally from the mosque of Ismā‘il Shah, Ardabil, 1540. The carpet is probably the largest ever to have been made in Persia, and its workmanship is of quite outstanding quality.
Carpet of the type known as 'Caucasian'. It is a particularly fine example of the type and is dated to the early eighteenth century.