Two Seated Men

13

Album Leaf
Late 15th century. Black ink, mounted. 39.1 x 27.5 cm (sheet size) 6.5 x 5 cm (design area).

This sensitively drawn sketch represents a pair of seated men, each wearing a different version of a multi-layered costume common in 15th-century miniatures and a tightly-wrapped turban with one loose end. The younger man holds a wine bottle close by his side, gesturing towards it with long, delicately curved fingers. He looks down rather importantly at the older man below, who pucks nervously at his beard and strains forward, stretching out his right hand as if asking for the bottle. Their positions suggest that the two have probably not been enjoying a friendly drinking session.

In a 1978 article in Apollo on the Fogg’s Islamic paintings, Stuart Cary Welch argues persuasively that this drawing was executed by Bihzad, the great miniature painter from the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara of Herat. Certainly, Bihzad was renowned for his line draughtsmanship. Gedi Ahmad, an early 17th-century biographer whose treatise on calligraphers and painters remains a standard source to this day, extols Bihzad’s fluency in charcoal drawing as superior to the brushwork of Mani, the 4th-century Iranian religious leader and a painter of legendary skill (Minorsky, 1959, p. 180). Writing in a similar vein, Babur, first Mughal emperor and a famous painting connoisseur, says that Bihzad excelled in drawing bearded faces (Beveridge, 1922, I, p. 291). This testimony is confirmed by illustrations signed by Bihzad in a Boston manuscript of 1489. Enough paint has flaked off some of the miniatures to reveal areas of line under-drawing. Several Buhistan compositions also contain a pair of figures seated in a manner similar to our seated men. Finally, the figures in the Fogg’s drawing exhibit much the same kind of expressive individuality and psychological interaction as the characters in Bihzad’s Buhistan.

Thus the quality of the line and the position and characterization of the figures in the Fogg drawing all support Welch’s attribution to Bihzad. But Welch also points out that the work is a finished drawing, not a preliminary sketch for any of the figurial groups in the Buhistan or in any other manuscript believed to have been illustrated by Bihzad, and thus has no parallels in the master’s accepted oeuvre. It may be, then, that one of Bihzad’s students or followers copied the seated figures from a larger work, for instance, one of the master’s paintings, as yet unidentified. The size of the two men, larger in scale than the figures in any known Bihzad painting, suggests that they were “blown-up” from a smaller model, just as their diagonal alignment suggests that they originally formed part of a much more spacious composition.

Mounted with several elaborate borders, including panels of calligraphy and gold and silver designs of animals, trees, and flowers against salmon-pink and blue paper, this drawing makes up part of a composite album leaf, probably assembled as recently as the early 20th century. On the other side is an Indian miniature depicting a man and woman feasting in a garden setting—an important work that was probably executed in the city of Gujran and dated from around 1640.

Assault on a Castle

Miniature from an unknown manuscript
Herat, ca. 1550. Opaque watercolor. 38.5 x 29.2 cm (sheet size) 31 x 20.2 cm (design area).
Inscribed with the name "Bihzad."

Traditional Persian manuscript illustration abounds in battle scenes, and this unfinished miniature
is as exciting an example of the genre as one could hope to find. A besieged army fights to protect
a fortified castle from a fierce onslaught of cavalry and infantry. Clearly outnumbered, the defenders
still hold their own and have already felled several of the attackers with a combined arsenal of
arrows, rocks, and hot pitch. The invaders' artillery includes a curious tube-shaped weapon which
looks like a device for shooting arrows in rapid succession. The attackers have also set the draw-
bridge ablaze and fed the flames with branches and reeds.

Both sides are urged on by trumpeters, and each army also includes non-combatant commanders
like the mounted senior staff officers in the lower left. The defending prince sits under a baldacchino
in the upper right directing his frenzied troops.

At first glance the scene looks chaotic, but actually the composition is tightly organized along a
series of diagonal axes, defined by the line of the hill, the railing of the drawbridge, and the
alignment of the men. These diagonals are anchored by vertical elements like the rectangular
banners, the drawbridge struts, the fortress walls and door, and accented by circular elements like
the curved turrets, the encircling moat, and the main focal point, the spiral-design shield.

The tumult of the siege contrasts with the strangely peaceful scene in the upper left. In a verdant
meadow above the barren battlefield, two men, perhaps princes, relax on splendid carpets inside
a spacious tent, their weapons hanging on the central pole. Outside, attendants prepare a meal.

Neither the identity of the embattled forces nor the significance of the idyllic camp scene is known.
Presumably designed as an illustration, the miniature was left unbound, perhaps because it was
unfinished, or was cut from its original page. A horse's tail and a ram's foot carefully cut and pasted
onto the new paper borders hint of a "surgery" performed several centuries ago; a stamp on the
back of the cardboard mount gives the date 1128/1715.

A more interesting inscription appears on the face of the miniature. Above the gold sky, to the left of
the flowering tree, is the name of the celebrated 15th-century painter Bihzad. The name was not
affixed by the master himself, for Bihzad's acknowledged signatures always occur in inconspicuous
places, usually in a humble phrase like "the work of the slave Bihzad." Nevertheless, some elements
in Assault on a Castle, like the pale ground scattered with small rocks and the spiral-pattern shield,
have close counterparts in the illustrations attributed to Bihzad from a Zafarnama manuscript of
1467 (Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, TL7, 1950). The careful composition, the expressive figures,
and the colors of the Fogg picture also recall the Zafarnama. But Bihzad's style still exerted great
influence in the 16th century, when the practice of inserting a camp scene above the horizon
became more common (See no. 17), and the Assault on a Castle may well be by a later follower.

Bibliography: Iranian Institute, 1940, pp. 253, repro., and p. 254; Pope, 1945, pp. 146, 149, 168, pl.
126; Schrader, 1967, p. 75, fig. 12; Sims, 1973, pp. 141, 329, fig. 30; Welch, S. C., 1979, pp. 15-16,
fig. 1. Bequest — Estate of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, 1960.199
Persian Painting
Safavid Period

During the second half of the 15th century, two separate political entities ruled Iran. The country's eastern half, Khurasan and Transoxiana, was governed by the last descendants of Timur; the western half, including eastern Anatolia, Azerbaijan, and the provinces of Fars and Kerman, was controlled by the Aq-Qoyunlu. In 1501 another, much stronger power arose which eliminated the major rival factions and within ten years established firm control over the entire land.

Known as the Safavid, this new dynasty differed in several respects from previous ruling families in Iran. In the first place, it was not a recent coalition of Mongol or Tatar invaders, but a group of northwestern Iranian tribes allied since the late 13th or early 14th century. Secondly, the Safavid dynasty originated as a spiritual order of Sufi dervishes under the leadership of a legendary mystic saint Shaykh Safi al-Din (1292–1354), for whom the dynasty was named. This religious movement, which, during the course of the 15th century, ceased to follow the orthodox tenets of Islam and proclaimed the Imam Ali as the legitimate successor of the Prophet Muhammad, was the most vital source of the dynasty's military and political strength. The order's popular Shi'a beliefs enabled its influence to expand well beyond the borders of Iran into Syria and Anatolia. Finally, although constantly threatened by the Ottomans to the west and the Uzbeks to the east, the Safavids governed Iran until 1723, considerably longer than any other dynasty.

As in the 15th century, the history of Iranian art under the Safavids is closely linked to the history of dynastic politics and personalities. The dynasty's first monarch and art patron, Shah Isma'il, was related by marriage to the royal house of the Aq-Qoyunlu and was undoubtedly familiar with the painting styles favored by the Turkmans. In 1501 the Safavids established their court at Tabriz, former capital of the Aq-Qoyunlu. There Isma'il set up an impressive atelier staffed with local artists, artists from former Turkman cities like Shiraz, and still others from the former Timurid capital of Herat, which came under Safavid control in 1510. Among the Herat painters was the venerated master Bihzad, who became director of the Safavid royal library. Under the Shah's sponsorship, the expansive forms typical of Turkman painting began to blend with the refinement and delicacy characteristic of the classical Timurid school. The combination of the two traditions produced the most spectacular painting style ever conceived in the history of Iranian art.

The art of the book continued to flourish in Herat even after the Safavid conquest and the enforced migration of some of its finest artists to western Iran. A number of illustrated manuscripts are documented as having been produced in Herat during the first decades of the 16th century, including a fine copy of Amir Khusrau's mystical poem Divan-e Khusrau (The bell and the polo stick), dated 929/1523 and now in the Fogg (no. 15). The exquisite miniatures in this manuscript reveal the persistence of the classical mode of painting cultivated to such a high degree of perfection by Bihzad and his contemporaries during the reign of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the last major Timurid art patron.

The lyrical and poetic paintings of Herat made an enormous impact on Shah Isma'il's son, Prince Tahmasp, who was still a child when appointed nominal governor of that city in 1514. As he grew up, Tahmasp was exposed to the literary and artistic tastes of the Timurids and began to develop into an accomplished calligrapher and painter as well as a sensitive connoisseur. In 1522 Tahmasp returned to Tabriz; and, following his father's death two years later, he ascended the throne at age ten.

The first half of Tahmasp's fifty-two year reign was spent at Tabriz, where the Shah personally supervised the activities of the painting studio established by Isma'il. It was during these years of Tahmasp's most generous and creative patronage that the synthesis of eastern and western Iranian styles achieved fruition. The culmination of this process can best be seen in two luxurious works commissioned by Tahmasp, a Shamsan lavishly illustrated with 258 paintings (now divided among the Houghton Collection, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and private collections) and a Khamsa of Nizami dated 1539–43 (British Library, Or. 2265). Dust-Muhammad, who himself executed several pictures for the extraordinary Shamsan, justifiably refers to these two manuscripts as "so beautiful that the pane is inadequate to describe their merits" (Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, 1953, p. 196). Peculiarly with sumptuously clad courtiers in complex landscape and architectural settings, the brilliant compositions in these manuscripts palpitate with life and excitement.

One significant aspect of the history of Safavid painting is that we know far more about the artists who worked in Isma'il's and Tahmasp's royal libraries than those employed by previous dynasties. Our information comes from sources like Dust-Muhammad's Account of Past and Present Painters and other equally important 16th- and 17th-century annals, as well as by way of a number of pictures with actual signatures or reliable ascriptions. Thanks in large measure to the discriminating scholarship of Stuart Cary Welch, Curator of Islamic Art at the Fogg, in collaboration with Professor Martin Dickson of Princeton University, it is now possible to recognize the personal styles of many Safavid artists mentioned in contemporary chronicles and to better appreciate both the individual and collective evolution of their sophisticated art.

In the numerous illustrations of Tahmasp's great Shamsan, Stuart Cary Welch has identified the hands of as many as fifteen artists, among them Mir Jalalvir, Mirza Ali, Mir Sayyid Ali and Mirzaffar Ali (Welch, S.C., 1972). The Fogg's extensive collection of 16th-century paintings includes a group of works which have close affinities with these painters' distinctive styles. Of particular importance is a pair of fascinating compositions undoubtedly executed by Mir Sayyid Ali (one is actually inscribed with the artist's name), which were probably destined for the celebrated Khamsa of 1539–43 (nos. 16–17).

Some of the Fogg's other attributable paintings reflect a new trend in Persian painting and patronage fostered at the court of Shah Tahmasp and continued in the later Safavid period. Whereas previous generations of painters had concentrated primarily on narrative manuscript illustrations, the oeuvre of many 16th-century artists consists of a high proportion of single drawings and miniatures. Very often these were mounted on folios with samples of elegant calligraphy and elaborately designed borders, and bound into albums for aristocratic cognoscenti. At least one 16th-century drawing in the Fogg, an unfinished portrait mounted with illuminated inscriptions which attribute the work to Bihzad (no. 28), is definitely documented as having been removed from a royal album.

In 1548 Shah Tahmasp shifted the court from Tabriz, which had been repeatedly attacked by the Ottomans, to Gazor, a more secure city 240 miles to the east. Although by then the monarch's passion for the art of the book had waned, some of the most talented Safavid artists settled in the new capital. Others moved to Mashhad in northeastern Iran and worked for Ibrahim Mirza. Tahmasp's nephew and son-in-law, a dedicated connoisseur in his own right, initially the brilliant tradition of the Tabriz school of painting was maintained in both Gazor and Mashhad; but during the second half of the century, especially in the 1560s and 1570s, the style changed as court artists began to create more attenuated figures and less detailed landscapes. (See nos. 20–22).

The traditional art of miniature painting was not monopolized by the two imperial courts during the Safavid period. Shiraz and Bukhara, two provincial capitals, also served as major artistic centers.
Muhammad-Zaman, whose corpus includes a series of Old and New Testament scenes directly inspired by contemporary European prints, specifically Flemish engravings of oil paintings by masters such as Van Dyck and Rubens (no. 40). Muhammad-Zaman adopted the Western concepts of architectural perspective, landscape recession, and figural form, creating a highly distinctive if somewhat disconcerting style.

At the request of his royal patron, Shah Sulayman (1668–1694), Muhammad-Zaman refurbished several paintings in Tahmasp’s Khamsa of 1539–43 and added four of his own compositions to the manuscript. Muhammad-Zaman’s “restoration” of this celebrated example of classical Iranian painting in a new European manner was the beginning of the end of traditional manuscript illustration in Iran. Although the art of miniature painting and drawing continued after the fall of the Safavid dynasty in 1722, it never again recaptured the technique or the spirit of this dynamic era.

Mu'in Masu’vīr, one of Riza’s most talented pupils, who had a passion for documenting his creations, is also well represented in the Fogg’s collection (nos. 35, 36, and 105). Active between 1635 and 1707, Mu’in has been characterized as the last great exponent of the Safavid tradition (Welch, A., 1973, p. 147). Mu’in’s illustration of Rustam and the Paladins in the Snow, from a Shahnama manuscript dated 1648–49, reveals an extremely inventive handling of a traditional scene, particularly in the treatment of the snowy landscape.

Throughout his long and prolific career, Mu’in remained unaffected by the European influences which began to permeate Iranian painting in the 17th century. Not so his younger colleague,
Guy u Chawgan [The ball and the polo-stick] is the best-known work of *Arif* of Herat, who wrote this mystical poem during a two-week period in 842/1438-9. Also called the Haihama, or Book of Ecstasy, the poem recounts the tragic passion of a dervish, or Muslim mendicant holyman, for a king. It uses as a mystical symbol the relationship between the ball and the mallet in polo, a game which the king and his entourage often played. Polo game imagery appears frequently in Persian literature as a metaphor for the mystic’s love for God. Just as the ball will accept repeated blows from the polo stick in order to reach the goal, so the mystic will submit to any affliction in order to achieve union with God. In *Arif’s Haihama*, the polo ball symbolizes the dervish, who is the mystical lover. The mallet is the instrument of the royal rider, symbol of the Beloved, that is, God.

Because of its florid language and limited narrative content, Guy u Chawgan is not among the most frequently illustrated Persian texts. Existing miniatures consist primarily of polo scenes. The Fogg’s intact copy, completed by the scribe ‘Ali al-Husaynī in 1523 and illustrated with these two fine paintings, plus a double-page sarlawh (illuminated frontispiece), departs from this common program. The first of the Fogg miniatures depicts the king with his young son. The verse above describes the prince’s beauty: “A moon that was a perfect charm was a fairy in human form.” Both sit on carpets under an elaborate tent while two ducks swim in a small pool. A white-bearded courtier attends them and a boy proffers a golden jug. In the second miniature, the young prince, on a dappled mount, accepts a polo ball from the dervish; but the accompanying verse refers to the king, whom the poor dervish worshipped ardently: “With the ball he gave his life into the hands of the Shah, where could he have given his life more pleasantly than this?” The simple landscape setting is illuminated by a golden sun with a woman’s face.

The text illustrates exemplify the classical painting style of Timurid Herat, which continued to set a high standard of artistic excellence after it fell to the Safavid dynasty in 1510. Particularly characteristic of the early 16th-century Herat school are the jewel-like colors; the slim, delicate figures, their eyebrows sharply arched over somewhat unfocused eyes; the intricate arabesques of the textile designs; and the gold ground landscape accented with small green plants. These same general features are found in a Divan of Hafiz, also executed in Herat in 1523 (Freer Gallery of Art, 32.45—32.54). King and pavilion appear in virtually identical form in the Freer manuscript.

The high quality of the Fogg miniatures attracted at least two royal admirers in the past. From an autograph inscription we know that this volume of Guy u Chawgan belonged to the distinguished Mughal connoisseur Jahangir, emperor of India from 1605—1627. Later, the book returned to Iran, where it was impressed with the seal of the Qajar ruler Fath ‘Ali Shah (1797—1834).

A Portly Courtier

16

Drawing
Tabriz, ca. 1535. Black ink with gold accents, mounted with colored and stenciled borders. 33.9 x 22.7 cm (sheet size) 13.5 x 10.4 cm (design area).

Of all the many single-figure drawings executed in Iran during the 16th and 17th centuries, perhaps none depicts a more self-possessed character than the one shown here. Although this personage may not be a court dwarf in the guise of the planet Mars as proposed by Eric Schroeder (Schroeder, 1942, pp. 101-103), he certainly is short in stature and wide in girth. Striking a relaxed pose, the sitter draws one foot up to his ample lap and braces the other against the ground. All the while leaning against a rectangular cushion for support in a way that recalls the convention for "royal ease" used in another Fogg work, the 1533 Guy a Chawang miniature of a king and a young prince (no. 15). His upside-down mace and his attire also follow early 16th-century courtly fashions. His beehive-shaped turban is wrapped around a tall baton and adorned with a plume, a distinctive style of headgear devised in the mid-15th century by one of the leaders of the Safavid order and worn by the dynasty's followers throughout most of its history. Because of their red turban batons (occasionally colored blue or black in contemporary miniatures), the Safavids were often called the Qizilbash, or Red Heads. The Fogg's figure is probably one such Qizilbash, grown portly through over-indulgence at court.

Sketched in black ink, with the faceted mace head decorated in gold, this composition is a calligraphic tour-de-force. The thickening and thinning of the contours through the shoulders and around the paunch and face reveal the masterful treatment of line typical of the finest Safavid draughtsmanship. Details, from the courtier's sensuous lips and stray locks down to the rippling edge of his robe, as well as the overall feeling of the figure, show the same sensitivity.

Schroeder ascribed the drawing to an unknown Persian painter transplanted to the Ottoman court of Murad III in the 1580s (Schroeder, 1942, no. XVIII); more recently, it has been tentatively attributed to Mir Musavvir, a major Safavid artist. Stuart Cary Welch describes Musavvir as one of the most intellectual artists working at the royal atelier of Tabriz, and one Persian chronicler notes that he had a "special flair for figural painting," a reputation which this work surely contrives (Dickson and Welch, forthcoming, chap. V). He is also noted for his smooth, flowing line. During the 1520s and 1530s, Mir Musavvir contributed a number of important paintings to Shah Tahmasp's luxurious Shahnama, including one of two signed paintings and the only dated illustration in the manuscript. Among the courtiers who populate Mir Musavvir's crowded reception and palace scenes are several pot-bellied gentlemen. Generally shorter than their swifter colleagues, these obese characters include one diminutive enough to look like an alarmingly overweight child. There is a satirical aspect about these figures that the Fogg's miniature shares; but whereas in the Shahnama illustrations the artist seems to be poking gentle fun at his subjects, here he lets the portly courtier mock the world with his bold eyes and self-assured expression.

By 1539 Shah Tahmasp’s painting atelier in Tabriz had begun a sumptuous copy of the Khamsa of Nizami, one of the great classics of Persian literature. Completed in 1543 and housed today in the British Library (Cr. 326B), this celebrated volume contains fourteen contemporary miniatures, plus three late 17th-century compositions commissioned by Shah Sulayman. There is little doubt that the original program included at least as many paintings as have graced the manuscript since the late Safavid period. A Battle Scene in the Royal Scottish Museum. Edinburgh, was almost certainly intended for the 1539–43 Khamsa, as were these magnificent illustrations belonging to the Fogg.

Although the origin of the Fogg’s paintings seems certain, their subjects still elude literary identification. The Khamsa, or Quintet, of the poet Nizami consists of a poetic treatise entitled the Treasury of Mysteries and four epic romances, Khosrow and Shirin, Layla and Majnun, Bahram Gur and the Seven Princesses, and Alexander the Great. The miniature of a palace at night has occasionally been described as the Feast of Khosrow. Several different titles relating to various episodes in the tragic love story of Layla and Majnun, have been attached to the encampment scene. Of the alternatives proposed, the Conference Between the Clans best suits the composition. Yet there are no Khamsa verses or distinctive iconographic details to precisely label the miniatures.

Fortunately, the identity of the artist is less problematic. Three faint words on the white tent top at the upper edge of the Nomadic Encampment read “the work of Mir Sayyid.” Although it is not a signature, this inscription can be accepted as a reliable attribution, along with similarly worded phrases in the same handwriting in other 1539–43 Khamsa miniatures. The full name of the artist referred to in the Fogg inscription is Mir Sayyid-Ali, known not only as a painter, but also as a poet. The son of Mir Musavvir (See no. 16) and ranked in at least two biographies of Persian artists as superior in talent to his father, Mir Sayyid-Ali spent the first part of his career in Tabriz; he later went to India, where he helped found the Moghal school of painting.

Although it lacks any notations, Nighttime in a Palace bears a close stylistic resemblance to the Nomadic Encampment and to another picture in the British Library Khamsa inscribed with the painter’s name. Together, the Fogg miniatures reveal the strengths of Mir Sayyid-Ali’s style: the meticulousness of his technique, the complexity of his settings, and the perfection of even the smallest details. These pictures also reveal the rich and sophisticated world of the Safavid court.

Certainly Mir Sayyid-Ali’s camp scene does not represent an actual encampment. It looks more like a royal outing of fashionable courtiers who play at the rustic life, an aristocratic amusement not unlike the one Marie Antoinette and her entourage enjoyed in the gardens of Versailles. The cast of characters includes a laundress washing clothes in a large gold basin, a young boy feeding branches into the fire under the hot water pot, a mother nursing her child, an old woman spinning.
wool, and other persons of various ages tending animals. Somewhat separated from these domestic activities, a pair of white-bearded men and their advisers confer under a lavishly appointed tent. The small covered tea bowls in front of them suggest that the meeting is a "working lunch."

Nighttime in a Palace vividly portrays the night life of a bustling urban complex. It too, abounds with genre vignettes incidental to the central event, a royal feast, represented in the foreground. From a roof-top pavilion, three court ladies peer down at the reveller on the garden terrace below: their companion lights the way with a taper. Behind them a young girl receives advice from a graybeard whose cross-eyed cat dozes at his feet. At the right, another encounter between youth and old age takes place at the door of a mosque; an elderly gentleman with a staff lectures a small boy. A rectangular panel above the door contains this hadith, or saying, attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "He who builds a mosque for God, God will build for him a dwelling in Paradise." The miniature also illustrates the palace's commercial affairs: a man carries a load of figgots through the outer gate; nearby, a shopkeeper weighs produce for a youth with a large platter; and a fruit seller waits to hand over a melon while his customers search for the correct change in their money pouches. Near a domed fountain, other figures perform evening chores: a girl fills her ewer from an animal-headed spigot and a boy with two more vessels stands outside. At the prince's quarters, three attendants bearing platters heaped with delicacies enter the garden terrace; they pass under an inscription taken from the Persian poet Hafiz: "The pupil of my eye is your nestling place: be kind, alight, for it is your home."

The many objects in these two paintings make it easy to see why Mir Sayyid-'Ali has been proclaimed a master of still life. He also displays here his considerable skill at rendering textures—the way he treats the fur and skin of the goats, sheep, cats, dogs and camels is so convincing that the viewer, like the barefoot boy in the center of the camp, feels the urge to run his hands along the animals' sides. The painter makes full use of his fertile imagination in his textile designs: every garment in the Nighttime in a Palace and every tent top and hanging in the Nomadic Encampment boasts a unique pattern, the most spectacular being the flying simurgs woven on the women's tent. He has even covered the hands and feet of his female figures with elaborate tattoos.

Confronted with the beauty and brilliance of these compositions, it comes as a shock to realize that some pre-20th-century owner had trimmed each miniature on all four sides, cut it horizontally into two equal pieces, and bound the fragments into an album (traces of red binding material remain on the edges). Now reunited in their original format, the illustrations still show a narrow gap across their centers. The blank spaces at the lower right and the upper center of the encampment scene are colored paper patches masking parts of the miniature that were cut out.


Seated Princess with Spray of Flowers

Recto

19

Album Leaf

Taliz, ca. 1540. Opaque watercolor and black ink, mounted with calligraphy. 39.7 x 28 cm (sheet size) 18.7 x 10.8 cm (design area).

Long admired for her great beauty and charm, the Fogg’s Seated Princess exemplifies the gentle, lyrical mood of classical Iranian painting. She also represents the ideal of feminine beauty extolled by generations of Persian poets: she is graceful and slim like a cypress tree, with a face shaped like the moon, lips like a rosebud, and eyes soft as those of a gazelle.

For all her timeless poetic qualities, this princess remains in fashion. Her marvellous headdress, possibly inspired by Chinese finery, consists of a royal blue cloth cap embroidered with gold arabesques and topped by a lotus-shaped gold frONTAL in shape and decoration it resembles a Persian dome. Her crown is made of sheet gold cut into trefoil studs with jewels. It sweeps out from her brow and tapers to a pair of small gold leaves. Under this, she wears another cap, of a lighter blue and red cloth, which hangs down the back of her neck and peeks out above her forehead. The whole seems held in place by the strand of matched pearls encircling her face. Her jewelry includes dangling gold earrings, a double necklace with a heart-shaped pendant, and a gold ring set with an oval stone.

Of the princess’ dark blue and gold undergarment, only one cuff and part of the provocatively split bodice are visible. Over this she wears a sky blue, long-sleeved robe and an orange, fur-lined coat. Both garments are patterned with golden blossoms, floral sprays, and swimming ducks; the outer robe also has a black yoke decorated with multi-colored scrolls. The princess gives us only a tantalizing glimpse of her diaphanous gold slippers.

This unsigned composition bears the hallmarks of the gifted painter Mirza ‘Ali. Son of Sultan Mohammad, the celebrated early Safavid artist and director of Shah Tahmasp’s royal library, Mirza ‘Ali began his training as a painter at a young age. By the late 1530s, he had matured into a master. Seated Princess with Spray of Flowers probably dates from this period, for she compares closely with at least two female figures in Mirza ‘Ali’s paintings for the famous Khamsa of 1539–43 (See nos. 17 and 18). Details like the princess’ stray locks and her close-fitting crown appear in very similar form in the Khamsa. But as Stuart Dyer Welch has pointed out, the most telling evidence is found in the striking physical resemblance between the seated princess and her Khamsa sisters (Welch, S. C., 1979, no. 70; Dickson and Welch, forthcoming, chap. V). All have the same delicate features, firm limbs, and sensuous demeanor.

This painting has been pasted on paper mounts containing a poem in praise of an unknown sultan written in ten panels of nasta’liq calligraphy.

Provenance: Louis Cartier. Bibliography: Martin, 1912, ii, pl. 100; Manteau and Vever, 1913, ii, pl. CVIII, no. 144; Kühnel, 1922, pl. 57; Sakisian, 1939, pl. XXXVIII, fig. 60; Biryon, Wilkinson, and Gray, 1933, no. 98; Pope and Ackerman, 1938, iii, p. 1977, V, pl. 902; Stchoukine, 1939, p. 77, no. 27; Robinson, 1965, p. 135, pl. 44; Welch, S. C., 1979, no. 70. Gift — John Goolet, formerly in the collection of Louis J. Cartier, 1958.60
In 1548 Shah Tahmasp moved the Safavid capital from Tabriz to Qazvin to escape the expansionist pressures of the Ottoman Turks. A number of veteran court artists followed him there. But others sought their fortunes elsewhere. Tahmasp’s increasingly negative attitude towards the arts no doubt contributed to their decisions to leave his atelier. One of the Iranian cities that attracted the displaced Safavid artists was Mashhad in the eastern province of Khurasan, governed since 1566 by Prince Ibrahim Mirza, the Shah’s nephew and son-in-law.

Ibrahim Mirza was sixteen years old when the move to Qazvin took place, but he had already acquired a reputation as a lover of art, poetry, and music. In the year of his appointment in Khurasan, the prince commissioned a new assemblage painting studio to prepare a sumptuous copy of Jami’s well-known series of poems, the Haft Awrang, or Seven Thrones. This luxurious volume, completed in 1565, contains twenty-eight miniatures (Fogg Gallery of Art, 48:12). None are signed, but several of the Haft Awrang paintings are believed to be the work of Mirza ‘Ali, one of the best trained and most disciplined artists in the second generation of Safavid painters. The similarity between Mirza ‘Ali’s work for Ibrahim Mirza’s Haft Awrang and the Youth with a Golden Pillow shown here has led Stuart Cary Welch to posit that Mirza ‘Ali painted the Fogg miniature around 1560 (Welch, S. C., 1978, pp. 70-71; Welch, S. C., 1979, no. 78).

Mirza ‘Ali gives us in this miniature an idealized but penetrating portrait of the type of pampered dandy that frequented the Safavid court. The youth’s languid manner is accentuated by the poppy dangling from his casually arranged turban and by his elongated torso. The air of artificiality and decadence typifies the change that gradually occurred in the style of Mirza ‘Ali and his colleagues after they left Tabriz. During the second half of the 16th century, the artists working in Qazvin and Mashhad moved away from the vigorous naturalism of the Tabriz school towards a greater distortion of physical form. At the same time, these figures grew distortive, almost dissipated in spirit. This young man has not yet reached the depravity of some figures in the Haft Awrang but his secretive smile hints at thoughts that we might not want to share. With an air of conspiracy, he leans over a stuffed pillow towards an unseen companion, offering a small cup of wine.

Both the cup and the pillow are painted in gold; the latter is rendered in a prickled technique which contrasts with the smooth finish of the youth’s brightly-colored garments. Mirza ‘Ali has also taken considerable care with the blue-and-white decoration of the double-handled wine bottle, and with the tightly-brushed rocks and flowers of the background.

Like a number of the Fogg’s Safavid miniatures, this study forms part of a double-sided album page. The recto side consists of a sample of calligraphy, as yet unidentified, cut out of cream-colored paper and pasted on salmon-colored paper. The lines are signed both by the calligrapher Mir ‘Ali (See no. 25) and by the cutter, Sang-i ‘Ali Badakhshi. Gold floral motifs decorate the outer margin of blue paper.

Muzaffar-'Ali was one of several Safavid court artists who composed illustrations for Shah Tahmasp’s Shahnama and Khamsa and for Ibrahim Mirza’s Haft Awrang. A respected lineage may have been the impetus for his long and creative career (the illustrious master Bihzad was his great-uncle), but it was his friendly relations with the two major royal patrons of the 16th century that assured his success. Muzaffar-'Ali continued to be highly regarded after his death in 1576. The 17th-century historian Iskandar Munshi extols the painter as “... incomparable in his time and unique in his period... who with a hair-splitting brush painted the portraits of models of justice and was a pupil of Master Bihzad and had learned his craft in his service and made progress to the height of perfection: all the incomparable masters, eminent portrait painters, acknowledged him to be unrivalled in that art, he was a fine painter and a matchless draughtsman.” (Iskandar Beg Munshi, 1978; vol. 1, p. 273).

Although Muzaffar-'Ali was trained under Bihzad, presumably at the royal library of Tabriz, his style shows little of the great master’s approach to painting. Compared with his teacher, Muzaffar-'Ali is a relaxed artist, preferring soft forms, broad, simplified surfaces, and loosely structured compositions. His most characteristic work appears in Ibrahim Mirza’s Haft Awrang to which the artist evidently contributed four pictures: Yusuf’s Escape from the Well, Qays’ First Glimpse of the Fair Layla, Don’t Blame Me for these Acts, and Yusuf as Shepherd. Recently, Stuart Cary Welch pointed out the many features these illustrations share with the Graybeard with a Lion, and has proposed an attribution to Muzaffar-'Ali around 1560 for the Fogg’s painting (Welch, S. C., 1978, pp. 71-72).

Obviously a fragment of a larger composition, this emblematic scene (to whom does the old man look as he gestures towards the lion?) takes place in a landscape similar to several of Muzaffar-'Ali’s Haft Awrang settings. The fluid forms and pastel colors of the tall crags and small rocks are very close to those in Joseph’s Escape from the Well. The artist has transformed the highest peak in the Fogg miniature into the head of a lion seen in profile, a bit of artistic whimsy also seen in some of the Haft Awrang paintings. The twisting tree, bright gold sky, and racing clouds also appear in several of Muzaffar-'Ali’s pictures for that volume. The cook in Qays’ First Glimpse of the Fair Layla is almost the twin of the Fogg’s graybeard, and the cow in this Haft Awrang illustration has the placid expression and smooth skin of the Fogg’s lion.

The manuscript for which Muzaffar-'Ali designed Graybeard with a Lion has never been identified or located. However, even in its presently reduced size, the picture suggests that the parent manuscript must have been an impressive volume, probably commissioned by Ibrahim Mirza at the time of the Haft Awrang or perhaps by Shah Tahmasp in his later years.

The painting was mounted as an album page with salmon and blue paper borders, presumably when it was cut down in size. The other side of the leaf contains fourteen lines of nasta’liq calligraphy, written on a gold ground and dated [1] 168/1754.

Equestrian with an Attendant

Album Leaf
Mashhad, ca. 1560. Opaque watercolors, mounted with calligraphy. 38.5 x 27 cm (sheet size) 24.5 x 18.4 cm (illustration).

This richly colored, idealized equestrian portrait seems to be the work of an artist known as "Painter A," a prolific, if minor, 18th-century master. According to Stuart Cary Welch, "Painter A's" real identity can be determined from a series of miniatures in the Tahmasp Album (Istanbul, University Library, IV 1422) inscribed with the name "Qadimi," meaning the "Veteran" or the "Prior." (Dickson and Welch, forthcoming, chap. V). These correspond stylistically to at least fifty compositions attributed to "Painter A" in Shah Tahmasp's great Shahnameh and to four in the Haft Awrang prepared for Ibrahim Mirza in 1556-1565. Thus, like Mirza 'Ali and Muzaffar 'Ali, "Painter A," alias Qadimi, seems to have received his training in Tabriz and then moved to Mashhad around the middle of the century. The Fogg miniature has many features in common with all of the Qadimi/Painter A works.

Although the chronicle Qadi Ahmad asserts that "the late Shah [Tahmasp] kept [Qadimi] at the [library] as a portraitist" (Minorsky, 1959, pp. 185-186), the Qadimi known to us certainly was not a reliable recorder of the human form, particularly late in his career. His figures in the Haft Awrang manuscript, and the rider and attendant shown here, are most peculiarly proportioned; their torsos, legs, and arms are even more attenuated than those executed at the Gazvin and Mashhad schools at this time. In addition to their rubbery, curving limbs, Qadimi's people all have very unnatural and easily recognizable mouths, aptly compared by Stuart Cary Welch to open wounds. Qadimi also had little concern for keeping the relative scale of his human and animal figures consistent. Sturdy enough in the chest and haunches, the Fogg's horse can hardly support the rider's weight on such disproportionately short and spindly legs, a problem typical of Qadimi's horses. This steed also has white-trimmed goggle-like eyes, another feature characteristic of the painter's style.

Qadimi never achieved the finished craftsmanship of some of his contemporaries, but on occasion he produced highly polished pictures like the Fogg work. Here the artist defines his forms with smooth, even contours and applies his pigments with a steady hand. His palette is bold and pleasing, despite an apparently random choice of color combinations. Qadimi uses one of his favorite colors, a bright orange, for the rider's boots and the attendant's tunic and decorates both with gold floral motifs. The equestrian's robe is trimmed in blue arabesques. A far more intricate design adorns the horse's saddle blanket, which closely resembles the decorated blanket covering Bursa's flanks in the Ascent of the Prophet to Heaven, one of Qadimi's illustrations for the 1556-65 Haft Awrang.

Equestrian with an Attendant is framed on all sides by poetic verses in nasta'liq, possibly from Hulai's Shah o Gada (The prince and the beggar). The recto contains a central panel with a prayer in nasta'liq, surrounded by twenty-four smaller panels written in the same script.

Two Cavaliers

The popular genre of Safavid album art was dominated by single figure drawings and paintings, but it also encompassed other, more active subjects. Representations of hunters killing wild animals, a theme already favored in the 16th century (see no. 9), appear occasionally, as do scenes of warriors in combat.

This drawing depicts the climax of a conflict between two mounted combatants. One warrior catches up to his fleeing opponent and smashes his helmet with a long-handled mace. The hapless victim, looking understandably befuddled, hunches up his shoulders as if to lessen the impact of the crushing blow. His steed lunges frantically forward in a futile attempt to escape the charging challenger, biting deep into its tail. The animal’s peculiar, distended nostrils and gaping mouth reveal its genuine terror. All four participants concentrate so intently on their individual actions and reactions that the overall effect is strangely static.

As is typical of many album works, this drawing does not include any landscape motifs that might suggest the setting of the combat. The many fine black ink strokes that delineate the human and animal hair suggest that the work is a finished piece. However, the artist may have intended to cover the forms with pigment. The warriors’ faces and hands have been painted in flesh tones; the helmets, arm guards, weapons and saddles in gold; the leather harnesses in red; and the sashes in white. In either case, the composition’s present state gives us another opportunity to admire the smooth, fluid quality of 16th-century Safavid draughtsmanship.

Shah Abbas also must have thought highly of this sketch, for he had the upper edge of the paper stamped with his seal. The inscription reads, "The Servant of the King of Holiness, Abbas, the year 995." This Hijra date corresponds to A.D. 1586–1587, the year before the Shah Abbas ascended the throne.

It is more difficult to determine when the two panels of nastaliq calligraphy, containing verses about a dervish in distress, were added to the drawing. The right side of each written panel is embellished with a small illuminated square. The left sides probably contained similar squarons, which were cut off to fit the size of the drawing. Gold framing lines separate the drawing and the calligraphy from the surrounding border, which is decorated with gold foliation.

Throughout the 18th century much of Central Asia was controlled by a khanate (state) of Turkish-speaking military nomads called the Uzbeks. Several Uzbek princes ruled from Bukhara, a city in Transoxiana that became an important focus of political and intellectual life in this period. The transformation of Bukhara into a major cultural center was largely due to Iranian artists and calligraphers, including many from Herat, carried off to Transoxiana during the Uzbeks’ periodic raids into Safavid territory (see no. 25).

Early 18th-century Bukhara painting bears the unmistakable imprint of the Bihzadian mode, particularly in color, composition and treatment of the human figure, so that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between early Bukhara work and that of the later Herat school (Robinson, 1956, p. 136). Its adherence to older traditions makes the Bukhara style seem old-fashioned compared with the inventive styles of Shih Tahmasp’s workshop. Yet this conservative tendency did not prevent artists in Bukhara from developing a distinctive palette or from producing rich, decorative designs.

When Marteau and Vever catalogued this painting in 1913, they identified it as part of a 1575 copy of another poem by Jami, the Subhat al-Abnar (Marteau and Vever, 1912, II, p. Cl. no. 123). Their attribution can now be revised on the basis of yet another Subhat al-Abnar manuscript formerly in the Kevorkian collection (Sotheby’s, 2 May 1977, lot 170). Certainly illustrated in Bukhara, the Kevorkian volume contains the date 935/1529. The Fogg’s Old Man Meets a Beautiful Woman is so close in style and content to a miniature from the 1529 manuscript that it must have been painted about the same time, perhaps by the same hand.

Both the Fogg and the Kevorkian miniatures are set in similar high-horizoned landscapes divided into two planes. A pastel-colored field, scattered with pale tufts of grass, rounded rocks, and small, twiglike plants fills the bottom, its upper edge seamed with short, curving lines. The upper plane has a bright gold ground which serves as a striking backdrop for the very painterly blue and brown boulders and mountainous crags in the Fogg’s illustration. The Kevorkian painting does not include these rocky formations, but the two works do share the same leafless bushes whose limbs bend at sharp right angles and the same tree with green foliage clumps shaped like pinons. The top half of the Fogg’s work is a darker-colored hill with angular leafless bushes accented with yellow leaves in star patterns. Even the perching magpies match perfectly in position and coloration. Although the personages in these illustrations are not identical mates, they do conform to the ideal canon favored in Bukhara painting at this time.

Finally, in comparing these two illustrations, mention should be made of the very similar placement of the text blocks and the illumination of the calligraphy. Considering all the many correspondences, we may conjecture that the 1529 Subhat al-Abnar and the as yet unlocated Subhat al-Abnar to which Old Man Meets a Beautiful Lady originally belonged were created as part of a complete set of Jami’s celebrated poems. We may further suppose that the lucky owner of these fine manuscripts was the Uzbek ruler Ubaydul lah ibn Mahmud (1512–1539), who first established a court at Bukhara.

Amorous Couple
Verso
illumination Recto

25
Miniature and calligraphy from an anthology of poetry
Bukhara, mid 16th century. Opaque watercolor. 26.3 x 13.5 cm (verso sheet size) 26.3 x 13.6 cm (recto sheet size) 13.7 x 6.9 cm (design area). Text copied by Mir 'Ali.

These two works belong to a set of twelve leaves, all in the Fogg's collection, which form part of an anthology of poetry (See nos. 76-85). Of these folios, eight have poetry on both sides; four have miniatures on one side and poetry on the other. The poet is not known, but his verses are predominately mystical in content.

The calligrapher has signed his name, Mir 'Ali, at the end of the prose introduction to the volume (Fogg, 1958, 72). The style of the writing indicates he is none other than the celebrated 16th-century calligrapher Mir 'Ali al-Harawi, credited with establishing a new canon for nasta'liq script and with perfecting the art of writing calligraphic samples and inscriptions. In 1528-29, the Uzbeks kidnapped Mir 'Ali from his native town of Herat and took him to Bukhara. There he worked in the library of Abd al-Azz Khan and died some twenty-five or thirty years later; the date has been variously reported as 1550 and 1558-9 (Minorsky, 1969, p. 136).

The distinguished calligrapher probably penned the Fogg's Anthology sometime around 1550. This dating is supported by the illuminations and the miniatures in the Anthology which are typical of the high-quality work produced in Bukhara in the 1540s and 1550s.

As in the illuminated leaf shown here, each line of calligraphy in the Anthology is reserved in contour panels against a gold or blue ground, decorated with multi-colored floral scrolls and medallions, and flanked by a pair of figures at the corners. In the example on the facing page, the youth in the upper corner holds a blue-and-white wine cup, while his companion in the lower corner touches a silver wine bottle. On the other folios, similar young boys hold fruit, books, or musical instruments. All are attired in rich clothing and have the long, rounded jaws and small, V-shaped mouths characteristic of the Bukhara style.

The miniature of an amorous couple is one of the Anthology's four paintings. In it, an elegant young man holds out to his beloved a fine porcelain cup and gently chuckles her under the chin. The lady reciprocates by reaching for her suitor's sash and offering a blue-and-white wine ewer, decorated with a fanciful beast. Both are colorfully attired. He wears a white turban wound around a green cap and a short coat embroidered with golden blossoms and vines over a deep red robe and sky-blue undergarment. She wears a dark blue coat decorated with graceful floral arabesques in gold, yellow, red, and white, over a bright yellow robe; a heavy gold necklace and an elaborate headdress complete her outfit.

The bright colors and intricate designs of this miniature stand out so beautifully against the plain background that the paper must have been left unpainted intentionally. Its border of black lozenges and red eight-pointed stars, both filled with floral arabesques and set against a gold ground, also contrasts very effectively with the plain ground on one side and the gold flocking on the other.

Flattering portraits of royal personages were in great demand during the Safavid era. This pencil sketch depicts a bearded nobleman, probably a prince, attired in a typically Persian outfit and wearing a turban adorned with a feather-brush. At his belt he wears a pointed penknife and a dagger painted in gold. An elaborate scroll design, executed in red ink on the upper robe, emphasizes the sitter’s broad shoulders and powerful torso. His piercing eyes, aquiline nose, and slim hands confirm his aristocratic status.

The illuminated and inscribed panels flanking the seated prince read on the right, “The work of his eminence Master Bihzad” and, on the left, “Portrait of Sultan Husayn Mirza.” Although they are written on the same sheet of paper as the drawing and are possibly contemporary with the work itself, the inscriptions are misleading. The characterization of the figure and the quality of the line bear only a general resemblance to miniatures designed by Bihzad and no respectable Persian painter, much less Bihzad, would have signed a work in such a conspicuous fashion. The identification of the sitter as Sultan Husayn Mirza, the last great Timurid ruler (usually referred to as Sultan Husayn Bayqara) and Bihzad’s foremost patron, is also questionable. The Fogg portrait does not resemble a royal figure, believed to be the Sultan, from the Zafarnama manuscript (attributed to Bihzad), which Sultan Husayn Bayqara commissioned in 1467 (Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, TL.7. 1960). The lines of this drawing have also been considerably altered. The changes are most noticeable in the prince’s lap and right side, where white lead has been used to erase the original, less robust contours. The positions of the dagger and the penknife have also been changed.

According to F. R. Martin, who once owned it, the Fogg drawing came from an album compiled in Istanbul around 1600, probably for Sultan Ahmed I (1603–1617), and subsequently given by Sultan Abd al-’Aziz (1861–1876) to an Ottoman dignitary. At least two other works Martin traces to this album also have illuminated inscriptions purporting to identify the artist and the sitter (Martin, 1912, p. 59). These are single figure studies in other American collections, probably also from the Sultan Ahmed album, with illuminated panels virtually identical to those in the Fogg drawing, several credit Bihzad as the painter.

The Fogg’s aristocrat was no doubt sketched by a 16th-century Persian artist, probably trained in Bukhara or Herat. At some point prior to 1600, the drawing was taken to Istanbul as were so many Persian drawings and miniatures in the 16th and 17th centuries. There the sketch may have been reworked by an Ottoman artist who not only made changes in the outlines of the forms but also added the mottled green ground surrounding the figure, the two-part feather-brush, so unlike any Safavid turban ornament, and the robe’s scallop-edged scroll design. (A similar scroll and scallop pattern appears in a portrait executed at the Ottoman court around 1500 [Freer Gallery of Art, XXXII.1928]. After the Fogg drawing was so enriched, it was mounted with stenciled borders and a piece of marbled paper with a heading elaborately illuminated for a Shahnama manuscript.

Isfandiyar's Third Stage: He Battles the Dragon

27
Miniature from the Shahnama of Firdawsi
Shiraz, middle to late 16th century. Opaque watercolor. 38.3 x 26 cm (sheet size) 25.3 x 22.2 cm (written surface).

Despite the growing taste for album paintings and for illustrated copies of lyrical and mystical poetry, the Shahnama remained a favorite subject for illustrated manuscripts during the Safavid period. The persistence of the Shahnama as an artistic genre certainly owes much to the poem's many stories of battles, hunts, and heroic adventures which lend themselves so naturally to pictures.

This folio, detached from an unknown copy of the Shahnama, depicts an episode in the Seven Stages of Prince Isfandiyar. At the urging of his father Shah Gusheasp, Isfandiyar set out to rescue his sisters from the Brazen Hold where they had been imprisoned by an evil king. Isfandiyar's journey took seven days, and on each day he was forced to do battle with a natural or supernatural foe. On the third day he encountered an enormous dragon. To protect himself, Isfandiyar ordered his carpenters to build a wooden carriage studded with swords. The prince harnessed two horses to this tank-like vehicle and rumbled off towards the dragon. Terrified by the fire-breathing apparition that confronted them, Isfandiyar's horses frantically tried to escape. But the dragon was quicker and instantly devoured them. In the same breath, the monster swallowed the box, and the sharp swords pierced its gut. Then Isfandiyar emerged from his hiding place and hacked off its head.

In this illustration the dragon is portrayed as a fantastic creature with a bright blue hide and flaming haunches. In its swift descent to attack Isfandiyar, the monster has torn loose a boulder from the mountainside with its left rear claw. One horse has already been sucked into the dragon's mouth, and the other watches in horror. In a departure from the traditional iconography for this scene, Isfandiyar is not represented, although we do see the wheeled "tank" pulled by his horses. Isfandiyar's troops are safely out of harm's way above the hillside, obviously marveling at each other about their leader's prowess and bravery.

The style of this painting connects it with numerous manuscripts executed in Shiraz during the mid- to late-16th century. The bushy clumps of foliage, jagged contours of the hills, and small clouds are especially close to landscape features in other miniatures with securely documented Shirazi provenance. Other elements that correspond to the 16th-century Shirazi style are the soldiers' square headdresses and their low, close-fitting helmets. The technique of reserving the text in contour panels against a background illuminated with floral motifs also betrays the origin of the work. Although the prolific ateliers of Shiraz produced an undeniable large number of mediocre manuscripts, apparently to keep up with the increasing demand for illustrated books, much Shirazi work is of extremely high quality, as the Fogg's page demonstrates. Besides its fine illumination and colorful illustration, the gold-painted border, with a simurngh, a gazelle, and a leopard set in foliage, also testifies to the great care lavished on the Shahnama manuscript to which the Fogg folio originally belonged.

Composite Camel with Attendant

Miniature
Khurasan province, ca. 1570-80. Opaque watercolor, mounted with gold floral border. 26 x 17.9 cm (sheet size) 17.3 x 12.4 cm (design area).

It takes but a moment to understand why the small groom in this miniature is looking back with such surprise at the animal he leads. The bizarre beast, in profile an ornamented camel, is composed of a wild assortment of humans, animals, birds, fish, and fantastic creatures, all tightly interwoven. Its long, curving neck, for instance, is made up of a female head, two seated men, a pair of horned demons, and a menagerie of creatures filling spaces between. A turbaned youth with a wine jar at his feet and a deer (or rabbit?) under his right arm makes up most of the camel’s belly, while an embracing couple forms its haunches. What looks like a perfectly normal tail is, in fact, an undulating lizard! Even the camel’s ankles and feet have been transformed into male heads and pairs of crouching rabbits.

The Fogg’s peculiar Composite Camel is not an isolated case in 16th-century Iranian art. The Metropolitan Museum owns an almost identical camel with attendant (25.63.6) and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has an entire manuscript of similarly ingenious compositions representing horses and other animals. Many late 16th- and 17th-century Mughal Indian examples are also known.

The origins of these phantasmagoric creatures can be traced to the animal motifs used to decorate gold, bronze, wood, and leather objects from Central Asia and the Near East in the first millennium B.C. A characteristic feature of this “animal style” art is the combination of natural and supernatural animals to create realistic forms. For early nomadic peoples such creations had magical or symbolic significance. Although we do not know why this genre of composite animals became so popular in the Safavid and Mughal periods, it seems likely that it reflects the mystical tendencies in the Iranian and Indian culture of the time.

Composite Camel fits the general stylistic framework of provincial Khurasan painting as defined by B. W. Robinson (Robinson, 1968, p. 110). The light-blue background, edged with bubble-shaped rocks and dotted with clumps of delicate flowers, is especially characteristic of the style. The miniatures in a manuscript of Nizami’s Layla wa Majnun from Khurasan, dated 981/1573 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ouseley Add. 137) contains, in addition to this simple ground plane, other landscape features found in the Fogg’s painting, namely, the short bushy trees on the horizon and the stream running through a flowering meadow in the foreground. Another telling comparison can be made between our groom and a young boy in the Bodleian manuscript (folio 68): both figures are still and slender, almost sticklike, and both wear the same unusual black and white striped robes.

The Fogg’s miniature cannot be precisely attributed since much research remains to be done on the various schools of painting in Khurasan during the second half of the 16th century. Mashhad was the foremost center for the arts during Ibrahim Sultan’s governorship (see nos. 20, 21, and 22), but other cities in Khurazan such as Malat, Bakhzad, Sabzivār, and Herat also produced illustrated manuscripts and miniatures, albeit in a more provincial style.

Young Man in a Blue Cloak

Miniature
Qazvin, ca. 1587. Opaque watercolor, mounted with marbled paper and floral borders. 34 x 21.9 cm (sheet size) 13 x 7.5 cm (design area). Signed by Riza.

In 1587 Abbas I, the seventeen-year-old grandson of Shah Tahmasp, ascended the Safavid throne at Qazvin. A forceful administrator and military campaigner, the young monarch reversed the empire's declining fortunes and raised Iran to the height of her political and economic powers. His forty-two year reign also marked the apex of the dynasty's cultural achievements, most evident in the spectacular architecture of Isfahan, where the Shah established a new imperial capital in 1596-1597.

Although less passionately devoted than Tahmasp to the art of the book, 'Abbas had been schooled in painting as a child, and as monarch supported ateliers at both Qazvin and Isfahan. The acknowledged protégé among the court artists of this period was Riza, who received his early training from his father, Ali Agha, and joined the Qazvin studio at about the same time. 'Abbas inherited the crown. Not much older than 'Abbas himself, Riza rose quickly in the Shah's favor, and, according to the historian Qadi Ahmed, once "made such a portrait that the generous monarch involuntarily expressed a thousand approvals and praises." (Mirmaksy, 1959, p. 192).

This similarly exquisite portrait, signed by Riza and probably executed soon after he entered the royal atelier, depicts an aristocratic youth holding a golden apple and gracefully posed in a landscape of gold rocks, vegetation, and clouds. The subject is simply but elegantly dressed in a long vermilion robe, white sash, and flowing blue cloak embellished with gold designs. A variety of ornaments, including a small white flower and a gold cap, nestle among the multiple bards of his large white turban.

Young Man in a Blue Cloak invites comparison with the Fogg's pair of seated figures attributed to Mirza Ali (Inv. 19 and 20), and Anthony Welch has demonstrated that Riza was greatly influenced by Mirza Ali's conception of human form and by his harmonious palettes (Welch, A., 1973, no. 6). Yet Riza was never an imitator, not even in his juvenilia; and, from the outset of his career, he developed a very personal style. This young aristocrat's swaying stance, conveyed by the fluid curves behind the knees and back and by the agitated hem of his garments, is typical of Riza's approach to representing standing figures. The youth's sweet, serene expression and his soft, wispy curls are also characteristics of Riza's style. Though many tried (See no. 34), no other Safavid artist ever matched Riza's elegance in refined single-figure studies.

Riza signed this portrait at the left, "Exercice of the most humble servant Aqa Riza," the final "a" is missing, presumably trimmed off when the painting was mounted. The stamp beneath the young man's feet was cropped at the same time but can still be identified as Shah 'Abbas's seal giving the year of his succession: "Abbas, the Servant of the King of Holiness [i.e. the Imam 'Ali], 995." The same stamp appears on at least one other signed portrait (Freer Gallery of Art, 32.9) very close in style to Young Man in a Blue Cloak, and helps establish the dating for Riza's early style.

Daydreaming Youth

30

Drawing

Gazelle, ca. 1590. Black ink. 12 x 6.7 cm (design area). Signed by Riza.

During Riza’s early years as a court artist, he not only introduced a new mode for single figures into Safavid art, but also developed an unusual and exciting drawing style. His black ink lines are sketched swiftly and surely, often ending in agitated, calligraphic hooks. This technique is commonly described as “splutter,” a word which captures exactly the staccato rhythm of Riza’s line.

The Fogg’s Daydreaming Youth exemplifies both the detached mood surrounding many of Riza’s solitary portraits, and the impressionistic quality of his draughtsmanship. Lost in reverie, this somewhat effete adolescent kneels against a large boulder in a cloud-swept landscape and rests his head on his shoulder, using his left hand as a pillow. In his right hand he holds a long handkerchief.

The youth wears the same kind of sashed robe with tightly wrinkled sleeves as his standing companion (see no. 29). But, instead of a turban, he wears a fur-trimmed stocking-cap topped with a small flower. A circular, jeweled earring and a penknife complete his outfit.

The daydreamer’s face is plump, as if he had not yet lost his baby fat, with a double chin and full, serious-looking lips. His almond-shaped eyes gaze off into some private, inner world from beneath arched eyebrows, which meet at the bridge of his aquiline nose. He has the same facial features and the same trailing locks as Young Man in a Blue Cloak (no. 29); and together, the two boys represent a figural type favored by Riza and frequently copied by his followers.

Riza’s handling of form and volume in this drawing is particularly noteworthy. The artist caresses, rather than defines, his subject’s soft, well-rounded limbs with a line which grows so faint in places that it practically disappears. To express the puckers and pulls of cloth, Riza has drawn a rapid succession of V-shaped folds, finishing them with his characteristic “splutter!” The landscape is rendered in the same calligraphic style, and the racing clouds are drawn in a series of short, wavy lines. The artist’s signature, written beneath the youth’s knees, exhibits a similar mastery of line and underscores the affinities between elegant calligraphy and elegant draughtsmanship in traditional Persian art.

Like the previous drawing by Riza, this work has been stamped near the bottom edge. The seal reads: “Fathullah.” The sheet of paper, now stained and spotted, has been pasted down on white cardboard and outlined with faded rulings.