Stylistically, the miniatures in the *Jamal u Jalal* are quite unlike those from Sultan-Husayn’s court workshop directed by Bihzad. A Battle, for instance, is in a somewhat rough, archaic idiom familiar from the commercial rather than royal levels of Shiraz and Herat (fig. 6). Figures are squat and have rounded, doll-like faces with little individuality; hobby-horse-like mounts also conform to a simple formula; and the background is an all-over pattern of grassy tufts, relieved by occasional folkloric foliage and flowers.

Of a piece stylistically with the *Jamal u Jalal* Battle is a comparable subject (fig. 7) from a somewhat earlier manuscript, a copy of Ibn Husayn’s *Khwarazmnama* ("The Epic of the Eastern Lands"), a popular hagiography recounting the exploits of the sainthood ‘Ali and his Shi’a (or partisan), written in Qhistan, eastern Iran, a region noted for its populist movements. Although the author completed this text in the year 1426/27, the copy with which we are concerned contains miniatures dated 1478/79 and 1487. A few, including figure 7, are signed by “the least of God’s servants, Farhad.” In all likelihood, the workshop of the Khwarazmnama was the training ground for the artists of the slightly later *Jamal u Jalal*. But if our two battle scenes (figs. 6 and 7) seem markedly close in style, pictures such as *Dindarl Goes Advice* (no. 1) from the Uppsala manuscript are far more intricate and spirited. The figures move more expressively and verge on actual portraiture; and the vegetation, architecture, and sky bring to mind all the ecstatic qualities we find in Shah Isma’il, for whom this miniature must have been painted.

After 1514, Shah Isma’il ceased campaigning and remained at Tabriz. His eldest son, Prince Tahmasp, was born in 1514. Two years later, the prince was sent as titular governor to Herat, where he was educated among the great artists and men of letters of the former Timurid capital, a crucial factor in the development of Safavid art. For while the father encouraged his artists at formerly Turkman Tabriz along the visionary lines already apparent in *Dindarl Goes Advice* (no. 1), the infant son was almost literally cutting his teeth on the subler, more harmonious, and more naturalistic miniatures of the school of Bihzad. Although by now past his prime as a practicing artist, Bihzad remained in Herat during the prince’s governorship, and his view of art continued to be influential.

The exhilaratingly vital *Rustam Sleeping While Rabbeh Fights the Lion* (no. 2) argues that Shah Isma’il’s enthusiasm for painting was on a par with that of such Turkman predecessors as Sultan Ya’qub as well as his son, Tahmasp, who has gone down in history as one of Iran’s most illustrious patrons. Dynamic as lightning, this illustration to an unrecorded *Book of Kings* can be attributed to the great Safavid painter Sultan-Muhammad, most of whose major works are included in this exhibition. Here, cheered on by Shah Isma’il’s gusto, he has created a masterpiece of controlled energy that far surpasses his promising, but tentative, works in the Uppsala *Jamal u Jalal*, such as *Dindarl Goes Advice* (no. 1). Furthermore, this picture and a few closely related ones (such as nos. 9 and 10) represent a moment of extraordinary creativity, when the founders of the Safavid state and of its school of art joined forces in perfect collaboration. Sultan-Muhammad’s later works, such as the signed *Allégorie de Drunkenness* (no. 44), which enables us to attribute the present miniature, and *The Court of Geyumars* (no. 8), however marvelous they may be, are not quite so rapturously energized.

Like time, artistic styles are in constant change; and disappointingly few examples of Sultan-Muhammad’s work for Shah Isma’il have survived from the years prior to the return in 1522 of Prince Tahmasp from Herat, another crucial moment in the development of Safavid painting. For the prince’s years at the former Timurid capital imbued him with a taste for the tranquil idiom of Bihzad, an idiom totally at odds with the unleashed animality achieved by his father through the wizardry of Sultan-Muhammad. In all likelihood, that great mentor of Apollonian painting, Bihzad, also moved to Tabriz at this time, and if Shah Isma’il’s and Sultan-Muhammad’s ferocious artistry was able to withstand the onslaught of a princely child, it yielded before Bihzad, the almost legendary personification of art. Like a caress poured onto raging seas, Timurid tastefulness calmed the surging artistic rhythms of Isma’il’s Tabriz.

Energies such as those of Sultan-Muhammad and Shah Isma’il, however, could not be

wholly subdued. During the years following Prince Tahmasp’s return to Tabriz, the royal ateliers were feverishly productive. Their most ambitious project was the Book of Kings, of which a minor portion of the miniatures and illuminations comprise a major part of this exhibition (nos. 3–39). Although the only date in this vast ocean of a manuscript, 1527/28, is found in a miniature on folio 516 verso (no. 30), the volume must have been in progress earlier. We suspect that it was already under way prior to 1522, and that its earliest miniatures, such as Hashang Slews the Black Div (no. 9) and The Death of King Mardas (no. 10), were painted for Shah Isma’il by Sultan-Muhammad at about the same time as his Rustam Sleeping, which we further believe is an unfinished picture for the same project.

Other pictures attributable to the same artist for the Book of Kings, such as Faridun Crosses the River Drya (no. 12), can be dated by their similarity to miniatures identical in style in a remarkable pocket-sized manuscript in Leningrad, a copy of *Arbi’s Guy o Chowgan* ("The Ball and Mallet") copied in 1524/15 by an artistic young scribe, Shah Tahmasp himself. Perhaps because his father had died in 1524, the new Shah’s taste for the style of Herat is dominant in the miniatures of this manuscript, which can be assigned to the court artists, including the aging Bihzad and the aspiring Shah himself, who was becoming an able artist. A Pole Game (fig. 8) is one of several miniatures assignable to Sultan-Muhammad, who here has adjusted, or even disguised, his style to the Bihzadian manner. But beneath the minuscule finish and seemingly naturalism, the lively Tabriz master is easily recognized. His ponies swing like released springs, and the players’ torsos rise mightily in their saddles, with little apparent concern on the artist’s part for correct proportion. As before, the resilient, ever creative, and comical Sultan-Muhammad must have delighted his Shah.

If the boy Shah once had favored Bihzad over Sultan-Muhammad, his view of art was now moderating. Although he may never have developed intense admiration for such pictures as Rustam Sleeping, one can be sure that he responded fully to Sultan-Muhammad’s creative passion in its new, calmer, and more harmonious form. Sultan-Muhammad had devoted all his intense, wistfulness to his new master in creating his supreme masterpiece, The Court of Gayamsars (no. 8), a loving work of many years. In it, he brought together the finesse and subtle patter of the Herat tradition and the vigor and earthiness of Tabriz. The painter’s fellow artists were “overpowered by this work,” as one of them, Dust-Muhammad, stated in his Preface to an album he prepared for Bahram Mirza, a brother of the Shah. Presumably Shah Tahmasp also appreciated it, despite concealed grotesques, Turkman-like expressiveness, and visionary excesses. We suspect that he always preferred more naturalistic and restrained art, despite Sultan-Muhammad’s attempts to persuade him otherwise.

As he grew older, Shah Tahmasp’s penchant for orthodoxy increased. In 1537, he and his Grand Vazir, Qadi-yi Jahan, stopped at Tehran for the trial and sentencing of extremist Sufis. By now, his own father’s poems ("I am God! I am the staff of Moset!") would have been interpreted as raw heresy. In 1541, Shah Tahmasp led a campaign against extremists in Khuzistan. His changes of attitude towards life were reflected in the later pages of his Book of Kings. But if, on one hand, his pictures reveal increased rigidity and hard-headedness, on the other they hint of deeper, more sensitive feelings, comparable to the disturbing dreams he wrote about in his Menaher. Apparently, Sultan-Muhammad perceived his patron’s multi-leveled, often contradictory moods, and interpreted them in such miniatures as The Death of Zuhub (no. 13) in which outward normalcy veils a world as ghoulish as the most extreme fantasies hiding in The Court of Gayamsars (no. 8). Other worldly elements were lent acceptability by touches of humor and decorousness.

Shah Tahmasp’s corps of artists included others no less gifted than Sultan-Muhammad. Infinitely controlled and gentle, with unerring grace as a painter was another senior master, Mir Musavvir, whose greatest work, The Nightmare of Zuhub (no. 11), also contains profound undercurrents. While Sultan-Muhammad challenges the observer with such passages, they were deeply hidden in tiny rocks or crevices by the Mir.

Aqa-Mirak was another of Shah Tahmasp’s major artists, said to have been his closest companion among them. Outwardly courtly and formal, he too plumbed the depths and scaled the heights. The most painterly of the Shah’s artists, Aqa-Mirak composed pictures with the confident bravura of heroic Rustam. His Faridun in the Gorge of a Dragon Teeth His Sons (no. 14) is at once a design of the utmost inventiveness and effectiveness, a disarming béstária, and a microcosm of intriguing earth spirits. Although his horses are of unrivalled elegance, and the dragon’s smile captivates, one senses that Aqa-Mirak’s personal joy and release came in painting the transparencies of the rocks. We delight, too, in his more vivid but comparable passage from Begtan Forces Farjud to Flee (no. 22).

Whether or not the Houghton Book of Kings was begun for Shah Isma’il or for his son, most of its 258 miniatures were painted for Shah Tahmasp, and the project went on over a period of many years. So monumental an undertaking required many artists, and we have isolated fifteen distinct hands, most of whom are identifiable by name. Fascinatingly, these artists represent two or more generations: that of Sultan-Muhammad and Mir Musavvir;
that of their sons, Mirza'Ali and Mir Sayyid'Ali; and that of the still younger master, Shakhsh-Muhammad, whose Fairman Against Kolbad (no. 37) was added to the manuscript in about 1540, a few years after the completion of the project.

Pictures by artists of the second generation, which had grown up in the established court of Shah Tahmasp rather than participating in the exciting formation of Shah Ismail's new school, reveal distinctive qualities. Although such artists as Mirza'Ali were aware of the vital Turkman strain in the Safavid style, they were trained in the synthesized Safavid manner that included so many characteristics of Bihzad. Thus, their work seems calmer, more elegantly refined, more cerebral, and less earthy than that of the first generation. Mirza'Ali's world, as compared to his father's, seems more closed-in, a microcosm of life rather than an all-encompassing vision. If the father created broad characterizations of all human types, the son narrowed his gaze, concentrating upon the elegant, even effete types of his patron's court. Like Mir Sayyid'Ali, he so lovingly recorded every texture and nuance of shape that his pictures are precise studies of Safavid material culture. By about 1535, such miniatures for the Book of Kings were stylistically similar to those for Shah Tahmasp's second great manuscript, the British Library's Qasim (no. 399 to 1540).

In his Preface to the Baharani Mirza Album of 1544/45, Dust-Muhammad wrote of "Sultan-Muhammad, Aqa-Mirak, and Mir Musavvir, who painted in the Royal Library, and beautifully illustrated a royal Shahnama ("Book of Kings") and a Khamsa ("Quintet") of Shahl Nizami." The former is almost certainly the Houghton manuscript, and the latter the Quintet in the British Library, from which all the contemporary miniatures are included in this exhibition (nos. 48-65). A more authoritative encomium scarcely could exist, for Dust-Muhammad was not only an eminent connoisseur, a calligrapher, and a distinguished man of letters, but he was also a painter trained by Bihzad. Moreover, he actually participated in the Book of Kings project (nos. 31 and 34).

Despite the incomplete state of the British Library Quintet, which originally included—or was planned to include—more pictures than the fourteen contemporary ones it now contains, it is clear that Shah Tahmasp intended it to be quite different from the book of Kings. Having become an ever more discriminating connoisseur, he now wanted a volume illustrated solely with masterpieces in the fully synthesized Safavid style of the moment. Old-fashioned or awkward artists were excluded from the new project, which was realistically scheduled for completion within a matter of years rather than decades. One need only handle this majestically unified, technically masterful, impressively compact production of the royal studios to sense that it is the artistic equivalent of the Shah's most effective phase as a ruler, the years when he campaigned against enemies within the realm and triumphantly protected it from external enemies.

Five of the nine major artists known from the Book of Kings contributed to the Quintet as it now stands, and Dust-Muhammad wrote that Mir Musavvir, whose miniatures for this project must have been lost, also worked on it. Sultan-Muhammad and Aqa-Mirak were joined by Mirza'Ali, and Mir Sayyid'Ali, who had been apprentices or very young masters in the years of the Book of Kings; and the stylistic uniformity of their miniatures was so marked that until recently some critics have claimed that the individual styles of Shah Tahmasp's artists could not be sorted out!

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It could be argued that Safavid painting had now reached its "classic" peak, that the technical and formal perfection and emotional refinement of the Quintet were unsurpassable. Conceivably, Shah Tahmasp felt this way, and instead of urging his artists to strive further or to repeat their successes to the point of boredom, he withdrew his patronage, possibly before the Quintet had been completed. Contemporary sources, including the Shah's own Memoirs, shed light upon his dwindling enthusiasm for painting and other pleasures. He had long been prone to moods of repentance, especially at times of crisis. In 1534, when exterior and interior enemies threatened, he had, in his own words, "wash[ed] away the stains... of pulverized emerald [hashtah] and liquefied ruby [wine]." "From this point forward," he wrote with pride, "debauchery and licentiousness were suppressed throughout our land." Qadi Ahmad, a calligrapher and man of letters, reveals that his denial of painting in particular occurred in about 1544/45, "when the monarch, having weared of the field of calligraphy and painting, occupied himself with important affairs of state, with the well-being of the country, and the tranquility of his subjects..." By 1558, his disaffection for painting was so complete that Shah Tahmasp issued an edict of "Sincere Repentance" formally banning the secular arts throughout the realm.

Ironically, the Shah's rejection of painting contributed to the founding of another great Persianate school, that of the Moghuls of India. For the second Mogul emperor, Humayun (r. 1530-40; 1555-56), who had been forced into exile from India, visited the Safavid court at Tabriz in 1544. While there, he invited Mir Musavvir to join his entourage, according to Qadi Ahmad, "but his son, Mir Sayyid'Ali, was more ardent than the father" and hearing of the emperor's interest "rushed off to India, leaving his father to follow." Mir-Sayyid'Ali's Young Writer (no. 74) and his Mir Musavvir Offers a Petition (no. 81) represent this extension of Safavid art at the Mughal court, as does a portrait of Shah Abul'Ma'ali (no. 75) by Dust-Muhammad, who went uninvited to the Mughal court, apparently to escape Shah Tahmasp's prohibition of wine.

Shah Tahmasp's fickleness towards painting also set in motion an extraordinary chapter of Safavid art. In the very year of the "Sincere Repentance" that ended patronage at his own court, he appointed Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, son of Bahram Mirza, to the governorship of Mashhad. Much admired by the Shah, this nephew was as keen a patron of painting and calligraphy as his uncle had been. When patronage ended at the court of Tabriz, it flourished at Mashhad. In 1556, another major Safavid manuscript was begun for Ibrahim at his capital, a Haft Awrang ("The Seven Thrones") of Maulana Nurud-din Abdu'r-Rahman Jami, the mystical poet who had lived from 1414 to 1492. Despite the lack of signatures, the twenty-eight miniatures of this manuscript, now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, can be attributed to several of the leading court painters. Although by this time Sultan-Muhammad had died and Dust-Muhammad, Mir Musavvir, 'Abd us-Samad, and Mir Sayyid'Ali had joined the Mughal court, Aqa-Mirak, Mirza'Ali, and Muzzaffar'Ali provided pictures for young Sultan Ibrahim's excitingly inventive undertaking. Among its miniatures, we recognize examples by Qadiini, one of the rowdier spirits of the Book of Kings (see nos. 17 and 33), whose style had now assumed his notion of courtly grace, as in Horseman and Groom (no. 79). 'Abd ul-'Aziz followed a similar course, after having been omitted from the roster of talent for the Quintet, possible on behavioral rather than artistic grounds.
considered hazardous, however, as it also provided a moose whereby Satan ensnared mystics. Considering that Shaykh-Muhammad’s father was a leading Sufi as well as a famed calligrapher, this interpretation of his son’s picture is fully justified.

In compensation for the impossibility of borrowing the Freer Jami, this exhibition includes two portraits by Shaykh-Muhammad which represent his style during the early period of the volume, _Kneeling Youth Reading_ and _An Amin Seated Beneath a Tree_ (nos. 70 and 77).

_Majnu Eaversops on Layla’s Camp_, another picture for the Jami by the same artist, might have outraged the repentant Shah (folio 25 verso, fig. 10). Instilled with the bodily rather than cerebral energy of lower culture, this miniature recalls the vitality and spatial illogic of Sultan-Muhammad’s early masterpiece, _Rustam Sleeping_ (no. 2), with a few major differences. Powerful forms were coming together implosively in the latter, whereas those, in the former seem to be exploding in every direction. Further characteristics, which caused a friend to comment on the Jami’s “evil style,” are apparent in the twisted humor of the people and animals, though these could also be read as Sufi metaphors. Excess and dissonance increased in Shaykh-Muhammad’s paintings, spurred on by his almost demonic patron. His _Piquing Amir of Bukhara_ (no. 80), with its ambiguous characterization, burningly peculiar colors built up over an inky ground, and writhingly organic forms, represents the artist’s style during the later years of the _Haft Awrang_.

Even Mirza-’Ali, whose refined courtliness of style enhanced the _Quintet_ (see nos. 54 and 99), fell under Ibrahim’s spell in his miniatures for the Freer manuscript. Sulaman and
breaths of another. Their trembling liveliness looks forward to the powerful draftsmanship of Shaykh-Muhammad’s artistic heir, Aqa-Riza, later known, after his mighty patron Shah Abass (r. 1587–1629) as Riza ‘Abbasi.

Happily, our exhibition ends not with Shaykh-Muhammad’s disturbingly ambiguous drawing but with a double-page Hawking Party (no. 85) shared between The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It can be dated to a final creative spurt a few years before Shah Tahmasp’s death in 1576, when he again became interested in painting. The Shah forgave many of those who had suffered from his puritanical attitudes, and he and Sultan Ibrahim Mirza together encouraged artists. The Hawking Party seems to have been the frontispiece to a final great early Safavid manuscript, one now lost. By this festive scene, Mirza ‘Ali must have gladdened both uncle and nephew, for it contains elements sufficiently classic for the Shah combined with the intense “baroque” mannerisms encouraged by Sultan Ibrahim.


2. For the most complete study of Timurid painting see Ivan V. Shtoukine, Les Peintures des manuscrits timourides (Paris: Institut Francais d’archeologie de Beyrouth, 1959).


4. The Temptation of Wine, attributable to Bihzad. Fogg Art Museum, Gift—Philip Hofer in honor of Stuart Cary Welch, 1972.339 verso (8.5 x 5.5 cm., drawing only).


9. Three further miniatures from this manuscript are now in the Keir Collection. One of Turkman date, the others of the Safavid group, of which The Ascension of the Prophet is dated the equivalent of 1552/53. These were identified and published by B. W. Robinson. See B. W. Robinson, Ernst J. Grube, G. M. Meredith Owens, R. W. Skelton, and Ivan Shtoukine, The Keir Collection: Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1996).
10. The text and 113 of the original 159 miniatures from this manuscript are in the Museum of Decorative Arts, Tehran (no. 7379). For further information on this important manuscript see Yahyā Zadkā, "The Khwarazmnamah: The Illustrated Copy in the Museum of Decorative Arts," Iran 29 (1991): 20-37. See also Martin Bernard Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch, The Huntton Shahnama (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, in press), especially Chapter 2 (with notes 7 and 8). The battle scene was formerly on the London art market.

11. This manuscript is in the State Public Library, Leningrad, Dorn 441, Ardibil Collection. For further information see O. F. Akinshkin and A. A. Ivanov, Persiatskie miniatury XIV—XVII vv. (Moscow: Nauka, 1968). See also Dickson and Welch, The Huntton Shahnama, especially Chapter 4 (with note 15).

12. See Dickson and Welch, The Huntton Shahnama; and Stuart Cary Welch, A King's Book of Kings: The Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972) fig. 11. A diverting caricature of members of the royal household staff, by their employer.

13. Folio 26 verso, after Akinshkin and Ivanov, Persiatskie miniatury, pl. 31.

14. Regrettably, we were unable to borrow Mirza-'All's most ambitious and characteristic miniature for the Book of Kings, 'Nasrinwan Receives an Embassy from the King of Hind,' folio 638 recto. For reproductions see Welch, A King's Book of Kings, pp. 180-183.

15. No. 36.2. We are grateful to the Freer Gallery of Art, and particularly to its curator of Islamic Art, Dr. Esin Atik, for permission to publish three miniatures from this major manuscript. For a discussion of all the miniatures in this volume, see Dickson and Welch, The Huntton Shahnama; for color reproductions see Stuart Cary Welch, Persian Painting: Five Royal Safavid Manuscripts of the Sixteenth Century (New York: Braziller, 1970) pls. 34-48.


Text completed by the scribe Sultan ‘Ali of Qayin at Herat in 1502/03.

110 folios; 34 miniatures (2 dated 1503/04)

Folios measure 370 x 170 mm.

Lent by the University Library of Uppsala (O Nova 2)

Although this manuscript was copied at Herat, which remained the Timurid capital until 1507, its miniatures include the earliest dated Safavid pictures we know that have remained in their manuscript. Only the first picture (The Sultan in his Divan, folio 2 verso) lacks the Safavid headgear, although it differs little stylistically from the others except in its calmness of treatment. In all likelihood, the manuscript and its artists changed hands after the completion of the first illustration. History supports this possibility inasmuch as the sons of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the last Timurid Sultan, were pitted against him in annual civil wars. One of them, Muhammad-Husayn, cooperated with the Safavids and joined Shah Isma‘il in Mazandaran in 1504, at which time he could have brought not only the unfinished manuscript but also its artists to Shah Isma‘il. Virtually all of the later pictures, including Dindar Gives Advice (folio 5 recto), are charged with Shah Isma‘il’s visionary fire. This, along with the Safavid headgear, seen here in its earliest stumpy form, attest to the picture’s Safavid origin. Already, as can also be seen in a miniature dated within a year of the paintings in this manuscript and added to a Turkman Khamsa of Nizami, the Safavid style was vigorously individual, reflecting Shah Isma‘il’s dynamism and strong direction. We assign the Safavid illustrations of the Jamāl u Jalāl to Sultan-Muhammad and members of his workshop who had already adjusted to their new patron’s taste for Turkman vegetation, ornament and extremism. Miniatures such as the Battle (folio 26v, fig. 6), however, hark back to the sub-royal idiom known from the late fifteenth-century copy of the Khwarizmshah of Muhammad ibn Husain (fig. 7).

OPPOSITE PAGE: Dindar Gives Advice, no. 1, folio 5 recto.


34 • Asafi’s Jamāl u Jalāl
2. Rustam Sleeping While Rakhsh Fights the Lion

From a book of kings apparently commissioned by Shah Isma'il Attributable to Sultan-Muhammad

Ca. 1515-22
318 x 268 mm.

By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum (1948.12.11.023)

The rash young Shah, Kay Ka'us, initiated a mission to destroy the divs of Mazandaran which resulted in his being taken captive. To rescue him Rustam set out on the shorter but more dangerous route to Mazandaran. The hero pressed forward until fatigue overtook him and then lay down to sleep in a pasture. Unbeknownst to him, Rustam had chosen the lair of a ferocious lion as his temporary bed. While he slept, the lion returned and attacked Rakhsh, who dug his teeth into the lion's back and trampled him to death. Awakened by the commotion, Rustam chided Rakhsh for so risking his life after which the two returned to their naps. S. R.C.

This thrilling miniature exemplifies Shah Isma'il’s visionary taste during the later years of his reign, when Prince Tahmasp served as nominal governor of Herat. Vivid in coloring, expressive rather than naturalistic in the drawing of Buzumad, the horse, and the lion, and alive with hidden animal-spirits peeping from rocks and tree trunks, its style emerged naturally from the Jamali Jalali pictures. By now, however, the impact of Shah Isma'il’s patronage and of the Turkenian metropolitan tradition is even more apparent.

Intriguingly, Sultan-Muhammad’s earlier pictures for Shah Tahmasp’s book of Kings (see nos. 9 and 10) are strikingly similar in style to the Sleeping Rustam. Indeed, Hushang Slays the Black Dog (no. 9), with all its indebtednesses to the Khwarazmian and Jamali Jalali, might well be from the same manuscript. It seems likely, therefore, that the Sleeping Rustam and its unfinished companion pictures were intended for a great manuscript in preparation for Shah Isma’il—a manuscript that he later gave to, or shared with, Tahmasp, on the prince’s return from Herat in 1522, and which later gained renown as the great Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp.

1. See Philipp Walter Schultz, Die persisch-islamische Miniaturmalerei: ein Beitrag zur Kunstgeschichte Iran (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1914) Vol. II, pls. 47, 48, 49. These pictures are consistent in size with those of the Houghton manuscript.

36 - Separate miniature
The Houghton Shahnama

The Shahnama ("Book of Kings"), the Iranian national epic, was begun by Daqiqi, who composed a few thousand lines before his untimely death, and completed by Abu'l Qasim Firdawsi of Tus in over 50,000 rhyming couplets in 1010 A.D. This copy, known as "The Houghton Shahnama," belonged to Shah Tahmasp, whose titles appear in several places, including the opening rosette (folio 16 recto, no. 5). Although the manuscript contains no colophon, one of the miniatures (folio 516 verso, no. 30) is dated 934 A.H. / 1527/28 A.D., but the project seems to have been in progress from c. 1522, or earlier, until c. 1536, after which two of its two hundred and fifty-eight miniatures were added (between 1535 and 1550, see nos. 27 and 31). No scribe's name is given and only two of the miniatures are signed: folio 60 verso by Mir Musa'vand, and folio 521 verso by dust-Muhammad (no. 31). The others can be attributed on stylistic grounds to the Tabriz court artists: Sultan-Muhammad, Mir Musa'vand, Aqa-Mirak, Dust-Muhammad, Mirza'Ali, Muzaffar'Ali, Shaykh-Muhammad, Mir Sarsar'Ali, 'Abd us-Samad, Qasimi, Qasimi, son of 'Ali (?), 'Abd ul-Vahhab, 'Abd ul-'Aziz (?), Bashdan Qura (?) and Mirza Muhammad (?). When complete, the manuscript contained 380 folios, each measuring about 470 by 318 mm.; text areas, inside marginal rulings, average 269 by 170 mm. (Measurements given for individual miniatures are taken at maximum points of the painted surface.)

This manuscript was presented by Shah Tahmasp in 1588 to Sultan Selim II, and it remained in the Ottoman Library at least until 1801, when Memned 'Arif, "Keeper of the Guns" at the Palace Treasury, finished writing synopses of the subjects on the protective pages of the miniatures. By 1903, it was in the collection of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, one of whose descendants sold it in 1959 to Arthur A. Houghton, Jr. Mr. Houghton subsequently presented 78 of its miniatures to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Others now belong to the Museum for Islamic Art, Düböl, and to several private collectors.1

3. Double Page Frontispiece to the Baysunghur Introduction

From Shah Tahmāsp’s Book of Kings, folios 2 verso and 3 recto

Ca. 1520–35

470 x 318 mm. (each folio)

Lent by Arthur A. Houghton, Jr.

Like a sumptuous and majestic carpet stretched out to welcome those fortunate enough to view this royal manuscript, the double page ‘awān represents the sustained efforts of at least two important but anonymous masters: the calligrapher, who may have been Māh- mad of Nīshapūr, who later copied the British Library Quintet (nos. 48–65), and the illuminator. In Iran, fine writing, in this case in nasta’liq script, was at least as much admired as painting; and the masters of illumination, whose floral arabesques, richly colored margins, and elegantly proportioned fields of lapis lazuli here set the austere splendor mood for one of Iran’s noblest manuscripts, were also revered. The Introduction to this as well as many other copies of the Shahnama was composed in the early fifteenth century for Prince Baysunghur, another major Persianate bibliophile.6

OPPOSITE PAGE: NO. 3, FOLIO 2 VERSO.


2. His superb and lavishly illustrated copy of the Book of Kings is in the Imperial Library of Iran. A facsimile edition was published in connection with the celebration of the 2500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great. See: The Shahnama of Firdawsi, The Baysunghuri Manuscript: An Album of Miniatures and Illuminations, Completed in 833/ 1430 and Preserved in the Imperial Library, Tehran (Tehran, 1971).

40 - Book of Kings of Firdawsi
4. Firdawsī Encounters the Court Poets of Ghānūs

From Shah Tahmāsp’s Book of Kings, folio 7 recto
Attributable to Aqa-Mirak

Ca. 1532
207 x 232 mm. (miniature only)
Private Collection

Seeking patronage for the completion of his Book of Kings, Firdawsī went to Ghānūs, the capital of Sultan Mahmūd, who—by happy coincidence—wished to employ the most talented poet of the era to compose an epic on the pre-Muslim kings of Iran. Upon his arrival, Firdawsī chanced upon three of Sultan Mahmūd’s court poets picnicking in a garden. Considering him a boorish outsider, and, when they learned he was a poet, a possible rival besides, they challenged him to add the last line to an extremely difficult quatrain. His solution was so brilliant that they reluctantly accepted him. In due course, Firdawsī also impressed the Sultan, who granted him the commission. 8 r. c.

According to Dūst-Muhīammad, Aqa-Mirak was among those “privileged to approach” the person of the Shah. Furthermore, “At the House of Painting he but picks up his brush and depicts for us pictures of unparalleled delight. . . . Good Lord! The Glory of this painter! What God-given Might!” Considering this lavish praise from a fellow artist who was also one of the inner circle, it is not surprising that Aqa-Mirak was honored by being assigned the task of painting the first picture in the Shah’s Book of Kings, Firdawsī Encounters the Court Poets of Ghānūs.1 Apparently he reciprocated by including a portrait of the Shah himself, the elegant young man surveying the scene at the far right, as the first figure among the thousands who appear in the royal manuscript. The style of the picture and the age of the young man, if we are correct in the identification, point to about the year 1532, when Shah Tahmāsp was eighteen and still beardless. The same royal countenance, somewhat older, was painted by Aqa-Mirak as Khusraw in the Shah’s Quintet (nos. 56 and 58).

OPPOSITE PAGE: Detail of no. 4. Illustration of the complete miniature, frontispiece.

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1. For color plates of this miniature and 16 others from Shah Tahmāsp’s Book of Kings, see Dickson and Welch, The Houghton Shahnameh. Also see Stuart Cary Welch, A King’s Book of Kings: The Shahnameh of Shah Tahmāsp (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972) pp. 80, 83.

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5. Rosette

From Shah Tahmasp’s Book of Kings, folio 16 recto
Ca. 1535
470 x 318 mm.
Lent by Arthur A. Houghton, Jr.

This sunburst of ornament, probably by the same illuminator as the double-page frontispiece, is inscribed in white nasta’liq with very much the same formulaic titles found on a miniature in Shah Tahmasp’s Quintet (see no. 57, folio 60 verso). It was placed following the Baysunghar Introduction, but before Firdawsī’s opening verses (which are also sumptuously illuminated), on the verso side of the same folio (no. 6).¹

Inscribed

upper cartouche
In His Name, the Most Praised and Most Exalted!

within rosette
Commissioned for the Library of the most mighty Sultan, and the most beneficent [Grand Khan], Khaqan, Sultan, son and grandson of sultans, [The Victorious]. Abu’l-Muqaffar, Sultan Shah Tahmasp, of Huseyni and Safavi descent [The Victorious] Bahadur Khan. May God the Most Exalted, perpetuate his realm and his rule, and diffuse . . . .

lower cartouche
. . . . his justice and his benevolence throughout the world!

¹. For a color reproduction, see Welch, A King’s Book of Kings, p. 78.
6. Opening Verses: In Praise of God and the Intellect

From Shah Tahmasp’s Book of Kings, folio 16 verso

Ca. 1535
470 x 318 mm.
Lent by Arthur A. Houghton, Jr.

The Shahnama opens thus: In the name of the Lord-creator of the Soul and the Intellect and is followed by a eulogy of the Universal Intelligence and the Universal Soul. These noble lines were enriched by the most inventive illumination in the volume, a sunrise of arabesque with flowering tendrils and cloud bands mounted over a running panel of similar motifs enlivened with animal masks and grotesques. This configuration is supported by three intercolumnar bands, such as are occasionally found on other pages of the manuscript.

Inscribed
in upper cartouche
The Beginning of the Book, the Shahnama

in lower cartouche
Chapter in Praise of the Intellect