

PERSIAN MINIATURES



A PICTURE BOOK
THE METROPOL-
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OF ART
NEW YORK
1940



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THE beginnings of Islamic book illustration in Persia, or Iran as the country is officially called today, are still very little known, since no actual examples have been preserved that can be authoritatively dated earlier than the end of the thirteenth century. Fragments of miniatures from Manichaean books of about the ninth century, found at Khocho in Chinese Turkestan, give us some idea of Iranian painting of this period, and twelfth- and thirteenth-century ceramics with polychrome overglaze decoration, found chiefly in Rayy (Rhages), illustrate the miniature style of the Saljuk period. Although the figure subjects of these ceramics are related to contemporary paintings of the school of Baghdad, in Mesopotamia, they show many features which are distinctly Iranian.

The earliest known Iranian manuscript is the copy of Ibn Bakhtishu's *Manafi al-Hayawan*, or "Description of Animals," now in the Pierpont Morgan Library. It was written and illustrated between 1295 and 1300 in Maragha, at the order of the Mongol ruler Ghazan Khan. Some of the miniatures are painted in the traditional style of the Baghdad school, which continued in use for some time after the Mongol conquest. But the majority, especially those with landscapes, are executed in a summary, impressionistic style with little color, in imitation of Chinese monochrome ink paintings of the Sung and Yüan dynasties. The Metropolitan Museum owns a leaf (fig. 1) from another *Manafi* which shows two eagles in a mountainous landscape with plants and blossoms of Chinese origin. The birds and animals are painted in subdued colors but in bolder style than the Morgan copy, suggesting a slightly later period—that is, the beginning of the fourteenth century.

The Mongol rulers encouraged their court painters to illustrate Iranian poems, especially the *Shah-nama*, or "Book

of Kings," composed in 1010 by the celebrated Firdausi. One of the earliest copies, known as the Demotte *Shah-nama*, was probably executed at Tabriz about 1320. The illustrations, which show several hands, are unusually large and must be ranked among the great masterpieces of painting. In most of them Iranian and Chinese elements appear side by side; in a few, as in the funeral of Isfandyar (fig. 2), the Chinese monochrome style predominates. The mourners (figs. 3, 4), representing types of Iranians and Mongols, are painted with remarkable realism.

To the Mongol period belong several small *Shah-namas* with finely executed illustrations based on Saljuk traditions. The figures are Mongol, but Chinese influence, seen mostly in landscapes and costumes, is less conspicuous than in the Demotte *Shah-nama*. Six miniatures (see fig. 5) from a small manuscript of about 1340, in the Metropolitan Museum, show this true miniature style at its best.

One of the most popular books of the early fourteenth century was the *Jami at-Tawarikh*, or "Universal History," written by the Mongol court historian Rashid ad-Din. The most famous copies, executed in his lifetime, are the Edinburgh University manuscript of 1307 and the Royal Asiatic Society copy of 1314. From a manuscript in the Top Kapu Seray Library at Istanbul comes an unusually large double-page painting in our collection representing Jonah Cast up by the Whale (fig. 6). Painted in vivid colors which anticipate those of the Timurid period, it may be assigned to the end of the fourteenth century. It shows a mixture of Chinese and Iranian elements. For the whale, the Persian artist substituted a Chinese carp, placing him in water stylized in Iranian fashion and bordered by a Chinese landscape.

The national Iranian style of miniature-painting reached its height in the fifteenth century under the Timurids, the

followers of Tamerlane. Shiraz was probably the cradle of this new style; but Herat, where Shah Rukh and his son Baisunkur Mirza established libraries and academies, became the great center of the arts of the book. The court artists continued to copy and illustrate Firdausi's *Shah-nama* but were now more interested in the poems of Nizami and Sadi. In illustrating these works Herat painters developed a style expressive of their romantic and lyrical content. The figures were placed in decorative landscapes and were more delicately rendered than heretofore. The Mongol and Chinese elements were still apparent but more stylized than in the fourteenth century, as may be seen in two miniatures from a *Shah-nama* of about 1436 (figs. 7, 8). A miniature from a manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsa* ("Quintet") of 1447, representing Khusrau watching Shirin bathing in a pool (fig. 9), is a fine example of the developed Timurid style.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, a different school of Timurid painting (see fig. 12) flourished at Tabriz, in Western Iran. The style is represented in this Museum by the miniatures of a *Diwan*, a collection of mystic and lyric poems by the celebrated fifteenth-century poet Jami, copied by the calligrapher Abd al-Karim, who worked at the court of Jehan Shah of the Black Sheep Turkomans.

One of the most famous Iranian painters of the late fifteenth century was Bihzad, the "Marvel of the Age," who worked for the Timurid court at Herat. Bihzad's mature style appears chiefly in two manuscripts, the Cairo manuscript of Sadi's *Bustan* ("Fruit Garden"), copied in 1488, and the British Museum's Nizami of 1442, the miniatures of which were executed in 1493. The Metropolitan Museum possesses a fine miniature (fig. 10) from a copy of Jami's *Diwan*, which shows all the distinctive qualities of Bihzad's painting. The composition, the lively action, the in-

dividuality of the figures (see fig. 11), and the harmonious color schemes are characteristic of this master.

When Herat was taken by the Safavids in 1510, Bihzad moved to Tabriz, the capital of the new dynasty. Some of his pupils, however, remained in Herat and the city kept its artistic importance for some time. One of the most famous books copied there in the early sixteenth century is a manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsa* in our collection, written in 1525. The fifteen superb illustrations (see figs. 13-15) reveal the technical skill, brilliant colors, and love of minute ornamental details characteristic of the Safavid period.

About 1535, when Herat was taken by the Uzbek Shai-banids, many artists of the Herat school transferred their activities to Bukhara, where they carried on the traditions of Bihzad's painting. The miniature illustrated in figure 17 is typical of the Bukhara school.

The Tabriz school reached its height under Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576). Mirak, a pupil of Bihzad, and Sultan Muhammad were among the best-known masters. Miniatures by the latter show the sophisticated figures and highly refined style (see fig. 16) of Safavid court artists. A famous painter of the second half of the sixteenth century was Ustad Muhammadi, probably a son and pupil of Sultan Muhammad, whose style was more realistic than that of the other Tabriz artists. To him may be attributed a hunting scene in this Museum (fig. 18), in which the figures are individualized in Muhammadi's characteristic manner (see fig. 19).

The last great painter of Iran was Riza-i-Abbasi, who worked at Isfahan, the new capital established by Shah Abbas (1587-1628). In his genre scenes and portraits of old men (see fig. 20) this artist reveals a close observation of nature. His original, calligraphic manner was imitated by a number of his followers.

M. S. DIMAND.

ببینت و در روزی که به پیشش همه خایه تند و سینه جی در بالاد و یک را بیدارند و موغی می شن



استخوان شکل او را برده اند و در آن کوزه ها می کشند و آب می کشند و در آن کوزه ها می کشند و آب می کشند

1. Leaf from a manuscript of the *Manafi al-Hayawan* ("Description of Animals"), Mongol period, about 1300

مردان با سوز خود و حسان شیرین تر از شیرین خوش	صفا بر لبه وان سحر خیزان حق بر لبه حسان سدان شب	برند در قند در لبه ساد بگشتن آب آه تمدن داه	برآمدن تان بدان جا کاه لگون شد شریاح کسان شاه	نشه زفت و مفسد از او عاید همه سانه ز خاک زینور	مژگان می چون دلبر خاک اندر آمد سر و غمش	
روزی ز کس را توان بر آرد ز کس کسان کلای کس	جان شد ز کس نام اشقذ آرد لگون تو خرید رمان آورد	او زین تا وقت آمد قه ایام			بلوان روزی که زفت آکن سود ز کس از سر خنده ار	یکداخت مریک کلاه می سار خود بر کز کزان خزار



شیرین و با او و کس زین کس از آن گرفتند	جها ز می داشت زیاده فرز کس آواج می ز می	زین کس از آن گرفتند زین کس از آن گرفتند	زین کس از آن گرفتند زین کس از آن گرفتند	زین کس از آن گرفتند زین کس از آن گرفتند	زین کس از آن گرفتند زین کس از آن گرفتند
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2. The funeral of Isfandyar, from a manuscript of the *Shah-nama* ("Book of Kings"), Mongol period, early XIV century



3. Detail of figure 2



4. Detail of figure 2

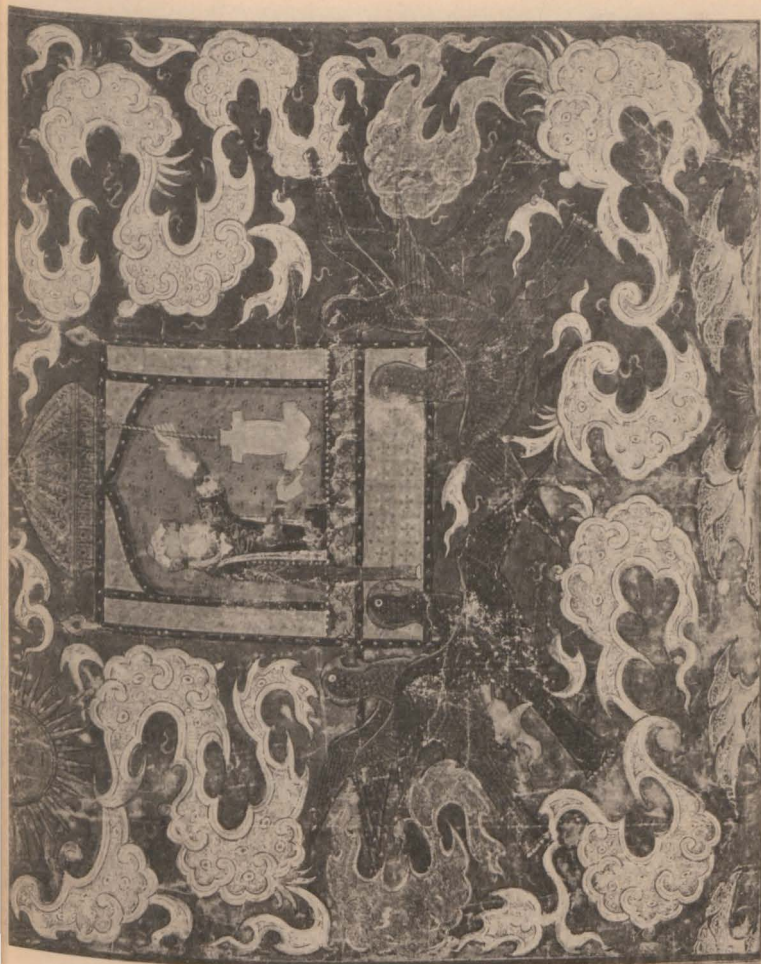
نورشده رخسار شاه
 صغی که در خشم و کرمی نگاه
 عوف و نه خنده گفت بر او
 می بر او گذارند شعله کلاه
 همان روز در رخ نورانی
 کابل مال آن جهان آمد
 هجرتی که خراج از پادشاه
 همه دستهای خسته شدند
 نشان نشسته زبلان افغان
 همان خون میان او گذارند
 بشنیدند در روزان خنده خورشید
 باران امانی که گفتند خورشید
 رهزنی که پست و پاره کرد مال
 مویز و خنک گفت مال را
 حتی خنک و کوه سپهر
 هر دو که شد شمشیر
 نهاده پیش از هر چه پست
 شمشیرها را در میان کار
 همانا خنک و در در گوشت
 جان بود نگاه مدینه
 از آن شمشیر هرگز نبرد
 ندانند بود یک خورشید
 کرد آن را او شمشیر بدست
 بدو گفتند بود که تو شمشیر
 کون گشتی شمشیر کوهی
 همه آن سخن گفتند که
 کرد و در پیش شمشیر
 هم شدند از سر و پای
 در آن روز شمشیر لوی
 بر او گویند بود آن شاه پوری



5. Dahhak and his priests, from a manuscript of the *Shah-nama* ("Book of Kings"), Mongol period, about 1340



6. Jonah Cast up by the Whale, from a manuscript of the *Jami at-Tawarikh* ("Universal History"), end of the XIV century



7. Kai Kaus attempts to fly to heaven, from a manuscript of the *Shah-nama* ("Book of Kings"), Timurid period, about 1436



8. Rustam lifts Afrasiab from the saddle, from the same manuscript as figure

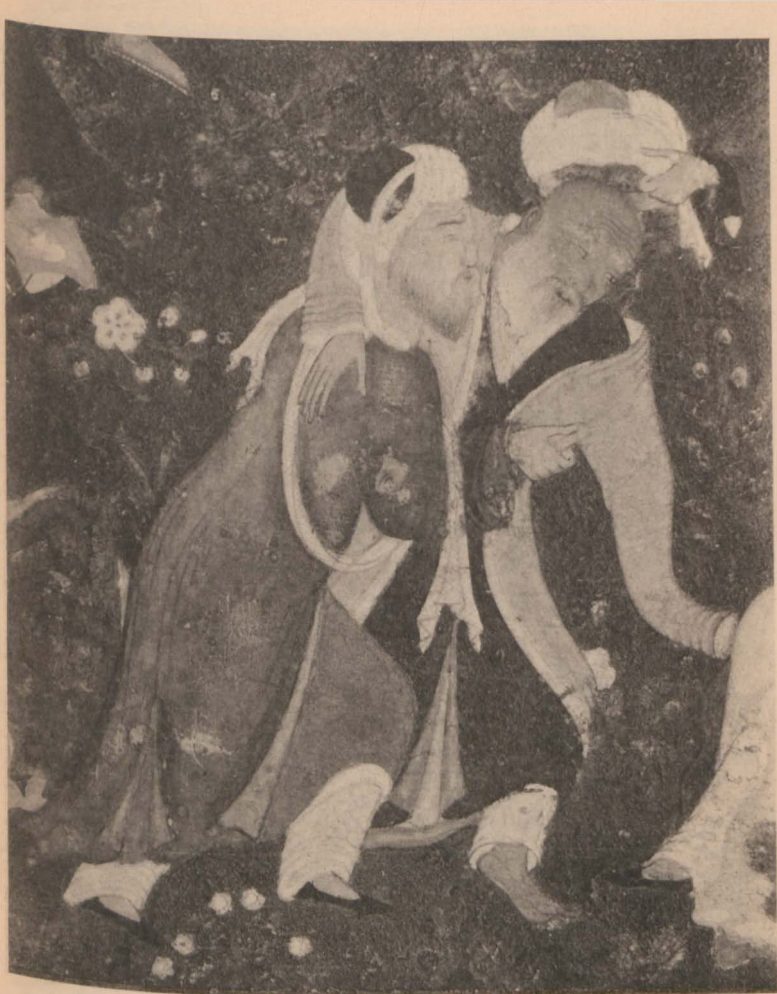
سَهْ اَز دِيَا رَا سِلُو دِي كَلْتَهْ	شَهْ يَزِي شَيْعِي دِي اَلِي شَهْ	فَشَلَمَا زِي دِيَهْ بِال اَلِي نِي سِيَا كِي	بِي حِي اَلِي عَشَق دِي رِي حِي اَلِي
سَمْتَرُ عَاغَلِ اَز تِيَا رَا شَاهْ	كِرْسِي سَلِي سَبَهْ بَلِي كِرْسِي لَهْ	حِي وَا هْ اَمْدِرُو رَا اَز اَشِكِي	بَشَاهُ شَهْ دِلَمَا اَمِي سِي
هَمِي دِي بَلِي رِي شَهْ نَدُوِي	اَز اَلِي اَي حَلِي كِرْسِي هَرْ رِي	زِي شَهْ رِي حِي مِ اَز حِي مِهْ اَبْ	هَمِي كِرْسِي دِي حِي اَز حِي سِيَا



9. Khusrau gazing at Shirin, from a manuscript of the *Khamsa* ("Quintet"), Timurid period, 1447



10. Dancing dervishes, style of Bihzad, from a manuscript of a *Diwan* ("Collection of Poems"), Timurid period, end of the XV century



11. Detail of figure 10



12. Hunting scene, introductory page from a manuscript of a *Divan*
("Collection of Poems"), Timurid period, about 1480



13. Khusrau on his throne, from a manuscript of the *Khamasa* ("Quintet"), Safavid period, 1525



14. Laila and Majnun in school, from the same manuscript as figure 13



15. Detail of figure 14



16. The infant Zal presented to his father Sam, from a manuscript of the *Shah-nama* ("Book of Kings"), Safavid period, middle of the XVI century



17. King Darius and the herdsman, from a manuscript of a *Bustan* ("Fruit Garden"), school of Bukhara, middle of the XVI century



18. Hunting party, style of Ustad Muhammadi, Safavid period,
second half of the XVI century



19. Detail of figure 18



20. Portraits of a youth and an old man, by Riza-i-Abbasi, Safavid period, beginning of the XVII century

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