



ART IN IRAN IX. SAFAVID TO QAJAR PERIODS

ART IN IRAN, History of

ix. Safavid to Qajar Periods

The unity of Safavid art. The arts of the Safavid period show a far more unitary development than in any other period of Iranian art. This characteristic is due not simply to the political domination of one family but also to the steady move toward a centralized autocracy supported by a skilled bureaucracy in a single city; it is this political evolution that broke down feudal powers, united Iran as a single cultural entity, and replaced the several provincial styles of the 9th/15th century with a uniform art emanating from the capital. Within this course of development three definite chronological divisions can be distinguished.

In the first period, from the beginning of the reign of Esmā'īl I to the end of the reign of Moḥammad Ḳodābanda (907-96/1501-87), centrifugal forces were still strong. Under a distinguished patron such as Ṭahmāsp a lavish and refined court style developed but did not exclude provincial centers, such as Shiraz, which continued to produce manuscripts of lesser quality throughout the 10th/16th century. Shah Esmā'īl I, Shah Ṭahmāsp, and Shah Esmā'īl II can all be typified as princely esthetes akin to the Timurid prince Bāysonḡor and the Mughal emperor Bābor. Under the particular aegis of Shah Ṭahmāsp, court



artists created a brilliant synthesis of Iran's various styles; nonetheless it remained a court rather than a national style.

The reign of 'Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629) encompasses the second period, in which governmental centralization not only provided the ruler with more far-reaching and extensive power than ever before in Iran's Islamic history but also concentrated potential patrons in the capital city of Isfahan. While new classes emerged as patrons, Iran's provinces lost virtually all their political and cultural autonomy. State workshops for arts of especial economic importance further imposed unitary styles so that art emanating from Isfahan (or Mašhad or Kermān) was coterminous with Iranian national art.

In the third period, from the accession of Shah Šafī to the death of Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn (1038-1134/1629-1722) the styles established during Shah 'Abbās's reign were perpetuated, and new elements further developed. Increased naturalism, portraiture, and realism coexisted with traditional Iranian idealism and studied elegance and grace. Monarchs, as well as lesser patrons, exhibited eclectic taste for foreign arts that were now less readily synthesized than before, and as in economics and politics, Iran was less sequestered from other cultures than it had been.

Safavid, pre-Safavid, and foreign art. As the Safavid order actively pursued the creation of a unified nation-state in Iran by bringing together disparate and formerly feuding elements, so, too, Safavid art emerged out of several previously distinct strands. Most important were those roughly corresponding to the historical division of Iran between its eastern and western halves; in the later 9th/15th century these were controlled respectively by the Timurids from Herat and the Turkmans from Tabrīz. Whether in architecture, calligraphy, or the figural arts, it was the blending and synthesizing of these two cultural traditions that was essential to the creation of Safavid art.

By the middle of the 10th/16th century the arts of Safavid Iran had already begun to exert considerable impact upon its neighbors. To Mughal and Deccani India the appeal of Safavid architecture, textiles, calligraphy, and painting was enormous, and large numbers of skilled Iranians emigrated to India to serve patrons there. But Safavid Iran also exerted a noticeable effect upon its chief rival, the Ottoman empire, although this impact is chiefly recognizable in calligraphy and painting.

Beyond these neighboring states Iran's cultural influence was less impressive,



and it did not exert the same attractive force for Europeans as did Mughal India or Ming China. Yet it is likely that Safavid fashions in clothing and in garden architecture, transmitted by way of European printed travel books, were important influence on 11th/17th-century culture in Europe.

Safavid art and religion. During the Safavid period orthodox Islam's official abhorrence of figural imagery was challenged on a theoretical and a practical level. Three important figures in Safavid art history—Dūst Moḥammad, a painter and calligrapher under Shah Ṭahmāsp; Šādeqī Beg, a painter and poet under Shah 'Abbās I; and Qāzī Aḥmad, a historian working under the same monarch—argued at length that figural painting is an art to be esteemed as highly as calligraphy and that this attitude is indeed sanctioned by the faith, since 'Alī was a painter and a calligrapher. This new theory did not occasion an increased production of figural imagery in the period; it merely sought to justify what was already there. But it does perhaps account for the more frequent illustration of certain, ostensibly religious subject matter, whether in the mystical works of poets like Neẓāmī and Jāmī or in the considerable number of hagiographies produced in the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries.

Artist and patron. The role of royal patron was of central importance in Safavid architecture and the arts. While this patronage was sometimes unsteady, the royal court set both taste and direction of the arts. There was scant commissioning of portable arts by members of the Shi'ite religious establishment, and the shah had the financial and governmental power to attract Iran's leading artists to his court. Several masters who began their careers working for leading aristocrats were unceremoniously commandeered by the shah when the range of their abilities became well known. An extensive system of artistic interconnections, established either through master-pupil relationships or through carefully fostered family ties, also helped to ensure that a well-trained and talented artist would receive an appointment at court, if the shah was a committed patron. Safavid rulers tended to be indulgent toward their artists and tolerated conduct that would have been injurious to those in other professions.

Throughout the Safavid period there was a steady growth in artistic individuality. The anonymity that had characterized earlier Iranian art was largely abandoned architectural inscriptions were signed; manuscripts bore the names of painters and calligraphers and illuminators; textiles were provided with the names of their designers. Differences in individual styles also became more readily apparent, and originality became as prized a feature



as adherence to tradition. This altered attitude reflected not simply the artists' own sense of their own worth and the distinctiveness of their respective styles but also a new attitude on the part of their patrons, who regarded artistic identification as an important part of a work of art.

In the second century of Safavid rule other patrons of note emerged, not in the provinces but instead in the capital. Not simply aristocrats, but also merchants, officials, and professionals either bought or commissioned works of art, and the role of these new patrons significantly altered the types and content of Safavid painting and drawing in particular.

The esthetic basis of Safavid art. No artist or historian of the Safavid period presents a complete conceptual framework for the arts, and an understanding of the esthetics of this period must be derived from both literary documentation and visual evidence. Qāzī Aḥmad's *Calligraphers and Painters* makes a central distinction between the two *qalams* of art—the vegetable reed of the calligrapher and the animal brush of the painter. The reed was the first created thing, and since it is essential to the writing of the Qur'ān, it is the “key to the gates of happiness.” Fine writing then is akin to an act of worship, and the relationship in this art between the religious and the esthetic impulse is obviously close. The various styles of calligraphy are described, and central to the quality of each are clarity, balance, and elegance of form.

For the esthetics of painting the most complete statement is to be found in Šādeqī Beg's *Qānūn al-šowar* (Canon of paintings). Much of the treatise is concerned with technical data of painting, but some more general esthetic concepts emerge. Šādeqī differentiates decorative painting (*naqqāšī*) from figural painting (*šūratgarī*). The former is limited to inanimate subjects, especially floral and vegetal patterns used in illuminated margins, and the practitioner of this art should base his designs on the valued works of his predecessors. In the latter the painter is dealing with animate subjects, whether animals or human beings. In order to render animals properly, a painter should turn to model works from earlier traditions, especially Behzād. Up until this point, Šādeqī deems it both appropriate and necessary for a contemporary painter to look to the past. But in rendering human beings he makes a crucial distinction, which would appear to be central to the esthetics of later Safavid painting.

The portrayal of human beings should be based upon direct observation. The purpose of representing the appearance or outer form (*šūrat*) of a human



being is to reveal his or her inner reality or real nature (*ma'nā*). A likeness is therefore intended to lay bare what is intrinsically real about a person. The two terms, *ṣūrat* and *ma'nā*, are frequent in the language of Islamic mysticism and philosophy, and Ṣādeqī skillfully exploits the additional, artistic meaning of *ṣūrat* in order to supply a metaphysical basis for his profession. Ideally, original subject and painterly likeness should create the same response in a viewer, since both reveal the inner form.

The visual evidence of Safavid art also prompts certain conclusions concerning the esthetics of this culture, though these remarks deal more with our perception of it than with its philosophical underpinnings. Whether in paintings illustrating literary texts or in inscriptions bordering the portals of mosques and tombs, the Safavid artist sought linear grace and rhythmic continuity. Elegance of line, whether figural or calligraphic, was more important than solidity of image or legibility of epigraph. Similarly, surface values whether the sheen of a silk carpet, the luster glaze of a pot, or the reflective surface of a polished steel vessel were more esteemed than a sense of heavy substance. Inlaid gold was replaced by gilding, and figural images are rendered with attention to texture of clothing and flesh rather than volume. Within these canons idealized images coexist with those which appear more inclined toward naturalism, both perhaps views of the same inner reality of which Ṣādeqī speaks.

Early Safavid period (907-96/1501-87). According to literary accounts, the first Safavid ruler, Shah Esmā'īl I (907-30/1501-24), was an active builder, but few monuments survive to testify to his architectural patronage. Portal inscriptions on two extant monuments, the Harūn-e Welāyat tomb and the Masjed-e 'Alī in Isfahan, do indicate that the public proclamation of official Shi'ite doctrine was of central importance to the king. This kind of strident statement is rarely encountered in the portable arts of the Safavid period, which usually express milder, more mystical attitudes. Thus the articulation of Shi'ite Islam and the shah's special relationship to it, which is found in the inscriptions on a brass inkwell, likely made for Esmā'īl himself, is extremely uncommon. During the first Safavid century portable luxury artifacts are predominantly private arts that convey personal taste rather than official conviction.

The evidence for Esmā'īl's patronage of the precious manuscript is more extensive than for his activity as a builder. Like his contemporary Bābor in India, the young monarch had a developed appreciation for fine painting and



calligraphy, as well as for the classics of Iranian literature. But while the Mughal emperor's esthetic inclined toward the cerebral architectonics of the late-Timurid master Behzād, Esmā'īl's taste was for the more turbulent and emotional paintings and drawings done for the Āq Qoyunlū Turkmans of western Iran, where Esmā'īl had come of age. This continuity of taste can be demonstrated by a manuscript of fundamental importance. Begun under the Āq Qoyunlūs in Tabrīz in 1481, this *Kamsa* of Neẓāmī (Topkapi Palace Museum, H. 762) was incomplete when Esmā'īl took that city in 1501. The nine illustrations finished before the shah acquired the manuscript are among the finest creations of Turkman art: they show a natural setting far livelier and more colorful than in Behzād's work; this master's concern with psychological relationships and logical space and proportions is also largely absent. Much of this wilder ambience is visible in the natural and architectural settings of the ten pictures added to the manuscript about 911/1505 by Shah Esmā'īl's atelier, though faces have become rounder and figures somewhat stockier in this page attributed to Solṭān Moḥammad. The new shah had inherited the artists of the Turkmans.

Present research has not yet been able to define the later development of painting under Shah Esmā'īl. In 928/1522 the shah's heir, eight-year-old Prince Ṭahmāsp, was recalled to Tabrīz from Herat where he had been nominal governor since 922/1516. It is likely that the Herat master Behzād accompanied him, for this painter was appointed director of the royal library on 24 April 1522. The appointment must have been to Ṭahmāsp's liking: educated in Herat, he would presumably have identified correct painting with Behzād's style. A small roundel by Behzād in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., depicts a youth and old man and indicates that the aging master was still a powerful and imaginative painter. His immediate influence on the Tabrīz court artists is demonstrated by a small copy of 'Ārefī's *Gūy o Čowgān*, completed in 931/1524-25 and presented by Ṭahmāsp to his tutor, Qāẓī Jahān. The scribe was the young prince himself, and the paintings were done by the leading masters at the court, surely including both Behzād and Solṭān Moḥammad, who with consummate skill had accommodated himself to the controlled, Behzāadian art favored by Ṭahmāsp.

In the same year Ṭahmāsp became shah and despite his youth emerged as a patron of imagination and discernment. The next twenty years saw the production of a series of manuscripts that rank among the finest works of Iranian painting and calligraphy. Shortly after his accession he ordered the



creation of a royal *Šāh-nāma*, and the production of this great book of 759 pages and 258 paintings by the leading masters in the king's library was to continue for the next two decades. (This manuscript, to be referred to as the Shah Ṭahmāsp *Šāh-nāma*, was formerly in the Rothschild collection and is now dispersed in many locations.) Its pages necessarily reflect the development of painting during the early part of Ṭahmāsp's reign. The earliest pictures are still very much in the Tabrīz mode, and it has been ably argued that Solṭān Moḥammad was consciously trying to win the young shah over to less Behzāadian art. Apparently he succeeded, for paintings datable to about 933/1526-27 show the emergence of a synthesis of Behzāadian reason and Turkman energy and fantasy. In 951/1544 Dūst Moḥammad referred to Shah Ṭahmāsp's great *Šāh-nāma* and singled out Solṭān Moḥammad's rendering of the "Court of Gayūmart" for special praise; it was regarded as the zenith of Safavid painting, and "the hearts of the boldest of painters were grieved and they hung their heads in shame before it."

The process of producing a precious book was complex. The patron first chose a skilled master, usually a calligrapher though sometimes a painter, as the director of the project. Perhaps in consultation with the patron, the director would determine the size and quality of the desired manuscript and would then select the team of masters to produce it—paper-makers, calligraphers, painters, illuminators, and binders. Scenes to be illustrated had to be selected in advance so that the scribe could leave appropriate areas blank. A manuscript as large as the Shah Ṭahmāsp *Šāh-nāma* probably utilized the skills of several calligraphers; at least fifteen painters made major contributions to the book.

If this great *Šāh-nāma* occupied the attention of many masters for many years, it did not monopolize their time. Other, smaller manuscripts were also produced, three of them for Ṭahmāsp's brother Sām Mīrzā a *Kamsa* of Neẓāmī in 932/1525 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art); a *Dīvān* of Mīr 'Alī-Šīr Navā'ī in 933/1526 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale) and a *Dīvān* of Ḥāfeẓ in about 934/1527 (Cambridge, Mass., Fogg Art Museum), which contains brilliant, signed works by Šayḳzāda, a close follower of Behzād, and Solṭān Moḥammad.

The culmination of the shah's patronage is the 946-50/1539-43 *Kamsa* of Neẓāmī (London, British Museum). Entirely written by one of the greatest of Safavid calligraphers, Šāh Maḥmūd Nīšāpūrī, known as Zarīn-qalam (Golden pen) because of the splendor of his script, it was also illuminated and provided



with fourteen contemporary miniatures by the leading court painters—Solṭān Moḥammad, his son Mirzā ‘Alī, Āqā Mīrak, Mīr Sayyed ‘Alī (the son of Mīr Moṣawwer), and Moẓaffar ‘Alī. In its sustained elegance this manuscript must be considered the most perfect of Safavid precious books.

While these selected manuscripts represent the high points of Shah Ṭahmāsp’s favored art, they do not delineate it completely. Other books, less lavish but still fine, were produced for patrons at the royal court and in provincial centers of power, where a local aristocrat might commission manuscripts for his own library. Commercial workshops also existed, both in the capital and in other cities, notably Shiraz, where a number of ateliers were actively producing the many dozens of handsome books known to have originated there. Provincial centers of art, whether for book making or metal working or pottery, had existed in Iran from early Islamic times with recognizable regional identities. What distinguishes the Safavid period is that by the end of the 10th/16th century the cultural hegemony of the royal court was such that provincial centers of patronage either tended to disappear or to become stylistically indistinguishable from the capital.

Manuscript making was not the only activity open to painters and calligraphers. The former drew and painted single pages that were not intended for inclusion in literary texts but were rather designed for precious albums (*moraqqa*); these were not haphazard assemblages of valued works but carefully composed, harmonious entities. The increased attention to the single page and the *moraqqa* is one of the most significant developments of later Safavid art. Although paintings bearing artists’ names (sometimes signatures but far more often contemporary or later ascriptions by patrons, collectors, or librarians) are preserved from earlier times, it is in the late Timurid and Safavid periods that artists’ names abound. Artists and collectors seem to have been far more aware of individual differences of style; this heightened sense of artistic individuality is accompanied, around the mid-10th/16th century, by a more developed sense of artistic history. Dūst Moḥammad’s valuable 951/1544 account of the master at Ṭahmāsp’s court has already been noted; later painters, such as Šādeqī Beg, and historians, such as Qāẓī Aḥmad, composed similar records (and from such documents it is possible to reconstruct the careers of major Safavid masters).

The life of the scribe Šāh Maḥmūd Nīšāpūrī serves as a good example, illustrating the vicissitudes of a Safavid artist’s career. He was the nephew and pupil of Mawlānā ‘Abdī, a calligrapher, and was famed as the peer of the



earlier masters Solṭān ‘Alī and Mīr ‘Alī. While the great Shah Ṭahmāsp *Šāh-nāma* of about 931-51/1524-44 may very well be the work of his hand, he did sign the British Museum *Kamsa*, which he wrote between 946/1539 and 950/1543. At the peak of his power he lost his patron when Shah Ṭahmāsp turned away from painting and calligraphy and dismissed the members of his atelier, apparently without giving them any remuneration for their past services. Without grants of land or patronage or pension, Šāh Maḥmūd moved to Mašhad, where he supported himself for many years by writing architectural inscriptions, samples of calligraphy, and a few manuscripts for occasional patrons. When the shah’s nephew Ebrāhīm Mīrzā was appointed governor of Mašhad in 964/1556, he began the creation of a magnificent copy of Jāmī’s *Haft owrang* (Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art) and hired the aging scribe to write a major portion of it. It was his last endeavor: Šāh Maḥmūd died in 972/1564-65 and was buried in Mašhad beside Solṭān ‘Alī.

Ṭahmāsp’s devotion to the arts of the precious manuscript was almost single-minded; his patronage of other arts was much less intense. In pottery there occurred nothing like the great production of 10th/16th-century Ottoman Turkey, and while the few dated examples of early Safavid pottery indicate that figural style closely followed that of the court painters, the artistry of both potter and pottery painter was less fine. There is a similar shortage of dated metalwork, but examples in the Topkapi Palace Museum indicate that heavily bejeweled vessels were the fashion at court. Metal objects depicted in painting of the period appear to be less fine and more restricted in type than in earlier times.

Fine designers, some of them surely painters, were employed in the production of precious textiles (many of which are also represented in contemporary painting), their silk material enlivened with brilliant colors and figural iconography based on literary texts and traditions. The Ardabīl carpets are by common consent the finest carpets ever produced in Iran and were presumably presented by Shah Ṭahmāsp to the family shrine in Ardabīl. Other carpets, both in silk and wool, have richly figured scenes of hunts or delineate the forms of ideal gardens, a central metaphor of Iranian poetry. The finest examples preserve the classic Safavid symmetry of design the composition is divided into four identical quadrants, but individual elements, whether human, plant, or animal, are rendered with considerable naturalism.

Despite these important developments and his own key role in the history of Safavid painting, Shah Ṭahmāsp’s pursuit of esthetic gratification slackened.



Through reawakened formal piety or through more active attention to politics and government the thirty-year-old shah ceased to function as an effective patron and kept his distance from the court arts for the rest of his long reign. Some of his painters, such as Mīr Sayyed ‘Alī, left to join the court of the Mughal emperor Homāyūn. A few others moved west to work for the Ottomans or sought the support of provincial patrons.

Although the court style survived these unfortunate years, it was sustained in undiminished power by only one patron, Ṭahmāsp’s nephew Ebrāhīm Mīrzā, who, between 964/1556 and 973/1565 assembled an atelier of painters and calligraphers that was as impressive as what had existed under Ṭahmāsp. The 28 unsigned paintings of the Freer Gallery *Haft owrang* already mentioned in connection with Šāh Maḥmūd reflect an ethos somewhat removed from the controlled elegance of the 946-50/1539-43 *Ḳamsa*: figures are more attenuated, color combinations more daring, sensuality more overt, and humor even ribald. Its painters almost certainly included Mīrzā ‘Alī, the son of Solṭān Moḥammad; Moḡaffar ‘Alī, the grandnephew of Behzād and the son of the early Safavid painter Ḥaydar ‘Alī; and Šayḵ Moḥammad, the son of the calligrapher Kamāl Sabzavārī. Among the calligraphers similar familial relationships are found: Malek Daylamī was the son of the famous calligrapher Šahrā-Mīr Qazvīnī; Rostam ‘Alī was also Behzād’s nephew and worked for Ebrāhīm’s father, Bahrām; and Moḡebb ‘Alī was Rostam ‘Alī’s son. Family ties and connections were obviously of central importance in landing important commissions in Safavid Iran.

After Ebrāhīm Mīrzā was recalled to Qazvīn in 973/1565, his painters apparently found employ with provincial aristocrats and with princes and nobles at the royal court. Some even went to work for commercial ateliers. Thus in the 980s/1570s painters probably trained in Ebrāhīm’s atelier perpetuated a provincial version of his style which has been aptly dubbed the Khorasan school.

Shah Ṭahmāsp died in 984/1576 and was briefly succeeded by his son Esmā‘īl II, a distinguished warrior who had been confined to prison for the last twenty years by his jealous father. Esmā‘īl’s eighteen-month reign had a damaging effect on the immediate future of Iranian art: he executed his brilliant cousin Ebrāhīm as well as nearly all the other princes of royal blood, thereby removing many of Iran’s potential patrons. Despite his own rapacity, he undertook the creation of an impressive *Šāh-nāma* intended to rival that of his father. While a number of excellent masters were gathered together in Qazvīn



for this purpose, their talents did not match those of Ṭahmāsp's artists. Now widely dispersed, the *Šāh-nāma* of Esmā'īl II was never completed. All of its masters were third- or fourth-generation Safavid artists, and few of them were the scions of earlier painters or calligraphers. The two leading masters were Sīāvoš and Šādeqī, painters trained by Moẓaffar 'Alī.

The turbulence of Esmā'īl II's reign did not end with his death. The political chaos of Iran demanded a strong and more imaginative ruler than his elder brother, Moḥammad Ḳodābanda (985-96/1577-87). Nearly blind, the new shah was fit neither as monarch nor patron. While the country drifted into civil war, economic stagnation, and political disintegration, there was no apparent patronage of any of the arts or architecture, and masters such as Šādeqī (whose valuable personal record, *Majma' al-ḳawāṣṣ*, allows the reconstruction of his career) wandered through Iran in search of stable patronage. Some officials and lesser aristocrats emerged as minor patrons during this period, in which drawings flourished, perhaps because they were cheaper than manuscripts or paintings, but many members of the artistic and intellectual elite emigrated to India, including the calligrapher, Mīr Ḥosayn Sahwī, who penned the quatrain accompanying Šādeqī's drawing.

Middle Safavid period (996-1038/1587-1629). This dismal condition ended with the accession of Shah 'Abbās, one of the most energetic patrons in Iranian history. Whereas Ṭahmāsp's primary interest had been in the art of the precious book, 'Abbās's patronage extended into many areas—architecture, precious books, single pages of painting and calligraphy, ceramics, textiles, carpets, and metals. His fostering of the arts was also of a different kind from that of his grandfather, and it must be understood in the context of his political activities. His passion for architecture was part of a larger fascination with urban planning, which mirrored his own ambitious economic and social policies. Authority, whether political or religious, was increasingly centralized in Isfahan, while trade with Europe and the Far East was increased; the existence of provincial centers of patronage ceased, and the role of non-royal patrons centered in Isfahan, where aristocrats, officials, professionals, and merchants lived. The importation of objects from Europe, India, and China made Iran's arts more cosmopolitan than they had been for centuries.

The new shah was a man of definite tastes. He held the paintings and drawings of Šādeqī and Reżā in high esteem and prized the calligraphies of 'Alī Reżā and Mīr 'Emād. The careers of these four individuals reveal some of the complexities and politics of the royal workshops. About 996/1587 Šādeqī,



already a well-established master, was appointed director of the royal library; the much younger painter Reżā had recently joined the staff. From their association came a *Šāh-nāma*, now in a fragmentary state in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, which was commissioned by the shah near the beginning of his reign and finished by about 1004/1595. Five of the surviving fourteen illustrations were done by Reżā and number among his finest works. Three were done by Šādeqī, clearly under the influence of his new colleague. Stylistically, these paintings are closely linked to the court style of Ṭahmāsp and Esmā'īl II and indicate that the youthful ruler's esthetic sense followed predictable lines.

According to contemporary accounts, Šādeqī was a difficult individual. He was dismissed from his post in 1005/1596-97 and succeeded by his enemy, the calligrapher 'Alī Reżā, who apparently prevented Šādeqī from receiving further important commissions. In the following year the painter retaliated by lodging a formal complaint with the shah that the new director had been derelict in his duties. The counter coup failed; 'Alī Reżā was a tough man who adroitly outmaneuvered attacks on his position and successfully protected himself from rivals, including Mīr 'Emād, who was murdered in 1024/1615-16 in a plot apparently organized by 'Alī Reżā. Despite his ruthless art politics, 'Alī Reżā was active as a scribe and a designer of architectural inscriptions and was honored with choice commissions in Mašhad and Isfahan.

Calligraphers had long performed multiple duties they wrote official letters for the court, often served as directors of libraries and of specific manuscript projects, wrote new copies of treasured literary works and produced single pages of calligraphy for albums. They also were called upon to design inscriptions for a variety of purposes exteriors and interiors of mosques, shrines, and tombs needed appropriate epigraphs; so too did objects—metalworks, ceramics, carpets, textiles, and tiles. The calligrapher's role was central to the production of art in the Safavid world.

In 1023/1614 Shah 'Abbās commissioned a second *Šāh-nāma*, which is in many ways a visual rejection of 10th/16th-century painting. Its illustrations are based upon the high court style of Prince Bāysonğor of Herat many of them are, in fact, copies or pastiches of paintings in the *Šāh-nāma* (Tehran, Golestān Library) produced for that prince about 834/1430. While archaistic renderings of earlier works are not uncommon in Iranian painting, such a concerted effort by an imperial patron is unique in the history of Iranian painting. During the same period the shah's taste for Timurid-revival forms of



architecture (e.g., the Masjed-e Šāh in Isfahan) was also most pronounced, and it may be that this conscious return to 9th/15th-century forms reflected the monarch's ambition to create an Iranian state as powerful as that of Timur's descendants.

The Timurid revival was brief and evidently limited to the monarch alone. In other areas of painting and drawing and in other arts the establishment of new directions affected the course of Iranian art for the rest of the Safavid period. In painting, drawing, and calligraphy the single page replaced the lavish illustrated manuscript as the dominant mode. Quicker and cheaper to produce, yet authentically revealing the hand of a master whose work was prized, small works of this sort were eagerly sought, not only in Iran but also by connoisseurs in India and the Ottoman empire.

In comparison with earlier, literary subject matter, the content of painting became fragmented; and scenes that had been small parts of earlier illustrations were now fit to be independent works of art, promoting an attention to naturalism comparable to that in contemporary Mughal India. Idealized beauties became the most common image of all, visual metaphors of the ideal beloved of Iranian mystical poetry. Thinner pigments and more daring colors were also used, and line became sketchier, so that the impression of polished and enduring finish of 9th/10th- and early 10th/16th-century painting is replaced by visions of greater transience.

Many of the images of graceful dandies that abound in Safavid painting are also to be found on ceramics, particularly of the "Kubachi" type produced in northwestern Iran and yet virtually identical with figures of the so-called Isfahan school. But these are not the most common type of ceramic of this period. Recognizing the importance of a widely based trade with Europe, where Chinese pottery fetched high prices, Shah 'Abbās brought Chinese potters to his state-operated workshops in Isfahan, Mašhad, Kermān, and other cities where they and Iranian potters produced skillful variants on Chinese types for sale in Europe and Iran. In keeping with Safavid attention to pre-Safavid arts, lusterware pottery, not seen in Iran since the Il-khanid period, was produced again in the early 11th/17th century.

Though Safavid metalwork does not appear to have been widely exported, there are important changes in the mid-Safavid period. Stocky candlesticks of Saljuq and Il-khanid times were replaced by more attenuated shapes that relied on simpler decorative patterns, gilding and silvering instead of inlays,



and mystical verses for their ornamentation. Much Safavid metalwork of the period was made of cut steel, a new material in the Islamic repertory.

Textiles too are sometimes inscribed with mystical verses. Both figures and poetry were supplied by painters and calligraphers employed as designers in royal workshops producing cloths for the aristocracy and for export, primarily to Mughal India. Techniques are varied weaves of silk and metal thread had been dominant in the 10th/16th century, but brocades became the most common form of decorative technique in the 11th/17th.

Carpets were an important source of revenue, and the industry rested to a large extent under the shah's control. While designs were selected to appeal to European customers and sometimes even incorporated European insignia, technique tended to be showier and less fine than in early Safavid times.

Later Safavid period (1032-1135/1629-1722). 'Abbās's paranoia resulted in the death or incapacitation of all his sons, and he was succeeded by his grandson, Ṣafī I (1039-52/1629-42), who was barely interested in architecture and merely brought to completion projects begun by his predecessor. The royal workshops continued to produce ceramics, textiles, and carpets that were stylistically and technically scarcely distinguishable from those of 'Abbās I. The master painter Reżā continued to paint until his death in 1045/1635, and his students dominated 11th/17th-century painting. But the reign of Ṣafī I marks no new directions in either art or politics.

His son, 'Abbās II (1052-77/1642-66), is the only one of the later Safavids whose reign could be called impressive. An important patron of architecture, he also encouraged Reżā's many students. Reżā's son Ṣafī was a gifted still-life painter and one of the court's principal textile designers. Moḥammad Qāsem and Moḥammad Yūsof specialized in single-page drawings and paintings of elegant youths. 'Abbās II commissioned several sumptuous *Šāh-nāmas* in traditional styles but also brought a number of Europeanizing painters to his court, most notably 'Alī-qolī Jabbadār and Moḥammad Zamān.

'Abbās II's successor Solaymān (1077-1106/1666-94) is amply described by several contemporary European visitors, especially Chardin and Tavernier: an unstable personality, he showed little interest in government or architecture but was a gifted and eclectic patron of painting and drawing, encouraging not only the Europeanizing masters "inherited" from his father but also the gifted Mo'īn Moṣawwer, who produced some of his finest, "journalistic" renderings



of contemporary Isfahan life during the shah's reign. Erotic subject matter, already apparent during the reign of Shah 'Abbās I, received wider attention, not only in paintings and drawings but also occasionally in ceramics. For the most part, however, ceramics, textiles, and carpets continued to utilize designs and motives established under Shah 'Abbās I.

The last of the reigning Safavids, Solṭān Ḥosayn (1106-35/1694-1722), appears to have abrogated responsibilities in patronage as well as in government. No manuscript can be confidently attributed to his patronage, though he commissioned 'Alī-qolī Jabbadār and Moḥammad Zamān to portray the Russian ambassador to the Safavid court. Portraiture too had been introduced at an earlier period, but it seems to have been both more realistic and more abundant in the last years of the dynasty. In 1135/1722 the shah ordered Moḥammad Zamān's son, Moḥammad 'Alī to paint a group portrait of king and court; it is impressive both for its forbidding gloom and as a final testimony to the Safavids.

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