

# ARTS OF THE BOOK AND PAINTING

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## Part One

# ARTS OF THE BOOK AND MINIATURES

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The art of the manuscript book in Central Asia has a history stretching back over many centuries and a vast heritage, only part of which has survived to the present day. Its lengthy

development involved the refinement of the arts of calligraphy, illumination and miniature painting.

## General features

The creation of an artistically presented manuscript was a long and laborious process, which demanded great skill on the part of all those involved: the calligrapher, the decorative artist, the miniaturist and the binder. Such a costly art form could only flourish in major cultural centres and under high patronage. As a rule, it was in the *kitāb-khāna*, the court workshop, of the ruler's library that a large force of craftsmen of the highest quality in all branches of book-making was assembled. Baghdad and Tabriz, Shiraz and Herat, Samarkand and Bukhara were renowned centres of the book-maker's art at this period.

The development of the art of the book was a single process involving the creative exchange of accomplishments between different cultural centres and also the continuous refinement of earlier traditions. All constituents of the artistically composed book – calligraphy, miniatures, decoration of the margins and chapter headings – had to form a harmonious whole within the confines of the manuscript. In the course of a long period of evolution, special canons were established, precise rules for the exact proportions of text and margins and of text and miniature on the manuscript page. The craftsmen endeavoured to achieve a harmony of line, colour and rhythm between calligraphy and painting, and to match the planar principle governing the organization of space in the miniature with the planar ornamentation of the decorative element.

The illumination of a manuscript comprised the embellishment of the first and last folios and also the artistic layout of the text and the borders.<sup>1</sup> At the centre of the first folio was a medallion in which the name of the manuscript's owner or the ruler was inscribed: an artistically decorated ex-libris. These medallions were round or oval, or else rosettes, taking the form of 8- or 12-pointed stars, and were surmounted by elongated cartouches.<sup>2</sup> The following folio was ornamented with a *sar-lawh* (frontispiece), decorating the entire page, or else an *ʿunwān*, a scalloped, rectangular headpiece placed in the upper part of the page, in which the title of the work was inscribed together with the traditional Muslim introductory formula, the *bismillāh*. The *sar-lawh*, which occupied 1 or even 2 pages when the following page was also decorated (Fig. 1), was either an ornamental composition or else it depicted the scene of a royal audience or hunt. In early miniatures (thirteenth to fourteenth century), each side of a double-page frontispiece illustrating a particular theme

<sup>1</sup> Akimushkin and Ivanov, 1979, pp. 35–7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 35–6.



Fig. 1. *Sar-lawh* (frontispiece) of al-Ghazālī's *Kimiyā-i Sa'ādāt* (Persan 14, fol. 1). (Photo: © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.)

was enclosed in a frame; at a later date, double frontispieces began to be brought together in a unified composition.<sup>3</sup> The function of the *sar-lawh* was to embellish the beginning of the text or the title of the work, or else simply to provide a colourful ornamental decoration for the opening pages of the book.<sup>4</sup> Frontispieces performed a semantic and symbolic function as 'the entry into the world of the book',<sup>5</sup> providing a point of departure for the literary and artistic narration.<sup>6</sup>

The pages inside the book were embellished with: (a) frames consisting of fine parallel gold and coloured (red/blue) lines, enclosing and highlighting the text; (b) ornamented headpieces in which the chapter titles were inserted; and (c) decoration of the manuscript's margins. The decorative artist had to take account of the layout of the text, the outline of the letters, the style of the calligraphy and the general artistic composition of the page (see Part Two below). The margins were decorated with coarse or fine gold spray; vegetal or geometric patterns; outline drawings of animals and birds; and appliqué work or incrustation. The ground of the margins was usually tinted in a variety of colours: light or dark blue, yellow, red, black, orange, etc. Such decorated margins are typical of Herat manuscripts of the second half of the fifteenth century: they surround the text and the miniatures

<sup>3</sup> Akimushkin and Ivanov, 1979, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> Shkurov, 1989, p. 178.

<sup>6</sup> Shkurov, 1983, p. 97.

like a luxurious picture frame. As the art of book design developed, the decorated head-piece began to appear on the page preceding the illustration, intensifying still further the decorative impression and preparing the viewer for the contemplation of beauty.

Great significance was attached to the artistic presentation of the colophon, where the name of the calligrapher and the individual commissioning the manuscript were usually inserted together with the date and place of production. The horizontal lines of the text were either tapered or reduced in length by steps. Occasionally, the colophon assumed the form of a rectangle which was narrower than the main text and was enclosed on the sides by broad ornamental frames. The earliest kind of colophon, encountered from the beginning of the fourteenth century, was trapezoidal; colophons in the shape of triangular medallions appeared later, in the 1380s (Fig. 2).<sup>7</sup>

bookbinding was a complex and highly esteemed art.<sup>8</sup> Covers were made from the hides of various animals (sheep, goats, horses, deer) which provided soft, smooth material of a suitable colour for artistic treatment. Patterns were applied by a special technique of cold embossing which produced a high relief. The decoration of covers in the fourteenth century was concise and restrained, characterized by a strict simplicity of ornamentation and the absence of gold leaf. The surface of the cover was usually decorated by a set of three medallions arranged vertically, the central medallion being large, scalloped and round or oval in shape, whereas the others, above and below it, were smaller in size. The rectangular surface of the cover was framed at the edges by a border of thin straight lines, the area between which was covered with plant motifs or intertwined decoration. Triangles were placed at the corners of the cover, with the hypotenuse towards the centre. The medallions and triangles at the corners were decorated with fine floral and plant designs.

As the art of binding developed, dark blue, red or even gold grounds began to appear in the medallions, overlaid with openwork tracery. Scenery started to be depicted on Herat bindings of the fifteenth century, which also featured Chinese elements in the shape of symbolic figures: animals and birds – dragons, phoenixes and ducks. Human figures only began to appear in the second quarter of the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The bindings from different artistic centres exhibited variations in the patterns and images occupying the medallions and the overall surface of the composition. Sometimes there was no central medallion. The development of the craft of binding was marked by Timurid Herat's strong influence on other centres.

<sup>7</sup> Akimushkin and Ivanov, 1979, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Aslanapa, 1979, pp. 59–91.

<sup>9</sup> Aslanapa, 1979, p. 60; Bosch, Carswell and Petherbridge, 1981; Pedersen, 1984, pp. 101–12.

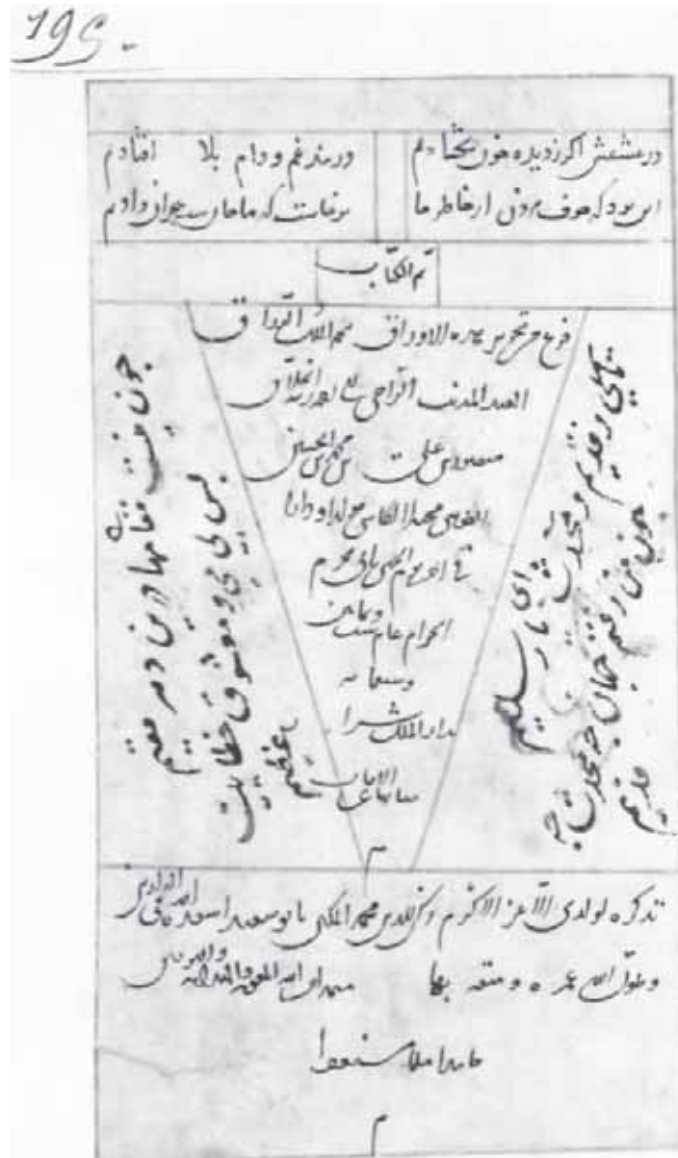


Fig. 2. Colophon from the manuscript of the *Dīwān-i ʿImād*, copied by Mansūr b. ʿAlī Kāshī (1384) (Suppl. Persan 745, fol. 195). (Photo: © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.)

All of the decorative elements involved in the presentation of the manuscript had to be combined and harmonized. The art of the book is a living, evolving art form in which all changes have arisen from within. The most significant transformation – the one which was to prove of greatest consequence for the development of the art – was the changing position of the picture or miniature in relation to that of the text within the confines of a single page.<sup>10</sup> This process developed in the course of the fourteenth century, with the picture tending to spread over an ever-greater area of the manuscript page. Whereas the

<sup>10</sup> Shkurov, 1989, pp. 162–5.

miniature had played a secondary role in early illuminated manuscripts, the area that it occupied gradually expanded until it came to dominate the actual text.<sup>11</sup>

## The importance of the miniature

This change was due, in large part, to the way in which the miniature evolved, to the progress it achieved and to its characteristic features. The latter emerged most clearly in a specific system of representation governed by line, colour, rhythm and convention, revealing the full potential of each of these means of expression as both representational and aesthetically significant elements.

Line was one of the chief means of expression, helping to create the image, to suggest movement and to construct spatial relations. Medieval Islamic art does not convey the illusion of real space, foreshortening, volume or chiaroscuro; the flat surface predominates. Consequently, the line gained in importance as a way of indicating structure. As a means of expression, it rises to a pitch of emotional intensity through its harmony, fluency or tense resilience. There were no limits to its possibilities, which ranged broadly from the lightest of touches and barely perceptible subtleties to emphatically thick outlines as required.<sup>12</sup>

Colour was a particularly important element in the artistic language of the miniature. It played a part in the structure of the composition as well as conveying meaning by emphasizing and highlighting what was most essential in the development of the subject, and its luminosity enhanced the value of the miniature. The sparkle of bright, resonant, pure, local colours generated a festive sensation, the highly poetic atmosphere of a fabulously beautiful world. Particular value was attached to the harmony and play of colours, the subtle combinations and contrasts, the alternation of cool and warm tones.

Rhythm also played an extremely important part in the creation of the image and the overall emotional mood of the work. In the miniature, rhythm was based on a repetition of the following elements: line; colour outlines; light patches; planes of different shapes and sizes; and repetition through specific intervals of blank space, i.e. unoccupied areas in the field of the miniature. Each of these rhythmic features was perceived in the course of the miniature's evolution as a device, a means of artistic expression, and its further development was consciously related to the subject-matter. The rhythmic tempo depended on the frequency with which these features succeeded one another within the area of the miniature. Thus flashes of sharp contour lines of varying thickness and length, the juxtaposition of contrasting colour and light patches and outlines, the breaking-up of surfaces into small

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Pedersen, 1984, pp. 89–100.

areas and the frequency of blank spaces all set a 'rapid' tempo, typically associated with duels and battles. In miniatures depicting audiences, lovers' trysts and conversations, on the other hand, a 'slow' tempo was employed: the blank spaces were not so frequent, surfaces were broader, light and colour patches and outlines were juxtaposed in more restful combinations, and the line was smoother and more flowing. The work's emotional expressiveness largely depended on this technique and rhythmic devices could express stately solemnity or oppressive tension, serene calm or all-consuming melancholy.

The conventional nature of the representational resources employed was a defining feature. In medieval Islamic art it was determined by the conceptual and aesthetic goals derived from the requirements of a religious and symbolic interpretation of the world. The miniature developed its own conventional language. Space, landscape and architecture were all represented conventionally. Local features were omitted; only the most generalized, ideal and perfect elements were recorded. The same laws of generalization and conventionality were also applied to the representation of human beings. All individual traits disappeared and only the most typical common features were conveyed. The real individual was transformed into a specific type possessing the qualities most typical of a particular personage and the conventional signs that went with it. He or she was represented in accordance with the prevailing canon of beauty, which strictly defined the pose and the gestures, the oval shape and the features of the face. In early miniatures, the faces were so uniform that it was practically impossible to differentiate between men and women; in order to individualize a hero, his name had to be written above him.<sup>13</sup>

As the art of the miniature developed, attitudes towards the human form gradually altered. Its representation, while remaining within the tradition of artistic convention, became increasingly individualized, more natural in its rendering of movement and more authentic in its evocation of the human figure. The human image in art is bound up with the notion of the portrait, which had long existed in the painting of Central Asia. During our period, the individual features of the subject were conveyed by means of conventional expressions, and the general appearance was typified. But neither the conventionality nor the typification of the subject's appearance prevented the onlooker from recognizing an actual individual face in the portrait, and the boundary between reality and the conventional language of the miniature was readily negotiated by the initiated viewer.

The illustrated manuscripts that have come down to us do not reflect in equal measure all the stages in the development of the miniature. Examples from the very earliest period have not yet been discovered. Early works which have been preserved provide evidence of attempts to use particular artistic resources and techniques to represent space (by

<sup>13</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, 1970.

extending the range of representation of the real world), landscape (from a few features to an integrated image of nature as a whole) and architecture; to convey the movements of human beings and animals; and, lastly, to establish a relationship of scale between figures and background. A process was at work which would lay down the artistic features of the medieval miniature and define its specific language. The period in question covered the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth, with artistic centres in Shiraz, Tabriz, Baghdad, Herat and Samarkand.

The earliest illustrated manuscript is a copy of *Warqa u Gulshāh* by <sup>c</sup>Ayyūqi (see Chapter 15, Part One), which dates from the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century (Fig. 3): the style of the miniature is linked to the tradition of eastern Iran and Khurasan and is characterized by its monumental quality, derived from the traditions of pre-Islamic wall painting.<sup>14</sup> Such miniatures are generally dominated by the symmetry of a frieze-like structure. The figures are separated by a tree or branch; a strict rhythm is established by alternating elements in a uniform, linear composition. At the same time, new features make their appearance – a product of the influence exerted on the miniature by the planar ornamental painting of Muslim architecture.

## Developments in the western Iranian lands under the Il Khanid and Turkmen dynasties

In the thirteenth century, the development of the miniature, as of all other expressions of culture, was brought to a halt by the Mongol conquest of Central Asia. Many of those engaged in cultural activities, including artists, fled to the south of Iran. The art of painting continued to develop there as can be seen from the Shiraz miniatures of the first half of the fourteenth century, which represent a continuation of the same line of development as the *Warqa u Gulshāh* miniatures of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The illustrations of the manuscripts of the *Shāh-nāma* which appeared in 1330, 1333, 1335, 1341 and 1352 are typical examples of Shiraz painting.<sup>15</sup>

The general style of the miniatures continued to be monumental and conceptualized. In most cases, the structure of the composition still resembled a frieze. But, in comparison with painting at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, the composition showed signs of further development, becoming more varied. The figures were either arranged diagonally or one above the other. Colour was also used to divide the surface into different planes: this was to become a favourite device in the Shiraz miniature.

<sup>14</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Gray, 1961, pp. 57–9; Grube, 1962, pp. 1–26; Ashrafi, 1974, pp. 10–14, Pls. 1–6.



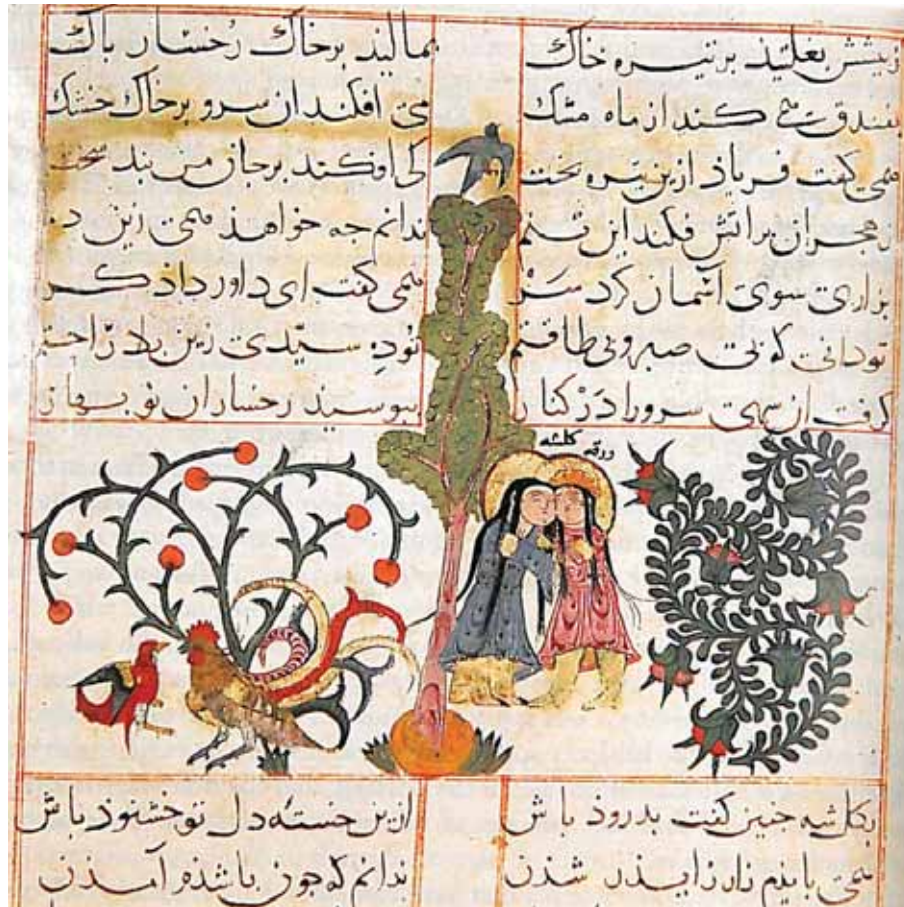


Fig. 3. Illustrated manuscript of *Warqa u Gulshāh*. (Photo: © Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, H. 841, fol. 33b.)

The above-mentioned features represent the first traces of a new attitude towards composition, which, to some extent, prepared the way for a qualitative change in the Shiraz miniature at the end of the fourteenth century.

Comparing the attitude towards landscape in the *Warqa u Gulshāh* miniatures and in the *Shāb-nāma*, it may be noted that only isolated elements of the landscape are depicted in the former: a tree, branches, flowers, a patch of grass denoting the earth; whereas in the illustrations for the manuscripts of Firdawsī's *Sbāh-nāma* some development in the landscape is already apparent: hills, rivers and trees can be seen and the representation of vegetation is more varied. Thus a school of painting emerged in Shiraz in the first half of the fourteenth century that maintained and continued the tradition of the pre-Mongol miniature of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

From the end of the thirteenth century, schools developed in Tabriz, and later in Baghdad, in which the artistic processes differed from those found in the Shiraz miniature. Their appearance was due to the cult of Chinese art introduced by the Mongols. At the same time,

Byzantine art also continued to enjoy considerable influence in those two centres. Examples of the painting of the period demonstrate that, throughout the fourteenth century, the schools of painting of Tabriz and Baghdad engaged in intense efforts to work out their own artistic language by assimilating in a creative manner the achievements of the two earlier cultures while maintaining their own traditions. The search for new artistic means of representing space at different stages in the development of painting was reflected in the cycle of miniatures of the *Shāh-nāma*, created in Tabriz in 1330–40 (the former Demotte Collection), and in six illustrations to the poem *Humāy u Humāyūn* by Khwājū Kirmānī, 1396, painted in Baghdad by the great master Junayd Sultānī (Fig. 4).<sup>16</sup> These miniatures exerted a formative influence on the subsequent evolution of the art of the miniature and on the elaboration of its specific artistic language.

There were no close contacts between schools of painting in Central Asia during the fourteenth century. The only link that can be detected during the first half of the century is the tradition of choosing the subject of the miniature from a particular poem. In the second half of the century, however, the link between the different schools can be traced in certain artistic features. From the 1370s it is possible to follow, in the Shiraz miniatures of the *Shāh-nāma* (Fig. 5),<sup>17</sup> the use of the new principle behind the construction of space, spreading out from the bottom upwards, that had been developed earlier by the Baghdad–Tabriz school. But the innovation in question was creatively assimilated by the artists of Shiraz and became an integral part of the dominant, rigorously planar system that had been prepared for such an advance by its own inner development.

Closer links developed between the painting styles of Shiraz, Tabriz and Baghdad at the very beginning of the fifteenth century. A large-scale migration of artists took place at that time, starting with Timur's conquest of Baghdad in 1393 and 1401 and of Tabriz in 1402, and the transportation of craftsmen to his new capital, Samarkand, and to the court of his nephew, Iskandar Sultan, the governor of Shiraz. In their new workshops, the miniaturists adapted to the prevailing tastes and ideals as well as introducing many elements from the traditions in which they had been trained and in which they had worked before their transfer. The Shiraz miniature was greatly enriched by the achievements of different schools of painting and an overall artistic style took shape, the language of the miniature.

The style of the Shiraz school of that period can be seen in the miniatures of two manuscripts of an *Anthology of Poetry* dated 1410–11 (British Library, London, and the

<sup>16</sup> Stchoukine, 1958, V, fasc. 2, pp. 83–96; Gray, 1961, pp. 46–7; Grube, 1962, Pls. 12–18; Grabar, 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Gray, 1961, p. 63.

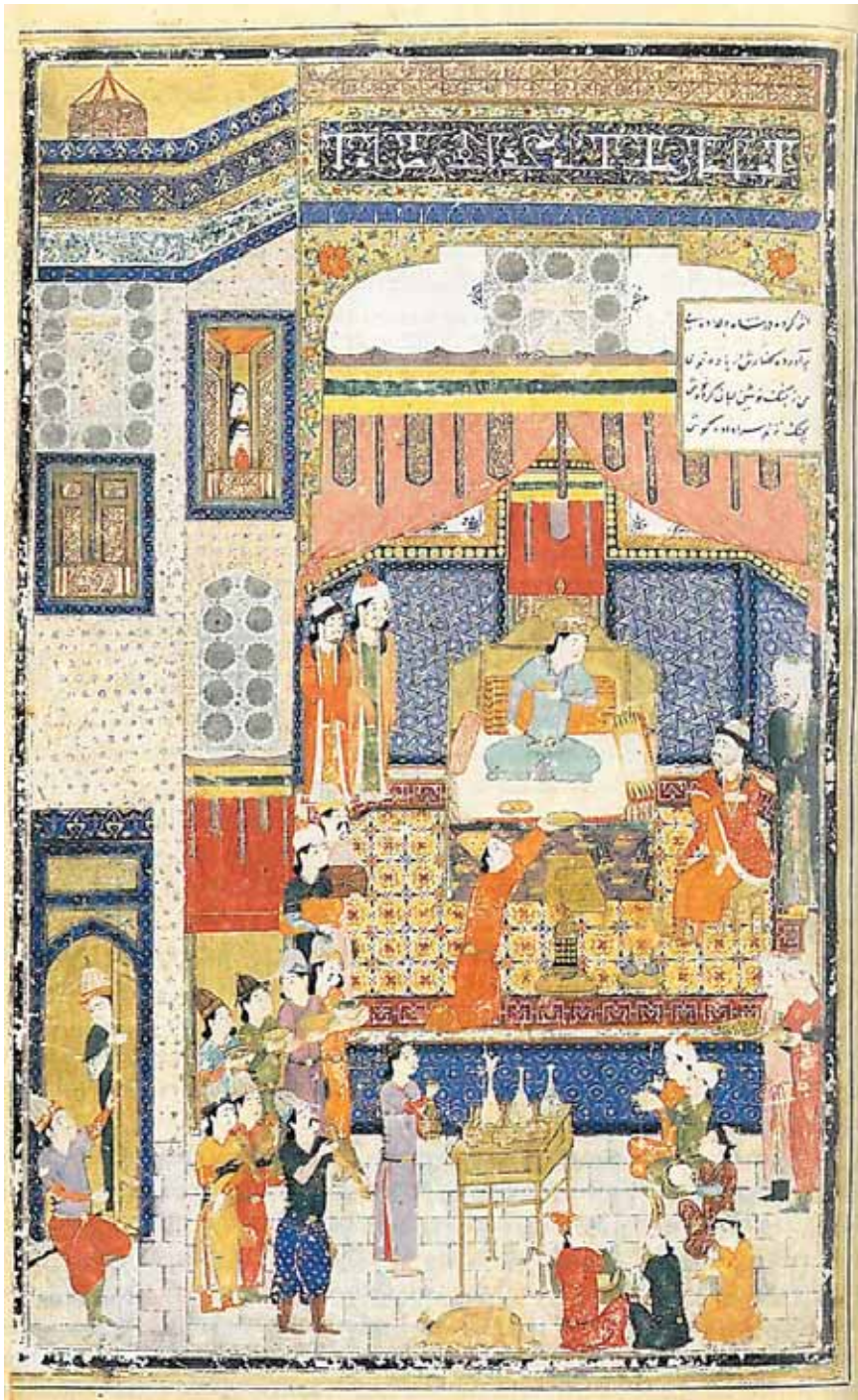


Fig. 4. Humāy at the court of the emperor of China. *Dīwān* of Khwājū Kirmānī, 1396, Baghdad. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Add. 18113, fol. 12r.

Gulbenkian Collection, Lisbon) (Fig. 6),<sup>18</sup> which are of major significance in the history of art. The establishment of the canon of miniature painting that was subsequently adopted

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 73–7, 79.



Fig. 5. Throne scene. *Shāh-nāma* of Firdawsī, 1371. (Photo: © Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, H. 1511, fol. 276a.)

by artists may be regarded as dating from that time. The Shiraz miniature achieved a synthesis between the spatial quality of the Baghdad–Tabriz school and the planar nature of Shiraz painting that, above all, fulfilled the function of illustrating the flat surface of the page without violating the conventions of the artistic language of the miniature. At the same time, a system of specific compositional patterns emerged as a result of the selection and canonization of favourite compositions. All this testifies to the fact that an artistic language and style were being forged for the miniature at the beginning of the fifteenth century within which it would develop in subsequent years.

## The Timurid period and the florescence of the Herat school

The following period (the second half of the fifteenth century) was characterized by a refining of the artistic language of the miniature that led to a golden age of painting. It

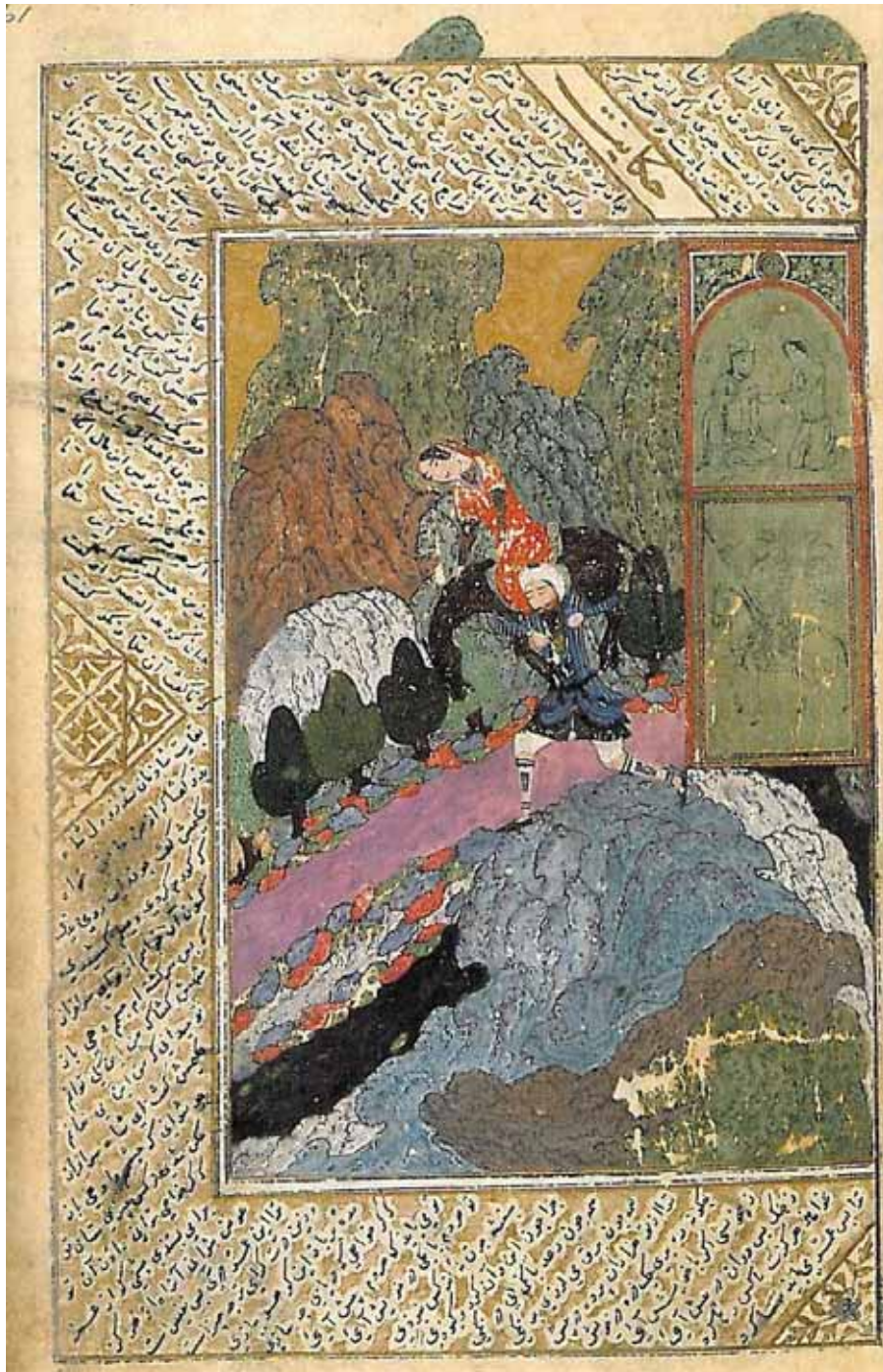


Fig. 6. *Anthology of Poetry of Sultān Iskandar*, 1410–11. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Add. 27261, fol. 61r.

was associated, first and foremost, with the work of the Herat school and with the painting of Bihzād (*fl.* later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries) and the artists of his circle who perfected the artistic resources and techniques of the genre. The fundamental discovery

was the necessary relationship between all elements of the composition, within which man became the centre of the picture.

Bihzād stands out clearly as a key figure in the overall development of the art of the miniature. Those of his works that have survived reveal a great master who, on the one hand, brought to a successful conclusion the fundamental creative experiments undertaken in the painting of the preceding period and, on the other, was the initiator of novel processes which to a considerable extent were to determine the development of the miniature in Central Asia throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The sources of his art lay in the early Herat miniature with whose traditions it maintained an unbroken link.

The Herat school was formed in the 1420s when the finest masters from Tabriz, Baghdad and Shiraz were assembled in that city. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, Herat, which had long been a town of considerable size, began to acquire the status of the Timurid capital. The architecture, literature, music and trades developing there produced remarkable results. But the city was most renowned at the period for its manuscripts which were produced in the *kitāb-khāna* of Baysunqur and Sultān Husayn Bayqara, where there was a brilliant group of masters of the art of the manuscript; there were over 40 calligraphers alone, according to the report by the contemporary historian, Dawlatshāh Samarqandī. The Herat manuscripts from the years 1420–30 that have survived (illustrations of Sa<sup>c</sup>dī's *Gulistān*, Khwājū Kirmānī's *Humāy u Humāyūn* (1427) (Fig. 7) and a *Shāh-nāma* (1430)<sup>19</sup> display both their link with the painting of the previous period and the achievements of the Herat school. The Herat artists, already able to apply expressive techniques to good effect, reached a level at which they began to tackle the challenging problems of the pictorial expression of emotion through poetically elevated representations of nature; and the different moods associated with scenes of pomp and ceremony or the tender encounter of lovers (Fig. 8) on the one hand, or with tense battle scenes on the other. Rhythm and colour became dependent on the subject. Never before had the palette been so pure and vibrant. The main background, occupying most of the surface of the work and hence determining the overall tonality of the Herat miniature of that period, consisted of light, soft tones on which the red and blue highlights in the attire of the figures gleamed like precious stones (Fig. 9).

The draughtsmanship also became more skilful, with greater emphasis on the detailed, graphic rendering of outlines. A sharp, hard, finely adjusted line circumscribes every detail of the composition, giving it a finished, independent look. Every outline here takes on its full value: there are no half-tones or attenuated effects. The geometrically precise, measured representation of architecture and architectural ornament, characterized by

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, 1965, p. 46, Pls. 13, 14; Stchoukine, 1954, Pl. LV; Gray, 1971.

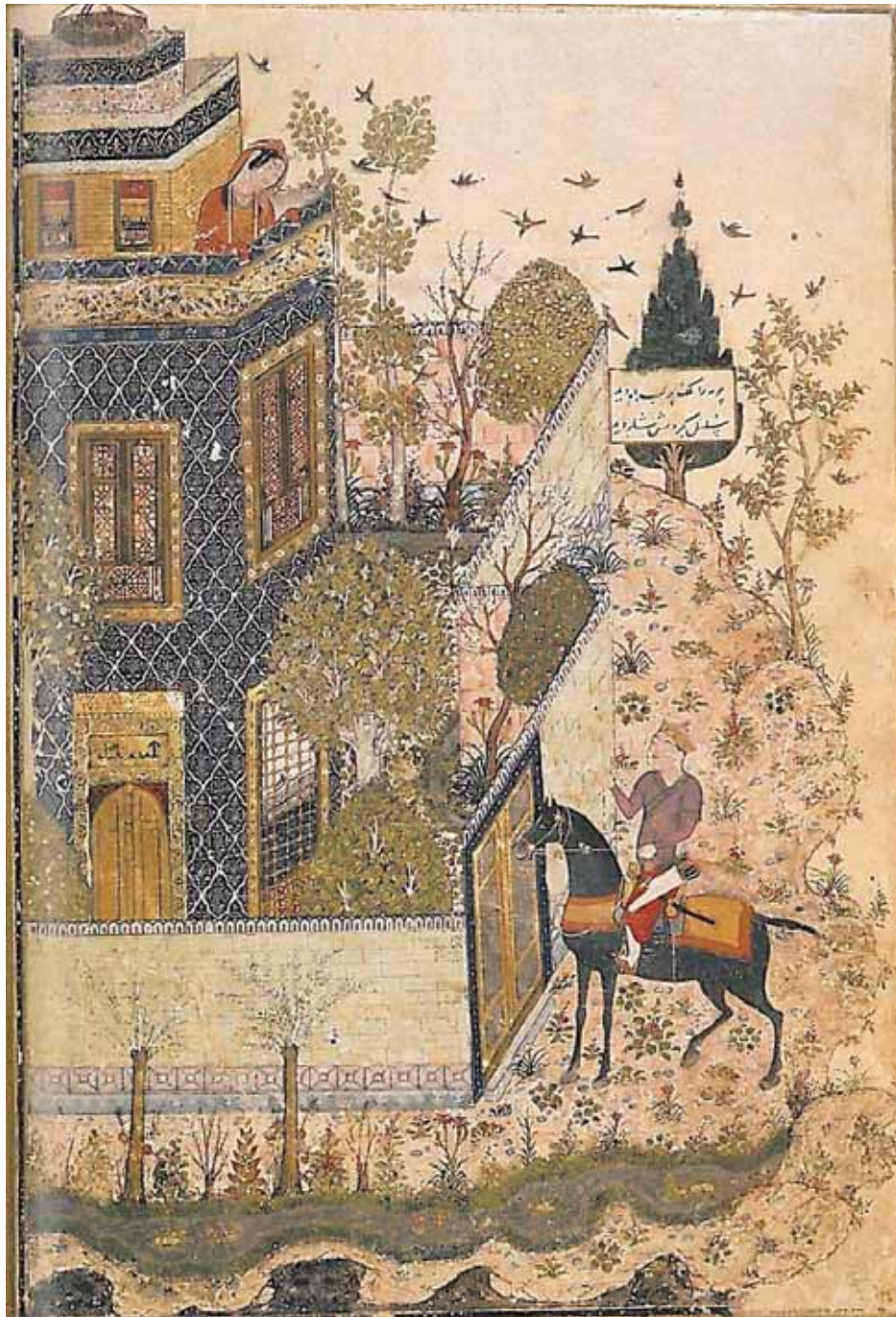


Fig. 7. *Humāy u Humāyūn* by Khwājū Kirmānī, 1427. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Add. 18113, fol. 18v.

fragmentation of form, isolation of detail and accuracy of rendering, impart a graphic quality to the overall structure.

Bihzād combined the best of previous practice and discovered within the already fairly well-developed system of artistic language employed in the miniature new means for its



Fig. 8. Humay and Humāyūn in the gardens of the Chinese emperor, 1430–40. Photo: © Les Arts décoratifs, Paris. Photo Jean Tholance. Tous droits réservés.



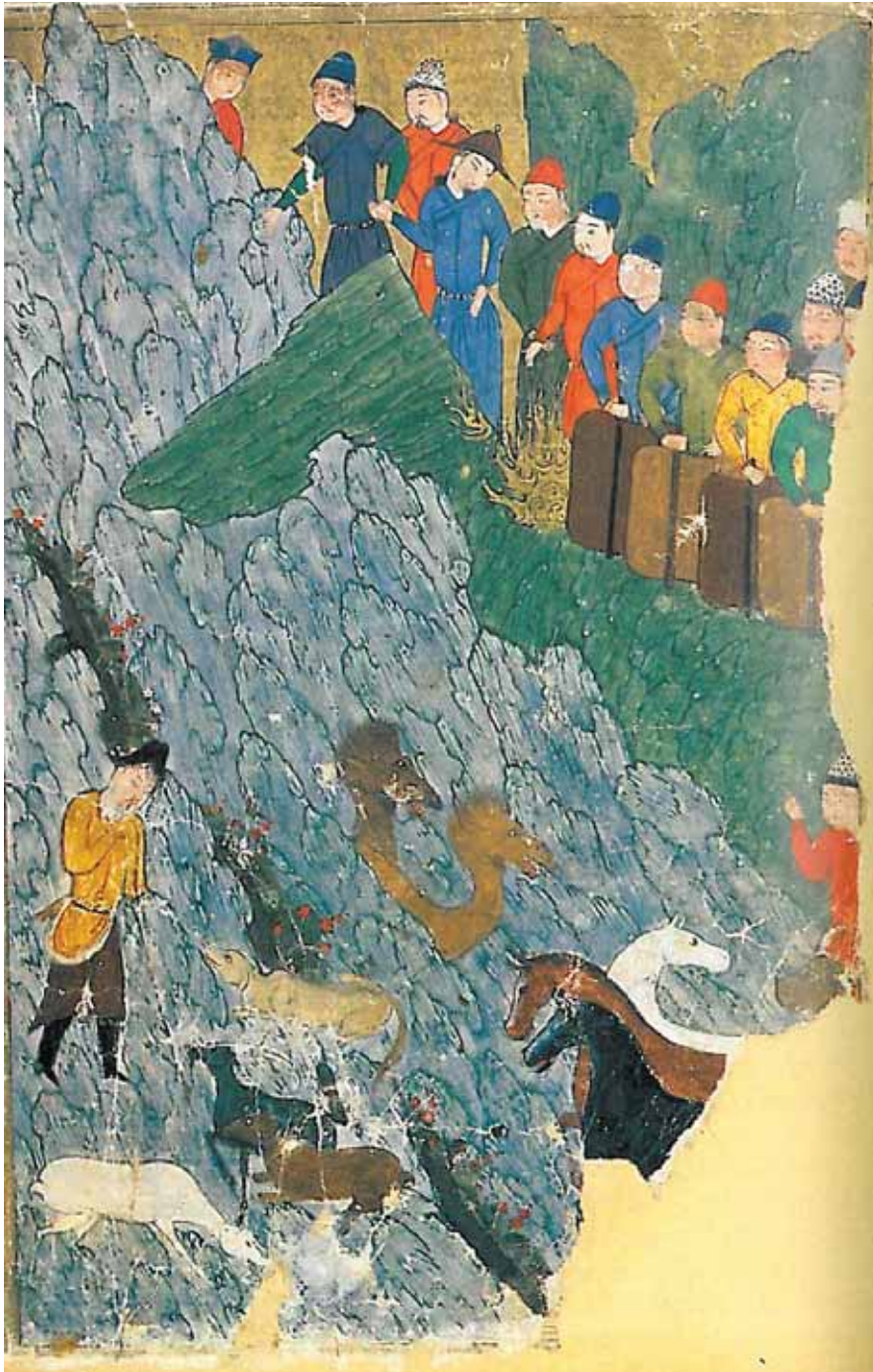


Fig. 9. Peoples of Qanqurāt: manuscript of Rashīd al-Dīn copied by Hāfiz-i Abrū for Shāh Rukh's library in the workshop of Baysunqur (Suppl. Persan, 1113, fol. 53). (Photo: © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.)

further refinement. He developed every kind of miniature painting in his work: figurative, battle scenes, genre painting, lyric-epic and portraiture. The most common was the figurative: ceremonial or festive occasions in interior settings, in the open air or in a garden

with a palace in the background. A typical example of this type of miniature is the diptych by Bihzād entitled *The Celebration at the Court of Sultān Husayn* from the manuscript of Sa<sup>c</sup>dī's *Bustān* [Garden] of 1488.<sup>20</sup> The artist has arranged the figures carefully, positioning each of them as engaged in a specific action. Bihzād introduced a new content into the traditional representational scene by reflecting the wider world (to the extent possible in the miniature with its conventions and within the framework of the genre) and by showing various aspects of court life, including a host of details of everyday activities. In one corner we see a group of drunken guests, in another some Negro attendants or yet again a scene depicting the punishment of a servant. We are thus presented with a *tableau vivant*, typical of the court life of the time. Examples of battle scenes are provided by the illustrations of the battle between the parent tribes of Laylā and Majnūn and the pursuit of an army in a manuscript of 1494 of the poet Nizāmī Ganja'ī's *Khamsa* (Fig. 10).<sup>21</sup>

There are many new elements in this traditional genre: armed clashes are vividly represented and the opposing parties are clearly distinguished. All the scenes are full of movement, with a complex rhythm of lines and splashes of colour intensifying the momentum within the miniature and the strained atmosphere of battle, as if to convey the actual sound of combat. Such dynamic images of fighting and such varied battle scenes were previously unknown in the art of the miniature. The encounters of Laylā and Majnūn and of Farhād and Shīrīn provide examples of the lyric-epic genre (this same manuscript of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*) (Fig. 11).<sup>22</sup> They are imbued with an exceptional poetic quality. Even the draughtsmanship is different in these miniatures. The line is soft, lyrical and curving. All is tranquillity and contemplation, pervaded with stillness, a dreamlike melancholy and an atmosphere of love.

Genre miniatures are typical of Bihzād, as is the inclusion of genre scenes in illustrations belonging to another category (*The Funeral* and *The Firewood-gatherers* from the *Mantiq al-tayr* [Discourse of the Birds] by <sup>c</sup>Attār, Metropolitan Museum, New York).<sup>23</sup> Three types of portrait are encountered in the work of Bihzād: first, the picture portrait, where the subject is represented in his or her customary surroundings; second, the solitary portrayal of the subject against a plain background; and, third, the caricature. The portrait had existed in Central Asian painting since earliest times, a fact attested to by written sources. Particularly valuable in this connection is Nizāmī <sup>c</sup>Arūdi Samarqandī's account, according to which Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna (999–1030) ordered a search to be conducted for Ibn Sīnā on

<sup>20</sup> Stchoukine, 1954, Pl. LXXIX; Gray (ed.), 1979, pp. 200–1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Pls. LXXXI, LXXX; Gray (ed.), 1979, pp. 194–5; Gray, 1961, p. 89.

<sup>22</sup> Stchoukine, 1954, pp. 78–81; Martin and Arnold, 1926.

<sup>23</sup> Gray (ed.), 1979, p. 190, Pl. LXI.

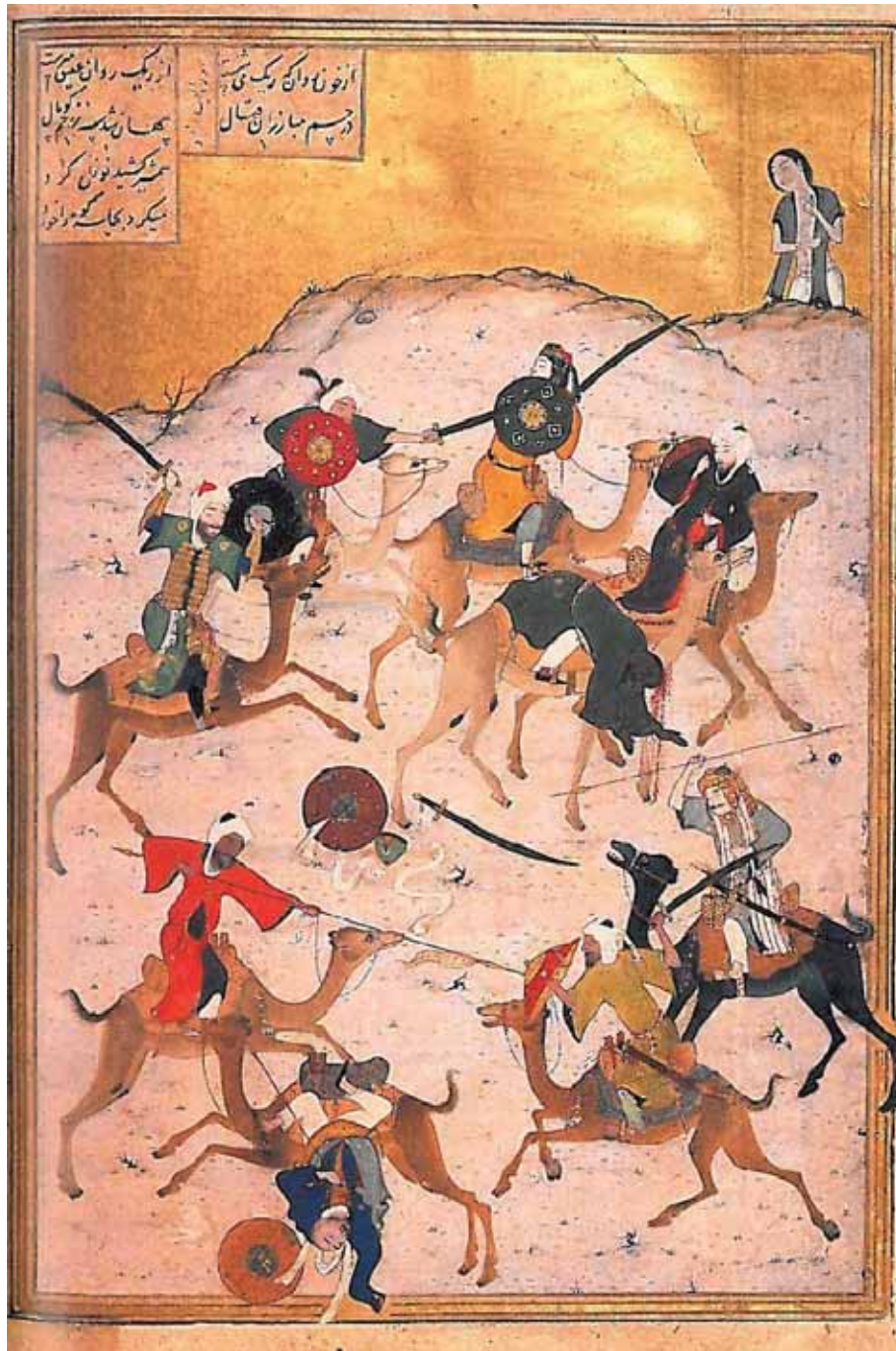


Fig. 10. Battle between the tribes of Laylā and Majnūn. *Khamsa* of Nizāmī, 1494. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Add. 25900, fol. 121v.

the basis of 40 painted portraits that he had commissioned from artists and dispatched to different provinces for the purpose of identification.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Dūst Muhammad, 1965, p. 174.

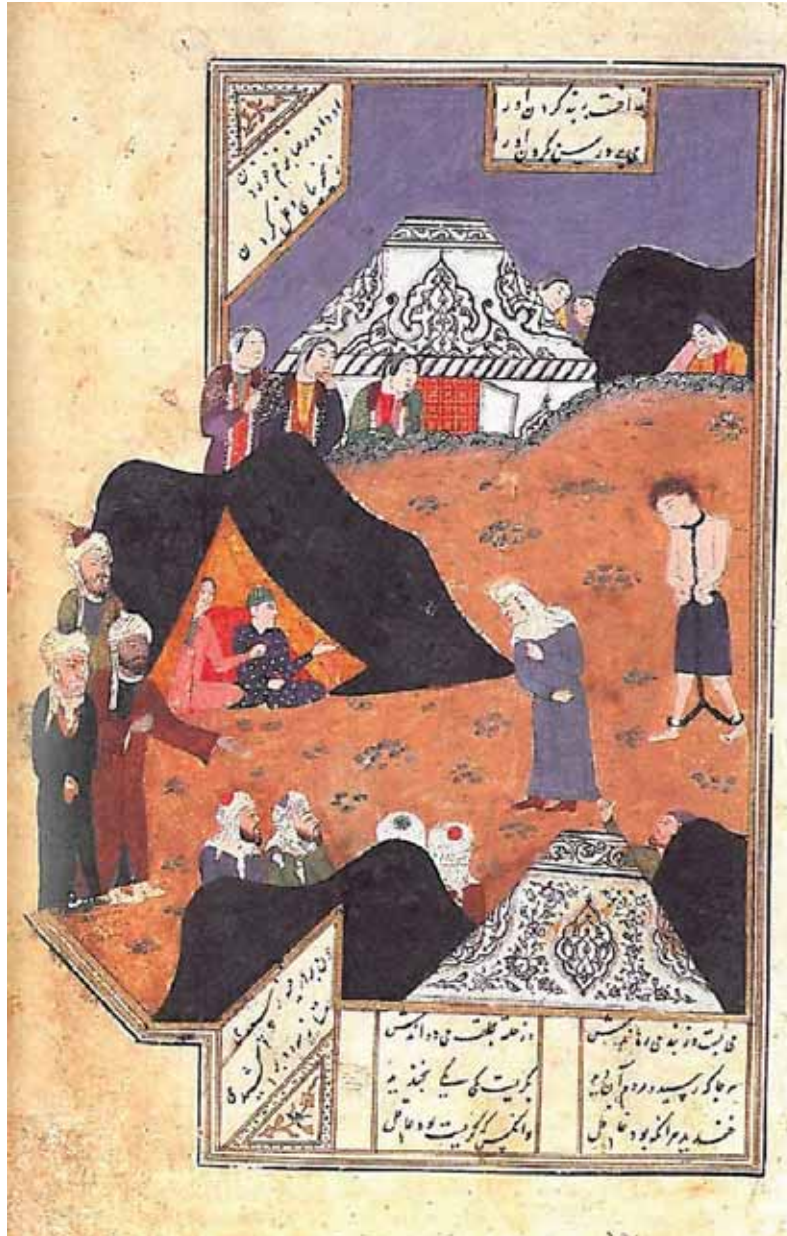


Fig. 11. Majnūn in chains before the tents of Laylā. *Khamsa* of Nizāmī, 1431, Herat. Photo: © Terebenin (Hermitage, St. Petersburg.)

A literary theme common in poetry involves two heroes becoming acquainted, recognizing each other or discovering their love through portraits. Memoirs also testify to the existence of the portrait as a genre in miniature painting. The Herat man of letters, Zayn al-Din Wāsifi, mentions portraits executed by Bihzād for Sultān Husayn Bayqara. From Wāsifi's narratives it is apparent that the subject was endowed with individual features and traits which presented a portrait of the living person within an idealized conceptual depiction. The boundary between reality and the conventional language of the miniature was so

easily crossed that the viewer could recognize in Bihzād's portraits the likeness of °Alīshīr Nawā'ī, Sultān Husayn Bayqara and the magnate Bābā Mahmūd.

The development and diversity of the portrait genre were the result of the trend towards a more realistic representation of human beings that began in the work of Bihzād. Figures became individualized through the depiction of movement and the variety of human poses and gestures as well as a closer approximation to the actual proportions of the body. Whereas earlier painting had made no attempt to delineate or differentiate figures, great attention was focused on human beings and the variety of human types in the works of Bihzād and his circle. Gesticulation became freer and more dynamic. Groups of figures were no longer just crowds but assemblies of individuals. Painted characters represented a wide variety of types, depicted at work and in everyday life: living in yurts or palaces, nursing children, preparing food or enjoying themselves. A man is shown washing his feet before entering the mosque; shepherds play on reed-pipes; then come porters, building workers, stone-cutters, grave-diggers, participants in a funeral procession, and so on.

The compositional patterns developed before Bihzād's day included a large number of scenes from everyday life, a broad range of material and an extension of the spatial boundaries of the narrative. Selecting typical episodes for a particular situation, the artist endeavoured to communicate to the picture the feeling of life in Herat in all its aspects. To achieve this end, Bihzād began by tackling the spatial problems: he reduced the dimensions of the architecture, the features of the landscape and the figures, leaving himself more room for detail and drawing the viewer's attention to the main action. All means were subordinated to that end: the architectural details and groups of secondary figures were relegated to the top, side and bottom edges of the composition, leaving the centre free for the main action as a three-dimensional space. The remainder of the scene, generally its upper half, is enclosed by a frontal wall or a hill, acting as a backdrop or background. The composition in Herat miniatures is no longer static: we find instead a clear expression of inner movement. At the same time, it acquires a peculiar stability and balance; every line and outline and the composition as a whole have a finished quality. In Bihzād's painting, the miniature reaches its zenith.<sup>25</sup>

## The Samarkand school

The miniature also followed a distinctive line of development in the other Timurid and Turkmen artistic centres that flourished during the fifteenth century, including Shiraz, Yazd, Tabriz and Samarkand. Samarkand became such a centre at the end of the fourteenth

<sup>25</sup> Grube, 1969, pp. 90–105; Pedersen, 1984, pp. 96–7; Bahari, 1987.

century when Timur began to send to his capital the finest craftsmen from the regions that he had conquered, and they were put to work painting murals on the walls of palaces and creating manuscripts. The renown of Timur's magnificent library has survived the passage of time but the actual manuscripts of the period have not. The written sources provide us with indications of the stylistic trends in painting during the first half of the fifteenth century. According to the sixteenth-century historian Dūst Muhammad, the Baghdad master 'Abd al-Hayy, brought to Samarkand from Baghdad in 1393 by Timur, introduced the Baghdad style and all the craftsmen began to imitate his work.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, to this day, no miniatures have been found that can be assigned on the basis of their imprint to Samarkand before the 1440s. In this connection, the Samarkand miniatures, *The Portrait of Ulugh Beg* and the illustrations to Nizāmī's *Khamṣa* copied in 1446–7 (Fig. 12), are of unique significance.<sup>27</sup> Their originality and high quality testify to the advanced level of development achieved by the Samarkand miniature in the fifteenth century.

Samarkand painting has a 'sparse' quality that is absent from that of Herat and much of the surface is left blank. The structure of the composition, which is based on accentuated vertical and horizontal lines, is particularly well defined. The elements of the composition, the landscape, the architecture and architectural decoration are enlarged; there are few figures. Every particular affirms that the Samarkand miniature has its own, special decorative structure. A general atmosphere of serene calm prevails in every detail (Fig. 13).<sup>28</sup>

Distinct schools likewise developed at the provincial courts of Shiraz, Yazd and Tabriz, although a consideration of them lies outside the scope of this book. The development of the miniature in all these places brought out both the originality of each school and their similarities. Each made its own contribution to the enrichment of the artistic language of the medieval Islamic miniature. The development of painting is clearly revealed as a single process involving an understanding of previous traditions, a creative exchange of achievements between different schools, an identification of fresh artistic challenges and a search for a distinctive artistic language.

<sup>26</sup> Dūst Muhammad, 1965, p. 174.

<sup>27</sup> Ashrafi, 1988, pp. 25–30; Gray (ed.), 1979, p. 169, Pls. LV–LVI; Ashrafi, 1987, pp. 75–85.

<sup>28</sup> Ashrafi, 1987, pp. 84–5.

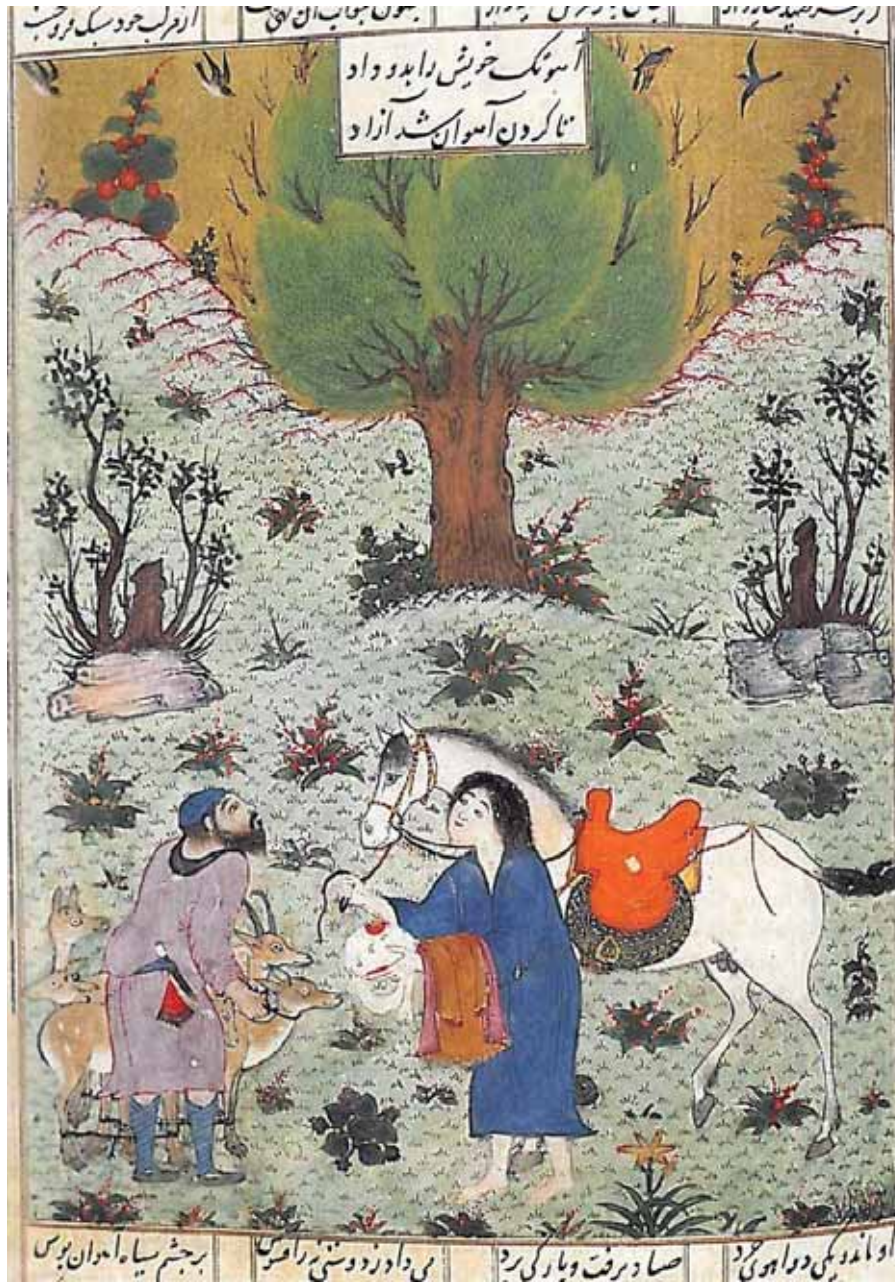


Fig. 12. Majnūn offers his clothes to the gazelle hunter. *Khamsa* of Nizāmī, 1446–7. (Photo: © Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, H. 786, fol. 118a.)



Fig. 13. Procession of a Timurid princess. (Photo: © Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, H. 2153, fols. 3b–4a.)



## Part Two

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF CALLIGRAPHY

(*P. Soucek*)

In the middle of the eighth century, the inhabitants of Central Asia employed numerous scripts for the many languages they used in religious and secular life. This linguistic and epigraphic multiplicity was particularly pronounced among groups with broad international connections such as the Manichaeans.<sup>29</sup> Even a single language, such as Old Turkic, could be written in a variety of scripts.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the fifteenth century, however, this epigraphic and linguistic variety had considerably diminished. The principal catalyst for this transformation was the spread of Islam, which carried with it both the Arabic language and the alphabetic system with which it was written.

The impact of Arabic and of its alphabet went beyond the fact that it also came to be used, in slightly modified versions, for the transcription of various Iranian, Turkic and Indian languages. The introduction of Arabic, which was initially spread in the region primarily through its role in the practice and propagation of Islam, also served to augment the prestige of both the activity of writing and the written word. Moreover, the new importance accorded to writing gave greater prominence to the production and embellishment of books.

In the mid-eighth century several book-making traditions were current in Central Asia. One was the *pothī* format that had originated in India. Books were made from long narrow sheets of tree bark or palm fibre. After a text had been incised or copied on to such a surface, the single sheets were pierced, strung on cord and protected by stiff outer covers.<sup>31</sup> This book format was used in Central Asia particularly for the copying of Buddhist scriptures; some of those books are well written and embellished with pictures.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Litvinsky, 1996, pp. 415–19.

<sup>30</sup> Gabain, 1950, pp. 9–41.

<sup>31</sup> Losty, 1982, pp. 5–15.

<sup>32</sup> Piotrovsky et al., 1993, nos. 72, 73, 84, pp. 258–9, 272–3; Losty, 1982, pp. 29–36.

Several factors, however, inhibited the development of a broader concern for calligraphy from the book-making traditions of Central Asia. In India proper, a relatively low status was assigned to writing, an attitude that reflects the long-standing reliance in that region on oral transmission for preserving important religious texts.<sup>33</sup> In addition, some believed that the religious merit attached to the copying of Buddhist scriptures could also be attained through their quantitative replication and this encouraged the use of printing rather than handwriting for religious texts. Since the skill of printing had spread to Central Asia from China, such texts were often in the scroll or 'butterfly' formats popular there.<sup>34</sup> The sacred books of the Manichaeans were renowned for the beauty of their illustrations, illumination and calligraphy but that community's diminishing importance after the mid-ninth century limited their impact on the broader culture of Central Asia. Manichaean reliance on pictures as a vehicle of religious instruction may also have diminished the expressive use of calligraphy.<sup>35</sup>

By way of contrast, the special importance that Islam accorded to its sacred volume, the Qur'an, placed writing and books at the centre of the religious and cultural life of the Islamic community. It is the prestige attached to writing which appears to have encouraged the development of calligraphy or modes of writing in which the formal aspects of a script are given an equal, or at times greater, weight than other more practical concerns such as ease of execution or even legibility. The Islamic calligraphic tradition is characterized by the concurrent use of different styles of writing in which the Arabic alphabet is written according to consciously articulated formal paradigms. The strokes from which the letters are formed can be thin, thick or variable in width. Individual letters and words may be broadly or closely spaced, overlapping or intertwined. The resulting hands run the gamut from severely rectilinear to fluid and curvilinear.<sup>36</sup>

Thus although the role played by writing in Central Asia from the mid-eighth to the sixteenth century was affected by the region's earlier cultural heritage, it is primarily the dual impact of Islam and of the Arabic alphabet that gave calligraphy a new prominence. The respect accorded to writing in the Islamic world is evident in correspondence, monumental epigraphy and, above all, books. The spread of Islam to Central Asia also encouraged the use of a book form of Mediterranean origin, the codex, in which leaves of parchment, and later paper, were sewn together along their vertical axis and attached to a protective cover.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Losty, 1982, pp. 5–18.

<sup>34</sup> Piotrovsky et al., 1993, nos. 77, 82, pp. 264, 269.

<sup>35</sup> Mair, 1988, pp. 50–3.

<sup>36</sup> *EP*, 'Khatt' (J. Sourdel-Thomine et al.).

<sup>37</sup> Déroche, 1992, pp. 17–20.

In the following discussion, therefore, the principal focus will be on calligraphy from Central Asia that employs the Arabic alphabet and is contained in books. The history of that tradition between the mid-eighth and the sixteenth century can be divided into two unequal segments. The first, stretching from 750 to 1258, marks the duration of the ʿAbbasid dynasty centred in Baghdad, whereas the second, from 1258 to 1500, opens with the consolidation of the Mongol empire founded by Chinggis Khan.

These two periods, the ʿAbbasid and the Mongol/post-Mongol, differ in various respects. The relative paucity of surviving examples from the earlier and longer period contrasts with the plentiful information available about the Mongol and post-Mongol centuries. Although the ʿAbbasid dynasty's control over Central Asia was largely indirect, Baghdad remained a vital centre of culture and its impact is particularly evident in the history of calligraphy. During the ʿAbbasid period, therefore, calligraphic trends in Central Asia often mirrored styles developed in Iraq. Despite strong formal links between the calligraphy of Central Asia and that of ʿAbbasid Iraq, however, the uses to which it was put reflect local needs and concerns.

## The ʿAbbasid period

Although the importance of calligraphy to the Muslim community was evident in many spheres of life, the scripts used to transcribe the Qur'an enjoyed high prestige, and this prominence is particularly marked for the first Islamic centuries. The international character of the ʿAbbasid culture makes it possible to identify key features of the calligraphy which circulated in Central Asia, even though most Qur'anic manuscripts from the eighth through the tenth century survive only in a fragmentary condition and among those scattered leaves none has yet been securely linked to Central Asia.

A book dealer's catalogue compiled in Baghdad in the late tenth century, the *Fihrist* [Index] of Ibn al-Nadīm, attests to the great prestige which had already been attached to writing and connoisseurship of calligraphy by the mid-eighth century. In Ibn al-Nadīm's own time many different scripts were recognized. Although his descriptions do not permit those hands to be identified among surviving calligraphic samples, his remarks do suggest that it was customary to adjust the size of a script and the thickness of its lines to the dimensions of the surface upon which a text was written.<sup>38</sup>

The critical importance of proportionality, spacing and visual balance in the execution of early Islamic calligraphy has been borne out in modern studies of the earliest Qur'anic scripts. By the ninth century meticulously executed and well-balanced scripts are known

<sup>38</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, 1970, Vol. 1, pp. 11–16.

to have been in use in Syria and Iraq. Western scholars often label these scripts as ‘Kufic’, suggesting that they originated in Kufa, which does not seem to be the case. Thus here the more neutral term ‘<sup>o</sup>Abbasid’ will be used.<sup>39</sup>

Since the regions of Khurasan and Transoxania, on the western edge of Inner Asia, had close ties to the <sup>o</sup>Abbasid capital, it can be assumed that the styles of calligraphy in vogue in Iraq would also have been known there. The early date by which use of the Arabic language had been introduced to the western regions of Central Asia is confirmed by the discovery at Mount Mug (in the upper Zarafshan valley of north-western Tajikistan) of a letter in Arabic from the local Sogdian ruler to an Arab commander. Internal evidence permits the dating of this document to 718–19 (Fig. 14).<sup>40</sup> The letter is written in a clear cursive hand which uses both the horizontal extension and the spacing of letters to emphasize parts of the text such as its salutation. These adjustments also provide an overall harmony for the page.

Further evidence for the fact that calligraphers in Central Asia had mastered the essential features of scripts used at the centre of the <sup>o</sup>Abbasid empire is provided by the painted inscriptions on a group of ninth- or tenth-century ceramic vessels probably made in the city of Nishapur during the Samanid period.<sup>41</sup> Although these inscriptions are secular in content and consist primarily of aphorisms, the scripts in which they are executed share many features with those used in early Qur’an manuscripts.

A dish now in the David Collection, Copenhagen, bears a text extolling the value of generosity inscribed in a dark-brown slip against a white ground.<sup>42</sup> This inscription has significant points of similarity with a number of Qur’ans written on parchment, such as the pages of a manuscript now divided among various collections (part of which is in the Iran National Museum, Tehran) (Figs. 15 and 16).<sup>43</sup> The texts on both the Qur’an pages and the dish are in a bold script, executed with broad strokes, in which angular geometric shapes are counterbalanced by a few letters formed of nearly solid circles. The shapes of individual letters on the plate and on the page are quite comparable, but the proportions and spacing of each text appear to have been carefully modulated to fit within a specific space. Qur’an pages of the type now in Tehran were being produced during the middle decades of the ninth century, and the pottery vessel may be of similar date.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Déroche, 1992, pp. 11–19, 34–42.

<sup>40</sup> Petrosyan et al., 1995, no. 7, pp. 122–3; Krachkovskiy, 1955, Vol. 1, pp. 181–7.

<sup>41</sup> Wilkinson, 1973, pp. 92–4, 96–109; Gouchani, 1986.

<sup>42</sup> Gouchani, 1986, no. 80, pp. 179–80.

<sup>43</sup> Lings, 1976, p. 18, no. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Déroche, 1992, group D.I or D.II, pp. 36–7, 43–5, 65–6, 69, 72–5, nos. 21, 24.



Fig. 14. Letter in Arabic on leather. (Photo: © Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, B-12, 718–19.)

During the first half of the tenth century, Qurʾans with a vertical orientation were copied in more attenuated variants of the ʿAbbasid script. This trend is exemplified by a Qurʾan on parchment from which pages are now in the Khalili Collection, London, and in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington.<sup>45</sup> Some inscriptions on Nishapur ceramics, such the

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., no. 57, pp. 109–10; Ettinghausen, 1938–9, Pl. 930a.

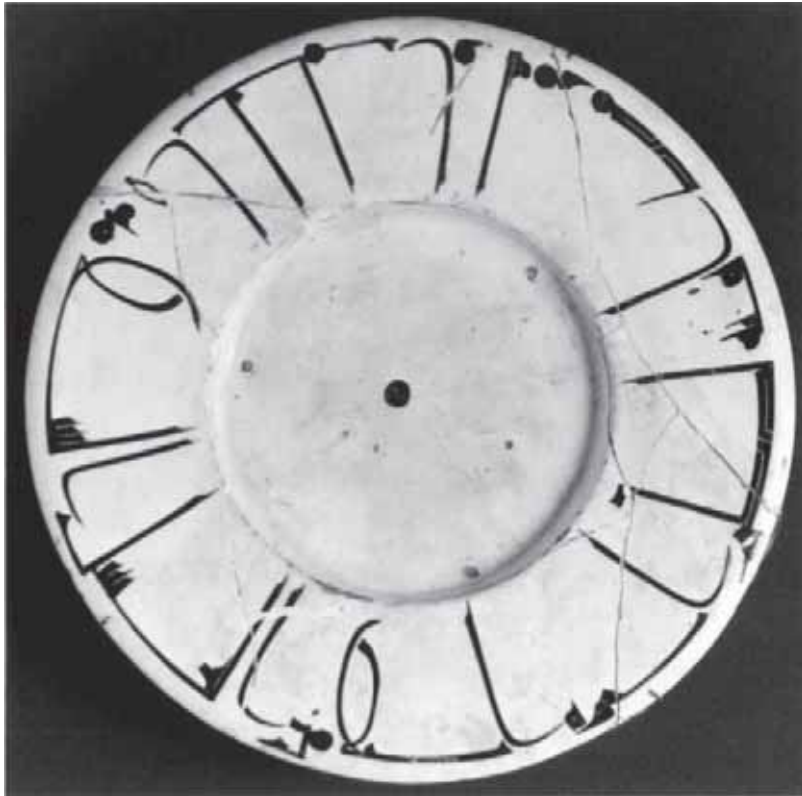


Fig. 15. Nishapur. Inscription on a pottery dish. Photo: © R.M.N./© Thierry Ollivier.

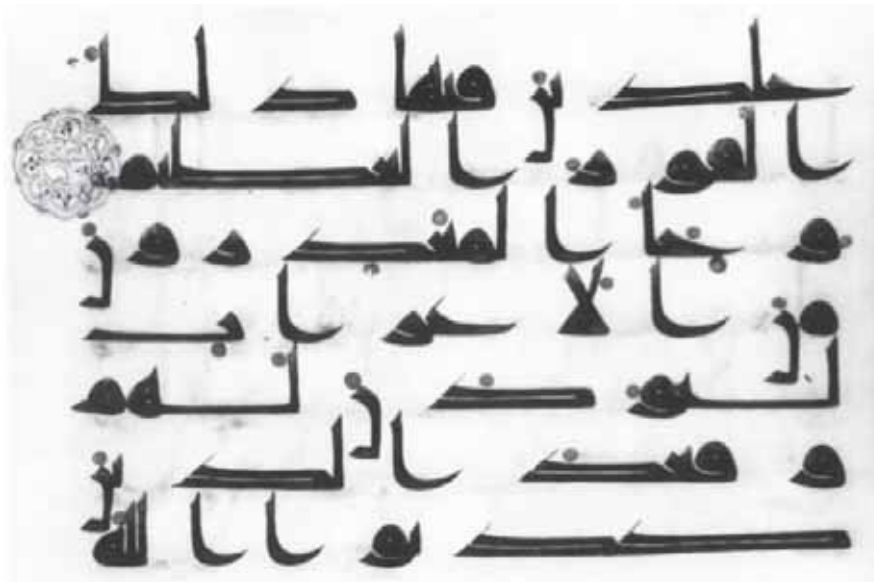


Fig. 16. Folio from a Qur'an parchment. (Photo: Courtesy of Iran National Museum, Department of the Islamic Period, Z. Rouhfar.)

one on a dish now in the St Louis Art Museum, share this accentuated verticality.<sup>46</sup> The mannerisms and exaggeration of the St Louis text also link it to a series of Qurʾans that have various connections to eastern Iran and Afghanistan and were copied during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

These Qurʾan copies are written on paper, a practice that becomes common in the region during the course of the eleventh century. In many of them, the text is shadowed by panels of minutely executed scrolls, giving the pages the overall appearance of an embroidered textile. An early member of this group is a Qurʾan both copied and illuminated by ʿUthman b. Husayn Warrāq in 466/1073–4, sections of which are now in the Mashhad Shrine Library.<sup>47</sup> In this hand, slender vertical letter shafts are counterbalanced by the wedge-shaped stylization of letters on the script’s base line. Descending letters have an angular profile. The confusing name ‘Eastern Kufic’ is often used for this style of writing, but it appears to be the regularized version of a cursive hand distinct from the ʿAbbasid script. Here, the term ‘New Script’, coined by F. Déroche, will be used to identify it. This calligraphic mode seems to have been particularly popular with scribes in eastern Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup>

In time this New Script developed pronounced mannerisms. Its vertical shafts are increasingly slender and elongated and some are bent into ornamental shapes. Closed letters become triangular or heart-shaped; others sprout foliate appendices. These features are evident in manuscripts copied by Abū Bakr b. Ahmad al-Ghaznawī, presumably in Afghanistan. One of his Qurʾans, now in Cairo and dated to 566/1171, opens with the description of the Prophet’s miraculous night journey, or *mirʿāj*, to the al-Aqsa mosque (sura 17:1). Abū Bakr uses pronounced horizontal extensions to dramatize the word ‘al-Aqsā’ which fills nearly one line of the page.<sup>49</sup> Another of his Qurʾan copies, now in Istanbul and dated to 573/1177–8, is striking for the different sizes and shapes assumed by a given word or phrase at different points in the text. Such adjustments were used to maintain the overall balance in a line or page.<sup>50</sup>

The eccentric hand employed by Abū Bakr al-Ghaznawī was, however, the vestige of an earlier age. By the late eleventh or early twelfth century it was used primarily for copying the Qurʾan. For other purposes it was replaced by scripts constructed on a system of

<sup>46</sup> Gouchani, 1986, no. 42 pp. 104–5.

<sup>47</sup> Mashhad Shrine Library, no. 70, fol. 2b (sura 33:31–32), Gulchin-i Maʿani, 1969, cat. no. 21, pp. 45, 49; it contains section 22 of a 30-part Qurʾan; Lings and Safadi, 1976, no. 35, p. 33; Ettinghausen, 1938–9, Pl. 930b.

<sup>48</sup> Déroche, 1992, pp. 132–5.

<sup>49</sup> Egyptian National Library, Ettinghausen, 1938–9, p. 1946, no. 7, Pl. 930c.

<sup>50</sup> Istanbul, Topkapi Sarayi Library, E.H. 42, fols. 95b–96a, sura 9:94; Lings, 1976, no. 19, p. 18.

harmonic proportions. The centre of these new developments was the city of Baghdad and the scribes Ibn Muqla (d. 939) and Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 1022) are traditionally credited with devising *khatt al-mansūb*, or proportioned script, in which the scale of all the letters in a given hand has a fixed relation to each other and the dimensions of any letter can be defined by reference to the height of the alphabet's first letter, the *alif*.<sup>51</sup>

This process was used to regularize cursive scripts that were already in common use. The most popular was a variant of *naskh*, widely employed as a book hand, and its use gradually spread eastwards from Iraq to Iran, Afghanistan and northern India. As early as 391/1000–1, Ibn al-Bawwāb copied the Qur'an in a form of *naskh*, thereby elevating the status of this calligraphic mode.<sup>52</sup> By the mid-eleventh century a well-defined type of *naskh* was used in Ghazna to transcribe a text describing the virtues of the Prophet Muhammad for a member of the Ghaznavid dynasty, Abū Mansūr ʿAbd al-Rashīd (?1049–52). A curvilinear gold script outlined in black is used for its opening invocation and title, and the body of the text is copied in black on a smaller scale.<sup>53</sup>

For a time Central Asian calligraphers used *naskh* concurrently with the more archaic angular scripts. Thus in the Qur'an dated to 466/1073–4 copied and illuminated by ʿUthmān b. Husayn Warrāq, discussed above, the fluid hand of his colophon is in sharp contrast to the one that he employed for the Qur'anic text itself.<sup>54</sup> The growing acceptance of cursive scripts for Qur'an copies is demonstrated by a volume copied in Mashhad dated to 592/1195. This book is also notable for the way in which the text is surrounded by illumination of finely executed scrolls.<sup>55</sup>

As the taste for elaborate illumination spread, calligraphers often worked in conjunction with illuminators. This is true of a Qur'an volume now in Paris that was copied by ʿUthmān b. Muhammad during 505/1111–12 at Bust in what is now southern Afghanistan. His forcefully executed hand gives the book a monumental appearance despite its small size (20.2 × 15.1 cm). The text's final page bears the signatures of both ʿUthmān and the illuminator, ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān, who has incorporated his name into the book's final decorative panel (Fig. 17).<sup>56</sup>

Manuscripts in which two or more cursive hands were contrasted with each other became popular in Central Asia during the twelfth century, particularly for books that included both the text of the Qur'an and explanatory materials. The most frequent scheme was to write

<sup>51</sup> Rice, 1983, pp. 7–15; *EI*<sup>2</sup>, 'Ibn al-Bawwab' (J. Sourdél-Thomine).

<sup>52</sup> Rice, 1983, pp. 7–15.

<sup>53</sup> Stern, 1969, pp. 7–19, 23–5, Fig. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Mashhad Shrine Library, no. 70, fol. 77a (sura 33:31–32), *Gulchīn-i Ma'ānī*, 1969, cat. no. 21, pp. 48, 49.

<sup>55</sup> James, 1980, no. 21, p. 36, CBL Ms. 1422.

<sup>56</sup> Richard, 1997, no. 1, pp. 33–2, 37; Sourdél-Thomine, 1987, no. 36, pp. 74–5.





Fig. 17. Panel from a Qur'an from Bust dated 505/1111–12 (Arabe 6041, fol. 125a). (Photo: © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.)

the commentary on a smaller scale immediately below the relevant Qur'anic text. Although the earliest commentaries were written in Arabic, the ones copied in Central Asia were normally in Persian or one of the Turkic dialects.

One of the most famous Qur'an commentaries is that written in Baghdad by Abū Jaʿfar Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī (d. 923). A condensed Persian translation of this voluminous text was prepared in Bukhara by a group of local scholars for the Samanid ruler, Mansūr b. Nūh (961–76). It provides a literal, word-for-word, translation of the Qur'an as well as more discursive comments. Shortly thereafter a similar commentary and translation in Eastern Turkic was prepared under Karakhanid auspices.<sup>57</sup>

Those initial efforts, meant to provide speakers of Persian and of the various Turkic dialects with aids to the study of the Qur'an, were soon followed by others, and a spate of commentaries was compiled in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. One of the most

<sup>57</sup> Eckmann, 1976, pp. 11–17.

popular was written, in Persian, by Abū Bakr ʿAtīq al-Sūrābādī (d. 1100) in the city of Nishapur some time between 1078 and 1087. His text includes colourful stories about persons mentioned in the Qurʾan such as Adam, Noah and Solomon.<sup>58</sup>

One of the treasures of the Iran National Museum, Tehran, is an integral copy of this work, in four volumes. The final volume contains a discursive colophon in which the scribe, Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Nishābūrī al-Laythī, explains how he completed the text on 8 Rabīʿ II 584/6 June 1189 as a gift for the Ghurid ruler Ghiyāth al-Dīn Abu ʿl-Fatʿh Muhammad b. Sām (1173–1203) after working on it day in, day out, for five years.<sup>59</sup> As befits a presentation copy, the volumes in Tehran are large (38.5 × 29.5 cm) and handsomely illuminated. The opening text pages of each volume are framed in gold and the text itself is surrounded by panels of scrolls as well as occasional foliate ornaments (Fig. 18).<sup>60</sup> This illumination recalls that of the nearly contemporary Qurʾans copied in the New Script by Abū Bakr al-Ghaznawī. The Tehran Sūrābādī manuscript employs three different scripts: sura headings are often in an ornamental version of the New Script, the Arabic text is in a majestic cursive hand with pronounced sublinear curves, and the Persian interlinear commentary is in a small-scale *naskh*.

Scripts popular in eastern Iran and Afghanistan such as those in Sūrābādī's commentary also provided a foundation for the development of calligraphy in the sections of northern India which came under Muslim control during the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. The Ghurid conquest of northern India in the thirteenth century must have soon been followed by the production of documents and manuscripts in Persian and Arabic, but the earliest surviving examples date only to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>61</sup>

Due to the fragility of works on paper in the climate of the subcontinent, the sequence and variety of calligraphy practised in India from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century are best understood from monumental epigraphy.<sup>62</sup>

These inscriptions in more durable materials demonstrate that Indian calligraphers developed several idiosyncratic variants of *naskh*. The one most often used in manuscripts is known as 'Behārī' or 'Bahārī' and is characterized by a dramatic elongation and thickening of sublinear letters. A monumental variant of this script appears in a mosque inscription from Gujarat dated to 1370–1.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Sūrābādī, 1966, pp. 4–20.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 21–2; Bahrāmī and Bayānī, 1949, Part 1: Figs. 4, 18; Part 2: pp. 16–17.

<sup>61</sup> Losty, 1982, pp. 37–41.

<sup>62</sup> Begley, 1985, nos. 1–30, pp. 8–67.

<sup>63</sup> Begley, 1985, no. 18, pp. 48–9.



Fig. 18. Folio from the *Tafsīr-Surābādī*, scribe Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Nayshābūrī, 584/1189, for Ghiyāth al-Dīn Abu 'l-Fat'h Muhammad b. Sām. (Photo: Courtesy of Iran National Museum, Department of the Islamic Period, Z. Rouhfar.)

The earliest dated Qur'an manuscript which can be connected with India is one now in Geneva: it was copied at the Fort of Gwalior in 1399. Its Arabic text displays bold horizontal elongations and is copied in gold, blue and red. The interlinear Persian translation is in a small-scale cursive script.<sup>64</sup> Qur'ans from the fifteenth century, such as one now in the British Library, contain the horizontal elongations and occasional overlapping of letters characteristic of the fully formed Behārī script (Fig. 19). Its interlinear Persian translation is in a more usual form of *naskh*.<sup>65</sup>

## The Mongol and post-Mongol periods

The Mongol invasions of the 1220s must have halted the production of luxury manuscripts in eastern Iran and Transoxania. In the second half of the thirteenth century, however,

<sup>64</sup> Losty, 1982, no. 18, Pl. VIII, pp. 39, 55–6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., no. 20, fol. 110b, pp. 39, 56; for a similar manuscript, see also James, 1992b, no. 27, pp. 103–5.



Fig. 19. Folio in the Behāri script from a Qu'ran, northern India, c. 1500. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Add. 5548, fol. 110v.

a gradual revival began, particularly in western Iran and Iraq, and it also incorporated calligraphic practices of Central Asian origin. Among them was the production of Qur'ans with Turkic interlinear translations and commentaries. The first such Qur'ans must have been produced in the tenth century for the Karakhanids, but the earliest surviving examples appear to be of fourteenth-century date. One manuscript with a Turkic commentary is thought to have been copied in Shiraz and some others may be from western Iran or even Anatolia.<sup>66</sup>

Among them are two manuscripts which share certain traits of calligraphy and illumination, one now mainly in the John Rylands University Library, in Manchester, and the other in the Mashhad Shrine Library. The Turkic text of the Rylands copy, which also has a Persian interlinear translation, has been analysed by J. Eckmann, who concludes that it

<sup>66</sup> Eckmann, 1976, pp. 11–13.

was transcribed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.<sup>67</sup> The Mashhad copy has a colophon in Arabic and Turkic that dates it to 737/1337 and gives the scribe's name as Muhammad b. Shaykh Yūsuf al-Abārī. This scribe also complains of the faulty copy from which he has worked and insists on his efforts to correct it.<sup>68</sup>

The discrepancy of scale between the Arabic text and its interlinear translations is very marked in these copies. The translations are written in a very fluid hand with unusual ligatures, whereas the Arabic letters are carefully formed and rhythmically spaced. The Rylands trilingual Qur'an has certain archaic features such as its three-line text and horizontal format which suggest that it may be a replica of an earlier, possibly tenth-century, manuscript.

Another Central Asian calligraphic practice carried westwards by the Mongol invasions was the use of a cursive form of the Sogdian alphabet for the transcription of both Eastern Turkic and Mongolian. The initial stage of this process, the adaptation of a Sogdian script to the transcription of Eastern Turkic or Uighur, antedates the arrival of Islam in the region and appears to have occurred spontaneously in oases such as Turfan where both the Sogdian and Turkic languages were in use.<sup>69</sup> Its adoption for the writing of Mongolian was a later application of this Uighur variant. Mongol tradition dates this innovation to 1204, but the consistency with which the earliest extant Mongol texts use the Uighur script suggests that the practice was already established by that time.<sup>70</sup> The Mongols and some of their successor states, such as the Timurids, used the Uighur script in their record-keeping and correspondence, but the surviving manuscripts in this hand are of Timurid date and will, therefore, be considered below.<sup>71</sup>

Despite such links to the Central Asian past, the major formative influence on that region's calligraphy from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century remained the traditions of <sup>ʿ</sup>Abbasid Iraq, particularly those associated with Yāqūt al-Musta<sup>ʿ</sup>simī (d. c. 1298), calligrapher of the last <sup>ʿ</sup>Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, Abū Ahmad al-Musta<sup>ʿ</sup>sim (1242–58). In this final <sup>ʿ</sup>Abbasid phase, the *khatt al-mansūb*, or proportioned script developed by Ibn al-Bawwāb, was given a further refinement. Yāqūt's name is linked with six scripts that were to lay the foundations for calligraphic practice over the next two centuries, and those

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 14–17; James, 1988, cat. no. 59, pp. 173–5, 244, Figs. 121–3a, 123c.

<sup>68</sup> James, 1988, cat. no. 58, pp. 175–7, 244, Fig. 124; Gulchīn-i Ma<sup>ʿ</sup>ānī, 1969, no. 48, pp. 107–8, Fig. p. 109.

<sup>69</sup> Sims-Williams, 1981, pp. 346–60.

<sup>70</sup> Bosson, 1995, pp. 88–90.

<sup>71</sup> Gabain, 1950, pp. 15–29; Sims-Williams, 1981; Ganjei, 1964; Bosson, 1995, pp. 88–90.

hands were traditionally divided into two categories, one more rectilinear and the other predominately curvilinear.<sup>72</sup>

The most rectilinear and monumental of these hands, *muhaqqaq*, was favoured for the largest and most impressive Qur'ans of the Mongol and post-Mongol eras. Following their conversion to Islam, the Il Khanid Mongols became active patrons of Islamic culture and some of the most impressive Qur'ans ever copied were made for Sultan Öljeytü (1304–16). They are all executed in *muhaqqaq* and show the full decorative potential of that script.<sup>73</sup>

The most majestic of them is known as Öljeytü's 'Baghdad Qur'an' (now in the Topkapi Saray Museum) and contains a *waqf* inscription dedicating it to his mausoleum at Sultaniyya. The manuscript's colophons state that it was copied in Baghdad, probably between 705/1306–7 and 710/1311–12, but the scribe does not provide his own name. D. James has suggested that he was one of Yāqūt's pupils, Ahmad b. al-Suhrawardī. This Qur'an's sumptuous illumination is signed by another Baghdad master, Muhammad b. Aybak.<sup>74</sup> The text of this unusually large volume (72 × 50 cm) is arranged five lines to a page; alternate lines are written in gold outlined with a fine black line and black bordered with gold. This choice of colours underscores the shape of the letters and gives them an almost sculptural appearance. This monumentality is further enhanced by the scribe's mastery of dynamic balance and his ability to integrate the size, shape and spacing of each letter with the overall structure of a page (Fig. 20).

Another of Öljeytü's Qur'ans was prepared in Mosul and is notable for its detailed colophons and certificates of commissioning. Its 30 volumes were transcribed between 704/1305–6 and 711/1312–13 by ʿAli b. Muhammad al-Husaynī, a descendant of the Prophet, who gives his full lineage in the manuscript's colophons, Öljeytü's own titles and ancestry and the names of his viziers Saʿd al-Dīn and Rashīd al-Dīn are included in the certificates of commissioning which open each of the volumes. The text of this Qur'an, although less impressive as a work of calligraphy than Öljeytü's 'Baghdad Qur'an', is a well-executed example *ot muhaqqaq*, and is written in a black-outlined gold script.<sup>75</sup>

The calligraphic modes linked with Yāqūt and his pupils found particular favour with the Timurids. Timur's penchant for the grandiose, well documented in the buildings he sponsored, is also evident in the scale of a Qur'an believed to have been produced for use in the great mosque of Samarkand. Its unusually large pages, measuring 165 × 99 cm, carry seven lines of *muhaqqaq* script in a forceful style. Although this hand lacks the

<sup>72</sup> The more rectilinear scripts are *muhaqqaq*, *naskh* and *rayhān*, the curvilinear are *thuluth*, *riqāʿ* and *tawqī*. See James, 1992a, pp. 14–16, 58–9.

<sup>73</sup> James, 1988, pp. 92–103, 111–26.

<sup>74</sup> James, 1988, cat. no. 40, pp. 92–8, 235–6, Figs. 53, 55, 61–2; Lings, 1976, nos. 46–7, p. 102.

<sup>75</sup> James, 1988, cat. no. 42, pp. 100–3, 237, Figs. 65–7, 68–72.



Fig. 20. Folio from a Qur'an, Baghdad, 707/1307. (Photo: © Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, E. H. 234, fol. 55a.)

refinement of the work associated with Ahmad b. al-Suhrawardī, its scale and rhythmic accentuations are impressive. Now dispersed in various collections, it has been attributed to one of Timur's calligraphers, <sup>c</sup>Umar-i Aqta<sup>c</sup>, although some of its pages are also credited to Timur's grandson, Baysunqur b. Shāh Rukh.<sup>76</sup>

The high esteem in which the calligraphy of Yāqūt and his followers was held in the post-Mongol period is also underscored by later manuscripts which reflect his style, some of which even bear his 'signature'.<sup>77</sup> A Qur'an manuscript now in Tehran presents a more overt example of such emulation because its colophon states that it was copied in Herat in 846/1442 by Mahmūd al-Sultānī after a manuscript by Yāqūt. Although the best-documented manuscripts by Yāqūt's followers are large-scale Qur'ans in the *muhaqqaq* script, Mahmūd's copy is relatively small (24 × 17 cm) and written in the delicate *rayhān*

<sup>76</sup> Soudavar, 1992, cat. 20a–b, pp. 59–62, Figs. 4–5.

<sup>77</sup> James, 1992a, pp. 58–9.

script.<sup>78</sup> This manuscript bears a particularly close relationship to a Qur'an with Yāqūt's signature dated to 698/1298, and which is now in Paris.<sup>79</sup>

Even though the calligraphers working for the Timurids in Samarkand and Herat showed great respect for the precedents of earlier calligraphers such as Yāqūt and his followers, they were not limited to the scripts of this classical repertoire. Newer forms of writing also gained in popularity. The greatest innovation of this period was the adoption of a fluid, curvilinear script known as *nasta'liq*, which emerged in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries as the preferred hand for the copying of Persian poetry. *Nasta'liq* is essentially a more flowing form of *naskh* with a descending extension of certain letters along the base line of the script, but it has a tendency to link letters together, a feature of some chancery hands. *Nasta'liq* is also often written with a very fine pen, which gives it a delicate appearance. Timurid and Safavid sources place the origin of this script in the Jalayirid realm, particularly in Tabriz, and date its inception to the lifetime of Timur.<sup>80</sup> An inspection of fourteenth-century manuscripts, however, demonstrates that the fluidity found in *nasta'liq* had been developing gradually and in more than one place. One style is connected with Shiraz and was in use by the middle decades of the fourteenth century, another variant was employed in Baghdad during the last quarter of the fourteenth century.<sup>81</sup>

The form of *nasta'liq* in use at the Timurid court in Herat and Samarkand, however, follows the precedent set in Tabriz in the first decades of the fifteenth century. A Tabriz-trained scribe named Ja'far b. 'Alī al-Tabrizī helped to establish this mode of *nasta'liq* in Herat during the second quarter of the fifteenth century through his leadership in the Timurid court workshop. The basic traits of this script can be seen from the opening page of a copy of Nizāmī Ganjā'ī's *Khusraw u Shīrīn* now in St Petersburg (Figs. 21 and 22). Its text is marked by the extensions of several letters which form a rhythmic pattern that in turn also draws attention to key words in the text such as the rhymes at the end of each hemistich.<sup>82</sup>

During the fifteenth century the *nasta'liq* script was further developed, particularly by calligraphers working in Herat. The elongated letters were then further exaggerated by the method of drawing them with thicker strokes and cutting the pen at an oblique angle so that the calligraphic line became more variable. Occasionally a text was formed with letters cut out of a sheet of paper and then pasted on to another surface, a technique known as *qit'a* (*découpage*). This was done in a copy of the *diwān* of the last important Timurid ruler,

<sup>78</sup> Atābāī, 1972, no. 2, pp. 3–4.

<sup>79</sup> James, 1992a, p. 59; Sourdel-Thomine, 1987, no. 6716; Lings and Safadi, 1976, no. 59, p. 46.

<sup>80</sup> Soucek, 1979, pp. 18–24.

<sup>81</sup> Richard, 1997, pp. 61–2, 67, 71–2, cat. nos. 26–7, 33–5.

<sup>82</sup> Petrosyan et al., 1995, no. 28, pp. 178–81.





Fig. 21. Opening page of a copy of Nizāmī Ganja'ī's *Khusraw u Shīrīn* (B. 132). (Photo: © Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg.)

Sultān Husayn Bayqara, that was probably produced in Herat at the end of the fifteenth century. One of the pages of this manuscript (now in Los Angeles) has a text cut from several shades of pastel paper that has been pasted on to a sheet of dark green paper. Although Sultān Husayn wrote this *ghazal* in Eastern Turkic, his vocabulary and literary style follow the conventions of Persian poetry.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Lentz and Lowry, 1989, no. 148, pp. 263–70, 359–60.

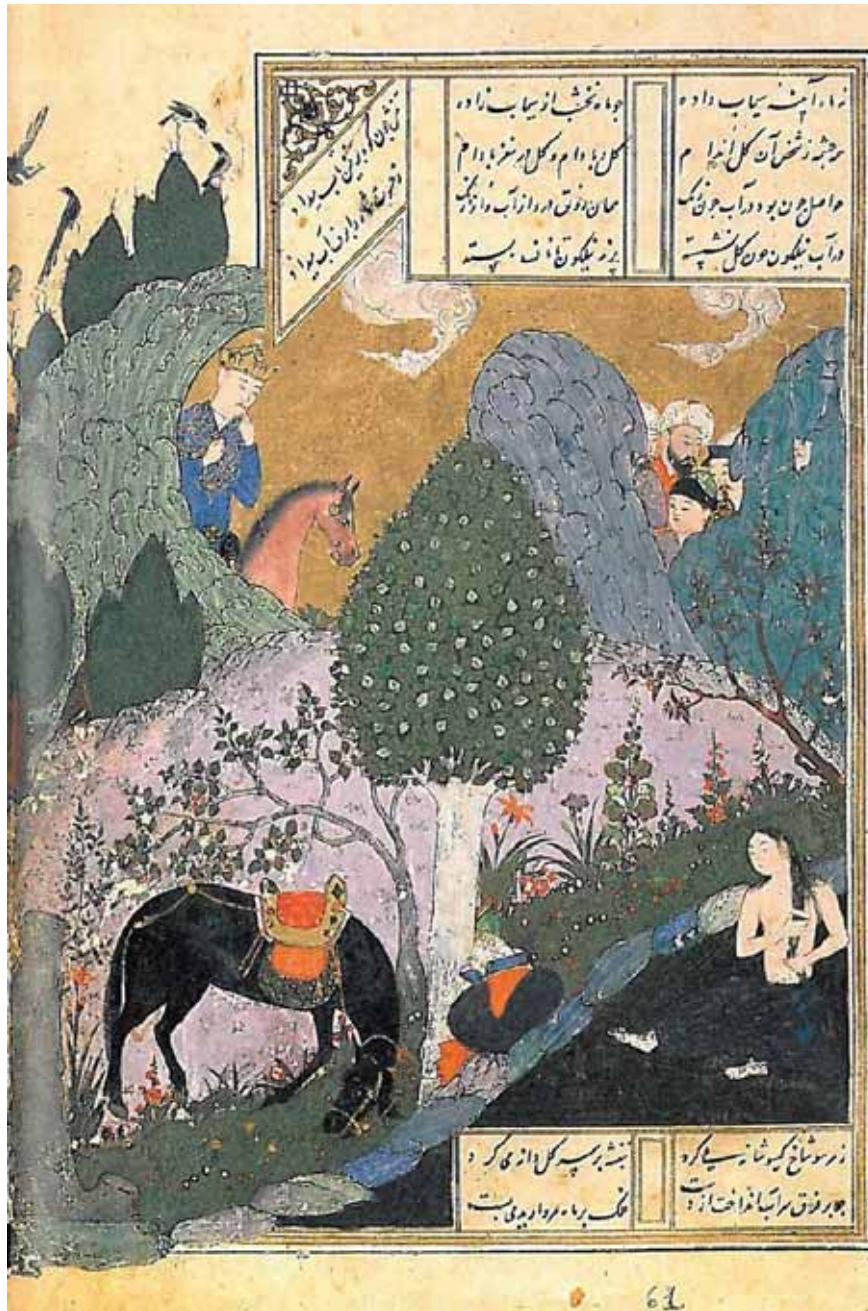


Fig. 22. Khusraw's first sight of Shīrīn bathing. *Khamsa* of Nizāmī, 1431 (VP 1000, fol. 61a). Photo: © Terebenin (Hermitage, St. Petersburg.)

There are, however, a few examples from the Timurid period of manuscripts in Eastern Turkic written in the Uighur script, also used by the Timurids for correspondence and record-keeping. In the case of manuscripts, that script has been given a highly decorative quality. One of the most unusual and the most handsomely produced is a description of



Fig. 23. Folio from the *Mir<sup>c</sup>āj-nāma* (Suppl. Turc 190, fol. 36). (Photo: © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.)

the Prophet's *Mi<sup>c</sup>rāj*, or Nocturnal Journey, now in Paris (Fig. 23). Its text is based on an Arabic original entitled *Nahj al-farādis* [The Path to Paradise].<sup>84</sup>

At the climax of his journey the Prophet comes before the divine presence, where he is instructed to bow down. In the ensuing dialogue, the Prophet recites God's praises and hears himself praised both by God and by an assemblage of angels. Then God gives him

<sup>84</sup> Séguy, 1977; Richard, 1997, no. 41, p. 77; Vámbéry, 1870, pp. 7–8.

instructions about the daily prayers, which the Muslim community is to repeat.<sup>85</sup> In this portion of the text, the phrases pronounced by the Prophet and those addressed to him are written in Arabic and then translated into Eastern Turkic. The Arabic text is copied in red *naskh*, whereas the Turkic is in black Uighur script with a few words highlighted in either red or gold. The name of God, Tengri, is always written in gold, and Muhammad's name is often in red.

## Conclusion

Although the haphazard survival of Central Asian manuscripts from the mid-eighth to the sixteenth century leaves many questions unanswered, this provisional survey confirms that an intimate connection existed between the region's Islamization and the widening popularity of calligraphy in the Arabic script. The study, copying and interpretation of the Qur'an provided an important catalyst for the development and diffusion of calligraphy. The rapidity with which new trends, many of which appear to have originated in Iraq, were adopted by scribes working in Central Asia is also evidence of the intensity of communication that existed between that region and more westerly parts of the Islamic world. At the same time, regional centres such as Nishapur and Mashhad in Khurasan, and Ghazna in Afghanistan, appear to have developed distinctive calligraphic traditions, which were also disseminated to neighbouring areas.

Despite the major upheavals that it engendered in other aspects of life, the Mongol conquest did not impede the development of Arabic calligraphy. If anything, the resources devoted to the patronage of the arts by the Il Khanid Mongols and their successors spurred the production of manuscripts on an unprecedented scale. The personal involvement of members of the Timurid dynasty in the writing of calligraphy is also symptomatic of the growing popularity of this medium during the fifteenth century. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the expanded production of books containing literary texts helped to give new prestige to more fluid scripts, such as *nasta'liq*, although the Qur'an continued to be copied in the canonical scripts developed by scribes in Abbasid Iraq.

<sup>85</sup> Séguy, 1977, Pl. 34a; Pavet de Courteille, 1882, text pp. 19–20; commentary pp. 12–13.