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AN INTRODUCTION TO  
PERSIAN ART

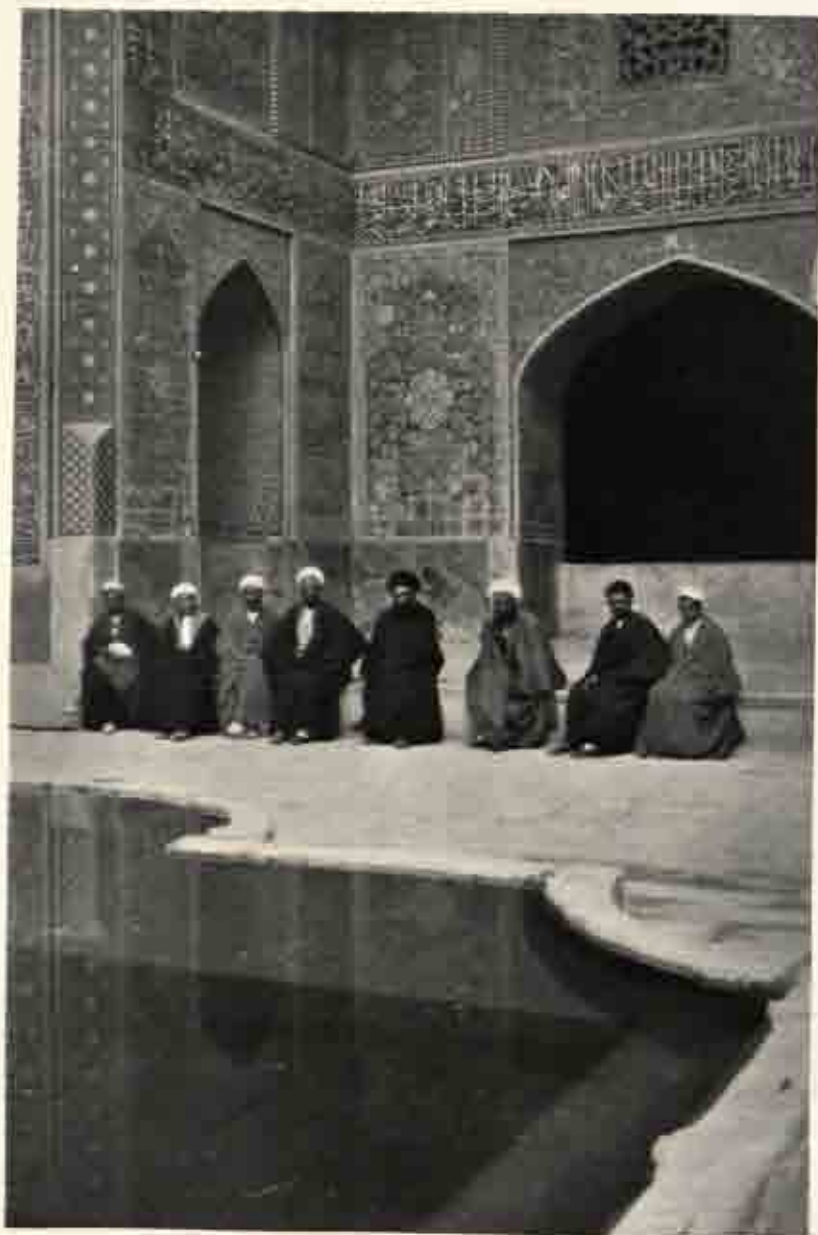
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*Photo Popé*

In the court of the Madrasa Mader-i-Shah, Isfahan

AN INTRODUCTION TO  
**PERSIAN ART**  
SINCE THE SEVENTH CENTURY A.D.

by

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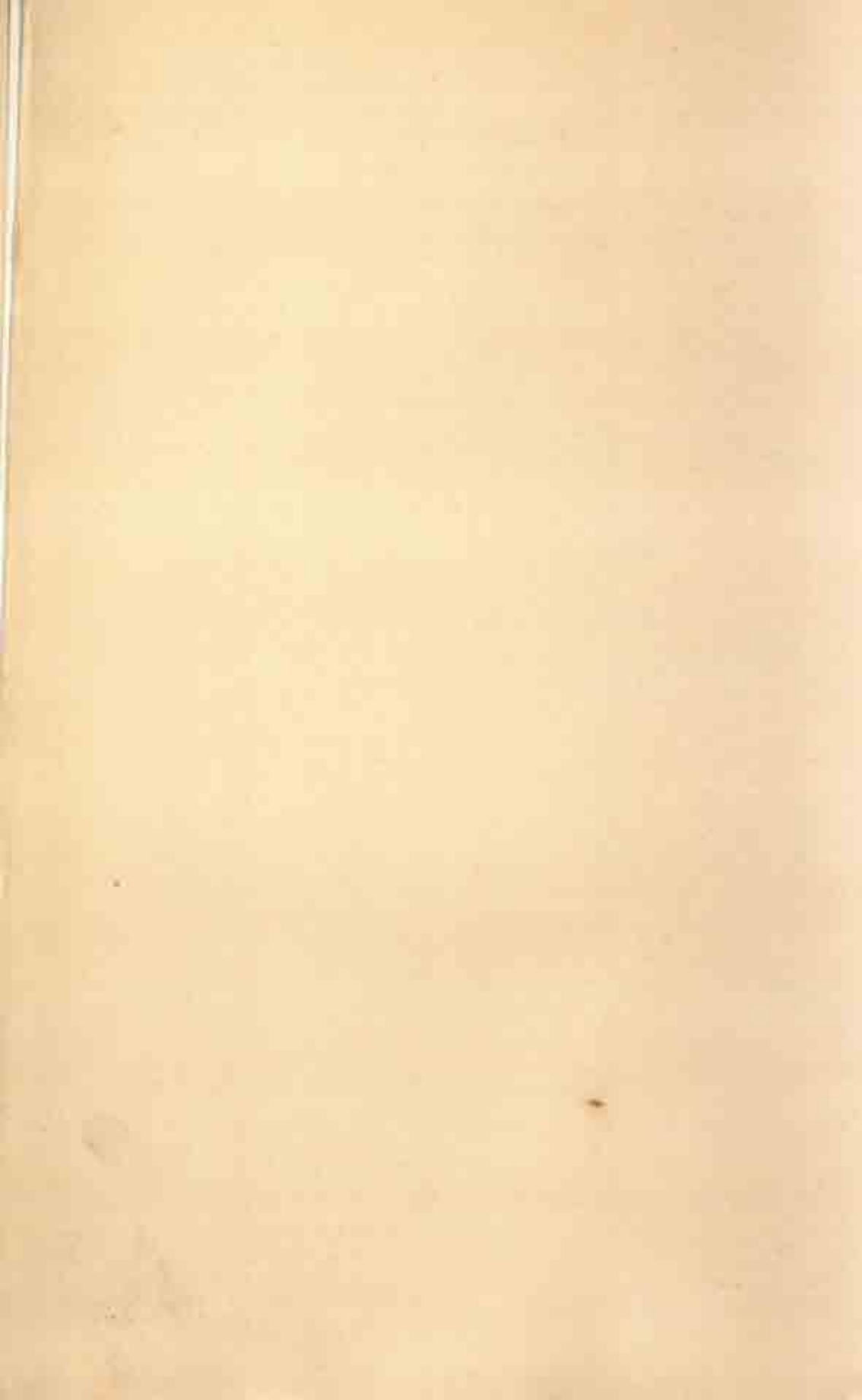
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1930





## PREFACE

AN Introduction to any subject is the first thing to read but the last thing to write. Any one of the topics dealt with in this book might properly occupy a lifetime's study, and concerning every one of them our knowledge is still seriously incomplete. But Necessity is the mother of other things than invention, and the sudden appearance of Exhibitions, Congresses, Monographs and Treatises on Persian Art, the opening of Persia to archaeological enterprise and the recent formation of Institutes and Societies in various countries are proof of a growing interest that creates an almost imperative demand for an introduction to the subject which shall be available to any general reader who seriously cares for art. If, under the circumstances, anyone can make a useful contribution, it is egotistical for him to hesitate from a too sensitive regard for his own reputation, and sentimental to sigh for the leisure necessary for perfect work.

The text that follows is meant literally as an Introduction. It aims to assist the observation of the objects themselves which alone have final authority. It may help to set the material in some sort of order, to define, however tentatively, the artistic intent or meaning, so often obscured by interests and a background foreign to those of the artist.

No claim is made that the text is either systematic or complete. System and completeness are indeed essential for a full understanding, but it is inappropriate to strive for them in an Introduction. Those ambitious really to grasp the subject will find the necessary material fully treated in the forthcoming Survey of Persian Art.

The analysis of knotting or of weaving, the chemistry of dyes, the compositions of glazes and other technical details have been excluded. These are, indeed, necessary to an accurate description of the objects and a knowledge of technique does give a more complete idea of the thing, in

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many cases throwing valuable light even on the artistic quality; but in an Introduction they tend to be dull and intrusive. These technical problems will be treated in the Survey of Persian Art by the acknowledged masters in each field. Here we are concerned primarily with works of art as such, the material object as merely the vehicle of beauty.

"Thank God," said Beethoven, "here is music that cannot be put to words." It was a profound and revealing remark, and is as true of the decorative arts as of great music. Writing about art may sometimes be a kind of art in itself, but can never be that which it writes about, nor can it serve as a substitute. Those willing to exchange words for things in the realm of Fine Art must ultimately confess themselves cheated. Thus in a certain sense it is impossible to write a history of art. In the presence especially of any masterpiece of decoration the most competent description seems strangely impotent and irrelevant.

Yet this does not justify the current fashion of disdaining any effort to write of art as if it were beautiful and important, nor should we be confined to describing merely a sequence of material facts and their mechanical interrelations with the general habits of a given time. This point of view is largely a reaction against the romantic effusions of the late Victorians, who often objectified their own rather provincial emotions. But we are not confined to such dreary alternatives as a doctrinaire Marxism or a romantic subjectivism. Works of art are products of the human spirit, created under the pressure of emotion and high enthusiasm, feelings which can be observed and in part recorded. As one Persian said, "Great art makes one strong and young and glad." Any history of art that ignores this magical potency, affecting indifference to this essential quality, surrenders all hope of conveying anything but the mere externals of its subject. No apologies are offered, therefore, for speaking of Persian art as the Persians themselves have spoken of it.

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My obligations are numerous and widely distributed. To His Majesty the Shah of Persia, under whose enlightened rule the old monuments are being restored and new arts encouraged, and to the Minister of the Court, Prince Teymurtash, the liveliest gratitude is due for permission to photograph some of the more important mosques and shrines and to study otherwise inaccessible material in Persia. H.E. Husseïn Khan Alâ has given valuable help on many occasions. From Dr. Sarre, Professor Herzfeld and Dr. Kuchnel I have learned much. To Captain Creswell I owe ideas and encouragement. Mr. C. Filippo has furnished me much valuable information over a period of many years. Friends in Persia have given valuable help, especially Dr. Jordan and Dr. Shafter, Najat and Solomon Rabbi, Uzzizullah Khan Zabih, and above all, A. Rabenou. To Miss Mariquita Villard I am indebted for careful and critical proof reading. But if the book has any merit the chief credit belongs to Dr. Phyllis Ackerman, who has made it possible not merely by indispensable practical assistance at every point in its preparation, but by many useful ideas. The chapter on gardens is her work, as well as much of the discussion of embroideries.

*London, December 18, 1930*





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## INTRODUCTION

WE live in an age of discovery, which profoundly and constantly changes our ways of life. These discoveries, moreover, are not merely in the realm of science and invention but also in the realm of the spirit. Hegel remarked: "If it be accounted a worthy achievement to have identified 60 species of parrot and 137 species of veronica, how much more important is it to discover the fundamental principles upon which the human reason depends." Similarly we might say, if it be accounted a worthy achievement to have determined the girth of Betelgeuse or a quick way to turn forests into paper, is it not equally admirable to discover and appreciate new ways in which the human spirit has envisaged its ideal of perfection? For that is what art really is.

It is thus a matter of no small moment that eager voyaging minds have, in the last twenty years, brought to the somewhat parochial and self-satisfied æsthetic culture of Europe, news of an art of Asia that is both real and profound, and have shown that to this handmaiden of some of the world's deepest and truest religions, certain glories of this world, commonly hidden from Western eyes, have stood revealed. To these cultural explorers we owe the introduction of another range of æsthetic forms, new vistas and expanded horizons.

Less than thirty years ago the grandeur and spirituality of Chinese sculpture was a closed book and only a few gifted souls had responded to the exalted emotion that informs the noblest of Chinese paintings. The impressive and sensitive art of India was classed as "heathen," the sculpture of Assyria, in some respects still unrivalled, was, to our dumb gaze, a "curiosity," while Persian art was all but damned by being faintly praised as "pretty."

But little by little the high quality of Persian art, its verve



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and distinction, its mastery of abstract ornament and poetic colour harmonies and its sensitive appreciation of the nature of material, have won the admiration and affection of the discriminating, and the scholar has come to see in it the fountain source of many derivative styles.

Broadly speaking, it is a decorative rather than a representative art, and it is in such terms that it must be judged. It seeks its effects, not in the gratuitous reduplication of natural objects, but in the creation of significant entities composed out of various elements: lines, contours, shapes, masses, colours, movement; and these entities have an independent value and beauty. They derive their power and authority from those principles of order in variety, multiplicity in unity, which are of the essence of the human mind.

Though it concerned itself thus with an art of design, the Persian æsthetic genius cannot therefore be relegated to a secondary rank. For in the same sense both music and architecture are arts of design, proof enough that design of a supreme quality attains a high seriousness and deep meaning that make it one of man's greatest achievements. The arts of design have no immediate appeal to sentiment and make no direct reference to nature, but their very abstractness, their detachment from a specific ideational content or emotional entanglement is a source of tranquil power. Nor are they merely a series of enticing forms. Like the greatest music, they may characterise and reveal ultimate values and give just expression to the basal and universal forms of the mind itself.\*

Great design has the authority of logic. Design bears, indeed, the same relation to beauty that logic does to science and philosophy. It is the proper introduction to art, its indispensable framework and perhaps also its finest achievement.

\*J. M. W. Sullivan, in his admirable volume on Beethoven, has given an excellent expression of this idea which was an important element in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Hegel.

## *Chapter I*

### *HISTORICAL OUTLINE*

It is significant that we first know the peoples who occupied the Iranian plateau by their art. Both Sir Aurel Stein and Professor Herzfeld have found in Persia a thin eggshell pottery decorated with beautiful bands of ingenious line patterns clearly and forcefully done, with a fine feeling for space and movement and for effective arrangement. Just who produced these potteries, or when they were made, we cannot yet say, but the best opinion places them well before 3500 B.C. and perhaps even before 4500 B.C.

About 3000 to 2700 B.C. another type of pottery appears, which has been found chiefly in the region of Nihavand, south-west of Hamadan. A great variety of jars, pots, little vases and cups have come to light, thick-walled and crude compared to the earlier style, but still with energetic and ingenious decoration. These potteries, and a somewhat related style that Professor Herzfeld found at Samarra, show taste and imagination. The shapes are interesting, often beautifully moulded, sometimes with delicate grooves or ridges and with abrupt changes of contour, while the painted ornament shows well-planned zones or panels of hatchings or checker boards often combined with eagles or vultures, highly simplified and entirely in silhouette but delineated with incisive force. Sometimes the smaller pieces have rather comical little strutting cocks which, while they may originally have had a religious significance, have a droll, engaging air that may be more than accidental. Whatever its originating motive, this pottery has already attained a high artistic quality.

Professor Herzfeld has also discovered a great rock carving in south-west Persia, which he feels must be placed as early as 2700 B.C., showing a king accompanied by a file of soldiers, greeted by a winged victory, the precursor



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of a characteristic monumental style that was continued in Persia down to the nineteenth century.

A great find of vessels, weapons, implements, horse trappings and personal adornments that appeared this last year in Luristan, the western border province of Persia, show how early the art of working in bronze was developed to a high artistic level in Persia.\* Though it is too soon to give a precise date for this material, some scholars have thought that the earliest pieces could be placed at least as early as 2000 B.C., even though the bulk of them may come from about 1000 B.C. or even a little later. These bronzes include a wide range of subjects and several distinct styles, but they show throughout a concentrated energy, a lively imagination, combined in the later periods with a keen observation of nature, and always a fine sense of simple and vigorous decoration.

It must not be thought that because artistic production was in some degree continuous in Persia for these thousands of years it was therefore the work of a single race. Scholars are now less given to thinking in terms of race and language than in continuity of culture. Whatever the earlier racial type was that the Aryans displaced when they swept into Persia about 1400 B.C., it was a people of artistic capacity whose techniques and traditions the invaders appropriated and used.

The first historical period of Persian art begins with Cyrus the Great (551-534 B.C.) and his immediate followers, who built at Persepolis, Susa and Ecbatana a series of palaces on a lordly scale such as have scarcely been equalled in the 2,500 years since they were begun. Adorned with rich polychrome decoration in tiles, metal and textiles, to say nothing of sculptured reliefs of high quality, these palaces, by virtue of their size, their lucid planning and their

\*Cf. Articles by the author in the *Illustrated London News*, September 6th and 13th, 1930; and *International Studio* for January 1931.

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beautiful workmanship, must always be counted among the masterpieces of architecture.

Alexander the Great put an end to the Achæmenian Empire, which had extended from Central Asia and India to the Danube and the Nile, and introduced into the country the full resources of Hellenistic art, yet there is no evidence that anything notable was created by his successors beyond a few Greek temples decidedly provincial in style. But concerning this whole period our knowledge is so meagre that almost no generalisations can be defended.

Persian life was constantly disturbed as well as often renewed by incursions of Turkic stock from the north-east, and one of these half indigenous, half foreign groups, the Parthians (248 B.C.—A.D. 222), overcame the last remnants of the Greek régime and set up a purely Asiatic dynasty. The Parthians exasperated Rome by continual defeats, but at the same time Rome and the Western world generally benefited by the great silk trade that in the latter part of their reign these monarchs opened up with the Far East. Again we know almost nothing about the art of the period, save that many of the princes were still dominated by the Greek taste, for some of their coins in the Greek manner are done with real elegance and finish. A few silver vessels in classical style and some stone reliefs have been found, the latter showing an interesting conflict between the Greek naturalism and the growing force of the native instinct for simplification and decoration. It is a time of great importance for the formation of Near Eastern art and the mingling of styles, but very little can be said about it until the spade of the archæologist has revealed the long-hidden evidence that must still lie under Persia's soil.

The Parthians were in turn set aside early in the third century A.D. by a strictly nationalistic dynasty, the Sasanians (222-650), whose new régime ushered in one of the greatest epochs in the history of Western Asia. The national



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religion, Zoroastrianism, was revived with utmost enthusiasm, and reinforced by racial and political motives inspired a self-conscious, confident and ambitious state. Again Persia was strong enough to defy and even to defeat Rome and to wage dreary decades of utterly exhausting war with Byzantium. These wars, however, opened up contacts which brought to Persia Roman and Byzantine elements that show most strongly in the architecture and sculpture of the period, and through the same channels Sasanian Persia in turn distributed her contribution to the Western world. The religious consciousness of this régime, its proud but humble acceptance of a divinely appointed and divinely sustained mission was no doubt one of the factors that contributed dignity and a noble style to all the arts. Certain Achæmenian themes were repeated, and the Achæmenian love of grandeur and power was reaffirmed, though in a slightly different form. The Sasanian period contributed essential elements to Persian art that survived centuries of change and disaster: the sense for expressive forms; a feeling for rhythm and a certain stateliness which, if sometimes temporarily lost sight of in the subsequent art, remained permanently a steadying force.

Despite its strength, wealth and formidable political organisation, the Sasanian Empire was in its turn doomed by its own inherent weaknesses, by its faithlessness to its own high religious ideals and the exhaustion of fruitless and needless warfare, as well as by the rising power of Arabia, which had all the strength that comes from youth, simplicity and fervent ideals.

The Arabian conquest of Persia (638-642) was hardly the catastrophic affair that it is usually thought to have been. It did mark the end of a period and the complete collapse of a dynasty and a political system; but Persia was not devastated, its population was not forced by the sword to accept Islam, each community was left pretty much to its former

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life, patrons of the arts were free to indulge their own tastes, and artisans continued their old habits.\*

The new doctrine was in many ways gratifying and inspiring. The rather elaborate theological framework which had governed the Sasanian social and political system, with its graded series of rigidly divided classes descending from the divinity Ahura Mazda himself by successive stages down to the lowest and most ignorant, had been a Procrustean bed which inhibited normal social development and intercourse, encouraged tyranny and oppression and permitted governmental irresponsibility, for the monarch was beholden only to God. The new gospel of Islam, with the principle that all men are brothers and each has equal access to God, was a doctrine of freedom and hope.

Islam was at its purest and best in these early years. Governed partly no doubt by hopes of plunder, the hosts of Islam were nevertheless also moved by a genuine zeal and conviction and there were more converts by argument than by threat.

The new dispensation was, of course, bitterly resented by the Persian aristocracy, but the masses found in the simpler and more viable faith of the Prophet a welcome relief from the artificialities and complexities to which the official Zoroastrianism had descended under the late Sasanians.

The great epochs in art are nearly always initiated by a new spirit, either a revival of an ancient religion, as in the case of the Zoroastrianism of the Sasanians; or a new and potent national consciousness, as with the Safavids, or, as in the present instance, the inspiring power of a youthful faith, confident and enthusiastic. But in addition to this heartening faith and an undoubted quickening of the spirit, the artists were at this time favourably affected in other ways also. Persian craftsmen were summoned to new opportunities. The uncouth conquerors were without skill in the

\*Cf. Sir Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, Chap. VII.



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arts and yet they felt the need of a prompt construction of places of worship that would not be unworthy of comparison with what they had seen of the churches of Byzantine Christianity or with the palaces of the Sasanian kings. From Samarkand to Gibraltar mosques were springing up and simple tent-dwelling generals began to nourish ambitions for sumptuous raiment and for palaces richly equipped. Persian artisans and designers were called on to meet these demands, not only in their own country but also in the rapidly developing Islamic capitals of the West, where they were in immediate contact with other arts and styles and with workmen from other regions. Persians and Byzantine Greeks were engaged on the same buildings and they all but touched elbows with dark-eyed Indians, swarthy Turks and industrious Copts in the workshops. A mingling of the artistic traditions of Western Asia was now inevitable.

This process was probably focussed in the great capital of Baghdad, into which poured vast treasures from half the world. Here, under the general domination of Persia during the Abbasid Caliphate (750-949), made famous by Haroun ar-Rashid, the new grammar of ornament was codified, and from this centre it was redistributed to the provinces. Other great cities, Samarkand, Ray, Damascus and Cairo, each developed its own variant of the common artistic language, modified by local traditions.

The Persian styles at this time still continued something of the heroic, epic quality of the Sasanian. Everything was simple, bold and strong. Roman influences had combined well with the feeling for scale that had been bequeathed by the Achæmenians, and in certain parts of Persia this character of strength and simplicity dominated the arts for another five centuries. The provincial pottery of the northern, western and eastern provinces, for we know nothing of the wares of Southern Persia of this date, still

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employed the old themes, simplified in form but emotionally intensified. The courtly Sasanian art was neglected in favour of such violent and bizarre figures as are found on the potteries of Garous, Kermanshah, Saveh and Mazanderan, which retained something of the strength but none of the courtliness (*cf.* p. 68) of earlier times. Much the same spirit is to be seen in the textiles, the bronzes and, in a different way, in the calligraphy.

At the same time a beginning was made of the typical Islamic patterns, of delicate geometrical and floral entrelacs. A quite new quality that came to be characteristic of Islamic art was now emerging and gradually dominating. The realism of Sasanian art, which had been sustained by the Greco-Roman and perhaps Indian contacts, now disappears, partly under the influence of the Islamic prohibition of the representation of living animals.

This development of an abstract style was not a new discovery but was really a revival of a disposition which had characterised Western Asia for centuries. As early as the Bronze Age there were clearly marked two separate tendencies, one in the direction of naturalism and the other in the direction of abstraction.\*

The former came into its perfect flowering in the Greek and Hellenistic art, the latter was brought to its supremest fulfilment in Islamic art, principally in Persia, with an independent and very noble development in the Far East. The prehistoric painted pottery of Sistan, of Susa I, of Samarra and Nihavand (Fig. 22) shows a taste and a mastery of varied and ingenious patterns that have not been superseded. This abstract style, despite the importation and development of more naturalistic fashions at the courts of the great kings, nevertheless seems to have maintained itself in folk art through a vast range of time. From Central Asia to the Red Sea the native disposition seems to

\*H. Frankfort, *Studies in Early Pottery of the Near East*, p. 27.



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have been in favour of abstract ornament and decoration rather than naturalism and pictorialism.

As a result, the new régime had at its disposal a vast amount of ornamental material, floral as well as geometrical. The floral motifs were in part appropriated from India, but even more from Hellenism. The geometrical resources had been greatly enriched by the development of Roman mosaic designs and especially by the elaboration of these at the hands of the workmanlike and ingenious Copts. The analytical disposition which is at the basis of an abstract style steadily divided the organic motifs inherited from these various sources into their elementary constituents and out of these simplified elements created new units and new combinations. It was as if words were split up into syllables and letters, thus opening up a literally infinite series of possible permutations.

About the year 1000 the new style finds superlative embodiment in the lovely stucco incrustations of Nayin (*cf.* p. 39), and the margins of the great Korans begin to be enriched with masterly patterns (*cf.* p. 105). By this time the older Sasanian traditions of fantastic heraldic animals begin to disappear, but the force of Sasanian art is not yet spent. It continues to express itself in the strong and noble forms of the finer bronzes which, despite their rich incrustations, proclaim their heritage from a race of heroes. The Sasanian themes also are still portrayed and minor decorative ornament continues even down to the present.

The Seljuks (1037-1194), a dynasty of Turkic origin that swept in from the north-east with prodigious force, brought with them a renovating spirit that initiated an epoch in Persian art and culture of far greater interest and importance than has generally been recognised. Thanks to the insufficiency of our historical documents and to the subsequent destruction by the Mogul invasion of so many Seljuk monuments, the unusual combination of admirable

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qualities, of robustness and refinement, of enthusiasm and discipline, which were impressively united in this, one of the finest periods of Persian history, has been underestimated. Every new discovery, and they are constant, enhances the reputation of these sturdy monarchs. Most of the finest Ray pottery (*cf.* p. 82) has been assigned to the Mogul period but some of the most beautiful examples are proven by dated specimens to be genuinely Seljuk. Two exceptional bowls in the collection of Emile Tabbagh of Paris bear indubitable dates, 1186, 1187, a time when a Seljuk prince, Toghril Beg III, was still ruling at Ray.

There are four great names to be remembered for this epoch: Toghril Beg (1037-1063), Alp Arslan (1063-1072), Malek Shah (1072-1092), and the famous Grand Vizier, Nizam el Molk, one of the greatest statesmen in history. These four organised an empire that included Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and the Caucasus. If they were, at the outset, lacking in the graces of civilisation, they nevertheless brought with them a quality of courage, of energy and of sincerity that Persia, at the moment, greatly needed. They accepted Islam not only with zeal but with understanding and devotion to its finer principles. They established peace and security over wide, troubled areas, they administered their empire with firmness and sagacity. Wealth increased, travel opened new and inspiring associations, science, literature and all the arts flourished. Indeed, the Seljuks came upon literature and the arts as a thrilling discovery and their enthusiasm was deep and unaffected. Every phase of intellectual and spiritual life was heightened by their eager but wise patronage. Scientists like Avicenna, an extraordinarily brilliant encyclopædic mind, some of whose works were standard in Europe up to the seventeenth century, profited mightily by the favourable environment. Poets, artists, theologians, geographers, historians and jurists were the natural flowering of this generous and



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civilised age. To men of such force and sincerity, trivial and pretentious arts could make no appeal, and whether in architecture or pottery (*cf.* Fig. 29) or metal (*cf.* Fig. 80) or textiles (*cf.* Fig. 69), the work of this period shows hard, clear thinking and conscientious care yet at the same time intense, sincere feeling, while their architecture has a decidedly heroic quality (*cf.* Fig. 20).

The Seljuk Empire was perhaps too extensive and too complicated to maintain itself for long. A succession of tragedies overwhelmed the last representatives of the dynasty and once more Persia broke up into minor principalities. But these petty rulers, despite their shrunken domains and weakened forces, not only profited by the high artistic standards that had prevailed, but even brought some of them to a more perfect fulfilment.

At the very moment when Persia seemed most richly endowed and nearest to the realisation of its cultural capacities, there burst over the country a sequence of hideous disasters, the invasions of the Moguls; Genghis Khan (1175-1227), Hulugu Khan (1257-1265) and Tamerlane (1335-1405) within the space of a century. This dreadful succession swept over the country like a bloody foam, leaving the fairest cities a wilderness of rubbish and rotting corpses. Their speed, their fury and their mastery of every branch of warfare made resistance not only futile but impossible. Their march was a series of massacres and devastations which not only destroyed every kind of public monument with their invaluable contents of works of art and books, but blotted out whole cities so that they became as if they had never been. The human destruction was equally appalling and, what was even worse, in many regions the accumulated knowledge and traditions of ages were heartlessly obliterated.

The horror and misery as well as the permanent damage of these invasions can hardly be fathomed; yet strangely

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enough there were compensations, for to the Moguls we owe a certain enrichment and expansion of Persian art. Even the first Moguls spared the artisan class and the later conquerors, partly civilised by their contact with China, became eager patrons of the arts, so that the court of Tamerlane reached a point of splendour that made him in this respect a worthy successor of the Sasanian monarchs. Indeed the cultivated Moguls commanded the services of the finest artists that could be summoned from every land which they controlled and even beyond. Thus they brought with them in their train not only the best possible examples of the arts and crafts of China but many of her artists too.

Although this was by no means the beginning of Chinese influence in Persian art, it was at this period more comprehensive as well as more decisive than any of the previous contributions had been. The rather stiff hieratic style of the Sasanians, while it had by this time lost much of its force, still constrained Persian design within the boundaries of limited and well-balanced movement. Stateliness and decorum, though they were gradually giving way to a more lively naturalism, were still the effective ideals. The introduction of Chinese elements modified this rigidity and imparted more ease and grace and a greater flexibility of composition.

New themes also appear from China; for example, the lotus, which had been rather severely architectonic in Persian art up to this time, was now, thanks to Chinese models, expanded into an especially lovely form, and from Persia to Egypt it became a favourite device. Again, the Chinese square seals, in themselves such a smart decoration, captivated the Persian designers, who devised in imitation a rectangular Kufic, which could be ingeniously built up into similar forms, and from this time to the seventeenth century this type of calligraphy was continuously employed in architectural ornament (Fig. 45). Even the typical



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Chinese key and fret work are frequent in mosques of these centuries. The phoenix, too, with his fierce expression and long, floating tail feathers, was enthusiastically welcomed as an admirable opportunity for the best and most characteristic Persian decorative effects (Fig. 31). Doubtless there were certain technical enrichments also at this time, though in proportion as we learn more of the Seljuk art and realise the technical mastery of that period this contribution seems to dwindle in importance.

Painting, as well as the decorative arts, notably textiles, felt the infusion of this new life. Moreover the Mogul princes, gradually embracing Islam, repaired some at least of their ravages with an extensive programme that gave us some of the world's most beautiful buildings. Two minor Mogul princes whose names ought to be remembered in connection with this period are Gazan Khan (1295-1304) and Muhammad Chodabenda Oljaitu (1304-1316). Gazan Khan became an ardent Muhammadan and his just and energetic reign saw order restored to Persia and an encouragement of all the arts and sciences. To Oljaitu, another devout and effective ruler, we owe three of the most beautiful buildings in Persia: parts of the Masjid-i-Jâmi of Isfahan; the great mausoleum of Sultanieh and the famous mosque of Varamin. The last two are particularly notable for the magnificence of the tiles, while both at Isfahan and at Varamin the stucco shows a new elegance and subtlety, combined with effective planning.

The Moguls were followed by a desultory and confused succession of petty princes, not great politically but often cultivated and enthusiastic friends of the arts, so that in some of these minor courts beautiful and important things were created. The crowning achievement of the period was in the realm of the art of the book. Never were such miniatures painted or such covers wrought. The nobles of the time brought to their collecting and connoisseurship the

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intense passion that was a native endowment carried over from their earlier, rougher life, and there was now enough secular literature greatly to enlarge the possibilities in this field.

This passion for the arts of the book brought to a high development the typical Persian patterns of medallions and panels with flowing interlocking arabesques. A wealth of new designs was fashioned with the same concentrated effort, highly disciplined imagination and fertility with which Bach turned out his endlessly fresh compositions. Indeed there is more than one striking point of resemblance between the abstract designing of this style, with its clarity, precision, organisation and energy, and the work of the great Sebastian.

The command of this new range of pattern and the kind of thinking that this style of designing stimulated, coupled with the advancing technique in mosaic faience incrustation (*cf.* p. 44), made possible a new advance in architecture with such glorious creations as the Blue Mosque of Tabriz and the incomparably magnificent and brilliant Gohar Shad of Mashad (Fig. 7). The textile and carpet arts were similarly enriched from the same source, as we know not only from the scanty remaining fragments but even more from the meticulous representations of them in the miniatures (*cf.* p. 120).

Although all the arts, with the possible exception of pottery, flourished superbly through this period, there was nevertheless a political and economic confusion throughout the country that was too unsatisfactory to last, and the forces were everywhere gathering for a decisive national renaissance like that of the Sasanian times. Under the stimulating leadership of Shah Ismail (1499-1524), hardly more than a boy but with the courage and resource of a veteran, the country was again united under a wholly native monarch, and set forth with resolute enthusiasm, thrilled as in the Sasanian renaissance by a new religious motive, this time



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a form of Muhammadanism which lent itself well to the reinforcement of the new nationalistic fervour.

It was in Shah Ismail's short reign that the characteristics of the new Safavian epoch were determined. Fresh impulses came from China bringing further new motives, particularly the cloud band, a floating ribbon-like device of which the Persians made the most for more than a century. The exciting conflict between the dragon and phoenix also becomes a constant theme. But more important than any particular pattern or specific influence is a new zest that finds expression in all the arts. Compared to the arts of later periods the output in the time of Shah Ismail was relatively small, but the quality was of the highest and none of the multiplication of effects, the expansion of technique, the elaboration of materials, or any of the lavishness of production that characterised the work done under his successors could ever compensate for the diminution of the early inspiration when all creation was at a fever heat and a certain extraordinary tension everywhere carried talent to the point of genius.

Shah Ismail's successor, Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576), enjoyed an Augustan reign not unlike that of Louis XIV in its length, prestige and rich accomplishment in the arts. Some of the arts of the preceding period were now carried to the limits of refinement. Thus before the middle of the century carpet-weaving reached a level of perfection that could hardly have been anticipated and has never since been approached.

But though a man of taste and himself skilled in painting and calligraphy, his vanity, as so often in the history of art, led to a demand for quantity production beyond the capacity of the artists and thus inevitably brought about a slackening of standards. The miniatures gradually became perfunctory, the carpets though still splendid became larger and less subtle, and the textiles in general lack something in inspiration (*cf.* p. 159).

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A brief period of danger and confusion ushered in the glorious reign of Shah Abbas (1587-1629), a ruler of wisdom and strength with a genuine enthusiasm for the arts. With a sure understanding of economic forces he developed foreign trade and so ordered his kingdom within that security and opportunity were assured for all. The great prosperity which resulted from his far-sighted rule resulted in an expansion of all the arts and in a development of architecture, particularly in Isfahan, on a scale of lavishness and grandeur that Persia had hardly known for a thousand years.

The wealth accumulated under Shah Abbas sustained the country through a succession of weak and incompetent monarchs. There was no possibility of further artistic advance in the old channels save in the direction of finesse and a certain kind of conscious originality. The rug weavers particularly strove for new effects by seeking to rival the velvet and brocade makers, as is shown by the carpets in the mosque of Kum made for the tomb chamber of Shah Abbas II (Fig. 68). Moreover the lack of an inspiring personality and a feeling that the country had passed the crest and was on the decline, diminished confidence and enthusiasm. In general, high standards, particularly in architecture, were maintained well into the eighteenth century, but the invasion of the Afghans (1720-1722) and the destruction and demoralisation consequent on their ferocities, the exhausting imperialistic adventure of Nadir Shah (1736-1747) and a succession of bloody and futile civil wars destroyed Persian prosperity and gave what seemed a mortal wound to the already dying art of the country.

Yet history has shown that the art of Persia has a curious longevity and that out of its weakness and desolation it can produce a new era and new creations, so that no economic or political disaster has yet been sufficient to destroy the tradition, to quench the ardour for beauty or permanently frustrate its expression.



## *Chapter II*

### *ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENT*

THE claim has often been made that in many arts Persia attained the highest excellence. It is incontestable that the art of the book, with all its conjoined crafts, carpets, textiles and perhaps ceramics, found their most complete and perfect expression in Persia. These claims can be readily tested by all thoughtful people as so many masterpieces are to be found in the great Western museums. But the architecture of Persia is less available and so its merits are less known. The relative scarcity of monuments of the earlier periods and the inaccessibility, particularly of the mosques, which after all are the most important expressions of Persian architecture, have conspired to withhold a knowledge of a great deal of the story of building in Persia. But every advance in our information, whether through the critical inspection of old ruins or the fortunate entrance to sacred places, proves that in the mistress art also Persia's achievements are worthy of very high rank.

The mediæval architecture of Persia has commonly been regarded as a "Saracenic" importation, and the Persians themselves have often felt that the domes and minarets of their beautiful mosques were as foreign as the religion celebrated within. But this is a most unhistorical view. Islam did not create the architecture of Persia nearly as much as Persia created the architecture of Islam. The invading Arabian hosts knew no building beyond the tent or the simple mud and timber house, and no quality of Persian architecture owes anything to them in idea or in technique. On the other hand, at the time of the Arabic incursion some of the world's most important architecture, the handiwork of Persian craftsmen after the plans of Persian designers, stood not only on Persian soil but also in many of the surrounding regions of which she had been sovereign.

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Persepolis, with its rational and lucid plan, its stupendous scale, its lofty, delicately fluted columns with their magnificent bases and capitals, its beautiful sculptured friezes and glowing colours, had already reached one of the high places in the history of architecture more than a thousand years before the advent of Islam. It has often been said that the great Achæmenian architecture was the creation solely of the court and that it died without issue. But this is far from true. There was affirmed at this period a sense of scale and grandeur that was never lost (Fig. 1), a feeling for polychrome decoration which was developed by the Sasanians and reached its fulfilment in mediæval Persia, as well as an ideal of rationality and clarity which, if it was never comparable with that of Greece, is certainly superior to that of Egyptian, Chinese, or Indian architecture. These qualities have controlled Persian architecture until recent times.

Sasanian palaces have rarely been surpassed in imposing power and richness of decoration. But more important than these obvious if admirable qualities was the contribution Sasanian builders made to arch, vault and dome architecture, which had consequences not only in Asia but also in Europe.\* True arch and vault building have been in some degree known and practised for thousands of years in the Mesopotamian Valley, as the discoveries at Ur prove; but the development of the arch on a huge scale and its use as the unit of construction ought perhaps to be credited to Sasanian Persia. Vaults also were developed on a scale that has rarely been attempted. The remains of the ruins of the Palace of Ardashir, discovered by Professor Herzfeld in southern Persia, built about 220, show a vault 100 feet high and 55 feet across, wider than any vault in Europe saving that of Barcelona Cathedral. The great Palace at Ctesiphon saw the de-

\*Cf. Monneret de Villard, "The Westward Expansion of Sasanian Architectural Forms" in the forthcoming Survey of Persian Art.



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velopment of the elliptical arch to a height and width that have never since been equalled. Though there are no domes still standing from Sasanian times, the ruins both at Sarvistan and Firuzabad are sufficiently complete to give us the original dimensions of the domes and their method of construction, and show how definitely the problem had been mastered at this early date.\*

We know, moreover, from actual finds and contemporary references, that all these buildings were ornamented in stucco with exquisite and ingenious repeating patterns† and often also with personages in complicated hunting scenes‡ or in fresco with abstract patterns and pictorial scenes. Moreover, the stucco was also partly polychrome and probably the stone reliefs of the period were painted too, for there are unmistakable traces of colour on the Sasanian rock carvings of Tak-i-Bustan.

The transition from the elliptical arch of Sasanian times to the characteristic pointed arch which was so widely adopted in Islam, whence it spread to Europe, apparently took place in the ninth century. There are excellent reasons to think that the hint came from India, from the pointed niche such as we find at Elephanta, a conscious reminiscence of the leaf of the pipal tree under which Buddha received his divine inspiration. Buddhism was in early Islamic times very strong in Central Asia, and even in Persia, so that there was abundant opportunity for the Persians to become acquainted with this feature. It is significant that the Nilometer in Cairo, with its pointed arch, a definite anticipation of later Gothic (Fig. 3), was built by an architect from Ferghana, a pro-

\*v. K. A. C. Creswell, *The History and the Evolution of the Dome in Persia*, in *Journal Royal Asiatic Society*, July 1914, pp. 681-701; summarised, Creswell, *Persian Domes before 1400 A.D.*, in *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. XXVI, 1914-15, pp. 146-55.

†Beautiful examples of this type were recovered by the German Expedition to Ctesiphon of 1929, and are now in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum.

‡A wall of this type is in the Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia.

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vince lying to the east of Persia but under Persian cultural dominion.

The arch, at first apparently merely a surface enrichment, as it was on the façade of Ctesiphon, becomes now the unit of construction in practically all building. It constitutes the city gate and sustains the mosque portal (Fig. 1), frames the palace entrance, and supports the shepherd's hut; it forms the long bazaar aisle and the entrance to the caravanserai. Throughout Persia the pointed arch is universal. Here is its natural and permanent home. It was adopted for a while in Europe, but it always savoured there of an exotic origin, was always a little foreign, and after a brief though glorious development, it passed from the stage, displaced by more tranquil forms, and is continued now only out of sentimental affection for the ecclesiastical tradition.

The most striking use of the pointed arch in Persia is in the mosque portal, where, as in the Masjid-i-Shah in Isfahan, it may attain a height of 80 feet or more, and by virtue of its scale and the co-ordination of its repeated forms, looks even higher. Some critics who have never seen Persian architecture but have inferred its character from provincial western derivatives or from poor photographs of inferior examples, have considered it lacking in solidity. But nowhere has a simple architectural form been managed to give a greater sense of thickness, depth and structural integrity than in the great portal and liwan arches of the Masjid-i-Shah or the mosque of Gohar Shad of Mashad. By a succession of receding contours, wide soffits with multiple mouldings, and deep concave channels, the arch is gradually built up and enriched so that it ceases to be the line of an opening and becomes instead an organised, complicated cluster of repeating forms, heavy, strong and wholly adequate. In some of the liwan arches of the mosque of Gohar Shad, the combined mouldings must reach a total depth of not less than 25 feet and every line and every modulation of the



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surface, however varied, consistently reinforces the central impression.

If the finest European vaults surpass both in form and in enrichment any built in Persia, the Persian arch, on the other hand, maintains a certain supremacy. In the first place, it has, at its best, a more sensitive and sophisticated contour than its European counterparts. The curve advances in progressive variation, flattening out at the turn, and then, straightening gradually, rises with an accelerating speed that keeps the line tensely alive and at the same time emphasises and makes inevitable the climactic apex. In the second place, the Persian arch more often realises its inherent character without undue concessions to practical necessities that constrain Northern building.

An arch to be fully true to itself should be an opening unimpeded in its transition to the space beyond. Hence it must be either the beginning of a vault which carries the form on without diminution, or the entrance to a spacious court or, if it leads into an enclosed structure, it should be into a dome chamber higher than itself. The European climate is too rigorous to permit of any such transition from the outside without mediation. Only the triumphal arches stand open and complete and they are rather homeless and detached. Even in the cathedral windows, the arches, often of such superb form and scale, are interrupted by mullions and tracery, structurally superfluous, which somewhat diminish their force and simplicity.

The Persian arched portal, thanks to the serene skies and steady sun, can often preserve its proper character. The outer mosque entrances must, like those of European churches, be reduced in order to preserve the sanctity of the interior, but this is accomplished with vault or half-dome forms and stalactites in such a way that the scale is not compromised but in some cases even is definitely enhanced. The inner arches, however, particularly those that lead to the

domed sanctuary chamber in the fourteenth and fifteenth century mosques, are unencumbered. Such an arch has no other function but to serve as the most perfect introduction. It need be brought down only enough to give it concentration without jeopardising its grandeur. Usually a half-dome mediates between this primary form and a secondary arch and then through this the sanctuary is visible, fully seen though rather dimly lighted; shadowed and tranquil.

The most impressive arrangement of these arches is in the Masjid-i-Shah in Isfahan. The outer portal leads into a domed vestibule; beyond this, at a slight angle, is the high vault of the north-west liwan. Through this, one looks across the open court and the pool to the vast portal and soaring dome of the sanctuary. Within this deep arch is the final entrance, still lofty and imposing although diminished, and through this is a great arched recess on the wall beyond, which in turn includes the arched mihrab and other subordinate arched forms. Not counting the magical reflections in the still water of the great pool, there is a succession of half a dozen arches each enclosing the next, repetitions in a diminishing vista of the same form but each different in weight and colour and all varying in planes of light, like the recurrence of a basic musical figure which sustains a bewildering elaboration. It is indeed the apogee of the pointed arch.

The decorative development of the pointed arch in Persia and in Europe took sharply divergent courses and a comparison is interesting and instructive. Persia, by the eleventh century at least, was renewing her mastery of polychrome ornament so that her architects composed their buildings on simple formulæ and concentrated their attention primarily on colour enrichment (*cf.* p. 43). By the fifteenth century there were few resources of the ceramic art that they did not control. The intricacy and brilliance of this surface ornamentation are so intense that one is dumbfounded in its pres-



ence, and attempts at description are quite futile. An interesting feature of this style of polychromy is that the ground colour is always dark lapis blue, deeper than still water. Thus the surface is unimpaired, but beyond it there are unfathomable depths. Again, many of the colours used fluctuate slightly, which imparts a glow and viability that still further enrich the simple forms.

The development of the arch theme in Europe, on the other hand, followed quite another path. Europe's resources in colour were meagre. The use of red, blue and gold paint she knew, but the effect was probably a little harsh. The stained-glass windows were curtains of glory but they filled voids, and the richness of their colour was not carried into the structure of the building itself. The Byzantine architects were indeed masters of a splendid style of polychrome ornament both in frescoes and mosaic, and the magnificence of Monreale might be thought to rival that of the Orient, but even Monreale pales beside the Gohar Shad (Fig. 7), and most of Byzantine and Romanesque polychromy was apparently the work of painters and designers whose results, partly because of the didactic motive, generally failed of a perfect and organic union with the structure itself. The only other method of enrichment left to the European builder was plastic ornament, decoration by line and shadow. In this, sculpture played an important part, for beautiful as it is in itself, in the best periods it was, from the point of view of the *ensemble*, hardly more than another device for shadowed and plastic surface, a function which it shared with a prodigious variety of other architectural enrichments. The very inventory is formidable; exciting pinnacles, leaping buttresses, belfries, spires, sudden gargoyles, balustrades, projecting gutters, hidden recesses, taut tracery flung far up from multiple shafts like rockets shooting up through dim vaults; the whole a veritable storm in stone. All this encyclopædic ornament ultimately tended to conceal the essential forms

and sometimes even to violate the principle of visible support.

The Persian use of colour, which never really broke the surface, kept the main forms simple and dominant. However gorgeous the investiture, the structure is never diminished or obscured. A large mass of stalactites at the top of a hemispherical vault, or double or triple cable mouldings of intense turquoise terminating in huge vases of mellow golden alabaster, are so engaged with structural forces and are so completely subordinated to them that they emphasise rather than compete with, or conceal, the elements.

Vault architecture in the Near East is as old as building itself. Both in Egypt and Mesopotamia we find small vaults in the second and third millennium B.C.; but there is good reason to believe that it was Persian builders who sufficiently mastered the principle to develop it on a big scale, though to what degree they were originators and what were the technical details of their contribution are rather difficult questions which need not enter here. Those who know the history of Roman architecture but not that of the Near East, saving as it partly reflected Roman methods, minimise the part Persia played, but the few who have studied Persian sources and remains feel that Persia has made to this fundamental form additions of the highest importance.

Fortunately no answer to this question is pre-requisite to an appreciation of the majesty and beauty of the finest Persian vaults. The sweep of the arch of Ctesiphon is still awe-inspiring. In many respects it is the most remarkable vault standing, 111 feet high and 76 feet wide at the approximate spring of the arch. It has usually been dated at the beginning of the Sasanian era, about 220-230, although more recent opinion tends to put it in the fourth century. Equally important is the great masonry vault of the Palace of Ardashir (*cf.* p. 19), 100 feet high with a span 55 feet wide, wider than any standing vault in Europe except that of Barcelona



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Cathedral. Such a structure could not have been built without centuries of experiment.

Vault architecture on a great scale was continued down into the Islamic period in Persia, and the vast and lofty vaults not only of the great mosques like the Masjid-i-Shah of Isfahan or the Gohar Shad of Mashad but also of the bazaars and caravanserais have a grandeur and force and at the same time a beauty of line that entitle them to the highest rank. Some are extremely simple, depending for their effect on the exquisite contours, like the barrel vault of the north-west liwan of the Masjid-i-Jâmi of Isfahan; but others, like that of the Royal Bazaar of Isfahan, are marked out with soaring, spreading ribs, very Gothic in appearance. These ribs are decorative, not structural. They cross and recross in intricate, handsome patterns, like their Gothic cousins increasing the apparent height and endowing the structure with life and energy. This style of ribbing is employed with great effect for the ornamentation of the half-domes within the arched portals. Where the portal itself is white, the ribs are generally painted blue with a red margin, and as they are flung upward the points define kite-shaped panels, diamond lozenges and concave triangles of continuously diminishing size. Just before the lines would naturally meet in a common focus at the peak of the arch, they suddenly cease, leaving as the apex of all this swift movement, a many-pointed star.

Often in place of ribbing the cavernous opening is magnificently enriched with clustered masses of stalactites (Fig. 6). In some cases these are of notable simplicity; in others, such as the portal of the Masjid-i-Shah in Isfahan, concentrated and complex, providing infinite material for exploration without impairing the basic form.

Quite another type of vault, less thrilling but useful, consists of a series of small domes or bays, supported by columns, each structurally self-contained. These can be multiplied indefinitely to cover the extensive area necessary

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in the congregational mosques. To avoid a dim interior with only a disconcerting lateral light, there are at regular intervals larger domes thrust through the roof, creating small cupolas, which permitted ample illumination through the drums.

The third great contribution that Persia has made to architecture is in the development of the dome. Again the problem of origin is of no immediate concern. Domes of a sort have existed for thousands of years. The corbelled domes, of which we have famous examples at Mycenæ, formed by a slight projection of each successive layer of material until the pyramid is locked into place by a single ring or stone at the peak, had early demonstrated the impressiveness of the form. Domes of mud brick were certainly common in Babylon and Assyria, and various Pacific islanders have favoured a reed construction in dome form.

Rome is generally credited with having created the first great domes, a claim that Persia has good reason to contest, for dome architecture is something more than a hemispherical form held up on walls, and great as the Roman architects were, they never really understood this, and never plumbed the essential nature of the dome either in plan or in structure. Their domes are solid bells of concrete, static and inert, not free elastic constructions, self-poised. They are, moreover, carried on circular drums or circular colonnades which fail to provide the essential contrast between the form of the dome and that of the enclosed space below. It is just this contrast which gives the dome its real grandeur and makes of it a satisfying synthesis of forms, a real culmination. In the Sasanian buildings at Ferahabad, Sarvistan and Firuzabad the Persians had already successfully placed large domes over a square, attaining an impressive organic co-ordination of these two contrasting spatial units.

Domes are so familiar we easily forget what an artistic triumph they are when fully developed. For obviously a



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round dome does not fit on a square base. Either the segments of the circle project over the sides of the rectangle or, if the dome is set to rest within the square, the awkward angles of the corners will be uncovered. How to fill these in a way structurally and æsthetically satisfactory was a baffling problem. Credit for the solution probably belongs to the Persians. The simplest means is to fill each corner with a spherical triangular surface (the pendentive), which brings the corner forward to meet and support the base of the dome. The other method, less obvious and mechanical and æsthetically more interesting, consists in filling the awkward gap with a series of successive arches and niches which gradually bring the corner up to the round base of the dome.

It was this latter principle of the squinch that the Seljuk builders carried to such a magnificent development. The two domes of the Masjid-i-Jâmi of Isfahan are incomparable in their simplicity, inevitability and forceful logic. Nowhere is a dome more perfectly united with its base, nowhere is a theme carried out with a more effective consistency (Fig. 4). Although the form is a dome on a square, the motif that unites and blends the two is, surprising as it may seem, the pointed arch. A cluster of niches with pointed arches constitutes the squinch. These are in turn included in a long pointed arch which carries their weight to the ground. This inclusive arch then embraces similar arched panels. The flat side walls are arched in the same manner, as is the lower register of the drum, arch within arch in a stately succession. Thus all the surfaces are panelled and arched; the volume is thereby enhanced and the junction is perfectly knit, while the integrity of the cube and the half-sphere is unimpaired.

The external shape of most of the Persian domes is ample cause for rhapsody. They rise majestic and serene. Gold or azure, they are unencumbered by shadows or by counterweights. With high drums, slightly bulging sides and an exquisitely delicate curve, they convey a feeling of grace, of



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utter self-sufficiency and of a volume so perfectly defined and intensely realised that a new quality of space seems to have been called into being.

Their colour alone is enchanting. Black and white arabesques wheel majestically across a turquoise field with a shadowed ogival lattice-work for a subordinate counter-motif. The drum glows curiously purple with its white Kufic on a ground of deepest blue. The gold finial marks an emphatic terminus with a concentrated flash of light. Seen washed by passing rain and still glistening wet, projected against the billowy masses of a white receding cloud, it is a vision of compelling loveliness that seems more intensely real than reality itself.

A striking feature of mosque architecture is the minaret. In the earlier Islamic centuries it was an almost chimney-like tower, the surface broken with the shadow patterns of raised brickwork, and the gradual taper interrupted by the Muezzin's platform supported on a flaring, graceful *cavetto* cornice. Another type, as at Saveh, is a straight cylinder which would be monotonous were it not for the zones of geometrical patterns in raised brick, rich, varied and well-contrasted. From the fifteenth century on, the minarets were almost always in pairs, flanking the main portal and the entrance to the sanctuary. The tapering shaft is covered with tile in bold geometrical designs and diapers and terminates in a sort of lantern, which is theoretically though not practically the Muezzin's platform. This is supported by stalactite brackets, often in gold, and is surrounded with a delicate wooden lattice balustrade. The bases of these minarets nearly always disappear behind the screen of the portal, but in Gohar Shad in Isfahan they carry directly to the ground, which gives them and the portal itself the appearance of great height and solidity (Fig. 7).

The inventory of Persian architecture is, after all, brief, for to these major forms of arch, vault and dome there is

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little to be added except such characteristic devices as the clustered stalactites. It is not in the variety of her architectural elements that Persia has excelled; it is rather in their perfect and harmonious composition, the justice and clarity with which each form is realised and all are organically assembled. The Western world soon gave up the effort to combine the pointed arch, the vault and the dome. In Persia the three are blended with a complete and effortless art. They belong together and grow out of one another with the inevitability and unchallengeable authority that are the mark of natural things.

Persian architecture has often been designated as panel architecture, for the wall surfaces are almost universally divided into series of panels, and panels within panels, slightly recessed. This style, while it came to its most brilliant and complete expression in Islamic times, was again the logical fulfilment of motifs current in earlier periods, perhaps from the very beginning of architecture in Western Asia. It appears in a rudimentary form on some of the buildings of Ur, where it was, perhaps, the result of necessity, for the deep vertical channels that divide these walls were essential for draining the hanging gardens above.\* The disposition, however, to divide a surface into a series of panels, quite apart from practical utility, was already evident, for the same scheme appears on a magnificent gold dagger sheath, and is quite common on the Luristan bronzes. Undoubtedly the tendency towards rectangular compositions is very ancient.

The tradition probably was more or less unbroken, but the next specific evidence of it that we have is on Achæmenian palaces which were panelled in more complex schemes. The façade of Ctesiphon is divided into a succession of horizontal bands, each consisting of a series of recessed units, not exactly a panel division but entirely in the same spirit and giving essentially the same effect, particularly in the receding sur-

\*Cf. C. L. Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*, p. 123.



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faces. A more definitely rectangular panel system is shown on some of the palaces represented on Sasanian silver plates.\*

In Islamic times the panels are carefully proportioned to the whole surface, and by their precise definition give an effect of sharply articulated units which impart an emphatic architectural quality; and at the same time they make the structure appear thicker, heavier and more active. They serve, too, an important function in avoiding the monotony that often characterises less artfully contrived brick construction, particularly in the Orient, where sun-dried brick is in constant use and the poorer houses and interminable expanses of brick walls without mouldings or copings are unpleasantly meagre and flat. Nor is the decorative function of these panels merely negative. They contribute a positive enrichment by creating a regular succession of shadow lines and in more highly ornamented structures make possible a delightful and satisfying variety.

These panels are always rectangular except for the spandrels over the arches, and even these are held within the scheme, for they function as the corners of a more inclusive rectangle that encloses the whole unit. A horizontal panel nearly always crowns the vertical panel, thus adding greatly to the richness. All these panels, though they sometimes have as many as five reveals, are sufficiently shallow to maintain the continuity of the surface without breaking into the flatness, either of the construction or the decoration. Thus the integrity of the wall is never damaged.

Brick is, indeed, the all but universal building material in most of Persia but the country is by no means a treeless waste, so that wood construction does play some part. While the main plateau is largely untimbered, there are forests on all the mountain rims and hence in the mountain villages both wood and stone, equally ready to hand, are used. Moreover in the great valleys the stately *chenar* grows in abund-

\*For illustrations see Sarre, *Die Kunst des alten Persien*, p. 105.



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ance and to gigantic size, so that the adjacent cities have availed themselves of this lumber to create some interesting features, particularly roofs and porches. Most of the rooms in the private residences are vaulted, but there are many with ceilings made of poles and panelled reeds, and particularly in Isfahan and Shiraz there was developed a porch architecture of great beauty and dignity.

Of the existing porches, by far the finest is that on the Chahil Sutun; but this is only a seventeenth century derivative of a style that had been used by the Medes 2000 years before. It forms a stately open room, more than 100 by 50 feet, with lofty tapering columns rising 50 feet, painted red and terminating in spreading stalactite caps in gold. These carry a richly coffered ceiling with delicate geometrical designs in gold, red and blue and the whole soaring, colourful ensemble is mirrored in quieter tones in the large pool below. The counterpart of this porch is to be found on almost every house of importance in Isfahan, smaller and simpler to be sure, but still high and stately.

There is quite a variety of structures in Persia, each defined by its own special use.\* Of these, the first in importance are the mosques. It is not possible either to understand or to visualise the mosque architecture without reference to the setting, the function and the point of view which both impose limits and confer advantages. Some mosques stand free and apart like the mosque of Saveh or that of Uljaitu at Sultanieh. There is a beautiful shrine of Neamatullah near Kerman quite isolated,† and the Kojā Rabi near Mashad sits in a delightful little park. In most of the larger cities the main mosque has an entrance from the great square or medan (Fig. 9), but by and large, the mosque is woven

\*For a more complete discussion cf. Martin Briggs, *Muhammadian Architecture in Palestine, Syria and Egypt*; Ernst Diez, *Die Kunst des Islamischen Völker*, H. Saladin, *Manuel de l'Art Musulman*, *l'Architecture*; a new edition of the last by André Godard is expected soon.

†Ill. Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, Vol. II, op. p. 156 and op. p. 342.

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into the structural texture of the city so that, save for the portal and the soaring dome, its glories are withdrawn and hidden.

For Persian cities are organised on the same basis as our mediæval towns, with the emphasis on protection and seclusion, and the street is rarely more than an alley for traffic, a narrow channel between dreary blank walls. The Renaissance style of the free-standing building, four square, with every side presenting a surface to be examined, is comparatively unusual. The buildings constitute a continuum, stretching away in a tiresome undifferentiated expanse. But behind the endless unvarying walls, concealed in the dreary uniformity are courts of mosque, palace and private residence in which are concentrated the beauty of the architecture. Seen from the inner parapet, each mosque court is a pool of azure glory sunk in the tiresome muddy sea of flat roofs and myriad little domes.

If this interior architecture sometimes means a loss of tridimensionality, a failure to grasp the architectural unit as a cubical whole, this is compensated for by the drama of the discovery which is unparalleled in the architecture of the West. The long blank wall of the street may be broken by a lofty recessed portal or a mosque. Through this shadowed entrance one passes into comparative darkness only to emerge suddenly into a scene of bewildering glory that surpasses all anticipation and is difficult to recapture even in memory. Usually, one faces the sanctuary with its vast cavernous arch surmounted by a huge dome of glowing turquoise or glistening gold. All about are the serried ranks of arched recesses, with a great arch at the centre of each side arch, invariably a blaze of cobalt and turquoise blue and green with varied other colours for freshness and accent. All this is reflected in the shining pool. It is a scene of unearthly splendour. In many of the mosques the court is lined with trees, shrubs and flowers, and inter-



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sected with water channels. One hears the muttered mumble of prayer or the droning of the theological class under a vault or the song of the birds, intensified in the reverent quiet. The sense of exclusion of the squalid outer world, of merciful isolation from the din of the bazaars, the heat, the dust and the confusion of the streets, the utter perfection of all that is visible are as thrilling as the peal of great music after silence.

Such a mosque represents a fully evolved plan, for the older mosques consisted merely of an enclosure with only the side toward Mecca developed as a building. It is, however, the type that is predominant throughout Persia. Always there is the great court with the large pool in the centre for ablutions. On the south-west side is the huge, dome-covered sanctuary itself, where a great recessed and panelled arch reveals the mihrab that marks the direction of Mecca, and beside it the high pulpit. Each of the other three sides is also broken by a high central arch, while the walls themselves consist of a series of arched recessed porches on two stories.

Second in importance only to the Mosques are the Madrasses or theological colleges, but these are now essentially the same in plan and treatment as the mosques, for it was the influence of the college that modified the earlier mosque plan to its present form.\*

In a country where saints are so passionately venerated shrines have become an important architectural feature, and they constitute one of the most picturesque and delightful features of the landscape. One turns a sudden corner and sees the compact little building, square or polygonal, topped with a bright blue dome, or sometimes a tent-like polyhedral cupola, rising above the dark green shifting foliage of the surrounding park.

In Northern Persia, particularly from the tenth to the fourteenth century, there was built a series of striking

\*Cf. Diez, *Die Kunst der Islamischen Völker*, p. 96.



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tomb towers, a sort of majestic defiance to oblivion. Strongly built, very high and markedly individual in design, they have served their purpose well. They are sometimes round with horizontal bands of magnificent geometrical ornament in relief brick work as at Saveh and Damghan; sometimes like a cluster of gigantic reeds as at Radkan,\* often with sharp projecting flanges almost like a great star as at Varamin or at Ray, or polygonal with beautiful recessed arched panels as Nachshirvan. In many cases they are surmounted with relief inscriptions in noble scale, and often they are, or were, covered with splendid polychrome tiles.†

The caravanserais and bazaars are also monumental buildings. The caravanserais, ruined and sound alike, cover the entire country. At one time on the main highroads they were only twenty miles apart, the usual day's journey for a heavy caravan. They had to be large to accommodate many caravans at a time so that they sometimes cover an acre or more, and they had also to be strong, forts really to protect the precious freight from prowlers or organised attack. The walls are nearly always simple, but the entrance gate is sometimes built up with a very imposing succession of arches and towers.

The bazaar is often nothing but streets and little shops roofed over, but the arches and vaults may attain real distinction. Thus at Isfahan there is a great entrance arch to the Royal Bazaar 60 feet high, decorated with splendid mosaic faience, and within there is fan vaulting reminiscent of an English cathedral so that the structure is really worthy to complement the mosques and palaces that face the same great square.

Occasionally, the fort or citadel or even the city wall, by virtue of simplicity and stability, scale and proportion, attains a real architectural quality. Thus a great tower on

\*Diez, *Die Kunst der Islamischen Völker*, fig. 95.

†For a series of splendid illustrations of these monuments see Sarre, *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst*.

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the old wall of Isfahan is the epitome of mass and permanence, the symbol of security.

Because the Monarch was so significant in Persia the palace was always of great importance. In Achæmenian and Sasanian times the king was the head and front not only of the State but also of the divine order itself; motives of aggrandisement were reinforced by political and religious sanctions, and, as a result, in those times the palace was the principal architectural feature of the country. With the advent of Islam, however, the religious centre was moved outside of Persia and the Viceregent of God was no longer the Persian King but a simple Arab merchant who, by virtue of his inspiration, became translated to the right hand of the Deity. The King has, indeed, maintained religious functions, but they are exercised in connection with shrines and mosques, and the palace is reduced to a purely secular status.

We do not know much about the palaces of the Islamic period previous to the Safavian Dynasty. Nothing complete exists, though the remains of the Palace of Alp Arslan have been identified at Nishapur and certain smaller palaces which cannot be attached to any person, have been partly disclosed at Saveh and Ray. By the time of Shah Abbas the palaces are relatively small, but they are designed with exquisite art and the utmost enrichment of every kind of decoration is lavished on them. Because they were thus small, each ruler had a vast number of them. Shah Abbas numbered his by the hundreds in Isfahan alone, and each was a masterpiece, though most of them had but a dozen rooms or less. Only two of these remain, the Chahil Sutun (Fig. 8) and the Ali Kapu (Fig. 10), each a series of exquisite rooms beautiful still, despite the ruination of much of the decoration. Shah Sultan Hussein also is reported to have had a huge number, some three hundred in Isfahan alone, all small, too. One of these, the Atagh Ashraf, with splendid polychrome plaster decoration, has recently been uncovered.



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In general, the private residences follow the royal styles on a becomingly modest scale, and nearly every feature of the palace finds some echo, however slight, in the homes of the nobles and wealthy merchants. But usually, instead of a detached building the private house will be continuous with the buildings of the town, so that here, too, a court architecture is developed, with the garden façade and porch alone playing a part in the exterior effect.

If Persia's contributions to the development of arch, vault and dome are of outstanding importance, her most brilliant achievement in the field of architecture, one quite beyond competition, was in the perfection of methods and styles of surface decoration. The great Achæmenian palaces were aglow with rich colour and from that time on, the wall was regarded as a commanding opportunity for beautiful enrichment.

The Sasanian buildings presented a varied and deeply plastic surface. The façades, such as that of the great Palace of Chosroes at Ctesiphon, still standing, and others whose appearance we can reconstruct from hints on the silver vessels, showed a series of niches, engaged columns and horizontal galleries that strongly suggest many of the frontals of Gothic cathedrals.

Apparently from the very first, wall surfaces were broken up with various channels, recesses and panels, mercifully clothed in shadow against the glare of the dazzling sun. From these simple beginnings there developed the most beautiful ornamental brickwork the world has ever seen. The Islamic genius for entrelacs was united with the skill of the Persian bricklayers to produce complex bands like embroidery, arranged in horizontal zones, principally on the minarets and tomb towers. No other architecture has ever been encased in a texture of such varied beauty and appropriateness. Veiled in this intricate web of chiaroscuro, it presented a grateful surface that could be seen and enjoyed even in the high



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Persian noon. A notable example is the minaret at Saveh.

Brickwork is fired clay and its staccato quality of texture is the appropriate expression of the hard-edged small unit; but unfired clay also has its own uses and charms and stucco, which is originally only semi-fluid clay, offered infinite possibilities for a different style of surface enrichment. No doubt the use of stucco ornament went back into remotest antiquity, very probably to pre-Achæmenian times though no examples are known. Wherever there was brick-work it was, of course, easy to put a special coat of clay on the surface and the very marks of the trowel and the amenableness of the material would suggest and invite moulding or decorative incisions. But stucco is too perishable to have lasted from very remote times. The earliest that we now know was discovered by Dr. Reuter and Dr. Kuehnelt on the German Ctesiphon expedition of 1929. Here is material that dates from the fourth, possibly even the third, century and shows that the art had already been carried to a very high perfection.

The Ctesiphon pieces show only conventional patterns but the Sasanian stucco workers were by no means limited to decorative motifs. They carried their sculptural tradition into this material as well as into the rock carvings and silver. In 1922 a considerable mass of stucco was recovered from the Sasanian palace of Chahar Takun near Varamin. There are some large and splendid fragments in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum and an entire section of wall in the Pennsylvania Museum showing a group of cavaliers and huntsmen framed in a series of architectural bands and panels. The hunting scene has close connections with the famous reliefs of Tak-i-Bustan.

It is impossible to trace the development of stucco ornament with any satisfactory continuity, for very few buildings of the early Islamic times are still standing in Persia. Numerous severe earthquakes and the devastating cataclysm of the

Mogul invasions combined to destroy whole cities which were readily obliterated because of the perishable nature of the building material. The earliest Islamic structure that remains is the lovely little mosque of Nayin, situated on the westward slope of a wide and shining plain between Isfahan and Yazd. Apparently the whole building was festooned with masterly stucco ornament. Not only the mihrab, but the columns and the spandrels over the arches and the soffits under them, were wrought with a rich and lovely surface (Fig. 11).

This stucco marks a decidedly new stage in the development of the art. In the more or less classic columns of the mihrab, and in the spot-stripes, originally the Sasanian ribbon with pearls, we find an echo of the old tradition. But for the rest, the leaf clusters, the richly moulded surfaces bounded by easy swinging lines interrupted only by the stately march of Kufic letters at their finest, we are dealing with forms that seem naturally to issue from the character of the material itself. The early ornamentation of Nayin has been the subject of two learned and penetrating analyses by Dr. Flury, models of scholarship, research, and experience.\*

The use of stucco ornamentation continued and developed. On the impost blocks that surmount the huge piers in the great dome chamber of the Masjid-i-Jâmi in Isfahan, we find a double system of spiral scrolls incised into the plaster, and on the interior of the dome itself traces of an applied vine ornament, which recalls in its spacing and rhythm that of some of the Seljuk damasks. The panels of the arches in the smaller dome chamber are decorated with a delightful combination of stellate forms. The little square spaces between the ends of the brick were also filled with various small patterns stamped in the clay and then fired—not exactly in stucco technique, but closely related to it, and apparently done by the same workmen.

\*Dr. S. Flury, *Un Monument des premiers siècles de l'hégire en Perse in Syria*, 1921; 1930.



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The most important Seljuk stucco, however, has been recovered from the ruins of palaces at Ray and Saveh. Ever since excavations at Ray reached the Seljuk level, fragments of stucco have been found, and in 1927 a native digger named Zal Khan uncovered what was apparently a foyer, completely covered with a repeating pattern in stucco. Various parts of the ornament were accented with gold leaf. At this time the workers regarded stucco as of no account, being a cheap material and having, as they said, "no pictures." The entire wall was therefore broken up and put through the fire. About £6 worth of gold was recovered, a reasonably profitable transaction in the view of the workers. Thus perished in our own time what must have been an extremely attractive example of Seljuk ornament.

A little further on a panel was found almost intact, showing a seated king and attendants with a band of precious inscription. This inscription carries the name of Togril Beg, by whom is probably meant Togril Beg III, last of the petty Seljuk princes, who met his end in 1194. Professor Nicholas Martinovitch believes that the Togril referred to is the great Togril, the mighty monarch who solidified the Seljuk empire, but stylistic evidence points rather to the later Togril. This important piece is now in the Pennsylvania Museum.

In another part of Ray a somewhat larger stucco panel was found but without any revelatory inscription. This one is important because of its slight traces of polychrome and because the border stripes follow closely some of those at Nayin. Another stucco panel, of great elegance and charm, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, was recovered at Saveh. It has cavaliers set in panels in a most delightful lattice ground, with large arabesques and fleurons reminiscent of the Sasanian manner.

Each of these periods of stucco had its own merits, but by general consent it was in the fourteenth century that the art reached its highest perfection. In the mosques of many parts



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of Persia the mihrabs were rendered in stucco, most sumptuously wrought, with stately inscriptions involved in a contrasting background of floral motifs or marching athwart a system of spiral arabesques, complicated leaf and flower designs with various types of interwoven linear borders. Occasionally the mihrab is topped by a horizontal panel. In the Masjid-i-Jâmi this carried a fragile openwork system of vines which has broken away, revealing a row of lotus blossoms as beautiful as any known in the history of this lovely motif. The whole mihrab was delicately polychromed.

Persian stucco carving is done by working free-hand directly in the hardening plaster. It has consequently a far finer and more expressive quality than the stiff plaster ornament of the Alhambra which is stamped with moulds and hence does not escape a somewhat mechanical look.

The final stage of stucco ornament touched the pinnacle of splendour in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, when under the name of *gatch* it was developed with an elegance and finesse that made it almost the rival of polychrome book covers. Indeed, it is but a translation to wall surfaces of the conception and almost the technique of the book covers done in delicate polychrome relief which to-day are as highly prized as paintings. This was the accepted treatment for the interiors of all who could afford it, varying in splendour in accordance with the resources and the tastes of the owner. The ceiling of the great audience chamber of the Chahil Sutun consists of the customary patterns of the time such as are found on the brocades and velvets, carpets and book covers; lotus palmettes, blossoms and long curving lancet leaves, picked out in gold leaf. The background of the various panels is sometimes vermilion, sometimes turquoise or deep blue, or a particularly delicious shade of pale green. Nowhere are vaults and arches so festooned in splendour. Although the patterns are rendered in low relief they are delicately moulded and their contours are

of a clean and knife-like sharpness. There is scarcely an interior wall surface of the Ali Kapu, the other imperial palace of Shah Abbas, which is not completely covered with this work. If the designers of the ceiling of the Chahil Sutun were book-binders, it was primarily the brocade-makers and miniature painters who prepared the patterns for the Ali Kapu (Fig. 12). A proper description of one panel would be a matter of pages, and there are scores of rooms and dozens of panels in each and all, saving those on the third floor which are variations of the one theme of the vase, foliage and animals, are strikingly different. Here the tones are flat and subdued; whites and ivories, pale yellow and soft grey green, occasionally light blue with a rather extensive use of a dull maroon for weight and richness. The gatch is wrought with the delicacy of a painter's brush. Indeed, at a distance of a few feet one hardly realises that it is not painting although it has a curious crispness and vitality which comes from the textured surface revealed by the fractured light. This altogether entrancing decoration of the Ali Kapu serves as a test of the soundness and dependability of the various European observers. The cynical Tavernier, who has been credited with common sense and a sober judgment in the face of romantic glamour, says of this lovely palace: "Within there is naught of beauty or interest." Herbert, on the contrary, saw and appreciated "the rooms embossed above and painted with white, red, blue and gold."\*

But this style of decoration was by no means confined to palaces. It was common in the better houses of all the great cities of the time. A charming example of two rooms from a private house in Isfahan is in the Pennsylvania Museum of Philadelphia. Herbert especially admired the effect of a dining room in a house in Shiraz. "The roof was arched, the

\*Sir William Foster, Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia, 1627-1629*, London, 1928; p. 128; cf. also Sir John Chardin's *Travels in Persia*, London, 1927, p. 260.



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walls embossed with gold and wrought into imagery, so shadowed that it was hard to judge whether embossed, insculpt, or painted."\*

The eighteenth century saw a return to the almost excessive opulence of the style of the Chahil Sutun and in the lovely little throne palace of Shah Sultan Hussein† which was recently disclosed intact in Isfahan we have every element of this style carried to an unusual degree of intensity. Multiple stalactites introduce a new note of richness, the mouldings are wider and more intricate, the foliate forms more brilliant and complex, the delicately modelled surfaces are more sensitive than ever, while the crimson, gold, turquoise and cobalt gleam with a truly regal magnificence that was not quite reached in either of the earlier palaces. But sophisticated and conscious as the art of this latter palace is, it has lost much of the poetry and dignity of design of the earlier examples. Neither the cunning hand nor the lavish purse would quite compete with the taste and genius of a more heroic age.

The most characteristic as well as the most important Persian achievement in architectural ornament was the development of coloured tile for the complete investiture of even the largest buildings. There are three main types of this tile casing: one consists of plain tiles of single colours in cross and star forms, often, as at Pir-i-Bakran, (a mausoleum of the fourteenth century), in two tones, the one deep lapis, the other brilliant turquoise. In our Western museums we know them only in very small sections and the effect of a large area is quite surprising in the intensity and richness, for the two colours merging, seem, in a curious way, to impart a subtle purplish glow to the whole. A far richer and more complicated method combines tiles in these same forms but with elaborate patterns of foliage and animals or human

\**Op. cit.* p. 70.

†*Cf.* Pope, *International Studio*, Dec. 1930.



figures. Often these are in beautiful lustre tones (*cf.* p. 79, Fig. 30).

The second main type of tile casing is generally called mosaic faience. It developed gradually from the use of coloured brick assembled in large patterns to enliven a surface, a technique that is still practised all over Persia with quite astounding ingenuity. From the use of coloured brick on a plain ground it was a short step to breaking the bricks up into varied shapes, and from this again but a normal step to the use of large sections of tile cut to form broad patterns. By the twelfth century this technique had been mastered by the Seljuks and particularly in Konia we find splendid examples. The units of the pattern in Seljuk times were still very large but by the fourteenth century ways had been found to cut the tiles into extremely small shapes and fit them closely into most complex floral and geometrical patterns (Fig. 13). The technique is difficult and for a long time it was thought to be an irrevocably lost art and many theories were advanced as to how it could have been done. The process is now no longer a mystery as the work is being done again to-day in Persia, especially in Isfahan, with highly satisfactory results. The shapes are delicately chipped out of the square tile of glazed faience with an adze-like hammer, with such craft that the glaze is not broken. The various units of the pattern are then placed face down upon the floor or on a paper on which the design has been sketched and assembled like a picture puzzle. The back is then coated with a strong mortar, making of the entire mass a single unit of whatever size is best fitted for the requirements of the place or the conditions of handling.

The results quite justify this obviously difficult and expensive process. Every glaze has a critical firing point at which it yields the purest and most intense colour and the most lustrous surface. By firing each one separately, the most brilliant possible gamut of tones can be secured. When

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the pieces are finally assembled the joints show slightly, thus outlining all the patterns with a little trickle of white which greatly enlivens and freshens the entire effect.

The ground colour of the mosaic faience is almost always a deep cobalt blue of a degree of intensity that is hard to imagine. Of the other major tones, the turquoise, particularly at the end of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, acquired a vividness that is rarely equalled by the stone itself. Professor Herzfeld actually compared a turquoise with the spandrel over the entrance to the Masjid Ali of Isfahan and found the faience had a decidedly clearer and more saturated colour. An intense light emerald green, a pure golden yellow, a fawn or saffron colour that ranges through a great variety of tones, a mirror black and milk white, with occasional accents of an unglazed, reddish terra cotta, complete this extraordinary palette.\*

All of these tones fluctuate widely, some more, some less. Even in an area smaller than the palm of the hand a blue may shade from clear cobalt to the deepest midnight tones. The turquoise and yellow are but little modulated but the saffron tones range all the way from fawn through umber even to a deep blackish garnet. The blacks also have sometimes a reddish glint. As the panels are assembled on an irregular surface they retain these irregularities and so, when erected, they present a great variety of slightly divergent facets to the light which gives to the whole design a subtle and shifting radiance.

The cost and time required for making mosaic faience were too irksome for monarchs like Shah Abbas who loved quick and dramatic effects and was not too exacting about details, so another type of faience was developed called

\*There are superb fragments of sixteenth century mosaic faience in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum and in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and an entire room in the Pennsylvania Museum. An important section of an entrance dated 1485 is in the possession of C. Filippo.



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*haft rengi* (seven colours) which, if less brilliant, was equally a *tour de force* and made possible certain new and admirable effects. The Isfahan potters learned how to fire the same seven colours together, with occasional additions of a grey blue and beige, on tiles about a foot square, and by outlining each colour with manganese they prevented them from mingling. They could then apply their colours in smaller units than was possible even to the most skilful mosaic faience workers and so, in addition to all the patterns that were available to the latter, they began to make scenes with personages. The whole interior of the Masjid-i-Shah in Isfahan and the court of Imam Riza are done in tile of this kind. It fills the spandrels of all the great bridges and is the typical ornament over the arches of palaces, houses and city walls. It was even used, in a few cases, for interior or porch decoration, where the patterns were made after the cartoons of the most famous painters. There are some beautiful examples of these *haft rengi* tiles with Riza Abbasi figures in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum and very handsome sections in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum, composed in rectangular pictures, which give a misleading idea as they are all fragments out of spandrels. The *haft rengi* tiles were in great favour for lining bathrooms.

Beautiful as they are, they cannot compete in depth of colour, in glow or brilliance with mosaic faience; but they have their place and in the sanctuary of the Mosque of Sheik Lutf Ullah in Isfahan (1618) the two styles are combined with the happiest results. The dado and the two great panels on the north-east and the south-west are in *haft rengi* while all of the rest of the dome, the walls and the inscription friezes, are in mosaic faience. The semi-mat surface of the painted tile provides a quiet pearl-like quality which is a welcome relief and foil for the intense depth and glitter of the mosaic. Each is the more beautiful for the

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contrast which is one of the many factors in the surpassing loveliness of this holy place (Fig. 16).

Architectural necessities did, at times, call for sculptural enrichment, but it was never a natural or easy medium for the Persians. They think more easily in two-dimensional decorative rhythms than in three-dimensional forms. Moreover decoration itself, which is of its very nature abstract, cannot, if embodied in the solid round, so readily disentangle itself from the representation of reality. The theological prohibitions, too, founded for the reproof of idolatry, were directed more emphatically against sculpture than any other art, for it was the sculptors who were the really dangerous and blasphemous image-makers.

There was an old tradition from Achaemenian times for sculptured column bases, and the beautiful inverted lotus bell bases of Persepolis, for example, found not unworthy successors in the palaces of Isfahan 2000 years later. Those of the Chahil Sutun are composed of four double-bodied lions, while those from the Palace of the Charbagh, used since its destruction as ornaments for the big pool of the Chahil Sutun, show a compact group of lions and maidens surmounted by a stalactite cap. Although the Persians had only the meagerest sculptural tradition with no accumulated skill and no practised technique, their fine sense for design and sure feeling for material have in both these examples led to the happiest results, so that modern sculptors find these figures both satisfying and engaging. The mass and bulk are fully respected, and both lines and surfaces are treated in terms of design, so that the decorative charm quite compensates for any deficiencies of modelling.

Stone-cutting itself presented no practical problems to the Persians. The corner posts in the main court of the Masjid-i-Jāmi in Isfahan, compact little columns issuing from sturdy vases and terminating in a dense mass of stalactites, are admirable examples of the stone-carver's art, and all the



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subsidiary details, especially the ornamentation of the shafts, are done with elegance and precision. If the Persians worked in brick and plaster it was primarily because these materials were more convenient and less expensive; but when building in regions where stone is the natural material, they have shown themselves wholly adaptable and capable of the finest effects. The Palace of the Khan in Baku, built about 1500, exhibits superb stereotomy and the detailed ornament, such as the arabesque reliefs on the portal, is done with a skill that the Burgundian stone-carvers would have admired (Fig. 19). The small marble mihrabs and gravestones, especially between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, are beautifully cut, and it would be hard to find a more exquisite example of the stone-carver's art than a little fifteenth century slate mould from Sultanieh, in the Boston Museum.

It is too early to write the history of mural painting in Persia. It was an ancient art and was practised in Sasanian times, as we know not merely in documentary references but from actual examples that have been found by Professor Herzfeld in Sistan. What was made of the art in immediately succeeding periods we can only remotely conjecture. The early Islamic period saw a decline in the painter's art almost to the point of extinction, and it is probable that the palaces from the seventh to the tenth century were ornamented with polychrome stucco rather than with fresco figures. But by the tenth or eleventh century the art was resumed, probably under the influence of Central Asiatic and Far Eastern styles. It is significant that a fragment of a mural painting, now in the National Museum in Teheran, resembling some of the Turfan frescoes now in the Ethnologische Museum of Berlin, has been found in Persia.\* Last year there was recovered from the ruins of the palace of Alp Arslan in Nishapur a fragment of a fresco showing a charming female head, again with marked Central Asiatic influences. The

\*Baill Gray is sure that this fresco is the work of Persian artists.

piece is now in the collection of Governor Jam of Mashad. As further proof of these Eastern influences, it is worth noting that a number of patterns common in the Central Asiatic and Mongolian frescoes were gradually adopted in Persia, particularly the flaming halo that appears at Tun Huang, which was by degrees amalgamated with the western ogival palmette and also developed as a separate motive.

There are many references in the literature which make it clear that by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the miniature painters were engaged in decorating panels and ceilings. The miniatures themselves constantly depict rooms revealing charming murals, not merely of more or less abstract compositions such as spiral interwoven arabesques or the cypress and flowering tree or the graceful willow, but also animated scenes with personages, especially cavaliers, and many a *fête-champêtre* which we can reconstruct from the slightly later panels of *haft rengi* such as one may see in the Victoria and Albert, the Louvre, and the Metropolitan Museums.

By the sixteenth century murals on a great scale were undoubtedly painted. The only remaining examples of the style to be seen are in the great north and south lunettes of the audience hall of the Chahil Sutun. These paintings, because they have been much neglected and still show the unrepaired damage of the fire of more than 200 years ago, because also the light is unsatisfactory and perhaps even more because of the forceful and somewhat tiresome eighteenth century battle scenes that occupy the main walls, seem to have been quite overlooked.

But here the mural decoration is of a high order, and despite the corruption of the surface we can still see a delicious green background with groups of running deer and other animals scurrying or dashing through the characteristic foliage that we find in the contemporary miniatures. Herbert speaks of all the walls as being painted with sports and land-



scapes.\* He also found similar scenes in the pavilion in the great garden on the outskirts of Isfahan: "The higher rooms are beautified with variety of landscapes, which represent their manner of sport, hawking, fishing, riding, shooting, wrestling, courting, and other fancies."†

There are a number of large double-page miniatures on such an extended scale, including such a wide expanse of landscape and such masses of human figures, that they are quite inappropriate as decorations for books. These are very close in style to the lunettes of the Chahil Sutun nor is it unreasonable to suppose that they had their counterpart on the walls of some great throne or banqueting hall or were originally planned as such decorations.

In the time of Shah Abbas the mural paintings of the miniaturists almost rivalled the work of the gatch makers as wall decoration and scores of panels both in the Chahil Sutun and the Ali Kapu, principally in the style of Riza Abbasi (Fig. 17), show that the greatest masters of the time were engaged in the work. For some of the Riza Abbasi panels in the Ali Kapu we have existing miniatures that are either the cartoons or subsequent copies. Of these, the most perfectly preserved is that of the Two Lovers in the Sarre Collection.‡

The work of local painters was supplemented by that of visiting or resident European craftsmen. One large fragment of plaster recovered from a building adjacent to the Ali Kapu is entirely in the contemporary European style of ornament and might have been transported intact from Italy. Numerous similar figure paintings still exist, especially in the rooms and around the porches of the Chahil Sutun, some in part the work of Persian painters, as is shown by the

\*Sir William Foster, Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia, 1627-1629*, London, 1928; p. 128.

†Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

‡Cf. E. Kuehnel, *Islamische Miniaturmalerei*, Fig. 80.

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treatment of the handsome brocades, others wholly of European authorship, the work doubtless in many instances of some itinerant brush wielder looking for fame and fortune where his mediocre talents could make more impression than in his own land (Fig. 18). One of these painters is known to us by name through the remarks of Herbert, who tells of the murals in the royal place of Ashraf: "The ceiling was garnished with gold and pencilled with story in lively colours; all which seemed to strive whether art or nature to a judicious eye would be more acceptable. One John, a Dutchman (who had long served the King), celebrated his skill here to the admiration of the Persians and his own advantage."\* He is also spoken of as John the Boor and it is stated that he was a Jew.† Sir William Ouseley, who travelled through there in the early nineteenth century, found these paintings still existing but in bad condition: "The walls of some chambers had been completely painted, and in three or four compartments I traced the vestiges of a European pencil. Diana with her nymphs at the fountain; near her a large urn, and dogs; and some portraits, almost of the natural size. But from the admission of damp air—and from the smoke of fire kindled on the floor of the sumptuous rooms, both the outlines and the colours had suffered so considerably that it was difficult to ascertain the subjects designed."‡ Quite a number of the Chahil Sutun paintings are distinctly in the Dutch style.

There was one quite original form of wall decoration which should not be overlooked, that of the so-called porcelain chambers, of which the finest example is in the Mosque

\*Sir William Foster, Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia*, 1627-29, p. 154.

†*Op. cit.* p. 207, 208.

‡Sir Thomas Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, Oxford, 1928, p. 28, quoting Sir William Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East*; more particularly Persia, Vol. I, London, 1892, p. 377.



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of Ardabil.\* Another fine one is in the Ali Kapu, and there are quite a number of others to be found in private houses in Isfahan and Julfa. In these rooms the entire wall consists of plaster recesses, the apertures of which are the exact shape of the contemporary faience, principally varied styles, shapes and sizes of ewers (Fig. 20). Into these recesses, in the case of the Ardabil Mosque, porcelains brought from China were fitted and the effect must have been very handsome when the entire walls were thus covered with their varied and gleaming surfaces. Judging by the shapes of the apertures, it was rather the local faience than imported Chinese porcelain that was used in the Ali Kapu. Where the wall bent forward to meet an arch or form a vault it was, of course, impractical to insert or retain a heavy object and here the interiors of the niches were painted the monochrome colours common in the faience, so that even though empty they must have presented no marked difference in appearance from the lower recesses which contained the real objects.

In the richer developments of this niche style a wider range of objects was used. Chardin describes such a decoration, in which vases, bowls and flasks of crystal, carnelian, onyx, jasper, amber, coral, porcelain, gold, silver and enamel were used. †

Even this device of shaped recesses which seems so novel and original had its antecedents. In Samarra, the Abbasid capital built by Muttawakil, the successor of Haroun ar-Rashid, when Persian influence was dominant, in the Caliph's palace there is a wall decoration of irregular-shaped niches which, while not exactly fitting ceramic forms, were undoubtedly devised for holding objects of this kind and had contours adapted to their shapes.‡ By the middle of the fourteenth

\*Cf. Sarre, *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst*.

†Quoted Diez, *Die Kunst der Islamischen Völker*, p. 182.

‡Cf. Herzfeld, *Ausgrabungen von Samarra*. Cf. also Diez, *op. cit.*, Fig. 45. A large section of this wall is now in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum.

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century the fashion was evidently well established. Ibn Batuta tells of a room with numerous niches in which there were vases of silver gilt and of Iraq glass.\*

In some cases, probably more often than has been recognised, textiles were used to cover the walls. We find them depicted as balcony hangings in the miniatures of two centuries and it is possible that some of the mural decorations shown in these illustrations might have been brocades, for we know by specific quotation from Ibn Batuta that in Khiva the walls of two houses that he visited were hung with beautiful silks.†

A final resource of the mural decorator was the use of mirrors occasionally in conjunction with jewel-like bits of coloured glass. These mirrors, mostly used in small facets and not too hard and bright, give a more agreeable effect than the description conveys. Seen as the facings of slender columns supporting deeply shaded porches or in dimmer recesses, the cool glitter plays with the tinkle and swish of the flowing water in the fountains, both successfully defying the furnace-like heat without. And even in cooler weather, which is, after all, the order of the day in Persia, their delicious glimmer lights the shadows.

The problem of windows, of letting the light in without cutting a gap in the wall destructive of its continuity and solidity, is inevitably difficult and has not always been happily solved in the West, particularly since the artistically unfortunate invention of large sheets of plate glass. A solution in the Orient was perhaps easier because the intense light without required only small apertures for adequate illumination of the interiors. Moreover, out of sheer self-defence the light had to be broken up, for a single opening would have let in one concentrated beam which would

\*Voyages, Edition Defremery, III, 8, quoted Diez, *Die Kunst der Islamischen Völker*, p. 182.

†Quoted Diez, *Die Kunst der Islamischen Völker*, p. 182.



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have been intolerable unless directly overhead, as in the bazaars.

One of the earliest solutions in Persia was the use of metal bars, perhaps a bit jail-like at first but by the fourteenth century a decided contribution to the beauty of the building. The large bronze bosses at the joints were inlaid with intricate designs in silver, sometimes with interesting inscriptions. One such knob in the Harari Collection has an inscription of Uljaitu and undoubtedly came from his great palace at Sultanieh, built in the early fourteenth century. Sometimes these metal windows were very tiny to permit of concealed observation, to let the women, for instance, look down unseen into the main court or the street. One example of the eighteenth century found at Hamadan, of bronze with gold inlays, is constructed like a little gate.\*

Probably contemporary in origin with these were window grills, at first in square or honeycomb segments, later with heavy flowing lines based on floral ornament. These grills, which were thick, were originally made in plain plaster but later were in faience, generally glazed blue which tinted and cooled the light as it diffused it.

The Islamic development of geometrical patterns, particularly stars, polygons, wheels and other radial forms, lent itself especially to window design (Fig. 21). Grills in these forms, made of light wood and so delicately cut and artfully fitted that at a little distance they take on quite a cobwebby effect, finely divide the opening into an intricate pattern, dense enough to maintain the integrity of the wall yet sufficiently distinguished from it in colour and texture to constitute an interesting decoration. Such grills were certainly richly developed quite early in the history of Islamic art though no existing examples in Persia go back before the sixteenth century at the earliest. Some of these grills are in plain turquoise faience, others in elaborate mosaic faience.

\*In the collection of E. Hindsman, Paris.

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Fine examples are in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago. When the weather was too chill the air was excluded by pasting a tough paper over the inside, leaving the window luminous and also preserving the pattern in shadow.

The fitting of coloured glass into the interstices of either the plaster or the wooden grills was the next obvious step. Just when stained glass was first used for windows in Persia we do not know, but certainly by the seventeenth century it was a common practice. Chardin noted and admired the range of patterns thus rendered. The use of bits of glass for the ornamentation and enlivening of architecture perhaps reached its zenith at this same time.

Judging by those that are still preserved, which rarely if ever antedate the eighteenth century, the effect of these windows and their colour schemes was approximately like those still in existence in Egyptian mosques and mausoleums. There was, however, a special Persian development in domestic architecture. The garden side of one of the main rooms of a house was sometimes entirely composed of stained glass, a great horizontal panel across the top, a vertical panel on either side somewhat as a support and a large middle window made up of subordinate panels. Sometimes these are arranged to open like doors. In other cases they can be pushed up like windows or the lower ones can be entirely removed in warm weather, thus making the room a part of the garden.

The glass itself was of a wide range of colours. Judging from a group of Isfahan fragments there was crimson, yellow and amber, two greens, two blues, violet and aubergine. In order to enrich the light further the surface of the glass is modulated either into a crape texture or with irregular pressed disks. It is for the most part rather dark and this was probably necessary to temper the fierce blaze of the Persian sun. Local tradition has it that much of it was made



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at Shiraz and it has approximately the same colour range as the Shiraz glass vessels. But it may, on the other hand, have been imported from Russia, as was the isinglass which the Persians also used for windows as early at least as the seventeenth century.

The patterns of the stained glass follow the usual Islamic geometric forms, and where carried in wood mullions, have a particularly pleasant effect, because the finely divided polygons and radial forms split up the surface into small units most of which run out at one point into a long acute angle. This is most appropriate to the material and even more to its function of fracturing the white light of heaven into a thousand slender vari-coloured rays. A further merit of this geometrical framework is that the infinitely varied colours and shapes are assembled into a symmetrical pattern and their multiplicity, which might otherwise be vague and confusing, is ordered and controlled.

Much of the later mediæval glass of Europe, discontented with its own intrinsic glories or over-persuaded by its didactic mission, shows a somewhat parvenu desire to exchange its rôle and become a painting, so that the forms are externally controlled by those of the natural objects represented. This relaxation of a basal scheme, originally devised to exploit solely the character of the material and its function, introduces an ambiguity that weakens the proper effect. The great wheel windows of France of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, majestically ordered for all their variety, are in the sounder oriental tradition to which, many scholars think, they are beholden.

The patterns of the Persian windows were not, however, only geometrical. One finds also large-scale flowers and shrubs, frequently issuing from a vase, a motif that was a ubiquitous feature of the art of Isfahan. But even when they are thus representative, the primary demands of symmetry and order are never violated and the scheme is never sub-

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merged by the pictorial intention. It is the nature and function of the materials that even here control the design.

If the Persian windows are beautiful, it was on the doors that the architects lavished their greatest effects. Most of the earlier doors, and for that matter some of the later ones, are in the same wooden lattice work used for the windows, the finest in complex patterns of polygons on a radial scheme, others in a repeating design of slots and brackets. These are often shown in the miniatures.

By the eleventh century, and probably earlier, the doors were treated with exquisite art.\* The total architectural unit consisted of the arch, the spandrels, shallow recessed panels and a decorative or inscription panel above, together making a delightful ensemble that was a constant invitation to further enrichment. The commonest layout for the door itself shows a long central panel with square ones above and below. The main panel carries an elongated ogival medallion with pendants bar and bell shaped escutcheons, a scheme much used on book covers and carpets. The border is usually a series of cartouches, in the same book cover-carpet style. Sometimes, as on a pair of doors in the Institute of Arts of Detroit, the wood is painted in imitation grain while the medallion panels are nothing less than perfect little miniatures.

In other instances the panels were divided into beautiful little inlaid compartments of varied shapes, the dominant units being octagons, adroitly fitted together, almost like mosaic, a style which also appears on book covers and carpets though it is really more appropriate for doors. The best examples of the type we have date from the eighteenth century, the finest being in the National Museum in Teheran, though no doubt there were better examples in earlier periods. It is the Persian edition of a type that had its super-

\*There is an interesting and important pair of carved wooden *mimbahr* (pulpit) doors dated in the tenth century belonging to A. Rabenou.



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lative expression in Fatimid and Mamluk times in Egypt and was continued there also until a late date.

The supremest efforts, however, were lavished on the lacquer doors and the finest ones leave nothing to be desired or imagined. Several pairs of doors of this type have come from the Chahil Sutun, of which the best-known example is in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Still richer examples are in the possession of Gen. Archaque Khan and in a private collection in New York. Here the entire surface is thickly lacquered. The outlines of the panels and medallions are ridged thick with gold and all the painting is similarly enriched. The doors in the American collection are signed by Mirza Riza. The gold leaf is almost like gold plating, the colours have a depth and translucency, thanks to the lacquer, that no miniature could rival.

These doors are nearly always set into a plain plaster or stucco wall and the contrast of this concentrated decorative intensity with the hard white surface is still another form of the scheme of focussed enrichment universal in Persian decoration.

More important still are the doors of the great mosques. The elaborate painted designs with animals and human figures would hardly be appropriate for a mosque entrance. Even the Persian theologians, who have been so liberal on this subject, could not have countenanced so obvious a violation of the proscriptions of the law. Hence the painter and all his works were excluded. Nothing remained, appropriate to the splendour of the setting and the importance of the opportunity, but silver and gold, and although the use of precious metals had been frowned upon by the Prophet, the prohibition was not so severe as that against the representation of living forms. Accordingly, in many mosques the main entrance doors were of wood covered with thick plates of silver and gold. Those of the Masjid-i-Shah, and those of the Madrassa Mader-i-Shah which have been influenced by

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them, have a central medallion with pendants and corner quadrants, again in the book-cover style. The ground is silver, deeply engraved to vary the texture. On this a pattern is built up, in quite high relief, of arabesques, blossoms, palmettes and lancet leaves in gold and silver. Most of the thickest appliqué is gold. The Masjid-i-Shah doors date from the Shah Abbas period, those of the Madrassa from a hundred years later, but the style was in use at least as early as the fourteenth century, for one of the palaces of Tamerlane at Samarkand had doors covered with silver plates inlaid and enamelled.\*

\*Clavijo, *Embassy*, p. 269.



# LIST OF SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL MONUMENTS

Tomb Tower of the Gunbad-i-Kabus, Gurgan (Mazanderan)	..	997
Masjid (Mosque), Nayin	.. .. .	c. 1000
Masjid-i-Jâmi (Congregational Mosque), Shiraz	.. .. .	c. 1000
Domed Mausoleum, Sengbest	.. .. .	Early 11th Century
Masjid-i-Jâmi, Isfahan	.. .. .	11th Century
Great and Small Dome Chamber, Isfahan	..	1085(?) to 1088
Mausoleum, Sultanabad	.. .. .	1157
Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar, Marv	.. .. .	1162/3
Tomb Tower of Mumine Chatun, Nachshirvan	.. .. .	1186
Tomb Tower, Ray	.. .. .	12th-13th Centuries
Tomb Tower, Radkan	.. .. .	13th-14th Centuries
Mausoleum of Sultan Muhammad Uljaitu Chodabenda, Shah, Sultanieh	.. .. .	1304-6
Main Court and Liwans, Masjid-i-Jâmi, Isfahan	..	Early 14th Century
Masjid-i-Jumeh (Friday Mosque), Varamin	.. .. .	1322
Masjid Gohar Shad, Architect, Kiwan ed-Din, Mashad	.. .. .	1418
Shrine of Shah Namat Ullah, Mahun (near Kerman)	.. .. .	1437
Madrassa (College) of Khargird	.. .. .	1445
Blue Mosque, Tabriz	.. .. .	Middle 15th Century
Masjid-i-Shah, Architect, Ahmad Shams ud-Din Muhammad Tabrizi, Mashad	.. .. .	1480
Parts of the Masjid-i-Jâmi, Isfahan, done by order of Shah Ismail		Early 16th Century
Masjid Sheikh Safi, Ardabil	.. .. .	16th and 17th Century
Masjid-i-Shah, Architect, Ali Akbar, Isfahan	.. .. .	1612/13
Royal Bazaar, Isfahan	.. .. .	Early 17th Century
Palace of the Ali Kapu, Isfahan	.. .. .	" " "
Palace of the Chahil Sutun, Isfahan	.. .. .	" " "
Palace at Ashraf, Mazanderan	.. .. .	" " "
Mausoleum of Koja Rabi, near Mashad	.. .. .	" " "
Masjid Sheikh Lutf Ullah, Isfahan, Architect, Muhammad Riza	.. .. .	1618
Musalla, Mashad	.. .. .	1677
Madrassa Mader-i-Shah Sultan Hussein (College of the Mother of the Shah Sultan Hussein), Isfahan	.. .. .	1710

### *Chapter III*

### *CERAMICS*

NOWHERE are the "intentions" that lie within a material more perfectly set forth than in Persian pottery. Here the nature of clay is fully realised and never violated. Clay is light, fragile, of a slightly ambiguous surface. It is ductile, accommodating itself to a great variety of shapes and may be delicately incised or richly moulded and still not lose its character. While the characteristics of clay even in the earliest periods in Persia were always respected and never outraged as they have been in certain European wares such as Meissen and Chelsea, the full realisation of the possibilities of the craft came with the Seljuk and Mogul potters from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, and under their sensitive hands, guided by a perfect taste and a lively imagination, inspired and helped by poets, calligraphers and painters, the peak of the ceramic art was reached.

It is true that the silhouettes of the finest Greek pottery are unapproachable in their vigour, their grace and their dignity. It is true that never have glazes been developed with such finesse as in the imperial ateliers of Ch'ing te Chên. Nevertheless, perfect and precious as these creations are, their virtues are somewhat eclectic and ambiguous. The Greek shapes have a severity and accuracy of outline appropriate to metal, indeed they probably were derived from bronze forms, and these clear, sharp edges disguise the humble nature of the substance. Again, Chinese porcelains often have such a combination of heaviness and hardness that they seem but stone richly disguised, and when the Chinese potters trusted less to their virtuosity in glazing and abandoned their decorative patterns for pictorial and tri-dimensional effects, they overstep limits and so overlook the true opportunities of their art. Other Chinese porcelains



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are so overglazed that the sensitive surface is concealed as under a regal garment of melted jewels.

But with delicate and scrupulous tact the Persian potters nurtured every lurking possibility and the more they concentrated their resources the richer and more surprising they became. The frank acceptance of limitations in art in fact rarely constrains the artist but seems rather to open the door to unanticipated successes. The very infirmity of the clay, its fragility, became an asset and, rendering it on a slow moving wheel, the potter imparted more than usual of his own sensitive human touch, giving it a friendly and intimate quality so becoming to a little vessel. The delicate shapes reveal a certain wistful lack of assurance. They are properly modest and tentative, but they are alive and seem to be the realisation and not a defiance of the material.

Moreover, not merely in shape did the potter flatter his material, but also in the delicate surface modelling. Sometimes only a row of thumb-pressed flat disks exhibit the compressibility of the material or a zone of parallel vertical lines are marked into the yielding substance, again showing its character. In other cases the surface is enriched with applied bosses, pierced and gilded but still obviously malleable lumps of clay. Friezes of lively animals thrown up against a brisk foliage, all done with simple outlines in low relief, preserve the original flexibility of the paste. Nor was the potter ashamed to expose the sandy underbody, for all except the most finished luxury wares frankly exhibit an uncovered foot proclaiming the original form over which the glaze has been poured like a gorgeous raiment.

The painted decoration is equally adapted to the character of the material. In the finest Ray potteries the patterns have a certain careless rapture, a spontaneous, light and casual charm. The gay rhythms, the crisp and dainty accents, the swift uncalculated strokes, the deep or evan-

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escent tones which are all but dissolved in the liquid atmosphere of the glaze, furnish an ensemble of form, surface, colour and pattern of unsurpassed perfection.

The design and decoration of the more important types of vessels in the history of art have been developed in the interest of religion for the purposes of a cult, and all the special emotion and enthusiasm that have sustained the great creeds have contributed to their perfection. The great archaic bronzes of China were devised for offerings. The libation cups of Greece, even when quite secular in use, had an underlying cultus motive, and in the monstrance and communion chalice we find Europe's most perfect art in metal. Not practical considerations but the attitude of worship inspired them.

But no such motif contributed to the beauty of the Persian ceramics. Ecclesiastical furniture, save for Koran stands and pulpits, are unknown in Islam. Yet there are other non-utilitarian motifs than the religious, and it seems probable that cultural attitudes operative since the earliest times have contributed to the intensity of purpose and the concentration of beauty of the Persian potteries.

Perhaps the enthusiasm for wine and the profound respect for water both played a part. No theological scruples stood in the way of the Persian princes who indulged in the flowing bowl as recklessly as any, and the artists who attended them were equally indifferent to the frowns of the theologians. Some of the bowls are actually inscribed in praise of wine, and a tenth century wine bowl in the Art Institute of Chicago pays humorous tribute to the virtues of its theme by a dramatic rendering of the various qualities of intoxication. For the enforcement of the Prohibition Law in the United States the types of intoxication were formally defined in medical and psychological terms, as grandiose, bellicose, amatose, lachrymose and comatose. But the modern classifiers were no more learned or astute



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than the Persian potters of Garous a thousand years ago. It takes neither analysis nor imagination to identify the types depicted in the frieze of animals in this brown glazed bowl.

The sacredness and potency of water in a land like Persia is not readily appreciated in the rain-soaked West. There is no Persian but at some time has wished for more water than he had, none but is familiar with tales of suffering and of death for the lack of it, and every landscape is a demonstration of its miraculous creative power. The terrain of Persia stretches gray, brown and white until a sudden splash of lush green marks the emergence of a spring, a rich verdant belt girds the base of a hill or a long finger of vegetation following a ravine stretches out into the desert (*cf.* p. 203). The importance of water is a key to much in Persia from poetry to economics including warfare.

No wonder then that the precious liquid, all but very life itself, should be retained and dispensed in vessels appropriate to its importance, expressive of gratitude and refreshment. One is always on dangerous ground in interpreting the basal cultural motifs that underly artistic creation, but that vessels of beauty and of worth should have been dedicated to the honour of the essential life fluid in a land where drought is a menace is surely neither unreasonable nor unduly sentimental.

But whatever the fact concerning the motive there is no question that the lovely decorated bowls were guarded with affection and enthusiasm. Even as early as the tenth century we hear of poems being written to them\* after the manner of the Greeks, who cast their verses at the feet of the Aphrodite of Cnidos. In similar vein the Persians wrote poems about their beautiful carpets, a sufficient witness to a zest that is indispensable to excellence in the arts.

Like every other Persian art, that of ceramics is of great

\**Cf.* Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams*, p. 380.

antiquity. The beautiful prehistoric painted wares have already been spoken of (*cf.* Fig. 22). The black polished ware, so difficult to date, supplied certain characteristic shapes which later potters continued, and certain decorative motifs in Persian pottery lasted for many centuries. On some of the Nihavand pieces there is a succession of rectangular panels alternately filled with close diagonal hatching and little checkerboards in dark brown. The same design, as similar as possible if one takes account of the differences in size and material, is to be found on Arak bowls of the fourteenth century. Some examples of the Samarra prehistoric ware found by Professor Herzfeld show further striking affinities with patterns used in mediæval times. One of the Berlin pieces anticipates the common mediæval motif of fish swimming in spirals toward the centre. It is the very same fish, with a long, deep-forked tail. This is an interesting fact, for a variety of models was possible. The garden scheme common on certain types found at Ray with a broad equilateral cross filled in with zigzag water marks indicating canals is a repetition of a design perhaps 3000 years old (*cf.* p. 205).

By Achæmenian times a few simple glazes were well in hand, acquired either from Egypt or from Mesopotamia, and the tradition was never broken. The great enamelled brick walls of the palaces of Susa are merely the epic forerunners of the faience walls of the mosques and palaces of mediæval Persia. From the Parthian time we have quite a number of vessels, mostly jars with a green glaze, from which the Han green glazes seem to have been derived\*; for the great silk trade between Rome and the Orient, which was now at its height, carried with it the inevitable interchange of other products.

Unfortunately we have only a single example of the fine

\*A striking piece of this type which has clear affiliations with the Han glazes is in the Collection of Raymond Koechlin of Paris.



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Sasanian polychrome pottery, a beautiful, somewhat fragmentary bowl in the Museum of Kiev, with a fantastic duck in black and yellow, after the style of the famous Bobrinski bronze duck (*cf.* p. 175) and like a duck on a seventh century Byzantine silk in the Vatican,\* rendered in thick enamel. It is possible that this piece was actually executed in early Islamic times, but it is none the less fully Sasanian in character. The Sasanian monochromes are almost equally rare, a dark blue vase in the Metropolitan Museum being an outstanding example.

There are at least two jars that must be placed at the very beginning of the Islamic period, one in the collection of Mr. T. L. Jacks, of Teheran, and the other owned by Mr. Alfred Pillsbury, of Minneapolis. Both show a markedly Sasanian character in the animal drawing and but little traces of the typical modifications of the subsequent epoch.

Beyond this we can only conjecture what the ceramics of the first Islamic centuries were like, though no doubt there are other existing pieces that belong to this time. The wares inevitably for a time continued the Sasanian styles, for such a universal and conservative art as pottery would be slow to respond to any change of political fortunes or the advent of conquerors like the Arabs, who were themselves without knowledge, taste or traditions in the artistic crafts. Probably the production of the special luxury wares originally for the Sasanian court may have ceased after the downfall of the dynasty, but we do not yet even know what these were. Doubtless the local potters plied their craft irrespective of whether they worshipped at a fire altar or called on Allah. The finer pottery of the time undoubtedly continued the Sasanian grandiose animal style in some form, with its emphatic power and expressive outlines.

It has been more or less assumed that with the advent of Islam all representations of living forms in art suddenly

\*Ill. Von Falke, *Decorative Silks*, fig. 66.

ceased as if by some ruthless and enforceable edict. Nothing of the sort occurred. There is no specific prohibition in the Koran against the representation of animal life, and while the disapproval of such a practice was no doubt quite definite, in the early years of Islam the objection was not taken too seriously anywhere. Even Omar, the uncle of the Prophet, used a metal censer with figures in relief,\* perhaps a Sasanian vessel; and the Prophet himself is reported on good authority to have permitted the use of living figures on curtains or carpets provided they were put to a use that would deprive them of dignity so that they could not possibly become objects of worship; for the basic motif for this prohibition was the avoidance of idolatry.

The first of the earlier Islamic pottery types to be found in sufficient numbers to constitute a well-defined class became known as Gabri about the time of their appearance on the Paris market, approximately twenty years ago.

Gabri is merely the Persian word for fire and is the usual designation for Zoroastrians or fire worshippers. One can say, I met a "Gabri" to-day. Owing to a misunderstanding of both the character and the effectiveness of the Muhammadan prohibition of the representation of living forms, it was immediately assumed that these early wares with their fantastic animals must either have been actually done in Sasanian times or by Zoroastrian communities that guarded their faith and privileges after the Arab conquest.

Because of the obvious relation of many of these pieces to the animal styles of late Sasanian silver, a closer connection than the facts warrant was taken for granted and they were first attributed to the seventh and eighth centuries.† Subsequently, however, epigraphic evidence, notably the character of the Kufic letters which have been so exquisitely studied by Dr. Flury, has made it plain that

\*Sir Thomas Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, Oxford, 1928, p. 7.

†Cf. Pézard, *La Céramique Archaique de l'Islam*.



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these wares belong really to the tenth and eleventh centuries.

These pieces are decorated in low relief with the background cut away so that the figures stand slightly above the surface (Fig. 24). The relief areas are for the most part in various tones of ivory or in a virile emerald green, the backgrounds in manganese browns running toward black, aubergine or, occasionally, a lighter green. Among the animals depicted are elephants, curious camel-necked horses, lions,\* griffons, deep-chested bulls,† sphinxes and other human-headed monsters‡ as well as various types of birds.§ Comical ginger-bread humans with affronted full-moon faces, sometimes with a fantastic dab of colour on their cheeks, sit rigidly astride of some of these monsters or battle mightily with strange demons. The bowls are for the most part straight-sided and rather deep, following T'ang shapes, though some of the larger ones have curved sides, and there are a few jugs, ewers and tiles.||

Later finds revealed wider variations of the style than had been anticipated. Some smaller bowls with incisively and accurately drawn patterns came to light, and other pieces with a band of Kufic inscription as principal ornament exhibit also an unexpected refinement. A notable example is a bowl with a beautifully rendered griffon in the Cleveland Museum, quite Sasanian in style, repeating with surprising accuracy the figure on a fragmentary brocade in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 23), ascribed to Byzantium.

The whole class was at first designated as Zenjan, which was given as the place where they were found, but all of

\*Ill. Butler, *Islamic Pottery*, pl. 44.

†Ill. Kuehnel, *Islamische Kleinkunst*, fig. 44, p. 85, and in colour, Pézard, *La Céramique Archaïque de l'Islam*, pl. 58.

‡Ill. in colour, Pézard, *La Céramique Archaïque de l'Islam*, pl. 66.

§Ill. in colour v. Hobson, *Eumorfopoulos Collection*, Vol. VI, pl. 53.

||Ill. in colour v. Pézard, *La Céramique Archaïque de l'Islam*, pl. 52.

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these pieces actually came from the mountainous district of Garous, somewhat to the north of Bijar, and the large green pieces were mostly gathered in the town of Yazkand, the name Zenjan being merely an Oriental red herring to confuse the trail leading to the buried treasure.

Other provinces were busy with similar themes in a similar spirit but with a more finished technique. To the south a few admirable pieces have been recovered in the neighbourhood of Kermanshah. One bowl in the Eumorfopoulos Collection shows a leopard in black outline on white (Fig. 25) done with a beautiful calligraphic sweep and effectively simple. From the same source comes a bowl in the Metropolitan Museum with a blue heraldic lion rendered only in silhouette but bursting with ferocity despite the economical presentation.\* A small bowl of the same period in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sam. A. Lewisohn carries a powerful dark red bull, also in silhouette.

The silhouette style was practised in various parts of Persia. A few particularly fine examples have come from Mazanderan. The British Museum has an interesting conventionalised goose and fish in black on white, and a related bowl with a simple swastika with vigorous floating ends of very vital quality was recently found at Ray, and is now owned by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Mazanderan produced also a group of potteries decorated with fantastic animals, wholly different in drawing and technique from the Garous work but psychologically akin. These beasts are on the whole a little less violent and nightmarish than those on the Garous potteries, but they lack little of the fierceness of their cruder relatives. Once more an almost hysterical imagination is at work striving in a

\*M. Dimand, *A Handbook of Mohammedan Decorative Arts*, fig. 63, p. 139.



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reckless mood to express an energy and excitement beyond that natural to the subject or the medium. These wares, which are produced primarily in Amol, Ashraf and Sari, are painted, without the low relief of the Garous. Huge birds with exaggerated outlines and markings in splendid colours of brown, red, black and green are splashed on an ivory ground with effective abandon. Outstanding examples are two bowls, one in the Lewisohn Collection, the other in the Detroit Institute of Arts, each with a grandiose bird. The bird in the Lewisohn bowl, which comes from Amol or Sari, is an apparition from a disturbed dream, albeit not a threatening one, and made rather winning by the mellow warmth of the colour.\*

A quite different style, probably from Amol, with the same emotional background presents the same animals struggling, as it were, through a coarse thicket of scrolling vines, rendered in a light green, enamel-like glaze.† Sometimes on these pieces there is a zone around the rim with a frieze of running animals drawn with incised outlines. Of this rare and attractive type the Boston Museum has a notable example.

A later type of bowl produced in Amol is quite as remarkable as its more dramatic predecessors. These also are decorated with an enamel-like light emerald glaze on a plain ivory ground, but they are further enriched with incised lines. The designs are as expressive as anything known in the history of abstract ornament. The patterns are broad and firm, the scrolls are constantly cut sharp across by long driving lines almost like gashes and the combinations that have been devised within the limits of the closely defined style are quite extraordinary in their variety and ingenuity. There is very little repetition in the hundreds of bowls

\*Illustrated in the *Illustrated London News*, Dec. 1930.

†Ill. Pézard, *La Céramique Archaique de l'Islam*, pl. 77, and colour-plates 78, 82.

known and each new one that comes to light springs a fresh surprise. It is astonishing that these designers could command such an inexhaustible repertory.

We can say almost nothing about the origins of the designs. That they have a basis in leaf, fish and bird forms is clear enough, although in most of them the naturalistic origin is recognisable only to one familiar with the whole series. A bowl in the Lewisohn Collection showing two ducks swimming on water is the clearest delineation of real objects that we have, but it is impossible to say that this is earlier and the more highly conventionalised ones later, because the style has not yet been arranged in a successive series. We know from signed and inscribed pieces that the type was produced from the eleventh to the fourteenth century (there is no sure evidence yet for an ascription to the tenth century); and yet within this period we can see but very little change unless it be that the fresher coloured and more sharply drawn pieces are the earlier. But of this there is no assurance.\*

These pieces have a highly individual character which has no known precedent, though it may have antecedents still undiscovered, and no derivatives. As far as our present knowledge goes, they cannot be connected with any other Persian style and yet they are a manifestation of the old Persian genius for lucid and forceful pattern, for expressive and inventive line compositions. It is a late development of the original talent shown in the early Susa and Samarra pottery, but qualified here by great boldness that is especially daring in the use of asymmetry.

Perhaps the most distinguished of the wares that can be roughly classed in the Gabri group is a type of straight-sided bowl, ivory white with incised decoration, found at Ray and probably made in the eighth or ninth century.

\*For Illustrations, v. Pézard, *La Céramique Archaïque de l'Islam*, pl. 40, 43.



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The whole surface of these bowls is treated with shallow etched lines which give, in a characteristic Persian fashion, a varied but consistent enrichment. The patterns are, for the most part, constructed of intersecting segments of circles or, in a few cases, of interlocking whole circles. Some of the irregular compartments thus composed carry animals or birds in low relief, while the rest are covered with repeating units devised to define a texture. Parallel hatchings, cross hatchings, and hatchings at varying angles, overlapping scales, little blocks, a pebbled or stippled surface cast a light web of delicate shadows on a luminous ground. Some of the schemes of interlocking segments suggest mural stucco decorations, and indeed it is quite probable that this whole conception of surface variation is taken over from stucco work.

The bowls were evidently the result of thoughtful planning and careful execution, so that although done at an early date and hence in a sense primitive, they must rank high among Persian potteries. Could it have been these little bowls to which laudatory verses were dedicated in the tenth century (*cf.* p. 63)? The handsomest piece of the type is in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum.\*

A related series in the same colour and technique but far simpler shows a single incised motif, usually a four-petalled flower or an outlined bird drawn with a fine calligraphic sweep (Fig. 26).

The so-called Gabri wares are provincial and late editions of Sasanian styles, intensifying the imperial character of the original with a primitive robustness, not to say violence. If the regal tradition has been somewhat vulgarised, and if violence has displaced stateliness, much of the authority and power of the original has nevertheless been retained. They have been called Sasanian, and spiritually it is a

\*This and a further group are well illustrated in Pézard, *La Céramique Archaique de l'Islam*, pl. 16, 18, 24, 28, 29.

reasonable designation even though they were made well after the Sasanian kings had passed off the stage leaving behind only their commanding spirit.

But at the same time these wares constitute a typical folk art in opposition to the cosmopolitan potteries of the court, a contrast that runs all through Persian art and must never be lost sight of. A folk art is more limited in range and skill and holds closer to old traditions, but it has a specific and spicy local flavour, whereas a court art acknowledges the international amenities.

While the provinces were demonstrating their vitality with these powerful designs, more civilised and urban types were being produced by the potters of Ray. Thus the silhouette style that played so important a rôle in the outlying centres was being perfected in Ray to a high degree of elegance. A group of very thin bowls of the eleventh to twelfth century has been found there, each with a single small but very expressive animal or human figure at the bottom in black on white with the interior details reserved. Sometimes the silhouette is so developed that the black and white are balanced in equal areas (Fig. 29).

A more direct and worthy heir of the Sasanian tradition than any of the provincial types that were at first called Sasanian has been found in small numbers at Ray, and also in a few places in Mesopotamia, so that it is not quite clear what place deserves the credit for its manufacture. This class consists wholly of rather shallow plates with flat rims in a cream-white glaze which has been rather speciously decorated with enamel. The ground is sometimes delicately modelled, giving pleasing two-toned texture. The figures are principally in splendid tones of deep purple, blue, light green and turquoise and sometimes aubergine. The commonest subjects are birds, particularly ducks and geese, harpies or Burak, the Prophet's human-headed horse. The



Kaiser Friedrich Museum possesses an impressive example of a great heraldic eagle,\* while the most important piece of all has recently been added to the Eumorfopoulos Collection, a superbly decorated plate with a dancer and musicians in Chinese style on a platform supported by a curious pair of hyenas.† A considerable number of these pieces are in the Havemeyer Collection, and an extraordinary group of four pieces in the collection of Emile Tabbagh of Paris. They all seem to be the direct descendants of the Sasanian piece at Kiev.‡

Lustre was now also developing, and to the Sasanian themes of horses, camels,§ wild boar|| and great birds was now being added the Pegasus (Fig. 38)\*\* and single figures, the sceptred prince (Fig. 28) or the popular motif of the darvish with his peaked cap and his guitar, a figure as familiar in Persia in the spring as the organ grinder in Europe.†† These piquant and charming personages are set on a ground stippled with tiny dots, but the figure itself is surrounded with an outline of white like a halo which gives a curious emphasis. Brief Kufic inscriptions are often part of the design. The pale golden and olive lustres which have, no doubt, suffered somewhat from time are not so attractive at first view but they have an individual and insistent charm that on acquaintance justifies the enthusiasm of the connoisseurs.

A contemporary ware, also found at Ray, simple but aristocratic, in mellow ivory, with incised or delicately

\*Ill. Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 14; Kuehnel, *Islamische Klein-kunst*, fig. 46, p. 87; Pézard, *La Céramique Archaique de l'Islam*, pl. 83.

†Hobson, *Eumorfopoulos Collection*, Vol. VI, pl. 59.

‡For additional Illustrations, v. Pézard, *op. cit.*, pl. 84.

§Louvre; for colour-plate 5.

||Victoria and Albert Museum.

\*\*For colour-plate of a similar piece cf. Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 18.

††Ill. Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 1; Pézard, *op. cit.*, pl. 117.

moulded decoration, must be given a high rank. The depth at which these pieces appear as well as the character of the Kufic indicates a date as early as the tenth century. Although there are one or two jugs and a few bowls, the type seems to have been dedicated principally to various forms of goblets and beakers. They seem to be a reproduction in the lightest possible clay of ivory cups. Sometimes they are delicately fluted and carry a wide band of most beautiful Kufic. Others have an overlapping scale pattern. Another in the Boston Museum has a stately rinceau of early arabesque forms reminiscent of stucco patterns. One little thin round bowl as light as paper has on the outside a regularly pebbled surface and in the interior a single glowing spot of intense violet. Often the rim has a band of pierced decoration closed only with the glaze. Of this type the Victoria and Albert Museum has the finest example.\* This class of ware gradually merges into a later style with clear coloured glazes, mostly in light turquoise. But the reticent charm of the early pieces and their elusive poetic quality depends on their purity and aloofness, and this is slightly compromised by the appeal of colour.†

Ceramic types were now rapidly increasing in number and new styles were constantly appearing. Chinese wares were becoming more popular and more influential, three hundred Chinese dishes having formed part of a present from the Caliph to an official in Baghdad in the year 1001.‡ The famous T'ang type with the orange, green and aubergine blended splashes was reproduced in a decidedly thick and heavy ware at Amol, and apparently at Ray also.§

\*Cf. Victoria and Albert Museum, *A Picture Book of Persian Pottery*, fig. 4. For colour-plate of a fine example v. Rivi re, *La C ramique dans l'Art Musulman*, Vol. I, pl. 30.

†For colour-plate v. Rivi re, *La C ramique dans l'Art Musulman*, Vol. I, pl. 17.

‡Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islam*, p. 134

§For colour-plate, v. Hobson, *Eumorfopoulos Collection*, Vol. VI, pl. 55.



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Some handsome fragments have been found at Susa and Samarra, which again justify the date of ninth century, but as the type was continued in Mazanderan even down to the seventeenth century each piece must be dated on its own evidence.

The Persians, moreover, were not content merely to imitate but soon made a delightful contribution to the style. Both at Ray and at Sultanieh have been recovered bowls of the ninth to tenth century on which the splashes are very finely and somewhat regularly divided so that the long strokes are reduced to more or less even patches, but still so freely applied that although the surface has a somewhat textile quality, their distribution does not seem rigid or artificial. Incised lines further enrich the surface, sometimes in designs,\* sometimes in scrolls that seem to mean nothing, 'scribbles' Mr. Rackham aptly calls them; but though so casual they introduced the duality of design, the playing off of one pattern and one type of movement against another, which was so dear to the Persian mind.

Quite another style developed from the same origin has decisively defined patterns. The Chicago bowl (Fig. 27), which is the best illustration of type, is signed by the same potter, Abu Talib, who signed a piece in the Louvre.† These are probably the earliest signatures in Persian art and the pattern, a quatrefoil divided by oblique lanceolate blossoms and containing a cruciform arrangement of lotus buds, is perhaps the first appearance in Persian art of one of the favourite themes of the sixteenth century which was commonly used in the Kashan medallion carpets (*cf.* Fig. 62).

These same free-and-easy incised patterns are used on a light turquoise ware also found at Ray, of which excellent examples are in the Detroit and Boston Museums. The lines

\*For colour-plate v. Pézard, *La Céramique Archaique de l'Islam*, pl. 35.

†Pézard, *op. cit.*, pl. 78. Signature on Chicago piece noted by Miss Julie Michelet.

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are seldom beautiful in themselves, but they do enrich the surface which is especially agreeable, as the glaze itself on these pieces has no intrinsic beauty beyond the attractive colour.

A quite different type seems to have been developed under the Samanid dynasty at Samarkand\* and to have been continued in Persia and even as far as Egypt; but it is not yet wholly clear where it originated. Many pieces have been found at Ray. This class consists principally of huge shallow plates with flat rims, and small round bowls, frequently decorated with four heavy green splashes on the rim, though sometimes, especially on the smaller bowls, these splashes are blue. A line of stately Kufic, also in blue, often runs across the centre. The bowls and, more rarely, the plates are sometimes decorated also with delightful geometrical patterns of interlocking stars, polygons and rectangles lightly and gracefully drawn in blue outline. A few are more pictorial, such as one in the Chicago Institute of Arts, which seems to present a banner, and another in the National Museum of Teheran, a charming bowl showing a palm tree, a sickle stuck into the trunk and a flail leaning against it, a delightfully Oriental indication of rest after toil. This little piece of faience epitomises much of Persian style, extreme economy of line and concentration of idea with happy and poetic implications.

Another style that is to be found from Samarkand to Saveh, unfortunately very rare, justifies the intense enthusiasm of connoisseurs. This class consists of quite large straight-sided white bowls, usually decorated with a stately procession of Kufic letters in velvety black that march around the interior slopes with almost military grandeur. In the finest pieces the black is enriched with a mellow cinnabar red. Sometimes the inscription is interrupted with

\*III. Pézard, *La Céramique Archaique de l'Islam*, pl. 91, 94, 106, 109; colour-plate 105.



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a few patterns, sometimes in place of the inscription there are noble lotus palmettes of beautiful internal construction and decisive force. The lotus is one of the most famous patterns in Asiatic art, but it has rarely been rendered with such vital authority as on these pieces. The most inclusive as well as the finest collection of this ware is to be found in the Museum of Samarkand. Some whole pieces and some beautiful fragments, the latter found at Sarai, are to be seen in the Hermitage, and a few, found at Ray and Nishapur, are in an American private collection. The most elaborate and sophisticated example of this style is an intact bowl in the Lewisohn Collection with a heptagon with concave sides broadly drawn in the bottom, while the straight sides have a succession of finger-shaped panels with scrolling vines, the whole rendered in the same black, red and cream. This bowl was found at Saveh and shows differences from those found further east, but in essentials the style is the same.\*

The strength of design of this type is due to the blank spaces between the elements. The Persians early anticipated some principles of impressionism, for despite their predilection for densely covered surfaces, they understood the effectiveness of discontinuity and the extra vividness that comes from the contribution of the observer.

Of the wares of the late Seljuk time and the Mogul period, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the array is so varied and so beautiful as to be quite bewildering. A list even of the major types would run the danger of reading like a sales catalogue. The incrustation movement (p. 43) reached its zenith in Persia between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries. In order to fulfil its ideal of maximum surface enrichment it had to call to its aid the potters with their arts of glaze. By the twelfth century, and still more in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the bulk of the ceramic production was for the gorgeous investiture of buildings.

\*Ill. in colour, *Illustrated London News*, December, 1930.

Entire walls of mosque and palace alike were composed of lustre star tiles joined by blue cross tiles (Fig. 30). Only a few small assemblages of these remain, but they are so beautiful that even single pieces are precious and originally they must have been overpowering in their shimmering radiance. Many show spirited animals of almost every species\* or occasionally personages,† rendered with such clarity and understanding that we are forced to infer the presence of a sophisticated body of painters though we have practically no confirmatory written evidence.

Great friezes, too, were constructed of tiles, modelled in relief, gold flecked with ruby, with flickering lambent lights and liquid reflections, still further enriched by the majestic inscriptions in Kufic and Nashki standing forth in bold blue strokes against the delicate background of white and metallic scrolling vines.‡ Often there are secondary borders of pinnacled ogives or running animals. A few obviously special efforts and more closely under Chinese influence depict a flaming phoenix winging an excited path through the clouds (Fig. 31). Such friezes were rendered also in a brilliant turquoise or a deep lapis,§ the plainness relieved by modelled patterns as in the lustre, and the too deep sombreness of the lapis lightened with tiny white scrolls varied by maroon.|| The same style was used for bowls and pitchers also.\*\*

Magnificent as the tiles are, it was in the fashioning of vessels that the Persian potter scored his finest triumphs. There are a few very large jars, fortunately several intact,

\*Ill. Butler, *Islamic Pottery*, pl. 58, 59, and in colour in Koechlin, *La Céramique*, pl. 9, and Rivière, *La Céramique dans l'Art Musulman*, Vol. I, pl. 41.

†Ill. *loc. cit.*, pl. 62.

‡Ill. *loc. cit.*, pl. 53, 54, 55; Koechlin, *La Céramique*, pl. 4.

§For colour-plate v. Rivière, *La Céramique dans l'Art Musulman*, Vol. II, pl. 55, 76.

||For colour-plate v. Rivière, *op. cit.*, pl. 65.

\*\*For colour-plate v. Hobson, *Eumorfopoulos Collection*, Vol. VI, pl. 62.



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some almost big enough to hide one of Ali Baba's forty thieves. The most perfect of these is a lustre vase in the Hermitage Museum,\* with a richly modelled surface divided into bands of running animals and foliage. Others seem almost as if cut out of solid blocks of lapis or turquoise, and indeed in intensity and brilliance these glazes sometimes surpass the stones themselves. The three finest lapis examples are one in the Havemeyer Collection,† fortunately dated but unfortunately broken; a splendid piece from the Parish-Watson Collection‡ now in the Freer Museum, with relief figures of polo players, cavaliers, animals and geometrical designs, and a sumptuous piece of the same type, with a liquid, unguent glaze, also intact, belonging to A. Rabenou. The most notable turquoise pieces are in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum,§ in the collection of Baron Edmond Rothschild (Fig. 32) and the collection of Mr. John N. Willys.|| The Rothschild jar, which is also intact, was a feature in the ceramic section of the Philadelphia Exhibition of Persian Art. All these large jars date from the twelfth or thirteenth century.

They are handsome and impressive but naturally in work on so large a scale the finesse of the artist is restricted. The ceramic art is, after all, intimate and delicate, lending itself better to vessels for daily use—pitchers (Fig. 41), cups, ewers, plain or with cocks' heads and other fantastic devices, vases, albarellos (Fig. 40) and bowls of many kinds. The potters of Ray lavished on their clay the utmost resources of their art and the finest bowls, obviously the ware of princes, were the work of more than a single artist: the poets

\*Ill. Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 25, and Riefstahl, *Parish-Watson Collection*, fig. 74.

†Rivière, *La Céramique dans l'Art Musulman*, pl. 67.

‡Cf. R. Meyer Riefstahl, *The Parish-Watson Collection of Persian Potteries*, Frontispiece and fig. 71-3, 75-87.

§E. Kuehnelt, *Islamische Kleinkunst*, fig. 62, p. 99.

||For colour-plate v. Riefstahl, *Parish-Watson Collection*, fig. 68.

wrote verses which the calligraphers rendered into crisp, delicate, staccato Kufic inscriptions on the interior of the rims and in flowing Nashki on the outside. The wealth of design and the variety of the colours were encyclopædic.

One series of monochromes, charming little straight-sided bowls in lapis, powder blue, turquoise, violet, green, grey and white, sometimes faintly veined or clouded, seem as if devised merely to exploit colour as such. Monochromes in other forms were treated with simple but telling modelled decorations, either geometrical patterns or with naturalistic forms of great force and beauty such as a blue bowl with a desert turkey in the Eumorfopoulos Collection.\* A smooth pear-shaped ewer may be ornamented only with a narrow belt of parallel vertical dashes. The handles of a plain cylindrical jar terminate in a richly wrought rosace. In the bottom of a grey-green bowl swim three fish in slight relief as if under water.† One of the commonest types in this class are turquoise or lapis ewers or jars with a band of running animals or Kufic inscription in slight relief on the shoulder, displayed against a background of delicate foliage.‡ The glaze tends to be thin on the raised portions, so that the white under-body shows through more, and is thicker in the hollows, and hence darker, thus giving a two-toned effect that adds greatly to the decorative vitality. There are cylindrical jars§ and pitchers with a heavy projecting spout|| in a lapis of unmatchable intensity with relief friezes of dancers, animals and foliage.

One small group found at both Saveh and Ray are in an

\*Hobson, Eumorfopoulos Collection, Vol. VI, pl. 60.

†Boston Museum, Hamburg Museum and Louvre.

‡Ill. Butler, *Islamic Pottery*, pl. 45, 46.

§Parish-Watson; colour-plate, Riefstahl, Parish-Watson Collection, fig. 67; Boston Museum; Pennsylvania Museum.

||Detroit Institute of Arts; Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Parish-Watson, colour-plate, Riefstahl, Parish-Watson Collection, fig. 62; Eumorfopoulos Collection, Vol. VI, pl. 71.



## INTRODUCTION TO PERSIAN ART

intense and liquid cobalt blue with white, gold and maroon decorations like the tiles.\*

A more luxurious ware obviously designed for the court was decorated apparently by pottery painters who expanded the repertoire of geometrical and floral ornament with the most delightful personages that have ever appeared on pottery. The more complex designs are rendered in polychrome on either an ivory or a light turquoise ground (Figs. 33, 35, 36). Gay bands of cavaliers, mounted on dashing ponies, gallop round the rim of a bowl (Fig. 34) or pitcher, or prance daintily under a fern-like tree, while pheasants with bright plumage, describing more graceful and harmonious curves than nature allows, float serenely in the open spaces.† More important still are the various scenes from the Shah Nameh in this style, of which Bahram Gur, with his favourite harpist, Azada, whom he reluctantly took into the hunting field, is the commonest.‡

These wares were not merely painted and glazed but all the resources of the gilder's art also were lavished on them (Fig. 37). Nearly all the painted potteries with personages are picked out with gold leaf§ and both the turquoise|| and the cobalt types\*\* are richly ornamented with floral sprays in pure gold leaf fired with the glaze, a perfect foil for the blue, lending to its tones depth, clarity and intensity. Indeed, the

\*Detroit Institute of Arts.

†For colour-plates v. Riefstahl, Parish-Watson Collection, fig. 31, 37, 42, 45 and 50; for additional black and whites, fig. 32-36, 41, 43, 46; also colour-plate, *Meisterwerken Muhammadanischer Kunst*, Vol. II, pl. 95.

‡For colour-plate with this subject v. Anton Springer, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*, B. and VI, op. p. 440, or Riefstahl, Parish-Watson Collection, fig. 7, 9.

Two especially fine renditions of the theme belonging to Mr. Mortimer Schiff have been reproduced in colour for the forthcoming *Survey of Persian Art*.

§For colour-plates v. Riefstahl, Parish-Watson Collection, fig. 51, 54, 55, 57, 58, and Hobson, *Eumorfopoulos Collection*, Vol. VI, pl. 64.

||For colour-plates v. Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 29, 23, and Riefstahl, Parish-Watson Collection, pl. 59.

\*\*For colour-plate v. Riefstahl, Parish-Watson Collection, fig. 56.

applied gold ornament is such a happy enrichment of these glazes that the Persian dealers rather too often seek its help. They argue that gold is gold, had the original remained it would have suffered no change in quality and they are merely restoring the piece to the artist's own intent. But the economic motive may be as influential in this practice as artistic sympathies. In any case, those who wish to be sure may test their gilded treasures with the all-solvent alcohol sponge.

There is a definite poetic quality about the best of these potteries. The figures and the foliage or the delightful little escutcheons formed of paired arabesques are never drawn in a rigid or complete fashion, but are dashed off with an airy grace and a contagious liveliness. This is, in its way, an impressionistic style and depends partly for its effect not only upon the stimulating quality of the suggestive line and decorative accents but also upon the slightly hesitant rhythms.\* One group of these pottery painters had the sharpest and most delicate touch, particularly in the rendering of cavaliers. They reinforced the vivacity of their drawing with a sparkling, adroit use of their principal colours, black, red and white, so daintily and crisply juxtaposed that the figures fairly crackle with animation.†

There are many brilliant variations of this painted and gilded technique. Thus a turquoise bottle in the Gutmann Collection has small, widely-spaced ogival panels, alternately blue and aubergine, each enclosing a tiny figure picked out with gold.‡ An ivory bowl in the same collection has the ground divided by a delicate gold lattice enclosing tiny gold birds in slight relief. Another variation has a complicated double rosace composed of arabesques half black,

\*For illustrations in colour cf. Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 22.

†For example *v. loc. cit.*, pl. 21.

‡Cf. *Illustrated London News*, November 8th, 1930, p. 815, centre of plate.



half white.\* An intricate and rather massive pattern in gold may be half buried in rich maroon.† Sometimes little applied bosses, moulded, pierced and touched with gold, further enrich these types.

The lustre ware which had been so auspiciously initiated in the tenth century and which reached such splendour in the tiles had its equally brilliant counterpart in bowls, pitchers, *dakhles*,‡ mugs and other vessels. These vary in technique and style of drawing, showing that they were the products of different kilns. On some the lustre is pale gold, on others olive or brown or flashing gold with ruby tints, on still others it is used with blue.§ Where the lustre has survived intact, as on the greater part of a large thirteenth century bowl in the Chicago Institute of Arts (Fig. 39) the results more than justify the oft-quoted rhapsody of Wallis: "Whether in the ruby, the golden, or the cooler tints, in which the lights of emeralds and sapphires are combined, they are unsurpassed in brilliancy and in that clear and resonant tone which characterises the finest lustre decoration. . . . The lustre is full of surprises, now appearing almost to obliterate itself and retire within the enamelled surface, allowing its presence to be but barely suspected by the faintest film of a coloured mist or a sparkle on the surface; then in a sudden flash, it will overwhelm figures and ornament, transfiguring them in a flood of dazzling radiance."||

The finest wares of the Mogul period were those decorated in lustre by the miniature painters. Indeed, so fresh and

\*Victoria and Albert Museum; Schiff Collection; Lewisohn Collection.

†Indjoudjian Collection, Paris.

‡Persian word meaning *into*, used for a flat dish in which money is kept, with a small opening *into* which one must thrust his hand to take out the coins, the size of the opening preventing any greedy fistful.

§For colour-plate see Hobson, Eumorfopoulos Collection, Vol. VI, pl. 67.

||H. Wallis, Notes on Early Persian Lustre Vases, No. I, p. 6, quoted also by A. J. Butler, Islamic Pottery, p. 127

vivacious is the drawing on some of these pieces that the contemporary miniatures seem in comparison clumsy and crude. The best horses would compare favourably with those of any period. Some large plates and bowls in this style show stately hieratic paintings,\* usually of a king on his throne surrounded by courtiers or other massed attendants, often rather rigid and lifeless but nevertheless fine because of the sumptuous and varied decoration of the garments, the admirable way in which the composition is fitted into the curve of the bowl and the subtle manner in which the figures and accessories are woven into a dense and varied texture, the whole united by a dominant tonality.

The metallic background of nearly all these lustre wares is broken up and deepened with a pattern of tiny dots, circles or commas, which fill in this medium the same function of varying the surface that the repeating incised texture enrichments do in the earlier wares.

The potter's interest extended to a considerable range of natural forms rendered in the round, including human figures, usually seated princes or a Madonna and child motif.† Lions are a not uncommon figure, and recently a whole group of this type of exceptional interest has been found near Ray. They are all rendered in a semi-naturalistic, semi-decorative style and covered with a clear turquoise glaze. In the Lewisohn Collection are a pigeon and a hawk, both life-size, the one suave, the other sufficiently ferocious. In the collection of Mr. T. L. Jacks, of Teheran, there is a splendid pair of eagles, and in the art trade are a horse and an elephant, built on rather too similar lines. This style had echoes in Mazanderan, and in the Art Institute of Chicago there is an elephant with a howdah of a related type but

\*For colour-plates v. Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 20; Hobson, Eumorfopoulos Collection, Vol. VI, pl. 66.

†Kaiser Friedrich Museum; Ill. Kuehnelt, *Islamische Kleinkunst*, fig. 52, p. 91.



covered with a T'ang glaze in brown, orange and green. Judging from the colours, this piece could date from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, but by the character of the glaze it must be placed much later.

After Ray was so shockingly devastated by the Moguls and ruin piled on ruination by earthquakes, Sultanabad, which became the Mogul capital, was the centre of the pottery industry, and a number of types of great beauty and interest developed there. Some of these styles are quite new, but others are merely a continuation of wares already well known in Ray. Thus some of the lapis styles are quite as common in Sultanabad, or Arak as it was known in the fourteenth century, as in Ray in the thirteenth. Turquoise or green jars with black patterns in relief are also found in both places. That there should have been this continuity is not at all surprising. The Moguls in their devastations always tended to spare the artisan class, so that doubtless not all the potters of Ray perished but some followed the court to the new capital.

The outstanding new style developed here is notable for the fine exploitation of a very limited colour scale, and for the quality of the animal drawing (Fig. 41). The design is rendered in grey and white, sometimes with a very small amount of brown and in certain types with minor accents in turquoise. These colours are so distributed that it is not possible to distinguish between the ground and the pattern. The two or three tones are interwoven in a perfect balance as in a reciprocal damask. When another tone, especially the turquoise, is introduced for variety or emphasis it is, as it were, brocaded on to this close-textured fabric. The sober tones are enlivened and enriched in the best examples by a hard, clear, glistening glaze that seems as if fresh dipped in cool water.

The quality of the animal drawing doubtless owes something to the new wave of lively naturalism that had just come

in from China, yet at the same time it goes back to a long Iranian tradition. Thus as early as the first millennium B.C. the Luristan bronzes exhibit a similar mastery of characteristic and expressive animal portraiture, and many of the same animals that are so skilfully depicted on the Arak bowls appear in this early art.

The most usual pattern shows entangled floral forms done with tiny dots that add a certain star-like quality, and against this, in the centre of the bottom, flying cranes and other birds, rabbits or deer. The curving side walls are often divided into narrow radial segments containing these animals, all drawn with great exactness yet with verve. There is, particularly, a falling deer in the Kelekian Collection in New York which is one of the outstanding examples of animal portraiture. A bowl, formerly in the Indjoudjian Collection in Paris, with foxes and hares, for refinement and accuracy of animal portrayal has never been matched by anything found at Ray, though the Ray painters, with their impressionistic style, could give a greater swing to their minute animals than was possible in the more meticulous Arak manner.\* In a remarkable piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum some virtuoso has thrown off the customary limitations and given us a dancing figure, just too large for the enclosing circle, which is broken through in a most suggestive way, a motif worthy of classical Greece. Certain it is that the very finest of the Arak wares were painted by the leading miniaturists of the day, and some pieces show a liveliness and a delicacy of detail that were not equalled in the miniatures themselves for centuries.

As if to prove that there were no technical limitations that held them to their simple types and to show that they, quite as well as the Chinese, could master the most difficult of all problems of clay modelling, that of the reticulated jar,

\*A bowl of similar style and workmanship with personages in the Eumorfopoulos Collection, Vol. VI, No. 411, pl. 69.



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the potters of Arak produced a few examples of which the finest, a jug (dated 1215-16) in the Macy Collection, could not be surpassed even in imagination. The pierced outer shell defines certain flower and animal forms, particularly winged sphinxes, very much in the style of the pierced bronze candlesticks of Ray (*cf.* p. 180). The colours are two tones of blue, lapis and turquoise, with the framework further emphasised by drawing in black. The smoother inner body is a brilliant turquoise and shines through the openings with a soft mysterious light.\*

These mediæval potteries nearly all go by the name of either Rhages or Sultanabad. Rhages is an especially unfortunate term, for it is merely the Greek name for a city which at the time the potteries were made and ever since has been known as Ray; and Arak would be a better designation than Sultanabad for the wares of that region. Moreover it is partly an accident that all these potteries should have become associated with these two sites. The ancient city of Ray is close to the capital, Teheran. It is, for the most part, still in the open fields. The modern town, Shah Abdul Azim, occupies only a portion of the original site, leaving the most important areas available for excavation. Similarly, Sultanabad offered easy access to the diggers and it promised returns, for it was known to have been the Mogul capital. The first experiments brought profitable results, and the European traffic there, due to a modern rug industry, gave ready marketing opportunities. Ray was, indeed, at this time one of the great cities of Asia, indeed of the whole world. Baghdad and Cordova alone in the west were comparable to it, and contemporary geographers report an incredible number of mosques, baths and palaces. And Sultanabad also was a capital. But neither the wealth of these cities nor the

\*A colour-plate by Jaffe of this piece will appear in the forthcoming Survey of Persian Art. For another example of the type *cf.* Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 28.

fact that they have yielded so much pottery is a proof that they were the sole or even the major centres of production.

At Kashan the modern city overlies the ancient, so that only limited and sporadic digging in private gardens has been possible, but this has yielded pottery that ranks with the finest, and some excavators report that the lustre wares found there surpass those of Ray.\* What is more important, for one kiln found in Ray, five have been reported at Kashan. The very name Kashan comes from the word '*kashi*,' which means faience, or perhaps faience (*kashi*) is named after the place. There are, too, several references in the literature that prove that Kashan was a major factor in the industry.

Recent excavations at Saveh, some 125 miles to the south-west of Ray, have brought to light the same types of pottery and occasionally pieces of surpassing elegance and beauty.

Isfahan also is proud of its pottery tradition, and when trade came with the glorification of the city by Shah Abbas, the fact that the Isfahan potters were ready to meet all demands is evidence that the art had long been established there. Herat, Hamadan and Tabriz undoubtedly had highly developed kilns; but even if we could be absolutely sure from documentary evidence that all of these cities produced wares of high quality, it would be difficult to distinguish the one from the other because of the general similarity of styles at this time. Systematic technical analyses which are being undertaken by a number of scholars will greatly assist in settling this problem.

The beautiful relief inscription tile on a lustre ground in the Baku Museum signed by a potter of Shiraz proves that

\*Curzon, speaking, of course, before the extensive development of native excavation at Rhages, wrote (Persia, Vol. II, p. 15): "A larger number of these beautiful vases with iridescent lustre, or *réflet métallique*, which are the most cherished among the curios of Persia, have been found at Kashan than elsewhere." Yakut in the thirteenth century refers to tiles as "Kashani"; Ibn Batuta in the fourteenth century saw a tomb at Mashad Ali in Irak faced with "Kashani" and at Tabriz a mosque with "Kashani."



this art had its masters in the south also, but there is no way by the eye alone to distinguish this piece from the tiles of Ray, Varamin or Kashan.

How widespread the potter's art was at this time in Persia and yet how closely interrelated the different centres were has been forcibly shown by the recent excavations of Professor Nicholas Marr at Ani. Here in the old Armenian capital, many miles from Tabriz, the nearest famous Persian city, he found not less than a dozen different wares entirely in the style of Ray. The light turquoise is a little bluer than the pieces at Ray, but the others are to all appearances indistinguishable. One fragment of a lustre bowl perfectly in the style of Ray or Kashan might suggest that these pieces were all imported; but kilns were found too, and wasters, proof positive that they were made on the spot.

The confident affirmation of the Mashadis that their city was from early times distinguished for its faience must be taken seriously, even though little material from the great period has been found. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a quite individual style of tile decoration was in full swing in Khorassan. Both the Koja Rabi, near Mashad, and the great mosque at Sabzewar have yielded tiles of considerable decorative charm. Those from Koja Rabi show delightfully complicated stellate entrelacs of black and white on light turquoise, while the beautiful Masjid-i-Shah in Mashad, which is signed and dated by Shams-ud-Din Tabrizi, is lined with small hexagonal tiles in deep emerald with delicate, almost invisible patterns in gold lustre. Of course it is possible that these tiles were made not in Khorassan but in Tabriz and brought there because they are so like those of the green mosque of Broussa, which is also the work of Tabrizi architects; but the Koja Rabi tiles and those at Sabzewar are so unlike anything else that has been found in any part of Persia that they must be local work.

The most interesting pottery of the fifteenth century seems to have been produced at Sultanieh, the capital of Sultan Uljaitu Chodabenda Shah, a marked and powerful personality and a great patron of the arts, in whose short but brilliant reign some of the most splendid architectural ornament in Persia was produced. Here at Sultanieh was built a great mausoleum that remains, even in ruins, one of the world's important buildings; and on the site of Uljaitu's palace the native excavators have discovered some fine examples of the ceramic art. The bowls are chiefly round and they have a high glaze. They seem to be a derivation of the Arak type, having radial segments with finely divided patterns in blue and brown on a scarcely visible ground of ivory. The blue and black wares of Ray and Arak are also continued. Thus in the Boston Museum there is a bowl with a whole shoal of fishes swimming in enticing spirals toward a reed-filled centre, a design thousands of years old in this part of the world (*cf.* p. 65), while in the Gulbenkian Collection in Paris there is an incomparable piece with a bright blue deer in the bottom.

A few architectural fragments from Sultanieh, tiles and casings of columns, have reached European museums. Most of these show various combinations of arabesques and delightful lotus blossoms rendered in a rather softly moulded high relief in white on a ground of very brilliant cobalt blue.\* The colour schemes on these tiles are slightly different from those of any preceding types. They are less fine than those of the great period, but they are quite handsome and the effect of a considerable mass of them on a building must have been impressive.

By the middle or end of the sixteenth century a quite new type of lustre pottery had been developed, especially in Kashan and Isfahan, principally rather graceful pear-

\*There are column casings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, tiles in the Art Institute of Chicago and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



shaped ewers\* and small flat vases which are really hand spittoons. The ground is either ivory or a clear, intense blue, and the pattern is laid on in a flashing dark coppery lustre, verging toward the yellow and golden tones and occasionally toward ruby. Some animal and figure motifs appear, but for the most part the decoration consists of foliage and flowers and an occasional rough indication of a brook.

Some beautiful white semi-porcelain wares were developed in other parts of the country for which, at the present day, the town of Nayin claims the major credit. Chardin† mentions other cities as places where this type of ware was made, and does not mention Nayin. But the local tradition is quite specific and is more than confirmed both by the actual existence of fine ancient specimens in use there to-day, and the recovery in gardens and incidental diggings of beautiful fragments. Sometimes this ware has a pierced design, covered with glaze, but still semi-transparent, somewhat in a thirteenth century style (*cf.* p. 75). Black, or occasionally dark brown, was the only colour used, and the dark brown was brightened by delicate scrolls and tiny leaves cut through to show perfectly white.‡

It is often said that there never was any real porcelain in Persia, and it is true that some of the wares that seem to be porcelain are in reality only high-fired, thin paste with a strong glaze that gives them a remarkable hardness. Sometimes indeed the paste is so interpenetrated by the glaze that the whole bowl is somewhat transparent, and looks and feels like porcelain instead of pottery. But although the production of real porcelain does call for an uncommon conjunction of favourable circumstances, there is no reason why it should not occasionally have been made in Persia. The Chinese potters were often there in considerable numbers

\*Ill. Koechlin-Migcon, *Oriental Art*, pl. 38.

†Chardin, *Travels*, p. 267.

‡Ill. Butler, *Islamic Pottery*, pl. 64.

## CERAMICS

to show the way, and Chinese porcelain was owned in quantities in Persia. Moreover, the precious and indispensable kaolin has also been found, though a little sparingly in Persia. In 1925 a small bed was discovered between Ray and Varamin, to which the Teheran potters swarmed like ants around honey. In a few hours the last grain had been swept up and carried to their kilns to mix with their ordinary clay, to give it more hardness.\*

The problem has, however, at last been taken out of the range of controversy by Professor Marr's discovery at Ani of a considerable group of porcelain fragments in the manner of one of the commonest types of Ray pottery, together with fragments and wasters of other typical Ray products. Undoubtedly all these wares, including the porcelain, were locally made, but the industry at Ani clearly represented an extension of the Ray style. Thus if porcelain was not actually made within the boundaries of Persia, it was at least made directly within the Persian cultural circle.

Delightful new types of faience were developed in the Safavian period. Perhaps the most distinguished of these new potteries is a small group of vessels of a particularly beautiful shade of blue, with designs of great elegance and simplicity reserved in a perfect milk white. The ornaments of arabesques of purest type or stellate medallions are drawn with remarkable precision and elegance. The mildness of the tones, the simplicity of colour and drawing and the quiet glaze give them a high quality of dignity. Only a few of these precious pieces have survived: four in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a bowl and plate in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, a bowl and pitcher in the Hermitage, a fine carafe in the Gulbenkian Collection and a few others privately owned.

There was an interesting development of certain highly-glazed green wares, principally bottles and flasks, with relief figures, frequently in European costume. There are small

\*Mr. Rowland Read was a witness of this incident.



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flasks of lighter colour in this general style, of such superior quality that they must have been the work of a specially gifted potter. The two lions on the bottle in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs could hardly be surpassed by any animal drawing in Persian art. There are also a few ewers with a matt glaze in imitation of the Chinese melon green that are worthy of their best predecessors. The Victoria and Albert Museum is the fortunate possessor of an incomparable piece of this style.

Another large class of wares of which only a few examples have survived in good condition has a rich foliage decoration in light blue and rose on a white ground.\* This style was carried into a great variety of wares, plates, bowls, flasks, pitchers, of which by far the finest series is in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The Persians of this period knew well the value of quiet colours, too, and striking effects are paralleled by delightful types in celadon green with graceful white flower sprays, dainty and crisp, occasionally relieved by tiny touches of dark blue. The ware is obviously an imitation of the Korean pottery of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The latter was inlaid, while in the Persian style the decoration is applied, but the effect is so much the same that it seems necessary to assume some connection. In the absence of antecedent examples in Persia it must be presumed that some of the Chinese potters brought Korean ware with them.

The most characteristic products of the period are the blue and white bowls and plates of huge size, and often of great style, that are so decidedly Chinese in appearance that they have, both by contemporaries and even in recent times, been thought to be purely Chinese. Shah Abbas, who always had a keen eye for economic advantage and

\*For illustrations of this and other Safavian wares *v.* Koechlin, *La Céramique*, pl. 12-16.

was diligent in the promotion of trade, could see no reason why Europeans should buy all of their porcelain in China when it could with a little effort be supplied from Persia, and thousands of miles of transit and time thereby saved. To assist the development of a ceramic style, which could take advantage of the Chinese vogue in Europe, he had several hundred Chinese potters and their families brought to Persia and settled there. They seem to have been established principally at Isfahan. Some of the characteristic Chinese formulæ were maintained for a long time, but the Persians, as usual, soon contributed some of their own stock of decorative ideas, and little by little these porcelains took on more and more a Persian character. The highly ingenious, fantastic animals that roar and threaten in these porcelains are often playfully ferocious, but admirably decorative.

There has long been a great deal of mystery about a type of Persian pottery which was found in the high mountain village of Kubatcha in Daghestan. Some five or six hundred of these pieces are known, principally in two styles, one black and green,\* or occasionally turquoise,† the other polychrome, generally with human figures. Four of the black and green pieces in the Kelekian Collection are dated 1468, 1473, 1480 and 1495,‡ which warrants placing this type at the end of the fifteenth century. It is quite probable that, as Dr. Dimand suggests, they were made in the vicinity of Tabriz. The other type, quite different in technique, colour and decoration, is clearly seventeenth century work. The rather coarse crackled glaze, the loose and careless drawing, the rather ambiguous pattern and the somewhat pallid and nondescript colours are, taken separately, rather commonplace; but the ensemble is none the less

\*III. Butler, *Islamic Pottery*, pl. 14, 52.

†III. Butler, pl. 51.

‡Cf. Dimand, *A Handbook of Mohammedan Decorative Arts*, p. 135.



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altogether charming. They realise more perfectly than any of the other potteries of this period the old Persian principle of a gay and careless freedom in drawing, an easy and flowing style which composes admirably with the mild colours of an undemonstrative glaze. The amount of white that is let through these patterns gives them a light and airy quality, and the only accents are a soft tomato red and occasional spots of deep blue, which are just enough to bring out the graciousness of the whole composition.

What such a mass of sophisticated pottery should be doing in an uncouth mountain village in the Caucasus has always been puzzling. The style of the figures is entirely Persian, characteristic not only of Isfahan but of the whole region as far north as Saveh. Various explanations have been offered: one, that certain potters had been exiled from Persia to this dreary, rather formidable region, and had there plied their craft until their line was extinct; another, more plausible, that these mountaineers, who were great freebooters, swooped down over the mountains, stopping caravans with goods out of Persia. There is no tradition among the Kubatchis that they made the plates, and their own pottery is of no account and in no way connected with these Persian treasures.

Further proof that these pieces came from Persia has been found in the excavations at Saveh. Here many tiles, plates and bottles in the same style have been recovered. So far none of the plates or bottles found are as perfectly finished or of such large size as those found at Kubatcha, but the difference in quality is not considerable. Remarkable fragments have been found in Isfahan itself and still others of a very high quality at Khumiseh and Khurud, to the south of Isfahan, towns that boast of a real pottery tradition and are still conscious of the fame of their early wares. The close connection of many of these pieces with the Riza Abbasi school is a further indication that it is to Persia

herself that we must look for a solution of this mystery.

We know the wares of Kashan, Isfahan, Nayin, Saveh and Khumiseh by the combined evidence of tradition and local finds, but it is more difficult to identify the work of the other localities, Shiraz, Mashad, Yazd, Kerman and Zorende which Chardin mentions as pottery towns.\*

The full collapse of the painted tiles in the nineteenth century into a wretched melange of feeble and confused drawing must be charged to Shiraz. With unseemly pride in their beautiful roses the Shirazis sought to perpetuate their fame and preserve their gardens in glaze, but the various bluish, pink and cerise tones that they achieved are execrable, and in conjunction with the intense yellow ground on which they are often displayed, downright poisonous. The style, however, spread. Its very infirmities were in a tasteless age accounted merits, and important buildings in many parts of Persia are disfigured with this soiled and lurid decoration.

The Isfahan potters, since the seventeenth century the most skilful and the most resourceful in Persia, satisfied the new demand for reds in ceramics more successfully than the potters of Shiraz, developing a delightful colour that fluctuated from a yellow rose through salmon tones to a golden maroon. This colour was based on the reddish tone of some of the older wares, but, accidentally or by intent, a new quality was introduced which, in combination with blue and milky white, produced a charming effect. These pieces are uncommon outside Isfahan where they have been made until recent times. There is a jewel-like fragment in the Gutmann Collection in Potsdam.

The potters have continued to ply their trade all over Persia and they still make tiles of beautiful colour. Their cobalt, lapis and black are as good as in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The yellows lack a little of the luscious

\*Chardin, *Travels*, p. 267.



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smoothness, smoother than the creamy curd, which we find in those of the Shah Abbas period. The turquoise tones are a little dead. Nothing can equal the clear penetrating blue of the fifteenth century. The greens are a trifle yellow. But the differences are not so great as might be thought. The real deterioration in the potter's art in Persia, as in all the other arts, is in the confusion and disintegration of design. No longer are gifted, specially trained artists working for the potters. When it comes to decorating their pots the craftsmen continue a pleasant style which is rather free and easy, but theirs is only an industry and has no place beside the really artistic wares of the earlier periods. One style, made particularly in Isfahan, principally with black designs on ivory or yellow, well drawn and well fired, proves that the potter's art in Persia is not dead but sleeping only, and, indeed, stirring in preparation for a new day.

## Chapter IV

### THE ART OF THE BOOK.

THIS is not the place to expound the history of painting or of book-making in Persia. Such a discussion is not needed in an introduction because of the excellent available treatises on the subject.\* Those who wish seriously to understand this intricate and important art must turn to these pages and to the actual examples themselves. It may, nevertheless, be permissible to indicate the spirit which endowed the Persian book with its peculiar quality of perfection and outline the succession of the major types.

Persian supremacy in the art of the book has never yet been seriously challenged. By common consent it was the Persian artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who demonstrated the infinite possibilities which the preservation of the written word presents. As in all the Persian arts that were carried to a high degree of perfection, a profound and ancient motive was a sustaining force. Always in the Near East the written word was held in special reverence. In lands where there was no popular literature and practically no books in circulation and where but few could read, the potency of the written word savoured of the miraculous. A few marks on a scrap of paper, did it but issue from the right source, could speed a man to perdition or lift him to prosperity and power.

Moreover, the revealed truth was early committed to writing, both in Zoroastrian books and, in a more serious

\*Mr. Laurence Binyon's summary statement in *Persian Art*, London, 1930, expresses a delightful insight, as does an address by Mr. Binyon printed in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 1930. Mr. Basil Gray's *Persian Painting* presents much information. Dr. F. R. Martin's pioneer work, *Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia*, is still interesting and provocative. Dr. Kuehnelt has an excellent survey in the article on Persian Painting in the last edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Dr. Kuehnelt's *Miniaturmalerei im Islamischen Orient*, Berlin, 1923, has a hundred and fifty plates and a brief but adequate text. A. B. Sakisian, *La Miniature persane du xii<sup>e</sup> au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle* is valuable.



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way still, in the sacred scriptures of Manicheism, that strange eclectic religion which was such a formidable rival to Christianity in its early youth and a threat not only to the Persian state religion but to the crown itself. When Mani's books, on which he had lavished excessive pains, were judged heretical and cast into the flames, rivulets of gold, according to the contemporary records, streamed from the fire, the pathetic residue of the gorgeous bindings.

That Mani himself was an artist, no doubt of original power, is proved by the tenacity with which his name has been held in reverence as a great painter and friend of the art, even despite his being universally execrated as a destroyer of the faith. According to popular belief he was, indeed, the founder of the Persian school of painting and many were the works signed with his name centuries after his death.

Just how the art really developed in Persia no one, except a few dogmatists, is ready to say. Mural painting certainly existed from the earliest times. A recently discovered Seleucid temple in Turkestan shows traces of interesting paintings on the stucco walls. Ample documents tell of the mural adornments of Sasanian times, of which a few battered fragments have been recovered (*cf.* p. 48). The walls of the palaces of the Caliphs at Samarra\* in the ninth century were richly decorated, as had been also the famous shooting-box of Kusra Amra, east of the Jordan, in the eighth century;† and oriental artists had plied their trade on the walls of Dura, east of Palmyra, as early as the second century.‡ In India, throughout all this early period, the art of painting reached heights of æsthetic splendour and

\*E. Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra*, Berlin, 1927.

†Discussed in every history of Islamic architecture and ornament, for example, A. Musil, *Kwsejr Amra*, Vienna, 1902, and Ernst Diez, *Die Kunst der Islamischen Völker*, p. 24 ff.

‡James H. Breasted, *Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Painting*, Chicago, 1922.

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spiritual fervour. The caves of Ton Huang over against China are to this day resplendent with images of the new Buddhist faith and similar murals from Turfan in the tenth century may now be seen in the Ethnographische Museum in Berlin.

The Persians, sensitive to every surrounding influence, with a passion for colour and a versatility in all the crafts, could not have been indifferent to this opportunity nor slow to profit by foreign instruction. Moreover, the famous episode of the contest in mural painting between a Chinese and a Byzantine painter which Firdausi put in the *Shah Nameh* in the tenth century proves that they were keenly interested in painting and well aware of its standards and ideals. The designs on the potteries of this century prove that there were competent and imaginative draughtsmen, capable, in their childlike way, of genuine artistic effects, and the etching on metal and the designs for charming brocades still further prove that here was a well-established craft, however silent the records or contemptuous the theologians.

The actual sources which contributed to the building up of the art of the book in early Mediæval Persia are much in dispute. M. Blochet,\* with intemperate violence, finds only a debased borrowing from post-classical art strained through a distorting Christian medium in Mesopotamia. Some see the instructing hand of China or even echoes from India, while others believe that Persia was capable of profiting by all these suggestions and, as in a score of cases, of creating its own style. But more fundamental than the problem of sources, which is after all as much a geographical and material as a psychological problem, was the attitude of the Persians toward this particular art, for it was this basic feeling that was responsible for their supreme achievement.

There is no hope of understanding the Persian book with-

\*E. Blochet, *Musulman Painting*, London, 1929, *passim*.



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out some idea of the importance and quality of the calligraphy. From the earliest Islamic times the calligrapher was honoured above other artists. His work was more precious than rubies. He was even a power in the kingdom. Kings themselves thought it a proof of their royal virtue to compete in the art, and many a page from the hand of famous monarchs still exists. The little Crown Prince of Persia to-day is a promising, not to say enthusiastic, calligrapher.

Moreover, calligraphy has had a more than royal sanction. The Prophet himself commended it, and one of the wise men said: "Writing is the offspring of thought, the lamp of remembrance, the tongue of him that is far off, and the life of him whose age has been blotted out."<sup>\*</sup>

From the earliest Islamic times the utmost resources of the calligrapher and of his fellow draftsmen were called into play for the ornamentation of the Koran. Here both opportunity and duty called for the ultimate effort. The Koran was the sole way to life and salvation. Upon it depended the whole structure of society, the order of the day and the path to the future. Supernatural in origin, the final authority and standard of the good in life, it was deserving of every tribute that human skill could lavish upon it, and from the tenth to the twelfth century its pages were ornamented with such a knowledge and such a sure feeling for splendid design that these early pages remain to-day almost the greatest achievement in the history of abstract art.

The calligraphers were fortunate in having at their disposal an alphabet more perfectly adaptable to artistic use than any other system of letters. The Arabic script supplies beautiful verticals that may be rhythmically massed, and at the same time interwoven bases that give the composition balance and a visible fluidity. The strokes, the spacing and

<sup>\*</sup>Sir Thomas Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, Oxford, 1928, p. 2. In this book Sir Thomas Arnold has gathered together a group of these revealing statements.

the size all permit of a wide range of expressiveness. The monumental and solemn affirmations of the Koran which seem to thunder: "Thus saith the Lord," the tense and heroic epics with their sharper and more irregular emphases or the delicate lyrical poetry which calls for a lighter, more flowing letter, all these and many other qualities can be immediately and directly transcribed into this most beautiful of all alphabets.

Such a sensitive and variable script was inevitably responsive also to the essential attributes of each succeeding culture. In the early pioneer period of Islam, those heroic days when the first ardours of the new faith absorbed men's devotion, we find in all the Muhammadan lands a letter of simplicity and force rendered with broad horizontal strokes expressive of assurance. But the Persian tradition of elegance and the progressive refinement of all the arts that began in the tenth century were soon reflected in the shape of the letters. The spaces become sharper and longer. The elements assume a greater verticality. Delicate finishing points and the decorative use of accents enrich the manuscripts. The dividing lines between the verses offer opportunities for elaboration and little patterns in gold and flecks of red embellish the interstices.

By the eleventh century the verticality is still further increased (Fig. 43). The letters become more slender and more aristocratic. The spacing and the dignity of the rhythms alone recall the former solemnity. Under the Seljuks the graceful and flowing styles which were revived from an earlier tradition, as well as introduced from new sources, moulded the stern Kufic into more gracious and fluid forms; and we have the beginning of the Nashki script, in which the flexibility of pen or brush tip dictates the shape and finish of each stroke (Fig. 44). Accents are now still further developed. From the eleventh to the thirteenth century they are elongated and held firmly in an oblique direction, seem-



ing to drive like beating rain against the resistant verticals which are, by contrast, infused with a surging movement.

The elegiac quality of the first style is giving way now to suppleness and grace. The contents of the secular books call for still further adaptations; crispness and daintiness become ideals. But the old standards of accuracy and control are never relaxed. The regular marching rhythms of the early Kufic and Nashki give way in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to a dancing movement (Fig. 46) that in the little poems is almost mincing.

The early Kufic received its most majestic rendering in manuscripts and sometimes on tombstones. Occasionally from the eleventh to the fourteenth century we find a stately form of it powerfully enriched with knots and entrelacs, "debased Kufic," the proud Orientalists call it; "glorified Kufic," the student of design would reply. This type, either wrought in stucco as on the ceiling of the recess of the north-east liwan of the Masjid-i-Jâmi of Isfahan or cut in limestone as in the mosque of Khargird, sometimes touches the zenith of monumental epigraphy. The Nashki also receives its sublimation in architectural friezes. Here the verticals are enhanced in a way that would be disagreeable in a manuscript. In mosaic faience the use of a bright white script on a deep lapis blue provides an excessive clarity of definition that permits of a close crowding of these verticals that would otherwise be confusing. The alternate verticality and obliquity of the strokes remind one of the spears in Velasquez' *Surrender of Breda*. So beautiful were these scripts that they came to be cherished as a supreme form of ornament and every other craft gratefully followed the models of the calligrapher.

At the same time that calligraphy was running such an exciting course the subsidiary arts of the book were equally put under tribute. The paper-maker was encouraged to exploit his utmost resources (*cf.* p. 190) and by the fifteenth

century novel tints and delicate polychrome spanglings became all the rage, especially for lyrical poetry. In one lovely little volume of poems in the De Motte Collection each page with its single verse has been stained and sequined to correspond to the emotional tone of each successive mood.

To these basal elements were added the fully developed talents of the illuminator and gilder who decorated the margins of the pages (Fig. 47), worked up the intricate frontispieces and designed chapter headings and other subsidiary ornaments. Of these gorgeous frontispieces, and particularly of the beautiful little panels of the chapter headings of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, it is impossible to speak temperately. The unapproachable perfection of their technique, their harmonies of colour and movement, the clear logic of their interrelations must leave every sensitive observer inarticulate. Here is a vast mass of material as extensive and varied as the scores of Johann Sebastian Bach, unstudied and almost unseen (Fig. 48).

As the calligrapher and illuminator had steadily advanced through successive possibilities to the perfection of their crafts, so also the miniature painter exploited a series of styles each faithfully corresponding to the culture of the time and to his own advancing technical mastery. At first, under the influence of Mesopotamia, we find solemn hieratic figures in heavy colours, often effectively massed in rich compositions. These challenge our attention by their naïveté and force. The Moguls, although violence and bloodshed came with them, brought a new style, expanded both in idea and in technique by Chinese prototypes but confined in subject to themes congenial to the conquerors. These miniatures, in contrast to a certain passivity in the preceding epoch, are bursting with fury and intensity of feeling. One miniature in the Indjoudjian Collection might well epitomise the whole spirit. On the slopes of a rough and steep little mountain a single warrior, formidable by



his audacity, assaults a dragon of hideous proportions and hysterical ferocity, while cowering on the rocks, two terrified rabbits in frozen fascination watch the flaming conflict.

The followers of Tamerlane had no sooner ceased their bloody task of massacre and destruction than they turned to the arts of peace. Tamed and civilised by the reasonableness of Islam, they brought to their new enthusiasm the same concentrated intensity that made them irresistible in war. They were the great bibliophiles. Shah Rukh and Baisangur would outshine our modern book collectors by the lavishness and zeal with which they pursued this fascinating art.

All through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the definitive style of Persian painting was taking form. We see the typical Persian instinct for incrustation finding splendid fulfilment. In certain examples practically the entire page is covered with a dense texture of shrubs, trees, animals and cloud patterns, each subject exploited in its own quality to enrich to the utmost the whole surface.

Even when there are miniatures illustrating scenes and events they are primarily decorative. The elements are numerous: patches of flowers; blossoming trees or autumn-tinted foliage; variegated brocade robes; elaborately embroidered tents; figured carpets; the intricate ornamentation of the background architecture and the minor accessories. These have provided the painters with a scale of forms as wide and adaptable as a language, so that their intense imaginations and highly disciplined ingenuity have been able to conjure up a bewildering variety of enchanting combinations.

These combinations are always organised according to the requirements of a decorative design. In the first place the entire composition is in a single plane. There are no successive semi-transparent curtains of diminishing light, no converging perspectives that break through the surface.

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The figures are encompassed by no atmosphere and cast no shadows. Modelling, save for the shallowest and most delicate kind, is studiously avoided. Neither the individual figures nor the separate colours blend or merge. All is rendered in a crystal sharpness with exquisite lapidarian skill.

Washed clean of all cloying shadows, the figures shine with a celestial clarity, and what has been lost in substantiality is more than gained in intensity. The surrender of plasticity, distance and atmosphere permits the presentation of an abstract world which has its own values, requires its own consistencies and is sustained by its own imagination. These must all be sympathetically understood if we are to relive the painter's intention.

This abstractness, which is a simplification, concentrates attention on particular images, endowing them with a heightened actuality. The elements can be more sharply juxtaposed, the total texture is more varied and more sparkling, the general interest is more evenly distributed and the separate parts more highly individualised. The very abstractness and the surrender of a merging harmony make possible a more direct contrast and variation of colour than are permissible in any other technique. The colours, neither blended in an enveloping tonality nor mechanically balanced around a common centre, are played one against the other in an animated polyphonic composition.

Nor does this abstractness involve such a violation of nature as might be thought. In fact it creates a world more freshly real. In moments of keenest observation we ourselves reject as superfluous many items of experience that we know in practice or reflection to be real, and the violation of perspective, the bringing of all the elements into a single plane, can also be a method of intensification and impart a special kind of unity. Where a few spaced flower sprays proclaim a whole garden and two trees an orchard we have



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not only lost nothing but have even gained in directness of appreciation. If some of the features like the rugged little mountains sometimes strike us as bizarre to the point of drollery, this is partly our misfortune in universalising our own limited experience. These abrupt and patterned crags prove, when compared with the actual Persian landscape, to be no irresponsible imaginings. In northern and eastern Persia especially, one everywhere comes upon these jagged little outcrops and toylike battlemented ridges, and one half expects to see a Mogul horseman with sharpened lance and fluttering banner charge out from a ravine or peer around some jag.

In general, Persian painting is woven around an illustrative topic involving persons, and despite the formalism of the composition, the intense absorption in the lust of the eye and the Homeric dwelling on the specific qualities of details, or the building up of luxurious subsidiary schemes, human action or emotion remains the principal theme. Hence it is commonly stated that the Persians never undertook pure landscape painting. But no sooner does one set a limit to any branch of Persian art than some new discovery sets it at naught. Dr. Aga Oglu has recently found at Istanbul a dozen beautiful pages of most varied and charming landscapes, not only devoid of all human figures, but untroubled even by the movement of any animal form.\* They are obviously derived from the frescoes of the Tarim Basin.

The organisation of movement in the miniatures is worthy of more study than it has received. Scenes of swift and graceful motion are common, but they are nearly always seen against an immobile environment, either the curtain of the landscape, or the spectators who, like the Greek chorus, stand fixed and reflect the universal mood of

\*Part of these will be published in the forthcoming Survey of Persian Art and a full monograph by Dr. Aga Oglu will appear later.

admiration or alarm. There is a certain stillness in most of these little scenes, in direct contrast with the rapid, dramatic style of the Far East, that is requisite for the maintenance of the spell they cast. Indeed the elements are generally too brittle to permit of any general flow of movement within the composition. Life is arrested for an instant, as when the single lightning flash reveals a moving world transfixed in sudden brightness.

Numerous dithyrambs have been composed on the colour of Persian miniatures, all justified. The earliest are in discreet tones of tawny browns, blacks, a few dull greens or blues or sober reds for enrichment, but as Persian painting gradually disentangled itself from the drab Mesopotamian style or the sensitive monochromatic preferences of the Chinese, the Persians' astonishing inventiveness and audacity in the mingling of pure and brilliant tones, which had already led to many triumphs in the field of ceramics and architectural decoration, shed new lustre on their painting, so that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it attained an unrivalled freshness, novelty and intensity of colour.

The artists were still capable of broad, simple effects, sometimes even of grandeur. They often did beautiful things with very limited colours; but in the most numerous and typical miniatures of this period, the range is almost unlimited and the juxtapositions dramatic; all the colours are of a delicious clarity and enamel-like depth, and the areas are defined by margins as sharp and clean as those of cloisonné. Golden skies and silver water, black-green cypresses against white-blossoming trees, the autumn foliage of the spreading plane, dappled horses in tawny deserts, clustered figures in raiment of scarlet, crimson and azure, diaper tiles and dainty frescoes, bright gardens behind slender fences of cinnabar red: these together compose the gayest of all possible symphonies. Every high key tone is



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employed, daring dissonances lend vibrancy, and the full values of black and white are used to relieve the all but surfeited eye and deepen all the contrasts.

The colour compositions are too complex and thoughtful for any brief summary. The control of dangerous dissonances by diminution of area, the restoration of the unity of texture by balanced or semi-balanced repetitions, the mingling by flowing lines or assembling into static decorative patterns, of tiny recurrent units are devices for maintaining the integrity without the obvious or facile means of colour blending or diffused tonality. These endless resources for effective colour composition call for more study than has yet been given them.

Persian painting is in every way a court-art, aristocratic and distinguished. Its very opulence is well bred. All is tense and of high quality. A certain self-contained decorum, so characteristic of Persian manners, restrains and quiets the emotions without any dimming of the æsthetic vividness. The conventional faces protect the composition from the undue intrusion of personalities or psychological distractions that might dilute or compromise the decorative pattern; but it must not be inferred that the Persian painters had no dramatic sense and no ability to express personality. There are plenty of exceptions to prove that the apparent limitation of their art has been due to no incapacity but rather to choice. A poignant portrait of a darvish ascribed to Bihzad\* is worthy of an honourable place beside the classic portraits of the Far East. It has the monumentality, grace and burning intensity, yet tranquillity withal, that belong to perfect art. A pathetic figure like the old woman in the famous British Museum Nizami,† carries the essence of a feeling embodied in a person. Drama is frequent, although never permitted to destroy the crystalline serenity of the total design.

\*F. R. Martin, *Miniature Painting and Painters*, pl. 85.

†Binyon, *Poems of Nizami*, pl. iv.

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Even the most reserved artists of the sixteenth century, in spite of their abstractness and courtly restraint, are capable of an eloquent expression of emotion, as in the illustration of Jesus and the Dead Dog,\* which depicts touchingly a tender contemplation. Often in groups by Bihzad we find individual figures betraying, albeit somewhat reservedly, animation of mind and feeling as well as of figure. Although the poses are by tradition circumscribed, nevertheless some of the finest artists delineate attitudes that eloquently reveal the quality of the inner life.

They even portray scenes of sly humour with vast relish† and some of the earlier renderings of animals show a sympathetic feeling for the comical. Master Muhammadi with his pictures of dancing darvishes and humans in animal form, in his light drollery as well as his masterly draughtsmanship is the Toba Sojo of Near Eastern art, the counterpart of the famous Japanese priest caricaturist of the ninth century.‡ More often than not there is an ironical flavour in the humorous episodes, a quality characteristic of the Persian mind and particularly appropriate to the technique of the miniatures. One could not imagine Hogarth's Rake's Progress in miniature, but the witticisms and subtle turns of Voltaire would lend themselves admirably to this light and elusive touch with its scrupulous avoidance of overstatement or the obvious. Indeed there is a Gallic freshness and *esprit* in much of this miniature style. But all of these expressions, whether of emotion or of humour, are unobtrusive and self-contained and the original decorative intent continues to hold full sway.

Occasionally the power of some tremendous theme breaks through the usual decorum, as in Mirak's famous rendering

\*Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, pl. xxviii.

†*loc. cit.*, pl. lxi, with illuminating comments p. 135 f.

‡E. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Vol. I., p. 174.



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of Muhammad's Ascent to Heaven.\* This impossible subject is compassed with a vividness, a splendour and an exhilaration that is more adequate than any words to the fervours of the heavenly morn. Faced with a similar task, Dante confesses himself dumb or can report his raptures only in faltering repetitions. But with Mirak we are caught up in glory and on the wings of his imagination accompany the Prophet far on his heavenward flight.

The miniatures are a coherent part of the text. Just as the emotions of the subjects are reflected in the calligraphy, so the more dramatic incidents seem to transcend the usual method of expression and flower into a new dimension. These miniatures are not like our illustrations, done separately and inserted. They are interpenetrated by the text and in turn mingle with it. In expressive exuberance they overrun sometimes the margins or, as the occasion may demand, shrink to a mere dramatic comment. Sometimes a poem may be decorated by tiny panels or marginal notes containing birds or flowers almost like a happy exclamation.

They hold, too, just as firmly to the surface of the page as the writing itself. Never do they break through, opening vistas like a hole in the book, letting in another world. The very lines, too, are calligraphic in their fluidity and one feels that the calligrapher himself could turn miniature painter or the painter could subdue his flaming art to the more sober delineation of the written word.

In the earlier periods the art had been almost anonymous, but in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries personalities begin to emerge. The outstanding master is Bihzad, so famous that his name was many times forged, an embarrassment to students and collectors to-day. Other talented and creative men were Sultan Muhammad, Aga Mirak, Sayyid Ali and Qasim Ali. But these are only the most conspicuous names.

\*Binyon, *Poems of Nizami*, pl. xiv.

There are many others that he who studies the art will come to love and admire.

During all this time the *relics* had kept pace with their colleagues and had given admirable and just expression to the character of each age. The sturdy covers of the fourteenth century Korans were ornamented with firmly articulated geometrical patterns in dressed leather. The same designs that compose the frontispieces or even those that appear on the brocades in the early miniatures are repeated on the outside as if a theme were being announced.

Remarkable technical skill in the treatment of leather furnished the necessary basis for a perfection of the craft that has known no rivals. By the fifteenth century, particularly in the School of Herat, the craft had attained perfect mastery. In the beautiful book covers formerly in the Martin Collection\* the medium has become wholly transparent and flexible to the will of the designer. The patterns are notable for their simplicity and the perfect distinctness and correlation of the parts. Yet because of the extreme fineness of the design, they put upon the worker a heavy task for which, as these examples show, the technique was now wholly adequate.

In the sixteenth century the miniature painters joined hands and prepared sketches of animals, foliage and *personnages* of such delicacy that it again seems impossible that they could be translated into leather. These designs in embossed and tooled leather are first cousins to the sensitive miniature sculpture of the numismatic arts and even vie with them in the minutiae of the modelling. These covers were sometimes left in plain brown leather and sometimes gilded.

Far more elaborate and striking effects in quite a different technique were made contemporaneously, with filograms, both in paper and in leather, cut out with a thread-like

\*Meisterwerke Muhammadanische Kunst, pl. 18.



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fineness that modern artists could hardly surpass with a brush or etching needle. These filograms were cut in a series of sheets, each of a different colour, which were then laid one over the other. Thus a design of black arabesques of cobweb fineness is superimposed on a clear turquoise which in turn lets through, in an artful pattern, an under layer of gold.

As a rule these covers all follow in general layout the great carpets. A central medallion with pendants and corner quadrants with delicate arabesque ornament in black and blue, may contrast with an open field with cloud bands in light relief in a clear green gold, fluttering across a stippled ground, occasionally decorated with spiral tendrils and lotus blossoms, in a darker, yellow gold. The commonest border is the familiar alternation of the long cartouche and the round medallion linked with running guilloches.

These precious covers were not merely an external protection, something added to the book, but were a highly valued and intrinsic part of the whole and then, as now, they were often encased in beautiful velvet or brocade envelopes.

Through all this virtuosity the integrity of the book was never lost sight of. The various masters engaged in producing a fine volume were as concerted in their efforts as a modern string quartet, and as sensitively responsive the one to the other. Each seems intensely conscious of the unity of the whole, and it is just this perfect integration of the varied elements that gives the finest Persian book its unrivalled place.

Before the middle of the sixteenth century the whole art of the book had begun to decline. Such high intensity could not be sustained. The court demand for faster and larger work was ruinous to a craft that required above all tranquil concentration and leisure. Little by little the technique relaxes. The accessories, particularly the carpets which were

done with such professional understanding by Bihzad and Sayyid Ali,\* are reduced to a perfunctory formula which soon loses all charm and all connection with the actual art. The glory fades. The compositions become stale and accidental and the colours dim.

Meanwhile the Persians' love of finesse and their enthusiasm for technical elegance, their long-disciplined and instructed sense for the flowing line learned from calligraphy, were among the several influences that converged to carry the art of drawing to a very high rank (Fig. 52). Some of the fifteenth century drawings of the Herat School are essentially compositions in calligraphic strokes, and each line is endowed with a lovely and expressive grace that could only have been the product of a sophisticated passion for calligraphy.

To this consummate mastery of the abstract line was added an equal facility with light washes, and particularly in the sixteenth century masters like Muhammadi created drawings that seem almost about to vanish from the surface of the paper like a breath from a mirror.

At the time of Shah Abbas, thanks to the periodical stimulation which Persian painting received from the Far East, and thanks also to the general level of renewed enthusiasm which accompanied his Augustan reign, new styles and new masters emerged. The skill in line drawing was revived (Fig. 53), and if the integrity of the book has now been relaxed and its elements detached, we are nevertheless in a measure the gainers, for the individual drawings typical of this period, perfect and complete in themselves, can be more easily and more exclusively enjoyed than miniatures which are part of a larger whole.

Two masters dominate the art at this stage of its history: Aga Riza and, more important and influential in the whole taste of the time, Riza Abbasi. The aristocratic quality of

\*Binyon, *The Poems of Nizami*, pl. xii.



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the earlier schools is now flavoured with decadence. The languid princes are too elegant, their self-conscious absorption in a flower too precious. But Riza Abbasi never loses the robustness of a truly great man, and if on one page he depicts too swooningly a fop, on the next he may have a shrewdly revealed, lusty roustabout. It is with his successors that complete decay sets in. Here is the degeneration of an overbred race, too tall, too swaying, vacant in their ennui.

By the sixteenth century and perhaps earlier the painters had expanded their usual methods, trying out lacquer and wood in place of tempera and paper, and by the seventeenth century the foremost artists, including Riza Abbasi himself, welcomed the further opportunity to demonstrate their versatility. The greater richness of tone passing through the mellow veil of the lacquer created effects of depth and softness that the ordinary medium never yielded. Some of these lacquer paintings fully rival the contemporary miniatures; particularly with the use of a sparkling gold ground they attained a quality appropriate to the material and technique that represents a precious addition to the repertoire of the Persian artists.

The technique, which reached its highest perfection in the book covers (Fig. 56), had many other interesting applications. The fragrant fruits of Isfahan were set forth on handsome lacquer dishes and huge trays were painted with complicated designs. At one of the banquets Chardin attended,\* great lacquer basins were considered fit to serve with flagons of gold, enamelled and jewelled. The dandies and beauties of Isfahan carried their mirrors in lovely lacquer cases and the humble scribe and the great calligrapher alike put away brush and pen in cases made worthy of their respected tools with this same ornament. A few great boxes which survive, octagonal, high-domed, archi-

\*Chardin, *Travels*, p. 88.

tectural in form, with a painting on each panel, were meant perhaps to hold the sweetmeats at some royal feast.

With the extinction of the schools of Shah Abbas, painting passed swiftly into a shadow. The pen boxes and mirror cases in lacquer continued a certain quality until the end of the eighteenth century. By the turn of the century the prestige of European painting had debased the pure decorative art of which Persia had been sovereign mistress, and shadow and perspective helped congest scenes of court and battle, introducing a muddy tonality for which the incontestable skill of the painter could not atone.

In the nineteenth century and down to the present day an individual artist of skill and taste has here and there kept the flickering flame of the ancient tradition briefly aglow, and even now both in Isfahan and in Teheran there are painters working in a variety of the older styles with a skill and finish that have deceived many a dealer and collector. These men long for opportunity. They seek patrons that will give them a chance to express their own emotions and free them from a too slavish dependence upon the ancient formulæ. Did Europe and America but know what graciousness and charm could be acquired for a modest outlay from these poor painters, many of them conscientiously holding fast at real cost to exacting standards, a new miniature art might be given a chance to live in Persia; and if the craftsmanship now obscures and misplaces the inner vision, it might be only a matter of time and opportunity for a fresh inspiration to assume a revitalising control.



## Chapter V

### CARPETS

It is by her carpets that the art of Persia has been most widely known. Their fame has been abroad in the world these many centuries. At an early date they came to Greece by way of Trebizond.\* Plato, if we can believe tradition, owned a rather magnificent set of oriental rugs. Were they Persian? In Byzantium, resplendent and sophisticated, they were much in demand and the first European travellers in Persia were often most impressed by the carpets. Barbaro speaks with astonishment of their superior quality,† and they constituted an important acquisition of Sherley,‡ the first Englishman to reach Persia, in the sixteenth century.

In less than a century after that a huge trade, which has never ceased to this day, was in full swing. Rubens, Van Dyke, Velvet Breughel and many other European artists owned and faithfully portrayed eastern Persian carpets of the type usually erroneously called Isfahan (*cf.* p. 137).

In modern times also it is by her carpets that Persia is best and most widely known. The organisation of a highly capitalised and efficient trade in the last fifty years has brought to every town in the Western world something of their glamour and merchants have exploited to the utmost their romance. But though the modern commercial carpets which have constituted the bulk of the recent traffic are superior to anything done in the West, they are only vague imitations of the early carpets, often degenerate and unintelligible versions that give little idea of the artistic quality of the originals.

Thus, although Persian carpets have been accepted for centuries as the symbol of Persian art, they rarely disclose its

\*Sir William Ramsay, *Asianic Elements in Greek Civilisation*, p. 119.

†Josafa Barbaro, *Travels to Tana and Persia*, p. 57.

‡The True Report of Sir Anthony Shierlie's journey Overland, London, 1600, p. 5.

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real character. The modern examples are too poor, the earlier ones too few and too little understood. Yet when properly studied, the earlier carpets are, perhaps, the most revealing introduction to Persian art, comprising more of the characteristic qualities, embodying older and more varied traditions, more intimately expressive of all phases of the life and culture than any of the other arts. Serving in a wide range of capacities for mosque and palace, for prayer or throne, both for practical use and for non-utilitarian contemplation, praised by poets, admired by visitors from abroad, envied by rival potentates and flatteringly imitated in other countries, the finest Persian carpets do express the essential spirit of the country's art.

All Persian carpets are divided into three sorts. Just as Persian society consists of sharply contrasted classes, so also the rugs that each produced and admired differ decisively. As kings and princes felt entitled to the finest that the earth affords, so their carpets represent the supremest effort of which the craft was capable. These sumptuous and cosmopolitan fabrics, each a special and individual effort, are to be clearly distinguished from two other classes. If we are to follow Mumford in classing these court products as High School carpets, then we must use the term Middle School for the work of the great establishments which we know were located at Kerman, Joshaghan, Shustar, Herat, Hamadan, Tabriz and Karabagh. These looms produced carpets down to the beginning of this century which, though less rich and artistically less important, were nevertheless often of admirable beauty. They were woven partly for export but more for petty princes, local chieftains, officials, and rich merchants, a sort of upper middle class that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were an important factor in the economic and artistic life of Persia.

On the other hand, there are the rugs made by nomads, in the mountain villages and by common townfolk primarily



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for utility; handsome but unpretentious, with few colours and simple patterns, strictly traditional or remote copies of the more favoured products of the upper classes. These have been aptly designated Low School rugs. A fourth class, the modern factory products, that represent an industry, not an art, need not concern us here. Indeed, in a brief study of Persian art we need consider hardly more than the High School carpets.

The major factor in raising carpet-weaving to artistic importance in Persia was the patronage of the courts. The wealth of kings was essential to provide the perfect materials (*cf.* p. 122) needed for the most splendid carpets, and to pay the many workers for the long months of toil required to tie the many hundreds of thousands of knots that compose their finely compacted surfaces.

Moreover the court could command the co-operation of great painters as designers, thereby at once assuring a high accomplishment in the cartoon. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth century the court painters were the chief source of æsthetic authority. They not merely planned and executed their beautiful manuscripts, but they designed buildings and superintended all the decoration, composed patterns for the faience makers and instructed the brocade and velvet weavers. It was inevitable that carpets, so highly prized by the Persians, should have been an object of their special concern.

The miniatures themselves bear witness that in the second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century especially, the chief painters had a knowledge of carpets so specific and detailed, so professionally competent not only in general composition but also in minor technical points, that they must have been recording an art of which they were themselves masters. If they let their fancy play with architecture, rendering impossible bulbous domes, and with some of the other decorative accessories, the carpets were held, by the best painters of the period, to concrete fact with a proprie-

tary affection.\* They made cartoons which were really their own marginal decorations, frontispieces, chapter headings and book covers writ large. The dyers and weavers, thanks to the long tradition of the carpet art, were prepared for any technical task that might be set them, so the illuminators had the satisfaction of seeing their most delicate visions endowed with grandeur and substantiality.

The head weavers played an important rôle and many of them were themselves experienced as designers. So on occasion they felt justified in violating the usual convention of the time, which bade the artist remain anonymous, and made bold to sign great carpets. Seven or eight such signatures are known, of which the most important are: Ghiyath ed-Din Jâmi, who boastfully inscribed the Milan Hunting Carpet in 1521-22; Maksud of Kashan, who with humble gesture signed the Ardabil carpet in 1539-40; the equally "humble slave" Muhammad Amin of Kerman† who in 1650 signed the lovely (little) prayer carpet known as the "Four Seasons" in the Shrine of Imam Riza and Neamat'ullah of Joshaghan who was content to put his name and the date 1671 on the set of silk carpets made for the tomb of Shah Abbas II at Kum (Fig. 68). The Muhammad Amin signature is especially interesting as this is the only carpet that has so far come to light provably of Kerman workmanship before the end of the eighteenth century after which the style was considerably changed.

It is not easy to say in just what the moving beauty of the great carpets consists. Certainly the characteristic Islamic designs get their most satisfactory expression in this art. They are on a scale which gives them an importance that the miniatures and brocades cannot attain, they have a solidity

\*A detailed argument will be advanced in the Survey of Persian Art for the identification of certain painters as rug designers. Of these, Bihzad, Sultan Muhammad and Sayyid Ali are the most conspicuous.

†I owe this reading to Professor Vladimir Minorski.



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impossible to velvet, and they are more intimate, richer in texture and more viable than the rather cold and aloof decoration in stucco and faience. But beyond this, the finest carpets embody special qualities that are essential to their specific effect.

Beauty of texture is a primary factor. To attain this the most costly materials are employed. Sheep were sometimes specially bred and tended like children that their wool might never be soiled or roughened. The choicest silk that could be spun was often used for the entire carpet or, in some cases where the pile was wool, for the warp and weft, to make the fabric soft and pliable and to allow close knotting. Gold and silver were freely employed to give variety and crispness to the texture and to increase the effect of opulence. These precious materials were garnered from the four corners of the realm, treasured in the king's storehouses, to be distributed to the looms of the palace organisation and to specially endowed and controlled workshops in the provinces, or advanced to independent establishments favoured by royal commissions.

How important the materials are in the final effect is rarely realised. Even to-day, of two carpets differing only in the grade of wool, dyed in the same pots for the same cartoon and made by the same weavers, the one may bring three times the price of the other. Not only does the finest wool or silk supply a velvety lustre, living and gleaming like the pelt of a fine animal which makes such an irresistible appeal to the sense of touch as well as the eye, but, even more important, the finest dyes are by themselves helpless to create a rich and satisfying effect. Only if they be embodied in a sympathetic and responsive material is their full beauty realised.

The brilliant and sophisticated Persian colour sense finds its perfect embodiment in the carpets. Their size permits of a far greater variety of colours than is appropriate in the smaller, lighter textiles or than is possible in a painted page. The great faience decorations offer the same majestic scale,

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but there the artists were restricted in colour, partly perhaps because of the difficulty of controlling a wide range of shades in faience, and partly because the architectural necessities demand of the great domes and panels a certain uniformity. A dominant tonality of a relatively simple kind, generally blue, is essential to preserve the homogeneity of the surface and the substantiality of the structure. As a vehicle for colour the carpets provided an opportunity not equalled by any other of the Persian arts.

There is practically no limit to the range of colours the Persian dyers could command, and yet with all this wealth available, the rug designers chose a relatively limited number; twelve to fourteen tones is the average for the great sixteenth century carpets. A few, like the Milan Hunting carpet, with its rather intricate pattern, have a considerably higher number, but it is not until the end of the sixteenth century that the designers tended to use more finely divided shades. In some of the later so-called Polonaise carpets\* and in the set in the Mosque of Kum (Fig. 68) we find more than twenty tones. Such a great variety is something of a danger, for it threatens disintegration of the plan and a certain loss of unity and substantiality. But the Kum carpets, the elaborate creations of a luxurious age, aimed at a sort of exciting opulence, and the reserve and simplicity becoming to the heroic style of the earlier carpets is distinctly wanting.

But the perfection of colour in the Persian carpets is not due merely to the dyers' mastery of a wide range of pure and lustrous tones. It comes even more from knowledge and imagination, which give a perfect control of colour harmonies and infinitely various schemes of composition. Indeed, the symphonic range of tones is assembled, not merely into a satisfying harmony, but into a highly integrated unity.

The colours are so deftly organised they do not lie on top

\*Such as the famous cope in the Victoria and Albert Museum which is of the same class.



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of one another as more or less detached elements, an effect too common in modern colour design, but by taking full advantage of their positions in the intricate pattern, they are, without being blurred or diluted, naturally and easily interpenetrated so that the living unity, essential in all arts, is created. The great carpets really are as single as a sonnet. A dominant tonality which, like a central theme, permeates and controls the whole is one device for achieving this unity. Each carpet thus has its distinct colour individuality: the deep yellow-enriched blue of the Ardabil\*; the clear sea-green of the Polish Branicki carpet; the rich sunlight gold of the Rogers Polonaise; the silvery pistache of the Kum carpets; the blue-crimson of the multiple medallion carpet of the Victoria and Albert,† each has a personal colour quality. In some of the carpets it is not a single tone that dominates but a balance of two, equally striking, as in the glowing scarlet and blue of the Milan Hunting carpet.‡ The unity of others is effected by the exact balance of a multiple tonality, as in the Vase carpets where there is a succession of large evenly distributed areas (Fig. 65); in others, notably in those of the Compartment type, there is a spaced recurrence of identically coloured areas, while in still others, notably some of the so-called Polonaise type, there is often only an intricately interwoven variety of colours.

The diffused dominant tone constitutes in some carpets an atmosphere, an enveloping air with a different quality of light from any that shines in this world. In this aura they exist in a realm apart, cut off from the mundane life in a mystic sphere of their own. So the Williams Tree carpet floats in a lucent greenish mist that is perfectly transparent but completely isolating, defining a transcendent plane of being, and there the starry beauty of the grove is suspended in a reality

\*Ill. F. Sarre and H. Trenkwald, *Old Oriental Carpets*, Vol. II, pl. 18-20.

†Sarre and Trenkwald, *op. cit.* pl. 15, 16.

‡Sarre and Trenkwald, *op. cit.* pl. 22, 23.

intense but impalpable, like the hour before the dawn.\*

Within the perfectly controlled unity of the dominant tone, the value of the specific colours is gauged with unfailing tact. The dynamic energy of each is felt with exquisite accuracy, and the more intense are held to their proper level by being adroitly diminished in area or by being mingled with the complementary, a device which, while it does to a slight degree tend to intensification, creates also by means of the perfect contrast an area or stream of neutral tone, a sort of mysterious, half-visible white light which heightens the sheen and gives an aerial perspective to an otherwise insistent colour. In still other cases the saturation is modified by surrounding or penetrating the area, especially in the case of certain deep scarlets, with tones of golden buff which cool the shade and impart to it a mellowness. The colours are also further mingled by intricate pattern movements which irresistibly entice the eye to a rhythmic sweep of the whole surface so that the tones, succeeding each other in a correctly modulated sequence, are automatically blended.

Some of the devices for securing colour balance are obvious. The deep crimson field of the Eastern Persian carpets is balanced by the complementary border in blue-green. Similarly, there are blue vase carpets with golden yellow borders. Quite as often the colour of the medallion will be exactly repeated in the corners and border, or certain colours in the field will be reversed in a corresponding pattern in the border, green vines on a red ground being balanced by red ones on green.

But there are also innumerable small devices that contribute to the perfection, each worthy of study. Thus, guard stripes are used often in a combination of complementaries so that they blend and neutralise at a little distance, forming an atmospheric boundary or a buffer zone between two strong, striving colours which would otherwise come into

\*Ill. Sarre and Trenkwald, *op. cit.* pl. 13.



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harsh collision. And a heavy colour, especially that of a medallion, is let down into a contrasting field by various kinds of marginations, delicate scrolls in the case of the North-west Persian medallion carpets, or various kinds of serrations or deep inlets. Or else a complex distribution of colours is tied together by a repetition of the dominant colour in tiny areas at small distances so that there is an effect of gradual interpenetration.

It is always a temptation to dally, fascinated by delicious texture and luxurious colour ; but one does not enter into the full quality of a carpet until one comprehends the intent and the design. For texture and colour are to the design only what rhyme is to the idea in poetry. All the sumptuous material can give only an elementary physical beauty and the colour with its resourceful variations and adroit combinations, while it does yield a richer quality of loveliness, also falls far short of the full æsthetic value. Beyond these, complementing them and deepening the significance of the art, is a beauty of meaning and pattern, exciting to the eye, indeed, but fully apprehensible only to the eye of the mind which searches far deeper levels. It is these deeper levels that we must explore if we are to understand Persian carpets as a fine art. All of the genius that had been plowed into the successive stages of Islamic ornament for nearly a thousand years, comes to a perfect expression in the greatest examples.

The first clue to the meaning of a carpet is its general theme, both of subject and of mood. As a rule the topic is some phase of the glories of this world, particularly as revealed in the flowers and the trees. Most Persian carpets are a celebration of the garden, the embodiment in permanent form of the beauties of blossoms and shrubbery, often with prowling beasts and fluttering birds (Fig. 57). Gardens were a passion with the Persians (*cf.* p. 203) and flower worship a cult (*cf.* p. 161). In the vari-coloured rug they thought to catch and hold the evanescent charms of the garden and

its blooms. As one of their own poets has said of an inspiring carpet:

" Proudly move by graceful fawn and to the garden go  
That the cypress may learn from thy stature how to  
win hearts"\*

The garden motif was employed and developed in an endless variety of ways.† Sometimes the theme seems to be animal combat (Fig. 58) or the hunt; but these exciting episodes always take place in a setting of luxuriant blossoms, as in fact they probably actually did, for many of the great hunts ended in a general *mêlée* in one of the vast walled parks. But whether the chase or the garden or both is the real theme, it is the treatment that counts and all subjects are in the last analysis alike in that they are regarded as material for decoration. It is not the full-blooded, substantial, plastic reality that is presented but the idea, albeit a highly sensuous idea, a vivid dream image, not the waking object (Fig. 59).

Thus the innumerable floral motifs of which the carpet designs are composed are not representations of vines and blossoms, but formalised patterns. The original perceptions have passed through the abstracting, synthesising, ordering alembic of the human mind and now issue as designs, realities of another world, the world of pure æsthetic illusion. So completely is the spirit of decoration established, that incongruities fatal in pictorial art are here without power to disturb us; we can see a horseman dashing by a peony relatively larger than a house without the least surprise. We are aware only of the animation of the silhouettes or are charmed by the graceful movement and rhythmical spacing. It is a new world into which we have entered, the world of Design; its elements are natural forms but their essence has been distilled.

\*Cf. Kendrick, *Guide to the Collection of Carpets in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, page 28.

†This problem will be discussed more fully in the *Survey of Persian Art*, both by André Godard and by the Author.



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In viewing a great carpet one immediately feels a pleasurable excitement from the intricate rhythms with their staccato accents and majestic pauses where the design hesitates in some well-poised ornament. The sense of a world to be explored gives a gratifying feeling of unexpended resources. But not until we have really unravelled the complex harmonies of line and movement do we discover the inner quality. Just as in a symphony those who follow only the major outlines in a glorious welter of sounds miss the constitutive interplay of voices and the subtle passage of evanescent themes from choir to choir, so also those who do not bother to trace the internal relations of a great carpet fail to see it as anything more than a handsome decoration.

These qualities are not by any means obvious or superficial. They must be searched for, and that, too, under the most favourable circumstances, for carpets more than any other works of Persian art are especially sensitive to their environment and conditions. The carpet itself must not be clouded by the centuries of accumulated dirt that so disfigures certain famous pieces. The quality of the light is all-important. The colour values alter with the light, one degree of intensity giving quite a different colour balance than another. In general our carpets are seriously underlighted and their tonality and colour composition are thereby distorted. The position of the carpet and the distance from the observer are also important. If one is standing on a large carpet one can revel in the texture and enjoy the colour, but it is quite difficult to comprehend its unity. Only when hung and seen at a distance is this fully possible.

It is often said that great carpets are more effective on the floor than on the wall, that were it not for the necessities of space and conservation, our museums would be better advised to spread than to hang their carpets, and at the Munich Exhibition many of the carpets were so displayed. This theory, however, though it has already become something

like a dogma, is, not the result of actual observation, but a more or less uncritical extension of the general principle that all decorative objects are better when seen in the place for which they were intended. Even were that principle universally true, however, some oriental carpets at least might be better seen hung, for they were not all made as floor coverings by any means. The miniatures show us carpets hanging from balconies and frequently erected as canopies.

Moreover, even in regard to the carpets intended for the floor, the principle is not conclusive. There is a great deal of ambiguity in the phrase, "made for a place." The designers certainly did not have in view the utility or position of the great carpets. Almost without exception the cartoons were the work of illuminators or miniature painters whose conceptions and specific patterns both were created in terms of verticality. It is significant in this respect that many of the typical carpet compositions were used also for wall panels. Such designs, when seen on the floor, are necessarily greatly distorted. The patterns are crowded one against another, or else longitudinal elements are compressed and latitudinal ones expanded, so that they are just as far from realising their true design character as a manuscript frontispiece looked at obliquely. In fact, the satisfactory and correct way to see one of these carpets is to stand away from it so that one has the same relation to it in proportion to its size that the eye has to a book when looking at a page illustration.

An elementary acquaintance with the fundamental principles of design assists greatly in the interpretation of any of the great carpets, for the feeling of richness which they convey is attained by a strict adherence to several of these principles. The most important is the method of combining a succession of pattern systems. The great carpets are never composed merely in one plane but consist of superimposed orders, one over the other in a way not easy to follow, which no other textile designers have ever mastered, even when working



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from Persian models. A superficial enrichment, especially common in the West, is obtained by complicating a single pattern with a multiplication of finely divided detail. The result is curiously shallow and ineffective and, to Persian taste, trivial (*cf.* p. 184). The enrichment of Islamic design, particularly in Persian art, consists not in the mere accumulation of surface patterns, but in the development and synthesis of subordinate systems each with its own character consistently maintained, each contrasting with the other in all possible ways. Only when we see a great carpet as a chord of individual schemes co-ordinated and organised, can we realise its full æsthetic worth.

The means by which these integrated schemes are inter-related are ingenious and skilful to a remarkable degree. The primary problem is to keep each one consistent and distinct, both in colour and movement, and yet maintain perfectly harmonious relations between them. The systems of movement must coincide at given points, and however much they cross and recross, collide and evade, by some inherent destiny they must arrive together in a resolution that gratifyingly terminates the long suspense.

There are various means of keeping a secondary scheme in its proper place. It is generally planned on a smaller scale. The lines are finer and less obtrusive, and the colour is usually nearer to the background tone so that the pattern is not only less conspicuous but also lighter in weight. Sometimes these secondary or tertiary systems are so delicately suppressed that they are, if not invisible, commonly overlooked, yet they make their contribution none the less. In the background of the Vase carpets, with their ponderous and majestic flowers, there is often a double or even triple shadowy ogival lattice of stems. Sometimes a static system will be contrasted with one in rapid movement. Thus in the Ardabil carpet the dainty blossoms are distributed with random grace almost like the stars of Heaven. The blossoms themselves are fixed,

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but spiral tendrils sway about them in a poetic dance of infinite grace.

There are also scores of other nice adjustments that enter into the carefully calculated whole; the weight and mass of the medallion which must be held in an exact balance, the expansive power of a coiled spiral, the energy of position of a motif, the relation of field to border, all must be exactly gauged so that the total composition may have stability and repose. To realise all these elements and appreciate the values that control each of them is to begin to understand great carpet design.

Such an analysis of colour and pattern is essential to an understanding of a great carpet, but too formal to touch the deepest secret of the beauty. No knowledge of the rules of a sonnet can guarantee a perfect result. The original idea is the work of a genius, an idea set aflame by intense feeling, expanded by a lively and resourceful imagination. Such qualities, indispensable to all artistic creation, come partly from a rich and disciplined tradition but in the greatest achievements they are even more the result of the incalculable emotion, the high and intense feeling that marks genius.

The subtlety and complexity of the designs is doubtless due to the long development that the art had in Persia and the gradual accumulation of tradition through centuries. For the weaving of carpets was an important art even in pre-Christian times. What they were like then we can only conjecture, but a description is to be found in every book on the subject, of a carpet of the seventh century A.D. that decorated the banquet hall of the Palace of Ctesiphon in the time of Khusrau II. It represented a garden in full bloom, with canals, trees, flowers and birds worked in the most precious materials and studded with gems. It was planned to capture and hold the glory of Spring to compensate for the dark cold rains of Winter.

We know also, from documentary references, that animal



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carpets were made at Hira and Numanyeh, at least from the tenth century, but both the Khusrau carpet and those of Hira are generally supposed to have been either embroidered or woven in a simple tapestry stitch like *khilims*. There is, however, no evidence for this assumption and a good deal against it. Even if they were in a flat weave rather than in pile knotting, it is more probable that they followed the complicated technique of some of the fragments found at Fustat, for only these more intricate forms of weaving would have the body and durability necessary for a very large floor covering.

Moreover, there is no obvious reason why these could not have been pile carpets; for pile carpet weaving was well advanced in the first century A.D. Professor Kozloff brought back from his famous find in Mongolia, fragments of pile carpet more solid and thick than anything that we have from the sixteenth or seventeenth century. It is true that the strands are not fastened into the warp and weft in accordance with modern systems of knotting, but this is a technical distinction only. It would have been perfectly easy for this style of pile weaving to reach Persia from the Far East through the channels of the silk trade which conveyed many ideas between the two countries in the first centuries of our era, and that it did get to the west fairly early is proved by a pile fragment in the Arab Museum in Cairo. This is a tenth century piece, as is shown by the style of the Kufic inscription and the technique is almost identical with that of the Kozloff pieces.

The point cannot now be settled, nor can we do more than guess at the character of the carpets in the Samanid and Seljuk times; but in view of the close interrelations between the arts which then obtained, it is legitimate to infer from some of the textiles and the stucco and faience patterns what the carpets looked like, particularly as some of these patterns, especially some noted by Dr. Riefstahl in Asia Minor, are emphatically textile in character so that if they were not translated into carpets we can only say, more's the pity.

The continuity of themes through this long period is abundantly proved both by documentary references to carpets of animal combat and the hunt, and by reflections in contemporary pottery. Thus a Garous bowl in the collection of Parish-Watson shows an elephant wearing a saddle blanket with an animal decoration. This blanket may have been an embroidery, but the necessity for durability in elephant trappings suggests that it ought rather to have been the soundest fabric the weavers of the time could supply. Again, since some of the carpets of the sixteenth century have elaborate medallions almost identical with those on some of the pottery of the twelfth and thirteenth century, it seems reasonable that the carpet weavers did not wait five centuries to see how admirably adapted this motif is to carpets.

We know the carpets of the second half of the fifteenth century by the extremely clear and accurate renditions in the miniatures. Many of these carpets, usually rather small, are in a style continued in the sixteenth century, probably at Tabriz. They seem to have had a beauty of colour and design never surpassed in later times.

The existing masterpieces were all produced in the sixteenth century. The revival of national enthusiasm that infused every level of life at that time with new zest and confidence was reflected in a series of majestic carpets that were never rivalled elsewhere, worthy of the highest ideals of Persian art.

The identification of the great Persian carpets is important, not merely for the convenience of a definite nomenclature but because it is essential to the understanding of the evolution of textile design in Persia and for determining the relations of the carpets to the other arts and to the local culture.

The classification by designs, so acutely carried out by Dr. Bode and Dr. Kuehnelt,\* the only method available at the

\*Wilhelm Bode, revised by Ernst Kuehnelt, *Antique Rugs from the Near East*, New York, 1922.



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time, has led to a designation by pattern rather than by provenance, so that we hear of Tree Carpets, Hunting Carpets and Vase Carpets. But these types were created at one time and another in many different centres and there are often more significant relations between pieces that fall into different classes under this method than between pieces in the same class.

The identification by provenance is exceedingly difficult for the native literature tells us almost nothing, the Arab geographers are vague and the European travellers, while they were often impressed by the beauty of carpets that they saw, are seldom specific. Moreover, such an imperial art tended to become cosmopolitan, for neither distance nor cost restrained the ambitions of the royal patrons and the court was supplied with the finest creations from every province. The success of one style inspired rival looms to copy or to attempt improvements so that the patterns are widely distributed and mingled and each effort is apt to be special and individual.

We do know from various records that in the great days carpets were woven in Tabriz, Hamadan, Shuster, Kerman, Yazd, Joshaghan, Kashan, Sabzewar, Tus and Herat, but just what carpets were woven where is next to impossible to say now. It is fairly easy, by means of stylistic and technical analyses, to divide the existing carpets into reasonably well-defined groups. It is possible also to assign some of these groups to some of these towns, but there are rug weaving localities to which we can assign no types and there are types for which we have as yet no localities.

To North-west Persia, probably the vicinity of Karabagh, can be assigned with a good deal of confidence, a group of medallion carpets of rather simple well-planned design (Fig. 60). A few of these seem to have been developed to the utmost limits of the technique then available, with magnificent cartoons prepared by illuminators or miniaturists. The

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Milan Hunting carpet and a beautiful carpet in perfect condition owned by Sir Joseph Duveen are noteworthy examples, obviously especially made for the court. It is this type from which the Turkish Ushak rugs were derived, and at the beginning they followed the Persian models very closely in both colour and pattern.

A second type from the same general region which Dr. Martin with good reason assigns to Tabriz are smaller, more elaborate in design and finer in weave (Fig. 61). They are usually marked by a round medallion and beautiful systems of arabesques. Green is the colour one remembers in connection with this group. The most famous examples are the Baker carpet at the Metropolitan Museum,\* a quite similar piece in the Paris Musée des Arts Décoratifs† and the Lobanov carpet in the Hermitage.

A highly individual and particularly sumptuous group of silk carpets was probably woven in Kashan (Fig. 61). In general, the ground is an intense crimson. They frequently have distinguished quatrefoil scalloped medallions, arabesques of exceptional elegance and often natural or fantastic animals. The outstanding examples are the carpet in the Musée des Gobelins; one given by Dr. Bode to the Schloss Museum in Berlin; another given by Peytel to the Louvre‡; one in the collection of Mr. Joseph Widener of Philadelphia; three in the Altman Collection in the Metropolitan Museum§; and one given by Mr. Edsel Ford to the Detroit Museum. The perfect mastery of the pattern, with drawing that any painter might envy, the fineness of the weaving, the luxury of the surface and the intense yet mellow colours bring these carpets near to the height of the art and their merits are sufficient to atone for occasional deficiencies in planning which

\*Sarre and Trenkwald, *op. cit.* pl. 33, 34.

†Koechlin-Migeon, *Oriental Art*, pl. lxxxvi.

‡Sarre and Trenkwald, *op. cit.* pl. 40.

§Sarre and Trenkwald, *op. cit.* pl. 39.



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seem to be the result of an unadjusted combination of cartoons.\*

From Eastern Persia there came, in the sixteenth century, a group of luxurious animal carpets and prayer rugs, nearly all on a field of deep crimson, somewhat like that of the Kashan carpets. The most notable examples are a pair, one of which, the so-called Emperor Carpet,† is owned by Mrs. Rockefeller McCormick of Chicago, while the pendant is still in the Austrian State Collection.‡ Another carpet of this group, but without animals, made at the beginning of the seventeenth century, has long been one of the chief treasures of the Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashad (Fig. 64). The patterns of these carpets are built up on double and triple systems of spiral vines with lotus and peony flowers and other blossoms interspersed. The Austrian pair are magnificently enriched with various real and fanciful animals, often engaged in furious combat. The borders of this type are particularly magnificent. Only that of the Austrian silk Hunting Carpet, which is by common consent one of the great documents in the history of the decorative arts, could be thought to surpass them. The ingenious way in which swinging vines and great palmettes are united and yet separated by complicated rhythms, terminating in majestic corner designs, represents a high watermark in carpet designing. The scheme has a quality and authority which is a result of long planning and experiment, for we find it clearly anticipated in its major outlines, especially in the planning of the corner ornaments, as far back as the fourteenth century, for example in the beautiful stucco mihrab of the Masjid-i-Jâmi of Isfahan that was made by order of Sultan Chodabenda Shah.

\*For a discussion of the Altman pieces, cf. Riefstahl, *Art in America*, Vol. IV, p. 147.

†Not to be confused with the silk Hunting Carpet that formerly belonged to the Emperor of Austria and is now in the State Collection. Ill. Sarre and Trenkwald, *op. cit.* Vol. I, pl. 1-5.

‡Sarre and Trenkwald, *op. cit.* pl. 6-8.

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This small group of sixteenth century Eastern Persian carpets was succeeded by a mass production following the same general format (Fig. 63). These carpets are commonly called Isfahans, but the centre of weaving was most probably Herat, for Adam Olearius says in 1635, about the time that these carpets were being most abundantly produced, that it was at Herat that the finest carpets were being woven.\* More widely known and more extravagantly praised than any other type, they are often supposed to represent the acme of the art, but while the best examples do achieve a combination of stateliness and elegance, of technical competence and glowing colour that entitle them to high rank, this is true only of a relatively small proportion of the existing pieces. Later examples, while often attractive floor decorations, rarely attain artistic importance. The very fact that they were produced in such numbers and repeated, over such a long period, essentially the same design doomed them to increasing inferiority, for great designing requires, first, time for reflection and experiment which is rarely granted where quantity is the aim; and, second, it calls for intense intellectual and emotional effort. With repetition the necessary tension slackens and the design becomes commonplace in conception and lifeless and then clumsy in detail. Because there are so many so-called Isfahan rugs of each succeeding decade, all adhering to the same basic scheme, a consecutive series of them provides a most instructive demonstration of the degeneration of design that marked the decline of carpet-weaving in the seventeenth century.

The growing demand for carpets at the Indian courts, and especially for merchandise for the European markets, led to the establishment of looms in North India which produced the same type in immense quantities. At the beginning, apparently, both the overseers and the weavers were

\*Adam Olearius, *Relation de Voyage en Moscovie, Tartarie et Perse*. Paris 1639, p. 526.



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Persians, but the carpets soon take on a distinctly Indian character. The double system of patterns was suppressed, the characteristic enrichment of cloud bands, particularly those set at oblique angles, and the small Chinese cloud forms, as well as many other tricks of design and weaving typical of the Persian work, were omitted. The patterns frequently are rigid and a rather disagreeable rose tone, which had been used sparingly and with discrimination by the Persians, is given a larger place than commends itself to Western taste.

As for true Isfahan carpets, strictly speaking there are none. No contemporary document saving one single cryptic sentence from a careless observer, ascribes carpet-weaving to Isfahan and there is, on the other hand, definite evidence to the contrary. Thus Raphael du Mans\* specifically affirms that only a few poor carpets were being made there and says that the weavers could scarcely make a living. The extremely high lime content of the Isfahan water makes the proper washing and dyeing of wool there an expensive and unsatisfactory process. Even with all the resources of modern chemistry the water cannot be made adequate to the finest results. Where there is a great carpet industry, there is fine water. This is a basic principle for the identification of rug-weaving centres.

However, there is one group of carpets that might reasonably be designated Isfahan because they were woven under the influence of the court, primarily at the time of Shah Abbas the Great, expressed the court taste and were controlled in design, at least to some extent, by court artists and the royal patrons (Fig. 65). These are the carpets usually known as Vase carpets, for in many of them we find a vase holding sprays of fruit blossoms. It is, however, an unfortunate name because there are many of the type in which the vase does not appear. The most typical design is a sequence of grandiose flower forms set on an almost invisible ogival

\*Raphael du Mans, *l'Etat de la Perse*, 1661.

lattice, on either a red or a blue ground. Others have elaborate patterns of arabesques, and still others delightful *mille fleurs* on a rose ground, such as an exquisite little piece in the Kelekian Collection (Fig. 66).

At their finest these carpets are, in the judgment of many shrewd critics, artistically the most satisfying of all Persian carpets. They were woven, by the common consent of all local traditions, in a lovely little mountain town called Joshaghan Ghali, or Joshaghan the Carpet Town, on the southwest slopes of the Kohrud Mountains, commanding a wide and delightful view of the plain that opens towards Isfahan sixty odd miles away. Because of its beautiful location, its delicious water and fair orchards it became a favourite summer place for the nobles of Isfahan. It was the carpets made here, with their heavy double warp and regal patterns, that for the most part adorned the palaces of Isfahan. Only a few have been found in mosques and very few reached Europe. They were specifically a Persian product, conceived in the Persian taste and made for Persian connoisseurs.

Joshaghan Ghali was, apparently, also the seat of manufacture of another group of carpets all but two of which have, on the contrary, been found in Europe and which were almost all made as presents for European monarchs or princes, done in a style conceived to flatter and impress their alien taste. These are the so-called Polonaise carpets, luxurious creations in silk and metal thread, materials that make a lavish display that smacks just a little of the desire to impress the foreign potentates. The name Polonaise became attached to them because the first ones exhibited, in the Paris Exposition of 1887, came from the Czartorisky Collection and were presumed to be products of the Mershewski factory in Poland which did produce rugs, though of quite a different character, and also silk girdles in imitation of the Persian striped scarves.\*

\*Cf. Author's article on Polonaise Rug, *The International Studio*, Vol. LXXVI, p. 535.



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Having been made perhaps primarily to please the Europeans, these carpets are somewhat different in both pattern and colour from any other Persian type, though there are abundant indications of their Persian authorship. The designs are, for the most part, rich, cold, and although sometimes intricate, a little obvious when compared to the great styles of the sixteenth century. The drawing is relaxed to broad, luxurious rhythms. There is rarely, saving in the earliest pieces, anything brisk, alert or sharp. Far more colours are used, in the elaborate examples, than in any other style of rug and, save for a few darker shades for accent, or an occasional panel in deep crimson, they are almost all in high-keyed tones; turquoise, pale green, orange, light yellow, saffron and vermillion. In the inferior examples, of which there are some hundreds, the colours are weak and confused and the drawing crowded and clumsy, but in the finest ones there are unexpectedly novel and gorgeous colour harmonies that give them genuine splendour. The metal thread is so lavishly used that often half the surface is silver and gold, and when well preserved, as it often is, the effect of opulence surpasses anything ever wrought in the textile art.

There is a small class of khilim or tapestry woven rugs usually associated with the so-called Polonaise type (Fig. 67). These exhibit often an even more lavish use of silver and gold than the Polonaise and, thanks to their flat, hard surface, the designs are uniformly more clean and crisp. In general the colours are superlatively clear and fresh; deep crimson, light emerald, bright turquoise are admirably foiled by the clear gold and still bright silver. These carpets were probably woven at Jehaz, a town between Yazd and Kerman.

As the wealth of Persia declined after the death of Shah Abbas, all the other looms seem to have diminished in importance except those of Joshaghan. On account of their

proximity to the court they maintained their prosperity into the eighteenth century and weavers even migrated there from other centres. The last great demonstration of the art is a set of carpets made in Joshaghan for the tomb of Shah Abbas II in Kum (Fig. 68). The tomb itself was covered by one of the Polonaise type but with vases in the design. For the floor there is a series of derivations of the later Vase carpet style.

The eighteenth century Joshaghan rugs have a firm texture, pure, soft and well-composed colours and clear drawing, but they are somewhat perfunctory in pattern. The design consists always of a sequence of floral motifs, usually with many sprays of fruit blossoms, almost always on a cherry-red ground with a narrow, dark blue border.

In Herat, also, creditable carpets were still being made, notably a fine edition of the rosette and leaf pattern which in the eighteenth century was open and well spaced though later the design became crowded and confused. These eighteenth century carpets suffer only by comparison with their classical predecessors. In themselves they are altogether charming.

A wide range of carpets produced in the Eastern and Southern Caucasus region might fairly be classed as Persian also, for the district was politically part of Persia through the Middle Ages, except for brief occupations by the Turks, and it was Persia that furnished the ideals and models for the local arts (*cf.* p. 239). Nearly all the important Persian carpets were known and copied there, including the Northwest Persia medallion type, Herats and Vase carpets. For the most part the technique was very coarse, so that the fluid designs of the originals took on a certain geometrical rigidity and angularity of outline, but this gave to the finest of them, such as the Dragon carpets, an emphatic, challenging force. The weavers, who probably for the most part worked without cartoons, as is shown by an analysis of the carpets them-



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selves, contributed a good deal of their own native style, particularly in the rich and intense colour schemes which are distinctly different from the Persian prototypes.

The largest and best-known group are the so-called Dragon carpets which were made in Kuba and some of the surrounding villages, principally in the seventeenth century, with somewhat coarsened derivatives in the eighteenth century. By a strange comedy of errors these were, for a long time, thought to be Armenian, a view that has now been generally given up, despite a recent energetic attempt to revive it.\*

With the coming of the nineteenth century with its poverty, economic and political disorganisation and the domination of the culturally uncouth court of the Kajars, carpets of high artistic merit ceased to be made in Persia. In a few cities technical competence was kept alive and the colours remained good, but artistic understanding all but vanished. In Herat, Kerman, Joshaghan, Feraghan, Bijar and Tabriz Middle and Low School carpets were still made of beautiful material and colour, admirable if uninspired examples of a decorative art. Various nomadic tribes in mountain villages also continued their time-old standards, producing some genuinely handsome fabrics, of which a delightful Bakhtiari in the Victoria and Albert Museum may serve as a good example.

But by the second half of the nineteenth century even these rugs had seriously deteriorated. The weavers in the major centres but dimly recall the classical styles. Misunderstood patterns are dissolved in meaningless intricacies, beautiful motifs are recalled only by clumsy vestigial distortions, problems of arrangement are neglected or confused and although these carpets remain incomparably superior to any type of floor decoration devised elsewhere, they are so far from the standards of earlier days that it is painful to see them together.

\*Further discussion of this problem will appear in the forthcoming Survey of Persian Art.

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Yet though the art has to many seemed thoroughly doomed, there are now encouraging signs of a revival. The government has already taken a lively interest in the problem and in various centres certain foreign manufacturers and native weavers alike are taking conscientious and intelligent measures to recover the ancient glories of an art so important for Persia's fame and wealth. Skill and industry there is aplenty; some of the lost dye secrets have been recovered, the materials employed are in many quarters being improved and designers are refreshing their inspiration by studies of the old carpets that remain in Persia and by adapting patterns from the old tile panels, especially those of the mosques of Isfahan, patterns particularly adapted to rugs because the work of the same artists who planned the great carpets. A more discriminating taste on the part of European and American buyers and a willingness to pay for necessarily expensive artistic quality when it appears, will provide the final essential to the revival of an art the world cannot afford to lose.



## *Chapter VI*

### *TEXTILES*

HERODOTUS was impressed by the sumptuous raiment of the Persians and Solomon was never so gloriously arrayed as the Persian Kings from Cyrus to Shah Abbas. Herodotus' words are confirmed by hints in the Bible and the figural reliefs of the Achæmenians show garments that are simple but rich in colour and of beautiful drapery.

During Sasanian times the textile art touched one of the high marks in history. Inspired partly, perhaps, by Chinese models and technique, encouraged by the lavish patronage of Rome, and flattered by Byzantine imitators, the master weavers did their utmost. Kings who conceived themselves the surrogates of God and hence regarded their persons as especially sacrosanct, demanded fitting raiment and apparently gave ample support to the industry. Damasks of exquisite fineness with striking heraldic patterns in a stately symmetry, became all the rage from Europe to China and left a permanent mark on the textile art of the world, setting for subsequent weaving in Persia a high and inspiring standard.

Less than two score fragments of these silks have been preserved and these only by beneficent chance, principally in western tombs or treasuries. That some of these pieces were interwoven with gold we know from Chinese records but none now exist. The design of these Sasanian damasks commonly consists of circles, the circumference often ornamented with pearl spots, though a very fine example such as the famous piece in the Schloss Museum\* in Berlin, may have a series of minor circles on the band, each enclosing an animal. This Berlin piece, perhaps the largest and most sumptuous of all, shows a richly caparisoned cavalier under a highly stylized palm tree. Sometimes in place of the circles

\*Ill. Otto Von Falke, *Decorative Silks*, fig. 69.

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there are relatively small octagonal panels. Within these units are horsemen, usually hunters, or animals or birds, symmetrically confronted. As many as a half-dozen units may be included in one repeat, but they are arranged in such a perfectly patterned mosaic that there is never a sense of either crowding or confusion. Plant motifs are confined to a highly-conventionalised tree that is sometimes placed between the confronted figures and a conventional flower spray, probably a rose, that sometimes decorates the frame of the rondel or panel. Such damasks are mentioned in Chinese records as early as the sixth century, for the Chinese saw the Persian Emperors so cloaked. They were early imported into China and monarchs intermediate between Persia and China paid tribute to their Chinese overlords in Persian textiles.\*

It has been thought that in the Achæmenian times the Persian colour scale was rather limited and harsh, at least such seems to be the evidence of the polychrome architecture. However this may be, by Sasanian times the Persians had demonstrated their mastery of rich and sophisticated colour harmonies. These Sasanian textiles are not brilliant, but they are very impressive. The noble Berlin piece is on a ground of midnight blue, with the figures and ornamentation in lighter blue, crimson, and a golden yellow. The Dragon piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum is in delicious tones of fresh green. The Saint Cunebert textile in Cologne is in a fine crimson, blue, green and white.† As far as we can tell, the colour schemes of other peoples at this time were immeasurably inferior. Those of Rome for example were meagre and obvious, and it is no wonder that the later Roman grandees indulged in ruinous rivalries for the acquisition of these aristocratic textiles.

The rich and delicate damasks were not, however, the only textiles of note produced in Persia at this time. A single

\*Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*, p. 488.

†Ill. Von Falke, *op. cit.* fig. 59.



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fragment of tapestry, now in the Hermitage, with a typical heraldic bird, similar to one that decorates a Sasanian damask in the Vatican library,\* wrought on a scarlet ground, is the sole witness of the early mastery in Persia of this important technique which the Persians perhaps acquired from their Egyptian conquests. They probably developed this type of weaving extensively, judging from the documentary references to wall hangings in the palaces.

The textile art did not suffer from the Arabic conquest. Him whom the Caliph delighted to honour, was decked in gorgeous robes until this custom necessitated an extensive manufactory as an adjunct to the palace whether of the Caliph, the Emperor, or the Prince. Fine weaves were needed, moreover, not only for robes of honour but also for cushion covers, wall hangings, curtains, military banners, and horse trappings. Literary references and fragments recovered in Mesopotamia, and in far greater abundance, in Egypt, show how important and extensive the textile arts were during the period of the Caliphate.

Remains from Persia itself are again painfully meagre, always for the same dreadful reason, the Mogul cataclysm. In general, those few examples that are left continue the Sasanian tradition. The most famous damask of the early Islamic period is the great elephant stuff in the Berlin Museum which can with confidence be dated before the ninth century.† This is almost pure Sasanian in style. By the tenth century the typical Persian scheme of the enclosing circle was disappearing, and the famous elephant stuff of the Louvre which can be dated about 950 is in the form of a panel with wide borders.‡

Although the elephant stuff has somewhat broken away from the rather hieratic Sasanian tradition, it is still formal

\*Ill. Von Falke, *op. cit.* fig. 66.

†Ill. Von Falke, *op. cit.* fig. 95.

‡Ill. Von Falke, *op. cit.* fig. 93.

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and sedate and a long way from the more naturalistic styles. These are generally supposed to be due to the influx of Chinese influence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but there is specific documentary evidence that at this time also silks that were decorated with flowers were in common use. In the tenth century we read that members of the court at Ray were garbed in many coloured clothes, that light flowered silks composed whole costumes, and that a favourite poet, az-Za'farani, asked the Vizier for a present of one of these costumes.\* Again, in the year 1001 the Caliph of Baghdad was given, as a propitiatory gift to smooth the way to a coveted title, ten Susan flowered silks.† These flowered silks evidently came from Eastern Persia also, as Ibn Haukal reports that Marv exported flowered silks to Tabaristan.‡

It is impossible to classify the few fragments that remain from early Islamic times, but we do know from contemporary documents where they were made. Herat turned out a fine gold brocade§ that was frequently cited in contemporary literature and Nishapur|| produced two styles, one called *kimkha* and the other *nakh*. Tabriz made cendal, a sumptuous kind of silk.\*\* Sultanieh was evidently also an important manufacturing centre.†† Cendal was produced there and much raw silk was received from the silk-producing regions.

Again, there is but one known example of the tapestry of this period. This is a heavy silk textile showing on a blue green ground a crowned sphinx in the coils of a serpent, ren-

\*A. Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams*, Heidelberg, 1922, p. 96, quoting *Jat.* III, 33, 4 *Jaq. Irsad*, II, 320.

†Mez, *op. cit.* p. 134, quoting Ibn al Gauzi, 184b.

‡Mez, *op. cit.* p. 436n, quoting Ibn Haukal, 316.

§Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce du Levant* II, p. 697, citing Ibn Battuta, *Clavijo*, *Mirkond*, *Barbaro*.

||Heyd, *op. cit.* II, pp. 697, 699, citing Ibn Battuta.

\*\*Heyd, *op. cit.* II, p. 697, citing Ibn Battuta II, 311; III, 81; *Clavijo*, 113, 118f; *Mirkond*, *Barbaro*, 33f.

††Heyd, *op. cit.* p. 701, citing *Clavijo*, p. 114.



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dered in red. The weave is a complex modification of the true tapestry technique.

The delicacy and complication of this weaving is wholly in the character of the period, for at this time there was evident a general tendency toward technical virtuosity all over the Islamic world, probably due to competition for the favour of the Abbasid court at Baghdad. The pictorial art, on the other hand, was almost wholly in abeyance as there were no gifted miniature painters to produce the designs. Consequently, the weavers had, apparently, no better models than the rather archaic pottery or metal work that was still continuing the Sasanian tradition. Hence, while the technique is highly sophisticated, the pattern remains naive. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, this piece has the archaic merits of simplicity and directness. It proclaims the eternal story of the conflict between good and evil that in its infinite variations has been one of the principal themes of Persian artists for thousands of years.

Fragments that have made their way into European treasuries show that the textile art continued to flourish, but until the coming of the Seljuks, despite finesse of technique and beauty of colour, they are not artistically important. *Æsthetically* more successful than the pictorial textiles were the inscription banners with the splendid Kufic script that was at this moment at the height of its austere beauty. These are rendered in white on red or black on red or yellow on blue. This new style was thoroughly understood by the weavers and thoroughly mastered. These are not yet fully appreciated in the west where the *æsthetic* value of calligraphy is not understood but there is an exceptionally fine example in the Institute of Arts in Detroit, and a magnificent whole coat with two kinds of Kufic letters on bright blue, evidently from the same place and time as the Detroit piece, in the Textile Museum of Washington.

By the end of the twelfth century we meet a wholly new

dispensation. Whether this was due to Chinese influence brought in by the Seljuks or to a progressive refinement of all the crafts of the time under this most notable dynasty we cannot say, but the materials recovered from graves at Ray prove that once more Persian designers and weavers had attained one of the highest levels in the history of the art. These sheer silk damasks have very simple colour schemes. Two especially fine examples in the collection of Mr. Robert Woods Bliss are rendered in white on white, the pattern revealed by the change of the weave. Others are in violet on cream. They are woven with incredible fineness and are so light it seems they would disappear at a breath. The drawing achieves a degree of exquisiteness and delicacy never surpassed in any silk. The old Sasanian themes still survive, circles enclosing derivations of the tree of life with confronted birds or animals, but they are on a much smaller scale, as a rule, and are interpreted with a lighter touch (Fig. 69). Occasionally there are *personnages* such as the figure of a woman, probably Bibi gar Banou, Queen of Ray, on the two pieces in the Bliss Collection.

At the same time we find the first rendition in textiles of the newly developed Islamic geometric style with complex polygons and irregular compartments enclosed by entrelacs worked out with splendid force and ingenuity. The old and the new is combined in a fragment belonging to Indjoudjian, of Paris, in which an entrelac compartment is filled with the paired figures in the derived Sasanian style. Kufic inscriptions also appear in this type of design, but they are now introduced only as decorative details in small panels. The shafts of the letters in the finest examples are as thin and firm as if drawn with a mechanical drawing pen.

Proto-Islamic motifs are here revived, too, and friezes of running animals engaged in scrolling foliage reappear with a new selection of beasts that bespeak the Seljuk interest in hunting. One of the principal centres of weaving at this time



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seems to have been Ray, for Mr. Rowland Read has found there numbers of very light loom weights; but it is certain that silks were also made in other places whose products are not yet properly identified—for example, Ardistan,\* where a great deal of silk was manufactured as early as the tenth century, and probably Sari,† where there was a textile industry also in the tenth century.

Printed silk fabrics of the same designs as the brocades were produced in some quantity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They simulated the damasks reasonably well, and of course, were infinitely quicker and less expensive to make. An interesting example is in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. A very early example of this type, probably tenth century, in the Musée de Tissus in Lyons, shows large circles in fawn and ivory on a rather faded green blue. A spotted hawk is holding a sparrow, and there are a lion and deer quite in the style that appears on some of the so-called Gabri faience.

Of the Persian textiles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries we know very little. No doubt they were influenced by an increasing importation of Chinese motifs and workmen which followed the repeated incursions of the Moguls and the opening of safe traffic on all the old caravan routes to the Far East.

There is one outstanding group of brocades of the period with Persian affiliations that is something of a problem. Of these, the finest is a group of eight vestments, formerly in the Marienkirche in Dantzic, and now in the Museum there. Some of these are heavily brocaded in gold on a plain ground, one very fine one has the brocade patterns arranged in varicoloured stripes. The gold brocading is very massive, the patterns deep cut, and in some there are emphatically rendered brocaded inscriptions, one mentioning "The Sultan—

\*Guy Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. 208, quoting from Istakhri.

†Guy Le Strange, *op. cit.*, p. 370, quoting from Mukaddassi.

the Wise." The most important motifs in the decoration are a vigorously drawn lotus and ogival palmettes with a flame-like fringe, a pattern that was developed with great enthusiasm in Western Asia after the fourteenth century and which had already been anticipated in some earlier pottery. A number of fragments of this style of brocade are scattered in various museums, including an admirable one with animals in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

It is usual to ascribe striped stuffs to Western Asia, Baghdad, Syria and Arabia, but there is no reason to believe that this basic textile formula was not equally appreciated in Persia. In the period from which we have a quantity of examples, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we find an extensive development of stripes and we know that the device of parallel bands carrying alternately inscriptions and patterns, such as appears on one of the Dantzig pieces and the Victoria and Albert fragment, is quite Persian, appearing as early as the twelfth century, for the Bobrinsky silver-encrusted bronze kettle in the Hermitage dated 1165 gives much the same effect as these brocades. Indeed the scheme of this bronze with the alternate lines of inscriptions and of animals is essentially identical with that of the Victoria and Albert piece. Muqqadassi specifically mentions striped stuffs that were made in Ray in the tenth century.\*

It has frequently been suggested that these pieces were woven in China for the western market, on the ground that while the pattern has a western Asiatic quality, there are traces of Chinese technique. On the other hand, an attribution to Syria or Egypt has also been advocated. The Dantzig vestments have been attributed to Persia also. One of the arguments for the western attribution has been the form of the lotus which is very much like that adopted in Egypt in the early fourteenth century, for which El Nasr had such an enthusiasm that it was called the Nasiri flower. This form of

\*Guy Le Strange, *op. cit.*, p. 370, quoting from Mukaddassi.



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the lotus was transmitted from the East via Persia, and the Persians made quite as much use of it as the Egyptians. It appears with great frequency and with perfect beauty in fourteenth century stucco, such as that in the Mausoleum of Haroun ar-Rashid at Tus, of which a fragment is in the Pennsylvania Museum, and the lotus was never more charmingly rendered than in the panel across the top of the stucco mihrab of Sultan Uljaitu in the Masjid-i-Jâmi of Isfahan (*cf.* p. 41) dated 1310.

It has also been held that Sultan is a peculiarly western title, but it was equally common in Persia, particularly in the fourteenth century and was the accepted designation for Ilkhan princes. But we are not confined to general considerations. There was one prince who ruled in Mazanderan in the fourteenth century, approximately at the same time that the Dantzig brocades were made, whose accepted designation was "the Sultan—the Wise."

How is it possible to have such a combination and balance of Chinese, Syrian, Egyptian, and Persian elements? Chinese, Syrian, western and Persian influences came together at this time at one great and very productive centre, Samarkand. The lavish court of Tamerlane stimulated an enormous production of textiles for the Lord of the World, and his wives and courtiers required the richest stuffs, not only for robes and mantles, cushions and carpets, but actually to build their palaces; for they dwelt, not in brick and stone, but in mansions entirely fabricated of priceless silks.\* These were characterised by very heavy gold brocading, and some of them were woven in stripes.† To be sure, some of the silks used in Samarkand were imported from China, but the best Chinese grades were not brocaded but plain.‡ For the weaving of the brocades Tamerlane had created his own industry

\*Clavijo, *Embassy*, pp. 226-268, *passim*.

†*Op. cit.* p. 239.

‡*Op. cit.* p. 288 f.

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in Samarkand, doubtless with some Chinese workers, but also with craftsmen brought from Damascus.\* Here were made zaytuni and kincobs, crapes, taffetas and tercenals. It seems most probable that these ambiguous brocades in which the east and west of the oriental world are commingled, were fashioned in the city where east and west had been brought together to exalt the glory of the great Conqueror.

The fifteenth century, though an age of political uncertainty and confusion, saw in the petty states and dynasties into which Persia was divided, the development of some of the important arts to a high degree of perfection. Under the influence of great bibliophiles such as Shah Rukh, the nephew of Tamerlane, miniature painting, illumination and book cover designing attained a superlative quality. This was soon reflected in the work of the weavers, and at the beginning of the sixteenth century the brocades took on a pictorial quality that showed their close dependence on the work of the painters. Although the old decorative traditions still fundamentally controlled all the patterns, Chinese motifs and, more especially, some elements of Chinese style, were now added.

We are not left wholly to surmise concerning the textiles of this period because the contemporary miniatures are sufficiently detailed to give us a good idea of the principal types, the commonest of which were plain brocades, rose, salmon, pale green or blue, covered with repeating patterns of charmingly drawn animals in small scale, swimming ducks, foxes and flying cranes, apparently in the original wrought with great delicacy. Frequently gold thread was used also. The style was obviously developed under Chinese influence.

The determining factor in the textiles of the sixteenth century seems to have been the increasing application of the miniature style, quite as much as the still further increase in Chinese influence with its tendency toward naturalism.

\*Clavijo, *op. cit.* p. 287.



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The early sixteenth century textiles that have survived have, for the most part, designs of *personnages*: scenes from the Persian poets, the hysterical sufferings of Majnun in the desert bemoaning his perfect love, episodes from the Shah Nameh and scenes from the sporting life of the great kings with their exciting hunts and hand to hand combats with ferocious wild beasts, as well as simpler court scenes of a prince and his attendants.

Technically, these brocades, which seem to have come from Herat on the one hand and Tabriz on the other, though no positive attributions are possible, maintained the high standard of the previous generations of weavers. They are thick and dense with the surface sometimes as smooth as parchment, sometimes having diagonal ridges that lend a little vivacity. On the whole, the colours are simple.

Those usually assigned to Herat show foliage and figures principally in white with delicate tones of blue and yellow on a clear crimson ground, but the same style also appears on a silvery grey blue ground, occasionally on a straw yellow ground, sometimes on black, and there is one fragment in the Washington Textile Museum that is on a deep blue. Some are merely white and yellow on black, such as a group of pieces signed by Ghiyath, of which there are examples in London, Paris, Lyons, Berlin, and Florence.

One remarkable fragment that belongs to the so-called Tabriz type seems to follow a miniature by some painter of the school of Bihzad. It shows a carpet executed with the knowledge and detail typical of some of the miniatures that can with the fullest confidence be assigned to Bihzad (*cf.* p. 120). It depicts a prince holding court out of doors. It is on a yellow ground and the costumes, carpet, and other details are in various tones of blue, green, and crimson, with a surprising and delightful admixture of black. It is fine and closely woven without being technically extraordinary (Fig. 70).

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A unique variant of this style, unfortunately only a fragment, also in the Washington Textile Museum must derive from some other centre, perhaps one of the cities of Eastern Persia. It depicts, with vigorous and telling stroke, a striding demon, and a deer standing beside a pool, all rendered in two tones of green.

Still another type seems to have come from Yazd. These pieces are so thick because of the mass of thrown threads loose across the back, that they seem almost spongy. The most conspicuous example of the type is a beautiful dated specimen in the possession of Parish-Watson. The colour chord of this panel is a little different from that of any other example known. On a ground of intense emerald green two figures in pale red robes stand under a white blossoming tree. The date is 1571.

The *personages* brocades vary greatly in scale. The simplicity of colour of the Parish-Watson piece follows the breadth and simplicity of the figures. The Bihzad school fragment is in a medium scale, those signed Ghiyath much smaller, while a long piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum wrought in delicate tone of rose, pale green, turquoise, and silver white, challenges a painter's brush in the extreme fineness of the drawing. Each of the tiny compartments of which the design is composed is a perfect picture with many minute details. Like many examples of Persian art, this brocade makes a double appeal. It is beautiful when closely examined. At a little distance the specific patterns are lost, but there remains an interesting general texture while at a somewhat greater distance the contrasting tonality of the various compartments have a surprising carrying power. Thus seen, either near or far, it is effective, and each quality reinforces the other. No provenance has been suggested for this piece.

But even this masterpiece is surpassed by a silk brocade, discovered in 1929, by Emil Wierzbicki in one of the treasure



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chests of Prince Czartoriszki in the Kusko Castle. This is a piece which for sheer perfection of technique, vivacity of drawing and richness of colour is not equalled by any existing piece. The field is divided into a number of compartments. Some are formed of an eight-pointed lobed star, alternating with an eight-pointed straight-sided star. The intervening spaces are composed of irregular compartments. The central star contains a portrait of a figure enthroned, apparently Shah Tahmasp. The other stars contain various angels bearing gifts or playing on musical instruments. In the smaller compartments are rendered a great variety of animals, antelopes, ibexes, deer, lions and certain fantastic winged animals. In the smallest there are ninety-six different types of birds, no two alike, no two in exactly the same position, all drawn with an accuracy, vivacity and ornithological precision that Audubon might have envied. It is the most complete and accurate record of the birds of Persia of this period that we have. The colours are the usual Persian range, golden yellow, blue, ivory and green. The drawing is impeccable, and the weaving of remarkable fineness. It is almost as light and thin as the famous Seljuk damasks.

Where the piece was woven cannot be said. Both Isfahan and Yazd produced textiles of excessive lightness; Ardistan made fine silk stuffs and Kum and Saveh also had a weaving industry.\*

But the utmost splendour of the textile art was attained in the velvets. In the Kelekian Collection there are some fragments of exquisite quality. One in two-toned green closely copies some sixteenth century miniature with hunting scenes. By this time the virtuosity of the weavers was adequate to any task, and the charging horsemen and fleeing animals are miracles of grace and speed. The textile is as thin as paper, and of delicious tone.

A few fragments exist of an extraordinary velvet the

\**Le Strange, Don Juan of Persia, London, 1926, p. 40.*

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provenance of which we can only guess, depicting the famous scene of Khusrau discovering Shirin.\* This velvet is unsurpassed anywhere for richness of colour. The deep cream coloured ground, the whole range of ivory, yellow and saffron tones, the various shades of crimson and ruby, and the clear black and fresh white make an unchallengeable ensemble. It is a melancholy thought that hundreds of such velvets must at one time have existed. Now we have not even one whole piece.

The velvets of Kashan were justly famous. Quite a number of fragments of unrivalled beauty exist. They show a dense surface with exact and clear drawing, a wide and harmonious range of clear and deep colours, and a massive enrichment in both silver and gold. They are the acme of textile luxury but they are always controlled by a conception that holds them to a strong and sound design, and a particularly fresh colour of blue with a liberal use of white and staccato black accents save them from a cloying richness. This is the culmination of the art of velvet.

A notable group of Kashan velvet fragments were recently recovered in Russia. The largest piece of the group belongs now to the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston and other pieces are in the Metropolitan Museum and the Washington Textile Museum, while a fine set is in the possession of Adolfo Loewi of Venice. They are in two markedly different styles, and formed originally part of two pavilions that probably belonged to Suleiman the Magnificent. They show varied hunting scenes and in part follow some of the same cartoon as the famous silk hunting carpet of the Austrian State Collection. They reveal a quality and richness that had not been anticipated.†

One special class of heavy damasks of this period was made

\*Also Kelekian Collection.

†Gertrude Townsend, *A Persian Velvet*, in *Bulletin of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts*, Vol. XXVI, p. 24.



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for turbans, and they attained a very high quality both in weave and in design. The pattern is arranged in horizontal stripes decorated with flower sprays, there is a narrow border with some form of spot or diaper on either side, and a deep end border, sometimes with metal thread, with spaced flowering plants. The tones are all pastel save sometimes for an intense crimson or fresh green. They were often enriched with inconspicuously woven gold and silver.

Quite in the same spirit but woven in a different school and probably at a different place is a group of two colour brocades in which again the patterns are rendered with exquisite daintiness yet wholly in terms of silhouettes. These silhouettes are as light as a frost tracery and the interior details are suggested by a brief but telling reserve of the ground, again, like so much of Persian art, done with precise judgment, not a line too much yet just enough to give a lively naturalism with the minimum means. All of the patterns are on a very small scale and at a little distance would be lost in the general shimmer, but close at hand they are quite worthy of the miniature painters who undoubtedly designed them. It is surprising what complex scenes can be thus minutely rendered in a limited medium. In the Musée des Arts Décoratifs is a complete little landscape with Chinese pavilions, boats and men, meticulously delineated. This and a coat in Moscow are notable examples of the type rendered in white on light scarlet, evidently the favourite combination in this school in the sixteenth century. A piece of the same period in the possession of Miss Lizzie Bliss, however, shows a design in stripes, with verses in white Nashki script (*cf.* p. 103) on green, and small white *personnages* in white on wider red and orange stripes (Fig. 71).

Although tapestry weaving was developed as an adjunct to the carpet industry, no one has ever suggested that pictorial tapestries in the European sense were produced in Persia at this period. But a fragment of one has recently come

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to light of quite astonishing beauty.\* Pictorially, this, too, is the work of a miniaturist, but the dyer and weaver have done their work so well that the honours are equally divided. The cartoon meets, with fit conventions, the requirements of the weave, yet does not sacrifice an air of graceful naturalness. A group of hunters mounted and afoot pursue their prey across a jagged screen of rocky hills, deep fawn, grey-beige and aubergine. A milk white ibex, head turned back, projects against a clear cerulean sky. A pale blue horse wears light green trappings and the gentlemen are dressed in overlapping layers of rose and turquoise, orange and cobalt with freshening spaces of pure white, a coat, a turban, a hawk carried on a violet glove. A twisted tree and unbotanical plants fill, without interruption, the design. It is a lyrical romance, yet masculine withal, a glimpse into a world of legend, sophisticated even in its naïve charm.

The period of Shah Abbas initiates a somewhat new style. Textiles were now taking a great place in commerce. The growing wealth of a widely extended upper class increased the demand for handsome costumes and hangings, and hence the output of the looms had to be proportionately expanded. As the quantity production mounted the quality inevitably deteriorated. The great weavers had in previous generations worked under the inspiration of miniaturists and illuminators and had no doubt accumulated many patterns which were now stock in trade and which could be more or less perfunctorily repeated. The court, however, still commanded the services of a few great artists of whom Riza Abbasi was the ablest and the most fashionable. Designs in his style became all the rage. They are rendered in mural paintings, even wrought into mosaic\* and *haft-rengi* faience (cf. p. 46) and they found a textile embodiment in a few beautiful velvets of which the best known examples are in the Victoria

\*Professor Herzfeld has noted in Kerman a mosaic faience panel signed Riza Abbasi.



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and Albert Museum, and the Institute of Arts of Chicago. Instead of the small figures somewhat incidental to the design as in the earlier velvets, the increasing anthropocentric interest of the time which saw the beginning of individual portraiture, in the style that had such a remarkable florescence in North India, results in whole curtains which represent a single individual on a large scale. These, like the velvets on a small scale, are on a ground of gold thread with a wide range of clear and intense colours.

Just as the carpet weavers had, in effect, invaded the realm of the velvet makers with their carpets of gold and silver (*cf.* p. 139), so the velvet makers in turn began to make large carpets of cut velvet, also inwrought with metal thread. The finest and largest pair of these found their way to the Turkish court, were taken into the field by the luxury-loving Turkish generals, captured by Augustus the Strong, of Saxony, in the Siege of Vienna, and on the defeat of the Turks came to Dresden. Now one graces the walls of the Metropolitan Museum.

If the textiles of this period furnish no examples that reach the intense quality of the finest pieces of the preceding century, the loss is somewhat compensated for by the remarkable enrichment of design and the increasing colour range. The resources and merits of the silks of this period have not been fully appreciated. No museum in the world has an adequate representation, and it is not easy to comprehend the range of the art. The dyers, by experimenting with various combinations, had managed to control the unfavourable water of Isfahan, excellent for drinking but bad for dyeing, so that their range of colours seems quite as extensive as that of the painters. In addition to all the usual colours, there are, for example, a wide gamut of delicate greys, mauves, violets, and aubergine so numerous that the very inventory of names is exhausted. The colour compositions are proportionately varied and ingenious, and the pattern makers had at

their command the limitless resources of the gardens of Isfahan and her wide, flower-spangled meadows.

Sufi poetry was all the fashion and flower worship a vogue. The Sufis saw in every living object a message from infinite perfection and in quite the Platonic sense regarded the love of beauty as the love of God. A number of velvets, one at Moscow, one in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and one in the Chicago Institute of Arts, for example, show gorgeously dressed, lackadaisical youths in sentimental adoration of a flower. Isfahan with its rich verdure, pools and watercourses was always the flower lover's paradise, and the textiles of the period depict with delicate accuracy enough flowers to illustrate a botany. Never losing sight of the artistic requirements of conventionalisation, that endowed each flower with a certain universality, the designers nevertheless based their art on precise observation and emphasised the essential character of every plant. There are roses and jasmine, pansies and stocks, lilies, iris, sweet sultans, larkspur, gillyflowers, sweet-william, poppy and narcissus, the blossom-gemmed branches of fruit trees and many more besides ; a more extensive array than has ever been depicted in any other textile art.

The Chinese influence which had been more or less continuous since Sasanian times was again re-enforced by trade and travellers and by the immigration of artisans. Already by the beginning of the sixteenth century Chinese porcelain merchants were established in Ardabil. They, as well as their porcelains, brocades, and furniture, are depicted in the miniatures. By the time of Shah Abbas there was a new and larger influx. Whole colonies of Chinese potters were imported, and there is evidence of their participation in the textile industries, not only in the designs but also in the materials, notably the gold thread which is often made on a paper core as in the Chinese weaves.\* Many velvets and brocades continued to use characteristic Chinese motifs such

\*I owe this observation to Miss Julie Michelet, of the Art Institute of Chicago.



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as the parallel undulating vines and the Chinese scheme of composing the repeat on the diagonal axis, a delightful deviation from the natural expectation of verticality. A few motifs may have come in also from India and from Europe. Despite, however, these characteristic appropriations that widened and enriched the textile arts of the time, they remained essentially Persian. There was the same lavish use of silver and gold and a new development of the cut velvets of the preceding two centuries.

The Persian weavers commanded the fullest range of texture effects possible in silk. Some of their weaves are so thick and resilient that they are almost spongy, some of such fragile gossamer that they scarcely have weight. There are firm damasks, sleek heavy satins, thin soft tissues, light crackling taffetas and stiff metal brocades of various densities and surfaces. Sometimes in these the silk rests on plated gold, sometimes the two are commingled in a perfectly distributed balance; in one type the gold, like a heavy setting for a very precious jewel, is encrusted about the finely drawn figures, often mounted hunters and their prey.

The great centres of weaving, as we know from a consensus of traditions as well as from documentary evidence, were Yazd, Kashan and Isfahan. Other places like Rasht, Ardistan, Kerman, and Shiraz had their own textile production, but not at all on the same scale as these major centres. Yazd specialised in a certain type of velvet, damasks of a related character and a special quality of brocades. The most characteristic velvets are deep crimson curtains and prayer hangings, used in private houses as the mihrab or actually as prayer carpets, with a few very large flowers on long stems suggesting sunflowers, rendered in dull golden yellow, with green foliage. This motif appears in the same style in Indian carpets and velvets which were evidently taken directly from pieces imported from Yazd, for the velvet industry, judging by the existing records, did not commence in India

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until toward the end of the eighteenth century (Fig. 75).\*

The Yazd silk damasks are made of a very fine but loosely spun thread that is not tightly drawn in the weave, so that the fabric has unusual lightness and flexibility. In general, they follow the usual Persian patterns, but they repeat also the Yazd velvet pattern with the large yellow blossoms on a crimson ground. This style seems to have constituted the bulk of the Yazd exports.

A common feature of Yazd brocades is a very crisp and delicate *buteh*† with interior floral detail on a dark blue ground. These pieces are unusually soft, with a thick mass of thrown threads at the back. The brocade borders of Yazd are less common than those of Kashan or Isfahan. They tend to be wider and are also very thin and light. The metal thread so characteristic of Persian stuffs for centuries scarcely appears at Yazd. Only in occasional instances is a design picked out with a very delicate use of silver. For some reason the animal style is very rare in Yazd textiles, but a sixteenth century piece on a dark blue ground in the Washington Textile Museum has a pattern of running gazelles in foliage obviously based on the work of some miniature painter and so skilfully executed that the shuttle has been hardly less flexible than the brush.

All of the early travellers who went to Kashan seem to have been impressed by the prodigious industry of the place. Originally a great pottery centre, by the sixteenth century various forms of silk manufacturing employed whole sections of the population. In the seventeenth century the production of velvets and other silks must have been enormous. The supreme effort represented by the sixteenth century velvets could not be maintained in a period tending more and more to demand quantity production and quick, grandiose effects. When the designer and weaver must look to the

\*I owe this observation to F. Pendarvis Lorey.

†The so-called pear or palm leaf pattern.



favour of the market rather than a royal patron and are constrained by the necessity of profit instead of being free to consult only ideal perfection, there is of course an inevitable deterioration in quality. Yet despite this, the Kashan velvets of the seventeenth century remain beautiful, for the weavers' profound mastery of the art did much to maintain a standard. Although it was no longer possible to command the services of the great miniature painters, more simple patterns were taken from the court carpets with splendid quartrefoil medallions and graceful arabesques and the texture is still delicious, the colour rich and deep. In later examples the palette becomes restricted and there is a marked preference for crimson and ruby tones.

If there was by the seventeenth century a deterioration in the colouring and in the force of the designs, and even in the technical finish, there was progress in other ways and new devices for the enrichment of fabrics were perfected. In the beautiful dark velvet mantle in the Museum of Stockholm, which is as perfect as the day it left the loom, the deeper colours of the richly toned pile are woven over a foundation of metal gold which is revealed only when movement opens the folds which emit golden flashes like myriad sparks.

In the brocades the Kashan weavers used a great deal of gold thread, and in later and more impoverished times they descended to a rather harsh quality of copper gilt. Their themes were more varied than those of Yazd. There are small *personnages*, particularly hunters, deer, falcons, often falcons attacking deer amid almost microscopic foliage. These are rendered in silk on an almost solid metal ground. The designs, especially the animals and birds, are done with a delicacy and accuracy that approaches painting.

The looms of Kashan turned out literally miles of brocade borders. These are very firm, are principally on a gold ground, and have beautiful undulating vines, sometimes interspersed with birds or tiny deer.

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As Isfahan was the capital of the country so was it the dominant centre of the textile art. Weaving was the chief industry of the city. A great quantity of cotton and silk, both figured and plain, was exported from there to all parts of Persia, the Caucasus and Mesopotamia. The shops were in two great bazaars that are still standing, in which there were stalls for 25,000 workers. The chief of the textile guild was one of the most powerful men in the country. Even the governor feared him, and while he but rarely intervened in the general affairs of the city, his potential influence was always felt and any action on his part was generally decisive. The court looms were on a huge scale occupying a district which began at the Meidan between Shah Abbas' principal palace, the Ali Kapu, and the Royal Mosque, and extending, according to local tradition, beyond the Palace of the Chahil Sutun, almost a quarter of a mile.

But even such masses of workers were hardly sufficient to meet the lavish demands of the court. These beautiful brocades are not swiftly wrought. The metal threads are difficult to construct. The varied patterns called sometimes for twenty or even thirty shuttles. Setting the loom for a great velvet was in itself a long and meticulous task, and the designs must have been frequently the work of slow and thoughtful study. Meantime the omnivorous court was constantly demanding more, and the cost of the garments furnished to the royal entourage, primarily for presents, must have been a serious charge on the resources of the State. As Chardin said, "the number of garments he (the Shah) thus bestows is infinite,"\* and not only did the king distribute an incredible number of costumes; he also gave away whole chests stuffed with cloths of gold and silver.†

Visiting Europeans have given almost bewildered descriptions of the dazzling opulence of the court in the time of

\*Chardin's Travels, p. 113.

†*Loc. cit.*



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Shah Abbas and the total effect of several hundred courtiers in attendance clothed in gold and silver and varied tones of grey, scarlet, yellow, green, plum and aubergine, enriched with many hued embroideries and couched with jewels beyond the power of eye to see or record, moving across the rich carpets of crimson and emerald or across the brighter carpets flashing with precious metals, vermilion, salmon, turquoise, rose and light green, amongst the gorgeous basins and scores of flagons enamelled and thick set with precious stones or covered with pearls, the huge cups of solid gold and the porcelains gleaming white and blue, and shining lustre, relieved with the freshness of scattered flowers and the cool expanse of still water in the pools, must have been a pageant of almost painfully intense beauty. Chardin himself said that "no part of the world can afford anything more magnificent and rich, or more splendid and bright."\* Compared with the realities in the palaces of Isfahan, the Arabian Nights seem tawdry and unimaginative and even Jerusalem the Golden a little monotonous.

The variety of the textiles is quite bewildering, and the inventiveness of the Persians a continual surprise. Not satisfied with every legitimate variation within each particular phase of the weaver's craft, they devised new techniques to render old themes. Of these one of the most characteristic consists of a richly coloured linen ground on which small bits of wax moulded and coloured to represent some of the characteristic floral motifs are applied. Naturally, these pieces have not survived well and many that one sees in either Persian or European collections give a poor impression of the craft, for this is an art that must be done perfectly for it to be satisfactory. But there are a few pieces and a number of fragments of such quality that they are worthy of a very respectable place in the history of Persian textiles. One in the Hermitage and one in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of

\*Chardin's *Travels*, *op. cit.* p. 88.

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Paris show a large flowering plant in delicate tones of rose and green on pale gold. Two other pieces in American private collections\* have the characteristic seventeenth century vase with paired lions and a similar great tree in vari-coloured foliage enlivened with powdered gold and silver, placed on a velvety green ground. Several smaller fragments even surpass these in quality. The large panels have quite the quality of tapestry. The fragments are probably seventeenth century and perhaps the two American pieces are also, though early eighteenth century might be a safer date for all four of the large examples. The finest are reputed to be from Isfahan, a reasonable attribution.

Despite the increasing poverty of the eighteenth century which resulted in a steady coarsening and impoverishment of the textile arts, the genius of the people continued to express itself in new and charming inventions, more adapted to the diminished financial resources of the clientele. Kerman saw the development of an offshoot of the Kashmir shawl industry. Another interesting adaptation of the Indian textile arts, the printed cottons, or *kalemkars* which had been made in Kashan† in the preceding century,‡ was still further developed in quantity if not in quality. Although these never compete with the finest Indian examples, some very charming prints with crisp designs and mellow colours were made toward the end of the eighteenth century, frequently with gold outlines.§ The centre of the manufacture since the eighteenth century seems to have been Isfahan, and to-day *kalemkar*-making is one of the chief industries of the town.

\*One in the collection of Mr. George D. Pratt, of New York.

†Herbert, *Travels in Persia*, p. 218.

‡Several fragments of sheer printed cotton in a private collection in New York probably represent the work of this period. The most interesting is the end border of a turban following the brocade design of spaced vases of flowers printed in red on white. The cotton is very loosely woven, the registration not very exact.

§A fine example in the collection of Miss L. P. Bliss of New York.



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Kalemkars are the poor man's curtain, and though principally used for hangings or bed covers, they are also made for every possible use, including prayer mats.

In the brocades the use of metal thread continued, but the quality deteriorated until in recent times the cheapest European gilded wire was used. The designs became coarsened and confused, and the weaving harsh and stiff. The less pretentious brocades of this period are the most successful. Some of the turbans are very attractive. The stripes became broader and the colours more brilliant, so that they are often quite effective.

The velvets of Kashan maintained a certain quality for a long time. The patterns were very much simplified, many being either perfectly plain or with simple geometrical figures. One of the best types shows on a panel of brilliant red a huge, simple cypress in light emerald green.

While the brocade makers were weaving their rich and delicate fabrics the embroiderers were busy too, but of their work in the earlier periods only the literary record remains. The craft was an ancient one in Persia, and evidently was early developed to a high level of beauty and skill. Callixenus the Rhodian attended a banquet given by Ptolemy Philadelphus in the third century B.C. (280 B.C.) where there were "thin Persian cloths having most accurate representations of animals embroidered on them." When Heraclius sacked the palace of Dastegird in the seventh century A.D., in addition to the great carpet he found embroideries that were worthy to become part of the booty.\* In the eleventh century Nassiri Khusrau found in Isfahan a whole street called the Street of the Embroiderers, Kou Tharraz, where there were fifty caravanserais full of merchants. Marco Polo found the ladies in Kerman making "excellent needlework in the embroidery of silk stuffs in different colours with figures of beasts and birds, trees and flowers, and a variety of

\*Heyd I, p. 17, quoting Theophan I, 494 and Cedrenus I, 732.

other patterns."<sup>\*</sup> In the fifteenth century Clavijo found the pavilions of Tamerlane and his court richly decorated with embroideries. Awnings were of white linen overset and let in with coloured embroidery; there were coloured cloths with embroidered patterns and worked insets, the great Khanum had silk cushions embroidered with oak leaves and flowers and other patterns and in the interior of one royal pavilion the walls were hung with silks embroidered with gold thread with an eagle figured in each corner, sitting with his wings closed.<sup>†</sup> Clothes too were embroidered, and gold thread played an important part.

In the seventeenth century Herbert found the men wearing cotton vests embroidered with silk, and the women wearing garments of fine lawn embroidered with silk and metal thread.<sup>‡</sup> And here at last we have actual examples, though they are rare and fragmentary. Thus a small piece of sheer muslin found at Isfahan shows a spray of poppies on a linen ground. The leaves are vari-coloured dark green, with contours of a delicacy and sharpness that does not seem to be part of the embroiderers' art, the blossoms a bright scarlet, and the whole is picked out with tiny gold threads. A piece in similar style, apparently made at Julfa, the Armenian suburb of Isfahan, has a characteristic Isfahan flower spray, only in exceptionally large size, with a nightingale wrought in heavy thick masses of twisted silver thread, all on a bright yellow ground. In the middle is a crucifixion. The piece has been used for an altar cloth.

The most numerous embroideries usually assigned to this period, however, are the large cushion and table covers attributed to Kuba and the similar but much higher keyed pieces from Isfahan. Many of these are labelled seventeenth century though very few can with any confidence be put be-

<sup>\*</sup>Sir Henry Yale, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, London 1903, Vol. I, p. 9.

<sup>†</sup>Clavijo, *Embassy*, pp. 237, 239, 241.

<sup>‡</sup>Herbert, *Travels*, p. 232.



fore the eighteenth century, and doubtless many more were done in the last hundred years or so. The ground is a loosely woven cotton, varying in weight, completely covered with darning, cross, or tent stitch. In the so-called Kuba (more properly Daghestan), type the patterns are strong, large-scale geometric medallions with vigorous angles and they are worked in dark colours, often on a black ground with a preponderance of a heavy red, with thick and rather lustreless silk. The darning stitch sometimes is vertical and irregular in length so that the whole ground is closely covered without any definition of the unit of the stitch; but in other and perhaps finer examples the stitch is diagonal and regularly spaced to give a texture, either diagonal or zigzag.

A group of very similar pieces usually in cross or tent stitch which run now one, now the other way, are lighter in both colour and design, the black enlivened with a more cerise red and a Nattier blue and sometimes considerable ivory and the patterns somewhat more floral, only partially geometrical palmettes and scattered blossoms, often with animal figures, notably confronted peacocks. They are generally assigned to North-west Persia and bear a striking resemblance in design and colour scale to the Karabagh rugs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A third sub-division of this general class, some examples of which almost certainly go back to the seventeenth century, are the *personnage* embroideries rendered in the same darning stitch, usually the diagonal form of it, and rather finer in scale as befits the subjects. The patterns of these, often rather large, seated or standing princes on either side of a cypress and flowering tree, are evidently copied from the type of Shah Abbas brocade commonly assigned to Herat. These pieces vary greatly in quality and doubtless represent the production of three centuries or more.

The technique is again used in a fourth class of cushion covers, but these, while again primarily geometrical in de-

sign or with highly stylised palmettes, are often in the high clear tones of the so-called Polonaise carpets. This style is known as *Musaif* and it is always assigned to Isfahan. These are always done with diagonal darning, and the finest ones often have the ground in a zig-zag development of the stitch while the pattern is rendered in straight diagonals. More delicate but less imposing examples sometimes have a filotirato ground with the designs in darning (Fig. 77).

The darning stitch predominates again in the rich, gold thread embroideries on a velvet ground, but here it is used, not to reweave, as it were, the entire surface of the textile as in the preceding types, but for the pattern only, to brocade the velvet ground. Rarely does it constitute the ground, and then the designs, of semi-conventional floriation, are done in a gold outline and filled with long and short stitch in polychrome silk; but usually the patterns are in the metal and often the whole design is in the gold and silver combined, with no silk. The texture of these is especially rich, a heavy basket weave surface being added to the diagonal and zig-zag stitching. The ground is usually grey or red, but an occasional piece is violet or purple. In much of the later work this technique gives way to a couching of the gold thread which saves the material, but, of course, impoverishes the quality, though here too the surface is varied with diagonals and zig-zags.

In Moscow, in Stockholm, and in Munich there are to be found pieces of this style copying the so-called Polonaise carpets. At a little distance these can scarcely be told from the Polonaise carpets themselves. They were, no doubt, much quicker to work, and hence much cheaper, and they may have served where quantity was needed, or where price was a consideration. While this whole class was typical of Isfahan, Kashan seems to have developed a similar technique.

Perhaps the best known form of Persian embroidery are



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the *nakshes* (women's trousers) of cotton solidly covered with silk embroidery in the tent stitch usually but sometimes in a cross stitch. The designs of these pieces, floral motifs in varying degrees of conventionalisation, run always in diagonal stripes. Occasionally metal thread is introduced. Again the attribution to the seventeenth century is all too frequent, eighteenth or nineteenth being more often nearer the fact.

The third major resource of the Persian embroiderers, in addition to the darning and tent or cross stitches, was chain stitch. This is variously used: sometimes to cover the whole surface in a solid design, the chains following the outlines of the patterns creating an interesting movement; more often in the brocade manner, filling that is, only the pattern solidly and leaving the ground fabric, velvet or satin, exposed; and sometimes only to outline the pattern. This latter very simple type is given quite a range by using either single or double outlines, sometimes in two colours, or by employing a very heavy silk so that the pattern seems to be drawn with embossed lines. A type characterised by a very delicate open tracery in chain stitch on thin silk is attributed to Kazvin.

Either this chain stitch or a long and short stitch in silk floss is used to embroider borders and repeating flower motifs on quilted cotton mats, either bath mats or prayer rugs. When clearly spaced and neatly wrought, these unimportant embroideries can have great charm. An artistically and technically far finer version of this class was made at Shiraz.\*

Cross stitch is used in a wholly different manner in a small group of panels and covers, thick soft silk on heavy cotton, with the crosses large and well marked, depicting stiff little trees and plants nursery fashion, a delightful and very individual style.

A quite different quality of work utilises a combination of filo-tirato with satin stitch in ivory silk on sheer white cotton.

\*A fine example in the possession of Lady Arthur Herbert, London.

## TEXTILES

The filo-tirato is used with great virtuosity, nearly a dozen different types of reticulations varying the quality of the ground and giving a lace-like character that yet remains substantial. There is every possible permutation on the single and the double square, the diagonal, the cross, and the cob-web, with and without buttonhole stitching. And in the reserved panels and the multiple borders a contrasting design is rendered in stem and satin stitch, occasionally with couched metal thread. Minor borders are sometimes filled with a simple darned lace that is integral with the textile. It is an unpretentious version of the characteristic Persian device of dual design, the netted ground and the solid designs contrasting and yet complementing each other.

The so-called mosaic embroidery stands quite alone. Certainly, the existing pieces are all, or almost all of the eighteenth or more often nineteenth century; but the art was established in the seventeenth century, for Chardin gives an account of it: "They make carpets, cushions, door hangings, and other felt furniture like garden knots and mosaic work, representing what they please, and all of it so neatly sewed, that you would think the figures are painted though 'tis all of it but patched work; the seam of them is not seen if you look at it never so near, they are drawn so curiously fine."\* Oddly enough, he says the tailors did this work.

Isfahan and Rasht are the centres of production. Brilliantly-coloured small pieces of felt or flannel are cut out in tiny patterns and fitted together to make a design, sometimes juxtaposed, sometimes overlapping. Some pieces instead of being true mosaic style are in appliqué on a felt foundation. All three types are held together with varied stitches; chain stitch, variations of buttonhole and long and short stitch for the details, for in most of this later work, unlike that which Chardin saw, the sewing is made part of the decoration. Very bright scarlet with black, white, and yellow with various sub-

\*Chardin, *Travels*, p. 274 f.



#### INTRODUCTION TO PERSIAN ART

sidiary tones make a brave showing. Almost all of these panels have a very wide outer border of plain scarlet or less often solid black. Most of them are intended as portières, but there are also cushion and saddle covers and prayer carpets. Flowering trees and birds are the chief motifs (Fig. 78).

In the seventeenth century a kind of filet was made for wedding veils. The technique is essentially the same as in the contemporary Italian work save that the reticulations are diamond shape instead of square and both the netting and the darned designs are done in silk, the latter, flowers and simple medallions, in two or three colours.

## Chapter VII

### METAL

THE Persian metal workers in early Islamic times were heir to one of the noblest traditions in the history of the art. Sasanian metal vessels are imbued with a stateliness and force that have hardly been rivalled.\* The silver and gold plates, although not large, because of their general simplicity and the concentrated energy of their high relief designs attain a real monumentality; the great bronze chargers which unite a huge size with a rich and powerful repoussé, were the appropriate appurtenances of a court whose pomp and grandeur equalled that of Rome and Byzantium, while the bronze ewers and jugs bespeak an heroic race, stronger and more serious than ordinary human beings. One piece alone is not so commanding, but a group of eight or ten seem the relics of an epic age.

Such a lordly tradition could not be readily extinguished. Moreover, the country was not ruined but in some ways benefited by the Arabic conquest, so that the petty princes were still in a position to order work of this type. The great chargers in the Hermitage and the Kaiser Friedrich Museum are generally classed as seventh or eighth century, as are some of the finest of the bronze vessels.

Grandiose fantastic animals in the round, of which the Bobrinski duck in the Hermitage is the most striking, continued an earlier style which now became more emphatically decorative.

It is interesting to compare this duck which is placed in the seventh or eighth century or by some authors even in the ninth, with another bronze duck in the same collection which is well within the Sasanian period.† The Sasanian

\*For illustrations of the finest series of these vessels *cf.* *Meisterwerke Muhammadanische Kunst*, pl. 126-132.

†For illustration *cf.* *Kuehnle Islamische Kleinkunst*, fig. 97.



duck is externally simple and smooth. Its effectiveness depends wholly upon volume and the way in which fundamental spatial forms are appreciated and presented. The later duck, on the other hand, is full of curves, deep cut channels and protuberant bosses making a textured surface. It is a concentrated bundle of decorative force. Naturalism has furnished only a theme which has given the artist an opportunity for a bold and striking improvisation. The basic form is there but it is only a foundation for a design *tour de force*.<sup>\*</sup> That a foolish and innocent duck could in any translation acquire such grandeur and authority is evidence of the decorative urge which was becoming increasingly strong in the Persian art of this period.

Quite a different style, less architectural but still monumental, is shown in a little paroquet in the Indjoudjian Collection (Fig. 79) which comes from Western Persia. Because of its relations with some of the Gabri pottery and with paroquets on Seljuk textiles and silver, this piece must be put in the tenth or eleventh century.

The Islamic emphasis on abstract pattern led to the development of new techniques in all the arts. The magnificent bronze jug of the Arab Museum in Cairo (seventh century?) unites with the grandeur of Sasanian form beautiful incised patterns on the bowl and a pierced crown. This method of piercing was apparently highly developed by the tenth century for fragments of a lamp in the Art Institute of Chicago, almost as thin as paper and pierced with regular, lace-like patterns, have inscriptions that make certain a tenth century dating. The outstanding example of this style is an intact lamp in the Louvre found in Jerusalem. It is undoubtedly western work but its close similarity to the Chicago piece proves that in this, as in so many other techniques, priority must be accorded to Persia.

<sup>\*</sup>For illustrations of both these pieces, one in colour, cf. *Meisterwerke Muhammadanische Kunst*, Vol. I, pl. 133-135.

We have many bronzes that we can date in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, not exactly court vessels and not on the same heroic scale as their predecessors, but still characterised by force and dignity. A heavy bronze ewer in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. S. A. Lewisohn of New York with a simple and somewhat crude incised ornament conveys a direct and conclusive authority (Fig. 80). One of the same series in the Louvre with an abrupt, flat-topped spout, always a challenging form, is richly incised with a great variety of *personnages* and ornament running out to the very tip of the spout. Mirrors in bronze with rather high relief patterns show much the same motifs. On an exceptional piece in the De Motte Collection (Fig. 81), closely related to some of the Ray pottery, Bahram Gur rides to the hunt with his harpist against a background of scrolls and dots, while in the border are peacocks, doves, hares and foxes between arabesque escutcheons. A lamp in the Detroit Institute of Arts with a pierced folding screen and another in the Louvre exhibit the same air of inevitability.

In this period we find surviving from before Achæmenian times the motif of the bull's head, the early symbol of good and friendly power. It is used as the top and spout of both bronze and pottery ewers. There is a particularly fine example in the Judah Collection in the Art Institute of Chicago (Fig. 82). The engraved designs, which show a marked advance over those of the preceding period, are the usual ones of the time; Kufic inscriptions, simple geometrical patterns, delicate foliage and the running animals arranged in parallel horizontal zones and round medallions.

The Seljuk style is characterised throughout by two tendencies seemingly opposed but successfully amalgamated by the artists of the time. The Seljuks' own character disposed them to a robust and forceful style; their new conversion to Islam and their recently acquired enthusiasm for literature and other cultural refinements stimulated a taste



for subtlety and finesse. The Sasanian and early Islamic background supplied the elements of the former, a tradition which under Seljuk architects was brought to monumental expression in the domes, piers and great arches of the Masjid-i-Jâmi of Isfahan (Fig. 2). The spirit of elegance also had precedents in many a manuscript page or in stucco incrustations like those of Nayin (Fig. 11).

Contemporary with the forceful bronzes are gold and silver vessels with delicate niello or massive repoussé decorations aiming at opulence and refinement. The most notable example is a sumptuous gold cup with an historical inscription in the Kevorkian Collection and a silver jug of similar style in rich repoussé is in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum. A silver coffer decorated in delicate niello in the Brummer Collection that had apparently been brought to France during the Crusades also carries an inscription, as yet undeciphered.

But these scattered pieces scarcely define the style or show the full resources of the craft at the time. A whole hoard, recently added to the Harari Collection, consists of more than twenty pieces (Fig. 83). In addition to coffers and jugs there are rosewater sprinklers, cups, incense burners, a spoon and harness ornaments. One shallow cup with a ring handle and flat thumb piece has its antecedent in a simple but very lovely little silver cup with a Persian Kufic inscription that establishes a tenth century date.\* A comparison of these two pieces gives an interesting measure of the elegance of ornamentation which the Seljuks added to the earlier form.

The decorations of these pieces show an extensive repertory of elements flexibly employed and rendered with a perfect command of a wide range of techniques. There are various forms of the scroll and arabesque; Kufic inscriptions, majestic or graceful as the feeling requires; a number of animals: ibexes, lions, hare, a hound, a horse

\*Found in a Swedish tomb by Dr. F. R. Martin; cf. Martin, "A History of Oriental Carpets before 1800," Vol. I, p. 5.

## METAL

and a pegasus, a winged fantastic goat, cranes, peacocks, ducks, paroquets, partridges and some human figures. These are rendered with piercing, engraving and, above all, niello, usually on a stippled ground. Some are repoussé, with high relief in malleable contours. One has a kind of cloisonné inlay of silver-gilt in silver, and modelled figures in half relief are applied to the two coffers. It is a princely treasure, sumptuous and sophisticated.\*

A good deal of gold work has appeared on the market in the last two years that presumes to come from the twelfth or thirteenth century. There are small, toy-like bulls with tasselled tails, various birds, several small seated human figures, and jewelry, especially bracelets and rings. Of more than thirty pieces examined, not one has proved genuine and a comparison of any of them with work really of this or the preceding period reduces them immediately to artistic insignificance. In the Detroit Institute of Arts there is a piece which when put side by side with some of these gold figures, in the Philadelphia Exhibition of 1926, put all pretenders to flight. It is a bracelet of solid design but crisp and minute ornament (Fig. 88).

From the deep incised designs on the bronzes it was only a step to inlay with precious metals. Already in the twelfth century this technique was well developed as we see from the famous Bobrinski kettle in the Hermitage Museum (dated 1163),† the test piece for all the incised and encrusted bronze of the period. This piece comes from Herat and it is clear from other inscribed pieces also that there was an important school of metal work in Eastern Persia. Hamadan, Isfahan and Shiraz were also reputed for their metal work, but what they produced we can only guess.

The art of engraving continued to develop parallel with that of silver incrustation and soon became as elegant and

\*Cf. *Illustrated London News*, Sept. 20, 1930, p. 481 f.

†Illustrated, *Meisterwerke Muhammadanische Kunst*, pl. 143.



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precise as etching itself. There is a whole series of kettles contemporary with the Bobrinski piece, with no inlay, but engraved with a variety of splendid animals, Kufic inscriptions and simple arabesques and escutcheons (Fig. 86). In addition to ewers and kettles there are also a number of large trays and basins, some with very simple incised designs of stellate rosaces.

The art of metal working was steadily expanding into new forms and new techniques. There is an exceptional plate in the Stora Collection with a cavalier against a background of heavy foliage in high repoussé. The cavalier is somewhat reminiscent of some of the figures on Ray potteries, but the general style shows closer affiliations with some of the Mazanderan ceramics.

The beautiful little silver coffers of the Seljuk times had already begun the use of applied figures in high relief, an idea which is perfectly developed on a substantial bronze strong box, also in the Stora Collection (Fig. 87). Across the front is a succession of hieratic figures in half relief, quite Gothic in character. Indeed, the whole box looks as if made in Limoges or the Rhine Valley. The worker's mastery of the material is further shown in an ingenious arrangement of bolts controlled by a series of dials that look for all the world like a modern safe lock or a radio cabinet.

Three columnar candlesticks from Ray with pierced and engraved designs have come to light recently and are now in the Louvre (Fig. 89), the Institute of Arts of Detroit and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The style of the pierced column appears as early at least as early Islamic times as for instance on the crown of the Bobrinski ewer in the Hermitage and its mate in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The Ray candlesticks are far richer than the somewhat meagre pieces of the same form from Egypt and Syria. The pierced pattern of arabesques and foliage defines cartouches enclosing engraved figures of sphinxes

and harpies while coursing animals, similarly defined, ornament the base. In subjects and drawing alike they are entirely in the style of the Ray potteries.

Every type of vessel or implement that could properly be wrought in metal was produced in this period; sturdy little cylindrical coffers with domed tops and similar huge buckets; deep, star-shaped basins (Fig. 90), braziers, cauldrons, incense burners, little trays and big chargers, globes and other astronomical instruments, a great variety of lamps with single, double and multiple spouts, pen boxes, delightful fittings such as faucet tops in the shape of cat or lion heads; charming little trifles, scissors, pincers for putting coals on the brazier, buckles, strainers and all kinds of cooking utensils, including perfectly modern-looking potato ricers, all seriously and lavishly done.

There could hardly be a more unpromising subject for artistic treatment than a mortar, yet by a combination of fine proportions, bold flanges and handsome rings devised to realise the weight, and beautiful engraving to mitigate the bleakness, the Persian metal workers of the twelfth to the fifteenth century made real objects of art of these modest utilitarian vessels. Although they met the practical necessities by being round on the inside, they are usually polygonal on the outside, which gives them a more sturdy architectural appearance.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw still further developments, particularly in encrusted metal. In various places in North-west Persia there were produced the handsomest spouted vessels ever wrought, large jugs with fluted concave sides and a high neck. These are completely covered with a complex and varied engraving enriched with silver and gold. For some judges these mark the crest of Islamic metal because of the perfect balance between the powerful expressive form and the intricate surface decoration\* (Fig. 84).

\*For the best series of illustrations cf. *Meisterwerke Muhammadanische Kunst*, pl. 345-351 inc.



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Examples of quite a new style were discovered last year at Herat. The two most important pieces from this find are now in the Harari Collection. The first is a bottle-shaped vase with a round body and a long neck with Kufic inscriptions in gold on the neck and around the shoulder a frieze of fantastic animals of an entirely different *genre* from those of Western Persia. A flask-shaped ewer is even more important. The incised lines carry a heavy silver inlay built up so high that it stands out in a ridge-like relief, outlining large cartouches which contain some beautifully drawn figures in the Chinese style. On one side is seated a bearded king surrounded by his courtiers. These are rendered with fluid outlines such as are not found on any of the earlier incised bronzes. The court scene bears such a resemblance to a portrait of Alexander in a Shah Nameh of the beginning of the fourteenth century in the Louvre\* they must be at least contemporary and have perhaps a closer relation.

In the Seljuk period we find the typical Islamic candlestick on a high round drum but very small in size. By the fourteenth century these had been developed on an imposing scale and for sheer grandeur and magnificence the great candlestick in the Stora Collection from the Mosque of Mashad Gali Sharun stands apart. The drum, a foot and a half high and more than two feet in diameter, is sparingly decorated with medallions, entrelacs and arabesques in silver, of superb beauty and force.†

The same architectural sense which controlled the structure of this impressive piece is responsible for the design of two twelve-sided boxes, of which one is in the Louvre and the other in the City Art Museum of St. Louis. The high, slightly spreading base seems like the first course of a monumental building, and a projecting band above functions

\*Blochet, *Miniature Painting*, pl. 47.

†To be illustrated in the *Survey of Persian Art*.

as a cornice, carrying a domed top as massive as the cupola of a mosque. This rests upon superimposed plates in the form of twelve-pointed stars and the sharp points of these bend down with a claw-like grip on the metal beneath. The whole object has not merely a suggestion of weight and substantiality, but also of self-centred force that gives it a scale, defying its actual dimensions.

The difference between the Persian encrusted metal and that of Mesopotamia, especially Mosul, has never been satisfactorily defined. It is certainly true that many magnificent encrusted bronzes are signed by workers of Mosul and nothing has been found yet in Persia provably Persian that has quite the variety and finesse of the greater Mosul pieces; but some of the names on the signed pieces are distinctly Persian, which suggests that Persian workmen may have emigrated there, for it is true that the pressure of the successive Mogul invasions did drive Persian artisans westward.

Just what Mosul owes to Persia it is too early to say, but that there was a competent school occupied with encrusted bronzes in Persia we know definitely from a candlestick in the Harari Collection which is signed Muhammad son of Raf'ed-Din of Shiraz with the date 1359. The piece differs in some respects from the Mosul pieces. The main zone keeps to an abstract decorative scheme and the borders of floral sprays are more varied and fluent than on the Mesopotamian pieces. A detailed study of this (Fig. 91) and the Stora piece may furnish the basis for a decisive canon.

A group of pieces of unsurpassed magnificence, some of which seem to be Persian, was discovered in Hamadan in 1908 by Dr. Mahboubian and are now in the Imperial Collection in Teheran (Fig. 85). They were apparently buried in some catastrophe in the fourteenth century and are in perfect condition. The most important pieces in the group are a pair of huge platters with a cloud of flying ducks in silver swinging in a wide zone around the centre, a device



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that was certainly used, if on a lesser scale, in Mosul. In view of the local tradition that there was a masterly school of metal workers in Hamadan we are warranted in a tentative hypothesis that some of these pieces originated where they were found.

A splendid richly encrusted basin in the Metropolitan Museum is almost certainly, as Dr. Dimand suggests,\* Persian work. It has a delicacy and lightness of touch, an ingenuity in compartment patterning that in themselves would point to Persia even if the elaborate figural ornamentation were not there to confirm the hint (Fig. 90).

An interesting type, surely Persian, of the fifteenth century shows a weakening of the general design in favour of a shallower cut surface and far more intricate treatment with less inlay and far less of the majestic rhythm that makes the thirteenth or fourteenth century examples so imposing and so satisfying.

It was men of this school who, following some of the Venetian embassies to Persia, migrated and set up shops in Venice that had important consequences for European art. Quite a number of pieces in this style are signed Muhammad el Kurdi. The work at Venice soon surrendered its native oriental character in favour of undistinguished and purely theoretical intricacies. The accents and nearly all the rhythms tend to dissolve in a tiny network of patterns apparently determined only by the ideal of industrious ingenuity in patterning and clever craftsmanship. The larger examples, of which an excellent group is in the British Museum, have a certain splendour of their own, however weak they may appear when contrasted with their oriental forebears. Such designs apparently impressed Leonardo, for he made various improvisations along the same lines. Sir Percy Sykes has called attention to the probability that it was this Venetian work that supplied the models for the pattern book of Virgil Solis which had quite a vogue in the fifteenth

\*A Handbook of Muhammadan Decorative Arts, p. 118, fig. 56.

century and seems to have been in the possession of Durer and Holbein and even to have found its way to London, where it influenced the goldsmiths of the day.\*

Unfortunately we have very little metal of the sixteenth century. The work of the armourers is of such superlative quality that we can only mourn the absence of other records of the metal workers' skill. An axe-head in the Beghian Collection with an exquisite pierced pattern through the haft leaves one breathless with admiration, and a pair of scissors in the same collection shows that the cutters of metal still yielded little in finesse and delicacy even to the relieurs or the illuminators. At the Munich Exhibition there were some girdles with buckles and plaques showing various systems of interlocking arabesques in sharp and delicate relief, beautifully planned and perfectly executed.†

A few ritualistic requirements for the various processions, particularly those of Muharram, called for the services of the metal workers. The commonest of all religious symbols in Persia are the metal Hands of Hussein, Persia's famous martyr who fought on, even after his hands were cut off, in the final bloody massacre that extinguished the Persian claimants to the Caliphate. They are badges to be worn by the faithful or carried on standards, made of bronze or brass, frequently with inscriptions and often enriched with gold or silver inlay. Another finial for processional standards consists of a pierced ogival palmette with fringed edges, often with interior arabesques or geometrical designs of high excellence. A common sign of authority was the dragon's head, which, according to contemporary faience representations, were often carried on a staff, apparently by officers of the court to indicate their office. These dragon heads are quite as ferocious as their Chinese antecedents. They are in bronze or occasionally in cast iron and some-

\*Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, Vol. II, p. 142.

†Meisterwerke Muhammadanische Kunst, pl. 247, 249.



times enlivened with gold accents, with the mouth and eye painted flaming red.

The seventeenth century saw a still further widening of the craft, although both in design and execution the work fell far from the high estate of previous centuries. By the end of the sixteenth century, vessels of engraved tin-plated copper were becoming fashionable, and a few of these are carved with a delicacy that is only just this side of visibility. The style which originated in the fourteenth century grew coarser in the seventeenth and was applied to bowls, buckets and huge basins (Figs. 93, 94), the patterns for the most part being those common on the tiles and carpets of the period. One of the most frequent is that of wide banded undulating arabesques. In the eighteenth century smaller intricate patterns were revived.

Since the time of the Luristan bronzes and probably since the domestication of the horse in Persia (*c.* 1500 B.C.), harness ornaments have expressed the universal affection and admiration for horses, and a seventeenth century gold inlaid stirrup in the Zeughaus of Berlin will compare favourably with the gorgeous stirrups of the European Renaissance.\*

Carved and pierced brass, bright yellow enough to vaguely simulate gold was in high favour and used for all kinds of pleasant utensils and accoutrements. The finest objects made in this style are the mountings for huge paper lanterns of the Far Eastern type. These embody the best designs of the day and revive something of the variety and rhythm of the metal work of older times.

Equally interesting and highly characteristic are the great pillar candlesticks often round, sometimes polygonal, with deep spirals or with a complex pattern of spiral arabesques. These are worthy of the best traditions of the craft. They continue some of the early monumentality, not by any accident of weight and thickness, but by proportion and the spacing of the parts. That the earliest pieces of the type are

from the sixteenth century is shown by an example in the Metropolitan Museum dated 1578-9 (Fig. 92). The finest example known is in the Hermitage Museum, nearly three feet high, of bright golden brass. With its lordly scale, and its vigorous and graceful design, it deserves high rank in any collection of chandeliers. Both these and the lanterns and occasionally the thin copper bowls preserved an admirable style well through the eighteenth century, adhering to the old traditions long after all the other arts had become enfeebled and compromised.

Quite a variety of little sweetmeat dishes, of modest value but charming, in thin bronze, often fluted and simply inlaid with silver, were produced, principally at Isfahan, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and perhaps earlier.

The art of enamelling, which was perhaps reintroduced into Persia by European workers in the seventeenth century, had an attractive development, particularly in Shiraz. Little talisman boxes, pen boxes and, more than anything else, kalian tops were made of carved silver with brisk small scale brocade patterns of birds in foliage picked out with dainty drops of blue, green, red and purple enamel.

It is perhaps easier to respect the character of the material when working in metal than in other, more flexible media, so it may be counted no specific merit of the Persians to have followed the rather peremptory dictates of bronze; but the variety of forms and patterns which they devised and mastered in the course of a thousand years proves them worthy to inherit the great tradition laid down by the bronze workers of Luristan thirty centuries ago and entitle them to one of the high places in the history of the craft. If in certain respects Persian metal work is rivalled by that of the Far East, it is on the whole true that, saving for Gothic armour which is in a class apart, there is no other that can show such original conceptions, such perfect taste and such impeccable craftsmanship.



*Chapter VIII*  
*SOME MINOR ARTS*

THE term minor arts is misleading and often unjust. As one critic has said, there are minor artists but no minor arts, for it is as possible for a gifted worker to express ideas and emotions of lofty import in the humblest material. The distinction, however, remains useful, not merely because there is an essential difference in quality between a great dome and a belt buckle, but because in those countries where taste and craftsmanship are universal the arts become infinite in number.

So it is in Persia. It is interesting that the Persian word for art implies no difference between the fine and applied or industrial arts—between major and minor arts. The Persian word is solely a term to indicate something that is purposely wrought. It is assumed that it will be wrought well. Thus there is an art of horse-shoeing and there is an art of calligraphy just as there was in Periclean days.

Beauty that is unconsciously carried into everything has a naturalness, a sanity and a charm that make a real contribution to the joy of living. There is scarcely any object that man can use that has not been accepted by the artists of Persia as an opportunity. The most ordinary thing is endowed with non-utilitarian beauty. A mason's tiny trowel for mosaic work is held in the beak of a flying crane and the fingers grasp the body and legs while the thumb fits neatly between the wings. A belt buckle portrays the eternal conflict between the lion and the deer, good and evil, night and day. A compass or an astrolabe, instruments in olden days of desperate utility on which hung the issue of life and death, are richly adorned with engraved arabesques and beautiful scrolls. The foot rest used in a bath is curved with extra grace to its purpose and carved with flowers and arabesques while the little bath stones, half bath brush, half pumice

stone in their use, may be made like a crouching hare or a boar covered with a turquoise or a cobalt glaze, the rubbing surface variously carved with arabesques or geometrical patterns. Perhaps the humblest art of all is to be found in the little plaques of terra cotta which are used as bread moulds. The value of the material is absolutely negligible. The patterns, whether paired birds under a sacred tree or complicated geometrical entrelacs are sometimes of striking beauty.

So, too, there was no material which the Persians did not exploit and no craft to which they did not lend distinction. Their religion, their philosophy, and their poetry disposed them to a sympathetic and respectful attitude toward the common earthy materials about them. They wrought marvels out of humble clay; stucco, which is not much more than mud, was worked into the loveliest forms, and they translated such different materials as stone, wood and glass from the commonplace to the significant.

Interesting vases, pots and jugs were carved out of solid stone and the beautifully clouded yellow marble of Yazd was used for simple vases of great charm while in Eastern Persia a black stone was turned and carved into excellent shapes with strong, appropriate ornamentation. A large teapot in the Art Institute of Chicago has a handle composed of pierced arabesques somewhat in the ceramic style but, as in all these stone wares, done with a strength and simplicity becoming to the material.

The tough and hard grained pear wood furnished an opportunity for the wood carver. Spoons with pierced handles of lace-like delicacy, combs and bowls cut thin as thin metal demonstrated the virtuosity of the carvers of Abadeh. This style was either continued in North India or derived therefrom. Beautiful wood cabinets inlaid with etched ivory with flower spray patterns, so characteristic also of the seventeenth century brocades, were a typical product of the



cabinet makers of Isfahan. All too few of these have survived. This art also was carried to India where it received the customary elaboration in the direction of excessive finesse in which the beauty of the earlier forms was sometimes lost.

Even more beautiful are the small boxes and cabinets composed of complicated pierced and inlaid panels which give an effect of great richness; they have also a certain dignity that comes from the architectural treatment of the general form (Fig. 97). But delightful as these later things are, they hardly bear comparison with a few simple boxes that remain from the sixteenth century such as a piece in the collection of Nazare Aga of Paris, which depends for its beauty on the deep and skilful carving of graceful arabesques with delicate traces of red, blue, and yellow polychromy. It is very Persian in its combination of simplicity of form and intensity of decoration.

The woodcarver lavished his finest efforts, however, on Koran stands, both large and small. Their sacred purpose no doubt spurred him to his highest efforts and the best examples embody every merit of the art (*cf.* Fig. 95).

The same skill in leather working that created such remarkable book covers (*cf.* p. 113) was extended to other uses, also. There are occasional leather boxes with low relief designs, somewhat in the spirit of the book covers; the grandees of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries strutted in boots painted with bright flowers.

Even paper, with us the very symbol of the transitory and worthless, was so beautifully made in Persia that it was sometimes more valuable than many a fine brocade. Hand-wrought of the finest materials, always silk or linen, never cotton, it was densely compacted, tinted, and lovingly hand-polished with a crystal egg to the exact degree of lustre and glint demanded by the specific purpose. Beautiful paper was the chief boast of cities like Dalataubad. Tabriz was famous for

a paper the colour of moist sugar and other cities basked in the knowledge that imperial edicts of certain grades were imperfectly valid unless inscribed on their paper. Marble paper was a Persian speciality. Herbert speaks of the royal edicts: "writ with gold upon paper of a curious gloss and fineness varied into several fancies, effected by taking oiled colours and dropping them severally upon water, whereby the paper becomes sleek and chamletted, or veined, in such sort as it resembles agate or porphyry."<sup>\*</sup>

Blank sheets of this fine old paper have always been prized, but now they are become doubly so, not merely for the love of the luxurious and mellow surface but primarily to give an antique verisimilitude to the work of modern painters who, in Sir Thomas Arnold's charming phrase, find themselves unduly captivated by earlier models.

We do not know when glass making began in Persia but interesting globular bottles have been found in the Luristan tombs. Probably the art was as ancient there as in the surrounding countries. From the depths of antiquity glass has been made in the Near East.

The oldest Persian piece of any artistic quality known is a plate of the late Sasanian or early Islamic period with a sharply incised fantastic bird, in the collection of Arcady Hannibal of Teheran. It is cut with an exquisite delicacy that proves it to have been the product of a long and experienced tradition. This piece was found in North Persia, probably near Ray.

There has also been found at Ray glass that must be at least as early as the tenth to the eleventh century, as the forms closely follow some of the bronze shapes that were of Sasanian derivation. Some of this glass may be even earlier as it was found, according to the report, with some stucco rondels now in the Art Institute of Chicago that are from the fourth century. By the twelfth to the thirteenth century the art

<sup>\*</sup>Herbert, *Travels*, p. 228.



of glass-making in Persia reached a delightful development. The shapes were as widely varied as those of the pottery and quite similar: plates, bowls, cups, flasks, jugs, ewers, rose-water sprinklers and tiny cosmetic bottles. Some of these are in a white pressed glass apparently imitating Fatimid crystal. Others are delicately moulded in low relief designs. Spun glass threads are used to make a rich decoration, particularly on the necks and spouts of flasks and ewers. Other types are wheel cut with strong designs of leaves and arabesques. One flask, certainly as old as the Seljuk period, carries in a simple foliage a twice repeated bird reminiscent of those that appear on some of the twelfth century pottery.\* The wheel cut patterns are necessarily simple as the technique is most difficult.† The finished glass is held in one hand while the wheel is worked with the other by means of the usual bow string. Inasmuch as the bottle is between the worker and the wheel, the pattern must be done entirely by touch.

Sometimes animal forms are rendered in glass. Thus there is a small fish of thin blown glass found at Ray that must have been purely ornamental.‡

While hardly of an artistic form, glass nursing bottles found at Ray, consisting of an egg-shaped bowl easily held in the hand and a long, delicate spout are characteristic of the skill and adaptability of the Persian craftsmen in all materials.

The white glass ranges from pure white through oyster tones to a light amber and honey colour. In addition to this, there is a wide range of delightful colours: a grey sea-green sometimes cut with fine spiral lines; a light emerald; several shades of clear and intense turquoise; dark blue and a very deep brown that in the light takes on a golden glow. The

\*Possession of A. Rabenou, Paris. There is a smaller similar piece in the Art Institute of Chicago.

†I am indebted to Mr. Rowland Read for this information about the technique. It is still in use in Persia.

‡Boston Museum of Fine Arts. A similar piece is in the Hamburg Kunstgewerbe Museum.

glass which imitates crystal is very solid and heavy, but most of the rest is very light and thin. In general it is far clearer and freer from bubbles than that of Western Asia.

In addition to this wide range of monochromes a few examples of decorated glass have been found. A splendid half of a bowl completely covered with a gold wash was recovered at Hamadan with a find of fourteenth century bronzes and may be Persian work (Fig. 100). It gives the impression of being clearer and more brilliant than most pieces from the west. A lovely little bottle in the Imperial Collection in Teheran is also covered with a gold wash and has very delicate polychrome ornamentation. This carries a somewhat ambiguous inscription that, as at present read, indicates Persian workmanship. There is a segment of a deep bowl in the Art Institute of Chicago found at Ray also on a gold ground on which the ornamentation is practically identical with that of certain pieces of Ray court pottery. There are the same little princesses, blithe and gay, on galloping ponies in rondels with scrolling vines.

A small bowl, in the Eumorfopoulos Collection, complete and intact, of quite similar workmanship, found at Hamadan, has very light thin enamel, the only colours that have survived being the gold, a maroon red, and a few delicate touches of bright green. The design, again of small seated figures in rondels, resembles that of some Ray court wares. Another bowl in the same collection, also, remarkable as it may seem, complete and intact, was found at the same place, but it is in a decidedly different technique. The enamel is very thick and intense in colour. It shows a rose-tinted white, grey blue, bright green, deep red, and pale yellow.

Two pieces in the Kelekian Collection are so purely Persian in character that, taken with the Chicago and Eumorfopoulos pieces, they ought almost to settle the question as to whether or not there was enamelled glass made in Persia. One is a large and quite magnificent plate with gold



wash and enamel decoration. A spirited cavalier, quite like those that ornament many of the faience plates from Ray, is the principal motif. The other piece, still more decisive, is a bottle with a tall neck with applied ornamentation in glass threads and ribbons around the base of the neck and designs in coloured enamel around the neck and on the shoulders. In form it is almost identical with many undecorated bottles found at Ray. By all ordinary laws of evidence both of these pieces as well as four others in the Shalis Collection should be ascribed to Persia.

In the course of some recent excavations at Ani, the ancient capital of Armenia, Professor Nicholas Marr of Leningrad recovered a large number of glass fragments, many of them richly enamelled. They were found along with pottery fragments, most of them indistinguishable from well-known types from Ray, and with kilns and wasters, sufficient proof that the pottery, at least, was made on the spot, evidently by Persian workmen. Professor Marr and Professor Orbeli of the Hermitage are satisfied that the enamelled glass also was a local product probably likewise made by Persian artisans.\*

Examples of all various types of glass have been found at Saveh, Aveh, and Nishapur. The fragments have not yet been properly assembled or studied. Indeed, it is really much too early to write any adequate account of mediæval Persian glass.

We have not enough examples of the fourteenth and fifteenth century glass even to make generalisations. The glass of this period seems to have remained mostly above ground and to have been completely destroyed. From the archæologist's point of view, cataclysms that deeply seal precious material are advantageous, for they protect it from the obliteration it would otherwise suffer in the usual course of

\*For further discussion of the problem of Persian enamelled glass, cf. the author, *Persian Glass*, in *Apollo*, December 1930 and January 1931.

time. But that glass was being made at this time within the circuit of the Persian cultural Empire we know from the testimony of Clavijo. He tells how Tamerlane imported from other centres and established in Samarkand various skilled craftsmen, including "craftsmen in glass and porcelain who are known to be the best in the world."\* In the Mosque of Sultanieh he found glass bowls used as lamps.†

Sixteenth century glass also is largely an enigma, but by the middle of the century the tendency in the direction of the exceedingly tall and slender bottles and ewers which was to culminate in the exaggerated types of the seventeenth century was well established, as is shown by illustrations in the manuscripts of the time.‡ The style had been clearly predicted in the long-necked silver rose-water sprinklers of the Seljuk period. The white, dark blue, green and brown glass is continued and many of the bottles show the all-over gold wash so characteristic of Persian glass.

For the seventeenth century large amounts of glass are available. Shiraz was the chief centre of the manufacture as Chardin testifies: "There are glass-houses all over Persia, but most of the glass is full of flaws and bladders and is greyish upon the account doubtless, that the fire lasts but three or four days and their *Deremne*, as they call it, which is a sort of broom, which they use to make it, doth not bear heat so well as ours. The glass of Shiraz is the finest in the country; that of Isfahan, on the contrary, is the sorriest, because it is only glass melted again."§

Herbert, writing at the same time, speaks of finding in the bazaar of Gombrun, Shiraz wine brought in long-necked bottles and he gives an amusing account of a Bacchic welcome in which, to the noise of bells, cymbals and drums, was

\*Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*, 1403-1406, p. 288.

†Clavijo, *op. cit.* p. 153.

‡e.g. British Museum Ms. Or. 5302.

§Sir John Chardin's *Travels in Persia*, p. 275.



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added the clashing of glass bottles emptied of wine, one against the other.\*

Chardin goes on to say that the art of glass making had been known in Persia only fifty years, which is clearly erroneous; but Chardin was taking his information from local gossip and it is quite possible that the Shiraz glass makers had been taught their particular craft by some Europeans.

This Shiraz glass comes in various colours in addition to white: there are rich shades of blue, green, amber, chestnut, and, rarely, very deep crimson. There are bowls and ewers which were made in sets for washing the fingers, rose-water sprinklers and long necked wine bottles and vases for single flowers often with skilful spiral twists, frequently as graceful as the flowers they imitate. There are no longer any cut or engraved decorations but the applied spun threads are still used, though only in simple patterns, such as straight mouldings or zigzags.

It is a superior artistic triumph to endow common materials, indefinite and inert, with great beauty; nevertheless the precious materials such as gold and jewels also have their artistic rights and that they are in their own quality favourably disposed to beauty and by their natural loveliness co-operate with the artist does not diminish either his honour or their æsthetic significance. There is always, in dealing with these precious materials, a temptation to over-lavishness and ostentation. Objects made of them were planned to exalt the prestige of the rich and powerful and there is consequently a somewhat ambiguous purpose, the love of display competing with the love of beauty, that lowers their final artistic rank.

Both in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century we find gorgeous vessels used for state occasions, with jewels and enamels embedded in gold and silver, wrought, pierced, and encrusted by every manipulation of the jeweller's art to

\*Travels in Persia, 1627-1629, p. 45; *op. cit.* p. 54.

express the opulence and the glory of the King of Kings. In the Hermitage is a great gold sabre sheath encrusted with plaques of emeralds of such size and beauty that it seems to belong to the world of the Arabian Nights. The Appurtenances of the Crown, principally made in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, some of which are on view at Teheran, attain a degree of almost unimaginable sumptuousness that gives point and substance to Milton's references to the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind. A mace whose shaft consists of spiral lines of rubies and diamonds, despite an almost excessive lavishness, has a considerable measure of dignity and beauty. But the most charming of all is a silk carpet-woven saddle cover of sumptuous colours which are enhanced by rich encrustations of masses of pearls.

The utmost peak of magnificence in the way of regal appurtenances is attained in two Persian thrones, one that of Shah Ismail in Istanbul, and the other the much lauded and much discussed Peacock Throne that now stands in the Gulistan Palace in Teheran. Both of these gorgeous pieces of furniture are unrivalled for sheer sumptuousness. The earlier one is naturally finer, more simple and compact in shape, more beautiful in design and more skilful in execution. But the Peacock Throne, although it was probably remade at the end of the eighteenth century from materials furnished by the original Peacock Throne, part of the plunder that Nadir Shah brought back from his Indian campaigns, is none the less an extremely handsome object. The delicacy of the enamels and the mellowness of the pure gold when seen in an adequate light are altogether enchanting, and if the form seems to the Western view lacking in architectural simplicity, the richness of colour and the fairylike quality of the enamelled plaques and dainty pinnacles give a total effect of shimmering opulence which is perhaps unique.

But these appurtenances and attributes of oriental royalty



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while only of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, represent, like everything else in Persian art, an ancient tradition. The equipment of Tamerlane which was largely the work of Persian artists and craftsmen, probably far outshone the wealth of the Safavids and the Kajars. Clavijo tells of the Emperor's gold furniture: "In the centre of the palace before the doorway to the alcoves were placed two tables made of gold, standing each on four legs, and the table top and the legs were all made in one piece of metal. The top of each of these tables might measure five palms in length, the breadth being three palms across. On the one table were set seven golden flasks, and two of them were ornamented outside with great pearls and emeralds and turquoises, set in the metal, while at the mouth there was a balas ruby. Beside these seven flasks there were standing six cups of gold, circular in shape, and one of them had set within the rim a very big round pearl of fine orient, while at the centre point of the cup was encrusted a balas ruby of beautiful colour that measured across two finger breadths."\* In another pavilion were even richer furnishings: "In the middle . . . facing the doorway, was placed a chest or small cabinet which was used as a stand for cups and dishes of plate. This cabinet was made entirely of gold, richly ornamented with enamel work with insets, and in height it would stand to a man's breast. The top was flat and it was enclosed at the back with the like of little battlements in green and blue enamel, which were scalloped. The whole of this cabinet was encrusted with jewels and pearls of large size, and in the centre part between the pearls and precious stones was set a single round jewel the size of a small nut, but it was not of any very excellent colour. To close this cabinet was a small door, and within was kept a set of drinking vessels. These were six flasks made of gold, beautifully chased, set with pearls and precious stones, and beside them stood six round gold cups likewise adorned with

\*Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406*, p. 228.

pearls and jewels. In front of this cabinet was standing a small table, some two palms in height, made of gold this too being ornamented with beautiful stones and many big pearls, while in the top of the table was set a great emerald of very light colour, green; this lay level with the table top. . . . Standing . . . beside this table was to be noticed a golden tree that simulated an oak, and its trunk was as thick as might be a man's leg, while above the branches spread to right and to left, bearing leaves like oak leaves. This tree reached to the height of a man and . . . the fruit . . . consisted in vast numbers of balas rubies, emeralds, turquoises, sapphires and common rubies with many great pearls of wonderful orient and beauty. These were set all over the tree while numerous little birds, made of gold enamel in many colours were to be seen perching on the branches."\* Another piece of lavish furniture was a wooden screen covered with plates of silver gilt, and the doors of the room were covered with plates of silver gilt ornamented with blue enamel designs with insets of wrought gold. The tree was probably Chinese, at least in conception, an early example of the metal and stone decorative trees still so popular. In still another pavilion were rose silk hangings with spangles of silver gilt, each spangle set with an emerald, pearl, or other precious stone.

Perhaps more beautiful effects have been attained in less costly but still precious materials where the mind of the artist was more concerned with æsthetic quality than with the flattery of a great patron. No better example of such work could be found than a dark green jade bowl with delicate interwoven arabesques inlaid in gold and silver that belongs to F. Steinmeyer, of Lucerne (*cf.* Fig. 101). The inlaying of jade with gold and silver lines and precious and semi-precious stones was common in seventeenth century Persia, especially for the handles of daggers and swords, and the

\*Clavijo, *op. cit.* p. 269 f.



same style was also richly developed at the Moghul courts of North India. But the Steinmeyer bowl must date as far back as the end of the sixteenth century. The delicacy and thinness of the tendrils, the purity of the arabesques, the ample spacing and the tactful restraint of the ornament which gives full play to the interesting contrast of the silver, gold, and dark green, all show the more temperate style than we usually associate with the sixteenth century.

Not much can be said about Persian ivory, as so little exists. The pierced plaques in the Hermitage and the National Museum of Florence, often ascribed to Persia, are more likely western work; but the scarcity of examples proves little. It would hardly be credible that Persian artists, so skilful and versatile, so eager to exploit every available material, should have neglected ivory. Moreover evidence does exist that at an early date they were exploring this craft also. Fragments of a twelfth century ivory box with incised circles framing animals, strongly reminiscent of Sicilian work, was recently found at Ray, and some of the Sicilian etched and painted boxes, notably one in the Cathedral of Trent, are so clearly Persian in style that, in view of the relations which we know existed between Persia and Italy, they may be taken as indirect evidence of the existence of Persian models. We know also that Tark, a village near Natanz, was celebrated in the thirteenth century for skill in carving ivory bowls which were largely exported.\*

The elephant rook in the National Museum of Florence is probably Persian of the ninth century. In character, silhouette and ornament, a floriated ronceau, it follows closely some Gabri bowls. There is no improbability in the tradition that it was part of a chess set given by Haroun ar-Rashid to Charlemagne. It seems to be of the time and they exchanged gifts. That the Persians made ivory chess pieces,

\*Guy Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, quoting Kazwini, p. 209.

moreover, is proven by the recovery from the ruins of the Palace of Alp Arslan at Nishapur of a small ivory rook in the form of a square, turreted castle on which are perched two falcons faced in opposite directions, simply and forcefully rendered as became the Seljuks.

Ivory work was continued, apparently in a very rich form, in the seventeenth century, for Chardin speaks of sweetmeat boxes which he saw at the court, of ivory with applied plaques of gold.\* At this time, too, powder horns, to which ivory was particularly adapted, were frequently deftly carved, sometimes with the usual arabesque patterns in panels but in one case with an expressive plastically wrought grotesque head whose vitality suggests some debt to China.

Jewelry had always been such an important adjunct to the costumes of all the upper classes as well as the court that the attention of some of the best craftsmen was for long devoted to this work. From the earlier Islamic period little survives. Some examples of Abbasid gold that may be Persian in origin were recently found at Baghdad, and there are similar pieces in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum which are worthy successors of the delicate granulated work which is found first at Sumer and more or less continuously from that time down to the middle ages (Fig. 88).

Much of the jewelry is complicated and ostentatious. Perhaps the best modern styles are to be found in the adornments, particularly ear-rings, of the fourteenth century.† The most charming combinations are pearls and gold, but various kinds of enamels and semi-precious stones were mounted in the usual oriental fashion with heavily wrought silver. Sir Robert Clive owns an exceptionally fine pair.

Filigree work of a wonderful delicacy and lightness is widely known as Zenjan work as this style has for centuries

\*Chardin, *Travels*, p. 77.

†A distinguished pair is in the possession of Mrs. Herbert Gutmann, of Berlin.



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been developed and still is practised in this small city between Kazan and Tabriz. In Isfahan this craft was practised also, perhaps with less technical virtuosity but with more taste and sober interest. In the fifteenth century Sultanieh and Tabriz were important centres for both gold and silver jewelry. In both cities pearl and mother of pearl jewelry were specialities.\*

Almost nothing of this period remains, none of the strings of pearls and other jewels that were draped on the turbans of the men or made a coquettish festoon under the chin, dependent from side to side, of the women's bonnets; none of the enamelled and jewelled holders from which the plumage of the headdresses sprang or the intricately patterned and many-coloured slides and buckles and buttons for the garments. The long dangling earrings, the chains and pendants for the neck, the heavy bracelets for the upper arms or the lighter ones that clasped the wrist in matched pairs, all these have gone into the melting pot in subsequent years of confusion and poverty, so that we know them only from the miniatures.

\*Clavijo, Embassy, p. 161.

*Chapter IX*  
*PERSIAN GARDENS*

To the European a garden means plants, trees, and shrubs, usually a lawn, and, since the Renaissance, almost always flowers.\* To the Persian a garden means trees and water, and if he must limit one of these it will hardly be the water. In all early Aryan thought indeed, the two are indissoluble, plants and water, life and youth; the tree of life and the fountain of youth, so that when the Aryan tradition was formulated in Zoroastrianism these were especially entrusted to the care of two feminine archangels: Haurvatat, who personified saving health, perfection, and really salvation, and Ameretat, embodiment of immortality.

That plants and especially water should have been of primary significance to dwellers in a land where much is barren was inevitable. When bare mountains rise from a bleak plain and all is in the neutral, though often lovely, tints of death, the sudden verdure about the rare gush of water is a promise of relief and even of salvation (Fig. 102). When man and land alike are ever threatened by an unrelenting sun or suffering from pitiless thirst, trees are the promise of protection, water the fluid of life. In Mazanderan and the north-west there are heavy forests, and through most of Persia there are fertile valleys, but the sudden transition from aridity to verdant growth is in the background of the Persian mind; and in the towns there is the same abrupt change from blank walls and dusty streets to the soft rustle of a hidden park.

To the Persian, then, a garden has always meant first of all a pool as a mirror of refreshment, and, second, trees to cool and dim the relentless light. A garden was a grove about a glistening fresh fountain, and such a grove was Paradise, literally Paradise, for our word comes from the Persian word for walled

\*A charming discussion of Persian gardens is given in V. Sackville-West, *A Passenger to Teheran*, New York, 1927, p. 91 f.



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park, which is their conception of a garden; and Paradise it is, for it offers rest at the end of the heat and dusty strife of the day like unto the perfect rest that crowns the struggle of life.

The garden, the grove, the paradise offers this and offers, too, something more that brings it even nearer in the Persian mind to the heavenly ideal. For it gives a setting and a pattern for a quality of life that touches the feeling of the infinite. Rest in a garden is contemplative; there a man composes his soul and is at one with his world; it is the place of unification within and without. Nor is this realisation of the self and of its coherence with the universe achieved only in isolation. The garden is the place of friendly intercourse, where mind meets mind in conversation touched with poetry and spirits intermingle, while the amber Shiraz wine passes in fragile turquoise pottery bowls. Life was and is lived largely in the garden and lived there at its best.

And, too, the garden is Paradise because it is the realisation of the earth's potentiality. Even the bare ground has its own high destiny; it contains the promise and potency of fertility, life and beauty, and if by the accident of insufficient water this destiny is for the moment frustrated, it can, by loving care, be released and fulfilled. Just as man transforms the inert clay into gracious shapes adorned with lovely colours, so also the earth yields to the same art and in the garden realises its own inherent and implied perfection.

The Persians, like all good architects, make a house and its garden a continuous unit; but whereas the European commonly unifies the two by carrying the house out into the garden, with terraces, balustrades, benches and statues that reflect the garden façade, the Persian achieves coherence by carrying the garden into the house, and makes no opposite concession. He does not ornament his garden with stones. He refreshes his house with water and plants. Thus even the humblest dwelling is built about a pool, and where there is a deep porch this may have a fountain too. Not

infrequently the water flows actually through the house. In many of the more pretentious dwellings there is a special room that can be thrown entirely open on one side (*cf.* p. 55). Similarly, he worships by preference out of doors, building, not shut-in temples, but wide vaulted liwans, niches facing an unroofed central court (*cf.* p. 33), and before the advent of Islam the Zoroastrians addressed their God under the open sky.

The earliest Persian gardens are unrecorded, but the present typical plan of a central pool or, in a large garden, series of pools with canals and paths related to this focus on a rectangular scheme, probably goes back to prehistoric times. One of the earliest pottery bowls\* found by Prof. Herzfeld at Samarra which must date at least 2000 B.C., has crossed canals defining four beds each with a tree and bird. Certainly, by Sasanian times it was the established conception, for the famous carpet of Khusrau seems to have represented such a garden. The garden carpets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are a continuation of this same tradition (*cf.* p. 126). Khusrau Parviz laid out a park near Kermanshah two leagues square, part planted with trees that bore all kinds of fruit both of the hot lands and the cold countries, the rest in meadow as a racecourse and pasturage for his horses; in the ninth and tenth centuries the Persian kings were wont to hold audience in a garden under a plane tree solidly encased in silver, and many of the twelfth and thirteenth century polychrome bowls found at Ray show the same water-filled canals that appeared on the Samarra fragment, and on the garden carpets.

In the fourteenth century there was undoubtedly a strong influx of Chinese influence in this as in all the other arts. Tamerlane's gardens at Samarkand had the characteristic Chinese architectural elements of bridges and trellises, and the miniatures of the subsequent century, while they seldom

\*Ill. Ernst Herzfeld, *Die Ausgrabungen der Samarra*, Band V, Ill. XVI.



show bridges, often do have these decorative wooden fences. These seem always to have been made of light palings, often painted red. The very simplest consist of a double top rail on slender uprights that do not break through the continuity of the upper horizontal and the beauty is entirely in the spacing. In a slightly more developed form the corner post is carried up to a finial, either plain or in a simple trefoil. Very rarely, and usually at an earlier period, such fences are carried out in a fine tracery of circles and their segments and radials. Occasionally, they are made very high to form a kind of open screen and then a portal is usually introduced, a narrow arch with panelled door, all carved. There are isolated examples of such high screens made entirely of these arched and carved panels. Thus a miniature in the Louvre shows a screen of rich invention and fine patterning. Fences were used in Tamerlane's garden\* primarily to define the paths, but in the miniatures they generally mark the edge of a paved open porch, or sometimes surround a polygonal space under a plane tree, making an informal little pavilion.

Similarly, the Chinese fashion introduced into the garden plan tree-houses, but these seem to have been but sparingly adopted if their rarity in the miniatures is a measure of their actual use. Sometimes these are only a bare platform, with a ladder, but in a more decorative style there is a balustrade and a proper staircase with arched portals at the turns.

But these importations were a passing phase that seemingly fell soon into general disuse. The surrounding wall, however, remained a structure of importance, for it is essential to the Persian conception of a garden that it be completely enclosed. Usually, this is merely a high, plastered brick wall without decorative function, but sometimes today, and probably more often in preceding periods, there are decorative battlements or even corner towers, pigeon towers being a fairly common feature.

\*Clavijo, Embassy, p. 227.

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Pavilions, too, remain in use though in a less fantastic form. These range from canopies held up on a pole or two, rich stuffs, intricate embroideries, or even sumptuous carpets, through complete peaked tents of similar extravagant materials to semi-permanent summer houses with carved and painted decorations and, finally, to complete little palaces, like the Hasht Behist (Eight Paradises), very gay and lavish, in the royal parks of Shah Abbas, equipped for feasting and unrestrained pleasure.

But a garden may be a complete garden without any of these features save the plainest serviceable surrounding wall if it have its pool, and this may be of the most unobtrusive design and construction. It is generally rectangular, almost always oblong and only rarely rounded at the corners, without any moulding to define the edge, but only a flat coping and kept so full that it brims to the very roots of the surrounding trees. Often the surface is elevated a foot or more so that the ground beyond is hidden, and the garden seems to rise direct from the smooth water. Generally the pool will be still. The unfractured quiet of the mirroring surface is the soul of the garden's spell. Indeed, one of the Caliphs of Egypt, where the art of the garden was early elaborately developed in much the same style, had a pool of pure quicksilver.

Though quiet water seems most truly of the essence of these gardens, fountains do sometimes appear. Shah Abbas had in one of his parks a twelve-sided basin with a varying spray from every side and two centuries earlier Tamerlane had beside him in one of his audience courts a pool with a playing stream in which he kept hobbing a real red apple as a decorative toy.\* More often the pool is stirred only by a slight trickle of renewing water.

But even the still waters are not left wholly inert. Fish slip through the canals, faithfully portrayed in the garden

\*Clavijo, Embassy, p. 220.



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carpets, and ducks with painted feathers sometimes swim about. Occasionally the fountains are lined or bordered with tiles on which swimming fish in graceful evolutions are faithfully depicted, lacking nothing of reality but movement.

Tamerlane edged one of his pools with turf, but lawns are now almost never seen. The smooth expanse of water suffices in its place, and grass plays another rôle, making a tangle among the trees to carry out the effect of unplanned nature. For though the basic layout of these gardens is so formally rectangular, there is maintained, at least in part, an illusion of happy accident. It is a grove, spontaneously sprung from God's earth and must not show too obviously the hand of man. To be sure, in the good examples not only the hand but also the cunning mind of man is there, fashioning compositions with the trees, cutting the verticals of cypress and aspen with the jagged horizontals of the pine, or weighting the whole with the solid mass of a plane, but these arrangements are subordinate to a more natural whole, and the grass completes the effect with a somewhat unkempt carelessness.

Of the trees the cypress and plane are the two most fundamental. The cypress is an ancient Aryan symbol, emblem of immortality. It is an essential motif throughout Near Eastern and especially Persian design, and the ever recurrent simile in literature for beauty of personal form. But perhaps even more important is the fact that it remains green and keeps a kind of substantial, reassuring freshness.

The plane tree, while perhaps not as ancient in Aryan tradition, has its early history too. Thus in one of the Achæmenian royal residences there was a gold plane tree in repoussé which the Greeks laughed at, saying it would not give shade enough for a cricket. The fruit trees are almost as important as the shade trees, for the Persian garden is in part an orchard and an impressive variety of fruits has been grown there for the last two thousand years at least. From this juxtaposition of the shade trees and the fruit trees,

quite dramatic at the season of blossom, has come one of the most typical Persian art motifs, the cypress and the flowering tree, the symbol of life and immortality.

Herbert, enormously impressed by the Persian gardens, gives a comprehensive list of all of the trees he noted in one of the royal parks, or wildernesses as he charmingly calls them: "They abound in lofty pyramidal cypresses, broad-spreading chenaers, tough elm, straight ash, knotty pines fragrant mastics, kingly oaks, sweet myrtles, useful maples; and of fruit trees are grapes, pomegranates, pomecitrons, oranges, lemons, pistachios, apples, pears, peaches, chestnuts, cherries, quinces, walnuts, apricots, plums, almonds, figs, dates and melons . . . also flowers rare to the eye, sweet to the smell, and useful in physic."\* But even in this careful inventory he has not been complete, for Nizami makes his melodious moan for the fair Shirin:

"The world is void of sun and moon for me.

My garden lacks its box and willow tree."

Of the flowers, the fairest to the Persian eye is the rose, while the sweetest to the smell is the jasmine. When the beloved is at her loveliest she may be called a rose and the lyrical praises of the flower itself are endless. The Persians have, not the snows of yester-year, but a rose parallel:

When the rose is gone and the rose garden fallen to ruin,  
Whence wilt thou seek the rose's scent? From Rose-Water?†

Chardin noted five sorts of them as common in the gardens of his day: pink, white, yellow and red, and two two-toned species: red on one side and white on the other, and red and yellow similarly combined. The latter, he says, were called *Dou Rompe* or "two places" and he claims to have seen roses of three colours on one and the same branch in this magical land of roses: yellow, yellow and white, and yellow and red. The plain red rose must, however, be con-

\*Herbert, *Travels*, London, 1929, p. 72 f. †Jalaluddin A.D. 1273.



sidered the most typically Persian for the common name for the rose is Red Flower.

The jasmine not only plays an important poetical rôle in Persia, but early assumed signal religious honours, for in Zoroastrianism it was made sacred to Vohuman the archangel, who personifies the good spirit and divine wisdom working in man and uniting him with God. Both the single and double varieties are common, the usual type being the so-called Spanish jasmine of excessive sweetness of perfume.

Of the other flowers associated with Persia perhaps the iris stands out most clearly and immediately in the Western mind, because the *onocyclus*, native to the country, has so fine a fundamental form, so many interesting variants, and has been so successfully hybridised for acclimatisation in our more temperate gardens. But of equal importance are the narcissus and the tulip. The former inspired so much admiration that early geographers sometimes mention where there were especially fine wild fields of them. Hyacinths and lilies of the valley are other important spring flowers. Poppies, anemones of the St. Brigid type, stocks, convolvulus, mallows, carnations, centaureas, campanulas, pansies, and violets, done with loving care, all occur frequently in Persian brocades of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and doubtless played a part in the gardens then as they do now; and to-day to the native plants and those introduced in older times have been added almost all the resources of European gardens.

To all this beauty the songs of birds, especially the beloved nightingale, added an essential magic. Herbert celebrates this last delight as he found it in the garden of the Chahil Sutun: "And the garden or wilderness behind the house was made fragrant with flowers, filled with airy citizens privileged from hurt or affrights, and for which they return their thankful notes in a more melodious concert and variety than if they were in the exactest vollyere (aviary) in the universe."\*

\*Herbert, *op. cit.* p. 128.

## Chapter X

### FORMATIVE FACTORS IN PERSIAN ART

THE course of Persian art presents an historical phenomenon of primary importance, one that calls for explanation not only because of the rôle that it has played in the history of civilization but because of its own intrinsic quality, its variety and its exceptionally long life. We need to know what were the conditions that led to the creation of an art so distinguished and so persistent. What is the secret of the remarkable vitality by which the Persian æsthetic genius continually renewed itself for fifty centuries, a longer period of artistic productivity than perhaps any other region can point to? What were the influences that determined the quality of each successive epoch, and what controlled the evolutions of its styles?

There has long been a somewhat sentimental prejudice against any serious effort to explain the sources and the reasons for anything that savours of inspiration. The very attempt to understand has been held to be incompatible with the spirit of art, an intrusion of intellect into the realm of feeling. English prose is full of cautions against it, and even such a wise and astute critic as D. S. McColl shakes a warning finger against the "taint of science." Knowledge is held to be the foe of appreciation, and pure emotion the sole appropriate response.

But knowledge in art need be no more destructive to emotion than the ability to read is damaging to poetic appreciation. On the contrary, it is a means to an end, the end of perfect realization. Confusion and excitement in the presence of works of art is no substitute for the true æsthetic insight. It is not the child, standing in the cathedral nave, who soars on wings like eagles', but the mature architect who brings to his perception a disciplined selectivity of judgment, whose admirations are based on an understanding of the



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forces at work, on illuminating memories and quick comparisons. These so enrich the total impression that the unsophisticated approach is by comparison only semi-conscious. There may be many things revealed to babes but fine art is not one of them.

It is true that the scientific interest in explanations and causes is a different approach than that of direct appreciation. But no one proposes to substitute an account of the origins of an art for the perception of the object itself. Knowledge does not take the place of vision, nor does it make the blind to see, but it does both train and supplement the eye.

The fear that knowledge may contaminate and enfeeble the æsthetic experience rests upon a tissue of psychological errors: upon the eighteenth century compartmental theory of personality and upon the notion of pure feeling, at one time the goal of psychological research but long since discarded as meaningless. It cannot be too often urged that we see by the eye of the mind and that a profound experience involves and is conditioned by the complete personality and not a single image. The immediate sensation complex is illumined, ordered, and intensified by the comprehensive background, of which it is the momentary expression. *Æsthetic* impressions are not isolated sensations. The response to beauty is part of a total texture which is in the moment of exclusive attention apparently separated from the organic whole, though without this it is deprived of meaning and value.

Because the sources and the life history of an artistic conception are constitutive of the quality of the thing, an understanding of the forces that have moulded and sustained the art of Persia is essential to a proper appreciation of it. Our immediate problem does not concern the reasons for artistic production generally. The play instinct, the so-called instinct for workmanship or other fundamental psychological mechanisms that operate universally in artistic creation are not in question. We seek rather those specific

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factors which gave Persian art its distinctive quality.

Many theories have been offered for the solution of these intricate and difficult questions. Some have held that the production of Persian art was merely one more example of spontaneous inspiration, that neither needs nor permits of any rational explanation. Indeed, the modern world has often consoled itself for its æsthetic inferiority by the condescending assumption that the great achievements of other times were the products of an unselfconscious spontaneity that did not understand its own processes or merits. This attitude, which sees in the artists of former periods the more or less passive vehicles of a divine or natural revelation, and explains away Shakespeare and the mediæval craftsmen as having wrought better than they knew, has long had a popular vogue. But the theory is more naïve than the artists that it presumes to patronize. The exception made in favour of the Greek architects whose exquisitely calculated and consistent variations could only have been the result of intensely theoretical preparation, must as scholars know, be extended into almost every time and period in which art of major importance was created. Any idea that the art of Persia has been a sort of happy accident, an unconscious and child-like expression as unpremeditated as the song of a nightingale, is wholly set at naught by everything that we know of it as well as by the specific witness of the Persians themselves, who, fortunately, have not been silent on this point.

Sir George Birdwood emitted the pious sentimentality\* that the classical Persian carpets, for example, were great because, being old, they stood nearer to the divine source of excellence—an incantation, often dutifully repeated, that belongs in a museum of theological curiosities and need not detain us.

A notion almost equally sentimental and far more common sees the excellence of works of art, particularly the antique

\*Sir George Birdwood, *Orientalischer Pracheteppeche*, in *Teppech-Erzengung un Orient*, p. 75.



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art of the Orient, as automatically dependent upon the passage of time, arguing that any work of art of the present day will ultimately receive the same praise from posterity that we now lavish on antiquity. More specifically it is held that the mellow glory of many ancient works of art is the creation of the softening hand of time, or, as Martin puts it, "the sun is the greatest dyer of them all."\* Adherents of this point of view are passionate in their adulation of patina by which is meant a variety of deteriorations: soil corrosions with its pitted surfaces, blunted margins and weakened structure, obscured patterns, faded colours and, quite as often as not, particularly in the case of textiles, plain downright dirt.

This idea rests upon certain material fallacies. The beauty of ancient colours is in no way the product of degeneration. Time has damaged more works of art than it has ever helped, and the most beautiful carpets are those whose colours are nearest their original state. Not accident, but taste, knowledge and a passion for perfection; the insistence on the finest materials and the ability to organize and harmonize them, are the real sources of artistic quality in Persian or any other art. It is the mind of man, and not the heat of the sun or the dissolution of surfaces that is responsible for the glory of Persian carpets and textiles. The essential mark of great art is eternal youthfulness, not senility, and it is the perennial freshness of Persian art, the brilliance of the miniatures, the deep sheen of the tiles or the lustrous intensity of the velvets that are one of the major sources of its charm. These stand as an effective rebuke to sentimental and superficial theories that glorify accident and deprecate the work of the mind, theories which have been a handicap to appreciation and to creative effort as well.

A more specific view would explain the arts of Persia by the freshness of her air, the glory of her sun, the sharp alternations of her seasons, the nature of her terrain and her

\*F. R. Martin, *History of Oriental Carpets Before 1800*, p. 146.

geographical location. The most charming expression of this Mother Nature theory, applying specifically to the Persian arts and endeavouring to explain the brilliance and permanence of the colours as well as other merits, was declaimed by Chardin with such engaging enthusiasm that it seems ungracious not to believe every word of it: "There is such an exquisite beauty in the air of Persia that I can neither forget it myself nor forbear mentioning it to everybody. One would swear that the Heavens were more sublimely elevated and tintured with quite another colour there than they are in our thick and dreary European climates. And in those countries the goodness and virtue of the air spreads and diffuses itself over all the face of nature, that it ennobles all its productions and all the works of art with an unparalleled lustre, solidity and duration; not to speak how much this serenity of air enlivens and invigorates the constitution of the body and how happily it influences the disposition of the mind."\* And again: "Their colours are much more solid and bright and do not fade so soon; but the honour of it is not so much to be ascribed to their art as to their air and climate which, being dry and clear, causes the liveliness of the colours."† Chardin attributes the brightness of the Persian colours to the air, while modern sentimentalists mistakenly gushing over faded fabrics, have attributed the softness of the colours to the mellowing effects of that same air.

These geographical and climatic theories are part of a general view which began in the eighteenth century and which has been especially current since the late nineteenth century glorification of Nature. It is a naïve philosophy that sees in natural phenomena the source and model of everything excellent in life. Thus it was long used to support a sentimental theory of democracy; it has been applied to the

\*Chardin, *Travels*, p. 134.

†*Op. cit.* p. 273.



justification of ruthless economic practices; evolution has been a shibboleth and "Nature's way" a slogan for medical as well as intellectual quackery. In the arts it is, according to this view, Nature that sets the palette and provides the patterns; it is Nature that poses the problems and gives the solutions; thus, the architecture of Persia and Mesopotamia was of necessity vaulted because while Nature provided abundantly of mud for bricks, she furnished the timber essential for a post and lintel construction with a stingy hand.

The theory has had some eminent exponents. Taine's "History of English Literature" was an endeavour to enthrone climatic factors in a governing rôle and the theory was revived in a much more modern and sophisticated way by March Philips in his really brilliant "Art and Environment." Elie Faure has repeatedly expressed the same basic idea in such glowing, lustrous phrases one is almost persuaded to prefer the poetry to the fact, while Professor Huntington has endowed the view with sufficient scientific respectability to make a wide acceptance of it easy.

It is an attractive notion that art is, in a sense, the handiwork of Nature, that expressive forms were ultimately moulded by primal forces; that the essential qualities of the physical environment were so burned into the minds of men that they issued forth again as noble patterns. But there are difficulties. It is true enough that Nature can condition the materials of the art and that she does furnish the designer with many inspiring models. But she does this everywhere and in many places she offers her substances to unskilful hands and spreads her glories before unseeing eyes. One set of peoples respond, another is indifferent.

There is, however, substantial truth in the view that sees a certain general impress of climatic and geographical factors on cultural achievements. There can be no question but that the climate of Persia with the exhilarating atmosphere and

brilliant sun has left its mark. Recent researches in the action of sunshine have shown that it is a factor of primary importance in maintaining physical and mental vigour and of all the natural endowments of which Iran can boast, from time immemorial it has been the gorgeous sunshine which has perhaps been the most precious. Every traveller in the land becomes poetical in its contemplation.

Again, if transparency of atmosphere does dispose to mental lucidity as has been so universally held in the case of Greece, this may be one of the sources of the peculiar clarity which has distinguished Persian art. In every period of her long artistic life the vague and the obscure have been offensive to Persian taste. Precision, definiteness and controlled articulation have ever been the commanding ideals.

Persia is, moreover, a country requiring constant effort. Only in a few sections is there the lavish productivity that encourages indolence, nor were the fleshpots ever sufficiently rich to corrupt more than a few spirits.

Somewhat more specifically, too, the climate and geography of Persia have contributed in some degree to the artistic expression. In no country of the world is the drama of physical life and death so strikingly embodied in the landscape. Even the eternal succession of night and day is more momentous in Persia than in other lands, and it has widely been held that the emphatic and daily presentation of various opposing forces and aspects of nature was one of the factors that suggested and to the popular mind confirmed the Zoroastrian dualism of the eternal warfare between good and evil. The conception of the garden which had such important consequences for Persian design in so many fields owes everything to the exhilarating contrast between the desert and the sown, between Paradise and the wilderness (*cf.* p. 203). And it is not impossible, though perhaps a bit fantastic, to see in the Persian tendency to intensity of decoration a direct echo of the ever recurrent contrast between



the lush fertility of the watered space, green, rustling, with shifting shadows, making a concentrated pattern against the neutral immobility and blankness of the desert.

But the most effective influence that geography exerts on culture comes from the contacts that it opens or excludes with other civilisations. The vital force in progress, by the common consent of anthropologists, has been just this confluence of varying cultures with their different ideologies and techniques. Such contrasts have always been a challenge and every great advance in human civilisation has been mediated by an intermingling of traditions and experience. It is not the purity of any race that has given it distinction and power, but rather the number and variety of its cultural contacts,\* and it is this that explains the art and culture of Persia. Never was any country in such vitalising relations with such markedly different neighbours. It is the only nation that has been in direct and continuous association with all the principal world civilisations. From each it learned and to each it gave.

To the north-east were many nomadic tribes in the vast steppes, forever renewing Persia with fresh vitality, and beyond them the ancient East, wise and skilful, the cultural aristocrat of Asia. To the south was prolific India, mother of religions, inventor of important scientific and art forms. From the west a succession of various influences poured into Persia through the centuries. Sumeria, Babylonia, the Hittites and especially Assyria contributed vital forms and many specific motifs and Persia's contacts with Egypt in Achæmenian and Sasanian times could not but be profitable. Classical Greece, and after her Rome and Byzantium, sup-

\*It has sometimes been thought that China, in its magnificent isolation, was an exception. An elementary knowledge of China's history, however, reveals the constant incursion of new forces and different ideas. Moreover, the country was in itself so vast that there was, in all the great periods, a productive if temporarily disconcerting, contrast and conflict between the North and the South.

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plied ideas of permanent moulding force. That Persia consciously drew on all these sources from the earliest times is shown by the famous inscription of Darius at Susa in which contributions to his great palace from nearly all these countries are specifically set down. Fifteen hundred years later a traveller found in the bazaars of Kamadin at the gate of Jeruft foreign merchants from "Rum (Byzantium) and Ind and precious goods from China, Transoxiana, Khitay (North China), Hindustan, Khorassan, Zanzibar, Abyssinia, Egypt, Greece, Armenia, Mesopotamia and Azerbaijan."\* There is further literary testimony for the continuation of the same eager and discriminating appropriation in later periods and this is fully confirmed by stylistic evidence.

Persia was, however, sufficiently remote from all these countries, sufficiently defended by her battlemented mountains and her shining deserts, to avoid cultural submergence, and those who did conquer her, Arabs, Moguls and Afghans, destructive as they often were, did not affect her spiritual integrity; for these invaders, whatever their numbers, were uncouth and illiterate and contributed little that could of itself suppress or even deflect the development of the Persian æsthetic genius. Had Chinese or Indians or Greeks settled in such numbers within her borders, the continuity of Persian art might have been broken. If in weaving the brilliant texture of Persian art the shuttle flew from China to Egypt, from the Ægean to the Ganges, it was nevertheless the nimble and discriminating Persian mind that presided at the loom.

Art is one of the most perfect expressions of mind. Its quality is determined by racial traits as well as by individual experience, and Persian art seems with peculiar intimacy and transparency to set forth a very distinctive national personality. It would be illuminating if we could define the essential traits of the Persians and show in specific detail how they are expressed in their arts; but the analysis

\*Guy Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. 315.



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and summary of the constitutive characteristics of any people is an extremely dubious undertaking, and the task of satisfactorily relating Persian art to the Persian mind is a problem for the future.

This question of the bases of national mentality thus expressed in the arts has, until recently, been rather casually dismissed on the assumption that it was the consequence of a definite physiological and nervous constitution as primordial as original sin, and the observation of Persians at work would seem to lend some support to such a view. The head weaver carrying in his mind a pattern as complicated as an orchestral score or children, almost babies, swiftly and accurately working designs according to instructions that are, after all, often most ambiguous; men and women rapidly tying 1,200 knots in a square inch on warps so delicate that they are almost invisible; the mosaic faience worker steadily and unerringly assembling his intricate patterns of tiny segments without ever seeing the face of the design; the glass cutter incising his pattern surely by the sense of touch, his vessel between him and the whirling wheel; an uneducated man who can review in memory not hundreds but thousands of objects, with detailed, exact descriptions, all these and many other similar evidences seem to point to a special and superior endowment of mind or hand.

But the theory that there is a specific biological equipment that is the determinant of any national mind has been conclusively set aside by practically all specialists competent to deal with such questions. Inherent racial superiorities or inferiorities are a myth that cannot be established by any scientific verification, damaging as this is to the pride of the Nordics. It is not to any hypothetical structure of the nervous systems of Persians or their innate capacity or any other physical quality that we should look for an explanation of the excellencies of the Persian arts.

Yet, even though it have no discoverable physiological

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basis, there is none the less such a thing as national character, a pattern of qualities, tendencies and capacities resting, not on a biological, but on a cultural basis. The result of language, custom and popular wisdom, this character is independent of any particular affirmations in religion or literature.

These culturally determined traits are responsible for much of the character of Persian art. Only if patience, for example, was an easy and natural virtue to the Persians could they have produced the sort of art they did. To weave a carpet of 90,000,000 knots, to spend two years on one book cover requiring some 500,000 separate impressions, to take a year to string the hundreds of delicate warps for a figured velvet, and as much time again making the thousands of shuttle passes to draw the design, mean a quality of patience that could not be commanded nor even acquired by any temporary advantage or necessity, but must be in some sense basic.

The remarkable skill of hand demonstrated in every Persian craft is the result of a capacity for concentration as well as patience. Only a people who by some natural persuasion cared more for perfection than for time could have accomplished these many miracles.

Some of these traits are common to all classes, others are limited to special groups. The fastidiousness which is a marked quality of most Persian art of the Islamic period is probably, to a large degree, a reflection of the manners and standards of the court. Though widespread, it could hardly be called a national trait any more than the craftsman's patience is an attribute of the aristocracy. It is rather a consequence of demand and of the social rewards attached to it. Moreover, exceeding competence in craftsmanship is a complement of an art that is primarily decorative and hence essentially an exploitation of materials. An art that must depend for its effect upon its own perfections and not on literary associations or any direct portrayal of emotion continually demands finesse.



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The marked intellectuality of Persian art, its insistence on lucidity and accuracy to a degree that distinguishes it from the art of its neighbours, may be due partly to the clean and exhilarating air which creates a habit of expectation, disposing men favourably to clear outlines and precision of form and arrangement, but it probably results even more from the fact that intelligence has always been respected in Persia. The wise have often been a class apart, recipients of every kind of honour. The Koran enjoins man to seek knowledge even though the search lead to China. The enthusiasm of the uncouth conquerors, particularly those from Central Asia, for the attributes of civilization immediately increased the esteem in which science and history as well as art were held and every great poet, geographer or astronomer walked more proudly because of the recognition and opportunities that he received at the courts of the Seljuk princes or, later, the Moguls and their immediate successors.

How decisive this intellectual superiority of Persian art was is shown by the fate of its most characteristic patterns when adapted and translated by neighbouring peoples. The great Persian designs, whether in faience or carpets, are logically organized and perfectly co-ordinated on subtle and half-concealed double or triple pattern systems in contrasted but co-ordinated rhythms. The fine fifteenth and sixteenth century carpets are as complex but as lucidly composed as a Bach fugue. When the same models are followed in India, despite the ambition to surpass and the unstinted support of a lavish court, while new and beautiful qualities are introduced, the total result is inferior. The colour in the finest Indian examples is richer and more intense, the drawing sometimes of surpassing finesse, the materials incredibly gorgeous, but the intellectual resources are impoverished. Subtleties of relation were omitted or blurred and consistency was ignored. Persian patterns undergo an even more serious deterioration at the hand of the unintellectual artists of the Ottoman courts.

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The importance of economic factors in determining the art of every country is now such a commonplace that it no longer needs to be argued that art rises and falls with prosperity. While the sentimental theory of the starving poet, the notion that poverty is a wholesome background for æsthetic creation, may in individual cases be true, general poverty is death to art and the great epochs of artistic creation have coincided with great wealth. But the greatest wealth does not necessarily produce the greatest art. The æsthetic achievements of the period of Shah Abbas are distinctly inferior to those of the time of Shah Ismail. Wealth contributes to beauty, but does not automatically create it any more than climate or geography. In Persian art it has always been especially important because so many of the arts, like carpets and textiles, called for expensive materials while others, like the book covers, the miniatures, and the great faience decorations required a costly amount of time which someone had to pay for.

Social and political conditions played an equally determining rôle. Peace as well as prosperity, security as well as excitement, encourage the arts. This principle cannot, however, be too widely generalised. It was not necessarily the complete organisation of the whole of Persia that created the finest art, for great art was produced in the courts of the smaller princes as well as at the capitals. Yet whenever political conditions nourishing ambition and confidence fostered the rise of a national enthusiasm, the powers of the artists were more amply released.

But even more important than such general considerations has been the character of the monarch, for from the days of Cyrus the Great it was on the royal patron that the arts immediately depended. Indeed, the history of Persian art might be written in terms of a series of dominant personalities: the Seljuks with their glorious domed and vaulted architecture (Fig. 2); Ghazan Khan who created the fairy-



like Blue Mosque of Tabriz; Uljaitu Chodabenda Shah who was responsible for the splendid mausoleum of Sultanieh, the Mosque of Varamin, and a magnificent development of stucco ornament; Shah Rukh the great bibliophile and his sister, who was able to command the Mosque of Gohar Shad at Mashad, the most brilliant building in Persia (Fig. 7); Baisangur, possessed of a consuming passion for calligraphy and painting and the friend and protector of Bihzad and Mirak; Shah Ismail who in turn regarded Bihzad as half his kingdom; Shah Tahmasp with an effeminate enthusiasm for all the arts; or Shah Abbas, the robust and forceful, to whom personally and individually much of the glory of Isfahan is specifically due, and in our own day Riza Shah, under whose patronage old monuments are being restored and the revival of the arts encouraged. Nor was it only the financial support provided by these monarchs that was determinate, but their personal and enthusiastic participation in the work they patronised and inspired. Shah Abbas himself laid out gardens and planned for buildings in Isfahan and gave detailed instructions to his workmen. Shah Tahmasp faithfully studied painting and calligraphy and wrought creditably. Baisangur was an artist more genuinely accomplished than many a professional.

In a civilisation where the monarch is such a force as he always has been in Persia, he not only determines the issues of life and death, war or peace, but he dictates also more intimately the occupations, the enthusiasms, the topics of conversation, the dress, deportment and general styles which are the order of the day throughout the land. His patronage and his interests are everywhere imitated, and if he can command the greatest artists, the courtiers and the petty princes are equally eager to give orders to the less great until there is built up a world of opportunity and appreciation which promises spiritual and material reward to all who bend effort and talent toward the creation of beauty.

Another source of the greatness of Persian art is its communal character. The individual achievements, however brilliant, are sustained by a tradition of great antiquity and by a racial as well as a national consciousness. The Persian artists have always been far more an organic part of the community than those in the modern western world. This means not only that the artist derives his themes, his point of view and his technique from the past but also that he is in intimate and natural relations with his environment. Isolation of the artist and concentration on his precious individuality, so often negatively defined in terms of difference or even eccentricity, have had no counterpart in the history of Persian art although it has for centuries been characteristic of art in the West.

This makes for co-operation and interchange among the various artists, no doubt another reason for the excellence of their work. Persian artists never hesitated to copy from one another, or perhaps we should say, to use the common themes and employ the same formulæ, in so far as the special task and material made it possible. Moreover the various designers were also brought into close relations with one another by means of the court ateliers created to meet the artistic needs of the great Shahs. In these organizations it was the painter and calligrapher, as the most gifted, highly trained and important, who wielded the ultimate authority and set their impress on everything from architecture to embroidery.

There were many advantages in such relations. All were held to the highest standards of the time and each worker felt the presence of an exacting audience of fellow experts.

It is, of course, difficult to decide what are the conditions best suited to creative effort but we know from our own environment which are unfavourable. Distraction, confusion, uncertainty, the paralysing inhibitions of self-distrust are fatal to any effective organization of those faculties which are



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engaged in serious artistic production; they quench the ardour essential to all creative work.

Unity of purpose, so characteristically lacking in the Western world, is one of the principal sources of mental and spiritual energy. In the greatest periods of Persian art, work was favoured by simple and basic integrity which released imagination and fixed purpose. One cannot say that life in Persia was always peaceful or secure. There were always elements of danger. But there was a stability of outlook provided by a religious conviction that had been harmoniously adjusted to the national disposition which enabled the artists to face their æsthetic problems, with souls well knit and all their spiritual battles won. Whatever their individual problems—poverty, hunger, unhappiness, whatever the immediate social and political uncertainties, they knew where their values lay and could hold to their purposes.

This religious and ethical conviction was indeed a factor of unmeasured potency in shaping the art of Persia. It determined its highest ideals, endowed it with seriousness and maintained its enthusiasms. The artists' values were grounded in a fundamental world philosophy, a theory of the nature of life and the universe, a scheme of God and man to which we now must look.

That Persian art was basically determined after the Arabic conquest, by the Islamic theology has been universally recognised; but this determination has almost always been interpreted in negative terms. It has commonly been asserted that Persian art is primarily decorative because the Muhammadan religion forbade the representation of living forms. Deprived of representation, the Persians were forced to concentrate their varied and resourceful national talent into the one narrow channel of decoration, and from this their art derived superior intensity.

There can be no doubt at all but that the prohibition against the representation of living forms, which, by the way,

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was not an utterance of the Prophet but an interpretation and interpolation in subsequent canons, has hampered a free development of the pictorial arts in Persia as well as elsewhere in the Islamic world, and there are well-known cases in contemporary times of fanatical mullahs protesting in the name of Islam against even such innocent paintings as the murals on the exterior of the Chahil Sutun which, in deference to this scruple, were covered with plaster some fifty years ago only to be revealed again quite recently.

But the effectiveness of this prohibition in Persia has been very much exaggerated. Living beings are not only lavishly portrayed in every Persian art from painting and ceramics to sculpture; they are even represented in some of the mosques, though numerous statements can be found based on theory and not fact, that here at least the proscription was devoutly respected. Thus over the entrance of the Mosque of Haroun al Valiahd in Isfahan there is a carved wood panel with a pair of flying angels resembling those in the Sasanian carving at Tak-i-Bustan. Even some of the shrines, around which clusters a greater fanaticism than about any of the mosques, have their representations of living forms. Directly over the entrance to the sanctuary of Shah Abdul Azim hangs a large painting of the Prophet and his Companions, and in another part is a full-sized statue of Musafa ed-Din Shah. At Kum the tomb of Fath Ali Shah is hung around with curtains of Rasht style embroidery made by his daughters, faithfully portraying this black-bearded profligate. At Mashad, in the holy shrine of Imam Riza, in the very tomb chamber, there is a life-size portrait of the venerated martyr himself, and the entrance to the tomb is hung with curtains embroidered with human figures, while the sarcophagus is frequently covered with gold brocades adorned with birds and animals, and in the court are many spandrels with pairs of peacocks, a common motif in architectural faience ornament. The princes in particular set the prohibition at naught and



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encouraged artists whose accomplishments knew no limits except those of their own ideas and competence.\*

Into the subtle differences between the Sufi and the Shiah theology in this matter, a far more complicated problem than has usually been thought, we should not enter here. In explanation of the representation of living forms even in their mosques, a practice so horrifying to other Muslims, the Persian theologians make the perfectly reasonable defence that the edict was devised only against idolatry which in the Prophet's own time had become so gross a superstition as almost to destroy the possibility of spiritual life.

The reason given by the Koranic commentators for the ruling was that the representation of living forms involved a blasphemous incursion into the domain of divine creation. Such presumption was offensive and intolerable to Arab theology. But there was in the Persian background a wholly different religious tradition; for the essence of Zoroastrianism, the Persian national religion for more than a millennium, involved the willing and loyal co-operation between God and his creatures. They were by every precept urged to fight on the side of Ahura Mazda, god of light and good, against Arhiman, his ever-threatening opponent, and God's ultimate triumph was held to be partly achieved by the precious assistance rendered by mortals. Thus in the original native Persian conception co-operation with God was not a presumption, but a duty. If, even in spite of this ameliorating bias, the artists' subjects and range were still limited and directed always along the lines of decoration, this was in response to a basic preference that has played a more or less dominant rôle in the entire art of these regions since prehistoric times.

The dualism of Zoroastrianism was by Islamic times gradually giving way to a more imminent philosophy. The

\*Sir Thomas Arnold in a learned, wise, and charming book, *Painting in Islam*, Oxford, 1928, has disclosed the deficiencies of the point of view that over-emphasises this prohibition, and has shown that the Persian instinct for beauty was too deep and strong to be thus constrained.

characteristic Asiatic world-view affirms the ever-present reality of spiritual values and forces and the essential oneness of man and his environment. On its material side this anticipated the scientific theory of evolution which for the modern world re-established the connection between man and his humble origins that, in theistic pride, he had, like a parvenu, sought to deny.

This attitude united early with certain mystical elements in Islam. "God is nearer to you than your own heart beat" was one way in which the imminence of the divine in human life was expressed in the Koran and Persian theology, and certainly, after Seljuk times, Persian Muhammadanism was infused with a quality of poetic imagination that developed these hints in a truly Iranian manner, appropriating metaphysical elements from India and from Greek Neo-Platonism. A theological poetry, or a poetical theology called Sufism, scarcely surpassed in elevation by the devotional literature of any language, soon modified the legalistic harshness of the Arab dispensation and, restoring the Persian sense of a vital personal relation with the Deity, opened the way for an inspiration in art that lent new fervour to the creations of the time and was in a real measure a compensation for the repressions of dogma, though it never displaced them.

The essence of Sufism is a passionate affirmation of the imminence of the Divine, the assurance that God, the living Whole and perfect One reveals Himself through all creation, and that every object of admiration and love ultimately leads to Him; that the humblest object partakes in some degree of Divine Perfection and that which we see either in nature or in persons to admire is the reflection, often in a remote and dim shadow, of the Absolute, near yet far. The Sufi sees in nature the outer garment of the living spirit, in the meanest thing and the lowliest material part of the texture of the perfect and the sublime, and to him it is man's privilege and



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duty to wring from reluctant matter its witness of divine perfection, in Hegel's phrase, "to release the import of appearances." The phenomenal world is a veil before the face of the Ideal and the Almighty, but to the penetrating eyes of faith it is transparent, and love reveals a divine glory.

In almost Platonic phrase the Sufi poets celebrate human love as but the beginning of the love of God, and explain the strange enchantment of beauty as a message from the divine. Beauty is the signal of the Holy Presence. It is a challenge to begin our heavenly journey, to seek the blessed union with the Source of all being who forever manifests Himself in light, love, and the beautiful. "God hath planted Beauty in our midst like a flag in the city" is Shabistari's affirmation that beauty is the symbol of all our deepest loyalties, an inspiring reminder of God the King; that, as others have said, Beauty, the light of the world, is the effulgence of the Divine countenance.\*

Beauty thus is not something special and apart, for the divine relationship includes all of reality and infuses itself through every phenomenon of nature so that each object and each event, if studied with loving care, will reveal its message and proclaim its celestial inheritance: "O God, I never listen to the cry of animals or to the quivering of trees or to the murmur of water or to the warbling of birds, or to the rustling wind, or to the crashing thunder without feeling them to be an evidence of Thy unity and a proof that there is nothing like unto Thee."†

If the world of Nature is so intimately bound up with divine perfection, how much closer must be man's own spirit. In the phraseology common to the western world, God resides also in the heart of man, and beauty is His speech.

\*Estelle Winwood, *The Poems of Shabistari*, cf. article, Sufi, in the *Encyclopædia of Islam* and many passages in E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*.

†Quoted Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p. 7

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In a passage worthy of the Phaedrus, Al-Ghazzali says: "The heart of man has been so constituted by the Almighty that, like a flint, it contains a hidden fire which is evoked by music and harmony and renders man beside himself with ecstasy. These harmonies are echoes of that higher world of beauty which we call the realm of spirits; they remind man of his kinship to that world and produce human emotions so deep and strange that he is powerless to explain it."\*

One cannot claim that such a point of view was itself an originating force in the creation of beauty. A passionate love of beauty was a powerful motive in Persia long before it received this philosophical expression; but it is clear that such a view must have deepened and intensified the experience and lent a favourable support to every artistic effort; and again, it must have keyed up each artist to gauge his work by the standards of infinite perfection, to form it more resolutely in the light of the Ideal rather than content himself with the lesser values of honour and reward. Indeed, one feels constantly in the examination of works of Persian Islamic art that the artist did consult perfection and that the audience for which he wrought was nothing less than God himself. The decoration on the bottom of a bowl or a bronze jug or the delicate pattern sometimes worked under a silver inlay on a bronze, revealed only by accident and damage, show an inspiration that surely expressed itself too in the visible design.

It would probably be too much to say that Sufism furnished as direct and universal a motive as did Christianity in Mediæval European painting. There were no specific characteristic themes in Sufism and no organised body of adherents waiting to be served by a pictorial exposition. It had no department of propaganda. But it is true that the whole outlook of this philosophy, which was widespread

\*Al-Ghazzali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, *Wisdom of the East Series*, p. 64.



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among the cultivated class, was in many ways favourable to a high quality of artistic creation. It provided reasonable excuse for evading the theological prohibitions, it exalted beauty to the level of a divine passion, its doctrine of imminence disposed men to see the ideal in the commonplace, it saw in the slightest hint of beauty an inspiring challenge to perfect insight and perfect love, and in the creation of beauty it saw a step toward God.

How vivid and how compelling this attitude and faith were is abundantly witnessed by many gifted poets, and the general enthusiasm for Sufi poetry which prevailed among the upper classes could not fail to influence the artists. These artists, many of whom were avowed Sufis, were serious men for whom the religious outlook was as natural and sincere as was the faith of the painters of China or the Italian masters of the Quattrocento.\* The artist felt himself to be the servant and prophet of the Almighty and His creations took on corresponding worth. It was his task to discover beauty, to eliminate the transitory and inert, to defend it from the accidents of Nature which dilute and destroy it and to give it timeless permanence. Thus lines were composed for the decoration of a beautiful tent, quite in the style of Keats' "Ode to Beauty":

Here are gardens where no rains have vexed  
And great tree branches where no doves have sung

. . . . .

The forest beasts you here together find;  
Though foe fights foe, they yet in peace do dwell;†

How close a connection there sometimes was between the outlook of Sufism and the artist's own theory of his work is shown by Khwandamir,‡ who actually declared that God

\*Bihzad, for example, was probably a Sufi.

†Mutanabbi, Ed. Dieterici, p. 379, quoted Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, p. 21.

‡Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, p. 35.

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was the Eternal Painter and the world was his artistic creation:

God's writing and his draftsmanship amaze  
The wise man by their magic loveliness;

and if God is thus compared to the painter, so also does Khwandamir compare the painter to God.\*

Is not this spirit one of the sources of the synthesis of intensity and serenity that we find in the remarkable portrait of a painter at work, intensely absorbed, which recently passed from the Doucet Collection to M. Emile Tabbagh of Paris; or of the equally burning yet tranquil vision which so illumines the soul of the Poet in the Garden in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts? (Fig. 54). Surely both these portraits and other paintings as well are sustained by a quality of seriousness and composure, a sense of rightness and inevitability, which have a transcendent origin.

Moreover, Sufism not only inspired the artists, it also provided for them a responsive and congenial audience that sympathised with and understood the metaphysical and religious hints in their work.

The specific connection between Sufi inspiration and particular artists and their work has never been studied, but it is a subject of such engrossing interest as well as importance that it cannot much longer be neglected. Even if the evidence fails to reveal works of Persian art that are the precise expression of some Sufi Fra Angelico, the fact will remain that beauty and work in beauty were endowed by Sufism with a status that could not but elevate and deepen the entire artistic life of the time.

\*Arnold, *op. cit.* p. 37.



## Chapter XI

### THE EXPANSION OF PERSIAN ART

THE influence of Persian art has extended throughout the world to a degree and with a persistence that has been equalled or surpassed only by that of Greece. In the first millenniums of history there were more or less homogeneous cultures that spread over large areas, in Asia probably involving the whole Continent westward from India and well into Europe. In these cultures Persia apparently played an important part, although the specific contributions that issued from the Iranian plateau cannot now be traced with any confidence. Professor Herzfeld, however, has found evidence of Persian priority at a number of points.\* The late Dr. Hall of the British Museum thought that a seal with an ibex-headed man that Professor Herzfeld found in North-west Persia antedates by a thousand years an almost identical seal found in Crete.† No doubt there was a good deal of give and take in all these districts, but none of these questions can be settled until archæologists have had an opportunity for searching work on Persian soil.

The identification of the immediate antecedents of the Sumerian civilization is one of the most challenging problems in archæology to-day. Some evidence points to Persia. Quoting probably some legend of the Sumerians, the Old Testament says that "the people journeyed from the East and came into the plain of Shinar (Babylon) and dwelt there," and C. Leonard Woolley says that the Sumerians "believed that they came into the country with their civilisation already formed, bringing with them the knowledge of agriculture, of working in metal, of the art of writing; 'since then,' said they, 'no new invention has been made'."‡

\*Cf. *Illustrated London News*, May and June 1929.

†*British Museum Quarterly*, Vol. III, p. 70.

‡Cf. Leonard Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*, London, 1929, p. 20

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These hints have had an interesting confirmation in the discovery of some gold and pottery vessels at Asterabad on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea.\* About 1835 some peasants digging near Asterabad discovered these objects, which were subsequently seen by a Russian, Count Cornelius de Bode, who made drawings of some of them and published an article in a Russian journal which appeared in a somewhat abridged form in an English journal. De Bode's drawing shows one figure on a gold cup that is quite Sumerian. The collection is not homogeneous, as de Bode and Rostovtzeff thought, for many of the bronzes belong to the same group as the recently discovered Luristan bronzes and must be of a much later date than the gold. Whether or not the few identifiable Sumerian remains in this find are antecedents of the Sumerian culture or some extension of it that may have come through trade or war, representing only an accidental survival, is one more problem that can be dealt with only by further archaeological investigation.

The interchange with China began in pre-Achæmenid times. Scholars like Dr. Laufer hold that the early cultural history of China is inexplicable saving in terms of the Persian contributions, which were basic, varied and recurrent over a long period. Persian influence continued to expand into Central Asia even against the westward stream of the Turkic migrations and it was strong enough there to modify Buddhist doctrine and iconography while that religion was passing through on its missionary journey to China.

Westward the course of Persian art took its way at an early date. The Achæmenian and Sasanian invasions of Egypt left traces in certain architectural features and in textile design. Persia was brought into contact with Rome in the third century, when the overland silk trade with

\*M. Rostovtzeff, *The Sumerian Treasure of Astrabad*, in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. VI, p. 4; and Vladimir Minorski, *Trans Caucasia*, in *Journal Asiatique*, Dec. 1930.



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China began to develop, and, as Dr. Breasted says, it was a thoroughly orientalised Rome that marked the end of the Classical world.\* It was two Persian religions, Manicheism and Mithraism, which were so potent in the late Roman Empire that even Christianity was threatened by the one and profoundly influenced by the other. Just what specific artistic contributions came with this contact and transmission of ideas is still a controversial question, but that they were real and important is incontrovertible. It is noteworthy that some of the outstanding architectural developments in Rome appear in the reign of Diocletian, whose interests and affections turned eastward.

After Rome passed into the shadow, Persia was in constant, too often belligerent, contact with Byzantium, and many cultural motifs were interchanged. Among the eastern influences in Byzantium that of Persia was necessarily dominant. She was the great Asiatic power, facing Byzantium as an equal and rival for world dominion. The clearest and most decisive contribution of Persia was in the field of textiles. The lordly, hieratic style of the Sasanian silks became the fashion in Byzantium and was imitated in turn in provincial renditions on many European looms.

One of the ceramic styles of Persia, too, entered into the Byzantine industry and went thence into Europe, for the Gabri pottery of Western Persia (*cf.* p. 67) has a Byzantine counterpart, so close in colour and design that Talbot Rice, who has made the most serious study of this,† finds the two wares distinguishable, at times, only by technical differentiae. From Byzantium the style passed into Italy, where there were various echoes and even approximations to the original Persian models, of which the thirteenth to fourteenth century Orvieto ware is the most conspicuous example.

\*James H. Breasted, *The Ordeal of Civilization*, Vol. I.

†Chapter in forthcoming *Survey of Persian Art on Relations between Persian and Byzantine Ceramics*.

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The Abbasid Caliphate in the ninth century, made famous by Haroun ar-Rashid and his Arabian Nights which are more Mesopotamian and Persian than Arabian, was dominated by Persian culture. The Islamic world, rich, powerful and superbly organised, was now brought for the first time into constant relations with the West. Haroun ar-Rashid and Charlemagne exchanged gifts and embassies, and Baghdad, the most magnificent city in the world, with the exception only of Byzantium, was the distributing centre for Persian ideas and Persian styles. Some Abbasid panels of carved wood, recently discovered near Baghdad, point to Persian workmanship, and we know that many Persian craftsmen were summoned for the enrichment of Baghdad. It is probable, too, that the pointed arch was developed there\* and then carried westward to the Mediterranean, where it appears first in a cistern at Ramleh, then in the Nilometer on the Island of Rhodes (861) (Fig. 3) and, on a grand scale, as the unit of construction in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun (867). From Syria and Egypt it was early distributed to Europe, first to Sicily, where the oldest example is in the bridge of Admiral Don Giorgio of Antioch. From Sicily it went with the Normans to France and England. Russell Sturgis' statement that certain types of Persian architecture contributed to mediæval European building almost as much as did the architecture of Rome itself, is now widely accepted.†

Asia Minor under the Seljuks and Ottomans might almost be called a cultural extension of Persia. When the Turks swept into Persia they were hardly more than barbarians, but in both literature and the arts they were soon eager pupils of Persian masters, and from the twelfth century on the Turkish art of Asia Minor is almost completely under the dominance of Persian ideas and methods.

\*Cf. E. Diez, *Orientalische Gothik, Studien zur Kunst des Ostens*, Vienna, 1923.

†Russell Sturgis, *A History of Architecture*, Vol. II, p. 58.



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The Turkish court carpets at first copied the North-west Persian medallion carpets in both design and colour. A Persian architect from Tabriz was responsible for the Green Mosque of Broussa, whose mate, the exquisite Masjid-i-Shah of Mashad, was also built by a Tabrizi. The beautiful so-called Rhodian faience, although carried out in an un-Persian intensity of colour was wholly of Persian inspiration\* and there is a tradition, plausible enough, that Sultan Muhammad, one of the most famous of Persian painters, went to Constantinople to superintend the designs. These potteries surpass anything of the same type done in Persia, but they are beholden to Persia not merely for most of their patterns but even for technical details such as the use of tomato red on a slightly relief underbody, a device which has its antecedent in fifteenth and sixteenth century pottery found at Saveh. The thick silver and gold brocades are also of Persian derivation and often hard to distinguish from their Persian prototypes.

Indeed, Persian architects, painters and craftsmen swarmed the Turkish courts and cities, either as volunteers seeking careers or as prisoners of war, for skilled artisans were a valued kind of booty in the Orient. Turkey had so many contacts with Europe that she in turn transmitted Persian styles and motifs in great volume and through many channels.

The Caucasus was, for a long period, not only a part of Persia politically, but was culturally dominated by her. Although ethnographically an impressive collection of racial stocks, its finest art was Persian or under Persian influence. The early and mediæval Islamic potteries were still produced there centuries after the style had ceased in Persia proper. Persian lustre tiles, indistinguishable from those at Varamin and Ray, decorated the mosques from

\*Dr. R. M. Riefstahl has recently found valuable new evidence concerning Persia's rôle in the ceramic art of Asia Minor which will be published in the *Survey of Persian Art*.

Tiflis to Darbend. Much of the fine Caucasus metal work is as purely Persian as if made in Isfahan, and the gold and enamel ware of Kumouk is as Persian as though from Shiraz. The carpet weavers of Daghestan copied in their own simple and virile way the Vase carpets and other Persian types from the Karabagh district and a few from Eastern Persia (*cf.* p. 141). One of the finest buildings of Persian workmanship of the late Middle Ages is the exquisite little Palace of the Khan in Baku (Fig. 19).

Turkestan and Afghanistan were, at various times, even more integrally part of the Persian cultural empire than the Caucasus, and some of the finest and truest Persian work is to be found there. It was an Isfahani who put his name on the great mausoleum of Tamerlane at Samarkand. One cannot give a sound account of the development of Persian art without reference to those regions, both as sources of material and inspiration and as a scene of the triumph of some of Persia's ablest artists.

The extension of Persian culture into North India is too well known to be described in detail. Thanks to the enthusiasm of the Moghul princes and connoisseurs, whole colonies of Persian artists were brought to Delhi, Lahore and Agra, there to ply their native skill on a foreign soil, working for masters who at first asked nothing better than that they should be true to Persian styles. Of course the vital native tradition of North India, with its centuries of momentum, gradually asserted itself until we have, later, a composite style which becomes more and more purely Indian.

Persian workmen found their way into Africa, too. It is more than possible that the ninth century carved panels of the great pulpit of Kairouan were the work of Persian craftsmen. Even in Zanzibar we find architecture and faience in the purely Persian manner.

Moreover, Persian styles not only made their contribution to the classical world and stimulated many of the arts of



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Asia and of Africa from prehistoric to modern times, but also, through their immediate derivatives, they enriched European æsthetic ideas and technique, contributing, for example, by way of Byzantium, both textile and ceramic models and introducing through Egypt and Spain the all-important pointed arch. But direct contacts between Persia and Europe were early established too. The first of these were very probably made at Nijni Novgorod, where Swedish merchants from Gothenburg maintained a station.\* By the tenth century Persian influence in Scandinavia had become quite substantial. Nearly 50,000 Persian coins (as well as a system of weights and measures and other remains, of which a beautiful silver cup is the most important) have been found at various Scandinavian sites of this period. There are also a considerable number of Swedish baptismal fonts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that might have been done by Persian carvers. The Sasanian tradition reached out its strong hand even to these remote regions.

By the tenth century, if not earlier, Spain also was in direct contact with Persia and Persian workmen settled there, especially potters. The Persian contribution to European ceramics through this channel is an oft-told tale.† Rome had bequeathed a ceramic tradition of a kind, and Gallo-Roman pottery has some interesting features, but sensitive contour or beautiful colour are not among them. The post-classical pottery of Europe was dull in form, meagre and harsh in colour. The lustre technique which revitalised the industry in Southern Europe was, in the judgment of most scholars, a Persian invention which spread westward. The lustre faience of Spain and that of Persia of the tenth century are often so close that there was for long a decided difference

\*The acknowledged master of this subject is Prof. T. J. Arne, of Stockholm.

†Cf. Otto Von Falke, *Maiolica* and the contributions of Henri Terrasse and Bernard Rackham to the forthcoming *Survey of Persian Art* on this subject.

of opinion as to whether a lovely little lustre mihrab in the Schloss Museum of Berlin was Spanish or Persian; and it is still difficult to distinguish it in colour or in technique from the famous signed and dated bowl from Malaga in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum.\* From Spain the technique went to Italy. Thus the glories of Deruta and Gubbio are but glints reflected from a Persian sunrise.

New discoveries constantly confirm and expand the story of Europe's debt to Persia. Fragments of etched ivory have recently been found at Ray that are unmistakably antecedents of some of the Sicilian ivory, and the ornamentation of strong-boxes with applied human figures in semi-round, as on the coffers of Limoges and the Rhine Valley, was originally a Persian idea appearing on a Persian example in a form so close to the European derivatives that one could be pardoned for confusing them (Fig. 87).

From the time of Marco Polo European travellers and embassies were penetrating Persia, and by the fourteenth century several Italian cities were maintaining legations at the courts of the Ilkhans. Following Venetian missions to Persia in the fifteenth century and the establishment in Tabriz of trading houses, a group of Persian metal workers set up shop in Venice (*cf.* p. 184) and we have a good many fine examples of their skill in carved and encrusted bronzes, some of the best of which bear the inscription Muhammad el-Kurdi. These bronzes are in a rather different style from those of the Near East. They are slightly greener in colour and the patterns are finer and more intricate. Hence it has been concluded that these modifications were locally contributed by the Venetian taste. But the earliest of these pieces are purely Persian and are indistinguishable from others found in Persia which, like a piece in the Stora Collection, carry Persian inscriptions.

Italian bookbinding also looked to Persian models and

\*I owe this observation to Dr. E. Kuehnelt.



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many Italian astronomical and navigating instruments were copies and elaborations of Persian prototypes. From the twelfth century on, the textile art of Italy was constantly beholden to Persian designers; thus many of the handsome Lucca brocades can be traced to Seljuk antecedents, the patterns being in a few cases almost identical, though there are evidences of the priority of the Persian versions. Indeed, European textile design is generally under great obligations to Persia, many of the most familiar patterns being ultimately of Persian invention, while in the carpet industry all but a very few designs are based on Persian originals.

Throughout the arts of design, as a matter of fact, Persia's influence is most emphatic. The pattern books of the Renaissance, such as the famous one edited by Nolis Vergilis, were often frankly made up of adaptations of Oriental and particularly Persian models.\* In European painting, on the other hand, it is less easy to identify any Persian influence, though Gustave Soulier has found many interesting and, as he thinks, determinative relations.†

The importance of Persia in European art is not, however, to be measured merely by the contribution of specific techniques or designs. There are certain general qualities of elegance, distinction, graceful symmetry and perfection of craftsmanship, now ideals in the decorative arts, which, however complex their origins, owe a great deal to Persian sources. Such a diffused influence is permanent, reflecting the same quality in a wide variety of arts.

Moreover, the Persian contributions to European arts and standards of taste are by no means things of the past. Every museum that has a collection of Persian art sustains its influence and many of our modern artists are turning for refreshment and inspiration to Persian styles, seeing in

\*Cf. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, Vol. II, p. 2.

†*Les Influences Orientales dans la Peinture Toscane*, Paris, 1924.

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certain of them the successful realisation of some of the most characteristic trends of contemporary art. Artists of such widely separated styles as Rothenstein, the portraitist; Brangwyn, the mural decorator; John Storrs, the sculptor; and Matisse, the colourist and innovator, acknowledge a precious inspiration from Persian sources, and Brangwyn and Matisse have themselves made interesting collections of Persian pottery.

While our heritage from the art of Greece is fundamental and immortal, only Persia can point to such a variety, such a wide distribution and such a repeatedly renewed influence on other cultures. One reason for this range and vitality of influence is Persia's geographical location. Almost at the cross-roads of civilisation, she has been in contact with every important culture for thousands of years and has been in a position also to disseminate her cultural material. There are, however, other regions almost as favourably situated and also enjoying a great variety of contacts which have left but little imprint on the progress of art in the world. The geographical factor alone is not, therefore, sufficient to explain Persia's importance.

The phenomenon is due primarily to the intrinsic character of Persian art. Somewhat the same qualities which bore Greek art on its revealing and inspiring mission throughout the world, have made Persian art effective and carried it so far afield. The triumph of Greek art lies in its perfect realisation of the essential qualities of the ideal human mind. It is the embodiment of the lucidity and rationality, the ordered variety that is the implicit norm of the mind itself. The forms of Greek art epitomise the strivings of the human spirit in its most perfect functioning. Because the Greek forms are thus based on the essential nature of mind they acquire something of the same communicability, universality and authority of the laws of logic which know no boundaries of race or time. Transcending these limits, they



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have an expansive power co-extensive with humanity. As Seneca said, "The mind abjures a mean and local habitation."

Somewhat the same qualities have given Persian art a similar expansive power. Again its well-ordered symmetry, its lucidity that rejects the accidental and the vague, and its unwavering ideal of rationality, that so facilitates the perception of design, commended it everywhere to man's understanding. For the logic of Persian as well as of Greek art is more than the logic of the syllogism. It involves the essence of the whole conscious life of the human being in so far as he reaches and maintains the human ideal; his vision, his motor responses, his feeling tone and specific emotions, his will as well as his ideas. These qualities are universal and always will be. It is they that have given both Greek and Persian art their wide appeal and their unquenchable immortality.

## *Chapter XII*

### *CONTEMPORARY ART IN PERSIA AND FUTURE PROSPECTS*

FOR more than two centuries now art has steadily declined in Persia. The loss of foreign markets, governmental incompetence, the dreadful Afghan invasion, the wasteful imperialistic enterprises of Nadir Shah and a succession of civil wars resulted in poverty, depression and confusion, unfavourable to art in any form. The Kajar Dynasty established by Fath Ali Shah was, save in one or two respects, hopelessly dull and tasteless. Aside from a few golden domes, it created no interesting monuments, and even destroyed ancient ones. Fath Ali Shah obliterated a Sasanian rock carving at Ray, a record of precious importance, replacing it with gross and inert effigies of himself and six of his 300 sons. The Zill es-Sultan, a local potentate of odious memory who ruled Isfahan in the last part of the nineteenth century, was animated by a mania for destruction. Jealous of the fame of Shah Abbas, he apparently wanted to destroy the monuments that recalled this glorious reign. It is said in Isfahan that he was more of a blight than the Afghan invasion. All the monuments suffered neglect, and some charming palaces such as the Aineh Khaneh and the Haft Dast were deliberately wrecked.

Persia's decline coincided with the mounting prestige of Europe. This would have been unfortunate enough for Persian art had Europe been at the height of some one of her great periods of artistic understanding, but the influence of Europe in Persia corresponded with the decline of European taste and all the atrocities of the "Age of Horror" with its inept architecture, gaudy decoration and clumsy furniture swept into Persia, particularly from Russia, capturing the favour of the nobles and depriving the few existing artists of hope for important commissions.



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Even at this period of depression, however, taste and skill in calligraphy survived. Mechanical print in foreign tongues could hardly compete with an art so widespread and so highly esteemed. Carpet-weaving skill was maintained, especially in the villages and mountain districts, and handsome and interesting rugs in a genuine native tradition with fine colours and indigenous patterns were made down to the turn of the century. The European and American financing of the rug trade and the demand for quantity production, with its inevitable lowering of standards, gradually reduced the weaver to the status of an animated machine. But the weavings of Isfahan, of Tabriz and Mashad, and to some extent of Kerman and Sultanabad, the last few years have shown marked improvement. The impetus to the revival of the art has come partly from some of the upper class Persians themselves; and the problem is recognised by the local authorities as well as by some of the foreign merchants and manufacturers, although, having been partly responsible for the debauchery of the industry, the foreign interests are now having trouble in re-establishing the standards that they helped to ruin. It is especially interesting that in Eastern Persia, in Mashad and Birjand there has been a genuine revival of rug weaving, and some of the better carpets from Birjand in quality of wool, richness of colour and fineness of weave are worthy successors of the work of more fortunate days. The greatest difficulty in this renaissance of the carpet art is with the designs, but the problem has been recognised and a few designers have recently appeared who really understand the old styles and have skill and taste in inventing new patterns.

The trade in falsifications has in a number of crafts encouraged the revival of old methods and occasionally even stimulated new inventions. Quite a number of falsifications of the Vase carpets have been produced in late years, most of them distributed through the Cairo market, but they are

so bad that it seems difficult to believe that anyone need be warned against them.

In other fields also the old traditions have been continued. Brocade weaving of a sort was carried on in various centres, and some imitations of old brocades and velvets have been attempted, but these also should deceive no one, though some velvets made in Kashan by David Izaak about thirty years ago were more successful than the brocades. In 1925, shortly after a group of Seljuk silks were discovered in Ray, a very clever forger of Teheran undertook to produce some silk prints, presumably of the twelfth or thirteenth century, a far easier task than trying to imitate the exceedingly fine damasks. Several pieces were made and burned full of holes with acids and other devices. The designs included some rather good Kufic, of which this particular worker is a master, but the drawing of the animals and foliage had an artificial clumsiness quite out of keeping with the style they were intended to exemplify.

The skill in silver filigree work for which Zanzan was particularly famous lent itself admirably to some falsifications in gold which flooded the market in 1925 (*cf.* p. 179). A romantic demand in Europe for "Saracenic" arms inlaid with gold supported even fifty years ago a lively industry in Isfahan as well as in India, but few are made now and the only types that need bother the connoisseur are those that were made in the Caucasus. These were carefully fashioned of the finest materials by workers who had never lost their hold on the old styles and workmanship.

The faience makers retained some of their skill in colour glazing throughout this time, and they have always been able to cut their tiles into delicate if uninspired mosaic patterns. The reparation of some of the Isfahan mosques has recently revived this skill in mosaic faience and some excellently composed panels have been made by the workers outside of hours. These have copied the designs in the



bazaar and on some of the seventeenth century residences. Those done with new tiles are rather bleak and dead in colour, but those cut from old tiles are not so easy to detect. Some of these have come into the Western market by way of Jerusalem. Some painted pottery in the twelfth and thirteenth century styles has been made, but only a very few workers have been successful in approaching the old standards. A few enamels on unglazed terra cotta have appeared, and one of these in the tenth century style is so well done there is still some uncertainty as to whether it is old or new.

There is, moreover, one dangerous type of falsification of these wares, that of assembly and repair. A genuine bowl with a lovely exterior but badly damaged interior is polished down to a thin shell, the interior of another bowl is fitted in and perhaps the bottom of a third added. Although the work is done with superlative skill, there are quick and reliable methods of detection.

As the Gabri ware mounted in price and popularity, and also as the difficulty and cost of recovering it increased, old and poor specimens were reglazed and a number were created quite new. But these again are rarely of a quality to deceive an expert. By far the most convincing falsifications of this type have been the work of certain Paris repairers. Doubtful pieces can be best tested by comparison with fragments of assured authenticity.

A few painters have made moderately good falsifications and have skilfully restored old, damaged miniatures. Some of the draftsmen working in line and wash drawing have done work so fine that it has more than once passed experienced connoisseurs. The binders have continued to ply their trade more or less inconspicuously, encouraged by occasional orders from conservative families for work in the old style. Recently certain painters and binders have combined to produce a bastard species of cut and painted leather

in the sixteenth century style, and several of these panels have reached Europe, there at first to be enthusiastically welcomed as genuine.

The wood carvers also found sufficient market for their work to keep the technique alive, and they have combined with the decorative painters to make chests and doors, a flourishing trade in this work having developed in the last five years, with America as the principal market. While the painted doors always show inconsistencies, overcrowding, or some other failure really to understand the old style, the finest are nevertheless often done with skill in drawing and richness and taste in colour. Another style of doors, very effective and well done, which recently reached the Paris market has panels covered with delicate plaques of pierced and incised bone showing *personnages*, animals and floral motifs in the sixteenth century style. Some of these doors are frankly produced as modern, but others are elaborately falsified and the prices range from £40 to £500.

The workers of Persia are conscious of the glorious past of their art and still have high standards of skill. They are capable, too, of intense and long-continued application. Their taste, while vacillating, is real and their admiration for certain excellent types is often genuine and enthusiastic.

The reparation of monuments which has been going on under the new régime of various parts of Persia, and particularly in Isfahan, has brought out many competent craftsmen, and the results have been excellent, in many places the new work being almost indistinguishable from the old. The lively-mindedness of the Persian, his quick response to an inspiring idea, his unquenched admiration for skill of eye and hand encourages the hope that Persia is once more, as so many times in the past, on the threshold of a new dispensation.

For one of the conspicuous features of Persian culture has been its extraordinary power of self-renewal. No



#### INTRODUCTION TO PERSIAN ART

calamity has extinguished the love of beauty and no period of depression has been sufficient to break the tradition out of which the Persian spirit has time and again fashioned a new expression. If, because of world conditions as well as her own misfortunes the art of Persia has at the moment a difficult task and a future not yet assured, we must remember that the outlook has many times been far more hopeless, and that of the Persian æsthetic spirit we may with justice say:

"This savours not of death.

This hath a relish of immortality."

## HISTORICAL TABLE

Prehistoric Period .. .. .	to 2750 B.C.
Archaic Period (including Elamite and Medean) ..	2750-550 B.C.
Achaemenian Period .. .. .	550-330 B.C.
Alexander's Successors .. .. .	330-200 B.C.
Parthian Period .. .. .	200 B.C.-A.D. 222
Sasanian Period .. .. .	222-650
Islamic Period .. .. .	637

The Hijra or Flight of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. The  
beginning of Islamic chronology. 621

Arab Conquest of Persia (overthrow of Sasanian Dynasty)	638-642
The Abbasid Caliphate (under Persian influence) ..	750-949
Haroun ar-Rashid, Caliph of Baghdad .. ..	786-809
The Seljuks .. .. .	1037-1197
The Mongols .. .. .	1220-1287
The Timurids .. .. .	1369-1500
The Safavids .. .. .	1501-1736
The Kajars .. .. .	1798-1925
Riza Shah Pahlevi .. .. .	1925



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*PLATES*







*Photo Poppe*

*Figure 1*

The North-east liwan of the Masjid-i-Shah,  
Isfahan





*Photo Pape]*

*Figure 2*

Piers in the great dome chamber of the Masjid-i-Jāmi,  
Isfahan, c. 1085



*Photo Cremall*

*Figure 3*

The Nilometer on the Island of Roda, 861

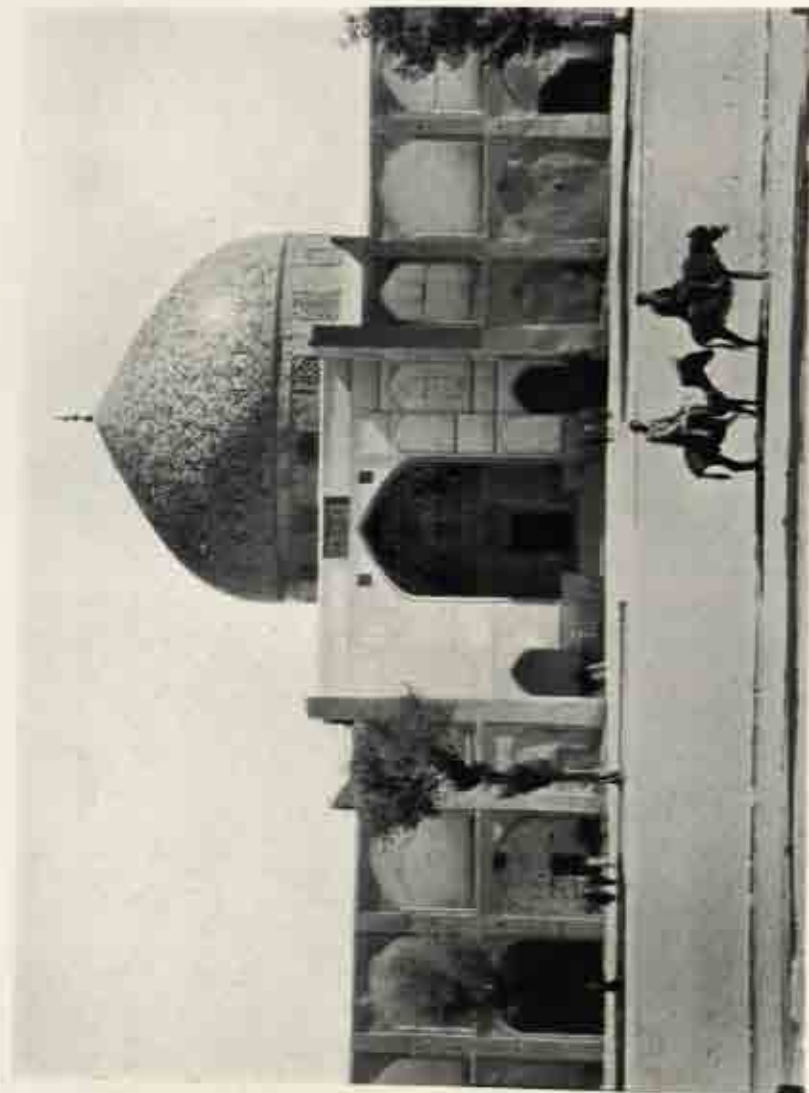


*Photo Poppe*

*Figure 4*

Squinch in the small dome chamber of the  
Masjid-i-Jāmi, Isfahan, 1088





*Figure 5.*

The Masjid Sheikh Lutf Ullah seen from the Palace of the Ali Kapu

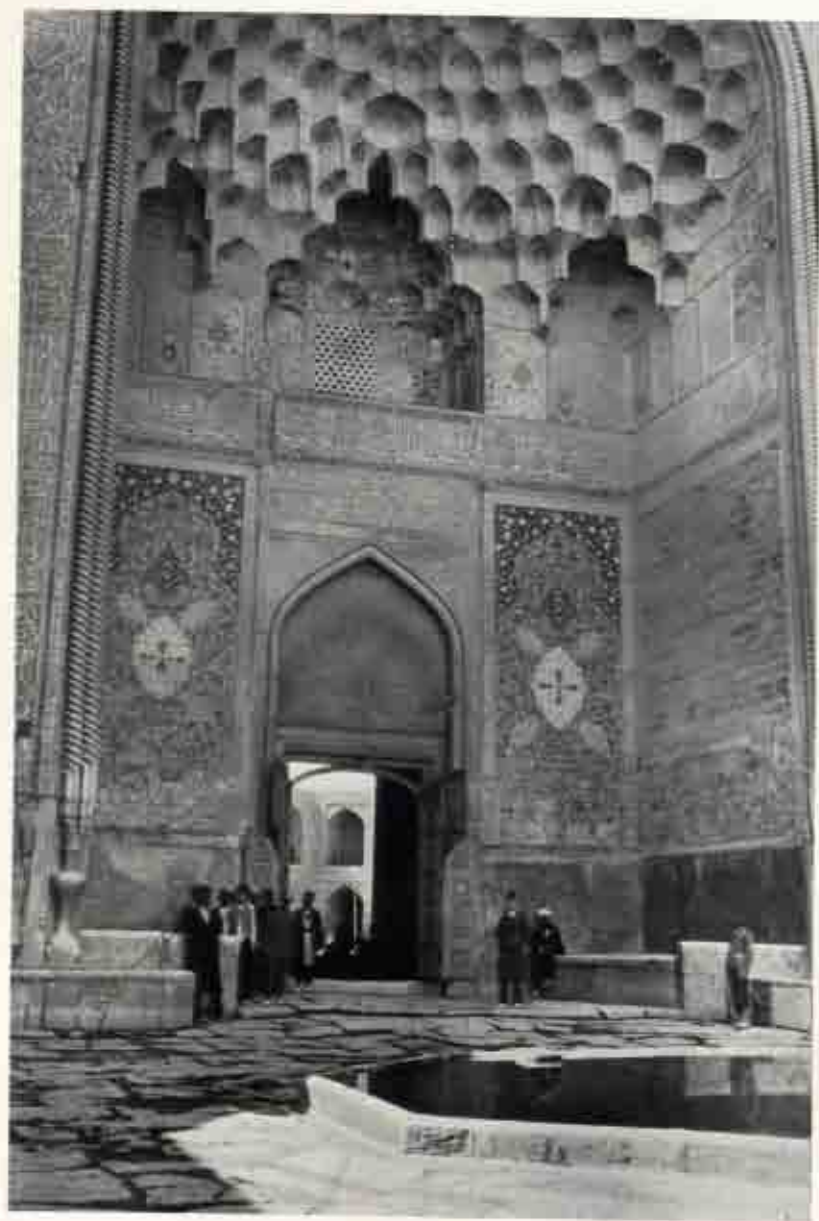
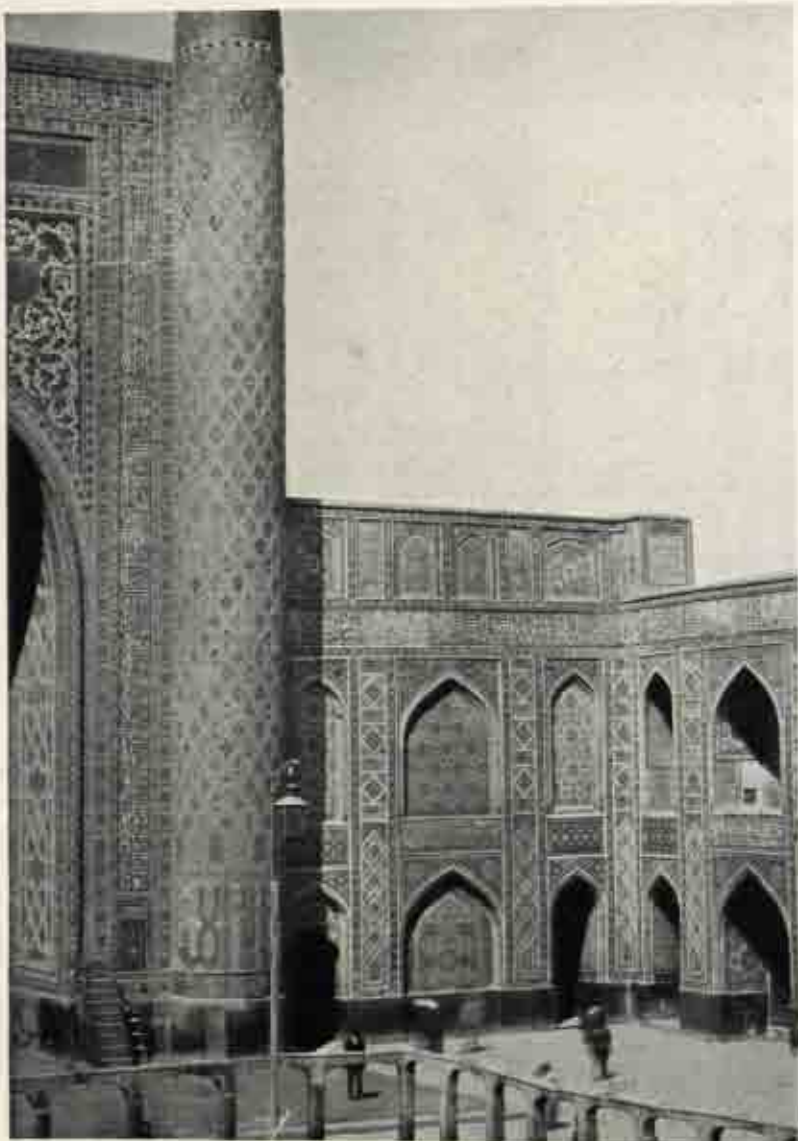


Photo Pope)

*Figure 6*  
The entrance to the Masjid-i-Shah, Isfahan





*Photo Pope*

*Figure 7*

Looking west in the court of Masjid-i-Gohar Shad, Mas'had



Photo: P. P. P.

*Figure 8*

The Palace of the Chahil Sutun, Isfahan. Beginning of 17th century





Photo Page 3

Figure 9

The meidan of Isfahan with the Masjid-i-Shah and the Palace of the Ali Kapu



*Photo Pope*

*Figure 10*

The garden of the Chahil Sutun with the Ali Kapu beyond





*Photo: Poppe]*

*Figure 11*  
Stucco decoration on the soffit of an arch in the  
Mosque of Nayin



*Photo Pope]*

*Figure 12*

Gatch in the Palace of the Ali Kapu, 17th century

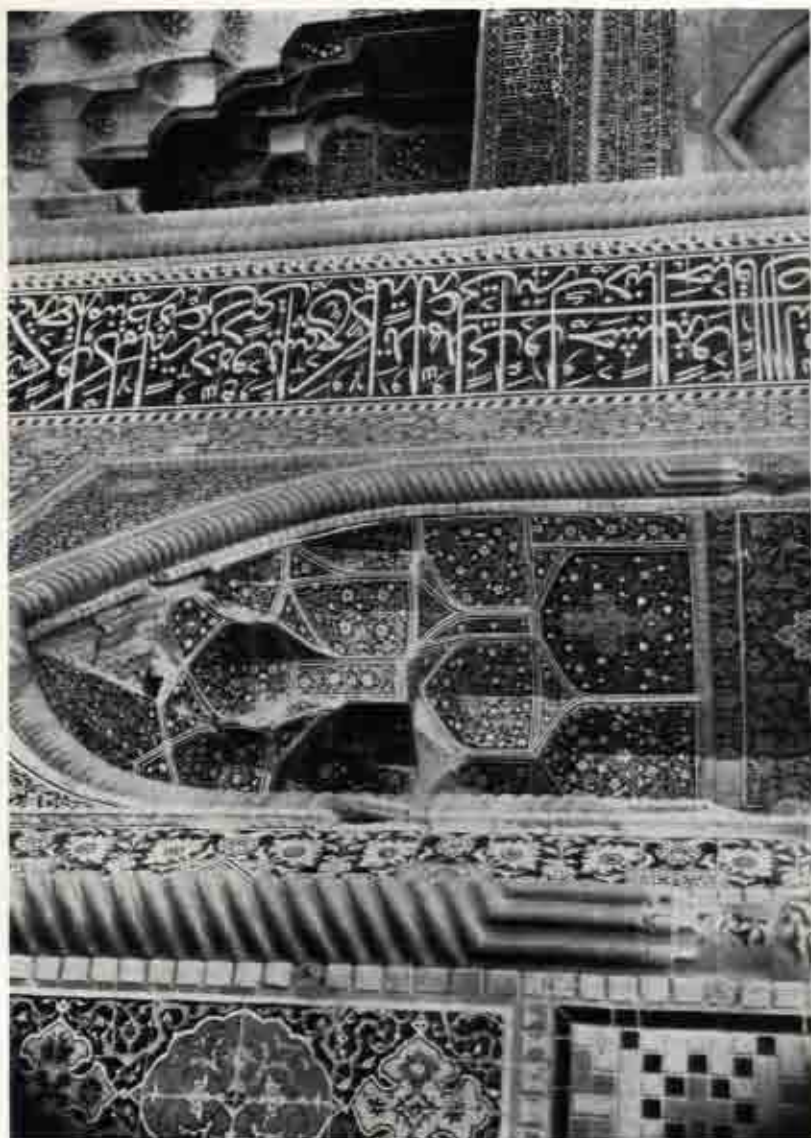




Photo: Pope

*Figure 13*

Mosaic faience panel, portal of the Masjid-i-Shah, Isfahan



*Figure 14*

Mosaic faience. Portal of the Masjid-i-Shah, Isfahan

*Photo: Pope]*

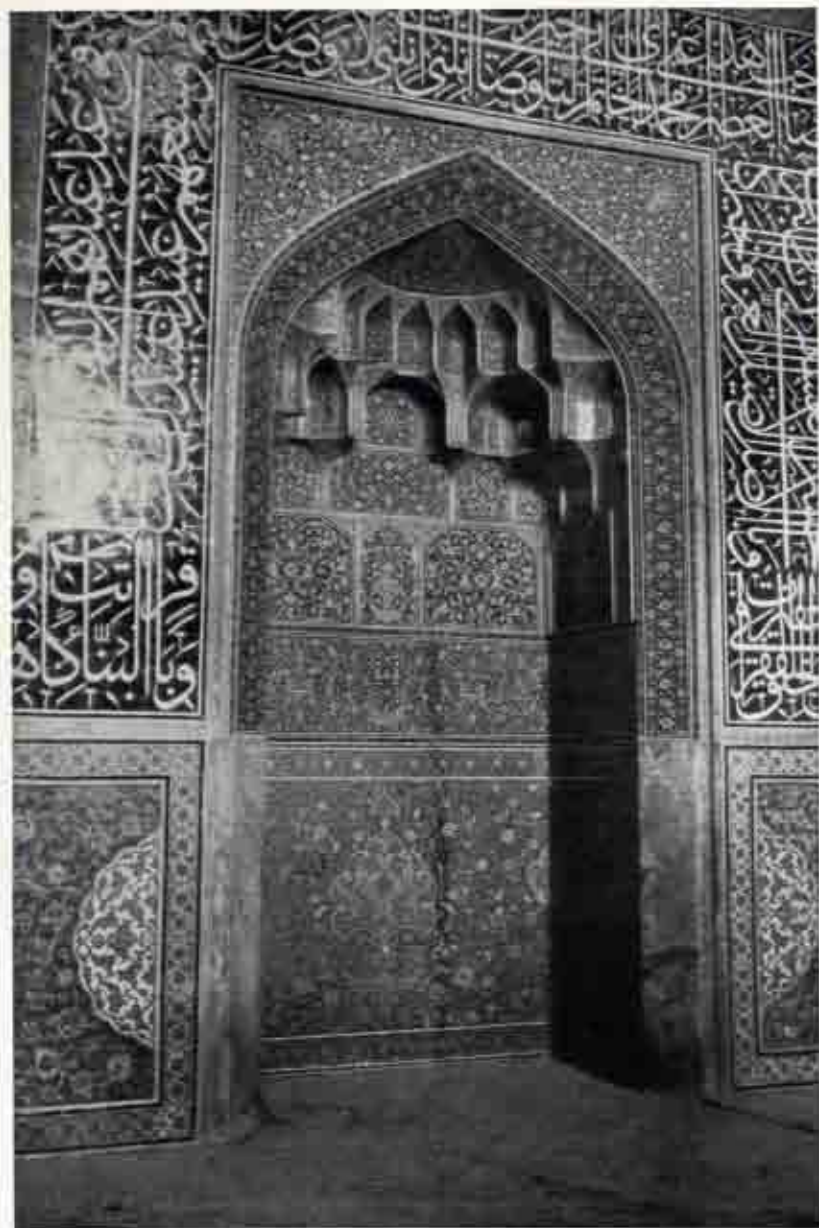




*Photo Pope)*

*Figure 15*

Mosaic faience panel, entrance to the great dome chamber, Masjid-i-Jâmi, Isfahan

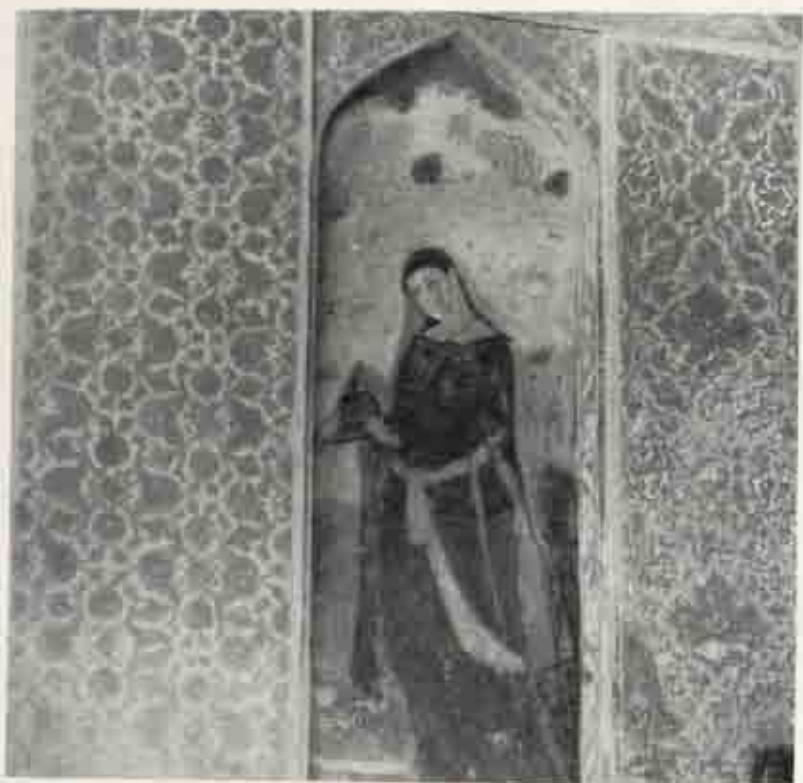


*Photo Pope*

*Figure 16*

Mosaic faience and *haft rengi* in the Masjid Sheikh Lutf Ullah, Isfahan,  
1621





*Phon Pope*

*Figure 17*

Mural painting in the style of Riza Abbasi, Palace of the Ali Kapu,  
Isfahan



*Photo Poppe*

*Figure 18*  
Mural painting in European style, Palace of the Chahil Sutun,  
Isfahan





*Photo Popel*

*Figure 19*  
Entrance to the Palace of the Khan, Baku.  
Early 16th century

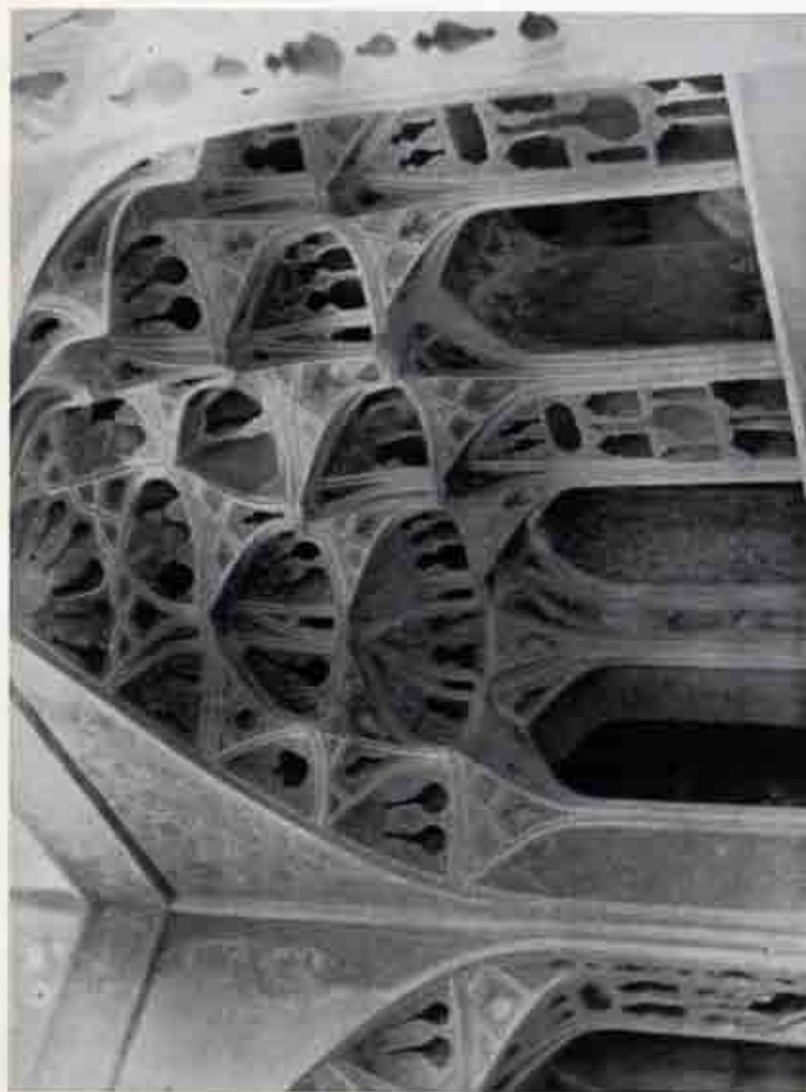
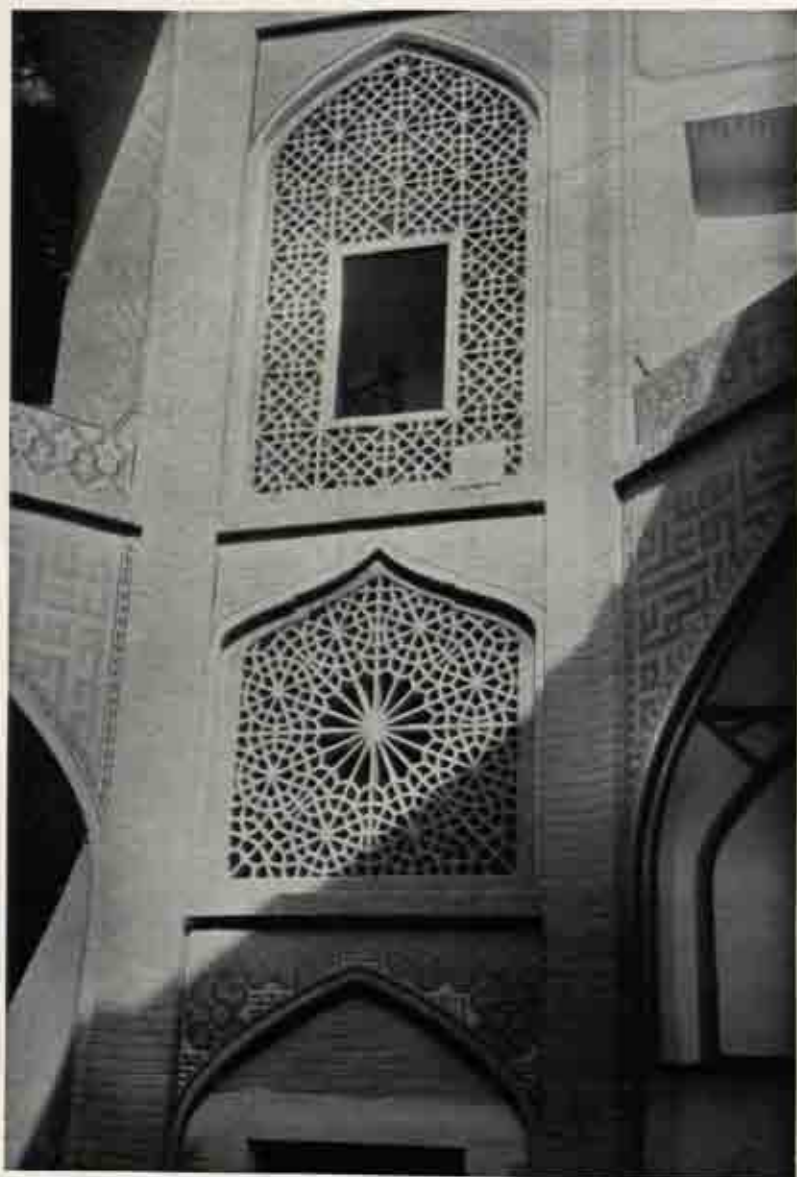


Photo Page

Figure 20

A porcelain chamber in the Palace of the Ali Kapu, Isfahan





[Photo: Pope]

*Figure 21*  
Wooden window grills in the Masjed-i-Shah, Isfahan,  
19th century



*Figure 22.*

Painted terra-cotta cup from Nihayend. Probably second millennium B.C.  
Institute of Arts, Detroit





*Figure 23*

So-called Gabri bowl with griffon. Garous, 10th century. Cleveland Museum of Art



*Figure 24*

So-called Gabri bowl with fantastic human-headed beast.  
Garous, 10th-11th centuries. Louvre





*Figure 25*  
Bowl with fantastic leopard, Kermanshah, 9th-10th centuries.  
Eumorfopoulos Collection, London



*Figure 26*

Incised bowl. Ray, probably 10th century. Louvre



*Figure 27*

Deep plate signed by Abu Talib, Art Institute of Chicago





*Figure 28*

Lustre bowl. Ray, 10th century. Parish-Watson Collection, New York



*Figure 29*

Bowl with black silhouette decoration. Ray, 12th century.  
Parish-Watson Collection, New York





*Figure 30*  
Panel of lustre tiles. Ray, 12th-13th centuries. Louvre



*Figure 31*

Lustre relief tile. Ray, 13th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art





*Figure 32*

Jar with relief ornament in turquoise faience. Ray, 12th-13th centuries.  
Collection Baron Edmond Rothschild, Paris



*Figure 33*

Cup with painted decoration. Ray, 12th-13th centuries.  
Parish-Watson Collection, New York





*Figure 34*

Bowl with painted decoration, Ray, 12th-13th centuries.  
Parish-Watson Collection, New York



*Figure 35*

Bowl with painted decoration, Ray, 12th-13th centuries  
Allan Balch Collection, Los Angeles





*Figure 36*

Cup with painted decoration, Ray, 12th-13th centuries.  
Parish-Watson Collection, New York



*Figure 37*

Bowl with gold relief decoration. Ray, 13th century.  
Parish-Watson Collection, New York





*Figure 38*

Lustre bowl, Ray, 12th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art



*Figure 39*

Lustre bowl. Ray, dated 1281. Institute of Arts, Chicago





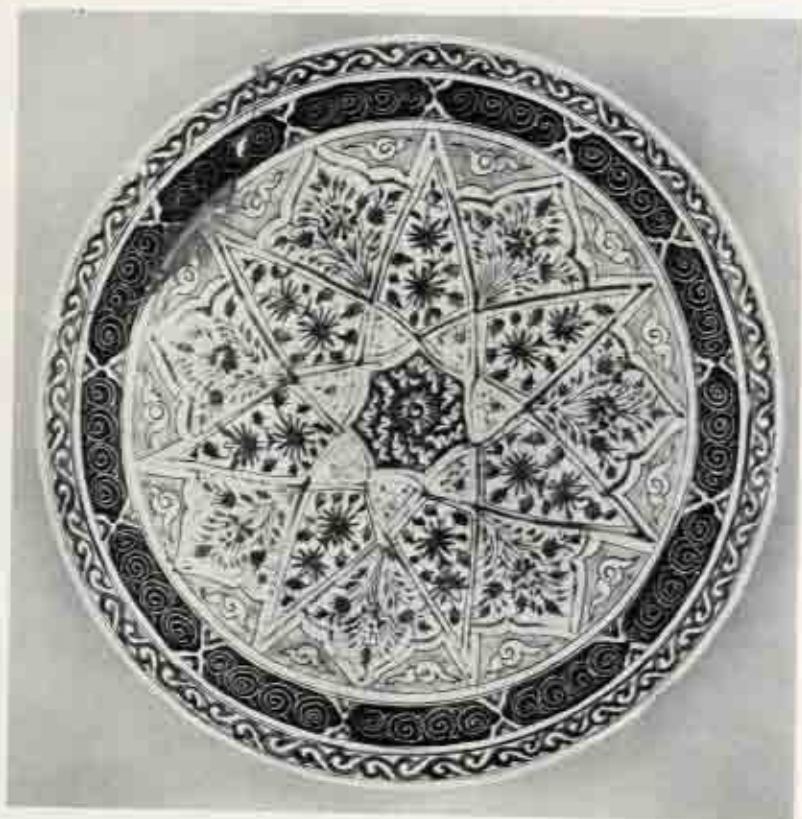
*Figure 40*  
Jar with relief ornament. Possession Raymond Armsby,  
San Francisco



*Figure 41*

Pitcher, Sultanabad, 14th century. Collection E. Debenham, London





*Figure 42*

Plate with painted decoration. Isfahan, 17th century  
Metropolitan Museum of Art



*Figure 43*

Koran page with Kufic script, 11th century. Toledo Museum of Art





*Figure 44*

Page of Nastalīq script by Mir Ali of Tabriz, 14th-15th centuries  
Boston Museum of Fine Arts



*Figure 45*

Tile with rectangular Kufic script from the  
Masjid-i-Shah, Isfahan, 17th century.  
Art Institute of Chicago



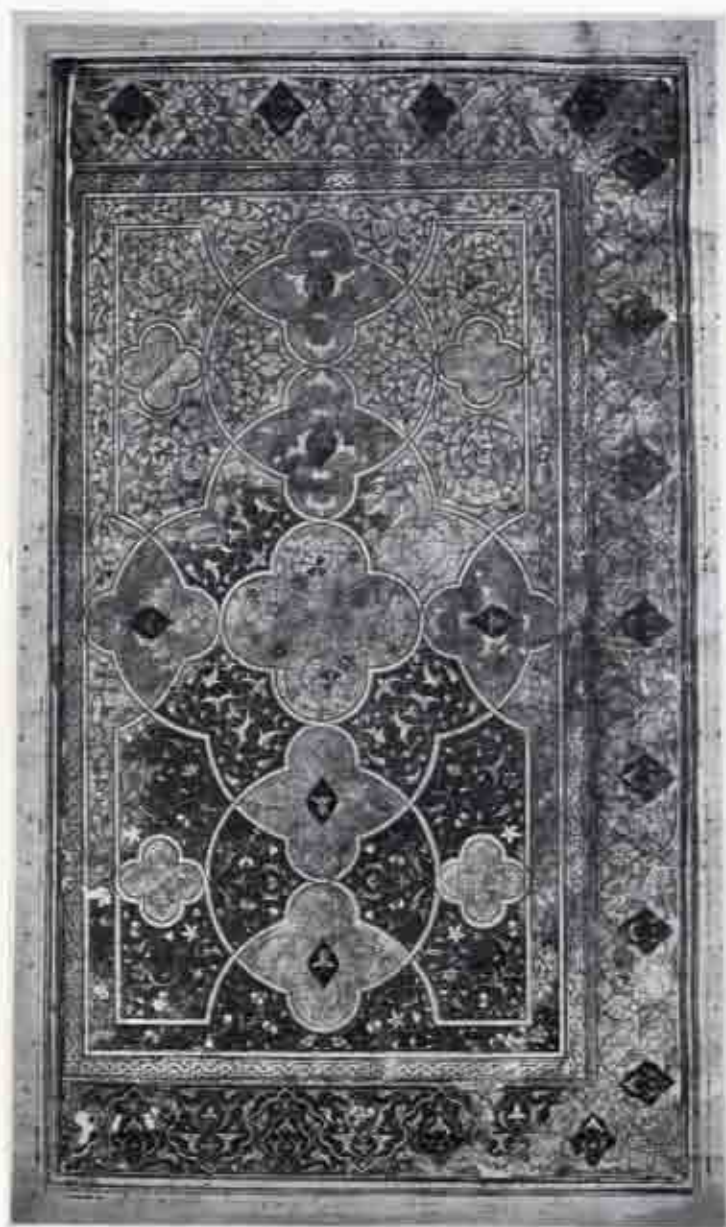
*Figure 46*

Ornamented page with Nastalīq script by Hamid-al-Hasani  
About 1600, Boston Museum of Fine Arts





*Figure 47*  
Ornamented page. 17th century, Boston Museum of Fine Arts

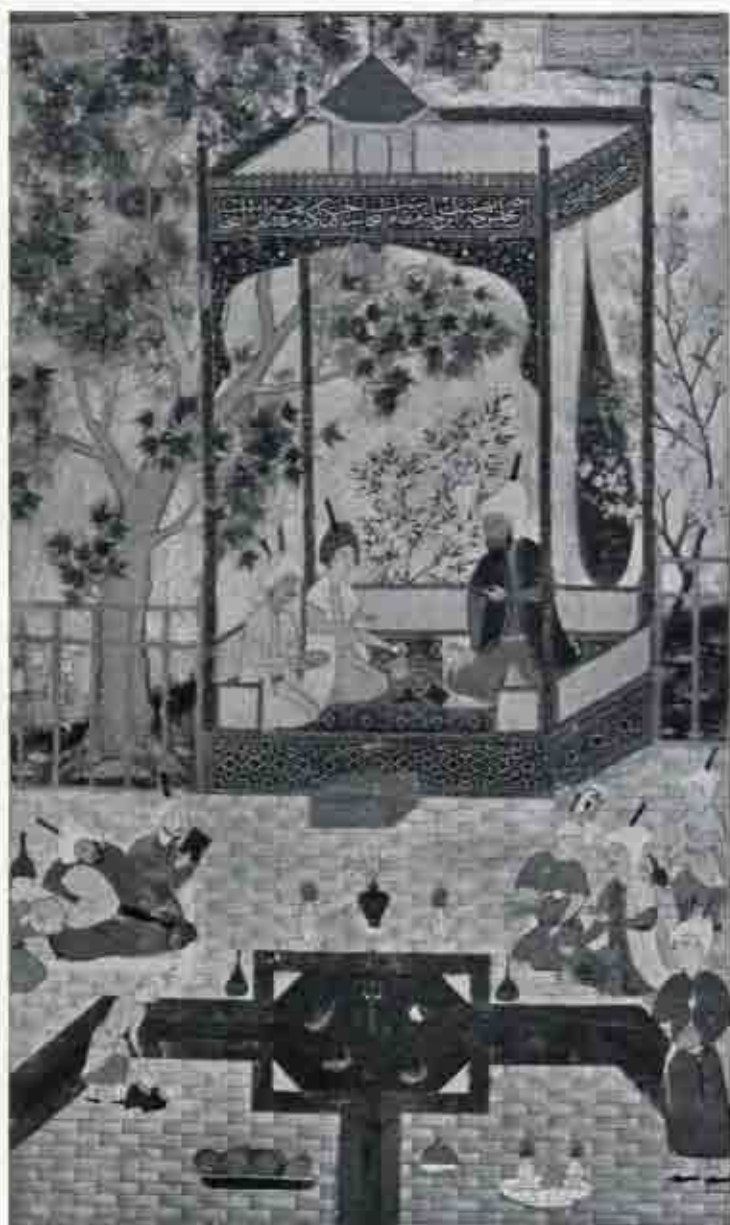


*Figure 48*  
Illuminated page. 15th century  
Boston Museum of Fine Arts





Figure 49  
Miniature, middle of the 15th century  
Collection A. Chester Beatty, London



*Figure 50*  
Miniature from the Jehanghir Album, 16th century  
Collection H.M. the Shah





*Figure 51*  
Miniature from the Jahangir Album. 16th century  
Collection H.M. the Shah



*Figure 52*

Drawing, 16th century. Boston Museum of Fine Arts





*Figure 53*  
Drawing by Riza Abbasi. About 1600  
Boston Museum of Fine Arts



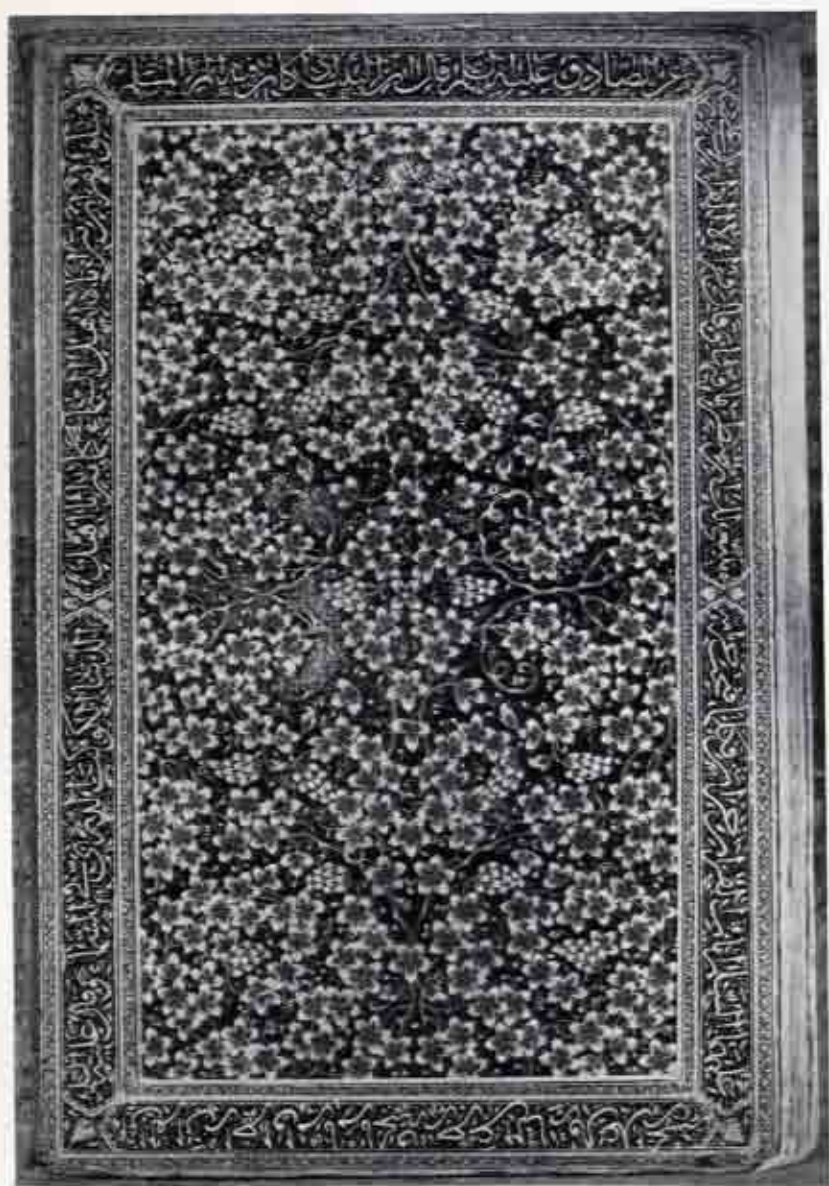
*Figure 54*

Portrait of a poet, 17th century. Boston Museum of Fine Arts





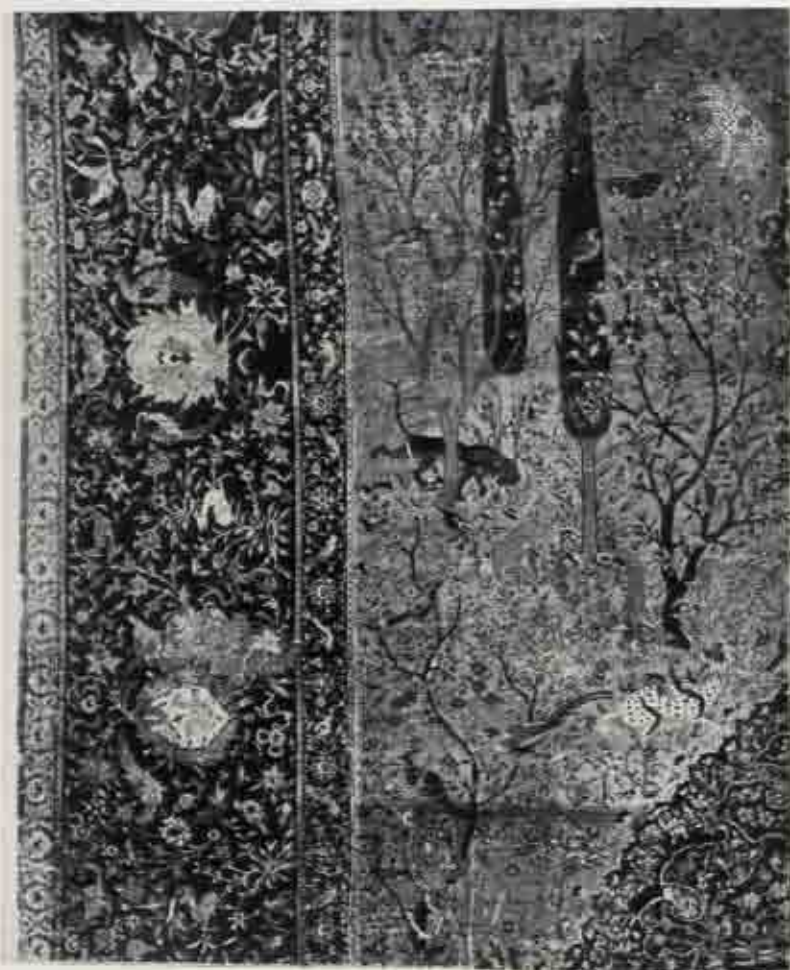
*Figure 55*  
Panel of a leather book cover, 16th century. Indjoudjian  
Collection, Paris



*Figure 56*

Lacquer cover of a Koran, signed Ali Riza, 1713  
Boston Museum of Fine Arts





*Figure 57*  
Detail of a carpet. 16th century. Musée des Arts  
Décoratifs, Paris



*Figure 58*

Animal carpet. 16th century. Formerly in the  
Sarre Collection, Berlin





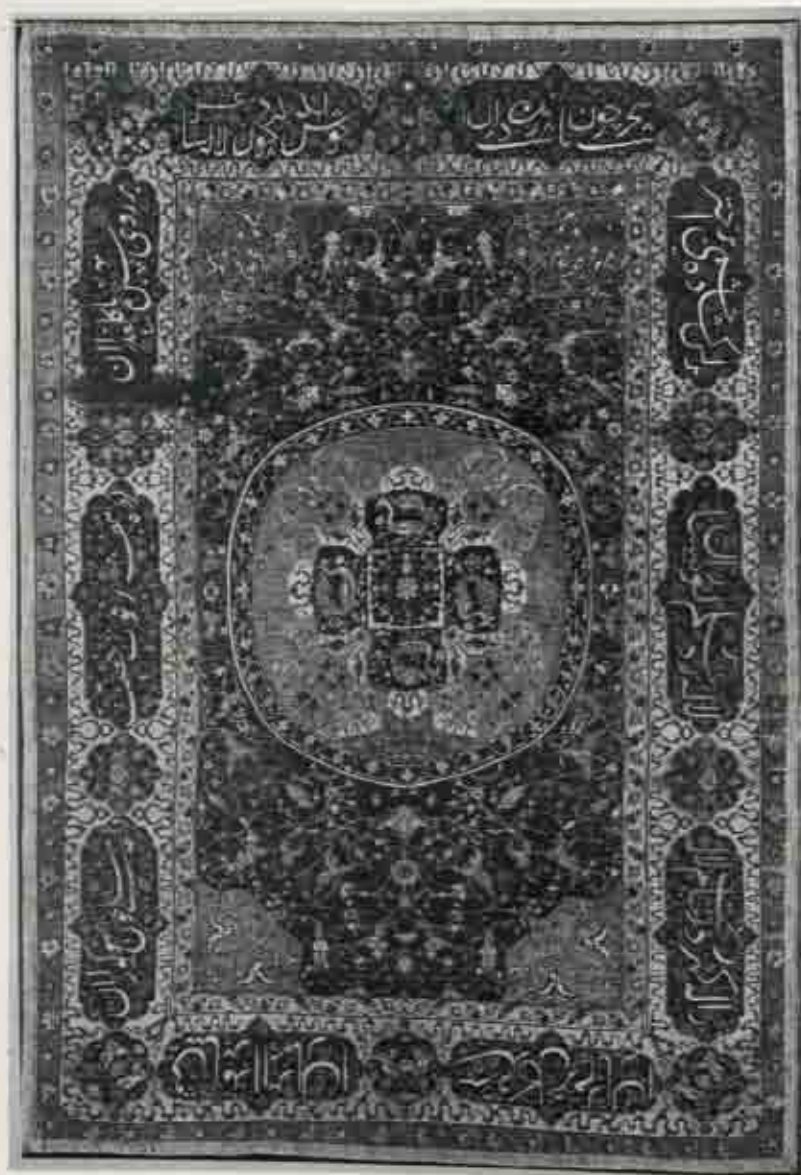
*Figure 59*  
Carpet, Eastern Persia. Early 17th century  
Museum für Kunst und Industrie, Vienna



*Figure 60*

Carpet, North-west Persia. Early 16th century  
Altman Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art





*Figure 61*  
Carpet, Tabriz. First half of 16th century. Musée des Arts  
Décoratifs, Paris.



*Figure 62*

Carpet, Kashan (?). Second half of 16th century  
Musée des Gobelins, Paris





*Figure 63*

Carpet, Eastern Persia. End of 16th century. Clark Collection,  
Corcoran Galleries, Washington, D.C.



*Figure 64*

Detail of carpet, Eastern Persia. Early 17th century  
Shrine of Imam Riza, Mashad.





*Figure 65*

So-called Vase carpet, Joshaghan Ghali. End of 16th century.  
Possession Mrs. Rockefeller-McCormick, Chicago



*Figure 66*

So-called Vase carpet, Joshaghan Ghali. Early 17th century  
Kelekian Collection, New York



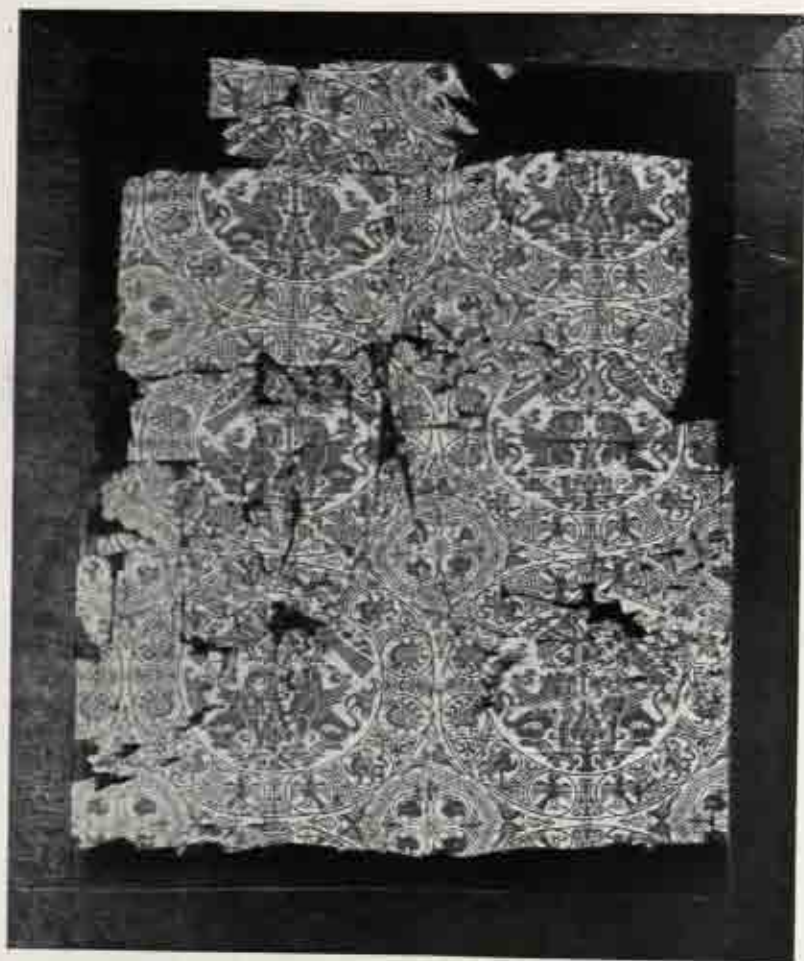


*Figure 67*  
So-called Polonaise carpet, tapestry woven with gold  
and silver, Jehaz (?). First half of 17th century  
Residenz Museum, Munich

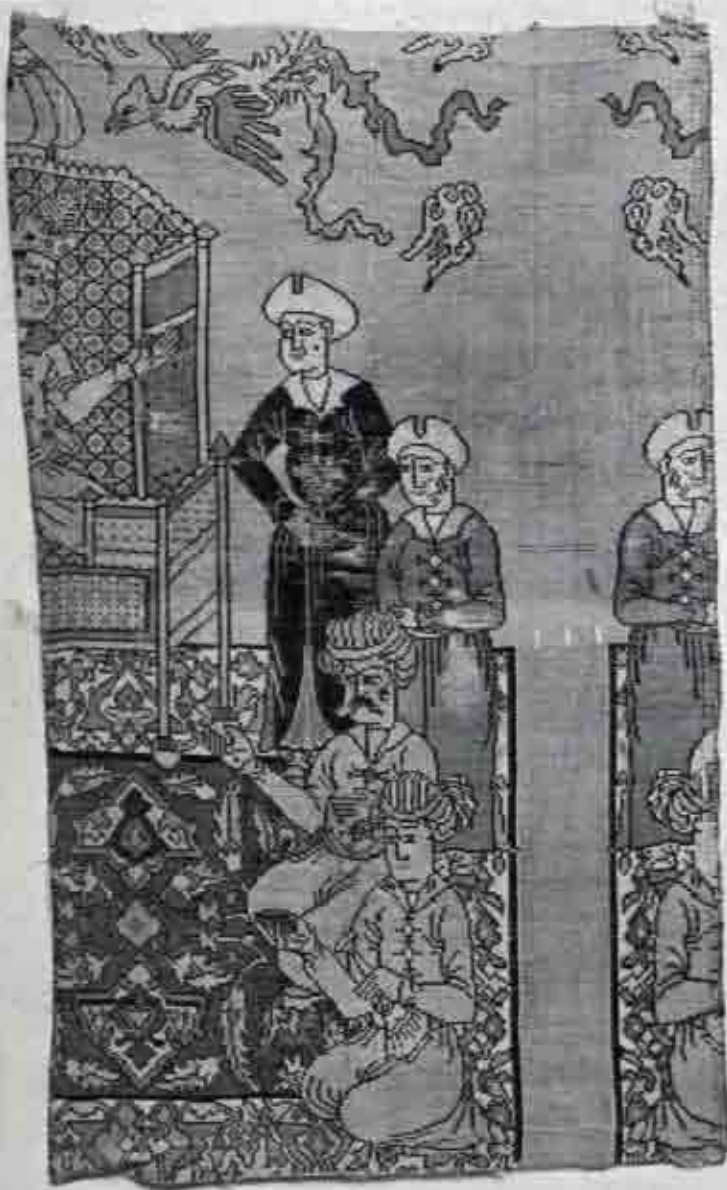


*Figure 68*  
Carpet, Joshaghan Ghali, 1681. From  
Mausoleum of Shah Abbas II, Kum





*Figure 69*  
Damask found at Ray, 12th century  
Acherof Collection, Paris



*Figure 70*

Brocade with design in miniature style. End of 16th century



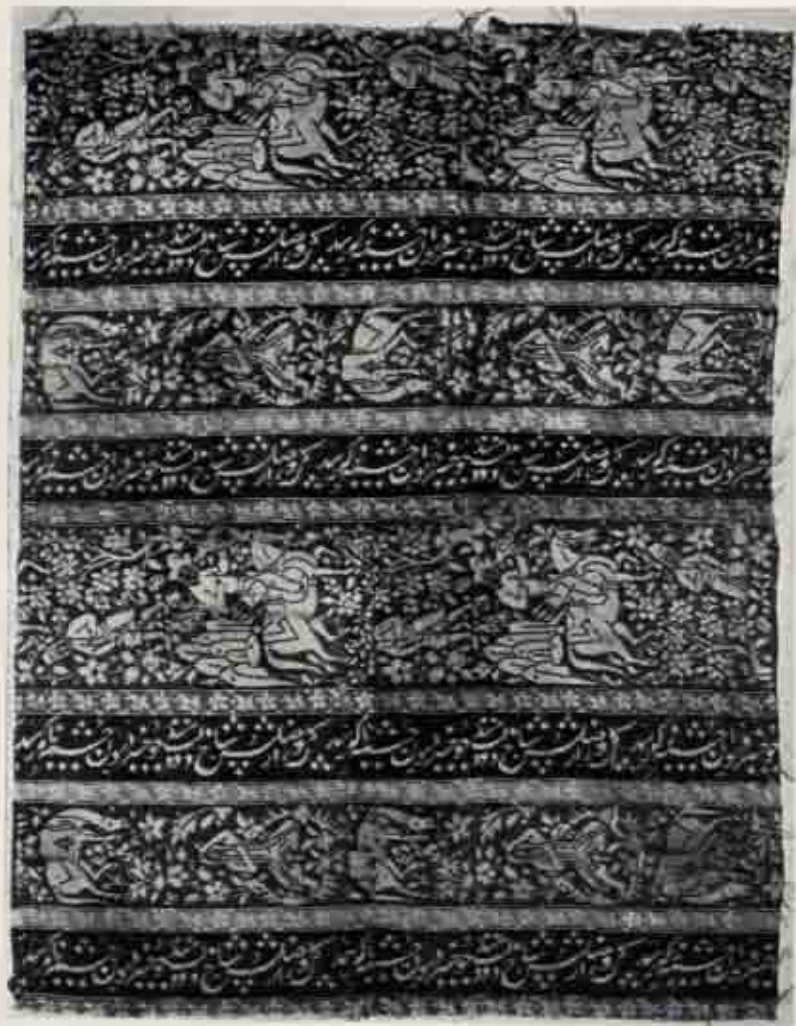


Figure 71

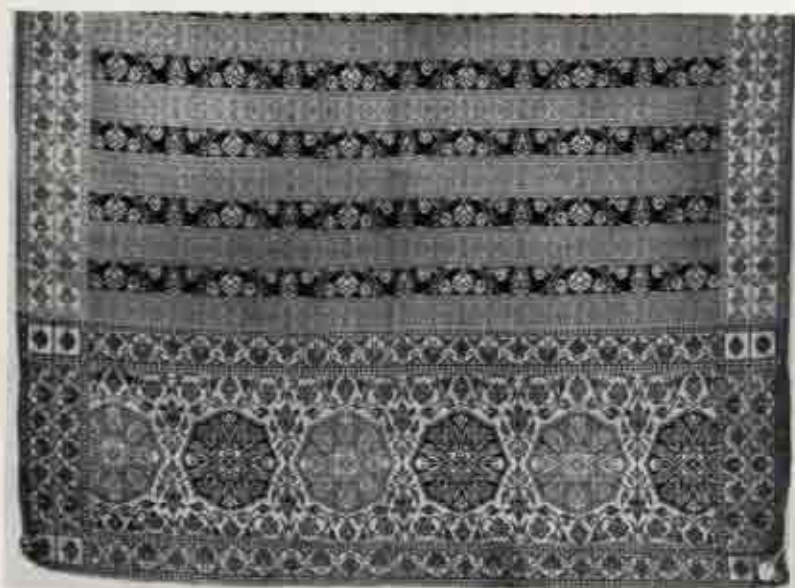
Brocade with *personages*, 16th century. Collection Miss L. P. Bliss, New York



*Figure 72*

Brocade on gold ground, Isfahan. Early 17th century  
Author's collection





*Figure 73*  
End of turban, Isfahan. Early 17th century, Kelekian Collection,  
New York



*Figure 74*  
Brocade border on gold ground, Isfahan. Early 17th century  
Art Institute of Chicago



*Figure 75*

Velvet, probably Yazd. 17th century. Kelekian Collection, New York





*Figure 76*  
Brocade coat, 17th century, Art Institute of Chicago



*Figure 77*

Musaiif embroidery, Isfahan, 18th century. Author's collection





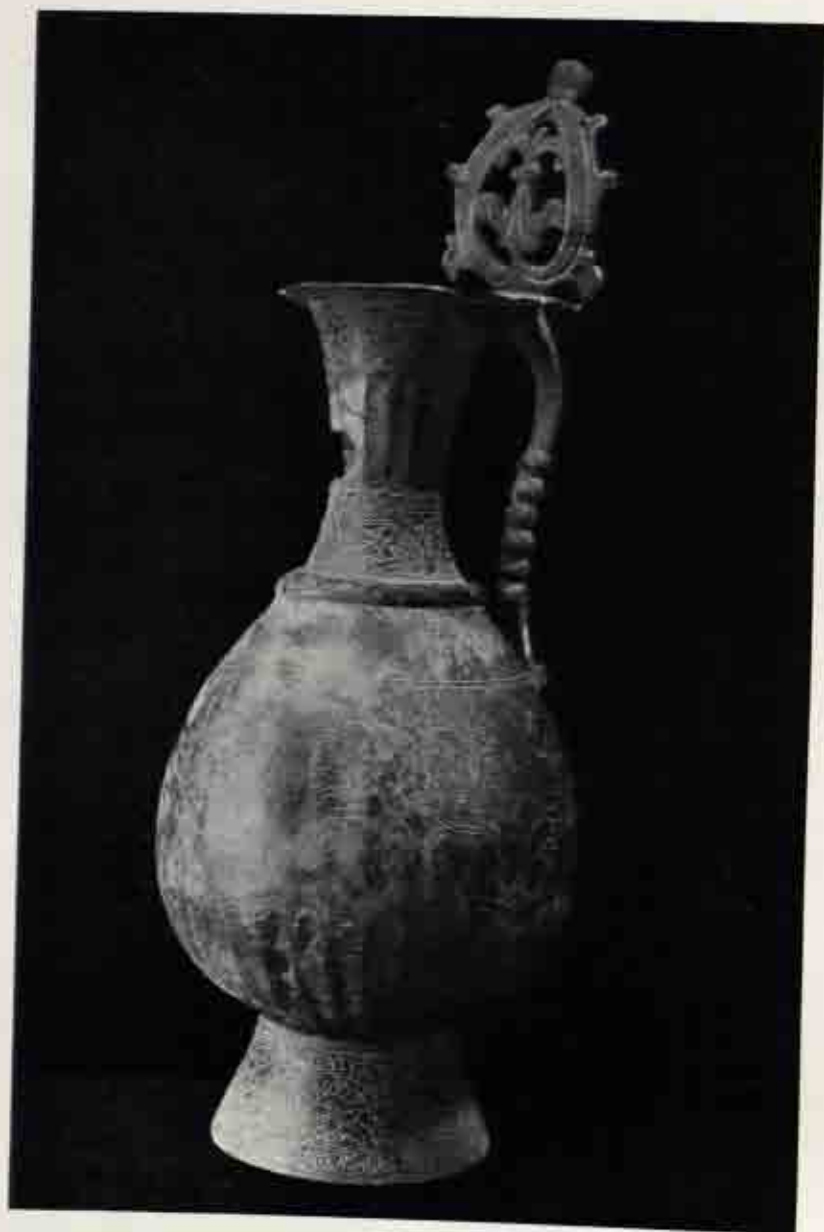
*Figure 78*  
Rasht embroidery. Early 19th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art



*Figure 79*

Bronze paroquet, 10th-11th centuries. Indjoudjian Collection, Paris





*Figure 80.*  
Bronze ewer with incised decoration, 12th century. Collection  
Mr. and Mrs. Sam A. Lewisohn, New York



*Figure 81*

Mirror with Bahram Gur and his harpist in relief,  
12th century, De Motte Collection, New York





*Figure 82*

Bronze ewer with incised decoration and bull's head spout.  
12th century. Judah Collection, Art Institute of Chicago



*Figure 83*

Jug in silver and silver gilt with niello decoration.  
12th century. Collection Ralph Harari, London



*Figure 84*  
Ewer in bronze inlaid with silver. North-west Persia.  
13th century. Louvre





*Figure 85*

Candlestick in bronze inlaid with silver, 13th-14th centuries  
Collection H.M. the Shah



*Figure 86*  
Kettle with incised decoration, 12th century  
Stora Collection, Paris



*Figure 87*  
Casket in bronze with applied relief figures. 12th century  
Stora Collection, Paris

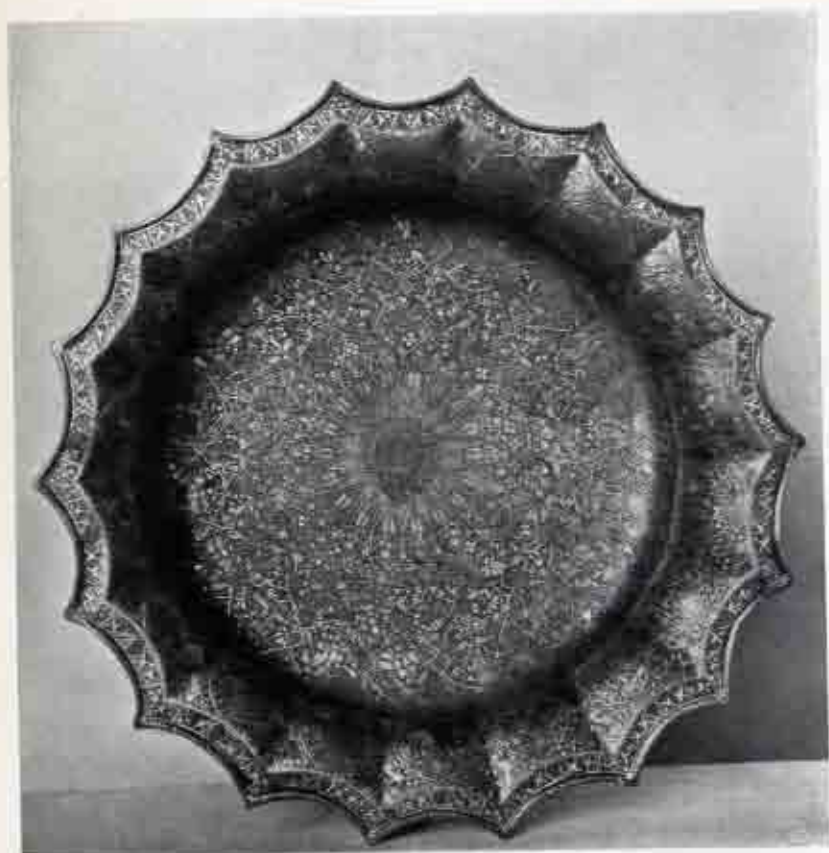


*Figure 88*  
Gold bracelet with filigree decoration. Institute of Arts, Detroit





*Figure 89*  
Candlestick in pierced bronze, found at Ray, 12th century. Louvre



*Figure 90*

Basin in bronze with silver inlay. 13th century.  
Metropolitan Museum of Art



*Figure 91*

Candlestick in bronze inlaid with silver. Made by Muhammad the son of Raf'ed-Din, of Shiraz, 1359. Collection Ralph Harari, London





*Figure 92*  
Candlestick in incised brass, Isfahan. 1578-79  
Metropolitan Museum of Art



*Figure 93*  
Jar in engraved tin-plated copper. 18th century  
Art Institute of Chicago



*Figure 94*  
Basin in engraved tin-plated copper. 17th-18th centuries  
Art Institute of Chicago



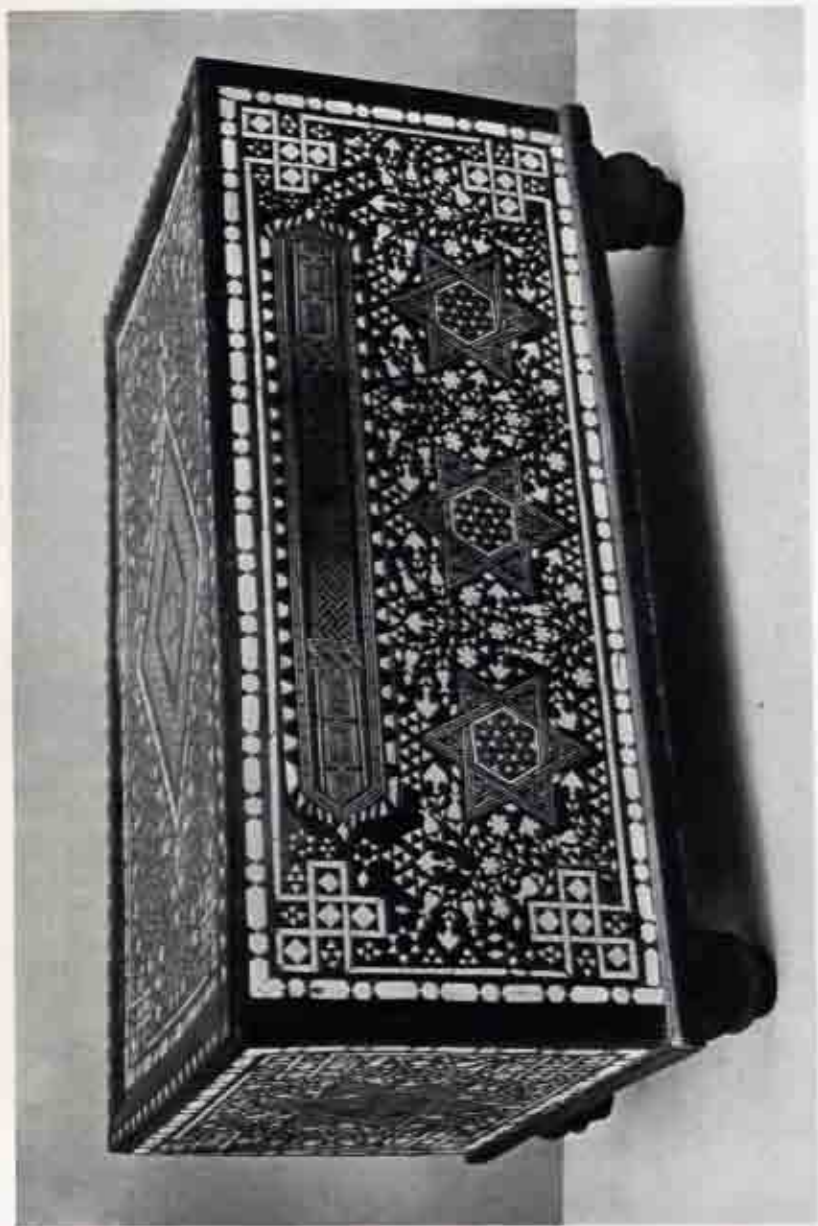
*Figure 95*

Carved wood panel of a Koran stand. 1360  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

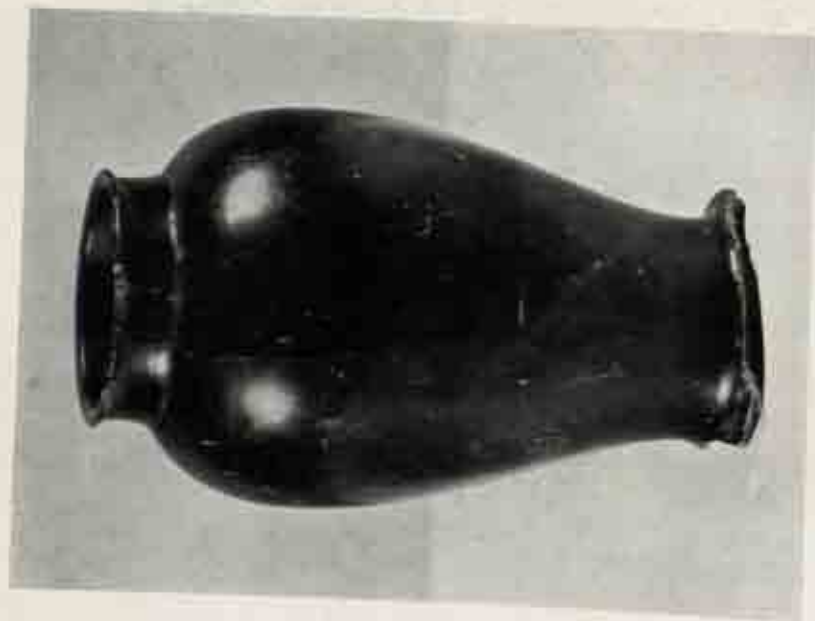




*Figure 96*  
Carved wood panel, Isfahan, 14th century. Indjoudjian  
Collection, Paris



*Figure 97*  
Box with ivory inlays and carved panels, 18th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art



*Figure 98*  
Dark brown glass cosmetic jar, found at Ray,  
12th-13th centuries (?). Art Institute of Chicago



*Figure 99*  
Grey-green glass jug with moulded relief  
decoration, found at Ray, 12th-13th centuries (?)  
Art Institute of Chicago





*Figure 100*

Enamelled glass dish. Found at Hamadan. 13th-14th centuries  
Collection H.M. the Shah



*Figure 101*

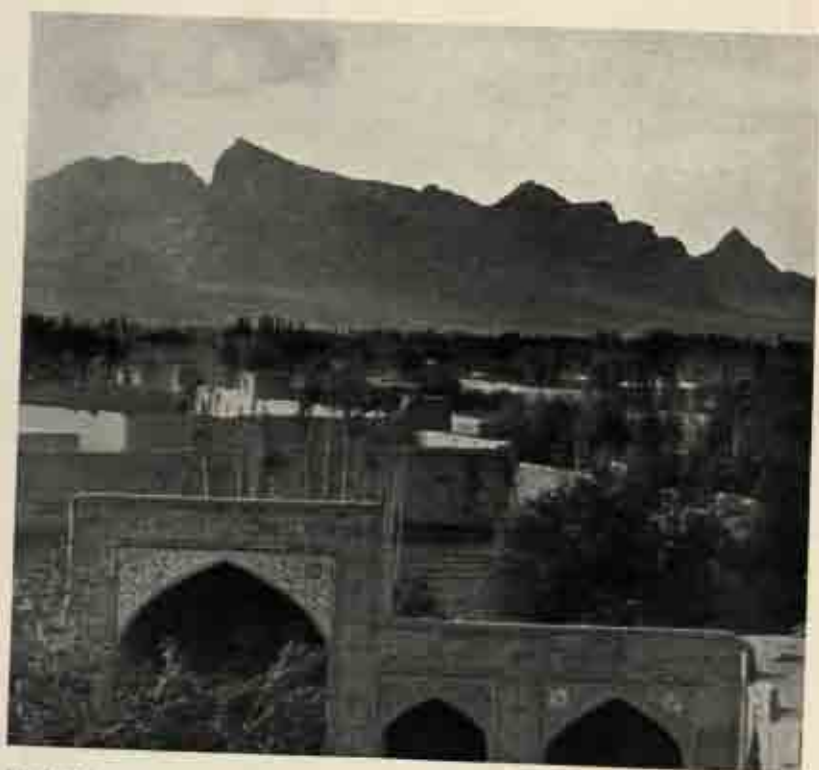
Jade bowl inlaid with silver and gold. Collection F. Steinmeyer, Lucerne



Photo Doyle

*Figure 102*  
The Elbruz Mountains near Shimran





*Photo Pope*

*Figure 103*

The mountains to the south-west of Isfahan

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