

The Suggestive Portrait of Shah 'Abbas: Prayer and Likeness in a Safavid *Shahnama*

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Shah 'Abbas was among the most innovative and intriguing figures of early modern Iran. In addition to establishing the magnificent city of Isfahan as a world capital through a dynamic reconfiguration of its architectural and urban design, he transformed Iran into the destination of ambassadors and travelers from the far reaches of Europe and Asia; it was documented in travelogues, epistles, and prints. Safavid Iran, therefore, was known for its robust economy, diverse population, and the dynamism of cities such as Isfahan. The cultural landscape was similarly rich, with the architectural, visual, and literary arts mobilized in the service of the ingenious ruler's imperial vision.

The Safavid dynasty was founded in Tabriz by Isma'il bin Haydar (r. 1501–24), who established a new religious and political authority in early modern Iran. In addition to inheriting the Sufi mantle of the fourteenth-century mystic Shaykh Safi al-din Ishaq Ardabili (d. 1335), Isma'il and his heirs claimed descent from the prophet Muhammad and viewed themselves as upholders of the Shi'i faith. Veneration of the family of Muhammad and their successors, the imams, was extended to the Safavid rulers, who were thought to be endowed with divine charisma. Shah 'Abbas (r. 1588–1629), the fifth ruler, implemented successful reforms and brought prosperity to the country.¹ The accompanying societal transformations were systematically represented through works of art and history that propagated the shah's vision of regal and spiritual authority. The portrait of the Safavid ruler was thus constructed through various means: textual, visual, and spatial.² In the late sixteenth century all three modes were employed to create an image of imperial authority in which the shah was depicted simultaneously as a charismatic leader, a pious believer, and a noble emperor. Shah 'Abbas emulated his fifteenth-century Timurid predecessors while sharing the rituals of sovereignty enacted by his immediate neighbors, the Mughals in Delhi and the Ottomans in Istanbul.³ The representations chosen by panegyrists, poets, painters, historians, and architects were often composite, based on sources about Islamic rulership as well as on Iranian archetypes, such as those found in the famed epic the *Shahnama*, or Book of Kings, by Abul Qasim Firdawsi. During Shah 'Abbas's rule, illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama* became a popular vehicle for the demonstration of imperial patronage and ideology.

At the turn of the seventeenth century the Safavid Empire was at its apogee. Shah 'Abbas had recaptured Herat from the Uzbeks on Iran's eastern borders and plans were under way to reconcile with the Ottomans. Isfahan was established as the capital of the empire with the construction of bazaars and an entirely new imperial district centered on the magnificent Maydan, or plaza. The city, located on important trade routes, was home to diverse communities of merchants, missionaries, and artists. Ceramics, silks, and manuscripts were produced for collection in the imperial treasury as well as for export to Europe

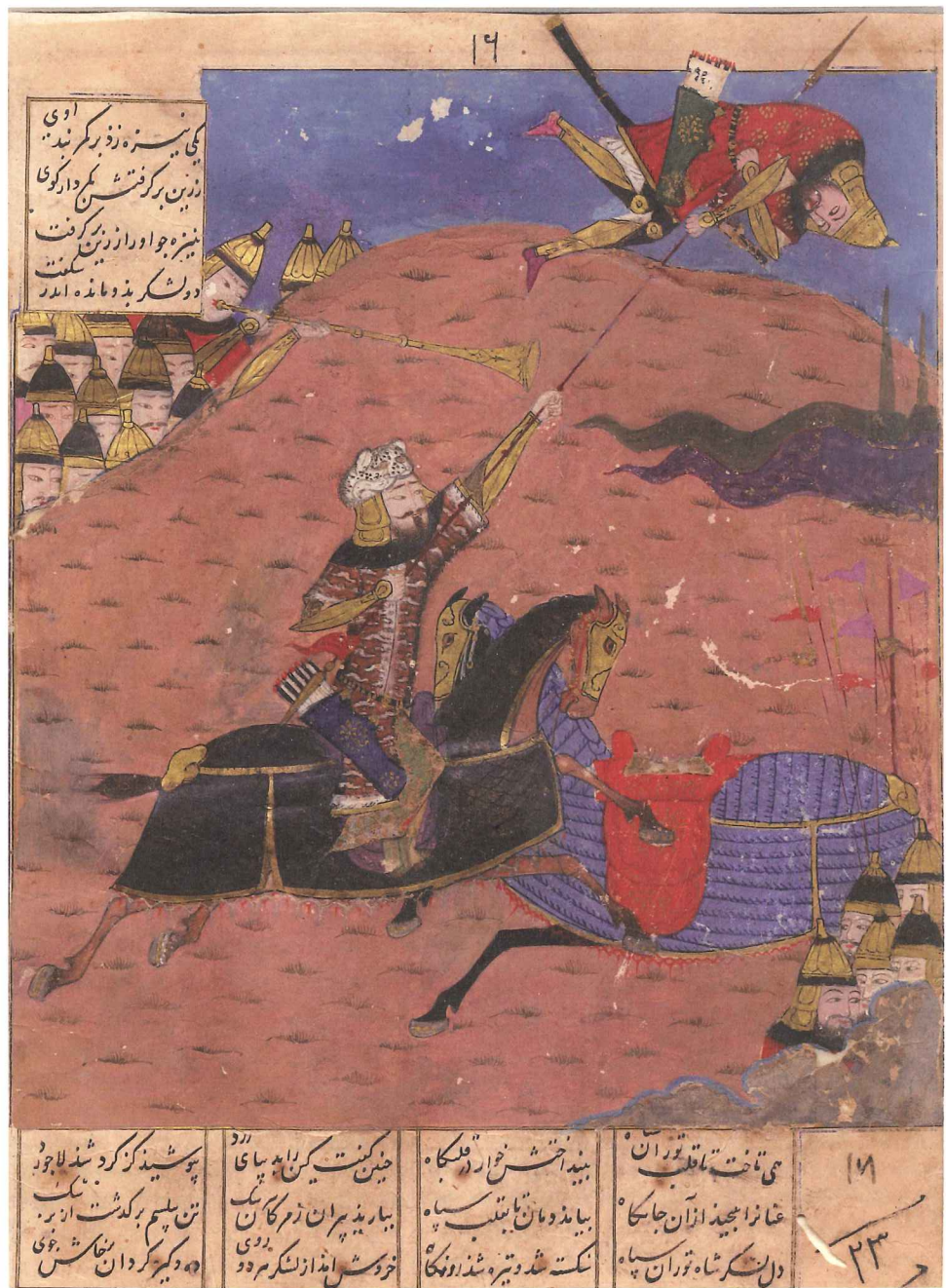
and Asia. It is within such a dynamic and cosmopolitan milieu that works of art were produced, and it is within equally complex literary and visual contexts that they must now be placed.

Drama, romance, and morality together vie for the attention of readers of Firdawsi's thousand-year-old poem the *Shahnama*.⁴ Its approximately 55,000 rhyming couplets make it an exemplar of Persian literature, which has been reproduced in different media for more than a millennium.⁵ Beginning with the advent of humanity, in the form of the mythical king Kayumars, the book moves through three successive dynasties (the Pishdadiyan, Keyanid, and Sasanian), to end with the conquest of Iran by the Arab armies that brought Islam to the region in the seventh century. Recognizable historical figures, such as the Byzantine Caesar, Alexander the Great, and the Sasanian kings Ardashir and Khusraw Nushirvan, inhabit the narrative. A constant theme in the stories is the struggle for supremacy between Iran and its northeastern neighbor, Turan, understood as the land beyond the Oxus River.

The study of one specific manuscript, a 1605 *Shahnama* at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (MS or. fol. 4251), can tell us much about the intersection between imperial portraiture and narrative illustration during the reign of Shah 'Abbas. The manuscript is an important document for examining the social and aesthetic trends that came together at the turn of the seventeenth century. In order to understand the intentions behind the making of the *Shahnama* and its reception, it must be viewed alongside other imperial representations and in conjunction with the religious and political changes taking place at the time. In addition, it is vital to consider this exciting example of Safavid painting in light of its Timurid precedents and in relation to artistic production in neighboring Mughal India, which boasted some of the most vibrant and innovative ateliers of the early modern period.

Safavid rulers found narrative illustrations an appropriate medium to assert their vision for a new religious practice in Iran, namely, Shi'i Islam. As Ulrike al-Khamis demonstrated in her study of a painting from about 1543 from the *Quintet* (*Khamsa*) of Nizami, Safavid miniatures "were not merely illustrative, but may have conveyed messages of contemporary concern, namely imperial propaganda."⁶ During Shah 'Abbas's reign, a normative version of Shi'ism was propagated, one that cohered more closely to the Sunni Islam practiced in Turkey and India. It was manifested in the establishment of Friday prayer sermons throughout Iran and the construction of imperial mosques.⁷ The visual arts were also called on to propagate Shah 'Abbas's ideological vision and to illustrate his royal persona.

The portrait of the Safavid ruler was conceptualized within the framework of a "competitive discourse" on kingship in the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal courts.⁸ Shah 'Abbas was distinguished from his counterparts in India and Turkey by the multiple descriptions of his complex character. In paintings of the early seventeenth century, the king is shown in



1 *Rustam Slaying Pilsam in Single Combat*, from Firdawsi, *Shahname*, 1435–40, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, detached $7\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{3}{4}$ in. (19 × 14.5 cm). British Museum, London, A1948.10-9.048 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum, London)

courtly scenes and in leisurely settings of serene intimacy. He is represented as a powerful ruler surrounded by his courtiers and as a lover enjoying sensual pleasures with his companion.⁹ Through texts as diverse as an Italian traveler's accounts to chronicles composed by his personal astrologer, a complex persona emerges, one that is easily recognizable as that of Shah 'Abbas. The paintings in the 1605 *Shahname* are visual complements to such texts, serving as they do to illustrate distinct attitudes toward kingship, authority, and piety in Safavid Iran.

Two sets of paintings from the 1605 *Shahname* are linked by their historical relevance to the period of Shah 'Abbas and their role as suggestive and surrogate portraits of the king. The first set is related thematically by the depiction of prayer and imperial piety, issues that are central to the *Shahname*'s poetry but rare in its visual iconography. In the second set, a

sequence of five images from the life of the hero Rustam, the narrative is analyzed through the relation between text and image, highlighting how emotions are evoked in subtle and innovative ways.

Firdawsi's text is highly unstable; no two manuscripts of the *Shahname* are alike.¹⁰ Some of these calligraphic changes and amendments were inserted by scribes as acts of willful creativity, and some were simply accidents. Moreover, multiple abridgements and expansions have been made to what may once have been an original, thus rendering questions of authenticity and intention much more complex. Over time, a sophisticated iconography developed for the main events of the *Shahname*. Take, for example, Rustam, who is described as a giant, distinguished by his size and strength. In paintings from the fifteenth and sixteenth century on, Rustam is not portrayed as a giant, being physically distinguished instead by



2 Rustam Shoots an Arrow into the Eyes of Isfandiyar, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page 14½ × 9½ in. (36 × 24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 509b (artwork in the public domain)

his clothing: he is often shown wearing a tiger-skin jacket and a novel headgear composed of a snow leopard's head (Fig. 1). As Marianna Shreve Simpson and the late Jerome Clinton wrote in 2006:

An illustrated manuscript of Persian poetry [such as the *Shahnama*] is a hybrid text of a particular kind, one that combines two distinct modes of expression. While this close and insistent conjunction results in a richer and more complex experience for the audience, the relation of word and image in such a hybrid work is not always straightforward.¹¹

For Safavid painters (and, subsequently, the art historian), there are two important textual devices that help in understanding the composition of the image.¹² The first is the rubric, an enlarged and demarcated phrase or sentence written in red and gold that summarizes the following story. The rubric, or title block, usually occurs before the illustration,

but it sometimes appears on the painting itself (Fig. 2).¹³ A more intriguing device is what has been called the “break-line” or “critical” verse, which is a couplet that occurs before and sometimes after the painting itself.¹⁴ The break-line verse, more immediately than the rubric, could guide the artists and allow them to synchronize the image with the text.¹⁵ In the 1605 manuscript, the rubrics introduce the forthcoming text and image, while the break lines add another layer of comprehension that serves to enhance the reading and viewing of the paintings.

Description and Historical Context of the Manuscript

The *Shahnama* manuscript MS or. fol. 4251 measures 14½ by 9½ inches (36 by 24 centimeters) and comprises 764 folios, of which 67 are illustrated.¹⁶ The colophon at the end of the manuscript states that it was completed on the third day of Safar AH 1014 (June 9, 1605). There is no attribution of the scribe or the patron, nor is there any indication of where the manuscript was produced. The cartouches are left empty, awaiting a dedication, which is the norm in such deluxe manuscripts. Smudged seals on the margins of the opening pages signal that this *Shahnama* was once part of an important collection. The high quality of the text and paintings indicates that it would have been produced in an imperial atelier. However, at this time Shah ‘Abbas himself was commissioning large-scale architectural projects, and few illustrated manuscripts appear to have been produced for him directly. It may be assumed, therefore, that it was intended for a high-ranking member of the Safavid court, and perhaps for presentation to the shah.

As in the case of most illustrated copies of the *Shahnama*, the primary subject for illustration in the 1605 copy is war, followed by heroic feats.¹⁷ The third subject is that of royal enthronements, with the life of the inner courtyard and palace given some representation. The artists of the *Shahnama* were called on to interpret visually concepts central to the poem’s narrative—namely, kingship and heroic virtues. In order to inscribe in paint the moral landscape of Firdawsi’s great epic, they needed to engage visually with what the text reiterates: the relationship between man and the divine.¹⁸ The painters and calligraphers employed to oversee the 1605 *Shahnama* were not only masters of their craft but also cognoscenti of the illustrative tradition, providing visual quotations from earlier manuscripts. For example, an illustration of Rustam shooting Isfandiyar in the eyes, from a 1604 *Shahnama*, while markedly different in treatment and scale, shares the compositional features seen in the 1605 version considered here (Fig. 3).¹⁹ The completed manuscript would have been read by those who also possessed a high degree of visual literacy and were familiar with the dramatic recitation of the *Shahnama*. Additionally, the audience of the manuscript would have knowledge of the meter and cadence of the poetry, as well as mental analogs from other *Shahnama* paintings.

The *Shahnama* was understood by its readers to be a combination of myth and history. Although the events take place in a pre-Islamic and sometimes fictionalized world, the themes of kingship and piety were relevant to Safavid patrons. The costumes of the characters and the architectural settings reflect the tastes and interests of the time.²⁰ For example, in *Garshap Saving a Noble from the Island of Demons*



3 Rustam Shoots an Arrow in the Eyes of Isfandiyar, from Firdawsi, *Shahname*, 1604, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{5}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{4}$ in. (37×23.5 cm). British Library, London, I.O. ISLAMIC 966, fol. 318v (artwork in the public domain; photograph © The British Library Board)

(Fig. 4), the Portuguese caravel in the picture resembled those sailing the Indian Ocean at the time, pointing to the Iranian artists' engagement with current political realities.²¹ The location of the stories shifts temporally and geographically as the artists interpret Firdawsi's world through Safavid eyes. The recontextualization of history is not limited to settings and clothing but also affects ideology; indeed, the illustrative program of the 1605 *Shahname* focuses a great deal of attention on the attributes of just kingship as it pertained to Shah 'Abbas's court, in particular, the necessity for displaying piety and humility.

The Iconography of Prayer

In the *Shahname* Firdawsi constructed a "Mirror for Princes" in which he asserted the importance of faith and the dependence of men's fortune on divine will. Rulers and heroes are portrayed as victims of hubris and poor judgment; they meet their fates at the hands of magical beasts and demons, anal-

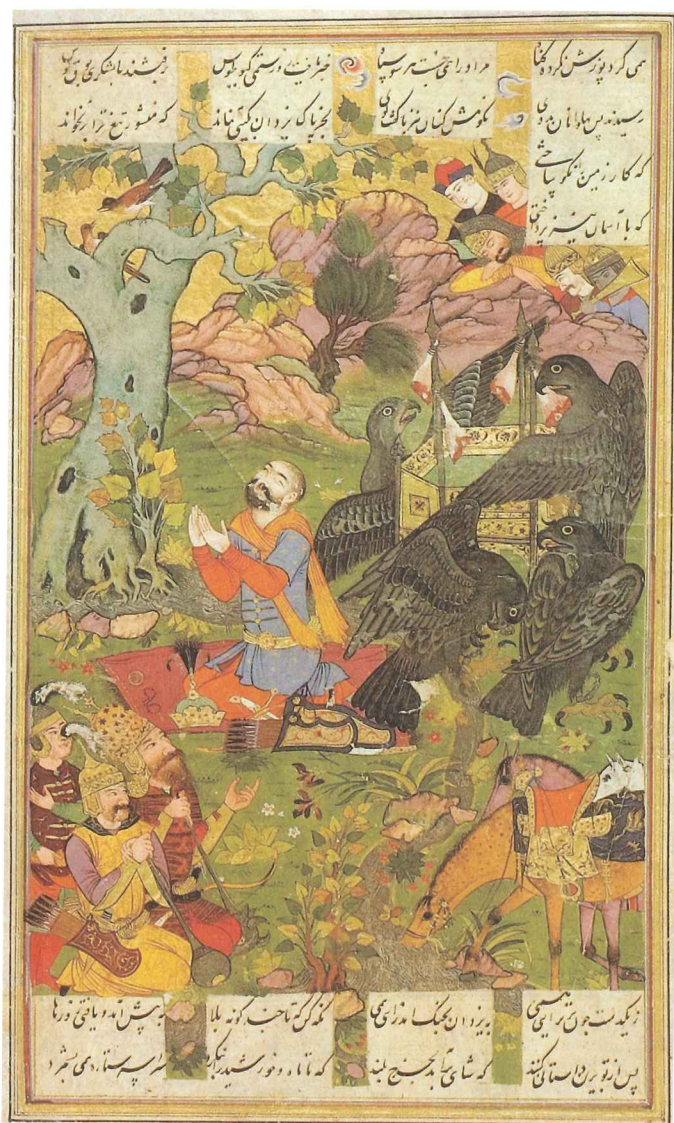


4 Garshap Saving a Noble from the Island of Demons, from Firdawsi, *Shahname*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 89b (artwork in the public domain)

ogies for the natural order of the world. Thus, the righteous king must bow to a higher authority and beg assistance from his creator. Supplication and prayer are addressed specifically in two images in the 1605 *Shahname*, both unusual in terms of their subject matter and iconography.

The first image is related to the story of the Keyanid king Kay Kavus, who was led astray by Iblis (the devil) (Fig. 5).²² In an attempt to conquer the skies, the king was provoked by the devil to build a fantastic flying machine that was carried aloft by four strong eagles. Flying toward the meat hung above them, the birds bore the throne into the air. Although Kay Kavus's flight was frequently illustrated (Fig. 6), the event that followed was not. When the great birds grew weary, they and the throne collapsed to the ground. Devastated and repentant, Kay Kavus prayed for forgiveness for his hubris.

The 1605 painting shows the moment when Rustam and his companions discover Kay Kavus. The figure of the king takes up the center of the image. Behind him lies the collapsed throne and the hungry eagles devouring the legs of mutton. Kay Kavus, lost in devotion as he raises his hands and gazes upward, appears oblivious to what is taking place behind him. The text on the page describes how the shah prayed for pardon from his sins and how he was admonished



5 *The Story of Kay Kavus and His Deception by Iblis*, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 219a (artwork in the public domain)



6 *Kay Kavus Airborne*, Eckstein *Shahnama*, 1584, fol. 129v, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, $18\frac{1}{8} \times 13\frac{1}{8}$ in. (46.2×33.5 cm). Collection of Sam Fogg Ltd., London (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Sam Fogg Ltd.)

by Gudarz, one of his wise companions. (The break lines are shown in italics below.)

When the heroes arrived
They berated the Shah.
"And when none in the world except holy God
[Yazdan]

Remained to read the title of your sword,
Since the works on earth were made good
You also had to try heaven,

Although to soar one hand-breadth is revolt.
You went to war against God.
See how, to be aloft a few moments
You opposed him.
In the future people will tell of you: 'A Shah
Went to the sky to see the sun and the moon,
And to count the stars.' "

In an important line immediately following these, which continues on the verso of the illustrated page (folio 219b), Gudarz advises Kay Kavus,

"Now do as princes do
When prudent, pious, and beneficent—
Serve God and him alone in good times and bad."²³

Both the text and image emphasize the importance of humility in the person of the shah, exemplified here by the errant ruler Kay Kavus. Although the god named in the verses is Yazdan, a name given to the Zoroastrian deity, the visual representation of Kay Kavus's prayer is very much an Islamic one. The king is shown sitting on the *sijdagāh* (prayer rug), his imperial trappings shed beside him. On the *sijdagāh* are a *tasbīh* (prayer beads) and *muhr* (literally "seal," in this case, prayer stone). The latter is a small tablet, often made from the clay of Karbala or other holy sites, and is an important object in Shi'i devotion (Fig. 7).²⁴ As a professed descendant of the Prophet Muham-



7 Prayer stone, Iran or southern Iraq, 19th century. British Museum, London, 0120.16 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © The Trustees of The British Museum, London)

mad and a devout Shi'i, Shah 'Abbas asserted the need for the proper enactment of customary practice. The readers of the 1605 *Shahnama* would have interpreted images such as those of Kay Kavus's supplication as current modes of prayer.²⁵ The German author and traveler Adam Olearius wrote during his visit to Iran in the early seventeenth century:

The Persians have a stone, wherewith they often touch their forehead, while they are at their Prayers; or haply they lay the stone upon the ground, and touch it with their foreheads. It is made of a greyish Earth, which is to be had about Metzef [Najaf] and Kufa. . . . The Figure of it is Octogonal, and it is somewhat above three inches Diameter, and contains, with the names of their twelve Saints, that of Fatima.²⁶

This small detail, the *muhr*, situated the painting historically and ideologically in Safavid Iran.

The second image utilizing the iconography of prayer is part of a set of paintings narrating the life and adventures of the warrior Gushtasp.²⁷ Known for his physical prowess, Gushtasp was asked to perform feats of bravery and strength, including slaying a great horned wolf and the dragon of Mount Sakila, events illustrated sequentially in the 1605 manuscript. The theme here is the intervention of the divine (*khudāvand*) who is the source of all power, and to whom Gushtasp prays before and after his feats. Folio 457b shows three large figures: the horned wolf and Gushtasp form the base of a compositional triangle, with Gushtasp's gored horse at the apex (Fig. 8). Behind the main characters are the hero's two companions, standing against the horizon. The verses on the page describe what happened when Gushtasp confronted the great wolf:

[Gushtasp] Dismounted, smote the beast full on the head,
And cleaved apart its back and breast and shoulder
With lofty height and the conduct of a lion
He was the renowned hero.

Then in the presence of the Lord of beasts,
Lord [*khudāvand*] of omniscience and of good and ill,
Made his thanksgiving to the Omnipotent [*kirdagār*],
And thus he said, "O you who determine fortune!

You point out the way to those that err,
And you are the just, supreme, and only God [*yak khudāy*].
We prosper and we triumph in your name;
All grace and knowledge are at your disposal."
When he returned from his place of prayer [*jāyghāh-i namāz*],
He pulled out the two long tusks.²⁸

Rather than illustrating the break-line verses, the artist chose to utilize the first two lines on top of the page. The break line is relevant, interestingly enough, for the following image, which depicts Gushtasp's second feat, namely, killing the dragon of Mount Sakila (Fig. 9).²⁹

He prised out a couple of the dragon's teeth,
And departing from there washed his head and body;
Then as he wallowed in the dust he raised
His voice before the Lord [*khudāvand-i pirūzgar*], the
Victory-giver,
Who had bestowed on him such mastery
Over wolf and lusty dragon, saying:
"Oh God,
In this place of idleness [*the river bed*]

You have the power and you are the helper
It is by you that one is [*set free*]
By shrewdness, courage and sheer strength have I flung
A dragon such as this upon the dust!
Luhrasp and glorious Zarir had had enough, of
Both the soul and body of Gushtasp.
My lot from fortune is but toil and hardship
And poison spread out instead of an antidote."³⁰

An intriguing slippage has occurred in the second painting; instead of witnessing, as one usually does in illustrated *Shahnama* manuscripts, the moment of engagement between warrior and beast, we see the dragon already dead.³¹ In the foreground of the painting Gushtasp is seen sitting on the prayer rug, his weapons and boots behind him. His gaze is focused above and his hands are cupped in supplication. The crown and archer's ring on his thumb identify his noble birth, although he had neither a throne nor imperial legitimacy at this time. On the ground in front we again see the *tasbiḥ* and *muhr*, along with what looks like the dragon's tooth. The text here tells us that Gushtasp has yanked two teeth out from the dying beast's mouth and, after washing himself of the blood and gore, "he raised his voice before the Lord, the Victory-giver, who had bestowed on him such mastery." The break lines do not describe a scene but pay hom-



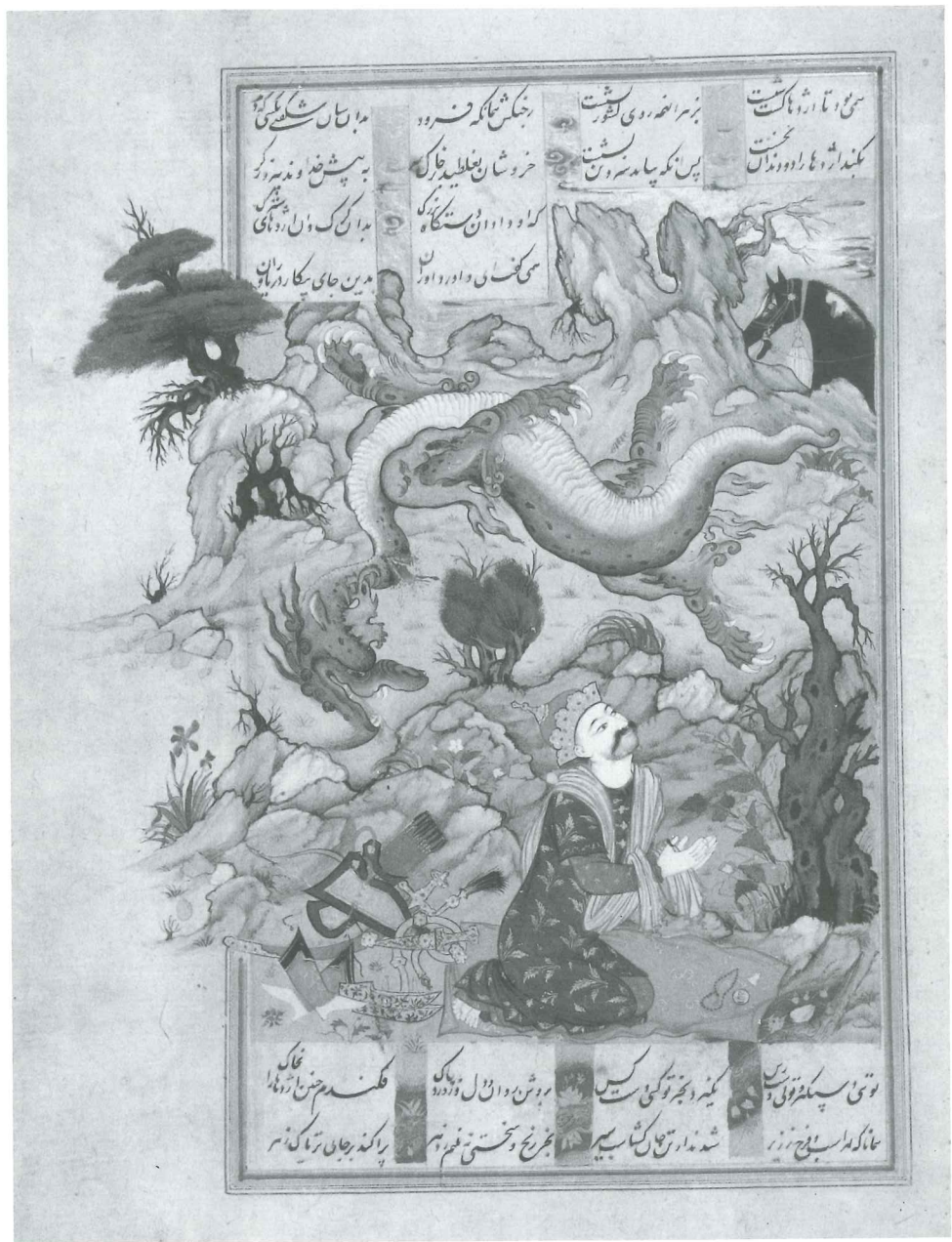
8 *Gushtasp and the Horned Wolf*, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 457b (artwork in the public domain)

age to the divine. Although the following text is an angry boast directed toward the father and brother who failed to recognize his greatness, Gushtasp's pose on the prayer mat illustrates another side of the hero, his piety. The painting thus corrects the attention of the viewer and redirects it back to God as the true holder of power.

In folio 460a Gushtasp kneels in the place of prayer described in the earlier folio. The two folios are meant to be read and viewed in sequence, as though little time has elapsed between the slaying of the wolf and the dragon. In fact, it is as though Gushtasp had just walked off the previous page and sat down to pray in the next one. We see not only that image and text on each page are in dialogue with one another but also that the visual narrative flows from one painting to another. These two images reinforce the assertion that paintings in manuscripts such as the 1605 *Shahnama* were

often composed in a way that was conscious of the sequence of images as well as the whole illustrative production. As such, both the designers of the book and its readers would have interpreted the codex as a serial experience, unfolding in time.³²

The prayer paintings transform the *Shahnama* into a commentary on the practice and performance of religion at the court of Shah 'Abbas. By adding the *muhr*—an object closely related to Shi'i practice—the artist superimposed a specific mode of worship onto the legends of Kay Kavus and Gushtasp. In the *Shahnama*, the protagonists recognize the importance of supplication and humility, which are central themes in the poem. However, scholars have noted that before 1588, there is little visual representation of religious practice in the early Safavid period.³³ The depiction of Shi'i prayer, too, is unprecedented.³⁴ The 1605 manuscript refigures, literally,



9 *Gushtasp and the Dragon of Mount Sakila*, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 460a (artwork in the public domain)

the tradition of *Shahnama* illustrations by addressing topics most pertinent to Shah 'Abbas's court.

The issue of the Friday prayer, or *namāz-i juma'*, was central to Shah 'Abbas's ideological vision, highlighted in the clerical debates about the legitimacy and appropriateness of Friday sermons in the absence of the Twelfth Imam.³⁵ During the first hundred years of the Safavid dynasty the rulers did not construct congregational mosques, in stark contrast to their Sunni rivals in the west, who viewed mosques as symbols of sultanic power and legitimacy. The issue was an increasingly divisive one and the subject of virulent polemics by the Ottomans against their Shi'i neighbors, whom they characterized as heretical.³⁶ Perhaps in light of this critique and as a resolution to internal debates, in 1603 plans were drawn up for the construction of the imperial congregational mosque, known as the Masjid-i Shah, in Isfahan (Fig. 10).³⁷ Pamphlets were circulated about the correct type of clay to be used for

the *muhr* and instructional treatises written in Persian for the city's residents to pray in congregational mosques together.³⁸ The choice of Persian was a conscious one, distinguished as it was from the more formal Arabic used by theologians. The treatises were seen as extending Shah 'Abbas's ideology throughout the empire and were meant to bring about the societal changes envisioned for Safavid Iran.

The shah himself served as an exemplar, through his barefoot pilgrimages and well-publicized acts of prayer and supplication at holy sites.³⁹ For the first ten years of Shah 'Abbas's reign, the northeastern city of Mashhad was occupied by the Uzbeks, who looted and defiled the shrine of the eighth Shi'i imam, 'Ali Reza, a cause of great anxiety for the Safavids. On regaining the city in 1598, Shah 'Abbas entered the holy shrine on foot and immediately called for the sermon to be read in the name of the Shi'i imams.⁴⁰ The first imperial act at this holy site therefore concerned a prayer, one of thanks-



10 Masjed-i Shah, Isfahan (photograph by Khosrow Bozurgi, © Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT Libraries)

giving. Late sixteenth-century chronicles portray Shah 'Abbas as a powerful leader who had consolidated the empire and restored it to the glorious days of his grandfather Shah Tahmasb. He was also depicted as a pious and repentant man, one who forsook personal gain and donated his income toward public welfare. Shah 'Abbas appropriated the title *Kalb-i āstān-i 'Alī* (Dog of the Threshold of Imam Ali), which is inscribed on the front page of each of the hundreds of manuscripts that he donated to the shrines of his ancestor Shaykh Safi, in Ardabil, and that of Imam Reza, in Mashhad.⁴¹ The image of piety appropriated by Shah 'Abbas was disseminated through varied means, from chronicles to endowment deeds, in theological treatises and illustrated manuscripts. What is remarkable is the consistency of the portrait revealed and the complexity of its message.

The Repentant Hero

The representation of Safavid kingship combined Shi'i iconography and Iranian modes of authority. The most popular figure for illustration in the 1605 *Shahnama* was Rustam, whose legendary family ruled in Sistan and served as "chief champions and advisors" to generations of mythical rulers.⁴² Firdawsi wove together intricate stories of Rustam and his sovereigns, and the complexity of moving between them is often negotiated through the illustrative program. In the 1605 manuscript, twenty of the sixty-seven paintings, almost a third, focus on the life of Rustam. It is thus not surprising that an analysis of select images from the Rustam cycle leads to important insights into the artistic agenda of the 1605 *Shahnama*, as well as its significance within Shah 'Abbas's courtly milieu. It also provides the opportunity to consider the patronage of and motivation for the manuscript.

Five paintings demonstrate how the Rustam cycle was formally composed. Together, they illuminate how a codex such as the 1605 *Shahnama* may have been received and contextualized by its readers. Additionally, the images highlight the emotional content of Firdawsi's poems in ways that are rooted firmly in Safavid literary and artistic culture. Two paintings act as bookends to the Rustam cycle, beginning with Rustam's birth to the beautiful Rudaba in folio 180 (Fig. 11) and ending with his death 339 folios later. The span of a

life is marked in these two paintings, which serve as the introduction and conclusion to a well-known heroic biography. The passage of time occurs also through the recitation of the *Shahnama*; the sequence of images reflects the cadences of an oral tale, for example, slowing down to furnish details or to hone in on particular attributes. Similarly, the paintings sometimes appear in quick succession and sometimes dramatically halt the narrative, forcing the viewer to linger on the image and contemplate its meaning.

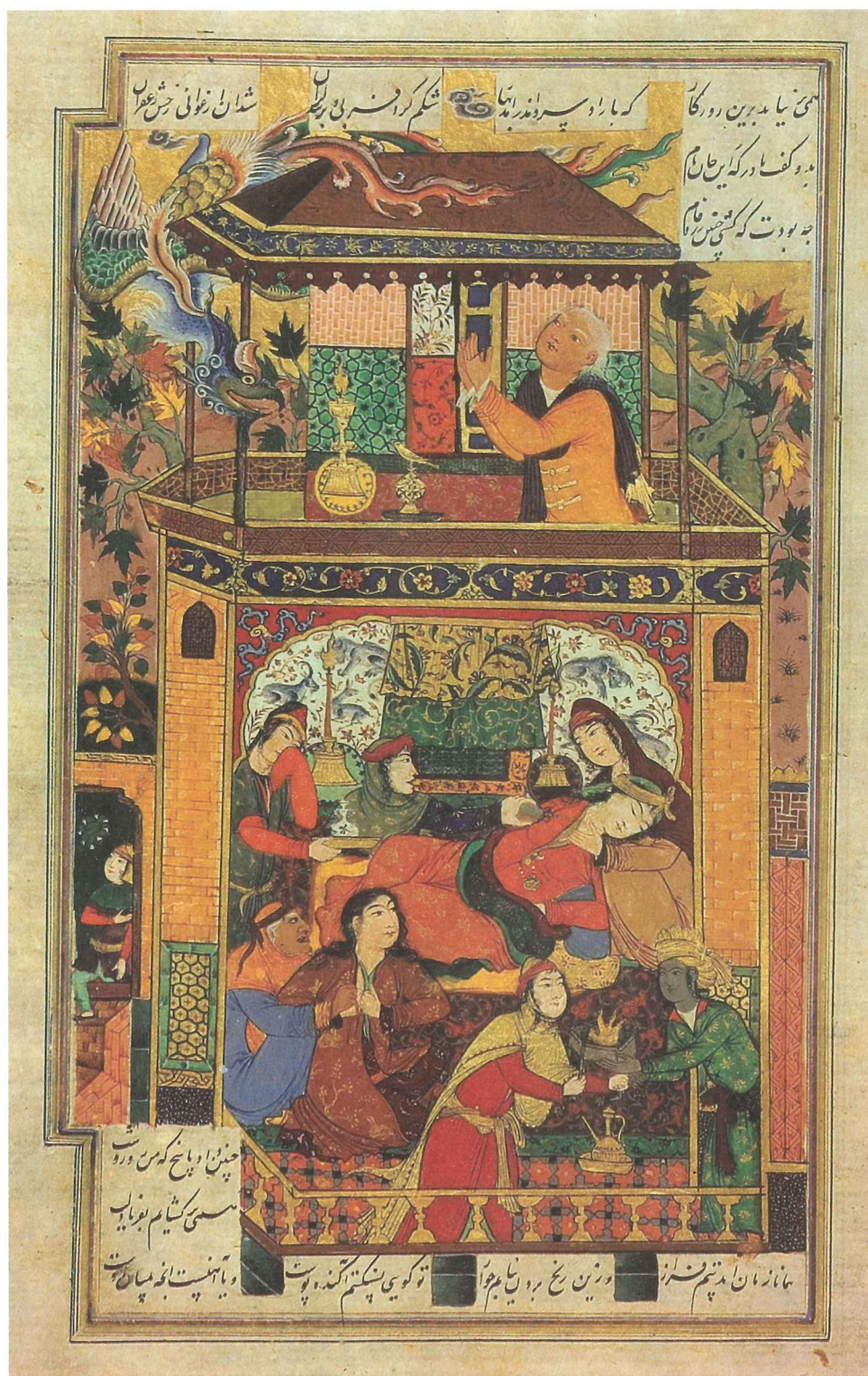
The first painting shows the albino Zal, Rustam's father, standing atop the roof of his house, hands joined in fervent prayer.⁴³ Below, his beloved wife Rudaba lies in the painful throes of childbirth.⁴⁴ The accompanying text explains that her labor had dangerously come to a halt when Zal remembered to ask help of his guardian, the magical Simurgh, or phoenix.⁴⁵ The tension is conveyed through the contrast between Rudaba's faint and collapsed body and the rush and confusion of her attendants. The enclosed room similarly contrasts with the open roof terrace on which Zal prays. The architectural setting is enlarged such that the viewer is placed directly within the house. There is not much room left on the page for the text, but it has been carefully selected as a visual and semantic frame for the illustration. The poem reads:

Before long the noble cypress was near childbirth,
The delightful spring grew parched, her heart was sad
She wept blood for the burden she bore.
Gone was her cerise bloom, her cheeks were saffron.
Her mother said to her: "My life!
Why have you grown so wan?"

Rudaba answered: "By night and day I cry for help.
I lie sleepless and withered like a living corpse.
My time has come,
But not deliverance.
My skin feels like it is stuffed with stones
And contains a mass of iron."⁴⁶

The break-line verses here are used effectively by calligrapher and painters. The two couplets are pulled out at opposite corners of the page and also break into the image. They detail Rudaba's loss of color and the anguish of her labor; they also vividly describe her seemingly lifeless body, wilting and heavy with the pregnancy as though it were stuffed with rocks or metal. The following text (on the verso side of the folio) recounts that Zal burns the feather of the Simurgh in the brazier, and, when the great bird appears, he raises his hands in reverence and prayers ("burdash namāz"). The Simurgh confides to Zal the manner in which Rudaba may be saved and predicts that the child born will be a great hero. The birth of Rustam, which this image foretells, was commonly illustrated in *Shahnama* manuscripts. Many of the illustrations, though, center on the moment of birth, with Rudaba and Rustam as the main characters of the story (Fig. 12). The moment before the birth, showing Zal's prayer to the Simurgh, is highly unusual and perhaps unique to the 1605 *Shahnama*.⁴⁷ It draws attention to the primary message in the tale—the divine intervention of the Simurgh.

The last image in the cycle, picturing the biers of Rustam and his brother Zawara, is set within a similar architectural

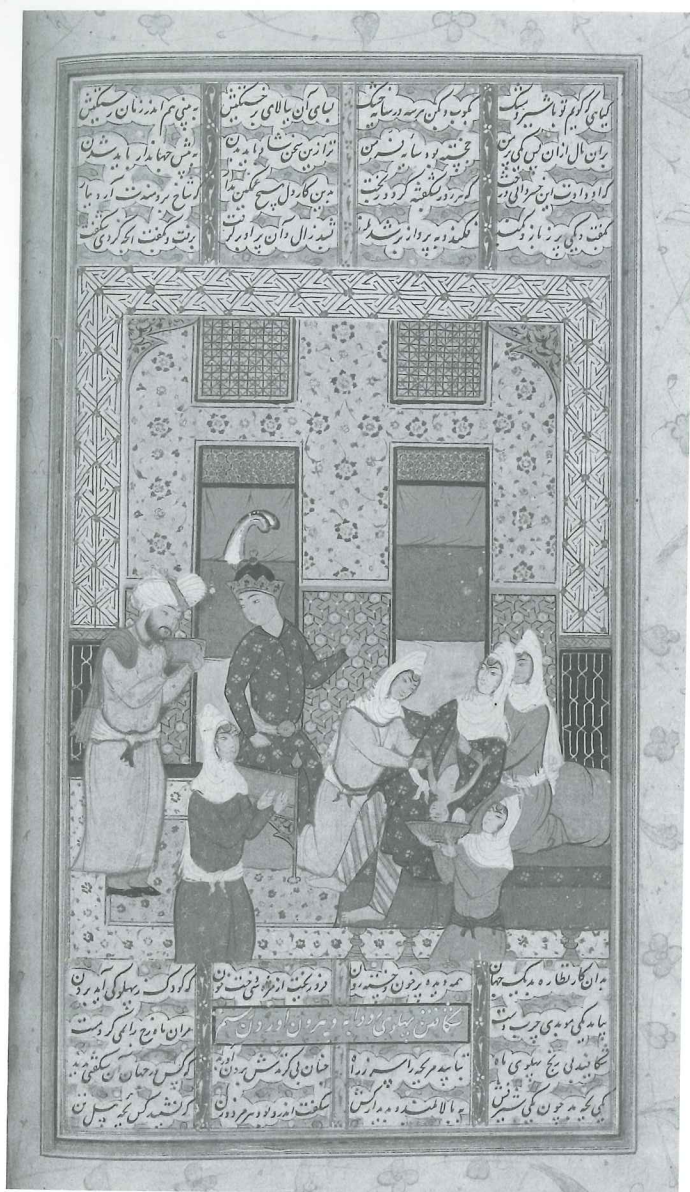


11 *Zal's Prayer to the Simurgh*, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 180a (artwork in the public domain)

setting, meant to again represent the ancestral home (Fig. 13). The distraught women, with Rudaba beating her breast at the death of her son, are moved to the upper story, and an old and wretched Zal appears in the lower left-hand corner of the page. In place of the Simurgh, a smoky wisp of a cloud floats above the parapet in the upper left corner of the painting, a reminder of the magical creature. In the lower right-hand corner is the remnant of another animal that played a significant role in the story, Rakhsh, Rustam's faith-

ful horse, whose body is borne on an elephant. The stillness of Rustam's and his brother's bodies contrasts with the churning anguish of Rudaba (who loses her mind, as we learn in the poem) and the crippling sadness expressed through Zal's bent shoulders.

In the center of the room, in almost the exact location where the pregnant Rudaba lay, rest the bodies of her sons, Rustam and Zawara, who had been led into a trap set by their half brother, Shaghad, along with the king of Kabul. The



12 *Birth of Rustam*, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1602, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 15 × 8½ in. (38.1 × 20 cm). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1907.279, fol. 51v (artwork in the public domain)

preceding text tells how the jealous Shaghad dug a pit filled with sharp swords and pointed spears onto which Rustam and Rakhsh were impaled.⁴⁸ As Rustam lay dying in the pit, he asked Shaghad to give him his bow and arrow so that he might fend off any wild animals lurking in the forest. Procuring his weapon, the mighty hero mustered his strength and shot an arrow that pierced the tree behind which Shaghad was cowering. Most *Shahnama* manuscripts depict the scene of Rustam dramatically avenging his own death (Fig. 14); paintings of his death and burial are comparatively rare.⁴⁹

The text on folio 519b describes how the mourners passed the biers of Rustam and Zawara from hand to hand until they arrived at their destination. The biers were placed in a verdant garden and a lofty tomb was built above them. The break lines tell how the two biers were placed on a single

platform (or throne, *takht*). The poem continues, "When they had mingled musk and roses, they poured them out at the elephantine hero's feet."⁵⁰ It is interesting to note here that the artists paid attention to the break-line verse and chose to transform the simile "elephantine hero [*gaw-i piltan*]" into a character in the painting, namely, the elephant bearing Rakhsh's body (who is mentioned, in fact, on the preceding page). This visual pun assumes the participation of the viewer, who would derive pleasure from seeing the beautifully rendered elephant, as well as an intellectual prod, from having just read the text. The centripetal focus of the painting acts as an effective end to the series, halting simultaneously the action on the page and the narrative of Rustam's life. The first and last paintings in the Rustam cycle reflect each other in important ways, separated though they are by hundreds of folios—indeed, a lifetime.

One of the most poignant stories in the *Shahnama* involves Rustam and Suhrab, the latter's son by Tahmina, the beautiful daughter of the ruler of Samangan. Rustam had fallen in love with Tahmina but, despite the consummation of their marriage, chose to return to Iran. He was never told of Suhrab's birth, even though he had left Tahmina with jewels and letters for any child that might be born of their tryst. Suhrab inherited Rustam's strength and thirst for battle and, when he learned the identity of his father, wanted to go to Iran and claim its throne for his family. However, Suhrab was tricked by the evil Turanian ruler Afrasiyab into attacking his father instead of reconciling with him. The episode is full of conflicting goals, deception, and missed opportunities, resulting in a deadly confrontation between the father and son.⁵¹

Rustam and Suhrab meet in battle without knowledge of their relationship, yet fighting their intuitive hesitation to strike each other. In the 1605 *Shahnama*, the story is narrated through three images that follow in a quick sequence, one after the other, introduced by a single rubric at the beginning of the set.⁵² Folio 234a shows the two men facing each other, flanked by their companions (Fig. 15). The page is symmetrically divided through the middle, heightening the sense of separation between the father and son. On the next folio Suhrab has struck Rustam a deadly blow with his knife (Fig. 16). However, Rustam employs guile to save himself, telling the novice that it is against the custom of warriors to kill after the first blow. The companions are now scattered behind an outcrop and the sky behind them is ablaze in gold. Suhrab stays his hand, and they leave the battlefield, to return the next day. The next two folios are text pages that slow down the pictorial narration at the height of suspense.

When they meet again, Rustam quickly strikes down his son and breaks his back (Fig. 17). Now it is Suhrab, the beautiful youth, who lies on the ground, the blood draining from his face. As he lies there writhing in anguish, Suhrab laments his own death and warns his conqueror that his father, Rustam, will avenge him. Hearing this, Rustam is shaken to the core and the world darkens before his eyes. His sword drops from his grasp and he falls to the ground in a stupor. On gaining consciousness, Rustam cries in anguish and asks Suhrab for proof of his identity. Suhrab's reply is given at the top of the page on folio 236a:



13 *The Biers of Rustam and Zawara*, from Firdawsi, *Shahname*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 519b (artwork in the public domain)

"When first they beat the war drums at my door,
My mother came to me with bloody cheeks.
Her soul was racked with grief to see me go.
She bound a seal [*muhr*] upon my arm, and said
'This is your father's gift, preserve it well.
A day will come when it will be of use.'"⁵³

On the painting, the seal, or amulet, can be seen tied on Suhrab's arm, evidence of Rustam's tragic mistake. Once

again, a seemingly small detail—a seal, or *muhr*—acts as a catalyst for contextualizing the painting and the plot.⁵⁴

The story of Rustam and Suhrab is a tragedy of epic proportions, and the paintings accentuate its pathos. The last image in the sequence abruptly ends what had until that point been a fast-paced viewing of the episode (Fig. 18). Just as Rustam's elbow and knee jut out of the frame, the hero enters the viewers' space, inviting them to feel the anguish in his eyes as they gaze at the flickering light in Suhrab's.



14 Rustam Kills Shaghad before Dying, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1604, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (37 × 23.5 cm). British Library, London, I.O. ISLAMIC 966, fol. 323v (artwork in the public domain; photograph © The British Library Board)

Rustam's face, which appears out of proportion to his body, is clearly the heart of the painting. With its furrowed brow accentuated by wrinkles around the eyes and on the forehead, it contrasts sharply with Suhrab's smooth and youthful countenance, drained of both color and expression. Like the subdued voice of the orator, the image slows the narration and forces the viewer-reader to confront the tragedy. The emotional pull is profound and its visual resolution complex.

The scale of the figures and the emphasis on their facial features represent what is known by modern scholars as the Isfahan style, which flourished at the end of the sixteenth century.⁵⁵ As Sheila Canby has characterized it, "large al-

mond eyes and bee-stung lips replaced the small eyes and mouths of earlier Safavids. Large round cheeks, thick arched eyebrows and short necks supplanted the small faces and long necks of earlier beauties of both sexes. Even the figures' bodies appear heavier, especially around the thighs, than those of their predecessors."⁵⁶ Moving away from the intricate narrative illustrations that characterized earlier *Shahnama*, in which figures and architectural spaces were closely linked to underline the complexity of the composition, Isfahan-style paintings, such as the set discussed here from the 1605 *Shahnama*, concentrated on a compositional hierarchy. The primary subjects of the story, placed in the center of the



15 *Rustam and Suhrab Face Each Other in Battle*, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 234a (artwork in the public domain)

page and enlarged, formed the core of the painting, set apart from the group scenes that were interspersed in the rest of the manuscript. Thus, the more common, densely illustrated scenes are retained in the 1605 *Shahnama*, but the innovative thematic changes are represented by new visual and compositional strategies.

Stylistically, these paintings conform to the trend toward greater modeling and the depiction of solitary and enlarged human subjects seen in the work of artists such as Reza-yi 'Abbasi.⁵⁷ His oeuvre ranged from single-page compositions featuring well-observed portraits (Fig. 19) to narrative com-

positions in manuscripts such as an unfinished *Shahnama* from the end of the sixteenth century. Such single-page paintings marked not only the independence of the artist, who could sell this work in the market at lower prices than those asked for entire manuscripts, but an autonomy of the work of art itself, which was freed to explore subjects other than those linked directly to literary tradition.⁵⁸ Like those of his peers, Reza's drawings and paintings paid unprecedented attention to dervishes and commoners, their simple dress and humble demeanor in stark contrast to the opulence and splendor of courtly scenes. This subject



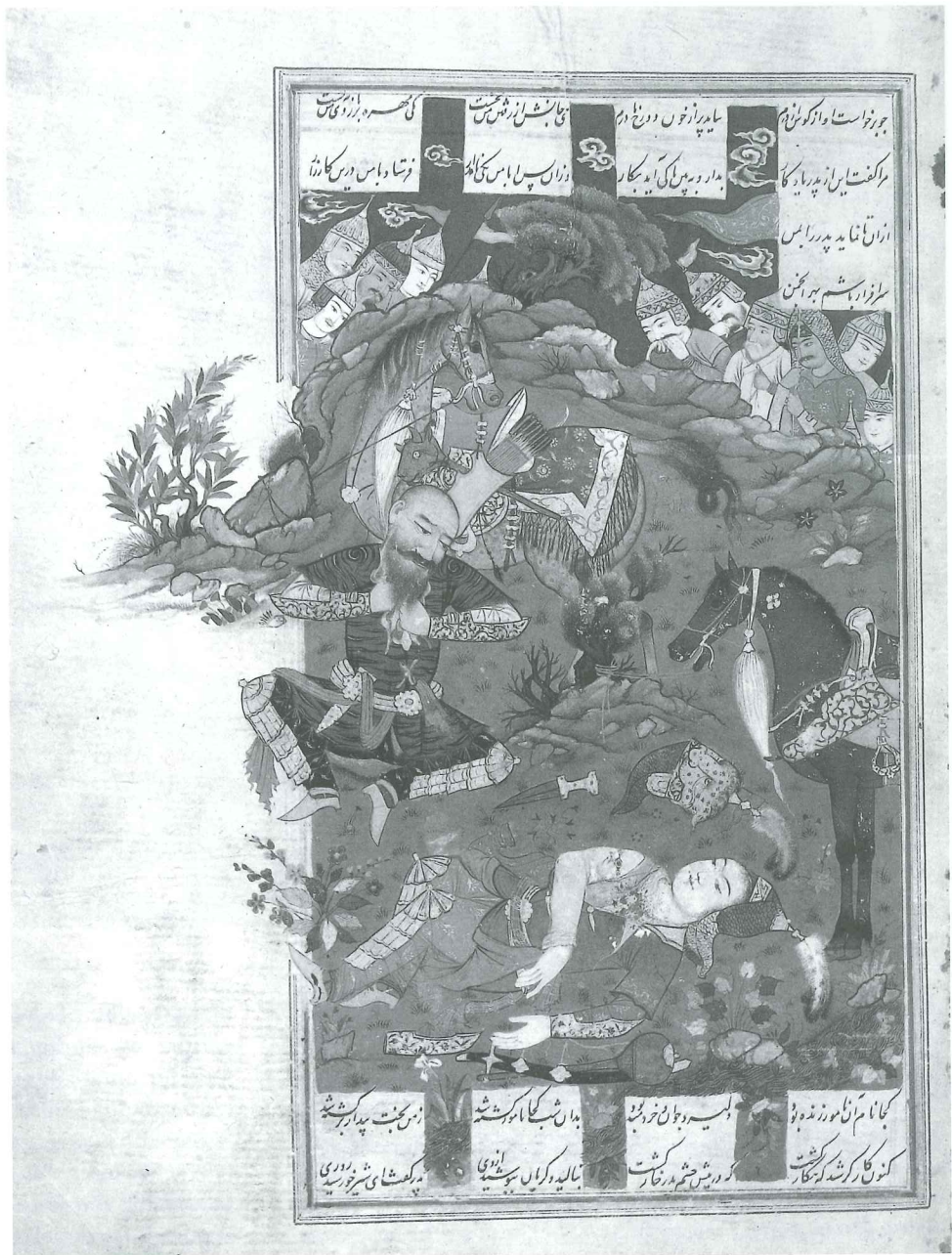
16 Suhrab Throws Rustam to the Ground, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 234b (artwork in the public domain)

matter corresponds, interestingly, with the textual descriptions of Shah 'Abbas's humility and his subservience at Shi'i holy shrines, pointing to the social changes under way in Safavid Iran.⁵⁹

Early seventeenth-century painting shared an aesthetic that was reflected in contemporaneous trends in Safavid and Mughal poetry. The *sabk-i hindī* (Indian style) or *shiva-yi tāza* (fresh style) mode of Persian poetry represented a regional aesthetic that "betrayed a tendency towards realism," an aspect also seen in the facial features of Rustam and Suhrab.⁶⁰ Addressing the work of the Iranian-Indian poet Sa'ib-i Tabrizi, Paul Losensky writes, "This 'poetics of the new' emphasizes the unexpected turn of thought or startling connection between image and idea."⁶¹ In poetry, greater emphasis was laid on intellectual themes that correlated the inner life of a subject with his or her religious experience. The *ghazal*, an erotic and elegiac form of love poetry, moved away from

its roots in a courtly and devotional sphere to "find a renewed congruity of meaning, and its protagonist, instead of the *ma'shūq/mamdūh/ma'būd* (... beloveds in the form of the lover, God, the intermediary) ... seems to be the mind of its author, creating ever new purely intellectual combinations of the old (worn-out) symbols."⁶² Innovation was not limited to poetry but extended to visual media as well, in which drama and emotion were explored through painting.

The emotions, from pathos to repentance, demonstrated in the Rustam cycle highlight important artistic and intellectual trends in Safavid culture during the reign of Shah 'Abbas. The paintings give scope to the individual's character and feelings as well as to his or her actions. More generally, artists such as Reza-yi 'Abbasi imbued their drawings and paintings with "psychological drama," which included exploring the inner life of the subjects they depicted.⁶³ Rustam's face in folio 236a is, clearly, a visual corollary to the poetic exploration of the emo-



17 *Death of Suhrab*, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 236a (artwork in the public domain)

tions. The portrait, moving and expressive, ultimately draws our attention to the protagonist's flawed human nature.

Rustam's tragic and fatal imperfection was a trope also deployed by Shah 'Abbas's historians, who conveyed not only the ruler's majesty but also his fallibility.⁶⁴ The fact that three paintings are used to capture the confrontation between Rustam and Suhrab, and that, remarkably, they appear in quick succession affirm its significance for the artists and, possibly, the patron of the 1605 *Shahnama*. Firdawsi's poetry was not read in isolation but was part of a burgeoning Safavid chancellery culture, in which issues of patricide and infanticide would have had some meaning. Shah 'Abbas's historians noted that the ruler had ascended the throne after a coup d'état in which he deposed his father and blinded his brothers. Later in life, he also put to death his three sons, all of whom he suspected—at different times—of sedition and treachery.⁶⁵

Pietro Della Valle, a Venetian traveler in Iran in 1618, was

given an audience with Shah 'Abbas, and his account of the meeting offers a glimpse of the shah's inner struggles.⁶⁶ At the end of a raucous gathering, Della Valle saw that his host stayed on alone with the musicians, troubled by his thoughts. "Holding first place among these," wrote Della Valle, "it seems, is the intense grief that he [Shah 'Abbas] harbors continuously over the death he inflicted in years past, on account of suspicions of rebellion, on Safi Mirza, his first-born son, a fully grown man, bearded, and of greatest expectation. This death, which he perhaps learned subsequently was a blunder, the afflicted father feels so deeply that every day he weeps for it bitterly."⁶⁷ The Safavid court historian Eskander Beg Munshi noted Shah 'Abbas's despotic and cruel behavior, in which fathers were made the executioners of their sons, and vice versa.⁶⁸ While it is risky to make direct connections between the illustrative program of the *Shahnama* and particular historical events, it is also unavoidable to



18 *Death of Suhrab*, detail, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 236a (artwork in the public domain)

assume that certain themes may well have resonated more than others for Safavid viewers.

A close consideration of the paintings' style and content provides clues about the manuscript's patronage. With the capital's shift to Isfahan, Shah 'Abbas bent his efforts to monumental urban and architectural projects; it has been suggested that manuscript painting was not prioritized during those years.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, because of the presence of masters such as Sadiqi Beg and Reza-yi 'Abbasi, paintings made in Isfahan attained a distinct style and became popular. Some of the foremost patrons at the Safavid court, of both architecture and painting, belonged to the new cadre of conscripted "slave" (*ghulām*)-bureaucrats who came to serve under Shah 'Abbas at the end of the sixteenth century. These newly converted Christians, raised in the palace and bearing close allegiance to the rulers, came to power with the changes in policy implemented already under Shah 'Abbas's grandfather Shah Tahmasb. During the former's reign, however, they attained unprecedented status, particularly in Isfahan, where the 1605 *Shahnama* was likely painted.

Assuming an Isfahan provenance for the manuscript, based on the style and content analyzed above, the patron of the 1605 *Shahnama* was most likely a *ghulām* and possibly the powerful and ambitious Muhibb 'Ali Beg (known as Lala Beg), who was the vizier of Isfahan as well as the tutor of the *ghulāms*. He stands out as the patron for two related reasons: first, in 1605 he was a rising "star" in the court, and the gifting

of the deluxe copy would have been in keeping with the culture of gaining favor with the shah.⁷⁰ Indeed, in 1605 another notable *ghulām*, Qarachaqaq Khan, the governor of Mashhad, had gifted his prestigious porcelain collection to Shah 'Abbas as a sign of his devotion to the royal house.⁷¹ A few years later, Muhibb 'Ali Beg would be entrusted with overseeing the great Masjid-i Shah mosque in Isfahan, which was itself, as demonstrated earlier, part of the new religious vision of Shah 'Abbas. This mosque, the first Friday mosque constructed in Safavid Iran, was a marker of a more normative Shi'i practice. The scenes of prayer in the 1605 *Shahnama*, themselves unprecedented, highlight this momentous change.

The second clue is the careful attention given to the composition and illustration of the Rustam cycle. As themselves vassals of the Shah, the *ghulāms* would have had a particular interest in depicting the story of Rustam, the mythic hero fighting for the rulers of Iran. As Massumeh Farhad writes in the context of later *Shahnama* manuscripts that were gifted to Shah 'Abbas, such illustrations "underscore the importance of the paladin Rustam, his descendants, and the conflict between the Iranians and the Turanians in the narrative cycle." She adds, "By commissioning illustrated texts of Persian classics (such as the *Shahnama*) . . . [the *ghulāms*] clearly expressed their awareness of long-established Persian cultural norms of the Persian elite."⁷² The Rustam cycle in the 1605 *Shahnama*, when viewed in the context of Safavid politics and visual culture, served as an assertion of *ghulām* identity as well



19 Reza-yi 'Abbasi, *Sketch of Man Pursued by a Bear*, Iran, 1592, ink on paper, $3 \times 3\frac{5}{8}$ in. (7.7×9.3 cm). British Museum, London, OA 1920.9-17.0254 (3) (artwork in the public domain; photograph © The Trustees of The British Museum, London)

as a deluxe royal commission. The manuscript as a whole, through its sophisticated rendition of key subjects and its emphasis on emotions, exemplified the innovations taking place in the visual arts of early modern Iran.

Portrait of the Shah

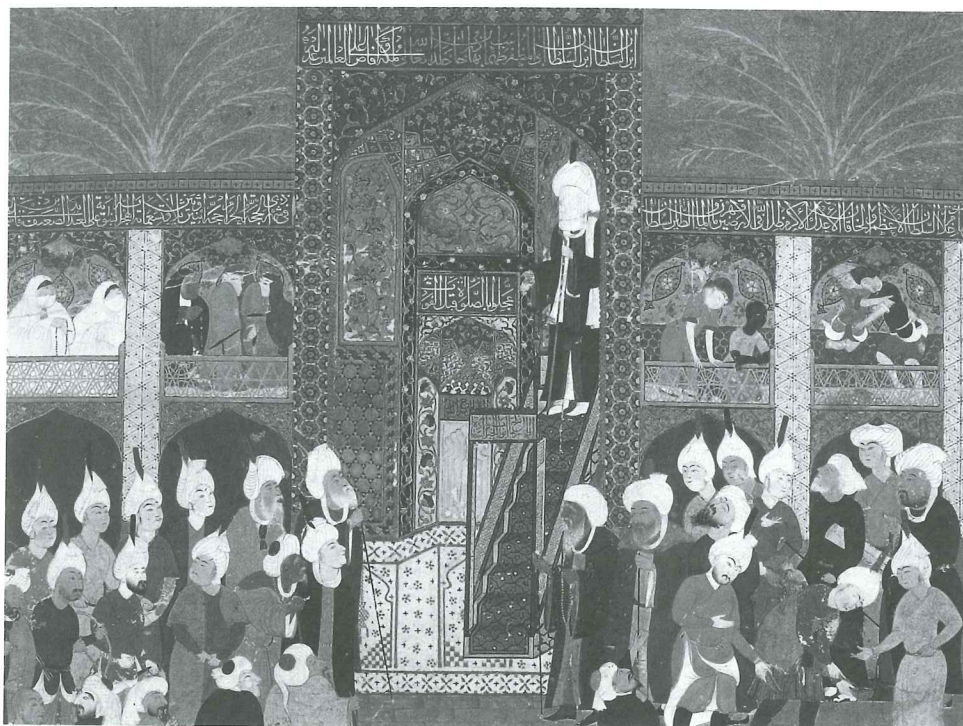
Textual descriptions of Shah 'Abbas were constructed in such a way as to display his humanity as well as his imperial vision. Looking more closely at the sets of paintings already considered, a more literal portrait begins to emerge. A physical likeness of the shah links the iconographic and thematic sets analyzed thus far, bringing to the fore issues of imperial portraiture in Iran at the turn of the seventeenth century. Art historians have noted that early Safavid painting is remarkable for its resistance to verisimilitude. In Timurid art, single-page portraits of the sultans and courtiers were popular items for collection in albums (Fig. 20).⁷³ Similarly, idealized images of rulers were inserted into the frontispieces of historical and literary texts such as the *Shahnama*.⁷⁴ In the Safavid period, one of the most remarkable paintings is found in a 1526 history of the Shi'i imams, *History of the Immaculate Imams* (*Tārīkh-i 'aima-yi ma'sumīn*), which alludes to Shah Tahmasb, the ruler at the time.⁷⁵ In *The First Sermon of Hasan ibn 'Alī in Madina*, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad is seen sitting in the pulpit of the Great Mosque in Madina (Fig. 21). Above the haloed figure is a foundation script praising the Safavid shah, whose name is highlighted and placed directly above that of the imam.⁷⁶ The conflation of mythic or historical figures with contemporary rulers fits well into the Iranian tradition of what may be called a "suggestive" portrait, one in which attaining a physical likeness was secondary to portraying the attributes of the king.

This attitude toward "suggestion" in early Safavid painting is all the more striking when compared with portraits of rulers in neighboring courtly cultures. In Ottoman Turkey,



20 *Portrait of Husayn Bayqara*, ca. 1500–1525, ink and gold on paper, $13\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{7}{8}$ in. (34.3×32.7 cm). Harvard Art Museums, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, Mass., Gift of J. Goelet, 1958.599 (artwork in the public domain)

for example, artists compiled abstracted and serialized portraits of the sultans.⁷⁷ Mughal rulers, such as Akbar (r. 1556–1605), commissioned richly illustrated dynastic biographies in which the ruler was depicted in a naturalistic manner.⁷⁸ Safavid court historians documented the lives of the shahs, from their military campaigns to their patronage of holy shrines; artists made sophisticated likenesses of courtiers and ordinary subjects, delighting in the quotidian.⁷⁹ However, the two forms of representation—one textual, the other visual—did not cohere, and it appears that there are no recognizable likenesses of the first four Safavid rulers. One of the reasons for this hesitation may have to do with their status as semidivine figures, as the shahs were believed to be direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet images of the Prophet himself were painted quite often, albeit veiled and often surrounded by a fiery halo, contradicting the belief that the rendering of holy figures was thought to be inappropriate.⁸⁰ A more con-



21 *The First Sermon of Hasan ibn 'Ali in Madina*, from *Tārīkh-i 'aima-yi ma'sūmīn*, ca. 1526, copied by Muhammad al-Husayni al-Varamini, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, $8\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ in. (21×15.8 cm). Russian National Library, St. Petersburg, MS Dorn 312, fol. 373v (artwork in the public domain)

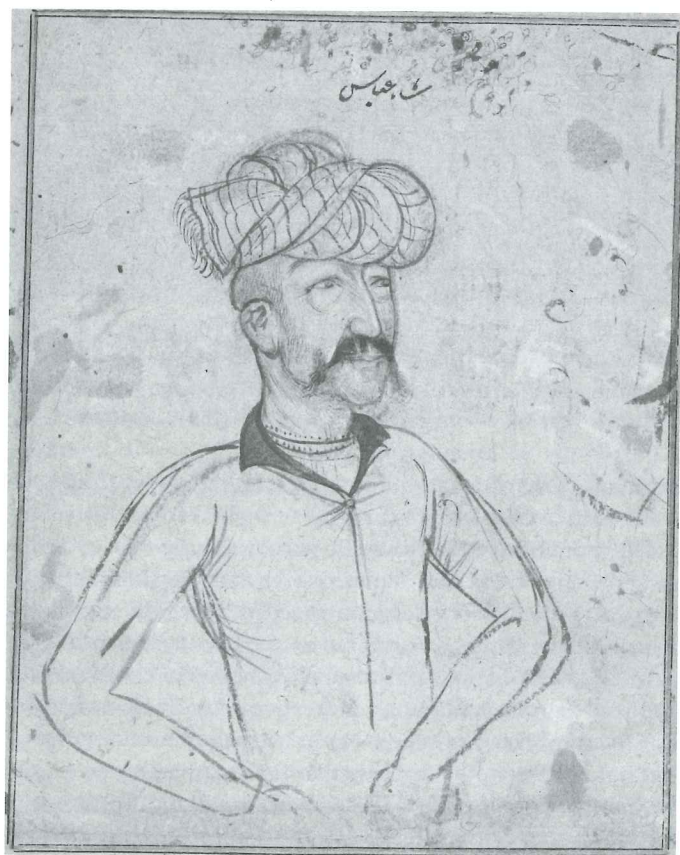
vincing reason may be that the tradition of portraying royal figures tended toward the idealized and the suggestive, particularly in the Timurid arts of which the Safavids were heirs.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Safavid imperial representation was radically transformed, as witnessed in the 1605 *Shahnama*. This manuscript's paintings of Kay Kavus, Gushtasp, and Rustam share many commonalities, such as narrative clarity, the dynamic use of color and composition, and a focus on individual figures. However, Gushtasp's face stands out in particular, recognizable as that of Shah 'Abbas. The protagonist of the paintings of Gushtasp's confrontations with the horned wolf and the dragon of Mount Sakila has a broad face with a light beard covering his chin (Figs. 8, 9). A notable feature is the large, drooping mustache, which had become closely associated with Shah 'Abbas's physiognomy.

Textual descriptions further this observation, primarily that provided by Della Valle:

In walking, speaking, and in sum, in all his acts and movements he [Shah 'Abbas] is very lively, and he finds it hard to stay still; nonetheless his natural fancifulness and restlessness are accompanied by an indefinable gravity, revealing true regal majesty.

He is rather handsome than ugly in appearance, though venerable. In complexion his countenance is as dark as that of Signor Coletta, and perhaps more, either by nature or through continual sunlight to which he is often exposed, without regard. . . . His hands he carries very darkly painted with henna, because in these lands this is thought very elegant in both men and women. He has an aquiline nose, moustache and eyebrows also completely black (if they are not dyed), and the rest of his face and chin is all shaven, as customary. His mustachios are drooping, this being curiously for reasons of religion, as they say that moustaches which point upwards, as we wear them, show



22 Attributed to Bishndas, sketch of Shah 'Abbas I, ca. 1618, black ink and watercolor on beige paper, $7\frac{7}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{8}$ in. (19.5×15.6 cm). Harvard Art Museums, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, Mass., Gift of Stuart Cary Welch, 1999.304 (artwork in the public domain)



23 *Gushtasp and the Dragon of Mount Sakila*, detail, from Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, 1605, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, page $14\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36×24 cm). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. fol. 4251, fol. 460a (artwork in the public domain)

pride, and thus in a certain way they desire to fight with heaven. He possesses very lively, lustrous, smiling eyes, and so in them as in the rest of his person his tremendous spirit is revealed.⁸¹

Shah 'Abbas's astrologer, Jalal al-din Yazdi, noted that in 1589 Shah 'Abbas was campaigning near Mashhad and fell deathly ill. After forty-three days, at the end of the month of Dhul Hij, the shah (*Navāb kalb-i āstān-i 'Alī*, "Lord, Dog of the Threshold of Ali") recovered his health, and in thanksgiving sheared his beard. His loyal companions (*yakrangān*) followed suit, and the cropped beard and drooping mustache became a signature of Shah 'Abbas and his followers.⁸²

Yazdi's and Della Valle's texts correspond closely with what has been considered, until now, to be the earliest depiction of Shah 'Abbas, a sketch made by an Indian artist. In 1618 the Mughal ruler Jahangir sent an embassy to Iran to meet with his "brother," Shah 'Abbas. The group included the ambassador Khan Alam and one of Jahangir's favorite artists, Bishndas, who was renowned as a talented portraitist.⁸³ The ambassadors were received at Shah 'Abbas's court and, as per Jahangir's request, Bishndas was allowed to make a sketch of the shah. The sketch is rendered in pencil and red and black ink, and shows the torso of the ruler, with his hands tucked into his sash, perhaps holding the handle of his sword (Fig. 22). His turban sits jauntily on his head, and his attire is relatively unadorned, as though he had just returned from a polo match or the bazaar. More important, Bishndas captures the physical attributes of the king: his slight figure, lively eyes, and the celebrated drooping mustache.⁸⁴

The 1605 *Shahnama* predates this sketch, combining the suggestive and naturalist modes of portraiture to create a unique representation of Shah 'Abbas. Thus, in a move away from traditional Safavid iconography, evinced in paintings

from the period of Shah Tahmasb, an identifiable likeness was placed within a mythohistorical space, appropriating the narratives from the *Shahnama* and making them contemporary (Fig. 23). On the one hand there are Zal, Kay Kavus, and Gushtasp, praying for divine intervention, repentance, and gratitude, respectively. On the other hand there is Rustam, whose bravery, strength, and intelligence are matched only by the deeply troubling event of his son's death at his own hands. Shah 'Abbas's history of martial victory, violence against cognates, and public repentance therefore seems to have been captured in the *Shahnama* stories. The well-defined bodies and expressive facial features bring the figures to life, allowing the viewer to empathize with them and to enter more easily into Firdawsi's poetic tales.

The court historian Muhammad Afushtah-yi Natanzi began his encomium listing the attributes of Shah 'Abbas by describing the ruler's "moon-like face [*qamar talat*]" and continued by praising his "Mercurial intelligence, pleasurable disposition, sun-like, bright eyes [possessing the] fury of Bahram, wisdom of Jupiter, the dignity of Saturn."⁸⁵ Like the protagonists in the 1605 *Shahnama*, the shah was "bigger than life" and served as an exemplary leader, yet one humbled by his shortcomings. In subsequent Safavid manuscripts, many completed after Shah 'Abbas's death in 1629, his face, too—with its shaved beard and drooping mustache—would become an ideal type and disseminated in diverse contexts.

Shah 'Abbas's countenance was replicated in later portraits of the ruler, from wall paintings in Isfahan to allegorical paintings made for Jahangir. But his dark chin and drooping mustache would also be utilized to portray fictional and real characters.⁸⁶ An intriguing example is found in a manuscript painting inscribed with the title *The Amirs of Shah 'Abbas* (Fig. 24).⁸⁷ The painting is one-half of what must have been a two-page frontispiece in which the second page most likely showed



24 *A Gathering of Grandees*, ca. 1620–25, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 15½ × 9⅞ in. (39.5 × 24.4 cm). Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, W 691 (artwork in the public domain)

Shah 'Abbas receiving ambassadors and his courtiers. In the extant folio, three male figures stand along the right side, two above and one below, united by the similar rendition of their facial hair and formal courtly attire. They all look attentively toward the left, presumably at the king, and all three are identified by inscriptions on their bodies. The top two are of particular interest, as they represent prominent officials at Shah 'Abbas's court, namely, the *ghulām* and governor of Mashhad Qarachaqa Khan on the left, and on the right, the tribal leader

Alpan Beg.⁸⁸ The two dignitaries are depicted as separate individuals through their clothing, facial features, and names. Nonetheless, they are also linked by the down-turned mustache, which marked them as Shah 'Abbas's companions, or *yakrangān*, and close associates. The shah's face was meant to be replicated and reproduced, in image and reality; he served as an ideal ruler and human subject. His likeness thus became a trope, and the specificity of Shah 'Abbas's identity was subsumed and dispersed throughout the spectrum of Safavid visual culture.⁸⁹

Manuscript painting in Iran shared many commonalities with the Safavids' neighboring courtly cultures, particularly that of the Mughals.⁹⁰ The famed *Akbarnama* (*History of Emperor Akbar*) was written about 1590–96 by the courtier Abul Fazl and illustrated by some of the most famous artists of the Indian court.⁹¹ Although the epic *Shahnama* and the historical *Akbarnama* diverged in style, both incorporated narrative elements focusing on kingship and the spectacular, while disseminating the rulers' ('Abbas's and Akbar's) piety and humility. The emphasis on the royal enactment of devotion is shared, as is the attention given to portraiture, which suggests that at the cusp of the seventeenth century there were visual categories of representation that transcended political boundaries and resulted in a concordance of imperial taste and judgment in the early modern Muslim empires.

Painting in early Safavid Iran gave life to subjects in a manner that was both individualized and ideological. The patron of the 1605 *Shahnama* is not named, yet the manuscript contains essential clues through its Isfahan provenance and the theme of vassalage, which point to a highly ranked courtier, most likely from the elite *ghulam* cadre. More significantly, it is clear from the iconography and illustrative program that Shah 'Abbas's imperial vision permeated the manuscript. The images of prayer helped to reconceptualize Safavid Shi'ism toward a normative practice that was similar to the Sunni doctrine proselytized by Iran's Ottoman neighbors. A stress on emotions defined the art and culture of the seventeenth century; this was a cosmos centered on the human subject and his or her individual relationship to the world. Through texts and images, the representations of Shah 'Abbas embodied perfectly that subjectivity through suggestive renderings of the imperial character and a set of surrogate likenesses.⁹²

The 1605 *Shahnama*, with its more than seven hundred folios and sixty-seven paintings, was a singular work of art that served as a portrait of Shah 'Abbas as well as an exemplar of Safavid painting in the early seventeenth century. The didactic goal of the 1605 *Shahnama* manuscript is undeniable, but it was never at the cost of visual pleasure. Indeed, pleasure was sought in the details of the pages' design, in the complex relations between images and text, and, most important, in the sensuality of the medium itself—paper, paint, gold, and silver. Whereas this aesthetic had already become codified in the fifteenth century, in the seventeenth it took on a different meaning. Employing empathy and drama, the artists of the 1605 *Shahnama* constructed images in which painting and literature came together to illuminate Shah 'Abbas's vision for transforming Safavid Iran.

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Notes

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able to me. Thanks are due to Marianna Shreve Simpson and Sunil Sharma for generously reading and commenting on the manuscript, as well as to Charles Melville and Dick Davis for their helpful suggestions at the earlier stages of my research. I am grateful to Karen Lang and the two anonymous reviewers for *The Art Bulletin*, whose astute questions pushed me to explore in greater detail the patronage of the manuscript. This research was supported by an Alexander von Humboldt Award, a MacMillan Center Director's Award, and the Morse Junior Faculty Award, the latter two through Yale University.

1. For an overview of the Safavid state, see Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).
2. This essay derives inspiration from Louis Marin's *The Portrait of the King* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). See also the recent exhibition catalog edited by Sheila Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (London: British Museum Press, 2009).
3. On the Timurid revival in Safavid court culture, see Sholeh Quinn, "Notes on Timurid Legitimacy in Three Safavid Chronicles," *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 2 (1998): 149–58. For paintings of the period, see Anthony Welch, *Artists for the Shah: Late Sixteenth-Century Painting at the Imperial Court of Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 182.
4. The *Shahnama* was completed in 1010 and dedicated to the ruler of the time, Mahmud of Ghazni (r. 997–1030). For concise discussions of Firdawsi's *Shahnama*, see Julie Meisami, "The Past in the Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," in "Cultural Processes in Muslim and Arab Societies: Medieval and Early Modern Periods," special issue, *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 247–75; and Dick Davis, introduction to *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, by Abolqasem Ferdowsi, trans. Davis (New York: Viking Press, 2006).
5. Oleg Grabar, "Why Was the *Shahnama* Illustrated?" *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 91–96. An Ottoman case study is provided by Emine Fetvacı, "The Production of the *Şehnâme-i Selīm Hân*," *Muqarnas* 26 (2009): 263–315.
6. Ulrike al-Khamis, "Khusrau Parviz as Champion of Shi'ism? A Closer Look at an Early Safavid Miniature Painting in the Royal Museum of Edinburgh," in *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. Bernard O'Kane (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 207.
7. Kishwar Rizvi, "Architecture and the Representations of Kingship during the Reign of the Safavid Shah Abbas I," in *Every Inch a King: From Alexander to the King of Kings*, ed. Charles Melville and Lynette Mitchell (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).
8. This is brought up in Gülru Necipoğlu's essay "Challenging the Past: Sinan and the Competitive Discourse of Early Modern Islamic Architecture," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 169–80.
9. A number of these paintings have been reproduced in Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*.
10. The earliest surviving *Shahnama* manuscript is an incomplete text dated 1217. However, it was not until the fourteenth century that illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama* became popular with the ruling elite. The primary theme of the epic revolves around issues of kingship and the relationship between men and their god, making it an appropriate text for patronage by rulers new to both Iran and Islam. See Firuza Abdulleeva and Charles Melville, *The Persian Book of Kings: Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32. See also Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History: The Illustrations of the Great Mongol Shahnama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
11. Marianna Shreve Simpson and Jerome Clinton, "Word and Image in Illustrated *Shahnama* Manuscripts," in *Shahnama Studies*, ed. Charles Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 221.
12. The Safavid *kitabkhāna*, or workshop, consisted of calligraphers and painters who worked together to produce a luxury manuscript. The calligrapher would mark out and fill in the text blocks, in consultation with the master, or *kitabdar*. The page would be sent to a group of portraitists, colorists, gilders, and burnishers, who would then complete the image. Finally, the pages would be collated together and bound. For the *kitabkhāna*, see Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's Haft Aurang: A Princely Manuscript from Sixteenth-Century Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Freer Gallery of Art, 1997), 318.
13. In the 1605 *Shahnama* there are three paintings in which the rubric is on the page, but for the rest of the sixty-four, it occurs before.
14. Farhad Mehran, "The Break-Line Verse: The Link between Text and Image in the First Small *Shahnama*," in Melville, *Shahnama Studies*.
15. However, this is not always the case, as pointed out by Marianna Shreve Simpson in "From Tourist to Pilgrim: Iskandar at the Ka'ba in Illustrated *Shahnama* Manuscripts," *Iranian Studies* 43 (2010): 127–46, at 132.
16. A description of the manuscript can be found in the catalog of Islamic

- manuscripts in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, Ivan Stchoukine et al., eds., *Illuminierte islamische Handschriften* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1971), 83–87. A monograph was also dedicated to the full set of illustrations; see Volkmar Enderlein and Werner Sundermann, *Schahname, Das persische Königsbuch* (Weimar: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1988). The manuscript was most recently displayed at the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin, where it was the subject of a catalog essay; see Kishwar Rizvi, "Kings, Heroes, and the Divine: The 1605 *Shahnama* at the National Library in Berlin" (in German; forthcoming in English) in *Heroische Zeiten: Tausend Jahre persisches Buch der Könige*, ed. Julia Gonnella and Christoph Rausch (Berlin: Edition Minerva, 2010).
17. Robert Hillenbrand has written on the 1524 copy of the *Shahnama-yi Shah Tahmasb* (the so-called Houghton *Shahnama*) in "The Iconography of the *Shah-nama-yi Shahi*," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. Charles Melville (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996).
 18. This point is also brought up in Jerome Clinton, "Ferdowsi and the Illustrations of the *Shahnama*," in *Islamic Art and Literature*, ed. Oleg Grabar and Cynthia Robinson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
 19. On copying and reproduction in Persian art, see Ada Adamova, "Repetition of Compositions in Manuscripts: The *Khamsa* of Nizami in Lenin-grad," in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelny (Leiden: Brill, 1992).
 20. Barbara Schmitz, "On a Special Hat Introduced during the Reign of Shāh 'Abbās the Great," *Iran* 22 (1984): 103–12.
 21. Enderlein and Sundermann, *Schahname*, 84.
 22. The title appears two pages earlier, on folio 218a, "The Story of Kay Kavus and His Deception by Iblis and How He Went Up to the Sky." I have written about this painting in relation to Shah 'Abbas's public piety (Rizvi, "Architecture and the Representations of Kingship"), but present it here within the broader context of the manuscript.
 23. The translations are my adaptations from the English version by Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner, *Shāhnāma of Firdausi*, 9 vols. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1905) (henceforth Warner). The manuscript has been checked against the definitive Persian compilation by Jalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shahnama*, 8 vols. (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987) (henceforth Khaleghi-Motlagh). In this passage, the reference is to Khaleghi-Motlagh, vol. 2, 97, 98; and Warner, vol. 2, 104–5.
 24. For a general commentary on prayer stones, see Helga Venzlaff, "Mohr-e Namāz: Das schiitische Gebetssiegel," *Die Welt des Islam*, n.s., 35, no. 2 (November 1995): 250–75.
 25. For a brief summary of Shi'ism, see W. Madelung, "Shīa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=Islam_sim_6920 (accessed January 14, 2011).
 26. Adam Olearius, *The voyages and travells of the ambassadors sent by Frederick, Duke of Holstein, to the Great Duke of Muscovy and the King of Persia begun in the year M.DC.XXXIII. and finish'd in M.DC.XXXIX. . .* (London: Printed for John Starkey and Thomas Basset, 1669), 279.
 27. In the Tehran redaction Gushtasp is called the grandson of Kay Kavus, but this is in contradiction to an earlier manuscript analyzed by Khaleghi-Motlagh. I thank Dick Davis for bringing this discrepancy to my notice.
 28. Khaleghi-Motlagh, vol. 5, 31; and Warner, vol. 4, 338–39.
 29. The title appears on folio 459b, "The dragon is killed at the hands of Gushtasp."
 30. Khaleghi-Motlagh, vol. 5, 43; and Warner, vol. 4, 346–47.
 31. The focus on dramatic engagement is seen in the numerous images of Gushtasp and the dragon. They are easily found on the Cambridge *Shahnama* Project website: <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/page>.
 32. A parallel reading is provided in David Roxburgh, "Micrographia: Toward a Visual Logic of Persianate Painting," *Res* 43 (Spring 2003): 11–30.
 33. Shreve Simpson and Clinton, "Word and Image in Illustrated *Shahnama* Manuscripts," 233. In the electronic database compiled by the Cambridge *Shahnama* Project, there are several images representing the act of prayer, but they are not imbued with specific meaning. Examples may be found from the Timurid period, such as in a 1436–37 *Shahnama* manuscript now in the British Library (*Isfandiyar Gives Thanks to God for Helping Him Kill the Wolves*). A more contemporary example may be found by turning to India, as in a 1604 copy of a mystic praying (*A Sinner's Passionate Plea to God*) from the *Kulliyāt* of Sa'di (Collection of the Prince and Princess Aga Khan, MS 35, fol. 107b), reproduced in Zeenut Ziad, *The Magnificent Mughals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 161. Shah 'Abbas's public acts of piety often reflected those enacted by the Mughal ruler Akbar. It would be interesting to consider whether visual tropes were similarly mimicked.
 34. The image was repeated in at least one subsequent copy, a 1617 *Shahnama* now in Vienna, *Shahnama* NF 118, fol. 46r, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. For details, see Dorothea Duda, *Islamische Handschriften*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1983).
 35. Safavid commentaries on the issue of the Friday prayer are collected in Rasūl Ja'fariyān, *Davāzdah risālah-yi fiqhī darbārah-yi namāz-i jum'ah az rūzgār-i Šafavī* (Qum: Anšāriyān, 2003). See also Andrew Newman, "Fayd al-Kashani and the Rejection of the Clergy/State Alliance: Friday Prayer as Politics in the Safavid Period," in *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of Marja' Taqlid*, ed. L. S. Walbridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 34–52.
 36. See Elke Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die safawiden im 16. Jahrhundert nach Arabischen Handschriften* (Freiburg: Schwarz, 1970).
 37. See Gülrü Necipoğlu, "Qur'anic Inscriptions on Sinan's Imperial Mosques: A Comparison with Their Safavid and Mughal Counterparts," in *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and Its Creative Expressions*, ed. Fahmida Suleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007). The inscriptions she cites are published in Lutf-Allah Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āsār-i Isfahān* (Isfahan: Kitābfirūshī-yi Saqāft, 1965), 401–63.
 38. These issues were most prominently brought up in the Persian treatise by the noted cleric Baha al-din 'Amili, *Jamī-yi 'Abbāsī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i farāhānī, 1980), 31–93.
 39. Kishwar Rizvi, "Sites of Pilgrimage and Objects of Devotion," in Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*, 98–115.
 40. On Shah 'Abbas's public piety, see Robert McChesney, "Waqf and Public Policy: The Waqfs of Shah 'Abbas, 1011–1023/1602–1614," *Asian and African Studies* 15 (1991): 165–90; and Charles Melville, "Shah 'Abbas and the Pilgrimage to Mashad," in Melville, *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*.
 41. A number of these manuscripts now comprise the Dorn Collection of the Russian National Library. Shah 'Abbas's dedication remains on the manuscripts, as noted in the catalog. See Johannes Albracht Bernhard Dorn, *Catalogue des manuscrits et xylo-graphes orientaux de la Bibliothèque Impériale publique de St. Pétersbourg* (St. Petersburg: L'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1852).
 42. Davis, introduction to Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*, xxi.
 43. The title appears on folio 179b, "Story of the Arrival of Sam and Zal from Zabulistan, the Birth of Rustam, and Sam Leaves for Gurgistan."
 44. This image has intriguing parallels with the scene of Muhammad's birth in the 1304 illustrated manuscript of Rashid al-din, *Jamī al-tawārīkh*, which in turn is believed to rely heavily on Christian nativity paintings. It is reproduced in Sheila Blair, *Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid al-Din's Illustrated History of the World* (London: Nour Foundation in association with Oxford University Press, 1995).
 45. Zal was born an albino and reared by the magical bird Simurgh after his father, Sam, abandoned him. The Simurgh remained Zal's guardian even after he was retrieved by the repentant Sam.
 46. Khaleghi-Motlagh, vol. 1, 144; and Warner, vol. 1, 320.
 47. My study of Safavid *Shahnama* illustrations, in museum catalogs; the *Preliminary Index of Shahnameh Illustrations*, compiled by Jill Norgren and Oleg Grabar (Ann Arbor: Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies, University of Michigan, 1969); and the Cambridge *Shahnama* Project database, <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk>, have not uncovered any similar depictions. This may be an issue of cataloging and does not exclude the possibility that these images exist; nonetheless, there is little doubt as to the scarcity of devotional imagery in earlier Safavid *Shahnama*.
 48. Shaghad was the son of Zal by a slave girl and had been brought up by the king of Kabul.
 49. A few unusual images depict the dead Rustam, such as a Mongol painting (Russian National Library, MS Dorn 329, fol. 214r) of 1333, in which the body of Rustam is prepared for burial, and another one, from 1335, that shows the caskets of Rustam and Zawara (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Great Mongol *Shahnama*, MS 22.393–31.436, fol. 155b).
 50. Khaleghi-Motlagh, vol. 2, 460; and Warner, vol. 2, 275.
 51. Jerome Clinton, trans., *The Tragedy of Sohrāb and Rostām: From the Persian National Epic, the Shahname of Abdol-Qasem Ferdowsi* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).
 52. Folio 233b reads, *Suhrab Battles Rustam, and Is Brought to the Ground by Rustam*.
 53. Clinton, *The Tragedy of Sohrāb and Rostām*, 153. The section, but not exact verses, may be found in Khaleghi-Motlagh, vol. 2, 187. Clinton's Persian text coheres more closely, as he seems to have consulted a similar redaction. However, the following lines differ from those reproduced in both Clinton and Khaleghi-Motlagh. The break lines read,

- "He was to point my father out to me, I raised my head (with pride) in every gathering. The noble warrior's name was Zhen-de Razm; who was a hero, a youth, a wise man."
54. As the reader will note, the term is the same for the amulet worn by Suhrab and the prayer stones, since on both objects, talismanic texts and seals are often impressed.
 55. The figures in the 1605 manuscript also recall the work of the Mughal artist Miskin, among others, whose dynamic drawings are full of action. The Safavid artists Abd al-Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali left Iran in the mid-sixteenth century to join the Mughal atelier and helped initiate a new mode of visual representation. John Seyller, *Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art; Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in association with Azimuth Editions, London, 2002), 49. Similarly, Iranian poets migrated to the wealthier and more religiously tolerant courts of India. Sunil Sharma, "Novelty, Tradition and Mughal Politics in Nau'ī's *Sūz u Gūdāz*," in *Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad*, ed. Franklin Lewis and Sharma (Amsterdam: Rozenberg; West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2007), 265. The impact of Iranian poets and painters is undeniable, but it is more difficult to demonstrate the manner in which Mughal painting may have served as inspiration for Safavid artists later in the century. The "influence" of Indian and European art on Safavid painting was also acknowledged by Ernst J. Grube and Eleanor Sims, "The Representations of Shah 'Abbas," in *L'arco di fango che rubò la luce alle stelle: Studi in onore di Eugenio Galdieri per il suo settantesimo compleanno*, ed. Michele Bernadini et al. (Lugano, Switz.: Edizioni Arte e Moneta, 1995), 178. Barbara Schmitz suggests that Mughal art would have influenced Safavid painting in the second half of the seventeenth century, acting as a conduit for "European" modes of representations. Schmitz, "Indian Influences on Persian Painting," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/india-xxi-indian-influences-on-persian-painting> (accessed January 17, 2011). I aim to show here earlier aesthetic links between Safavid and Mughal visual and literary culture.
 56. Canby, introduction to *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*, 20.
 57. This connection was also made in Enderlein and Sundermann, *Shahname*, 94.
 58. Single-sheet paintings were not unique to this period; they had been made for collection in albums since at least the fifteenth century. David Roxburgh, *The Persian Album, 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
 59. Sheila Canby alludes to this latter point in her overview of Safavid art during this period, *Persian Art (1501–1722)* (London: British Museum Press, 1999), 107.
 60. "The rise of this genre betray[ed] a tendency towards realism noticeable also in the use of images taken from real life and of elements from popular speech, hitherto not regarded as suitable for the poetic idiom"; J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Sabk-i Hindi," in Bearman et al., *Encyclopædia of Islam, Second Edition*, http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=Islam_sim_6377 (accessed September 7, 2010). See also Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (May 1998): 317–49.
 61. Paul E. Losensky, "Sā'eb Tabrizi," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/saeb-tabrizi> (accessed November 9, 2010).
 62. A. Bausani, "Ghazal," in *Encyclopædia of Islam, Second Edition* (accessed September 10, 2010).
 63. Anthony Welch, "Painting and Patronage under Shah 'Abbas I," in "Studies on Isfahan: Proceedings of the Isfahan Colloquium," pt. 2, special issue, *Iranian Studies* 7, nos. 3–4 (Summer–Autumn 1974): 458–507. This trend is also noted in the works of Mughal artists, such as Govardhan, who painted intriguing portraits of ascetics and Sufis.
 64. An interesting parallel may be found in the manner in which the Mughal emperor Jahangir modeled himself after the literary figure Majnun. See Ebba Koch, "The Mughal Emperor as Solomon, Majnun and Orpheus or the Album as a Think-Tank for Allegory," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 276–311. I am grateful to the author for sharing her article with me before its publication.
 65. H. R. Roemer, "Safavid Iran," in *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 276.
 66. While one may hesitate to credit Della Valle with too much insight—after all, this was his first meeting with Shah 'Abbas—his observations are detailed and corroborated by textual evidence provided by Shah 'Abbas's historians.
 67. Pietro Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, trans. George Bull (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 171.
 68. Eskander Monshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas*, trans. Roger Savory (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978), 525: "if a father were commanded to slay his son, the order would be obeyed instantly; if the father procrastinated out of compassion, the order would be reversed; and if the son hesitated in his turn, another would be sent to put them both to death."
 69. Massumeh Farhad, "Military Slaves in the Provinces: Collecting and Shaping the Arts," in *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran*, ed. Sussan Babaie et al. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 117. A notable exception was the 1614 *Shahnama* (New York Public Library, Spencer Collection), which was commissioned by Shah 'Abbas but completed under the supervision of his vizier, Mirza Muhammad Sharif. Sheila Canby, *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501–1576* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 65.
 70. Sussan Babaie, "Launching from Isfahan: Slaves and the Construction of the Empire," in *Slaves of the Shah*, 90.
 71. Farhad, "Military Slaves in the Provinces," 124.
 72. Ibid., 134.
 73. Roxburgh, *The Persian Album, 1400–1600*, 207, 245–46.
 74. Eleanor Sims, "The Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi's *Shahnama* Commissioned by Princes of the House of Timur," *Ars Orientalis* 22 (1992): 43–68.
 75. Ibn Arabshah Veramini, *Tārīkh-i 'aīma-yi ma'sūmīn* (837/1433), recopied about AH 932 (1526), MSS Dorn 312, Russian National Library, St. Petersburg.
 76. For a more detailed discussion of the image, see Sheila R. Canby, "Safavid Painting," in *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501–1576*, ed. Jon Thompson and Canby (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 108. On its role in the representation of Shah Tahmasb's ideology, see Kishwar Rizvi, "Its Mortar Mixed with the Sweetness of Life: Architecture and Ceremonial at the Shrine of Safi al-din Ishaq during the Reign of Shah Tahmasb I," special issue, *Muslim World* 90, nos. 3–4 (Fall 2000): 323–52. There are two paintings in the manuscript *Haft Awrang* (Seven thrones) of Abdur Rahman Jami (completed 1565) at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., which contain similar architectural epigraphy, with the name Shah Tahmasb highlighted in gold. They are reproduced in Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Persian Poetry, Painting and Patronage: Illustrations in a Sixteenth-Century Masterpiece* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 25, 48. I am grateful to Dr. Simpson for pointing out this connection. In the Freer manuscript, however, the paintings are allegorical settings representing the Sufi themes prevalent in Jami's poetry. Another "portrait à clef" is suggested with the insertion of Shah Tahmasb in the famed *Shahnama-yi Shahi* of about 1530. See Canby, "Safavid Painting," 88.
 77. For recent studies of the Safavid and Ottoman contexts, see Gülrü Necipoğlu, "The Serial Portraits of Ottoman Sultans in Comparison," in *The Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman* (Istanbul: İşbank, 2000); Priscilla Soucek, "The Theory and Practice of Portraiture in the Persian Tradition," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 97–108; and Zeren Tanindi, "Transformation of Words to Images: Portraits of Ottoman Courtiers in the *Diwans* of Bâkî and Nâdirî," *Res* 43 (Spring 2003).
 78. Recent studies related to Mughal portraiture include Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala, eds., *The Indian Portrait 1560–1860* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2010); and Molly Emma Aitken, *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
 79. The work of Reza-yi 'Abbasi exemplifies this trend; see Sheila Canby, *The Rebellious Reformer: The Drawings and Paintings of Reza-yi 'Abbasi of Isfahan* (London: Azimuth Editions, 1996).
 80. On portraits of Muhammad, see Oleg Grabar, "The Story of Portraits of the Prophet Muhammad," *Studia Islamica* 96 (2003): 19–38, figs. VI–IX; and Christiane Gruber, "Between Logos (Kalima) and Light (Nur): Representations of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Painting," *Muqarnas* 26 (2009): 1–34.
 81. Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, 159.
 82. Jalal al-din Yazdi Munna'ijim, *Tārīkh-i 'Abbāsi, ya rūznāma-yi Mullā Jalāl*, ed. S. Vahidniya (Tehran: Vahid, 1987), 49.
 83. Jahangir, *Tūzūk-i Jahāngīrī, or Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Alexander Rogers, ed. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1968), vol. 2, 116–17.
 84. The sketch corresponds to group scenes attributed to Bishndas and to Shah 'Abbas's favorite, the painter Reza-yi 'Abbasi, who is believed to have been present at the gathering and may have also sketched the shah. It is discussed in Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*, 60–63. The differences in the Mughal and Safavid versions cannot be explored here, but it is important to note that there did not appear to be any hesitation expressed by the king to having his likeness made.
 85. Muhammad Afushtah-yi Natanzi, *Naqāwāt al-aṥār fī dhikr al-akhayr*, ed. Ehsan Eshraqi (Tehran: Ilmi, 1994), 9.
 86. Grube and Sims, "The Representations of Shah 'Abbas," 183.

87. The painting was reproduced recently in Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*, 133.
88. It has been shown that the distinctive turbans worn by the two men were popular during the turn of the seventeenth century, and, indeed, a figure similar to Qarachaqa Khan is illustrated in the 1605 *Shahnama* as well. In folio 640v, the sage Mazdak, seen discussing his precepts with the shah in a courtly setting, wears the same headgear as Qarachaqa Khan in the Walters Art Museum painting. Schmitz, "On a Special Hat," 109. Schmitz also suggests that the Walters image and the 1605 *Shahnama* were likely painted in the same location and around the same time, which she suggests is closer to 1620 than the 1605 date of the manuscript. While I agree with the formal relation between the two and the possible relation of their fabrication, I am less convinced of a later dating for the paintings in the *Shahnama*.
89. The idea of an "everyman" is also brought up by Shreve Simpson ("From Tourist to Pilgrim," 146) in the context of Iskander.
90. Ottoman governors were also important patrons of Safavid deluxe manuscripts, especially those produced in Shiraz. See Lale Uluc, *Turkmen Governors, Shiraz Artisans, and Ottoman Collectors: Sixteenth-Century Shiraz Manuscripts* (Istanbul: Işbank, 2006).
91. On the illustrated *Akbarnama*, see Geeti Sen, *Paintings from the Akbarnama: A Visual Chronicle of Mughal India* (Varanasi, India: Lustre Press, 1984).
92. Kishwar Rizvi, "Image of Man, Vision of the Divine: Illustrated *Majālis al-ushshāq* ('Assembly of Lovers') Manuscripts in 16th-Century Iran," presented at the workshop "Troubling Images: Some Cross-Cultural Reflections" (Religious Studies Department, Yale University, May 18, 2010). This essay is being prepared for publication. A corollary may be again found in contemporary literature; see Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).