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To the Memory of
SIR THOMAS ARNOLD
Professor of Arabic in the University of London
the Learned and Lovable Scholar
who contributed so much
to our knowledge of the East
and first suggested
an Exhibition of Persian Art in London







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**TISSUE, WOVEN IN SILK AND GOLD THREAD;
SECOND HALF OF 16TH CENTURY**

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PERSIAN ART

by

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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

559 B.C.—A.D. 1926

By E. DENISON ROSS

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THOUGH the opening pages of Persian history carry us back to the sixth century before our era, they contain names with which, thanks to the Bible, we are all familiar.

THE MEDES AND THE ACHAEMENIDS

The history of Persia proper begins with the accession of Cyrus king of the Persians in 559 B.C. At this time the western half of what is to-day Persia was ruled over and largely inhabited by two separate branches of Iranians, who came from the region of the Oxus River. In the North the Medes had been established for several centuries with their capital at Ekbatana, the modern Hamadan. In the South the Persians had arrived more recently. The Medes, owing to their long intercourse with their neighbours the Assyrians, had learnt the art of writing and attained a high standard of civilization. They were therefore superior to the Persians, from whom they were able to demand tribute. This position of inferiority had long been distasteful to the Persians,

who under their ruling chiefs the Achaemenids, so-called from their ancestor Achaemenes (Old Persian *Hakhāmanish*), had been rapidly gaining in power. Even before the accession of Cyrus II they had begun to meditate rebellion, and when in 550 B.C. Cyrus attacked and defeated the Median king Astyages he united into a single state these two Iranian kingdoms and thus laid the foundation of the Persian nation.

Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, fearing the strength of this new Iranian state, set about making a confederacy with some of his neighbours, with a view to overthrowing Cyrus. Among the kings he invited to join him was Croesus, king of Lydia, who, vainly imagining himself strong enough alone to encounter the Persians, marched against them without waiting for the other confederate states, only to be defeated and made prisoner by Cyrus (546 B.C.). The capture of Babylon, which next occupied the attention of the Persian king, was rendered easy in 539 by the mutiny of the Babylonian troops. Nabonidus fled and his son Belshazzar perished. In the following year Cyrus gave the captive Jews the opportunity of returning to Jerusalem. Ezra (ii. 64) tells us the exact number of those who took advantage of it. The Empire of Cyrus now spread over Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. He had four capitals, namely his own city of Pasargadae, the Elamite city of Susa, Ekbatana the capital of the Medes, and Babylon. It was after the conquest of this last city that Persepolis was founded. If Xenophon is correct in saying that Cyrus was killed in battle against the Scythians in 529 B.C., his body must have been brought a great distance to be buried in Pasargadae. His reign of thirty years

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witnessed the rise of an obscure group of Iranians to be one of the foremost nations of the world.

Cambyeses, son of Cyrus, succeeded his father, and thanks to his father's experienced generals rather than to his own merit he was able to add both Egypt and Ethiopia to the Achaemenid Empire. In 522 B.C. he perished by his own hand, unable to bear the misfortunes of internal revolts. He was succeeded by his collateral Darius I, whose long reign of sixty-four years is recorded on the rocks of Behistun, confirming in a most striking manner the general account of Herodotus.

It was during this period that the Persians were first brought into direct contact with the Greeks of Europe. By his victory over Croesus, king of Lydia, Cyrus had become master of most of Asia Minor, including a number of Greek towns. These colonies had hitherto enjoyed the same prosperity and freedom as those in Sicily and Southern Italy. During the reign of Darius they rose in revolt and appealed to Athens for help. It was the decision of the Athenians to send aid to their kinsmen that led Darius to the ill-starred attack of Greece by land and by sea; and in 490 B.C. the Persians met with a crushing defeat at the famous battle of Marathon. Darius died five years later, and it was left to his son Xerxes to renew the war by land and sea. In spite of his vast cosmopolitan army, in which, according to Herodotus, fifty-six different nations were represented, he met with stubborn resistance and was severely defeated at the battles of Salamis and Plataea. The Empire of the Achaemenids lasted down to 331 B.C., when Darius III Codomannus was defeated by Alexander the Great.

The religion of the Medes and the Persians divided creation between two powers—Ahuramazda, the spirit of Goodness and Light, and Ahriman, the spirit of Evil and Darkness. This religion, which afterwards became known as Zoroastrianism, was superseded by Islam in the seventh century A.D., but not wholly, for it has still a small number of adherents in Southern Persia who are known as *Gabr* (Guebres). Their co-religionists in Bombay, the descendants of those who left Persia at that time, are known as Parsees.

THE GREEKS AND THE PARTHIANS

After the death of Alexander some parts of Persia were ruled over by the Greek Seleucids, who had become masters of Alexander's Eastern Empire (323–140 B.C.). In 256 a certain chief named Arsaces made himself master of the Seleucid province of Parthia, which lay between Media in the west and Bactria in the east.

The Parthian kings were, it seems, immigrants of Scythian descent who had become persianized. Whether they were regarded as foreigners by the other Iranians it is difficult to determine, but it is certain that they were at first much influenced by Greek culture and used Greek as their official language. Towards the beginning of the second century B.C. they seem to have exchanged Greek for Persian civilization, and everything goes to show that the Persian traditions of the Achaemenids had during Seleucid and Parthian rule been carefully preserved. They established their capital at Ctesiphon on the Euphrates, opposite the Greek capital Seleucia. The history of the dynasty thus founded begins with

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

struggles against the Greeks established in Persia, whom they finally overcame in 140 B.C., and continues with campaigns against the nomads of Central Asia. The outstanding figure among the Parthian kings is Mithridates II (the Great), who was the first Persian king to come in contact with the Romans. He died in 87 B.C.. Another branch of the Arsacids had set themselves up in Armenia, where they ruled from 150 B.C. to A.D. 428. The last of the Parthians, Artabanus IV, was deposed in A.D. 226 by Ardashīr, son of Bābagān and grandson of Sāsān.

THE SĀSĀNIANS

The rise of Ardashīr, who claimed descent from the Achaemenids and usurped the Parthian throne, led to the establishment of the second national dynasty in Persia, that of the Sāsānians.

Our knowledge of Persian history up to the end of the second century of our era was, in the days of our grandfathers, based partly on the Bible and partly on the Greek historians. This knowledge has in recent years been greatly increased by the discovery and interpretation of Persian inscriptions by Rawlinson. The Greeks had presumably no more knowledge of these inscriptions than the Persians had of the Greek histories. Moreover, the Persians must at a very early date have lost the key to the cuneiform records, for the historical tradition which obtained general and enduring currency among them was purely legendary. Thus the three dynasties which according to Persian tradition preceded the Sāsānian do not in any way correspond with the accounts of the Greek historians or with their own inscriptions. The student cannot, however, afford to remain ignorant of these legends, if

only because of the important part they play in the Art and Literature of mediaeval and modern Persia. Such names as Jamshīd, Sām, Zāl and Rustam lie at the root of Persian culture. These legends were for long preserved in the form of Pahlavi (Middle Persian) chronicles, which in their turn were translated under the early 'Abbasid Caliphs into Arabic; both originals and translations have disappeared, but their contents have been preserved in early Arabic histories dealing with Persia, and in Firdausi's *Shāhnāma*. The first two legendary dynasties were those of the Pīshdādī and Kayānī; the third or Ashkāni (Arsacid) is partly legendary and partly historical. With the Sāsānians tradition and history first began to go hand in hand.

It is not known at what period the Persians began to attribute their ancient monuments to legendary heroes and kings, but it is quite evident why they did so. The Muslim historians whose practice it was to write universal histories, beginning with Adam, had at their disposal, when dealing with the earliest periods, only two sources: one, the Biblical stories as preserved in the Qur'ān and its commentaries, and secondly, the written and oral tradition of the Zoroastrians. It was quite natural, then, that when a Persian Muslim discovered a ruin of great antiquity he should attach to it the name of some personage celebrated in these histories; and thus it came about that Persepolis was called the Throne of Jamshīd, the Tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae was called the Tomb of Solomon's Mother, and so forth.

In A.D. 224 Ardashīr Bābagān, the founder of the Sāsānian dynasty, defeated the last of the Parthians in battle and set himself up in Ctesiphon as King of

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Kings of the Iranians. His successors continued to rule over Persia down to the conquest of that country by the Arabs at the beginning of the seventh century. This dynasty includes some of the greatest names in Persian history, the most familiar being those of Shāpūr I, who defeated the Emperor Valerian at Edessa, Bahrām, who received the nickname *Gor*, or Wild Ass, on account of his prowess in hunting that animal, and Anūshirwān the Just (A.D. 531-578), whose praises the Muslim poets were never tired of singing. It is no doubt to the Sāsānians that we must attribute the real consolidation of the Persian people, more than to the Achaemenids, who were too much engaged in far-flung expeditions to devote themselves to the well-being of their native land. The Sāsānians, throughout their long rule of four hundred years, were indeed engaged in constant warfare against the Nomads on the east and the Byzantines on the west. Although these wars were for the most part undertaken in defence of their frontiers, Anūshirwān extended his empire from the Black Sea to the Oxus, and conquered part of Southern Arabia. By the beginning of the seventh century, however, both Byzantium and Persia had begun to deteriorate as a result of endless campaigns which led to no lasting result. When, therefore, the Arabs suddenly issued from their deserts to attack their immediate neighbours, they met with only feeble resistance, and in less than ten years made themselves masters of Persia (A.D. 641).

THE ARAB CONQUEST

The conquests of the Greeks, who belonged, like the Iranians, to the Indo-European stock, did not as

far as we know bring about any great or lasting change in the Persian people. With the inrush of the Semitic Arabs, however, a people possessed of little culture but professing a new religion, the whole face of Persia was changed for the first time in a thousand years of history ; and this in spite of the fact that the new religion was by no means forced upon them—for it was open to every Persian to retain his old religion merely on the payment of a poll-tax—and in spite of the circumstance that owing to their own inexperience in orderly government the Arabs were obliged to make extensive use of the Persians for purposes of administration. One of the Umayyad Caliphs is reported to have said " These Persians astonish me. They have reigned a thousand years without once needing us, while during the hundred years we have reigned we have not been able to do without them for a moment."

While the successors of the Prophet of Arabia ruled from Medina or Damascus they retained much of the simplicity of the desert, and the Umayyads merely aimed at an expansion of the Arab state, but when, at the end of eighty years, a new line of Caliphs arose and chose Baghdad for their seat of government, the influence of Persia immediately made itself felt and the Arab Caliphate became almost Persian in character. It must be remembered that the 'Abbāsids owed their accession to the Caliphate very largely to the Persians who, especially in Khurāsān, had carried on an active propaganda in favour of the rival house. Several Caliphs, including Harūn ar-Rashīd, married Persian wives ; great Ministers of State, like the famous Barmecids, were Persian ; half the great men of letters who graced the court of Baghdad were pure

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Persians, though they wrote in Arabic; and Persian dress became the prevailing fashion. The 'Abbāsids were no doubt also filled with imperialistic ideals by Persian history, and this ambition to create a world empire hastened the dismemberment of the Caliphate.

NATIONAL MOVEMENT

It was not, however, till the middle of the ninth century that a strong national movement took place in the great north-eastern province of Khurāsān, which led to the establishment of a semi-independent Persian dynasty known as the Sāmānid. Their rule in Samarqand, Bukhārā and Khurāsān (875-990) witnessed the birth of Modern Persian Literature, and with it the revival of the ancient traditions and legends of Iran and the first efforts on the part of the poets to compose a national epic. Arabic had only supplanted Persian among the *līterati*, but the Arabic script had everywhere taken the place of Pahlavi (employed in Sāsānian times), to which it was in every way superior. Under the Sāmānids the modern Persian language was fixed in a form which it has ever since retained.

TURKISH INVASIONS

At the end of the tenth century this first Islamic Persian dynasty came to an end, and Persia was not destined again to be ruled over by national kings till the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the intervening period their rulers were all either Turks or Mongols. The Sāmānids were overthrown by a Turkish governor, whom they had appointed to administer the country we now call Afghanistan, with his headquarters at Ghazna. This Governor

had a son named Mahmūd, who carried his victorious armies into Persia and Turkestan and invaded India many times, on one occasion penetrating as far as Somnath at the southern extremity of Kathiawar. Mahmūd collected round him in his court at Ghazna a galaxy of Persian poets, many of whom had been at the court of the Sāmānids; and it was to this Turk that Firdausi presented the final draft of his famous *Shāhnāma*, in which are recorded the lives and deeds of the ancient legendary kings of Iran and of the Sāsānids. The historical and literary importance of this work, which comprises sixty thousand verses, cannot be over-estimated. It is the fullest account we have of these legends of old Iran; it is an invaluable monument of the beginnings of the Modern Persian language, and its subject-matter probably gave the first incentive to those painters who founded the great school of Persian miniaturists.

The Ghaznavids, the name given to the dynasty founded by Mahmūd, were in their turn overthrown in A.D. 1037 by two brothers, the grandsons of a shepherd named Seljuk, belonging to a Turkish tribe which had crossed the Oxus and made themselves masters of Khurāsān. One of these brothers, Toghrul by name, leaving the other in charge of this province, advanced through Persia without meeting serious opposition, and in A.D. 1055 entered Baghdad, where he found the then Caliph a mere puppet in the hands of a Persian belonging to the powerful Shī'a family of Buwayh, who had kept several Caliphs in succession prisoners in Baghdad while they themselves ruled such Persian provinces as had not fallen to the Sāmānids or Ghaznavids. In the circumstances we can imagine that the Caliph received with open

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arms the uncouth Turk, who, as a good Sunni, was anxious to uphold his dignity. [The chief distinction between the two great dividing sects of the Muslims, *Sunni* and *Shī'a*, lies in the question of the rightful inheritance of the position of Caliph or successor to the Prophet Muhammad. The Caliphs who were at the head of the Muslim state, first in Medina, next in Damascus (the Umayyads), and afterwards in Baghdad (the 'Abbāsids) down to A.D. 1258, are regarded by the Sunnis as legitimate Caliphs. The Shī'as, on the other hand, hold that the only legitimate Caliph was 'Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, who enjoyed this position from A.D. 656 to 661, and that his descendants had an hereditary right to the Caliphate.] Having disposed of the Buwayhids and re-established the Caliph in Baghdad, Toghrul turned northwards and made Rayy (near the present Tehrān) his capital. The dynasty of the Seljuks which he founded is one of the greatest in Persian history; no less than four of its rulers were men of outstanding personality, and the hundred years which elapsed between the entry of Toghrul into Baghdad and the death in 1157 of Sultan Sanjar, the last great Seljuk, were one of the most important periods in the history of Persian Art and Literature, though little of the former remains, owing to the passage of marauding armies. From the middle of the twelfth to the beginning of the thirteenth century minor branches of the Seljuks ruled over those portions of the great Seljuk Empire which had not fallen into the hands of a Turkish dynasty, the Khwārazmshāhs, whose founder had been a governor of Khwārazmia (Khiva). It was Muhammad, the last king of this line, who had the

temerity to treat the great Chingiz Khan with contempt, and as a result saw his country invaded and laid waste by the redoubtable Mongol (A.D. 1220).

THE MONGOLS

It was Hulagu Khan, the grandson of Chingiz Khan, who finally established the Mongol rule in Persia. He razed to the ground almost every town which he passed through, and in 1258 made a shambles and a dust heap of Baghdad, putting to death the last of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs. There is no doubt that the passage of the Mongols was responsible for the loss of innumerable treasures of Persian art and literature. The Mongols ruled over Persia for about eighty years (1256-1336). During the next fifty years Persia was split up among a number of local dynasties whose rule was brought to an end by the great world-conqueror Tamerlane, who founded a kingdom with its capital at Samarqand, a city which he himself embellished with buildings which may still be seen to-day. It was one of Tamerlane's line, Sultan Husain Baiqara, who was the patron of the artists of the finest period of Miniature painting, including the great Bihzād.

THE SAFAVIDS

From the beginning of the sixteenth century down to the beginning of the eighteenth Persia was again ruled over by a national dynasty, that of the Safavids. Shāh Ismā'il, the founder, was descended from a famous Muslim saint of Ardabīl. While still a mere boy he gathered round him a large number of devoted followers, and in 1502 made himself

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master of Persia by defeating the Turkoman rulers in the West. He made Tabriz his capital, and in spite of a signal defeat at the hands of Sultan Selīm (A.D. 1514), his dominions, at his death, stretched from the Oxus to the Persian Gulf and from Afghanistan to the Euphrates. He also succeeded in establishing Shī'ism as the state religion of Persia, which it has remained ever since. One of the most illustrious of the Safavid monarchs was Shah 'Abbās I (1587-1629), under whose fostering care arts and letters flourished to an astonishing degree. The famous miniaturist Rizā 'Abbāsi was a painter at his court. In 1736 the last of the Safavids, the infant 'Abbās III, was deposed by the Turk Nādir Shah, who made himself master of all the lands between the Indus and the Caucasus, and pushed his conquests as far as Delhi, whence he is said to have brought the famous peacock throne.

LAST TWO CENTURIES

After Nādir Shāh's assassination Persia was plunged into anarchy, but the Kurdish chief Karīm Khan Zand (1750-9) cleverly ruled a large part of the country from Shīrāz.

Towards 1786 Persia found itself re-united by Muhammad Aqa of the Turkish tribe Qājār, who transferred the capital to Tehrān. The best known of the Qājār dynasty was Nāsir al-dīn Shāh (1878-96), whose reign saw the westernization of Persia.

Modern ideas, which found expression in the election of a representative assembly ("Majlis") in 1906, led finally to the fall of the Qājārs, unable to cope with the difficulties which followed the world

war. The situation was saved by the timely appearance of a strong man. Rizā Khan, rising from the ranks of the army, became Shāh in 1926 under the name of Rizā Shāh Pahlavi.

PERSIAN DYNASTIES

PRE-ISLAMIC.

The Achaemenids. B.C. 559-331.

The Seleucids. B.C. 323-A.D. 129.

The Parthians. B.C. 248-A.D. 226.

The Sāsānians. A.D. 226-641.

ISLAMIC.

The Caliphs of Damascus. 661-750.

The Caliphs of Baghdad. 750-1258.

The Sāmānids. 874-999.

The Buwayhids. 932-1056.

The Ghaznavids. 962-1186.

The Seljuks. 1037-1300.

The Khwārazmshāhs. 1077-1220.

The Mongol Il-Khāns of Persia. 1258-1336.

The Jalāyirs (Iraq). 1336-1411.

The Muzaffarids (Fars, Kirman). 1313-93.

The Karts (Herat). 1245-1389.

The Sarbadārs (Khurāsān), 1337-1381.

Tamerlane and the Timurids. 1369-1500.

The Qara-Qoyunlu or Black Sheep. 1378-1469.

The Aq-Qoyunlu or White Sheep. 1378-1502.

The Safavids. 1502-1736.

The Afghans. 1722-1729.

The Afshārs. 1736-1796.

The Zands. 1750-1794.

The Qājārs. 1779-1926.

Pahlavi. 1926-

PERSIAN ART

By ROGER FRY

THE aim which I have set before myself in this introductory essay is to enable those who care for art, but have little familiarity with Persian work, to discover as quickly as possible those specific aesthetic qualities which distinguish Persian design from all others. What we want to do is to elucidate those nebulous mental and emotional reactions which the word Persian, when applied to any object of art, evokes within us. For there is a quality in Persian design which, even though it passes into other types at certain points, yet, in its central manifestations, is distinguishable from all other systems of design. And that quality is so far constant through the ages that we feel no surprise that Horace should have denounced Persian refinements of luxury when he was boasting of the joys of the simple life. For we still associate with Persia the idea of sumptuous splendour, but always of splendour tempered by a certain refinement, ingenuity and choice. It is the opposite of what we call barbaric splendour. We bring with us then, from the outset, the notion of a people with a strong sensual appetite, but one that would quickly be sated by gross abundance, that requires for its satisfaction subtlety, complexity, ingenuity—a highly civilized sensuality which will prefer elegance of statement to mere force. Something of these qualities may, I think,

PERSIAN ART

be traced from the very earliest period at which we can speak at all of a Persian nation and Persian art.

ACHAEMENID ART

A. ARCHITECTURE

In general, the art of the early empires aimed at crushing the spectator by a display of the supernatural power of the divinity or of his representative the king. In Egypt it was the religious aspect that was more emphasized, in the Mesopotamian empires the superhuman power of the king, but in both cases it was essential to the idea to emphasize in architecture the weight and size of the structures and in sculpture the physical preponderance of the king. When we compare with this what has survived of the Achaemenid capitals—the palaces and halls of audience of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes—we are struck by a new note of elegance, by the relative thinness and slimness of the columns whose shafts of twelve and thirteen times the diameter of the column bore a wooden ceiling at a height of over sixty feet from the pavement.

In passing we may note that here at once the Achaemenid builders hit upon an architectural formula—that of a series of high, slender columns supporting a roof and open to the air on one or more sides, which remained a peculiarly distinctive feature of later Persian times in the form of garden pavilions. It becomes, indeed, a formula quite peculiarly expressive of Persian lyricism with its intense feeling for formal gardens, cypress alleys and stone-framed pools of water.

B. SCULPTURE

When we turn to the sculpture which adorned Achaemenid buildings, we find that in the main it

PERSIAN ART

follows Mesopotamian originals, giving, no doubt, a different significance to its symbols, but most of all mitigating the harshness and brutality of the originals. For the Babylonian, and still more for the Ninevite artist sensibility, as we understand it, was out of the question. It would be an exaggeration to speak of any acute sensibility even in Achaemenid sculpture, but at least there is a certain toning down of the harsher elements, a certain leaning towards elegance, and even, in the bull heads of the capitals, a certain delicacy of observation which were quite unknown in Babylonian and Assyrian art. But whilst speaking of this, the earliest emergence of a distinctively Persian art, we must remark how essentially derivative it is, how ready the Persian artist was to take his models from outside and merely adapt them to new requirements. This extreme adaptability is, I think, a constant trait in Persian art. It is harder to point to definitely original conceptions in Persian art than in that of most great artistic centres. We tend, perhaps, at the present time to exaggerate the importance of originality in an art; we admire in it the expression of an independent and self-contained people, forgetting that originality may arise from a want of flexibility in the artist's make-up as well as from a new imaginative outlook. In the long run it is not nearly so important whether an artist himself invents a motive as what he makes of the motive once it has come into existence.

SĀSĀNIAN CULTURE

It is with the rise of the native Persian Sāsānid Empire that Persian culture attains to complete self-consciousness and, indeed, to some kind of inde-

pendence. The culture of the Sāsānid period is responsible for a considerable number of works of art, many of which are of high aesthetic value and of the utmost importance for their influence on subsequent artistic evolution, both in Persia and elsewhere.

Sāsānid art covers one of the most crucial periods in the art history of the world. Between the third century of our era and the sixth a great change took place in the art of Europe and the near East. It was the change from the outworn Graeco-Roman tradition to the much richer, more varied, and above all more decorative style which formed the basis of the European tradition throughout the Romanesque and Gothic periods. Graeco-Roman art was based on a naturalistic rendering of the human and animal forms, together with a very limited and highly conventionalized repertory of decorative motives in which the acanthus and the palmette were the dominant feature. By the second century of our era this tradition was exhausted by repetition at the hands of commercial craftsmen and artists. Its models were used without conviction, and the sculptors were increasingly incapable of attaining even to the mere naturalism of earlier centuries though they were obliged to continue as best they could on the old lines for want of any new principle of design.

The change that took place in these crucial centuries implied the abandonment of complete naturalistic representation in favour of a much more summary account of appearances, but one in which the rhythms acquired a new vital energy. This more summary treatment admitted also of far richer decorative effects, and we find a change from the

worn-out plastic basis of Graeco-Roman art to a flatter use of the surface in which colour tended to replace plasticity. Byzantine mosaics, for example, replaced the impressionist paintings of Pompeii. Even the sculptors aimed at getting what may be fairly called colour effects upon their walls by playing one pattern of richly carved surface against another. The incrustated decoration of the walls of Mshatta, for example, replaced the high relief scroll-work of Roman friezes. And with this went an outburst of free and sometimes fantastic invention which disregarded the strict and uniform conventions of Graeco-Roman art.

A. ROCK-SCULPTURES

Sāsānid art gives us a picture of this change. In its earlier stages we can find instances of a rather clumsy imitation of Roman originals. But already in the great sculptured rock carvings of the third century which celebrate the triumphs of Sāsānid kings over Roman emperors we find Roman motives being handled in a new spirit, with a new vitality in the gesture, a new richness and freedom in the decorative treatment of drapery. Indeed, in some ways these reliefs must count among the greatest creations of the period in question, comparable in their imposing dignity with the pictorial triumphs of Byzantine artists. In these and in many other works we find the borrowings from Rome crossed by reminiscences of Mesopotamian art seen through the medium of Achaemenid translations. And yet the whole result, in spite of its composite origins, has its own specific flavour. In the rock sculpture of Khusrau Parvīz, at the end of the sixth century, we

find a bas-relief representing one of the celebrated royal hunts which took place in a "paradise" or enclosed park. In general disposition it recalls Assyrian or even more strongly Egyptian hunting scenes; but what strikes us, apart from the general tapestry-like disposition of the figures over the ground, is the vividness and precision of the naturalistic rendering of animals. It is hard to define wherein lies the difference between this naturalism and that of Graeco-Roman art, though the impression produced is utterly distinct. It consists perhaps most in the emphasis on character and in the much greater vital energy of the rhythms. I call attention to this particular sculpture not for its completeness as a work of art—for it is somewhat incoherent in design—but because this intimate and imaginative comprehension of animal life becomes so marked a characteristic of Persian art of the great period which followed the Muhammadan conquest.

B. CARPETS

We must note, too, the flat disposition of the figures over the surface and the regularity of the border, since they give already some suggestion of one of the best known of all forms of Persian art, the floral and animal carpet. Indeed, we know from descriptions that among the royal treasures of the Sāsānid kings was a "garden carpet" seventy cubits long and sixty broad. This was evidently the original of a type of carpet often repeated in later periods, in which a formal garden divided by walks bordered by cypresses and tulips and runnels of water formed the basis of a highly stylized decorative scheme. It is typical of the Persian

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temperament that this garden motive never lost its appeal either to artists or poets.

C. TISSUES

Among the most important documents for the understanding of Persian aesthetic feeling in the formative period are the remains of the elaborate silk tissues which must have played a large part in those magnificent court ceremonials which rivalled if they did not surpass in splendour those of Byzantium.

D. GOLDSMITHS' WORK

In the splendid goldsmiths' work of the time, as in the silk tissues, we find that intensely vital and free rhythm, that large simplification of the essential character, which are the crowning achievements of Persian art. We find in these Sāsānid decorative arts the basis of a tradition of design which was cultivated with ever-increasing power and sensitiveness by the pottery painters of the first centuries of Muhammadan rule.

MUSLIM CONQUEST

A. CERAMICS

The Muhammadan conquest made no sudden break in the Persian tradition. The chief artistic remains of the early Muhammadan period from the mid-seventh century to the Mongol invasion in 1220 A.D. are the ceramic wares of Rayy (Rhages), Sultānābād and other centres. It is in the ceramics of these centuries that we get at once the purest and the highest expression of the Persian genius for art. It is here that their exquisitely subtilized and con-

trolled sensuality comes out most clearly in every part of the work. First of all, in the delicately sensitive plastic feeling shown in the galb of bowls and pots. Their curves approximate to straight lines, in striking opposition to the swelling curves of Greek and Roman pottery, and their straight lines have always a suggestion of movement. In its sense of the proportions and significance of the galb I think the Persian pottery of this period surpasses even the finest products of Chinese kilns.

Although Chinese porcelain found its way to Sāmarrā as early as the ninth century, the Persian potters seem to have made no effort at that technical elaboration of the material basis of their ware which pre-occupied the Chinese; they were content with the reddish clay of their country, and gave all their attention to the perfection of the modelling and the colour schemes of their decoration. Even in colour they were satisfied with a relatively limited range, which, however, they used with almost unfailing taste for the proportional quantities of the different masses. It is in the quality of the contours, whether painted or lightly incised, that we feel to the full the intensity and sureness of their aesthetic conviction. We have here the culmination of those freely moving and intensely vital rhythms which the East has always tended to cultivate in contradistinction to the tighter more regular curvature of Western art such as we see in Greek ceramic decoration. In the disposition of his design across the surface of a plate or round the edges of a bowl the Persian artist seems to be guided by a far more delicate sensibility than the European, to grasp more fully in a single *coup d'œil* the relations of any part to the whole and the interplay of the flat

decoration with the plastic form upon which it is thrown.

In many of these pots, indeed in some of the finest, animal forms play the chief part, combined, however, with stylized floral scroll work. What I have said of the representations of animals in the Sāsānid bas-reliefs—of the intimate understanding of character and vital movement which they show—holds good even more of this later work. Only now and then, in the finest examples of twelfth-century sculpture in France and Italy, can we find Western examples to compete with them. The rendering of the human form is no less interesting. Working in entire ignorance of that elaborate study of human anatomy which the Greeks had made, the Persian artist aimed only at an abbreviated summary, but his infallible instinct for rhythm and his intuitive sympathy enabled him to endow his figures with life and feeling. In the faces he adopted an extremely simplified formula, giving the oval of the face in a single sweep of his brush, and indicating the features with a few curves which scarcely vary, and yet the regard of the faces is full of expression and is in harmony with the significance of the gestures.

B. CALLIGRAPHY

As we are dealing here with the linear rhythms of the Persian artists, something must be said of their calligraphy, for in Persia, quite as much as in China, the art of painting is closely bound up with that of beautiful writing. In Europe the Roman script, though it is capable of being used with admirable effect in those types of architecture in which rectangular forms predominate, has a rhythm

which is too inflexible to allow of its coming to terms with pictorial rhythms, since those perforce are based mainly on the forms of living creatures. In this respect the fact that Chinese and Persian scripts are based on a much more free and flowing rhythm is of great importance since it enables the painter and decorative artist to combine calligraphy with pictorial forms in a single work of art. And in both countries alike we find this constant intermingling of script and painting. Perhaps in the matter of freedom and flow we must give the palm to the Arabic script, on account of its greater continuity. We must also note the variety and number of different types of script that the Persians had at their disposal. And we find, both in miniature and pottery painting, the happiest and most unexpected effects produced by the incorporation of inscriptions in the pictorial or decorative design. Even in their architecture, owing to the habit of covering large surfaces with painted tiles, these inscriptions play a great part. By using different kinds of emphasis and different varieties of script, the artist was able even to mingle together in a single design two or more series of inscriptions so as to form a kind of decorative palimpsest, wherein even the diverse meanings of the texts must have added a peculiar kind of piquancy to the total effect on the mind. Nothing, I think, is more typical of the subtlety and ingenuity of the Persian genius than this peculiar interweaving of pictorial and literary elements through the special possibilities of the Arabic script. This practice seems to show how important a position systems of linear rhythm held in the æsthetic sensibility of Persian artists.

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MONGOL INVASION

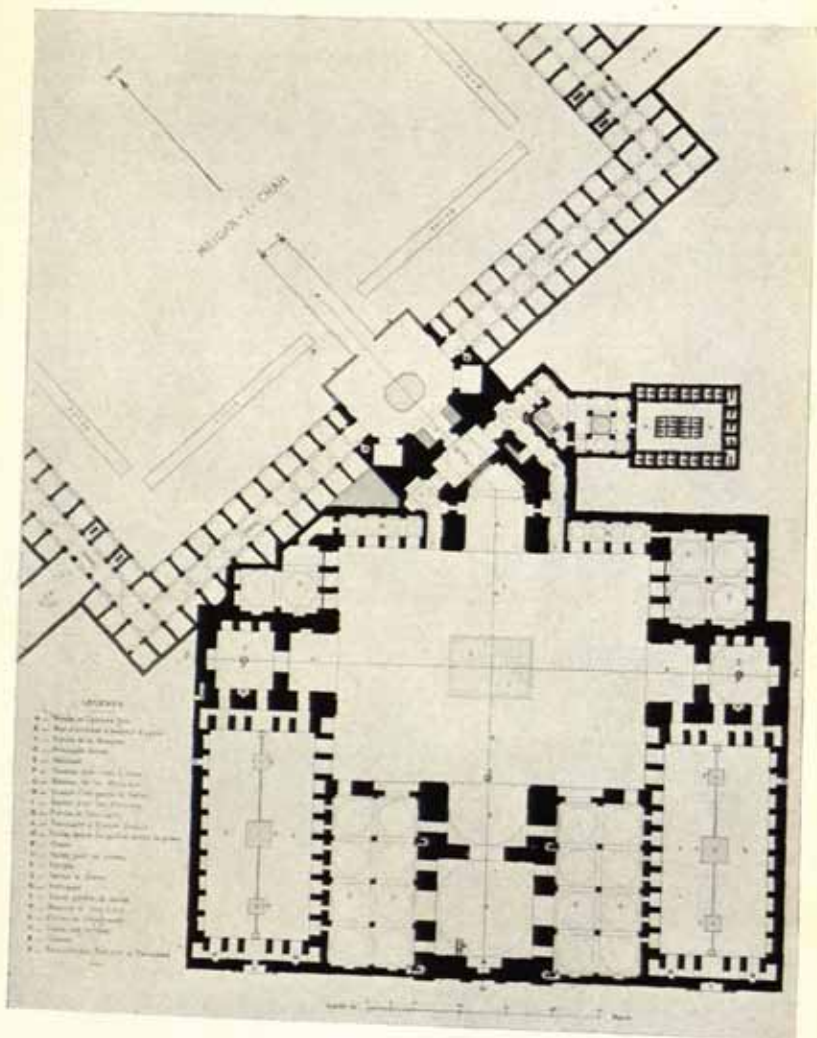
When we read accounts of the Mongol invasion of 1220, we can hardly conceive how any culture should have survived so total a catastrophe. Indeed, the finest type of pottery, particularly that of Rayy (Rhages) was extinguished. Never again does Persian pottery, for all its refinements and charm of colour, rise to the same kind of æsthetic significance as that of the preceding period.

But the art of miniatures seems to have survived much more. It was practised perhaps in a greater number of centres, some of which may have escaped the worst of the storm. Nor is it possible at this period to draw any clear boundary between the miniature art of Persia proper and that of the neighbouring districts of Irāq and Upper Mesopotamia. The same general tradition of design was followed throughout the whole Muhammadan world, so that there is no sudden break in this tradition as regards miniature painting. Certain it is that we can find examples throughout the thirteenth century which still keep to the great style of the pre-Mongol period, drawings in which the figures have an ample sweep of contour, a significance of gesture, which are almost comparable to that of the great Italians of the early fourteenth century. What they miss, however, is the grandeur of the general architectonic disposition of Giotto and his circle. In the feeling for animal life, however, they are still supreme, and the celebrated *Natural History* of 1295 in the Pierpont Morgan collection has rarely been equalled in the expressive power of its daring and instinctive generalizations of animal form.

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MODERN TIMES

To many people, Persian art is most typically represented by the elaborate carpets and the coloured illustrations of the sixteenth century, and no one can deny that this was a period of great creative activity and high technical accomplishment. Even at this period Persian artists continued to show their native taste in the decorative disposition of figures, and in the drawing of delicate floral shapes scattered over the ground or in the branches of flowering trees silhouetted against the sky. But an almost photographic literalism in the faces replaces the vivid abstract of character of the earlier painters, and we look in vain for the sweeping unity of design and the vital energy of rhythm of the pre-Mongol period. None the less it is pleasing to note the prolonged vitality of the national feeling, a prolongation that remains to give, even in a much later form of Persian art, the large oil paintings of the nineteenth century, a certain charm and distinction. Nor need we despair that the Persian genius which has survived so many apparently overwhelming disasters may in future years find the way to revive its ancient splendour and recover its position as one of the great cultural centres of the civilized world.



THE MASJID-I-JUM'A, ISFAHĀN

By kind permission, from Coste "Monuments Modernes de la Perse"

EARLY PERSIAN ART

By C. J. GADD

British Museum

THE title of this chapter is not wide enough to include all the products of human craftsmanship, aiming at something beyond mere utility, which were made in early times in the land, or in certain parts of the land, now called Persia. For the Persians themselves were late comers into the country which has since been identified with them.

PRE-IRANIAN POPULATION

Until the end of the great Assyrian Empire the hill country to the east of the plains about the lower course of the Tigris was held by a race of uncertain affinities called by their Babylonian and Assyrian neighbours Elamites, that is, "highlanders." It is, then, only from about 550 B.C. that the history of Persian art, strictly so called, begins. But the Elamites, many centuries before this, had excelled in certain crafts, particularly in the making and decoration of pottery. They were not, indeed, unique in this, for the use of painted pottery was widespread at a time which seems to precede the beginning of known history. Even in Persia proper discovery of early painted wares is still proceeding, and their mutual relations are generally obscure, but the most celebrated find, and almost the only

PERSIAN ART

one made in such conditions that it could be properly studied, is the pottery of Susa.

THE POTTERY OF SUSA

This is distinguished into two classes, called first and second styles, the first being earlier than the second by an unknown interval of time. Vessels of the first style are made of fine clay on the slow-turned wheel, and their fabric is not only very thin but so porous that they cannot hold liquids. The most characteristic shape is the high and slightly convex-sided "tumbler." But this pottery is most admired for its fine black-painted decoration. Besides geometrical designs, zigzags, squares, lozenges, circles, and triangles, there are pictures of animals and men, birds, trees, and artificial objects, generally presented in a very summary manner. In the second style the fabric, shapes and decorations have all changed. The vessels are made for ordinary use, and are therefore more robust and of more practical forms, the commonest being a kind of bottle, sometimes spouted, and large jars built up by hand. More attention is now given to representing natural forms, most often birds and goats; the geometrical patterns are less bold than in the first style.

BABYLONIAN INFLUENCE

While this decorated pottery was being produced at Susa (and probably also other related kinds elsewhere, such as that of N i h ā v a n d), Elam possessed a culture of her own. But when the land was brought under the rule of Babylonia by the great conqueror

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Sargon of Agade, about 2600 B.C., Elam became an artistic appanage of the plains, and simply copied the contemporary Babylonian types during the whole of two millennia. The great change of population at the end of the seventh century B.C. brought the Iranians into contact with the ancient civilization of Babylonia and Assyria, and thus gave rise to a new art which can now for the first time be called Persian.

ACHAEMENID ART

Cyrus founded his empire upon the conquest of the Medes, peoples of Asia Minor, and Babylonians; his successor added Egypt, and the arts which flourished under this dynasty were variously influenced by all of these nations. The Persian achievement was to create an art of their own out of these diverse traditions. For reasons of proximity, long continuity of culture, and prestige of recent supremacy, the arts of Babylonia, particularly in the forms and with the accretions which they had acquired in the hands of the Assyrians, were dominant in forming the new expressions of Persian imperial consciousness. For the art of the Achaemenids was entirely official; it had nothing of popular taste or individual suggestion, but was employed upon the surroundings of the Great King himself and had no other aim than to magnify his grandeur and celebrate his conquests. Being thus of foreign inspiration and limited scope, this art does not escape a certain monotony and lifelessness, which do not, however, rob it of power nor exclude a good deal of originality in the use of elements derived from abroad.

PERSIAN ART

ARCHITECTURE

Very considerable remains of Achaemenid architecture still exist, chiefly at and near Persepolis and in the earlier ruins of Pasargadae. The palaces of Persepolis, being the work of Darius and his successors, display a marked development in design as compared with Pasargadae. The change is obviously due to the intervening conquest of Egypt, and shows how ready the Persians were to absorb novelties. These buildings exhibit in their structure much less dependence upon Assyrian models than in their decoration. The most striking works of Darius and Xerxes were the columned halls (*apadāna*) which they built for places of audience. These stood upon high-piled terraces, and were approached by double flights of stairs diverging and converging to the top, with balustrades richly ornamented and in some cases sculptured with figures of soldiers represented as ascending the stairs. Their walls were built of crude brick, but all the door and window frames were of hewn and sculptured stone, and over the whole spread a flat roof of timber and mud, supported on lines of fluted columns with elaborately-carved bases and still more elaborate capitals composed of the fore-parts of two bulls set back to back over volutes. The entrances were guarded, following the Assyrian tradition, by human-headed and winged bulls, carved in high relief. The best indication of what these columned buildings looked like when complete is given by the royal tombs near Persepolis, the most famous of which is that of Darius himself. Part of the sculptured façade represents the elevation of such a hall; in the middle of four columns of the

EARLY PERSIAN ART

kind described is the rectangular door surmounted by a cornice, and the flat roof shows the projecting ends of a row of beams.

ELEMENTS OF ACHAEMENID ARCHITECTURE

The fully-developed style of Achaemenid building, slightly sketched above, is compounded of diverse elements. Assyrian influence predominates in such structural features as the terrace, the mud-brick walls, the stone reinforcements, and the lavish use and style of stone reliefs. But it is Egypt which suggests (perhaps by way of Syrian adaptations) the hypostyle hall in place of the narrow rooms about a central courtyard, and the pattern of the cornices which crown the door and window frames. It is evident, too, that the fluting of the columns owes something to the practice of the Ionian Greeks. A very interesting account of the building of his palace at Susa by Darius reveals that the presence of these disparate features was due to participation in the work by craftsmen from all of these lands. The king describes, in the three chief languages of his empire, the sources of his raw materials, and the respective parts of the work which were entrusted to the charge of each nation. Among other details he relates that the terracing and brick-making were done by the Babylonians, his cedar-wood was brought by the Syrians, his gold came from Sardis and Bactria, lapis-lazuli from Sogdiana, silver from Egypt (a surprising statement), and the marble columns from a place which is perhaps Aphrodisias in Caria. Even without this inscription it would have been evident

that the inspiration of Achaemenid building was foreign and mixed, but the only artists who find no place in the list are those Persian architects who planned the whole work, and directed the contributions of the various people to such effect that the discordant styles of Babylon, Egypt, the Medes, Ionians, and Sardians (such were the nations which laboured at Susa) were blended into a new harmony.

DECORATION OF PALACES

In the decoration of palaces and tombs sculpture in relief had the principal share. This sculpture may be divided into two classes both as to material and as to subject. That is to say, it was either of stone or of burnt brick, moulded and enamelled, and its subjects were either secular or religious. The stone reliefs were, of course, suggested by the Assyrian sculptures, but the method of laying specially moulded bricks together in such a way as to make up figures and architectural ornaments was also of Babylonian and Assyrian origin, and can still be seen employed on the Ishtar Gate at Babylon. It was, however, used with great effect by the Persian kings. The famous *Frieze of Archers*, now in the Louvre, is the finest surviving example. Most of the Persian reliefs display long files of bodyguards or subject auxiliaries of the royal army distinguished by their national costumes. The Median and Persian dresses, described by classical authors, may readily be observed on the sculptures—the king himself always appears in the Median dress which was considered more handsome than the Persian—and the high-pointed caps associated with the Scythians are often to be seen. These endless files of soldiers



Photo : Mansell

BRICK-WORK FRIEZE REPRESENTING
ARCHERS OF THE ROYAL BODYGUARD

from

THE PALACE OF DARIUS I AT SUSA, c. 500 B.C.

By kind permission of the Musée du Louvre, Paris



GOLD ARMLET, ORIGINALLY
INLAID WITH LAPIS-LAZULI
from

THE TREASURE OF THE OXUS, ABOUT V c. B.C.

By kind permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Controller H.M. Stationery Office

EARLY PERSIAN ART

and servants produce indeed a cumulative effect of majesty, but in life and invention it must be owned that the Persepolitan sculptures are far inferior to the Ninevite. A smaller number of scenes is religious ; among these may be reckoned not only the winged bulls of the gateways, but the pictures of the king in conflict with monsters, and the upper part of the sculptured façades of the royal tombs, which show the king, under the protection of the god Ahuramazda, worshipping before the sacred fire, standing upon a great platform in the form of a throne which is supported by figures representing all the nations over whom " the lance of the Persian man has travelled far."

METAL WORK

The Persians of this age were notable workers in metal, and though little of their armament has survived, since this was mostly of iron, their mastery in the making of luxurious objects, the Oriental ostentation of which was reproached by moralists, is attested by many splendid examples, among them being several very fine bronze figures of animals. Especially magnificent were their gold and silver work, statuettes, vessels, models, and articles of adornment made by casting or beating, and decorated with embossing or engraving, and particularly by the inlaying of one precious metal in another, or of semi-precious stones in gold *cloisons*. The armlet or bracelet ending in two confronted animal heads is a characteristic form, and the gold armlets of this kind, embellished with stone or paste inlays, may be counted among the most splendid examples of ancient jewellery.

SEALS AND GEMS

It remains only to speak of the seal-stones and engraved gems, by no means the least beautiful and interesting remains of Achaemenid art. Although heirs in this custom of using seals to the Mesopotamian civilization, the Persians generally preferred the stamp-seal to the cylinder, though fine examples of the latter kind were still made. The stamps are either in the form of cones with slightly convex bases carrying the device, or of scaraboids; chalcedony is the favourite material. The scenes engraved upon these gems are still mainly religious, continuing the motives familiar to ancient Babylonian art, some of which, belonging as they do to a religion very different from the Zoroastrian, are modified to fit the new ideas. Thus, the king is now a common figure upon the seals, where no Mesopotamian king ever appeared at all. He figures as the hero overcoming monsters, who had been in the earlier art a divine, mythical personage. Egyptian influence is admitted with the representation of the god Bes, regarded, no doubt, simply as an amuletic figure. Secular scenes have little or no place on Mesopotamian seals, but on the Persian they are much commoner. The king sometimes appears subduing a foreign enemy, particularly a Greek hoplite, and hunting of wild animals both by horsemen and on foot is often depicted. In execution these gems are often of great beauty, and it has generally been held that the hands of Greek artists can be seen at work upon them. So far as this ascription depends upon stylistic innovations there is reason to doubt whether the influence is not rather Persian than Greek, but it is evident



IMPRESSIONS OF EARLY PERSIAN SEALS, V-IV c. B.C.

EARLY PERSIAN ART

that many Greek craftsmen were in Persian employ, and these have doubtless left their mark upon the style and cutting, if not upon the subjects, of the seals.

ART UNDER THE SELEUCIDS AND ARSACIDS

To cover the ground allotted to this chapter, a word should be added upon the Seleucid and Parthian periods, between the death of Alexander and the rise of Ardashīr. Hardly anything, however, is known about the arts of Persia in these ages; there are very few material remains, and what little evidence is available does not suggest great artistic activity or much achievement beyond a lifeless copying of Hellenistic models, and a few native products of rather debased and barbarous style. Revival of the arts had to await a new national dynasty, the Sāsānian.

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ARCHITECTURE

By K. A. C. CRESWELL

THE ACHAEMENID PERIOD

THE history of Persian architecture begins with the Achaemenid period. Of the earliest monument known, the palace of Cyrus at Pasargadae (B.C. 559), only a column remains, and of the Palace of Darius at Persepolis (B.C. 521), only the foundations of the bases of the columns. We are, however, on sure ground when we come down to the reign of Xerxes (B.C. 485-465).

Achaemenid palace architecture was a columnar trabeated style, the chief feature being a grove of columns between four walls, preceded by a colonnaded portico flanked by square towers.

The columns are more slender than anything known in Greece, they are much more widely spaced, and the number of flutings is greater. The bases are generally bell-shaped (plate opp.), and the columns about 10-12 diameters in height ($2\frac{1}{2}$ diameters more slender than those of the Erechtheion at Athens). The number of the flutings varies from 32 at Istakhr to 40, 48 and 52 at Persepolis, against 16-24 in Greece. The total height attains as much as 68 feet 9 inches (Persepolis). The intervals between the columns are considerable, varying from 4 to 6 dia-

meters or slightly more, against $1\frac{2}{3}$ ths to $2\frac{2}{3}$ ths for Greece.

The capitals of the columns are indeed novel; they are composed of volutes set vertically and surmounted by the foreparts of a pair of bulls set back to back; on their common back rests a corbel which projects in front of the column so as to carry the transverse beams of the roof (plate, p. 46).

No palace has preserved its entablature, but we know what the entablatures must have been like, thanks to the façades, imitated from palace façades, carved on the rock-cut tombs at Takht-i-Jamshīd and Naqsh-i-Rustam.

The roofs were flat and of timber. At Persepolis cedar, brought from a distance, was used, and the words of Quintus Curtius ("*multa cedro aedificata erat regio*," V, vii, 5) have been confirmed by Dieulafoy, who found traces of charred cedar in the ruins. These flat roofs were covered with a thick layer of mud, mixed with chopped straw and beaten solid, and there can be little doubt that they were capped by a stepped cresting.

Although the doorways and window-frames at Persepolis are sometimes great monoliths, the walls were only of mud brick, and grooves were left in the doorways and window-frames so that they might be bonded in. These walls are from 6 to 9 feet thick in the Hall of 100 Columns; doubtless they were faced with faience. The doorways are decorated with the Egyptian reed-cornice.

Achaemenid palaces, after the Assyrian fashion, were set on great platforms approached by monumental staircases, the wall at the side of the staircase being decorated with bas-reliefs illustrating triumphs,

processions of prisoners, envoys bringing gifts, etc. The masonry of the retaining walls was usually very massive, and the blocks were joined with iron dovetail cramps. No cement was used, and each course was set back very slightly. At Susa the retaining walls were of brick faced with faience.

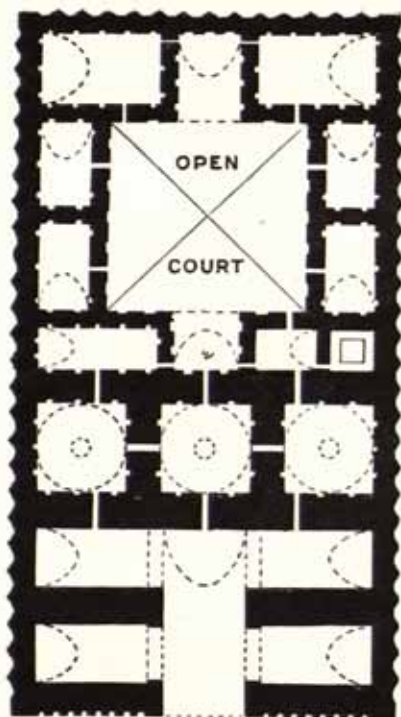
The Persepolitan type of palace was followed at Susa, Istakhr and Ecbatana.

ORIGINS

The Persian Order, if one may apply this term to the columns and entablature of the Achaemenid period, is closely related to archaic Greek work. The large number of flutings on the shafts (40-52 at Persepolis) occurs in the archaic temple of Diana at Ephesus (B.C. 560). The enrichments of the capitals, three in number and separated from each other by a bead and reel string, are found in nearly all archaic Ionic capitals, *e.g.* Ephesus and Naukratis (both B.C. 560). The remarkable feature of bulls at the summit appears to have been original.

The flat timber roof and its setting on columns to form a portico or a hypostyle hall (*apadāna*), was probably derived from Median huts (p. 46, fig. 3). A timber roof, set directly on columns without the intermediary of arches, was employed for the Great Mosque of Baghdad in A.D. 764, and appears to have been frequently used for mosques in Persia during the first three centuries of Islam. It still survives in the modern Persian *talār*, an open portico in front of palaces, *e.g.* Chihil Sutūn.

The square towers flanking the entrance portico were derived from the Hittite *khilāni*, reed cornices



PLAN OF THE PALACE OF FĪRŪZĀBĀD

By kind permission, from Dieulafoy

ARCHITECTURE

from Egypt,* and the great raised platforms from Assyria and Babylonia.

Achaemenid architecture, therefore, was a fusion of elements of different origin, made familiar to the Persians by the conquests of the Great King.

SĀSĀNIAN PERIOD

Hardly anything remains on Persian soil belonging to the period of five and a half centuries which elapsed between the fall of the Achaemenid dynasty (B.C. 331) and the rise of the Sāsānians (A.D. 226-641). Of the latter period the two principal monuments are the palaces of Fīrūzābād and Sarvistān. These two buildings, which may be placed in the third and fourth centuries respectively, present the most complete contrast to the Achaemenid palaces. Instead of the columnar trabeated style, we have massively constructed buildings covered with vaults and domes.

Fīrūzābād measures 170 by 320 feet and is therefore a really large building. The entire fabric is of broken stone or rubble, bound by a good mortar of lime mixed with sand. The plan is striking for its noble simplicity. All the spaces shown are covered by elliptical barrel-vaults, except the open court and the three rooms on the transverse axis, which are covered by elliptical domes, each 45 feet in diameter with an eye in the centre to admit light. A good deal of the stucco decoration remains; that on the outside consists of reed-like pilasters of semi-

* "The Persians and Cambyzes not only pillaged Egypt, tore off gold, silver, ivory and precious stones from her temples, but burnt them down. Report says that the famous palaces of Persepolis, Susa and Media were built after all this wealth had been conveyed to Asia, together with Egyptian craftsmen."—Diodorus Siculus, I, xlvi, 4.

circular section with panelling between. In the interior the arched doorways are set in moulded frames surmounted with the Egyptian reed cornice, as at Persepolis and Susa, but the cornice, instead of beginning with a vertical rise, spreads out, thus showing a later and decadent form of composition.

Sarvistān is much smaller, measuring 120 by 140 feet, but it is better built; the walls are of stone and the domes are of brick, but practically all the stucco decoration has disappeared. Like Fīrūzābād it has three domes, but they vary in size, are differently placed, and the plan is more complex. A great advance in scientific knowledge is shown in the vaulting arrangements. In order to lessen the thrust of the elliptical barrel-vaults, and to avoid very thick side walls, piers are built within the walls, thus forming a series of recesses. These do not carry transverse arches, as might be expected, but serve to support semi-domes over the recesses between them, and above these semi-domes rises the central elliptical vault, its span being reduced by this arrangement from 26 feet (the extreme width of the hall) to about 17. The recesses being rectangular the semi-domes are set over them by means of squinches.

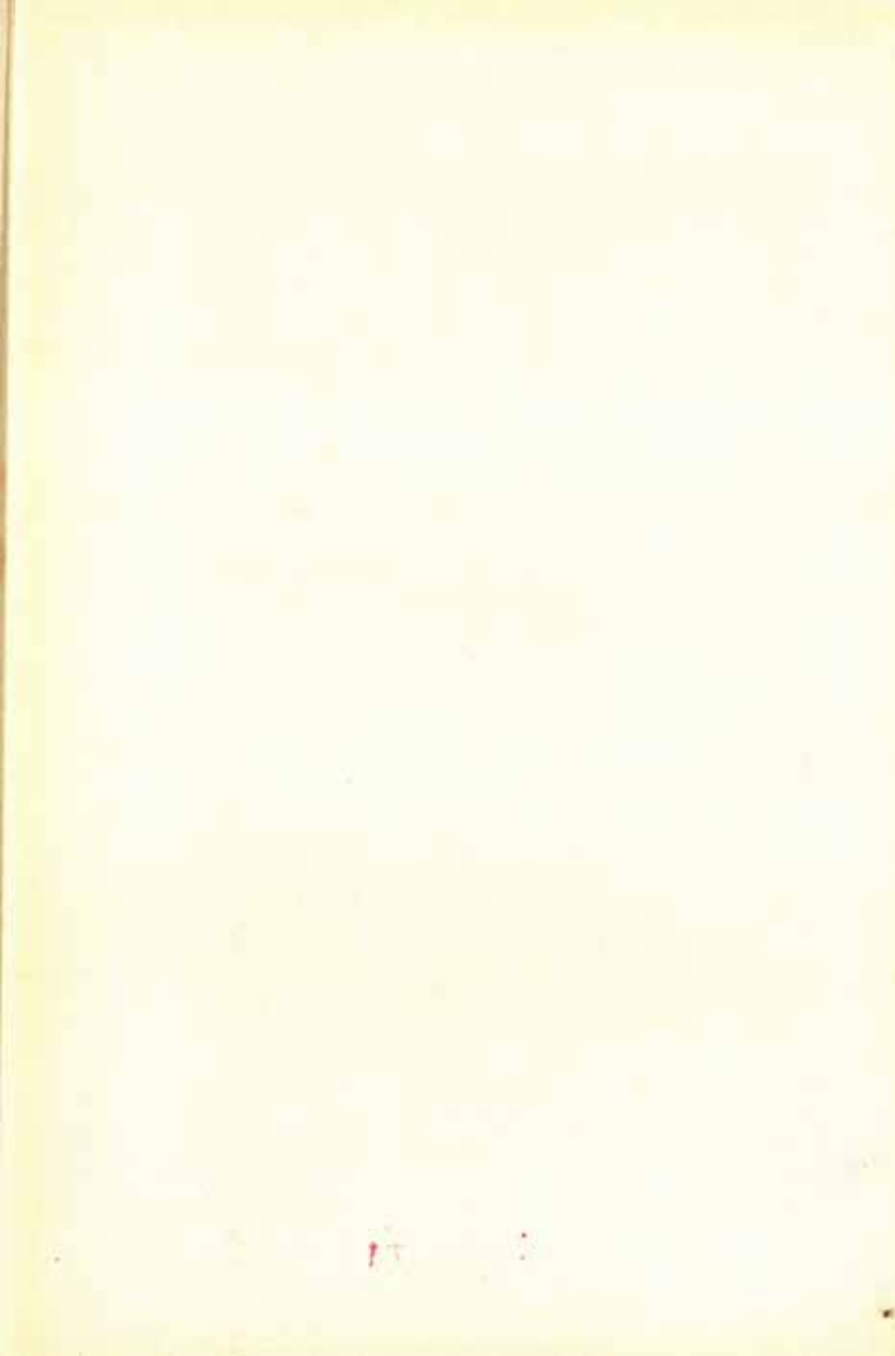
The domes of Fīrūzābād and Sarvistān, be it specially noted, are not placed, like Roman domes, over circular or octagonal rooms; they are set over square rooms by means of squinches, *i.e.* arches which are set across the four corners of the square so as to convert it into an octagon; on this octagon rests the dome.

The squinch was a fundamental discovery in architecture, a discovery for which Persian architects must receive the credit. The dome had



INTERIOR OF HALL, PALACE AT SARVISTAN

*From "Architecture : East and West," by H. Phénix Spiers,
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ARCHITECTURE

been known long before, and domed huts are shown on a bas-relief found by Layard in the palace of Sennacherib (B.C. 705-681) at Nineveh. Its use, however, had been very restricted, until a means was discovered whereby it could be set over a square chamber; for a complex building, an aggregation of cells such as a palace, cannot be composed of circular rooms. There are two solutions of the problem: the squinch and the spherical triangle pendentive; the former was discovered by the Persians, who therefore played and, as we shall see, continued to play, a vital part in the evolution of domical construction.

Another important feature occurs in these two palaces, a feature which is not found in Achaemenid architecture, nor in Assyrian or Babylonian either, viz. axial planning.

The last great building of the Sāsānian period, the palace of Khusrau, known as Qasr-i-Shīrīn, exhibits all the above features—vaults, domes on squinches, and axial planning.

THE MUSLIM PERIOD

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (A.D. 632) Mecca only remained the seat of the Caliphate until 661, when the Umayyad Dynasty arose with Damascus as its capital. The Umayyad Dynasty fell in 750, and the 'Abbāsīd Dynasty which succeeded it made Baghdad its capital. This transfer was of immense importance for the history of Muslim architecture. Up till then the influence of Syria had dominated, and all the Umayyad monuments known to us are governed by it. But just as the transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople displaced its centre of



gravity towards the East, so the transfer of the seat of the Caliphate displaced the centre of gravity of the Muslim Empire from the Hellenistic to the Iranian sphere of influence. Hence the very great difference between the cut stone monuments of the Umayyads and the brick and stucco monuments of the early 'Abbāsids which are still preserved in 'Irāq. The latter, though not on Persian soil, may be said to belong to Persian architecture, and Persia, although it remained but a province of the Empire, nevertheless played a great part in the evolution of 'Abbāsīd architecture.

The ancient *apadāna*, as we have seen above, exercised a powerful influence, and the Great Mosque of Baghdad (764) and the Great Mosque of Sāmarrā (847) had flat roofs resting directly on columns (or piers in the case of Sāmarrā) without the intermediary of arches. The same statement applies to a number of early mosques in Persia proper, *e.g.* Saghāniyān, described by Muqaddasī (985). Some of them even had wooden columns, and the brick columns of Nāyin (early tenth century), with their flat slab-like impost blocks, are surely derived from wooden prototypes. Unfortunately the mosque of Nāyin is the only Muslim monument dating from before A.D. 1000 which still stands on Persian soil. It is an arcaded courtyard type of mosque, decorated with wonderfully preserved stucco ornament related to that of Sāmarrā, but instead of a flat timber roof each bay is covered by a shallow brick dome.

Considerable progress was made in the eleventh century in vaulted and domed construction, as may be seen in that part of the Masjid-i Jum'a at Isfahān

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which was built by Malik Shāh (1072-1092), and of which excellent photographs, taken lately by Mr. A. U. Pope, show that the elaboration of the simple squinch began sooner in Persia than elsewhere.

THE XIIITH AND XIIIITH CENTURIES

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed the development of faience decoration, in the form of both tiles and mosaic, which attained a degree of beauty and splendour never seen before. Splendid calligraphic friezes of lusted faience surmounted dadoes composed of star tiles in golden brown lustre on a white ground, and mihrābs were executed in the same material, *e.g.* the famous mihrāb (A.D. 1226) of the Meidān Mosque at Kāshān, formerly in the Preece Collection and now in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin. Equal progress was made in stucco ornament.

But the thirteenth century also witnessed the greatest disaster that has ever befallen Persia—the Mongol inroads—which began in 1220. So terrible was their effect that hardly a monument exists representative of the period between 1226 (the Meidān Mosque at Kāshān) and 1307 (the Mausoleum of Muhammad Khudābanda at Sul-tānīya). But not only were monuments destroyed and building almost brought to a standstill: the Mongol Terror caused an enormous emigration of craftsmen to Asia Minor (as the inscriptions on the monuments of Konia and Divrigi prove), and especially to Cairo, which became the refuge of Islam from the Mongols. Maqrīzī testifies to this fact, saying:

“When the East and ‘Irāq were destroyed by the

invasion of the Tatars, from the appearance of Chingiz Khan shortly after 610 (1213/4) until the murder of the Caliph al-Musta'sim at Baghdad in Safar 656 (Feb./Mar. 1258), numbers of Orientals came to Egypt and built themselves homes on the banks of the Khalīq and round the Birkat al-Fil." (Maqrīzī, I, pp. 364-5.)

CHANGE IN THE MOSQUE PLAN

An important change took place in the mosque plan, apparently in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The simple arcaded courtyard type gave way to one with a great vaulted *eivān* (in Arabic *līwān*) in the centre of the arcades on each side of the court (*ṣahn*). This feature occurs in the Great Mosque at Varāmīn, the Masjid-i Jum'a at Isfahān, etc. It is not possible to say how this type arose, or even to fix the exact date of its appearance, for hitherto it has been extremely difficult, in fact almost impossible, for non-Moslems to enter Persian mosques in actual daily use (the Great Mosque at Varāmīn is ruined and abandoned). We have seen, however, that axial planning was known during the Sāsānian period.

THE MONUMENTAL PORTAL

Persian mosques almost always have a monumental portal, consisting of a deep rectangular recess roofed by a semi-dome resting on stalactites. A fine example of such type is the monumental portal at the south end of the Meidān at Isfahān leading into the Great Mosque of Shāh 'Abbās. There can be little doubt that such portals are a development of the Bāb al-'Āmma (836) of the Caliph's palace at

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Sāmarrā, where the same feature occurs in its simplest form, viz. a rectangular entrance-bay roofed by a semi-dome resting on two squinches.

PERSIAN MINARETS

Persian minarets vary but slightly in form: a tall slightly tapering cylindrical tower (earliest example—the Minār-i-‘Alī at Isfahān, built by Malik Shāh, 1072-92), with a little covered balcony near the top for the *mu’adhdhin*, or man who makes the call to prayer. These tall shafts are decorated with geometrical patterns and bands of inscription, either executed in the brickwork itself, or in faience mosaic, or in glazed tiles of dazzling brilliancy.

PERSIAN DOMES

We have seen that the domes of the Sāsānian period were elliptical in form. This type appears to have given way to the hemispherical form and later to the pointed, *e.g.* the beautiful dome of the Mausoleum of Muhammad Khudābanda at Sultāniyā, A.D. 1307. The Timurid period, however, witnessed the appearance of a new type of dome, consisting of the former type covered over by a very slightly bulbous shell, which is superimposed on it, leaving a large space between. This type only appears towards the end of Timur’s reign (*d.* 1405). His earlier buildings do not possess this feature, but when we come to the mausoleum of his wife Bībī Khānum (begun 1399 and finished 1403) and his own mausoleum, both at Samarqand, we meet with the double dome with slightly swelling outline, a type which henceforth became a constant feature in Persian architecture. It is probable that this type

was derived from domes composed of an inner and outer shell of wood, such as that which once rose over the transept of the Great Mosque at Damascus (described by Ibn Jubayr in 1184). Not only were the two famous buildings mentioned above built by Timur immediately after his return from the sack of Damascus in 1401, but we are expressly told in the *Institutes of Timur* (1787 ed., p. 103) that the workmen who were spared from the sack of that city were brought to Samarqand and employed on Timur's buildings. Wood being scarce, I suggest that they built these two domes in brick, as nearly as possible like the dome of their own great mosque. After Timur's death, the double dome passed from Samarqand to Khurāsān, over which it was spread by the Timurides, then ruling at Herāt, thence to Tabrīz (Blue Mosque), and finally all over Persia. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was in general use for all important buildings. It even spread into India, first appearing in the Mausoleum of the Mogul Emperor Humāyūn, built 1556-65, and soon became a regular feature there. Under eighteenth-century decadence it took an increasingly bulbous form, in fact, as Saladin remarks, "the greater the swelling of the dome, the later the date at which it has been built."

THE TIMURID PERIOD

The Timurid Period was a really great one in architecture as it was in painting. It was distinguished by the planning of mosques and madrasas with four great *eivāns* placed axially, by the use of decorative schemes composed of enamelled bricks and plain brown bricks of fine quality juxtaposed

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with wonderful effect, by the use of faience mosaic which persisted throughout the fifteenth century (*e.g.* the Blue Mosque at Tabriz and the Musallā at Herāt), by the use of dadoes of Marāgha marble, and by the double dome.

THE SAFAVIDS (A.D. 1502-1736)

Shāh 'Abbās the Great (1587-1628) was one of the greatest rulers, and certainly one of the greatest builders, Persia has ever had. Perhaps his most remarkable achievement in this field was the wonderful capacity for town-planning which he displayed at his capital, Isfahān; nothing of the sort had been attempted since the foundation of Baghdad (A.D. 762) and Sāmarrā (836). The scheme included the Great Meidān surrounded by vaulted bazaars, with the portal of his mosque opening in the centre of the south side, the Ala-Qapu palace on the western side, the avenue, over two miles long, known as the Chahār Bāgh, with its beautiful plane trees, its bridge, etc.

His great mosque, the plan of which is remarkable for its clear, simple and harmonious disposition, has one remarkable feature, unique, I believe, in Persia, viz. the ingenious planning of its monumental entrance whereby the main axis of the mosque which, being directed towards Mecca, runs from north-east to south-west, is accommodated to the axis of the outer portal on the south side of the Meidān, the axis of which runs from north to south (plate, p. 54). The mosque, as may be seen from the plan, has four *eivāns* placed axially, the northern one being the rear half of the entrance. At the back of the three other *eivāns* is a great domed chamber with a mihrāb on the Mecca side. The south-east *eivān* is

flanked by two halls, each with eight dome-covered bays and a mihrāb at the end of each aisle. The whole building, including the main dome, is splendidly decorated externally with enamelled tiles and faience mosaic.

Shāh 'Abbās was also distinguished for the number of caravanserais and bridges which he caused to be erected during his reign.

GILT DOMES

In the seventeenth century, during the reign of Shāh Sulaimān, the custom arose of covering the domes of sacred shrines with plates of gilt copper, *e.g.* the shrine of Imām Rizā at Mashhad* in Khurāsān. Chardin, who was in Isfahān in 1673, saw the plates being made; he says that they measured 10 by 16 inches, that there was ten crowns worth of gold on each, and that 3,000 had been ordered. This innovation was so popular that quite a number of examples exist to-day: Mashhad-i 'Alī at Najaf, Mashhad-i Husain at Kerbelā (both due to Nādir Shāh), Imām Mūsā at Kāzimain (Agha Muhammad Khān Qājār), Fātima at Qūm, Imām Mahdī at Sāmarrā (both due to Fath 'Alī Shāh), etc.

SHĀH SULTAN HUSAIN (1694-1722)

Fine work was still being executed at the beginning of the eighteenth century, *e.g.* the Madrasa (or college) of Shāh Sultan Husain at Isfahān, built in 1700-1710, which consists of a nearly square court surrounded by two storeys of vaulted arcades (the upper storey containing cells for students) with a great *eivān* in the centre of each side. Attached to it

* *Mashhad* means "place of martyrdom."

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is a caravanserai which no doubt served to provide the college with a revenue. Shāh Sultan Husain rebuilt the Chihil Sutūn palace of Shāh 'Abbās, which had been destroyed by fire, but the work shows a great falling off in quality, for Persian architecture was moving rapidly towards that decadence which was complete by the end of the century.

CONCLUSION

Persia was certainly one of the great creative centres of architectural development : for the science and skill shown in the construction of vaults, domes and pendentives, Persian architects must ever command our respect and admiration, and in the field of polychrome decoration on the grand scale their achievements still remain unrivalled.

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PAINTING

By LAURENCE BINYON

TO become acquainted for the first time with Persian painting is to enter a country of enchantment. No other art in the world has quite this enchanted air, this splendour of romance. Were it possible to display in a gallery all the Persian masterpieces of painting, the effect would be to dazzle and intoxicate. It is not possible, for the simple reason that these masterpieces are for the most part contained in the manuscripts which they illustrate. Some of these manuscripts, the work of years, are comparable to little galleries of paintings, but galleries in which one picture only can be shown at a time.

In the art of the world Persian painting is a unique flower. It has qualities, charms, and also limitations, which are all its own, and which mark it off from the other creative arts of Asia as much as from the creative arts of Europe. Its origins are somewhat obscure, and various diverse elements have contributed to its development, but the fully-formed tradition, which had its period of glory from the thirteenth to the end of the sixteenth century, is essentially Persian. It is not unnatural then to assume that even in the early periods, of which (since so much has been lost) we know so little, the original impulses of the Iranian race counted for more than may appear on the surface.

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MANICHAEAN PAINTINGS

One Persian of Sāsānian times acquired legendary fame as a painter. This was Mānī, who lived in the third century A.D., and who was the founder of Manichaeism. He was not only a painter himself, but encouraged the art as an adjunct to his religion, and Manichaean paintings must once have been very numerous. But Manichaeism was relentlessly persecuted, and all these works have perished except for a couple of miniatures and a wall-painting (ascribed to the ninth century) found in Central Asia by von Le Coq, and now in Berlin. The resemblance between these miniatures and far later Persian paintings points to a continuity of tradition. Moreover, though only negligible fragments of Sāsānian wall-paintings have survived, the motives found in sculptured reliefs and in silver-work of the period—for instance, Bahrām Gor hunting with his mistress, Āzāda—reappear in late Persian painting as favourite themes.

THE ARABS AND ISLAM

But the Arab conquest in the seventh century cut across this tradition, which for a long period seems as if submerged. From this time onward Persia is a part of Islam. The Persian painting with which we are concerned is a Muhammadan art. In complete contrast with Christianity and with Buddhism, which have protected and fostered pictorial art as an aid to devotion, Islam has always sternly discountenanced the representation of human and indeed all living beings as an encroachment on the prerogative of the Creator. Such a prohibition involved no self-denial

on the part of the Arabs, who had no gift for painting, but among the races conquered by Islam were peoples who, like the Persians, inherited ancient artistic traditions, and whose instincts could not be suppressed; and where the desire was strong the art arose and was gladly patronized by kings and princes. None the less, it was consistently frowned upon by the theologians. Painting was ranked far below the art of writing, which could be employed on making beautiful copies of the Qur'ān; it had no place in the spiritual life; it was largely despised, and painters as such have been rarely thought worthy of a record; hence the disconcerting scarcity of biographical material.

It followed also from these conditions that the painters were limited in their subject-matter. In Persian art there are illustrations of sacred story; of the life of the Prophet, of the patriarchs and heroes of the Old Testament, and of Jesus. But in the real sense of the word there is no religious painting; no such sublime and touching images as Christianity and Buddhism have inspired. Nor is there any public art; the Persian painters were attached to courts, and their best work was devoted to the illustration of magnificent manuscripts, such as kings would treasure for their private delectation. And the Persians naturally turned to the history and legends of their own race, not of their conquerors, for their themes. After the Arab conquest, Baghdad became under the Caliphs a great centre of culture, learning and art. Not only from Mesopotamia, but from Syria and Egypt artists gathered together. Many of these artists were Christians, and their art derived mainly from late classical traditions, numerous



THREE LADIES IN A GARDEN
from
A MS. OF THE DĪWĀN OF HĀFĪZ, XV c.

By kind permission of A. Chester Beatty, Esq.

PAINTING

monuments of which still existed. This phase of painting is sometimes called "Arab." There is no evidence that any Arab was ever a painter, but the manuscripts illustrated by these painters, a few of which survive, are Arabic works. The finest and most famous of these manuscripts is a copy of the *Assemblies* of Hariri in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, dated 1237, full of lively pictures of contemporary life. In this school of painting, we find examples of animated figure-drawing with large design and expressive gesture; the drawing of vegetation is strongly conventional and the draperies often highly stylized.

CHINESE INFLUENCE

In complete contrast are some illustrations to the *Fables of Bidpay* in an album at Constantinople which some authorities would assign to the twelfth century, though the date is doubtful.

Here is manifest the strong influence of a very different art, that of China, with its fine observation of nature, subtly-planned design, linear power and delight in movement. Without entering into controversial questions, we may note that from the seventh century, long before the Mongol conquest of Persia, there was trade between China and the Arab empire, and objects of Chinese art were imitated in Muslim countries. It was from China that the art of paper-making was introduced. How familiar the Persians were with Chinese paintings is not certain; but it enjoyed, as we know from frequent reference in literature, an enormous prestige, and always excited the keenest interest. Chinese painting, however imperfectly it may have been known, had

the same kind of attraction and authority in the Near East that Italian painting has had for Northern Europe.

The Mongols were already masters of China when they conquered Persia in the thirteenth century. They brought West with them Chinese artists and artisans, and now the impress of China on Persian painting was direct. Of this phase, the most important work surviving is a copy of a history of the world by Rashīd ud-Dīn entitled *Jāmi' al-tawārikh*, part of which is in the Edinburgh University Library and a smaller part in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society in London. It was written in Tabriz, 1306-1314. The numerous paintings in this manuscript are of fascinating interest from many points of view. The Chinese element in the design, and in the colour, which is much more sober than in most Persian painting, is manifest, though the native element is also strong. There is more reliance on line, less detailed decoration.

Certain borrowings from China persist in Persian art; dragons and other fabulous animals are constantly used in decoration, as also the modes of drawing curling white wisps of cloud. China, on her side, had borrowed certain Sāsānian motives of decoration. But such things do not amount to a formative influence. Probably the chief gift of China to Persian art was a stimulus to emulation; and whereas the Persian artists, with their strong decorative instincts, were liable to become rather sleepily content with a traditional formula, the Chinese example of vigorous line and energetic movement had a kindling effect. In scenes of hunting and battle, the Chinese drawing of horses and horsemen

(favourite themes during the Mongol dynasty in China) was taken as a model ; it is clearly shown in a page from a *Shāhnāma* of the early fourteenth century now in the Louvre. As might be expected, the Chinese influence was felt chiefly in the eastern provinces of Persia, and is seen from time to time in the work of artists who preferred line to colour.

TIMUR

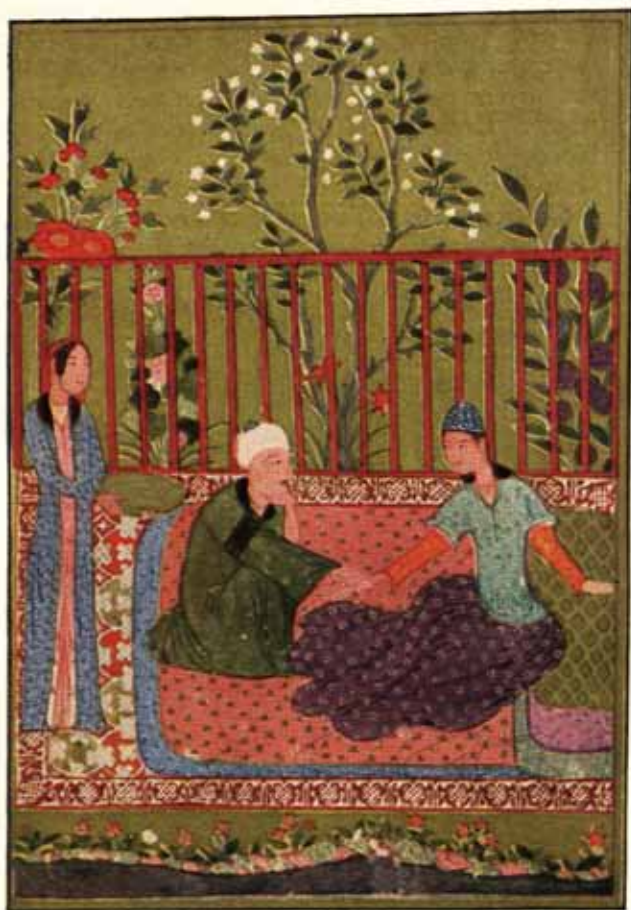
Once again, in the fourteenth century, a new conqueror appeared, and Persia submitted to Timur (Tamerlane). Under Timur and his descendants, the characteristic Persian style of painting was gradually formulated. In the British Museum is a manuscript of Khwājū Kirmāni's *Humāy wa Humāyūn*, dated at Baghdad 1396, still in the lifetime of Timur. The paintings in this manuscript show a decided development from earlier work. The Chinese element has been completely assimilated. The conception of picture-making is such as we shall find in all the succeeding art of the classic period. The very high horizon and system of perspective are common to Asiatic painting ; what is peculiarly Persian is the strong sense of pattern, the richness of decorative detail, the sumptuous colour-design. The ground covered with tufts of plants and flowers, each detached and magnified to show its particular beauties ; the rocky ridges at the top of the design, above which are figures, half seen, and trees or flowering bushes rise against the sky ; these motives and devices will be repeated again and again with endless variation. The note of luxury, refined and choice, begins now to be more pronounced ; it was to reach its height under the Safavid dynasty in the sixteenth

century; but all through the fifteenth century Persian painting, accepting a now fully-formed system of conventions, is mainly bent on combining the given elements into a supremely decorative whole. Even in the frequent scenes of battle and bloodshed, a certain impassiveness reigns; too strong an insistence on the clash of drama would burst the decorative frame. The painters are most at home in those garden scenes (and gardens are a passion in Persia) where the personages have themselves the slender grace of young cypresses and their attire is gorgeous as the flowers.

BIHZĀD

In the latter part of the fifteenth century we come to the most renowned name in Persian painting, Bihzād. So great is Bihzād's fame that his name has been affixed to any number of miniatures by their owners, more as a mark of admiration than for any critical reason; and the task of sifting the work attributed to him is difficult indeed. We may establish probabilities; in but a few instances can we hope for certainty.

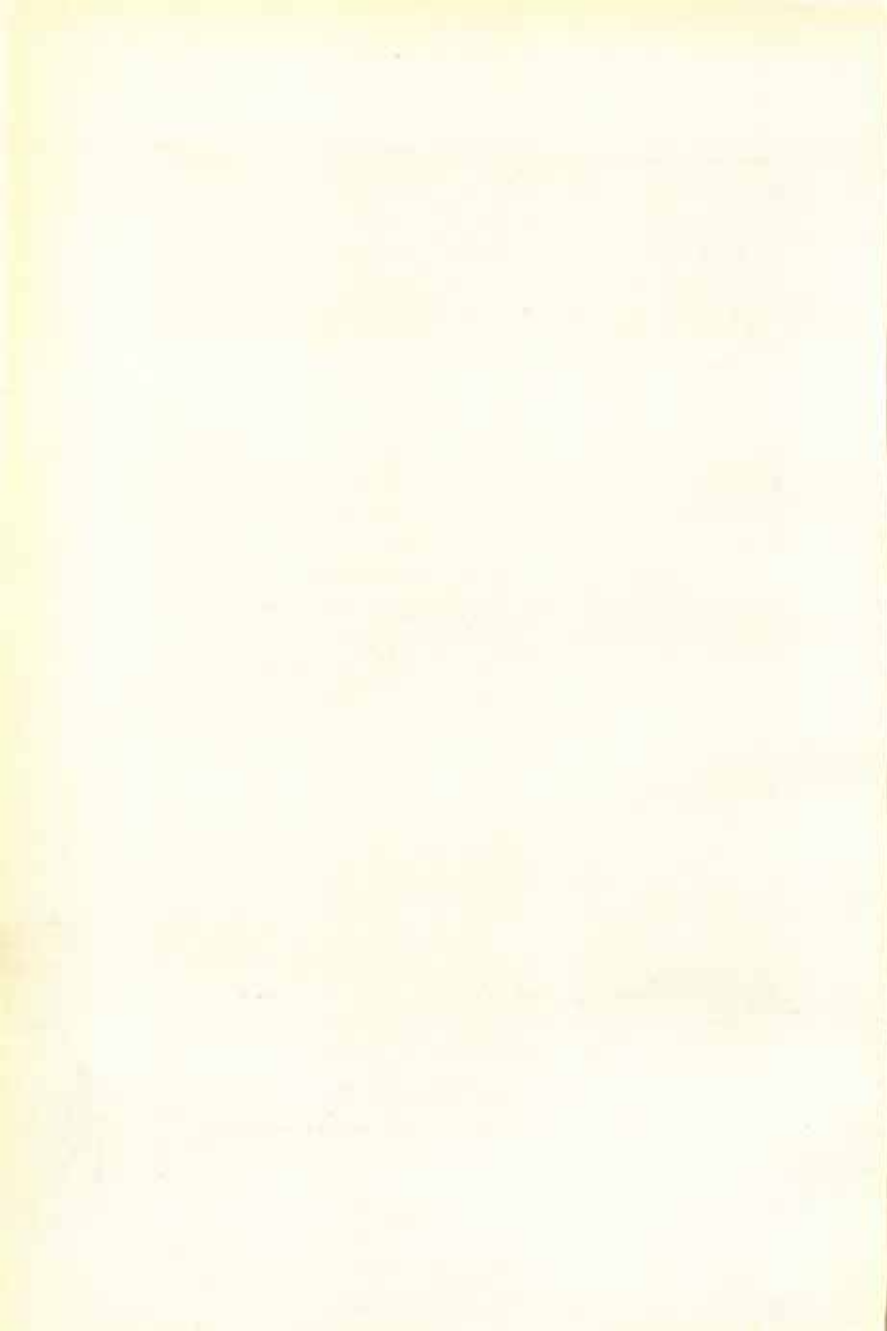
What part exactly did Bihzād play? Was it that of an innovator, or that of one who completes and crowns a tradition? If we may take the paintings in the *Life of Timur* belonging to Mr. Garrett, and recently published by Sir Thomas Arnold, as typical of Bihzād, we might surmise that Bihzād re-vitalized a tradition of picture-making which was in danger of becoming static or too luxuriously decorative, by his dynamic energy and dramatic invention. These qualities are found in earlier work of the fifteenth



LADY AND PHYSICIAN, FROM A MS. DATED 1411

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century, but not in the same degree. And Bihzād has also a marvellous delicacy of line, which is perhaps what his countrymen most appreciated in his work. The author of these paintings is a master who, retaining the glow of harmonious colour and the sense of pattern, has an instinct of seizing the gesture of momentary action for communicating the strain and stress of movement—the effort of breath, the tensiety of muscle, and he also uses trenchant lines and angles in his compositions with more intention and resource than his predecessors or followers. In the scene of the passage of Oxus, in face of the enemy, every man is alive, intensely concentrated on what he is doing or dreading—we feel the straining of the horses as they swim to gain the bank, and this is something rare in Persian painting, where expressiveness is so often sacrificed to beauty of pattern and the personages are often merely types and masks. Here, too, there are felicities of unexpectedness, where the sudden seizure of reality in a movement or attitude results in an exhilarating freshness of design. These paintings, which have always been attributed to Bihzād, are of exceptional originality; yet they are not universally accepted as his work. The same unusual power, however, of combining dramatic expressiveness with harmonious design, vigour with delicacy, appears in some small signed miniatures in a manuscript of Nizāmī's *Khamsa* dated 1441, now in the British Museum. Some other manuscript-illustrations and single paintings may be accepted as the work of the master with some confidence; but it is hardly possible as yet to appreciate his achievement as a whole. Probably his style underwent considerable

changes. Bihzād worked for many years at Herāt, but after Shāh Isma'īl, the first of the Safavids, had taken Herāt the painter moved to Tabriz and was made Director of the Royal Library.

Such migrations in the painters' lives are typical; and how far the advent of a noted master would affect a local tradition, or the fashion of a new court affect his style, is a point hard to determine. Bihzād was still living in 1524, but the date of his death, as of his birth, is unknown.

Very close to the master's style is the work of Qāsim 'Alī, author of some splendid miniatures in Nizāmī's *Khamsa* dated 1494, in the British Museum. He worked at Herāt.

BIHZĀD'S SUCCESSORS

The group of artists who succeeded to Bihzād and who worked for Shāh Tahmāsp at Tabriz created a new and brilliant style. The most famous of these is Mīrāk, who ranks only second in repute to Bihzād. Somewhat younger than Mīrāk was Sultān Muḥammād, who was not only a painter but a designer of carpets and a bookbinder. Mīr Sayyid 'Alī was a poet as well as a painter; he was invited by the Moghul emperor Humāyūn to Kabul, and laid the foundations of the Indian Moghul school. Ustād Muḥammādī, noted for his exquisite line drawings—a beautiful example is in the Louvre, flourished in the latter part of the sixteenth century. These Safavi painters carried the taste for sumptuous refinement to an extreme. The illustrations to the poems of Nizāmī in a manuscript executed in 1539–1543, now in the British Museum, form a group of master-



A PICNIC (unfinished) SCHOOL OF SULTĀN MUHAMMAD
MID. XVI c.

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pieces by some of the most famous of them. Colour-harmonies of astonishing subtlety and brilliance, of a kind unknown to Europe, intoxicate the eye. Under skies of dazzling gold, or of deep blue, fantastic rocks of delicate colour foil the glorious foliage of a plane-tree, or of blossoming shrubs; flowers of exquisite shape spring in verdure beside streams. The antelopes, the lions, the wild asses of the hunting-scenes are marvels of wild grace and speed, the fine-bred horses of a miraculous elegance of form. Every object is made precious to the eye. And the human figures which animate these vivid scenes, with their rich apparel and fastidious bearing, are romance incarnate. Perhaps the finest painting in this MS. is the *Ascent of Muhammad to Heaven*, in a quite different *genre* from the rest. The prophet rides on Burāq up the blue night, flinging flames from the radiance of his presence, and surrounded by flying forms of angels as he leaves the earth spinning small among the clouds below. This subject is a fairly common theme, but nowhere else treated with such ethereal splendour.

FAVOURITE SUBJECTS

It is characteristic of Persian art that the same subjects are painted over and over again. Poetry supplies the vast majority of the themes: Firdausi's *Shāhnāma*, Nizāmī's *Khamsa* ("Five poems"), the *Būstān* of Sa'dī, Jāmī's story of *Joseph and Zulaikhā*, yielded inexhaustible material. Those who begin the study of Persian painting soon recognize familiar figures: Rustam slaying the White Ogre and performing other famous exploits; Sohrāb, the beautiful,

killed by his father, Rustam, in single fight ; Khusrau surprising the fair Shīrīn as she bathes ; Shīrīn falling in love with Khusrau's portrait ; Bahrām hunting the wild ass ; the Seven Princesses, beloved of Bahrām, each in a pavilion of a different colour ; Majnūn, the martyr to his love for Laila, sitting emaciated in the desert surrounded by the wild animals, or watching the warriors on their camels fighting in his cause, or fainting in Laila's lap ; Joseph, with his halo of flames astounding by his beauty the ladies of Egypt, who cut their fingers in their agitation instead of the fruit on their plates ; Zulaikhā in her wretched old age brought before Joseph ; Solomon and the Queen of Sheba enthroned and surrounded by all the beasts and the birds ; Alexander taking counsel with the Seven Sages, or voyaging to India ; these are some of the romantic figures most frequently met with.

These traditional themes continued to be painted, and in many cases the illustrators of MSS. followed an ancient style, so that their work seems much more primitive than its actual date. But the chief masters of the Safavid period had carried their aim of perfecting their means of expression to such a point of luxurious beauty that it was impossible to go further on those lines. The languor of decay succeeded.

RIZĀ 'ABBĀSĪ

Early in the seventeenth century, Rizā 'Abbāsī sought to break away from tradition and to create a new style, not dependent on rich colour and pattern but on vivacity of line. He was certainly an artist of marked individuality, and though he and his



A POET WITH A WINE CUP IN HIS HAND, LATE XVI c.

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followers developed affectations he restored some animation to the art. Single paintings, as opposed to manuscript illustrations, begin to be much more common with Rizā and his school. Portraits of dervishes, of fair ladies, and beautiful youths ; love-idylls, picnics, and similar themes show the tendency of the time.

EUROPEAN INFLUENCES

In the seventeenth century, European influence begins to operate. An artist called Muhammad Zamān was sent by Shāh 'Abbas II to Rome, where he became a Christian ; he worked for some time in India, then returned to Persia. His paintings betray strong Italian influence ; cast shadows (unknown to native tradition) are introduced, and designing in three dimensions is attempted. This European influence filters into Persian painting, though the ancient fashions were largely maintained in a coarsened form in the illustration of manuscripts. Paintings in oil, sometimes of great size, or in tempera varnished over, came into vogue in the eighteenth century. At the end of that century, and in the early part of the nineteenth, Fath 'Alī Shāh had numerous portraits of himself (easily recognizable by his marvellous black beard and wasp-like waist) and of his courtiers painted ; he presented some of these to the East India Company, and to English visitors to Persia. The paintings of this school, which include traditional subjects as well as dancing girls, acrobats and still-life, have no claim to very serious consideration, but are often amusing and sometimes charming : the gift of colour and decorative

pattern never quite deserts the Persian artist and artisan.

CONCLUSIONS

The limitations of Persian painting are obvious. Cut off, through the restrictions of Islam, from the expression of religious conceptions, and dependent on the patronage of courts which largely dictated its themes, this art could not expand in freedom. Devoid of intellectual curiosity, the painters accepted certain formulas of design, and made no journeys of exploration outside them. Though their landscape backgrounds are of ravishing beauty, they never found in pure landscape a means of pictorial expression. Portraiture is not uncommon, but portraits are not the Persians' strong point. Yet within their limitations what an enchanting world they have created! The exquisite ornateness in which they excelled is perfectly appropriate to miniature-painting; and never did artists show more sensuous appreciation of the materials of their art, more choiceness and fastidious workmanship. Their line-drawing is of singular delicacy; but it is in colour above all that the genius of Iran is revealed. One's ideas of colour are enlarged and enhanced in contemplation of Persian painting. These artists seem to work in a sort of closed garden of the mind, unearthly in its vividness and beauty; to our eyes at least it is a fairyland, and in a degree beyond any other art it brings us

The glory and the freshness of a dream.

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POTTERY AND GLASS

By BERNARD RACKHAM

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IN the history of pottery of post-classical times Persia has played a part which, if less obviously recognizable at first glance, is hardly inferior to that of China. With traditions derived from their own past and learning lessons of technique from Egypt, the land in which glass and clay were first united in the form of glazed earthenware, the Persians of the Middle Ages produced varied types of pottery which are the delight of all who have an eye for beautiful things. For their inherent qualities alone these wares would call for notice in any survey of the art of the past. But their interest to the student is increased by the fact that they exercised on pottery in other lands both East and West an influence which even now endures. It may not be as easy to trace this Persian influence as it is to see in all modern pottery, and in the very existence of porcelain, the proofs of China's late-asserted mastery; but none the less in technique and design, and in the very impulse which secured for pottery acknowledgment as a vehicle for artistic expression worthy to rank with materials counted more precious, a Persian strain can be discovered in most Western wares, and even in China.

The Persians had a sure sense for ceramic form; in this they outrivalled even the Chinese, whose

curiosity to explore every kind of technical process more often betrayed them into the perpetration of non-ceramic forms and decoration. The appeal of Persian pottery is pre-eminently to the sensibilities; no intellectual training is needed for the appreciation of its qualities. The song it sings is a simple melody of exquisite beauty free from difficult complications of harmony or rhythm. If the note of majestic power is seldom present, if Persian pottery has little of the massive strength of much Chinese, it shows in its forms a tender loveliness, a natural suavity, as of the more delicate kinds of plant life. In colour again the Persian potters were no less sure of themselves. The colour glazes and pigments they evolved are in themselves wholly admirable and were combined in harmonies of faultless balance. They suggest the hues of flowers, in contrast to the gemlike quality of the Chinese pigments.

Our knowledge of Persian pottery has only lately taken definite shape, and the later wares, those of Safavid times, were the first to become familiar to Western connoisseurs, though there was great uncertainty as to what could rightly be classed as Persian. Later, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the wares of the later Middle Ages came within the ken of the West, but only in quite recent decades have we become aware of the existence even of the many different kinds of pottery made in Persia during the first centuries of Islam. Precise classification by date and place of origin still remains difficult. Reliable information is generally lacking. The frequency with which certain types have been found in certain places sometimes justifies a local denomination, but even then we have not the evidence of local

production in the form of kiln-wasters which has been helpful to a more precise knowledge of Syrian and Egyptian wares. The only wise attitude in this matter is one of suspended judgment.

EARLY ISLAMIC WARES

The earliest post-classical wares which have yet come to light are attributed to the time of the Sāsānid Kings, but nothing has yet been found to indicate that the pottery of that period was in any way comparable to its metalwork. The early Islamic period, on the other hand, is represented by great quantities of pottery brought to light in recent years by excavation, some of them showing clear traces of Sāsānian traditions. Discoveries at Sāmarrā confirmed by finds at Sūsa attributable to the same age give evidence of the types of ware in use in Persia in the ninth century, and there is reason to believe that in Persia itself pottery technique was at that time at a high level. Comparison with the contemporary T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-906) wares of China reveals Chinese influence in Western Asia, alike in the shapes of some of the wares, in their opaque white glaze, and in the imitations of a favourite Chinese decoration consisting of irregular splashes of green, orange and blue pigment. Other Western Asiatic wares of this period connect them no less unmistakably with European art. A group of wares with a smooth greyish-white enamel show painted decoration in blue sometimes combined with green, in which short invocations in Kufic script are found side by side with laurel wreaths and other motives of obvious kinship with Hellenistic art.

LUSTRED WARE

More significant in the history of pottery are the finds of metallic lustred pottery which must be held to be amongst the earliest examples as yet known of this technique. The fact that almost identical wares have been found in Egypt and elsewhere, as well as at Susa and Sāmarrā, justifies some reserve on the question of the country in which lustre painting on pottery was invented, but to Persia certainly belongs the credit of having in later times used this technique with a mastery nowhere surpassed. The early lustre wares are of two classes; one of these has monochrome painting in a fresh golden yellow, the motives consisting of animals, or sometimes human figures, against a background of dots. The painting of the second class, of geometrical designs or palm-fronds and other plant forms set amongst a kind of cell-pattern, is in lustre of two colours, a tawny yellow and a brownish olive-green.

Another large category is made of soft red or buff earthenware with a coating of white slip * under a transparent lead glaze and decoration cut or scratched through the slip before the application of the glaze. These wares, which are found especially at Z a n j ā n, may be divided into several classes, in all of which animals and birds are conspicuous amongst the stock of motives, though Kufic inscriptions enlisted with masterly skill to play a decorative role, and palmettes or foliated scrollwork, are sometimes the only decoration. In one class, artistically perhaps the most

* Fine clay mixed with water to the consistency of cream, and used on pottery either as a surface layer over a "body" of coarser clay or for painting, is termed "slip."

significant, the design stands out against a background of hatched lines; spots of green and purple are sometimes dabbed more or less haphazard over the scratched design, evidently to imitate the effect of certain contemporary Chinese pottery. In another group the background is cut completely away, showing dark red through the glaze, which is sometimes stained to a deep green.

Akin to these groups is another, stated to come from Āmōl, the capital of the Caspian province Māzandarān, with decoration painted under the lead glaze in dark brown, red and yellowish olive-green, sometimes within outlines previously scratched in the slip coating. The designs are generally rough flowers, foliations or inscriptions, and of little artistic worth. The Āmol wares are archaeologically interesting because they link up the early Islamic pottery of Persia proper with the wares found in fragments on the rubbish mounds of Afrāsiyāb, near Sāmārqānd.

TURKESTAN

The Turkestan wares, also influenced technically by T'ang Chinese pottery and therefore not later in date than the tenth century, include several varieties, often of great and austere beauty. This is particularly true of the inscriptions and interlaced strapwork painted in dark brown and red clay pigments on a white ground. Very striking also is the decoration of a sub-class in white on either a dark brown or a red ground. A noteworthy distinction between the wares of Turkestan and Persia is the almost entire absence in the former of animal motives; and such plant forms as occur are severely stylized.



DISH WITH FIGURES DANCING, RAYY, XII c.

By kind permission of G. Eumorfopoulos, Esq.

POTTERY AND GLASS

For this abstinence there is compensation in the extreme nobility of lettering where inscriptions have been introduced.

UNGLAZED EARTHENWARE

Returning to Persia proper, we may remark that side by side with glazed and painted wares there seems always to have been a production of unglazed earthenware for common use, of soft buff body, either left plain or with decoration incised or carved with an engraving tool, or done in relief by means of small stamps probably of wood. These unglazed wares, though not at first sight very interesting, are often admirable in shape, and their decoration is sometimes of real beauty.

RHAGES

To the period of the Seljuk rulers (eleventh to twelfth centuries) belongs a splendid creamy white-bodied pottery, with a clear colourless siliceous glaze, approaching in its refinement the quality of porcelain. It has been found especially on the site of Rayy (Rhages), near Tehrān, and may perhaps have been made there. The decoration, animals and figures, sometimes grouped in a pictorial manner, is deeply engraved in the body of the ware in strong sweeping lines showing a very sure sense of design. Occasionally the ware is left plain white, or covered with a transparent cobalt-blue glaze; more often the designs have been reinforced with pigments of unusual intensity, blue, purple, green and amber-yellow. The same porcelain-like body, often so thin as to be slightly translucent, is seen in some other

wares noteworthy for their delicate shapes and finish ; their decoration consists not only of lightly-traced engraving and carving in very slight relief, but also occasionally of friezes of arabesque foliage cut right through the walls and afterwards filled with the translucent greenish-white glaze, a technique much favoured in later times in China, but apparently of Persian origin. The glaze, as a rule plain white, is sometimes stained dark blue, turquoise-blue or to a soft maroon purple.

In the twelfth century, and until its sack by the troops of Chingiz Khan in 1221, Rhages was the centre of production of lusted wares and tiles in great quantity. Human figures and animals, singly or combined together in scenes from the chase or court life, are the most characteristic features of their decoration, although graceful arabesques or foliage may be its only content. The lustre painting is sometimes applied over a bright cobalt-blue glaze. The same workshops that made this lusted ware also probably produced the bowls and dishes from Rhages with paintings in enamel colours and gold on a ground of opaque enamel, creamy white or less often turquoise-blue. Figure compositions with a tendency to overcrowding, and lacking the large decorative effect of those on the earlier polychrome Rhages ware, here also predominate—princely persons on gracefully-moving horses or camels (violent action is seldom depicted), squatting ladies with Mongolian features, hair in long plaits and brocaded gowns, servants holding flasks and beakers. Both design and execution strongly recall the miniature paintings of the period, perhaps indicating the handiwork of the same artists.



POTTERY DISH WITH COLOURED GLAZES,
RHAGES OR RAKKA 11TH OR 12TH CENTURY

By kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum

SULTĀNĀBĀD

Towards the end of the thirteenth century, when Rhages though not utterly destroyed by the Mongol invaders had ceased to be a city of any importance, the lead in producing fine pottery was taken over by Sultānābād. Three types especially are associated with this place, and in all decoration in slight relief, effected by various processes, is a factor. We have first jugs, jars and vases with animals in combat or pursuing one another, birds, or inscriptions in Kufic characters, occupying a frieze round the neck or shoulder or sometimes spread over the entire surface and carved with an admirably subtle sense of conformity with the shape of the vessel. The covering glaze is generally coloured, dark blue being most usual. A transparent glaze, in this case usually turquoise-blue, is the determining feature in the next type, including some of the most perfect works to be found in the whole range of the potter's art, in which the decoration is carried out in a thick black under the glaze, applied either as a pigment or as a slip coating through which the design is engraved so deeply as to stand out in perceptible relief. The commonest Sultānābād wares are those in which the decoration (a favourite theme is a single bird or animal embowered among closely-set leaves) is painted in black outline partly filled in with cobalt and greenish turquoise-blue; the painted design is sometimes reinforced by modelling in slight relief in white slip against a background of grey or drab tone. In tilework also, as the fourteenth century approached, relief tended to play a more and more important part. For

covering the walls of mosques the earlier interlocking cross and star tiles were superseded by friezes and niches composed of large tilework slabs, moulded in relief with verses from the Qur'ān in lettering of majestic sweep, or with animals or figure-subjects; the golden lustre pigment was combined with dark blue and occasionally greenish turquoise. The appearance of dragons and lotus-flowers as elements in the design is a token of the new flood of Chinese influences which came with the Mongol invasions. In the fourteenth century painting was often entirely eliminated; the designs are in simple relief, often sharply cut, under an opaque turquoise-blue enamel.

SAFAVID PERIOD

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries under the Safavid rulers, Persian pottery underwent a complete change of character. A new world of beauty was created. We have first the lustre wares, with painting of feathery trees, vaguely realized flowering plants, or interlaced arabesques, in iridescent brownish olive or fiery crimson tones. The underlying glaze is white, dark blue or rarely deep orange.

This renaissance of Persian pottery culminated in the reign of Shāh 'Abbās the Great (1587-1628). To this period belong the wares with a white siliceous body, in thin parts translucent like porcelain, which are believed to come from Kermān. Some are painted in a vivid blue with landscape or floral designs in which the influence of imported Chinese porcelain is generally clear to see. In another very beautiful group the same blue is combined with a

greyish celadon-green and a thick bole-red, like that of the so-called "Rhodian ware" of Asia Minor; the motives of this three-colour group are more purely Persian in character, such as paired gazelles or peacocks and bunches of pinks. In a variation of the same type the ground is greenish-drab or bright blue, and opaque white is used for the painting; in yet another delightful type from the same workshops the decoration is done by cutting through a surface-layer of slip stained with the same bright blue. In the seventeenth century there emerges a large class of uncertain local origin, in which imitations of late Ming (A.D. 1368-1643) Chinese porcelain are more definitely dominant, though everywhere translated into a charming idiom reflecting the Persian temperament and widely removed from the unswerving self-sureness of the Chinese models. The painting in this class, which is shown by comparison with Chinese porcelain to have lasted into the eighteenth century, is in a soft dark blue finely outlined in black; in another late class from the same source the painting is done entirely in an inky bluish-black. In this period also we find a revival of the technique of glaze-filled piercings in a delicate translucent ware of a tone aptly termed lettuce-white. Common to most of these later Persian wares are certain peculiar shapes—great rice-dishes saucer-shaped or with broad rim, small octagonal trays, flower-vases with five flaring necks, pear-shaped jars, vessels with mammiform mouthpiece used either for drinking or as hookah-bases, long-necked perfume-sprinklers and so forth. Of developments in the nineteenth century it need only be said that they mostly follow traditional modes, but without main-

taining the sure sense of rhythm in shape and design which seldom fails in their forerunners. The only important innovation—the introduction about 1800 of overglaze flower-painting in imitation of European porcelain—bore no fruit of artistic significance.

TILEWORK

In later Persian architecture tilework continued as in ancient times to play a very important part. A splendid development was that of the friezes, in tiles carved in countersunk relief and covered with an opaque enamel, generally turquoise-blue, of Arabic inscription against a ground of noble volutes. This type reached its highest development in the hands of Persian artisans at the court of Tamerlane at Samarcand. About the same period we find the perfection of another technique, that of cut tilework mosaic with coloured glazes, which was practised almost all over the Islamic world, but nowhere more splendidly than in Persia, especially at Isfahan. The designs, in their highly abstract rendering of natural forms, here approach closely to those of carpets. The latest development of tilework technique in Persia came under Shāh 'Abbās. Pottery had then become generally recognized in Europe as a vehicle for picture painting, and Persia followed the lead of the West in making tilework pictures and picture-tiles which justify themselves completely by their beauty and durability of colouring. The process culminated in the garden-scenes and pictures of court life with which many buildings in Isfahan were adorned.



DETAIL OF TILEWORK PICTURE, ISFAHĀN, XVII c.

By kind permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Controller H.M. Stationery Office

POTTERY AND GLASS

PERSIAN GLASS

A few words must be said about Persian glass. In general it must be admitted that glass occupies an unimportant position in Persian art. Fine examples of mediaeval glass have been found in Persia, both enamelled and cut in facets or engraved, but it is very unlikely that these were made in Persia. Recent opinion attributes them to Syrian glasshouses. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, a distinctive type of glass was produced in Persia, under Venetian influences. The "metal" is impure and uneven but agreeable in colour—blue, bluish-green, brownish-yellow and purple as well as white. The forms are peculiar to the country, bottles with long curved and twisted neck and mouth like the gaping jaws of a snake, others with straight tapering neck and trumpet mouth, small square flasks often roughly moulded with flowers, and ewers with long curved spout flanked by wing-like appendages at the tip. More curious than beautiful are the bottles in the bulb of which is encased a group of flowers in full relief in glass paste of various colours. Graceful and pretty as much of this glass is, it cannot compete with the work of the glass-blowers of ancient Syria or of many European countries.

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TEXTILE ART

By LEIGH ASHTON

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SĀSĀNIAN TEXTILES

THE first period of Persian history for which we possess specimens of textile fabrics is that of the Sāsānian Kings (A.D. 226-642). Sāsānian Art is interesting for two reasons. It is the art of a country which is bent upon reviving its former glories, those of the Achaemenid Empire; and it is at the same time the art of a transitional period, which is bridging the gap between an old civilization and a completely new one, that of Islamic power. The vitality that was paramount in the politics of the day is also evident in the art, and it is clear that many of the characteristics of early Islamic textile design were developed under the Sāsānians. Persia in Sāsānian times was singularly well situated for commercial activity and acted as the clearing-house between Byzantium and the Far East. Of the merchandize which would pass through its gates, none was more important than the silk thread from which the highly-prized robes of the rich Persians and Byzantines were made, and it is clear that the Sāsānian weavers were brilliant designers and executants, though much may have been due to the importation in A.D. 360 of Syrian workmen. The reliefs at Tāq-i-Bostān and else-

where show clearly patterned textiles of a marked type. The designs of these textiles are highly formalised and consist of horizontal rows of motives, of which the most characteristic is the *roundel*, a circular rim containing a design of confronted animals or some more elaborate hunting scene, more rarely a single great heraldic beast. The spaces between these roundels are usually filled by some conventional diaper. When the roundels are not used a formal arrangement of various motives carries out the typical stiffness of the pattern. Some of the more common of these motives are birds, trees, beasts or gryphons, while a peculiar fluttering scarf is often found round the necks of the various animals. The silks are usually woven with a simple twill, and the colours used are mainly green, yellow, red and blue.

The same type of design was used in Byzantium, and it is impossible to say from any evidence that we possess in which country the pattern originated. The Achaemenids, as we know from the Archers' frieze at Susa, used roundels and squares, but on a much smaller and less elaborate scale, while on the other hand Roman costume of the period shows a similar use of small circles. The roundel is probably a Hellenistic decoration—an early silk at Sion shows a similar arrangement—but its adaptation to so splendid a purpose is one of the achievements of the Sāsānian designers, while the elaborate animal motives, which were adopted in as widely different countries as Mediaeval China and Ottonian Germany, are a pure Sāsānian invention, as the silver plate of the time amply attests. Its general adoption in Byzantium is probably the result of that strong taste for Oriental ideas so characteristic of fashionable

PERSIAN ART

Rome at all times of its history. Sāsānian silks may be seen in many churches and museums on the Continent, some of the best-known being in the Schloss-Museum, Berlin, the Vatican Library, Rome, and St. Ursula's, Cologne. Perhaps the most celebrated (plate opp.) is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; in design it exactly reproduces the robe which Khusrau II wears upon the relief at Tāq-i-Bostān, while its colour, a plain green, is supposed to have been the royal Sāsānian colour.

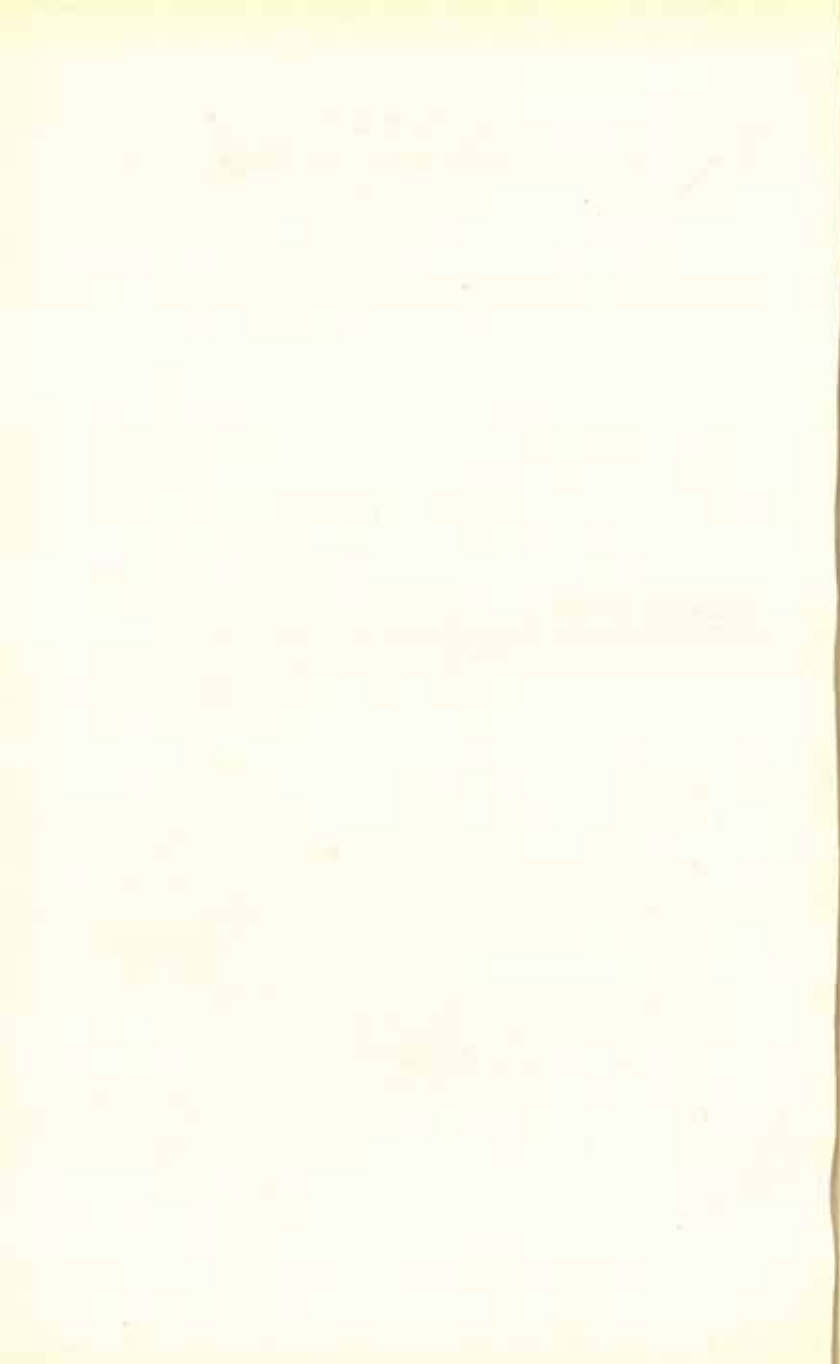
EARLY ISLAMIC TEXTILES

The early centuries of the succeeding Muhammadan era in Persia have left us practically no certain examples of textile art. But it is clear from the metalwork, the so-called *Gabrī* pottery and the fresco decoration found at Sāmarrā, that the imprint of Sāsānian design was not lightly swept aside. One of the few textiles which we can point to with certainty, the celebrated silk from St. Josse-sur-Mer, now in the Louvre, was woven, as its inscription states, in Khurāsān in the middle of the tenth century. Here the grand manner of the Sāsānians is still very much in evidence, but Khurāsān was only a division of Persia, and already the disturbed state of the Empire must have begun to have its reaction on the art of the country, a reaction which was to culminate in a new style, that of the Seljuks. An excellent example of this transitional work is the eleventh-century silk tissue at Leon with confronted animals, woven by one Abū Bakr at Baghdad. In a group of silks found recently at Ray (Rhages) the transition has already taken place, and these tissues may be taken as typical



SĀSĀNIAN SILK DAMASK, V-VI c. A.D.

By kind permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Controller H.M. Stationery Office



TEXTILE ART

of the work of weavers under the Seljuks and their successors (A.D. 1037-1256).

THE SELJUKS

The change in design is a subtle but a distinct one. The roundels or horizontal rows of motives still remain, the elaborate motives are still there, but there is an elegance about the drawing and the detail which is new. The field of the design is more broken, the immediate effect is less striking. The textile designs of the Seljuk periods are as great in their way as those of their forerunners, and in fineness of technique they have never been surpassed, but they display a more conscious art and consequently are on a different level to those of the Sāsānians. It was exactly on the same lines that in China the directness of the T'ang period (A.D. 618-906) had given way to the suavity of the Sung (A.D. 960-1279).

THE MONGOLS AND TIMURIDS

In Persia itself the Mongol invasion broke up the old civilization, and we find in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries under the Timurids a completely new type of textile design with flowing arabesque and floral motives. The orderly type of pattern is gone and the regular scrolling designs of the kind that are found in Egyptian and Mesopotamian textiles seem to have been adopted. The distinctly Chinese flavour of many of these forms is sufficiently accounted for by the Mongol invasion. It is difficult to identify any existing tissues as certainly Persian, but the type is clear from the illustrations on pottery and manuscripts. This Near Eastern type, as it should more properly be termed, was imported into

the West and influenced the early weavings of the Italian looms to no small extent.

THE SAFAVIDS

With the re-establishment of the Persian Empire under native rulers, the *Safavids* (1499-1736), an era of great prosperity and luxury developed. A large group of Safavid textiles are still in existence. The earlier and more splendid varieties of silks and velvets are distinguished by patterns with figure-subjects, for Persia did not conform to the Muhammadan rule against the representation of the human form (plate opp.). A contemporary account of the embassy to Constantinople in 1579 confirms this class of design, and the celebrated velvets at Rosenborg and Karlsruhe are examples which came to Europe in the seventeenth century. The only evidence for dating these figured velvets more closely is afforded by the costumes shown. A peculiar head-dress with a large pole-like protrusion, fashionable in Shāh Tahmāsp's reign (1524-1576), serves to mark one type, while elaborately fringed shawl head-dresses typical of Shāh 'Abbās' time (1587-1628) give us another chronological indication. The centres of weaving in Persia at this time were and still are Yazd, Kāshān, Rasht and Isfahān, while the first two of these were celebrated for their velvets.

The textiles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were most frequently decorated with motives from the animal and floral world. The most common flowers are the tulip, iris, rose and hyacinth; the most frequent animals the leopard, gazelle and hare, while the parrot often appears.



PANEL OF VELVET, PERIOD
OF SHĀH 'ABBĀS I (1587-1629)

*By kind permission of the Victoria and Albert
Museum and Controller H.M. Stationery Office*

The celebrated cone-pattern so much associated with Persian design has been considered by some to represent the flowering date-palm. Two well-known romantic tales are frequently represented, Laila visiting her lover Majnūn in the desert, and Khusrau II and Shirin.

The range of colours of the Persian weaver from the sixteenth to eighteenth century is inexhaustible, and the use of metal thread a regular feature; the motives themselves are nearly always arranged in stiff horizontal rows.

With the close of the seventeenth century the scale of the design decreases, and in the eighteenth century the design is always treated much less vigorously, the object being to achieve delicacy of effect rather than boldness of pattern. A particular type of brocade sash was much affected in this period, with close horizontal stripes terminating in broad end patterns with large floral medallions. An interesting feature of these sashes is that they were widely adopted in Poland, where a native school of weavers at Slutsk (Sluck) carried on the Persian tradition.

It is hardly to be wondered at that in a country where weaving was of so high a quality embroidery should follow suit. The most common use of embroidery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was for the covers used to wrap up ceremonial presents. Two types are outstanding, both worked in double-darning or cross-stitch on a linen ground. The first type is distinguished by elaborate geometrical pattern of the type associated with the so-called "Dragon" carpets of the Eastern Caucasus. These may be safely attributed to North-West Persia, while the second type, closer in style to

the "Animal" and "Hunting" carpets with motives from the chase and figure subjects, were more probably worked in Central Persia. Both are outstanding groups among Eastern embroideries. Another class with a special interest to English workers embraces the bath-mats, curtains, etc., of quilted cotton with floral designs, in coloured silks, which penetrated to India and England, and formed the basis of the typical Queen Anne style of bed-furniture. With these may be conveniently classed the large group of printed cottons (*qalam-kār*), which, originally produced in Persia, were soon manufactured with greater ease in India and became one of the staple exports from the East to Europe. These cottons were block-printed, and in the early seventeenth century examples finished off by hand with pigment; later, when the skill of the workers had increased, it became possible to print entirely from blocks and the expensive process of finishing by hand was abandoned. The best-known of the cotton-print designs, the celebrated "Tree of Life" pattern, was much copied and is familiar in this country from its general use on seventeenth-century crewel-work curtains.

One well-known group of embroideries remains to be mentioned. These are the so-called *naqsha*, embroidered women's trouserings, with elaborate floral patterns arranged in diagonal stripes across the body. The complicated nature of the pattern and the rich effect obtained has probably never been surpassed. It is in this extraordinary grasp of the effects obtainable by textile design that Persia has always been in the forefront of the world; and her skill in design was equalled by her skill in technique.

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CARPETS

By C. E. C. TATTERSALL

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EARLIEST SPECIMENS

OF all Persian works of art perhaps none hold a firmer place in the hearts of the Persians themselves, or are more esteemed by foreigners for their beauty and utility, than hand-woven carpets. It is somewhat surprising therefore to find how meagre is the history, especially the early history, of such an important product, and how difficult it is to be certain of the locality of origin of the earlier types. It is true that old records often mention carpets; but unfortunately they never describe clearly their exact nature; while the numerous representations in miniatures are rarely drawn with sufficient accuracy to be very useful. The obvious recourse to actual specimens is disappointing, because none of these appear to date from before the sixteenth century, and all too few fall even within that period. This paucity is of course due to the very nature and use of carpets. Manuscripts and paintings are made to be preserved; metal-work is very durable; and pottery, though fragile, is even more so; while carpets, though made of delicate fibres, are intended for hard usage; and when their deterioration sets in the progress towards

complete destruction is rapid. They are sufficiently portable, too, and sufficiently valuable to be taken far from where they were made; and they only very rarely carry with them internal evidence in the form of inscriptions and dates. These difficulties in the way of research leave much to conjecture.

When pile carpets were first made is quite unknown, but there is some reason for thinking that the art started not very far from Persia. Pile fabrics of a kind were produced in Egypt at least from the fourth century A.D.; fragments of others, more like ordinary carpets, excavated by Sir Aurel Stein in Turkestan, may perhaps be only a few centuries later in date; more or less complete carpets, confidently believed to date from the thirteenth century, are to be found in Turkey. References to Persian carpets at various dates, such as that to the Garden Carpet of Chosroes woven in the sixth century, and those of the traveller Marco Polo in the thirteenth, throw a little light on the subject, but less than would have been the case if more technical description had been given.

It seems on the whole probable that pile carpets were made in Persia well over a thousand years ago, and it is certain that the art had advanced to a high level of achievement by the end of the fifteenth century. The famous carpet from Ardabil, now one of the greatest treasures of the Victoria and Albert Museum, is of special importance to archaeologists because of its inscribed date A.H. 947—equivalent to A.D. 1540—which is a much-needed fixed mark in the chronology of these early carpets. A few examples appear to be rather earlier than this, but certainly not many.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSIAN CARPETS

It is unnecessary here to do more than mention the perfection in design, colour and workmanship that has given the carpets of Persia such an eminent place among the triumphs of textile art. Some of their prevalent characteristics, however, may be mentioned, though it is to be clearly understood that the range of variation is a wide one. In shape they are rectangular, and long rather than square. The colouring, rich and deep in tone, has, without being cold, a tendency towards blue; the ground being commonly a crimson or indigo. Yellow-reds, greens and browns are comparatively rare, and the yellows, though plentiful, have in the older carpets usually faded to an almost neutral tint. The materials used are various, but for the pile itself wool is nearly always chosen. In certain definite types silk is found instead, and very occasionally gold and silver thread is woven in among the pile by a tapestry method. For the foundation—*i.e.* the warp and the weft—wool and cotton are used about equally; and sometimes silk in the finest old pieces.

DESIGNS

The designs of Persian carpets are mainly based upon floral motives, though simple geometrical patterns occur, and occasionally figures of men and animals and other objects.

A. GARDENS

It is recorded that as early as the time of Chosroes I (A.D. 531-579) there was a carpet with a faithful representation of a garden; and this subject, more or less modified, has remained a favourite one ever



ANIMAL CARPET, XVI c.

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since. Sometimes it is given the form of a map, or plan, with flower-beds, paths, and ponds, but more frequently that of a thicket of plants and flowers. There is a tendency as times goes on for this pattern to be more regularly arranged. The blossoms become large, prominent and more conventional, and the supporting stems form a perceptible network. This stage is well exemplified by carpets of the early seventeenth century. In the next century and later, the process is carried so far that the stems become a regular diaper, and the blossoms little more than rosettes of one or two kinds. It is thus that simple patterns such as those known as the *Herātī* and the *Mīnā Khānī* have been evolved.

B. "HUNTING" SCENES

To the Persian the chase pre-eminently suggests the idea of action, as the garden does that of repose; and thus the complement to the patterns described will be found in others representing animals pursued by huntsmen or beasts of prey. A very fine example of these "Animal" or "Hunting" carpets is in the Austrian National Collection.

C. MEDALLIONS

To the above early types of design must be added another in which occurs a large central medallion of lobed outline, often accompanied by appendages stretching towards the two ends of the carpet. Such a medallion, developed in various ways, is still much used in the latest rugs.

D. BORDER

The design of Persian rugs always includes a border, which is mostly divided up into two or more parallel bands. The majority of border-patterns are

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based upon the motive of a wavy stem bearing leaves or blossoms, though often so conventionalized as to become almost geometric. Another plan is to have a row of detached devices of one or two kinds ; while sometimes the border contains a succession of variously shaped panels.

E. "VASE" CARPETS

The more formalized of the floral carpets, especially those of the early seventeenth century, so often contain vases in the pattern that "Vase" carpets have become a recognized type.

F. "POLONAIS" CARPETS

About the same time were made large numbers of rugs with a silk pile often embellished with gold and silver thread. These were apparently always intended as royal gifts to foreign potentates, and their designs differ so much in feeling from those of undoubted Persian products that questions have often been raised as to their provenance. The term "Polonais," still applied to them, is the reflection of an attribution at one time suggested. The Persian term for such carpets is *zarbaft* or *gulābatūn*.

G. LATER PATTERNS

In the eighteenth century, besides the progressively formalized versions of earlier types, are found even simpler patterns, such as rows of repeated detached flowers or "cone-devices."

LOCATION OF CARPETS

Up to this date it is not easy to determine in what parts of Persia the various carpets were made, though *Isfahān* is often regarded as the centre of pro-

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duction of the "Animal" carpets, Jōshaqān of the "Vase" carpets, and the north-west provinces of those with the large central medallions. From the eighteenth century, however, when remaining examples become much more numerous, it is mostly possible by attending to details of design and technique, as well as to colour and material, to attribute each kind of carpet to its proper district. The study of the different types is of the greatest interest, but its scope is altogether too wide for exposition here.

NINETEENTH CENTURY

The nineteenth century does not at first see much change in carpet patterns, but from about the middle of the century the influences of Western production and demand are felt in various directions. On the one hand the market for cheap rugs, and the introduction of cheap and bad dyes, alike have a detrimental effect upon quality. On the other, there is a stimulus towards the production of sumptuous silk carpets (neglected since the seventeenth century) and of carefully designed and well-woven pieces for superior furnishing purposes.

PERSIAN AND FOREIGN CARPETS

Even a casual study of the design of her carpets shows that Persia derived her inspiration chiefly from nature and borrowed but little from the art of other countries. An exception must be made in the case of China, who did supply her with various decorative devices—notably the "cloud-band"—and methods of treatment. It seems certain also that dragons and

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other Chinese animals must have been adopted ; for though these are not found in existing Persian carpets they are plentiful in early Caucasian pieces, which themselves undoubtedly derived their designs from Persian sources. This small debt Persia has amply repaid, for her patterns are found, in more or less modified form, in the rugs of Turkey, the Caucasus, Turkestan, India, and thus indirectly in those of the whole world. India, indeed, appears to owe her whole carpet industry to the fact that Akbar early in the seventeenth century introduced Persian weavers in a deliberate and successful attempt to establish the practice of carpet knotting. For a time, many of the carpets made there were so like that they can only be distinguished with difficulty from their Persian originals.

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METAL-WORK

By LEIGH ASHTON

SĀSĀNIAN SILVER UTENSILS

OF all the treasures that the ancient world has bequeathed to us possibly the most splendid is the great series of silver dishes and flagons of the Sāsānian era in Persia. The majority of these pieces are in the Hermitage at Leningrad, now that the Bobrinsky, Polovtsov and Stroganov collections have been absorbed into that museum. The reason that so many of these pieces are to be found in Russia is a simple one. The district of Perm, where most of them have been dug up, was the centre of the fur trade of the ancient East, and so the merchants from Persia would barter their silver for the fine pelts from the Russian curers.

A. DISHES

The greater part of this series consists of dishes and plates. The shape is the ordinary shallow circular one on a low foot, but there is no central depression above the foot-rim. The decoration is of various kinds, the commonest being a representation of a hunting-scene worked in *repoussé* or chiselled and often parcel-gilt. The scene covers the whole surface of the dish and there is no border. The quality of the drawing is superb and the movement of the figures and animals vivid in the extreme. One of the chief beauties of these dishes is the

extraordinary skill with which the designer fills his circular space. This skill in the treatment of circles is noticeable in other branches of Sāsānian art, especially textile-weaving. Occasionally dishes are found with borders of scrolling leaves or joined hearts. In these cases the scene in the centre is more restricted in design and in a few specimens consists of a central medallion containing a single animal, the field being left plain. Some of these last may possibly represent a later type. Very rarely the decoration is engraved and not *repoussé* (plate opp.).

B. EWERS

The *ewers* are also decorated mainly in *repoussé*. The design (on the body of the vessel) consists of panels containing figures or animals separated by foliage or formal trees, while the neck is usually decorated with a conventional design of similar character or a series of rosettes. The figures in these panels are occasionally very Hellenistic in form, as is natural, for there are many Hellenistic motives to be found in every branch of Sāsānian art. The winged dragon, however, the animal so popular in decorative design of the time, is probably not an adaptation of the Greek hippogryph, as is so often suggested, but a throw-back to an earlier motive of Middle Eastern Art. This winged dragon is found so often in Sāsānian patterns that it has been sometimes thought that the animal was a national badge and that its frequent use is in the nature of an heraldic treatment, a theory that may well be true. The use of badges was common in the Near East—the reliefs of eagles at Diarbekr and the enamelled coats of arms on Egyptian glass-vessels are typical instances—and it is



SILVER SĀSĀNIAN DISH
from
THE TREASURE OF THE OXUS

By kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum

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quite likely that the winged dragon was the family coat-of-arms of the Sāsānian kings. At all events Chosroes II (A.D. 590-628) wears it on his robe in the reliefs at Tāq-i-Bustān. It is probably from this animal that so many of the winged beasts found in Islamic design are derived.

BRONZE EWERS—SĀSĀNIAN AND MUHAMMADAN

Apart from these splendid examples of silver and gold there exists a series of ewers in bronze, the earliest of which belong to the Sāsānian era, while the latest continue well on into the Muhammadan period. The metal is plain and not inlaid, while the vessels have often only a slight ornament round the neck or foot and sometimes a decorated knop for the thumb to hold when pouring out. When the decoration is more elaborate, a similar scheme to that of the silver ewers is followed with panels of animal or figure subjects. It is possible to see from this group exactly how in one form at any rate the Islamic designers absorbed their Sāsānian prototypes.

The earlier pieces, with long, slender handles and elongated spouts, are Hellenistic in form, and only the decoration of the surface in engraving or *repoussé* shows distinctive Sāsānian motives. The first ewers of the Muhammadan era, dating roughly from the seventh to the tenth centuries, have become more elaborate and slightly different in style; the spout is more often on the body of the ewer than at the top and sometimes takes the form of an animal, while the knop for the thumb on the handle often repeats this animal representation. Fine examples of this group are to be seen in the Kaiser

Friedrich Museum, the Harari collection and the Louvre. Occasionally the whole vessel is in the form of a beast, and provides the prototypes for the mediaeval aquamanile. The animals used are strongly Sāsānian in feeling, and the whole group provides as definite a link between Sāsānian and Islamic design in metal-work as the early Gabrī pottery does in ceramics. The use of animals in the round was continued at a later period in a series of candlesticks and ewers with rows of birds or lions round the rim or embossed on the body of the piece. These vessels are usually dated in the twelfth century, but there is no doubt that some of them are earlier owing to their close connection with Sāsānian animal forms.

INLAYING AND ENGRAVING

It is noticeable that in none of this group is inlay used of any other material. It is not before the middle of the twelfth century that the practice of inlaying came into general use, the metals employed being at first silver and red copper, later gold.

The majority of the metal-work of a definitely Persian character that we possess of the intervening centuries from the ninth to the twelfth is decorated by engraving only with large surfaces of plain metal. A whole series of bronze vessels of this time, found mainly in Khurāsān, Rayy (Rhages), Hamadān, and even as far east as Samarqand, are decorated with elaborate arabesque and animal ornament and inscriptions in Kufic lightly engraved. The workmanship is fine and the decorative patterns often extremely complicated, though it must be admitted that the effect does not seem to be very striking now, except

when gilding is employed to heighten the contrast of the plain surface with the decorated. But it must be remembered that originally these pieces were highly polished, and in this case the engraved ornament would be very effective. The strength of the forms of the vessels of this date is their chief beauty and, it must be admitted, a great one.

To contrast with this plainer style of decoration, an elaborate type of inlaid bronze vessel had been gradually evolved. The main metal-work vessels with which we shall have to deal comprise basins, dishes, ewers, candlesticks, mortars, writing-cases, Qur'ān boxes and the two astronomical instruments, the celestial globe and the astrolabe. By about 1150, in North Persia and in Mesopotamia at Mosul, this type of inlay had worked out a formula which was destined to become widely popular in the East. The type of decoration itself consisted mainly of bands of elaborate ornament depicting animals and human beings, or inscriptions, or medallions with hunting-scenes in the Sāsānian manner. The human figures are short, squat little people wearing Arab costume, the robe girdled at the waist, a turban on the head. It is noticeable that all the inscriptions on metal-work of the period are in Arabic, though the people of the country undoubtedly spoke Persian. The method of executing this inlay was first to engrave the surface with the design and then lay the thinnest foil of silver or gold over each section to be so treated, the engraved edges being beaten down over the edge of the inlaid metal to hold it in position, thus achieving a kind of cloison. The interspaces of the design were filled with a flat bituminous composition of a black colour.

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As the surfaces to be covered in a complicated design were numerous and often extremely small, the skill and labour were enormous. In addition, each little piece of precious metal was as a rule elaborately engraved after it was in position. Examples of these types are to be found in all big public museums (plate opp.).

It is exceptionally difficult to distinguish the pieces made in Persia from those made at Mosul, more particularly as there may well have been an interchange of workmen between the various towns, since both the countries were ruled by related princes. The Persian examples that we can definitely claim as such—there are a few inscribed pieces which fix their provenance, such as the ewer from Nakhchawān bequeathed by Monsieur Piet-Latauderie to the Louvre, and the cauldron from Zanjān in the Bobrinsky Collection—seem to possess an extra modicum of elegance in the form of the vessel, an extra modicum of finesse in the planning of the decoration, but there is little definite difference, and it is a bold man who would claim to prognosticate on the two styles without an inscription to help him.

METAL-WORK, A.D. 1258-1500

With the fall of the Caliphate in 1258 there seems to have been a lull in the industry of metal-work in Persia and at Mosul. It is more than likely that many of the artists migrated for the time being to Cairo, but with the return of the Timurids the work once again started in full flow in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Now, however, there is a very distinct difference in the style of the decoration. The planning of the pattern is still the same,



BRONZE CANDLESTICK, XIII c.

By kind permission of R. Harari, Esq.

METAL-WORK

but the figures are of a more graceful type, while the long, flowing robes and elegant head-dresses belong to the new Persian civilization and are no longer Arab. The inscriptions also are not in Kufic, the Persian script being employed.

Timurid metal-work is the last phase of the mediaeval style of decoration which was used to such splendid purpose in Persia, at Mosul, in Syria, and in Egypt. It is a type of applied art of the very front rank for skill in both design and execution; indeed, the art of metal inlay has never been employed anywhere else in the history of the world with such success.

METAL-WORK UNDER THE SAFAVIDS

Under the Safavid rulers (1502-1736) the Persian style grows rapidly more distinctively indigenous. The scrolling arabesques become of the flowing type found on carpets and manuscripts, while the treatment of animals and human figures becomes more pictorial. The bold flavour of the earlier decorative pieces gives way to a more delicate but weaker type of pattern, while the whole of the design is on a much smaller scale. The use of bands of pattern ceases, except for an inscription round the rim or foot, and the surface is entirely covered with close scrolling forms which approximate to a diaper. Occasionally inset cartouches bearing an inscription or the name of the artist provide a contrast. The whole effect degenerates rapidly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into a stiff, conventional type of decoration, only relieved by the black niello with which the ground of the vessel is almost invariably treated. By the eighteenth century this conventionality has all the marks of a stereotyped planning, and though

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this is clever enough the glory has departed from Persian metal-work.

INLAYING OF STEEL

Almost the only new invention of this last phase of Persian metal-work is the inlaying of steel, for which under the earlier rulers of the Safavid dynasty metal-workers were celebrated. This inlay, which consists as a rule of some delicate arabesque or inscription inlaid in gold on the plain steel surface, was often very happily employed. Later, like the bronze work, it deteriorated into a conventional type of decoration, which rapidly lost all its charm.

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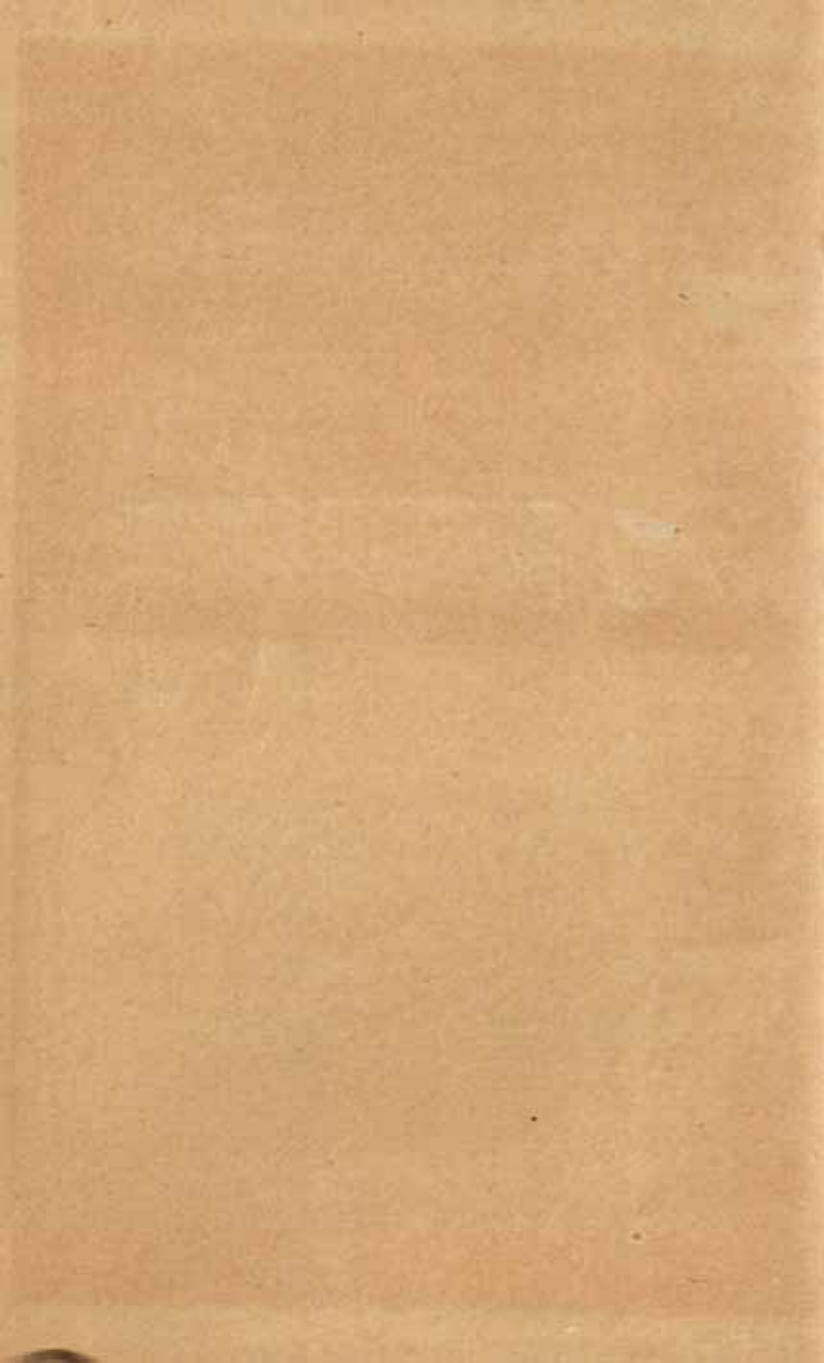
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