PERSIAN LACQUER PAINTING IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

PERSIAN LACQUER PAINTING IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

Lacquer, as a medium for artistic expression, was not readily chosen by Persian artists before the late Safavid period.

It was during the Qajar period that delicately painted miniatures on various surfaces drew the attention of the European market to the talent of Persian artists.

Although some well known scholars have devoted their time to document artefacts from this period, a systematic study of the techniques and stylistic developments has not yet been produced.

The purpose of this thesis is to fill this gap.

Qalamdâns, mirror cases, book covers and enamels painted by both well known and less well known artists were selected and compared and, with the aid of comparative material, a chronology of stylistic development was established.
Attention has been paid to the way artists related to the various surfaces to be decorated, their handling of figural representations, floral depictions and other naturalistic elements, and the influence of the Islamic heritage on the choice of subject matter.

The qualitative treatment of large surfaces, such as canvas or walls, and small surfaces, such as qalamdāns, book covers and mirror cases was strikingly different. While the figural representations which are depicted on small surfaces and based on foreign models are both delicate and dynamic, those based on live models, such as the ruler or patron or even battle scenes, appear to be stiff.

The treatment of perspective is also notably different. It is virtually absent in large pictures, but invariably present on qalamdāns and mirror cases.

The European influence is discernible in most of the paintings, but each artist introduced his individual approach to the stylistic execution of the subject matter.

Artists on the whole preferred to keep the technique of colour preparation to themselves or to hand down the
knowledge to their students orally. Interviews were conducted with a number of Persian artists who were willing to provide information about some of the techniques practised by their predecessors, thereby enabling us to gain a valuable insight into the methods used by artists in the Qajar period.

Last, but not least, the historical environment and patronage which undoubtedly influenced artists also received considerable attention.
INTRODUCTION

Lacquer-work of the Far-East, namely China and Japan, has been thoroughly and efficiently documented. Detailed studies describe the technical developments and the artistic endeavour. Islamic lacquer-work in general, but Persian in particular, has not received the same degree of attention until fairly recently.\(^1\) One of the reasons for this may be the lack of systematic chronology and cataloguing of the available material, which is scattered all over the world in museums and private collections.

There are sufficient numbers of known, documented and exhibited artefacts, however, which provide an adequate amount of information regarding the techniques and styles the artists used in the production of these items, that warrant a systematic and scientific evaluation of the subject.

It is important to bear in mind that any form of art or architecture is a manifestation of the particular culture in question and a reflection of its unity and diversity. In order to understand both, the particular culture on the one hand and the chosen art form on the other have to be simultaneously evaluated within the historical and religious framework which determines both.
During the course of this thesis reference will be made to the relevant Sūra of the Qur'ān in order to demonstrate the power of the language to which the painters of lacquered objects were subjected every day of their lives.

As a medium for artistic expression, lacquer - strictly speaking - was not chosen by the Persian artists until the late Safavid period. This is not to say, however, that no lacquered artefacts were produced prior to the sixteenth century.

Lacquer was widely used in the Far-East and it was therefore virtually impossible that no lacquered artefacts would appear in the markets of Persia. There was a popular and busy trade-route between China and Persia where products of the minor arts were exchanged. The rate of exchange depended on the supply and demand ratios.

The fact that only a small number of lacquered items can be traced to the early period of the history of lacquer in Persia is significant for a number of considerations:

(1) Were the artists able to produce lacquer which matched up to the quality of the Far-Eastern products?
(2) Closely related to the first point is the availability of good quality raw material. The source of lacquer in Persia is different from that of the Far-East and this may have determined the quality of the finished article.

(3) Patronage is another factor which determined the number of artefacts produced. Unfortunately, there is not enough information available from the early years of lacquer production which deals with the question of patronage. More information on patronage is available from the period under study in this thesis and it will be expounded under the relevant section.

(4) Miniature painting was the most popular medium and invariably the same artists were involved in producing both lacquer and miniatures. The artists were in a position to choose the medium which was thought to be the right one for a particular representation and their choice must have been influenced by the fact that they already possessed considerable expertise in miniature painting.
There was an increase in the popularity of lacquer painted objects from the sixteenth century onwards and it reached its peak during the Qajar period.

There are various pieces, selectively chosen, which have been published and evaluated from this period, but there are equally important ones which have not.

Throughout the history of art, cases are mentioned where artists chose not to divulge to anyone their knowledge of a particular technique; this meant that their secrets died with them. In the appropriate chapter I will discuss the names of such artists as I personally attach a great deal of importance to the acquisition of such knowledge. Therefore I made direct contact with living artists or the descendants of artists who are or were in possession of such information. A significant portion of this study will be devoted to the description, as well as the evaluation, of this information. It will add an extra dimension to the art-historical analysis of lacquer art during the Qajar period because it provides an insight into the spiritual as well as the technical aspirations of the artists and the circumstances which determined their art. At the same time it might throw some light on the current social trends which made demands on the artists, thereby indirectly steering the course of artistic development in a particular direction.
In every known culture, religion has always played an influential part in all walks of life; therefore it is inevitable that it manifested itself in artistic expression also. The religious element in Islam is perhaps stronger than in other cultures. There is no universally accepted formula for its representation in the Islamic world and therefore it is as diverse as the art of Christianity.

Sunnis and Shi'as, as the two major branches of Islam, as well as the Sufis, made their contribution to Islam's plurality, which is invariably reflected in the various representative arts. There are, however, universal imperatives in the Qur'ān which serve as guidelines for convergence in content.

During the course of Chapter One the techniques involved in the production of lacquerwork will be discussed with reference to some material which has already been briefly looked at by other scholars. The major reference material on which this thesis is based has not yet been evaluated at all; at best it has been only very sketchily described in various catalogues, yet it is extremely rich both in artistic and informative value. The second Chapter will be devoted to the lacquer produced during
the Safavid and Zand periods; Chapters Four and Five will
deal with the lacquer produced during the Qajar period.

The religious motivation behind the artists' work is
another dimension which will be mentioned wherever
pertinent. However, by the very nature of this
motivation, any analysis must belong to the world of
speculation.

The task is much easier when the technique and choice of
medium for these reflections are discussed. The evidence
is visible, verifiable, and readily available for
evaluation. Most of the items under discussion are
photographed and are included where appropriate with an
illustration number.\textsuperscript{2} Drawings will also be included
wherever detailed discussion requires additional visual
information.
INTRODUCTION: FOOTNOTES

1. cf. for example various articles in PDFCA, 11, June 1981; Fehérvári, "Near and Middle East and India", in *Lacquer, an International History and Collector's Guide*, and Haldane, *Islamic Bookbindings in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. For full publication details of these and other references and abbreviations, see bibliography.

2. Unless otherwise specified, all the material referred to and illustrated in the thesis belongs to private collections in London, New York and Switzerland.
CHAPTER ONE

PERSIAN LACQUER TECHNIQUE

Lacquer art originated in the Far East, whence it exerted influence over the countries which were to produce lacquer artefacts of their own.¹ It was first adopted in Iran then in Turkey and India.

Before Persian lacquer is evaluated, the term 'lacquer' has to be clarified. According to Sir Harry Garner, the term entered the English language in the 17th century. It may have been derived from the word 'lac', which is of Hindustani origin, describing a material produced from the exudate of a particular type of Indian or Indo-Chinese tree. It is a dark red gum and is collected as solid resin from the twigs of the tree. In the eighteenth century, the word 'shellac' was used to describe layers of the dried material.²

When the raw lacquer is tapped it first appears as a viscous, creamy grey liquid which on exposure to air turns dark brown and later still, dull black.³

In China, lacquer was applied in the form of thin layers, mostly on materials such as wood or fabric. It sets as a hard and durable protective layer.⁴ Lacquer was also
used as an adhesive on wooden artefacts. According to another reference, in China lacquer is obtained from the sap of a tree called *Rhus verniciflua* or *Rhus succedanea*. It was applied possibly as an adhesive, but certainly as a protective top layer, as early as 1027-771 BC. Later excavations revealed specimens which were painted with red and black lacquer, presumably the pigment was mixed with the lacquer and applied with a brush.

It is not until 206-221 AD, that the actual method of lacquer painting is revealed: "The most sophisticated method for making the base of lacquer objects can be seen on the cylindrical cups and boxes, often on those with the most exquisite decoration. The technique is referred to as 'dry lacquer'. A form, of the correct size and shape for the internal dimensions of the vessel, was first made of wood or clay. Layers of cloth (usually hemp or ramie) and lacquer were applied over this and when dry, the wood or clay form was removed. More layers of lacquer could then be applied followed by polishing. The resulting object was thin and light, but strong, and less liable to warp than those for which a wooden base was used."
Information on a slightly different technique was provided by some artefacts discovered during the excavation of sites dating to the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD. The surfaces of these wooden vessels were covered with a lacquer composition before the ground colour and then the decoration in lacquer was applied. Sometimes the wood was covered with a layer of fabric which was embedded in the lacquer composition. In some examples another method of 'dry lacquer' was used; this involved the use of fabric only, without the wooden base. As it turned out, the 'fabric only' improved the durability of the object.\(^10\) This technique was far superior to the earlier techniques, which created controversy amongst some scholars. The controversy was over whether previous techniques should or should not be classified as 'proper lacquer'.\(^11\)

Oil-based paints were introduced during the Han dynasty, probably to extend the range of colours which were miscible with lacquer.\(^12\) Metal foils, mainly gold and silver, were also used during the Han dynasty,\(^13\) and the use of these two elements may have inspired some of the Persian artists discussed below to try to emulate their effect.
The Japanese lacquer technique differed somewhat from the Chinese. Gold and silver powders were bound together with glue and applied with a brush to a lacquer surface, which served to protect the artefact as well as providing a suitable surface for decoration.  

In Islamic art, the term "lacquer painting" is different from what is understood as Chinese or Japanese lacquer painting. "True lacquer painting appears never to have been produced in early Islamic art; the proper technical term should really be 'lacquered' or 'varnished' painting".  

The reason why it should be called 'varnished' rather than 'painted' is because the colour was not mixed with the lacquer and then painted onto the surface. Instead, a different technique was used. After the surface received the necessary pre-treatment, a layer of lacquer was applied and allowed to dry. The decoration was painted onto this surface. This step was followed by the application of another layer of varnish or lacquer. The choice of 'paint' changed during the history of lacquer painting and this aspect will be discussed further below.
Only few examples of painted lacquer artefacts remain from the early period. Bookbindings are rare, but this may be explained by the fact that the base material, papier-maché, was rather fragile and therefore prone to disintegration.

There is an extant lacquer painted panel in the Lester Wolfe Collection which is discussed by E. Grube in detail. During the course of his discussion Grube speculates that lacquer technique in Persia may have been intended primarily for panel painting. It is quite feasible that the papier-maché which was prepared for decoration during this period was not strong enough for artefacts which were used in everyday life, therefore the lacquer technique as described by Grube was intended for special objects only.

If this were the case, then the question why lacquer technique was not applied readily to objects which would have provided a much stabler background, such as wood or metal, is a valid one. The possible explanations or answers to this question will be considered in the following chapters.

This chapter, as indicated by its title, will deal with the description and evaluation of the development of
lacquer technique in Persia during the 18th and 19th centuries. To indicate the enormity of the task a quotation from a paper by B.W. Robinson is cited as an introduction: "Qajar lacquer painting is indeed a vast subject. An enormous quantity of high quality material is available, a number of these bear the names of the artists often with dates. It was suggested at the beginning that systematic organisation of this material was necessary, collecting biographical particulars of the artists from civic records (if any survive), or old letters, or oral tradition in their native places; and their grouping, so far as possible, into definite areas, schools and periods of activity".¹⁸

Mr Robinson's proposition that "Qajar lacquer painting" should be systematically evaluated is the task of this thesis. In order to obtain a true picture of the stylistic development, the prevalent style of the period preceding it will be discussed and illustrated briefly. Information concerning the techniques involved in lacquer-making prior to the Qajar period is rather sparse and will receive attention only briefly. It was possible, however, to obtain several oral descriptions of the recipes of lacquer techniques from living restorers and relatives of nineteenth century artists and these will serve as the backbone to this chapter.
The importance of such oral information in an art form where technical and artistic know-how did not assume a written form but were handed down from generation to generation—in some cases dying out with a particular master—cannot be stressed enough. Oral communications of this nature are extremely difficult to verify. They can only be backed up by visual evidence—namely the works of art produced by the deceased artists (whose technique may be known to the descendants only). Their publication, therefore should be taken on trust.

Some of the techniques described in this study agree completely or only partially with already published material. Some new ideas, which may be contradictory to what has been published, will also be put forward and discussed. It is this seemingly contradictory evidence that shall be weighed up first.

One of the first and perhaps most important techniques while making lacquered objects was the preparation of the marqash and zarak surfaces. It is stated in a study by Dr. Kiani that "marqash... is a mineral soil mixed with a silvery metal colour".19
It is possible that Dr. Kiani found some evidence to support this claim. However, according to the evidence which is offered during the course of this thesis, this does not appear to be so. On the basis of this new evidence, an attempt shall be made to contest this claim and offer the counter-assertion, that *marqash* means "a dazzling golden surface".

During our research a *qalamdān* came to light in a private collection. It is signed by Ḥajjī Muḥammad and dated 1116/1704. (plate 1A and B) This particular *qalamdān*, will be discussed thoroughly during the course of the thesis under the appropriate section. This *qalamdān* is relevant here to the discussion of *marqash* because it seems to be the only example which indicates that an attempt was made to produce a different type of *marqash* effect by the application of another technique. The surface of the *qalamdān* was subjected to the traditional preparatory technique. At the next step, however, that is to say at the application of the *marqash*, instead of using gold powder or golden specks, the artist applied flattened gold wire approximately a millimetre in thickness. The whole surface of the *qalamdān* was closely and tightly wound around with the wire in such a way that none of the underlying background could be seen. The gold wire was covered with translucent paint and varnished.
The "striped" effect created by the flat wire is clearly visible beneath the deep red background in Plate 1A. The decorative motifs were applied on top of the varnished surface, which then received the final finishing touch, roğhan kamān, for its preservation and protection. Roğhan kamān plays an important part in lacquer decoration, but before the preparation of roğhan kamān is discussed, a description of the margash technique is offered.

Preparation of the Margash

In 1971 an interview was made with the artist and restorer Mr. Bahavār, a descendant of a family deeply involved in art and at the same time one of the only remaining students of Kamāl al-Mulk, the most eminent court artist of Nasr al-Dīn Shāh. Kamāl al-Mulk was the founder of the modern school of art in Iran and was himself educated in Europe. He was responsible for creating a school in and around the second half of the 19th century which was very much influenced by the European style. As was the tradition in Iran for members of artists' families, Mr. Bahavār was also an accomplished artist and a skillful restorer. In his case, it was fortunate that the application of the margash
technique had been handed down by his predecessor, thus enabling him to practise this art form for over fifty years.

His account of how *marqash* was prepared is as follows:

In order to obtain *marqash*, lumps of pyrite, otherwise known as 'fool's gold' because of its golden colour, were mixed together with large chunks of rock salt crystals. Pyrite is a mineral, iron disulphide, which crystallises in the cubic system. To achieve a homogenous mixture of the two substances, the lumps were crushed with a hammer. The hardness of the salt crystals caused the mineral to flake. The salt was then separated from the pyrite by dissolving it in water. After the separation was effected, the artist mixed the golden flakes with gum arabic, yielding a viscous liquid suspension, which is in fact liquid *marqash*.

The next stage in the sequence of producing the lacquer painted artefact was the application of the *marqash* to the previously prepared surface of the object.

The brush was dipped into the liquid *marqash* and with a flick of the wrist this was sprayed onto the surface of the object. This action was repeated several times until an even but thin golden layer was achieved. The object
was allowed to dry before the next stage of the preparation procedure.

When the object was completely dry, it was burnished with a piece of agate in order to render the surface as smooth as possible. The object was now ready for the application of the first thin layer of roghan kamān.

There is another technique which is often confused with marqash, called zarak. In this case, small specks of gold are used. Whilst a sparkling effect is created by the marqash technique, with zarak, a smooth gold background is achieved.

The same artist described another technique practised by artists for the preparation of zarak. It involved mixing the flakes of gold with fine grit or salt and placing the mixture in a metal box, usually of tin. The bottom of the box was pierced with very fine holes, large enough for the gold particles to fall through. On shaking, most of the gold particles were released from the grit, fell through the holes and dispersed over the prepared surface of the artefact.

In order to make the flakes adhere to the surface of the object, the 'wet' preparation was applied. Either gum
arabic or serisholm was applied. The surface was not allowed to dry until after the gold background was produced.

It was difficult to calculate exactly the amount of gold needed to produce a thin but even distribution. Invariably some remained attached to the grit. This problem was solved by washing the mixture with water, which neutralised the mechanical bond holding the gold, the grit, or the salt together.

Preparation of the Roghan Kamān

Roghan kamān is a versatile and vital substance in lacquer technique. It is impervious to acids, water and dust; therefore it is ideal as a final application on an object, to ensure its protection.

The first thin layer was applied to the object, allowed to dry, and then followed by more applications. At this stage the object was ready to receive the painted decoration and it was up to the individual artist to choose the subject matter of his painting. He could choose to leave a gold background or to produce a
translucent or a transparent surface. In order to obtain either of the latter, colour was mixed in with the roghan kamān and applied to the gold background. By this technique a three dimensional effect was produced, where the background seems to recede into the object, while the painted decoration stands out.  

Dr. Kiani put forward the following reference on the preparation of roghan kamān: according to the Iranian artist and lacquer expert Mosaver al-Mulki, the following were necessary for the preparation of varnished (roghan kamān) objects: "... Sandarous, or Sandarach, which is similar to amber, and linseed, in equal proportions. They must be boiled until perfectly mixed. The preparation is applied after covering the surface with hot glue. It should be noted that several methods were common for the surface preparation of different objects". Mr. Mosaver al-Mulki also gives four other instances of surface preparation for qalamdāns and mirror cases such as moji (wavy - plate 2), abri (cloudy - plate 3), talā'ī (golden - plates 4 and 5), and siyāh (black - plates 6 and 7). Other common backgrounds will be discussed in the appropriate chapters.

Another method for the preparation of roghan kamān was given by a living Iranian artist and restorer by the name
Mr. Muhammad 'Ali Moyenī is involved in the practical preparation of rōghan kamān, which he uses to revarnish old pen-boxes. According to his method, the basic ingredients consist of between 55-65% sesame-seed oil, mixed with between 10-15% jalā oil and approximately 10-15% sandarous, which can be classed as a resin and is obtained from the exudate of plants, especially firs and pine. The sesame-seed oil is brought to the boil in an appropriate container and during the boiling process the necessary additives are added. The container is shaped in such a way that the maximum protection is given to the liquid within from the flames, because of the highly inflammable nature of the constituents.

The odour is very unpleasant and this creates a problem for the artists, because on the one hand ventilation must be provided, while at the same time a dust free environment has to be maintained.

The mixture is simmered for days in order to effect the separation of the oil from the other liquids and solids. After the simmering procedure is completed, the mass is allowed to cool in a controlled environment.
Owing to the specific gravity of the other ingredients, they sink to the bottom of the container, while the oil rests on the surface. However, the simmering process does not assure complete purification, therefore subsequently, multiple filtering have to be carried out. Finally the transparent and purified oil is decanted and stored under suitable conditions.

One of the inherent qualities of the aromatic oils to which roğhan kamān belongs is instability. Therefore, it is advisable to have only small batches prepared at each time.

The application of roğhan kamān is achieved through multiple rather than single layers; the customary number ranges between ten and twelve. The object is allowed to dry for between ten to twenty-four hours between applications, with the sporadic addition of such catalysts that assist the reduction of the drying period. Other varnish oils take several days to dry.

Finally, a mirror-finish is achieved through this layer-by-layer application. The interviewee maintained that this technique was practised by his predecessors four generations back. This would mean that it must have been
one of the established techniques during the Qajar period.

If the method described above is compared to that outlined by Sir John Chardin, it becomes evident that there is not one single universal lacquer making procedure. During his travels, Chardin noted and later reported the following observations on a technique which was apparently practised in Isfahan in the seventeenth century:

"Shellac is melted by being held over the fire until rendered plastic. It is then placed on a stone and a small amount of pigment (previously dissolved in water or oil) is deposited within a hollow formed on the surface. This is closed over and the lac vigorously hammered and pulled out with the hands until the colour is uniformly mixed. The hammering causes an increase in the temperature of the substance and the result of this operation is a mixture which gradually assumes the consistency of India rubber". 25

To date, there is no sure evidence to show whether the two different techniques were practised in the same area or they were specific to one particular artistic community only. The fact that shellac is a substance
which is dependent on two factors, the insects that produce it and the type of vegetation the insects feed on, can be considered to be evidence in itself for the location of its application which is probably restricted to the areas where these two conditions are prevalent.

A technique briefly described by Oliver Watson is similar to, but not as specific as, the one obtained from the above mentioned interview with Mr. Moyeni.²⁶

It can be concluded on the basis of this evidence, that a number of techniques existed for the preparation of the constituents of what is called 'lacquer technique' during the last century and which are still practised today.

Manufacture of Moulds and Qalamdâns

In order to make any type of shaped Persian lacquer work, the availability of a specific basic material has to be ensured. Today, as in the past, this basic material is papier-maché. The method of preparing papier-maché has remained unchanged throughout the centuries. What has changed, however, is the type of paper used in the manufacturing process. Some objects were made from
papier-maché composed of newsprint only, and some were made from a combination of newsprint and rice paper pasted on top of each other. Originally, rice paper was used because of its exceptionally long life, for which reason it was considered to be the most suitable process.

In general, the paper-board maker usually sat before a large flat polished stone slab measuring approximately 50 cms square and 12-15 cms in thickness. As a base, a superior quality white paper was placed on the stone, overlapping it by approximately 2 cms all round. The paper was thoroughly soaked in water to ensure that removal would not present a problem later. Following this procedure, the soaked newsprint or rice paper was immersed in a large vat of glue and laid carefully upon the base paper. The process was repeated until the desired thickness was obtained. During the immersion process precautions were taken to exclude air-bubbles by repeatedly squeezing the sheets of paper together. After this procedure was completed, another sheet of fine paper was placed on top of the whole and weighed down for a few days by a flat wooden board.

The compact, solid, layered paper mass or board which resulted from this procedure was cut to size with a jazān, a blade originally used for cutting leather.
(plates 8 and 9) This method was suitable only for the production of flat surfaces, not for shaped ones which were necessary for the manufacture of mirror-cases or book bindings and boxes.

Wooden or clay moulds were used for shaped objects. Qalamdāns, which will be discussed in detail later, required two moulds, one for the outer slip-cover, and one for the inner drawer box. (figs. 1 and 2) For the cover, the solid wood mould was heavily soaped, then paper-coated by the method described above, with periodical beating and brushing. After obtaining the right consistency, it was dried, one end was cut off and shaped into the final form of drawer cover.

Most of the artists had their own pen-box maker who prepared the initial mould from which the basic shell was made. The seal of the maker can be found on the inside lip of the base of the outer cover of the more important pieces.

Patrons expected the pieces to be perfect, not only for aesthetic reasons, but because care and precision during production gave them added strength. In order to ensure smooth movement of the inner compartment within the cover, a thin strip of leather was stuck to its base.
Fig. 1  "PLAN" OF A TYPICAL QALAMDAN

a. base of sliding cover;
b. top and sides of sliding cover;
c. side of inner drawer.
Fig. 1A "PLAN" OF A TYPICAL QALAMDAN.

a. base of sliding cover;
b. top and sides of sliding cover;
c. side of inner drawer.
Fig. 2 "PLAN" OF A TYPICAL QALAMDAN

a. base of sliding cover;
b. top and sides of sliding cover;
c. side of inner drawer.
This was covered with a layer of lacquer to facilitate easy movement.

The dimensions of the drawer were built up to match exactly the dimensions of the outer mould. After the drying procedure the outer mould was removed and the piece that was previously cut off from the end was affixed to one end of the drawer. The product was then subjected to a thorough sanding and finishing until the two parts fitted exactly. (fig. 3)

Besides papier-maché, wooden moulds were also used. These were well cleaned before use and were the exact size of the internal part of the pen-box. A sheet of paper was attached to the cardboard body with the aid of serisholm approximately one millimetre in thickness, but this varied according to the instruction of the artist in charge. The intended pen-box and the mould were dried together.

The removal of the cardboard presented some difficulty, but this was overcome by making an incision and a precise straight line with a jazān. (plates 8 and 9) Usually the surface was slightly creased because it was not very easy to control the setting of the cardboard inside the wooden mould.
Fig. 3 TYPICAL RECIPROCATING "CUTS" ON THE TOP OF QALAMDĀNS.
After the dry body was removed, it was subjected to a polishing process which entailed the use of a suspension made up from a mixture of emery and synca, one-fifth and four-fifths respectively. This procedure was followed by gentle rubbing, cleaning, polishing and grinding until it was smooth and shiny.28

Information on another way of making moulded objects was also obtained from the artist Mr. Bahavār.29 It involved the following procedure: a light, sticky substance was prepared, usually out of starch. The mould was polished and then covered with soap, paraffin or any oily material that would prevent sticking. Ordinary paper with various designs was immersed in water and placed inside the mould. This procedure was repeated 20-30 times, each time with the addition of a new sheet of paper and some more glue, until a reasonable thickness was built up. When the desired thickness was achieved, a sheet of oiled paper was placed on top of the layered mass and beaten gently with a light hammer.

The mould was left for a few days to dry completely, because had it remained slightly wet, the desired shape would not have been achieved. In order to remove the penholder from the mould, lines where the incisions would be
made on the top were carefully marked with a pen and then cut with a sharp knife.

A mould for the tipped end was made in the same manner and the two parts stuck together. The unevenness of the surface was removed by sanding and finally the desired paint applied.  

George Watt mentions a technique which he calls Kashmir papier-maché. This technique is similar to the one discussed above, and is described in the following manner:

"Kashmir papier-maché in its true form differs considerably from that of Europe. The paper is never exactly reduced to a pulp. It is simply softened and pasted together layer upon layer within a mould until, by repeated slow drying and replacing within the mould while additions are made, the article attains the correct shape and desired thickness. While moist, it is wrapped around with a thin muslin rag and covered with a layer of dressing material said to be plaster-of-Paris (or gach). The article is next smoothed and rubbed down till it is given the required uniform surface to allow for the ground colour (zamīn) being imparted. When this is dry, the pattern is painted in water colours and when
thoroughly set, is glazed by the purest and most transparent varnish procurable".31

During the interview with Mr. Moyeni valuable information was obtained concerning the methods the artists used in order to transfer the design onto the lacquered artefact.32

Gardeh is made by the artists, mostly on occasions when they had to reproduce certain designs more than once. These are usually repetitive geometric patterns designed specially for border decoration and later illumination on a special artefact. Gardeh was also used for the outlines of single figures which were to be reproduced more than once. (Plates 10-12) Gardeh, in other words, was a pattern and the artists kept an extensive collection of them in various sizes.

This does not mean, however, that a pattern was invariably used for painting onto lacquered artefacts. Its use depended on the degree of difficulty involved in repeating a particular design.

This method involved the following steps: the decorative motifs were first drawn onto a paper similar to ordinary tracing paper, which is called gardeh. A special tool was
used to make tiny perforations following the contours of the drawing; these holes were made less than a pinhead apart. Then the gardeh was placed on top of the object to be decorated and with a gentle rubbing action, red vegetable powder, American clay powder or black powder, obtained from Chinese ink, was applied. The powder penetrated through the holes, thereby transferring the whole design through the gardeh onto the object. The object was placed into a dust-free glass case immediately and with the aid of a sharply pointed brush and water colour, the lines were rendered permanent.

It is known to have taken between ten months and three years for the artist to complete the water colour painting and the illumination on a special artefact, probably commissioned by a patron. The final procedure involved the application of the protective coating in a dust free environment.

The generally accepted methods of preparation of most of the colours will be described later. At this stage the slightly different descriptions of the techniques which were obtained from the above mentioned artist and from Mr. Moyeni will be discussed.
Attention was drawn to the basic ingredients these artists used to make the water colours, which were the following:

1. During the production of a number of colours including yellow, white, red, green and black, arsenic ruby of sulphur proved to be an excellent, but dangerous raw material because of its high toxicity.
2. Aluminium or potassium sulphate, generally referred to as alum, was the basic ingredient in the preparation of most colours;
3. Copper acetate, which appears as a green layer on the surface of copper objects, proved to be an ideal source for green;
4. Mercury, which produces an amalgam with most metals;
5. la'al or rubies, which were ground to provide a red pigment;
6. The root of a plant, which is sometimes red and sometimes yellow;
7. Zāk, which is a mineral crystal salt;
8. Myrtle, which is a tree, whose green leaves are used to make pigments for water colours.

All of these ingredients are subjected to a special separation procedure, mixed with the lac, dried and ground to a fine powder. The resulting powder can be dissolved in water. Lac, which is mostly obtained from
the tragacanth tree, is not soluble in cold water. With heating and simmering, the consistency and viscosity of the resulting mixture is easily controlled, yielding a translucent water colour which can be thinly or heavily applied to the surface to be decorated.

**Preparation of the Colours**

The preparation of the colours was extremely important. Vegetable and mineral dyes were used almost exclusively, except for cochineal which was made of dried insect bodies. This was mainly used for producing a scarlet colour. The bodies of the insects would be impregnated with the juice of red grapes, covered up and dried in the heat of the sun. The product was then pulverised and was ready for mixing with a suitable binder, which could be albumin, or serisholm. Mixing the scarlet dye and carmine yielded a crimson coloured pigment.

Cochineal does not come from a singular species of insect. The principal type is called the kermes insect (*Coccus ilicis*) which lives on oak trees. Another less important species is the *Coccus lacca*, which lives on fig trees and was imported from India. A third variation of red, called Armenian red, was obtained from a species of
plant from the Caucasus, the *Porphyrophora kammellii* which is grown at the foot of Mount Ararat.

In the sixteenth century, Mexican *cochineal* (*Coccus cacti*) was widely distributed through Europe and the Levant. These insects belong to the same group and live on the *opuntia*. In order to produce a large quantity of these insects, the right plant on which they prefer to multiply must be cultivated. Each species yields its own more or less distinct shade of red. The way the insects are killed, whether by pouring hot water or alcohol over them, or the way they are dyed, makes no difference. After the discovery of America good quality reds were obtained from American clays. A good pigment mixture would comprise at least 90% mineral colour and the rest made up of binder.

*Indigo* was dried in a vat and used for practically all shades of blue. For a while it was grown in Persia, specifically Kirman, but later it was imported from Bengal and from an area near Ormuz.

It is extremely important that the indigo plant should have reached complete maturity, otherwise the colour would not stand up to the test of time. The quality and
tone of the colour would be inferior to that produced from a mature plant.

Blue colours were also produced from mineral salts such as copper oxide, but as this proved to be lethal, it was abandoned. Another popular source of blue, lapis lazuli, was also favoured in Europe. The same procedure was applied to this semi-precious stone, as to the other minerals: it was ground into a very fine powder and then mixed with a binder. The disadvantage of lapis lazuli was its cost therefore, whenever possible, blue was derived from indigo.

Madder, a herbaceous climbing plant with yellowish flowers, is a source for colours ranging from the shade of the lightest rose to deepest the ruby. The intensity of the colour depends on the amount of the pulverised root of the plant used. The variation in hue, whether red with a bluish or a yellowish tint, depends on the age of the root. For example, a fully ripened seven year old root gives a rich bluish red, while a three year old provides a sharp brick red. The plant could be used in its cultivated form as well as in its wild form.

Another factor to be considered when making dyes is the type and concentration of the various additives. Hydrogen
sulphate, alum or potassium salts affect the intensity and the depth of the shade. The above mentioned dyes which give a red colour, especially the lighter shades, do not give a long lasting colour if used alone; therefore they are mixed together with madder. This combination gives a deeper, more exciting blue-red than madder alone.

The red called düghi is a madder which is slightly modified with the addition of soured sheep's milk (karakerut).

Pomegranate, which is a cheap source for dyes, was found to be very suitable for yellow. With the addition of isparag, which is a local species of spurge, a yellow colour bordering on the orange is achieved. Combined with madder, pomegranate yields a shade which varies from a brownish, reddish tone, to what the Persians call 'date colour'. With the addition of jeftī, a dwarf oak growing in Luristan, a deep brown colour is produced.

Isparag can also be used for yellow. Another yellow, especially in Central Persia, is made from vine leaves, (barg-i-maw); these give a greenish tint. Yellow dyes are also made out of buckthorn berries, which grow wild in the Near East. This plant, however, is not widely used in
Persia. The compact colours are produced by mixing the basic colours such as indigo with yellow, to produce green.

Stone green (ab-ī-sangar) is made out of the mixture of isparag and copper sulphate. Turquoise and peacock blue, which are so popular in tile decoration, but not so popular in lacquer painting, are produced from copper sulphate.

Violet is mixed from indigo, with either madder or cochineal. For deep brownish violet, sūmāch, a spice, is often used in combination with ferrous sulphate.

Black was an important colour in Persian painting. It was used not only for outline drawing, but also in the overall colour scheme; horses, garments and beards were painted in brilliant black. It was usually obtained from gall-nuts, which are excrescences on a certain oak-tree caused by the sting of an insect. Another method of producing the pigment for the paint involved burning mustard oil of sesamium indicum in the following manner: a small lamp with a rudimentary spout was filled with oil which was lit via a cotton wick. The soot was collected in a bell-shaped earthenware receptacle and then mixed with gum arabic.
Finally, the most important colour, gold, was obtained by first beating out the metal into gold leaf. Fragments of the leaf were then pounded with sand and mortar until the whole became a fine dust. The sand was removed by washing, leaving the dust ready for receiving either glue or gum, depending on the medium to which it was to be applied. This most precious of all colours, had to be carefully stored, and boxes like the eighteenth/nineteenth century ivory example reproduced in plate 13 were used.

Gold could also be prepared by an alternative method. Gold liquid was obtained by pressing a gold coin into a strip, stacked in alternate layers of gold and chamois. This was then wrapped in cow's leather, strapped to a heavy iron block to be pounded with a sledge hammer. This could be used as leaf, or processed further until it became a powder, which would be transformed into liquid gold by adding either serisholm or katīreh, which is gum tragacanth.

Gum arabic and gum tragacanth are the dried solids excreted by the appropriate gum plant, originally in a viscous liquid form which solidifies on contact with air. The solid can be dissolved in boiling water, yielding a sticky liquid which is extremely suitable for obtaining a
homogeneous suspension of the various pigments of powdered materials.\textsuperscript{34}

Tools of the Artists

Besides the colours, the most important tool of the artist was the brush, which was made according to the delicacy of the painting. Their preparation could take as long as the actual painting of an object. In old times, brushes were made out of the hair of Persian cats. The best hair was obtained from the back of the neck, or down the spine, near the tail. Usually the first growth of hair of a young adult cat was used. This hair was springy and flexible, while the later cuts produced a blunter tip.\textsuperscript{38}

After cutting the hair, it was soaked in water, paying attention to and preserving the orientation. The hairs were then laid out one by one to dry. After this, they were gently combed with the thumb and carefully put into a line. Then a feather from a crow or a pigeon was placed on a glass or ivory sheet and the tip cut off at a slant, and cut off again where the feather branched out. The hairs were then assembled and tied carefully with a thread dipped in glue to shape the brush head. As the
glue dried, it affixed the hairs to the wall of the quill.

Inkwells

Generally, artists considered it a duty of their profession to make some of their own tools, such as brushes. However, when this was not possible, they supervised master tool-makers as they worked on the items.

One of the tools which was vital for the artists was the inkwell which needed particular attention and expertise. Plate 14 shows four examples of nineteenth century silver inkwells in a variety of different designs. They varied greatly in their decoration; some were decorated with elaborate filigree work, others were left plain. The task of decorating these was left to silversmiths who followed the instructions of their patrons. Inkwells such as these were made from the sixteenth century onwards, but they were at their most elaborate during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.35

Inkwells were frequently kept in the pen-boxes, which were specially designed to hold them securely. Plate 15
shows five silver spoon shaped inkwells. The spoon-shape was designed for practical reasons. Such an inkwell could be carried around without a qalamdan. The ink was in the form of powder which was dissolved in water when it was required for use. This could be carried out in the spoon which could be neatly folded away once the process was terminated. This process was also probably carried out in specially adapted boxes. (plate 16) This is the only example I have come across, but in this seventeenth century steel box, decorated with intricate silver inlaid calligraphy, the lid opens to reveal a serrated plate over which the brush could be drawn to give a finer point. When the plate is removed, the bottom section has room to hold either powdered ink, or a moistened rag saturated with ink or perhaps colour.

Besides silver inkwells there were others made of ivory and gold; the choice of the medium depended on the requirements of the patron. Ivory inkwells are reproduced in plates 17B and 18A.

Other Tools

A variety of other tools were necessary for the production of lacquer painted decorations. These range
from very specialised tools such as those used to draw margins or double contours, to tools with a more general purpose such as scissors. Many of these tools were used by calligraphers and painters alike. That they were of some importance is evident from the great attention to detail that has gone into their production: they are not merely functional, but highly decorative as well. Many have the name of their owner inscribed or even incorporated into the decorative elements. This can be seen on an ivory combination pen holder and cutter which belonged to Rāzi, a court artist of Nasr al-Dīn Shāh in the 19th century. His name has been incorporated into an openwork panel on the tool. (plate 27A) This may also indicate that such tools were either made by the artists themselves, or made to order.

A selection of these tools is illustrated in plates 17 to 27. They have been chosen as representative of the wide range of tools available to the artists and of the quality of production.

Tools such as the one depicted in plate 17A were used for making margins or lines, while others were used to impress designs. The tools depicted in plates 18B and C, plates 19A to E, plates 20A and B and plate 21A were used to create designs or to mix pigments and colours.
Plate 21C depicts a tool which was used for cutting and holding brushes and pens. Plate 21B is an example of a tool used for holding different brushes while the artist was at work.

Plate 22 depicts a tool used for burnishing objects as well as for writing. It has an ivory handle and its tip is made of a semi-precious stone. Judging by its appearance, it probably belonged to a court artist of considerable reputation.

Plates 21D, 23A, B, and C show examples of pens made of bamboo. These were made to the artist's own specification, with thick, thin or medium tips.

Plate 24 depicts a selection of brushes which are in use even today; these were invariably made by the artists themselves.

Scissors were used for cutting paper, papier-maché and tracing paper; plates 25A, B and C and plate 26 show pairs of steel scissors, inlaid with gold; the one in plate 26 is a pair of travelling scissors and these are kept in a pen-box along with other tools. An interesting feature of most of these scissors is that the finger holes on each side are formed into the words "Ya Fattāh"
which have a double meaning: 'victorious' and 'cutter' or 'opener'.

Tools were often kept and carried around in specially made cases. One such case is represented in plate 27. It was made to hold the combination pen holder and cutter described above, a pair of scissors, and a combination jazān and burnisher.
CHAPTER ONE: FOOTNOTES


3. ibid., p. 21.

4. ibid., p. 22.

5. ibid., p. 25.


7. ibid., loc.cit.

8. ibid., p. 21.

9. ibid., p. 22.

10. Garner, op.cit., p. 34.

11. ibid., p. 35.


13. ibid., p. 27.

14. ibid., loc.cit.


20. cf. below, Chapter One, pp. 18-19.
21. Interview with the Iranian artist Mr. Bahavār, Tehran, 1974.


23. The galamdāns reproduced in plates 2 and 3 will be discussed below; plate 4 is an unsigned bookbinding dating from the early 19th century; plate 5 is another bookbinding signed by Rāzī Mudḥahhib Sānī' Humayyūm and dated 1299/1882; plate 6 is a galamdān signed by 'Ībād Allah Mudḥahhib Bāshī in 1308/1891; the galamdān reproduced in plate 7 is unsigned and undated, but may be attributed to Rāhīm and to the third quarter of the 19th century.

24. Interview with Mr. Moyenī, Tehran, in 1974.


28. ibid., loc.cit.

29. Interview with Mr. Bahavār, op.cit.

30. Interview held with the families of two 19th century artists, Muḥammad Baḡīr Semirūmī and Luṭf Allah al-Ḥamzāwī, Tehran, 1974.


32. Interview with Mr. Moyenī, op.cit.

33. Information on the time required to complete an object is sometimes given on that object. An example can be seen in the inscription on a mirror painted by Muḥammad Baḡīr ibn Muḥammad 'Alī which mentions that the paintings took eleven months to accomplish. The inscription is reproduced in plate 40C.

34. Laurie, A. P. "The Pigments and Medium" in SPA, Vol. V; Brown, P. Indian Paintings under the Mughals, pp. 189-90; Pliny, Historica Naturalis, Book XXXII, Ch. 136; Vitrivius, Di Architectura, Book VII, Ch. 8; Pliny, op.cit., Book XXXIII, Ch. 
54; and interviews with the Iranian artists Bahavār and Moyeni.

35. The same inkwells were used in Turkey and India, and examples from both countries are sometimes equally lavish. For some late 16th century Ottoman examples cf. E. Atil, The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, New York 1987, nos. 62 and 67.
CHAPTER TWO

STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORY
OF LACQUER IN PERSIA

History and Stylistic Development
before the Qajar Period

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that the origin of lacquer as a substance for the decoration, preservation and finishing of artefacts such as pen-cases, bookbindings and mirror cases, just to list a few, can be traced back to the Far-East. The use of this technique as a form of decoration became accepted in Persia relatively late in the history of lacquer. As soon as it established its foothold, however, it became very popular because of its flexibility.

It was claimed until quite recently that the lacquer technique was not introduced and practised in Persia until late Timurid and early Safavid times. Recent research and archaeological discoveries in Persia, however, produced evidence that the technique was not only known but also practised by Persian artists well before that time. Here, in this chapter, a brief account
will be given of some objects which date from pre-Safavid times.

Initially, the purpose of lacquer was to provide protection for the surface of various objects.

The earliest lacquered objects were discovered at Nishapur, which was one of the most important centres for producing pottery as well as other artefacts. One of the items excavated at Nishapur, a lacquered wooden box, resembles locally produced pottery in its decorative pattern. This resemblance provided sufficient information to enable the excavation team to date the wooden object. Unfortunately exact dating is always difficult, but to give a late tenth or early eleventh century date would be a reasonable approximation.

Some important objects were discovered during restoration work carried out in the Caravansarai of the Robāt-e-Sharaf. These included metal vessels, pottery and a wooden box, the latter with a lacquered surface. The decoration of the box is made up of seven human figures, all of them musicians, playing different instruments. Above is some intertwined scrollwork, providing a frame all around the box. Both the figures and the scrollwork recall the decorations on eleventh and
twelfth century metal and pottery wares; accordingly this piece was attributed to the same period. It should also be mentioned here that the outlines of the figures were not painted, but incised, a technique that was applied to contemporary sgraffito pottery or engraved metalwork. A small fragment of this wooden box was examined in the research laboratories of the National Gallery. The analysis confirmed that the box had a lacquered surface. As far as it can be ascertained thus far, these are two of the earliest lacquered objects to have been discovered in Persia.

A third object, similar to the one just described was discovered during excavations at the Islamic site of Ghubayra in Kirman province, Persia. It was a small fragment of a wooden box, the background painted in black and red with an incised simple scrollwork decoration. The surface was lacquered which helped to preserve this piece for so many centuries. Since the piece was found in a late thirteenth century layer, it was accordingly dated to the Ilkhanid period.

Thus we may say that in Persia lacquer was used more or less as varnish over the painted surface of an object in order to protect rather than to decorate it; at the same time it often helped to enhance the overall appearance,
without being an integral part of it. Colour was not mixed with lacquer and because of this, the resulting product became transparent rather than translucent. In later times the method and purpose of application were changed, but it never came close to resemble either in style or in technique those which were in use in the Far-East.

A possible connection between Islamic and Byzantine lacquer painting, however, may be indicated by the existence of a Qur'ān stand or rahla discovered in Konya, Anatolia. It is an early piece, dated 678/1279-80. The elaborated carved decoration was covered with a protective layer of lac or varnish. It is safe to assume that this is not an isolated piece and that other lacquered wooden objects were manufactured in Anatolia during the Seljuq period.5

The examples which were cited above underline the new theory that lacquer was known to the Persian artists probably as early as the eleventh century or earlier, and that the technique was different to the one used in the Far-East. There was, on the other hand some connection between Byzantine and Islamic lacquer-work. Even at this stage, the historical significance of 'Byzantium' should not be ignored; after all, it was
the bridge, the gateway between East and West. Christian and Islamic artistic expression culminated in a unique synthesis here which can be attributed to the unifying influence and established authority of Constantinople, especially during the Ottoman period. Another factor which must not be overlooked either, is the influence of Armenia. It is a land where Christianity and Islam meet, where one exerts an influence on the other and it should be remembered also that Armenia was in close contact with Persia. Before any discussion can commence about the various cultural influences on Persian lacquer, the time when Persian lacquer art established itself as characteristically Persian should be specified. Persian lacquer art made its mark properly post the fifteenth century after the Mongol invasion, but significantly after the death of Timur. Lacquer painting in the true sense of the word was first applied to bookbindings in Persia. For this reason these early bookbindings will be examined first.

Bookbindings before the Qajar period

It was during the early Timurid period but after the death of Timur that one of the most famous and important artistic centres was established at Herat. The workshops
of Herat produced magnificent manuscripts and book-bindings and Persian artists excelled in their decoration. One of the reasons for this excellence can be attributed to the appreciation of poetry and the general love for the written word, which is conveyed in their art with great mastery. The earliest surviving example of these bindings is found on a manuscript of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's *Mathnāwī*, dated 888/1483. This date applies to the completion of the manuscript only and it may not coincide necessarily with the date of the book-cover, which is now in the Turkish and Islamic Art Museum Library in Istanbul. The lacquer decoration surrounds the stamped, moulded and gilt lobed central medallion, while the corners and the border are decorated with quarter medallions. The black lacquer surface is ornamented with floral scrollwork in gold which is reminiscent of the well known Ardebil carpet of 1539, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The date at which painted covers were introduced instead of the tooled or stamped leather ones is not known precisely, but examples of the former can be found as early as the sixteenth century. They reached their pinnacle toward the end of the eighteenth century. Originally, the decorations were painted directly onto the leather; but owing to its unsuitability for this
purpose, another method had to be invented. The leather tended to crack on application of the paint, and this could not be prevented even by pre-treating the surface. The problem was solved to some extent by applying a layer of a gesso like substance on top of the leather, and painting the lacquer decorations onto that.

The few extant examples of early Persian bookbindings were executed either in red with gold decoration or in black with gold. The black background is a suitable base for any motif to be highlighted, such as the typical Safavid tree with its characteristic kite-shaped leaves which stand out in the foreground. (plate 28A, B, C) The combination of red and gold was rather rare. One such pair of bindings are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A second example in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London is dated 1004/1595. A third example was in the Kevorkian Foundation in New York.

Decorative themes were mainly chosen from sources such as myths and fables, and these were enriched by elements borrowed from nature. Later when the British extended their administration over India and Afghanistan, bordering Persia could not escape the infusion of the culture brought to the area by the colonists and merchants. The British were quite welcome at the Persian
royal court and it will become evident from the plates that British contemporary dresses were copied and adapted for Persian figures. European scenery was reproduced as a background to portraits, yielding a fascinating amalgam of Renaissance-type landscape with pseudo-European portrait depiction applied to Persian faces.

With the advent of the Safavids in the sixteenth century, the centre of artistic activity was moved to Tabriz. The consequences of this historical event were far-reaching on the developments of artistic trends. War broke out between the Safavids and the Ottomans in 920/1514 and Tabriz fell a victim to Ottoman occupation. The artists were taken to Constantinople and the result of this was that stylistic development received a different cultural input.

In Constantinople, Central Asia exerted its own particular influence on the Persian artists who suddenly gained direct access to its culture and to its people. It was inevitable therefore that the various artistic styles which co-existed in the same place left their long lasting impressions on the painters. The synthesis of western and eastern traditions yielded an exclusively new style which was to become typically Persian.
At the same time, in the areas which were still under Safavid administration and not affected by the Ottoman invasion, lacquer art followed its own particular path of development. Decorations became much more detailed and elaborate, the combination of floral and animal depiction sometimes on their own, or together with human figurative representations, provided a real feast for the eyes. The themes of the paintings varied from actual historical events to mythological stories, incorporating scroll-designs inter-woven with elements of Sasanian or even ancient Mesopotamian decorative motifs such as the eight-petalled rosette. Besides the elaborate design and vivid colour, gold and black decoration was still continued, but was slowly replaced with richer representations.

Such a Sasanian theme is seen on a bookbinding in black and gold in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg. The scene it depicts, the familiar 'feline devouring the gazelle' under the tree in the Garden of Eden, is an ancient Sasanian theme in accordance with the Zoroastrian religion, dealing with the infinite struggle of the two rivals: good and evil (Ahoura-Mazda and Ahriman) or power and weakness, which are always engaged in the never-ending battle for superiority. Light and dark, and for that matter all the opposing forces of nature, are represented in this symbolic composition.
This picture contains fantastic birds and unusual cloud effects which no doubt originated from the Far-East. They were successfully blended into the Islamic concept of worldly Paradise without upsetting the visual harmony.

Certain nationalistic elements found their way into the visual arts and the religious vocabulary also provided a rich source for inspiration. In the Islamic world in general and Persia in particular, the written words of the Qur'an and the charismatic poetry were transposed into visual images: calligraphy became the epitome of visual expression. It was invariably used to decorate the outer border of bookbindings. It was a privilege for any artist to be commissioned to illuminate Qur'anic manuscripts or paint the decorations on the binding. Qur'anic manuscripts were not the only manuscripts to be bound. Poetry books were also bound and the covers were decorated with motifs which hinted at the nature of the content within.\(^{13}\) "Word", with the aid of art became a picture, there for all to see and to appreciate.

Other themes favoured by the Safavids, such as royal hunting scenes and ancient iconographic motifs, are further indication that the Persians preferred sources which were either Parthian or Sasanian. However strong an influence Islamic religious ideas had, they could
never neutralise or subdue the nationalistic element from the Persian quest for self expression.

The centre of artistic activity moved from Tabriz to Qazvin for a period of approximately fifty years and subsequently to Isfahan, where lacquer art was cultivated in conjunction with other minor arts such as miniature painting. Persian lacquer-bindings of the sixteenth century, which was the best period of the Safavid epoch, are parallel in excellence to the contemporary minatures that reached their maturity during this time. If we were talking in European terms, the Safavid era could be compared to the "Renaissance" in European art. Moreover, the beautiful natural environment of Qazvin, Shiraz and Isfahan led to a preoccupation with nature rather than with the abstract and in this it is comparable to the Romantic period in European art. Naturalistic representations are an almost idealised view of reality, where beauty in composition and in colour play the most important role.

The exterior of the back cover of a late sixteenth century Persian binding is an excellent example for illustrating this point. There is a structure to the composition which comprises an outer border, which encloses an inner picture-field containing the action.
This sort of arrangement is generally accepted and is used in cover design during this period.

The inner picture-field has both floral and animal depictions. Birds, a hare, gazelles and a spotted panther flow through a naturalistic composition. There are clumps of flowers and in the centre, the familiar Safavid tree. There is at least one known publication which describes this binding. According to this description, or rather interpretation, the panther is chasing the hare; the tree, the clouds and the winged birds are taken from Chinese lacquer painting.\textsuperscript{17}

It is possible, however, to offer a different interpretation of this picture. The central theme of the inner picture-field and the tree in particular deserve special attention. It could be the tree of life which plays a very important part in Islam as it does in Christianity. The whole scene could be an idealised depiction of Paradise, either the Earthly or the Heavenly, where all species live in perfect harmony. This is conveyed by the floating movements of the various animals. The flying birds resembling wild ducks are typically Persian motifs which originate in Pharaonic Egypt, and are not like the slim and gracious Far-Eastern depictions of the phoenix.\textsuperscript{18}
Perhaps it would be pertinent to draw attention to the contrast between form and content: the delicacy of the representation and the theme of the representation. There can be no doubt attached to the aesthetic appeal of the visual representation for example of a hunting scene, but on reflection the violence and cruelty which transpire from these representations neutralise the momentary joy which is perceived by the senses. The dichotomy is obvious: killing, violence, chase and destruction on the one hand; delicacy, intricacy and beauty on the other. Perhaps this duality is an integral part of the spiritual make-up of the artists and indeed the whole Muslim society and it provides the hidden driving force for the achievement of such excellence in artistic expression.

During the early Safavid period there was a considerable amount of cultural exchange between the West and Persia which was enhanced further by the presence of the common enemy, the Turks. In the history of bookbindings the European connection must have made a strong impression, since the European age of the Renaissance was renowned for extravagance and excellence in the field of Codex-binding. In Europe generally, but in Italy particularly, the value of some products of art was linked directly to
the amount of gold leaf and lapis lazuli used during their execution.

It was during the latter part of the Safavid period that blue obtained from lapis lazuli was actually introduced into the colour scheme. Colours other than blue changed to a lighter shade during this period. Sometimes the whole composition was suffused with weak yellow, possibly to imitate gold. The composition itself became less fantastic, the drawings less flimsy, and attempts were made to adopt a more realistic representational approach. Medallions became more popular creating a picture within a picture effect which was a contemporary European technique.

Patronage in Europe played a very important part not only in determining the value of a particular product of art, but also in choosing the subject matter itself. The patrons liked to be included in the pictures, usually in idyllic surroundings or involved in courtly activities. There are several examples of bookbindings from the Safavid era where the prince is depicted either in a highly stylised heavenly garden surrounded by scholars or by lady or male companions. There is a beautiful example of this, dating from the sixteenth century and painted by an artist from the Qazvin school, entitled "Picnic in the
palace gardens". The prince is seated under a flowering tree receiving refreshments while his companions are in attendance. There is a traditional outer frame with scroll and flower designs. Another important feature of this depiction is the pond. Water plays a significant part in Islamic architecture; it is an organic part of palace gardens. Its purpose is two-fold: firstly to reflect the sky and everything around it at ground level to create an illusion of continuity; and secondly to create space which is a fundamental aim of all Islamic visual expression (with the difference that space is created in an enclosed framework on the vertical axis). This picture is interesting for another reason also. It adheres to the style practised at the Qazvin school, yet it manages to demonstrate certain characteristics which were typical of the Tabriz school, the relative stiffness of the princely figure for example. In spite of the apparent rigidity the whole picture nevertheless conveys motion. This is achieved by the way the youthful figure in the lower right corner demands attention from the observer through his hands and his head. While moving toward the edge of the picture he turns his head back. His eyes are not looking at the figure next to him, however, but they are directed towards an elderly gentleman in the other corner of the picture. The artist thus created an illusion of
continuous movement without detracting from the most important focal point of the picture: the picnicking prince. This type of balancing manipulation was used very effectively by the ancient Greeks and was adopted by Muslim and European artists somewhat later. It was especially popular during the Renaissance and the post-Renaissance period, which coincides with the beginning of the Safavid period in Persia. The tree however, is definitely not European; it is almost certainly Far-Eastern. A perfect synthesis is achieved with the combination of Western and Eastern elements and the inclusion of Persian facial features.

The royal hunt and picnicing scenes are brought together in the sixteenth century bindings reproduced in plate 28A to C. The paintings combine Safavid iconography with Far Eastern elements such as the clouds, the birds and some trees (e.g. plate 28C, right). The balancing manipulation described in the previous example is used here to the same effect. Although the scene painted by 'Alī Rezā 'Abbāsī in 1025/1616 is in the same style, it is distinctly different from the above mentioned painting in that the trees are fashioned in the Chinese style of depiction. (plate 29) Another difference is noticeable in its translucent appearance, replacing the black background used in the former. This was achieved through
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the application of a light reddish-brown background and colours which blend gently into one another. In order to soften the impact of the painting, the artist mixed red into the green and black instead of using pure colours.

It is evident in this picture that the floral background is incidental to the main theme and aside from the fine brushwork, little attention is paid to realism. The figures are taller than the trees, the bouquet of flowers in the centre is disproportionately large and the bowl of fruit in the foreground is simplistic.

The borders framing these bookbindings are reminiscent of contemporary Persian carpets. The patterns on carpets and textiles were often copied in paintings, and it is possible that some of the artists were involved in designing the patterns which the weavers then implemented.

Eastern Asiatic influences become evident in other lacquer bindings which entail the depiction of animals grouped together in the centre and a bold rendition of a cliff piece underneath. The border is adorned with floral sprays which can be found frequently in contemporary Persian manuscript bindings. During this period other types of bindings were produced which manifest different
trends in taste. Colours and themes are chosen in order to catch the eye, often lacking refinement in representation. It was suggested that these bindings were produced for foreign dignitaries as either presents or merchandise.25

The production of lacquered bookbindings continued in the mid to late seventeenth century, but dated examples are very rare. There are no known extant bookbindings that have figural or floral scenes as described above but only compartmentalised or overall scroll decoration. Yet given the later preponderance of floral designs on lacquered objects, we must simply assume that bookbindings also went through an as yet undocumented transitional phase, in which the floral studies by the seventeenth century artists started to influence the design of bookbindings.26

By the combining of inspired subject-matter and sophisticated technique, Persian lacquer-wares became popular and enjoyed the demand of a very wide market and competed in popularity with the lacquer products of the Far-East and Europe. Their possession proved to be a measure of wealth, social standing and for the artist a recognition of his talent. The aristocracy and the rich
middle-classes commissioned lacquered artefacts in the first place to demonstrate wealth and to keep in line with current fashion and often but not invariably, aesthetic considerations were ignored.

Lacquered Door Panels before the Qajar Period

The political situation was consolidated to some extent and as a result, architectural activity began to increase. Several palaces were built in Isfahan, all of which were lavishly decorated. The internal doors were decorated with lacquer paintings. The decorative elements were multiform, but a popular composition would employ a number of medallions which were to serve as frames for the scene within, compound or simple. Generally speaking, the medallions occupy a central position in the picture. There was a popular trend for a certain structure in the design which can be detected also in the case of bookbindings. The outer frame is well defined and there are a number of contrasting fields within. Usually the outer frame is more elaborately decorated than the inner field, which in turn serves as a background to one or more medallions. Compared to the rest of the picture, the medallions are small and resemble miniatures in character. The depictions reflect serenity both in theme
and execution; even in hunting scenes violence is not particularly stressed, but rather it is movement which is being emphasised.

Scrollwork was an integral part of the panel decorations, the same way as it was in the case of bookbindings. The paintings were executed in the same style as the miniatures and the subject matter was also similar. These aspects provide further information about the taste and preference of the artists and their patrons.

The frequency with which these types of paintings were produced may be an important indication of the market forces in operation. The paintings are usually inscribed and the pictorial representations of the patrons are frequently present. The latter may take the form of group compositions or simple portraits. This practice was widespread in Europe, and particularly in Italy, the patron was included in the visual composition either as a bystander or as the narrator of the action. Most of the time he was an incidental element and only very rarely the dominant character in a group picture.27

Whether or not this practice was copied by the Muslim artists in their own compositions is incidental, but it cannot be denied that there is a great deal of similarity
in application. The practice of including the figure of the patron in a painting was adopted by the artists of India and it became one of the major characteristics of Mughal art.\textsuperscript{28}

Only a few lacquered doors have survived from the Safavid period. Information about these lacquered doors may be obtained from the miniatures depicting them.\textsuperscript{29} There were four distinct styles of painted doors between the fifteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century. There are obvious variations on each style which provide vital information for art historical evaluation and correct dating.

The earliest of these styles comprises a centrally positioned medallion depicting either solitary figures or couples. These can be observed also in contemporary miniature paintings. The next example occurs almost one century later on a lacquer door of a garden kiosk and on another one which is decorated with a red frame and blue panels with rosettes. Several doors belong to this style; they were produced in Qazvin or Isfahan.\textsuperscript{30}

The next style is of a later date, nevertheless it can be considered to be a continuation of the previous style.
Although the figures still appear in large format, the composition becomes more elaborate and more crowded.

To solve the problem of overcrowding, the artists divided up the working area by introducing more than one medallion and filling the spaces between them with floral designs and arabesques. The decorative motifs are usually fantastic, mythical rather than factual, and the composition is closer to the Far-Eastern and ancient Persian than to the European.\footnote{31}

Later, the size of the figures gradually decreases, but the skill of execution remains as high as before. In this style group we find some pictures in which there is a reversal to the larger format, and some architectural elements, such as lobed arches, find their way into compositions which thusfar had adhered to sources provided by nature. The inclusion of the architectural elements is probably due to European influence, but they are also in evidence in Persian miniatures.\footnote{32}

The third style group comprises probably the largest number of lacquer painted doors. The manner of representation corresponds to the naturalistic romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The designs reflect simplicity and sobriety.
An interesting trend was developing where the delicate and intricate medallions which provided an exclusive frame for human portraiture or group representations were excluded from the compositions. The salient feature of the new trend in decoration was floral scrollwork with sunflowers and birds perching on trees.  

Previously the background provided a marked colour contrast for the decorative elements. The new tendency was to use a plain gold colour which looked more simple. Nevertheless, it created an impression of extravagance. It has been speculated by some scholars that the new style of painting might have been a reflection of declining artistic skills. It is possible, however, that the tendency toward simplicity and straightforward representation reflected the new attitude to art and architecture, which was emerging in France. During this period the royal courts of Persia and India were visited frequently by British and French dignitaries who undoubtedly exchanged ideas about artistic and philosophical trends in Europe. Purpose, purposefulness, necessity and desirability were debated and applied to aesthetics of art also. The artists of the royal court were knowledgeable not only in their own fields, but in other areas as well. It is possible therefore, that they
sympathised with the contemporary European trend and reflected it in their own art, more or less successfully.

The fourth style group can be described as an attempt to revive the old classical styles. Low-relief together with intarsia were introduced, but the execution of the final product was far from being perfect. It is possible that the new generation of artists did not have the same expertise and all they managed to achieve was a poor imitation of the old classical style. We can only speculate about the reasons for the decline in excellence; political reasons may have played a part in the development of certain trends and practices. At the same time it is also possible that the gap widened between supply and demand.

Lacquer doors, as mentioned earlier, were not produced in great abundance. The doors which were described in this section provide a reasonable amount of information about stylistic developments of this particular type of lacquer painting. There are, however, other groups of lacquered artefacts which offer more information, thereby allowing a greater insight into the development of this genre.
Miscellaneous Objects of the Pre-Qajar Period

There are numerous miscellaneous items which have been published by other scholars; these will receive only brief attention. One such item is in the Arms Collection in the Neue Hofburg in Vienna. It is a canteen made of papier-maché and attributed to the middle of the sixteenth century on the basis of its painted design, which is reminiscent of a dated Turkish canteen in the Collection. The papier-maché canteen is painted with the same technique as the lacquer painted book covers and other similar lacquered objects. The decoration is painted on a thick layer of gesso and covered with a layer of transparent lacquer. The whole surface is covered with a finely speckled gold ground, reminiscent of the marqash background described in the previous chapter.\(^{37}\)

Miscellaneous artefacts often provide valuable information on the social and private habits of a particular community. One such item is a carved ivory pendant, dating from the third quarter of the seventeenth century. (plate 58) The ivory is carved in the form of three flowers in low relief partially enclosed within a disc, in the centre of which a smaller disc of painted lacquer is inset. One side forms a sliding cover opening
on a pivot to reveal a bust portrait of Shāh 'Abbās II. Such pendants were often worn by wives in veneration of their husbands and it may therefore be assumed that this pendant was originally worn by a member of 'Abbās II's seraglio.

A lacquer painted casket in the Victoria and Albert Museum, dated 1126/1714 is signed by Muhammad Zamān. The painting depicts a princess attending to her toilet, while she is surrounded by European looking females.38

One of the most important items of the pre-Qajar period is a lacquer-painted box painted by Muḥammad 'Alī Ashraf. It is clearly one of the best examples of floral depiction which was to set the trend for many of the artists of the Qajar period. (plates 31A to C) The patterns, comprising floral sprays and birds, are painted on a golden brown translucent margash background. Three colours dominate: red, white and green. The brushwork is unusual in that the shading of the petals and the leaves is achieved by first using a very fine brush in order to get the outline and background, followed by concentrations of tiny dots wherever shading was required. The birds received a thicker application of paint in order to create the impression that they are emerging from their floral habitat. The rendition of the
flowers and birds is characterised by naturalistic realism, as if the artist had carefully studied the anatomy of both birds and flowers. The detail is so perfect that even the thorns on the stalks of the roses, the veins on the leaves and the individual feathers on the back of the birds are discernable. 39

Lacquer Painted Qalamdāns before the Qajar Period

There is a section in the last part of the Holy Qur'ān which throws some light on the importance of the pen and inkwell: "Nūn wa al-Qalam wamā Yasturūn". "Nun by the Pen and by the (Record) which (men) write". 40 We know that artists obtained a lot of inspiration from the Qur'ān. They used this inspiration in their artistic expression. Representations such as calligraphy, which is the ultimate expression of the written word, were carefully executed in mosques and as decorative elements on bookbindings. Writing is the product of pen and ink. Consequently, the tools which were employed for the purpose of spreading the "Word" were treated with the respect they deserved. The pen-case or qalamdān, as can be seen from the illustrations, received special attention from the artists, both in the choice of decorative motifs and in their executions.
The pen and inkwell are considered to be the symbolic representatives of human knowledge and vision, which differentiate human beings from animals. Ideas and images are transmitted through the pen and ink, therefore they should, by right, be honoured and respected. A parallel may be drawn between the pen and the mind which is the instrument that transmits the thoughts and images that the hand, with the aid of the pen, translates into a comprehensible visual language. It will be seen from the plates that most of the galamdāns are decorated with human faces or scenes incorporating human beings. The faces seem to give a different personality to each galamdān. Most of these will be discussed in detail later.

Primarily galamdāns were owned by scholars and the nobility, but clerks, curators and pedagogues also had access to them. No other country in the Islamic world served the pen and ink as well as Persia and this transpires from various philosophical writings and the charismatic poetry from Firdawsī onwards. The greatest masterpieces are, however, the illuminated manuscripts. Persian artists obtained true tranquillity and unusual artistic insight through copying the Qur'ān and gilding its margins with gold and sometimes with more elaborate
designs. The same degree of tranquillity could be gained through creating painted pictures for *qalamdāns*.

The shape of the *qalamdān* was elongated and narrow, with rounded or squared ends. It had a sliding drawer for the pens and the ink (figs. 1-4). The ink-holder was usually made of silver, gold and enamelled gold. The lacquered *qalamdāns* were made of papier-maché. The decoration was rich and usually confined to the top and the sides, but there are examples which had decorations on the base also. The decoration of the base equalled the lavishness of the sides and the top.

The original pen boxes were made of bronze or brass with silver inlay, but there were some which were inlaid with gold. The earliest known dated *qalamdān* of this type was made in 542/1148.\(^4^1\)

There is another early *qalamdan*, which is made of bronze, signed by the artist called *Shādhī* and dated 607/1210. It is now in the Freer Gallery in Washington.\(^4^2\) A third *qalamdān*, richly inlaid with gold and silver, is now in the British Museum. It is dated 680/1281 and signed *Muhammad ibn Sungūr*.\(^4^3\) An Egyptian provenance was recently suggested for this *qalamdān*.\(^4^4\)
There are more signed pieces known from the thirteenth century. The mottoes on the metal *galamdāns* usually express praise for the greatness and glory of the patron, who is inevitably the owner of the *galamdān*. There are also a number of poems dedicated to the arts and handwriting. The metal *galamdāns* were attractive, but the weight of the metal was a definite handicap, weighing down the belts and turbans. It was not surprising therefore, that the metal was replaced by the lighter and more flexible wood. At the beginning the artists used wooden boards or wooden strips. It should be noted however, that as wood is not plentiful in Persia an alternative had to be found to replace it. Only a very few pieces survived from that period and these have incalculable rarity value.

The Far-Eastern lacquer technique was not employed by the Persian artists. The method they preferred was similar to the more recent oil and lacquer combination, followed by the varnishing technique described in the previous chapter, which resulted in a more shiny finish. This type of lacquer is mostly used on cardboard. Lacquer applied with the above mentioned technique prevents the penetration of heat or cold, stops bursting or easy breaking. The mould and pattern of the *galamdāns* were made out of cardboard in preference to pasteboard, which
proved to be more durable without curving or bending under pressure.

Basically, we may discern three different ways of organising the surface of lacquered qalamdāns:

1). The first type uses figural scenes in the westernising mode in conjunction with secondary designs of floral scrolls or arabesques, the latter being painted on the less visible parts of the qalamdān. This is by far the most common composition. It entails the placing of the figures wearing late Safavid, Mughal or very generalised European seventeenth century costumes on garden terraces or in misty landscapes, with cloud streaked skies in which birds take flight. The figures are grouped by twos and threes, often correctly drawn to scale and placed in overlapping stances; difficult stances are attempted by foreshortening, and repousoir elements such as broken tree-stumps are also used. Favoured leitmotifs include small figures sketched in the background riding over bridges, tall trees in groups, vistas of trees, buildings with towers and arches in an unidentifiable architectural style (perhaps European via the Mughal painterly vocabulary), ruined arches and rocky hillocks in the foreground. (plate 32)
The qalamdān reproduced in plate 33A and B is a typical example of the Indianising style with the addition of Far-Eastern decorative elements such as the flowering tree and the bird in a cage. It depicts a young couple embracing each other. The female figure is wearing Indian style jewellery and headdress and holding a large flower in her hand, while the male figure is dressed in a turban and long cloak and wears a dagger.

The style of the clothing and turban is typical of the late Safavid and early Zand periods. The qalamdān is also comparable to dated pieces from the same period. It can therefore be dated to the early eighteenth century on these grounds.46

In a close up detail the artist's lack of knowledge of anatomy becomes evident. (plate 33B) At first sight it is difficult to determine who is holding the flower: the girl's right arm clumsily folds around the neck of the young man. The feet of both figures appear in an unnatural posture: the girl seems to be suspended in mid-air and the young man's feet also barely touch the ground. The representation of the clothing on the other hand shows the artist's ability to convey patterns and suggest the texture of the material. The body of the girl
is vaguely hidden behind the transparent skirt, conveying eroticism. 47

The sides of the qalamdān are decorated with traditional floral designs. (plate 33C) The shading of the flowers is carried out with the dotted technique frequently used by the artists of the period. (plate 33D)

Plate 34 depicts a qalamdān which is another good example of the style under discussion. The lady is Indian; she is standing by a tree and holding a fan. There is a stream with ducks in the foreground. The sides are decorated with gold scrollwork on a red background; the richness of the decoration is an indication that it was designed for someone special. In fact there is an inscription which supports this assumption. It reads: "To the order of the exalted nobleman". It is signed 'Alī Qūlī and dated 1117/1705. The painting on the top is finely executed but that on the base is much cruder as are those on the sides.

A third example of the "Indian style" is represented in plate 35. The qalamdān is signed by Muhammad Sābir and dated 1131/1719. The painting on the top comprises a young Indian female standing under a tree, holding one of the branches with one hand and drawing aside her skirt
with the other. The landscape behind her is not easily definable; there are hillocks and what may be defined as city walls. At the top of the picture the tiny figure of a rider is discernable. At the feet of the maiden a small stream is visible with clumps of flowers.

There is a vast difference between this picture and those painted by contemporary Persian artists in that the figure is almost entirely detached from both the background and the foreground landscapes. The latter seem to be included only as incidentals, as fillers to the excess space. No European influence is evident in this Indian-style painting, unlike other contemporary Persian paintings. Even in those Persian paintings which manifest an Indian influence, the European element is invariably present.48

There are other themes which were frequently favoured such as horseback hunting of boar and deer, amorous couples with musicians and companions, visits to an old wise man - which is an Indianising motif often combined with Christian themes, scenes from the story of Khusrau and Shirin, and other love stories and religious subjects, such as Shaykh San'ān and the Christian maiden.
The scene from the story of Shaykh Șan'ân and the Christian maiden which decorates the qalamdân reproduced in plate 32 is treated in the style discussed above. It is a panoramic depiction in a landscape, with a large building and figures at a gateway in the background, and a herd of animals and the main group in the foreground. The signature is almost obliterated, but the word Zamān is still clearly visible. The qalamdân can be assigned to the beginning of the eighteenth century on stylistic grounds.

One of the most important pieces in this series is a rectangular qalamdân with an inscription around the rim in cartouches, which contains the name of the artist, Muhammad Zamān, and the date in abjad as well as in numbers: 1084/1672-3. The main scene depicts a tripartite design of a meeting with a wise man, a rearing horse with attendants, and an imaginary seascape with a seventeenth century galleon. It is remarkable for its dream-like, almost Leonardesque quality.

2). The second compositional style combines minute bird and flower designs on the top or sides of the qalamdân with figural landscapes. An example of this style, signed by Muḥammad Zamān and dated 1086/1671-2, is in the Iran Bastān Museum. It has a design of three flowering
trees with birds perched on their branches, an iris plant and three small white flowers. The sides show a carnation growing in fanning sprays; the inside of the lid is decorated with a hunting scene.

Another example of this style is reproduced in plate 36. The top and sides are painted with birds amongst roses. The qalamdān is not signed, but it is in the style of Muhammad Zamān. It can be dated to the early eighteenth century.

The design most popular during this period was the 'small floral style' first seen on the Muhammad Zamān qalamdān. It was a very important style and as such it continued to be popular through the later part of the eighteenth century and even has an "afterlife" as an archaic style to the present day. These small-scale and delicate designs show a profusion of flowers in bud or in full bloom. They are botanically precise and each flower is easily distinguishable: roses, hazelnuts, tulips, carnations, and especially the leitmotif of a small clump of three or four snowdrops. Often three to five medallions or cartouches were superimposed on this type of design or the same medallions and cartouches, filled with flowers and birds, were set against a plain background. Generally the compositional schemes are very
refined and well adapted to the scale of the object, which was not always the case during the later periods. A good illustration of this style can be seen on a *galamdān* painted by Muhammad 'Alī Ashraf in 1160/1747. The top and sides are decorated with flowers and nightingales on a black background, and the edges with an intertwining floral motif in gold. The theme is one at which Ashraf also excelled in painting on other types of objects. Another example of work by him in a similar style can be seen on a casket in the Iran Bastān Museum.

Both examples are signed "Ze ba'd Muhammad 'Ali Ashraf ast": literally translated "after Muhammad 'Ali is the noblest". This can be understood to refer to the painter himself and his teacher, who could have been Muhammad Zamān. 'Alī Ashraf's known works span most of the late eighteenth century; however, it is feasible that he painted in the first half of the century as well. It seems to be clear from the surviving evidence that he was exclusively a lacquer painter.

A variation on this compositional style can be seen in the *galamdān* painted by Hajjī Muhammad in 1116/1704 (plate 1A and B). The top of the *galamdān* is decorated with a portrait of a lady, bird and flower compositions, and a floral scroll. This *galamdān* differs from others
mentioned so far in that the compositions are enclosed within gold framed panels, with the scroll acting as a background motif, whereas the decorations on the latter are disposed as an overall pattern. A number of other galamdāns decorated in a similar manner are known from the period.

3). The third compositional type uses floral designs exclusively: either in the form of repeating flowering bushes, or as overall designs of vine or floral scrolls and flowering branches. They are rendered in a manner which is at the same time naturalistic and poetically evocative of the eternal springtime so much loved by Timurid and Safavid painters. A beautiful galamdān in the Iran Bastān Museum signed Haji Muhammad and dated 1122/1710-11 is a superior example of this style. Another compositional style which enjoyed a certain degree of popularity portrays battle scenes, usually purely Persian in nature. A fine example is a galamdān in a private collection in New York, painted by Muhammad Zamān. The scene represents the battle of Chalderān between Shāh Ismā'īl and the Ottomans. The subject was popular in both miniature and mural paintings, and continued to be represented up to the twentieth century.
One motif which was very popular throughout was the scrolling grape leaf design. It was common in the Safavid period and continued in use up to the twentieth century. A typical example can be seen on the back of a qalamdān dated 1148-9/1735/6 in the Royal Collection at Niyavarān, Tehran, and on a book cover dated 1147/1734 in Leningrad. Both are signed by the artist Muhammad Ḥādī.

Muhammad Zamān is one of the more famous artists who practised in the late seventeenth - early eighteenth centuries. It had been previously suggested that he visited Italy where he learned the styles and techniques favoured by European artists, and subsequently converted to Christianity. This prevented him from returning to Persia, so he went to India instead, where he worked for a considerable length of time before returning to Persia to work at the royal court. This account, however, has been conclusively disproved. It is possible that Muhammad Zamān did not leave Persia, and that he acquired his knowledge of European painting and Christian religious themes from paintings imported into the Persian court. His painting "The Flight to Egypt", where he depicted the Virgin wearing earrings, bears witness to the later interpretation. Jewellery is not found on paintings of the Virgin anywhere in Europe and it is purely a Middle-Eastern element.
Muhammad Zamān made a great contribution to the style of the period. His influence is also detectable in miniature painting, especially in the depiction of scenery which bears the mark of European influence. Most of his paintings reveal Italian and Flemish influences with a Christian biased subject matter.57

The style in which Muhammad Zamān and his contemporaries practised was easily applied to lacquerwork with little or no modification. A development particular to this form of art may be detected in their work: notably, the naturalistic and minute depictions of flowers and birds which are devoid of any anecdotal element.

Some galamdāns of the period which follow the compositional layouts outlined above, are executed in a different style, which could be called the "etching style". This is illustrated by the square-ended galamdān reproduced in plates 37A to C. The background of the top surface is richly decorated with floral patterns and arabesques executed in gold and red and interrupted by five scalloped medallions. The layout is not dissimilar from that of the galamdān by Hajjī Muhammad (plate 1A and B) and would fall into the second of the compositional styles described above.
The top and bottom medallions comprise perching birds and the central one is flanked by two other medallions containing the busts of two youths. A male figure in the kneeling position drinking a cup of wine occupies the central medallion. (plate 37A) In each case the background is black and the figural representations are outlined and shaded in white. The sides are decorated in a similar fashion to that of the top, but here the medallions contain traditional elements such as the lion devouring a gazelle, birds and other wild animals. (plate 37B) The rich floral decoration on the bottom of the galamdān follows the traditional style of the period. (plate 37C)

Each figural representation is full of dynamic motion and the faces of the animals under attack manifest pain and distress. An overall symmetry is maintained by the posture of the figural representations: one faces in one direction, while the other faces in another direction. This type of symmetry shall be referred to as 'twisting symmetry'.

Although this galamdān bears the signature of 'Alī Rezā 'Abbāsī and the date 1059/1649, the style of the hats worn by the figures suggests a later date. It was common
practise for later artists to try to copy earlier masters such as 'Alī Rezā.58

Another galamdān decorated with a similar technique dates from about the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century. It is unusually large, approximately double the size of the standard galamdān, and has rounded ends. (plate 38A) The bird and flower design is executed in gold on a black background. First, the artist outlined the flowers and the birds and then filled them in with gold paint. The shading was carried out with a very fine brush, producing a very interesting effect, similar to a photographic negative. (plate 38B) The sides of the galamdān are decorated with similar motifs. (plate 38C) The "etching style" technique was used as a model by artists painting in the 19th century.

The composition and style of the gualamdān painted by Mu'īn Musawwir, who practised during the second half of the seventeenth century, are typical of the period. (plate 39A and B) The three separate floral sprays are outlined in gold and very finely painted. The scroll-work is also executed in gold and more gold was used on the sides and base. The presence of gold might be an indication that the galamdān was made for a rich person and probably on special commission.
The end of the seventeenth century saw the decline of the Safavid era. The rulers lost their interest not only in the affairs of the state, but also in the cultural field. The artists and their skills were wasted because of the lack of patronage. The golden age of Iranian art came to an untimely end, which was also hastened by the Afghan invasion during the reign of Shāh Husayn II (1105-1135/1694-1722). Isfahan fell under Afghan occupation, while the Ottomans initiated another invasion from the west. During this period there was total artistic stagnation, and power was not reconsolidated under effective hands until the middle of the eighteenth century. Under the leadership of Muhammad Karīm Khān, the Zand dynasty did not survive very long and the development of lacquer art was uneventful. The country was finally united under Aqā Muhammad and the capital was moved to Tehran. This was the beginning of the Qajar period which was to last until 1924.

Despite the political instability following the Afghan invasion and the overall domestic decline in the period of Nādir Shāh (1149-1160/1736-1747), some art seems to have flourished. From the extant examples we can confirm that during this period not only did the number of painted qalamdāns increase but for instance we also find mirror-cases, circular and oval boxes, caskets for
jewellery, and small panels that decorated larger objects (from which they have now been detached); it would also appear that floral and filigree designs for the doublures of lacquer bookbindings fell out of favour in this period.

The influence of the late seventeenth century Europeanising school of Muhammad Zamān continued up to the end of the Zand period and this can be considered the watershed of Zand and Qajar painting. This is certainly also true for lacquerwork as long as the terms are qualified for later generalisation; it is true that the Safavid repertoire of themes, compositional elements and compositions, including the mixing of landscape and portrait cartouches, portrait medallions on floral background, hunting and figural scenes with floral bouquets above and below, were to become the stock in trade of later painters. We shall see that these elements were often used in new and unusual ways attesting that later Qajar art was not under the 'spell' of Safavid compositional inventions.

Muḥammad Baqīr ibn Muḥammad 'Alī was another artist who incorporated European compositional and artistic styles into his paintings. There is an exceptionally fine example of his work executed on an instrument case with a
mirror. The case is rectangular in shape and is fitted with a drawer and mirror-cover. The painting on the case depicts the familiar European Renaissance theme of the 'Adoration of the Shepherds'. It is noteworthy that in the meantime European art had entered the 'Age of Enlightenment'. The subject-matter and mode of execution changed considerably from that of the Renaissance. Diderot wrote in the *Encyclopedie*: "The general purpose of any art, or of any system of instruments and rules concurring towards the very same end, is to impress specific forms onto the basic element provided by nature". Persian art as portrayed by both Muhammad Zamān and Muhammad Bāqīr, was still in the realm of the mythical rather than the naturalistic and realistic. Renaissance perspective was applied to the picture under discussion. (plate 40A) The main figures occupy the foreground of the picture which is separated from the background by a classical column encircled by drapery. The classical column is a familiar prop, which was widely used by artists in order to compartmentalise the picture and to separate the external scenery from the internal one. It serves as a substitute wall which would in most cases inhibit the picture by its sheer presence and effectively reduce the surface area on which the action is depicted. The presence of the animals in front of the central group conveys to the observer the actual location
of the scene: a manger. The classical column is positioned in such a way that it creates a dividing line between the religious and the secular sections of the external scenery. The church is on the left hand side and the houses and trees are on the right. Pictures of this type provide more than just a visual image to the observer; they reflect the attitudes of the artists to the demands of the patrons and to the way they see the art of other cultures. The reason why they chose Christian religious stories for their subject could be manifold. One reason could be attributed to Armenian influence on the choice of the subject-matter. It is noteworthy that the faces of human figures are not European, despite the context in which they appear. The women appear Middle-Eastern; this is especially true for their eyes. It is possible that the artists used Armenian women whose skin was fair and eyes were black as their models; such women appeared in Armenian Christian paintings.61 The Virgin is also depicted wearing earrings, a necklace and bracelets. This, as was pointed out above, is not customary in European painting, but is purely Middle Eastern.

Another element that separates this painting from the European models it emulates is noticeable in the colour scheme employed by the artist. Whereas blue obtained
from lapis lazuli was favoured in Europe at this time, the dominant colours here are red and green. These colours capture the serenity of the Nativity perfectly. The colours were deliberately chosen in order to achieve such unashamed tranquility. Red and green, when used as filters, neutralise one another because of their relative position in the colour spectrum. They offset one another when they appear side by side, and this is exactly what the artist has achieved in this painting, creating a contrast between the various figures by using the two colours alternately. The two colours are used to the same effect in the other paintings decorating the mirror.

The outer face of the mirror cover portrays a lady in the process of choosing a garment and jewellery. (plate 40B) Again this picture is divided by a classical draped column into two distinct areas, an internal and an external one. The external scenery is very European, while the internal one is a mixture of eastern and western elements. It is not possible to tell whether the artist mixed the two cultures deliberately or accidentally. The lady is represented wearing a number of items of jewellery. The same applies to her companion and maid who are shown with beads and earrings, which in European painting would be very unusual indeed, because the social hierarchy had its own
hallmarks, one of which was jewellery. While the mistress was lavishly adorned with clothing and jewellery, the maids and servants were simple and unassuming.

This is an indication that jewellery in the Middle-East had no social significance, or at least a different one. It was looked upon merely as a decorative item without a symbolic role. Social position therefore had to be signalled differently. The excessive showing of pearls and beads is definitely Eastern and it is very likely to have been copied from the local Armenians, or imported from Turkey and India.

The way artists tried to imitate Europeanness in their depiction of the 'Mistress' and the social standing of her companions is also noteworthy. Her hair is in locks, while the heads of the servants are partially covered with a rectangular kerchief, revealing naturally flowing long hair. In the Middle-East the custom was for ladies of virtue to have long hair. Cutting of the hair was inflicted as a punishment for loose morality. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the lady in the picture might have been a courtesan. Although she possesses the wealth in material terms, as depicted in the picture, her companions are richer in the moral
sense, and this message is passed on by the artist by the way he chooses to dress them.

A female figure holding a fan is shown on the inner face of the cover (plate 40c). The clothing and jewellery are eastern, while the method of creating perspective is definitely western. The illusion of distance and depth is achieved by painting parallel lines with a common diminishing point which is well behind the figure, centrally positioned within the frame which resembles a window, while the external scenery is visible through the open door. The decoration under the window is Persian, as are the patterns of the carpet.

In order to appreciate the expertise of the artist, we should examine the plate which depicts the lady with the fan. If we look at the picture carefully, it will become apparent that the picture is in fact a mirror image: the lady is looking at herself in the mirror which the inner face of the case is covering. If this is so, then it is an ingenious device by which the artist depicted on the cover the image reflected by the object it is encasing. This interpretation is supported further by the appearance of the female in the picture; she is definitely posing, gazing at a fixed object. The drapes around the frame appear to be on the outside which is a
further support for the mirror image hypothesis. The clothing, which comprises a skirt, a tunic and a heavily embroidered long cape, might have been modelled on the outfits worn by English ladies living in Persia at the time. Trade with the Middle and Far-East was prolific and a large number of merchants and traders took their families from England to Persia. The excessive showing of beads both on dress and hair however, is a Middle-Eastern custom. There is an indication that the person in the picture is a Christian; she is wearing a cross around her neck just below the beads. In fact it is a Gregorian cross and therefore the person belonged to the Orthodox faction of the Church and was probably Armenian.

An inscription in two parts, placed above and below the lady, gives the signature of the artist as "Muhammad Bāqīr ibn Muhammad 'Alī the noblest and humblest in the court of Isfahan". The second part of of the inscription mentions that the paintings on the mirror case took eleven months to accomplish, and that was in Ḥijrī Jamādā al-Awwal 1187/1773.

Another mirror-case is dated 1204/1790 and signed Ya Ṣādiq al-Wa'd. The case and the outer face of the cover are delicately painted with flowers and birds. The background is light brown and the dominant colours are
shades of red and green. The inner face of the cover depicts a seated female figure holding a rose in one hand while covering her heart with the other. The hairstyle of the female figure is reminiscent of Botticelli's "Venus in the Primavera", painted around 1485. However, the head-dress is definitely eastern. She seems to be sitting on a balcony and there is a low wall with narrow rim behind her. (Plate 41).

In front of her feet is a tiny gazelle which is purely incidental to the picture. Behind her in the centre of the picture, there is a tree which puts the distance into perspective and on her left there is a young man offering her another rose. The male figure is European looking, but his hairstyle is French. The predominant colours are green and red. The coat of the youth on the other hand is light brown.

Although works in the style of 'Alī Ashraf and his contemporaries continued to be produced in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a new style which started to emerge is associated with the reign of Karīm Khān Zand in Shiraz. Karīm Khān actually ruled as regent for a puppet Safavid prince. This sense of political continuity may have extended to the arts, and this may explain the reason why Zand painting did not produce revolutionary
formal or thematic changes. In terms of media, it can be said that it continued the tradition of large scale mural and oil paintings which were initiated and established in the late Safavid period. Only easily recognisable new facial types and changes in figural proportions and costumes can be noted. In general the faces of the women are round and full-cheeked, the eyes are wide and the hair is parted centrally. The bodies are on the plump side and their costume usually consists of a transparent blouse and embroidered striped wide trousers, sometimes topped by a knee-length tight fitting coat. The head is covered with a small cap and/or aigrette with a long scarf attached.

The men are usually clean-shaven and also round faced. Their heads are covered by either the high Zand turban, an Astrakhān hat, or a small cap with a few wisps of hair peeping through. They usually wear a long sleeved fitted overdress with a cummerbund at the waist. The body proportions tend towards the stocky.

Although the figures are well modelled and logically placed in relation to each other, the landscapes and architectural settings inherited from the Safavid period are sometimes oversimplified.
The Persian painter never really grasped the finer points of western aesthetics and from the eighteenth century onwards merely grafted them on the compositions which used a basically Persian vocabulary: it was unrealistic, decorative painting used as illustration.

Still, the Zand style can be appreciated for its fine detailing, intimate atmosphere and poetic undercurrents. Miniatures and manuscripts of this period are rare, and therefore lacquer work takes on a special importance as a source for research for establishing the character of Zand style in conjunction with the study of contemporary oil and mural painting.

Before we embark on the discussion of the Qajar period the existence of two transitional styles should be mentioned. The first continues basically to portray the first two rulers of the Qajar dynasty, Aqā Muḥammad and Fath ʿAlī Shāh. Most of these examples are painted in the "small figure" style and are unsigned and undated. This style is labelled transitional for two reasons. The first is that the artists used an artistic technique based on ancient models as discussed supra, the second that the setting of the portraits is invariably predictable.
The "small figure style" eventually developed into the grander and richer "court style" of the Fath 'Alī Shāh period. The main purpose of this style was to impress the viewer with the ruler's power and legitimacy. It is distinguished by a rather cold magnificence and loss of charm of the styles of previous periods.

The second type is more aptly termed a "compositional type" than a style: it depicts groups of the Holy Family with Saint Peter or Shaykh Șan'ān and the Christian Maiden, beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing virtually unchanged until the end of the Qajar period. This type of Christian veneration scene is combined with hunting, Indianising scenes or visits to holy men with slight variations in style according to the period. They are extremely difficult to date and are attributed to artists such as Muhammad Sādiq and Muhammad Zamān II (from the Fath 'Alī Shāh period) and to Aqā Najaf, a mid-nineteenth century painter. Hallmarks of the style are: details of gold ewers, peacocks in the foreground and pseudo-Queen Anne costumes for the women.

It has been mentioned supra that the elegance and the finesse had disappeared from paintings of this period. In a sense this is true. However, the new trend is extremely fascinating. It can be called puritan,
simplistic and realistic, but it cannot be condemned as crude. The representational magic of the recent past is still present: the worldly Paradise with its exotic flowers and innocent singing birds are still there.
Summary of the Stylistic Development of the Pre-Qajar Period.

The flower and bird motif was the principal theme of the Shiraz school, while the figures and their depictions were the practise of the Isfahan school. In the earlier compositions, colour combined with imagination provided magnificent pictures. The Shiraz compositions tended to be logical, orderly, though sometimes seemingly lifeless. In the sixteenth century Shiraz painters utilised the earlier established animated scenery depiction, but rendered in a more skillful form of drawing. The second half of the sixteenth century witnessed the signs of growing eclecticism. Landscapes became more crowded, rocks and trees took on a heavier form. In spite of influences from without, the Shiraz school retained its uniqueness concerning the structural systems of composition. The painters tended to leave their creations unsigned, therefore it is virtually impossible to compile a chronology of their names and works. Various manuscripts were signed by the scribes as in the case of the Khamsa of 992/1584 which was signed by Qāsim "in Shiraz".

The Isfahan school as mentioned above, was involved mainly with figural representations. It is noteworthy
that the faces of young women are very similar to the faces of Armenian women, which is not surprising as the artists were inevitably captured by their beauty and they were their source of inspiration. Male faces always look Middle-Eastern. Older men are inevitably bearded. Female faces tend to look enigmatic, their heads are usually covered with various types of head-dress.

The leaping rabbit is a characteristic depiction of the Shiraz school. The colours employed in landscape depiction are varied; in some examples however, the sky is painted gold, the hills cream, and the banks of the rivers a light brown. This colour scheme provides a relatively homogenous monotone effect. More and more the painters became involved with religious and literary sources for inspiration, frequently depicting scenes from the Shah-Nāmah.

The paintings become more alive in the second half of the sixteenth century; favourite stories are portrayed, with even the observers of the stories participating, in contrast to the earlier compositions where the figures tended to be unconnected and solitary.
CHAPTER TWO: FOOTNOTES


2. ibid., loc.cit.


8. Mr. B. W. Robinson informed me, in a verbal communication, that he believes the binding to be contemporary with the MS. This will make it one of the earliest known lacquer painted bindings.


15. This preoccupation with natural and floral elements, and the manner in which they were represented, may also have been partly due to the influence of imported Chinese Ming porcelain.

16. Gratzl, E. "Medallion Bindings from the 16th c. on", SPA, pl. 968.


18. Compare with Haldane, D. Islamic Bookbindings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, nos. 91, 94, 95 and 98, all from the 16th century.


21. This is especially marked in the low reliefs on the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum.


23. The painting was applied directly to the book cover, without the application of any preparatory surface.

24. One example has already been pointed out, the similarity between the scrollwork on the binding of the 888/1484 copy of the Mathnawi and the Ardebil carpet in the V & A.

25. Sarre, Islamic Bindings, pls. XXIX and XXX.


29. Fehérvári, op.cit., section entitled "Lacquered or varnished", pp. 152-54.

30. ibid., p. 272.

32. cf. Mantegna's "Martyrdom of St. James" in the Church of Eremitani, Padua.


38. *idem.*, *loc. cit.*

39. Other works by Muhammad 'Alī Ashraf are discussed on pp. 86-7.


42. cf. SPA, pl. 1321; Herzfeld, E. "A Bronze Pen-case", *Ars Islamica*, III, 1936.

43. Barrett, D. *Islamic Metalwork in the British Museum*, p. 49, and pls. 30-33, p. XVIII.


45. The qalamdān is decorated with scenes from the story of "Shaykh San'ān and the Christian Maiden"; it is discussed below, p. 85.
46. Indian style qalamdāns were very popular in the Zand period. For dated comparative material, cf. pls. 34 and 35, dated 1117/1705 and 1131/1719 respectively.

47. A similar representational style and erotic use of drapery was characteristic of paintings on Greek pottery, and it is possible that Persian artists were indirectly familiar with some examples. cf. Bördmann, J. Greek Art, pls. 176 and 180.

48. The exchange of artists between the Persian and Indian courts is a tradition with a long history. There is no evidence to point out that Muḥammad Sābir was of Indian origin; it is very likely, however, that he was a Persian working in the "Indian Style".

49. The story of Shaykh Sanʿān will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

50. Compare, for example, the use of the stream and two ducks in the foreground with the same motif in pls. 33 and 34. It should also be pointed out that the use of religious scenes on this and similar objects need not indicate that they are to be understood as devotional items. These scenes were used as a pretext to introduce Christian elements and to display ladies in Western costumes.


52. The special marqash technique used for the background in this qalamdān has already been mentioned in Chapter One. cf. pp. 18-19.


55. Ibid., p. 66.

56. Adle, op. cit., loc.cit.

58. The question of "copies" or "forgeries" was discussed in detail by Grube in "Traditionalism or Forgeries: Lacquered Painting in 19th century Iran", where he gives a number of examples where the date of an object was copied along with it when it was copied. Such items need not necessarily be considered "forgeries", since they were not made to deceive. Grube suggests that they are "imitations" or "re-creations", reflecting a sense of traditionalism in Persian art. cf. PDFCA, 11, pp. 277-84, and especially p. 283.


61. The use of Armenian women as models for this and similar paintings is very probable when one considers the large Armenian population resident in Julfa, a suburb of Isfahan, where Muhammad Bāqir ibn Muhammad 'Alī was practicing. A large number of Armenians had been perviously brought in by Shāh Tahmasp to settle in that area.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ARTISTIC BACKGROUND OF
THE QAJAR PERIOD

The middle of the eighteenth century was characterised by civil wars and general chaos. Power was contested by the Zands and the Qajars. The Qajars were members of a Turkish tribe who settled in Armenia during the days of Tamerlane and then they moved on to the region of Astarabad (Gurgan). Eventually, they were victorious over the Zands of Shiraz and carried on ruling until 1924.\(^1\) Under Agā Muhammad Tehran was established as capital. Isfahan, which suffered throughout the bitter years of strife, became a wilderness by the end of the eighteenth century. During the contest for power and for a short while during the following period the suffering and devastation was reflected in the various works of art.

When the power of the Qajar family was consolidated, however, the arts began to flourish. The ruling family and its wealthier subjects extended patronage over a wider range in the arts, which included painted lacquer and enamel and large oil paintings.\(^2\) The artistic trend which was at its budding stage during the last years of the Safavid era began to blossom during the Qajar period.
Brush painting techniques which had been already introduced were developed further. There was a revival of portrait painting with court patronage and there are several portraits of Nādir Shāh and later of Fath 'Alī Shāh.

The subject-matter, which included portraiture and depictions of females, was invariably chosen by the patron. Some of the female figures were instrument players or dancers, probably resident members of the patron's household. This type of dependence on the taste and choice of the patron ineluctably led to the loss of individual endeavour and to stagnation in overall stylistic development.

Fath 'Alī Shāh, although not a great ruler, nevertheless became immortal through his patronage of the arts. In his palace he conjured up the magnificence of the ancient Persian pomp and ceremony of the Achaemenids and the Sasanians. He was determined to rival the splendours of other courts in a similar way to the first Umayyad princes over a millennium earlier. He commissioned a large number of oil-paintings on canvas which depicted him, either on his own or in the company of ministers or ghulāms. Diplomatic relations with Britain and France were established and strengthened during his reign.
This political move had important consequences for the arts and crafts especially in the field of portrait painting. Portraits were painted on various surfaces and can be found in miniatures, and on canvas, murals, qalamdāns, bookbindings and mirror cases.

Large Oil Paintings and Miniature Painting
of the Early Qajar Period

There was a noticeable change in one important aspect of figural representation in the early part of the Qajar period. Whilst in the previous period Armenian and European faces were depicted by Persian artists, now local beauties with thick curvilinear eyebrows, large almond shaped eyes and small, but fleshy lips became the standard. The figures are more squat, and the head tends to be large in relation to the rest of the body. Where outdoor scenery comprising slender trees, hillocks and buildings is employed as background to the portrait, a European flavour is retained. The emphasis on jewellery both on male and female figures is even more prominent than before.

The technique of painting onto canvas was first introduced to Iran in the seventeenth century, and
continued in use during the eighteenth. It was in the nineteenth century however, which was considered to be the age of the true 'renaissance', that both mural and portrait painting flourished. A few mural paintings have survived from this period. One depicts Aqa Muhammad and his courtiers, whilst another represents Fath 'Alī Shāh and some of his sons. These murals can be found in the pleasure house of Fath 'Alī Shāh at Karaj. Another, similar to these can be found in a pavilion in the Shrine of Qumm.

Oil painting of the period, but more precisely during the reign of Fath 'Alī Shāh (1797-1834) was characterised by stiffness and lack of perspective. All the extant portrait pictures of Fath 'Alī Shāh have predictable settings and it seems that he liked himself to be painted out hunting or in the company of others, giving audience. In the hunting scenes he is depicted with a long pointed black beard, while in the group portraits his beard seems to have been trimmed.

All the portraits depicting the King have their prototypes in ancient Persian bas-reliefs. This may be the reason why all the figures are so still in the paintings; they are modelled on sculpted examples. This is seen in the portrait of Fath 'Alī Shāh on the
book cover reproduced in plate 42. It seems that the painters of the period were not trained in drawing, and this is why the figures tend to be out of proportion. This is true only for figures; flowers were beautifully drawn and painted. A painter most noted for his expertise in flower painting was Lutf 'Alī Khān. Because of the brilliance and delicacy of the flowers, many artists, especially mirror painters, copied them.\footnote{11}

The Shāh had three painters under his patronage and it could have been any one of them who painted these portraits. Many of the paintings are unsigned, which sometimes makes attribution difficult. Two of the painters, 'Alī and Bāqīr painted in very similar styles. The third one, Muhammad Ja'far, a member of the famous Ja'farī family from Kashan, the greatest ceramic centre of Persia, had a more distinctive style;\footnote{12} his drawing tended to be still, his colour shading coarser than that of the other two painters. Many members of the family bear the name Abu'l-Hasan. The most noted, Abu'l-Hasan, the son of Muhammad, was sent to Italy and was a prolific portrait painter. He made studies for the pleasure palace of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Naṣr al-Dīn Shāh. While the overall decoration manifests some imperfections, the small water colours depicting nature scenes are very fine indeed.\footnote{13} The painter-in-chief of
Fath 'Alī Shāh was Mirzā Bābā. He was active from about 1785 until 1810. As chief painter to the court, he held the title naggāsh bāshī, although he never seemed to have used this title. He was a master in all the arts; he produced excellent lacquerwork, and was an accomplished miniature painter and illuminator. He was actively involved in painting pictures in oil, mainly historical portraits. Another theme besides portraiture, the still life, became popular. A number of artists made an attempt at this genre, but none managed to reproduce the richness of colour that Mirzā Bābā attained in his paintings. Noticeably, red had become the dominant colour, replacing green which was favoured by the artists of the Safavid period. The idea of still life painting must have been borrowed from European painting, but with a difference. In European painting still life depicting fruit or flowers is invariably highlighted by a plain, unassuming background, in order to draw the attention of the observer to the central theme. In the painting 'Still life with pomegranates', by Mirzā Bābā, the fruits and flowers are placed on a low stone wall, probably belonging to the courtyard, while the architectural elements of the surroundings, which are typically Islamic, provide the background.
Muhammad Sādiq was another painter who was active in the second half of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. There is a striking difference between his style and that of Mīrzā Bābā. While Mīrzā Bābā attempted to establish an Islamic style of depiction of European elements, Muhammad Sādiq remained loyal to the Europeanising trend of the Safavid era. A typical example of this is a painting which depicts a prince on horseback attacked by a dragon. The motif is based on the legend of St George and the dragon, with the prince appearing as St George. The rendition of the sky portrays the artist's mastery in brushwork and handling of oils, which, together with the mode of depicting the horse conforms to contemporary European style. The European influence is less evident in another picture depicting a couple in the process of drinking wine. The clothing and head-dress of the girl is typically Persian, the wide trousers were especially favoured in the Zand period. The colours are rich, with red as the dominant colour. Delicate brush-work complements the richness of the composition, particularly in the decoration of the clothing. It is striking, however, that the human figures in both pictures are very stiff and motionless, while the horse and dragon convey movement, in spite of the artist's adherence to a rather idealised form of a horse.
Another artist, Mīhr 'Alī, was frequently commissioned by the Shāh to paint his portrait. Like Mīrzā Bābā, Mīhr 'Alī painted a series of historical portraits. The Shāh is invariably portrayed dressed in full royal clothing and adorned with heavy jewellery. The large scale portraits are impressive indeed, however, Mīhr 'Alī was not able to convey life and motion in his paintings of the Shāh either. But perhaps it was Abū al-Qāsim who possessed the most impressive and distinctive style in portrait painting. This may be due to the fact that he was not a native of Tehran, but came from Shiraz. His portraiture is restricted mainly to girls playing musical instruments and to dancers. The figures in these pictures are dressed in splendid clothes and are painted with lavish colours. The dominant colours are red and blue. Although these paintings are very striking, the artist's skill transpires not from the ability to animate, but from the subtle brushwork and use of colour. It seems that oil painting, especially on canvas, presented a considerable amount of difficulty to the artists. In order to compensate for the lack of motion and perspective, they used lavish colours and painstaking detail.

The paintings of Muhammad Hasan who was active during this period, reveal that this artist may have been more
familiar with anatomy than his contemporaries. This is evident in a painting of a prince holding a flintlock.\textsuperscript{25} The figure of the prince lacks the familiar stiff posture, the muscles are accentuated and the hand holding the flintlock is much more realistic than any others seen thusfar. The face of the prince manifests an expression of self-awareness and this is true also for the female figures in another two paintings.\textsuperscript{26} Curvatures of the body are conveyed through the subtly flowing folds of the girl's skirt and the sleeves of the blouse.

\textit{Sayyid Mīrzā}, who was active during the same period, does not seem to have been very prolific. Still, his paintings are very accomplished, and his figures more animated. The posture of the heavily jewelled dancing girl in one of his paintings is full of movement.\textsuperscript{27} The increased number of folds on the dress covering the upper torso convey the three-dimensionality of the body. Contemporary portraits lack this three-dimensionality and even some of \textit{Sayyid Mīrzā}'s other paintings are devoid of it. In his depiction of \textit{Hazrat Yūsuf}, he returns to the familiar stiff posture.\textsuperscript{28}

A painting, depicting a seated minister and dated 1850/60, probably painted by \textit{Ṣāni' al-Mulk}, is interesting for a number of reasons.\textsuperscript{29} The face of the
figure is extremely realistic and expressive, finely detailed and resembling a photograph. The hat is meticulously executed and even the texture of the material can be seen and almost felt. However, in contrast to the fine depiction of the head and of the hat, the body seems cumbersome, the hand and the rosary are drawn rather than painted. It transpires from the comparison of this painting to those discussed above, that there was a dual trend in portrait painting. While fine detail and realistic rendition dominate in some pictures, a simplistic and sketchy approach was applied to others. A mixture of the two is seen in this particular portrait.

Another interesting artist of this period was Mahmūd Sharīf, also known as Mālek al-Shu'arā, who was both a poet and a painter at the court of Nasr al-Din Shāh. One example of his work can be found in the Library of the Gulistān Palace. It is in the form of a gouache depicting Mashhad, dated 1290/1873.30

Kamāl al-Mulk, the most noted artist of the late nineteenth century (d.1941), was a member of the Ja'fārī family. He founded the School of Fine Arts in Tehran and he was a pupil of the French painter
Cavanel. Some of his paintings will be discussed further below in the appropriate section.

It was noted earlier that large oil-paintings were executed on a variety of surfaces, ranging from canvas to plaster and stucco. One such oil painting on plaster depicts a pair of angels holding the royal crown, being surrounded by grotesque plants and animal heads. The representation is simplistic and the figures are out of proportion.

Religious paintings had fervent adepts in Persia. Religious personalities were a much favoured subject-matter for the lay artists and for the dervishes, who used to draw people on the streets while reciting the Qur'ān and showing pictures of the martyrs in Islam. The most popular of these pictures was the portrait of the Caliph 'Alī, usually represented hidden by a white veil in conformation to one of the imperatives of Islam, which forbids the visual representation of Islamic religious personages.
Miniature Painting

Canvas, as a medium for artistic expression, was not one which the Persian painters mastered readily. While they excelled in miniature painting, which was best applied to manuscripts, lacquered papier-maché and enamelled gold, they failed to translate and transfer that technique onto a large surface, where rendition of perspective and proportion required different perception of the subject matter. Although the confined space on a mirror-case, galamdān, jewellery and boxes required much more delicate brushwork than did the large surface area, traditionally it was much closer to the artist's own image of how things appear in reality.

Valuables, such as jewellery were brought from India, which together with the famous Imperial Library of the Mughal rulers, gave the Persian artists new ideas. Better artists were taken from the Indian Court and the few miniatures still existing of this period reveal that the Indian style of painting was fashionable for a period in Persia. 34

Miniatures were also painted onto paper for illustrated manuscripts in the tradition of the preceding periods. The emphasis was on human and animal figures and the
narrative element. The background tended to be oversimplified in comparison to that on other surfaces and the human figures are modelled on reality, rather than on super-human qualities. Iconography was also employed as a means to differentiate sets of groups and their various roles in the story.\(^35\)

The most notable of the miniature painters were the descendents of Shāfī 'Abbāsī. Although there was considerable diversity in their styles, they shared a number of common features. Some of these comprise partially conventionalised depictions of flowers with richer tones on gold background, integrated into the decorative element. The most unusual one is the wholly naturalistic skillfully executed representation of the actual flower. Symmetry is conveyed by picturing a yellow rose on the one side and a red one on the other. The use of coloured inks in polychrome depictions is an innovation which played a very important part. Coloured inks were employed in another style in which the whole medium of gently modulated washes supplement the sensitively graded lines.\(^36\) It is more usual to find the latter in monochrome, where one class is entirely in blue. This could have been due to the influence of the blue ceramic style, much in favour at the time.
Blue was prepared by heating lapis lazuli then plunging it into water to break it up, followed by grinding and the floating off of the ultamarine in water. Earlier, during the Safavid period, azurite imported from Hungary was used and only later replaced by the real ultramarine. When good quality blue was required, the lapis lazuli powder was mixed with resin, wax and linseed oil to form a stiff paste. After a number of days it was pounded in warm, slightly alkaline water. Mauves and pinks were made with ultramarine and Indian crimson lake. These were used by painters in Isfahan during the period under discussion. Peori and verdigris mixed with sugar or honey as a medium may also have been used. However, as the medium used in Persian miniature painting is not water soluble, it cannot have been either gum arabic or gum tragacanth mixed with sugar or honey.

It is necessary for the colours which are used in miniature painting to be opaque, because opacity is essential in order to superimpose successive layers to get a pure tone and, therefore, only mineral colours can be employed. Vegetable dyes are transparent and they would yield a secondary intermediate shade.

The paper which was used by the Persians was composed of linen rags with long, coarse interlocked fibres. This
surface enabled a good binding of the paint and enhanced the brilliance of the reflecting surface of the gold. Probably, at first, the surface of the paper was powdered with Chinese wax, followed by burnishing with a piece of soft silk.\footnote{41}

**Persian Enamelled Works of the Qajar Period**

There is another medium that played a significant role during the Qajar period, namely, enamel work. This technique is particularly important for this study, since the same artists were frequently engaged in painting lacquered objects and decorating enamelled artefacts. Several of these enamelled items are signed by the artists and most of the time even dated. For this reason I consider it essential to deal with this technique here in brief.

Enamelling requires a series of procedures which differ from those of lacquer painting on papier-maché. Normally, a metallic surface is used for the purpose. The design is engraved in low relief on the metallic surface and this is followed by colour application and firing. Different colours are applied and fired separately, since they have different melting points. When a translucent
rendition is required, for example for the background, only a thin layer is painted on. The colour of the metal, most frequently gold, shows through the enamel, giving an impression very similar to margash. Opaque white enamel, however is used as the basis for painting. It is applied and fired first; and this is then followed by the application of the other colours. The use of white enamels as a base for painting is clearly seen in plates 43A and B.

Most of the miniature painters of the early Qajar period were also conversant with the technique of enamelling and produced paintings which were comparable in excellence to contemporary miniatures. It seems that these two artistic modes of expression were favoured by the artists much more than painting on large surfaces, such as canvas or stucco.

One of the most famous enamel painters of Fath 'Ali Shah was called Muhammad Ja'far. He was commissioned by the Shāh to decorate a jewellery set which was given as a present to Sir John Kinneir Macdonald for his part in achieving a Peace Treaty with Russia. The set comprises a collar, a star and an emblem. Basically, three different styles of rendition are discernable in the enamelling. The royal crown on the collar is highlighted
with white enamel and shaded with a fine touch of red in order to produce a three dimensional effect. In contrast, the two plaques flanking it on either side depicting female faces which are surrounded by petals in the shape of a sunflower, appear to be concave. This effect is achieved through the combination of the translucent red colour of the petals on the one hand and the thick application of enamel to the centre, on the other. Minute flowers fill in the spaces between the eight plaques, each delicately enamelled in order to resemble precious stones.  

The expertise with which Persian enamel artists were handling this particular medium is in evidence even more with certain items amongst the crown jewels of Iran. Before these are discussed, however, a brief mention should be made of the very fine enamel work which can be seen on the hilt and scabbard of a late eighteenth century dagger. The inscription of the artist appears in the following manner: *ragam-ī kamtarīn Husaynī* with the date 1209/1795. The two components of the piece are covered with a gamut of floral decoration, comprising roses, chrysanthemums, iris, lilies, hydrangeas, narcissi and orchids in low relief against a background of leafy branches.
The early nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new trend in floral design. It is noticeable on this dagger that the colours are much more vivid and varied, ranging from light pastel to darker base colours. White is used frequently in order to create a three dimensional effect.\(^{47}\)

This stylistic development is even more noticeable on the frame of a mirror which can be found amongst the Crown Jewels of Iran. It was painted by the enamellist, ghulām Khānazād 'Alī.\(^{48}\) A variety of flowers are painted on a gold background in a style which is reminiscent of the Dresden style. The European depiction of flowers became more and more popular, probably because of the old herbals which were exported from Europe to Persia. There were also European floral artists at the court to teach the artists of the Shāh to draw à la France.\(^{49}\) The colours include vermillion, which is one of the most favoured colours used on Dresden porcelain and is a newcomer to the range the Persian artists were using in previous periods. The brushwork is very delicate, but at the same time purposive. An illusion of depth is created by the translucent background, the flowers seem to be floating on the surface. White is used in abundance both for highlighting and for providing an actual colour for the hydrangeas.\(^{50}\) A garland of flowers surrounds the
central medallion which contains a portrait of Fath 'Ali Shāh, seated. The figure of the Shāh seems to be coming out of the frame.

A contemporary of Khānāzād 'Alī, Muhammad Bāqīr, was also an outstanding enamel painter. One of the sets he made comprises three items: a bowl, which might have been used as a cup, a saucer and a spoon. The base material is of gold and the exterior surfaces are covered in painted or translucent enamel. The dominant colours are green, orange, blue and crimson. The spoon is decorated with two heads of young princes on the handle and two suns with human faces on the bowl. The bowl narrows towards the handle creating an interesting effect in that the uppermost part of the handle is attached just under the mouth as if a beard were to follow. Human faced suns are not unusual features. They also appeared in the crown jewels, but in those instances they were depicted in full frontal position. Both the bowl and the saucer are decorated with a number of circular medallions each containing an astronomical symbol and outlined with arabesques of different sizes and divided by scrollwork and flowers. Poetic inscriptions adorn both the saucer and the bowl. According to Robinson, the animals on the cover are the twelve Chinese and Japanese signs of the Zodiac, slightly adjusted but in their proper order. It
is also suggested by Robinson that there might have been a connection in Persian astronomy/astrology of the Far-Eastern Zodiac to the normal twelve signs portrayed on this enamel.

The work of Khānāzād 'Alī and Muhammad Bāqīr is very similar in both style and quality. A similar effect to that of their paintings is discernable in an enamelled mirror case which bears the signature of the enamellist, kamtarīn Muhammad Muḥsin Amīr Kalhūr. It is dated 1212/1797-98 and it depicts one of the earliest known portraits of Fath 'Alī Shāh. The central medallion containing the portrait of the Shāh is surrounded by a background of dark green foliage. This in turn is framed with a border containing cartouches with flowers. The flowers are painted in vivid pastels on white background. The outer cover of the mirror case depicts a profusion of flowers and leaves; birds and fruits are visible in their midst, while in the centre, emerging from within the flowers, is a female figure. Every available space is covered with contrasting colours, applied in differing thicknesses in order to create the illusion of layering. It is not unreasonable, given the similarity in the styles of these three artists, to suggest that they belonged to the same school.
A similar stylistic and compositional approach is discernable on a royal box, dating from the end of the eighteenth - beginning of the nineteenth century. It is rectangular in shape, made of gold, and decorated with enamel (plates 43A and B). The decoration of the top comprises a lobed cartouche flanked by floral designs and framed by alternating flowers and oblong cartouches with an Arabic invocation to 'Alī in Nasta'liq calligraphy. The central cartouche contains the portrait of a Persian lady holding a bouquet of flowers. Her dress and the flowers are painted in vivid blue and pink. (plate 43A) The four sides are decorated with flowers and birds over a gold background within lobed medallions, while the surrounding areas are painted in cobalt blue highlighted with gold leaves. (plate 43A) On the bottom of the holder there is a very realistic representation of a single iris with three rosettes on a gold background, framed by oblong cartouches painted in light blue containing floral scrolls. (plate 43B) While the style of the other floral depictions conform to those of the other enamels, the naturalistic appearance of the iris is more reminiscent of the meticulous representations of the Safavid period. In this piece, traditionalism, conformism and compositional innovation merge into one harmonious unity.
In complete contrast to the box described above, another painted by 'Abd al-Majīde Beg Yusif Begūfe Badkūhe and dated 1314/1896 concentrates on geometric elements. (plate 44) It is cylindrical in form, enamelled and studded with diamonds. At the one end the surface comprises an inner and an outer circular band with a square cartouche in the centre containing calligraphic inscriptions. Sparsely spaced rosettes with interlinking leaves decorate the outer band, while the inner one painted in deep red serves as background to the cartouche. The other end is much more lavishly decorated. Again, there are two circular bands, but here the background is enamelled in white with floral designs. In the inner band there is a five pointed star outlined with cobalt blue and studded with diamonds and a pentagon formed by vermilion coloured tulips. The walls are decorated with elongated lobed cartouches in alternating light and dark enamel and minute floral patterns. The contrast between the two ends of the box is really striking. The relative simplicity of the background of the first is in harmony with the calligraphic inscription; the richness of the other is in harmony with the status of its owner. One is earthbound, the other is not. The artistic achievement does not lie in the style, but in the composition. The execution of the patterns is not comparable to those painted by greater artists, but
the fact that the whole as such is extremely impressive cannot be denied. Some conformity is, however, discernable in this design. The colours of the flowers are rich and varied and the style of depiction is reminiscent of that of the Europeans.

It is not only the influence of Dresden that is discernable in floral depictions; traces of Limoges and Meissen are also detectable.\textsuperscript{55} It seems, therefore, that Persian enamellists were imitating the painting on European porcelain in general, with the same proficiency.

The influence of Limoges is strongly evident in a plate and cup on splayed foot which belong to a private collection in London. (plate 45) The enamelling is carried out on the plate on a pure gold background. Three distinctive groups of decorative motifs which adorn the plate are discernable. The outer border comprises reciprocating triangles, the second wider band contains sprays of flowers, followed by a narrow band of inscriptions mentioning the name of Mālek Bahmān, one of Fath ʿAlī Shāh's sons. The innermost circle depicts a radiating fan with alternating colours. The enamelling technique of the outer border and that of the band of inscriptions are comparable: in both cases the gold background is completely covered with delicately executed
brushwork. This provides a vivid contrast to the main decorative themes. The sprays of flowers were first incised on the gold body of the plate, followed by layer by layer application of colour; in the case of the leaves the thin application produced a translucent effect, while the thicker layering of the flowers created a three dimensional effect. Each segment of the fan is separated by gold platted lines and their inner fields are decorated with tiny floral and leaf designs. A similar treatment is discernable on another gold rectangular plate; however, in this case, the outer border comprises the more curvilinear motifs of scroll, floral and leaf designs. In both examples the colours are very striking. The inclusion of a radiating central pattern in the form of a fan or a sun seems to have set a new compositional trend, not to be found in lacquer painting. It is frequently found in architectural tile decoration in the Safavid period and it is possible that the artist used these in order to introduce a typically Muslim element to differentiate Persian enamels from European ones. In the case of the cup, the gold is first covered with a light blue enamel, followed by floral decoration.

The style and technique of painted enamels remained constant during the reign of Fath 'Alī Shāh and no discernable changes occured for approximately the next
thirty years after his death. Even then, the changes that took place were not in the mode of depiction, but rather in a more extensive utilisation of colour and an individualistic approach to the subject matter. There was another technical innovation around 1860 which is attributable to Hasan Shirāzī.57 Shirāzī managed to apply a whole range of coloured enamels onto silver, while previously only a limited number of colours comprising blue, green and violet were suitable on a metallic surface. By applying a translucent green to the surface of the metal, he created a foundation to which the other colours adhered more readily. The most notable artist, whose work surpassed those of his predecessors, was Kāzim ibn Najaf 'Alī. He excelled not only in enamel painting, but in lacquer painting also.58 His work spans the period between 1860-1880 and he was the most prolific painter of his time.59

Artistic Trends after Fath 'Alī Shāh

The artistic trend which was prevalent during the reign of Fath 'Alī Shāh followed the mainstream tradition which was inherited from approximately the middle of the eighteenth century. This mainstream trend was established by the court artist Muhammad 'Alī Ashraf, who excelled in
naturalistic floral representations. The style of Ashraf was unique and sought after. He had a school of followers which continued well into the Qajar period. His technique of lacquer painting recalls the impressionistic style of dot matrix.60

After the death of Fath 'Ali Shāh and the ascension to the throne of his grandson Muhammad Shāh, the emphasis moved away from royal portrait painting. Dancing girls, lavishly decorated women and themes from popular Persian stories and myths became the subject-matter of paintings.61

An active school of painters who chose to paint sacred subjects was established. One of these painters was Aqā Shāh Najaf.62 Often they depicted the Prophet Muhammad, subjects from Christianity and the Holy Family. Saints and angels were frequently included in their paintings, imitating Italian compositions.

These illustrators were interested mainly in the personalities involved in the stories, rather than in the stories themselves. Visual narration is almost absent. Curiously, the mystical representation so much favoured by European painters is lacking from the artistic vocabulary of the Islamic painters; the depictions are
rather factual. This will transpire from the painting to be discussed below. One of the reasons for this may be that the theologians gave no encouragement to pictorial art. Religious symbolism was virtually non-existent until recently in the shape of the Hilāl or crescent.

Emotion is another factor which is missing from pictorial representation. Emphasis is on line and colour, an appeal to the rational rather than the emotional aspects of human nature. It is probably not for the lack of knowledge of how, but rather, for producing beauty only for beauty's sake. The emotional transcends the conventional form of visual expression in the hands of the Muslim artist. It disintegrates and then reassembles in the shape of calligraphy or scroll design, providing a background to the main theme of the picture. The feeling of pleasure is created through the medium of the senses; shades of happiness or sadness are transmitted through the colours. The faces are there to serve one purpose only: to convey the factual story and nothing else. The other devices which the artists conjured up replace the narrative role. Emotive expression is conveyed sometimes via movement of the hand or by a particular piece of clothing, such as the veil women use to indicate mourning.
CHAPTER THREE: FOOTNOTES

3. ibid., p. 10.
8. ibid., loc.cit.
12. ibid., p. 1900.
13. ibid., loc.cit.
14. Falk, op.cit., p. 25 and n. 8; he also signed as artist and illuminator of a MS. of Fath 'Ali Shāh's own poems, presented to the Prince Regent in 1812. ibid., loc.cit.
15. ibid., pp. 30-32.
16. ibid., loc.cit.
17. ibid., Pl. 3.
18. ibid., Pl. 4.
19. ibid., Pl. 5.
20. ibid., pp. 35-6.


25. *ibid.*, Pl. 27.

26. *ibid.*, figures 17 and 18, pp. 43 and 44.

27. *ibid.*, figure 19.

28. *ibid.*, Pl. 27, and pp. 42 and 45.


31. Colnaghi and Co., *op.cit*.


33. Godard, *op.cit.*, loc. cit.


36 Ackerman, P. "The Bird and Flower Pictures", SPA, V, p. 1901.


42. See Chapter One for the description of margash. For a bibliography on Persian enamel work see Robinson B. W. "Royal Qajar Enamel", Iran, X, 1972, p. 24, n.1.


44. Ibid., p. 36.

45. Ibid., p. 37.

46. cf. plate 95, Ibid., loc.cit.

47. cf. plate 95, Ibid., loc.cit.


50. Ibid., loc.cit.

51. Robinson, "Royal Qajar Enamel", op.cit.

52. Ibid., p. 27.

53. Ibid., pp. 24-5.

54. cf. plate, Ibid., loc.cit.

55. cf. Dresden, Meissen and Limoges porcelain in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

56. The plate is in a private collection in London; an inscription around the rim also mentions the name of Malek Bahman.


60. See above, Chapter Two, "Miscellaneous Items".
62. See Chapter Four and Appendix I.
CHAPTER FOUR

LACQUERWORK OF THE QAJAR PERIOD

Najaf and his Family

Before lacquerwork of the Qajar period is discussed, a family of lacquer painters whose joint work covers a span of around a hundred years (1815 - 1920) should be mentioned. Their work will be illustrated and described in the relevant sections in this chapter.

Aqā Najaf, also known as Najaf 'Alī, was the head of an active school of painting which was established during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. His dated work covers a period from 1815 to 1856. His sons Muhammad Kāzim, Muhammad Ja'far, Ahmad and Muhammad 'Alī were also prolific lacquer painters. The eldest three were active between 1850 and 1890; Muhammad 'Alī, who was still a young boy at the height of his father's career, was active until around 1920. Najaf's younger brother Ismā'īl and his nephew Haidar 'Alī belonged to the same school. They were court painters during the reign of Naṣr al-Dīn Shāh.
The range of subjects painted by members of this family is very wide; it includes traditional themes such as scenes from the *Shahnāmeh*, "Indian style" representations, Christian and Muslim themes, battle scenes, Persian historic events, floral compositions and portraiture. Persian themes are often combined with European ones; European styles and techniques are nearly always present.³

Although every member of the family had his own style, they worked close together and strongly influenced one another. This creates some difficulties in attributing unsigned pieces to a particular artist, specially since often, and even in signed pieces, the hand of more than one member is distinguishable.⁴

Historical documents that shed light on the lives of artists of this period are not very common. It is fortunate, therefore, that such a document pertaining to the Najaf family has survived.⁵ The document is the marriage contract of Najaf's daughter Shahr Bānū. All of the abovementioned artists were present and signed as witnesses, with the exception of Muhammad 'Ali, who was probably too young at the time to act as witness. The document is described in full in Appendix I.
The first painting to be discussed in a series of painted mirror cases is interesting not only for its style, but also for its content. During the Safavid and later the Qajar period, artists freely interchanged ideas not only with the Europeans and Armenians, but also with the Indians. Persian influence can be detected in Mughal art and this is also true in reverse. The reasons for this were discussed earlier.

The European connection can be seen on the outer face of the cover which depicts two young women and a bearded white haired old man kneeling in front of a seated figure who is flanked by two women. (plate 46A) One of the latter is holding a lighted candle in a candlestick. The other figure is occupied with placing a covered receptacle on a stone altar-shaped protrusion. The action takes place in a garden which can be divided into three areas. The first area comprises the main theme with the figures in the foreground. In front of the main group there are leitmotifs that are not directly connected to the story. The inclusion of incidental objects or leitmotifs is not unfamiliar; they are also present in paintings of the preceding era.
The composition is reminiscent of representations of the "Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple". According to the story, the Virgin, accompanied by her parents, was presented at the temple as a child. They placed her on the first step - as indeed she is positioned in the painting - and she ascended the rest of the steps of the altar. The fact that she is represented as a young woman and not as a child and that her mother is portrayed as a lady of similar age, is common even in European representation of this scene.

There are buildings in the form of open pavilions in the background, while angels peep out of the clouds above the trees. The pavilions possess pointed arched windows which point to their Persian character. The foreground is separated from the background by a river and a bridge; a solitary figure, apparently not connected to the story, is placed on top of the bridge. The composition is as crowded as those discussed previously. The composition of the background comprising the buildings is clumsy and overwhelming. The whole painting seems stiff and lacking in dynamic motion. The candlelight might suggest that the action is taking place in the evening; this however, is not conveyed by the colour of the sky which is an orangey yellow. It is obvious that the artist introduced the
candle because it was present in the engraving or painting he used as his source. The account of the Presentation does mention that the daughters of Israel "... shall each take a taper or a lamp...".

A practically identical scene can be seen on the back of a mirror case painted by Sayyid Mirzā and dated 1231/1815-16, now in the Chester Beatty Library. The composition and many details, such as the architecture, the trees, the clouds and the angels peeping through them, are identical. This even applies to minute details such as the positioning and gestures of the hands, and the small metal plaque attached to the garment of the seated man. The most prominent differences are in the rendering of the faces and the absence of the child and some vases in the foreground.

The manner in which the figures are represented is interesting. They are all covered with draped clothing, the folds arranged in such a way that the shape of the body is suggested through the material. Despite the apparent flow of the clothing, the figures are very stiff. This is especially true for the girl in the foreground; her body is very distorted, giving the impression that the artist had not knowledge of human
anatomy. This is also true of the figure standing on the bridge in the background. He seems motionless, and suspended in mid-air. Most of the figures are represented in profile, but the inclusion of the figure with the receptacle restores the balance, as she is represented frontally.

The inner face displays an Indian princess seated on a terrace and attended by six ladies. (plate 46B) There are trees and pavilions in the background. The figures are extremely simplistic and the execution is naive. The figures, all in profile, are even more motionless than the previous example, despite the movement suggested by the gesturing of the hands. The style of this painting is definitely not Persian, but most likely an imitation of the contemporary Indian style.

There is a barely legible signature which may be read as Ya Sahib al-Zaman. The date is illegible, but judging from the style, subject matter, and the similarities this mirror bears with that painted by Sayyid Mirza, the early nineteenth century is a possible date. A galamdan in a private collection, decorated with floral panels and portraits of Indian girls and youths painted in a similar style, is signed Ya Sahib al-Zaman and dated 1207/1793.
The already familiar theme of flowers and birds is depicted on the outer face of the cover of another mirror case. This mirror case is not dated, but stylistically it can be attributed to an artist who was active around the turn of the nineteenth century. The background is of a darker brown than the ones discussed earlier, contrasting much more sharply with the flower motif. (plate 47A) The flowers themselves are of a much paler shade, orange rather than red, but the dominant colour is still green. The effect can be compared to a framed picture, where the frame is lighter in colour and therefore, the painting appears to be sunken into the frame. This illusion is enhanced by the darker background.

On the inner face of the cover there is a framed portrait of a young mullah. He is kneeling on a green prayer rug holding worrybeads. (plate 47B) The shape of the window behind him is not square, like the windows described so far, but it is of the traditional Persian pointed-arch type. The external scenery does not exhibit any European characteristics, it is definitely Islamic, with an emphasis on the water tank. The water tank is significant in Islamic architecture and garden design and it can be found in all the palaces, courtyards of mosques and mosque-madrasas. It is probably the latter which is depicted in this picture. The face of the young man is
definitely Middle-Eastern. The crowded effect, which was an integral part of the previous pictures, has disappeared and the overall simplicity conjures up the kind of tranquillity that resides within the walls of any religious institution. The dominating colours are still green and red, but they are well balanced by pale ochre and the black turban of the young mullah. (plate 47B) The black turban is an indication of the family and religious background of the person wearing it: he is most likely the son of a sheikh, whose family are descendants of the 'Alids. The simplicity of the picture and the apparent reality of the background yield some information about the artist and his relationship to the subject matter. It is a real life portrait for which the young man posed and it was executed in the actual environment and the artist took great care to reflect the atmosphere of the surroundings.

The next mirror case was made "to the order of Mirzā Hasan Khan", signed yā Shāh-ī-Najaf and dated 1250/1834. (plate 48A) The outer face is divided into three main sections, with two panels flanking the central scene on either side. The top and bottom panels depict Bahrām Gūr in two of the Seven Pavilions with princesses and ladies in attendance. The two panels are narrative in character, as is the painting on the inner face of the cover, which
depicts Bahrām Gūr in the White Pavilion. (plate 48B) The central picture of the outer face depicts an European lady, leaning against a window ledge with a crimson curtain behind her. It is not connected to the stories of the two other panels and is an excellent example of the "picture within a picture" compositions which were popular in Renaissance and post-Renaissance paintings. Its inclusion supports the hypothesis that during this period the trend in Persian painting was to combine European themes with Persian and Islamic stories, as manifested by other mirror cases discussed in this chapter.

Another mirror case painted by Ismā'īl, and dated 1274/1858 also conforms to this trend. The outer face of the cover depicts members of the Armenian clergy together with a number of worshippers in front of a church. (plate 49A) In each corner of the cover there is a medallion containing an angel. The picture field is less crowded than in the previous instance and instead of surrounding the central picture with figural representations, the painter included cartouches of scroll and floral motifs. On the inner face of the mirror case there is a portrait of the Prime Minister Mīrzā Ḥājjā Khan Ṣadr-ī-A'zam, seated against two bolsters by a window. (plate 49B) There is an inscription above the
head of the minister which reads: "To the order of Hishmat al-Dawla Hamza Mirza".

It is definitely a posed picture; the composition is somewhat simplistic and the figure is stiff and emotionless. It cannot be said, however, that Isma'îl was not familiar with the technique of portrait painting or with anatomy, because his small scale figural representations are full of dynamism and expression. It is possible, that Isma'îl, like the other artists who were involved in large scale portrait painting, especially in oils, had a different perception of perspective and had difficulty in conveying proportions.

The case has a similar layout to the outer face of the cover: four corner panels containing angels, cartouches with scroll and floral motifs and a central picture field, which in this case comprises the scene of a banquet, attended by Europeans. (plate 49C)

The following hypothesis may be formulated on the basis of the common features which are present in these four paintings. It is possible that the trend to combine European and local themes became popular due to requirements of the market which was directly or indirectly influenced by the presence of Europeans in
Persia. By combining traditional local elements with those familiar to the Europeans, the artists ensured that the market opened up in both directions, that patronage could be gained not only from the Persian nobility, but from European customers also.

In all four mirror cases the outer covers comprise combinations of European and Islamic or traditional themes, while the inner faces are devoted solely to depicting stories with which the customers of the home market could identify. Another important factor which should be mentioned is that the Najaf family originated from Isfahan, where they were directly or indirectly subjected to the influence of the Armenians. This is clearly discernable especially in the painting of Isma'il.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, lacquer-painted artefacts enjoyed great popularity, not only among Persians, but also among European connoisseurs. Scenes from the Holy History and Persian erotic subjects were often mixed. A mirror-case, dated 1850 and painted by 'Abd al-Razzāq, depicts a crowded, but finely detailed scene of bathing women. The overall picture is very dynamic, but the individual figures are somewhat staid. The ornamentation of the arches and spandrels of the bath
is very clear and precise, indicating that the artist may have been more familiar with geometry and architecture than with human anatomy.

The style of the mirror case dated 1271/1855 and signed by Zayn al-'Ābidīn Isfahānī (plate 50) could be compared to that of Muhammad 'Alī Ashraf, who painted approximately a hundred years earlier. The outer face of the cover depicts a spray of flowers comprising roses, tulips and carnations. Amongst the flowers birds and butterflies are discernable, all of which are painted on a sparkling brown background. The dominant colours are red, yellow and green. These paintings seem dull in comparison to the painted enamels. This may be explained by the fact that the medium on which this type of lacquer was painted does not lend itself so readily to the vivid colours of the enamels. The technical execution, with very fine brushwork, is at least as good as that on the enamels described above. On the inner face of the cover a bouquet of lilies and irises and smaller more colourful flowers are painted on a gold background. It is more usual to find sprays and bouquets of flowers on book-covers and qalamdāns than on mirror-cases of this period and the artist Zayn al 'Ābidīn Isfahānī was one of the court painters actively involved in painting both.
A similar scene with birds and flowers decorates the mirror case represented in plate 51A. It is different in that it is painted in gold on wood which has been very finely carved in low relief instead of papier-maché. It is signed by Mirzâ Rizâ and dated 1287/1870. The border is decorated with scrollwork and a gilded frame of inscriptions.

Wooden mirror cases and qalamdâns are not uncommon in this period. The wood used for these items was pear wood, brought from 'Abâdeh, a suburb of Shiraz. The wood was soaked until soft. The pattern was then transferred onto the wood, carved and left to dry out.

The inner face of the cover depicts 'Alî and the two young imâms, Hasan and Husayn, framed by flowers above and below; the outer border is inscribed with verses. (plate 51B) The heads of all three figures are surrounded by a halo, the customary symbol for saints. The background is simplistic, only a few trees are included in order to signify perspective. The figures demonstrate a degree of naivitê and stillness, but not the stiffness which was characteristic of earlier figural representations. The style of this picture is eclectic in that the subject-matter is unquestionably Islamic, reminiscent of the painting of the young mulla described
supra, however, the mode of expression is Christianising. Here the Islamic custom of sitting on the ground is realistically presented, which was not the case in the painting of the mystic, discussed earlier. The flower border is painted in fine colours of red, yellow and green on a dark background, whilst the background on which the figures are depicted is rendered with a brilliant gold colour. The inside is treated in a similar manner to papier-maché. A lining is put onto the wood, the painting completed and then lacquered.

The glass mirror is painted with flowers in the manner in which free standing mirrors were decorated, in delicate pastels, with a frame of inscriptions and arabesque outline. These decorations are applied in reverse painting, a technique used from the early Zand through to the late Qajar period.

There is another mirror case with a painting of the Prophet Muhammad and 'Alī as the central theme. (plate 52A) The Prophet's face is barely visible through a veil. Although this was common practise in Sunnī traditions, it is quite unusual in Shī'a traditions. The two young imāms Hasan and Husayn are depicted with Fatima, seated in the foreground. The figure standing behind 'Alī is probably Salman al-Fārisī, that behind the
Prophet Qanbār, 'Alī's servant. A group of angels is painted above the heads of the central figures.

This painting provides a very important insight into the artist's attitude toward religious thematology. He uses iconographical representation as the symbolism proper—that is, the creation of visual signs or patterns signifying concept or ideas of divine things, like the angels, which represent Goodness and Virtue. (plate 52A) The central theme of the Prophet, 'Alī and the Companions employs visual images for representing not concepts, but events which had actually happened and people who had taken part in sacred history. Of course symbols and representational conventions for sacred or historical subjects overlap. Naturally, the heavenly things occupy the uppermost part in the hierarchy, while the more earthly events are lower down in the pictorial order. The central group provides the link between the heavenly and the earthly; it is through the Prophet and the revelations that man's salvation can be achieved and the imāms are the active instruments of the heavenly word. The scene is framed by a border of verses.

It is interesting to compare the theme of this painting to the one on the outer face of the cover. (plate 52B) The latter is divided into three compartments by gold
rococo scrollwork. The top compartment depicts Armenian clergy and European worshippers outside a church. A number of female figures kneel in front of the priests, as if praying not to God, but to the clergy. The fact that this picture occupies the uppermost register of the painting emphasises the artist's attitude to the Christian religion and to its earthly rather than heavenly character, unlike the painting on the inner surface, where Islam's holiness is painstakingly pointed out. This aspect is underlined further in the other two pictures of the hierarchy. The middle compartment comprises a large European banquet al fresco, with a lake and boat in the background, while the lowest one comprises a European carriage and riders by a lake. Iconographic representations and symbolism are totally absent, materialistic realism dominates all three pictures.

The third painting which decorates the cover is narrative in character. (plate 52C) It is again divided into three sections, illustrating the story of Shaykh San'ān and the Christian maiden. In the top scene, the drunken Shaykh is cradled in the maiden's lap, with dervishes and Europeans on either side. In the background, the dome and two minarets of a mosque can be seen. In the central scene, the Shaykh is receiving wine from the maiden, again with
Europeans and dervishes on either side and ordinary buildings and a lake in the background. The bottom scene depicts the Shaykh and the maiden seated in front of a fire, attended as before, and with a church in the background.

The story of Shaykh San'ān is a story with a strong moral message. According to the legend, the Shaykh was a saintly man and followed the Sunnī rites. One night he dreamed that he went from Mecca to Greece, where he adored an idol in the form of a Christian maiden. He denied his faith for her and became the minder of a herd of pigs in order to gain her hand. His companions employed him to return to Mecca, but he was relentless, so they left him and went back to Mecca, where they consulted a wise man. The wise man reprimanded them for leaving their companion in the time of need and instructed them to pray for the soul of the Shaykh. For forty days and nights they prayed, until one day, one of them saw the Prophet Muhammad whose words: "the faults of a hundred worlds can disappear in the vapour of a moment's repentance" gave new hope. The Companions then returned to the Shaykh to give him the good news. The Shaykh performed his ablutions and set forth toward Mecca. As this was happening, the Christian girl also had a dream in which she heard "Follow your Shaykh, embrace
his faith, be his dust". She followed him and proclaimed the True Faith. However, her heart was broken and she wished to confess her sins and she then bid farewell to Shaykh San'ān and died.\textsuperscript{12}

The concern about the interaction and the resultant implications thereof between the two societies and cultures is clearly evident in this story and the order of events have been clearly defined in the painting. One can go as far as to say that the artist consciously exercised value judgement, in that he expressed his disapproval of interaction between infidels and believers.

What may start out as a natural, human involvement, could lead to dire consequences. Togetherness in front of the fire is followed by temptation: the acceptance of the wine from the maiden, which leads to committing a sin: drunkenness, and denouncement of the True Faith, which leads to spiritual misery and regret. Everyone, regardless to which religion he/she belongs is ultimately answerable for sins committed in the manner prescribed by the particular religion. Shaykh San'ān was bound by the imperatives of Islam, as was the maiden to Christianity.
It may be argued that the artist chose this particular story and used it in the combination of these pictures to convey implicitly the prevalent religious and social attitudes of the time, to point out that the presence of Europeans in Islamic Persia is acceptable only out of economic necessity and that caution must be exercised in order to guard the religious and social traditions.

Although the mirror is not signed or dated, it may be attributed to Isma'īl (and dated to the third quarter of the nineteenth century) on stylistic grounds. The floral borders, the floriated scrollwork and the Rococo scrolls used as framing elements are all similar to those found on pieces signed by Isma'īl, such as that reproduced in plate 49 A-C.\(^{13}\)

In complete contrast both in style and theme to the mirror case just discussed is another painting on a mirror case, which is signed by Muhammad Baqīr Semirūmī and dated 1294/1877. (plate 53A) The difference in style is due to the fact that oil paints have been used instead of water colours. It was Semirūmī who was responsible for the introduction of oil painting onto Persian lacquer. Semirūmī was a practising artist from the third quarter of the 19th century until the early 20th century. He was first at Isfahan, but later moved to Mashhad,
where he became official court artist. The techniques he introduced influenced other contemporary artists such as Lutf-Allah al-Hamzawi and Kamāl al-Dīn Isfahānī, both practising in Isfahan.\textsuperscript{14}

At that time, Russian icon painting played a very important role and greatly influenced Persian art. Persian artists were acquainted with Russian icon paintings, which involved painting with oils on a wooden surface.\textsuperscript{15} Semirūmī attempted to try the same oil painting techniques on papier-maché galamdāns and mirror cases. It is also possible that the Italian Renaissance had some influence on the work of Semirūmī and his contemporaries.

The surface was prepared in a similar way to canvas intended for oil painting. This made the surface considerably more durable. Tracing was carried out in the same way as with water colour (described supra); however, the brushes were much more pointed and stiffer. The powdered colour was pressed through the perforations of the gardeh onto the surface of the object previously prepared by the traditional method. The quality of the painting was as excellent as that of the water colour, in spite of the degree of difficulty that the procedure entailed.
In a paper by G. Fehervari, it is stated on the basis of interviews with present day living artists in Iran: "According to present day Iranian artists who are still practising this technique, the methods they use today or that were used in Safavid and Qajar times are entirely different from those applied in earlier times in Iran. But even then it was an entirely different technique from those that were exploited in the Far East."

However, it is worth considering whether the application of oil on lacquer by Semirūmī, Hamzāwī and Kamāl al-Dīn Isfahānī was in fact inspired not only by icon making, but also by the Far-Eastern concept, described in Chapter One. They may also have seen qalamdāns made in a similar technique allegedly by Russian sailors whose ideas on decoration stemmed entirely from their experience of oil-based icon painting. Decoration on qalamdāns made by the sailors reflected their lives on the ocean waves, with nautical scenes around the sides and an idealised woman (occasionally nude) on the top. This will be discussed further in the chapter when examples will be given.

The mirror case signed by Semirūmī in 1294/1877 is reproduced in plates 53 A-C. The outer face of the cover depicts a group of pedlars comprising two female, one
male and two child figures. The group is flanked by two trees. The style of the painting conforms to the contemporary European Romantic movement which favoured such idealised representations.

In contrast, the painting on the inner face of the cover recalls the styles of the preceding period, that is, the Rococo and the high Baroque. The picture comprises a seated female figure under a flowering tree, holding an infant. The landscape background is dominantly blue and grey, with a touch of moss green. In each corner of the panel there is a rose, surrounded by smaller flowers and leaves. The oval panel is framed in gold Rococo scrollwork, with a rose and green leaves in each corner. (plate 53B)

The picture which decorates the case is painted, like the first one, in the Romantic style. A group of women and a child are seated under a large tree. The tree in the centre of the picture field provides shelter for the weary group. There is a river in the foreground and one of the female figures is preparing to dip her feet into its refreshing water. (plate 53C)

Semirūmī's expertise in the use of oils is evident in all three pictures discussed thus far. Curiously, however,
the picture in the oval frame is stylistically different from the other two in that there are much sharper colour contrasts with more of a Persian than a European flavour. There are at least two possible explanations for this difference. 1) Either that the picture was not painted by Semirūmī himself, but by one of the pupils under his supervision, 2) that it was painted by Semirūmī, but keeping to the prevalent artistic tradition, by including local or national elements in the composition. The latter explanation is probably the more likely one, judging by the fact that a similar trend is demonstrated in the paintings of Ismā'īl.

It is not infrequent to find paintings referring to wedding preparations on the outer cover of mirror cases and detailed portrayals of the wedding night on the inner face of the cover. One such depiction can be found on a twelve sided hinged mirror case. (plate 54) Although it is not signed, it may be attributed to Ja'far, son of Najaf, who painted in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The case and outer face of the cover are each decorated with three shaped panels framed with gold Rococo scrolls. The uppermost panel is divided into three rooms, the middle one depicts a group of women with the bride preparing for the wedding ceremony; two female onlookers are in the room on the left and two seated male
figures in the room on the right. At first sight it is not easy to discern that there are three rooms. There are two posts which separate the three areas. It is in the way the artist positioned the figures in the two side ones, that one is able to judge that there are three distinct and unconnected areas or rooms and not one which is divided by the two posts. The fact that posts are positioned in front of the figures, reaching from the top to the bottom of the panel, further supports this conclusion. The central panel depicts the young couple in the company of the wedding guests, after the ceremony. Here, two massive pillars break up the background of trees and shrubs. In the bottom panel the young bride is attended by maidens who are preparing her for the wedding night. Again, the positioning of the pillars in this case indicates that the action is taking place in one large room. Symmetry is strictly observed. The dominant colours are red and green, in the old traditional style. Both the upper and the lower panels are flanked by two medallions on either side displaying the portrait of a young maiden, possibly that of the bride. The inside of the case depicts the actual wedding night, the consumation of the marriage. The external scenery is separated from that of the internal one by drapes and pillars. A female head is peeping from behind one of the pillars, while another is visible behind the shrubs. This
depiction may be portraying a local custom whereby the witnessing of the consumation of the marriage is an essential part of the marriage contract. Without it, the contract may become void. Similar customs are known to exist in other parts of the Islamic world. Again, we find that paintings are useful source material, providing additional information about local customs or cultural peculiarities.

The mirror case reproduced in plate 55 A - C is unsigned, but may be attributed partly to Najaf and partly to Isma'il, and dated to the third quarter of the nineteenth century; it represents a revival of late 18th - early 19th century subject-matter. The outer face of the cover comprises the "Holy Family" with angels and three greybeards. (plate 55A) The layout is very similar to that of a mirror case discussed in the previous chapter. The background depicts the familiar European landscape and buildings with a leitmotif in the foreground. Perhaps it is noteworthy that the leitmotif was omitted from the four pictures described supra and it is reintroduced in this picture. The inner face of the cover depicts a European lady sitting on the terrace with a maid in attendance and a child behind her. (plate 55B) The style of representation in these two pictures is reminiscent of that of Najaf, while the one on the cover
is more like that of Isma’il. The picture in the central medallion depicts a group of banqueting Europeans and in the panels above and below there are hunting scenes. (plate 55C)

Another popular compositional style of the pre-Qajar period continued to be used on mirror cases during the middle to late nineteenth century: that is, the flower and bird motif. The case and cover of the mirror case reproduced in plate 56A comprise almost identical floral and bird designs. The inner face reveals a less crowded picture of three birds perching on a flowering shrub. (plate 56B) Although the painting is not signed, it may be attributed to Fath Allah Shirāzī, in the late nineteenth century.21
A large box painted by Mirza Baba is stylistically closely related to an earlier one painted by Ali Ashraf, however, it has some interesting innovations. The lid can be technically divided into two distinctly different areas: the top, which is raised, and the curved shoulder. The top comprises only one spray of flowers of roses, hydrangeas, tulips and carnations, leaving a relatively large area of background uncovered by flowers. The artist attempted to imitate a turtle shell effect by using paler and darker shades of brown on a beige background. The shading of the flowers is achieved in the same way as in the paintings of Ali Ashraf: with clusters of minute dots. The top is contrasted by the curving shoulder which comprises a marquash background, medallions painted with green translucent lacquer and flowers and medallions painted with red translucent lacquer and a gold floral pattern. It was mentioned above that the floral depictions of Ali Ashraf were meticulous and naturalistic. In this painting by Mirza Baba they adhere even more to reality, particularly the carnations and the tulips. The birds are much more slender than those painted by Ali Ashraf, but these belong to a different species. In both Ashraf's and Mirza Baba's paintings the
corn flower appears repeatedly; it was also widely used by Muḥammad Ṭāhī in his floral representations.

On the inside of the lid of the box there is figural representation of a hunting scene. The picture is dominated by the dynamic movement provided by both the animal and the human representations. The figures are still awkward and anatomically unrealistic; however, proportionally they are closer to reality than the figures which were depicted on the mirror cases discussed earlier. The whole picture is set into a frame with a marqash background which is covered with translucent green lacquer. (plate 57C) The decoration of the frame comprises medallions with floral designs surrounded by vine leaves and an intertwined floral pattern. The sides of the box depict the familiar flower and bird design, but in contrast with Ashraf’s paintings, here the decoration is sparser. (plates 57D)

Another important and unique lacquer painted artefact is a Royal backgammon set. It is painted on wood and lacquered. Thusfar it is the only one of its kind known to exist in the world. (plates 58A and B) The backgammon set is not signed, but the style in which the figures are rendered suggests that it may be the work of Muḥammad Ṭāhī, an artist who was active during the Fath Ḥasan, an artist who was active during the Fath 'Alī Shāh
period. This is especially true for the female figures; their faces, dresses and hair jewellery are treated in an identical manner to large oil paintings signed or attributed to Muhammad Hasan.23

When open, the top and sides form the shape of a cross which is divided into a central picture field in the shape of an oval medallion outlined with gold rococo scrolls, depicting a bouquet of flowers on a deep red background. (plates 58 C and D) This is flanked by four more irregularly shaped medallions, one of which contains a pair of female figures, one younger and one older - possibly mother and daughter; the other three comprise the paintings of young couples. (plates 58 D and E) On the top, positioned above and below the two medallions with the couples, another two medallions are decorated with embracing young couples. (plates 58C and F) The dominant colours of the clothing are again rich red, pink and gold. The skirt of the young woman in one of the larger medallions is painted with delicately executed multicoloured minute flowers, while the outfit of the young man is of a warm brown colour. Behind the couple a flat landscape is just visible. (plate 58F) The European influence in both style and content is definitely discernable, however, the background decoration of the cross and the floral medallions are typically Persian.
The whole cross is framed by a band of alternating oblong medallions and rosettes over a black painted background. The background to the medallions depicting figural representations is also black and decorated with gold scrollwork. (plates 58D - F)

Different stylistic and compositional elements are discernable on a circular box dating from the second quarter of the 19th century. Although the box is unsigned, the subject matter indicates that it must have been painted by one of Fath 'Alī Shāh's court painters. (plate 59) The picture comprises a walled courtyard with water tanks and pavilion and Fath 'Alī Shāh walking with his companions. The courtyard is surrounded by trees on the outside, providing a frame within the frame for the main theme and acting as an aid to the creation of perspective. Similarly to the painting of the young mullah, (plate 47B) the landscape adheres closely to realism, providing useful information about the arrangement of the royal gardens and habits of the Shah. Such realistic depictions serve as useful tools for the art historian and the student of architecture.

A completely different theme is represented on a snuff box signed Naṣr Allah al-Husaynī and dated 1278/1862. (plate 60) The surface of the snuff box is divided into
two areas, one of which comprises a lozenge-shaped medallion depicting a camel-rider in a landscape framed with gold scrollwork and surrounded by roses and other flowers on a black surface. The other provides the outer frame, comprising inscriptions with gold corner pieces painted with flowers.

There is enough evidence to prove that there was another flourishing market for lacquer painted objects which comprised detailed depictions of nudes, nuptial and sex scenes. One of these was discussed earlier.

A snuff box, signed by Fath Allah Shirāzī and dated 1292/1875 is also worth a mention here. The picture on the lid depicts a group of Indian and a group of Turkish young men engaged in conversation in a landscape. (plate 61) The interior of the lid is painted with a scene of an amorous couple reclining on a verandah.

Lacquer Painted Qalamdāns

The layout of the decoration on a qalamdān painted and signed by Rahīm Dekānī in 1225/1810 recalls that on the qalamdān by Hajjī Muhammad, painted more than a hundred years before it. (plate 62 and plate 1) The style of the
painting, however, is reminiscent of 'Alî Ashraf. The three scalloped medallions comprise the heads of two European girls and one European male, while the two end medallions contain tiny landscapes. The paintings support the hypothesis that, at least for qalamdāns, the old and familiar styles and compositions were still in demand.

Another favourite theme of the Safavid period, the leopard attacking the gazelle, can be seen on the next example. It was painted by Mulla 'Alî Muhammad in 1231/1816. The picture is painted in monochrome black on a background of yellowish hue with small scroll-like motifs in gold. Besides the leopard-gazelle theme, there are two more violent depictions. In one a dragon is attacking a stag and in the other, a hawk is attacking an ibex. (plate 63) It is unusual to see so much violence being depicted on a qalamdān, when this type of surface was mainly used for idyllic and harmonious themes. This again may be indicative of a prevalent desire to return to traditional themes or that the artists who produced such pictures were experimenting and testing the market.

The "Indian Style" which was popular during the eighteenth century continued to be used in the nineteenth. This is illustrated by a qalamdān which is
unsigned and undated; its shape, however, suggests a
dating to the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

The painting on the top of the qalamdān depicts a young
Indian woman, represented in profile in a landscape with
flowers and trees. (plate 64) If we compare this scene
with a similar one painted by Muhammad Šābir in 1719, it
becomes quite clear that this figure is integrated
into the landscape and that the trees and the flowers are
part of a whole unified visual entity, whereas the image
in the earlier example is clearly segmented. Something
else that also becomes quite clear is the difference in
the facial expressions. The earlier picture is obviously
iconographic, while the second one is naturalistic and
realistic. Both pictures manifest Indian characteristics,
but there is a definite deviation in the overall effect.
One can even go as far as to say that the one painted by
Muhammad Šābir manifests Far-Eastern features. It
cannot be denied, however, that European influence is
much stronger in Persian painting than anything that
might have come from the east. This of course could be
due to several factors, such as the presence of Europeans
in the Persian court, patronage provided by the Europeans
or a natural bias towards the habits of more developed
societies.
The next qalamdān to be discussed originates from the middle of the nineteenth century; it is unsigned but may be attributed to a member of the Najaf family. The painting depicts the portrait of a young Qajar prince, possibly Nasr al-Dīn before his accession. The Najaf family were court artists at the time, and it is very likely that they would have been commissioned to paint a royal portrait. The style of the painting is also in keeping with the Najaf family. (plate 65)

The portrait is painted on a sparkling gold background with a leitmotif of two tiny gazelles in the foreground. The prince is dressed in a black frock-coat with gold embroidered facings and two orders, over black trousers with gold stripes. The headdress comprises a tall ashtarakhān cap. Above the head of the prince, clouds and landscape elements are vaguely visible. What is striking about this painting is the very sharp contrast between the gold background and the black suit of the prince. Intermediate colours are used intermittently in the sparse vegetation of the landscape. The artist made certain that all attention would be focused on the princely figure and that no incidental shapes or colours would detract from the central theme. The gold marqash background acts as 'highlight'. The figure is well proportioned; the face, in spite of being still, is
expressive and suggestive. The landscape above the head of the prince is diffuse, creating an illusion of three-dimensionality.

A new technique for decorating qalamdāns appears to have been introduced around the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It is alleged that this technique, known as abrash, was invented by an artist called Abū Ṭālib. Abrash technique is of two types: the first results in a kind of marbling, producing the effect of fleshy leaf-like forms; the other produces a "turned" effect resembling waving or combing.

Examples of both types are reproduced in plates 2 and 3. Plate 2 has a red background with vegetal forms in the "fleshy" abrash technique, picked out with gold dots. Plate 3 is an example of the second or "turned" effect. The light brown background is covered with fleshy leaf-like forms upon which are imposed, in very low relief, green and gold "turned" arabesque medallions decorated in a wavy, combed effect. The two qalamdāns are not signed. But the style and degree of mastery of the abrash technique are comparable with signed and dated works by Abū Ṭālib, currently in a private collection in London. The qalamdāns reproduced in plates 2 and 3 probably date from the second quarter of the nineteenth century.
Unfortunately, and as was the case with many artists, Abu Talib seems to have carried the secret of the technique to the grave. Still, the technique seemed to have fascinated contemporary and later artists to such an extent that they attempted to emulate it to varying degrees of success.

One such artist is called Rajab 'Alī. A signed qalamdān painted in 1259/1842 attempts to combine both types of abrash techniques. Another example of Rajab 'Alī's work is seen on a mirror case in the Iran Bastān museum, dated 1252/1836.²⁸

A qalamdān, painted by the master painter 'Abbās Shirāzī and dated 1277/1861 is a fine example of the artistic trend which was emerging during the second half of the nineteenth century. The rectangular qalamdān with slightly tapered edges is covered with a multitude of decorative motifs, ranging from landscape to portraiture. (plate 66) The top and sides comprise six oval panels containing bust portraits of European girls and youths, alternating with panels framed in gold rococo scrollwork. Some of the latter contain European landscapes, while others are filled with masses of flowers, the rose being the dominant feature. The portraits are especially finely executed. The facial expressions convey the character of
each person, ranging from enigmatic innocence to self assured strength. One overwhelming similarity transpires on comparing the style and content of these portraits with similar European depictions from the Gothic and Renaissance periods. Dynamic motion is conveyed by the so called "S shape" which is assumed by the figures. This is a characteristic feature of European paintings of both the Gothic and the Renaissance period. The use of the "S" shape to convey motion became an integral part of European painting in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This would suggest that 'Abbās Shirāzī had carefully studied the style of his European contemporaries and used that knowledge to integrate the acquired style into a traditional Persian composition. Here, style and content give a true picture of the artistic perceptions of the latter part of the nineteenth century. To illustrate this point further and to provide another example of how the "S shape" is used to convey motion, another painting by an unknown artist of this period is cited. It depicts a number of female figures, one of whom is naked. This is the figure to be discussed in detail. The theme of the painting is reminiscent of the European painting entitled "Susanna and the Elders" painted by Rembrandt in the seventeenth century, but here, the bathing beauty is surrounded by two groups of females. (plate 67) The posture of the bather, from head
to toe, is characterised by a flowing motion, following the shape of the letter S. The head bends forward with a gentle twist of the neck, one of the elbows drops behind the rising curve of the right knee, then smoothly curves upwards to cover the right breast. Likewise, the thighs intertwine and the left knee and lower leg bend under the body. The stiff posture of the standing figure behind the bather provides the contrast, the division between the lower and upper registers of the picture, where the two peeping heads provide yet another contrasting feature. The vertical build-up of the scene is not entirely a result of the shape of the surface it occupies; it seems to derive from the hierarchy of importance of the figures represented.

Another painting by 'Abbās Shirāzī reveals a different compositional style. The top of the qalamdān is divided into five oval panels. (plate 68) The central one contains the portrait of a young woman holding a bird, the uppermost and the lowest comprise the bust portraits of one short haired and one long haired females. It is difficult to discern whether they are European or Persian because of the shape of the eyes, the face and the lips. 'Abbās Shirāzī pays a lot of attention to the details of the hands and their positioning. They are at least as dominant a feature of the painting as the faces; they
either convey motion or reinforce stillness. The two secondary panels enclose paired deer, replacing the floral sprays used in the previous example. (plate 66) The style of this depiction is in direct contrast to the portraits, tending to spoil the overall impression of the complete painting. The deer are too large and in each case the hooves are hidden, as if to indicate the artist's difficulty in rendering them. Again, motion is conveyed by the 'S' shape.

Flower and bird compositions continued to be popular decorations for qalamdāns in the nineteenth century, although certain changes in style and technique are noticeable. One is a turtle shell effect for the background of the compositions, seen on a qalamdān signed by Muḥammad 'Alī Shirāzī.30 (plate 69) The turtle shell effect creates an illusion of three dimensionality in the overlaid flower and bird design.

Another great artist of the period, Ghulām Rizā Imāmī, similarly manipulates the background in order to create three-dimensionality, although in this case he resorts to zarak instead of the turtle shell effect.31 There is a noticeable difference in the styles of the two artists. Rizā Imāmī's birds are much slimmer than those of Muḥammad 'Alī Shirāzī. The petals of his flowers are
shaded with a cruder version of the dot technique, hence his flowers look less naturalistic than Shirāzī's. In both cases, the colours are rich and vivid. This is not the case in the next two examples.

The first one is a qalamdān in the style of 'Ībād-Allah dating from the latter part of the nineteenth century. The background is black, the floral and bird designs are mainly of a dull gold colour, highlighted with a certain amount of colour. (plate 70) The combination of the dark background with motifs in gold and a little colour yields a very interesting effect. It is reminiscent of the negative of a colour photograph, where the colour scheme is reversed. This style of painting is quite new in the Persian repertoire of this period. A similar effect was attempted by the painter of the next qalamdān, though not as successfully. The background is of reddish brown and covered with interlacing gold scroll and floral motifs, highlighted with reddish brown. (plate 71)

Battle scenes were popular themes for qalamdān decorations in the Safavid and Zand periods. They continued to be so in Qajar times, though the representations show that the artistic trend was in a state of flux at the time. Two examples have been chosen to illustrate these points. The first was painted by
Mubarak bin Mahmud, during the second half of the 19th century. It depicts a European battle scene with a cavalry charge, probably copied from a French original. (plate 72) The picture effectively captures the atmosphere of a battle; the space is used optimally to show the direction of the charge and the odd horse pointed out in detail indicates dynamic motion.  

Mubarak's painting seems sedate and orderly when compared to a battle scene painted by Ahmad during the same period. Ahmad's picture depicts a battle between the Persians and the Turks with all its fury. (plate 73) Total confusion is revealed in the scene: sabres are raised high in the air and the bodies of the horses stretch forward in full flight. The figures are much smaller than those in the previous picture, yet the movements are more easily discernable.

Another representation of a crowded scene dates from the early twentieth century. It is unsigned but on stylistic grounds it is attributable to Ibrahim. The facial expressions and the movements of the figures are vivid and lifelike. The overall atmosphere of the painting is reminiscent of the paintings of the nineteenth century English painter William Holman Hunt. It is very likely that Ibrahim was familiar with contemporary English
styles, but whether he had knowledge of the reasons behind the particular contentual trend is subject to speculation. Nevertheless, there are signs in this picture of a strong social awareness, which transpires from the mode of presentation of women with their infants and the group on the left side of the qalamdān, where youths surround a bearded old man, probably a teacher.

The qalamdān painted by Fath Allah Shirāzī in 1287/1870 is dedicated to Sultan al-'Ulāma Aqā Mirzā Sayyid Muhammad Madd Zill al-'Alī. (plate 75) The surface is sparkling dark brown and is divided into three distinct areas comprising a central oval panel which is flanked by two smaller quatrefoil panels. The central panel contains richly coloured stylised flowers, framed in gold C-scolls. The small panels contain rabbits in landscapes. Roses and some smaller flowers are scattered all over the background. Besides the masterly execution of the theme, it is worthwhile to note the combination of the floral design with the animal, in this case, the rabbit. The rabbit, as mentioned earlier, was an integral part of Safavid book-cover design and it is very rare to find it on qalamdāns. The inclusion of the rabbit in this example may be indicative of a traditionalising trend, which found a legitimate place next to the progressive and regressive trends. There is very little doubt about the
fact that the artistic trend of the latter part of the nineteenth century was in a state of flux, that no one distinctive style emerged, and that those artists who did not engage in copying European precedents referred back to the old traditional Persian style and content of the Safavid period.
The Paintings of Najaf and His family

Najaf and his family of painters have already been mentioned above. As head of an active school of painting, Najaf 'Ali had a distinctive style which influenced nineteenth century Persian lacquer painting.

Some of his and his family's paintings on mirror cases have already been discussed. They were also responsible for a number of qalamdāns some of which will be discussed below as further examples of their style. All were painted around the middle of the nineteenth century.

The first, dated 1268/1852 and signed yā Šāh Ī-Najaf, is decorated with scenes of a narrative nature. (plate 76) There are four distinctive groups of people in a landscape. The first to the left is a reclining female figure with long dark hair and laconic facial expression, dressed in red and attended by a maid. The next group comprises an Indian youth and a horse, followed by an Indian and a Turkish prince, and finally, three bearded sages. The artistic treatment of the composition is unusual for the period and this is where Najaf's particular talent manifests itself. The angle at which the lady reclines and the size of the figure could have presented a problem for balancing the rest of the
painting. Najaf solved this problem in an ingenious manner by reducing the size of the next group and setting them back, creating at the same time an illusion of distance and depth. The positioning of the third group strikes a perfect balance: two of the figures, namely the Indian prince and one of the sages, face one another, while the Turkish prince faces the second sage who is sitting under a tree at a distance from the third group. The cloak of the Indian prince is a continuation of the curve of the reclining figure, but in the opposite direction. Finally, the third sage, positioned under the tree, seems detached from the rest of the composition, but is technically an integral part of the picture. All the figures are anatomically realistic and dynamic.

The second qa[lmān, is signed vā Shāh i-Najaf and dated 1270/1854. (plate 77) The picture depicts an Indian lady standing in a landscape of trees and buildings with ducks in the foreground. The composition is reminiscent of earlier qalamāns discussed before in the thesis, though more refined. The masterly touch is discernible in the manner of execution of the clothing and the rendering of anatomical details. Depth and perspective also add to the overall reality of the picture. The figure is not superimposed onto the landscape, but stands in it. In the
examples discussed earlier this aspect was either lacking or was not as effective.

Thematically, the next painting is not particularly striking. It comprises a central panel with the all familiar 'Holy Family' scene, flanked by two others with groups of men in discussion; separating them are smaller panels with portraits of girls in European clothing. (plate 78) The qalamdān is signed in the familiar style of ū Shāh ʿī-Najaf and dated 1271/1855. The colours, scrollwork, faces and size and positioning of the figures is closer to the style of Jaʿfar, Najaf's son. It is therefore quite possible that it was painted by him. It was acceptable for other members of the Najaf family to invoke his name, thereby making definite identification more difficult.

The layout of the composition is very similar to those of door panels. Each medallion tells its own story and the intermediate ones with the girls' heads are unconnected and act as space fillers; but artistically they are as superbly executed as the main panels.

The artist responsible for producing the next qalamdān is difficult to identify with certainty. The qalamdān is dated 1262/1845, and can be attributed to one of the
painters of the Najaf school. Like the galamdān discussed above, the top surface is divided into three scalloped areas enclosing portraits of young women dressed in European style clothing. (plate 79A) The background is prepared in the marqash technique, and the figures are painted over this. The shading of the clothing is interesting for two reasons. 1) Instead of using the much favoured dotted technique, the artist employed heavy, often patchy brushwork. (plate 79B - D) Even the flowering cherry tree and the pattern of the dress manifest the use of this technique, portraying a tendency towards an impressionistic approach. In contrast however, the hands and the faces bear the mark of the traditional approach. (plate 79C) 2) Whereas the dress pattern blended into the dress material in earlier paintings, here it is not "woven" into the texture. The same observation applies to the feathers on the lady's hat. (plate 79B) In the first half of the century painters would have taken painstaking measures to highlight every single component of the feather, like they did with the veins on leaves.

It has been mentioned a number of times that religious themes were much favoured during the period. The next galamdān which is again signed ʿā Shāh ʿī-Najaf dates from the third quarter of the nineteenth century.
Stylistically, the sides are more likely to have been painted by his brother Isma'īl. (plates 80A and B) The shading of the figures is carried out with heavier brushwork, and the colours do not fade out as gently as in the case when Najaf painted the pictures. Isma'īl used this type of shading technique.39

The top comprises three oval shaped medallions, each depicting a saint in front of Armenian style churches. The central saint is a stock theme of the school of Najaf: bald headed with clasped hands and the characteristic tilted pose of the head. Najaf's treatment of the facial expressions is particularly striking. The same model was probably used for all three saints, nevertheless, each possesses a different expression. The central one seems to be either meditating or teaching, the top one is likely to be praying aloud and the bottom one is reading. A lot of attention is paid to the shape and gesture of the hands, perhaps in order to indicate what cannot be said.

Besides painting Christian and Islamic religious themes, the Najaf school also referred to Judaical stories, as illustrated by the series of pictures on the next qalamdān.
On the basis of the shape of the qalamdān which has a concave edged slightly rounded top surface, it is highly likely that it was painted by Najaf himself, rather than by Ismā'īl. Later qalamdāns tended to possess more rounded tops.  

The series of paintings on the top and sides depict events from Moses' life. (plates 81A - E) Each episode is confined to the space within a scalloped medallion flanked by two oval medallions depicting the portraits of the Holy Mother with the Child. The holy nature of the females is indicated by the halo above their heads.

Najaf chose the iconographic style of depiction in order to emphasise the religious nature of the stories. The composition combines a strange mixture of Judaical, Persian and Christian motifs. For example, in the picture on the left side, the infant Moses is being subjected to temptation in the presence of the Persian ruler and his body is gently held by an angel. (plate 81A) The face of the angel which is peeping through clouds also appears in the central picture above the church in the background. (plate 81C) In the third medallion, the angel is replaced by a female figure who stands outside the window observing the action that is taking place within. (plate 81B)
Episodes from the adult Moses' life are depicted on the sides of the qalamdān. One side illustrates the story of Moses' cane turning into a serpent, (plate 81D) while the painting on the other side tells the story of the drowning of the enemy army in the Red Sea. (plate 81E)

On the next qalamdān the style of Aqā Najāf was imitated by his nephew, Haydar 'Alī, who painted during the third quarter of the 19th century. The qalamdān is dated 1290/1873. Like the previous example, the top comprises three oval shaped medallions. The central one contains the portrait of a teacher with clasped hands, while the upper and lower ones depict the figures of a kneeling and a sitting dervish. (plate 82A) The delicate brushwork can be really appreciated by looking at the close-up details. (plates 82B - D). There is an open book in front of the dervish in the top medallion and he is drawing the observer's attention to it by gesturing with the left hand's middle and index fingers extended and the thumb and the other fingers in a clasped position. The gesture of the right hand is also interesting. Here the thumb, the index and small fingers are extended in a gentle curve, while the middle and fourth fingers are closed. The gesture of the hands conveys the message that the stillness and positioning of the head hides. The facial expression projects the dervishes devotion to the
Holy text, as does the body's posture. The section of the galamdān immediately above the dervish's head is gently scalloped and superposed by a rounded end, reminiscent of a cross section depiction of the dome of Persian Mosques.

The gently tilted head, the facial expression and the positioning of the clasped hands of the figure in the central oval medallion convey a different message. This figure is not communicating with the observer, but despite the visual absence of any other figures in the picture, he appears to be conveying the message to others around him within the compartment of the medallion. In contrast to the top figure, the central one exudes warmth, love and gentleness.

While the artist applied the dotted technique for shading around the beard and the mouth, he also used the texture of the medium, for example on the forehead, for the purpose of creating contrast. (plate 82C)

The lowest picture in the hierarchy is more airy than the other two. This effect is created by the application of lighter colours and more vivid background. The bare feet of the dervish indicate that he is situated in a Holy place, most likely in a madrasah. The facial expression and the presence of a closed book in front of the feet
suggest that the figure is listening to someone talking about religious matters. (plate 82D)

The next qalamdān was painted by Aqā Najaf's son Muhammad Kāzim in 1294/1877. (plate 83A and B) The top is divided into five scallopped medallions, depicting scenes of Farīdūn with Minushīhr, Kay Khusrāw and Rustām, Naṣr al-Dīn Shāh with Sadr-ī-Nishān, Farīdūn and the captive Zāhāk and Kā Ka'ūs and Kay Khusrāw. The sides and base are equally fascinating for their composition, style and rich colour. Despite their masterly execution, there is a noticeable difference between Kāzim's way of treating anatomical details and that of Aqā Najaf; they lack the type of fluidity which Najaf conveyed.

Ahmad, another of Najaf's sons painting in the third quarter of the nineteenth century and using the signature Ahmad bin Najaf 'Alī, painted the next qalamdān in 1303/1886. (plate 84) The surface is divided into three main scalloped medallions, the central one depicting a horseman about to slay a stag in a mountainous landscape, the two others comprising girls' heads with the familiar enigmatic facial expressions. In between the main panels there are large red roses and other types of smaller flowers. The duality of the picture is striking: a violent scene being framed by idyllic naturalistic
designs. The two girls' heads give the impression of being in front of the frame, while the other two appear to be behind it. This aspect can be found in practically all the paintings of the Najaf school.

The last qalamdān to be discussed was painted by Najaf's brother Ismā'īl in 1266/1850. It depicts a crowded battle scene. Persian troops are drawn up into a square, in the middle of which is Minūshīhr Khān Mu'tamid al Dawla seated on a throne. Around the square a battle with the Arabs is in progress. The river and the city of Baghdad is visible in the background, while another city and trees arranged in rows are discernible on the right. (plates 85A and B) Mu'tamid al-Dawla is represented on the side riding in procession and reviewing the troops. (plate 85C) The rendering of both scenes is uncharacteristic of the Najaf school. Instead of the Europeanising mode of depicting buildings and trees, Ismā'īl employed an interesting form of impressionism. It is especially noticeable in plate 85B, where the shading is clearly made with the dotting technique usually applied in the shading of flowers. He also created a striking contrast by applying more paint to the hats of the soldiers than to their clothing. (plate 85C) In the battle scene on the other hand, and apart from the colour of the trees, colours are practically translucent,
misty and less striking, reminiscent of water colours rather than oils.

This painting of Ismā'īl was discussed last for the purpose of showing that even within a well established school such as that of Najaf, there was room for individual expression, and that there are no set rules for artistic treatment of any subject-matter. Ismā'īl was able to conform both to accepted styles and compositions; however, when it came to depicting scenes for which European models were not available, in the last instance for example, he was left to his own imagination and ingenuity. It is tempting to describe his battle scenes as simplistic, but in terms of what? In terms of European art, in terms of his brothers' work, or even compared to his other paintings? The following questions must be asked in order to understand this seemingly out of place style: did Ismā'īl visit Baghdad, did he witness live battle scenes, what were the sources he used for this painting? Once these can be answered, then a large part of the problem can be solved.
The Russian Connection

It was mentioned earlier that no art can be viewed in isolation, and that it is inevitable that interaction will occur between countries which are of close geographic vicinity or between those that are in direct contact with each other. It was also mentioned that Persian artists may have been influenced and inspired by Russian painted qalamdāns.\footnote{41} To illustrate these points, some comparative material is cited from neighbouring Russia.

The first example is a qalamdān made in Moscow, bearing the trade mark of the Fabrika Lukutina. It was painted during the late nineteenth century, when Persian trade was extending in both directions, to the east and to the west. The shape of the qalamdān follows the traditional Persian rounded type, but that is all the similarity one can detect. (plate 86) The division into panels and the figural representations are markedly different from those found in Persia during this period. The central panel depicts a young woman holding an open book in one hand; panels above and below depict a horse each. The overall background is gold with light brown shading in the middle which, together with the dividing lines of the panels, creates an effect of roundness. This is a clear deviation
from the Persian custom, where the panels are not rounded by shading and where the background space is filled with leitmotifs or floral or scenic representations. Clearly, the aim of the background is different here. The artist wanted to recreate the shape of the medium on which he was painting in the painting itself, hence the rounded effect. Even the vine leaves which surround the top and lower ends of the qalamdān have this purpose in mind. The colour scheme is two tonal. It lacks the richness of earlier and even contemporary Persian qalamdāns. This is not universally true of all the qalamdāns which were produced during this period in Russia, as can be seen from the following examples.

The overall style and content of the next qalamdān is the same as that of the one just discussed, and most likely it was painted by the same artist. The theme, style and basic colour scheme are the same. Although in this case the dress of the young woman is painted in a rich dark red and the horses are of a different colour, the background and the vineleaves are practically identical to those in the previous painting. While these two paintings are definitely European in style, that reproduced in plate 88 is of a curious mixture of European and Oriental. The qalamdān still has the traditional Persian shape with rounded ends, however,
the partitioning of the picture field is entirely
different from the Persian or indeed from that of the
Russian galamdāns discussed above. In traditional Persian
painting, figural or floral representations were
invariably separated from the background by panels, as
indeed was the case in the previous Russian examples.
Here, however, only the central picture field is
highlighted from the background, the incidental figures
above and below it are painted directly onto the
background. The background is rich red, more in the
oriental than the European style. The whole surface is
surrounded by a gold pattern comprising scrolls and
delicately executed intermittent floral patterns. The
central panel is oval, reminiscent of a window. Within
the window there is a nude figure of a woman drying
herself after a bath. In contrast to this scene, the
representations above and below create a totally
different image. The one above depicts a horseman wearing
a fez, while the one below wears a turban. The former
faces forward, while the latter is looking back. Even the
stance of the horses is different. The one above is calm,
moving forward at a steady pace, while the one below is
brought to an abrupt halt by its rider. A number of
interpretations of this picture are possible. One of
these, and possibly the most likely, is that the painting
recreates a Turkish scene. The rider above represents the
military aspect of that particular society, as indicated by the headwear, the central panel symbolises the marital/social aspect and the figure at the bottom represents the religious aspect, hence the turban. It must be borne in mind, however, that symbolism in art is not chosen in an arbitrary fashion, it must conform to certain sets of rules and fulfill the role suggestion rather then be an explicit depiction of an event. Certainly, this was true in the past. Symmetry was also important and the symbolic element conveyed the "unsaid". The symbolic meaning can be deciphered from the head-dress.

The qalamdān reproduced in plate 89 illustrates two points. Firstly, it shows how accepted formulae can be maintained and changed at the same time; secondly, it highlights the differences in the quality of execution of Persian and Russian artists. The same sort of division of the background used in the two previous examples can be found here, but with a difference. The colour of the background is the same throughout the whole surface, including that of the central panel. This sort of arrangement is rarely found in Persian painting, because Persian artists considered it important to compartmentalise every item in the painting in order to evoke optimum response to each from the observer. The
painter of this picture was able to draw attention to the central portrait by the finely drawn gold frame. The overall traditional format has been maintained: there is a central pictorial field with incidental decorative items flanking it above and below. The second point is best illustrated by the appearance of the flowers. Whereas flowers on Persian lacquer-painted objects are delicately and expertly executed, here they are obviously not. The flowers do not even remotely resemble lifelike examples. They seem to be there only to fill up space and to conform to the traditional format.

The qalamdān reproduced in plate 90 is made of wood. The background signals a complete change from anything described so far. The whole surface which is not occupied by the painting is black and covered with a minute diaper of silver inlay based on stars and circles. The combination of stars and circles is not typical of either Persian or of Islamic decorative motifs. Near-circles are usually created by gradually reducing the square, but an overall angularity is invariably maintained. The portrait insert conforms to the European Romantic style, the enigmatic expression on the young woman's face is almost angelic, with a transcendental quality, yet the clothing is very realistic and skillfully executed.
The treatment of the background may have been inspired by items such as the nineteenth century Caucasian qalamdān reproduced in plate 91. The qalamdān is made of wood and painted a reddish brown colour, so that it resembles bronze. The surface is covered with an intricate silver inlaid pattern. Although the intertwining design elements are finely executed, they crowd the background to such an extent that the individual designs lose their intended effect. It is fair to comment, however, that the combination of wood and metal is an odd one. However well the wood is carved, there is no natural coherence between the two media. It must have presented a great deal of difficulty to the artist to fit the metal wire into the wooden grooves. Perhaps this is the reason why the design elements are curvilinear and not angular.

Qalamdāns such as those mentioned above were made in Russia for the Persian market. Persian artists copied the technique and produced pieces which are practically identical to the Russian models. One such artist is Lutf-Allah al-Hamzāwī, who painted the qalamdān reproduced in plate 92 in 1315/1897. The division of the top surface is very similar to that on Russian made qalamdāns: a central panel enclosing a portrait of a lady sitting at a writing table, with floral decorations above and below and European-style scrollwork at either end.
The romantic river landscapes that decorate the sides are also comparable to Russian examples.

The same can be said of a qalamdān painted by Mīrzā Mustafā Shirāzī in 1901. The central oval panel encloses a portrait of a European lady, and is flanked by bunches of flowers and gold scrollwork. (plate 93A and B) Earlier works by Mustafā Shirāzī, on the other hand, are more in keeping with the contemporary Persian style. An example of his earlier work can be seen in plate 94. The qalamdān is signed Ya Mustafā and dated 1302/1884. The top comprises three clearly defined oval panels. The central panel encloses a Madonna and child, with tiny cherubs placed to either side of the Madonna; and two remaining panels enclose birds and rose sprays. Here, as before, the Madonna is represented wearing a string of beads, but the halo that surrounds her head was not discernable in previous examples.

The qalamdān is painted in monochrome black with gold highlights. The overall effect is somewhat reminiscent of the steel and gold qalamdāns, and it is possible that the artist tried to imitate the metallic effect.
The first of the bookbindings to be discussed is dated to the end of the eighteenth, beginning of the nineteenth century. It is made of leather over pasteboards and covered with clear lacquer. The design of the central panel is rich but simple. The inner picture field comprises a bird amongst the branches of a flowering shrub with white, red and pink flowers; narcissi and irises painted in purple flank the shrub. The border is decorated with stylised leaves and alternating pink and blue flowers. This design is an imitation of contemporary galamdân decorations, but the execution is cruder and lacks the natural effect.

The next example is in complete contrast to the one discussed above. It is dated 1218/1803-4 and signed Vardi Ashfār; an inscription in another panel mentions that the picture was finished by Ḥusayn Qūlī Khān. The whole surface of the covers is painted in black and highlighted with gold scrolls and flowers. The inner picture field of both the top and bottom covers has three irregularly shaped medallions. The central medallions depict European figures, while the flanking ones show a hawk attacking a duck in flight. The border is decorated with red rosettes with yellow centres. This is perhaps the first time that
European figures are depicted on a Persian bookbinding, which indicates a break away from the traditional Timurid-Safavid content and an attempt to conform to themes which were being adopted for qalamdān decoration.

The painting on the cover of a bound manuscript, dated 1252/1836-7, depicts the battle of Karnal between the armies of Nādir Shāh and Muhammad Shāh in 1739. The theme of the battle was derived from murals in the Chahāl Sitūn, Isfahan. Although the overall impression the painting creates is that of dynamic movement achieved with the help of the curvilinear lines employed for the depiction of horses' necks, swords and camels' heads, on close examination, however, the figures appear to be stiff and motionless and in some cases disproportionate. This seems to be a constant and predictable element in the artistic trend of the period, but applicable only to pictures which represent local, Persian or Indian scenes. Where there were no European models for battle scenes to follow, the artist had to rely only on his knowledge of history and anatomy; the latter was by no account fully developed. The painting on the lower cover further underlines this observation. It depicts a prophet with his disciples, some of whom are seated, while others are standing. A number of the figures are grotesquely disproportionate and perspective is barely discernible,
the architectural elements in the background are confusing: one is Islamic, the other is European, while at the same time there is no other European theme discernible in the picture. In contrast, a great amount of attention is paid to the depiction of inanimate objects, such as the floral pattern of the carpet, the clothing of the disciples, books and head-dresses. The richness of the colours compensates for the naivété elsewhere in the picture.

A second example of a lacquer painted bookbinding decorated with a battle scene from approximately the same period is even more simplistic. The battle scene is derived from the same murals as above, but the rendering lacks finesse. Here, even the animals look clumsy and the atmosphere of the battle is not captured at all. The mountains in the background are heavily outlined, and appear like stage scenery positioned close behind the small group of fighting men; no space is visible and the impending victory is suggested only by a few chopped off heads.

Another painting from the same period is found on the upper cover of a bookbinding. The picture is framed by compartments filled with stylised flowers and gold quatrefoil shapes with inscriptions. The picture
depicts a colourful banqueting scene with dancing girls in the foreground, society figures on either side and Shāh 'Abbās II seated in the middle. In spite of the faces and figures being stereotyped, the picture has a lively atmosphere. This is achieved by an overall symmetry, the variety in the style of the headwear of both the dancers and the audience and the inclusion of architectural elements. The headwear of some of the figures on the left is reminiscent of the Chinese and Far-Eastern fashions, while those on the right are mainly of the local style. A lot of emphasis is laid on inanimate objects such as jars, fruitbowls, the pattern on the carpet and the decorations on clothing.

The decoration of the inner cover is not unusual for the period. It comprises a black background with elaborate gold floral work, a central scalloped medallion depicting a bouquet of flowers flanked by panels above and below with inscriptions, and gold corner pieces with red and white roses.

The following picture bears witness to the above assertion that when European themes and models were used by the artists, the figures were anatomically more realistic. The composition of the picture is simple but impressive. It is framed by two bands, one with floral
patterns and the other plain. The central panel is painted in gold, enclosing three scalloped medallions. The one in the centre depicts the Virgin Mary and Child. A noticeable difference between this depiction of the Madonna and the European ones is discernible in the depiction of the headdress. In European paintings the emphasis is on covering the head, while in this case, the artist made certain that the "Madonna's" long black hair is shown. Another feature that deserves a mention is the fact that in European paintings the Madonna and the Child usually resemble real people, while in this case, they are evidently drawn. The other two medallions comprise portraits of girls with Qajar features. 49

The portrait of Fath 'Alī Shāh is represented on the outer face of a pair of book covers dating from the early nineteenth century. 50 He is represented sitting on the Peacock Throne between two pillars with spiral decorations, and attended by princes, ministers and ghulāms.

Although the painting is not signed, the style, especially on the outer faces, is reminiscent of that of Sayyid Mirzā. 51 The face of the monarch in particular is very much like that on the large oil painting in Tehran, originally from the Hasht Bihisht Palace in Isfahan.
overall impression of the picture is that of rigidity, especially in the rendering of the perspective. The enthroned monarch is motionless and emotionless and is sitting awkwardly on the throne. His legs are depicted in sideview while the rest of his body is shown frontally. The attendants are no less inanimate than the Shāh. The picture is obviously a posed one; the style is original and the only European trace that can be found is in the external scenery. More shades of colour have been introduced to the traditional red and green in order to enhance the overall impression. The frame of the picture is decorated with simple blue, pink and yellow motifs on a vivid red background.

Hunting and royal reception scenes were popular themes for bookbindings of the early nineteenth century and so were floral compositions. These consist of either a repeat pattern of large scale flowering bushes, mostly roses, intermingled with birds and butterflies and other varieties of flowers such as carnations, hyacinths, bluebells, fruit blossoms or single flowering bushes, or free floating bouquets of mixed flowers. The design occupies the whole field. Usually there is a multiple scroll or cartouche border. There may also be spandrels with arabesque decoration.
The salient features of Qajar lacquer painting of this period were the meticulous techniques the artists employed, the varied and vivid colours and naivety in depiction. Poetry must have influenced the artists in their choice of colour, and types of flowers. It cannot be accidental that different covers have different dominant colour schemes.

A lacquered book binding from the middle of the nineteenth century is noteworthy as a suitable example. It was made by Ḥājjī Muḥammad Tāqī of Isfahan for the successor of Fath ʿAlī Shāh, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh of Persia in 1270/1854. The traditional outer frame encases a calligraphic band. The inner field is decorated with flowers, leaves and scrolls, and in addition there are five pairs of birds: parrots, partridges and peacocks; each bird faces another of the same type, which is an old Persian convention from the Sasanian period. In the centre there is a panel portraying a youth in national dress, offering a girl a glass of wine. Above and below, two small panels represent a building with water and two even smaller panels contain the bust of a bare headed young man. Yellow is used extensively.

Offering wine is significant. It is mentioned frequently in Sufi poetry in connection with its intoxicating effect:
"I drink the wine of Thy presence and lose myself in its intoxication...." "One more cup my beloved, that I may entirely lose myself".  

The wine in the picture may be an allegory of love's intoxicating effect in the cradle of the naturalistic depiction of flowers and birds. Losing one's self is necessary in true love, because only through selflessness can one experience the other. The two smaller panels may allude to the state of commitment of the young couple; house and water may mean forthcoming marriage.

This book, as it happens, contains romantic poetry, therefore the depiction on the cover is a most suitable translation of words into visual images.

The same painter produced several other book covers, once again with yellow as the dominant background colour, covered with gold. Blue and yellow are used for the circles that form the central design.

Circles have deep meaning in both the religion and the philosophy of Islam; it is the sign of God, perfection, unchangeableness, the beginning and the extinction of life, and sign of the source and the goal.

These book covers are important because they point out the prevailing stylistic and compositional differences or
predictible consistancies with which the artists of the period handled certain media. Predictible consistency can be found across the various media in the depiction of inanimate, floral or European subject-matter. The differences lie in the compositional elements chosen for book covers, qalamdāns and mirror cases.
CHAPTER FOUR: FOOTNOTES

1. Muhammad Kāzīm was also an enameller. His work was discussed above. cf. Chapter Three, p. 137.

2. Najaf 'Alī held the title "Naqqāsh Bashi"; see Appendix I. His son Muhammad Kāzīm seems to have been a court painter too. His signature is found on a galamdān decorated with audience scenes (of the type known as "mashāhir" made for Naṣr al-Dīn Shāh.

3. See, for example, the mirror reproduced in plate 48A, where scenes from the story of Bahrām Gur are mixed with an inset portrait of a European lady; and another with a scene of Armenian clergy in front of a church on the outside of the cover (plate 49A), a traditional Persian portrait on the inside (plate 49B) and a European banquet on the back of the case (plate 49C). These and other examples will be discussed in detail below.

4. The invocation signature "yā Shāh-ī-Najaf", for example, seems to have been used by more than one member of the family. Muhammad Ja'far, more than any of the others, tended to leave his work unsigned.


6. See D. James "Lacquer Items in the Chester Beatty Library", PDFCA, 11, 1981, pp. 318-327, and plate 5b. For the mirror, the account of the Presentation of the Virgin, and similar representations in Persian art, see pp. 322-25, and nn. 22 and 24.

7. The dating is based on the style of the garments, which suggest a dating to the Zand period at the earliest; the carpet is very similar to that represented in plate 42, which dates from the period of Fath 'Ali Shāh.

8. cf. the paintings of the 17th century artists Adriaen van der Werf anf Frans van Mieris, in the Pitti Palace and Palazzio Vecchio, Florence, respectively.

9. Brother of Najaf 'Alī; see Appendix I.


13. Compare with the mirror signed by Ismā'īl, reproduced in plates 49A-C; cf. also B.W. Robinson, "A Lacquer Mirror Case of 1845", *Iran*, V, pp. 1 ff.

14. The work of Lutf Allah al-Hamzawi will be discussed below; see the qalamdan dated 1315/1897 reproduced in plate 92.

15. The Russian influence may have been indirectly passed on through the large Armenian population settled in Julfa, a suburb of Isfahan.


17. cf. Chapter One, p. 13 and n. 12.

18. cf. Watteau "Fete in a Park", in the Wallace Collection, London.

19. The mirror is undoubtedly the work of one or more members of the Najaf family: the layout and Rococo scrollwork are typical of Ismā'īl, while the colour scheme and faces appear to be the work of his elder brother Najaf 'Ali. On the other hand, the size, grouping and positioning of the figures are similar to works usually attributed to Ja'far. See Appendix I, and section on "Najaf and his Family", pp. 144-5.

20. The face of the old man with the white beard represented to the extreme left of plate 55A is a stock theme of Najaf 'Ali; the paintings on the back of the case, on the other hand are reminiscent of the work of Ismā'īl, and are comparable to the mirror signed by him and reproduced in plate 49C.
21. A mirror, signed by Fath Allah Shirāzī and dated 1289/1872, is very similar in style. It is decorated with birds, butterflies and flowers on a sparkling dark ground.


25. The sliding cover of the qalamdān has a slightly domed top; this would indicate a late dating. Earlier pieces had slightly flatter tops. For typical qalamdān shapes, cf. Appendix II.


27. It is not impossible that, through the trade routes from the East, such oriental elements gradually fused into the local Indian tradition and, with some modification, found their way into Persian painting.

28. The qalamdān is in a private collection; the mirror is in the Iran Bastān, Tehran, no. 3477.

29. Gombrich, E. H. The Story of Art, p. 157. An example of the "S" shape assumed by figures can be seen in Ruben's "Descent from the Cross" painted in 1611. The original design for the painting in Antwerp Cathedral is now in the Courtauld Institute Galleries, London.

30. Muhammad 'Alī Shirāzī was active around the middle of the 19th century. A similar turtle-shell effect was seen on the box painted by Mirzā Bābā, reproduced in plate 57.

31. The technique of zarak was described in Chapter One. cf. above, pp. 21-2.

32. The paintings decorating the sides of this qalamdān are identical to those decorating the sides of another in a private collection in London. The latter is signed 'Ībād Allah Mudhahhib Bāshī, and dated 1298/1881. Its sides are painted with birds and flowers in gold tinted with green and pink.
33. The sides of the qalamdān are decorated with military scenes including a review after a battle; the ends are decorated with paintings depicting the front of Milan Cathedral, and the Piazza in Venice.

34. This artist signed his name as Fakhr Anbiya' Ahmad, and should not be confused with Ahmad ibn Najaf 'Ali who was active around the same time.

35. The figures on this qalamdān are comparable to others found on a qalamdān signed by Ibrāhīm, now in a private collection. This qalamdān is decorated with paintings of mothers and children.


37. Compare with plates 33 to 35, and plate 64.

38. These elements are very similar to those on/a mirror case also attributed to Ja'far, reproduced in plate 54. See above pp. 166-8, and no. 19. The invocation signature "yā Shāh-ī-Najaf" was often used by members of the family other than Najaf 'Ali.

39. See above pp. 152-3, and plate 49A-C for a mirror case painted by Ismā'īl.

40. For typical qalamdān shapes, see Appendix II.

41. See above p. 63.

42. This qalamdān also bears the seal of the Fabrika Lukutina, Moscow.


44. ibid., plate 119.

45. ibid., loc.cit.

46. ibid., plate 122.

47. ibid., plate 128.

48. ibid., plate 123.

49. ibid., plate 128.
50. The book covers are in a private collection in London.

51. For other paintings by Sayyid Mirza, see Falk, Qajar Paintings, plate 37, and pp. 42-4, where he mentions two portraits of two of the sons of Fath 'Ali Shāh painted by him.

CHAPTER FIVE

ARTISTIC INNOVATIONS IN THE LATTER PART
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The favourite method used by artists for shading during the earlier part of the nineteenth century was the so-called dotted technique, which was executed with a very fine brush.¹ The gradual application of minute dots of a darker shade than the background colour produced a three-dimensional effect. The dots were so fine that it is virtually impossible to discern them without the aid of a magnifying glass. In Europe this technique was referred to as pointillism.

In the third quarter of the century a new technique which we shall term Persian impressionism emerged. At first, in its transitory phase, it comprised a combination of both the dotted and stroked brushwork techniques. Later this was replaced by the stroked brushwork technique. The artist who practised this technique most frequently was Ibrāhīm; Haidar 'Alī, a member of the Najaf family whose painting was discussed in the previous chapter, also favoured it. In this case it was on the sides of the same galamdān where he used the dotted technique.²
The sides are adorned with four medallions depicting male figures, three of which are bearded. The medallions are surrounded by a bird and hazelnut design. (plate 95A)

Considering that the root of Sūfism was in Iran, many artists were deeply influenced and tried to depict the faces of certain people who were among the original followers of the founder of Sūfism, Mūlavī. This particular galamdān depicts Mūlavī with four of his followers Shaykh 'Attār, (plate 95B) Sultān Ibrāhīm, (plate 95C) Ba-Yazīd Bastāmī, (plate 95D) and Shaykh Sāfī. (plate 95E) They are represented in different stages of life, from youth to old age.

The fine brushwork which characterises the figural representations on the top of this galamdān has been replaced by the less refined, but more energetic dotted technique (compare, for example, plates 82C and 95E). The ungroomed appearance of the hair of the Sūfī figures and the shading of the trees in the background all reflect the artists intention to introduce a different approach to an otherwise traditional contextual representation. The facial expressions are also different. In each case, they reflect the personality of the person the artist portrayed. For example, the face of the youth expresses bewilderment on the one hand and a
kind of resignation on the other. (plate 95C) The artist's choice of using the tilted head posture is also striking. In the case of the other two dervishes on the top of the qalamdan, the heads are held straight and without conveying motion. (plates 82B and D) In both instances, the artist was portraying holy men, upright and untouched by the elements of nature. Their earthly experiences are limited to and directed by the imperatives of of the Qur'an. On the other hand, the teacher in the central medallion, like the shepherd and the youth depicted in another medallion on the same qalamdan are very much earthbound. The third medallion contains the portrait of an elderly man with a white beard and moustache. The moustache overlaps the beard and is as long as the beard itself. Judging by the headdress, he is probably also a man of learning or a prominent member of the community. It is highly unlikely that he is a monastic person. The expression in the eyes suggets that he is also concerned with human matters.

The application of the dotted brushwork technique is more evident in two of the medallions. (plates 95D and 95E). While in the other representations its use was confined mainly to the shading of the clothing and the background, in this example it is also discernable on the face,
notably, under the lips, above the moustache and around the beard.

All the faces depicted on this qalamdān are Persian and different from each other. It is safe to assume that the artist used a different model for each one, which is a divergence from the practices of the early part of the era under study, when European or Armenian examples were copied or the same Persian model served as a prototype.

The floral decoration on the bottom of the qalamdān is executed in monochrome gold on a black background in conformation with the traditional style of the period. (plate 95F)

A further example of the impressionistic approach is provided by the qalamdān discussed in the previous chapter, (plate 79A) but it is more evident in the paintings decorating the sides. For example, the depiction of the horse in plate 96A is especially striking for the lack of transition from the lighter shade to the darker one. The artist used a vivid red colour and applied it in patches in order to create the effect of roundness. It is difficult to establish the nature of the composition behind the horse and the rider. The dynamic brush strokes almost engulf the tower-like
architectural element, the depiction of which further underlines the observation that the artist did not intend to adhere to reality. A similarly interesting composition is discernable at the other end of the gālamdān. This time it comprises another horseman dressed in blue. It is worth dwelling over the appearance of the horse's head, the depiction of what appears to be a cloud and the style of the flowering trees that frame the picture. (plate 96B) There is a definite dualism in this picture: the almost violent depiction of the cloud on the one hand and the beauty of the flowering trees on the other. No doubt can be attached to the fact that the artist was experimenting with both colour and compositional style when he chose to paint the engulfed tower on the one side and the cloud on the other side of the gālamdān. The shape of the horses and indeed of the other animals in the picture are almost grotesque. (plates 96C and D)

A curious motif appears on the other side of the gālamdān. It depicts a shepherd, followed by a dog, both looking startled. The body-posture of the shepherd indicates that he is running toward something that resembles fire, with two animals, probably a horse or a camel in the middle, in flight from the scene. The whole atmosphere of the picture reflects dynamism, achieved by the use of contrasting elements such as the flowering
tree and the dog which are practically motionless, and
the shepherd and the fire which convey motion. (plate
96E) A strange kind of interaction between the humans
and the animals is discernable in the central theme.
(plate 96D) A male figure, placed between two females,
appears to be departing from one and heading towards the
other. The facial expressions of all three reflect their
appropriate emotional state: one seems to be saying
farewell, while the other one is expressing an expectant
mood; the face of the third one, the male, is conveying
both remorse and expectation. Two of the four sheep face
in one direction, toward the woman being left behind,
while the other two face in the opposite direction,
toward the waiting woman. The outstretched arms of the
figure on the left together with her beckoning eyes
further underline the painful state of the situation,
while the bemused look on the face of the other woman
indicates that her life is about to turn for the better.

A qalamdān bearing the signature Mahmūd Sharīf Mālek
dates from around 1260-1290/1844-1873. The top surface
depicts scenery comprising a herdsman and herd in the
foreground with buildings to the left and right and trees
in the background. (plate 97A) The search for new
standards for artistic expression culminates in this
qalamdān. Whereas in the previous examples only a gradual
deviation from the traditional style of pictorial representation could be discerned, it can be said that in this case the artist completely diverged from the familiar mode of depiction. But before detailing these changes, it is worth referring to the developing artistic trends during this period elsewhere, namely in France.

During the third quarter of the nineteenth century, French artists in general, and Cezanne in particular, were experimenting with the question: how to achieve depth without sacrificing the brightness of colours, and an orderly arrangement without sacrificing the brightness of colours and the sense of depth. The all important so-called 'linear perspective' invented in Italy during the Renaissance lost its overall impact. 'Linear perspective' was invented in order to create an illusion of space. Cezanne did not aim at creating an illusion, but he wanted, rather, to create the feeling of solidity in depth.4

Another French artist, Seurat, studied the scientific theory of colour vision and on the basis of his findings, used small regular dabs of unbroken colour like a mosaic to build up his picture.5 One of Seurat's pictures depicting the Bridge at Courbevoie was painted in 1886 and can be found in the Courtauld Institute Galleries.4
It is interesting to compare the way Seurat used the dotted technique, otherwise known as pointillism to that of Mahmūd Sharīf Mālek (plate 97B) They both avoided all contours and broke up every form into areas of multicoloured dots. Both paid a great deal of attention to horizontals and verticals. This is seen, for example, in the bridge-towers, the bridge, the small hill with trees and the trees in the background in plate 97C, or the tree and animals in plate 97D, or even the herd and archway in plate 97E.

It is not possible to say whether this particular Persian artist was in any way familiar with the artistic developments in France, nor is it possible within the framework of this study to establish whether these developments in the two different and geographically distant countries were inspired by one and the same underlying motivation. It is probable that Persian artists were acquainted with the works of artists such as Seurat through prints and reproductions. In any case, one assumption that cannot be denied is that artistic inspiration and innovation are neither bound by geographical distance, nor by demand as such.

In light of the historical developments which entailed closer contacts between Iran and certain Western
countries, particularly France, it is practically certain that some of the Western influence filtered into Persian art. One of Nāṣr al-Dīn Shāh's ministers, Mīrzā Taqī Khān, founded the Dār al-Funūn, or Academy of Arts and Sciences, in 1269/1852. This institution was European in organization, staffed by a majority of Europeans who taught Western science, history and culture. The first French school was founded in Tabriz in 1255/1839 by the Lazarite mission which with Les Filles de la Charity, eventually established a large number of schools all over the country.

The top of a qalamdān reproduced in plates 96A - H is decorated with a scene of bathing females. It is neither signed nor dated. If compared with that reproduced in plates 95A - E, signed by Māhmūd Sharīf Mālek, it becomes evident that they are both by the same artist. It was mentioned above that Māhmūd Sharīf Mālek avoided all contours and relied exclusively on the dotted technique. The artist applied the dotted brushwork technique throughout the whole painting. (plates 98B - D) Outline is not discernible anywhere else in the picture, except in the depiction of the eyes and the lips of the women. No doubt can be attached to the fact that the inspiration originated from Europe. The only Persian element discernible in the whole composition is the nose of the
reclining figure on the left side of the painting. On first sight, nothing peculiar catches the eye concerning the representation of the figure under discussion. (plate 98B) On closer examination, however, it transpires that the artist was not able to use the dotted brushwork technique as efficiently for painting figures as he was able to use it for recreating scenery. For example, the shading of the torso is carried out in such a way that the body assumes an unnatural appearance, as does the hand. The arm is supposed to be resting on a covered object, yet it seems to be in front of it. The same point can be made for the figure on the other side of the painting. (plate 98D) The left arm embracing the head is unusually short, while the feet are completely misshapen. The central group comprising two seated women and a child manifests the same characteristics. (plate 98C) Curiously, however, in all three examples a great deal of attention is paid to the narrative character of the faces. The one on the right is attentive and posing, (plate 98B) the one on the left is pensive (plate 98D) and the frontally depicted figure of the central group expresses sorrow. The posture of the figure facing it expresses sympathy and solidarity and the bemused look on the face of the child suggests a sense of detachment. (plate 98C)
Judging by the depiction of the female body, the Persian painters, like the French impressionists such as Delacroix and Renoir, accepted large buttocks as the norm. This, however, had a precedent in the paintings of the famous romantic painter, Rubens, who also depicted females in this fashion, but used a different technique. It is interesting to note however, that the artist utilised some of the artistic effects employed by artists in Europe during the Renaissance. This comprises the shell-like appearance of the cloths on which the figures are sitting or reclining. In the overall compositional layout of both top and sides the relationship between verticality and horizontality are equally emphasised.
The next qalamdān, though not dated, is signed by Ibrāhīm. The picture on the top depicts a battle, which is not an unusual theme in Persian lacquer painting. (plate 99A) As can be seen from the close-up detail, it is also painted in the realistic impressionist style. (plates 99B - F) The facial expressions of both men and horses are worth studying. They all express a range of emotions: from fear to determination. Anatomical precision is also evident in the picture. Symmetry is carefully maintained by confining the action-packed scene to one end of the picture and contrasting it with the army standing in preparedness at the other end.

In contrast, the paintings on the sides present a different appearance. For example, the horses look less realistic and their execution is much cruder; this is achieved through the use of stroked brushwork. (plates 99B and C) Fluency has almost disappeared from the depictions and grotesque elements can also be discerned, for example in the lion, the horses and even in the human figures. (plates 99D - F) On closer examination, it is difficult to believe that the pictures on the sides were painted by the same hand as the one on the top. It is possible that the scene on the top was indeed painted by Ibrāhīm, whereas those on the sides were produced by a member of the Najaf school.
A similar dichotomy can be found in another galamdān painted by Ibrāhīm. But here the contrast is even greater. The top is painted in the classical style and is divided into five areas: three oval shaped medallions containing busts of European women and two rectangular picture-fields containing landscapes. (plate 100A) The brushwork alternates between smooth lines and dots: dots are mainly used for the hair and the background. (plates 100B - D)

The sides are adorned with medallions depicting rustic scenery and a medallion in each corner containing a kitten. (plates 100F and G) The background is decorated with gold floral patterns on a black base. (plates 100F and G) Two styles are combined in these paintings: the traditional classical and the realistic impressionist. The latter is most evident in the portrayal of the kittens and the scenery in the central medallion on the one side. (plates 100F and G) There is no Persian element detectable in the pictorial representations, but it is present in the floral design.

The decoration on the cover of another galamdān signed by Ibrāhīm is again divided into three parts, but this time two of the figural representations are not contained in medallions. The third one appears as an insert in an oval
shaped medallion. (plate 101A) The Persian element is reintroduced in these three pictures: all the faces and the clothing are modelled on Persian prototypes. Here, Ibrāhīm combined the impressionist technique with the Persian content. (plates 101B and C)

Another innovation is worth noting. Throughout the early part of the century, figural representations were frequently accompanied by a particular leitmotif. This was a heritage of past practises. These leitmotifs were invariably in the foreground of the pictures and they were never an integral part of the whole composition. They comprised either animals such as ducks and peacocks or inanimate objects.

During the middle part of the nineteenth century, the leitmotif seems to have disappeared. This may be due to the fact that artists wanted to give a different format to their compositions: to make them more life-like and realistic. In this particular composition, the presence of cats is noteworthy. The cats are as life-like as the other figures and furthermore, they are an integral part of the whole scene. (plate 101C) The inclusion of cats could be considered as a replacement for the leitmotifs used during the early part of the period.
The sides are decorated with rustic landscapes painted in the realistic impressionist style. Again the faces are typically Persian. (plates 101D - F)

The trend seems to have alternated during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The artists were willing to experiment with new styles that possibly filtered in from certain parts of Europe. At the same time, however, they adhered to traditional decorative motifs, especially when it came to filling in empty and unconnected areas. Essentially the content had not changed. Invariably, European scenes or figures served as models; when Persian elements dominated, they were executed with a modern acquired technique.
CHAPTER FIVE: FOOTNOTES

1. The use of this technique may be traced back to artists such as Sayyid Mirzâ who was practicing in the early 19th century.

2. cf. above, Chapter Four, "The Paintings of Najaf and his Family", pp. 193-95. The top of the qalamdān is reproduced in plates 82 A-D.


4. ibid., loc.cit.

5. ibid., loc.cit.

6. ibid., loc.cit.

7. Dār al-Funūn was established to maintain national integrity and to further the Arts; although it was staffed by a majority of Europeans, it was set up as a Persian institution.


9. cf. the paintings of Delacroix and Renoir in the Louvre, Paris.


11. The use of various leitmotifs has been widespread since Safavid times; cf. for example the gazelle in plate 41, the ducks in plates 33 and 34, the rider in the distance in plate 34, the figure on the bridge, the goose, and the ewer and basin in plate 46A and the tiny peacock in plate 55A. cf. also Chapter Two p. 81.
CONCLUSION

The style and content of Safavid paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries left their mark on Persian paintings for a considerable length of time. Traditional and mythical elements, finely executed floral designs, calligraphy and stereotype human and animal figural representations were the dominant decorative features of the time.

The artists were invariably involved in painting on a number of different media ranging from enamels, papier-maché and wall surfaces, to wood. Some, however, excelled only at painting in miniature.

The stylistic development of Persian lacquer painting passed through a number of transitional phases, some of which were directly related to foreign influence, but the traditional Islamic flavour was never fully replaced by foreign elements.

The turbulent history of Persia, especially during and immediately following the Afghan invasion in 1135/1722 which marked the end of Safavid rule, inevitably had its effect on the artistic development of the period. In 1164/1750 a new dynasty, the Zands, emerged. During this
period, lacquer painting was more or less stagnating; nothing worth noting had really emerged until power was consolidated under the Qajars. With the reign of Fath 'Ali Shāh (1212/1797-1250/1834) a new and relatively prosperous era opened in the history of Persia. Political and economic conditions were once more favourable for artistic activities.

As political and economic contacts intensified with both the neighbouring countries and Europe, the artistic development gradually began to reflect the foreign influence. Artists started to paint in oil on canvas and miniature painters found a new medium for their art, namely, painting on lacquer surfaces in water colours in miniature style. Interest in and love of lacquered objects gradually increased. The demand for lacquered objects such as mirror cases, book covers, caskets, letter-boxes, galamdāns and panel paintings grew. The artists' enthusiasm for painting in miniature is invariably reflected in the finished products.

Mirror cases became even more popular in the latter part of the Qajar period and this observation is supported by the existence of a large number of surviving pieces. The subject-matter of mirror case decorations is varied,
ranging from single portraits, flowers, battle- and Royal Court scenes, weddings to scrollwork.

Book covers decorated with gold and black were still favoured in the second half of the eighteenth century, but these were gradually replaced by more colourful designs, often with the inclusion of blue, green and red and naturalistic elements.

The progress of the design of book covers towards a freer style continued throughout the eighteenth century and this stylistic development left its mark also on other lacquered objects in the nineteenth century. Previously a strict distinction between decorations of book covers and other lacquered items was apparent, mainly in the area of artistic execution. Decorations were characterized by very fine brushwork and painstaking detail. Certain themes, such as floral composition, enjoyed continuing popularity. This may have been dictated by the need for non-figural representation on Qur'ān covers on the one hand, and the excellence Persian artists achieved in painting such scenes on the other.

The number of qalamdāns surviving from the period suggests that this object was the most popular on the market. Qajar qalamdāns are long and narrow boxes with
rounded ends. The top is invariably decorated with rich designs ranging from portraits, flowers and birds to battle scenes.

Qalamdāns showing portraits and gold scrollwork are the most appealing to the eyes. Solitary figures are painted in great detail and finesse; they are in most cases European or Armenian looking females. Floral and bird designs are usually executed in polychrome or are painted with a brush in black over a brown background. The latter type is limited in number, which may indicate that they were made not for the general market, but rather on special order. Another design which was introduced towards the middle of the nineteenth century and was used by a small number of artists only, was the so called abrī technique, otherwise known as the marbling effect.

Large oil paintings became fashionable during the reign of Fath 'Alī Shāh. They depict historical or battle scenes, court scenes, portraits of the Shāh, country life, religious scenes or dancing girls. Portraits of Fath 'Alī Shāh were based on ancient models and this may explain the fact that the body posture and the facial expression of the Shāh are invariably stiff and lifeless.
In addition to historical portraits, favourite scenes from legends and popular stories were sometimes represented, usually referring to stories from Bahram Gur, Khusraw Parviz or Shaykh San'ân.

The most numerous of all surviving Qajar oil paintings depict women. They were characterised by round faces, straight noses, enigmatic eyes, oriental eyebrows and cherry-like lips. It is striking that a lot of attention was paid to the depictions of the clothing: the material flows gently over and emphasises the delicate curves of the body. The artists' view of the "female of the time" which was a combination of reality and idealization transpires from the attention they paid to suggesting eroticism. Jewellery, headdresses, and flowing long black hair are all designed to enhance the appearance of the ladies depicted in the paintings. Most of these paintings, in contrast to the Royal portraits, were usually painted with inferior materials.

During the eighteenth, but more notably in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Indian and in some cases Far-Eastern elements are discernible in Persian painting.
In figural representations and enamelled miniatures, the European influence is more dominant. Floral designs on enamelled pieces often resemble those depicted on Dresden, Meissen or Limoges porcelain. This in itself is not surprising, as French artists attended the Persian Royal Court in order to acquaint court artists with painting à la France.

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, the French style seems to have been favoured by Persian artists to such an extent that the technique of Persian painting began to change considerably. The second half of the nineteenth century was characterised by daring experimentation with both style and content, but the artists never really lost sight of the traditions of Islam.

Some artists from the pre-Qajar period, such as Muhammad Zamān and Muhammad 'Alī Ashraf, set the trend for generations to come. Muhammad Zamān introduced Christian elements into his paintings, often depicting the Holy Family in familiar settings. 'Alī Ashraf's ability to depict floral and bird designs with minute details attracted the majority of artists who copied his style with more or less success.
The trend changed during the middle part of the nineteenth century. Islamic motifs were frequently combined with European ones; purely Islamic themes were also used. The pictures became more narrative in character, their content was often taken from well-known stories or actual live models. Faces became more expressive, greater attention was paid to the correct depiction of anatomical detail and body postures became more flexible and life-like.

Towards the latter part of the nineteenth century, a new technique was introduced into Persian painting, which was referred to in the text as pointillism. This technique was practised by a member of the Najaf family, namely, Ismā'īl. It involves the use of tiny dots and/or short brush strokes to effect shading. The technique was introduced in France at approximately the same time and was referred to as impressionism. It is impossible to say at this stage whether Ismā'īl and his contemporaries were in direct contact with their French counterparts, but the possibility cannot be excluded from the hypothesis.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a gradual decline in artistic achievement is noticeable: the emergence of commercialism, the increased interest of foreigners in
Persian art unavoidably influenced the artistic trend that was to be characteristic of times to come.
APPENDIX I: HISTORICAL DOCUMENT ON THE NAJAF FAMILY

The document in question is the marriage contract of Najaf 'Ali's daughter Shahr Bānū, also known as Safiyya Sultan Khānum, to Aqa abu'l Hasan son of Fadhil 'Ali Naqqāsh in 1271/1854-5. The contract was witnessed and signed by a number of the members of the Najaf family, as well as others who were present at the ceremony. The contract is reproduced in figure I.1.¹

The document is interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that such documents pertaining to the every-day life of famous artists are not very common. The signatures (in seal form) of the guests and witnesses are also interesting. (figure I.2) An inscription above each seal identifies it, giving the full name of each person as well as the relationships they bear with one another. The witnesses include:

1. ('Ālisha'n Rafī' Jayga) Aqa Najaf 'Ali Naqqāsh Bāshī, father of the above mentioned (i.e. Shahr Bānū); the name on the seal appears as Najaf 'Ali.

2. ('Ālisha'n Rafī' Makān) Aqa Muḥammad Hasan, uncle of the above mentioned;² the name on the seal appears as Gul Bustān Muḥammad Hasan.
3. (‘Ālisha’n) Aqā Muhammad Kāzim, son of the distinguished honourable Najaf ‘Alī, brother of the above named; the name on the seal is (‘Abda) Muhammad Kāzim.

4. (‘Ālisha’n) Aqā Muhammad Ja’far, another brother of the above mentioned; the name on the seal (in Tughra script) is (‘Abdah-al-Rājī) Muhammad Ja’far.

5. Ālisha’n) Muhammad Qāsim Naqqāsh son of Haji Aqā Muhammad Ibrāhīm.

6. Aqā Haydar ‘Alī son of the deceased Muhammad Ismā’il; the name on the seal is ‘Alī bin Ismā’il.

7. Aqā Muhammad Ismā’il son of the deceased Aqā Bābā Naqqāsh.

The name Muhammad Ismā’il is mentioned twice, in (6) and (7). One is referred to as "the deceased", and as the father of Haydar ‘Alī. Najaf ‘Alī had a younger brother by the name of Muhammad Ismā’il who also had a son called Haydar ‘Alī; both were accomplished lacquer painters. But the Haydar ‘Alī mentioned cannot be Najaf’s nephew, since we know that his father was still alive in 1854, the date on the document. His signature is found on
objects which are undisputably by his hand well after this date. This leaves the second Muhammad Ismā'īl, in (7), and it is very likely that he is Najaf's brother.

The inscription above Muhammad Ismā'īl's name, in (7), gives his father's name as Baba Naqqash. This would mean that Ismā'īl's father, and therefore Najaf's, was a painter too. Thus at least three generations of the Najaf family were lacquer artists. One bookbinding signed by Baba Naqqāsh is known to exist.  

The importance of Najaf 'Ali and his position are indicated by the long string of 'honorary' titles before his name. (figure 1.3) He is also given the title Naqqāsh Bāshi, which means that he was the chief or official court painter.
APPENDIX I: FOOTNOTES


2. The term "Amm" (paternal uncle) is used; this means that Aqā Muḥammad Hasan is Najaf 'Allī's brother. There is no further information about him, and no evidence to indicate that he too was an artist.

3. I am very grateful to Mr. B. W. Robinson who pointed out Bābā Naqqāsh's work to me.
Fig. I.1  Wedding contract of Shahr Bānū, daughter of Aqā Najaf 'Alī.
Fig. II.2  Seals and signatures of witnesses and guests, with the relationship of each of the signatories to the bride specified after his name.
Fig. I.3 Line from wedding contract, showing the list of "honorary" titles given to Najaf 'Ali, including that of Naqqāsh Bāshī.
APPENDIX II: TYPICAL QALAMDĀN SHAPES

Qalamdāns can be classed into four categories, according to shape:

1. square ended, with detachable or hinged cover;
2. round ended, with detachable or hinged cover; (Figs. II.1 and II.2)
3. square ended, with sliding cover; (Fig. II.3)
4. round ended, with sliding cover; (Fig. II.4)

These shapes did not change much over the years. There were slight variations in size, and occasionally, in shape. An example can be seen in Figure II.6, on a qalamdān with slightly pointed ends.

The tops of most qalamdāns are gently curved; some late examples however, developed domed tops. One example is illustrated in Fig. II.5.
Fig. II.1 Square ended qalamdān with hinged cover - top and side views, with vertical section through centre of qalamdān.
Fig. II.2 Round ended qalamdān with detachable cover-top and side views, and vertical section through centre of qalamdān.
Fig. II.3  Square ended qalmdān with sliding cover-top and side views, with vertical section through centre of qalmdān.
Fig. II.4  Round ended qalamdān with sliding cover-top and side views, with vertical section through centre of qalamdān.
Fig. II.5  Round ended qalamdān with slightly domed sliding cover-top and side views, with vertical section through centre of qalamdān.
Fig. II.6 Qalamdān with slightly pointed ends—top and side views, with vertical section through centre of qalamdān.
APPENDIX III: LIST OF ARTISTS

Names are listed in alphabetical order according to first names of the artists. Dates are approximate, and indicate the span of an artist's working life.

'Abbās Shirāzī: mid 19th century;

'Abd al-Mejīde Beg-Yūsif: enameller; late 19th - early 20th century;

'Abd al-Razzāq: mid 19th century;

Abu'ul Hasan Ja'farī (son of Muhammad Ja'farī): oil painter, period of Nasr al-Dīn Shāh;

Abu'ul Qāsim: oil painter, period of Fath 'Alī Shāh;

Abū Talib: mid 19th century;

Ahmad (also signed as Fakhr Anbiyā' Ahmad): third quarter of the 19th century;

Ahmad bin Najaf 'Alī: third quarter of the 19th century;

'Alī Ashraf: See Muhammad 'Alī Ashraf;

'Alī Qūlī: Safavid, late 17th - early 18th century;

'Alī Rezā 'Abbāsī: first half of the 17th century;

Aqā Najaf 'Alī: see Najaf 'Alī;

Bahavār: contemporary;

Fath Allah Shirāzī: third quarter of the 19th century;

Ghulām Khānazād 'Alī: (enameller) late 18th - early 19th century;

Ghulām Rizā Imāmī: mid-nineteenth century;

Hajjī Muhammad: late 17th century - early 18th century;

Hajjī Muhammad Tāqī: mid 19th century;

Hasan Shirāzī (son of Mahmūd Shirāzī): enameller and lacquer painter, second half of the 19th century;
Haydar 'Ali (son of Ismā'īl): third quarter of the 19th century;

Husayni: enameller; late 18th century;

Husayn Qūlī Khān: late 18th - early 19th century;

'Ibād Allah Muhmmud Mudhahhib Bāshī: second half of the 19th century;

Ibrāhīm: late 19th - early 20th century;

Ismā'īl (brother of Aqā Najaf 'Ali): mid 19th century;

Ja'far (son of Aqā Najaf 'Ali): see Muhammad Ja'far;

Kamāl al-Dīn Isfahānī: mid - third quarter of the 19th century;

Kamāl al-Mulk (aka al-Mulkī): member of the Ja'fārī family, late 19th - early 20th centuries (died 1941); founded the School of Fine Arts in Tehran.

Kāzīm ibn Najaf 'Ali: see Muhammad Kāzīm;

Lutf 'Ali Khān (Shirāzī): second quarter of the 19th century;

Lutf Allah al-Hamzawi: late 19th - early 20th century;

Mahmūd Sharīf (aka Mālek al-Shu'arā): mid 19th century (court of Naṣr al-Dīn Shāh); the title Mālek al-Shu'arā was given to the poets laureate.

Mīhr 'Ali: oil painter, period of Fath 'Ali Shāh;

Mīrzā Bābā: late 18th - early 19th centuries;

Mīrzā Mustafā Shirāzī (sometimes signed as Yā Mustafā): late 19th century;

Mīrzā Rizā: late 18th - mid 19th century (period of Karīm Khān and Fath 'Ali Shah);

Mubārak ibn Mahmūd: second half of the 19th century;

Muhammad 'Alī Ashraf: second quarter - late 18th century;

Muhammad 'Alī ibn Najaf 'Alī: late 19th - early 20th century;
Muhammad 'Ali Shirāzī: mid 19th century;

Muhammad 'Ali Moyeni: contemporary;

Muhammad Bāqīr: enameller; early 19th century.

Muhammad Bāqīr ibn Muhammad 'Ali: second half of the 18th century;

Muhammad Bāqīr Semirūmī: third quarter - late 19th century;

Muhammad Hadīl: mid 18th century;

Muhammad Hasan: portrait and lacquer painter, period of Fath 'Alī Shāh;

Muhammad Ja'far: enameller, period of Fath 'Alī Shāh;

Muhammad Ja'far ibn Najaf 'Alī: second half of the 19th century;

Muhammad Kazīm ibn Najaf 'Alī: enameller and lacquer painter, second half of the 19th century;

Muhammad Muhsin Amīr Kalhūr: enameller, late 18th - early 19th century;

Muhammad Sābir: first quarter of the 18th century;

Muhammad Sādīq (sometimes signed as Sādīq al-Wa'd): period of Fath 'Alī Shāh; also painted in oils;

Muhammad Zamān: late 17th - early 18th centuries;

Muhammad Zamān II (sometimes signed as Yā Sāhib al-Zamān): period of Fath 'Alī Shah;

Mu'īn Musawwir: second half of the 17th century;

Mulla 'Alī Muhammad: first half of the 19th century;

Musaver al-Mulkī: early 20th century;

(Yā) Mustafā: see Mīrzā Muṣṭafā Shirāzī;

(Mawlāna) Muzaffar 'Alī: late 16th century; court painter in miniatures and lacquer;

Najaf 'Alī (signed as Aqā Najaf or Yā Shah-ī-Najaf): first half of the 19th century, (ca. 1815 - 1856);
Nasr Allah al-Husaynī: third quarter of the 19th century;

Qāsim: second half of the 16th century; miniature painter;

Rahīm Dekānī: early nineteenth century; this reference is to the Persian artist, not to his Indian namesake.

Rajab 'Alī: mid 19th century;

Rāzī: 19th century, court artist during the period of Naṣr al-Dīn Shāh.

Rīzā Imāmī: mid 19th century;

(Yā) Sādiq al-Wā'd: see Muḥammad Sādiq;

(Yā) Sāhib al-Zamān: see Muḥammad Zamān II;

Sānī al-Mulk: oil painter, early in mid 19th century;

Sayyid Mīrzā: first half of the 19th century;

Semirūmī: see Muḥammad Bāqīr Semirūmī;

Shāfi' 'Abbāsī: miniature and lacquer painter, 17th century;

Vardī Ashfar: early 19th century;

Zayn al-'Ābidīn Isfahānī: second half of the 19th century.
GLOSSARY

Ab-i-sangar stone green;

Abrash a marbling, combed or turned effect used in lacquer decoration;

Abri cloudy;

Barq-i-maw vine leaves;

Coccus ilicis an insect growing on oak trees; the principal source of cochineal;

Coccus lacca another source of cochineal; insects grow on fig trees;

Coccus lacci Mexican cochineal;

Cochineal a red dye produced from the dried up bodies of insects of the kermes family;

Dughi a shade of red obtained from the mixture of madder and karakerut;

Gach a mixture similar to plaster of Paris;

Gardeh a pattern, sometimes used for copying motifs or repeating patterns onto objects;

Gesso a preparation of plaster of Paris or gypsum, used for treating surfaces before painting;

Ghulâm courtiers;

Hilâl crescent moon, later a symbol of Islam;

Isparâq a local species of spurge used in the production of yellow pigment;

Jalâ clear varnish;

Jazân a multi-purpose small sharp knife or blade;

Jefî a dwarf oak;

Karakerut soured sheep's milk;

Katîreh gum tragacanth;
Kermes a species of insects, especially coccus ilicis, whose dried up bodies are used as a source of cochineal;

La' al rubies, used in the production of red pigments, also colour produced (ruby-red);

Lac a resinous exudate of a particular Indian or Indo-Chinese tree;

Madder a herbaceous climbing plant, used as a source for varying shades of red;

Marqash a sparkling golden background used in Persian lacquer painting; obtained by flaking lumps of Pyrite and mixing them with gum arabic to produce liquid marqash;

Möji wavy;

Mullah a teacher or expounder of the law and dogmas of Islam;

Naqqāsh painter or decorator;

Naqqāsh Bāshī chief painter;

"Nūn wa al-Qalam wamā Yasturūn" "Nūn" by the Pen and the (Record) which (men) write. Verse 1 of Sūra 68 "the Pen" of the Qur'ān;

Opuntia a tree on which Mexican cochineal (coccus lacti) live;

Pointilism a brush technique in which the colours are applied in dots;

Porphyrophora kammellii a species of plant growing at the foot of Mount Ararat from which Armenian red was obtained;

Qalamdān pen box or pen-case;

Rahla a Qur'ān stand;

Realistic Impressionism a term coined to describe a style of Persian painting which combined Impressionism with Traditionalism;

Rhus veniciflua or Rhus succedanea a tree from whose sap lacquer is produced in China;
Roghān kāmān an aromatic oil which is impervious to acids, water and dust, and as such, was used as a final protective application on objects;

Sandarach or Sandarous a resin resembling amber obtained from the exudate of some plants, especially firs and pine;

Serisholm a binder;

Sesamium indicum sesame, an East Indian hairy plant;

Shahnāmah The Book of Kings;

Shaykh Sanān the main character in a story with a moral, who dreamt that he had fallen in love with a Christian maiden and nearly renounced his religion for her; the story was a favourite subject for painters in all media;

Sīyāh black;

Sūmāch a spice, mixed with ferrous sulphate to produce a deep brownish violet;

Talā'ī golden;

Tragacanth tree from which lac is obtained;

Zak mineral crystal salt;

Zamīn background colour;

Zarak small specks of gold mixed with gum arabic to produce a uniform and smooth golden background.


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PERSIAN LACQUER PAINTING IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

THESIS PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

NASSER D. KHALILI

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PERSIAN LACQUER PAINTING IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

LIST OF PLATES

Plate No.

1A  Qalamdān painted by Ḥājjī Muhammad in 1116/1704. The surface of the qalamdān was covered with flattened gold wire, then painted and varnished.

1B  Detail of plate 1A, showing signature and date.

2  Qalamdān decorated in the abrash technique (mojī). Attributed to Abū Tālib; mid 19th c.

3  Qalamdān decorated in the abrash technique (abrī). Attributed to Abū Tālib; mid 19th c. A special tool, shaped like a comb, was used in the decoration of the medallions.

4  Bookbinding. Unsigned; early 19th c.

5  Bookbinding by Muḥammad Rāzī Šānī Humayyūm. Signed Rāzī Mudhahhib, and dated 1299/1882. The covers were apparently made as a present to the Czar.
6 Qalamdān, signed by 'Ibad Allah Mudhahhib Bāshī, and dated 1308/1891.

7 Qalamdān; unsigned, but probably the work of Rahīm; third quarter of the 19th c.

8 and 9 Steel jazān and combination pen-rest and cutting block, decorated with gold damascening.

10 Gardeh, or pattern used by artists in tracing complicated or repeating designs onto the surfaces to be decorated.

11 and 12 Details of above.

13 Small ivory box, used to store gold dust used in painting; 18th/19th c.

14 Four 19th c. silver inkwells.

15 Five silver spoon-shaped inkwells.

16 A 17th c. steel box decorated with a silver inlaid calligraphic band. The brush was drawn on the serrated block inside the box to create
a fine point; powdered pigment or ink was stored in the compartment below it.

17A Tool used in making margins or lines; may have also been used to create a "wavy" or combed effect.

17B Small spoon-shaped ivory inkwell.

18A Small spoon-shaped ivory inkwell.

18B and C Tools used for creating patterns and mixing pigments and colours.

19 A-E Same as above.

20A and B Same as above.

21B Tool used for holding different brushes while the artist is at work.

21C Tool used as a combination pen or brush-rest and cutting block.

21D Bamboo pen.
22 Burnishing tool with ivory handle and semi-precious stone tip.

23 A-C Selection of bamboo pens.

24 Selection of brushes, some contemporary.

25 Three pairs of steel scissors decorated with gold damascening. The handles have been shaped so as to read "Ya Fattāh".

26 Pair of steel travelling scissors.

27 A-C Travelling case containing an ivory combination pen holder and cutter inscribed with the name of Rāzī, a 19th c. court artist (17A), a pair of scissors and a combination jazan and burnisher (27C).

28 A-C Pair of 16th c. bookbindings, and detail of 28B.

29 Bookbinding painted by 'Alī Rezā 'Abbāsī in 1025/1616. Photo courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts.
30 Ivory pendant decorated with the portrait of Shāh 'Abbās II; third quarter of the 17th c.

31 A-C Box, painted by Muhammad 'Alī Ashraf, and details of paintings on lid and inside lid; mid 18th c.

32 Qalammān decorated with a scene from the story of "Shaykh San'ān and the Christian Maiden". The signature "... Zamān" is still legible. Attributed to Muhammad Zamān; beginning of 18th c.

33A and B Qalammān painted with a scene in the "Indianising style" and detail; unsigned, early 18th c.

33C and D Side of above qalammān and detail showing the dotted technique used for the shading of the flowers.

34 Qalammān painted in the "Indianising style" by 'Alī Qūlī in 1117/1705. An inscription on the top reads "to the order of the exalted nobleman".
35 Qalamdān, painted in the "Indianising style" by Muhammad Sābir and dated 1131/1719.

36 Qalamdān, unsigned and undated; in the style of Muhammad Zamān; early 18th c.

37A and B Top and side of qalamdān decorated in the "etching style". Although the qalamdān is signed 'Alī Rezā 'Abbāsī and dated 1059/1649, the style of the hats worn by the figures suggests a later date.

37C Decoration on the base of above qalamdān.

38A and B Top of unusually large qalamdān painted with gold in the "etching style", and detail; late 17th - early 18th c.

38C Side of above qalamdān.

39A and B Wooden qalamdān painted by Mu'in Musawwir and detail showing signature; second half of the 17th c.

40 A-C Three paintings decorating an instrument case with mirror. An inscription on Plate 40C
mentions that they were painted by "Muhammad Baqir ibn Muhammad 'Ali the noblest and humblest in the court of Isfahan", while another mentions that they took eleven months to accomplish, and that was in Jamadi al-Awwal 1187/1773.

41 Mirror case with the signature Ya Sadiq al-Waad, and the date 1204/1790.

42 Bookbinding decorated with the portrait of Fath 'Ali Shāh on the Peacock Throne; inscribed at the top "al-Sultān Fath 'Ali Shāh". Unsigned, but may be attributed to Zayn al-'Ābidīn Isfahānī; dated 1263/1847.

43A and B Top, sides and base of box, decorated with painted enamels; end of the 18th - beginning of the 19th c.

44 Enamelled box, painted by 'Abd al-Majīde Beg Yusūf and dated 1314/1896.

45 Enamelled plate and cup; the calligraphic band on the plate mentions the name of Mālek
Bahmān, one of Fath 'Alī Shāh's sons; early 19th c.

46A and B Outer and inner faces of a mirror case cover. The first is decorated with a scene of the "Presentation in the Temple", the second with an Indian scene. The invocation signature reads Ya Sāhib al-Zamān; early 19th c.

47A and B Mirror case decorated with floral compositions and the portrait of a young mullah. Unsigned; turn of the 19th c.

48A and B Mirror case decorated with scenes depicting Bahrām Gūr in three of the Seven Pavillons. The central portrait of the European lady is unconnected to the other scenes, and illustrates the "picture in picture" technique employed by some artists. The mirror case was made to the order of Mirzā Hasan Khān, is signed Ya Shāh-Ī-Najaf and dated 1250/1834.

49A Outer face of a mirror cover painted with a scene of Armenian clergy outside a church. Signed by Ismā'īl and dated 1274/1858.
Inner face of above cover, painted with a portrait of the Prime Minister Mirza Agha Khan Sadr-î-A'zam, made to the order of Hishmat al-Dawla Hamza Mirza.

Banqueting scene decorating the back of above mirror case.

Mirror case painted by Zayn al-'Abidin Isfahani; dated 1271/1855.

Outer face of a carved and painted mirror case, signed by Mirza Riza and dated 1287/1870.

Inner face of above mirror case, depicting 'Ali with the two young imams, Hasan and Husayn.

Inner face of mirror cover, depicting the Prophet with 'Ali, Hasan, Husayn and Fatima. The two other figures are probably meant to represent Salmân al-Farisî and Qanbar, 'Ali's servant. Unsigned, but may be attributed to Ismâ'îl; mid 19th c.
52B Outer face of above mirror case, decorated with scenes of Armenian clergy and European banquets.

52C Back of above mirror case, decorated with scenes from the story of "Shaykh Şan'ān and the Christian Maiden".

53 A-C Three oil paintings decorating a mirror case painted by Muhammad Baqir Semirūmī in 1294/1877.

54 Mirror case painted with scenes from a wedding. Unsigned, but may be attributed to Ja'far, son of Najaf and to the third quarter of the 19th c.

55A Outer face of cover of a mirror case, depicting the Holy Family. The mirror case is unsigned, but may be attributed partly to Najaf, partly to Ismā'īl and to the third quarter of the 19th c.

55B and C Inner face and back of above mirror case, decorated with European and hunting scenes.
56A and B Mirror case decorated with flower and bird motifs. Unsigned, but may be attributed to Fath Allah Shirāzī and to the late 19th c.

57 A-D Various views of a box painted by Mīrzā Bābā. The decorations include flower and bird motifs, calligraphic bands and a hunting scene on the inside of the lid (57C); late 18th - early 19th c.

58 A-F Various views of a backgammon set. Unsigned, but may be attributed to Muhammad Hasan; period of Fath 'Alī Shāh.

59 Circular box decorated with a painting of Fath 'Alī Shāh walking with his companions in a walled courtyard. Unsigned, but may be attributed to one of the court artists of the Fath 'Alī Shāh period.

60 Top view of a snuff box painted by Nasr Allah al-Husaynī in 1278/1862.

61 Lid of a snuff box painted by Fath Allah Shirāzī in 1292/1875.
Qalamdān signed by Rahīm Dekānī and dated 1225/1810.

Qalamdān painted with a scene of leopards attacking gazelles. Signed by Mullah 'Alī Muhammad and dated 1231/1816.

Qalamdān painted with a scene in the "Indian style". Unsigned and undated; third quarter of the 19th c.

Qalamdān painted with a portrait of a young Qajar prince, possibly Naṣr al-Dīn. Unsigned, but may be attributed to a member of the Najaf family and to the mid 19th c.

Qalamdān painted by 'Abbās Shirāzī in 1277/1861.

A painting of "Susanna and the Elders" decorating a qalamdān by an unknown artist; mid 19th c.

Qalamdān by 'Abbās Shirāzī: mid 19th c.
69 Qalamdān painted by Muḥammad ʿAlī Shirāzī, using a turtle-shell effect for the background; mid 19th c.

70 Qalamdān, in the style of ʿIbād Allah; latter part of the 19th c.

71 Qalamdān, unsigned and undated; second half of the 19th c.

72 Qalamdān depicting a European cavalry charge. Painted by Mubārak bin Mahmūd in the second half of the 19th c.

73 Qalamdān painted by Ahmad depicting a battle scene between the Persians and the Turks; second half of the 19th c.

74 Qalamdān painted by Ibrāhīm; beginning of the 20th c.

75 Qalamdān dedicated to Sultān al-ʿUlama Aqā Mīrzā Sayyid Muḥammad Madd Zill al-ʿĀlī; signed by Fath Allah al- Ṣhirāzī and dated 1287/1870.
Qalamdān, signed Yā Shāh-ī-Najaf and dated 1268/1852.

Qalamdān, signed Yā Shāh-ī-Najaf, and dated 1270/1854.

Qalamdān, signed Yā Shāh-ī-Najaf and dated 1271/1855. It is possible that, in this case, the invocation signature was used by Najaf's son Ja'far.

Top view and details of qalamdān painted by a member of the Najaf school; dated 1262/1845.

Top of a qalamdān signed Yā Shāh-ī-Najaf; third quarter of the 19th c.

Side of the same qalamdān; the paintings on the sides are more in the style of Ismā'īl, Najaf's younger brother.

Qalamdān painted with scenes from the life of Moses. Scenes from his life as a child are depicted on the top (Plates 82 A-C), and scenes from his adult life are represented on
the sides (Plates 82D and E). Attributed to Najaf; mid 19th c.

82 A-D Top and details of a qalamdān painted by Najaf's nephew Haydar 'Alī in 1290/1873. The signature and date are clearly visible in Plate 82C. The sides and base of the qalamdān are reproduced in Plates 95A-F.

83A and B Top and side of a qalamdān painted by Najaf's son Muhammad Kāzim in 1294/1877. Inscriptions above and below the different panels identify the scenes.

84 Qalamdān painted by Ahmad ibn Najaf 'Alī in 1303/1886.

85A and B Top view and detail of battle scene painted on a qalamdān signed by Ismā'īl in 1266/1850.

85C Side of the same qalamdān, depicting Mu'tamid al-Dawla reviewing his troops.

86 Russian qalamdān, bearing the mark of the Fabrika Lukutina; late 19th c.
Russian qalamdān, bearing the mark of the Fabrika Lukutina; late 19th c.

Russian qalamdān, decorated with a central panel depicting a nude, flanked by two riders, the latter possibly Turkish; late 19th c.

Russian qalamdān; late 19th c.

Russian qalamdān; the central panel is painted in the usual way, but the area around it is covered with a filet of inlaid silver wire; late 19th c.

Caucasian wooden qalamdān. The whole surface is covered with intricate silver inlaid wire; 19th c.

Persian qalamdān imitating Russian examples. Painted by Lutf Allah al-Hamzāwī in 1315/1897.

Persian qalamdān imitating Russian examples; painted by Mirzā Mustafā Shirāzī in 1901.
Another qalamdān painted by Mirzā Mustafā Shirāzī, in monochrome black with golden highlights. It is signed Ṭā Mustafā and dated 1302/1884.

Side and details of the qalamdān reproduced in Plates 82A-D, painted by Haydar 'Alī in 1290/1873. The figures depicted are the followers of the founder of Sufism, Mulāvī. They are Shaykh 'Attār (95B), Sultan Ibrahim (95C), Ba-Yazīd Bastāmī (95D) and Shaykh Sāfī (95E).

Base of the same qalamdān.

Details of the sides of the qalamdān painted by a member of the Najaf family in 1262/1845. The top is reproduced in Plates 79A-D.

Top and detail of a qalamdān painted by Mahmūd Sharīf Mālek; painted sometime between 1260-1290/1844-1873.

Details of the sides of the same qalamdān.
98 A-D Top and details of a qalamdān attributed to Mahmūd Sharīf Māleḵ; third quarter of the 19th c.

98 E-H Details of the pastoral scenes decorating the sides of the same qalamdān.

99A Top of a qalamdān depicting a battle scene, signed by Ibrāhīm; early 20th c.

99 B-F Details of the scenes decorating the sides of the same qalamdān.

100 A-D Top and details of a qalamdān painted by Ibrāhīm. The signature appears as Salām ʿalā Ibrāhīm and is clearly visible on Plate 100C.

100 E-G Details of the sides of the same qalamdān.

101 A-C Top and details of a qalamdān painted by Ibrāhīm; early 20th c.

101 D-F Side and details of the same qalamdān.
PLATE 58B
PLATE 75
PLATE 98H