

**THE AFTERLIFE OF THE *SHAHNAMA SHAH-TAHMASP*: TRACKING THE
MANUSCRIPT'S DISPERSAL, FROM THE OTTOMAN COURT TO THE MODERN
MARKETPLACE**

by

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Abstract

The art of painting encompasses a variety of mediums in the Persianate world, but miniature paintings within book manuscripts have attracted special scholarly attention. The valuation and conception of Persian miniature painting within the context of illustrated manuscripts from the Medieval period has been controversial. More recent scholars of the arts of the book challenge the earlier scholarship, which perceived illustrations of the manuscripts as representations of Persian classical painting and defined them within a single and a generalized formulation. One important reason behind the emergence of Persian classical painting as an aesthetic category had to do with the way that Persian painting became available to their European and North American audiences. Although there were many intact manuscripts, most of them, especially the *Shahnamas*, were dismantled and dispersed. Hence, rather than seeing the paintings in the context of their respective manuscripts, the audiences saw them as single paintings. This thesis is therefore concerned with dismantlement and dispersal of Persian manuscripts, and their commodification in the art market. The primary object of study here is one of the most well-known *Shahnama* manuscripts, called *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* (1524-1540), commissioned by the Persian Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp, and presented to the Ottoman Sultan Selim II as an enthronement gift in 1568. I am going to approach the afterlife of this manuscript through a critical discussion of Orientalism, as it has been foundational in the emergence of an art market for Islamic manuscript paintings, and in the establishment of Islamic art history as an academic field, and subsequently, Persian painting as a subfield. I am also going to shed a critical lens on how concepts, methods, and categories from Renaissance scholarship, including “the classical,” were transposed on to studies on Persian painting, culminating not only in the classical Persian

painting as a category, but also in the attribution of a single author to the *Shahnama*. To better understand this trajectory, I incorporate an analysis of the socio-political, cultural and economic transformations that European countries, the Ottoman Empire and Iran experienced between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This thesis weaves together the multiple factors that contributed to the separation of the images from the manuscript and their dispersal across the globe to numerous museums, galleries and private collections.

Lay Summary

In this thesis, I use the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* and its tragic history of dispersal in the early-nineteenth century as a case study on how early collectors and connoisseurs, especially the ones trained in Italian Renaissance painting tradition, appropriated *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* in order to suit the tastes of the emerging art market. This process eventually facilitated the transfer of single page folios from the manuscript to European and American museums and collections. The early European scholars and collectors who often acted as an intermediary between the market and the dealers played a significant role in the removal of manuscripts from their original context. The mis-representation of *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* by early collectors such as F.R Martin and later on by scholars such as Stuart Cary Welch and M.B Dickson, among others cultivated the market for the sale of the individual folios from the manuscript. Inspired by recent studies that challenge the dominant perception of manuscript illustration, this thesis provides a different approach towards arts of the book from the Persianate world.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Shabnam Shahkarami. No Generative Artificial Intelligence tools were used in the research process, development, or writing of the thesis.

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Introduction

1.1. Arts of the Book

When it comes to Persian arts of the book, manuscripts inspired by literary works, and in particular the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), an epic poem composed in the eleventh century by Iranian poet Abolghasem Ferdowsi, occupy a prominent position.¹ Even though Persian painting as a broader artistic category extends well beyond manuscript illustration, encompassing murals, ceramics, metalworks, textile, and stand-alone paintings, the study of medieval and early modern illustrated manuscripts have attracted significantly more scholarly attention. Prior to the emergence of one of the earliest illustrated *Shahnama*, called the *Great Mongol Shahnama* commissioned by Ilkhanid (1258-1336) *vazir* Rashi-al-Din in the 1330s, narratives from the *Shahnama* were already being conveyed through the integration of text and image across a variety of media—including architecture, vessels, ceramics, and other portable objects.² However, *Shahnama* manuscripts were first illustrated under Mongol rule, and during the reigns of the succeeding dynasties, painted *Shahnama* manuscripts grew both in number and resplendence. Patrons ranged from rulers to various members of the court, and the manuscripts served multiple political, diplomatic, cultural and personal purposes. Fortunately, many illustrated manuscripts from the thirteenth century onward have survived in considerable numbers. However, at the present, scholars and enthusiasts of the arts of the book are faced with

¹ *Shahnama* composed by Iranian poet in 11th century consist of 50,000 couplets narrating stories inspired by mythological, heroic and historical documents and narratives of pre-Islamic kings, heroes and warriors transmuted into a rhyming whole. The stories reflect the dilemma of conflict between good and evil culminating in Iran-Turan war, legitimacy of the rightful ruler, and doing of justices as foundational themes of *Shahnama*

² Eleanor Sims, Boris I. Marshak, and Ernst J. Grube, *Peerless Images: Persian Painting and Its Sources* (New Haven (Conn.): Yale university press, 2002). 43-50

the great challenge of fragmented and dispersed manuscripts and single-page paintings detached from their original textual context.

The social life of thousands of copies of *Shahnama* manuscripts have been studied through different approaches: techniques of production, skill, and the materiality of the manuscripts; intentions of patronage and perception; attribution and authorship; contextualization of their political, cultural and economic circumstances; and more recently the afterlife of the manuscripts and their changing significance, value and function throughout their history.³ The most dominant scholarly approach, however, has been the reconstruction of the vast corpus of fragmented and dispersed folios in order to examine their aesthetic, intellectual and contextual circumstances of production and dissemination in the Islamic world prior to the advent of modernity.⁴ The less popular, yet increasingly necessary approach centers on the afterlife of dispersed manuscripts to investigate the processes through which these manuscripts were stripped from their original function, meaning, and value and relocated to Europe and North America through the colonial and commercial networks of art dealers, government officials and collectors from the eighteenth century onward.⁵

This thesis seeks to contribute to this understudied aspect of the afterlife of one of the most celebrated manuscripts produced for the second Safavid Shah, Shah-Tahmasp (1522-1569)

³ Stuart Cary Welch, *Persian Painting: Five Royal Safavid Manuscripts of the Sixteenth Century* (G. Braziller, 1976), <https://go.exlibris.link/1v04H8FF>; Sinem Arcak Casale, *Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500-1639*, 1st ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2023), <https://go.exlibris.link/Yf8hyNLR>.

⁴ Robert Hillenbrand and B. W. Robinson, *Persian Painting: From the Mongols to the Qajars: Studies in Honour of Basil W. Robinson*, 3;3.; (I.B. Tauris in association with the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, 2000), <https://go.exlibris.link/1KWfTt>.

⁵ Robert Hillenbrand, "Western Scholarship on Persian Painting before 1914: Collectors, Exhibitions and Franco-German Rivalry," in *Islamic History and Civilization*, vol. 82 (2010), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004191020_010; David J. Roxburgh, "Au Bonheur Des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910," *Ars Orientalis* (Washington, D.C) 30, no. Journal Article (2000): 9–38.

called *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* (1524-40). This manuscript, renowned for its exceptional artistic quality, offers a valuable case study for investigating the complex and intertwining mechanisms and motives that have led to the dismemberment and dispersal of illustrated manuscripts from the Islamic World in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period corresponds to significant political and cultural reforms in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, which shaped the remarkable and at the time tragic story of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* manuscript, from its mysterious disappearance from the Topkapi Palace, to its subsequent dispersal. As such, as a case study the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* opens up new perspectives on the global circulation, re-contextualization and commodification of illustrated manuscripts in the modern era.

1.2. *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*

The *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* manuscript, produced between (1524-1540) in Safavid atelier in Iran, was gifted to the Ottoman Sultan Selim II (1566-77) on his ascension to the throne and presented in a ceremonial procession in 1568. This congratulatory gift was part of the lavish diplomatic offering including jewels, textiles, a copy of the Quran, and other illustrated manuscripts, and functioned as a diplomatic gesture from Shah-Tahmasp (1524-1576) for a new era of peace and diplomacy between the two rivals. Forty-four camels, accompanied by a Safavid delegation of seven-hundred members, carried the sumptuous gifts to Erzurum, a city just west of the Persian-Ottoman frontier. There, they met with eight thousand Ottoman soldiers who were there to welcome them.⁶

⁶ Casale, *Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500-1639*. 72-3

This ceremonial gift-giving had significant implications. The tumultuous relationships between the Safavids and the Ottomans started with Sultan Suleyman's two campaigns against Iran between 1548-55, and reached its peaceful period with the Treaty of Amasya in 1555. Exchanging gifts between the rulers were a common prestigious gesture as the first step towards diplomacy and the establishment of good relationships between the two neighbouring states. The ceremonial presentation of Shah-Tahmasp's gifts to Sultan Selim was recorded in two different Ottoman chronicles; first, by Ahmed Beg in the *Chronicle of the Szigetvar Campaign* in 1569, in Turkish, and second by Seyyid Lokman in the *Book of Kings of Sultan Selim* in 1581, in Persian (Fig. 1).⁷ Depiction of this ceremonial gift-giving in the above-mentioned Ottoman historiographies included carefully selected gifts from the Safavid Shah, aimed to signify the Ottoman's military and political superiority and Safavid's submission.⁸

The *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* is arguably the most monumental and luxurious example of Safavid painted manuscripts, consisting of 759 folios, 258 of which are intricately painted and illuminated. It was the work of multiple artists from different generations working in the Safavid manuscript atelier, and since no other illustrated manuscript from the Safavid period exceeds fourteen illustrations, the exceptionally high number of illustrations in this manuscript, with their rich representations of the material culture of the Safavid world, provides us with some information about the mostly lost architecture, textiles and decorative arts of the period.⁹

Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp was highly praised and valued in the Ottoman court, too. In the early 1800s, Mehmed Arif Efendi, the Keeper of the Guns in the Topkapi Treasury, translated

⁷ Casale, *Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500-1639*. 76-7

⁸ Casale, *Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500-1639*. 73

⁹ Stuart C. Welch, "78 Pictures from a World of Kings, Heroes, and Demons: The Houghton Shah-Nameh," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 29, no. 8 (1971): 341, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3258515.341-42>

the texts to Turkish and inserted synopses in between the pages of the manuscript. The inserts were placed to facilitate the reading of the book, by summarizing the long couplets narrating the stories that were largely known by the court audiences. This copy of the *Shahnama* was one out of many copies owned in the Ottoman court, and as the result of constant interactions and confrontation, *Shahnama* stories became part of the collective literary-cultural memory of the Persianate world and the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰

1.3. The Afterlife of *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*

Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp remained intact in Topkapi Palace Library in Turkey until the early-twentieth century. However, in 1901, it mysteriously left the library and found its way into the possession of the French collector Baron Edmond Rothschild. In 1903, the manuscript was displayed at the Exhibition of Decorative Arts in France. Later on, in 1957, the manuscript was acquired by Arthur Houghton, the American bibliophile and collector, who was the founder of the Rare Book Library at Harvard University, and the president of The Grolier Club, the oldest bibliographic club in the United States. Houghton purchased the manuscript through the Rosenberg & Stiebel Gallery in New York from its previous owner Baron M. de Rothschild, son of Baron Edmond de Rothschild (d.1934).¹¹ In 1962, some of its paintings were displayed in the

¹⁰ Ünver Rüstem, “The Afterlife of a Royal Gift : The Ottoman Inserts of the *Shahnama-i Shahi*,” *Muqarnas* 29, no. Journal Article (2012): 245–337.

¹¹ Sheila Blair, “Reading a Painting: Sultan-Muhammad’s The Court of Gayumars,” in *The Empires of the Near East and India*, ed. Hani Khafipour, Book, Section (Columbia University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.7312/khaf17436-045>.

Grolier Club, and then at M. Knoedler and Company (1968), the Pierpont Morgan Library (1968), and the Asia House Gallery (1970).¹²

Upon acquiring the manuscript, Houghton commissioned Anthony Welch and M.B. Dickson to prepare a monograph that resembled the original appearance of the manuscript. The monograph was produced in two volumes; the first volume provided detail descriptions of the painters who contributed to production of the manuscript, while the second volume included high-quality prints of 258 paintings with gold-sprinkled margins reproducing the original manuscript.¹³ In the 1970s, Houghton dismembered the manuscript and donated seventy-eight of its illustrated folios to the Metropolitan Museum of New York as a gift to celebrate the museum's centennial establishment, in addition to \$500,000 to set up a proper display of the manuscript in the newly built Islamic Art galleries.¹⁴

After its dismemberment, as Sheila Blair explores in “Reading a Painting: Sultan Muhammad’s Court of Gaymars”, in 1976, Houghton placed seven folios of the manuscript for sale, which were attributed by Stuart Cary Welch and M.B. Dickson to the most well-known artists of the Safavid atelier.¹⁵ The sale of these seven folios at the auction house of Christie’s in London fetched £863,500. The careful selection of the seven folios attributed to two older and younger generations of Safavid artists set the price value for different hands of the artists for the future folios from the same manuscript in the market. Next year another set of four folios from the manuscript came to the market, including one of the mostly praised paintings, *The Court of*

¹² Stuart Cary Welch, *A King’s Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), <https://go.exlibris.link/0GBrZwWL.17>

¹³ Blair, “Reading a Painting: Sultan-Muhammad’s The Court of Gayumars.” 533

¹⁴ Blair, “Reading a Painting: Sultan-Muhammad’s The Court of Gayumars.” 530-32

¹⁵ Sheila Blair, “Reading a Painting: Sultan-Muhammad’s The Court of Gayumars,” in *The Empires of the Near East and India*, ed. Hani Khafipour, Book, Section (Columbia University Press, 2019), 533 <https://doi.org/10.7312/khaf17436-045>.

Kayumars, attributed to the artist Sultan Muhammad. It was sold to Prince Sadrudin Agha Khan, and now is housed in Agha Khan Museum in Toronto (Fig 2).¹⁶

Between 1976 and the present, many of the 258 paintings from the original binding came to the market, including fourteen folios in 1988, which were exhibited in three different Christie's offices in Tokyo, Hong Kong and Munich. In 2011, another painting called *Faridun Tests his Sons* was sold by Sotheby's London for £7.5 million to the Agha Khan Museum in Toronto. And in 2022, *Rustam Kicking Away the Boulder Pushed by Bahman*, was sold for £ 4.8 million by Christie's London,¹⁷ and *Rustam Recovers Rakhsh* to a private collector in Europe for £8 million by Sotheby in London.¹⁸

The unbinding of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* by Houghton in 1970s changed the destiny of the manuscript forever. Out of 258 paintings, 78 are at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, while the Tehran Contemporary Museum of Arts holds most of the paintings, numbering at 118, in addition to the entire text, colophon and binding. Other than permanent galleries and museums such as Museum fur Islamisch Kunst, Berlin; the National Museum of Asian Art; Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the David Collection, Copenhagen; the Museum of Fine Arts, Doha; the Naser Khalili Collection; Harvard Art Museum; Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, Mass.; and the Agha Khan Museum, Toronto, which hold some of the folios permanently, the rest are still circulating in the market.

¹⁶ Blair, "Reading a Painting: Sultan-Muhammad's The Court of Gayumars." 534

¹⁷ <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6361844>

¹⁸ <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2022/arts-of-the-islamic-world-india-including-fine-rugs-and-carpets-2/rustam-recovers-rakhsh-from-afrasiyabs-herd>

1.4. Illustrated Manuscripts and their Dispersal

The rise of Orientalism in Europe after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 marked a turning point in the history of the Middle East, including the afterlife of painted manuscripts. Auction houses such as Christie's and Sotheby's in London were already in operation since 1766. However, now the wealthy bourgeoisie of Europe had met the "exotic Orient," and found new commodities previously far less available in the market. It is no coincidence that the disappearance of painted manuscripts and various artefacts from their previous contexts began around this period. European colonial incursions into the Middle East, beginning with France and continuing with the British Empire, brought with them not just soldiers, but also scholars, the academic Orientalists. They also allowed easier access to merchants and to all kinds of entrepreneurs eager to bring anything back to Europe that could fetch a good price. The exhibitions and World Fairs that functioned as the "commercial machinery" coupled with the increasing presence of photographers and artists and their visual invention of the exotic Orient. Once they transformed the Orient and its material culture into objects for display, manuscripts could also become valuable commodities, whether the purchasers were private individuals, or museums and libraries.¹⁹ It is also important to note that this was also a period when the Ottoman Empire was losing its grip over its territories, and Iran was equally in turmoil. This led to a series of reforms in both countries, but while solving some of the problems, the measures also brought in further social and political tensions.²⁰

¹⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1; 25th anniversary; (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014), <https://go.exlibris.link/9MMkqD>; Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), <https://go.exlibris.link/Vbjhxx8>. 5-17

²⁰ Renée Worringer, *A Short History of the Ottoman Empire* (University of Toronto Press, 2021). 252-60

1.5. Literature Review

A substantial body of scholarship has addressed the dispersal and dismemberment of manuscripts from the Islamic World, examining the mechanism and apparatuses that have contributed and facilitated their dispersal, collection, exhibition, and scholarship. Scholars such as David Roxburgh, Priscilla Soucek, Oleg Grabar, and Robert Hillenbrand, Kishwar Rizvi, Barry.D. Wood, Daniel Fulco, Leoni Claudio, Stephanie Vernoit, Christina Gruber and Wendy Shaw, and many more have contributed significantly to this discourse. Their studies take two different trajectories, yet overlap in many instances. The first approach explores the historical relationship between early collectors, art dealers, exhibitions and World Fairs, and maps out how Islamic manuscripts particularly Persian, Turkish and Arabic ones, entered the Western collections and became cultural commodities. This line of inquiry situates collecting practices within the broader context of Orientalism, global capitalism and historical circumstances.

Secondly, scholars such as Priscilla Soucek and David Roxburgh, trace the historiography of manuscript scholarship in the context of intertwined relationships between early collectors and art dealers and their role in the dispersal and dismemberment of the manuscripts. They challenge the aesthetic concepts such as authorship, attribution, and the classical, which have been borrowed from the Italian Renaissance scholarship.²¹ In her article, “Walter Pater, Bernard Berenson and the Reception of Persian Manuscript Illustration”, Priscilla Soucek traces the early development of collecting and scholarship on Persian painting. She highlights how initial encounter with Persian paintings along with the influences of key figures

²¹ Roxburgh, “Au Bonheur Des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910.”

in this field, shaped early perceptions of Persian painting.²² Along with David Roxburgh and Robert Hillenbrand, she has also explored the role of exhibitions such as the 1910 Munich and the 1912 Paris exhibitions, and the publication of their accompanying catalogues as pivotal moments in establishing the study of Persian painting as a serious subject. In fact, in 1961, Richard Ettingshausen was one of the first scholars to trace the history of the Bernard Berenson Collection as one of the early collections of Persian manuscripts. Through a detailed analysis of each single-page folio, Ettingshausen identified their acquisition history and connected them to the specific dealer who sold them, which contributed to the reconstruction of the history of each fragmented folio.²³

Following a different trajectory, scholars such as David Roxburgh, Marianna Simpson, and Oleg Grabar have taken a multi-dimensional approach towards studying manuscripts from the Islamic World. While contextualizing the production of illustrated manuscripts, they also challenged the early application of concepts such as authorship, connoisseurship, attribution and role of patronage as the sole forces behind artistic creativity. These groups of scholars have taken primary sources seriously in situating the manuscripts within their artistic, cultural and philosophical contexts.²⁴

²² Priscilla P. Soucek, "Walter Pater, Bernard Berenson, and the Reception of Persian Manuscript Illustration," *Res (Cambridge, Mass.)* 40, no. 40 (2001): 112–28, <https://doi.org/10.1086/RESv40n1ms20167541>.

²³ Hillenbrand, "Western Scholarship on Persian Painting before 1914: Collectors, Exhibitions and Franco? German Rivalry."

²⁴ Oleg Grabar, ed., *Mostly Miniatures: An Introduction to Persian Painting* (Princeton University Press, 2000); David J. Roxburgh, "Kamal al-din Bihzad and authorship in Persianate painting," *Muqarnas* (The Netherlands) 17, no. 1 (2000): 119–46, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993-90000010>; Simpson Marianna, "The Making of Manuscripts and Workings of Kitabkhaneh in Safavid Iran," *SIMPSON, MARIANNA SHREVE. "The Making of Manuscripts and the Workings of the Kitab-Khana in Safavid Iran." Studies in the History of Art* 38 (1993): 104–21. [Http://www.jstor.org/stable/42620405](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42620405). 38 (1993): 104–21.

Wendy Shaw and Christiane Gruber are the two scholars who most strongly challenge the development of categories such as the classical within the context of Persian painting for equating Renaissance scholars' concepts of patronage and the hand of the artist with fifteenth and sixteenth-century Persian manuscript production.²⁵ On the other hand, Barry Wood and Kishwar Rizvi, examine the early 20th century transformation of Iran, and the establishment of culture and art institutions in the context of nation-state formation and modernization efforts. They explore the role of early 20th century exhibitions, including Burlington House Exhibition of Persian Art, organized largely by Arthur Pope in 1930s for their contribution to construct an aura of Persian Art and civilization on the global stage.²⁶

The following generation of scholars such as Daniel Fulco explored displays of Islamic Arts in Vienna and Paris Exhibitions during Qajar (Iran) and late nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire.²⁷ Meanwhile, John R. Hodgson examined the motivations and underlying reasons for collecting Islamic manuscripts, focusing on the largest in Britain, that of the Earls of Crawford.²⁸ Hugh Cuddon's article explores the intertwined connection between World Exhibitions and collectors in the nineteenth century, in addition to the influence of ethno-racial discourses, and the Aesthetic Movement in displaying and collecting artefacts from the Islamic world and

²⁵ Christiane Gruber, "Questioning the 'Classical' in Persian Painting: Models and Problems of Definition," *Journal of Art Historiography* 6, no. Journal Article (2012): 6-CG/1; Wendy M. K. Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art?: Between Religion and Perception*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108622967>.

²⁶ Kishwar Rizvi, "Art history and the nation: Arthur Upham pope and the discourse on 'Persian art' in the early twentieth century," *Muqarnas Online* 24, no. 1 (2007): 45–65, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993-90000110>; Barry D. Wood, "'A Great Symphony of Pure Form': The 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art and Its Influence," *Ars Orientalis* (Washington, D.C) 30, no. Journal Article (2000): 113–30.

²⁷ Daniel Fulco, "Displays of Islamic Art in Vienna and Paris," *MDCCC 1800* 6, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.14277/2280-8841/MDCCC-6-17-4>.

²⁸ John R. Hodgson, "'Spoils of Many a Distant Land': The Earls of Crawford and the Collecting of Oriental Manuscripts in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (ABINGDON) 48, no. 6 (2020): 1011–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2020.1765532>.

distributing them into American collections and museums.²⁹ Finally, Afshin Marashi's book *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power and the State*, provides a wealth of significant information about the introduction of modernity and the underlying factors and mechanism which gave rise to the construction of nation state of Iran and its implications.³⁰

1.6. *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* in Literature

In examining the dispersion of illustrated manuscripts and the reasons behind it, particularly the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, it is essential to recognize that there is an interconnected relationship between the role of early collectors, connoisseurs, exhibitions, and the resulting scholarship which cannot be divided into discrete academic approaches. The accessibility and availability of Persian manuscripts and their entry into museums, and exhibitions was facilitated by the commercial network of early collectors, diplomats and the art market which resulted in the emergence of Persian manuscript scholarship. Understanding this scholarly overlap is necessary in studying and clarifying how academic and market-driven contexts overlapped.

F.R. Martin, an avid collector, art dealer, diplomat, and one of the first scholars of Islamic Art, prepared the first major monograph on Persian paintings in 1912, titled *The Miniature Paintings and Painters of Persia, India, and Turkey from the Eight to the Eighteenth Century*. This is considered one of the first serious studies of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*

²⁹ Benedict Cuddon, "A Field Pioneered by Amateurs: The Collecting and Display of Islamic Art in Early Twentieth-Century Boston," *Muqarnas* (Netherlands) 30, no. 1 (2014): 13–33, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993-0301P0003>.

³⁰ Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940*, 1st ed, Studies in Modernity and National Identity (University of Washington Press, 2008).

manuscript, using stylistic analysis of the paintings from various manuscripts in his possession, or in the possessions of his fellow collectors, in order to identify the main painters responsible for the paintings of the manuscript. Aiming at connoisseurship, the study uses two most prominent Safavid artists, Bihzad and Aqa Mirak as the representatives of two prime models of Timurid and Turkmen schools of art between late fifteenth to sixteenth century, comparing their work to the most prominent painters of quattrocento Italy.³¹

The next significant study of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* manuscript came from Cary Stuart Welch, M.B. Dickson, and Sheila Canby to a lesser extent, in two separate studies in 1972 and 1981. The major contribution of the first publication has been the exploration of the synthetic styles of Timurid-Turkmen in the paintings of the manuscript as the result of political circumstances of Safavid ascension to power. This study contextualizes the movement of the artists from eastern Iran to the Safavid capital in the west, the city of Tabriz, as a turning point in the history of Persian painting. Based on the characteristic features of the two schools of painting, substantial effort has been placed on attributing the individual paintings of the manuscript to nine main artists of Shah-Tahmasp atelier. The 1981 publication by Welch and Dickson, even though taking a different approach by integrating the text and its translation, as well as detailed commentaries about each painting and their relation to the text, still follows the similar trajectory of their 1972 study.³²

³¹ F. R. 1868-1933 Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from the 8th to the 18th Century*. by F.R. Martin: 2 (B. Quaritch, 1912, 1912), <https://go.exlibris.link/4xVbp4ND>.

³² Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp*; Priscilla P. Soucek, "'The Houghton Shahnameh', by Martin Bernard Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch (Book Review)," *Ars Orientalis* (Washington, D.C) 14, no. Generic (1984): 133.

The next important literature on the manuscript came from Robert Hillenbrand, and aimed to answer the important questions of the frequency, subject-matter and unprecedented number of paintings of the manuscript, including their iconography. Hillenbrand suggested that the dominant illustrations narrating the stories between Iran and Turan functioned as symbolic representations of contemporary events such as the confrontation between the Safavids and the Ottomans, which temporarily ended with the peace Treaty of Amaysa in 1555.³³ Sheila Canby in another account explores the material culture of the Safavid world and their representations in the illustrations of the manuscripts. She explores the role of the *kitabkhaneh*, or the Royal Library as a source for providing models for visual language used in a variety of artistic and cultural productions including metalworks, arms and armours, ceramics, textiles and carpets and their close representations in museums and galleries.³⁴

The next group of studies explores the manuscript in the context of Safavid-Ottoman relationships and interactions. The major work in this context is Sinem Arcaç Casale's comprehensive study about the significant role of the manuscript in the context of gift-giving. She explores the agency and function of the object, and its arrival at the Ottoman court as a signifier of political negotiation and imperial power and identity. Casale examines the significance of the gifting of *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* as a diplomatic gift to Ottoman Sultan through primary sources and visual analysis of some of the paintings which communicate hidden messages of Safavid artistic achievement, religious legitimacy, as well as generosity and prestige. She also exemplifies the agency of the object as a mobilizer of production of two

³³ Robert Hillenbrand, *Studies in the Islamic Arts of the Book* (Pindar Press, 2012), <https://go.exlibris.link/GB5nn41N>.

³⁴ Sheila R. Canby, *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp: The Persian Book of Kings*, Second printing, 2015, with Metropolitan Museum of Art (Metropolitan Museum of Art Yale University Press, 2014).

dynastic chronicles that I have briefly discussed: *The Szigetvar Campaign* in 1569 and the *Book of Kings of Sultan Selim* in 1581 that narrated and depicted the ceremonial procession of this gift-giving.³⁵ Another study, following a similar art historical trajectory, is by Rustam Unver, which analyses Ottoman engagements with the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* manuscript in 1801 through insertions of translations and commentaries about the stories of *Shahnama*.

Despite the richness of the existing scholarship, there are many questions that require deeper exploration. The availability of resources such as highly skillful artists, premium-quality paper, exceptional amount of gold, silver and pigment, and its production longevity point to only part of much broader inquiries. It is important, just as well, to ask why the role of the painters have increased in comparison to calligraphers, and what kinds of conceptual and perceptual transformations about painting led to patronage and production of such a lavishly painted *Shahnama* manuscript in the Safavid court of the sixteenth century. To comprehend the multi-dimensional circumstances of the manuscript's production and reception, it is essential to situate it within a longer historical context that involves both what came before it and what preceded it. This involves not only its iconographic and formal development, but also the conceptual shifts that shaped the Safavid regime of image-making. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the dominant scholarly studies which contributed to the dispersal of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, and subsequently to the loss of integrity and unity between text and image. Central to this analysis is a critical examination of the dominant art historical theories that have shaped the mis-perception and mis-representation of the manuscript

³⁵ Casale, *Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500-1639*.

1.7. Thesis Outline: Multi-layered Dimensions of *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*'s Dispersal within an Orientalist and Eurocentric Framework

In this study, I aim to explore the dynamism that resulted in dismemberment and dispersal of *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* in the nineteenth century, within the context of cultural and political reforms in both Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, I seek to connect the emergence of interest in and enthusiasm for studying of the arts of the book from the Persianate World to the early scholarship, which shaped the mis-representation and mis-conception of illustrated manuscripts from the Islamic World.

In chapter two, I will contextualize the production of *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* within the political-religious circumstances of Safavid dynasty, and explore the early and later scholarly theoretical frameworks, which contributed to mis-perception and mis-conception of illustrated Persian manuscripts.

In chapter three, I explore the romanticization of illustrated manuscripts, and challenge the adoption of the Italian Renaissance art historical canon as the dominant scholarly approach for studying illustrated Persian manuscripts. By adopting the Italian Renaissance model, scholars chose stylistic evolution embodied in naturalism and three-dimensional representation of the outside world as the principal standard in evaluation of paintings in the illustrated manuscripts. I will propose that manuscript paintings cannot be fully understood through only a visually focused approach. Instead, they need to be integrated within the complex and multifaceted regime of social, political, ideological, and mythological circumstances within which they have been produced and circulated.

In chapter four, I am going to contextualize the emergence of the art market within the broader framework of the dissolution of political stability in the Ottoman Empire and Iran in the

early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This chapter will examine the historical conditions that facilitated the removal of cultural artifacts from the Middle East, and their transfer to European and American collections. Special attention will be given to the dynamic processes that underpinned the relocation of the manuscripts from the Middle East, and the role of Europeans and Americans who acted as diplomats, art dealers and organizers of exhibitions in this process.

In chapter five, I will follow in the footsteps of recent scholars who approach the production of manuscript paintings as a multifaceted phenomenon which challenges the attribution of a single page illustration to an artist or group of artists from a specific workshop. I argue that the significance of *Shahnama* manuscripts lie in their fluid and flexible textual and visual quality, which allows them to acquire new modes of existence, and function through circulation, appropriation and transformation.

2. Reading the Manuscripts from the Islamic World

2.1. The Rise of Safavid Dynasty

The Safavid dynasty's genealogical roots go back to Shah Safi-al Din Ishaq, a Sufi leader who attracted followers among the nomads of the eastern part of Anatolia and Azerbaijan, and southwest of the Caspian Sea in the late-thirteenth century. Shah-Safi's qualities as a pious and ascetic leader, as well as his political endeavours led him to be recognized as a charismatic leader. His descendent Ismail rose to power as the leader of the Safavid order in 1501. At the age of sixteen, Shah-Ismail established the Safavid dynasty by imposing Shi'ism as the official state religion of Iran, which dramatically altered the religious political and cultural landscape of the region. This shift from Sufi-based order to centralized Shi'i theocracy centred on Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, as the legitimate leader of the Muslim community. This political and religious transformation had significant implications for Ottoman-Safavid relationships and rivalry, as well for the production of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* paintings.

Shah-Ismail took possession of the Aq Qoyunlu (the former Turkmen ruling elites) library and its workshops in Tabriz. Then, he fought to gain control of the Eastern frontiers, then under Uzbek rule, where the former Timurid capital Herat was situated. Herat was a prosperous city during the Timurid period, and a cosmopolitan centre of literary and artistic production, where artists, scribes and calligraphers, and scholars from around the Islamic world worked. When Shah-Ismail finally defeated the Uzbeks in 1510, their library in Herat, with all its manuscripts and paintings, fell into the hands of the Safavids. The head of the library of Herat,

Kamal-Al-Din Bihzad, the famed painter, moved to Tabriz and became the head of the Tabriz library and workshop.³⁶

Prince Tahmasp moved to Herat as a child with his guardian to safeguard the control of recently conquered territories of the Eastern frontiers, and to assert Safavid domination symbolically as a governor of Herat at the age of two. He was trained in calligraphy, painting, and literature at an early age, which cultivated his interest and passion for visual arts and calligraphy. After his father's death, he ascended to the throne in 1524. However, between 1524 and 1531, Shah-Tahmasp was fighting in several frontiers: from the east the Uzbeks invaded Khurasan (the eastern province of Iran), the civil war brought instability which prompted the attack of the Ottomans from the west, while Herat and Khurasan were invaded seven times by the Uzbeks. Being aware of the constant invasion and plunder in the eastern frontiers and internal unrest, Ottomans were eager to attack and annex the fertile province of Azerbaijan, with its capital in Tabriz, and important cities such as Baghdad, Karbala, and Najaf which were under Safavid control. In 1534, the Ottomans invaded Tabriz, and took Baghdad by the end of the year, but soon after Shah-Tahmasp regained Tabriz, and Hamadan. The conflicts continued until the signing of the Amaysa Treaty in 1555 between the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman and Shah-Tahmasp, and peace lasted until the deaths of Shah-Tahmasp and Sultan Selim II, Suleyman's successor.³⁷

³⁶ Sheila R. Canby, *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp: The Persian Book of Kings*, Second printing, 2015, with Metropolitan Museum of Art (Metropolitan Museum of Art Yale University Press, 2014).13-20

³⁷ Asia Society. Museum et al., *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501-1576*, First (Skira, 2003), <https://go.exlibris.link/cJdMY82f.11-12>

2.2. *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* in early Scholarship

F.R. Martin and many scholars following his footsteps, adopted two primary strategies in the study of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* and other illustrated manuscripts and single-page folios. First, they mythologized master painters of the Persianate world, including Bihzad, Mirak, and Sultan Muhammad, elevating them as individual artist geniuses of the Safavid atelier. The second strategy involved the application of Italian Renaissance art historical paradigms to the Persian arts of the book, emphasizing the role of rulers like Shah-Tahmasp as the bibliophile patron paralleling the role of the Medici family. For example, as Soucek notes, equating Persian practices of patronage and artistic production with Vasari's narratives of Lorenzo di Medici as the great patron of artists, including his account of how artists such as Michelangelo trained in Lorenzo's private garden, has been a popular approach, spread by scholars such as Martin, Marteau, and Vever.³⁸

Even though Martin was not the first, nor the last scholar to subjugate Persian painting to Western art historical norms and paradigms, his influential monograph, "The Miniature Paintings and Painters of Persia, India, and Turkey from the Eight to the Eighteenth Century" had a long-lasting impact on how Persian paintings were conceptualized and studied in modern scholarship.

As Priscilla Soucek observes, the synchronization between Italian and Persian painting tradition falls into Orientalist evolutionary theories of classification of culture, race, tradition, custom, and religion. Additionally, Soucek exclaims that by elevating the status of Persian painting and situating it within the cultural hierarchy equal to quattrocento Italy, scholars and collectors such as Martin, Marteau, Henry Vever, Bernard Berenson, Goloubeff, elevated the

³⁸ Soucek, "Walter Pater, Bernard Berenson, and the Reception of Persian Manuscript Illustration." 118-21

Persian miniature paintings from “Craft” to “Fine Arts”, which could guarantee and secure their value in the market and within artistic circles.³⁹

Martin used other manuscripts and albums to trace the hand of Bihzad and masters of Safavid atelier by stylistic analysis, techniques, and the presence of their signatures. Bihzad, the most renowned artist of the Timurid (1370-1507) and Safavid (1501-1722) periods, was equated with the most well-known Italian artists of the Renaissance, which elevated the role of the artist as the single contributor to artistic creativity. The chronological parallel with Italian patrons of art during the Renaissance, like the Medici family, eased their comparison with Timurid and Safavid rulers and princes as the sole force behind the production of material culture, including arts of the book. This was part of the Orientalist rhetoric of appropriating an alienated and unfamiliar artistic culture, and relocating it into a familiar and well-known paradigm.⁴⁰ Dust Muhammad’s (ca. 1510-1564) preface to the Bahram Mirza Album is an important primary source with useful information about the nature of artistic production. There, we read that artistic production had more to do with the artists’ engagement with design, outline and depiction holistically and collectively, rather than working as individual geniuses. The Album was a compilation of single folios of paintings, drawings, calligraphy, including Chinese and Central Asian drawings of lions, camels, dervishes and falcons. It was meant to provide a model for future generations of artists through visual genealogies across generations.⁴¹

³⁹ Soucek, “Walter Pater, Bernard Berenson, and the Reception of Persian Manuscript Illustration.” 119-20

⁴⁰ Gruber, “Questioning the ‘Classical’ in Persian Painting: Models and Problems of Definition.”

⁴¹ David J. Roxburgh, “Disorderly Conduct? F.R. Martin and The Bahram Mirza Album,” *Muqarnas* (Netherlands) 15, no. 1 (1998): 32–57, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993-90000408>.

2.3. *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* in Later Scholarship

With an approach similar to F.R. Martin, in 1972 Anthony Welch and B.M Dickson compared and contrasted the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* with other manuscripts and single-page folios available to them. Among these was the *Khamsa Nizami* (1539), now at the British Library, discussed and presented as a prototype for Safavid artistic maturity and a sign of the synthesis of Turkmen and Timurid styles of painting. The *Khamsa* paintings marked stylistic maturity according to three qualities: first, the degree of naturalistic human proportions, secondly, the logical handling of space, and third, the degree of “harmony” in composition. These qualities served as the criteria for analyzing the stylistic variations and qualities of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* paintings. In this analysis, Welch identifies Tabriz style as highly stylized, less proportionate and fantastical, derived from art rather than nature, with excessive vitality, and spatially illogical. In contrast, the Timurid style, particularly as manifested in the work of Bihzad, (particularly a painting in the *Bustan Sa’di* made for the Timurid Sultan Husayn Mirza in 1488) , was closer to naturalism, and individualized expression.⁴² Welch and Dickson identified the artists of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* based on the hand of the artists from later manuscripts such as *Khamsa Nizami* (1539), or other signed folios from contemporary manuscripts, while stressing the role of artists such as Bihzad and Sultan Muhammad in bridging and merging of Timurid and Turkmen styles within the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* visual program.

A key example of romanticization in Welch’s study of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* is his treatment of *Court of Kayumars* (folio 20v, Fig. 2), now housed in the Agha Khan Museum

⁴² Welch, *A King’s Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp*. 44-50

in Toronto. *Court of Kayumars* is one of the first episodes of the *Shahnama* stories of the first king, governing the world of humans and animals. He initially lived in the mountains with the first people populating the world, dressed in leopard skin. He was the king who taught the first men about preparing food, and making clothing. He reigned for thirty years, and had a son who was handsome and wise named Siamak, who was killed by the black demon. The story continues with the constant battle between the righteous and evil forces, confronting the reader with questions such as the nature of wisdom, the fate of the human soul, and incomprehensibility of God's purpose.⁴³ The painting in question depicts Kayumars on a paradisiacal mountain top, holding court with both humans and animals in attendance.

Welch describes this painting as “one of the world's greatest mystical works of art”, emphasizing its harmonious balance and aesthetic refinement. He attributes the painting to Sultan Muhammad, during a time when, according to Welch, the artist “was absorbing the stylistic idiom of the Herat master,” Bihzad. This attribution implicitly supports the notion of movement of Bihzad from Herat to Tabriz, positioning Bihzad as “the embodiment of the masterly produced Timurid style.”⁴⁴ Welch emphasizes the mystical atmosphere of the painting, particularly in its integration of Chinese-inspired natural motifs such as stylized trees and rocks.

The rich visual elements in *The Court of Kayumars*, including colourful rocks, flora and fauna, and human figures, some concealed, others emerging or perching among the landscape,

⁴³ Firdawsī et al., *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* (Penguin Books, 2007), https://ubc.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwbV27DsIwDLR4DLAB5VIAndioQpNAMzGgIgY22Ks0TdQFBh7_j9MHAsQaKZE85Bzf-RwAGvkh-YMJm9CQVDJhGA24WhHJuJRGWJFOUJOQn1adqLLG5lph2aboV1j5paUWnZZ-4QLYpjkyr-1QOIrAXGdiU_xq8OWqt6lj34Gmt6CLtT0tQfDY8kP3r2Fd3yPNL470DplMrvKi8764O6j8-6wxKPikl6JMWHyKFBKB9DAil2PwEtDluBICTCdYnwKnyAqUEZxQpkJeSrG4Pw7YQyzz-VKfoqxYFzZgWTyf5sL7YJwLzAFBqP21PP8nDneegvp1Rs2w.

⁴⁴ Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp*. 34-36

have been interpreted as evidence of Chinese influence on Persian painting, as well as demonstration of the artist's masterful use of colour. Appearing in the first half of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, the folio is also noted for high levels of detail and naturalism, reflecting the synthesis of Timurid and Turkmen styles of painting.⁴⁵ By attributing the *Court of Kayumars* to Sultan Muhammad, the head of the Tabriz library and workshop, Welch distinguishes this painting from the others in the manuscript by highlighting its highly stylized landscape, characteristics of Turkmen tradition, skillfully balanced with Timurid naturalistic refinements. The synthesis of these two styles, in Welch's view serves as the evidence of Sultan Muhammad's artistic leadership and innovation in the Safavid atelier.⁴⁶

On the other hand, some of Welch lesser-favoured paintings in the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* are considered as a "continuation of old fashion", such as *The Joust of the Eleven Rock: Faribourz vs. Kalbad* (Fig. 3), also housed in Agha Khan Museum in Toronto. This folio is attributed to Shaykh Muhammad, one of the first generation of the artists who worked on the manuscript. From Welch's perspective Shaykh Muhammad's work reflects a more conservative and archaizing approach, which he describes as a "deliberate turn back of the clock". Welch admires animated, dynamic compositions, which he considers more convincing and aesthetically advanced than the non-animated and less-adventurous ones. Interestingly, despite his criticism of Persian painting's lack of perspective and modelling, Welch also acknowledges the medium's unique strengths. He admits that Persian painters could paint anything based on the two-dimensionality of the paper by compositional techniques, different sizes, use of colour, and the organization of space. On the other hand, Welch admits that in order to fully admire Persian

⁴⁵ Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp*. 54-55

⁴⁶ Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp*. 50-60

painting, one should move beyond the picture plane and follow the rhythms, shapes, colours, and of course, imagination.⁴⁷

There is a sense of contradiction in Welch's descriptions of the paintings. On the one hand, Welch is aware of the complex and multifaceted regime of image-making within the context of text-image relationship, role of the *Kitabkhaneh*, and the close conceptual association between painting and poetry, the latter asserting its abstract and metaphorical qualities in rhythm, shapes, and colours. But on the other hand, he cannot figure out any other framework other than attribution and connoisseurship within the framework of naturalism. Though Welch describes the paintings of the manuscript as decorative art to sooth and please, to entertain, and to delight and amuse, he also sees them as the reflection of the intellectual, cultural and artistic richness of Shah-Tahmasp's court.⁴⁸

In the coming chapters by adopting Edward Sa'id critique of Orientalism as one of my theoretical frameworks, I am going to situate the study of illustrated manuscripts and the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* within the rise of colonial expansionism and imperialism, and the emergent European hegemony over the Middle East. As the Orient became a subject for European scholarly theories and practices through imposition of modern concepts such as authorship and authenticity, scholars, dealers, and entrepreneurs alike removed the manuscripts from their holistic contexts by emphasizing the illustrations as representatives of "Persian Classical Painting". The concept of "Classical Persian Paintings" follows the same rhetoric of "Classical Persian Literature," which was built on the concept of the author or the artist as the sole producer, creator, genius or hero. This mis-representation combined with motives for

⁴⁷ Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp*. 26-27

⁴⁸ Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp*. 28-30

financial gains contributed to the dismemberment of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* by its later owner Houghton, hindering the effort for having a holistic understanding of the manuscript and making it impossible to reunite its folios.

3.Collectors, Art Market and Socio-Political Transformation in the Ottoman Empire and Iran

3.1. Early Collectors and Orientalism

The inter-related dynamics between the dispersal and commodification of the manuscripts from the Islamic World, and the tendency to draw analogies between Persian painting practices and Quattrocento Italian painting, represent a critical area of focus in recent scholarship. This growing body of research, which increasingly views Persian painting within the broader context of arts of the book, has been significantly shaped by wide-spread availability of manuscripts as the direct consequences of looting, and diplomatic or commercial interactions between the Middle East and the West. The binary relationship between the Occident and the Orient, which subjugated the Orient to the authoritative, often colonial scrutiny of the Occident, has disseminated into discourses of art and material culture as well. The adopted conceptual framework romanticizes, classifies and appropriates the Orient and its artistic output, and as a result art historical discourses follow the Orientalist rhetoric of an imaginary and inferior Orient, which can be politically dominated and culturally appropriated.⁴⁹

Even though F.R. Martin elevated the status of Persian painting by equating it to Renaissance Italian paintings within the Western artistic hierarchy, he at the same time described the portrait of a dervish as follows: “sitting and deeming in the mosque in a bazar, in a café.” “He is always the same, and never less interesting. He is the best representative of the submissiveness of the East, of that submissiveness which knows that one day the time will come

⁴⁹ Said, *Orientalism*.

when the East will resume its grandeur.”⁵⁰ Martin’s detailed, but imaginative and romanticized analysis of Timurid and Safavid artistic developments is the systematic consequence of the establishment and development of Orientalist institutions and academic disciplines in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, as well as Orientalist ideological inclinations and colonial ambitions. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said examines the mechanisms that perpetuate Orientalist practices of knowledge production through Biblical studies (including archeology), philology, geographical societies, travel books, books of exploration, and fantastic and exotic literature.⁵¹

Coupled with prejudiced beliefs and popular clichés with their own truth value, this amounts to a multi-faceted practice of knowledge production about the Orient, which rarely questions its own epistemological foundations. Instead, it reaffirms the clichés with self-proclaimed scientific accuracy and authority.

The interconnected system of amateur collectors, exhibitions, scholars, and popular publications on the imaginary Orient sustained the mis-representation of and mis-conceptions about the arts of the book until recently. As Edward Sa’id discusses, Orientalism was a mentality based on an assumed binary distinction between the Orient and the Occident, and it governed writers, poets, novelist, scholars, politicians, philosophers, and artists. Its broad set of epistemological and ontological framework could be applied to any branch of knowledge including scholarship on Islamic arts of the book.

⁵⁰ Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from the 8th to the 18th Century* . by F.R. Martin: 2. 46-7

⁵¹ Said, *Orientalism*.

3.2. The Long History of Compilation, Dismembering and Dispersal

The practice of collecting Islamic manuscripts and single-page folios stretches back to the pre-modern era. In 1912, F.R. Martin, remarked that if we could go back in time “Jahangir, the Mughal ruler of India would have paid 20,000 pounds in the money of our time for the *Amir Khusraw Dihlavi* manuscript.” Following the passage, he traces the history of collecting to tenth-century Baghdad where there was a vibrant market for old books, as well as for individual folios, albums, autographs, and fragments of old calligraphy. Furthermore, citing the tenth-century chronicler Muqqadasi, Martin highlights the existence of hundreds of booksellers in Baghdad who were compiling books and separate folios indicating that bibliophily and appreciation for the arts of the book were deeply rooted among the intellectuals of the time.⁵² In fact, the practices of compiling and collecting single-page folios, and their sale in the market had a long-lasting history in the pre-modern Islamic World. For example, one of the earliest albums produced for the Timurid prince Baysunghur (1397-1433) contained numerous drawings and sketches to be used as a model for manuscript illustrations, is now divided between the Topkapi Palace Library, and the Diez Album in Berlin.⁵³ A notable Safavid era example, whose history stretches into the twentieth century, is the *Bahram Mirza Album*, compiled by Dust Muhammad, the supervisor of Tabriz Library in early 16th century. Bahram Mirza, a nephew of Shah-Tahmasp, oversaw the creation of this album, which included paintings, calligraphy and drawings. It eventually found its way to the Topkapi Palace. However, the album was dismantled in the early twentieth century, and many of its folios were sold in the art market.

⁵² Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from the 8th to the 18th Century*. by F.R. Martin: 2. 57

⁵³ A. T. Adamova, “Bihzad’s Lost Album,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Cambridge, UK) 32, no. 4 (2022): 912–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186322000475>.

Martin expresses dismay over the fact that Sultans, Shahs and Pashas were opening their libraries to the market, allowing merchants to acquire rare books and valuables at the fraction of their worth. Nonetheless, as David Roxburgh points out, Martin contributed to the dismantling of manuscripts himself. He assembled the Bellini Album at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, by putting together different folios from variety of manuscripts and albums accessible to him from Topkapi Place collection in the early twentieth century. The Bellini Album, originally compiled in 1600 in Turkey, was photographed, and subsequently dismantled in the 1900s. A portion of it came to Martin's possession. According to David Roxburgh, Martin went as far as to physically altering manuscripts, detaching unsigned paintings and reattaching them with signatures of renowned artists such as Bihzad, in order to enhance their perceived value. One such case is the *Portrait of the Dervish from Baghdad*.⁵⁴ In that regard, lacking historical contextualization and with no distinction between the past and his present, Martin's account of premodern practices of collecting serves no other purpose than legitimating his and his fellow collectors' practices.

In contrast to Martin's narrative, the practice of album compilation in Persian and Turkish contexts followed a carefully calculated juxtaposition of calligraphy and painting, which could provide valuable information about their original conception, and the aesthetics and logic governing the sequencing of an album's pages. Misunderstanding of the Persian and Turkish albums as mere scrapbooks, or random compilation of paintings and calligraphy resulted in their dismantling and loss of their art historical integrity.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Roxburgh, "Disorderly Conduct? F.R. Martin and The Bahram Mirza Album." 240-50

⁵⁵ Andrea Lerner and Avinoam Shalem, eds., *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition "Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst" Reconsidered*, Islamic History and Civilization, v. 82 (Brill, 2010). 208

When it comes to a manuscript losing its original intent and value, the *Great Mongol Shahnama* from Ilkhanid dynasty (1256-1335) is a good example. It is one of the first illustrated *Shahnama* manuscripts, which was a victim of mutilation by its owner George Demotte in the twentieth century. In order to increase the value of each folio as a painting, Demotte cut the pages that had paintings on both sides, and furnished the painting with an unrelated text on a new blank page. As a result, the entire text of *Great Mongol Shahnama* is lost.⁵⁶

Another demonstrative case is the Diez Album, which I have shortly discussed above. It was part of the vast collection owned by Heinrich Friedrich von Diez, a Prussian diplomat who served as an envoy to the Ottoman Empire between 1784-1790. This collection, now housed in the Berlin Library since 1817, contains approximately 17,000 prints and 830 manuscripts, with more than half originating from the Middle East. Among the collection are three albums of drawings, sketches, and paintings compiled in Timurid workshops of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A significant portion of the Diez Album was acquired from three albums housed in the Topkapi Palace, which had entered the treasury as war booty or diplomatic gifts no later than the sixteenth century. Diez published accounts of his acquisitions, including the famed Piri Reis atlas, during the reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807), detailing how manuscripts had been removed from the Inner Treasury and transferred to the *harem* (the private chambers of the sultan and the imperial family) under Sultan Abdulhamid I (1774-1789). According to Diez, after Selim III ascended to the throne in 1789, the *harem* was moved to the Old Palace, and its women in need of money began selling manuscripts and books. Diez describes these manuscripts,

⁵⁶ Lerner and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*. 206

including atlases and various Persian works, as having been entrusted to the *harem* as a source of “recreation and conversation”.⁵⁷

Another incident involves the Russian General Suchtelen. In 1828, he transferred the whole library of Shah-Abbas Safavid (1571-1629) from his grandfather’s mausoleum in Ardabil to St. Petersburg, in addition to transferring the most precious manuscripts from the Tehran Imperial Library to the West. Part of that now constitutes the MM Vignier, Henry Vever, Marteau, Goloubeff, Doucet, and Stoclet collections. Most of these collectors did not have much knowledge of the language or the history of the Islamic World. As self-proclaimed experts and scholars, they produced descriptions of illustrated manuscripts and paintings, which were empty rhetoric for financial gain, rather than efforts at genuine art historical analysis and knowledge production.⁵⁸

Most of the collections were the result of circumstance and chance. For example, F.R Martin was a diplomat, Goloubeff was a Russian émigré to France, Demotte was an art dealer, and Vever was a jeweller, and their collections were the circumstantial consequences of their presence in the Ottoman Empire and Iran.⁵⁹ However, circumstance and chance could not have provided them with such easy access to so many works of art without the socio-political transformations in both Iran and the Ottoman Empire that provided the chance and the circumstance.

⁵⁷ David J. Roxburgh, “Heinrich Friedrich Von Diez and His Eponymous Albums: Mss. Diez a. Fols. 70-74,” *Muqarnas* (New Haven) 12, no. Journal Article (1995): 112–36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1523227>.

⁵⁸ Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*. 211

⁵⁹ Hillenbrand, “Western Scholarship on Persian Painting before 1914: Collectors, Exhibitions and Franco? German Rivalry.” 211-12

As I have previously expressed, the European art market, ever hungry for more of the Orient, was sustained by a complex network of various apparatuses of representation, from academic disciplines to popular publications and World Exhibitions, which perpetuated the circulating clichés of the exotic Orient, and legitimated and often served imperialist agendas.⁶⁰ However, this alone could not have opened up the Middle East and allowed its commodification into the Orient without the internal problems that Iran and the Ottoman Empire faced, and the similar solutions that they implemented to solve them.

3.3. Socio-Political Transformation in Ottoman Empire and Iran: New Global Dynamics

From the late sixteenth to the seventeenth century, the Ottomans started to experience cultural, social, and political changes, such as market-oriented large estates replacing small farms (similar to Enclosures in England around the same time), old administrative bureaucracy gradually replaced by new men educated outside the palace system, rise of religious zealotry, and waves of rebellions.⁶¹ After these came the profound transformations brought about by the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, which also marks a turning point in the history of Middle East at large. The invasion introduced Western cultural influences, spurred shifting alliances between France, Britain and the Ottomans, and contributed to the rise of Orientalism in Europe. The Ottomans' strengths have historically stemmed from their ability to integrate diverse cultural

⁶⁰ Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in *Grasping the World*, 1st ed., ed. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, Book, Section (Routledge, 2004), 442-60 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429399671-28>.

⁶¹ Baki Tezcan, "The Second Empire: The Transformation of the Ottoman Polity in the Early Modern Era," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 29, no. 3 (2009): 556–72, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2009-038>.

traditions, including Turkish, Mongol, Arab, and Persian. However, by the late 19th century, the Empire faced increasing challenges from nationalism, and European expansionism. Sultan Mahmud II's reforms, aimed at modernizing the military and bureaucracy, were imposed from above to centralize authority, but inadvertently exposed internal division. European powers, exploiting the weakening unity of the Empire, increased their influences and territorial acquisitions, culminating in the Treaty of Berlin (1878). At the same time, Turkish nationalism began to emerge, blending Ottomanism, Islam, and Turkism into a new ideological framework.⁶²

By the turn of the 19th century, European powers had significantly expanded their global dominance. Between 1815-1914, France and Britain increased their control over global territories from 35% to 85% with Africa and Asia mostly affected. The Ottoman Empire mostly controlling much of North Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean, became the target of European expansionism. The disintegration of the Empire benefited European powers seeking resources for the growing global economy. Along these transformations, Turkish elites and public became increasingly acquainted with Western style of representation through the establishment of Fine Arts Institutes, Imperial Museums, and Archeological Departments.⁶³

Amid similar global circumstances, Iran was eager to move towards modernization and take part in the global stage. Nasir-Al-Din Shah's (1831-1896) visit to London Crystal Palace in 1851, alongside his entourage, illustrates the Iranian elite's fascination with and appropriation of European culture. It also reflects the broader transformations in how Iran's architecture and art were represented and perceived in World Exhibitions. As significant as the implications of this engagement was the transformation of the function, meaning and value of material cultural, what

⁶² Worringer, *A Short History of the Ottoman Empire*. 250-70

⁶³ Worringer, *A Short History of the Ottoman Empire*.277-90

Timothy Mitchell describes as “setting the world as a picture”.⁶⁴ With this practice manuscripts were transformed into commodities and objects of display, and representations of *a* reality through the “Western perspective,” as Mitchell describes it. This coincided with the emergence of a global economy, a system that redefined political and economic relations on the one hand, and marked a seminal moment of transformation in the perception of culture, and of the self and the other, on the other hand.

Nasir-AL-Din Shah, who ruled Iran between 1848-96, was the first ruler from Iran who toured Europe between 1873-1878, attending the Crystal Palace, in London, Paris and Vienna Exhibitions in 1873. He met Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830-1916), and for this occasion, Ali Quli Mirza, the minister of Education loaned a wide array of objects such as minerals, ceramics, armours, textiles, musical instrument and carpets, amounting to something akin to a cabinet of curiosities. In a sense, Iranian officials voluntarily engaged in a form of self-Orientalism. For instance, by framing two paintings from the *Hamzanama* and the *Khamsa Nizami*, they set a precedent for manuscripts to be dismantled and reframed to cater to the “theatricality of Orientalism”, and create new market values. As a result, sixty-six folios from *Hamzanama* were purchased for the Orientalist Museum of the *Oesterreichisches Handelsmuseum* in Vienna.⁶⁵

Exhibitions, such as the Vienna World Exhibition (1873) and the Paris Exposition Universelle (1878), in which both Iran and the Ottoman Empire participated, intertwined with commercial collecting practices and served as means to fill up the cabinets of the emerging major museums in the West, such as the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the

⁶⁴ Mitchell, “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order.”

⁶⁵ Fulco, “Displays of Islamic Art in Vienna and Paris.”55-60

Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, and the Museum of Berlin.⁶⁶

The 1910 Munich exhibition and the 1912 Paris exhibition in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, marked the first major presentations of Persian miniature paintings, accompanied by a detailed survey prepared by Claude Anet (1868-1931) and F.R. Martin. This first serious survey of Persian illustrated manuscripts by French collectors was also among the first efforts to approach illustrated manuscripts from both visual and textual perspectives. The 1912 exhibition catalogue noted the growing fascination in Persian illustrated manuscripts among Western amateur collectors and scholars. However, this interest cannot be considered independent of the socio-political upheaval in Iran, and the 1907 revolution against Qajar dynasty.⁶⁷

With the advent of modernity in Iran, a series of cultural organizations, such as the Society of National Heritage (1922), were established to invigorate scholarship on the history and cultural legacy of the past. For this purpose, a group of architects, archaeologists and scholars such as Andre Godard, Ernest Herzfeld and Arthur Pope were employed in the project of modernization. Arthur Pope was elected in 1919 as the advisory curator for Muhammadan Art at the Art Institute of Chicago. The Society of National Heritage invited Pope to give lectures about the greatness of Iran's ancient civilization.⁶⁸

Arthur Pope, as a significant figure in the popularization of Persian art, was involved in many archeological and cultural projects, including the 1931 the exhibition of Persian arts in the Burlington House in London. A group of scholars and British Orientalists such as Laurence

⁶⁶ Stephen Vernoit, "Islamic Art in the West: Categories of Collecting," in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, vol. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119069218.ch45>.

⁶⁷ Soucek, "Walter Pater, Bernard Berenson, and the Reception of Persian Manuscript Illustration."115-17

⁶⁸ Rizvi, "Art History and the Nation."48-50

Binyon and Sir Thomas Arnold were involved in the organization of this exhibition. More than \$10 million worth of objects from all the museums and collections around the globe including 300 private lenders were displayed. This was a major event in bringing serious collectors and art dealers together under the leadership of Pope. As Barry Wood articulates, this exhibition was one of the pivotal moments for the construction of misconceptions about the peoples of the Middle East as exotic, and reenforced the prevalent stereotypes.⁶⁹

The important point raised by Wood is that despite contextualization of the objects according to their historical and intellectual circumstances, Pope's invention of concepts like "pure form" for Persian art, or ideas such as "artistic spirit of Persian people", perpetuate the idea of linearity, unity, purity, homogenous characteristics of the Orient. In this exhibition, scattered folios from different manuscripts, were displayed in different rooms, and they were praised for their visual qualities such as colour, beauty, and composition perpetuating the dominant aesthetic methodology of the day. Laurance Binyon and J.V.S Wilkinson and Basil Gray's catalogue, *Persian Miniature Painting* (a survey of Persian manuscripts), was used as a reference by many following scholars.⁷⁰

3.4. Nationalism and the Legacy of the Past

Between 1905-11 the Constitution Revolution challenged the authority of the Qajar monarchy, initiating significant social, political and cultural transformations. This period coincides with increasing European presence in Iran, including archeological excavations, and the emergence of nationalist sentiments shaped by exposure to European notions of reform and

⁶⁹ Wood, "A Great Symphony of Pure Form': The 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art and Its Influence."

⁷⁰ Wood, "A Great Symphony of Pure Form': The 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art and Its Influence."

public participation in politics. From 1925 to 1979, during the height of nationalistic sentiments in Iran, the Pahlavi regime used historical figures, the architectural ruins such as Persepolis, and the legacy of Cyrus the Great to legitimize its royal kingship. The modernization of Iran, which began in late 19th century, included the transformation of the infrastructure, such as the establishment of the national army, a modern education system, national communication networks, and uniform national institutions. These developments aimed to promote a homogenized sense of nationhood, consolidating Iran's diverse population under Iranian nationalism.⁷¹

As a result, starting around 1925, there was a renewed search for a lost national identity, which manifested itself in the revival of historical figures such as Ferdowsi, and reinvigorated interest in old Persian literature such as the *Shahnama*.⁷² As part of this revival, the *Shahnama* became a cornerstone of authenticity and originality in relation to Iranian nationalism, and Ferdowsi became the promoter of Iran's language. In academic and cultural institutions, and with state-sponsored projects and market-driven initiatives the *Shahnama* acquired a new mode of existence. The identity of the text became tied to its author's name as the marker of authenticity. This conceptual transformation introduced both social and monetary values to the text, disregarding the premodern tradition of patron-sponsored production of illustrated *Shahnama* manuscripts. With the introduction of printing press, the *Shahnama* became widely available and the translation of the text by Western scholars further elevated Ferdowsi's status, earning him the title "Homer of Persia" and positioning *Shahnama* as one of the greatest works of "Classical World Literature." The modern discourses surrounding attribution and authenticity also spurred a

⁷¹ Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*.115-20

⁷² Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*.50-60

surge in *Shahnama* research, with scholars dedicating years to textual corrections and comparisons. Efforts to create accurate editions such as the Moscow edition, became the focal point, fuelling a market for the most authentic version. The millennium of Ferdowsi's birth was celebrated in 1934 with the construction of his mausoleum, designed by German archeologist Ernst Herzfeld, and French architect Andre Godard. The month-long event included an international Orientalist conference attended by scholars from seven countries. The occasion also featured the gifting of the newly published edition of the *Shahnama* by German Orientalist Fritz Wolf and an illuminated *Shahnama* manuscript from Russian museums to the Iranian government.⁷³ However, this pursuit reduced the *Shahnama* to a commodified emblem of nationalism, curtailing the endless interpretive possibilities that had once allowed it to thrive as a dynamic cultural product. In that sense, the long history of Iran's socio-political and cultural transformations from the nineteenth-century onward contributed to the commodification of Persian paintings that had begun with amateur European collectors, and reinforced the idea of the "classical", rather than presenting an alternative.

⁷³ Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*.125-28

4. From Marketing the Classical to Alternative Interpretations

4.1. *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp's folios for Sale*

Due to the high value established by Houghton in 1976—through the sale of seven individual folios, followed by four more the next year at astronomical prices—the market for paintings from the *Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp* remains active and competitive. This is evident on the Sotheby's auction house website as it reads:

“The Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp is a perfect encapsulation of artistic skill, patronage and beauty – universally acknowledged as one of the supreme illustrated manuscripts of any period or culture and ranking among the greatest works of art in the world. The record for any Islamic work on paper is held by a folio from the same manuscript, sold at Sotheby's in 2011, and so the rare appearance of another at auction represents a great opportunity for collectors in this field and beyond.”⁷⁴

In another account, it reads:

“There is no European equivalent of Shah-Tahmasp's gathering of all the greatest artists of the era, along with the greatest scribes,,,. But let us imagine a scenario in which the greatest patron of Renaissance Italy, perhaps Pope Julius II, gathered in one atelier the elite artists of the 15th and 16th century.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ <https://www.sothebys.com/en/press/a-royal-masterpiece-to-star-at-sothebys-this-october>

⁷⁵ <https://www.sothebys.com/en/press/a-royal-masterpiece-to-star-at-sothebys-this-october>

At the sale of another folio from the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* manuscript in 2022, *Rustam Recovers Rakhsh from Afrasiyab*, the manuscript is likened to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* “illustrated with the greatest artists such as Michelangelo or Titian.”⁷⁶

These quotations encapsulate the core motivations behind the collecting and connoisseurship of illustrated manuscripts. First, such manuscripts are admired for their aesthetic beauty, royal patronage, and association with celebrated artists. Second, they are valued for their potential to fetch high price—not only as cultural artifacts but also as financial investments. Recent sales of folios from the manuscript highlight how closely tied elements of provenance and exhibition history, strategic scholarly framing, and carefully curated literature contribute to their appeal for potential clients. The close relationship between scholarship, auction houses, and collectors has sustained and intensified the market for single-page Islamic paintings. Over time, books and individual folios, sometimes as a single sheet and other times as compilation of folios from different bindings, were sold in the art market through a network of art dealers, government officials, and sometimes scholars acting as connoisseurs.⁷⁷ The dispersal of these manuscripts across the globe was fuelled by the art market which worked as an intermediary between museum officials, collectors, and art dealers, and the appeal for Persian manuscript paintings, including the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, was crated and sustained by their presentation as examples of Persian Classical Painting, a category invented according Eurocentric paradigms.

⁷⁶ <https://www.barnebys.com/blog/an-extremely-rare-persian-manuscript-could-fetch-over-6-million>

⁷⁷ David J. Roxburgh, “Micrographia: Toward a Visual Logic of Persianate Painting,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43 (March 2003): 12–30, <https://doi.org/10.1086/RESv43n1ms20167587>.

4.2. Eurocentric Perception and Reading of the Manuscripts: Development of the Persian Painting Aesthetic

Since the early twentieth century until recently, the study of illustrated manuscripts has been dominated by Eurocentric perceptions of painting. European conceptualizations of mimesis remained as the only model for understanding how representation works. This approach toward manuscript paintings has perpetuated the dismemberment and dispersal of thousands of illustrated and non-illustrated manuscripts from the Islamic World. As the result of this approach art historians have focused on reading the images by comparing and contrasting other images from various manuscripts in order to trace the hand of the artist, the original workshop, and the patronage, production and reception circumstances. In other words, the field was dominated by connoisseurs, or art historians acting as connoisseurs.⁷⁸ In certain ways this attitude was informed by how same generation of art historians and connoisseurs approached the Italian Renaissance. As I discussed above, the typological markers and norms for pictorial representation established there also became the defining parameters of the “Classical Persian Painting”, which perfectly explains the literature dominating the study of *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*.⁷⁹

The exhibitions and World Fairs combined with the private enterprises of collectors and auction houses eventually provided the ground for the scholarship to emerge. The emergence of Oriental Studies as an academic discipline in Europe, Britain, and North America goes back to

⁷⁸ Roxburgh, “Micrographia.” 15-20

⁷⁹ Soucek, “Walter Pater, Bernard Berenson, and the Reception of Persian Manuscript Illustration.”

the establishment of linguistic departments of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.⁸⁰ The simultaneous rise of disciplines such as ethnography, history, archeology, and philology, and the creation of modern museums provided Europe with a mentality that saw itself superior to the Middle East not just militarily and politically, but also intellectually.⁸¹ Who could know the best methods and approaches for understanding the Orient, other than the European scholar? Beginning with this mentality, the study of the aesthetic qualities of manuscripts from the Islamic World initially started with calligraphy and text. The first scholar to study manuscript paintings was the French linguist Edgard Blochet (1870-1937). His interest in the illustrations continued when he joined the Bibliothèque Nationale and prepared the catalogue and the essays for Islamic manuscripts.⁸²

The next scholarly study of manuscripts came in a 1908 monograph of calligraphers' biography and Ottoman historiographic tradition of calligraphy by C.I Huart, called "Les Calligraphes et les Miniatures de l'Orient Musulman", focusing on individual calligraphers and "the virtue of their personal link" to painters. Huart used primary sources as a reference for historical context to widen the scope of knowledge about manuscripts. The appearance of Persian manuscripts in Western exhibitions of Islamic art, has been detailed by a French collector and dealer Jean Schopfer de Morges (1863-1931) in the 1912 Paris Exhibition catalogue, and traced the initial love for Persian miniature to the 1903 Paris exhibition in Musée des Arts Décoratifs where *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* appeared for the first time after its removal from Ottoman treasury.⁸³

⁸⁰ Oriental Studies now have been replaced by Middle Eastern Studies, Islamic Studies, or Art and Architecture Studies from the Islamic Land because of its loaded racial and undermining overtone.

⁸¹ Said, *Orientalism*.150-70

⁸² Soucek, "Walter Pater, Bernard Berenson, and the Reception of Persian Manuscript Illustration."114

⁸³ Soucek, "Walter Pater, Bernard Berenson, and the Reception of Persian Manuscript Illustration."117

Development of Persian painting as an art historical category emerged in tandem with a rising interest in other Oriental objects. Persian paintings and single-page folios were often displayed besides other artefacts in exhibition houses of the 19th century. The amalgamation of the objects and mediums started with one of the earliest exhibitions organized by a private collector, Adolph Goupil in 1888, where multiple of objects were displayed side by side: Persian carpets, Arab glassware, marbles and tapestries, to modern paintings, drawings, and furniture from Renaissance which were divided into two rooms of Oriental Room and Occidental Room.⁸⁴ As one anonymous author remarked, the exhibition could, “transport the owner from the One Thousand Nights to the dwellings of Great Lords of 16th century.”⁸⁵ The romanticizing and the exoticizing tone found in catalogue descriptions reflects the broader approach to the arts of the Islamic world. In the early scholarship, which originated from catalogue publications, artefacts, and objects from the Islamic world were appreciated for their aesthetic qualities, rather than their cultural and historical context. Objects were displayed to evoke authentic atmosphere, a picturesque setting, designed to charm the viewer and appeal to senses. This approach treated objects as a source of pleasure and inspiration for the emerging Arts and Craft Movement in Europe.⁸⁶ The formulation of scholarship on Persian painting and arts of the book parallels the scholarship of Islamic arts which emphasized on the formal and aesthetic qualities, rather than contextual analysis. The intimate circle of amateur collectors and art dealers who discussed the formal qualities of arts of the book from the “Orient”, coincided with the establishment of public institutions and museums, and colonial ambitions of European powers. According to David

⁸⁴ Roxburgh, “Au Bonheur Des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910.”

⁸⁵ Roxburgh, “Au Bonheur Des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910.”13

⁸⁶ Roxburgh, “Au Bonheur Des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910.”15-20

Roxburgh, the emergence of early exhibition houses and museums encouraged the collectors to increase “visibility” for the collections through scholarly analysis and catalogue publications. As Priscilla Soucek remarks, this visibility raised the status of Persian painting to be marketable. The French jeweller, and collector Henry Vever, exemplifies this trend. As a member of Society of Friends of the Louvre, Henry Vever displayed his collection accompanied by a published catalogue, which reflects the interaction between colonial acquisitions with the emergence of museums. Another example is F.R. Martin the Swedish collector, art dealer and scholar, who organized the exhibition of his entire collection in the General Art and Industry Exhibition in Stockholm in 1897. This was one of the first attempts towards defining artefacts based on object’s type, material classification, and organization. Martin’s next exhibition in 1912, emphasized only paintings and arts of the book from Persia, Turkey and India, using scholarly discussion and research to promote his collection. The exhibition was followed by a monograph published in the same year, as one of the first comprehensive investigations into the arts of the book.⁸⁷

4.3. Challenging the Euro-centric Concept of the Classical

To find an aesthetic language for the monumental corpus of illustrated manuscripts from the Islamic World, as well as for their representation, and conceptualization, art historians used formalist theories introduced by the Swiss scholar Henrich Wölfflin (1864-1945). Consequently, they classified artistic styles into early Archaic, Classical, and Baroque. Wölfflin’s formalism presented Renaissance art as an ideal representation of Classical art, the revival of Greco-Roman

⁸⁷ Roxburgh, “Au Bonheur Des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910.”14-20

artistic tradition.⁸⁸ Classical as the “peak moment of artistic excellency,” as Christiane Gruber discusses, culminated in quattrocento Italian Renaissance Art, and their synchronized counterparts, the Timurids and the Safavids in the Persianate world.⁸⁹ Following Wolfflin principles of artistic development from “linear to painterly execution, from planar to three dimensional and from closed to open form, from multiplicity to unity of composition”, can be traced in how Welch and Dickson examined the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* paintings.

The application of formal aesthetic values such as logical ground plan, delicately balanced pallet, and minuteness of scale to specific folios of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, for example, *Zahak is told his fate*, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, is often framed as evidence of the maturity of the Tabriz style and the influence of Timurid naturalism, all under the broader umbrella of Classicism. However, these interpretations frequently lack the critical analysis of what terms such as “classical”, “naturalism” mean within the context Persian painting. The uncritical use of Western aesthetic terminology, as well as conceptual system of formal values, stylistic classification, and temporal categories for Persian painting practices is highly problematic from an art historiographical perspective. In fact, this is nothing but hollow, market-driven rhetoric. Such practices contributed to commodify and to enhanced the market value of artistic works from the Islamic lands, perpetuating more fragmentation and the loss of integrity and unity of illustrated manuscripts.

To overcome the prevailing barriers in studying Persian painting, we need to adopt, as Oleg Grabar suggests, a “libertarian approach,” so as to detach Persian manuscript painting from the constraint of established aesthetic frameworks and allow multiple interpretations. Relying on

⁸⁸ Gruber, “Questioning the ‘Classical’ in Persian Painting: Models and Problems of Definition.”2-4

⁸⁹ Gruber, “Questioning the ‘Classical’ in Persian Painting: Models and Problems of Definition.”6-7

historicized and local conceptual and perceptual frameworks. This means challenging: first of all, rigid taxonomies based on style, second of all, strict chronological sequencing, third of all, assumptions of linear artistic progress, and lastly, Western modes of interpretation and conceptualizations of representation, which often do not take into account other possibilities of engagement with visual material. Instead, a more dynamic approach starts with openness to varieties of compositional logic, not a straightforward relationship between text and image, and of course, the knowledge of the text which allows deeper levels of engagement, along with the worldview and perceptual framework in which the paintings were conceived and perceived. Persian poetry and prose are rich in abstraction, ambiguity, metaphor, and moral lessons embedded in multi-layered narratives. Paintings might or might not reflect these complexities, but they nonetheless emerged with the same cultural milieu.⁹⁰

Another important distinction between manuscript paintings and large-scale canvases lies in their modes of perception and reception. Manuscript paintings were intended to be viewed intimately, often by a small group of audiences, or even a single viewer, inviting close, contemplative engagement. This private and contemplative experience contrasts with public viewership of large canvases on the wall. On the other hand, concepts such as imitation and innovation have completely different implications in the palace library workshops, governed under the supervision of a head of the library, and supported financially with the patronage of the court.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Oleg Grabar, "Why Was the Shahnama Illustrated?" *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 91–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210860903451238>.

⁹¹ Oleg Grabar, "Toward an Aesthetic of Persian Painting 1," in *Islamic Visual Culture, 1100-1800*, 1st ed., II (Routledge, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003554882-13>.

4.4. Role of the *Kitabkhaneh* (Royal Library)

The *Kitabkhaneh* or Royal Library functioned and operated as a highly organized and collaborative institution under the supervision of a head, and the patronage and financial support of the ruler. Manuscript creation mostly required a group of various specialists, including calligrapher, painter, designer, gilder, colourist, illuminator, book binder. The calligrapher was usually the head of the library and was responsible for scribing the text and the supervising the project for its successful completion. The designer prepared the page layout and its compositional structure, carefully managing the relationship between text and image. Painters created illustrations, most often multiple painters worked on a single folio as the result of the collaborative and multi-functional nature of the library. Libraries mostly worked also as a workshop where apprentices were trained and imitation of great masters was part of the artistic development. Typically, the manuscript was signed by the head of the *kitabkhaneh*, the calligrapher and the supervisor. The function and performance of the *kitabkhaneh* was directly impacted by the patron's resources, intention and circumstances, as Marianna Simpson emphasizes in the case of *Haft-Awrang* manuscript, commissioned by Ibrahim Mirza, nephew of Shah-Tahmasp. In this manuscript, five different scribes worked on the manuscripts in different locations. As the patron moved, his artists also moved with him.⁹² David Roxburgh and Marianna Shreve Simpson explore the role of the Royal Library within the context of image-making and providing models for the artists across mediums. As a multi-functional institution, the *Kitabkhaneh* (royal library) housed book collections, but also functioned as an artists' workshop, training school for apprentices, and a production site. Such an institution differs in its

⁹² Simpson Marianna, "The Making of Manuscripts."

every single aspect from the Italian artist studio, where imitation and continuity of tradition were considered as mastery, and valued more than innovation and creativity. Attribution of a single-hand of the artist and the role of the individual ruler as the defining element for stylistic consistency and expressive style does not apply to Persian painting. Persian painting does not reveal the brush stroke or any evidence of the artistic style. Instead, pigments are applied smoothly, and surface is polished erasing any gestural marks that could be connected to a specific hand.⁹³

In one account, Sheila Canby references the writings of Michel Membre, a Venetian traveler and ambassador to the court of Shah-Tahmasp, who offers intriguing, though limited insights into the Safavid courtly life. Membre, sent by Venice in hope for forming alliances against the Ottomans, briefly describes an encounter with Shah-Tahmasp's encampment. He reports that the camp consisted of 5,000 tents and 14,000 members, excluding servants, and that the plains surrounding the encampment were filled with animals. He provides a description of the audience hall, noting that the dome was covered in various textiles and its floor layered with felt and luxurious silk carpets. Notably he mentions the presence of a tent set for painters. Connectedly, Sheila Canby suggests that Shah-Tahmasp's painters and craftsmen accompanied him during his travels and campaigns.⁹⁴

Considering the historical, political and cultural circumstances surrounding the production of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, including the longevity of its production, the mobility of the artists, lavishly illustrated and illuminated folios as well as ongoing confrontation

⁹³ Simpson Marianna, "The Making of Manuscripts."

⁹⁴ Asia Society. Museum et al., *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501-1576*, First (Skira, 2003), <https://go.exlibris.link/cJdMY82f>.

and exchanges with the Ottomans in the West, Mughals in India, and Uzbek in the East, the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* should be considered as an integrated work of art. Produced in collaborative and dynamic circumstances, the manuscript's diverse painting style could be the result of multiple painters working on a single illustration in different locations and the impact of multiple factors such as availability of resources and artists. The governing modes of analysis which places emphasis on artist-patron relationship and the impact of Bihzad, and his naturalistic style of painting as the dominant force behind the production and perception of paintings of *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* were often applied to serve market needs and collectors' interests, and they fail to acknowledge the manuscript's multi-dimensional qualities. The diversity of styles and quality in the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* reflects not only the availability of resources, artists, but also the shifting political circumstance, and most crucially, the fortunes and intentions of its patron. Concepts such as author and authorship, as well as attribution and connoisseurship are modern ideas, and they do not align with the Persianate visual culture of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In the next section, I examine the *Shahnama* manuscripts as dynamic and adaptable works that challenge the application of the concept of authorship to both its textual and visual forms. Rather than perceiving *Shahnama* as unified epic by a single author, and its visual representation by single artist, it is more appropriate to approach it as an openness for the emergence of multi-discourses expressed in numerous forms and mediums.

The *Shahnama* and the Concept of Authorship

4.5. *Shahnama*, a Flexible and Fluid Epic

The poetic, and composite structure of the *Shahnama*, blending the heroic, the mythical and the historical was particularly suited to oral tradition. The emergence of multiple variation of the text has been the result of its flexibility to absorb new narratives and evolve through oral tradition. To a lesser extent, the tradition of storytelling called *naqqali*, continues to this day in coffeehouses and family gatherings. Even though the oral tradition of *Shahnamakhani* (narrating stories of *Shahnama*) hasn't been documented, in the largely illiterate world of pre-modern Iran, oral tradition was the dominant means of preserving and disseminating collective memory, and cultural identity.

Ferdowsi acknowledge his sources and praise Daqqiqi whose 1,000 lines of verse were incorporated into the *Shahnama*. Ferdowsi also drew from Zoroastrian texts and oral histories passed down through generations. Although the *Shahnama* is primarily based on royal chronicles, Ferdowsi's main focus is on the ideal of the "good man", "good hero" and "good deed" in their confrontation with evil and darkness. According to Ghazal Dabiri, the stories of historical and mythological kings and heroes of the *Shahnama* played a key role in providing "didactic narrative which reflected the ideal of the society's values."⁹⁵ By excluding religious concerns from the stories, *Shahnama* focuses on the ideal of kingship, making the epic a flexible model for the succeeding rulers, and facilitating the emergence of a variety of sub-genres. Such

⁹⁵ Ghazzal Dabiri, "The Shahnama: Between the Samanids and the Ghaznavids," *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 13–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210860903451196>.

adaptability and fluidity of the text allowed its incorporation and interpolation into other cultural products, and played a significant role in constructing a collective historical memory of the Persian speaking people.⁹⁶

4.6. The Question of Author and the Artist and the *Shahnama*

As I have explored above, the attribution of a single author to the text of the *Shahnama* (Ferdowsi), and the search for the hand of the artist in the paintings of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, such as Bihzad, had multiple motivations behind them. Orientalist scholarship appropriated Persian painting and pulled it into the domain of Renaissance scholarship, where the products of a different culture could be analyzed and framed according to familiar terms, such as the author and the artist. On the other hand, rising Persian nationalism, rather than challenging such practices, willingly participated in them, and presented Ferdowsi as a national hero, and the *Shahnama* as the quintessential national artistic and cultural product. The market also played an important part. In order to give value to single page folios of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, the artist of the illustration and the writer of the text had to be invented, highlighted and presented as geniuses akin to their Renaissance counterparts. However, as I have also discussed previously, attributing a single author to the *Shahnama* and individual artists to its paintings clearly contradicts with the realities of how the text came into being, and how its paintings were produced and experienced.

Attribution of a single author and the emergence of the concept of editorial authorship in *Shahnama* studies can be traced back to the publication of the first printed illustrated *Shahnama*

⁹⁶ Dabiri, “The Shahnama: Between the Samanids and the Ghaznavids.”

in Bombay in 1846, and the first lithographic edition produced in Tabriz, Iran in 1858.⁹⁷ These changes were followed by the revival of the name of the author as part of the broader Iranian nationalist agenda. The celebration of the poet's millennium by the National Monuments Council (*Anjoman-e-Asar-e Mili*) funded in 1922, along with a series of scholarly discussions organized during the International Conference of Orientalists in 1934 are some of the earliest attempts to link Ferdowsi to the *Shahnama*.⁹⁸ However, the pre-modern history of the circulation and reception of the *Shahnama* challenges this. In Mughal India, production and circulation of *Shahnama* manuscripts was a common practice. During this period, interpolated materials, additions and modifications easily had entered the text. The circulation of *Shahnama* manuscripts within the Ottoman court over the long period of time led to the development of different visual idioms and new vocabularies, and created a common lingual and cultural taste between the Safavids and the Ottomans. In the context of the presentation of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* to Sultan Selim II, the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* manuscript, functioned as a shared cultural and lingual discourse which created a network of commonality between rulers, artists, poets, and writers, as Sinem Arcak Casale explores in *Gifts in the Age of Empire*.⁹⁹ Persian as the “lingua franca”, sustained a shared literary status among the Persianate world and beyond, which was manifested in numerous *Shahnama* exchanges and emulations, such as ruler's illustrated historiographies, adding to the cultural productivity of different locales. The production of two Sultan Selim II chronicles as the result of Shah-Tahmasp's gifting epitomizes the agency of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp* as text-image unity, to be transformed and translated

⁹⁷ Hyunjin Cho, “Illustrated Manuscripts and Lithographic Books in Dialogue: Firdawsi's *Shahnama* in Nineteenth-Century Iran” (2023), <https://go.exlibris.link/nHJ5YKPw>. 124-8

⁹⁸ Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*. 127

⁹⁹ Casale, *Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500-1639*.

into another discourses, which inevitably renders the Eurocentric notion of the author obsolete. Here, of particular importance is the tradition of reciting *Shahnama* stories in a mostly illiterate world where the oral recitation has been the dominant mode of literary transmission.

Olga Davidson has extensively explored the connection between the textual variations of the *Shahnama*, as the combined result of its oral transmission, and its recitation and performative narration. Davidson further extends the notion of poetic performance in the *Shahnama* by connecting the textual variations in different manuscripts to the oral tradition of re-composition-in-performance”.¹⁰⁰ The oral tradition of recitation and storytelling shows the dynamism of the text and its flexibility to integrate, adopt and give rise to numerous versions as epic-cycles, and sub-genres.¹⁰¹

The emergence of new epic-cycles and sub-genres, such as dynastic chronicles, religious historiographies, ruler’s genealogies, and world histories which emulated the *Shahnama* in various geographies from Mughal India to Ottoman Turkey, reflect the constant interaction and engagement with the text. Repetition and re-creation of characters, plots, motifs, vocabulary, stories and concepts across multiple subsequently produced manuscripts, both illustrated and not, while using the *Shahnama* as a model, contradict the modern concept of author as a guarantor of “stylistic uniformity”.¹⁰² Inter-textuality through repetition, adaptation, citations, appropriation has been part of the mechanism of continuity and preservation of cultural memory in pre-modern societies.

¹⁰⁰ Olga M. Davidson and Ferdowsi, “The Text of Ferdowsi’s Shâhnâma and the Burden of the Past,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (Ann Arbor) 118, no. 1 (1998): 63–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/606299>.

¹⁰¹ Gabrielle Rachel Van den Berg et al., *Shahnama Studies III: The Reception of the Shahnama / Edited by Gabrielle van Den Berg, Charles Melville*, 12;12.; (Brill, 2018), <https://go.exlibris.link/ftf2qbmn>.

¹⁰² Van den Berg et al., *Shahnama Studies III: The Reception of the Shahnama / Edited by Gabrielle van Den Berg, Charles Melville*, 12;12.;

The fine line between creation and imitation, innovation and tradition, in the premodern Islamic world challenges the introduction and application of modern concepts such as authorship in both illustrated and non-illustrated manuscripts. Institutionalization of the *Shahnama* through the establishment of the printing press, scholarly organizations, and discourses interrupted the fluidity of the living tradition.

5. Conclusion

The multifaceted phenomenon of manuscript dispersal cannot be fully understood without situating it within the dynamic and deeply embedded system of power structures that have produced the East-West binary since the late eighteenth century. The notion of Western hegemony over the Orient, as Edward Sa'id discusses, had obvious political and economic implications, but the acquisition of knowledge through classification, assimilation, and appropriation was an equally important component of this hegemony. This mechanism was eventually embedded into institutional structures and gave rise to epistemological frameworks that shaped "taste and value," as Edward Sa'id calls it, and informed the perception and representation of the arts of the book. World Fairs, and auction and exhibition houses had a particularly pivotal role in this process. The dispersal and dismemberment of manuscripts and their display must be understood within the broader context of nationalism, capitalism and imperialist agendas, in which scholarship, display strategies and the art market were tied together.

The appearance of the *Shahnama* as a national emblem, is closely tied to the rise of modern concepts of identity and culture, introduced by J.G Herder and culminated in the *nationalliteratur*.¹⁰³ J.P. Herder believed that each nation has a national literary heritage which should be revived as an expression of its authentic identity.¹⁰⁴ However, the gradual absorption of the *Shahnama* into this discourse began in a colonial, rather than national context. In the early

¹⁰³ Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*. 60-62

¹⁰⁴ Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*. 50-52

nineteenth century, British officer and scholar Turner Macan (1792-1836), serving in the British East India Company, undertook the first major editorial project on the *Shahnama* in India, in order to delete the interpolated material and produce the original version of the text.¹⁰⁵ His work was based on the *Shahnama* manuscript he acquired in India, which supposedly belonged to the king of Oudh. Macan altered and published this version of the *Shahnama* as the first edited text by a non-indigenous Persian speaker. The manuscript then became part of the Bibliotheca Lindesiana, one of the major Orientalist collections acquired by Alexander Lindsay in 1854. The acquisition of three thousand manuscripts and books from the Middle East in Persian, Arabic and Turkish by Alexander Lindsay, the twenty-sixth earl of Crawford, was just a small part of an ambitious effort to acquire texts from around the world, reflecting his broader colonial and imperial project of knowledge production.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile, the appearance of the first lithographical printing press in Iran in the nineteenth century had a significant cultural and ideological implications, including the perception of the *Shahnama*. The *Shahnama*, as the apparatus of representation of the glorious Persian past, mobilized the discourses of national heritage, serving both the reconstruction and romanticization of Iran's pre-Islamic past. The appropriation of the *Shahnama* into discourses of nationalism created a marker for authentic cultural and artistic continuity which shaped the notion of modern Iranian identity. In order to make manuscripts legible within the Western canon, classification, connoisseurship and attribution became part of academic scholarship and

¹⁰⁵ Van den Berg et al., *Shahnama Studies III: The Reception of the Shahnama / Edited by Gabrielle van Den Berg, Charles Melville*, 12:12.;

¹⁰⁶ Hodgson, "'Spoils of Many a Distant Land': The Earls of Crawford and the Collecting of Oriental Manuscripts in the Nineteenth Century."

museum displays. In this context, manuscripts were both aesthetically appealing and valuable, and subjected to fragmentation, collection and reinterpretations.

The future of *Shahnama* studies is impossible to foresee, and it is very optimistic to expect dispersed manuscripts to be recompiled. However, as I have discussed in the particular case of the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp*, knowing the afterlife of *Shahnama* manuscripts, the motivations and dynamics that facilitated their dispersal, and the problems with how Persian paintings have been studied and presented can provide us with the necessary tools for more holistic approaches, even in the dispersed state of the manuscripts.

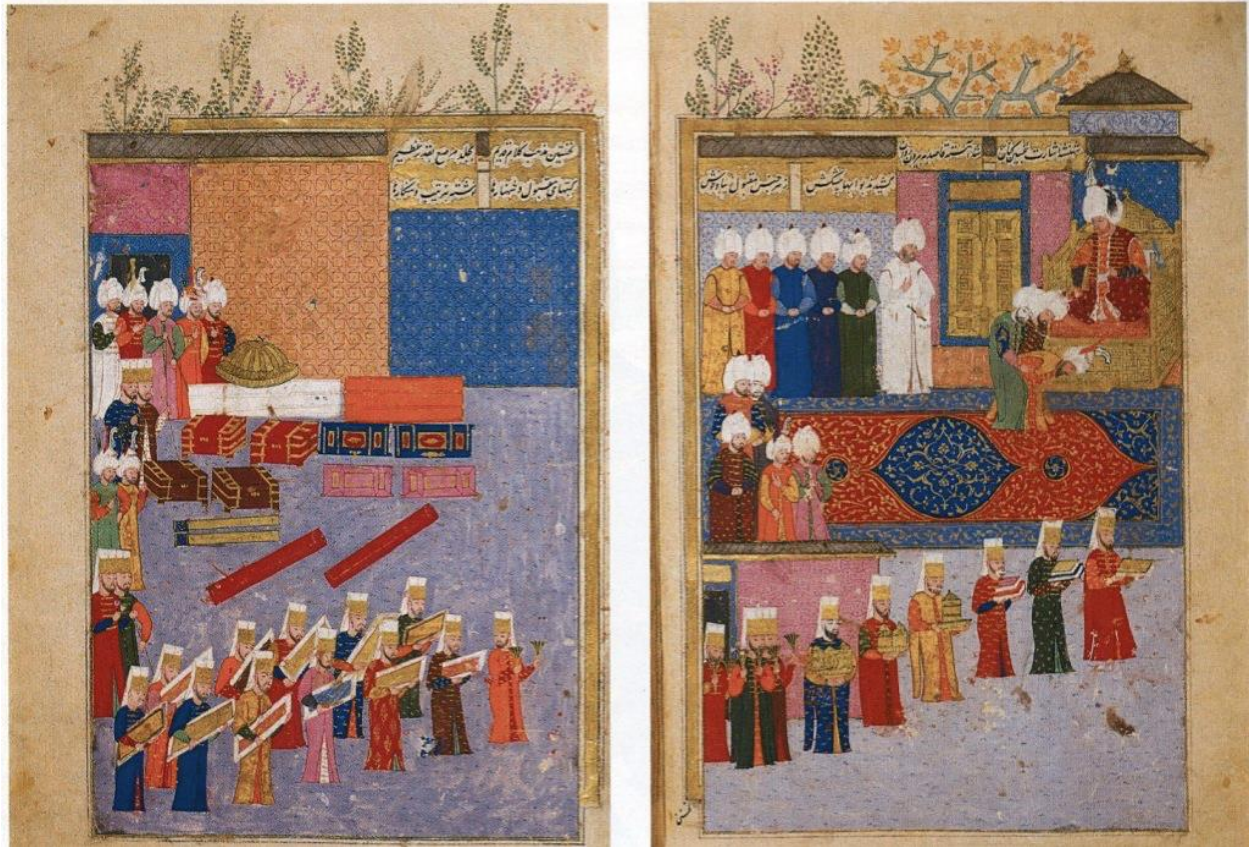


Figure 1: Sultan Selim II Receiving Shah Tahmasp's Envoy in 1568. From Loqmān, Şehnāme-i Selīm Hān (Shāhnāma-i Salīm Khān). Istanbul, 1581. Ink, opaque water-colour, and gold on paper. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, A. 3595, fol. 53b–54a. Photo © https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selim_II#cite_note-52

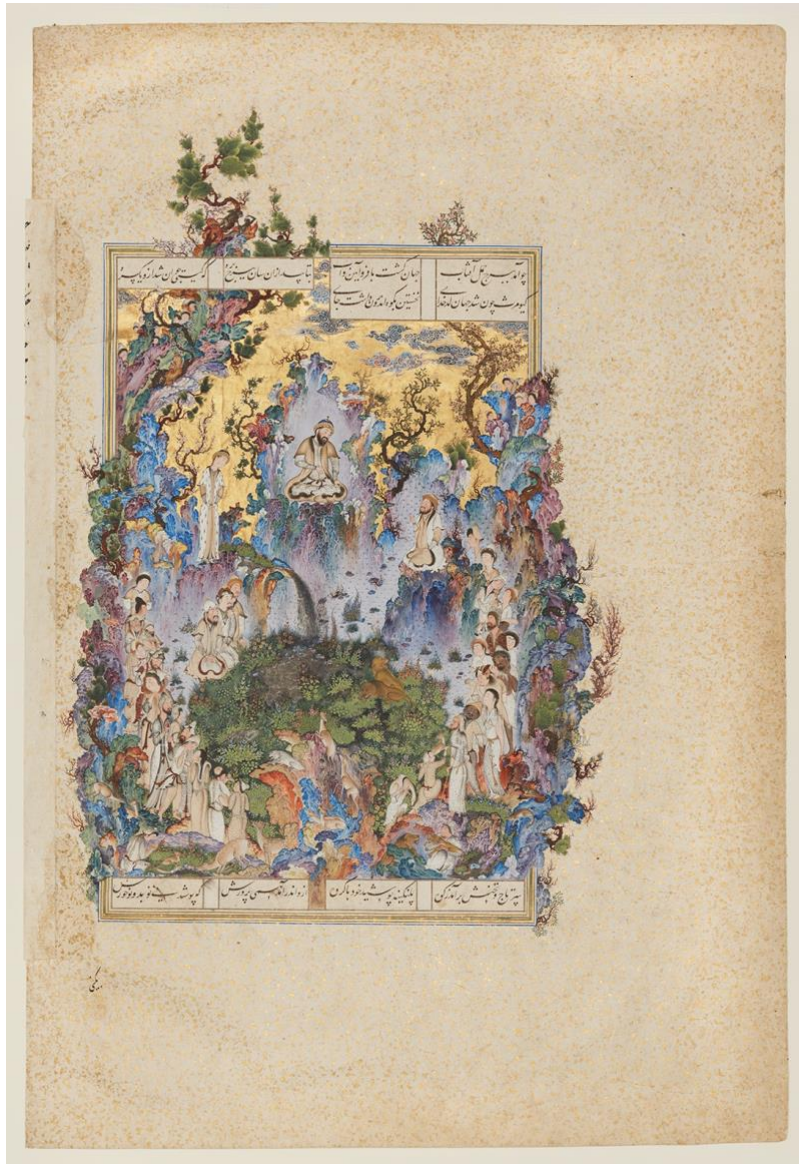


Figure 2: *The court of Kayumars*, folio from the *Shahnameh* (book of kings) of Shah Tahmasp, Attributed to Safavid master Sultan Muhammad, Iran, Tabriz. Dimensions: 45 x 30 cm, ca. 1524–1525. Opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper. Image is credited to © The Aga Khan Museum



Figure 3: *The first joust of the rooks: fariburz versus kalbad.* Folio from the *Shahnama Shah-Tahmasp.*, Attributed to Shaykh Muhammad, Iran, Tabriz. 47.2 x 32 cm, circa 1540. : Opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper. Image is credited to © The Aga Khan Museum

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