



Fig. 14. *Iskandar's March into the Gloom and Khizr's Discovery of the Water of Life*. Private collection.

background the mountains appear misty and less jutting than Mu'in's usual crags. The painting is a beautifully rendered evocation of the moment of Khizr's enlightenment and Iskandar's intimation of mortality.

38. *The Death of Iskandar*, fol. 237a.
The David Collection (fig. 37)

Although Alexander the Great sacked the Achaemenid capital at Persepolis and put an end to that great dynasty, he was transformed in the *Shahnameh* into a

Persian king. Scenes such as this of his death in Babylon enjoyed popularity in the late 16th century, perhaps in response to the depiction of this incident in the *Haft Awrang* of Jami produced for the Safavid prince Sultan Ibrahim Mirza.⁵¹ The illustration does not follow the text closely, since Firdausi did not describe the king as lying in the lap of a prince when he died. Mu'in has included three bareheaded youths holding kerchiefs, two of whom have laid their crowns on the ground. They gaze at the dead king, who lies crowned on his coat of mail beneath a parasol. Oddly, since Iskandar's youth is emphasized in the text, he has been portrayed with a white beard. Two soldiers frame the central figural group while horses and two grooms stand in the foreground. The landscape conforms to Mu'in's others in this manuscript.

39. *Ardashir Recognizes his Son Shapur Playing Polo*, fol. 243b. The David Collection (fig. 38)

Ardashir had ordered his minister to kill his beloved, the daughter of Ardavan, unaware that she was pregnant. The minister, who had this knowledge, hid her and her son, Shapur, until the boy was seven years old. At that point, to the joy of Ardashir, he confessed what he had done. The king then ordered his son and one hundred other boys to be brought together to play polo, stating that he would recognize his own son when he saw him.

Here, Ardashir looks admiringly at his son, who is about to run faster than the other boys to hit the polo ball, even though it came close to the king. The boy holding the polo ball, the only one not wearing a crown, is the groom whom Ardashir asked to send the ball in his direction to see how the boys would react. On the basis of dress, the boy in the golden robe and crown is the most likely candidate to be identified as Shapur. Interestingly, the boys are not playing polo on horseback, but play a game akin to hockey. The figure with the moustache next to the king is presumably his minister, while the other figures are servants or attendants. As in many of Mu'in's illustrations, the composition consists of two parts, the king and horsemen on the right and the boys on the left.