

40. *Bahram Gur Kills the Lions to Gain the Throne*, fol. 258b. The David Collection (fig. 39)

Bahram, the son of Shah Yazdegird, was sent to live in Arabia as a small child. As he grew, he gained a reputation as an excellent hunter with an eye for the ladies. When he learned of his father's death, he returned to Iran with an army, but the Iranians refused to accept him as their king until he had proved himself. They challenged him to take the throne from two lions that were chained to it. As Bahram approached the throne, ox-headed mace in his hand, one of the lions burst its chains and charged at him. He smashed the mace onto its head and felled it, then turned to the other one and also did it in. After that he sat on the throne as the new shah of Iran.

Here Bahram polishes off the second lion, while soldiers and either an archmage or his companion, Khusrau, look on in amazement. The golden throne with the crown on the seat dominates the upper half of the composition. Painted in two tones of gold, the throne is decorated with trees and bushes of the type found in the murals in many of the illustrations in this manuscript. Several other mid-17th century *Shahnamehs* contain illustrations of this scene with the action taking place inside a palace or with a smaller throne, but the lions, throne, and ox-headed mace are all iconographically necessary and are found in all images of this very popular scene.

41. *Anushirwan Enthroned with Buzurgmihr, Before the Introduction of Chess*, fol. 295b. The David Collection (fig. 40)

Anushirwan received an embassy from India that brought many opulent gifts, including a chessboard and chessmen. The ambassador said that if Anushirwan could figure out how the game was played, the Indians would pay tribute to Iran, but if he failed, then the Iranians would have to pay tribute to India. Anushirwan handed the game to his sage advisor, Buzurgmihr, who spent a day and a night puzzling over the game until he discovered how to play it.

This illustration appears to depict the moment when Buzurgmihr, in the company of the archmages, explains the game of chess to Anushirwan. Presum-

ably the figure kneeling in the foreground and wearing a green-and-gold robe is Buzurgmihr, who has the tools of a scribe lying beside him. In Anushirwan's hand is a blue sheet, most likely a letter to the Indian king. This setting of Anushirwan's palace is more complex than in other illustrations of interiors in this manuscript. Moreover, the faces of the archmages are more individualized than elsewhere. As mentioned above, one wonders if Mu'in did not include veiled portraits of the patron and his associates here. Without more historical information about Abu'l Mahdi Husain, one cannot extrapolate a further significance of this particular moment in the text in relation to the patron, but the inclusion of a scene concerned with the efficaciousness of a royal advisor may have referred in a flattering way to the patron. As the penultimate illustration in the manuscript coming from the story of one of the last major kings of pre-Islamic Iran, this painting may have functioned similarly to a finispiece, which could have implied contemporary relevance as well as narrative veracity.

42. *The Battle of Sa'ad-i Vaqqas and Rustam-i Hurmuzd*, fol. 350a.

The David Collection (fig. 41)

The last chapter of the *Shahnameh* recounts the reign of Yazdegird, who was ultimately defeated by the Muslim Arabs. This illustration depicts Sa'ad, the son of Vaqqas, who was sent by the caliph 'Umar to attack the Iranians. Yazdegird appointed Rustam, the son of Hurmuzd, to lead the army against the Arabs. After waiting in vain for an auspicious day to start the battle, Rustam and his forces took on the Arabs. For three days they fought in the desert. Rustam and Sa'ad battled on a mountainside, both eventually on foot. At first, Rustam had the upper hand, but when a cloud of dust obscured his vision, Sa'ad attacked him with his sword, slaying him with a mighty blow of the sword to his head.

In this painting, Sa'ad is at the end of a line of Arabs on camelback, wearing a green-and-gold robe and slashing the head of Rustam on the left. Despite incorporating many elements used throughout the

manuscript, such as the groom at the left with his trademark hat, Mu'in has adhered closely to the description of the battle in Firdausi's text. Perhaps faithfulness to the narrative was necessary in order to avoid seeming ambivalent or too pro-Iranian on the subject of the victory of the Muslim Arabs over the Zoroastrian Iranians.

Conclusion

With its wealth of names and dates, the David Collection *Shahnameh* still has secrets to divulge. A glance at the two appendices to this article enables one to see how illustrations have been placed erroneously in the rebound manuscript. The second appendix shows where the catchwords on the verso do not match up with the first word on the following recto. Even after having identified fifteen dispersed pages, one cannot be sure that other folios were not also removed from the manuscript. Despite these outstanding questions, the information that is found in this manuscript contributes to our understanding of the teamwork involved in producing such a book. The calligrapher Muhammad Salih ibn Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad al-Kirmani most likely decided on the novel format of the manuscript with the marginal band of text running around three sides of each page. The illuminator, Mulla Mu'min Shirazi, would have produced the illuminated *'unwans* that open the manuscript, and the later chapter on Luhrasp and would have embellished the text with gold and decorated rubrics. Following the calligrapher and illuminator, Mu'in Musavvir would have produced the illustrations. The maker of the now-lost binding would have completed the job by

arranging the text paper in quires, sewing them together, and encasing them in a binding.

Does this manuscript mark a major step in Mu'in's career? The internal evidence suggests that Mu'in came into his own as a manuscript illustrator of high status with this *Shahnameh*. Instead of working as part of a team of painters, as in the British Library *Shahnameh* of c. 1630-1640, Mu'in executed and signed every miniature in the David Collection manuscript. After this manuscript he embarked on an even more ambitious project, the two-volume *Shahnameh* of 1655, now shared between the Chester Beatty Library and the Aga Khan.⁵² His painting style did not change markedly from around 1640 until 1655. Yet clearly he found patrons who favored his work and preferred his style to that of his contemporaries working at the Safavid court, such as the artists of the Windsor Castle *Shahnameh*. At this stage of our knowledge, the presence of the names of the patron, scribe, and illuminator and Mu'in's signature on every illustration appears to indicate a level of control that he had not enjoyed before, when he was part of a team of artists illustrating a manuscript. Even if Mu'in used a very limited palette and range of figures, his choice of episode and his customary faithfulness to the text, with a few lapses, provide interest and originality. Despite its missing pages, the David Collection *Shahnameh* in its present state proclaims the pride of authorship and ownership embodied within it. The manuscript demonstrates that Isfahan, the capital, was not the only source of artistic excellence and innovation, and that at least one citizen of Yazd had the wealth and influence to attract leading artists of the book to produce a first-rate illustrated *Shahnameh*.