

NEW ACCESSIONS OF ISLAMIC ART

By MAURICE S. DIMAND

Curator of Near Eastern Art

During the past year the Museum's collection of Islamic art has been greatly enriched by several important purchases, gifts, and bequests. The bequest of twenty ceramics and two Persian rugs by Horace Havemeyer has already been discussed in a separate *Bulletin* article (May 1957). One of the most notable additions was the Cora Timken Burnett Bequest of Persian miniatures and other art objects, which included many important Arabic and Persian paintings of the thirteenth to the seventeenth century.

The earliest miniature painting in the Burnett Bequest comes from the famous manuscript of *Materia Medica*, an Arab version of the Greek work by Dioscorides, copied and probably painted by Abdallah ibn al-Fadl in the month of Rajab 620 A. H. (July-August 1224). The miniatures from this manuscript, now in various collections in Europe and America, are of the Baghdad school. They illustrate the preparation of medicine, medical consultations, and operations. The Burnett miniature represents a thirteenth-century Baghdad pharmacy, with its storage jars and druggists preparing medicine from honey. The style of painting, based on Syrian and Iranian traditions, shows a keen observation of daily life. The story is told in a simple way and the composition is limited to essentials. The figures and building are treated in a purely decorative manner, which is further enhanced by the use of a few vigorous colors, such as red, blue, green, yellow, and purple, with the addition of gold.

Six miniatures in the Burnett Bequest belong to the Mongol school of Persian painting. The earliest of these, showing a pair of bullocks, comes from a copy of *Manafi al-Hayawan*, or "Description of Animals," by Abu Said ibn Baktishu. The characteristic feature is the Chinese influence introduced into Iran by the Mongol conquerors. The best-known and earliest copy of *Manafi al-Hayawan* is in the Morgan Library. It was copied in Maragha at the order

of the Ilkhan ruler Ghazan Khan in 1297 or 1299. Many of the miniatures in both manuscripts are painted in an impressionistic manner with little color, suggesting the monochrome Chinese ink paintings of the Sung and Yüan dynasties. The naturalistic landscape, with lotus plants and Chinese clouds, and the subdued colors are typical of the Mongol style.

Another important Mongol example is a leaf with miniature paintings on each side, belonging to a manuscript of *Munis al-Ahrar*, an anthology of Persian poetry by Muhammad ibn al-Jajarmi, who was also the scribe. It is dated Ramadan 741 A. H. (February 1341). This leaf, one of six from the above manuscript, is decorated on both sides with three bands on a red ground containing representations of constellations and signs of the zodiac. The small miniatures show the characteristic style of the Mongol school, which is also known to us from the fine illustrations of a *Shah-nama* ("Book of Kings") in the Monroe Gutman collection in New York, fourteen of which are presently on loan at the Museum.

Contemporary with the Mongol school of painting in Iran was the Mamluk school, to which belongs a miniature representing a mechanical device, or automaton, placed on top of an elephant. It comes from a well-known manuscript of al-Jazari's treatise on *Automata*, copied in the month of Ramadan 715 A. H. (October 1315). Five other paintings from the same manuscript, acquired in 1955 from the Kevorkian collection, are now in our Museum. The Mamluk rulers of Egypt and Syria were particularly fond of al-Jazari's work. In the library of Santa Sophia in Istanbul there is a manuscript of the *Automata* copied in Cairo in 1354 for an amir of the Mamluk sultan Salah ad-Din Salih. The miniatures of these Mamluk manuscripts are painted in bright colors and a bold style based on traditions of the Mesopotamian school of painting.

Ten of the miniature paintings in the Burnett Bequest belong to the Timurid school of the

fifteenth century. The artists working for the Timurids were responsible for the development of a true national style of Persian painting. Shah Rukh (1404-1447) and his son Baisunkur Mirza were great patrons of the arts of the book. One of the earliest Timurid paintings in the Burnett collection represents a pair of lovers in a garden, probably Humay and Humayun. It is unusually large, measuring $19 \frac{1}{4}$ by $12 \frac{9}{16}$ inches, and comes from the same manuscript of Rashid ad-Din's *Jami at-Tawarikh*, or "Universal History," as the Jonah and the Whale in the Metropolitan Museum. This work of the famous Mongol historian and vizier of emperors Ghazan and Uljaitu remained popular under the Timurids.

Several Timurid miniatures in the Burnett Bequest came from another copy of the *Jami at-Tawarikh* which can also be dated in the period of Shah Rukh. Here, as in the miniature representing the pilgrimage of Adam, the Timurid style is fully developed. Of particular interest is the treatment of the landscape with spongy mountains that appears in so many Timurid paintings of the fifteenth century.

Another Timurid miniature in this collection is a rare painting on silk. Only very few Persian silk paintings are in existence. One is in the Boston Museum and another one was formerly in the collection of Countess de Béhague in Paris. The Burnett painting represents a garden scene with two lovers. The subject is characteristic of the romantic spirit prevailing in the Herat school of Shah Rukh and Baisunkur. The idea of painting on silk was derived from China. Persian artists were familiar with Chinese paintings as there were many of them in the Herat library.

From John M. Schiff the Museum acquired, partly as a gift from The Schiff Foundation and partly as a purchase from the Rogers Fund, the Mortimer L. Schiff collection of Persian pottery with painted polychrome overglaze decoration, which includes six outstanding examples that will be on exhibition shortly. This well-known group of thirteenth-century pottery has been shown in many exhibitions of Persian art here and abroad. It contains several masterpieces of the so-called Minai ware, made in the kilns of Kashan. One of the famous potters of Kashan, Abu'l Kasim Abd Allah, wrote in 1301 a treatise

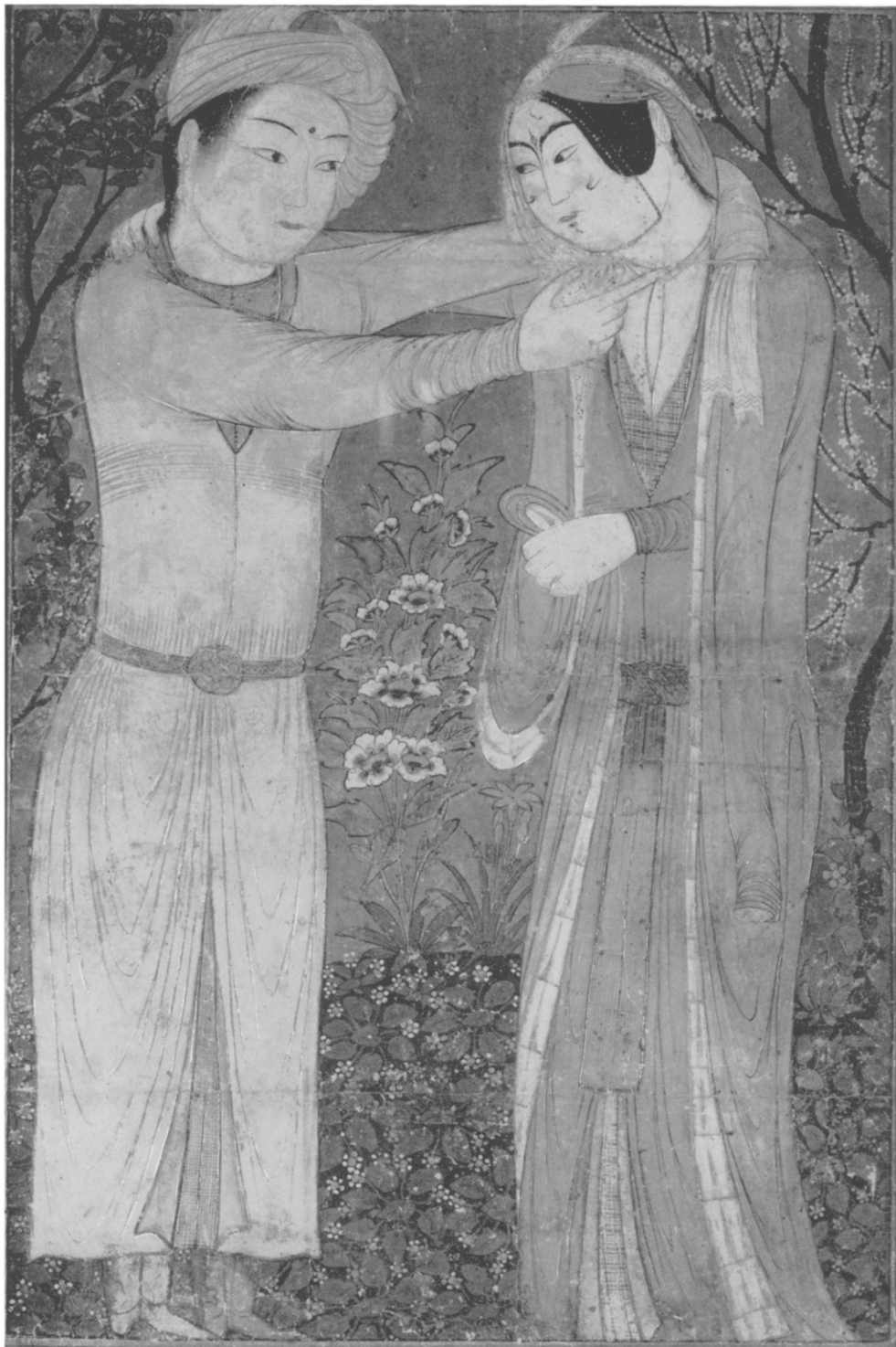
on Persian faïence technique. He mentions two types of overglaze technique: one uses decoration in gold leaf and white, red, black, and yellow paint; the other, using seven colors, is the true "Minai" technique, closely related to miniature painting. Pottery of this type was fired twice, first after glazing and a second time after being painted, when it was placed in earthenware containers and fired for half a day. The decoration of this fine Saljuk pottery consists mostly of figure subjects, such as horsemen, seated and standing figures of courtiers and princes, hunting scenes, and sphinxes.

Three of the outstanding bowls in the Schiff collection are decorated with the story of Bahram Gur and his lute-player Azadah. This popular theme of Persian art is narrated in the epic poem the *Shah-nama* by Firdausi. In two of our bowls two consecutive episodes of the story are represented simultaneously. Bahram Gur is shown transfixing with a single arrow the hind hoof and ear of a deer, and the same scene includes the death of Azadah, who, after making a mockery of Bahram Gur's skill, was thrown from the saddle and trampled to death. These three bowls in the Schiff collection are masterpieces of thirteenth-century Persian miniaturists and are related to contemporary paintings in manuscripts of the Baghdad school.

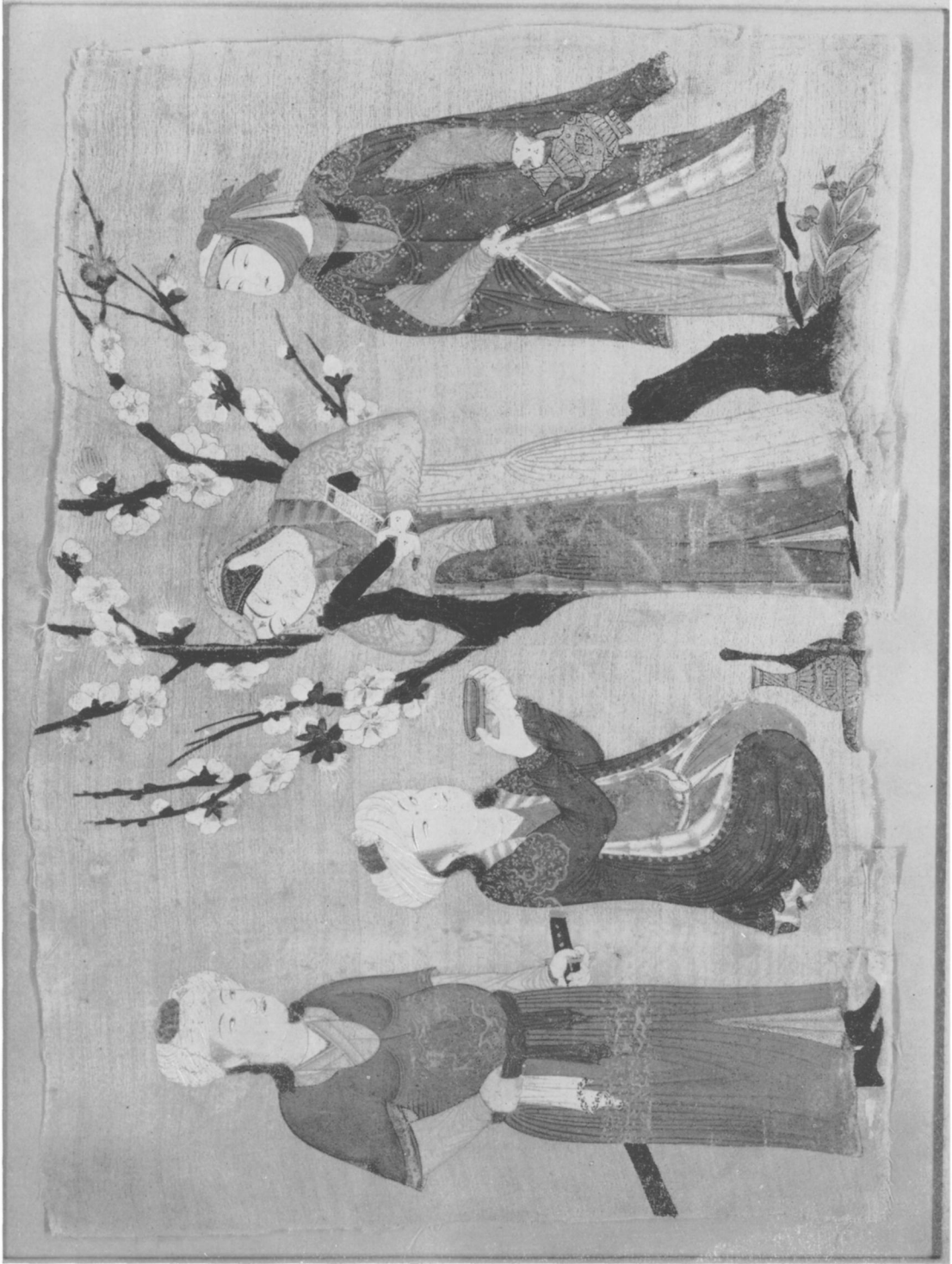
Through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. A. Wallace Chauncey the Museum received as a gift fifteen Persian and Mesopotamian ceramics and two Syrian enameled glass beakers, from the Henry G. Leberthon collection. There are three outstanding examples of twelfth-century lusterware from Rakka with elaborate arabesque designs and decorative writing. Another important piece is a thirteenth-century albarello with painted decoration in white and gold on a cobalt blue background. The albarello shape, which originated in the East, was adopted later by Italian potters. Several examples of later Persian ware of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries belong to the so-called Kubatcha group, with decoration consisting of plants and figures in monochrome or polychrome. This ware, although found in Kubatcha in the Caucasus, should be regarded as Persian and was probably made in the region of Tabriz.



LEFT: A pair of bullocks, from *Manafi al-Hayawan, or Description of Animals*. Persian (Mongol school), about 1300. RIGHT: *Personifications of the moon and signs of the zodiac*, from *Munis al-Ahwar, an anthology of poetry*. Persian (Mongol school), 1341. Both Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956



Prince Humay and the Chinese princess Humayun, from a manuscript of Jami at-Tawarikh, or Universal History. Persian (Timurid school), about 1410. Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956



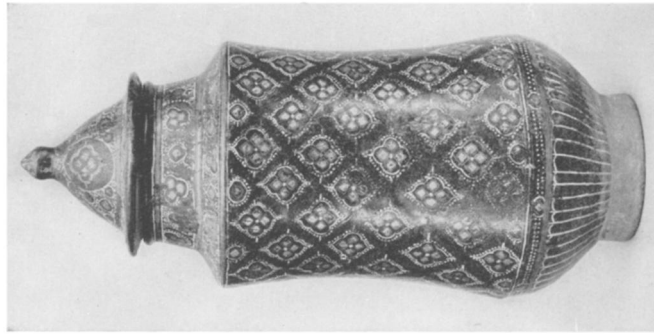
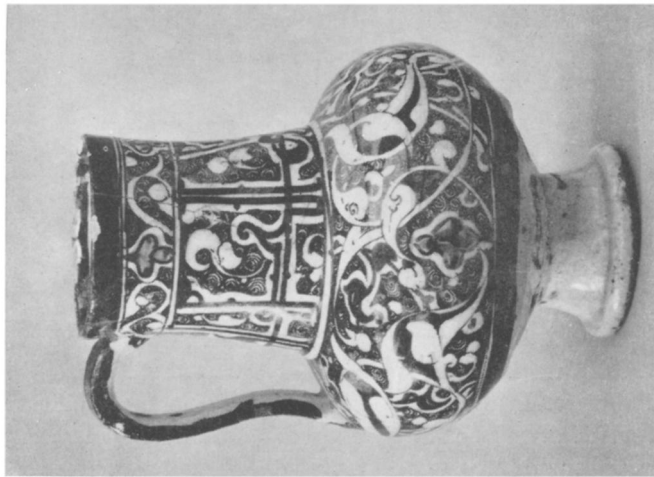
Garden scene with lovers and servants. Painting on silk. Persian (Timurid school), early xv century. Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956



Bowl with the story of Bahram Gur and his lute-player Azadah. Persian (Kashan), about 1200. Ultra-violet and x-ray photographs of the bowl are shown on page 239. Rogers Fund and Gift of The Schiff Foundation, 1957



Bowls with scenes from the story of Bahram Gur and Azadab. Persian (Kashan), early XIII century. Rogers Fund and Gift of The Schiff Foundation, 1957



LEFT: Jug with lustered decoration, Mesopotamian (Rakka), xii or xiii century. Height, 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. CENTER: Albarello with painted overglaze decoration in white and gold on a blue ground. Persian (probably Kashan), first half of the xiii century. Height, 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. RIGHT: Dish with floral decoration in colors. Persian (so-called Kubatcha), end of the xvi century. Diameter, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. All Gift of Mr. and Mrs. A. Wallace Chauncey, 1956