Sura 68 of the Koran begins with the phrase, "Nūn wa'l-qalam wa māyasturīn . . ." (Nūn. By the pen and by what they inscribe . . .). This enigmatic sentence, in which the angels seem to dip their pen in the inkwell of the nūn, as well as later interpretations (tafsīr) and traditions (hadith), greatly contributed to the kind of divine homage given to Islamic calligraphers. Painters did not benefit from such grace, however, as we know from later religious texts like the hadith, in which opposition to painting was even more open. It is amazing, therefore, to see the efforts Persian painters (and poets!) made to link these two forms of expression. The efforts are particularly exemplified in the arts of the book that were so magnificently practiced in Iran during the period termed "classical."

These attempts to link calligraphy and painting have a long history, and their evolution—in illuminated manuscripts as well as in literary production—can be followed through various stages. The Iranian world has a well-established tradition of images that goes back to antiquity; an example of the coexistence of text and image in this area can be traced as far back as Achaemenian times, with the inscription of Darius the Great in Bisutun (sixth century B.C.). The structural relation between text and image became increasingly intricate in illustrated manuscripts, at least from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards. These links can be observed, among other things, through the composition and layout of the paintings, which were achieved with the help of calligraphic ruling (the mastār). These relations seem to be expressed in some Persian poetical texts. It would be interesting to know if this relationship between calligraphy and painting found during the classical period of Persian painting had some theoretical basis, and, if it did, whether we have any chance of discovering what it was. Two "theories"—one, the so-called theory of the two qalams and the other known as the "seven principles of painting"—can throw some light on the subject. Although probably drawing on an earlier literary tradition, both of these theories appeared in Safavid Iran, and both represented an attempt to link painting to calligraphy in order to give the former some sort of legitimacy in Islamic art.

Some introductory remarks on the Persian literature on art are first necessary to provide a general framework in which these theories appeared and a glimpse of the place the artist occupied in that literature. Although some of these texts have been translated into Western languages, others have not and therefore remain out of the reach of the majority of scholars. One of the first Persian texts to be translated was Qadi Ahmad's Gulistān-i hunar. This biographical account of calligraphers and painters was written between 1596 and 1606 and can be considered fundamental to the history of the arts of Safavid times. As the great Iranian scholar M. T. Danish-Pazhuh has shown, however, some parts of Qadi Ahmad's text were in fact taken from the works of 'Abdi Beg Shirazi. Among these borrowings, one passage in particular led specialists to what has been called the "theory of the two qalams." This theory will therefore be analyzed in the light of 'Abdi Beg Shirazi's original poem, the Ayin-i Iskandari (The Rules of Alexander, ca. 1543), which has never been translated, and the works of his followers. The study of such a theory—even if the term is certainly exaggerated—can throw some light on the relations which existed between calligraphy and painting. From the formal relation between text and image, we can then move on to a more intellectual correspondence between form and meaning, with the help of Sadiq Beg Afshar's Qānūn al-suvar (Canon of
Some technical aspects will also be discussed through the study of the Haft asl-i naqqâshi, or "seven principles of painting," and related terminology. These seven principles appear in a number of texts on the arts, such as Sadiqi's Canon, Qutb al-Din Qissakhwan's preface to a lost album, and Qadi Ahmad's Gulistân-i hunar. We will conclude with the relevance of these theories to the poetic and rhetorical genre and how they fit into the total Persian aesthetic system. The historical circumstances which made the formulation of these theories possible will also be considered. Finally we will show that 'Abdi Beg's poems are not be taken as recipe books: they do not explain the practical aspects of painting, nor do they consider the personality and free will of the painter.

THEORIES ON THE ARTS AND PERSIAN KUNSTLITERATUR

Literature on the arts and aesthetics—both the theory and practice of the arts and the rules of the various aesthetic movements that have taken place from antiquity to modern times—were always important in Europe, but Persian literature has never offered much on these subjects. One would expect to find some rules defining what is beautiful and harmonious, or at least some criteria by which a finished work of art may be judged. These might include the correct proportions, not only of the human body—which is certainly not a main concern in Islamic art—but also, let us say, of the page of a manuscript or the façade of a building. Was there something like the Western "Golden Section" (φ) that could have been known and used by Iranian artists and applied to any medium of art, including architecture and painting? The use of a form, of course, does not guarantee knowledge of the mathematical laws that lie behind it.

Was the Persian painter free to paint whatever he chose? In addition to choosing the illustrative program for an epic—a decision probably made by the head of the library (often the master calligrapher) in consultation with the patron—innumerable decisions were made by the artist that ultimately gave the painting its visual form and aspect. But what constraints were placed on the painter? Were they recorded anywhere?

That the Muslim artist does not have a Promethean dimension does not need to be proved here. However, Persian sources, poetic as well as biographical, often compare the painter to the Creator (comparable to the European Deus pictor); they refer to his creations in superlatives and rarely disparage him. In the absence of a divine origin of painting, Safavid authors seem to have adopted a mythology of the Persian painter that begins with Adam, continues with Mani, and includes even 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Such is the case with Dust Muhammad in his preface to Bahram Mirza's album (1544–45). Other authors such as 'Abdi Beg Shirazi and his followers, Qutb al-Din Qissakhvan (preface to a lost album perhaps dedicated to Shah Tasmâp dated 1556–57), and Qadi Ahmad in the Gulistân-i hunar (written between 1596 and 1606) also used mythological characters. This mythology was not entirely new; it had appeared in Persian literature since at least the time of Nizâmi.

An interesting exception in this apologetic literature is the work of Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat, who appears to be almost the only author to write anything on harmony—or rather its absence—in painting. Of Qasim 'Ali, for instance, he writes, "asl-i tarh-i ü bi-andântar ast" (the composition of his drawings is more unharmonious [than those of Bihzad]). Mirza Haydar also makes the interesting point that "any expert connoisseur can recognize" lack of harmony, implying that connoisseurs understood what constitutes harmony. This concept of harmony remains undefined, however: does it concern only proportions and measurements, or are there other visual components to be considered, such as color and rhythm. Does tacit understanding answer any written rule? Indeed, the only field in the Islamic visual arts in which theoretical or normative literature seems to exist is calligraphy. Thus we have, on the one hand, calligraphy, the Islamic art par excellence, of divine origin, and, on the other hand, painting, which existed well before Islam, but for which no written rules or religious patronage existed. Therefore, in a period—the first half of the sixteenth century—during which painting, and especially book illustration, has reached a real climax, it is not surprising to find the poet trying to discover a link between calligraphy and painting.

THE "THEORY OF THE TWO QALAMS"

One of the most significant texts used in the artistic literature of Safavid times is 'Abdi Beg Shirazi's Ayin-i Ishandari (The Rules of Alexander, ca. 1543). The chapter on the "Excellence of Art" is a morceau de bravoure in artistic literature, since it describes the
peaks of glory achieved during the reign of Shah Tahmasp. The author even states (at least in one of its copies) that the shah himself was an excellent painter, and we have some examples of his work in Bahram Mirza’s album. Among the works of ‘Abdi Beg, descriptions of paintings are important; they can well be compared to the Greek ekphrasis as practiced by Philostratos in his Eikones.

The chapter on the “Excellence of Art” was quoted by later Safavid authors, such as Qutb al-Din Qissakhvan and Qadi Ahmad, in his Gulistān-i hunar, although its author’s name is not mentioned. The quotation by Qadi Ahmad is not complete, and several verses from ‘Abdi Beg’s chapter are scattered in other sections of the Gulistān-i hunar. The main part appears in the introduction to the first section:

O key of talent, for which Reason has become a banner! What is this key [of art]? The tip of the qalam.
The qalam is an artist and a painter
God created two kinds of qalam:
The one, ravishing the soul, is from a plant
And has become the sugar cane for the scribe;
The other kind of qalam is from the animal,
And it has acquired its scattering of pearls from the fountain of life.
O painter of pictures that would have enticed Manil! Thanks to you, the days of talent have been adorned.

This is the passage that led to the invention of the "theory of the two qalams." The "key to art" would be the tip of the qalam. According to Adle, the critical dot could give the unity of a modular construction that would link the act of painting to that of calligraphy. However, one must keep in mind that ‘Abdi Beg’s poem cannot be considered normative, no more, at least, than Nizami’s Khusrāw and Shīrān. I do not think that ‘Abdi Beg Shirazi’s poems can be compared with theoretical treatises such as Alberti’s and even less with artist handbooks such as Cennini’s. The goal of ‘Abdi Beg was to enhance the glory of his patron through the description of the shah’s artistic achievements for a learned audience; it was not intended to be used by artists as a canonical mode d’emploi. ‘Abdi Beg’s poem only strengthens the link between calligraphy and painting, and beyond this link, it stresses the ideographic character of painting, as other poets, such as Nizami and Khwandamir, had done before.

Nevertheless, it seems quite obvious that there was a new development in the modular construction of the page. From at least the end of the fourteenth century, when nasta’līq was invented, the relationship between calligraphy and painting was given an emphasis hitherto almost unknown. Nasta’līq, more than naskh, requires ruling (mastar) on the page. Amazingly, when looking at the pages of the Divān of Khwaju Kirmani, probably copied by Mir ‘Ali Tabrizi in 1396 (British Library, ms. Add. 18.113), the composition of the illustrations closely follows the lines of the mastar; this mastar includes not only the horizontal lines for calligraphy, but also vertical lines for the columns of a poem, and perhaps also some oblique ones.

Still earlier, some pages from the so-called Demotte Shāhnāma (ca. 1330) display apparently unprecedented compositions based on the mastar. Among these pages, the ones depicting the coronation and the bier of Iskandar are certainly worth noting. These paintings closely follow the horizontal and vertical lines of the mastar; moreover, the rectangle in which the coronation set is an example of the use of the Golden Section. Again, is it really surprising when Dust Muhammad says of the not-so-far-off epoch of Ustad Ahmad Musa that the latter “invented the kind of painting which is current at the present time”? Could this mean that it was not merely the style of painting that could be called “classical”, but also the whole notion of the composition of the manuscript that appeared at this time?

The modular composition of the page that includes both calligraphy and painting lends unity to both the page and the manuscript. The repetition of a form or a measure is used as a kind of discourse. As al-Farabi wrote, “The sides of the square and the segment of a circle serve as the measuring instrument in architecture . . . and are analogous to the syllogism in logic, the strophe in poetry.” From this unity arises the notion of harmony and, more precisely, “the harmony of the parts and of the whole,” one of the basic principles of aesthetics. Unfortunately, this assessment—especially applied to painting and bookmaking—is not clearly expressed in any Persian text. It seems more a consideration a posteriori, although, according to Golombok and Wilber, “this theme may be what Ibn Rushd had in mind when he said that in every work of art is an idea which predetermines the measurements and form of all of the parts.”

In Persian manuscripts, the text is almost always placed inside (or around) the illustration, a practice that often distinguishes Persian “classical” painting from most of the late Safavid, as well as Indian and
Ottoman, works in which a page can be absolutely devoid of text.\textsuperscript{2} This suggests that the visual language adopted by the Persians was closely linked to their cultural background.

Another interesting point is how the painters sign their names. The most frequent formula, if one is used, is 'amala (done by), though others, such as raqama (the cipher), also appear, mainly at a later date; even kataba (written by) was used much earlier by painters like Abu Zayd on mınā'ı or luster ceramics.\textsuperscript{30} These formulas are the same as the ones used by calligraphers; they show again the close link between calligraphy and painting.

Finally, we should emphasize that the close relation between calligraphy and painting also reflects collective work achieved in the royal workshop (kitābkāna). The upkeep of a kitābkāna was an expression of power in the Persian courts, at least after the Ilkhanid period, if not before. The collaboration of a working team was certainly not a matter of choice; the very few documents that are known to us on the organization of the workshops leave little doubt that no independent initiative was allowed.\textsuperscript{31} It was probably the head calligrapher who decided the illustrative program of an epic, with the approval of the patron, in order to leave room for the illustrations. In a few cases, painters such as Bihzad also included calligraphies of their own in the illustrations.

It is certainly possible to find further examples of the relation between calligraphy and images (that is, painting and drawing), such as the animated style of calligraphy found in metalwork from the twelfth and thirteenth century, or the comparison of letters of the alphabet with figures. It is not uncommon to find such comparisons in calligraphic treatises, such as Sayrafi Sha'ir's Cultzār-i safā, in which all the letters are compared to some form, as for instance: "The mūn is a basin, and its dot is a fountain."\textsuperscript{32} We could also add that the nasta'lig style made its appearance at the same time as the Hurufi sect, which attributed to letters some hidden and Gnostic meanings.\textsuperscript{33}

**SADIQI'S QĀNŪN: MEANING VERSUS FORM**

To the present day, the only known Persian technical treatise devoted entirely to painting and in any way comparable to Cennini's handbook is Sadiqi Beg Afshar's Qānūn al-suwar (1597). Its title, "The Canon of Forms," seems to have been inspired by Avicenna's Qānūn fi al-tibb, and therefore sounds very promising. Compared with some of the major European treatises, however, one must admit disappointment. Its contents are as follows: introduction (1–35);\textsuperscript{34} on the composition of the treatise (36–51); advice to pupils (52–60); characteristics of painting and tying the brush (61–71); how to hold the brush (72–74); [on decorative painting] (75–85); on the mixing of colors (86–87); on the shustamān\textsuperscript{35} (88–95); gold and silver solutions (96–109); on the art of portraiture (110–12); on drawing animals (113–26); on oil colors (127–35); on jasmi (opaque) colors (136–44); on silver coating (145–49); on making colors (150–68); on white lead and lead oxide (164–77); on verdigris (178–81); on cinnabar (182–85); on ruby red (186–91); [on raughan-i kamān] (192–205). Although the order of the contents appears somewhat confused, the subjects discussed fall into four categories: theory and advice (1–60), on tying the brush and holding it (61–74), sorts of painting and drawing (75–85; 110–26); and color-making for both watercolor and oils, including varnish (86–109; 127–205).

The question that arises from reading Sadiqi's Canon is, what is really canonical about it? At the very beginning, Sadiqi tells us his goal: "Let me be the one who looks for meaning on the face of painting" (shawam ma'nī-halab az rūy-i šurat [12b]). Later on, he adds, "I have searched for so long in the path of form / That I've changed my way from the form to the meaning" (52).\textsuperscript{36} When Sadiqi speaks of the art of his master, he says, "He could see beyond the rules of sight . . . / with a single hair he painted both worlds" (21b–22b). On the subject of portraiture, he declares: "No one will ever be free from error, / Not even Mani or Bihzad" (111). Of animal painting, he writes, "You have to be far from the likeness of the animals" (121); and he goes on, "Repetition, even if it seems magical, would be monotonous [compared] with nature" (125). These statements show that the task of the painter is not to copy nature but to go beyond it to reach the world of ideas. This is also the reason why the proportions of the human body are not to be taken into consideration by the painter.

At almost the same time in Mughal India, Abu 'l-Fazl wrote these words about painting:

> What we call form (suwar) leads us to recognize a body; the body itself leads us to what we call a notion, an idea (ma'nī). Thus on seeing the form of a letter, we recognize the letter, and this again will lead us to some idea. It is similar in the case of what people term a picture.\textsuperscript{37}
What is expressed in these lines is not far from the definition of art given by Ibn Rushd in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, “Art is nothing but the form of the thing produced by art, and this form resides in the soul of the artist; it is this idea which is the principle for the form produced by art in the matter.”

This notion was present in Persian literature well before Safavid times, as, for instance, in Nizami’s description of the skill of Shapur, the painter of *Khusrav and Shirin*, when the poet wrote, “The image came out of his imagination without the help of the brush.” This means, of course, that according to Nizami the image exists even before it is drawn on the paper.

The duality between *sārat* (form) and *ma’nī* (meaning) can be related to the Sufi notion of *zāhīr*, “the exterior” and *bātīn*, “the interior,” as well as to the Zoroastrian complementary opposition between *mēnōk* and *gētīk*. Every creature has a double nature: *gētīk*, the terrestrial, opaque, heavy one, and *mēnōk*, the ethereal, transparent, subtle one. We could thus have a survival of a Mazdean notion in Islamic Iran. This would explain why Sadiqi’s master can “see beyond the rules of sight,” and also why the Persian painters do not try to reproduce nature and do not show shadows, but a bright, pure, luminous world, beyond the reach of terrestrial sight. This would also explain why the human body is painted flat, almost transparent, without the forms of muscles, while *dīvūs* are shown with heavy bodies, with muscles, hair, and genitalia.

Finally, this apparent antinomy between form and meaning could also well be expressed in the theory of the two *qalams*: painting, like calligraphy, carries a meaning, an idea, an ideogram in the same way that Persian painting does not try to reproduce a model from nature but to present an archetype; the logo-

gram representing the Achaemenian king in royal inscriptions was usually not his proper name but his title, which was sufficient for his identification. As Alberto Manguel writes, “This notion, that we are capable of reading before we can actually read, . . . harks back to Platonic ideas of knowledge existing within us before the thing is perceived.”

Of course, it would be interesting to show what the relations, if any, are between the Old Iranian and Zoroastrian notions of the duality of beings and their ideographic representation and the Platonic idea. If these relations seem at the moment somewhat difficult to prove, at least we can assume that the Iranian world in the classical Islamic period was receptive to Hellenistic philosophy.

**THE “SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PAINTING” AND THE TERMINOLOGY OF BOOKMAKING**

The subordination of painting to calligraphy needs to be carried no further. However, parallel to the theory of the two *qalams*, the “seven principles of painting” also developed in Safavid times. The earliest reference to these “seven principles” seems to have been made by Qutb al-Din Qissakhvan in 1557: “As in calligraphy, which has six styles, in this technique [i.e., painting] seven “styles” are to be found: *islāmī, khatāʾī, farangi, fassālī, abr, dāq, gīrīh.* Once again, we have what appears to be a similesque reference to the six styles of classic Arabic calligraphy. In 1559, in his *Rauzat al-sifāt*, ‘Abdi Beg referred to “seven principles of painting” without naming them:

Naqsh bi haft asl dar ā fašl u vašl / hamchū siphrīst dar ā hafst asl!

*Raunaqi islāmi-i islāmiyān / kardā khatāhā-ī farangi / 'ayyān.*

Painting has seven principles; it is like the sky, which has seven spheres,

The Islamic brightness of the Muslims / has made manifest the faults of the Franks.

The lines contain an untranslatable pun: *islāmī* means both “Islamic,” and “arabesque”; *khatā* can mean both “a fault,” and “China”; and *farangi* is the word for the Franks, but could perhaps also mean one of the seven principles.

We know that Qutb al-Din borrowed some lines from ‘Abdi Beg’s *Ayyān-i Iskandār*, so the seven principles could have been ‘Abdi Beg’s invention as well. The list given by Sadiqi is slightly different: *islāmī, khatāʾī, abr, vāq, nilūfar, farangi, band-i rūmī.* Qadi Ahmad gives almost the same list as Qutb al-Din—*islāmī, khatāʾī, farangi, fassālī, abr, vāq, girīh*—which he quotes without mentioning him. The first reference to *islāmī* in the written sources is probably in the *Arzdāšt* of ca. 1427-28, in connection with bookbinding. Dust Muhammad attributes its invention to ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, who was also the inventor of painting and illumination. However, the identification of *islāmī* with an “Islamic” design invented by ‘Ali b. Abi Talib and *khatāʾī* with “faulty” or “Chinese” needs to be treated with caution. The poet Umidi (d. 1519 or 1523) composed this satirical verse after the battle of Chaldiran.
between Selim the Grim and Shah Isma’il in 1514:

Qasă’ dar kărğāh-i kibřā’t / fikanda tārīb-i islīmī kḥatā’ī.\(^{53}\)

We know that the victory went to Selim and that the pen name of Shah Isma’il was kḥatā’ī. This verse could thus be translated, “Destiny in the divine workshop / has thrown the design of islīmī/Selim on kḥatā’ī/Shah Isma’il.”

Without entering into yet another discussion of the terminology and variations of these seven principles, certain points need to be made.\(^{54}\) First, these seven principles of painting only concern decorative painting and not animate figures.\(^{55}\) Although their date of appearance is still uncertain, it is late, so they do not seem very important to the whole body of painting production. Furthermore, imitating the six styles of calligraphy was limited to non-figurative painting, which seems somewhat absurd in the framework of an attempt to “Islamize” painting.

Second, it is not clear whether these principles deal only with painting *stricto sensu* or whether other operations involved in the making of books could be included. The two operations that come to mind would be *abri* and *fassali*, if we understand them to mean respectively “marbled paper” and “the setting of margins.” The question would then be, why mention these two techniques and not others such as *zar-afshan* (gold flecking) and the *’aks* (stencil) that are also commonly used for setting margins?

No references to mural painting are made in Sadiqi’s *Qānūn*. All the operations described by the author seem to deal with book painting and bookmaking. However, the term *gīrā-bandī* is used in connection with the tile decoration of the Bām-i Bihisht madrasa in Mandu, built in 1442;\(^{56}\) later on, *rūmī, abrī,* and *kḥatā’ī* appear in documents dated 1591 and 1592 concerning Iznik tiles;\(^{57}\) and *band-i farangi* and *gīrīh-i rūmī* are mentioned by Muhammad Salih in his description of the royal hammam in Shahjahanabad,\(^{58}\) suggesting that the seven principles of painting were not limited to bookmaking.

In Anand Ram Mukhlis’s *Mīr’at al-’īṣṭilāh*, the definition of *islīmī-kḥatā’ī* (used as a doublet) is “the lines traced around paintings that people call *band-i rūmī*.\(^{59}\)

It is clear from this definition that the seven principles had by then lost their original meaning as principles of painting, if they ever really had it.

To conclude, many questions spring to mind when it comes to the use that can be made of Persian literature on the arts. Apart from technical or biographical treatises, such as Sadiqi’s *Qānūn* or Qadi Ahmad’s *Gulistān-i kūnar*, some texts such as ‘Abdi Beg’s appear to be part of a rhetorical—and often ekphrastic—genre that happened to be in vogue during the sixteenth century. However, in spite of the difference of literary genres, these three authors share a common tradition: Sadiqi’s *Qānūn*, for instance, is versified in the same meter (*hāzaż*) as Nizami’s *Khusraw and Shīrīn*.

As for Qadi Ahmad, the borrowings from ‘Abdi Beg are significant enough to verify his importance. It is certainly not a coincidence that most of the Persian literature on painting appeared in this period (end of the fifteenth to the end of the sixteenth century) and almost disappeared afterward. Indeed, the Timurid period was marked, according to Maria E. Subtelny, by “a self-consciousness of taste for technical refinement . . . . This self-consciousness found expression in the codification of many areas of the arts.”\(^{60}\)

The early Safavid period continued this movement, and probably amplified it, particularly in the domain of painting. It should be remembered that some authors, such as Khwandamir, began their career with the Timurids and continued it under the patronage of the Safavids (or the Mughals). It would also be tempting to compare this Persian theorizing literature with what was being produced in Italy at almost the same time.\(^{61}\)

The Safavid period, and in particular the long reign of Shah Tahmasp (1524–76), was the time not only for the making of the modern state, framed against the two great powers the Ottomans and the Mughals, but also for the codification of an artistic language and for collecting in albums samples of past glory. The most significant—although not the only—of these is, of course, Bahram Mirza’s album compiled by Dust Muhammad. ‘Abdi Beg’s poems could also be interpreted as a manifestation or reflection of a specific national cultural identity, which probably fits into the general politics of Safavid rule.

The second half of the reign of Shah Tahmasp, especially after the treaty of Amasya of 1555, was a period of peace. According to some authors it was marked by the shah’s repentance (*tawba*) for indulging in prohibited practices and in particular by what has been regarded as his progressive lack of interest in painting. However, this apparent loss of interest—mentioned by authors such as Qadi Ahmad—has to be treated with caution. Qubts al-Din Qissakhvan writes
in 1556—that is, a year after Shah Tahmasp’s tawba—that the shah continued to have an interest in painting and calligraphy. As Chahryar Adle pointed out, a loss of interest would have included calligraphers as well. Some historians mention the miserliness of the shah: Hasan Beg Rumlu claims that he did not pay his army for fourteen years. At that time—from ca. 1546 to ca. 1558—he was occupied with building his palaces at Qazvin, which he had decorated with murals, some of which remain to this day. In short, the study of Shah Tahmasp’s reign certainly calls for reassessment; undoubtedly it was a period extremely favorable to the arts, and encouraged the production of poetic descriptions of artistic achievements.

The political and economic situation of the Safavid kingdom changed drastically after the death of Shah Tahmasp in 1576. After the troubled reigns of Isma’il II and Muhammad Khudabanda, Shah ‘Abbas restored royal prestige, but amazingly neither Sadiqi’s Qânîn nor Qadi Ahmad’s Gulsîstân-i hunar is dedicated to him. Thus, these two main sources for the history of painting in the second half of the sixteenth century appear as reminders of the glory of a fading golden age.

Beyond the question of theoretical texts and terminology, another problem to be faced here is the reliability or the capacity of the written sources to elaborate what we would like to see as a theory of Iranian aesthetics. The relation between calligraphy and painting is well established in parallel with the iconographic nature of painting; this phenomenon seems to stress a topos in artistic production that could be compared with the relationship between poetry and painting in Western literature. However, its didactic dimension does not seem to be clearly applied to Persian painting in any text. On the contrary, it seems to have arisen from a “national” consensus that could well have had its roots deep in Iranian culture, probably since pre-Islamic times. Moreover, one has to be very cautious when drawing parallels between theoretical and rhetorical discourse and the practice of painting itself. When we read Sadiqi’s treatise, for example, a striking feature is the inner contradiction of his discourse, let alone his practice. Thus he writes about his master Muzaffar ‘Ali: “When he wanted to draw the portrait of someone, he made it in such a way that you would have said it was the original model. You could not find anyone who could tell the difference [between the actual person and the portrait] were it not that [the latter] cannot move or rise up.” Of course we cannot take Sadiqi’s assessment literally, but the contradiction between theory or rhetoric and practice is not solely the preserve of the Persians. The French painter Antoine Gros (1777–1835) considered himself a follower of David’s neoclassicism, but was at the same time regarded by some critics, much to his displeasure, as one of the first Romantic painters, eventually he committed suicide. The discourse and practice of Ingres (1780–1867), too, were permanently in conflict. Another interesting parallel could be drawn between the Indian aesthetic theories (Bharata, Abhinavagupta) and their practical counterparts.

It seems obvious that a “good” painter, like a good poet or a musician, distinguishes himself by his capacity to improvise within a general framework that has its own rules, written or unwritten. One has to bear in mind that a majority of their potential readers or viewers knew by heart most of the epics that were illustrated. In some cases, the princes for whom they were made may not even have been literate (as is said about Akbar, for instance). The artist’s personal touch is achieved by the use of hitherto unknown or unexpected details, as is ornament in music. As Alberti wrote about Demetrius, “What pleases is not only to give the likeness of all the elements, but to add beauty to them.” On this point, painting can easily be compared with Persian classical poetry. C.-H. de Foucault has shown brilliantly how the Persian poet describes nature not merely by what he sees, but according to rules (rhetorical, as well as poetic). Thus Persian poetry does not show nature as it is, but according to an artificial or formal vision which is often far from reality, and for which a limited number of words are used. He adds, “Since the 11th century, we can see nature described by poets without emptiness, without shadows and without depth, as it will be later in miniature painting,” a statement that seems as good an example as any of a global Persian aesthetic system.

These lines do not attempt to provide many answers, and the problem of establishing an aesthetic theory for the Persian classical world seems far from solved. However, three different levels—theory, rhetoric and practice—seem to be distinguishable. Theory—that is, rules establishing the ratios of harmony and the definition of beauty—would not necessarily be clearly formulated, but would find their echo in poetry (rhetoric) and painting (practice). Moreover, as in music, where the mode imposes the framework for improvisation, or in poetry, where the expected rhyme or radif
has to create surprise, the painter has a relatively limited range for innovation. Naturally, this thin margin of freedom or transgression cannot be written down, and it is probably here that a painter can show his genius.

Université de Provence
Aix-en-Provence, France

NOTES

1. This kind of poetic comparison (this one is my own invention) in which the letter is compared to a form or object occurs in calligraphic treatises; see below, Sayyafi Sha‘ir’s Gulzar-i safi.

2. For other examples in the Koran, see sura 96: 2-3: “Read: in the name of your very generous Lord, who has taught by the pen.” On the relations between calligraphy and religion, see also Annemarie Schimmel, Calligraphy and Islamic Culture (New York, 1984).


5. Persian text ed. by A. Suhayli-Khansari, Gulistān-i hunar (Tehran, 1973), trans. V. Minorsky, Calligraphers and Painters (Washington, D.C., 1959). Vladimir Minorsky’s English translation, from a Russian version by T. Minorsky, was based on earlier work by B. N. Zakhoder and C. Clara Edwards. The autograph copy of this fundamental text, preserved in the Salar Jung Library, Haydarabad, is entitled by the author Tashkra-i khushiwiwan va naqqashan. On the two versions of Qadi Ahmad’s text (1596 and 1606), see Yus Porter, “Notes sur le Gulistān-e hunar de Qazi Ahmad Qomi,” Studia Iranica 17, 2 (1988): 207–23. As I noted in this article, the technical appendix in the conclusion to the classical version of the Gulistān-i hunar (Minorsky trans., pp. 195–201) is a collection of texts of various origins, the oldest being an extract of Tifliš’s Bayān al-san‘ā’at (twelfth century).


7. Chahryar Adle was probably the first to use the term; see “Recherche sur le module et le trace correcteur dans la miniature orientale, I: La mise en evidence à partir d’un exemple,” Le monde iranien et l’Islam 3 (1973): 81–105 (at that time Adle did not know that these lines were borrowed from ‘Abdi Beg).


10. For a general survey of the subject, see Julius von Schlosser, Die Kunstliteratur (Vienna, 1924). I would like to thank my colleague Catherine Chédéau for helping me through the maze of European Renaissance literature.

11. Some references to theoretical literature can be found on the subjects of poetry, music (Farabi, Jami, Maraghi), and even—although in a general context of geometry—architecture. For the latter, see Ghiyāth al-Dīn Jāmīshī Khāshānī, Miftāḥ al-ḥisāb (1427); of special interest is the study of H. Laleh, “A propos du traité d’architecture de Qiyās al-Dīn Jamshīd Khāshānī,” in Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies, Bamberg, ed. Bert Fragner, C. Fragner, and G. Gnoli (Rome, 1995), pp. 391–400. See also al-Buzjānī, Kitāb fīma yahājtu ‘ilāhīyāt al-‘asrīn min a‘māl al-hanāṣa (About that which the artisan needs to know of geometric constructions); on this text, see Oğulu Necipoğlu, The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture. Topkapı Palace Museum Library MS H. 1956 (Santa Monica, Calif., 1995), pp. 151–81.


15. Thackston, Century of Princes, p. 361, gives a slightly different translation.


23. Alberti was the leading figure of theoretical literature in the Italian Renaissance. His De Pictura (1435) is considered one of the major works on the theory of painting. Cennino Cennini's Il Libro dell'Arte (before 1457) is certainly the best example of an Italian Quattrocento artist's handbook.

24. On the "ideographic" character of painting in Persian literature, see Y. Porter, "La forme et le sens. A propos du portrait dans la littérature persane classique," in Pand-o Sokhan. Mêlange offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, ed. C. Balât, C. Kappler, and Z. Vesel (Tehran, 1995), pp. 219–31. For Khwandamir, see also M. M. Qazvini and L. Bouvat, "Deux documents inédits relatifs à Behzad," Revue du Monde musulman 26 (March, 1914), in particular the preface to the muraqqa' offered to Behzad (undated, early 16th c.); Persian text pp. 155–58: "He has drawn without colors or qalam, splendid idols of luminous features"; further on, "Now, with the tip of the musk-scattering brush, he draws figures of splendid idols of luminous features." As observed by Priscilla Soucek ("Nizami on Painters"), the perceptual process that lies behind Nizami's assessment is that the image is impressed in the humor of the eye, and both images transferred from the eye to the imagination (khiyāl), which is, according to Nizami 'Aruzī, "a faculty located in the posterior portion of the ventrical of the brain, which preserves what the 'Composite Sense' has apprehended from the external senses, so that this remains in it after the subsidence of the sense-impressions" (ibid., p. 11). It could be added that the name of the painter in Fattahl's poem, Hūsn u dīl, is precisely Khiyāl; see Porter, "La forme et le sens," p. 227.


26. The width of the painting is 21 cm; the total height, including the title, is 33.97 cm: that is 21 × 1.618 (or φ).

27. Quoted from Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, 1: 214.


29. Of course, there are exceptions, since Ottomans as well as Mughals used this Persianate visual language.


31. See, for instance, the "Arzādābāt" written by Ya'far Tabbī, the head calligrapher of Baysunghur Mirza's library, trans. Thackston, Century of Princes, pp. 325–27. See also the so-called Decree of Bihzad written by Khwandamir, ca. 1522, ed. by Qazvini and Bouvat, "Deux documents inédits relatifs à Behzād," pp. 152–54 and 159–61. On the date of this document, see G. Hermann, "Zur Biographie des persischen Malers Kamāl ad-Dīn Bihzād" in Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran 23 (1990): 261–72.


34. The references are to the edition in Porter, Painters, pp. 202–11. Numbers refer to verses, "a" and "b" to the hemistiches; square brackets indicate that the title of the chapter does not appear in the text.

35. Shūstāmān is probably a kind of varnish, and not "tinting", as translated by M. B. Dickson (in Dickson and Welch, Houghton Shahnameh, pp. 259–70 [B. 88–91]; and Thackston, Century of Princes, p. 325); see Porter, Painters, pp. 96–98, Rawghān-i kūrān is a kind of varnish used in lacquer painting.

36. This observation is not very far from what Plato says about Beauty; see The Banquet, § 210, for instance.


39. Nizami, Khusrav u Shīrūn, ed. Vahid Dastgirdi (Tehran, 1354/1955), p. 48. A parallel could be drawn with Sai's biography of Sinan, who created the palace of the body of Adam "without ruler or compass" simply through the command "Be!" (quoted from Necipoğlu, Topkapi Scroll, p. 117).

40. As observed by Priscilla Soucek ("Nizami on Painters"), the perceptual process that lies behind Nizami's assessment is that the image is impressed in the humor of the eye, and both images transferred from the eye to the imagination (khiyāl), which is, according to Nizami 'Aruzī, "a faculty located in the posterior portion of the ventrical of the brain, which preserves what the 'Composite Sense' has apprehended from the external senses, so that this remains in it after the subsidence of the sense-impressions" (ibid., p. 11). It could be added that the name of the painter in Fattahl's poem, Hūsn u dīl, is precisely Khiyāl; see Porter, "La forme et le sens," p. 227.


43. This idea is from one of my students, Nadia Ali, "Le nu dans les peintures de manuscrits persans du XIIe au XVIIe siècles," Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Provence, Département d'Histoire de l'Art, 1998, p. 127. She also quotes a Chinese treatise, mentioned by E. H. Gombrich (Art and Illusion [New York, Pantheon, 1960], p. 269), saying, ... since demons and spiritual beings have no definite form,
and since no one has ever seen them, they are easy to execute."


43. Edition by H. Khadivjam, "Risāla-i dar tāriḵ-i khaṭṭ-u naqqāšī," p. 673; it must be noted that the text of the preface to the Amir Ghāyib Beg album written by Mir Sayyid Ahmad (Topkapi Palace Library, H. 2161, dated 1564-65), follows closely that of Qutb al-Din; for a translation of Mir Sayyid Ahmad, see Thackston, Century of Princes, pp. 353-56.

44. According to Qadi Ahmad (trans. Minorsky, p. 56), the invention of the "six styles" of Arabic calligraphy (aq̄lam al-sitta) is credited to Abu 'Ali ibn Muqla (866-940); they are thulth, naskh, muhaqqaq, rayhān, tauq, and riq'a. Qadi Ahmad (ibid., p. 58) quotes a verse credited to Yaqut al-Musta'simi (d. 1296), in which the six styles are mentioned.


46. Sadiqi, Ḍamān, vv. 77-79.

47. Qadi Ahmad, Gulustān, ed. Suhayli-Khvansari, p. 132; Minorsky's translation is inaccurate, see Calligraphers and Painters, p. 178.


49. Ibid., p. 343.

50. Quoted by Anand Ram Mukhlis, Mirʿat al-istilah (1744); see Porter, Painters, p. 110.

51. A survey of the "seven principles" is provided in Necipoğlu, Topkapı Scroll, pp. 111-26; see also Porter, Painters, pp. 109-12.

52. A clarification of the distinction between the terms naqqaši (decorative painting) and muṣawwar (figure) is attempted by Necipoğlu, Topkapı Scroll, pp. 205-6.


56. Porter, Painters, p. 111.


64. See Echraji, "Description contemporaine des peintures murales," fig. 54.

65. On this topic, see Lee, Ut Pictura Poesis.

66. Sadiqi, Qānūn, vv. 25-26; it is amazing to see that this image of the "rising up" of the painted figure was already used by Plato (Phaedrus, § 275 d), and is commonplace in later European artistic literature.

67. Baudelaire wrote of Gros: "Quand l'âpre idée s'adoucit et se fit caressante sous le pinceau de Gros, elle était déjà perdue" (quoted from J. Lichtenstein, La peinture, Textes essentiels [Paris, 1997], p. 685).

68. On Ingres, see Lichtenstein, La peinture, pp. 372-75.


72. Ibid., p. 291.