

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