

**LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

**Narrative Scenes on Medieval Metalwork: The Case of  
Bahram Gur**

By

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A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Islamic Art

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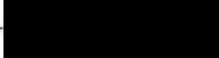
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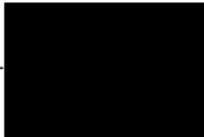
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# **DEDICATION**

To my parents and sisters.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This Project would not have been possible without the support of many people. Many thanks to my advisor, Dr. Abdallah Kahil, who read my numerous revisions and helped make some sense of the confusion. Also, thanks to my committee members who offered guidance and support.

And finally, thanks to my parents, sisters, and friends who endured this long process with me, always offering support and love.

# Narrative Scenes on Medieval Metalwork: The Case of Bahram Gur

Mira Hariz

## ABSTRACT

The Seljuqs are a tribe from Oguz origins who came into Central Asia from the Eurasian Steppe<sup>1</sup>. The Turkic dynasty ruled over the area from 1040 to 1194<sup>2</sup>. They were known for their warfare skills, and eventually their rule spread westward through the Atabegs<sup>3</sup>. Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the region witnessed political unrest. However, art production under the Seljuqs thrived<sup>4</sup>. One of the materials of which many objects survived is metalwork. The surfaces of these objects are adorned with various decorative schemes which include, enthronement scenes, court entertainment scenes, hunting scenes, astrological symbols, vegetal motifs, and geometry. Figural representation was widespread, however the appearance of the narrative scene of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork is unprecedented. Three reasons could be attributed to this occurrence. First, the Seljuqs associated with the story of a heroic Persian King. The Seljuq military men decided to include the story of a heroic King on their metalwork as a resemblance to them. Bahram Gur is a ruler from the Sassanian period<sup>5</sup>. He is known for his hunting prowess, strength against wild animals, and military power. Second, oral traditions, and the widespread of the story of Bahram Gur facilitated the appearance of the narrative scenes on metalwork

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<sup>1</sup> Osman Aziz Basan, *The Great Seljuqs* (London: Routledge, 2010), 47-48.

<sup>2</sup> Basan, *The Great Seljuqs*, 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> A.C.S. Peacock, *Early Seljuq History* (Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> M. S. Dimand, "Saljuk Bronzes from Khurasan," *Bulletin - Metropolitan Museum of Art* 4, no. 3 (Nov 1, 1945)87-88.

<sup>5</sup> Houtsma, M., Arnold, T. W., Basset, R., Hartmann, R., ed., *The Encyclopedia of Islam II*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1913), 585-586.

from this period. The traveling scholars, poets, artists were part of the Muslim culture, which enhanced exchange of knowledge and information. And the stories of Bahram Gur were widespread in Iran which triggered a high image production in the area<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, the oral traditions lead to the widespread of the stories of Persian Kings. Third, the appreciation of the Seljuqs of the Persian culture, may have triggered the rendering of the narrative scene of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on their metalwork. The Seljuqs were military commanders who came into Persia to defend territory<sup>7</sup>. The art produced under their rule reflected the culture of Persia. Moreover, the representation of Bahram Gur on their metalwork could indicate the appreciation of some rulers to the story of a heroic Persian Sassanian King.

Keywords: Seljuq, Metalwork, Narrative Scenes, Bahram Gur, Azadeh, Turkic Tribes, Khurasan, Herat, Mosul.

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<sup>6</sup> John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 38-39.

<sup>7</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Seljuq Metalwork and the Story of Bahram Gur

The Seljuqs are a tribe from Oguz origins who came into Central Asia from the Eurasian Steppe.<sup>8</sup> The Turkic dynasty ruled over the area from 1040 to 1194.<sup>9</sup> They were known for their warfare skills, and eventually their rule spread westward through the Atabegs.<sup>10</sup> The Seljuq political-military administration was characterized by the introduction of the atabeg post.<sup>11</sup> Atabeg is the title of an office holder who acted as a guardian to a Seljuq prince and prepared him for kingship.<sup>12</sup> Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the region witnessed political unrest. However, art production under the Seljuqs thrived.<sup>13</sup> One of the materials of which many objects survived is metalwork. The surfaces of these objects are adorned with various decorative schemes which include, enthronement scenes, court entertainment scenes, hunting scenes, astrological symbols, vegetal motifs, and geometry. Among the figural representations on six metalwork from the Seljuq period (Figs. 1-6) is the representation of the narrative scene of the Persian hero Bahram Gur. The metalwork studied was attributed to Khurasan and Mosul. During this period, the Seljuqs were in Khurasan and

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<sup>8</sup> Osman Aziz Basan, *The Great Seljuqs* (London: Routledge, 2010), 47-48.

<sup>9</sup> Basan, *The Great Seljuqs*, 21-22.

<sup>10</sup> A.C.S. Peacock, *Early Seljuq History* (Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 72-73.

<sup>11</sup> Taef Kamal El-Azhari, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 286-287.

<sup>12</sup> El-Azhari, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*, 301-302.

<sup>13</sup> M. S. Dimand, "Saljuk Bronzes from Khurasan," *Bulletin - Metropolitan Museum of Art* 4, no. 3 (Nov 1, 1945)87-88.

the Atabegs in Mosul. The two shared the same culture despite being politically independent.

These scenes were the only narrative episode represented on metalwork during the Seljuq period. In parallel, various episodes from the *Shahnama* were rendered on ceramics; episodes such as the stories of Bahram Gur, King Kay Kavus, and the romance of Bizhan and Manizha.<sup>14</sup> It is then important to note that the story of a Bahram Gur, a Persian king, known for his power and hunting prowess was the only one appearing on metalwork.

The metalwork to be studied is made of brass and inlaid with silver.<sup>15</sup> These objects were produced between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Figs. 1-6) and commissioned under the reign of the Seljuqs and Atabegs. The lack of sufficient contemporary primary sources on the metalwork production from this period, created various speculations regarding the location of their workshops. Art historians attributed the production of metalwork objects to various areas.<sup>16</sup> Metalwork of this period was attributed to the workshops of Mosul and Khurasan (Fig. 7). Both workshops thrived under the rule of the Seljuqs and the Atabegs.<sup>17</sup> The six objects discussed in this paper (Table 1, Figs. 1-6) are selected for their surface decorations which include a narrative scene: the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bahram Gur, Bizhan, and Manizha, and King Kay Kavus are all protagonists in Firdawsi's *Shahnama*.

<sup>15</sup> Esin Atıl, William T. Chase and Paul Jett, *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Pr, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> The locations of the metal workshops have been discussed by each of Eva Baer, Sheila Blair, and D. S. Rice. Their studies will be discussed in the literature review and throughout the paper.

<sup>17</sup> The Atabegs are military commanders who founded smaller polities in eastern Turkey, Iraq, and Syria after the death of Sultan Muhammad Tapar in 1118. Christian Lange and Songül Mecit, eds., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 22-24.

<sup>18</sup> The narrative scenes were identified by Marianna Shreve Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," *Studies in the History of Art* 16 (1985), 131-149.

Bahram Gur is a legendary Sassanian King known for his hunting prowess and strength. According to the popular legend, on one of his hunting trips, his slave harp player Azadeh accompanies him, and challenges him to hunt two deer.<sup>19</sup>

Figural representation, during the Seljuq period, depicting rulers, hunters, dancers, musicians was part of the surface decoration of metalwork (Figs. 8-9). However, what is particular about the scenes discussed in this paper is that they represent a heroic story from the narrative Persian literary tradition.

*Table 1 – Seljuq Metalwork with the Narrative Scene of Bahram Gur and Azadeh*

<b>Fig . No.</b>	<b>Object Type</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Dim.</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Year/Period</b>	<b>Museum, Reference</b>
<b>1</b>	Box Cover	Bronze inlaid with silver	9.4 x 1.7 cm	Khorasan	12 <sup>th</sup> c	Walters Art Gallery, 54.515
<b>2</b>	Lidded Bowl	Bronze engraved, and inlaid with silver	18.5 x 21.5 cm	Herat, Khurasan	1200	The British Museum, 1950,0725.1
<b>3</b>	Ewer	Brass inlaid with silver and copper	30.4 x 22 x 21.5 cm	Mosul	April 1232 (dated Rajab 629)	The British Museum, 1866, 1229.61
<b>4</b>	Ewer	Copper alloy repousse, engraved, and inlaid with silver and red copper	45.5 x 32.3 cm	Iraq or Syria	1200-1250	Louvre, AD 4413
<b>5</b>	Cup	Brass inlaid with silver and gold	-	North Mesopotamia	Mid-13 <sup>th</sup> century	Turk ve Islam Eserli Musezi, 102
<b>6</b>	Inkwell and Pencase	Brass inlaid with silver	-	Iran	Early 13 <sup>th</sup> c	Private Collection Marquet de Vasselot

<sup>19</sup> Firdausi and Dick Davis, *Shahnameh* (New York: Viking, 2006).

## 1.2 The Seljuqs and the Story of Persian Kings

Figural representation as surface decoration was widespread under the Seljuqs, on both ceramics and metalwork. Narrative scenes were widely seen on ceramics. However, the appearance of a narrative scene, of Bahram Gur and Azadeh, on metalwork is unprecedented. Three reasons could be attributed to this occurrence. First, the Seljuqs associated with the story of a heroic Persian King. The Seljuq military men decided to include the story of a heroic King on their metalwork as a resemblance to them. Bahram Gur is a ruler from the Sassanian period.<sup>20</sup> He is known for his hunting prowess, strength against wild animals, and military power. Second, oral tradition, and the widespread of the story of Bahram Gur facilitated the appearance of the narrative scenes on metalwork from this period. The traveling scholars, poets, artists were part of the Muslim culture, which enhanced exchange of knowledge and information. And the stories of Bahram Gur were widespread in Iran which triggered a high image production in the area.<sup>21</sup> From the spread of stories through travelers, a class of story tellers emerged.<sup>22</sup> Court story tellers were given the title “teller of *Shahnama*”. These story tellers were part of the Ghaznavid court; the ruling class preceding the Seljuqs. And they were later praised by the Seljuqs.<sup>23</sup>

The oral tradition led to the widespread of the stories of Persian Kings. These events that are only proven in some primary sources are some of the occurrences that set off the representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on Seljuq metalwork. Third, the appreciation of the Seljuqs of the Persian culture, may have triggered the rendering of the narrative scene of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on their metalwork. The Seljuqs were military commanders

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<sup>20</sup> Houtsma, M., Arnold, T. W., Basset, R., Hartmann, R., ed., *The Encyclopedia of Islam II*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1913), 585-586.

<sup>21</sup> John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 38-39.

<sup>22</sup> Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 58-59.

<sup>23</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 58-59.

who became the military defense of the Samanids and later Ghaznavids, under the rule of the Abbasids.<sup>24</sup> The art produced under their rule reflected the culture of Persia. Moreover, the representation of Bahram Gur on their metalwork could indicate the appreciation of some rulers to the story of a heroic Persian Sassanian King.

### 1.3 Methodology

The purpose of the research is to interpret the appearance of narrative scene of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork of the Seljuq period. Chapter three will present the metalwork with the narrative scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh<sup>25</sup>, and compare their surface decoration to metalwork from the same period. Moreover, an overview of the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh in Firdawsi's *Shahnama* (ca. 977-1010) and in Nizami's *Haft Paykar* (1197) will be presented. The description of the surface decoration of the metalwork (Figs. 1-6), will be followed by an overview of the figural representation on metalwork.

Chapter four will give three reasons for the appearance of narrative scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork from the Seljuq period. First, the Seljuq military atmosphere could have triggered an image production of a heroic ruler. A parallel could be drawn between Bahram Gur's hunting prowess, and bravery, and the military strength of the Seljuqs. Second, the spread of stories of Persian Kings through oral tradition or earlier manuscripts.<sup>26</sup> The widespread of the *Shahnama* stories, specifically the story of Bahram Gur, could have triggered the production of his narrative scenes as surface decoration. Third, the appreciation and adoration of the Seljuqs of the Persian culture, specifically of the Persian past, could have triggered the need to include narrative scenes with Bahram Gur on their metalwork.

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<sup>24</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*

<sup>25</sup> Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," , 131-149

<sup>26</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Narrative Scenes on Metalwork and Ceramics

Narrative scenes on metalwork and ceramics first appeared under the Seljuqs. The metalwork and ceramics with narrative representation has been discussed by each of Eva Baer, A. S. Melikian Chirvani, and Marianna Shreve Simpson. In the book *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art: The Political Economy of Federal District Courts*, Eva Baer discusses the surface decoration of metalwork from all the periods of Islamic art and identifies the narrative representation on Seljuqs metalwork.<sup>27</sup> A.S. Melikian Chirvani discusses the decorative themes of metalwork from Iran, Western Iran, Khurasan, or Herat, in his articles “State Inkwells in Islamic Iran” and “Le Shah-Name, La Gnose Soufie Et Le Pouvoir Mongol”. His studies allowed for an insight on the royal theme and more specifically the representations of epics and legends under the Seljuqs.<sup>28</sup> In the article “Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects”, Marianna Shreve Simpson identifies the scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on both metalwork and ceramics. Her article is a documentation of all metalwork and ceramics with the narrative scenes produced under the Seljuqs and Ilkhanids.<sup>29</sup> In her study, she identifies the representations on ceramics and metalwork to the stories of Faridun and

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<sup>27</sup> Eva Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art: The Political Economy of Federal District Courts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

<sup>28</sup> A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "State Inkwells in Islamic Iran," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 44 (1986), 70-94.; A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "Le Shah-Name, La Gnose Soufie Et Le Pouvoir Mongol," *Journal Asiatique* 272, no. 3-4 (1984), 249-337.

<sup>29</sup> Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," , 131-149

Zahhak, and Bahram Gur and Azadeh.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, she interprets these representations as being allusions to fighting evil, comparing the ruler to the main characters of the stories.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Marianna Shreve Simpson explains the identifying elements of the figures which helped her attribute the scenes represented to their respective narratives.<sup>32</sup> These elements are the man and woman on camelback being Bahram Gur and Azadeh, Bahram Gur carrying his bow and arrow, the harp in Azadeh's hand, and the two deer they are out hunting.<sup>33</sup> The study of Marianna Shreve Simpson is the only one identifying all the narrative scenes on metalwork during the Seljuqs, Atabegs, and Ilkhanids periods. She ends her study with speculations on the occurrence of narrative scenes on metalwork and ceramics. The first being the impulse of knowing the story. The second reason she gives is, artists recreated the story as a mental reconstruction for story tellers. And for the third reason, Marianna Shreve Simpson references Lisa Volov Golombek's unpublished paper. Lisa Volov Golombek argues that it could be a coincidence that the scenes of a hunting ruler with a harp player on camelback have parallels with the story of the Persian King.<sup>34</sup> Other studies covering narrative representations were done by each of Richard Ettinghausen and Alyssa Gabbay. Richard Ettinghausen's study, "Bahram Gur's Hunting Feats or the Problem of Identification", identifies the figures on a Sassanian silver plate (Fig. 12) as Bahram Gur and Azadeh. His study also highlights the earliest representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh during the Sassanian period.<sup>35</sup> In Alyssa Gabbay's study "Love Gone Wrong, Then Right Again", the different written versions of the story of Bahram Gur and

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<sup>30</sup> Faridun, Zahhak, and Bahram Gur are Persian Kings whose stories are included in Firdawsi's *Shahnama*.

<sup>31</sup> Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," 131-149

<sup>32</sup> Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," 134-135.

<sup>33</sup> Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," 134-135.

<sup>34</sup> Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," 141-142.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Ettinghausen, "Bahram Gur's Hunting Feats Or the Problem of Identification," *Iran* 17 (1979), 25-31.

Azadeh are presented. She focuses on the love connotations of the story and the characters' development between Firdawsi's, Nizami's, and Amir Khusraw's versions.<sup>36</sup>

The question of how heroic scenes with a clear reference to a legend from the oral tradition of Persian narrative, which found its way to written literature is not discussed per se in these works. However, they are essential to pose the question of this paper.

## 2.2 The Widespread of the *Shahnama* under the Seljuqs

The period in which heroic Persian stories started being popular is a subject of speculation, however, it is certain that it was widespread in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Kumiko Yamamoto discusses how the oral traditions influenced the writing of the *Shahnama* in his book *The Oral Background of Persian Epics*.<sup>37</sup> He refers to "Tarix-e Beyhaqi" (*Tarikh al-Beyhaqi*), the history book written at the Ghaznavid court by the secretary al-Beyhaqi, in which an aspect of the court life under the Ghaznavids is presented highlighting the importance of the oral tradition in the court at the time.<sup>38</sup> The study of Kumiko Yamamoto allows an understanding of how the stories of Sassanian kings spread through Persia and the regions surrounding it.<sup>39</sup> In the process, he studies the possible sources of the *Shahnama*. His research results in two possible sources, the *Xwadây-nâmag* (Book of Lords) or the *Shahnama* of Abu Mansur.<sup>40</sup> His research further helped in establishing that the *Shahnama* stories were widespread even before the Seljuq.

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<sup>36</sup> Alyssa Gabbay, "Love Gone Wrong, then Right again: Male/Female Dynamics in the Bahrâm Gūr-Slave Girl Story," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (Dec 1, 2009), 677-692.

<sup>37</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 53-54.

<sup>38</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 53-54.

<sup>39</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 56-57.

<sup>40</sup> Abu Mansur b. 'Abd-al-Razzaq (d. 961) was a military commander of Khurasan under the Samanids. He ordered the translation of the *Xwadây-nâmag* (Book of Lords). Dj Khalegi-Motlagh, "Abū Manşūr Ma'marī," *Encyclopedia Iranica* 1, no. 4 (1983, 2011), 337.

Marianna Shreve Simpson's study "The Narrative Structure of a Medieval Iranian Beaker" presents and analyses the Freer Gallery Beaker (Fig. 19), which is a ceramic beaker with colored representations of the love story of Bizhan and Manizha the story clearly is a part of the oral tradition of love stories that relied on Arabian tradition of love stories, the most famous of them is the story of Laila and Majnun. Her study highlights the various sources the artists relied on to represent the narrative of Bizhan and Manizha. Specifically, Marianna Shreve Simpson quotes Firdawsi "where he describes the tale as "ancient" and says that he first learned it from a book written in Pahlavi. Then, at the end, he states, "I have now told this adventure in its entirety, as I heard it recited according to the ancient tradition.""<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, two studies discuss the importance of oral traditions in spreading the stories of Persian kings. John Renard, in his book *Islam and the Heroic Image*, studies how heroes from pre-Islamic history in Persia change with the arrival of Islam. He demonstrates the spread of the *Shahnama* stories through oral traditions, specifically through the ghazal or dastan<sup>42</sup>; which are two forms of recitals familiar in Khurasan at the time.<sup>43</sup> In the book *Medieval Oral Literature* edited by Karl Reichl, Julia Rubanovich argues that the *Shahnama* stories were transmitted through private silent readings or through reading aloud during the reign of the Ghaznavids, Seljuqs, and Ilkhanids.<sup>44</sup> The mentioned literature will be used to prove the importance of oral traditions in spreading the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh. Essential to this study, John Renard highlights the Seljuqs rulers' interest in Bahram Gur for his strength and hunting prowess.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Marianna Shreve Simpson, "The Narrative Structure of a Medieval Iranian Beaker," *Ars Orientalis* 12 (1981), 15-16.

<sup>42</sup> Ghazal is a poem typically about love. Dastan is a form of oral history recital known in Central Asia, the stories usually focus on an individual who protects his tribe. Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, 16-17.

<sup>43</sup> Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, 16-17.

<sup>44</sup> Karl Reichl, *Medieval Oral Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 658-659.

<sup>45</sup> Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, 86-87.

## 2.3 The Decorative Themes on Metalwork

A prominent characteristic of Seljuq metalwork, and all metalwork of this period, is the surface decoration which was made with various techniques culminated with silver or gold inlay. The subjects of these decoration included geometric forms, representation of humans and animals, inscription, and vegetal forms. The human figures are often enclosed within medallions of various outlines, and consisted in their majority of entertainment scenes, specifically enthronement scenes, hunting scenes, musicians and dancers in courts, and astrological symbols. The book *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art* by Esin Atil, W.T. Chase, and Paull Jett, a comprehensive study that focuses on the technical aspects of making a metalwork object. It covers the aspect of production, material, and decorative themes of metalwork.<sup>46</sup> The authors present a historical background of metalwork production and attribute the changes in metalwork of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries to the changes on the political and economic levels in the region. In the book *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art: The Political Economy of Federal District Courts*, Eva Baer explores the production techniques, surface decoration, and possible lines of influence on the metalwork.<sup>47</sup> Her study is useful here to understand the metalwork production under the Seljuqs. Specifically, the study clarifies where and when the narrative scenes on metalwork first appeared. M. S. Dimand covered the metalwork decoration in Iran, specifically in his book *A Handbook of Mohammedan Decorative Arts* and his article “Saljuk Bronzes from Khurasan”. Narrative scenes came to be incorporated within a variety of surface decoration on the metalwork.

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<sup>46</sup> Atil, *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art*

<sup>47</sup> Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art: The Political Economy of Federal District Courts*

Other studies were limited to specific themes in these representations. In the article “Gender and the Politics of Music in the Early Islamic Courts”, Lisa Nielson covers the representation of musicians in the courts of Baghdad in the early period using the 9<sup>th</sup> century texts.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in the article “Music and Musicians in Islamic Art”, Walter Denny covers the ceremonial atmosphere linked to music in the courts, and in parallel explains their representation in manuscript paintings, on metalwork, and ceramics. Many of Seljuq metalwork objects were decorated with astrological themes. These themes are discussed by Stefano Carboni, in his book *Following the Stars: Images of the Zodiac in Islamic Art*, and in Stephen P. Blake’s book *Astronomy and Astrology in the Islamic World*.

Few studies were used to study the surface decoration of the metalwork from the Seljuq period. Ernst Kühnel, in his article "Zwei Mosulbronzen Und Ihr Meister" (Two Mosul Bronzes and their Master), studies metalwork in the Islamic Art department of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Specifically, he studies the decorative themes and stylistic characteristics of pieces attributed to Badr al-Din Lu’lu’ who, in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was the ruler of the city of Mosul in northern Mesopotamia, to which several metalwork objects are attributed. The most prominent research on metalwork attributed to Mosul is done by D.S. Rice. In his article “The Oldest Dated Mosul Candlestick 1225”, D.S. Rice covers the decorative themes of the candlestick and proves its attribution to Mosul. In his research, “The Brasses of Badr al-Din Lu’lu’”, he covers the decorative themes of the metalwork briefly and focuses on the epigraphic text which is the more prominent side of the pieces. In the article “Inlaid Brasses from the Workshop of Ahmad al-Dhaki al-Mawsili”, he attempts to cover the metalwork attributed to the naqqash Ahmad al-Dhaki al-Mawsili and his pupils along with covering the decorative theme chosen for the pieces, which is the royal theme.

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<sup>48</sup> Lisa Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music in the Early Islamic Courts," *Early Music History* 31 (2012), 235-261.

And Finally in his articles “Studies in Islamic Metalwork II” and “Studies in Islamic Metalwork III”, D.S. Rice covers the decorative themes and epigraphic decoration of two pieces attributed to Mosul and signed by Mawsili artists. His studies were insightful in terms of decorative themes, deciphering epigraphic text, attributing the pieces to rulers and regions, and understanding the apprenticeship program followed in metal workshops of Mosul.

To conclude, the previously mentioned studies are important to understand the narrative scenes on metalwork in the broader context of surface decoration. The scenes were included among astrological symbols, enthronement scenes, hunting scenes, and court musicians and dancers. They were part of a wide variety of surface decoration. However, the appearance of these narrative scenes on metalwork marked Islamic Art’s history.

## **2.4 The Seljuqs Politics and Art Patronage**

The Seljuqs are military groups who took over the rule in Persia under the Abbasids in the 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Other Seljuq tribes moved westward and advanced in Anatolia. The Seljuq rulers accumulated substantial wealth from the taxes and battle booties. This wealth was one major catalyst for artistic production of lavish objects in this period. In the book *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*, Sheila Canby, Deniz Beyazit, Martina Rugiadi, and A. C. S. Peacock, which is the catalogue that accompanied a major exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2016), is an excellent source for the study of art under the Seljuqs. The book of Chirstian Lange and Mecit Songul, *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, covers the attitude of the Seljuqs as a military tribe, as well as their art patronage. It explores the Seljuq courts and the imitation of the atabegs

to their courts.<sup>49</sup> As for the Atabeg metalwork, specifically in the city of Mosul, the chapter “The Principle of Parsimony and the Problem of the “Mosul School of Metalwork” by Julian Raby, in the book *Metalwork and Material Culture*, edited by Venetia Porter and Mariam Rosser-Owen in 2012, identifies the metalwork objects that could be attributed to Mosul and analyzes their production techniques and surface decoration.<sup>50</sup> The previously mentioned literature review were used to draw a connection between the political military atmosphere of the Seljuqs, and the appearance of the narrative scene of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork.

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<sup>49</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*

<sup>50</sup> Venetia Porter and Mariam Rosser-Owen, *Metalwork and Material Culture in the Islamic World: Art, Craft and Text : Essays Presented to James W. Allan*, Vol. 32 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE METALWORK AND THE STORY OF BAHRAM GUR AND AZADEH

The metalwork produced in Mosul and Khurasan under the Seljuqs rule was made of brass and inlaid with silver or gold.<sup>51</sup> The techniques used to shape the vessels are casting, hammering, spinning, and turning.<sup>52</sup> The techniques used to decorate the surface of the vessels are punching, chasing, bossing, tracing, engraving, and inlaying.<sup>53</sup> The inlay technique was used to enrich the surface of the metalwork by placing metal wires or sheets of a different color from the ground material over a surface pattern.<sup>54</sup> The metalwork studied (Table 1) was produced during the Seljuq period and characterized by surface decoration. Figural representation depicting rulers, hunters, dancers, musicians was part of the visual culture prior to the Seljuqs. However, with the arrival of the Seljuqs in 1040, narrative scenes as surface decoration emerged. The earliest piece, attributed to Khurasan, with the representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh is the Box Cover from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Fig.1). The earliest appearance of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork produced in Mosul is on the 1232 British Museum Ewer (Fig. 3).

The workshops where the metalwork (Figs. 1-6) was produced are, in most cases, unidentified by the museums. Based on the studies of Max van Berchem and Sheila Blair, the metalwork can be attributed to the workshops of Herat and Mosul. According to Sheila

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<sup>51</sup> Atıl, *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art*, 16-17

<sup>52</sup> Atıl, *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art*, 16-17.

<sup>53</sup> Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art: The Political Economy of Federal District Courts*, 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art: The Political Economy of Federal District Courts*, 4-5.

Blair, in her book *Medieval Persian Art*, the metalwork from Iran or Khurasan in Table 1, can be attributed to the Herat workshop.<sup>55</sup> The city is located on the Hari Rud, today Western Afghanistan. During the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this city witnessed political unrest. Sheila Blair gives three arguments to suggest the presence of a metal workshop in Herat at the time. The first argument is the increased architectural patronage in the city.<sup>56</sup> The second argument is the nisba “al-Haravi” (هراتي) signed by artists on the metalwork, specifically on some vessels produced in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>57</sup> The third argument relates to the mineral sources found near Herat.<sup>58</sup> Sheila Blair then concludes that Herat in Khurasan (Fig. 7), is probably the workshop where the metalwork attributed to Khurasan was produced.

The Mosul workshop first identified by Max van Berchem, then accepted by D.S. Rice. According to Rice, Max Van Berchem gives three arguments to attribute the metal workshop to Mosul.<sup>59</sup> First, the proximity of the copper mines in the upper basins of the Tigris and Euphrates, near Mosul. Second, the passage in Ibn Sa’id’s *Geography* (1270), which briefly mentions the production of metal wares in Mosul, and third the number of pieces signed by artists with the nisba al-Mawsili (الموصلية).<sup>60</sup> The statement of Ibn Sa’id regarding Mosul, as quoted by Rice, goes as follows<sup>61</sup>:

“Mosul...there are many crafts in the city, especially inlaid brass vessels (awani al-nuhas al-muta’am) which are exported (and presented) to rulers, as are the silken garments woven there.”

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<sup>55</sup> Sheila Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Persian Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 67-68.

<sup>56</sup> Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Persian Art*, 69-70.

<sup>57</sup> Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Persian Art*, 70-72.

<sup>58</sup> Blair, *Text and Image in Medieval Persian Art*, 78-79.

<sup>59</sup> Max Van Berchem, “Monuments et Inscriptions de l’Atabek Lu’lu’ de Mossoul,” *Orientalische Studien* 8, no.1 (1906), 197-210. In D. S. Rice, “The Oldest Dated ‘Mosul’ Candlestick A. D. 1225,” *The Burlington Magazine* 91, no. 561 (1949), 334-341.

<sup>60</sup> Rice, “The Oldest Dated ‘Mosul’ Candlestick A. D. 1225,” 334-335.

<sup>61</sup> D. S. Rice, “Inlaid Brasses from the Workshop of Aḥmad Al-Dhakī Al-Mawṣilī,” *Ars Orientalis* 2 (1957)283-285.

The following chapter will discuss the narrative scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Figs. 1-6). One of the pieces attributed to Mosul is signed with the *nisba* al-Mawsili (الموصلية) and dated (Fig.3), while others are attributed to Khurasan, or Mosul based on style and technique. The chapter will also cover the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh, of Firdawsi, and Nizami. This will allow a comparison between the narrative representation and the written texts. Lastly, ceramics with a variety of narrative scenes as surface decorations were produced under the Seljuqs. However, the story of Bahram Gur is the only narrative scene represented on the metalwork.

### **3.1 The Narrative Scene of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on Seljuq**

#### **Metalwork**

The metalwork studied (Figs. 1-6) exhibits surface decoration which were common to metalwork produced in Mosul and Khurasan. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh is what differentiates this group of metalwork (Table 1, Figs. 1-6) from the rest of the metalwork produced between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Figs.8-9).

Bahram is a name of five kings of the Sassanian dynasty<sup>62</sup>, the best known of them, seen in representation on artwork attributed to Iran, is Bahram V, son of Yezdigerd I. He ruled from 420 to 438 AD and was raised by Arab Mundhir Tribe who ruled the city of al-Hira in southern Iraq.<sup>63</sup> His strength and skill, specifically when he defeated a lion and a wild ass with one arrow, earned him the name of Gur, meaning “wild ass”.<sup>64</sup> He is known for his military campaigns against the Byzantines.<sup>65</sup> In the Iranian legends, Bahram Gur is

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<sup>62</sup> Houtsma, M., Arnold, T. W., Basset, R., Hartmann, R., ed., *The Encyclopedia of Islam II*, 585-586.

<sup>63</sup> Houtsma, M., Arnold, T. W., Basset, R., Hartmann, R., ed., *The Encyclopedia of Islam II*, 585-586.

<sup>64</sup> Houtsma, M., Arnold, T. W., Basset, R., Hartmann, R., ed., *The Encyclopedia of Islam II*, 585-586.

<sup>65</sup> Houtsma, M., Arnold, T. W., Basset, R., Hartmann, R., ed., *The Encyclopedia of Islam II*, 585-586.

portrayed in stories of adventure showing his prowess as a hunter, or of romance, specifically his private hunting trip with his slave harp player Azadeh.<sup>66</sup>

In written texts such as the *Shahnama*, Bahram Gur was known for his passion for hunting. On one of his hunting trips, he invited Azadeh, a harp playing slave girl. She rode on the back of his camel carrying her harp. During the trip, Azadeh challenged Bahram Gur to turn a male deer into female by shooting off his antlers, while pinning the other deer's head, foot, and ear together. Bahram Gur accomplished her challenge and felt proud and victorious. Subsequently, Azadeh felt sorry for the two animals, which angered Bahram Gur. Thus, he proceeded to push her off his camel, and trample her to her death.

The story of Bahram Gur and Fitna (another name of Azadeh), is also in Nizami's (d. ca. 1209) *Haft Paykar* (1197).<sup>67</sup> The *Haft Paykar* is part of the *Khamasa* of Nizami (d. ca. 1209) written in 1197. It is a romanticized biography of the Sassanian ruler Bahram Gur. Nizami mentions Firdaws's *Shahnama* many times throughout the *Haft Paykar*. He briefly narrates the stories from Firdaws's *Shahnama* while making minor changes to them. The rest of the *Haft Paykar* focuses on new stories written by Nizami. Bahram Gur's hunting trip with Fitna (Azadeh) is almost identical to Firdaws's version. In Nizami's story, when Bahram Gur meets Fitna he is already the king of Iran. On their hunting trip Bahram Gur is fighting an onager<sup>68</sup> (Figs. 1 and 6). However, Nizami changes the ending considerably. Instead of trampling Fitna to death, Bahram Gur pardons her. The ending of Nizami's story was seen as a lesson in forgiveness. Instead, Bahram Gur decides to keep Fitna in a palace estate,

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<sup>66</sup> Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, 70-71.

<sup>67</sup> "Haft Peykar," Encyclopedia Iranica Foundation, , <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/haft-peykar>.

<sup>68</sup> Gabbay, "Love Gone Wrong, then Right again: Male/Female Dynamics in the Bahrām Gūr-Slave Girl Story," , 680-681.

where she must carry out the task of carrying a calf on her shoulder up a staircase. The story ends with Bahram Gur and Fitna reconciling.<sup>69</sup>

Most of the narrative scenes on the metalwork (Figs. 1-6) cannot be attributed to Nizami's or Firdawsi's version of the story. The narrative scenes are not descriptive of the whole story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh. The most common representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork is the one showing both individuals on camelback with Azadeh playing the harp (Figs. 2.b, 3.a, 4.b, 5.a, 6, 7.a, 8.a).

The narrative scene appears on six different vessels attributed to Khurasan and Mosul, between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. The first is a Box Cover from the Walters Art Gallery (Fig. 1), attributed to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and to Khurasan.<sup>70</sup> Bahram Gur appears on camelback in the middle of a chalice. He is turning back to strike down a winged monster, while two deer heads appear at the bottom of the chalice.<sup>71</sup> A. S. Melikian Chirvani interprets the two deer heads as an allusion to the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh.<sup>72</sup> Bahram Gur fighting a winged monster reminds of Nizami's version of the story, whereby Bahram Gur is hunting an onager. Furthermore, A. S. Melikian Chirvani argues that the representation of Bahram Gur on the interior of the box in a chalice<sup>73</sup>, highlights the importance of the user. The user of the box may have intended to have Bahram Gur represented, as a sign of power, strength, and to link themselves to the Persian past.

The second vessel is a Lidded Bowl from the British Museum (Fig. 2), attributed to Khurasan to the 1200. Representations of astrology are the main surface decoration on the

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<sup>69</sup> Gabbay, "Love Gone Wrong, then Right again: Male/Female Dynamics in the Bahrām Gūr-Slave Girl Story," 680-681

<sup>70</sup> All areas the vessels are attributed to here, are based on their museum entries. Art historians have proven the workshop location of the vessels listed to be either Mosul or Khurasan.

<sup>71</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, "State Inkwells in Islamic Iran," 77-78.

<sup>72</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, "State Inkwells in Islamic Iran," 77-78.

<sup>73</sup> The fact that the figure only appears to the person using the box, evokes the idea of the private experience of the object brought up by Oleg Grabar, *Islamic Art and Beyond, Volume III, Constructing the Study of Islamic Art* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

bowl (Fig. 2). Bahram Gur and Azadeh appear on the bottom register of the decoration in a frieze of huntsmen (Figs. 2.a, and 2.b). Both figures have their back turned to each other. Bahram Gur is aiming his bow and arrow, while Azadeh appears to be playing the harp behind him. The figures are not accompanied by the two deer. The third vessel is an Ewer from the British Museum (Fig. 3), signed with the date April 1232<sup>74</sup>, and the city of Mosul (نقش شجاع ابن منعه الموصل في شهر الله المبارك شهر رجب في سنة تسع وعشرين وستماية بالموصل). Bahram Gur and Azadeh<sup>75</sup> appear in an eight-petal medallion out on a pleasure hunt (Fig. 3.a). The figures are set apart from the surface decoration of the vessel. The figures engulf the medallion, appearing on camelback. Bahram Gur pointing his bow and arrow, while Azadeh is playing her harp. The two deer from the narration appear at the bottom right of the medallion (Fig. 3.a). This narrative representation is descriptive of Firdawsi's *Shahnama* as both figures appear to be on camelback on a pleasure hunt of two deer. The first deer in front of the camel is the one alluding to the deer Bahram Gur pins its ear, hoof, and leg together.<sup>76</sup> The second deer behind the legs of the camel is alluding to the second deer mentioned in the story. The fourth vessel is an Ewer from the Louvre Museum<sup>77</sup> (Fig. 4), attributed to Iraq to the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Bahram Gur and Azadeh appear on camelback in a twelve-petal medallion. The figures consume the composition of the medallion. Azadeh is playing the harp, while Bahram Gur is pointing his bow and arrow (Fig. 4.b). In this scene, Bahram Gur seems to be pointing his arrow ready to hunt, but the deer are omitted from the representation. The background of the medallion is filled with

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<sup>74</sup>The date of this Ewer coincides with the rule of Badr al-Din Lu'lu' (r. 1218-1259) over Mosul at the time. D. S. Rice, "The Brasses of Badr Al-Din Lu'Lu'," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 13, no. 3 (1950), 627-634.

<sup>75</sup> The figures were identified by the curator of the British museum. It was later mentioned by both Eva Baer and Marianna Shreve Simpson in their respective book and article.

<sup>76</sup> Firdausi, *Shahnameh*, 604-605.

<sup>77</sup> This ewer shows the narrative scene of Bahram Gur and Azadeh along with Christian figures. This is a question that could be answered in a study of the metalwork attributed to Syria, under the Ayyubid's rule.

vegetal scrolls, allowing the figures to appear clearly. The fifth vessel is a brass Cup from the Turk ve Islam Eserki Musezi (Fig. 5), attributed to North Mesopotamia to the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. The figures appear on the bottom of a facet, within a variety of indecipherable engravings (Fig. 5.a). They occupy the whole of the bottom register of the facet, highlighting the importance of the narrative scene. Similarly, to the previous representations, Bahram Gur and Azadeh appear on camelback. Azadeh is turning her back to Bahram Gur, playing the harp. While Bahram Gur is pointing his bow and arrow ready to hunt. A deer is seen at the bottom of the facet, alluding to their pleasure hunt. Silver inlays have not survived on this vessel. It is attributed to Mosul by Eva Baer based on its iconography and rendition style.<sup>78</sup> The sixth vessel is an Inkwell and Pencase, from the Marquet de Vasselot collection (Fig. 6) attributed to Iran, and to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>79</sup> This vessel is dated by A.S. Melikian Chirvani to the 13<sup>th</sup> century based on the ornamentation style and the epigraphy.<sup>80</sup> On this vessel, Bahram Gur appears in two medallions. The first representation shows Bahram Gur on horseback, ready to shoot his arrow. In another medallion an onager is represented. This first medallion highlights Bahram Gur's hunting skills. The second representation, Bahram Gur appears with Azadeh on camelback. The two figures appear in the middle of the medallion, with their backs turned to each other. Azadeh is playing her harp while Bahram Gur is ready to shoot his arrow. A body of a deer, and a head of a deer appear separately in the medallion, alluding to the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh out on their pleasure hunt.<sup>81</sup> The composition of the narrative scenes on the metalwork studied can be compared to manuscript paintings. There is "no constant common system for conveying heroic narrative

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<sup>78</sup> Eva Baer, "A Brass Vessel from the Tomb of Sayyid Baṭṭāl Ghāzī. Notes on the Interpretation of Thirteenth-Century Islamic Imagery," *Artibus Asiae* 39, no. 3/4 (1977), 299-335.

<sup>79</sup> The attribution of the metalwork is based on the museum entry. However, based on the art historians' research, D.S. Rice and Sheila Blair, the metalwork of this paper can be attributed to the workshops of Mosul and Khurasan.

<sup>80</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, "State Inkwells in Islamic Iran," 86-87.

<sup>81</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, "State Inkwells in Islamic Iran," 86-87.

in visual form".<sup>82</sup> The space within the medallions (Fig. 3.a, b, c) is treated differently than the rest of the vessel. The vegetal scroll behind the figures seem to create a subtlety that allows for a better understanding and discerning of the figures. In addition, the enthronement scenes on the Ewer of the British Musuem (Fig.3) and Cup in the Turk ve Islam Eserli Musezi (Fig. 5), seem to remind of the audience scene and frontispiece of *Kitab al-Aghani* in the respective volumes XX and XI.<sup>83</sup> The narrative scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh focus on the pleasure hunt of a Persian king. Bahram Gur is seen in all figures ready to hunt, highlighting his strength, and hunting prowess. Furthermore, the composition of the narrative scene is similar on many of the vessels (Figs. 2-6). Both figures appear on camelback with their backs turned, Bahram Gur with his bow and arrow ready to hunt, and Azadeh playing her harp.

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<sup>82</sup> Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," 137-138.

<sup>83</sup> Julian Raby, *The Art of Syria and the Jazira, 1100-1250*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 90-91.

*Figure 1 - Box Cover, Bronze with silver inlay, 1.7x9.4 cm, 12th century, Khurasan, Walters Art Gallery, 54.515.*



Figure 2 - Lidded Bowl, Bronze engraved and inlaid with silver, 18.5x21.5 cm, ca. 1200, Herat, The British Museum, 1950,0725.1.



Fig. 2.a: Bahram Gur and Azadeh in the extreme bottom right. Image courtesy of Marianna Shreve Simpson, 1985.



Fig. 2.b: Bahram Gur and Azadeh on camelback. Image courtesy of Eva Baer, 1983.

Figure 3 - Ewer, Brass inlaid with silver and copper, 30.4x22x21.5 cm, April 1232 (dated), Mosul (signed), The British Museum, 1866,1229.61.

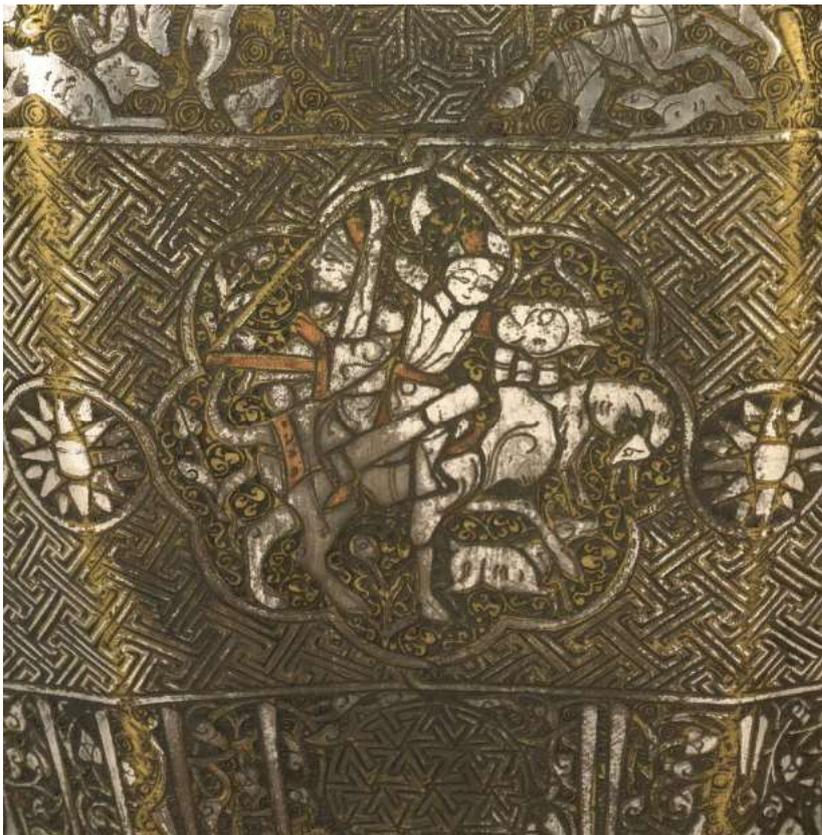


Fig. 3.a: Bahram Gur and Azada on camelback

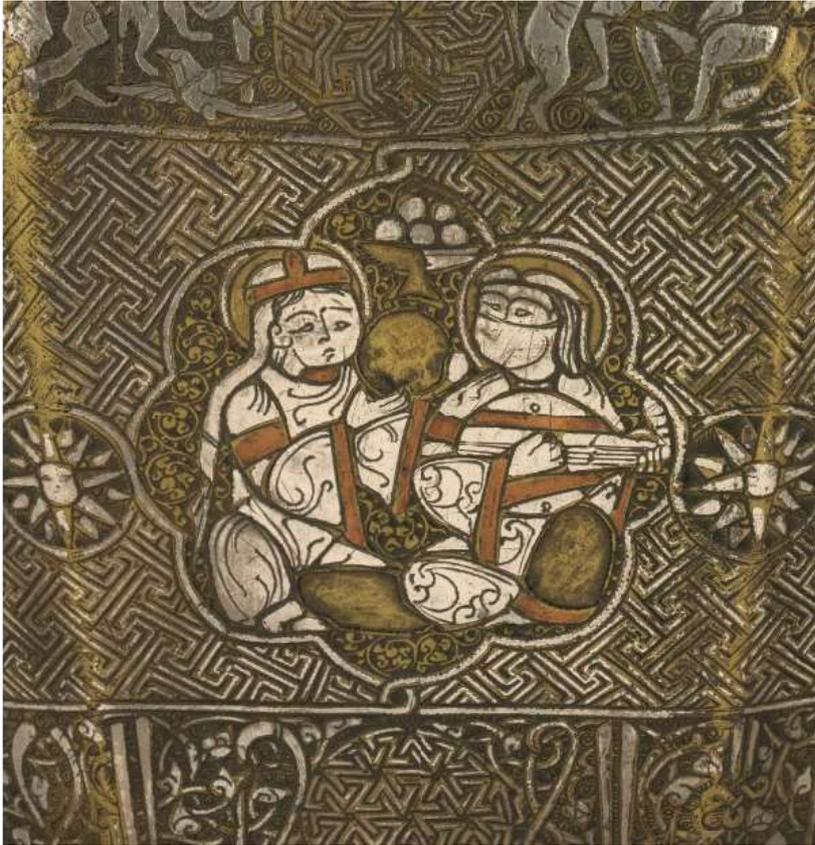


Fig. 3.b: Pair of Female Musicians



Fig. 3.c: Male Figure Hunting Ducks

*Figure 4 - Ewer, Copper alloy repousse, engraved, and inlaid with silver and red copper, 45.5x32.3 cm, ca. 1200-1250, Iraq or Syria, Musee du Louvre, AD 4413.*



Fig. 4.a: Huntsman on horseback



Fig. 4.b: Bahram Gur and Azadeh on camelback

*Figure 5 - Cup, Brass inlaid with silver and gold, mid-13th century, attributed to North Mesopotamia, Turk ve Islam Eserli Musezi, 102. Photos courtesy of Eva Baer, 1977.*



Fig. 5.a: Bahram Gur and Azadeh on camelback



Fig. 5.b: Accession scene



Fig. 5.c: Mounted Hunter with winged lion



Fig. 5.d: Christian Figure

*Figure 6 - Inkwell and Pencase, Brass inlaid with silver, early 13th century, Iran, Private Collection of Marquet de Vasselot. Photos courtesy of A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, 1979.*



### 3.2 Figural Representation on Seljuq Metalwork

During the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the metalwork produced was characterized by figural representation such as enthronement scenes, hunting scenes (Fig. 4.a), and personification of astrological symbols (Fig. 2). Annette Hagedorn argues that the princely theme of equestrians and hunters, is a reference to the Persian princely ideology.<sup>84</sup> The Seljuq metalwork with huntsmen (Figs. 2,3, and 4) could be hinting at the Persian ideology. The court entertainment scenes included musicians, dancers, and court festivities (Fig. 3). By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the scenes depicting enthroned figures feasting and drinking while being entertained by musicians and dancers were fully developed.<sup>85</sup> The representation of musicians varied, and they came to be included in different scenarios (Figs. 3.b, 9.b). The representation of the dancer along with the musicians could be seen as a metaphor for leisure and good life.<sup>86</sup> Zodiac signs were often used to decorate metalwork, specifically in the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>87</sup>, as seen on the Lidded Bowl (Fig.2). The Seljuqs sultans were known for their interest in the science and employed scientists to work on astronomical tables.<sup>88</sup>

The figural representation under the Seljuq is mainly of enthronement scenes.<sup>89</sup> Specifically on metalwork, the scene of Bahram Gur hunting with Azadeh appears within a variety of enthronement scenes of other unidentified rulers. The decorative repertoire of the court entertainment conveys a certain idea of prosperity and might have become routine. Whereas the representation of narrative scenes is a phenomenon that first appears on medieval metalwork under the Seljuq and could be interpreted differently. To conclude, the decorative

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<sup>84</sup> Annette Hagedorn, *Die Blacas-Kanne*, Vol. 2 (Münster: Lit, 1992), 127-128.

<sup>85</sup> Atıl, *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art*, 21-22.

<sup>86</sup> Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen, "The Depictions of the Female Dancer in Islamic Art," *RIDIM-RCMI Newsletter* 22, no. 1 (Apr 1, 1997)4-5.

<sup>87</sup> Rice, "Inlaid Brasses from the Workshop of Aḥmad Al-Dhakī Al-Mawṣilī," 291-292.

<sup>88</sup> Sheila R. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 166-167.

<sup>89</sup> Raby, *The Art of Syria and the Jazira, 1100-1250*, 88-89.

repertoire of medieval metalwork is varied. The narrative scenes studied (Table 1) fall within this repertoire. The enthronement scenes, court celebrations, and astrological symbols have become generic and lack importance. Whereas the narrative scenes of Persian legends represent Persian culture and history, suggesting that the Turkic tribes in the region related to stories from the lands they just conquered.

*Figure 7 - Map of East and Central Asia. Courtesy of Eva Baer, 1983.*



### **3.3 Narrative Scenes on Seljuq Ceramics**

While on metalwork narrative scenes were unprecedented, on ceramics from the same period they were common. The stories of Bahram Gur and Azadeh (Figs. 10-11), Faridun and Zahak (Fig. 15), Bizhan and Manizha (Fig. 19), and King Kay Kavus (Fig. 20) were seen on ceramics from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The treatment of narrative scenes on ceramics is different than that of metalwork. First, multiple scenes are represented simultaneously, overlapping. Second, the narration is the only surface decoration on the

ceramic vessel. Whereas on the metalwork the narrative scene appears within a variety surface decoration.

The representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on ceramics reads differently to the user of the vessel. The figures are the only representation on the bowl making them everything the user sees when using the bowls (Figs. 10, 11). Furthermore, the two Bowls from the Metropolitan Museum depict two episodes from Firdawsi's story simultaneously. Bahram Gur and Azadeh appear on camelback, and Azadeh appears a second time being trampled by the camel. Other stories from the *Shahnama* appear on ceramics such as the story of Bizhan and Manizha. It is important to note that none of the previously mentioned scenes compare to the representation of Bizhan and Manizha on the Freer Gallery Beaker (Fig. 19). The narration with all its episodes is represented on the surface of the beaker. The registers on the beaker represent a sequence of events based on the story of Bizhan and Manizha.<sup>90</sup> The love story represented was popularized in written and oral forms well before Firdawsi's *Shahnama*.<sup>91</sup> The representation of narrative scenes on ceramics, is proof that artists were familiar with the narration of Persian Kings. However, since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the only narrative scene on metalwork from the Seljuq period was that of Bahram Gur and Azadeh.

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<sup>90</sup> Simpson, "The Narrative Structure of a Medieval Iranian Beaker," 16-17.

<sup>91</sup> Simpson, "The Narrative Structure of a Medieval Iranian Beaker," 15-16.

*Figure 8 - Ewer, Bronze cast, and engraved, 11th century, Iran, The Metropolitan Museum, 38.40.240.*

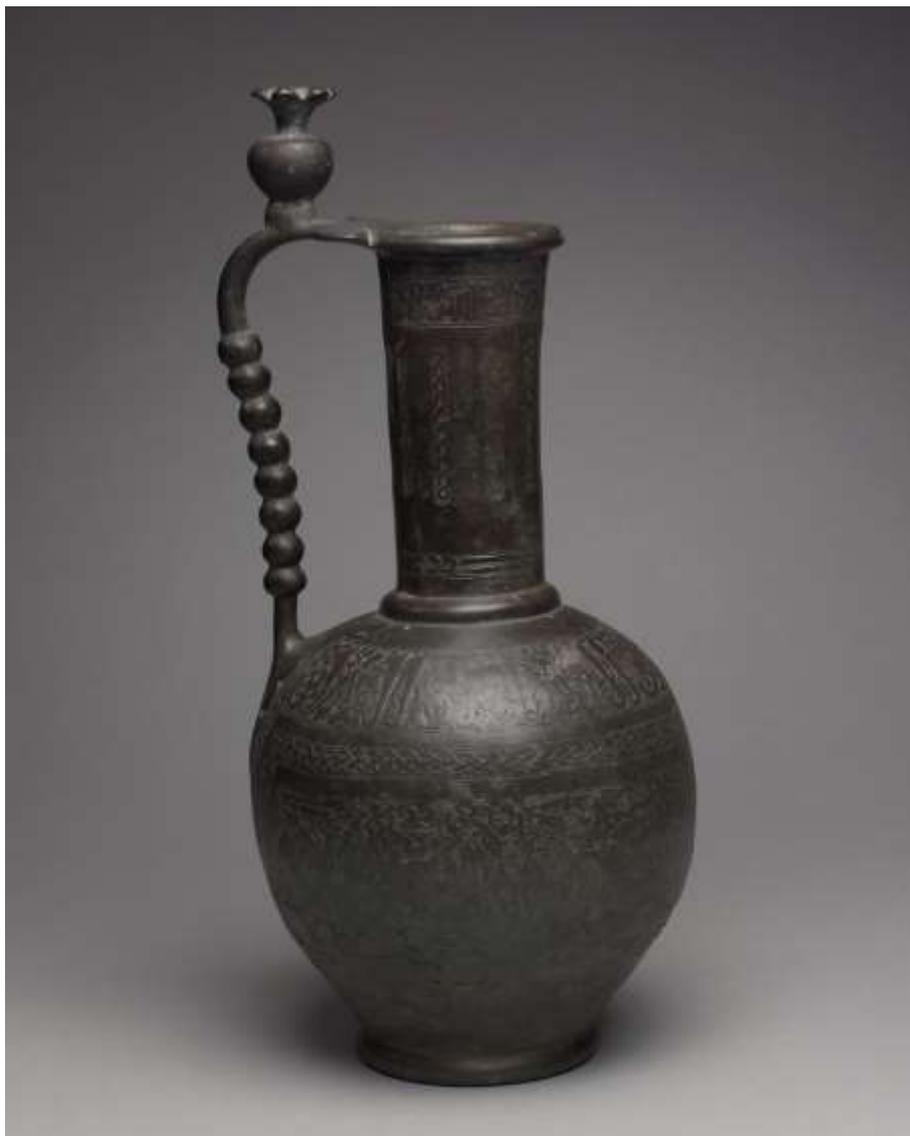




Fig. 8.a: Close up



Fig. 8.b: Close up

*Figure 9 - Ewer, Brass inlaid with silver and black compound, 1226, Iraq, probably Mosul, The Metropolitan Museum, 91.1.586.*



Fig. 9.a: Close up



Fig. 9.b: Close up

*Figure 10 - Bowl, Stonepaste glazed, inglaze-painted, overglaze-painted, and gilded, 8.7x22.1 cm, late 12th – early 13th century, Kashan, Iran, The Metropolitan Museum, 57.36.2.*



*Figure 11 - Bowl, Stonepaste polychrome inglaze and overglaze painted on opaque monochrome glaze (mina'i), 9.7x21.6 cm, 12th-13th century, Iran, The Metropolitan Museum, 57.36.13.*



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE INTERPRETATION OF THE APPEARANCE OF NARRATIVE SCENES ON METALWORK

During the Seljuq period, figural representation on metalwork was widespread. Narrative representation on metalwork began during their rule. Three reasons will be presented to clarify this occurrence. First, the Seljuq military background could have triggered the representation of a powerful military ruler, Bahram Gur. Second, the increasing popularity of the story of Bahram Gur through oral tradition. Third, the Seljuqs' appreciation of the Persian history and culture, specifically one of their most powerful rulers; Bahram Gur.

#### 4.1 The Heroic Story and the Seljuq Military Atmosphere

The Seljuqs (r. 1040-1194) came into Persia as a military Turkic tribe, known for their warfare skills.<sup>92</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, their rule spread westward through the Atabegs.<sup>93</sup> The Atabeg is a powerful prince who rules over a region assigned to him by the Sultan. In addition, the Atabeg is the guardian of Seljuq prince preparing for kingship.<sup>94</sup> Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the region witnessed political unrest; with the arrival of the Seljuqs, the Atabegs, the Fatimids, and the Ayyubids.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the arrival of seven Crusades between 1096 and 1270 further complicated the political atmosphere.<sup>96</sup> But, by the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, the Seljuqs had established their power against all forces. They invaded Khurasan

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<sup>92</sup> Basan, *The Great Seljuqs*, 21-22.

<sup>93</sup> A.C.S. Peacock, *Early Seljuq History*, 72-73.

<sup>94</sup> El-Azhari, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*, 301-302.

<sup>95</sup> Atıl, *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art*, 13-15.

<sup>96</sup> Atıl, *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art*, 16-17.

and made Nishapur their first capital in 1040.<sup>97</sup> And the Byzantine, Ghaznavids, and Buyids, all failed to fight against them.<sup>98</sup> Starting the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, they governed Persia under the authority of the ‘Abbasids in Baghdad.

The Seljuq political-military administration was characterized by the introduction of the atabeg post or guardians of royal princes.<sup>99</sup> The Sultan would assign a region for each powerful prince to govern. In addition, the Sultan assigns for each area a young Seljuqid prince.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the Atabegs became guardians of royal princes while ruling over regions. After the death of the Seljuq Sultan Muhammad Tapar in 1118 (512 AH), military commanders and Atabegs founded small polities in eastern Turkey, Iraq, and Syria in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>101</sup> These small principalities modeled their courts based on the Seljuqs courts, and eventually they became considered the “successor states”.<sup>102</sup> The Zengid Atabegs ruled over Syria and Iraq from 1127 to 1234 and they were the third dynasty created by the Seljuqs.<sup>103</sup> The Zengids were known for their military achievements, specifically against the crusaders.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, they were powerful military men, but they became rulers with a thrive for territorial expansion.<sup>105</sup> How did this new power dynamic translate into the art during this period?<sup>106</sup> This need for political advancement might have been reflected in their art. The decoration of outdoor hunting, and battle scenes was noticed by D.S. Rice on the metalwork attributed to Mosul. Specifically, when Rice mentions that the variety of outdoor battle scenes, and accurate depictions of military equipment was a

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<sup>97</sup> A.C.S. Peacock, *Early Seljuq History*, 47-48

<sup>98</sup> A.C.S. Peacock, *Early Seljuq History*, 72-73.

<sup>99</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, 79-80.

<sup>100</sup> Peri J. Bearman, *The Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 731-732.

<sup>101</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, 23-24.

<sup>102</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, 23-24.

<sup>103</sup> El-Azhari, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*, 316-317.

<sup>104</sup> El-Azhari, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*, 316-317.

<sup>105</sup> El-Azhari, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*, 319-320.

<sup>106</sup> This issue was posed by my advisor Dr. Kahil after discussing the previous drafts of this thesis.

characteristic of Mosul metalwork in the medieval period.<sup>107</sup> As seen on the British Museum Ewer (Fig. 3.b) whereby a figure is hunting ducks, on the Musee du Louvre Ewer (Fig. 4.a), a huntsman is represented on camelback, and on the Turk ve Islam Eseri Musezi Cup (Fig. 5.c), a man is hunting a winged lion.

The metalwork studied (Table 1) was commissioned under the reign of the Seljuqs and Atabegs and was attributed to Khurasan and Mosul. The Seljuqs and the Atabegs were military leaders who were becoming rulers over regions. The military ranks relating to the rulers, were seen visually in the artwork produced at the time.<sup>108</sup>

However, the novelty here is the appearance of a narrative scene. Their exposure to various art fields, including stories of Sassanian Kings is what lead to the inclusion of stories from the *Shahnama* on their metalwork. The rulers might have asked to include Bahram Gur on their metalwork as a sign of resemblance to Persian Kings. Seljuqs rulers might have related to his story because of its similarity to their rule and history. They were military men who were becoming rulers similarly to Bahram Gur. Thus, the Seljuqs linked themselves to his skill, strength, and his Persian culture.

The metalwork with the representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh is part of a larger group of metalwork with a variety of surface decoration including enthronement scenes, and hunting scenes. The metalwork could portray the strength, and military power of the Seljuqs and Atabegs through these scenes. The representation of Bahram Gur could be seen as an intentional step taken by Seljuqs rulers to further portray their strength, comparing themselves to Persian Kings. As seen on the Box Cover and Inkwell and Pencase (Figs. 1, and 6), Bahram Gur is represented hunting an onager showing his strength. Therefore, the Seljuqs are linking themselves to a strong powerful ruler who is part of the heritage of the

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<sup>107</sup> Rice, "Inlaid Brasses from the Workshop of Aḥmad Al-Dhakī Al-Mawṣilī," , 285-286.

<sup>108</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, 25-26.

culture of Khurasan, the region they were now ruling. However, it was not necessary to use narrative scenes to display the power of a ruler. The question is why art patrons and metalworkers would choose the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh to be the only narrative scene represented on metalwork.

The Seljuq sultan is a military commander of high rank. His authority conveys an image of heroism and bravery. According to, the genealogist Abū'l-Ghāzī Bahādur (d. 1663), the Seljuqs gained a reputation for having betrayed their tribal followers and have sought to link themselves with the Turanian ruler Afrāsīyāb of Firdawsi's *Shahnama*.<sup>109</sup> This primary source further proves the link the Seljuq created with the stories of Persian Kings. According to A.S. Melikian Chirvani, "It is a traditional royal eulogy conveyed in visual terms: the ruler is often celebrated as the "Bahram Gur of our time" or "the second Alexander".<sup>110</sup> This statement is further confirmed in his article "Le Shah-Name, La Gnose Soufie Et Le Pouvoir Mongol", whereby the poet Khāqānī (d. 1199) confirms that Turkic rulers were compared to rulers from the *Shahnama*, "l'Atabeg est tel Faridun [...] Il est l'atabeg aux appuis divins de Mohammad et aux qualités d'Alexandre".<sup>111</sup> Khāqānī is comparing the Atabegs to heroic Persian Kings from the *Shahnama*. Hence, the choice of representing Bahram Gur on metalwork was intentional. The Seljuqs were linking themselves to figures of strength and courage from Persian history.

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<sup>109</sup> A. C. S. Peacock, "Seljuq legitimacy in Islamic history" in *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, ed. Christian Lange and Songül Mecit, 79-80.

<sup>110</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, "State Inkwells in Islamic Iran," 77-78.

<sup>111</sup> Melikian-Chirvani, "Le Shah-Name, La Gnose Soufie Et Le Pouvoir Mongol," 295-296.

## 4.2 The Increasing Popularity of Narrative Texts and Oral Tradition

The popularity of narrative texts is a reason behind the artists familiarity with the topic of Bahram Gur and Azadeh. Specifically, oral traditions helped with the widespread of the *Shahnama*. Since the early period, according to Arab scholar Ibn Hisham (d. 833), al-Hārith (d. 624), a physician and poet-minstrel who traveled as a merchant, entertained people of Mecca with tales of Rostam and of Persian kings which he learned during his stay in Persia.<sup>112</sup> The traveling scholars, poets, artists were part of the Muslim culture, which enhanced exchange of knowledge, information, and culture. In the book *Islam and the Heroic Image*, John Renard argues that dastans<sup>113</sup> were the reason behind the spread of the stories of the *Shahnama*.<sup>114</sup> And the stories of Bahram Gur were widespread in Iran which triggered a high image production in the area.<sup>115</sup> Renard's argument can be proven with the narrative scenes represented on metalwork and ceramics produced under the Seljuqs (Tables 1-5). Furthermore, in the book *al-Fihrist*, the Arab bibliographer ibn al-Nadim (d. 990) names several tales which belong to the national legend of Persia. His knowledge and mention of these stories highlights their importance and spread throughout the Muslim world.<sup>116</sup>

From the spread of stories through travelers, a class of story tellers emerged, specifically during the Ghaznavid period. According to the accounts of al-Beyhaqi; the terms *Shahnama-khwan* (the teller of *Shahnama*) and *kārnāme-khwan* (the teller of chronicles) became prevalent.<sup>117</sup> The teller of *Shahnama* was a title given to court story tellers. These story

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<sup>112</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 53-54.

<sup>113</sup> Dastans are oral poems transmitted in performance; the performers re-enact a memorized text through improvisation or reading aloud. Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, 16-17.

<sup>114</sup> Reichl, *Medieval Oral Literature*, 666-667.

<sup>115</sup> Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, 38-39.

<sup>116</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 56-57.

<sup>117</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 58-59.

tellers were part of the Ghaznavid court; the ruling class preceding the Seljuqs. Furthermore, Kārāsi was a renowned storyteller in the court of Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 1040-1041, d. 1041) and was later praised by poets in the Seljuq period.<sup>118</sup> Hence, the Seljuqs were aware of the poets, story tellers, and intellectuals of the Ghaznavid courts and sought to have them in their court.<sup>119</sup> In conclusion, the oral traditions, and later story tellers, were part of the widespread of the stories of Persian Kings. The above-mentioned primary sources prove the widespread of the stories of Persian Kings. This occurrence set off the representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on Seljuq metalwork.

In addition to the oral traditions, art historians have attributed the sources of the *Shahnama* to two earlier written sources. This could further highlight the widespread of the stories. Kumiko Yamamoto breaks down the art historians' opinions on the sources of the *Shahnama*, and his chapter "The Oral Tradition and the Poet" will be used significantly. Jules Mohl assumes that Firdawsi's source is the *Xwadāy-nāmag* (Book of Lords), a collection of oral traditions which is no longer extant today.<sup>120</sup> Whereas Theodor Nöldeke refuted Mohl's claim and argued that Firdawsi's *Shahnama* is based on Abu Mansur's *Shahnama*, written in 957 and attributed to Herat. Only fifteen pages of the preface of Abu Mansur's *Shahnama* are extant today. Furthermore, Nöldeke refutes the possibility of oral tradition having an influence on Firdawsi's *Shahnama*.<sup>121</sup> Olga M. Davidson questions both Nöldeke and Mohl's theories and argues that Firdawsi's source for the *Shahnama* is oral poetry.<sup>122</sup> These studies help establish that the Persian legends were part of the shared culture of Persia well before Firdawsi's writings. Hence, the representation of Bahram Gur

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<sup>118</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 58-59.

<sup>119</sup> The Seljuqs courts will be further studied in Chapter 5, Section 1.

<sup>120</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 62-63.

<sup>121</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 62-63.

<sup>122</sup> Olga M. Davidson, "The Text of Ferdowsi's *Shahnama* and the Burden of the Past," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 1 (1998), 63-68.

and Azadeh on metalwork were not necessarily based on Firdawsi's rendition of the story. The "*Xwadây-nâmag*" (Book of Lords) was compiled in the Sassanian period and provided the basis for later chronicles.<sup>123</sup> The manuscript was later translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 756), a Persian scribe for the 'Abbasid court of al-Mansur (r. 754-775).<sup>124</sup> Eventually, the Persian legends manuscript was rewritten in Persian courts of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>125</sup> Hence, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the stories of Persian Kings were well known in the Ghaznavids courts. The attribution of Firdawsi's text to Abu Mansur's *Shahnama* is based on uncertainty.<sup>126</sup> The co-authors of Abu Mansur's *Shahnama* are mentioned in Firdawsi's text.<sup>127</sup> According to Francois de Blois, in his book *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, Firdawsi based the Sassanian chapter in his *Shahnama* on the manuscript of Abu Mansur.<sup>128</sup> Francois De Blois bases his analysis on the names of the authors found in both manuscripts.

The story of Bahram Gur was widespread through oral traditions, and earlier written manuscripts. The representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork (Table 1) and ceramics (Table 2)<sup>129</sup> appeared well before the first illustrated *Shahnama* was found. The Seljuqs were exposed to these sources and were made aware of the stories of the *Shahnama* prior to Firdawsi's writings. Nonetheless, the story of Bahram Gur is the only one represented on their metalwork.

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<sup>123</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 2-3.

<sup>124</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 2-3.

<sup>125</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 2-4.

<sup>126</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 5-7.

<sup>127</sup> Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 5-6.

<sup>128</sup> This reference appears in Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, 6-7.

<sup>129</sup> The scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh have been identified by Marianna Shreve Simpson in her study "Marianna Shreve Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects"

Table 2 – Ceramics with the Narrative Scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh

Fig. No.	Object Type	Medium	Dim.	Location	Year/Period	Museum, Reference
10	Bowl	Overglaze-painted in mina'i	8.7 x 22.1 cm	Kashan, Iran	Late 12 <sup>th</sup> – early 13 <sup>th</sup> century	The Metropolitan Museum, 57.36.2
11	Bowl	Stonepaste polychrome inglaze and overglaze painted on opaque monochrome glaze	9.7 x 21.6 cm	Iran	12 <sup>th</sup> – 13 <sup>th</sup> century	The Metropolitan Museum, 57.36.13
-	Bowl	Stonepaste overglaze painted (mina'i ware)	9.2 x 21.3 cm	Iran	12 <sup>th</sup> – 13 <sup>th</sup> century	The Metropolitan Museum, 57.36.14
-	Bowl					Collection Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan
-	Bowl					Staatliche Museen, Islamisches Museum
-	Bowl					Calouste Gulbekian Foundation, 992
-	Bowl	Molded white ware				Royal Scottish Museum, 1976.338

### 4.3 The Appreciation of the Seljuq to the Persian Culture

The third reason behind the appearance of narrative scenes on Seljuq metalwork may be related to the appreciation of the Seljuq of the Persian culture. The Seljuqs were military commanders who came into Persia to defend territory, rule, and conquer. The arts during this period reflected a general adoration of the Persian culture. Since the early Islamic period, oral tradition was prevailing in Persia spreading the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh. Moreover, the story is a direct link to the culture of the region since it portrays a

Persian King's power. To represent the story on metalwork could mean the Seljuqs want to associate themselves with the culture of Persia.

According to Hugh Kennedy in his book *The Court of the Caliphs*, "the patronage of scholars was part of the exercise of the elite power and the caliphs led the way".<sup>130</sup> The Seljuqs came into Central Asia and ruled under the 'Abbasids. This led the Seljuqs to build their courts similarly to the 'Abbasids, including acquiring intellectuals, art patronage, royal courts.<sup>131</sup> The Seljuq court became known for the poets who were a part of it, poets such as Haysa Baysa (d. 1179), al- Abīwardī (d. 1113), and al-Tughrā'ī (d. 1120-21).<sup>132</sup> Some of the poets were polymaths providing astrological studies to the rulers.<sup>133</sup> The Seljuq court became an intellectual scene, with an increasing interest in various art fields.

The art patronage scene was flourishing despite the political unrest in the region. The metalwork studied (Figs. 1-6) highlights this growing art production. The artwork studied here are ewers, bowls, trays, that were used by the elites as utilitarian objects. Decorated or not, the vessels would still provide the same functionality, but why did they need to be decorated?<sup>134</sup> First, it is important to note, that art reflects a monetary aspect. The objects are expensive, require hours of work, and require decisions when it comes to its decoration. The patron buying the art piece is the one dictating or approving its decoration. The wealthy and ruling class influenced the decorative themes.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, the experience with the object is a private one.<sup>136</sup> When using the object, the patron experiences its decoration alone, or with a small group of people. Choosing the decorative repertoire is a personal preference of the ruling class: enthronement scenes, astrological symbols, hunting scenes, court scenes.

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<sup>130</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, 31-32.

<sup>131</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, 31-32.

<sup>132</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, 33-34.

<sup>133</sup> Lange, ed., *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, 31-32.

<sup>134</sup> Grabar, *Islamic Art and Beyond, Volume III, Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, 14-15.

<sup>135</sup> Grabar, *Islamic Art and Beyond, Volume III, Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, 27-28.

<sup>136</sup> Grabar, *Islamic Art and Beyond, Volume III, Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, 27-28.

The scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh were unseen in surface decoration on metalwork prior to the Seljuqs. The narrative scenes repeated on several pieces produced under the Seljuqs' and later Atabegs' rule<sup>137</sup> highlight the common interest in the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh.

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<sup>137</sup> The study is based on the scenes identified so far. However, the evidence suggests that there might more narrative scenes still unidentified, an argument Simpson mentions at the end of her study. Simpson, "Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects," 131-149.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The Seljuqs are a Turkic tribe who ruled over Central Asia from 1040 to 1194.<sup>138</sup> They were known for their warfare skills, and eventually their rule spread westward through the Atabegs.<sup>139</sup> Art patronage under the Seljuqs and Atabegs was thriving.<sup>140</sup> Narrative scenes on metalwork first appeared under the Seljuqs. These scenes appear amongst a variety of surface decoration including figural representation with enthronement scenes, hunting scenes, musicians and dancers, and astrological symbols. The production centers in this period were attributed to Mosul and Khurasan. What made the pieces stand out is the appearance of the narrative scenes of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on their surface decoration. The inclusion of the narrative scenes could have been triggered by three reasons. First the parallel between Bahram Gur and the Seljuqs and Atabegs. The Seljuqs and the Atabegs were military men who became rulers over regions. Their military strength and territorial expansions were their main concern. The image of Bahram Gur's heroism seems to echo the political and military atmosphere of the time. Second, the spread of the stories of Persian Kings through oral traditions might have triggered the rendering of the stories on metalwork. The Seljuqs were made aware of the stories of Sassanian kings in their courts. The ceramics with narrative scenes (Tables 2, 4, and 5) prove that the Seljuqs were aware of many stories from the *Shahnama*. Nonetheless, only the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh appears on the

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<sup>138</sup> Basan, *The Great Seljuqs*, 21-22.

<sup>139</sup> A.C.S. Peacock, *Early Seljuq History*, 72-73.

<sup>140</sup> Dimand, "Saljuk Bronzes from Khurasan," , 87-88.

metalwork. The third reason is the appreciation of the Seljuqs to the Persian culture. The Seljuqs were military commanders who came into Persia to defend territory, rule, and conquer. The Seljuq visual representation reflected their appreciation of the Persian culture. The story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh is the only story represented on the metalwork from the Seljuq period. Bahram Gur's military qualities, hunting prowess, fearlessness, all related to the Seljuq rulers and made them choose his story to be the only one represented on their most expensive utilitarian object: the metalwork.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh appears on two vessels along with another story from the *Shahnama*, the story of Faridun and Zakhak. Faridun and Zakhak are two Persian Kings who fight over kingship. The narrative scenes are represented on metalwork from the early Ilkhanid period (Figs. 13-16, Table 3). The Candlesticks (Fig. 13, 14) depict the scenes of Faridun and Zakhak in individual medallions but within a larger context of a variety of decoration, similarly to the metalwork studied previously. Whereas on the Bowl of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig.16), Faridun and Zakhak are depicted within a frieze of huntsmen and near the representation of Bahram Gur and Azadeh.

To conclude, the story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh on metalwork is the first narrative scene to be identified on metalwork from the Seljuqs period. Three reasons were given to answer why the Seljuqs decided to include this story on their metalwork. In parallel, other stories of Persian Kings were appearing on ceramics. And at the beginning of the Ilkhanids period, another story from the *Shahnama* began to appear on four metalwork vessels (Table 3). No other narrative scenes have been identified on metalwork. Thus, the Seljuqs played an important role in generating narrative representations on metalwork.

Table 3 - Mongol Metalwork with the Narrative Scenes of Faridun and Zahhak, and Bahram Gur and Azadeh

Fig. No.	Object Type	Medium	Dim.	Location	Year	Museum, Reference
13	Candlestick	Copper alloy, repousse, engraved, and inlaid with gold, silver, and black compound	D1: 22.3 cm D2: 7.4 cm H: 25 cm	Iran	1285-1315	Louvre, AD 4421
14	Candlestick	Brass cast engraved, and inlaid with silver and black compound	23.7 x 21.2 x 21.2 cm	Iran or Iraq	1300-1350	The Met Museum, 91.1.580
15	Basin	Brass engrave and originally inlaid with silver and gold	16 x 77.2 cm	Iran	1300-1320	Victoria & Albert Museum, 546-1905
16	Bowl	Copper alloy engraved and overlaid in silver and gold	11.9 x 22.7 x 17.3 cm	Iran	1351-1352 (dated AH 752)	Victoria and Albert Museum, 760-1889

Figure 12 - Plate with a hunting scene from the tale of Bahram Gur and Azadeh, Silver with mercury gilding, 4.1x20.1 cm, ca. 5th A.D., Iran, The Metropolitan Museum, 1994.402.



*Figure 13 - Candlestick, Copper alloy, repousse, engraved, and inlaid with gold, silver, and black compound, 22.3x7.4x25 cm, 1285-1315, Iran, Louvre Museum, AD 4421.*



*Figure 14 - Candlestick, Brass engraved, and inlaid with silver and black compound, 23.7x21.2x21.2 cm, ca. 1300-1350, Iran or Iraq, The Metropolitan Museum, 91.1.580.*



*Figure 15 - Basin, Brass engraved and originally inlaid with silver and gold, 16x77.2 cm, ca. 1300-1320, Iran, Victoria & Albert Museum, 546-1905.*

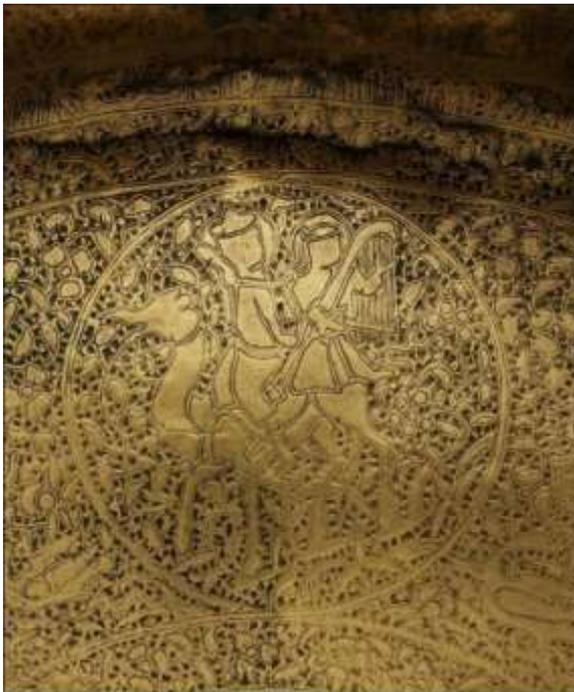


Fig. 15.a: Bahram Gur and Azadeh on camelback



Fig. 15.b: Ruler on Camelback



Fig 15.c: Enthroned Ruler with Attendants

*Figure 16 - Bowl, Copper alloy engraved and overlaid in silver and gold, Turanshah, 11.9x22.7x17.3 cm, 1351-1352 (dated), Iran, Victoria & Albert Museum, 760-1889.*



Fig. 16.a: Bahram Gur and Azadeh on camelback



Fig. 16.b: Huntsmen and scene identified as Fariddun and Zakhak

*Figure 17 - Bowl, Composite body, opaque white glaze, polychrome underglaze and overglaze painted decoration, 9.8x21 cm, early 13th century, Kashan, Iran, Detroit Institute of Arts, 30.421.*



*Figure 18 - Equestrian Portrait of Badr al-Din Lu'lu', folio from Kitab al-Aghani of Abyl-Faraj al-Isfahani, ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, 28.6x21.5 cm, 1217-1219, Mosul, Royal Library, Cod. Arab. CLXVIII.*

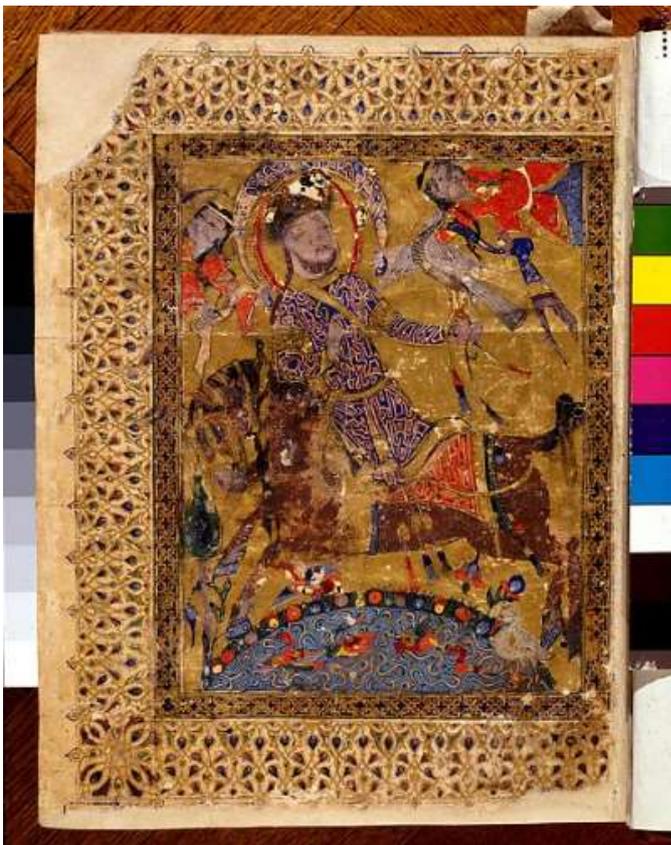


Figure 19 - Bahram Gur Hunting with Azada, folio from a Shahnama, dated 1352 (753 AH), ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, 15.2x8.1 cm (painting), Iran, Shiraz, The Met Museum, 57.51.32.



Fig. 19.a: Painting close.

Figure 20 - "Gustaham Slays Lahhak and Farshidvard", folio from a Shahnama, 4.6x10.6 cm (painting), ca. 1330-1340, Isfahan, Iran, The Metropolitan Museum, 1974.290.19.

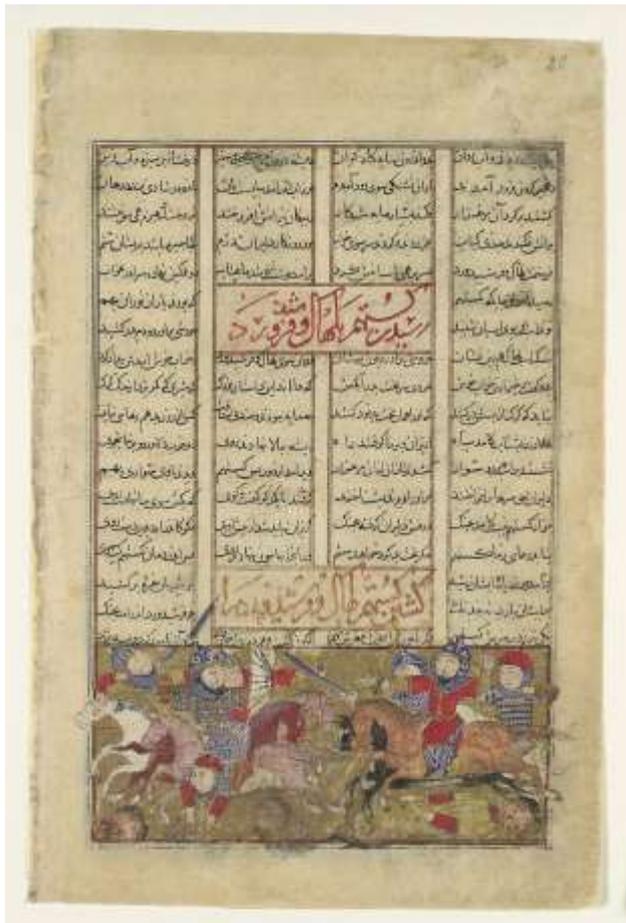


Fig. 20.a: Painting close.

*Figure 21 - Beaker, Stone-paste painted under glaze and over glaze with enamel (mina'i), 12x11.2x11.2 cm, late 12th century, Kashan, Iran, Freer Gallery of Art. F1928.2.*



*Figure 22 - Bowl, Fritware painted with black, turquoise, blue, brownish red, and pink over white glaze opacified with tin and gilded, 8.2x19.1 cm, late 12th – early 13th century, Kashan, Iran, Harvard Museums, 2002.50.53.*



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: CERAMICS WITH NARRATIVE SCENES TABLES

*Table 4 Ceramics with the Narrative Scenes of Faridun and Zahhak*

<b>Fig. No.</b>	<b>Object Type</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Dim.</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Museum, Reference</b>
17	Bowl	Composite body, opaque white glaze, polychrome underglaze and overglaze painted decoration	9.8 x 21 cm	Kashan, Iran	Early 13 <sup>th</sup> century	Detroit Institute of Art, 30.421
-	Bowl	Overglaze-painted in mina'i				Keir Collection
-	Bowl	Overglaze-painted in mina'i		Kashan, Iran	1186-1187	Private Collection

*Table 5 Ceramics with the Representation of Kay Kavus and Bizhan and Manizha*

<b>Fig. No.</b>	<b>Object Type</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Dim.</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Museum, Reference</b>
21	Beaker	Stone-paste painted under glaze and over glaze with enamel (mina'i)	12 x 11.2 x 11.2 cm	Kashan, Iran	Late 12 <sup>th</sup> century	Freer Gallery of Art, F1928.2
22	Bowl	Fritware painted with black, turquoise, blue, brownish red, and pink over white glaze opacified with tin, and gilded	8.2 x 19.1 cm	Kashan, Iran	Late 12 <sup>th</sup> – early 13 <sup>th</sup> century	Harvard Museums, 2002.50.53

## APPENDIX B: THE STORY OF BAHRAM GUR AND AZADEH

The story of Bahram Gur and Azadeh as it appears in Dick Davis' translation of Firdawsi's *Shahnama*:

“For a while Bahram occupied himself solely with playing polo and hunting. And so it was that one day he went out hunting without any of his companions, taking with him only his harp-playing slave girl. Her name was Azadeh, and her cheeks were as red as wine: she sat with him on his mount, her harp in her hand. She was his heart's delight and desire, and his name was always on her lips. That day, Bahram had asked for a brocade cloth to be draped across his camel's back, and that it be provided with four gem-studded stirrups, two of which were silver and two of gold. [...] Two pairs of deer appeared in front of them and the young prince turned smiling to Azadeh and said, “When I draw back the bowstring, which of these two do you want my arrow to strike? There is a young female, and she has an old male companion.” Azadeh replied, “You are a Hon of a man, and a warrior doesn't fight against deer! But turn that doe to a buck with an arrow, and with another arrow make the buck into a doe. Then urge your camel forward, and as they flee from you, use your slingshot, and strike one of the deer on the ear, so that she will rub it against her shoulder and lift up her foot to scratch the spot, and when she does that—if you want me to call you the fight of the world—pin her foot, ear and head together with one shaft. Bahram readied his bow and broke the silence of the plain with his cry. He had a double-headed arrow in his quiver, and as the buck fled before him, he shot this arrow so that it severed the buck's antlers; instantly, now that its antlers were gone, the buck looked like a doe, and Azadeh stared at Bahram in astonishment. Then he shot two arrows into the doe's head, so that they protruded like antlers, while the blood ran down over her muzzle. Next he urged his camel toward the other pair; he fitted a pellet in the fold of his slingshot and loosed it at the ear of one of them. He was rightly pleased with his skill, because the deer immediately scratched at its ear, and Bahram notched an arrow to his bow. The shaft pinned foot, ear, and head together, and Azadeh's heart was wrung for the animal. Bahram pushed her from the saddle and she fell headlong to the ground. He said, “You're nothing but a stupid harp-player. What do you mean by setting me such a task? If I had missed, I'd have brought shame on my lineage.” He trampled her beneath his camel's hooves, and blood spurted from her breast and arms. After this, he never took a slave girl hunting with him again.”