

2018 AP[®] ART HISTORY FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

3. Suggested time: 15 minutes.

The work shown is *The Court of Gayumars*, a folio from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*, created c. 1522–1525 C.E.

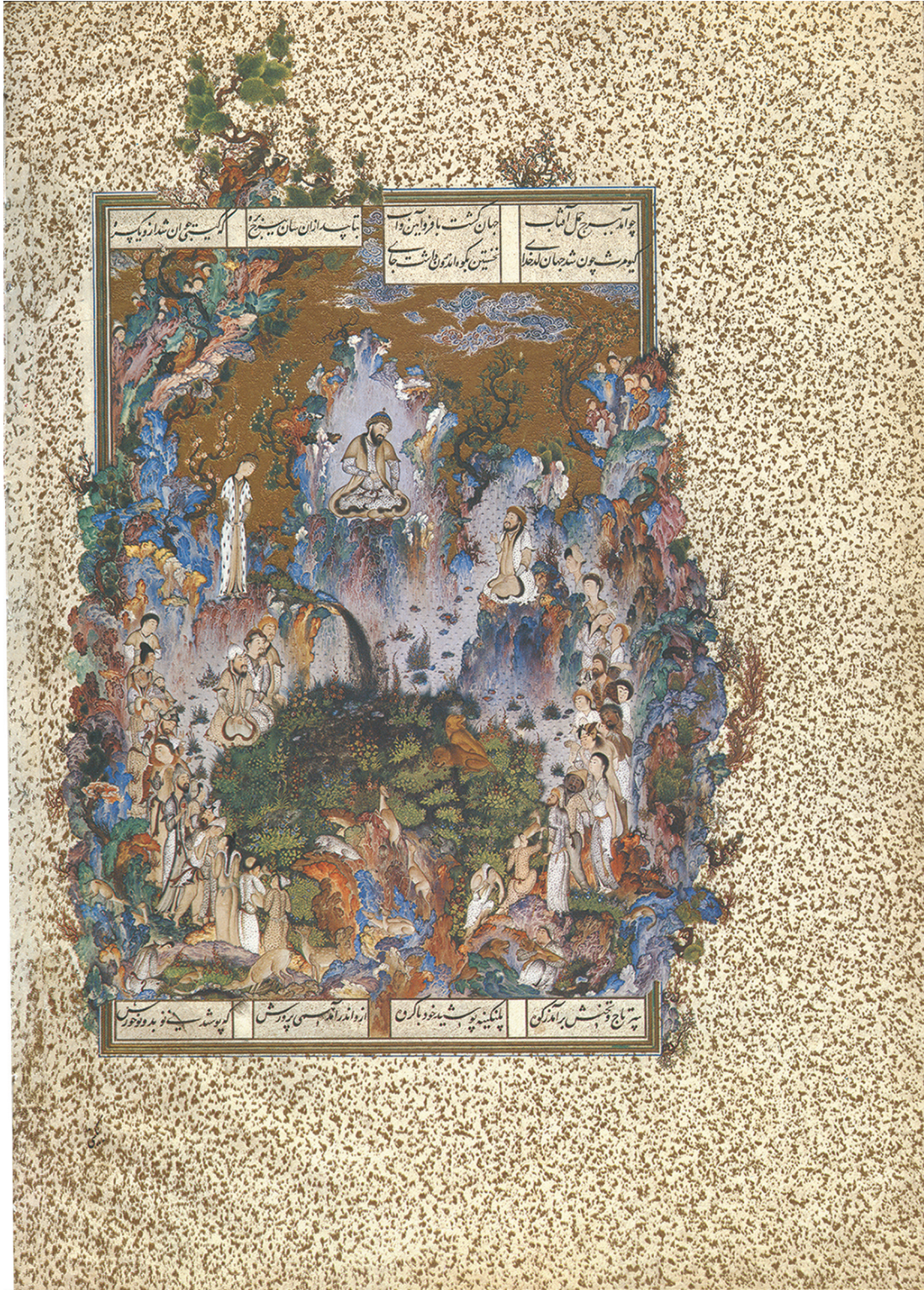
Describe the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Describe at least two visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Using specific contextual evidence, explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function.

Using specific visual evidence, explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*.

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Courtesy of Wikimedia

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4. Suggested time: 15 minutes.

The work shown is Lintel 25 from Structure 23 in Yaxchilán, Chiapas, Mexico, 725 C.E.

Describe at least two visual characteristics of the ritual depicted in the work.

Use at least two examples of specific contextual evidence to explain the ritual depicted in the work.

Explain the political or religious significance of this ritual for Maya rulers.

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Question 3 (continued)

Using specific contextual evidence, explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function.

A *Shahnama* is a manuscript intended for secular use. As a *Book of Kings*, a *Shahnama* recounts stories of virtuous kings and a model of conduct for rulers to follow. In the genre of a “mirror for princes,” a *Shahnama* was meant to extol the virtues of ruling with justice and loyalty. Thus, at its most basic level, a *Shahnama* functioned as a guide for just and benevolent rule. It is a compendium of Persian stories intended for the education of kings and princes.

Shah Tahmasp’s *Shahnama* was originally commissioned by his father, Shah Isma’il I, and completed about 20 years later during a period of dynastic change. This patronage of a lavishly illustrated copy of a *Shahnama* can therefore be interpreted as legitimizing their reign by connecting a relatively new state to the mythic beginnings of Persian history and fabled rulers such as Gayumars. This parallel is all the more apparent given Firdawsi’s dedication of the original *Shahnama* to the ruler Mahmud of Ghazna, a king who had succeeded in gaining power over competing territories by the end of the 10th century. For Firdawsi, Mahmud of Ghazna appeared to be positioned to end dynastic strife and unify the region: a similarity that would not have been lost on Shah Tahmasp and his father.

The commissioning of a *Shahnama* also served an important courtly purpose. Lavish manuscripts such as copies of the *Shahnama* were a central part of Safavid artistic patronage. Apprenticed in calligraphy and drawing, Shah Tahmasp was a devoted and knowledgeable patron, who combined his education from the city of Herat with the local capital culture when he moved back to Tabriz. Commissioning a *Shahnama* served to demonstrate his commitment to Persian literary culture; it would also have showcased his wealth and status. An extravagant court production, a *Shahnama* was viewed only on special occasions during which an elite audience could leisurely appreciate the sumptuous materials and fine details, as well as the good taste of the manuscript’s patron.

Using specific visual evidence, explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of The Court of Gayumars reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*.

In terms of subject matter, the depiction of the Gayumars’s benevolence and the prosperity of his reign provided a moral example for the education of young Shah Tahmasp, who inherited his father’s throne at age 10 and who oversaw the completion of this commission of a *Shahnama*. Shah Tahmasp may also have understood the inclusion of Gayumars’s son and grandson as significant. Shah Tahmasp may have seen a parallel between himself and the legendary prince Hushang, as both young men were slated to assume roles as political and cultural leaders after their fathers.

Visual characteristics of the illumination reiterate themes of dynastic authority. The use of hierarchical scale and the placement of Gayumars at the apex of the composition reinforce the authority of the shah and of dynastic relationships generally. Gayumars’s placement in the compositional hierarchy, atop the circle of humans and animals, gives him significance as a leader.

Though Gayumars is the central point of this illumination, Persian painting tradition allows for multiple centers of interest. Viewers’ eyes are meant to explore freely, roaming over the different colors and shapes, moving from one visual element to the next. Such personal exploration was intended to be part of the delight of the elite experience of viewing the manuscript, in its function as demonstrating the wealth and power of the patron as well as his refinement and commitment to Persian literary culture. The sumptuous materials, meanwhile, made the manuscript appropriate for royalty.