Building Our Collection:
Mughal and Safavid Albums

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Museum of Islamic Art
Exhibition Themes

Art and Politics: The History of Albums

Artistry and Intercultural Exchange in Mughal and Safavid Albums

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The collecting of Persian miniature paintings and calligraphy, and the compilation of albums, has been a pastime of princes and other elites since the time of the Timurid court in the 15th century CE. These objects, prized for their artistic virtuosity, rich symbolism, and historic importance, have remained central to the collecting of Islamic art until the present day.
Art and Politics:
The History of Albums

The folios on display in this exhibition were once bound together in albums assembled largely in Iran and India. In Arabic and Persian, the word used for these collected folios is the same: *muraqqa’*, which is often translated into English as “album.” The word *muraqqa’* denotes an object that has been patched together. Often used as a metaphor for the patchwork of the heavens or the constellations, or referring to the patched cloak of the wandering dervish, this term also encapsulates the sophisticated juxtapositions of calligraphy and painting (not always containing both) compiled and bound into volumes between the 15th and 19th centuries, the dispersed pages of which are on display here. The culture of connoisseurship at the royal courts of the early modern Islamic world can be reconstructed in part through an examination of the methods in which albums were compiled. The careful selection of calligraphy and illustration, and the connoisseur’s appreciation of the interplay between word and image, colour and composition, and the recognition and esteem of the hands of particular artists, sheds light on the artistic cultures of early modern Iran and India.

The collection of miniature paintings and calligraphic compositions and their compilation into albums for the private enjoyment of kings and courtiers were popular pursuits in both Safavid Iran (1501–1736 CE) and Mughal India (1526-1858 CE) as demonstrations of the cultural refinement of the rulers and their courtiers. These royal collecting practices travelled from the Timurid1 court in Herat, to Iran and India, and from India to Europe, when the British also later adopted the practice of compiling albums in imitation of Indian elites. The practice of compiling miniature paintings and calligraphy was later adopted by the British in India in the 18th and 19th centuries, and many British patrons not only collected miniature paintings but also commissioned works from Indian artists, bringing connoisseurship of Islamic and Indian art from the Subcontinent to circles of European elites.

1 The Timurid dynasty ruled parts of Iran, central Asia and the Caucasus from 1370 CE, with Timur’s (d. 1405 CE) initial conquests, until 1507 CE. The artistic production, court culture, religious scholarship and administration of the Timurid court was to exercise a great influence on the later dynasties of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals, who emulated the Timurids with the aim of bolstering their imperial legitimacy.
How do these dispersed album pages shed light on the past? Albums from the Safavid period in Iran demonstrate the development of painting styles from the constrained formalism of the early period, to the later, more intimate, depictions of beautiful women and youths, reflecting changing artistic tastes and interests at court. Influenced by the school of the famed artist Riza Abbasi, the single portraits of the later period were owned and enjoyed by wealthy patrons as a display of their artistic knowledge.

The dispersal of the royal Safavid atelier late in the reign of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524 –1576 CE) contributed to this trend; because artists no longer enjoyed stable patronage, it has been argued that artists in the following decades created a more affordable and immediately appealing form of artwork on a single folio that could be sold to patrons whose pockets were not sufficiently deep to commission an illustrated manuscript in its entirety. These single pages were then bound in albums by artistic connoisseurs, a practice that gained popularity in 17th century Safavid Iran. In contrast to the charming individual portraits of dandies, beautiful ladies and dervishes produced in Safavid Iran, the portraits of rulers from the Mughal period in India reinforced the grandeur and power of the Mughal emperor through the careful use of symbolic imagery, and emphasise the importance of dynastic legitimacy to the imperial project of the Mughals and Safavids, as evident in the images of Shah Isma’i Safavi and his descendants, and the portraits of Shah Shuja’ and Aurangzeb.

Mughal and Safavid albums also shed light on the ways in which powerful figures used art to reinforce their social and political authority. Albums often included famous paintings made during previous dynasties that were removed from their bindings and re-compiled into new works as acts of cultural appropriation.

Collections of paintings and calligraphy were often taken by invading armies as tokens of artistic prestige, and as a symbolic capture of the defeated dynasty’s cultural legitimacy. This theme is explored through exhibition objects such as the Mughal portraits that were taken into British collections primarily during the 19th centuries.

Artistry and Intercultural Exchange in Mughal and Safavid Albums

The paintings and calligraphic compositions in this exhibition demonstrate the many artistic techniques used in the production of Mughal and Safavid albums. From the concertina bindings that encase fine samples of calligraphy in *nasta’liq* script, to the intricate brushwork of Mughal and late Safavid painting, this section of the exhibition examines the artistic significance and technical brilliance of such objects. One way that Safavid and Mughal album pages illuminate the history of cultural exchange is through the creative adaptation of foreign artistic motifs by artists, whereby imported features and styles were integrated into the local artistic canon.

In addition to artistic motifs from the Timurid and Safavid courts, the Mughals adapted elements from European prints into their painting, as we can observe in the image of “St. Jerome as a Figure of Melancholy” (see MS.44.2007 below). This image reinterprets Christian religious iconography in a new way, using the image of the saint as metaphors for emotions and integrating them into the visual language of Mughal art. The Safavids similarly painted ladies and youths in European costume, demonstrating the integration of foreign clothing fashions into Persian elite culture such as in the image, “Portrait of a Maiden in European Costume” (see MIA.2014.259 below). However, late Safavid artists were also influenced by Mughal painting techniques as well as themes, especially in the area of portraiture, when artists such as ‘Ali Quli Jabbadar created sensitive, individual portraits in the Mughal style, as is the case with many of the portraits in the St. Petersburg Muraqqa, while also making use of European techniques of perspective and shading. While there is some scholarly debate surrounding the attribution of the painting “Lady Offering Refreshments to a Tribesman” (see MIA.2014.385 below), it nonetheless demonstrates the synthesis of Mughal and European painting techniques.

The exchange of artistic motifs across vast geographical expanses did not take place merely between Europe and Asia, but also between different cultures and dynasties within the continent of Asia itself. For instance, many of the objects on display here show how the artists under the patronage of the rulers of the Mughal and Deccan courts in India adapted the artistic conventions of the Safavid court of Iran. Examples include the use of *nasta’liq* script that was developed and perfected at Timurid courts, and later adapted as part of Timurid artistic heritage of the Safavid, Mughal and Deccan courts. The use of *nasta’liq* script is a perfect example of how not just images and a repertoire of decorative motifs, but other forms of art – either transported in albums or transmitted by the peripatetic artists themselves - travelled long distances and can highlight the routes along which exchange was carried out.

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3 The Deccan sultanates, namely, the courts of Bijapur, Golkonda, Ahmadnagar, Berar and Bidar, ruled over the Deccan plateau in the south of the Indian Subcontinent. By the late 17th century, these sultanates had effectively been absorbed into the Mughal Empire, especially with the military conquests of Aurangzeb in 1686-87. The Deccan Sultanes, perhaps to an even larger degree than the Mughals, were influenced by Persianate culture and Iranian religious and artistic practices.
Objects: Selections from the Exhibition
Lady Reading an Album
Safavid Iran (Qazvin), mid-16th century
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper
MS.598.2007

An elegantly and richly attired lady enjoys a page from a book that has been painted gold, perhaps symbolising the illumination of an expensive manuscript. This painting in the style typical of the Safavid court at Qazvin, conveys the elite social status associated with access to illuminated manuscripts. This miniature painting also provides some insight into reading practices, or at least the depiction and perception of reading practices, in the Safavid period (1501–1736 CE), and would suggest that the reading of beautiful manuscripts was the purview of the wealthy. A number of other depictions of attractive young ladies perusing manuscripts exist from the Safavid period that have been attributed to the artist Mirza Ali, who was active in the mid-16th century CE. For instance, Stuart Cary Welch has attributed the portrait, "A Coquette Reading" to Mirza ‘Ali, who began his career an artist in the ateliers of Shah Tahmasp and Sultan Ibrahim Mirza4, dating the painting to circa 1570 CE5. Painted in the court style associated with Qazvin, the craning neck, curving posture and treatment of the colour and pattern of the textiles would suggest the hand, or the influence, of Mirza Ali on the painting "Lady Reading an Album."

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4 Sheila R. Canby, Princes, Poets and Paladins: Islamic and Indian Paintings from the collection of the Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 64.

5 Stuart Cary Welch et al., Wonders of the Age: Masterpieces of Early Safavid Painting 1501-1576 (Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 1979), 211.
Mirza ‘Ali has recently been identified as ‘Abd al-Samad the Iranian artist who emigrated from Shah Tahmasp’s atelier to the court of the Mughal Emperor Humayun in the year 1550 CE and was head of the royal atelier under Akbar from 1572 CE. If Mirza ‘Ali and ‘Abd al-Samad are the same individual, the date assigned to “Lady Reading an Album” should fall before 1550 CE, as Mirza ‘Ali’s work in this style ceased before this date. However, it is not impossible that this work was completed by one of his students or an artist under his influence, as the impact of Mirza ‘Ali’s work is clear in the colour scheme of the lady’s attire and her pose, the composition and gold background. Both the composition and tone bear a striking similarity to the work attributed to Mirza ‘Ali in the Harvard Art Museum, a folio from an album dated to circa 1540 CE: “Seated Princess with a Spray of Flowers.” Another painting attributed to Mirza ‘Ali, “Youth with a Golden Pillow,” also in the Harvard Art Museum, dated to the mid-16th century, features a figure with similarly delicate features and pose, clothed in textiles of the same hue as the “Seated Princess” and “Lady Reading,” which identifies the painting at hand as the product of the court of Shah Tahmasp; it possible therefore that Mirza ‘Ali perhaps before his emigration to India, or one of his pupils was responsible for its creation.


7 A number of works in the Shah Tahmasp Khamsah of Nizami (BL Or. 2265) have also been attributed to Mirza ‘Ali, such as, “Shãpūr shows the portrait of Khusraw to Shīrīn” (folio 48v), and “Khusraw listens to Bārbad playing the lute” (folio 77v).
Two bearded men, possibly poets or scholars, examine a richly bound manuscript together, studying and discussing the text, or reciting aloud the poetry that it may contain. Set in a richly illuminated border, this image was clearly valued by its royal owners and later mounted in an album, possibly at the Mughal court. The artist of this painting, Aqa Mirak,⁸ was employed in the court workshop of the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-76 CE), and lent his talent to a number of prestigious projects, such as the illustration of Shah Tahmasp’s Shahnamah and the Khamsah of Nizami. In particular, it is possible to identify Aqa Mirak’s style through the paintings attributed to him in the latter work, the Khamsah produced between the years 1539-1543 CE in the royal atelier at Tabriz.⁹ The somewhat wide jaw of the scholar/poet on the left is similar to the depiction of Anushirvan in Shah Tahmasp’s Shahnamah, and similar physiognomies appear among the courtiers in both “Shapur Returning to Khosraw” (folio 57v) and “Khusraw Enthroned” (folio 60v), and both images have been attributed to Aqa Mirak shortly after their creation, which supports the attribution of “Two Poets Reading” to this famous Safavid artist. Interestingly, this particular work also bears an inscription from the Mughal imperial library in the border, which implies that at one point it was part of this collection, demonstrating the interest of Indian rulers in collecting and appreciating Persian painting.

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⁹ Now held in the collection of the British Library Or. 2265. For instance, from the Makhzan al-Asrar, “Anūshīrvān and the Owls,” inscribed “Mīrāḳ, the painter 946 (1539/40)” (folio 15v); from Khusraw and Shirin: “Shāpūr returning to Khosraw,” by Mirak (folio 57v); “Khusraw Enthroned,” with inscription attributing the painting to Mirak (folio 60v); “Khusraw and Shirin Listening to Stories Told by Shirin’s Maidens by Mirak,” (folio 66v); From Layla and Majnūn, “Majnūn with the animals in the desert,” by Mirak (folio 166v).
The folio features a portrait of a dervish, wrapped in voluminous robes and sitting in contemplation under a tree, a common theme in the Isfahan school of painting. This style was pioneered by the famous Persian artist Riza ‘Abbasi (c. 1565–1635 CE), under whom Mu’in Musavvir (c. 1630–1697 CE), the purported artist of this painting, studied. The lower left side of the painting bears an inscription identifying the subject as the Dervish Muhammad Khatib, and with the possible signature of Mu’in Musavvir accompanied by a date: dar jumādà al-thānī sanah 119.

However, it was common in manuscripts of this era to omit the first numeral of the date indicating the millennium, so the date 1119 AH has a much stronger basis in fact than 1109. This does not rule out the possibility that the work is indeed by Mu’in Musavvir and the attribution and date were added later.

This painting illustrates the style of the famous Safavid-era artist Riza ‘Abbasi, who revolutionised miniature painting during his lifetime. Rather than depicting scenes from well-known epic poems within a bound and illustrated manuscript, Riza ‘Abbasi pioneered a new style of painting of delicately rendered portraits of individual men or women set in a natural landscape. These single portraits often used a stylised language of visual symbolism; images of dervishes, for instance, could often symbolise the qualities of the dervish, rather than constituting the pictorial representation of a real individual. Next to the man lie two books, suggesting his status as a scholar or a sage. The composition and tone of the portrait is similar to the work of Riza ‘Abbasi dating from the 1620s CE, which featured a number of paintings of dervishes in contemplation and also bears similarity to the painting "Youth and Dervish" in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which has been ascribed to one of the students of Riza ‘Abbasi and dated to the second quarter of the 17th century. A number of similar compositions of single figures seated under a tree with golden leaves and swirling Chinese clouds exist in the collection of the British Museum, such as "Kneeling Woman Counting." This compositional style was intended for inclusion in an album, rather than as an illustration to a particular narrative, and there is a great deal of debate surrounding the social and political conditions that gave rise to this new form of art production.

From the 11th/17th century, dates were often shortened, with the first or first two numerals of the date omitted. Gacek, Arabic Manuscripts: A Vade Mecum for Readers (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 87.


Which is inscribed and dated Chahar shambeh 3 Ramadan AH 1084/ Wednesday, 11 December 1673 CE.

Concertina Album of Nasta’liq Calligraphy
This concertina album was written by the official calligrapher of the Safavid ruler Shah 'Abbas I in nasta'liq script. 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi was active between the years 993 and 1025 AH (1585-1617 CE). His calligraphy training in thuluth and naskh scripts took place under the tutelage of Atabeg Tabrizi, and he appears to have taught himself nasta'liq in the style of Mir Ali Heravi. In addition to his fame as a calligrapher of nasta'liq script, he also designed the thuluth inscriptions for many of Shah Abbas’s buildings in Isfahan, including the mosque built near the maydan by Maqsud Beg, as well as inscriptions for the shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad. 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi was appointed head of the royal Safavid library in the years shortly following 1005 AH (1597 CE), when the Safavid court moved to Isfahan. Historical records portray him as the enemy of his contemporary, the brilliant calligrapher Mir ‘Imad Hasani (961-1024 AH/1554-1615 CE), playing something of the Salieri to Mir ‘Imad’s Mozart. Hearsay associates him with the Mir Imad’s grisly murder in a Safavid library, spurred by a conspiracy. Curiously, 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi ceased to produce calligraphic compositions after the year 1026 AH (1617-18 CE), although he is reported to have died in 1038 AH (1628-29 CE), and therefore we lack knowledge of his artistic development and production in the last ten years of his life, following the death of Mir ‘Imad. This concertina album is a case in point, as it is dated 1015 AH (1606 CE). However, his influence lives on in the compositional style of calligraphic inscriptions in later Safavid buildings.

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Portrait of the Emperor Aurangzeb
This image of the Aurangzeb, who reigned the Mughal domains as the emperor ‘Alamgir (r. 1658-1707 CE)\textsuperscript{20} demonstrates the importance of portraiture and albums to the projection of imperial legitimacy. Aurangzeb has received a reputation in the current historiography of the Mughal Empire as a philistine who withdrew his patronage from the royal atelier, causing the production of innovative miniature painting to cease at the Mughal court. However, it is clear from this portrait, as well as the numerous extant portraits of Aurangzeb,\textsuperscript{21} taken from an ornate Mughal album with beautifully illuminated golden borders, that Aurangzeb placed a great deal of value on the careful depiction of his portrait in order to enhance his status as emperor. Surrounded with a golden halo symbolic of his divine right to rule, and holding a flywhisk (which was also a symbol of royalty), Aurangzeb expressed a clear political goal in commissioning such a portrait as a projection of imperial power.

\textsuperscript{20} This portrait has been previously published: I. Stouchkine, “Portraits Moghols, IV, La Collection du Baron Maurice de Rothschild,” Revues Asiatiques VI (1929-30): 212-41, no. XVI, and in Colnaghi, Persian and Mughal Art (London: Colnaghi, 1976) no. 126, p. 196.

\textsuperscript{21} A number of other portraits of Aurangzeb exist, spanning his lifetime from his youth as a prince to his old age, depicting him in a variety of aspects. In the Padshahnama, he is depicted with his father, Shah Jahan, at his wedding feast: fig. 43, “Shah Jahan honouring Prince Aurangzeb at Agra before his wedding,” (p. 104-5); fig. 44, “The arrival of Prince Aurangzeb at the court at Lahore” (p. 106-7); fig. 45, “Shah-Jahan honouring Prince Aurangzeb at his wedding” (p. 108-9). Other depictions of Aurangzeb include: “Prince Aurangzeb reports to Shah Jahan in Durbar at Lahore in 1649” British Library, Add.Or.3853; “Equestrian portrait of Aurangzeb” British Library, Johnson Album, 3,4 Aurangzeb in his old age” British Library Johnson Album 2,2.
But why did Aurangzeb feel such an intense need to depict and project the legitimacy of his rule? When his father, the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (1592-1666, ruled 1628-1658 CE), fell ill in 1657 CE, a bitter conflict for the throne ensued among his four sons. The *Vaqīʿat-i ‘Alamgiri* describes this internecine battle between the Mughal princes and was written by a courtier and administrator, ‘Aqil Khan Razi (d. 1696 CE), who collected his information on the war of succession from eyewitnesses to the events.²² Although ‘Aqil Khan Razi opens the work with praise of Aurangzeb’s piety and to some degree favours the victor, his depiction of the conflict does not paint the triumphant prince in an overly eulogistic light and in fact gives equal attention to the Machiavellian political calculations and ruthlessness of all four brothers: Dara Shikoh, Shah Shuja’, Aurangzeb and Murad Bakhsh, detailing the battles they fought against each other. After such a gruelling battle to achieve the throne, involving treachery, the imprisonment of his father, and fratricide, Aurangzeb had to craft a careful image of himself to establish the legitimacy of his rule, hence the series of imperial portraits conveying a sense of Aurangzeb as a pious man in possession of a divine right to rule.

Portrait of Shah Shuja'
The favourite grandson of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, and second son of Shah Jahan, Shah Shuja (r. 1616 –1661 CE) was unfortunately doomed to crushing defeat at the hands of his ruthless brother, Aurangzeb. Appointed governor (subahdar) of Bengal in 1641 CE and Orissa from 1648 CE, Shah Shuja was later forced into exile in Burma by his brother Aurangzeb, where he was later brutally murdered, during the internecine fratricide that occurred during the struggle for the Mughal throne after Shah Jahan’s illness in 1657 CE, as recounted in the contemporary historical chronicle, the Vaqi’at-i ‘Alamgiri. An inscription in the bottom margin of the painting identifies the subject of the portrait as Shah Shuja; while there is no paleographic reason to doubt this inscription, the possibility exists that it is a later addition.


Stylistic reasons for identifying this figure as Shah Shuja’ are numerous, such as comparisons with other portraits of the prince that confirm a similar appearance; furthermore, the golden halo emanating the light of the divine right to rule, the richness of his attire, and the style of turban, which was sported only by members of the Mughal court of a sufficiently high rank, as evidenced in the portraits of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb sporting similar style of turban in the Windsor Padshahnama.25

The painting also bears in the top left corner the inscription awwal, meaning of course, “first,” i.e., of the first degree. Historians of the Mughal imperial library have established that inscriptions of this nature indicate the ranking assigned to works of art and manuscripts held in the collection of the Mughal emperors.26 Even if the inscription is imitative and not imperial, its presence emphasizes that if an object is considered to have belonged to a prestigious collection (such as that of the Mughal emperors), it is more highly valued, hence the importance of studying the biography of an object and its ownership history.

This portrait therefore seems to have been part of the collection of manuscripts and albums in the Mughal imperial library. This royal library collection was dispersed when the Iranian ruler Nadir Shah invaded Delhi in 1739 CE, and many items from this collection were taken from India to Iran as trophies of victory, and again in 1858 CE when the British ended the Indian Mutiny and laid waste the Red Fort - and the rest of Delhi - dispersing whatever remnants of the library were left after the depredations of Nadir Shah.


Shah Isma'il Safavid with his Descendants
This painting demonstrates the importance of art to dynastic legitimacy in its depiction of the Persian ruler Shah Isma’īl Safavi, standing under a yellow parasol symbolic of imperial status, surrounded by six of his descendants. Later inscriptions identify the subjects of the portrait as the sons of Shah Isma’īl, seating to his left: Bahram Mirza, Rustam Husayn Mirza of Qandahar (governor of Multan under Akbar), and Mirza Mukarram Khan, while Sultan Husayn Mirza, Sultan Murad Mirza and Rustam Mirza are seated to the right of Shah Isma’īl.

Interestingly, it would appear that the painting was made at the Mughal court and owned by the Mughal rulers, suggesting that possessing a depiction of a rival dynasty was a means of exercising symbolic political influence over them. In contrast to paintings of the Mughal dynasty, wherein the Mughal rulers are depicted as direct descendants of Timur, this painting of the Safavid rulers illustrates their descent from the founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Isma’īl. The purpose of this painting is somewhat ambiguous and requires further study.
One conjecture is that this painting is perhaps an attempt to undermine the Safavid claims to political legitimacy that the Mughals clearly understood as emanating from Timur and his line of descendants. However, another possible, and contradictory, conjecture is that the Mughals to some degree envied the Safavids’ self-proclaimed status as sayyids and perhaps wished to depict their descent in the silsilanamah tradition of documenting the genealogy of reigning dynasties. Similar dynastic propaganda is evident in Mughal painting as well. For instance, in the Padshahnama on folios 2b-3a, from circa 1657 CE, Timur and Shah Jahan are depicted facing each other on opposite folios. Each emperor is seated on a golden throne underneath the parasol indicating imperial status; Timur offers a crown in Shah Jahan’s direction, and Shah Jahan, effulgent with the light of divine right to rule, extends a hand of acceptance.

Compositionally, it is very similar to a folio from the Johnson Album, held in the collection of the British Library, entitled “Timur Enthroned with his Descendants,” featuring Timur under the imperial parasol, flanked by Babur, Humayun, Akbar and Jahangir. Similar symbolic elements, such as the imperial parasol, and the emphasis of dynastic continuity through the gathering of descendants, are all used in this image as well, but to stress that the Safavids are descendants of Shah Isma’il, rather than Timur, suggesting that a Mughal political project to undermine the Safavid imperial legitimacy is subtly at play in this painting. Perhaps the two images were meant to contrast and record the competing claims of imperial legitimacy of the Safavids and Mughals. However, the theories put forward here are purely conjectural and require further research.
Portrait of Saint Jerome as the Representation of Melancholy
The artist responsible for this unique and striking painting, Farrukh Beg, enjoyed a long career that stretched from the Safavid princely courts of Khurasan, to the Mughal Empire, then to the Deccan Sultanates, as his fame and talent carried him along the economic and political currents of the time. While it seems that he learned his trade in the atelier of the provincial court of Safavid-era Mashhad, with the wave of other Persian artists migrating to India in search of patronage and a stable existence, he made his way to the court of the Emperor Akbar in 1585 CE. However, his stay there was short lived, and he was invited in the early 1600s to join the artistic retinue of the court of Sultan ‘Adil Shah II of Bijapur. Mughal artists often adapted images from the visual language of western European Christianity, but assigned a new meaning to the figures and symbols that they used. In this case, the figure of the Christian Saint Jerome is re-interpreted as the embodiment of melancholic contemplation.

30 Welch, India: Art and Culture 1300-1900, 224
This particular miniature is based on a print by the Flemish printmaker Marten de Vos (1532-1603 CE) of ‘Dolor’ (Sadness), which in turn was based on a depiction of St. Jerome by the German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528 CE). The flexible approach of Mughal artists to Christian iconography created an innovative Mughal visual language, through the adaptation of such images from contemporary European prints and paintings.

This miniature painting is dated 1024 AH (1615 CE), and it appears to have been mounted onto the album page circa 1640 CE. It bears an ascription to the artist Farrukh Beg in what appears to be Shah Jahan’s hand in the lower border of the painting and also bears the seal impression of Jahangir, suggesting that the painting pre-dates the album border. This painting, with its vibrant colours and attention to detail, was clearly esteemed by the Mughal Emperors, and it would seem that it was included in one of the royal albums of Shah Jahan (r. 1628 - 1658 CE). The borders have been attributed to the famous Mughal naturalist painter, Mansur, who was a favourite of the Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605 – 1627 CE).

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31 This painting, and the engraving by Martin de Vos, have been published in Stuart Cary Welch, India: Art and Culture 1300-1900 (Munich: Prestel, 1985), Figs. 147a and 147b, 221-225. It has also been published in J. Rogers, Mughal Miniatures, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), fig.45, p.69 and exhibited in the 1985-86 exhibition “India!” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and more recently in the exhibition, “Wonder of the Age: Master Painters of India, 1100–1900” from September 28, 2011–January 8, 2012 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Portrait of a Maiden in European Costume
This depiction of a Safavid lady dressed in European fashions sheds a great deal of light on the historical and artistic trends of 17th-century Iran. The late Safavid period in art is considered to begin with the reign of Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1571 - 1629 CE) under whose rule trade between Iran and Europe was encouraged. In support of this economic project, a community of Armenian merchants was relocated to Isfahan in the colony of New Julfa, as Armenians could travel with impunity in Ottoman territories and therefore trade directly with Europe. Through the commerce in luxury goods, primarily silk and textiles, European artistic motifs and images began to enter Persian art. An excellent example of this trend is the artistic practice of Sadiqi Bayg, the director of the Safavid royal atelier from 1587 to 1598 CE, and his student Riza 'Abbasi, of using figures in European costume in their artwork. In addition to European fashions, artistic techniques from Europe were also integrated into Persian painting of late Safavid Iran, such as the use of perspective, shading, and the use of shadow, all of which are evident in the other paintings on display in this exhibition from the late Safavid period.

Paintings can also provide insight into the fashions in attire of the time. The use of European costumes was adopted at the 17th-century Safavid court in the spirit of fashionable disregard for traditional attire. (Much as in elite circles of 18th-century France, it was considered the height of fashion to dress like a “Turk.”) The prevalence of European costume in late Safavid painting would also suggest that, as in India during the same period, numerous European prints and drawings were in circulation.

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Canby, Princes and Paladins, 67.
Lady Offering Refreshments to a Tribesman
In this intriguing allegorical painting, a beautiful woman clad in rich textiles offers refreshments, in the form of watermelon and drink, to a Bhil, or tribesman, who wears a skirt of leaves. The features of both are delicately rendered, and the portrait contains a number of puzzling symbolic details, such as the snake winding around the tree above the lady’s head, about to pounce on the unguarded eggs in a bird’s nest. Other intricate details include a leather-bound and gilded manuscript lying next to the lady and the refined Chinese ceramics that she has transported to the forest, which seem to take part in this conversation between civilisation and refinement - in the form of the lady - and asceticism and simplicity - in the form of the tribesman. ‘Ali Quli Jabbadar has painted a number of other, similar scenes, involving gatherings of dervishes in the wilderness, or a dialogue between a lady and an ascetic.33

33 Vladimir Grigor’evich Lukonin and A. A. Ivanov, Persian Miniatures (New York: Parkstone International, 2010), 241. There is a painting ascribed to Ali Quli Jabbadar in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, entitled “Shah and Courtiers,” in which a watermelon or similar fruit is sliced and consumed, and it is depicted and presented to the viewer much as in the image of the lady offering refreshments to a tribesman. Furthermore, the St. Petersburg Album contains a number of images involving a similar theme and composition. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a painting by ‘Ali Quli Jabbadar from the Davis Album entitled, “Two Old Men in Discussion Outside a Hut,” depicts a similar scene to the one at hand.
Painted by 'Ali Quli Jabbadar, this late Safavid artwork demonstrates the flow of artistic techniques between India and Iran in the early modern period. Interestingly, his epithet or nickname, ‘Jabbadar,’ or ‘keeper of the arsenal/armoury,’ would suggest that he was part of the Safavid army, and he is identified elsewhere as having Albanian origins, suggesting that his roots lie in the Ottoman Empire. However, rather than through work in the army, 'Ali Quli Jabbadar distinguished himself as an artist who integrated both Mughal and European artistic techniques into his paintings. The influence of Mughal painting techniques is evident in both the brushwork and the sensitive and individualised (rather than stylised) facial features of the two subjects, as well as the depiction of the textiles. 'Ali Quli Jabbadar was part of a generation of late Safavid artists who used European motifs and techniques extensively in their artwork. The influence of European methods of painting, such as foregrounding, perspective, shading, and the influence of Mughal portraiture techniques, which consisted in a sensitive portrait of an individual, rather than a stylised depiction of an abstractly beautiful face are evident in the work of 'Ali Quli Jabbadar. While 'Ali Quli was influenced by both European and Mughal compositions and techniques at the beginning of his career during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1642–1666 CE), whereas his later style became increasingly Persianised, stylised, and two-dimensional in composition.

This work appears to bear the signature of 'Ali Quli Jabbadar, although it is ambiguous whether this is a genuine signnature, an attribution, or an attempt at associating the image with 'Ali Quli Comparison with other published signatures of this artist, such as in his painting, “European Landscape,” which, if it is indeed genuine, bears a resemblance to the signature on the painting in MIA’s collection; the palette used to paint this landscape shares a great deal in terms of colour, tone and use of perspective in "Lady Offering Refreshments to a Tribesman." A further signature on 'Ali Quli Jabbadar’s early painting “Women by a Fountain” is also similar, with the final letter, the ya, of Quli arching backwards underneath the rest of the signature, would suggest that the signature here might be genuine. However, the veracity of this signature has been debated, and the attribution of the painting on stylistic grounds has been made to the Mughal atelier under Shah Jahan.

35 Abolala Soudavar, Art of the Persian Courts: Selections from the Art and History Trust Collection (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), fig. 148, p. 369.
36 Vladimir Grigor’evich Lukonin and A. A. Ivanov, Persian Miniatures (New York: Parkstone International, 2010), 239.
37 Abolala Soudavar, Art of the Persian Courts: Selections from the Art and History Trust Collection (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), fig. 148, p. 370.
38 Saqib Baburi, personal communication, 4 September 2014.
Portrait of Muhammad Riza Khan
This painting features Muhammad Riza Khan in a garden smoking a hookah under an overcast sky. A Mughal civil servant who rose to the position of Deputy Nawab (governor) and tax collector of Bengal, one of the India’s richest provinces, under the British in the 1760s. Caught in British political machinations surrounding the collection of taxes in wealthy Bengal province led by Warren Hastings, he later fell from grace and was imprisoned and tried, although he was acquitted in 1773 CE. It is perhaps through this unfortunate incident that he became acquainted with Sir Elijah Impey, the British Chief Justice of Bengal from 1774 to 1782 CE, and personal friend of Muhammad Riza Khan. It was in Sir Elijah Impey’s art collection that this painting resided. In fact, the portrait of Muhammad Riza Khan even carries Sir Elijah Impey’s Persian seal, as it was common during this period for British officials in India to speak Persian and use the etiquette and symbols of power employed by the Mughal elites, including seals and titles in Persian.

Sir Elijah was also a collector of Indian paintings and he and his wife, Lady Mary Impey, commissioned studies of flora and fauna for the “Impey Album”, numbering sixty-four in total (two of which MIA holds in its collection), demonstrating the spread of Mughal artistic and collecting practices to the British elites in India. The British, while they continued elite Indian practices of patronising local artists, also adapted artistic patronage to their own tastes, by commissioning natural history paintings, thereby establishing the Anglo-Indian school of painting.

A black and white image of this painting was published in Welch, Room for Wonder: Indian Painting during the British Period 1760-1880 (New York: American Federation of the Arts, 1978), 33.

Welch, Room for Wonder, 32.
Bibliography and Further Reading


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