
The Study of Persian Painting



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I do not begin at the beginning, since whatever one wishes to speak of so often follows some significant precursor, but to make a start: F. R. Martin's *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from the 8th to the 18th Century* was published in 1912. Martin describes his book as 'purely prefatory to a knowledge of a hitherto neglected section of art'.¹ It is an *éminence grise*, a great slab of a book presumably intended mainly for collectors and so perhaps rather intimidating to students of later ages, but containing a great deal of information, a little of which we would now see as incorrect, and a large collection of illustrations in black-and-white that continue to be useful. There is considerable focus on the work of individual artists and, in particular, attributions to Bihzad abound. Already from the title it is clear that Martin sees the painting of Iran, of (Muslim) India, and of (Ottoman) Turkey as a continuum. The question of whether these areas can—or should—be considered together or severally continues to arise, and must, I think, be decided for each particular occasion. Two other monumental books that, between them, demonstrate this question of choice are Arménag Sakisian's *La miniature persane du XIIe au XVIIe siècle* and E. Blochet's *Musulman Painting XIIIth–XVIIth Century*, both of 1929.²

Already in 1912 Martin had produced a monograph *Les miniatures de Behzad dans un manuscrit persan daté 1485*, giving a fuller account of one of the manuscripts in his great work, and perhaps indeed a spin-off from it.³ In the following decade several monographs were brought out in beautifully produced books, as though to suggest that those who could not afford the pleasures of a collector of manuscripts might at least have those of a bibliophile. Martin's *Miniatures from the Period of Timur in a MS of the Poems of Sultan Ahmad Jalair*, of 1926, is again on a large scale; its illustrations, though in black-and-white and so lacking the occasional touches of colour of the originals, can still be counted as their best reproductions.⁴ Again in 1926 Martin, together with Sir Thomas Arnold,

¹F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from the 8th to the 18th Century* (London, 1912; reprinted, London, 1968). Martin's main error is the conflation of the painters Mirak Khorasani and Agha Mirak, p. 51. It is not the purpose here to enlarge on his other failings.

²Arménag Sakisian, *La miniature persane du XIIe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris and Brussels, 1929); E. Blochet, *Musulman Painting XIIIth–XVIIth Century* (London, 1929).

³F. R. Martin, *Les miniatures de Behzad dans un manuscrit persan daté 1485* (Munich, 1912). The manuscript is now Pers. 163, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

⁴F. R. Martin, *Miniatures from the Period of Timur in a MS of the Poems of Sultan Ahmad Jalair* (Vienna, 1926). The illustrations are now F1932.30–37, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

published *The Nizami MS. Illuminated by Bihzad, Mirak and Qasim Ali* (. . .).⁵ This situates the manuscript Or. 6810, then in the British Museum but now in the British Library, briefly, with a firm view of its patronage, and reproduces all its illustrations in black-and-white. A considerable advance is made in 1928 by Laurence Binyon's *The Poems of Nizami*.⁶ This reproduces all the illustrations of Or. 2265, then in the British Museum, in colour and on a large scale. It provides an account of Shah Tahmasp's patronage and his artists, a life of Nizami, an outline of narratives concerned, and observations on individual pictures. Arnold's *Bihzād and His Paintings in the Zafar-nāmāh MS* is still the only work to have published the relatively few illustrations of this, the Garrett manuscript, together in colour.⁷ Arnold gives brief comments on the pictures but adds the dimension of the fifteenth-century manuscript's subsequent history in Mughal India, marked by notes of Jahangir and Shah Jahan—it is the note by Jahangir that claims its eight illustrations for Bihzad. Of particular interest for the Royal Asiatic Society is J. V. S. Wilkinson and Laurence Binyon's 1931 publication of *The Shāhnāmāh of Firdausī with 24 illustrations from a fifteenth-century manuscript formerly in the Imperial Library, Delhi and now in the possession of the Royal Asiatic Society*.⁸ The importance of Asian art is asserted; there is a background history for the manuscript, including attention to the commissioning patron, Muhammad Juki; five of the 25 plates used are in colour, and they are accompanied by narrative. At the end of this period comes the moment when a large number of Persian paintings could be seen at first-hand in the exhibition of 1931 at Burlington House, whose contents were published in 1933 as *Persian Miniature Painting* by Binyon, Wilkinson, and Basil Gray—the book is known affectionately as BWG.⁹ In addition to its balanced account of succeeding styles, this is the first work to offer in translation some of the most important historical notices on Persian painters.

Meanwhile, in the Mughal sphere, Binyon and Arnold had written *The Court Painters of the Grand Moguls* in 1921, and Percy Brown had written *Indian Painting under the Mughals A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1750* in 1924.¹⁰ In the latter year came—I believe as the first publication of an album—Ernst Kühnel and Hermann Goetz's *Indische Buchmalerei: aus dem Jahāngīr-Album der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, with half its plates in colour,¹¹ and in 1929, Ivan Stchoukine's *La peinture indienne à l'époque des Grands Moghols*.¹² In the same year, full colour was used in Wilkinson's *Lights of Canopus* on the manuscript Add. 18579, then in the British Museum, with an account of its author and notes sufficient for a preliminary understanding of its fables.¹³

⁵F. R. Martin and Thomas Arnold, *The Nizami MS. Illuminated by Bihzad, Mirak and Qasim Ali, written 1495 for Sultan Ali Barlās ruler of Samarqand in the British Museum* (Or. 6810) (Vienna, 1926).

⁶Laurence Binyon, *The Poems of Nizami* (London, 1928).

⁷T. Arnold, *Bihzād and His Paintings in the Zafar-nāmāh MS* (London, 1930).

⁸J. V. S. Wilkinson and L. Binyon, *The Shāhnāmāh of Firdausī with 24 illustrations from a fifteenth-century manuscript formerly in the Imperial Library, Delhi and now in the possession of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London, 1931).

⁹L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (Ontario and London, 1933; reprinted, New York, 1971). The Bibliothèque Nationale and the British Museum both refused to lend from their holdings (p. 10).

¹⁰L. Binyon and T. Arnold, *The Court Painters of the Grand Moguls* (London, 1921); Percy Brown, *Indian Painting under the Mughals A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1750* (Oxford, 1924; reprinted, New Delhi, 1981).

¹¹Ernst Kühnel and Hermann Goetz, *Indische Buchmalerei: aus dem Jahāngīr-Album der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1924).

¹²Ivan Stchoukine, *La peinture indienne à l'époque des Grands Moghols* (Paris, 1929).

¹³J. V. S. Wilkinson, *Lights of Canopus* (London, 1929).

Characteristic of the 1950s to 1970s was a proliferation of catalogues that selected the illustrated manuscripts that, in many previous catalogues, had been mixed with the unillustrated. By listing these holdings, and often also identifying what subjects were on what folios, these mapped routes into what had previously been the territory of advanced scholars of language. Though sparsely illustrated and mainly in black-and-white, they held the promise that readers might be able to see the originals. Important among these catalogues was B. W. Robinson's on paintings in the Bodleian Library, which groups works by period and place of origin and adds lists of comparative material in other repositories.¹⁴ The majestic catalogues of the Chester Beatty collection cover both illustrated and unillustrated manuscripts, but list all subjects in the former. The Persian catalogue was preceded by the Turkish volume brought out in 1958 by Minorsky and Wilkinson. From 1959 to 1962 three matching volumes of Persian material were published, written variously by Arberry, Blochet, Minovi, Robinson, and Wilkinson.¹⁵ Full listings were also supplied for the illustrated Persian works of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in 1971 by Stchoukine, Barbara Flemming, Paul Luft, and Hanna Sohrweide.¹⁶ From 1954 to 1977 a further six books by Stchoukine on Persian and Turkish illustrated manuscripts are not catalogues in the usual sense but, rather, overviews of periods, with historical background and discussion, and listings of manuscripts in various collections in varying degrees of detail. In black-and-white, Stchoukine's poetic verbal descriptions nevertheless convey colour to the mind's eye.¹⁷ This period shows early stirrings of interest in Sultanate painting in Karl Khandalava and Moti Chandra's 1969 *New Documents of Indian Painting—A Reappraisal*, and Irma L. Fraad and Richard Ettinghausen's proposal of 1971 of criteria to distinguish Sultanate from Persian painting.¹⁸

The year in which I entered this world was 1970. I came to the study of Islamic art in general and Persian painting in particular by a wandering route. Having studied French with an inclination to the medieval at Cambridge, I had done a little school teaching, made an amateur film of an Old French romance, tried a return to Old French, and attended film school—and I had also visited Turkey and Iran. In 1969 I joined a party for a circuit of Afghanistan, and was captivated by the beauty of its coloured mountains and partly wrecked monuments. I had friends who had moved from a first choice of subject to a study of Western art history, and a friend at SOAS who was studying Persian for the Foreign Office. When consulted, the latter told me that Islamic art as a whole was not a large subject, so it could be picked up from a late start, and so I went to SOAS in 1970 to do an MPhil by examination.

¹⁴B. W. Robinson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Paintings in the Bodleian Library* (London, 1958).

¹⁵V. Minorsky and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *The Chester Beatty Library: A Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts and Miniatures* (Dublin, 1958); A. J. Arberry, M. Minovi and E. Blochet, *The Chester Beatty Library: A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts and Miniatures*, I (Dublin, 1959); M. Minovi, B. W. Robinson, J. V. S. Wilkinson and E. Blochet, *Persian*, II (Dublin, 1960); A. J. Arberry, B. W. Robinson, E. Blochet and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *Persian*, III (Dublin, 1962).

¹⁶I. Stchoukine, Barbara Flemming, Paul Luft and Hanna Sohrweide, *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland: Illuminierte Islamische Handschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1971).

¹⁷I. Stchoukine, *Les peintures des manuscrits timûrides* (Paris, 1954); *Les peintures des manuscrits safavides de 1503 à 1587* (Paris, 1959); *Les peintures des manuscrits de Shâh 'Abbâs 1er à la fin des Safawîs* (Paris, 1964); *La peinture turque d'après les manuscrits illustrés, 1^{er} partie* (Paris, 1966); *La peinture turque d'après les manuscrits illustrés, II^{me} partie* (Paris, 1971); *Les peintures des manuscrits de la 'Khamseh' de Nizâmî au Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi d'Istanbul* (Paris, 1977).

¹⁸Karl Khandalava and Moti Chandra, *New Documents of Indian Painting—A Reappraisal* (Bombay, 1969); Irma L. Fraad and Richard Ettinghausen, 'Sultanate painting in Persian style, primarily from the first half of the fifteenth century. A preliminary study', in *Chhavi: Golden Jubilee Volume, Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1920–1970* (Benares, 1971), pp. 48–66.

At first, since Professor Fehérvári was away digging, I was in a holding pattern attending a kindly introduction to some points of Arabic from Professor Norris, being dazzled by Professor Bivar with a study of epigraphy that was much more profound than I deserved, and receiving some tuition in the procedures of photography from Mr Burton-Page. When the topic of painting eventually came over the horizon, it was a term's progress through Ettinghausen's *Arab Painting*, followed by a similar term through Gray's *Persian Painting*.¹⁹ These two admirable books laid out their subjects with clarity and with carefully chosen illustrations in colour that still count as key images. Both authors were sensitive both to the historical background to the works they discussed and to their aesthetic qualities. There was no comparable work on Ottoman painting, even for a brief sequence in the Summer term.

In SOAS, while Persian art came under the Department of the Near and Middle East, Mughal art was the purview of the Department of South Asia. Since I wanted to know a little about Mughal painting, I followed a course by a PhD student, Ellen Smart. Ellen introduced me to Miss Titley, who was in charge of illustrated manuscripts, Persian, Mughal, and Turkish, at the British Library, to assist with the proofreading of her *Miniatures from Persian Manuscripts* (. . .).²⁰ This catalogue not only contains manuscripts listed alphabetically under author with their narrative subjects listed, but has a compendious list of these, of people, and of things, derived from a card index she had formed to answer questions from the public.

Since I was looking to do a PhD, Miss Titley suggested that I should offer as a thesis topic a study of illustrations to the *Khamsah* of Amir Khusrau Dihlavi, whose five-part work written at the turn of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century reflects the *Khamsah* of Nizami, written in the late twelfth. The illustration of medieval romances was a very congenial subject since I had studied the five works of Chrétien de Troyes, a French poet of the late twelfth century (under Dr Topsfield, father of Andrew Topsfield, the specialist in Indian painting) and had written an article on the literary means by which visual effects were conveyed in Chrétien's narratives. As an art historical model, I could follow Priscilla Parsons Soucek's fine thesis on illustrations to Nizami's *Khamsah*.²¹ It was clearly vital to get as full a grip as possible on Amir Khusrau's narratives, which are not well served in translation. Some knowledge of Persian therefore was necessary for my topic, and furthermore it was a requirement of SOAS for a qualifying examination to proceed to a PhD. This brought me under the eye of Professor Lambton, whose sphere of interest lay outwith the field of poetical narrative; I believe that I did not buckle under that commanding presence because at school I had had a Latin teacher of similar mettle.

The 1970s offered the public, and me among them, the chance to see Persian pictures and manuscripts as a part of the 'Arts of Islam' exhibition at the Haywood Gallery in 1976, and more specifically in 'Imperial Images in Persian Painting' curated by Robert Hillenbrand at the Scottish Arts Council Gallery in 1977. I continued to visit Miss Titley, at first still in the British Museum's building, in her cubicle with mahogany fittings, to learn from her in

¹⁹R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, etc., 1962); B. Gray, *Persian Painting* (Geneva, etc., 1961). The Skira series also included works on the painting of India and Central Asia, but not of Turkey.

²⁰Norah M. Titley, *Miniatures from Persian Manuscripts. A Catalogue and Subject Index of Paintings in the British Library and British Museum* (London, 1977).

²¹Priscilla Parsons Soucek, 'Illustrated Manuscripts of Nizami's *Khamsah*: 1386–1482', unpublished PhD dissertation, New York University, 1971.

unofficial mode and to look at whatever manuscripts she was currently working on. There was also the opportunity to take slides standing on library steps at the window with the manuscript laid on a clean duster. Slides were important as I was beginning to give courses to various groups—at the time the possession of many slides was seen as a mark of status, almost, I thought, equivalent to owning vast flocks of sheep and camels. Another opportunity to see real pictures came when students and members of the Islamic Art Circle were occasionally invited by Edmund de Unger to the Manor House, Ham, to see before their very eyes the treasures of the Keir collection displayed on the walls of rooms and corridors, and already partly known from the catalogue edited by Robinson and others in 1976.²²

The 1970s had begun with an important article by Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, whose title—‘Le roman de Varqe et Golšâh: Essai sur les rapports de l’esthétique littéraire et de l’esthétique plastique dans l’Iran pré-mongol, suivi de la traduction du poème’—is self-explanatory.²³ The manuscript is the only known illustrated copy of this work; it is datable to the thirteenth century, thus early in the history of illustrated works, and it is lodged in the library of Topkapı Sarayı. From the advantaged position of a native speaker, Melikian-Chirvani translates the text and discusses its literary character; and reproduces all its illustrations (though in black-and-white), discusses them, and elucidates their symbolism. At the end of the decade came a publication that is of considerable use to students of Persian painting of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, edited by Gray.²⁴ This goes into more detail than heretofore on the different phases of style, adds the discussion of script and of illumination, and offers a list of literary sources. A third of its illustrations are in colour, and examples draw heavily on the collection at Topkapı, indicating a further opening of that collection.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a considerable surge of activity: it became easier to see pictures in fact or in colour illustration, and they were written about in a more detailed and penetrating way. In the wider field of Islamic art, painting would find a place in two new periodicals: *Islamic Art* (1981–2009) and *Muqarnas* (1983 onwards).²⁵ In 1989 the exhibition catalogue *Timur and the Princely Vision* by Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry combined dazzling colour with a strong message of interpretation.²⁶ The latter was further supported by Wheeler M. Thackston’s translations of historical excerpts and documents.²⁷ Mughal painting as an area of study had been able to benefit from translations of histories by the

²²I. Stchoukine, B. W. Robinson, E. J. Grube, G. M. Meredith-Owens and R. W. Skelton, *Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book* (London, 1976).

²³Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, ‘Le roman de Varqe et Golšâh: Essai sur les rapports de l’esthétique littéraire et de l’esthétique plastique dans l’Iran pré-mongol, suivi de la traduction du poème’, *Ars Asiaticus (numéro spécial)* XXII (1970). Melikian-Chirvani’s view that the manuscript was produced in Khurasan does not now meet total agreement.

²⁴B. Gray (ed.), *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia* (Paris and London, 1979). Unfortunately, some passages are misplaced.

²⁵*Islamic Art* initially received a grant from the Mehdi Mahboubian Foundation, with later support from the Bruschetti Foundation to the Islamic Art Foundation, New York; with editors Ernst J. Grube and Eleanor G. Sims, and, initially, John Carswell. *Muqarnas*, edited by Oleg Grabar, was sponsored by the Aga Khan programme for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

²⁶Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Los Angeles and Washington DC, 1989).

²⁷Wheeler M. Thackston (trans.), *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art* (Cambridge MA, 1989).

British in India: its glorious abundance was displayed in exhibitions in the United States and the United Kingdom.²⁸ An outline of Turkish painting *Turkish Miniature Painting* by Nurhan Atasoy and Filiz Çağman became available in English in 1974.²⁹ Miss Titley's catalogue of Turkish manuscripts of 1981 again contained extensive information on the content of painting, including abstruse information on turban types.³⁰ The holdings of Topkapı were further displayed by Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanındı in J. M. Rogers' translation of 1986.³¹ Fine Ottoman pages were exhibited at the British Museum in 'Süleyman the Magnificent' and described by J. M. Rogers and R. M. Ward.³²

In a closer focus on particular manuscripts, a reconstruction and study of the great *Shāhnāmāh* datable to the 1330s dispersed by Demotte was brought out by Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair in 1980 with due attention to its themes, and in 1996 Abolala Soudavar would offer an interpretation of the cycle of illustration in this *Shāhnāmāh* as referring to the Mongol ruler Abu Sa'id.³³ In 1981 Martin Bernard Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch brought out a study of the *Shāhnāmāh* made for Shah Tahmasp in the 1520s, at the time in the possession of Arthur Houghton, and eventually to suffer dismemberment.³⁴ In two monumental volumes on the scale of Martin, this work devotes attention to identifying the work of individual artists. Other manuscripts were treated in two exemplary publications of the 1990s that give due weight to codicology. Of special interest to the RAS would be Sheila Blair's publication of the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, formerly in the possession of the Society and now in the Khalili Collection.³⁵ This provides full facsimile in colour, and a discussion that returns us to Morley's original view that this manuscript is of a piece with the portion in the Edinburgh University Library, and that consequently its date of 714/1314 applies to both.³⁶ The other book, by Marianna Shreve Simpson, is *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's Haft Aurang* (. . .), covering the codicology, illustrations, and intention of a manuscript copied by six scribes over a decade from the mid-1550s on.³⁷

By the end of the 1990s we had learnt that the full study of an illustrated manuscript began with the contemplation of the binding (if present), the paper, and (at some point) of the illumination. It then required an estimate of whether it was complete or a fragment, whether

²⁸Jeremiah P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London, 1982); Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry, *Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory* (New York, 1985); S. C. Welch, *India: Art and Culture 1300–1900* (New York, 1985); Milo C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India 1600–1660* (Williamstown, 1978); Milo C. Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court* (Washington DC, 1981); Milo C. Beach, *Early Mughal Painting* (Cambridge MA, 1987).

²⁹Nurhan Atasoy and Filiz Çağman, *Turkish Miniature Painting*, (trans.) Esin Atil (Istanbul, 1974).

³⁰N. Titley, *Miniatures from Turkish Manuscripts: Catalogue and Subject Index of Paintings in the British Library and British Museum* (London, 1981).

³¹Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanındı, *The Topkapı Saray Museum: The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts*, (trans.) J. M. Rogers (London, 1986).

³²J. M. Rogers and R. M. Ward, *Süleyman the Magnificent* (London, 1988).

³³Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History: The Illustrations of the Great Mongol Shahnama* (Chicago and London, 1980); Abolala Soudavar, 'The saga of Abu Sa'id Bahādur Khān: the Abu-Sa'idnamé', in *The Court of the Il-Khans 1290–1340*, (eds) Julian Raby and Teresa Fitzherbert (Oxford, 1996), pp. 95–218.

³⁴Martin Bernard Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1981). Its illustrations in black-and-white are now superseded for the purposes of picture reference by Sheila R. Canby, *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp* (New York, 2011).

³⁵Sheila Blair, *The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art: A Compendium of Chronicles* (Oxford, 1995).

³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 16–27.

³⁷Marianna Shreve Simpson, with contributions from Massumeh Farhad, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's Haft Aurang. A Princely Manuscript from Sixteenth-Century Iran* (New Haven and London 1997).

produced within one period or over several, what the historical and intellectual background of the times, who the commissioning patron and/or intended recipient was, and what the intention of the production. We needed to read (or obtain a reading of) the colophons, of any later notes, and of seal imprints. We needed an understanding of the text—in the first instance as composed by the author, but more particularly as used in the manuscript in question, whether the painter(s) had followed that text obediently or whether, by negligence or intention, they had diverted from it. Having identified the subjects illustrated, we could consider the cycle of subjects chosen, whether its purpose seemed to be royal aggrandisement, diplomacy, entertainment, or (as seemed to me in some cases) for personal introspection. We could then study the pictures and observe their style and the colours used, their manner of storytelling (there is usually an element of the diagrammatic in Persian painting), their adherence or otherwise to past models, their possible use of foreign models and techniques, their idiosyncratic characteristics, their intentions and how far these were realised, and, I would add, their quality. We might or might not believe ourselves able to discern the hand of a particular painter, and continue from that to a view of the course of his (or very occasionally her) development. I think that if we discussed matters that had not received (much) attention before, it was not that we were by nature more enlightened than our predecessors, but that we had been able to learn from them and had more resources available, whether material or in terms of trains of thought already suggested. It might be added that such abundance has sometimes led to prolixity, a cumulonimbus of words with footnotes like towering skyscrapers.

During this time, the writing of a book *Islamic Art* for the British Museum had devolved on me, and with Muhammad Isa Waley of the British Library I had written a slim monograph on a manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsah* for the Mughal Akbar.³⁸ I had done gallery talks for the British Library, and lectures for the British Museum³⁹ and other institutions. In 1997–1998 I was asked by Giles Tillotson to teach Indian painting at SOAS during his sabbatical. It was interesting to note that SOAS had gathered the art history of different lands into a single department, so that elements could be mixed and mingled but—it seemed to me—were somewhat cut off from their cultural bases with bold spirits only undertaking language learning. I also understood that some art historical theory was taught, a topic that had rather passed me by—I had learnt that it was considered more polite to speak of reception rather than influence, though I have not entirely renounced the latter. Such theory as I have, was acquired largely accidentally. There is a background of a rather libertarian literary view—which may perhaps be considered as cross-training. In (high) school, the firm line when attempting *explication de texte* was that there was no all-purpose correct approach: one came at it from the point of view of the needs of a particular passage. Later one was assumed to understand the language of a text, and then examined it for meaning: if it appeared to have architecture and symbolism it probably did. Since I was at Cambridge in the time of Leavis, I learnt of the 'value judgement'.

³⁸Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art* (London, 1991); Barbara Brend and Muhammad Isa Waley, *The Emperor Akbar's Khamsa of Nizāmī* (London, 1995).

³⁹On one occasion bringing a box of slides on the wrong topic but feeling obliged to lecture from it.

In 2003 I at last managed to publish the book of my thesis as *Perspectives on Persian Painting* (. . .), using Persian as a parasol over Sultanate, Mughal, and Ottoman painting.⁴⁰ In 2006, Patricia L. Baker and I edited a Festschrift for Professor Géza Fehérvári, with the title *Shifting Sands, Reading Signs*.⁴¹

Then in 2010 a daunting conjunction came to a conclusion with the publication of a book on the Society's *Shāhnāmāh* for Muhammad Juki, and an exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, of *Shāhnāmāh* illustrations from collections in the United Kingdom in celebration of the millennium of its completion. For both I was glad of the support of the reprint in 2000 of Warner and Warner's heroic nine-volume translation of Firdausi's epic; for the first, for the late Sandy Morton's discussion of the Mughal notes; and for the second, for comments from Charles Melville.⁴²

Early in the new century, in the field of *Shāhnāmāh* studies, a new expression came into use: the 'break-line', meaning the line immediately preceding the picture and upon which it depends. The use of this expression was expounded by Farhad Mehran in 2006 in the publication of a conference.⁴³ Another field that attracted attention was the study of albums—their pictures, prefaces, and structures. Already in 1996, the entire contents of the St Petersburg *muraqqa'* had been published, Persian and Mughal paintings together with leaves of calligraphy.⁴⁴ In 2001 both Wheeler Thackston and David J. Roxburgh dealt with album prefaces in Topkapı, the former translating and the latter discussing; and in 2005 Roxburgh proceeded to the contents of the albums.⁴⁵ The Mughal albums of the Chester Beatty Library were published in detail by Elaine Wright et al. in 2008.⁴⁶ Catalogues of collections presented as histories of painting are now filled with excellent colour reproductions: that of the Hermitage by Adel Adamova in 2012 (2010 in Russian), and of the Al-Sabah by Adamova and Manijeh Bayani in 2015.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, new knowledge arrives. An article in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 2017 by James White convincingly resolved the dating of an important picture in Topkapı, 'The Monastery', which had long been in dispute,⁴⁸ and following Massumeh Farhad's delivery of the Yarshater lectures in 2019 on Safavid albums in the seventeenth century, a further book may be anticipated.

One feature of the twenty-first century is the increase in native speakers studying in this area, a fact which can lead to better readings and closer interpretations, but should not discourage

⁴⁰Barbara Brend, *Perspectives on Persian Painting. Illustrations to the Amūr Khusrāu's Khamsah* (London, 2003).

⁴¹Patricia L. Baker and Barbara Brend (eds), *Shifting Sands, Reading Signs: Studies in Honour of Professor Géza Fehérvári* (London, 2006).

⁴²*The Shāhnāmā of Firdausi done into English by Arthur George Warner, M.A. and Edmond Warner, M.A.* (London, 1905–25, reprinted London, 2000). Barbara Brend, *Muhammad Juki's Shahnāmāh of Firdausi* (London, 2010). Barbara Brend and Charles Melville, *Epic of the Persian Kings: The Art of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh* (London, 2010).

⁴³Farhad Mehran, 'The break-line verse: the link between text and image in the "first small" *Shahnāmā*', in *Pembroke Papers: Shahnāmā Studies*, Vol. I, (ed.) C. Melville (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 151–169.

⁴⁴Yuri Y. Petrosian, Stuart Cary Welch, Anatoly Ivanov and Oleg Akimushkin, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqa': Album of Indian and Persian Miniatures from the 16th through the 18th Century and Specimens of Persian Calligraphy by 'Imād al-Ḥasanī* (Lugano and Milano, 1996).

⁴⁵Wheeler Thackston and David J. Roxburgh, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 2001); D. J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 2005).

⁴⁶Elaine Wright et al., *Muraqqa': Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library* (Alexandria, VA, 2008).

⁴⁷Adel Adamova, *Persian Manuscripts, Paintings and Drawings from the 15th to the early 20th Century in the Hermitage Collection* (London 2012); A. Adamova and Manijeh Bayani, *The Arts of the Book and Portraiture* (London and Kuwait, 2015).

⁴⁸James White, 'A sign of the end time: "The Monastery", Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi H. 2153 f.131b', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27.1 (2017), pp. 1–30.

the rest of us from continuing to learn the language. Momentous in another way is, of course, the increase in available technology. For those based in the great libraries there are the possibilities of X-ray fluorescence analysis and Raman spectroscopy for the study of metals and pigments used on a page, but much wider is the digital world. Having become accustomed to the computer (for myself in the 1980s), at first for the production of words, one was freed from the literal use of cut-and-paste with scissors and gum to its metaphorical equivalent. Gradually we learn that the computer enables us to draw in knowledge: that the date of an occurrence of which we are not quite certain can be checked on a website with the probability of an accurate result. Then we learn that whole library catalogues can sometimes be brought into view, and it is often possible to summon up articles from earlier times—though the elder among us may sometimes need to be reminded of how this is done. Thus background is more easily obtained than in the past, though perhaps we need to compensate for this convenience with an increased rigour in its deployment. Another possibility is the outflow of information from one's own website, if one has the time and tenacity to feed it.

Pictures are now widely available as digital images, a name to indicate their incorporeal state. By contrast to the expense in time and money of ordering photographs, images can be acquired from many libraries, free until the point of publication. The existence of pictures of particular subjects can be learnt from specialised databases, together with information as to whether they are published or not.⁴⁹ These visual riches enable teaching and lecturing by means of PowerPoint, which has taken over from teaching by slide projection, and indeed arrogated the name 'slide' to their individual units. The making of PowerPoint slides can perhaps be seen as a minor art form that has some commonality with cinema. They are notably less effective when used with the verbal disciplines since words on the screen compete for attention with what is being said. In the visual sphere, however, they allow for the building of one thought on another as images and effects are added in a single slide. They allow the introduction and changing of comparative pieces and the precise indication of details. We who compose them should be careful that our fervour as *auteurs* does not lead to an excess of flashing arrows, bold lassoes, and transitions by way of explosion.

I am particularly grateful for the digitisation of Persian—and Mughal—manuscripts that has been carried out at the British Library,⁵⁰ since it enables me to study their two finest copies of the *Khamsah* of Nizami from fifteenth-century Herat. Since the 1970s I have been able to visit these manuscripts, and it is of course a different order of experience to be in the presence of the actual volume, but to be able to summon up the simulacrum at home, to run to and fro among the folios, to enlarge an image and capture it in screen shot without distress to the original is a great delight.⁵¹

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⁵⁰Sponsored by the Iran Heritage Foundation.

⁵¹I am engaged with the copies of the *Khamsah* of Nizami Add. 25900 and Or. 6810, both of which make appearances in Martin, *Miniature Painting and Painters*.