
‘Lifting the Veil from the Face of Depiction’:

A Festschrift in Honour of Barbara Brend



MEHREEN CHIDA-RAZVI, ALISON OHTA AND EMILY SHOVELTON



Introduction

‘Master Ahmad Musa, who was his father’s pupil, lifted the veil from the face of depiction, and the [style of] depiction that is now current was invented by him.’¹ This oft-quoted

¹W. M. Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Leiden and Boston, 2014), p. 12.

phrase from Dust Muhammad's (fl. 1510–64) preface to the Bahram Mirza Album² serves as the inspiration behind our title for this Festschrift in honour of Dr Barbara Brend, whose work has enhanced our understanding and appreciation of Persianate painting.

Barbara has long held a special place in the heart of the Royal Asiatic Society. She joined the RAS in 1973 and has graciously served in a number of different guises: as a member of Council since 2001; as Honorary Secretary from 2005–2008; and, more recently, as Vice-President between 2018 and 2021. Currently, she chairs the Library Committee and serves on Publications. She has a special interest in the Society's collections of Persian manuscripts; in 2010, she published her monograph on the splendid Timurid *Shāhnāmāh* of Muhammad Juki, one of the Society's most treasured possessions.³ In doing so, she 'lifted the veil' of this manuscript and its exquisite illustrations, raising it from obscurity and making it accessible to a much larger audience. On the Royal Asiatic Society's 175th anniversary in 1998, she gave a lecture at the British Museum titled "The Book of Kings: The Juki *Shāhnāmāh* of the Royal Asiatic Society", and as the RAS prepares for its bicentenary, Barbara will write on other less well-known Persian manuscripts in the RAS collection for the Bicentenary volume of the Journal. She has supported the Society's outreach programme by funding the digitisation of its Mughal *Gulistān* of the poet Sa'di, completed in 1583 in Fatehpur Sikri; and an autographed copy of the *Kitāb-i Mathnawīyyāt-i Zafar Khān*, copied in Lahore in 1663. All in all, the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* was the perfect home for this Festschrift, acknowledging both her scholarship and her worthy and generous contributions to the life of the RAS. It is a token of the respect and affection in which the Society and its members hold her.

When the three of us started this project and told Barbara what we were planning, she expressed surprise with her characteristic modesty. We would like to thank all the contributors, including Barbara herself, for their work, patience, and good humour, and also the Journal Editorial Board, the RAS Council, Charlotte de Blois (former Executive Editor of the Journal), Professor Sarah Ansari (President of the RAS and former Honorary Editor of the Journal), Professor Daud Ali (Editor of the Journal), Matty Bradley, and Sally Hoffmann and Nicki Marshall of Cambridge University Press for their help and support.

The subjects covered in this Festschrift are broad and somewhat eclectic, reflecting both Barbara's friendships as well as her interest in Persian and Indian manuscripts.

First and foremost, Barbara traces how the study of Persianate painting has advanced since she entered the field. In his article, Jonathan Bloom seeks the origins of Persian painting in the Fatimid period. Robert Hillenbrand's contribution analyses the persistently tricky question of aesthetics in Islamic art, and Judy Kolbas speculates if a Mongol was present in the Mamluk Mint. Cheryl Porter contributes a study of the pigments used for the paintings in the Muhammad Juki *Shāhnāmāh*, while Andrew Topsfield writes on the RAS Snakes and Ladders (Andrew's father, coincidentally, taught Barbara while she was at Cambridge).

Several articles, naturally, focus on Persian manuscripts:⁴ Mehreen Chida-Razvi analyses the portrayal of elite women in Ilkhanid painting; Charles Melville examines the RAS manuscript of Mirkhwand's *Tārīkh-i Rauḍat al-ṣafā*; Sheila Blair discusses three approaches to reading the

²Topkapı Palace Library, H.2154.

³B. Brend, *Muhammad Juki's Shahnamah* (London, 1991).

⁴For the object details and accession information of the items in the contributor's articles mentioned here, please see the relevant articles within this volume.

frontispiece of the Cairo *Būstān*; Adel Adamova seeks Bihzad's lost album; Elaine Wright looks at the use of 'Chinese' paper and gold margins in a fifteenth-century Shiraz Anthology; and Eleanor Sims reattributes a princely gathering scene said to be from Aq Quyunlu Tabriz to Ya'qub Beg's court, almost a century earlier. Firuza Melville gives an account of Badr al-Din Hilali's *divan* of poems, now in Cambridge, which was copied by Mir Ali Haravi, and the circumstances of their friendship; and Marianna Shreve Simpson discusses a copy of the Humay and Humayun manuscript in Philadelphia. Turning to South Asia, Rosalyne Hurel looks at the changing depictions of *yogini*, while Emily Shovelton examines the Shiraz connections of a *Shāhnāmāh* manuscript in the library of Sultan Muhammad Shah of Gujarat, and Ursula Sims Williams unravels the seals of Tipu Sultan. Moving away from the painted page, Alison Ohta discusses the binding of Sultan Öljaytū's Qur'an made in Hamadan and other Ilkhanid examples. Although it is not widely known, Barbara also has an interest in Persian bookbinding, as witnessed by an article she wrote in 1989 on that subject.⁵

The three of us have enjoyed not only working together on this honorific volume, but also the wonderful discussions we had with Barbara as we sought to delve into her past. We discovered that Barbara developed a deep fascination with stories from a young age, partly due to the books her father read to her as a child. It is this interest that has been a consistent thread throughout her research on Persianate manuscripts.

Barbara's attraction to the Islamic world was instigated by her travels to Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan in the 1960s. In 1966 she spent two weeks in Tehran, and in 1969 she joined a group of 30 people travelling around Afghanistan for a month. While the majority of people on the tour were there to 'find themselves', Barbara was one of only two people interested in properly looking at buildings and sites; the other, Susan, became a lifelong friend.

Inspired by her travels, Barbara's interest in the Islamic world grew. She enrolled at SOAS to do her MPhil, during which time she met Norah Titley, the Curator of Persian manuscripts at the British Library. Norah was instrumental in fostering Barbara's deep interest in and love for Persianate painting. After proofreading Norah's seminal 1977 publication on miniatures in Persian manuscripts in the British Library and Museum,⁶ it was clear to Barbara that the study of paintings was to be her focus for further study. The stories depicted in the paintings gripped her, continuing a lifelong interest in narratives, historical characters, and epic tales. Her father, an ardent admirer of Sherlock Holmes, published a chronology of the Holmes stories in 1951.⁷ His interest in Conan Doyle's writing greatly informed Barbara's way of thinking. As an only child, she used her imagination to invent characters and games, frequently writing her own stories, which her friends would then act out.

Stories were integral to her studies as well. While studying French at Cambridge, Barbara was drawn to medieval texts. The writings of the twelfth-century writer Chrétien de Troyes (fl. 1165–80) were of particular interest, and she later realised they had a direct parallel with the writings of Nizami (1141–1209). De Troyes wrote five romances exploring themes of love, morality, quests, and 'banging people over the head with swords'—just like Nizami! Barbara continued to chase stories and pictures and when she began her PhD at SOAS in

⁵B. Brend, 'The arts of the book', in *The Arts of Persia* (London, 1989), pp. 232–243.

⁶N. Titley, *Miniatures from Persian Manuscripts: A Catalogue and Subject Index of Paintings from Persia, India, and Turkey in the British Library and the British Museum* (London, 1977).

⁷G. Brend, *My Dear Holmes* (London, 1951).

1977, it was the tales depicted in Amir Khusrau's *Khamsa* that caught her attention and motivated her to make her first trip to India in 1982, to hunt for copies of this manuscript.

After completing her PhD in 1986, Barbara's career path did not follow a straight trajectory. Rather, following a non-traditional, non-institutional route, she undertook various teaching opportunities, lectured on tours, and was able to publish extensively. This included multiple studies of the *Khamsa*, of both Nizami and Amir Khusrau, as well as many other aspects of Persianate painting. Additionally, she was asked by the British Museum to write a textbook on Islamic art, which was published in 1991.⁸ This has become a foundation text for students of Islamic art, and is found gracing shelves in bookshops all over the world.

In 2010, Barbara, with contributions by Alexander Morton, published her book on the RAS's Juki *Shāhnāmāh*. She had first seen the manuscript with Norah as a student when it was relatively unknown and rarely included in teaching syllabi. Today, it is impossible to imagine a course on Timurid painting that does not include illustrations from it. Following her publication of the Juki, she co-curated an exhibition on the *Shāhnāmāh* at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and wrote the accompanying exhibition catalogue, along with Charles Melville.⁹ Barbara's love of the *Shāhnāmāh* has manifested itself in yet another way—her cats have frequently been named after characters in the epic; Hoshang is currently occupying Barbara's attention!

Barbara's acute eye for the details found within illustrations has meant she has a knack for pointing out details that others might miss, and she always spots the opportunities that artists' took to add humour to their work. Most importantly, she has always maintained a keen interest in the texts to which these paintings belong, and in many of her publications she has sought to elucidate the interrelationship between text and image for her readers. This continues with her latest achievement, *Treasures of Herat*,¹⁰ which presents a detailed study of two Persian manuscripts in the British Library.

Art historians who study the Persianate world tend to focus on one broad geographical area, for example, the Ottoman Empire, Iran and Central Asia, or Mughal South Asia. Few are those who become experts on multiple regions; Barbara is, of course, one of them. Her wide-ranging expertise has meant that she is frequently sought out by students, colleagues, and friends for advice. The three of us, and, suffice to say, all the contributors to this volume, have benefitted from her generosity, kindness, and encouragement, which even extended to agreeing to write a contribution for her own Festschrift! Readers are thus in a unique position of being able to hear from Barbara herself on the ways in which the history of Persianate painting has developed over the last 50 years. They will also immediately note that, for the first time, the print version of this journal issue includes figures within the contributions printed in colour. As the majority of images included are of book paintings, that they were available to the reader in full colour was of immense importance. For that, we are incredibly grateful to Professor Sarah Ansari, President of the RAS, as her generous gift allowed for this to happen.

Having spent as much time as she has studying paintings from so many wonderful manuscripts, we chose to ask Barbara an unfair question: what is her favourite story? After only the briefest of pauses, she answered that it was the paintings from Khusrau and Shirin. It was the big, romantic stories that had always grabbed her—and this was one of the best of them.

⁸B. Brend, *Islamic Art* (London, 1991).

⁹B. Brend and C. Melville, *Epic of the Persian Kings* (Cambridge and London, 2010).

¹⁰B. Brend, *Treasures of Herat* (London, 2022).



Barbara drawing at Ribāṭ-i Zayn al-Dīn, near Yazd in the direction of Kirman.

It seems only fitting to close with a story, one which centres on Barbara. Over 20 years ago, Barbara and a group of friends, including Alison Ohta, visited Petra in Jordan. Alison remembers Barbara, with a long billowing scarf, wearing a large-brimmed hat, perched precariously on a donkey, following the steep path to the monastery at the top of the cliff. From below Alison watched with a mixture of alarm and admiration as Barbara climbed higher and higher, towards the summit, where she languidly enjoyed the view. An accomplished rider, like so many of the protagonists in the paintings she studies, Barbara was perfectly at ease.

It is with immense pleasure that we present this Festschrift as a small token of appreciation and admiration on behalf of all those who have benefitted from knowing and learning from Barbara Brend.

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Forthcoming

- ‘Illumination and a problematic picture in a *Dīvān* of Hafiz-i Sa’d for Pir Budaq Qara Quyunlu’, for *Festschrift* for Dr Zeren Tanındı.
- ‘The Persian visual tradition’ for *Alexander the Great: Legend of a Life*, the provisional title of a book to accompany an exhibition at British Library in October 2022.