excited the admiration of other painters, who tried in vain to imitate it, the author goes on to say:

‘And this case is similar to that of al-Qasir and Ibn ‘Aziz in the time of Yâzûrî, the chief minister of Hasan b. ‘Ali b. Abd ar-Rahman (i.e. the Caliph Musta‘ânî), for he often used to incite them and stir up one against the other, since he was especially fond of an illustrated book or anything like a picture or gilding. Thus he invited Ibn ‘Aziz from Iraq and excited his evil passions, for (the vizier) had sent for him to contend with al-Qasir, because al-Qasir demanded extravagant wages and had exaggerated opinion of his own work—and it really merited so high an estimate, for in painting he was as great as Ibn Muqâlah was as a calligrapher, while Ibn ‘Aziz was like al-Bawwâh.

I have already given a detailed account of the matter in the book I have written on this subject—namely, the classes of painters, with the title “The light of the lamp and the amuser of company in respect of the annals of artists”. Now Yâzûrî had introduced al-Qasir and Ibn ‘Aziz into his assembly. Then Ibn ‘Aziz said, “I will paint a figure in such a way that when the spectator sees it, he will think that it is coming out of the wall.” Whereupon al-Qasir said, “But I will paint it in such a way that when the spectator looks at it, he will think that it is going into the wall.” Then (every one present) cried out: “This is more amazing than the proposal of Ibn ‘Aziz.” Then Yâzûrî bade them make what they had promised to do: so they each designed a picture of a dancing-girl, in niches also painted, opposite one another—the one looking as though she were going into the wall, and the other as though she were coming out. Al-Qasir painted a dancing-girl in a white dress in a niche coloured black, as though she were going into the painted niche, and Ibn ‘Aziz painted a dancing-girl in a red dress in a niche that was coloured yellow, as though she were coming out of the niche. And Yâzûrî expressed his approval of this and bestowed robes of honour on both of them and gave them much gold.1

Had Maqārizī’s history of painters survived, we should know more of the art treasures accumulated by the Fatimidis of Egypt. As it is, we owe such knowledge as we do possess to the special interest which this indefatigable historian took in such matters; he exhibits an assiduous eagerness in the collection of all possible kinds of information connected with the culture of his native land, and gives long lists of the precious objects found in the palace of Musta‘ânî; among them was a peacock of gold studded with precious gems, with eyes of rubies and a tail made of enamel in imitation of the varied colour of the living bird—a huge cock, also of gold, covered with jewels, and a number of other animals. Of these costly treasures of the Fatimid court, nothing remains except a few crystal vessels. At the site of their earlier capital, Mahdisiyah, before they added Egypt to the Fatimid dominions, there has recently been found a marble base-relief, representing a prince, with a cup in his hand, listening to a girl playing a flute.3

before the chief Qādī and his assessors. Such perishable articles were probably regarded with a certain amount of indulgence, as obviously not being likely to become objects of idolatry, as was also the case with the waxen figures, made in the shape of men or angels or animals of various kinds, that were used in the eighteenth century in Constantinople for decorative purposes, on the occasion of the wedding festivities of persons of high rank.

But statues of living persons, since for them no possible excuse could be found, are exceedingly rare, as clearly coming under the condemnation of the law. Yet statues, even though they most flagrantly suggest the idolatry which Islamic theology is ever eager to combat, have not been unknown in the history of Muslim art. Khuwārsawāy (883-893), the son of the founder of the Tūnūnī dynasty of Egypt, had in his palace near Cairo a room called the House of God, to the walls of which were attached statues of himself and his wives and singing-girls, wearing crowns of gold and attired in costly jewelled robes. 3 ᾧAbd al-Rahman III (912-961), the greatest monarch in the history of Muḥammadan Spain, set up a statue of Zahrā, his favourite wife, over the gateway of the magnificent palace he built for her in the neighbourhood of Cordova, and called after her name.

Under the tolerant rule of the Saljūq princes of Asia Minor it was even possible for a school of sculpture to blossom forth for a brief period. When ʿAbd al-Dīn Kay-qubād (1219-1236) built the walls round his city of Konia, he set up on each side of one of the great gates a winged figure, 4 such as appears in many of the paintings in Persian MSS., especially in representations of Muḥammad's ascension to Paradise. In the Museum of Konia there are still preserved several other examples of sculptured figures, in low relief, testifying to the disregard by the Saljūq princes of the strict ordinances of their faith; among them are one or two human figures, but most of them are animals, e.g. the antelope, the elephant, and fantastic beasts such as the winged unicorn and the winged sphinx. 5

In the Qara Sarai of Mosul, a palace built by the Atābeg Badr al-Dīn Luṭu’ (1233-1239), there was a frieze of plaster figures, probably originally 100 in number, representing men looking out of niches, so that only the upper part of the body is visible, with the hands crossed in front of the body; each had a halo behind the head; but all that remain have been mutilated and the features obliterated. 6

But such examples are exceedingly rare, and it is not until modern times that any Muḥammadan ruler has dared so to outrage public opinion as to erect a statue in any open space outside the precincts of his palace; but the Egyptians have by now become accustomed to the statues which Ismā‘īl Pasha (1863-1882) erected to his ancestors—that of Muḥammad ‘Alī in Alexandria and of Ḥāfiz Pasha in Cairo; since then other statues have been set up in Cairo, among them one of the founder of the National Party, Muṣṭafā Kāmil Pasha, and schools of both painting and sculpture have been established.

To a separate group of their own belong the animals that are found carved on bridges, city gates and towers, and other public buildings, and on palaces as well as private houses; they served as talismans and were intended to ward off evil, especially the approach of an enemy. Such a usage represents a survival from pre-Muḥammadan times and indicates a demand on the part of popular superstition so urgent as to thrust the prohibitions of the theologian aside. The figures generally take the form of a terrible beast of prey, such as a lion or an eagle or dragon; of rarer occurrence is a human figure, e.g. the carved relief of a man whose head is surrounded by a halo over a gate of a Khān or caravanserai erected on the road between Sinjär and Mosul some time between 1233 and 1259; the man is thrusting a lance into the mouth of a scaly dragon and probably represents Khwājah Khsrā, the patron saint of travellers, and was set up over the entrance of this caravanserai to serve as a talisman to ensure the safety of those who frequented it. 7

To these scanty notices of such breaches of the Sacred Law within the dominions of the Arab empire in the days of its greatness, and in the Muḥammadan West, may now be added some examples of the encouragement of the painter's art by the princes who rose to power in the Muḥammadan East after the break-up of the Abbasid empire. One of the earliest of these dynasties that succeeded in establishing itself with any permanence in Persia was that of the Samanids (874-999), under whose rule Bukhārā and Samarqand became centres of civilization and learning; one of these enlightened

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5. For an account of the recent excavations on this site, see R. Velázquez Bosco, Molina Acayuela y Alaminuy (Madrid, 1912).
7. For an account of these excavations, see also H. Glück, Die beiden 'samandischen' Druckreliefs (Grundlagen zur islamischen Skulptur), Konstantinopol, 1917.

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princes, Naṣr ibn Ahmad (913–942), is said to have ordered the poet Rūdāgī to make a metrical version of the fables of Kāhlī and Dimnah, and he was so delighted with this poem that he had it adorned with pictures by Chinese artists.1

The Samanids disappeared before the rising power of the Turks, and one of the princes who helped in the final destruction of their rule, the great conqueror Maḥmūd of Ghaznī (998–1030), sought to gratify his pride in his own prowess by having his palace decorated with pictures of himself, his armies, and his elephants. It is characteristic of the fortiﬁmous mention of such works of art by Muslim authors that this information is derived from a biography of the great Sufi saint, Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī-l-Khayr; the painter of these pictures was the father of the saint, who at the time was a mere child, but he rebuked his father for thus glorifying the name of Sultan Maḥmūd instead of that of God; the story goes on to tell that the pious admonition of the child caused the painter to repent, so that he destroyed the pictures he had painted.2 What view the choleric Sultan took of such proceedings is not recorded, for this aspect of the matter was naturally of no interest to the hagiographer.

In considering the attitude of the Muhammadan annalists towards the painters and their art it must be borne in mind that historical science in the Muslim world owed its birth to theology, and may almost be regarded at the outset as a branch of exegesis; the ﬁrst impulse to the writing of history came from the need of a biography of the Prophet and of elucidations of the numerous historical references in the Qur‘ān; consequently some of the greatest historians in the Muhammadan world have at the same time been theologians. Such men of course sympathized with the orthodox condemnation of the art of painting and had no desire to sully their pages with the record of the doings of such godless folk. It was not until the changed attitude towards the art of painting, to which reference will be made below, found expression in literature about the beginning of the sixteenth century that the historian could record the activities of the painter without drawing a moral lesson or giving some expression to his disapproval.

Had the historians deemed such matters worthy of their pen, we should have had accounts of the pictorial decoration of the private apartments of Muslim monarchs such as the Abbasid Caliph Muḥtadī (869–870)3 or Sultan Fīrūz Shāh Taghlaq of Dihīlī (1311–1388), but it only ﬁnds mention when these pious princes give orders for the destruction of such pictures as being condemned by the Sacred Law. The latter had various garden scenes painted in their place.4 More valuable still would it have been if there had been preserved some description of the decoration of the palaces of the Timurid princes, for with their love of art they must have beautified their dwelling-places with the same lavish embellishment as they allowed their painters to give to the adornment of their manuscripts. All that the historian of the achievements of the founder of the dynasty tells us of the palace which Tīmūr built in a garden to the north of Samarqand, early in 1397, is that it was decorated with frescoes which put to shame the famous book of Mānī and the picture gallery of China.5 Bābūr visited this North Garden during his brief occupation of Samarqand a century later, in 1497–8, but makes no mention of any paintings; he records, however, the existence of another garden, the Bāgh-i-Dīlkušā, which Tīmūr laid out to the east of the city, in which he erected a great kiosk, painted inside with pictures of his battles in India.6 As Tīmūr did not invade India till 1398, this must have been a later construction than the North Garden. Tīmūr’s son, Shāh Rukh (1404–1447), also erected a garden house in Harāt and it had decorated with pictures,4 and the miniatures in the manuscripts of this period suggest that such mural decorations were common. Bābūr also mentions a small, two-storied building outside the city of Harāt, which his grandfather, Sultan Abū Sa‘īd (1452–1467), had ordered to be decorated with pictures of his own campaigns and encounters.1 Of these wall-paintings nothing whatever remains, but of their general character some conception may be formed from the scanty traces of the frescoes painted for a grandson of Bābūr in Akbar’s palace at Fathpur-Sīkri. Though these were painted a century later (about 1570) and exhibit the characteristics of the eclectic Hindu-Persian style which Akbar encouraged, they conform to the tradition of the frescoes painted for Akbar’s ancestors in Samarqand and Harāt.6

The monarchs of the Safavid dynasty in Persia, who were for several generations contemporaries of the Timurids in India, likewise decorated their palaces with frescoes, but it was not until European travellers began to describe them that we come to know much about them. Sir William

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1 Shams-i-Sīrāj ‘Abū, Ta‘rīkh-i-Fīrūz-shahr, p. 374 (Calcutta, 1899).
3 The Bābūr-nāma, translated by A. S. Beveridge, p. 78 (London, 1911).
5 The Bābūr-nāma, p. 192.
decorated with hunting scenes and the story of Khusrav and Shirin, is now in ruins.

Such are the scanty records, scattered throughout the literature of more than a thousand years, of the encouragement that Muhammadan monarchs and nobles gave to workers in the pictorial and plastic arts, despite the disapproval which their theologians expressed for all representations of living beings. Most of these works of art have perished; but a certain number of the carpets, ivories, crystals, metal-work, and wood-carving have survived the various cataclysms that from time to time have swept over the Muhammadan world, and they are now safely guarded from iconoclastic zeal in public museums, private collections, and—strangest of all—in the sacristies of Christian churches and cathedrals.

But almost all the wall-paintings have perished; the exceptions are the frescoes of recent date in Persia, to which reference has just been made, and two examples of a much earlier date, one of the Umayyad and the other of the Abbasid period, which have only come to light in recent years. The first of these two was discovered in 1898 in the desert of Transjordan to the east of the northern end of the Dead Sea, in a kind of shooting-box called Qaysay 'Amra; this pleasure-house, erected in the desert by one of the Umayyad princes early in the eighth century, is built of limestone and consists of a main rectangular hall with a few rooms attached; on the walls and vaulted ceilings of all but one of these rooms are the much-damaged remains of paintings. Among the subjects represented are six royal personages, standing for the chief enemies of Islam who had been defeated by the Umayyads; to these reference will be made later on; some symbolic figures representing the ages of man, and Victory, Philosophy, History, and Poetry; a number of nude figures, some of them men engaged in gymnastic exercises; dancers, flute-players, and other musicians; various animals, particularly gazelles and antelopes, together with hunting scenes; a row of figures representing different trades; and a number of heads in medallions surrounded by foliage also form part of the varied decoration of this building.

Opposite the entrance of the main hall is a painting of a dignified figure seated on a throne, placed in a niche supported by four columns; over the niche are the scanty fragments of an Arabic inscription which invokes the blessing of God over some person whose name has entirely perished. This painting is undoubtedly intended to represent the prince for whom the building was erected, and much speculation has been devoted to the problem

2 A. Musti, Khosra 'Amra (Wien, 1907).
3 See below, chap. VIII.
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of his identification. The most plausible solution is that put forward by Max van Berchem, namely, that it is intended for a portrait of the Umayyad Caliph Walid I (704–715), whose victorious armies had added Spain to the Arab empire and had extended the domination of Islam to the shores of the Atlantic in the West and into India and the borders of China in the East. This identification is based on the decipherment of the bilingual inscriptions above the heads of four of the six royal personages mentioned above. The inscriptions make it clear that these monarchs are arranged in order from left to right, according to the relative geographical position of their kingdoms from West to East; moreover, they are not all set in one line, but stand in two rows, three a little behind the other three. Max van Berchem has acutely recognized that those standing in the front row are emperors, those standing a little farther back are rulers of kingdoms of lesser importance.

Professor Herzfeld has given cogent reasons for thinking that this group of the various monarchs of the earth is copied from some Sasanian original, in which the Khusrau had been represented as receiving the homage of rival princes. It is characteristic of the place which pictorial art was destined to fill in Islamic culture that the earliest memorial of it that has survived should illustrate the luxurious habits of the pleasure-loving Umayyad princes, devoted to women, music, and the chase, and contemptuous of the austere ideals of the new faith that their fathers had so recently adopted. Further, since the new religion did not encourage such artistic efforts, foreign painters had to be employed by those who in this manner flouted the admonitions of their own theologians; and thus the first example of painting in the Muhammadan period is one of the last creations of profane art surviving from the Hellenistic age.

The examples of fresco decoration that have survived from the Abbasid period were discovered in Sāmarrā by Professors Sarre and Herzfeld in the course of the excavations which they carried out during the years 1911–13. The founding of this new capital of the Abbasid empire was prompted by the constant disturbances that arose between the population of Baghdad and the Turkish soldiery, whose insouciance made the life of the inhabitants unbearable; so the Caliph Mu’tasim resolved to move the capital to Sāmarrā, about sixty miles north of Baghdad, and settled here in 838. The new city

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owed its magnificence mainly to the building activity of his two sons, who successively succeeded him. Its glory began to pass away after the year 883, when the Caliph Mu’tamid abandoned his grandfather’s capital and moved the seat of government back again to Baghdad. The site is now a vast area of ruins, and no buildings are left standing except the great mosque. Remains of frescoes were found on the site of the palace and in a few private houses, but in very few cases had they remained in situ; most were scattered in broken fragments on the floor. The subjects of these frescoes must in many instances have been similar in character to those of Qaṣr ‘Amra; there are nude female figures, dancing-girls, hunting scenes, animals, and birds. Whoever may have been the painters of these pictures—and from the signatures it appears that both Christians and Muslims were employed—we have independent evidence that one of the palaces, named al-Muhāfīz ‘the chosen’), built by Mutawakkil (847–861) in Sāmarrā, was decorated by Greek painters, and that the subject of one of their pictures was a Christian church with monks praying in it. Greek signatures were actually found by Professor Herzfeld in the ruins of this city.

Such creations were not of course an abomination in the sight of the theologians, though they were not always so bold as Qaṣīf Mughīṭī ad-Dīn in standing up to rebuke what they considered to be wickedness in high places. If opportunity presented itself they would of course be unlikely to refrain from using fire or knife for the destruction of the offending handiwork of the artist, but for the rest they behaved like the theologians described in a document about the middle of the eighteenth century: ‘The ulāmā ponder over this state of affairs; they weep and groan in silence, while the princes who have the power to repress these criminal abuses merely shut their eyes. But we are God’s, and unto Him do we return!’

The influence of these theologians was, however, strong enough to exclude figure-painting out of all buildings devoted to religious purposes and keep the general body of orthodox believers uncontaminated by such abominations, and it is not doubt largely in consequence of their teaching that painting in the Muslim world has always remained, for the most part, a courtly art and has never become an integral part of Muslim culture, as has been the case with the culture of Christendom.

But apart from these deliberate and conscious examples of a flouting of

2 More detailed descriptions of these figures will be found in Chapter VIII.
3 Die Malereien von Sāmarrā, pp. 5–6 (Berlin, 1947).
4 Id., pp. 90–1.
5 Yaqūt, Mu‘jam al-balādis, Vol. IV, p. 44.
6 Fatwa relatif à la condition des zimmis, et particulièrement des Chrétiens, en pays musulmans, traduit de l’Arabe, par M. Belin (Journal Asiatique, IVme série, Tome XIX, p. 125, 1852).
the Sacred Law, there is evidence to show that by the fifteenth century the compelling influence of many of the ordinances embodied in the Traditions of the Prophet had ceased to be operative in the Eastern dominions of the Muhammadan world, and that it was felt by the theologians to be useless to appeal to them against the tyranny of accepted facts. The teaching of the Traditions as corroborated by the authority of the accepted exponents of Islamic jurisprudence was perfectly clear as regards the institution of the Caliphate, viz. that the Caliph must be a member of the tribe of the Quraysh, to which the Prophet himself had belonged; but by the fifteenth century it had become quite common for monarchs with no pretensions to Arab descent to assume the exalted title of Khalifah, though this had in previous centuries not only been thus restricted but had been regarded as unique and capable of being conferred only on the one head of the Muslim community. So many foreign and non-Arab races had become absorbed into the fold of Islam, so many barbarians such as Mongols and Turks had after their conversion taken rank among the most powerful of contemporary Muhammadan sovereigns, that academic considerations tended to decline in influence and the individual predilections of the ruler brushed aside any appeal to the Traditions as theological pedantry. Even after the Mongol conquerors of Persia and Transoxania had accepted Islam they still for some generations followed the Yasiaq, the customary law of their heathen ancestors, in spite of the effort of the accepted exponents of the faith to make the Shari'ah or Sacred Law operative. As is well known, the prescriptions of the Shari'ah had always remained in large measure theoretic and, in the practical concerns of life, to a very considerable degree inoperative; but there was a great difference between the scrupulous desire of a despot such as Harun ar-Rashid to keep within the letter of the law and his frequent consultations with the great legist of his reign, Abû Yüsuf, on cases of conscience,¹ and on the other hand the self-assertiveness of one of the monarchs of the new type, whose ancestors had helped to break up the Arab empire and had bequeathed to their Muslim descendants institutions and ideals that had taken firm root before the faith of Islam had been superimposed upon them.

Among the many traditional judgements of Islam which thus received fresh consideration was that which had hitherto been passed upon the art of painting. Bâbur, the Chagatai Turk, descended through his mother from the Mongol Chingiz Khân, was interested in painting and probably saw no reason why he should suppress his tastes in such a matter at the bidding of

a theological pedant, whose text-books his own adventurous life had left him no leisure to study. There is no evidence that Bābur himself ever acquired any practical knowledge of art, but a Mongol prince of an earlier generation, Sultan Ahmad, of the Jālā’īr dynasty of I’rāq (1382–1410), had practised the art of painting as well as that of gilding. Whether any of the sons and grandsons of Timūr, who were such generous patrons of art, ever themselves studied painting, does not appear to be recorded, but a later member of the family, Baysunqur Mīrāz (d. 1499), a descendant of Timūr in the fifth generation, who was himself for a short time ruler of Samarqand, is mentioned with commendation by Bābur, his cousin, as not only an excellent calligraphist, but 'in painting also his hand was not bad.' In those days when, as in contemporary Europe, the cultivation of knowledge tended to become encyclopaedic, it was considered that some acquaintance with the art of painting might very fittingly be added to other accomplishments. Of Haydar Mīrāz, the talented author of the Tā’rīkh-i-Rashidi (1499–1531), his cousin, Bābur, wrote: 'He had a hand deft in everything, penmanship and painting, and in making arrows and arrow-barbs and string-grips; moreover he was a born poet.'

Such royal interest in the painter’s art was doubtless ultimately to his advantage, but it must often have been embarrassing, especially when his exalted patron formed too high an estimate of his own achievements, as when the rough U‘zbeg conqueror of Harāt (in 1507), Muhammad Shaybānī Khan, took upon himself to correct the drawing of Bihzād, just as he would touch up the handwriting of Sultan ‘Ali of Mashhad, the greatest calligraphist of his day, and teach exegesis to professed theologians.

Even a descendant of a saint, whose family had risen to power largely on a wave of religious enthusiasm—Tahmāsp, the Safavid Shāh of Persia (1524–1576)—is said to have taken lessons from the famous painter, Sultan Muhammad, and was praised by his annalist as 'an incomparable artist, a delicate painter with a fine brush, whose work was like magic.'

1 Bābur’s attitude towards the customary jaw of his heathen ancestors is of interest here. In his Memoirs he writes: 'Our forefathers through a long space of time had respected the Chingle-tari (ordinance), doing nothing opposed to it; whether in assembly or Court, in sitting-down or rising-up. Though it has not Divine authority so that a man obeys it of necessity, still good rules of conduct must be obeyed by whosoever they are left; just in the same way that, if a forefather have done ill, his ill must be changed for good.' Bābur-nama, translated by A. S. Beveridge, pp. 198–9.

2 Dasturshāh, Tā’rīkh-i-Dam‘ānī, ed. E. G. Brown, p. 223 (f. 9).

3 Bahār-nāma, p. 113.

4 Bahār-nāma, p. 122.

5 Id., p. 129.

6 Rkandar Munkh, Tā’rīkh-i-Ālamārā-zi ‘Abbād (India Office Library, E60 449, fol. 74 b). The list of such royal amateurs comes up to modern times, insomuch as Nāṣir ad-Dīn, Shāh of Persia from 1848 to 1866, used to amuse himself with drawing, and some of his sketches—an ass, a wild goat, and a greyhound—are to be found in an album in the British Museum (Or. 4795).
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A contemporary ruler, of lesser importance, 'Abd ar-Rashid, who was Khân of Khashgar from 1533 to 1570, is also said to have had a great aptitude for arts and crafts. 'Once, for example, he cut a tree out of paper, and painted all the branches, the leaves, and the trunk in their proper colours; he did it so skillfully that even the masters of that craft were astounded.'

The Persian historian, Khwândamîr, gave expression to this new-born appreciation of the art of painting, in a preface which he wrote for an album of pictures by the great master, Bihzâd. This Khwândamîr, born about 1475, was the grandson of a still more eminent historian, Mirkhând, the author of the Rawdat as-Safâ, a universal history from the creation of the world to the author's own time, and he compiled an abridgement of his grandfather's work under the title of Khulâsât al-Akhbâr or 'Compendium of History'; when he was only twenty-three years of age, he was placed in charge of the library of that great patron of letters, Mir 'Ali Shîr, to whom he gratefully dedicated this compilation, acknowledging that had it not been for the considerate kindness of his patron, he could not have completed in six years a tenth part of what he had succeeded in finishing in as many months. In the reign of the luckless Bâdi' az-Zamâ'ân, who only managed to retain his father's kingdom for a year, Khwândamîr held the office of a judge in Harât, and drew up the conditions of surrender when in 1507 the Uzbek leader, Muhammad Khân Shaybânî, captured this city; he had to endure great indignities from these uncouth conquerors, and breathed a sigh of relief when they were defeated by Shâh Ismâ'îl in 1510. After the death of Shâh Ismâ'îl in 1524 he left Harât, and after a long and perilous journey succeeded in reaching Agra, where he paid his respects to the Emperor Bâbur in 1528; after this monarch's death, he entered the service of Humâyûn and died about 1535 or 1537.

The document translated below occurs in a collection of official papers, drawn up by Khwândamîr and entitled Nâmâh-i-Nâmî. It is of interest not only for the appreciation it reveals of the work of Bihzâd, but also for the high place it assigns to the art of the painter. Though written in a highly rhetorical and artificial style of mixed poetry and prose, it is obviously inspired by feelings of genuine sympathy for painting and altogether ignores the hostile attitude of the older generation of theologians. The album must have contained specimens of both painting and writing, and by weaving the praise of the two arts together Khwândamîr endeavours to secure for the former


The talented minister of Sultan Hosayn Bayqânî, and like his master a patron of men of letters and artists; he was himself a writer both of prose and verse; see 1191.

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the consideration which (as we have already seen) was universally accorded to the latter.

'A description of an album put together by the Master Bihzâd, in whom have been made manifest the (divine) guidance and leading.

The Eternal Painter when he made the sun
Adorned an album with the sky for leaves.
Therein He painted without brush or paint
The shining faces of each beautiful form.'

Since it was the perfect decree of the incomparable Painter and the all-embracing wish of the Creator "Be and it was," to bring into existence the forms of the variegated workshop, the Portrait-painter of eternal grace has painted with the pen of (His) everlasting clemency the human form in the most beautiful fashion in accordance with the verse "And He has fashioned you and has made your forms most beautiful," and has adorned the comeliness of the condition of this company (i.e. mankind), endowed with such charming qualities, by decking them out with various wondrous branches of knowledge and marvellous arts,—in accordance with His gracious words, "We have favoured them beyond many of Our creation".

God's grace and art became revealed in men,
When with His pencil He designed their forms.
When God displays His skill, His art adorns
The course of time, like pages in a book.
Sometimes His pen's point, redolent of musk,
Drawn lines whose excellence is unsurpassed.
Sometimes a moon-faced beauty stands revealed
Where'er He mixes colours with His brush.
Sometimes His art doth cause a stream of gold
To flow within the garden of fair speech.
Sometimes He raiseth up a lofty tree
Whose fruit gives comfort to the troubled heart.
Sometimes His magic pen makes roses blow
In all the flower-beds of the written word.
Where'er He decorateth words with gold,
Each tiny fragment casts the sun to shame.
God's writing and His draughtsmanship amaze
The wise man by their magic loveliness;
The eye rejoices at the curving line
Although the mind may fail to grasp the sense.
God's form and meaning both create delight
And shed illumination on man's eye.

"By the pen and what they write." This verse is a sign of the perfection of the super-excellence of writing. And the verse, "He has taught with the pen" expresses the abundant merits of penmanship.

Imagination cannot grasp the joy
That reason draweth from a fine-drawn line.
It is impossible to express the delight of the soul of man at a design and a picture made in such a way that it represents an amir and a wazîr and rich and poor, and it is

1 i.e. God.
2 i.e. the stars.
3 Qur. iii. 52.
4 Qur. xl. 66.
5 Qur. xviii. 72.
6 Qur. lviii. 1.
7 Qur. xxvi. 4.
impossible to describe with the help of pen and fingers a particle of the beauty and grace and delight and reposefulness of this marvellous art.

From the beginning of the world the most distinguished of the sons of Adam (on whom and on our Prophet be peace so long as writing is formed by ink and pen!) have busied themselves in these two noble tasks, and they have carried off the palm of superiority over their like and their equals on the field of perfection and superiority and on the plain of skill and excellence. Accordingly, the distinguished names of some of these persons have been mentioned in the preface to this album, and the fine specimens of their handwriting and their famous pictures, executed with their marvellous pens, have been given a place in these pages.

Among these perfect painters and accomplished artists is the compiler and arranger of the pages of this album, the producer of wonderful forms and of marvellous art, the marvel of the age, whose faith is unassailed, who walks in the ways of love and affection, Master Kamal ad-Din Bilzad.

His brush, like Min‘is, wins eternal fame;
Beyond all praise, his virtuous qualities;
Bilzad, acknowledged as supreme in art,
The master of the painters of the world,
Unique among the artists of his age,
Has turned the name of Min‘ to a myth.
Hairs of his brush, held in the master’s hand,
Give life unto the forms of lifeless things.
His talent is so fine that ‘tis to boast
If we maintain, his brush can split a hair.
If will you doubt that in the painter’s art
His mastery has reached perfection’s height,
You need but look with an impartial eye
And contemplate the marvel of these forms,
Wherein he has adorned these beauteous leaves
And perfumed the marvels therein.
For never yet has any page received
Pictures so fair or writing so refined.

For without taint of flattery or risk of pride, it may be maintained that ever since the cheeks of rosy-cheeked beauties have been adorned with musk-like down, no pen has ever set down upon the surface of any paper specimens of writing such as are written in this album; and since the album of the sky has been fashioned with the light-scattering form of moon and sun, the rays of the intelligence of no expert draughtsman have ever fallen on the like of the forms which decorate these pages.

Every drop that the pearl-scattering pen, like a diver, has brought up from the sea of the inintand to the shore of these leaves is a most precious pearl. Each figure which intelligence becoming a painter, leaving marvellous memorials behind it, has transferred from the tablet of the heart to the pages of this book, is a houri enchanting the soul.

Within the sea each pearl is to be found
That love has fostered ‘neath the waves of joy.
All eyes flash out with radiant loveliness,
Each heart is joyous as a lover’s trust.

But since the praise of the delicacy of these precious pearls and the description of the fineness of these unique figures is not the office of any one who has no store of ability,
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But this new evaluation of the art of painting never succeeded in displacing the earlier condemnation, for the latter was too firmly rooted in popular sentiment and was too decisively set forth in theological text-books, whose authority had been recognized for centuries, to make way for any more modern speculation, and it has continued to hold sway in the greater part of Muhammadan society up to recent times. When Sultan Mahmūd II (1808–1839) tried to force Western manners and customs on the people of Turkey and had his portrait hung up in all the barracks, the inhabitants of Constantinople, stirred up by the ʿulamāʾ, rose in revolt, and four thousand corpses were thrown into the sea before the rising was quelled.¹

In considering the strong hold which this hostility towards the painting of figures had upon the consciences of orthodox Muslims, it is instructive to recognize how many instances may be quoted from Turkish history to show that those who indulged in a taste for pictorial art generally kept their pictures hidden, and the wild speculations that were spread abroad, when after the death of the Wazīr Qara Muḥammad in 1644 it was discovered that in a secret room he had kept portraits of himself and some of his contemporaries, show how rare it was (at least at that period in Turkey) for any persons but those highly placed to dare to flout the fanatical opinion of Muhammadan society.² D’Osson gives an account of a picture, representing the repulse of an attack upon Algiers by the Spanish, which ʿAlī Ḥasan Pasha, Grand Wazīr in the reign of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd I (1773–1789), had had painted for himself, but he did not dare expose it in his palace in Constantinople, but kept it in his country house, to which his Christian and European friends would resort to see this picture,—as sometimes the Sultan himself. For the exalted position of the sovereign made him safe from the risks that a commoner would run; and consequently we find that many of the Sultans of Turkey, from Muḥammad II, who summoned Gentile Bellini from Venice, onwards, kept painters in their service, but they generally took care not to excite the prejudices of their subjects by letting the knowledge of such predilections get abroad. So well was the secret kept, that even up to the sixteenth century European visitors to Constantinople used to refer to the Muhammadan detestation of pictures as universal, so that even Sulaymān’s (1520–1566) interest in pictorial art was not generally known to his contemporaries.³ Muḥammad IV (1648–1687) was also a patron of painters, but he took care to keep his pictures shut up in a private room. Even the famous collection of the portraits of the Ottoman Sultans, which has frequently been published, was said in the eighteenth century to have been kept concealed, not only from the knowledge of the general public, but also from all the officers of the court who did not enjoy the intimate confidence of the Sultan.⁴ Even when Salīm III (1789–1807) made up his mind to disregard the prejudices of his fellow countrymen and conceived the idea of having the portraits of his ancestors engraved in England, a Greek peasant, with a talent for painting, was employed to copy them in the seclusion of the palace, and the copies were sent to England in 1806 with express instructions that every possible secrecy was to be observed during the progress of the work.⁵

D’Osson relates an interesting story which shows how impression was the influence of this oft-repeated prohibition on the mind even of a Muhammadan tempted to disregard it; he was once asked by a high official in the court of Sultan Muṣṭafa III (1757–1773) to employ on his behalf a European painter to make sketches of the most picturesque views of Constantinople. This official accordingly received four such pictures and put them away carefully in a private room. Then, under promise of profound secrecy, he expressed a wish to have his own portrait taken, and the painter visited him in the pretended guise of a physician. But when the portrait was finished, he said to D’Osson: ‘After thinking the matter over, I am sorry that I have had my portrait painted; the sight of it offends my eyes and gives a shock to my conscience; it may even some day expose me to disparaging judgements in the minds of my family, even in those of my own children. Allow me to make you a present of it; keep it in memory of me, but do not let any one know that it is a portrait of me or that it was made by my orders.’ Such priggings of conscience even served as the basis of much opposition to photography, when this began to make its way into Muslim countries. Many devout persons felt conscientious scruples against being photographed, in spite of the sophism that was put forward for the salving of tender consciences, that the operation in no wise resembled the painter’s blasphemous attempt to imitate the Creator’s production of human forms, since the photograph was really brought about by the agency of the sun and was consequently a result of the operation of divine activity itself. The likeness of the photograph to the portrait made by the painter was too close to prevent the new invention from falling under the same condemnation as had for nearly

⁴ D’Osson, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 453.
⁵ Id., p. 456.
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thirteen centuries depressed the older art. There were even cases like that of the photographer in modern Dihli, who, after he had for many years been in great request as a successful operator, especially in taking groups, repented of his evil ways and destroyed all the plates he had accumulated; he then attempted to gain a livelihood by photographing ancient buildings, since here there would be no imputation of an attempt to create life, but through ignorance of the laws of perspective his results were always bad.

Similarly, pious hands have carried on the work of destruction and mutilation up to recent times. One of the most lamentable incidents in the annals of such destructive activity is recorded by Professor von Le Coq, who learned on his arrival in Qarakhoja, in Turfan, where he found the Manichaean pictures which are so important for the early history of Persian art, that only a few years before—about 1897—a peasant had found a number of Manichaean MSS, with pictures decorated in gold and colours and had thrown five cart-loads of them into the river, as unholy things. 1

1 A. von Le Coq, Auf Reisen im Osten (Berlin, 1926).

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THE student of the art of painting in the Muhammadan world is faced with peculiar difficulties. The subject-matter of his interest is so widely scattered that fortunate indeed must be the individual who can succeed in gaining access even to the most important examples. The great public collections in London, the University Libraries of Oxford and Cambridge and Edinburgh, furnish abundant material, but some of the most noteworthy achievements in Muhammadan painting are to be found in the Asiatic Museum in Leningrad and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; the Libraries of Berlin, Munich, and Vienna also, though not so rich, cannot be neglected. Apart from these public institutions, access to which is not hard to obtain, there are numerous private collections which are in some instances jealously guarded, and no publications have yet revealed the contents of them. Like many other treasures of art that were once available in Europe, a considerable number of some of the finest paintings produced by Muhammadan artists have crossed the Atlantic to America, and must be studied in Boston or New York. The Muhammadan East itself parted with some of its most magnificent treasures of pictorial art at a time when their beauty was not appreciated by their oriental owners, but some still remain in Persia and India. A Shah Namah decorated for Baysunqur, the prince to whom the authoritative recension of this epic in its present form is attributed, still exists in the palace of the Shah of Persia, and must contain some of the delicate and charming work of the school of Harat; but it has never been described, and shares this obscurity with other treasures of the same kind. 1 The fall of the Ottoman Imperial House and the confiscation of its inherited works of art by the new government has revealed the unsuspected existence of a number of Persian paintings of the best period, but we still await an adequate account of the contents of the Museum of the Evkaf and other places in which they are now stored. For India, some account has been published of the illuminated MSS, in the Patna Oriental Public Library, 2 and the Government of Bihar and Orissa has had photographic reproductions made of the miniatures in three manuscripts; but no account is yet available of the contents of the Library of H.H. the Nawab of Rampur, and there are

1 E. Herzfeld, Einige Baudschätzen im Persien (Leipzig, 1926).
2 V. C. Scott, An Eastern Library (Glasgow, 1910).
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doubtless other private collections in India which will in time add to our
knowledge of Muhammadan art.

But apart from the fact that the existing materials are difficult of access or,
as being still undescribed, are practically unknown, or at least not available
for purposes of study, the student is faced by a further difficulty in that
examples that have thus survived form but a very small part of the total
number of works of art that once existed. Consequently there are great gaps
in his knowledge—a whole school of painting can only be guessed at through
the survival of a single example; the sources of such schools or groups of
painters as can be distinctly recognized often remain obscure; the advent of
new influences can be observed, without its being possible to trace them to
their source. These and similar difficulties are in great measure the result of
the enormous destruction that has deprived us of all knowledge of hundreds,
if not of thousands, of pictures; more particularly is this the case with regard
to the earliest examples of this art. With the exception of frescoes upon the
walls of palaces, practically all the Muhammadan pictures of which we have
any knowledge were painted on paper—a material so easily damaged or
destroyed, especially in the East. Manuscripts and paintings require special
care and watchfulness in countries where the ravages of white ants and other
insects can be so successfully achieved in an incredibly short space of time,
and where semi-tropical rain may ruin by damp the painted page within the
space of a few minutes. When due precautions are relaxed, or carelessness
neglects to take the requisite amount of care, irretrievable ruin may result.
The fact that so many royal volumes have survived to us in stately bindings,
and in a wonderful state of preservation, is due to the care that has been
bestowed upon them by generations of librarians, for the written page has
generally been regarded with respect by devout persons in the Muhammadan
world, and when some royal patron has bestowed his favour upon artists,
calligraphists, painters, workers in gold, and binders, the resulting work of
art has often been guarded with jealous care in the palace of his descendants,
so far as political conditions have permitted the continuity of such precau-
tions. But there have been lamentable exceptions. The late Sir Sayyid
Ahmad Khan, famous alike as theologian, social reformer, and man of
letters, used to relate that in the days when there was still a Mughal Emperor
living in the Fort at Delhi, he once entered the Royal Library and, noticing
a confused heap of loose leaves lying in a corner of the room, began turning
them over with a stick; among much that deserved no particular notice, he
came across a finely written page, illuminated with rich gold work, and after
further diligent search he managed to recover out of this rubbish heap the
complete manuscript of the Memoirs of Jahangir, the copy that had been
written out for the Emperor's own use, when he had had copies made for
distribution among contemporary Muhammadan princes. He carried the
recovered volume away to his own house in the city of Delhi, but nothing
has ever been heard of it since the mutineers sacked his house in 1857. If
such an incident could occur in a royal palace that had had a continuous
history since Shah Jahan built it in the Fort of Delhi in 1638, it may easily
be imagined how the loss or damage of manuscripts might occur in places
less closely guarded.

But such sporadic destruction has been trifling when compared to the ruin
effected by the plundering of captured cities, when libraries were involved
in the horrible fate that befell the inhabitants exposed to the savageries of
a victorious army. To the fact that Nadir Shah in 1739 stripped the Royal
Library of Delhi of some of its finest treasures, we owe the preservation of
the best examples of the work of Akbar's painters; safe in Persia, they escaped
the fate that befell the manuscripts that Nadir Shah did not consider it worth
his while to include among the rich booty which he carried away with him
from India, and so were not doomed to be looted by an ignorant soldiery
at a later date, as were the remnants of the Imperial Library in Delhi and the
Royal Library in Lucknow. Nadir Shah's stolen volumes, after their long
journey across the plains of India and the mountains of Afghanistan, safely
reached their destination in Harat;1 but how often did such good fortune
befall the precious manuscripts that formed part of the loot of other armies?
Abandoned by the wayside, or thrown carelessly away, many a precious manu-
script must have perished in this fashion, while those that were left behind
in the ruined castle or palace suffered such a fate as befell the MSS. of the
monastery of Pantocratoras, as described by Robert Curzon in his Monas-
teries of the Levant.2 'I went,' he says, 'to look at the place, and leaning through
a ruined arch, I looked down into the lower story of the tower, and there I
saw the melancholy remains of a once famous library. . . . It was indeed a
heart-rending sight. By the dim light which streamed through the opening
of an iron door in the wall of the ruined tower, I saw above a hundred ancient
manuscripts lying among the rubbish which had fallen from the upper floor,
which was ruined, and had in great part given way.' He managed to extric-
ate two or three, 'but found that the rain had washed the outer leaves quite
clean: the pages were stuck tight together into a solid mass, and when I
attempted to open them, they broke short off in square bits like a biscuit.
Neglect and damp and exposure had destroyed them completely.'

Such a report might have been given of many a Muhammadan library, if any observer had cared to record its fate. The history of most Muhammadan countries is filled with the record of continuous warfare; one dynasty succeeds another, and the founder of a new kingdom has to reward his victorious army by giving over the conquered capital to plunder.

The destruction of perishable works of art on such occasions, which occur throughout the course of Muhammadan history with monotonous frequency, must have been enormous. What treasures must have perished when Mahmūd of Ghaznī in A.D. 1029 destroyed the greater part of the Buwayhid library at Rayy! For since the founder of the dynasty, Buwayh, is believed to have been a descendant of the ancient kings of Persia, national sentiment may even have conserved examples of Sasanian art in this royal library. What he did not destroy, Mahmūd carried off to his own capital, but all his accumulated treasures perished when Ghaznī was in its turn plundered and burnt in 1190 by the Ghurid chief, ‘Alā ad-Dīn Husayn, who earned his nickname of Jahānsūz, 'the burner of the world', by this exploit.

But there are two conquerors whose devastations were above all others responsible for the wholesale destruction of Muhammadan manuscripts—Chingiz Khān, and his grandson, Hulāgu. A Muhammadan soldier might possibly have been able to understand that a manuscript had some commercial value, but the savage Mongols had the same contempt for Muhammadan books as they had for Muhammadan men of learning, and it is characteristic of their attitude to all that the followers of Islam held most sacred, that when the Mongols sacked Bukhārā in 1220 they stabled their horses in the great mosque and tore up the manuscripts of the Qur’ān to serve as litter for their horses. The thoroughness of the destructive methods of the Mongol conquerors has seldom been equalled in history; after massacring the inhabitants and burning the city of Jūrjānīyyah in 1219, the Mongols opened the dikes and submerged the site under the waters of the Oxus. They so utterly destroyed the city of Bāmiyān, that for a hundred years afterwards it remained deserted and uninhabited. In 1220 they razed the city of Nīshāpūr, one of the most populous in Khurasan, to the ground, and sowed the site of it with barley. A similar fate befell Baghdad when Hulāgu captured it in 1258; 800,000 of the inhabitants were ruthlessly massacred, and the city was given over to the savage soldiery for a whole week to be plundered.

Baghdad had been the capital of the Abbasid Caliphs for nearly five centuries, and though for a long period it had grievously fallen from its former high estate, still, of the treasures that had at one time poured into it from all parts of the vast Muslim empire, much in the way of pictures and manuscripts may well have survived up to the middle of the thirteenth century, and in the sack of the city by the Mongols many treasures of art must have perished. Another wave of calamity poured over such centres of Muhammadan culture in Persia and Central Asia as had managed to emerge into new life after the storm of the Mongol invasion, when in the latter part of the fourteenth century Timūr set out on his career of conquest, inflicting on a new generation the miseries that had marked the devastating progress of the Mongols. Such wholesale methods of destruction implied the loss also of those wall-paintings which appear from certain historical indications to have been a distinctive feature of the decoration of the palaces of Muhammadan sovereigns at that period.

But even when the works of the painters had managed to escape from the catastrophic ruin that accompanied the convulsions of political life, there was still another peril, more intimate and persistent even in times of profound peace, namely, the bigotry of pious owners or others who had an opportunity of destroying the pictures which current orthodox opinion regarded with detestation. Many a picture has met its doom at the hands of some Muhammadan Savonarola and been condemned to perish in a 'bonfire of vanities', especially when they have been works of erotic art, to which the stern puritanical feeling of orthodox Islam has been more persistently hostile than has been the case in Christian Europe. The widely prevailing condemnation of pictorial representations of living beings (to which reference has been made in the preceding chapter), taught by every theologian and accepted by the majority of the faithful in most parts of the Muhammadan world, must he held responsible for the total destruction or partial mutilation of countless works of art. Sultan Fīrūz Shāh, one of the noblest figures in the history of Muslim India of the pre-Mughal period, has put on record, in his Víctories (an autobiographical sketch of such of his achievements as he regarded as redounding to his credit), how he ordered all pictures and portraits which had been painted on the doors or walls of his palaces to be effaced, and 'under the divine guidance and favour' even had all figured ornaments removed from such objects as saddles, bridles, and collars, from censers, goblets, and cups, from dishes and ewers, and even from tents, curtains, and chairs. Such action on the part of this pious monarch of the fourteenth century is doubtless typical of many an instance of pricking of conscience in Muslims who have suddenly waked up to the realization of the fact that

1 Professor Browne gives a long list of the cities which were destroyed by the Mongols (Literary History of Persia from Ferdowsi to Seljuk, p. 446).

1 Sir H. M. Elliot, The History of India as told by its own Historians, Vol. III, p. 382.
they were harbouring in their houses the unclean thing. Some were even ready to go farther, if we may believe the story told of the pious Umayyad Caliph, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Azîz (717–720), who, finding a picture in a bathroom, had it rubbed out, adding, 'If I could only find out who painted it, I would have him well beaten'.

Even when pictures have not been entirely destroyed, their beauty has often been spoiled by a similar fanatical iconoclasm; e.g. features are frequently found to be erased, while the rest of the picture is left untouched, regardless of the fact that the beauty of the whole has thereby been ruined. In the collection of the illustrations of the Amir Hamzah Romance in the Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the faces of men and women—in some cases also those of animals—have been roughly scored through, to the great damage of these imposing compositions. Such examples of fanatical mutilation are of frequent occurrence. Generally it is the human countenance as such for which such cruel treatment is reserved, but sometimes the iconoclast is more selective and expresses his righteous indignation in regard to the representation of particularly holy personages; e.g. in the MS. of al-Biruni's great work on Systems of Chronology in the Library of the University of Edinburgh, any excision of human faces would have implied the mutilation of every single picture in the book, but the wrath of some former possessor or reader must have been excited by the sight of a portrait of the Prophet (fol. 111)—which, for obvious reasons, is rare in Muhammadan art—so he scraped off all the paint from the face, down to the white surface of the paper, though (strangely enough) there are two other portraits of the same MS. (foll. 79 and 191) which have escaped such rough treatment, as well as portraits of other Prophets such as Adam, Abraham, Isaiah, and Jesus. A curious instance in which a sense of property has exercised a certain restraint upon religious zeal occurs in a Persian MS. in the India Office Library (no. 1129 (Etch 982), fol. 29). This book contains a selection of passages from Nizâmî's writings, dealing with the theological and ethical virtues, and is calculated to make an appeal to a devout mind having a tendency towards mysticism; this particular copy is a fine piece of calligraphy, and each page of the manuscript is beautifully decorated with gold and colours, among which a pale blue predominates. Unfortunately for the tender conscience of the wholom owner the manuscript contained one picture (and only one) representing a group of persons seated in the open on a piece of ground dotted about with scattered flowering plants, each with a single flower or two. To cut out the picture would have implied the destruction of a portion of the text, nor could the picture be erased without spoiling the aesthetic appearance of the page of which it formed a part; so the owner salved his conscience and got out of his difficulty by employing a painter to render the picture harmless by continuing the landscape over the heads and faces of the men forming the group, so that only a number of headless trunks remains, and where heads might have been expected, nothing but flowers and leaves is to be seen (Plate VII).

Such mutilation of the artist's work has not always been prompted by so devout a motive, and the dirty smear of colour over what is otherwise a masterpiece of the painter's art is sometimes the result of a wet finger being drawn over the painted surface. For such wanton injury the women of the household are probably to be held responsible. In Persia and India it has often been a practice to keep precious manuscripts in the zenana, as being the most inviolable part of the building, and the women have not always proved to be the wisest guardians of these irreparable treasures. To such profane hands is probably also due damage of another kind, namely, the clumsy addition of black lines, to indicate the features and outlines of a form, such as often mar the beauty of an early masterpiece.

But even when the Muhammadan picture has succeeded in escaping the various forms of destruction that threaten its existence, or the many ways in which the beauty of its delicate surface may be injured, the student of this art is still faced with many difficulties peculiar to the special circumstances of the case. It is probably largely due to the prevailing attitude of contempt with which orthodox society in the Muhammadan world viewed the painter and his work, that the modern student has so little material beyond the pictures themselves for determining the date and place of origin, for assigning a picture to any one particular school or to the activity of any one particular artist—even in such cases in which there are some means of ascertaining the names of any painters at all for the period or country concerned. For though biography is one of the earliest manifestations of literary activity in the Muslim world, it was not until the beginning of the tenth century of the Muhammadan era that any attempt was made to provide biographical details regarding the painters; before that period we have the names of one or two isolated painters, but know nothing whatever about them except their names.

If the painter happened at the same time to be a calligraphist or chanced to indulge in the common recreation of the cultivated Persian gentleman

1 Even some of the manuscripts of the Emperor Akbar's library were kept in the harem (Abu 'l-Fadl, A'târ-i-Akhbar, translated by H. Blochmann, Vol. I, p. 103).
and have written verses, he might thereby find mention in some collection of notices of poets or fine writers, and thus win for himself a fame that his paintings would never have succeeded in gaining for him. To the later sources for the biographies of Muhammadan painters reference will be made in Chapter X.

Some historical indications are occasionally to be found on the pictures themselves, but the signatures are often forged and the ascriptions to particular artists can only be accepted after all the evidence of style, colouring, &c., have been carefully weighed. This is particularly the case when the picture occurs on a separate piece of paper by itself or in an album along with others; but an equal amount of care has to be observed even when the pictures are found as illustrations of a manuscript. At first sight it might appear that some indication would be given by the date of the manuscript, if (as often happens) the copyist has written in the colophon the year in which he completed his task, or even added the name of the city in which he worked (though this added information occurs more rarely), or, in the case of an undated manuscript, by such indications as to date and provenance as are supplied by the character of the handwriting or the peculiar nature of the paper. But the large number of MSS. to be found in every oriental library containing blank spaces for pictures that were never painted, shows how rash it is to assume that the date of a manuscript is sufficient by itself to determine the date of the pictures that may be found in it. Any length of time may elapse between the writing of the manuscript and the filling up of the blank spaces left for pictures, and since the time when wealthy collectors have begun to manifest an interest in Persian painting, modern forgers have got hold of manuscripts with such empty spaces and have filled them in with imitations of earlier work—in some instances with a considerable amount of skill, but in others it is clear that the modern imitator has had neither the time nor the patience of his predecessors, for his work lacks the delicacy and the marvellous detail of the earlier work which it lays claim to represent.

Fortunately, many manuscripts which would have provided opportunities for such fraudulent proceedings had been safely deposited in public collections, long before high prices tempted the modern dealer. An example may be taken from the British Museum, in which there is a beautiful MS. of the Turki Diwan of Nawâ'î (Or. 1374), which there is reason to believe was a copy made for presentation to his royal master; there is on fol. 40 three-

1 Moreover, the date in the colophon of a MS. may sometimes be that of the original MS., which the calligrapher has faithfully copied out to the last letter.

2 The poetical name of Mir 'Ali Shir; see p. 34.
quarters of a page left blank for a picture; at any time in the four centuries that have intervened since the copyist completed his task, a painter might well have been asked to fill up the vacant space. Such an opportunity was given to Muḥammad Zamān in 1675, to put some of his workmanship side by side with the pictures by the greatest masters of the reign of Shāh Taḥmāsp (1524–1576); in the superb copy (Or. 2265) of the Khamsa of Nizāmī, the copying of which occupied the great calligraphist Shāh Mahmūd Nishāpūrī from 1539 to 1543, there were three blank spaces left unfilled for over a century. The difference in colouring, style, and composition between the later work by Muhammad Zamān, fresh from his training in Rome, and that of the genuinely Persian work of his predecessors strikes the eye at once. In this manuscript, both Muḥammad Zamān and some of Shāh Taḥmāsp’s artists have dated their pictures, but how frequently work of different periods in the same manuscript lacks any such indications.

But even when pictures have been written upon them the name of an artist, the difficulties of the student are not at an end. The paintings of Bihzād may serve as an illustration. Having got hold of the name of an outstanding personality, the student might delude himself with the expectation that, so far at least as this master’s work is concerned, he can occupy himself with the study of some definite body of material; but now comes the puzzling problem of determining which are the genuine works of Bihzād. He appears to have sprung into fame at once, and to have received the enthusiastic recognition of his contemporaries, for it is to them that we owe—rather than to any Vasari of a later epoch—practically all that we know about this master. He soared to such heights of renown that his name came quite early to be used as a familiar term of praise applied to any painter of distinction, and the phrase ‘with a brush like that of Bihzād’ came into as common use as the earlier phrase ‘with a brush like that of Mān’. Consequently every prince with a taste for painting wished to possess examples of the work of this great master, and could easily find a complacent librarian who would add to some fine miniature in his royal patron’s library the honoured name of Bihzād. So, just as every self-respecting picture-gallery in Europe in the eighteenth century liked to boast that it possessed some canvas painted by Michelangelo, so in the Muhammadan East the royal collector, whether Persian, Uzbek, Turk, or Indian, was proud in the possession of a picture bearing the name of the most famous painter that Persia has ever produced.

As may easily be expected, there were not wanting numerous persons ready to satisfy such a demand, and the name of Bihzād is consequently one of the commonest found on paintings from the sixteenth century onwards;
DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF THE STUDY OF MUSLIM PAINTING

and this forging of his signature is not confined to a period close to the lifetime of the painter or to pictures that bear some resemblance to the products of his brush, but can be illustrated through each succeeding century down to the twentieth; and not in the case of Persian pictures merely, but forgers could so confidently assume a lack of any critical faculty or of any acquaintance with the true characteristics of Bihzâd’s work, that even late Indian painting of execrable quality has been fathered upon him. His name has sometimes even been written at the bottom of a picture, though the real artist had taken the trouble to sign his name at the top. The clumsiness of these forgeries and the lack of any intelligent appreciation of the real qualities of Bihzâd’s art are demonstrated not only by his signature being foisted on work that is entirely undeserving of notice, but also by the fact that no single forger appears to have taken the trouble to study the undoubted examples of Bihzâd’s signature. For it was the practice of this painter, on the rare occasions when he did sign his work, to write his name in microscopical characters in some obscure part of the picture, e.g. the flap of a saddle, in the water of a duck-pond, &c.

The difficulties that present themselves owing to the lack of the signatures of the artists are paralleled by the absence in most cases of any indication as to the subject-matter of a picture. It was not customary for a Persian painter to write any title under his painting, even if it occurred in a separate and detached form on a single piece of paper; if it was in a manuscript, presumably the reader of the text was expected to be able to connect the pictorial representation with what he was reading, and in the case of an epic like the Shâh Nâmâh or the romantic poems which were most commonly illustrated, little difficulty was likely to occur; but, when the picture had been painted on a separate piece of paper, there was often no clue whatsoever as to the subject which it was the intention of the painter to illustrate. Similarly, there are innumerable portraits of nameless historical personages, the identification of whom is now impossible, or at least has not up to the present been achieved. Such separate pictures have in a large number of instances been put together in albums—a practice which is as old as the end of the fifteenth century, as is evident from the preface that Khwândâmir wrote to the album of paintings by Bihzâd. In some instances a later owner has become dissatisfied with the anonymity of the contents of his album and has had titles invented for them, and as these in the majority of cases appear to have been selected on no other principle than that of enhancing the value and importance of the collection, the result has been a source of perplexity, if not of amusement, to the modern student. One of the most ludicrous examples of such arbitrary denomination is that of a picture in an album in the Royal Library, Cairo, which received the title ‘Adam and Eve’, and was attributed to Mâni, a court painter of Shâh ‘Abbâs, and as such has been reproduced in several publications; but the picture refuses thus to come within the circle of Islamic orthodoxy, and to any one acquainted with the characteristics of Indian painting it reveals itself as the god Krishna with his wife Râdhâ standing under a mango tree in the rainy season. In another album (Bibliothèque Nationale, Arabe 6075) there are similarly misleading denominations derived from a desire to enhance the value of the collection by assigning to the pictures a much earlier date than they originally claimed for themselves; e.g. a group of Indian grandees of the sixteenth century is designated ‘Hârun ar-Rashîd, Ma’mûn, and the Barmecides’, and is attributed to Bihzâd, though centuries had elapsed between the two periods.

One of the most urgent desiderata in the history of Muslim painting is the settlement of the problem as to which of the pictures bearing the name of an artist are authentic, and the definition of the main characteristics of his style. At present much confusion exists in regard to such matters, and there is no agreement even among the highest authorities. A critic is needed who will do for Muslim pictures the work that Morelli did for the Italian galleries in the nineteenth century.


See pp. 35–7.
III

THE ORIGINS OF PAINTING IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

For the reasons set forth in the preceding chapters, examples of pictures from the earlier periods of the Muhammadan era are exceedingly rare, and there is no distinct evidence that any artist of native Arab birth made any contribution whatsoever to painting. The Arabs appear to have had very little feeling for either plastic or pictorial art. The wandering life of the desert was certainly ungenial for the activities of either the sculptor or the painter, and the culture of the dwellers in such few towns as Arabia could boast of was largely influenced by the artistic and intellectual outlook of the Bedouins. The scanty remains of Sabaeae and other pre-Islamic art in Arabia show how crude were the representations of their deities, though in some of their bronze work lively representations of animal forms were achieved.

The gods of the Arabs at the period of the birth of Muhammad received little in the way of artistic treatment, for the Arabs at this period seem to have been content with shapeless blocks of stone as symbols of the divinities they worshipped, and whenever they did spend any artistic effort upon them, it was of a meagre character. The image of Dhu ‘l-Khalaṣa, which stood seven days’ journey south of Mecca, was a white stone with a kind of crown worked upon it.1 Al-Fals, who was worshipped by the Banū ‘Taiyy, was a mere projection in the middle of a hill, bearing a rough resemblance to the figure of a man.2 Al-Jalsad was a white stone like a human trunk with a kind of head of black stone; if one looked closely at it, one could make out some slight resemblance to a human face.3 One of the idols in the Ka‘bah at Mecca, named Hubal, was of red carnelian in the form of a man. This deity was an importation, and indeed two of the three Arabic words used in the Qur‘ān for an idol—wathmūn and jämān—are foreign words, and it is probable that such artistic activity as was devoted to the plastic representations of them was likewise of foreign importation.

But when in the seventh century the Arabs poured out of their deserts over the centres of a culture new to them, in the Roman and the Persian empires, they found gratification in painting as in other novel experiences which appealed to the frankly pagan spirit with which many of them were still animated, in spite of their conversion to Islam. Their conquests of

1 Wellhausen, Reste arabischen Hidjazismus, p. 43 (Berlin, 1897).
2 Id., pp. 59–71.
3 Id., p. 46.  
4 The third is tilmāl (likeness).
THE ORIGINS OF PAINTING IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

faith and their peculiar religious observances, cultivated the art of painting; and, finally, the people of Transoxania, who had an art of their own long before the faith of Islam was brought across the Oxus, and had cultural relations with the East and especially with the Buddhism of Central Asia. Each of these gave its own contribution to the sum total of what is known as Muhammadan painting, for this art was no creation of any specifically Islamic culture, but was a development of the forms of art cultivated under the systems of civilization prevailing before the Arab conquest or still cultivated after that period by some of the conquered communities as part of their corporate culture, and now adapted to the special needs and circumstances created by the new faith, with its distinctive outlook upon life.

The Christian subjects of the Arab empire played an important part in the development of Muslim culture. Von Kremmer and Tor Andræe have pointed out their influence on the development of Islamic dogma, and Goldziher and Snouck Hurgronje have shown how largely dependent upon them were the early beginnings of Muslim law. Their influence in the realm of art is not so easy to determine, inasmuch as the material is neither so obvious nor so abundant; but evidence has already been quoted to show that Christian artists worked for their Muhammadan masters in the early days of Islam, and they doubtless continued to do so in succeeding generations. The Mosul workers in bronze, of a later period, appear also to have been mainly Christians.¹

Unfortunately, statistics are almost entirely lacking for the extent of the Christian population of the Muslim empire, but some estimation of its great numbers throughout the Umayyad and Abbasid periods may be formed from a consideration of the large native Christian populations which the Crusaders found upon their arrival in Muhammadan territories, and from the predominant position the Christians assumed in several cities after the Mongol conquests in Mesopotamia and Syria had depressed the former Muslim governments. In the tenth century there were between 40,000 and 50,000 Christians in the city of Baghdad,² and many other cities in the empire contained flourishing Christian communities. The majority of the officials in the government offices—even down to modern times—were Christians,³ and though complaints were violently expressed from time to time that the Muslims were ruled by the Christians even in their own empire, and though attempts were made to deprive them of all official appointments, yet their

³ Id., p. 40.

superior aptitude always led to their being reinstated, and there have been occasions when Christians have been found among the highest officers of the Crown. The long lists of metropolitans and bishops belonging to the rival Churches of the Jacobite and the Nestorians give some indication of the extent of the Christian population, and the enormous expansion of the Nestorian Church after the period of the Mongol conquests is significant of the vigour and, presumably, wealth which this Church had preserved during the six previous centuries of its existence under Muhammadan rule; e.g. the Nestorian Patriarch, Yabullah III (1281–1317), had under his jurisdiction as many as twenty-five metropolitans in Persia, Mesopotamia, Khurasan, Turkistan, India, and China.⁴

There must have been a considerable art activity connected with the life of ecclesiastical systems so widespread and so well organized, and there is evidence to show that large sums of money were sometimes spent on the decoration of churches; e.g. in 759 the Nestorian bishop, Cyprian, expended a sum of 56,000 dinars (gold coins) on the building of a church in Nisibis,⁵ and when in 924 the mob in Damascus plundered a Christian church of that city the value of the loot, in the shape of crucifixes, chalices, censers, &c., amounted to the vast sum of 200,000 gold dinars.⁶ In a church into which such enormous wealth had been poured in the shape of articles made of precious metals, painters must also have been employed to exercise their art either upon wall decoration or upon the adornment of service books. It is not easy to obtain historical evidence as to the extent of the wealth of the Christian community, but the protests of Muhammadan travellers against the ostentatious exhibition of wealth by Christians in the cities they visited provide some indirect information on the matter, and we happen to have some figures as to the income of a distinguished Nestorian Christian, named Gabriel, who was the personal physician of the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashid (786–809); he derived a yearly income of 800,000 dirhams from his private property, in addition to a salary of 280,000 dirhams a year in return for his attendance on the Caliph. The second physician, also a Christian, received 22,000 dirhams a year.⁷

The most flourishing Churches in the Muhammadan East under the Abbasid Caliphate were the Nestorian and the Jacobite, as was natural in a period when adherence to the Orthodox Eastern Church, the Church of

³ A. Mez, Die Renaissance des Islam, p. 50.
the ancestral enemy over the western border, the Roman empire, might excite a suspicion of disloyalty to the Caliph. But this latter Church was undoubtedly also represented within the borders of the Muslim empire, and among the many captives brought in after the annual raids of the Caliph's troops into Byzantine territory, there may quite possibly have been some painters who found in the exercise of their art a means of winning the favour of their captors. In the reign of Mahdi (773-785) a church was erected in Baghdad, merely for the use of the Christian prisoners who had been taken captive in the constant campaigns against the Roman empire, and the fact that they needed a church of their own would seem to suggest that they belonged to the Orthodox Church, since there were Jacobite and Nestorian churches in abundance in Baghdad, and monasteries in almost every quarter of the city. Barhebræus, the great Jacobite bishop (ob. 1286), employed artists belonging to the Orthodox Church to work for him, and Muslim princes and nobles may well have extended to them a similar patronage. What enthusiasm might he felt for Byzantine art may be judged from a passage in the Kitāb al-Buldān, by Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadhanī, who wrote just at the beginning of the tenth century; speaking of the Romans, by whom of course he meant the Byzantines, the people of the Eastern Roman empire, he describes them as the most skillful painters in the world: 'One of their painters can paint a man in such a way as to leave out nothing; he is not content until he has made it clear that it is a youth or a man of mature age or an old man; even then he is not content until he has made him handsome and attractive; then he goes on to make him look joyful or weeping; further he makes a difference between the grin of a man who is rejoicing over the affliction of his enemy and the giggle of one who is ashamed, between one who is plunged in sorrow and one who is smiling, between gladness and the grin of one who is talking nonsense; and in this way he varies the composition of his pictures.'

But the most obvious intermediary through which the classical traditions embodied in Christian art passed into the painting of the Muhammadan East is the pictorial art of the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches, and the painters who first worked for the Muhammadan conquerors were probably members of one of these two Churches which had attracted to themselves the main body of the oriental Christians living under Muhammadan rule, and had indeed even before the coming of the Arabs counted among their adherents the majority of the Christian populations of the eastern provinces of

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5 Roman empire, as a result of their detestation of the foreign ruler in Constantinople and of their abhorrence of the heresies taught by the State Church.
6 No separate study has yet been devoted to the paintings produced by the adherents of these two Churches, and such scanty remnants of their pictorial art as can with absolute certainty be assigned to them belong exclusively to ecclesiastical art, and naturally the subjects of such pictures are not such as could be immediately transferred to the secular art of the followers of another faith. But it seems more than probable that either Nestorian or Jacobite painters were among those who were employed by the Muhammadan conquerors to produce those earliest works of art that have come down to us. To this group would seem to belong the artists who painted the frescoes at Qusayr Amra; they certainly could not have been Arabs, since the Arabs had no artistic traditions capable of reaching such a degree of attainment in the beginning of the eighth century. It has been supposed that they were Greeks, or at least subjects of the Byzantine emperor, for they wrote the names of the historical and allegorical personages that formed part of the pictorial decorations of this building in Greek; thus (according to Professor Becker's reading) we have

\[
\text{Καίκαρ Ρωδοπίθης Χοσάριος Ονάς}.
\]

i.e. Caesar... Roderic... Husrasa... the Negus (of Abyssinia)... representing contemporary monarchs, and

\[
\text{ΝΙΧΗ ΣΚ(Ε)ΥΗ(Σ) ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΠΟΝΙΣΗ}
\]

as symbolical figures. But the same eminent scholar is of opinion that the painters knew Arabic better than Greek, for the inscriptions over the heads of the historical figures are bilingual, and while the Arabic letters are obviously formed by some one accustomed to write Arabic, and in the case of one name the scribe has written the word as he heard it pronounced, not as strict orthography and consistent usage demand that it should be spelt, the Greek letters, on the other hand, appear to have been first traced in a different colour, and to have been copied from some pattern set before the artist. Professor Becker therefore concludes that the painters belonged to some Aramaic stock, coming either from Mesopotamia or settled in Syria. Though the influence of Hellenistic art is obvious throughout the whole building, there are other elements that are distinctly oriental, especially the style of the ornament, the hunting scenes, and the type of some of the female figures.

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2 Id., p. 361.
3 Id., pp. 362-3.
4 Id., p. 378. (See also below, Chap. VIII.)