Islamic miniature painting in India probably began only a few years after the first permanent conquests by Muslims in the "sub-continent of Asia" at the end of the 11th century. Few of the pre-16th-century works survive. A notable exception is a group of miniatures from a dispersed manuscript of the Delhi poet Amir Khusrow Dihlawi, who wrote in Persian a Khamsah imitating that of the Persian Nizami (cat. 64). The miniatures in their primitive simplicity show a marked similarity to the pictures of the Inju works from Shiraz in Persia in the 14th century (see cats. 23 and 24). The artistic traditions of the few other miniatures from the courts of the numerous Muslim sultans in North and Central India as well as in the Deccan are only now being studied. Generalizations are hard to promulgate when there is such a paucity of original material on which to base them.

The artistic tradition that arose with the advent of the Mughal Empire in 1526 ("Mughal" is a corruption of "Mongol") is no better documented. Humayun, son and successor of the first emperor Babur (d. 1530), was defeated and fled into exile to the court of the Persian Shah Tahmasp in 1540. The assured history of Mughal painting dates from his return to Delhi in 1555. With him came two Persian painters from Shah Tahmasp's studio, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus-Samad. These artists, and others who came later from Persia, trained the Indian artists who produced the greatest Mughal miniatures.

The first major work of the new imperial atelier was the preparation of a volume of 1,400 large-size miniatures on cotton cloth, the Humay Namah (see cat. 65). The work was probably started under Humayun but was completed under his son and successor Akbar. Under Akbar the Great (1556–1605) the imperial court was a haven for both statesmen and connoisseurs. Akbar extended the boundaries of his kingdom and reorganized it. Complete tolerance was accorded to all sects and public religious discussions were fostered. Jesuit missions from the Portuguese settlement of Goa and English trading representatives were both received at court. The Portuguese brought European prints and pictures with them and these were studied and adapted to Mughal uses by the court artists (cat. 71). This eclecticism had far-reaching effects. Persian was Akbar's language, but he had Rajput princesses in his harem. Hindu works like
the Mahabharata (in Persian the Razm Namah or Book of Wars) and the Hari-Vamsa (cat. 67) were translated into Persian and were illustrated by the same Persian and native artists of the royal atelier who prepared copies of the memoirs of the Emperor's grandfather Babur (cat. 66) or of the Emperor's own history (Abkar Namah, cat. 68). Manuscripts of other literary works were also prepared there (cats. 69 and 70).

Under Akbar's son Jahangir (1605–27) and grandson Shah Jahan (ruled 1627–58) fewer major historical or literary manuscripts were produced. Accent shifted to portraits (cat. 74) and to the great imperial albums which contained them as well as genre scenes (cat. 75). Shah Jahan was more interested in architecture than in painting. The Taj Mahal remains as testimonial of his preference. His son Aurangzeb (ruled 1658–1707) embarked on a policy of religious intransience and persecution. This bigotry drastically curtailed the production of pictures from the royal studios and heralded an eventual end to the glorious tradition of Islamic miniatures in India.

64. A Physician Preparing a Potion in a Domed Room, Surrounded by pipes on Nefs

Substanate period, mid or late 15th c. 25.1 x 8 in. (miniature only).

From a dispersed manuscript of the Khamsah of Amir Khosrow Dihlavi. Until recently leaves from this manuscript have mostly been attributed to the "Injū School" of Shiraz in the middle of the 14th century. Recently, Richard Ertinghausen, having recognized the text, published two of the miniatures in the collection of the Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C. (Substan, pl. 1).

Other leaves from this manuscript are in museums in Kansas City, Seattle, Worcester, Montreal, and London, as well as in the Vever and Barney Collections. See Survey, pl. 84A and B; West Coast Museum, p. 70, cat. 53.

65. The Giant Landale 1ho-Sudan Lad before the Amir Sabib Qaran

Above: The Hero Qaran on His Horse Siya Qaras Flee from His Enemies

Mughal, early period of Akbar, ca. 1560–70. 27 x 20 in. (within borders).

From a dispersed Wajapār-Rabarī (Memoirs of the Emperor Babur) with the attribution "Designed by Mihānā; painted by Doorahā." It was a very common practice in the imperial atelier to have several painters collaborate on a miniature, each working in his specialty, design, landscapes, faces, etc. (see also cat. 68). Mihānā, one of the great Mughal painters who is mentioned in Emperor Akbar's personal memoirs, painted miniatures in most of the great imperial manuscripts. See Brown, p. 197; Beatty, Indian III, pls. 52–53.

Other leaves from this manuscript are in the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, and in a private collection also in Cambridge. See Welch, cat. 9.

66. Two Scenes of Natural History

Above: Birds in Leafy Trees

Below: Birds in Date Palms

Mughal, period of Akbar, ca. 1590. 6 1/4 x 5 in. (trans. opening).

From a dispersed Wajlapār-Rabarī (Memoirs of the Emperor Babur) with the attribution "Designed by Mihānā; painted by Doorahā." It was a very common practice in the imperial atelier to have several painters collaborate on a miniature, each working in his specialty, design, landscapes, faces, etc. (see also cat. 68). Mihānā, one of the great Mughal painters who is mentioned in Emperor Akbar's personal memoirs, painted miniatures in most of the great imperial manuscripts. See Brown, p. 197; Beatty, Indian III, pls. 52–53.

67. The Hero Balbārār Arovūblūnus a Rajah in a Garden Position

Mughal, ca. 1590–95. 27 3/4 x 47 3/4 in. From a dispersed manuscript of the Hari-Vamsa, depicting an episode from the combat of the Yadavas. It is very probable that this miniature and another from the same source, also in the Burney Collection (Portland, cat. 66A), belong to the same manuscript as the famous Giri-Govardhana (Krishna holding up Mount Govardhana) in the Metropolitans Museum, New York. See Welch, cat. 15.

68. Troup of the Emperor Babur Storm a Fortress

Mughal, period of Akbar, ca. 1590. 13 3/4 x 8 3/4 in.

Episode from the Abkar Namah with the following attribution: "Drawn by Farajshah, coloring by Sāhān Dās." This miniature undoubtedly comes from a manuscript of the Abkar Namah, one of the most important documents of Akbar's painting. 117 miniatures of which are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. See Welch, cat. 12, A and B.

The painter Farajshah, "the slave" or "disciple" (rather than the greater Farajshah Beg), painted miniatures in many of the great imperial manuscripts (see Brown, p. 196). The less important Dāsān helped complete miniatures for a Rasta Namah and Darab Dās Namah now in the British Museum, a manuscript in the Beatty Library, and a dispersed Razm Namah dated 1586 (see Brown, p. 196). Dāsān Dās painted miniatures for manuscripts now in Tehran, Baltimore, London, and for a slightly later Abkar Namah now in the Beatty Library, Dublin (see Brown, p. 196).

69. Demons Preparing Food for a Torrent Near their Mountain Lair

Mughal, period of Akbar, ca. 1600. 9 3/4 x 6 in.


From an unidentified Akbar manuscript. Besides appreciating the monumental historical manuscripts of the Akbar period, the Mughal connoisseurs also delighted in the "horrors" of monsters and the charms of genre-scenes.

70. A Man Hides in an Elephant Skin and is Carried off by a Giant Sloth

Mughal, period of Akbar, ca. 1600. 27 3/4 x 7 3/4 in. (miniature only). Coll. Ardehkar, India.

The collectors of manuscripts at Akbar's court appreciated books of fables in the style of what is now called The Arabian Nights.

71. Two Miniatures with Christian Themes

a. Moses and the Plague of Serpents

b. The Assualtion

Probably late period of Akbar, ca. 1600–05. 27 3/4 x 3 3/4 in, 6 3/4 x 3 3/4 in. (miniatures only).

Father Jerome Xavier's Life of Cēbrāl was translated from the Persian into Latin with the assistance of Abū-Sāmir ibn Qurban of Lahore, who is mentioned in Emperor Jahangir's memoirs. The Jesuits had reached Farbahar Shīh, the capital of Empress Akbar in 1576 as a member of the third Jesuit mission to the court. The Emperor, interested in a single religion that would have both Eastern and Occidental virtues and beauties, was very receptive to the missions from Goa. See Sir E. MacLagan, The Jesuits and the Great Mughal, London, 1912.

72. Abdullah Khan using Pickelhaube at a Hunting Expedition

Late Akbar or early Jahangir period, ca. 1600–10. 9 3/4 x 7 1/4 in. (miniature only). Coll. The Maha Rao Rajput of Beni, Mr. F. T. S. Robert son.

Abdulah Khan was a curteous of whom several portraits are known, the best known by Nīdar-iz-Zamān, the greatest court painter of Emperor Jahangir (see Ashtoon, pp. 174–75, no. 602). Other portraits are in the British Museum, the Rupam State Library, and in the Museum of Fine Arts, See Gomaravarnian, Gedosvand, no. 112, pl. LVXII.

73. Majmun in the Desert Surrounded by Animals

Mughal, period of Jahangir, ca. 1600. 9 3/4 x 6 in.

Drawing from a Khamsah of Nizāmī or from a dispersed album. There is a certain similarity among the drawings and two others recently exhibited at Asta House: "The Lion's Court," attributed to Far rah Shīh (see cat. 68), and "Akbar Watches an Animal Fight during a Hunt," attributed to Mīdānī. See Welch, nos. 10 and 12.

The Mughal court, where Persian was spoken even into the 17th century, was fond of illustrations of Persian romances.
64. A physician preparing a potion

65. The Giant Landshur Ibn-Sa'dan led before the Amir Shih Qara
66. Two scenes of natural history

68. Troops of the Emperor Babur storm a fortress
69. Demons preparing food by a torrent

70. A man in an elephant skin is carried off by a Simurgh
71a. Moses and the plague of serpents

71b. The Ascension

73. Moamen in the desert surrounded by animals
74. Emperor Shah Jahan receives a falcon from his son Dara Shikoh

75. Six sages on a river terrace
75. Six Sages on a River Terrace

Moghul, period of Shah Jahan, ca. 1640-50. 9 x 6 1/8 in. (miniatuer only).

Album page with an ornamental border, in the style of the painter Bichitr. Under Emperor Shah Jahan, the borders of great imperial albums were decorated with humans or animals, underlining the interest of the sitter of the portrait. A military leader would have a border composed of soldiers, vases, as here, a border of scholars and thinkers. Frequently the quality of these border illuminations would be as fine, or finer, than the miniature itself.

76. Bowl, Laura Ware in Light Brownish Gold on White Ground

"Post Samarra Ware," Iraq or Iran, probably 10th c. Height 1 1/4 in., diameter 9 3/4 in.

The figure of the man at the bottom of the bowl, surrounded by two birds with fish in their beaks, may seem "primitive" to some 20th-century eyes, but the quality of the lustre belies this.

For similar bowls see Skey, pls. 356c, 577, and 579 A, B, Wilkinson, no. 27.

Ceramics

Fine clay pottery has been produced in Iran for thousands of years. Anyone who has seen an earthenware vessel in the shape of a great humped-back bull or stag from before 1000 B.C. is not likely to forget their charm.

The potters of Islam took already known techniques of throwing and turning on a wheel and adapted them to their own uses. Decoration ranged from the deceptively simple to the most complex overall arabesque patterns. Major kilns existed in Mesopotamia at Samarra, which was the capital of the Abassid caliph for about fifty years in the mid-9th century. Excavations there can be dated with chronological certainty, as the site was abandoned when the center of the caliphate shifted back to Baghdad in A.D. 883. Other excavations at sites in Persia as well as Mesopotamia have led to the establishment of lists and dating of many kinds of ceramic ware. Laboratory analysis of the metallic colors used for painted decoration and glazes has increased this knowledge.

A major center for Iranian pottery was the city of Nishapur in Northeast Persia. Certain types of ware were already produced there in the 9th century and within one or two centuries several kinds of decoration became common—a highly colored ware with yellow and green pigments featuring primitively rendered animals (cat. 77), a slipware with floral motifs and unusual brown and rust colors (cat. 78), and the magnificent white bowls decorated with bands of real (cat. 79) or sometimes simulated kufic script. ("Simulated" because, although the writing seems to present an inscription, the letters are entirely decorative and do not spell out any words.)

Major rival of Nishapur was Rayy, whose potters produced the celebrated "Minai ware" (cat. 80). (The destruction of the kilns of Rayy during the Mongol invasions of the 13th century aids in dating the products of this city.) Another famous ware was the blue and black usually associated with the city of Kashan, north of Isfahan in Western Iran (cats. 82 and 83). Other medieval Islamic pottery from Persia came from kilns in Anjar, Gurgan (cat. 81), and Sultanabad.

While bowls and pitchers seem the most usual kinds of ceramics, potters also produced tiles which formed friezes or large panel revetments for the decoration of palaces and mosques. The kilns of Kashan were noted for their tiles (cat. 83) as well as their vessels. Nor was Persia the only Islamic country to appreciate the potter's art. Turkey under the Ottoman sultans boasted of Iznik (the former Byzantine Nicea), whose ceramics displayed a brilliant tomato red clay pigment called "Armenian bode." Iznik tiles (cat. 87) decorated whole sides of the mosques and palaces of Istanbul; Iznik bowls and plates are still prized.

Moorish Spain also had kilns, particularly around Valencia. Islamic potters working for Christian patrons is a unique feature of Hispano-Moresque art during the 13th and 14th centuries (cat. 85). Even later in Persia, kilns produced tiles and vessels. One kind copied the blue and white ware of China. Another was named for the village of Kubachi on the Caucasus (cat. 84). Heads of men and women commonly serve as decoration on these provincial plates.

As with miniatures, so with ceramics—the great periods of production came early. Little remains today to suggest the glories of antique Persian pottery.