Mughal painting

Mughal painting identified in the text. First in na in 1650, imprisoned in Bijnor from the text by Binyon and repaired in 1610. It seems as if the work was signed by Mughal patrona complex, is 'A against his brother saw a particular are more elegant rendered'. He then painting, but it is this is the sort of Zafarnamah, and
is to the left in the lowest sector; the second, which gives 1659–60, is in the lower right of the uppermost sector. Though Aurangzeb’s second and definitive coronation takes place in 1669/1659, the greater part of his first year falls in 1070/1669–70.

In the upper right of the page is Note 3. I thank Mr. Morton for the reading: 'आनंदगिता (युज़‍ु नवन्नवला)' 52 illustrated pages, the first line being in Arabic and अज्ञा (a form of shorthand). In a seemingly rapid hand and on such an august page, this is probably late and might well be a statement of contents by someone selling the work to the Šāhīr Jang, whose name appears in Note 4 on the margin paper in the upper left. 16

Mughal painting in Muhammad Juki’s Šahištāmah

Mughal painting as completion or repair has been identified in three illustrations in the Šahištāmah.

First in narrative order, the repainting of the imprisoned lover in his pit in ‘Rustam rescues Bizhan from the pit’ (No. 15, pl. 48) was noticed by Binyon and Wilkinson. 17 Presumably this repairs some local damage, perhaps the flaking of a whitish pigment. The domical head with shaded eye sockets, and the black void of the cave-prison are framed by a scalloped edging of bright rock are perhaps best matched by illustrations to the Amār-i Suhayl (British Library, Add. 18529), a work that has some pictures dated 1013/1604–5 with references to Jahāngīr by his pre-regnal name as Salīm; but a final colophon of 1019/1610–11. 18 Particularly relevant is ‘The young hawk and the king’, dated to the early period and signed by Muhammad Rūzā. 19 The painter was from Herat and might thus have been considered especially qualified to attend to the Šahištāmah. The work might again have been done for or as a result of the inscription that took place in 1602.

Seemingly the earliest intervention under Mughal patronage, and certainly the most complex, is ‘Talhand dies during the battle against his brother, Gav’ (No. 29, pl. 63). Binyon saw a particular character in this page: ‘horses are more elegant, their motion more naturally rendered’. He feels a connection with Mughal painting, but it is that of a Timūrid exemplar: ‘this is the sort of picture which Akbar’s painters in Delhi [sic] may have taken for their model in similar battle-scenes’. 20 Wilkinson saw it as resembling illustrations in the Garrett Žofarnāmāh, and Gray as more lively than the other pictures. 21 Already in 1979 Robinson saw the picture as Mughal work in imitation of Timūrid style, adding eight reasons: 22

1) that the picture is stuck in; 2) groups that can be associated with the school of Bīhāzī, and not known in earlier Herat painting; 3) weakness in the drawing considered in detail, and the use of some stippling and cross-hatching in landscape; 4) slimmer horses than elsewhere and without caparisons; 5) differences in drawing, especially the outline of helmets; 6) different type of face; 7) the palette, ‘especially a pale lilac pink’ seen as characteristic of India rather than of Herat in 1440s; 8) inclusion of a corpse with intestines displayed. Robinson goes on to suggest that the picture might have been ordered as a challenge by Jahāngīr.

As the variety of these opinions tends to suggest, ‘Talhand dies’ exhibits a blend of features Persian and Indian. It can, however, be stated at once that this character does not result from overpainting. 23 To make his point with regard to the style of Bīhāzī, Robinson refers to two scenes of combat, datable to 895/1490, in the British Library’s Khamsah of Nūzāmī, Add. 25900. 24 There is indeed a good match in these for two falling riders. In addition, we have a shift from the horses of the 1440s, to a later rendering, in which bodies are fuller and sleeker, but legs finer. The Appaloosa type colouring, noted in ‘Talhand dies’, is also found in the Nūzāmī, though dappled horses have not yet turned blue. Since the Khamsah pictures are well embedded in the style of late fifteenth-century Herat and the Šahištāmah picture is not, the latter can safely be placed in the sixteenth century; but overpainting in the Khamsah shows that at some point it passed into India, so it might possibly have transmitted elements to Mughal painting.

The landscape of “Talhand dies” is reminiscent of styles of Bakuhan type in its symmetry, and context of foreground and middle ground. In particular, in the more distant light blue sector, the small and neat pieces of rock recall a picture which may be datable c. 1539, “The pilgrims who die of thirst” (British Museum, 1920–17.0260). 25 This also has carefully drawn figures that are animated, but a little stiffened, and without volume. A very distinct difference is that whereas the Central Asian style is sparsely populated, “Talhand dies” is crammed with figures. The rocky background in “Talhand dies” suggests a slightly later composition. With its range of slightly muted
blue-greens and its grotesque faces it recalls the Album picture ‘Humayün in a mountainous landscape’ of the early 1550s (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin), 23 in which Persian modes have been adopted into early Mughal style; and in this also the composition has become dense. On the other hand, some features do suggest an input from India. The skin tones are more realistic than in many Persian works; the turbans are flatter than those of Central Asia at the period; some of the military bandsmen play a double-ended drum (dbol), which is more characteristic of India; and indeed their front ranks lean forward in unison in a manner that recalls Sultanate painting of the fifteenth century. 29

The curious style of ‘Talhand dies’ is perhaps best explained if we suppose that a painter trained in a Bukharan mode is working in the Mughal context, though possibly intending to pay tribute to the tradition of Herat. He notes new motifs, but does not change his methods—he remains steadfast in the Persian portrayal of elephants. A parallel case is to be seen in a Gulistan of Sa’di (British Library, Or. 5302), copied in Bukhara in 975/1567–68. 29 Six of its thirteen illustrations are in a style of Bukharan character, but evidently produced for Akbar, who is explicitly represented. It seems clear that these pictures were produced in India, rather than in Central Asia with the help of Mughal sketches, since here also Mughal content is acquired without Mughal style. In this manuscript ‘The prince who proves himself’ provides a battle scene whose landscape is broadly similar to that in ‘Talhand dies’, and whose detail includes Indian mahouts, a falling rider, dappled blue horses, and a row of ducks in the sky; the latter comparable to those in the water at the lower edge of the Shāhnāmah picture. It seems probable that the Bukharan-style illustrations were added to the Gulistan text without much delay, since the adoption of elements of Bukharan tradition by Mughal painters can be distinguished in some illustrations to the Anvar-i Suhayli of 978/1570 (School of Oriental and African Studies, London, MS. 10102). 30 In this ‘The young hawk and the king’ has features in common with ‘Talhand dies’: it has a dappled-blue horse, landscape with zones of a pale lilac and dull green, and a rocky background—though this shows no faces. The Shāhnāmah picture is clearly not by the same hand as the Gulistan or Anvar-i Suhayli examples, but it would have been made when their styles were still within reach. The theoretical possibility that it could preceed them, being produced for Humayün or even for Babur, 31 is not easy to pursue in the present state of knowledge of the painting of Transoxiana, but seems unlikely.

Binyon and Wilkinson both recognised the Mughal style of the last Shāhnāmah illustration, ‘Zağlîlīl hides in a mill’ (No. 31; pl. 65). 12 For the former it is a matter of regret that this climactic picture was not painted by a Persian; the latter implies that the Mughal painter is completing or repainting, supplying in particular the background and building. In 1979 Robinson inclines to the view that there is some underlying Persian work. 33 This might seem likely, given ‘that the composition with action along the lower margin seems uncharacteristic of Mughal painting, but compares with that of the illustration three before it, ‘Escape of Quhad’.

Opposite: Pl. 70. Zai in Sineurgh’s nest. Illustration to Shahnāmah of Ferdowsī, 1580s. Private Collection.