India and gemstones are inseparable. Among the Subcontinent’s most prolific patrons of the jewelled arts were the Mughal emperors, whose adornments dazzled visitors four centuries ago and continue to excite viewers today. Complementing the brilliance of these creations were the miniature paintings of the time. Often likened to jewels, these works on paper do more than entertain the eye; they illuminate as well. By comparing the paintings and the objects depicted in them, the world of Mughal opulence is opened to the reader. *Jewels without Crowns* brings together two fields of artistic accomplishment by one of the most visionary dynasties of the Islamic world.
JEWELS WITHOUT CROWNS
MUGHAL GEMS IN MINIATURES
This book is published in conjunction with the exhibition 'Treasury of the World: Jewelled Arts of India in the Age of the Mughals', which was launched at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia on 31 July 2010

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Delhi, India, Early 19th century

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Pictorial Genealogy Showing the Descendants of Jahangir and Miran Shah.
First quarter of the 17th century. Aga Khan Museum, Toronto © AKTC, Geneva
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Foreword

Jewels without Crowns' is a lovely description of both the jewelled objects and the miniatures in this book. The pieces from The al-Sabah Collection of Mughal jewelled arts include many examples of extraordinary items forever captured by artists as they would have been worn, used or gifted in that era.

The Mughal period was dedicated, in part, to the pursuit of exquisite beauty and opulence. Whether created for personal adornment or to be given as tokens of respect, symbols of affection, subtle demonstrations of power, and emblems of allegiance, each is a work of art. That works of art, the stunning miniatures included herein, memorialise the jewelled art is fitting tribute to the objects and the people who possessed them.

Dynastic gifts, like the famed inscribed 249.3 carat spinel that was given to the Mughal emperor Jahangir by the Safavid ruler Shah 'Abbas I, first linked two ruling powers. Later, as Jahangir passed it on to Shah Jahan, and he to 'Alamgir, and new inscriptions were added, the gift acquired the power of legacy – preserving a historical record of Mughal dynasties, the Tirmurid and Safavid dynasties that preceded the Mughal period, and the Durrani era that followed.

But the real gift of the spinel and the other Mughal pieces is how they continue to resonate for generations. French philosopher Albert Camus wrote that “[e]very authentic work of art is a gift offered to the future.” Each object in Treasury of the World, whether created as a gift or a personal treasure, is an exquisite work of art and thus, each is “a gift offered to the future.”

The Qur’anic manuscript also speaks of gifts in the simple word ‘hiba’. ‘Hiba’ has a beautiful connotation... it refers to the art of giving, the purity of unselfish giving. This ‘art’ is also a gift to the future and is demonstrated immeasurably by Syed Mokhtar Albukhary, through the Albukhary Foundation, and Syed Mohamad Albukhary, through the creation of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. Their efforts give us the chance to know who we are by preserving and sharing objects that show us from whence we came.

Finally by sharing their talents with us, Susan Stronge and Lucien de Guise are presenting us with a great gift: Jewels without Crowns: Mughal Gems in Miniatures. Susan’s introduction reflects the depth of her academic and cultural understanding of the Mughal era; Lucien’s text shows a passion for the jewelled arts of the period, making this book a jewel to be treasured.

Hussah Sabah Salem al-Sabah  
Co-owner, The al-Sabah Collection  
Director general, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah
Let all the glitters of emeralds
pearls, rubies and diamonds
disappear like a fading rainbow
But let this one solitary tear pearl
remain
glistening
on the cheek of time:
this white, splendid Ta Mahal.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)
Chairman’s Foreword

The Mughal emperors are among the best-known rulers of the Islamic world. There are few people anywhere who do not at least know the name of Shah Jahan and his monument to love. The Taj Mahal was recently voted among the most popular buildings on the planet, and yet other aspects of the Mughal achievement are much less familiar. This book brings together two of the great legacies of that era: miniature paintings and the jewelled arts. We are fortunate that there is an abundance of both.

Many of the creative glories of other dynasties have long since disappeared, but the output of the Mughals was so considerable that a large amount remains intact. The longevity of these items is also explained by the impression that they made on people of other cultures. There is clearly such an exceptional quality to their art, it has been cherished both inside India and out. A large number of paintings, in particular, are housed in national and royal collections in the West.

For Mughal jewellery, there could be no better flagship than The al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait. The contribution of H.E. Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah and H.E. Sheikha Hussah Sabah Salem al-Sabah to this field is unique. The world should be grateful for their foresight in collecting these works of art at a time when they were widely disregarded. It is an act of visionary connoisseurship.

This has now been universally recognised, making Treasury of the World one of the most well-travelled exhibitions in recent times. Since the launch of the exhibition at the British Museum in 2000, it has been to nine different locations around the world. Now, it is coming closer to its original homeland. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia provides an ideal venue, being one of the very few institutions in Asia dedicated to Islamic art. The success of the exhibition would not have been possible without the whole-hearted commitment of the Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture Malaysia. Our most sincere thanks to Datuk Seri Utama Dr Rais Yatim.

The Mughal era was a time of extraordinary diversity, accompanied by a fascination with trade and innovation. Emperors were often surprisingly modern in their approach and unusually concerned with the welfare of their people. Most of all, though, they were captivated by the beauty that surrounded them in a country that they at first conquered and then became assimilated into. I hope that Jewels without Crowns opens a window onto the dazzling achievements of this Muslim dynasty.

Syed Mokhtar Albukhary
Chairman, Albukhary Foundation
“For this purpose, he [Akbar] has built a workshop near the palace, where also are studios and work-rooms for the finer and more respectable arts...Hitherto he very frequently comes and relaxes his mind with watching at their work those who practise these arts.”

*From the Commentary of Antonio Monserrato (circa 1580)*
Director's Introduction

The relationship between the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is as old as the museum itself. In 1999, the year that we opened, the DAI graciously loaned us the exhibition Zarabi: Reflections of an Ideal World. As with every endeavour from the Gulf’s premier cultural institution, the display of exquisite carpets provided the ideal launch for the IAMM.

Eleven years later, we are again indebted to H.E. Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah and H.E. Sheikha Hussah Sabah Salem al-Sabah for Treasury of the World: Jewelled Arts of India in the Age of the Mughals. This is an exhibition of such grandeur, it would be hard for the IAMM to add anything of value to it. The artefacts on display are so exceptional, nothing on this scale has been seen since the days of the Great Mughals themselves.

Our museum’s contribution is a simple one: to publish a book that shows many of the objects from the exhibition alongside miniature paintings that depict similar items. Jewels without Crowns: Mughal Gems in Miniatures attempts to capture the magnificence of the era by putting its greatest artistic achievements in context. It is one of the remarkable gifts of Mughal art that the paintings of the time record with loving care the appearance of the royal court and the objects that turned it into a glittering spectacle.

To achieve our objective would have been impossible without the unrivalled al-Sabah Collection of Indian jewelled arts that forms the core of the book. In addition, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the following institutions that have permitted the use of their images in this publication: the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, British Library, British Museum, Chester Beatty Library, Musée Guimet, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, National Museum, New Delhi, the Royal Collection and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Their generosity has enabled us to show, through these exquisite paintings, the opulence for which the Mughals are still renowned. I would also like to thank Susan Strange and Lucien de Guise for their writing, along with the staff of the DAI and the IAMM who have made this exhibition and book possible.

Mughal paintings, like their decorative arts, were the result of varied artistic influences. These cross-currents of influence are as important to creativity now as they were four centuries ago, which is why we look forward to continuing collaborations with the individuals who assembled The al-Sabah Collection and are so generously prepared to share it.

Syed Mohamad Albukhary
Director, Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia
The Treasury of the World
by Susan Stronge

Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador to the court of the “Great Mogul”, first set eyes on the emperor Jahangir in Ajmer at the beginning of January, 1616. He presented the letter from his king, James I, as well as a coach, knives, an embroidered scarf, his own sword, a small harpsichord known as a virginal and a musician to play it. The emperor received him politely, but Roe heard later that Jahangir had asked an Italian Jesuit residing at the court “whether the King of England were a great Kyng, that sent presents of so small valewe, and that he [Jahangir] looked for some jewells.”

Roe soon realised he had entered a world of unexpected and unimaginable splendour. The English coach was taken apart so that a copy could be made by Jahangir’s artisans and was reassembled with more luxurious fittings - its original Chinese velvet lining was replaced with a silver-ground floral silk brocade and the brass nails with silver. The Mughal version was lined and upholstered with Iranian gold brocade in time for Jahangir to ride in it on his ceremonial departure from Ajmer when he returned to the capital Agra in November the same year. Roe watched as the court moved out of the city in a grand procession towards the royal encampment where they would halt for the night. Jahangir was preceded by men beating drums and accompanied by others carrying “strange ensigns of majesty” that included flywhisks with ruby-inlaid gold handles, parasols and canopies of cloth of gold also decorated with rubies. His wife, Nur Mahal, followed in the English coach. A servant walked alongside carrying a jewelled gold footstool, with the princes and twenty richly caparisoned royal elephants immediately behind. Palkquins covered with crimson velvet embroidered with pearls, rubies and emeralds and set with jewelled gold panels transported other ladies of the court who, like Nur Jahan, were concealed from public view behind screens. The rest of the procession, with its hundreds of elephants and horses, the grandees of the court and their guards, passed before the eyes of the astonished ambassador before he too set out for the encampment.

The slightly supercilious Englishman suffered many humiliations because of the inadequacies of his presents, which were essential for those seeking an audience at the Mughal court. He frequently remarked on the avid desire of the emperor and his sons for precious stones, as well as the size and quantity of the jewels they wore. Many of these were brought by traders from Goa, the Portuguese settlement that was the great market for precious stones in the East throughout the 16th century and for much of the 17th century, because it provided complete freedom of trade as well as generous customs facilities. When Roe saw Portuguese merchants arriving at court, he wrote to England that the rubies, spangles, emeralds and jewelled ornaments they offered attracted so much attention that he and his companions “were for a tyme eclipsed”.

Jahangir’s appearance was particularly splendid at Nowruz, the great New Year festival held at the beginning of spring after Akbar introduced the “new and divine” era.

Left
The Delivery of Presents for Prince Daru Shokah’s Wedding. Attributed to Bhandas. Circa 1635. ©The Royal Collection. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
in 1584. This was in fact the Iranian solar calendar which was then used simultaneously with the Islamic lunar system. Nowruz celebrations lasted several days, during which time the palace was sumptuously decorated, Jahangir gave and received extravagant or unusual presents in its chambers or in the houses of particularly favoured members of the court, and artists and craftsmen revealed their newest creations.

Roe also saw Jahangir spectacularly adorned on his solar and lunar birthdays when the emperor was ceremonially weighed against gold and silver, as well as other commodities which were given away to those in need. Akbar had introduced this custom as well, borrowing an ancient tradition of Hindu kingship. It was retained by his successors until Aurangzeb, his austere great-grandson, abolished it during his reign as the emperor ‘Alamgir.

On all these occasions, Roe was dazzled by Jahangir’s jewels, marvelling at rubies the size of walnuts and ‘pearles such as mine eyes were amazed at’. When Jahangir received the ambassador in private audience after a birthday weighing, the richly adorned ruler sat on a small gold throne next to a table bearing as many as fifty pieces of gold plate set with jewels. In a letter to Prince Charles, the future King Charles I, Roe reported that Jahangir bought every precious stone he saw and that his jewel house was ‘the treasury of the world’.

The Mughal empire had evolved by then from a precarious kingdom to the status of a world power whose wealth was immense. In 1526, the Central Asian prince Babur had followed the example of Timur, the 14th century conqueror from whom he was descended, and invaded the northern regions of the subcontinent known as Hindustan. Babur defeated the ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, Ibrahim Lodi, adding the kingdom and its possessions in the Punjab to his own principality of Kabul. By the time he died in 1530, he had extended his territory south into Rajasthan and east into Bihar. He built stone monuments, none of which survive, inspired by those of his Timurid ancestors that he saw in the great cities of Samarqand and Herat, and had a passion for creating gardens in the Iranian style. These were symmetrically laid out, divided into four parts by running streams and planted with scented trees and flowers.

Babur’s son and successor Humayun at first made his own territorial gains but after ten years was forced to flee by Sher Khan, the Afghan whose army inflicted severe defeats on the Mughals. Humayun arrived at the court of Shah Tahmasp in Iran, while Sher Khan established himself as ruler of Delhi, adopting the title Sher Shah Sur and swiftly introducing administrative reforms that endured long after his death in 1545. Humayun eventually reconquered Delhi in 1555, but died the following year after falling down the stone steps of his library. Few could have imagined that his successor, the thirteen-year-old Akbar, would transform the fortunes of his family as well as the arts of what would become a vast empire.

Akbar at first ruled from Delhi, and under
the guidance of Humayun’s leading military commander, the aristocratic Bayram Khan, quickly seized the strategically important cities of Lahore, Multan and Aimer while fighting off attacks from various claimants to Sher Shah's legacy. Hindustan, with the agricultural wealth of the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain and its immensely important trade routes, was now firmly under Mughal control. When Akbar reached the age of seventeen he clashed so seriously with his mentor that Bayram Khan had to leave, setting off on a pilgrimage to Mecca. On the way to the port of Surat, he was assassinated and, for the first time, the young man ruled in his own right.

Over the following years, Akbar and his generals led the Mughal armies to dramatic victories in much of Rajasthan and defeated the kingdoms of Gujarath and Bengal. Akbar suppressed revolts, made alliances and entered into strategic marriages. In the days of Babur and Humayun, the Mughal elite had consisted mostly of Muslims newly arrived from Central Asia, but under Akbar indigenous Muslims and Hindus as well as large numbers of Iranians attained the highest ranks at court. Their common language was Persian.

Some Hindu Rajputs became particularly close to the emperor and as early as 1562 Akbar had married a lady from a Rajasthani royal family. All the Hindus in imperial service acknowledged the supremacy of the emperor and followed court etiquette with its mixture of Safavid and Timurid traditions, but followed their own beliefs and customs without interference, as did Akbar’s overwhelmingly Hindu subjects.

Akbar’s vigour, energy and curiosity are clear from the accounts of those who met him and from his achievements. He built fortified cities and a new capital at Sikri, the auspicious place not far from Agra where his first two sons were born in 1569 and 1570. It was renamed Fatehpur, or ‘City of Victory’ after his conquest of Gujarat in 1573. The emperor took great interest in the work of artificers and artists in the palace and across the empire, constantly encouraging improvements and technical innovations. In architecture as in the art of the book, Iranian forms and concepts blended with indigenous styles to create a distinctive, rapidly evolving court style.

The artists, calligraphers and illuminators in Akbar’s ketab khana, or ‘House of Books’ produced some of the greatest manuscripts of the Mughal age, a fact which is all the more remarkable because the emperor was unable to read. However, this did not hinder his acquisition of knowledge - the books on history, philosophy and ethics in his vast library were read out to him, and he had an exceptional memory. He also knew and loved the great works of Persian literature, and composed verse in Persian and Hindi.

In 1589 Akbar ordered Abu'l Fazl, the most famous scholar of the age, to write the history of the reign. By 1596, the Akbarnama was virtually complete. Abu'l Fazl had added a third volume entitled the A'in-i Akbari, or ‘Institutes of Akbar’, in which he surveyed the departments of the royal household. He also
described the court ceremonies and listed the emblems of royalty, beginning with the throne and including the parasol and standards that Roe had noticed. All of these were used throughout the Mughal period.

Abu'l Fazl mentioned the twelve Mughal treasuries of which one was exclusively for precious stones and another for artefacts made of gold and silver, many of them encrusted with jewels. Precious stones were the foundation of Mughal wealth, and gave a literal brilliance to its ceremonies and festivals. These were divided by the jewellers into three groups. The first contained the stone called in Persian la'ī, short for la'ī Badakhsh, 'the Badakhshan red [stone]'; the second diamonds, emeralds, and red and blue yaqut (meaning ruby and sapphire, both varieties of corundum); and the third pearls. These poured in from the treasuries of vanquished enemies, or were presented by emissaries as tribute and bought by the emperor, his nobles and family or their agents. A significant proportion must have been acquired from Portuguese traders like the ones who discomfited Roe so much.

Most of the stones were mined outside the empire. The spinels came from Badakhshan, far to the north of Kabul, the diamonds came predominantly from Golconda in the Deccan, and the finest rubies, described in ancient Sanskrit treatises as having the crimson colour of 'pigeon's blood', were found in Burma. Sri Lanka supplied sapphires and other stones, and emeralds were transported from Colombia to Goa on Portuguese ships which also brought pearls from the Gulf of Mexico and the Persian Gulf fisheries. The Mughals followed Iranian traditions in gemmology rather than Sanskrit treatises in which particular stones represented the planets of the Indian solar system. Here, complicated astrological considerations determined their auspicious arrangement when set in rings, pendants and other ornaments. In Iranian culture the spindled, like other precious stones, had its own very different but equally complex symbolism and held a pre-eminent position. It was seen primarily as a metaphor of sunlight, which was itself a metaphor of the divine in metaphysics, and of the sublime in art. Persian poetry from its earliest beginnings mentions the region where the stone originates and reveals that it was closely associated with royal attire and set into crowns and court regalia.

Spinel were by far the most valuable stones in the Mughal treasury, assessed according to the beauty of their deep rose-red colour and their size, lustre and transparency. 'First-class' spinels were worth not less than 1000 mohurs (a Mughal gold coin not in general circulation, but used within court circles), compared with a minimum of 30 mohurs for first-class stones in the other groups.

The emperor might select individual stones from this rich store to present to the royal parents of a new baby or to a prince about to depart on an important military campaign. Precious stones were exchanged at Nowruz and at royal weddings, particularly during the reign of Shah Jahan, the great connoisseur of jewels. When the marriage of his son Dara
Shokuh was celebrated at Agra in 1633. Shah Jahan’s daughter Jahan Ara Begum was in charge of the arrangements. She presented jewellery and superb robes of honour to the princes, and an extremely rich jewelled sword and dagger to her uncle Asaf Khan, who held the highest rank in the empire. On the night of the wedding, as fireworks cascaded over the palace, Shah Jahan gave the bridegroom similar weapons, a royal necklace of pearls and spinels, and two thoroughbred horses caparisoned with jewelled saddles. A week later, the bridegroom covered the path between the palace and his mansion with cloths of gold and silver for his father to walk across in the final ceremony of the nuptials, when the emperor scattered precious stones and gold and silver coins for the benefit of the assembly.

Shah Jahan commissioned the most extravagant emblem of royalty ever made for the Mughal emperors. After his accession in 1628, he ordered Sa’ida, the Iranian supervisor of the royal goldsmiths, to make what would become known as the ‘Peacock Throne’, though at the time it was called simply the Jewelled Throne. Shah Jahan himself selected the precious stones from the royal treasury that were to be used in its ornamentation.15 It took seven years before the ‘heaven-like throne’ was finished and revealed to the court, inevitably at Nowruz. Twelve gold pillars supported a gold canopy encrusted with rubies, fringed with pearls and enameled on the inside and two enameled gold peacocks perched on the top, each holding in their beak a spinel. The throne beneath the canopy was covered with emeralds, diamonds, spinels, rubies and pearls, and round the base were verses by the court poet Haiji Muhammad Khan Qudsi, enamelled in translucent green. They contained a chronogram giving the date of completion of Sa’ida’s masterpiece.

Of all the thousands of precious stones adorning the throne and its canopy, only one was singled out by the court chroniclers. In 1621, Shah ‘Abbas had sent Jahangir a spinel that had belonged to Ulugh Beg, Timur’s grandson, and was engraved with Ulugh Beg’s titles and those of the Iranian ruler. Within days, Sa’ida had been ordered to add Jahangir’s titles to this precious Timurid family possession. Shortly afterwards, news arrived at court of a great Mughal victory in the Deccan led by Shah Jahan, and the emperor despatched the spinel to his son as a reward. The historians wrote that it was given the most prominent place of all in the decoration of Sa’ida’s throne, and its illustrious provenance was recorded in detail.

For the rest of the reign, Shah Jahan took his place on the Jewelled Throne on every great occasion. When he transferred the capital from Agra to his new city of Shahjahanabad in Delhi in 1648, the throne was installed in the Hall of Public Audience for the emperor. There, he bestowed rewards on all those who had created the city in the grand finale of the inaugural celebrations.

Ironically, the most spectacular Mughal coronation ever held was that of the emperor who is remembered now for his severe asceticism. In 1657, Shah Jahan fell so
seriously ill that no one expected him to recover and a war of succession broke out between his sons. Aurangzeb seized power, hurriedly arranging a coronation to consolidate his position and adopt his new title, Alamgir, before having his brothers killed. For the full coronation, which took place the following year, Alamgir sat on the throne made for the father he had deposed and imprisoned, inside the palace that was adorned as lavishly as ever it had been in Shah Jahan’s reign.

When the French jeweller merchant Jean-Baptiste Tavernier saw Alamgir’s birthday ceremony in 1665, the traditional splendour of the court was still apparent. The emperor was weighed on the usual jewelled gold scales beneath red velvet awnings, receiving gifts from his provincial governors that included large numbers of precious stones. On another occasion Tavernier saw Alamgir seated on the Jewelled Throne, but concluded that he cared little for precious stones (though the emperor insisted that Tavernier be shown the royal collection), and preferred gold and silver.16

By 1670, however, the character of the court had changed. Alamgir abolished the weighing ceremonies in that year, the coronation anniversary celebrations seven years later, and even had the gold and silver railings demarcating the different ranks in the Hall of Public Audience removed.17 From 1685 he embarked on a long campaign to defeat the sultans of the Deccan, moving the court away from Delhi and draining the treasury. The wars were ultimately successful, but Mughal power was fatally weakened. After Alamgir’s death in 1707, the emperors became progressively less significant as their regional governors became increasingly independent and other leaders grabbed land and power. By 1738, Nadir Shah of Iran saw an opportunity to sweep into Delhi and forced the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah to relinquish the treasure still remaining in the palace, including the Jewelled Throne which was later destroyed. Its precious stones were scattered and none would ever again be connected with Sa'id’s fabulous creation, except for the spinel, identifiable by its inscriptions, that found its way into the collection of Sheikh Nasser and Sheikh Khussah al-Sabah and was first published by Manuel Keene.18

The influence of the great age of Mughal magnificence persisted long after the decline and disappearance of the empire. Shah Jahan’s great monuments, including the palaces at Delhi and Agra and the Taj Mahal survive, their white marble walls inlaid with red carnelian and green jade blossoming plants demonstrating the harmony of the arts of his reign. Similar flowers inlaid with rubies and emeralds, or enamelled in translucent red and green enamel on white ground, decorate vessels and daggers in a style that was adopted in courts across the Subcontinent, as later rulers tried to evoke the splendour of Shah Jahan’s reign. Persian continued to be used as the language of the educated elite and in the administration of many courts, whether the rulers were Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs, until it was replaced by English under British colonial rule. Later rulers even collected royal Mughal spindles, engraved with the titles of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Alamgir.
Notes:

6. See Richards, 1993, for a succinct account of the history of the Mughal empire.
10. Spinel has various colours and sources. For the Badakhshani source of the red spinels favoured at the Mughal court, following Iranian convention, see Melikian-Chirvani, 2001.
11. For the sources of gemstones, see Untracht, 1997, pp. 312-33 passim. See also Ball, 1977, vol. II, pp. 84-96 for Tavernier's mid-17th century description of the pearl fisheries, the Portuguese role in selling pearls from Goa and the taste for large pearls from the Gulf of Mexico in the courts of the subcontinent.
13. For the definitive monograph on the meaning of spinels in Persianate culture, see Melikian-Chirvani, 2001.
14. Tavernier (Ball, 1977, vol. I, p. 15) mentions transactions made at court using these coins. Silver coins were used for general commerce.
Jewels without Crowns

Jewels, crowns and India have been linked since 1876, when the Earl of Beaconsfield described the Subcontinent as “the brightest jewel in the imperial crown.” The novelist-turned-politician then eased the way for Queen Victoria to be declared Empress of India in the same year. This announcement was celebrated with a formal ceremony in India, attended by a huge number of native princes. Unfortunately, the British failed to handle the occasion with the required precision. A rifle salute caused the elephants to stampede and trample a number of guests to death.¹

Before delighting his Queen-Empress with her new title, Benjamin Disraeli had been making the commonplace connection between India and jewels in his novels. *Lothar*, published in 1870, has the eponymous hero visiting Bond Street, where he is offered a black pearl with a setting of Golconda diamonds for two thousand guineas. There is also discussion of uncut diamonds recently acquired from an Indian prince.²

Long before the Victorian era, many had tried to cultivate the treasure of India. Its precious stones and spices had been admired by customers as far away as ancient Rome. The Roman empire’s most serious addiction was Indian pepper, but its gemstones were also admired by the citizens of the Eternal City, including the historian Pliny the Elder. Writing in the first century AD, Pliny showed a well-informed interest in the origins of diamonds.³

Among the many luxuries that have tempted invaders of India are gemstones. Valuable and versatile, the decorative possibilities are immense. For the Mughals, jewellery had a place from top to toe. The only missing item was a crown; this was something the dynasty had in common with most other Muslim rulers apart from the Qajars of Iran and their towering, pearl-encrusted showpieces. Despite references to imperial diadems in Mughal written records, when they appear in paintings they are not placed on the emperor’s head. In painted form, haloes became the substitute from the time of Jahangir onwards.

Jahangir went further than having a halo. Always ready with some personal reminiscences, he took particular pride in his coronation: “Having thus seated myself on the throne of my expectations and wishes, I caused also the imperial crown, which my father had caused to be made after the manner of that which was worn by the great kings of Persia, to be brought before me...having placed it in on my brows, as an omen auspicious to the stability and happiness of my reign, kept it there for the space of a full astronomical hour.”⁴ The hour that the new emperor spent with his diadem resulted in an analysis that is more financial than philosophical. In his memoirs he calculates the values of the diamonds on each of the crown’s twelve points, along with substantial quantities of rubies and pearls.

As a mark of how open the Mughals were to influences of all types, their paintings include angels, putti or people holding a selection of alien crowns; some were taken direct from European templates while others are descendants of Central Asian kingship
symbols. Despite these regal distractions, the Mughals continued to be depicted wearing turbans. They experimented with a number of variants in the formative years of the dynasty. Akbar comments on his efforts to improve what seemed to him the unsatisfactory prototype developed by Babur. On rare occasions, emperors tried out fashions inspired by Europe. A painting of Jahangir in the Freer Gallery of Art shows the sartorially experimental emperor wearing a medley of styles reminiscent of King James I.5

Mughal artists re-created the world about them; as jewelled objects were important to their patrons, painters made an effort to represent these props accurately. Given the precision of the artists and the quantity of jewellery that has survived, it is possible to bring together these two branches of the Mughal arts. There is a surprising absence of such attempts. The most noteworthy is Susan Strong’s exploration in the essential Chester Beatty Library publication Murqqa.6 The insights provided by her pioneering essay make it the definitive eight pages on the subject.

In Jewels without Crowns, the investigation continues. The matches between real objects and painted depictions selected for this book are seldom perfect. However, the resources of The al-Sabah Collection’s exhibition Treasury of the World: Jewelled Arts of India in the Age of the Mughals7 provide an unbeatable foundation for comparisons with miniatures, supplemented by a number of artefacts from the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

As Stronge has suggested, with more research it might be possible to spot the very stones that appear in the various contemporary written records of the time. A helpful feature of Mughal jewels is that they were sometimes inscribed. This process, which might be considered an act of vandalism by some gemmologists, becomes a gift for art historians who can trace the attachment of emperors to their favourite stones. In common with much Mughal artistic activity, the individuals who did this work were recognized at the time. Typically within the Islamic world, artists have toiled anonymously. Among the credited Mughal masters was the versatile Mawlah Rihim, "unrivalled in calligraphy, book-binding and skilled as an engraver on precious stones."8

Inscribed jewels are just one of the many ways in which Mughal art is personalised. They provide a human element to items that are continually sought after and relatively unchanging. This is not always the case for jewels without inscriptions. The Kohinoor diamond is still much in demand, with the Indian government calling for its repatriation. Its immutability is another matter. After Prince Albert had worked his improvements upon it, the stone’s weight was almost halved. When Richard Burton gave Elizabeth Taylor a large yellow diamond, he was doing more than augmenting her famous collection. As the stone had allegedly been given by Shah Jahan to Mumtaz Mahal, it brought the most famous Mughal romance up to date by three centuries.
It is these sometimes spurious links with the lives of the Mughals that make their art so irresistible. Throughout the geographical and historical enormity of the Islamic world, there is no other dynasty which takes an approach to people and places that connects so readily with a modern audience. This was a time of ceaseless experimentation. When Jahangir the innovator put his face on a coin, he did not hold back from including one of the drinking vessels from which he was inseparable.

Exposed to art from all directions, Mughal patrons introduced a syncretism into their paintings that was as colourful, exuberant and distinctive as their jewellery. The only other Muslim rulers who appear to draw the viewer into their world are the Qajars. However, once visitors have gained admission to their painted pleasure domes, they will generally find it lacks the human dimension that resonates through Mughal works. Similarly, the great vistas of Ottoman parades and ceremonies that were faithfully recorded are a sterile experience when compared with the fecundity of life in India.

The extraordinary attention to detail of Mughal artists does not apply solely to recording their masters' possessions. The rulers themselves in many cases are shown with the same accuracy. Jahangir seems to have rejoiced in his sagging features as he became increasingly worn out by the cares of office and parenthood. His son, Shah Jahan, took a more rigid approach, insisting on profile paintings only - without a clear preference to which side was more acceptable. Despite this vanity, Shah Jahan allowed himself to be seen ageing over the years, or at least for the black of his beard to be slowly overtaken by grey.

These images were not intended for the unwashed masses beyond the palace walls. Truthful though the portraits may have been considered by emperors who often added their critical assessment to the paintings, these works were for private appreciation. As the late Stewart Cary Welch explained with his own entertaining brand of honesty: “During the heyday of the empire, such bumpkins as ourselves could never have seen these treasures...” It seems probable that the rulers would want to have their treasures preserved in a manner that they could return to later in life, like a photo album, to examine their changing features and fashions.

Whether being used to record rites of passage or family playtime, painted images could make a lasting impression upon the viewer. As this rarely indicated those outside the court, the sight of a royal portrait was a phenomenon to be marvelled at. A semi-royal Jesuit image seems to have caused a tumult of interest among the population at large, at least according to the Jesuits themselves. In 1608, a painting of what Father Manoel Pinheiro called the “Three Wise Kings”, in transit from Portugal to Jahangir’s court, was exposed to the general wonderment in the port city of Cambay. The ever-hopeful Pinheiro wrote that, “Moors and gentiles alike flocked to see it,” attracting a thousand visitors a day over a thirteen-day period. Out of sensitivity to local custom, the organiser arranged separate viewings for men and women.
Imported icons are of rather less relevance to visualising the Mughal court than the numerous paintings that have been preserved in collections around the world. These are an essential supplement to the records kept by the Mughals and their foreign visitors. From the time of the *Baburnama*, written in the early 16th century, we have accounts of life at court and on campaign, often filled with delightful trivia. Akbar continued the tradition: “His Majesty has appointed fourteen zealous, experienced and impartial clerks, two of whom do daily duty in rotation... to write down the orders and doings of His Majesty... what books he has read out to him; what alms he bestows; what presents he makes...” Maintaining the list of presents alone might have justified the manpower assigned by the emperor.

How these items were used is as revealing as what they were. In other cultures, a single piece of jewellery might have been considered adequate to make a statement, but that was not the Mughal way. Abundance was their byword. The Mughal emperors aimed to impress on an entirely different scale from their European counterparts. In this they succeeded. The constant stream of foreign visitors that came to their court related the experience with awe. François Bernier, a French doctor and all-round connoisseur, wrote of a summer outing by a daughter of Shah Jahan: “You can conceive of nothing more imposing or grand, and if I had not regarded this display of magnificence with a sort of philosophical indifference, I should have been apt to be carried away by such flights of imagination as inspire most Indian poets.”

Bernier’s countryman, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, was moved by something closer to outright cupidity. The French jeweller, not content to be dazzled by the baubles at Shah Jahan’s court, went in search of their source at the diamond mines of India, “as the fear of dangers has never restrained me in any of my journeys.”

To this day, the seediness of the later imperial court is obscured by the brilliance that impressed observers such as Bernier and Tavernier. By the late 18th century, the cheerless rendezvous of the Comte de Modave at the imperial court fill his journal with daily disappointment: “The Emperor, the courtiers, the furniture of the palace, all recall to us a real indigence.”

Above

Akbar Fights with Man Singh. By Qaswat. Circa 1600-1603.
© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
The plight of the imperial progeny was another matter of concern for the French count, who found some of them close to starvation. This situation, again, contrasts with the days of the Great Mughals. Siblings may have blinded and murdered one another in wars of succession but there seems to have been genuine affection between grandparents, parents and their offspring. In addition to entries in memoirs, nuclear-family gatherings have frequently been depicted in paintings. The togetherness tends to revolve around the presentation of gifts, usually jewels. There is sometimes a human element to this genre that gives them a perhaps unintended charm. The miniature of Shah Jahan with his four sons (overleaf) has the youngest, Murad Baksh, peeping from behind the billowing robes of the emperor and Dara Shukuh as a tray of jewels is inspected. There is no indication that the young princes will one day be at each others’ throats or that the eldest will be executed for heresy.

Shah Jahan seems a little tired by the routine of gift exchanges in this painting, but there are others in which the light of divine rapture overcomes him at the sight of a gemstone. He was a true enthusiast who knew how to put on jewellery as well as how to value it. The Padshahnama describes the gift giving at the wedding of his son Dara Shukuh, with an illustration that is as close to a 17th-century wedding photo as there could be. It shows the following incident with precision: "...for good luck His Majesty fastened around the Prince’s head the sehra veil, which consists of strands of lustrous pearls with brilliant rubies and emeralds.” Three weeks later, the emperor was again attending a wedding; this time it was of his younger son, Shah Shujah. “Then, with his own hand, he [Shah Jahan] fastened around the prince’s head the sehra of pearls with a ruby and an emerald that he had bound around the eldest prince’s head...”

Mughal paintings show many of the other necessities of imperial life. Weapons are ubiquitous, befitting their importance as emblems of status as well as items of survival. Jewelled swords and daggers were among the most esteemed gifts bestowed by emperors. Edged weapons appear in all their variety within miniature paintings. In their three-dimensional form, they provided a canvas for artisans to go far beyond the functional, producing arms that were not only of technical superiority but among the supreme expressions of composition in precious metals and gemstones.

The appeal of Mughal weaponry remains universal. At the auction of Yves Saint Laurent’s art collection in 2009, it seemed that having been born and brought up in North Africa, a love of Islamic aesthetics remained with him throughout his life. Among his passions was the Mughal armoury, an unexpected interest for a man as gentle as Saint Laurent. When he was conscripted into the French army to fight in Algeria, he only lasted a few weeks before ending up in a mental institution. For Mughal artists, too, these were not instruments of death but a vehicle of creativity. The self-portrait of Mir Sayyid Ali on page 46 shows an aesthete bordering on the epicene who still values his gem-encrusted dagger.
Among the places that earlier Mughal artists did not delve was the harem. As a result, the viewer is given access to a vast amount of those items that were on public display and very little from the *zīnāna*. Mirrors were common items that are rarely seen in paintings. Rarer still are whimsical accessories such as beard combs designed to be filled with rosewater.

Clothing is a feature studied with care by artists surrounded by what must have been the widest ranges of fabrics ever worn by males. Every imaginable colour is visible, in designs that vary from bold stripes to delicate brocades. Inevitably, the most lavish and copious of all was the emperor’s attire. Akbar, who was less clothes conscious than some of his successors, was still provided with a full selection of apparel. According to the historian Abūl Fazl: “Every season, there are made up one thousand complete suits for the imperial wardrobe and one hundred and twenty made up in twelve bundles are always kept in readiness.”

Robes of honour were an integral part of the court hierarchy, not always dispensed in accordance with an individual’s worth. Jahangir’s son Parviz was brazen enough to ask the emperor for a robe of honour that would truly make him stand out on their next encounter. The indulgent father acceded. Occasionally, European elements are apparent in less formal wear, sometimes worn in surprising combinations with local attire. In at least one painting [page 68] is what looks like a kimono converted to Indian use. Japanese style was admired further west as well; at a slightly later date, a portrait of Samuel Pepys shows the English diarist wearing what is unmistakably a kimono from the Edo period.

Of the other subjects that court artists painted with attentiveness are accessories to hospitality. Whilst full-blown banquets are hardly ever depicted – and if they are the focus tends to be on the ceremonial rather than the food – other gastronomic pursuits included betel nut, hookah smoking and, occasionally, fruit. The latter was a subject discussed by a number of emperors. As might be predicted, Jahangir was an authority in this field, giving his opinions freely. On a visit to Kabul, his memoirs are full of information: “Although the grapes were not yet fully ripe, I had often before this eaten Kabul grapes. There are many good sorts of grapes, especially the Sahibi and Kishmishl. The cherry also is a fruit of pleasant flavour, and one can eat more of it than of other fruits; I have in a day eaten up to 1.50 of them...” Notwithstanding the sweetness of the Kabul fruits, not one of them has, to my taste, the flavour of the mango.

The natural world was a constant source of wonder and inspiration to the Great Mughals. Despite being more settled than
their ancestors, there was an inclination to stay on the move, travelling from palace to palace or to the next luxury-tent encampment. Hunting was an inescapable part of their lives, and as is so often the case with hunters, this gave them an endless curiosity about nature that was answered by the commissioning of artists to record animals in painted form. In a less scientific way, this was extended to the applied arts. The most common manifestations are the hilts of daggers. Usually made from jade, although metal and rock crystal were also used, these can be sculptures of the highest quality. Hills of horse heads were supplemented by the less obvious choices of sheep and camels. The best of them are expressive to behold and coolly tactile in the hand. They appear with surprising infrequency in paintings.

Another creative marvel of the Mughal artisan that is almost unknown to the painted page is the 'hawking ring'. There are a number of these extant, along with other jewelled items with an avian theme, mainly pendants. For sheer visual delight it would be hard to match the parrot ring in the al-Sabah Collection. This swivelling figure perfectly captures the colourful character of the bird in the folklore classic *Tutin-nameh* (Tales of a Parrot). The paintings of birds from Akbar's reign show the depth of an interest inherited from his father and grandfather. In one of the most frequently mentioned passages in the development of Mughal art, Humayun's servant Jauhar relates how his master instructed an artist to make a picture a bird that had entered his tent.

The world under their feet was as important to Mughal rulers as the world around them. Globes appear in numerous paintings, often as a symbol of dominion held in the hand, to be passed from one emperor or spiritual leader to the next. This type is more reminiscent of a spherical nephrite boulder than of the planet earth. For a more planetary form of globe, the viewer needs to look at where the emperors' feet are planted. In some depictions, the ground they stand on is a true picture of the planet; in others it is like a gently rounded field, representing the curvature of the earth. Every approach indicates the ruler's mastery of all that he surveys, and more. The earth's mineral contents are part of their bounty.

Mughal artists tended not to use map-like accuracy when depicting their masters' domain, although there are examples that show different seas and continents. When Jahangir visualised himself embracing the Iranian ruler Shah 'Abbas I with the world
and their symbolic beasts beneath them, the Mughal lion can be seen pushing his Safavid counterpart’s sheep into what is undoubtedly the Mediterranean.

Precision was the hallmark of Mughal artists, whose work has been likened to jewels since their miniature paintings were first seen outside India. Adding to their bijou quality was the size of the miniatures, a description that applies to more than just the word’s original use (‘minimum’ – Latin for ‘red lead’). At the smaller end of the spectrum, the paintings might be a few centimetres in height; at the other extreme, the height of some images in the Padshahnama is almost 40 centimetres. As a finishing touch, burnishing ensured a jewel-like lustre.

With the decorative arts there was a similar hunger for miniscule detail that would escape the notice of all but the most attentive viewer. Much of the finest work requires a magnifying glass to be appreciated fully. Spectacles were a useful aid for both the artist and the patron in a milieu that valued precision and smallness of scale (page 150). For Shah Jahan, according to the historian Kalim, the need for spectacles arose from his tears of despair at the death of Mumtaz Mahal.16 In the Memoirs of Bayazid, written by one of Akbar’s courtiers, a fascination with technical virtuosity at a microscopic level is apparent: “another of these rare craftsmen is Mawlana Fakhr the book-binder, who has made twenty-five holes in a poppy seed... and there is the unique craftsman Ustad Waris, the gold-wire drawer, who has made twenty-five gold and silver wires so thin that Mulla Fakhr could draw them through the holes in the poppy seed.”19

Painters were able to express themselves within a restricted format, creating visual inventories of their patrons’ possessions at the same time as conjuring atmosphere and character. The details that the viewer does not experience are the sounds and smells of the setting. At Jahangir’s coronation, the emperor writes of nearly three thousand wax lights, perfumed with ambergris, and gold and silver censers for burning “odoriferous drugs.”20 For forty days and nights the great imperial state drum was struck without ceasing.

At most court gatherings, silence was expected from those assembled unless being addressed by the ruler. On other occasions, music was a way of enhancing the mood. Sir Thomas Roe described his visit to the Nowruz celebration in 1617 at Mandu with his usual keen observations on the appearance of the emperor’s throne, and then sneers at “the old Musick of singing Whores.”21

Above
Queen Victoria, Empress of India, in 1887
The mastery of Mughal artists did not always find the market it deserved beyond the imperial court. Although their work had reached Europe and impressed Rembrandt van Rijn, Bernier was disappointed by the lack of reward accorded to their talent. "Want of genius, therefore, is not the reason why the works of superior art are not exhibited in the capital...The rich will have every article at a cheap rate."22

Over the following two centuries of Mughal decline, new art markets emerged in India. Among these were British administrators whose tastes could never match the grandeur, or the intimacy, of the Mughals. The world's richest dynasty had been a prodigious patron of the arts. By the time of Bahadur Shah II, the last ruler of the line, all that was left was the varnish on the veneer. Some unconvincing bravado was displayed by artists whose portraits show the emperor smothered in jewellery. Among the cascade of precious stones is one item that comes closer to being a crown than the headgear depicted in paintings of the Great Mughals. Reminiscent of a papal tiara, it is a jewel-laden wedding cake of a crown that overwhelms the delicate and accomplished poet beneath it.

The whereabouts of this remarkable construction are unknown, but there is a substitute housed in the Royal Collection. Purchased by Queen Victoria in 1861, it had previously been sold to a British army major at an auction of Bahadur Shah's effects in Delhi. A public sale of Mughal treasures after the Mutiny of 1857 indicated that the family fortunes could sink no lower. The headgear was described in a letter from the Secretary of State for India to Prince Albert: "It cannot however be called a crown. It is a very rich skull-cap worn on the head of the Emperor, & round the lower part of which the turban was wound - & in the turban jewels were placed."23 There was little doubt at the time that it had indeed been worn by Bahadur Shah.

The crown in the Royal Collection is smaller than the veritable mountain of light that is seen above Bahadur Shah's head in paintings. Despite this, it is still an imposing combination in which gold, emeralds and rubies stand out, surmounted by a feather. In a curious circle of coincidences, it is reminiscent of the type of crown that artists from centuries before had shown Timur handing to his descendants. Unlike all the other jewellery in the Mughal storhouse, this item always seemed to end up being held by his successors rather than being worn.
Notes:

3. Pliny appears to have confused North and South India but he certainly located the correct subcontinent: “The rivers that produce gems are the Chenab and the Ganges, and of all the lands that produce them India is the most prolific.” Cited in Peter Francis, 2001, p. 120.
6. Stronge, in Mughals, Wright, 2008, p. 188.
7. The catalogue of Treasury of the World, by Manuel Keene and Salam Kaoukja, is an invaluable survey and technical analysis of Mughal jewelled objects.
15. Padshahnama, 1/1, pp. 438 ff and pp. 461-64.
18. “His tearful eyes sought help from spectacles, for his eyesight had decreased from weeping,” Cited in Du Temple, 2003, p. 11.
Timur
d. 1405

Mirān Shah

Sultan Muhammed

Abu Sa'id

Umar Shaykh

Babur
1526-1530

Humayun
1530-1540
1555-1556
Dawn of a Dynasty

“\nThe chief excellency of Hindustan is, that it is a large country, and has an abundance of gold and silver."

*Emperor Babur, from the Baburnama*
The Mughals tended to look to the less distant past than some Muslim dynasties. Not for them were family trees tracing their lineage back to Adam or other prophets. Despite being descended from Genghis Khan, they were content to make Timur Leng their source of a legitimacy based on martial prowess rather than spiritual authority.

Whilst the concept of the all-conquering Timur was very real to the Mughals, contemporary images of their patriarch were more elusive. A heavily turbaned, lightly bearded model emerged, as seen in this miniature showing Timur passing on his apocryphal crown of leadership to Babur as Humayun looks on. In most of these depictions the tireless horseman is not burdened with the quantities of jewellery favoured by his more sedentary descendants. He is usually shown with simple clothing; his one piece of trophy attire being a spectacular belt. The belt was a symbol of power whose origins lay in eastern Asia. It was of greater significance for Muslim dynasties such as the Ottomans and Safavids than for the Mughals, who expended more effort on colourful sashes. The detachable components of the belt could, however, be used to decorate the heads of horses as well as the waists of humans.
Later Mughal emperors liked to ponder the lives of the dynasty’s founders. Painted during the reign of Jahangir, this image of Babur suggests a scholarly type rather than a real person. The inspiration is wholly Iranian, no doubt under the creative influence of Aqa Reza, a native of Iran who became a favourite of Jahangir’s. Babur is shown at ease, in the manner of Iranian youths, one shoe resting languidly on the ground. He wears a turban that would have been considered outsized by Mughal standards, topped by an equally prodigious feather ornamen. The luminous gold of his waistcoat makes up for the modest sprinkling of jewellery; this includes dangling earrings of a style that was fashionable in Iran. Accumulating gemstones was not Babur’s hobby. According to his daughter Gulbadan, “The treasure of five kings fell into his hands. He just gave it away.”

The jewellery items that conform most closely with the taste of Babur’s descendants are his finger rings. Typically for an accomplished archer with a Central Asian heritage, he wears a thumb ring. In the Baburnama, the first Mughal emperor mentions a thumb guard worn on the left hand, in addition to the standard archer’s ring worn on the right.
By Shah Jahan's reign, the gentle fog of nostalgia had settled on artists of the imperial household. In this painting, Babur wears similar colours to those chosen during Jahangir's time and he continues to savour the outdoors and a good book—probably his own composition, the *Baburnama*. The borders are now filled with angels, scholars and a lion contemplating a yak. The greatest changes are to the clothes and the jewellery, which have become more Mughal. Sash-cord ornaments and a gem-laden dagger sparkle at Babur's waist, while the emperor's pièce de résistance is unquestionably the jewel in his right hand.

The combination of a ruby sandwiched between two pearls became the quintessence of Mughal style. Jean Baptiste Tavernier commented on this arrangement, observing that they were worn in the ears of every "person of any quality" during Aurangzeb's reign. The size of the set being handled by Babur would have made it more appropriate as a pendant or bazuband. The dynasty’s enthusiasm for rubies and spinels had been established more than two centuries before by Timur, who also admired pearls. The Castilian ambassador Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo described Timur’s headdress as being surmounted by "a spinel ruby with pearls and precious stones around it."

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*Above*
Inscribed royal spinel
Engraved and drilled 'balas ruby', with inscription of Shah Jahan
LNS 57 MS

*Left*
Babur Seated in a Landscape
Attributed to Poyag
Circa 1640
© RMN (musée Guimet, Paris) / Thierry Olivier
A key painting in the development of Mughal art, its date and place of execution have been discussed more extensively than the identity of its subject. The most persuasive view comes from A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, who believes it to be a self-portrait of Mir Sayyid Ali.

For an artist whose work is invariably described as 'jewel-like', there are remarkably few precious stones on display. The young aesthete wears no finger rings, bracelets or pendants. His dagger sheath is magnificently caparisoned but upon closer examination might be missing the vital component of the dagger itself. The subject's only concession to the dandified jewellery-wearing habits of Iran is a hoop-shaped earring.

Mir Sayyid Ali was from Iran, and before making his name at the Mughal court had been immersed in the elaborate world of Iranian earrings. Similar types are visible in the Hamzanama, although the wearers tend to be creatures of fantasy, such as Zummurud Shah, or wry depictions of holy men. Otherwise, this great book, supervised by Mir Sayyid Ali for Akbar after the death of his original patron, Humayun, features very little jewellery. Over the following century, Mughal artists depicted male adornment on an unprecedented scale.
Humayun
1530-1540
1555-1556

Akbar
1556-1605

Jahangir (Salim)
1605-1627
marries Nur Jahan Begum

Khusrau Parviz Shah Jahan
(Shahryar) (Khurram) 1627-1658
marries Mumtaz
Mahal

Dara Shukoh Shah-Shuja 'Alamgir I
(Aurangzeb) Murad Baksh
1658-1707
The Great Mughal Patrons

“Elizabeth by the grace of God etc. To the most invincible and most mightie prince, lord Zelabdim Echebar king of Cambaya. Invincible Emperor etc.”

*Salutation of letter from Queen Elizabeth I to Emperor Akbar*
Akbar is seen here in a moment of spiritual communion, to the alarm of his entourage. He emanates calm in his inactivity, leaning on his gorgeously decorated matchlock, oblivious to the commotion around him. Crashing through the background is an elephant, whose mahout brandishes an ankus (goad). This is one of the easiest items of Indian paraphernalia to identify and appears in many different media, including Mughal carpets of the 16th century.

Despite their utilitarian function, elephant goads were also ceremonial items presented by rulers. Some very superior versions exist, made from precious metals, sometimes inlaid with gemstones. The example illustrated here is raised above the everyday by a shaft covered with rock crystal. Elephants also came in a wide spectrum of quality and were treated accordingly. Akbar was inclined to proving his manhood by taking control of unruly beasts; other emperors honoured elephants as symbols of warlike valour. Late into the reign of the obesey unheroic Muhammad Shah (1719-1748), they were a convenient vehicle upon which the emperor could smoke his hookah and at the same time maintain the illusion of mobility. His mahout was depicted steadying the imperial hookah rather than clutching an ankus.
Natural history was a popular hobby among the earlier Mughal emperors. Babur described a sojourn of several days en route to Ghazipur where he found: “gardens, running water... and various birds of coloured plumage.” Babur’s grandson, Akbar, chose the artist Miskin to illustrate the natural history section of the Baharnama. Other illustrations by Miskin include the tour de force of observation and imagination known as ‘Ten Birds’.

The pleasure that the artist took in the colour and modelling of the birds is evident. The same delight in three-dimensional possibilities was transferred to the decorative arts during Akbar’s reign. Jewellery, in particular, offered the opportunity for conveying the sense of a bird’s movement and brilliance. In the case of ‘Ten Birds’, some of the representations may have been exaggerated; on other occasions accuracy was the main concern. Two decades after Miskin’s exuberant image, Jahangir’s favourite artist of the animal world, Mansur, left us with the definitive impression of the dodo, shortly before it became extinct. The flightless and relatively colourless Mauritian bird seems not to have been considered a worthy subject for immortalising in the Mughal jewelled arts.
Ram Das Kachhwaha was a Rajput noble in the service of both Akbar and Jahangir. Although he wears very little jewellery, he is thoroughly au courant with the times in his choice of earrings. His only weapon is a typical dagger of the Akbar period, less sumptuous than the example shown above. Later versions have a knuckle guard which rather diminishes the simple vigour of this type. The guardless dagger has an integral strength that comes from being made of a single piece of steel, from point to pommel.

The dagger worn by Ram Das doesn’t entirely capture this organic quality. The proportions in the painting make the grip seem spindly in relation to the blade. His staff suffers from similarly peculiar proportions and hardly looks up to the task of supporting this sturdy warrior. The artist must have had the same misgivings. Under magnification it is possible to see that the hilt of the dagger has been repainted. Originally, the grip would have been even longer and flimsier than it is now. Any such technical failings are more than made up for by the subject’s look of quiet dignity.
Delving into the folkloric Iranian past, this manuscript shows a scene from Nizami’s tale of King Khosrow and Princess Shirin. It is rare in Mughal painting to see females as vigorous as the polo players on the right. They look more determined than the men, and wear more jewellery. The clothes and accessories are very much of the Akbar era. Khosrow parades sideburns of the Jahanigir style, while Shirin is the only player to have forsaken a Mughal turban for a truncated conical construction with sarpel feather.

The most conspicuous difference in jewellery between the two polo teams is that the females wear bazuband armlets on their upper arms. In the real world of the Mughals, these were unisex items with royal associations. They are mentioned by Abu’l Fazl, albeit with an emphasis on female wearers, in his record of Akbar’s reign, the *Ain-i-Akbari*. The usual configuration would be a central stone flanked by two smaller stones or pearls. The example shown above left makes elaborate use of a carved emerald; carving and religious inscriptions were relatively common on bazubands. As with her headgear, Shirin went beyond convention with her armlets.

Above
Upper armband (bazuband)
Enamelled gold set with emeralds and diamonds
India, probably Deccan
Carved emerald, 2nd quarter 17th century;
setting probably 19th century
LNS 141 J

Left
Shirin Plays Polo with Khosrow
Circa 1590-1600
Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia
In this portrait from Shah Jahan’s reign, the emperor’s beloved grandfather is seen quite differently from during his own time. Akbar the tireless adventurer has evolved into a stooped and almost saintly figure. He now stands in isolation, while two generations earlier he would have been in the thick of the action, whether military or scholarly. Akbar used his sword in a wide variety of situations in those days, but to see it serving him as a walking stick is unfamiliar. The bandage-like wrapping of the belt around the scabbard adds to the air of infirmity.

The degree of embellishment on the sword is higher than was usually shown in paintings from Akbar’s reign; what he did with his arsenal was more important than how it looked at that time. He did, however, unquestionably delight in jewelled weapons and often gave them away to favoured individuals. Abu’l Fazl mentions the emperor having thirty “special” swords, a different one being sent to him every day. Shah Jahan was another great enthusiast of gem-set weapons and would have wanted his grandfather to carry an appropriate sword. The example shown above has, as in the miniature painting, a liberal allocation of emeralds and rubies on the hilt, locket and chape.
In contrast to the magnificence of the imperial court, European subjects were handled with economy by Mughal artists. This miniature painting from the reign of Akbar indicates the novelty of foreigner visitors to India. Despite the emperor’s admiration for what he described as the “expressive figures” of European art, the pet mongoose in this work has a livelier look than the humans. The most animated feature is a billowing cascade of cape.

The sword does not conform to European styles of the time and is more typical of Iran or India. The artist had perhaps not caught a glimpse of Western rapiers at Akbar’s court. The Jesuit Antonio de Monseratte’s account of his travels mentions that the emperor “is very fond of wearing a European dagger and sword.” Apart for a hint of ruby at the centre of the quillon, this shamsir is as unornamented as the human subjects. The only items of jewellery in the painting are small rings worn on the subjects’ fingers. The overall impression is one of men with a taste for primary colours and, by Mughal standards, pitifully little sparkle.
With its shimmering frame and textural feel, this painting has an almost unseemly richness. As well as being a masterful study of the complex relationship between Jahangir and his father, it is replete with symbolism. The simplicity of the late emperor’s attire contrasts with the resplendent Jahangir. The younger ruler’s robes are trimmed with six-pointed stars, a symbol used by Humayan and Akbar. As with the halo that glows around the imperial heads, it is suggestive of divine light and the right to rule.

Jahangir’s jewellery is lovingly picked out by the artist. The pearls are a profusion of celestial orbs, echoing the globe that Akbar is about to entrust to his successor. The son’s most notable accessory is the locket pendant on his chest, very similar to the example shown above. This rare ornament is contemporary with the painting. Although its purpose is unclear, considering Jahangir’s curiosity about the hidden world it is likely to have had a talismanic function. The Portuguese Jesuits wrote of Jahangir’s gratitude for curing their ambassador of an affliction using holy relics. However, the octagonal shape of this locket is more indicative of an interest in Chinese ‘pak-kua’ lore.
More than most Mughal emperors, Jahangir was recorded in moments of quiet joie de vivre. In such informal encounters, his right hand was seldom far from a drinking vessel of some sort. In this sylvan setting, he accepts a cup from his eldest son, Prince Khusrav. Soon after this painting was executed, Khusrav led a rebellion against his newly enthroned father.

Jahangir took drinking vessels seriously. He is seen here, early in his reign, holding a cup that might be made of gem-set gold or, more likely, rock crystal. The shape conforms with Chinese porcelain types. Later in life the emperor favoured shallow, jade forms that would have required a steady hand, as seen in a drawing by the same artist on page 86. Among Jahangir’s collection of cups are inscriptions that indicate the close relationship in his mind between poetry and the fruit of the vine. The priority was to keep the vessel full: “...may the cup of jade be always like a ruby.” Mughal skill at setting jewels into hardstones was established by the late 16th century. Embellished rock-crystal cups with covers remained highly valued two hundred years later at the court of the Qianlong Emperor.
With Jahangir's relish for recording every detail of his reign, we are left with a full account of the weighing of his son Khurram (later Shah Jahan) in 1607, the year he married Mumtaz Mahal. The 16-year-old prince's weight in precious metals was to be distributed among "faqirs and the needy". The emperor's memoirs reveal his pride in the improvements that Khurram had effected at his garden home in Kabul. Jahangir drew parallels between two of his passions - succulent fruit and precious stones: "There was an abundance of cherries on the trees, each of which looked as if it were a round ruby, hanging like globes from the trees."

Inside Khurram's home there is a glimpse of the garden and an eyeful of precious objects, most of which are covered in silk awaiting weighing. Among the visible works is a wide selection of weapons, along with numerous pieces of jewellery as well as jade and bejewelled vessels. A rare sighting is a small flat dish that matches a superb work in The al-Sabah Collection. Made of gold, set with rubies and emeralds, it was the type of less-than-essential item that elevated Mughal domestic life to the highest level of opulence.
The identity of the princely subject has been discussed without conclusion. More apparent are his leisure pursuits. This is Mughal life at its most refined, with a serious side provided by the religious scholars in discussion with the young royal. The mullahs have avoided the temptation of the young sophisticate’s cellar in the foreground, lovingly decanted into glass vessels. Mughal glass from this era is extremely rare, especially in the form of a spittoon. There was considerable excitement in 2018 when such an item was auctioned, although it later turned out to be an equally unusual 17th century English product. Some things work better without too much transparency.

The spittoon near to the prince is one of the accessories of the betel-nut aficionado. It is shaped in a popular Indian style often likened to two lotus flowers joined at the stem. The al-Sabah Collection has an elegant example from this period in jade, of an entirely different shape. The IAMM bidriware receptacle, albeit of a much later date, makes for a closer match. This zinc and copper alloy inlaid with silver has some of the dazzling quality of gold, along with floral motifs that are visible on the spittoon in the painting.
Symbolism verges on surrealism in this scene inspired by one of Jahangir’s dreams. The focal point is supposed to be the emperor taking aim for a second shot at the enemy general Malik Ambar. There are, however, a number of visual distractions. Jahangir’s Abyssinian adversary becomes a macabre sideshow; he is a disembodied Saint Sebastian, an image that would have been familiar at the Mughal court. The ruler’s white-slippered feet are a visually arresting feature, planted upon the world in its East-West polar axis. Below the globe is a bull, which is in turn supported by a fish. This follows an Islamic tradition that associates the two beasts with the biblical Behemoth and Leviathan.

The fish was an equally powerful part of the Mughal hierarchy. Standards representing the Order of the Fish were prized emblems of office that appear with disappointing infrequency in paintings. One exception is an ‘inflatable’ specimen that dwarfs the elephants in a hunting scene of Aurangzeb, circa 1700, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The al-Sabah example is among the most exquisite extant, with its rock-crystal eyes and almost comically expressive features. Two later versions exist in the Mittal Museum of Hyderabad. They are of similar size (about 60 centimetres wide) but are made of riveted iron rather than the gilded silver seen above.
Soon after taking on the Deccani general Malik Ambar (page 70) in his imagination, Jahangir went on to tackle a bigger foe – poverty. Armed with a bejewelled bow and arrows, the emperor puts an end to the shadowy figure of deprivation on the left. As he is on the side of the angels, there are four putti to assist him. Two of them bear a crown, an entirely European symbol of Jahangir’s majesty, probably derived from religious paintings.

Apart from his bow, the emperor is lightly armed. He must have had a lot of confidence in his archery skills as he carries no sword. His only other weapon is a ‘kard’ dagger, which hangs inconspicuously from his sash. This was considered the least threatening of edged weapons. Inserted deeply into a scabbard, the hilt was barely visible. Unlike heavy-duty daggers such as the idianjar and katar, the kard was often a single-edged knife, more suitable for peeling fruit than for mortal combat. Despite this they could be exquisite items, with scabbards to match. The example shown above is from long after Jahangir’s reign but features the same superb detailing that can be seen in the painting. Enamelling was already well established at the Mughal court by the 17th century.
This painting commemorates an event of 1617, by which time Prince Khurram had been given the title 'Shah Jahan'. Jahangir, with his customary attention to detail, describes at least one occasion that year when he presented a ruby turban ornament to his eventual successor. As Jahangir brimmed with sentimentality on the subject in his memoirs, it would have made a suitable theme for a painting commissioned by Shah Jahan two decades later.

Some of the details that reveal most about court life are in the foreground, including a gold crutch held by an individual who also appears to have a bull whip tucked into his sash. There was evidently a lot of standing around at Mughal ceremonies. As sitting in the presence of the ruler was not permitted, a stick of some sort was a useful support. The crutch, known as 'zafar takieh' or 'cushion of victory', came in different lengths. The shorter of these were for leaning on while seated on the floor for long periods of time. Both types were curved, for comfort, with rounded ends that were often decorated with animal forms, although the examples above and in the painting have not taken the zoomorphic approach.
Painted four centuries after the life of Mu'in al-Din Chishti, this portrait conveys the intense aura of the Sufi saint. Later generations of the family were revered by the Great Mughals. Akbar paid particular homage to Sheikh Salim Chishti after he had prophesied the birth of his first son, Jahangir, initially named Salim.

The progenitor of the Chishti dynasty is seen here handing over a globe surmounted by a symbolic crown. Jahangir stands holding the divine gift in an adjacent painting. The holy man's attire is a model of restraint, without taking the unclothed route of the yogi. His sole concession to frivolity is his staff. Instead of being a plain wooden stick, it is topped by a finial of similar shape to the one illustrated above. For Sufi masters the staff was a symbol of authority that often ended up being venerated after their lifetime. The closeness of later generations of the Chishti order to the imperial family compromised a simple precept of their founder:

“Never seek any help, charity, or favours from anybody except God. Never go to the court of kings…”

Above
Finial (probably for a staff)
Patterned agate fitted with a copper or copper alloy ferrule
India, Mughal or Deccan
Late 16th-1st half 17th century
LNS 374-HS

Left
Mu'in al-Din Chishti Holding a Globe
By Bichitr
circa 1610-1618
© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
At one time it was assumed that this miniature painting depicted Shah ‘Abbas I of Iran. It is now thought to be a portrait of his court officer ‘Isa Khan. At the same time as painting ‘Isa Khan, the travelling Mughal artist recorded one of the few contemporary images of the Safavid emperor. The pose of the two Iranians is identical. While Mughal dignitaries are usually shown with hands engaged in purposeful activity, Bishn Das presents their slouching Safavid counterparts with fingers stuffed inside sashes.

Both Shah ‘Abbas and ‘Isa Khan are dressed in a similar manner. The emperor’s robe is considerably more decorative than his courtier’s and the ruler has a curved sword of unmistakable Iranian provenance. In their sashes they both wear daggers with bifurcated hilts that have more of a Mughal look to them. In the case of ‘Isa Khan the weapon is also encrusted with jewels. The Safavids were less addicted to daggers than the Mughals but would doubtless have admired the superb quality of Jahangir’s armourers. At the same time, Jahangir’s memoirs reveal his joy at receiving a dagger from his Iranian counterpart with a simple hilt made of speckled walrus ivory.
Jahangir’s most persistent tormentor, Malik Ambar, had risen far in life. Starting as an Abyssinian slave, he ended up controlling the kingdom of Ahmadnagar in the Deccan. This painting by the Mughal artist Hashim shows a stout and purposeful individual who stands to attention with an unadorned Deccani sword in one hand and what appears to be a writing case hanging from his belt.

If the details of the belt fittings had been less sketchily drawn, they would doubtless reveal the same sculptural sophistication as the fitting from The al-Sabah Collection shown above. Indian craftsmen were masters of much more than precious stones. Their ability with chasing and hammering was only visible at the closest range. This was not work intended to awe the impressionable; the aim was for contemplation by men of dignity, including Malik Ambar. Among the several depictions of this great survivor there is never a trace of ostentation. Mughal historians such as Mutamad Khan describe the considerable wealth of Jahangir’s adversary without suggesting any parvenu vulgarity: “he maintained his exalted position to the end of his life, and closed his career in honour.”
It is unusual for prayer beads to be depicted as prominently as they are in this painting by Balchand. In addition, the Hindu artist seems to have shown the correct number of beads; Muslim tasbih can have 33 beads, one third of the full number, representing the 99 Names of God. Prayer beads, like archer's rings, were very much a male accessory. Jahangir's enthusiasm for archery is visible in the rings that hang below his left hand.

All the Great Mughals have been depicted with tasbih. Aurangzeb was inseparable from his. Akbar was painted holding a rosary of rubies, sapphires and pearls. Jahangir made greater use of emeralds, as is apparent in the painting here, and in a lustrous principal dividing bead in The al-Sabah Collection. William Hawkins describes Jahangir at Agra, praying at dawn with beads of emerald, ruby, pearl, diamond and coral. The Portuguese missionary Bento de Goes mentions the "great consolation" that came to Jesuit priests when visiting Jahangir, whose paintings of Jesus and the Virgin Mary helped them to pray with their own Christian rosaries. According to Sir Thomas Roe, the emperor was not averse to using these devices himself.
Painted some years after Jahangir's death, the miniature has the hard precision that characterises work of Shah Jahan's reign. In this unusual scene, Jahangir is accompanied by the enduring Asaf Khan and, more distinctively, by a lion. Jahangir was concerned with animal welfare and initiated customs such as washing his elephants with warm water in the winter. Lions were, however, more usually his quarry than his companions. His memoirs are filled with lively episodes, including the dissection of a lion he had shot. In order to discover the source of its courage, “I wished to look at his intestines.”

At a more symbolic level, Jahangir chose the lion as his footrest in a painting of himself embracing Shah 'Abbas I of Iran. His Safavid rival was assigned a sheep as his emblem. In the painting shown here, Jahangir wears no lion-inspired accoutrements, despite their existence at the time. His dagger is of a type that often appears in royal portraits. Probably made of ivory, it might in reality have taken a form similar to the lion-headed knife illustrated above. Carved from walrus ivory, this would originally have had gem-set eyes. Mughal emperors are almost never depicted with zoomorphic dagger handles.
This sensitive portrait by the popular court artist Manohar shows a care-worn Jahangir close to the end of his life. The emperor's declining years were spent in a bleak confrontation with his third son, Shah Jahan. It's no wonder the ageing ruler looks so wistfully at the cup cradled in his right hand.

The cup is less prominent than the sword, and yet the eye is drawn towards this delicate and somewhat impractical drinking vessel. Jahangir had a passion for jade carving that transformed the medium during his reign. Such was his regard for this material, many works feature poetic imperial inscriptions. Jahangir's enthusiasm was shared by Chinese emperors. Mughal jades were among the few items from 'Hindustan' sought out by these dedicated aesthetes. The Qianlong Emperor was frequently moved to poetry by cups such as this. 'In Praise of a Hindustan Jade Drinking Vessel' was composed in 1774 and likens his latest acquisition to:

"...a bright moon clearly reflected in water... I simply cannot keep myself from gazing at it again and again."
Jahangir's favourite wife has received more attention from historians than from contemporary portraitists. As with paintings of other Mughal women of power, this portrait makes little effort to explore the formidable inner Nur Jahan. In addition to her womanly and political attributes, historians have often recorded her skill with a musket. Some sharp-shooting on a tiger hunt impressed Jahangir sufficiently to write: "As a reward...I gave her a pair of bracelets of diamonds worth 100,000 rupees."

There is little in the way of jewellery that Nur Jahan has neglected to wear in this painting. A notable accessory is her earring. Freely worn by Mughal men and women, this example is more lavish than usual. For objects that were so ubiquitous in their day, worn by every level of society, there are surprisingly few extant. Among the most impressive survivors is a pair in The al-Sabah Collection. With their supportive pearl loops, for draping over the top of the ear, these earrings are very similar to the one worn by Nur Jahan. They are only a few decades older than this Kishangarh painting, which was executed in the mid-18th century, almost 200 years after her birth.
So commanding is the presence of Asaf Khan, he has no need of the usual complement of jewellery. This brother of Nur Jahan and father of Mumtaz Mahal wears no rings on his fingers or ears, although there is a trace of piercing on the lobe. He proffers a sarpech while caressing a pendant decorated with the unmistakable sideburn coiffure of Jahangir. It would be useful to have more colour in the drawing, to determine whether the pendant is a painted miniature or a cameo. The only paint, however, is a white catchlight that gives a glint to the subject’s eye. The rest of the focus is on the pendant.

Jahangir and Shah Jahan were the only Mughal emperors known to have commissioned cameo carvings. Among the negligible number still in existence is The al-Sabah Collection’s magnificent portrait of Shah Jahan, an emperor whom Asaf Khan also served. The wazir would have been one of the few commoners in a position to own such a precious item. He is known to have received European cameos from the Flemish merchant Jacques de Coutre, who considered him to be the second most important man in the empire.
Mughal emperors were often depicted pondering a jewel or a flower; Shah Jahan instead concentrates on matters of state. In one hand is the imperial seal of office, of particular importance to an emperor who had recently acceded to the throne. In the other hand is an unadorned sword. The image must have pleased Shah Jahan as at least one identical version still exists. This miniature in the Aga Khan Collection is unusual for being pasted onto an album page below a smaller portrait of Jahangir. The father’s presence indicates the Mughal preoccupation with imperial lineage. The seal in Shah Jahan’s hand hints at his descent from Timur while spelling out his name and titles, written without being reversed to make them easy for the viewer to read.

Mughal seals took the form of either finger rings or stamps that might be hung from the waist. The elegantly engraved jade ring shown above belonged to an official of Aurangzeb. Niccolao Manucci wrote at the time about the ubiquitous importance of seals, which extended to royal tiger hunts: “As soon as the tiger is dead, they put on its head a leather bag... Having tied the bag, the official attaches to it his seal.”
Before he acquired the pointed beard that has defined his appearance ever since, Shah Jahan experimented with different facial-hair configurations. Established earlier in his life was a love of precious stones. Painted when he was twenty-five years old, the young prince is already showing his enthusiasm for exquisite jewellery. In this frequently reproduced miniature, Shah Jahan seems captivated by the brilliance of the bejewelled spray in his left hand.

Although the design of this object is closer to a European aigrette than a Mughal sarpech, it was Shah Jahan who took turban ornaments to a new level of conspicuous display. This kept growing over the following centuries. It was, perhaps, the absence of crowns that led the Mughals to increase the imperial luster of these ornaments, forbidden to anyone outside the ruler’s closest circle. The original tradition of wearing certain feathers as a symbol of power goes back at least as far as Timur. The impression of a feather bent slightly with the weight of an attached stone or pearl was maintained in the classic shape of the sarpech above. The shape became the only reminder of the forerunner, as the stones became ever more spectacular.
This unusual drawing shows Shah Jahan as a Mughal man of action several years before he became emperor. The informality of his pose belies the splendour of his accoutrements. Despite being barefoot, he is bedecked in jewels and holds a matchlock gun appropriate to his status. The trigger, highlighted in gold, gives a taste of the rest of his firearm. This includes a barrel rest that is almost identical to one in The al-Sabah Collection; made of steel inlaid with floral decoration in gold, imperial matchlocks were considerably more refined than the general issue.

In this drawing the barrel rest appears to levitate. A later painting, also in the Chester Beatty Library, shows Shah Jahan's son Aurangzeb hunting with a similar gun. Instead of using a barrel rest, he relies on his retailers' shoulders for the same purpose. Mughal matchlocks needed support as they were notoriously heavy at the muzzle. Being made of thick, high-quality steel, they could take a large amount of powder and were very accurate. The tiny flask placed near Shah Jahan's feet is probably for priming rather than the full-scale powder flask.

Above
Gun barrel rest
Steel, inlaid with gold
India, Mughal or Deccan
17th century
LMS 186 M

Left
Shah Jahan Firing a Matchlock
Brush-and-ink drawing
Circa 1620
© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
The submission of Rana Amar Singh was significant enough to be recorded in different forms. Although this drawing is different in some details from the full-colour painting in the Royal Collection *Padshahnama*, both share an abject-looking Rajput king. Jahangir notes in his memoirs that the Rana presented Khurram with a “famous large ruby” among other gifts. In addition, “…the Rana rendered homage to my lucky son with the rites and rituals underlings perform when paying homage... As a sign of favour, my son came forward and when the Rana grasped my son’s leg and asked forgiveness for his offences, my lucky son took his head in his lap and consoled him in such a way that his distress was settled.”

The artist seems to have captured this very moment, with the future emperor extending an unaccustomed hand of reconciliation. As the drawing is about submission to Mughal rule, the court attendants play an important part creating an impression of invincible majesty. The flywhisk bearer, however, looks committed to using his tool of office as more than a royal symbol, ready to drive away any insect that approaches his master’s faintly haloed head.

Above
*Flywhisk handle*
Carved jade set with rubies
India, Mughal
Late 17th century

Left
*The Submission of Rana Amar Singh of Mewar to Prince Khurram*
Tinted brush-and-ink drawing
Circa 1620-1626
© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
Shah Jahan was clearly attached to his firearms. Although they were not considered to be part of the upbringing of young noblemen, the emperor was made of more purposeful stuff. Shah Jahan followed the interests of his grandfather, Akbar, who was credited by the historian Abu’l Fazl with going beyond matchlock technology: “Guns are now made in such a manner that they can be fired off, without a match...”

By the time of Shah Jahan, Mughal firearms had won the praise of critical European visitors. In this painting by the well-established artist Payag, the emperor stands in a commanding position on top of the world, musket at the ready. The gun shares many features with the IAMM example shown above. Both have extensive gold decoration on the breech and barrel, and an ivory plate of distinctively Indian shape behind the ‘serpentine’ match holder. They differ in the extent of enamelling and the improbable bouquet of jewels on the barrel rest. The gap of more than a century between the two guns shows how slowly firearms evolved in Mughal India, contributing to the downfall of the dynasty.

**Above**

**Matchlock musket**
Composite material with bone / ivory inlay
India
18th century

**Left**

**Shah Jahan with his Bejewelled Musket**
By Payag
Circa 1620–1625
© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
This portrait of Shah Jahan and his three eldest sons includes their grandfather, Asaf Khan. Scholars have shown that Manohar’s signature is an anachronism: the faces in his original work have been painted over, leaving a dedication to Jahangir as the only indication of the original subjects.

Jewellery fashions cannot have changed much between the reigns of these two image-conscious emperors. The items that the four imperial males wear are quite generic, although Dara Shokuh wears a large pendant that could be a rare sapphire or one of the extremely unusual blue diamonds mentioned by Tavernier. Few blue stones have come down to us from this period. A closer match to the jewellery in The al-Sabah Collection is the gold-and-ruby pendant that adorns the youngest child in the painting. Aurangzeb may already have been showing his austerity by managing without a pearl drop on his pendant.

Balancing the small princes on the left of the painting is the weightier figure of Asaf Khan. The emperor’s father-in-law extends a tray of jewels as tantalizing as a selection of sweets. He wears no jewellery himself, not even the miniature portrait of Jahangir that he flaunted during the previous emperor’s reign (page 90).
Shown here is the left-hand side of two paired folios from the Padshahnama commemorating the reunion of Shah Jahan with his three eldest sons and their grandfather in March 1628. The painting is of special interest because it includes a horse-head dagger handle, an exceptionally rare sight amid the profusion of katars in Mughal miniatures. The attendant who wears the dagger seems almost aware of his place in history; he gestures with his free hand and tries to make eye contact with the viewer.

Mughal artisans were at their most expressive with these hilts, carving cold and unyielding jade with considerable difficulty into the spirited embodiment of a horse. Although many examples are embellished with gold and precious stones, it is their sculptural quality that continues to make them so sought after. Among the imperial owners who found them irresistible was Aurangzeb, no friend of frivolity. A more abstract variant on the theme was sold in 2008, from the collection of Jacques Desenfans. The dagger, with Shah Jahan’s inscription, has a hilt of sardonyx, often used for cameo carvings. Desenfans believed the emperor had chosen this stone for its closeness to the colouring of his favourite piebald horse.

Above
Hilt
Carved nephrite jade
India, Mughal or Deccan
Circa 1660-1670
LNS 50 H5

Left
Shah Jahan Receives his Three Eldest Sons and Asaf Khan during his Accession Ceremonies
Attributed to Ramdas
Circa 1640
The Royal Collection © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
The companion piece to this painting, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (page 40), takes the family story back a few generations. Both works feature a similar, mythical crown. In the Chester Beatty miniature, history is seen from Shah Jahan’s viewpoint, with the crown being handed from Akbar to himself, bypassing the middle generation, Jahangir. Shah Jahan did at least continue to use the services of his father’s minister, Asaf Khan. The wazir is at least ten years older here than in the portrait on page 90. Since then he has grown a beard and carries two swords and a shield.

The shield is prominent but less colourful than the riotous spiral-cane devices seen in earlier paintings. On a hide shield, the bosses would usually be made of brass or steel. Instead of the usual four bosses needed to fasten the inner hand grips, Asaf Khan has ten. In keeping with his status, they are bejewelled. Although this is a feature seen on many imperial shields, few have survived. Their symbolic value was much higher than their combat utility.
Shah Jahan's regard for jewels was exceptional. Whilst Nicolao Manucci considered it compulsive, Francois Bernier paid the following compliment: "In the whole empire of the Great Mogul there was no one more proficient in the knowledge of stones than Chah-Jehan." Emeralds were among the emperor's favourite gems. One treasured example was engraved with the words: "He who possesses this charm will enjoy the special protection of God." His enthusiasm was shared by other great Islamic empires of the time. The Ottomans were avid collectors, with the most single minded of all being the Safavids.

Shah Jahan is depicted here possessing a pearl-mounted emerald of epic size. With a hint of faceting, the artist brings the stone to life, suggesting the sun-dappled waters of the ruler's verdant retreats in Kashmir. As emeralds were rarely cut with multiple facets, Muhammad Abed might have been trying to suggest the appearance of a delicately carved surface instead. If so, there could have been no finer inspiration than the 233-carat emerald shown above. The subject of swaying vegetation is perfectly captured in the stone's liquid depths and remains as irresistible today as it was four centuries ago. The emerald has been missing from The al-Sabah Collection since the Iraqi invasion of 1990.
Shah Jahan is twenty-five years older at this weighing ceremony, held in 1632, than he was at the session on page 66. The katar is more than ever the most popular choice of dagger among those in attendance, including the emperor himself. Shah Jahan’s looks as if it might be jade, inlaid with precious stones. By the mid-17th century this technique allowed for a wide variety of applications, visible on objects as diverse as cups and scribe’s sets as well as the ubiquitous sash-cord ornaments that were used to keep daggers in place.

The katar shown above makes virtuoso use of the contrast between pale-green jade and the rich warmth of rubies, accented with tiny slivers of emerald. Its opulence would have been very much in keeping with the imperial weighing tradition, described by the Jesuit Sebastian Manrique as taking place in a “chamber adorned with all the most precious and valued products of the world.” At an earlier ceremony, Sir Thomas Roe had given an unusually generous impression of the proceedings but couldn’t resist planting some doubts about the treasure that was used to balance the emperor’s weight: “it being in bagges might bee Piibes [pebbles].”
Taken from the Padshahnama, this page shows an incident during the reign of Shah Jahan that the emperor wished to glorify. His general, Quli Khan, is presented with a key to the city which the Mughal forces had been besieging. The vanquished Iranians are submissive before the mounted victors. To emphasise their plight, the horseless burghers stand helpless as an energetic elephant pounds across the background.

In a more subtle manner, the artist has added some heraldic elements. Mughal heraldry is a subject that deserves greater study, although it is known that Shah Jahan occasionally used a sunburst emblem on his banners. A blazing, halo-like sun on a white ground frames Quli Khan, the emissary of imperial majesty, and coordinates well with his gold-harnessed horse. Similarly outstanding is the general’s shield, with a star-and-crescent motif that has no need of diamonds or emeralds to create an effect. A precedent for celestial heraldic devices was set by their ancestor, Timur, who used three circles to represent the fortunate planetary conjunction of his birth. By the mid-17th century, the additional presence of colourful European coats of arms cannot have escaped the attention of the Mughal court.
Bijapur was one of the most artistically developed sultanates of the Deccan. During the reign of Shah Jahan, the Bijapuri ruler Sultan Muhammad Adil Shah adopted certain features of Mughal painting. There were strings of pearls, bangles and sarpeches, all accompanied by a pose of committed aestheticism. While savouring a flower in his right hand, his left hand cradles a piece of fruit. There is a softness to the work that is different from the unforgiving lines of Shah Jahan's artists. The voluptuousness of the scene extends to the pendant that hangs from the sultan's neck. Instead of being harsh and cold, it glows beguilingly. The stones are cut in a less angular manner than in the similar pendant shown above; the pearls are mobile tear-shaped drops, rather than being rigidly attached.

Similar pendants can be seen in other paintings of Muhammad Adil Shah. Unlike his Mughal counterparts, who invariably piled on the precious stones to make an impression, the Sultan of Bijapur preferred to make a smaller number of items work harder. He was known to be obsessive about individual stones, including a ruby that he hunted down after suspecting it had been wrongfully obtained by Portuguese Jesuits.
Few Mughal paintings feature a single female subject. This woman stands, with numerous Rajasthani elements, in the stark outdoors while holding a lavish accoutrement of courtly life. The covered cup appears to be made of gold, set with jewels, a technique represented in The al-Sabah Collection by similar covered boxes.

A closer match to the shape of the vessel is a unique enamelled ensemble, complete with its original saucer, from the mid-17th century. Covered cups of this era are extremely rare. Those that have not been melted down in later years were often rejected in their own time by princely perfectionists if they suffered any damage or became unfashionable.

Enamelling was among the liveliest Mughal achievements. Although originally inspired by European wares, the Subcontinent's craftsmen perfected colours such as vibrant reds and greens that match rubies and emeralds. The pearl on the painted cup has been replaced by a white motif that bears a passing resemblance to the flaming pearl of Chinese art. As a finishing touch, some of the gold base beneath the enamel has been allowed to gleam through.

Above
Lidded cup and saucer
Gold with champlevé and painted enamels
India, Deccan or Mughal
Probably circa mid-17th century
LNS 2191 1-a-c

Left
Woman with a Covered Cup
Circa 1660
© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
Rustam Khan was one of Shah Jahan’s favoured generals, who later died fighting the rebellious Aurangzeb. The stolid-looking portrait is less noteworthy than the border that surrounds it. This has been attributed to Payag, a considerably better-known artist than the painter of the central section. Among the border’s fascinating vignettes is what appears to be a pair of retainers inspecting their master’s collection of weapons. Lying with the swords and daggers is a scribe’s set that matches one in The al-Sabah Collection.

It is unusual for Mughal artists to depict scribes with their utensils. In a touching portrait of a calligrapher by Hichitr, the elderly man is seen using a simple blue-and-white ceramic ink pot. Here, the highly animated armourer has a complete scribe’s set. As the top of the inkwell has been opened, he is clearly using the set rather than doing an inventory of it. This makes it more likely to be a humble brass utensil than one made of jade inlaid with rubies and emeralds. The al-Sabah example is truly imperial in appearance but comes with the practical feature of an ink reservoir that is lined in silver.

Above
Inkstand
Nephrite jade inlaid with gold and set with rubies and emeralds
India, probably Mughal
Circa mid-17th century
LNS 84 H5

Left
Rustam Khan in a White Jama
By Hufrar; border attributed to Payag
Circa 1650-1658
© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
Birds of prey appear in many Mughal paintings. When seen with members of the imperial court, they often wear a jewel tied with a silk cord around their neck. Although travellers were voluble on the subject of Mughal rulers and their hawks, they were less expressive on the subject of avian jewellery. It would have been a very special bird to wear a gemstone such as this. The emerald is a smaller version of that worn by Shah Jahan, and is painted with a luminosity that surpasses the emperor’s pendant.

There is an almost identical piece of jewellery in a miniature from about ten years later, after Aurangzeb had grabbed the throne. The bird also looks remarkably similar although it is unlikely that the new emperor would have seized his father’s hawks as well as his empire. The Mughals had a fondness for hawks that is apparent in Shah Jahan’s tender pose. Jahangir’s diary records his commitment to falconry: “Certainly of all hunting amusements, this is the best.” Aurangzeb’s approach was more distant. The physician Bernier noted that the later emperor’s substantial collection was as much for show as for sport.
Shah Jahan is depicted offering a red jewel to his eldest son Dara Shokuh. The stone is a richer shade than most spinels; the typical pink that was so admired by the Mughals would have been lost among the plum blossoms in the curiously romantic backdrop. This is a flower associated with winter, the phase of life that the greyng Shah Jahan is approaching. The emperor’s favourite son is well past his spring, being about thirty-five years old at the time of this painting.

Mughal emperors rarely appear in winter wear, which would have provided less opportunity for displaying their jewellery. In this case, Shah Jahan is handing over a similar ensemble to the one he wears as a bazu band in the image with musket (page 100). Presenting this impressive gemstone might suggest that it was time for a new generation to make its mark on the world upon which they are standing. Two angels watch over them from ominous clouds. A decade later, Shah Jahan would not give up his jewels so willingly to Aurangzeb, the usurper son who took the name 'Alamgir' ('Seizer of the Universe').
This posthumous painting of Shah Jahan shows the emperor in a conventional pose. As always, he is depicted in profile and, not unusually, he is dispensing jewellery. The recipient cannot be identified but is almost certainly one of the imperial offspring. Judging by his look of complacency, he has participated in the ritual before.

The most unusual detail is the utensil in Shah Jahan’s right hand. Ceremonial staffs in the form of a backscratcher appear in some miniatures, including the sumptuous Padshahnama of Shah Jahan in the Royal Collection. It would be more typical for an attendant to hold the staff than the emperor himself, although later paintings also show rulers holding their own flywhisks. In this case Shah Jahan clutches what is probably an ivory-handled backscratcher. The example in The al-Sabah Collection is an extremely rare jade version, seemingly carved as small sections in imitation of bamboo. Many other materials have been used in India, including inlaid steel and bidri ware. The deadliest variants are Sufi dervish staffs with a finial that doubles up as the handle of a concealed stiletto blade.
Night scenes are rare in Mughal art. This view of two sons of Shah Jahan is more disorientating than usual because it comprises two miniatures joined together. Aurangzeb is taking up the rear, while his younger brother Murad Baksh gets the golden halo. It is hard to reconcile the Aurangzeb depicted here with the fiery young prince who dared defy an enraged elephant. His lance is held with the limp nonchalance of a Balkan Sobrañie.

Both princes are heavily armed. Murad Baksh carries a bow, which is less elaborate than in other paintings that feature the imperial family with this ancestral weapon. The young princes' grandfather, Jahangir, saw himself as a champion of the coruscating bow, ablaze with jewels. The bow depicted in this painting is comparatively simple and yet Murad Baksh twirls the arrow as if he is about to perform a wondrous feat with it. Few such weapons have survived from that era, but some appear to have been decorated with gold, lacquer and precious stones. The example shown above relies instead on verses of Iranian poetry. A golden bow retained symbolic value until the reign of the last Mughal emperor, displayed as part of Bahadur Shah II's ceremonial parades.
In this drawing there is more than a hint of the future ascetic about the purposeful young Aurangzeb. He is shown here in his early twenties, still allowing himself the basics of his princely station in life. Among the greatest extravagances is his belt, composed of a series of large square-cut stones. It is a distinctive item, rarely worn except by emperors, and it shows his waist to trim effect.

Mughal artists tend to have been honest in depicting the prosperous figures of their patrons. Aurangzeb's diet matched his piety. The Italian traveller Niccolao Manucci recorded: "His food was suitable to the simplicity of his apparel. A little rice and pulse were the only meals served to his table." The evidence of paintings suggests that Aurangzeb retained a love of jewels for the whole of his long reign, although he was seldom seen with a belt as lavish as this. Few Mughal belts of any type have survived, although a later example exists in The al-Sabah Collection. With a circumference of about 125 centimetres, it would have been made for a more pleasure-loving individual than Aurangzeb.
\['Alamgir I (Aurangzeb)\\n1658-1707\\n|\\nBahadur Shah I (Shah Alam Bahadur)\\n1707-1712\\n|\\nJahandar Shah ---- Azim -------- Jahan\\n1712-1713 | 1713-1719 | 1719-1748\\n|\\n\['Alamgir II\\n1754-1759\\n|\\nShah Alam\\n1759-1806\\n|\\nAkbar II\\n1805-1837\\n|\\nBahadur Shah II\\n1837-1858\]
A Dynasty in Decline

"My life now gives no ray of light,
Nor brings solace to heart or eye;"

Poem by Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar II
The future emperor Shah Alam Bahadur (1707-1712) would have been in his early thirties when this miniature was painted, during the reign of his father, Aurangzeb. Although he did not share Aurangzeb’s zeal for the Orthodox, he maintained an understated personal style. Along with his posture, the young general’s military calling is confirmed by his sword, shield and dagger. The ‘khanjar’ dagger is of a type that had recently become fashionable among the Mughals. Its origins are disputed, with different authorities either attributing it to the Dacca or considering it a home-grown product.

Shah Alam Bahadur was proud of this type of weapon, as was recorded by the embassy of the Dutch East India Company to his court in 1712: “After his honour had made his salutations, he was presented by the Emperor with a Hindoo斯坦 cander or dagger, studded with precious stones — according to the testimony of all, an unusual favour.”

The succulent mint colour of the dagger hilt in the painting suggests that it was made of nephrite jade. There appears to be no carving, although it would have been beyond the resources of most artists to show such delicate work anyway.
The great-grandson of Aurangzeb is seen here striking a less heroic pose than usual. Instead of being engaged in hunting or carrying military paraphernalia, Emperor Farrukh Siyar (reigned 1713-1719) holds a sarpech and a flywhisk. Among the non-Mughal courts of India, wielding a flywhisk was the work of an attendant. For Mughal artists its significance as a symbol of authority superseded concerns about job classifications. A more imperial statement is made by Farrukh Siyar’s jewellery. He wears the same style as his distant ancestors; remarkably the size of the pearls and gemstones seems to have grown over the years, despite the precarious situation of these later emperors.

The flywhisk in the painting might be made of jewel-encrusted jade, like the one above, although it has a distinctly golden hue to it. Examples of gold flywhisks set with precious stones do exist, including one in The al-Sabah Collection. In examples such as that, kundan settings tended to ensure that gold served the sole purpose of framing a profusion of jewels, usually rubies. Jade was the preferred base material when its luminous quality was meant to be fully exposed to the beholder.
Muhammad Shah was a more successful art patron than emperor. During his long reign (1719-1748), Mughal painting went through something of a renaissance. The results were quite different from the era of the Great Mughals but there was an undeniable new vigour. Muhammad Shah must also have been considered a blessing to the empire’s hookah-making ateliers. He is rarely seen without his smoking paraphernalia. This was a pleasure shared by the ladies of the Mughal court, which was fortunate as so much of his time was spent in their company.

The hookah mouthpiece used by the emperor in the painting is probably made of jade. It is without any embellishment; or it could be that the artist preferred to save his finest brushes for other details. Among the more eccentric elements to have caught his attention is the fan bound together with four sets of jewels. Muhammad Shah’s sword hilt, however, seems to have interested him so little that it has dissolved, chameleon-like, into the cushion upon which it lies. As an example of how ornate the hookah mouthpieces of this era could be, the one shown above is a fiesta of rubies, diamonds and enamel.
Ahmad Shah was an emperor with a short and undistinguished reign (1748-1754). The chronicle of Nawab Javed Khan states that “the emperor considered it to be most agreeable to him to spend all his time in ease and leisure.” The image that this pleasure addict chose for the painting was so inappropriate, it is almost as if the artist is protesting against it. Ahmad Shah was a son of the harem, not the battlefield, and yet here he carries two swords and a dagger. Only the dagger has been painted in full. The other two weapons and the sash appear to be unfinished.

The dagger is in itself a curiosity. It has the jade ‘pistol grip’ that became popular in the Mughal court during the time of Aurangzeb, and yet the proportions of this example are unusual. Far more typical of these hilts is the al-Sabah Collection weapon illustrated above. Made of the same lustrous light-green nephrite as the hilt in the painting, it has the more compact dimensions that would have made it fully functional rather than a fashion accessory. In Ahmad Shah’s favour it must be noted that he resisted the temptation to overload himself with jewels, apart from a ruby bazuband of eye-catching enormity.
The French-Swiss engineer sits resplendent enjoying the fruits of his labours for the Nawab of Oudh. Colonel Polier was a scholar and collector who appreciated more than just the sensual side of India, his home for three decades. When he retired to France, he took much of his collection with him, showing what the *Asiatic Journal* of June 1819 termed, “a fondness for Asiatic magnificence.” An untimely display of the colonel’s wealth led to his murder by French bandits.

In the painting by Mihr Chand, Polier wears discreetly luxurious Indian jewellery and clothing. The lifestyle is more regal than the household accessories, which are more eclectic than his apparel. The hookah base is bell shaped, a form that took over from the globular type in the mid-18th century. It appears to be made of glass, also popularised in India during the 18th century. Earlier hookah bases were created from bidriware, which is widely thought to have influenced all that came later. The example shown above owes a smaller debt to bidriware than to the long-established Mughal love of adorning the everyday with a profusion of gemstones. Red glass provides a substitute for rubies, highlighted by gilded frames in the shape of peacock feathers.
By 1801, the original Peacock Throne of Shah Jahan was long gone. The shame of the 1739 raid by Nadir Shah lived on in the replacement throne shown here, with its less than sparkling character. Emperor Shah Alam's (1759-1806) body language, with a hand languidly draped over a cushion, displays a lack of formality. Although appearances still needed to be maintained, the emperor is unencumbered by a surfeit of jewellery. He does wear a striking necklace, however. This is not made of pearls, as his ancestors would have worn or as the peacocks above the throne carry in their beaks. The beads could either be jade or emeralds.

The Comte de Modave was a witness to how low the emperor's fortunes had sunk. "The pompous spectacle of the audiences of Aurangzeb which Bernier has described for us with so much pleasure and exactness, has been replaced by the strictest parsimony, which is born of real poverty..." he related of his visit in 1775. The French count found himself in an imperial presence of less grandeur than depicted in the painting. "The throne of heavy gold set with a heap of precious stones of inestimable value has been replaced by an armchair of gilt and wood..."
Artist Biographies

ABU’L HASAN
Born circa 1588, Abu’l Hasan was known by his first patron, Jahangir, as the ‘Wonder of the Age’. He was from a creative family; his father was the renowned Iranian artist Aqa Riza, and his brother was Muhammad Abed. In his youth he was influenced by the European prints that circulated at the Mughal court; his earliest-known work was inspired by the German artist Durer. His paintings have a strong sense of volume, despite retaining the precision of Iranian painting.

AQA RIZA
Aqa Riza left his native Iran, perhaps Herat, to work at the court of Akbar. His paintings were more experimental than most artists brought up in the Safavid tradition while preserving a sense of exquisite detail. They seem to have pleased Jahangir greatly when he was still Prince Salim. Aqa Riza’s importance lies as much in his ability as a teacher as an artist. The painter also turned his hand to garden design.

BALCHAND
Active from the late 16th to the mid-17th century, Balchand was in the service of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. His brother, Payag, found special favour with the last of these emperors, while Balchand’s achievements were recognised by Jahangir as well. The artist’s appearance is better known than many of his contemporaries as he appears in two of his own compositions depicting himself in detailed court scenes from the Padshahnama.

BICHITR
Bichitr is another artist whose appearance is known from paintings; as usual, details about his life are sketchy. He appears to have worked from the second decade of the 17th century until almost 50 years later. Bichitr’s earlier works are more innovative than those from later in his career. His portraits are conspicuous for their sensitivity, rendered with extraordinary technical virtuosity.

BISHAN DAS
Jahangir’s regard for Bishan Das is apparent in the emperor’s memoirs, which praise his skills as a portraitist above all others. He was also in the service of Akbar and Shah Jahan, for both of whom he executed penetrating insights into the character of his subjects. His career lasted around fifty years, and he appears to have lost none of his probing intensity towards the end.
GOVARDHAN
As with so many Mughal artists, Govardhan was born into imperial service. His father had worked for Akbar, and the son continued the tradition with Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Govardhan’s most memorable images tend to be of holy men, but his versatility extended to subjects that must have moved him less at a personal level, including scenes extolling the Mughal dynastic succession.

HASHIM
The versatility of many Mughal artists is absent from Mir Hashim’s oeuvre; his talents were concentrated in one genre of portraiture to the exclusion of all else. Having specialised in the fastidious recording of human features, he was pre-eminent in this field. His work includes few distractions from the intense analysis of his subjects; backdrops are almost non-existent.

HUNHAR
The lack of information about the 17th century Hunhar is exacerbated by the presence of another Hunhar a century later. The earlier Hunhar is often referred to as one of the great artists of Shah Jahan’s reign, which makes the absence of details more mysterious. He was sufficiently admired to have been part of the Padshahnama project, and his talent seems to have been used by Aurangzeb in a number of different paintings.

LAL CHAND
La’l Chand, also known as Lal Chand or Lalchand, was an established portraitist during the reign of Shah Jahan. Among his most famous works is an image of the Iranian ambassador Muhammad Ali Beg, with an inscription in Shah Jahan’s hand that identifies both the subject and the painter. As with so many artists of the time, his signature appears on the Padshahnama.

MAHESH
Mahesh was the father of the animal-painting specialist Miskin, who also worked for Akbar. Mahesh was listed by Abu’l Fazl among the painters to have achieved recognition at the imperial court. One of the many Hindus to have become highly regarded at the time, little of his background is known today. An experimental individual, his work often has a spiritual thread running through it, including Akbar’s mystical trance and a painting of a Jain monk.
MANOHAR
Manohar was another artist with a celebrated artist as a father. Basawan taught his son a great deal, but their styles ended up being entirely different. While Basawan was renowned for his three-dimensional handling of space, Manohar was a master of line. Dating from the late Akbar to Jahangir period, his compositions emphasise the stateliness of the imperial court rather than offering psychological examinations of the subjects.

MIHR CHAND
Mihr Chand is of a much later date than the true ‘Mughal’ artists listed here. His work shows a strong inclination to revive that earlier quality. Based in Lucknow, he was open to the many European influences that were welcome at the ruler’s court. He combined Mughal traditions with techniques such as perspective and chiaroscuro, taking a particular interest in the paintings of the German artist Johann Zoffany.

MISKIN
Miskin was greatly influenced by his father, Mahesh, and collaborated with him on many works, including a number of pages from the Akbarnama. In contrast to his stunning depictions of birds, Miskin was also able to tackle very different subjects, such as a man being hanged and the vicissitudes of war. He was as adept at monochrome sketches as he was with vivid colour.

(MIR) MOSAVVIR
A successful miniature painter from Tabriz, Mir Mosavvir was influenced by the definitive Iranian artist of the age, Bihzad. Among his most important works was a collaborative effort on the Khamse of Nizami. Dust Muhammad, who also followed Mosavvir’s son Sayyid Ali into Humayun’s service, commented that the illustrations were “so beautiful that the pen is inadequate to describe their merits.”

MUHAMMAD ABED
Muhammad Abed (or Abid) is another case of an accomplished artist about whom little is now known. He was the son of Aqa Riza and brother of Abu’l Hasan. These connections were important enough for him to mention them on his paintings. He became prominent at the court of Shah Jahan without achieving the high renown of his father or brother.
MUHAMMAD KHAN
An artist from Bijapur whose approach owes a great deal to Mughal artists. Zebrowski has shown how dependent Muhammad Khan was on the forms of Mughal art, but he retained a palette that is distinctively Deccani in its richness, along with an abundant energy that would have been out of place at the Agra court.

PAYAG
The output of Payag shows astonishing variety. Extending over the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, it was with the latter ruler that his ability was really appreciated. His facility with character studies has left us with some penetrating portraits, including individuals on the margins of Mughal life. At the same time he was admired for his more formal renderings of court figures, including Shah Jahan at his most majestic.

RAMDAS
As his name suggests, Ramdas was yet another of the Hindu artists who brought a syncretic feel to the Mughal atelier. In common with many other painters, he served the emperors from Akbar to Shah Jahan but appears not to have been among the very few retained by Aurangzeb. His signed works include illustrations for the Akbarnama, Baburnama, Timurnama and Razmnama.

(MIR) SAYYID ALI
The son of Mir Mosavvir, Mir Sayyid Ali continued the Iranian style that became the foundation for Mughal art. He was among the pioneers at the court of Humayan and then Akbar, being one of the many Iranian artists to leave his homeland as his former patron Shah Tahmasp became increasingly Orthodox. Having supervised the formative Hamzanama project, he headed off to Mecca on the Haj, never to be heard of again.
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Portrait of Bahadur Shah II, Mughal. Last phase, Circa 1650.
National Museum, New Delhi