AN ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPT FROM SIND

by

M. Idris Siddiqi

A complete and illustrated version of the romance Sayf al-Muluk wa-Badi' al-Jamali was acquired by the British Museum in 1921. The manuscript (Or. 8358) is in a good state of preservation. It is written in nasta‘liq and the text on each folio is framed by a border of two red and three black lines enclosing a thicker yellow line. The headings are in red in the running text and occasionally form separate lines. There are 199 folios each measuring 9 1/2 x 4 1/2 ins. The 63 illustrations occupy the top, middle or bottom of the text area: and none covers the entire page. There is a double page illumination at the beginning of the manuscript. The colophon at the end reads:

تمت كتاب سيف الملك وبدع الجمال دعاه رفيق وحفرة ربيب الوعاب از دست قرير

سرار تفسیر الراحل الى حسب ربيب الغلي عبد محمد واثر تاريخ جهانم شهير شعبان

المعلوم سنة 1189 في دار الصفرا بلدة تنا في يوم السبت بظم خلال عشرة باندير

والفكر صورت اختتام بها.

The manuscript was completed by Muhammad Wârith on 4th Shawwâl A.H. 1189 (1st October, A.D. 1775) in Thatta. To the best of my knowledge it is the earliest illustrated work known to have been executed in Sindh; and its many miniatures may make an important contribution in the future study of painting in Sindh. These miniatures are rather archaic but possess a peculiar charm and certain features not to be found in the contemporary schools of painting in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent. These features are the characteristic representation of the vernacular culture of Sindh although it is premature to single out these miniatures as “Sindhi painting”. For one manuscript alone cannot serve to establish a new school of painting although this has been the practice in recent years when new schools have been created with the discovery of every new manuscript, every new collection and sometimes even with the discovery of one or two miniatures. More material will have to be brought to light before such a claim can be justified in the case of the manuscript under discussion.

Sindh, once occupying an area from the port town of Daybul to Multan, was reduced in the latter half of the 18th century A.D. to a petty Muslim state. How is it that the states of Bundi, Mewar, Kishangarh and others in Rajasthan and of Gulber, Bilaspur, Kangra, Basohli and Kulu in the northern Punjab—all much smaller by comparison—have produced an immense wealth of visual art while no such material is available from Sindh? The answer may be sought in the historical and cultural background of Sindh in general and of Thatta in particular.

Thatta is mentioned as a flourishing city before A.D. 1331, when Muhammad Tughlaq, sultan of Delhi, died in its vicinity while pursuing the leader of a revolt in Gujarat who was given shelter by the rulers of Thatta. For four centuries it was the capital of lower Sindh, under the Muslim dynasties of the Sammâs (c. 1340-1520), the Arghûnids (1520-55), the Târâkhânids (1555-02) and the Mughal emperors of Delhi (1552-1739). During these four centuries Thatta was one of the seats of Islamic learning, arts and crafts as well as a flourishing port of continental trade.

Sindh had formed part of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphate, and from the end of the ninth century was divided into the small principalties of Multan and Manşûra. Subsequently it was ruled, under the suzerainty of the Qajânavîd, Ghiyâr and Delhi sultans and also by princes of the Rajput tribe of Sumra, who embraced Islam. In about 1340 the Sammâs, who were also Rajput converts to Islam, wrested power from the Sumras. We have no contemporary record of their cultural attainments but the surviving monuments of this period which stand on the northern extremity of the necropolis at Mâkli Hills, two miles south of Thatta, testify to the way in which their contact and matrimonial alliances with the states on their eastern border helped in the procuring of stone-cutters from Ahmadabad and Bijapur. The tomb of Jâm Nizâm al-Dîn (1465-1509) is a stone structure in the Ahmad Shâhî style with ornamental carving found in the 15th-century monuments of Gujarat with a local character. A band of interlaced hålîb—a verse from the Koran—characteristically Islamic—

1 K. Khandakarwala, M. Chandras and P. Chandras, Miniature Painting, a catalogue of the Exhibition of the Sri Medichand Khafchand Collection held by the Lalit Kala Akademi, 1960, New Delhi 1960, p. 9.
2 P. Brown, Indian Architecture, Islamic period, Bombay 1942, p. 119.
provides a striking contrast to its neighbour, a band decorated with carved geese, half and full lotuses, and arched panels set with sunflowers entirely Hindu in character.8

Shâh Beg Arghâun defeated the last Sūmra prince in 1521. The brief rule of the Arghâuns was ended when Mirzâ Isâ Khân Tarkhân I seized lower Sind with Thatta in 1555. During the rule of Mirzâ Jân Beg Tarkhân Akbar decided to annex Sind. After a desperate resistance Jân Beg sued for peace and was confirmed as governor of Thatta, in which charge he was succeeded by his son Mirzâ Ghâzî Beg Tarkhân. Upon his death in 1612 the Mughal officials were appointed as governors of Sind. In about 1733 Thatta was given to one Amin Khân as a reward and henceforth was held on a sort of contract or lease. The last lessee was Miân Nâr Muhammed, the real founder of the Kalhora dynasty, which ruled Sind when our manuscript was executed. From the seventeenth century we have various accounts by European travellers, who, impressed by its charm and prosperity, called Thatta an Eldorado and a Utopia of wealth beyond avarice. To the trader and traveller from the West, Thatta was practically synonymous with Sind. In 1609 the East India Company instructed its agents to sail to Laurie a good harbour within two miles of Nagor Tutie, as great and as big as London. In 1613 Captain Payton described Thatta as one of the most celebrated marts of India. Mandeselo praised the artisans of Thatta as the most industrious in the Mughal kingdom.4 Alexander Hamilton in 1699 mentions Thatta as a large, densely populated and a very rich city about three miles long and one and a half miles broad.5 According to him there were four hundred educational establishments in Thatta where students from all over Asia studied philosophy, politics and the different branches of the speculative sciences in addition to theology.6 Tavernier classed it as one of the greatest cities of India.

This was the period when Mughal painting having reached maturity began to influence provincial centres. We are told that two palaces built by Ghâzî Beg Tarkhân in Thatta were decorated with wall paintings. In all probability these were executed in the style of the wall paintings at Agra and Lahore. Nothing of these palaces has survived. After the death of Mirzâ Ghâzî Beg, the Tarkhâns ceased to be associated with the govern-

8 Idris Siddiqui, Thatta, Karachi 1965, p. 16.
5 Capt. A. Hamilton, A new account of the East Indies, Edinburgh 1727, i. 115.
6 Ibid., p. 127.

ment of Thatta. Whatever painters they may have patronised were presumably engaged in laying the foundations of a school in which Mughal painting was adapted to Sindhi requirements; and they may have dispersed without having accomplished much. The influences which may have helped in the formation of this provincial school, if any, can be assumed from the relationship of the Tarkhâns with the Mughals and the Rajputs. Jân Beg Tarkhân and Mirzâ Ghâzî Tarkhân were closely connected with the court of Akbar and Jahângîr. Jân Beg’s daughter was married to prince Khurram. They were also related to the Rajputs: Mirzâ Bâqî Beg Tarkhân and his son Mirzâ Musallar were married to Rajput grîls. Mirzâ Sâlih Tarkhân and Jân Bîhâ, both sons of Mirzâ Isâ Khân Tarkhân II, grandson of the elder Mirzâ Isâ Khân Tarkhân, was related to Samajas on his mother’s side. Unfortunately, as yet, there is no evidence of the impact on the paintings of Sind by these contacts with Kutch, Rajasthan, Agra, Delhi and Qandhar.

The decline and decay of Thatta began in 1739 when the province of Sind was ceded to Nâdir Shâh by the emperor Muhammed Shâh. Nâdir Shâh entrusted its administration to Miân Nâr Muhammad, chief of the powerful politico-religious Kalhora clan of Sind. Nîr Muhammed abandoned Thatta to its fate preferring to rule Sind from the small township of Khudabad. Moreover Thatta lost its importance as a commercial centre owing to the sitting up of the branch of the Indus Delta on which it was situated. Pottinger who visited Thatta in 1809 remarks that with the transfer of the capital ‘‘ the population has decreased so rapidly that upwards of two thirds of the city is now uninhabited’’ and in lieu of the bustle of a trading city the streets are deserted.8 Despite this the copyist Muhammad Wârîsh has preferred to add the honorific ‘‘ Dâr al-Sâfî’’ to Thatta while working there in 1775. We need not follow in detail the history of the Kalhora dynasty: Nîr Muhammed died in 1753, and was succeeded by Muhammed Murâd Yâr Khân, who was dethroned in 1758. The government of Sind was contested by A’tîf Khan and Ghulam Shâh. The latter was ultimately confirmed in 1764 by the Afghan amir Ahmad Shâh Durranî (who had succeeded Nâdir as suzerain of Sind). Although illiterate, Ghulam Shâh was an energetic ruler. In 1768 he founded the town of Hyderabad which he made his capital. In 1772 he was succeeded by Miân Muhammed Sarfarâz Khân; but Kalhora rule was brought to an

8 Sir H. Pottinger, Travels in Bahuchistan and Sind, 1816, p. 351.
9 Ibid., p. 355.
end in 1783 by the Talpurs, who were in their turn defeated by the British in 1843.

The Kalhoras were the first Sindi dynasty to wield power after the fall of the Sammas in 1521. This gave them some degree of popularity but the period was one of unrest and disorder punctuated by three civil wars—the invasion of Nādir Shāh and the constant threat of invasion due to their intransigence in paying tribute to their suzerains of Persia or Afghanistan. In spite, however, of their limited resources they patronised art and learning; and it was in this period that Sind produced the great mystical poet Shāh 'Abd al-Latif of Bhīt who composed and sang for the people of Sind as Farīd had for the Punjab.

In the thousand chequered years of Muslim rule, Sind was brought into contact with Persia, Qandahar, Kabul, Multan, Agra and Delhi, Rajastān, Bijsapur, Ahmadābād and Kutch. These contacts made their impact on the cultural life of Sind—an impact however more apparent than real since owing to its geographical isolation, Sind has tended to develop its own indigenous traditions taking foreign influences and moulding them to its own pattern. This applies as much to its architecture as to its legends, folklore and painting.

The romances of Layā and Majnūn, of Shārīm and Farīd, of Wāniq and 'Udhrā and others did not attract the imagination of the bards and poets of Sind. It is not that Sind has failed to produce its share of Persian scholars who composed excellent poetry and prose. Works of considerable value were produced in the field of theology, philosophy, logic, medicine and other branches of knowledge. But such works were written for the learned few. What has most popular appeal in Sind folklore and poetry are the romances of which most are connected with the Sumra and Samma periods. Unmar, the hero of 'Umar Mā'īn was a Sumra prince as also was Chanesar, hero of Chanesar Layain, the latter being the daughter of the Raja of Khangar; Tamachi of the Noori-Jam Tamachi was a Summa prince who lost his heart to Noori a fishermaid. The Sāssi Panha, Rano and Munaw, Sohni and Mehr and other stories are tales of simple people. The story of Sayf al-Muluk and Bādī al-Jamāl was equally popular in Sind although its hero and heroine are "foreigners". For reasons unexplained their story is associated with the destruction of more than one town of Sind. According to Tūḥfat al-Kīrām it was also in the reign of one of the Summa princes that Dalaru, a descendant of the Hindu king of the same name and the founder of Dalar or Alor, tried to seize Bādī'

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13 Qanā'ī, Tūḥfat al-Kīrām, p. 45.
16 E. G. Browne, A Catalogue of Persian Ms. in the Library of the University of Cambridge, 1899, p. 406, Add. 242; and British Museum, Or. 86.
17 Rieu, Catalogue of Persian Ms. in the British Museum, ii, 744b.
18 H. E. Ecre, Catalogue of Persian Ms. in the Library of the India Office, i, 221-2, no. 788.
by Gawari in a.h. 1025 (a.d. 1616–17). This poem is remarkable for the large number of Hindi words and the comparatively small number of Persian and Arabic words. The British Museum manuscript was copied in a.h. 1159 (a.d. 1746) and has a large number of illustrations, in mid-eighteenth century Deccani style.

The British Museum copy which is the subject of this essay is dated a.d. 1775 and is therefore the latest of the three. It was executed at Thatta at a time that city had ceased to be the capital of Sind for some forty years and when all the more important families had migrated to Hyderabad and other towns. At this time Sind presents a picture of factional rivalries, civil wars and the constant threat of invasion. Trade and commerce were at their lowest ebb; the East India Company had withdrawn its Factory from Thatta. It yet seems possible that the scribe Muhammed Warith copied the manuscript for some Kalhora prince or some influential patron.

The subjects illustrated are more or less those of the other two manuscripts already mentioned. The difference in style and execution is however marked. Anyone familiar with Sind and with the crowded bazars and narrow crooked lanes of Thatta, Hyderabad, Shikarpur or Sehwan will meet the types he has seen in the illustrations of this manuscript represented in all their simple charm and dignity.

In order to relieve the desolate and monotonous appearance of their countryside the Sirdis introduced colours into their buildings and employed bright polychrome effects in their handicrafts—textiles, pottery, tiles, enamel and lacquer work. The palette of the miniatures in our manuscript likewise includes green and yellow of various shades, dark blue and red, dark and light brown, mauve, purple, grey, almond and orange. These colours impart the warmth and brilliance which is characteristic of the handicrafts of Sind. In certain cases the background is rendered in rather dull and muddy colours in order to set off the figures which are clothed in brilliant colours.

The miniatures are devoid of landscape. The background is monochrome or painted with contrasting patches of colour (e.g. fig. 112). As a result the figures stand out from the background. These features already occur in the paintings of Malwa and Mewar at a much earlier date.

Compositions are simple; and forms somewhat crude leaving the impression of a rustic rather than a metropolitan vision. There are no

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18 British Museum, Or. 86.  
19 M. Chandra, Mewar Paintings, Lalit Kala Akademi, 1967, pls. 3 and 7.
of red sandstone. Pillars are cylindrical, some being surmounted by lotus form capitals. Such buildings are adaptations of the structures depicted in the paintings of Bikaner, Jaipur and Jodhpur in the 18th century, but the resemblance must not be pressed too far since these buildings are lower, having small pillars, cusped arches and at the sides squat domes crowned by pinnacles. The upper storeys are more like wooden balconies of the type which is found in some residential houses of Thatta town.

The principal male figure represented is a Sindi landlord (nazerah) with regular features and muscular body draped in a distinctive attire (figs. 109, 110, 112, 113). Faces are roundish and are shown in three-quarter profile: features such as large eyes and delicate nose are precisely drawn and achieve some degree of expression. The colour and designs of textiles in the miniatures really seem to resemble those of Sindi. Thatta has been famous for the spinning, dyeing and weaving of silk and cotton; and in its palmy days some five thousand looms were said to be employed in weaving shawls and lungis. Dye stuffs were rodiang or madder, saffron, sunflower and musahg—a dye prepared from walnuts. The Sindi ajrak has beautiful geometrical and conventionalised flower patterns printed in light and dark red, brown, light and dark blue and white. The Thatta lungis used for turbans, scarves or waist bands were in great demand even as far as Agra; they had warps of silk and wefts of cotton and their ends were embroidered in gold or silver or decorated with fringes. Other stuffs were the garbi or lassar for the trousers of the well-to-do and mashru for cushion covers. Trouser material known as susi had invariably striped warp. Most of the patterns of these textiles are depicted in the miniatures in brilliant colours.

The turban does not consist of folds which sweep back along the head as is found in Rajasthani miniatures of the 17th and 18th centuries. It is the Sindi turban of pheniya type, loosely twisted round the head and divided into two parts by the cross band formed by one of the ends; the other end is pulled from the centre and arranged in the form of a fan known as a turro (fig. 109). These turbans are made either of ajrak or of

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109. Folio 28a

110. Folio 32b

lungs and are very handsome. With Sayf al-Mulîk and other important persons the turro is embellished with a black sarpech (figs. 110, 113). In some cases a roundish alâh sticks out from the turban (fig. 112).

The floating transparent draperies of contemporary and earlier Mughal, Rajasthani and Deccani paintings are here replaced by the pehrana or shirt with sleeves sometimes of a flowered material called phullo. This is a shirt open at the sides and reaching to the calf; it is

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Ibid., p. 285.
brought in at the waist. The neck and chest are often decorated with sausankari, that is embroidery. Sindi sausankari is still popular today. Owing to the thickness of the material the figure is not revealed. In certain miniatures persons wear the nintano, a long coat with arms reaching to the elbow and open in the front. It is always rendered in polychrome in contrast to the pehransu. The bechau or sash is worn short with frills at the end and hangs in front, occasionally down the side and more rarely completely wrapped around the waist. The trousers are salwars (salunas) of striped material known as susi. The chauri bearers carry fly whisks made of peacock feathers as in the paintings of Rajasthan, the Deccan, Chamba and Kangra. Figures are shown either squatting on carpets, mounted on horses or standing in an attitude of composure and dignity. The effect of movement is rendered by the backward whirling pehransu (fig. 110).

With one exception the beard is worn short and well trimmed: this is the type known as sakhari or auspicious. Hair is concealed by the turban except for a curl which generally protrudes and encircles the ear lobe. This hair style does not appear elsewhere and is perhaps intended to represent the curling end of pattras erroneously considered as chaurai hairstyle.

The female type is graceful and conforms to the Sindi girl described by Burton. The face is sharply outlined; the mouth delicate and rather sensual and the nose straight with upturned nostrils. Faces are shown in three-quarter profile while those of the fairy maids are in full profile. According to Burton’s description, “her long, fine and jetty hair, is plastered over a well arched forehead in broad, flat bands, by means of a mixture of gum and water”. This peculiar feature is represented in the paintings by a grey line immediately beneath the thick hairline (cf. folios 8a, 8b, 39a, 43a, 44b, 61a, 72b, 95a). Burton continues “behind the chevelure is collected in one large tail, which frequently hangs down below the waist, and then the head, as frequently happens here, is well shaped, no coiffure can be prettier than this”.

This is well represented in the manuscript; and on folio 61b these beautiful braids instead of hanging at the back where they could not be seen, are twisted over the shoulder so as to hang down in front thus adding to the charm of the composition. Occasionally locks of hair have been shown hanging on the cheeks in cork-

III. Folio 61a

screw fashion. “Her eyes,” writes Burton, “are large and full of fire black and white as an onyx stone of almond shape with long drooping lashes, undeniably beautiful” the kajal (lamp black) exaggerates eyes into becoming the feature of the face.” In folio 94a the eyes of the dancing girl are emphasised by the kajal which is not used for the other women.

Upon the brow and the cheek bones a little powdered tāl is applied with a pledg of cotton to imitate perspiration”, a feature faithfully portrayed.

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28 Artin, op. cit., p. 590.
29 H. F. Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, London, 1851, i. 276-7.
30 Ibid., p. 275.
31 Ibid. p. 276.
in folio 61b depicting Badi’ al-Janâl and the daughter of the king of Ceylon embracing each other (fig. 111). Almost every detail corresponds to the description of the Sindi girl given above.

The female costume is typically Sindi. Over the head and extending down to the waist behind the back is a veil, orhini or gauhadi of Thatta silk with rich edgings. It is coloured in order to denote that the wearer is a happy wife, subbaghî. Widows and old ladies, as in other regions, are generally dressed in white. The orhini except in folio 43b are not transparent.

The wide baggy skirt, the cholo is open in front reaching down to the ankles. Sleeves are loose and there is a richly worked border around the neck. The skirt envelopes the body very loosely and is quite unlike the transparent choli or flowing jamas closely fitted above the waist and revealing rather than covering the form and contours of the body. In folio 45a, the artist has tried although with little success, to depict the contours of the breast by shading in black lines over a yellow shirt. This device occurs in no other miniature. The striped salwar or sultan is generally concealed by the long skirt. On the whole the costume is picturesque but imparts a slightly grotesque impression to the wearer.55

Ornaments are shown by white dots. Over the head are white circular discs connected by a string of pearls. Occasionally a white dot, bindi, decorates the centre of the forehead. Disc-shaped ear studs, necklaces studded with semi-precious stones, armlets etc. are rendered in a similar way to those of Rajasthani paintings of the 17th and 18th centuries. Black pompons and tassels are worn on the arms and wrists. The fairies wear a typical three pointed crown (figs. 111–113), a slightly modified form of that worn by Krishna in paintings of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Kangra.

The musicians and dancers are portrayed with great warmth of feeling (folios 54a and 49a). The dancing girl with slim body and beautiful appearance in folio 49a has her left hand on her waist and her right hand raised above her head. The tabla player with his two tablaâs attached to his waist is shown standing as also the castanet player. In scenes of dancing and singing the musicians are normally shown seated with their instruments but it seems that the artist of our manuscript was perhaps inspired by the performance of a street dancer—a common scene in the bazaars of the Sub-continent where dancer, musicians and audience remain standing. In folio 62a (fig. 112), however, the three musicians depicted in the upper

55 Ibid., p. 277.
backs are common to Sind and Rajasthan. The artist however has not always found it convenient to place it at the proper angle and to render it in its true perspective. In folio 39a the lady is seated almost outside the rear limit of the settee so that only her legs find a place on the seat. The bed on fig. 113 has long legs of lacquer work from Hala near Hyderabad. It also has a finely painted canopy. The scene depicts the first meeting of Badi’ al-Janah and Sayf al-Mu’lilik after their marriage.

Swords with or without sheath are shown in thick black lines. They are suspended from the waist on the left side. Instead of pointing behind the blade is placed in front across the legs—a position which would obstruct movement. In folio 102b a person is shown moving with an axe resting on his shoulder. The practice of carrying axes is commoner in Sind than in Kutch and Gujarat.

Animals are naturalistic. Horses are stately, their manes unplaited but well arranged and falling on one side as in the Rajasthani type of the 18th century (fig. r10). The camel in folio 3a is naturalistic but smaller than the man leading it. There are also the bear, fox and magra rendered naturalistically. The tiger is yellow with black stripes as in Mewari paintings of the 17th century.39 The birds including the parrot, mina and pigeon are well executed but the peacock is treated conventionally.

Although the miniatures are the work of several hands and of varying quality, the style is uniform. It is a style possessing a simple charm and dignity with certain features unknown in contemporary schools of painting. Many other features however are borrowed but are assimilated so that the overall impression is one of local colour. This makes a quite definite impact and possesses something of the life of the people of Sind who rightly claim a culture older and more varied than that of any other region of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent.

The miniatures are the creation of a period when the Mughal order had been replaced by the vigorous Kalhora rule. They possess a rough country vigour, a simplicity and freshness characteristic of folk art. They also establish the fact that Sind had its own contribution to make to the history of late 18th-century painting in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent.

39 M. Chandra, op. cit., pl. 4.

Mr. Siddiqi, a promising young scholar, died in June, 1967.

QAJAR PAINTED ENAMELS

by

B. W. Robinson

Visitors to the Persian Crown Jewels in the basement of the Central Bank of Iran on Firdawsi Avenue, Tehran, may be excused for catching their breath as they enter this Arabian Nights grotto. The whole collection has been superbly arranged and lit, and the eye wanders incredulously from rows of dishes heaped with unset diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and turquoises, to great candlesticks encrusted and dripping with gems, and from tassels and ropes of huge pearls, and swords entirely covered with diamonds, to the golden "Throne of Nâdir" and the towering crown of Fath ‘Ali Shah.

But amidst all this overpowering richness and splendour one comes across a considerable number of objects less obtrusive and spectacular, but of far greater interest to the lover of Persian art: the vases, dishes, boxes, and qalains (water-pipe) fittings of enamelled gold or silver. These provided the Persian miniature painter of the Qajar period with his most exquisite field of activity, and, as many of the pieces are signed and dated, it seemed worth while to collect this material and, by collating it with examples elsewhere, to give a general idea of this little-known branch of Persian painting in its period of finest achievement, between about 1790 and 1880.

That most enlightened and observant traveller the Comte de Rochechouart has left us a detailed account of Persian enamelling in the 1860s, including an exhaustive description of the technical processes involved and the composition of the various enamels used, an aspect of the subject which need not concern us here. He estimated that in Tehran alone more than two hundred craftsmen in enamel were at work, but that not more than half-a-dozen of them could be regarded as serious artists. The Count’s attitude to Persian painting as such is by no means favourable ("C’est à faire grincer les dents"), but the painted enamels excited his enthusiastic admiration: "Pendant quelque temps, il a été de mode en Perse d’avoir les têtes de kalioun [i.e. qalains] émaillées à Genève ou à Paris,